**The Development of**

**Islamic Civilization to the**

**Eighteenth Century**

The religion of Islam is often viewed solely in terms of its origins in the barren, sparsely settled Arabian Peninsula. To be sure, it was in the Arabian city of Mecca that Islam was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in the years AD 610 to AD 632. However, during the century following Muhammad’s death, the Arabs expanded out of the peninsula and conquered a world empire stretching from Spain to present-day Pakistan. The great capital cities of the first Arab-Islamic empires, Damascus and Baghdad, were located not in Arabia but in the long-settled lands of antiquity. To understand the development of Islam and Islamic civilization, we must recognize that the Middle East region into which Islam expanded was a rich repository of centuries of accumulated intellectual exchanges, religious experiences, and administrative practices. Islamic society built upon these existing foundations and was shaped by them. As Ira Lapidus has written, **“The civilization of Islam, though born in Mecca, also had its progenitors in Palestine, Babylon, and Persepolis.”**

Ancient Near Eastern civilization began to develop within the city-states that first appeared in lower Iraq around 3500 BC. These settled communities developed written alphabets, governing institutions, and elaborate religious rituals. By about 2400 BC, larger political entities began to emerge in the form of regional empires in which several cities were incorporated into a single state ruled by a dominant monarch. The growth of ever-larger regional empires acted as an integrative force by unifying greater numbers of people under common legal systems and exposing them to shared cultural and religious experiences.

Over the course of centuries, improvements in agricultural and military technology, in transportation and communications, and in social and administrative organization enabled empires to dominate increasingly extensive territories. This process reached its first culmination in Egypt’s Nile Valley, where an advanced civilization took shape under the rule of the pharaohs. The monuments to gods and kings that line the banks of the Nile testify to the shared religious and dynastic traditions of the ancient Egyptians. A similar unifying effect was achieved by the Iranian-based Acheminid Empire (550 BC–331 BC), which brought all the Middle Eastern lands from Egypt to the Oxus River into a single imperial framework. In the wake of the conquests of Alexander the Great in the fourth century BC, the Middle Eastern lands lying between Iran and the Mediterranean Sea absorbed yet another layer of tradition as Greek was implanted as the language of administration and high culture. Alexandria and Antioch developed into centers of Greek learning, and Greek became the dominant language of discourse among the urban elite from Egypt to Anatolia.

The absorption of new ideas and techniques continued with the Roman conquest and the consolidation of Rome’s efficient administrative practices in Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Anatolia during the first century BC. Yet although the Mediterranean lands of the Middle East were administered as provinces of the Roman Empire, their high culture remained more Hellenic than Latin.

With the transfer of the imperial Roman capital to Constantinople in AD 330 and the fall of western Rome a century later, the eastern identity of the empire was solidified. That identity was represented by the Byzantine Empire, which preserved the administrative practices of Rome within the context of Hellenic civilization. Formative Islam interacted not only with the existing material cultures outlined above but also with established religious beliefs and practices. At the time of the rise of Islam, local and regional cults, though still in existence, had largely been subsumed by the official religions of the dominant Byzantine and Sasanian empires. It was only natural that the formation of empires contributed to religious uniformity. Subject peoples were expected to abandon their local gods and goddesses and adhere to the officially sanctioned imperial religion. Thus the process of imperial consolidation led also to religious consolidation and to the emergence of monotheism, the belief in the supremacy of one god. By the time of the Arab-Islamic conquests, most of the inhabitants of the Middle East belonged to one of three monotheistic faiths.

Monotheism was first preached by the prophets of ancient Israel and is one of the most significant and enduring legacies of the Jewish faith. Although the Jews had been dispersed from Palestine by the Romans in the first and second centuries AD, Jewish communities continued to flourish in the Middle East on the eve of the rise of Islam. Other forms of monotheism were also present in the region. In the seventh century BC, the Iranian prophet Zoroaster preached a doctrine that upheld the existence of a supreme God pitted in a constant struggle against the forces of evil. Zoroastrianism was revived by the rulers of the Iranian-based Sasanian Empire (AD 234–AD 634) and was adopted as the official religion of their state.

A third monotheistic faith, Christianity, grew rapidly from Roman times onward and was proclaimed the state religion of the Byzantine Empire in the late fourth century. However, differing interpretations over the nature of Christ created divisions among the adherents of the faith and led to the growth of separate churches, each jealously guarding its version of the truth. At the Council of Chalcedon in 451, the main body of the church defined Christ as having two natures, divine and human. But other Christian communities, known as Monophysites, believed that Christ had only a single nature. The Monophysite doctrine was institutionalized in the Coptic church of Egypt, which had its own religious hierarchy and conducted its ritual in the native Egyptian Coptic language. The Armenian Church in Anatolia also held to the Monophysite interpretation, as did certain groups in Syria. At the time of the rise of Islam, these regional Monophysite churches, with their vernacular liturgies, were under attack from the Byzantine authorities, who sought to impose the official Greek Orthodox version of Christianity on all the subjects of the empire.

Islam unified the Greco-Christian territories of Byzantium and the lands of Iranian Zoroastrianism into a single religiously based universal empire. The encounter between the new faith of Islam and the established traditions of the Middle East led to the creation of a new civilization that was profoundly and unmistakably Islamic yet also bore evidence of the centuries of accumulated practices that had preceded it.

**The Rise and Expansion of Islam**

On the eve of the rise of Islam, the settled lands of the Middle East were ruled by two competing imperial states, the Roman-Byzantine Empire in the west and the Sasanian Empire of Iran in the east. The Byzantine emperors were successors to the Caesars and presided over an imposing edifice of high cultural and political traditions that blended Greek learning, Roman administration, and Greek Orthodox Christianity. In the early seventh century, the emperor’s territorial possessions stretched from the Italian peninsula across southern Europe to the magnificent capital city of Constantinople. The empire’s Middle Eastern provinces included Egypt, Palestine, and Syria, as well as parts of Iraq and Anatolia. Supported by a standing professional army, a highly developed bureaucracy, and the priesthood of the Orthodox Church, the rulers of Byzantium appeared to be powerful and secure. In the late sixth and early seventh centuries, however, Byzantium was weakened by challenges to its military, religious, and administrative authority. Beginning in 540, the imperial rivalry between the Byzantines and Sasanians broke out into open warfare that continued almost uninterrupted until 629. Campaign and counter campaign exhausted the military forces of both empires, depleted their treasuries, and inflicted extensive damage to the lands and cities lying between the Nile and the Euphrates. To meet the financial demands of constant warfare, the Byzantine emperors periodically raised taxes, a measure that alienated their subjects, who had already suffered economic hardships from the passage of warring armies back and forth across their lands. Religious divisions created additional tensions between the Byzantine state and its subjects. Once the Byzantine Empire adopted Greek Orthodox Christianity as the state religion in the late fourth century, the emperors and the church attempted to enforce popular acceptance of this officially approved version of the faith. But peoples within the empire continued to adhere to other forms of Christianity, and to Judaism, and to use their own vernacular languages for scripture and ritual. Unwilling to tolerate these challenges to official orthodoxy, the state branded them as heretical and undertook to suppress them. The persecution of Jews and of Christians outside the Greek Orthodox community caused great disaffection within the empire and explains in part why many Byzantine subjects welcomed the arrival of the more religiously tolerant Muslim rulers.

The Sasanian Empire of Iran, with its capital at Ctesiphon on the Tigris River, contested Byzantium for control of the territories between Iraq and Egypt. Heir to the 1,200-year-old Acheminid tradition of universal Iranian empire, the Sasanian state was based on the principle of absolute monarchy. The emperor was the king of kings (*shahanshah*), a distant and all-powerful ruler living in palatial splendor and surrounded by elaborate ceremonial trappings. Over the centuries, Iranian bureaucratic practices had become refined, and the Sasanian Empire was administered by a large and experienced scribal class. Like their Byzantine counterparts, the Sasanian emperors had at their disposal an effective standing professional army, which was noted for its heavily armed and armored cavalry. Yet the Sasanian Empire’s apparent strength was, like Byzantium’s, diluted by popular discontent, much of which stemmed from religious diversity. By the late sixth century, the official Sasanian state religion of Zoroastrianism had become more significant as a ceremonial faith for the ruling elite than as the religion of the population at large. In the western portion of the empire in particular, people were more attracted to various strains of Christianity and Judaism than to the religion of the imperial court. In the absence of a unifying religious affiliation with their ruler, many subjects of the Sasanian Empire lacked feelings of loyalty toward the state.

Although the Byzantine and Sasanian empires were in a period of transition when Islam first extended into them, it is important to recognize their impact on the development of Islamic governing practices and religious doctrine. Formative Islam would be influenced by the Greek legacy of Byzantium, by the bureaucratic tradition of Iran, and by the concepts of emperor that had developed in the courts of Constantinople and Ctesiphon. Islam must be understood as a product of the societies into which it spread as well as of the society in which it originated.

**PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIA**

With the exception of Yemen in the south and a few scattered oasis settlements elsewhere, the Arabian Peninsula is a vast desert. It is the home of the Arabs, an ancient Semitic people whose origins cannot be traced with certainty. In contrast to the rigorously administered domains of the Byzantine and Sasanian empires, the Arabian Peninsula of the early seventh century lacked any central organizing authority. It had no state structure, no common legal system, no administrative center. Tribes were the largest units of social and political organization to which an individual’s loyalties were given. Each tribe was an entity unto itself bound by ties of kinship based on a belief in common descent from a founding ancestor.

The majority of Arabia’s inhabitants were pastoral nomads engaged in raising camels, sheep, or goats. The scarcity of pasturelands in the harsh environment of Arabia required constant movement from one grazing ground to another. Competition for the scarce resources of the land created rivalries among the tribes, and warfare became ingrained as a way of life. All males were expected to be warriors, and accounts of the exploits of the most daring among them became enshrined in tribal culture. The widespread experience of the Arabs in warfare was to be a significant factor in the early expansion of Islam.

Notwithstanding the divisions inherent in the tribal structure of pre-Islamic Arabia, forces of cultural unity were present. The Bedouin ethos of bravery and honor was celebrated in a special style of Arabic poetry known as a *qasidah.* The existence of this poetry, which was recited at market fairs and tribal gatherings, has convinced historians that the Arabs of the seventh century possessed a common poetic language that could be understood in different regions of the peninsula. This was of the utmost significance for the spread of Islam because it meant that the Prophet Muhammad’s religious message could be communicated to Arabic speakers across a broad expanse of territory. Isolated though it was, the Arabian Peninsula was not completely cut off from the forces that shaped Middle Eastern civilization. On the eve of the rise of Islam, two Arab tribal confederations guarded the northern Arabian frontiers as client states of Byzantium and the Sasanians, respectively. Both of these Arab confederations were Christian, providing evidence of the spread of the concept of monotheism among the Arabs before the time of Muhammad.

At the southwestern tip of Arabia, Yemen was another source for the entry of external influences into the peninsula. Unlike the rest of Arabia, Yemen was a fertile and well-watered region able to support a settled agricultural society. By the fourth and fifth centuries AD, several Arab communities in southern Arabia had adopted Christianity, and the ruler of Yemen’s last pre-Islamic dynasty converted to Judaism. Yet despite the fermentation of religious doctrines in the settled regions of northern and southern Arabia, most of the tribes of the interior continued to practice various forms of animism, worshipping local idols or deities. During the two centuries before Islam, Arabia acquired increasing importance as a commercial transit route between the Middle Eastern empires and Yemen. The wars between Byzantium and the Sasanians disrupted the east-west overland routes and gave rise to a brisk north-south caravan trade through the Hijaz, Arabia’s coastal plain adjacent to the Red Sea. The main Arabian beneficiary of this commercial network was the city of Mecca, which developed into the most important commercial center of the peninsula. By the early seventh century, Meccan merchants had accumulated sufficient capital to organize their own caravans and to provide payments to an extensive network of tribes in exchange for pledges to allow the caravans to pass in peace.

In addition to its role as a commercial center, Mecca was a religious site of major significance. The city’s shrine, the Ka'aba, became the center of an animistic cult that attracted worshipers throughout western Arabia. By the time of Muhammad’s birth, the Ka’aba had become the site of an annual pilgrimage during which warfare was suspended, and Mecca’s sanctuary became a kind of neutral ground where tribal disputes could be resolved. The city derived considerable income from its religious role, and its leading families recognized the importance of the sanctuary as a source of wealth and influence. The leading clans of Mecca were all members of the Quraysh tribe that settled the city, established its religious role, and dominated its political and commercial life. Although formal municipal organizations did not exist, the affairs of the city were loosely regulated by a council of prominent Quraysh merchants. Historians have suggested that Mecca was in a state of transition between the vanishing tribal ways and a nascent urbanism spawned by merchant capitalism. The customary tribal values were being displaced, but no fully developed set of communal values suitable for an urban setting had yet emerged.

**MUHAMMAD AND THE FOUNDATIONS OF ISLAM**

Muhammad ibn Abdullah, the future Prophet of Islam, was born in Mecca around 570. His early life gave little indication of the compelling prophet and skillful statesman he would later become. He was born into the clan of Hashim, a subtribe of the Quraysh. Orphaned at the age of two, Muhammad was raised and sheltered by his uncle, Abu Talib. As a young man, he engaged in the caravan trade and may have journeyed to Damascus. His financial position was secured when, in his early twenties, he married a wealthy widow, Khadijah. Khadijah holds an honored place in the history of Islam; she was the first convert to the new faith after Muhammad himself, and she supported him during the difficult early years of his prophethood when he was scorned by most of Mecca’s population. Although Muhammad was widely respected as a decent and trustworthy individual, he lived an otherwise ordinary life as merchant, husband, and father to the four daughters born to Khadijah. But as Muhammad neared his fortieth year, his behavior gradually began to change. He often left Mecca, sometimes for days at a time, to meditate in solitude in the mountains outside the city. Some scholars have conjectured that Muhammad was reflecting on what he saw as the problems that afflicted Meccan society and was seeking ways to resolve them. It was during one of his solitary vigils on Mount Hira that Muhammad was summoned to his prophetic mission, an event known in Islam as the Night of Power. The summons came as a command from God, transmitted through the angel Gabriel, for Muhammad to recite to his fellow Meccans the divine messages that he had been chosen to receive. The Night of Power marked the beginning of a movement that would transform Arab life and lead to the emergence of a universal monotheistic religion. For the remaining twenty-two years of his life, Muhammad continued to receive revelations, which his companions recorded, memorized, and later collected into a single book, the Quran (Recitation), which constitutes the core of the Islamic faith. The Quran is a sacred work in both form and content. Not only does it contain God’s commands, it also represents the direct word of God; its language is therefore divine and unchangeable. Throughout the centuries since the Night of Power, non-Muslims, especially the Christian and Jewish monotheists for whom Islam represented the most direct challenge, have found it difficult to accept the idea that the Quran contains God’s words, not Muhammad’s. The point here is not to debate the contesting claims to religious truth but to insist on the depth of Muhammad’s experience and the utterly convincing language in which that experience was conveyed. The verses of the Quran, especially those from the Meccan period, reveal an individual possessed of a compelling sense of urgency and inspired by a commitment that transcended his previous existence and pushed him into the role for which he believed he had been chosen—as the Prophet of God. Muhammad’s prophethood can be divided into two phases, the period at Mecca (610–622) and the years in Medina (622–632). The difference in the Prophet’s circumstances during these two periods of his life is reflected in the style and content of the revelations. The Quran was revealed in a series of chapters (suras) and is organized according to the length of the chapters, with the longest first and the shortest at the end. The shorter chapters are from the Meccan years, when Muhammad concentrated on establishing the theological foundations of the faith. The central element of the Meccan period was an uncompromising monotheism. As an early Meccan revelation insisted, Say: He is God, One, God, the Everlasting Refuge, who has not begotten, and has not been begotten, and equal to Him is not anyone.(Sura 112)

***The Rise and Expansion of Islam***

The Arabic word for one supreme God, *Allah,* refers to the monotheistic deities of Judaism and Christianity as well as Islam. It is thus incorrect to employ the term *Allah* in an exclusively Islamic context. The term translates as *God,* and that is how it should be employed and understood. What did the omnipotent deity of the Quran want from his human creations? In the Meccan revelations, he demanded that they practice prescribed patterns of worship and behavior. They were to submit to his will and show their gratitude toward him as the provider of the bounties of the earth. Islam means submission, and the followers of the faith, Muslims, are those who have submitted to the will of God. In addition to matters of ritual, God set forth

commandments on how human beings should relate to one another in their daily social intercourse. He warned the people of Mecca to pay more attention to the less fortunate in society and to moderate their search for wealth. The following bluntly critical passage demonstrates God’s displeasure at practices in the Mecca of Muhammad’s day:

No indeed; but you honour not the orphan,

and you urge not the feeding of the needy,

and you devour the inheritance greedily,

and you love wealth with an ardent love.

(Sura 89)

The Quran chastised those who were uncharitable and warned those who felt that their wealth had made them immune from punishment that God would be the final judge of their afterlife. The concept of the Day of Judgment was a central element of the faith. The revelations warned the people of Mecca that their deeds, their attitudes, and even their innermost thoughts would be assessed by the Almighty on Judgment Day. The theology of the Quran was thus basic and straightforward. Humans were instructed to obey the revealed will of an omnipotent God of judgment: Those who accepted him and followed all of his commands would be rewarded with paradise; those who rejected God and deviated from his commands would be condemned to the fires of Gehenna. Muhammad’s preaching attracted few converts and aroused considerable opposition during the Meccan period of his mission. After all, he posed a challenge to the social, economic, and religious structure of the city. Not only did he criticize the attitudes of the wealthy Quraysh merchants, he also condemned the religious practices that made Mecca a prosperous pilgrimage center. As the years passed and the Meccan opposition turned from scorn to threats of physical harm, Muhammad and his followers began to search for a more hospitable location. When an invitation came to them to settle in the city of Yathrib (later Medina), Muhammad accepted it.

Located some 200 miles (322 km) north of Mecca, Medina was a fertile oasis city suffering from the ravages of an extended blood feud among its several tribes. Muhammad was invited as a mediator and was promised by Medinan representatives that any Muslims who accompanied him would receive protection.

In 622 the small community of Muslims gradually migrated from Mecca to Medina. The event, known as the *hijrah* (emigration), marks a turning point in the development of Islam: 622 is the first year of the Muslim calendar. During his ten years in Medina, Muhammad’s status rose dramatically. From a scorned prophet with few followers, he became the head of a small state and the dominant figure throughout Arabia. This transformation was achieved through a combination of warfare, negotiation, and preaching, the success of which seemed to confirm Muhammad’s right not only to prophethood but to political leadership as well. Muhammad consolidated his authority in Medina by convincing influential personalities in the city to embrace Islam and accept his leadership. Once he established his power base, he was able to take measures against the groups that continued to deny his prophetic and political authority. Among the latter were several Jewish tribes whose members would not accept the legitimacy of Muhammad’s claim as the Prophet. Muhammad eventually expelled them from Medina and ordered their property confiscated and distributed among the Muslim emigrants. Even as he was consolidating his position in Medina, Muhammad made plans to bring Mecca into the expanding Islamic community. His strategy was to disrupt the caravan trade on which Mecca’s prosperity depended. Within a year of his arrival in Medina, he ordered the first of what would become an ongoing series of raids on Meccan caravans. The initial raid occurred during one of the sacred pilgrimage months, when, according to established custom, hostilities were to be suspended. This was disturbing to the many Muslims of Medina who continued to respect existing traditions. However, a divine revelation sanctified warfare against unbelievers and designated all Muslims who engaged in spreading Islam through force of arms as deserving of special merit. In retaliation for Muhammad’s attacks on their caravans, the Meccans launched several campaigns against the Muslims in Medina, but each time, the outnumbered Muslim forces managed to hold their own and even to gain limited victories. Muhammad emerged during these encounters as an innovative military tactician, and his success in thwarting the Meccans enhanced his prestige among the neighboring tribes. Many swore their allegiance to him not because they fully understood or accepted the religious message of Islam but because association with Muhammad’s endeavor appeared to guarantee victory, and with victory came the spoils of war. The increasing size of the Prophet’s forces and his effective alliances with the tribes enabled him to stifle the trade of Mecca to the point where the city’s prosperity was seriously threatened. In 630 Muhammad led a force of 10,000 men to the outskirts of Mecca; demonstrating his qualities as a statesman, he promised the inhabitants that their lives would be spared and their property would remain secure if they surrendered the city and accepted Islam. The Quraysh leadership agreed to the terms, and the Prophet made a victorious entry into the city from which he had fled just eight years earlier. According to accounts of the occasion, Muhammad went to the Ka˛aba and had the idols destroyed, proclaiming the shrine sacred to God. Mecca would remain a pilgrimage center, and the Ka’aba would become the focal point of the new faith.In the years between the *hijrah* and the surrender of Mecca, Muhammad’s leadership role became more complex. Medina developed into a small city-state with a treasury, a military, and an ever-increasing number of converts. The content of the Quran reflected the changing circumstances by offering instructions on how the expanded functions of the state were to be organized and how human beings should conduct their relations with one another. In these commandments, the all-embracing nature of Islam was established. For example, contracting a debt agreement as the Quran required—in writing before a witness— was a religious duty, and failure to follow the prescription was a sin. In this way, the details of marriage, inheritance, divorce, diet, and economic practice were made part of the religious experience of Muslims. Muhammad created a community (*ummah*) in which the laws of human behavior in daily life were prescribed by God.

It would be an exaggeration to call Arabia a cohesive, unified state after the surrender of Mecca. Nevertheless, the transformation created by the Prophet had been substantial. He had implanted the core concept of a community of believers united in their recognition of a single Supreme Deity and in their acceptance of that deity’s authority in their daily lives; he had conveyed notions of social morality that forbade alcohol and the blood feud and that recognized the legal status of women and demanded protection for the less fortunate in society. Muhammad combined in his person the roles of prophet, state builder, and social reformer. Today there is much emphasis on the martial elements of Islam, but to comprehend fully Muhammad’s mission, we need to consider the importance of Quranic passages like this one:

Be kind to parents, and the near kinsman,

and to orphans, and to the needy,

and to the neighbour who is of kin,

and to the neighbour who is a stranger,

and to the companion at your side,

and to the traveller.=

(Sura 4)

**THE ARAB CONQUESTS AND THE FIRST EMPIRE**

When Muhammad died in 632, it would not have contradicted historical patterns if Arabia had rejected the Prophet’s summons and taken up the old ways again. Instead, Muslim factions in Mecca and Medina resolved to continue the development of the new religious community and competed with one another to assert their control over it. Because Muhammad had no sons and because the Quran contained no clear instructions on how a successor should be chosen, the question of the leadership of the community was open to different interpretations. The early converts to Islam who had suffered with Muhammad in Mecca and participated in the *hijrah* to Medina preempted all other claimants by naming one of their own, Abu Bakr, as the new head of the community. The other factions accepted Abu Bakr’s leadership, but the dispute over the first succession sowed seeds of conflict that have affected Islam throughout its history. Abu Bakr (632–634) was simply called the successor—*khalif*—anglicized as caliph. Eventually the term *caliph* came to designate the religious and political leader of the Islamic community, and the office became known as the caliphate. Abu Bakr and his three successors, Umar (634–644), Uthman (644–656), and Ali (656–661), are known in Islamic history as the Rashidun (rightly guided) caliphs in recognition of their personal closeness to the Prophet and their presumed adherence to Quranic regulations. Although two of them were assassinated and their reigns were filled with political and social turmoil, Muslims of later and even more troubled times looked back with nostalgia on the era when the four companions of the Prophet launched the movement that thrust the Arabs out of the peninsula and into world history. The second caliph, Umar, recognized the need to direct the raiding instincts of the tribes away from intercommunal conflict and authorized attacks against the southern flanks of Byzantium and Sasanian Iran. Thus began the epoch of the Arab conquests and the building of an Islamic empire. The speed and extent of the Arab conquests were remarkable. In 637 the Arab forces defeated the imperial Sasanian army at the battle of Qadisiyya, an encounter that was quickly followed by the capture of Ctesiphon and the beginning of the difficult Arab campaign across the Iranian plateau toward the Indian subcontinent. Success against Byzantium was equally swift. The Arabs captured Damascus in 635, and in 641 they occupied parts of the rich agricultural province of Egypt. By 670 the western campaign against Byzantine and Berber resistance had reached present-day Tunisia, and in 680 the daring Arab commander Uqba ibn Nafi led a small force from Tunisia through Algeria and Morocco to the Atlantic Ocean. The westward expansion of the Arabs culminated in the conquest of Spain in the first half of the eighth century. Within 100 years of the Prophet’s death, Arab forces had reached the Indian subcontinent in the east, and in the west they had occupied Spain and crossed the Pyrenees into France before they were finally halted by the forces of Charles Martel at the battle of Poitiers in 732. In this first wave of conquests, the Sasanian Empire was completely destroyed and its territory absorbed within an Arab-Muslim administration. Byzantium, although it suffered the loss of its core Middle Eastern and North African provinces, retained control of Anatolia and the Balkans and presented a formidable barrier to Muslim expansion until it was overcome by the Ottomans in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Even more stunning than the speed and extent of the conquests was their durability: With the exception of Spain, which retained an Arab-Islamic presence until the fifteenth century, the areas occupied during the first century of expansion have remained Islamic, if not Arabic, to the present day. In North Africa, as in Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean—the heartlands of Hellenism and early Christianity—and in the long-settled region of Iraq, the Arabic language and the Islamic faith became dominant. Persian language and culture eventually reasserted themselves in Iran, but they were expressed in an Islamic idiom.

The conquests would not have been so swift or so durable without the existence of a combination of social, economic, and religious factors that facilitated the local population’s acceptance of the new Arab rulers. First, as we have discussed earlier, monotheistic religions were widely practiced among the peoples in the conquered territories, and the Islamic assertion of monotheism placed it within the existing religious traditions. Second, Islam manifested considerable tolerance toward non-Muslims. The Quran commanded Muslims to protect “people of the Book”—that is, Jews and Christians who possessed a revealed scripture. In practice, this toleration was extended to the Zoroastrians of Iran and the Hindus of the Indian subcontinent. Forced conversions played only a small part in the Arab conquests, and for at least two centuries the majority of the inhabitants of the Islamic empire were non- Muslims. They were known as *dhimmi*s, a term meaning followers of the religions tolerated by law. *Dhimmi*s were allowed the freedom to practice their religion and to manage their internal affairs through their own religious officials. However, *dhimmi*s were not regarded as the equals of Muslims and were required to pay a special poll tax (*jizyah*); they were prohibited from serving in the military and from wearing certain colors, and their residences and places of worship could not be as large as those of Muslims. Although these and other restrictions constituted a form of discrimination, they represented an unusually tolerant attitude for the era and stood in marked contrast to the practices of the Byzantine Empire.

The taxes imposed by the Arab-Islamic state were less burdensome than those levied by the Byzantine and Sasanian empires. Moreover, the Arab rulers tended to leave existing administrative practices undisturbed and did not interfere with local customs. Although some of the conquered peoples adopted Islam, the Arabs did not encourage conversions during the first century of their rule. This was partly because the *jizyah* constituted an important source of state revenue and partly because the Arabs, at this early stage in the development of Islam, regarded it as an exclusively Arab religion.

**THE FIRST CIVIL WAR AND THE END OF THE RASHIDUN CALIPHATE**

The question of the succession to the caliphate had been largely ignored in the rush of the early conquests. But when the caliph Uthman was murdered by mutinous Arab tribesmen in 656, the succession issue reemerged. It was resolved only after a civil war that left an enduring schism within the Islamic *ummah*. Ali was chosen to succeed the murdered Uthman. Next to the Prophet himself, Ali is the most revered of the founders of Islam: He was the Prophet’s cousin, the husband of the Prophet’s daughter Fatima, and one of the most dedicated of the early converts to Islam. Indeed, in some quarters of the *ummah,* the belief existed that Muhammad had intended for Ali to be his immediate successor. By the time he was finally selected as caliph, Ali represented a broad coalition of interests calling for greater equality among all Muslims, both Arab and non-Arab, and for the restoration of the leadership of the community to the house of Muhammad. But Ali’s right to the caliphate was contested by Muawiyah, the powerful governor of Muslim Syria.

The forces of the two claimants to the leadership met at the battle of Siffin in 657. The results of the encounter were inconclusive, leaving both Ali and Muawiyah in the same positions they had held before the fighting began. In the aftermath of the battle, a substantial portion of Ali’s forces withdrew their support, allowing Muawiyah to expand his power in Syria and Egypt and preventing Ali from establishing his uncontested right to the caliphate. Though Ali set up a capital in Kufa, one of the Arab garrison cities in lower Iraq, his position continued to deteriorate, and he was murdered in 661. Ali’s caliphate was short and divisive but far from inconsequential. It came to represent the validity of the legitimist position of authority within the Islamic *ummah* and, as we will see in later chapters, stood as an enduring symbol of the desire of a substantial minority of Muslims to embrace a communal leader directly descended from the family of the Prophet. Indeed, attachment to the memory of Ali and his family and the tragedy associated with them was infused with such great passion and vitality that it gave rise to a permanent schism within the Islamic community.

**FROM ARAB EXCLUSIVISM TO ISLAMIC UNIVERSALISM: THE UMAYYAD AND ABBASID EMPIRES**

Ali’s passing marked the end of the first phase in the development of the Islamic community and the beginning of a new period of imperial expansion and consolidation. Muawiyah was recognized as caliph throughout the empire and became the founder of the Umayyad dynasty (661–750). He was a pragmatic ruler whose principal concerns were continued expansion of Islam, management of the state’s resources, and consolidation of his dynasty. During his caliphate, the political center of the empire was transferred from Mecca, the small caravan city of its origins, to the ancient city of Damascus, with all its Byzantine associations. Muawiyah adopted certain Byzantine administrative practices and employed former Byzantine officials and craftsmen, initiating the transformation of the Arab empire into a Byzantine successor state and surrounding the caliphate with the trappings of monarchy. Although the conquests continued to bring material wealth to Damascus under Muawiyah’s successors, the Umayyad Empire was troubled by internal dissension. Part of the dissent was caused by the policy of Arab exclusivism adopted by the Umayyad ruling elite. They continued to equate Islam with Arab descent and to administer the empire’s fiscal and social affairs in such a way as to favor the Arabs and to discriminate against the growing number of non-Arab converts to Islam. The discontent culminated in a revolution that overthrew the Umayyad house in 750 and brought to power a new dynasty, that of the Abbasids. The office of the caliphate remained with the Abbasids from 750 to 1258.

Under the Abbasids, the heroic age of the conquests gave way to the development of administrative institutions, commercial enterprises, and a legal system. The bureaucrat, the urban merchant, and the learned judge replaced the Arab warrior as the favored element in society. The consolidation of the conquests in the geographical center of a centuries-old admixture of cultural and religious traditions resulted in a complex interaction between the existing cultures and religions of the Middle East and the dynamic infusion of energy from Arabia. The new and vibrant Islamic civilization that arose found its first, but by no means its last, expression in the period of the high caliphate (750–945) of the Abbasid Empire. The first 150 years of the Abbasid Empire, represented by such caliphs as al-Mansur (754–775), Harun al-Rashid (786–809), and al-Mamun (813–833), were a period of relative political stability, immense economic prosperity, and increasing universalism within the central Islamic domains. These conditions, in turn, created the possibilities for the flowering of a rich and diverse civilization. The Abbasids abandoned the Arab exclusiveness that had generated so much discontent under the Umayyads. In its place, they adopted a universalist policy accepting the equality of all Muslims, regardless of their ethnic origins. This attitude, coupled with the revitalization of urban life and the expansion of commercial activity, led to a growing cosmopolitanism within the empire as converts from among the conquered peoples participated fully in the economic and political life of the state. The universalism of the Abbasids was symbolized by yet another transfer of the imperial capital, this time from the predominantly Arab city of Damascus eastward to a newly created city, Baghdad, which the caliph al-Mansur established on the west bank of the Tigris. The change of location brought the Islamic political center into more direct contact with Iranian imperial traditions, with their emphasis on royal absolutism and bureaucratic specialization, and added yet another layer of influences to the Arab and Byzantine experiences of the Islamic state. Abbasid administration was modeled on Sasanian government and employed large numbers of converted Iranians in its increasingly elaborate bureaucratic structure. Sasanian practices also had an impact on the office of the caliphate. During the era of the Rashidun, the caliphs functioned as first among equals and lived modestly on the model established by Muhammad. This emphasis on simplicity changed under the later Umayyads, who distanced themselves from the population, took pleasure from the riches that flowed into the treasury at Damascus, and became less consultative and more authoritarian. The Abbasid rulers, with their more direct exposure to the Iranian idea of an absolute king of kings, carried the evolution of the caliphate to absolutist monarchy further than any of their predecessors. The Abbasid caliphs lived in luxurious palaces, isolated from all but their most trusted inner circle of courtiers and advisers. They came to identify themselves not simply as successors to the Prophet but as “shadows of God on earth,” and they exercised vast powers over their subjects. Thus the Abbasid solution to the problem of political authority was to centralize it and to place it in the hands of an absolute monarch who exercised the powers of both secular king and spiritual head of the Islamic *ummah.* For nearly two centuries following the revolution of 750, this Abbasid formula worked reasonably well and brought to the empire unprecedented prosperity, dazzling intellectual achievement, and general political stability based on the widespread acceptance of the benefits of caliphal absolutism. But no monarch could maintain absolute control of an empire that stretched from Morocco to India. In the late eighth century, North Africa slipped away from Baghdad’s authority and became a region of autonomous Islamic states.

During the ninth century, independent and often short-lived dynasties rose and fell in various parts of Iran. Yet despite the emergence of new centers of power, the Abbasid caliphs remained the dominant rulers of the Middle East until the tenth century, and the imperial court at Baghdad set a style of royal behavior that was imitated in provincial capitals and breakaway dynasties throughout the vast territories in which Islam had become established.

**CONCLUSION**

In the historically short span of time from the Prophet Muhammad’s death in 632 to the transfer of the imperial capital from Damascus to Baghdad in the 750s, the Islamic *ummah* had expanded from its Arab origins to embrace a universal world empire. The epoch of the Arab conquests constitutes a decisive period in world history, one that transformed a nomadic desert population organized along tribal lines into the ruling elite of an imperial structure concentrated in the heartlands of classical antiquity. Arabic replaced Greek, Persian, Aramaic, and other established literary traditions as the language of administration and high culture; Islam replaced, though it did not eliminate, Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and paganism as the dominant religion in the Middle East. This process of replacement raises important questions. In its interaction with the existing literary, religious, and administrative traditions of Byzantium and Iran, how could the Islam of the revelations, the Islam of the Prophet’s caravan city of Mecca, survive as a guide to administrative, economic, and social practices? How could the peoples living within the territories of the extensive Arab conquests, with their long-established traditions, be organized to obey the commands on proper human behavior that God revealed to a Meccan merchant in seventh-century Arabia? In developing answers to these questions, or simply in developing certain patterns of living and worship, Muslims affirmed their belief in the validity of Muhammad’s mission by creating a civilization centered on the revelations contained in the Quran.

**The Development of Islamic Civilization to the Fifteenth Century**

**PATTERNS OF ISLAMIC HISTORY**

Islamic history is sometimes treated as the rise and decline of the Abbasid Empire. In this version of the Islamic past, the chronological signposts are presented in the following manner: During the years from 750 to 945, an absolutist empire centered in Baghdad experienced a period of economic growth, cultural richness, and political stability that made it the dominant world power of the era. In 945 an Iranian military dynasty, the Buyids, took over temporal power in Baghdad, reducing the caliph to a figurehead and ensuring that the Iranian ruler exercised decisionmaking authority in the Abbasid Empire. According to this interpretation, the weaknesses that beset the Abbasids in the late tenth century caused Islam to enter into a long period of political and cultural decline that was intensified by the empire’s destruction in 1258 and continued until the consolidation of the Ottoman Empire in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

Although the dates in the above account are correct, this interpretation, with its exclusive focus on the Abbasid Empire and its linking of the decline of that empire with the decline of Islam, is misleading. Even when the Abbasids were at the peak of their power, other Islamic dynasties and cultures were being formed. Their achievements were as important for the development of universal Islam as were those of the Abbasids. In an attempt to conceptualize the stages of Islamic history, Marilyn Waldman has suggested that rather than viewing the Abbasid Empire as the core around which a series of lesser Islamic states revolved, we should instead think in terms of a group of regional Islamic empires, each of which developed a particular synthesis of local and Islamic practices. Waldman’s perspective enables us to see that at the same time that Baghdad flourished, so, too, did distinctive and wealthy royal courts in Delhi, Ghazna, Cairo, Córdoba, and other regions. There was no single Islamic polity or culture that was tied to the fate of the Abbasids in Baghdad. The regional empires (or regional dynasties, as some prefer to call them) expanded and enriched Islamic traditions in areas that lay outside the Abbasid domains. Thus, although the fall of the Abbasid Empire in 1258 resulted in considerable political fragmentation, it did not lead to a “dark age” of Islamic culture, nor did it create a political vacuum in the central Islamic lands. This is not to deny the important role played by Baghdad and other leading cities of the Abbasid Empire in nurturing and disseminating Islamic legal, intellectual, political, and religious traditions. However, ideas that originated in Baghdad were often received and applied somewhat differently in the provincial capitals or in the cities of the other regional empires. Scholars who emphasize the significance of regional Islamic empires seek to demonstrate the existence of Islamic pluralism across time and space. Islamic societies were dynamic and diverse, not static and monolithic; they included areas as different as India and Syria, Egypt and Spain. It should again be stressed that the fate of the Abbasid Empire itself was not fully reflective of the fate of Islam in the period from roughly AD 1000 to 1500. This is not to suggest that the late and post- Abbasid eras were without political turmoil or economic problems but, rather, that the durability of Islam as the first truly global civilization demonstrates the existence of a constant process of renewal from one Islamic region to another. Because Islam was universal, a period of stagnation in one segment of the *ummah* might be reversed by an infusion of intellectual, economic, or military energy from another. Thus, a constant process of renewal and preservation was taking place in various quarters of the Islamic world. There is no question that the destruction of the Abbasid Empire and the death of the last caliph were significant historical events, but we should not conclude that they marked the decline of Islamic civilization. The Abbasid successor states and the Islamic regional empires preserved and enriched Islamic cultural and religious traditions in the centuries after the sack of Baghdad.

