

CHAPTER TEN

Ottomans and Safavids

States, Statecraft, and Societies, 1500–1800

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The period commonly styled as ‘early modern’ with reference to European history roughly coincides with an equally distinct era in Islamic history, one that might be termed the ‘age of the great dynastic empires’. The grandest of these empires, most populous and prosperous though also the shortest lived, the Mughals of India, is arguably the best researched and best known perhaps because of its relevance to British history. Many features of Mughal India, from Turkic dynastic origins and Persianate political culture to the central place of Islam especially in terms of social organisation and legal practice, and its flourishing literary and visual arts, could be profitably studied in conjunction with Ottoman and Safavid polities. There was also considerable mutual and reciprocal influence between the Mughals and the other two empires: Mughal shahs contested the eastern marches of the Safavid domains and sought ways to wrest ideological leadership of the Sunni Muslim world from the Ottomans; they provided prosperous employment to artists and men of letters from Iran, architects and military experts from Ottoman lands. History, shared heritage and culture, continuing contacts and connections, especially intimate with the Safavids, all indicate that the Mughals should be viewed in the same context as their Muslim contemporaries, yet geography places the Mughal empire outside our purview. In the period under study, those regions and peoples of west Asia and north Africa (with the major exception of Morocco) which now come under the Eurocentric rubric ‘Middle East’ as it is commonly understood these days and provide the focus of the present volume were ruled exclusively by the Safavid and Ottoman empires.

Historians often refer to these polities as Safavid Iran and Ottoman Turkey. This practice is misleading for at best it falsely implies a predetermined territorial aim as well as an ethnic supremacy, or at least predominance in each case. Territorial and cultural if not ethnic ‘Iranianness’ of the Safavids may be defended, but in the case of the Ottomans there is the additional and more serious problem that while Europeans may have referred to their domains as ‘Turkey’ none in the Islamic world nor any in Asia in general would have recognised the term; in the Turkish language itself the word ‘Türkiye’ had to be invented as a translation of European usage only around the

turn of the twentieth century. Muslims and other Asians knew the Ottomans as 'Rûmî', that is to say 'Romans' since they conquered regions previously known as 'Rûm', Byzantine Rome. The lands ruled by these Turkish-speaking Muslim 'Romans' were the domains of the 'House of Osman', the Ottoman realm, never 'Turkey'. Unlike China or India or even Iran there was no historical Turkey, certainly not where the Ottomans held power. Ottoman lands did not constitute a historical entity except as the hinterland of Byzantium/Constantinople, the second Rome. The territorial expanse of Süleyman the Magnificent's sixteenth-century empire was very similar to that of Justinian a millennium earlier in the sixth century. There were exceptions in the two empires' reaches. Whereas Justinian held sway in Italy, Ottoman 'Romans' never succeeded in their half-hearted attempts to conquer it; on the other hand, in Hungary and lands around the Black Sea as well as to the east in Mesopotamia and to the south in Arabia and shores of the Red Sea Süleyman's domains were much more extensive. Essentially, however, Justinian's and Süleyman's rule from Constantinople/Istanbul extended over all that they could conquer far from that central, focal point. Rather than being seen as territorial entities, both the Ottoman and the Safavid powers should more usefully be conceived as dynastic empires.

The Emergence of Ottomans and Safavîs

The eponymous founders of the Ottoman and Safavid dynasties, Osman Bey (d. 1324) and Shayh Sâfî ad-dîn (d. 1336) were early fourteenth-century contemporaries, one a frontier chieftain in north-west Anatolia and the other a sûfî shayh in Ardabîl in Âzerbayjân near the Caspian coast. Osman Bey was one of dozens of chiefs who led bands of frontiersmen on the Saljukî-Byzantine marches along the rim of the central Anatolian plateau; victories in skirmishes against local Byzantine forces enhanced his reputation and stature among frontiersmen in Bithynia so that at his death people calling themselves Osman's men, Osmanli in Turkish, constituted a significant force, though still restricted in territory to Bursa and the region to the south east of the Marmara Sea. In the course of the fourteenth century Osman's descendants, still the Osmanli, succeeded in enlarging their domains both against Byzantium and against the other frontier emirates in west Anatolia. Two factors assured success to the Ottomans: the control of the passage to south-east Europe at the Dardanelles from the mid-century, and cutting off the hinterland of Anatolia from other emirates on the Aegean Sea. Even though utterly defeated by Timur (Tamerlane) in 1402, Ottoman power rose again due to their unrivalled position straddling the Dardanelles, controlling the passage of would-be frontiersmen to the Balkans and their booty back to Anatolia. Shayh Sâfî's descendants, on the other hand, consolidated the primacy of their order over other mystic brotherhoods in Âzerbayjân and extended their appeal into Anatolia.

