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THE ARMY OF THE CRIMEAN KHANATE IN THE MILITARY CAMPAIGNS AGAINST THE MOLDOVAN PRINCIPALITY (1484–1538)

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The article examines the features of the military campaigns of the Crimean Khanate, as an ally of the Ottoman Empire, against the Moldavian Principality during 1484-1538, analyzes the number, armament and tactics of the Crimeans, the process of Moldova's transformation into a vassal state of the Porte is shown.

The purpose of the study is a comprehensive analysis of the participation of the Crimean Khanate's army in hostilities against Moldova in 1484-1538.

The methodological basis of the article is the general scientific principles of historicism, objectivity and systematicity. The historical-genetic method allows us to trace changes in political relations between the Porte, the Crimean Khanate and Moldova. The historical-comparative method allows us to compare the army of the Moldavian Principality, the Crimean Khanate and the Ottoman Empire, primarily their numerical composition, tactics and features of military art.

Scientific novelty. The article shows the significant role of the Crimean Tatars in the conquest of Moldova by the Ottoman Empire. A large array of contemporary narrative sources, works of Romanian, Turkish and Ukrainian researchers are used. The reports of the contemporary chronicles and annals about the battles of 1518 and 1538 are critically examined – mainly about the number of participants, the course and consequences. It is proven that the actions of the Crimeans weakened the ability of Moldova to resist the Turks, dealt a powerful blow to the mobilization capabilities of the principality, and also made a significant contribution to the tactical and field reconnaissance of the Ottomans. It is traced that Moldova was never able to find effective allies among other states, and Poland, due to the conflict over Pokuttya, acted as a situational ally of the Porte, in particular in the campaign of 1538.

Conclusions. The Turkish sultans began to involve the Tatars for raids on the Moldavian territories from the second half of the 15th century, as an instrument of pressure, intimidation and punishment. The Tatar raid of 1518 ended in failure for them, as the Moldavian army, thanks to night maneuvers, was able to defeat the Crimean camp and pursued the enemy. Relations between Moldova and the Porte significantly worsened during the reign of the lord Petru Rareș. It is proven that the military campaign of the Porte in 1538 had a number of reasons, primarily due to the actions of the Moldavian lord P. Rareș, strategic goals and the need to obtain a bridgehead for further campaigns against European states. It is concluded that the principality in 1538 was unable to fully mobilize the army due to the actions of the Tatars and the resistance of the Moldavian elite (boyars), the lord was unable to give the enemy a decisive battle in a pre-selected place. The Crimean Khanate, thanks to the use of successful tactics and maneuvers, actively contributed to the capture of Moldova by the Ottomans. Due to their high mobility, the Crimeans were engaged in tactical reconnaissance on the battlefield, carried out diversionary maneuvers, and were recruited by the Ottomans to collect fodder and supplies on the territory of Moldova.

Keywords: Crimean Khanate, army, military art, Late Middle Ages, battles, tactics, campaign, Petru Rareș, Ottoman Empire, Principality of Moldova.

ВІЙСЬКО КРИМСЬКОГО ХАНСТВА У ВОЄННИХ КАМΠΑНІЯХ ПРОТИ МОЛДОВСЬКОГО КНЯЗІВСТВА (1484–1538 РР.)

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У статті досліджено особливості воєнних кампаній Кримського ханства, як союзника Османської імперії, проти Молдавського князівства протягом 1484-1538 рр., проаналізовано чисельність, озброєння і тактику кримців, показано процес перетворення Молдови на васальну державу Порти.

Метою дослідження є комплексний аналіз участі війська Кримського ханства у бойових діях проти Молдови 1484–1538 рр.

Методологічною основою статті є загальнонаукові принципи історизму, об'єктивності та системності. Історико-генетичний метод дозволяє простежити зміни у політичних відносинах між Портою, Кримським ханством та Молдовою. Історико-порівняльний метод дозволяє порівняти військо Молдавського князівства, Кримського ханства та Османської імперії, насамперед їх чисельний склад, тактику та особливості військового мистецтва.

Наукова новизна. У статті показано вагому роль кримських татар у підкоренні Молдови Османською імперією. Використано великий масив тогочасних нарративних джерел, праці румунських, турецьких, українських дослідників. Критично розглядаються повідомлення тогочасних хронік і літописів про битви 1518 р. та 1538 р. – головно, про кількість учасників, хід та наслідки. Доведено, що дії кримців послаблювали спроможність Молдови до опору туркам, завдавали потужного удару по мобілізаційним можливостям князівства, а також здійснювали вагомий вклад у тактичну та польову розвідку османів. Простежено, що Молдова так й не змогла знайти дієвих союзників з-поміж інших держав, а Польща через конфлікт за Покуття виступала ситуативним союзником Порти, зокрема у кампанії 1538 р.

