CHAPTER II

A BRIEF HISTORY OF TURKISH CIVILIZATION

2.I Introduction

Spengler's cyclical theory of history posits that a civilization, like a living organism, has a life span determined by its biological nature.[22] Ibn Khaldun averaged the life span of the civilizations he studied to last not more than three generations or about a hundred and twenty years.[23] In terms of duration and durability, Toynbee described the Ottoman Empire as 'unique' for its ability to persist for more than six centuries.[24] He credited the empire as an 'excellent illustration' of his social theory of 'challenge and response',[25] attributable to what Talat Sait Halman might describe as 'the adoptive and adaptive aspects of mobility, not only in terms of movement through space and climate but also the receptiveness to change.[26]

In this chapter, the Ottoman Empire occupies a major focus because the impact of its long and expansive rule opened the path for its transformation into

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22 Oswald Spengler, ***The Decline of the West.*** Vol. I (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1926-1928) p.107.

23 Ibn Khaldun, **The Muqaddimah. An Introduction to History.** Translated from the Arabic by Franz Rosenthal (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958) p. lxxviii.

24 Arnold Toynbee. ***A Study of History***. Abridgement of Vol. I – VI by D. C. Sommervell. (London: Oxford University Press, 1946) p. 173.

25 Ibid., p. 132.

modern Turkey. The essence of Turkish civilization can be better understood if there is some historical perspective of the legacy of its long dynastic rule and an appreciation of the Ottoman-Turkish socio-polity prior to its modernization reforms.

2.2 Early History

The Turks began as nomadic Oguz tribes in Northern Central Asia who migrated south and west towards Europe, the Middle-East and Central Asia more than two thousand years ago. In these new lands which they invaded they were known as Turkomans or Turks.[27] Two great dynasties ruled Turkey. They were the Seljuks and the Ottomans. Prior to them, the earliest known was the Gokturk Empire (552 –744 A. D.) followed by among others, the Karahanids and the Gaznevids. These empires, however, had no form or structure, having no capital, boundaries or institutional framework. They were generally a loose community of nomadic tribes flung across Central Asia who acknowledged the authority of some line of more dominant tribal chiefs.[28]

It was as early as this period that these nomadic Turks were exposed and converted to Islam, mainly by Orthodox Sufi missionaries from Iran and Iraq, just

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[26] Talat Sait Halman, 'Islam in Turkey' in Philip H, Stoddard, David C. Cuthell and Margaret W. Sullivan (eds) ***Change and the Muslim World*** (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1981) p. 152.

[27] Stanford Shaw, ***History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey***. Vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) p. 2.

[28] Ibid., p. 2-3.

as they were simultaneously exposed to Christianity, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism and other religions of the time. Their acceptance and conversion to Islam was in its totality. They abandoned their shamanistic beliefs, adopted Arabic, the language of their new religion, incorporated Islamic moral codes and began to settle into a more sedentary culture.[29]

The Seljuks began as Oguz mercenaries for the Karahanids in the Middle-East and ruled from the 11th century. In 1055, Tugrul Bey, the founder of the dynasty, had imposed upon the weak Abbassid caliph in Iraq to appoint him as sultan or temporal head while the caliph remained as spiritual leader.[30] From Iran and Iraq, the Seljuks expanded into Byzantine Anatolia, building their base at Isfahan in Iran after the defeat of the Byzantine army at Manzikert in 1071.[31] Suleyman, one of Tugrul Bey's relatives, ruled southern-central Anatolia where he later established the Seljuk Empire of Rum[32] with its capital at Konya.

The Seljuks continued to champion and spread Islam and Anatolia became increasingly Turkish. The Seljuk dynasty, however, became weak and began to decline through territorial fragmentation caused by their practice of dividing family inheritance, thereby creating offshoots of many competing families and their respective minor dynasties. In 1242, the Seljuks were invaded by the Mongols who

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[29] Ibid., p. 4.
[30] Ibid., p. 4.
[31] Feroz Ahmad, ***The Making of Modern Turkey*** (London: Routledge, 1993) p. 16.
[32] 'Rum' means 'Rome' or 'Roman'. It refers to the European and Byzantine lands that the Turks conquered.

established the Great Mongol Empire under the suzerainty of China.[33] A brief period of relative peace was followed by anarchy among various families who ruled the Empire's vast territories. Finally, in the late 13th century, leadership passed on to the Ottomans.

