

# THE OTTOMAN WORLD



Edited by

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

# ‘ON THE TRANQUILLITY AND REPOSE OF THE SULTAN’\*

The construction of a *topos*



*Hakan T. Karateke*

Those who received their high school education in Turkey learned from the history textbooks that one of the reasons for the stagnation and decline of the Ottoman empire was the lack of participation by sultans in military campaigns. The section that dealt with this decline usually followed one on the glorious Süleymanic age (1520–66), and gave either the reign of Selim II (1566–74) or that of Murad III (1574–95) as the beginning of the period of stagnation and decline. Although the absence of the sultan from the battlefield was not necessarily prominent among the many ‘internal’ and ‘external’ factors that were usually listed in this section, it tended to stick in the collective memory of those who went through the Turkish education system. This historical detail was perhaps so salient because it was generally mentioned in connection with the fact that sultans now ‘spent much of their time submerged in pleasures in their palaces’. Such information may have been more likely to capture the attention of a typical teenager, in contrast to the otherwise quite tedious narratives of history.

One could justifiably view this chapter as my attempt to set the record straight for at least one of the teachings with which I was inculcated during my high school education. But the situation is actually much more alarming than that. This largely unquestioned explanation, ubiquitous not only in Turkish history textbooks, shows to what degree we may have internalized the standard narratives that have become so much a part of the ‘natural’ paradigms originally established on the basis of nothing but historical narratives. While there may be no way around the texts that we have at hand, reading them uncritically and without context is probably one of the biggest obstacles to producing a reasonable historiography of the Ottoman empire.

This essay will investigate the circumstances surrounding the genesis of the view that the increasingly frequent military debacles from the late sixteenth century onwards were caused, among other things, by the sultans’ physical absence from campaigns. While modern historians might dismiss this line of reasoning as insubstantial, they tend not to consider under what circumstances such an explanation could be advanced by Ottomans at the time. I will explore how and why the controversy about the sultan’s participation in military campaigns arose in the late sixteenth century, and how it made its way into twentieth-century textbooks. A survey of how the issue is represented in certain contemporary historical and political works enables us to explore

at least some views on the ways in which public opinion was shaped in the Ottoman capital, how the imperial image was promoted and, at times, challenged, and how the concept of rulership evolved over time. Although the topic raises many related questions on the mobility or immobility of Ottoman sultans in general, analysis of these broader questions of how often, how far, where and, most importantly, for what purposes the Ottoman sultans travelled remains for another study.

### MURAD III'S INERTIA

Mustafa Ali, a bureaucrat of the late sixteenth century, writes rather apologetically in one of his major historical works, the *Künhü'l-abbar*, about Murad III's reluctance to go on campaign. In an extra section composed after Murad's death in 1595, and introduced by the heading 'On the tranquility and repose of the sultan', Ali investigates the reasons for the sultan's unwillingness to set out on campaign, even though his vezirs were very much in favour of it. Murad III, relates the author, would not budge from the Ottoman capital once he had made the journey from Manisa to Istanbul to be enthroned. Ali dismisses the argument that the sultan had epilepsy and therefore could not travel. He produces an explanation that the sultan's 'personal substance' (*zat*) required immobility. None of the letters in his name, Murad, had the quality to cause him to move. All of them, says Ali, carried characteristics that would increase his inclination towards the ground.<sup>1</sup>

At the time Ali devised this hypothesis, the twenty-one years of Murad's reign, in addition to the eight-year reign of his father Selim II (1566–74), had passed without a sovereign having actively participated in any military campaign. Discontent about Murad's inertia had sprung up already during his lifetime. Ali clearly touches upon the subject in his *Nushatü's-selatin* of 1581, although not as straightforwardly as in his later work. After describing in detail the squabbles between the commanders Lala Mustafa Paşa and Sinan Paşa before they left for the Iranian campaign of 1578, Ali claims that, if Murad had accompanied the army, all the Iranian lands would have been seized and the situation on the eastern front would have been resolved completely.<sup>2</sup> Another writer, Asafi, focuses on the same Iranian campaign in his *Şecaatname*, written in 1586, a few years after the *Nushat*. He claims that, had the sultan taken the trouble to campaign, then not only the Iranian lands, but all the territories as far as China would have come under Ottoman control.<sup>3</sup> Of course, if the military campaigns of these years had resulted in overwhelming success, the issue of the sultan's participation would probably not have arisen. The arguments revolve primarily around the fact that, although these campaigns did not end in total disaster, they were far from being clear victories, and were a significant drain on the imperial treasury. No such criticism is known to have arisen during the reign of Murad's predecessor, Selim II. The difference here is that a favourable peace treaty was signed with the Austrian Habsburgs two years after Selim's accession and that in 1571, most spectacularly, Cyprus was taken from the Venetians by the commander-in-chief Lala Mustafa Paşa.