Висновки. Турецькі султани почали залучати татар для набігів на молдовські території ще з другої половини XV ст., як інструмент тиску, залакування та покарання. Набіг татар 1518 р. завершився для них провалом, оскільки молдавське військо завдяки нічним маневрам змогло розгромити табір кримців та вело переслідування ворога. Відносини Молдови та Порти значно загострилися в роки правління господаря Петру Рареша. Доведено, що військова кампанія Порти 1538 р. мала цілу низку причин, насамперед через дії молдавського господаря П. Рареша, стратегічні цілі та необхідність отримання плацдарму для подальших кампаній проти європейських держав. Зроблено висновок, що князівство у 1538 р. не змогло у повному обсязі мобілізувати військо через дії татар та опір молдавської еліти (бояр), господар не зміг дати ворогу вирішальний бій у заздальній обраному місці. Кримське ханство завдяки застосуванню вдалої тактики та маневрів активно сприяло захопленню Молдови османами. Завдяки високій мобільності, кримці займалися тактичною розвідкою на полі бою, здійснювали відволікаючі маневри та залучалися османами для збору фуражу та припасів на території Молдови.

Ключові слова: Кримське ханство, військо, військове мистецтво, Пізні Середньовіччя, битви, тактика, кампанія, Петру Рареш, Османська імперія, Молдавське князівство.

1. Introduction

Moldova occupied an important place in the foreign policy of the Ottoman Empire, primarily as a springboard for attacks on Hungary, the Habsburg state and other European monarchies. The rulers of Moldova tried to get rid of the influence of the Ottomans, which led to a fierce confrontation. In order to keep Moldova in the sphere of their interests, the sultans involved it in military campaigns against the principality of the Crimean Tatars.

Historiography of the issue. The confrontation of Moldova with the Ottoman Empire and the Crimean Khanate was covered in the works of N. Iorga, S. Gorovei, M. Guboglu, I. Ursu and others. M. Chuchko and N. Zacharia focus their attention on the campaign of 1538, as a result of which the Porte removed the Moldavian ruler Petru Rareș. Romanian historian M. Adauzhe is the only one among other scientists who examines the battle near Ștefenesti, proving that it took place in 1518 and not in 1538 as other researchers claimed.

The purpose of the study is a comprehensive analysis of the participation of the Crimean Khanate army in the hostilities against Moldova in 1484–1538.

The methodological basis of the article is the general scientific principles of historicism, objectivity and systematicity. The historical-genetic method allows us to trace changes in relations between the Porte and Moldova. The historical-comparative method allows us to compare the army of Moldova, the Crimean Khanate and the Ottoman Empire, primarily its numerical composition, tactics.

2. Moldova in the orbit of the Ottoman Empire and the Crimean Khanate

The Principality of Moldova came into the field of view of the rulers of the Ottoman Empire primarily as a bridgehead, a springboard for an attack on Hungarian territories (Balukh, 2021: 4). In 1420, the Ottomans tried to capture the city of Kiliya at the mouth of the Danube, but they failed. In 1456, the Moldavian ruler Petru III Aron paid the Sultan a tribute of 2 thousand gold coins, following the example of Wallachia, so that the principality would not be captured by the Ottomans (Uricariul, 1993: 53). Relations between Moldova and the Porte worsened during the reign of the Moldavian ruler Stephen III the Great, as a result of which several large-scale military conflicts took place between the countries. Thus, on January 10, 1475, near the city of Vaslui, a united army of Moldovans, Hungarians, Poles and other allies (totaling up to 50 thousand soldiers) met in battle with a large Ottoman army, which included a significant contingent of Vlachs and Bulgarians – a total of 100–150 thousand soldiers (Kármán, Kunčević, 2013: 125; Стрийковський, 2011: 194). It should be noted that according to J. Długosz, the Ottomans numbered only 30 thousand (Długosz, 1997: 588). Stephen himself chose the battlefield – a valley that was a semi-oval, surrounded on all sides by hills covered with forest. Inside the valley, the terrain was swampy, which limited the movement of troops (Iorga, 1966: 149). In addition, a thick fog hung over the battlefield, and the Ottomans did not conduct thorough reconnaissance. The Moldovans lured the enemy into a trap – the Ottomans and their allies came under artillery and archer

fire, only part of their troops was able to cross the Birlad River before the wooden bridge collapsed, and then the soldiers found themselves in a swampy area, attacked from different sides. The commander of the Ottoman army – the beylerbey of Rumelia – Suleiman, lost control of the soldiers, as a result of which the army was defeated, losing more than 40 thousand fighters (Liviu, Ovidiu, 2018: 149). However, Stephen III was unable to take advantage of the results of the victory, not receiving effective assistance from European allies. The Turkish ruler Mehmed II gathered a large army and again invaded the territory of the principality. Moreover, Moldova was attacked by Tatar troops, who, together with the Ottomans, captured most of Bessarabia and controlled the southern mouth of the Danube (Shaw, 1976: 68). The Tatar troops were probably commanded by karachi-bek, the head of the Shirin clan – Eminek. The Moldavian lord was forced to release part of the army so that the soldiers could defend their homes from the Tatars, so his army numbered only 12-20 thousand soldiers. Making maximum use of the terrain, with forests and swamps, Stefan avoided battles in open areas, set up ambushes for the enemy, and used the “scorched earth” tactic. However, the numerical superiority of the enemy allowed the Ottomans to surround the Moldavian army from several sides in the White Valley (Valea Alba) on July 26. The Moldavian soldiers created fortified positions, repelled several enemy attacks, but suffered heavy losses and a number of tactical defeats. Stephen III retreated to the northwestern part of the principality (and possibly to Poland), the Ottomans failed to capture a number of powerful fortresses, including Suceava and Khotyn, their army suffered from famine and a plague epidemic, and the sultan decided to retreat from the territory of Moldova (Bărbulescu, 2002: 157–158). In the end, seeing that the principality was suffering enormous losses from the conflict with the Porte, the Moldavian lord decided to become a vassal of the sultan, paying the latter an annual tribute, although Moldova retained the right to conduct foreign policy.

