

PURSUIT OF POWER

Venetian Ambassadors' Reports
on Spain, Turkey, and France
in the Age of Philip II, 1560-1600

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rather than with steel, by his brain rather than by his arms. He has acquired more by sitting still, by negotiation, by diplomacy, than his father did by armies and by war. He was one of the richest princes the world has ever seen, yet he has left the revenues of the kingdom and of the crown burdened with about a million of debts. He owes to his good fortune rather than to the terror of his name the important kingdom of Portugal, with all its territories and treasure; on the other hand, he has lost Flanders. In Africa he has gained Peñón, but lost Goletta.¹ Profoundly religious, he loved peace and quiet. He displayed great calmness, and professed himself unmoved in good or bad fortune alike. He had vast schemes in his head: witness his simultaneous attack on England and on France, while assisting his son-in-law to acquire Saluzzo, while attempting to expel the French from Italy, while facing the revolution in Flanders.²

On great occasions, in the conduct of wars, in feeding the civil war in France, in the magnificence of his buildings, he never counted the cost; he was no close reckoner, but lavished his gold without a thought; but in small matters, in the government of his household, he was more parsimonious than became his station. He sought aggrandizement for his kingdom by ceding Siena to the grand duke, Piacenza to the duke of Parma, Flanders and Burgundy to his daughter.³ He held his desires in absolute control and showed an immutable and unalterable temper. He has feigned injuries, and feigned not to feel injuries, but he never lost the opportunity to avenge them. He hated vanity, and therefore never allowed his life to be written. No one ever saw him in a rage, being always patient, phlegmatic, temperate, melancholy. In short, he has left a glorious memory of his royal name, which may serve as an example, not only unto his posterity and his successors, but unto strangers as well. . . .

1. The fortress before Tunis.

2. Events of the mid-1590's.

3. Philip ceded to his daughter and his son-in-law Albert the sovereignty of the Netherlands (in effect, the southern part) but when they died without issue the land reverted to Spain.

II.

The Great Lords of the Turks—in Dissolution

9 "TURKEY IS A REPUBLIC OF SLAVES"

Gianfrancesco Morosini, 1585

To the east of Philip's Spain, to the east of Venice lay the Turkish colossus. The Venetian ambassadors probably knew this empire better than any other westerners, as they had not only observed it firsthand for years as Venetian representatives, but traveled its waters as merchants, fought its navy as galley commanders, and coped with its foreign policies as statesmen. In this report as in the one he wrote on Spain (see pages 70–80) Morosini zestfully explains the structure of a complicated society. Though pungent details of his report suggest the beginnings of Turkish decline, the emphasis is on the semipermanent features of the Ottoman Empire.

Of all the subjects this excellent Council can discuss, none is so important or deserves so much attention as the great sultan of Turkey, his empire, his people, his forces, his wealth, his form of government, and finally, what should be hoped for or feared from that quarter. Since this Most Serene government shares such a long stretch of border lands¹ with that potentate, and since he is the only power from whom we need fear any serious hostilities, no senator should ever tire of hearing every detail about this topic. He should be as well-informed as possible, and he should know, if need

From a report by Gianfrancesco Morosini, 1585, Albèri, III, 3: 253–322.

1. Chiefly on the Dalmatian coast of modern Yugoslavia.



36. The Sultan and His Guard.

(Detail from Braun and Hogenberg, *Civitates orbis terrarum*, 1576, I, pl. 51. Rare Book Division, New York Public Library.)

arises, how to keep peace with this ruler as long as possible, or else overcome him in a war, if it should please God to afflict us in that way.

The present Turkish sultan, Murad III, is the thirteenth² in the Ottoman dynasty, which, it is generally thought, had its origins among people who inhabited the borders of Scythia on the Caspian Sea. They lived in abandoned villages, eating only fruit and game. About 800 A.D., this tribe came down from Scythia into Asia Minor and conquered many villages in that area, where the cursed religion of Mohammed was already established. Since they had no religion, and this one seemed to conform to their own customs, they embraced it. Because they were very numerous they terrified all the inhabitants of these villages and overcame a number of cities without having any king or recognized chieftain. They were organized as military squadrons or commando units until 1300 A.D., when one of their number,

2. Murad was the twelfth unless one counts Suleiman, son of Bayazid, who was sultan of part of the empire from 1403 to 1411.

named Ottoman, a man of low birth, began to build a reputation as a strong and spirited leader. Shrewd and clever, he took advantage of the rivalries among his people, attracted many of them to him, and led them in war and conquest, making himself master of various towns and provinces of both the Turks and their neighbors.³ In this manner, he became powerful and founded the kingdom and empire which his descendants have ruled to the present day, marvelously handing it down from father to son. I say marvelously because it is their custom, in order to stay safely in power, that when one of them succeeds his father, he immediately puts to death all his brothers. In view of this custom it seems extraordinary that in such a long time this family line has never died out, even though it is always carried on in each generation by one man alone.

They succeed to the throne without any kind of ceremony of election or coronation. According to Turkish law of succession, which resembles most countries' laws in this respect, the oldest son should succeed to the throne as soon as the father dies. But in fact, whichever of the sons can first enter the royal compound in Constantinople is called the sultan and is obeyed by the people and by the army. Since he has control of his father's treasure he can easily gain the favor of the janissaries and with their help control the rest of the army and the civilians.

Because this government is based on force, the brother who overcomes the others is considered the lord of all. The same obedience goes to a son who can succeed in overthrowing his father, a thing which bothers the Turks not at all. As a result, when his sons are old enough to bear arms, the sultan generally does not allow them near him, but sends them off to some administrative district where they must live under continual suspicion until their father's death. And just as the fathers do not trust their own sons, the sons do not trust their fathers and are always afraid of being put

3. This account of the early history of the Ottomans is based on legends. For a more accurate view, see appropriate headings in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*.

to death. This is the sad consequence of unbridled ambition and hunger for power—a miserable state of affairs where there is no love between father and sons, and much less between sons and father.

This lord has thirty-seven kingdoms covering enormous territory. His dominion extends to the three principal parts of the world, Africa, Asia, and Europe; and since these lands are joined and contiguous with each other, he can travel for a distance of eight thousand miles on a circuit through his empire and hardly need to set foot in another prince's territories.

In Africa the sultan has a common border with the kingdom of Fez and with the Moors. And also, I might add, with the king of Spain, because of the strongholds which His



37. Ottoman Empire, with Constantinople Near Upper Left Corner.

(Ortelius, *Epitome*, 1602, fol. 10. Rare Book Division, New York Public Library.)

Catholic Majesty has in Africa, and because of the narrow straits which separate Spain from Africa.

In Asia he shares common borders with the Persians for a very long distance, and with the Georgians, Tatars, Circassians, Mingrelians, Arabs, Prester John [Ethiopians], Moors, and Nubians; and in Europe with the emperor, the king of Poland, Archduke Charles, and Your Serenity.

The principal cities of the Turks are Constantinople, Adrianople, and Bursa,⁴ the three royal residence places of the sultans. Buda⁵ is also impressive, as are the Asian cities—Cairo, Damascus, Aleppo, Bagdad and others—but none of these have the things which usually lend beauty to cities. Even Constantinople, the most important of them all, which is posted in the most beautiful and enchanting situation that can be imagined, still lacks those amenities that a great city should have, such as beautiful streets, great squares, and handsome palaces. Although Constantinople has many mosques, royal palaces, inns, and public baths, the rest of the city is mazy and filthy; even these [public buildings], with their leaded domes studded with gilded bronze ornaments, only beautify the long-distance panorama of the city. They dazzle the eyes of those approaching the city for the first time, and raise high expectations, but as I said above, as soon as these people enter the city they are greatly disappointed.

The security of this country does not depend on the numbers or the quality of fortresses, because the Turks do not try to fortify their borders extensively, much less the interior of their empire. In the past they were even less careful about fortifications than they are now. In the recent Persian wars they did fortify various places they had seized from the Persians so that they could hold them and discourage their enemies from ever trying to retake them.

No, the security of the Turkish lands depends first on the

4. Constantinople, formerly Byzantium, was renamed Istanbul by the Turks, but the Venetians used the older name. Adrianople and Bursa are respectively west of Constantinople in the Balkans and south in Anatolia.

