

READING #2

The Ottoman Empire

Extending into modern-day Turkey as well as to the Balkan areas of Europe and parts of North Africa and Southeast Asia, the *Ottoman Empire* was the largest and most enduring of the great Islamic empires of this period. Founded by the Osman Dynasty in the 1300s, the empire lasted until its defeat in 1918 by the Allies in World War I. Thus, a single dynasty controlled the empire for over 600 years.

Mehmed II Called “the Conqueror,” *Mehmed II* (ruled 1451–1481) firmly established the empire’s capital after his forces besieged Constantinople (once the center of the Byzantine Empire) in 1453. Despite its triple fortifications, the city fell as its walls crumbled under the bombardment of Ottoman cannon. Under Mehmed II’s rule, the city—its name changed to Istanbul—prospered due to its location, which was a nexus for trade; the city controlled the *Bosporus Strait*, the only waterway linking the Aegean Sea with the Black Sea. Under Mehmed II, Istanbul grew even more beautiful and expanded across both sides of the strait. One famous landmark is the royal residence of the sultans, *Topkapi Palace*, which began construction during the reign of Mehmed II.

The armies of Mehmed II next seized lands around the western edge of the Black Sea. Then they moved into the Balkans in Southeast Europe. To counter the power of Venice, Mehmed strengthened the Ottoman navy and attacked various areas of Italy. Although he did not conquer Venice, he forced the city to pay him a yearly tax. In the early sixteenth century, the Ottomans added to their empire lands in present-day Syria, Israel, Egypt, and Algeria. When the Mamluk Dynasty declined, Istanbul became a center of Islam. (For more on the Mamluk Empire, see page 150.)

To staff their military and their government, the Ottoman sultans used a selection system called *devshirme*, begun in the late fourteenth century and expanded in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Through this system, Christian boys who were subjects of the empire were recruited by force to serve in the Ottoman government. Boys ages 8 to 20 were taken each year

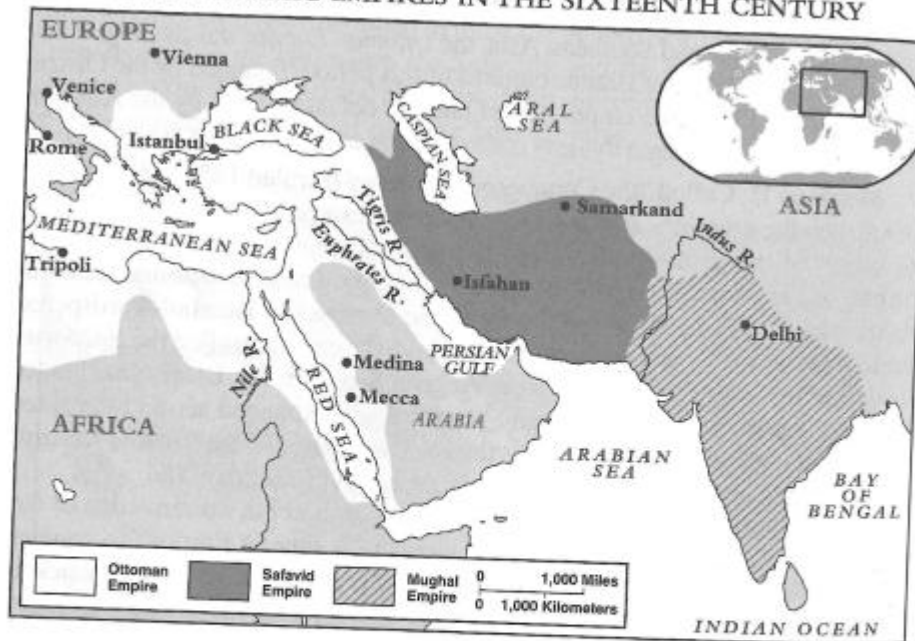
from conquered Christian lands in Europe. After converting to Islam, they were taught various skills in politics, the arts, and the military. The most famous group, called *Janissaries*, formed elite forces in the Ottoman army. Other boys were groomed to become administrators of the newly conquered territories; some were scribes, tax collectors, and even diplomats.

