

An Ottoman Imperial Campaign: Suppressing the Marsh Arabs, Central power and peripheral rebellion in the 1560s

İ. Metin Kunt*

Bir Osmanlı Sefer-i Hümayûnu: Cezâ'ir-i Arab Kalkışmasının Bastırılması, 1560'larda Merkezî Güç ve Uçlarda İsyan

Öz ■ 1560'lardaki Cezâ'ir-i Arab isyanı yöresel ama geniş çaplı bir sefer sayesinde bastırıldı. Seferin hikâyesini Feridun Bey Szigetvar seferi üzerine yazdığı kitabın sonuna yaptığı bir eklemeye anlatmaktadır. 1565-1568 yıllarını kapsayan Mühimme defterleri de önemli ayrıntılar içermektedir. Feridun Bey, kapıkulundan 2.000 yeniçeri ve birkaç yüz topçu da yöresel güçlere ek olarak yollandığı için olacak, dikkatle hazırlanan bu seferberliği “Sefer-i hümayûn” diye adlandırmaktadır. Kalkışmanın bastırılması geçmişteki suçlar için katı cezalar kadar ilerdeki sadakat için mükâfatlar da içeriyordu. Bunun da ötesinde hem Şah Tahmasb ile hem Basra körfezindeki Portekizlilerle ilişkiler de dikkatle izleniyordu.

Anahtar kelimeler: Basra, Ulyanoğlu, Cezâ'ir-i Arab, Feridun Bey, Safevi, İskender Paşa, Canbulad Bey, Portekiz

In the 1560s and 1570s the Ottoman Empire successfully concluded an epic struggle against the Austrian Habsburgs in Hungary; failed to capture Malta and lost the great sea battle of Lepanto against a Mediterranean European coalition under Spanish leadership but nevertheless conquered Cyprus from Venice and Tunis from Spain; attempted but failed to cut a canal between the Don and Volga rivers to reach the Caspian Sea north of the Safavis of Iran; started to prepare for a naval campaign in the eastern Indian Ocean to aid Aceh in Sumatra against the Portuguese but were distracted by a rebellion in Yemen. Sultan Suleiman's last campaign was against Szigetvar in south-west Hungary where the aged pādishâh

* Sabancı University, Istanbul.

died of old age in 1566; his son and successor Selim II, served by the grand vezir Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, a statesman of far-reaching vision, continued his “magnificent” father’s policies around the far-flung frontiers of his empire.¹

As his victorious grand army returned to the capital from Hungary in the autumn of 1566, Sultan Selim’s government started preparations for other campaigns in the Mediterranean, in the Indian Ocean, and in the Ukraine. These campaigns as well as the Yemen revolt which diverted the Indian Ocean effort are well-known in Ottoman historiography. Another rebellion which took place at about the same time near Basra in lower Iraq gets barely a mention in the comprehensive Ottoman history of the period, Gelibolulu Mustafa Âlî’s *Künhü’l-Abbâr* (“Essence of History”), lost among these other great events.² This is what the great historian records, as the first “event” of Selim II’s reign:

The revolt of Son of ‘Ulyan (Ibn ‘Ulyan) near Basra. The aforementioned was one of the more powerful of the ‘urbân (tribal Arab) sheyhs living in the islands. He would not put up with the unlawful exactions of the governors-general of the region and rebelled about the time of the imperial accession. He collected around him a great many of the rebellious desert-riding, fight-seeking ‘urbân of evil-intent and attempted seditious mischief. This situation was reported by the Governor-General of Baghdad, Iskender Pasha of Circassian origin (his battle against Shah Ismâ’îl son of Shah Tahmâsb near Erzurum has been mentioned above), a statesman of good judgement and prudent action, wise and experienced and courageous as well, so he was appointed commander of the forces to suppress the uprising. Governors-General of Basra and of Shehrizol, as well as some Kurdish beys famed for bravery were to serve under him; 2,000 janissaries of the imperial palace and some cannoniers and cannon-carriage men were sent, too. After repeated clashes and battles with the ‘urbân of evil-name most of their settlements and villages were plundered and ruined; towns that were the seat of their ill-starred rebellion were burned and destroyed. Toward the end of the year 975 (AH; Spring 1568) Muslim troops were ordered back to their barracks, safe, sound, and laden with war booty.

1 I thank Collegium Budapest for their fellowship in Spring 2008 which facilitated the writing of this article.

2 *Künhü’l-Abbâr*, transcription Faris Çerçi, Kayseri 2000, pp. 5-6. For the historian see Cornell Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire*, Princeton 1986 and Jan Schmidt, *Pure Water for Thirsty Muslims*, Leiden 1991. The other great historian of the period Selaniki does not mention this incident at all. Ibrahim of Pechuy (Pecs in Hungary), a 17th-century historian, repeats Mustafa Âlî’s passage verbatim.