Both Ottoman political power and Safavî religious appeal were based on a similar, almost identical, social reservoir, the Oghuz Turks, the 'Ghuzz' of Arab Muslim writers. The Oghuz branch of western Turks had moved to the eastern Caspian region in the tenth century and in the mid-eleventh had provided the military power of the Saljukî sultans. Oghuz tribesmen coming south into Iran had been encouraged by Saljukî central authorities to move on with their flocks to Âzerbayjân and eastern Anatolia where the mountain ranges and river valleys provided summer and winter pastures to their extensive livestock. While it was the Saljukî Sultan

Alparslan's defeat of the Byzantine emperor at Malazgirt (Manzikert) in 1071 that opened Roman Anatolia to Turkish power, it was the Oghuz who in fact settled the 'land of Rûm' and established the first local political entities. The Oghuz of Âzerbayjân and Anatolia were reinforced by other Turkish immigrants especially during the Mongolian upheaval of the thirteenth century: some displaced from Transoxania by the Mongol irruption, some as Mongol allies with a common inner Asian political and social ethos. The Oghuz of Anatolia lived in an uneasy relationship with the Saljukîs of Rûm, those of Âzerbayjân came under the sway of Ilkhanî Mongols; with the disintegration of the Saljukî state by the end of the thirteenth century and of the Ilkhanîs by the mid-fourteenth the movement of Oghuz to the west continued, to Rûm and later to the Balkans but by then under strict control and guidance of the Ottomans. Once Timur's grand design failed the Oghuz of eastern Anatolia and Âzerbayjân eventually created their own political formation, the Aqqyunlu federation, with the participation of Turkmen of northern Mesopotamia and western Iran. It was within the confines of the Aqqyunlu that the Safavî sûfî order flourished and came to provide the spiritual bond to Aqqyunlu subjects and court alike. The Safavî dynasty of shayhs forged marriage ties with the Aqqyunlu shahs; the rank and file of the order was also politicised and indeed militarised as Safavîs assumed leadership of Oghuz raiders in the Caucasus. The Ottomans had glorified their expansion into Byzantine, Bulgarian, and Serbian lands as 'ghaza', frontier fighting for the cause of Islam. By the late fifteenth century the Safavîs of Âzerbayjân, too, added ghaza to their spiritual claim to leadership of Oghuz tribesmen. The Ottoman polity had undergone a transformation to a centralised rule after the conquest of Constantinople in 1453; by the end of the century the Safavî shayhs effected a veritable revolution when they displaced the Aqqyunlu rulers and became shahs themselves.

Turko-Persian Polities

Ottoman ghâzîs had expanded their domains over two centuries with fairly constant fighting not only against non-Muslim neighbours to the west but also against other Turkmen emirates of Anatolia, at least when they failed to coerce them into submission. The Safavîs, on the other hand, displaced the Aqqyunlu dynasty and, all at once, became the rulers of a well-defined domain within the space of a single year in 1501. They inherited a polity which they of course changed to suit the new dispensation. But Safavî rule was not only a dynastic change, nor even the replacement of existing political cadres, it was the occasion of the greatest religious revolution since the emergence of Islam itself. Ghaza in the service of Islam had served as one aspect of Ottoman ideology as it expanded; a new religious basis for political rule was the much greater ideological impact of the Safavî dynasty when Shi'ism was enforced on Safavî subjects. To understand the necessity for such a drastic and unprecedented policy of mass conversion we need an evaluation of the main features of Muslim polities around 1500.

Since the Saljukî sultanate was established in the eleventh century, and even more firmly since Mongol Ilkhanî rule in the thirteenth, a new model of socio-political organisation had developed in central and eastern Islamic lands, one which has been termed 'Turko-Persian'. Simply put, the term refers to polities that emerged since the Ghaznavîs and Saljukîs in the eleventh century which were based on Turkish/Turkic

military muscle and civilian administrators, mostly of Iranian stock, who glorified and revived the Sasanî heritage of politics and government. The presentation of the great Persian epic of kings, *Shâhnâme*, by Ferdowsî to the Turkish ruler Sultan Mahmud of Ghazneh in the early eleventh century may be taken as the beginning of this new style of government. The book of kings, with its accounts of the wisdom and valour, as well as the jealousies and failings of Sasanî shahs and heroes, set values and virtues of kingship. The *Shâhnâme*'s version of the worldly and spiritual attainments of the exemplary universal ruler Alexander, Iskandar in Muslim usage, provided the highest standard later rulers were measured against and often attempted to emulate. The great Saljukî sultans, Ilkhanî shahs and other Turko-Persian rulers reigned in the ethos of the *Shâhnâme* and under the shadow of Iskandar. Persian heritage thus shaped the ideology of states and Iranian *vazîrs* and scribes provided the practical apparatus of government. On the other hand rulers and their armies were most commonly of Inner Asian origin or descent. The politics of the ruling house and the disposition of the army were imbued with this Turkic heritage. Rulers and military commanders spoke Turkish; Persian bureaucrats and authors provided the literary and artistic culture of the court and of the polity as well as its statecraft.

The Inner Asian heritage of ruling houses shaped dynastic politics even when they were established in predominantly sedentary regions of historical Iran and West Asia. The ruler reigned as the senior member, the great khan, of the dynastic clan; other male members of the family, brothers of the khan, his sons and nephews, shared political power as governors of regions. Succession was not by a generally accepted rule such as seniority but by acclamation by leaders of the polity of the most politically astute and militarily effective member of the ruling house. One might say that the rule of succession was that there should be no rule, but an eminent historian of Inner Asia has in fact borrowed a term from Celtic polities, *tanistry*, to define this process in the Turkic context. The importation of the term helps to create a comparative context but the comparison is inexact: *tanistry* in the Celtic case refers to the designation of an heir apparent whereas in Inner Asian history there was never such certainty of succession. Instead, the process of the candidates battling each other, sometimes metaphorically but often in reality, was expected to bring out the best possible great leader, a literal survival of the fittest to rule. This was such an important consideration that even at the risk of civil war the principle of a leadership struggle was maintained. The inevitable instability of political rule afflicted all post-Saljukî Turko-Persian polities.

