

# The decline and reform: the Ottoman Odyssey\*

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**Sources:** Britannica Online <http://www.britannica.com/>, Questia's The Columbia Encyclopedia <http://www.questia.com/library/encyclopedia/>, The Encyclopedia of World History <http://www.bartleby.com/67/>, Hanover College History Department <http://history.hanover.edu/etexts.html>, Library of Congress <http://www.loc.gov/rf/>, New Internationalist Magazine <http://www.newint.org/>, The Internet History Sourcebooks Project <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/>, United Kingdom, National Archives <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>, United States National Archives <http://www.archives.gov/>, Washington State University, World Civilizations online class <http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/>, Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page), World History: 16th to 19th Centuries <http://www.fsmitha.com/h3/index.html>

\* *"The Odyssey"* is the epic poem attributed to Homer recounting the long wanderings of Odysseus. The noun *odyssey* used for "a long voyage marked by many changes of fate", or for "an intellectual or spiritual search".

The reign of Süleyman I "the Magnificent" is considered as the peak of Ottoman magnificence, but signs of weakness was signaling the beginning of a decline.

The Ottoman observers of the period point to the cause of decline as the corruption of the recruitment system (*devsirme*). The use of government opportunity for personal benefits corruption and favoritism at all levels of administration is also a subject of complaint. It is often criticized that the accession and appointments to positions are made not according to ability but as a consequence of the *devsirme*-harem intrigues.

The result was a growing failure of administration throughout the empire, increasing anarchy and misrule, and the fracture of society into hostile communities looking for selfish gain.

## The side of the economy

Economic difficulties began in the second half of the 16th century. The changing trade routes caused the decline of the provinces taking place on the old international trade routes of the Middle East. This decreasing of sources created an increasing imbalance of trade between East and West. The Ottoman economy also faced a serious inflation, caused by the influx of precious metals into Europe from the Americas.

As the treasury lost its revenues, state obligations like salary payments began to be covered by debasing the coinage (devaluation), increasing taxes, and confiscations. All these worsened the situation particularly for the *reaya* and the salaried *askeri* class. This further weakened the affairs of the "state" because those depending on salaries tended to corruption.

On the other hand Inflation weakened the traditional manufactures. Functioning under strict price and quality regulations, the guilds were unable to provide goods at prices to compete with the cheap European manufactured goods. On the other hand, for the sake of the customs revenues of the state there was no protective policy, like the mercantilist measures of European states, to restrict the imports. In consequence, traditional Ottoman industry fell into rapid decline.

## Social unrest

The situation for the people worsened by a large population growth during the 16th and 17th centuries, like that occurred in much of Europe at this time.

The amount of food production failed to expand to meet the needs of the rising population, instead fell as the result of the anarchic political and economic conditions. Landless and jobless peasants fled off the land to the cities. Those remaining in the countryside joined rebel bands, known as *Celâli*, pressing on those who remained to cultivate and trade. These revolts control of regions and taking away remaining tax revenues for themselves and often cutting off the regular food supplies to the cities made central government and the army weaker

The early reforms introduced during the 17th century were limited in scope to end the immediate difficulties, to restore the *timar* system as the basis of army and to control taxes to prevent abuses.

However, the growing wealth and power of European states owed to mercantilist policies promoting local productivity by the rules of competition and mercantilist policies to favor a national bourgeoisie, could not be understood until the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

On the other hand, a fact obscuring the picture, and preventing the administrators to observe and deal with the real causes of the decline was the military defeats and losses of territories.



by Seçuk Erdem from his album *Unplugged*

During this period of economic decline, The Ottoman Empire also had continuous wars with its European enemies and had lost the possessions on the northern coast of the Black Sea, from the Romanian principalities to the Caucasus. In addition, the Ottomans were forced to allow the European powers to intervene legally on behalf of the Christian subjects, which meant increasing European influence in internal Ottoman affairs.

In the later Ottoman period, a new factor was added: the loss of control on most of the provinces and the rise of local ruling notables, called *ayan* or *derebeyi*. In many ways, this resembled European feudalism, but emerged in the Ottoman Empire in a period when it weakened or eliminated elsewhere.

These local rulers were able to exercise almost complete authority, collecting taxes for themselves and sending only nominal payments to the treasury, thus further increase of financial and administrative problems.

### Resistance to change

The potential for reform due to the nature of the Ottoman society laid only in the hands of the ruling class. However, most of the administrators saw little need for the empire to change, as they benefited financially from the anarchy and the sultan's lack of control. In addition, the ruling class was completely isolated from developments in the outside.



“Traditions matter!” By Selçuk Erdem, from Unplugged

The assumption was that the remedies to Ottoman decline lay entirely within neglected Ottoman practice and experience. All the advances in industrial and commercial life, science and technology, and particularly political and military organization and techniques that took place in Europe remained strange to the Ottomans.

It is only during the 18th century that this isolation was at least partially broken down when a few

Ottoman ambassadors went to Europe and more European merchants, travelers, and consuls began to come into the Ottoman Empire. These contacts led to only to some changes in the modes of living of certain minority, mocked or accused as *alafranga* ( Frankish way) marked the period called the **Tulip Age** (1703–30).

### The search for a “new order”

The 18th-century reform efforts are representatively attributed to the reign of **Selim III** (ruled 1789–1807), considered the originator of modern reform in the Ottoman Empire.

All the early efforts to modernize the Janissary corps had created such opposition that Selim concentrated on creating a new European-style army called the *nizam-i cedid* (“new order”). It was financed by an entirely new treasury, called the *irad-i cedid* (“new revenue”), and under the guidance of European technicians, factories were erected to manufacture modern weapons, technical schools were opened to train Ottoman officers.

Nevertheless, much of the energy was diverted by the French expedition to Egypt (1798–1801) under Napoleon Bonaparte, the rise of nationalisms among Ottoman subject peoples like the Serbian revolt (1804) and a new war with Russia (1806–12). Finally, Selim was overthrown by a conservative coalition ending the reforms.

