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Political Refugees, Diplomacy, and War: Reassessing the Political Causes of the Battle of Ankara

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ABSTRACT

The Battle of Ankara (1402) represents one of the most significant turning points in the history of Timurid–Ottoman relations. A combination of political, geopolitical, and human factors contributed to the emergence of this large-scale confrontation. Among these factors, political refugees—an element that has received comparatively limited scholarly attention—played a decisive role in intensifying the crisis between Timur and Sultan Bayezid I and accelerating the transition from diplomatic tension to armed conflict. Employing a descriptive-analytical method and drawing on library-based sources, the present study seeks to answer the following question: What role did political refugees play in the formation and escalation of the diplomatic crisis between Timur (r. 1370–1405) and Bayezid I (r. 1389–1402), which ultimately culminated in the Battle of Ankara, and how did this phenomenon contribute to transforming political disputes into direct military confrontation? The findings indicate that political asylum during this period had become an active instrument in regional power relations. The presence of political figures such as Sultan Ahmad Jalayir and Qara Yusuf of the Qara Qoyunlu at the Ottoman court, together with Bayezid's political exploitation of their presence, heightened Timur's sensitivity toward and suspicion of Ottoman policies while simultaneously providing him with grounds for advancing political and military demands. Conversely, Timur's support for the disaffected Anatolian emirs created a form of political counterbalancing against the Ottoman Empire and elevated the rivalry between the two powers from the level of territorial disputes to a crisis involving legitimacy and political intervention. By acting as intermediaries in the transmission of information, contributing to the radicalization of political positions, and becoming symbols of the broader conflict, these refugees deepened the diplomatic divide between the two empires. Ultimately, the persistence of this situation brought diplomatic negotiations to an impasse and paved the way for the military confrontation at the Battle of Ankara.

Keywords: *political refugees, Timur, Bayezid I, Battle of Ankara, diplomacy, political crisis.*

Introduction

The Battle of Ankara (1402) was one of the most consequential events in the political history of the Islamic world during the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, and its repercussions profoundly affected the balance of power in Anatolia, Iran, and other Islamic territories. Fought between Amir Timur Gurkani and the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid I, the battle resulted in the defeat and captivity of the Ottoman ruler and shaped the political trajectory of



the Ottoman state for many years. Historians and researchers have therefore consistently sought to explain the causes and circumstances that led to this conflict. Among the factors receiving the greatest scholarly attention are geopolitical rivalry over Anatolia, the expansionist policies of the two states, the political ambitions of the two rulers, conflicting regional interests, and military and strategic considerations. Nevertheless, the causes of the Battle of Ankara extended beyond territorial disputes and political competition, because until the outbreak of hostilities, relations between Timur and Bayezid continued to operate through correspondence, warnings, and diplomatic initiatives. The fundamental question, therefore, is what factors caused these tensions to move beyond political rivalry and disagreement and culminate in direct military confrontation. One of the most significant factors in this process appears to have been political asylum and its role in intensifying the crisis between the two powers. On the eve of the Battle of Ankara, some of Timur's most prominent political opponents, including Sultan Ahmad Jalayir and Qara Yusuf of the Qara Qoyunlu, sought refuge in Ottoman territory and were placed under Sultan Bayezid's protection. Conversely, several Anatolian emirs and local rulers who had lost their political positions as a result of Ottoman centralization policies turned to Timur's court and requested his assistance in recovering their territories. Political refugees thereby ceased to occupy the position of passive actors and became part of the political rivalry between the two states. Their presence not only affected the political decision-making of the two rulers but also gradually found expression in diplomatic relations between Timur and Bayezid. An examination of correspondence and historical reports indicates that the extradition or protection of political refugees became one of the principal points of contention between the two rulers. Timur's insistence on the surrender of his opponents and Bayezid's refusal to comply increased mutual distrust and intensified political tensions. Moreover, each side attempted to use political refugees as instruments for exerting pressure on the rival, weakening his influence, and expanding its own sphere of political authority. Political asylum thus transcended its individual and humanitarian dimensions and became an influential factor in the foreign relations and diplomatic crisis between the two states. Accordingly, the principal question of the present study is: What role did political refugees play in intensifying the diplomatic crisis between Timur and Bayezid and in facilitating the transition from political tension to war? The study also seeks to demonstrate how political refugees, alongside other political and geopolitical factors, accelerated the transformation of existing disputes between the two powers into military confrontation. The research hypothesis is that political refugees, by becoming one of the principal points of dispute in Timurid–Ottoman relations and contributing to increasing mutual distrust, intensifying political competition, and promoting intervention in the opposing side's sphere of influence, played a significant role in the transition from diplomatic tension to war and in the outbreak of the Battle of Ankara.

