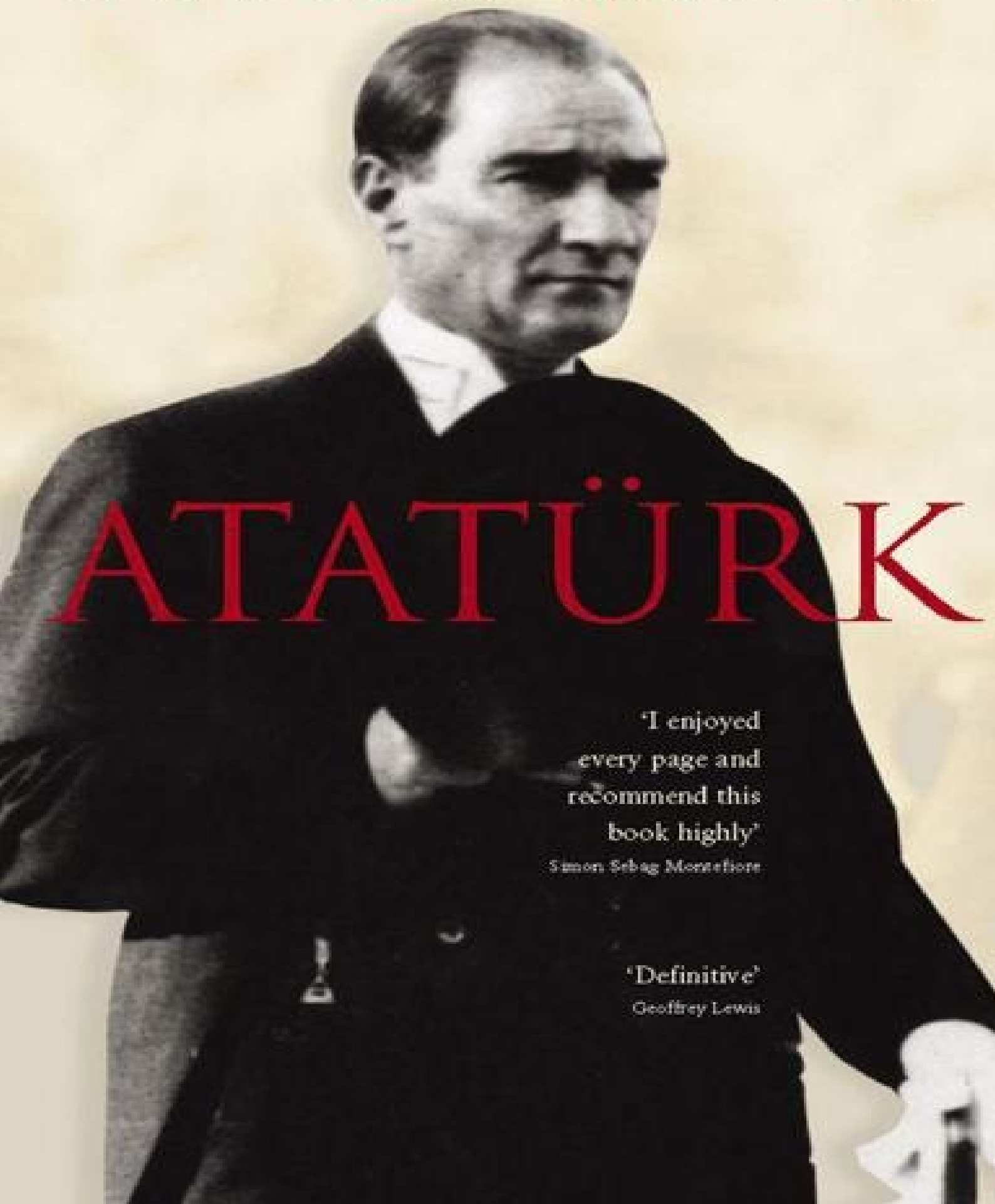


ANDREW MANGO



# ATATÜRK

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*Simon Sebag Montefiore*

'Definitive'

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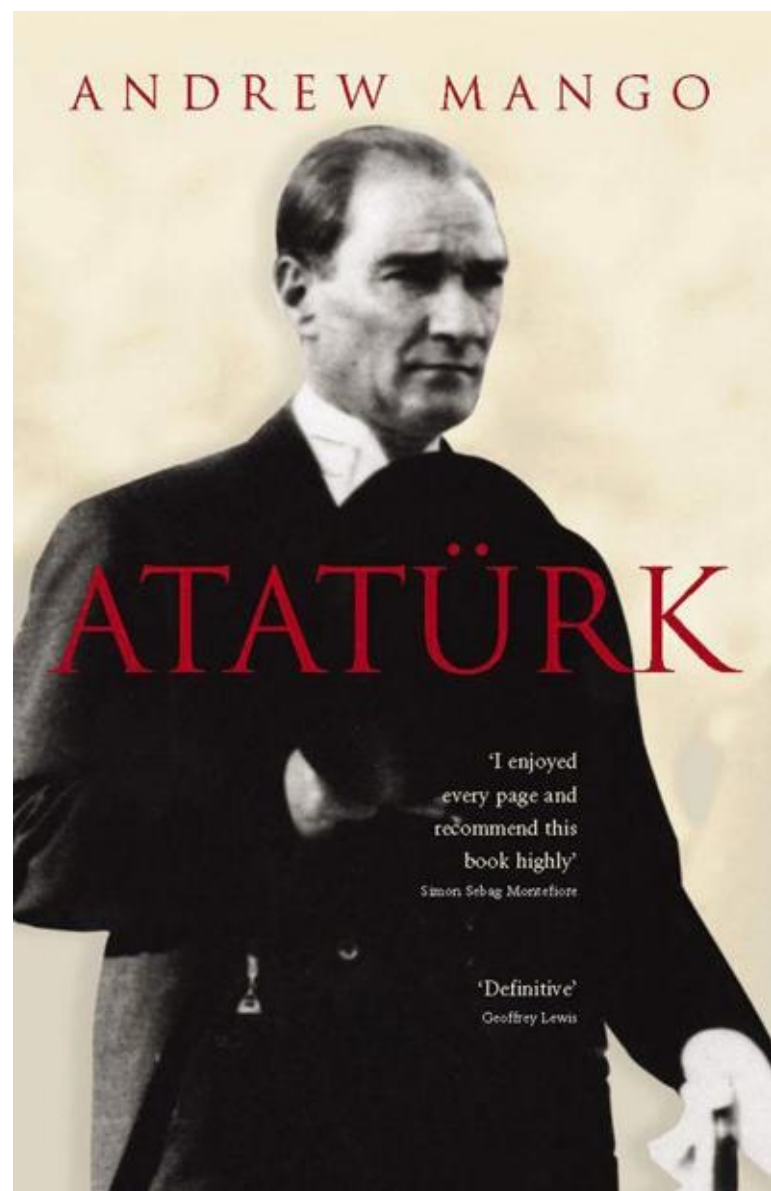
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# *Atatürk*