Following the short rule of Mustafa IV, the decisive reformer **Mahmud II** (1808–39) came to throne and his reforms will determine the destination of the Empire.

In addition to creating a new army and restoring central control in many provinces, he began the reorganization of the state based on European ideas of the rule of law, a regulated bureaucracy, and equality of the subjects.

One of his first actions was to ally with the Janissaries to break the power of the provincial governors. At this stage, the Sultan was forced to accept *ayan*'s rights in turn for their recognizing to obey the rule of the Sultan. This is called The Deed of Agreement (*Sened-i İttifak*), signed between the *ayan* gathered at *Üsküdar* and the Grand Vizier Bayraktar Mustafa Paşa in September 28, 1808. However, in a short time expeditions started to remove rebellious governors and local notables like Janikli, Çapanoğlu, Karaosmanoğlu and the same from their hold over large parts of Anatolia and the Balkans.

The periphery cleaned, the initial step for the reforms was the reconstruction of the central army and this brought the Sultan into conflict with the Janissaries. In 1826, Istanbul Janissaries mutinied in protest but received a tough response. Istanbul was in war for several days and at the end, almost all the Janissaries found death. This episode is known as “the Auspicious Incident” (*Vak'a-yı Hayriye*). The elimination of the old army system was completed in 1831 by the final abolition of the *timar* system.

The new army equipped, and trained by European advisers, like Helmuth von Moltke who later will become commander of the German army. From this stage onwards, the army became the major

instrument of the protection of the state and driving force of modernization.

One of the earliest reforms was the replacement of the turban with the fez (1828) made compulsory for all the public agents.

Reform expanded to the political and economic institutions of the Ottoman Empire but at the beginning the priority was the needs of the army. For example the modernization of higher education began with the need to train officers and army doctors. Even the earlier administrative and taxation reforms was set in motion by the need to pay the army and to collect the taxes for this purpose

### Institutional centralization

Mahmud began his reforms by decreasing the power of opponent institutions. He diluted the influence of the *ulema* and of popular religious organizations by creating a new directorate of evkâf (charitable endowments) in 1826. This was a measure to gain control of the financial base of religious power. The independent religious offices was made a part of the Ottoman bureaucracy to keep them under government control.

Ministries (*nezaret*) near to contemporary structure were founded (*Meclis-i Vükela*) like ministry of the interior, ministry of foreign affairs, ministry of finance, ministry of commerce etc.. A set of advisory councils created to prepare new laws, and regulations. The most important was the Supreme Council for Judicial Regulations (*Meclis-i Vâlâ-i Ahkâm-i Adliyye*).

A modern hierarchical system of ranks introduced for governmental officials and today's administrative units like *vilayet*, *kaza*, *nahiye* etc. belong to those reforms.

In the area of communications the issuing of the first Ottoman newspaper in Turkish, *Takvim-i Vekayi* began to be published in 1831 followed by a postal system founded in 1834. The first modern population census was also held in 1831.

The opening of a translation bureau (1833) and the reopening of embassies abroad gave some the opportunity to learn European languages and encounter European ideas.

By the time of the death of Mahmud II in 1839, the Ottoman Empire was diminished in extent due to wars and losses of territories but administratively it was consolidated. However, the Empire throughout the century and until its collapse will be subject to European pressures on various pretexts, with Russia supporting separatist movements and the other powers swinging between.

### The “Tanzimat”

The “Tanzimat” (Reorganization) is the name given to an era during which series of Ottoman reforms took place under the reigns of **Abdülmecid I** (1839–61) and **Abdülaziz** (1861–76).

The period is marked by the *Hatt-i Serif* of Gülhane (“Noble Edict of the Rose Chamber”; Nov. 3, 1839) and the *Hatt-i Hümayun* (“Imperial Edict”; Feb. 18, 1856) known also respectively as “Tanzimat Fermanı” and “Islahat Fermanı”.

The *Ferman* of 1839 expressed principles of individual liberty, freedom from oppression, and

equality before the law and security of life, property, and honor to all subjects of the empire regardless of their religion or race.

The reform measures, implemented principally under the leadership of **Mustafa Reşid Pasa**, also aimed the development of a standardized system of taxation to eliminate abuses and established fairer methods of military conscription.

The reforms included the development of a new secular school system, the reorganization of the army, the creation of provincial representative assemblies, and the introduction of new codes of commercial and criminal law, which were largely modeled after those of France. To mention briefly, promulgation of a commercial code (1850) followed by a penal code (1858). commercial procedure code (1861), and maritime code (1863)

Tanzimat reforms, influenced by the modern European ideas, intended to change the empire from the old system based on theocratic principles to that of a modern state. Moreover, this was also observed in education.

The first efforts to change the education system had started with the creation of naval engineering (1773), military engineering (1793), medical (1827), and military science (1834) colleges. A modern institution for diplomats and administrators was founded in 1859 under the name *Mekteb-i Mülkiye*. (Today's Faculty of Political Science of Ankara University)

In 1846, the first comprehensive plan for education provided for a complete system of primary and secondary schools leading to the university level, all under the Ministry of Education. In 1869, “free and compulsory primary education” was implemented.

The reformers were handicapped by a lack of sources and trained staff, besides a tough opposition by conservatives who argued that the reformers were destroying the empire's fundamental Islamic character by following the Western modes. On the other hand reforms was also slowed by external problems due to interference from the major European powers, continuing wars of defense and different nationalist movements within the Empire.

### A period of crisis

An agricultural crisis due to drought in 1873 and 1874 had produced a famine in the rural areas, which already was disturbed by the increased burden of regular taxes. The burden of taxation had been aggravated by the increasing of Ottoman debts. Added to this was the revolts of Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1875) and Bulgaria (1876) backed by Russia. Russia's pressure turned to a declaration of war (April 24, 1877) ending in defeat for the Ottomans. According to the Treaty of San Stefano (March 3, 1878), the Ottomans were to recognize the independence of Romania, Serbia and Bulgaria, give up the Batum, Artvin, Kars, Ardahan regions to Russia.

