



The effects of the gunpowder technology in the demise of the frontier lords in the Ottoman Balkans

Los efectos de la tecnología de la pólvora en la desaparición de los señores fronterizos en los Balcanes otomanos

Resumen

In this article, the introduction, dissemination, and proliferation of the gunpowder units in the Ottoman military structure in the fifteenth century are discussed. It aims to bring an alternative approach to the effects of gunpowder technology on the relationship between the frontier lords and the Ottoman center in the Balkans. In this aspect, the performance of the Ottoman military organization in two different military encounters, the Battle of Varna and the Battle of Kosovo, is stressed. Then, the Ottoman acquisition of the advanced firearm units such as the war wagons is evaluated through the military interactions between the Hungarians and the Ottomans. Lastly, the effects of the transformation of the Ottoman military organization on the intra-domestic power structure in the Ottoman Balkans are discussed through the literature on the issue. In parallel with it, it is questioned whether it is possible to see the execution of a prominent frontier lord of the Evrenos family, Ali Bey in 1451 by Mehmed II as the sign of the shift of the power balance in the Ottoman Balkans.

Palabras clave:

Gunpowder, Frontier lords, Ottoman military, Battle of Varna, Balkans

Abstract

En este artículo se discute la introducción, difusión y proliferación de las unidades de pólvora en la estructura militar otomana en el siglo XV. Su objetivo es aportar un enfoque alternativo a los efectos de la tecnología de la pólvora en la relación entre los señores fronterizos y el centro otomano en los Balcanes. A este respecto se destaca la actuación de la organización militar otomana en dos encuentros militares diferentes: la Batalla de Varna y la Batalla de Kosovo. Luego, la adquisición otomana de las unidades de armas de fuego avanzadas —como, por ejemplo, los carros de guerra— se evalúa a través de las interacciones militares entre los húngaros y los otomanos. Por último, se analizan los efectos de la transformación de la organización militar otomana en la estructura de poder intra-nacional en los Balcanes otomanos, a través de la literatura sobre el tema. Paralelamente, se cuestiona si es posible ver la ejecución de un destacado señor fronterizo de la familia Evrenos —Ali Bey— en 1451 por parte de Mehmed II, como el signo del cambio del equilibrio de poder en los Balcanes otomanos.

Keywords

Pólvora, señores de la frontera, ejército otomano, Batalla de Varna, Balcanes

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This paper will focus on the introduction of gunpowder technology into the Ottoman Empire and its consequences on the relationship between the frontier lords, semi-independent political entities who spearheaded the Muslim expansion in the Balkans, and the Ottoman state in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Although substantial research has been done regarding the dissemination of firearms in the eastern Mediterranean and its effects on the social uprisings beginning with the late sixteenth century, the Ottoman Balkans has received incidental attention in this regard. This situation, I think, stems from two main reasons: first, a good portion of Ottoman historians give the impression that there had always been a strong central authority in the Balkans, projecting the experience of Mehmed II's state back to the past and even the beginnings of the Ottoman state; thus they are in the opinion that the introduction of gunpowder did not significantly change the intra-domestic power struggle between the Ottoman center and the frontier lords in the region¹. Secondly, they think that the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 and its political prestige successfully allowed Mehmed II to gain the upper hand against the frontier lords, having been able to diminish their political and economic capabilities thanks to a number of strategies such as the confiscation of their waqf estates². However, I think that these historians gravely overlooked the effects of the gradual adoption of the gunpowder technology by the Ottoman central army in the weakening of the lords' political stances in the Balkans. In this article, relying on a number of Turkish and non-Turkish histories as well as chronicles such as two relatively neglected gazavatnames of Kasifi and Zaifi, I will argue that the Ottoman state—at least military—had already begun to hold sway over the lords in the pre-1453 period; having significantly improved its firearm capabilities in the post-1444 period after the Battle of Varna.

To begin with, it is first necessary to ponder the question of the development of the firearm technology in the Balkan armies in general and the Ottoman forces in particular in order to properly assess the relationship between the Ottoman center and the frontier establishments in the Ottoman Balkans. According to Petrovic, 'the first known mention of the use of cannon in the Balkan lands relates to a brief conflict between the garrison of the town of Kotor and Venetian fleet on 13 August 1378, when the defenders of Kotor employed three bombards against the warships of Venice'³. Agoston adds that through the 1380s, the firearms units were fairly commonly used in Bosnia, whence it spread to Serbia between 1382 and 1386⁴. Accordingly, the Serbian contingents that

served in the Ottoman army in 1386 against the Karamanids probably introduced this new weapon to the Ottomans⁵. Although it is not clear whether the Ottomans used firearms during the Battle of Kosovo, according to Johann Schiltberger, a crusader who fell captive to the Ottoman Turks at the Battle of Nicopolis in 1396, Bayezid I formed a special fighting unit, capable of using arquebuses⁶. Further, according to Agoston, the Ottomans used primitive forms of canons between 1394 and 1402, during the siege of Constantinople⁷. Asikpasazade, on the other hand, reports that the Ottoman armies first used the firearms units during the Karamanid siege of Antalya in 1423, being able to successfully target Karamanid Mehmed Bey, a development which effectively marked the end of the siege⁸. Despite this, Agoston argues that in the first half of the fifteenth century, the gunpowder units did not make a huge effect on the battlefield⁹. For instance, although it is reported that the Ottomans had possessed a number of gunpowder units during the siege of Thessaloniki, their contribution to the capture of the city was quite limited; that is, the Ottomans overcame the much-weakened Thessaloniki defenses in 1430 using ladders and siege towers and climbing to the relatively intact city walls with the help of the archers¹⁰. This situation seems to have continued until the 1440s when the transmission of gunpowder weapons from Europe to the Ottoman Empire had significantly accelerated.