The other main aspect of these political formations, the functional-ethnic division between Turkish military and Persian bureaucracy, worked well when kept in check by a strong ruler who could maintain the balance, but the inherent factionalism surfaced during leadership struggles. This division was also reflected in society: despite the fact that there were townsmen and peasants of Turkish background as well as Persian nomads, the main deep cleavage in society was between the nomadic Oghuz and sedentary Persian population. Political ideology derived from the Persian heritage and the military prowess of the Turks often failed to uphold the polity. The historical significance of the Ottoman and Safavî empires is that each in its own way and to a varying extent managed to overcome political and social divisions and create relatively durable political entities. The Safavî dynasty took over an existing state and imposed Shi'î Islam on its populace to transcend the Safavî brotherhood of Oghuz Turks and to subvert the Sunnî Islam of the majority of townsmen and peasants of its domains: the resulting bonding in Shi'ism of hitherto disparate social and political elements

proved remarkably successful. The new Shi'î self-identity in fact survived Safavî rule itself and provided the basis of Iranian nationalism and patriotism in the twentieth century.

An Islamic revolutionary ideology could work as the cement of a Muslim society such as in Aqqyunlu-turned-Safavî lands, but in the Ottoman case Muslims, Turkish or others, sedentary or nomadic, were no more than half the population. The successful Ottoman frontier enterprise grew slowly, over many generations, incorporating non-Muslim Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbians, not only as conquered peoples but also at the ruler's court and in the military. Except in specific political and institutional circumstances there was no coercion to conversion to Islam. The Ottoman solution to endemic political and social instability was not so much through ideology but through institutional arrangements to strengthen the political centre around the sultan's household. Ottoman structures were so well-rooted and resilient that the Ottoman dynasty remained in power into the twentieth century even after its central power weakened from mid-eighteenth century on; when it finally disbanded in defeat after the Great War, along with the Austro-Hungarian and the Russian empires, it left behind no ideology to speak of. At its zenith, though, the effectiveness of Ottoman central authority was as remarkable as the success of the Safavî revolution. The epic clash between Ottoman military organisation and Safavî fervour provided the main backdrop to west Asian history from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries.

Ottomans vs. Safavîs: the Shaping of Modern West Asia

The stage of the Safavî revolution was Aqqyunlu lands in eastern Anatolia, Âzerbayjân, Mesopotamia and western Iran. The appeal of the Safavî order, however, had been much wider, also reaching Oghuz Turkmen groups elsewhere in Anatolia and Syria, in Ottoman and Mamluk domains. Before the order politicised and militarised Safavî adherents in Ottoman lands were treated the same as followers of any other sûfî order, as long as they did not create social disturbances. Safavî agents from Âzerbayjân regularly visited Ottoman subjects who were Safavî adherents and collected tithes for the shrine of Shayh Sâfî at Ardabîl. Once Shah Ismâ'îl toppled the Aqqyunlu dynasty and called on all his adherents, wherever they may have been living, to join the movement, Ottoman Safavîs became a great danger to the Ottoman state. Anatolian Oghuz Turkmen had supported the Osmanli frontier enterprise but in the second half of the fifteenth century they felt increasingly hemmed in, even marginalised by Ottoman political intervention, taxation and humiliating regulation. With Shah Ismâ'îl Anatolian Oghuz had a new opportunity to join a movement and help to establish a political order where they would have a proud and prominent place. Soon after Shah Ismâ'îl's initial success many Ottoman Safavî adherents either pulled up tents and migrated to his domains or remained behind to stage uprisings. By 1510 the Ottoman government was in danger of losing control of Anatolia. 'Let the Ottomans keep Rumeli [Roman lands in the Balkans], this side [of the Dardanelles] will be Safavî-ruled' was the battle cry of Anatolian Oghuz. The Safavî ferment in Anatolia was suppressed with difficulty; many of the insurgents were deported to the Balkans, some from the southern port of Antalya by ship across the Aegean Sea, to place them beyond the reach of the call from Ardabîl. Finally in 1514 the full Ottoman army marched on the Safavî frontier and defeated Shah Ismâ'îl's superb cavalry at Chaldiran. This was a victory of an army which at its core had the sultan's household

troops with the musket-bearing janissary infantry supported by the household field artillery; the shah's valiant Turkish cavalry, invincible until Chaldiran, succumbed against this awesome firepower. In 1071, at a location very close at Manzikert the Byzantine army had failed in its attempt to stem the tide of Saljukî pressure on Roman Anatolia; had Sultan Selim's Ottoman army similarly failed at Chaldiran Anatolia would have come under Safavî rule even more easily than the Saljukîs captured it more than four centuries earlier. After all, the Turks of Anatolia in the early sixteenth century were much more amenable to Safavî rule than the Byzantine populace was to Saljukî invasion; many, indeed, were outright supporters of a new regime. Victory at Chaldiran assured Ottoman domination of Anatolia and eventually shaped the boundary between the two empires. Chaldiran was essentially a defensive battle for the Ottomans; after his victory Sultan Selim invaded Safavî heartlands in Âzerbayjân but could not hold this hostile territory nor its capital Tabriz, fiercely loyal to the Safavî cause. Western portions of what had been Aqquyunlu lands in eastern and south-eastern Anatolia, including the second capital Amid/Diyarbekr, were incorporated into the Ottoman realm; in later campaigns Sultan Suleiman also captured Iraq, but Âzerbayjân, again invaded and devastated, remained in Safavî hands though Qazvîn, further removed from Ottoman threat, replaced Tabriz as the main seat of the shah.