**THE CREATION AND USES OF WEALTH**

The advent of the Abbasid Empire ushered in an era of economic prosperity that led to a revival of urban life and the expansion of trade and industry not only within the Abbasid domains but throughout the world of Islam. Baghdad, nourished by the produce of the carefully controlled irrigation systems of the lower Tigris-Euphrates, grew into a huge cosmopolitan city with a population that may have reached 1 million inhabitants in the ninth century. Referred to by contemporaries as the navel of the universe, the Abbasid capital was the hub of a vast trading network that linked it to China, India, Africa, and the entire Mediterranean region (In bringing these diverse regions into sustained commercial contact with one another, Islamic merchants created an international market in which the products of India and Southeast Asia were exchanged for the goods of Spain and the Mediterranean lands. Cities became centers of production and consumption, and urban life flourished in bustling ports like Fustat, Almería in Spain, and Basra, the home of Sindbad the Sailor in the tales of the *1,001 Nights*. The long-distance caravan trade revived existing inland cities such as Damascus and Aleppo and generated tremendous population and commercial growth in Marv, Samarkand, and Bukhara, the eastern cities that acted as way stations along the Silk Route to China. Merchants exploited the commercial opportunities of the expanding international marketplace to acquire huge fortunes. Their wealth gave them status and enabled them to play a prominent role in shaping the contours of Islamic society as it emerged during this period. Increased agricultural production fostered the rise of large urban centers and contributed to the extraordinary prosperity that characterized the Islamic empires of the eighth through twelfth centuries. The growth in agriculture was made possible by the transfer of crops from India to the Middle East and the Mediterranean basin, a process that created the most significant agricultural revolution in world history between the adoption of sedentary agriculture and the European discovery of the Americas. Following the Arab conquest of Sind (Pakistan) in the early eighth century, crops from the subtropical climate of India were transported to the Fertile Crescent, Egypt, Africa, and Islamic Spain. In all of these regions, the newly introduced crops became such staples that we tend to think of them as having been part of the cultivated landscape since classical antiquity. But such food crops as rice, sugarcane, lemons, limes, bananas, date palms, spinach, and eggplant as well as the industrial crop cotton were all brought by the Arabs from India to Iraq and then disseminated across North Africa to Spain and other parts of Europe.

Through their conquests and settlement of diverse climatic regions and the establishment of trading networks connecting those regions, the Arabs, a people whose immediate pre-Islamic existence was not primarily associated with sedentary agriculture, acted as the catalysts for an agricultural revolution that had an impact on the clothes people wore, the foods they consumed, and the ways in which the majority of them organized their working lives. The wealth generated from the produce of the land and the profits of commerce enabled Abbasid high society to enjoy a refined style of living surrounded by luxuries of regional and distant origin. The royal family established a pattern of patronage that benefited artisans, physicians, and writers, especially Arabic poets. This pattern was imitated by rich merchants and high ranking functionaries in both Baghdad and the provincial capitals. It contributed to the widespread florescence of a rich literary and scientific culture and imprinted on a certain segment of Islamic society the notion that to be great and powerful involved more than having an army; it also meant having a court of poets, scholars, and physicians. In the centuries to come, local rulers would nurture literature and learning even as they sought political separation from the Abbasid caliph, showing that their aspirations for power were firmly grounded in the high Islamic cultural tradition. The intellectual adventure of high Islamic society was not limited to poetry and the decorative arts. Ideas, like material goods, were transported back and forth along the caravan routes and sea-lanes, and noted scholars were recruited by caliphs and princes alike to adorn their courts. Muslim mathematicians, working within the Indian and Persian traditions, made lasting contributions to algebra (from the Arabic word *al-jabr*) and trigonometry. Muslim astronomers, physicians, and chemists produced works that influenced the development of the natural sciences in European as well as Muslim intellectual circles. The patronage of the Abbasid caliph al-Mamun (813–833) helped launch the movement that recovered the works of the noted Greek philosophers and physicians, among them Aristotle, Plato, and Galen, and translated them from Greek into Arabic in state-sponsored translation academies. The presence of the classical Greek tradition in Arabic editions compelled Muslim scholars to grapple with a human-centered philosophical tradition and produced two of the most noted Aristotelian commentators of the Middle Ages, Ibn Sina (Avicenna in Latin; 980–1037), a physician employed in a number of royal courts in eastern Iran, and Ibn Rushd (Averroës in Latin; 1126–1198), a Muslim jurist from Córdoba. The appearance of Arabic editions of Aristotle in regions as distant from one another as Spain and eastern Iran is evidence of the mobility of ideas within the global civilization of Islam. The diffusion of both secular ideas and Islamic religious doctrine was facilitated by the widespread manufacture and use of paper in the Islamic territories. Paper manufacturing is generally believed to have originated in China in the first century BC. It entered the world of Islam following an Arab victory over a Chinese force east of the Aral Sea in 751. Among the prisoners taken in the clash were some Chinese papermakers whose skills were transmitted to Muslim craftsmen. Paper was introduced to Baghdad in the late eighth century and made its appearance in Spain by 900 at a time when Western societies still depended on papyrus and parchment. Within another century, the manufacture of paper had spread across the world of Islam, with centers of production located in Samarkand in Central Asia and Valencia in Spain. From the eighth century onward, Islam became a global civilization in which knowledge, technology, and artistic tastes were transported back and forth across a vast domain. Because of the very diversity and extent of the territories in which Islam became a prominent religious force, a variety of regional practices and interpretations imparted special characteristics to Islamic cultures in different parts of the world. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, no single political or cultural unit embraced the totality of Islam. Some scholars now point to the existence of several Islams coexisting in vibrant diversity yet united in acceptance of the message of the Quran and the core requirements of ritual. It is to those that we now turn.

**ISLAMIC RITUALS AND INSTITUTIONS**

The view, often expressed in the West, that the organization of Islamic social and political life is based solely on the revelations contained in the Quran is incorrect and ignores the complex historical evolution of Islam. From the very first conquests under the Rashidun caliphs and continuing on through the Abbasids, the emerging class of Islamic scholars made a sustained effort to accommodate the Quranic revelations to the traditions of the long-established cultures over which the caliphs came to rule. This effort at synthesis led to the elaboration of theology and to the development of a comprehensive legal system based on the Quran but not restricted to it. At the popular level, the establishment of a universally accepted set of rituals provided Muslims with a sense of common identity and gave an Islamic dimension to their daily lives.

Yet even as Islamic scholars sought to unify doctrine and ritual, the faith continued to attract a great diversity of peoples who brought to the emerging Islamic tradition a rich variety of cultural backgrounds and religious experiences. This interplay between unity and diversity was a constant feature of formative Islam; the faith was flexible enough to embrace new practices and accommodate regional variations but still rigorous enough to preserve its core identity.

***The Five Pillars of Faith***

Islamic ritual is the institutionalized form through which all believers submit themselves to God and acknowledge his omnipotence. Although a discussion of ritual cannot convey to an outsider the true meaning of Islam for a practicing Muslim, it can provide insight into the exacting demands and the communal emphasis of Islamic worship. This worship is based on the five pillars of faith.

**Proclamation of Faith (*Shahadah*).** With the words “I attest that there is only one God and Muhammad is his Prophet,” Muslims affirm their faith in Islam. As noted previously, the basic religious principle of Islam is monotheism. The deity of the Quran is an all-powerful, righteous God of judgment whose commands are not to be questioned. The second element of the faith is the acceptance of Muhammad’s role as the final Prophet of God. According to the Quran, Muhammad was not only the transmitter of the divine message, he was designated as the Seal of the Prophets, the last in the long line of human beings who had received and transmitted God’s word. The Quran recognizes the missions of earlier prophets but contends that the commands they conveyed have been forgotten. Islam was therefore portrayed not as a new religion but as the revival of the true word of God that had been revealed to Abraham and to other prophets throughout the course of human history. Over time, human beings in their weakness either ignored or perverted the revelations of these prophets. Through Muhammad, the all-merciful God for one last time revealed his will to his human creations. There would be no future opportunities to receive God’s plan; there would be no prophets after Muhammad. God’s designation of an Arab prophet and the Arabic language as the vehicles for his final revelation was of the utmost significance for the Arabs’ sense of themselves and their role in human history.

**Prayer (*Salat*).** Muslims are instructed to perform the ritual prayer five times daily at intervals from dawn to sunset. This is not a casual communication with God but a rigorously prescribed set of movements and recitations during which believers face in the direction of the holy Ka’a ba in Mecca and acknowledge total submission to God by touching their foreheads to the ground. The daily prayers are most often performed in the workplace or the home. The Muslim day of communal worship is Friday, and the noon prayer on that day is the moment when the members of the *ummah* gather in the large congregational mosques.

**Fasting (*Sawm*).** The Quran commands all adult Muslims whose health permits to abstain from food, drink, and sexual activity from dawn to dusk during the month of Ramadan, the month in which Muhammad received the first revelations. Fasting is a time of atonement and a reminder, through abstention, of God’s generosity in providing for his human creations.

**The Pilgrimage to Mecca (*Hajj*).** Muhammad incorporated the Ka˛ba, the existing shrine of Mecca, into Islam and made it the key sanctuary of the new faith, associating its origins with the figure of Abraham. According to the Quran, Muslims should make the pilgrimage to Mecca and its shrine at least once in their lives, though the duty is most explicitly directed at those who can afford the journey and whose working lives will not be unduly disrupted by the lengthy travel time required. As with prayer, the rites of pilgrimage are institutionalized; the ceremony occurs during a certain month and involves specific obligations. Throughout the centuries, the pilgrimage has served as a reminder to Muslims the world over of their shared faith. The duty of the caliph, as the guardian of the holy cities, to keep the pilgrimage route safe has been one of the most sacred administrative trusts.

**Alms (*Zakat*).** This duty is part of the concept of charity to the less fortunate that appears frequently in the revelations. *Zakat* is an annual wealth tax all Muslims must pay. Although the Quran does not specify the amount of the *zakat*, it developed in practice as 2.5 percent of a person’s accumulated wealth and assets and was collected by the central treasury.

***Jihad***

The obligation of *jihad*, although not a formal part of ritual, constitutes an integral component of Islamic doctrine. The basic meaning of *jihad* is striving in the path of God. This can refer to an individual’s inner struggle against sinful inclinations or to an exceptional effort for the good of the Islamic community. Certain modern Muslim writers have thus emphasized the need to internalize *jihad* in order to achieve religious reform. *Jihad* has also been invoked by late twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century movements as an instrument of political protest. These movements have defined the incumbent regimes, whether in Egypt or elsewhere, as irreligious and have claimed that it is therefore necessary to overthrow them by means of a popular *jihad*. In addition to its spiritual connotations, *jihad* means armed struggle against non-Muslims for the purpose of expanding or defending the territory under Muslim rule. *Jihad*, then, is a nuanced doctrine, and rendering it simply as “holy war” is incorrect and should be avoided.

***The Shariah: The Integration of Religion and Society***

The five pillars constitute the essential framework of Muslim worship. But the Quranic revelations were intended to direct all the affairs of the *ummah*, including relations among human beings. As the Islamic state expanded into a world empire, its leaders encountered new situations and adopted administrative practices not found in the Quran. How was the Quran, revealed in Mecca and Medina and responsive to the needs of those small Arabian cities, to be employed as the code of conduct for an empire stretching from Spain to Central Asia? Conversely, if the reason for the existence of the Islamic *ummah* was to ensure that human society conducted itself according to the commands of God, how could the community justify the use of practices not found in the Quran?

From the eighth through the tenth centuries, much of the intellectual energy of Muslim thinkers was directed toward these issues, with the aim of devising a uniform legal system that would recognize the requirements of imperial administration and the value of local customs while remaining true to the concept of a community guided by divine revelation. The result of these efforts was the compilation of the *shariah*, the all-embracing sacred law of the Islamic community. The *shariah* is not a single code of law; rather, it consists of four different sources to which legal experts may refer when assessing the propriety of human actions. The first source is, of course, the Quran. But the Quran, though it sets forth clear moral guidelines and precise instructions on matters of marriage, divorce, and inheritance, does not address all of the practical legal issues that might arise in society. In order to fill in details not directly addressed in the Quran, Muslim jurists came to a consensus on the permissibility of employing three additional sources of law. The first and most important of these is the tradition of the Prophet, known as *sunnah*. Muslim scholars agreed that since God had chosen Muhammad to receive the final revelation, he must have possessed exemplary human qualities. Therefore, the words and actions of Muhammad in his daily life were taken as divinely approved guides for human conduct. This source of law became codified as scholars sifted through the many stories (*hadith*) about Muhammad that were in general circulation. Those accounts that could be verified on the basis of the reliability of the original eyewitness and of the individuals who transmitted them over the years were accepted as genuine and were used by legal experts in their assessment of proper conduct. The second additional source of law is analogy (*qiyas*). When jurists encountered a situation for which there was no direct precedent in the Quran or *hadith* literature, they assessed it on the basis of principles previously accepted for a similar situation. The third supplementary source is the consensus of the community (*ijma*). As consensus developed in practice, it referred to decisions made by the leading scholars and jurists of the community. When they collectively agreed that certain practices were forbidden or permitted, their decisions became part of the *shariah*. The exercise of applying informed human reasoning to points not covered in the Quran was known as *ijtihad*; it represented the right of learned scholars to interpret the intent of God’s revelations and provided Islamic jurisprudence with an evolutionary capability.

It is important to recognize that the three supplementary sources of law, even though they involve an element of human reasoning, are based on the principles of the Quran and thus on the will of God. The *shariah* is divine law intended to regulate all human activities and to empower Muslim jurists to assess the legality of the actions of individuals on the basis of their compliance with God’s commands.

The compilation of the *shariah* was accompanied by the parallel elaboration of a practical system of justice with courts, rules of evidence, and properly trained officials. The judges (*qadi*s) who presided over the *shariah* courts were appointed by the state, and their application of the sacred law strengthened *shariah*-based norms within society. The office of *qadi* became so essential a component of Islamic societies that it virtually defined them as Islamic. Where there was a *qadi*, there was the presence of Islamic law.

***The Role of the Ulama***

It is often asserted that there is no priesthood in Islam. To the extent that there are no human intermediaries between the individual believer and God, the statement is correct. However, for a religion to survive and retain its vitality, there must exist individuals trained in doctrine and prepared to transmit it. In Islamic society this group is known as the ulama (literally, those who know). Because of the wide scope that Islam plays in the regulation of human affairs, the ulama perform a variety of functions within Islamic society. Since the governing law is God’s law, the scholars who compiled the *shariah*, the judges who applied it in the Islamic courts, and the legal experts who advised the judges were considered part of the ulama establishment; and since the most important form of knowledge was knowledge of religion, the teachers in the mosque schools and universities, too, were members of the ulama, as were the mosque preachers and the prayer leaders. This broadly based group of teachers, religious scholars, and legal functionaries occupied a central position in Islamic society. They were the guardians of the high scholarly tradition, the formulators of doctrine, the compilers of the *shariah*, and the transmitters of religious knowledge.

In the eleventh century the central government in Baghdad established a formal system of higher education designed to ensure uniform training for the ulama. The schools of instruction, called *madrasah*s, offered standardized training in Arabic, Islamic jurisprudence, Quranic exegesis, and the like. One result of this educational effort was to mold the ulama into a class committed to a

standard orthodox vision of Islam and to the state that promised to uphold it. In addition, the spread of the *madrasah* system from Baghdad to other Islamic centers served to provide the ulama with a relatively standard form of training and thus contributed to the maintenance of a certain unity in the Islamic scholarly tradition.

*Sufism*

The learned Islamic tradition represented by the ulama, though providing a measure of uniformity to law and doctrine, did not necessarily fulfill popular religious needs. The Arab conquests brought peoples of such diverse local cultures and religious experiences into the *ummah* that a mingling of existing forms of worship with Islamic ritual was to be expected. One of the strengths of formative Islam was the recognition that different manifestations of popular piety would have to be tolerated within the *ummah*. The official ulama establishment at first resisted and then accepted the existence of popular religious practices. However, the ulama persisted in their attempts to keep such practices within an Islamic frame of reference. Sufism, or Islamic mysticism, embodies a rich variety of religious experiences. It began as an ascetic movement among individuals who opposed the worldliness and materialism of the Umayyad court in Damascus. During the ninth century Sufism evolved into a devotional movement centered on the love of God. Sufi worship acquired ecstatic characteristics, and its practices spread among the population in the central Islamic lands. In place of the formal intellectualism of the ulama, Sufism represented emotional religious experience, an attempt to attain closer communion with God; in the Islamic context, this meant to come as close to God as Muhammad had done.

The development of Sufism followed a general pattern: Groups of devotees would gather around a local religious figure whose stature was based on his or her ability to attain communion with God through special ritual practices that might include breathing exercises, the chanting of phrases from the Quran, or physical movements such as rhythmic dancing, all of which were intended to put the participant in a state to reach out to God. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, groups of Sufis who practiced the same ritual and followed the same master formed themselves into structured brotherhoods (*tariqah*s). Although most brotherhood organizations were local, several established regional branches, and a few managed to set up networks throughout the world of Islam. In many locales the brotherhoods became the centers of communal volunteer activities, distributing food to the poor, organizing relief in times of famine or illness, and in general serving as a focal point of social as well as religious life. For the majority of Muslims, spiritual fulfillment was found in the Sufi experience. Just as the *shariah* bound society together under a uniform legal system, the brotherhoods functioned as a structured subsystem in which diverse emotive practices found an outlet within an Islamic framework.

*The Status of Women in the Quran*

As with other features of Islam during its formative centuries, the social and legal status of women underwent considerable change. Moreover, women’s roles in society differed depending on the social class to which they belonged and the region of the Islamic world in which they lived. Although there were many variables shaping the roles of women throughout Islamic history, the Quran set forth guidelines that were intended to improve their status in seventh-century Arabia.

The Quranic reforms concentrated on the areas of marriage, divorce, and inheritance. In pre-Islamic Arabia, women were sold to their husbands by their family or tribe in exchange for a dowry. The Quran prohibited this practice by making the dowry payable to the bride alone, not to her family, thus giving women the legal right to own material wealth. In addition, the wife was allowed to keep the dowry even if the marriage ended in divorce.

Another marriage reform was contained in the Quranic injunction that restricted to four the number of wives a man could have and in the admonition that if a husband feared he could not treat each of his wives equally, he should marry only one. This proclamation is often misunderstood because it is not placed in historical context. Polygamy was unlimited in pre-Islamic Arabia, and the Quranic prohibition against taking more than four wives was indeed a reform. Prior to the advent of Islam, divorce was a completely unregulated male prerogative among the Arabs of the peninsula. Quranic legislation managed to curtail the unbridled rights of husbands to divorce their wives, but husbands were still able to repudiate their wives without stating a cause, a practice that sustained male domination in marriages. Women, who had no divorce rights in pre-Islamic times, did acquire them through the *shariah*. However, a wife’s ability to initiate divorce remained limited and involved far more complex legal processes than prevailed for husbands.

In the realm of inheritance, the regulations of the Quran instituted major advances for women. Whereas before Islam women were completely excluded from inheriting, the Quran decreed that wives, daughters, sisters, and grandmothers were entitled to fixed shares of the deceased’s estate. To be sure, the proportion of the estate assigned to females was less than that to which males were entitled, but the very act of granting women legal status as inheritors represented a profound change from existing Arab practices. Women were acknowledged as having economic rights and were therefore given legal status within the community of Islam.

Notwithstanding the Quran’s reformist attitude toward gender relationships, the divine revelations did not accord women equal status with men. For example, the Quran stated that “men are the managers of the affairs of women for that God has preferred in bounty one of them over another” (Sura 4). And as the expansion of Islam brought the Arabs into contact with other cultures and required them to adapt to urban life, the reformist tendencies of the Quran were abandoned. In the regulations of the *shariah* as well as in the customs of everyday life, the status of women declined.

**TWO VERSIONS OF LEADERSHIP: SUNNI CALIPH AND SHIA IMAM**

The Islamic community is divided into two major branches, Sunnis and Shias (or Shiites). The fundamental difference between them is over who should hold the political leadership of the Islamic community and what the religious dimension of that leadership should be. Sunni Muslims accept the legality of the selection of the Rashidun caliphs and their successors, the Umayyads and the Abbasids. They acknowledge the caliphs as mortal beings with no divine powers. Thus, although the caliphs represented the religious leadership of the community, their authority was temporal, and they left matters of doctrine and jurisprudence to the ulama. The caliphs were responsible for upholding the *shariah* and ensuring that opportunities for the fulfillment of an Islamic way of life prevailed within the community. The term *Sunni* is derived from the word *sunnah*, meaning tradition or custom, and is used in this context to refer to those Muslims who followed the custom of the community. Sunnis constitute the vast majority of Muslims in the world and are sometimes designated as orthodox Muslims, though that definition is misleading.

The Shias contend that with the exception of Ali and his descendants, all of the caliphs were usurpers. They also hold a much different view than the Sunnis of the religious functions the leader of the community is empowered to exercise. Although Shia doctrine was elaborated over the course of several centuries, the core of the Sunni-Shia split originated in the years immediately following the death of the Prophet Muhammad.

As discussed above, disputes over the succession to the caliphate led to a Muslim civil war that pitted the supporters of Ali, the Prophet’s cousin and son-in-law, against the forces of Muawiyah, the founder of the Umayyad dynasty. Although the civil war produced no clear victor, Ali’s murder in 661 enabled Muawiyah to secure his claim to the caliphate and to make certain that his son, Yazid, succeeded him. During the first year of Yazid’s reign (680), the shia (partisans) of Ali persuaded Ali’s son, Husayn, to lead a rebellion against the Umayyads. In the Shia version of the history of this episode, Husayn was motivated by a desire to reverse the secularizing and materialist tendencies of the Umayyads and to redirect the community along the path that Muhammad had prescribed for it. But the popular support Husayn had been promised failed to materialize, and in 680 the grandson of the Prophet and his small band of followers were killed by Umayyad forces at the town of Karbala in Iraq. This was a seminal event in the development of Shiism: Shias viewed Husayn’s rebellion as a protest against Umayyad tyranny, and his death took on the aura of martyrdom. Karbala developed into the holiest shrine of Shiism, and the annual rites of mourning for Husayn at that site became the most important religious ceremony in the Shia calendar. From a doctrinal perspective, Husayn’s death became a symbol of the suffering to which the forces of oppression had subjected the Prophet’s family and the usurpation of that family’s right to rule. Husayn’s martyrdom thus solidified the Shias’ belief that the individuals most qualified to hold supreme political authority over the Islamic community were the descendants of the Prophet through the line of Ali and his wife, Fatima, the Prophet’s daughter. The Shias hold that Muhammad had selected Ali as his successor and that each of the Shia leaders (Imams) since that time had designated his successor before his death. This process was continuous from Ali, regarded as the first Imam, to the twelfth Imam, who (as explained below) has been ascribed a major part in Shia Islam. As Shia doctrine evolved in the decades after Husayn’s martyrdom, it accorded the Imams a special religious role that the Sunni caliphs did not have. Shiism maintains that Muhammad was granted divine inspiration that he in turn transmitted to Ali and that was then passed to the designated Imams after him. Even though Sunni dominance prevented these Imams from exercising political authority, Shias consider them the vessels through which God provided his uninterrupted guidance to human society. The Shia Imams are regarded as having been divinely inspired; they possessed esoteric knowledge not granted to other humans, including knowledge of the hidden meanings of the Quran, and were therefore able to offer infallible pronouncements on religious law and to provide interpretations that took into consideration changing circumstances.

Shia doctrine took on added complexity, and added importance for the history of the modern Middle East, by the way it interpreted events involving the twelfth Imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi. According to the majority Shia position, sometimes called Twelver Shiism, the twelfth Imam entered into a condition of occultation in the year 874. He disappeared but did not die; he was— and, over eleven centuries later, remains—concealed by God. At some point before the Day of Judgment, he will return as the Mahdi, the expected one, and will fill the earth with justice.

Shia doctrine accords al-Mahdi the status of the Hidden Imam who, because he is still alive, continues to exercise control over human affairs. However, this notion posed both political and religious problems for the Shia community.

How was the community to be guided in the absence of the Hidden Imam? How was his divine inspiration to be communicated to his followers? Chapter 6 examines the process by which the Shia ulama in Iran established their claim to represent the Hidden Imam, a claim that had important consequences for the shaping of modern Iranian society. The followers of another version of Shiism, known as Ismailis or Seveners, differ from the Twelvers in their interpretation of the line of succession between the seventh and eighth Imams. They contend that the imamate has continued uninterrupted to the present day, and they follow the Aga Khan as their infallible Imam.

**THE MIDDLE EAST FROM THE ELEVENTH TO THE FIFTEENTH CENTURIES: AN OVERVIEW**

During the eleventh century, military power and the ruling authority that went with it passed from Arabs to Turks in the central Islamic lands. Turkish pastoral nomads from Asia had been in contact with Islam from the early period of the Arab conquests, and Turks had served as professional soldiers in the armies of various Abbasid caliphs. Several of the Turkish tribes on the frontier of settlement along the Oxus River had adopted Sunni Islam; when they eventually entered the central Islamic territories they did so as defenders of the faith, not as agents of its destruction.

By the middle of the eleventh century, a confederation of Turkish tribes known as the Seljuks had established domination over Iran, and in 1055 the Abbasid caliph invited the Seljuk leader to assume administrative and military authority in Baghdad. The Turkish Seljuks became the lieutenants of the caliph and the defenders of the high Islamic tradition. In this capacity, the Seljuk sultans (temporal rulers) created a huge empire stretching from northeastern Iran through the Arab lands. In the period of Seljuk ascendancy, other Turkish tribes migrated westward and established a permanent Turkish presence in northwestern Iran and the Caucasus region. ***Following the Seljuks’ defeat of the Byzantine army at the battle of Manzikert in 1071, these migrating tribes moved into Anatolia and began the gradual transformation of that land from a Greek-speaking Christian territory to a Turkish-speaking Muslim one***. Despite the Seljuks’ early success at empire building, they were unable to maintain lasting central authority over the territories under their control. By 1157 their empire had broken up into a series of smaller successor states ruled, for the most part, by Seljuk princes. But the Seljuk period had lasting importance. It demonstrated the absorptive qualities of Islam, as the Turks adjusted quickly to urban life and adopted the high cultural traditions of Islam, such as patronage of the arts, sponsorship of architecture, and respect for the *shariah* and the ulama. In addition, the Seljuks were responsible for a rejuvenation ofSunni Islam; it was the Seljuk minister Nizam al-Mulk who founded the *madrasah* system of state-sponsored education for the ulama. Moreover, theSeljuks expanded the domains of Islam into eastern Anatolia, thus laying thegroundwork for the emergence of the Ottoman state, the most imposing of allthe Islamic empires.

Following the breakup of the Seljuk Empire, western Iran and the central Arab lands were divided among several ruling dynasties. Although these states were not major powers, they were more than mere city-states, commanding sufficient resources to enable their princes to maintain luxurious courts and continue the tradition of offering patronage to poets and scholars. It was into this politically fragmented Middle Eastern world of the eleventh and twelfth centuries that the European Crusaders made their first appearance and established the four Latin kingdoms of Edessa, Antioch, Tripoli, and Jerusalem. After slightly less than 200 years of troubled occupation of the region and the launching of several Crusades, the Europeans were ejected from the eastern Mediterranean. Other than leading to the creation of a spirit of resistance and cooperation among rulers in Syria and Egypt, whose combined efforts led to the Crusaders’ defeat, the influence of the Crusades was minimal. A far more serious threat to the Islamic world came from the east. During the thirteenth century, all of the Islamic lands from India to Syria suffered the effects of the Mongol conquests. Unlike the Arab conquests of the seventh and eighth centuries, which brought a new religious and social order, or the Seljuk expansion in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, which invigorated the existing Islamic institutions, the Mongol invasions appeared to have little purpose other than *conquest and destruction*. They devastated Iraq and Iran. The first wave of invasions took place in the 1220s under the leadership of Genghis Khan, whose armies vanquished the important commercial cities of Samarkand and Bukhara and brought all of Iran under Mongol influence. In 1256 another Mongol campaign was launched against the west by Genghis Khan’s son Hülagü, whose objective was to conquer all of the Islamic lands as far as Egypt. In 1258 his forces defeated the caliph’s army and then sacked the city of Baghdad and killed the Abbasid caliph, thus toppling the institution that had served as the symbol of universal Islam for 500 years. The Mongol destruction of Baghdad also brought to an end that city’s role as an important center of commercial and intellectual life. Although the rise of other Islamic cities had caused Baghdad to lose its dominance well before the Mongol conquest, it had nevertheless remained the seat of the caliphs and the symbolic center of Islam. After 1258, the once thriving imperial capital was reduced to the status of a provincial city, and its population, economy, and influence declined precipitously. Hülagü did not achieve his ambition of conquering Egypt. In 1260 the forces of the Mamluks, a new Turkish military sultanate based in Cairo, defeated the Mongols in a battle fought north of Jerusalem. As a result of their victory, the Mamluks became the masters of Syria and ruled it and Egypt until 1517. The rule of the Mamluks was not without turbulence, but its persistence for a period of over 250 years shows once again the significance of the Turkish role in governing Middle Eastern Islamic states from the eleventh century onward. The Mamluk defeat of Hülagü’s forces did not end the wave of invasions from the east. From 1381 to 1404, the armies of Timur Lang (Tamerlane) laid waste to large portions of Iran, defeated the Turkish princes of Anatolia, and sacked Damascus. Although Timur conquered vast territories, he did not construct a stable empire. Following his death in 1405, Anatolia and the Arab lands were once again fragmented into several small dynastic states.

**CONCLUSION**

Following the military victories of the Arab warriors, the Quraysh administrators and merchants consolidated the conquests and ensured that the production and distribution of resources in the conquered territories were not unduly disturbed. In this process of consolidation, local customs were often allowed to continue, and certain existing practices were incorporated into the Islamic tradition.

But throughout this pragmatic creation of an empire, an Islamic impulse guided the organization of state and society. The irreverent behavior of some members of the elite could not disrupt the desire of society at large to sustain the concept of the *ummah* espoused by Muhammad. The moral imperatives of the Quran were elaborated upon and formed the core of the *shariah*, a sacred legal system that made everyday activities religious duties. Overseeing the enforcement of the *shariah* and the purity of doctrine were the ulama, a class of scholars, judges, and teachers who set and transmitted the norms by which Islamic society perpetuated itself. On a popular level, religious expression found outlets in the Sufi brotherhoods and the rituals associated with them. The Mongol invasions were a shock to the existing Islamic order in the Middle East, but they did not succeed in destroying it. Out of the chaos and instability of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, there emerged in the territory from Anatolia to India three substantial Islamic empires that stabilized political conditions in the central Islamic lands, reshaped and reinvigorated cultural and religious life, and launched Islam on a new era of expansion and splendor.

**The Ottoman and Safavid Empires: A New Imperial Synthesis**

During the sixteenth century, the central Islamic lands that had been so devastated by the Mongol invasions recovered their political unity and cultural vitality within a new imperial synthesis represented by the Mughal Empire of Delhi in the east, the Safavid Empire of Iran in the center, and the Ottoman Empire in the west. Each of these empires was an expansive Islamic state and each made lasting cultural, political, and social contributions to the region in which it was situated. The emergence of these three states clearly demonstrates that Islam had not reached the limits of its expansion during the classical Abbasid caliphate. **Marshall Hodgson has written that a visitor from Mars who arrived on earth during the sixteenth century would probably have concluded that the world was on the verge of becoming Muslim**. This conclusion would have been drawn partly because of the extent of Islam and partly because of the power and prosperity of the three central Islamic empires. The Mughal Empire, whose most familiar architectural monument is the stunning Taj Mahal, lies outside the scope of this book, but its existence should be recognized as evidence of the emergence of a new Islamic imperial synthesis in the sixteenth century. Although the Safavid Empire of Iran collapsed in 1736, the success of its rulers in establishing Shiism as the state religion has had far-reaching significance for the entire Middle East. The Ottoman Empire provides a continuous link from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries. From 1517 until the end of World War I, a period of 400 years, the Ottoman Empire was the ruling power in the central Middle East. Ottoman administrative institutions and practices shaped the peoples of the modern Middle East and left a legacy that endured after the empire’s disappearance. At its peak, the Ottoman Empire was a European as well as a Middle Eastern power, and its long rule over the Balkans and its role in Great Power diplomacy have also left a lasting mark on European history.

**THE RISE OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE**

The future Ottoman Empire originated as one of over a dozen small Anatolian principalities that came into existence in the wake of the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century. These Turkish principalities were Islamic warrior states whose ongoing military confrontations with Christian Byzantium were inspired by religious motives as well as by a desire for material gain. The tradition of *gaza*, warfare against non-Muslims for the purpose of extending the domains of Islam, was a driving force among the Muslim frontier warriors (*gazi*s), and the *gazi* spirit was to play a decisive role in shaping the Ottoman Empire. An Ottoman poet of the fifteenth century described a *gazi* as **“the instrument of the religion of God, a servant of God who purifies the earth from the filth of polytheism; the *gazi* is the sword of God, he is the protector and the refuge of the believers. If he becomes a martyr in the ways of God, do not believe that he has died—he lives in beatitude with God, he has eternal life.”** As important as the *gazi* ethos was as a motivating factor among the frontier warriors, it was by no means the only one. The drive to acquire the spoils of war and to achieve temporal power also motivated the tribesmen and their chieftains. The tribal leaders were as likely to attack a rival Muslim force as they were to assault a Byzantine frontier post. Although the *gazi* forces were mainly tribal, the rulers of the Turkish principalities attempted to imitate the court life of settled Islamic empires. They adopted the style of Islamic urban civilization by practicing patronage, by appointing *shariah* judges to see that the law was properly applied in their domains, and by establishing institutions of Islamic learning. The admixture of the freewheeling frontier warfare of the *gazi*s and the efforts of their chieftains to adopt the practices of high Islamic tradition was another factor that shaped the Ottoman Empire.

Much about the early history of the Ottoman state remains obscure, but its beginnings are usually traced to the achievements of a Turkish chieftain named Osman, the ruler of one of the smaller *gazi* principalities. During the early 1300s, Osman’s *gazi* warriors achieved a series of military successes against the Byzantine forces. These victories enhanced Osman’s reputation and attracted other chieftains and tribesmen to his realm. The growing military power at Osman’s disposal enabled him and his son Orhon to expand their domains in northwestern Anatolia. In 1326 Orhon captured the city of Bursa from the Byzantines and made it the capital of his emerging state. He asserted his independent authority by striking his own coins, and he affirmed the Islamic impulse behind his conquests by founding a *madrasah* and constructing a mosque that bore an inscription describing him as “*gazi*, son of *gazi*.” As Orhon’s *gazi* principality made the transition from a frontier society to an established state, his subjects came to be known by his family name, Osmanlis (Ottomans). The sense of belonging to a single dynastic house created sentiments of solidarity and loyalty that gradually transcended tribal affiliations. By the middle of the fourteenth century, the Ottomans had expanded to the shores of the Sea of Marmara; across the water lay the lands of Christian Europe, which had always been beyond the reach of Islamic rulers. They were not beyond the reach of the Ottomans. Over the course of the next two centuries, all of southeastern Europe came under direct Ottoman control. The Ottoman expansion of the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries was no less remarkable than the Arab conquests 700 years earlier. Not only did the Ottomans add new European territories to the domains of Islam, they also extended their rule to the Arab lands where Islam had originated. **Three successful military campaigns can serve to illustrate the transformation of the Ottoman state into a world power**. **The first of them was the conquest of Constantinople, an achievement that had eluded Muslim commanders throughout the centuries**. On May 29, 1453, following a long siege, the forces of Sultan Mehmet II (also known as the Conqueror) entered the Byzantine capital and brought an end to Constantinople’s role as the symbolic center of eastern Christendom. Henceforth known as Istanbul, the city became the seat of the Ottoman government and was restored to its former splendor by Mehmet II’s program of reconstruction and repopulation. Inhabitants throughout the Ottoman domains were encouraged—and sometimes forced—to resettle in Istanbul, and by the end of Mehmet’s reign in 1481 the city was once again a thriving cosmopolitan metropolis with a population of over 100,000. Istanbul continued to flourish during the Ottoman centuries, and by the late sixteenth century its population exceeded 700,000, making it the largest city in Europe. It was also one of the most architecturally breathtaking cities anywhere. Mehmet II and his successors undertook lavish building programs that endowed Istanbul with monumental religious structures and palaces and made its appearance worthy of the capital of the leading Islamic empire of the era. During the sixteenth century, the royal architect, Sinan, perfected the classical Ottoman style, with its vast domes, towering pencil minarets, and geometric complexes. Istanbul came to possess a visual monumentality that symbolized Ottoman wealth and power. The occupation of Istanbul provided the Ottomans with an unparalleled strategic base from which to dominate the Black Sea and the eastern Mediterranean. However, to take full advantage of their position, the Ottomans required a navy; without one, they could not wrest control of maritime commerce from the well established Italian city-states, most notably Venice. Mehmet the Conqueror constructed shipyards in Istanbul; gathered skilled carpenters, merchants, and sailors from the coastal regions under his rule; and forged an Ottoman navy that eventually drove Venice from the eastern Mediterranean and established the Ottomans as the supreme maritime power from the Adriatic to the Black Sea. The creation of a fleet also enabled the Ottomans to conquer and occupy the principal strategic Mediterranean islands from Rhodes (1522) and Cyprus (1570) in the east to Crete (1664) in the center and to extend their control over North Africa with the conquest of Algiers (1529) and Tunis (1574).

