

CHAPTER TWO

THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

THE CRISIS OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE SEEN BY SEVENTEENTH- AND EIGHTEENTH- CENTURY ITALIANS

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Introduction

Modern scholars have found several reasons for the long period of crisis of the Ottoman Empire, and they disagree only over the relative importance of the individual causes. The most often cited reasons for the decline are the following: a drastic change in the training, personality and activities of the rulers; the growing influence of the *enderun* (the ones who served in the inner part of the Ottoman imperial palace containing the ruler's residence) over state affairs, coupled with factionalism in the *birun* (the ones who served in the imperial palace but outside the residence of the imperial family) and the establishment of close ties between the members of the inner and outer services; the growing corruption that partly was a result of the emergence of these factions; the sudden inflation at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, supposedly caused by the shift of world trade from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic and by the influx of silver from the Americas into the Ottoman Empire; the conflict between the old Turkish elements (*beys*, *gazis* and *sipahis*) and the descendants of slaves; changes in the organization and composition of the military establishment; and finally the inability of the Ottoman Empire to expand further (Sugar 1977, 187–95; Lewis 1962).

According to Turkish and international scholarship, each of these phenomena contributed to the steady decline of the Ottoman Empire's power. In the second half of the seventeenth century, the crisis of the Ottoman Empire started to become evident for contemporary Europe.

According to Mustafa Soykut, the “tremendous invincible” image of the Turk that arose following the fall of Constantinople changed to that of the “vincible Turk” as a result of the joint Christian victory at Lepanto (1571) (Hess 1972). This image changed again during the decades after the Ottoman failure in Vienna in 1683, and it became the simple denomination “Turk,” and was modified again in the European mentality of the eighteenth century, becoming the “nunc innocuous Turk.” This development of denominations then culminated in the second half of the nineteenth century with the image of the “sick man of Europe” (Soykut 2006).

Early modern Europeans emphasized both admirable and frightening aspects of Ottoman greatness (Çirakman 2001, 49). The new European balance of power and relative stability of the Westphalian system, along with the consolidation of power of the old nation-states such as France and England, prepared the ground for the more favorable romantic images about the Turks, but it also created a tangible change in the European attitude towards the Ottoman question.

Italians played a special role among Western Europeans in this respect. On the one hand, many Italian soldiers, military engineers and volunteers took part in the Habsburg army’s campaigns, and fought against the Ottomans in the territory of the Hungarian Kingdom. On the other, several Italian states, especially Venice (Mantran 1985; Kissling 1977) and the Papal State, had a direct diplomatic, political and commercial relationship with the Ottoman Empire. In the Republic of Venice already in the fifteenth century a literary style denominated by Paolo Preto as “turchesca” (Preto 1975) had evolved. Thanks to the experience of these Italians of various professions and the topicality of the topic of the “Turks,” several Italian authors wrote about the Ottomans in different genres (diplomatic reports, studies, propagandistic writings, military news, literary works etc.) and portrayed Ottoman life, Ottoman customs and the Ottoman court. Although the main characteristics of these writings were fear of the Ottomans and anti-Muslim propaganda, a number of authors recognized that the Ottoman Empire had arrived at a point of decline. But the views of the writers in this period were shaped by their personal experience and casual observation of Turkish affairs. The prevailing images of Ottoman government in this period were unsystematic and sporadic. The analysis of the seventeenth-century perceptions of the Ottoman system of government in the writings of Venetian ambassadors is instructive. These envoys were motivated by empirical observations, which emphasized pragmatic and immediate concerns.

Now, after this general overview, I would like to analyze two characteristic examples of contemporary Italian writings about the Ottoman Empire's decline: first, Count Luigi Ferdinando Marsigli (Stoye 1994), a military engineer, erudite and virtuoso; second, the Venetian diplomat Carlo Ruzzini (Pedani 2002), former ambassador in Istanbul (the so-called *bailo*).