2.3 The Rise of the Ottomans

The Ottomans were from the Kayi tribe of the Turkomans. The founder of the dynasty, Ertugrul and his followers had served the Seljuks as auxiliaries against the Byzantines and the Mongols; and in return for their services, ruled some frontier territories in Western Anatolia,[34] along the Byzantine border. He was succeeded by his son, Osman after whom the dynasty was named, 'Osmanli' or Ottoman in English.[35]

Osman (1280 –1324) advanced further west into Byzantine lands through conquests and pacts while the Seljuk Empire finally collapsed around 1300. He captured and established his capital at Yenisehir and thereafter, he and his followers began a more settled life.[36] His descendants gave the empire the first true signs of the form and structure of a state. The capture and establishment of Bursa as capital in 1326 marked the change of the emerging empire 'from a nomadic border principality to a real state with a capital, boundaries', and most important of all, a

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[33] Feroz Ahmad, ***The Making of Modern Turkey***, p. 8.
[34] Stanford Shaw, ***History of the Ottoman Empire***, Vol. I, p. 13.
[35] Ibid., p. 13.
[36] Ibid., p. 14.

'settled population'.[37] They continued the 'ghazi'[38] spirit of conquering infidel lands with the conquest of Thrace, Macedonia, Bulgaria and Serbia in Europe in the 14th century, and continued with the Seljuk tradition of building palaces, mosques and madrassahs which became centers of Islamic learning.[39] To establish control, Christian peasants from Europe were trans-migrated to Anatolia and Turkomans from Anatolia to conquered lands in Europe.[40]

To counterbalance the political rivalry among Turkoman chiefs and the power and influence of Turkish nobility, the Devsirme system of recruiting non-Muslim youths as slaves from conquered lands as the sultan's personal guards and soldiers[41] - known as the Janissary - was extended with their recruitment into his administration as well. Finally, instability caused by rival principality chiefs led to the defeat of the first Ottoman Empire in 1402 by Timurlenk or Tamerlane, the Central Asian conqueror. The Interregnum or break in the continuity of the Empire lasted until 1413 when the Ottoman Empire was restored.[42]

The crowning glory of the Empire was the defeat of Byzantine Constantinople in 1453 by Mehmet II the Conqueror (Fatih) (1451-1481). The city was renamed Istanbul. Its strategic location made it an ideal capital for the Ottoman

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[37] Ibid., p. 14.
[38] 'Ghazi' means fighter, warrior or hero of the Islamic faith. Muslims believe that they achieve martyrdom and their reward in 'paradise' is assured when they die in the defence of Islam.
[39] Stanford Shaw, ***History of the Ottoman Empire***. Vol. I., p. 17-19.
[40] Ibid., p. 19.
[41] Frank Tachau, 'The Political Culture of Kemalist Turkey' in Jacob M. Landau (ed) ***Ataturk and the Modernization of Turkey*** (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974) p.61.
[42] Stanford Shaw, ***History of the Ottoman Empire***. Vol. I., p.28.

Empire. With its conquest, Mehmet was recognized as the leader of the Muslim world. He conquered Greece in 1459 and completed the capture of Serbia, Albania and other parts of Europe and Asia.[43] A hallmark of his rule was the creation of the millet system of 'autonomous self-government under religious leaders'[44] that was extended to religious minorities in the lands he conquered, especially in Istanbul where Jews, Armenians, Christians and other minorities lived and whom he depended upon to remain to maintain economic and social life in the conquered city.[45]

Ottoman greatness peaked during the reign of Suleyman I the Magnificent (1520-1566). By this time, the Ottomans had assumed the caliphate when Selim I defeated Syria and the Mamluks of Egypt in 1517. The Empire now stretched as far up to the Danube. The Ottomans had also become a naval power in the Mediterranean by the 16th century. Although the first siege of Vienna was abandoned in 1529, Hungary had accepted Ottoman suzerainty by 1533. That same year the Safavids in Iran and Baghdad were defeated and the rest of Iraq in 1538, thereby extending Ottoman lands up to the Persian Gulf.[46] The signs of Ottoman decline, however, appeared in the last decade of Suleyman's rule despite his attempts to wipe out government corruption, inefficiency and other social and economic problems that were compounded by an incompetent government plagued

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[43] Ibid., p. 55 – 58.
[44] Ibid., p. 59.
[45] Ibid., p. 59.
[46] Feroz Ahmad, ***The Making of Modern Turkey,*** p.22.

by palace intrigues.[47] Unrest and revolts marked the last years of the reign of one of the greatest of Ottoman rulers.

