The Ottoman Empire: From Conquest and Integration of the Peripheries to Attempts of Modernization

Anvar Allamuratov

Karakalpak State University

Abstract: The Ottoman Empire, spanning from 1299 to 1923, developed a unique imperial system by integrating elements from ancient Eastern empires, the Byzantine tradition, and the Islamic Caliphate. This empire ruled over diverse ethnic and religious groups, demonstrating remarkable adaptability in governance. The Ottoman rulers aimed to extend their influence across the Mediterranean, striving to create a powerful empire comparable to Rome. Their expansionist policies were driven by military innovation and economic structures that prioritized imperial wealth and the sustainability of the ruling elite. However, internal challenges, economic transformations, and external pressures led to the empire's gradual decline. This article examines the mechanisms of conquest, integration of peripheral regions, and modernization attempts, highlighting the empire's resilience and ultimate dissolution.

Keywords: Empire, Army, Economy, Development, Integration, Conquest, Periphery.

Introduction

The imperial traditions of antiquity were adopted by the Ottomans and applied to create their own imperial system using modern technical achievements, primarily in the military sphere. The capture of Constantinople in 1453 makes Sultan Mehmed II the heir to the Byzantine emperors, which is emphasized by the adoption of the title "Roman Emperor" (Keysar i-Rum) and Byzantine symbols (crescent), a powerful empire is created - "pax ottomanica".

During the rise of the Ottoman Empire, the entire population of the country consisted of three main categories: askeri (people of the sword) - courtiers, military, ulema (people of the pen) - officials representing the power of the sultan; rayah - ordinary subjects, both Muslims and non-Muslims (Somel, 2004). The ruling class consisted of those who, regardless of ethnicity and religion, served the Empire, they were called "Ottomans" and were exempt from paying taxes (Meyer, 2007).

In the Ottoman Empire, the subordination of the economy to political and social priorities was affirmed and the "command-administrative system of the economy" was supported (Oreshkova, 2005), in which the main duty of the ruling elite was the constant

search for means and methods of increasing the wealth of the courtiers, the population of the capital, and satisfying the demands of its growing army, which determined the direction of its efforts toward external expansion.

For such a society, formed by the empire, war became an urgent necessity, a means of ensuring imperial expansion. At the rise of the empire, its armed forces knew no equal, which was ensured not only by the number of warriors hungry for booty, but also by the use of military technical achievements.

The widespread introduction of firearms into the Ottoman troops allowed them to achieve military-technical superiority in the late 15th - early 16th centuries (Lieven, 2007) over the troops of the Qizil-Bash, Mamluks and Safavid Iran, which were defeated.

The political system of the Ottoman Empire, following B. Downing, can be called "military-bureaucratic absolutism" (Quataert, 2005). The process of formation of the Ottoman imperial political system ended at the beginning of the 16th century.

The political system of the Ottoman Empire, which had developed by the time of its "golden age", despite many of its actual political and moral-legal limitations, was based on the religious dogmas of Islam. In this religious-political system, the imperial power represented the will of God in relation to its subjects, which, together with the system of distributing land allotments to soldiers, emphasizes its patriarchal nature. The power of the sultans was sacred (Oreshkova, 2005), their will was considered law, but was limited by the norms of Sharia (Oreshkova, 2005).

The concentration of public power in the hands of the sultan did not lead to the complete centralization of governance, which was delegated to feudal rulers and rulers of autonomies. Incorporation and the establishment of imperial dominance in a format close to the "suzerain-vassal" relationship were the two main methods of subordinating the periphery. At the same time, the heterogeneity of the peripheries constantly required the center to pay attention and take into account their characteristics, which inevitably led to the establishment of specific management in relation to the status of each periphery (Antonova-Goleva, 2023).

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative historical analysis to examine the development, governance, and transformation of the Ottoman Empire. The study utilizes primary and secondary sources, including historical records, scholarly articles, and archival materials, to analyze the empire's expansion, administrative structures, and modernization efforts. A comparative approach is employed to assess the influence of military, economic, and political factors on the empire's stability (Gürkan, 2022).

Data collection includes an extensive review of literature on Ottoman governance, warfare, economic policies, and sociopolitical transformations. The study applies content analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns within historical sources, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the empire's evolution.

