

The Muslim Empires

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Turks fight Christians at the Battle of Mohács

CHAPTER OUTLINE AND FOCUS QUESTIONS

The Ottoman Empire

Q What was the ethnic composition of the Ottoman Empire, and how did the government of the sultan administer such a diverse population? How did Ottoman policy in this regard compare with the policies applied in Europe and Asia?

The Safavids

Q What problems did the Safavid Empire face, and how did its rulers attempt to solve them? How did their approaches compare with those in the other Muslim empires?

The Grandeur of the Mughals

Q What role did Islam play in the Mughal Empire, and how did the Mughals' approach to religion compare with that of the Ottomans and the Safavids? What might explain the similarities and differences?

CRITICAL THINKING

Q What were the main characteristics of each of the Muslim empires, and in what ways did they resemble each other? How were they distinct from their European counterparts?

THE OTTOMAN ARMY, led by Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent, arrived at Mohács, on the plains of Hungary, on an August morning in 1526. The Turkish force numbered about 100,000 men, and its weapons included three hundred new long-range cannons. Facing them was a somewhat larger European force, clothed in heavy armor but armed with only one hundred older cannons.

The battle began at noon and was over in two hours. The flower of the Hungarian cavalry had been destroyed, and 20,000 foot soldiers had drowned in a nearby swamp. The Ottomans had lost fewer than two hundred men. Two weeks later, they seized the Hungarian capital at Buda and prepared to lay siege to the nearby Austrian city of Vienna. Europe was in a panic, but Mohács was to be the high point of Turkish expansion in Europe.

In launching their Age of Exploration, European rulers had hoped that by controlling global markets, they could curtail the power of Islam and reduce its threat to the security of Europe. But the dream of Christian nations to expand their influence around the globe at the expense of their great Muslim rival had not entirely been achieved. On the contrary, the Muslim world, which seemed to have entered a period of decline with the collapse of the Abbasid caliphate during the era of the Mongols, managed to revive in the shadow of Europe's Age of Exploration, a period that witnessed the rise of three great Muslim empires. These powerful Muslim states—of the Ottomans, the Safavids, and the Mughals—dominated the Middle East and the South Asian subcontinent and brought a measure of stability to a region that had been in turmoil for centuries. One of them—the Ottoman Empire—managed to impose its rule over much of eastern Europe and achieve a dominant position in the Mediterranean world.

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... century, much of
... severe Europe
... anarchy, and the Ottoman Empire had entered a
... gradual decline. But that decline was due more to
... factors than to the challenge posed by a resurgent

Ottoman Empire

QUESTIONS: What was the ethnic composition of the Ottoman Empire, and how did the government administer such a diverse population? How did Ottoman policy in this regard compare with policies applied in Europe and Asia?

Ottoman Turks were among the Turkic-speaking nomadic peoples who had spread westward from Central Asia in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries. The first to appear were the Seljuk Turks, who initially attempted to revive the declining Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad. Later they established themselves in the Anatolian peninsula as the successors to the Byzantine Empire. Turks served as warriors or administrators, while the peasants who tilled the farmland were mainly Greek.

The Rise of the Ottoman Turks

In the late thirteenth century, a new group of Turks under the tribal leader Osman (OS-MAHN) (1280–1326) began to consolidate power in the northwestern corner of the Anatolian peninsula. That land had been given to them by the Seljuk rulers as a reward for helping drive out the Mongols in the late thirteenth century. At first, the Osman Turks were relatively peaceful and engaged in pastoral pursuits, but as the Seljuk empire began to crumble in the early fourteenth century, the Osman Turks began to expand and founded the Osmanli (OS-MAHN-lee) dynasty, with its capital at Bursa (BURR-suh). The Osmanlis later came to be known as the Ottomans.

A key advantage for the Ottomans was their location in the northwestern corner of the peninsula. From there they were able to expand westward and eventually take over the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, between the Mediterranean and the Black Seas. The Byzantine Empire, of course, had controlled the area for centuries, serving as a buffer between the Muslim Middle East and the Latin West. The Byzantines, however, had been severely weakened by the sack of Constantinople in the Fourth Crusade in 1204 and the occupation of much of the empire by western Europeans for the next half century. In 1345, Ottoman forces under their leader Orkhan (OR-KHAHN) I (1326–1360) crossed the Bosphorus for the first time to support a usurper against the Byzantine emperor in Constantinople. Setting up their first European base at Gallipoli (GAH-LIP-poh-lee) at the Mediterranean entrance to the Dardanelles, Turkish forces expanded gradually into the Balkans and allied with fractious Serbian and Bulgar forces

against the Byzantines. In these unstable conditions, the Ottomans gradually established permanent settlements throughout the area, where Turkish provincial governors, called **beys** (BAYS) (from the Turkish *beg*, “knight”), collected taxes from the local Slavic peasants after driving out the previous landlords. The Ottoman leader now began to claim the title of **sultan** (SUL-tun) or sovereign of his domain.

