RELIGION AND WORLD CIVILIZATIONS

How Faith Shaped Societies from Antiquity to the Present

VOLUME 2

MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN WORLDS

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Seljuk and Ottoman Civilizations

This section considers the rise of the Turks and the thriving and influential Seljuk and Ottoman civilizations that followed their conversion to Islam. Both established powerful expansionist empires that brought political upheaval and cultural change to the areas where they established their authority.

The Seljuk Empire existed from the early eleventh century until the late twelfth century. At the height of its reign, the Seljuk Empire claimed authority from the Hindu Kush to Asia Minor and from central Asia to the Persian Gulf. The entries provided here explain how the rise of the Seljuks led to extraordinary consequences for various states. This is perhaps most notable in the case of the Byzantine Empire, which witnessed Seljuk conquests of many of its lands and those attacks, in turn, contributed to the birth of the crusading movement as Byzantine officials sought the aid of the papacy and Western Christians in response.

The longer lasting Ottoman Empire was founded in the late thirteenth century and only ended with the abolition of its sultanate in the early twentieth century in the wake of World War I. The Ottomans oversaw one of the most powerful empires in the world during the early modern period, continually threatening Christian Europe through its efforts at military expansion and settlement of conquered areas. The decline of the Ottoman Empire, beginning in the late eighteenth century and lasting until its fall in the early twentieth century, along with the abolition of its once widely recognized caliphate, brought a void in Sunni religious authority and led to major political restructuring in the Middle East and eastern Europe.

Abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate

After the Ottoman Empire took over control of the caliphate from the Mamluks in 1517, they sought to use the institution as a means of bringing greater solidarity among Muslims in the broader Islamic world. This was especially the case in the last quarter of the nineteenth century during a time of Ottoman political and military weakness. Indeed, the Ottoman Empire was already on the brink of collapse in the early years of the twentieth century when the war between the Great Powers broke out in 1914. The empire entered World War I alongside the Central Powers and the Ottoman caliph immediately declared a *jihad* against the Allies. Despite the Ottomans' and Germans' joint efforts during the war, both nations suffered defeat. The Ottoman Empire signed an armistice in 1918 and its territories were occupied by Allied forces in many places, including the empire's capital city of Istanbul. The British, concerned about the reaction of Muslims under their colonial control in India, did not harm or demean Mehmed VI, the Ottoman sultan and caliph, but nevertheless took him

under their strict control. Consequently, the caliph took a passive attitude against foreign occupation in the empire in the years following the end of the war that would contribute to his eventual downfall and the abolition of the caliphate itself in 1924.

In 1919, unhappy with the foreign occupation, among other things, nationalist Turkish military officers came together under the leadership of General Mustafa Kemal, then Atatürk, and began the Turkish War of Independence in Anatolia. Their movement, known as the National Struggle, oversaw the founding of a government, opened a National Assembly in Ankara, and then launched an armed struggle against the Allied occupiers. In response, the Ottoman government in occupied Istanbul issued a fatwa declaring the supporters of the nationalists under Atatürk traitors. Moreover, the Ottomans incited and supported uprisings against the nationalist Ankara government by emphasizing religion, even forming an army, with the guidance of the British, named the Caliphate Army to fight against the nationalist forces. The Ottomans also signed the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920, which left only symbolic land to the empire. These actions by the sultan and caliph led to difficulties for the leaders of the National Struggle, who had to contend with both the foreign occupiers and internal threats inspired by the Ottoman government.

The military stage of the Turkish War of Independence ended on September 9, 1922, when the Turkish army defeated Greek occupying forces supported by the British and entered Izmir (Smyrna). Although the Ankara government fought and won the war, in the diplomatic negotiations that followed the British sought to invite both the Ankara government and the Istanbul administration to the peace negotiations to be held in Lausanne, which would create a dual representation of the Turks. In response, the Ankara government declared the Istanbul administration was no longer the legal representative of the Turkish nation. The Turkish National Assembly adopted a law abolishing the sultanate by separating it from the caliphate on November 1, 1922. Then the last Ottoman sultan, Mehmed VI, had to leave from the capital city of Istanbul with a British battleship for fear of safety. Subsequently, the Assembly elected his cousin, Abdul Majid Effendi, as the new caliph on November 19, 1922. Around eight months later, the Treaty of Lausanne was signed by the Ankara government on July 24, 1923. Then, a law was passed in the Assembly declaring a republic in place of the empire, and the Assembly elected General Mustafa Kemal as the president of the newly formed Turkish Republic on October 29, 1923. Thus, both a new administrative system and head of state were established.

According to the law abolishing the sultanate, the caliphate would continue as a religious institution in which the caliph would maintain his religious authority but would not participate in political affairs. Yet Abdul Majid Effendi assumed the caliphate in such a way as to suggest that he still maintained political authority and influence. Moreover, Aga Khan III and Syed Ameer Ali, leaders of the Indian Muslims, sent a letter to the Ankara government seeking to place the caliphate under their protection, which the Turkish administration saw as interfering in the internal affairs of Turkey. In response to these events, President Mustafa Kemal and the government made the decision to end the caliphate, which was realized when the Assembly passed a law on March 3, 1924, abolishing the caliphate. A ten-day period was given to the members of the Ottoman dynasty to leave Turkey. Abdul Majid Effendi and his family were put aboard a train in Istanbul and the Istanbul governor and police chief accompanied him to the border. Thus, the Ottoman caliphate, the last caliphate of Islam, which existed from 1517 to 1924, came to an end.