Diplomatic pressure from other European powers led to the minor modifications of these terms in favor of the Ottoman Empire at the Congress of Berlin (June–July 1878). However, Cyprus was put under British rule by a separate convention in return of its diplomatic and military support.



**Turkey in Europe!** Poster showing newly crowned "champion of the world" boxer James J. Corbett meeting with political leaders and other dignitaries from several European countries. Corbett is shown shaking hands with William E. Gladstone, Prime Minister of England. The leaders are: Victoria, Queen of Great Britain; Léopold II, King of the Belgians; Kaiser Wilhelm II; Emile Loubet, President of France; Umberto I, King of Italy; Franz Joseph I, Emperor of Austria; Alexander III, Emperor of Russia; and Abdülhamid II. Across the top of the poster are emblems of European countries. British Cartoon Collection (Library of Congress).

In addition to the losses, the Ottomans were forced to accept new financial controls. By the well known decree *Muharrem Kararnamesi* (December 1881) in return for a reduction of the public debt a European-controlled organization, the Ottoman Public Debt Administration (*Düyun-u Umumiye*) was set up to collect certain revenues.

Taken in conjunction with the activities of European-controlled banks and with the tariff limitations imposed on the Ottomans by the Capitulations, the result was a distinct restriction on Ottoman ability to guide the allocation of its resources.

### The first Ottoman constitutional period

Besides radical external changes an internal political development brought about the first Ottoman constitution on Dec. 23, 1876.

The intellectuals engineering the change will be known as the Young Ottomans. They had conducted an opposition to the regime in their exile in Paris and London since 1867. Their political views ranged from Westernist revolutionism to Islamic traditionalism.

**Namik Kemal** (1840–88) by view representing the middle among these intellectuals has been regarded as the representative figure. He helped to

form and popularize the idea of a constitution and of loyalty to the Ottoman fatherland. However the architect of the change is **Midhat Paşa** from the higher Ottoman bureaucracy.

Following the deposition of Abdulaziz, in May 30, 1876 a new cabinet was formed, including Midhat and other partisans of reform. The new sultan Murad V, with a reputation for liberalism, ruled only several months, and by the reason of becoming mentally ill, he was deposed.

The new sultan **Abdülhamid II** agreed to a constitution. The *Kanun-u Esasi*, adopted in December 23, 1876 was the first comprehensive Ottoman constitution and the first in any Islamic country. The constitution retained full executive power of the sultan to whom ministers were individually responsible. In legislation the sultan was assisted by a two-chamber Parliament, the lower house (*Heyet-i Mebusan*) indirectly elected and the upper house (*Heyet-i Ayan*) nominated by the ruler.

The Parliament called under the constitution in March 1877 but dissolved by the Sultan in less than a year and was not recalled until 1908. The liberals exiled; some, including Midhat Paşa, were put to death.

### **Absolutism under Abdülhamid**

The reign of Abdülhamid II (1876–1909) is often regarded as a reaction against modernization, but in fact, the reforms in all areas continued. Remarkable developments in administration and the army, the formation of a gendarmerie, the growth of communications, especially the telegraph and railways, and education are observed.

However the opposition particularly among the intellectuals and young members of the army and students, demanding back the “constitution” gave way to a more organized action.

In 1889, (during the centenary of the French Revolution!), the Committee of Union and Progress (*İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti*) commonly known as the Young Turks in Europe declared itself.

Committee’s founding leaders and the political exiles in Paris, Geneva, and Cairo, prepared the ground by pamphlets and newspapers for revolution by developing an active critique of the system. The Committee of Union and Progress’ political conspiracy and organizational methods left an impression to the future periods by the term “komitacilik” used in Turkish politics.

The most known among them were Ahmed Rıza in Paris, editor of the newspaper *Meşveret* (“Consultation”), a defender of strong authority with ideas of reform influenced by August Comte’s philosophy of positivism, and his rival Prince Sabahattin who is famous for his liberal ideas and administrative “decentralization” whose organization was called “Teşebbüs-ü Şahsi ve Adem-i Merkeziyet Cemiyeti”. (Does this suggest us today’s political agenda and parties policies!)

### **The “Young Turk Revolution”**

The movement was composed of Ottoman officers, bureaucrats, and intellectuals who opposed the regime of Sultan Abdulhamid and were guided by two main aims: the preservation of the empire and the restoration of the 1876 constitution.

In July 1908 they succeeded in overthrowing the regime and ruled the empire until the ends of World War I.

The symbolic event is considered to be the revolt of Ahmed Niyazi Bey, an army officer in Macedonia, in July 3 with a group of supporters, issuing a call to rebellion and the restoration of the 1876 constitution.

Acts of insubordination soon spread throughout Macedonia, and the Committee of Union and Progress assumed the leadership role in this uncoordinated movement of resistance.

Troops dispatched from Anatolia to suppress the rebels joined them instead and when the control began to be lost Abdulhamid gave way and proclaimed the restoration of the constitution.

This initial success of the Young Turks, which excited celebrations in many parts of the empire, opened the way for a series of profound changes.

The sultan lost much of his power, and the Young Turks, in particular the Committee of Union and Progress, took hold of the reins of power.

Profiting from this period of disorder Bulgaria proclaimed its independence (October 5), the following day, Austria annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina, which it had occupied since 1878. This in turn provoked the first popular movement in the Ottoman Empire of this kind: the popular boycotting of Austrian goods

After the elections held in haste, in which candidates of the Committee of Union and Progress won a large majority of the seats, In December 1908 the Ottoman Parliament, opened.

Within the year of the Revolution, a conservative uprising and political crisis in Istanbul menaced the regime. Some corps of the soldiers, with the support of religious students in the capital mutinied and took control of the city.

A large army from Macedonia established control of Istanbul (April 24), and the Parliament proclaimed the deposition of Sultan Abdulhamid on the grounds of his complicity in the insurrection and installed his brother Mehmed V (Reşat) on the throne.

