Ottoman Empire

AP World History

v     Origins: Islam has traditionally been a state that unifies its political and religious

allegiances.  The great Caliphates of the 8th‐12th

century illustrate that, the last great Caliphate the Abbasid Caliphate stretched from Spain to India and will crumble in the late 12th-early13the century.  There to pick up the torch were the Ottomans, not as widespread as their predecessors the Ottomans were one of three unifying Islamic forces in the wake of the Abbasid; the Savafid Persians and Mughals in India were the other two.  All were militarily advanced and highly centralized.  The Ottomans spread the largest influence.  They originated in the steppes of central Asia and migrated west into Turkey (Asia Minor).  They were vassals of the Seljuk Turks but rapidly gained their own power under Osman I in 1280.  They rapidly acquired territory in the 13th–15th centuries.

v     The head of the Ottoman State was the Sultan, the Sultan was the supreme political and

religious leader of the Turks.  Selim will add the title Caliph I in 1519.  A caliph is a religious

and political leader of the Islamic World.  Sultans/Caliphs rule over Viziers or advisors who

in turn rule over a series of provincial governors known as “Beys or Knights”.  This is a form

of federalism.

v     The Ottoman Military State: the strength of the Ottoman Empire was their advanced

military state.  The state was based on technological advancements such as gunpowder and

premier organizational strategies.  They used an elite fighting force hand selected (Prussia’s

Grenadiers) from birth to form the Janassaries.  Their conquest began in the 1300’s with the

conquest of the Balkans (see my notes on Bosnia), this continued with a total control of the

Mediterranean region.  Their greatest conquest came in  1453 when with 24‐foot long cannons

they besieged the legendary walled city of Byzantium’s capital Constantinople with 1200‐

pound cannons pillaging the legendary city.  The conquest increased in the 15th century

under Selim I who moved into North Africa, conquered Egypt, and the major port cities of

North Africa while also laying claim to portions of the vast sub‐Saharan trade routes of the

Islamic world.  Selim I focused largely on the Danube valley and the lands of Wallachia,

Romania, Hungary and Transylvania.    (Dracula was historically a fighter/Wallachian

prince.)  The great thrust into this region came under the leadership of one of the world’s

great leaders Sulieman I, the Magnificent.  His military conquest, political leadership and

restructuring of Ottoman law made him the greatest leader in Islamic history.  The conquests

continued during the conquest of the Danube valley in the 16th century sieges on Austria’s

catholic Holy Roman Empire.   By 1529 they had reached the gates of Vienna only to be

turned back by a crusading army.  This would be the farthest penetration of the Ottomans

and Muslims in to Europe.  Ottomans use of gunpowder combined with their dynamic

Calvary and navy made them the military power of the world.    Their Janissary system keptthe Turks at the forefront of modern warfare and ensured that the Ottomans would be a

powerful state through the First World War.

v     Religious Policy: the Ottomans learned a lesson from Cyrus the Great and the Persian

organizational philosophy by granting all groups under their yoke‐Religious Tolerance.  The

best example comes to us from the siege/conquest of Vienna in 1453, after which the Caliph

Mehmed I granted all the people in the Christian holy city an equal footing on religious terms

and total tolerance.  He even allowed the continuation of religious services on Sunday of the

legendary Christian outpost the Hagia Sophia, Muslims worshipped there on Fridays!

Ottomans ruled over “Millets” or communities of different religions.  They were forced to

pay a jizwa a religious tax on non‐Muslims but aside from that the different nations were

granted total religious autonomy by the Ottomans.  In order to rule a state of diverse

populations that included alternate sects of Muslims (Sunni‐Ottomans, Shia, Suffi), Hindus,

Jews, Buddhists, Atheists, and Christians (Coptic, Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant) it was

necessary to allow for religious worship and tolerance.  The most common languages were

Arabic (Islam’s holy language), Turkish and Persian.

v     Succession, Social Status and Women:  The Sultan rarely married, he kept enslaved

concubines (by honor) in the “sacred place” or Harem.  The offspring of his different

concubines had the ability to be the “heir” but they often were forced to kill all their brothers

once they obtained the distinction, the mother of the heir became the “Queen Mother”, the

most powerful woman in the realm.  Harems occupants often left and married high officials,

it was an honor to be a part of the sultan’s extended family.