That is all the historian Âli has to say about the Marsh Arab rebellion in the wetlands area north of Basra, called the ‘Arab Islands’ (Cezâir-i Arab).³ While conceding that it was the oppression of Ottoman governors that provoked the revolt, he does not hesitate to characterize the Marsh Arabs as rebellious trouble-makers. A considerable regional force was arranged, reinforced by troops with muskets and cannon from the imperial household; the campaign was not as swift as expected for the Marsh Arabs put up a fierce resistance but ended eventually with Ottoman victory, with punitive destruction and sacking. Order was restored.⁴

A study of this revolt and its suppression is important on various counts. It provides a good example of how a regional campaign was conducted, especially at a time when a full-scale imperial campaign was undertaken at the other extremity of Ottoman domains. Composition of the troops, recruitment of volunteers, production and transportation of war material are all detailed in the sources. The language used, especially in the narrative, is also worthy of note. Registers of imperial council correspondence have much material on the Marsh Arab uprising, shedding light on the preparations for the campaign and its conduct. We have also a fairly detailed narrative account, remarkable for its rhetoric as much for the information it provides, in what seems to be an addendum to Feridun Ahmet Bey’s book on Sultan Suleyman’s Szigetvar campaign. Feridun Bey, as he is more commonly known, was at the time the grand vezir’s confidential secretary (the Ottoman term is *sir kâtibi*, secretary of secrets). Although the title of the book he finished in 1568 and presented to the sultan is *Nüzhetü'l-esrâri'l-ahbâr der sefer-i Sigetvâr* (“The inside story of the Szigetvar campaign”; I use the Topkapı Palace Library MS H.1339), it is in fact an unabashed paean to his patron Sokollu Mehmed Pasha. Both the preface and the epilogue make the author’s purpose clear: to show the new sultan what an extremely loyal and exceptionally capable servant the grand vezir was. The book begins with the decision to march against the Habsburgs, the story of the campaign itself, and Suleyman’s death just as Szigetvar’s inner keep was captured. This is no more than a quarter of the book. The author then goes on to describe the hard decisions the grand vezir had to take and his

3 Cengiz Orhonlu noted the surprising silence of the most prominent Ottoman historians of the period on southern affairs and the need to resort to archives: “1559 Bahreyn seferine aid bir rapor” (A report on the 1559 Bahrayn Expedition), *Tarih Dergisi*, XVII (22) 1968, s.1-16.

4 For changing concepts of “restoring the order” see Markus Reinkowski, “The State’s Security and the Subjects’ Prosperity: Notions of Order in Ottoman Bureaucratic Correspondence (19th Century)”, *Legitimizing the Order*, Reinkowski and Hakan Karateke, eds., Leiden 2005.

wise actions until the new sultan came to take over his father's household as well the empire's army on the return march. He mentions specific criticisms levelled at the grand vezir (often by members of the new sultan's princely entourage) and defends the grand vezir's policy, both in the immediate aftermath of the campaign and during the first two years of Selim II's reign, covering peace negotiations with the Habsburgs and culminating in the grand gathering in Edirne in the winter of 1567-68 to celebrate the sultan's accession in the presence of ambassadors from east and west. A triumph to confirm Ottoman universal power, acknowledged by the whole world, personified by the sultan and ably supported by the grand vezir: this is how the author or his publicist might have summarised the book on a dust cover. And then Feridun Bey adds a section of twenty-three folios on the campaign against the Marsh Arabs, saying that the uprising happened just as the sultan acceded to the throne, and thus provided the setting for the first victory of his reign; this is sufficient justification for the inclusion of this story which obviously has nothing to do with the Szigetvar campaign.

Feridun Bey, in his capacity as the grand vezir's private secretary, saw all state papers and penned the grand vezir's letters and memoranda. His narrative of the campaign against the Marsh Arabs quotes from official correspondence as well as including his own observations on the personalities involved. He presents the narrative as another Ottoman triumph, minor though it was compared to the capture of Szigetvar, but Szigetvar was Suleyman's triumph whereas the suppression of the Marsh Arab rebellion was in the name of the new sultan, Selim II, so it marked an auspicious beginning to the new reign. Feridun Bey's narrative can be compared with official documents of the period preserved in three registers of letters issued by the imperial council, literally *Mühimme Defteri* [=MD] (Registers of Important Affairs), covering the years 1564-68 but missing more than a year between June 1566 and August 1567.⁵ This is especially unfortunate for our purposes because most of the Szigetvar campaign as well as part of the expedition against the Marsh Arab revolt fall in this interval.

5 These three registers are numbers 6 (Muharrem-Zi'lhicce 972 AH/August 1564-July 1565); 5 (Muharrem 973-Zi'lhicce 973 AH/July 1565-June 1566), and 7 (Safer 975-Safer 976/August 1567-July 1568). The register numbers are obviously not original but were entered, with a mistake, during an early attempt at cataloguing. The fourteen-month interval between nos. 5 and 7 was presumably covered in another volume, now lost. These registers were published with facsimile text, summary transliteration and index by the Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi [=BA] (General Directorate of State Archives) in the 1990s. See also another work on the topic Abdurrahman Sağırılı, "Cezâyir-i Irak-ı Arab veya Şattü'l-Arab'ın Fethi Ulyanoğlu Seferi 1565-1571", *Tarih Dergisi*, sy. 41, İstanbul 2005, s. 43-111.

From the registers we learn that the disturbances around Basra in fact started late in Sultan Suleyman's reign. Mustafa Âli started the history of Selim II's reign and Feridun Bey ended his book with the narration of the Marsh Arab revolt only because it was suppressed after the accession. The first mention of troubles in the Mesopotamian marshes is contained in a letter to the Governor-General of Basra. The letter is dated 25 October 1564 but since it is in response to a letter from the Governor-General, trouble must have been brewing even earlier at least by several months.⁶ The order issued to the Governor-General accepted his proposal to build a fort on the Shatt al-Arab because the area swarmed with rebellious Marsh Arabs on their boats, as well as horseback Arabs from the Safavi side of the border. It appears that an earlier order had decreased troops conscripted in Basra, the local "volunteers", from 400 to 200; now the Governor-General was allowed to raise an additional hundred for the new fort. The Governor-General also proposed to remove the men stationed at a fort further up the river to the new one; the imperial council agreed but reminded him that the older fort may need to be maintained as well. Clearly, during the decade or so since Basra had been captured from the Safavi Empire, the central government felt that security was sufficiently established to allow economies but this was now proved wishful thinking and a false economy. There was still reluctance to spend funds but the decision was left to the authorities on the spot. The Governor-General also reported intelligence received from Safavi lands, *yukaru cânib* (literally "the upper regions") in Ottoman parlance, and he was reminded of the need to be vigilant about cross-border developments.