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ANDREW MANGO

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*To Mary*

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*Daphne and Benedict*

*with love*

# Preface

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MUSTAFA KEMAL ATATÜRK is one of the most important statesmen of the twentieth century. He established and shaped the Turkish republic, today the strongest state between the Adriatic and China in the broad Eurasian land belt south of Russia and north of the Indian subcontinent. He influenced the history of his country's neighbours. For peoples ruled by foreigners, he showed a way to national independence in amity with the rest of the world.

Atatürk is usually known today as a radical modernizer and westernizer. The description is true but not sufficient. He imported Western practices in order to bring his country into parity with the richest countries of the world, most of which were to be found in the West. But his aim was not imitation but participation in a universal civilization, which, like the thinkers of the European Enlightenment, he saw as the onward march of humanity, regardless of religion and the divisions caused. He believed that the struggle for genuine independence should be waged by each nation for itself in the name of an overarching secular ideal of progress common to all, and therefore leaving no room for antagonism towards the most advanced nations. He was an anti-imperialist only in the sense that his ideal was a universal commonwealth of civilized people. Above all, he was a builder, the greatest nation-builder of modern times.

Atatürk's vision was optimistic and humanist. His practice often fell short of it. Moreover, particularly towards the end of his life, his thought was contaminated by doctrines of ethnic and racial superiority current in the contemporary West. Atatürk had, and still has, many opponents in Turkey. Traditional Muslims saw in his ideal of secular progress an idolatrous juggernaut, and believed him to be an imitator of the infidels. For others he was simply an unprincipled dictator. Nationalists in neighbouring countries have other bones to pick with Atatürk. He defeated the Greeks; his generals beat the Armenians; he wrote off the Arabs, while adding to his country a district which Syrian Arabs claim for their own. Kurdish nationalists hold him responsible for the policy of assimilating Kurds within the Turkish nation. All these anti-Turkish nationalists are to be found among Atatürk's detractors. Turkish and non-Turkish Marxists had their own critical reservations; but they no longer figure.

The controversy which surrounds Atatürk works to the advantage of the biographer and historian, as it throws up not only new arguments but also new sources of information. In Turkey, where the debate is particularly lively, new books on Atatürk proliferate. The first volume of Atatürk's collected writings and a new edition of his private letters appeared just as the manuscript of this book was nearing completion. So did a comprehensive refutation of criticism levelled at Atatürk by Islamic opponents. However, even before these latest works, enough fresh material had accumulated to justify a new biography. This material is almost entirely in Turkish. It consists of memoirs and diaries of Atatürk's contemporaries, extracts from his own notebooks and archive, histories of the republic, accounts of specific events, etc. The information these books contain is in the public domain, although many publications are out of print and others are hard to trace. This new biography is based largely on published Turkish sources, which until now have never been adequately checked, compared and collated.



I apologize to non-Turkish readers for the paucity of books in English and other European languages in my bibliography. The fact is that Mustafa Kemal was largely unknown in the West until 1919 when he assumed the leadership of the Turkish nationalist movement. Later, foreigners met him for official purposes, but none had privileged access to him. Western scholars who have written about him have relied, as I have done, on published Turkish sources: these I have usually cited direct.

My reliance on Turkish material, and the fact that Atatürk is a figure of Turkish history first and of world history second, have led me to adopt the modern Turkish phonetic spelling for proper nouns. One exception is Istanbul, where it would have been pedantic to dot the capital I, as Turkish spelling requires; nonetheless I have retained it for all other place names, such as İzmir (Smyrna), İzmit (Nicomedia), İznik (Nicaea), etc. Total consistency is impossible, first because modern Turkish spelling has not yet achieved it, and second because some of the Turks mentioned in this book spelled their names according to different conventions. On occasion I have modernized their spelling, changing, for example, Khalide Edib to Halide Edip. For some places which were once under Ottoman rule I give the modern Turkish spelling, followed in brackets by their current name, e.g. Yanya (Ioannina, later Yanina in Greek Epirus). For others, I use the traditional English spelling: Salonica, Aleppo, Damascus, Baghdad, Mecca, etc. Surnames were introduced by law in Turkey in 1934. For the earlier period I give the forenames of Turks mentioned in the narrative and then in brackets the surname which they later adopted, e.g. Ali Fuat (Cebesoy), Falih Rıfkı (Atay), etc. With regard to Atatürk himself, I am not entirely consistent. In general, I call him Mustafa and then Mustafa Kemal before 1934, but occasionally the surname Atatürk slips in before he adopted it officially in 1934.

I have written this biography in London, drawing mainly on books diligently assembled for me by Ahmet Yüksel of Sanat Kitabevi, the prince of antiquarian booksellers in Ankara. I could not have done it without his help. As my work progressed, I discussed it with many friends on my frequent visits to Turkey. I am grateful to them all, particularly to Professor Sina Akşin, Dr Şahin Alpay (who alerted me to some interesting material in the American press), Şakir Eczacıbaşı (who sent me a photocopy of an article in the US magazine *The Caucasus*), Professor Selim İlkin (who has kept me supplied with Turkish press cuttings and other material on Atatürk), Altemur Kılıç (whose father was one of Atatürk's closest friends), Professor Emre Kongar (who gave me the photograph album published by the Turkish Ministry of Culture, of which he was permanent under-secretary), Professor Baskın Oran, Ambassador Müfit Özdeş (a descendant of a personal friend of Atatürk), Professor Azmi Süslü (who heads the Atatürk research centre in Ankara) and Professor Mete Tuncay. I owe a double debt of gratitude to my friend Professor Metin And, for his hospitality during my visits to Turkey and his encouragement and advice throughout. I thank my friends Canan and Peter Reeves for reading and commenting on two draft chapters, and for their hospitality in Istanbul and Bodrum. I am grateful to the military history department (ATASE) of the Turkish General Staff for arranging for me an escorted tour of the Anatolian battlefields of the Turkish War of Independence.