Ethical considerations involve the accurate representation of historical sources and adherence to scholarly integrity in data interpretation. Since this study does not involve

human or animal subjects, no ethical approval was required. The findings contribute to a nuanced understanding of imperial structures and their long-term impact on historical state formations.

Result and Discussion

The political center of the Empire was the ruling military-bureaucratic layer, concentrated under the Sultan in Istanbul, but the economic and even, one might say, geopolitical center were the Balkans (Downing, 1992). The territorial core of the Ottoman Empire consisted of those regions (Bulgaria, Greece, Thrace, western and central Anatolia) in which the system of military feuds was the dominant administrative structure (Meyer, 1991).

From the imperial center, the power of the sultans extended to vassal states (Wallachia, Moldavia, the Crimean Khanate, the Ragusan Republic, the Sherifty of Mecca); sanjaks of the hükümet type, which implied hereditary governance; hereditary family-clan holdings with tax, administrative and judicial immunity on the condition of military service (yurdluks and odjak-lyks); sanjaks governed by the heirs to the throne - shehzade. The administrative structure of the Ottoman Empire was also distinguished by the simultaneous use of different principles of territorial division, and the government of the sultan also had to take into account the confessional principle of governance (Fadeeva, 2001).

The Ottoman Empire included territories that had their own distinct state structure, administrative institutions, regular troops, and sometimes their own diplomatic relations.

The local rulers of the Hejaz were the Sherifs of Mecca, descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, who represented a local oligarchy of competing clans.

Tunisia and Algeria, the territories of the Ottoman Empire on the "far west" of its borders, were ruled by military oligarchies of Janissaries. Although they were ruled by beylerbeys appointed from Istanbul in the early 16th century, they too were affected by a period of decentralization (Bozkuş, 2022). From the early 17th century onwards, power in these provinces was seized by military commanders of local Janissary detachments.

The Crimean Khanate, Wallachia, and Moldavia, being semi-independent monarchies, recognized Ottoman suzerainty but remained independent in their internal affairs. These states had their own bureaucracy and armies, and had the right to mint their own coins (Inalcik, 1997).

Sometimes these countries took such foreign policy steps that were contrary to the interests of the Sublime Porte, and thus could lead to conflicts with Istanbul (Meyer, 1991).

The cumbersome structure of political and administrative subordination not only absorbed a significant part of the imperial resources, but also could not cope with their seizure, distribution and delivery to their destination on the scale of a huge empire.

The Ottoman Empire, despite the constant proclamation of unity and centralization, was never able to implement these principles in practice. The heterogeneity of the peripheries (Bosnia, Albania, Kurdistan, Syria, Egypt, Iraq), their actual economic autonomy, with frequent political independence during periods of unrest, turned the

imperial system formed through constant expansion into a fiction. Only the latter, providing benefits to the conquerors, united the empire into a single whole.

The crisis of the Ottoman Empire is associated with the fact that in the 16th century the area of cultivated land in the empire practically stopped growing, while the population growth, on the contrary, continued. Moreover, this led to the fragmentation of timars (conditional land holdings of warriors) at a very rapid pace and a decrease in their profitability. At the same time, already in the second half of the 16th century the territories of the empire were included in the emerging world market, in which the most developed countries of Western Europe played the main role (Finkel, 2010). The economic difficulties were aggravated by the "price revolution" that reached the empire, caused by the influx of cheap American silver into Europe. The result was a reduction in treasury revenues and a decline in the military might of the empire (Topal, 2021).

During this same period, the empire's inability to cope with the management of the heterogeneous peripheries, different in their level of development, political and cultural traditions, which constituted it, became apparent. Despite the aforementioned crisis phenomena of the late 16th - early 17th centuries, the Ottoman rulers and their entourage made every effort to preserve the old social order, which provided the empire, or rather its political center, with prosperity, prosperity and military success.

The Kopryulyu reforms, despite their obvious achievements, did not become a modernization of the empire. They can be characterized as an attempt to rehabilitate the classical (traditional, patriarchal) imperial institutions. The reforms, after all, were aimed at stabilizing the imperial system so that it could once again begin to conquer (Inalcik, 1997).