A year later the rebellion had started in earnest and its leader named. Upon receiving reports from Baghdad and Basra that Son of 'Ulyân received food, weapons and naval supplies from within Ottoman-controlled areas and that his casualties were buried in Ottoman lands, in other words it was an internal revolt and not the result of external (Safavi) interference, the imperial council responded on 27 November 1565 that such activities should be prevented.⁷ On 15 January 1566 the Governor-General of Basra was ordered to produce gunpowder by getting saltpetre from Wâsit, and told that the muskets and bullets he had requested had been sent; he was also ordered again that he should prevent by all means any supplies reaching the rebels. In separate letters he was informed that material for cannon-making (fire wood, clay for moulds, iron and tin) and troops he had requested (some janissaries from Shehrizul as well as Anatolian/Turkish and Kurdish conscript-volunteers) were to be sent to him from neighbouring

⁶ BA, *MD*, no. 6, pp. 130-131/275.

⁷ BA, *MD*, no 5, p. 237/597.

provinces.⁸ On the same day orders were written to the Governors-General of Baghdad, Diyarbekr, Aleppo, Shehrizul as well as to the District-Governor of Kilis telling them to send supplies and men to Basra and to prepare for a campaign.⁹

By January 1566, then, a major campaign was being planned to crush the unruliness at the southernmost end of the empire's frontier with Safavi Iran, although the expedition was postponed until the Autumn of 1567 when the Habsburg frontier was secure. This was part of the new grand vezir's programme of belligerent policy: criticising his predecessor of inactivity, Sokollu Mehmed Pasha mobilized the main army against the Habsburgs to dictate Ottoman terms; he prepared the navy for the conquest of Chios, a Genoese possession hitherto tolerated in the Aegean, partly to make amends for the failure to capture Malta in the previous summer; finally he mobilized the eastern and south-eastern provinces against the Marsh Arab revolt led by Ibn 'Ulyân.

We follow the developing story in Feridun Bey's narrative where the tone is quite different than the matter-of-fact language of official correspondance. Feridun Bey calls the punitive expedition a *sefer-i humâyûn*, an "imperial campaign", just as he does the sultan's own campaign against Szigetvar, as if a sultan was leading it in person, perhaps because household troops were included. On the other hand, Sultan Suleyman considered it an "imperial campaign" when he himself participated, otherwise not even if household troops were included in a task force under separate command in 1552.¹⁰ This in itself is worthy of note for the implication that *humâyûn*, imperial, had evolved to take on a connotation of "state" apart from the person of the *pâdishâh*, emperor—unless Feridun Bey was forcing the issue to justify his inclusion of this coda. By the middle of the sixteenth century detachments of household troops were routinely stationed in various provincial cities and involved in limited expeditions under the command of a vezir. As late as the end of the century they still objected to the janissary commander himself serving under a vezir with a large janissary contingent, but this was a different situation.¹¹

8 BA, MD, no 5, pp. 319-320/831-833. The term *rumî*, Ottoman for "Roman", refers Turks of Anatolia, in the present context, but by extension to Turks of the Balkans as well; in short, the Turks who displaced Byzantium. For a comprehensive discussion of the term see Salih Özbaran, *Bir Osmanlı Kimliği: 14.-17. yüzyıllarda Rum/Rumi Aidiiyet ve İmgeleri*, İstanbul 2004.

9 BA, MD, no 5, pp. 315-318, 320/821-830, 834-835.

10 Geza David & Pal Fodor, "Mühimme defterlerine göre Osmanlıların 16. yüzyıl Macaristan Politikası" in *Uluslararası Türk Arşivleri Sempozyumu*, İstanbul 2006, p. 5.

11 Rhoads Murphy, *Ottoman Warfare*, London, 1999, pp. 43, 222-223. The quotation

On the origins of the revolt Feridun Bey's summary is more detailed and somewhat different than the summaries in the registers of official correspondence. There were two leaders of the revolt, he says. One was Ulyanoglu (Son of Ulyan), the (recognized) leader of the Arab Islands, and the other Muhammad Osman, whose ancestors used to be governors (hakim) of Basra in earlier times, though the heading of the whole narrative, "The Revolt of Muhammad Osman with the assistance of Ibn Ulyan" implies that the main protagonist was the former, and this heading makes sense considering the ending of the revolt with Ibn Ulyan submitting to Ottoman authority. Since Basra was conquered by the Ottomans these two had been wavering between obedience and rebellion, notes Feridun Bey, and finally during the governorate of Dervish Ali Pasha Muhammad Osman rebelled openly. He attacked Basra, burning and destroying villages around it and laying siege to the city itself for five months. Clearly it was necessary to put down this rebellion and the Governor of Baghdad Iskender Pasha was appointed commander.

Feridun Bey had met Iskender Pasha personally and, providing the "human element" in his story of the expedition, gives details of the pasha's career, partly in Iskender Pasha's own words. He was of the Kabartay tribe of Circassia, a tribe famed for valour, and a slave-servitor (*kul*) of Husrev Pasha, deceased while Governor of Rumeli. Iskender Pasha recalled, with Feridun Bey attending, that he served as Husrev Pasha's kitchen superintendent and later transferred to the palace as a *chavush* pursuivant and rising to chief of finance of royal revenues (*defterdar*) of "Arab and Acem", that is all lands south and east of Anatolia. When Van was conquered he became its first Governor, and was later also Governor of Erzurum and Diyarbekr, where, he noted, his late master Husrev Pasha had been Governor as well. He had great experience at these posts watching the eastern frontier and fighting the Safavis.