In England I have received help and encouragement from my friends and colleagues Professor Clement Dodd and Dr William Hale. I am particularly grateful to Professor Geoffrey Lewis, who read the completed manuscript, made valuable suggestions and raised my spirit when I needed it most. I have received useful criticism from Dr George Harris of Washington. Caroline Knox of John Murray has been a long-suffering, helpful and enthusiastic editor. My style has benefited from the comments of my wife Mary, and my work from her patience. My faults are my own and I rely on my readers to point them out.

## *Note on Spelling and Pronunciation*

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Modern Turkish uses the Latin alphabet, modified to ensure that there is a separate letter for each main sound. The spelling thus aims at phonetic consistency. Consonants have more or less the same sound as in English, except that:

*c* is pronounced as *j* in *joy*

*ç* is as *ch* in *chair*

*ğ* is silent, but lengthens the preceding vowel

*j* is pronounced as in French, or as *s* in *measure*

*ş* is as *sh* in *ship*

*h* and *y* are pronounced as consonants, as in *hit* and *yellow*

Vowels have the following values:

*a* as in *father*

*e* as in *pen*

*i* as in *pin* (the capital also carries a dot, *İ*)

*ı* is a back, close, unrounded vowel which does not exist in English, the nearest equivalent being the phantom vowel in the second syllable of *rhythm* (in Turkish transliteration *ritim*)

*o* as in *pot*

*ö* as in German, or in French *eu*

*u* as in *room*

*ü* as in German, or in French *u* (in *une*)

The circumflex (^) is sometimes used to indicate a long vowel, as in *siyasî* (si-ya-see, meaning political). Used after the consonants *k* and *l*, it indicates that the consonant is soft (palatalized), e.g. *kâr* (k<sup>i</sup>-a-r, meaning profit, to distinguish from *kar* (k-a-r), meaning snow).



[The Ottoman Empire in 1881](#)

[The Balkan Wars and Gallipoli Campaign](#)

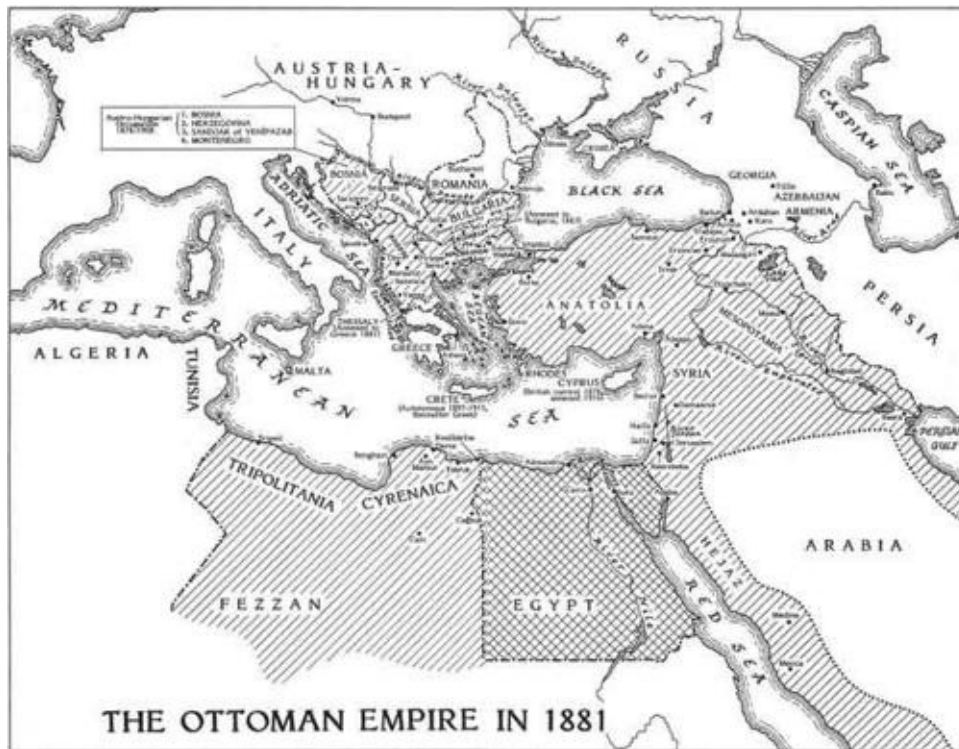
[The Eastern Campaign and Eastern Front, 1916–1921](#)