The Ottoman sultans attracted Tatar detachments for military campaigns against Moldova and European states, because: firstly, they sought to protect their own army from heavy losses, and secondly, they knew about the effective tactics of the Crimean light cavalry. The Crimean Khanate had limited human resources (in the 16th century, the population of the state was 200–300 thousand people), so even under conditions of large-scale mobilization of men, the khan could gather an army of several tens of thousands of people, and even then not all of them were experienced, fully armed and protected by armor warriors (Kozlovskiy, 2025b: 89). Since the main emphasis of the Tatar army was on mobility and maneuverability, heavy weapons had to be sacrificed – only in major campaigns did the Crimeans use artillery (a maximum of several dozen

guns, mostly light), so they had limited opportunities to storm various fortifications (Kozlovskiy, 2025a: 129). At the same time, in open terrain, the Crimean horse archers could use various tactical techniques, lure the enemy into ambushes, strike from the flanks and rear, and much more (Kozlovskiy, 2025c: 59). The sultans also understood perfectly well that the strategy and military doctrine of the Crimeans were based on the destruction of the economic and demographic potential of enemy states, so such states would be easier to conquer (Storozhenko, 2004: 102). The Tatars were to disrupt mobilization in the Moldavian lands, destroy settlements, attack the logistics of the enemy army, sow panic, destroy individual military units, and much more. The Crimean khans participated in the military campaigns of the Porte for various reasons. First, in this way they did not want to lose the protection and support of the Ottomans. Second, the Tatars received many gifts, funds, and could count on great booty. Third, the khans considered Moldova and Wallachia as potential vassals, since they occupied territories that previously belonged to the Horde (many Tatars lived in Budzhak, the territories in the steppe between Akerman and Kiliya, on the Lower Danube).

In 1484, the Sultan, having gathered up to 60 thousand soldiers together with the Crimean Tatars, set off on another campaign against Moldova and on July 6 the siege of Cilicia began, the garrison of which numbered only 400 soldiers (Manea, 1995: 204). Eight days later the fortress capitulated, and the result of the campaign was that the Ottomans gained control over Budjak (Costin, 2006: 51). According to researchers S. Gorovei and M. Szekelly, in 1486 Moldova and the Porte concluded an agreement according to which the principality became a vassal of the empire (Gorovei, Szekelly, 2005: 239–240). The Moldavian lord sent a detachment of 600–2,000 soldiers to the Ottomans, who fought with the Poles in 1497–1498. Later, Stefan sent an army to support the military leader Malkochoğlu Bali Bey, who also attacked Poland. For military service, the Moldavian lord received gifts from the Sultan, including a sable kaftan (Uzunçarşılı, 1964: 186). In addition, the principality paid 4,000 gold coins to the Porte every year, which was another confirmation of vassal dependence (Guboğlu, 1969: 55). Such dependence, submission, was called in Turkish documents – “asservire”. In 1492, the Moldavian lord concluded a treaty with the Crimeans, according to which Moldova provided the Khanate with funds and gifts (temporary indemnity) to protect the principality from Tatar raids.

3. Tatar campaigns in Moldova 1510–1518. Battle of Ștefanesti

After the death of Stephen III, a slow decline in political activity began in Moldova. The new ruler, Bogdan III the One-Eyed, tried to escape from the influence of Istanbul and became close to the Hungarians

and Poles. In 1510, Moldova concluded an alliance with Poland – both countries pledged not to join coalitions of enemy states and to inform each other about the movements of Ottoman troops. Bogdan III pledged not to provide military assistance to the Porte, and Sigismund I promised to provide shelter to the ruler and help him regain the throne in the event of Turkish aggression (Hurmuzaki, 1940: 458).

