Defining ‘Ottoman’: Legacy of a Dream
Mehmet & Constantinople

Issues to address 14th - 15th c:

- Succession
- Borders
- Administrative infrastructure
Succession:
- Traditional Mongol-Turk practices saw succession contested between ‘most able’
- Death of leader invited challenges from ‘vassals’, lesser families
- Osman passed power to Orhan during his lifetime to assure acceptance, avoid conflict
- Orhan inherited territories without contest
Mehmet I:
- Battled three brothers appointed ‘rulers’ by Mongols (after capture, death of Bayzid)
- Used Byzantine assistance to gain back Anatolia
- Empire nearly destroyed
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Murat II:
- also battled several claimants
- Some supported by Byzantium, others by rival Turkish (Anatolian principalities)
- Attempted not to provoke further resistance
- Growing autonomy (e.g., Karaman)
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- Mehmet II ruled twice, once as child
- Returns to throne on death of Murat II (1451)
- Authority in question, cannot afford challenges
- Had surviving brother(s?) killed
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Begins ‘Ottoman’ practice of fratricide:

“And to whomsoever of my sons the Sultanate shall pass, it is fitting that for the order of the world he shall kill his brothers. Most of the ulema allow it. So let them act on this.”

- Practice rapidly normalized
- Critiqued in Mongol sources for betraying ‘traditional’ society – seen as ‘Ottoman’
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Borders:
- Frontiers, with associated difficulties
- West: Serbia; Byzantine, Venetian, Genoan ‘colonies’
- Anatolia: local principalities (eg Karaman)
- East: Usman Hasman
- South East: Mamluk Sultanate
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Serbia – Hungary:
- In spite of vassalage since 1398, constantly negotiated
- Story of family connections, opposing factions: ‘options’ to appeal to either Hungary or Ottomans
- Murad II captured Serbian King: he ‘became Ottoman’
- Leader pro-Ottoman faction brother grand vizier
Underpinnings of Vassalage:
- Tribute payments: often refused (e.g., Bosnia, Herzegovina), provoking interventions
- ‘Defense’ against Hungary as important as value of tribute
- Flexibility: vassals can play ‘patrons’ off against each other
- Marriage used to stabilize relations
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Examples:

Herzegovina
- Lord of realm converted, served as Grand Vizier under Mehmet’s son (Bayzid II), married Mehmet’s daughter

Byzantine Eastern Colony (following submission):
- Daughter of ruler entered Sultan’s Harem
- Treasurer who negotiated surrender was cousin of Ottoman Grand Vizier, entered administration
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“Eastern Strategies”

- Broadly defined: Mamluks, Karaman States, Usman Hasan

- Eastern states offered alliances to Venice to capture position on Black Sea (Trebizond)

- Mamluk’s backing claimant to Karaman, Ottomans backing rival
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- Mehmet planned attack into Syria, counting on Karaman support
- Karamanids ‘abstained’, counting on Mamluks
- Ottomans defeated Karamanids
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- Major challenge remained in Usman Hasan
- Intervening in eastern region as successor to Timurids: direct competitor to Ottomans
- Drew on ‘traditional’ symbols of legitimacy
  - Turkish lineage as ‘ancient’ as Ottomans
  - Respect for Islamic law (Ottomans illegally taxing Muslims)
  - Respect for nomadic rights (Ottomans forcing sedentarization)
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Crimea:
- Region connected directly to former rule by Ghengis Khan
- Annexation but special status ‘client’ (rather than vassal)
- Tatar horsemen valued; stipend paid to state to assure cavalry’s role in Ottoman campaigns
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Context in which ‘conquest’ (fall?) of Constantinople took place, 1453
- Following on history of attempts – 13 since 650
- grandfather Bayzid carried out 8 year siege
- Key change in Ottoman strategy: Rumelo Hisari & cannon technology
Constantinople:
- Repeated requests for help from ‘Europe’ (Genoa and Venice, commercial interests; Pope, state leaders, political/religious interests)
- ‘tied aid’ offered: closer connection to Roman Christianity - refused
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‘Story of the Conquest’

- Nicolo Barbaro (Venetian)
- Kritovoulos (Greek)
- Georges Sphrantzes (courtier Byzantine court)
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Mehmet II & Constantinople
Mehmet entering Constantinople after his Victory.

[painting late 19th-early 20th C.]
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Questions and Issues:
- what are the ‘biases’ we need to take into account and how do we see them reflected?
- what aspects of society do we see reflected in these accounts?
- how does understanding the ‘conquest’ help us understand the process of ‘becoming Ottoman’?
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Compare with an Ottoman view,
Historian & Philosopher Tursun Beg, writing some years after the battle.