v     Ottoman culture: the greatness of Ottoman society can be seen in its architecture and

writing.  The minarets and mosques of Anatolia (Turkey) have no peer in the world.  Like all

Islamic societies, the Islamic scientists of the Ottomans were at a zenith while Europe was in

chaos during its middle age period.  However, as Europe ascended Ottomans like the rest of

the Muslim world focused on the memorization and recantation of the Quran and ignored

the scientific achievements that made them the envy of the world.  This is a reason for their

decline.

v     Long decline of the Ottoman State: things reached a zenith after Sulieman the

Magnificent, his heirs, which were rooted in corruption and incompetence, did not fulfill his

outstanding rule.  The military struggles and subsequent defeat at the hands of Austria

contributed to this demise.  Turned back from Vienna in 1683 by the Poles led by King Jan

Sobieski and his catholic/Austrian force, the Ottomans would be pushed back gradually

through the beginning of the 18th century.  Bringing about a long series of decline and chaos

that ensued with harsh treaties in 1699 at Karlowitz and 1718 at Passarowitz (stripped

Ottomans of Danube gains) the Ottomans gradually lost territory and became known as the

sick old man of Europe.  They attempted to rule over diverse territories in the Islamic

traditions and after the 18th century were largely successful and slowly dying.  In addition to

wars with Austria, the Ottomans were also wounded by failed wars with Russia and Peter

the Great.

The ottomans were also victimized by internal corruption that came not only from the

Sultan’s but also from the once vaunted military machine, the Janissary.  The Janissary had become a backward corrupt institution unwilling to reform, as evidenced by their

assassination of Selim III for his attempts at reform in 1807.

After the 1820’s and the assassination of Selim III, the Ottomans made gains in terms of

their reclamation.  The empire was secularized, the Sultan’s adopted western traditions

in science, economics, and education against the protests of Islamic clergy (sounds a lot

like Iran today doesn’t it!).

The reforms were damaged by nationalist revolts in Serbia, Yugoslavia and Greece (1821)

during the age of nationalism.  The conflicts re‐ignited the conflicts with Europe as they

attempted to wrestle all Islamic territories form the Turks.  The Ottomans were forced to

recognize Greek Independence after their European Sponsored civil war was successful

in 1832.

Egypt would experience a similar revolution in 1805 led by Muhammad Ali who

effectively removed Egypt from Ottoman rule and desired a modern independent

Egyptian state outside of Islamic rule.  His revolt became particularly damaging when

Egypt began on the path to empire in the 1830’s.  He grew so powerful taking huge

chunks of Africa and getting to Istanbul itself, Europe intervened this time on the behalf

of the Ottomans!  The empire had been badly damaged by this scenario.

The Islamic world would undergo a major transformation when Egypt fell out of

Ottoman control and the Suez Canal built by the Grandson of Muhammad Ali, Isma’il

linked the Red Sea and Mediterranean Sea.  This opened the eyes of Europe with the

massive policy of imperialism in full swing this economic prospect was huge.  Hence the

beginning of western influence in the Islamic world.   The canal was built by the French

and English and was a marvel of modern engineering when completed it revolutionized

shipping and trade in the region.  To pay for it shares were sold which Europe rapidly

snatched up and gradually assumed control of the region, gradually working as far as the

Sudan.  In 1881 a revolution occurred under the religious leader/rebel Mahdi.  He

massacred British forces and in 1885 the battle of Khartoum handed Britain one of their

greatest defeats.  By 1898 the Mahdi had certainly attained British attention and they sent

General Horatio Kitchener one of their greatest leaders to defeat him at the battle of

Omdurman.  The advanced weaponry of the British with their machine guns and rifles

proved too much.  The Madhi was defeated and the region was firmly under British

control until the 1950’s.

The Eastern Question:  The Ottomans and their decline gave rise to a question for

Europe.  The ottomans seemed a positive alternative to the radicalized states popping up

in the Middle East.  It was no longer a threat and it had become very conservative like

much of Europe so it seemed that the Ottomans were the best option for power in the

East, which is why they were defended against the armies of the Middle East by Europe.

