

Module 5, Discussion 2: The Successes of the Ottoman Empire

Main Topic

The ambassador Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq of the Holy Roman Empire recorded many observations when he visited the Sublime Porte. Above all things, he was amazed by the focus and discipline he found in the Janissaries, which was in stark contrast to the troops of his homeland. Busbecq described his own military's forces in embarrassing and disgraceful ways in light of the forces of the Ottoman Empire. The Janissaries were capable of many incredible means of preservation and organization, while the Christian troops were prone to boisterous needs and difficult accommodations. As an example, the Janissaries and other Ottoman troops were accustomed to receiving only the minimum amount of rations to sustain life (and sometimes less) when necessary, whereas Christian troops would refuse anything less than ordinary food and required that it be in ample supply. This ability to maintain such a functional and flexible military had much to do with the Ottoman Empire's victories on the battlefield: enemies could not match its collective might.

Another element that assisted the state greatly in its ability to thrive and expand was its policies regarding birthrights and inheritance. Essentially, it had none, and instead operated in many ways as a meritocracy. As Busbecq wrote, "In making his appointments the Sultan pays no regard to any pretensions on the score of wealth or rank, nor does he take into consideration recommendations or popularity, he considers each case on its own merits, and examines carefully into the character, ability, and disposition of the man whose promotion is in question." Instead of requiring that subjects be of noble birth to obtain positions of power, people were instead selected to perform duties and fill roles based on their abilities. It is no surprise that this had many positive effects on the efficacies of government and also suggests many things about why the Ottoman Empire was so successful and powerful.

Re: Module 5, Discussion 2 (by Madelyn Brockman)

The Ottoman Turk's treatment of minorities was very severe as far as affecting every aspect of Jews and Christians lives. What they were able to buy, wear, eat, and where they were able to walk and live were controlled because of their religion. This is very invasive and harsh treatment of a people.

Actually, the book noted that non-Muslims were treated rather fairly by their Ottoman rulers from about 1300-1600. It wasn't until the 17th century that things started to worsen.

I don't recall reading anything in the selected articles that mentioned harsh treatment toward non-Muslims. The article *Islam and the Jews: The Status of Jews and Christians in Muslim Lands, 1772 CE* basically mentioned that these subjects could not have anything more than what Muslims had (whether rich or poor). I found this part interesting: "They should not be allowed to clothe themselves in costly fabrics which have been cut in the modes which are forbidden to them, in order that they may not offend the sensibilities of poor Muslims and in order that their faith in their religion should not be shaken by this."

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The article was also written in the 18th century, which would have been around the time that Muslim treatments toward non-Muslims worsened. So you are probably right. I was just pointing out that, aside from some rather strong beliefs and customs about where non-Muslims fit into society, there was nothing mentioning acts of violence or people suffering.