Thus cut off from western, Ottoman Oghuz, nor able to keep Mesopotamia, the Safavî movement resulted in an Iranian realm. Safavî expansion in the north east into Turkistan was also checked by the Uzbek khans of Central Asia. To the east, too, the Safavîs were blocked by Babur Shah's newly emerging Mughal power. Shah Ismâ'il's call had been heard far and wide but his edict was only obeyed in this land hemmed in by formidable Sunni rivals. Located in Iran it became the most Persianate of the new Muslim empires. Yet at the same time its power remained based on the original supporters of the call, the Oghuz of Anatolia and Âzerbayjân. In other ways, too, the Safavî realm was closer to the inner Asian roots of later Muslim empires, while the Ottomans effected an imperial organisation claiming for themselves the Sasani heritage. It is a further irony that when sixteenth-century Ottoman writers depicted contemporary west Asian politics with reference to the Shâhnâmeh they cast themselves as representing legendary Iran and the Safavîs as Turan.

After defeating Shah Ismâ'il, Sultan Selim next turned south toward the once powerful and prosperous Mamluk sultanate in Syria and Egypt, recently under pressure from Portuguese activity in the southern seas. This is another defining point in west Asian history but one where European maritime expansion had a great impact on regional power relations. When the Portuguese blockaded the Red Sea and cut off the lucrative spice trade which contributed hugely to Mamluk prosperity, the great Mamluk cavalry army was impotent to deal with this danger. They were simply not equipped with an adequate naval power, nor had they seriously adapted to gunpowder warfare. They sought help from their European partners in the spice trade, the Venetians, and even from the Ottomans. Until recently, as late as the 1480s, the Mamluks and Ottomans had been engaged in a struggle for mastery of Cilicia, south of Ottoman Anatolia. Now Mamluks needed Ottoman naval expertise and gunpowder know-how. In 1516 Sultan Selim, victorious over the Safavîs and secure in his eastern marches, decided to move south. He defeated the Mamluks north of Aleppo and captured Syria. The following winter his army, aided by the navy along the route in Palestine and Sinai, marched on Cairo itself. Early in 1517 he broke

Mamluk resistance outside the capital and brought the sultanate to an end. Full mastery over Egypt was a process that continued at least throughout the following decade, but at his death Sultan Selim left his son Suleiman a much enlarged empire. During his long reign from 1520 to his death in 1566 Sultan Suleiman continued the struggle against the Safavîs and wrested Iraq from their control. He also dealt with the Portuguese danger in the Indian Ocean by establishing a naval command at Suez and in the Arabian Sea; by mid-sixteenth century the Ottomans and the Portuguese had reached a *modus vivendi* which restored to the Ottoman Levant a healthy share of the spice trade.

Replacing the Mamluk sultans in Syria and Egypt also made the Ottoman sultans the rulers of the Hijaz, the birthplace of Islam and the setting of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. Ruling Jerusalem directly as an Ottoman district and governing the Hijaz through the sharifs from their base in Jidda, the Ottomans became the pre-eminent power in Sunni Islam. In eastern Anatolia and in Iraq, captured from the Safavîs, the Ottomans had many Shi'î subjects but after the initial epic and vital clash gave way to periodic invasions of Safavî lands the Ottomans developed their imperial ideology to include leadership of the Islamic community and defence of the true faith against Safavî heretics and Habsburg Holy Roman emperors.

Institutions and Ideologies

Whereas the Safavî Oghuz, settled in Iran, conformed to the model of the Turko-Iranian polity, the Ottomans had the curious task of creating distinct military and civilian officers out of the human material they had available to them in Anatolia and in their European territories. Rising from the rough frontier instead of the more sophisticated, Persianised centres of culture in Anatolia, the Ottoman court as well as its periphery were Turkish speakers and remained so even when the dynasty attained great power and prestige. The ethnic-functional division between a Turkish military and a Persianised civilian administration simply did not happen to a full extent. The scribes of course maintained Persian traditions to an extent both in their book-keeping and in their literary efforts, but in the new capital Constantinople/Istanbul as well as in the flourishing Anatolian and Balkan urban milieu Turkish was established as a legitimate, eventually the preferred language of expression in history writing, literary efforts, and other products of high culture, hitherto considered the exclusive domain of Persian. Even the *ulamâ*, at least in Anatolia and the Balkan provinces, replaced Arabic with their native Turkish not only in such mundane tasks as keeping court records and issuing legal documents, but also in learned discourse.

While Turkish triumphed as the literary and spoken language of Ottoman Rome, ethnic Turks were limited in their political and military roles. Some just managed to receive revenue grants for military service but their holdings were not hereditary, their sons had to prove their own prowess to be granted revenues. For a Muslim-born Turk the way to join the ruling elite was rather through a madrasa education to serve as a member of the *ulama* or in the scribal profession. For the military-administrative elite, normally made up of ethnic Turks in the Turko-Persian model, the Ottomans created a new 'Roman' race, a new blend, Turkish-speaking and Muslim, but from non-Muslim, non-Turkish origins. The emergence of this 'rûmî' ethnicity was partly due to intermingling in the normal course of events in Anatolia and in the Balkans, especially in urban environments. But there was also a deliberate attempt in elite

households: revenue grants to officers and even to relatively minor cavalymen assumed that the holder would maintain an official household, a retinue proportionate to the amount of revenues. In the case of a cavalryman stationed in a village, collecting the local revenues made up of agricultural taxes as well as fees and fines charged in the course of his duties in keeping the peace, his retinue might consist of two or three local lads volunteering for military service. Higher ranking officers were expected to maintain military households numbering dozens of retainers. District governors and governors general of provinces fielded hundreds of warriors under their banners. As for the sultan himself, his revenues allowed him to maintain household troops in the tens of thousands.