5. Modern Budapest, won by Suleiman in 1541.



38. Constantinople, with Sultan's Seraglio in Foreground.

(Detail from Braun and Hogenberg, *Civitates orbis terrarum*, 1576, I, pl. 151. Rare Book Division, New York Public Library.)

abundance it has of all the necessities of life. Not only is there enough for the daily needs of her people, but great quantities of foods and other goods are exported. From Constantinople go wool, leather, furs, and cambric; from

Greece, cotton and spun thread; from Syria, silk, ginger, spices, cotton, dyes, spun thread, pistachios, muslin, and carpets; from Alexandria, spices, ginger, vegetables, dates, *bordi*,⁶ textiles, carpets, sugar and other things; and from the Morea, wheat and other grains. There could be even more if there were additional people to cultivate the fields. They also have mines of every kind of metal, though these are not very important.

The security of the empire depends more than anything else on the large numbers of land and sea forces which the Turks keep continually under arms. These are what make them feared throughout the world.

The sultan always has about 280,000 well-paid men in his service. Of them about 80,000 are paid every three months out of his personal treasury. These include roughly 16,000 janissaries, who form the Grand Signor's advance guard; six legions, or about 12,000 cavalry called "spahi," who serve as his rear guard; and about 1,500 other defenders, including the *muteferrika* [mounted royal guard], *ussineri*, and *cavusi*.⁷ There are also armorers, artillerymen, *adjemi-oghiani* [cadet janissaries], grooms, servants, pages, doctors, and others; all together they bring the total to the figure I gave. They are not paid by the month, as in Christian countries; remuneration here is calculated at so much per day.

The other 200,000 cavalry are called timariots⁸ because they are not paid with money like the others, but are assigned landholdings [called timars]. Each of them is required to maintain one armed horseman for every 5,000 aspers of income produced by his timar, and present them for inspection whenever the governor of his province so orders. These timars are made up of lands—we would say *campi*—throughout the Turkish empire. When these people take over a kingdom or other dominion they are not satisfied merely to

6. Ribbons and edgings of silk and golden threads.

7. The *cavusi* were sometimes guards, sometimes ushers, marshals, or messengers.

8. Or spahis (feudal cavalry).

have jurisdiction and manorial dues; they want the entire revenues from all the lands in the country. They distribute these lands to their soldiers for their pay and maintenance and call them timars.

The timariots are in no way inferior as fighting men to the soldiers paid every three months with cash, because the timars are inherited like the fiefs distributed by Christian rulers. Fief-holders [in Christian lands] don't count for much militarily, because it often happens that the owner of a fief is not a soldier and knows nothing about warfare; moreover, fiefs are often inherited by women or minor children. But with the Turks, those who hold timars are sure to be soldiers, since these lands are not assigned to anyone else. As soon as a timariot dies, his timar is immediately given to

39. Fortress on the Dardanelles.

(Detail from *Camocio, Isole, famose porti*, 1573, pl. 13. From an original in the Free Library of Philadelphia.)



another soldier, so that this militia is always composed of professional fighting men. As a matter of fact, their number is always increasing, because as the Turkish empire expands they divide up land in the newly conquered countries just as they did with the other ones. In this way they maintain armies larger than another ruler could have if he paid them ten and a half million gold ducats a year.

What about the fighting qualities of these widely feared Turkish soldiers? I can tell you the opinion I formed at Scutari, where I observed the armies of Ferrad Pasha and Osman Pasha (Ferrad's army was there for more than a month, and Osman's for a matter of weeks). I went over to Scutari several times to confer with the two pashas and also, unofficially, to look at the encampment, and I walked through the whole army and carefully observed every detail about the caliber of their men, their weapons, and the way they organize a bivouac site and fortify it. I think I can confidently offer this conclusion: they rely more on large numbers and obedience than they do on organization and courage.

Although witnesses who saw them in earlier times claim they are not as good as they used to be, it appears that the janissaries are still the best of the Turkish soldiers. They are well-made men, and they can handle their weapons—the arquebus, club, and scimitar—quite well. These men are accustomed to hardships, but they are only used in battle in times of dire necessity. They always insist on guarding the person of the Grand Signor, or the general commanding the army, and they avoid joining in the attack even when they are needed.

As for the cavalry, some are lightly armed with fairly weak lances, huge shields, and scimitars; they look more like mummers than warriors. Others carry nothing at all to protect their bodies, although they do have lances and swords, and they rely chiefly on bows and arrows, with which they can do a lot of harm.

If I compare these men with Christian soldiers, such as those I saw in the wars in France or in the Christian King's

conquest of Portugal,⁹ I would say they are much better than Christian soldiers in respect to obedience and discipline. However, in courage and enthusiasm, and in physical appearance and weapons, they are distinctly inferior. In my humble opinion, 10,000 Christians could face 30,000 Turks with complete confidence. But it would be harder to govern 2,000 Christians than 100,000 Turks—much harder if the Christians were Italians!

The naval forces which the Great Turk uses to defend his empire are vast and second to none in the world. He has an enormous number of galleys in his dockyard and he can turn out more whenever he wants, because he has plenty of wood, iron parts, skilled workmen, pitch, tallow, and all the other things needed. True, at present they do not have at hand all the armaments they would need to outfit the as yet uncompleted galleys, much less those the Grand Signor has ordered made, and they are short of cotton sailcloth and other things. But his resources are so great that if he wanted to he could quickly assemble what he needs; he has already begun to attend to this.

The Turkish fleet has only thirty or forty galleys armed with Christian slaves, while all the others are as bad as the galleys that we man here with peasants. They may even be worse. The Turks themselves admit that most of their galleys are not as good as Christian ones. While I am on this subject I want to say how much I deplore the foolishness of Christian rulers. It never occurs to them that they could take away from the Turks the very heart of their naval force if they would discreetly ransom as many Christian slaves as possible, because these slaves are the shipwrights, the caulkers, the mates, the boatswains, and the captains, not to mention the oarsmen, who make their galleys as good as they are. Freeing them would not only be very easy, it would be to the glory of God, it would be a blessing to those poor devils, and it would make all of Christendom safer. . . .

The whole empire is inhabited by three groups of people:

9. Morosini had served as ambassador to Austria, Savoy, France, and Spain.



40. Jewish Merchant in Constantinople.

(From Nicolay, *Navigazioni*, 1576, fol. 266. Collections of The Library Company of Philadelphia.)

Turks, Moors,¹⁰ and Christians. In Asia and Africa the Moors are more numerous than the Turks, while in Europe the largest number are Christians, almost all of whom practice the Greek rite. There are also many Jews, since that¹¹ is really their homeland, even though they live in it like strangers rather than natives.

Control of the empire, however, is in the hands of the Turks, and so I will only discuss them. The others are a great deal more numerous, but they are all laborers or farmers, and more oppressed by the Turks than the Jews were under Pharaoh.

There are two types of Turks. One is composed of people native-born of Turkish parents, while the other is made up of renegades who are sons of Christians. The latter group were

10. By "Moors" the ambassador means all non-Turkish Muslims.

11. Presumably Morosini is referring to the Ottoman province of Syria, which included Palestine.

taken by force in the raids their fleets and pirates make on Christian lands, or else harshly levied in their villages from the sultan's non-Muslim subjects and taxpayers. They are taken while still boys, and either persuaded or forced to be circumcised and made Muslims. It is the custom of the Porte [Turkish government] to send men throughout the country every fourth or fifth year to levy one-tenth of the boys, just as if they were so many sheep, and after they have made Turks of these boys they train each one according to his abilities and what fate has in store for him.

Not only is most of the Turkish army made up of these renegades, but at one time they used to win all the chief positions in the government, up to the first vizierate, and the highest commands in the armed forces, because ancient custom forbids that the sons of Turks should hold these jobs. But the present Grand Signor ignores this custom and chooses whatever men he wants and believes can serve him best, without regard for their status.

After they have been taken away as young boys the renegades are sent to different places to be trained according to the jobs they will be given. The handsomest, most wide-awake ones are placed in the seraglio [palace] of the Grand Signor, or in one of two others used only for this purpose, and there they are all prepared for the same end, which is to rise to the highest government offices. The Turks care not at all whether these boys are the children of noblemen or of fishermen and shepherds. All of this explains why their major officials are all good-looking and impressive, even when their manners are uncouth.

