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# Turkey

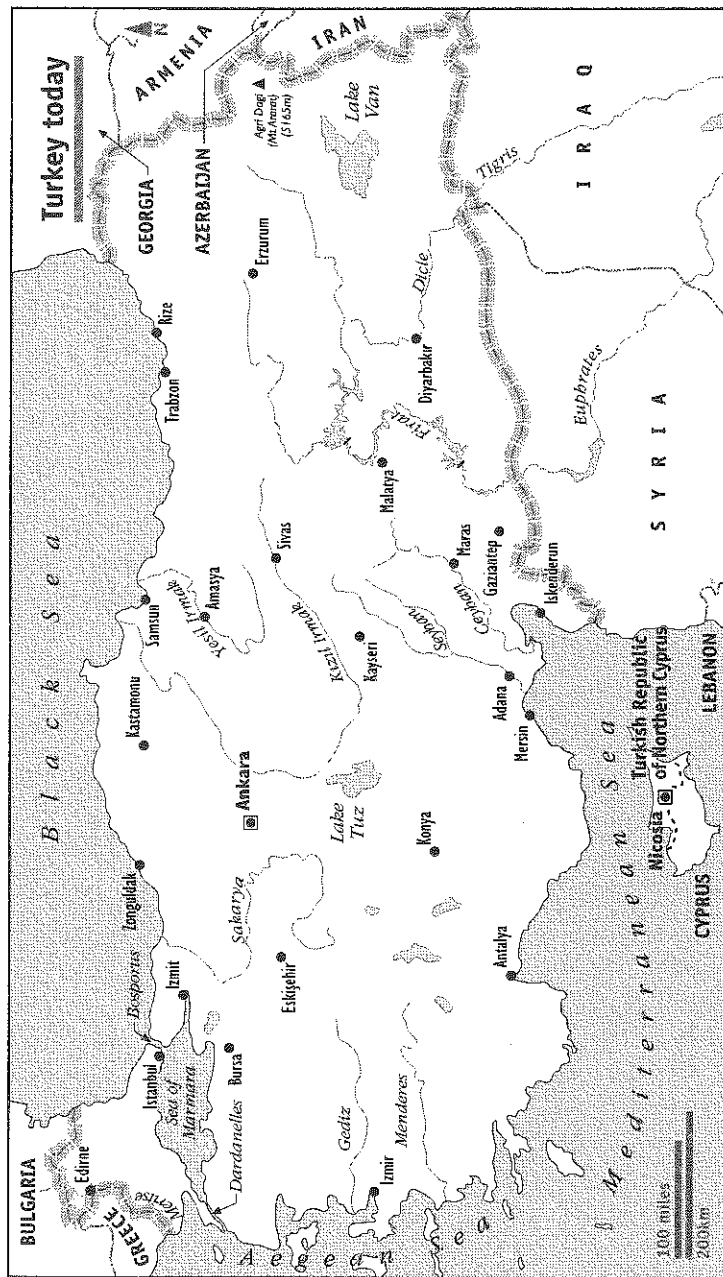
## The Quest for Identity

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Map by MAPgrafix

# 1

## The Ottomans: from Statehood to Empire, 1300–1789

### THE EMERGENCE OF THE HOUSE OF OTTOMAN

The Turkic tribes, under the leadership of the Seljuks, established their foothold in Anatolia in 1071, five years after the Norman invasion of England. Alparslan defeated the Byzantine emperor Diogenes at the battle of Manzikert and laid the foundations of the Seljuk Empire, the Seljuks of Rum, with their capital at Konya. Rum was the term used by early Muslims to describe the Byzantines as ‘Romans’ and their empire was called the ‘land of Rum’. Later the term was applied to Asia Minor or Anatolia and, until the present, to the Greeks of Turkey. The Seljuk Empire was a federation of Turkish tribes, each led by its own bey, or leader, who recognized the sovereignty of the Seljuk dynasty. But when the Seljuks were defeated by the Mongols in 1243 and became their tribute-paying vassals, the beys began to break away from the Seljuks and declared independence for their principalities or *beyliks*.

The Ottomans had their origins in a clan that was loyal to the Seljuks, who rewarded their leader, Ertuğrul, with lands near Ankara which were extended further west to the region of Söğüt near modern Eskişehir. Ertuğrul is said to have died in 1288 at the age of 90 and was succeeded by his son Osman, whose name was adopted by his followers who called themselves *Osmanlı*, anglicized to Ottoman. As most vassals seized the opportunity to

declare their independence as the Seljuks declined, Osman remained loyal until the death of Sultan Kaikobad II in 1298. Osman then declared his independence, marking the beginnings of the Ottoman state. Osman's principality abutted the Byzantine empire and he was able to wage religious war, or *gaza*, against the Christians, enabling him and his successors to become religious warriors (*gazis*) par excellence and attracting followers from all over Anatolia. This was a great advantage that the Ottomans had over most of the other principalities. Osman Gazi died in 1326 and was succeeded by his son Orhan Gazi (r.1326–59), who captured the strategic city of Bursa in the same year, making it the first capital of the Ottoman state. At this stage the leaders enjoyed the title of *gazi* which made them little more than first amongst equals. They had yet to become sultans.

By 1326, there were a number of successor states to the Seljuks in Anatolia, although Karaman claimed recognition as the true successor to the Seljuks. The other beys – of such principalities as Aydın, Saruhan, Mentеше, Kermiyan, Hamid, Tekke, Karesi and Kastamonu – refused to grant such recognition. For the time being, the Ottomans were too small and weak and therefore preferred not to join the struggle for Seljuk succession. Orhan had the good fortune of being located adjacent to a rapidly declining Byzantine Empire and of capturing some of its territory while other Muslim emirs fought against each other. He extended his state along the southern coast of the Sea of Marmara and in 1345 captured Karesi from its Muslim ruler, thereby opening a way to cross the Dardanelles and begin expansion into Europe.

In 1341 Orhan intervened in the affairs of Byzantium, answering Cantacuzenus's appeal for help against his rival. Orhan saved the throne for Cantacuzenus and was rewarded with the hand of his daughter, Theodora, in marriage. Thereafter, it became almost a tradition for Ottoman sultans to take Christian wives, at least until the reign of Murad III (r.1574–1595). Orhan had already captured the strategic fortress of Gallipoli on the Dardanelles straits and secured his hold on the northern shore of the Marmara, capturing Tekirdağ. The Ottomans were poised to cross the straits and raid into the Balkans. When Orhan died in 1359, he had laid not only the territorial foundations of the state, but he had also begun to lay its institutional foundations by

creating the institution of the *Yeniçeri*, or 'new troops', better known in the West as the janissaries.

The world of Islam was familiar with slave armies, but not the innovation of collecting (*devşirme*) youths from Christian communities and training them to become an elite of soldiers and administrators. Hitherto, the Ottomans had had no regular or standing army and had relied on tribal levies loyal to their own leaders. As the Ottomans were a federation of clans, each with its own leader, the sultan was still little more than the first among equals, dependent on his personal qualities and his success as a conqueror. Orhan tried to overcome this shortcoming by recruiting a regular army of his own from among Turkoman tribesmen. But his experiment failed because the Turkomans were essentially horsemen and did not take to the discipline of fighting in the infantry.

#### GROWTH OF THE MILITARY

Around 1330 Orhan began to take Christian youths aged between twelve and twenty from their families, converting them to Islam, and then training them as his 'new troops'. They were apprenticed to Turkish farms where they learned the language and the religion before being given a rigorous education in the palace school where they joined the state's ruling elite. Haji Bektaş (1242–1337), the founder of the Bektaşî order of dervishes, blessed the first janissary corps and became the patron saint of the janissaries until their dissolution in 1826.

This military innovation took generations to mature and, in time, the recruits of the *devşirme*, both as soldiers and administrators, strengthened the power of the sultan at the expense of the chieftains of the clans. These men recognized only one loyalty, to the ruling sultan, who was their master and they his *kul* or servitors, though the term *kul* is often rendered 'slave'. The sultan had the power of life and death over them. In theory, they were cut off from their origins and therefore from loyalty to their original community. In practice, such ties were not always forgotten and there are cases of men of the *devşirme* who rose up to become provincial governors and grand viziers, and who rewarded the communities from whence they came with mosques, libraries and

bridges. The privilege of being a janissary could not be inherited by an heir, who would be a free-born Muslim.

The legality of the *devşirme* was raised under the Sharia or Islamic law. The Sharia granted non-Muslims who had submitted to Islamic rule and paid the poll tax, or *jizya*, the status of *dhimmi*, or protected people. They were allowed to practice their faith and live according to the rules of their communities. The sultan was forbidden to persecute them in any way, and taking away their male children was illegal. However, some parents understood that their children were destined for a comfortable and bright future and gave them up willingly. Sinan, the great Ottoman architect who was himself a *devşirme* recruit, is said to have used his influence to have his brother taken into the system. But the sultan, bound by the Sharia, could not violate it unless the *ülema*, the doctors of Islamic jurisprudence, found a loophole and legalized the practice. To do so, the ulema invented the fiction that if the sultan returned the poll tax to the community, the community would no longer be protected and the sultan could then legally take 'prisoners of war', and that is what the sultans did. The practice may sound harsh and even barbarous to our modern sensibilities, but the idea of being recruited into the *devşirme* was so attractive to some that an occasional Muslim family would even ask their Christian neighbours to pass off their Muslim children as Christians so that they could be recruited!

The *devşirme* operated in Anatolia, but the Balkans and Albania, Bosnia, and Bulgaria were the preferred provinces. The recruits were also taught a craft: for example, Sinan (1490–1588) learned about construction as a janissary, and served in the army building roads and bridges before becoming architect to the sultans. Janissaries were taught according to a very strict discipline: to obey their officers, to be totally loyal to each other, and to abstain from all practices that might undermine their ability as soldiers. That is why they were such a formidable force at a time when they were fighting against feudal levies and were therefore superior to armies of Western Europe.

The *devşirme* introduced the principle of 'meritocracy' into the Ottoman system. *Devşirme* recruits were taken purely for their abilities and usually came from modest, rural backgrounds, unlike feudal Europe where birth determined one's status in life. The *devşirme* proved to be a method of integrating the conquered

Christian communities into the imperial system, especially during the early centuries of expansion when Ottoman rule was usually lighter than the one it replaced.

#### EARLY OTTOMAN CONQUESTS AND EXPANSION

According to contemporary accounts, the Ottomans in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries had a well-organized and disciplined force consisting of about 12,000 janissaries, who constituted the infantry, about 8000 *sipahis* or well-trained cavalry, 40,000 troops, feudal in character, supplied and led by rural notables and tribal clans, as well as many thousands of irregulars. European soldiers captured in battle and mercenaries tended to form the artillery. From the time of Orhan's reign, Christian vassals also supplied troops to fight both in Anatolia and Europe. As late as 1683, during the second siege of Vienna, a Wallachian corps was given the task of bridging the Danube. A Muslim Ottoman army, supposedly waging 'holy war' was willing to use Christian troops!

