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THE EVOLUTION OF OTTOMAN NIGHT OPERATIONS: FROM EMIRATE TO EMPIRE

Abstract. This study examines the transformation of Ottoman attitudes toward night warfare from the late thirteenth to the late fifteenth century. By analyzing the evolving organization and composition of the Ottoman military, it demonstrates that, beginning with the reign of Murad I, Ottoman leadership gradually abandoned night-time offensive engagements. Instead, nocturnal activity was increasingly confined to intimidation and psychological pressure rather than direct combat. The paper attributes this shift to several interconnected developments. Most notably, the growing differentiation of military functions reassigned rapid raiding operations to frontier forces, reducing the central army's reliance on such tactics. At the same time, the expanding prominence of infantry units, together with the establishment of specialized logistical formations, diminished the army's overall mobility and made coordinated night assaults less feasible. Finally, the integration of gunpowder weaponry, including handheld firearms and artillery, further discouraged nocturnal operations, as the transport and use of such equipment compromised both stealth and tactical surprise.

Keywords: Early Ottomans, Late Byzantium, night combat, gunpowder, military tactics

This paper focuses on the evolution of night combat in the early Ottoman Emirate from the 1280s to the 1470s, primarily by analyzing Greek and Ottoman Turkish primary source material originating from the Late Middle Ages and Early Modern era. Although there are a number of studies on the early Ottomans' approach to contemporary warfare in general, the issue of night combat has been seriously overlooked by researchers. The reasons are unclear; however, one may argue that the lack of Ottoman military treatises from this period and relatively infrequent reports about night operations in contemporary primary sources could be essential factors behind this lack of academic interest. Previously, several researchers concentrated on the conduct and organization of night battles during the Roman and Byzantine periods. This study seeks to contribute to these



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previous undertakings, expanding upon them and introducing the ways in which the Ottomans performed military operations after sunset.

Previously, Georgios Chatzelis questioned the perception of night combat by the Byzantine military treatise writers in the 10th century, concluding that such narratives do not describe night operations negatively¹. On the contrary, he asserts that since night attacks were “a suitable way to acquire victory with minimal losses,” the military manual writers often described how they needed to be conducted². Chatzelis also reinforces his argument by occasionally citing Byzantine historical works such as Skylitzes, who gives several instances in which the Byzantines usefully conducted night operations³. Aside from Chatzelis’ work, Łukasz Różycki dealt with “night combat in late antiquity in the light of Roman military treatises”. Relying on the late antique military treatises and late Roman and Byzantine historiography, Różycki investigated the theory and practice of night combat in the 6th century⁴. Departing from the “classical” analysis method, he gave substantial attention to the psychology of night combat in this period. In this respect, he concludes that fighting at night was essential to Roman warfare, as evidenced in the military treatises, which did not regard it as dishonorable. In contrast, the Romans endeavored to maximize the advantages offered by darkness⁵.

As previously stated, no current study directly ponders the question of night combat and its evolution over the centuries in the early Ottoman Empire. Several studies indeed examine the military history of the Ottomans in the late Middle Ages. However, they are not directly related to nor focus on a specific analysis of night operations. Instead, these studies mostly concentrate on the evolution of Ottoman armed forces from a cavalry-based military system into an infantry-oriented one⁶. Scholars’ lack of interest in studying this area of scholarship notwithstanding, the Ottoman and Byzantine primary sources from the late Middle Ages and early modern period provide satisfactory details to fathom the mechanisms, organization, and evolution of Ottoman night combat. Suggesting that although the lack of Ottoman or extensive Byzantine military treatises in this period might appear an obstacle to such an undertaking, the existing sources still allow for conducting research.

¹ G. CHATZELIS, *Byzantine Military Manuals as Literary Works and Practical Handbooks*, London 2007, p. 117–119.

² *Ibidem*.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ Ł. RÓŻYCKI, *Night Combat in Late Antiquity in the Light of Roman Military Treatises*, SC 13, 2023, p. 57.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ F. EMECEN, *Osmanlı Klasik Çağında Savaş*, İstanbul 2011. R.P. LINDNER, *Bapheus and Pelekanon*, IJTUS 13.1–2, 2007, p. 26. M. UYAR, E. ERICKSON, *A Military History of the Ottomans. From Osman to Atatürk*, Santa Barbara 2009, p. 17.

The Ottoman sources utilized in this article comprise a number of chronicles, histories, and *gazavatnames*, which could be defined as sources that relate the military exploits of the Muslims (the Ottomans, in this case) against the Christians. A particular source, albeit seriously overlooked, is the eyewitness account of an Ottoman poet and historian, Kaşifi, who provides many vital details about Ottoman warfare under Murad II⁷. Byzantine sources are equally significant in understanding the topic since they often delineate Ottoman strategies and armed tactics during various military encounters. In their works, the late Byzantine historians Laonikos Chalkokondyles, Nikephoros Gregoras, and Emperor Ioannis Kantakouzenos elaborately describe several night battles the Ottomans fought in the 14th and early 15th centuries⁸. The latter two authors' writings, when used comparatively with early Ottoman sources, present invaluable information about the situation on the ground, indicating how the Ottomans conducted their raiding operations at night. However, a historiographical problem regarding the reliability of the existing source material needs to be addressed. It is accurate that the early Ottoman chronicles provide extensive information about the conduct of night battles in the 1300s. However, one should note that although these chronicles were penned relatively late towards the end of the 15th century, their writers, including Aşıkpaşazade, claimed to have relied on an earlier source, the historical work of the son of Orhan Gazi's imam called Yahşi Fakih⁹. Thus, it still makes them valuable sources for research.

A similar issue can be found when using the works of Byzantine writers. Although it is well known that Byzantine writers such as George Pachymeres, in this period, tried to imitate famous ancient authors and historians, this does not decrease the importance of their works as historical sources. These works are still invaluable, providing eyewitness accounts of many historical developments, events, and phenomena. Since Ottoman historians tend to change or omit several "unpleasant events" in their historical works, Byzantine sources allow us to approach the issue comparatively, enabling us to draw a broader perspective.

The aim of this article is not to evaluate the entire Ottoman military machine, tactics, and strategies associated with it. It will instead ask the question: Why do the sources not mention any Ottoman ruler or high-ranking military commander,

⁷ KAŞIFI, *Gazaname-i Rum*, ed. E.M. ESMail, Master's Thesis, Mimar Sinan Güzel Sanatlar Üniversitesi, 2005 (cetera: KAŞIFI).