In 1360, Orkhan was succeeded by his son Murad (MOO-RAHD) I, who consolidated Ottoman power in the Balkans, set up a capital at Edirne (EH-DEER-nay) (see Map 16.1), and gradually reduced the Byzantine emperor to a vassal. Murad did not initially attempt to conquer Constantinople because his forces were composed mostly of the traditional Turkish cavalry and lacked the ability to breach the strong walls of the city. Instead, he began to build up a strong military administration based on the recruitment of Christians into an elite guard. Called **Janissaries** (JAN-nih-say-reez) (from the Turkish *yeni cheri*, “new troops”), they were recruited from the local Christian population in the Balkans and then converted to Islam and trained as foot soldiers or administrators. One of the major advantages of the Janissaries was that they were directly subordinated to the sultanate and therefore owed their loyalty to the person of the sultan. Other military forces were organized by the beys and were thus loyal to their local tribal leaders.

The Janissary corps also represented a response to changes in warfare. As the knowledge of firearms spread in the late fourteenth century, the Turks began to master the new technology, including siege cannons and muskets (see the comparative essay “The Changing Face of War” on p. 453). The traditional nomadic cavalry charge was now outmoded and was superseded by infantry forces armed with muskets. Thus, the Janissaries provided a well-armed infantry that served both as an elite guard to protect the palace and as a means of extending Turkish control in the Balkans. With his new forces, Murad defeated the Serbs at the famous Battle of Kosovo (KAWSS-suh-voh) in 1389 and ended Serbian hegemony in the area.

Expansion of the Empire

Under Murad’s successor, Bayazid (BY-uh-ZEED) I (1389–1402), the Ottomans advanced northward, annexed Bulgaria, and slaughtered the French cavalry at a major battle on the Danube. A defeat at Ankara (AN-kuh-ruh) at the hands of the Mongol warrior Tamerlane (see Chapter 9) in 1402 proved to be only a temporary setback. When Mehmet (MEH-MET) II (1451–1481) succeeded to the throne, he was determined to capture Constantinople. Already in control of the Dardanelles, he ordered the construction of a major fortress on the Bosphorus just north of the city, which put the Turks in a position to strangle the Byzantines.

THE FALL OF CONSTANTINOPLE The last Byzantine emperor desperately called for help from the Europeans, but only the Genoese came to his defense. With 80,000 troops ranged against only 6,000 to 8,000 defenders, Mehmet laid siege to Constantinople in 1453. In their attack on the city,

administration during the imperial period was a Turkish tribal tradition and was similar in some ways to *fief*-holding in Europe. The empire was divided into provinces and districts governed by officials who, like their predecessors, combined both civil and military duties. They were assisted by bureaucrats trained in the *medrese* school in Istanbul. Senior officials were assigned land and supplying armies to the empire. These lands were turned out to the local cavalry elite called the *sipahis* (PAH-heez), who obtained their salaries by exacting a portion of all peasants in their fiefdoms. These local officials were not hereditary aristocrats, but sons often inherited their landholdings, and the vast majority were descendants of the *beys* who had formed the tribal elites before the imperial period.

CHRONOLOGY The Ottoman Empire

Reign of Osman I	1280–1326
Ottoman Turks cross the Bosphorus	1345
Murad I consolidates Turkish power in the Balkans	1360
Ottomans defeat the Serbian army at Kosovo	1389
Tamerlane defeats the Ottoman army at Ankara	1402
Reign of Mehmet II the Conqueror	1451–1481
Turkish conquest of Constantinople	1453
Turks defeat the Mamluks in Syria and seize Cairo	1516–1517
Reign of Suleyman I the Magnificent	1520–1566
Defeat of the Hungarians at Battle of Mohács	1526
Defeat of the Turks at Vienna	1529
Battle of Lepanto	1571
Second siege of Vienna	1683

Religion and Society in the Ottoman World

The most Turkic-speaking peoples in the Anatolian peninsula and throughout the Middle East, the Ottoman ruling elites were Sunni Muslims. Ottoman sultans had claimed the title of caliph (“defender of the faith”) since the early sixteenth century and thus were theoretically responsible for guiding the flock and maintaining Islamic law, the *Shari’a*. In practice, the sultan assigned these duties to a supreme religious authority, who administered the law and maintained a system of schools for educating Muslims.