The Ottoman conquests continued under Murad I (r.1359–89). He fought on two fronts: in Anatolia, where he took advantage of the divisions among the Muslim principalities, and in the Balkans against the Christians – Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbs, Bosnians, and Albanians – who were equally divided. The Ottomans entered the Balkans at the invitation of the Christian rulers who were fighting against each other and sought Ottoman help. In 1361, Murad captured Ankara from the Turkomans and Adrianople (Edirne) from the Byzantines, making it second capital of the Ottoman state in 1367. The Ottoman victory at the battle on the River Maritza in Bulgaria in 1371, where Murad defeated a Serbian coalition, opened the road to the conquest of the Balkans just as the battle of Manzikert in 1071 had prepared the way for expansion into Anatolia. The Byzantine emperor and the Christian princes in the Balkans agreed to accept Ottoman suzerainty and to serve in the Ottoman armies as the sultan's vassals.

Murad also acquired territory by forming matrimonial alliances as, for example, when his son married into the Germiyan family and the Ottomans were given Kütahya and its six provinces as dowry. He also purchased lands from the principality of Hamid, but, in principle, conquest remained the main method of

expansion. However, the two-front campaign was difficult to maintain and occasionally a Muslim-Christian alliance (as between Karaman and Bosnia) was capable of inflicting defeat on the Ottomans. Sensing weakness, Ottoman vassals in the Balkans rebelled and forced Murad to confront them in battle. The Balkans, and not Anatolia, had become the Ottoman's heartland and Murad took the challenge very seriously. On 15 June 1389, Murad, with an army of 60,000, met a force of Serbs, Bosnians, Wallachians, Moldavians, and Albanians, estimated at 100,000, and defeated them at the battle of Kosovo. His army was a mixed force of Muslims and Christians and included Bulgarian and Serbian princes, as well as levies for Turkoman principalities. The Serbian King Lazarus was killed in battle and Murad was assassinated by a Serb who came to pay homage as he reviewed his victorious army. The defeat of the Serbs acquired mythical proportions in Serbian poetry and folklore; in the nineteenth century, the battle became a source of nationalist inspiration and was put to political use, as it is today. The battle of Kosovo secured Ottoman power in the Balkans, and Kosovo acquired an important place in the Ottoman economy for it held vast deposits of minerals and was a major supplier of lead and zinc, necessary for the artillery. That is why the Ottomans and Hapsburgs fought over it for many years.

As the power of the Ottomans grew, the Byzantines tried to maintain cordial relations with Murad. Emperor John Palaeologos gave one of his daughters in marriage to Murad, and two other daughters to his sons, Bayezid and Yakub Çelebi. These beys were sent as governors to Germiyan and Karesi, with their own janisaries, where they gained experience of warfare and administration. The youngest son, Savcı Bey, who ruled over Bursa during Murad's absence, plotted with Andronicus, the Byzantine emperor's son, to overthrow their fathers and seize power. The plot was discovered and Savcı Bey was executed while Andronicus was blinded, following the Byzantine tradition.

Bayezid I (r.1389-1403) was proclaimed sultan at Kosovo; his first task was to execute his brother Yakub Çelebi, in order to guarantee his own succession, thereby establishing the tradition of fratricide within Ottoman politics. This practice violated the Sharia and it was legitimized only during the reign of Mehmed the Conqueror. He pronounced that if God had bequeathed the

sultanate to one of his sons, that son could put his brothers to death for the sake of the order of the realm. The *ülema* legitimized the practice by issuing a *fetva* – legal opinion – arguing that fratricide was justified by *raison d'état* as the practice produced stability and therefore strengthened the state. Savcı Bey was executed because he had conspired against the sultan; Yakub Çelebi and other fratricides over the years were carried out as preventive measures!

Ottoman expansion continued under Bayezid's brilliant command and he consolidated his rule in Anatolia, subduing the *beyliks* of Aydın, Menteşe, Saruhan, Germiyan and Karaman. He laid siege to Constantinople in 1391 on the death of Emperor Palaeologos and defeated a European crusade, launched to save Constantinople, at Nicopolis in 1396. Having captured Salonika, he resumed the siege of Constantinople until he was bribed into raising it.

During the fourteenth century the Ottomans had begun to weaken tribal power by instituting the *devşirme* system, thereby recruiting Christian youths from outside the tribes and converting and training them so that they were totally loyal to the house of Osman. Therefore, by the fifteenth century, there was no unified sentiment in Anatolia, no sense of political unity or what would later be described as 'national' cohesion that inspired the various tribes. In fact, they were jealous of each other's growing power, and especially alarmed by the growing power of the Ottoman dynasty. Anatolia was divided into rival and conflicting tribal confederations, struggling to survive against the expansion of a neighbour.

The defeated and dispossessed beys of Anatolia appealed to the Mongol leader Timur – known in the West as Tamerlane – to stop Bayezid waging war against Muslim rulers and to reinstate them. Timur, the most powerful Mongol ruler since Genghis Khan and one of the greatest conquerors of world history, had subdued Central Asia and the Golden Horde in southern Russia, invaded India in 1398 and overran Iran, Iraq and Syria. He then advanced into Anatolia and defeated the Ottomans at the battle of Ankara in 1402. Bayezid was captured and died in captivity eight months later.

Timur's intervention in the affairs of Anatolia was brief but had the most momentous consequences. He had destroyed Ottoman

power, given a temporary lease of life to the Anatolian beys and prolonged the life of Byzantium for a further fifty years. Timur died in 1405, leaving the Anatolian *beyliks* to fend for themselves while the Ottomans regrouped. Ottoman succession was disputed by Bayezid's sons and Mehmed I (r.1413–21) was finally recognized as the new sultan in 1413. By the time of his death in 1421, he had recovered most of the lands lost to Timur, and even organized a small navy to protect his domain from Venetian raids.

Murad II (r.1421–51), who had served as governor of Amasya, succeeded Mehmed. But before he could consolidate his power, he had to deal with two pretenders to the throne, supported by the Byzantines and the beys of Germiyan and Karaman. By 1426, both of them had become Murad's suzerains and paid tribute to him. Thereafter, Murad advanced into Macedonia and captured the strategic port city of Salonika from Venice in 1428. Murad was forced to fight a double-fronted war, against the Europeans, who organized an army led by the Hungarian Janos Hunyadi (c.1387–1456), as well as Karaman, which rose up in rebellion. Murad defeated Karaman in July 1444 but was forced to sign a ten-year truce with Hungary. He then abdicated in favour of his son, Mehmed, and retired to Manisa. The Hungarians, sensing Ottoman weakness, broke the truce and advanced into Ottoman territory. The janissaries brought Murad out of retirement to lead his army and the Christian force was routed at Varna in 1444. The war with Hungary continued until Hunyadi, at the head of a large army, was defeated at Kosovo in 1448. Murad died at Edirne and Mehmed II, known as the Conqueror (r.1451–81), finally came to the throne.

#### MEHMED THE CONQUEROR AND HIS INFLUENCE

Mehmed's fame rests on the conquest of Constantinople on 29 May 1453. Important though that was, his reign is more significant in Ottoman history for his decision finally to break the power of the Anatolian beys in his entourage and to establish the hegemony of the men of the *deûşirme* who, unlike the beys, were his servitors and totally loyal to him, and over whom he had the power of life and death. As a result, the Ottoman Empire became more autocratic and bureaucratic, with the sultan relying on his

grand vizier to conduct day-to-day business and even lead the army. The notables whose power was based on their tribal affiliation lost much of their political influence, their lands and property, and became dependent on the state. Perhaps it was this that ended any possibility of an independent landed aristocracy as a counter-force to the Palace emerging in the Ottoman Empire as it did in Europe. The sultan became an absolute autocrat, supported by loyal servants who in time became kingmakers. However, Islamic ideology required that he remain accountable to the Sharia and therefore the *ülema* of freeborn Muslims remained an autonomous political force in the empire.

Constantinople, which the Ottomans continued to call Konstantiyye until 1915, as well as Istanbul and *Dersaadet* (the abode of felicity), gave them an imperial mission as they believed that they had acquired the mantle of Rome. Though the city fell after a difficult siege, many Greek Orthodox subjects welcomed the Ottomans as they allowed them to practise their faith, unlike the Catholics who had wanted to restore papal hegemony by reuniting the two Churches. Mehmed granted the Orthodox Church a charter that gave the patriarch total jurisdiction over his community in return for the payment of a poll tax. The Armenian Church was also brought to the new capital and granted religious and cultural autonomy. Within a short time, a relationship was established between the state and the religious communities that developed by the eighteenth century into the *millet* system, or virtually autonomous religious communities. In pre-secular Ottoman society, religious allegiance was not a private matter but a matter of communal concern. People were organized according to the Church into which they had been born, regardless of the language they spoke or the ethnic group they belonged to. The religious and social life of each community was organized according to its traditions and individuals were bound by its laws. The Muslim *millet* included all Muslims (Turks, Kurds, Arabs, and converts) regardless of their ethnicity or language; the same was true for the Greek Orthodox *millet* that included not only Greeks but Slavic peoples of the Balkans and, later on, the Arab world. The same was true for the Jewish and Armenian communities. Only in the nineteenth century, with the advent of nationalism, did the *millets* begin to acquire an ethnic colouring and Serbs,

Bulgarians, Catholics, and Protestants acquired their own communal organizations. However, even in 1919, Greek Catholics felt more akin to Italian Catholics than to the Greek Orthodox army that invaded Anatolia! The *millet* system suggests that the Ottomans made no attempt at assimilation, only a pragmatic integration that allowed the empire to function smoothly.

Istanbul was refurbished after the conquest of 1453 as befitting the capital of a world empire. Mehmed imported craftsmen from all over the empire and settled them in the city in order to rebuild it. Its population increased substantially, especially after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, when they were invited to settle in the empire and many chose the capital. Between 1500 and 1600, Istanbul became one of the most important cities of Europe; around 1600 it was still one of the most populous cities until it was overtaken before the end of the seventeenth century, first by Paris and then London.

The imperatives of empire also led Mehmed to extend his territories in all directions. He conquered southern Serbia and extended Ottoman influence in Wallachia. Commerce had been important to the Ottomans ever since their rise to power in the fourteenth century, but with the acquisition of Istanbul, sea power and international trade became crucial for Ottoman security and economy. Venice had become a rival and the Ottomans were forced to pay attention to their fleet and the defence of the city. Mehmed therefore captured the island of Mytilene (Midilli) and fortified the straits. He pressured Venice in the Mediterranean until she was forced to sign a treaty in 1478. He then conquered the Crimea making the Crimean Tatars his vassals and the Black Sea an Ottoman lake. Ottoman expansion continued until Mehmed's death in 1481, with attacks on Rhodes and even southern Italy, where the Ottomans seized Otranto.

Bayezid II (r.1481–1512) was forced to contest the throne with his brother Cem Sultan (1459–1495). First, he had to bribe the janissaries by granting an 'accession present' in order to win their loyalty; thereafter it became a tradition with which every sultan complied at the beginning of his reign. Cem was defeated and sought asylum with the Knights of Rhodes, who were paid in gold to keep him hostage. Cem went on to Naples where he died as a captive of the Pope, who was also able to blackmail Bayezid and

force him to pay to keep Cem in captivity. Scholars have speculated as to what Bayezid might have achieved had he not been distracted by Cem's challenge to the Ottoman throne and the manipulation of the Christian powers. Given the anarchy ruling in Italy at the time and the ease with which the French conquered Italy in 1494, the Ottomans might have subjugated Italy, altering the course of world history. In Rome, it was feared that that city might share the fate of Constantinople.