### **External problems towards the Great War**

The Second Constitutional Period also witnessed revolts, wars and losses. To mention briefly the Albanian revolt and independence (1912) War with Italy (1911-1912), The Balkan War (1912 -1913), the Second Balkan War (June–July 1913).

This period is also marked by a rising nationalism and organization among Armenian and Arab populations of the Empire.

The free and democratic atmosphere of the early days was lost. When in July 1912 opposition groups forced the government to retire, the response of the Committee of Union and Progress in January 1913, was to seize the power again in a coup led by **Enver Pasha**.

Following this takeover, the committee suppressed all opposition parties and by 1914 controlled practically all the seats in the Parliament as well as all government ministries, establishing an authoritarian regime that ruled until the end of World War I.

### **Positive aspects**

In economic policy The Young Turk government aimed to promote industrialization and a national economy (İktisad-ı Milli). One of the measures to promote industry is worth mentioning: The Law for the Encouragement of Industry (*Teşvik-i Sanayi Kanunu*) of 1909. Although policies had little success, they did build a framework for later state-directed economic planning.

On the other hand, all these dramatic developments gave birth to the Turkish nationalism. From the late 19th century, a Turkish cultural consciousness began to take shape as writers promoted an interest in the history of the Turkish peoples, in the cultivation of Turkish literature, and in the reform of the Turkish language.

These pursuits and the promotion of the idea of a “Turkish nation” became more pronounced after the disastrous years, and Turkey achieved to construct the “nation state” in the “modern” sense by this cultural accumulation.

During the Young Turk period considerable attention was given to education, especially to the neglected area of primary education. The process of secularization of the law was carried much further. A major development in national journalism took place. And besides all, the position of women improved.

The whole period was one of intense social and political participation attempts with efforts for positive changes but all disrupted by many internal and external events, finally by the First World War.

## Names and Terms\*

\*For the biographies Encyclopedia Britannica at <http://0-www.search.eb.com/> is used.

**“Tulip Age”** The name *tulip* from Turkish *tülben* became popular during the reign of Ahmet III from 1703 to 1730 and gave its name to the period. This “age” is also famous for its pleasure-seeking new way of life, reflected in arts and literature which also flourished during this time. However, the popularity of tulips is not particular to the Ottoman history. Tulips were introduced to the Western world by the Austrian ambassador to Turkey, Augier Ghislain de Busbecq in mid 17<sup>th</sup> century. Then on a speculative frenzy over tulips in the Netherlands and in other countries took place and is known as the “Tulip Mania” also called “Tulip Craze” and in Dutch “*Tulpenwoede*”. Houses, estates, and industries were mortgaged so that bulbs could be bought for resale at for the equivalent of hundreds of dollars each. For more information on “tulip mania” in Europe see Encyclopedia Britannica at <http://0-www.search.eb.com/eb/article-9073725>

**Selim III** (December 24, 1761–July 29, 1808) Ottoman sultan from 1789 to 1807, who undertook a program of Westernization and whose reign felt the intellectual and political ferment created by the French Revolution.

A poet and an accomplished composer of Ottoman classical music, Selim had enjoyed greater

freedom prior to his accession than the Ottoman princes before him. Influenced by his father, Mustafa III (reigned 1757–74), Selim had acquired a zeal for reform.

When Selim succeeded his uncle Abdülhamid I (April 7, 1789), he attempted to end the social, economic, and administrative chaos facing the empire. He set up a committee of reformers (1792–93) and promulgated a series of new regulations collectively known as the *nizam-i cedid* (“new order”). These included reforms of provincial governorships, taxation, and land tenure. More significant were his military reforms: in addition to new military and naval schools, he founded new corps of infantry trained and equipped along European lines and financed by revenues from forfeited and escheated fiefs and by taxes on liquor, tobacco, and coffee. Finally, to provide for direct



contact with the West, Ottoman embassies were opened in the major European capitals.

Selim's reorganizations and the increasing influence of France evoked a strong reaction from the conservative coalition of the Janissaries, the ulama (men of religious learning), and others adversely affected by the reforms. Selim, on the other hand, lacked the determination to enforce the measures. In 1805, when he ordered the reorganization of troops in the Balkan provinces, the Janissaries mutinied in Edirne and were joined by the *ayan* (local notables), who hitherto had supported the sultan. Selim halted the reorganization and dismissed his reformist advisers.

In the ensuing months of confusion, the reformists rallied around Bayrakdar Mustafa, pasha of Rusçuk (now Ruse, Bulgaria), who marched to Constantinople to restore Selim. Bayrakdar took the city, but in the meantime Selim had been strangled on orders from his successor, Mustafa IV.

**Mahmut II** (July 20, 1785–July 1, 1839) Ottoman sultan (1808–39) whose westernizing reforms helped to consolidate the Ottoman Empire despite defeats in wars and losses of territory.

Early in his reign Mahmud faced erosion of his empire in the Balkans. The war with Russia, which had continued fitfully after a truce in 1807, was ended by the Treaty of Bucharest (May 28, 1812), ceding the province of Bessarabia to Russia. By 1815, Serbia was virtually autonomous and a Greek independence movement was stirring. The Greeks in the Morea (the Peloponnese) rebelled (1821) against Ottoman rule, and Mahmud summoned the assistance of Muhammad 'Ali Pasha, governor of Egypt. After massacres on both sides, Ottoman authority in Greece had been partly restored when the united British, French, and Russian fleets destroyed the Ottoman-Egyptian fleet in the Bay of Navarino (Oct. 20, 1827) in southern Greece. Mahmud then declared jihad (holy war) against the infidels. The Ottomans were defeated in the Russo-Turkish War of 1828–29, and he acknowledged Greek independence in 1830.

