

# **Political and Administrative Secularization of the Ottoman Empire**

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## **ABSTRACT:**

*The Ottoman empire was established in the last decades of the 13th century by the efforts of a Turkish Osman-I and continued till early 20<sup>th</sup> century. His father Ertugral Ghazi migrated from Mangolia towards Middle Eastern regions and worked as employ of the Saljuks. The Saljuks built a powerful Muslim empire in Central and Southwest Asia decades before, after the defeat of the Byzantine Empire. However, after its decline Ottoman Turks established the Empire, which was a typical combination of Western and Eastern multi-cultural societies and their traditions. According to the historians and many writers, it was an Islamic state, but in fact, it based on the secularism and non-Islamic traditions. The Ottomans used religion-Islam to make integrity in the conquered areas of the Islamic world and the western regions, because they felt that the religion could play a vital role in the establishment of strong empire. In the early sixteenth century, the Ottoman ruler got the title of caliph and became the custodians of Hermain-ul-Sharefain because the caliph ideally played a role as a spiritual and political leader of the Muslim world. So, it remained under the influence of Islamism, but after many decades the secularization of the empire reemerged and it transformed into a secular/modern empire. The proposed paper focuses on the emerging elements of the secularism in the empire after its establishment. The research study is based on the theoretical and analytical approaches of research to investigate that it was substantially a religious state or used religion Islam as the instrument to get the stability and favour of the Muslim world.*

**Keywords:** Ottoman empire, Islamism, Secular, Politics, Sultan

## **Introduction:**

The Ottoman empire was established in the end of the thirteenth century by the efforts of Osma I (1286-1323AD), called the founder of the empire. The Ottoman ruling history is surely the marvelous survival of the ruling dynasty of the Islamic world. It was a local Turkish principality emerged in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century on the Anatolian frontier of the Byzantine Empire. It was a regional sultanate straddling western Anatolia and the Balkans and a multi-ethnic empire spanning three continents that endured from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and subsumed the histories of the grooves of nations. The founder of the empire, Osman established a dynastic claim that was maintained by thirty six of his descendents.<sup>1</sup> The

Ottoman Empire itself struggled against the Byzantine Empire and various Latin states to enlarge their frontiers, and almost indiscriminately snatched from the venerable domains that enveloped them the most useful doctrines, weapons, and political formations. Indeed, the territories and institutions of the Ottoman Empire were in some ways successors to the Byzantine Empire. Furthermore, the successor state adopted much of the Byzantine tax structure through the utilization of customary law, which the Ottomans blended into sultanic law as a complement to Islamic law.<sup>2</sup> The Ottoman Empire covered an enormous territory, including Anatolia, the Balkan region in Europe, Middle Eastern regions and many areas of North Africa. In the period of Salem I (1512-1520AD), the empire had possession of Sunni Islam's three holiest shrine cities, Mecca Madina and Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup> The Ottoman conquests were facilitated by policies that left the defeated Christian princes in control of their states as long as they accepted vassalage and provided tribute and warriors to assist further Ottoman conquests and that allowed Christian officials and soldiers to join the Ottoman administrative institutions and army as mercenaries without being required to convert to Islam. As a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-cultural entity, the Ottoman Empire was the last of the great Islamic empires, which emerged in the later Middle Ages and continued its existence until the early twentieth century.

### **Nature of the Ottoman Empire:**

The Ottoman empire was one of the most successful multi-national states which was achieved only at the expense of the Turks, its dominant people. The Turks and especially Anatolian peasantry became increasingly self-effecting and were the last of the component people of the empire to gain their own independence from it. The Ottoman empire was secular in its nature but used the slogan of Islamic religion for the stability of their rule in the world.