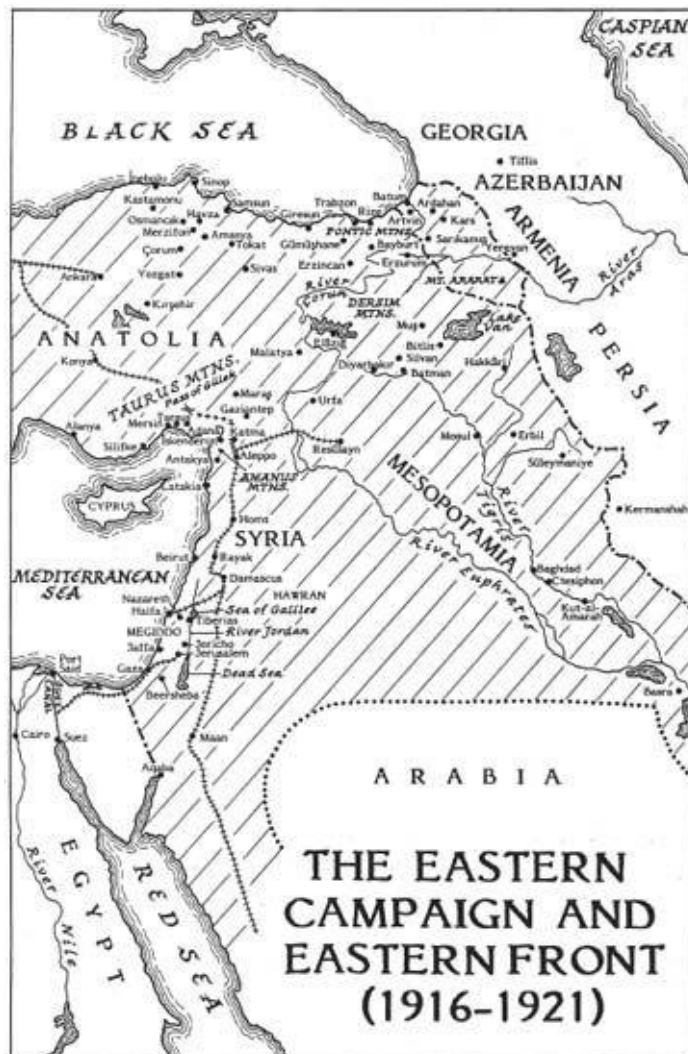
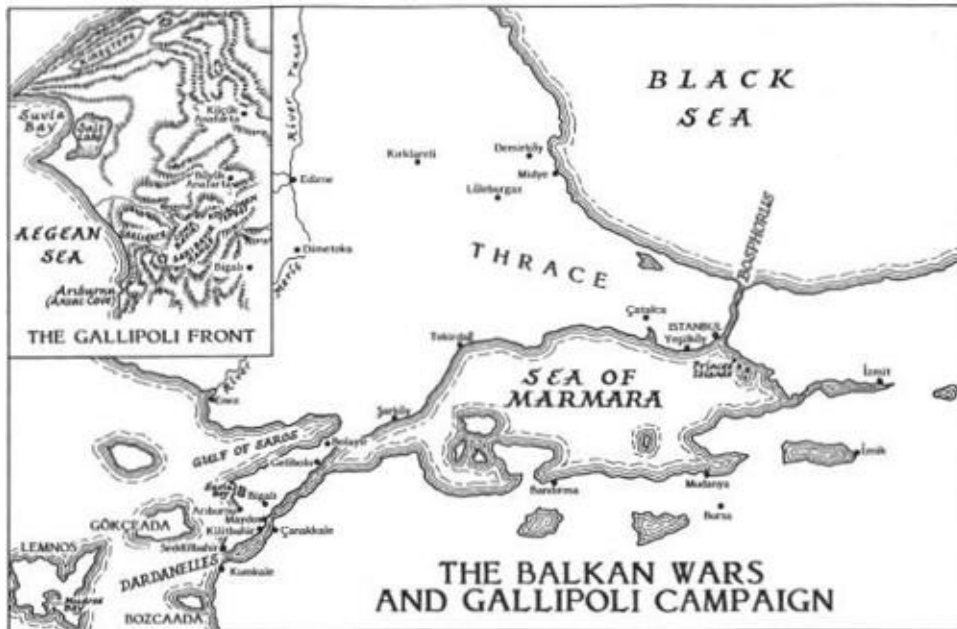
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# Introduction

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MUSTAFA KEMAL ATATÜRK was born during the *belle époque* of European civilization. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, Europe and its extensions across the oceans were at peace and could concentrate on advancing their power, knowledge and prosperity. France had recovered from the defeat in the war with Germany in 1870, the United States from the ravages of the Civil War. Germany was growing richer and stronger by the day. Austria-Hungary was a delicately constructed haven of peace. After its victory over the Ottoman empire in 1878, Russia was undergoing an economic transformation and expanding its power in Asia. Britain was spreading the benefits of peace and order and progress throughout its empire. Japan had opened its doors to the West, and was applying Western knowledge to lay the foundations of its industrial and military power. European civil servants, businessmen, engineers, scientists, doctors – and, increasingly, their American cousins – were organizing, developing, trading, building, teaching throughout the globe. Europe was mastering and transforming the world. It both gathered and scattered the fruits of its labour. But it also made victims.

It is misleading to describe the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as being uniquely the age of imperialism. Empires had existed throughout recorded history, and their founders and rulers had, quite naturally, believed that their power, their way of life, their values and their religion – the civilization, in short – benefited not only themselves, but also the peoples over which they held sway. The claim was often true.

What was new in the nineteenth century was the competitive coexistence of several empires inspired by the same civilization. That civilization had developed within Christendom, but after the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, its organizing principle was not religion, but rationalism. In spite of its regional origin, rationalism could appeal to all men as creatures endowed with reason. However, while the application of reason to the mastery of the material world produced undeniable benefits, in the realm of human affairs its results were mixed. True, the exercise of reason could improve on traditional social and political arrangements. But the pursuit of rationalist policies and ideologies created new differences and new tensions within and between existing communities.

At the same time, old divisions survived under new names. Where traditional Christians believed they fought infidels, enlightened rationalists of Christian antecedents believed they were at grips with ignorant fanatics. Thus, Muslims had been infidels because they controverted Christianity. Now they were fanatics because they resisted rational enlightenment. Religious missionaries sought to convert infidels to the true faith. Similarly, enlightened European thinkers, teachers and rulers attempted to make fanatics see reason and mend their ways.

The observation that some communities fared worse than others, that some took to enlightenment while others resisted it, suggested to thinkers, who believed themselves to be rational, that humanity was divided into races with unequal capacities. By the end of the nineteenth century this inequality could be explained and justified by extending to human society the principles established by Charles Darwin in his study of the origin of species. Social Darwinists believed that races were to human



what species were to animals. Their views were widely spread and influential. Racial differences were seen not only between blacks and whites, Europeans and Asiatics, but also between Teutons, Latins and Slavs.

Rationalists reinforced another old division when they subdivided races into nations. The success of European peoples, united domestically and distinguished from their neighbours by language and historical antecedents, and consequently thinking of themselves as distinct nations, led to the belief that nations were the natural units of political organization.

It is not surprising that the authors of the French Revolution should have seen their people as *grande nation*, since it was among them that Reason had triumphed and had produced a declaration of human rights of universal application. Nor is it surprising that their neighbours should have attempted to emulate them in ever-widening concentric circles. But while one can follow the concatenation of ideas which led from universal human rights, posited by reason, to the ideology of nationalism and the consequent belief that it was best for state and nation to coincide, it remains nevertheless true that nationalism and the brotherhood of man were not obviously compatible, even in theory. In practice the ideology of nationalism, which flowed out of the French Revolution, split up existing states and communities. It produced much suffering and millions of victims, caused material losses and impoverished the lives even of winners in nationalist contests for territory and power. The fate of losers was much sadder.