Earlier in the year, Mahmud had agreed to appoint Muhammad 'Ali as governor of Syria and Tarsus (in southern Anatolia). In return for his services against the Greeks, Muhammad 'Ali demanded (1831) the promised governorship. When Mahmud refused, Muhammad 'Ali's forces under his son Ibrahim Pasha invaded Syria, captured Damascus and Aleppo, routed the Ottoman army at Konya (1832), and advanced on Constantinople. Mahmud sought British aid, but—with France supporting Egypt—Great Britain refused. The Sultan then turned to Russia, which sent its fleet to the Bosphorus and signed a treaty of mutual defense (July 1833). Determined to take revenge, Mahmud sent his army against the Egyptians in Syria but was severely defeated at Nizip on June 24, 1839, a few days before his death.

The string of military defeats and the separatist revolts earlier had convinced Mahmud of the need for reforms in his army and administration. In 1826 he



destroyed the defunct Janissary corps, thousands of its members dying in the ensuing massacre. He abolished military fiefs granted to cavalrymen (1831) and then established a new army, under his direct control, trained by German instructors.

Among his administrative reforms, Mahmud adopted the cabinet system of government, provided for a census and a land survey, and inaugurated a postal service (1834). In education, he introduced compulsory primary education, opened a medical school, and sent students to Europe. In addition, the sultan's right to confiscate the property of deceased officials was abolished, and European dress was introduced.



**Abdülmecid** (April 25, 1823-June 25, 1861) Ottoman sultan from 1839 to 1861 who issued two major social and political reform edicts known as the Hatt-i Serif of Gülhane (Noble Edict of the Rose Chamber) in 1839 and the Hatt-i Hümayun (Imperial Edict) in 1856, heralding the new era of Tanzimat ("Reorganization").

Well educated, liberal minded, and the first sultan to speak French, Abdülmecid continued the reform program of his father, Mahmud II, and was strongly assisted by his ministers Mustafa Resid Pasa, Mehmed Emin Âli Pasa, and Fuad Pasa. The reform edicts were in part directed toward winning the support of European powers. The edicts proclaimed the equality of all citizens under the law and granted civil and political rights to the Christian subjects. The main purpose of the reforms, however, remained the preservation of the Ottoman state. The army was reorganized (1842) and conscription introduced; new penal, commercial, and maritime codes were promulgated; and mixed civil and criminal courts with European and Ottoman judges were established. In 1858 a new land law confirming the rights of ownership was introduced, and an attempt was made to establish a new system of centralized provincial administration. The sultan's educational reforms included the formation of a Ministry of Education and the establishment of military preparatory schools and secondary schools; he also established an Ottoman school in Paris (1855).

Abdülmecid's foreign policy was directed toward maintaining friendly relations with the European powers to preserve the territorial integrity of the Ottoman state. He ascended the throne as a mere boy a few days after the Ottoman defeat by the Viceroy of Egypt at the Battle of Nizip (June 1839). Only an alliance of European powers (excluding France) saved the Ottomans from accepting disastrous terms from Egypt (Treaty of London, July 1840). In 1849 Abdülmecid's refusal to surrender Lajos Kossuth and other Hungarian revolutionary refugees to Austria won him the respect of European liberals. Finally, in 1853 the Ottomans were assisted by France, Great Britain, and Sardinia in the Crimean War against Russia and were admitted as participants in the Treaty of Paris (1856).

The European powers, however, while insisting on reforms regarding the Christians and minorities in the Ottoman Empire, obstructed the sultan's efforts at centralization and at recovering power in Bosnia and Montenegro in the Balkans.

Abdülmecid restored Hagia Sophia, built the Dolmabahçe Palace, and founded the first French theatre in Constantinople



**Abdülaziz** (February 9, 1830, June 4, 1876) Ottoman sultan (1861–76) who continued the westernizing reforms that had been initiated by his predecessors until 1871, after which his reign took an absolutist turn.

Between 1861 and 1871, reforms were continued under the leadership of Abdülaziz able chief ministers, Fuad Pasa and Âli Pasa. New administrative districts (vilayets) were set up (1864); on French advice a council of state was established (1868); public education was organized on the French model and a new university founded; and the first Ottoman civil code was promulgated. Abdülaziz cultivated good relations with France and Great Britain and was the first Ottoman sultan to visit western Europe.

By 1871 Abdülaziz' ministers Âli and Fuad were dead, and France, his western European model, had been defeated by Germany. Abdülaziz, willful and headstrong, without powerful ministers to limit his authority, became the effective ruler and placed greater emphasis on the Islamic character of the empire. In foreign policy, he turned to Russia for friendship, as turmoil in the Balkan provinces continued.

When insurrection in Bosnia and Herzegovina spread to Bulgaria (1876), ill feeling mounted against Russia for its encouragement of the rebellions. The crop failure of 1873, the sultan's lavish expenditures, and the mounting public debt had also heightened public discontent. Abdülaziz was deposed by his ministers on May 30, 1876; his death a few days later was attributed to suicide.



**Mustafa Reşit Paşa** (March 13, 1800 -December 17, 1858) Ottoman statesman and diplomat who was grand vizier (chief minister) on six occasions. He took a leading part in initiating, drafting, and promulgating the first of the reform edicts known as the Tanzimat ("Reorganization").

Mustara Resid entered government service at an early age and thereafter rose rapidly in the service of the Turkish government, becoming ambassador to France in 1834. During his stay in western Europe he studied the French language and Western civilization and developed friendly relations with French and British statesmen. He supported the westernizing reforms of the Sultan Mahmud II, who appointed him his foreign minister.

Mahmud's successor, Sultan Abdülmejid I, was determined to continue his father's programs and entrusted Resid with the preparation of new reform measures. Elaborated in the form of a rescript, or decree (*hatt-i serif*), this program was proclaimed on Nov. 3, 1839, and guaranteed to Ottoman subjects equality and security of life and property, without distinction of race and religion. Although not all of these provisions were carried out, Resid became the symbol of westernizing reforms. Between 1839 and 1858 he was twice appointed minister of foreign affairs and served six times as grand vizier.