Ali's dismissal of the claim that his suffering from epilepsy was an explanation for Murad's reluctance to go on campaign is clear evidence that the issue was controversial and that various explanations were being openly debated. Salomon Schweigger, a



**Figure 8.1** Süleyman in procession through Istanbul, c.1533. From Pieter Coecke van Aelst, *The Turks in MDXXXIII: a series of drawings made in that year at Constantinople by Peter Coeck of Aelst, and published from woodblocks, by his widow, at Antwerp in MDLIII*; reproduced in facsimile (London, 1873) and as *Gravürlerle Türkiye I* (Ankara, 1996), plate 113. Reproduced here with permission of the Turkish Ministry of Culture.

Protestant preacher who spent four years from 1577 to 1581 in Istanbul as part of the entourage of the Habsburg envoy, heard about Murad's disease (*fallende Krankheit*).<sup>4</sup> Aside from his failure to attend a single campaign, Murad did not leave the palace during the last years of his reign. For two consecutive years he failed even to attend the Friday procession to an imperial mosque, a unique occurrence in the Ottoman throne city. According to the historian Selaniki (d. 1600), a vigilant observer of late sixteenth-century events, whenever Murad wanted to go out for the Friday prayer, he was frightened into changing his mind by allusions to an alleged plot by the Janissaries to dethrone him when he left the palace for that purpose.<sup>5</sup> Selaniki's explanation for Murad's resistance to going on campaign also cites more directly the strained relations between the sultan and the Janissaries, recounting that the latter several times made bold demands of the sultan personally at the imperial council. As a result, Murad did not trust the Janissaries to support him in the tensions that were likely to arise during a campaign.<sup>6</sup>

Critical remarks about Murad III's military immobility make even more sense when one considers his grandfather's and great-grandfather's itineraries (see tables 8.1 and 8.2). Süleyman I and Selim I (1512–20), in stark contrast to their descendant, were among the most militarily mobile of all Muslim sultans of any era. Süleyman went on thirteen campaigns: five times to Hungary, including the Vienna campaign of 1529, and three times to Iran and Iraq, going as far as Tabriz and Baghdad. He was away

from Istanbul once for twenty months and on another occasion for twenty-three, and altogether was absent from his throne city for almost one-fourth of his reign; at the time of his death, at the advanced age of seventy-two, he was on campaign in Hungary. Selim I was remembered as ‘seldom sedentary’ (*kalilü’l-karar*) by the imperial annalist Naima almost two centuries after his death.<sup>7</sup> The successful campaigns of Selim and Süleyman were constantly cited as acclaimed examples in order to foster the ideal of a ‘combatant sultan’.<sup>8</sup> Their military successes and their desire to be at the war front in person became linked in the minds of many, and laid the grounds for the construction in later literature of a *topos* about the physical absence of the sultan from the battleground as an explanation for the increasing prevalence of unsuccessful battles, or even of civil unrest.

**Table 8.1** Campaigns of Selim I

<i>Destination</i>	<i>Departure</i>	<i>Duration</i> <sup>9</sup>
Iran	20 March 1514	484 days
Egypt	2 June 1516	783 days
Departed for Edirne,	18 July 1520	65 days
Died in his tent near Çorlu	22 September 1520	

Source: Based on Anon. 1966.

Notes: Reigned 1512–20: 2,933 days; approximately 1,323 days (45.1 per cent of his reign) were spent away from Istanbul. Selim made a trip to Edirne only two weeks after he returned from the Egyptian campaign (August 1518) and stayed there for about five months.

**Table 8.2** Campaigns of Süleyman

<i>Destination</i>	<i>Departure</i>	<i>Duration</i>
Belgrade, Hungary	18 May 1521	153 days
Rhodes	16 June 1522 <sup>10</sup>	226 days
Hungary (Mohács)	23 April 1526	203 days
Vienna	10 May 1529	215 days
Hungary (Köszeg/Güns)	25 April 1532	210 days
Iran, Iraq (Tabriz, Baghdad)	10 June 1534	577 days
Corfu	17 May 1537	190 days
Moldavia	8 July 1538	143 days
Hungary (Buda)	20 June 1541	160 days
Hungary (Esztergom)	23 April 1542	207 days
Iran (Tabriz)	End of April 1548	605 days
Stay in Amasya	28 August 1553	702 days
Hungary (Szigetvár)	1 May 1566	130 days
Died on campaign, 7 September 1566		

Source: Based on Anon. 1979 and Anon. 1981.

Notes: Reigned 1520–66: 16,786 days; approximately 3,721 days (22.1 per cent of his reign) were spent away from Istanbul. Only his thirteen campaigns are listed here. Occasional trips to Bursa or Edirne for a duration of up to three months are not listed. Süleyman also stayed in Edirne from November 1541 to April 1542 – i.e., between two campaigns.