Liberty, equality and fraternity were not logically incompatible with the existence of multinational empires, even if in practice they subverted the hierarchies on which these empires rested. But nationalism, which spread together with the ideals of the French Revolution, destroyed them. It added a new animus to old communal, religious, sectarian and tribal differences, endowing them with a rational explanation. Both ideology and observation found rational justification for aggression. National communities had mastered the new rational European civilization in unequal measure. Observably, this inequality was reflected in their performance, both domestically and in contest with other communities. This led to the conclusion that, like races, national communities were not only actually, but inherently, unequal in their aptitude for civilization and their propensity for unreasonable fanaticism. Nations, like individuals, could therefore be divided not only into advanced and backward, learned and ignorant, but into deserving and undeserving, rich and poor. It was not a dispensation with which the losers could agree. But they could only prove that they did not deserve their lot by gaining strength through the acquisition of the universal European civilization. Civilization was the prerequisite of success. Conversely, success in a national contest was proof of civilization.

Racial, regional, ethnic and national stereotypes have always been part of human discourse. They can be accepted as a convenient shorthand to denote differences in the way of life of specific communities. Rationalism did not reduce the use of racial or national stereotypes, but it explained them in new ways. Where medieval Arab geographers wrote that Slavs and other northerners were irascible, because red bile predominated in their temperament, rationalists dispensed with the theory of humours in favour of that of civilization. Vicomte de la Jonquière declared in 1881: 'The Ottoman people is not more recalcitrant to civilization than any other nation. It has native qualities for which one would look in vain in the other races of the empire: it is honest and decent. The ignorance which it is plunged, the fanaticism of which it provides so much bloody evidence – all this should be attributed to those who are in charge of its destiny.'<sup>1</sup>

These were the dominant ideas in the dominant part of the world when Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was born in Salonica in 1880/1.

At the end of the nineteenth century the Ottoman state was more than six hundred years old, and showed its age. The history of the state could be traced back to 1281 when Osman, a warlord (*bey*) Turcoman (Türkmen) stock, inherited a principality in north-western Asia Minor and set about enlarging it at the expense of neighbouring Byzantine lands. To the east of Osman's original fief, the central plateau of Asia Minor had earlier been conquered by Seljuk (in modern Turkish spelling Selçuk) Turks, following their victory over the Byzantines at Malazgirt in 1071. The conquerors first called the land Rum (or Roman). The term Rumeli (Roman land, Rumelia in English) was later transferred to Ottoman conquests in Europe and was replaced in Asia Minor by Anadolu (Anatolia in English, from the Greek *Anatole*, meaning the East). Europeans found a simpler name. By the end of the twelfth century, they started referring to the lands conquered by the Turks as Turkey (first attested in the Italian form of *Turchia*).<sup>2</sup> This name travelled with Osman Bey's successors as they crossed into Europe at the beginning of the fourteenth century and spread their dominion further and further west. But the conquerors did not call their land Turkey or themselves Turks. They saw themselves as Muslims, ruling 'the land of Islam' (*darü'l-İslam*, literally the House of Islam), where they had established 'the state' (*devlet*, or in later bureaucratic usage *Devlet-i Aliyye*, the Sublime State, again *Memalik-i Mahrusa*, the Divinely Guarded Dominions).

The Ottoman state was Muslim, dynastic and medieval in its organizing principles. Its government was based on Muslim religious law (*sharia*, in Turkish spelling *şeriat*), which was supplemented by royal ordinances (*kanun*) and customary law (*örf*), and stretched, sometimes beyond reason, to cover day-to-day requirements. In accordance with that law, non-Muslim monotheists who submitted to Muslim rule were given protected status and allowed to run their communal affairs. The three main non-Muslim confessional communities – Greek or Eastern Orthodox Christians, Armenian Gregorian (Monophysite) Christians and Jews – were known as *millet*, a term which later acquired the secular meaning of nation. Although its extent varied over time, the *millet* system of communal self-government gave the Ottoman state a multi-ethnic, multicultural character which was generally absent in Christian-ruled Europe. True, non-Muslims suffered disabilities in the Ottoman state, but they could survive and prosper, a prospect denied until modern times to Muslims in lands reconquered by Christian rulers, and enjoyed only fitfully by their Jewish subjects.

The non-Muslim *millets* were one element in a complex system of corporate government. Everybody had a master (*sahip*) who was personally responsible for the behaviour of his charges. Small pyramids made up the large pyramid of the Ottoman state, headed by the sultan or sovereign. He reigned absolute, but under the unchanging divine law, to 'enjoin the good and forbid evil', and to maintain justice (*adalet*), defined as perfect balance in the constituent elements of the state.

Throughout almost the entire history of the Ottoman state, its official ideology was religious. Its message was simple: follow the Prophet and his law, and all will be well. Although the practice of the state was more mundane, the official, religious ideology affected the cast of mind of the Muslim rulers of the state. Since they possessed revealed truth which had shown its worth during the expansion of Ottoman power, they were reluctant to turn to unbelievers for anything other than technical advice. When they did so, they had to disguise their purpose. In any case, the official ideology of the state was an obstacle to innovation.

Conservatism was not confined to the theory of government. Hippocratic medicine, Ptolemaic astronomy and geography, and other branches of medieval science survived in the Ottoman state long after they had been, first amended, then discarded in western Europe. Muslim apologists have always argued that Islam is not contrary to human reason. Moreover, particularly in modern times, they have insisted that Islam is the most reasonable of all religions. Nevertheless it remains true that official

Ottoman Islam delayed the spread of the new learning based on the primacy of reason. But the new learning could not be stopped.

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The Ottomans were prompt to use European military technology. But outside the military sphere the penetration of European ideas and practices was slow. It was not until 1727 that a Hungarian from Transylvania, who had converted from Unitarianism to Islam, was able to set up in Istanbul a first printing press using Arabic characters. It was closed down after a few years, and printing had to be reintroduced later.

True, changes in production sometimes travelled quickly. The cultivation of new crops such as potatoes, maize, tobacco – spread far and wide in Ottoman dominions. But social organization, including the organization of the armed forces, continued to follow pre-modern patterns until the nineteenth century. And the ruling mentality, often pragmatic in day-to-day affairs, remained medieval in its points of reference. As Turkish scholars are fond of saying today, Turkey has never had its Renaissance.

In 1529 and then again in 1683, Ottoman armies had laid siege to Vienna; in 1878, Russian troops were encamped outside the Ottoman capital, Istanbul. New learning had created the military, political and economic power of Russia which became the chief gravedigger of the Ottoman state. The organization and ordinance of the armies and navies of the Romanov tsars, and the wealth first of the agriculture and then of their manufacturing industry – achieved in every case by the use of western European techniques – outstripped the resources of the Ottoman state by an ever-widening margin from the eighteenth century onwards.

