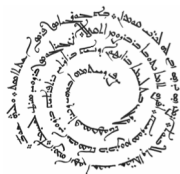


Reforming Ottoman Governance



Munaqashat: Gorgias Studies in the Modern Middle East

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Reforming Ottoman Governance

Success, Failure and the Path to Decline

By

Fuat Andic

Suphan Andic



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We also wish to thank Travis Lee, who copyedited this volume, as well as Gorgias Press for publishing the book and giving us the pleasure of seeing this volume in print.



Figure 1: The Ottoman Empire during the time of Süleyman the Magnificent (1520–1566)

CHRONOLOGY (SELIM I–MEHMET VI)

Years of reign	Sultan	Important dates
1512–1520	Selim I	Conquest of Egypt, Selim assumes the title of Caliph (1517)
1520–1566	Süleyman	Vienna sieged (1529); War with Venice (1537–1540); Annexation of Hungary (1541)
1566–1574	Selim II	Ottoman navy loses the battle of Lepanto (1571)
1574–1595	Murad III	Janissary revolts (1589 and 1591–1592)
1595–1603	Mehmed III	War with Austria continues (1595–)
1603–1617	Ahmed I	War with Austria ends; Buda is recovered (1604)
1617–1622	Osman II	Janissaries murder Osman (1622)
1622–1623	Mustafa I	Janissary Revolt (1622)
1623–1640	Murad IV	Baghdad recovered (1638); War with Iran (1624–1639)
1640–1648	İbrahim I	War with Venice (1645); Assassination of İbrahim (1648)
1648–1687	Mehmed IV	Janissary dominance in Istanbul and anarchy (1649–1651); War with Venice continues (1663); War with Austria, and siege of Vienna (1683)
1687–1691	Süleyman II	Janissary revolt (1687); Austria's occupation of Belgrade (1688)
1691–1695	Ahmed II	War with Austria (1694)
1695–1703	Mustafa II	Treaty of Karlowitz (1699); Janissary revolt and deposition of Mustafa (1703)
1703–1730	Ahmed III	Refuge of Karl XII (1709); War with Venice (1714–1718); War with Austria (1716); Treaty of Passarowitz (1718);

		Tulip Era (1718–1730)
1730–1754	Mahmud I	War with Russia and Austria (1736–1759)
1754–1774	Mustafa III	War with Russia (1768); Russian Fleet in the Aegean (1770); Invasion of the Crimea (1771)
1774–1789	Abdülhamid I	Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (1774); War with Russia (1787)
1789–1807	Selim III	Consultative Council (1789); Napoleon in Egypt (1798); Janissary revolt and assassination of Selim (1807)
1807–1808	Mustafa IV	Janissaries dominate administration
1808–1839	Mahmud II	Document of Agreement (1808); Eradication of Janissaries (1826); Treaty of Hünkâr İskelesi (1833); Battle of Nizip (1839)
1839–1861	Abdümeccid	Imperial Edict (1839); Crimean War (1853–1856); Imperial Edict (1856); Treaty of Paris (1856)
1861–1876	Abdülaziz	Suez canal opens (1875)
1876–1909	Abdülhamid II	First Constitution (1876); War with Russia (1877); Parliament closed <i>sine die</i> (1877); Young Turks revolution and second constitution (1908)
1909–1918	Mehmed V	War with Italy (1911); Balkan war (1912); World War I (1914–1918)
1918–1922	Mehmed VI	Defeat (1918); Mehmed VI leaves Istanbul (1922); end of Sultanate

NOTE ON TRANSCRIPTIONS

Spellings of Turkish words and names in the text are according to official modern Turkish. As a phonetic language, Turkish is easy to pronounce. The unusual pronunciation of the eight letters not found in English is noted below.

Â, â	Long a as in <i>bar</i>
C, c	'G' as in <i>general</i>
Ç, ç	'Tch' as in <i>match</i>
ğ	Soft 'gh' as in <i>though</i>
I, ı	'U' as in <i>radium</i>
Ş, ş	'Sh' as in <i>shell</i>
Ö, ö	'Ea' as in <i>heard</i>
Ü, ü	'U' as <i>municipality</i>

PREFACE

This book grew out of an early attempt at translating our previous study, *Reforms in the Ottoman Empire*, which we published in Turkish. The purpose of that book was to give Turkish readers a brief history of Ottoman administrative reform efforts in a single volume. However, simply translating our Turkish volume into English would not suffice for the non-Turkish reader, for what we assume to be common knowledge for Turkish readers is not necessarily so for non-Turkish readers. Expansive clarification was needed.