In 1510, Moldova was involved in the civil war between the rulers of the Porte. Sultan Bayezid II declared his eldest son Ahmed as his successor, while the Sultan's youngest son, Selim, with the support of the Janissaries, started an uprising and arrived in Crimea, where he was supported by the Kafin sanjak Suleiman (governor of Kafa) and Khan Mengli I Gerai (Gonța, 2015: 27). The ruler of Wallachia supported Selim, while the Moldavian master maneuvered between Selim and Bayezid II. Since Moldova paid tribute to Bayezid II, Selim ordered the Tatars to attack the principality in response in August 1510. The Tatar attack is mentioned in the “Chronicle of Grigore Ureke”: *“Beti Gerai, the sultan, the son of the khan, the nephew of the emperor, without warning with a large crowd of Tatars entered the country in three places and plundered from Orhei to Dorogoi and above the Prut, took much booty, enslaved people and captured a lot of cattle. Then the sultan, being very badly wounded by arrows, died”* (Costin, 2006: 54). The Tatar raid was repelled, and the Moldavian lord asked the Polish king to release the Horde khan Sheikh Ahmed, who had been in Poland since 1504, from captivity, but the Polish monarch did not do this. In January 1512, Selim concluded an agreement with Bogdan III against Bayezid II, receiving the right to collect taxes in the lands near the mouth of the Danube, including the town of Isaccia/Oblucica (Cuboglu, 1966: 193). In April 1512, Bayezid II, not wanting to plunge the state into a whirlpool of confrontation, under pressure from Selim, abdicated the throne in favor of his younger son, and Moldova became even more dependent on the Porte (Costin, 2006: 59). Perhaps such actions of the Moldavian ruler were due to the fact that he sought protection from Tatar raids. Grigore Ureche claims that in 1513 another Tatar raid on Moldova took place: *“Khan Mengli I Gerai plundered Lithuania as far as Vilnius, causing much damage and capturing many slaves. At the same time, Khan Beti Gerai's son entered Moldova, plundered the country as far as Iasi, burned the territory of the Karlegaturia, and even reached Dorohoiu and Ștefanesti. And others plundered as far as Lepusna and Chigheciu, wanting to get out with the slaves, many souls drowned in the Dniester, both slaves and their own. And Bogdan sent his voivode Corpaciu against them, who struck them with a thousand men. And having given battle, seven hundred of our men fell, and three hundred fled. And the Tatars, having suffered greater losses from the water than from the army, returned to Perekop”* (Costin, 2006: 62).

A much larger-scale Tatar raid took place in early August 1518, but for some reason these events were not reflected in historiography, perhaps due to confusion in different sources. Attention was drawn to another Tatar campaign by the Romanian researcher M. Adauge, who processed a large array of Turkish, Moldavian and Wallachian sources and compared their information. According to the researcher, the Tatar invasion took place along the Prut – Chugur – Ștefanesti – Șerbaca route (Adauge, 2012: 75). Although the Romanian researcher N. Iorga, relying on Moldavian and Polish chronicles, claims that the Tatars advanced much further south than the Chugur, reaching the mouth of the Sarata in the Falci area (Fălciului) (Iorga, 1910: 219–220). The reason for the Tatar campaign was the foreign policy pursued by the political leadership of the principality. On April 22, 1517, lord Bogdan III died and his son Stefan IV became the ruler, but since he was a minor, the state was actually ruled by the princely council headed by the regent, the castellan of Suceava – Luka Arbor. L. Arbor had considerable experience in military art – from a young age he accompanied his father on various military campaigns (he witnessed the storming of the fortress of Nyamc by Mehmed II's army), in 1497 he led the defense of Suceava from the Polish army (Nistor, 2002: 365–366). On March 9, 1518, in Krakow, Stephen IV, with the assistance of the regent, concluded a secret alliance treaty with Poland, according to which the Polish king Sigismund I undertook to defend Moldova and Wallachia from the Ottomans, in return for which the master undertook to side with Poland in the event of a conflict between the latter and the Porte (Eremia, 1992: 145). Apparently, the sultan learned about the agreement and, since he did not have his own forces to punish the master (the Turks had been waging another war with the Safavids since 1514), he sent the Tatars against Moldova.

According to various sources, the Tatar army numbered 20–25 thousand soldiers (Adauge, 2012: 78). Turkish chronicles greatly overstate the number of Tatars, giving figures of 70, 100, and even 200 thousand (Guboglu, Mehmet, 1966: 227, 254, 535). However, N. Iorga reduces this figure to 15 thousand people (Iorga, 1910: 221). There is no reliable information about who commanded this army – the sons of the khan, the military leaders of Budjak, murzas, and representatives of the most influential families of the Khanate are mentioned. There is also no reliable data on the size of the Moldavian army. R. Rosetti claims that in 1509–1536 the army of the principality numbered approximately 30 thousand soldiers (Rosetti, 1947: 333). M. Adauge notes that during large-scale conflicts and total mobilization the lord could gather 70 thousand soldiers and in a limited period, for example during sudden enemy attacks – 20–25 thousand (Adauge, 2012: 79). T. Movileanu writes that by the middle of the 16th century,

the Moldavian army numbered up to 40 thousand soldiers (Movileanu, 2013: 122).

The Khanate army moved along the same route as during the attacks of 1510 and 1513, and the Moldavian commanders were informed in time about the enemy invasion, gathered an army near Chirleu and headed to the mouth of the Coroviea River to intercept the Tatars near Ștefanești, where the pass was located. The Tatars crossed the Prut River and on August 8, their scouts discovered a Moldovan camp south of Ștefanești, set up their own camp and planned to attack the Moldovans on August 8. Meanwhile, along the Prut River, detachments of boyar troops and armed peasants from the southeastern counties of Moldova, mainly Cara de Jos, were heading towards Ștefanești (Adauga, 2012: 81). The commander of the Moldavian army, Luca Arbor, instructed the vornicul Petru Carabăț (P. Cărăbăț) to lead the mentioned detachments, secretly cross the Prut, advance along the left bank of the river, then cross the Prut again in the opposite direction and thus find themselves in the rear of the Tatars (Giurescu, 1943: 140; Costin, 2006: 71). P. Carabăț's detachments crossed the Prut at night, finding themselves 2–3 km behind the Crimeans. Petru Carabăț's army probably crossed through a secret ford, which the Tatars did not know about, north of the village of Costești, where the river made a bend. At the same time, the second part of the Moldavian army approached the Tatar camp at night and waited for dawn.