The other boys, who are not so handsome but are strong and healthy, are made *adjemi-oghlani*, which means they are in a kind of seminary for the janissary corps. In order to accustom them to hard work and physical suffering they are made to tend the sultan's gardens, look after horses, sail on ships, transport lumber, building stone, and other goods, or work in the mills. They make them drudge day and night, and they give them no beds to sleep on and very little food. When these boys begin to shave they make them janissaries.



41. Janissary Under Arms.

(From Nicolay, *Navigazioni*, 1576, fol. 152. Collections of The Library Company of Philadelphia.)

The first group, the ones destined for higher positions, presently number about six thousand. They are trained under discipline which is stricter than that of our monasteries, they never leave the seraglios, nor even their own rooms, and they speak to each other only when it is urgently necessary. Eunuchs, most of them Negroes, have charge of them, and for any little offense they beat them cruelly with sticks, rarely hitting them less than a hundred times, and often as much as a thousand. After punishments the boys have to come to them and kiss their clothing and thank them for the cudgelings they have received. You can see, then, that moral degradation and humiliation are part of the training system.

The first thing they are made to learn is the Turks' false religion, which they know so well as to put us to shame. They pray together without fail at four prescribed times every day. They also learn to read and write in Turkish, but except for that they have no instruction in things pertaining

to gentlemen and soldiers—no horsemanship, no training with arms. Far from that, they do such tasks as sweeping the place where they live, and cooking.

Four of these young men are assigned when they are at least eighteen or twenty to serve continually with the sultan. Each of these is almost sure to end in such an important position as aga of the janissaries, admiral, beglerbeg in Greece and Anatolia, and finally pasha in the Porte. These four have the task of dressing and undressing the Grand Signor, and guarding him at night while he sleeps. When he rides on horseback through the city or in battle or while hunting, one of them carries his arms, another his rain clothes, the third a pitcher full of an iced drink, and the fourth something else.

Every three years the Grand Signor allows those of the young men¹² who have reached an age where they can serve in battle to leave the seraglios if they wish. He gives them either the position of cesimir,¹³ with forty aspers per day, or that of spahi, with twenty-five or thirty, according to how well they are thought of at the time they leave.

Perhaps I have discussed these young men a little longer than I should have, but Your Serenity and Your Illustrious Lordships will understand why the matter is important. It is these young renegades who will provide the future army officers of all grades, the governors of the provinces, and even the pashas themselves. They are usually the sons of the commonest peasants and other people and they have been taught nothing of any significance about the world, trained in no military matters except the use of bows and arrows, and treated vilely and cruelly. It is amazing that any of them turn out well, and yet it is these who end up governing that enormous empire.

The sphere of the native-born Turks includes such things as the management of the mosques, presiding over civil and criminal law courts, and running the chancery. They pro-

12. That is, the whole group of boys selected for special training, not merely those who served as the sultan's servants.

13. In Albèri's edition the word *cesimir* is followed by [?], presumably because the correct reading of the manuscript is unsure.



42. Mufti.

(From C. Vecellio, *Costumes anciens*, 1859, II, 365. Libraries of the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.)

vide the cadis and the cadi-askers, the sultan's advisers, and the grand mufti, who is the head of their false religion. The cadis [judges] are like our *podestà*,¹⁴ and render justice to everyone, and the cadi-askers¹⁵ hear appeals from the courts of the cadis.

The renegades are all slaves, and are proud to boast, "We are slaves of the Grand Signor!" As is well known, Turkey is a republic of slaves, where it is they who are in command. The other Turks, even though they are not technically slaves like the renegades, might just as well be considered such, and they hold it an honor to be referred to that way. This is especially true of the ones who serve the sultan in the positions just mentioned.

The Turks are a sordid and depraved lot, and very lazy.

14. Venetian governors of subject cities. They were judges as well as administrators.

15. Judges of the army, judicial officials second in rank only to the sheikh ul Islam, or grand mufti.

They spend most of their time sitting still and doing nothing. The favorite entertainment of all Turks—from the important men right down to the lowest of them—is to congregate in shops or on the streets and drink a black liquid called *kahvè* as boiling hot as they can stand it. They say it helps a man to stay awake.¹⁶ Some eat opium so as to feel happy, while others take *teriaka*,¹⁷ Galen's tonic,¹⁸ and such things. The ones who drink wine don't leave the table until they are drunk. The Turks never walk for pleasure; they laugh at Christians they see out for a stroll, and say they are crazy to walk if they don't have to.

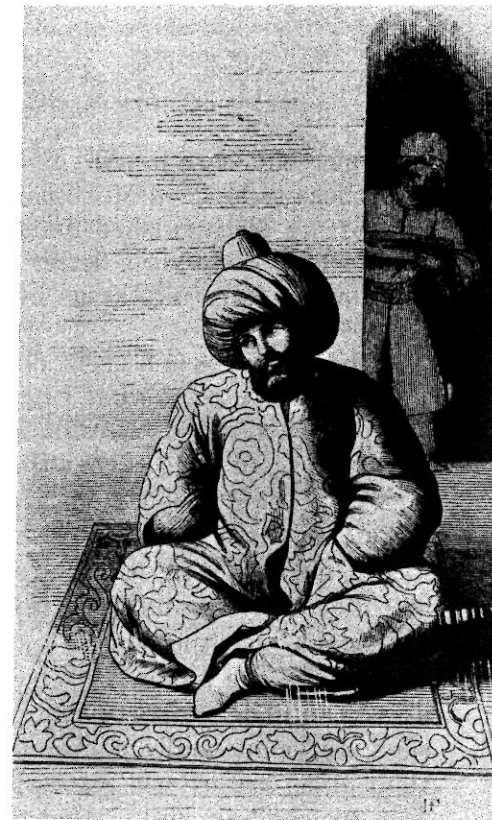
Very few Turks, especially in the areas I have seen, do any physical labor. They don't work the land, they don't take any exercise, they don't take pleasure in developing skills, they play no ball games or soccer, they don't ride horses, and they don't play at bowls. In fact, their only amusement is archery. However, sometimes the Grand Signor and some of his pages and a mute or buffoon will ride around on horses the way they do in Spain when they throw lances.

In appearance they are very pious adherents of their false religion. (I say "in appearance" because their piety masks a profound wickedness.) They are very regular in observing the hours of prayer and they always have the name of God on their lips, but never blaspheme. Every wealthy Turk builds a mosque, making it as splendid as he can, and provides a rich endowment for its upkeep. As a result, the mosques are kept so clean and orderly that they put us Christians to shame. They are built not only by the Grand Signor, the sultans [his sons?], and the pashas, but also by people of lower status. In addition to mosques they also build asylums more imposing than their own houses, and in many of these they will give food for three days to anyone who asks for it—not only Turks, but also Christians and Jews. For the good of their souls they also put up stone bridges to help wayfarers over streams, and they pave roads

16. Coffee became popular in Europe a few decades after this report was delivered.

17. Opium flavored with spices.

18. Perhaps a narcotic made from mandrake?



43. A Turk in His Home.

(From C. Vecellio, *Costumes anciens*, 1859, II, 369. Libraries of the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.)

and build caravansaries to lodge pilgrims and travelers, since there are no inns in the lands of the Turks.

The whole of the Turk's religion consists in praying four times a day and fasting one month a year. Before their prayers they wash their hands and arms up to the elbows, and also their feet. Very few fail to pray at the prescribed times, either in mosques or houses, or on the public streets and squares. No one is afraid he will be considered sanctimonious for carrying out his devotions in public; quite the contrary, they deem it a great honor to be considered zealous about their religion. They are also required to fast for one entire month, during which they eat nothing at all during the hours of daylight. After nightfall they may eat and drink until daybreak, as many times as they want and whatever they want, as long as it is not pork or wine. (Consuming these things is considered sinful and is forbidden them at all times.)

Those who observe these requirements are called good

Muslims. If I were to tell you about the filthy and depraved lives these same good Muslims lead, I would sully the chaste ears of my distinguished listeners. But the Turks do know how to hide their vices better than Christians; they choose their words carefully so as at least to appear morally upright.