Review of the Literature

No independent study has thus far focused specifically on the role of political refugees in accelerating the transition from diplomatic tension to war in Timurid–Ottoman relations, particularly in connection with the outbreak of the Battle of Ankara in 1402. Nevertheless, some studies dealing with relations between Timur and the Ottomans, or with the Battle of Ankara more generally, have referred briefly to political refugees without examining them as an independent analytical variable in explaining the crisis.

The Battle of Ankara has consistently been regarded as a turning point in the history of relations between the Timurid and Ottoman empires and has been examined in numerous works from political, military, and diplomatic perspectives. Most of these studies, however, have either concentrated on the structure of Timurid power or

provided a general narrative of the confrontation between the two empires, paying considerably less attention to the human and intermediary mechanisms that contributed to the escalation of the crisis.

One important work in this field is Beatrice Forbes Manz's *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane*, which offers a structural analysis of the Timurid state. Although the author discusses the political and military organization of Timur's government, the role of political refugees and their influence on Timur's foreign policy toward the Ottomans are not addressed. Harold Lamb's *Tamerlane: The Earth Shaker* presents a narrative account of Timur's conquests, including the Battle of Ankara. His analysis, however, is primarily concerned with the dramatic narration and description of events and does not sufficiently examine diplomatic mechanisms or the role of transregional actors, such as political refugees, in the formation of the war. Adam Knobler's article "Timur and Europe" focuses mainly on the diplomatic dimensions of Timur's foreign relations with Europe. Although it acknowledges the broader importance of the Battle of Ankara, the issue of political asylum and its role in relations between Timur and Bayezid remains peripheral to the analysis.

Persian-language scholarship also includes works such as Ataollah Hassani's 2012 article, "The Position of Amir Timur Gurkani and Sultan Yildirim Bayezid in the Accounts of Historians and the Causes and Factors of the Battle of Ankara," which examines historians' perspectives and the various factors contributing to the battle. Even in such studies, however, political refugees are generally mentioned only as a subsidiary aspect of the disputes between Timur and Bayezid and are not investigated as an independent variable in the analysis of the diplomatic crisis.

Certain studies of Timur's military policies and structures, including Vali al-Din Parast's works on "Timur's Combat Techniques and Military Policies" (2020) and "The Application of Soft-Power Policies in Timur's Conquests" (2013), emphasize the factors underlying his military success. These studies nevertheless remain largely confined to military analysis and devote comparatively little attention to the connection between human-political factors, such as refugees, and the decision-making process that led to war.

The principal gap in the existing literature is therefore the absence of an independent study analyzing political refugees as an intermediary factor in the transformation of the geopolitical rivalry between Timur and Bayezid into a diplomatic crisis and, ultimately, the Battle of Ankara. The present study seeks to address this gap by demonstrating how political refugees moved beyond the status of marginal actors and became determining elements in the transition from tension to war.

The Contexts Underlying the Emergence of the Crisis in Relations between Timur and Bayezid

During the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, the territorial expansion of the Timurid and Ottoman empires brought the political frontiers of the two states into closer proximity and created the initial conditions for conflict. After consolidating its authority over Transoxiana, Khurasan, Iran, and parts of the Caucasus, the Timurid Empire sought to extend its influence toward Anatolia and the Mediterranean littoral. The Ottomans, meanwhile, successively conquered the Turkic principalities of Anatolia, including Aydın, Saruhan, Menteşe, Karaman, and Kastamonu, thereby becoming the dominant power in Anatolia and extending their borders toward its eastern regions. Consequently, the expansionism of the two major regional powers brought them into a shared sphere of political and geographical interests and laid the foundations for rivalry and confrontation (1, 2).

