

## **Ottoman Empire**

The Ottoman Empire was a vast, multi-ethnic state that existed from the 14th century until the end of World War I. At its peak, it spanned three continents and included territories in Europe, Asia, and Africa. The empire was founded by Osman I in 1299 and lasted until 1922, when it was dissolved and replaced by the modern state of Turkey.

Throughout its history, the Ottoman Empire was known for its cultural diversity, political complexity, and military power. The empire was ruled by a succession of sultans, who were absolute monarchs with vast powers over their subjects. The sultans were assisted by a complex bureaucracy, which was responsible for governing the empire's diverse territories and populations.

The Ottoman Empire was a Sunni Muslim state, and Islam played a central role in its political and cultural life. However, the empire also included significant populations of Christians and Jews, who were allowed to practice their own religions under the Ottoman Millet System, a system of religious and legal autonomy that allowed each religious community to govern itself according to its own laws and customs.

One of the hallmarks of the Ottoman Empire was its military prowess. The Ottoman Army was a powerful force that was able to conquer and maintain control over vast territories. The empire's military success was due in part to its use of innovative tactics and technologies, such as gunpowder, and its ability to assimilate and integrate new populations and cultures.

Throughout its history, the Ottoman Empire faced a variety of challenges and conflicts, both internal and external. It underwent periods of reform and modernization, such as the Tanzimat in the mid-19th century, as well as periods of decline and turmoil. One of the most significant challenges faced by the Ottoman Empire was its decline in the face of rising European powers, which culminated in the empire's defeat in World War I.

After the war, the Ottoman Empire was dissolved and replaced by the modern state of Turkey, which was founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. The legacy of the Ottoman Empire can still be seen in many parts of the world, including the Middle East, the Balkans, and parts of Africa. Its cultural, political, and military achievements continue to be studied and debated today.

## **Ottoman Ruling System**

The Ottoman ruling system was based on a hierarchical structure that placed the sultan, or the Ottoman emperor, at the top of the system. The sultan was an absolute monarch who held vast powers over his subjects. The sultan was assisted by a complex bureaucracy that was responsible for governing the empire's diverse territories and populations.

The Ottoman Empire was divided into provinces, or vilayets, which were further subdivided into districts, or sanjaks. Each province was governed by a governor, or a vali, who was appointed by the sultan. The governor was responsible for maintaining law and order, collecting taxes, and implementing the sultan's policies.

Under the governor, there were a number of administrative officials, including judges, tax collectors, and military commanders, who were responsible for carrying out the day-to-day functions of government. The Ottoman Empire also had a system of religious and legal

autonomy, known as the Millet System, which allowed each religious community to govern itself according to its own laws and customs.

The Ottoman Empire was a Sunni Muslim state, and Islam played a central role in its political and cultural life. The sultan was regarded as both a political and religious leader, and he had the power to issue religious edicts, or fatwas, on matters of law and theology. The Ottoman Empire also had a complex system of Islamic law, known as the Sharia, which was used to regulate many aspects of daily life.

The Ottoman Empire's military was a powerful force that played a central role in the empire's success. The Ottoman Army was organized around a system of conscription, which required all able-bodied men to serve in the military for a period of time. The army was equipped with innovative technologies, such as gunpowder, and was able to assimilate and integrate new populations and cultures, which helped it to maintain its military dominance over a vast territory.

Throughout its history, the Ottoman Empire underwent periods of reform and modernization, such as the Tanzimat in the mid-19th century. However, the empire also faced challenges and conflicts, both internal and external, that contributed to its eventual decline and dissolution in the early 20th century.

### **Ottoman Conquest of Istanbul**

The Ottoman conquest of Istanbul, also known as the Fall of Constantinople, occurred on May 29, 1453, when the Ottoman army, under the leadership of Sultan Mehmed II, captured the city of Istanbul from the Byzantine Empire.

The Byzantine Empire had been in a state of decline for several centuries, and by the 15th century, it had lost much of its former power and territory. Istanbul, which was then known as Constantinople, was the capital of the Byzantine Empire and a key strategic city for both the Byzantines and their enemies.