The creation of a successful navy was accompanied by improvements in the Ottoman land army that made it the most formidable military force of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. At the heart of Ottoman military superiority was the development and extensive use of gunpowder weapons. As early as 1453, Mehmet II had deployed huge siege guns to breech the walls of Constantinople. In the decades that followed, the Ottomans adapted artillery technology to serve their special needs, most notably by developing light field guns that could be transported on wagons to distant battlefields. These guns were used with devastating effect against the feudal armies of Europe, whose infantrymen still fought mainly with pikes. In addition, the Ottomans equipped their own infantry, the Janissaries (discussed in the next section), with gunpowder weapons to such an extent that in the sixteenth century they deployed more firearms than any other armed force in the world. These technical advantages enabled the Ottoman armed forces to defeat the armies of both Europe and the Middle East in campaign after campaign. But superior weapons technology and combat training were not the sole reasons for Ottoman military success. According to recent studies, the Ottoman commissariat was highly advanced in comparison to that of its adversaries. Ottoman troops were better and more regularly fed than other armies of the time, providing yet another example of the depth of Ottoman military professionalism.

Although the Ottomans concentrated their efforts on expansion in Christian Europe, they also regularly sent their armies to the east to repel the advances of the Safavid Empire of Iran; **these campaigns represent the second example of the growth of Ottoman world power**. (The Ottoman-Safavid struggle is examined in a separate section later in this chapter.) When Sultan Selim I led the Ottoman army on an eastern campaign in 1516, his objective appeared to be the occupation of the Safavid imperial capital at Tabriz. However, he decided instead to neutralize the threat posed by another regional rival, the Mamluk Empire, which was centered in Egypt but which also controlled Syria and certain territories in southern Anatolia. The efficient Ottoman military easily drove the Mamluks out of Syria, and in early 1517 Selim marched his forces across the Sinai Peninsula and captured Cairo. This swift action resulted in the Ottoman acquisition of most of the classical heartlands of Arab Islam and brought about the integration of Arab and Ottoman Islamic traditions. The Ottoman conquest of the Arab lands established the sultans as the supreme rulers within the universal Islamic community. They were recognized as the protectors of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina and therefore assumed the important duty of ensuring the security of the annual pilgrimage. In order to fulfill this responsibility, and also to contain the expansive Portuguese seaborne commercial empire, Selim ordered the creation of a Red Sea fleet. Although the Ottomans proved unable to compete with the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean, their domination of Egypt allowed them to establish hegemony in the Red Sea and to incorporate Yemen into their empire. In addition to having commercial and strategic benefits, Selim’s occupation of Egypt enhanced the Islamic standing of the Ottoman sultans by enabling them to gain access to the title of caliph. According to legend, a member of the Abbasid ruling house escaped the Mongol destruction of Baghdad in 1258 and made his way to Cairo, where he and his descendants were sheltered by the Mamluks and recognized as legitimate caliphs. Following the Ottoman conquest of Egypt, the reigning caliph was taken to Istanbul and allegedly transferred the title to Selim and his successors in the Ottoman dynasty. The sultans did not make extensive use of this rather questionable right to the caliphate until the nineteenth century, when they resurrected the legend of the transfer in order to obtain universal Muslim support for their attempts to ward off European imperialism. **The third example of successful Ottoman expansion concerns the European campaigns of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (1520–1566), the most powerful of the Ottoman rulers.** Although Süleyman achieved important military victories at sea and on the eastern front, he was primarily a *gazi*-inspired sultan who concentrated on pushing the Ottoman frontier ever-deeper into Europe.

In 1520 Süleyman led the Ottoman forces in the capture of the important fortress city of Belgrade, which became the primary staging ground for subsequent Ottoman campaigns. During the rest of the 1520s, Budapest and most of Hungary were brought under Ottoman control. Then, in 1529 Süleyman shocked all of Christendom by marching an Ottoman army across the Danube and laying siege to Vienna, the Hapsburg imperial capital and the gateway to central Europe. Although the outskirts of Vienna were destroyed and the city walls were breached in several places, the defenders held out until the threat of winter forced the Ottomans to begin their long withdrawal back to Istanbul. In the years to come, Süleyman’s European campaigns consolidated Ottoman rule in Hungary and Serbia, but the sultan was unable to mount another siege of Vienna. Central Europe was beyond the limits of Ottoman territorial expansion. But the area that did lie within those limits was so extensive—from the Danube to Yemen, from Albania to the northern shores of the Black Sea, and from Algiers to Baghdad—that the Ottoman Empire was, at Süleyman’s death in 1566, the major European, Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, and Persian Gulf power; it was not only the leading Islamic state of the sixteenth century, it was a world empire of vast influence and territorial extent.

**OTTOMAN RULING INSTITUTIONS AND ATTITUDES**

In general terms, the Ottoman sultans ruled over an absolutist, bureaucratic, agrarian-based empire. However, it must be emphasized that an empire as large, diverse, and long-lasting as that of the Ottomans did not have a single and unchanging system of administration. Indeed, one of the reasons for the Ottomans’ success was their official recognition that the diversity of the territories over which they ruled required the adoption of flexible administrative practices that could accommodate the needs of different regions and different cultures. Modern scholarship has identified Ottoman rule with such terms as **plasticity, adaptability, and pragmatism**. It is important for students of the modern Middle East to recognize the skills the Ottoman ruling class employed to entrench among the subject peoples of the empire an appreciation for the benefits of Ottoman rule; this appreciation, though severely tested, continued into the twentieth century.

**The principles that guided the Ottoman ruling elite and shaped their attitude toward state and society came from four basic sources**. *One was the tradition of gaza, holy war against non-Muslims for the purpose of expanding the domains of Islam*. Note, however, that the earlier historiographical emphasis on the religious impulse as the single driving force behind Ottoman expansionism must now be modified by an appreciation of other factors. In particular, the first Ottoman armies to cross the Sea of Marmara into southeastern Europe were composed of substantial contingents of Greek Christian mercenaries who, like the Ottoman *gazi*s that accompanied them, “followed the Ottoman standard not for God, but for gold and glory.” Thus, the Ottoman policy of empire building was buttressed by Islam, but included pragmatic temporal considerations as well. *The second principle shaping Ottoman rule was the legacy of urban Islamic civilization, which included the notion of dynasty, an elaborate court tradition with the monarch serving as a patron of scholars, and a belief in the ruler’s responsibility for instituting and enforcing the laws and values of Islam.* The Ottoman sultans accepted their Islamic duties by implementing the *shariah* and establishing an Islamic legal system throughout the empire. In addition, they assumed the role of protectors of the universal Islamic community, a role highlighted after the Ottomans took over the administration of such venerated Islamic cities as Jerusalem, Damascus, and Baghdad, as well as the holy places of Mecca and Medina. *A third principle influencing the organization of society was local custom. Ottoman officials developed a shrewd sense of what needed to be changed in the conquered territories and what should be allowed to remain*. Any provincial governor whose policies were so heavy-handed that his province rose up in rebellion was as deserving of dismissal as a lenient governor who failed to produce sufficient revenue. As long as taxes were remitted and stability was maintained, the Ottomans were content to tolerate the existence of a wide variety of local practices. This attitude gave rise to an administrative and fiscal mosaic in which subtle shades of difference existed. **In this context, it has been accurately noted that the Ottomans were more interested in efficiency than in uniformity**. *But it was precisely this administrative flexibility that enabled the Ottomans to rule for so long over territories as diverse as Serbia and Egypt or Syria and Greece.*

*The fourth principle that shaped Ottoman governing attitudes was the division of society into rulers and ruled*. The latter, referred to as *reaya*, a term denoting subjects, were expected to produce through labor and taxes the wealth that supported the ruling elite. The state had few obligations toward its subjects aside from the need to ensure conditions of stability and order so that the subjects would be able to generate the wealth on which the rulers depended. The Ottoman ruling elite were called *askeri*s—literally, the military. However, in practice, membership in the ruling class included high-ranking civilian officials and members of the ulama as well as the military. In addition to their elevated status, the ruling elite enjoyed special privileges, the most important of which were tax exemptions. Within the ruling elite, there was a special group of educated individuals who have been called the true Ottomans. Members of this group not only served the state in high-ranking positions, they also practiced the norms of behavior required of a cultivated, well-bred class. This included having knowledge of Ottoman Turkish, which was a complex amalgam of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish written in the Arabic script. A true Ottoman was also familiar with the Islamic cultural tradition and could read the Quran in Arabic. Although the Ottoman Empire was founded by Turkish military chieftains, its ruling elite adopted a cosmopolitan outlook and regarded themselves as cultured Ottoman Muslims. The term *Turk* took on pejorative connotations and was used to refer disparagingly to illiterate peasants. At the pinnacle of the Ottoman hierarchy was the sultan-caliph, an absolute monarch whose right to rule was derived from his membership in the house of Osman and his ability to defeat rival claimants to the throne. Succession did not automatically go to the eldest son, but was contested among the royal princes. During the first four centuries of Ottoman rule, the royal princes received military and administrative training in the various provinces of Anatolia. Each of the princes was trained as if he would be the next sultan; each had an equal claim to the throne. When the reigning sultan died, the struggle for power began as the contending princes rushed toward Istanbul. The first prince to secure the support of the royal court and the imperial guard in the capital city was proclaimed sultan. In order to prevent continuing rival claims to the throne, the Ottomans adopted the practice of **fratricide**; once the victorious prince had assumed the office of sultan, he ordered his brothers killed. This was a practical matter of state, and justification for the practice was encapsulated in the Ottoman political statement that **“the death of a prince is less regrettable than the loss of a province.”** At some point in the seventeenth century, fratricide was discontinued, as was the program of training the princes before they assumed the throne. As a result, several of the later sultans were raised within the cloistered walls of the royal palace and had no governing experience prior to becoming rulers.

As the Ottoman state evolved from a *gazi* principality to a bureaucratic world empire, the sultans instituted an imperial council, or divan, to deal with the increasingly complex affairs of government. The members of the divan were responsible for advising the sultan on the military, administrative, and judicial affairs of the empire and were among the highest-ranking members of the true Ottoman elite. The divan was presided over by the grand vizier, the most powerful official in the government hierarchy. He was the absolute deputy of the sultan and acquired the right to exercise executive authority in the sultan’s name. During the reigns of weak sultans, the grand viziers sometimes assumed extensive powers and made decisions without consulting the monarch.

**Historians have identified numerous fine gradations within the Ottoman ruling elite, but the three major groupings were** **the military, the civil service, and the religious establishment**. Before we consider these groupings, however, it is necessary to examine the unique Ottoman slave system that provided the manpower for much of the ruling elite.

***The Ottoman Slave Elite***

At some point in the fourteenth century, the Ottomans institutionalized a method for procuring slaves from among their European Christian subjects. Known as the *devshirme* (collecting) system, it consisted of a levy every few years on adolescent male Christian children from the European provinces of the empire. This was the method by which the Ottomans were able to tap the vast manpower reserves of their European Christian provinces and place them in the service of the state. The children were removed from their families and taken to Istanbul, where they were converted to Islam, tested and screened, and then trained for service in the empire. The *devshirme* system procured soldiers for the infantry corps while also providing the Ottoman state with its top-ranking military commanders and civilian administrators. With the exception of the religious establishment and the middle and lower levels of the bureaucracy, which were composed entirely of free Muslims, the Ottoman ruling institutions were run by slaves of the sultan. The most promising young men taken in the *devshirme* levy were assigned to special schools within the royal palace complex, where they underwent several years of training designed to prepare them for a life of leadership as the Ottoman ruling class. They studied Persian, Arabic, and Ottoman Turkish, and they learned calligraphy and painting as well as military strategy and the handling of weapons. **According to a sixteenth-century European observer, the purpose of the palace schools was to produce a “warrior, statesman, and loyal Muslim” who was at the same time “a man of letters and a gentleman of polished speech, profound courtesy and honest morals.”**

The individuals who successfully completed their palace training were appointed to the most responsible military and administrative positions within the empire. From the mid-fifteenth to the mid-seventeenth centuries, virtually all of the grand viziers, the sultan’s designated deputies, were converted Christians taken in the *devshirme* levy and trained in the palace system. Most other high-ranking ministers, members of the divan, provincial governors, and leading military commanders had similar backgrounds. They managed the affairs of the empire and led its armies, yet they were all slaves of the sultan. (In a sense, of course, the term *slaves* is misleading, because the *devshirme* system is so unlike the chattel slavery practiced in the Americas.) These warrior-statesmen acquired vast wealth, wielded immense power, had household slaves of their own, and married women of their own choosing. But the power they possessed derived from the will of the sultan; they were his creatures, his bondsmen, and he could dismiss and punish them as he chose.

The *devshirme* levy and the palace training system succeeded in severing the ties of young adolescents with their places of origin and creating a trained cadre of officials who were dependent on the sultan and thus totally loyal to him. Their rise in the Ottoman system was determined largely by their own talents (with help from a patron or two), not on the standing of their families. In this way, the Ottoman elite was constantly renewed by the infusion of newly trained and newly committed warrior-statesman-slaves. Because it was forbidden to enslave a freeborn Muslim, the system did not allow for hereditary positions—the offspring of these converted high-ranking officials were regarded as full-fledged Muslims and were, in theory, excluded from holding positions in the Ottoman hierarchy that were reserved for the sultan’s slaves. The Ottoman slave system offered limitless opportunities to the young men who became a part of it; indeed, there are recorded instances of Christian— and Muslim—parents attempting to arrange for their sons to be taken in the *devshirme* levies.

***The Military***

**The Janissary Infantry.** The two main branches of the Ottoman armed forces came from quite different sources. Although *sipahi*s and their retainers (see below) made up the bulk of the Ottoman armies, the most efficient imperial military unit was the professional standing infantry corps known as the Janissaries. The Janissaries were a slave army that, at its peak in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, was the outstanding military unit in Europe. Known for their discipline, morale, and professionalism, the Janissaries were paid regular salaries and were expected to be ready for military duty at all times. Forbidden to marry or to engage in trade, they were quartered in barracks and when not on active campaign were frequently deployed to maintain domestic law and order. By the time of Süleyman the Magnificent, the Janissary corps numbered around 40,000 troops and had expanded from an infantry force to include specialized artillery units.

**The *Sipahi* Cavalry.** The provincial cavalrymen, or *sipahi*s, were freeborn Muslims who fulfilled an administrative as well as a military function. In an attempt to maintain a large army without making huge cash payments, the sultans awarded *sipahi*s the rights to the income from agricultural lands known as *timar*s. Each *sipahi* was assigned a specific *timar* from which he was allowed to collect the taxes that served as his salary. In return, the *sipahi* was expected to maintain order in his *timar*, to report for military service when called upon by the sultan, and, depending on the size of his income, to bring with him a certain number of armed and mounted retainers. Most of the European and Anatolian provinces were divided into *timar*s, but the practice was uncommon in the Arab territories.

***The Civil Service***

As a centralized imperial state, the Ottoman Empire was characterized by an immense and elaborate bureaucracy. The Ottomans drew on the administrative traditions of the Byzantines, the Iranians, and the Arabs to create a highly differentiated civil service in which a veritable army of scribes kept detailed records of census surveys, treasury accounts, official appointments, and the rules and regulations of the government. Most of the directors and managers were drawn from the *devshirme* levy, while the middle-level Ottoman civil servants were freeborn Muslims who received on-the-job training as apprentices in one of the several ministries. Often referred to as men of the pen, they were crucial to the efficient functioning of the state.

***The Religious Establishment***

Along with the bureaucratic and military elite, the ulama formed the third pillar of the Ottoman ruling class. In keeping with the *gazi* spirit that inspired the Ottoman rulers and their warriors from the early years of frontier warfare against Byzantium, the sultans accorded the ulama a respected place in Ottoman society. To a degree unprecedented in the classical Islamic empires, the Ottomans endeavored to establish *shariah* norms of justice by organizing the *qadi*s (judges) into an official hierarchy and arranging for their appointments in the various administrative subdivisions of the empire. Over the course of time, an official known as the *shaykh al-Islam* emerged as the chief religious dignitary of the empire; he oversaw the appointment of *qadi*s and *madrasah* teachers in the far-flung Ottoman territories and acquired status as the official whose legal opinion the sultans sought when they contemplated the introduction of certain administrative and fiscal measures. Despite the influence the ulama exercised on the population at large, despite the importance of the *qadi*s in establishing *shariah* norms of justice, and despite the authority of the *shaykh al-Islam*, the entire religious establishment held office at the pleasure of the sultan. The income of the ulama may have been largely independent of the state, but their appointments were not. The *shaykh* *al-Islam* who dared to issue an opinion that contradicted the sultan’s wishes was likely to be dismissed, no matter how well founded his opinion may have been in Islamic legal doctrine.

***The Millet System***

Readers accustomed to the concept of a homogeneous nation-state in which the inhabitants are united by a shared language and a shared sense of citizenship may find the Ottomans’ method of organizing their subjects along religious lines somewhat unusual. As a result of the Ottoman conquests, the sultans came to rule over lands inhabited by millions of Christians and Jews. The religious mosaic of the Ottoman Empire as a whole can be seen in the population of Istanbul. Of the city’s 700,000 inhabitants in the sixteenth century, 58 percent were Muslims, 32 percent Christians, and 10 percent Jews. Partly out of the Islamic requirements of toleration and partly for pragmatic reasons, the sultans organized their non-Muslim subjects into religious communities called *millet*s and granted them a considerable degree of autonomy. Each of the three major non-Muslim religions—Greek Orthodox Christianity, Judaism, and Armenian Christianity—was granted *millet* status and placed under the direct authority of the leading church official. The three officials—the Greek Orthodox patriarch, the Armenian patriarch, and the Jewish grand rabbi—were selected with the approval of the sultan and resided in Istanbul, where the Ottoman state kept track of their activities. Recent scholarship has determined that the Ottomans did not attempt to create an empire-wide *millet* structure until the nineteenth century and that up to that point the *millet* system lacked uniformity, differing from region to region and group to group.

It is nevertheless possible to identify common patterns in Ottoman administration of non-Muslims. Christians and Jews were allowed religious freedom and had the right to retain their religious educational systems and religious legal structures. They were directly administered by their own communal officials, who exercised both civil and religious responsibilities. These officials were in charge of tax collection, education, justice, and religious affairs within their religious communities. By permitting non-Muslim subjects to retain their religious laws, educational systems, and communal leadership, the Ottomans were able to administer their diverse peoples with a minimum of resistance. The Jewish community in particular prospered under Ottoman rule, and large numbers of Jews emigrated to the Ottoman domains from Spain following the Christian reconquest. Yet no matter how prosperous or prominent non-Muslims might become, they were not regarded as equal to Muslims. They were tolerated, but they were also subject to social discrimination that barred them from service in the Ottoman armed forces and prevented them from becoming members of the Ottoman ruling elite.

**THE LOSS OF OTTOMAN SUPERIORITY**

The once-prevalent idea that the Ottoman Empire entered into a period of precipitous decline following the reign of Süleyman is no longer accepted. Indeed, some historians now question whether the term *decline* is an accurate description of the process through which the Ottoman Empire lost its dominant position.

It is perhaps preferable to view the Ottoman experience from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries as a period of transformation during which the Ottomans struggled to find a new imperial synthesis in a changing international environment. External factors, most prominent among them the penetration of European merchant capital into the empire, caused a wrenching dislocation of the Ottoman economy. Beginning in the late sixteenth century, Ottoman raw materials, normally channeled into internal consumption and industry, were increasingly exchanged for European manufactured products. This trade benefited Ottoman merchants but led to a decline in state revenues and a shortage of raw materials for domestic consumption. As the costs of scarce materials rose, the empire suffered from inflation, and the state was unable to procure sufficient revenues to meet its expenses. Without these revenues, the institutions that supported the Ottoman system, especially the armed forces, were undermined.

The penetration of European manufactured goods into the empire and the eventual domination of Ottoman commerce by Europeans and their protégés were facilitated by a series of commercial treaties, known as the Capitulations, which the Ottoman sultans signed with the Christian states of Europe. The first Capitulation agreement was negotiated with France in 1536; it allowed French merchants to trade freely in Ottoman ports, to be exempt from Ottoman taxes, and to import and export goods at low tariff rates. In addition, the treaty granted extraterritorial privileges to French merchants by permitting them to come under the legal jurisdiction of the French consul in Istanbul, thus making them subject to French rather than Ottoman-Islamic law. This first treaty was the model for subsequent agreements signed with other European states.

The Capitulations were negotiated at a time of Ottoman military domination and were intended to encourage commercial exchange. However, when the military balance between Europe and the Ottomans tilted in favor of Europe, European merchants, backed by the power of their states, were able to exploit the Capitulations to the disadvantage of the Ottomans. The treaties not only had a devastating effect on the Ottoman economy but also had long-term political implications. By granting the various consuls jurisdiction over their nationals within the Ottoman Empire, the Capitulations accorded the consuls extraordinary powers that they abused with increasing frequency in the course of the nineteenth century.

External economic factors combined with a range of domestic problems to render the various components of the Ottoman system less cohesive than they had been at the time of Süleyman. The rule of incompetent sultans, the presence of struggles over the succession, and the rise of political discord within the court all served to weaken the effectiveness of the central government. The shortage of revenue and the rise of inflation had a devastating effect on the large numbers of state employees on fixed salaries and created an atmosphere that fostered bribery and other forms of corruption. And finally, the government’s inability to make regular payments to the Janissaries or to fund the acquisition of new military equipment meant that the Ottoman armed forces lost the absolute dominance that they had earlier possessed.

This loss of dominance was manifested on the battlefield. In 1683 the Ottomans mounted a second siege of Vienna. Although they were defeated outside the city walls, their ability to launch such an ambitious campaign appeared to demonstrate the power of the Ottoman armed forces. However, in the 1690s, the Ottomans engaged in simultaneous wars with Austria and Russia and were defeated on both fronts. The Treaty of Karlowitz, signed with Austria in 1699, ceded most of Hungary to the Hapsburgs and marked the Ottomans’ first major surrender of European territory. The following year, the sultan signed a treaty with Peter the Great acknowledging the Russian conquest of the northern shores of the Black Sea. From this point on, the Ottomans were on the defensive. They were not, however, as moribund a military power as they have sometimes been portrayed. During the eighteenth century, the Ottoman forces held their own in two wars with Austria and defeated the Russian army in two other wars. These victories may have led the Ottoman ruling elite to conclude that the armed forces of the state were as relatively powerful as ever. That this was not the case was amply demonstrated in the Ottoman-Russian War launched by the Ottomans in 1768. In the course of this conflict, the Russian Baltic fleet entered the Mediterranean and destroyed an Ottoman fleet off the coast of Anatolia. The land war was equally devastating for the Ottomans, as the Russian forces drove them out of Romania and the Crimea on the Black Sea. The settlement that ended the war, the Treaty of Küchük Kaynarja (1774), was one of the most humiliating agreements ever signed by the Ottomans. In addition to ceding territory, the sultan granted Russia the right to construct a Greek Orthodox church in Istanbul and to make representations to the Ottoman government on behalf of the Greek Orthodox community. These provisions laid the foundation for Russia’s claim to be the protector of the entire Greek Orthodox *millet* within the Ottoman Empire. Russia would use this claim as a pretext for frequent interventions in Ottoman internal affairs in the decades that followed.

The military defeats that led to the ceding of Ottoman territory showed that the armed forces of the empire had lost the technological advantages they once possessed. If the empire was to survive, military improvements had to be undertaken immediately.

**THE TRIUMPH OF SHIIS M: THE SAFAVID EMPIRE OF IRAN, 1501–1736**

***Shah Ismail (1494–1524) and the Establishment of the State***

Just as the Ottomans rose from their humble origins among the tribes of Anatolia to become rulers of a world empire, so their Safavid rivals to the east emerged from a relatively obscure background to found a dynamic and prosperous imperial state. The Safavids were either of Kurdish or Turkish origin. In the late thirteenth century, a member of the Safavid family founded a Sunni Sufi religious brotherhood in Azerbaijan, the Turkish-speaking region of northwestern Iran. The brotherhood attracted an ardent following among the Turkish pastoral tribes of the area, and by the late fifteenth century its influence had expanded into Anatolia and Syria. The heads of the brotherhood led the tribes in a series of expeditions against the Christians of the Caucasus, thereby acquiring temporal power as well as enhancing their reputations as servants of Islam. Their Turkish followers were known as Qizilbash, the Red-headed Ones, after the red headgear they wore to identify themselves as supporters of the Safavid brotherhood.

In 1494 a seven-year-old boy named Ismail succeeded his brother as head of the order and eventually transformed it into an imperial institution. Ismail’s forces captured the city of Tabriz in 1501 and Ismail proclaimed himself shah (king). He then organized a series of campaigns in which the Qizilbash brought areas of eastern Anatolia and Iraq, including Baghdad, under Safavid control.

In 1510 Ismail extended his authority to eastern Iran, defeating a coalition of Turkish tribesmen and establishing the borders of his state at the Oxus River.

Ismail’s most ardent followers were located among the tribes of Anatolia, but before he could organize them for further expansion against the Ottomans, the sultan sent a huge army into the region. The Ottoman and Safavid forces met at the battle of Chaldiran in 1514; the gunpowder army of the Ottomans crushed the mounted archers of Ismail and consolidated Ottoman dominance in eastern Anatolia.

Ismail’s defeat at Chaldiran did not prevent him from founding a dynasty and building an empire into which he introduced revolutionary and far-reaching religious changes: He was responsible for establishing Shiism as the state religion of Iran. The Safavid brotherhood was founded as a Sunni order, and historians are uncertain when its leaders adopted Shiism or even if they did so before the reign of Ismail. It is known that for a few years during Ismail’s youth, he was sheltered by a local Shia ruler and may have acquired his Shia convictions from this experience. Whatever the sources for his belief, Ismail became a fervent Shia and was determined to make all of the inhabitants in the territories under his control adopt Shiism. When he proclaimed himself shah in 1501, he also proclaimed Twelver Shiism to be the official and compulsory religion of the state. Ismail enforced his proclamation by dissolving the Sunni brotherhoods and ordering the executions of all who refused to accept Shiism. As there was no existing Shia religious establishment in Iran, Ismail created one by importing Shia ulama and legal experts from the Arab lands, especially from Lebanon.

These religious officials filled the vacuum at the highest ranks of the religious hierarchy and laid the groundwork for the emergence of a vibrant Shia ulama class. The version of Twelver Shiism promulgated by Ismail contained important deviations from previously accepted doctrine. Ismail claimed to be descended from the seventh Imam, to be divinely inspired himself, and to be the earthly representative of the Hidden Twelfth Imam. He thus portrayed himself as guided by the Imam and empowered to render infallible judgments on religious practices and legal issues. Ismail’s claims were widely accepted, and the religious authority he claimed for himself was acknowledged to be present in his successors as well.

Under Ismail’s successors Shiism became firmly embedded as the religion of the vast majority of the Iranian population. Although this outcome did not, as some have claimed, make Shiism synonymous with Iranian national culture, it did serve to set Iran off from its Sunni neighbors. In addition, because the Safavids ruled over a large and powerful empire, their Shia beliefs were seen as a threat by their Sunni neighbors, especially the Ottomans. The success of Shiism in the Safavid domains therefore created a new level of hostility between Sunni and Shia and tended to make precarious the existence of Shia minority communities within Sunni-administered territories, and vice versa.

The Safavid state was established by the military prowess of the Qizilbash tribesmen. In order to retain their loyalties, Ismail granted tribal leaders control of vast tracts of grazing land and rewarded the most powerful of them with appointments as provincial governors. This practice did not differ noticeably from the policies followed by the rulers of the dozens of short-lived dynastic principalities that had preceded the Safavids. However, Ismail introduced new administrative institutions that enabled the Safavid state to become far more durable than any of its immediate predecessors. He began to build a governing apparatus by appointing urban Iranians to the newly created bureaucratic posts within the government. A certain tension developed between the emerging class of Iranian bureaucrats and the Qizilbash tribal leaders, who were largely excluded from the civil administration. At Ismail’s death in 1524, the Safavid Empire was in a stage of transition from tribal military regime to absolutist bureaucratic empire.

***From the Reign of Shah Abbas I (1587–1629) to the Collapse of the Safavids***

A recurring problem for Ismail’s successors was the factiousness of the Qizilbash tribesmen and their resistance to the imposition of state control. Struggles for prominence among the Qizilbash leaders and their occasional revolts against the government prevented them from effectively defending the Safavid domains. When Shah Abbas ascended the throne, Turkish tribal incursions in the east and Ottoman advances in the west threatened to overwhelm his empire. Abbas reversed the decline in Safavid fortunes, and his reign marked the apogee of the Safavid state. He recovered the lost territories on the eastern and western frontiers (including Baghdad), introduced radical domestic reforms, and made his capital, Isfahan, into one of the most beautiful and culturally vibrant cities of the world.

Recognizing the need to control the unruly Qizilbash leaders, Abbas built up a military counterweight to them in the form of a standing royal army composed of converted Christian slaves captured during expeditions to the Caucasus. This was similar to the Ottoman slave system. The new *ghulam* (military slave) army was a gunpowder force that included an artillery corps and infantry armed with muskets. This army, which may eventually have numbered 37,000 troops, was directly financed by the shah and was in turn directly responsible to him.

As we will see in succeeding chapters of this book, rulers who sought to improve their armed forces had to find ways of increasing their revenues in order to be able to pay for the acquisition and maintenance of expensive weaponry. In the case of Shah Abbas, he transferred lands from the tribal leaders to his own royal estates. Over the course of his reign, Abbas converted huge areas of Iran into crown lands, the revenues of which went directly to him, not to the state treasury. With these revenues, he financed the new standing army. Abbas’s land transfer policy and his direct control of the new military weakened the power base of the Qizilbash and concentrated centralized royal authority in his person.

In 1598 Shah Abbas designated Isfahan, a city located in the center of Iran, as the new imperial capital. Isfahan was already an established city and had once been the Seljuk capital. However, Abbas transformed the city, lavishing huge sums on the construction of a carefully planned urban center laid out along broad thoroughfares and embellished with richly decorated mosques, a royal palace, luxurious private residences, and a large bazaar, all maintained in a lush garden setting. The material splendor of Isfahan coupled with Abbas’s generous patronage attracted artists and scholars, whose presence contributed to the city’s rich intellectual and cultural life. As activities from carpet weaving to miniature painting, from the writing of Persian poetry to the compilation of works on Shia jurisprudence were encouraged, Isfahan became the catalyst for an explosion of Persian culture that spread to other Safavid cities and continued after the death of Abbas. Isfahan was also a thriving commercial center whose merchants, prospering under the stable, centralized government established by Abbas, became consumers and patrons themselves. At the time of Abbas’s death, the Safavid capital had a population estimated at 400,000; the large size of the city and the impressive achievements of its residents prompted the inhabitants to coin their famous boast: “Isfahan is half the world.”

Although the Safavid dynasty had only one effective ruler after Abbas, the centralized machinery of government he had set up enabled the empire to survive his successors’ incompetence and provided Iran with another century of political stability. With the exception of a major confrontation with the Ottomans over Iraq, the seventeenth century was a peaceful period in which the economy prospered and cultural life flourished. However, in the absence of external military threats, the Safavid shahs allowed the expensive standing army to decline. Their failure to maintain an effective military force opened the way for a rebellious chieftain based in the territory that is now Afghanistan to seize Isfahan and bring an end to the Safavid dynasty in 1722.

The fall of the Safavids ushered in a lengthy period of decentralization in Iran. From time to time, a powerful military commander was able to establish dominance over the contending tribal confederations and bring large parts of Iranian territory under his control, only to have his fledgling state splinter into factions on his death. Finally, in 1794 a Turkish tribal chieftain named Fath Ali Shah established the Qajar dynasty in central Iran. Although the Qajars were the nominal ruling dynasty of Iran until the 1920s, they never succeeded in recreating the royal absolutism or the bureaucratic centralism of the Safavids.

**THE SUNNI - SHIA STRUGGLE FOR IRAQ**

From the time of Shah Ismail’s occupation of Baghdad in 1508 until Sultan Murat IV’s reconquest of the city in 1638, the Shia Safavids and the Sunni Ottomans waged a seesaw struggle for control of the lands of Iraq. The results of this confrontation had a significant impact on the region at the time as well as creating the mixture of sectarian loyalties that has survived into the modern era.

Baghdad and the lands of Iraq were under Safavid control when Ismail introduced Shiism as the compulsory religion for the subjects of his empire. Within Iraq, Sunni shrines were destroyed, the main mosques were turned into Shia places of worship, and attempts were made forcefully to convert the population. The Ottoman sultans, who considered themselves the protectors of Sunni Islam, could not ignore the imposition of Shiism in the territory that had been the center of the Abbasid caliphate. Nor, for economic reasons, could they tolerate Safavid control of the outlet to the Persian Gulf. In 1534 Süleyman the Magnificent commanded an expedition that succeeded in restoring Iraq to Ottoman control and confirming the Ottoman sultan as the supreme ruler in the world of Islam.

Iraq remained in Ottoman hands until 1624, when the armies of Shah Abbas occupied Baghdad and massacred many of its Sunni inhabitants. Again the Ottomans responded, but despite mounting several sieges of Baghdad, they were unable to capture the city until 1638. Sultan Murat IV, who led the victorious campaign, immediately sent Ottoman military commanders into the countryside to restore Sunni rites among the population and to banish Shia ulama from the region. From that point until World War I, Iraq remained in Ottoman hands.

Although control of the Persian Gulf port of Basra was an important objective for the Ottomans and Safavids alike, the intensity of their struggle for Iraq suggests that something more profound than economic interests was at stake. The lands of Iraq became the center of a contest for supremacy between Ottomans Sunnism and Safavid Shiism. The territory evoked different historical images for the followers of the two branches of Islam. To the Ottomans, Baghdad was the Abbasid capital city for 500 years, the home of the founders of universal Islam whose legacy the Ottoman sultan-caliphs sought to perpetuate. For the Safavids, Iraq was the home of the two most sacred shrines in Shiism: Najaf, the center of Shi˛a theology, and Karbala, the site of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn. The commemoration of Husayn’s death was the most important ritual event in Shiism, and pilgrimage to Karbala came to be regarded by the Shia as a legitimate substitute for the pilgrimage to Mecca. In popular Shia practice, a tablet made from the clay of Karbala and said to be impregnated with the blood of Husayn was a valued talisman; put under a pillow, it was believed to guard the sleeper as if he or she were at Karbala, under the protection of Husayn himself.4 The Safavid shahs saw the retention of these shrines under Shia authority as a religious duty; their loss to the Ottomans was a source of profound grief. It is no wonder that the land of Iraq, sacred to followers of both branches of Islam, became a troubled region. Although it remained Arabic-speaking and under Sunni Ottoman control, a majority of its population embraced Shiism. The sectarian divisions implanted during the Ottoman-Safavid struggle would play a significant role in the modern history of Iraq.

**PART TWO**

***The Beginnings of the Era of Transformation***

For the Ottoman Empire the eighteenth century marked a period of political and economic disintegration brought about by a combination of declining central authority and intense external pressures. The most prominent feature of this decay was a process of decentralization both within the administration and in the Ottoman state’s ability to control its territories. As the absolutism of the sultans waned, other officials within the Ottoman system acquired power and the wealth that went with it. These officials came to have a vested interest in the decentralized status quo and opposed the efforts of sultans and grand viziers to reimpose royal absolutism.