Early memoranda urging reforms were drawn up by Ottoman administrators in the eighteenth century. But little was done, as the Russians swept down to the Black Sea. Then in 1789, the year of the French Revolution, a reforming sultan, Selim III, mounted the throne in Istanbul and set about creating a model new army, as part of his new order (*nizam-ı cedid*). Selim III was influenced by the French example, largely out of fear for the safety of his dominions, a fear for which he was soon to find excellent grounds, as Napoleon invaded Egypt in the name of the French Republic in 1798.

The Ottomans' connection with the French was old. It went back to the alliance concluded in 1541 between Sultan Süleyman I (Suleiman the Magnificent) and Francis I of France against the Habsburg emperor Charles V. It was as part of that alliance that French merchants and other residents in the Ottoman state were given privileges, known as *capitulations*, which were later extended to other European states, and which had the effect of placing Europeans in the Ottoman state outside local jurisdiction. Freely given at first as a means of fostering trade, the capitulations were later resented by the Ottomans, while Europeans insisted on them as a defence of their nationals against the arbitrariness of a backward Asiatic state.

Selim III was deposed and then killed by a popular rising led by the Janissaries, the Sultan's slave troops which had turned into an unruly praetorian guard. Provincial notables tried to fill the void. But they were outmanoeuvred by Mahmut II, who disbanded and massacred the Janissaries in 1826, and set in train the process of westernizing reforms which continued under his successors. The reforms, known collectively as *Tanzimat* (the establishment of order), were crowned by the adoption of the Ottoman constitution in 1876 at the beginning of the reign of Abdülhamit II. Although within fifteen months the sultan had suspended indefinitely the sessions of parliament, the process of modernization in education, communications and administration went on throughout his despot's reign.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Ottoman state had developed a military and civil administrative machine fashioned on European models. Power was transferred from traditional groups

– the Janissaries, feudal levies, the *ulema* (Muslim divines), guilds, provincial notables – to European-style bureaucracy. Improvements in communications – the building of the first railways and the establishment of an effective telegraph network – allowed this bureaucracy to carry out the orders of the sultan and his ministers much more thoroughly than had ever been possible before. The Ottoman state had always traded with the world. By the end of the nineteenth century, it had become integrated in the world trading system through better communications, lower customs tariffs and foreign investments.

Thus the Ottoman state came to resemble, at least superficially, its neighbours to the west and north – the Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires. Like them, it was multi-ethnic. Like them, it was dynastic, while being ruled bureaucratically. Like them, it was threatened not so much by maladministration as by the interplay between foreign foes and separatist movements, which had won the allegiance of subject nationalities at home. But there was this difference: not just the rulers, but the national communities from which the rulers had come in Austria-Hungary and, to a lesser extent in Russia had been trained in the new learning. In the Ottoman state, on the other hand, while the rulers had become enlightened, the mass of Muslims, who, in spite of the reforms, still constituted the ruling community, maintained in their illiteracy the habits of the pre-modern age. Contrary to the views of Muslim reformers, and to the claims of nationalist agitators among subject communities, it was not so much the Ottoman state as the Muslim community which was behind the times.

The Ottoman state kept its multi-ethnic character throughout its existence. Ottoman civilization was the common product of distinct religious communities speaking many different languages, coexisting within the same society while keeping their separate corporate identities. True, non-Muslim communities were not always content with their subordinate status. Particularly in the Balkans agrarian discontent often had an ethnic component, since the major landowners were Muslim. Christian merchants and tradesmen had different grievances, in that they were denied a political status commensurate with their wealth. Often religious solidarity overrode Ottoman loyalty, as Ottoman Christians looked to the protection of the Christian powers of Europe and sometimes sided with them in war. But then Muslims – Kurds, Arabs and local Ottoman governors wishing to consolidate their autonomy – were also open to subversion by the sultan's foes.

Muslims and non-Muslims were to be found in various proportions throughout the empire. But there were certain geographical and occupational patterns. Slav, Vlach (Romanian) and Albanian Christians made up a large part of the peasant population of the interior of the Balkan peninsula. Greeks were concentrated along the coasts, with the exception of the Turkish-speaking Greek Orthodox (known as Karamanlı) of central Anatolia, while Greek merchant communities were to be found in most towns.

The Armenians had begun to spill out of their original homeland on the eastern Anatolian plateau in late Byzantine times. Under the Ottomans they provided most of the artisans and tradesmen of Anatolia. Ottoman architecture, ceramics, textiles – areas of endeavour where the Ottoman state made a lasting contribution to world civilization – relied in large measure on Armenian craftsmen. Armenian merchants were busy in the overland trade with Asia and were generally dominant in Anatolia.

There were Jewish communities in most market towns in the Balkans and Anatolia. Istanbul, where the chief rabbi (*hahambaşı*) was deemed by the Ottoman government to be in charge of all the Jews in the empire, contrary to the tradition of Jewish communal self-government, was home to an important community; so were Salonica and İzmir (Smyrna). Most Jews, outside the Arab-speaking

provinces, traced their descent to refugees from Spain and Portugal, who had been welcomed in the Ottoman empire after their expulsion by the Catholic Kings. The Jews prospered in the years of Ottoman greatness, then went into decline, as local Christians came to control trade with Christian Europe, and did not rise again in society until the second half of the nineteenth century, when the Jewish community was reinvigorated by the spread of new learning, mainly from France, and began replacing Christian competitors who laboured increasingly under the suspicion of disloyalty.

The degree to which the different religious communities mixed varied with time and place. They usually came together in work, while living in separate neighbourhoods and villages. The *şeriat* code allowed Muslim men to take Christian or Jewish wives, but did not allow non-Muslims to marry Muslim women. Converts to Islam were welcomed, but forced conversions were banned in theory, and rare in practice. However, thousands converted to Islam in the centuries of Ottoman expansion. In the Balkans, mainly they came from communities which had been marginalized under Christian rule. In the Balkans, most Muslims were descendants of Slav and Albanian converts. Among Jews, there was an important wave of conversion to Islam after the failure of the Messianic movement led by Sabetai Sevi in the seventeenth century. His followers, and later converts from Judaism to Islam, retained until recent times a separate identity within the Muslim community, where they were known as *dönme* (converts) or *Selânikli* (people from Salonica).