Indeed, significant developments in gunpowder technology had taken place in Europe in the 1420s and 30s when the Hussite rebels in Bohemia began introducing war wagons against the Holy Roman imperial forces¹¹. Hussites were a Proto-Protestant Christian movement, that followed the doctrines of the Czech theologian Jan Hus, raising objections against the Catholic church on a number of theological issues including ecclesiology, simony, and the Eucharist. The execution of Hus in 1415 and following persecutions against his fellow clergymen in the succeeding years, turned the faction into an armed organization. Initially, the Hussite military was composed of simple peasants who used their converted farm tools and captured enemy arms as their primary weapons¹². However, the leader of the rebellion, Jan Žižka, soon figured that these military groups under his command would not stand against heavily armored imperial cavalry attacks; thus he felt compelled to develop a new battle tactic, making use of the captured enemy firearms¹³. During a small-scale military conflict at Nekmír in December 1419, he first employed transport carriages as a fortified defensive position, deploying 18 to 21 soldiers to each wagon: 4-8

1. Uzunçarsılı, 1988, 509.

2. Kiprovska, 2008, 213. Öz 1999, 34. Beldiceanu, 1965, 27.

3. Petrovic, 1975, 170.

4. Ágoston, 1994, 19.

5. Ibid., 19.

6. Schiltberger, 1879, 9: '(...) And as Weyasit saw that they continued to resist, he sent for more people and ordered arquebuses to be brought, and platforms to be constructed'.

7. Ágoston, 1994, 24.

8. Asikpasazade, 2003, 450: 'Bu tarafda Karamanoglu Muhammed Beg sürdi, Adalya'nun üzerine düsdi. Ceng itmege basladı. Ceng iderken bir gün kaza-yı asumani be-hük-m-i Rabhani Muhammed Beg'i top-ılan urdılar. Pare pare oldı'. ['On this front, Karamanoglu Mehmed Bey galloped his horse, reaching the city of Antalya. He began fighting over the city. On the battlefield, by the will of God, he was haphazardly hit by cannon fire, having been fallen to pieces'].

9. Ágoston, 1994, 24-25.

10. Anagnostis, 1989, 33-34.

11. Todika, 2019, 11.

12. Górski, Wilczynska, 2012, 28.

13. Ibid., 28.

crossbowmen, 2 handgunners (men armed with early shoulder arms), 6-8 pikeman, 2 shield carriers, and 2 drivers¹⁴. Although the number of firearm units in the early stage was relatively low, the Hussite army was able to stop the imperial cavalry charge and then rout them in this battle, which combined with another Hussite victory at the Battle of Sudomer in 1420. This prompted Žižka to start mass manufacturing of the war wagons. Despite these initial successes, however, the Hussite faction had undergone a religious schism in this period. That is, while the radical wing of the Hussites, called Taborites, rejected any kind of reproachment with the Catholic church, the other party, Utraquists was ready to unite with the church in case celebration of the communion under both kinds (bread and wine to priests and laity alike) was guaranteed¹⁵. This division subsequently led to a civil war, which eventually paved the way for the Catholics to align themselves with the Utraquists and defeat the majority of the Taborite party in 1434¹⁶. After this time, many unemployed Hussite militiamen began seeking employment in neighboring countries such as Poland and Hungary. Indeed, the Hungarians began showing a special interest in the structure and the development of Hussite military strategies and tactics, as the leading Hungarian military and political figure at the time, John Hunyadi, personally (albeit sporadically) engaged in political affairs in Bohemia between 1434 and 1438, having found a chance to study new approaches of Hussite warfare¹⁷. Accordingly, Hunyadi adopted this Hussite-style battle tactic in his struggle against the Ottomans, mounting small-scale artillery to the wagons and increasing the number of gunpowder units in them¹⁸.

In this light, I argue that the effective usage of these units by the Hungarians against the Ottoman raider troops in the following years inflicted heavy damage on the latter and significantly deteriorated their morale, a development which manifested itself with a general reluctance of these troops in participating in an armed conflict with the Hungarians. The raider troops were acting under the command of the frontier lords who were based in various Balkan provinces, having frequently organized pillaging operations against the hostile state organizations¹⁹. However, their operations began to increasingly result in failure after the Hungarian adoption of firearm weapons in the battlefield and employing them in their defensive formations in the 1440s. That

is, after their initial successful raiding operations against Hungary in the 1430s, they began encountering certain setbacks on this front beginning with 1440. In this year, Sultan Murad II initiated a full-scale campaign against Hungary, forcing the Hungarian defenses in the western front, besieging Belgrade in 1440. The siege, as Doukas reports, lasted for six months. However, although the Ottomans were able to breach the city walls from several points, their final assault was far from success²⁰. According to a contemporary Polish priest, Jan Długosz, the besieged force used a feigned retreat tactic, having allowed the besiegers to step onto the ditch near the walls and scale their ladders in the walls²¹. It appears that an important portion of the Ottoman besiegers was composed of raider troops since Chalkokondyles reports that Evrenosoglu Ali Bey, "an influential frontier lord in the Ottoman Balkans", 'came first with his men to lead the assault the walls'²². However, during the ongoing struggle, the besieged militias began throwing combustible materials onto the previously disseminated gunpowder below, having the attackers consumed by the fire²³. Subsequently, the attacking troops began withdrawing; however, it seems that there was another group of assaulters that was attempting to approach the city from the riverside²⁴. According to Jefferson, the Hungarians were able to drive back this second group, 'by the flash of cannons, absorbing their ships into the waters'²⁵. Since it was a siege warfare, the Hungarians could not use the war wagons in this encounter; however, their successful employment of canons and gunpowder allowed them to repel the Ottoman forces, having the latter sustain its first major defeat against the Hungarians. Subsequent to this defeat, Murad gave up his hopes of conquering Hungary through Belgrade and instead focused his attention to open a new front through Wallachia and Transylvania for his new expansionist attempts.