The Janissaries, once the dependable military foundation of Ottoman expansionism, became a threat to the state. The discipline of the corps declined, and its members avoided the restrictions that had confined them to military service alone. Janissaries established lucrative business relationships with craft guilds, engaged in trade and commerce themselves, married and brought their offspring into the corps, and developed a reluctance to engage in combat. The Janissaries were determined to protect the privileges that decentralization provided them; their rebellions in the streets of Istanbul against any attempts to reform their training or curb their civilian activities became commonplace in the course of the eighteenth century.

The diffusion of power was further evident in the formation of other interest groups within the administration. The bureaucracy, once noted for its efficiency and its adherence to the policy of promotion on the basis of merit, became infused with nepotism, and the buying and selling of offices was a common practice. The high-ranking ulama also exercised considerable independent authority.

The decline of central authority also brought opportunities for local leaders to acquire a greater measure of regional power. Throughout Anatolia and the European and Arab provinces of the empire, local valley lords (*derebey*s and *ayan*) gained increasing degrees of autonomy from Istanbul, setting up what were essentially small principalities. These autonomous rulers did not seek to overthrow the Ottoman state, only to distance themselves from its authority, to collect and control the revenues generated in their territory, and to pass their autonomy on to their heirs. They no longer provided their allotment of armed men to fight the sultan’s wars except when they saw some personal advantage in doing so.

The weakness of the central Ottoman state sapped its ability to deal with the military and economic pressures its European adversaries exerted with increasing frequency. As we saw in Chapter 3, permanent territorial losses became commonplace during the second half of the eighteenth century. Such losses were sustained because of the inefficiency of the Ottoman armed forces. Yet even as the state was threatened by the advances of Russia and Austria, the entrenched interest groups within the empire refused to surrender their privileges. The administration was paralyzed by the intransigence of the Janissaries, the self-aggrandizement of the *derebey*s, and the self-serving practices of influential officials and ulama; it was thus rendered incapable of taking the decisive steps required to reverse its fortunes on the battlefield. And with each territorial concession, more revenue-producing land was lost to the Christian enemies.

European gains were not confined to territorial concessions. With the ending of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, European commerce penetrated the Middle East to an unprecedented extent. The products of the Industrial Revolution, cheap textiles and metal goods, flooded the region, bringing about a change in the pattern of consumption and causing the local handicraft industries to suffer. Because of the incursions of European commerce and capital, the formerly self-sufficient economies of the Middle East became integrated into the world economic system. In response to the hunger of the European industrializing states for cheap raw materials and foodstuffs, certain regions of the Middle East were transformed into exporters of specialized agricultural products—cotton in Egypt, cereals in Syria, silk in Lebanon. However, commercial agricultural production in the Middle East was dependent on the demands of the European market and was thus subject to price fluctuations determined by European needs and tastes. In this way, the Middle East was incorporated into the global economic system as a dependent region, a supplier of raw agricultural commodities, and a consumer of European manufactured goods. The institutional and economic transformation of the Middle East occurred simultaneously:

As the rulers of the Ottoman Empire, Egypt, and Iran attempted, with varying degrees of effectiveness and determination, to reform their armed forces and their administrative institutions, their states were drawn into the evolving world economy that was largely shaped by Europe.

Even the benefits of expanded commercial activity in the Ottoman world were realized mainly by European merchants or their local agents. In the course of the eighteenth century, the Capitulation agreements were renegotiated and additional privileges granted to the European powers. Among them was the right to grant certificates of protection to non-Muslim Ottoman subjects. These certificates, called *barat*s, allowed their holders to receive the same protection that European nationals had. Armed with barats, which were freely granted by European representatives, the minority subjects of the empire had a distinct advantage over Muslim merchants and were able to take control of important sectors of Ottoman external trade. Thus, in commerce as in political organization, the empire experienced a marked tendency toward decentralization.

Despite the economic and political difficulties of the eighteenth century, the Ottoman Empire could still draw on considerable human and material resources. Its weakness was relative, not absolute: Huge Ottoman armies still took the field; scribes, bureaucrats, and viziers still conducted affairs of state; and the religious establishment nurtured the Islamic traditions and maintained the *shariah* courts. Each of these components of the Ottoman system may have functioned less efficiently than before, but we should not assume that the empire was on the verge of collapse or that it was completely lacking in officials determined to preserve the Ottoman-Islamic values in the face of Christian advances.

For the Ottoman order to recover, though, the central government had to regain control over the institutions and resources of the state, for only by reestablishing central authority could the state in turn undertake the military reforms that were needed for the empire to survive. The failure of Ottoman forces in the field convinced an influential group within the Ottoman ruling class that when it counted, European military technology was superior. If selected elements of that technology could be introduced into the Ottoman armed forces, then perhaps European encroachment would be halted and the Ottoman system would be allowed to revitalize itself without external interference.

The nineteenth century in the Middle East is frequently characterized as a period of tension between forces of continuity and forces of change. On the one hand, the reformers, who advocated the adoption of European institutions and technology, have often been portrayed as the progressive elements of society courageously charting the course toward an inevitably Westernized twentieth century. On the other hand, the adherents of continuity, who viewed with alarm the dismantling of the Islamic order and sought to preserve tradition and retain the values and ideals that had served Ottoman and Islamic society so well for so long, are sometimes portrayed as nothing but archaic reactionaries.

We should avoid these simplistic characterizations if we are to appreciate the agonizing and dangerous process of transforming an established religious, social, and political worldview.

**Forging a New Synthesis: The Pattern of Reforms, 1789–1849**

The sixty-year period from the ascent of the Ottoman sultan Selim III to the death of the Egyptian governor Muhammad Ali defines an era of state-sponsored military reforms during which the rulers of the Ottoman Empire and Egypt sought to remake their armed forces in the image of the European powers. The military reformers of this era did not question the cultural norms, social structures, or political relationships on which the Ottoman order rested.

However, their efforts to transform their armed forces and reestablish central political authority led them to reorganize the machinery of government and introduce new educational facilities. Military reform was thus the spearhead that led to the reform of civilian institutions and to the creation of new elite whose status was based on its training in European-style academies. Taken together, these government-sponsored activities inserted the central state into the daily lives of its subjects more directly and more pervasively than had previously been the case. Whether it was Muhammad Ali, the autonomous governor of Egypt, or the reforming Sultan Mahmud II in the central Ottoman Empire, the rulers in the era of transformation sought to expand the central state and to eliminate the customary intermediaries—the ulama or the *millet* leaders, for example—between the population and the state. In the course of pursuing their goals, the rulers of this period confronted, and in many cases destroyed, elements of the old order that opposed them. By so doing, they unintentionally undermined the Ottoman system as a whole and opened the doors to a process of transformation that extended far beyond the military.

**SELIM III (1789–1806): BETWEEN OLD AND NEW**

The policies of Sultan Selim III constituted an intensification of the efforts at military reform carried out by his eighteenth-century predecessors. His goal was not to transform the traditional Ottoman state but to preserve and strengthen it. In this regard, he was a conservative ruler whose vision of the proper Ottoman order was modeled on the system established under Süleyman the Magnificent. But because Selim’s programs laid the groundwork for a fullfledged reform movement by his successor, and because his downfall identified the barriers to further change, his reign constituted an important bridge between the old and the new.

When Selim ascended the Ottoman throne, the empire was engaged in yet another losing war with Austria and Russia. To the sultan and a trusted set of advisers, the lessons of the campaign were clear: Unless improvements were made in the military, the Ottoman state could not survive. Once peace was concluded in 1792, Selim embarked on a series of reforms designed to reorganize the existing armed forces along European lines. This involved the employment of European advisers under whose supervision new methods of training and tactics were introduced, new weapons were purchased and deployed, and existing foundries and arsenals were upgraded and new ones constructed. To placate the Janissaries and convince them to accept the new methods, Selim raised their salaries and rebuilt their barracks. However, he only aroused their suspicions, and they successfully resisted his moves toward reform. Frustrated in his attempts to curb their domestic unrest or to improve their military prowess, Selim took steps to bypass them.

To this end, the sultan’s most ambitious military project was the creation of an entirely new infantry corps fully trained and equipped according to the latest European standards. This unit, called the *nizam-i jedid* (the new order), was formed in 1797 and adopted a pattern of recruitment that was uncommon for the imperial forces; it was composed of Turkish peasant youths from Anatolia, a clear indication that the *devshirme* system was no longer functional. Officered and trained by Europeans, the *nizam-i jedid* was outfitted with modern weapons and French-style uniforms. By 1806 the new army numbered around 23,000 troops, including a modern artillery corps, and its units performed effectively in minor actions. But Selim III’s inability to integrate the force with the regular army and his reluctance to deploy it against his domestic opponents limited its role in defending the state it was created to preserve.

***Opening to the West***

Although Selim wished to restrict the adoption of European technology and ideas to the military sphere alone, his decision to establish permanent Ottoman embassies in the European capitals had the effect of opening new channels for the transmission of knowledge about the West into educated Ottoman circles. The first mission was sent to London in 1793, and by the end of the century Ottoman embassies had also been set up in Paris, Berlin, and Vienna.

The recognition that it was necessary to have permanent representation in Europe marked a departure from previous Ottoman practice. From the beginning of the Ottoman conquests, European commercial and diplomatic agents had been active in Ottoman domains. But the Ottomans, convinced of the superiority of their system, had not deemed it necessary to round out an exchange.

If the European rulers needed commercial agreements or peace treaties, they had to send their representatives to Istanbul to seek the sultan’s favor there. When an Ottoman ruler wished to discover information about conditions in Europe, he was content to rely on the details provided by one of the European representatives. In the centuries of Ottoman domination, the drawbacks of this one-sided dialogue may have been minimal; by the time of Selim, they were of major significance.

A similar attitude of superiority prevailed toward the languages of Europe; an educated Muslim Ottoman official of Selim III’s era might have known Ottoman, Arabic, and Persian, but he would not have had the opportunity to study a single European language. The Ottoman state communicated with Europe through official court translators (dragomans) employed from the Christian *millet*s. By the eighteenth century, members of the Istanbul Greek community held most of the top dragoman positions in the imperial service.

During Selim’s reign, the impact of the new embassies on informing the court about conditions in Europe was slight. The Ottoman ambassadors were ignorant of the languages of the countries to which they were assigned and had to rely on the goodwill of the Greek dragomans they took with them. Nevertheless, these missions provided a small cadre of young Ottoman officials with direct experience of Europe and with a grounding in French, the language of European diplomacy.

***The Overthrow of Selim III***

The formation and expansion of the *nizam-i jedid* aroused active opposition from the elements of Ottoman society that had benefited from the decline of central authority. From the start of Selim’s reign, the Janissaries had viewed his entire program of military reform as a threat to their independence, and they refused to serve alongside the new army in the field. The powerful *derebey*s were alarmed by the way in which the sultan financed his new forces—he confiscated *timar*s and directed the revenue toward the *nizam-i jedid*. Further opposition came from the ulama and other members of the ruling elite who objected to the European models on which Selim based his military reforms.

Led by the rebellious Janissaries, these forces came together in 1806, deposed Selim III, and selected a successor, Mustafa IV, who pledged not to interfere with their privileges. The decree of deposition accused Selim III of failing to respect the religion of Islam and the tradition of the Ottomans. Over the course of the next year, the embassies in Europe were dismantled, the *nizam-I*-*jedid* troops were dispersed, and the deposed sultan, whose cautious military reforms were intended to do no more than preserve the tradition of the Ottomans, was murdered.

**A REVIVED CENTER OF POWER: THE EGYPT OF MUHAMMAD ALI, 1805–1848**

***The Mamluk Restoration and the French Invasion***

The diversion of Ottoman resources in wars with European states and campaigns against local warlords reduced the empire’s ability to maintain administrative control over several of its provinces. This was evident in the case of Egypt, which by the late eighteenth century had become in reality if not in name an autonomous state under a revived Mamluk order. Although the Ottomans continued to send governors to Cairo, the Mamluk beys had effectively replaced the sultan’s representatives as the source of administrative and financial authority in the province. The Mamluk regime was unstable, oppressive, and unpopular. It had no cohesive central government but operated instead through a network of competing Mamluk households, each of which collected taxes, employed troops, and engaged in commercial ventures with local merchants and European agents. Given the absence of an administrative center to provide direction from the top, society was held together by various arrangements worked out among the Mamluks and leading merchants, guilds people, and members of the religious establishment. From time to time one of the Mamluks was able to attract sufficient clients and men at arms to become dominant in the country. This occurred under Ali Bey al-Kabir (1760–1773), who expanded Egypt’s trade with Britain and France and showed a willingness to improve his army by hiring European advisers and purchasing European weapons. However, Ali Bey was overthrown by his own Mamluk military commander, and from 1775 to 1798 Egypt was dominated by a tenuous alliance between two rival Mamluk factions.

Thus, although late-eighteenth-century Egypt was not as isolated as it has sometimes been portrayed, the frequent internecine warfare among the Mamluk factions and their heavy-handed tax policies caused order and security in the rural areas to break down. Moreover, the tendency of the Mamluk system to fragment prevented the establishment of any stable central authority through which the country’s resources could be organized and its administration regularized.

This would change during the governorship of Muhammad Ali. In the aftermath of the French Revolution in 1789, Britain and France became embroiled in a series of wars that lasted until Napoleon Bonaparte’s defeat at Waterloo in 1815. The major battles of the Napoleonic Wars were fought on the European continent, but the Franco-British rivalry extended beyond Europe and brought the two powers into conflict over access to overseas markets and strategic outposts. Egypt became directly enmeshed in this rivalry when an ambitious French expedition led by Napoleon invaded the country in 1798 and administered a decisive defeat to the Mamluk forces at the Battle of the Pyramids. The immediate military objective of the French expedition was to strike at Britain’s communications routes with India.

Napoleon was also motivated by commercial considerations, hoping to colonize Egypt and to establish it as a reliable source of grain for the French mainland. The British destruction of the French fleet in 1798 at the battle of Aboukir Bay near Alexandria frustrated French goals, and Napoleon soon returned to France.

However, the rest of the expeditionary force, cut off from the outside by the British fleet, remained in troubled occupation of the country for three years. The engineers and scientists whom Napoleon had brought with him drew up plans for new canals and communications, and the fledgling French administration attempted to reorganize the landholding and taxation systems. But the occupation was unpopular among Egyptians, and few of the French schemes were actually implemented. The whole episode was brought to an end by a joint British-Ottoman expedition that landed in Egypt in 1801 and eventually arranged for the evacuation of the French forces. One important result of the French invasion was to impress on local Middle Eastern rulers the technological capabilities of a European power that could mount a complex amphibious expedition across the Mediterranean and penetrate to the very heartlands of Ottoman domains.

***The Reform Policies of Muhammad Ali***

From one perspective, Muhammad Ali can be viewed as another traditional warlord seeking to establish an independent hereditary dynasty at the expense of the weakened Ottoman state. Yet for all the customary features of warlordism and absolutism that characterized Muhammad Ali’s rule in Egypt, his regime also represented the first sustained program in the Middle East of state-sponsored Europeanization of the military and of the institutions that supported it.

Muhammad Ali was an ethnic Albanian, born and raised in the Greek coastal city of Kavalla. He arrived in Egypt in 1801 as second in command of an Albanian contingent that was part of the expedition sent by the Ottoman government to evacuate the French. Several factions competed to fill the power vacuum left by the French departure. Muhammad Ali emerged the victor and was recognized by Istanbul as the Ottoman governor of Egypt in 1805. With his position established, Muhammad Ali launched Egypt on a breathtaking forty years of internal development and imperial expansion. He completely refashioned the armed forces, reorganized the administration and installed a centralized bureaucracy, changed the patterns of landholding and agricultural production, introduced heavy industry, and conquered an empire that by the 1830s included the northern Sudan, the western coast of Arabia, all of Greater Syria, and parts of southwestern Anatolia. All of these administrative, fiscal, and personnel changes formed part of a process of state building in which Muhammad Ali transformed the governing structures of Egypt from those of a subordinate province to those of a fledgling state. In the course of making Egypt a military and economic power, Muhammad Ali also brought the country into sustained diplomatic and commercial contact with Western Europe. Muhammad Ali’s political objective was to secure independence from the Ottoman Empire and to establish in Egypt a hereditary dynasty for his family. Because he believed that independence could be won and preserved only by means of a powerful army and navy, the main purpose of all of his reforms was to strengthen the armed forces. Impressed by what he had seen of British and French troops, he determined that his military would be modeled along European lines. The most immediate barrier to Muhammad Ali’s goal of building a European-style army was the continued interference of the Mamluks. Unable to reform them or to win their allegiance, Muhammad Ali destroyed them. In 1811 about seventy-four leading Mamluks were massacred as they left a banquet to which he had invited them in the Cairo citadel. During the months that followed, Mamluk power was decisively broken throughout the country, and Muhammad Ali began the systematic reconstruction of an officer corps based on the European model. In particular, he established an officers’ training school in Aswan with European instructors and Turkish and Mamluk students. And in a further attempt to produce a cadre of Egyptians with an understanding of European military sciences, he sent several training missions to Europe, mainly to France. Members of these student groups, returning to Egypt with firsthand experience of Europe and a knowledge of its languages, had an impact on the future direction of their country that extended far beyond the narrowly military origins of their training. In addition to providing for the specific training of combat officers, Muhammad Ali founded educational institutions intended to produce experts in the support services required by the military. During a twenty-year period beginning in the early 1820s, schools of medicine, veterinary medicine, engineering, and chemistry opened their doors. In time these, too, would have influence beyond their initial military intent.

Such an intensive program of higher education oriented toward Western subject matter brought with it a concurrent effort to produce suitable textbooks and instruction manuals. In 1835 Muhammad Ali established the School of Languages for the express purpose of training translators and preparing Arabic textbooks for the state educational institutions. This school exercised an important influence on the direction of Egypt’s cultural and educational life until its closure in the 1850s. A related development was the founding of a government printing press that published the translated materials, printed government decrees for distribution, and brought out the first Arabic-language newspaper, *al-Waqai al-Misriyyah* (Official Gazette), in 1828.

Muhammad Ali’s wholehearted acceptance of the printing press was a break from the cautious cultural tradition of the Ottoman world and was of the utmost importance in promoting the spread of Western ideas to the educated elite of Egyptian society. As he set up his European-style facilities for training officers, Muhammad Ali was faced with the need to obtain large numbers of common soldiers to fill his new army. At one point he thought that the inhabitants of the Sudan could be molded into an effective slave army, and in 1820 he ordered an invasion of the region. Although a portion of northern Sudan was successfully conquered and added to Egypt’s domains, an army of Sudanese troops did not materialize.

Muhammad Ali then turned to Egypt itself and began conscripting native Egyptian *fellahin* (peasants). Like Selim III’s use of Anatolian Turks in the *nizam-i jedid*, this was a departure from the existing norm in the Ottoman world. But Muhammad Ali was not bound by traditional notions of warfare, and though his relentless conscription led to the depopulation of the countryside, he managed to build a peasant army that at its peak numbered more than 130,000 troops. The very act of conscription represented a new form of government control over the population. Effective conscription—as well as efficient taxation—required accurate population statistics, and Muhammad Ali endeavored to collect them by establishing conscription registers and, later, by ordering a national census. Military service was harsh and conscription was dreaded, but Muhammad Ali was determined to support his bid for independence with a credible military machine.

Muhammad Ali recognized that in order to pay for his military, he would have to exploit Egypt’s resources to their limits and ensure that the central treasury obtained the maximum possible revenues from all productive sources within the economy. At the time Muhammad Ali became governor of Egypt, the existing systems of land tenure and taxation allowed considerable revenue to be diverted from the state. Mamluks and individuals within the ulama profited from their control of *iltizam*, a tax-farming system in which tax farmers remitted a fixed annual sum to the treasury and retained whatever surplus they could extort from the peasants under their control.

During the first ten years of his rule, Muhammad Ali confiscated the *iltizam* lands and instituted a tax on the extensive *waqf* revenues administered by theulama. *Waqf* was a practice, approved by the *shariah*, that permitted the incomefrom property to be set aside in perpetuity for charitable purposes suchas the upkeep of mosques and schools. The revenue from *waqf* endowmentswas not subject to tax, and by the nineteenth century large portions of productiveland in both Egypt and the central Ottoman domains were devoted to *waqf* and thus lay outside the state’s control. The ulama acted as trustees for *waqf* endowments and assigned *waqf* revenues to their designated purposes.

The centralizing governments of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries sought to break the hold of the ulama over *waqf*s and to gain control of the revenues generated by the endowments. Thus Muhammad Ali’s policies served the dual purpose of increasing the state’s control over land and revenue and of reducing the wealth and prestige of the Mamluks and the ulama. Over the course of his reign, Muhammad Ali granted land to certain trusted officials who were expected to cultivate it in exchange for tax exemptions, and he gave large tracts of land to his relatives. The net result of these practices was to introduce the concept of private ownership of land and to concentrate enormous holdings into the hands of a few families.

Muhammad Ali’s regime also experimented with new crops, by far the most important of which was a special variety of long-staple cotton known as Jumel after the French engineer who helped develop it. Jumel cotton was favored by the European textile industry, and it quickly became Egypt’s most lucrative cash crop. To further boost revenues Muhammad Ali brought previously marginal lands into cultivation and increased the yields of existing plots by rebuilding and expanding the irrigation system. Thousands of *fellahin* were put to work dredging canals and constructing barrages so that the annual Nile flood could be stored and used for a full summer growing season when the river was low. These public works projects were carried out through extensive use of the corvée, a levy of forced peasant labor. As with the regime’s large-scale conscription practices, the corvée, by uprooting peasants from their lands and forcing them to serve on work gangs, caused a temporary decline in agricultural productivity in those regions most heavily affected by the levy. It was common for foremen on the work gangs to apply the *khurbaj* (whip). Muhammad Ali did not introduce the corvée and the *khurbaj* into the Egyptian countryside, but he did not prohibit their application.

During the first years of Muhammad Ali’s rule, Egypt’s revenues were derived mainly from the export of agricultural commodities. However, Muhammad Ali did not intend for Egypt to become an exporter of raw materials and an importer of European manufactured products. In an effort to make the country self-sufficient, he began a program of industrialization with an emphasis on war-related materials and textiles for the local market. By the mid-1820s, the arsenal in the Cairo citadel was producing 1,600 muskets a month, and in the late 1830s the new naval complex at Alexandria employed 4,000 workers and was responsible for the construction of nine warships with over 100 guns each.2 Machinery and managers were imported from Europe, but the labor force was recruited from among Egyptian peasants and craftsmen. Estimates on the numbers of workers vary widely, but it appears that during the late 1830s at least 30,000 to 40,000 Egyptians were employed in industrial enterprises. The products of the war-related industries were of high quality, whereas the textile industry was less successful and could not capture markets that Muhammad Ali did not control directly.

The entire program of state-sponsored industrialization was rushed, and many of the factories were abandoned in the 1840s when Muhammad Ali was forced to reduce the size of his army to 18,000 men (see the next section). Muhammad Ali’s ability to direct the Egyptian economy and to control its revenues was attained through a monopoly system. He forced cultivators to sell directly to him at a fixed price, then sold to European buyers at the considerably higher market price. He controlled industrial development in a similar fashion, directing capital investment and collecting the revenues. His domestic monopoly was an irritant to European merchants, who had no opportunity to purchase materials from any Egyptian supplier other than the governor. For most of his reign, Muhammad Ali appears to have defied many of the Capitulation restrictions that were supposed to apply in all Ottoman territories.

One of Muhammad Ali’s most lasting achievements, and the one that made the implementation of his other reformist schemes possible, was the reorganization of the central administration. Government was taken away from competing Mamluk factions and centralized under Muhammad Ali’s absolute authority. From him there radiated a system of delegated power that at the highest level rested in functionally differentiated ministries. At the middle level there emerged a new group of officials trained in technical and administrative schools and appointed on the basis of their qualifications. Government became more bureaucratized and more predictable. To buttress the state’s control over the countryside Egypt was divided into ten provinces, each of which was administered by a centrally appointed governor responsible for law and order and the collection of taxes.

Muhammad Ali’s creation of a centralized bureaucracy was one of his most enduring legacies, but the complexities of his government should not be overemphasized. He ran his state in the manner of an extended household; his sons were appointed to key positions, his loyal officials received grants of land, and he made the major decisions himself. Nor should Muhammad Ali’s success in Egypt be associated with any identification on his part with Egyptians. He was a dynast, not an Egyptian, and he is reputed to have despised his subjects.

The language of his higher administration was Ottoman Turkish, not the local Arabic, and the initial composition of his new bureaucratic and military elite showed his preference for Turks and Circassians over native Egyptians. He also exhibited the traditional Ottoman reliance on minority groups for administrative expertise; his administration contained a high proportion of local Christians, and his most trusted personal adviser and minister of foreign affairs, Boghos Pasha, was an Armenian. Although Muhammad Ali continued to regard himself as a member of an Ottoman ruling elite that was culturally and linguistically separated from the population over which it ruled, his pragmatic educational policies turned out a new elite of native Egyptians who began to assume positions of responsibility in the bureaucracy. The high posts in the military hierarchy continued to be awarded to non-Egyptians, but within the civilian administration the graduates of the new schools began to secure important positions, and within a generation of Muhammad Ali’s passing, Arabic replaced Ottoman Turkish as the language of administration.

***The Wars of Expansion***

Unlike Selim III, who did not have the opportunity to deploy his new army, Muhammad Ali sent his reformed military on wars throughout the Middle East. His military campaigns began in the service of the Ottoman sultan; they concluded with the near conquest of Istanbul.

His first overseas campaign was against the puritanical Wahhabi movement in western Arabia. The Wahhabis had captured the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, and the Ottoman sultan, Mahmud II, diverted by European war and domestic turmoil, ordered Muhammad Ali to put down the revolt.

The Egyptian forces, led by Muhammad Ali’s son Ibrahim, a brilliant commander, landed in Arabia in 1811 and over the course of a difficult campaign captured Mecca and Medina and established an Egyptian presence in the Hijaz. The conquest of the Sudan began in 1820 and brought portions of that region, including its Red Sea coast, under Egyptian dominion.

In the meantime, events in Ottoman Europe presented Muhammad Ali with an opportunity to expand the Mediterranean base of his empire. In 1821 a nationalist revolt against Ottoman rule broke out in Greece. Neither the rebels nor the Ottoman army was able to achieve a decisive victory, and the revolt dragged on until Sultan Mahmud II requested Muhammad Ali’s military intervention. In exchange for his assistance, Muhammad Ali was promised the governorship of Crete. The Egyptian forces, again commanded by Ibrahim, subdued the Greek rebels and helped the Ottomans recapture Athens in 1827.

By this time, however, the Greek revolt had become internationalized, and European intervention forced Ibrahim to evacuate his troops and leave Crete under Ottoman sovereignty. Muhammad Ali’s support of the sultan had proved costly and had gained him no new territory. His next campaigns would serve his own needs.

In order to obtain raw materials lacking in Egypt (especially timber for his navy) and a captive market for Egypt’s new industrial output, Muhammad Ali turned against the sultan and invaded Syria. From fall 1831 to December 1832 Ibrahim led the Egyptian army through Lebanon and Syria and across the Taurus Mountains into Anatolia, where he defeated the Ottoman forces and pushed on to Kuhtaya, only 150 miles from Istanbul.

The Egyptian invasion of Syria triggered a European response that reveals the intricate linkage between the actions of local Middle Eastern rulers and Europe’s determination to defend its interests in the area. As Ibrahim’s forces pushed the Ottoman armies out of Syria, Mahmud II desperately sought a Great Power ally. Only Russia responded to his appeals, and in 1833 the two states signed a defensive alliance known as the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi. This treaty overturned a cornerstone of British policy: the aim to keep Russian influence at Istanbul to a minimum. Thus, when the treaty was disclosed, British and French diplomats swung into action in order to prevent further Russian gains in Istanbul. They successfully pressured the sultan and Muhammad Ali to end their hostilities and sign a treaty that recognized Ibrahim as governor of the Anatolian district of Adana and all of Greater Syria. Although Muhammad Ali had failed to achieve international recognition of his sovereign independence, he had expanded his empire and survived the European intervention his actions had caused. He would not be so fortunate the next time.

During Ibrahim’s years as governor of Syria (1833–1840), he introduced many of the domestic programs that had already been adopted in Egypt. The Egyptian monopoly system was also imposed on Syria, making it a captive market for Egyptian textiles. This damaged the local craft industries and, in combination with Ibrahim’s imposition of military conscription, produced unrest in the region during the late 1830s. Sultan Mahmud II, hoping to use this unrest to his advantage, sent an army against Ibrahim in spring 1839. But the Ottoman forces were routed at the battle of Nezib, setting off another international diplomatic crisis that brought an end to Muhammad Ali’s imperial dreams. Britain, more than ever convinced that the rise of Muhammad Ali’s military and commercial power was incompatible with British interests in the Middle East, sent a fleet to Beirut in 1840 and, in joint action with Ottoman forces, landed troops in Lebanon. Once the expedition was ashore, the local hostility that had been building against Ibrahim’s administration burst forth in a number of popular uprisings. Ibrahim retreated to Egypt, and the powers of

Europe imposed a settlement on the Ottoman-Egyptian conflict.

By the terms of the Treaty of London of 1841, Muhammad Ali was compelled to withdraw from all the territories he had occupied except the Sudan. The treaty also stipulated that the Egyptian army could not exceed 18,000 men. Although these were significant restrictions with important consequences for Egypt, Muhammad Ali managed to achieve at least a portion of his objectives. The Treaty of London stated that the governorship of Egypt was to be a hereditary office held by his family. Indeed, Egypt was ruled by Muhammad Ali’s descendants until 1952. However, the Egypt of his successors would find itself in a considerably weaker economic position than it had been during the height of his power. Partly as a result of Muhammad Ali’s occupation of Syria and his establishment of the monopoly system there, Great Britain persuaded the Ottoman government to sign a trade convention in 1838 known as the Treaty of Balta Liman. The agreement was to have a profound impact on Ottoman (including Egyptian) economic development. It provided for the abolition of all monopolies within the Ottoman Empire and granted foreign goods entry at the favorable tariff rate of 3 percent. Other European states soon wrested similar concessions from the Ottomans. In combination with a vigorous enforcement of the Capitulations by the European powers and a decline in Egypt’s military strength, the Balta Liman agreement helped bring an end to Egypt’s industrial development and economic independence. Thus, a significant result of Muhammad Ali’s reign was to intensify Western European involvement in the affairs of the Middle East as a whole and Egypt in particular. To paraphrase Marshall Hodgson on Europe’s determination and ability to defend its developing global interests, if Egypt mattered in London, then London would surely matter in Egypt.

Following the signing of the Treaty of London and the forced reduction of the Egyptian armed forces, most of Muhammad Ali’s war-related industries were abandoned, many of his schools were closed, and the public works projects ceased. The military machine for whose needs he had developed the Egyptian economy no longer existed. Yet despite Muhammad Ali’s failure to establish complete Egyptian independence, his attempt to create an autonomous state had led him to construct an infrastructure of government that outlasted his rule. He left to his successors the all-important legacies of a centralized administration and a small cadre of trained officials who would continue his commitment to European-inspired reform.

**NATIONALISM AND GREAT POWER INTERVENTION: THE GREEK REVOLT, 1821–1829**

In addition to outside powers and internal warlords, the Ottoman government faced another threat to its territorial integrity during the nineteenth century: nationalist independence movements by its European subjects. The new ideology of nationalism, with its central principle that peoples speaking the same language and holding shared memories of a common past should form distinct political states, endangered the imperial religious structure on which the Ottoman Empire rested. As nationalism spread among its Balkan subjects, the state was confronted by a continuous series of nationalist uprisings that were often manipulated by the Great Powers for their own ends. The first Balkan independence revolt broke out in Serbia in 1804, but because of the Serbs’ difficulties in attracting a Great Power patron, the uprising did not achieve its objectives until 1830, when Serbia was granted autonomy. The Greek revolt, in contrast, generated Great Power support and led to the creation of an independent Greek state.

There were two components of the Ottoman Greek world in the early nineteenth century. The first lay outside Greece proper and consisted of the cosmopolitan Greek intellectual and commercial centers in Istanbul and the Russian Black Sea port of Odessa. Members of the flourishing community in Odessa were prominent in shipping and trade, whereas the Phanariot (from their quarter, Phanar) Greeks in Istanbul dominated the hierarchy of the Greek Orthodox church and held the influential positions of dragomans. Members of this wider Greek community became familiar with conditions in Western Europe and with the ideas of the French Revolution, which they communicated to their compatriots in Greece proper. In 1814 a secret society, Philike Hetairia (the Society of Friends), was founded in Odessa for the purpose of coordinating a movement for the independence of Greece from the Ottomans.

Conditions on the Greek mainland were in marked contrast to the world of Phanar and Odessa. As was the case in other regions of the empire, the decline of Ottoman central authority in Greece caused government to become less efficient and more capricious and led to the rise of local Turkish—and Greek— *derebey*s who controlled the land and exploited the peasantry. The alienation of the population from its Ottoman overlords was increased by the development of nationalism, in this case by a resurgence of Greek literature and a new awareness of the classical Greek past. The Ottomans came to be seen as alien oppressors, not imperial protectors.

 The armed revolt broke out in 1821 and briefly occupied two fronts. The Philike Hetairia, led by Alexander Yipsilantis, attempted to foment a rebellion in the Danubian Principalities; this ill-conceived endeavor was quickly crushed by the Ottoman forces. On the Greek mainland, bands of rebels attacked Ottoman installations and killed individual Turkish residents. Although the mainland rebellion lacked coordination and central leadership, it succeeded in driving the Ottomans from the Peloponnesus. However, the revolt soon reached a stalemate; the rebels could not force the Ottomans out of the north, and the Ottomans could not subdue the Greek forces in the Peloponnesus. It was a brutal confrontation, and both sides took bitter reprisals against the civilian populations. The enmity spread to Istanbul, where the Ottomans executed the patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church and the chief dragoman. These executions marked a significant break in the relationship between the Ottoman ruling elite and the Greek elite of the Phanar quarter of Istanbul, on whom the Ottomans had traditionally relied as translators and transmitters of information about Western Europe. The Greek revolt would make it necessary for the Ottomans to train their own Muslim translators in Western languages. Desperate to end the rebellion, Sultan Mahmud II called on Muhammad Ali of Egypt, whose troops, as we have seen, had considerable success against the rebels. When the Egyptian and Ottoman forces linked up in 1827, the revolt appeared doomed. It was at this point that the Great Powers asserted their interests and changed the outcome of events. In Britain public opinion was overwhelmingly in favor of the Greek cause. Russia, using its standard pretext for interference in Ottoman affairs, emphasized its role as protector of the Greek Orthodox church and asserted its right to intervene on behalf of its coreligionists.

Here was displayed the delicate pattern of diplomacy that developed around what came to be called the Eastern Question. Britain and Russia each feared that the other would use the excuse of the Greek revolt to acquire Ottoman territory. Both powers were eager to gain an advantage at the Ottomans’ expense, but they did not wish to antagonize each other and create a situation that could lead to war between them. They therefore applied the unwritten code of Eastern Question diplomacy: They joined together, along with France, and offered to mediate between the Ottomans and the Greeks, hoping that by overseeing the settlement of the crisis they would preserve their respective interests. But Mahmud II refused to play according to the rules of European diplomacy, insisting that the only acceptable settlement was the full restoration of Ottoman sovereignty over Greece. The Great Power alliance responded to the sultan’s intransigence by escalating its pressure and sending a fleet to Greece in 1827 to set up a blockade of all supplies bound for the Ottoman-Egyptian forces. Somehow, the European and Ottoman-Egyptian fleets both chose Navarino Bay for their anchorage. Without a declaration of war from either side, one of the largest naval battles of the nineteenth century occurred on October 20, 1827. When it was over, most of the Ottoman-Egyptian fleet was on the bottom of the bay. The defeat at Navarino prompted Muhammad Ali to withdraw from Greece, but Sultan Mahmud II still refused to concede the loss of the region. Russia then declared war on the Ottoman Empire in 1828, and by the following year its armies had, with considerable difficulty, crossed the Danube and captured Adrianople, the Ottomans’ second capital. This was a situation that the checks and balances of Eastern Question diplomacy were supposed to prevent: The Empire was facing a disastrous military defeat, and Russia stood to make considerable unilateral territorial gains. Britain considered dispatching a fleet to Istanbul, and war seemed imminent. However, hostilities were avoided when Britain and Russia decided that dismemberment of the Ottoman

Empire was not in the best interests of either power. Put simply, each state concluded that the existence of the empire as a weak buffer state between their competing ambitions was preferable to going to war over the division of Ottoman territories. The Greek crisis was settled according to this principle. In the Treaty of

Adrianople (1829) between the Ottomans and Russians, Russia reduced its original territorial demands and agreed to withdraw to the Danube. The affairs of Greece were regulated by a convention of 1832, which declared Greece an independent state under the protection of Britain, Russia, and France. The Greece that emerged from the revolt was a truncated state of some 800,000 inhabitants, with 2.4 million Greeks remaining under Ottoman rule. This was a virtual guarantee that Greek foreign policy would be irredentist. Joint Ottoman-Egyptian action had defeated the forces of the Greek revolt, but Great Power intervention overturned the results achieved in the local arena.