Large-scale military households were a long-established feature of Islamic polities at least since Umayyad times and it might be said that the system reached its apogee in the Mamluk sultanate where the principle of dynastic succession was curbed in favour of a mamluk commander acclaimed as sultan. Such households were made up of slaves specially trained and groomed for military service and higher office; they were also deliberately alienated from the native population. Unquestioned personal loyalty to the master of the household, literally the owner of the mamluks, was the justification of the system. Mamluk slaves were outsiders, originally non-Muslim (for Muslims could not be enslaved though slaves would become Muslims), most, Turks and Slavs, from the Eurasian steppe. Removed from their original homeland and family ties, placed within a polity where they were deliberately kept apart from the society at large, these highly trained and effective military households formed the underpinnings of political power.

In Arab and Persian lands military slaves were mostly of Turkish origin and maintained a Turkish ethos. In Ottoman Rome the irony was that since ethnic Turks formed the dominant if not the majority element in language and society at large, slaves in military retinues, at least those in the sultan's and grandee households, had by definition to be from a non-Turkish background, though Turkified and Islamised after recruitment. The Ottomans utilised all the traditional sources of recruitment: captured in battle or raids, received as presents from tributary chieftains, or purchased. There also developed a uniquely Ottoman method, one descriptively called *devshirme*, gathering: these were young men on the threshold of puberty taken from their rural, Christian families in Ottoman domains and drafted into royal service. In classical Islamic law non-Muslims within an Islamic polity would have been classified as poll-tax (*jizya*) paying protected people of the book (*dhimmi*) and therefore exempt from this human levy. The origin of *devshirme* recruitment is obscure but it may have developed at first in the frontier zone where, in the shifting boundaries and loyalties, who was subject to Ottoman rule and who an outsider may have been difficult to determine. In any case, the legality of *devshirme* recruitment did not seem to have exercised Ottoman rulers; the *ulamâ* felt they had to justify it only a century after it was first practised.

The hand-picked *devshirme* boys stood apart from men captured in battle or in raids: frontier lords may have drafted such boys for a short time in earlier days but soon, in the first half of the fifteenth century, *devshirme* were destined only for the sultan's household and later in the century came to dominate the top offices of the realm both as higher-ranking provincial officers and in central government. Other slaves, some said to be 'volunteers' from Ottoman lands, some taken in the Mediterranean, or along the central or eastern European frontiers, formed the backbone of

grandee households. Taken together these 'new Turks', so to speak, came to represent Ottoman Rome par excellence. European visitors, who conceived of the Ottomans as 'Turks' and their realm as the 'Turkish Empire', talked and wrote in undisguised surprise about meeting 'a Turk, but English born', or German, Russian, Italian, Greek, or Serbian. A Polish embassy to Istanbul had a young secretary who sought and was granted permission to talk to his brother who was by then 'a Turk' in the sultan's palace service. Often the wives of these 'new Turks' were themselves equally foreign-born young women who came out of palace service at the same time as their husbands to form a new Ottoman household at the young man's first appointment to independent office. By the mid-sixteenth century the Ottoman military-administrative elite was made up of these new Turkish-speaking Muslim officers who called themselves not Turkish but 'Roman' or 'Ottoman'; it was in this sense that Ottoman writers could comment that the 'Ottomans' took the best qualities of many nations and blended them into a new, superior race: they may not have known of expanding the gene pool, but they thought they observed the benefits. The Ottoman Romans distinguished themselves from ethnic Turks, functionally if the Turkish-born were fellow members of the elite as bureaucrats or *ulamâ* members, socially and politically from the urban and rural Turks, subjects of the Ottoman sultan as much as Greeks or Armenians or Arabs. The Ottoman dynasty, too, was as much a product of this new blend as their servitors. From the beginnings of the family of Osman, the beys made marriage alliances with neighbouring Byzantine or Serbian princesses. Later the sultans chose not to continue such marriages but sired their sons and daughters with harem favourites of various ethnic backgrounds brought up in the palace. The language of the dynasty as well as of the polity remained Turkish, but not, strictly speaking, as a mother tongue.

Ottoman dynastic power was based on this group of Ottoman Romans, many of whom received their education and training in the imperial palace. When they received independent office outside of palace service the sultan's servitors headed their own households formed, like the imperial palace, of slave servitors though not of *devshirme* origin. If, in one sense, the Ottoman state was the rule and reign of the sultans, in another, equally valid sense it can be said to have been the conglomeration of all the households, the sultan's as well as those of his great officers. The whole system can be defined as consisting of the sultan and all the independent office-holders with assigned revenue sources as livings, *dirlik* in Ottoman usage: the sultan, a few dozen vezirs and pashas, several hundred provincial officers, and tens of thousands of cavalrymen around the realm made up this Ottoman class.

In contrast, the Safavî empire was centred on a charismatic shah. The first shah, Ismâ'il, invincible until Chaldiran, was the anointed leader of his Turkoman followers, Âzerbayjanî and Anatolian alike. To achieve a greater degree of internal integration than the Aqquyunlu Turkoman sultanate had been able to, Shah Ismâ'il initiated a programme of converting all his subjects, town-dwellers, nomads and peasants, and of whatever ethnic background, to Shi'ism. Followers of the Safavî brotherhood had been close to the Shi'î version of Islam in any case, but for the Sunni majority in his realm this forced conversion was revolutionary. The fact that the programme was achieved within a generation or two is a truly remarkable historical phenomenon. Furthermore, this messianic movement was not specific to any particular region. The Safavî message and the call was for all Muslims. Once the transfer of power from Aqquyunlu to Safavî was accomplished the revolution was carried elsewhere, mainly

to those areas where the natural constituents still lived: Ottoman Anatolia was the first target; Mamluk Syria was also threatened; areas of eastern Iran and Turkestan in Transoxania were invaded. Shah Ismâ'il and his successors were checked in their ambitions by Ottoman firepower in the west, stiff Uzbek resistance in Central Asia and by the rise of Babur's Mughals in Afghanistan. The movement meant to conquer and convert the Turko-Persian Islamic world was thus hemmed in in greater Iran and turned into a regional Shi'î empire, its messianic zeal curbed and spent.