After the siege of Belgrade, the Hungarians first employed the war wagons in their military encounter against the Ottoman forces under the command of Sehâbeddin Pasa in 1442, being able to eliminate an important portion of their military capacities. A year before Sehâbeddin Pasa's military undertaking, the frontier lord of Nicopolis, Mezid Bey, organized a campaign, aiming to test the Hungarian defenses in Transylvania in 1442. After the initial raiding operations in the area, Mezid Bey set his camp in Sibiu; however, being overconfident

14. Todika, 2019, 14.

15. Graham, 2006, 555.

16. Nikodem, 2018, 181.

17. Bartok, 1998, 36.

18. Indeed, Hunyadi was savvy about the Ottoman military tactics and battle strategies, which even prompted some of the Ottoman chroniclers to argue that he had previously served under the command of Ottoman frontier lords. Oruç Bey 2011, 72: 'Üngürüs askeri geldi. Yanko adlı bir kafir vardı. Evrenüs Beg oğlu Ali Beg'in yanında idi. Türkler'in bütün savaş hiyellerini öğrenmişti. Ali Beg'in yanından kaçıp Üngürüs Kralı'nın beglerbegisi olmuştur' ['Then, the Hungarian army has arrived. There was an infidel lord by the name of 'Yanko'. He was initially under the service of Ali Bey, the son of Evrenos Gazi. He was able to learn the entirety of Turkish battle tactics and strategies. However, later he escaped from the court of Ali Bey, taking refuge in Hungary; then he began serving as a governor for the Hungarian king'].
19. Mihailovic, 1975, 177.

20. Ducas, 1834, 211.

21. Długosz, 2001. Cited in Jefferson, 2012, 241.

22. Chalkokondyles, 2014, 410.

23. Jefferson, 2012, 241.

24. Ibid., 241.

25. Ibid., 241.

about his military capabilities, paid no significant attention to taking necessary measures to guard his position²⁶. This prompted Hunyadi to launch a surprise night attack against Mezd's position, allowing him to completely annihilate the Ottoman forces, eliminating Mezd Bey. Immediately after this, Hunyadi also dealt with the raiders who had dispersed in the Transylvanian countryside²⁷. He dressed his own soldiers in Ottoman clothes and waited for their return in the main Ottoman camp, having been able to catch them by surprise; thus, concluding his victory over the Ottomans²⁸.

Since Hunyadi relied on a surprise factor in his encounter with Mezd Bey, which required a swift and decisive military strategy, he did not feel the necessity to employ the war wagons; however, during his second confrontation with the Ottomans who were led by the Ottoman governor of the Balkans, Sehabeddin Pasa, he put them into work, much to the amazement of the Ottoman troops. Bartok thinks that Hunyadi had welcomed this second invading army at the Iron Gate Pass near the city of Orsova on Danube, considering that the Ottomans would not be able to fully benefit from the highly mobile raiding troops in this hilly terrain near the river²⁹. According to him, Sehabeddin Pasa organized his ranks according to the traditional Ottoman military formation; that is, he placed the janissaries in the center around his position, with the sipahis and raiders on the flanks³⁰. In the face of this, Hunyadi, also stationed the infantry into the middle, before the heavy cavalry, while deploying his light cavalry forces in the wings. As Todika asserts, Hunyadi employed the war wagons on both sides of the main body, behind

the light cavalry units³¹. The battle had started with Hunyadi's heavy cavalry attack on the Ottoman center; however, Bartok's suggestion of successful janissary engagement with this force notwithstanding, the Hungarian heavy cavalry seems to have withdrawn to a narrower part of the valley, in order for the Ottoman to pursue³². Subsequently, the Ottoman light cavalry units, the raiders, began pursuing the Hungarian heavy cavalry in the hopes of eliminating them as an effective fighting force. This proved to be an ill-designed attempt; however, considering that the Hungarians began resorting to their war wagons, creating confusion in the Ottoman ranks which had never experienced such a battle formation before. Thus, in close cooperation with the reserve infantry and light cavalry forces, the Hungarians managed to annihilate much of the Ottoman raider cavalries. However, considering that Sehabeddin Pasa managed to escape with his retinue, it seems that a portion of the janissary forces left the battlefield intact³³.

