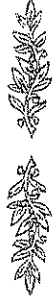


Peace Be upon You



FOURTEEN CENTURIES OF MUSLIM,
CHRISTIAN, AND JEWISH CONFLICT
AND COOPERATION

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Slavs, not the Huns, not the first wave of Arab armies to emerge in the seventh and eighth centuries, and not the Seljuk Turks in the eleventh. For fifty years after the brutal sack of Constantinople in 1204, the Latins ruled the imperial city, and the Byzantine emperor sat in exile. In the middle of the thirteenth century, the imperial family returned, but hardly in triumph. For the next two hundred years, Byzantium was more a name and a legend than a real power capable of determining what went on in the eastern Mediterranean or the Balkans. Controlling only a few thousand square miles of land, the latter-day rulers of a once-mighty empire watched helplessly as the Ottomans sealed them in their city.

Though Byzantium had shrunk and its emperor was reduced to a man in robes barely able to raise five thousand men to defend the city's ramparts, it remained a potent symbol as the last relic of Rome. For that reason alone, it was a target worthy of young Mehmed's ambitions. And even with a handful of defenders, the walls of the city and its strategic placement between the waters of the Golden Horn and the Bosphorus represented a formidable challenge to any adversary that wanted to take it. Siege technology was not advanced enough to breach the ramparts. From the heights along the water's edge, a few defenders could destroy ships that attempted a landing. Some of Mehmed's predecessors had tried to take the city and had failed, even with numbers on their side. Constantinople was weak, but it could still defend itself.

Mehmed was impetuous, arrogant, and seething with resentment, but even at the age of twenty-one, he knew better than to attack the city unprepared. He marshaled a large army, built a fleet, and commissioned the construction of an immense cannon before he began the attack on Constantinople in the spring of 1453.

The Byzantines did the best they could. Some Genoese and Venetian ships and mercenaries came to their aid, though most of Europe refused Emperor Constantine's request for help. Some Western Christians suggested that if the emperor were willing to bow to the pope, more active support might be forthcoming, but that was not a price he was willing to pay. While the Roman Church had established itself as the supreme doctrinal authority in the West, the Eastern Orthodox Church had never acknowledged that the pope was anything more than the bishop of Rome, worthy of respect but not obeisance. Given the choice between capitulating to the pope and surrendering to the Ottomans, Constantinople preferred the infidel. "Better the turban of the Muslim in the

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE LORD OF TWO LANDS

WHEN THE END finally came, it was a calamity. It was also meaningless. After more than a thousand years, the city of Constantinople, the seat of the greatest empire Christendom had ever known, was occupied by a Muslim army. But by the time that Sultan Mehmed II, ever after known as the Conqueror, marched into the Church of Hagia Sophia, in the heart of Constantinople, Byzantium had long since ceased to be an empire in anything but name.

Mehmed came to power burdened with a substantial Oedipal complex. His father, Murad, had significantly enlarged the scope of Ottoman rule, and when Murad died in 1451, Mehmed succeeded him—for a second time. After victories over the Hungarians and the Serbs, Murad had abdicated in 1444, only to be recalled by the court when the teenage Mehmed, obstinate and disdainful of his father's advisers, proved unable to govern effectively and unwilling to work with the vizier appointed by Murad to guide the young prince. Though there are no records recording what Mehmed felt at being installed and then abruptly shunted aside by his commanding father, it's unlikely that he took it in stride. In portraiture, his face defined by the long, sharp nose and the classic beard of an Ottoman prince, it is difficult to discern his character. But his later behavior suggests that he never forgave or forgot what his father had done, and Constantinople paid the steep and fatal price.

His father had won almost every confrontation with almost every adversary that the Ottomans faced, but one prize eluded him. Constantinople had been taken exactly once, in 1204, but not by Muslims. The Venetians had done what no other power had accomplished—not the

midst of Constantinople," the saying went, "than the miter of the Latin." The emperor Constantine was left with his guile, intimate knowledge of the walls that had been built by the emperor Theodosius a millennium before, and prayer. Those were not enough.

Though Constantine shared the name of the city's founder, he did not share the same luck. The Ottoman generals did what had been considered impossible and breached the iron gate that protected the Golden Horn from enemy ships. Mehmed had numbers on his side, and he exploited the thinness of the defenses and weaknesses in the fortifications. Tens of thousands of his soldiers poured into the city and overwhelmed it. Constantine ripped off his imperial insignia, charged into the onslaught, and died. He declared that he would not be remembered as the emperor who fled the greatest city in the world in the hour of its greatest need.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND "THE CONQUEROR"

THE OTTOMAN ARMY entered the city on May 29, 1453. Because the Byzantines had refused to surrender, Mehmed gave his troops license to loot and pillage; they would have rebelled if he had not. But the city was already depopulated and all but a handful of churches and palaces were deserted. Some later Western accounts describe a horrific sacking, but there is little evidence of that. No matter how psychologically devastating, the physical damage was relatively mild, both to property and to people.

Mehmed made directly for Hagia Sophia. For a millennium, the church had stood as a monument to the empire, the center of Eastern Christianity. At the end of May 1453, an alien language was heard under its domes, and a conquering people replaced the old rites with theirs. The church echoed with the sound of the *shabada*, and with the Muslim call to prayer. Thereafter, Hagia Sophia would be a mosque, with the names of the first four caliphs surrounding its main dome. When Mehmed first entered, so legend has it, a soldier was attempting to pry loose the tiles in the floor. The sultan struck him with the flat of his sword, and said, "For you the treasures and the prisoners are enough. The buildings of the city fall to me."