After consolidating his power in Anatolia, Sultan Bayezid I adopted a policy of territorial expansion in Europe and, through extensive conquests in the Balkans and the siege of Constantinople, acquired a prominent political and military position in the Islamic world. His successes against Christian powers brought him considerable prestige

and resulted in his recognition as one of the leading Muslim rulers of his age (3, 4). Timur, by contrast, regarded himself as heir to the Mongol tradition of universal conquest (5) and as the sovereign of a vast portion of the Islamic world. He therefore observed the growing power of the Ottomans with concern and was unwilling to permit a powerful rival on the western frontiers of his realm to attain a position of superiority (1, 6, 7).

One of the earliest focal points of tension between the two states was the frontier region of eastern Anatolia, particularly the principality of Erzincan. According to Mirkhwand, Bayezid dispatched an envoy to Taharten, the ruler of Erzincan and a political dependent of Timur (8, 9), demanding that he acknowledge Ottoman suzerainty and remit the revenues of the region to the Ottoman treasury. Taharten informed Timur of this demand and requested his support (8). Khwandamir writes in this regard:

“During these events, Yildirim Bayezid, who had attained complete distinction among the Caesars of Rum through the abundance of his power and prosperity, allowed the fumes of pride and presumption to enter the palace of his mind. He sent an envoy to Taharten, the governor of Erzincan, declaring that henceforth he was required to remit tribute and revenue to our imperial treasury; otherwise, a wave from the surging sea—that is, a detachment of the formidable army—would be dispatched in that direction and would leave no trace of habitation in that land. Taharten presented the circumstances to the attendants of the court of majesty and glory. When the victorious Sahib-Qiran became aware of the Caesar’s arrogance and pride, his exalted mind became disturbed and offended, and he contemplated marching toward Rum. First, however, he wrote and dispatched a letter of admonition to Yildirim Bayezid” (10).

Hafiz-i Abru and Hammer-Purgstall likewise emphasize that Bayezid’s expansionist policy in eastern Anatolia and his attempts to extend Ottoman influence in the region were among the principal causes of the escalation of tensions between the two states (2, 11). In response to Bayezid’s conduct, Timur sent a letter attributing his behavior to “royal arrogance,” “deception by the commanding self,” and failure to understand his own political position. Citing the maxim “May God have mercy upon the man who knows his own rank and does not transgress his station,” Timur emphasized the necessity of recognizing one’s proper position and refraining from exceeding the limits of one’s political status. He further referred to the extent of his conquests, declaring that “the greater part of the inhabited world” was under his command and that the “rulers of the surrounding lands” had submitted to his authority. He also asserted that his system of governance rested upon “steadfastness” and “prudence” and that no ruler or army was capable of disobeying his commands or resisting his forces. Elsewhere in the letter, Timur reminded Bayezid of his own knowledge of the Ottoman ruler’s “lineage,” “ancestry,” and familial origins, urging him to observe his proper “political limits” and warning him against exceeding the bounds of his authority. Timur then explained that he had hitherto refrained from attacking Ottoman territory because he was aware of Bayezid’s wars against the “Franks” and of his role in *ghaza*, or warfare against the enemies of the Islamic world. Timur regarded such activity as conducive to the “welfare of Muslims” and the “weakening of unbelievers.” In Timur’s view, however, Bayezid had now entered a sphere beyond his proper jurisdiction and had embarked upon a course of “political interference” in matters that did not concern him. Timur consequently warned that such conduct would bring nothing but “sedition” and “calamity” upon Bayezid and urged him to act rationally and avoid further tension. Bayezid, however, not only refused to retreat from his position after receiving the letter but continued to speak with “haughtiness” and “arrogance” and, disregarding the “political consequences” of his conduct, issued a severe and threatening reply. He declared that he had long contemplated “resistance” and “warfare” against Timur and

remained committed to this decision, adding that if Timur did not advance into Ottoman territory, Bayezid himself would march as far as Tabriz and Sultaniyya (11).