Although there is a great deal more I could say about the Turks, I want to let what I have just told you suffice, and I will say just a few words about the other peoples in the empire. I mentioned earlier that there was a larger number of Moors than Turks in Africa and Asia, just as there are more Christians in [the Turkish lands in] Europe. Both the Moors and the Christians are so oppressed, downtrodden, and discouraged, and their land so wrecked and wasted by the Turks, that the population is declining from day to day and things are going from bad to worse. The Turks carry away the little property their subjects have and even their sons, and continually persecute them with beatings, so that their lives are utterly miserable. We can well imagine—in fact, we can be certain—that the Turks cannot rely much on these people, who would seize any opportunity that came along to overthrow the government and escape from such misery. The tyranny of the Turks over their subjects is the reason why the country does not produce as much as it could, because human nature is such that men will work hard only for their own gain. When these people toil and suffer long hours to improve their miserable lot, only to have what little they produce snatched from their hands, naturally they decide it is better to settle for the bare minimum they need to sustain life than to wear themselves out for others.

I have tried very hard to learn the facts about the ordinary revenues the sultan receives each year from the whole empire. I have it on good authority that after deducting the incomes from the timars, which go to the soldiers, the Grand Signor annually receives eight million in gold. I could not, however, get the facts about his nonordinary income. He

receives gifts from his officials and other people, and of course he can seize whatever he wants from his subjects whenever he pleases, but these sources do not provide a regular, fixed sum. The amount of the additional income depends instead on chance. When someone dies the Grand Signor, who is the real owner of everything, takes whatever he wants from the estate, and considers it a favor if he leaves anything to the widow and children. He can easily find pretexts to make it appear that justice requires him to confiscate the goods. He often takes property from the wealthy, a thing he can easily do because no one would dare to speak out against him. The mere whim of the Grand Signor is justification enough to do anything in the world. The sultan will never lack money when he needs it because he can always turn to wealthy private subjects and get from them, as gifts or by force, whatever amount he wants.

Many people think the Grand Signor's incomes are actually much greater than his expenses, and a widespread belief holds that he has accumulated a huge surplus in his treasury. I have not heard anyone say this on reliable authority, however, and anyone who considers the matter carefully will be skeptical. Think of the many large expenditures they have regularly in that Porte, including those which not everybody witnesses but which are very familiar to anyone who has been active in any government. Obviously the sultan can save very little of his revenues. . . . He spends 5.5 million in gold each year on his soldiers, and then he has all the expenses of a shipyard, in which he maintains a great fleet. Your Serenity, who knows how much he spends on his own shipyard, where things are better managed, will realize how much the Turks must spend on a yard where everything is run by slaves and thieves. They say that a galley costs the Turks only 1,000 ducats, but I can vouch for the fact that for a little pleasure boat built for the sultan's use they spent 100,000 ducats. It is not that they really spend that much, but everyone in the arsenal, from the admiral down to the lowest official, steals so much. They take the Grand Signor's lumber and ironware and use it to build commercial ships

women and boys in the seraglios, and this costs a great deal because all the clothes he gives, from those of the janissaries on up, are made of silk and gold thread. Then there are the costs of the stables, where they keep many horses, mules, and camels, and expenditures for hunting and other kinds of recreation; anyone can see these must consume a great deal of money. To all these major expenses, which other rulers do not have, we must add those which are normal and inevitable for the conservation of a vast empire and the court of such a great ruler.

However, it would be a mistake to think this ruler would ever hesitate to go to war because of a lack of funds. He doesn't need so much extra revenue as other kings require to mobilize his army and navy. And furthermore, if he wants to seize the money of private individuals, he has only to give the word. Other kings have to be careful not to stir up resentment among their subjects, but the Turks are all the sultan's slaves, and he can do what he wants with them.

The armed might of this empire, and everything else about it, are under the sole command of the Grand Signor. It is not simply that he is the absolute master of everyone and everything, but he uses his great power in such a way that I can safely say that no one ever dreamed of such a tyranny, much less brought it into being. He not only puts his subjects to death at will, but he holds them in such awe that they accept their fate instantly and without the slightest resistance. He takes what he wants: their possessions, their children, and even, you might say, their bodies. He is of course obeyed when he gives a command, but even the mention of his name makes men tremble. He directs every aspect of their religion, appointing and dismissing priests, and making human and divine laws as he pleases. He hires and fires whomever he wants as officials, and has only to hint his wishes in order to be obeyed. He makes men and women marry each other whenever he wants to, and obliges men to divorce their wives at his order. In short, there was never a king or lord who was a more absolute master of his people than the sultan. True, the people he rules are all mere sheep



44. Gallies Guarding Constantinople.

(Detail from Braun and Hogenberg, *Civitates orbis terrarum*, 1576, I, pl. 51. Rare Book Division, New York Public Library.)

and boats of their own, and frequently even the houses they live in.

Then, too, anyone who knows on what a grand scale the sultan lives will realize that his household expenses must be huge. Each day he must feed more than 19,000 men, women, and children in the seraglios and provide their clothing and other living needs, and he does the same for all the pashas, sultanas, and many others. Every day when the divan [council] is in session he feeds the pashas and all the lesser officials, who are very numerous. He gives the ambassadors from other countries hay, fodder, firewood, and money, and he gives the ambassadors from Persia and the Holy Roman Empire not only those things but also chickens, mutton, rice, sugar, spices, candles, and other goods sufficient for their daily needs and for making gifts as well. Every year he gives ordinary clothes and fine ones too to foreigners (the custom of the Porte is to give only clothes as presents), and on every little occasion he also gives them to many other people. Clearly this is very expensive. . . . He gives clothes to the sultanas inside and outside the seraglios, and to many

when men particularly enjoy giving orders. He also escaped those worries and dangers that usually nag at Ottoman princes when they reach maturity, because as soon as he arrived on the throne he put to death his five brothers, the oldest of whom was just nine. He was not considered cruel for doing this, since the mufti had decided he must do it for the safety of the government. For that matter, if the Grand Signor alone believed the security of the empire required it, he could have a third of his people put to death.

The sultan is very small but well formed—perhaps a bit fat. He has large, pale eyes, an aquiline nose, good skin color, and a big, blond beard. He looks good when seated on horseback, wearing his turban, because then his smallness is not so obvious, but when he is seen standing on his own feet he looks almost dwarfish. His facial expression does not suggest an evil character. His health is rather delicate, and his life is not likely to be long.

He used to enjoy reading books on different subjects, and they say he still does this sometimes, but the questions he asks of his men of learning show clearly that he knows very little. In my opinion the sultan spends his time very unsuitably. He is almost always secluded in his seraglios in the company of eunuchs, pages, dwarfs, mutes, and slave girls (it would be bad enough if they were ordinary women). There is no worthwhile person for him to talk with, since except for a few of the women everyone in the seraglios is less than thirty years old and belongs to one of the types I mentioned.

In the morning he gets up quite late, leaves the women's quarters, where he sleeps every night without exception, changes his clothes, and then breakfasts. If it is a council day he gives an audience to the aga of the janissaries, the *cadi-askers*, and finally the pashas. If someone has just been made a *beglerbeg* [governor of a province], *sanjakbeg* [governor of a district], or something of the sort, he approaches and kisses the sultan's hand without saying a word or having anything said to him. At the same time any newly arrived ambassador or other representative from another

45. Turkish Woman.

(From C. Vecellio, *Costumes anciens*, 1859, II, 392. Libraries of the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.)

and peasants; a tyranny like his would never work if there were a nobility around him, or even his own family and relations. (To ensure his power each sultan always has his kinsmen beheaded.)