Feridun Bey notes that when Sokollu Mehmed Pasha became grand vezir in 1565 (with *istiklal*, independence of action) he took up Iraqi affairs: Lahsa (Gulf coast of Arabia) being a most distant province where messages to and fro took six months he was careful to select the able and valiant Ali Bey, son of Elvend Bey, a district-governor in Baghdad province, as its new Governor-General, and appointing Iskender Pasha from Diyarbekr to Baghdad to command the regional

from Pechevi is clearly about the janissary agha serving under Koca Sinan Pasha, not the use of janissary troops as such. The assertion of Kochi Bey, a seventeenth-century political memorialist, that "vezirs of old never employed padishah's kul [household troops]" is obviously mistaken; it is astonishing how ignorant this famous advisor to sultans was of Ottoman precedent.

force. The governorship of Shehrizul (thus, later Shehrizor, comprising Kerkuk, Erbil and Sulaymaniya in northern Iraq) was given to Muzaffer Pasha, who had been trained in the palace and at the time an experienced district-governor of Vidin on the Danube. All these preparatory steps were accomplished over the winter of 1566-67, after the Hungarian campaign had ended; the campaign itself started in the summer of 1567.¹² While the land force commanded by Iskender Pasha was composed of troops from these provinces, a river fleet of 550 vessels was readied at Birecik on the Euphrates (near Urfa). Eight thousand or so volunteers were recruited in Aleppo province and they joined the 2,000 janissaries and 200 cannons sent from the imperial household. Canbulad Bey, district-governor of Kilis-and-A'zaz was appointed commander of this force after overseeing the repair and construction of the river fleet. The fleet sailed down the Euphrates carrying the janissaries, artillerymen and the Aleppo recruits.

Feridun Bey then goes on to quote from the ferman sent to Iskender Pasha and to Ali Pasha, the new Governor-General of Lahsa. In all probability Feridun Bey penned these ferman himself, it is therefore especially curious that the contents are somewhat different than his summary above. The ferman to Iskender Pasha designating him the commander-in-chief for the campaign specifies not only the regular forces from the Diyarbekr, Shehrizul, and Basra provinces but also that Kurdish beys from Diyarbekr and Van provinces were assigned under his command. The Kurdish beys, hereditary chiefs, were to bring, each according to his stature, a number of fighters armed with bows and arrows or with muskets. Among them the ruler of Imadiya Sultan Huseyin Bey is mentioned by name as the most important. The ferman goes on to confirm that Canbulad Bey has been appointed commander of the river fleet and the land forces gathered in Aleppo; here it is interesting to note that although Canbulad Bey is hailed as the scion of an important Kurdish family of tribal chiefs it is also specified that he was "raised in the palace" and had served previously with loyalty and ability. Keep us informed, the ferman tells Iskender Pasha, of all the men and materiel gathered for the purpose, prepare registers in two copies, one for you to keep and one to send to Istanbul; otherwise it is up to you to decide where it would be best and easiest for the various groups to gather. Do keep well-informed about the movements of

12 David & Fodor ("Mühimme defterlerine göre...", p. 7) argue that because in 1552 the Ottomans undertook operations in no less than five separate fronts they could not wholly achieve their aims. The postponement of the Basra campaign until 1567 seems to indicate that Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, who had served under Vezir Ahmed Pasha on the Hungarian-Transylvanian front in 1552, may have learned the main lesson of that year.

the rebels (against “religion and state”) by means of spies, decide how to proceed against them by consulting people who are knowledgeable (about local affairs), report to us your plan of action and immediately proceed with your purpose, the ferman ends. Ali Pasha of Lahsa was not asked to join the action but was told to stay in his own region, keep on his guard about similar Arab disturbances, and also to gather intelligence about the Najd, Bahrain, the area south of Basra and possible Portuguese actions in the Gulf. He was further asked what he knows about the development of the revolt of Mutahhar son of Shemseddin in Yemen. Would it be possible, he is asked, to send troops through Najd to Yemen? He is to report on all these matters forthwith. Clearly the geography of Arabia was not well-understood in İstanbul, neither the distance from the Gulf to Yemen nor the crossing of the desert of the Empty Quarter.

In Feridun Bey’s narrative the next item is how administration was arranged in the provinces whose governors and troops went on the campaign. The district-governor of Mosul Sinan Bey was sent to Baghdad as the acting governor. Shehrizol, a more difficult terrain and more open to Safavi pressure, was entrusted to the Governor-General of Sivas, Ahmed Pasha of the Isfendiyar family and the brother of a vezir, who was to proceed there with the provincial troops of Sivas; he himself was to remain in Mosul and to deploy one district governor in Erbil and one or two district governors were to be stationed in Kerkuk.¹³ The thinking behind the moves was to send the nearest provincial troops on the campaign and to send forces from inner provinces on to protect the borders. We learn from the Imperial Council registers that the same was done for the slightly later campaign to suppress the Yemen rebellion: when the Governor-General of Damascus Lala Mustafa Pasha was appointed commander-in-chief for this expedition the Governor-General of Karaman was sent to Damascus with the district governor of Ichel deputising in Karaman for the duration.¹⁴

Feridun Bey proceeds with the story of the campaign based on, he says, what was reported by various people who actively participated in the campaign. He follows Canbulad Bey’s progress south-east, often with historical and geographical notes on interesting sights along the way. The river fleet and land forces gathered under Canbulad Bey’s command in Birecik set out with great fanfare on Friday, 4 Muharrem 975/11 July 1567. The first stop was at Balis near Aleppo where Huseyin Bey, Canbulad Bey’s son, was district-governor. At Rakka (near Palmyra) he notes that the Abbasi family (caliphs 750-1258) used to spend summers there. Crossing

¹³ BA, *MD*, no 7, p. 101/268.

