



Murad III repeated their betrayal with Safavids

Ottomans Used the Policy of “Needle Stings” with the Kurds

Turkish Ottomans violated the rights of Kurdish people. Violation did not stop by occupying their lands and exploiting them to strengthen their state, then make a coup against them and abuse them; it went beyond as yesterday’s allies were sacrificed and left alone facing the Safavid terror machine, especially during the reign of Ottoman Murad III. Perhaps geography has caused Kurdish people to be between two colonial powers that turned their land into a field of war operations whose worst results were destroying several Kurdish cities and villages.

In his book “Documentary Studies of Modern History and Civilization of Kurds” (Dirasat Wathaekaya Fi Tarikh Al- Kurd Al- Hadith W Hadarathim), Imad Abdulsalam Ra’of described the important period of history of the triangular relations between Ottomans, Safavids and Kurds saying, “Such early stage of Baban history remained far from being recorded by historians, as well as the interest of writers and travelers. Had it not been for what we read in Sharafnama, a historical stage of at least three centuries would have been forgotten”.

With reference to the approved historical documents, we find that Ottomans and Kurds entered into pragmatic allies which were imposed by geostrategic contexts of the stage with the purpose of pushing the attacks of Safavids on one hand. On the other hand, it was also because of the desire of Ottoman sultans to strengthen domestic front in light of the rebellion of Turkmens and their refusal to be subject to the logic of state. Ottomans were able to settle their war against Safavids in the Battle of Chaldran in (1514) thanks to the strong support of Kurds who fought on their side. However, they denied all these sacrifices and divided Kurdistan between themselves and Safavids.

Ottomans dealt coldly with the plight of Kurds facing the brutality of Safavids.

On the other hand, Kurds saw that Ottomans were the best ally against the ambitions of Turkmen Aq Qoyunlu (white sheep, Sunni), as well as Qara Qoyunlu (black sheep, Shia), who controlled important areas of Kurdistan lands. However, the leader of Aq Qoyunlu, at that time Hasan Al- Taweel expressed his desire to Turkify all Kurdish tribes and unite Turkmens under one political umbrella whose capital was Diyarbakir.

In this context, one of the advantages of Ottoman/ Kurdish coordination was the conviction of Ottoman sultans to allow Kurds to conduct their affairs with some kind of independence from the central administration. This represented an advanced model of autonomy which will remain a constant demand of Kurds up to the present day. Such demand have been facing, for long decades, a categorical rejection on the side of Ankara rulers who wanted to forcibly subdue Kurds by ice and fire, away from any openness or desire to meet the legitimate demands of Kurds, given the privacy of Kurdish character and culture.

It can be said that the situation of “fragile peace” which characterized the dealings of some Turkish sultans with Kurds will come to an end when Ottoman sultan, Murad III, took over ruling in (1574). This made separation during the stage of Ottoman/ Kurdish coexistence despite the strategic importance of Kurdistan region. Thus, we find that Evliya Chalabi stated, in his book “a Journey to Egypt, Sudan and Abyssinia” (Rehla Ela Misr, Sudan, and Habasha), “people of states call the ruler Khan... had it not been for the existence of Kurdistan as a dam between Ottomans and Persians, Ottomans would not have achieved stability because Persians were a brave vigorous opponent”.

It is worth noting that the policy of Sultan Murad III came to complete the chapters of suffering which Kurds experienced, before, in a bloody confrontation against Ismail Al- Safawi who tormented Kurds and saw them as ideological enemy who cannot be trusted. Regarding this point, Mohammed Amin Zaki stated in his book “Summary of the History of Kurds and Kurdistan from the Oldest Historical Ages until Now” (Kholaset Tarikh Al- Kurd W Kurdistan Min Akdam Al- Osour Hata Al- An), “The era of Shah Ismail and his history with Kurds were similar to the era of Aq Qoyunlu Turkmen. They were eras of sever injustice and aggression because Kurds were Sunnis so they were neither trusted nor confided, unlike Turkmen who were extremist Shias and Rafidah. Therefore, he did not leave an opportunity without inflicting great harm to Kurds”.