On the morning of August 9, the Moldovans attacked Crimeans from two sides at the same time (Bogdan, 1895: 128). Not being ready for battle, the Tatars panicked, their main part crossed the Prut River near the village of Costesti, many soldiers drowned. These events were reflected in Grigor Ureka, but the chronicler mistakenly placed them under 1538: “*On Monday morning, at dawn, they [the Moldavians] attacked them [the Tatars] without warning, when they had no caution and fortunately for Stephen, they defeated them, and many Tatars died, many drowned in the Prut and were swallowed up by Chugur. And many they [the Moldavians] captured alive, including two great Murzas, namely Tamiza and Bikaza. And those who remained, they pursued through the fields, cutting them down and shooting them, all the way to the Dniester. There, the horses, tired from the long journey, entered the Dniester and drowned. Only the khan and a few escaped, but he was also seriously wounded in the head, so they returned with great losses and disgrace. Even those who escaped fled without weapons and without horses*” (Costin, 2006: 71). According to the chronicler, the army was commanded by Alp Geray – one of the sons of Khan Mehmed I Geray.

References to the defeat of the Tatars can be found in other sources. In the Moldavian chronicles, we can read the following: “*On August 14, the Tatars came to the Moldavian land, first of all to the town at the mouth of the Prut – Shcherbanca; those Tatars were*

commanded by Alb-Sultan and ordered the land to be burned. And Stefan the voivode gathered his army and went against it alone along the mountain above the Prut. And he sent to Karabets, his great janitor, to cross the Prut with the entire Lower Country to him. And he ordered him to attack the Tatars at dawn on Monday. And he did, and the janitor attacked them, struck them and killed many, and took many alive as prisoners, and they also caught two great murzas, and they chased and beat the others across the field, killing and chopping them down to the Dniester, so that only with a small number of people did that Alb-Sultan escape. And Stefan the voivode returned to Khirlov because he himself had participated in that battle” (Grekul, 1976: 122). The Putnian Chronicle states: “*In the year 7026 (1518), on August 9, voivode Stefan defeated the Tatars near the Prut and pursued them across the field to Chughur, killing them and capturing their leaders*” (Vladescu, 1925: 132). The “Chronicle of Macarius” also tells how host Stefan defeated the Tatars, many of them drowned in the Prut and Chughur (Bogdan, 1891: 200).

M. Adauga notes that in the defeat of the Tatars, the Moldavian army used a number of elements of military art – a carefully planned wide bypass of the enemy from the rear, a night march, a sudden attack at dawn, when the enemy was not expecting it, and the pursuit of the Crimeans for their final defeat (Adauga, 2012: 83). There is no information about the losses of the Moldovans and Tatars during the clash, in the Moldavian chronicles the losses of the Tatars are described as “many”. It could have been hundreds, or possibly several thousand, given that the Crimeans were accompanied on their campaigns by a large number of auxiliary personnel who performed various tasks – collecting supplies and fodder, transporting prisoners, etc.

4. Aggravation of relations between Moldova and the Porte

The successful repulse of the Tatar attack in 1518 did not help Moldova free itself from vassalage and weaken the influence of the Porte. After the conquest of Egypt in 1517, the Sultan, in addition to various titles, received the title of Islamic Caliph and began to be considered the protector of the entire Islamic world. In the spring of 1521, Ottoman envoys arrived in Suceava, conveying to the master the Sultan's demand to provide a military contingent for joint military operations against the Hungarians (Ali Mehmet, 1976: 13). The principality's leadership was slow to respond, but the Sultan instead sent warnings threatening the Moldovans with punishment for refusing to participate in the military campaign. Moldova's position was further weakened when the Ottomans captured Belgrade on August 29, 1521, and the defense system of the Kingdom of Hungary, a potential ally of Moldova, effectively collapsed. The master could not

resist the Porte also because Poland did not want to enter into conflict with the Turks and did not support the principality (Costăchescu, 1993: 532). Despite this, during 1523-1524, Moldavian troops attacked the Ottoman garrisons in Cîlîea and Cetatea-Alba (Bilhorod-Dnistrovskiy), as well as the Tatar settlements in Budjak, as the Tatars, returning from campaigns against Transylvania, plundered Moldavian villages (Celichowski, Kętrzyński, 1952: 697). At the same time, as a sign of vassalage, in May 1526, the owner, after paying tribute, sent gifts (*peşcheş*) to the sultan at his camp near Filibe (Plovdiv) – 40 pieces of sable fur, 5 pieces of ermine fur and other things that were purchased in Muscovy (Maxim, 2008: 50). After the defeat of Hungary in the Battle of Mohács in 1526 and the death of the Hungarian monarch, Moldova lost a potential ally in the fight against the Porte. It is worth noting that the Moldavian master did not provide the Sultan with a military contingent on the eve of the battle, which also led to an even greater confrontation with the Ottoman Empire.