#### EXPANDING OTTOMAN POSSESSIONS

By the fifteenth century, the Ottomans had reinvented themselves from being a tribute-levying empire to one dependent on world trade. Recent research in the Genoese and Venetian archives shows that the Ottomans took trade in the region seriously. From the early fourteenth century their conquests were based largely on the capture of strategic points, such as Gallipoli and the Dardanelles, which provided revenues from trade in the region. After inflicting a defeat on Venice in July 1496, they not only exempted the Venetians from paying an annual tribute, but agreed that Venice pay a four per cent tax on its exports to the Ottoman empire; trade had become as important as tribute.

Apart from waging war in Europe, the Ottomans were faced with the threat of such rivals as the Mamluks in Egypt and Syria, and the Safavids in Iran. The struggle with the Safavids assumed an ideological character, as a contest between the Sunni or orthodox Islam of the Ottomans and the heterodox, Shia Islam of the Safavids. This long-drawn-out conflict sapped the energies of both empires and was responsible for the relative decline of both in comparison with the rise of European power.

Having deposed his father Bayezid, Selim I (1512–20) was forced to turn his attention to the east and meet the rising power of Shah İsmail. In 1514, Selim defeated the Safavids at Chaldiran and acquired Azerbaijan and Kurdistan. Two years later, Selim advanced against the Mamluks and conquered Syria in 1516 and Egypt the following year. Egypt's agriculture and commerce provided Istanbul with considerable wealth as well as revenues from trade with India and Asia. The Ottomans also became the guardians of the two holy cities of Mecca and Medina and were elevated to the status of the



most powerful Muslim state in the world. Jerusalem, or Kodus, became the third holy city of Islam; the Ottomans built great bazaars to enliven commercial life and Selim's successor, Süleyman, built the city's distinct white walls. Jerusalem did not become a major regional capital such as Damascus or Aleppo, but it was one of the three Holy Places of Islam and enjoyed great religious significance. The empire had doubled in size and its Islamic element was strengthened by the addition of the Arab provinces. Moreover, Egypt brought the Ottomans into direct contact with the Portuguese in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean.

In the sixteenth century, the balance in the world had shifted from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic. Christopher Columbus's discovery of America in 1492 and Vasco da Gama's voyage around southern Africa to reach India in 1498 diminished but did not end the importance of the Islamic world. Trade with Asia did not dry up as a result, but the Ottoman treasury received less revenue. The empire also became too large and unwieldy to be ruled by the sultan alone and he was forced to rely more and more on his bureaucracy. The men who rose through the *devşirme* became more influential, as did the women in the Palace.

### SÜLEYMAN THE MAGNIFICENT

Süleyman I (r.1520–66) is perhaps the most famous of the Ottoman sultans. He is known as *Kanuni* (the lawgiver) to the Turks, and 'Süleyman the Magnificent' in the West. He continued to expand and consolidate his empire in the tradition of his predecessors, capturing Belgrade in 1521 and besieging Vienna in 1529. The Ottomans actively participated in the European conflict between the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V and Francis I of France; the Ottoman role was partially responsible for Charles's failure to crush Martin Luther's Protestant Reformation. Wars in Europe continued until Süleyman's death in 1566, when he died leading the campaign into Hungary. He also fought against the Safavids, capturing Baghdad in 1534.

Commerce had become an important part of the Ottoman economy and Ottoman merchants – Muslim and non-Muslim – traded in Europe, especially Italy, and Asia. As a result of this, in 1535, Süleyman granted certain privileges, known as 'capitula-

tions', to French merchants. They were permitted to live according to their own laws and customs while they resided in the empire, so long as Ottoman law was not violated. Over time, these capitulations were extended to other European states, leading to an expansion of commerce between Europe and the Ottomans.

The expansion of the Ottoman navy may also be explained as a measure to control the Mediterranean in order to secure commerce in the region. Thus Süleyman used Barbarosa Hayrettin to seize control of the North African coast from Charles V, establishing Ottoman rule over Algiers, Tunis and Libya. A serious attempt was also made to destroy Portuguese power in the Arabian Sea, but the Ottoman fleet was destroyed at the battle of Dui in 1538. Ottoman ships were constructed for the calmer waters of the Mediterranean and were no match for Portuguese galleons. Perhaps that is why the Ottomans made no attempt to sail in the Atlantic, though they mapped it and knew much about it. Like the Chinese in East Asia, the Ottomans were content with their empire in the eastern Mediterranean.

By Süleyman's reign, the Ottoman Empire had developed into a stable form with a military-bureaucratic ruling class, tempered by the free-born *ülema*, that ruled over a multi-religious population of peasants, merchants, and artisans, organized into virtually autonomous religious communities. Executive and legislative power resided in the sultan, who was aided by ministers who assumed more of the sultan's prerogatives as the empire expanded and became more bureaucratic. After Süleyman's reign, the grand vizier began to assume many of the sultan's duties and the sultan became more palace-bound. The patriarchs, as leaders of the non-Muslim communities who tended to the religious and communal needs of their flocks, enjoyed the protection of the sultan. No attempt was made to assimilate the various communities; they were integrated to the extent that day-to-day interactions were normalized and provided a social context for cultural exchange. The system worked well until the introduction of nationalism in the nineteenth century, enabling each community to go its separate way, something that they could not have achieved had they been assimilated.

Ottoman administration was advanced for the time in comparison with contemporary Europe, and Christian peasants found Ottoman

rule to be lighter than that of their feudal co-religionists. Martin Luther (1483–1546), who had no sympathy for the ‘Turks’ whom he considered barbarous, agreed that the peasants yielded to the Ottomans because their taxes were lighter. Ottoman taxation continued to be light while the sultan conquered prosperous lands, but became heavier when the conquests ended.

With the conquest of Constantinople, the Ottomans acquired some Byzantine administrative practices. The sultan became increasingly distant, leaving day-to-day affairs to his imperial *divan* which was presided over by his grand vizier and was composed of other ministers. His principal ministers were the military judges (*kadiasker*) of Rumelia and Anatolia, the judge of Istanbul, the minister of finance, the keeper of the seal and the chief of the janissaries. Later, the offices of *Şeyhülislam*, the supreme religious authority, the *reis-ül kuttub*, the minister in charge of foreign relations, and *kapudan* pasha, admiral of the fleet, were added to the *divan*. A military officer, a pasha with two horsetails designating rank, was appointed governor of a province, which was subdivided into *sanjaks* governed by a pasha with one horsetail. Below him there were districts, or *kazas*, governed by a *kadı* and landlords who represented the local people.

Land belonged to the state and the empire’s economy depended on the state’s control of both the land and agricultural production, the principal sources of revenue. Land was divided into a variety of fiefs (*tumars*) whose revenues were allotted to the administrators – the beys and viziers – as their salaries. These fiefs were not hereditary and could be confiscated on the holder’s death. As they could not be passed on to the landholder’s beneficiaries, it was not possible to create a landowning class as in Europe. In theory, peasants could not be evicted from the land they cultivated so long as they paid the tithe to the landlord. That measure gave peasants security of tenure and may explain the general absence of peasant rebellions in Ottoman history.

The reign of Süleyman the Magnificent is traditionally described as the ‘high noon’ of the Ottoman Empire. He was described as the last of the great first ten rulers who had established and laid the foundation of a world empire. These rulers were not only great conquerors but wise and talented administrators, who ruled over their territories with ruthless sagacity. After Süleyman, it was said,

the sultans were often incompetent, mediocre and corrupt men who were more given to the pleasure of the harem than the battlefield; a sultan such as Murad IV (1623–40) was the exception rather than the rule. Incompetent rulers lacked the initiative and drive of such great sultans as Mehmed the Conqueror, and therefore tended to paralyse the administration and weaken the empire. But despite this shortcoming, the empire was able to rely on the exceptional talents of such grand viziers as Sokullu Mehmed Pasha and the Köprülü dynasty of grand viziers which controlled the empire for almost half a century, as well as the occasionally competent sultan, such as Murad IV.

As an explanation for Ottoman decline relative to the rise of Western Europe, this is only partially true and modern scholarship has sought other explanations. By the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Ottoman Empire was operating in a totally different environment, both internally and overseas. The empire had been transformed from a state whose primary goal was territorial expansion, which therefore created the need for an active sultan-general to lead the armies, to a bureaucratic state that had to deal with such economic factors as commerce and relations with an expanding Europe. The Ottomans had created a world empire that was far too complex to be ruled by an individual, however gifted. Power had to be delegated and the sultans were forced to create a *divan*, an early cabinet, with a grand vizier and other ministers. During Süleyman’s reign, the situation remained ambiguous and he executed his grand vizier, İbrahim Pasha, because he had become jealous of the growth in the latter’s power. But his successor, Selim II, came to depend on his grand vizier and his bureaucracy, which then acquired its own residence known as Babiali or the Sublime Porte (similar to Number Ten Downing Street, the residence of the British prime minister).

For the same reason, the imperial harem also emerged as a focus of political power in the sixteenth century. The grand vizier was often related to the sultan by marriage and therefore directly connected to the harem and its powerful women, such as the *valide sultan*, the sultan’s mother or the sultan’s favourite concubine. Sometimes the sultan was a minor and therefore a regency headed by the sultan’s mother had to be established until he came of age.

By the middle of the sixteenth century, the empire had reached the limits of expansion, especially of lands that could be profitably exploited to bring economic benefit. That was the difference between Ottoman imperialism and the imperialisms of such European powers as Spain, England, and Holland: their motives for expansion were largely economic and they plundered their colonies for all they were worth. The Ottomans presented a classic case of what has been described as 'imperial over-extension'. They had to maintain large armies in central Europe, North Africa, and Cyprus, as well as powerful naval forces in the Mediterranean, the Aegean, and the Red Sea. In addition to the Holy Roman emperor and his allies, the Ottomans began to face the threat of the growing power of Russia in the Crimea. In Anatolia, the Safavids posed a threat with their religious propaganda among the nomadic Turkoman tribes. All this was a great burden on the treasury, forcing the Ottomans to find new ways to meet their fiscal obligations.

Overseas, a great transformation was marked by a shift from the Mediterranean sphere to the world of the Atlantic. With the age of discovery, the former trade routes upon which the Ottomans had depended for centuries lost their prominence and the empire's revenues from commerce declined. But this was a gradual process and did not affect the empire immediately; however, due to the political and social structure of the empire, there was no obvious solution. The Ottoman economic system was incapable of withstanding the challenge of Western mercantalism and industrialization.

