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The Battle of Nedao and its Importance in Eastern European Turkish History

Nedao Savaşı ve Onun Doğu Avrupa Türk Tarihindeki Önemi

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The battle of Nedao is an extremely key battle to construct Eastern European Turkish history. It is one of the events that reshaped the ethnic structure of Europe. As a result of this war, many tribes relocated and new formations (disintegrations and coalitions) took place among the tribes. In terms of Turkish history, according to some sources, it is seen either as an event that brought the collapse of the European Huns or as an event that enabled the Huns to re-emerge strongly with the Bulgars, which strengthened the Turkish presence in Europe. As well as examining these views in our article, we will try to find solution to the problem of exact location where the Nedao River is.

Key Words: Nedao, European Huns, Eastern Europe, History.



After Atilla's death, his son Ilek, the eldest son born from Arakan, took the throne in line with his will. According to sources, however, Ilek had two brothers from the same mother and three brothers from Krimhilde, the daughter of the Bavarian prince. These brothers, who received different manners as they were born from different mothers, did not accept Ilek's reign after Atilla's death and divided the state among themselves. This situation provided an opportunity to gain independence and form their own political institutions for other tribes who were living under the governance of Huns, but were not of Hun origin. The first step came from King Ardarik of Gepid. The Eastern Goths (Ostrogoths) rebelled after him. At the end of the struggle in 454 in the region of Nedao River (Dopsch 2019), when Atilla's eldest and beloved son Ilek (Mignarelli 2018: 59) died, the Huns had to retreat (Orkun 1933: 121-122).

The status of Huns after Atilla also found its place in Nibelungen Epic. Although Etzel, who represented Atilla, survived in the epic, his sons were unable to maintain his authority. Since the intention of some Germanic tribes living in the Hun country was to leave, it was stated that they did not want to be shared while the state was being shared among Atilla's sons. Others wanted to continue to live in the Hun country. It was also stated that Ostrogoths remained faithful to the Huns until 468 while the Germanic tribes rebelled under the command of Ardarik in a way that the Gepids took the lead and when the Battle of Nedao occurred, they killed thirty thousands Huns who were victorious (Keleş 2010: 296).

Jordanes, a Byzantine historian, described this and later events as follows: After Atilla's death, there was a struggle among his successors to decide who would become the ruler and their ambitious behavior caused a lot of damage to the khanate. Such disagreements are a situation often seen among those who will take over the reigns. Atilla's sons were experiencing this disagreement to ensure a convenient distribution with unlimited ambition (Martens 1884: 82-83).

When Ardarik, the king of Gepid, learned the situation, he immediately took the tribes, which was under the Huns' dominance from Huns. Thereupon, a war took place between the two armies near the Nedao River in Hungary (Martens 1884: 83).

The Goths joined the war with their spears, the Gepids with their swords, Rugis benefited from the pieces of weapons, the Suevians as infantry, the Huns with their arrows, the Alans with their equipped heavy weapons, and the Heruls with their light weapons (Kuosmanen 2013: 212)

Although not clear from Jordanes' records, it can be reached to the conclusion that Gepids were supported by an alliance of Ostrogoths, Rugis and Suevians, to face the Huns and the Alans (Kozan 2014: 207). However, excluding Gepids, who were regarded as the winner of the war, the Ostrogoths' position in this war is doubtful. Although the sources do not clearly indicated in which side the Ostrogoths joined the war, some sources even stated that the Ostrogoths did never participate in this war (Gračanin-Škrkulja 2014: 168). Researchers such as Alföldi (1926: 97-100), Thompson (1948:152-153), Heather (1996: 167-168) mentioned that Ostrogoths did not participate in the war. ALTHEIM and BURY said that the Ostrogoths fought alongside the Germans against the Huns (Alföldi 1951: 152-153; Bury 1958: 296-298). Researchers such as VARADY and POHL asserted an opposite direction view that the Ostrogoths did never lost their loyalty to the Huns (Varady 1969: 324-328; Pohl 1980: 252-263).

It should be kept in mind that the weapons and their numbers may have been approached from an emotional point of view by associating these records from Jordanes about war, dramatic narration of wars in literature and the fact that the wars took also their place in the Greko-Roman literature (Mingarelli 2018: 62).

The war was resulted in the victory of the Gepids and Attila's eldest son Ilek lost his life in a way that would be honored his father. The Huns, who were supposed to bring the world to their knees, had succumbed (Martens 1884: 83-84).

When Ilek died, his brothers went to the northern shores of the Black Sea, which we had previously described as Goths' residence. The Goths had settled here before (Kuosmanen 2013: 213).