The Ottoman rulers were successful at this time because as ghazis fighting the infidel they attached into their service thousands of nomads fleeing into Anatolia from the Mangols. The early Ottoman leaders also were members and sometimes leaders to the urban ahi brotherhoods that were organized so as to bring help and relief to the people, when the defenses of the centralized state failed. While there were other Turkoman ghazi leaders in Anatolia, the Ottomans were in direct contact with the Byzantines and could best exploit the latter's weakness and thus attract the manpower that enabled them to conquer and rule the Christian lands across the straits in Europe.

The early Ottoman empire was based on both religious and economic motives. The followers sought to extend the dominion of Islam and to secure booty. But when the last ruler of the period tried to use the wealth and power gained by the European conquests to capture the Turkish and Muslim east, he brought on himself and his state the onslaught of a new nomadic hoard, led by Tamerlane, who defeated the Ottoman army, broke up the empire, and reduced the Ottomans to equal status with the other restored Turkoman principalities. The first period of the Ottoman history and in fact the first Ottoman empire thus ended in an interregnum (1402-1413AD) in which different elements of Ottoman society struggled for power, with chaos again enveloping the entire era.<sup>4</sup>

The founder of the empire, Osman I (1286-1323AD) worked for the establishment of strong Ottoman state, so developed friendly relations with the neighbour countries. He also emphasized on the administration of the state and divided the conquered areas into three principalities which handled by the uc-bey (subedars). Moreover, further advances in the Byzantine empire and the Europe were made with the help of the leaders of the principalities. The real power rule of the Ottomans was started after the decline of Saljuk Turks in the last decades of fourteenth century.

Yet, Osman I was succeeded by his son Orhan (1324-1359AD), who also adopted the expansion policy of newly establish Ottoman empire. In newly conquered areas, he created endowments system to finance and support the activities of his supporters as well as the Sufi mystic orders, which encouraged the nomads to accept Ottoman leadership. The army and government of Orhan were based on the Anatolian Turks but also entered the Christians, who served them to secure the fame and booty in the expeditions.<sup>5</sup> After Orhan, his successors adopted almost same policies of territorial expansions and included the subjects of conquered areas in their administration, army, society and other institutions of life. So, the multidimensional changes and multi-ethnic people became a part of the Ottoman Empire and its system.

**Motives of Expansions:**

The Ottoman people, generals and the military men, who distinguished themselves in the early days of expansions were not of Turkish race but were Greeks, Albanians, Slaves and the Italians, who had embraced Islam or whose forebears had done so. With respect to the objects and motives of the Ottoman conquests, there was very little, if any, of missionary enterprise on behalf of Islam. The motives for conquest and expansion were the ambitions to extend the expenses of neighboring states and hope of the plunder on the part of the soldiers. The religious zeal had nothing to do with it. As a matter of fact, there was no very large extension of Islam in Europe as a result of the Ottoman conquests. There is also nothing to show that the Ottomans soldiers were animated by any religious zeal in their campaigns in Europe. The main cause of their military efficiency was to conquer more and more areas for the territorial expansions. Moreover, it offered immense rewards to the soldiers for victories in battles and for personal valour, in the share of booty and plunder levied in the conquered districts, of captives to be sold as slaves of women for wives or concubines or to be sold for harems, and of lands to be distributed as fiefs. In the rare intervals of peace the soldiers soon wearied of life in barracks and yearned for active campaign. It was necessary to find employment for them at a distance. So, the ottoman conquests were continued with the help of army.

The ottoman family members were pure Turks in their origin, but the Turkish blood very soon diluted. The mothers of future Sultans' after ten generations were either captives taken by slaves or corsairs bought on account of their beauty. They were of every race, Greeks, Slaves, Italians or Russians but in spite of this mixed blood the type of Sultans remained much the same for ten generations.

**Early Ottoman policies:**

In the early period of Ottoman establishments, they adopted the policy of Islamism and tolerance about the non-Muslims and the people of the book. The Christians, Jews and others who followed the God, had the rights to protect their lives, properties and religions as long as they paid the special tax (jazy) and accepted their sovereignty. A few Balkan Christians have converted to their religion to secure the benefits of membership and freedom. The people in Ottoman conquered areas, mainly accepted their dominancy except some of the urban areas, where people were not ready to accept the suzerainty of the Ottomans. Moreover, they were afraid of the enslavement and the loss of their properties in the hands of the Ottoman invaders.