In 1451, Mehmed II became the sultan of the Ottoman Empire, and he was determined to capture Constantinople and make it the new capital of the Ottoman Empire. Mehmed II assembled a massive army and navy, and in April 1453, he began a siege of Constantinople.

The Byzantine defenders, led by Emperor Constantine XI, put up a valiant defense, but they were outnumbered and outgunned by the Ottoman forces. Mehmed II used innovative tactics, such as building massive cannons, to breach the city walls and gain entry to the city.

After a fierce battle, the Ottoman forces captured Constantinople on May 29, 1453, ending the Byzantine Empire and marking the beginning of the Ottoman Empire's rise to power. Mehmed II made Istanbul the new capital of the Ottoman Empire, and the city became a center of Islamic culture and civilization.

The conquest of Istanbul was a significant event in world history, as it marked the end of the Byzantine Empire and the beginning of the Ottoman Empire's domination of the Mediterranean world. The Ottoman Empire would go on to become one of the most powerful

and influential empires in history, lasting for more than 600 years until its dissolution after World War I.

## **Mehmet II**

Mehmed II, also known as Mehmed the Conqueror, was a sultan of the Ottoman Empire who reigned twice, from 1444 to 1446 and from 1451 to 1481. He is best known for his conquest of Constantinople, which occurred in 1453 and marked the end of the Byzantine Empire.

Mehmed II was born in 1432 to Sultan Murad II and was trained in the art of warfare and administration from a young age. He became sultan for the first time in 1444, but was forced to abdicate two years later in favor of his father, who had returned to the throne.

After his father's death in 1451, Mehmed II returned to power and immediately set his sights on conquering Constantinople. He assembled a massive army and navy, and in April 1453, he began a siege of the city.

Mehmed II used innovative tactics, such as building massive cannons, to breach the city walls and gain entry to the city. After a fierce battle, the Ottoman forces captured Constantinople on May 29, 1453, marking the end of the Byzantine Empire and the beginning of the Ottoman Empire's rise to power.

Mehmed II was a skilled administrator and military strategist, and during his reign, he expanded the Ottoman Empire's territory, reformed the legal system, and promoted the arts and sciences. He was also known for his religious tolerance and was known to have appointed officials from different religious backgrounds to high positions in his government.

Mehmed II died in 1481 at the age of 49, and he is remembered as one of the greatest rulers in Ottoman history. His conquest of Constantinople is widely regarded as one of the most significant events in world history, as it marked the end of the Byzantine Empire and the beginning of the Ottoman Empire's domination of the Mediterranean world.

## **Janissary Army**

The Janissaries were an elite infantry unit in the Ottoman Empire. They were originally created in the 14th century by Sultan Murad I as a personal bodyguard force, but they later evolved into a standing army unit made up of Christian boys who were taken from their families and raised to serve the Ottoman Empire.

The Janissaries were recruited from the Balkans and other parts of Europe, and they were trained in the Ottoman military tradition and the Islamic faith. They were known for their loyalty to the Ottoman sultan and for their military prowess.

The Janissaries were organized into a hierarchical system, with the highest-ranking members serving as advisors to the sultan and the lower-ranking members serving as foot soldiers. They were also divided into various units based on their skills and training, such as the infantry, the artillery, and the cavalry.

The Janissaries were equipped with the latest military technology, including firearms and cannons, and they played a key role in the Ottoman Empire's military successes. They were also known for their distinctive uniform, which included a tall, cylindrical hat and a long robe.

Over time, the Janissaries became a powerful political force in the Ottoman Empire, and they were able to influence government policies and decisions. However, their power eventually led to corruption and abuse, and they were disbanded in 1826 by Sultan Mahmud II, who saw them as a threat to his rule.

Despite their eventual downfall, the Janissaries played an important role in the Ottoman Empire's military and political history, and they remain a significant part of Ottoman culture and identity.

