

## The Ottoman Turks: Emergence of Muslim Polity during Thirteenth Century

\*Dr. Zahra Akram Hashmi

\*\* Samia Khalid

### Abstract

The inclusion of Turk element in the annals of Islamic history laid profound transitional impact on the course of ensuing period. The ottoman principality expanded from a tiny chiefdom to an empire with vast territories. This paper examines that how Turk chiefdoms emerged out of a political vacuum when Abbasid's hold over the region slipped away and new political view rose. This new shift of power emerged and gradually included first the surrounding regions in the vicinity of the declining Eastern Roman Empire. This article purposes two perspectives; to trace the origin and mobilization of ottomans and to explore the dynamics of their emergence from a chaotic situation of 13<sup>th</sup> CE.

**Key Words:** Seljuks, Ertughral, Turk nomads, Bazyntine Empire, Islam

### Introduction

The Ottomans emerged in the context of Turkish nomadic invasions, which shattered central Byzantine domination in Asia Minor<sup>2</sup> as well as Mongol invasion of the Middle East that brought chaos and increased population pressure on the frontiers. The Ottoman Empire sprawled over three continents and covered almost one million square miles area for continuous six centuries.<sup>3</sup> Their appearance on the political panorama of Middle East was a multicultural and pan-Islamic power and administrator

---

\* Assistant Professor, Govt. Degree College Ahmadpur East, Bahawalpur

\* In charge & Assistant Professor, Department of History, The Islamia University, Bahawalpur

of a small area, however rapidly extended their small Turkish principality to state and then empire.<sup>4</sup>

The term Ottomans was identical to Islam. It is applied for Muslims now days. Turks became synonymous with Muslim although Turks in general preserved such distinct characteristics as language and statehood".<sup>5</sup> Initially, the Ottomans ruled only one of a number of Turkoman territories located around the Byzantine state in western Anatolia. In fact, the frontier character of Anatolia was also considered a borderland between Christianity and Islam. Consequently, a combination of these societies and cultures was called "Ottoman civilization." Fighting against the Christian Byzantine government, they got the title of Ghazi (raider).

A review of the political, economic, and social developments of this civilization provides historical insights into the making of modern eastern Europe, Turkey, and the Middle East. It included most of the territories of the eastern Roman Empire, some portions of the northern Balkans and north Black Sea coast and areas that Byzantium had never ruled. Ottoman policies of pragmatism and flexibility attracted a host of supporters regardless of religion and social rank. Its basic concept was not based on any nationality as Persian, European or Arabic but pure Muslim having the loyalty with Islam and this Islamic spirit strengthened them into one bond.<sup>6</sup>It encompassed the Southeastern Europe, Northern Africa, and the Near East. In the way, Ottoman Empire was the center of interactions between Eastern and Western civilizations. But during the empire's last 300 years, it had steadily declined in power. Europeans competed with each other to gain control of this strategically important area. Eventually, it was collapsed after the world war I.

### **Turkish Origins of Ottomans**

The Ottomans belonged to the Turkish race and their Empire comprising different Turk ethnic groups. They were members of *kayi* clan of oghuz

tribe who came into Anatolia from Central Asia. Actually, Turks were a large nation subdivided into many tribes and clans. The Chinese annals speak of them as Tou-Kiou and Byzantine as Turk. The original home of Turks was the valley of Altai Mountains in the eastern portion of Eurasia. The bifurcation of aboriginals of that vast area was in the way that Turks were in the western part of Altaic mountains; Mongols were in the center and Manchu Tungus<sup>7</sup> in eastern part of the region. This area today is a part of Outer Mongolia.

The Altaic nomads had strong tribal organization, own customs and social sanctions but without the formal organs of government and law. Their livelihood came mainly from raising flocks. However, the scope of their authority was limited to pastures and to military activities. They did not use to extend their relations with foreign neighbors. In regard with religion, they practiced the rituals of Shamanism. They worshiped the elements of nature through a series of totems and spirits considered to have special powers that could affect man for both good and evil, priests with special power to control and use the spirits. It was a simple religion of them.<sup>8</sup>

### **Migration from Altaic to plains**

In 2<sup>nd</sup> BC, political, military, and climatic conditions in the Altaic homeland were greatly changed. The Turk tribes moved to the various plain areas. From 5<sup>th</sup> CE to 13<sup>th</sup> CE, there were four waves of migration. Those who moved to the south and west, toward Middle East, and Central Asia came to be known as Oghuz and, in general, as Turkomans or Turks. In their new abode, Turkomans established their pastures while centuries-old system of agriculture and trade at new places were replaced by pastoral economies. They displaced the settled ethnic elements that preceded them. Up to the 11<sup>th</sup> CE, the Oghuz nomads who were mainly settled on the northeastern defense line of Middle East, now left this area

and moved towards the north and west into areas of less resistance in what is today Russia and Eastern Europe.

