

LESSON 1

The Rise and Expansion of the Ottoman Empire

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What factors help unify an empire?
- How can the creation of a new empire impact the people and culture of a region?

READING HELPDESK

Academic Vocabulary

- successor
- domain

Content Vocabulary

- janissary
- gunpowder empire
- sultan
- grand vizier
- harem
- pasha
- ulema

TAKING NOTES

Key Ideas and Details

Organizing Create a chart like this one to show the structure of the Ottoman society. List the groups in order of importance.

Class	Description

IT MATTERS BECAUSE

At its peak in the sixteenth century, the Ottoman Empire consisted of lands in western Asia, North Africa, and Europe. The Ottomans contributed new designs to world art, as seen in their magnificent mosques. They also practiced religious tolerance with their subjects.

Rise of the Ottoman Turks

GUIDING QUESTION *How did the Ottoman Turks establish power and expand their empire?*

In the late thirteenth century, a new group of Turks, under their leader Osman, began to build power in the northwest corner of the Anatolian Peninsula. As they expanded, the Osman Turks founded the Ottoman dynasty. In the fourteenth century, the Ottoman Turks moved into the Balkans, building a strong military by developing an elite guard called **janissaries**, children enslaved from the local Christian population and converted to Islam. The janissaries were trained as foot soldiers or administrators and they served the sultan, or Ottoman leader.

As knowledge of firearms spread during this period, the Ottomans began to master the new technology. With the janissaries, the Ottomans defeated the Serbs at the Battle of Kosovo in 1389. During the 1390s, they advanced northward and annexed Bulgaria.

Fall of the Byzantine Empire

In their expansion westward, the Ottomans came to control the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. These two straits (narrow water passageways), separated by the Sea of Marmara, connect the Black Sea and the Aegean Sea, which leads to the Mediterranean Sea. The Byzantine Empire had controlled this area for centuries.

Under Mehmed II, the Ottomans moved to end the Byzantine Empire. With 80,000 troops fighting against only 7,000 defenders, Mehmed laid siege to Constantinople.

“When he saw what a large number had been killed, and the ruin of the buildings, and the wholesale ruin and destruction of the City, he was filled with compassion and repented not a little at the destruction and the plundering. Tears fell from his eyes as he groaned deeply and passionately: What a city we have given over to plunder and destruction.”

—Kritovoulos, from *The History of Mehmed the Conqueror*, 1453

DBQ DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

Why did the Ottomans need to capture Constantinople?

janissary a soldier in the elite guard of the Ottoman Turks

successor one who follows, especially one who takes over a throne, title, estate, or office

gunpowder empire an empire formed by outside conquerors who unified the regions that they conquered through their mastery of firearms

sultan “holder of power”; the military and political head of state under the Seljuk Turks and the Ottomans

The attack began on April 6, 1453, as the Ottomans bombarded Constantinople with massive cannons hurling stone balls weighing up to 1,200 pounds (545 kg) each. The Byzantines fought desperately for almost two months to save Constantinople. Finally, on May 29, the walls were breached, and Ottoman soldiers poured in. The Byzantine emperor died in the final battle, and a three-day sack of the city began.

In capturing Constantinople, the Turks now linked the European and Asian parts of the Ottoman Empire. Mehmed II renamed the city İstanbul. With the Ottoman Empire in control of this important crossroads, Europeans looked to the seas for trading routes to Asia. These explorations led Europeans to Africa and the Americas.

Expansion of the Ottoman Empire

From their new capital at İstanbul, the Ottoman Turks controlled the Balkans and the Anatolian Peninsula. From 1514 to 1517, Sultan Selim I conquered Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Arabia—the original heartland of Islam. Through these conquests, Selim I was now in control of several of Islam’s holy cities. These cities included Jerusalem, Makkah (Mecca), and Madinah (Medina). Selim declared himself the new caliph, or defender of the faith and **successor** to Muhammad.

Ottoman forces advanced westward along the African coast almost to the Strait of Gibraltar. They also began to expand into other parts of Europe, back into the Balkans, and the Romanian territory of Walachia. The Hungarians, however, stopped their advance up the Danube Valley.

Under Süleyman I, whose reign began in 1520, the Ottomans advanced anew up the Danube, seized Belgrade, and won a major victory over the Hungarians in 1526 at the Battle of Mohács (MOH • hach). They then conquered most of Hungary and moved into Austria. Advancing to Vienna, they were defeated in 1529. They moved into the western Mediterranean until the Spanish destroyed a large Ottoman fleet at Lepanto in 1571.

During the first half of the seventeenth century, the Ottoman Empire in eastern Europe remained a “sleeping giant.” Occupied with internal problems, the Ottomans kept the status quo. However, in the second half of the seventeenth century, they again went on the offensive, laying siege to Vienna. Repulsed by a European army, the Ottomans retreated and were pushed out of Hungary. Although they retained the core of their empire, the Ottoman Turks would never again be a threat to central Europe.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Explaining What was the role of the janissaries in the rise of the Ottoman Empire?

Life Under Ottoman Rule

GUIDING QUESTION *How was the Ottoman Empire ruled under a sultan? What were society and culture like in the Ottoman Empire?*

Like the Muslim empires in Persia and India, the Ottoman Empire is often labeled a “**gunpowder empire**.” Gunpowder empires were formed by outside conquerors who unified their conquered regions. Such an empire’s success was largely based on its mastery of firearms.