### **Nation/Community (Millet) System**

The concept of the nation system did not exist in the Ottoman Empire in the modern sense. Instead, the Ottoman Empire had a system of millets, which were religious communities that were recognized and given certain rights and autonomy within the empire. The millets were organized based on religious affiliation, and each millet was led by a religious leader who was responsible for administering the community's affairs.

Under the millet system, the Ottoman Empire recognized the rights of non-Muslim communities, including Christians and Jews, to practice their religion and govern themselves according to their own customs and traditions. Each millet had its own laws and courts, and the Ottoman government generally did not interfere in the millet's internal affairs.

While the millet system provided a degree of autonomy and religious freedom to non-Muslim communities in the Ottoman Empire, it was not a system based on national identity or the idea of a "nation." Instead, it was a system that recognized the diversity of religious and cultural groups within the empire and sought to accommodate their different needs and practices. However, over time, the millet system contributed to the development of separate communal identities and helped to shape the ethnic and religious diversity of the region.

The Ottoman Empire was a vast, multiethnic and multireligious empire, with a complex social structure that included many different communities. The communities of the Ottoman Empire were organized around religious affiliation, and each community was granted a degree of autonomy and self-governance under the Ottoman millet system.

The millet system recognized the diversity of religious and cultural groups within the empire and allowed each community to govern itself according to its own laws and customs. The millets were led by religious leaders who were responsible for administering the community's affairs and representing its interests to the Ottoman state.

Some of the major communities in the Ottoman Empire included:

1. **Muslims:** Muslims were the largest religious group in the Ottoman Empire and included people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, such as Turks, Arabs, and Albanians. Muslims were organized into a variety of groups based on their social and economic status, including the ruling elite, the military, and the peasantry.

2. Christians: Christians made up a significant minority of the Ottoman Empire and were organized into several different millets based on their religious affiliation. The largest Christian millet was the Greek Orthodox millet, followed by the Armenian and Syrian Orthodox millets.
3. Jews: Jews were also organized into their own millet, which was led by a chief rabbi. The Ottoman Empire was home to a significant Jewish community, particularly in Istanbul, Salonica, and other urban centers.
4. Other groups: The Ottoman Empire was also home to smaller communities of Druze, Alawites, Yazidis, and other religious and ethnic groups.

Despite the autonomy granted to each community under the millet system, the Ottoman state retained a significant degree of control over all aspects of life within the empire. The Ottoman government was responsible for maintaining law and order, collecting taxes, and defending the empire against external threats. However, the millet system allowed for a degree of diversity and tolerance within the Ottoman Empire and contributed to its cultural and intellectual richness.

The Ottoman Millet System was a system of governance used in the Ottoman Empire that allowed for separate legal and administrative systems for different religious communities, or millets. The term "millet" referred to a community of people who shared a common religion and were allowed to govern themselves according to their own laws and customs.

Under the Millet System, each millet was headed by a religious leader, who was responsible for the administration of the millet's affairs, including education, justice, and social welfare. The leaders of each millet were appointed by the Ottoman government and were given a significant degree of autonomy in their own affairs.

The Millet System was established in the late 16th century and was based on the principle of religious tolerance. The Ottoman Empire was home to a diverse range of religious communities, including Muslims, Christians, and Jews, and the Millet System allowed these communities to coexist peacefully under Ottoman rule.

The Millet System was abolished in the early 20th century, as part of a series of reforms aimed at modernizing the Ottoman Empire. However, the legacy of the Millet System can still be seen in the contemporary Middle East, where religious and ethnic communities continue to maintain their own distinct identities and legal systems.

### **Devşirme (Gathering) System**

The Ottoman Devşirme System was a form of military recruitment that was used in the Ottoman Empire during the 14th to 17th centuries. The term "devşirme" means "collection" or "gathering" in Turkish, and the system involved the collection of young boys, usually between the ages of 8 and 18, from Christian families in the Balkans and Anatolia to serve in the Ottoman military.

