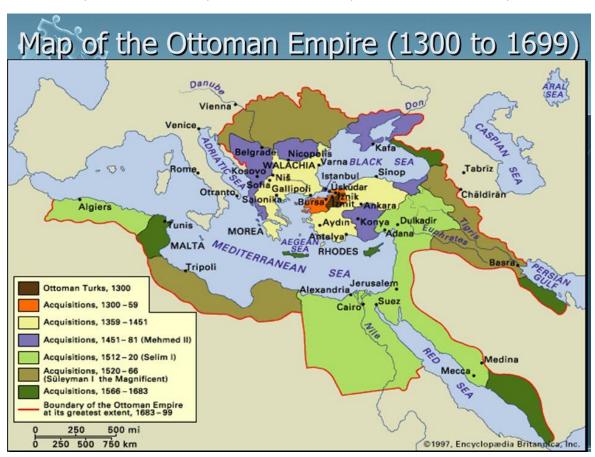# The Early Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire was created by Turkic warrior groups located in the Anatolia region. Their raiding of agricultural regions was now legitimized in Islamic terms. Starting in 1300 C.E. and over the next 300 years, the Ottoman Turks would conquer and occupy most of the Middle East, North Africa and southeastern Europe. I would be the Islamic world's most significant empire. The sultan was a mixture of a Turkic warrior prince, a Muslim caliph (successor to the Prophet), and a victorious emperor.

Map of the Ottoman Empire (1300 to 1699)

Legend:
- Ottoman Turks, 1300
- Acquisitions, 1300 – 59
- Acquisitions, 1359 – 1451
- Acquisitions, 1451 – 81 (Mehmed II)
- Acquisitions, 1512 – 20 (Selim I)
- Acquisitions, 1520 – 66 (Süleyman I the Magnificent)
- Acquisitions, 1566 – 1683
- Boundary of the Ottoman Empire at its greatest extent, 1683 – 99

0   250   500 mi
0   250 500 750 km

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The seizure of Constantinople in 1453 C.E. saw the end of Christian Byzantium. The Ottoman rulers now saw themselves as successors of the Roman Empire and protector of the faith "the strong sword of Islam." Constantinople was now called Istanbul and became the capital of the Ottoman Empire.

The siege of Vienna in 1529 C.E. (although defeated by a coalition of Christian forces) had Europeans now talking about the "terror of the Turk." The Ottoman Empire spread so fast that by the sixteenth century, only 19% of the population were Muslim, 81% were Christian.

The Ottoman Empire was one of the three "gunpowder empires" [The "**Gunpowder Empires**" that formed in the 16th century represented three diverse Muslim empires that spread across vast territories through the use revolutionary military technology and strategy. They were the **Ottoman Empire**, the **Safavid Empire**, and the **Mughal Empire**]. Their effective use of cannons against their enemies was a major component of their rise to power.

The responsibility of protecting the three holy Muslim cities of Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem was now in the hands of the Ottoman Empire. In addition, a conflict between the Sunni Ottoman's and the Persian Safavid empire who were Shiite Muslims (1534 C.E. to 1629 C.E.) greatly divided the Islamic world.

Suleiman I, commonly known as **Suleiman the Magnificent** was the tenth and longest-reigning Sultan of the Ottoman Empire from 1520 C.E. until his death in 1566 C.E. Under his administration, the Ottoman state ruled over at least 25 million people. The overriding law of the empire was the Sharia, or Sacred Law, which as the divine law of Islam was outside of the Sultan's powers to change. Suleiman the Magnificent would lead the Ottoman Empire into a **Golden Age** which was a time of peace, high profits from taxes and trade, and era of advancements in science, mathematics, art and literature, especially by cultural diffusion from the Safavids of Persia.

Many Christians welcomes Ottoman rule as it meant lower taxes and less oppression as was seen during their Christian rulers' reigns. Many Christian men, including Balkan landlords, Greek merchants, government officials, and high-ranking clergy, became part of the Ottoman elite.

The role of women drastically changed with the emergence of the Ottoman Empire. Their once open-associated relationship with men was taken away. They were now secluded from the general population and forced to wear veils. Many women from the Caucus Mountains and the Sudan were forced into slavery. Women were not counted in the census and Muslim reformers fought to restrict them from holding religious gatherings.

In the Ottoman Empire, a **millet** was an independent court of law pertaining to "personal law" under which a confessional community (a group abiding by the laws of Muslim Sharia, Christian Canon law, or Jewish Halakha) was allowed to rule itself under its own laws.

The Ottoman Empire expanded the number of Muslims within their empire by using **Devshirme**. Starting in the late 14th century, it was the "Gathering" of Christian boys within the empire from Christian villages and converting them into Muslims. Every few years, young boys between the ages of ten and eighteen would be taken, dressed in red uniforms and taken to Istanbul for conversion. By doing this, the sultan was creating a population of civil and military officials that were personally loyal and dependent upon him. Later on, these boys would become the **Janissaries**. They would eventually be the military leaders and one of the ruling classes within the Ottoman Empire.

Ottoman Janissary soldiers
Note the use of musket-style rifles and the cannon in the background, evidence of the Ottomans being part of the Gunpowder Empires.