The Turkoman adherents of the movement at its inception were reorganised into *uymaq* groupings based on provenance even more than on ancient Oghuz tribal affiliations. The *uymaq*s were settled in various parts of the Safavî realm, their leaders as governors. True to Turkish dynastic politics, as in the Ottoman case, princes were also sent out to provincial commands. But with ideological impetus gone the institutional weaknesses became apparent. The policy of 'Shi'ification' of the realm had been successful and gave Safavî society a considerable degree of cohesion, but the conception of the shah as messianic leader died with Shâh Ismâ'il in 1524. His son and successor Shâh Tahmâsb ruled with great authority but when his long reign came to an end in 1576 dynastic struggles plunged the realm into turmoil. The factional politics of princes and *uymaq* leaders, divisions in court and provinces reduced the earlier Safavî dream to ordinariness.

When, after a decade of faltering, Shâh Abbâs emerged as a strong ruler he had to reorganise his empire to strengthen its institutions. First he had to deal with the Ottoman threat. The Ottomans had followed up their initial defeat of the Safavîs by conquering Baghdad and Basra. After Tahmâsb's death the Ottomans reopened hostilities, this time marching in the north, through the southern Caucasus, invading Âzerbayjân, and gaining the silk production on Caspian shores. The Ottoman invasion allowed Shâh Abbâs to reunite his Turkoman forces. Although defeated and forced to retreat, accepting loss of his territories to Ottomans in 1590, he bided his time and renewed hostilities once he had dealt with the Uzbek threat to his lands and while the Ottomans were engaged in a long war against the Habsburgs. In a war that continued intermittently for the next four decades Shâh Abbâs first regained his losses in Âzerbayjân and Georgia, then he attacked Ottoman Iraq, capturing Baghdad after a century of Ottoman rule. The Ottomans soon recovered Baghdad but only after Shâh Abbâs's death. The 1639 treaty between the two empires concluded a war that had lasted intermittently since 1578; the boundary set in the treaty was merely a return to the status quo established by Sultan Suleyman and Shâh Tahmâsb in the middle of the previous century.

Reorganisation and Reorientation

Shâh Abbâs was able to take the struggle to the Ottomans because he set his rule on much firmer foundations. Shrewd enough to realise that with the founding ideology of his forefathers long diminished he had to strengthen his rule by other means, he decided to emulate the royal institution surrounding and supporting the Ottoman sultan. He needed his own household troops to balance the military power of the Turkoman commanders, so he drafted his slave-soldiers from the Caucasus, mainly from Georgia. He needed greater investment in firearms, muskets for his household troops and an effective artillery. To achieve this end he needed to bolster his royal revenues, not by appropriating revenue-grants allocated to provincial military, but by

enhancing his revenue base. In both empires small-scale revenue-grants comprised agrarian revenues, collected mostly in kind. As the size of a revenue-grant increased so naturally did the community that provided its income. In towns and cities, the command and revenues of which were allocated to high-ranking officers, a greater proportion of the revenue came from commercial and industrial activities and so provided more cash to the holder. The ruler's own revenue sources included the most important cash sources in the realm, customs duties on international trade and commercial taxes. It follows that in both empires increase in foreign trade enhanced the ruler's revenues, hence the age-old tradition of building caravansarays, bridges, roads to facilitate trade and also providing security at mountain passes and river crossings. In the Ottoman case the sultan's revenues were greatly increased by the conquest of Mamluk lands and reviving the Indian Ocean trade through the Levant. As for the Safavids, they looked to European partners to carry their silk, their most important cash export, south through the Gulf or north through the Caucasus.

Shâh Abbâs took great care to encourage silk production and exports. For their international expertise he patronised Armenian merchants. He had decided to move his capital further away from Ottoman threat to the heart of his realm, to the once-royal city of the Saljukids, Isfahan. Shâh Abbâs rebuilt the city on a grand scale befitting the capital of his great empire as the symbol of his royal power. As part of his urban programme he resettled an Armenian community in Isfahan. In close proximity to the shah, the merchants of New Julfa enjoyed his protection; their rigorous engagement in international trade, especially in the export of Safavid silk in all directions, north to Russia, east to India, as well as to Europe, supplied the income with which Shâh Abbâs paid for his musket-bearing household troops and his new gunpowder empire.

If the Safavid shah learned from the example of his mighty neighbours, the Ottomans returned the compliment. As the Safavids discovered ideology alone could not guarantee success, the Ottomans felt the need to hone the ideological basis of their empire. During the formative centuries of Ottoman polity, as a 'rûmî' identity had been forged, the sultans ruled over a population including large non-Muslim communities. The Ottoman sultan was the refuge of all his subjects regardless of religious identity; he projected justice as the foundation of his rule, and *qânûn* imperial law as the cornerstone of his justice. Ottoman political theory, mainly articulated in history writing, justified a powerful ruler and his *qânûn* law as necessary to keep the order of the world. Dursun Beg who wrote the history of Mehmed the Conqueror (of Constantinople) at the close of the fifteenth century argues that whereas God entrusts a prophet with divine, eternal law, *shar'ia*, he also supports a ruler who imposes his *qânûn* law in each age. 'Divine right of kingship' may have been a European theoretical construct but Dursun Beg's formulation comes very close to its spirit.