The present Turkish emperor, Sultan Murad, was born on August 27, 1546. His father was Sultan Selim and his mother was a Venetian, as she herself used to say. She had been captured at Corfu,¹⁹ she said, where her father was serving as governor, but she never could say what her family name was.²⁰ Sultan Murad had the pleasure of beginning to rule his great empire when he was only twenty-eight, an age

19. A Greek island in the Ionian Sea, formerly a Venetian possession.

20. Modern historians of the Ottoman Empire follow Joseph von Hammer (*Geschichte des osmanischen Reiches*, 10 vols., 1827–35) in saying that Murad's wife, not his mother, was a Venetian woman. But see Albèri, III, 3: 235 n. Some ambassadors said she was of the Venetian noble family Baffo.

ruler comes to him for the same purpose. Even if the ambassador explains his mission he receives no answer at all. The Grand Signor only deals with ambassadors by means of notes, just as the king of Spain did during my time there.²¹

He used to be self-restrained with the ladies, but now he has gone to the other extreme. For many years he was satisfied with a single woman whom he loved very much, and while he never made her a *kebir*, which means a freed woman, and gave her a dowry, nevertheless everyone considered her his wife and sultana. This woman was born of very common people in Albania,²² but she has a very vital personality. Even without the aid of beauty her personality was enough to hold the Great Turk's affections for many years. Although surrounded by lovely women presented to him as gifts by various people, he ignored his mother and sisters when they urged him to consort with other women so as to have sons,²³ since this woman was no longer fertile. He loved her so much that they could not change his mind.

Finally, however, he was attracted by a slave girl given him by his sister, who was the wife of Mohammed Pasha. He had no intention of sleeping with her, and simply enjoyed looking at her and having her sing and play an instrument for him, but that was enough to rouse his wife's anger and jealousy. In order to hold on to her husband, she got some other women to help her use charms and spells to keep him tied to her with love and make him impotent with other women. But the poor woman's plans completely backfired. As I wrote to Your Serenity at the time, the Grand Signor learned from his mother about his wife's doings and lost all his respect for her. He had already been tempted by the slave girl but had resisted his inclinations because of his fondness for his wife. Now he gave himself over to enjoying this girl and found himself so delighted with this pastime that he decided to see if it would be the same with other

21. Morosini had been ambassador to Spain from 1579 to 1581.

22. Albania was then part of the Ottoman Empire. Modern historians, as indicated above, say this concubine, and not Murad's mother, was a Venetian.

23. In the course of his life he eventually fathered 102 children.



46. Sultan's Favorite.

(From C. Vecellio, *Costumes anciens*, 1859, II, 378. Libraries of the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.)

women. He tried out many other beautiful young girls, whom everyone brought to him, and in this way began the life he now leads. This is very different from his old ways; he is not satisfied now with one or two but has relations with more than twenty women. Every night he sleeps with two, and often with three. Since their religious laws require a man who has been with one woman to wash before going to another, he often bathes two or three times a night. This is a real danger to his life because his health is weak, and he suffers from epilepsy; he could easily drop dead without warning. While I was there it was believed at one time that he had died, and there was almost a sack of Constantinople and Pera.²⁴

He is considered a pusillanimous man, but prouder than

24. Mobs often sacked palaces and houses of the wealthy when a sultan died. Pera was a suburb of Constantinople (Istanbul), where the European embassies were situated.

the devil. He does not seem very clever, even though you might say he governs his whole empire by himself, since he has no permanent councillor with whom he regularly discusses affairs, nor any intelligent and trustworthy man who can give him advice. The way he frequently countermands his own orders shows his lack of firmness of mind, and everyone says this results from his allowing first the women and then the eunuchs to twist him around. The reason they can do this is that while the pasha can reach him only by writing notes, which cannot counter objections to his proposals, the women and the eunuchs are always around him and can usually put in the last word. If the pasha then sends another note replying to what they suggest, the sultan is once again in doubt. I don't mean to say that he is not a very stubborn man, but he becomes stubborn only when he has finally made up his mind. Before he does that he is afraid of being tricked and he suspects the pasha of being bribed to advise him against what are his best interests. That is why he is indecisive, and constantly changes his mind about what to do. After he has once decided he cannot be moved.

He trusts no one, and is wise not to, because he knows that all the people who serve him can easily be bribed. He has no one but himself to blame for this. By giving offices to those who pay him most and oftenest, he teaches everyone else to take money in order to be able to make him gifts, since otherwise they would never advance at all.

Although Sultan Murad governs his empire by himself with complete authority and under no restraint from any kind of council, he still has to use officials to carry out his commands. No human being could run the whole organization by himself. The chief officials are his pashas, who are also called the viziers of the Porte. At present there are eight of these men, but there is no fixed number. The sultan appoints new ones and dismisses old ones whenever he wishes. (His predecessors in former times were much slower to change viziers than he is.)

Only the first vizier deals with all the other viziers. Usually that post is given to the one who became a vizier first.

When he goes, the next one in line succeeds him, and so on, and the custom is not to interrupt this order and promote one of them ahead of the men who were made viziers before him. When the sultan wants to appoint someone as first vizier who was made a vizier after some others, he simply dismisses the others until the man he wants is first.

In former times they never took his office away from a first vizier without also taking his life. But while I was *bailo*²⁵ two were dismissed and one was sent to the war zone, so that I had to negotiate Your Serenity's affairs with four different first viziers. You can easily imagine what problems this created. As soon as I had come to know one pasha, and had made friends of his staff, he would be dismissed, and I would have to start over again with another. This cost Your Serenity money, and gave me a lot of trouble.

That is all I think it is worthwhile to tell Your Serenity about the Great Turk, his family, his lands, the nature of his subjects, his armed forces, his incomes and expenditures, his way of governing, his personal qualities, and finally his viziers. . . .

Now, Serene Prince and distinguished gentlemen, I must turn to the relations of the Grand Signor with the other rulers of the world. But first I would like to make a little digression. Your Serenity and you, distinguished gentlemen, know that the sultan is a great ruler, who appears at this time to have no superior in the size of his lands, the amount of his wealth, the number of his subjects, or the size of his armies. Nevertheless, you should also keep in mind that he is not invincible. If you compare him with the other powers individually, he looks stronger than each of them, but it is very clear that if all Christians joined together against him, he could never hold them back. When the time comes that he must fight on land and sea at the same time his weaknesses will be very apparent. But the price we pay for our sins is that something we all agree should be done at all costs is almost hopelessly impossible. The real foundations of the Turks' power is the disunion of the Christian countries and

25. The Venetian ambassador in Constantinople was called a *bailo*.



47. Village on the Dardanelles.

(Detail from Camocio, *Isole, famose porti*, 1573, pl. 13.
From an original in the Free Library of Philadelphia.)

their suspicions of each other. We must beseech God to remove these obstacles and give his people the grace to lose their fear of the infidels.

The Great Turk knows he is powerful, and he actually believes himself stronger than he really is. This is why he does not care about having the friendship of any other power, and why he says, with such remarkable arrogance, that his Porte is always open just as wide to would-be enemies as to would-be friends. His insolence arises partly from the natural pride of that people, who call themselves "The Shadow of God, the Granter of Empires and Crowns," and other arrogant names of that sort. It also stems from seeing that no ruler in the world, no matter how powerful he is, fails to send to the Porte to ask for the sultan's friendship. They regard that as a tacit confession that they are greater than every other power. This in turn makes the Turks believe that even if they betray those who consider

them friends, as they will always do when it suits their purpose, the betrayed allies will always come back and seek to revive the friendship again.

Now, to begin with the Christian rulers, I think I can safely say that the Turks are deadly enemies of them all. They do maintain a "friendship" with some, but this is more apparent than real. The difference in religion counts too much for it to be otherwise, especially with those people. That is the reason they hate the pope more than anyone else. They consider his military forces negligible, but they believe he could be the force to unite the other Christian rulers against them, and so they hate him fiercely.

They think very little of the emperor,²⁶ knowing how weak his armies are. Despite this they periodically renew their treaty with him because of the profit it brings them. His Caesarian Majesty sends them 45,000 thalers a year, which the Turks call harac [tribute], because he is required to give it each year. He also gives other presents to the Grand Signor, the pashas, and various officials of the Porte, and these amount to 60,000 thalers a year.