The abolition of the caliphate was criticized in Turkey. In particular, supporters of the caliphate argued that Turkey lost its best means of exercising diplomatic and cultural authority in the international arena. Nevertheless, President Mustafa Kemal's first goal was to create a modern and contemporary state through revolution and reform, and the caliphate was an important obstacle to these developments. Second, he aimed to end the "ummah" understanding in the Turkish community and to strengthen national sovereignty in a Turkish nation instead. Last, but not least, he wanted to prevent the reactionary elements within Turkey from initiating a counterrevolution by using the caliphate as a rallying symbol of authority for such efforts.

The abolition of the caliphate gave rise to great confusion in the Islamic world, which was followed by intense reactions and turmoil. This was especially the case for Muslims living under British colonial rule in India and Egypt, as they asked for the caliphate to be restored in Turkey, even asking President Mustafa Kemal to take the title of caliph himself, but he rejected both requests. Debates over the caliphate continued for many years in the Muslim world, but these did not lead to its restoration.

Ercan Karakoc

See also: Volume 2: Medieval Arab Civilization: Abbasid Caliphate; Fall of Baghdad and the End of the Caliphate; Rashidūn

Caliphate; Umayyad Caliphate; *Seljuk and Ottoman Civilizations:* Collapse of the Ottoman Empire; Establishment of the Ottoman Caliphate; Establishment of the Secular Republic of Turkey; *Jihad*, World War I, and the Ottoman Empire; Millet System; Ottoman Empire; *Volume 3: Early Modern and Modern Africa:* Establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate in West Africa

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Armenian Genocide

The Armenian Genocide was the mass murder and deportation of up to 1.5 million ethnic Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire between 1914 and 1923. The genocide was perpetrated by the government of the Ottoman Empire, which was under the control of a group of revolutionaries called the Young Turks. Because they were carried out in such an organized manner, with the intention to completely exterminate the Armenians, the atrocities committed against the Armenians are considered the first modern genocide.

The Armenians are an ethnic group that has lived in western Asia for over four thousand years, mainly in the modern nations of Armenia and Turkey. They were generally part of large empires, including the Persian Empire, but at times had their own sovereign kingdom. In the fourth century CE, the Kingdom of Armenia became the first nation in the world to adopt Christianity as a state religion.

In 1555, the western part of historic Armenia became part of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman government allowed the Armenians a large measure of self-rule, but they did not have equal rights as citizens. They were subject to many restrictions, their loyalty to the empire was often questioned, and their efforts to secure reforms sometimes ended violently, including massacres in the 1870s and 1890s in which hundreds of thousands of people were killed. Despite their precarious position, however, the Armenians as a group were successful, with higher levels of education and wealth than the majority Turkish population. This led to resentment by the Turks.

In the early twentieth century, the Ottoman government became increasingly unstable. A group of revolutionaries known as the Young Turks staged a coup in 1908 that removed the sultan (ruler) from power. The sultan's supporters accused the Armenians of supporting the coup, and massacred as many as thirty thousand of them in retaliation. In 1912, long-standing tensions between the Ottoman Empire and its Christian neighbors resulted in the Balkan Wars. The Ottoman Empire was defeated and lost territory. Muslims were either expelled from or fled the forfeited territories and sought refuge in what remained of the Ottoman Empire. Hundreds of thousands of refugees settled in areas inhabited by Armenians, and they resented the prosperity of their new neighbors. Additionally, the Armenians were accused of colluding with the Ottoman Empire's enemies during the Balkan Wars. Meanwhile, the Young Turks released propaganda claiming that the Armenians were the primary threat to the Ottoman Empire, and that its survival necessitated their removal.

In 1914, the Ottoman Empire's entry into World War I on the side of Germany and Austria-Hungary sealed the Armenians' fate. Military leaders accused the Armenians of colluding with the Allied Powers. Armenians were removed from war zones to prevent them from working with the Allies, and all Armenians were expelled from the Ottoman military and assigned instead to unarmed labor battalions. Meanwhile, the Ottoman government, led by a triumvirate of officials known as the Three Pashas (a pasha is a high-ranking Turkish official)—Mehmed Talat Pasha (prime minister), Ismail Enver Pasha (minister of war), and Ahmed Cemal Pasha (minister of the navy)—released a steady stream of propaganda that portrayed the Armenians as traitors and infidels.

The Armenian Genocide began on April 24, 1915, with the arrest and eventual execution of approximately 250 prominent Armenians who lived in Constantinople, the Ottoman capital. On May 29, the Temporary Law of Deportation (Tehcir Law) was passed, which gave the Ottoman government the authority to deport anyone who was suspected of being a threat to national security; the intention of the law was to facilitate the persecution of the Armenians under the guise of legality. Following the passage of the Tehcir Law, the Armenians were evicted from their homes and their property was confiscated.

Unimaginable horrors were then perpetrated against the Armenians. With no food or water, and often stripped naked, tens of thousands of Armenians were forced on death marches through the desert to Syria. The intention of the death marches was for the victims to die along the way from dehydration, starvation, exhaustion, and