

THE DECLINE
AND FALL OF THE
OTTOMAN
EMPIRE

ALAN PALMER

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PREFACE



THE GREATEST HISTORIAN OF AN EMPIRE'S DECLINE AND FALL decided on the immense theme of his life's work when he 'sat musing on the Capitol, while the bare-footed fryars were chanting their litanies in the temple of Jupiter'. A far humbler enterprise had its origins in musings at a site no less evocative than Gibbon had chosen, but to a background of less contemplative supplications: I was seated well above the Bosphorus, while sandal-footed tourists were ordering their luncheons on the terrace of the old Seraglio.

As I looked out from this historic palace to the long white classical façade of the Dolmabahçe and the green parkland of Yildiz beyond, I thought I would write almost entirely about the Sultans themselves. But when I left Istanbul I soon realized that this would be a mistake. In retrospect the most fascinating aspect of the Ottoman past is not a succession of rarely remarkable sovereigns, but the empire's geographical extent, and the way in which an astonishingly narrow ruling class imposed government on lands extending from the Danubian plains to the mountains of the Caucasus, the headwaters of the Gulf and the deserts of southern Arabia and North Africa. It has to be admitted that although the Ottoman Empire was pre-eminent in the Balkans and the Near East for more than six centuries, when it collapsed in the wake of the First World War no one was surprised to see it disappear: long before Tsar Nicholas I's casual complaint of having 'a sick man' on our hands, foreign observers were predicting the imminent downfall of so cumbersome an institution. But how did it survive so long? The decline was certainly not rapid, nor was it in any sense constantly progressive, a steady downward graph from the autumn of 1683 when, for the second time, an Ottoman army failed to take Vienna. The reforms which arrested the decline have a particular historical interest of their own; and so, too, do the reformers who attempted to put them into practice.

Modern historical fashion favours analysis by topics at the expense of narrative. Over the two and half centuries covered by the main body of this book there are constantly recurring problems: secular and religious authority; the inadequacies of a unique form of military feudalism; movements of population; the greed of powerful neighbours; and above all, uncertainty whether to borrow from the West or to seek inspiration from Ottoman origins in north-western Anatolia. But it is easy to perceive at work in these centuries H.A.L. Fisher's famous non-pattern of 'one emergency following upon another as wave followed upon wave'; and I have therefore planned the book primarily as a work of narrative history, reflecting the form of the highly personal autocracy established in the Ottoman Empire.

I must admit that when I began research into the material for this book, the Ottoman Empire seemed as irrelevant to what was going on around us as are the Wars of the Roses. Only in the Lebanon was there a long and sad continuity of conflict. Now, however, the Ottoman past is less remote. The dynasty may have gone, but many problems that plagued the later Sultans once more make the news. For two years the cycle of history has been spinning in top gear. Half forgotten place names are back in the headlines: towns like Basra, Mosul, Damascus or Diyarbakir; and distant

outposts in Bosnia-Herzegovina or Albania in the west and along the sea coast of the Gulf or the mountain chain of the Caucasus in the east. Once again we learn of the Kurdish struggle for survival and of Armenian aspirations for independence. We are reminded of the underlying Muslim character of Sarajevo—a place-name which for three-quarters of a century has been more generally associated with the Habsburgs than with the Ottomans. We read of rival nationalities re-emerging in Macedonia and of the clash of linguistic minorities in Bulgaria. And, more gradually, we are becoming aware of the nineteen Turkic languages which, having outlived the Soviet Union, threaten to allow an Ottoman ghost—or, at least, the shade of Enver Pasha—to disturb the early years of the new central Asian republics. With a Soviet empire falling so speedily that it had no time to go into decline, the fate of Russia's former Ottoman rival in the Black Sea becomes strangely topical.

Writing about a past empire spread over three continents inevitably presents problems of nomenclature. Where any place has a name in common English usage, e.g., Salonika, Damascus, Jaffa, I have used that form. Otherwise I have generally used the place-name current in the period of which I am writing. For most of the book, Istanbul therefore appears as Constantinople, Izmir as Smyrna, Trabzon as Trebizond. In doubtful cases I have employed what I assume to be the form most familiar to the reader, e.g., Edirne rather than Adrianople. To help identify places I include a list of alternative place-names after the main narrative. The reader will also find there the dates of the Sultans who reigned in Constantinople, and a glossary explaining some of the Ottoman terms used in the text, although I hope that I have also indicated their meaning at the first point in the narrative where they appear. For proper names—some of which are of Slavonic, Greek, Arabic or Persian origin—I use the forms which seem to me to look best in English, rather than the standard Turkish spelling system (which, of course, updates Ottoman usage). Commonly Anglicized words are given the accepted form—e.g. Pasha, Vizier. To linguistic purists offended by all such inconsistencies, I apologize.