## MEHMED III'S SOLE CAMPAIGN

When Mehmed III succeeded Murad III in 1595, the controversy and rumours of immobility persisted. Mehmed's absence from one of the first Friday processions of his reign (10 February 1595), on account of severe weather, may have encouraged these rumours, although he did appear the following week at the Süleymaniye mosque.<sup>11</sup> The Janissaries were very much in favour of the sultan's leading the campaign which was likely to set out during the next season. While the army, under the command of Koca Sinan Paşa, was still at the Hungarian war front, the janissary commanders, meeting in their Istanbul barracks, were critical of the fact that this robust sultan, twenty-nine years of age, refused to go on campaign with them, whereas Süleyman had done so even when he was old and sick and had to use a carriage. Janissaries on duty at the palace staged a protest at the next meeting of the imperial council in their traditional way by leaving before the soup. At the end of September 1595 they took an oath stating that they would go on another campaign only if the sultan also were present.<sup>12</sup> That same day, several *kadis* and *medrese* professors created a small commotion during a sermon at the Süleymaniye mosque by accusing not only the sultan, but also the ruling elite, of passivity in the face of insults such as the capture of Muslim families after the fall of Esztergom castle in early September.<sup>13</sup> At the beginning of November, the preacher of the Ayasofya mosque was sent to the palace to deliver a moving sermon on the Islamic duty of 'commanding right and forbidding wrong'. Mehmed III burst into tears.<sup>14</sup>

Discussion on this subject probably continued throughout the city during these months. On 1 December, Koca Sinan Paşa was appointed grand vezir for the fifth time, and on 21 December he invited the senior religious authorities, including the chief *mufiti* and the chief military judges of Rumeli and Anatolia, to a lavish banquet to discuss the issue. This occurred despite the fact that Sinan Paşa's dislike of the *ulema* was apparently no secret.<sup>15</sup> The party initially rejected the idea of the sultan himself going on campaign, citing the practical difficulties of raising an appropriate army, in terms both of the necessary number of soldiers and of the splendour that a campaign featuring a sultan would require. They also raised the example of the last two sultans, who had successfully guided Ottoman armies from the throne, via commanders, and had even conquered new lands. A group of *ulema* reasoning about the number of soldiers might seem strange in another context, but in this case it indicates the extent to which the issue had become a public concern. What this group of high-ranking religious figures actually had in mind when arguing against the presence of the sultan on campaign, and whether there were ulterior motives for their position, cannot be established from the documentation at hand. However, it is quite likely that this was not the recommendation that Sinan Paşa was aiming for when he arranged the banquet. By some unclear means, towards the end of the meal opinion shifted in the other direction, and the meeting finally concluded that, if enough supplies and provisions could be dispatched to the front, it would then be appropriate for the sultan to set out with the army.<sup>16</sup>

According to Baron Wratislaw of Mitrowitz, a Habsburg diplomat imprisoned in Istanbul during this time, Sinan Paşa capitalized on the general discontent of the Janissaries and *sipahis* (palace cavalry) by further inciting them to complain. They reportedly submitted a petition to the sultan during a Friday procession, 'requesting him to

go to Hungary against the Christians, and follow in the footsteps of his predecessors'.<sup>17</sup> While deliberations continued, Sinan Paşa entered Mehmed III's presence and advised the sultan that it would be utterly wrong to send the army to the battlefield under a commander-in-chief who was merely the grand vezir or one of the lower-ranked vezirs. If the grand vezir was sent as commander, his deputy (*kaimmakam*) in Istanbul would purposely withhold further soldiers and provisions from the army in order to cause the grand vezir to be unsuccessful, in the hope of damaging his reputation and ultimately replacing him. If another vezir was appointed commander, the grand vezir himself would not want him to succeed and thereby become a possible contender for his own position. A higher authority such as the sultan himself would be a solution to all these problems, suggested Sinan Paşa.<sup>18</sup> Such a view evidently arose as a consequence of the behaviour of contending commanders-in-chief in previous campaigns. Sinan Paşa is generally depicted in Ottoman chronicles as trying to persuade the sultan to go on campaign out of fear of carrying the responsibility for a likely disaster entirely on his own shoulders. He had barely escaped execution for his failures during the defence of Esztergom and other castles a few months previously.