Luigi Ferdinando Marsigli

Count Marsigli was a nobleman from Bologna with various Venetian and Papal connections. Marsigli spent a significant part of his life serving the Habsburg Emperor Leopold I, fighting against the Ottomans in Hungary, practically from the siege of Vienna of 1683 (Cardini 2011) to the Peace Treaties of Karlowitz in 1699 (F. Molnár 2013). But he was not only a soldier and talented, well-trained military engineer, but also a diplomat, a scholar and furthermore a passionate collector: not just of books, manuscripts, maps and so on, but of all types of information and for this reason more recent scholars describe him also as a spy (Bene 2006).

He had an extremely and unusual complex experience of the Turks, which he had earned both in Europe and in the core of the empire. First, in 1679, he went to the court of the sultan with the staff of the new Venetian ambassador, Pietro Civrani, and stayed there for eleven months. This first journey to Istanbul as a “turista curiosissimo” was determinative from the point of view of his knowledge about the Ottomans. Marsigli here started collecting data on the recent situation and the military organization of the Ottoman Empire. When he returned, he entered the service of Emperor Leopold: immediately before the Ottoman siege of Vienna, Marsigli was captured and returned to the imperial army only after nine months of adventurous Turkish captivity. In addition he participated in various secret and official diplomatic missions in Rome and also in Istanbul. At the negotiations of the Treaty of Karlowitz (1698–99) he was “councillor assistant” of the imperial delegation. After the signing of the peace, the emperor appointed Marsigli as the commissioner to the Habsburg-Ottoman border demarcation (F. Molnár 2010; Gardi 2011, 98–99).

Marsigli's principal work about the Ottomans, entitled *Stato militare dell'Impero Ottomano, incremento e decremento del medesimo*, was published in Italian and in French only two years after his death (Marsigli 1732). In this book Marsigli summarizes all his knowledge about the Ottomans: before analyzing in detail the current state of the military issues concerning the Turks, in a number of chapters he describes also the origin

and the development of the Ottoman Empire, the differences between the ancient and the contemporary Turks, the major extension of the empire, the various nations, languages and religions in the empire, the temperament of the Turks, all the types of money that they used, their trade, and also their incomes and expenses. The main goal of this book was to help, by means of information, the project of reconquering the European territories occupied by the Ottomans centuries ago, and with the description of their weakness, Marsigli intended not only to convince the audience that the Ottoman military force that seemed so frightening was in reality weak (“... provar evidentemente quanto sien deboli, e fiacche quelle forze, che sono credute sì poderose e terribili” [Marsigli 1732, XII]) but also to demonstrate that just like every empire in history, the Ottomans too had come from nothing and would return to being nothing: “nulla furono gli Ottomani, e nulla saranno.”

Carlo Ruzzini

Carlo Ruzzini, a contemporary of Marsigli, was born in Venice and started his career in public service at the Venetian arsenal and dockyard; then he became a diplomat: he was sent in 1691 as ambassador to Madrid, after this to Vienna, and in 1698–99, during the negotiations at Karlowitz, he represented Venice. Thereafter Ruzzini was appointed first as Venetian ambassador in The Hague, and then from August 1705 to September 1706 in the Turkish Court as special representative of Venice (*ambasciator straordinario*) for the congratulations of the accession to the throne of Sultan Ahmed III. Ruzzini represented the Republic of Venice also during the peace negotiations at Passarowitz, and then went again to Istanbul for the ratification of the peace (from May 1719 to October 1720). Finally he was elected as doge in 1732 (Mosto 1983; Rendina 2003). During his three years’ reign he tried to keep Venice neutral and out of further conflicts.

From his first journey to Istanbul there is a report, a *relazione* (Ruzzini 1996) that he wrote after his return to Venice. In this writing Ruzzini focuses on two main issues: the foreign policy state of the empire after the defeat suffered at the hands of the Christian monarchs (the so-called external situation [*stato estremo*] and the internal one of the state [*stato interno*] after the most recent revolution [*quasi guerra civile*]) and the change of the sultans. From his second diplomatic mission we have no report (*relazione*), only dispatches (*dispacci*).