The system which provided for semi autonomous government within the empire was shared by a number of other Christian people. However, the Greeks had peculiar advantages over their fellow subjects, since they were fitted to carry out tasks that the Turks themselves could not perform. As Christians, scholars, official Ottoman diplomats and nmerchants, they never lost touch with the Western world. Furthermore, the Non-Turks people, including Christians showed their loyalties for their masters because of their religious tolerance and the moderate behavior.

Thus, the secularism in the Ottomans was entered from its basis, because of the non-Muslims indulgence in every walk of life. For example, in addition to retaining certain of the administrative personnel of their predecessors, the Turkish rulers instituted a regular system of a forcible annual recruitment system of Young Christian boys to be trained as soldiers and administrators of the empire. They were mainly brought from the provinces of the capital and trained through the military trainings and religious teachings. Moreover, they were made on graduation from the cultural rehabilitation, were assigned either to the ranks of famous Janissari corps of the army or posts in the administrative services.<sup>6</sup>

### **Ottoman's Administration and Institutions:**

The Ottoman rulers created the administration, the educational and cultural institutions. It eventually favoured not only the sunni Muslims but other sectarian or religious people. The nobility or ruling class was divided into institutions, according to the responsibilities and work.

Under the Ottoman system of administration, the sultan stood at the top of the power pyramid. He was both the temporal and spiritual leader, who drew his authority from the Islamic law (Sharia) and the imperial law (kanun) and was obligated to preserve the peace, security, and stability of the empire he ruled. The government itself was an extension of the sultan's private household; government officials were the personal servants of their royal master, who were appointed and dismissed in accordance with the sultan's decision or momentary whim.

Until the reign of Mehmed II, the conqueror of Constantinople, the sultan participated in the deliberations of his ministers. As the power and the territory of the empire grew, the sultan became increasingly detached and stopped participating in the meetings of the divan.

The Ottoman Empire was a multi-national empire, consisted of several heterogeneous elements which made the administrative system complex, intricate and complicated. The empire consisted of following parts as:

- **Directly Administrative areas:**

The regions directly administrated were divided into districts of sanjaks, each of which had a separate manual or Qanunnama of taxation which rested upon the terms made at the time of conquests. The institutions worked in these areas may be discussed as

The Ottoman ruling Institutions, which consisted on the Sultan and his family, the officers of his household, the executive officers of the government, the army, the court and the relevant government.

The Muslim Institutions of the Ottoman Empire represented and maintained the entire system that was based upon the life and work of the Prophet (PBUH). It contained a hierarchy of jurists or theologians, a graded corps of teachers and classified body of judges whose jurisdiction covered the whole empire. The entire educational system as well as the judicial administration was in the hands of the religious classes.

These two great institutions of the Ottoman Empire were joined together at the top. They differed fundamentally in this that while the members of the ruling institutions were drawn from Christian families. The members of the religious institutions were exclusively drawn from the Muslim families.

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- **Less directly Administrated Regions:**

A number of regions less directly administrated under special regulation, e.g., Egypt was under a special government headed by Pasha sent out from the capital (Constantinople) for the term of three years and paying a large part of annual revenue to the imperial treasury. The holy cities of Makkah and Medina far from paying tribute, received a large annual subsidy at the cost of Egypt. The holy cities were conquered by Salem I during his short ruling period (1512-1520AD) and honorary adopted the title of *Amir-ul-Muslimeen* or caliph of Muslim Ummah.

Furthermore, the North Africa conquered by the Corsairs was brought under the Empire by Khairuddin Barbarosa. It was seldom in strict obedience to the parent government.