### **Turks in Islam**

Islam spread outside the borders of the Arabia to the Roman and Persian empires and both powers became a part of Islamic Empire. The leadership of Islam came into the hands of Ummayyads during 8<sup>th</sup> CE. During the regime of Waleed bin Abdul Malik, direct interaction of Turkish nation with Islam was recognized when Qutaiba bin Muslim conquered Turkistan. At the same time, they started to embrace Islam. As Shakeel Ahmad opined;

*"Islam gave to the Turkish state a purpose, a meaning but at the same time it submerged the national characteristics into its own to the extent that Turk became synonym with Muslim, although Turks in general preserved such distinct characteristics as language and statehood."*<sup>9</sup>

Turk nomads, who were a part of much larger body, were based on stockbreeding and marketing the products of their herds. They came to major centers of Middle East to sell their products and to buy some of the artifacts. Many came in the employ of caravans and as slaves, bodyguards and members of the armies of the Abbasid caliphs. The Abbasid caliph Al-Mansoor employed the Turks in army. Later, Al-Muatasim Billah engaged them on a large scale in order to control the Persian element in his army. Subsequently, they rose to powerful positions in both Abbasid's army and government. In the declining period of Abbasid, some of these Turk mentors succeeded in establishing their own Principalities in the borderlands. As the Karahanids, who took over Transoxania from the mid tenth century until the beginning of the thirteenth century. The Gaznevids established their rule in Kharasan, southern Iraq, and Afghanistan at about the same time. The Great Seljuks, who controlled over the heartland

of Islamic civilization as guardians of the caliphs from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries. Each of these Turkish dynasties defended and strengthened Islam but each lasted for only a short time.

### **The First Turkish State in Middle East and Asia Minor**

In Middle East and Asia Minor, Seljuks were the first Turkish group to establish a political entity during 11<sup>th</sup> CE.<sup>10</sup> Their dominion was associated with the Turko-Muslim dynasty that ruled much of that region before the Mongol conquest. Seljuks were a band of Oghuz warriors, came from central Asia. The real founder of the Seljuk dynasty was Tughral Bey. This power appeared from the heydays when Islamic world had to face the after effects of crusades as well as that of Mongols.

In fact, the decay of Abbasid rule was started in 11<sup>th</sup> CE and Seljuks emerged as a sole power that was responsible to reunify the fragmented Islamic world and to restore the prestige of Abbasids caliph. Tughral Bey conquered Baghdad in 1055 and reunified the fragmented Muslim rule. However, they supposed to be military protectors of the powerless later caliphs of Baghdad who recognized them as sultan (assistant).<sup>11</sup> The Seljuk leader, as sultan, assumed most of the caliph's authority to legislate the administrative, military, and secular matters that were not directly governed by Muslim law. The caliph remained more as a spiritual leader with the power to regulate the matters of personal behavior and individual relationships. The Seljuks established their rule over many portions of Iran, Palestine, Syria and Mesopotamia.

For instance, the Seljuks headed by Alp Arslan (1063-1072) occupied all Byzantine Anatolia, which gradually formed into an integrated Turkish dominion and recognized as Seljuks of Rum. The starting point for settling down the Turkish tribes in Anatolia was the battle at Manzikert in 1071 CE when the Byzantine army was defeated.<sup>12</sup> Their first capital in Asian Minor was Iznik that later moved to Qunia. The Seljuks of Rum were

responsible to bring Islam and Turkish language into the Anatolia. As the rulers of the Islamic state the Seljuks restored and elaborated the traditional Perso-Islamic administrative apparatus that was developed in the late Abbasid times. They ruled for two centuries at Anatolia but brought the most striking civilization in the history of this realm.

Under Seljuks of Rum, many semi-nomadic tribes of Turks migrated from Central Asia to the different areas of Anatolia where plenty of pastures and suitable warm environment provided an ideal condition for their lifestyle. This influx brought two major contrastive elements that laid drastic changes in the history of Middle East as well as of the world; Ottomans and Mongols.