With France the Turks have had a special understanding for a long time. This was particularly true during the life of the emperor Charles V, because with the French and the Turks equally hostile to the emperor it was easy for them to unite against their common enemy. The same motive has kept alive their alliance down to the present, because they are both still hostile to the Spanish even though the circumstances have altered somewhat. Since the Turks don't share any borders with the French or have any other grounds for conflict, it seems unlikely they will ever fight each other. Quite the contrary, if the Spanish decided to attack the French, the sultan would probably help France, not so much out of friendship as to keep the king of Spain from becoming more powerful than he now is. The Turks tend to underestimate France, believing the recent wars²⁷ have weakened it to the point where it counts for little. The French ambas-

26. I.e., the Holy Roman Emperor, Rudolf II (1576–1612).

27. The Wars of Religion, which racked France in the latter sixteenth century. See Part III, on France.



48. Pera, Suburb of Constantinople and Site of Venetian Embassy.

(Detail from Braun and Hogenberg, *Civitates orbis terrarum*, I, pl. 51. Rare Book Division, New York Public Library.)

sadors don't command much respect in the Porte, and French merchants who trade in Turkish lands are treated as badly as others, if not worse.

As for the Catholic King [of Spain], the Turks are extremely hostile to him and consider him their worst enemy. They know how powerful he is, however, and how hard it would be to hurt him, and they would not object to improving relations with him. They would like very much to have an ambassador come from His Catholic Majesty to negotiate peace.²⁸ If this happens neither the French nor anyone else will be able to stir up trouble between them, because the Turks are very determined to have peace. I grant you that if

28. In this same year (1585) Philip II and the sultan formally ended the war which had begun in 1570 and had really come to an end in 1581.

the Turks agree on a truce, they won't hesitate to break it when it suits their purposes, just as I am sure the king of Spain would do. But with one fighting a war in the Netherlands and the other fighting one with Persia, the result could be a temporary peace between them. That they can ever be on genuinely good terms, however, is hard to believe.

About myself, Serene Prince and illustrious gentlemen, I will say nothing. I am sure your goodwill is such that you realize, without my telling you, that I have done all I could and spared neither my energies nor my purse in your service. If my accomplishments at any time fell short of the good intentions I always had, I beg you to call on your boundless reserves of kindness and forgive my many failings. I can honestly say that neither illness of body, nor anxiety of mind, danger of plague, threats of imprisonment or death, endless wearisome negotiations, nor anything else has ever even slightly delayed me in serving you. I know very well how great are my debts to Your Serenity, and I freely admit that not even with the sacrifice of my life could I pay back a small part of them.

May it please God, the source of every blessing, to reward, preserve, and continually prosper this Serene Republic until the day of the Last Judgment.

10 "ITS DECLINE MAY NOW BE UNDER WAY"

Lorenzo Bernardo, 1592

Bernardo had served a few years earlier as ambassador to Constantinople. In 1591 the Venetian government again sent him to Turkey, this time to bring back as a prisoner the current ambassador, Girolamo Lippomano, who had been discovered to be swindling Venice of funds sent him to buy grain. (This is the same Lippomano whose dispatches on the Spanish Armada appear earlier in this book.) When the ship was within sight of Venice Lippomano jumped overboard and drowned himself. Bernardo proceeded home and within a few days read the customary report of a returned ambassador. Toward the end of it he offered this analysis of the reasons Venice could expect a decline in Ottoman power. Like other ambassadors who discussed this topic, he stressed weaknesses in the empire's leadership, luxury and dissipation, loss of control over the armed forces, and the failure of Turkish will or spirit.¹

Three basic qualities have enabled the Turks to make such remarkable conquests, and rise to such importance in a brief period: religion, frugality, and obedience.

From the beginning it was religion that made them zeal-

ous, frugality that made them satisfied with little, and obedience that produced men ready for any dangerous campaign.

In an earlier report² I discussed at length these three qualities, which were then and always had been typical of the Turks. Now I plan to follow the same order, but to discuss whether any changes have taken place subsequently that might lead us to hope that empire will eventually decline. For nothing is more certain than that every living thing (including kingdoms and empires) has a beginning, a middle, and an end, or, you might say, a growth, maturity, and decline.

In former times, Serene Prince, all Turks³ held to a single religion, whose major belief is that it is "written" when and how a man will die, and that if he dies for his God and his faith he will go directly to Paradise. It is not surprising, then, that one reads in histories about Turks who vied for the chance to fill a ditch with their bodies, or made a human bridge for others to use crossing a river, going to their deaths without the slightest hesitation. But now the Turks have not a single religion, but three of them. The Persians⁴ are among the Turks like the [Protestant] heretics among us [Christians], because some of them hold the beliefs of Ali, and others those of Omar, both of whom were followers of Mohammed, but held different doctrines.⁵ Then there are the Arabs and Moors, who claim they alone preserve the true, uncorrupted religion and that the "Greek Turks" (as they call these in Constantinople) are bastard Turks [i.e., bastard Muslims] with a corrupted religion, which they blame on their being mostly descended from Christian renegades who did not understand the Muslim religion. As a matter of fact, I have known many of these renegades who

2. Delivered after his earlier embassy in Constantinople.

3. By "Turks" he means here not only the Ottoman Turks but also all of their Muslim subjects.

4. The Ottoman Turks had conquered three western Persian provinces in the period 1577-90.

5. In effect the ambassador means that some Persians belonged to the Sunnite (orthodox), others to the Shiite sect of Islam.

From a report by Lorenzo Bernardo, 1592, Albèri, III, 2: 366-77.

1. Bernardo's discussion is infused by his profound belief in the "lessons" of ancient history.

wars. Everybody shirks war service as long as he can, and when he does go he hangs back from the front lines and concentrates on saving his own life. When the authorities announce a campaign in Persia there are outcries and revolts, and if the sultan wants to send janissaries there he creates new ones who are so glad to have the higher pay that they are willing to risk dangers which the regulars dread and flee. In short, nowadays they all look out for their own safety.

As for frugality, which I said was the second of the three sources of the Turks' great power, this used to be one of their marked characteristics. At one time the Turks had no interest in fine foods or, if they were rich, in splendid decorations in their houses. Each was happy with bread and rice, and a carpet and a cushion; he showed his importance only by having many slaves and horses with which he could better serve his ruler. No wonder then that they could put up with the terrible effort and physical discomfort involved in conquering and ruling. What a shameful lesson to our own state, where we equate military glory with sumptuous banquets and our men want to live in their camps and ships as if they were back home at weddings and feasts!

But now that the Turks have conquered vast, rich lands they too have fallen victims to the corruption of wealth. They are beginning to appreciate fine foods and game, and most of them drink wine. They furnish their houses beautifully and wear clothes of gold and silver with costly linings. Briefly, then, they become fonder every day of luxury, comfort, and display. They are happy to follow the example provided by the sultan, who cares nothing about winning glory on the battlefield and prefers to stay at home and enjoy the countless pleasures of the seraglio. Modeling themselves on him, all the splendid pashas, governors, and generals, and the ordinary soldiers too, want to stay in *their* homes and enjoy *their* pleasures and keep as far as possible from the dangers and discomforts of war. The pashas make use of their wives, who are related to the Grand Signor, to persuade him to keep their husbands at home. They do this



49. Dervish, Member of a Muslim Religious Order.

(From Nicolay, *Navigations*, 1576, fol. 203. Collections of The Library Company of Philadelphia.)

had no religious beliefs, and said religions were invented by men for political reasons. They hold that when the body dies the soul dies, just as it does with brute beasts, which they are.

The belief that one's death is "written" and that one has no free will to escape dangers is declining in Turkey with each passing day. Experience teaches them the opposite when they see that a man who avoids plague victims saves his life while one who has stayed with them catches plague and dies. During my time there as *bailo* I even saw their mufti flee Constantinople for fear of plague and go to the garden⁶ to live, and the Grand Signor himself took care to avoid all contacts with his generals. Having learned they can escape from plagues, they now apply the same lesson to

6. By "the garden" he may be referring to the gardens of the sultan's seraglio.

not only to satisfy the men but also because they know that if they stay in Constantinople their husbands can win more favor by serving and fawning on the Grand Signor. If they go to war their rivals find it easier to slander them and they run a greater risk of losing the sultan's favor. And right behind the great men are all the lower ranks of soldiers, following in their footsteps, and trying to avoid being pulled away from the comforts of home.