Resid's reforms included the abolition of the slave trade, the introduction of new codes of commercial and criminal law, and the reform of administrative regulations to end nepotism and traffic in favours and appointments. A supporter of France and Britain in his foreign policy, he was grand vizier at the outbreak of the Crimean War (1853–56).

**Namık Kemal** (December 2, 1840-December 2, 1888) Turkish prose writer and poet who greatly influenced the Young Turk and Turkish nationalist movements and contributed to the westernization of Turkish literature.

An aristocrat by birth, he was educated privately, learning Persian, Arabic, and French, which resulted in his working for the Ottoman government translation bureaus in 1857–58. Kemal became acquainted with the leading poets of the day and began to write poetry in the classical Ottoman style. Later he was influenced by the writer and editor of the newspaper *Tasvir-i Efkâr*, Ibrahim Sinasi, who had spent much time in Europe and was greatly enamored of Western ways and ideas. Kemal became editor of the *Tasvir-i Efkâr* in 1865, when Sinasi fled to France.

By 1867, however, the highly political nature of the publication caused trouble with the Ottoman government, and he, together with other Young Ottomans, as this group of reforming young writers came to be known, fled to London, and then to Paris and Vienna.

Kemal spent his time studying and translating works of such great French authors as Victor Hugo, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Charles-Louis Montesquieu into Turkish. He also published the newspaper *Hürriyet* ("Liberty"). When the Young Ottomans returned to Constantinople in 1871, Kemal continued his revolutionary writings as editor of the newspaper *İbret* and also wrote his most famous play, *Vatan yahut Silistre* ("Fatherland; or, Silistria"), a drama evolving around the siege of Silistria in 1854, in which he expounded on the ideas of patriotism and liberalism. The play was denounced by the Ottoman government and led to his imprisonment on Cyprus (1873–76). After his release and another period of virtual exile, he became governor of Sakiz (Chios) in 1888.

Namık Kemal, the social reformer, is best-known as the propagator of two basic ideas: *vatan* ("fatherland") and *hürriyet* ("freedom"), ideas modeled after European concepts that he virtually introduced into the Turkish language. Although a liberal thinker, Kemal never rejected Islam in his plan of reform. He believed that the religion was compatible with a thoroughly modernized Turkey having a constitutional

government modeled after that of the English. His best-known novels include *Intibah yahut Ali Beyin sergüzesiti* (1874; "Awakening; or, Ali Bey's Experiences") and *Cezmi* (1887/88), a novel based on the life of the 16th-century khan of the Crimean Tatars, 'Adil Giray. A widely read social work is *Rüya* ("The Dream"), expressing his desire for a Turkey free from oppression.

**Mithat Paşa** (October 1822 - May 8, 1883) Twice Ottoman grand vizier who was known for his honest ability, his administrative reforms, and his initiation of the first constitution of the Ottoman Empire (1876).

Son of a qadi (judge), Midhat was trained for an administrative career. He joined the office of the grand vizier, eventually becoming the second secretary to the Grand Council. His enemies arranged for him to be given (1854) the nearly impossible task of halting the revolt and brigandage rampant in Rumelia, in the Balkans, where he achieved startling success. After restoring order to Bulgaria (1857), he spent six months' study leave in Europe.

In 1861 Midhat was made a vizier and entrusted with the government of Niš, where his reforms were so successful that Sultan Abdülaziz charged him to help prepare a scheme for their adoption in other parts of the empire. After reorganizing the Council of State, he was made governor of Baghdad (1869), where his success was as impressive as at Niš. Midhat took a bold step in 1872. In an interview with the absolutist sultan, he expressed opposition to the grand vizier Mahmud Nedim's antireform policies. The sultan thereupon appointed him grand vizier in place of Mahmud Nedim. Too independent for the court, however, Midhat remained in power only three months. He was later made minister of justice and then president of the Council of State.

Deteriorating conditions in the empire in 1876 led to a coalition of Midhat, the grand vizier, and the minister of war that deposed Sultan Abdülaziz on May 30 and placed his nephew Murad V on the throne; Murad's insanity led to his deposition in August, and he was replaced by his brother Abdülhamid II. Midhat again became grand vizier, and, mainly at his urging, the empire's first constitution was promulgated on December 23, guaranteeing a broad range of democratic freedoms. In the following February, however, he was dismissed and ordered to leave the country. He was recalled again the next year and appointed governor of Smyrna. In May 1881 the sultan again ordered his arrest, and, although he escaped and appealed to the European powers to intervene for him, he gave himself up shortly afterward.

At his trial he was found guilty of having caused the death of the deposed Sultan Abdülaziz and sentenced to death. On British intercession the sentence was commuted to life banishment. Midhat spent the last days of his life in At-Ta'if, where he was probably murdered.





**Abdülhamid II** (September 21, 1842- February 10, 1918) Ottoman sultan from 1876 to 1909, under whose autocratic rule the reform movement of Tanzimat (Reorganization) reached its climax and who adopted a policy of pan-Islamism in opposition to Western intervention in Ottoman affairs.

A son of Sultan Abdülmecid I, he came to the throne at the deposition of his mentally deranged brother, Murad V, on Aug. 31, 1876. He promulgated the first Ottoman constitution on Dec. 23, 1876, primarily to ward off foreign intervention at a time when the Turks' savage suppression of the Bulgarian uprising (May 1876) and Ottoman successes in Serbia and Montenegro had aroused the indignation of Western powers and Russia. After a disastrous war with Russia (1877), Abdülhamid was convinced that little help could be expected from the Western powers without their intrusion into Ottoman affairs. He dismissed the Parliament, which had met in March 1877, and suspended the constitution in February 1878. Thenceforth for 40 years he ruled from his seclusion at Yıldız Palace (in Constantinople), assisted by a system of secret police, an expanded telegraph network, and severe censorship.

After the French occupation of Tunisia (1881) and assumption of power by the British in Egypt (1882), Abdülhamid turned for support to the Germans. In return, concessions were made to Germany, culminating in permission (1899) to build the Baghdad Railway. Eventually, the suppression of the Armenian revolt (1894) and the turmoil in Crete, which led to the Greco-Turkish War of 1897, once more resulted in European intervention.