Marsigli and Ruzzini about the Ottoman crisis

It is generally known that given the Ottoman concept of the state, the ability of the ruler was fundamental to the empire's functioning. At the turn of the seventeenth to the eighteenth century the Ottoman Empire had become institutionalized and depersonalized. The sultan was scarcely more than a symbolic node, a *primus inter pares* at the heart of the system of power (Finkel 2007, 328).

During the secret negotiations for the peace in 1691, Marsigli says that the sultan did not even know the real needs of the Ottoman Empire, firstly because of his limited capacities, and secondly—and this is the main reason—because of the personal interests of the viziers, who hid the reality of the situation from the sultan: “Le necessità dell’Imperio Ottomano non conosciute dal Sultano per mancanza di cervello et al più delle volte coperteli dal privato interesse delli Vesiri” (HHStA, Wien /Staatskanzlei Türkei/ Karton 160. f.20.). Then in his book he speaks about the modified authority of the sultans and states that all the sultans after Süleyman, whom the Turks called “Magnificent,” were in reality mad or tyrants: “fossero stati o pazzi o Tiranni del Popolo Musulmano...” (Marsigli 1732, 28). Ruzzini reports the same situation, and, speaking about the reign of Mustafa II (1695–1703), emphasizes the point that since the sovereign had left Istanbul, he lived only for pleasure, under the mufti's influence, by saying the following:

sultan Mustafa ripposava tra gli ozii, occupato nei piaceri del seraglio e nei frequente esercitii delle sue cacce. Trasportò la sua residenza in Adrianopoli. ... e il mufti ... havendo saputo ocupar ... con qualche forza di magia il cuore e la volontà del sovrano. (Ruzzini 1996, 760)

The Ottoman sovereign was not able to observe the already empty rituals, and as a consequence the ruler started to govern by means of secular administrative law, the kanuns (Kerekes 2008). With this altered style of government, the basis of power was changed: it ceased to be absolute. Religious and secular power fell into the hands of the Grand Vizier (in Turkish *Vežir-i Azam* or *Sadr azam*, the greatest minister of the sultan) and the Şeyhülislam (chief of the ulema, the class of learned men: the highest authority in the issues of Islam). Regarding the increased power of the ulemas and the army, Marsigli and Ruzzini have a similar opinion, stating that in this situation they had more power than that of the sultan and the viziers together:

la Milizia esistente appunto del Gran Signore ... divenne arbitra di dar carceri, e morte al Sultano, e promuovere al Soglio i Fratelli, o Fili dell'Imperatore desposto ... Quando questo Corpo tutto della Milizia di Costantinopoli è unito all'ordine dell'Ulama ... ecco il Sultano, quella Gran Signore, quel gran supposto Monarca, passa dal Trono al carcere, se non al patibolo, con il Visir. (Marsigli 1732, 31)

gli ulema declinati, sensibili e potenti. ... Le milizie e gli ulema, o siano li effendi, sono li ordini supremi dell'impero. Ma se il primo è il braccio, è l'altro l'occhio e la mente. (Ruzzini 1996, 764)

While in the first period of the Empire Ottoman princes had served as the governors of provinces, Süleyman the Magnificent adopted the Arab-Islamic mode of succession through the oldest living male of the family: all princes were kept from birth until death in the inner palace. The sultans were not present. In other words, the sovereigns were separated from their subjects and at the end of the seventeenth century were unsuited to the function of a ruler, unable to stand at the head of the multinational Ottoman society. Ruzzini and Marsigli speak also about the power struggles in the *saray*, and about the increased power of the women there:

Hebbero sempre gan forza e gran credito in quella corte le madri de sultani e spesso poterono anco erigersi in arbitre delle massime, e del comando. ... La forza del chislar agà, huomo deforme, eunuco moro, custode delle donne: è alto il suo posto appresso il sultano ... perchè da lui dipendono quelle che sogliono muovere il cuore: le femine. (Ruzzini 1996, 766, 770)

Both authors emphasize the point that the power of the sultan was great only in appearance, and the same was valid also for the authority of the pashas (governors of a province): Marsigli (1732, 28) says that it was apparently very impressive but was in reality “del gran lunge inferiore a cosi strepitoso apparato.”