In the section where the sons of Attila attacked the Goths, Jordanes mentioned that the Huns considered the Goths as a fleeing tribe from themselves and attacked them. He stated that the Huns escaped after being defeated and they

tried to seize the region called “Var” in their language and found near Danaber River in Scythia (Martens 1884: 85-86). He then mentioned that the Gepids had captured the Huns’ territory and that the Huns migrated to the old territory of Goths. He recorded that Sarmats, Cemandris and some of the Huns settled in *Castra Marti’s* territory (a city on the Romanian Coast); Attila’s youngest son Irnek accepted the small Scythian land as country and his nephews, Emnetzur and Uldinzur, progressed towards Romania (Martens 1884: 85).

As it is revealed from the archaeological finds, there was a radical dynastic change in the region after the Battle of Nedao. The rather splendid tombs harboured traces of the Gepids’ alliance with Eastern Rome in Nedao (Harboiu 2003: 8).

The Ostrogoths settled in the Pannonia region after the Battle of Nedao (Harhoiu 1999-2001: 135). One of the hitting points of recent archaeological studies is that small communities that spread around after the Battle of Nedao reached until Eastern Lithuania (Blijjiene 2013: 151).

After the Battle of Nedao, the policy of the Eastern Roman Empire, the region’s great power, also changed. The settlement of the Germens in the Pannonia region was treated as a policy of the Eastern Roman emperor Marcianus. In order to maintain his dominance in this region and to ensure security along Tuna and Sava Rivers, he supported the settlement of communities such as the Gepids and the Ostrogoths (Wozniak 1981: 351, Gračanin-Škrgulja 2014:171).

As a matter of fact, the political situation of the Carpathian Basin was shaken in 454 and nearly one year before the death of Attila, several Germanic tribes united under the leadership of Gepid king Ardaric against the Huns. The real purpose of this alliance was to ensure the division of the Hun State, which was left to Attila’s sons. This purpose was achieved by the battle of Nedao happened in 454 between the Gepids under the command of Ardaric, with their allied army and the Huns. After this war, the Gepids became the dominant power of the Carpathian Basin. Thus, the Gepids became neighbors to the Eastern Roman Empire. This neighborhood was not welcomed by the Roman Empire, and in re-

cent archaeological researches, the Gepids were regarded as stepchildren of European history and archeology (Quast 2001: 431). The graves and findings of Transylvania were effective to reveal the presence of Gepids in the region (Harhoiu 1999-2001: 97). In fact, although the Battle of Nedao war and later sources confirm the Gepid's presence in here, there is still insufficient archaeological work to support it (Kiss 2014: 3).

Jordanes' records of the Huns continued as follows:

As a result of the Goths' agreement with Rome, the Goths wanted to take more land and attacked the Sadagars who were living in Hungary. As soon as Atilla's son Dengizik received the news, he gathered a small number of Ultinzurs, Angirscirs, Bittugurs and Bardos, attacked the Goths and suffered a severe defeat (Martens 1884: 87).

It is also necessary to remember the following lines of Jordanes in order to understand the situation of Ardaric and Ostrogoths in the Attila period:

In the meantime, the army of Ostrogoths was especially prominent under the command of Valamir, Theodemir and Videmir. Because they belonged to a family (Amal Family) as noble as the Atilla and the fame of this family was important. Numerous troops of the famous Gepid King Ardaric were also there. He was devoted to Atilla with great loyalty, so he wanted to join Atilla. Atilla, based on his sharp intelligence, appreciated Ostrogot commanders Valamir and Ardaric more than any other leader (Martens 1884: 87-88).

Valamir was discreet, effectively spoken and experienced person in combat tricks. Ardaric, as we said before, was a loyal and wise person. Therefore, Atilla trusted them about fighting against their relatives Visigoths. The other masses, if it is said, any other kings and leaders, were eagerly waiting a sign from Attila. If Attila gave a single sign with his eye, all of them would come forward with fear and anxiety, they could surely fulfilled the order of Attila without hesitation. (Martens 1884:88).

If we look at the consequences of the Battle of Nedao,

1. The Gepids settled in Pannonia which was a Hun center before. The name of the region started to be called Gepidia. The Gepids not only defeated the Huns

but also acquired a large part of the treasury and used special bridges made of gold for their horses (Bach 2001).

2. The Rugis established a kingdom from lower Austria until the northern part of the Danube River.

3. The Heruls established a kingdom in the area from Moravia to the Danube River.

4. Until 470, the Pannonia administration came into the hands of the Suevians (Kozan 2014: 208).

Regarding the Nedao River where the war took place, very different opinions emerged when researchers carefully focused on this topic and questioned exactly where the river was located. It is important to mention these views, especially after the 5th century, as it constituted a key position both for the Eastern Roman Empire, the Huns, the Avars and other communities. Diculescu mentioned it in left side of the Sava River while Maenchen-Helfen said it was located south of Pannonia. Walter Pohl said it was located south of Pannonia, and the west side of the Tisza River, and the views were generally shaped like this. As another point of view, Nedao is also accepted within the borders of Romania (Greene 1987: 121). However, the result of these views is that Nedao is located in a region between the Danube and Tisza and its name may be *Netabio*, *Netabium* and *Netabius* (Gračanin-Škrkulja 2014: 168, Diculescu 1923: 65-66, Maenchen-Helfen 1973: 149, Pohl 1980: 259-260). When analyzed etymologically, it is stated that the name Nedao may be derived from the Hungarian word *Nagy* 'big', perfect as many connections can be established between Hun and Hungarian languages. As a result, it was concluded that Nedao could be the Danube which is the biggest river in Hungary (Ujvarosy 2019: 1).