#### AN AGE OF REVOLUTION

In the Western world, the transition from feudalism to commercial capitalism was marked by revolution – the rising middle classes, the bourgeoisie, had to fight for political power. That was accomplished in England between 1640 and 1688, culminating in the 'glorious revolution'; in France, the revolution took place between 1789 and 1815. Where there was no bourgeoisie strong enough to challenge the power of the feudal class – as in Spain or Russia – there was no revolution and the old classes remained in power. That was the case with the Ottomans. While they maintained a government strong enough to preserve order and allow merchants

and manufacturers to make their fortunes, they did not permit these merchants to emerge as a political force capable of promoting their own interests. This was made more difficult by the fact that the merchants were divided by religious affiliation – Greek Orthodox, Catholic, Armenian, Jew and Muslim – and could not act together as a class to protect their economic interests. The Ottomans, while aware of the importance of commerce for the economy, were never solely concerned with the interests of the commercial classes, nor did they take a conscious interest in the rapid growth of the economy. However, they were committed to defending the interests of the consumer, and one of the most important officials was the *muhtesib*, the inspector of the market place, who supervised prices and the quality of goods and weights and measures to see that consumers were not cheated. That in itself stifled the growth of capitalism and a market economy.

There were however a number of wealthy merchants who, in theory, might have played the role of carrying out a bourgeois transformation had they been given the opportunity. For example, a Greek merchant, known as Sheytanoglu, from a prominent Byzantine family, made a fortune from the fur trade and the imperial salt monopoly and, as a result, was able to fit sixty galleys for the Ottoman navy. But Murad II became suspicious of his increasing wealth and power and executed him in 1578. There were other prominent rich bankers and merchants, but the Ottoman ruling class never permitted them to alter the character of the state or economy. Even in Europe such change required a revolution, and the Ottoman state was too strong to allow any such radical political and social transformation. Thus there were rebellions and insurrections, but there was no single violent transformation of the political order and its supporting social system that would replace the existing ruling class with another, giving the empire a new look and direction.

It was not as though the Ottomans did not understand what was going on in the world around them; they were aware of the developments taking place in Europe. There was always a constant stream of visitors from Europe and some of these visitors stayed on and served the empire, especially as military experts. There were commercial contacts with the Italian city-states such as Genoa and Venice from the earliest days of the Ottomans, and

Muslim merchants resided in Italian cities. Mehmed the Conqueror had sent students to Italy to study the arts, and corresponded with the Pope. As a result, the Ottomans were well aware of developments in the world around them but were unable to absorb these developments into their own complex, multi-religious society. Nor did they realize how the changes in Europe were beginning to affect their own society, but that was the nature of empire and an imperial ruling class. They were conservative and bound to the status quo and would not permit the rise of a mercantile class that might transform the state and overwhelm the old ruling elites. The Ottomans had three principles that guided the state's economic policy: to provision the urban economy, especially that of Istanbul, and to keep the army, the bureaucracy, and the Palace well supplied; to provide the necessary revenues from taxation, urban and rural; and to preserve the status quo by maintaining strict controls in the towns and the countryside. The Spanish empire pursued a similar policy in the sixteenth century and later; despite her empire and her great wealth, Spain too failed to make the transformation to a bourgeois society, remaining a society dominated by the commercial classes, and therefore lagging behind such European states as Holland and England. It was not a question of religion (Islam or Catholicism), as some have suggested, but was rooted in the very nature of pre-Enlightenment imperialism.

But Ottoman decline was not precipitous. The empire was powerful enough to defend itself throughout the seventeenth century and was even able to launch a campaign that took Ottoman armies to the walls of Vienna in 1683 for the second time. In 1570–71 the Ottomans captured Tunis and Cyprus and the European power took the threat seriously enough to join forces and inflict a crushing defeat on the Ottoman navy at Lepanto in 1571. Such was the empire's wealth in the latter sixteenth century that Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, the grand vizier, informed Sultan Selim II that the fleet destroyed at Lepanto could easily be replaced with new and better galleys. However, as a result of the defeat, Selim was forced to make peace with Venice and the emperor.

By the reign of Selim II (1566–74) power had passed into the hands of other men, such as Sokullu Mehmed Pasha (1506–79),

though they were not all as outstanding a statesman as he was. Born in the town of Sokolovic in Bosnia, he was recruited and trained in the *devşirme* system. He rose through the ranks until he was appointed grand vizier in 1564, having already married Süleyman's daughter and Selim II's sister. It was he, not the sultan, who administered the empire until he died in 1579.

Apart from the regular wars (with Iran, 1578–90, and Austria, 1593), the Ottomans had to cope with a situation that is described as the 'crisis of the seventeenth century'. This was marked by a number of factors that worked together and created a difficult situation that the Ottoman state found itself confronted with. Earlier scholarship argued that it was primarily the influx of American gold and silver that came into the Mediterranean world via its commercial connections with the West that created inflation and the pressure on the Ottoman economy. The treasury was forced to find more money to pay the salaries of its armies and administration. Recent research suggests that a cash economy had already penetrated large parts of the Balkans and Anatolia along the coast and the process was accelerated in the sixteenth century with the influx of New World silver, resulting in increased commercialization. Thus taxes were now collected in cash rather than kind, altering the method of landholding in parts of the empire. Inflationary pressures were aggravated by the growth in population, urbanization, and monetization of the economy that increased the demand for money and pressure on the empire's limited resources. The state was forced to finance larger armies to fight exhausting wars against the Hapsburgs and the Safavids, and one quick solution was to debase and devalue the currency, putting more brass than silver in the coins. The result was social turmoil and in 1589 the janissaries in Istanbul revolted in protest against their lower pay and declining standard of living. These revolts continued into 1592 before they were quelled. In the 1590s, central Anatolia began to witness social disorder with peasant unrest known as the *Celali* rebellions, named after the religious leader who began the first revolt. Serious dissatisfaction continued until the 1650s, undermining the authority of the state.

## THE JANISSARY-ÜLEMA ALLIANCE

Despite all these problems and military setbacks, the Ottomans held their own throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. One of the most serious consequences of this prolonged crisis was the emergence of an alliance between the *ülema* and the janissaries that prevented the possibility of any structural reform in the state and society. The military provided the power, literally from the barrels of their guns, while the *ülema* provided ideological legitimacy. For example, the Ottomans were unable to follow the example of the Greek community which established a printing press in 1627, because the *ülema* objected that the printing press was a violation of the Sharia. When İbrahim Müteferrika, a Hungarian convert, set up the first Ottoman printing press a hundred years later, it survived only until 1742, when it was again shut down because of strong opposition from the reactionaries. The press was finally able to reopen in 1784! Even reformers who often diagnosed the problems of the empire correctly generally proposed a solution that asked the sultan to restore the practices of Süleyman the Magnificent, during whose reign the empire was thought to be at its peak.

When the situation seemed critical, such as during the reign of Murad IV (1623–40), a strong ruler was able to restore order but could not carry out fundamental reform. He ended fratricide in 1623 because his brother İbrahim was the last surviving Ottoman apart from Murad, and killing him would put the dynasty at risk. İbrahim was therefore isolated in the Palace and allowed to lead a passive and degenerate life away from political power. By 1632, Murad had established control over the state and continued a policy of conquest, capturing Baghdad from the Safavids in 1638.

The stability proved temporary for, in 1648, when Mehmed IV, a minor, came to the throne, the capital was in a state of anarchy, dominated by the janissaries, while rebel pashas controlled much of central Anatolia and the Venetians blockaded the Dardanelles. But in 1656, Mehmed Köprülü (d.1661) was appointed grand vizier and given absolute power. He is an example of Ottoman meritocracy, an illiterate rising from the sultan's kitchen to the rank of provincial governor and grand vizier, thanks to his own talent and patronage in the Palace. He remained in power for only

five years until his death in 1661. During his brief tenure, he restored control over the janissaries and the rebels in Anatolia, lifted the Venetian blockade at the Dardanelles and restored Ottoman control over Transylvania and Wallachia. Mehmed Köprülü's aggressive policies were continued by his son, Fazıl Ahmed Köprülü (1635–76) and Kara Mustafa Pasha (1676–83). But the political stability of these years did not survive long and the long exhausting wars with the Hapsburgs, marked by the second siege of Vienna in 1683, hastened Ottoman decline.

## GROWING EUROPEAN INFLUENCE

The Treaty of Carlowitz, signed in January 1699, was a turning point in Ottoman–Hapsburg relations. From being the aggressors, the Ottomans were forced to go on the defensive, and they began to take the European example seriously. Sultan Ahmed III (1703–30) led the reform drive during what is known as the 'Tulip Period'. But his attempts to introduce European methods into the army were thwarted by the *ülema*–janissary alliance. In 1729, faced with the threat of Austrian and Russian armies, the Ottomans invited Western experts to introduce modern methods of warfare. Count Alexander de Bonneval, a French officer, came to Istanbul to modernize the engineer and bombardier corps. Possibly to facilitate his work, he converted to Islam so that a Muslim, not a Christian, might be responsible for the reforms. Known as Ahmed Bey, he entered Ottoman service in 1731 and established a school of military engineering in 1734. He was given the rank of pasha and the title 'Bombardier' (*Humbaracı*) the following year. But his reforms did not take root and when another European reformer, Baron de Tott, arrived in Istanbul in 1768, he found hardly any evidence of *Humbaracı*'s efforts, as though he had failed totally to reform the army.

Baron de Tott arrived to carry out military reform while the empire was at war with Russia. The Russian fleet dominated the Aegean Sea by 1770, defeated the Ottoman army on the Danube and invaded the Crimea. The Ottomans suffered such crushing defeats that they were forced to sign a humiliating treaty with Catherine the Great in 1774. The Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca made the Crimea and northern coast of the Black Sea independent of Ottoman rule.

Catherine was also given the right to protect the Orthodox Church in Istanbul, thereby giving Russia the excuse to intervene in Ottoman affairs. The treaty marked the beginning of what has come to be known as the 'Eastern Question', the attempts by the Great Powers to exploit the multi-religious character of the Ottoman Empire by acting on behalf of the Christian communities. In return, Sultan Abdülhamid I (1774–89) was recognized by Russia – and soon after by other European powers – as the Caliph of all Muslims. According to Article 3 of the Treaty, the Sultan retained his spiritual authority over Muslims in the Crimea, by now ceded to Russia. The Sultan's claim to the caliphate was confirmed under subsequent treaties with the Powers.

The claim to the caliphate was an important innovation and had considerable influence on the future policy of the empire, strengthening the conservatives and enabling them to manipulate Islam in order to forestall reform. After the fall of the Abbasid caliphate in 1258, a number of independent sultans had assumed the title, and even Murad I had used it as early as 1326. However, the Ottomans began to attach importance to both the title and its prerogatives after 1774, in order to counter Tsarina Catherine's claim to be the protector of Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman Empire. The sultans in turn claimed spiritual authority over Muslim communities under Christian rule and found that this was a useful tool to use in their relations with Europe.

Piecemeal reform during the eighteenth century, obstructed by the reactionaries, had failed to improve the situation of the empire against the growing power of the European states. The treaty with Catherine did not bring peace or satisfy Russia's appetite for expansion. In 1783, she annexed the Khanate of Crimea, and three years later the Ottomans were again at war with Russia. When Selim III came to the throne of the troubled empire in 1789, his reign began the empire's longest century of continuous reform, culminating in 1908 with revolution.

#### SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

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## 2

### From Reform to Revolution, 1789–1908

#### REFORM OF THE MILITARY

When Selim III (r.1789–1807) came to the throne in April, revolution in France was just getting underway. His empire was in dire straits: he was at war with Russia, the Hapsburgs had taken Belgrade, Napoleon began the French occupation of Egypt in 1798, the Wahabbis, the founders of religious fundamentalism, were gaining strength in the Hijaz (today's Saudi Arabia), attacking the Ottomans for their lax religious practices, while in the Balkans, Tepedenli Ali Pasha of Janina – in present-day Greece – was in rebellion. He was a local notable (*ayan*) who, like many others throughout the empire, challenged the power of Istanbul and sought autonomy, if not independence, depriving the sultan of revenues. But a recurrent problem for the state was how to curb the power of the janissaries. During the crisis of the seventeenth century, the *devşirme* had fallen into disarray. The janissaries, adversely affected by inflation and the debasement of currency, enrolled their sons and relatives into the corps so that they too could obtain a salary. Moreover, they joined various guilds of artisans and began to ply a craft in order to augment their pay. As a result, the old discipline and esprit de corps that had made them the envy and the scourge of Europe disappeared, and the janissaries became a menace to the sultans. In alliance with the *ülema*, whose

ranks had also swelled as a result of the economic crisis, the janissaries became opponents of any social or military reform that would threaten their position in society. Selim realized that military reform was critical if he were to wage successful warfare at the same time as curbing the growing power of his provincial notables. In 1801, peasants in Serbia revolted because the Ottoman officials and janissaries had seized their land. Istanbul attempted to arm and grant property rights to the peasants but to no avail. In 1815 the principality was granted autonomy. In 1804, the Russians annexed Armenia and northern Azerbaijan and advanced to the very borders of Anatolia. The following year, Mehmed Ali Pasha established his authority in Egypt and soon founded a dynasty that survived until its overthrow by a military coup d'état in July 1852. Mehmed Ali had been sent by Selim to drive out the French army that had destroyed the Mamluks and entered the heartlands of Islam for the first time since the eleventh century.

Selim introduced military reform in these inauspicious times. Inspired by the example of the French Revolution, whose impact was felt in Istanbul, Selim called his new army the 'new order' (*nizam-ı cedid*). He invited experts from France, built new barracks and training schools and moved forward cautiously. But he had to raise taxes in order to finance his reforms and this measure met with opposition. When, in 1805, he wanted to create his new army in the Balkans, the notables rose up in rebellion. Unable to crush the rebels, Selim found that the janissaries had overturned their soup cauldrons in rebellion as well. The reformers were isolated and once again the janissary-*ülema* alliance had triumphed. Selim was deposed in 1807 and his 'new order' army was disbanded.

Selim's reformers, mainly bureaucrats, men of the Sublime Porte who survived slaughter by the janissaries, took refuge with Alemdar Mustafa Pasha (1750-1808), a notable of Ruscuk in the Balkans. Mustafa Pasha decided to support reform and restore Selim, who had been replaced by Mustafa IV (r.1807-8). He marched on Istanbul, but Selim was murdered in the palace and Alemdar Mustafa brought Mahmud II (1808-38) to the Ottoman throne and became his grand vizier. His goal was to integrate provincial notables into the imperial system by creating a charter that would be honoured by the sultan, giving them rights and obli-

gations. The result of his consultations with the empire's notables and the reformers was the signing of the 'Deed of Agreement' (*Sende-i İttifak*), sometimes described as the Ottoman Magna Carta. The notables swore to be loyal to the sultan so long as he did not violate the law. They agreed to supply troops and to the establishment of a modern army, and also to pay taxes levied after consultation with them. Finally, they demanded an end to arbitrary punishment inflicted by the sultan. It seemed as though the provincial notables and the bureaucrats were gaining the recognition they had failed to win when their power was checked by the *devşirme* some centuries before. But that proved to be illusory, for the janissaries revolted again and killed Alemdar Mustafa. Mahmud was saved because he had executed Mustafa IV and had thus become the last surviving Ottoman. The janissaries were forced to accept Mahmud but he, in turn, agreed to disband the new army. For the moment, military reform was halted until the historical circumstances favoured it a few years later.

Historic conjunctions appear at rare moments in a country's history when the usual forces that provide social balance and maintain the status quo break down. War and defeat are often the cause of such breakdowns - which is what happened in Egypt when this Ottoman province was invaded by Napoleon in 1798. Napoleon had defeated the Mamluks and had destroyed their social power, which had left the *ülema*, another source of conservatism, defenceless and impotent. Thus when Mehmed Ali assumed political authority in 1805, he inherited a virtual political *tabula rasa* upon which he could write his own programme. What little threat the Mamluks posed to his regime he destroyed when he massacred their leaders in the citadel of Cairo in 1811.

Mahmud's moment in history arrived in the 1820s, during the Greek war of independence. He defeated Tependeli Ali's rebellion in 1820 with some difficulty, but in so doing he weakened his position in the region, and the Greeks of the Danube provinces and Morea seized the opportunity to rebel and fight for their independence. The janissaries failed to defeat the rebels, resulting in the capture of Athens by Greek insurgents. In 1824, Mahmud appealed to Mehmed Ali of Egypt, his suzerain, to send his modern army against the rebels and Ibrahim Pasha, Mehmed Ali's son, quickly quelled the rebellion. But the Great Powers - England,



France, and Russia – intervened on behalf of the Greeks and destroyed the Ottoman-Egyptian fleet in October 1827. Russia declared war on the Sultan and the war was concluded with the Treaty of Adrianople in 1829. As a result, Mahmud was forced to give autonomy to Greece, Serbia, and Rumania, and the Kingdom of Greece was established in 1830 with the consent of the Powers.

The Greek war revealed to Ottoman Muslims the impotence of the janissaries – who could not even overcome rebel insurgents let alone an organized army – without the assistance of a modern army organized by the empire's governor in Egypt. For Mahmud, this was a historical conjunction similar to the defeat of the Mamluks in Egypt. The janissaries had lost face, as well as the support of the artisans of Istanbul. When they rebelled in 1826, the janissaries no longer had any popular support in the capital and even the *ülema* held back; both artisans and *ülema* welcomed the elimination of the janissaries and the creation of a modern army. The massacre was described as an 'auspicious event' and Mahmud created his new army which, in order to appease conservative elements, he called the 'Victorious Army of Muhammad' under a '*ser'asker*' (war minister) and not under the *ağa* of the janissaries. Janissary standards, usually decorated with pictures of various animals, were replaced by a single flag decorated with the star and crescent, a symbol adopted later by the republic. Mahmud also introduced modern uniforms, a frock-coat to be worn by his bureaucrats, and the fez hat to mark his new order – the rise of a new class and the demise of the old. The establishment of the empire's first newspaper in 1831, emulating Mehmed Ali's example, was also an important step in the modernization of society. The paper, though only read by the elite, influenced the creation of 'public opinion' and the development of the language.

Without the support of the janissaries, the *ülema* no longer had the influence to prevent reform, and reforms came fast and furious. Students were sent to Europe to learn modern methods. New schools were set up, including a school of medicine (1831) and the War College in 1834; the entire governmental structure was bureaucratized. The new army was trained in an entirely new tradition, breaking all ties to the past; the link between the army and religion – the Bektāşi order of dervishes – was broken when the order was abolished. Ottoman officers, with their modern education and

outlook, became the vanguard of secular progress. The financial independence of the *ülema* ended with the creation of the inspectorate of foundations, or *vakfs*, and the Şeyhulislam virtually became a civil servant, acquiring his own office. The Sublime Porte, the heart of Ottoman government, was modernized with bureaux that were later transformed into ministries – civil affairs, the interior, and foreign affairs – led by a grand vizier. Mahmud also set up a translation bureau to train Muslim interpreters or dragomans, a task that had been performed by the Greek aristocracy, the Phanariot Greeks, before the Greek war of independence. Ottoman Greeks and Armenians continued to play a prominent role in the conduct of foreign affairs as ambassadors and even as a foreign minister, but Muslims began to learn European languages and that was an important innovation which had radical consequences, as these languages, especially French, brought them in contact with new ideas such as liberty and constitutionalism. Embassies in the major European capitals, established by Selim III, were restored, permanently enhancing the impact of the West on the bureaucratic class.

#### THE SUBLIME PORTE AND MEHMED ALI

The class that gained from these and later reforms was the men of the Sublime Porte, who began to curb the autocratic powers of the Sultan by forcing him to adhere to 'constitutional' forms. Like the men of the *devşirme*, who had come to the fore in the second half of the sixteenth century, the men of the Sublime Porte were establishing their claim to power in the nineteenth. As there was no rising middle class in Ottoman society demanding change, the bureaucrats used the threat of European intervention to force the sultan to succumb to their schemes. The Great Powers of Europe – England, France, Austria, Russia, Prussia and Germany, and Italy after 1870 – were crucial players in the development of the 'Eastern Question'. They brought about the creation of an independent Greek state, and the Porte required their support to control the ambitions of Mehmed Ali of Egypt, the first successful modernizer of the non-Western world.

In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, Mehmed Ali had created a state with a modern army and an industrial economy. He had regional ambitions that clashed with those of Mahmud and

Great Britain, for the British could not permit a strong modern state to control such a strategic country as Egypt and threaten Britain's route to India and the east. The Egyptians went to war against the Ottomans in 1831, advanced into Anatolia, defeated the Ottoman army led by the grand vizier, and threatened the capital. Mahmud was forced to appeal to Russia, and the tsar responded by sending naval squadrons and troops to defend Istanbul. Russian military help against a fellow Muslim required a *fatwa*, a religious injunction from the Şeyhulislam, to make it acceptable to the people! Mahmud then signed the Treaty of Hünkâr İskelesi with Russia on 8 July 1833, marking the zenith of Russia's influence in Istanbul. But Britain and France refused to accept Russian hegemony at Istanbul and after the Ottoman–Egyptian war of 1839–41, they intervened and forced Mehmed Ali to restore Syria to the Porte, while he was recognized as the hereditary ruler of Egypt.

Apart from the empire's diplomatic dependence on Europe during these years, its economic dependence on Europe, especially Britain, also increased. The Porte had begun to surrender its economic monopoly in the eighteenth century, when it was forced to allow its provincial notables to sell directly to European merchants. In 1829, the Treaty of Adrianople forced it to permit the notables of Wallachia and Moldavia, the emerging agrarian middle class, to sell their agricultural produce to foreign merchants at higher market prices rather than the lower prices set by the state. The Anglo-Ottoman Commercial Convention of 1838 established Ottoman economic policy until the abolition of capitulation in September 1914. It gave important commercial privileges to Britain, which at that time was embarking on the second phase of its industrial revolution; Britain required markets for her goods and she therefore engaged the Ottomans in the economic and political network of an emerging industrial civilization. The convention removed all state monopolies and allowed British merchants to purchase goods throughout the Ottoman Empire, including Egypt, which remained nominally part of the empire until 1914 when it became a British protectorate. As a result, Egypt's state-driven economy was destroyed. Duties were limited to 5 per cent on imports, 12 per cent on exports, and 3 per cent on transit. Initially, the convention was signed by Britain, but other European powers were soon given the same privileges. The Porte

was able to have import duties raised to 8 per cent in the 1861–2 negotiations and to 11 per cent in 1907. The attempt to raise these duties by a further 4 per cent failed dismally. In short, the duties established by the regime of the capitulations did not provide the protection the domestic market needed to industrialize, and the attempt to industrialize after 1847 ended in abject failure and was never made again.