In the course of the sixteenth century Ottoman writers posited various ideological bases for sultanic rule. For a generation or two after the conquest of Constantinople 'caesar' was added to Ottoman imperial titles. Ottoman court historians evoked Alexander the Great and ancient Persian kingship and depicted the sultans as their rightful heirs. From the middle of the century they also brought out Islamic themes. Ottoman control of Islamic holy cities and their mastery over the annual hajj pilgrimage, as well as the demographic change in favour of Muslims as a consequence of southern expansion all played a part. The old Islamic ideal of a single *umma* community under the leadership of a single caliphal political authority had long since become a distant memory. Muslim political writers had long accepted the reality of

many rulers in the world of Islam and thought righteous rulers all could be styled a caliph in their own realms. On that basis even in the fifteenth century Ottoman sultans had styled themselves 'commander of the faithful'. In the mid-sixteenth century a retired grand vezir, Lutfi Pasha, wrote a treatise confirming this view of the multi-caliphate but argued that Ottoman sultans could be called the greatest caliphs of the Islamic world. At about the same time Sultan Suleyman also wanted to make sure that his sultanic *qânûn* was fully in accordance with Islamic *shar'ia*; this was accomplished by the great juriconsult Ebus'suud Efendi. By the end of the century the Ottomans routinely used Islamic terminology in reference to the sultan, his reign, and his armies, as the champions of Sunni Islam. The epic struggles against the Catholic Habsburgs, both in the Mediterranean and in central Europe may have played a part in the Islamisation of Ottoman ideology, but it was confronting the Safavî 'heretics' that truly established the Sunni Islamic nature of the polity.

Institutionally, too, there were changes. The Ottoman sultans had increased their household troops to such an extent that their pay, though not increased, nevertheless became a huge burden on the sultan's own treasury. Imperial revenues had increased considerably with cash sources in the Levant, Egypt, and further south. Yet the amount of silver in the realm was not sufficient for the degree of monetarisation necessary to support the pay for imperial expenditures. Restored trade in the south and increased trade in the Mediterranean brought much needed European silver (ultimately from Mexico and Peru by way of Spain and Italy), but much of it was expended on inconclusive warfare against the Habsburgs and the Safavîs and also for luxury imports, furs from Russia and jewels and fine textiles from India. Around 1600, therefore, the Ottomans too had their 'time of troubles' characterised by unrest among household troops and uprisings among provincial troops, especially in Anatolia. When these disturbances were finally brought under control and peace established along the borders, the administration of the empire was reorganised along new lines, according to new principles.

Earlier, 'classic', Ottoman rule was based on the principle of an egalitarian agrarian society, the peasants allocated plots of land large enough to support a family. The plots were equal not in size but in productivity; smaller plots were given in better-watered parts or with richer soil, somewhat larger in mediocre land and largest in stony, difficult areas. This conception of equality was carried into other spheres; money fines and non-Muslim per capita tax (*jizya*) were collected at the ratio of 1.2:4 from the poorest subjects, middling and better-off respectively. Land dues and share of production, as well as incidental dues and fines were paid to the revenue-grant holder, a cavalryman, an officer, pashas, vezirs, and the ruler himself. In the Ottoman realm there were about 50,000 cavalrymen and several hundred provincial officers with their own revenue sources, living close to the peasants and townsmen in their domains. The holders of larger revenue grants were of course much more distant, many of them, certainly the vezirs and of course the ruler, in the capital. Such officers sent officials from their own households to manage the revenue sources which, in the case of the sultan, were dispersed throughout the realm. The larger the revenue source, as a rule, the more distant the holder: this held true in both empires. The Safavîs had allowed their Turkoman commanders to hold large revenues in the provinces; the efficiency and the superiority of the Ottoman system was due to the large number of small-scale holdings.

Yet from around 1600 the need for cash in the sultan's treasury caused a shift away from smaller revenue grants to larger holdings; in this way, too, the Ottomans came to resemble the Safavids. Revenues in large-scale holdings were often collected through tax-farming. Another change was to charge a collectivity, a village, say, or a community or a guild or a congregation, to be responsible for revenue collection within the community. The power and protection of the Ottoman state used to reach its individual subjects directly; from around 1600 corporate bodies, civic or ethnic or confessional, came to be addressed and held responsible. Such a system inevitably enhanced the role of local prominent men, Muslim *â'yân* notables, non-Muslim communal leaders, especially their clergy, and officials owing primary responsibility to a particular grandee rather than to a larger entity, a 'state'

Ottoman and Safavid historiographical traditions treat the issue of 'state formation' very differently. Safavid historians see a twofold division of royal demesnes and the 'state' sector, state here comprising revenue sources allocated to officials and officers. This is a distinction between a 'privy purse' versus a 'public treasury' and is treated as the paradigm even in very recent analyses on Shâh Abbâs and his policy of royal power through trade and household-building. On the contrary, Ottoman historiography has analysed the emergence of state institutions, such as the imperial council and the central bureaucracy, from within the sultan's household. Beginning in the mid-sixteenth century, the central political problem was to determine the limits of sultanic power and the functioning of the imperial council under a policy-setting grand vezir. This tension was never resolved, even in the constitutional period at the end of the nineteenth century; how sultans and grand vezirs wielded power depended by and large on personal forcefulness and exigencies of particular periods. Yet the scribal bureaucracy, funded by the sultan's own household treasury until the seventeenth century, thereafter gained a degree of independence when many of them were allocated their own revenue sources. The civilian bureaucracy was strengthened even more when, as a result of defeat at the hands of a European coalition, eighteenth-century Ottoman government turned away from military conflict as chief instrument of foreign policy and adopted diplomacy as its main tool in dealing with European powers.