The history of such reforms has been told before in books and scholarly articles authored by both Turkish and foreign historians. However, with few exceptions, most suffer from a number of shortcomings. For instance, studies penned in the early years of the Turkish Republic are tainted with ideological biases and revisions of Ottoman history. Among such previous studies are critiques of Sultan Abdülhamid II that go to great lengths to demonize him. Early republican ideologues painted him as despotic, tyrannical and the ‘red’ (or blood-stained) Sultan while remaining silent regarding his dramatic efforts at reform. Still others claim the reign of Sultan Abdülmecid in the early nineteenth century was the first period of attempted modernization (or *tanzimat* in Turkish), all but ignoring the efforts of his predecessor, Sultan Mahmud II. Yet Mahmud was perhaps the most determined of all the reformers and took extraordinary measures for reform, revolutionary for his time, when internal and external circumstances complicated reforms. Without Sultan Mahmud II there would have been no Tanzimat Era.

In yet another example of ideologically driven bias and revisionism, many early Turkish historians wrote of the ‘Tulip Era’ during the first half of the eighteenth century as one of hedonism, debauchery and fornication. In fact, it was the only renaissance in the history of the Ottoman Empire. To this day, such revisionism is repeated even in the history textbooks used by Turkish high school

students. Additionally, they characterize prominent Turkish political actors of the early twentieth century, the inheritors of the Ottoman Empire, as heroes promoting liberty, equality, and progress. Nothing is further from the truth. These inaccurate assertions and defamatory labels should be brought in line with the historical record.

Historical events are like links in a chain: each link is influenced by the preceding ones and in turn influences those thereafter. Events and eras do not stand alone. However, in many writings on Ottoman era reforms, a general conceptual framework, within which such reforms can be studied, is absent. Yet, because history is not merely an accumulation of happenings, but a chain of components along a continuum, such a framework is crucial. We decided that neo-institutional economics provides such a framework for our purposes of studying Ottoman reforms, though it was not included in our Turkish edition of this volume. However, our aim in both versions is the same: to present readers with a concise history of Ottoman era administrative reforms. We do not claim to present new historical facts. Such facts have been exhaustively expounded upon in Turkish and foreign historical literature. We merely seek to set this examination within a condensed, appropriate format the non-specialist may comprehend and enjoy.

F.A & S.A
Washington, DC, August 2013

INTRODUCTION

This book examines the history of administrative reform efforts throughout the seven hundred years of the Ottoman Empire, beginning with the reign of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent and continuing to the demise of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Turkish Republic. Early in the Empire's history, public administration slowly but surely began to deteriorate. Radical technological and intellectual changes taking place in Europe, especially during the Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which transformed governance there, did not alter the outlooks of the Empire's rulers. Ignoring change elsewhere, the Ottoman Empire began to lose the territories it had gained in Europe and the global balance of power turned against it. Many historians, Turkish as well as foreign, have investigated the decline of the Ottoman Empire and its causes. Indeed, many volumes and numerous scholarly articles have been published on the subject. All these works are valuable but none, as far as we know, attempts to study the causes of the Empire's decline within a general conceptual framework. Nor have previous writers analyzed the often antagonistic relationships amongst the various governmental institutions and organizations that plagued the Ottoman Empire. Too often, the events leading to the Empire's decline and its ultimate demise at the end of the First World War are examined as a series of distinct events without establishing links between them. Such investigations provide unsatisfactory explanations to the topic at hand.

Of course, history does not consist of individual and separate links, but is a chain of events; a chain in which each link is affected by and connected to the previous one and in turn affects each subsequent one. To investigate only what happened at a given point in history is not sufficient; one also needs to know why events have happened. What are the links between events: the causes and effects? This is of paramount importance and necessitates a global

view grounded not only in theory but also in a developed frame of reference within which events are analyzed. Investigating the history of reforms in the Ottoman Empire is no different.

The book's first chapter explains the general conceptual framework the book adopts: neo-institutional economics.¹ It provides an approach well suited to investigating the centuries-long back and forth of reform and counter-reform efforts in the Ottoman Empire. In three previous books, we investigated the radical Ottoman reform movement known as the Tulip Era (1718–1730), as well as attempts at reform during the nineteenth century, but these examined isolated approaches to reform.² In time, we concluded a more expansive approach was needed. It is, however, important to point out that a number of Ottoman writers attempted such thorough diagnoses of the Empire's ills within the context of governance and articulated them in counsels they wrote, which were submitted either directly to the Sultans or contained within history books they penned. These counsels provide great historical value. Practically all of them diagnosed the problems facing the Empire, but frequently and simplistically recommended a return to the "good old days" of Süleyman the Magnificent.³ Of course, such a remedy was not practical.

¹ The adjective "neo" in neo-institutional economics does not imply that it is new. The approach has been used for more than a quarter of a century. Its proponents used the adjective "neo" in order to separate their approach from that of Veblenian institutional economics. See Thrainn Eggertsson, *Economic Behavior and Institutions*. Cambridge University Press, 1990; Douglass C. North, *Structure and Change in Economic History*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1981; *idem*, *Institutions, Economic Change and Economic Performance*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990; *idem*, "Economic Performance through Time," *American Economic Review*, June 1994, 359–368.