The effect of this military failure was huge both on the frontier entities and the Ottoman central administration as Nesri says, 'the soldiers of Islam have never experienced such a crushing defeat before'; however, I argue that since they had suffered the majority of the casualties, the raider soldiers were more heedful of the military potential of the war wagons³⁴. Immediately after this ill-designed campaign, the word about the newly introduced Hungarian weapons had quickly spread among the frontier troops³⁵. Therefore, during the first phase of the Crusade of Varna in 1443, the raiders avoided close contact with the war wagons. At the battle of Zlatitsa Pass, for instance, in contrast to

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26. Oruç Bey 2011, 72: 'Sonra, Sultan Murad Han, Edime'de oturup Uç Begi Mezd Beg'e Üngürüs'e akın verdi. Mezd Beg kendine fazla güveniyordu. Eflak Eli'nden geçip Üngürüs'e aldırmadan Akıncılar'ına izin verdi'. [Later, positioning himself in Edirne, Sultan Murad ordered the frontier lord, Mezd Bey, to pillage the Hungarian territory. Mezd Bey was overconfident of himself; thus, when he arrived in Wallachia, he let his raiders loose in the area without giving heed to the Hungarian danger].
27. Ibid., 72: 'Yanko mel'unu, Mezd Beg'i yalnız bulup ansızın üzerine geldi. Mezd Beg de yanında bulunan adamlarıyla ceng edip sonunda merhum Mezd Beg orada şehid oldu. Tovacı'lardan dahi hayli adam şehid olup o akın başarısızlıkla bitip ordumuz bozuldu hicretin 845'inde'. [Having found him unaccompanied by the majority of his fellow raiders, Yanko suddenly assaulted Mezd Bey. The latter tried to fend off the attack with a few men; however, he was slain at the end. Thus, in the year 845, this whole campaign in this way meet with failure and our army had been scattered, while many of the tovacis (land holding raiders) had also fallen].
28. Jefferson, 2012, 286.
29. Bartok, 1998, 66.
30. Ibid., 69,
31. Todika, 2019, 15.
32. Bartok, 1998, 69.
33. Asıkpasazade 2003, 471: 'Begler eyitdiler: «Ne'ylersin hay gel düşmana karsu varalum, ordumuz bari ayag altında kalmasun». didiler. Kula Sahin eydür: «Bu gice katlanun, dün yarısında ben anlarun hakından gelem». didi. Ahsam karanusu olicak düşman kayısı kalmadı. Börkün düşmana bağsladı. Sorar ki: «Tuna yakın midur?»' [The army commanders said: «Where are you heading? Come, resist the enemy, at least our army would not be completely eliminated». Kula Sahin (Sehabeddin Pasa) answered: «Hold your ground until the night, I will overcome the enemy during the night». When the night fell however, he gave no heed to the enemy, having submitted his cap to them. Then he asked: «Is Danube nearby?»].
34. Nesri, 1957, 637: 'Elhâsıl asker-i İslâm münhezim oldu. Bir veçhile kırgın oldu, demeli degil'.
35. The awe that the Hungarian gunpowder units had created among the frontier lords even reflected in the historical work of Bayburtlu Osman who claims that the Hungarians acquired the gunpowder technology from a Muslim dervish. Interestingly, according to him, the Ottomans retransferred this technology from the Hungarians in the later periods. Bayburtlu Osman, 1961, 17: 'İbtida tûfengi ol zuhura getürdi. Sonra Macar vilâyetine vardı. Anda bir begün kızın Müslimân edüp aldı. Macar halkı tûfengi andan öğrendiler. Sultân Orhan dahi Macar pâdisâhına adam göndürüp bir kaç tûfeng getürdüp yeniçerilere verdiler. Önce yürüdiler, Hacı Bekdas-î velinün berekatıyile Yeniçeri ocagı çoğaldı. Âl-i Osman'un revnakı açıldı. Solak ve yayabası andan taklid oldı'. [He (the dervish) invented the rifles. Then he journeyed to the land of Hungarians. Here, he converted a daughter of a Hungarian lord, marrying her. The people of Hungary learnt this innovation (rifle) from him. Afterward, Sultan Orhan had dispatched emissaries to Hungary, where they acquired a few rifles to be delivered to the janissaries. These janissaries began accompanying the sultan ahead of him. Over time, with the blessings of Hacı Bektas Veli, the janissaries had multiplied. The house of Osman began flourishing. Then some other military corps, Solak ve yayabasis originated from them (janissaries)].

Murad II, Turahan, "who was the most influential frontier lord in the Ottoman Balkans at the time", seemed to be highly familiar with the military capabilities of the Hungarians³⁶. After previously routing the Ottoman forces Battle of Nish, the Hungarians continued their advance towards Edirne, encountering the main Ottoman army at the Zlatitsa Pass. The pass was blocked by the Ottoman army; thus as Pálosfalvi notes, when the battle had reached a stalemate, the Hungarians pretended to withdraw from the battlefield, luring the Ottomans to abandon their fortified positions and attack the wagon formations³⁷. Although Murad II ordered a general assault, Turahan prevented this, convincing the sultan that such a military action will be disastrous for the Ottoman army³⁸. If Murad II's strategy had taken place, having been forced to position themselves in the frontline, Turahan and his raider troops would suffer most of the casualties akin to what had happened to Sehâbeddin Pasa's forces before. Indeed, the superiority of the Hungarian arms proved itself when the withdrawing Hungarian forces managed to ambush and destroy the pursuing Ottoman troops at the Battle of Kunovica, capturing the sultan's brother-in-law, Mahmud Çelebi³⁹. Since this was an ambush, the Hungarians could not properly make use of war wagons, however, thanks to their high firepower, the Czech mercenary cavalries that were equipped with arquebuses, broke the Ottoman ranks, allowing the remainder of the army to encircle and rout the Ottoman forces⁴⁰.

