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# 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 1952. 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-I cedit*). 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' (*Send-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 *fetva*, 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 Namik 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.

#### SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

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