

Cambridge University Press

0521574560 - An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire,

Volume 1 - 1300-1600

Edited by Halil İnalcık

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

HALİL İNALCIK AND DONALD QUATAERT

These volumes summarize the field of Ottoman social and economic history and, at the same time, offer new findings and perspectives. They build on a half-century tradition of scholarship and present an area of study still in its infancy. Simultaneously, the various authors offer their own research, pushing beyond synthesis into new inquiries and analyses.

In organizing the six centuries of Ottoman history, the classical period 1300–1600 is taken as a well-defined, distinct period with an autocratic centralist government and a command economy, while in the following “decline” period, underpinnings of this traditional polity entered a process of transformation. The seventeenth century became in fact a period of transition, witnessing thorough-going changes. The Köprülüs’ attempt to restore the traditional autocratic centralist system totally failed during the disastrous war period from 1683 to 1699. The eighteenth century saw a radically changed Ottoman Empire with the rise of local powers under provincial notables and “dynasties,” decentralized, so to speak. The central government followed “liberal” policies not only in the administration of the empire but also in landholding and economy in general. Also, there occurred a radical change in the attitude of the Ottomans toward Europe and its civilization. The Ottomans, for the first time, now admitted the Europeans’ superiority and began to imitate and borrow western ways. This led to increasing Ottoman dependence on Western powers for survival. The nineteenth century witnessed gaining momentum in Ottoman dependence on the West, both politically and economically, and in radical westernization reforms.

In our volumes, these four periods – 1300 to 1600 and the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries respectively – have each been prepared by one specialist independently; but the unity of approach is

Cambridge University Press

0521574560 - An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire,

Volume 1 - 1300-1600

Edited by Halil Inalcik

Excerpt

[More information](#)

secured by a common plan presenting the period in its political, economic and social aspects.

The individual chapters are substantially expanded with tables providing detailed statistical data. A genealogical table, general chronology, a list of weights and measures, and a glossary (in transcription) are also included. Bibliographies at the end of each author's section are designed to provide the basic literature on the period discussed. In the books, the authors hope the reader will be able to follow the metamorphosis of an empire as a whole, as viewed in its basic aspects.

Hopefully, our volumes will be invaluable for a time and, by the force of its own syntheses and new research, be superseded in the not too distant future. Their publication makes clear the accomplishments and shortcomings of a maturing field that is exploring the social and economic structures of an empire whose legacy has been overlooked for much of the twentieth century. This neglect has been part of a more general attitude that has ignored the Ottoman influence on the present, however powerful it may have been. The decades-long neglect seems doubly odd since the work of some eminent earlier historians, such as William Langer's *The diplomacy of imperialism* (1935) placed the Istanbul-based empire at the very center of European history (in this case political). Recently, the Ottoman past has begun to receive the attention merited by its actual historical role. Take, for example, the commercial success of the flawed *Peace to end all peace* (1989) by David Fromkin, that examines the Middle East regions of the empire during the World War I period. The accelerating interest in the Ottoman experience should be reinforced considerably by the events of the early 1990s, including those in southeastern Europe and the emergence of Turkey as an international power astride Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia. Empires do fall but the residues of their influence linger on.

Until World War II, studies of Ottoman history dealt almost exclusively with military and political events. This focus generally derived from the emphasis then prevailing in European historiography. More particularly, the Ottomans represented for Europeans primarily a military intrusion, requiring latter-day crusades that haunted the Western memory. After c. 1945, interest shifted to the economic and social aspects of the Ottoman historical experience, in part because of better access to the Ottoman archives. The new focus also derived from the growing emphasis on social and economic history in the West. That is, as before, trends in Ottoman historiography followed those set in other areas of historical research.

Cambridge University Press

0521574560 - An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire,

Volume 1 - 1300-1600

Edited by Halil Inalcik

Excerpt

[More information](#)*General introduction*

3

Fernand Braudel's *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (1949) can be taken as a watershed, presenting the Ottoman Empire as an integral part of the Mediterranean world, not only in the struggle for hegemony but also in economic relations. In earlier works, notably in Wilhelm Heyd's classic, *Histoire du commerce du Levant* (1936), the Ottomans' role in Mediterranean trade is viewed solely from its European (in this case, Italian) partner's vantage point; thus, developments affecting their position in the Levant are judged negatively without taking into account positive effects that might have accrued to people in the region itself. Little note was given to the fact that the Ottomans did not aim to destroy the Italian trade in the Levant, but rather sought to control and profit from it, which meant eliminating the Latin domination and exploitation that had been established during the period of Byzantine decline. That is, among its other contributions, this work attempts to present events from the Ottoman perspective. It offers the Ottomans as agents capable of independent and internally consistent actions and not, as had been the case for too long, as passive spectators of a European drama.