Although a temporary peace was established between the Ottomans and the Hungarians after this last encounter, the latter soon began preparing for a new expedition that culminated in the Battle of Varna, during which, I argue, they had managed to have the upper hand until its final phase thanks to their choice of an advantageous battlefield near the "Devne limanı", preventing Ottoman encirclement attempts and their effective use of the war wagon units. Before the battle, Hunyadi stationed his left flank in "Devne limanı", extending the line towards the hill range in the northwest of Varna. As he was aware

of the presence of the Ottoman light cavalry units in the flanks, he deemed that such a deployment would foil the Ottoman efforts to cut behind his ranks⁴¹. Apart from this, the Hungarians also deployed six hundred war wagons behind their lines, a situation that proved to be fatal during the critical moments of the battle⁴². Hunyadi thought that in case of a defeat, the army could take refuge behind the safety of the war wagons. The battle had started with the assault of the Ottoman left wing under the command of Sehâbeddin Pasa on the Hungarian left wing. In response, Hunyadi started a general assault on the other side of the battlefield, managing to rout much of the Ottoman sipahis and raiders on the right flank. Although Hunyadi was advantageous on this front, the Hungarian right flank soon began to crumble, fleeing to the safety of the war wagons, which proved to be quite effective in slowing down the Turkish assault⁴³. However, it seems that a portion of the Ottoman militias, under the command of a certain Davud Pasa attempted to encircle the war wagons from behind, having been able to put a number of them out of action⁴⁴. In this critical moment, Hunyadi had come to the right flank's aid, managing to strike them from the rear, a development which put the Ottoman flank to flight⁴⁵. At this stage, Hungarians appeared to be more advantageous compared to the Ottomans, considering that most of their forces, including the war wagons (except the right flank), had been intact while the Ottoman left and right flanks had collapsed. Thus, Hunyadi's plan was probably to encircle the Ottoman center with the war wagons and initiate a full-scale attack in cooperation with other units under his command. However, an unexpected development at this stage, King Władysław III's direct charge against the Ottoman center had dashed these high hopes, which eventually led to a general rout of the Hungarian forces⁴⁶. In the end, the Ottomans surrounded the war wagons. As the author of gazavatname states, although the sultan was intending to attack these units, the state officials induced him to force them to surrender instead, considering that a direct assault would cause serious casualties for the Ottoman army⁴⁷. Adopting the second initiative, the Ottomans

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36. Gazavat-i Sultan Murad bin Mehmed Han, 1989, 23: 'Amma ez-canib Turahan Beg Padisah'in önüne gelip ve yere yüz urup eyitti kim, padisahım küffar-ı hakısar askerini arabasına alub ve ölüm-eri olub durdu. Ferman buyurun ki asakir-i İslam geri döneler'. ['At that time, Turahan Bey came into the presence of the sultan and said 'My sultan the cursed infidels have taken refuge in their wagons, turning them into death machines. Order the soldiers of Islam to withdraw!'].
 37. Pálosfalvi, 2018, 118.
 38. Gazavat-i Sultan Murad bin Mehmed Han, 1989, 23.
 39. Ibid., 19.
 40. Jefferson, 2012, 352.
 41. According to Zaifi, Hunyadi knew that the Ottoman forces were mostly composed of raider units who lacked proper equipment. He even says that these are not Murad's soldiers: Zaifi 1994, 303: 'Egerci çokdurur Türkün çerisi, Çukallu yokdurur binde birisi, Dahi sol misedeki Türki dirsen, melul olma anuñün gussa yirsen. Akıncıdur temasacı heman ol, eline almayub tığ-ı keman ol (...) Murad Han'un bular degildir çerisi'. ['Although the Turkish soldiers seem to be numerous, most of them lack proper equipment (literary translation: one out of one thousand of them have worn heavy armor). So do not be upset by looking at the Turks who are positioned themselves in this forest. Most of them are raiders who even do not know how to use bows and arrows. (...) They are not the sultan's (Murad's) soldiers'].
 42. Pálosfalvi, 2018, 128.
 43. Jefferson, 2012, 464.
 44. Ibid., 464.
 45. According to Kasifi, the Ottoman left flank had already significantly diminished due to the efficiency of the Hungarian gunpowder units. Kasifi, 38: 'Ama küffar kavmi el çabukluğuyla Müslümanların sag ve sol cenahlarını kırdılar. Kafirler gürültü tüfekleriyle sağdan ve soldan sayısız mümin öldürdüler'. ['However, thanks to their adroitness, the infidels were able to break the left and right flanks of the Muslim army. Relying on their 'noise rifles', they managed to slay countless Muslim soldiers on the battlefield'].
 46. Ibid., 6.
 47. Gazavat-i Sultan Murad bin Mehmed Han, 1989, 68: 'Padisahım eger simdi biz alayımız ile bu arabaları urup ve canib-i erbaadan yürüyüb feth idersek arabaların cümlesi yagma olunmak görünür, heman olısı budur ki varub alargadan muhasara edüb oturalım'. ['My sultan if we surround the war wagons and assault them from every direction, they will be plundered and thus be useless. Thus, it is necessary to besiege them and force them to surrender'].

were able to capture the wagons intact without a fight, effectively bringing the battle and crusader threat to an end⁴⁸.