Broadly speaking, the Muslims were employed by the state, which they served as soldiers and civilian officials; they were also landowners and peasants. The non-Muslims provided almost all the merchants, tradesmen and craftsmen, as well as making up a part of the peasant population. Because of their religious affinity with western Europe, Ottoman Christians took to new learning long before their Muslim neighbours.

Ottoman law and practice classified people by their religion. The Muslims were thus treated as a single community. But this community was divided in practice by language and way of life. In the Balkans, the main languages spoken by Muslims were Albanian, Serbo-Croat, Bulgarian, Greek and Turkish. In Anatolia, the Muslims spoke Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic and Caucasian languages. Ottoman Turkish – an amalgam of Turkish, Arabic and Persian – was the official, bureaucratic language of the state. Socially, there were important divisions between town and country, and between settled and nomadic populations. The state was based on towns. Thus urban Arabs were part of the state; nomadic Bedouins and Kurds were outside it.

Ethnic separatism did not become a threat to the cohesion of the Ottoman state until the beginning of the nineteenth century. Its roots were both at home and abroad. Discontent was home-grown; the ideology of nationalism came from Europe. Local risings, followed by European intervention – usually in the shape of wars launched by Russia – had led by 1878 to the creation of the independent states of Greece, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro. Bulgaria had become autonomous as a prelude to full independence; Bosnia and Herzegovina had come under the administration of Austria-Hungary, and Cyprus under that of Britain.

In Europe, the Ottoman state was reduced to Albania, Macedonia and Thrace – territories running in a broad strip from the Adriatic to the Turkish straits. In Asia, it ruled over Anatolia (with the exception of a north-eastern corner ceded to Russia in 1878) and the Arab lands. Egypt was theoretically under Ottoman suzerainty, but had in effect been lost to the sultans after the establishment of the Muhammad Ali dynasty at the beginning of the nineteenth century. However, the Ottomans still ruled Libya (Tripolitania and Cyrenaica), either directly or through local chieftains.

In 1893, an Ottoman census, which excluded Libya as well as territories no longer under the effective jurisdiction of the sultan, gave the total population of the state as 17 million.<sup>3</sup> It was



certainly an underestimate, as many people avoided the registrars for fear of taxation and conscription, and, more importantly, as local customs did not allow many women to be counted. But this is the best indication we have of the population of the state, and the numbers of the religious communities within it, roughly at the time of Atatürk's birth. Of the 17 million, some 12.5 million were shown as Muslims. Of the rest, there were over 2 million Greeks, under a million Bulgarians, just over a million Gregorian, and another 150,000 Catholic and 37,000 Protestant Armenians, 180,000 Jews, and some 240,000 foreigners (most of whom were natives holding foreign passports).

In Ottoman possessions in Europe (excluding Istanbul, its suburbs and the Aegean islands), there were, according to the census, 1.4 million Muslims, out of a total population of 3.1 million. Most of the sultan's Muslim subjects lived in Asia. While official statistics made no mention of the mother tongue of residents, it was common knowledge that the greatest concentration of Turkish speakers was in Anatolia. Anatolia, the first Byzantine territory conquered by the Selçuk Turks, was still the Turkish heartland as the Ottoman centuries drew to a close.

At the end of the nineteenth century the ruling Muslim community of the Ottoman empire was gripped by anxiety. Their state had been in retreat for two centuries. Every time a province was lost, waves of Muslim refugees poured into the sultan's remaining possessions. In the Balkans, the first mass flight of Muslims followed the Greek rising of 1821 and the establishment of the Greek kingdom under European protection in 1830. This migration of Muslims was dwarfed by the influx of refugees during and after the Russian-Turkish war of 1877–8. Muslims flooded in from Bulgaria, which became independent in all but name. They came from Thessaly, which was ceded to Greece, a country not involved in the war, but deemed by the European great powers to deserve compensation for the gains achieved by countries which had been.

Even more Muslim refugees had come from the lands conquered by Russia in its advance to the south. Although most of these lands had been under Ottoman suzerainty only briefly, their inhabitants saw in the Ottoman state their protector and their refuge. First came hundreds of thousands of Turkish-speaking Tartars from the Crimea and the surrounding steppes, then the majority of Circassians and Abkhazians from the western Caucasus, and large numbers of Chechens from the northern slopes of the Caucasus, of Lezgis and other Daghanis from its eastern slopes, of Muslim Georgians from Transcaucasia.

A younger contemporary of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Turkish writer Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, born in a refugee settlement on the outskirts of Edirne (Adrianople), wrote in his autobiography:

I was born during a war – the 1897 Turkish-Greek war. These were not tranquil years. They were pregnant with a blood-perplexing century ... Ours was a refugee neighbourhood. The flotsam of torrents of refugees torn by wars and massacres from the Crimea, Dobruja, and the banks of the Danube, had been pushed back here step by step, as armies suffered defeat after defeat for one hundred and fifty, two hundred years, and as frontiers contracted ... In our neighbourhood of refugees, every family had come from a different place, and every one had a different story to tell about the places where they had stopped and whence they had fled. Day by day the number of people grew, as new refugees made their way through the frontier. When they abandoned their homes, their land, their birthplaces, these newcomers threw supplies of food, cooking utensils, blankets and bedding into oxcarts and took to the road. Women and children were perched on top of the loads. These miserable convoys were the returning remnants of the conquering armies that had settled in the Balkans, the banks of the Danube, and further afield, and had built towns, castles and villages ... <sup>4</sup>

Everywhere, Muslims were haunted by the thought that they were losing the state (*devlet elden gidiyor*, 'the state is slipping from our hands', or in the case of Turks who had adopted the terminology of the French Revolution, *vatan elden gidiyor*, 'the fatherland is slipping from our hands'). 'How can the state be saved?' was the question Muslims asked themselves. But who

Ottoman reformers tried to save their dominions by adopting European ways, Muslim conservatives saw another threat, that of losing their traditional religion (*din elden gidiyor*, '[our] religion slipping from our hands').

The feeling of Muslim insecurity was particularly strong in Macedonia. The province, except for its chief city of Salonica and the Chalcidice peninsula south of it, had been included in Greater Bulgaria, under the treaty of San Stefano (Ayastefanos, now Ye şilköy in Turkish), imposed by the victorious Russian army in 1878. When a few months later, as a result largely of British opposition to such a drastic extension of Russian influence, the treaty was revised at the Congress of Berlin, and Macedonia was reassigned to the Ottoman state, local Muslims could not but feel that the reprieve was temporary. The feeling found confirmation in the outbreak of guerrilla activity in Macedonia. This was spearheaded by the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO), founded in 1893. IMRO drew its supporters from among Eastern Orthodox Slav-speaking Macedonians, whose grievances were partly ethnic and partly agrarian. Its slogan was 'Macedonia for the Macedonians' and its official aim was the creation of an autonomous Macedonia within a Balkan federation.