### **Tributary provinces:**

In these regions are included Venice's Island of Cyprus, the Emperor Ferdinand's possessions in Hungary, the territories of Ragusa, Transylvania, Moldavia and Wallachia all paid regular tribute for the privilege of maintaining their own administrations.

And the last one was, certain protected Vassal states (feudal states) included Crimean Tartary, Georgia, Mingrelia and parts of Arabia.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Ottoman Sultans and other institutions:**

The sultan as the head of the state had limitless authorities. Theoretically, he was a caliph of Muslims in the Islamic world. In that capacity, he was head of the Islamic state, defender, executor and interpreter of sharia and defender of the faith. He was under obligation to punish heretics and recalcitrant infidels to protect true believers and to extend the area of his realms. Apart from his theoretical part of his authority, his powers were infinite. The central and local governments, the household, the court, the army and highest officials, all depended upon him.

The sultan had the sole power of legislature. There were four types of laws operating in the Ottoman Empire, the Sharia (sacred law), the Qanuns (written decrees of the sultans), the Adet or the established customs; the urf, or the sovereign will of the reigning sultan. However, the sharia could not be altered by the sultan. The qanun was issued by the sultan, dealt with the economic, military, criminal, courts and police matters. In the Ottoman empire, each department had its own qanun.

The nobility was also an important part of the administration and the Sultan had bestowed upon all his nobility. These officials bounded to provide their military services in return of high salaries and other facilities.

Lybyer observed that 'the very extent of the privileges of the kullur (nobility) made towards the breakdown of the system. The privileges of the Sultan's kullur, however, fell short of those of western nobility in this respect that they were not hereditary'.<sup>8</sup>

The nobility of the Ottomans was also a combination of different nations and regions, who got the high ranks because of their expertise and abilities.

The rank of viziers was also developed under the Ottomans, who worked as the chief councilors of the Sultans for peace and war, administration and justice and deliberated over all important matters of the state in the meetings of the Divan. In the period of Sulaiman, the office of grand vizier developed and attained unprecedented power. The viziers under the Ottomans were responsible to deal with the important matters of the politics, economy, military, treasury, markets and the society as well.

Another important institution was divan, who worked like supreme council with the help of vizier. The Reis Effendi and lesser secretaries and clerks wrote down carefully all that was decided upon, controlling administration and justice and influencing legislation, the Divan, under the leadership of the grand vizier, governed the Ottoman Empire for the Sultan.<sup>9</sup>

These were two main institutions or ranks which filled by the appointments of favourites and the eligible persons but they did not Turkish by birth. So, the indulgence of non-Turkish people increased gradually and the empire went towards decline.

### **The Muslim Institutions:**

The structure of the Muslim institutions of the Ottoman Empire was wholly different from that of any of the Christian ecclesiastical organizations. Islam recognized no organized priesthood, no aristocracy and no monks, yet the Ottoman Muslim institutions possessed groups that were much like each of three. In addition it had a graded education system, with a graded corps of teachers, it continued, a hierarchy of jurists and it supplied a classified body of judges, whose combined jurisdiction covered the whole empire. The Sultan was the head of these institutions.

The financial support of these institutions was made through the vakf, or religious endowments. The Evakf as a whole supported all the official members of the Muslim institutions, except the judges who derived their income from fees and fines.

The educational system of the Ottomans was an integral part of the Muslim institutions. The reading places (schools) were divided into three major categories, mektabs, ordinary madrassas and higher madrassas. There was no compulsory education, where primary schools existed the instruction was free and some students were even fed and lodged. On receiving the high degree, the students became 'danishmend'. Those who desired to become the jurists had to pursue a long course of the study in the higher madrassas.