Subsequent Balkan nationalist revolts did not produce exactly the same sequence of Great Power involvement, but all of them did attract external intervention, forcing the Ottomans always to pay attention not just to the rebels themselves but also to the rebels’ potential Great Power patrons. That the Ottomans could also find outside patrons and manipulate Great Power rivalries to their own advantage was a lesson that Mahmud II learned well when he used the Russian threat to help create the Franco-British alliance that halted Muhammad Ali in 1833 and again in 1839–1840.

**SULTAN MAHMUD II (1808–1839): CENTRALIZATION AND TRANSFORMATION**

Mahmud II has received bad press from Western diplomatic historians who view him simply as the sultan who ruled during a period of increased dismemberment of Ottoman lands and who was overshadowed by his own governor, Muhammad Ali of Egypt. Yet despite the territorial losses suffered during his reign, one might argue that Mahmud II was the most effective of the late Ottoman sultans, a skillful and determined monarch whose rule achieved for the empire what Muhammad Ali’s had for Egypt. Like Selim III, Mahmud II was primarily a military reformer. However, he differed from his ill-starred predecessor in that he saw the need to act decisively against the centrifugal political forces that continued to paralyze royal authority. Given the dominance of the *derebey*-ulama-Janissary coalition that had overthrown Selim III, Mahmud II had to proceed cautiously. The first years of his reign were occupied by a campaign to reestablish central authority within the provinces. Using the Janissaries, whose loyalty he secured with bribes, Mahmud II moved against the *derebey*s and succeeded in breaking their power. By the 1820s, with the Greeks in revolt and Muhammad Ali demonstrating the superiority of his reformed military, Mahmud II ordered the creation of a new European-style army corps to which he intended to attach various Janissary units. The Janissaries, as they had done so often in the recent past, mounted a demonstration against the proposed reforms, but Mahmud II had prepared for the rebellion and used his new troops to crush it. Within the space of a few hours on June 15, 1826, thousands of Janissaries were massacred on the streets and in their barracks, and the military institution that had once been the foundation of Ottoman power was destroyed forever. The elimination of the Janissaries removed the major obstacle to further reform, and during the final thirteen years of his reign, Mahmud II instituted a rapid-paced program that transformed the traditional Ottoman order. His first priority was the rebuilding of his army along European lines. To avoid the charges of infidelism that had weakened Selim III, Mahmud II called his new force “the triumphant soldiers of Muhammad.” It was trained by Prussian and French officers and British naval advisers. Further European influences penetrated the military through the educational infrastructure Mahmud II established; in 1827 a medical school for army personnel was founded in Istanbul; and in 1834 the sultan opened the Imperial War College, modeled on the French officers’ training academy at St. Cyr. Instruction at both of these institutions was in French. Following the example of Muhammad Ali, the sultan began sending groups of students to Europe for advanced study, thus ensuring a further commitment to European models among members of the new officer corps. In the same year that the Janissaries were destroyed, Mahmud II also abolished the *sipahi* units and formed a professional salaried cavalry. A related development was the elimination of the *timar* system in 1831.

Mahmud II’s reforms were not confined to the military. To increase the administrative efficiency of the state and to reestablish royal authority in the conduct of affairs, the sultan undertook a reorganization of the bureaucracy. He abolished old offices, introduced new lines of responsibility in an effort to create European-style ministries, and raised salaries in an attempt to end bribery. Just as French uniforms symbolized the post-Janissary army, so the replacement of the turban and the robe by the fez and the frock coat among the bureaucracy represented Mahmud II’s efforts to force Europeanization on the civilian branches of government. In 1838 the sultan founded two institutions for the training of higher officials. Both of them offered a mixture of standard and secular subjects and, significantly, included instruction in French. To keep his officials informed of his programs, the sultan founded an official gazette, *Takvim-I* *Vekayi* (Calendar of Events), in 1831. The first newspaper to be published in the Ottoman-Turkish language, it became required reading for all civil servants.

As earlier sections of this chapter have shown, the Ottoman Empire was involved in a series of international diplomatic crises during Mahmud II’s reign. The empire’s ability to negotiate treaties and alliances was severely hampered by the paucity of officials with knowledge of a European language. Even the customary practice of employing Greek dragomans had to be abandoned as a result of the Greek revolt. In the 1830s Mahmud II moved to fill this void by reestablishing the Ottoman embassies in Europe and by opening a translation office to deal with state correspondence and train Ottoman officials in European languages. Both the embassies and the translation office proved to be important training grounds for the next generation of civil servants.

Under Mahmud II the autonomy of the *derebey*s was curbed, the Janissaries destroyed, and the bureaucracy reorganized and made dependent on the direct authority of the sultan. A more delicate issue was how to limit the power of the leading ulama who had been instrumental in the overthrow of Selim III. Some ulama accepted the military reforms as necessary, but the entire religious establishment was independent of the central state and in command of considerable resources through its control of *waqf* revenues. Mahmud II attempted to circumscribe the authority of the *shaykh al-Islam*, the chief religious dignitary of the empire, by making his office part of the state bureaucracy. The sultan also tried to acquire control of *waqf* revenues by creating the Ministry of Religious Endowments (1826) to administer *waqf* income and direct any surplus to the state rather than allowing it to go to the religious establishment. This centralization measure was not fully implemented during Mahmud II’s reign, but it marked the beginning of state intervention in the financial affairs of the religious establishment and weakened the position of the ulama vis-à-vis the central government.

**CONCLUSION**

Although the Ottoman Empire suffered territorial losses during Mahmud II’s reign, his reforms strengthened the military and administrative arms of the state. His legacy, like that of Muhammad Ali, was the creation of an environment in which the new elite—aptly termed “the French knowers”—were favored. As the sultan became committed to European reforms and as European economic and military pressure on the empire increased, those who knew European ways and European languages received appointments to the highest posts in the military command and the civilian bureaucracy. The opponents of reform were either eliminated or, as in the case of the ulama, gradually bypassed. After Mahmud II’s death, the members of this new elite, trained in the translation office, the European embassies, and the military academies, continued his reforms and inaugurated a new phase in the transformation of the Ottoman system.

**The Ottoman Empire and Egypt during the Era of the Tanzimat**

During the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the reforms Muhammad Ali and Mahmud II had inaugurated for the purposes of revitalizing their armed forces were extended into nonmilitary areas by their successors. The emulation of European methods of administration, education, and political organization brought about a continued expansion of the role of the state and was accompanied by a pressing need for qualified administrators and technical experts. Europeans filled many of these positions, but the new state-sponsored schools turned out increasing numbers of Ottoman and Egyptian graduates who quickly moved into the top ranks of the state hierarchy. Although the Islamic foundations of society were not openly questioned by the new generation of Western-trained officials, their policies tended to reduce the institutional significance of the religious establishment and to enhance the opportunities available to individuals trained as they were. Throughout the period, European economic penetration of the Middle East acquired a new and more pervasive dimension. Added to the earlier sales of arms and other manufactured products was the provision of huge amounts of capital investment and easy access to credit. As the local reformers struggled to finance their projects, European banks and financiers stepped forward with loans that seemed, at the beginning, to offer favorable terms. However, as we will see, these loans became the Achilles’ heel of the reform movement, and the accumulation of indebtedness led directly to the British occupation of Egypt and to the less obvious but nonetheless equally real loss of economic sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire.

**THE TANZIMAT: CONTINUED OTTOMAN REFORM UNDER THE BUREAUCRATS**

The period from 1839 to 1876 is known in Ottoman history as the Tanzimat (literally, reorganization) and marks the most intensive phase of nineteenthcentury Ottoman reformist activity. During these years, the inspiration for reforms came not from the sultans but from Europeanized Ottoman bureaucrats, the French knowers, who were shaped by the institutions established by Mahmud II. The career patterns of the leading civilian reformers of the Tanzimat era show how different their experiences were from the generation that preceded them and how their rise to power was tied to their exposure to Europe. The first fifteen years of the Tanzimat were dominated by Rashid Pasha (1800–1858), who acquired his credentials for high office through his service as Ottoman ambassador to Paris and London in the 1830s. He rose rapidly in the Ottoman administration and was minister of foreign affairs at the time of Mahmud II’s death in 1839. He used this high position to gain exceptional influence and went on to hold the office of grand vizier six times and the position of foreign minister twice. His commitment to remake the governing institutions of the Ottoman Empire in the image of Europe drove him to promote the careers of a number of like-minded younger men, the two most important of whom became his successors as leaders of the reform movement. The career of the first of these disciples, Ali Pasha (1815–1871), serves as a compelling example of the relationship between knowledge of a European language and access to power in the changing Ottoman Empire of the mid-nineteenth century. The son of an Istanbul shopkeeper, Ali became an employee in the translation office at age eighteen, and by the time he was twenty-six he was Ottoman ambassador to London. After five years in London, Ali Pasha returned to Istanbul, where he became minister of foreign affairs in 1846 and grand vizier in 1852, a post he held several more times until his death. Ali Pasha’s associate in the last two decades of the Tanzimat, Fuad Pasha (1815–1869), began his higher education at the military medical school founded by Mahmud II and then transferred to the translation office. This educational background opened up an appointment to the Ottoman embassy in London that in turn led to Fuad’s promotion in 1852 to the first of what would be five terms as minister of foreign affairs. Fuad Pasha was the most thoroughly Europeanized of the three men and was famous in diplomatic circles for his devastating wit expressed in perfect French. Once, when he was being pressed by an Englishwoman to reveal how many wives he, as a Muslim, had, he replied: “The same as your husband—two, only he conceals one and I don’t.” Rashid Pasha and his two disciples dominated the Tanzimat and, in collaboration with other bureaucrats whom they sometimes persuaded and sometimes coerced, were the driving forces behind the movement to transform the administrative structure of the Ottoman Empire. The most striking evidence of the new direction in which the empire was being taken is contained in two royal decrees that defined the very essence of the Tanzimat. The first of them, the Hatt-i Sharif of Gülhane, was issued in 1839 at Rashid Pasha’s insistence. The decree was not a piece of legislation but, rather, a statement of royal intent the sultan issued to his subjects. In it the Ottoman ruler promised certain administrative reforms, such as the abolition of tax farming, the standardization of military conscription, and the elimination of corruption.

These sentiments had been expressed previously, but what made the Hatt-i Sharif so remarkable was the sultan’s pledge to extend the reforms to all Ottoman subjects, regardless of their religion. In 1856, at the conclusion of the Crimean War,

Ali and Fuad Pashas encouraged the promulgation of a second decree, the Hatt-i Hümayan, in which the principles of 1839 were repeated and the guarantees of the equality of all subjects were made more explicit. Thus, Muslim and non-Muslim were to have equal obligations in terms of military service and equal opportunities for state employment and admission to state schools.

The intent of the two decrees was to secure the loyalty of the Christian subjects of the empire at a time of growing nationalist agitation in the European provinces. It appears that during the period of Ottoman decentralization in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the *millet*s acquired a greater degree of autonomy than they had previously possessed. The decrees of 1839 and 1856 sought to break down the religious and cultural autonomy of the *millet*s and to create the notion of a common Ottoman citizenship, or Ottomanism, which would in theory replace the religious ordering of society in which Muslims were dominant. The pledges were not fully implemented, as much due to Christian preference for new nationalist affiliations as to lingering Muslim feelings of superiority, but the attempt to replace religious affiliation with secular identity continued with the proclamation of a Nationality Law in 1869. This law reinforced the principle that all individuals living within Ottoman domains shared a common citizenship regardless of their religion. The two decrees together with the Nationality Law represent a sharp break with customary Ottoman attitudes and show the extent to which the reformers were prepared to go in attempting to keep the state together. In order to preserve the Ottoman Empire, they introduced the concept of the secular organization of society, which would have the long-term effect of undermining the entire basis of the Ottoman system. During the Tanzimat, military improvements continued to receive attention, but the sphere of state-sponsored reforms was consciously extended to other areas as well. Thus, whereas Mahmud II’s educational policies concentrated on training officers and physicians for the armed forces, the Tanzimat officials established institutions of higher learning for civilians. The two most important of them were the Civil Service School (1859) and the Imperial Ottoman Lycée at Galatasaray (1868). The impact of these two schools, along with the earlier war college, on the formation of the Ottoman political and administrative elite can scarcely be overemphasized. Graduates from the three institutions enjoyed a high success rate in gaining state employment and occupied positions of authority in Turkey and the Arab states until well into the twentieth century.

In addition to their concern with higher education, the Tanzimat reformers drew up proposals for an elaborate system of secondary schools and in 1847 created a Ministry of Education as an arm of the state. Although the secondary schools were slow to develop, the very act of creating them and placing them under the control of a central ministry constituted an expansion of the state’s role in an area not previously considered part of its responsibility and marked yet another step toward the establishment of an educational system outside the control of the ulama.

The Tanzimat was also a period for the promulgation of new legal codes.

With the French civil code as the model, new penal and commercial codes were introduced, a system of secular courts called *nizame* was established to deal with cases involving Muslims and non-Muslims, and a new civil code, the Mejelle, was compiled. The Mejelle, which was completed in 1876, represents the combination of the new and the customary that characterized so much of the nineteenth-century Ottoman reform movement. On the one hand, it was based on the *shariah* and ensured that no matter how much Western law might affect commercial or maritime codes, the civil code for the inhabitants of the empire would remain within an Islamic framework. On the other hand, the organization and arrangement of the Mejelle was inspired by European legal codes and its administration was placed under the jurisdiction of a newly created Ministry of Justice.

If the Tanzimat era lacked the dramatic confrontations of the reigns of Selim III or Mahmud II, it nevertheless produced far-reaching changes in the Ottoman system. For this very reason, some members of the Ottoman elite questioned the wisdom of the reforms and warned that the abandonment of longstanding Islamic institutions in favor of the hasty adoption of European ones would lead to disaster for the *ummah* of Muhammad.

***The Young Ottomans***

One of the results of the increased interaction between the Ottoman Empire and Europe was an Ottoman literary renaissance that found expression not just in established genres like poetry but also in new forms, especially the periodical press that flourished under private ownership in the last two decades of the Tanzimat. Among the main contributors to the new journalism was a group of intellectuals and bureaucrats known as the Young Ottomans. They were not a coherent organization, but they did share certain values they presented in their journals and newspapers.

The Young Ottomans represent an attempt to reconcile the new institutions of the Tanzimat with the Ottoman and Islamic political tradition. They were united in their dislike of the bureaucratic absolutism of Ali and Fuad Pashas and called for the development of a more democratic form of government. In their view, the two reformers had placed the empire in the worst position possible; it had been deprived of its essential Islamic political and social values, but it had not become more efficient through the forced adoption of European institutions. The Young Ottomans sought the best of both worlds; they called for the revitalization of the empire through the incorporation of selected European models and at the same time insisted on the retention of the Islamic foundations of state and society. Theirs was the complex vision of reformers and preservers.

The democratic form of government they espoused was found, they claimed, in the Islamic tradition of consultation. This was not the participatory democracy emerging in Western Europe but a form of consultation between an absolutist ruler and his ministers. Reform was desirable, but it had to be grounded in the Islamic tradition.

Yet for all their insistence on the need to find sources of change within the Islamic tradition, the most pronounced impact of the Young Ottomans stemmed from their elaboration of the notion of Ottoman patriotism. The concept of the equality of all Ottomans as citizens had been endorsed in the decrees of 1839 and 1856. In the 1860s and 1870s, the most prominent of the Young Ottomans, Namik Kemal, developed this concept to its secular conclusion in his poems and his famous play *Vatan* (Fatherland), all of which extolled the Ottoman fatherland and insisted that all Ottomans ought to share feelings of devotion to this territorial entity above any loyalties they might feel to their religious communities. This was the beginning of territorial patriotism, the belief that there was an Ottoman *patrie* to which its inhabitants owed primary allegiance. Thus, although Namik Kemal held firm convictions about the need to respect the Islamic foundations of Ottoman society, his ideological solution to the problem of Ottoman territorial disintegration was of European inspiration.

***The Ottoman Constitution of 1876***

In the course of their studies in Europe, some members of the new Ottoman elite concluded that the secret of Europe’s success rested not just with its technical achievements but also with its political organizations. Moreover, the process of reform itself had imbued a small segment of this elite with the belief that constitutional government would be a desirable check on autocracy and provide them with a better opportunity to influence policy. These sentiments became more widespread when, following the death of Ali Pasha in 1871, Sultan Abdul Aziz reasserted royal authority. His chaotic rule led to his deposition in 1876 and, after a few troubled months, to the proclamation of an Ottoman constitution that the new sultan, Abdul Hamid II, pledged to uphold.

Although the constitution provided for an elected chamber of deputies and an appointed senate, it placed only minimal restrictions on the sultan’s powers. He retained the right to make war and peace, to appoint and dismiss ministers, to approve legislation, and to convene and dismiss the chamber of deputies. Despite the latitude it gave to the sovereign, the constitution provided clear evidence of the extent to which European influences operated among a section of the Ottoman bureaucracy. The constitution also reaffirmed the equality of all Ottoman subjects, including their right to serve in the new chamber of deputies. In a significant omission, the *millet*s were not mentioned. The constitution was more than a political document; it was a proclamation of Ottomanism and Ottoman patriotism, and it was an assertion that the empire was capable of resolving its problems and that it had the right to remain intact as it then existed. It was unfortunate for the framers of the constitution that Sultan Abdul Hamid II did not share their belief in the virtues of limited monarchy. In 1878, after only two sessions of the chamber of deputies, he dissolved the assembly, suspended the constitution, and inaugurated thirty years of autocratic rule.

***Ottoman Finances***

As the Ottoman Empire expanded its administrative apparatus and sought to maintain a modern army and navy supplied with weapons and warships purchased abroad, the strain on its finances became acute. The problem confronting the Tanzimat reformers was that they inaugurated expensive new programs while the sources of state revenues remained fairly constant. In order to cover its annual budget deficits, the empire began to take out loans on the European money markets. The first loan, for 3.3 million Ottoman lire, was arranged in 1854 during the Crimean War. Over the next twenty years, the Ottomans contracted an additional fifteen loans totaling over 200 million Ottoman lire (about 180 million sterling). As was to happen in Egypt, the increased level of debt meant that more and more funds had to be diverted away from the operating budget of the empire and directed instead to paying the interest on the loans. By 1874 about 60 percent of the state’s total expenditure was devoted to servicing the debt.2 This was an impossible burden, and in 1876 the government failed to make all of its payments. In effect, the Ottoman Empire was bankrupt. European diplomats rushed in to protect European creditors. The immediate crisis was finally resolved by the Decree of Muharram (1881), which authorized the establishment of an Ottoman Public Debt Administration and pledged to reserve certain state revenues to service the debt. The real effect of the decree was the surrender of Ottoman financial independence to European interests. The Public Debt Administration was composed of representatives of the main creditors and was authorized to collect designated revenues and use them to pay the interest on the debt. These payments were given priority over all other Ottoman expenditures. The debt continued to be a burden on the empire and its successor states, and only in 1954 did the government of Turkey fully repay its share.

***The Diplomacy of the Tanzimat: Patterns of European Pressure on the Ottoman Empire***

The numerous crises of the Eastern Question exercised a significant influence on Ottoman foreign and domestic policies during the second half of the nineteenth century. The purpose here is not to explore each war and treaty but to depict in broad strokes how the unfolding of the Eastern Question affected the Ottoman Empire.

Although the Ottoman civilian reformers were busy with internal reorganization, they also had to contend with renewed Russian expansion into Ottoman territory. Russia carried this out in three main ways: first, by using its religious ties with the Greek Orthodox subjects of the empire to gain influence in Ottoman internal affairs; second, by allying itself, on the basis of common religious and Slavic cultural bonds, to the Balkan independence movements in an effort to become the Great Power patron of whatever new states might emerge; and, third, by direct warfare against the armies of the Ottoman state. The other Great Power neighbor of the Ottomans, the Austro-Hungarian Empire of the Hapsburgs, exercised a more cautious foreign policy than did Russia. Austria, after all, faced a problem similar to the one that confronted the Ottomans; it, too, was a multiethnic state whose subject peoples were responding to the appeal of nationalism. Nevertheless, Austria was always willing to gain territory at Ottoman expense when the right occasion presented itself. One such occasion arose in the circumstances surrounding the Crimean War.

The Crimean War (1854–1856) was precipitated by Russian attempts to gain direct authority over the Orthodox Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire. For centuries, Orthodox and Catholic priests, supported by Russia and France respectively, had competed with one another over the rights to supervise the holy shrines in Jerusalem. The Ottomans regarded these matters as trivial and granted various privileges to the clergy of both faiths. The issue resurfaced in the 1840s and reached a climax in 1853 when Russia presented an ultimatum to the Ottoman government demanding that it sign a joint accord guaranteeing the position of the Orthodox Christians in the empire. This would have given Russia the right to intervene on behalf of approximately 8 million Ottoman subjects, and the sultan rejected the ultimatum. Russia then sent troops into the principalities (Moldavia and Wallachia), which prompted France and Britain to rally to the cause of Ottoman resistance to Russian advances.

Such a response was in keeping with the principle of the balance of power that characterized Eastern Question diplomacy: No Great Power (Russia in this case) was to be allowed to acquire unilateral territorial gains at Ottoman expense. If the powers could not agree on an equal division of Ottoman spoils, then groups of them (France and Britain in this case) formed coalitions to prevent one of their members from gaining a unilateral advantage. This pattern of behavior was also designed to avoid warfare among the Great Powers over Ottoman lands. However, in the case of the 1853 crisis, the system broke down. When war was finally declared, it was fought on Russian territory in the Crimea, where the British, French, and Ottoman allies bungled their way to an indecisive victory over the Russian forces. While the armies of the four powers were fighting it out in the Crimea, Austria occupied the principalities.

The Treaty of Paris (1856) brought an end to the hostilities and arranged for the readjustment of boundaries. Among other things, the signatories pledged to respect the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire, a pledge that came rather late in that, as a result of the war, the principalities were well on their way to becoming independent as a united Romanian state. The treaty further arranged for the demilitarization of the Black Sea and the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Danube. These were severe blows to Russian ambitions, and for the next twenty years Russian foreign policy was directed toward overturning the restrictions imposed by the Treaty of Paris.

An opportunity to do so presented itself during the series of wars and revolts known as the Great Eastern Crisis of 1875–1878. By the time of the crisis, the doctrine of Pan-Slavism had gained adherents in Russian political and intellectual circles as well as among Slavic Balkan nationalist leaders. Pan-Slavism was a mixture of Orthodox Christian and Slavic cultural sentiments that combined to create the idea of a Russian mission to liberate the Slavic peoples—Serbs, Croatians, Slovenes, and Bulgarians—from Ottoman rule and unite them into a vast federation. Slav nationalists who wanted nothing to do with a Russian dominated Slavic federation could nonetheless use Pan-Slavism as a means of obtaining Russian support for their independence movements.

When anti-Ottoman rebellions broke out in Bosnia in 1875 and in Bulgaria the following year, both movements sought Russian intervention. How- ever, the Ottomans responded quickly to the Bulgarian revolt and suppressed it with exceptionally harsh measures. This provided Russia with an excuse to take up the cause of its fellow Slavs, and in 1877 Russia declared war on the Ottoman Empire. The reformed Ottoman military fought well at the start of the campaign, but the Russian forces gradually drove the Ottomans out of Bulgaria. In early 1878 the Russian army captured Adrianople and imposed a harsh treaty on the Ottomans. At this point, Britain, seeing its entire Middle Eastern policy threatened, prepared for war with Russia. Hostilities were averted by the intervention of Chancellor Otto von Bismarck of Germany, and instead of fighting over control of Ottoman territories, the powers met at the Congress of Berlin in 1878 to find a more peaceful method of dismantling the Ottoman Empire. That is precisely what was achieved in the various agreements reached by the congress—the European powers kept peace among themselves by awarding one another bits of Ottoman territory. In this instance, the principle of the balance of power operated as the Great Powers intended it to. The Ottoman losses were considerable. Serbia, Montenegro, Romania, and part of Bulgaria were recognized as independent states; Russia gained Kars and Batum in eastern Anatolia; and Austria was granted the right to administer the province of Bosnia. In addition, Britain, the ally of the Ottomans, demanded control over Cyprus in exchange for continued British support. The Ottomans were not pleased with the request, but their permission was not really necessary; Britain had already occupied the island to use it as a base from which to protect British interests in the eastern Mediterranean. The Berlin settlement was announced during the second year of Sultan Abdul Hamid’s reign. It is no wonder that for the remainder of his long sultanate he was suspicious of European promises and hostile to Europeans in general. Nor should it be any wonder that the Tanzimat officials, for all their concern with administrative reform, should have continued to devote huge sums to military modernization. The development of effective armed forces was not a luxury but a basic requirement for survival.

**THE ARAB PROVINCES OF GREATER SYRIA DURING THE TANZIMAT**

Although the Tanzimat reforms brought greater efficiency to the Ottoman administration of the Arab provinces, they also disrupted the political and social arrangements that had meant relative communal harmony for nearly 300 years. Adding to the disruption of long-established patterns of life was the European economic penetration of Greater Syria during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Greater Syria (which included the present-day states of Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan) contained the largest concentration of Ottoman Christian subjects outside of Europe. The governorship of Muhammad Ali’s son Ibrahim (1831–1840) affected the relations between Muslims and Christians throughout the region, but especially in Mount Lebanon, the local name for the entire Lebanon mountain range, except for its most northern parts. Because of its isolation from administrative control, Mount Lebanon had long served as a place of refuge for dissident religious groups. In the early nineteenth century, political power in the region was shared between two sects, the Maronite Christians and the Druze. The latter group was a dissident offshoot of Shiism dating from the eleventh century. Although less numerous than the Maronites, the Druze were fierce defenders of their sectarian identity, and their chieftains were accepted as equal members of the social order. Over the centuries, the two communities had worked out informal arrangements that allowed for a rough and ready tolerance between them. Ibrahim’s notions of interventionist administration would destroy those arrangements. Ibrahim insisted that the government treat all the religious communities in Greater Syria equally, and he issued decrees abolishing the special taxes that Jews and Christians had to pay on their places of worship. However, his most disruptive policy was the introduction of universal conscription and the simultaneous attempt to disarm the local population. When certain Druze communities refused to surrender their weapons in 1837, Ibrahim armed a force of several thousand Christians and sent them against the Druze. The Christian forces took advantage of this opportunity to enlarge the territory under their control. In 1839 Ibrahim had a change of heart and ordered the Christians to return their arms. They refused and took part in a general uprising of all the religious communities against Ibrahim, an event that helped force the Egyptian evacuation. Greater Syria returned to Ottoman rule, but sectarian relations had been profoundly changed. The Maronites had acquired increased power within Mount Lebanon and a new freedom in Syrian society as a whole that they were not inclined to surrender. Encouraged by the promises of equality contained in the Ottoman decrees of 1839 and 1856, Maronites and other Christians expanded their commercial activities, entered into lucrative relationships with European representatives, founded new educational institutions, and generally asserted themselves in a manner that the Druze and Sunnis saw as overstepping the bounds of what was permitted to minority subjects in a Muslim state. The smoldering Muslim resentment over this change in the accepted social and political order erupted into a brutal civil war. It began in 1860 with Druze attacks on Christian villages in Mount Lebanon and soon spilled over into the quarters of Damascus, where several thousand Christians were massacred and European consulates were burned.

To restore order and forestall direct European intervention in the crisis, an Ottoman military force was dispatched to Damascus and Fuad Pasha himself arrived in the city to make certain that the Muslims deemed responsible for the massacres were punished. These actions failed to satisfy the European powers, and in 1861 a conference of European representatives met in Istanbul to work out a formula that would ensure the safety of the Christian population. The proposed solution was the creation of an autonomous administrative status for Mount Lebanon. This involved the establishment of a small political unit, called the *mutasarrifiyyah*, which was to be governed by a non-Lebanese Ottoman Christian subject and protected by a guarantee of the European powers. The governor worked through an advisory council in which the religious communities of the district were represented. Although the *mutasarrifiyyah* appeared to be an awkward political entity, it provided its inhabitants with peace and prosperity until its abolition in 1914. However, because it was organized along sectarian lines, it did not soften communal distinctions but, rather, served as a daily reminder of their existence.

***The Social and Economic Impact of the Tanzimat***

From the beginning of Ottoman rule in the Arab lands, the officials from Istanbul and the local urban notables alike recognized the need to cooperate with one another. A pattern of interaction emerged that has been termed the politics of the notables.3 Most pronounced in the cities of Syria, the politics of the notables was based on the satisfaction of mutual interests. An Ottoman governor could not exercise effective authority without the assistance of the local dignitaries, who had their own independent power base. The local notables, in turn, required access to the governor and, through him, to Istanbul if they were to satisfy the needs of their clients. In this delicate relationship, the notables played the role of intermediaries, gently reminding the governor of their interests while helping him see that the demands of government were also met. The Tanzimat policy of adopting codes of administrative conduct that took precedence over personal relationships threatened to upset the balance between the notables and the state and to undermine their privileges. How could the notables retain their power and status in the changing political climate?

One way was to take advantage of the economic opportunities that were made available by the European commercial penetration of the Levant. Beginning in the 1830s, European commercial activity along the Syrian coast expanded enormously, mainly through the port of Beirut, which rapidly grew into a major economic and cultural center. As the Ottoman Empire was drawn into the international market, its economic survival depended on the development of exports that were needed in Europe. In the case of Greater Syria, this meant increasing the cultivation of such agricultural products as wheat and barley. To make the switch from subsistence to commercial agriculture, the urban notables brought large tracts of new land under cultivation. They were aided in their acquisition of new holdings by their ability to use one of the major reform decrees of the Tanzimat to their own advantage.

The Ottoman land code of 1858 was a centralizing measure designed to regularize landholding patterns and to increase the tax-collecting efficiency of the central government. It was also supposed to protect the peasant cultivator by allowing him to register his lands and thus deal directly with the state instead of with tax farmers. The law required all landowners to register their land with the government; in return, they would receive a written title deed. It further permitted individuals to purchase and register previously unoccupied state lands. Although the impact of the land law varied from region to region within the empire, in parts of Greater Syria it led to the creation of vast private estates. Individual notables bought huge tracts of uncultivated state lands with the intention of developing them for commercial agricultural purposes. In other instances, peasant cultivators, distrustful of the aims of the law, chose to register their lands in the name of their local notable patron—who would, they assumed, see things right with the government. They were, of course, mistaken. By these and other means, the local notables acquired ownership of large tracts of valuable commercial land, thus expanding their wealth and influence. They successfully subverted a reform decree that was intended to limit their power.

Although the local Arab notables generally opposed the Tanzimat, they could see that positions of administrative authority in the changing Ottoman state were going to young men trained in the government schools. Beginning in the 1870s, many of the leading Arab families adopted the practice of enrolling their sons in the higher academies of Istanbul. Upon completing their studies, these young Arabs obtained positions in the Ottoman bureaucracy and thus gave their families access to the government. Indeed, throughout the Tanzimat, the Arab urban elite managed to preserve their privileges and to make themselves indispensable to the Ottoman officials sent out from Istanbul. The politics of the notables survived the centralizing reforms.

**EGYPT DURING THE ERA OF CIVILIAN REFORM**

***From Muhammad Ali to Ismail, 1848–1863***

Of Muhammad Ali’s two immediate successors, Abbas (1848–1854) lacked his father’s ruling skills as well as his commitment to reform, and Said (1854–1863), though he intensified Egypt’s contacts with Europe, was an ineffective ruler. Nevertheless, the momentum of Muhammad Ali’s administrative reforms carried over to their reigns, and the central government continued to broaden and to become more functionally specialized with the creation of new ministries and councils. And as was the case in the central Ottoman Empire, the administrative positions required to carry out the increased range of state activities were filled by a new elite of officials trained in Europe or in European style Egyptian institutions.

This trend is illustrated by the career of Ali Mubarak (1823–1893), one of the most influential and talented of Egypt’s nineteenth-century reformers. Born in a Delta village, Mubarak attended a government preparatory school before being admitted to the Cairo School of Engineering. As the top student in his class, he was chosen to be a member of a student military mission Muhammad Ali sent to France in 1844. He studied for two years in Paris and was then assigned for an additional two years to the school for artillery officers and military engineers at Metz. When he returned to Egypt in 1849, he was given a modest appointment as instructor in the artillery school. But after only one year in that post, he received a remarkable promotion to become director of the entire system of government schools. Ali Mubarak was the first native Egyptian Muslim to obtain such a high-ranking position. It marked the start of his rich career of public service that spanned nearly four decades and included appointments as head of the ministries of education, public works, and railways.

In each of these capacities, Mubarak demonstrated extraordinary skills as an educator, engineer, and administrator. His opportunity to shape the development of several areas of Egyptian life was made possible in part by his transit through the state-sponsored educational system of local and European technical schools.

This was also the case with another native Egyptian, Rifaa al-Tahtawi (1801–1873), who exercised a major influence on the direction of his country’s cultural life. Al-Tahtawi was educated at the traditional Islamic university, al- Azhar, and appeared headed for a career as a member of the ulama until Muhammad Ali chose him to accompany one of the early missions to Paris in 1826. Al-Tahtawi’s official role was imam, or religious guide, but he persuaded the Egyptian authorities to allow him to study with the other members of the mission. By the time he left Paris five years later, al-Tahtawi had absorbed the principal works of French political thought and had become a shrewd observer of French customs. Upon his return to Egypt he was instrumental in persuading Muhammad Ali to found the School of Languages (1835), an institution that played in Egypt a role similar to the translation office in the Ottoman Empire. As director of the school for fifteen years, al-Tahtawi supervised the translation of 2,000 works from foreign languages into Arabic. He also wrote several books, including an account of his student days in Paris that contained favorable comments on French society.

For both Mubarak and al-Tahtawi, the path to state employment passed through Paris. Other members of the new administrative elite would have similar experiences. The cumulative effect of this training was to create a group of officials who not only were familiar with the West but who also, as in the case of Mubarak and al-Tahtawi, admired certain aspects of European civilization and used their positions of authority to encourage the spread of Western ideas and the adoption of Western systems of education and administration. With the elimination of Muhammad Ali’s monopoly system and the abandonment of his policy of industrialization, Egypt’s economic development came to be shaped by the needs of the European market. In effect, the country became integrated into the international economic order as a virtual plantation economy, exporting raw materials, most notably cotton, and importing European manufactured goods. The massive export of cotton required a dependable transportation system, and in 1852 Egypt entered the railway age with the completion of the first rail link between Cairo and Alexandria. At the same time that the country’s internal communications were being improved, it became more closely linked to the international commercial network by the establishment of regular steamship lines between Alexandria and several Mediterranean ports. The project that, above all others, was to consolidate Egypt’s linkage to international shipping had its beginnings in 1854, when the Egyptian ruler Said granted the French engineer Ferdinand de Lesseps the concession to construct a canal across the Isthmus of Suez from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea. The agreement was a financial disaster for Egypt and contributed to the country’s plunge into bankruptcy. In addition, bitterness over de Lesseps’s manipulation of Egypt and its rulers became embedded in the national consciousness. But de Lesseps was not the only European entrepreneur attempting to profit from the economic opportunities that Egypt offered in the years after Muhammad Ali. Reputable firms and marginal operators, skilled technicians and common laborers, all attracted by the wealth to be made in transport construction, the cotton exchange, and concession hunting, poured into the country in the 1850s and 1860s. By 1872 an estimated 80,000 Europeans, over half of them Greeks and Italians, were resident in Egypt. Made exempt by the Capitulations from taxation and from the jurisdiction of the Egyptian government, they sought and received protection from their consuls whenever their scandalous social behavior or irregular financial dealings attracted the attention of the Egyptian authorities. The consuls themselves exercised extensive political and economic influence in Egyptian affairs, and their offices became centers of nearly autonomous power in Cairo and Alexandria.

Some of the Europeans who came to Egypt obtained employment in the state service, mostly as skilled technicians such as train drivers, steamship pilots, and mechanics. Others received more lucrative positions—in 1855 Said appointed an Englishman as minister of railways and communications, and in 1861 he named an Italian to the same post. These appointments of foreigners occurred just as Egyptian officials like Mubarak and al-Tahtawi were demonstrating their own qualifications for high office. The result was tension between Egyptians eager for the influence and rewards they felt they deserved and Europeans equally determined to cash in on an advantageous economic opportunity. By the time of Said’s death in 1863, Europeans, with their economic privileges, their diplomatic protection, and their often patronizing manner, had become a source of irritation at all levels of Egyptian society. The situation would become exacerbated with the rule of Ismail.