The Imperial Sultans

At the head of the Ottoman system was the **sultan**, who was the supreme authority in a political and a military sense. As the empire expanded, the status and prestige of the sultan increased. The position took on the trappings of imperial rule. A centralized administrative system was adopted, and the sultan became increasingly isolated from his people.

domain place where one has absolute ownership of land or other property

harem “sacred place”; the private domain of an Ottoman sultan, where he and his wives resided

grand vizier the Ottoman sultan’s chief minister who carried the main burdens of the state and who led the council meetings

pasha an appointed official of the Ottoman Empire who collected taxes, maintained law and order, and was directly responsible to the sultan’s court

ulema a group of religious scholars who served as advisers to the Ottoman sultan; this group administered the legal system and schools for educating Muslims

▼ The Topkapi Palace overlooks the Bosphorus and Sea of Marmara, part of an essential trade route connecting the Aegean and Black Seas.

► **CRITICAL THINKING**
Interpreting Significance What was the symbolic importance of where the Topkapi Palace was located?

The position of the sultan was hereditary. A son, although not necessarily the eldest, always succeeded the father. This practice led to struggles over succession upon the death of individual sultans. The losers in these struggles were often executed.

The private **domain** of the sultan was called the **harem** (“sacred place”). Here, the sultan and his wives resided. When a son became a sultan, his mother became known as the queen mother and acted as a major adviser to the throne. This tradition often gave considerable power to the queen mother in the affairs of state.

The sultan controlled his bureaucracy through an imperial council that met four days a week. The **grand vizier**, a chief minister who carried the main burdens of the state, led the meetings of the council. During the council meetings, the sultan sat behind a screen, overhearing the proceedings, and then privately indicated his desires to the grand vizier.

The empire was divided into provinces and districts, each governed by officials. They were assisted by bureaucrats known as **pashas**, who had been trained in a palace school for officials in İstanbul. The sultan gave land to the senior officials. They were then responsible for collecting taxes and supplying armies for the empire from this landed area.

The Topkapi (“iron gate”) Palace in İstanbul was the center of the sultan’s power. The palace was built in the fifteenth century by Mehmed II. Like Versailles in France, it had an administrative purpose but also served as the private residence of the ruler and his family.

Ottoman Society

Like most Turkic-speaking peoples in the Anatolian Peninsula and throughout western Asia, the Ottomans were Sunni Muslims. Ottoman sultans had claimed the title of caliph since the early sixteenth century. In theory, they were responsible for guiding the flock and maintaining Islamic law. In practice, the sultans gave their religious duties to a group of religious advisers, scholars known as the **ulema**. This group administered the legal system and schools for educating Muslims. Islamic law and customs were applied to all Muslims in the empire.

The Ottoman system was generally tolerant of non-Muslims, who made up a significant minority within the empire. Non-Muslims paid a tax, but they were allowed to practice their religion or to convert to Islam. Most people in the European areas of the empire remained Christian. In some areas, however, such as present-day Bosnia, large numbers of non-Muslims converted to the Islamic faith.

The subjects of the Ottoman Empire were divided by occupation. In addition to the ruling class, there were four main occupational groups: peasants, artisans, merchants, and pastoral peoples (nomadic herders). Peasants farmed land that the state leased to them. Ultimate ownership of all land resided with the sultan.



Artisans were organized according to craft guilds. Each guild provided financial services, social security, and training to its members. Outside the ruling elite, merchants were the most privileged class in Ottoman society. They were largely exempt from government regulations and taxes.

Technically, women in the Ottoman Empire were subject to the same restrictions as women in other Muslim societies. However, their position was somewhat better. Within the Ottoman Empire, Islamic legal scholars were more tolerant in defining the legal status of women. This relatively tolerant attitude was probably due to Turkish traditions that regarded women as almost equal to men. For instance, women were allowed to own and inherit property. They could not be forced into marriage and, in certain cases, were permitted to seek divorce. Women often gained considerable power within the palace. In a few instances, they served as senior officials.

Architecture and the Arts

The Ottoman sultans were enthusiastic patrons of the arts. Artists came from all over the world to compete for the sultans' generous rewards. They produced pottery; rugs, silk, and other textiles; jewelry; and arms and armor. All of these adorned the palaces of the rulers.

By far the greatest contribution of the Ottoman Empire to world art was in architecture, especially the magnificent mosques of the last half of the sixteenth century. The Ottoman Turks borrowed from the Byzantines and modeled their mosques on the open floor plan of Constantinople's Byzantine church of Hagia Sophia, creating a prayer hall with an open central area under one large dome.

In the mid-sixteenth century, the greatest of all Ottoman architects, Sinan, began building the first of his 81 mosques. One of Sinan's masterpieces was the Süleymaniye Mosque in İstanbul. Each of his mosques was topped by an imposing dome, and often the entire building was framed with four towers, or minarets.

The sixteenth century also witnessed the flourishing of textiles and rugs. The Byzantine emperor Justinian had introduced silk cultivation to the West in the sixth century. Under the Ottomans, the silk industry resurfaced. Factories produced silks for wall hangings and especially court costumes. Rugs were a peasant industry. The rugs were made of wool and cotton in villages from different regions.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Explaining What aspects of Ottoman life did the sultan control?

LESSON 1 REVIEW

Reviewing Vocabulary

1. **Describing** Write a paragraph describing the relationship between the sultan and the grand vizier.

Using Your Notes

2. **Explaining** Use your graphic organizer on Ottoman society to identify how the upper classes were supported by the lower classes.

Answering the Guiding Questions

3. **Evaluating** How did the Ottoman Turks establish power and expand their empire?

4. **Assessing** How was the Ottoman Empire ruled under the sultan?

5. **Summarizing** What were society and culture like in the Ottoman Empire?

Writing Activity

6. **Narrative** Write a paragraph on Ottoman expansion or warfare from the point of view of a janissary in the Ottoman army.