² Fuat Andic & Suphan Andic, *The Last of the Ottoman Grandees: The Life and Political Testament of Âli Pasha*. Istanbul: ISIS Press, 1996; *idem*, *Window to the West – The Tulip Era (Batıya Açılan Pencere – Lâle Devri)*, Istanbul: EREN, 2006; *idem*, *The Crimean War, Âli Pasha and the Paris Treaty (Kırım Savaşı – Âli Paşa ve Paris Antlaşması)*. Istanbul: EREN 2002.

³ The last counsel, the political testament of Âli Pasha, is an exception.

The book reviews all of these counsels and, wherever appropriate, examines the similarity of their approach with that of neo-institutional economics. With that in mind, the book first explains the basic tenets of neo-institutional economics, as it is the analytical lens used throughout the book. The subsequent chapters then summarize each of the aforementioned counsels. This is done, for the most part, in chronological order and we argue that the first serious attempt at institutional reform in the Ottoman Empire occurred during the reign of Sultan Ahmed III (1703–1730) during the Tulip Era. This period in fact brought with it a significant change in the mentality of the Empire's administrators, but it unfortunately did not last long. This brief era of reform began in 1718 and ended abruptly in 1730 with a bloody revolt by the Janissaries, the Ottoman sultan's elite corps of household infantry.

The next serious attempt at reform was spearheaded by Sultan Selim III (1789–1807), who focused primarily, but not exclusively, on the rejuvenation of the army and the Janissaries. However, another military revolt ended Selim III's reign and his attempted reforms, then known as the New Order (*Nizam-ı Cedid*), came to an end. In that period one thing becomes very clear: the military-religious (*ulema*) complex (especially the Janissaries) was strengthened and resolved to even more fervently oppose reform. This was due to nascent reform measures undermining the common interests of these influential Ottoman power centers. Indeed, this anti-reform alliance not only created major obstacles for reform, but thwarted general economic and social change. Despite the previous success and power of this alliance, Sultan Mahmud II, who succeeded Selim III and was one of the ablest, most determined and courageous sultans in the history of the Ottoman Empire, succeeded to a great extent in breaking the Janissary-*ulema* complex. He obliterated the Janissary order, which in the previous two hundred years had challenged the power of the Sultans and, in more cases than not, succeeded in overthrowing several of them.

We then move on to the mid-nineteenth century, which saw the Imperial Edict of Sultan Abdülmecid, the son and successor of Mahmud II, who ascended to the throne in 1839. The underlying concept of Abdülmecid's edict was no longer simply reform of the military or a return to the time of Süleyman the Magnificent, but instead to adapt Ottoman institutions and organizations to the contemporary, European model. Without doubt, reforms took place,

but they did not redress all the ills plaguing Ottoman governance. As the nineteenth century continued to unfold, the reform paradigm changed. The Imperial Edicts of 1839 and 1856 were steps towards a paradigm of constitutional governance. This originated in part with intellectuals, but also within the higher echelons of the military, who favored a parliament-checked constitutional monarchy. To this end, the military dethroned Abdülaziz, who succeeded Abdülmecid, and in 1876 Abdülhamid II took the throne with promises of a new constitution and the establishment of a parliamentary system. However, the 1877 Russo-Ottoman war began and interrupted reform, leading the Sultan to suspend the constitution and parliament. In 1909 yet another coup dethroned Abdülhamid II after a 33-year reign. The parliament reconvened and the constitution was reinstated. However, the coup, engineered by the military, was mounted by leaders who were young, inexperienced, over-ambitious and devoid of political wisdom.

Finally, we cover the triumvirate of Enver, Cemal and Talât Pashas that took power, producing no substantial reforms, though Enver Pasha, intent on reforming the military, virtually surrendered it to Imperial Germany's High Command. At the time, problems the world over denied an opportunity for the Ottoman Empire's leaders to pursue reform. In 1911 Italy seized what is today Libya from the Empire and Tsarist Russia, the Ottoman's perennial enemy, aided the Balkan provinces of Greece and Bulgaria, which had always coveted Istanbul, in a war declared in 1912, and succeeded in removing from the Ottoman domain the bulk of the Balkans (the Empire's European holdings). Even if serious reforms were contemplated, under such circumstances they had to be subordinated to the greater concerns of the Empire's very survival. Due to such concerns, the Ottoman Empire entered into alliance with Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire and, with them, fell into abyss of World War I. The Empire that had been living on borrowed money since the mid-nineteenth century was now living on borrowed time. At the end of the war it collapsed and its Arab

provinces were partitioned between France and Britain, carrying forth even to the present unhealthy consequences.⁴

This book covers a great sweep of world history through the lens of the Ottoman Empire and its varied attempts — some more serious and successful than others — to reform its governing institutions and organizations. Despite an ignoble end to the Empire in the global conflagration that was World War I, over a period of 700 years there were numerous efforts at reform undertaken, though, as we will show, they were just as often undermined by the inter- and intra-institutional rivalries and vested interests the Sultans sought to alter.

⁴ For the aftermath of the partition of the Ottoman Empire, see David Fromkin, *The Peace to End All Peace*. New York: Avon Books, 1989, and Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World*. 2003.