The imperial expansion of the Ottomans, after overcoming the structural crisis, became the last surge of their medieval greatness. During the 18th century, the Ottoman Empire itself was forced to resist the growing military pressure from the Habsburg Empire and Russia (wars of 1710–1711, 1716–1718, 1736–1739, 1768–1774, 1787–1792), while simultaneously maintaining the border with Persia (1720s, 1731–1735 and 1741–1746). At the same time, the Sublime Porte, encouraging trade with the Western powers – Great Britain and France – with privileges, laid the foundations of the "Eastern Question" – a situation in which intra-Ottoman problems were viewed as issues requiring international intervention (Kilasov, 2005). Over time, the Ottoman Empire will become the object of trade, financial, and then colonial claims of the leading Western powers, as well as Russia, pursuing its own geopolitical goals.

From the 18th century onwards, the Ottoman rulers began to realise that they could no longer expand the sphere of influence of Islam and therefore needed to preserve what was left. This priority was achieved by granting new concessions to both the local ruling elites and the European interest groups that needed raw materials and markets for their flourishing economies. Thus, political concessions to local elites were the reason for decentralisation during the 18th century, on the one hand, and on the other, they facilitated the economic penetration of Western businessmen into the Ottoman provinces. Since economic thought in the Ottoman Empire was primarily focused on supply, the accumulation of foreign capital was openly welcomed by the state, which cared little about

the possible consequences of this policy for the domestic economy. In any case, the negative consequences began to manifest themselves only from the second half of the 19th century. By that time, the entire infrastructure of the Ottoman financial system was under the control of Western entrepreneurs (Penskoy, 2010).

Throughout the 19th century, the Ottoman political leadership tried to find a way to preserve the imperial system through reforms that would stop its disintegration. The reforms reproduced European models of administrative management and helped to establish relations with European states. The most expressive manifestations of the desire for reform were the publication of the Tanzimat of 1839, which gave rise to a new period of reforms, as well as the imposition of the Constitution in 1876, but its norms soon became a fiction. Abdul Hamid II (1876-1909) established an authoritarian regime that asserted the ideas of pan-Islamism. The Sultan's reign ended with the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, but the Young Turk leaders who came to power were unable to change the fate of the empire, which was inexorably heading towards decline.

Against the backdrop of the weakening of the empire, its political elite and intellectual circles began searching for a new ideology capable of ensuring the unity of the imperial system, or at least its greater Muslim part. In the 19th century, during the reign of Mahmud II, the ideology of Ottomanism emerged in the ruling circles. This was a new view of the Ottoman Empire as a common homeland for people of different nationalities and religions. The idea of Ottoman citizenship came to the fore: the population of the empire was something whole, united, regardless of religious and ethnic origin. But the new concept required justification for broader powers of the supreme authority to protect the non-Muslim population, which could not be implemented in practice due to the resistance of the Islamic elites ruling on the periphery. The core of mass consciousness was the inequality between the faithful and non-Muslims (Oreshkova, 2005).

Pan-Islamism, another ideology, took shape as the official state doctrine under Abdul Hamid II. It was a kind of reaction to the Tanzimat reforms, "liberal", "Western" Ottomanism, and Pan-Slavism, which was gaining strength in the Balkan provinces. This doctrine, unlike the previous one (Ottomanism), had a religious basis and appealed to the consciousness of all Muslims, not just subjects of the Ottoman Empire. The idea of Islamic unity, understandable to all Muslims and embodied through propaganda campaigns, proved to be an effective weapon in the hands of the Sultan to confront European states (Abidulin, 2009).

However, despite its popularity, pan-Islamism never became a reliable ideological basis for the unity of the Ottoman Empire. This doctrine repelled non-Muslims and could not withstand the beginnings of nationalism on the periphery of the empire. In the center, its own nationalist views were formed. These views were formalized in the ideology of pan-Turkism (Turkism). The ideology of Turkism was a kind of compromise between the increasingly frequent manifestations of nationalist views, both in the center and on the periphery, and the need to oppose them in ideological terms. It became an imperial idea for the preservation of the Ottoman Empire. Pan-Turkism was an ideological palliative for the weakening empire, at the same time these ideas required the creation of a new empire of

the Turks. The elimination of the additive "pan" contributed to the establishment of the idea of an independent Turkish nation, destined to take its place among modern nations (Meyer, 2007).