¹⁴ BA, *MD*, no 7, 276/781.

into Iraq the Ottoman force is met by the local district-governor Hacı Ahmed Bey, brother of Huseyin Bey, lord of Imadiya, mentioned above. At Ane the district-governor was an Arab chief, Ebu Rish Bey; “a pleasant, prosperous place, with lots of orchards”. Near Hit there are bubbling tar and sulphur springs, “supplying tar and sulphur to the world”. Stories about the Abbasid caliphs accompany the descriptions of Hilla, Karbala, Najaf and Kufa. There is approving mention of a fort Shah Tahmasb built “to protect pilgrims and travellers” from Arab robbers. On 14 Rebi ul-ahir 975/17 October 1567 Canbulad Bey’s force left Hilla through Rumahiya and Samavat for Riyza Fort on the Euphrates near the Arab Islands wetlands. The local Arab sheyh, loyal to the empire with a revenue grant came out to greet the imperial fleet, was rewarded with a robe of honour by the commander, and joined the expedition.

Up to this point the story of the expedition reads almost like a travel book to an exotic place, familiar in history and culture but a very different geography within the Ottoman domains. When Canbulad Bey’s force reached Sadr ud-dar where Ulyanoglu collected transit revenues the rebels gathered there scattered and went further into the marshlands. There follows further observations about the area, noting that these Marsh Arabs were rebels against authority since the time of Ali, the fourth caliph, taking refuge in the hundreds of waterways and islands of the wetlands, each island with its own chief, recognizing no outside authority but fighting among themselves. Only recently Ebu Ulyan (thus here) became the great chief receiving a tithe of the rice and date crop, the two mainstays of the area. On 8 Cemaziulevvel 975/9 November 1567 Iskender Pasha’s land force and the Euphrates fleet finally met at Zernuk, a fort in the wetlands; soon after 150 river vessels from Baghdad also joined them. Meanwhile, at Sadr ud-dar, Ulyanoglu’s base, two new forts were built on either side of the waterway and two more at Zernuk, of mudbrick reinforced with date palm trunks. On 18 Cemaziulevvel Canbulad Bey attacked the main rebel force dug in defensive positions on Sadr ul-buhran, one of the larger islands of the wetlands. After a fierce battle the rebels fled but many of Canbulad Bey’s men died in the fighting. Muzaffer Pasha, the Governor-General of Shehrizul joined Canbulad Bey and the Ottoman force proceeded to build two more forts on the islands. The cutting of date palms for construction was a terrible blow for the local economy. Some locals came to submit to Ottoman rule to save their date palms, but some attacked Muzaffer Pasha’s men to stop them cutting the trees. There followed another fierce battle, and Muzaffer Pasha lost many good men ambushed by the rebels.

Before battle could be resumed there was a great thunderstorm and torrential rains, “the like of Noah’s flood”. With the lull in the fighting the Ottoman

troops proceeded with the construction of forts. Just as the army was getting ready for another attack on the rebels Ibn Ulyan sued for peace. Terms were dictated: he had to pay reparations toward the cost of the campaign if he wanted to save himself. He deliberated for some time but finally accepted Ottoman terms. Iskender Pasha, the commander-in-chief organized a grand assembly of all the Ottoman governors, pashas, beys, and all their household retainues, a gathering in the imperial manner, *āyin-i selātīn*, to grant audience to Ulyanoglu's envoys, his nephew and a trusted man by the name of Muhammad Haris, who declared their submission to the sultan. The Ottoman troops rejoiced to see the end of fighting, the envoys being treated with respect and assigned a campaign tent for their use. The following day Iskender Pasha gave further details of Ottoman terms: each year the Marsh Arabs were to pay 15,000 gold pieces and sons of the most respected of the local leaders were to reside at Basra; when the annual payment was delivered the hostages would be exchanged for new ones. The envoys accepted these terms and, writes Feridun Bey, thus were these islands conquered and added to the imperial domains. Next Ibn Ulyan's brother Mir Sultan, another commander of the islands, came with his men in 46 vessels to submit to Canbulad Bey's fleet crossing the marshes and to "kiss the commander's hand". The river fleet was greeted by the Governor-General of Basra Ali Pasha and his nine galleys. There was another meeting of the two main sections of the Ottoman expeditionary force at Fethiye ("Conquest") Fort with Iskender Pasha's land force and Canbulad Bey's fleet coming together south of the wetlands. Mir Sultan, already rewarded by Canbulad Bey was also received with respect by Iskender Pasha and given more robes of honour.

There were, however, still more rebels to be dealt with. On the Shatt, or "nehr-i tavi'l-i Arabi" (the long Arab river) across from Rahmaniye Fort Fazl ibn Ebu'l-Leys, who earlier joined Muhammad Osman in attacking Basra, stood defiant though he had been invited to submit more than once. On 8 Shaban 975/7 February 1568 the Ottoman army marched against him. There was a great battle with continuous fighting for five days on an island on the Shatt until Fazl was defeated and escaped the scene. Another new fort was built there and Mir Aziz, a loyal local sheyh was appointed its commander. "There was glory under the rule of the Sultan of Rum", says Feridun Bey; "emperor of Rome" doesn't quite have the right flavour, there is a sense of distance from the centre of Ottoman power in Feridun Bey's expression.

