

Mustafa Agha (Special Champion Archer in the Ottoman Army), *Fath-name-ye Iravan* (The Book of the Conquest of Yerevan), annotated translation from the original Ottoman Turkish text by Nasrollah Salehi and Safiye Khadiv, Tehran: Tahouri Publishers, 2015. 195 pages (in Farsi).

In 1721, the Afghans, witnessing the decline of the Iranian Safavid State, rebelled and marched on the Iranian capital, Isfahan. On October 1722, Isfahan fell to the Afghans, Shah Soltan Hoseyn was deposed, while his son and heir, Tahmasp II, fled and began to gather support for the restoration of the dynasty.

Concurrently, Peter the Great of Russia took advantage of the instability in Iran and invaded the Caspian littoral in 1722. By autumn 1723 the Russians had captured the western and southern coasts of the Caspian Sea and negotiated a treaty with Tahmasp. The treaty, signed in September 1723, handed the coastal regions between Derbent and Baku, as well as the province of Gilan, to Russia. In exchange, Russia promised to assist Tahmasp expel the Afghans and restore the dynasty.

Although the treaty was never ratified, the Ottomans, fearful of the Russian presence in the South Caucasus (the backdoor to their easternmost provinces), also took advantage of the chaos in Iran. In 1723, they violated the 1639 peace treaty with Iran and invaded the *khanates* of Yerevan, Nakhichevan, Ganja, and Karabagh, as well as eastern Georgia, all of which were under Iranian suzerainty. By 1724, the Ottomans had taken the cities of Tiflis, Ganja and Yerevan. The Armenian meliks of Karabagh and Zangezur, however, resisted the Ottomans and kept their strongholds (*seghnakhs*) free from occupation.

Although Peter the Great had promised Russian aid to the Georgian king Vakhtang and to the Armenian meliks, he, in order to avoid a war with the Turks, abandoned the Christians. In June 1724, Russia and the Ottoman Empire signed a treaty by which they partitioned the South Caucasus. Ironically, historical eastern Armenia and eastern Georgia, populated mainly by Christians, fell into the Ottoman zone, while the rest of the South Caucasus, populated mainly by Muslims, became part of the Russian sphere.

By 1735, however, the Iranian general, Nader (crowned shah in 1736) had negotiated a Russian withdrawal from the South Caucasus and had reestablished Iranian control of Tiflis, Ganja and Yerevan by driving out the Ottomans. The Southern Caucasus remained under Iranian suzerainty until

the Russian conquest following the Russo-Iranian wars of 1804-1813 and 1826-1828.

There are only two known primary sources regarding the Ottoman conquest of the fortress of Yerevan.¹ The first, the subject of this review, was written in Ottoman Turkish; the second, the account of Abraham of Yerevan, was composed in Armenian.²

Both authors were soldiers who witnessed the Turkish invasion of Yerevan province and the siege of the Yerevan fortress in 1724. Their accounts, naturally, differ. The first describes the invasion and siege from the Turkish point of view, while the second views it through the eyes of the defenders.

While Abraham describes the Turkish invasion of Yerevan province, which began in spring 1724, Mustafa Agha's account focuses primarily on the siege of the Yerevan fortress from June 7 to October 7, 1724. Moreover, while Abraham mentions the Armenian defenders, Mustafa's account does not.

Mustafa's manuscript, composed of 29 folios written in Ottoman Turkish, is located in the Topkapi Saray Museum in Istanbul. The facsimile was published in Istanbul in 1970 as *Revan Fathnamesi, 1724*. Although Nasrollah Salehi's Persian translation takes up only 26 pages, his detailed annotations and appendix, as well as the introduction by Mohammad Monir Aq-Tapeh are valuable additions to the text. Furthermore, the original facsimile, written in the *naskh* style, is included for scholars who can read the manuscript and compare it to the Persian translation.

Mustafa's text is a day-to-day account of the long siege, the attacks launched by the Ottoman janissaries and their artillery, the resistance of the defenders and the numerous delays of the surrendering of the fortress. It is interesting to note that Mustafa, like Abraham, mentions the role of the Armenian Catholicos Astuatsatur in the final negotiations to surrender the fortress to the Ottomans.

Salehi has performed a valuable service by making available an important primary source to those who cannot read Ottoman manuscripts. The only shortcoming is the translator's lack of awareness of Abraham's text, which was translated into Persian and published in Tehran in 2014. A comparison between the two texts and the inclusion in footnotes of data absent from the Turkish version would present a more complete picture of the siege from both sides. I have communicated with Salehi and I hope that the lacunae will be filled in the next edition.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ The relations between the Armenian Catholicosate and the Ottoman pashas, who governed the Yerevan province during the eleven-year-long occupation, is noted in the unpublished documents located at the Matenadaran, described in Catholicos Simeon of Erevan's *Jambr*, annotated English translation by George Bournoutian, Costa Mesa, Mazda Press, 2009.
- ² George Bournoutian, *Abraham of Erevan, History of the Wars*, Costa Mesa, Mazda Press, 1999, pp. 18-35.