Ultimately, while Timur was campaigning in Syria, Bayezid launched a military expedition at the instigation of Sultan Ahmad Jalayir and Qara Yusuf of the Qara Qoyunlu, who had sought refuge at the Ottoman court out of fear of Timur's military power and apprehension of his retaliation. In response to the destruction of Sivas, Bayezid besieged Erzincan and, after fighting Taharten, the city's ruler, succeeded in capturing it. During the battle, Muqbil, Taharten's deputy, was taken prisoner by Qara Yusuf's men. Following the conquest of the city, the inhabitants of the citadel of Erzincan requested safe conduct, and Sultan Ahmad Jalayir interceded with Bayezid on Taharten's behalf. Bayezid consequently restored the government of Erzincan to Taharten; nevertheless, he took Taharten's wife and children captive and sent them to Bursa. Bayezid then returned to his own territory (12).

Furthermore, Bayezid's centralizing policy in Anatolia generated dissatisfaction among local emirs who perceived their political autonomy to be under threat. The incorporation of local principalities into the Ottoman realm and the consequent restriction of the authority of Anatolia's ruling dynasties intensified opposition to Ottoman rule. This situation provided Timur with an opportunity to exploit the discontent prevailing in Anatolia and to expand his political influence by supporting Bayezid's opponents. Thus, even before political refugees became a decisive issue in relations between the two states, competition over spheres of influence, conflicting geopolitical interests, and attempts to control Anatolia constituted the principal foundations of the crisis between Timur and Bayezid (2, 13, 14).

In this environment, Anatolia became the arena of competition between two powers, each claiming political and military supremacy in the Islamic world. Although this rivalry initially possessed a political and geopolitical character, the entrance of new actors—particularly exiled emirs and rulers—gradually gave it greater complexity and moved it beyond the level of frontier disputes. The issue of political refugees must therefore be analyzed within the framework of a broader crisis rooted in conflicting regional interests, competition over Anatolia, and the efforts of the two empires to consolidate political predominance (1, 2, 11).

Political Refugees and the Beginning of the Diplomatic Crisis

Although geopolitical rivalry between Timur and Sultan Bayezid had developed before the outbreak of the Battle of Ankara, the issue that transformed this rivalry into an overt crisis and direct confrontation was that of political refugees. During the late fourteenth century, Anatolia and its neighboring regions became the scene of extensive displacement among defeated rulers and emirs. Bayezid's expansionist policy in Anatolia resulted in the deposition and flight of numerous local rulers, while Timur's successive conquests likewise compelled several regional sovereigns to abandon their territories. Political asylum consequently became one of the most important issues in the foreign relations of the two states and gradually acquired security and military dimensions (2, 13).

The most prominent political refugees of this period were Sultan Ahmad Jalayir and Qara Yusuf of the Qara Qoyunlu. Having lost their political positions as a result of Timur's campaigns, both men sought refuge at the court of the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid in order to preserve their lives and recover their power (15, 16). Bayezid's acceptance of these figures must be understood within the context of his rivalry with Timur. By supporting Timur's political enemies, Bayezid sought to create a means of pressure against him and, where necessary, to employ these exiles in future conflicts (2).

The Ottoman sultan not only admitted the two refugees into his territory but also placed substantial economic and political resources at their disposal (7, 8). Samarqandi writes:

“When the just and subject-protecting warrior-king Yildirim Bayezid heard that a sovereign such as Sultan Ahmad had sought refuge with him, he went forth to receive him. Both dismounted and observed the requisite forms of mutual honor, and each led a horse for the other. Sultan Ahmad asked Yildirim about the war against the Franks, while Yildirim asked the sultan about the hardships of the journey and the abandonment of his hereditary kingdom. They held a festive assembly, and Yildirim assigned the province of Kütahya to provide for Sultan Ahmad’s expenses before departing for Bursa. The sultan remained for some time in Kütahya in comfort and enjoyment. Yildirim then summoned him and held royal banquets in Bursa, after which the sultan returned to Kütahya” (17).