In some ways, becoming a Janissary provided a path of upward mobility in the Ottoman Empire, even though the Janissaries continued to be called “slaves of the state.” Some parents even wanted their sons to be recruited into the service.

Suleiman I The Ottoman Empire reached its peak under *Suleiman I* (ruled 1520–1566). His armies overran Hungary in 1526 and, by 1529, were hammering at the gates of *Vienna*, the main city in Austria. Their attempt to take Vienna failed twice, but the ability of the Ottomans to send troops so far into the Christian Europe caused great fear there.

In 1522, Suleiman’s navy captured the island of *Rhodes* (now part of Greece) in the eastern Mediterranean, which had long been a stronghold of Christian knights. In the 1550s, the Ottoman navy took control of Tripoli in North Africa.

THREE ISLAMIC EMPIRES IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY



Suleiman ordered many mosques, forts, and other great buildings constructed in the cities under his control. For example, he ordered the construction in Istanbul of the magnificent *Suleimani Mosque*, which can be seen from the Golden Horn promontory that juts into the Black Sea at its convergence with the Bosphorus. Suleiman also reformed the empire's legal system and thus came to be called "the Lawgiver."

Ottoman Economy Ottoman trade was energized in its early years by repeated expansion through conquest. Rulers forced people in occupied areas to send monetary tribute as well as goods to the central government in Istanbul. The Ottoman navy allowed traders to serve as *middlemen*, handling goods from both directions and receiving profit in exchange, in much the same way that the Dutch served as middlemen in Western Europe. In this way, some European styles and furnishings became popular in the empire.

Because of his control of the North African coast, the Ottoman sultan controlled the trade in gold and slaves. Eastern luxuries, particularly silk and spices, continued to be popular trade items, but the Ottomans also had a strong trade in creations of their own artisans: distinctive tiles, pottery, and rugs, for example.

To finance an economy backed by a powerful military, the Ottomans levied taxes on the peasants. Local officials and tax collectors, distant from the central government, grew wealthy and corrupt from skimming money from the taxes in their areas. Agricultural villages continued to be burdened with the upkeep of officers and troops. This burden of taxes and the military would eventually contribute to the economic decline of the empire.

An additional reason for the flourishing of trade in the early years of the empire was that the tolerant sultans allowed Christian and Jewish merchants to prosper as long as they paid taxes. Also, to increase commerce, the Ottomans signed *trade agreements* such as those with France that opened up commerce between the two powers. However, the terms of the agreements with France would ultimately diminish the Ottoman profits in the long term.

Many business agreements were signed in the empire's *coffeehouses*, settings not only of business transactions but also of cultural events such as poetry recitations and scholarly debates. They also hosted trade meetings with representatives of such areas as Yemen, the major exporter of coffee. Trade agreements made by the sultans allowed European importers to purchase coffee through the Ottoman Empire at rates cheaper than direct purchase from Yemen.

Interaction with the Americas led to the introduction of new crops on Ottoman lands that could be sold for cash. Near the city of Izmir, typical agricultural products such as dates, nuts, and olive oil were replaced by cotton and tobacco. Even though the use of the latter was officially prohibited throughout the Ottoman Empire, it quickly became popular among citizens.

By the seventeenth century, profits from imports dwindled. Problems in the neighboring Safavid Empire, for example, led to a reduction in silk production.

Social Classes The Ottoman social system was built around a warrior aristocracy that soon began to compete for positions in the bureaucracy with the *ulama* (scholars and experts in Islamic law). Within the military, more and more power and prestige was assumed by the Janissaries, who ultimately tried to mount coups against the sultans. The tension between the military elite and absolutist rulers became characteristic of all three Islamic Gunpowder Empires.

As sultans became less effective and less capable, strong advisors called *viziers* came to occupy influential positions in government, where they spoke

for the sultan. Women also played social and political roles at court. Many wives and concubines of the sultan tried to promote their own children as likely heirs to the throne, giving rise to "harem politics," a reference to the *harem*, a residence where a man's wives and concubines lived.