⁸ L. NEVILLE, *John VI Kantakouzenos*, [in:] *Byzantine Historical Texts*, Cambridge 2018, p. 266; *Ioannis Cantacuzeni eximperatoris historiarum libri IV. Graece et Latine*, vol. III, ed. L. SCHOPENI, Bonn 1831 [= CSHB, 1–3] (cetera: IOHANNES CANTACUZENUS), p. 82; *Nicephori Gregorae Byzantina historia*, vol. I–III, ed. L. SCHOPEN, I. BEKKER, Bonn 1829 [= CSHB, 30–31] (cetera: NICEPHORUS GREGORAS); LAONIKOS CHALKOKONDYLES, *The Histories*, III, ed. A. KALDELLIS, Cambridge 2014 (cetera: LAONIKOS CHALKOKONDYLES), p. 68.

⁹ A. ÖZCAN, *Tevarih-i Al-i Osman*, [in:] *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, vol. XL, İstanbul 2012, p. 580.

personally organizing a night attack on the enemy, in the post-1371 period after the Battle of Maritsa¹⁰? As stated before, this study seeks to contribute to early Ottoman history, bringing attention to the issue of changing patterns regarding the Ottoman center's approach to night combat. Therefore, this article's priority is not to detail the techniques and tactics the Ottomans relied on in every single military encounter. Instead, relying on the above-mentioned primary source material, I will argue that the Ottoman rulers favored night combat, actively participating in it during the early to mid-14th century. However, after the "separation of the military roles and responsibilities" between the frontier units and the central Ottoman military structure after the late 14th century, they began to avoid this kind of warfare, partaking in it only for defensive operations.

First, it is necessary to briefly talk about the rise of Ottomans in the northwest of Anatolia, to assess the importance of night operations in this period. The early Ottomans appeared in the Byzantine borders in Bithynia (Northwest Anatolia) in the 13th century. Although there is no consensus among historians as to the exact period regarding the advent of the Ottomans in Bithynia, it appears that they began to augment their regional power in the area towards the end of the 13th century, defeating the local Byzantine lords and occasionally incorporating them into their military structures. The increasing Ottoman menace in the region resulted in the fall of the strategic Byzantine cities, including Bursa (1326) and Nicaea (1331). This paved the way for the Ottomans to firmly establish themselves as a political factor in western Anatolian politics.

The early Ottoman rulers supported and actively participated in night operations against their adversaries, a situation that was subject to change in the following periods. Under Osman I's early rule, the Ottoman army did not seem to have a unified and homogenous military structure. Osman I could be likened to a "chief raider" who was able to gather militias around him for raiding, pillaging, and occasionally expansionist campaigns¹¹. Other lords who acted under his loose authority, however, were able to plan and organize their independent military actions¹². During a campaign, the Ottoman ruler acted as "first among equals," and night combat provided the perfect moments for successful military operations¹³. Dur-

¹⁰ H. İNALCIK, *Murad I*, [in:] *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, vol. XXXI, İstanbul 2006, p. 158. There is a lot of confusion regarding the Battle of Maritsa and Battle of Sırp Sındığı in the early Ottoman studies. The current academic stance tends to regard them as the same battle.

¹¹ BAYBURTLU OSMAN, *Tevârih-i Cedîd-i Mir'ât-i Cihân*, İstanbul 1961, p. 49.

¹² D.D. LEZZE, *Historia Turchescha*, Bucuresti 1910, p. 4. Lezze reinforces this stating that Osman Gazi had many "friends" around him.

¹³ GEORGES PACHYMÉRÈS, *Relations Historiques*, X, ch. 25, ed. A. FAILLER, Paris 1984–2000 (cetera: GEORGES PACHYMÉRÈS), p. 365. Pachymeres notes that when Osman Gazi announced his military campaign against the Byzantines before the battle of Bapheus in 1302, a significant number of militias from the Aegean Beyliks and an important political figure by the name of Ali Bey from the Chobanid Turcoman Emirate had joined his forces. However, after the successful outcome of this

ing this period, there was an attempt to establish a small household-like infantry army known as *yaya*. However, the overwhelming composition of the Ottoman military still consisted of mobile raider troops, as night combat was essential to their military operations¹⁴.

Countless reports about Ottoman night-time operations in the late 1200s and early 1300s exist in Byzantine and Ottoman histories and chronicles. Aşıkpaşazade, for instance, emphasizes Ottoman military exploits at night, reporting that Osman Gazi frequently benefited from the cover of darkness in directing operations against local Byzantine castles and fortifications. For example, he states that, regarding one of his earliest military operations, Osman I led his men against the “infidels of the castle of Kulaca” at night, successfully raiding the castle. The local Byzantine lords only became aware of this Ottoman operation the next day¹⁵. In another passage, Osman I dispatched Gazi Rahman, one of his subordinates, to besiege the castle of Aydos (Aetos in Greek) in Bithynia¹⁶. According to the chronicle narrative, Gazi Rahman managed to seduce the daughter of the castle commander, who took the Ottoman soldiers into the castle at night. Subsequently, the Ottomans captured the castle of Aydos¹⁷. It is true, as Wittek and Hickman stated before, that such stories entered the chronicle of Aşıkpaşazade from earlier Islamic *ghazi* traditions, which aimed to embolden the soldiers of Islam against their non-Muslim enemies¹⁸. However, as we shall see below in other parts of his work, Aşıkpaşazade gives significant importance to the night operations the Ottomans organized. The emphasis on this level of frequency demonstrates that it was a common military tactic the Ottomans employed at this time.

Aside from the castle sieges, the Ottoman rulers and their subordinates in this period preferred to conduct raiding and ambush operations at night on many occasions. Regarding the Battle of Bapheus, fought between the Ottomans and

military action, Ali Bey did not stay with Osman; instead, he returned to his territory, carrying the booty that he had gained from Bapheus.

¹⁴ AŞIKPAŞAZADE, *Osmanoğulları'nın Tarihi*, ch. 31, ed. K. YAVUZ, Y. SARAÇ, İstanbul 2003 (cetera: AŞIKPAŞAZADE), p. 365. F. EMECEN, *Yaya ve Müsellem*, [in:] *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, vol. XLIII, İstanbul 2013, p. 354.

¹⁵ AŞIKPAŞAZADE, ch. 26, p. 357.

¹⁶ *Siege of Philadelphia by Umur of Aydın = Le siège de Philadelphie par Umur Pascha d'après le manuscrit de la Bibl. patriarcale d'Istanbul, Paneghias 58*, ed. et trans. M. COUROPOU, ed. H. AHRWEILER, Paris 1981 [= ByzSor, 3], p. 67–77 (edition in pages 71–73): Archival documents from the Patriarchate of Constantinople also provide information about other Turcoman beyliks' night operations in this period. According to Patriarchal reports, shortly before his death in 1348, Umur of Aydın organized an unsuccessful attack against the Byzantine city of Philadelphia.