[see ‘Additional Readings’]
The Views from Europe:
- varied (compare Wheatcroft’s interpretation of ‘the darkest day’ with contemporary response of Venetian)
- [see ‘Additional Readings’]
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Video Excerpt

“Islam: empire of faith
(The Ottomans – Part 3/3)

[on Youtube – 10:50-21:40]
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European Responses:
- outrage followed by negotiation: Venice recovering investments, Genoa protecting position in Galata
- no European state willing to engage in ‘re-conquest’: Pope called for Holy War, proposal of new crusade collapsed for lack of support
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Ottoman Responses:
- Repopulation city first priority
- Greek, Genoese traders enticed back
- policies of ‘colonization’ also pursued
- Policy of building new institutions’
- Topkapi Palace
Topkapi Palace
Topkapi Palace
(above)
Map ‘Istanbul’
(Right – note Genoese Galata quarter)
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Religious authorities placated by *millet* system:
- each permitted own constituency
- enjoyed same privileges as Muslim clerics
- church property tax free
- Jewish, Christian, Orthodox laws respected
- ‘colonization’ helped to maintain balance
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Costs of Empire:
- Campaigns in West and East, conquest of Constantinople costly
- Demanded efficient, permanent army
- Infrastructure of empire also costly
- How to maintain loyalty, economic contributions new territories, peoples?
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Economy:
- Impact of Conquest: Black Sea became Ottoman Lake
- Trade in ‘basics’ grains, fruits, forest products, skins, hides, cotton
- Luxury goods: silks, woolens, minerals, metals, spices, sugars, honey, dyes, alum, furs
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Economy:
- Slave trade also flourishing
- Fed from Caucuses, raids in new European territories
- Across Black Sea
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Economy:
- Role of Capitulations
- Used to build commercial relations with Europe (especially Italian states)
- Political ‘tool’ for Ottomans? two-edged sword
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Economy:

- Government revenue derived from:
  - Customs on trade
  - Taxing and exacting tribute from slave trade
  - ‘gifts’ (military, state officials)
  - Poll tax paid by non-Muslims
  - Taxes on agriculture, livestock raising: still largest segment of economy
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Military and Administration:
- demands soon exceeded traditional role ghazi
- Three principal ‘systems’ supported new empire: janissaries, timar, devshirme
- Each had economic, administrative and social impact, short and long term
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Janissaries:
- Reportedly some 12,000 in 1473
- Paid salaries (every three months)
- Who were they?

[observed by Barbaro, see additional rdgs; also du Busbeq, additional rdgs ’16th C.’]
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- Began under Murad I, late 14\textsuperscript{th} c
- response to warriors seeking autonomy in region of Thrace
- Fear of dependency on troops with local loyalties
- tax levied on war ‘booty’ – 1/5\textsuperscript{th} of slaves became property of Sultan
- first members of janissary young slaves totally dependent on court
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Turkish term *yeniçeri* means ‘new’ troops:
- Original ‘source’ from war captives soon supplemented with ‘devşirme’ conscripts
- Highly trained, disciplined force, called ‘the scourge of Europe’
- Considered ‘elite’: class set apart
- During 14th-15th centuries: forced celibacy
Devshirme:
- Levy ‘one in forty’ applied to Christian boys mostly in Balkan states
- Became members not only of military but of administration
- Bosnian recruits ‘favoured’ for palace duties
- Origins late 14th century; important source of state personnel
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Devshirme:
- Few barriers to social mobility
- Created ‘class’ defined by, dependent upon the state
- Also served function of integrating newly acquired Christian territories
- Consistent with Christian-Muslim relations of Frontier, now ‘urban’
Devshirme

Christian children being led to work

Boys to be circumcised

[observed by Barbaros, see additional rdgs]
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Timar:
- Complicated system by which ‘soldiers’ rewarded, ongoing cavalry assured, local territories administered
- *Sipahis* (cavalry), janissaries received rights to land and peasants on it (in lieu of salary)
- Rights continued as long as participation in military campaigns continued
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Timar:
- Grants both small (managed by provincial governor) and large (directly from Sultan)
- Sometimes held by high-placed women as well
- Careful records kept
- In early years, *timariots* often moved so that none became too ‘rooted’ in local region
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Impact of Military and Administrative Changes:

- Establishing of janissaries ‘betrayal’ to traditional powers:
- Creating tax on ghazi
- Creating competition (ultimately, replacement) for ghazi military power
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‘Betrayal’ epitomized in two new offices:
- *kadi ‘asker*: judge specifically for the military administrator (*askeri*) class, demarcated clear boundary around ‘ruling’ class as distinct from ‘people’
- *uc Beyleri*: lords of the frontier, reflecting right of sultan to name (and remove) *beys* in the frontier regions
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- Mehmed II’s symbolic act:
  refused to stand at sound of martial ghazi music
- Custom-honored power of the ghazi, ‘vassalage’ of the state to the ghazi -- clearly no longer pertained
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- Frontier of pastoralists, independent raiding clans became one of agriculturalists, dependent on central state, tied to ‘fiefs’ ultimately ‘owned’ by the sultan.

- Conquest of Constantinople, making it into capital: crucial moment

- Crystallized ‘Ottoman’ political vision marginalizing ghazi, favouring new ‘classes’: janissaries, devshirme, timariots