Further criticism from other authors indicates that discontent about the commanders was prevalent. Ali's views on the sultan's military inertia suggest that it was not only the idea of the sultan remaining in Istanbul during a campaign to which the bureaucrat was opposed. He was also troubled by a related development, namely that the military commanders were becoming too powerful on account of the awe they created around themselves, and that they were intruding into spheres to which they otherwise had no right, such as the appointment of judges. In Ali's critical, perhaps over-sensitive view, this had developed into something like a 'dictate of commanders' (*serdarlar saltanati*).<sup>19</sup> Hasan Kafi, himself present on the 1596 Eğri campaign, had few good words to say about the Ottoman military commanders. In his treatise on statecraft, *Usulü'l-hikem*, which he rewrote in the euphoria after the campaign's success, he warns the sultan not to trust anyone other than himself and recommends that the sultan in person, and not the commanders, who were often negligent, should inspect the army before a battle. His advice, though offered indirectly, was that the sultan should lead the army in person on campaigns.<sup>20</sup>

However, it appears that there was another faction in the palace, led by Mehmed III's mother, Safiye Sultan, which was vehemently opposed to Mehmed's going to the battlefield. Although Baron Wratislaw's assertion that she had claimed, 'relying upon the Alcoran', that 'no new sultan shall be obliged to go to war for the space of three years' is probably incorrect, it nevertheless accurately reflects her position in this matter.<sup>21</sup> Mehmed perhaps hoped to assert his authority over his very influential mother by personally leading a successful campaign that would build up his charisma and aura.

The grand vezir Sinan Paşa died in April 1596, and Mehmed III himself led the army to Hungary, as a result of which the fortress of Eğri (Eger) was captured and a victory secured over a combined Habsburg–Transylvanian army at the battle of Haçova (Mezőkeresztes). According to Ottoman narratives, after the fall of the Eğri fortress, when news spread that the Habsburg army was approaching, Mehmed wanted to dismiss his army and return to Istanbul. He also showed signs of wanting to flee the Haçova battlefield when the Ottoman army initially appeared defeated. However, in the end, as narrow a victory as it turned out to be, Haçova did validate the formula at

this particular moment: when the sultan came along, victory was assured. Talikizade, participating in the campaign as official historiographer, states that the thirty-year-plus hiatus in sultan-led campaigns had resulted in the amassing of munitions by the enemy, assaults on Muslims, and the vanishing of the awe they felt vis-à-vis the sultan.<sup>22</sup> Now victory was secured.

After returning to Istanbul, Mehmed assured his vezirs during the Friday prayer that he would campaign again. His words quickly reverberated throughout the city, and even caused market prices to rise.<sup>23</sup> However, although Mehmed spread similar rumours later in his reign, especially when his rule became insecure, the 1596 Eğri expedition remained his only military campaign. His successor, Ahmed I (1603–17), did not campaign at all. While the Zsitvatorok treaty of 1606 with the Habsburgs stabilized the European front, the *celali* revolts and Safavid wars in the east dominated the next few decades for the Ottomans, but it was not until 1621 that another sultan, Osman II (1618–22), again led the army in battle. Subsequently, other seventeenth-century sultans – Murad IV (1623–40), Mehmed IV (1648–87) and Mustafa II (1695–1703) – did lead relatively successful campaigns (see table 8.3).

It seems safe to assume that a new kind of rulership was already in the making by the late sixteenth century, whereby the practice of imperial seclusion now widened to include the sultan's military activities. This may have derived partly from the personalities of Süleyman's immediate successors or from special circumstances surrounding their reigns. Yet, resistance to this development from various groups forced Mehmed III and, later, his successors to be militarily more active. It did not take much effort for the general public to be aware of the sultan's immobility and to turn it into easily manipulable common knowledge. It was then used as a political argument when the need arose, and, once the issue became the subject of open debate, it gained more political weight, hindering or delaying evolution in the idea of rulership.

## SUBSEQUENT RECEPTION

This debate probably remained vivid in the political and public memory for some time. It was handled in some detail by certain seventeenth-century chroniclers, who used narratives contemporary to the events as sources, though others passed over the subject in silence. An association of military failures with the sultan's not leading the army may thus have remained a conviction for some, especially those close to janissary circles. Whenever futile military campaigns multiplied, discontent arose in some sections of society. An uneasy desire to quell any anxiety on this topic perhaps ensured that, when a sultan did participate in military campaigns, it now became the subject of extraordinary emphasis. According to Silahdar Mehmed, for instance, no other sultan ever made as grandiose and heroic an appearance as did Mehmed IV at a parade in Edirne that preceded his departure for the Kamanıçe campaign in 1672.<sup>24</sup>

Neither Veysi's *Habname* nor Mustafa Safi's *Zübdetü't-tevarih*, both of which were written in the 1610s, contains a discernibly critical view on the issue of the sultan leading the army. In fact, Safi, an imam at the imperial palace, whose book is an extreme example of panegyric historiography, cites Mehmed III as an ideal sultan with respect to his decision to go on the Eğri campaign. He claims that no other sultan had ever attained or even come close to attaining the good reputation that Mehmed acquired by protecting the honour of the sultanate with this campaign.<sup>25</sup> Only a decade or so