When it came to the decline of the Ottomans no one was to conquer too much…pick off a

little at a time so they are still viable, it was a managed decline by Europe.  They would

prop up, pick off, prop up, and pick off.  The question arose during conflicts in Greece,

with the Ali revolution in Egypt and the Madhi revolt.   The key battle in this question

took place in Crimea the areas of Wallachia and Moldavia, which were Ottoman, states,

and the predator this time Russia in search of a warm water port.  Europe again sideswith the dying Ottoman states in 1853 to support them from a certain collapse at the

hands of Russia.  The same occurred in the 1870’s when the Balkans with the aid of

Russia revolted and after it wad defeated by the Turks they were attacked and crushed

by Russia, but Europe intervened…so it wouldn’t be too much.  At the conference of

Berlin in 1878 the Ottomans were granted a favorable peace treaty with Europe’s aid to

preserve the balance of power.

Tanzimat Reforms (1839‐1876)

∙        Religious tolerance

∙        Legal reforms

∙        Creation of schools in western thought

∙        Telegraph and postal system

∙        Women and rights to education

None of the reforms were able to solve the demise of the Ottomans and their empire.

This is the time period that gives rise to the Islamic conservative and the Islamic Liberal.

A conflict that rages in the Islamic world today is reformation of the Islamic world

acceptable, what is the role of the West?

One group of liberal reformers was the Young Turks who demanded an end to the

sultanate, economic reforms, and the establishment of a liberal constitutional system.

They were young pro‐western military officers who formed an army to overthrow the

sultanate.  Led by Enver Pasha they overthrew the sultanate in 1908.  They began a

rigorous reform movement with a parliamentary government, overthrowing the sultan

Abdulhamid II and aligned them with Germany for modernization.  In the process they

also began the worlds first genocide, in this case the massive extermination in 10 short

years of over 1.5 million Armenian Christians (my heritage).  For more information on

this tragedy see me…

The Young Turks were unable to save the Ottoman Empire.  Italy attacked in 1911 the

last provinces in North Africa the Turks lost.  They were defeated in the Balkans in 1912

to gain some land back a year later.  During WWI in a last ditch effort to save itself the

Ottomans aligned themselves with Germany and Austria‐Hungary.  When the alliance

was defeated the empire officially fell and will be replaced by the Turkish state in the

1920’s.

The Safavids of Persia:

Brief History of Iran

Persia had always been a key component of the Islamic world; it had been a caravan post on the

way to India during the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphate during the 1200’s.  After a long power

struggle with the Turks and Mongols this empire gained independence in the 1400’s and formed

a theocracy.

Establishment of the Empire:  in 1501 a 15 year old named Ismail gained control of the region

and took the title of Shah and established the Safavid Empire.  The name came from the strict Shia Muslim faith they practiced.   The main priority of the Shah was to convert the

populations to Shiite Islam.

Abbas the Great: the Ottomans were a constant threat to the West.  To the East were the

Afghans, and the Uzbeks.  The Safavids built themselves into a gunpowder empire.  Abbas

the great created a janissary type force with gunpowder, infantry and cavalry.  Like his

equivalent Sulieman I, Abbas was a tremendous leader in all areas, intellectual and tolerant.

The centerpiece of this empire was the trade that emerged from Isfaha the Persian Metropolis

it was famous for its silk, ceramic, and metalwork.  But it was most noted for its rugs.

Like the Ottomans they endured a decline in the 17th and 18th centuries.  Unlike the Ottomans

the Safavids didn’t hang on they collapsed all together during the early 1700’s.  the reasons?

Lacked ports

Surrounded by enemies

No navy

Siege from East (Afghan raiders)

∙        As it declined Russia using its northern position began to siege and attack the remnants

of the Safavids, they seized piece after piece of the Caucus Mountains, which lie between the

two countries.  This included the countries/territories of Georgia, Azerbaijan, Chechnya, and

Armenia (still hotspots today for conflict).  The Georgians and Armenians had asked Russia

for assistance in liberating themselves from Persia, instead they became part of Russia.

∙        The Qajar dynasty will follow the Safavids they will rule form 1794‐1925.  They were

unable to resist foreign control.  They had been partitioned and carved up by European

forces including in the 19

th

century when they will be divided amongst Britain and Russia

with the hope of outflanking the Ottoman Empire.  Russia got the North and British the

South.  This lasted through the 1940’s.    The Russians and Britons will fight for control over

the remnants of Persia and the Silk Road, before she finally gains independence in the 1970’s.