

## **POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC TRANSITION OF OTTOMAN SOVEREIGNTY FROM A SOLE MONARCH TO NUMEROUS OTTOMAN ELITES BETWEEN 1683 AND 1750S**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to explore the Ottoman transformation that took place immediately after empire's great defeat at the siege of Vienna in 1683. There is no doubt that this debacle forced the state to reconsider and alter not only its economic but also political behaviour. It was due to this very reason that we see a new redistribution of power that opened the way for new Ottoman strata between the second siege of Vienna and the second half of the eighteenth century. This transition can be classified into three distinct steps, which allow us to understand Ottoman power transition from a single one to plentiful ones, including Muslim and non-Muslim nobilities of the Ottoman state. The first phase of periodization encompassing the years between 1683 and 1699 the power of Muslim elites took the upper hand to the detriment of Ottoman monarchs. The second periodization covering the years between the Peace of Karlowitz and Patrona Rebellion of 1730, Mustafa II and mostly Ahmed III endeavoured to restore the sultanic authority to no avail. In the third and last stage, roughly embracing the years between 1730 and 1750s, non-Muslim nobilities of the Ottoman Empire slowly but surely started to gain first with the aid of Mahmud I and then that of foreign states. At the end of the day, by the second half of the eighteenth century both the Ottoman sultans had lost their power and influence and new Muslim and non-Muslim elites had emerged. More importantly though, these new groups were not only eager to fight but also cooperate with one another in order to get more from the new distribution of power within the state.

**Keywords:** Ottoman Empire, Sovereignties, Muslim and non-Muslim elites Distribution of Power and Wealth, Millet System

### **MAIN TEXT**

Although it is usually questionable and unsound to designate important watersheds in the history, there were still some turning points, which not only more crucial than other events but also altered the course of the history to a great degree. If we reject the claim of their existence, we are apt to fall into error of explicating everything within the continuity paradigm that inclines to interpret historical events as having no sharp beginning or ending for that matter. Such a concept of a stagnant society is in no position to demonstrate reality of the historical facts owing to leaving no role whatsoever for historical incidences of high significance. For the sake of this paper, therefore, we have chosen three turning points that not only paved the way for the emergence of new Ottoman elites but also greatly changed the course of the Ottoman history approximately between 1683 and 1750s. These three milestones will prominently facilitate to understand the Ottoman transition of power from a single sultanic authority to various authorities of first Muslim and then non-Muslim elites of the Ottoman Empire by the second half of the eighteenth century. By the end of these stages, we will observe new Ottoman nobilities who were more and more concerned with penetrating deep into the state

institutions and progressively profiting from the new state system.

The first periodization covers the events that took place between the second siege of Vienna in 1683 and the Treaty of Karlowitz which was signed in 1699. Throughout these sixteenth years, we observe the emergence of a new era where Muslim elites at the expense of one single sultanic authority. In the second period of the years between 1699 and 1730, we see Ottoman sultans' efforts to recover their authority to no avail. In the third and last stage encompassing the years from 1730 into the 1750s, we discover the appearance of new non-Muslim elites who first owed their power to Ottoman sultans and then European powers of the time. In the end, on the one hand the authority of Ottoman sultans diminished largely. On the other hand, Muslim and non-Muslim nobilities began to compete with one another in order to get the upper hand in the new distribution of wealth and resources.