***Ismail the Magnificent (1863–1879)***

Ismail is one of the most controversial figures in modern Egyptian history, a foolish spendthrift to some and a farsighted if extravagant reformer to others. Whatever judgment one may pass on this grandson of Muhammad Ali, there can be little doubt that his policies affected Egyptian domestic development and external relations until well into the twentieth century. Ismail’s objective was nothing less than the complete Europeanization of Egypt in as short a time as possible. Personally familiar with the Paris of Napoleon III and the Istanbul of the Tanzimat, Ismail made little attempt to blend his reformist programs into long-standing Egyptian-Islamic traditions. “My country,” he is said to have proclaimed, “is no longer in Africa, it is now in Europe,” and he set out to make this statement true.

With a thoroughness never envisaged by Muhammad Ali, Ismail encouraged the development of European-educated Egyptian elite. He increased the budget for education more than tenfold and embarked on a program to expand the primary and secondary school systems and to found specialized technical and vocational institutions. Two of the latter deserve special mention. Dar al-Ulum, founded in 1872 at Ali Mubarak’s urging, was intended to retrain graduates of the religious schools to become teachers of Arabic in the new national primary and secondary system. As the principal modern teacher training college in the country, Dar al-Ulum became one of the largest and most successful of the new postsecondary institutions. The School of Languages, reopened in 1868, was far more elitist and European-oriented. By 1886 the institution had evolved into the Cairo School of Law, offering its students a French-based legal education that made them among the most sought-after candidates for state employment. Ismail also revived the practice of sending student educational missions to Europe and began the process of turning female education into a responsibility of the state. In addition to making these educational reforms, Ismail founded a national library in 1871 and later established a number of learned societies and museums.

Although Ismail encouraged the formation of a Western-trained elite, he made no attempt to alter the relationship between the monarchy and the people. He remained an authoritarian ruler, dispensing and withholding royal patronage at his pleasure. Much attention has been given to his establishment of a consultative chamber of delegates in 1866. But Ismail did not surrender any of his prerogatives to the chamber, and he created it as much out of tactical considerations as for the purpose of consultation. On another political issue, the question of Egypt’s relationship to the Ottoman Empire, Ismail secured some modest gains. Whereas Muhammad Ali had attempted to establish his independence through warfare, Ismail’s method was to shower Ottoman officials with gifts and bribes. When Sultan Abdul Aziz paid an official state visit to Egypt in 1863, the first Ottoman sultan to set foot in the country since Selim I conquered it in 1517, Ismail spared no expense in entertaining his sovereign. These efforts were rewarded when the sultan elevated Ismail to khedive, a Persian term meaning lord or master and implying something closer to royalty than the position of governor does. In addition, Egypt was granted the right to expand its army, to issue its own currency, and to contract foreign loans without the sultan’s approval, a privilege Ismail pursued with relish. In the realm of legal reform, the most significant development during Ismail’s reign was the introduction of the Mixed Courts. The increase in the number of foreigners conducting business in Egypt brought a concurrent increase in the number of disputes between foreigners and Egyptians. Under the terms of the Capitulations, which sheltered foreign nationals from Egyptian law, the usual method of dealing with such disputes was to have the consul of the foreigner hear the case and render a decision based on the law of the foreigner’s country. In these circumstances it was rare for foreigners to be convicted, no matter how grave the offenses they may have committed. To protect Egyptians from this abuse and to bring uniformity to a practice in which dozens of different consuls rendered judgments based on the legal codes of several different countries, the Mixed Courts were established in 1876. They were empowered to deal with all civil and commercial cases to which foreigners were party. Remaining in existence until 1949, the Mixed Courts were governed by the French civil code and staffed by judges who were appointed for life and thus free from dismissal for political reasons. An important related development was the opening of the National Courts in 1884. These courts had jurisdiction over all Egyptians in matters of civil, commercial, and penal law and, like the Mixed Courts, operated on legal codes drawn from French law. Although some Egyptian judges were employed in the new justice system, they tended to be overshadowed by the European judges, who received the choice appointments.

With the establishment of the Mixed and National courts, the Egyptian system of justice was dominated by European judges and European lawyers applying legal codes derived from European law. The *shariah* courts continued to exist, but since their jurisdiction was confined to the areas of personal status and *waqf*, the field of ulama legal activity was severely restricted. At the same time, however, splendid opportunities became available for Egyptians trained in French law, and those who could afford it rushed to enroll in the Cairo School of Law or to pursue legal studies in France. Thus was Egyptian society set in conflict with it. Ismail’s determination to transform Egypt into a European country drove him to devote enormous sums to copying the external trappings of European civilization. Sections of Cairo were refashioned on the model of Paris and provided with boulevards and parks serviced by waterworks, gaslights, and tramways. Ismail also poured huge sums into the construction of railways, bridges, and new facilities at the port of Alexandria. The crowning achievement in the field of transport was the completion of the Suez Canal in 1869, an occasion Ismail celebrated by entertaining European royalty and dignitaries in lavish ceremonies. In a gesture that was intended to testify to his appreciation of European culture, he commissioned the Italian composer Giuseppe Verdi to write the opera *Aida* for the opening festivities and ordered the construction of an opera house in which to stage the performance. Verdi was two years late with his composition, but the Suez Canal flourished nonetheless. It quickly became a major international waterway benefiting all maritime states by reducing the distance and thus the costs of transporting goods and passengers between the East and Europe. Britain, with its imperial possessions in India and the Far East and its position as the leading overseas trading nation of the time, gained the most from the canal: The waterway cut the distance from London to Bombay in half, and by 1881 more than 80 percent of the traffic through the canal was British. Ismail’s vast expenditures were in effect fueled by cotton. The Northern blockade of Confederate ports during the American Civil War forced British textile mills to turn almost exclusively to Egypt for their cotton supply. The country experienced a tremendous economic boom that saw its income from cotton exports rise from 918,000 sterling in the early 1850s to over 10 million in the late 1860s. In these circumstances, land became a valued economic asset, and the officials who received grants of land from Ismail used their profits from cotton to purchase additional holdings. An increase in the size of private landholdings was a prominent feature of Ismail’s reign, and he himself controlled one-fifth of all the cultivated land in the country.

But even the large revenues generated by the cotton boom could not keep pace with Ismail’s expenditures. To finance his ambitious schemes and his expensive personal tastes, the khedive was forced to borrow huge sums from European financial institutions. The practice proved disastrous. Brokerage commissions and various hidden charges reduced the value of the loans before they were paid out. In addition, the high interest rates (usually around 10 percent) the European lenders charged diverted funds from the Egyptian economy. As Egypt sank into debt, Ismail took desperate measures to keep his creditors at bay. In 1872 he issued the *muqabala* law, which allowed landholders to pay six times their annual land tax in advance in exchange for being relieved of all future land tax obligations. In 1875 Egypt sold its 44 percent interest in the Suez Canal Company to the British government for £4 million, but this sale provided only stopgap revenue. By the 1870s new loans were being used simply to meet the interest payments on previous loans. In 1876 the Egyptian government announced that it intended to suspend interest payments on its debt for three months, a statement that amounted to a declaration of bankruptcy. It was the same year that the Ottoman government defaulted on its interest payments. However, the consequences for Cairo would ultimately be more severe than they were for Istanbul. Over the course of the next six years, Egypt’s economic problems led to its loss of political independence. European financial houses pressured their governments to take actions that would prevent Egypt from defaulting on its loan payments. Recognizing the need to placate his creditors, Ismail agreed in 1876 to the establishment of a body known as the Caisse de la Dette Publique (Public Debt Commission). Composed of four representatives from the European creditor nations, the commission was charged with ensuring that the Egyptian debt was serviced. In addition, two controllers, one from Britain and one from France, were appointed to the Egyptian government to supervise the expenditure of Egyptian revenues. This system of dual control, as it was known, amounted to direct European intervention in the financial affairs of Egypt. When Ismail attempted to preserve his financial independence by dismissing the two controllers and rallying popular support, the European powers decided that his reign must end and called upon the Ottoman sultan to exercise the authority he still possessed over Egypt. Sultan Abdul Hamid II, not sorry to see the removal of such a troublesome and ambitious prince, issued a formal decree deposing Ismail in 1879 and appointing his son Tawfiq as khedive.

***The Urabi Revolt, 1879–1882***

The deposition of Ismail and the accession of the weak Tawfiq gave the European powers freedom to arrange the disbursement of Egyptian revenues as they saw fit. In 1880 Tawfiq issued the Law of Liquidation, which established Egypt’s consolidated debt at the staggering total of £98.4 million (it had been £3 million when Ismail assumed the throne) and set up a procedure for making regular annual payments on the debt. These payments were given priority over all other state expenditures and amounted to more than 60 percent of Egypt’s annual revenue; Ismail had mortgaged his country to European financiers.

The deposition of Ismail may have brought a measure of financial order to

Egypt, but it did not bring political stability. Discontent within various sectors of the elite and among elements of the population at large led to a reaction against European interference and to the emergence of a figure who is regarded in some circles as Egypt’s first nationalist hero.

Ahmad Urabi was an Egyptian of peasant origins who had risen to the rank of colonel in the army. Not one of the European-educated officers, he had studied first at al-Azhar and then gone into the army. Perhaps because of his peasant background and his traditional training, he came to be seen in some quarters as representing the authentic voice of the Egyptian people. It was the voice of a peasant population whose labor and taxes had produced the wealth for Ismail’s grandiose schemes, the voice of impoverished rural discontent against tax-exempt foreigners and wealthy local landlords. The Urabi movement began with a relatively minor incident within the officer corps. In early 1881 Colonel Urabi and a group of fellow Egyptian officers protested an impending law that would prevent Egyptians of *fellah* (peasant) origin from rising through the ranks to officer status. When it became clear that Urabi was supported by large portions of the army, Khedive Tawfiq rescinded the offensive law. But the movement did not stop there. What began as an internal protest on an army matter was elevated by Urabi and his supporters to a national campaign against European domination of Egypt’s affairs.

The politics of Urabi’s movement was made exceedingly complex by the shifting coalitions of notables and high-ranking officials who alternately opposed and endorsed him. However, the movement had two essential purposes: to eliminate foreign control of Egypt’s finances and to curtail the autocracy of the khedive by establishing constitutional limits to his authority. Referring to himself as a delegate of the people, Urabi gained the support of the army, a group of reformist notables, and the peasantry, who looked upon him as the leader who would free them from their bondage of taxation and indebtedness. In 1882 Urabi was appointed minister of war and began to make provisions for the formation of a national assembly that would be empowered to determine Egypt’s budget and spending priorities. While Urabi and his supporters asserted their rights to manage the affairs of their country, Khedive Tawfiq was forced to depend on foreign support to preserve his throne. To the governments of Britain and France, the Urabi movement represented a double-edged threat. They refused to believe that a government dominated by Urabists would honor its international financial obligations. In addition, they were alarmed at the prospect of a nationalist government’s restricting their access to the Suez Canal. They preferred the rule of the pliable Khedive Tawfiq to the difficulties of dealing with an Urabist government that was responsive to the needs of Egyptians. Reacting to an outbreak of anti foreign rioting in Alexandria in June 1882, the British government authorized the commander of the fleet anchored off Alexandria harbor to bombard the city. In August came the fateful decision to land a British expeditionary force at the Canal Zone. On September 13, 1882, the British forces defeated Urabi’s army at the battle of Tel al-Kebir, and two days later Urabi was captured and his movement brought to an end. In ordering the invasion of Egypt, the British government intended only a brief interventionist action to restore Khedive Tawfiq’s authority; instead, it inaugurated an occupation that lasted until 1956. Egypt had indeed become a part of Europe, but not in the way that Ismail had intended.

The British and the khedive portrayed Urabi as a traitor to his government; he was tried and sentenced to a life of exile in Ceylon. But to the Egyptians who supported him at the time and for those to whom he later became a legend, Urabi was a patriot whose goal was to preserve his country’s independence from foreign economic control. The popular cry of his followers, “Egypt for the Egyptians,” would be heard again.

**CONCLUSION: THE DUALISM O F THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY REFORMS**

The reforms in the Ottoman Empire and Egypt created an institutional dualism in Middle Eastern society. With the notable exceptions of the destruction of the Janissaries and the Mamluks, most traditional institutions were retained alongside the newly created ones. Thus, although the Ottoman and Egyptian governments introduced new legal codes and new court systems, they did not eliminate the *shariah* courts; and although both governments devoted considerable funds to the development of elite European-style academies, they did not close the doors of the religious schools. These schools, despite a decline in their prestige, continued to preserve the Islamic learned tradition, to transmit Islamic values, and to provide educational opportunities for large numbers of students.

The problem arose when the graduates of the Islamic schools sought employment in administrations that were committed, for better or for worse, to policies of Westernization. No matter how extensive these students’ knowledge of the Quran or the *shariah* may have been, they did not have the qualifications to compete with the students trained in Europe or in European-style schools. At the same time, the opportunities for employment in the traditional elite sector of society were shrinking as the new courts, new schools, and new concepts deriving from European thought reduced the role of the ulama to the more narrowly religious sphere of activity. The favored new elite of French knowers, small though it may have been, exercised an increasing dominance in the direction of the affairs of state, whereas the religiously educated found their once respected training to have limited application. The wrenching nature of imposed change is captured in the remark of Fuad Pasha, the Ottoman minister, to a European diplomat: “Our state is the strongest state. For you are trying to cause its collapse from the outside, and we from the inside, but still it does not collapse.” This dualism had a divisive effect on society as a whole. There had, of course, always been a wide gap between educated officials and the population at large. But as the educated officials came increasingly from Westernized schools, the gap widened. An illiterate conscript from rural Anatolia and his commanding officer who might have been trained in Paris inhabited two different universes. So, too, did an al-Azhar shaykh and a professor in the Cairo Medical School. Nor was the gap between the new elite and the traditional sectors of society bridged by the transmission of any obvious benefits to the latter group. To the Egyptian *fellahin*, the transformation of society meant conscription in Muhammad Ali’s armies or Ismail’s public works gangs; it meant heavy taxes and increased indebtedness; it meant abandoning the family plot of land and joining the growing ranks of rural laborers working for atrociously low wages on the vast estates of the emerging class of private landowners.

The impact was similar in the rural heartlands of the Ottoman Empire. As the nineteenth-century transformation brought certain advantages to Egyptian and Ottoman society, it also brought economic hardship, social disruption, and political exploitation.

**Egypt and Iran in the Late Nineteenth Century**

During the final decades of the nineteenth century, the major European powers expanded their overseas empires and, whenever possible, protected their principal imperial possessions by entering into agreements among themselves or by neutralizing the rulers of territories bordering on those possessions. Britain, for example, had started to secure the route to India by annexing Aden in 1839 and by establishing treaties with some of the Arab shaykhdoms in the Persian Gulf. Additional shaykhdoms were brought under British control as first Bahrain (1880), then Muscat (1891), and finally Kuwait (1899) signed treaties pledging not to deal with any foreign power except through Britain. The French North African empire, begun with the conquest of Algiers in 1830, was made more secure with the occupation of Tunisia in 1881; Morocco would be incorporated into this empire in 1912. Italy, in a desperate search for overseas possessions, invaded the Ottoman North African province of Tripoli in 1911. And Russia, though continuing to seek territorial gains in Ottoman Europe, was also in the process of acquiring a huge Asian empire. As will be seen in this chapter, Egypt, Iran, and the Sudan were all drawn into this Great Power rivalry, usually to the detriment of their own interests.

**ENGLAND ON THE NILE: THE BRITISH OCCUPATION OF EGYPT, 1882–1914**

***The Cromer Years, 1883–1907***

The British occupation of Egypt produced one of the most significant colonial encounters of the modern era. It shaped Egyptian economic development for several decades, had an impact on the formation of the country’s political leadership, and became the focus of an anti imperial nationalist movement that affected Egyptian (and British) politics for the first half of the twentieth century. Britain occupied Egypt in order to safeguard the Suez Canal, to restore Egypt’s political and financial stability, and, in the context of the imperial competition of the era, to prevent France from occupying it first. Britain did not intend to engage in a prolonged occupation, and it certainly did not intend to get involved in the task of governing Egyptians. Until the outbreak of World War I, Britain could not even define its relationship to Egypt; the country was not declared a colony or a protectorate, but remained in theory an autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire ruled by a hereditary khedive. Although undefined, however, the British presence was, as its critics pointed out, simply a veiled protectorate.

The individual who presided over the occupation with absolute authority for its first quarter century was Evelyn Baring, later Lord Cromer, a colonial administrator with several years’ service in India. Cromer’s attitude toward non- Western, non-Christian peoples was typical of many British officials in the late Victorian era. Convinced of the innate superiority of Western civilization, Cromer believed that “Orientals” could never improve their lot until they had mastered the ways of the West, and for this they required a long apprenticeship under the enlightened tutelage of “advanced” countries like Great Britain.

Throughout his long tenure as British consul general, Cromer disparaged Egyptian demands for independence and assured his superiors in London that direct British guidance would be necessary for years to come. Cromer’s priorities were to restore Egypt’s credit by meeting the debt payments and to maintain domestic tranquillity by supporting the rule of Khedive Tawfiq and discouraging political agitation. Because he was completely opposed to the development of any local industrial base that might offer competition to the British textile industry, Cromer sought to increase Egypt’s revenue by expanding its agricultural production. He authorized a massive effort to improve the Nile-based irrigation system through such projects as the construction of the Aswan Dam, completed in 1902; the rebuilding of the Delta Barrage; and the excavation of still more canals. In addition, Egypt went through another railway boom as its already extensive network of track was doubled. These improvements brought about a substantial rise in Egypt’s agricultural output, especially cotton, which remained the main source of revenue. Indeed, during the Cromer years Egypt became more dependent than ever before on the export of this single crop.

In terms of Egypt’s international financial standing, Cromer’s policies must be considered a success. By the mid-1880s, the budget showed a surplus, and there appeared to be no danger of defaulting on the debt payments, which during most of Cromer’s period amounted to between 25 and 35 percent of annual government revenues. In addition, the British administration’s concern with agricultural development brought with it a rise in the general standard of living in the countryside. Taxes were reduced and such practices as forced labor and the use of the whip were abolished. Despite this progress, the needs of the Egyptian *fellahin* were still largely neglected. The Egyptians who benefited most from Cromer’s investment in public works were the large landholders who saw their property values and their profits grow. Although they may not have liked the British occupation as such, they came to have a vested interest in the social and economic advantages it brought them, and they would attempt to preserve those advantages even as they demanded British evacuation.

The British governed Egypt through a rather cumbersome arrangement that was often frustrating both to them and to Egyptians alike. Since Egypt remained nominally an Ottoman province, the Egyptian governmental structure was retained, and Egyptian personnel continued to occupy their posts as ministers and civil servants. Over the years, this practice expanded the cadres of Egyptian officials who had experience in the state bureaucracy, though it cannot be said to have increased their experience in decision making. For even if Egyptian officials had some latitude in day-to-day office management, they did not govern their own country. The British adviser attached to each ministry, in consultation with his British staff, determined policy, and Lord Cromer, with his control over the budget, determined funding priorities. By the turn of the century, hundreds of British officials, army officers, engineers, and teachers—many unqualified by either training or experience—dominated all areas of important decision-making within Egypt. Their salaries, several times higher than those of their Egyptian counterparts, were paid by the Egyptian rather than the British government, and their air of cultural superiority, emphasized by their memberships in exclusive British sporting clubs, contributed to growing tensions with the Egyptian educated classes, who believed they were qualified to govern their own country.

Although Cromer’s programs were designed primarily to serve British imperial and financial interests, they brought certain material advantages to Egyptians. However, in many areas of social development his policies were regressive. This was particularly true in the field of education, where he reversed the trend toward a state-supported school system that had been such a pronounced feature of Ismail’s reign. The reasons behind Cromer’s restrictive educational policies were financial and political. During his first years in office, Egypt’s uncertain financial situation and Cromer’s predilection for investment in revenue enhancing public works projects led him to reduce the budget for education. Many of the specialized postsecondary institutions founded by Ismail were closed, and enrollments in the government primary and secondary schools declined. Even after Egypt’s finances improved, Cromer provided only limited funding to the Department of Public Instruction. Moreover, whereas Ismail’s government school system had borne the costs of instruction, Cromer’s administration introduced tuition fees at all levels, a measure that severely restricted the general public’s access to state education. The political aspect of Cromer’s educational policies was shaped by his experiences in India and led him to believe that the growth of Western-style educational institutions, especially universities, would create a group of Egyptian intellectuals imbued with nationalist ideals and a sense of frustration over their inferior status. Accordingly, the consul general attempted to confine the Westernized schools to the training of future civil servants and to direct the bulk of primary school graduates into vocational institutes. One of the factors that prolonged the British occupation and generated tension between Cromer and the Egyptian nationalists was the question of the Sudan. Ismail had completed the conquest of the Sudan that was begun by Muhammad Ali and had strengthened the Egyptian military and administrative presence there. But when a figure calling himself the Mahdi mounted a rebellion in the Sudan against the Egyptian occupation in 1881, his forces quickly overran the scattered Egyptian garrisons. Determined to hang onto the Sudan, the Egyptian government sent an ill-prepared expeditionary force into the Mahdi’s territory in 1883; it was massacred. General Charles Gordon’s relief force fared no better, and following Gordon’s death at Khartoum in 1885, the Sudan was abandoned to the Mahdi and his successors for the next ten years. Neither Cromer nor the government in London wished to mount an expensive military campaign that would put a strain on both the Egyptian and the British treasuries.

As the scramble for territories in Africa heated up in the 1890s, however, the British cabinet reconsidered its position on the Sudan. When rumors of the presence of a French force in the southern Sudan reached London, the cabinet authorized a joint Anglo-Egyptian expedition under General Herbert Kitchener. Kitchener’s difficult reconquest of the Sudan began in 1896, and it was not until 1898 that his forces were able to enter Khartoum and restore what the Egyptian government believed would be Egyptian control over the Sudan. But Cromer and the British government had other plans for the region. They had drawn up provisions for the creation of an Anglo-Egyptian condominium that would make Britain the effective ruling power in the Sudan. Even though Egyptian troops had participated in the reconquest and the Egyptian treasury had contributed over half the cost of Kitchener’s campaign, Britain essentially separated the Sudan from Egypt and arranged for the territory to be administered by a British governor general. British Prime Minister Lord Salisbury told Cromer that Britain intended to have “a predominant voice in all matters connected with the Sudan” and expected the Egyptian government to follow any advice it might receive from London regarding Sudanese affairs. Egyptian opinion was outraged by Britain’s action, and demands for the restoration of Egypt’s role in the Sudan remained a central plank in the nationalists’ platform until 1955, when the Sudanese themselves voted to become independent rather than affiliate with Egypt.

The primary medium through which Egyptian opinion was expressed was the periodical press. In what may seem like a paradox, journalism flourished during the British occupation and assumed an increasingly important place in Egyptian political and cultural life. Although many of the leading journals of the Cromer era, from the daily newspapers *al-Muqattam* and *al-Ahram* (The Pyramids) to the monthly magazine *al-Hilal* (The Crescent), were founded by Syrian-Christian émigrés who came to Egypt to escape the harsh rule of Sultan Abdul Hamid II, they all addressed the question of Egypt’s relationship with Britain. But the Egyptian press served a larger purpose than the presentation of political opinions. It was a forum for the propagation of ideas on the major cultural and social issues of the era. Islamic reformers and Christian secularists, supporters of parliamentary democracy and of khedival autocracy, advocates of Swiss educational methods and of the reform of al-Azhar found an outlet for their views in the lively Egyptian periodical press. Educated Egypt had found a voice, or perhaps many voices, and its echoes reverberated across the political landscape.

Of the leading newspapers of the time, *al-Liwa* (The Standard), founded in 1900, probably best represented the rising current of Egyptian protest. It was published by Mustafa Kamil (1874–1908), whose education reflects the path to upward mobility chosen by other ambitious Egyptians of his generation. Kamil enrolled in the Cairo School of Law in 1889 and received his law degree from the University of Toulouse in France. A skillful political journalist and a spellbinding speaker, Kamil gained popularity through his demand for the immediate end of the British occupation. When Cromer and some members of the Egyptian landholding class responded to Kamil’s attacks with arguments about the prosperity that British administration had brought to Egypt, Kamil retorted, “The chains of slavery are still chains, whether they be forged of gold or of iron.”2 Though Kamil sometimes claimed that Egypt had Islamic bonds with the Ottoman Empire, he also began to move away from the concept of Egypt as part of a wider Islamic or Ottoman world. More clearly and more directly than his contemporaries, he articulated sentiments of Egyptian patriotism, arguing that Egypt was a unique territorial entity with its own special characteristics and urging its inhabitants to offer it their deepest affection. The following lines are representative of Kamil’s patriotic message: “My country, to you my love and my heart, my life and existence. . . . For you, you are life, and there is no life without you, O Egypt.”3 Kamil was not a systematic thinker, but his writings and his oratory contributed significantly to the awakening of the political consciousness of the Egyptian public and to the emergence of the idea of territorial nationalism. The Egyptian political atmosphere became more highly charged with the death of the accommodating Tawfiq and the accession of his eighteen-year old son, Abbas II (1892–1914). Though schooled in Switzerland and Vienna, Abbas II was an Egyptian nationalist and aspired to be more than a mere figurehead ruler. He directly challenged Cromer’s authority and provided funds for anti-British newspapers like Kamil’s *al-Liwa*. To the mix of a vocal press and an independent-minded ruler was added a severe international recession in 1907–1911 that drove the price of cotton down and caused severe hardship in the Egyptian countryside. The spark that ignited the flame of anti-British feeling was provided by the Dinshaway incident of June 1906. It is always dangerous for the historian to single out a specific event as the start of a larger movement, but Dinshaway, coming as it did at a time of economic recession and political discontent, seemed to galvanize Egyptian opinion. The event was simple enough. Five British officers went pigeon shooting in the Delta village of Dinshaway, which, like countless other Egyptian villages, raised pigeons for meat and eggs. In the course of pursuing their sport, the officers managed to wound the wife of the village prayer leader and to set fire to a threshing floor. The villagers protested, and in the altercation that followed two British officers were wounded, one of whom later died. Because of the political and economic tensions that existed at the time, the British authorities were determined to punish the inhabitants of Dinshaway as an example to the rest of the country. A special tribunal was set up, and fifty-two of the villagers were charged with the unlikely crime of premeditated murder. Thirty-two were quickly convicted, and four of them were publicly hanged in Dinshaway. Several others received floggings, and the remainder were sentenced to prison at hard labor.

Egyptian reaction to the sentences was one of shock and outrage. The press, led by Kamil’s *al-Liwa*, denounced the verdict, and the peasants of the Egyptian Delta created folk ballads about the incident, one of which included the lines: “They fell upon Dinshaway / And spared neither man nor his brother. / Slowly they hanged the one and flogged the other.” Dinshaway created a certain common ground between the *fellahin* and the urban nationalists and demonstrated to both that Britain was not a benevolent protector but an alien occupier. The British show of force was a miscalculation that intensified Egyptian demands for an end to the occupation and hastened the departure of Lord Cromer, who submitted his resignation in 1907.

***The Growth of Political Organizations, 1907–1914***

Cromer’s successors, Sir Eldon Gorst (1907–1911) and Kitchener (1911–1914), addressed some of the immediate political and economic grievances that surfaced in the aftermath of the Dinshaway incident. Gorst achieved a conciliation of sorts with Khedive Abbas and opened up more high-ranking administrative posts to Egyptians. Kitchener sought to restore Egyptian confidence in Britain by reviving the public works program and legislating the Five Feddan Law (1912), which was supposed to protect small landholders by prohibiting the seizure of properties of five *feddan*s or less for debt (1 *feddan* equals 1.04 acres, or .416 hectare, abbreviated *ha*). But neither of these consul generals could stem the growth of Egyptian opposition to the British presence.

This opposition was expressed through three main organizations, all of them founded in 1907. They consisted of groups of Egyptian thinkers and activists associated with a particular vision of their country’s future that they promulgated in various widely circulated newspapers. The opinions of the groups’ leaders reveal the broad range of social perspectives that had developed among the Egyptian elite. The Constitutional Reform Party, grouped around Shaykh Ali Yusuf (1863–1913), an al-Azhar graduate, and his newspaper, *al-Muayyad*, advocated Egyptian independence within an Islamic framework. Such well known Islamic reformers as Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida contributed to the columns of *al-Muayyad* . At the other end of the political and cultural spectrum was the People’s Party. Its leading spokesman was Lutfi al-Sayyid (1872–1963), a graduate of the Cairo School of Law and editor of the paper *al-Jaridah*. The People’s Party introduced a tone of secular liberalism into the debate on Egypt’s future, and though it advocated independence, it stressed a more cautious approach and reminded Egyptians that they must demonstrate their worthiness for self-government. The third grouping, the National Party, was led by Mustafa Kamil and regarded *al-Liwa* as its official organ. Kamil, as mentioned above, demanded immediate British evacuation and argued that Egypt was a distinct territorial entity to which its inhabitants owed their devotion. The public debate on these important issues was abruptly terminated with the outbreak of World War I; Britain declared Egypt a protectorate, imposed martial law on the country, and deposed Abbas II in favor of his more malleable uncle, Husayn Kamil.

**IRAN DURING THE SECOND HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY**

European influences came to Iran later than they did to Egypt and the Ottoman Empire and had far less impact there than in those two states. In part this was because powerful forces of decentralization had taken root in Iran during the chaotic period between the fall of the Safavids in 1722 and the consolidation of the Qajar dynasty in 1794. Unlike Muhammad Ali and Mahmud II, the Qajar shahs were never able to gather together sufficient resources to destroy, or even to limit to any measurable degree, the centrifugal elements within society.

***Changes in Iranian Shiism after the Safavids***

One of the primary factors militating against the centralization of state authority in Iran was the prominent and independent position that the Shia religious establishment had achieved within Iranian society. As noted in Chapter 3, the Safavid shahs were accepted as the divinely inspired representatives of the Hidden Imam. Their recognized religious authority assisted them in legitimizing their temporal power. However, with the fall of the Safavids and the emergence in the late eighteenth century of the Qajar shahs, who made no claims to divinity, the question of the right to exercise religious authority in the absence of the Hidden Imam was reopened. The Shia ulama maintained that since the Qajars were merely temporal rulers, the ulama had the exclusive right to provide interpretations on issues of law and religious practice. They established their claim to be the legitimate interpreters of the will of the Hidden Imam by assuming the right to exercise *ijtihad.*

What this meant in practice was that those members of the religious establishment whose piety and depth of learning were deemed by their peers to be superior were empowered to render judgments on matters of law and religious practice; they were, in short, entitled to recognition as *mujtahid*s, learned individuals qualified to exercise *ijtihad*. In the late eighteenth century, there were never more than three or four *mujtahid*s at any given time. This changed during the first half of the nineteenth century, when the religious establishment won popular acceptance of two concepts: first, that all believing Shia Muslims should attach themselves to a *mujtahid* and accept his rulings as valid on matters of religious observance and legal practice and, second, that the rulings of living *mujtahid*s were preferable to all other existing rulings. The acceptance of these principles generated a need for an increase in the ranks of recognized *mujtahid*s.

With the proliferation of *mujtahid*s, an informal hierarchy emerged that recognized certain *mujtahid*s as possessing such high qualities of learning and understanding that their rulings should take precedence over those of their contemporaries. These individuals bore the title *marja al-taqlid*, the source of emulation, and were the dominant figures within the Shia religious establishment.

During the twentieth century, it became customary to refer to an individual who had achieved the status of a *marja al-taqlid* by the term *ayatollah*, the eye of God. With the fall of the Safavid dynasty and the rise to power of rulers who had no divine attributes, the previously close association between Shia Islam and the state ended, and the Shia religious establishment functioned independently of the government. Backed by a population that granted them extensive authority in religious and legal matters, the ulama could function as a powerful force of support or opposition to the policies of the shahs. By the time of the Qajar dynasty, popular belief held that the rulings of *mujtahid*s were more authoritative statements of the will of the Hidden Imam than the proclamations nof the shahs. Thus, if a *mujtahid* denounced a royal decree as incompatible with the teachings of Islam, then believers were enjoined to accept the *mujtahid*’s decision. In this way, the ulama gained a powerful voice in Iranian political life.

***The Reign of Nasir al-Din Shah (1848–1896)***

The Qajar shahs established their court at Tehran and surrounded themselves with the pomp and ceremony associated with the long-standing Iranian monarchical tradition. Although individual rulers lived in great personal luxury, the appearance they gave of firmly established royal authority was deceiving.

On several occasions during the nineteenth century, the Qajar shahs controlled little beyond the gates of Tehran. They have been described during this period as “having no military security, no administrative stability and little ideological legitimacy.” These limitations are illustrated in the long reign of Nasir al-Din Shah (1848–1896). When he assumed the throne, the standing army of the state was pitifully small, numbering as few as 3,000 troops. Real military power rested with the tribal chieftains, who often commanded more armed men than the shah. Since the military forces of the state were so weak, Nasir al- Din had to depend on tribal levies. When he was unable to pay them, which was often, the tribal armies disbanded. Given these circumstances, the tribal chieftains enjoyed a considerable degree of political and financial autonomy.

Because the state could not destroy them, as Muhammad Ali had the Mamluks or Mahmud II the Janissaries and the *derebey*s, it resorted to manipulating rivalries among them in order to survive. In these circumstances, the tax-collecting abilities of the government were severely limited, and Nasir al-Din’s treasury was chronically short of funds.

Early in his reign, Nasir al-Din did undertake a modest program of military reform, increasing the size of the standing army, introducing new training procedures, and changing the pattern of recruitment. But these measures were hesitant and foundered on the shah’s inability to pay the new recruits. The only lasting improvement in the armed forces during Nasir al-Din’s reign was the creation of the Cossack Brigade in 1879. Commanded by Russian officers and supplied with Russian arms, the Cossack Brigade was the most effective military arm of the government. However, it remained small (2,000 to 3,000 mounted men), and its control by Russian officers had obvious disadvantages. Iran, then, did not engage in a sustained program of European-inspired military reform, with all the offshoots that this produced in Egypt and the Ottoman Empire. Nor, in the realm of administration, did the role of the government appreciably expand to create a demand for the recruitment of a cadre of civil servants trained for new tasks. The offspring of the royal family and the semiautonomous local chieftains received most of the choice provincial governorships, a practice that discouraged the rise of a professional bureaucracy with defined duties and written codes of conduct. A further obstacle to the emergence of administrative professionalism was Nasir al-Din’s habit of replenishing his treasury by selling offices and tax-farming privileges to the highest bidders on an annual basis; the successful buyers, knowing their tenure in office was likely to be short, sought to recover their costs and to make a profit by whatever means they could. Bribery and extortion were commonplace. The most obvious victims of these abuses were the peasant classes, who were subjected to arbitrary acts on the part of local chieftains and government officials alike. Large landlords, encouraged by the absence of any government regulations, seized small peasant holdings and reduced their inhabitants to laborers. Although it may be true that the peasantry has traditionally resented centralizing governments for their conscription and tax-collecting efficiency, it is also the case that effective regimes have afforded rural society a measure of security and stability. In the Iran of Nasir al-Din, the government came to be resented not only for its inability to provide protection from regional exploiters but also for the rapacious practices of those few official government representatives who did manage to exercise authority in the rural areas. Nasir al-Din did make an initial but hesitant attempt to improve both his bureaucracy and his officer corps by opening a new institution of higher learning, Dar al-Funun (1851). Staffed by Europeans and offering instruction in European languages and applied sciences, Dar al-Funun stood alone as the only state-sponsored school of its kind. Although some of its graduates pursued further education in Europe and obtained positions in the bureaucracy and the military, the institution did not have an immediate impact on the conduct of Iranian statecraft. Its enrollments fluctuated widely, depending on the level of the shah’s personal and financial support. One visitor in the early 1870s counted only about seventy students and one European instructor, figures much lower than they had been when the school first opened. In part, the failure of the school to create a critical mass of well-placed, reform-minded bureaucrats and military officers was due to the presence of the Qajar princes and tribal dignitaries in the most important government posts; hence, training at Dar al-Funun did not become an established route to status and power. In the absence of any other state-sponsored institutions, all levels of education were dominated by the ulama.

The influence of the Shia ulama was not confined to the field of education. As we have seen above, during the eighteenth century, the power of the religious establishment increased vis-à-vis the authority of the temporal government. Throughout the nineteenth century, the ulama successfully asserted their right to intervene with religious interpretations of political acts. They also kept their grip on the educational and judicial reins of society; no new elite emerged to replace them in the school system, and there were no major secular challenges to the *shariah* or to the ulama’s role in the administration of justice. In contrast to the changing attitudes in Cairo and Istanbul, in Qajar Iran it was still considered a sign of greater status to be admitted to the ranks of the ulama than it was to become a member of the civil service.

The ability of the religious establishment to maintain its independence from the central government was based to a large extent on its financial autonomy. Nasir al-Din could barely collect enough taxes to keep his small administration running, whereas the ulama amassed considerable wealth. In Shia Islam the temporal government was not allowed to collect the *zakat*, the charitable donation Muslims must pay; instead, the ulama received the *zakat*. A major source of revenue, the funds were used to sustain the members of the religious establishment, to operate *madrasah*s and support the students attending them, and to provide social assistance to the underprivileged. In addition to *zakat* taxes, the ulama received income from teaching, administering *waqf*s, registering deeds and titles, and maintaining mutually advantageous ties with urban merchants. The Shia religious outlook, so dominant in Iran, enabled the ulama of Nasir al-Din’s time to deepen their influence over the population at large and to appear as the protectors of the people from a government that was increasingly viewed as corrupt and impious.