The sultan soon halted the pillaging. The city was to be the capital of -

his empire, and he did not want to be burdened with unnecessary renovations. The place was in sorry enough shape as it was and in need of repair. In the ensuing months, the Ottomans refashioned the city, both physically and culturally. Some Byzantine nobles had escaped; others were taken captive; some were ransomed; and a few were executed. But Mehmed could not afford to have the entire city emptied of its Greek inhabitants. In order to keep it functioning, he did what he could to assure the population that their rights would be respected. He even tried to entice those who had left to return and offered to pay them restitution if their property had been damaged or destroyed.

As an added incentive, Mehmed promised that he would not interfere with religion. The Byzantine emperor had stood at the head of the Orthodox Church, and with him gone, the patriarch was the logical replacement. But at the time of the city's fall, the reigning patriarch was abroad, and in his place, Mehmed turned to Gennadius—one of the most respected monks in the city, who was known to be fiercely independent and equally fierce in his opposition to Rome—and announced that he would be the leader of the church.

It was later said that Mehmed ordered his officials to scour Constantinople for someone worthy of the appointment. In the words of one contemporary Greek chronicler, "Gennadius was a very wise and remarkable man. . . . When the Sultan saw him, and had in a short time had proofs of his wisdom and prudence and virtue and also of his power as a speaker and his religious character, he was greatly impressed, and held him in great honor and respect, and gave him the right to come to him at any time, and honored him with liberty and conversation." In January 1454, the sultan installed the new patriarch and granted him authority over the daily lives of the city's Christian populace, "no less than that enjoyed previously under the emperors."

The extent of the patriarch's power was spelled out in a charter drawn up by the sultan's vizier. Gennadius was more than the spiritual guide of the Greek Orthodox who had fallen under Ottoman rule. He was in many ways their king, with power to tax and judge and the authority to appoint local representatives throughout the empire. Much like the Byzantine emperor, he had more influence than the heads of other Christian churches in the East. While he ultimately answered to the sultan and to the Ottoman state, on issues ranging from birth to marriage to death, including estates, taxes, and intracommunal trade, he had

wide latitude. The Ottomans may have ruled, but Mehmed II had no interest in micromanaging the daily lives of Christian subjects. That would have required more bureaucracy and more effort. Better to find a partner and delegate the dirty work of administration to him.¹

It did not seem remarkable to anyone at the time that Mehmed could be simultaneously so merciless with the nobles and the ruling class and so merciful toward most of the people and their religious leaders. But it runs contrary to the modern notion that there is no separation between church and state in Islam. That lack of separation is said to be in contrast to the wall dividing secular and religious power in the West. Yet until at least the nineteenth century, those walls did not exist in the Western world, and the entire framework has never made much sense when applied to the Muslim world.

For instance, the Byzantine Empire, which the Ottomans ended, never had separate spheres for religion and politics. The emperor was simultaneously the head of the state and the head of the church—and that formula was replicated in other parts of the Christian world, including Reformation England, where the king demanded the obedience of the archbishop of Canterbury. Throughout Byzantine history, the emperor enforced doctrine, led military campaigns, and convened tribunals to punish those who dissented from the imperial orthodoxy. As we saw, the refusal of Egyptian Coptic Christians to bow to the authority of both emperor and the patriarch in Constantinople in the sixth and seventh centuries was one reason for the ease of the Arab conquest of Egypt soon after Muhammad's death.

In contrast, while there were occasions when Muslim rulers attempted to dictate doctrine, those times were the exception, and not the rule. In one sense, the Ottoman sultan had unlimited power over his subjects. He had power over life and death. But in other ways, he was as constrained by, and in theory just as subject to, religious law as any other Muslim. Like earlier rulers, he deferred to the scholars and judges who comprised the *ulama*. Even when the Ottoman sultan added the title of caliph in later centuries, he did not exercise total doctrinal authority. True, he could issue laws of his own whether or not those agreed with sharia (religious) law. But he still needed, and cultivated, the support of the *ulama*. The only sense in which it can be said that there is no separation between church and state in Islam is that there is no church. The possible exception is Iran. After the sixteenth century, Iran's Shi'a mul-

lahs gradually coalesced into an institution that in its hierarchy and coherence resembled the Catholic Church, but without the ability to coerce errant believers. Almost everywhere else, Islam had no central, governing religious body. Throughout the history of Muslim societies, from the emergence of a clerical establishment in Baghdad during the Abbasid caliphate through the evolution of Sufism and other forms of individual piety, the political and doctrinal spheres were distinct and governed by different people.

The de facto separation helps explain why Mehmed could be so indifferent to the religion of his subjects. Like most imperial rulers, the Ottomans drew a distinction between the state and the people. Neither Mehmed nor any of the Ottomans evinced an interest in converting the Greek Christian population of Constantinople. To the contrary. The Ottomans provided incentives to encourage the Greeks to work with the new regime to revive the city and restore it to greatness. For their part, the Christians of Constantinople, their religious rights intact, seem to have accepted the new rulers. Greek Christian architects drew up plans to reinforce and reconstruct the decaying walls and fortifications that had in the end failed to protect the city. They designed mosques and helped Mehmed transform Hagia Sophia into a Muslim house of worship. They also built a vast new covered market, which would become the famed Grand Bazaar of Istanbul, and manned many of its stalls and shops.