¹⁷ AŞIKPAŞAZADE, ch. 26, p. 357.

¹⁸ W. HICKMAN, *The Taking of Aydos Castle: Further Considerations on a Chapter from Aşıkpaşazade*, JAOS 99.3, 1979, p. 400. P. WITTEK, *The Taking of Aydos Castle: A Ghazi Legend and its Transformation*, [in:] *Arabic and Islamic studies in honor of Hamilton A.R. Gibb*, ed. G. MAKDISI, Leiden 1965, p. 665.

the Byzantine central army sent from Constantinople in 1302, for instance, Neşri provides invaluable insights. According to him, when the Byzantine expeditionary force under the command of Mouzalon reached the shores of Yalova (Pylai) from Constantinople, Osman Gazi was waiting for them, setting an ambush nearby¹⁹. It appears it was already night when the Byzantines disembarked; thus, Osman gave the signal of attack against the disorganized Byzantines, catching them off guard. Neşri adds that the Byzantines could not withstand the Ottoman attack, which resulted in some of them losing their lives while others took their boats back to Constantinople²⁰. A few years later, at the Battle of Katoikia, the Ottomans under the command of Orhan Gazi also resorted to night ambush tactics, and as such were able to defeat a local Byzantine garrison force²¹. Other near-contemporary Byzantine sources, such as the historical work of Gregoras, also provide similar information regarding the Ottoman conduct of night combat. After Osman I died in 1326, his successor, Orhan, also pursued an aggressive stance against the Byzantines, sending an amphibious raiding party to the area of Rhegium (modern Küçükçekmece) near Constantinople. Gregoras states that Emperor Andronikos III managed to learn about the potential objectives of this expedition; thus, he dispatched a small military force under the command of John Kantakouzenos²². Under the cover of darkness at 3 am, 24 Ottoman ships appeared near the shores of Rhegium. Once disembarked, the Ottomans divided their force into smaller groups, beginning to raid the area; however, as the dawn started showing its light, Kantakouzenos arrived with a force of 700 cavalry, catching the Ottomans in a disorganized state. The Ottomans, however, could not retreat to their ships, since a small Byzantine navy commanded by Andronikos was able to strike the raiders' navy in cooperation with the land army, managing to sink 14 of their boats²³.

Although this night operation resulted in an Ottoman failure, the Ottoman rulers continued to rely on it in the coming decades, especially after they crossed Hellespont. The Ottoman sources provide significant information regarding Ottoman night operations in the 1350s. Aşıkpaşazade, for instance, reports that the troops under the command of Süleyman Gazi, the Ottoman heir apparent, were able to capture the castle of Çimpe by entering the castle through a hole used to discharge horse manure at night²⁴. According to Aşıkpaşazade, it was the time of harvest, so the people of Çimpe were working in their farmlands in the countryside; thus, the Ottomans captured the castle with relative ease. Referring to the Byzantine

¹⁹ MEHMED NEŞRİ, *Kitab-ı Cihan-Nüma*, ed. F.R. UNAT, M. KOYMEN, Ankara 1957 (cetera: MEHMED NEŞRİ), p. 177.

²⁰ MEHMED NEŞRİ.

²¹ GEORGES PACHYMÉRÈS, XI, p. 21.

²² NICEPHORUS GREGORAS, 11, ch. 4, p. 539.

²³ NICEPHORUS GREGORAS, 11, ch. 4, p. 539.

²⁴ AŞIKPAŞAZADE, ch. 38, p. 375.

sources, however, we can discern that the story of Aşıkpaşazade is fiction. The Ottomans did not “conquer” the castle of Çimpe; in contrast, John Kantakouzenos allocated the Çimpe area to his Turkish soldiers, who acted as landholders over the local populations²⁵. This situation is also hinted at in the Ottoman sources, which mentioned that the *infidels of Çimpe willingly joined the ghazis, i.e., the holy warriors*²⁶. Regardless of this, however, it is still interesting that Aşıkpaşazade attributed the alleged capture of the castle to a night operation. In addition, he and other Ottoman historians stress that Süleyman Gazi continued to conduct night operations to capture other Byzantine fortifications in Thrace in this period²⁷. The author of the Oxford Anonymous Chronicle reports that Süleyman Gazi attacked a Byzantine camp at night soon after landing on the Gallipoli Peninsula²⁸. Aşıkpaşazade states that the Ottoman troops captured a castle named “Alasolonya”, located near Çimpe, as a result of a night operation²⁹. He also reports that the Turks, under the command of the leading frontier lord at the time, Hacı İlbey, preferred to undertake their raiding operations at night rather than during the day, considering that the enemy would be more vulnerable at night³⁰. These instances indicate that, although being the representative of the Ottoman dynasty in the Balkans, Süleyman was almost acting as a leader of the Ottoman raider militias in Thrace. In other words, drawing a precise line to divide him from other raider leaders was difficult. The troops under his command were not different from those of other raider leaders in the area, and just like the others, night operations were essential for his military strategies.

Despite that, however, the approach to night combat began to differ considerably in the coming periods, first appearing during the night battle of Maritsa in 1371 against the Serbians. Süleyman Gazi, who spearheaded the Turkish political

²⁵ IOHANNES CANTACUZENUS, III, p. 277.

²⁶ AŞIKPAŞAZADE, ch. 38, p. 375: *El-hasil-ı kelam bu Çimbini Hisarı kafirleri bu gazilerilen müttelik aldılar, yöürüdiler.*

²⁷ Süleyman Gazi was leading the Ottoman troops in this front, albeit in a loose fashion, after the capture of Çimpe. He was acting as a great lord (ulu bey) over various semi-independent or independent warlords in Thrace at the time.

²⁸ *An Early Ottoman History. The Oxford Anonymous Chronicle*, ed. D. KASTRIDIS, Liverpool 2017 [= TTB, 5], p. 385.

²⁹ AŞIKPAŞAZADE, ch. 38, p. 375.