The capture of these war wagons at the Battle of Varna had made significant changes in the Ottoman military structure, paving the way for the establishment of the "Topçu Arabacıları Ocacı" (Artillery Wagoners' Corps) which proved to be an efficient fighting force against cavalry formations. In the aftermath of the Battle of Varna, Hunyadi immediately began preparations for a new expedition, sending an Ottoman pretender, Davud, to Deliorman region in 1445⁴⁹. Aside from that, he also personally led another invasion against the Ottomans just four years after Varna, facing the Ottoman army at the Battle of Kosovo in 1448. These swift political and military actions, I argue, partly stem from Hunyadi's anxiety about the transformation that the Ottoman army was undergoing. That is, Hunyadi was aware of the fact that the Ottomans captured the majority of the war wagons at Varna; thus, he was intending to strike one final blow against the Ottomans before the latter would begin properly make use of them. Hunyadi was thinking that the only reason for his defeat at Varna was the king's untimely assault to the Ottoman center and his subsequent death, a development that crippled the army's morale. According to this, if he was able to field another fighting force against the Ottoman army which had been largely composed of highly mobile raider militias and sipahi troops, he could secure the victory for himself. In spite of this, however, it turned out that the Ottomans had already begun possessing their own war wagons during that period. That is, although several Ottomanists claim that the military unit called "Topçu Arabacıları Ocacı" (Artillery Wagoners' Corps) had been formed just merely for transportation purposes; Uyar and Erickson contradict this, saying that, in fact, they were the Ottoman counterparts of the Hungarian war wagons⁵⁰. According to them, the captured war wagons at the Battle of Varna had formed the backbone of the "Topçu Arabacıları Ocacı" (Artillery Wagoners' Corps) in the Ottoman army. These units played a decisive role at the Battle of Kosovo in 1448, being a key element to secure the eventual Ottoman victory. That is, although the Ottoman sources portrays the frontier units as treacherous entities due to their flight from the battlefield, they are generally silent about their performance at the Battle of Kosovo. This stems from the fact that the Ottoman army was not technologically handicapped at the Battle of Kosovo compared to Varna, thus, the Hungarian forces did not pose a military threat as they did before⁵¹. Uyar and Erickson assert that at the Battle of Kosovo, 'Hunyadi first attacked mainly the

left-wing of the Ottomans without achieving any success. Then, his inspired night attack to the center was crushed before the Kapikulu war wagons'⁵². At first sight, the students of medieval Balkans might think that Hunyadi repeated King Wladislas' previous mistake at the Battle of Varna by attacking the Ottoman center. In contrast, however, Hunyadi was aware of the threat but had no other choice. He saw that the initial assaults against the Ottoman flanks did not perform well due to the tactical withdrawal of the Ottoman light cavalry units⁵³. A direct charge against the Ottoman center would also result in a failure because of the deployment of the Ottoman war wagons there. Thus, he felt compelled to organize a night attack, in the hopes of catching the Ottoman center by surprise. This attempt, however, eventually failed due to the preparedness of the Ottoman ranks⁵⁴. The efficiency of the war wagons, which coupled with the firmness of the janissary troops, managed to stop the Hungarian cavalry charge while the Ottoman left and right wings began surrounding the Hungarian center, paving the way for the victory⁵⁵. Thus, although the Hungarians were militarily much advantageous at the Battle of Varna, they lost this advantage at the Battle of Kosovo. In Varna, the assault of the Ottoman left flank against the Hungarian right flank failed due to the intervention of the war wagons; however, the Ottoman acquisition of these units at Kosovo put the Hungarians into a difficult situation this time, a development which manifested itself during unsuccessful Hungarian cavalry charge against the Ottoman center.

The transformation the Ottoman army had gone through, I argue, had perpetual ramifications for the political landscape in the Ottoman Balkans, significantly deteriorating the military stances of the frontier lords against the Ottoman center. Inalcık asserts that shortly after the introduction of firearms, the state took severe measures to prevent their dissemination within the empire⁵⁶. The frontier provinces were not an exception to that trend. As stated before, the frontier militias had been reluctant to fight against the Hungarian war wagons in the 1440s since they would be military handicapped in an open battle against these units. The decreasing military importance of these troops and their lack of modern equipment was also reflected in the historical work of a Flemish diplomat, De Busbecq, who served in the Ottoman court in the sixteenth century. According to him, —although some of them might have possessed individual firearm weapons— the majority of the Ottoman raiders were still not properly armed with firearms in 1555, having been frequently 'routed by comparatively small groups of Christian arquebusiers'⁵⁷. This was a deliberate attempt by the state;

48. Zaifi, 1994, 344: 'Arabalari hep şaha verirler. Buyurdi şah içinde her ne kim var, yazıp beglik iderler cümle iy yar'.

49. Babinger, 1957, 302.

50. Uyar, Erickson 2009, 19.

51. The Ottoman sources reports the redundancy of the gunpowder units in the Ottoman army during this campaign. Kasifi, for instance, reports that in contrast to the previous battles, the Ottomans had a new weapon called Gürültü topu "Noise canon". Kasifi, 27: 'Padişah isin ustalarına gürültü tüfegi dökmelerini, böyle bir kapıyı gürültüsüz ve tassız bir savaşla alınamayacağını söyledi. O zaman gürültü tüfegi isinde usta olanlar, kardir ile kursuna bakır karıştırdılar. Bu karışımından da gürültü tüfegi (top) döktüler'. ['The sultan ordered the professional canon makers to produce a noise rifle (canon in fact), saying that these fortifications could not be overcome without artillery support (literary without stone and noise). Thus, these professionals who exceed themselves in gunpowder production carefully mixed copper with lead. They manufactured the noise rifle from this alloy'].