Had Mehmed stopped with the capture of Constantinople, he would have earned his sobriquet "the Conqueror." But he was still very young, and his ambitions were not sated. He took on his father's old adversaries in Hungary and Serbia, and he solidified Ottoman control over much of the Balkans and the southern coast of the Black Sea. More often than not, cities surrendered, opening their gates to the sultan rather than suffer death and destruction. The Ottomans honored the flag of truce. When they promised to protect the rights of the local populace, they did.

Inevitably, after decades of leading his armies, Mehmed grew tired and ill. He did not age gracefully, and his accomplishments had not made him happy. He drank too much and became ever-more distrustful of those around him. At the risk of unfairly psychoanalyzing him from a distance of many centuries, it might be said that he did everything he could to banish the memory of his father, and he failed. Had he consulted a Sufi master, he might have learned that he could go to the ends of the earth, win every battle, and become rich beyond imagination, but

unless he bared his soul to God, he would remain restless and unfulfilled. And so he was, until he died in 1481, fat, gout-ridden, surrounded by Jewish and Persian physicians helpless to heal him, an old man at the age of forty-nine.

Though the Europeans were dismayed at the loss of the city they had done so little to help and so much to undermine, whatever affinity they felt was an illusion. In truth, the Christians of Western Europe were more alien and more hostile to Orthodox Byzantium than the Ottomans. The Ottomans and the Byzantines had been fighting for more than a hundred years, and they had also lived side by side while each attended to other enemies. Mehmed's father had married a Byzantine-Serbian princess, which was neither the first and nor the last time that a Muslim Ottoman married a Christian woman for reasons of state. The two empires had been bound not only by marital ties, but by financial ones. For many years, before Mehmed, the Ottoman sultan paid an annual fee to the Byzantine emperor, because the Ottomans preferred a toothless Byzantium to a rival power in Constantinople guarding the vital crossroads. Later, in the nineteenth century, the powers of Europe were to make the same calculations about the Ottomans, and the empire would survive not because it was strong but because it was weak.

EUROPE AND THE OTTOMANS

THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE lasted nearly five hundred years, longer than all but a handful of dynasties the world has known. Byzantium, and Rome before that, each survived more than a thousand years, but only the Ottomans could claim that the same family ruled in succession from the beginning until the end. Though there may have been some convenient rewriting of the family tree, there was an unbroken chain stretching from Osman in the fourteenth century through the last sultan, Mehmed VI, in the first decade of the twentieth. By way of comparison, European dynasties have rarely lasted more than a few hundred years and have usually ruled an area no larger than an Ottoman province. For the better part of five centuries, however, the Ottoman Empire encompassed the entire eastern Mediterranean. From the early sixteenth century until the early twentieth, it also ruled North Africa and Egypt; the Caucasus between the Black and Caspian Seas; the Crimean Peninsula and the

surrounding regions; all of the Near East from present-day Israel to the borders of Iran; and the Balkans, including Greece, Serbia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania, and parts of modern Hungary.

In the collective memory of the West, the Ottomans loom large. More than the first wave of Arab conquests, more than the Muslims of Spain or Saladin and his armies, the Ottomans were woven into the consciousness of modern Europe. At the very time that the centralized monarchies of Western and Central Europe were emerging, they faced an adversary whose size, organization, wealth, and power dwarfed anything they could muster. The lords of Spain, France, England, the German lands, and the Holy Roman Empire may have thought of themselves as titans, but against the Ottomans, they barely rated as pygmies. Acting in concert, the fleets of the Italians, the knights of Spain and France, and the foot soldiers of Hungary, Poland, Austria, and Prussia were able to stave off total defeat, but until the eighteenth century, the shadow of what they called "the perfidious Turk" clouded even the brightest of their days.

Gradually, the Ottomans lost their comparative advantage, and in the late eighteenth century, the monarchs of Europe and Russia reversed the tide. Even then, the empire shrank but did not collapse. Unlike many other regions of the globe, the core of the Ottoman Empire was never occupied or ruled by the Europeans. The empire contracted, but the central lands of Turkey and large parts of the Middle East, including Iraq and Arabia, remained under Ottoman rule until the end of World War I.

Close in proximity, the Ottomans and the Europeans were separated by a wide cultural gulf. Religion, however, was perhaps the least important dividing line. The Ottomans were ruled by a Turkish family, whose origins were, as many scholars have noted, shrouded in obscurity. There is as little known about Osman, the dynasty's founder, as there is about Romulus and Remus, the mythic progenitors of Rome. There are almost no written records about the Ottomans for the first century of their existence, and their primary adversaries—Serbs, Hungarians, Byzantines, and the Turkish emirs in Anatolia, did not leave many accounts of the defeats that they suffered at Ottoman hands.

In time, Europe became familiar with the Ottoman state, but well until the nineteenth century, its inner workings remained opaque. The sultan and his harem became legendary, but few Westerners understood

how the Ottomans governed, fought, or lived. Western ambassadors in Istanbul wrote accounts of the imperial capital, but they had limited contact with the elite and were shown only those aspects of courtly life they were allowed to see. Not until the nineteenth century, when the Ottomans were forced to open up more of their society to foreign scrutiny, was the veil pulled aside, and even then, only partly.

One result of ignorance was imagination. In fanciful, often salacious accounts, Westerners conjured a picture of a sultan serviced by a harem of willing women guarded by eunuchs from sub-Saharan Africa and defended by a slave army of men taken as captives while still young boys and trained to a hard life as warriors who would just as soon die at the sultan's command as breathe. In his throne room, surrounded by viziers plotting the next campaign against the West, the Ottoman sultan sat, shrouded in mystery. Like the Eastern potentates that he emulated, he seldom allowed visitors to gaze upon him, which only enhanced the aura of mystery. Westerners filled the gaps in their knowledge with fears and transformed the sultan into a holy warrior bent on extinguishing Christian power in order to fulfill what Muhammad had started and to avenge the Muslim world for the loss of Spain.