The commander-in-chief allowed Canbulad Bey's river fleet to depart in early Ramazan 975/early March 1568, taking Ibn Ulyan's brother and nephew to Istanbul. Thirty vessels of the fleet was to form a bridge at Wasit for the army to cross

on its way back to Baghdad, otherwise its job was done. There was more sightseeing on the way, visiting the “magnificent ruins of Iyvan-i Kisra” (Ktesiphon) and nearby tombs of important men from earliest Islamic times. Thence to Baghdad and more tomb visitations there and celebrating the end of Ramazan holiday. The imperial fleet departed for Aleppo on 12 Shevval 975/10 April 1568, nine months after setting out from Birecik.

This story is told strictly from the point of view of Canbulad Bey’s river force, presumably because Feridun Bey’s informants were people who brought the now loyal Arab hostage-guests to Istanbul. The account starts with the “imperial fleet” setting out and ends with its return from Baghdad. The engagements with the rebels are mostly the ones undertaken by Canbulad Bey’s force. Only in his “audience on the imperial style” do we meet Iskender Pasha, the commander-in-chief, although he was the one person introduced with a “human interest” story at the very beginning of the narrative. What the main army did during the campaign is not clear, nor what happened to one of the main leaders, Muhammad Osman. What is perfectly clear, however, is Ottoman intentions, or how an imperial power behaves when faced with rebellion. A large regional force was brought together, but only after the main imperial campaign against Szigetvar came to a satisfactory end. The empire was reluctant to fight on two fronts simultaneously, even if one campaign was a relatively limited one. The empire was ready to fight, made clear from the organization of the expedition, but it would rather not, if it could gain its ends through politics. In terms of local politics, there was awareness that leadership in the wetlands region was fluid and therefore an effort was made to separate the different leaders. Ulyanoglu came back into the fold, publicly honoured but with payment and hostages. Destruction of the local economy was a threat and the campaign commanders did not hesitate to make good their threat. Strongholds were built to keep the locals in check.

Aside from how any imperial power might deal with a peripheral disturbance, the narrative of the Arab Islands revolt conforms, in general outline, to specific Ottoman patterns discerned by Halil İnalçık in one of his path-breaking articles, on “Ottoman Methods of Conquest” (the terminological confusion between “revolt” and “conquest” is not mine but Feridun Bey’s who starts by calling it a revolt but ends up with conquest).¹⁵ In İnalçık’s analysis at the instance of initial defeat of a neighbouring territory full Ottoman administration was not immediately applied, especially if the terrain presented difficulties. The cooptation of local leaders was

15 Halil İnalçık, “Ottoman Methods of Conquest” in *Studia Islamica*, II (1954), pp. 103-129; also see Suraiya Faroqhi, *The Ottoman Empire and the World Around It*, London 2006, pp. 78-79.

an old Ottoman practice. Sometimes such leaders would become Ottoman officials and would be employed elsewhere, but in mountainous, forested, or as here marshy areas the chiefs might be recognized at least for the time being. The long-term goal of Ottoman administration was eventual incorporation of such special status areas as regular provinces. The fact that such regions as Crimea, Moldavia, Wallachia, and parts of Kurdistan maintained their special status for centuries did not mean that they were meant to stay that way forever.¹⁶ According to İnalçık's original formulation the final absorption of a territory under Ottoman aegis would be signalled by conducting a population and economic survey of the region (*tahrir*) to determine the human and production capacity and the potential tax yield. On the basis of the administrative regulations issued for this region, taking into consideration past practice, and the detailed survey conducted, tax revenues would be allocated as revenue grants; thus was full Ottoman rule established. In view of some recent research there is need for further elaboration of İnalçık's analysis. It appears that there was also a different sort of intermediate state of affairs, whereby even the *tahrir* survey of borderlands may have been illusory, indicative of expectations for the future rather than actual reality; wishful thinking, one might say.¹⁷

Feridun Bey's narrative is a partial story, a digest easy to read and to celebrate an "imperial" victory. The Imperial Council registers supply details missing from this celebration. It is clear from the correspondence that the Ottoman council was quite worried about Safavi interference. It had been learned that the Shah had rejected Ulyanoglu's appeal for assistance, but in his refusal the Shah had told Ulyanoglu that he could not help him because he was preoccupied with disturbances in Gilan whereas he should have said that he *would* not help *because he was at peace with the Ottomans*.¹⁸ It should be pointed out, however, that this Ottoman self-righteousness is belied by the treatment, at about the same time but at the other extreme of the empire's domains, of a Hungarian nobleman who sought Ottoman protection. While the Ottoman response quite correctly pointed out that his wish to come over could not at that point be granted because of

16 I applied İnalçık's conceptual framework drawn from early Ottoman history to later periods: "An Interpretation of Seventeenth-century Ottoman Northern Policy" in *Boğaziçi University Journal*, 4-5 (1976-77), pp. 111-116 (the article was reviewed by Omeljan Pritsak in *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, II (1978), p. 134).

17 Geza David, "The interpretation of demographic data coming from loosely controlled regions of the Ottoman Empire" in *Arab Historical Review for Ottoman Studies*, 19-20 (October 1999), pp. 253-256; Dariusz Kolodziejczyk, *The Ottoman Survey Register of Podolia (ca. 1681)*, Harvard University Press, 2004, pp. 26-49.