The Bolognese count personally experienced the effects of the shifting and weakening of power, mostly during the drawing of the borderlines following Karlowitz, when they could hardly come to an agreement because of the Turks' misunderstandings:

Questa dipendenza del Passa particolarmente da Vecchi del Paese l'ho sperimentato, ponendo i limiti per Cèsare con la Porta, a tenore della pace di Carlowitz, atteso che nè il Commissario della Porta, nè il Passa osava su i contrasti arbitrar cosa alcuna contro la volontà, spesse volte brutale de' Vecchi del Paese. Ed in fatti la credenziale del Commissario Turco parlando, che dovesse tutto eseguire a tenore delle Tavole Sacre e Sante della Pace, col consenso de' Vecchi, risposi in voce e in iscritto che la

facesse cambiare e ridurre alla norma di quella che mi è Cesare, fidandosi della mia fede. Ne però la Porta volle cambiarla, lasciando all'ignoranza ed all'interesse privato d'ogni piccolo Turco confinario l'interpretazione di quelle Tavole prima chiamate Sacre e Sante. E quando non si avessero avuti nelle mani lochi da demolire e da cedere, dopo stabiliti li limiti, non si sarebbe mai venuto allo stabilimento di questi. (Marsigli 1732, 30–31)

About the leaders of the empire, Ruzzini (1996, 772) writes thus that jealousy towards one's fellows is the strongest law and feeling among them, and he also states that there are only a few really talented persons among the Turks: "La gelosia del comando vince ogn'altro affetto e sprezza ogn'altra legge. ... l'impero non è ricco di molti soggetti che siano dotati di grande mente."

At the end of his book about the Turks, Marsigli summarizes the state of the empire after the supplicatory peace of Karlowitz and especially Passarowitz, by listing the difficulties of the European part of the empire, the lack of money and the absence of well-trained armies and leaders, and tries to encourage the Christian world to ally against them, and also mentions the possibility of revolts that could destroy the Ottoman Empire:

... avrebbe il Mondo Cristiano visto in quale angustia sarebbe stato l'Impero Ottomano in Europa per la diminuzione de danari, per la mancanza di Milizia di buona qualità, per la deficienza di esperti Capi, per timore de propri Sudditi, di Religione Christiana, non mancando fra loro, ... che stanno in osservazione di non solo tentare di sottrarsi all'Impero Ottomano, mà di farsi anche Principi Nazionali. Di tal sentimento son'pure i Turchi a riguardo della casa Ottomana, che dà Solimano il Grande in quà la giudicano un seminario di Principi, ò Tiranni, o Effeminati, e per ciò l'anno anche ridotta schiava come dissi della Milizia, frà le quali non sarà impossibile, che si veggono sedizioni, che faranno la distruzione di quest'Impero. (Marsigli 1732, 199)

Meanwhile, the Venetian envoy describes the dissatisfaction among the various peoples of this wide multinational empire, and mentions the disappointed pashas, but in his view these tensions were only temporary ones, and did not mean serious danger for the empire:

Per altro, nell'estesa ampia di quei paesi vi cresce spesso la zizania e le ribellioni. Sono varie le sementi da quali nascono. In alcuni popoli... , che intieramente dipendono, spesso vi sono dei malcontenti contro i pascià che li governano. Spesso anco questi compaiscono malcontenti della Porta. Il timore delle frequenti mutationi che sopra di essi di fanno, e la facilità che per la distanza tengono di sottrarsi dall'insidie degl'emoli e dai pericoli della corte, li rende arditi e contumaci. ... Ma per la buonasorte di

quell'Impero sono tutti questi per il più fochi di paglia, che celermente s'accendono e si estinguono. (Ruzzini 1996, 778)