At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the internal restructuring of the political, administrative and economic systems of the Ottoman Empire continued, as well as transformations in the fields of culture and education, carried out thanks to the activities of the central government, under constant influence from the Western powers. At the same time, it can be said that the price for relative modernization successes in the areas that make up the core of the empire was the aggravation of its decentralization and the impending secession of the peripheries (Somel, 2004).

In the 20th century, the Ottoman Empire entered weakened, its economy remained predominantly agrarian, finances fell under the control of European powers, the population of about 25 million people (Taşansu, 2007) was divided into conflicting religious and ethnic groups. The crisis of the Ottoman Empire in the second half of the 19th century - early 20th century was rooted in the lag of the institutional system of power behind the development of socio-economic relations and in the inhibiting impact of political structures on social production, the end result of which was the death of the Ottoman Empire (Cicek, 2004).

The Ottoman Empire, created by successful expansion, expanded the boundaries of its domination until it was stopped by the imperial overstrain of relations between the center and the periphery, which was joined by the challenge of the modernizing West.

As S. F. Oreshkova shows, the imperial state structure of the eastern type and Islam, which acted as the main socially forming factors, contributed to the progress of Ottoman society at first. Subsequently, it was they that led to a slowdown in the pace of social development (Inalcik et al, 1997). In other words, the Sublime Porte as a patriarchal empire, despite its military might and expansionist successes, was unable to resist the representatives of the new generation of institutional empires and overcome its archaism against their background.

Beginning in the 18th century, after the Köprülü reforms, which never became full-fledged modernizing transformations, the Ottoman Empire was in a state of political stagnation. Its center no longer showed a desire for change, while on the periphery the influence of local elites (for example, the Ayans) gradually strengthened, which was facilitated by the halt in imperial expansion due to the growing power of the western and northern neighbors of the empire.

By the end of the century, political stagnation had turned into degradation, which was expressed in the dependence of the sultan and his government on the courtiers, clergy, and janissaries. The political paralysis of the imperial center and its failures in wars led to the fact that at the beginning of the 19th century, the collapse of the empire was considered by its government and neighbors as a possible near-term prospect. It can be said that the threat of political collapse gave impetus to the modernization of the empire, expressed in the Tanzimat reforms and the formation of the ideology of Ottomanism. The transformation of the empire according to the Western model saved it from collapse back in the 19th century, allowing the central government, on the one hand, to get rid of the influence of

overly conservative socio-political forces (for example, the janissaries), and on the other hand, to fill institutional borrowings from the West with Ottoman imperial content (the incorporation of ayans, the creation of a modernized Turkish army, the state apparatus).

At the same time, the modernization efforts of the center were stopped by three factors. Firstly, the prospect of losing the sacred character of the central government, which is the successor of the Prophet Muhammad. Secondly, the growing separatism of the peripheries, the spread of nationalist ideas there under the influence of modernization and Ottomanism. Thirdly, the growing political and economic dependence on the leading Western powers. Due to these circumstances, the issue of preserving the empire remained relevant.

The growing need to maintain a balance between modernization and the interests of preserving the integrity of the heterogeneous imperial system gave rise to the dictatorship of Abdul Hamid and the temporary triumph of the ideas of pan-Islamism.

The combination of dictatorship, ethnic cleansing, Islamism and a policy of maneuvering between the great powers, with increasing reliance on Germany, stabilized the political situation in the empire, but could not save it from new military defeats and territorial losses. At the same time, the conservative dictatorship and Islamism could not restrain modernization and nationalist (including pan-Turkist) sentiments in the center of the empire, which led to the Young Turk revolution in 1908.

After the revolution, despite the subsequent reforms, the Ottoman Empire was completely disorganized: the political center of the empire returned to the dictatorship regime, nationalist separatism grew on the periphery, and neighboring states of the empire waged successful wars against it. The Young Turk government sought to create a legally rational administration in the provinces, along with a constant demonstration of Turkish nationalism and the forced introduction of the Turkish language in local administrations and judicial bodies, which did not meet the interests of the provinces themselves and caused an exacerbation of the national feelings of their populations (especially in Albania and Arabia) (Meyer, 1991). The policy of the Young Turks consisted of applying the principles of national-state Turkish unity to imperial heterogeneity, i.e. an attempt to combine the incompatible.