Actually, the period starting from 13<sup>th</sup> century, an overall downfall in the Muslim world was prevailing and destructive invasions of uncivilized group of Mongols were creating a state of anarchy. Many changes occurred in the wake of the Mongol conquest. The Mongols conquered Anatolia in 1243 CE and many changes occurred in the wake of the Mongol conquest who first knocked the Seljuks off their feet. However, they survived in the late thirteenth century as a vassal state of the Mongols who had already subjugated the Seljuk sultanate at Baghdad. The Great Abbasid dynasty also sacked and chaotic conditions prevailed throughout the Middle East. Eventually, Mongol influence had disappeared by the 1330s leaving a vacuum in the region. In this power vacuum, many Turkish elites established themselves at different territories and the Ottoman Turks settled in northwestern Anatolia.

### **Ertugrul and Formative Phase of Ottomans**

Suleiman shah, head of the Kayi tribe of Turks was ancestor of ottomans who initially established a separate tribal State of Mahan in northeastern Iran in the late twelfth century. In the early thirteenth century, due to Mongolian invasion he moved from Iran to Anatolia along with

thousands of his tribesmen. He died while crossing the Euphrates into Syria, after that demise most of his family members went back to Kharasan and had no choice except joining the Mongol service. However, Ertugrul (d.1288), the other son of Suleiman Shah, moved westward into Anatolia.<sup>13</sup>

Ertugrul who was head of his tiny band, is considered to have been the founder of the Ottoman dynasty in northwestern Asia Minor. Being a man of action having great martial qualities, he joined the services of the Seljuks of Rum along with his 400 tribesmen and settled down his clan over there. Sultan Alauddin was ruler at the time. In some campaigns against Mongols, Ertugrul fought and succeeded to restore the dignity of Seljuks over them. He also succeeded to defeat a combine army of Greeks and Mongols, between Brusa and Yaischeere.<sup>14</sup> In lieu of his services, Ertugrul bestowed with two small districts in western Anatolia; Sogit and Domaniq. Both districts were adjacent to the borders of the Byzantine province of Bithynia.<sup>15</sup> Lane poole further added;

*'Ertoghrul and his horsemen were a welcome support to Alaeddin's waning fortunes. In a latter encounter with a small byzantine force, they came off victorious, and Allaeddin made a further addition to their territory on the borders of his own, over which he had a very nominal sovereignty.'*<sup>16</sup>

Sultan Allauddin acknowledged their importance and awarded honours, and more area of his land. In order to give further confidence to Ertugrul, Allauddin gave the name of his principality as *Sultani*.<sup>17</sup> In fact, the settlement in his dominion of a loyal and hardy band was a welcome accession of strength particularly when they belonged to Turk race and were enthusiastic with Muslim faith. In 1288, Ertugrul died and his son Osman (1288-1326) became his successor. The dominion and headship of Ertugrul's portion of the Kayi tribe passed to Osman. Osman was born at

Sogit around 1258. He was leader of his band twelve years before his father's demise, therefore had many skills and martial features of his father. He started a series of victory and extended the boundaries of his domain. Osman declared himself an independent ruler but did not assume the title of sultan yet he was simply an Amir and formally recognized the supremacy of Seljuk sultan. As Halide Edib exhibits that:

*The most striking thing about the ottomans in Asia minor is the smallness of their number and vastness of their empire and shortness of time in which they built it up...the ottomans could not succeed it they only possessed the physical virtues of the fighting nomad and his special but simple outlook in state building; their task demanded a very keen and comprehensive mind and the practical ability to create a lasting and workable political sysem.<sup>18</sup>*

In the Ottoman system, Osman was the first ruler but neither he nor his two immediate successors assumed the title of sultan but they were entitled as Amir. Afterwards, his descendant assumed the title of sultan who acted in political, military, judicial, social, and religious capacities, under many titles. However, the title of sultan was the expression of the believes that he recognized the superiority of caliph though his own status, strength and power was many times more than the caliph.