2.3.1 The Ottoman-Turkish Socio-polity

The Ottoman-Turkish socio-polity was essentially a medieval society. Its medieval outlook was characterized by a distinctly all-pervasive religious spirit.[48] This socio-polity called the sultanate was infused by Islam as expressed by its embrace of the shari'ah[49] or seriat in Turkish. At the tip of this traditional Ottoman society was the patrimonial authority called the sultan. He was both the temporal head or sultan and the spiritual leader, the caliph, a position believed to be the successor to the prophet's leadership of the community of Muslim believers.[50] Politically, it was the basis of authority. He was not considered a representative of the people but the representative of God – from the concept of 'khalifa' in Islam - meaning vicegerent. Hence, the English terms, 'caliph' and 'caliphate'. The concept of state therefore, had meaning for the masses only within a religious context: the state was Islamic, the ruler was the leader of the community and it was the duty of Muslim subjects to obey and to submit themselves to the leader. The ruler however, never claimed any divine quality or personal charisma. He was mortal and could be deposed, replaced or even killed.[51]

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[47] Stanford Shaw, ***History of the Ottoman Empire***. Vol. I., p. 107 – 110.
[48] Niyazi Berkes, ***The Development of Secularism in Turkey*** (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1964) p. 9.
[49] 'Shari'ah' is the Islamic legal system by which an Islamic state or nation is administered and guided by.
[50] Niyazi Berkes, ***The Development of Secularism in Turkey***, p. 9.
[51] Ibid., p. 13.

This unity of state and religion as reflected in the concept of the sultanate-caliphate was held together directly below by the Grand Vizer who was the head of the ruler's administrative, military and judicial staff.[52] A distinct but important and highly organized, and hence powerful group, was the ulama, the religious teachers and learned leaders.[53] They were led by the Seyhul Islam, the chief mufti or the highest ranking religious authority. The rest below was the common people or 'radya': the tradesmen, artisans and the peasants who were governed by the feudal lords. The 'radya' was segregated into Muslims and non-Muslims, the latter being administered by their own autonomous religious communities called millets. The ulama and their network of agents were often the only official links between the central government and the masses in the remote provinces. They could reach segments of the population which were beyond the direct control of the central authority.[54]

This was generally the traditional order of Ottoman society. It was primarily a traditional and religious community. A Turk in medieval times never called himself a Turk but a believer, a member of the believing community. His loyalty was first to Islam, the sultan, and then the state. As long as all the institutions function, there was peace and order and the sultan continued to rule.[55]

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[52] Ibid., p. 10.
[53] Binnaz Toprak, ***Islam and Political Development in Turkey*** (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981) p. 26.
[54] Ibid., p. 26.
[55] Niyazi Berkes, ***The Development of Secularism in Turkey,*** p. 14.

2.4 Decline and Fall

Bernard Lewis attributed the rise and strength of the Ottomans to the contribution of 'able and intelligent men'[56] whose vision of a world empire was matched by both military might and consolidation capability. These leaders were also fired by the 'ghazi' spirit – the intense drive to conquer infidel lands to spread Islam. However, the Ottoman practice of fratricide or the killing of one's siblings and relatives who posed a potential threat severely limited the choice of capable leaders. Subsequent leaders lack the 'ghazi' spirit and were, according to Lewis, 'incompetents, degenerates and misfits,'[57] largely due to a very protected palace upbringing and a life-style dedicated to the harem and other pleasures. Government was largely left to the Grand Vizer and other administrative and religious bodies who competed for power and favour.[58]

Hence, corruption and inefficiency permeated the government and the armed forces lost the superiority it was known for due to its failure to keep up with military techniques of warfare, equipment and training compared with its European counterparts. The loss of its pioneering spirit against the infidel had lulled the armed forces into a 'decline in alertness, in readiness to accept new techniques... a general deterioration.... parallel to that in the bureaucratic and religious classes.'[59] The discovery in the 15th and 16th centuries of new sea routes that by-passed the

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[56] Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961) p. 23.
[57] Ibid., p. 23.
[58] Ibid., p. 23.