The religious classes and the people who performed the religious duties were five in numbers, the Sheikhs (preachers), the Khatibs (leaders of Friday services), the Imams (leaders of daily services), the Muezzins (people to prayers) and the Kaims (caretakers of the mosques). Moreover, the dervishes (Sufis) were also the members of this class. However, they also took part in the official and political matters of the state.<sup>10</sup> The Judicial system of the empire was in the hands of the Ulemas. The Ulemas as jurists were also performing their duties in the Ottoman territories, included Crimea and North Africa which remained under the influence of vassal governments. Indeed the application of the Ottoman judicial system was wider than that of any other branch of their administration. The judges tried to deal all cases whether civil or criminal but they were not competent to deal with all judicial cases. So, there were established a separate system of jurisdictions in controlled areas. The kullur, the sayyads and the members of foreign colonies had their separate courts of justice. Furthermore, the cases related to the administration of vakf lands were decided by special courts. The judges were graded in five principal classes, the greater mullas, the lesser mullas, the mufettidshes, the qazis and the naibs. The law which judges administered was codified by the doctors of Hanafite school and applied the Qanuns of Sultan and customs and immunities of the areas in which they served.<sup>11</sup> So, it can say that the administration and judicial system of the empire was too based on the secularization, which may not fulfill the demands of the empire and its heterogeneity. There was not any proper and the unite code of conduct in the empire, which could be a symbol of the fully Islamic state in the world.

### **Increasing Secularizing Trends in the Empire:**

In the end of 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the secularizing trends clearly dominated in the Ottoman Empire, especially after the treaty of Passarowitz (1718AD) made after the defeat in the war against Austria. The Ottomans realized that it would not be possible to defeat the European powers with traditional military means and technology anymore and that the Ottomans had to turn to Europe for inspiration and innovations. Furthermore, the perception of growing threat from Russia and Austria was compelling the Ottomans to look for allies, France being the most notable candidate as it was also in trouble with the same countries in this period. So, they felt a need to develop friendly relations with Europe. They had a chance to observe European technological and scientific developments for purposes to employ it in building domestic military power in the first place leading to a rise of interest in French civilization and culture also as a byproduct.<sup>12</sup>

This period of modernization and the secularization was ended till the 1730s but it provided the strong basis to the republicanism of the Ottoman empire, which turned after the First World War. The era of secularization in 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century is also called the tulip era. In this period, the process of innovations and reforms was adopted with the secularizing tendencies. Moreover, the ambassadors were sent to various European countries like Mehmet Çelebi for education and to make observations on European civilization.<sup>13</sup> During his stay in France, Mehmet Çelebi had realized and observed the effective usage of technology and science in every field of life. He had delivered a report to the incumbents for the replacement of traditional and old system of the Ottoman empire with the more effective and advance technology, technicians, traditions and methods.<sup>14</sup>

The Ottomans invited foreign officer and corps to train their own men and attempted to build modern administrative, social and military system in the empire. There were also made some implications for secularist politics because the transfer of the elements of material culture involved the importation of various non-material cultures, attached to them in various ways. However, these changes were not accepted by the Ulemasa and other religious scholars so they opposed these all diversions. Moreover, the issues of implication and practices were also developed in other fields of education as mathematics, geometry, medicine and geography. The Tulip Era was important in the process of the secularization of Ottomans because of a spirit of worldliness that it generated. It was a period of time characterized with decline in moral and religious concerns and a rise of interest in the material world exemplified with the cherishing of the elements of Western civilization, culture, literature, architecture and arts. The traditional rich segments of the Ottoman society liked spending money for mosque constructions and various religious endowments in the past, but the secularization increased and in the *Tulip era* emphasized on the construction of palaces, manors, pools, parks, gardens and fountains. It saw the emergence and proliferation of operas, taverns, parties and coffee houses.<sup>15</sup> The Ottoman sultan Ibrahim considered as the most leading reformist and supporter of the secularization and modernization. He was the person, who first time allowed official Ottoman printing, which was used for the publication of both religious and non-religious items or images. He was concerned with innovation and awakening in Islam. He defended the importance of introducing new methods and ideas from the west.