Relations between the Porte and Moldavia became tense after Petru IV Rareş (1527-1538 and 1541-1546) became the first ruler of the principality, who wanted to free himself from Ottoman influence, and the Sultan, in turn, wanted his protegee, Stefan V Lacusta, to lead the state. The Sultan was annoyed by the fact that Petru Rareş allowed himself not to pay tribute to Istanbul in some years and fought with Poland over Pokuttya. At first, Rareş did not conflict with the Sultan, behaved quite loyally to the Ottomans, and in August 1527 sent to Istanbul a tribute increased by the Sultan, in the amount of 10 thousand gold coins (Gonța, 2015: 35; Ursu, 2008: 33). The Moldovans regularly sent detailed reports to Istanbul on the military and political situation in the region (Tappe, 1964: 26). In 1529, the host provided the sultan with a military contingent for a campaign in Transylvania. On June 22, near Feldior (near Brasov, Transylvania), the Moldavian army defeated the Austrians, and later the Moldavians defeated several enemy detachments. In response, King János Zápolya presented Rareş with several Transylvanian fortresses, including Cetatea de Balte, Rodna, Ungoraş, Bystrica, and others (Guboğlu, 1986: 740). In 1530, the Moldavian prince launched a military campaign against Poland, which, however, proved unsuccessful, as the Moldavians suffered several defeats, including near Obertin, on August 22, 1531, as a result of which the principality lost only up to 8 thousand soldiers killed (Davies, 2012: 102).

In the spring of 1531, the Sultan, in his correspondence with the leaders of European states, advised to stop direct relations with Suceava and to turn to Istanbul, since the rulers of Wallachia and Moldova were “*tribute payers and slaves of the Sultan*”, and their possessions were the property of the Porte (Hurmuzaki, 1900: 21). According to the treaty concluded between Poland and the Ottoman Empire in 1533, Moldova and

Wallachia were recognized as vassals of the Sultan. Already in 1534, after several military campaigns of Moldova against Poland, the Sultan finally decided to overthrow Rareş from the Moldavian throne by military means, but was unable to launch a military campaign due to the confrontation with the Safavids. Under such circumstances, Petru Rareş initiated a political rapprochement with the Habsburg Empire, deciding to break off relations with the Porte and Poland. Relations between the principality and the Porte were aggravated by the murder of the regent of Hungary – Alvise Gritti, who was an advisor to the Sultan and a close associate of the Grand Vizier Ibrahim Pasha. In 1534, A. Gritti arrived in Transylvania, where he was supposed to settle the disputed issues between the kings János Zápolya and Ferdinand, but the diplomat sought to seize power in Transylvania and transfer Moldova and Wallachia to his sons (Gorovei, 1982: 113, 115). On the orders of A. Gritti, was killed the Transylvanian voivode Emeric Čibac, which provoked an uprising of the local population, which was supported by the Austrians. Petru Rareş and János Zápolya were forced to send troops to suppress the rebellion. A. Gritti and two thousand Janissaries hid in the fortress of Mediaş, in southern Transylvania. Soon the troops of the Transylvanian voivode Stefan Mailat and the Moldavian boyar Teodor Bubujoc approached the fortress, who, instead of providing assistance to A. Gritti, laid siege to Mediaş. On September 28, the garrison capitulated, and A. Gritti and his two sons were executed (Iorga, 1937: 369). Knowing that the Sultan would not forgive the murder of A. Gritti, the Moldavian prince concluded an alliance with the Habsburgs on April 4, 1535, under which he undertook not to allow Turkish troops through the territory of Moldova and not to visit Istanbul (Decsei, 1970: 140). In May, the Moldovans concluded agreements against the Ottomans with the voivode of Transylvania – Stefan Mailat, and the prince of Wallachia – Vlad VIII Vintila. According to O. Balukh, the master sought to provoke a conflict between Poland and the Porte in this way (Балух, 2021: 5). In the summer of 1535, the Moldavian troops attacked Pokuttya (where they burned about 100 villages) and Podillia, but in August they were stopped by the detachments of M. Sieniawski and were forced to retreat. In December, the Moldavian army conducted a small military expedition to Pokuttya, which, according to the Poles, was intended to distract part of their forces from the confrontation with Muscovy (Plewczyński, 2011: 394).

5. Campaign of 1538

After the end of the war with the Safavids, in 1536, Sultan Suleiman I offered his master to take part in the campaign against the Habsburgs and provide the Hungarian king Janos I Zápolya with a 6,000-strong military contingent. The ruler of the Porte promised to forget about the incident with A. Gritti and help in the conquest of Pokuttya, and Zápolya promised

to provide large funds and gifts (Zaharia, 2011: 20). Rareș distrusted the Ottomans and refused the Sultan, which was regarded by the Ottomans as a betrayal and a challenge (Чучко, 2018: 246). In November 1537 – February 1538, hostilities broke out again between Poland and Moldova, on February 1, the Moldavian army defeated the Polish border troops on the Seret River, resulting in the death of up to 900 soldiers.