Obedience was the third source of the great power of the Turkish empire. In the old days obedience made them united, union made them strong, and strength rendered their armies invincible. They are all slaves by nature, and the slaves of one single master; only from him can they hope to win power, honors, and wealth and only from him do they have to fear punishment and death. Why should it be surprising, then, that they used to compete with each other to perform stupendous feats in his presence? This is why it is said that the Turks' strict obedience to their master is the foundation of the empire's security and grandeur. But when the foundation weakens, when the brake is released, ruin could easily follow. The point is that with those other state-preserving qualities [of religion and frugality] changing into state-corroding qualities, disobedience and disunion could be the agents which finally topple it.

This is all the more likely now that the chief officials have no other goal but to oppose each other bitterly. They have all the normal rivalries and ambitions of ministers of state, but they also have unusual opportunities for undercover competition with each other, because many of them have married daughters, sisters, and nieces of the Grand Signor. These women can speak with His Majesty whenever they want and they often sway him in favor of their husbands. This practice throws government affairs into confusion and is a real source of worry to the first vizier, who fears to take the smallest step without notifying the sultan. He knows that his rivals' wives might sometime find the Grand Signor in the right mood and bring about his ruin, something the *caiacadin* [matron of the harem] did to the first vizier Sinan when I was there.

When I was *bailo* [four years ago] I found the Turks less obedient than they had earlier been, and I mentioned this fact in reporting here to the Senate. This time I learned that the situation had deteriorated still further, as was clear from four notable acts of disobedience which had taken place in the years since my earlier departure. The first was the revolt against the beglerbeg of Greece and the defterdar [treasurer], when the spahis boldly entered the council room and demanded that the Grand Signor execute those two and give them their heads. No gifts of money, no command from the sultan would shut them up until they had had their way. They took the heads and brutally hurled them along the city streets with horrible cries. Another act of extreme disobedience took place when the janissaries set fire



50. Drunken Turkish Soldiers.

(From Nicolay, *Navigation*, 1576, fol. 152. Collections of The Library Company of Philadelphia.)

to the houses of Jews in several places in Constantinople and burned down a quarter of the city. They also sacked the Jews' homes with terrible cruelty. For all this they were never even threatened with punishment.

The third incident took place when the ulema⁷ rose up against a man who had devised a new tax imposed by the Grand Signor and looted and burned his house so that he was fortunate to escape with his life. And the fourth event was one which took place in these recent months while I was in the Porte. The janissaries took advantage of a fire which broke out in the vineyards of Pera, near my residence, and attacked, looted, and burned the house of Ibrahim, the brother of the *caiacadin*. Their grievance against him was simply that while pasha he had publicly executed two janissaries at Diyarbekir! If they dare to commit crimes like this in the city, before His Majesty's eyes, what won't they do in their camps when they are armed? Surely they will be beyond what they did while I was there to Osman, the pasha general in Persia: to force him to raise their pay they slashed the ropes on his pavilion to collapse it on top of him, and with other insults like that they actually made him do what they wanted. If the Grand Sultan decides to revive the war against Persia there is real danger of outright rebellion; this possibility will have to be a major consideration when he makes up his mind.⁸

Just as obedience to a prince creates a spirit of unity, so disobedience causes discord and strife. I have already said how much the pashas who are in office hate each other. In the same way, the *massuli* or dismissed pashas think of nothing but ruining the ones in office so they can return to their former posts. The beglerbegs and sanjakbegs resent having to pay good money for their positions not only to the pashas but to those inside the seraglio and in the Grand Signor's personal staff. Then there are the common people, who hate the judges, sanjakbegs and beglerbegs because

they tyrannize and victimize them beyond bearing. (The only way these men can hold their jobs is by spending and bribing on a large scale, so they have to rob and murder the common people in order to raise the money. This is so customary in that empire that anyone who does otherwise simply doesn't know his trade.)

The Grand Signor himself stirs up hatred and indignation among his subjects by making himself the heir of those who die rich, and grabbing their goods from their children. His avarice and penny-pinching are subjects for loud grumbling in every tavern and gathering place in the empire. This public talk is resulting in widespread scorn for the sultan, whom they consider a Sardanapalus⁹ who was raised in the seraglios among jesters, dwarfs, and deaf-mutes. They know that he refuses to take part in military campaigns the way his ancestors did. Those men used to take the field with their armies and set examples of personal bravery; each one tried to outdo his predecessor in conquering kingdoms and winning fame and glory. What they accomplished is stupendous; no other series of emperors ever did anything like it. In most empires there have been one or two or at most three brave and able rulers in a row who have expanded their empires, but these have invariably been followed by an equal number of inferior ones who have lost much of the conquered land and started their empires on declines. In the uninterrupted succession of thirteen Ottoman rulers, however, the Turkish empire has been remarkably fortunate. If one was great, the next tried to surpass him, and if one conquered lands, the next tried to conquer much more. None of them ever lost so much as an inch of the land his predecessors had won; it seems that their religion forbids them ever to give up any land once they have recited their prayers on it. I find there is only one place which the Turks have lost and never recovered, and this is the island of Cephalonia, which the bravery of General Pesaro and Gonzalo Fernán-

7. The body of scholars of Muslim religion and law.

8. He did not resume the war with Persia, but began one with Austria (1593).

9. Sardanapalus was an Assyrian king who, according to legend, burned himself on a funeral pyre with his favorite concubine while the Medes were besieging his palace.

dez [de Córdoba] won for our Most Serene Republic in 1500, and which we have retained ever since.¹⁰ That is the only example in Ottoman history.

It seems reasonable to say that if the Ottoman Empire rose so remarkably fast in a short time because the Grand Sultan went on the major campaigns and because his men hoped and struggled for rewards, then its decline may now be under way. Sultan Selim, the father of the present Grand Signor, was the first to hold that a king or emperor's real satisfaction is not to be found in brave deeds on the field of glory but in peace and quiet, in gratifying all his physical senses, in enjoying the pleasures and comforts of the seraglios in the company of women and jesters, and treating himself to jewels, palaces, loggias, and every other human creation his heart desires. Sultan Murad has followed his father's example—in fact, he has gone further, because at least Sultan Selim occasionally left the seraglio and hunted as far away as Adrianople, but the present Grand Signor, as I said, hardly ever goes out.

We can hope that his son Mohammed will do the same. As I said earlier,¹¹ he is a spirited boy with an aptitude for military life, but he is following his mother's advice, which is to avoid raising any suspicions in his father.¹² He too now lives in seclusion in his seraglio and spends his time enjoying the pleasures of the flesh. We can hope that he will become so addicted that he will never be able to leave them, even if he should want to, and that he will pass on this inheritance to his successors. It seems quite possible that this would mean that no sultan would ever go in person on campaigns, but that they would leave them to their slaves, which would certainly start their empire on a downward path.

Anyone who studies the histories of the kings of Persia

10. Cephalonia is an Ionian island, off western Greece. The war in question was really won by the Turks, and while the Venetians won Cephalonia, they lost several other possessions in the peace settlement.

11. In a part of the report not included in this excerpt.

12. Eighty years earlier Sultan Bayazid II had been deposed by his son, the great-grandfather of Murad III.



51. Sultan Selim II ("the Sot").

(From Stirling-Maxwell, Don John of Austria, 1883, I, 452. Libraries of the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.)

SULTAN SELIM II.

and the kings and emperors of Rome will find that the Xerxeses, the Caesars, and the Trajans personally led their campaigns and as a result enjoyed victory after victory. But when kings and emperors preferred a life of ease and luxury and sent their generals out to conquer, either the campaigns went badly or the generals developed a taste for ruling, kept the conquered lands for themselves, and turned against their lords. That could easily happen in the Ottoman Empire, and it might prove to be the beginning of a decline. Of course, it's true that while the Grand Signor did not go out with his troops he pushed his borders eastward three hundred miles to Tabriz by conquests in Georgia, Shirvan, and Armenia¹³ during the war with Persia. But the change in the government was already reflected in this war, because it took twelve long years, the lives of countless men, and an incredible amount of money to win this territory. When Suleiman was sultan it took him only one year to carry out the same campaign.

My conclusion, distinguished gentlemen, is that the three

13. More correctly, in Azerbaijan.

basic qualities which made the Turks a great power—religion, frugality, and obedience—are vanishing. If this trend continues, and if the sultan's successors follow his example of remaining in the seraglios and letting others lead campaigns, then we can hope for the decline of the empire. Just as it rose to great strength very rapidly, it seems logical to expect it to decline very rapidly, in the same way that those plants which quickly mature and produce fruit are also quick to wither.