Under the Devşirme System, the Ottoman authorities would select boys from Christian families based on their physical and intellectual abilities. These boys would then be taken

from their families and sent to special schools called Enderun, where they would receive an education in Turkish language, Islamic religion, and military tactics.

After completing their education, the boys would be assigned to various branches of the Ottoman military, such as the Janissaries, who were the elite infantry units of the Ottoman Empire. The Devsirme soldiers were highly trained and disciplined, and they were considered to be some of the most loyal and effective soldiers in the Ottoman army.

The Devsirme System was controversial, as it involved the forced removal of young boys from their families and their conversion to Islam. However, it was also seen as a way for non-Muslim families to rise in social status and gain opportunities that were otherwise unavailable to them in the rigid social hierarchy of the Ottoman Empire.

Over time, the Devsirme System became less common as the Ottoman Empire began to rely more on the recruitment of soldiers from within the empire's Muslim population. The system was officially abolished in the late 17th century, although some elements of the system continued to be used in the recruitment of soldiers for the Janissary corps.

### **Ottoman Armenian Community**

The Ottoman Armenian community refers to the Armenian population that lived within the Ottoman Empire, which was a multi-ethnic state that existed from the late 13th century until the end of World War I. The Ottoman Empire included modern-day Turkey, as well as parts of southeastern Europe, western Asia, and northern Africa.

The Armenian community in the Ottoman Empire was one of the largest and oldest Christian communities in the region. Armenians had lived in the area for thousands of years, and their culture and language had developed distinct characteristics.

During the Ottoman Empire, the Armenian community was largely concentrated in eastern Anatolia, in cities such as Istanbul, Van, and Diyarbakir. Armenians were active in various professions, including commerce, crafts, and agriculture, and they were known for their entrepreneurial skills.

### **Ottoman Greek Community**

The Ottoman Greek community refers to the Greek population that lived in the Ottoman Empire, which was a multi-ethnic state that existed from the 14th century until the end of World War I. Greeks have a long history in the region, and their presence can be traced back to ancient times.

During the Ottoman Empire, Greeks were one of the many ethnic and religious groups living within the empire's borders. They were primarily Orthodox Christians, and they had their own unique language and culture. Greeks were dispersed throughout the empire, but they were particularly concentrated in the western regions of Anatolia, as well as in the Balkans.

Throughout the Ottoman period, Greeks faced a variety of challenges and hardships. They were subject to discriminatory laws and policies, and there were occasional outbreaks of



violence against them. Nevertheless, they were able to maintain a distinct identity and culture, and they contributed significantly to Ottoman society and economy.

One of the most significant events in the history of the Ottoman Greek community was the Greek War of Independence, which took place in the early 19th century. The war resulted in the establishment of an independent Greek state, which led to the emigration of many Greeks from the Ottoman Empire.

After the Greek War of Independence, the Ottoman Empire underwent a period of reform known as the Tanzimat, which aimed to modernize and liberalize the empire's institutions. As a result of these reforms, Greeks were able to participate more fully in Ottoman society and to make significant contributions to the empire's economy and culture.

However, tensions between Greeks and Ottomans continued to simmer, and during the late Ottoman period, there were outbreaks of violence and repression against Greeks, particularly in the wake of the Balkan Wars and World War I. Ultimately, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire led to the emigration of most of the Greek population from the region.

### **Ottoman Jewish Community**

The Ottoman Jewish community refers to the Jewish population that lived in the Ottoman Empire, which was a multi-ethnic state that existed from the 14th century until the end of World War I. Jews have a long history in the region, and their presence can be traced back to ancient times.

During the Ottoman Empire, Jews were one of the many ethnic and religious groups living within the empire's borders. They were primarily Sephardic Jews, who had been expelled from Spain in 1492 and had found refuge in the Ottoman Empire. Later, Ashkenazi Jews also settled in the Ottoman Empire, particularly in the cities of Istanbul, Salonica, and Izmir.