There are also different views about the date of the Battle of Nedao. Although the date of the war is generally accepted as 454, there are also opinions suggesting that it was 455 (Gometz 2008: 57). There are other suspicious situations such as this time discrepancy in our knowledge of the war. For instance, although it was said to have led the state to collapse after Attila's death, chronological information was not given about how these events took place. Besides,

it is also suspicious that the tribes within the Hun country united as an army and the war took place just after Attila's death in 453. One approach to clarify this situation is that there were kings and leaders in these tribes and therefore they did not have any difficulty in forming an alliance after leaving the Huns. This may be possible, but we still have limited considerations of how the division could have taken place between Atilla's sons and these tribes (Mingarelli 2018: 69).

In addition, it was thought that the view that Atilla's three sons from Arakan were nominated to the throne might cause an error. In some sources it was suggested that Atilla's other wives may also have children and therefore the throne had more heirs. In this case, the fact that the throne was entrusted only to the children of the noble woman among Turks - for example, only Attila and Bleda were candidates for Oktar's throne - this is enough to eliminate this suspicion according to our view (Mingarelli 2018: 70).

It is also known that after the Battle of Nedao, the Huns fought two battles with the Ostrogoths in 455 and 464-466, being a response to the views that the Huns could not be revived in military terms after the defeat of Nedao (Dopsch 2019: 8).

Another problem with this war is whether an agreement was made as a result of the war. In fact, it was stated in the sources that an agreement was made in the region in 455, but it is not known at the end of which war it was made. Hence, the fact that the Battle of Nedao took place in 454 with the lack of information whether there was any agreement after that and the existence of a warless agreement in 455-456 (Varady 1969: 331) made the association of these two possible. It is interpreted that the parties of the war were given a certain time before the agreement to clarify their thoughts about the region and therefore it took some time for the agreement to be concluded.

It is important to make a general assessment on the Huns for understanding this topic. If we examine the history of the European Hun State in three stages, the first stage is between 375-408 years when the Huns were in the east of the Danube River and in alliance with the Roman Empire. The second stage includes



the years 408-434 and the political organization that took place during this period made the Huns even stronger and moved its center to the east of Pannonia. During this period, the Hun attacks were concentrated in Pannonia and the Northwestern Balkans. The third and last period (434-453) covers Huns' direction to Italy and the West. Due to the Battle of Nedao, the period of the alliance with the Roman Empire was completely over. The important point here is that after the Battle of Nedao, the Gepids settled in the north-west of Transylvania thanks to the ethnic coalition they established with the Huns. As a matter of fact, after the Hun defeat in the Battle of Nedao, their presence in Transylvania and Pannonia became weaker until the second half of the 6th century, and it was not difficult for Langobards to defeat them (Moisil 2002: 2). In fact, perhaps it can be said that the Gepids' revolt against the Huns started with their dream of independence brought the end to them. They lost their power in Hun country and army when they left Huns.

As a result, after Atilla's death, his three sons, Ilek, Dengizik and Irnek, came to administration but the state never returned to its old days. Only a year later, Ilek died in 454 after a war with the Germens. Dengizik and Irnek had taken the center of the state to the north of the Black Sea; Dengizik was killed in 468 after the Goths betrayed him. Huns under the rule of Irnek were the main nucleus of the Bulgars and they pioneered the establishment of the Turkish-Bulgarian State. In addition, the Hungarian dynasty Arpad is believed to be descended from Irnek's lineage (Ahmetbeyoğlu 2013: 161-175).

Another view is that after the dissolution of the Huns, Hungary was the country of their successors Avars and the process of the dissolution of the Huns was due to the fact that their sons could not preserve their power since Attila's period (Harmatta 1952: 282).

At the end of the Battle of Nedao, the collapse of the Germens slowed down as a result of the policies of the Huns executed until then (Rosen 2009: 80). In fact, although this war is considered by most sources to be an end both for the Germens and for the Huns, on the contrary, it was a strong beginning for Turkish history. It actually enabled the Huns, especially those united under Irnek rule, to establish the foundations of the Ogur tribes and the Bulgars. This situation came

to the fore in the works of Omeljan PRITSAK. He stated that Irnek, who withdrew from Dynyeper River region, was the founder of the Dulo tribe, being the origin of Bulgars (Pritsak 1995; Maracz 2015: 25).

Therefore, we may conclude that the Battle of Nedao strengthened the Turkish presence in Eastern Europe in a way that it would perhaps never be lost again.

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