**Table 8.3** Campaigns after Mehmed III (setting off from Istanbul or Edirne)

Ahmed I (1603–17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ 1604 Pest (Austria) (+)</li> <li>◦ 1604 ‘East’ (Safavids) (-)</li> <li>◦ 1605 Esztergom (Austria) (+)</li> <li>◦ 1610 ‘East’ (Safavids) (-)</li> <li>◦ 1615–16 Revan (Safavids) (-)</li> <li>◦ 1617 Ardabil (Safavids) (-)</li> </ul>
Mustafa I (1617–18)	None
Osman II (1618–22)	* 1621–2 Hotin (Poland) (-)
Mustafa I (1622–3)	None
Murad IV (1623–40)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ 1626 Baghdad (Safavids) (-)</li> <li>◦ 1629–30 Hemedan and Baghdad (Safavids) (-)</li> <li>◦ 1633 ‘East’, against the Safavids, who laid siege to the castle of Van; campaign downgraded when siege is abandoned.</li> <li>* 1634 Poland; campaign abandoned at Edirne when agreement is reached with the Poles.</li> <li>* 1635 Revan (Safavids) (+)</li> <li>* 1638–9 Baghdad (Safavids) (+)</li> </ul>
İbrahim (1640–48)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ 1642 Azov (Russia) (+)</li> <li>◦ 1645–6 Crete (Venice) (-)</li> </ul>
Mehmed IV (1648–87)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ 1658 Transylvania (+)</li> <li>◦ 1663 Uyvar/Neuhäusel (Austria) (+)</li> <li>◦ 1666–8 Crete (Venice) (+); sultan decides to join the army in August 1668, sets off from Edirne, but receives the news of the fall of Candia on the way and proceeds to Salonica.</li> <li>* 1672 Kamanıçe (Poland) (+)</li> <li>* 1673–4 Hotin (Poland), Ukraine (-)</li> <li>* ◦ 1678 Czehryń (Russia); 1678 (+); sultan leads the army as far as Hacıoğlupazarı and stays there for three months.</li> <li>* 1681 Russia (-); peace agreement signed before the campaign begins.</li> <li>* ◦ 1683 Vienna (-); sultan leads the army as far as Belgrade and stays there for five months.</li> </ul>
Süleyman III (1687–91)	* ◦ 1689 Austria (-); sultan leads the army as far as Sofia.
Ahmed II (1691–5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ 1693 Belgrade (Austria) (+)</li> <li>◦ 1694 Peterwardein (Austria) (-)</li> </ul>
Mustafa II (1695–1703)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* 1695 Lippa, Lugos (Austria) (+)</li> <li>* 1696 Timișoara (Austria) (+)</li> <li>* 1697 Zenta (Austria) (-)</li> </ul>

Notes: \* sultan leads the army

◦ campaign in a foreign state; sultan does *not* lead the army

+ victory

- defeat

- drawn battle: no clear outcome, or peace treaty

had passed since the controversy surrounding this topic, and what Safi meant by such an allusion must have been easily grasped. Veysi, on the other hand, a *kadi* by profession, who presented his advice treatise to the grand vezir Nasuh Paşa, does mention the recurring futile campaigns on the eastern front as the greatest public concern of these years, but he does not even implicitly mention the sultan’s failure to lead the army as a cause.

A direct reference to the issue is found only in the anonymous *Kitab-ı müstetab*. This book, which was probably written around 1620 by someone of *değişirme* origin and in all likelihood sympathetic to the Janissaries, is an advice treatise and uses this rhetorical format to bring several issues to attention. Seven questions addressed in the addendum of the book to a fictitious group of members of the ruling elite are placed in the mouth of the sultan. The first question enquires whether the reason for the rising Safavid threat and unrest in Anatolia could be that the sultan had not personally been leading campaigns to Iran.<sup>26</sup>

One would expect that such concerns, whether widespread or not, would subside after Osman II's Hotin campaign in 1621 and disappear by the mid-1630s, with Murad IV's successful campaigns to Revan and Baghdad (see table 8.3). Indeed, Koçu Bey, writing in the 1640s, does not raise the issue as a problem, but mentions Süleyman I's participation in campaigns only as part of his efforts to gather information about his subjects.<sup>27</sup> Katib Çelebi's *Düsturü'l-amel*, also written during the 1650s in the tradition of advice treatises, does not touch upon the issue at all. However, a decade later, when Hezarfen Hüseyin is gathering laws pertaining to state institutions in his *Telhisü'l-beyan* (1669–70), he regards both options, namely either the sultan or a commander leading a campaign, as equally valid. *Telhis* may be regarded as a different genre, since it is a compilation of legal material, which often had a timeless language repeating previous wording. However, Hezarfen Hüseyin made the compilation for an audience other than lawmakers or jurists, and often rearticulated other laws in his own words and integrated them with contemporary views.