This mixture of half-truths and legends fed Western anxiety. Feared, loathed, and grudgingly admired, the sultan ruled a formidable empire on the borders of Europe. Though the Turks were only one of many different groups in the empire, the word "Turk" became a proxy for all things Ottoman, and not a positive one. For the English, as for most Europeans, "Turk" meant barbarism and savagery.²

In the absence of evidence to the contrary, caricature was taken as fact. Even after the Ottoman Empire was exposed as a state like any other, with its own strengths and more than its share of weaknesses, the image never fully faded. In fact, it outlasted the empire itself. The memory of Turkish warriors fighting in the name of a Muslim God against the armies of Christendom survived the fall of the Ottomans and lodged itself in Western culture. When Turkey applied for membership in the European Union at the start of the twenty-first century, French, German, and Dutch voices murmured uncomfortably that Turkey was still too alien, too other, and perhaps too Muslim. Laced through these concerns were hints that having fought the Ottomans for centuries and finally triumphed, Europe was not about to allow the Turks to enjoy the fruits of that hard-won victory.

The reputation of the Ottomans also suffered from the nationalist movements that swept the Balkans and the Near East in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. First the Greeks in the 1820s and then the Hungarians, Serbs, Bulgarians, Romanians, and, finally, the Arabs of the Near East defined themselves as nations that had been conquered, brutalized, and silenced by Ottoman autocrats. For the Greeks and other Balkan peoples, there was an added religious element: the Muslim Ottomans, they claimed, had oppressed Christian peoples. Even the Arabs, who caught the infectious bug of nationalism just before World War I, distanced themselves from the Ottomans, though their main bone of contention was more ethnic than religious.

Here as elsewhere, conflict has received the most attention, and in the West the religious undertones have been emphasized. Without question, the early Ottoman rulers considered themselves Muslim warriors. They called themselves *ghazis*, which in Arabic meant "holy raiders," in order to link themselves to the companions of Muhammad and to the Arab dynasties that had ruled after his death. In their relations with the Christian West, the Ottomans were anything but peaceful. Once they had defeated Christian Byzantium and taken control of the Balkans, they turned to the last fortresses of the Frankish Crusaders on the islands of Rhodes, Crete, and Malta, and to the cities along the Danube, including Buda, Pest, and above all, Vienna.

But what is usually overlooked and forgotten is that the title of *ghazi* was only one of a long line of titles, which included not only Lord of Two Lands, but also Lord of Two Seas; Sultan of the Arabs, Persians, and Romans; Distributor of Crowns to the Rulers of the Surface of the Earth; Sovereign of the White Sea, Black Sea, Rumelia, Anatolia; Overlord of Rum and Karama, of Dulkadir and Diyarbakir; Azerbaijan, Syria, Aleppo, Egypt, Noble Jerusalem, Venerated Mecca and Sacred Medina, Jidda, Yemen, and Many Other Lands; and Thunderbolt of War, the World Conqueror. The Ottomans were proud of their victories, proud to style themselves as the heirs not just to the early caliphs but to Caesar and Rome and to the Persian monarchs of antiquity, proud to rule both Europe and Asia, both Jerusalem and the holy cities of Arabia, and proud that the monarchs of Europe feared and reviled them. The fact that the Ottomans were also Muslims who had won victories rivaled only by the caliphs of the seventh and eighth centuries was one laurel, but hardly the only one.

What is also forgotten is that for most of those five hundred years, the Ottomans were indifferent to the religion of their subjects. The empire was ruled by a small number of governors and judges and a formidable army barracked in the capitals of each major province. Except for the sultan and his family, membership in the ruling class was not based on race or religion. It was based on a system of organized enslavement of young boys. Taken from their villages, they were sent to schools in Istanbul, and in the imperial capital of Adrianople, and trained as soldiers or as bureaucrats. The soldiers were known as Janissaries, and many of them began life as Christian peasants, who then converted to Islam. Theirs was not, however, an orthodox Islam, but one suffused with the mysticism of a Sufi order known as the Bektashis that seems to have preserved many Christian rites.

Every year, Janissary corps would sweep through the villages of the Balkans and the Caucasus and collect a quota of children. Few aspects of Ottoman rule have generated as much controversy and ill will. By the nineteenth century, the practice had largely come to an end, but the memory was enough to rouse the Balkan peoples against their overlords. The Janissaries were slaves in the sense that their rights and their wealth, property, and status were at the whim of the sultan. But in many other respects, they were a privileged elite. Unlike the Africans enslaved in the Americas, the Janissaries were the ruling class of an empire and enjoyed the concomitant benefits. Though later generations of Westerners decried the forced recruitment, the opportunity to have sons rise high in the ranks of the empire was not seen as a grave injustice by many families. Besides, in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, no peasants—whether Christian or Muslim—had expectations of Jeffersonian democracy. The Ottoman ruling class was harsh and unsentimental, but they differed from the rulers of Europe only in efficiency. When the kings of France or Spain needed to raise an army, their troops also entered villages and violently drafted eligible young men without asking permission. The recruitment of the Janissary corps in the Balkans and Greece was, in that sense, no different.³

While the Ottoman ruling class was Muslim, the empire was not, and Islam did not act as a glue holding together the disparate parts of the state. A majority of the population of the European lands controlled by the Ottomans was Christian and remained that way until the end. Even

in regions such as Egypt and Iraq where Muslims were in the majority, the Sunni Islam of the Ottoman ruling class was somewhat different than the Islam of many Arabs. On the whole, while the sultan proclaimed himself caliph and protector of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, he seems to have cared not one whit about the religion of his subjects. No efforts were made to convert Christians and Jews, nor did the Ottomans try to enforce one version of Muslim law. Being a Muslim was no guarantee of better treatment by local governors, and being Christian or Jewish was not necessarily a burden to overcome.