Bayezid also assigned the revenues of Kayseri and Aksaray to Qara Yusuf and his followers (18). Hafiz-i Abru writes:

“During these events, Amir Yusuf also fled before the army of the Sahib-Qiran and went to Rum. Yildirim Bayezid received him favorably and designated Aksaray as his residence for as long as he remained in the lands of Rum, with its revenues to be spent on his expenses” (11).

This action effectively amounted to recognition of their political status and open support for Timur’s opponents. From Timur’s perspective, such conduct went beyond a conventional diplomatic gesture and constituted direct intervention in his political sphere of influence.

In response, Timur attempted to resolve the matter through diplomatic channels. In his earliest letters to Sultan Bayezid, he demanded the extradition of Sultan Ahmad Jalayir and Qara Yusuf, describing them as corrupt and seditious figures whose presence generated political instability in Islamic territories (17, 19, 20). Timur declared in his letter:

“Those two men who escaped the edge of our sword are indeed the source of evil and the substance of corruption. They caused the devastation of cities and the destruction of peoples. Like Pharaoh and Haman, they raised their necks in pride and arrogance and, together with their followers, entered your protection. Wherever they set foot, they carried misfortune and destruction with them. Far be it that such accursed and ill-fated men should remain secure under the protection of the ruler of Rum, or that you should grant them refuge and shelter. Rather, it is incumbent upon you to expel them, seize and arrest them, and put them to death. Take care not to disobey this command and thereby place yourself within the grasp of our wrath. You have surely heard the fate of those who opposed us and understood the punishment and injury that befell them at our hands. Act, therefore, so that matters do not descend into dispute and altercation, still less into war and conflict. We have now made our method clear to you and set forth examples of it” (21).

Timur therefore demanded that Bayezid surrender the two men and cease supporting his political enemies.

The demand for the extradition of Ahmad Jalayir and Qara Yusuf was, in effect, a test of political relations between the two powers. Timur expected Bayezid, by accepting the demand, to acknowledge his political superiority and prevent the further escalation of disagreement. The Ottoman sultan, however, not only refused to surrender the refugees but continued to support them. According to the sources, some Ottoman emirs and advisers considered the extradition of the two men to be in the interests of the Ottoman state, but Bayezid rejected Timur’s demand because of his confidence in his own military power and his concern that compliance would damage his political prestige (20).

Bayezid's refusal to extradite the refugees brought the crisis into a new phase. Thereafter, correspondence between the two rulers gradually ceased to resemble diplomatic dialogue and assumed the form of threatening exchanges. Both sides attempted through their letters to challenge the political legitimacy of the rival and demonstrate their own superiority. Drawing upon his universal claims and extensive conquests, Timur sought to compel Bayezid to retreat, while the Ottoman sultan, relying on his military successes in Europe, refused to accept any form of political concession (6, 8, 12).

In the victory proclamation issued after the capture of the fortress of Kemah, Timur identified Bayezid and his instigators—Sultan Ahmad Jalayir and Qara Yusuf—as responsible for the outbreak of war. The proclamation states:

"We committed no oppression and followed no path of aggression. We spoke with kindness and gentleness, asking him to remove the source of corruption from the body of his kingdom—namely Ahmad Jalayir and Qara Yusuf the Turkman, who devastated cities and caused the servants of God to be put to death. We said that satisfaction with one's sins is itself another sin, that acknowledgment of ingratitude is repeated unbelief, and that the assault of a desperate and fearful sinner is more dangerous than the sedition of a bloodthirsty oppressor. Yet those two persisted in corruption and sedition, serving as his ministers while he exercised sovereignty. They continually mingled with him in friendship until they incited him to disorder and rebellion. They themselves accepted no reform, caused great harm, and gained no benefit. Ibn Osman continued along his crooked path. When we prohibited him, he did not accept; when we warned him, he did not understand; when we showed him the straight path, he did not turn away from his own way. In accordance with our majesty and customary manner of correspondence, we wrote his name beneath our own, but he raised the hand of injustice and stepped beyond his proper limits" (21).