The laws of campaigns: first, it is clear that the greatest task of the sultan is to conquer lands, to drive away the enemies, and fight those whom we are required to fight. This task is carried out either by the sultan going on a campaign in person or by him appointing someone trustworthy from among the vezirs or commanders as a commander-in-chief over the army.<sup>28</sup>

The sources quoted above indicate that sensitivity on the subject was high at the end of the sixteenth century, gradually receded during the course of the seventeenth, and by around 1670 was accepted as one of two alternative practices of campaign leadership. Such evidence suggests that the debate and the sensitive public opinion about the sultan's going on campaign were context-specific. The debate should therefore be understood in its contemporary context, and not necessarily as a continuing issue.

## RESURGENCE OF DEBATE

While a thorough examination of the historiographical literature of the eighteenth century may help produce a more accurate perspective on the changing perceptions of this issue, the actual discussion seems to have faded away. However, the *topos* resurfaced in modern Ottoman and Turkish historiography. Starting in the second half of the nineteenth century, some historians dealt with the issue within the larger development of a modernist, positivist, disenchanting and anti-monarchical worldview. Historians in this tradition first judged ahistorically the sultan's failure to lead military campaigns as non-compliant with the standards of the modern world, and eventually came to view this as one of the reasons for the decline of the Ottoman empire. Among

others, Frederick II of Prussia and Napoleon Bonaparte enjoyed great reputations in the nineteenth-century Ottoman military imagination as ideal enlightened leaders who also frequently led their armies personally.

Hayrullah, in his *History of the Ottoman state*, a much admired work of its time (published between 1856 and 1875), philosophizes at length about the benefits of the sovereign’s being at the war front. In his view, it was beyond doubt that the 1596 Eğri campaign would have been unsuccessful had the sultan not been there. He sees an additional force in the sultan’s person which infuses ‘firmness and fortitude’ into the soldiers. After listing examples from ineffectual campaigns in which Murad III and Mehmed III did not participate, Hayrullah evaluates the issue from the perspective of civilization: even the sovereigns of cultured, civilized and well-regulated countries (*terbiye, temeddün, nizam*) were now present in person on the battlefield. The crux of his argument is that the sovereign’s being at the war front should not be considered ‘Bedouinism’, a concept frequently used in opposition to ‘civilization’ in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>29</sup> By handling the issue within the political and cultural terms and concerns of his time, Hayrullah clearly brings a totally new perspective on the controversy.

Another historian who touched upon the issue is Abdurrahman Şeref, whose *History of the Ottoman state* was written as a course book for schools of higher education in the early 1890s. Şeref was also the last person to occupy the post of imperial annalist of the Ottoman empire. However, his reference to the issue is neither explicit nor presented in the framework of a decline paradigm. The relevant section in the first edition of his book describes the deliberations of Mehmed III over whether to lead the Eğri campaign:

Sultan Mehmed III prepared himself to go on the campaign in person. The crescent of the imperial standard, which had withdrawn itself into the shadow of silence since the time of Sultan Süleyman, [rose] again from the horizon of the Divine guidance and illuminated joyful eyes.<sup>30</sup>

A curious approach to the issue comes from Mizancı Murad, in his *Tarih-i Ebü'l-Faruk*. The book is a popular history written by a journalist. Murad often colours his narrative by filling in the inevitable blanks quite imaginatively and by freely inserting several unfounded claims. Although otherwise adhering to a demystified worldview which no longer tolerated a predestinarian historical approach or astrological explanations for events, Murad’s depiction of the issue can best be understood as a product of his dramatization skills. When dealing with the reign of Mehmed III, he depicts a general situation of despair in late sixteenth-century Ottoman society.<sup>31</sup> According to his narrative, after the fall of Esztergom castle in September 1595, which indeed caused profound public unease, ‘there was mourning and grief everywhere, earthquakes and floods occurred, many strange signs were observed, such as the sighting of fish that had not been known before, and water turned black as ink in some places’.<sup>32</sup> Yet, ‘a miracle happened among all this confusion. A divine sign which was particular to the Orient appeared’.<sup>33</sup> This miracle was Mehmed III’s decision to lead the army to Eğri. The labelling of this decision as a miracle was the result of Murad’s conviction that ‘the order of the army was disbanded since the sultans stopped going on campaigns’.<sup>34</sup> He presented this as the only miracle in the entirety of his portrayal of a miserable period.