Perhaps the main distinction between the two empires, with important consequences to be felt to this day, was in the position of the *ulamâ* men of learning and religion and, by extension, the interpreters and administrators of Islamic law. In Safavid society the Shi'î *ulamâ* gained great power when the founding ethos of the polity forcefully converted its subjects to the Shi'î rite. Once the Safavid brotherhood lost its impetus, the *ulamâ* came to represent the religious conscience of the realm. Supported by generous pious foundations established by shahs and grantees, and wielding the power of interpreting and advancing *sharî'a* unmatched in Sunni society, they continued to exert great social influence independent of whatever political power the dynasty still held. Ottoman *ulamâ*, by contrast, had become state functionaries. An Ottoman *qâdî* magistrate was empowered by political authority; he administered not only *sharî'a* to Muslim Ottomans but *qânûn* law promulgated by sultanic authority to all subjects. Criminal and commercial law as well as administrative procedures and matters of taxation were all established by the sultan's firman. The *qâdî* magistrate was also required to oversee purely administrative matters and work closely with military-administrative provincial officials so that, in effect, they constituted a parallel administrative apparatus. Ottoman *qâdîs*, similar to other

provincial officials, were shifted every year or so to a different location. Promotion to high office passed through many provincial appointments. True, some learned men preferred to stay in their hometowns. This was so especially in the Arab provinces. Such *ulamâ* families continued to play their traditional role as community leaders but however much they might be respected in their locality they could not achieve high office in the empire. In the eighteenth century Damascene *ulamâ* petitioned the sultan that they too wanted to be considered for positions at the centre of power. The sultan replied that they were by all means welcome to such consideration provided they learned Turkish and joined provincial rotation. Some, at least, took up the challenge; in the nineteenth century there were a growing number of Arabs-turned-Ottoman, if we can so designate them, holding high office in Istanbul.

When Ottoman military might faltered, defeated by technologically advanced European armies and navies, when central power was diffused and devolved to provincial and regional notables, the social fabric of the empire was held together by the scribal bureaucracy at the centre and by the magistrates throughout the realm. By the end of the eighteenth century, even before Napoleon invaded Egypt, the Ottoman centre decided that to survive it had to learn from the example of Europe. During the nineteenth-century programme of European-style modernisation it was the civilian administrators, from the scribal chambers as well as from among the *ulamâ*, who were at the forefront of reform. Their policies were successful enough that Ottoman central power once again extended to its provinces. There was, however, a cost. With Islam setting the ideological tone, with Muslims as the self-styled 'real Ottomans', with Muslim provincial notables wielding increasing power through the eighteenth century, non-Muslims were seen as the subject flock. *Rayah*, a term once comprising all subjects of the 'just sultan', came to refer only to the neglected, often ignored non-Muslims by 1800. At the dawn of modern history, in the age of revolutions, Ottoman internal developments coincided with the new European ethos of national liberation to goad non-Muslim subjects in Ottoman Europe to ever-louder demands for self-determination and autonomy.

While the Ottoman dynastic empire survived until the end of the Great War by reforming and reinventing itself, the Safavî dynasty collapsed at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Shâh Abbâs the Great left his successors a greatly enhanced royal authority but this was squandered in successive generations. The royal household, designed by Abbâs as a force with firepower, instead became bloated with sinecures. The shah's hold on his provinces weakened, Afghan tribesmen rose against Safavî rule and invaded Isfahan itself. Russia and the Ottoman empire both tried to exploit these disturbances by advancing on Safavî provinces in the Caucasus. Nadir Khan, a Turkoman supporter of the Safavî claimant, defeated the Afghans and fought the Russian and Ottoman invaders; wielding supreme power and following military successes he soon declared himself the shah. For all his military prowess Nadir Shâh was not able to establish a lasting political system and remains an interesting footnote in Ottoman-Safavî relations: he formally suggested to the Ottoman sultan and his *ulamâ* that Shi'î Islam should henceforth be considered not a major cleavage but merely a fifth interpretation of *sharî'a* law to be placed on the same footing as the four Sunni schools. He may have hoped for a better integration into the Islamic *umma*, but his suggestion was rejected; when he was assassinated in 1747 any semblance of territorial unity was lost. The former Safavî realm was resurrected and central authority was re-established fifty years after Nadir Shâh's death, when another Turkoman

power, the Qajars, ascended the throne of Iran which they placed in Tehran, closer to their own tribal power base. The history of Qajar Iran is no less interesting, in its own distinct way, than the history of Ottoman reform in the nineteenth century. The seeds of their relative success and failure were already sown by 1800: Qajar Iran was able to keep its territories intact due to the Safavî cement of society even though it was made up of disparate ethnic elements and even when it came under immense foreign pressure. The Ottoman empire gradually adopted championship of the Sunni Islamic world, even resurrecting the conception of a universal caliphate now held by the House of Osman, a policy which integrated Muslim subjects closer but was unable to counter non-Muslim demands for autonomy and independence. Safavî social cohesion lived on after the dynasty collapsed; the realm of the House of Osman was divided, even before its demise, into many constituent ethnic parts.