On February 24, 1538, Ferdinand I Habsburg and Janos Zápolya, mediated by Pope Paul III, concluded an agreement under which Ferdinand I transferred Transylvania and Eastern Hungary to Zápolya, but on the condition that after the latter's death all his possessions would pass to the Habsburgs. Later, Petru Rareș joined the alliance between Zápolya and the Habsburgs. With this step, the Moldavian ruler also sought to intimidate the Polish king into making concessions regarding Pokuttia, however, Sigismund I sided with the Sultan. In May 1538, the Polish monarch appealed to the Sultan to overthrow P. Rareș and replace him with a more loyal Polish ruler, in return for which the Poles wanted Moldova to remain a buffer state and not be annexed to the Ottoman Empire. The Sultan agreed to replace Petru Rareș with a more loyal candidate (Guboglu, 1956: 111).

Preparing for a military campaign against Moldova, the Sultan gathered a large army, numbering from 120 to 240 thousand people (Setton, 1984: 444). Of course, the sources often overestimate the size of the Ottoman army. The Crimeans were also involved in the campaign – according to M. Guboğlu's calculations, the army of Sahib I Gerai numbered 15–20 thousand soldiers (Guboğlu, 1986: 740). Although one can find much smaller figures for the number of the khanate's troops – 8–10 thousand (Hammer, 1834: 152). Also, there is no exact data on the number of the Moldavian army. Petru Rareș claimed that he could gather 45 thousand soldiers (Movileanu, 2013: 121). Researcher A. Veranchic indicated that in the event of a large-scale mobilization, the host could gather 60–70 thousand soldiers and this is confirmed by the data of Transylvanian diplomats (Holban, 1968: 199; Istoria militară, 1986: 40). Papal nuncio Fabio Mignanelli claimed that Moldova could muster 30,000 soldiers (Holban, 1968: 464–465).

The Sultan's campaign against Moldova began on July 9, 1538. The Ottomans crossed the Danube and invaded the principality. Petru Rareș, like his predecessors, sought to lure the enemy into difficult terrain, severely limit the maneuverability of his troops, and defeat him in battle. However, the master's plans were thwarted by the actions of the Poles, who actually acted as the Sultan's allies – a 20,000-strong army besieged the Khotyn fortress on August 18 (Чучко, 2018: 256). Petru Rareș hastily concluded peace with Poland, pledged not to make any more claims to Pokuttia, and to compensate for the losses incurred during attacks on the Polish border.

The Crimean army also went on a campaign. The Khan mobilized, ordered the soldiers to gather on the left bank of the Dnieper within ten days, taking with them a three-month supply of food. Those who did not appear were threatened with confiscation of property (herds and pastures) and even the death penalty. The Khan took 40 light cannons-zarbutans and a thousand archers-tyufenkji on the campaign (Tarih-i Sahib Giray Han, 1973: 165). The soldiers of the influential Baryn, Shirin, Mangyt and Kipchak families participated in the campaign. Near the Dnieper, the Crimeans were attacked by a detachment of 500 Nogais under the command of Aksak Ali Mirza. The Tatars defeated the Nogais, captured 50 prisoners, who were executed by order of the Khan. Then the Crimeans crossed the Dnieper for three days. Later, the Khan's army crossed the Dniester River and set up camp. They managed to capture several prisoners, who claimed that the master had hidden the treasures in his father-in-law's fortress, which was located behind the mountain, and his army was decreasing every day, since the nobles with their detachments were leaving the prince (Tarih-i Sahib Giray Han, 1973: 165). The prisoners were executed. The Crimean army broke into Moldova, began to plunder and ravage its territories, as described by Remal Khoja: *"The next day, at dawn, they set out on the road, the people of the Bogdan vilayet [Moldova], leaving their homes, each one alone, moved in a whole stream for certain reasons to the steep mountains. The army set foot on the Bogdan border. Sweeping and burning everything in its path, they moved forward. Bogdan Bey saw that no one was left next to him. And one night he himself disappeared, and no one knew where he had gone. This time the Tatar army found the vilayet quiet and desolate. They took away herds of horses, flocks of sheep and other livestock (kara tovar), Almighty Allah has given so many blessings to this vilayet of the infidels that there is no limit or end to them. However, hazrat khan did not allow them to take anything other than provisions"* (Tarih-i Sahib Giray Han, 1973: 166). Some historical works state that the Moldavian army defeated the Tatars near Stefanesti. Obviously, this is an error related to the confusion in dates in the Moldavian sources, as already noted. It is not excluded that the Moldavians engaged in battles with individual Tatar detachments and defeated them.

