The Ottomans Build a Vast Empire

Key Terms and People

ghazi  warrior for Islam  
Ottoman  follower of the most successful ghazi, Osman  
sultan  ruler of a Muslim state  
Timur the Lame  conqueror of Persia and Russia  
Mehmed II  conqueror who made Istanbul his capital  
Suleyman the Lawgiver  ruler who brought Ottoman Empire to its height  
devshirme  policy for creating the sultan’s army  
janissary  soldier slave drawn from conquered Christian territories  

Before You Read

In the last lesson, you read about cultural achievements made in the Muslim empire. 

In this lesson, you will read about the rise of the Ottoman Empire, 1300–1600.

As You Read

Use a chart to list the main rulers of the Ottoman Empire and their successes.

TURKS MOVE INTO BYZANTIUM 

How did the Ottoman Empire begin? 

In 1300, the world of the eastern Mediterranean was also changing. The Byzantine Empire was fading. The Seljuk Turk state had been destroyed. Anatolia, the area of modern Turkey, was now inhabited by groups of nomadic Turks. They saw themselves as ghazis, or Muslim warriors for Islam. They raided the lands where non-Muslims lived.

The most successful ghazi was Osman. Western Europeans thought his name was Othman. They called his followers Ottomans. Between 1300 and 1326, Osman built a strong but small kingdom in Anatolia. Leaders who came after Osman called themselves sultans, or “ones with power.” They extended the kingdom by buying land. They also formed alliances with other chieftains and conquered everyone they could.

The Ottomans used gunpowder. Their soldiers could use cannons and muskets to fight. This gave them a great advantage when attacking others. Even walled cities were no obstacle for the Ottomans.

The Ottomans ruled in a kindly way. Muslims had to serve in the army but paid no taxes. Non-Muslims paid tax
Lesson 4, continued

but did not serve in the army. Many joined Islam just to avoid the tax. Most people adjusted easily to their new rule.

One warrior did not. He was Timur the Lame. He conquered Russia and Persia. In 1402, he defeated the Ottoman forces. Timur captured the sultan and took him to Samarkand in a cage.

1. How did the Ottomans get their name?

2. Why, most likely, was Constantinople made the capital city?

POWERFUL SULTANS SPUR DRAMATIC EXPANSION

How did the empire grow?

In Anatolia, the four sons of the last sultan fought for control of the empire. Mehmed I won control. Later, the empire transferred to his son Murad II. He defeated enemy armies and invaded other countries, expanding the empire’s size. The next three sultans continued and brought the Ottoman Empire to its greatest power. Most victorious was Mehmed II, who took power in 1451. He built a force of 100,000 foot soldiers and 125 ships to gain control of the city of Constantinople. In 1453, he took the city and the waterway it controlled. Mehmed made the city his capital. He renamed it Istanbul. The rebuilt city became home to people from all over the Ottoman Empire.

Other emperors used conquest to make the empire grow. After 1514, Selim the Grim took Persia, Syria, and Palestine. He then captured Arabia, took the Muslim holy cities of Medina and Mecca, and gained control of Egypt.

SULEYMAN THE LAWGIVER; THE EMPIRE DECLINES SLOWLY

Why was Suleyman the Lawgiver a great leader?

Suleyman I took power in 1520. He ruled for 46 years. He brought the Ottoman Empire to its greatest size.

Suleyman revised the laws of the empire. His people called him Suleyman the Lawgiver. Suleyman ruled his empire with a highly structured government. Thousands of slaves served the royal family. The policy of making people slaves was called devshirme. Christian boys were taken and made slaves. They were educated, converted to Islam, and then trained as soldiers. The janissaries were an elite group of enslaved soldiers who fought fiercely for the sultan. Other slaves held important government jobs.

The empire allowed people to follow their own religion. Jews and Christians were not mistreated. His empire was also known for great works of art and many fine buildings.

Although the empire lasted long after Suleyman, it spent the next few hundred years in decline. None of the sultans were as accomplished as Suleyman had been. However, the Ottoman Empire continued to influence the world into the 20th century.

3. What were two of Suleyman’s accomplishments?
Lesson 4, continued

As you read this lesson, fill out the chart below by writing answers in the appropriate boxes.

| What role did each ruler play in the building and expansion of the Ottoman Empire? |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Osman                        |                                 |
| 2. Murad II                    |                                 |
| 3. Mehmed II                   |                                 |
| 4. Selim the Grim              |                                 |
| 5. Suleyman                    |                                 |

List the achievements of Suleyman in the boxes below.

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<th>Social Achievements</th>
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