In the book entitled '*Usulul Hikem fi Nizamul Umem*', he argued that the Ottomans were receding because of their weaknesses in the area of technology, failure to devise wise

political methods, laws, procedures and principles to establish viable political regimes unlike west. Ibrahim made a distinction between three types of government including monarchy, aristocracy and democracy, and went on with the virtues of democratic government with its promotion of popular representation and parliamentarianism. According to Ibrahim, the good governance that came with democratic movements in Europe was closely associated with their advance in front of the Ottomans. The Muslims were in a state of ignorance. While adopting the latest military technology and methods, in the first place, the Muslims had to employ modern technological and political means to gain wealth and establish unity among the Muslims with viable political and administrative methods.<sup>16</sup> On the other side, a class of conservatives was opposing a total campaign of Westernization. The conservatives thought that the christianity was still an enemy of Islam. It was wrong to rely on the Christian states for alliance. They argued that cultural and social westernization would mean a denial of traditional Islamic heritage, which was never acceptable. The betrayal of France in 1807AD was a proof of this. They argued that if the harmony of traditional institutions was being broken, it would not be possible to unite them again.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Secularism and its Impacts:**

The early or classical system of empire reached its peak in the sixteenth century, but signs of weakness signaled the beginning of a slow but steady decline. In the second half of the sixteenth century, there emerged a series of external and internal challenges to the classical Ottoman system, and this led to a series of crises and subsequent transformations of the empire in military, political, social, and financial institutions.

The long wars continued in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which increased the financial burden and spoiled the classical military structure. Moreover, the corruption and bribery increased in the political, administrative and economic institutions which affected badly the performance of these institutions. This in turn led to the transformation in political, administrative, social, and financial structures of the empire, throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The measures to remedy financial crisis led to the gradual replacement of the timar system with the direct taxation (tax-farming) system, transforming the Ottoman classical land and the tax system. Thus the economic and military changes in Europe, and subsequent crises and responses to these crises radically transformed the empire and its political, administrative and socio-economic structure. These transformations tended towards a decentralization of Ottoman authority and administration. However, with the entrance of the

state to a period of decline due to the failure to match up with European military, economic and political power, religion was introduced to a process of retreat in shaping Ottoman state and social structures. The reforms were adopted to replace traditional ways and institutions with more effective and advanced European ones in order to recover the state from decline. An important development in this context was the opening of European model educational institutions with their secular curriculum. These schools were to raise up the intellectual and bureaucratic cadres of the state which were traditionally occupied by madrasa graduates. More comprehensive reforms were adopted during the later periods of the Ottoman decline with the prominence of a thinking that survival and recovery of the state was possible only if a total transformation project was adopted covering social and cultural arenas too which were formerly excluded from the reforms. During and after the Tanzimat period, reforms were adopted in legal and administrative domains with remarkable secular contents. Ideas of republicanism, secularism, equality, freedom of thought and conscience etc. were adopted as legal and constitutional norms. The power and authority of the religious institution was significantly minimized to be transferred to secular offices, directories and ministries during the Constitutionalist period.

**Conclusion:**

After the establishment of the Ottoman Empire, the rulers used one of the most important source of legitimacy during the early period with its Islamic legal, educational, bureaucratic systems. The Ottoman Empire always had the germs of secularism in its nature and system. It was the state of multinational groups and heterogeneous cultures. The slogan of Islamism was adopted just for the stability of their own imperial rule in the world. If critically observed and analyze then, it can see that the secularism was existing in every field of life. The sharia system was just to show the Islamic ideology and identity of the state. The sultan of the Ottoman empire was all in all in his activities and the decisions. Moreover, it was impossible to challenge his decisions and the authorities. Each and every department even household life totally depended on the imperial head of the state. The women in the harem were like a piece of beauty and entertainment for them. They spent all their lives in the slavery of the sultans. It was an inhuman act but continued till the end of the empire. Thus, the Ottoman Empire was a more secular and modern state in its practices but Islamic in its theology. The great contrast

between ideology and the practices of the empire. Moreover, it seemed impossible to convert it into a pure Sharia and democratic state of Muslims.

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