Merchants and artisans formed a small middle class; below the middle class were the peasants, who were usually poor—particularly because they had to pay tribute to the government to help support the Ottoman armies. Below the peasants were slaves. They came from many areas as the Ottoman armies penetrated into Central and Eastern Europe, capturing prisoners of war in the Ukraine and elsewhere. Other European slaves were those captured by the *Barbary pirates* in the Mediterranean and then sold to the sultan or other high-ranking officials. Some people were *impressed*, or forced into service, in the navy as galley slaves—estimates of the number of people impressed go as high as a million or more between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries.

One reason for the success of the empire was its relative tolerance toward Jews and Christians. The empire accepted Jews who had been driven out of Spain in 1492; Mehmed II issued an invitation to them to settle in Istanbul. Some members of the Jewish community, which expanded rapidly after 1492, became court physicians and diplomats; others contributed to the literary community and (according to some accounts) were responsible for bringing the printing press to the Ottoman Empire. Often, however, Jews were only permitted to live in specified areas of the cities. Under Suleiman, Christians and Jews were allowed to worship and live with few restrictions as long as they paid a tax required of all non-Muslims in the empire. The elite of the empire, however, were always Muslim.

Decline of the Ottoman Empire In 1571, after Suleiman's death, a European force made up mostly of Spaniards and Venetians defeated the Ottomans in a great naval conflict known as the *Battle of Lepanto*. After the reign of Suleiman, the Ottomans fell victim to weak sultans and strong European neighbors. In time, the empire became known as the "Sick Man of Europe." Successors to Suleiman were often held hostage to harem politics conducted by women and eunuchs. Although neither group would have the opportunity to rule, women and eunuchs nevertheless became powerful behind the scenes. The Ottoman Empire as a whole grew less tolerant of non-Muslims and more insular. Slavery there continued into the twentieth century.

Continuity and Change Under the Ottomans While tremendous changes in government and religion took place in the area controlled by the Ottoman Empire, the arts, culture, and the economy showed continuities. Until 1453, much of the area had been controlled by the Byzantine Empire and followed the Eastern Orthodox religion. After the fall of Constantinople, the area became Ottoman and the dominant religion became Islam. The emperor was replaced by a sultan, and the Byzantine Empire's Justinian Law was replaced by *shariah*. Shariah is a system of Islamic jurisprudence that deals with all aspects of life, such as criminal justice, marital laws, and issues of inheritance, to name but a few.

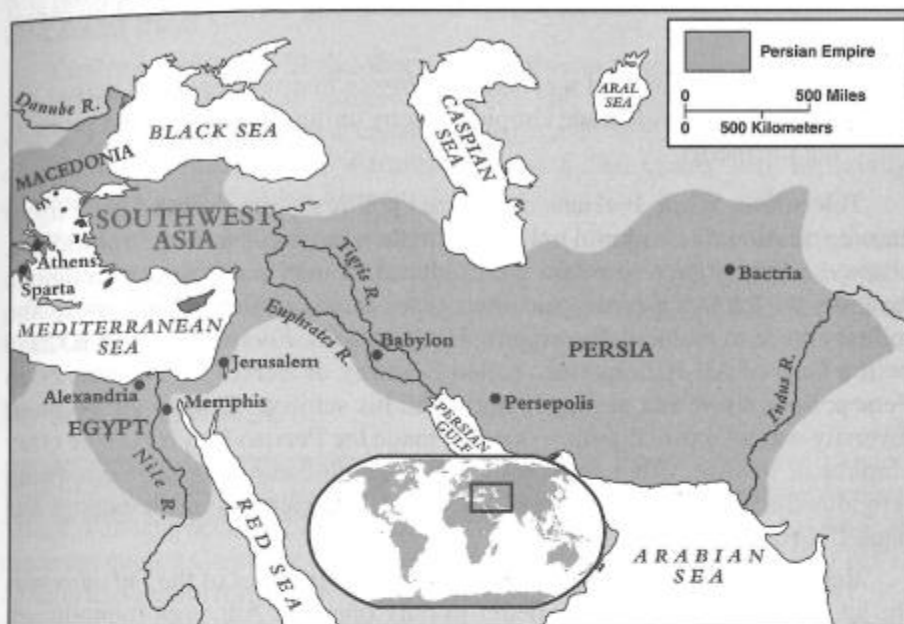
Despite the above differences, continuities existed. Constantinople, newly named Istanbul, remained the western end of the overland Silk Roads, and the *Grand Bazaar* there continued to be full of many foreign imports: amber and wood products from Russia, spices and silk from China, ivory and slaves from Africa, and carpets from Persia. Demand for goods that passed through Constantinople created an export market to other cities of the empire. Coffeehouses, although banned by Islamic law, continued to do a thriving business throughout the towns of the empire.