Abdülhamid used pan-Islamism to solidify his internal absolutist rule and to rally Muslim opinion outside the empire, thus creating difficulties for European imperial powers in their Muslim colonies. The Hejaz Railway, financed by Muslim contributions from all over the world, was a concrete expression of his policy.

Internally, the most far-reaching of his reforms were in education; 18 professional schools were established; Darülfünun, later known as the University of Istanbul, was founded (1900); and a network of secondary, primary, and military schools was extended throughout the empire. Also, the Ministry of Justice was reorganized, and railway and telegraph systems were developed.

Discontent with Abdülhamid's despotic rule and resentment against European intervention in the Balkans, however, led to the military revolution of the Young Turks in 1908. After a short-lived reactionary uprising (April 1909), Abdülhamid was deposed, and his brother was proclaimed sultan as Mehmed V.



**Enver Paşa** (November 22, 1881 - August 4, 1922) Ottoman general and commander in chief, a hero of the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, and a leading member of the Ottoman government from 1913 to 1918. He played a key role in the Ottoman entry into World War I on the side of Germany, and, after the Ottoman defeat in 1918, he

attempted to organize the Turkic peoples of Central Asia against the Soviets.

An organizer of the Young Turk Revolution, Enver joined General Mahmud Sevket, under whose command an "Army of Deliverance" advanced to Constantinople to depose the Ottoman sultan Abdülhamid II. In 1911, when warfare broke out between Italy and the Ottoman Empire, he organized the Ottoman resistance in Libya, and in 1912 he was appointed the governor of Benghazi (Benghazi; now in modern Libya).

Back in Constantinople, he participated in the politics of the Committee of Union and Progress, leading the coup d'état of Jan. 23, 1913, which restored his party to power. In the Second Balkan War (1913), Enver was chief of the general staff of the Ottoman army. On July 22, 1913, he recaptured Edirne (Adrianople) from the Bulgars; and until 1918, the empire was dominated by the triumvirate of Enver, Talât Pasa, and Cemal Pasa.

In 1914 Enver, as minister of war, was instrumental in the signing of a defensive alliance with Germany against Russia. When the Ottoman Empire entered World War I on the side of the Central Powers (November 1914), Enver cooperated closely with German officers serving in the Ottoman army. His military plans included Pan-Turkic (or Pan-Turanian) schemes for uniting the Turkic peoples of Russian Central Asia with the Ottoman Turks.

These plans resulted in the disastrous defeat in December 1914 at Sarikamis, where he lost most of the 3rd Army. He recovered his prestige, however, when the Allied forces withdrew from the Dardanelles (1915–16). In 1918, following the Russian Revolution of 1917 and Russia's withdrawal from the war, he occupied Baku (now in Azerbaijan). After the Armistice in Europe, Enver fled to Germany (November 1918).

In Berlin he met the Bolshevik leader Karl Radek, and in 1920 he went to Moscow. He proposed the idea of overthrowing the regime of Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) in Turkey with Soviet aid, but this plan received no support from Moscow. Though the Russian leaders became suspicious of him, Enver was nevertheless allowed to go to Turkistan with a plan for helping to organize the Central Asian republics. In 1921, however, the revolt of the Basmachi in Bukhara against the Soviet regime flared up, and Enver joined the insurgents. He was killed in action against the Red Army.

# Readings

## Reading 1

### From Tanzimat Fermanı (3 November 1839)

It is well known that during the early ages of the Ottoman monarchy, the glorious precepts of the Koran, and the laws of the Empire, were ever held in honor. In consequence of this, the Empire increased in strength and greatness; and all the population, without exception, acquired a "high degree" of welfare and prosperity.

For one hundred and fifty years a succession of incidents and various causes has checked this obedience to the sacred code of the law, and to the regulations which emanate from it; and the previous internal strength and prosperity have been converted into weakness and poverty, for in truth an empire loses all its stability when it ceases to observe its laws.

These considerations have been ever present to our mind, and since the day of our accession to the throne, the thought of the public good, of the amelioration of the condition of the provinces and the alleviation of the national burdens, has not ceased to claim our entire attention. If we take into consideration the geographical position of the Ottoman provinces, the fertility of the soil, and the aptness and intelligence of the inhabitants, we shall attain the conviction that by applying ourselves to discover efficacious methods, the result which, with the aid of God, we hope to obtain, will be realized within a few years.

Thus, then, full of confidence in the help of the Most High, supported by the intercession of our prophet, we consider it advisable to attempt by new institutions to obtain for the provinces composing the Ottoman Empire, the benefits of a good administration.

These institutions will principally refer to these topics:-

1. The guarantees which will insure our subjects perfect security for their lives, their honor, and their property.

2. A regular method of establishing and collecting the taxes.

3. An equally regular method of recruiting, levying the army, and fixing duration of the service.

In truth, are not life and honor the most precious blessings in existence? what man, whatever may be his detestation of violence, could refrain from having recourse to it, and thereby injuring the government and his country, if his life and honor are exposed to danger? If, on the contrary, he enjoys perfect security in this respect, he will not forget his loyalty, and all his acts will conduce to welfare of the government and his fellow subjects.

If there is no security for their fortune, all listen coldly to the voice of their prince and country; none attend to the progress of the common weal, absorbed as they are in their own troubles. If, on the other hand, the citizen possesses in confidence his property, of whatever kind it may be, then, full of ardor for his own affairs, the sphere of which he strives to extend, in order to increase that of his own enjoyments, he daily feels the love for his prince and his country growing more fervent in his heart. These sentiments become within him the source of the most laudable actions.

It is of the highest importance to regulate the imposition of the taxes; as the State, which in the defense of its territory, is forced into various expenses, cannot procure the money necessary for the army and other branches of the service, save by contributions levied on its subjects.