Jews were dispersed throughout the empire, but they were particularly concentrated in urban areas, where they were involved in commerce and crafts. They were able to maintain a distinct identity and culture, and they contributed significantly to Ottoman society and economy.

One of the most significant events in the history of the Ottoman Jewish community was the establishment of the Ottoman Millet System. This was a system of religious and legal autonomy that allowed each religious community in the empire to govern itself according to its own laws and customs. Under this system, Jews were able to establish their own courts, schools, and other institutions.

Throughout the Ottoman period, Jews faced a variety of challenges and hardships. They were subject to discriminatory laws and policies, and there were occasional outbreaks of violence against them. Nevertheless, they were able to thrive and to make significant contributions to Ottoman society and culture.

During World War I, many Jews were affected by the turmoil and violence of the war, and some were killed or forced to flee their homes. However, the end of the war and the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 marked a new era of stability and progress

for the Jewish community. Today, there is still a small Jewish community in Turkey, primarily located in Istanbul.

## **Harem**

The harem system in the Ottoman Empire referred to the living quarters and administrative offices of the Ottoman sultan, as well as the women who lived there. The word "harem" comes from the Arabic word "haram," which means "forbidden," and it was used to describe the private areas of a home that were off-limits to outsiders.

The Ottoman harem was a complex social and political system that included the sultan's wives, concubines, female relatives, eunuchs, and other household staff. It was a hierarchical system, with the sultan at the top and the other members ranked according to their status and position within the harem.

The women of the harem were largely segregated from the outside world and were subject to strict rules and regulations. They were expected to live according to Islamic customs and to serve the sultan and the Ottoman state in various capacities, such as by bearing children or serving as political advisors.

The harem system was also a way for the Ottoman sultans to maintain their power and authority. By marrying into powerful families and keeping their female relatives under their control, the sultans were able to forge political alliances and ensure the loyalty of important figures within the Ottoman state.

Despite its reputation as a place of luxury and decadence, the harem was also a site of political intrigue and competition, as the women vied for the sultan's favor and influence. Some women in the harem were able to attain positions of power and influence, while others were relegated to more menial tasks.

The harem system remained an important part of Ottoman court life throughout the empire's history, although its power and influence waned over time as the Ottoman state became more centralized and bureaucratic.

## **Ottoman Tax System**

The Ottoman Empire had a complex tax system that evolved over time, but generally followed a pattern of collecting revenue from various sources to support the needs of the state. The Ottoman tax system was based on the concept of "fiscal centralization," in which the state controlled and collected all taxes and revenues, rather than relying on local officials to collect them.

The primary sources of revenue for the Ottoman state included:

1. Land tax (haraç): This tax was collected from landowners, who were required to pay a percentage of their crop or land value to the state. The tax was collected by tax farmers (iltizam holders) who bid on the right to collect the tax in a particular region or province.



2. Head tax (cizye): This tax was levied on non-Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire, including Christians and Jews, who were exempt from military service. The tax was intended to compensate for the exemption and was collected based on a person's age and gender.
3. Customs duties (resm-i gumruk): These were taxes on goods imported or exported from the Ottoman Empire. The state controlled all ports and borders, and the customs duties were collected by state officials.
4. Other taxes: The Ottoman state also collected taxes on a variety of other goods and services, including livestock, textiles, and public services such as bridges and roads.

The Ottoman tax system was often criticized for its complexity and the burden it placed on the common people. The tax farmers who collected the land tax were often accused of exploiting the peasantry, while the head tax was seen as discriminatory against non-Muslims. Over time, the Ottoman state made efforts to reform the tax system and reduce the burden on the population, but the system remained in place until the empire's collapse in the early 20th century.

### **Tanzimat Fermanı – Hatt-ı Sharif – Imperial Edict of reorganization**

The Tanzimat Fermanı (or "Reform Edict") was a decree issued by the Ottoman Sultan Abdülmecid I in 1839. It marked the beginning of a series of reforms known as the Tanzimat period, which aimed to modernize the Ottoman Empire and strengthen its position vis-à-vis the European powers.