While the Ottomans fought against the Christian states of Europe, they fought against the Shi'ite shahs of Iran with just as much intensity. In neither case was the propagation of Islam a primary motivation. The Ottomans were a dynasty bent on expanding and perpetuating their own rule. As with the Romans, the Mongols, the Han, and other empires, power was primary, and all else was secondary. Religion was at best an instrument of control. If the mantle of religion could be used to justify expansion, all the better. If religious toleration helped pacify subject peoples and maintain stability, so be it.

JEW\$ UNDER OTTOMAN RULE

THE OTTOMAN FORMULA that stressed obedience to the sultan and indifference to the religion of subject peoples was developed before the fall of Constantinople, but it only became vital to the empire's success after. By leaving the religion of his subjects alone, the sultan was able to use them to enhance the power of the state. For instance, in his effort to restore the glory of Constantinople, Mehmed ordered thousands of people throughout the empire to relocate. Some of these were Turks and Muslims, but many more were not. Greek Orthodox from Anarolian cities with needed skills were told to move, and though they were given assistance and guaranteed an income and jobs, they were not given a choice. Nor were the soldiers of the sultan's armies, of course. And nor were thousands of Jews, many of whom lived in the Balkans. Their ability to act as intermediaries between the Muslim eastern Mediterranean and the Christian West meant that they could, and soon did, play a pivotal role in the commercial and economic success of the Ottoman state.

Under the Byzantines, Jews had been tolerated but hardly embraced. In Christian Constantinople, an affluent Jewish community performed the same function as economic intermediaries that they did in numerous other cities in the Mediterranean world. They were represented at the emperor's court by a chief rabbi who was both a leader and an advocate. In the Byzantine system, his authority was narrow. Under the Ottomans, however, the Jews gained more autonomy and in time became active supporters of the sultan's rule. After the conquest, Mehmed allowed the chief rabbi who had served the Byzantines to retain his position. This rabbi was not, as some have suggested, the head of all Jews in the Ottoman Empire, though in time the position would become the chief rabbi of Jewish lore. Initially, he was responsible only for the Jewish community of Constantinople, which was fairly small in 1453, but which soon swelled by thousands because of Mehmed's resettlement policies.

Faced with an underpopulated capital and insufficient numbers of people capable of carrying out complicated tasks, Mehmed ordered thousands of Jews to move to Constantinople. They were singled out not because of their beliefs, but because they were a close-knit group that possessed skills that the Ottoman state dearly needed. The forced relocation of Jews from various parts of the Balkans and Anatolia could not have been pleasant for those made to move their homes, and there have been heated debates among scholars about how to characterize Mehmed's edicts. Some have likened the removals to the pogroms and persecutions of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Others, including the fifteenth-century Jewish poet Elijah Capsali, had little to say about the relocations and saw the Ottomans as a significant improvement over both the Western Christian regimes in Europe and the Eastern Christian rulers of Byzantium. Capsali, in fact, took the fall of Constantinople as a divine punishment against those who had abused the Jews and a sign of God's favor for those who showed tolerance.

In short, there was nothing about Mehmed's policies that discriminated against the Jews as Jews, or against any Christian denomination as Christian per se. The Ottoman bureaucracy treated all subjects as instruments of the state and servants of the sultan, to be used and disposed of as he saw fit. In that sense, all citizens of the empire were discriminated against by the sultan and the ruling elite, and had few rights separate from what the sultan permitted. In no part of the world in the fifteenth

century was the situation dramatically different. While the Jews who were forced to relocate to the new capital may have suffered, only through a very particular contemporary prism can it be said that they suffered because of their religion.

And by the end of the fifteenth century, the Jews of Constantinople were thriving, and Jewish communities in other parts of the empire were living secure, prosperous lives. Skepticism and fear during the first years of Mehmed's reign gave way to acceptance and then outright enthusiasm. While Jews and Christians had to pay a head tax, these were offset by the tax benefits they received for setting up business first in Istanbul and then in other major cities. Jews dominated what primitive forms of banking there were, as well as trade in jewels, pearls, and satin. The Jewish community of Egypt remained intact, and when Egypt was finally conquered by the Ottomans early in the sixteenth century, they reaped economic benefits. And one foreign community of Jews found a home in the empire and were met with a warm embrace that contrasted sharply with what they had left behind.

In 1492, after the defeat of the Muslim kingdom of Granada, the triumphant monarchs of Spain fulfilled a long-standing ambition of the Spanish Catholic Church and ordered the expulsion of the Jews. With little time to prepare and in danger for their lives, thousands packed what they could and left the country. The cities of Western Europe shunned them, and North Africa was divided into petty principalities with little economic vitality. But the Ottomans announced that the exiled Jews of Spain were welcome and would receive aid and support, including transportation from Spain to the heart of the empire on the other side of the Mediterranean. Jews were allowed to move to Istanbul, but the sultan proclaimed that he would be particularly pleased if they settled in one of the oldest cities in the Balkans, Thessaloniki, also known as Salonica.