Osman formed the principalities of Aydın, Karesi, Mentese, Saruhan, and Osmanlı in western Anatolia. By analyzing his regime, two major objectives are evident. First is to annex all byzantine area and other is to spread Islam towards the Christian lands though there were no any forced conversion. This domain did not consist purely of Turks but it was a mixture of Greeks and slaves who called themselves as osmanlis. Their culture was not Arabic, Persian and Turkish but Islamic. Turks added significant contribution in developing, promoting Islamic civilization, culture and history. They had always considered themselves the first as

Muslims. Osman set the precedents for his descendants to rule with relative tolerance and flexibility, and combined the elements of the high Islamic civilization.

Geopolitically, the Ottomans began in a favorable location. They were on the eastern frontier of the Byzantine Empire. Furthermore, the Ottomans courted Turcoman-Muslim tribes—migrating westward away from the Mongols and in search of safe lands. While these tribes fought fervently to spread Islam against the Christian Byzantine Empire, Ottoman leadership developed a policy of integrating non-Muslims of newly conquered lands into their social fabric. The reason behind was described by

*The Ottoman state had matured during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and placed greater emphasis on its Islamic character, the military and bureaucratic service of unconverted Christians became more problematic... The state's primary concerns, however, were not religious but rather political: to maintain and extend its power by whatever means necessary.<sup>19</sup>*

In time Greeks, Armenians, and Jews were also employed in state service, usually in diplomatic, technical, or commercial capacities. Accommodating politics, growing military power, and the economic dynamism created by an expanding frontier paved the way for the rise of the Ottomans.

In addition, the Byzantine Empire was deteriorated by their internal problems. There were endemic conflicts between the bureaucrats and the landed gentry and between the peasantry and big landlords. Economic conditions were also poor due to the debasement of the coinage, over taxation, and wasteful spending by the ruling classes. Therefore, the Byzantine feudal holders were unable to resist against the advancing Turkomans.<sup>20</sup> Osman established his stronghold along the frontiers of Bithynia in the pasturelands and commenced an organized political set

up.<sup>21</sup> He led his clan for thirty-eight years and rule the area for twenty six years. He was simple in nature, and had great love for pastures mode of life having a large stud of horse. In the capacity of a simple and humble ruler, he adopted a policy based on law, justice and discipline.<sup>22</sup>

His goal was completed by his descendent however, his dream to capture Bruca the most important city in Asia Minor came true and this city was conquered under the command of his son Urhan when Osman was on his deathbed. Shortly, with the news of surrender the Bruca, Osman died and buried over there. Urhan (1326-1359), who was his father's principal lieutenant for both the state and the army, succeeded him. During the reign of his father, Urhan participated in many raids and was a part of troops who controlled the seaside against Byzantine Constantinople. Urhan institutionalized the policies of conquest begun by his father, emphasizing expansion.

Subsequently, each of the successor added more area into their Empire. They extended their kingdom through diplomacy, military expedition and matrimonial alliances. Within two centuries, the Ottomans had transformed an insignificant area into a vast empire ruling. In the mid-15th century, the city of Constantinople (Istanbul), the largest and wealthiest city of the Middle Ages and the last fortress of the Byzantine Empire, fell to the Ottomans. The conquest of the imperial Byzantine city of Constantinople raised the status of the Ottoman Empire from a regional entity to world power.<sup>23</sup>

The incorporation of new terrains and the addition of the empire brought various forms of legal systems, religious traditions, cultural practices, as well as other forms of administering societies. With this complex legal and cultural landscape, the Ottoman authorities opted for bringing all its provinces in line with one another through a bureaucratic process of standardizing the system of administration throughout the empire. There

was also attempt to create a powerful central authority that would regulate the core-periphery relations.<sup>24</sup>

They had established an empire that encompassed not only the former Byzantine lands of Southeastern Europe and Anatolia but also Hungary and the Arab world. Its geopolitical position, at the crossroads of the European, Asian and African continents furnished the Ottomans an important place to contribute in world history.<sup>25</sup> It also had complete control of link between Europe and Asia. They ruled for centuries over a multiplicity of peoples who followed different religions and spoke languages as diverse as Turkic, Greek, Slavic, Albanian, Arabic, and Hungarian.<sup>26</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The Ottoman Empire was one of the greatest, most extensive, and longest-lasting empires in the world history. The Ottomans had changed an unimportant area into a vast empire, covered three continents and sprawled almost one million square miles area that was inseparable for over 600 years. Ertugral established his band in the Asia Minor yet he remained chief of a small area. Osman was first to dream of empire. Accommodating politics, growing military power, and the economic dynamism created by an expanding frontier paved the way for the rise of the Ottomans. The Ottoman dynasty at its peak stretched from Hungary in the north, around the Black Sea, and across Egypt all the way west to the borders of Morocco.