Istanbul remained a center of arts and learning. Poets and scholars from across Asia met in coffeehouses and gardens, creating a rich intellectual atmosphere as they discussed works by Aristotle and other Greek writers, as well as the works of many Arabic scholars, such as Ibn Khaldun, quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Cultural contributions of the Ottomans included the restoration of some of the glorious buildings of Constantinople, most notably the cathedral of Saint Sophia (which the Ottomans turned into a grand mosque) and the Topkapi Palace. From the time of Mehmed II, who established a workshop for their production, Ottoman *miniature paintings* and illuminated manuscripts became famous. As in Europe, artisans belonged to guilds that set high standards, particularly for artisans working in gold, silver, and silk.

Persian Empire

Beginning in 559 B.C.E., under the leadership of *Cyrus the Great* (ruled 559–529 B.C.E.) the *Persians* conquered most of the lands from the Aegean Sea (west of Turkey) to the borders of India. After 30 years of rule, Cyrus was succeeded by his son *Cambyses*, who conquered Egypt and parts of Southeast Europe. Their empire became known as the *Achaemenid Empire*, sometimes called the First Persian Empire. It united three of the earliest centers of civilization—Mesopotamia, Egypt, and India—into one powerful empire, covering a territory almost the size of the United States. It was the largest, most diverse empire the world had yet seen, including more than 70 distinct ethnic groups

THE PERSIAN EMPIRE UNDER THE ACHAEMENIDS



The Reign of Darius Like rulers in Egypt and China and other places, Persian rulers supported their legitimacy with claims that they ruled by divine right. However, their power rested upon their own abilities to build and hold an empire. Ruling such a large empire in an era when transportation and communication were so slow required new ways of thinking about power. Under *Darius I* (ruled 522–486 B.C.E.), Persia divided lands it conquered into provinces so that the king's policies announced in the capital of Persepolis could be administered throughout the empire. Then, rather than simply demand the loyalty of rulers who were selected locally, Darius created a new position—*satrap*, a ruler of a province who was responsible to the emperor, not to local leaders. Finally, inspectors, called “The Eyes and Ears of the King,” traveled to each province and reported to the king on the behavior of the satraps. The provincial structure, with satraps and inspectors, created an efficient administrative bureaucracy.

To pay for this bureaucracy, Darius instituted regular tax payments. The flow of tax dollars into the government enabled the Persians to fund several magnificent projects under Darius.

- The capital city, *Persepolis*, which was located in what is now Iran, became a celebrated city, featuring an impressive royal palace and celebrating the artistic traditions of several groups in the empire.
- The *Royal Road*, which spanned some 1,500 miles across the empire, was the most famous of the network of roads built to encourage trade. Darius added an efficient courier service with postal stations along this road.

- Darius also instituted the construction of *caravanserais*, which were combination inns and markets for people traveling the Royal Road by camel caravan.
- The empire instituted a *common currency* that was accepted across the empire. This made trade simpler thereby uniting the empire and promoting prosperity.

Toleration While Persians centralized political power, they did not try to enforce religious and cultural uniformity in their empire. Darius I, in particular, allowed ethnic groups to retain their cultural identity and tolerated religious diversity as long as people paid their taxes and contributed soldiers to the military force to maintain the empire. His successor, *Xerxes* (519–465 B.C.E.) built a Gate of All Nations (also called Gateway of Xerxes) at an entrance to Persepolis to show that he was honoring all his subjects. Persian toleration of diversity was an unusual policy, one that made the Persian Empire unlike other empires of its time. (Test prep: Write a paragraph comparing and contrasting

Society Persian society had much the same social stratification as earlier empires of the region. However, because of its size, it had a larger class of educated, well-paid government workers. This bureaucracy included accountants, administrators, tax collectors, and translators.