52. Uyar, Erickson, 2009, 29.

53. Ibid., 29.

54. Ibid., 29.

55. Kasifi says that Ottoman gunpowder units were highly effective against the Hungarians during a military encounter that preceded the battle of Kosovo. Kasifi, 29: 'Gürültü tüfekleriyle saldırdılar[...] Ok taşları mühre tüfegi ve kılıçla Freng kavminden çoğunu öldürdüler'. ['They attacked with noise rifles[...] They killed most of the Frankish infidels with arrow stones, "mühre rifles" (kind of personal firearm) and swords'].

56. Inalcık, 1996, 23.

57. De Busbecq, 1927, 123-134.

that is, it was well aware of the importance of the gunpowder units in the intra-domestic balance of political power in the Ottoman Balkans⁵⁸. According to this, if the frontier lords attempted to raise the banner of rebellion against the ongoing centralization policy in the Balkans, the state could easily quell their rebellions, unleashing the firearm units against them⁵⁹. Further, it appears that besides the formation of the "Topçu Arabacıları Ocagi" (Artillery Wagoners' Corps), the state began to develop highly sophisticated —more accurate and more efficient— cannon units in this period. The very first instance of deployment of such canons by the state against the lords in a threatening way, I argue, took place under Murad II's rule. The Ottoman historians have long pondered on the reasons that Murad II had personally led a campaign against the Despotate of Morea in 1446⁶⁰. The contemporary Ottoman sources are all silent about the issue, while Chalkokondyles simply states that Despot Constantine had organized a military operation in Attica, plundering several locations under the Turkish control in the region during the crusade of Varna in 1444⁶¹. However, according to Bastav, considering that Constantine also had committed previous transgressions against the Ottomans in the region, this cannot be the main reason behind such a military venture⁶². Further, prior to this, no Ottoman sultan had militarily engaged in this remote frontier territory which is regarded within the boundaries of Turahan Bey's political activity. In this light, I argue that through this campaign, Murad II first aimed to test his newly developed firearm weapons against the relatively weaker state organization in Peloponnesus; and second, he aimed to show the efficiency of the gunpowder units to his main intra-domestic antagonist, Turahan Bey. It appears that the Ottoman army had relied on highly functional canon units during this military operation since, as

Chalkokondyles states, these firearms were able to accurately target the defenders on the Hexamillion Wall⁶³. Considering that the Ottomans faced serious difficulties in breaching Thessaloniki city walls in 1430, this situation shows the degree that the Ottoman gunpowder technology had reached in little more than a decade in the 1440s. Additionally, having personally come and employed cannons in this remote frontier territory, the sultan wanted to give a message to Turahan Gazi that the military balance had significantly changed in his favor. In other words, the recent developments in the gunpowder technology (the formation of the war wagon system and the improvement of the highly functional cannons) substantially reduced the sultan's military dependence on the raider units; and conversely, together with the increase of the number of the household units, it allowed the Ottoman center to gain the upper hand in its political rivalry with the frontier entities even before the stabilization of Mehmed II's rule with the Conquest of Constantinople⁶⁴. This was well assessed by the frontier lords too, since although Mehmed II ordered the execution of Evrenosoglu Ali Bey in 1451, they could not militarily or politically protest this undertaking⁶⁵. Considering that Murad II was afraid of even imprisoning Turahan Bey due to his reluctance to fight against the Hungarian armies during the Long March in 1443, this situation indicates the magnitude of the shifting of the power balance in the Ottoman Balkans in a relatively short period of time⁶⁶. This also refutes Inalcik's argument that Mehmed II initially threw in his lots with the frontier lords in order to properly challenge the towering bureaucratic power of the Grand Vizier Çandarlı Halil Pasa⁶⁷. Inalcik thinks that the lords had willingly cooperated with Mehmed II in the hopes of initiating an appeasement policy with the center⁶⁸. That is why, for example, Turahan Bey acted as Mehmed II's most trustful

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58. A similar situation can also be observed in Crimea where the Ottomans had discouraged the Khans to possess effective gunpowder units until the mid-1500s when the Russian armies began slowly gaining the upper hand. Cf. Inalcik, 1948, 368.
59. Agoston, 1994, 31: 'Although a number of fortified Ottoman garrisons located within the administrative boundaries of the frontier lords in the Central and Western Balkans seem to have possessed gunpowder units including riflemen and cannoners, the archival records indicate that the state carefully supervised them. In 1455, for example, besides several janissaries, there were eleven Christian firearm militias, who were assigned by the state in the Novo Brdo castle. Further, we are able to trace four Christian cannoners in the castle of Resava between 1467 and 1468. Aside from this, as Agoston proposes, the castle of Belgrade had seven Christian firearm militias in 1529'. In his memories, Konstantin Mihailovic narrates that along with a number of janissaries, he was taken captive by the Hungarian forces while defending the castle of Zvecaj (a small fortress approximately 25km south of Banja Luka). This situation also shows the extent of the state control over the frontier fortresses in this period. Cf. Mihailovic, 1975, 143.
60. Bastav, 1970, 58.
61. Chalkokondyles, 2014, 66: 'Ὡς δὲ τὸ τεῖχος τοῦ Ἴσθμοῦ αὐτῷ παρεσκευάστω, στρατὸν τε ἐπέμπευ ἐπὶ Ὡς δὲ τὸ τεῖχος τοῦ Ἴσθμοῦ αὐτῷ παρεσκευάστω, στρατὸν τε ἐπέμπευ ἐπὶ [When the Isthmus wall was completed, he sent an army against the sultan's land, plundered it, and remained at war].
62. Bastav, 1970, 58.
63. Chalkokondyles, 2014, 110. Agoston, 2005, 66.
64. For instance, although a number of Ottoman chroniclers claim that sultan has planned this military operation in cooperation with Turahan, according to Zaifi, the sultan personally berated Turahan for staying idle while the Byzantines were erecting the Hexamillion wall. According to this, Turahan stated that he had no military power to overrun the Byzantine fortifications, a situation which necessitated the sultan's intervention. Zaifi, 1994, 375: 'Bes andan Turahan Bege didi sah, nie olmadun bunı yaparken agah. Cevabında didi mir-i Turahan, ki tapundur bu demde sah-ı devran. Cihanun sahlığı sana sezadır'. [“Then the sultan asked Turahan why he stayed idle while the wall was being built. Turahan answered: You are the sultan of the age. The title ‘world-conqueror’ is more suitable for you’].
65. Ducas, 1834, 230. 'Στείλας ἕνα τῶν ἀρχόντων ἐκ τῶν υἱῶν τοῦ Ἐβρενέζ, Ἀλὶν ὀνόματι, πρωτοστίαριος ὄν τῷ τότε καιρῷ, ἐν τῷ οἴκῳ τῆς ῥηθείσης τὸ παιδίον ἐπὶξεν. [Mehmed dispatched an official from the sons of Evrenos Ali by name, who at that time was captain of the Palace Guard, with orders to strangle the child in his crib. The next day, Mehmed executed Ali, and married the child's mother against her will to Ishak, his father's slave].
66. Gazavat-i Sultan Murad bin Mehmed Han, 1989, 28.
67. Inalcik, 1954, 58.
68. Ibid., 58.