Not all who made the trip survived. Said one taciturn contemporary account, "A part of the exiled Spaniards went overseas to Turkey. Some of them were thrown into the sea and drowned, but those who arrived there the king of Turkey received kindly, as they were artisans." These transplanted Jews willingly shared their wisdom and learning with their new overlords, including knowledge about the arts of war. Jewish engineers and artisans helped the Ottomans manufacture advanced artillery

and complicated siege engines, which the sultan put to good use against the Europeans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The outcasts of Spain thus became an asset for the Ottomans.⁴

Some of the exiles moved to Istanbul, but the bulk settled in Salonica. By the middle of the sixteenth century, the city had a substantial Jewish population and had established itself as a metropolis that could stand proudly in the shadow of Istanbul. The Jews of Salonica were self-governing, answerable to the Ottoman governor and ultimately to the sultan but not to the chief rabbi in Istanbul. That began to change in later centuries, as the sultan ceded more authority to religious leaders in the imperial capital, which meant enhanced powers not only for the chief rabbi, but for the patriarchs of the Greek and Armenian churches as well. Initially, however, the Jews of Spain who settled in Salonica competed not with the Jews of Istanbul but with the older population of Greek Jews who had lived in the city for fifteen hundred years and had hosted Saint Paul on his travels through the Roman world spreading the gospel. These rivalries faded, though never completely, and with each passing century, the Jews of Salonica became richer, more powerful, and more central to the commercial life of the empire.

The illustrious history of the Jews of the Ottoman Empire stands in sharp relief to the treatment of their brethren in Christian Europe until the mid-eighteenth century and of course during the Holocaust of the twentieth. The kingdoms of Europe cared greatly about the religion of their subjects and fought destructive wars in order to coerce belief and stifle heresy. The Ottomans were ruthless as conquerors but once they had achieved military victory, they preferred a lean and tranquil administrative system.

This tolerance may explain why few Christians and Jews converted to Islam during the Ottoman centuries, especially compared with the earlier rates of conversion in Andalusia or in the Near East, Egypt, and Persia after the coming of Islam in the seventh century. The presence of increasingly powerful Christian states in Europe, who represented the possibility, however unlikely, of a different order and a different regime may also have dissuaded Christians from converting. Other factors notwithstanding, the benign neglect of the Ottoman state allowed Jews, Greek Orthodox, Armenians, Catholics, Copts, and others to live in peace and security and to practice their beliefs unmolested. There are many reasons why the Ottomans were so successful and so resilient, but

perhaps the most important was that they gave people just enough autonomy to keep them content, loyal, and uninterested in change.

ΣΥΛΕΥΨΙΑΝ ΑΝΔ ΤΗ ΑΡΕΧ ΟΥ ΕΜΠΙΡΕ

MANY OF TODAY'S inhabitants of the Balkans would dismiss the characterization of the Ottoman Empire as tolerant and relatively benign. Bulgarians, Serbians, and Greeks bear no affection for the Ottomans or for the Turks, and they recall an empire notable for its brutality and its ill treatment of them. The issue here is not whether the Ottomans were cruel, like most imperial powers, they could be. It is not whether individual governors took advantage of their power to steal, rape, and otherwise abuse their subjects. In their treatment of the peasants of the Balkans, however, the Ottomans were neither more nor less cruel than feudal lords in Europe were toward their peons. Some Ottoman governors were tyrants, others were not, and the ones who were tend to get the attention. There are many chronicles written by peoples that the Ottomans ruled that depict their masters in a very unkind light. Some of these highlight religion as the dividing line, but that does not mean that it was. The dividing line for the Ottomans was power, who had it and who did not.

The Ottomans did what was expedient. In today's terms, they were realists, not idealists. Sultans from Mehmed on may have described themselves as holy warriors when they took the field against enemies, but when it came to governing, they were pragmatists to the core. The unspoken formula was beautiful and elegant: the empire was ruled by a sultan with nearly unlimited powers, answerable only to God and in theory to the *ulama*, who almost always validated what he wanted to do. That included marrying Christians, employing Jews, and forging alliances with Catholic states—none of which were held to be incompatible with orthodox Islam as then understood.

The Ottoman bureaucracy, in turn, did not discriminate on the basis of religion or race. From the Janissary corps to the civil service to the palace eunuchs, the government was run by a motley collection of races. While becoming a Janissary did entail converting, there was often more form than substance to the Islam of the foot soldiers who fought the sultan's battles so ably.

Tartars, Serbs, Greeks, Arabs, Berbers, Copts, Armenians, Jews, Sun-

nis, Shi'ites, Druze, Nubians, Slavs, Bulgars, Hungarians, Georgians, and of course Turks combined to form a crazy quilt of languages, traditions, and rites. The Ottoman court in Istanbul and various provincial administrators also made use of Venetians, Genoese, Florentines, and Romans, as well as merchants and translators from France, Austria, Spain, and England. Not until the ruling class seized on the notion of "Turkishness" in the late nineteenth century was there anything particularly Turkish about the Ottoman state.

The sultans also viewed marriage through the lens of politics rather than race, religion, or love. Wives and the concubines of the harem came from a wide range of ethnic groups and multiple faiths. The goal was to bind the disparate groups of the empire to the sultan, and so he could hardly sleep with only Muslim women or only Turks. That in turn meant that most sultans—as the children of such unions—were of mixed ethnicity. The empire not only had a multicultural administration; it had a multicultural sultan.