In return, it seems that Ottomans were afraid that Kurds would achieve absolute independence from Istanbul in light of political situations which were moving towards expanded “decentralization” regarding the dealing of Kurds with the ruling of Ottoman sultans, especially that Kurds demonstrated high combat efficiency in the wars of Ottomans topped by the wars of annexing Cyprus Island. Some accounts indicate that they were the center of gravity of Ottoman army. This proposition is confirmed by Imad Abdulsalam stating that “the presence of Shahrizor governor among the greatest leaders of this campaign indicated that Kurdish princes and their fighters were working under his command. In addition, they were also the main center of gravity not regarding the island (i.e. Cyprus) conquest, but with regard to maintaining it when he became its governor, unlike the rest of the other leaders”.

This ambiguous relationship between the center and periphery was described by Mohammed Amin stating, “In sum, all Kurds voluntarily and willingly entered the ruling of Ottomans... so, there came these measures and systems which aimed at the country progress under Kurdish emirates and local administrations which contained Ottoman sovereignty”.

At the geostrategic level, the reign of Murad III coincided with the deterioration of security situation within the borders of Safavid state, especially with Qizilbash incursion and their control of Safavid political decision making. This fact prompted Ottomans to incite Kurds to launch attacks on Safavid lands with desire to decrease borders of the enemy neighbor and expand their borders. This proposition is confirmed by Abbas Ismail Sabbagh in his book, “History of Ottoman- Iranian relations” (Tarikh Al- Elakat Al- Othmania Al- Irania), who stated, “In the midst of these turmoils, Khosrow Pasha incited Kurds to attack the lands of Safavid state”.

However, the encouragement of Turks to Kurds to attack Safavids made them respond to these attacks and abuse Kurds in a series of battles including those fought by Safavids in order to retrieve Kilan region in (1591) as it was one of the most important silk production areas. Meanwhile, Ottomans took no action as Murad III was satisfied by only sending correspondence to Shah Abbas to give amnesty to Khan Ahmed, governor of Kilan. That request was refused by Shah Al- Safawi as he was aware of Ottomans ambitions in Kilan.

In line with the above, during the reign of Murad III, Ottomans turned a blind eye to the Safavid attacks which targeted Kurdish lands with the purpose of achieving two strategic goals. The first was causing exhaustion to Kurds in the face of Safavids and making them the responsibility of defending their lands considering that the defense responsibility was a “self-responsibility”. Thus, Ottomans were not obligated- in their view- to defend them and the borders of their states. The second goal was to exploit such move of Safavids which was weak compared to the strength of Turkish Ottomans at that time; then, force them to sign a treaty of demarcation between the two parties to serve the expansion goals of Ottoman Empire.

Turks have sacrificed their Kurdish friends and left them as a victim that was severely and cruelly abused.

It seems that Ottoman strategy succeeded to expand its borders at the expense of Kurdish people and clans through agreements with Kurds between the two imperial powers. This forced the dreams of Kurds to maintain areas which were governed according to the political model of autonomy. Regarding this point, in the same reference, Mohammed Amin stated, “In (998 /1589 AH) Sinan Pasha Ghakhala Zada marched from Baghdad to Iran and invaded it up to Hamadan. This forced Shah Abbas to delegate Mirza Haider to travel to Astana asking for peace with Ottomans in order to put an end to the long wars whose battles took place between the two parties for several years. A peace treaty was concluded in Nowruz in (998 /1590 AH) which required that the states of Azerbaijan, Shirvan, Kyrgyzstan, Lorestan, and Shahrzazur shall be subject to Ottoman Empire, in addition, Shia sect shall be abolished and eliminated in all countries”.

In general, it can be said that Murad III opposed the autonomy privilege which was granted to Kurds. They were prevented from expanding at the expense of Turkish lands while moving to exhaust Safavids through intermittent battles which were similar to “needle stings” so that he would benefit, after that, from the reaction of Safavids who destroyed Kurdish areas. Thus, they gave a justification to Ottoman Sultan to intervene and force Safavids to negotiate according to his terms, the most important of which was to release Shia Turkmen whom he made, by force, subject to the Turkish central ruling after they posed a serious threat to Ottoman national security. Thus, Murad III was able to kill three birds with one stone: weaken Kurds, subjugate Turkmen and impose his privileged conditions to Safavids.

Ottomans have divided Kurdistan with Safavids forgetting the Kurdish epics in Chaldiran.

References:

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