Mediterranean Sea which the Ottomans controlled also contributed to their loss of supremacy at sea. Territorial expansion was capped by physical and geographical barriers and the Ottomans were unable to defeat the Hapsburgs or to capture Vienna despite attempts over a period of one and a half century.[60]

The inflated bureaucracy and expenses of warfare increasingly taxed the peasants who, debt-burdened, were forced to abandon their farms to seek employment in the cities. Overall agricultural productivity declined. The industrial sector was also outdated. 'Industrial production (was) primitive, static and inert, utterly unable to resist the competition of imported European manufactures'.[61] At a time when Europe was advancing in science and technology, the state of the agricultural, industrial and transport sectors in the Ottoman Empire was still at the level of their medieval ancestors.[62]

New trade routes to the East and the discovery of the Americas by the Europeans brought an influx of cheap precious metals which debased and devalued the Ottoman coins and currency, the value of which was hitherto, controlled by the sultans.[63] The Ottoman's lack of openness to new ideas was attributed to a sense of superiority and a disdain of ideas and inventions coming from other civilizations, especially that of Christian origins. Another attribute was the deterministic, passive

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59 Ibid., p. 26.
60 Stanford Shaw, ***History of the Ottoman Empire***, p. 217 – 218.
61 Bernard Lewis, ***The Emergence of Modern Turkey***, p. 34.
62 Ibid., p. 32.
63 Feroz Ahmad, ***The Making of Modern Turkey***, p. 21.

and fatalistic mentality of the Ottomans.[64] While Europe was in the throes of the Enlightenment and the Renaissance, these transforming ideas of the West hardly touch Ottoman lands.[65]

By the 18th century, the empire had lost its vitality, the 'vigour of its intellectual life'.[66] While the works of Turkish writers and poets were being translated into Greek and Latin, there was almost no parallel translation of European works into Turkish or Arabic. The ban on printing presses by Bayezit II (1481 – 1512) to print anything in Turkish or Arabic was only lifted in 1784.[67]The decline was stark, especially in contrast to the rest of the world, mainly Europe, which was modernizing and advancing in both science and technology. Other signs of decline were the cessation of territories,[68] renunciation of conquered lands,[69] concessions of defeats[70] which were seized upon by far flung provincial territories, especially in Asia and Africa, to declare their independence and to break away from the empire.[71] For good reasons, by the late 18th century, Turkey was called the 'Sick Man' of Europe.

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64 Bernard Lewis, ***The Emergence of Modern Turkey***, p. 34.
65 Ibid., p. 53.
66 Ibid., p. 35.
67 Ibid., p. 51.
68 The Treaty of Carlowitz in January 1699 was the first of many wherein the Ottomans conceded loss of territories: Hungary and Transylvania to the Habsburgs; the Aegean islands to Venice, Podolya and the southern Ukraine to Poland, etc. See Stanford Shaw, p. 224.
69 The Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca in 1774 granted Crimea its independence, allowed Russia to occupy certain territories round the Black Sea, gave Catherine the Great of Russia the right to protect the Orthodox church in Istanbul, among other terms. See Stanford J. Shaw, p. 250.
70 For one and half centuries, Turkey had tried to defeat Hungary. It tried to capture Vienna in 1529 and 1683 but failed both times. Finally, they had to concede defeat and retreated.
71 Bernard Lewis, ***The Emergence of Modern Turkey***, p. 37.

2.5 Early Reforms and Westernization

The need for change was first acknowledged in the 17th century and initial reforms were basically to strengthen the central authority through internal laws and policies. In the 18th century, the reforms needed were quite different.[72] Europe itself was undergoing much changes and upheavals, culminating in the French Revolution in1789. The sultans made attempts to arrest the deterioration. For the first time in its history, Turkey 'opened its doors to the West'.[73] Through diplomatic and cultural contacts, it saw the technical superiority of the West and sought Western assistance in military and naval affairs, mainly from France. Simultaneously it experienced worldliness in its many manifestations: western ideas, literature, music, architecture, art, etc.