Also, it can be said, without exaggeration, that the Ottoman superpower in the East substantially contributed to the shaping of modern Europe. For example, when a decisive struggle developed against Venice and its powerful Habsburg allies who then dominated Europe, the Ottomans did not hesitate to extend the same capitulatory commercial privileges to France, England and the Dutch that it earlier had bestowed on the Venetian Republic. This Ottoman re-orientation proved to be a decisive turning point for the initial mercantilist-capitalist expansion of these rising Western nation-states. (It also, obviously, was important for the Ottoman economy.) From then on, every European country aspiring to mercantilist expansion, as a prerequisite for its economic development, sought these economic privileges from the sultan. The West depended, at least at the beginning, on supplies from or through the Ottoman Empire for its newly rising silk and cotton industries. The first successful chartered companies in the West were the Levant companies.

The Ottoman Empire's economic significance in world trade, so far understated by historians, is dramatized in this study. The various authors, on the one hand, trace trade patterns long forgotten by historians in the West. For example, while the horizontal trade route in the Mediterranean through the Middle East to Venice or Genoa was considered the main trade link with Arabia and India, a vertical south-north international trade route through Damascus – Bursa – Akkerman – Lwow had

Cambridge University Press

0521574560 - An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire,

Volume 1 - 1300-1600

Edited by Halil Inalcik

Excerpt

[More information](#)

also developed through Ottoman territories, beginning c.1400. The so-called oriental goods, including spices, silks and cotton goods, reached Poland, the Baltic countries and Muscovy through this route. Further to the east, Hungary and Slovakia through the Danubian ports and Braşov in Transylvania were another market for the south–north trade. At times, Hungary received more spices through this route than through Venice. On these points, Ottoman customs registers were found to have fully supported the findings of Polish, Hungarian and Romanian historians.

The authors, on the other hand, track the shifting importance of the trade in its global context. In the sixteenth century, the Ottoman Empire played a determining role in world trade. The empire's far-flung adventures – on the Volga river, in the Mediterranean, in Azerbaijan and the Caspian Sea, in Yemen, Aden and Diu, in Sumatra and Mombasa – all had economic implications. Ottoman military actions were closely connected with economic – fiscal issues, such as the control of the Tabriz – Bursa silk route, the Akkerman – Lwow route, the Black Sea sources of food and construction materials for İstanbul, and Yemen and Aden for the Indian trade. The battle of Lepanto (1571), and the advent of the English and Dutch in the Mediterranean (1580–90), marked the beginning of the empire's reduction to a regional state. At the same time, the rise of the Atlantic economy, with America's huge supplies of cheap silver, cotton and sugar, and above all Europe's aggressive mercantilism, caused the collapse of the Ottoman monetary system, triggering dramatic changes in the seventeenth century. Subsequently, the relative importance of Ottoman foreign trade to the global economy declined although, after c. 1750, its volume actually rose, especially during the period 1750–1850. International trade rose to greater heights than ever before in Ottoman history. Thus, by 1914, the Ottoman and Western economies were intertwined to an unprecedented degree. But, in terms of economic significance, the Ottomans had slipped from first to second-rate status.

Our examination of foreign trade justifiably stresses the dynamic Ottoman role in the world economy. At the same time, the various authors spend considerable time examining the importance of trade within the Ottoman frontiers, an activity that too often has been overlooked in favor of the foreign trade. To a degree not sufficiently highlighted in the previous literature, this intra-Ottoman trade played a vital role in the economic life of the empire, even during its final years. Overall, tracing the history of these domestic trade patterns over time, an emphasis that derives from our concern to present the story from the Ottoman vantage

Cambridge University Press

0521574560 - An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire,

Volume 1 - 1300-1600

Edited by Halil İnalcık

Excerpt

[More information](#)*General introduction*

5

point, makes apparent their centuries-long continuity. And, as a corollary, we more clearly can see the disruptive impact of the territorial losses of later Ottoman times that diverted, truncated or altogether destroyed well-established domestic trading networks.