The reality of the harem itself is at odds with the myth. The seductive mysteries of the harem became an obsession of Westerners who fantasized about lascivious nights, willing women, lots of silk, a surfeit of pillows, and black eunuchs with gold earrings and scimitar-laden cummerbunds. There was that, perhaps, though as the Western women who penetrated the harem later reported, there was much less sex and much more tea drinking and sewing. While one purpose of the harem may have been to gratify the sultan's desires, the primary aim was to make sure that there was at least one male heir and that the pool of possible mothers reflected the diversity of the empire. It was, in that sense, a version of sexual democracy unburdened by concerns of race, class, or religion.

The willingness to ignore religion in order to focus on realpolitik defined the reign of the empire's greatest sultan—Suleyman. Though he was known as "the Magnificent" in the West, his primary sobriquet in the Ottoman world was different, and telling. To his subjects, he was "the Lawgiver." During his reign of more than forty years, the empire reached its apex. His conquests brought the Ottomans to the gates of Vienna in the West and deep into Persia in the East. All of North Africa came under his nominal control, and the last of the Crusader principalities, the demesne of the Hospitallers on the island of Rhodes, which had

resisted all challengers for more than two hundred years, fell after a long and gritty battle in 1526.

But while Suleyman led his armies to victory on the periphery, the core of the empire was peaceful, prosperous, and stable. After centuries of struggle, the Ottomans were able to consolidate their rule. Suleyman's forty-six years in power were dramatic, but less because of external pressures than because of familial squabbles that turned deadly, as they often did among Ottoman princes. In most other respects, it was a placid and stable time. Suleyman formalized and codified the administrative practices that he had inherited from his father and grandfather, and for nearly three hundred years thereafter, his laws governed the state. During his reign, revenue flowed into the coffers in Istanbul; the Janissaries recruited their own version of the best and the brightest; provincial governors were dispatched from the capital to rule comfortably in the sultan's name; and only the Safavid shahs of Iran to the east and the Habsburgs of Austria to the west prevented the Ottomans from extending their reach from China to the English Channel.

Every apex is also the beginning of decline. Suleyman's armies achieved such rapid victories against the Hungarians in 1529 that they unexpectedly were able to advance up the Danube to Vienna. The army had not prepared for a long siege of the city, and was not equipped for winter. After weeks of stalemate, Suleyman, ensconced in a tent more opulent than many of the palaces of Europe, decided that it was more prudent to withdraw than submit his Janissaries to a winter campaign. The march on Vienna had been so easy that he imagined he could return again the following spring. Instead, it was a lost opportunity, and Ottoman forces would not seriously threaten the city again until 1683, when they would fail once more.

During these years, European diplomats and merchants had more contact with the Ottomans. Suleyman was an imposing, enigmatic figure, but he did grant audiences, and a number of diplomats wrote their impressions. Much of what they said reinforced the sense that the Ottomans, with Suleyman at their head, were utterly alien and brutally effective.

Regular diplomacy and occasional interaction did begin to peel away the mystique. In 1520, a Venetian envoy described a young Suleyman as "tall and slender, with a thin and bony face. The sultan appears friendly

and in good humor. Rumor has it that he... enjoys reading, is knowledgeable and shows good judgment."⁵ He had the same aquiline nose as his great-grandfather Mehmed, and an even narrower face adorned with the sparse Ottoman beard favored by his family. That look did not change over the decades, though he grew paler and more sallow with the passing years. Toward the end of his life, the sultan received a perspicacious emissary named Ghiselin de Busbecq while "seated on a rather low sofa, not more than a foot from the ground and spread with many coverlets and cushions embroidered with exquisite work.... His expression... was anything but smiling, and had a sternness which though sad was full of majesty." Suffering from gangrene, heavily made up, and deathly pale, Suleyman exuded a potent and painful combination of grandeur and tragedy.

He had every reason to be sad. His victories notwithstanding, his personal life was a shambles. He had broken the cardinal rule of the Ottoman ruling class and married one of his concubines. Sultans were not supposed to love the mothers of their children, but Suleyman did. She, in turn, used her position to champion her sons and turn her husband against the children of his other mistresses. The result was death all around. Suleyman ordered the execution of two of his sons, and another's life ended under questionable circumstances. When his wife died, his two remaining sons by her turned on each other, and on him. He had yet another executed, along with several grandchildren, leaving only Selim, who would succeed him.

These dramas were duly recorded by the European envoys in the city. Much as the Roman emperors had combined an exquisite ability to rule the known world with dark and depraved family dramas, Suleyman and his heirs led lives rent by passions, intrigue, sex, and murder. While some of these stories fed the European imagination about the lascivious Turk, more to our point is that religion never entered the equation.

To wit: Suleyman commissioned the construction of a major mosque in Istanbul, the Suleymaniye. It was the most important Muslim monument of its day, but over half of the workers and artisans who built it were Christian. In addition, the sultan may have believed himself to be a devout servant of God, but as was true of the clergy in Rome at the time, such devotion didn't preclude sin. The Medici and Borgia popes commissioned works of art, kept mistresses, and tried to ensure the well-

being of their many illegitimate children. The Ottoman sultans conducted themselves in a similar manner.

