

Ottomans (cont.)

- To create a loyal bureaucracy and government, the Ottomans developed a unique slave system known as Kul that provided manpower needs. The system was based on a yearly levy known as devshirme. This was a human tax on all ~~non-Muslim~~ non-Muslim subjects of the Empire, particularly from the Balkan provinces.

The boys, usually between 7-10 years old, were brought to the capital, converted to Islam, and taught Turkish.

- Most of them became Janissaries, the famed Ottoman elite soldiers that were armed with gunpowder weapons. Those who displayed the most aptitude and intelligence were sent to the Imperial Palace, trained in literature, science, the arts, & military skills, and once they reached adulthood became the highest administrators of the state.

* Ideally, the Kul system provided the state with a group of expert administrators who, due to their separation from their families & homes, owed loyalty only to the Sultan.

Causes of Ottoman Decline

* The reasons for a loss of relative power after the reign of Suleyman are complex. However, a few strands of this process can be identified.

① The Ottoman process of succession. As the oldest son had no automatic claim to the throne, his sons fought to succeed him - sometimes this 'struggle' →

Causes of Ottoman Decline

struggle began even before the Sultan's death. Once a Prince had established himself as Sultan, he would then face the grim task of executing his siblings to stabilize the state and avoid future conflict. This often resulted in a loss of talent and ability, as well as encouraging the growth of factionalism & 'intrigue within the Imperial Court.

② Logistical difficulties - Continued conquests and the vast increase in the Empire's size by 1550 produced serious communication and transportation problems. Extended conflicts (such as those against the Safavids) and failure to pay the troops on time caused rebellion and opposition within military ranks.

③ The political influence of the Janissaries - as the Empire's elite troops, the Janissaries soon became aware of their political power; much like the Praetorian Guard of Imperial Rome, the Janissaries soon became the makers and breakers of Sultans. Their agenda favored the installation of weak and pliable sultans, who could be encouraged to grant the Janissaries more and more influence within the Ottoman Imperial system.

④ Greater contact with the Western-dominated global economy also affected Ottoman power. Large amounts of American silver entered the Ottoman economy after 1600 - unprepared for this influx, prices within the Empire rose dramatically, and inflation increased prices and decreased spending power, sparking anger against the Imperial Administration. Inflation combined with corruption throughout the Ottoman bureaucracy to seriously undermine both Government revenues and government prestige. This of course coincided with a general decline in commercial activity and trade revenues due to the outflanking of trade between Europe and Asia by European merchants.

⑤ A belief that Europe was a peripheral area of little importance had long sustained Ottoman self-perceptions of their power ~~and importance~~. While this had been true before 1500, by 1750 this perception proved a serious handicap, as it prevented the Ottomans from recognizing the fundamental importance and consequences of Europe's internal transformations. The conservatism of powerful forces such as the Janissaries reinforced this perception. As a result, Europe far surpassed the Ottomans technologically

⑥ Overextension of Imperial territory was also a factor; Although the Ottoman Empire had been built on territorial expansion through military conquest, it lacked the resource base to effectively administer and govern thousands of miles of territory over the long term. Some contraction was therefore inevitable, even without pressure from foreign rivals such as Russia.