The content of this victory proclamation demonstrates that Timur sought above all to establish the political and moral legitimacy of his confrontation with Bayezid. By emphasizing that he had neither practiced "oppression" nor pursued "aggression," and that he had repeatedly sought through "admonition," "forbearance," and "warning" to dissuade Bayezid from supporting Sultan Ahmad Jalayir and Qara Yusuf—whom he portrayed as agents of "corruption," "sedition," and the "devastation of Islamic lands"—Timur transferred responsibility for the war to the opposing side. In this account, Bayezid's decision to shelter these two political rivals and persist in supporting them represented a departure from prudence and proper governance and created the conditions for conflict. Timur's reference to the conventions of diplomatic correspondence, and his claim that he had placed Bayezid's name beneath his own out of "majesty" and "magnanimity," further emphasized his asserted political superiority and the necessity of observing a hierarchical order of power. Bayezid's behavior was accordingly characterized as an act of "transgressing one's limits" and departing from the legitimate political order. The victory proclamation was therefore an ideological and propagandistic text intended to legitimize the war, present Timur as the protector of order and the interests of the Islamic world, condemn his political enemies, and assign responsibility for the outbreak of hostilities to the Ottoman sultan.

In addition to the issue of Ahmad Jalayir and Qara Yusuf, the presence of other dissatisfied Anatolian emirs and rulers at Timur's court also contributed to the expansion of the crisis. Many local emirs who had lost their power as a result of Bayezid's centralizing policies sought refuge in Timur's camp and encouraged him to campaign against the Ottomans (4, 13). The rulers of Aydın, Menteşe, Germiyan, and Kastamonu were among those who presented

their grievances against Bayezid to Timur and requested his intervention in Anatolia to restore their territories (2, 21, 22).

Political refugees on both sides of the conflict thus became instruments of political pressure. By sheltering Ahmad Jalayir and Qara Yusuf, Bayezid sought to contain Timur's influence, whereas Timur, by supporting the dissatisfied Anatolian emirs, attempted to weaken the foundations of Ottoman authority within Anatolia. Consequently, the refugee issue moved beyond the level of a diplomatic disagreement and became one of the principal factors intensifying tensions between the two states.

The Exiled Anatolian Emirs and Timur's Policy of Intervention

One of the most significant consequences of Bayezid's expansionist policy in Anatolia was the emergence of a wave of political migration among Turkman emirs and local rulers who had lost their political and territorial positions as a result of the forcible incorporation of independent principalities into the Ottoman realm (23). During the final decade of the fourteenth century, Bayezid rapidly annexed the principalities of Aydın, Menteşe, Germiyan, Kastamonu, Karaman, and other local Anatolian polities, thereby dismantling a substantial part of Anatolia's traditional political structure. Although this policy strengthened Ottoman authority, it simultaneously produced a group of dissatisfied and oppositional rulers who turned to rival powers in order to recover their lost positions. Under these conditions, Timur's court became the principal political refuge for these emirs, whose presence in the Timurid camp created the necessary grounds for his intervention in Anatolia (13).

Historical sources indicate that many of these emirs reached Timur's court after escaping imprisonment or the political restrictions imposed upon them by Bayezid and requested his protection. Khwandamir writes:

"Amir Bayezid, the ruler of the fortress of Aydın, came into the presence of the sovereign of the face of the earth. His Majesty gladdened him with various gifts and favors and bestowed the province of Aydın upon him" (10).

Hammer-Purgstall similarly provides a detailed account according to which the rulers of several Anatolian provinces whose territories had been conquered by Bayezid escaped by disguising their clothing and identities. The ruler of Germiyan reportedly fled disguised as a monkey trainer, the ruler of Menteşe in another form of disguise, and the ruler of Aydın in the guise of a tightrope walker, eventually reaching Timur's camp. In Timur's presence, they complained of Bayezid's expansionist policies and requested the restoration of their principalities. Taharten, ruler of Erzincan, also contributed to this wave of dissatisfaction by presenting grievances concerning Ottoman encroachments upon his territory and household (2, 22).