By the end of the 18th century, concerned Ottoman intellectuals and statesmen saw westernization as necessary to reform the empire.[74] Throughout the 19th century the concerns of the reformers were to westernize the military, educational, legal and political institutions.[75] The promulgation of a 'New Order' and its reforms were strongly opposed by the ulama and the Janissary which was dissolved with the creation of the new army, Nizam-i Cedid in 1826. In 1839, the ruler officially proclaimed the Gulhane Charter that launched the 'Tanzimat'[76]

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[72] Binnaz Toprak, ***Islam and Political Development in Turkey***, p. 31.
[73] Ibid., p. 31.
[74] Ibid., p. 32.
[75] Ibid., p. 32.
[76] 'Tanzim' means ordering. 'Tanzimat' is the plural, meaning a series of acts, orders or reforms. The Tanzimat (1839 – 1867) was a period of reforms and growing western influence. The period saw the emergence of the co-existence of two entirely different legal and social systems along

regime whose task was to create a new order to the organization of the state by making reforms to meet the changes of the West to ensure economic progress and national survival.[77]

The reformers believed in the 'principles of the sanctity of private property and constitutional restraints on the authority of the sultan'.[78] When attempts to introduce a money economy resulted in further economic decline, an opposition group which became known as the Young Ottomans, forced the newly installed Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876 – 1909) to adopt a constitution in 1876 which he shelved in 1878 out of insecurity for his position.[79]Abdulhamid was a 'tanzimat' ruler. He believed in the westernizing ways of the reformers. Justin McCarthy called him, 'a builder-sultan'.[80] He built palaces, mosques, schools and roads; constructed railway and telegraph lines, and he promoted agricultural and industrial enterprises. He supported the Pan-Islamic movement[81] in the hope that it would help to consolidate the disintegrating empire and also to bolster his own position in the Muslim world.[82] To support all these, he borrowed excessively from the West, depending on the people's taxes for repayment and plunging the nation further into financial ruin.

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with two entirely different sets of educational institutions: one traditional and the other, modern and secular. A characteristic of this period was its cultural duality, wherein institutions based on western models began to emerge alongside long-established Islamic institutions.

77 Niyazi Berkes, ***The Development of Secularism in Turkey***, p. 144 –145.

78 Feroz Ahmad, ***The Making of Modern Turkey***, p. 23.

79 Ibid., p. 30.

80 Justin McCarthy, ***The Ottoman Turks. An Introductory History to 1923*** (London: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1997) p. 307.

81 Al-Afghani's movement to unite Muslim communities to resist European aggression and to expel colonialists from Asia and Africa. See Mohammad Redzuan Othman, p. 1.

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81 Al-Afghani's movement to unite Muslim communities to resist European aggression and to expel colonialists from Asia and Africa. See Mohammad Redzuan Othman, p. 1.

82 Mohammad Redzuan Othman, 'Afghani's Pan-Islamic Ideas and the Turks' Appeals'. Paper

Discontent and a desire for a democratic government saw the formation in 1889 of a secret political society called the Committee for Union and Progress (CUP). Made up of intellectuals, but mainly army officers trained and educated by Western-style military academies, these 'Young Turks' became an opposition, ironically, spawned by Abdulhamid himself.[83] Finally, in 1908, giving in to the pressures of war with the Macedonians, Bulgarians and Greeks, near financial disaster and European banks closing in, Abdulhamid restored the constitution and allowed free elections. The bureaucrats, religious groups and supporters of the sultan were unhappy with the elected CUP-backed government and the seemingly reduced powers of the sultan. In April 1909, the army put down a revolt, deposed Abdulhamid and installed his brother Mehmed V (1909 – 1918) as sultan and with the CUP, assumed power. But war in the Balkans, defeat in the First World War, invasion by the Greeks, loss of its territories and the impending dismemberment of the empire finally led to the abolishment of the sultanate and caliphate and the exile of the last of the Ottoman sultans in 1924.

2.6 Conclusion

The rise to greatness and the disintegration of the Ottomans cannot be ignored as integral to the legacy of Turkish civilization. The seeds of a secular worldview and a western orientation, the keystones of modern Turkey, were spawned during two centuries of soul-searching for its identity and role against an aggressive and

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presented in International Conference on Jamal Al-Din Al-Afghani in Renaissance Hotel, Kuala Lumpur, 1998. p. 16.

advancing world whose values and character were both unfamiliar and hostile. At the same time, the trends of new ideas were increasingly appealing and the inevitable changes, necessary for survival. What began as attempts to reform were finally brought into fruition through Kemal Ataturk's revolution to rebuild a new Turkey.

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[83] Justin McCarthy, ***The Ottoman Turks***, p. 315.