Marsigli suggests using this opportunity to expel the Turks to remote “Arabia” (a plan that was to be partially realized some centuries afterwards), proposing that the allied forces should go against the Ottoman Empire together at the same time, in order to take possession of the territories already divided in the treaties among the allies:

... avendo maniera di conculcare questa Potenza Ottomana, col fare trà i [popoli, stati] Confinanti, e trà i Remoti un'comparto, che tolga le Gelosie fatali di uno contro dell'altro,... e liberarne l'Europa e l'Asia, che fu sotto l'Impero Greco, con sicurezza di andare, non à combattere, mà à prendere il possesso di ciò, che loro avranno nel Trattato di Aleanza diviso. (Marsigli 1732, 199)

On the one hand, Ruzzini stresses that the military force of the Ottomans was only virtual, and that they had financial problems; on the other, he also explains the crisis by citing psychological and ideological reasons: “La cieca obbedienza, la rassegnazione al destino, la stessa fede ai dogmi della lor legge, a poco a poco s'inebolisse, e di tal modo i pregiudittii giungono sin a scuotere i primi fondamenti della monarchia” (Ruzzini 1996, 765).

In conclusion, we can say that to the phenomena described by contemporaries and modern historians as contributing to or signaling social, moral, economic and political decline we can add also the aforementioned spiritual and ideological causes. Having survived the war of 1683–99 and the subsequent loss of territory enshrined in the Karlowitz Treaty, the empire recovered, albeit painfully, as it adapted to meet new circumstances (Finkel 2007, 328). But the history of the Ottoman Empire in the early modern age—considered by contemporaries as a decline—in reality was also an important step and part of an ongoing process: from the decadence of a traditional society and empire the Ottoman Empire gradually transformed itself into a modern state.

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THE TANZIMAT AND THE STRUGGLE
OF NON-MUSLIM MINORITIES
FOR CITIZENSHIP:
THE SHORT SEASON OF REFORMISM
WITHIN THE DECLINE
OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

MANUELA BORRACCINO

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the European powers' maritime superiority over the Ottoman Empire, the development of new military techniques and of an efficient bureaucracy, the economic reorganization due to the commerce with the Americas gradually encircled and ended up choking the Sublime Porte. Between 1768 and 1774 the Russians seized Crimea. In 1798 Bonaparte launched his expedition to Egypt and started the renewal of Egyptian society. In 1821 the Turks were expelled from Greece and in 1882 Britain occupied Egypt.

The European ideas also played a big role in eroding the legitimacy of the Middle Eastern imperial social and political structures. The ideas of equality, brotherhood and justice, promoted by the French Revolution, had deep roots in the Middle East; nevertheless, for centuries the only justification of Ottoman despotism had been the need for security against foreign invasions and turmoil. European ideas aroused secular resentment against despotism. Arabs, Persians and Turks travelling to the European capitals in the nineteenth century could see the results of representative democracies, even under monarchy, the relative freedom enjoyed by women and their role in arts and humanities, if not in politics, and, most of all, the impact of modern education and industrialization (Corm 2009).

It is within this historical context that the demands for reforms arose in the Arab world. The Western progress had an impact not only through a political system of values, but also through the Industrial Revolution that was arriving to the Ottoman provinces through the import-export trade facilitated by the Turkish Capitulations or *ahdnames*, i.e. concessions of

free trade in the empire that the sultans had arranged with the European powers (Emiliani 2012). Through these grants, the Christian nations had also obtained the right of defending the non-Muslim communities within the Ottoman Empire: Russia became the patron of the Orthodox Christians, France and Austro-Hungary of the Catholics, Great Britain of the Protestants and the Jewish minorities.