Similarly, the authors have placed considerable emphasis on the study of landholding patterns and forms of agricultural exploitation. As a result, a comprehensive picture of the crucial agrarian sector over the entire Ottoman period begins to emerge. We explain and trace the impressive continuity in small landholding patterns while also illustrating how and when large estates did emerge. Generally, we found that over time and space, large estates tended to appear in areas being brought under cultivation rather than on already settled lands. This trend was especially marked in the nineteenth century, when the state settled refugees and reluctant tribes on once nearly vacant lands. In the focus on agriculture, we contribute to a debate that has engaged historians and historical sociologists for the past several decades. The debate centered on the issue of the Ottoman social formation and the utility of the paradigms of Marx and Weber. Some of the research in our volumes suggests limits to the usefulness of these models: the Ottoman village generally was not a self-sufficient social entity independent from the city. A money economy was quite developed in the Ottoman world from an early date, and then expanded considerably in the nineteenth century. Further, smallholdings – not large estates – generated most of the marketed surplus throughout the Ottoman era. Thanks to the meticulously detailed tax and population surveys of the bureaucracy, we now see an Ottoman social formation based on the *çift-hane* in rural areas, a social system that is fully described for the first time by İnalcık in this volume. Indeed, this is the “peasant family labor farm” discussed by A. V. Chayanov as an independent mode of production.

In volume II, our treatment of manufacturing activities during the period c. 1600–1914 (we ignore the earlier period for reasons stated in the preface), extends and sometimes breaks with existing accounts in several important respects. First, the contributions by the various authors collectively offer a comprehensive account that points to remarkable continuities in the loci of manufacturing. In many cases, industrial centers flourishing c. 1600 were still active in 1914. Second, in common with the commercial and agricultural sectors, Ottoman manufacturing is seen to have possessed its own internal dynamics, creatively adapting to shifts in domestic and international conditions. Thus, sometimes new production

Cambridge University Press

0521574560 - An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire,

Volume 1 - 1300-1600

Edited by Halil Inalcik

Excerpt

[More information](#)

centers but more often new production methods and/or new products appeared to retain markets or capture new opportunities. And, as in the case of trade and agriculture, the declining political fortunes of the state and the concomitant territorial losses are seen to have played a vital role in the story of Ottoman manufacturing.

In these volumes, much attention is placed on the relations of the empire with the West which intensified after the sixteenth century. The Ottoman state was the first Asian empire to experience the impact of the phenomenal rise and expansion of Europe in the economic and military fields. While the mercantilist West was keenly interested in the preservation and exploitation of this market so vital for its economy, the Habsburg and Russian empires, taking advantage of new advanced war technology, started an aggressive policy for the conquest and dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire. Thus, already in the first decades of the eighteenth century, the so-called Eastern Question appeared in European politics, putting on the agenda the issue of the very existence of the empire. In the new period, European hegemony changed the Ottoman Empire's position from dominance to mounting dependency. In an attempt to find a way out of the crisis, the Ottomans sought to alter first their military, and then their administrative organizations. So, there appeared for the Ottomans what we may call the Western Question, in the sense of a traditional Muslim society trying to determine to what extent it should follow European ways.

These military and administrative changes accompanied and accelerated increasing imports from the West, not only in weaponry but also in the artifacts of everyday life. In the eighteenth century, the substantial reduction in transport and manufacturing costs in Europe led to an unprecedented trade expansion with the Ottoman territories. During the nineteenth century, additional innovations in transportation technologies further changed the face of the land and densities of populations.

A most interesting development in the post-classical period was Ottoman "liberalism" in culture and economic issues. Capitulatory privileges were extended to all European nations. As the authors show, a liberal policy was also manifest in land possession rights, in *vakfs* and tax-farming; these entailed administrative decentralization and brought about the rise of the provincial notables and loss of the central bureaucracy's control in the provinces. In the final Ottoman century, liberalism resumed with the 1826 destruction of the Janissary protectors of guild privilege and the 1838 Anglo-Turkish Convention. Government efforts to direct the economy, after nearly wrecking it in the late eighteenth

Cambridge University Press

0521574560 - An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire,

Volume 1 - 1300-1600

Edited by Halil Inalcik

Excerpt

[More information](#)

---

*General introduction*

7

century, steadily diminished thereafter. In the nineteenth century, however, the state still attempted to intervene and protect. Administrative centralization, marked by a vast expansion in the numbers and responsibilities of bureaucrats, accompanied military changes that resulted in a state apparatus vastly larger and more powerful than that of the previous era. Wars and territorial losses, however, continued to shatter trade networks and forge new ones, profoundly affecting agricultural as well as manufacturing activities in their wake.

In brief, we have attempted to present an interpretation of the Ottoman social and economic reality in its global context from, whenever possible, new perspectives, based on original archival materials and the most recent studies derived from these same sources.