³⁰ According to Irene BELDICEANU-STEINHERR (ANONYMOUS, *La vita de Seyyid Ali Sultan et la conquete de la Thrace par les Turcs*, ed. I. BELDICEANU-STEINHERR, [in:] *Proceedings of the 27th International Congress of Orientalists. Ann Arbor, Michigan, 13th–19th August, 1967*, ed. D. SINOR, Wiesbaden 1971, p. 275), the long-lasting memory of Hacı İlbey in the region led to the compilation of a hagiographic work called, *Seyyid Ali Sultan Velayetnamesi* which depicts a spiritual figure, Kızıl Deli, as the real conqueror of the Balkans. She thinks that Kızıl Deli and Hacı İlbey were identical figures. AŞIKPAŞAZADE, ch. 47, 383. The chroniclers report that Byzantines also occasionally resorted to night raids against the Ottomans hitting the coastal cities in the southern shores of the Marmara sea: *Nagah bir gice kafider girü Biga’yı ogurladılar. Kafider hayli bedbahtlıklar itdiler ve Biga’yı yıkup bozdılar. Geldiler, şimdiki Biga’yı anun yirine kurdılar.*

gains in Thrace, died in 1357–1358 due to an alleged hunting accident³¹. Immediately after this, Orhan Gazi sent his other son, Murad, to Thrace as a representative of the central state authority; however, Orhan's death in 1362 prompted Murad to return to Anatolia to claim the throne. Before leaving Thrace, Murad appointed a bureaucrat named Lala Şahin Paşa as the region's deputy. The Battle of Maritsa was a reaction against the Ottoman advances in Thrace, which threatened the small Serbian rump states on the west bank of the Maritsa River. Vukašin Mrnjavčević, the ruler of a fragmented Serbian Empire, aligned himself with his brother Uglješa, the co-ruler of the empire, and moved against the Ottomans to expel them from Europe.

When the Serbs were advancing towards Adrianople (Edirne), the Ottoman ranks were not fully ready for an all-out war. The Ottoman forces were primarily led by two leaders who were not on good terms with each other. Lala Şahin was the head of the central troops³². Considering the sheer size of the Serbian army, he was planning to adopt something like a scorch-earth tactic, aiming to drag the Serbian forces into Eastern Thrace. He hoped to receive reinforcements from Anatolia before seriously challenging the invading enemy forces. However, Hacı İlbey did not share Lala Şahin's opinion and planned to organize a sneak attack on the enemy at night³³. While the Serbs were advancing towards Edirne, he was active in the countryside with his fellow raider troops, watching the movements of the enemy units. Although, as the highest Ottoman official in the area, Lala Şahin ordered him not to engage the enemy, he acted otherwise. At the time when the Serbians camped near the banks of the Maritza River during the night, Hacı İlbey gathered his troops and led a surprise attack against them. The Serbians probably supposed that the main Ottoman army had arrived from Anatolia; thus, they began fleeing westwards in a piecemeal fashion, many of them losing their lives drowning in the river³⁴. This remarkable military success, however, was not regarded as commendable by Murad I, who was worried about the popularity of Hacı İlbey on the western front. Therefore, in the aftermath of the Battle of Maritza, Lala Şahin arrested Hacı İlbey due to his so-called irregular actions during the Serbian advance, putting him in prison and then executing him at the orders of Murad.

³¹ AŞIKPAŞAZADE, ch. 41, p. 378. DUCAS, *Historia Byzantina*, Bonn 1834, p. 39.

³² *Anonim Tevarih-i Al-i Osman*, ed. N. AZAMAT, İstanbul 1992 (cetera: *Anonim Tevarih-i Al-i Osman*), p. 25.

³³ *Anonim Tevarih-i Al-i Osman*, p. 25: *Andan Hacı İlbeği eydür: 'Yoldaşlar, nice idelüm?' dedi. Yoldaşları eydür: 'Tedbir sizündür. Siz nice dersenüz eyle idelüm' didiler. Andan Hacı İlbeği her bir yoldaşını bir depo üzerine kodı. Andan bunlara ısmarladı. Eyitdi: 'Her kaçan ben tavulbaz uram haykıram, siz her biriniz dahi eyle idün' didi.* AŞIKPAŞAZADE, ch. 26. Although some of the Ottoman sources depicts Lala Şahin as the commander of the attacking forces, this was not the case. *Lala Şahin Allah'un inayetine sığınup peygamberin mucizati berekatında gazilerle bir gice tablbaz kakup dün baskınını eyledi.*

³⁴ *Chronica Byzantina Breviora*, ed. P. SCHREINER, Wien 1975, p. 451: ὅταν ἐνίκησαν οἱ Τοῦρκοι τὸν Οὐγκλεζῆ, τὸν δεσπότη, ἔτους ,ζωοθ'.

The Battle of Maritza was a watershed phenomenon for the future of Ottoman night combat, manifesting the tactical and strategic differences between the Ottoman center and the frontier. As a result of the foundation of the *kapıkulu* household army and the establishment of the semi-independent frontier principalities in the Balkans, this strategic divergence would grow in the following decades. Although the sources do not mention the Janissary soldiers in 1371, they appear to be an essential fighting force under the command of Murad I at the Battle of Kosovo in 1389. This crucial development meant that, instead of primarily relying on the raider troops, the Ottoman ruler began having his personal “slave army” under his command. Furthermore, through implementing the timar system in the decades to come, besides the nomadic light cavalry forces, the Ottoman rulers would also begin recruiting land-holding *sipahi* soldiers. Unlike the raider militias, whose main aim was to wreak havoc in enemy territory and gain booty and slaves through raiding campaigns under the frontier lords, the *kapıkulu* and *sipahi* were soldiers immediately available to the central Ottoman state mechanism, whenever a military necessity occurred³⁵.

In his memoirs, a former janissary who reconverted to Christianity, Konstantin Mihailović, expresses this difference in detail. In his first-person account, he sharply distinguishes between the central Ottoman military structure and the raider troops, which he calls “akıncı”³⁶. He said the frontier lords led the raiders’ troops in various boundary areas, including Smederevo, Nikopolis, Kruševac, Vidin, Upper Bosnia, and Sitnica³⁷. The raiders could organize their raiding operations independently from the central army. Night combat was an essential element in their military tactics and strategies. Another former janissary, Georgius de Hungaria, provides much information on how the raiders fought at night. He states that they operated under experienced commanders “always at night,” which allowed them to organize surprise attacks on the enemy³⁸. The raiders could cover great distances at night thanks to their rapid maneuvering capabilities, aiming

³⁵ Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi MAD. 525, p. 50. Occasional tensions can be detected between the state-appointed timar holders and the regional timar holders. In one instance, a newly appointed timar holder did not seek permission from a regional *subaşı* before participating in a raiding campaign and he was reported to the authorities, which decreed the termination of his status as a timar holder: *Şimdiki halde bu mezkur destursuz akına gittiği sebebden bu timar Kapanderi ve kardaşı Koşar'a ve Komnen'e müştereken virildi, hissenin yarusın Kapandırir yiyüp, her sene eşer ve yarusına mezkurlar müşterek mutasarrıf olub nevbetçe eşerler. Fi evail-i Şevval sene 858 der Sofya.*

³⁶ K. MIHAILOVIĆ, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, trans. B. STOLZ, Ann Arbor 1975, p. 177: *The Turkish raiders are called in their language akandiye which means 'those who flow' and they are like torrential rains that fall from the clouds. From these storms come great floods until the streams, leave their banks and overflow, and everything this water strikes, it takes, carries away, and moreover, destroys, so that in some places they cannot quickly make repairs.*

³⁷ K. MIHAILOVIĆ, *Memoirs...*, p. 177.