Originally, the Ottomans courted Turcoman-Muslim tribes, migrating westward away from the Mongols and in search of safe lands. Later on, the term Turks became synonymous with Muslim and these tribes struggled to spread and strengthened Islam against the Christian Byzantine Empire.

The whole set up of Ottoman Empire was so flexible that each nationality enjoyed autonomy and do not have any rigid centralized control. The greatness of ottoman state lay in the liberal attitude. Its tolerance for other religions, the absence of state control over religion, its decentralization of administration, its adaptability to new concepts and its general flexibility to all aspects of government.

The ottomans achieved such surprising military success in the years between 1450 and 1566. They included absolute power of the sultan combined with the personal qualities and abilities of most of those eras. During this period, supreme authority among the Ottomans rested in a single man. All obeyed the Sultan who alone had complete control of all resources whether men material or money.

### References

<sup>2</sup> The Asia Minor was actually the large peninsular territory they had wrested from the Byzantine Empire, by its Greek name, Anatole (sunrise; the East), or Anatolia. Anatolia is a bridge connecting the Middle East and Europe, and it shares in the history of both those parts of the world. Despite the diversity of its peoples and their cultures, and the constantly shifting borders of its ethnic map, Anatolia has a history characterized by remarkable continuity. Greek name, Anatole (sunrise; the East), or Anatolia. Anatolia is a bridge connecting the Middle East and Europe, and it shares in the history of both those parts of the world. Despite the diversity of its peoples and their cultures, and the constantly shifting borders of its ethnic map, Anatolia has a history characterized by remarkable continuity. During crusades in 11<sup>th</sup> century, all of Byzantine Anatolia was occupied by the nomads. The waves of conquerors and settlers have imposed their language and other features of their culture on it.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Roucek, *Central Eastern Europe* (New York: Pentice Hall, 1950), 14.

<sup>4</sup> Stanley Lane Poole, *The Story of the Nations: Turkey*, (London: T Fisher Unwin, 1908), 3.

- <sup>5</sup> Kemal Karpat, *The Ottoman State and its Place in World History : Social, Economic and Political Studies of the Middle East*, (Leiden,1974), 59.
- <sup>6</sup> Phillip Price, *A History of Turkey from Empire to Republic* (London: George Allan & Unwin, 1956), 35.
- <sup>7</sup> Tungus are nomadic people widely spread over eastern Siberia; related to the Manchu.
- <sup>8</sup> Stanford Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey: Empire of the Gazis: the Rise and Decline of the Ottoman Empire, 1280-1808*, (New York: Cambridge, 1976), 1.
- <sup>9</sup> Rai Shakil Akhtar, *Turkey: In New World Perspective (A Cultural- Historical Perspective)*, (Lahore: Sang e Meel, 1995), 2.
- <sup>10</sup> However, the first known Turkish political entity was the Goktiirk Empire, which lasted from 552 to 744, extending from the Black Sea across Asia along the northern borders of Mongolia and China almost to the Pacific Ocean. See Shaw, 3.
- <sup>11</sup> Rai Shukil Akhtar, *Turkey: In New World Perspective (A Cultural- Historical Perspective)*, (Lahore: Sang e Meel, 1995), 3.
- <sup>12</sup> Donald Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700–1922*, (New York: Cambridge University press, 2005), 16.
- <sup>13</sup> Lord Eversley, *The Turkish Empire: Its Growth and Decay* (Lahore: Premier Books House, 1967), 13.
- <sup>14</sup> Lane Poole, 5
- <sup>15</sup> Shaw, 13.
- <sup>16</sup> Lane Poole, 15.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid, 6.
- <sup>18</sup> Halide Edib, *Conflict of East and West in Turkey*, (Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf, 1935), 14.
- <sup>19</sup> Donald Quataert, 31.
- <sup>20</sup> Andrina Stiles, *the Ottoman Empire: 1450-1700*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1991), 12.

<sup>21</sup> Phillip Price, 35.

<sup>22</sup> Lane Poole, 23.

<sup>23</sup> Donald Quataert, 21.

<sup>24</sup> Halide Edib, 45-48.

<sup>25</sup> Donald Quataert, 19.

<sup>26</sup> Gábor Ágoston and Bruce Masters, *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire*,(new York: Facts On File, 2009), 29.