The Tanzimat Fermanı contained a number of provisions, including:

1. Equality before the law: The Ferman granted all Ottoman subjects, regardless of their religion or ethnicity, equal rights and protections under the law.
2. Creation of a modern legal system: The Ferman called for the creation of a new legal system, based on European models, that would be applied uniformly throughout the Ottoman Empire.
3. New administrative system: The Ferman established a new administrative system, which divided the empire into provinces (vilayets) and districts (sanjaks) and created a system of appointed governors and officials.
4. Military reforms: The Ferman called for the creation of a modern, professional army, trained and equipped with the latest European technology.
5. Religious toleration: The Ferman called for greater religious toleration and the protection of non-Muslim minorities.

The Tanzimat Fermanı marked a significant departure from traditional Ottoman practices, which had been characterized by a highly centralized, authoritarian system of government. The reforms were intended to create a more modern, efficient, and effective state, better able to compete with the European powers. However, the reforms were also met with resistance from traditionalists, who viewed them as a threat to Ottoman identity and culture. Despite these challenges, the Tanzimat reforms continued to be implemented throughout the latter half of the 19th century, helping to modernize the Ottoman Empire and bring it more in line with European norms and values.

## **Islahat Fermanı – reform edict**

The Islahat Fermanı (or "Reform Edict") was a series of decrees issued by the Ottoman Sultan Abdülmecid I in 1856. The edict was part of a larger effort by the Ottoman Empire to modernize and reform its institutions in the face of mounting pressure from the European powers.

The Islahat Fermanı contained a number of provisions, including:

1. Religious toleration: The Ferman granted greater religious freedom and protections to non-Muslim minorities, including Christians and Jews.
2. Equality before the law: The Ferman extended the principle of equality before the law to all Ottoman subjects, regardless of their religion or ethnicity.
3. Property rights: The Ferman granted greater protections for property rights and the right to own and transfer property.
4. Conscription: The Ferman introduced a new system of conscription for the Ottoman military, based on European models.
5. Administrative reforms: The Ferman called for a series of administrative reforms, including the creation of a new system of provincial governors and the establishment of a centralized administrative bureaucracy.

The Islahat Fermanı was seen as a significant step forward in Ottoman modernization and reform. However, its implementation was limited by a number of factors, including resistance from conservative elements within Ottoman society, financial constraints, and the ongoing challenge of managing a vast and diverse empire. Despite these challenges, the reforms initiated by the Islahat Fermanı would continue to shape Ottoman governance and society well into the 20th century.

## **Meşrutiyet – constitutional monarchy**

Meşrutiyet (or "Constitutionalism") was a movement in the late Ottoman Empire that called for a more democratic and representative form of government. The movement emerged in the late 19th century in response to the growing power of European nations and the desire among some Ottoman intellectuals and political leaders for greater political and civil rights.

The Meşrutiyet movement gained momentum in the wake of the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, which overthrew the absolute rule of Sultan Abdulhamid II and established a constitutional monarchy in the Ottoman Empire. The new government, led by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), introduced a series of reforms aimed at modernizing the Ottoman state and strengthening its position vis-à-vis the European powers.

The most important of these reforms was the Ottoman Constitution of 1876, which established a bicameral parliament (Meclis-i Mebusan) and a cabinet government led by a Grand Vizier. The constitution guaranteed certain basic rights and freedoms, including freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, and the right to a fair trial. The parliament was initially dominated by members of the urban elite, but efforts were made to broaden its membership and extend its authority to the provinces.

The Meşrutiyet period was marked by a number of political and social changes, including the growth of nationalist movements and the emergence of new political parties. However, the

period was also characterized by political instability and economic difficulties, as the Ottoman Empire struggled to modernize and compete with the more advanced European powers.

The Meşrutiyet movement came to an end with the outbreak of World War I and the subsequent collapse of the Ottoman Empire. However, its legacy would live on in the nationalist movements that emerged in the aftermath of the war, which would ultimately lead to the establishment of new, independent states in the former Ottoman territories.