³⁸ GEORGIUS DE HUNGARIA, *Traktat über die Sitten, die Lebensverhältnisse und die Arglist der Türken*, trans. R. KLOCKOW, Köln 1993 (cetera: GEORGIUS DE HUNGARIA), p. 186–200.

to collect as much booty and slaves as possible from enemy lands³⁹. Idrisi Bitlisi also reinforces this statement, putting a particular emphasis on the raiders' night operations. He likens the raiding operations to a "dawn wind," which struck the infidels always "at night"⁴⁰. In addition, several other primary source reports point out specific Ottoman night raid operations. For example, in 1395, Evrenos Gazi is reported to have conducted a night operation against Theodore Palaiologos, the Byzantine ruler of the Peloponnese, as a response to his siege of Corinth, which the Latin vassals of the Ottomans controlled⁴¹. During the Hungarian-Ottoman War of 1437–1442, the Ottoman commander Mezd Paşa led a large raider contingent to wreak havoc in Transylvania to facilitate the region's subjugation⁴². He set his camp in Sibiu, allowing the raiders to raid the surrounding territories for the night, which appeared to be a grave tactical mistake since the Hungarian commander Janos Hunyadi was closely observing his strategic position⁴³. Benefiting from the darkness and the absence of the main body of the raider troops, Hunyadi organized a sneak attack against the main Ottoman camp and was able to defeat the Ottoman army and eliminate Mezd⁴⁴.

Conversely, in contrast to the previous Ottoman rulers, those in power in the post-1371 period generally refrained from organizing night attacks against enemy military formations. In other words, although the early Ottoman rulers and dynastic figures, including Osman Gazi, Orhan Gazi, and Süleyman Paşa, personally conducted night operations or dispatched armies for combat at night, the Ottoman sources do not mention Murad I – especially in his later years –, and then his successors organizing night combats. It is true that the Ottoman central army fought several night battles during the 15th century; however, these were primarily defensive encounters. During the Battle of Varna (1444), there are some reliable reports that several minor skirmishes occurred between the Ottomans and the Crusaders in darkness⁴⁵. Also, we know that both sides fired cannons to intimidate

³⁹ GEORGIUS DE HUNGARIA, p. 186–200.

⁴⁰ İDRİS-İ BITLİSİ, *Heşt Behişt. VII. Ketibe*, Ankara 2019, p. 51.

⁴¹ *Kleinchroniken = Die byzantinischen Kleinchroniken*, ed. P. SCHREINER, Wien 1975 [= CFHB, 12.1], p. 33.16–17.

⁴² H. ŞİMŞİR, *The Effects of the Gunpowder Technology in the Demise of the Frontier Lords in the Ottoman Balkans*, RCEM 21, 2022, p. 11.

⁴³ ORUÇ BEY, *Oruç Bey Tarihi*, [in:] *Üç Osmanlı Tarihi*, ed. N. ATŞIZ, İstanbul 2011, p. 72: *Sonra, Sultan Murad Han, Edime'de oturup Uç Begi Mezd Beg'e Üngürü'se akın verdi. Mezd Beg kendine fazla güveniyordu. Eflak Eli'nden geçip Üngürü'se aldırmadan Akıncılar'ına izin Verdi.*

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 72: *Yanko me'unu, Mezd Beg'i yalnız bulup ansızın üzerine geldi. Mezd Beg de yanında bulunan adamlarıyla ceng edip sonunda merhum Mezd Beg orada şehid oldu. Tovacı'lardan dahi hayli adam şehid olup o akın başarısızlıkla bitip ordumuz bozuldu hicretin 845'inde.*

⁴⁵ KAŞIFI, p. 38: *Gece gelip hilal ve kamer göründü. Güneş tekrar batıda kayboldu. Cihân, en iyi renklere bürünüp 'adeta kaplanın sırtına benzer bir renge boyandı. Hemen ardından da güneş gibi, hilalde kaybolup dünya baştan başa yüzü karalar gibi oldu. O anda Engürüs Şehinşâhi köslerin sesini feleğe*

each other at night before the opposing armies confronted each other the following day⁴⁶. However, actual all-out fighting did not occur. Despite that, four years later, at the Battle of Kosovo (1448), the Hungarians carried out a night attack on the Ottoman center, where the janissaries and gunpowder units were stationed. During this battle, the Hungarians aimed to catch the Ottomans off guard, knowing they could not use their gunpowder units efficiently at night⁴⁷. However, this design failed due to the preparedness of the Ottoman ranks⁴⁸. In 1453, Skanderbeg also organized a night operation against an Ottoman army under the command of a certain İbrahim Paşa⁴⁹. During this campaign, the Ottoman commander aimed to drag the Albanians into a pitched battle; however, Skanderbeg had other plans. While Skanderbeg tried to entice the Ottomans into the Mokra Valley (Makedonski Brod, North Macedonia), the advancing Ottoman army did not follow the Albanians, bivouacking in the field of Polog, near Tetovo⁵⁰. This prompted Skanderbeg to launch a cavalry raid against the Ottoman camp, which caused disorder and chaos in the Ottoman ranks⁵¹. At a critical moment, Skanderbeg's forces managed to kill the commander of the Ottoman expeditionary forces, İbrahim Paşa, a development which resulted in the total disintegration and subsequent flight of the Ottoman army⁵². Moreover, seven years after this battle, the Ottoman central army encountered the enemy at night during Mehmed II's campaign in Wallachia in 1462. This campaign aimed to subdue the rebellious Wallachian prince Vlad III, who had discontinued paying tribute to the Ottomans. The Ottoman army crossed the Danube from Vidin, whence they continued their advance in Wallachia despite the corrosive Wallachian scorch-earth and hit-and-run tactics⁵³. However, the Ottomans managed to advance towards the Wallachian capital, Târgoviște, setting their camp south of the city⁵⁴. On the 17th of June,

yükseltti. Yiğitlerine hazır ol emri verip etrafta meş'aleler yaktırdı. Sanki, cihanı gazab ateşiyle yaktilar. Kâfirler, güürültü tüfekleriyle sağdan ve soldan sayısız mü'min öldürdüler.

⁴⁶ KAŞIFI, p. 38.

⁴⁷ M. UYAR, E. ERICKSON, *A Military History...*, p. 29.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁹ *To Χρονικον των Ιωαννινων*, ed. Λ.Ι. ΒΡΑΝΟΥΣΗ, Αθηνων 1965, p. 18–20. Indeed, the Albanians long relied on surprise night attacks against their opponents, using the advantages of the rugged Albanian landscape. The author of the Chronicle of Ioannina provides plentiful details about the surprise attacks organized by the regional Albanian lords and Carlo Tocco in the region in the 14th century.