Cambridge University Press

0521574560 - An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire,

Volume 1 - 1300-1600

Edited by Halil İnalcık

Excerpt

[More information](#)

---

Part I



THE OTTOMAN STATE: ECONOMY AND  
SOCIETY, 1300-1600

HALİL İNALCIK, UNIVERSITY OF BİLKENT



Cambridge University Press

0521574560 - An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire,

Volume 1 - 1300-1600

Edited by Halil İnalcık

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## EMPIRE AND POPULATION

### FORMATION OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

The Ottoman state came into existence around 1300 as a small frontier principality which devoted itself to the *gaza*, Holy War, on the frontiers of the Seljukid Sultanate in Asia Minor and of the Byzantine Empire. Its initial *gazi* frontier character influenced the state's historical existence for six centuries: its dynamic conquest policy, its basic military structure, and the predominance of the military class within an empire that successfully accommodated disparate religious, cultural, and ethnic elements. The society to which these elements gave rise followed in the tradition of earlier Islamic empires, but some of its most unique features were created by the Ottomans themselves.

The Ottoman crossing of the Dardanelles and settlement on European soil proved of crucial importance for the transformation of the Ottoman state from a rather insignificant frontier principality into an empire encompassing the Balkans and Asia Minor. Süleyman Pasha, son of the second Ottoman sultan, Orhan (1324–62), was responsible for the first Ottoman settlement in Europe. He first established himself on the Gallipoli peninsula in 1352 as the ally of John Cantacuzenus, pretender to the Byzantine throne. Two years later Süleyman seized the fortified city of Gallipoli and made it a strong base from which he initiated his conquests in Thrace. He soon attracted Turkish immigrants from Anatolia, landless peasants, nomads, and all kinds of uprooted people seeking a new life on the other side of the Straits. Thus the so-called Pasha *sancak*, which would embrace the entire Balkan peninsula, came into being.

After a precarious period following Süleyman's sudden death in 1357, the conquest of Thrace was resumed with renewed vigor under the command of his brother, Murad, and in 1361 the important city of Adrianople

Cambridge University Press

0521574560 - An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire,

Volume 1 - 1300-1600

Edited by Halil Inalcik

Excerpt

[More information](#)12 *I The Ottoman state: Economy and society, 1300–1600*

fell to Ottoman forces. The rapid conquest of Thrace caused consternation in Byzantium and in Europe because the European approaches to Constantinople had fallen so rapidly into Ottoman hands. During the period 1362–89, Murad I subdued the greater part of the Balkans north to the Danube and made Ottoman vassals of most of the local dynasts, thus creating an empire composed of vassal states. In 1389, in the battle of Kossovo-Polje, the attempt of the assembled Balkan dynasties to throw off Ottoman domination failed.

Losing his father on the battlefield, Sultan Bayezid I (1389–1402) vigorously took up the reins of government and consolidated his holdings in Anatolia. In 1393, he returned to the Balkans to establish centralized control over the Slavic principalities and to expand further to the north. Bayezid's rivalry with Hungary in the lower Danubian territories and with Venice in the Morea, Albania, and the Aegean resulted in an Hungarian–Venetian alliance against the Ottomans. When Bayezid began his siege of Constantinople, Hungary and Venice succeeded in mobilizing the Crusaders to stop him. But Bayezid surprised and defeated the Crusaders at Nicopolis in 1396. Thus he firmly established Ottoman rule in the Balkans and also gained enormous prestige for himself throughout the Islamic world. Egypt and Syria now believed themselves to be free from Crusader attack. Furthermore, the Ottoman sultan did not hesitate to eliminate the Turkish dynasties of Anatolia in an attempt to incorporate into his empire all lands west of the Euphrates in Asia Minor. As Bayezid strove to expand his territory and to build a strongly centralized state on the model of the classical Islamic states, he unavoidably became embroiled with the native military class in Anatolia who looked to Timur in the east for salvation and protection.

Now Timur, claiming himself heir to the Mongol Empire in Iran, claimed overlordship in all of Anatolia, including the Ottoman state. When Bayezid challenged Timur, he suffered a crushing defeat at the battle of Ankara in 1402, and his empire collapsed. As a result, the Anatolian dynasties reestablished themselves and the vassal states in the Balkans (Byzantium, Wallachia, Serbia and Albania) regained their freedom from the Ottomans.

Civil strife among contending Ottoman princes between 1403 and 1413 slowed greatly the Ottoman recovery in spite of Timur's death in 1405. Nevertheless, stability quickly returned during the reigns of Mehmed I (1413–21) and Murad II (1421–51), because they could build upon the prior solid institutions of the Ottoman state. Those forces – the Janissary