***Iran between Russia and Britain***

The lack of direct state initiative in introducing European-style reforms did not mean that Iran escaped Western influences. Both Russia and Britain regarded the country to be of the utmost strategic importance, and their repeated interference in Iranian affairs contributed to the administrative paralysis of Nasir al- Din’s regime. During the first half of the nineteenth century, Russia occupied territories traditionally claimed by Iran in Turkestan and in the Caucasus region along the Caspian Sea, including portions of the important province of Azerbaijan. By absorbing Turkestan, Tajikistan, and the lands of the Caucasus into the Russian empire, the czars assumed the difficult task of ruling over an ethnically diverse population of Christians and Sunni and Shia Muslims.

Events since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 have demonstrated that the ethnic and religious loyalties of this population survived both czarist and Soviet attempts at assimilation. Russian expansionism in Iran had commercial as well as territorial objectives. Following a decisive military victory over the shah’s irregular tribal forces in 1828, Russia imposed the Treaty of Turkomanchai on Iran. The treaty included clauses granting Russian merchants extraterritorial rights and favorable tariff rates similar to the privileges accorded western Europeans in the Ottoman Capitulations.

In the opinion of British policymakers, the Russian advances in Iran posed a threat to the security of India and offered unwelcome competition to British industry’s search for overseas markets. The commercial challenge was met by a treaty signed in 1857 in which the shah granted British merchants the same low tariff advantages and extraterritorial privileges previously accorded Russians. As happened in the Ottoman Empire and Egypt, the capitulatory agreements opened the way for the economic penetration of Iran and drew that country into the European-dominated global economy. Although the volume of Iran’s international commercial exchange was much less than that of Egypt and the Ottoman Empire, the country’s economic transformation followed a pattern similar to theirs. Iran exported raw agricultural commodities—cotton, silk, wheat—and imported manufactured goods—primarily textiles and hardwares—from Britain and Russia. Iran’s traditional textile industry declined in the face of competition from cheap foreign imports. However, one area of production, carpet making, did prosper from Iran’s economic opening. As Persian carpets became popular in the West, production was increased to meet the new demand.

Britain’s alarm over Russia’s territorial advances toward the borders of India led the British to inform St. Petersburg that they would not stand by if Iran were dismembered. Since neither power wanted war over Iran, they tacitly agreed to allow the country to exist as a buffer state between their strategic interests, an arrangement similar to the one made in the case of the Ottoman Empire. Still, both imperial powers continued to compete for influence over the Iranian government. Russian policy aimed at keeping Iran weak and undeveloped, whereas Britain encouraged economic improvements that might strengthen the country and enable it to resist Russian encroachment. Nasir al- Din Shah, caught in the middle of this rivalry, sought to play the two powers off against one another through the use of the only leverage he had: the granting of economic concessions. This device was also a way for Nasir al-Din to acquire much-needed cash with which to finance his taste for imported luxury goods and his expensive trips to Russia and western Europe. In 1863 the shah awarded the concession to build a telegraph line to a British company and later tried to counterbalance this by giving other concessions to Russian subjects. The shah’s court was soon besieged by European concession hunters, the most successful of whom was Baron Julius de Reuter, a British subject. In 1872 Nasir al-Din awarded Reuter a concession that was quite possibly the largest ever negotiated. Reuter won the exclusive right to construct all railways, canals, and dams in Iran as well as extensive privileges in mining and agricultural development. The shah, desperate for funds, surrendered the economic development of his country in exchange for a relatively modest initial fee and future royalties. Objections to the concession, both within Iran and from the Russian government, were so strong that Nasir al-Din was compelled to cancel it in 1873. Russia and Britain continued to compete for economic concessions from the shah, especially over the rights for railway construction. Their pressure and counter-pressure so stalemated any activity in this area that by 1900 Iran had less than 20 miles (32 km) of functioning railway.

***The Tobacco Protest of 1891***

The corruption and inefficiency of Nasir al-Din’s government, combined with its policy of opening Iran to foreign economic exploitation, created a current of popular unrest that finally broke into open revolt. In 1890 the shah granted an English company the exclusive right to produce, sell, and export Iran’s entire tobacco crop. This award, which affected a product widely consumed and marketed by Iranians, brought all the elements of discontent together in a series of mass protests against the concession and the ruler who had granted it. Significantly, the protest was organized and led by members of the Shia ulama. They urged the population to join them in preserving the dignity of Islam in the face of growing foreign influences; they portrayed the shah’s concession policy as a transgression of the laws of Islam and used their independent power base to denounce the government. In 1891 a *mujtahid* from Shiraz issued a decree declaring the use of tobacco unlawful until such time as the concession was canceled.

The decree was framed in the context of Twelver Shiism and warned that the use of tobacco in any form was an offense to the Hidden Imam. The *mujtahid* thus employed his power of interpretation to counteract a policy of the central government. The Iranian people, already alienated by the shah’s accommodation of European economic interests, followed the *mujtahid* ’s ruling by engaging in a statewide boycott of tobacco products. Throughout 1891 several huge demonstrations against the concession were held in Tehran and other major cities. Unable to enforce his will on a public that had rallied behind its religious leaders, the shah canceled the concession in 1892. For the ulama, the experience of the tobacco protest showed that the Iranian people were receptive to calls for political activity based on Islamic frames of reference.

The last years of Nasir al-Din’s rule were notably unproductive. The protest against his use of concessions was a financial handicap as well as a personal humiliation, and he found it necessary to contract loans from Russia to keep the state afloat. Iran thus joined Egypt and the Ottoman Empire as a debtor state. During this final period of his long reign, the shah became openly hostile to contact with the West, prohibiting the establishment of new schools and preventing Iranians from traveling to Europe. The isolationism of Nasir al-Din’s regime is encapsulated in his boast that he preferred to appoint ministers who did not know whether Brussels was a place or a cabbage.7 His assassination in 1896 was not a cause for widespread grief.

**CONCLUSION**

Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, the Middle Eastern economic order was restructured by the penetration of European capital and commerce into different parts of the region. The Capitulations, which originated as enticements to western European merchants from a militarily dominant Ottoman Empire, were transformed into instruments of European economic and political control in the age of expansive European capitalism and dominant European military technology. In an effort to recover Middle Eastern military strength and thus to prevent both provincial rebellion and European imperial encroachment, the rulers of Egypt and the Ottoman Empire started to purchase European military technology and to fund European-style training facilities.

But the expenditures associated with these endeavors exceeded the capacities of the two states’ revenue-producing abilities, and they were forced to seek loans from European lenders. Eventually, the unfavorable economic environment of the Capitulations, which limited the revenue-raising opportunities of the two states, forced them into bankruptcy. In the case of the central Ottoman Empire, bankruptcy led to European control of the distribution of Ottoman revenues but not to European occupation of the Ottoman capital city. The rivalries inherent in the Eastern Question were too intense and the territory involved too strategic to permit one Great Power to dominate the empire at the expense of the others. Nor was the Ottoman Empire a passive state.

In the case of Egypt, however, Britain deemed its interests so important that it defied all potential European resistance and occupied the country in 1882. During Lord Cromer’s long tenure as administrator of the occupation, he managed Egypt’s economic, political, and social development so as to further British, not Egyptian, interests. Cromer’s primary concern was financial stability, and although he presided over an impressive expansion of the Egyptian economy, he ensured that the economy remained geared to the export of raw materials for British industry. And in an effort to justify the continuing British presence in the country, Cromer insisted that Egyptians were unprepared for independence and sought to perpetuate this condition by limiting the educational opportunities available to them. Yet the British occupation itself fostered the growth of Egyptian nationalism, and by the eve of World War I secular and religious leaders alike took up the call that had first been heard during the Urabi revolt—“Egypt for the Egyptians.” Although Iran shared certain historical trends with Egypt and the Ottoman Empire, it diverged from them in others. In the realm of economic development, for example, Iran, like the other regions, was drawn into the global economy as an exporter of raw materials. And the Qajar shahs granted capitulatory privileges and economic concessions to Britain and Russia, thus placing the transformation of Iran’s economy in the hands of foreigners. However, Iran did not experience the governmental centralization that was such an important precondition for the transformation of Egypt and the Ottoman Empire. European-inspired military reforms, which had been the original driving force behind the Ottoman and Egyptian transformations, were not carried out in Iran. Nor did Nasir al-Din Shah undertake a sustained effort to train a cadre of civil servants committed to the promulgation of European-style institutions. In the absence of royal determination and trained personnel, Iran did not experience an era comparable to the Ottoman Tanzimat or Egypt’s intense Westernization during the reign of Ismail. Moreover, in Egypt and the Ottoman Empire, the expanding functions of the central state reduced the role of intermediaries between the government and the population. For example, Muhammad Ali’s seizure of *waqf*s, Mahmud II’s creation of a Ministry of Religious Endowments, and Ismail’s establishment of the Mixed Courts all contributed to the reduction of the ulamas’ revenue and influence. By contrast, the shahs of Iran lacked the power to successfully confront such intermediary groups. The powerful and independent Shia religious establishment continued to possess greater influence among the population than did the shahs. The Tobacco Protest of 1891 serves as a dramatic example of the clergy’s ability to emerge victorious in a power struggle with the monarch. The combination of a decentralized government and a potent religious organization caused Iran to take a different course in its interaction with Europe and European ideas than did the Ottomans or Egyptians.

**The Response of Islamic Society**

By the end of the nineteenth century, nearly all of the major political units of Islam, from Indonesia to northern Nigeria, were under some form of European control. Those that had escaped direct occupation—Iran, the Ottoman Empire, Afghanistan, and Morocco—found their sovereignty restricted by European control of their economies. The domination of Islamic lands by the states of western Europe posed a terrible dilemma for Muslims. Why did the divinely ordained Islamic community suffer such defeats at the hands of the infidels? The general Muslim consensus was that the divine message revealed to the Prophet remained valid. It was not Islam that was flawed; rather, the flaw lay with Muslims themselves and their failure to follow the commands of God. In this view the abandonment of the *shariah* for secular constitutions and man-made legal codes was symptomatic of the errors of the Western-educated elite, whose eager embrace of alien institutions not only had failed to save society but had hastened its ruin. But the French knowers were not the only targets of criticism. Muslim intellectuals and political activists argued that Islamic practices had become degenerate and had deviated from the true path as set forth in the revelations.

In this atmosphere of self-criticism, a current of reaction against the adoption of European ways accompanied a reassertion of Islamic values. Especially prominent in Egypt was a movement of intellectual inquiry that sought to rediscover the essential principles of Islam and to explain their application to the changing world of the twentieth century.

**RELIGIOUS ASSERTIVENESS AND AUTHORITARIAN REFORM: THE ERA OF ABDUL HAMID II**

Abdul Hamid II (1876–1909) was the last Ottoman sultan to exercise unrestrained royal authority. Within two years of coming to power, he suspended the constitution he had pledged to uphold and shifted control of the machinery of government from the bureaucrats back to the royal palace in order to enforce his autocracy. His reign of thirty-three years, the third longest in the history of the Ottoman dynasty, began with a cautious mixture of reform and conservatism but ended in an oppressive reaction against European institutions and ideas. The sultan used the vastly expanded powers of the central government to impose restrictions on the political and intellectual activity of Ottoman subjects. The reaction against the wholesale adoption of Western inspired reforms was symbolized by Abdul Hamid’s stress on the Islamic heritage of the Ottoman Empire. In contrast to the secularism of the Tanzimat, he surrounded himself with the trappings of the caliphate and catered to the religious establishment. Abdul Hamid also downplayed Ottomanism, with its acceptance of the equality of all religions, and adopted in its place the doctrine of Pan-Islam. This doctrine was closely linked to Abdul Hamid’s emphasis on his position as caliph and his claim to be the protector of Muslims throughout the world. The idea of a revived Islamic *ummah* under the rule of a single caliph had little likelihood of being realized, but Abdul Hamid’s exploitation of the concept enhanced his status and drew further attention to the possibilities of casting off European domination through a renewal of Islamic solidarity.

Pan-Islam also served as a useful instrument of diplomacy in the sultan’s dealings with Britain, France, and Russia. If he could convince the European imperial powers that he possessed a measure of authority over the millions of Muslims in their colonies, he would gain leverage in negotiations with them. From a domestic standpoint, Abdul Hamid’s stress on Islamic ties was intended to secure the continued loyalty of the Arab inhabitants of the empire. Many of the leading Muslim Arab notable families enjoyed increased prestige and easier access to important administrative posts during Abdul Hamid’s reign, and certain privileged Arab ulama became part of his palace entourage. The crowning material symbol of Pan-Islam was the Hijaz railway from Damascus to Medina, opened in 1908. Constructed to facilitate the annual pilgrimage, it was financed by private subscriptions from Muslims throughout the world and was thus free from the taint of European investment capital.

Despite its outward display of anti-Westernism and traditional religiosity, the first decade of Abdul Hamid’s reign witnessed an acceleration of certain Tanzimat programs, most notably in the field of education. The long-accepted historical view that the Hamidian era was dominated by currents of obscurantist religious conservatism has recently been reassessed on the basis of new information and a better understanding of the global context in which the late Ottoman Empire functioned.1 This new interpretation recognizes that the sultan and his bureaucrats undertook an extensive program of state-sponsored educational expansion in order to counter the spread of foreign influences generally and the success of Christian missionary schools in enrolling Ottoman subjects in particular. The emphasis was on the secondary school system, which had been underdeveloped during the Tanzimat period. As an example of the magnitude of this educational project, the Ottoman state constructed fifty-one new secondary schools in the years from 1882 to 1894, mainly in the Asian provinces. The curriculum, designed and administered by state officials, employed European pedagogical techniques to teach modern sciences while at the same time inculcating students with the principles of Islamic morality, Ottoman identity, and loyalty to the sultan. In short, the Ottoman state adopted

a Western-style system of education and underpinned it with indoctrination in core Ottoman values. The entire system was highly centralized and the sultan’s agents closely monitored the schools and their instructors. The scope and direction of this educational project demonstrates an element of activism during the Hamidian era and shows that the sultan’s goal was more to Ottomanize modern secondary education than it was to restore the pre-Tanzimat system. Further evidence of advances in modern education is seen in the opening of the University of Istanbul in 1900. In addition, the Hamidian era witnessed a rapid development of the empire’s communications and transportation systems. Istanbul was linked to Vienna by rail in 1883, and soon thereafter the fabled Orient Express began to offer regular service from Paris. Other lines brought the cities and towns of Ottoman Europe and Anatolia into closer contact with Istanbul, and an extensive telegraph network reached out to the most distant parts of the empire. These improvements tightened the central government’s control over the hinterlands. One of the significant results of the transportation boom was a strengthening of ties between Germany and the Ottomans. In 1882 the German general Colmar von der Goltz was employed as head of a mission to reorganize the armed forces, continuing a long-standing tradition of Prussian involvement in Ottoman military modernization. During the Hamidian era, German investment capital played a leading role in the construction of railways, most notably in the development of the Berlin-to-Baghdad line across Anatolia, a project that caused Britain such unease that it became as much a diplomatic issue as an engineering challenge. The German-Ottoman connection was made closer by Kaiser Wilhelm II’s two state visits, in 1889 and 1898, and by his much publicized declaration during the latter occasion that Germany was the friend of the world’s 300 million Muslims.

Notwithstanding the improvements in education and transportation, the reign of Abdul Hamid had its dark side. The insecure sultan, haunted by memories of his predecessor’s deposition and convinced of the dangers of constitutionalism, tried to impose total control over the information available to his subjects and the activities in which they could engage. The press was tightly censored, the school curricula were subjected to close scrutiny, and the public discussion of politics was forbidden. An internal network of government spies and informants, aided by the new telegraph system, infiltrated all levels of the administration; its reports led to the imprisonment and exile, often on the most dubious evidence, of many loyal Ottoman officials and intellectuals. Others escaped the tyranny by voluntary exile or immigration. Away from the reach of Abdul Hamid’s police in Paris and Berlin, they formed protest groups and published pamphlets, which were smuggled into Istanbul, denouncing the sultan and his autocracy. And the institutes of higher learning, which Abdul Hamid tried so desperately to control, became breeding grounds of discontent as students and teachers alike chafed at the clumsy restrictions of the censors. Abdul Hamid’s regime was also marked by the ruthless suppression of national separation movements. The harshest measures were directed against the Armenian community. In the opinion of the sultan and his advisers, the loss of territory in the Balkans was bad enough, but the creation of an independent Armenian Christian state in the heartland of Anatolia was unthinkable. When confronted with a series of Armenian nationalist activities in the 1890s, the sultan struck back with a vengeance. The brutal Ottoman response to Armenian nationalist agitation did not distinguish between political militants and the Armenian population at large. In the rural areas of Anatolia, Abdul Hamid unleashed Kurdish irregulars against Armenian villages, and many innocent people were massacred. In Istanbul the state security apparatus harassed and intimidated respectable merchants and clergymen. In 1897 Abdul Hamid used such ferocity to crush an uprising against Ottoman rule in Crete that Greece declared war on the empire. Although the Ottomans easily won the military contest, they lost the diplomatic one; intervention by the European powers forced the sultan to accept the autonomy of Crete, confirming the already suspicious ruler’s distrust of the West.

During the final years of his reign, Abdul Hamid became increasingly isolated in the royal palace. His Pan-Islamic policy was not unpopular with the Muslim subjects of the empire, but it had proved no more successful than the programs of his Tanzimat predecessors in preventing the loss of Ottoman territory. The graduates of the very schools he had founded came to see the sultan as an impediment to progress, and the movement that would overthrow him began to form within the officer corps and the exile communities in Europe.

**ISLAMIC PURITANISM ON THE TRIBAL FRONTIERS: THE WAHHABI, SANUSI, AND MAHDIYYAH MOVEMENTS**

European expansionism was not the only inspiration for Islamic revivalism. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, an increase in doctrinally based Islamic movements occurred among the rural populations in various Islamic regions. The leaders of these movements often were men educated in the classic Islamic tradition who came to believe that the infiltration of decadent popular practices was causing Islamic society to deviate from the tradition of the Prophet. The rural movements they launched for the purification of the faith helped spread the conviction that Islamic society would have to look within itself for the sources of its own regeneration. The three movements to be examined here were by no means the only ones of their kind. They were, however, among the most influential and the most enduring.

The theological foundations of the Wahhabi movement were set by a scholar from central Arabia, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792). Educated in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, Abd al-Wahhab set forth, in writings and preaching, an uncompromising affirmation of *tawhid*, the oneness of God. In this regard he labeled Sufism, with its veneration of saints, as a form of polytheism and branded its practitioners as apostates and thus deserving of death. There was a distinct fundamentalist orientation to Abd al-Wahhab’s thought, especially in his insistence that the Quran and the *hadith* were the only reliable sources through which the divine will could be comprehended. Yet coupled with his fundamentalism was an innovative quality that led him to denounce the practice of unthinking adherence to the interpretations of scholars and the blind acceptance of practices that were passed on within the family or tribe. He believed in the responsibility of the individual Muslim to learn and obey the divine commands as they were revealed in the Quran and the *hadith*. Abd al-Wahhab’s preaching attracted the support of a local chieftain from Najd, Muhammad ibn Saud. Ibn Saud’s warriors and Abd al-Wahhab’s reformist message merged into a powerful politico-religious force that expanded throughout northern Arabia and succeeded in capturing Mecca in 1803. It was at this point that the Ottoman sultan requested Muhammad Ali to send his Egyptian troops to Arabia to destroy the movement. Although the power of the Wahhabi forces was broken, the reformist ideals of Abd al-Wahhab became ingrained among the tribes of Arabia. The Wahhabi example of self-generated purification had a profound impact in Islamic circles at the time and later became influential among twentieth-century reformers, who adopted many of its principles.

The Sanusi order, which had its base in Cyrenaica (now eastern Libya), was more within the tradition of Sufism than was the Wahhabi movement. Its founder, Muhammad ibn Ali al-Sanusi (1787–1859), was an Algerian who spent several years studying and teaching in Mecca. His views were unpopular there, and he eventually settled in Jaghbub in Cyrenaica, a tribal region that lacked any center of political authority. The aim of al-Sanusi and the order he founded was to recreate the original community of the Prophet. The order rejected the Ottoman and Egyptian forms of Islamic behavior in favor of a more austere desert life. Although the doctrines of the Sanusi brotherhood may not have been as intellectually venturesome or as rigorously puritanical as those of Abd al-Wahhab, al-Sanusi’s political achievement was noteworthy. Al-Sanusi and his followers had remarkable success in integrating the surrounding tribes into his religious order and establishing a comprehensive network of brotherhoods and trading posts stretching from northern Cyrenaica into the Sudan. The order survived its founder’s death and, as the only organized unit in the region, took part in the struggle against European imperialism. The Sanusis opposed French expansion in Central Africa and resisted the Italian invasion of Tripoli in 1911. The order had its ups and downs during the various phases of Italian rule in Libya, but when the victorious Allied powers were looking for a ruler for the new state of Libya in 1950, they settled on al-Sayyid Muhammad Idris, the head of the Sanusi brotherhood and the grandson of its founder. The Sanusi order thus became the basis for the contemporary Libyan state. The Mahdiyyah uprising in the northern Sudan has been previously mentioned in the context of Anglo-Egyptian relations (see Chapter 6). Here our concern is with the movement as another example of revived Islamic political activity. The Mahdist revolt was both a rebellion against the Egyptian occupation of the Sudan and a movement for the purification of Islam. Egyptian rule was neither popular nor effective. It had been established by a brutal conquest and could be maintained only by the stationing of thousands of Egyptian troops in the country. Taxes were much higher and more forcefully collected than had been the case previously, and the administrators sent to the Sudan were often corrupt. By the late 1870s, Sudanese discontent with the corruption and the oppressive taxation of the Egyptian administration had reached a breaking point. It was this discontent that Muhammad Ahmad channeled so masterfully into a mass movement of protest and purification. Muhammad Ahmad (1844–1885), a Sudanese, received a traditional religious education and had established a reputation for asceticism and piety that had gained him a modest popular following. In 1881 he proclaimed himself the Mahdi, the expected one, and to the degree that his followers accepted this claim, he was regarded as directly inspired by God. His goal was to revive the faith and practice of the Prophet through the restoration of the Quran and the *hadith* as the foundations of a just society. He made a virtue of the poverty of the Sudan by renouncing worldly goods and citing the relative luxury of the Egyptian governors as evidence of their impious behavior. He formed an administrative unit, soon to become a full-fledged state, modeled closely on the Prophet’s practice in Medina. The Mahdi introduced a military dimension to his movement by declaring a *jihad* against the Egyptian administration, claiming that only by dislodging these lax Muslims from the Sudan could a true Islamic society be established. With remarkable speed, the Mahdi attracted a large and devoted following and conquered most of the northern Sudan, including Khartoum, which his forces captured in 1885. The Mahdist state survived under his successor (known, significantly, as the caliph) until Kitchener’s reconquest of the Sudan in 1898. Although the movement spanned less than twenty years, its legacy continues to be a factor in Sudanese politics. During the Mahdi’s lifetime, his rebellion attracted considerable attention throughout the Islamic world. His stunning successes in routing the Anglo-Egyptian army and establishing an indigenous Islamic state offered hope to Muslims everywhere that Islamic revival could serve as the weapon to drive out European imperialism.

**THE REFORM OF HIGH ISLAM**

The growing concern for the continued survival of the Islamic *ummah* in a world increasingly dominated by Europe also found expression in the urban milieu of high Islam. Here, as in the tribal response, the emphasis was on the need for Muslims to acquire a proper understanding of the original principles of Islam so as to recover the spirit of solidarity and piety that had brought such triumph to the Prophet and his successors. Although some members of the ulama used this period of reevaluation to recommend the rejection of all Western innovations, the most original of the new thinkers recognized the importance of accommodating European achievements in science and technology within the framework of Islam. Theirs was the most difficult task of all—reasserting the universal applicability of the faith while at the same time incorporating ideas that originated outside the revelations.

The activist political dimension of Islamic revival was embodied in the person of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1839–1897), who has been described “as a man whose life touched and deeply affected the whole Islamic world in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.” Al-Afghani’s pronounced influence on Islamic opinion was due less to the originality of his theological formulations than to the appeal of his call for direct action in the name of Islamic solidarity.

He was a complex individual, but at one basic level he may be characterized as an itinerant antiimperial activist blessed with exceptional personal magnetism. Raised and educated in Iran, he took up residence in Egypt in 1871 and attracted a group of young men to his ideas of political and religious reform. His activities were unwelcome to Khedive Tawfiq, who ordered him deported to India in 1879. Al-Afghani resurfaced in Paris in 1884; he and one of his disciples, Muhammad Abduh, published an Arabic newspaper, *al-Urwah al-Wuthqa* (The Indissoluble Bond), that emphasized the importance of religiously based political solidarity. Later al-Afghani became an adviser to Nasir al-Din Shah in Iran, but when the shah granted the tobacco concession of 1890, al-Afghani became one of the leading organizers of the mass protests against it. He was expelled from Iran, but his influence in opposition circles remained strong; Nasir al-Din’s assassin was one of al-Afghani’s former students. He spent the last five years of his life in Istanbul as a guest of Sultan Abdul Hamid, who was attracted by his Pan-Islamic message but so appalled by his politics that he kept the famous visitor under virtual house arrest.

The purpose in all these wanderings and in the writings in *al-Urwah al- Wuthqa* was to arouse in Muslims a determination to overcome their weaknesses.The Christian West was currently dominant not because it was superior but because Islam had fallen into a state of decadence and stagnation. For al- Afghani, Islam was in accord with the scientific spirit and the demands of human reason, but Muslims had become ignorant of the true principles of their faith. They had to take it upon themselves to rediscover these principles and to discard the superstitions that had corrupted the community. Two elements central to al-Afghani’s conception of Islam were unity and action. It was the unity of the *ummah* that had brought such greatness to Islamic civilization in thepast. Despite the existence of different races and languages among Muslims, al-Afghani believed that Pan-Islamic sentiment was the most powerful force forbringing the community together. Muslims should use their feelings of communalsolidarity to resist European exploitation and to revive their sense ofcommon purpose. However, this revival could be achieved only by effort; itwould not come as a gift from God. Al-Afghani deplored all forms of passivity,but he was especially critical of Muslim rulers who allowed European armies toinvade their territories and permitted European concession hunters to controltheir economies. He called for their overthrow and for the return of politicalauthority to pious and uncorrupted leaders. It was al-Afghani’s encouragementof action, the sense he conveyed that the status quo could be changed, that generatedsuch appeal among young Muslims of his era. His memory as the firstwidely publicized figure to explain how a reformed Islamic community couldstand as a bulwark against Western subversion of the values of the Middle Easthas remained inspirational to the present day.What al-Afghani sought to accomplish through political agitation his most famous disciple, Muhammad Abduh, pursued by the more measured steps of intellectual inquiry and institutional reform. Abduh (1849–1905) is one of the most intensely studied Arab Muslim thinkers of the modern era. Born in anEgyptian village, he went on to become a student and then a teacher at al-Azhar in Cairo. During his student days, he met al-Afghani and became a devotedmember of his circle. After al-Afghani’s expulsion from Egypt, Abduh becameactive in the Urabi movement and was exiled in 1882. He was abroad forsix years, mostly in Beirut but also in Paris. Upon his return to British-occupied Egypt, he served for a time as a judge and then was appointed muftiof Egypt in 1899. As the chief Islamic official in the country, he initiated reformsin the *shariah* court system and tried with little success to introducechanges in the organization and curriculum of al-Azhar. A dignified and respectedman, Abduh was as inspirational in his quiet way as the more charismatical-Afghani. His numerous disciples came to occupy prominent positionsin the Egyptian political and religious establishment, and his far-reaching proposalsfor the reformulation of Islamic doctrine generated a debate among theMuslim clergy and laity that has lasted from his time to ours.

Abduh’s proposals, contained in his major scholarly work, *Risalah al-Tawhid* (A Treatise on the Oneness of God), and in his decrees as mufti, represented hisresponse to the challenge posed by Europe’s success. His purpose was todemonstrate that Islam was compatible with modernity and that an educatedMuslim did not have to choose between being modern and being Muslim; thetwo went hand in hand. In broad summary, Abduh attempted to reconcile theunquestioning obedience demanded by divine revelation with the freedom ofindependent human reasoning. Like Abd al-Wahhab and al-Afghani, he sawthat local superstitions and administrative practices dating from earlier centurieshad become accepted as integral parts of Islamic doctrine and were robbingthe *ummah* of its intellectual vigor and social dynamism. Abduh believedthat the eternally valid requirements of Islam were found in the Quran and theverified *hadith* and had been most rigorously observed during the period of theRashidun caliphs, the four immediate successors of the prophet. Thus, the reformisttendency associated with Abduh’s name, the Salafiyyah movement,stems from the Arabic word for ancestor, *salaf*, and is tied to Abduh’s contentionthat the study of the early community provided the surest guide to divinelyapproved behavior. Practices that had been incorporated into the communitysince the time of the Rashidun, ranging from political theory tojudicial organization, were the products of human reason and were designed tomeet specific historical circumstances. It followed that such practices could bemodified by human reason to meet new circumstances; they were not part ofthe eternally valid revelation. In Islamic theological terms, Abduh was callingfor the reopening of the gate of *ijtihad*, the application of informed human reasonto new situations.

If, after the passage of more than a century, Abduh’s proposals seem somewhat contrived and conservative, we must attempt to appreciate how bold they were at the time. Abduh was both a preservationist and a reformer. He could accept, for example, Muhammad Ali’s administrative reforms, and he was a strong advocate of broadening the curricula of the Islamic educational institutions. Change did not frighten Abduh. But the thought that some Muslims and Europeans might conceive of change as possible only outside the framework of Islam did concern him. Thus he sought to demonstrate that positive change was not the preserve of the Christian West but was also permissible, even encouraged, in a properly understood interpretation of Islam. In this way he managed both to constrain and to open the receptivity of Islamic society to new ideas and practices. The new had to be measured against the standards of the Quran, the *hadith*, and the practice of the

Rashidun; if it was acceptable on those grounds, then it could be applied on the basis of informed human reason. Abduh’s disciples took his thought to extremes in both areas: Some considered him the founder of a rigid school of interpretation, and others regarded him as the sponsor of the unbounded application of human reason.

**EMERGING CURRENTS OF ARAB CULTURAL DISTINCTIVENESS**

Within the Ottoman domains, Abdul Hamid’s stress on his role as caliph was a recognition of the importance of Islam as the primary bond between the Arabs and the Ottoman state. The subject peoples of the Balkans had more readily discovered their national distinctiveness because they were also religiously distinct. But for Arab Muslims, the ties of the *ummah* were paramount, and these ties were represented by the Ottoman state. As long as loyalty to the empire appeared to be consistent with loyalty to the best interests of Islam, most Arab Muslims accepted the legitimacy of Ottoman rule. However, when a Syrian reformer, Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi, suggested that the Ottomans were responsible for the corruption of Islam, he introduced a nationalist argument that had profound implications for the Ottoman-Islamic order in the Arab provinces. Al-Kawakibi (1854–1902) was from a distinguished family in Aleppo. His career as a journalist and a municipal administrator in his native city brought him into frequent conflict with Abdul Hamid’s censors, and in 1899 he finally emigrated to Egypt, where he became a prominent figure in the intellectual circles of Cairo. In his two published works, *Tabai al-Istibdad* (The Nature of Despotism) and *Umm al-Qura* (The Mother of Cities: Mecca), he analyzed the causes for the degeneration of Islam and offered suggestions for its regeneration. Both books contained extensive criticism of Abdul Hamid’s oppressive rule. At its most basic, al-Kawakibi’s defense of Islamic civilization was a glorification of the Arab role in the development of that civilization. The virtues of Islam—its language, its Prophet, its early moral and political order—were Arab achievements. In his view, the decadence of Islam was caused by practices the Turks and other non-Arab peoples had introduced into the *ummah*, and he went so far as to express regret that the Turks had ever embraced the faith. The Arabs were the true protectors of Islam, and al-Kawakibi called for the Ottomans to relinquish their unjustified claim to the caliphate and to restore the office to its rightful possessors, the Arabs. In his opinion, the regeneration of Islam would begin with the establishment of an Arab caliph in Mecca whose responsibilities would be confined to purely religious matters. Al-Kawakibi was not an Arab nationalist, but in suggesting that the Arab version of Islam was the only pure one, he provided an ideological opening through which Arabs, as Muslims, could oppose Ottoman rule. Muslims did not, of course, constitute the only Arab grouping within the empire. Large Christian minority communities were present in Syria and Mount Lebanon. How did they respond to the new currents of Islamic reformism, and what role did they see for themselves in a state that increasingly emphasized its Islamic heritage? During the second half of the nineteenth century, the Arab Christians of Syria and Lebanon experienced an economic and literary renaissance that is known as *al-nahdah*, the awakening. This resurgence also affected the Arab Muslims of the region, but its greatest impact was on members of the Christian communities. The main catalysts for the awakening were foreign Christian missionary activity and the printing press.

Beginning at the time of the Egyptian occupation of Syria (1831–1840), activity by US Protestant, French Catholic, and Russian Orthodox missionaries increased dramatically. The original missionary impulse to convert the local Christians to mainstream Western versions of the faith quickly shifted to a concern for lay education and to a heated competition, especially between Presbyterians and Jesuits, to enroll members of the local Christian communities in their schools. This competition had fortunate side effects: By 1860, the Presbyterians had founded thirty-three schools in Beirut, Jerusalem, and the villages of Lebanon. This was capped in 1866 by the opening in Beirut of the US sponsored Syrian Protestant College (later the American University of Beirut), an institution that was to produce a glittering list of alumni in the fields of politics, medicine, and literature. The Jesuits were equally industrious, founding schools in Beirut, Damascus, and Aleppo as well as in the villages. The Reverend Daniel Bliss, the founding president of the Syrian Protestant College, was keenly aware of the competition between the Protestant and Catholic missions and is reported to have claimed during the ceremonies marking the opening of the Syrian Protestant College that he was, in effect, establishing two universities. His prediction came true nine years later when the Jesuits opened the Université St. Joseph in Beirut. In addition to their concern with establishing schools, the US and Jesuit missions imported Arabic printing presses, which they used to produce textbooks and religious materials. In time, these presses published new editions of classical Arabic texts and served as the inspiration for the development of a lively journalistic tradition. Throughout Lebanon and parts of Syria, this extensive educational effort, conducted largely in the Arabic language, contributed to an Arabic cultural renaissance. There was a revived interest in the classical literary tradition as well as much experimentation with new forms and styles. The career of Butrus al-Bustani (1819–1883) exemplifies the Arab cultural awakening. Born a Lebanese Maronite Christian, al-Bustani was so favorably impressed by his early contacts with American missionaries that he converted to Protestantism. He taught for a time in the missionary schools and in 1863 founded his own institution, the National School, which taught Arabic and contemporary scientific subjects. Al-Bustani’s prodigious literary effort included the compilation of an Arabic dictionary, the founding and editing of several periodicals, and, in collaboration with his sons, the production of eleven volumes of an Arabic encyclopedia. His objective was to spread knowledge and appreciation of the Arabic language, and the cumulative impact of his life and work “contributed to the creation of modern Arabic expository prose, of a language true to its past in grammar and idiom, but made capable of expressing simply, precisely, and directly the concepts of modern thought.” Al-Bustani also encouraged receptiveness to the scientific discoveries made in Europe, believing that only through a willingness to acquire modern knowledge would the Middle East recover its proper place in the world.

The influence of al-Bustani and others who shared his enthusiasm for blending the Arabic cultural heritage with contemporary political and scientific thought generated a lively intellectual atmosphere among the growing numbers of educated Arabs concentrated in Beirut. During the 1860s and 1870s, literary clubs and scientific societies became active in that city and served as centers for the discussion of political as well as literary topics. The emphasis on the Arabic language that was at the heart of the *nahdah* led naturally to a heightened awareness of the cultural identity of the Arab community. This was especially marked among the Christian Arabs, the principal beneficiaries of the foreign educational missions. Because of their Christianity, members of this community did not regard the new ideas and institutions coming from Europe as a threat to the foundations of their civilization; they did not have to go through the elaborate intellectual exercises of the Muslim reformers in order to justify change and the acceptance of Western concepts of political and social organization. The success of Europe was an affirmation of the local Christians’ faith, and to important segments of them, European intervention and protection offered a tempting route of escape from their minority status under Ottoman rule. Ties between France and the Maronite Christians of Lebanon were especially close.