⁵⁰ M. BARLETI, *George Castriot, Surnamed Scanderbeg, King of Albania*, trans. C. MOORE, New York 1850, p. 268. *Generall of the Turkes was encamped in fieldes of Pologue, tarrying for the breaking of the day.*

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 269. *The darknesse of the night did much augment their terrour, and the audacitie of the Christians whom they sawe to be aduanced so farre without their confines and from their owne dwellings.*

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 270–271.

⁵³ I. CEAUȘESCU, *Istoria Militară a Poporului Român*, Bucharest 1984–1988, p. 78.

⁵⁴ C.D. STRĂINI, *Țările Române*, vol. I, București 1968, p. 176.

Vlad III launched a night attack against the Ottoman camp, hoping to eliminate Mehmed II, and forcing the Ottomans to withdraw. Despite that, as Aşıkpaşazade implies, the Ottomans were aware of the Wallachian plans beforehand; thus, they accordingly organized their ranks⁵⁵. This statement is also supported by the writer of the Anonymous Italian chronicle of Verona, believed to have been written by a specific merchant called Cristoforo Schiappa, who was well-versed in the political developments of the Ottoman Empire. According to Schiappa, Mehmed II did not allow his soldiers to exit their tents in case of a night raid to prevent potential confusion in the army. The chronicle further details that the Wallachians lit torches and attacked the Ottoman camp, making noise from their bugles to demoralize the enemy. They organized continuous attacks from different directions, lasting *three hours after sunset until four the next morning*⁵⁶. The sources differ concerning the Ottoman and Wallachian casualties. The Ottoman source claims that the Wallachians were defeated, while a Wallachian source reports that the Ottoman army was defeated and demoralized, preventing them from continuing the campaign⁵⁷. However, the Ottoman army kept moving toward the north, briefly capturing the contemporary Wallachian capital Târgoviște. Finding the city evacuated, they subsequently returned to Edirne⁵⁸.

I argue that this changing attitude towards night combat first stemmed from the organizational evolution of the Ottoman military and administrative structure at the time. Osman Gazi, Orhan Gazi, Süleyman Paşa, and Murad I – earlier in his reign – were something like raider lords commanding a military force mainly composed of mobile cavalry units⁵⁹. These units were fully capable of rapid offensives, using surprise tactics. However, with the increase of infantry units in the Ottoman military, especially towards the closing decades of the 14th century, the Ottoman central army began to lose this advantage on the battlefield. Although there is no practical information about the percentage of infantry units in the Ottoman army in this period, with the formation of household infantry units, *yaya* troops, and an irregular infantry force called *azabs*, the Ottoman army lost its previous advantage of agility⁶⁰. In this period, the Ottoman army became a military juggernaut comprised of various cavalry, infantry, gunpowder, logistic, and other auxiliary units. Konstantin Mihailovic, for instance, underscores the infantry-based

⁵⁵ AŞIKPAŞAZADE, ch. 137, p. 513: *Nagah bir gice bir tarafdan bir gulu belürdi. Heman padişahun gazi kulları hazırlar-ıdı; gördiler, bu gelen gulu bu me'l'un Kazuklu'nun leşkeri-miş.*

⁵⁶ A. PIPPIDI, *Noi izvoare italiene despre Vlad Tepes, si Stefan cel Mare*, SMIM 20, 2002, p. 15–21.

⁵⁷ T.R. MCNALLY, *Dracula*, Boston 1989, p. 145.

⁵⁸ F. BABINGER, *Mehmed the Conqueror and his Time*, Princeton 1978, p. 207.

⁵⁹ PHILIPPE DE MÉZIÈRES, *The Life of Saint Peter Thomas*, ed. J. SMET O. Carm, Rome 1954, p. 205.86: *Tandem strenuitate militum Hospitalis necnon et aliorum paucorum, et strenuitate et benedictione ipsius domini legati, Turcis devictis et restoractis, Deo operante galeas ascenderunt.*

⁶⁰ K. MIHAILOVIĆ, *Memoirs...*, p. 35–36. Mihailović gives the number of *azab* soldiers around 20.000. He also gives special attention to the *yaya* soldiers, mistakenly saying that Alaaddin, the grandson of Osman, had pioneered establishing these troops.

structure of the Ottoman army. According to him, the household army comprised 6000 troops, and only a tiny percentage of this being cavalry. He argues that, as was observed in previous encounters such as Varna, the “Christian cavalry” was always superior to the Ottoman cavalry, mainly made up of the provincial *sipahi* units, besides the nomadic light cavalry units. According to Mihailovic, the real strength of the Ottoman army lies in its infantry forces. While he admits that defeating the Ottoman janissaries is not easy, he proposes an interesting tactic. Mihailovic advises his readers to attack the Ottoman army’s rear guards and baggage trains to weaken its cohesion and unity⁶¹. He says the Ottomans stationed their pack animals, especially camels, next to the janissaries holding the center of the Ottoman army during a military encounter. He advises shooting flaming arrows into the camels, which would be frightened, and trample the janissary contingents, causing panic, which would be followed by a general frontal attack by the Christian army. Mihailovic claims that he tried it with one camel, and even this was sufficient to cause turmoil in the Ottoman ranks during Mehmed II’s Wallachian campaign in 1462–1463⁶². Uyar and Erickson reinforce this idea, detailing the structure of Ottoman battle formation in the mid-15th century. In this period, along with the firearms units, the janissaries were permanently stationed in the center, flanked by the provincial cavalry troops. *The Azabs* were usually deployed in front of the main army, aiming to soften and disorganize the first wave of the enemy charges. The artillery and other firearms units were also used to disrupt the enemy formations further. After wearing down the enemy in this way, the Ottomans organized a general counterattack, seeking to surround the enemy from all sides with the help of the cavalry troops on the flanks. *The success of this battle formation depended upon the constant practice of combined arms and strict discipline. Any disharmony or failure would certainly result in a disaster*⁶³. In this way, although the Ottomans continued to use the nomadic light cavalry units in this period to a certain extent, the overall loss of agility and rapid maneuvering capabilities must have forced them to gradually jettison night operations. Additionally, attempting an offensive night battle must have also been deemed too precarious by the Ottomans, considering the risk of friendly fire, lack of coordination, disorganization, and the possibility of being exposed to enemy counterattacks.

Furthermore, the tactical and strategic evolution that the Ottoman army underwent is another factor in the changing approach towards night combat. As Wilksman pointed out previously, in western Anatolia, the early Ottomans adopted a strategy of raiding and despoiling Byzantine territory as far as possible to break their capacity to resist⁶⁴. When the enemy lost its ability to defend its possessions due to the constant raider attacks, the Ottomans pushed to annex its lands.

