It is undeniable that the power of the Turks was once formidable to their neighbors not by their numbers only, but by their military and civil institutions, far surpassing those of their opponents. And they all trembled at the name of the Turks, who with a confidence procured by their constant successes, held the Christians in no less in contempt as warriors than they did on account of their religion. Proud and vainglorious, conquest was to them a passion, a gratification, and even a means of salvation, a sure way of immediately attaining a delicious paradise. Hence their zeal for the extension of their empire; hence their profound respect for the military profession, and their glory even in being obedient and submissive to discipline.

Besides that the Turks refuse all reform, they are seditious and mutinous; their armies are encumbered with immense baggage, and their camp has all the conveniences of a town, with shops etc. for such was their ancient custom when they wandered with their hordes. When their sudden fury is abated, which is at the least obstinate resistance, they are seized with a panic, and have no rallying as formerly. The cavalry is as much afraid of their own infantry as of the enemy; for in a defeat they fire at them to get their horses to escape more quickly. In short, it is a mob assembled rather than an army levied. None of those numerous details of a well-organized body, necessary to give quickness, strength, and regularity to its actions, to avoid confusion, to repair damages, to apply to every part to some use; no systematic attack, defense, or retreat; no accident foreseen, nor provided for...

The artillery they have, and which is chiefly brass, comprehends many find pieces of cannon; but notwithstanding the reiterated instruction of so many French engineers, they are ignorant of its management. Their musket-barrels are much esteemed but they are too heavy; nor do they possess any quality superior to common iron barrels which have been much hammered, and are very soft Swedish iron. The art of tempering their sabers is now lost, and all the blades of great value are ancient. The naval force of the Turks is by no means considerable. Their grand fleet consisted of not more than seventeen or eighteen sail of the line in the last war [Russo-Turkish war of 1787-92], and those not in very good condition; at present their number is lessened.
The present reigning Sultan, Selim III, has made an attempt to introduce the European discipline into the Turkish army, and to abolish the body of the Janissaries. [He has] caused a corps to be recruited, set apart a branch of the revenue for their maintenance, and finally declared his intention of abolishing the institution of Janissaries. This step, as might be expected, produced a mutiny, which was only appeased by the sultan's consenting to continue their pay during their lifetimes; but he at the same time ordered that no recruits should be received into their corps. The new soldiers in the corps are taught their exercise with the musket and bayonet, and a few maneuvers. When they are held to be sufficiently disciplined, they are sent to garrison the fortresses on the frontiers. Their officers are all Turks and are chosen out of those who perform their exercise the best.

Source:


Scanned by Jerome S. Arkenberg, Dept. of History, Cal. State Fullerton

This text is part of the Internet Modern History Sourcebook. The Sourcebook is a collection of public domain and copy-permitted texts for introductory level classes in modern European and World history.

Unless otherwise indicated the specific electronic form of the document is copyright. Permission is granted for electronic copying, distribution in print form for educational purposes and personal use. If you do reduplicate the document, indicate the source. No permission is granted for commercial use of the Sourcebook.

(c)Paul Halsall May1998
halsall@murray.fordham.edu