Duties could not be raised unilaterally by the Porte and required the consent of all the signatories. That was the stipulation that Britain imposed on the capitulation after she signed a treaty with the Ottomans in 1809; the capitulations were no longer seen by Europe as privileges granted unilaterally by the sultan, but rights negotiated by the Powers, rights that could be altered only by multilateral agreement. The capitulations and other treaties became a heavy burden on the Porte, a burden that the Ottomans were only able to shed after Europe was at war in 1914.

#### THE MOVEMENT TOWARDS WESTERNIZATION

Apart from a desire to destroy Mehmed Ali's experiment in modernization, Ottoman statesmen believed that the Ottoman Empire would benefit greatly by being integrated into the world market that the British were in the process of creating. In 1824 Mahmud had taken away the privileges that protected Ottoman merchants, forcing them to compete with foreign merchants without state protection. That measure began to undermine Ottoman commerce and manufactures, a process that was completed by the 1838 convention. The new agrarian middle class benefited from the liberalization of trade, for they were able to sell their produce at prices higher than those paid by the state. Merchants who sold foreign imports and acted as middlemen on behalf of European companies also prospered. But the crafts withered, unable to withstand the competition of cheaper, machine-made goods from Europe. Such ports as İzmir, Istanbul, Salonica, and Beirut prospered as more and more goods were imported and exported, and that created a vibrant economic climate that led to the immigration of Greeks from a stagnant Greece to a dynamic Ottoman Empire.

The benefits of free trade went disproportionately to the Christian communities of the empire because they were able to

become the protégés of foreign merchants residing in Ottoman lands. As interpreted by the Powers, the capitulations permitted them to sell protection to their co-religionists and to make them protégés, thereby giving them the same protection they had enjoyed under the capitulations. The French consuls were able to make protégés, of Ottoman Catholics, the British of Protestants, and the Russians of Orthodox Christians. Only Jewish Ottomans were excluded because there was no Jewish nation. With the creation of a united Italy, Italian consuls took it upon themselves to sell Italian protection to a few Ottoman Jews. Consequently, the Jewish community tended to identify with the problems of the Muslim Ottomans, including their quest for a new patriotic identity. Not only did such a status allow Ottoman Christian merchants to benefit from lower taxes, it also meant that Ottoman authorities were unable to apply Ottoman laws since they could be brought only before consular courts.

#### EMERGENCE OF A NEW MIDDLE CLASS

Since a commercial/industrial Muslim middle class did not emerge as a result of the liberalization and the integration of the empire into the world economy, the Porte turned to the landlords to create a class that would be totally loyal to the new state that the bureaucrats were fashioning. The land code of 1858 was a step towards legalizing the private ownership of land. Earlier, in 1847, the Porte had passed a law whose aim was to encourage cultivators to farm unused state lands. Instead of being used by landless peasants, this law was manipulated by local landlords to augment their holdings, making them more prosperous and politically powerful. In regions where tribal life was prevalent, land was registered in the name of the tribal leaders, who became the landowners and their clansmen the peasants. One of the aims of this land code was to settle the tribes. Most of these landlords farmed their lands using peasants as sharecroppers, hardly encouraging innovation on the land. However, some became capitalist farmers and grew such cash crops as tobacco and cotton, and prospered especially during and after the American civil war, when demand for their cotton grew on the European market. These are the men who emerged as the new middle class in the twentieth century, after the constitutional revolution of 1908.

The initiative for reform passed entirely to the bureaucrats on the death of Mahmud II on 30 June 1839. His successor, Abdülmecid I (1839–61), was only sixteen when he came to the throne and was guided by Mustafa Reşid Pasha, one of the great reforming statesmen of the era. Abdülmecid became sultan at a critical juncture during the crisis with Mehmed Ali, and Reşid Pasha persuaded him that if he carried out reforms that modernized the empire he would win the support of Europe, especially that of Great Britain. Abdülmecid agreed and launched an era of reform (1839–76) known collectively as the *Tanzimat*.

#### TANZIMAT (RESTRUCTURING)

The first proclamation (the Charter of the Rose Chamber) was announced on 3 November 1838. This promised the beginning of a new age with equality for all – Muslim and non-Muslim – the end of bribery and corruption and no punishment without trial, that is to say, it established the rule of law. The lives, honour and property of all Ottoman subjects were guaranteed, putting an end to the status of *kul* under which the sultan's servants could be executed at the ruler's whim and their property confiscated. The last such political execution had taken place in 1837, when Mahmud II had Pertev Pasha killed because of palace intrigue, and the lesson was not lost on Reşid Pasha. The charter gave state officials the security of life and property and they came into their own. Tax-farming was also abolished, but within a few years the law was sabotaged by tax-farmers who had much to lose and the practice continued until the end of the empire.

The Charter of 1839 was a crucial step in the process of secularization, which continued until the dissolution of the empire and beyond. While it undermined the principle of the traditional *millet* system, based on privileges for religious communities, the communities were unwilling to abandon their privileges at the same time as welcoming the equality. The Great Powers were asked to observe its implementation; in fact, they were invited to implicitly supervise Ottoman affairs if the Porte did not live up to its promise. They were being made the guarantors of reform. The *Tanzimat* statesmen calculated that if the sultan strayed from the path of reform, the European ambassadors would bring him back

to the path since there was no internal social force that could do so. They relied on the support of the foreign embassies to keep up the pressure for Westernization. Stratford de Redcliffe (1786–1880), Britain's ambassador at the Porte, played a particularly important role in the Westernization movement of the bureaucracy; in fact, some scholars claim that the charter was largely his work, as he was considered to be a most influential figure among the Ottoman Westernizing reformers. He had spent much of his professional life in Istanbul before he became Britain's ambassador in 1847 and remained in Istanbul until 1858 where he was known as the 'Grand Ambassador', the doyen of the diplomatic corps. He disliked Russia and her influence, as directed through the Orthodox Church, and he promoted Protestantism as an alternative. He succeeded in having the Protestant Church and community recognized as a separate *millet* in 1850, even as he promoted Westernization and reform.

Just as the Charter of 1839 followed the Mehmed Ali crisis, the second Royal Charter was proclaimed on 18 February 1856, while the Congress was meeting in Paris (February–March 1856) to settle the Eastern Question after the Crimean War. The Crimean War broke out when the Sublime Porte refused to accept a proposal by Russia that she be allowed to protect Orthodox Christians in the empire. Supported by Britain and France, the Ottomans declared war on Russia on 23 September 1853. The British and French joined the war in March 1854 and the fighting took place on the Crimean peninsula. The Tsar agreed to make peace on 1 February 1856, when he was faced with defeat and the threat of Austria joining the anti-Russian coalition.

The Crimean War had other local results. Trade in Western commodities increased dramatically as European armies camped in the environs of the capital. The first telegraphic lines were laid between Europe and the Ottoman Empire, revolutionizing communications, especially for commercial purposes. Modern war and the example of Florence Nightingale's work in the Crimea led to the founding of the Ottoman counterpart of the Red Cross Society, in June 1868. Called simply the 'Society for helping sick and wounded Ottoman Soldiers', it was renamed 'the Ottoman Red Crescent Society' in June 1877 and continues as such to the present.

By the Treaty of Paris, Russia surrendered the mouth of the Danube and a part of Bessarabia to the future Rumania; the province of Kars in the Caucasus was given to the Porte, and Russia agreed to renounce her claim to protect the Orthodox Church in the Ottoman Empire. The Black Sea was neutralized until the treaty was revised in 1871. The Ottoman Empire was included in the European Concert system and the Powers guaranteed its independence and territorial integrity. But the Ottomans were not considered a European state and so were not granted equality. The Ottoman proposal to abrogate the capitulations was ignored, as the Powers claimed that Ottoman society and its laws were too alien for Europeans to live under. Nevertheless, in order to further the process of Westernization and secularization, the royal charter of 1856 reaffirmed the terms of the 1839 charter and defined in more precise terms equality between Muslim and Christian subjects. But the European powers saw the question of equality totally differently. The Porte saw equality as equality before the law for all Ottoman subjects, with communal privileges restricted to religious affairs, and the religious community (*millet*) reduced to a congregation (*cemaat*). For Russians, equality meant the extension of the religious communities' right to autonomy if not independence. For the British, equality meant the equality of the *millets* as corporate communities and not equality between Christians and Muslims as Ottoman subjects as the Porte proposed. The Porte also carried out educational measures that would promote understanding between the communities and lead to the success of Ottomanism, an ideology that focused loyalty around the person of the sultan and the dynasty. The opening of the Lycée of Galatasaray in 1868 was intended to bring together the intelligentsia of all communities in a secular environment to promote unity. After initial resistance from virtually all the communities, the institution flourished and was followed by other foreign religious institutions, such as Robert College, founded by American missionaries. These institutions stimulated the growth, not of Ottomanism but of national sentiment, among the cosmopolitan student body of the empire.

The Charter of 1856 strengthened the position of the Christian population, especially that of the rising middle class, while that of its Muslim counterpart became weaker. The Christian communities

were secularized and the hold of their clergy weakened. The communities began to acquire the characteristics of individual 'nations' and began to undergo a 'renaissance' during which they recovered their history, language, and literature. In 1863, the Armenian community had its own constitution and a 'national' assembly, which heightened national aspirations. In February 1870, the Porte permitted the creation of the Bulgarian Church, independent of the authority of the Greek Orthodox Church. The Bulgarian Exarch was appointed head of the Bulgarian *millet* and the Exarchate began the task of creating the Bulgarian state and the Bulgarian individual. Services were thereafter conducted in Bulgarian, the language of Sofia, and local dialects were discouraged, especially when the language was introduced in schools.

The Muslims received none of these benefits from the *Tanzimat* reforms. There was no 'national' Church with which they could identify, as Islam remained a universal religion. Economically they found it more difficult to compete against the protected Christian merchants. Therefore they began to abandon commerce and industry and seek employment in the state bureaucracy and army. Initially, after the reforms of Mahmud II, the bureaucracy grew and absorbed this population, providing it with a modern education and secure employment. But by the 1860s, the Ottoman bureaucracy had reached saturation point; not only was it more difficult to find work in the bureaucracy, but promotion came to depend on patronage. Those who were affected by this new trend – the new intelligentsia – blamed the *Tanzimat* statesmen for the deterioration of the empire and for their own plight because of the concessions they had made to Europe and to Ottoman Christians.

#### THE YOUNG OTTOMANS MOVEMENT

A new movement known as the 'Young Ottomans' rose out of this popular discontent. This was the first modern opposition movement critical of the regime. The Young Ottomans rebuked the high bureaucrats, the pashas, for making the Europeans, the Levantines (people of European origin who settled in the empire), and some Christians, a privileged group while neglecting the Muslim population. They criticized the Porte for making economic concessions to Europe and undermining the empire's

economy. All the reforms of the *Tanzimat* had not led to the creation of a modern economy; they had merely led to the subordination of the Ottoman economy to that of Europe. Some regions of the empire had been totally integrated into the economy of a European country and their links with Istanbul were weakened. Syria's economy was integrated into that of France and Iraq's into that of Britain, so that when the Ottoman Empire was partitioned after the First World War, these regions were mandated to these countries.