The Capitulations became in that way a tool of interference because their counterpart was represented by the Millet, i.e. the Christian and Jewish communities that could profess their religion within a framework of limits. Through the *millet* system, during the first half of the nineteenth century, the European powers tried to enforce their domination by creating some territorial nationalisms through the Middle Eastern religious minorities (Maronites and Druzes in Lebanon, Chaldeans and Nestorians in Iraq and in Persia, Copts in Egypt, Alawites in Syria) or ethnic minorities (Armenians, Greek, Albanians, Kurds). In that way, the European powers conveyed through the Capitulations those new ideas that were characterizing the European modernity, such as “nation” and “nationalism”: in 1821 the Balkans and Greece, the provinces with the major presence of Christian communities, were the first ones to promote a rebellion against the sultan.

Under the Ottoman Empire, the overwhelming majority of the Oriental Christian communities, comprising over 90 percent of the region’s native Christians, became relegated to the second class or the *dhimmi* status in their own ancestral homelands (Egypt’s Copts as well as the Chaldeans and Assyrians of Iraq and the Greek Orthodox of Syria, Palestine and Jordan). The word *dhimmi* literally means in Arabic someone who lives “under the protection of” (*fi dhimmat*) Muslims (Malik 2009, 13). The *dhimmi* category, as it was traditionally applied by the ruling Muslims to the conquered communities of Christians and Jews, entailed a set of imposed restrictions involving special taxation, distinctive dress, a ban on political participation, prohibiting the carrying of weapons, an expected deferential attitude towards Muslims, legal disadvantages, obstacles in building or renovating places of worship, the barring of publicly celebrated religious festivals, etc. The Lebanese-American historian Habib C. Malik points out that some apologists’ histories of Islam written by Westerners have described the *dhimmi* system as one of tolerance and acceptance of minorities. Today, he states, “the *dhimmitude* is now recognized for what it truly is: a premeditated system of organised and gradual liquidation of non-Muslim communities, or, at the very least, their deliberate and sustained marginalisation to the point of dehumanisation” (Malik 2008). The slaves, the women and the unbelievers were subject to

strictly enforced legal as well as social disabilities, which affected them in almost every aspect of their daily lives. In the course of the nineteenth century, voices were raised in favor of all the three groups of inferiors, and suggestions were made for the abrogation or at least the alleviation of their status of inferiority. These new trends were due in part to the influences and pressures from the outside; they were also affected by the changing attitude among the Muslims themselves (Lewis 2002). The European powers were unanimous in demanding the abolition of the position of legal inferiority assigned to Christians and incidentally also to Jews in the Muslim states and in using every means at their disposal to persuade the Muslim governments to grant equality to all their free subjects without discriminating on the ground of religion. The process for the emancipation of non-Muslims began with Bonaparte's expedition in Egypt and ended with the abolition of the numerous restrictions and disabilities imposed by Muslim law and tradition on Christians. The brief French occupation of Egypt, together with the appearance of Armenians in the service of the advancing Russian power on the eastern frontier of Turkey, like the employment of Christians and occasionally Jewish subjects of the Ottoman Empire by the Western powers, created new tensions and produced new reasons for resentment among Muslim citizens. The status of dhimmi or protected non-Muslim subjects of the Muslim state were incompatible with the acceptance of the protection or patronage, sometimes even the citizenship, of a foreign power (Lewis 2002). Both were incompatible with the quest for equality of rights before the law as equal Ottoman citizens. This in turn was undermined by the parallel trend towards separation, autonomy or independence in most of the predominantly Christian provinces of the empire.

Despite the difficulties, the new idea of equal citizenship for Ottoman subjects of different religions gained strength. It was not only supported by the European powers, but it was also promoted by the midcentury by a group of reformers among the Muslim Turks, who were trying to bring their country into line with what they perceived as modern enlightenment.

The Ottoman Rescript of the Rose Bower (*Hett-i Sherif* edict), promulgated in 1839 by the young Sultan 'Abd al Majid, launched the short season of the *Tanzimat-i khayriyye* or The Auspicious Regulations, the reforms that were aimed at integrating the non-Muslim minorities by enhancing their civil liberties and rights. Dealing with matters such as the security of life, honor and property, fiscal reform, the edict states that "these imperial concessions are extended to all our subjects, of whatever religion or sect they may be."