subordinate in contrast to several state officials such as the commander of the Janissary corps, Kazancı Togan⁶⁹. However, considering the execution of Ali Bey immediately after his enthronement, I argue that this cannot be his genuine political strategy. In contrast, the lords were aware of the augmenting military potential of the Ottoman center, which besides substantially boasting its firearm capabilities, significantly increased the number of household troops in this period⁷⁰. Therefore, the lords adopted an obedient approach in their dealings with the sultan, acting as his political subordinates. In this way, they managed to partially protect their regional administrative roles, being assigned as state governors to frontier provinces under the rule of Mehmed II in the following years⁷¹.

This article has addressed the introduction of gunpowder technology in the Ottoman Empire and its subsequent ramifications on the long-lasting intra-domestic political rivalry between the Ottoman state and the frontier entities in the Balkans. Although the gunpowder technology initially did not make significant changes in this regard, the situation began to significantly change after the 1440s. The capture of the Hungarian war wagons by the Ottoman forces, which combined with the improvements in the canon technology in this period, seriously threatened the military and political stances of the frontier lords. The transformation of the power balance in the region reflected in the sultan's campaign against the Despotate of Morea in 1446. Besides testing his newly developed gunpowder weapons, Murad also aimed to show his advanced military capabilities to Turahan Gazi during this campaign. In this respect, although Mehmed II executed one of the most influential frontier lords in the Balkans, Evrenosoglu Ali Bey in 1451 before the conquest of Constantinople, the weakening political and military positions of the frontier lords did not allow them to show a remarkable response.

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69. Mustafa Ali, 2003, 7: 'Sehabeddin Pasa ile Turhan göndürülüb bu makule evza-ı na-sezaya ba-is ne idüğü sorıldı. (...) Fe emma ol tarihde yeniçeri agası olan Kazancı Togan muhkem dögülüp azl olındı agalığı Mustafa Aga nam merd-i akıla virilmesi münasib görüldi. Ve cümle yayabasıları ve zabıtları muhkem degnekden geçürıldı'. ['Turahan and Sehabeddin had been sent to them to investigate the reasons for such an inappropriate move. Even a general slaughter was ordered to kill them all. All the viziers and the scholars, whose advice was mostly respected, intervened in this, asking the sultan to forgive their misbehavior. They said that these people are very pure-hearted; that is why they are not aware of their transgression. When he calmed down, the sultan recalled the order. However, the commander of the janissaries, Kazancı Dogan, was forced to resign after having been beaten up. It was deemed appropriate to give this office to another janissary named Mustafa Aga. Accordingly, all janissary commanders and officers were beaten up by sticks'].
70. Although it was previously supposed that the support of the frontier lords was a key factor behind the enthronement of Selim I and the fall of Bayezid II, in contrast, as Kiprovskaya says the janissaries were the mastermind behind this development. It is true that during his rebellion against his father, Selim I managed to gather a substantial force mostly from the frontier circles to challenge his father. However, subsequently, he lost the battle against the Ottoman central army, a situation which forced him to evacuate Balkans for Kefe. This situation also indicates that the frontier militias did not stand much of a chance against the central troops. Further, if the frontier lords were indeed able to protect their political and military power in this period, Selim I would continue his struggle, taking refuge in the courts of the frontier leaders as another rebellious prince, Savcı Bey did before. Conversely, when Bayezid II invited his son, Sehzade Ahmed to take the power, the janissaries rebelled and forced the sultan to renounce this decision. Later, due to the janissaries' strong inclination for Selim, Bayezid felt compelled to leave the throne to him. Cf. Kiprovskaya, 2008, 219.
71. Mihailovic, 1975, 177: 'Now besides this there are voivodes (sancakbeys) appointed by the emperor (Ottoman Sultan) in all regions against the Christians, such as: the Smederovo voivode and his aid the Krusevac voivode; against the Hungarians and Wallachians, the Nikopolis voivode and his aid the Vidin voivode; against the Croats and Carinthians (Slovenes) voivode of Upper Bosnia and his aid the Sitnica voivode'.

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