



ČĀLDERĀN

ČĀLDERĀN, battle of, an engagement fought near *K̅*voy in northwestern Azarbaijan on 2 Rajab 920/23 August 1514 ([Figure 1](#)), resulting in a decisive victory for the Ottoman forces under Sultan Salīm I (r. 918-26/1512-20) over the Safavids led by Shah Esmā'īl I (r. 907-30/1501-24).

The contemporary chroniclers tended to cite certain individual acts of provocation on the part of Esmā'īl as the cause of the Čālderān campaign. However, no single event prompted Salīm's decision to wage war. It was, in fact, the direct and inevitable result of the establishment of the Safavid state.

Salīm's predecessor, Bāyazīd II (r. 886-918/1481-1512) spent much of his reign concerned with affairs in Europe while pursuing a policy of centralization with respect to the administration of Anatolia. As the movement of the Turkman tribes became more restricted and as the burden of taxation became more onerous the central government, already culturally and linguistically divorced from its Anatolian subjects, came to be viewed as an oppressive foreign regime. Preaching of the sort practiced by Safavid propagandists had long found a receptive audience among the disaffected tribes, and as a result the expressions of discontent that occurred from time to time often took on a heterodox veneer. However, the presence of Safavid supporters at, for instance, the revolt of 905/1500 led by Moṣṭafā Qaramānoġlū must not obscure its political and economic causes.

An examination of the relations between the two powers will reveal that Safavid influence over the Anatolian population was of great concern to the



Ottoman government. In an early letter Bāyazīd is chastised for preventing the pilgrimage of Qezelbāš to the Safavid shrines at Ardabīl. Shortly after, the Ottoman ruler deported several thousand Anatolian Shi'ites to the Morea. It must be noted that this policy was directed almost exclusively toward the regions bordering on the Safavid state, indicating that Bāyazīd was particularly fearful of a loss of manpower to Esmā'īl.

Relations between the two powers were aggravated by the arrogant, seemingly hostile attitude of Esmā'īl. An Ottoman embassy sent in 910/1504 to protest the Safavid treatment of Sunnis was subjected to a number of indignities. Bāyazīd's preoccupation with affairs elsewhere prevented him from taking any action at the time, and this in turn encouraged Esmā'īl to take bolder risks. Three years later, during the Safavid campaign against the Du'l-Qadr ruler 'Alā'-al-Dawla, Esmā'īl's army crossed into Ottoman territory, and once again Bāyazīd let a deliberately provocative act go unanswered. Salīm, then governor in Trabzon, viewed his father's inactivity with alarm and ordered retaliatory raids to be carried out against Safavid territory.

The escalation continued, and Esmā'īl sought an alliance with the Venetians while making overtures toward Bāyazīd's son, Šāhanšāh, then governor of Qaramān; but after the discovery of his rebellious intentions, Šāhanšāh was executed in 917/1511. In 916/1510 the Safavid ruler had the skull of the defeated pro-Ottoman Uzbek ruler Moḥammad Šaybānī Khan made into a drinking cup and sent it to Bāyazīd together with a number of demands. Esmā'īl's continued defiance and Bāyazīd's apparent unwillingness to respond aggravated the relations between the sultan and his sons. Finally Salīm rebelled and with the backing of the Janissaries eventually forced the abdication of his father. Esmā'īl took advantage of the chaotic conditions caused by the internecine struggle for the Ottoman throne to foment further rebellion. The uprising of Šāhqolī Bābā Takkalū in 917/1511 attracted a large number of Qezelbāš and disaffected Sipahis. Following his defeat near Sīvās on 5 Rabī' II/2 July the surviving Qezelbāš fled to Safavid territory. However serious the consequences of that revolt, the uprising instigated by the Safavid agent Nūr-'Alī Ḳalīfa the following year during the height of the civil war was of far more importance. Thousands of Qezelbāš rose in revolt and even the prince Morād b. Aḥmad, grandson of Bāyazīd, joined in on the urging of two Safavid propagandists. Nūr-'Alī Ḳalīfa and his supporters briefly took the city of Tūqāt (Tokat) and had the *koṭba* read there in the name of Esmā'īl. Vast tracts of land near Čorūm (Chorum) and Amasya were laid to waste. They



joined forces with the followers of Morād and again marched on Tokat. This time the inhabitants resisted and the city was burnt as a result. Morād then left for Iran while Nūr-‘Alī Ḳalīfa headed toward Sīvās. At Qoyūlḥeşār (Qūyla Ḥeşār) the rebels engaged and defeated an Ottoman force before leaving for Safavid territory by way of Arzenjān.