18 BA, MD, no 7, p. 125/321.

the recently established peaceful relations with the Habsburgs, he was asked to keep sending information and told that he could defect “when the opportunity arises”.¹⁹ Another important detail missing in Feridun Bey’s story is that just as the campaign was starting in September the Council noted that trade in Basra had declined considerably and soon thereafter decided that the extortionate one-third tithe in Basra should be reduced to one-fifth.²⁰ There were carrots as well as sticks. Again from Council correspondence we learn that after the suppression of the Islands revolt muskets and other materials were sent on to Lahsa; clearly the intention was to secure the Gulf coast as well.²¹ Finally, the two commanders of the land force were rewarded for their success, Iskender Pasha was appointed to Egypt and Muzaffer Pasha to Baghdad.²²

It is also clear that the Marsh Arab/Arab Islands revolt was quite a major one. Although the government carefully planned the campaign and put together a considerable force, yet the severity of the battles and the fierce resistance took the Ottoman commanders aback. The Ottomans had their muskets and cannon but the rebels were equipped with firearms as well, presumably supplied by the Portuguese active in the Gulf region. This points to another pattern in Ottoman entanglements with various European powers: especially in a coastal area there was always the danger of Franks supplying muskets in huge quantities to potential Ottoman rebels. We learn from the recent work of Abdurrahim Abu-Husayn that the Venetians, for example, used Cyprus as a base to supply firearms by the thousands to the unruly Druze of Lebanon, a role later in the century taken over by Medici Grand Dukes of Tuscany.²³ Abu-Husayn quotes the Damascene chronicler Ibn Tulun on a curious incident in 1520, of unspecified “Franks” attempting to seize Beirut port, dressed as Ottoman Turks (Ibn Tulun’s word is “arwâm”, i.e. “Romans”, see n. 8); the attempt was repulsed easily according to Ibn Tulun’s account.²⁴ [From then on sporadic Venetian attempts throughout the

19 Geza David, “Janos Balassi and his Turkish connections” in *Acta Orientalia*, XLVIII/3 (1995), pp. 339-346, and “The *Muhimme Defteri* as a source for Ottoman-Habsburg Rivalry in the Sixteenth Century” in *Archivum Ottomanicum*, 20 (2002), pp. 167-209, here pp. 200-202.

20 BA, *MD*, no 7, p. 144, 147/369, 375.

21 BA, *MD*, no 7, pp. 468-469, 784/1349, 1350, 2141, 2142.

22 BA, *MD*, no 7, p. 864/2368.

23 “The Long Rebellion: the Druzes and the Ottomans, 1516-1697” in *Archivum Ottomanicum*, 19(2001), pp. 165-191, for the 1520 incident 167-68.

24 Quite reasonably Abu-Husayn suggests that the “Franks” in question must be Venetians. Zeynep Yelçe (Sabancı University), however, reports a reference to the same incident in Marino Sanudo’s *Diarii* which claims that these “Franks” were indeed

sixteenth century, or at the turn of the seventeenth century the much grander designs of Medici Tuscany with papal encouragement to recover Cyprus from the Ottomans and to seize Palestine and even Syria as a whole always sought local support, of the Druze or the rebel Canbulad Ali Pasha. The Franks were to supply muskets and the local allies the main fighting force. The Ottoman government was able to put down endemic Druze rebelliousness at some cost and was well aware of the danger of Frankish contact by sea. The fact that the Ottomans were not able to rid the Gulf of Portuguese presence undermined their efforts on the Gulf coast.

This “imperial campaign” serves as a good illustration of how a regional expedition was organized with a mixture of imperial, provincial and newly recruited troops. It also shows the routines of Ottoman statecraft, both in appointing commanders close to the borderlands and protecting inland provinces, and in dealing with rebels. Feridun Bey’s narrative gives dramatic life to the story otherwise pieced together through documents. But the celebratory tone of the narrative disguises the larger story, deliberately ignored by Feridun Bey; after all, his purpose was not to write history but flatter the sultan. In recent decades, since Cengiz Orhonlu published a report on the Bahrayn expedition (see note 2) we have learned a great deal more about lower Mesopotamia and the Gulf region in the mid-sixteenth century, especially from the research of Salih Özbaran, a rare historian who exploited not only Ottoman but Portuguese materials as well.²⁵ Local powerholders of Basra had switched their support from the Safavis to the Ottomans when Sultan Süleyman took Baghdad from Shah Tahmasb thirty years earlier, but Ottoman power had still not yet been fully established. Ibn Ulyan was not a new actor in the 1560s; he had been recognized by the Ottomans as the leader of the Islands region since the 1540s. This was a many-sided political struggle, not simply a matter of a distant uprising in a difficult border region. The Safavis had been ousted but they still had designs. The Portuguese had pushed up the Gulf and started to form political contacts with local notables. Ottoman efforts to capture Bahrayn just a few years previously had ended in fiasco.

French. Ms Yelçe also reminded me that Nicolas Vatin, in his comprehensive study of the Knights of St John at Rhodes (*L'Ordre de Saint-Jean-de-Jerusalem*, 1994; Turkish translation, 2004, p.289) noted that it was a French fleet sent by François I to support the knights against a possible Ottoman threat which attacked Beirut.

25 His articles have been collected in *The Ottoman Response to European Expansion: Studies on Ottoman-Portuguese Relations in the Indian Ocean and Ottoman Administration in the Arab Lands in the Sixteenth Century*, Istanbul 1994. Also see his “Ottoman Naval Policy in the South”, *Süleyman the Magnificent and his Age*, C. Woodhead and M. Kunt, eds, London 1995.

Though a *modus vivendi* had been reached with the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean but the struggle to control the Gulf continued intermittently. The “victory” that Feridun Bey celebrated was but one step in this struggle, by no means a decisive one.