Even if the Turks have enormous armed forces, this does not mean their state will not decline. If armed might guaranteed that an empire would last forever, think how many examples one can find of powerful Greek and Roman empires, especially the Roman one (the world has never seen a mightier power), and yet it was totally ruined in little more than two hundred years.¹⁴ If having more money, more land, and more inhabitants always made one country more powerful than the others, the world would not have seen so many of those reversals in which countries with smaller but better armies wiped out larger ones. It is good government, not armies, that conserve an empire; fine laws and institutions have maintained our republic, with God's help, in a world where many states are more powerful.

This is a law of nature, that the same forces which caused a thing to grow must also keep it alive when mature. If the Turkish empire rose so high with the aid of the three qualities I have discussed, then when it lacks its wings it will surely fall.

14. The poor syntax of this sentence accurately reflects that of the original, and is typical of much official Venetian prose.

11 "FITS OF IDIOCY, WITH LUCID INTERVALS"

*From the dispatches of various ambassadors,
1595–1601*

The most visible aspect of the rapid decline of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the sixteenth century was the lowered caliber of the sultans. This change had already been apparent when Selim the Sot (1566–74) replaced Suleiman the Magnificent, but Selim had at least been fortunate in his very able grand vizier, Sokolli. Murad III (1574–95) and Mohammed III (1595–1603) lived in a ghastly world of servile viziers, grasping concubines, opium dreams, and capricious violence. These dispatches suggest the way this environment destroyed the capacity for government of Mohammed III.

JANUARY 21, 1595

[In cipher] *This is the third dispatch of this post, but it is to be read first because the news it contains will not brook delay. I made use of every means in my power to find out whether the sultan [Murad] were really dead; and among other steps, I sent Borisi to Memi Pasha, who assured him that the sultan died on Monday the night of the sixteenth-*

From the dispatches of various ambassadors, 1595–1601, *Calendar of State Papers . . . Venice . . .*, vol. 9. The dispatches of 1595 and 1596 are by Marco Venier; 1597 and 1600, Girolamo Cappello; 1601, Agostino Nani. Translation by Horatio F. Brown. Minor changes have been made in Turkish titles, etc.

seventeenth of this month, at the hour of the first cry. Ferrad¹ wished to send Memi Pasha in his galley to bring back the prince Mohammed. But the sultans declared that this sudden departure would waken suspicion.² Accordingly they resolved to send the bostanji pasha [chief gardener] in the middle-sized caique, as he was accustomed to go every day to Akbunar [Akbaba] to fetch water for the sultan's use. His caique has a double relay of rowers, and so it is expected that he will be back in seven or eight days.

JANUARY 27, 1595

[In cipher] The rumor of the sultan's death has spread down to the very children; and a riot is expected, accompanied by a sack of shops and houses as usual. I have hidden the embassy archives and brought armed men into the house to protect it and to see that it is not set on fire.

The new sovereign [Mohammed III, 1595–1603] arrived this morning at the hour of salaam. I saw him arrive and disembark at the Kiosk. In the eleven days which have elapsed since the death of Sultan Murad, several executions have taken place in order to keep the populace in check. Inside the seraglio there has been a great uproar, and every night we hear guns fired—a sign that at that moment someone is being thrown into the sea.

As regards the death of Sultan Murad, I must repeat that he was attacked by his old epilepsy while receiving the kapudan [admiral] in audience. He was carried inside and suffered all night. Next day he began to mend and progressed so favorably that they almost thought him out of danger, when a second fit came on; this kept him for two days and two nights languid, feeble, like one dead. It was followed by a retention of the urine which caused him to call out in pain, and on top of the other illness carried him to the grave. He refused all medical attendance and all medicine; even when in health his habit of life was strange; and they

1. A former grand vizier, temporarily governing Constantinople in the absence of the current grand vizier, Sinan.

2. The death of a sultan was not announced until his successor had arrived in Constantinople and was ready to assume power.

say, though it is hardly credible, that he ate no bread, but lived on solid meats, thick soups, sheep's marrow, and other aphrodisiacs, for he lay immersed in lust. . .

JANUARY 31, 1595

[In cipher] The new sultan seems to be a resolute man, and terrible. The moment he arrived at the seraglio he went to look on his father's corpse; then his nineteen brothers were brought before him, one by one. They say that the eldest, a most beautiful lad and of excellent parts, beloved by all, when he kissed the sultan's hand exclaimed, "My lord and brother, now to me as my father, let not my days be ended thus in this my tender age"; the sultan tore his beard with every sign of grief, but answered never a word. They were all strangled, all the nineteen;³ and that same day late in the evening the dead sultan was carried to the tomb with less pomp than usually accompanies persons of even low degree. The new sultan, dressed in purple cloth, followed the corpse to the first door of the seraglio; Ferrad and the other pashas, dressed in black, attended it farther. On the bier, which in this country is borne head first, was placed a small turban with aigrettes. The bier was covered with cloth of gold with a jeweled belt of gold across it. It was placed on a piece of ground near Saint Sophia under a great magnificent military tent; and round it will soon arise the mortuary chapel, where the coffin will repose on a lofty platform in the middle, and all round it lower down will lie the nineteen sons, who were not carried in the procession that day owing to the late hour, but were taken out the day following. At present they are all in plain wooden coffins, but later these will be covered and adorned.

The day of his brothers' funeral the sultan placed in divan his tutor, Mohammed of Mecca; a man held in high esteem, wise, and not avaricious. Ferrad⁴ is in great favor with the sultan for the way in which he kept the city quiet during so

3. A number of female slaves, pregnant by some of the older of these brothers, were thrown in the sea.

4. Mohammed made Ferrad his grand vizier but soon had him strangled.



52. Turkish Pallbearers.

(From C. Vecellio, *Costumes anciens*, 1859, II, 393. Libraries of the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.)

many days of interregnum. The sultan has given his seal to no one yet. Sinan will soon be here, in spite of a false rumor of his death. His Majesty has made great changes in the seraglio; he has expelled all the buffoons, the dwarfs, the eunuchs, and the women; they were all sent to the old seraglio; the amount of goods they carried out with them was incredible; the carriages, chests, and baskets of the whole

city hardly sufficed. The present to the janissaries⁵ is one hundred and twenty purses of ten thousand sequins per purse.

The sultan is about medium height, strong and well made, and wears a black beard and two huge moustaches.

JUNE 6, 1596

It has been found impossible to delay much further the departure of the sultan for the [Austrian] war. The sultana mother, enraged at seeing him leave her,⁶ after attempting in vain many means of stopping him, persuaded a girl of singular beauty, with whom he is desperately in love, to beg of him as a favor that he would not go. She did so one day when they were together in a garden; but the sultan's love suddenly changed to fury, and drawing his dagger, he slew the girl. Since then no one has dared to approach the subject.⁷

MARCH 29, 1597

The doctors have declared that the sultan cannot leave for [i.e., return to] the war on account of his bad health, produced by his excesses in eating and drinking.

MAY 10, 1597

The sultan's eldest son is dead, and the sultan is grown so fat that they say he will make no more.⁸

JULY 29, 1600

The Grand Signor has retired to Scutari, and public rumor has it that for three days he had been subject to one of his fits of idiocy, with lucid intervals.

5. A new sultan always made a gift to the janissaries to win their support.

6. She feared that she might lose her influence over him.

7. The sultan went in splendor to the battlegrounds in Hungary, timidly watched the fighting, and never again went to war.

8. And he did not. By this time, however, he had fathered five sons, of whom the third eventually succeeded him as sultan.

JANUARY 21, 1601

. . . The sultan, on the persuasion of his mother, has refused to sign any more documents; instead the grand vizier in the presence of the other viziers writes out the sultan's replies, as used to be done in the days of Sultan Suleiman.

In this way the sultana and the chief eunuch hope to obviate the danger which threatens them from the insolent soldiery, and to free themselves from the charge of turning the sultan round absolutely; all the same owing to their secret influence with the grand vizier, everything is arranged to suit their views.