Islamic law and customs were applied to all Muslims in the empire. Although most Turkic-speaking people were Sunni Muslims, some communities were attracted to Sufism (see Chapter 7) or other heterodox doctrines. The government tolerated such activities as long as their practitioners remained loyal to the empire, but in the early sixteenth century, unrest among these groups—some of whom converted to the Shi’ite version of Islam—outraged the conservative *ulama* and eventually led to war against the Safavids (see “The Safavids” later in this chapter).

THE TREATMENT OF MINORITIES Non-Muslims—mostly Orthodox Christians (Greeks and Slavs), Jews, and Armenian Christians—formed a significant minority within the empire, which treated them with relative tolerance. Non-Muslims were compelled to pay a head tax (as compensation for their exemption from military service), and they were permitted to practice their religion or convert to Islam (people who were already Muslim were prohibited from adopting another faith). Most of the population in European areas of the empire remained Christian, but in some places, such as the Balkan territory now known as Bosnia and Herzegovina, substantial numbers converted to Islam.

Each religious group within the empire was organized as an administrative unit called a *millet* (mi-LET) (“nation” or “community”). Each group, including the Muslims themselves, had its own patriarch, priest, or grand rabbi

who dealt as an intermediary with the government and administered the community according to its own laws. The leaders of the individual *millets* were responsible to the sultan and his officials for the behavior of the subjects under their care and collected taxes for transmission to the government. Each *millet* established its own system of justice, set its own educational policies, and provided welfare for the needy.

Nomadic peoples were placed in a separate *millet* and were subject to their own regulations and laws. They were divided into the traditional nomadic classifications of tribes, clans, and “tents” (individual families) and were governed by their hereditary chiefs, the *beys*. As we have seen, the *beys* were responsible for administration and for collecting taxes for the state.

SOCIAL CLASSES The subjects of the Ottoman Empire were also divided by occupation and place of residence. In addition to the ruling class, there were four main occupational groups: peasants, artisans, merchants, and pastoral peoples. The first three were classified as “urban” residents. Peasants tilled land that was leased to them by the state (ultimate ownership of all land resided with the sultan), but the land was deeded to them, so they were able to pass it on to their heirs. They were not allowed to sell the land and thus in practice were forced to remain on the soil. Taxes were based on the amount of land the peasants possessed and were paid to the local *sipahis*, who held the district in fief.

Artisans were organized according to craft guilds. Each guild, headed by a council of elders, was responsible not only for dealing with the governmental authorities but also for providing financial services, social security, and training for its members. Outside the ruling elite, merchants were the most privileged class in Ottoman society. They were largely exempt from government regulations and taxes and were therefore able in many cases to amass large fortunes.

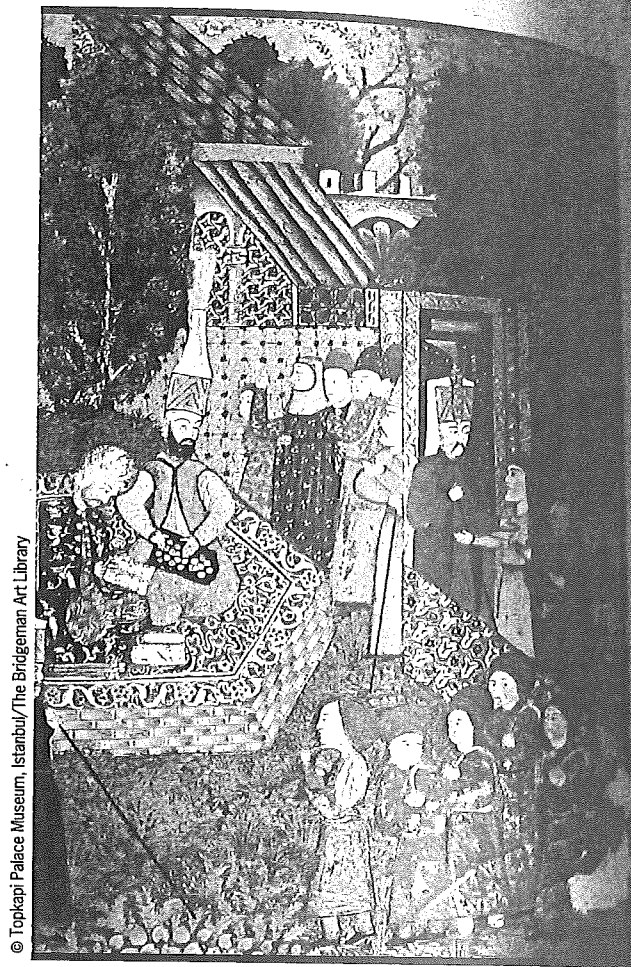
system was adopted that increasingly isolated the sultan in his palace. The position of the sultan was hereditary, with a son, although not necessarily the eldest, always succeeding the father. This practice led to chronic succession struggles upon the death of individual sultans, and the losers were often executed (strangled with a silk bowstring) or later imprisoned. Potential heirs to the throne were assigned as provincial governors to provide them with experience.