⁶¹ K. MIHAILOVIĆ, *Memoirs...*, p. 169.

⁶² *Ibidem*.

⁶³ M. UYAR, E. ERICKSON, *A Military History...*, p. 51.

⁶⁴ J. WILSKMAN, *Comparing Military Cultures*, Doctoral Thesis, University of Helsinki, 2021, p. 371.

Although this tactic continued in the Balkans in the following decades, these initial raiding forays and later campaigns began to be operated by different agents. In this period, the Ottoman rulers assigned this initial raiding strategy to the frontier militias. The central troops, on the other hand, organized the final operations to annex the target territories. In contrast to the raiders, they aimed not to defeat or demoralize the enemy with swift surprise attacks day or night. They sought to face the enemy in an open battle and capture its lands through conquest. Kiprovska and Schmitt also ponder this issue indirectly, naming the initial raider operations the “akıncı phase,” during which the raiders aimed to reduce the defensive capabilities of the enemy territory, preparing it for future annexation⁶⁵. According to this interpretation, the “akıncı phase” was characterized by continuous raiding, slave hunting, and destruction of the enemy’s economic infrastructure, which was followed by the intervention of the central Ottoman military and bureaucracy and the integration of the target region into the Ottoman administrative structure. However, this strategy had its disadvantages too, especially against those who adopted irregular warfare, as happened many times in Albania between 1444 and 1478. Here, the raiding parties were not always successful in subduing the rebellious Albanians, due to reasons ranging from the mountainous characteristics of the region to the united nature of the rebellious movement, which resulted in them being frequently ambushed in the deep valleys and ravines in the Albanian countryside⁶⁶. Besides dispatching occasional separate army groups just like the one under the above-mentioned İbrahim Paşa, this prompted Murad II and later Mehmed II to personally campaign in Albania, which failed mainly due to the rebels’ irregular style of warfare, which primarily relied on surprise attacks and ambushes.

⁶⁵ O.J. SCHMITT, M. KİPROVSKA, *Ottoman Raiders (Akıncıs) as a Driving Force of Early Ottoman Conquest of the Balkans and the Slavery-Based Economy*, JESHO 65.4, 2022, p. 497.

⁶⁶ *Χρονογραφία της Ηπείρου. Των τε ομόρων ελληνικών και ιλλυρικών χωρών διατρέχουσα κατά σειράν τα εν αυταίς συμβάντα από του σωτηρίου έτους μέχρι του 1854*, ed. Π. ΑΡΑΒΑΝΤΙΝΟΣ, Αθήναις 1856, p. 175: Κατά τὸ ἔτος 1455 μετὰ στρατοῦ πολυπληθοῦς ὁ Τουραχάνης περίφημος στρατάρχης τοῦ Σουλτάν Μεχμέτ ἐπετέθη πρὸς κατάκτησιν τῆς διαφυγούσης μέχρι τούτου τὸν ὀθωμανιὸν ζυγὸν ἰλλυρικῆς ἐπικρατείας, καὶ ἐντὸς αὐτῆς προχωρήσας ἐπέφερε μεγίστην φθορὰν, καὶ ἔμελλεν ἔκτοτε, ἵνα κατακτηθῆ ἡ ἐπικράτεια ἐκείνη, ἐὰν μὴ ἔτρεχε βοηθός της ὁ τῆς Οὐγγρίας βασιλεὺς ἰωάννης, οὗ τινος ὁ στρατός συμπλακεῖς γενναίως μετὰ τῶν Ὄθωμανῶν ἔλαβεν ἐντελῆ νίκη, καὶ ἦδη καταδιωχθεὶς ὁ Τουραχάνης μόλις διέφυγε τὴν αἰχμαλωσίαν, ἀλλ’ ἐκ τῆς θλίψεώς του ἀσθενήσας ἀπέθανε καθ’ ὁδόν. My translation as follows: *In the year 1455, with a large army, Turachanis, the famous commander of Sultan Mehmet, attacked to conquer the Illyrian territory that had hitherto escaped the Ottoman yoke. Advancing, he inflicted great damage. That territory would have been conquered if King John of Hungary had not come to the aid, whose army, having fought bravely with the Ottomans, had obtained a complete victory. Turachanis, although being pursued, had barely escaped captivity, but he died on the road from his grief, having fallen ill.* It is interesting that the raiders under the command of Turahan Gazi managed to subdue the Albanian rebels, ending their preceding revolt in 1436. However, Turahan’s military operations did not go as planned during Skanderbeg’s rebellion, since he failed to defeat the rebellious Albanians, losing his life on the way back in 1455–1456.

Lastly, the increasing use of early gunpowder units in the Ottoman army could also make it burdensome to operate night campaigns. Although it is not entirely clear when the Ottomans began using gunpowder units first, there are reliable reports that they were already employing some arquebus units under the rule of Bayezid I⁶⁷. We see that the use of cannon and other firearms also significantly increased in the decades to come. The establishment of the war wagon units and the improvements in cannon technology in the post-1444 period gave a significant thrust to the proliferation of firearms in the Ottoman army⁶⁸. The adoption and development of firearms units in the Ottoman army were decisive factors in its success against the enemy, as proved in several critical battles later, such as Otlukbeli (1473) and Çaldıran (1514). During these battles, the Ottomans established mobile fortresses using their war wagons against the advancing cavalry formations, a strategy that proved highly effective⁶⁹. Despite that, however, firearms also appeared as a barrier to structuring an effective night operation, at least in this early period. It was arduous work to carry and station the cannons and war wagons for a potential night attack. Uyar and Erickson even conclude that the Ottomans in this period “sacrificed tactical mobility” to “achieve strategic mobility”⁷⁰. They add that, at times, the Ottomans used war wagons for offensive purposes; however, the slow speed of these offensives did not allow them to organize swift surprise attacks. Moreover, before the wheellock, the main firearms used by gunpowder armies were arquebuses and matchlocks (according to Ágoston, which were in use in the Ottoman army by 1444)⁷¹. These weapons made stealth and concealment impossible. Also, aside from being occasionally unreliable and faulty, they had a low rate of fire (one shot per two or three minutes), and the firearm accuracy was also inferior at night. On top of that, since they would lose the concealment advantage, the attacking infantry would be an open target for those who dared to make a sortie against the attacking enemy. This situation could also decrease the chances of a successful operation. In this way, adopting the early firearms units appears to be a factor that discouraged the attacking enemy from organizing night combat.