But the Young Ottomans were also the products of the *Tanzimat* era. They emerged out of the influence of the press and education of those years, which permitted the growth of an intelligentsia. Such intellectuals as İbrahim Şinasi (1824–71) expressed novel ideas in the journals that were read only by the literate few, but heard by the many when their ideas were read in the coffee houses of the cities and towns. The Porte responded by trying to curb the press and introducing laws which punished ideas critical of the regime. This led the intelligentsia to found secret societies devoted to the fall of the regime.

The recognition of Ismail Pasha as the hereditary Khedive (ruler) of Egypt in 1867 had unintended consequences for the Young Ottomans. The introduction of primogeniture alienated his brother Mustafa Fazıl, who was next in line to Ismail, and made him a dissident and one of the leaders of the Young Ottomans movement. While in exile in Europe in 1867, he wrote an open letter to Sultan Abdülaziz (r.1861–76) recommending constitutional monarchy as a solution to the empire's problems and calling for a government that guaranteed all liberal freedoms. The Young Ottomans wanted to end the autocracy of the sultan and his bureaucrats, convinced that the laws of the state could not be reformed under absolutism. The Porte responded by taking harsh measures against its critics, and such journalists as Namık Kemal (1840–88) and Ali Suavi (1838–78) were forced to leave Istanbul. Having failed to take over the government in Istanbul, the opposition regrouped in France, where they formed the Young Ottomans Society and continued their opposition to the Porte in a more sympathetic environment.

In their journals the Young Ottomans repeatedly called for a constitution and representative government, the first to establish a

contract between the sultan and his subjects, and the second to discuss and legislate on the affairs of the empire. They emphasized the deterioration in the economic life of the people and the financial situation of the state, and lamented the Porte's dependence on the Great Powers and their increasing interference in Ottoman affairs. These factors were undermining the relationship between Muslim and non-Muslim subjects, all of which did not bode well for the future. For them, the solution was to establish a government in which the people participated and in which the sultan was subject to law.

But the Young Ottomans did not propose revolutionary change. Their objective was not to overthrow the system, but merely to reform it so that it was more inclusive and capable of standing up to European expansion. They belonged to the intelligentsia and lacked a social base that was radically different from the elite. Education and culture alienated them from the peasantry and the urban classes of artisans and merchants of the bazaar. Far from wishing to incite revolution, they were convinced that the only way to bring about real change was to bring to the throne a ruler sympathetic to their ideas.

Namık Kemal expressed the ideas of Ottoman liberalism coherently and consequently became the most influential thinker among the Young Ottomans, with ideas that were significant during his lifetime and long after his death. His poetry, plays and essays were widely read by the intelligentsia, even though they were banned by the regime. Apart from developing the notion of liberty, he introduced the doctrine of natural rights, perhaps for the first time in Islamic thought, as well as the idea of *vatan* (*patrie* or fatherland) and territorial patriotism, and the sovereignty of the people. Patriotism/Ottomanism was the most potent of his ideas: all Ottomans, regardless of their religion or language, owed loyalty not to the Ottoman dynasty but to their Ottoman fatherland. His ideas came mainly from post-revolutionary France, but were expressed in terms that would be comprehended by his Islamic milieu because he was able to reconcile them with the Sharia. Rousseau's social contract was explained as the Islamic oath of allegiance (*biat*) that established a contract between the ruler and the ruled. The Sharia was malleable and capable of adapting to progress no matter where it came from. Unlike earlier critics of

Ottoman decline, Namık Kemal argued that it was impossible to go back to an imagined glorious past, but legitimate to adopt such practices as constitutionalism that had been already tried successfully in the West.

While in exile in Europe, Namık Kemal came to fully understand the importance of contemporary Western advances in technology. But he realized that the Ottomans could only make material progress after they had abandoned the traditions of fatalism and adopted the ideas of freedom and progress. The Ottomans had failed to make rapid progress, not because Islam was the barrier, but because the empire had become part of the world market and its economy and political life was dominated by Europe. That was the shortcoming that had to be rectified.

#### BANKRUPTCY AND UPEHAVAL: UNRAVELLING OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

While the Young Ottomans criticized the results of the *Tanzimat* reforms, the empire was heading for a financial crisis that forced the Porte to declare bankruptcy in October 1875. The empire had remained financially solvent until the government had to borrow money from Europe in 1854 during the Crimean War. The money raised from European loans was not used productively to create an infrastructure for a modern economy by building roads and railways so as to create a 'national' market. Instead the Court spent huge sums in ostentatious consumption, building modern palaces, buying arms from Europe and building a large navy. Huge sums of borrowed money were spent on royal weddings. When a royal princess died in 1880, she left behind the considerable debt of 16,000 gold liras, money borrowed from the Galata bankers.

The empire's economic, financial, and political situation was adversely affected by the outbreak of peasant rebellion in Herzegovina in 1875. What began as a peasant uprising against abuses by landlords, soon acquired religious and national overtones, of Christian Slavs against their Muslim overlords. The leadership of the movement began calling for union with their Slavic brothers in Serbia, and this won them the support of the pan-Slav movement in Russia which hoped to expand its influence in the Balkans. That is precisely what the Austrians feared, as

Slavic nationalism would block Vienna's expansion to the Aegean Sea and the port of Salonika. The situation became even more complicated in May 1876, when the Bulgarians revolted against the Ottomans and Serbia and Montenegro declared war. The strategic interests of the Great Powers clashed and they were therefore unable to resolve the conflict diplomatically. The Russians supported the rebels; the Austro-Hungarians opposed them, fearing the impact of the pan-Slavic movement in their own empire. Britain was fearful that Russia's growing influence in the region would adversely affect her own position. German unification in 1870/71 added a new player to the diplomatic game, making it even more complex.

The Ottomans suppressed the rebellion with great ferocity, soundly defeating the Serbs and Montenegrins. In Britain, William Gladstone, the leader of the Liberal Party, exploited the Ottoman suppression of the Bulgarian rebellion against Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, his pro-Ottoman Tory rival. He denounced the Ottomans as barbarians who had committed atrocities against Christian Bulgarians, and appealed for British support for the rebels. In that climate, the Russians declared war in April 1877, captured Plevna after a long siege that delayed their advance, and arrived at the outskirts of Istanbul during the spring of 1878. There, at the village of San Stefano (today's Yeşilköy), Russia dictated peace terms to the Porte: an enlarged Bulgaria, extending to the Aegean Sea, was to become autonomous, cutting off Ottoman access to the provinces of Albania and Macedonia; Rumania, Serbia, and Montenegro were to be granted independence, while Russia annexed the provinces of Kars, Ardahan, and Batum in the Caucasus; as compensation, Vienna was to be allowed to administer Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Britain was unwilling to accept these Russian gains and sent warships to Istanbul. Bismarck, the German chancellor, fearing a Great Power confrontation, acted as 'honest broker'. He convened the Congress of Berlin (June–July 1878) and revised the Treaty of San Stefano, settling the Eastern Question by achieving a balance in the region between Russia, Austria-Hungary, and Britain. Autonomous Bulgaria was reduced in size and the province of Eastern Rumelia, nominally Ottoman but with a Christian governor, was established south of Bulgaria; it united with

Bulgaria in 1881. The independence of Serbia, Montenegro, and Rumania was confirmed, as was Russia's annexations in the Caucasus and Vienna's administration of Bosnia-Herzegovina. With the Cyprus Convention of 4 June, the Ottomans ceded the strategic island of Cyprus to Britain in return for the promise of British protection against further Russian encroachments in Anatolia. Other lands ceded by the Porte at San Stefano were restored to the Ottoman Empire. The Treaty of Berlin also included Article LXI, by which the Porte undertook to carry out, under the supervision of the Powers, 'the ameliorations and the reforms ... in the provinces inhabited by the Armenians and to guarantee their security against the Circassians and the Kurds'. That was a crucial provision that had dire consequences for the future of the Ottoman–Armenian relationship. As a result of the congress, the Ottomans lost about 40 per cent of their empire and about 20 per cent of their population (about two million Muslims). Many fled to Istanbul and Anatolia as refugees from the Balkans, and the population of Istanbul is thought to have doubled as a result of the crisis and war.

#### FROM AUTOCRACY TO CONSTITUTIONALISM

Rebellion and war confronted the Porte with a severe conundrum. It was able to crush the rebellion and wage war successfully against its enemies in the Balkans, but was in a dilemma as to how it should deal with the Great Powers. The reformers decided that the empire required a constitutional monarchy so as to win the sympathy and support of Europe. Such a regime would not be possible under Sultan Abdülaziz and he was therefore forced to abdicate on 30 May 1876, committing suicide four days later.

Midhat Pasha (1822–84) the great reforming statesman, believed that under the new sultan they could establish a constitutional regime with an elected assembly that would curb the corruption of the Palace and bring financial order to the empire. But Murad V turned out to be mentally impaired and was therefore dethroned and replaced by Abdülhamid II (r.1876–1909). He came to the throne on 31 August, having promised Midhat that he would rule as a constitutional monarch. He ordered the preparation of a constitution, calculating that a

constitutional regime would prevent European intervention and that the Powers would allow the empire to manage its own affairs. But the Great Powers had already decided to hold an international conference in Istanbul to discuss the crisis in the Balkans and the measures necessary to resolve it.

The conference met on 23 December 1876 and the Porte proclaimed the inauguration of the constitutional regime on the same day, suggesting that the conference had become redundant. But the ambassadors refused to accept this logic and proposed a plan of reform for the Balkans that granted autonomy for Bulgaria and Bosnia-Herzegovina. When the Porte rejected this proposal, the ambassadors issued the warning that they would leave the capital and that, in such circumstances, Russia might declare war. The Porte reconsidered the plan and rejected it once more, whereupon the ambassadors left Istanbul, leaving the situation up in the air. But the constitutional experiment continued even though its principal architect, Grand Vizier Midhat Pasha, was dismissed by the sultan and exiled. Elections were held on 20 March 1877. They were indirect, two-tiered elections in which the notables of each religious community elected its own representatives to the assembly; in the upper house or the Chamber of Notables, members were appointed by the sultan.

The rapid transition from autocracy to constitutionalism was quite an accomplishment for the reformers. In less than a decade they had apparently managed to accomplish what had taken centuries in Europe, and what the Russian reformers were able to achieve a generation later, and then only after a revolution. Moreover, the Assembly, representing the various *millets*, acted with surprising patriotism in the face of an ongoing crisis and war. While there was criticism of the government, it was couched in constructive and rational terms, which betrayed loyalty to the idea of Ottomanism and the state. But war turned out to be inauspicious for the continuation of constitutional government. Russia declared war on 24 April 1877. When the Russian army advanced towards the capital the following year, the sultan was given a pretext to suspend parliament. In February 1878, parliament was suspended and did not reconvene for the next thirty years, until the restoration of the constitution in July 1908. But Abdülhamid maintained the fiction that he was acting according to the consti-

tution throughout his reign. Laws that he enacted, he said, would be debated by the Assembly when it met again, and he did his constitutional duty and appointed members to the Chamber of Notables until 1880. The war against Russia, Europe's partisan attitude towards the Ottomans and the crisis in the Balkans shattered the illusions of the reformers with regard to Europe's attitude towards the Muslim world. The reformers were faced with the contradiction of adopting Western ideas and institutions while struggling against Western imperialism.