But, to the extent that it existed at all, the Macedonian identity was uncertain. The Slav language spoken in the province was barely distinguishable from Bulgarian, and Bulgarian nationalists refused to concede the existence of a separate Macedonian nationality. Even so, Bulgarian military intelligence cooperated with IMRO in the hope of making a reality of the Greater Bulgaria, promised at San Stefano only to be snatched away in Berlin. Seeing in IMRO an instrument of Bulgarian expansionism, Greek and Serbian intelligence services sought to counter it by setting up their own guerrilla bands to promote their claims to the province. But as everybody fought everybody else – the various Christian nationalists both each other and the Ottoman government, as everybody terrorized the local population, all actors kept an eye on the behaviour of the European great powers. It was the great powers which had imposed the treaty of Berlin, and which were now pressing, singly or in varying combinations, for reforms in the remaining Ottoman dominions. Particularly among Muslims there was a feeling of dread in the face of the machinations and decisions of the great powers. Speaking of his schooldays in Edirne, Şevket Süreyya Aydemir wrote:

Our conception of the great powers [the Ottoman Turkish term *düvel-i muazzama* can also be rendered as 'huge powers'] was vague. But what we understood and believed was that everything that the great powers wanted was harmful to our Ottoman state. After all, even in our own city of Edirne, the consuls of the great powers, driving through the streets in their carriages and the consulate *kavases* [locally recruited guards, usually of Montenegrin origin], walking the streets in their gold-braided uniforms, looked down on us, as if from a great height.<sup>5</sup>

Muslims reacted to the threat by trying to strengthen their state and also by imitating the behaviour of their Christian neighbours. The same author remembered:

Our most popular game was to play at bands [*çete*, guerrilla band; *çeteci*, bandit] and committees [*komite*, secret organization; *komiteci* or *komitacı*, member of such an organization, and, by extension, nationalist terrorist]. First, we chose *kaptans* [from Greek *kapetanos*, captain] and *voivodas* [a Slav word for military leader] ... from among the strongest and bravest of the children, who then split up into groups. Those who took part in the game would turn back the edges of their fezes to make them look like the fur hats (*kalpak*) worn by Greek and Bulgarian bandits ... Instead of knives and guns, they stuck sticks and pieces of wood into their belts, and instead of bombs, they filled their pockets and sashes with stones.<sup>6</sup>

A culture of violence spread throughout the Ottoman state. It was the product of violent European strains – exemplified first by the Italian *carbonari* and then by the anarchists – grafted on to local habits of lawlessness. The gun, the knife, the grenade, assumed symbolic significance. They were used in secret initiation ceremonies in incongruous combinations with crosses, Bibles and Korans; the

appeared in the emblems of secret nationalist organizations and the bannerheads of their literature. But there was this difference between Christian and Muslim communities: among the former nationalism, although originally a secular movement, combined with religion, and clerics often encouraged or even took part in violent action; among the Muslims, nationalism developed in opposition to religion. The Muslim religious establishment stood for the whole Muslim community (*ümmet*), and not for the nations that were arising in its midst. On the other hand, the Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Churches, and the Armenian Gregorian Church, had become by the end of the nineteenth century bearers of their respective nationalist ideologies.

Hard-pressed by external and internal enemies, the Muslim community was also threatened by a decline in numbers. This was partly due to the effect of wars, as Muslims, outside Istanbul and certain other exempted areas, were subject to conscription, while non-Muslims did not, as a rule, serve in Ottoman armed forces. Another reason for the relative decline of the Muslim population was its backwardness in new European learning, and, in particular, medical knowledge. This made for high rates of morbidity and mortality. Most doctors and pharmacists were non-Muslims, and the majority of Muslims still relied on traditional Hippocratic or folk medicine. Poverty, which came with backwardness, also depressed health standards.

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was born during the reign of Abdülhamit II, the last Ottoman sultan to exercise autocratic power. Abdülhamit came to the throne in 1876, at the age of 34, in the middle of a domestic and an international crisis, which, not for the first time, threatened the survival of the state. In 1875, the Christian peasantry had risen in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In 1876, nationalist agitation led to a rising among the Bulgarians, which was suppressed with heavy loss of life. The massacre of Bulgarian villagers by bands of Muslim irregulars outraged public opinion in Russia, Britain and elsewhere. Statesmen who sought to preserve the Ottoman state were correspondingly weakened. The European great powers demanded immediate reforms. A constitutional party, which had arisen among the higher ranks of the Ottoman bureaucracy, tried to counter foreign-backed demands for local self-government by advocating voluntary reform throughout the empire. Liberal Ottoman bureaucrats convinced themselves that parliamentary government under a constitutional monarch would hold the state together and satisfy foreign critics. There was also strong Muslim religious agitation, directed against foreigners and against ineffective government at home. Abdülhamit II came to the throne as the candidate of the constitutional party.

The first Ottoman constitution was duly proclaimed on 23 December 1876, and parliament assembled on 19 March 1877. But instead of appeasing the Russians, parliament only served to hasten the tsar's declaration of war. On 14 February 1878, after the Ottoman armies had been defeated by the Russians, Abdülhamit dissolved parliament. While the constitution remained theoretically in force, the sultan thereafter ruled the country as an autocrat. His first task was the reconstruction of the Ottoman state which had lost territory both in Europe and in Asia.

Conditions were difficult: the country was flooded with refugees, the treasury was bankrupt, and the havoc caused by military operations had led to famine in some areas, notably in eastern Anatolia. Domestic peace was disrupted as nationalist agitation continued among Christians in Macedonia, and started among Armenians in Anatolia. Abdülhamit managed the crisis by exploiting the differences among his foreign and domestic foes. He used Russia against Britain, and Germany against both. He formed tribal regiments among the Kurds, on the lines of the Russian Cossacks. They were a means of co-opting and bribing unruly Kurdish tribes, and they helped keep Armenian nationalists at bay. But when attacks by Armenian nationalists led to violent and, usually, disproportionate retaliation by local



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