The implementation of such a policy by violent methods only contributed to the growth of resistance in the provinces, which was taken advantage of by the opponents of the Ottoman Empire during the First World War.

Conclusion

In the conditions of growing instability and disunity of the Ottoman Empire, its generally accidental entry into the global conflict of empires (World War I) looks natural, the final bloody act of the history of the empire of the Ottoman conquerors. In conclusion, we learned about the domestic and foreign policy of the Ottoman Empire, as well as the period of the Ottoman conquests not only in European states but also in Asian countries. It

can be said that the main problem in the Ottoman Empire was the Young Turk party, which interfered with the policies of the Ottoman Sultan.

References

Abidulin, A. M. (2009). *Official ideology and propaganda campaigns in the Ottoman Empire during the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1876-1909)* (Abstract of a Candidate of Sciences (History)). Saratov.

Antonova-Goleva, B. (2023). 'Top-Down' or 'Bottom-Up' Modernisation: Local Railway Entrepreneurs in the Ottoman Empire in the Second Half of the 19th Century. *Turkish Historical Review*, *14*(1), 26–57. https://doi.org/10.1163/18775462-BJA10007

Bozkuş, Y. D. (2022). Armenian Intellectuals in the XIX. Century in Ottoman Empire: The Example of Diran Kelekyan. *Bilig*, *2022*(101), 1–30. https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?partnerID=HzOxMe3b&scp=851303810 96&origin=inward

Cicek, K. (2004). The economy of the Ottoman Empire during its transformation into the periphery of the West, 1700–1914. In A. I. Miller (Ed.), *The Russian Empire in comparative perspective* (pp. 207–229). New Publishing House.

Downing, B. (1992). *The military revolution and political change.* Princeton University Press.

Fadeeva, I. L. (2001). *The concept of power in the Middle East.* Eastern Literature.

Finkel, K. (2010). *History of the Ottoman Empire: Osman's vision.* ACT.

Gürkan, H. (2022). The Meritocracy Paradigm During The Emergence Of The Modern State In The Ottoman Empire. *History Studies*, *14*(3), 565–583. https://doi.org/10.9737/hist.2021.1094

Inalcik, H., & Quataert, D. (Eds.). (1997). *An economic and social history of the Ottoman Empire, 1300–1914.* Cambridge University Press.

Kilasov, A. R. (2005). *Systemic crisis of the Ottoman Empire in the second half of the 19th – early 20th centuries* (Abstract of a Candidate of Sciences (History)). Makhachkala.

Lieven, D. (2007). *The Russian Empire and its enemies from the 16th century to the present day.* Izdatelstvo "Europa".

Meyer, M. S. (1991). *The Ottoman Empire in the 18th century: Features of the structural crisis.* Nauka.

Meyer, M. S. (2007). Features of the formation and development of the Ottoman Empire. In D. D. Vasiliev (Ed.), *Basileus: A collection of articles dedicated to the 60th anniversary of D. D. Vasiliev* (pp. 222–239). Eastern Literature.

Oreshkova, S. F. (2001). Byzantium and the Ottoman Empire: Problems of continuity. In *Byzantium between West and East: An experience of historical characteristics* (Vol. 2, pp. 474–494).

Oreshkova, S. F. (2005). The Ottoman Empire and Russia in light of their geopolitical delimitation. *Questions of History, (3),* 34–46.

Penskoy, V. V. (2010). *The great firearms revolution.* Yauza: Eksmo.

Quataert, D. (2005). *The Ottoman Empire, 1700–1922.* Cambridge University Press.

Somel, S. A. (2004). Ottoman Empire: Local elites and mechanisms of their integration, 1699–1914. In A. I. Miller (Ed.), *The Russian Empire in comparative perspective* (pp. 177–205). New Publishing House.

Taşansu, T. (2007). *The process of modernization in the Ottoman Empire and Russia and its reflection in the imperial and nationalist ideology (19th – early 20th century)* (Abstract of a Candidate of Sciences (History) Dissertation). Moscow.

Topal, O. F. (2021). Friday sermons and the complexities of standardization in the late Ottoman Empire. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, *48*(4), 642–665. https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2019.1688643