While the issue was treated from diverse perspectives by widely read, late Ottoman historians, Hayrullah and Mizancı Murad seem to have a common thread in their approach. A self-orientalizing angle can be detected in their treatment of this historical event. Hayrullah feels compelled to evaluate the event in respect to its compatibility with the requirements of civilization in general and uses such loaded words as Bedouinism, thus clearly positioning himself within the common Orientalist discourse of the time. Mizancı Murad also uses Orientalist images, referring almost humorously to divine signs and miracles in his narrative of Mehmed III's participation in the Eğri campaign. Significantly, neither of these historians attempted to present the issue within a declinist discourse. Such a viewpoint emerged only in the Republican period. The first history textbook of the Turkish Republic, designed for high schools and published in 1931, defined the parameters of this paradigm for decades to come. Under the section headed 'The main reasons for the period of stagnation', the book states:

In the absolutist Ottoman state, the ruler was the executor of the state affairs and the commander of the army. The sultans since Selim II – except for one or two – *did not go on a campaign* with desire or ardour. Thereafter, the sultans and the princes withdrew themselves into the palace and spent their lives among *women and eunuchs*.<sup>35</sup> [emphasis in original]

One of the most influential general history books in popular as well as academic history writing in Turkey, İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı's *Ottoman history* reproduces this view in similar words.<sup>36</sup> While it is clear that Uzunçarşılı wrote within the Republican discourse in terms of how he presents the issue, it is likely that he consulted the original sources as well. A manuscript copy of *Kitab-ı müstetab*, quoted above as one of the most explicit criticisms of the sultan's general reluctance to lead campaigns, was found in Uzunçarşılı's private library.<sup>37</sup> Later, several generations of pupils at Turkish high schools would be taught history from textbooks written by Emin Oktay, who also shared this view.<sup>38</sup> A quick glance at more recent textbooks shows that the perspective has persisted.<sup>39</sup> This view has even found its way into a general history of the Ottoman empire in the English language.<sup>40</sup>

## CONCLUSION

While the sultan's presence on the battlefield probably had a limited effect on actual military tactics, there is no doubt that it was a tremendous boost to the soldiers' morale. This was especially critical at a time when the outcome of battles depended highly on personal combat skills. Moreover, perhaps partially based on convictions about divine assistance to a sultan-led campaign, campaigns carried out under the sultan's personal command raised expectations of a victorious outcome. Following Osman II's unsuccessful Hotin expedition, İbrahim Peçevi, a contemporary historian, concluded the narrative of this campaign in his *History* with the thought that it was surely a warning sign from God that the Ottomans were not victorious despite the fact that they had fought with two sovereigns, namely Osman II and the Crimean Khan, against the Poles, whose king was not even on the battleground.<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, the material allowance for a sultan-led campaign usually surpassed the budget of a regular campaign. Going back to the arguments made during the

banquet at Sinan Paşa’s mansion, the initial course of action eventually agreed by the high *ulema* was immediately to send ample ammunition and provisions to the front as a preparation for the Eğri campaign. A *sefer-i hümayun* (or *hünkar seferi*, a campaign in which the sultan personally took part) was always equipped with much more abundant material provisions in addition to the necessary ‘imperial splendour’ (*tecemmül-i saltanat*) required.<sup>42</sup> No doubt such a well-equipped and better-organized military expedition had many favourable implications for the army as a whole, which would also justify the belief that the sultan’s leading the army on campaign had the potential to affect its outcome positively.<sup>43</sup>

The equation was nevertheless far from being so straightforward. There were obviously many failed campaigns in which the sultan himself took part, whereas several others led by a commander-in-chief other than the sultan turned out to be overwhelmingly victorious. The perception that, from Selim II onwards, the Ottoman sultans’ no longer leading military campaigns is one of the reasons for Ottoman decline is, whether plausible or not, characterized by historiographical defects. A context-specific sensitivity in public opinion regarding this matter did indeed arise at the end of the sixteenth century, and a general debate on the causes of the not very successful military campaigns of that time did take place. The theme remained vivid in the political and public memory at least until the 1620s and was reflected in some, but not all, contemporary historiography. By the mid-seventeenth century the debate had subsided, and sensitivity to it gradually disappeared. On the other hand, many seventeenth-century sultans again led the army in person on actual battlegrounds. A variant also practised by these sultans was to lead the army to a principal stage (such as Belgrade or Sofia) on one of the Ottoman *viae militares* and to quarter there until the return of the army. Clearly, neither this latter formula nor the leadership of an able commander-in-chief (such as a member of the Köprülü family) was seen as a problem, or at least not one that was important enough to be invoked in the explanations for failed campaigns of the seventeenth century.

Yet, that context-specific debate was reproduced first in late Ottoman historiography, and then in republican Turkish historical writing, in different contexts but with little reference to the original circumstances. Republican historiography presented the subject matter of a genuine discussion teleologically as a factor in loss of military strength, even a general decline, of the Ottoman empire from the late sixteenth century onwards. Controversial views were attributed to a period later than the one in which discussion actually occurred, a practice most probably imported into republican historiography initially by quotation of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Ottoman works. In effect, incautious use of such views was no different than the similar reproduction of other factors of decline – indeed, the entire decline paradigm – from Ottoman works into Turkish republican historiography.