Similarly, the number of slaves in Persia was much greater than in other empires. Farmers owned slaves, using them as agricultural laborers, and their numbers increased as agricultural production increased. Other slaves were servants to city-dwellers, and still others were owned by the government and used to build roads, large buildings, and irrigation systems throughout Persia.

Even though Persian society was patriarchal, women were allowed to own and manage property, and if they worked in a shop, they were allowed to keep their wages. Common Persian women engaged in economic activities,

including weaving textiles and trading them for food for their families. Divorce was possible. Some aristocratic Persian women wore veils, mainly to advertise their social status.

Environment and Technology The Persians irrigated their fields, as did other civilizations in Southwest Asia. The Persian method, however, was innovative: underground canals, called *qanat*, were used to reduce the evaporation of the water as it traveled to the fields. *Qanat* were especially common in the arid Iranian Plateau of central Persia.

Trade The Persians conducted much trade along the Persian Road and other land routes. They also conducted trade by sea. For example, ivory and gold came from Turkey; cedar and woolen fabrics from Phoenicia; wine and oil from Greece; and grain, textiles, and papyrus from Egypt.

Songhay Empire The Songhay people were the main ethnic group in and around the city of Gao on the Niger River. Gao was conquered and the Songhay were absorbed into the Mali Empire. As the Mali Empire began to decline in the early 1400s, Songhay gained its independence. In 1464, *Sunni Ali* became ruler of Songhay and began to aggressively expand into territory on both sides of the Niger River. He took over Timbuktu with its famed center of Islamic scholarship. Although a Muslim himself, he instituted repressive

policies against some of the scholars there, particularly those associated with peoples he had overthrown in his empire-building campaign. By the 1480s, he had built an empire that surpassed that of the Mali Empire before him. The cause of Sunni Ali's death in 1492 is uncertain. According to some, he drowned while crossing the Niger River; others contend that he was killed by his sister's son in a bid for power. The Songhay Empire would last for 100 years, until its defeat by Moroccan forces wielding firearms, uncommon weapons for armies in Sub-Saharan Africa at that time.

over the Indian Ocean.

Trans-Saharan Trade While the East African Coast had been fairly well populated for many centuries before the arrival of Islam, few societies had inhabited the Sahara Desert because its arid climate made it nearly impossible to farm. Though nomadic communities did conduct some trade across the Sahara, the volume of trade increased exponentially with the arrival of Islamic merchants in the seventh and eighth centuries.

Camels and Trade Merchants from Southwest Asia traveled across the Sahara on camels. Native to the Islamic heartland (Arabia), camels began to appear in North Africa in the third century B.C.E. Camels, accustomed to the harsh, dry climate of the Arabian Desert, adapted well to living in the Sahara. Compared to horses, camels can consume a large quantity of water at one time (over 50 gallons in three minutes) and not need additional water for a long stretch of time. They began to replace horses and donkeys after 300 C.E.

As use of the camel spread, people developed as many as 15 types of camel saddles for different purposes.

- South Arabians developed a saddle in which the rider sits in back of the hump, which makes riding easier because the rider can hold onto the hair of the hump.
- Northern Arabians developed a saddle for sitting on top of the hump, putting them high in the air, which gave them greater visibility in battles.
- Northern Africans developed a saddle that allowed them to sit in front of the hump. Being near the head gave the rider the best possible control over the camel.
- Somalis in Eastern Africa, who were semi-nomadic and needed to carry their possessions with them, designed a saddle for carrying loads.

By the end of the eighth century C.E., the trans-Sahara trade had become famous throughout Europe and Asia. Gold was the most precious commodity traded. West African merchants acquired the metal from the waters of the Senegal River, near modern-day Senegal and Mauritania. Foreign traders came to West Africa seeking not only gold, but also ivory and slaves. In exchange, they brought salt, textiles, and horses. For more than 700 years, trans-Saharan trade brought considerable wealth to the societies of West Africa, particularly the kingdoms of Ghana and Mali.

...the East Coast of Africa.

¹ World History: Preparing for the Advanced Placement Examination (Des Moines, Iowa: AMSCO Publishing, 2015).