The significance of these refugees was not limited to their complaints against the Ottomans. As active political actors, they played an important role in shaping Timur's foreign policy. Possessing detailed knowledge of the political and military conditions of Anatolia, they provided local intelligence and explained the structural vulnerabilities of Ottoman rule in an effort to persuade Timur to invade Anatolia. From this perspective, the political migration of the Anatolian emirs to the Timurid court became a means of shaping Timur's regional strategy and directed him toward direct confrontation with Bayezid (2, 4, 13).

Recognizing the political value of this group, Timur sought to incorporate its members into his broader plan for expanding influence in Anatolia. Support for the exiled emirs enabled him to construct a network of potential allies within Ottoman territory. These allies not only strengthened the legitimacy of Timur's intervention but could also provide local military forces and bases in the event of war. Support for refugee emirs should therefore be understood

as part of Timur's interventionist diplomacy, through which political asylum was connected to geopolitical and military objectives (14).

Within the same framework, Timur succeeded in attracting another discontented group in Anatolia: the Tatars inhabiting the regions of Sivas, Kayseri, and Malatya. Dissatisfied with direct Ottoman domination, these communities gradually distanced themselves from the Ottoman state during the conflict between Timur and Bayezid. Exploiting ethnic and historical affinities, Timur invited them to cooperate with him and, in a letter addressed to the leaders of the Qara Tatars, emphasized their shared ancestry and history while encouraging them to free themselves from Ottoman rule and join his army (21). This policy ultimately produced practical results on the battlefield, as a portion of the Qara Tatar forces serving in the Ottoman army defected to Timur during the Battle of Ankara, thereby weakening one of Bayezid's most important sources of manpower (21).

The political asylum of the Anatolian emirs cannot therefore be regarded merely as a secondary factor in Timurid–Ottoman relations. It gradually became a foundation for Timur's political penetration of Anatolia, the creation of a network of local allies, and the legitimization of his military intervention. Just as the refuge granted to Ahmad Jalayir and Qara Yusuf intensified the diplomatic crisis between the two states, the presence of the exiled Anatolian emirs created the social and political conditions necessary for Timur's involvement in Anatolia's internal conflicts and, ultimately, for the outbreak of the Battle of Ankara (13, 14, 21).

Conclusion

An examination of the role of political refugees in the emergence of the Battle of Ankara demonstrates that this phenomenon gradually became an active element in transforming political tensions into full-scale war. Within this context, political refugees acted as agents who contributed to the reconfiguration of regional power relations through the transfer of experience, information, and political narratives.

At a more consequential level, the asylum granted to figures such as Sultan Ahmad Jalayir and Qara Yusuf of the Qara Qoyunlu transformed the crisis from a frontier dispute into a fully international and multilayered issue. Their presence at Bayezid's court, together with his exploitation of them within the local structure of power, provided Timur with a direct pretext for intervention. Timur's demand for their extradition and Bayezid's refusal to comply brought the diplomatic divide between the two powers to a point of no return and effectively paved the way for war. These refugees were therefore not merely subjects of dispute but principal instruments in the escalation of the crisis.

At the same time, the exiled Anatolian emirs created a network of political discontent around the Ottoman state and thereby facilitated Timur's intervention in Anatolia's internal political structure. By supplying information, engaging in political agitation, and demanding restoration to power, these groups played a significant role in shaping Timur's decisions. They enabled him to redefine his military intervention not as an act of unqualified aggression but as support for dispossessed local legitimacies.

Political asylum in this period thus developed from a passive phenomenon into a determining factor in regional politics. By linking the Ottoman Empire's internal crises to Timur's foreign policy, it accelerated the transition from confrontational diplomacy to direct warfare and transformed the Battle of Ankara into the culmination of an accumulated political and geopolitical crisis.

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All authors equally contributed to this study.

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