More recently Giancarlo Casale has followed in the footsteps of Cengiz Orhonlu and Salih Özbaran to provide a fresh look at the question of Ottoman entanglement with the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean. He argues in a fascinating article that until Sokollu Mehmed Pasha became Grand vezir in 1565 Ottomans could not quite decide what to do about the Portuguese presence in the South, the loss of the spice trade, and possible actions in the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf.²⁶ Whereas another illustrious grand vezir Rüstem Pasha thought in 1544 that Basra was “a ruined place...worth nothing at all”²⁷ Sokollu Mehmed Pasha had clear ideas about the importance of the spice trade. His Marsh Arab campaign should be seen as part of a new grand design, now convincingly explained by Casale. The vezir’s plan was not only to push the Portuguese away from the Gulf but to acquire spices at the source. A military alliance with the sultan of Aceh in Sumatra was proposed to fight the Portuguese with Ottoman gunpowder expertise; a fleet specially designed for the purpose was to be built at Suez to export cannon to Aceh and import spices.²⁸ The Basra and Yemen revolts curtailed the plans yet Ottoman spice imports grew. After Sokollu Mehmed Pasha’s death Ottoman governors in southern provinces continued the trade in their own names, with their own capital, not as part of state policy.²⁹

Feridun Bey may not have known it in 1568 but the Ottoman Empire had in fact reached its southern limits at Qasr Ibrim on the Nile, in Yemen, and in Basra. Any later expansion came in new frontiers, in the Caucasus and in the Ukraine; naval activity in the South came to an end and the once-mighty Ottoman navy limited itself to patrolling the eastern Mediterranean soon after Feridun Bey presented his book to Selim II.

26 Giancarlo Casale, “The Ottoman Administration of the Spice Trade in the Sixteenth-Century Red Sea and Persian Gulf” in *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 49 (2006) no 2, pp. 170-198.

27 Casale, “Ottoman Administration of the Spice Trade...”, p. 177.

28 Casale, “Ottoman Administration of the Spice Trade...”, pp. 183-192.

29 Casale, “Ottoman Administration of the Spice Trade...”, pp. 195-196. For a later example of enterprising pashas see my “Dervish Mehmed Pasha, Vezir and Entrepreneur”, in *Turcica*, IX/1 (1977), pp. 197-214.

Finally, it may serve as a coda to note that a century after the Basra expedition Kâtip Çelebi, the celebrated historian and bibliographer-encyclopedist, gave the fullest account of it by any Ottoman writer in his treatise on Ottoman naval campaigns. When my colleague Abdur Rahim Abu-Husayn looked for any local Iraqi sources for the events of 1567-68 all he could find was a reference in a grand, eight-volume modern work by al-Azzawi that took over 20 years to finish.³⁰ Abu-Husayn reports (in private communication) that the information in this work is from Kâtip Çelebi's account, with the important implication that there are no authentic Iraqi sources, at least none that al-Azzawi was able to locate. Kâtip Çelebi was a palace bureaucrat as well as an intellectual. Some of his writings, especially in the 1650s toward the end of his life, were on current affairs where he tried to conceptualize major issues of his times, to look at them dispassionately and from a wider perspective.³¹ During the long war for the conquest of Crete (1645-69) Venetian sea power threatened to overwhelm not only Ottoman supply lines to the island but the Dardanelles and therefore the defense of İstanbul itself. In 1657 when palpable panic gripped the capital Kâtip Çelebi decided to write a history of Ottoman naval engagements and provide thoughts on how to conduct the war.³² He justified inclusion of the Basra campaign in his history, under the heading "The Arabian Iraq Islands Campaign", by saying that although his book is on *naval* engagements this particular expedition involved a great river fleet and was fought on waters. He seems to have read Feridun Bey's report on the expedition. In fact, other than adding some geographical details at the beginning, his account reads as a competent summary of it. Kâtip Çelebi hoped that the information he supplied on the expedition might be useful in the future. His book was held in high regard among Ottoman intelligentsia and it was one of the first to be published when Müteferrika İbrahim Efendi initiated printing in Ottoman Turkish about 70 years after it was written. How useful his account was to later Ottoman administrators and commanders is difficult to judge. After all, it is just another story of an empire dealing with a local disturbance with some carrots and some very big sticks; some negotiation, some reward and some punishment in the classic Ottoman, or any imperial way.

30 Abbas al-Azzawi, *Tarikh al-Iraq bayn ihtilalayn* (History of Iraq between two revolutions), vol 4, pp. 108-9.

31 His *Düstur el-amel* (Guide to Rectification of Defects) was on statecraft in the face of financial difficulties; *Mizân ül-hak* (Balance of Truth) on social customs versus strict religious principles on the occasion of Kadızadeli disturbances.

32 *Tuhfet ül-kibâr fi esfâr ül-bihâr* (Accounts of great deeds in naval campaigns), İstanbul 1329/1911, pp. 83-5.

SUPPRESSING THE MARSH ARABS, CENTRAL POWER
AND PERIPHERAL REBELLION IN THE 1560s

An Ottoman Imperial Campaign: Suppressing the Marsh Arabs, Central power and peripheral rebellion in the 1560s

Abstract ■ The revolt of the Marsh Arabs in the 1560s was put down by means of a major regional campaign. The narrative of the campaign is supplied by Feridun Bey in a coda to his book on the Szigetvar campaign. The registers of important affairs for the years 1565-1568 also supply pertinent details. This was a carefully prepared affair, called an “imperial campaign” by Feridun Bey, presumably because 2,000 janissaries and some hundreds of artillerymen of the sultan’s porte were sent to join local forces. The suppression of the revolt provided rewards for future loyalty as well as severe punishment for past transgressions. Also, relations with Shah Tahmasb on one hand and the Portuguese in the Gulf area on the other were carefully monitored.

Keywords: Basra, son of Ulyan, Marsh Arabs, Feridun Bey, Safavi, İskender Pahsa, Canbulad Bey, Portuguese