After the Treaty of Karlowitz the Ottoman Empire turned gradually from the hunter to the hunted in the wars which were now waged against its well organised adversaries in spite of the fact that the Ottomans could still win some victories even long after following the devastating defeat of 1683–1699. As a matter of fact, it was not the first time that the Ottomans realized their inability to cope with the European powers at the battlefields. However, this lack of competency for the first time became so apparent that the Ottoman political leaders started to regard necessary changes in their structures as a matter of life or death for the state. Even though both Christian Europe and Shi'i Persia had already scored important victories against the Ottomans before 1699, the Ottomans never so deeply felt that there was no turning back of the clock as it had been previously the case. In spite of gaining some of what had been lost before at the Treaty of Passarowitz in 1718 and later also signing one of the most favourable treaties of the eighteenth century named the Treaty of Belgrade in 1739, the Ottoman statesmen were now more than aware of their weaknesses, limitations and vulnerabilities. That explains why the Ottoman Empire rather preferred to refrain from conducting any further offensive campaigns within the earlier dichotomy of Dar ul-Islam (abode of Islam) versus Dar ul-Harb (abode of war) in practice. After 1739, we do not even see any Ottoman who looked for a permanent state of war against the infidels in either the East or the West. From time to time, the empire still moderately tested its strength and ability to acquire small territories if need be. In the end, however, the Ottoman Empire chose to integrate itself into the diplomatic system of Europe in order to maintain a consistent peace policy for the sake of the empire, especially in the second half of the eighteenth century.

At this point, losing many territories particularly in the West did not actually stop the Ottoman state from reasserting itself as an important world power and reorganising its traditional institutions to keep pace with Europe. Moreover, the Ottoman Empire not only accomplished to overcome devastating impacts of the long lasting wars and the disasters thereafter, but also in adopting its traditional structure to meet the requirements of the new era and conditions of the following decades. There is no doubt that this transition brought enormous financial burdens on the Ottoman treasury. The empire could only have enough funds to afford these economic liabilities by means of transformation military and landholding systems of previous centuries. In the course of the time, it also means a decentralisation of Ottoman provincial and urban organisation. In other words, we see the emergence of Muslim elites such as members of pasha households, ayan, malikane owners etc. as well as non-Muslim nobilities, e.g. dragomans, beratlis and Phanariotes and so on. Even though each elite group had its own unique story of gaining strength and political influence, they all became significant players in due course. By the second half of the eighteenth century, they turned out to be essential political and economic figures of the Ottoman Empire. From now onwards, these Muslim and non-Muslim elites were not only more and more eager to gain the upper hand against one another but also actually had preconditions and means to free themselves from the tight control of central authorities. This multiplication of power in the newly created Ottoman system only came into existence through a long process of power transition, which had been stimulated because of the three stages shortly mentioned above. Taken all into consideration, the Ottoman sultans now lost its previous rights and privilege to distribute wealth and power to whomever it desired. As heads of the state apparatus, they were now less and less able to play the role of the benefactors, who had been exclusively seen as providing protection, arms, provisions and booty to members of their military bureaucracy. In short, after these process had been completed, the Muslim and non-Muslim elites of the empire were more free to rely upon their own power to sustain their high state positions and more willing to make their own decisions, which might often been in a disagreement with interests of the central Ottoman government.

Considering everything, the period from the Second Siege of Vienna up until the second half of the eighteenth centuries witnessed a crucial transition from a single sovereignty of the sultan to multiple sovereignties of first Muslim and then non-Muslim elites in the Ottoman Empire. Overall, these new elites of the empire was about to dominate the empire following the second half of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Although we cannot instantly identify or define these new groups with their religious, ethnic or

national backgrounds, the Ottoman millet system played a determining role for the aforementioned elites who had taken a distinct path to reach the same results during the period under discussion. Nonetheless, the millet system alone falls far short of comprehending their close relation with the state once they seized power in the Ottoman Empire. That is to say, neither the new Muslim nor non-Muslim elites of the empire looked forward to establishing their own autonomous or independent states of liberation from the "Turkish yoke" at this stage. Instead, they did enthusiastically pursue their own personal interests rather than anything else. Not surprisingly, their self-interests were not usually in harmony with their religious and national/ethnic ideology or set of beliefs. One should at least wait until the beginning of the nineteenth century so that close cooperation between Muslim and non-Muslim elites of the empire largely disappeared. It was only thereafter that these new Ottoman notabilities systematically looked for destruction of the Ottoman hegemonies in those lands which were one way or another under their own control.

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