By this time Salīm had succeeded in forcing his father’s abdication but still faced resistance from his brother Aḥmad. Following the latter’s defeat at Yeni-şehir on 9 Şafar 919/15 April 1513 Salīm was able to turn his attention toward his troublesome neighbor.

Before the start of the campaign Salīm ordered the execution of upwards of 40,000 Anatolian Qezelbāş as punishment for their rebellious behavior. He also attempted with some success to block the export of Iranian silk into the Ottoman empire.

Having secured the necessary *fatwās* sanctioning the war Salīm launched the campaign on 23 Moḥarram/20 March. As other units joined the army on its way, the force numbered about 140,000 troops by the time it reached the frontier. The strain of the march began to make itself felt both on the troops and on the supplies. Salīm was forced to leave behind 40,000 of his army, ostensibly to garrison the region between Sīvās and Kayseri (Qayşariya). However, according to the Ottoman historian Sa’d-al-Dīn, this action was taken as the result of a shortage of provisions. The army halted at Arzenjān to await supplies sent by sea. Here, the Beglerbegī of Qaramān, Hamdam Pasha, approached the sultan on behalf of several of his fellow officers and attempted to convince him to return to Istanbul because of the hardships faced by the troops, but he was executed on the spot, and the campaign continued. The Ottomans reached Sīvās on 8 Jomādā I/1 July. Progress then became difficult due to the devastation wrought by the withdrawing governor of Diyarbakır (Dīārbakr), Moḥammad Khan Ostājlū. On I Rajab/22 August Salīm reached Čālderān, and the battle took place on the following day.

When the Ottomans arrived the Safavid army, numbering about 40,000 troops, was waiting in place. Moḥammad Khan Ostājlū and Nūr-‘Alī Ḳalīfa, two commanders with firsthand knowledge of Ottoman tactics, urged Esmā’l to attack at once. They were rudely rebuked by the courtier Dürmiş Khan Şāmlū and by the shah, who considered it cowardly to engage an unprepared enemy. This mistake, which enabled the Ottomans to prepare their defenses, would prove costly to the Safavids.



After some initial success against the Ottoman left wing, Esmā'īl decided to renew his attack on the center and in so doing played right into the hands of the Ottomans. The Janissary units were stationed in the center behind a barricade of gun-carriages. As the Safavids advanced the Janissaries opened fire supported by the Ottoman artillery. The largely cavalry Safavid forces were soon in disarray. When Esmā'īl realized the extent of defeat he broke off the engagement and fled with some 300 of his followers.

Salīm was thus able to march unopposed into Tabrīz, which he occupied on 17 Rajab/7 September. The logistical problems which the Ottomans had so far overcome proved to be their downfall. The scorched earth policy of Moḥammad Khan Ostājīlū and harsh conditions in the region made the maintenance of such a large force in the region impossible, and Salīm was forced one week later by the Janissaries to return to winter quarters at Amasya. The campaign, however, was a success in that it curtailed for the moment the Safavid role in Anatolia and resulted in the Ottoman occupation of Diyarbakır and the subjugation of the Du'l-Qadr principality.

If the campaign viewed in this light resulted in a partial victory for the Ottomans, it proved a disaster for the Safavids and in particular for Esmā'īl himself. After Čālderān Esmā'īl went into mourning and never again led his troops into battle. The bond linking the shah as a semidivine spiritual guide and his disciples, the Qezelbāš, had been irreparably broken. Within a year of the defeat the Qezelbāš tribal elements would make a serious challenge to Esmā'īl authority as he gradually withdrew from management of the affairs of state.

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See also N. Falsafī, “Jang-e Čalderān,” *MDAT* 1/2, 1332 Š./1953, pp. 501-27, repr. in his *Čand maqāla-ye tārīkī o adabī*, Tehran, 1343 Š./1964, pp. 1-88; this article includes maps showing the author’s reconstruction of the order of battle and the movements of the combatants. A useful summary of most of the relevant Ottoman narrative source material is to be found in Ahmet Uğur’s *The Reign of Sultan Selim in the Light of the Selim-nāme Literature*, Berlin, 1985. Uğur has also included a facsimile reproduction of the very important *Tawārīk-e Āl-e ‘Otmān*, defter ix, by K. Pāšāzāda, ms. Süleymaniye Veliyeddin Efendi, no. 2447. An account of the campaign and its aftermath is to be found on fols. 120b-141a. A detailed Ottoman campaign journal and important *fath-nāmas* are reproduced in Farīdūn Beg’s *Monša’āt al-salātīn* II, 2nd ed., Istanbul, 1274/1857-58, pp. 396ff.

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