Despite that, however, although Ottoman rulers avoided organizing or planning night attacks in this period, they did not stop using the night time to gain a psychological advantage against the enemy. In 1373, a son of Murad I, Savcı,

⁶⁷ J. SCHILTBERGER, *The Bondage, and Travels of Johann Schiltberger. A Native of Bavaria in Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396–1427*, ed. J. BUCHAN TELFER, London 1879, p. 9: [...] *And as Weyasit saw that they continued to resist, he sent for more people and ordered arquebuses to be brought, and platforms to be constructed.*

⁶⁸ ZAIFI, *Gazavat*, p. 334. Zaifi, notes that the Ottomans possessed around 2000 riflemen and numerous cannon at the Battle of Varna: *Kuruldu niçe yirde yine toplar, yaraklandı bin iki bin tüfekler.*

⁶⁹ GUGLIELMO BERCHET, *La Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia*, Torino 1865, p. 135.

⁷⁰ M. UYAR, E. ERICKSON, *A Military History...*, p. 50.

⁷¹ G. ÁGOSTON, *Firearms and Military Adaptation: The Ottomans and the European Military Revolution, 1450–1800*, JWH 25.1, 2014, p. 89.

initiated a revolt to overthrow his father. Upon hearing this, Murad I crossed to Europe, hoping to suppress the rebellion before it spread further. The armies of Murad and Savcı met at a place near Constantinople called Pikridion. Before any military encounter took place, Murad I moved forward to the enemy camp at night, and *when he was very close to the enemy camp so that he could easily be heard, he called each man by name in a loud voice, praising the deeds of who had ever done anything noble or valiant*⁷². He further promised that no harm would be done to those who participated in Savcı's rebellion. This, in return, prompted those who sided with the rebellious prince to join Murad I's side, a development which effectively ended the rebellion⁷³. A similar situation can also be observed before the Battle of Nicopolis (1396), fought between the Ottomans and the allied Crusader forces. Before the arrival of the main Ottoman army under Bayezid I, the Crusaders besieged the castle of Nicopolis on the 12th of September 1396; however, since they lacked siege equipment, they decided to force the castle commander, Doğan Bey, to surrender. The Ottoman commander, however, opted to resist the Crusaders, thinking that an Ottoman relief force would arrive soon. This caused a stalemate to last for about two weeks until the 25th of September, when the Ottoman army appeared a few kilometers south of Nicopolis⁷⁴. Ottoman chroniclers report that before engaging directly with the enemy forces, Bayezid I managed to come close at night to the besieged castle of Nicopolis without being detected by the Crusaders⁷⁵. Subsequently, he called out to the castle commander Doğan Bey and his wavering soldiers, informing them about his arrival and encouraging them to resist until the morning⁷⁶. Therefore, he prevented the potential surrender of the castle⁷⁷. Lastly, in 1422, Murad II also employed psychological warfare against his opponent, Mustafa Çelebi (also called Mustafa the Impostor – Düzmece Mustafa or Düzme Mustafa), who, after the death of the previous ruler, his brother Mehmed I, had managed to garner support from the leading frontier families, especially

⁷² LAONIKOS CHALKOKONDYLES, I, p. 71.

⁷³ LAONIKOS CHALKOKONDYLES, I, p. 72.

⁷⁴ H. KAÇAR, J. DUMOLYN, *The Battle of Nicopolis (1396), Burgundian Catastrophe and Ottoman Fait Divers*, RBPH 91.4, 2013, p. 905.

⁷⁵ MEHMED NEŞRİ, p. 327.

⁷⁶ MEHMED NEŞRİ, p. 327: *Ve rivayet iderler ki, giceyle Bayezid Han suret tebdil idüb, kâfir Niğbolı'yu muhasara iderken varub, bir yüksek yirden Niğbolı'nun dizdarına çığırdı. Hünkar'un kalada Toğan nam bir kulı vardı. Ol Hünkâr'ı avazından bilüb, geliüb, söyleşüb "Esbabımız çokdur, Hünkâr'un devletünde kâfire zebun değilüz, didi. Hünkâr dahi eytdi. "Gayret idün, Göreyim sizi üşde fil-hal yıldırım gibi ben dahi yitişdim, didi.*

⁷⁷ F. EMECEN, *Niğbolu Savaşı*, [in:] *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, vol. XXXIII, İstanbul 2007, p. 90. Emecen thinks that this correspondence between Bayezid and Doğan Bey would have actually taken place as the Ottoman *fetihnames* (Declaration of conquest) compiled subsequent to battle indicate that Doğan Bey indeed informed the main Ottoman army about the size of the enemy army.

the Evrenosoğulları in the Balkans. Being backed by the frontier lords, Mustafa Çelebi captured Edirne (Adrianopolis) and began advancing against Murad II in Bursa. In such a precarious political atmosphere, Murad II devised a plan to cause a division among the frontier troops. The leading frontier lord at the time, Mihaloğlu Mehmed Bey, was previously imprisoned by Mehmed I⁷⁸. Hoping to use his towering influence over the other lords, Murad II took Mehmed Bey with him while advancing against Mustafa. Before the two armies faced each other that night, Murad II ordered Mehmed Bey to win over the frontier lords who had aligned themselves with the enemy army. Upon hearing Mehmed Bey's voice, the frontier lords abandoned Mustafa, who had to flee back to the Balkans without even participating in the battle⁷⁹. These instances convey that the Ottoman rulers attached substantial importance to psychological warfare and that the cover of night was an excellent time to employ this. Indeed, we do not see any Ottoman ruler or high-ranking commander organizing a night operation in the post-1371 period. However, using darkness allowed a tactical advantage to achieve an objective that was more effective than brute force alone.

This paper focused on how the early Ottoman approach to night combat evolved. It has analyzed the structure and organization of Ottoman military tactics and strategies from the late 13th to the late 15th centuries. It argues that in contrast to the previous periods, Ottoman rulers, from Murad I onwards, began to increasingly turn away from organizing offensive night operations, only using night time for psychological warfare. This stemmed from three main reasons. First, a process of the "separation of military roles" took place in the Ottoman army, as a result of which the swift raiding operations were delegated to the frontier militias. Secondly, the increase in the infantry units vis-à-vis the cavalry troops made night operations more difficult. In addition, the formation of other military units for logistical purposes rendered a certain loss of agility for the Ottoman army. Third, the adoption of firearms units, including arquebusiers and cannons, seems to be another reason why we do not see any night operations during this period. Carrying heavy firearms units, including cannons, to the battlefield without detection by the enemy was particularly difficult. Also, the use of firearms would certainly mean the loss of any advantage of concealment.

⁷⁸ AŞIKPAŞAZADE, ch. 84, p. 434.

⁷⁹ AŞIKPAŞAZADE, ch. 84, p. 434.

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