However, the appearance of this *topos* in differing contexts results in its being more than just a repeated stereotype. It also holds clues to how concepts of rule in the Ottoman empire changed. Around the last quarter of the sixteenth century, as the sultan was becoming a militarily less mobile ruler, the challenges he faced because of this development delineated the limits of his authority. The political conjuncture, agendas of pressure groups, and resulting public opinion forced some sultans to be militarily more active than they might have wished to be. Subsequent perspectives on the same string of incidents offer us a comparative insight into how expectations of sultanic

rule evolved over time. While the seventeenth century saw the delayed acceptance of evolution in the military role, notions of rule among the Ottoman intelligentsia in the nineteenth century were shaped by modern disenchanting and anti-monarchical worldviews. Study of Ottoman perceptions of going on campaign and the sultan's military role therefore has much to contribute to the history of political thought in the Ottoman world.

## NOTES

- \* 'Der huzur u rahat-ı hakani', Mustafa Âli on Murad III (Âli 2000: II, 239).
- 1 Âli 2000: II, 239–40.
- 2 Âli 1979: 112–16.
- 3 Asafi Dal Mehmed 2007: fol. 3a.
- 4 Schweigger 1986: 145.
- 5 Selaniki Mustafa Efendi 1989: II, 445.
- 6 Ibid.: I, 432.
- 7 Naima 2007: II, 401.
- 8 E.g., Peçevi 1866: II, 187; Hezarfen Hüseyin 1998: 183.
- 9 Some dates are disputed, hence durations are approximate.
- 10 Army leaves on 4 July.
- 11 Selaniki Mustafa Efendi 1989: II, 444, 449.
- 12 Ibid.: II, 524, 527.
- 13 Ibid.: II, 525.
- 14 Ibid.: II, 531–2.
- 15 Âli 2000: III, 697.
- 16 Selaniki Mustafa Efendi 1989: II, 548–9.
- 17 Wratislaw 1862: 175–6.
- 18 Hasan Beyzade Ahmed 2004: II, 472–5. This argument found its way into later historiography: e.g., Peçevi 1866: II, 189; Katib Çelebi 1869–71: I, 68; Naima [1281–3] 1864–6: I, 136–7; d'Ohsson 1824: 418.
- 19 Âli 1997: 324–5.
- 20 Hasan Kâfi el-Akhisarî 1981: 267–8.
- 21 Wratislaw 1862: 176.
- 22 Talikzade Mehmed Subhi 1986: 210ff.; Woodhead 1994: 473.
- 23 Selaniki Mustafa Efendi: II, 670.
- 24 Silahdar Mehmed 1928: 569; also quoted in Doğru 2006: 19.
- 25 Safi 2003: II, 16–17.
- 26 Anon. 1988: 36–7.
- 27 *Koçi Bey risalesi* 1994: 15.
- 28 Hezarfen Hüseyin 1951–3: 380; Hezarfen Hüseyin 1998: 173.
- 29 Hayrullah 1875: XIV, 72–3.
- 30 Abdurrahman Şeref 1894–5: II, 9. The second, more concise edition omits the section referring to Süleyman and simply says: 'Sultan Mehmed III decided to go on the campaign in person' (Abdurrahman Şeref 1900–01: II, 9).
- 31 Mehmed Murad 1911: 163.
- 32 Ibid.: 168–9.
- 33 Ibid.: 170. Bu kargaşalık arasında bir mucize vaki oldu. Şarka mahsus bir ruhaniyet numunesi baş gösterdi.
- 34 Ibid.: 170, 185–6.
- 35 *Tarih* III 1931: 59–60. Tevakkuf devrinin başlıca amilleri: . . . Mutlakiyetle idare edilen Osmanlı devletinde, hükümdarlar devlet muamelâtının nâzımı ve ordunun kumandanı idiler. Selim II. den itibaren padişahlar – bir ikisi müstesna – heves ve gayretle *sefere çıkmamışlardır*.

Bundan sora [!] padişahlar ve şehzadeler tamamen saraya kapanmışlar ve ömürlerini *kadınlar ve haremağaları* arasında geçirmişlerdir.

36 Uzunçarşılı 1951: 120.

37 Uzunçarşılı 1943: 712.

38 Oktay 1969: 123.

39 Kara 1991: 140, mentioned among the ‘internal causes of Ottoman decline’.

40 Shaw 1976: 170–01, quoted among ‘the political and military factors of decline’.

41 Peçevi 1866: II, 378. My thanks to Murat Yaşar for this reference.

42 Selaniki Mustafa Efendi: II, 548.

43 However, some sources present the financial aspect of campaign preparation as one of the reasons for the Ottoman administration’s reluctance to organize a sultan-led campaign: the grand vezir Boynu Yaralı Mehmed Paşa persuaded Mehmed IV to abandon the idea of campaigning in 1656 by arguing how much more expensive it would be if the sultan were present (Naima 2007: IV, 1696, though there may have been other reasons not mentioned by Naima).