THE HAREM The heart of the sultan's power was in the Topkapi (tahp-KAH-pee) Palace in the center of Istanbul. Topkapi (meaning "cannon gate") was constructed in 1459 by Mehmet II and served as an administrative center as well as the private residence of the sultan and his family. Eventually, it had a staff of 20,000 employees. The private domain of the sultan was called the *harem* ("sacred place"). Here he resided with his concubines. Normally, a sultan did not marry but chose several concubines as his favorites; they were accorded this status after they gave birth to sons. When a son became a sultan, his mother became known as the queen mother and served as adviser to the throne. This tradition, initiated by the influential wife of Suleyman the Magnificent, often resulted in considerable authority for the queen mother in affairs of state.

Like the Janissaries, members of the harem were often of slave origin and formed an elite element in Ottoman society. Since the enslavement of Muslims was forbidden, slaves were taken among non-Islamic peoples. Some concubines were prisoners selected for the position, while others were purchased or offered to the sultan as gifts. They were then trained and educated like the Janissaries in a system called *devshirme* (dev-SHEER-may) ("collection"). *Devshirme* had originated in the practice of requiring local clan leaders to provide prisoners to the sultan as part of their tax obligation. Talented males were given special training for eventual placement in military or administrative positions, while their female counterparts were trained for service in the harem, with instruction in reading, the Qur'an, sewing and embroidery, and musical performance. They were ranked according to their status, and some were permitted to leave the harem to marry officials. If they were later divorced, they were sometimes allowed to return to the harem.

Unique to the Ottoman Empire from the fifteenth century onward was the exclusive use of slaves to reproduce its royal heirs. Contrary to myth, few of the women of the imperial harem were used for sexual purposes, as the majority were relatives of the sultan's extended family—sisters, daughters, widowed mothers, and in-laws, with their own personal slaves and entourages. Contemporary European observers compared the atmosphere in the Topkapi harem to a Christian nunnery, with its hierarchical organization, enforced chastity, and rule of silence.

Because of their proximity to the sultan, the women of the harem often wielded so much political power that the era has been called the "sultanate of women." Queen mothers administered the imperial household and engaged in diplomatic relations with other countries while controlling the marital alliances of their daughters with senior civilian and



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Recruitment of the Children. The Ottoman Empire, like its Chinese counterpart, sought to recruit its officials on the basis of merit. Through the system called *devshirme* ("collection"), youthful candidates were selected from the non-Muslim population in villages throughout the empire. In this painting, an imperial officer is counting coins to pay for the children's travel expenses to Istanbul, where they will undergo extensive academic and military training. Note the concern of two of the mothers and a priest as they question the official, who undoubtedly underwent the process himself as a child. As they leave their family and friends, the children carry their worldly possessions in bags slung over their shoulders.

military officials or members of other royal families in the region. One princess was married seven separate times from the age of two after her previous husbands died either in battle or by execution.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE GOVERNMENT The sultan ruled through an imperial council that met four days a week and was chaired by the grand vizier. The sultan often attended behind a screen, whence he could privately indicate his desires to the grand vizier. The latter presided over the imperial bureaucracy. Like the palace guard, the bureaucrats were not an exclusive group but were chosen at least partly by merit from a palace school for training officials. Most officials were Muslims by birth, but some talented Janissaries became senior members of the bureaucracy, and almost all the later grand viziers came from the *devshirme* system.