Meanwhile, on August 31, the Sultan's army camped near the town of Felchii, then the Ottomans passed through Vaslui, the Prut Valley and on September 9 entered Iași (Gorovei, 1982: 150). The Tatars joined the Ottoman army and the Khan arranged a solemn meeting with salutes (Guboglu, Mehmet, 1966: 254). According to one version, a fire broke out during the salute, as a result of which Iași burned down, along with the Orthodox churches (Hammer, 1834: 152). On September 11, the Ottomans were already near Târgu Frumos. Thinking that the Ottomans would move along the valleys of the Șii and Siret rivers

to Suceava, Petru Rareș decided to give battle in the mountainous area of Botoșani, where the Turks could not maneuver and use their superiority in numbers. The Moldovans began to dig ditches on the roads, build embankments and trenches in the forests, but the Sultan's army included special detachments of workers, including Vlachs, who were engaged in clearing the roads (Gorovei, 1982: 152–153). Rareș's army was greatly reduced as the boyars disrupted the recruitment of peasant militias, unwilling to leave their estates without a workforce (Erdogru, 2016: 325). It is quite likely that the mobilization measures were also thwarted by the actions of the Tatars, and the boyars were forced to defend their estates from them. The Moldavian lord did not receive military contingents from Zapolya and the Habsburgs. The “Chronicle of Macarius” indicates that in September the prince met with the boyars, most of whom were in favor of Petru Rareș either asking for forgiveness from the Sultan or fleeing (Bogdan, 1891: 205). The Moldavian lord decided to leave the state – in mid-September, with his closest entourage and security, he arrived in Khotyn, intending to get to Muscovy through Poland, but the garrison of the fortress did not let him in. Perhaps this was done under pressure, as the Ottomans repeatedly wrote to the Poles asking them to capture Peter Rareș if the prince found himself on Polish territory and hand him over to the Sultan (Guboglu, 1958: 6). In such a situation, the prince set off across the mountains to Transylvania, where his fortresses, donated to Zapolya, were located. On September 18, the Ottoman army entered Suceava. Stefan Lacusta became the new Moldavian master, and the Ottomans left garrisons in Suceava and Tyahin (Bender) (Guboglu, 1956: 112). According to researcher Y. Pylypchuk, after 1538, the Crimeans controlled Chisinau, Balta, Kiliya, Dubossary and other settlements (Pylypchuk, 2016: 190). This indicates that the Crimean khans also gained influence over Moldova and controlled part of its territory. Thus, as a result of the campaign of 1538, the Sultan, with the participation of the Crimeans, managed to deprive the Moldavian master, Petru Rareș, of power and transfer power to his candidate, and capture the capital of the principality. Moldova fell into even greater vassal dependence on the Porte.

6. Conclusions

The Crimean Khanate and the Ottoman Empire considered the Principality of Moldova as a springboard for an attack on European countries, primarily Hungary, a tribute payer, a vassal who could provide military contingents. The Sultans began to involve the Tatars in raids on the Moldavian territories from the second half of the 15th century. For example, a joint campaign of the Tatars and the Ottomans took place in 1484. The involvement of the Tatars allowed the Ottomans to avoid unnecessary losses in their own army, and made the Moldavian masters more loyal

to Istanbul and more pliable. The sultans used the Crimeans as an instrument of pressure, intimidation, and punishment, because as a result of the Tatar raids, villages were destroyed and thousands of inhabitants were taken prisoner, which dealt a heavy blow to the economic potential of the state, which was much smaller than in Poland, Hungary, and other countries.

The Tatars conducted successful raids in 1510 and 1513, collected considerable booty, and left the territory of the principality virtually without losses. The campaign of 1518, which is almost not described in historiography, was completely different. The Moldavian army was prepared for resistance and was able to defeat the Crimeans near the village of Stefanesti, near the Prut River. The secret of the Moldavian success was that part of their troops imperceptibly, during a night march, bypassed the Tatar camp from the rear, and on the morning of August 9, the host's soldiers struck the enemy simultaneously from two directions. The Tatars did not expect the blow, could not resist and were defeated, although the sources do not contain statistics on the losses of the Crimeans.

Relations between Moldova and the Porte significantly worsened during the reign of the master Petru Rareș, who was involved in the execution of the Ottoman diplomat A. Gritti, entered into constant conflicts with Poland over Pokuttya (thus exposing the Porte to clashes with Poland), irregularly paid tribute and concluded an alliance with the Habsburgs. These and other actions of Petru Rareș led to the fact that Sultan Suleiman I in the summer of 1538 launched a large-scale campaign against Moldova, with the aim of depriving the current master of power. The prince sought to lure the enemy, who significantly outnumbered the Moldavian army, into difficult terrain and give a general battle there, but on August 18, the Poles began the siege of one of the key Moldavian fortresses, and the Tatar army crossed the eastern borders of Moldova. Perhaps it was because of the Tatar raid that mobilization measures in Moldova failed, and the vast majority of the elite advocated peace and concessions. The result of the 1538 campaign was that Petru Rareș lost power in favor of the Ottoman protege Stefan Lacusta, Ottoman garrisons remained in the fortresses of the principality and the capital, and the state finally became a vassal of the Porte. As a result of several successful military campaigns, the Crimean khans controlled the Moldavian territories in the middle and lower reaches of the Prut and Dniester rivers for some time. Thus, the Crimean Tatars helped the Ottoman Empire conquer Moldova, weakened it, and had a demoralizing effect on the Moldovan population and, above all, the elite. However, it is also worth remembering the fact that during the reign of Suleiman I, the Ottoman Empire was at the peak of its power, so without effective assistance from the allies, it was very difficult for Moldova to resist a powerful enemy.

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