Although, thanks to God, our subjects have been for some time delivered from the scourge of monopolies, falsely regarded hitherto as a source of revenue, a fatal practice still exists, although it can only have the most disastrous consequence; it is that of venal concessions known by the name of *iltizam*.

...

It is therefore necessary that, in the future, each member of the Ottoman society should be taxed in a ratio to his fortune and his ability, and that nothing further shall be demanded from him.

## Reading 2

### Ottoman urban life and the parvenu in 1840's

Source: Charles Issawi, *The Economic History of Turkey, 1800-1914*, University of Chicago Press, 1980, pp.349-350, taken from Ahmet Cevdet Paşa, *Tezâkir-i Cevdet*, Ankara, 1953, I, pp.18-22

While Resit Pasa's partisans had based their platform on fighting corruption, and serving to improve education and civilization, such unpleasant undertakings of theirs caused public opinion to turn against them. Public protests increased. Sultan Abdulmecit called these transactions "theft by contrivance". Hence giving of expensive presents to government official, farming out of tax revenues, and the selling of tithe and tax revenue without public auctioning were banned. Since honorable public servants had never profited from such deeds, they were not adversely affected by the new prohibition. The corrupt ones, on the other hand, started taking bribes secretly and blocking the open auctioning of the tax revenues. People who earned money from such sources could not keep it, but squandered it away. Money easily made easily spent.

Yet, buying and selling increased in Istanbul. Merchants became rich. At a certain time any time, many beys, pasas, and ladies from the family of Mehmet Ali of Egypt left that country and came to Istanbul, where they spent the great quantities of money they had brought with them and became an example to the *bons vivants*. They opened a new era in luxurious living. In particular, the Egyptian ladies preferred western clothing and jewelry, and the ladies of Istanbul, notably the ladies of Palace, started imitating them. A large number of Egyptians

purchased houses and villas on the shore and other real estate at high prices. Thus, real estate prices greatly increased and a false wealth developed in Istanbul. In fact, the balance of payments was hurt and trade deficits began. Great quantities of money began to flow to Europe. But, since the civil servants were getting their salaries at the beginning of the year and merchants were reaping great profits from the increased consumer market, nobody thought seriously about the future. Especially in summer, the shores of the Bosphorus and other resort areas were filled with *bons vivants*, and people avoided mentioning anything that would induce sombre thoughts and dark reflection. Istanbul became like a paradise and each corner of it became a place of pleasure and enjoyment.

Especially after the inception of the ferryboat service, the pleasures of the Bosphorus increased and the price of real estate on the shores of the Bosphorus also rose greatly. But economic balance was lost as the revenues of the state could not meet expenditures. Yet, since the Porte was not well aware of the situation at the Treasury, no serious thought was given to the deficit. In 1267 (1850) Nafiz Pasa, the minister of treasury, began complaining, and one day at a meeting of ministers he said that salaries could not be given on the first of the following month, that it was necessary to delay payment of the salaries for a week. Those attending were confused and terrified. Everybody began thinking of what would befall them if the state could not meet its payroll demand on the first of the month and, therefore, the Treasury would be considered to have gone bankrupt. Even Resit Pasa was alarmed and feared the consequences of His Imperial Majesty's reaction when he heard about this situation. A commission was appointed at the High Council of Judicial Ordinances to examine the matters relating to the Treasury. The minister of war Rüstü Pasa, foreign minister Ali Pasa, and the minister of treasury Halit Efendi were appointed to this commission. Books were brought from the Treasury and examined. It was then seen that the expenditure of the state was much higher than the revenue. Treasury matters were indeed in bad shape. The Treasury was in a state of *crise* (crisis). Yet there was no word in the Turkish language that conveyed the meaning of *crise*. Trying to find a word for *crise* became a problem. One night we were gathered in Fuat Efendi's kiosk on the Bosphorus and this matter came up. After some searching, the word *buhran* was found to convey the meaning of *crise* in Turkish and was accepted as such. In fact the word was used in the official memorandum, "The situation of *crise* at the Treasury." In 1268, matters with regard to the Treasury became even more serious. Everybody at the Porte began talking about those matters. Although, to improve matters, the first precaution should have been to cut down on expenditure, it was decided to borrow money. It was mostly Fuat Efendi who recommended this solution. Finally, some gold was borrowed from France.

### Reading 3

**Adolphus Slade, *Records of Travels in Turkey, Greece and of A Cruise in the Black Sea with the Captain Pasha in the Years 1829, 1830 and 1831*, Vol. 1, London, Saunders and Otley, Conduit Street, 1832, pp. 150-152**

The *Selimier* steered like a cutter, and sailed like a frigate. "What a beautiful ship!" I exclaimed to his excellency. "By God's grace," he said, "she is." A poor compliment, I thought, to the architect. "Who built her?" I asked. "Who knows," was the answer. "She must do your excellency honour," I continued. "Please God," he answered. Alas! I thought, man gets little credit among these people, Allah takes all. I elicited in five minutes' conversation that it would not be his fault if we met the enemy. He had left Bosphorus in compliance with the sultan's orders; but his private opinion, backed by his officers, was, that it would be madness to engage. However, we talked on business, particularly about the Russians retaining possession of the important post of Sizepolis, which they had taken in February of the same year. "They must be driven from it," I observed; "let us do it." That did not enter into his ideas: "Bakalum," he replied. *Bakalum*, (*nous verrons*,) was his constant answer to every suggestion, good or bad. I soon learned its value, and the force of Sebastiani's caustic remark to Selim III. "Your majesty bewails destiny, in giving you Russia and England for enemies; you have three enemies yet more powerful." "God forbid," said the sultan; "what do you mean? Greater than the lion of the north, the queen of the seas-impossible!" "Yes," continued the general, "Inshallah-Allah Kerim-and *Bakalum* are your deadly foes." Discerning Sebastiani! *Bakalum* is indeed the bane of the Osmanleys. By it they deliberate weeks on the subject which should be decided in a day. The opportunity is lost; the cause should be referred to *Bakalum*, but they press a higher power, and repeat, "Allah Kerim" (God is wise.)