European hegemony around the world during the second half of the nineteenth century alienated people from the West and Westernization and encouraged them to turn to their indigenous traditions and nativism. This was as true for India and Asia as for the Islamic world. Such Ottoman thinkers as Namık Kemal were in the forefront of this movement, and Abdülhamid encouraged this trend, for it added to his popularity throughout the Muslim world and weakened the arguments of the opposition. Islam was under pressure from Western imperialism in Iran and India, North Africa and South-East Asia. Muslims around the world saw the Ottoman Empire as the last remaining Islamic power capable of standing up to the West, and Sultan Abdülhamid as the universal caliph of the Islamic world leading the resistance. The sultan exploited the office of caliph to bolster his position against the West, and used political Islam as an ideology in the struggle against imperialism. He is described as a pan-Islamist, but his purpose was to use Islam for a defensive, not aggressive, purpose; he called for Islamic unity and solidarity and in that he was partly successful. Abdülhamid's policy was facilitated by the historical conjunction that was marked by the rise of imperial Germany. He won the support of the German kaiser, who had no Muslim colonies and who could therefore befriend a Muslim ruler and use this friendship against Germany's imperial rivals – Britain, France, and Russia. Kaiser Wilhelm II paid a state visit to the Ottoman Empire in October 1898, the only European ruler to do so. After Istanbul he went to Jerusalem, riding into the city on a black charger, and placed a wreath on the tomb of Saladin, the great Muslim hero who had defeated the crusaders. The kaiser then proclaimed himself a friend of the Muslim peoples, cementing a relation that led to the German–Ottoman alliance during the First World War.



## EMERGING TRADITIONALISM

Compared to Ottomanism and Islam, the ideology of Turkism remained marginal and restricted to a small minority of intellectuals who were familiar with the works of or personally knew such European Turcologists as the Frenchman Leon Cahun (1841–1900) or the Hungarian Arminius Vambery (1832–1913); the latter was a friend of Abdülhamid and is alleged to have acted as his spy among the dissidents! Muslim intellectuals who came to Istanbul from Russia were more conscious of being ‘Turks’. They brought with them the idea of nationalism for they had confronted the ideology of Slavism on a daily basis in the Russian Empire. Such activists as İsmail Gasparinski (1851–1914), Yusuf Akçura (1876–1935) and Ahmet Ağayev (1869–1939) popularized the ideology of Turkism. But they could not make it the dominant ideology and replace Ottomanism/Islamism while Turks ruled over a multi-ethnic, multi-religious empire.

Even after the settlement of the Congress of Berlin, the Great Powers continued to pressure the Ottoman Empire as they consolidated their hold on the region. In May 1881 France established a protectorate over Tunisia to forestall Italian ambitions, totally disregarding the promise of Ottoman territorial integrity made at Berlin. Egypt’s financial troubles, the declaration of bankruptcy, and the anti-regime rebellion in the army led to British intervention in September 1882, followed by an occupation that lasted until 1954. In the Balkans and Greece, the struggle to satisfy national aspirations continued. The Greek attempt to wrest the island of Crete in 1897 led to a war that the Ottomans won on the battlefield but lost at the peace table. Thanks to Great Power intervention, the sultan was forced to give up Thessaly and establish an autonomous regime in Crete, the prelude to the island’s annexation in 1912.

Macedonia, the region between Albania and Thrace, was contested by Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbs, and Muslims. Macedonia’s principal city, Salonika, was predominantly Jewish, inhabited by Jews who had been expelled from Spain after 1492 and who were pro-Ottoman. All the communities organized guerrilla bands to fight for their own national cause, creating a situation of political confusion that invited foreign intervention. The Powers called for reform and the Porte agreed to take measures that would appease

the Christian population. But Russia and Austria, who had conflicting interests in the region, found the Porte’s reform measures unsatisfactory and made proposals of their own. In 1903, they succeeded in establishing quasi-foreign control over Macedonia, but violence continued until the constitutional revolution of July 1908, which established temporary harmony between the communities.

The Armenian community in Asia Minor was affected by the growth of nationalism in the region throughout the nineteenth century. Missionary activity stimulated a cultural renaissance, leading to a revival of the classical language and literature, as well as the secularization of communal life. The Armenian intelligentsia began to agitate for representative government within the community, as well as protection from tribal and feudal elements which dominated the region. Russia patronized the reform movement and Article LXI of the Berlin Treaty promised joint action if the Ottoman government failed to satisfy Armenian demands. The Armenians organized themselves to struggle for national rights and found support from neighbouring Russia. But the Armenian movement was divided, with some willing to struggle alongside the Young Ottomans, later the Young Turks, so as to bring about a liberal regime that would satisfy Armenian aspirations. These were members of the class of notables, mainly merchants, bankers and professionals, who benefited from being part of a large empire rather than members of a small national state. Those who wanted to create a nation state in Asia Minor were farmers and provincial merchants, and they emulated the Balkan example of provoking European intervention on behalf of their cause. The attempt to provoke intervention failed when they seized the Imperial Ottoman Bank, an Anglo-French institution, in Istanbul in August 1896, but the Great Powers were too divided to act in concert and intervene. As a result, the Armenian movement was crushed for the moment.

Apart from dealing with Great Power involvement in the affairs of his empire, Abdülhamid carried out reforms in many areas in order to put his house in order. Finance was a principal concern, and the possibility of European financial control, as in Tunisia and Egypt, leading to occupation, seemed real. So in November 1881, the sultan agreed to the creation of the Ottoman Public Debt (OPD), an

institution independent of the finance ministry, to service the empire's loans. The delegates to the OPD were provided by England, France, Germany, Holland, Italy, and the Ottoman Empire, and the Ottoman Public Debt soon had a staff larger than the Ottoman finance ministry. It collected some of the most important taxes and paid the foreign bondholders from its receipts. The sultan introduced new taxes to make up for the shortfall, but he failed to tax the incomes of thousands of foreigners, as well as the thousands of protégés, who were able to take advantage of the capitulation treaties.

As a result of the creation of the OPD administration, foreign investors had greater confidence in the sultan's financial regime and the future of the empire. Consequently, foreign capital was invested in the empire to create an economic infrastructure of railways, roads, mines, and steamships, integrating the empire more closely into the expanding world market. Limited progress was made with the telephone system because Abdülhamid feared that it would be used for subversive purposes, but railway, road, and port construction increased dramatically during his reign, though never sufficiently to meet the needs of empire.

Abdülhamid understood the importance of agriculture and therefore promoted its development by founding specialist societies. The founding of the Agricultural Bank in 1888 was of great significance, for its aim was to regulate credit to farmers and cut out the moneylenders. Unfortunately, only the large landowners benefited by obtaining loans to enlarge and improve their holdings, while the small subsistence farmer could not obtain money and therefore stuck to old methods of cultivation. There was an expansion of large farms and farmers growing cash crops such as tobacco, cotton, figs, and olives that could be marketed for export. These prospered and became the rural bourgeoisie, influential in political life after 1908.

Commerce benefited from the export of agricultural goods and minerals. Unprotected industry, on the other hand, could not compete against the imports from Europe. Consequently, industry was local and small scale and artisans concentrated on such goods as leather, glass, cloth, paper, and hand-woven carpets. As a result, Ottoman industry remained underdeveloped, and only during the republic were measures taken to industrialize.

Politically, Abdülhamid's educational reforms proved to be the most significant, for they helped to undermine his regime. By introducing these reforms, the sultan dug his own political grave! Thus during his reign, education among the Muslim population expanded dramatically, though not as rapidly as among the non-Muslim communities. Attention was focused on middle and high schools and primary education was neglected so that overall illiteracy remained high. But secular education, especially for military and bureaucratic careers, became the ladder of upward mobility for the urban lower middle class. The Hamidian schools allowed people of the lower middle class to rise up the social ladder by joining the army. Many members of the Young Turks movement came from this social class and education enabled them to enter the bureaucracy. However, many in the same social group preferred the religious schools, the *medrese*, and opted for careers as lower *ülema*, as preachers in mosques. The secularly educated officers tended to be anti-Hamidian, and the sultan was always wary of the so-called *mektepli*, that is to say, the academy-trained, secularized officers. He therefore promoted officers who lacked such education but had risen from the ranks, their principal quality being their loyalty to the Ottoman throne. This duality in education continued until the end of empire and the two societies – the secular and the religious – lived side by side.

Education was the catalyst that produced the new and potentially revolutionary movement. Prior to the Hamidian reforms, members of the opposition belonged to the counter-elite. Such people – Ahmed Rıza (1859-1930) and Prince Sabaheddin (1877-1948), and many Young Turks in exile – did not want to change the political and social system, but merely to make it more inclusive and modern. Ahmed Rıza was extremely wary of Western involvement in Ottoman affairs, while Prince Sabaheddin was willing to use Western intervention to overthrow the sultan and establish a new regime. Abdülhamid was able to buy off many exiles by offering them sinecures in his regime; for them that was inclusion!

But members of the lower middle class, born in the 1870s and 1880s, who benefited from the new secular schools, considered the restoration of the constitution as just the beginning. They wanted to transform not just the political but the social, economic, and cultural life of the empire and turn their movement

into a revolution. Not surprisingly, the older leaders – Ahmed Rıza and Prince Sabaheddin – who were socially conservative, played only a minor role after 1908, Sabaheddin as the leader of the Liberal opposition. The political initiative passed to a different social class in 1908, opening a new page in Ottoman history.

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## 3

### The Constitutional Revolution, Reform, and War, 1908–1918

#### RESTORATION OF THE CONSTITUTION

Figuratively speaking, the Ottoman Empire entered the twentieth century on 23 July 1908, the day Sultan Abdülhamid II (r.1876–1909) restored the constitution he had shelved thirty years earlier. His decision generated great optimism and euphoria throughout the empire, as the new era held the promise of ‘liberty, equality and justice’ for all its citizens. Muslims and non-Muslims, as well as the various ethnic communities – Greeks, Bulgars, Macedonians, Armenians, Arabs, Kurds, Jews and Turks – embraced each other in the streets in anticipation of the constitutional age. Overnight, the press was free to publish without fear of censorship; people congregated in coffee houses, knowing that there were no Palace spies in their midst. In towns and cities, crowds marched with banners and musical bands to the governors’ offices and made speeches in praise of the new order. An amnesty was declared for political prisoners, and exiles began to return to Istanbul from Europe, Egypt, and other parts of the far-flung empire.

In the provinces, the event was celebrated with equal gusto. The heads of various committees who had opposed the sultan’s autocracy promised to cooperate and swore oaths of loyalty to the empire. The sultan’s advisers, though not the sultan himself, were