The absence of a rigid, doctrinal Islam was in stark contrast to the role of religion in the West. As the Ottomans drew closer to Europe, they held up the mirror to Western Christians who were descending into a long period of intolerance. Disgusted with the corruption of the Catholic Church, the German monk Martin Luther set in motion a chain of events that produced both the Reformation and decades of war in Europe. Luther viewed the Ottoman Empire under Suleyman as an exemplar of religious toleration. Though he did decry the Ottomans as "servants of the devil," for Luther that was a mild critique compared to what he said about the pope and about Jews. Luther hoped that a reformed and purified church could one day emulate the Ottoman model.

Several decades later, the French philosopher Jean Bodin, committed though he was to his Catholic faith, wrote favorably of the Ottomans, "The great emperor of the Turks doth with as great devotion as any prince in the world honor and observe the religion by him received from his ancestors and yet detests he not the strange religions of others; but to the contrary permits every man to live according to his conscience... and suffers four diverse religions: that of the Jews, that of the Christians, that of the Greeks, and that of the Mohametans." Having lived through the wars of religion that were sundering Europe in general and France in particular, Bodin had witnessed the costs of intolerance. Protestants and Catholics regarded each other with contempt, hurling invective and promising punishment in this life and damnation in the next. The Ottoman Empire presented an alternative that Bodin could not help but admire.

The Islam of the Ottomans did not create obstacles to allying with Christian states, and Suleyman became enmeshed in the politics of Europe, not just as an adversary but as a strategic partner. Europe was cross-hatched with divisions, especially between Protestants and Catholics and between two royal families, the Habsburgs and the Valois, whose feud was acrimonious and intense. The Habsburgs ruled Spain, and under Charles V they governed the central European lands of the Holy Roman Empire as well. The Valois controlled France and posed a challenge to Habsburg hegemony. Under Francis I, the animosity

between the two families became personal. The two monarchs developed an abiding hatred for each other, which was based less on direct experience than on dynastic aims. But that did not make the hatred any less intense, and it led Francis I to court the enemies of the Habsburgs, no matter where they were or what God they worshiped.

The Habsburgs had more territory and more wealth (especially given the flow of silver from the new lands of South America), but they also confronted more enemies. Not only was Charles V faced with Francis, but he also had to contend with Protestant German princes, rebellious Dutch burghers, an increasingly unpredictable England, and of course, a restive and expansionist Ottoman Empire led by a sultan who could draw on seemingly inexhaustible resources to outfit his army. Having conquered the Hungarians, Suleyman came face-to-face with the Habsburgs. Watching from Paris, Francis decided in the early 1520s that the enemy of his enemy was a friend, and he reached out to Suleyman for an alliance. Suleyman, recognizing the strategic advantage, agreed.

For the remainder of Suleyman's life, the French and the Ottomans worked together to humble the Habsburgs. The pincer alliance was a constant irritant to Charles V and his heirs, but they never succumbed, in part because of skilled leadership and in part because Central Europe was never a prime objective for Suleyman. Persia presented a more immediate threat to the Ottomans, as did Venetian raiders interrupting trade in the Mediterranean. But as one historian has written, "The French alliance was the cornerstone of the Ottomans' European diplomacy." Suleyman knew that his partnership with France kept the Habsburgs on the defensive, and that freed him to pursue other ambitions. He also undermined Habsburg power by stirring the pot inside the Holy Roman Empire. He reached out to Protestant princes and offered his protection, claiming that the Protestants, because they had risen up against the idolatry of the Catholic Church, were in their way much like the first Muslims who had rejected the idolatry of the Meccans.⁶

These snapshots from Suleyman's life barely do justice to his reign of more than forty years, but they reveal an Ottoman state that was no more, and no less, defined by creed than the Habsburgs were defined by Christianity or the Romans by whatever pagan cult was in vogue. Islam was part of the governing creed, but it shared space with the imperatives of maintaining order, propagating the dynasty, and jockeying for position in foreign affairs. The sultans at times used Islam as a spur and jus-

tification for war, but they drew on the legacy of Muhammad and the warrior culture of the early Arab conquests only when it suited them. When they wished to do things that might be seen as problematic in light of Islamic law and jurisprudence, they did so without hesitation, knowing that even in the unlikely event that one of the *ulama* objected, others would support whatever the sultan did. Many of their actions should have raised such flags, if Islam had been the vital force keeping the empire together. There was no way to justify fratricide and rebellion using the Quran or the hadith, nor was the harem or the system of eunuchs easy to reconcile with Islamic law.

The Ottoman legacy also forces us to reconsider what we mean when we say "Islam." The alliances that Suleyman cemented with the Catholic French did not lead anyone to question his bona fides as a Muslim. The autonomy that Mehmed granted to the Jews, Greek Orthodox, and Armenians did not trigger challenges to his standing as a devout believer. Islam, like any great religion, is an umbrella that encompasses a wide range of virtues and a multitude of sins. Scholars and judges may have retained a right to criticize the sultan, but they almost never exercised it. Rulers were seen as a necessary element because they held back the chaos that would inevitably ensue if the state collapsed.

Suleyman's death did not immediately remove the Ottomans as a threat to Europe. A century later, in 1683, another sultan again menaced Vienna, and he came very close to taking the city. But even had he succeeded, it is unlikely that the Ottomans would have overrun Europe. The Russians had become a formidable foe, as had the French and the English. And while its rivals had evolved, within the empire, little had changed. The Ottomans were slowly losing their competitive edge. After 1683, Europe began to push back, and the balance tipped. For centuries, the Ottomans had stood as monument to equilibrium. Then the empire began to fray, and when it finally collapsed in the early years of the twentieth century, relations between Muslims, Christians, and Jews took a turn for the worse.