The reign of Abdul Hamid brought into ever-sharper focus the question of the future of Christians in the Ottoman Empire. However, the Hamidian regime’s political repressiveness also affected Muslim Arabs, especially that group of journalists, intellectuals, and nascent politicians who had managed to partake of the educational opportunities offered during the *nahdah*. The Beirut literary societies became increasingly multi-sectarian and began to discuss such subjects as the shared heritage of the Arabs and the notion that solidarity among Arabic speakers had a greater claim on communal loyalty than did religious ties. The idea of patriotism, of the love of a particular territorial entity as an element of social cohesion, also became current. Christian Arabs, as members of a restricted minority community, had a special interest in promoting the concept of equality based on nonsectarian considerations, but the appeal of a shared sentiment of Arabness also attracted Muslims. This current of cultural renewal was by no means a nationalist independence movement, nor did it eliminate deeply rooted feelings of sectarian identity. But it did serve to increase the Arab community’s awareness of its distinctiveness and historical achievements. As such, the Arab awakening represented the addition of yet another challenge to the Ottoman system.

**CONCLUSION**

By the turn of the twentieth century, the once solid Ottoman-Islamic Middle Eastern order was rendered unstable by the variety of responses emanating from its core components to the challenge of European dominance. There was a growing awareness that the Islamic community had to find within its own traditions the means for regeneration or else face the loss of those traditions.

At the center, the Pan-Islamic caliphal autocracy of Sultan Abdul Hamid II generated support from those elements of Ottoman society that had been disadvantaged by the Tanzimat and was endorsed, at least in its Pan-Islamic political dimensions, by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani. In British occupied Egypt, growing feelings of national distinctiveness and demands for political independence mingled with the country’s long-standing role in the Islamic cultural universe as represented by the reformist ideas of Muhammad Abduh. On the tribal frontier, the currents set in motion by the Wahhabi, Sanusi, Mahdiyyah, and other similar movements continued to create waves of unrest against both local corruption and European encroachment and to offer appealing programs of Islamic-based activism as solutions to the problems besetting the *ummah*. And in the Arab center, the *nahdah* generated a vibrant Christian Arab movement of cultural solidarity that also attracted Muslim Arabs and reawakened memories of the central Arab role in the creation of one of history’s major civilizations. The Young Turk conspirators who overthrew Abdul Hamid in 1909 attempted to impose a single solution on these diverse trends; in so doing they set them in conflict with one another and unintentionally brought an end to the Ottoman system in the Middle East.

**The Era of the Young Turks and the Iranian Constitutionalists**

The Young Turk era from 1908 to the Ottoman defeat in 1918 marked a period in which all the trends of the preceding century met in a head-on collision. Adding to the turmoil of these years were proposals for new forms of cultural and political identification that were at odds with the dominant ideology of Ottomanism. The situation in Iran was equally turbulent as that country experienced revolution, civil war, and foreign occupation.

Events within the Middle East unfolded against the backdrop of a changing international order that contained elements of promise—and of danger—for the Middle Eastern region. A promising component of the new order was the emergence of Japan as a modern military power. In a span of barely fifty years, Japan was transformed from a decentralized feudal society to a unified and technologically advanced nation, having acquired the institutions that appeared to lie at the core of European success—a constitution (1889) and a modern military machine. Japan’s new status was affirmed by its decisive victory over Russia in the war of 1904–1905, a victory celebrated in many parts of the globe as a triumph of Asia over Europe. The example of Japan was a source of both envy and inspiration to reform-minded activists in the Middle East. To many of them, Japan stood as a symbol of what was possible, indeed of what was necessary, if European dominance was to be resisted. For Ottoman and Iranian leaders, the urgency of military reform was highlighted by changing configurations within the European alliance system. The changes were primarily caused by Germany’s growing strength and Britain’s reaction to that development. Germany was a member of the Triple Alliance, a system completed by Bismarck in 1882. The alliance joined Austria-Hungary and Italy with Germany in a mutual defense pact that lasted until World War I. France responded to the Triple Alliance by entering into its own alliance with Russia in 1894. Britain preferred to avoid the entanglements of continental alliances, but increasing industrial and naval competition from Germany forced the British to reconsider their policy of isolation. As a result, Britain entered into an informal agreement with France, the Entente Cordiale (1904), in which the two powers resolved the overseas disputes that had kept them at loggerheads for more than twenty years. By the terms of the agreement, France finally recognized Britain’s occupation of Egypt and the British acknowledged France’s preeminent position in Morocco. This dual alliance was expanded into the Triple Entente in 1907 when Britain and Russia reconciled their long-standing differences in Asia. The Anglo-Russian accord was reached at the expense of Iran. The two powers agreed to reduce their competition for influence in Iran by recognizing mutual spheres of influence in the country: Russia would be dominant in the north and Britain in the southeast. The independent center was to be neutral. However, as we will see later in this chapter, the two Great Powers did not hesitate to violate that neutrality when it served their interests. The relative speed with which Britain and Russia agreed to partition Iran presented an ominous threat to the Ottomans. Throughout the nineteenth century, the rivalries among the Great Powers had served to restrain any one of them from occupying large portions of Ottoman territory. But the formation of the Triple Entente raised the specter of Great Power cooperation in dismembering the empire. The Ottoman leaders responded in two ways: They reemphasized military reform in the hope that they, like the Japanese, could ward off Europe by developing more effective European-style armed forces; and they strengthened the empire’s economic, military, and diplomatic ties with Germany, a potential ally in any confrontation with the Triple Entente.

**THE R EVOLT OF 1908 AND THE YOUNG TURKS IN POWER**

The movement that became known as the Young Turks was an amalgam of three separate protest groups, one an exile community of long standing, the second a collection of discontented civil servants and students, and the third a coalition of disaffected army officers stationed in Ottoman Europe. From the time of the Young Ottomans, an active Ottoman exile community existed in Paris and Geneva. This community grew during Abdul Hamid’s reign and in the 1890s attempted to exercise a direct influence on Ottoman political life. The program of the exiles consisted of demands for the restoration of the constitution of 1876 and a condemnation of the tyranny of Abdul Hamid’s regime. In 1902 a member of the Ottoman royal family organized a congress of Ottoman liberals in Paris that repeated the demand for a constitutional regime. However, these patriotic, European-oriented exiles had no power base and were frequently divided among themselves. Their major contribution to the growing wave of anti-Hamidian sentiment was to revive the idea of a constitution as a means to curb royal autocracy and preserve the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire by restoring the principle of Ottomanism.

Within the empire itself, students in the military-medical academy founded a secret protest society in 1889. Known as the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), it soon attracted other students and some civil servants. In common with the exiles, the participants in the CUP were largely the products of European-style schools and viewed the Hamidian repression as an impediment to the reforms needed to preserve the empire. They believed in the urgency of restoring a constitutional regime and endeavored to establish cell groups to further their program. However, in 1895 and 1896 Abdul Hamid’s spies uncovered the movement and arrested and exiled its members. Although a clandestine opposition continued to exist, it had little chance of developing as the sultan increased the scope of his security operations and introduced new measures of censorship.

Abdul Hamid’s nearly paranoid distrust of all organized institutions extended to the armed forces. During the last years of his reign, the quality of military equipment deteriorated and salaries, which the early reformers had attempted to raise and to pay regularly, were allowed to decline and to fall into arrears. This caused widespread disaffection among line officers, some of whom began to form secret protest groups that became linked to the CUP. Opposition to Abdul Hamid was especially pronounced among officers of the Ottoman Third Army stationed in Salonika. These officers, educated in European-style military institutions, were loyal to the empire and its proud military tradition and confident that their training had prepared them to carry on that tradition. They believed that Abdul Hamid’s attitude toward the army was undermining its strength and reducing its abilities to defend Ottoman territory in Europe. This patriotism, firmly grounded in Ottomanism, led a group of officers from the Third Army to stage a revolt in summer 1908 and to demand that Abdul Hamid restore the constitution; they warned the sultan that if he did not act, they would march on Istanbul and restore the constitution themselves.

Choosing not to challenge the power of an uprising within his armed forces, the sultan accepted the demand from Salonika, and on July 24, 1908, the constitution was declared once again in effect. Abdul Hamid’s gesture temporarily restored his popularity, and there was a general rallying behind the sentiments of Ottoman solidarity and political liberty. Elections to the new parliament were held in fall 1908, and by the end of the year representatives from all areas of the empire gathered in Istanbul, where Abdul Hamid formally convened the chamber of deputies that he had dissolved thirty years earlier. But not everyone shared the enthusiasm for European political institutions. In spring 1909 a counterrevolution broke out against the new government. It was led by common soldiers and theological students in Istanbul who voiced their resentment against the influence of the Europeanized army officers by chanting slogans calling for the restoration of the *shariah.* This time the Third Army acted directly.

Styling itself “the army of deliverance,” it marched on Istanbul, put down the disturbances, and gave its support to the parliamentary government. Abdul Hamid was accused of fomenting the counterrevolution, and the chamber decided to remove him from office. The way in which the sultan was deposed reveals the crosscurrents of opinion swirling through the Ottoman Empire at this crucial moment in its history: In order to satisfy the Muslim sentiments Abdul Hamid had so skillfully exploited, the traditional method of deposition was followed, the *shaykh al-Islam* issuing a formal decree declaring that the sultan was deposed. However, in order to give voice to the spirit of Ottomanism and political liberty that had inspired the events of 1908–1909, a four-member parliamentary delegation, including an Armenian and a Jewish representative, was sent to inform Abdul Hamid that he had been removed from office. Abdul Hamid was exiled to Salonika, the birthplace of the revolution, and replaced as sultan by his younger brother, Mehmet V (1909–1918), who was little more than a figurehead.

The first phase of the Young Turk period, from 1909 to 1913, witnessed a struggle for power between the CUP, with its base of junior and middle-level army officers and civil servants, and shifting coalitions of liberals and conservatives who had little in common but their opposition to the CUP. Through the manipulation of parliamentary elections and sheer ruthlessness, the CUP gradually gained full control of the government. By 1913 it was able to consolidate its rule as a virtual military dictatorship under the triumvirate of Enver, Talat, and Jamal Pashas. Each of these three men was talented, patriotic, and ambitious; each was also deeply flawed, and together they led the Ottoman Empire to its final dissolution. Enver (1881–1922) and Jamal (1872–1922) embodied the opportunities for social mobility made possible by the new educational institutions; both were from modest origins, both attended the war college in Istanbul, and both became staff officers in the Third Army in Salonika. Talat Pasha (1874–1921), the most competent of the triumvirate, followed a career in the new civilian communications branch of the empire. He rose from a poor family to assume a position in the post and telegraph service in Salonika, and in 1917 he became grand vizier of the Ottoman Empire.

Although the CUP became increasingly oppressive after 1913, it was at heart a reformist movement, and its first years were marked by an intellectual freedom unparalleled in Ottoman history. With the lifting of Abdul Hamid’s censorship, the periodical press underwent a resurgence in the major cities of the empire. It was an exhilarating period, as ideas so long denied public expression poured forth in an exuberant torrent. The government, when it was not distracted by wars and the struggle simply to stay in power, concentrated on the expansion of the primary and secondary educational system and the improvement of the military, which had been badly neglected during Abdul Hamid’s last years. As pragmatic reformers, the CUP leaders believed that the population would respond favorably to more efficient government. This conviction led them to attack the bloated bureaucracy, pensioning off incompetent officials and generally reducing the number of personnel on the state payroll. Although the logic behind this policy may have been sound, its implementation alienated many members of the civil service and several Arab notable families whose members had occupied posts in the provincial administration on an almost hereditary basis. This was typical of the kind of mistakes that the inexperienced CUP leaders made; they were usually well intentioned, but their policies often offended key groupings within Ottoman society.

***Ideology and Politics: The Debate on Identity***

The deposition of Abdul Hamid accelerated the public debate over the political and cultural loyalties of the peoples of the Ottoman Empire. At one level, the debate focused on achieving the proper mix between European and indigenous ideas and institutions. At another level, it concerned the troubling issue of national identity. Individuals often found themselves torn between one or another of the alternatives that surfaced during the years before World War I, years that were at once stimulating and perplexing.

When the Young Turks seized power in 1909, they were determined to save the Ottoman Empire. However, in order to pursue this objective, they had to decide what the essential character of the empire was to be. Was it principally an Ottoman state committed to a program of transformation and equal rights for all its ethnically diverse inhabitants? Or was it an Islamic state dependent for its survival on the rediscovery of properly interpreted Islamic traditions? Or, finally, given the composition of its political and military leadership, was it really a Turkish state to which certain minority nationalities were attached?

The CUP leaders were committed to the concept of Ottomanism. Much like the Young Ottomans forty years earlier, they believed that the best way to restore the vitality of the empire was through constitutional government that would limit the power of the monarch and guarantee the rights of non-Muslims by incorporating them into the framework of Ottomanism. One of the government’s first acts after the deposition of Abdul Hamid was to abolish the *millet* system, thereby stressing its commitment to Ottomanism and to the ideal of preserving all Ottoman territory. At the same time, however, the regime could not abandon the Islamic foundation on which imperial legitimacy had rested for so many centuries. Thus, the CUP continued to stress the role of the sultan as caliph and to use Islamic symbols to buttress its own claims to legitimacy. In this, as in other aspects of its rule, the CUP was caught on the horns of a dilemma. In order for the ideal of Ottomanism to be realized, the religious distinctions between Muslim rulers and non-Muslim subjects had to be abolished in substance as well as in theory. It was also necessary to eliminate the factors that encouraged national separation movements within the empire and for the international community to respect the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire. None of these conditions came close to being fulfilled. Shortly after the restoration of the constitution in 1908, Bulgaria proclaimed its final independence, Austria annexed the province of Bosnia, and Crete declared union with the Greek mainland. Further contempt for Ottoman sovereignty was shown by the Italian invasion of the North African province of Tripoli in October 1911. The Ottoman government sent reinforcements to support the Sanusi resistance in Tripoli, but pressures from other crises prevented Istanbul from offering serious opposition to the Italians; in October 1912 the Ottomans signed a treaty ceding Tripoli and some of the Dodecanese Islands, including Rhodes, to Italy. This eventful year also witnessed devastating Ottoman setbacks in Europe, as Albania proclaimed its independence and an alliance consisting of Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece, and Montenegro drove the Ottoman forces out of most of Europe during the First Balkan War. In spring 1913, the erstwhile Balkan allies began quarreling over the division of the territories they had taken, providing the Ottomans with an opportunity to regain portions of Thrace. Yet this final victory was a hollow one; in 1912, Ottoman domains in Europe totaled 65,350 square miles (169,910 sq. km) inhabited by an estimated 6.1 million people. When the last treaty of the Balkan Wars was signed in September 1913, Ottoman Europe had been reduced to 10,882 square miles (28,293 sq. km) and a population of 1.9 million people.1 In terms of manpower, revenue, and productivity, these losses were staggering. They were also damaging to the CUP, which had committed itself to the preservation of the empire and instead presided over the loss of the heartlands on which the *gazi* state was founded. Adding insult to injury was the humiliation of the Ottoman military by the armies of the small states inhabited by former subject peoples.

The events of 1908–1913 called into question the policy of Ottomanism. They demonstrated once again that neither the Great Powers nor the Balkan successor states were willing to respect the territorial integrity of the Ottoman state, they showed that minority people preferred national affiliations to Ottoman citizenship, and they undermined the proposition that Muslim and Christian could share in a common Ottoman bond. The CUP leaders were far from perfect, but they faced almost insurmountable odds in their patriotic goal of preserving the imperial domains. Although the upheavals did not prompt the CUP to abandon its policy of Ottomanism, they did generate a new awareness of the importance of the Anatolian Turkish core to the identity of the empire. The empire had been made much more homogeneous by the loss of 80 percent of its European domains, and it was only natural that in the wake of the Arab *nahdah* and the Balkan nationalist movements, a specifically Turkish cultural movement would also emerge. The movement contained several elements, but it can be broken down into two main, often overlapping currents. The first current, Pan-Turkism, originated among Muslim Turkish exiles from Russia, several of whom achieved prominence in Istanbul intellectual circles at the turn of the century. Pan-Turkism stressed the existence of unifying bonds among all speakers of Turkish. To advocates of Pan-Turkism, the Ottoman Turks were just one branch of the several Turkish-speaking peoples who inhabited a vast expanse of territory from Anatolia to China. Even if they spoke different dialects, they shared the same basic language and therefore constituted a single and distinctive people. And as one people, they should have their own state made up of all the Turkish speakers in Anatolia, Russia, Iran, Afghanistan, and China. The grandiose political program of the Pan-Turkists may have stimulated Ottoman Turkish intellectuals to rediscover their own Turkish past, but it did not attract sustained support. More appealing to the Turks of the empire was a doctrine that became known as Turkism and focused more directly on the Ottoman situation. The doctrine stressed the crucial Turkish contribution to the success of the Ottoman Empire and posited the notion that there was a special pre-Islamic, pre- Ottoman cultural heritage that distinguished the Turks from the other inhabitants of the empire. In a marked departure from Ottomanism, the writer Mehmet Emin published a poem in 1897 that began, “I am a Turk, my religion and my race are noble.” Although Emin’s statement contained an element of ethnic distinctiveness, it still equated Turkishness with Islam. The formation of a Turkish cultural club in Istanbul in 1912 and its association with a journal, *Türk Yurdu* (Turkish Homeland), aided the transformation of the once pejorative word *Turk* into a positive force of cultural identity. It is significant that the leading spokesman of this trend, Ziya Gökalp (1876–1924), was born and raised in eastern Anatolia. A member of the CUP inner circle, Gökalp argued that Turkish national traditions, what he called the soul of the nation, had become submerged under the cultural practices of the people over whom the Turks ruled. His self-proclaimed mission was to rediscover this soul by examining the history of the pre-Islamic Turks and by studying popular culture, which he believed had held fast to authentic Turkish traditions. For Gökalp, language was the essence of nationality, and he disdained the hybrid Ottoman language in favor of a modified Turkish vernacular that he claimed was a more accurate reflection of the original Turkish soul. In seeking a place for Islam as a component of Turkism, Gökalp argued that the Turks had borne the burden of Islamic greatness for centuries and that a reformed Islam was an essential part of the Turkish nation. The combination of nationalism, Islamism, and modernism that circulated among the Ottoman elite during the Young Turk era is captured in Gökalp’s statement, **“We belong to the Turkish nation, the Muslim religious community and the European civilization.”** During the prewar years, the doctrine of Turkism did not develop into a coherent ideology defining a specifically Turkish national state. However, the discussions of a Turkish cultural heritage as distinct from the Ottoman one sowed the seeds for a full blown Turkish nationalist movement in the postwar era.

***The CUP and the Arab Provinces***

The CUP’s policies toward the Arab-speaking provinces were determined by the regime’s quest for political security and centralized administrative control. Like any government with a questionable claim to legitimacy, the CUP sought to purge the administration of officials from the old order and replace them with appointees loyal to and dependent upon the Young Turk regime. Those who suffered most from this practice were the long-established Arab notable families. For example, the al-Abid family, perhaps the wealthiest in Damascus at the beginning of the twentieth century, was represented in Abdul Hamid’s palace entourage, in the central Ottoman government, and in the local Syrian administration. The CUP dismissed the al-Abids from their posts, confiscated some of their lands, and pushed them into self-imposed exile in Paris. Another distinguished Damascus family, the al-Azms, thrived politically and financially under Abdul Hamid. An al-Azm representative sat regularly on the provincial and municipal councils of Damascus, and in the 1890s two members of the family served as ministers in the Ottoman cabinet in Istanbul. The CUP purged the al-Azms from the administration and replaced them with loyal supporters of the new regime.

By denying the Arab notable families their traditional access to the government, the CUP undermined the notables’ ability to satisfy their local clients and upset the established social and political order in the Arab provinces. Increasingly, the Arab elite came to perceive the CUP as a Turkifying government. The leadership of the party was dominated by Turks, and many of the officials appointed to replace Arabs in the provincial administrations were also Turks. Although the intention of the CUP leaders was to centralize the government, not necessarily to Turkify it, their policies caused important segments of the Arab population to become disaffected from the regime. Frustrated at their exclusion from power and angered at seeing their carefully laid plans for advancement within the Ottoman system destroyed by young army officers who failed to appreciate the advantages of mutual cooperation, some members of the Arab elite began to contemplate alternatives to the CUP’s brand of Ottomanism.

Although Arab grievances did not coalesce into an organized political movement for national independence, they did take on the coloring of Arabism, a protonationalist outlook that served both political and cultural purposes. On the one hand, Arabism was a means through which some members of the Arab notable families protested against the CUP’s attacks on their political and economic status; on the other hand, it represented an affirmation of Arab cultural identity and a desire for that identity to receive greater recognition by the government. Arabism manifested itself in the formation of a variety of literary clubs, reform societies, and clandestine organizations among Arabs in Istanbul and throughout the Arab provinces. The twin strands of political protest and cultural affirmation became intermingled in the programs of these societies, which called for the recognition of Arabic as an official language, the appointment of Arabs to administrative posts within the Arab territories, and greater political autonomy for all the Arab provinces. These demands show that the proponents of Arabism were fully prepared to accept Ottoman rule, but they wanted it to be decentralized. Their grievances were directed against the CUP regime that had deprived them of their proper role within the Ottoman order, not against the Ottoman state itself. The largest of the Arab organizations formed during the Young Turk era was the Party of Ottoman Administrative Decentralization. Founded in early 1913 and headquartered in the safety of Cairo, the Party established branches in most of the Arab cities of Greater Syria. Its president was Rafiq al-Azm, a member of the Damascus family mentioned earlier, and its agenda was dominated by Syrian urban notables. The name of the party suggests that its membership was willing to reach an accommodation within the framework of Ottomanism but that any such accommodation had to provide scope for a return of the notables to their former status. The willingness of the discontented Arab elite to find a common ground with Ottomanism can be seen in the resolutions passed by the Arab Paris Congress of 1913. Organized jointly by the Decentralization Party and a society of Arab students in Paris, the congress is often seen as the starting point of Arab nationalism. Although the congress certainly provided a forum for the expression of Arab discontent, the tone of its resolutions was strongly Ottomanist, not separatist. The delegates expressed a desire for reforms and decentralization but stated clearly that they did not wish to separate from the Ottoman Empire.

Even though the Paris Congress was decidedly moderate, it did prompt CUP leaders to realize that they had to take steps to satisfy the demands of the most important non-Turkish Muslim people within the empire. The government appointed an Arab, Said Halim, as grand vizier (1913–1917) and adopted a number of other conciliatory measures that turned out to be more superficial than substantive. Among them was the appointment of the president of the Paris Congress and four other Arab notables to the Ottoman senate. These gestures were accompanied by a determined—and successful—CUP effort to co-opt leading Arab dissidents by securing their appointments to provincial administrative posts. Thus, by the eve of World War I, the voice of Arabism had been muffled if not stilled. The CUP was able to quell Arabism with such ease because it was advocated by so few. It is important to recognize that from 1908 to 1918 the vast majority of the Arab inhabitants of the empire supported Ottomanism. Deeply ingrained habits of loyalty to the Ottoman state and perceptions of the sultan caliph as protector of the Islamic *ummah* were the chief elements of this support. Too often, the years from the Young Turk revolt to the outbreak of World War I have been viewed from the perspective of the postwar era, which portrays the period simply as the gestation phase of Arab nationalism or as the preparation for the end of a doomed empire and the rise of separate nation states in the Middle East. But the historian must attempt to reconstruct an era as it was for those who lived through it—and for most members of the Arab elite, the Young Turk era was a time to plan for a future within the political framework of the Ottoman Empire. Despite the CUP’s campaign against certain Arab notables whose prestige stemmed from their service in the Hamidian regime, many distinguished Arab families retained their power, and others acquired new standing under the Unionist regime. Thus, during the Young Turk era, Arabs continued to attend the advanced academies in Istanbul and to occupy high-ranking positions in the civilian bureaucracy and the officer corps. Sati al-Husri and Shakib Arslan represent the diversity of Arab beliefs that could be accommodated within the framework of Ottomanism. Al-Husri (1880–1968) was the epitome of the Europeanized professional. Upon graduating from the civil service college in 1900, he was posted to the Balkans as a schoolteacher and later as a district administrator. An avid reformist and constitutionalist, al-Husri engaged in CUP activities before 1908 and was one of the young professionals who rose to prominence as a result of the CUP triumph.

In the years following the deposition of Abdul Hamid, his work in Istanbul as teacher, as director of the teacher training college, and as editor of journals on educational reform gained him the reputation as the founder of modern Turkish pedagogy. Al-Husri was a Syrian Arab, but he was also a cosmopolitan member of the Ottoman elite, and his successful career was based on service to the Ottoman state; he had a vested interest in the preservation of that state, a goal he attempted to realize through educational reform and the spread of the idea of Ottoman patriotism. At the other end of the spectrum of Arab Ottomanism was Amir Shakib Arslan (1869–1946). A Druze prince from a powerful family in Lebanon, Arslan was influenced by the ideas of al-Afghani and Abduh and became a strong supporter of the Pan-Islamic policy of Abdul Hamid. As a journalist, poet, and local political figure, Arslan advocated the proposition that the survival of the Ottoman Empire was the only guarantee against the division of the *ummah* and its occupation by the European imperial powers. For him, Ottomanism and Islam were closely bound together; the reform of Islam would naturally lead to the revival of the Ottoman Empire. Although he regretted the overthrow of Abdul Hamid, he was able to accept the CUP regime because of what he perceived as its commitment to the preservation of the Islamic core of the Empire. The CUP, in turn, recognized the advantages that the support of an established family like the Arslans could bring and rewarded them accordingly. Arslan was elected, with CUP backing, to the Ottoman parliament in 1914 and was later joined by two of his brothers. The Arslans saw that Ottomanism had its political benefits and represent an example of an Arab notable family that retained its status under the CUP regime. Neither al-Husri, the secular professional educator, nor Arslan, the Pan-Islamic notable, believed that Arab separatism served his ideological goals or his personal interests. As a result, both supported Ottomanism, albeit of a somewhat different variety. For al-Husri, Ottomanism meant the adoption of European concepts of territorial patriotism, constitutional government, and secular citizenship; whereas for Arslan, it meant the retention of the Islamic foundations of the Ottoman order and an emphasis on the bonds of Islamic solidarity. Most of the Arab subjects of the empire accepted some form of Ottomanism, whether al-Husri’s Europeanist version, Arslan’s Islamic orientation, or some combination of the two. The demands of Arabism—political decentralization, cultural autonomy, and the replacement of the CUP regime—and the various options that existed within the dominant ideology of Ottomanism were all strands of the complex pattern of identity of the Arabic-speaking peoples. But for all the ideological turbulence and political restlessness of the period from 1908 to 1914, the majority of Arabs—both the elite and the population at large—entered World War I committed to the preservation of the Ottoman Empire.

**THE PERIOD OF THE IRANIAN CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION**

The years of political upheaval from 1905 to 1911 mark a new phase in Iranian history and are generally referred to as the period of the constitutional revolution. As with the Young Turk revolt of 1908, the introduction of constitutional government in Iran was used as a weapon to attack royal autocracy. However, whereas the Ottoman constitutional movement had been founded on a transformed bureaucratic elite and a reform-oriented officer corps, the Iranian movement was led by an awkward coalition of interests that contained contradictory ideas of what constitutional government was to achieve. The three main components of the coalition—traditional bazaar merchants, ulama, and a small group of radical reformers—were each convinced that if they could find a way to limit the shah’s authority, they could then take the lead in guiding the country in the direction they thought it ought to go.

The popular protests that culminated in the constitutional decree of 1906 were directed against the policies of Muzzafir al-Din Shah (1896–1906), a weak and ineffective ruler. Facing the customary Qajar problem of how to generate enough income to keep the royal court in luxury, Muzzafir al-Din reintroduced the practice of concession granting. In 1901 the shah awarded a British subject, William D’Arcy, the concession for oil rights in the entire country except for five northern provinces. In exchange the Iranian government was to receive 16 percent of the company’s annual profits. This proved to be a costly surrender of Iran’s resources. Oil was discovered in commercial quantities in 1908, and in 1914 the British government became the major shareholder in the company holding the concession. Iran’s vast oil reserves were placed at the disposal of Britain, and the preservation of British control over Iranian oil became a central factor in Britain’s Middle Eastern policy. Muzzafir al-Din also had recourse to foreign loans, borrowing money from British, French, and Russian financial institutions.

The income from the loans, rather than being deployed in economic development or military improvements, was used to meet payments on earlier loans or was squandered on Muzzafir al-Din’s three hugely expensive trips to Europe between 1900 and 1905. In reopening Iran to foreign economic penetration, Muzzafir al-Din made himself vulnerable to the same charges that had been leveled at his father during the tobacco protest of 1891. The renewal of foreign economic activities in Iran struck hardest at the bazaaris, the urban class of merchants, guild masters, and moneylenders that had traditionally been the hub around which most of Iran’s economic life revolved. By granting foreigners favored customs rates in both the import and export trade, the government made it impossible for local merchants to compete successfully. In addition, the import of low-cost manufactured items, especially textiles, destroyed the local craft industries. For the bazaaris, the shah’s practice of selling Iran to foreign Christian economic interests was not only offensive to their religious sensibilities, it was a threat to their economic survival. Another group instrumental in coordinating the protest against the shah was composed of a small but active circle of European-oriented reformers. They were not part of a common employment group—the activists included aristocrats, civil servants, army officers, and even some royal princes. Their experiences of the West were also diverse—some had traveled and studied in Europe, others had witnessed the Ottoman reforms from Istanbul, and still others had acquired their understanding of European institutions and ideas from translated books. What united them was their opposition to royal corruption and foreign exploitation; they believed that Iran was stagnating under the Qajars and that radical reforms were needed to shake the country from its doldrums and restore its position in the world. Motivated by sentiments of patriotism and liberalism, the reformers believed that constitutional government was a key ingredient to building a strong and progressive Iranian nation.

The reasons for the ulama’s participation in the constitutional movement are more difficult to determine. Although the ulama were by no means united in their support for the movement, several leading *mujtahid*s and large numbers of lesser ulama played a major part in the antigovernment demonstrations of 1906. The ulama were closely tied to the bazaaris, and it is likely that members of the religious establishment suffered financially from the influx of foreign business activity. In addition, the policies of Muzzafir al-Din tended to reproduce the conditions that had sparked the protest of 1891 during which the ulama had accused the ruler of violating the tenets of Islam. Finally, although Muzzafir al-Din was hardly a centralizer, the Shia religious establishment continued to guard its independence from the state and may have viewed the constitutional movement as an opportunity to guarantee that independence into the future. Hence, the important ulama role in the constitutional revolution was based not on demands for more reform and transformation but on demands for less. In the Ottoman Empire the ulama generally opposed a constitution because they thought it would reduce their power; in Iran the ulama supported one because they thought it would increase theirs. The first phase of the constitutional revolution began with a large protest movement in Tehran in December 1905 and concluded in August 1906 when the shah, faced with huge antigovernment protests led by the bazaaris, the ulama, and the reformers, capitulated to the demonstrators’ demands and signed a decree convening a constituent assembly. The first assembly (Majlis) met in October 1906 and drafted two constitutional provisions that completely restructured the allocation of political authority within Iran. The first provision, the Fundamental Law, reduced the powers of the monarch by giving the elected legislature final authority over loans, concessions, treaties, and budgets. Muzzafir al-Din signed the Fundamental Law a few days before his death. In the second provision, the Supplementary Fundamental Laws, the rights of Iranian citizens were defined and the legislature granted additional powers, including authority over the appointment and dismissal of ministers. But this had not been a secularizing constitutional movement, and the ulama’s triumph was ensured by constitutional clauses that stated that Twelver Shiism was the official religion of the state and provided for a supreme committee of *mujtahid*s to review all new legislation to verify that it conformed to the *shariah.* When the new shah, Muhammad Ali, reluctantly approved the Supplementary Fundamental Laws in late 1907, it appeared that the long tradition of authoritarian Iranian monarchy had come to an end. However, Muhammad Ali Shah was determined to restore Qajar authority. A deteriorating economic situation accompanied by inflation and high prices for basic foodstuffs created lower-class discontent with the government of the Majlis and encouraged mass support for a Qajar restoration. The royalists used ulama loyal to the shah to denounce the constitutionalists as atheists and to arouse popular sentiment in favor of the monarchy. At this critical juncture, external forces played an important role in determining the fate of the fragile constitutional experiment. In August 1907 Britain and Russia signed the entente in which they agreed to divide Iran into spheres of influence; Britain would be dominant in the southeast, Russia would control the north, and a neutral zone would be allowed to exist in the center. The royalists could show that the constitutional government had been even less effective than the shahs in preserving Iranian sovereignty. With popular unrest increasing and more members of the ulama denouncing the constitutionalists, the royalist position became more favorable. Muhammad Ali staged his counterrevolution in June 1908; he sent the Cossack Brigade to close the Majlis, arrested and executed leading members of the constitutionalists, and reestablished royal authority in Tehran. Iran was plunged into civil war and economic chaos. The eleven months of civil war demonstrated clearly the inadequacy of the government’s armed forces. The shah was able to hold Tehran, but other areas of the country loyal to the constitutionalists refused to submit to his authority. During summer 1909, an armed rebel force from the province of Azerbaijan advanced on Tehran from the north while a confederation of Bakhtiyari tribesmen moved up from the south. The two forces entered the capital in July and restored the constitution. Muhammad Ali Shah, who had taken refuge in the Russian legation, was deposed in favor of his young son, who became shah under regency. The second Majlis convened in August 1909. The constitution had been successfully defended, but it remained to be seen whether a constitutional regime representing such diverse interests could govern effectively.

Over the next two years, the Majlis was the scene of constant friction between the reformers and an alliance of bazaaris and ulama. The coalition that had been united in opposition to the Qajar regime broke apart over such issues as the relationship between the state and the religious establishment, the question of equal rights for non-Muslims, and the extent and pace of social reform. (These same issues resurfaced in the aftermath of the 1979 revolution.) The verbal arguments in the Majlis were transformed into armed clashes on the streets of Tehran between supporters of the various political factions. Once again, government became paralyzed, and an age-old pattern repeated itself. With the central government torn apart by internal disputes, the tribal confederations reasserted their independence and refused to pay taxes; law and order completely broke down in the rural areas. As the tribes roamed and looted at will, the British landed troops at Bushire in October 1911 in order to protect the stability of their sphere of influence. This had become all the more urgent with the discovery of oil by D’Arcy’s exploration company in 1908. When the British occupied southern Iran, Russia invaded the north and in November threatened to occupy Tehran unless the government accepted an ultimatum demanding the dismissal of a newly appointed US financial adviser. When the Majlis refused to accept the ultimatum, it was dissolved by the prime minister and the cabinet. The Russian demands were then granted, and the period of the constitutional revolution was over. On the eve of World War I, the Majlis remained suspended, and Iran was governed by a conservative group of ministers whose actions were closely monitored by Britain and Russia. In addition, the northern and southern halves of the country were under foreign military occupation. The occupying powers dealt with tribal leaders and local merchants in their spheres of influence without any consideration for the government in Tehran. Iran had gained a constitution and eliminated the authority of the Qajar shahs, but in the process it had become divided against itself. Not only did the coalition of bazaaris, ulama, and reformers break down under the pressures of governing, but the objective that had brought them together in the first place—the reduction of the foreign presence in Iran—had been thwarted. The casting aside of traditional institutions, no matter how desirable it might appear, was a painful process that did not always produce the intended results.

**CONCLUSION**

Under the twin pressures of European economic and imperial expansion and mounting domestic discontent, members of the Ottoman and Iranian elite sought to readjust the governing institutions of their states. In the Ottoman Empire, the Young Turks restored the constitution of 1876, hoping that its promises of equality for all Ottoman citizens would generate a spirit of unity and a willingness to cooperate in the implementation of new reform programs.

However, the Young Turks pursued a policy of Ottomanism at a time when the various ethnic communities within the empire demanded either independence or a greater measure of political and cultural autonomy. The attempts by the CUP government to balance Ottomanism with stricter central controls alienated the groups that had benefited from the long reign of Abdul Hamid II. Yet despite the centrifugal forces at work, the majority of the Arab and Turkish inhabitants of the empire retained their loyalty to the Ottoman state and shared the belief that European encroachment on Ottoman domains should be resisted. Iran, which had not undergone as intense a transformation as the Ottoman Empire, nevertheless experienced a constitutional revolution that had the same larger objective as the Young Turk revolt: to preserve the state from internal collapse and external aggression. But within Iran, the forces favoring a constitution had very different ideas about what the constitution was supposed to achieve in terms of the domestic social and political order. For the ulama and the bazaaris, the new regime was to reduce European economic activity and preserve their customary position in the social hierarchy. But the European inspired reformers hoped for a more thorough transformation that would lead to the introduction of secular laws and a strong legislative assembly. Once the constitution was proclaimed, the differences among the coalition members burst into the open and made effective governance impossible. Moreover, the central state and the armed forces were so weak and the treasury so depleted that neither a royal regime nor a constitutional one could exert authority within the country. As the situation in Iran deteriorated, Britain and Russia attempted to keep order in their zones of influence by occupying them. This was the first of several twentieth-century violations of Iran’s sovereignty by outside powers, and it contributed to the growth of the intense Iranian resentment against foreign intervention.