My debt to earlier historians will be clear to any reader of the bibliography. I would like to thank the staffs of the Bodleian Library at Oxford, the London Library, the Public Record Office and the British Library for their ready assistance. At John Murray Ltd I have profited from the good advice and editorial direction of Grant McIntyre and Gail Pirkis and I am grateful, too, for Elizabeth Robinson's perceptive reading of typescript and proofs. My wife, Veronica, has helped me greatly: she accompanied me on every visit to the former Ottoman lands and, as well as compiling the index, has been a stimulating critic of the book, chapter by chapter. Once again she has my deepest thanks. The book is dedicated to my aunt, Elsie Perriam, in the hospitality of whose Devonshire home the drafts of some chapters were first written.

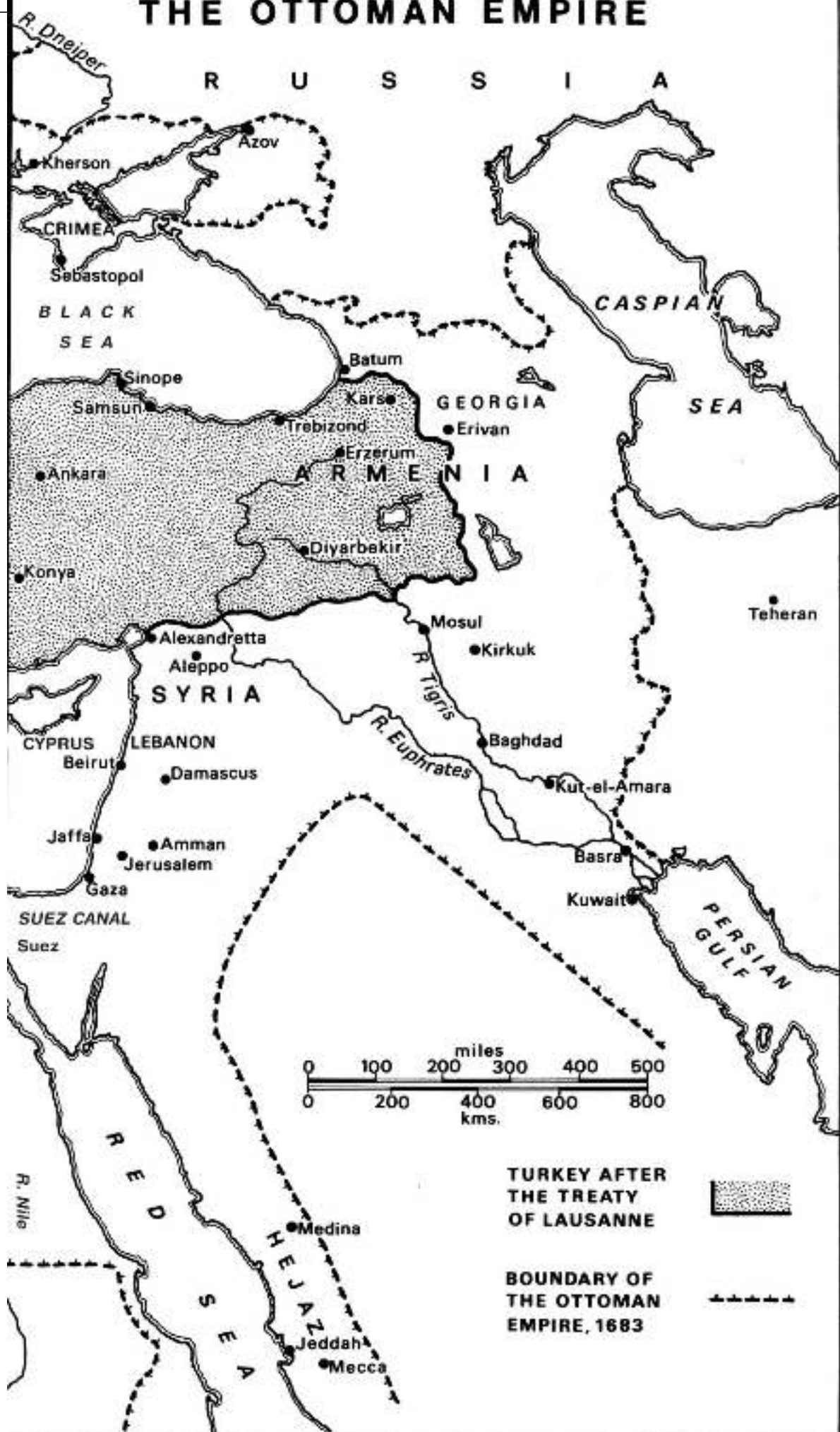
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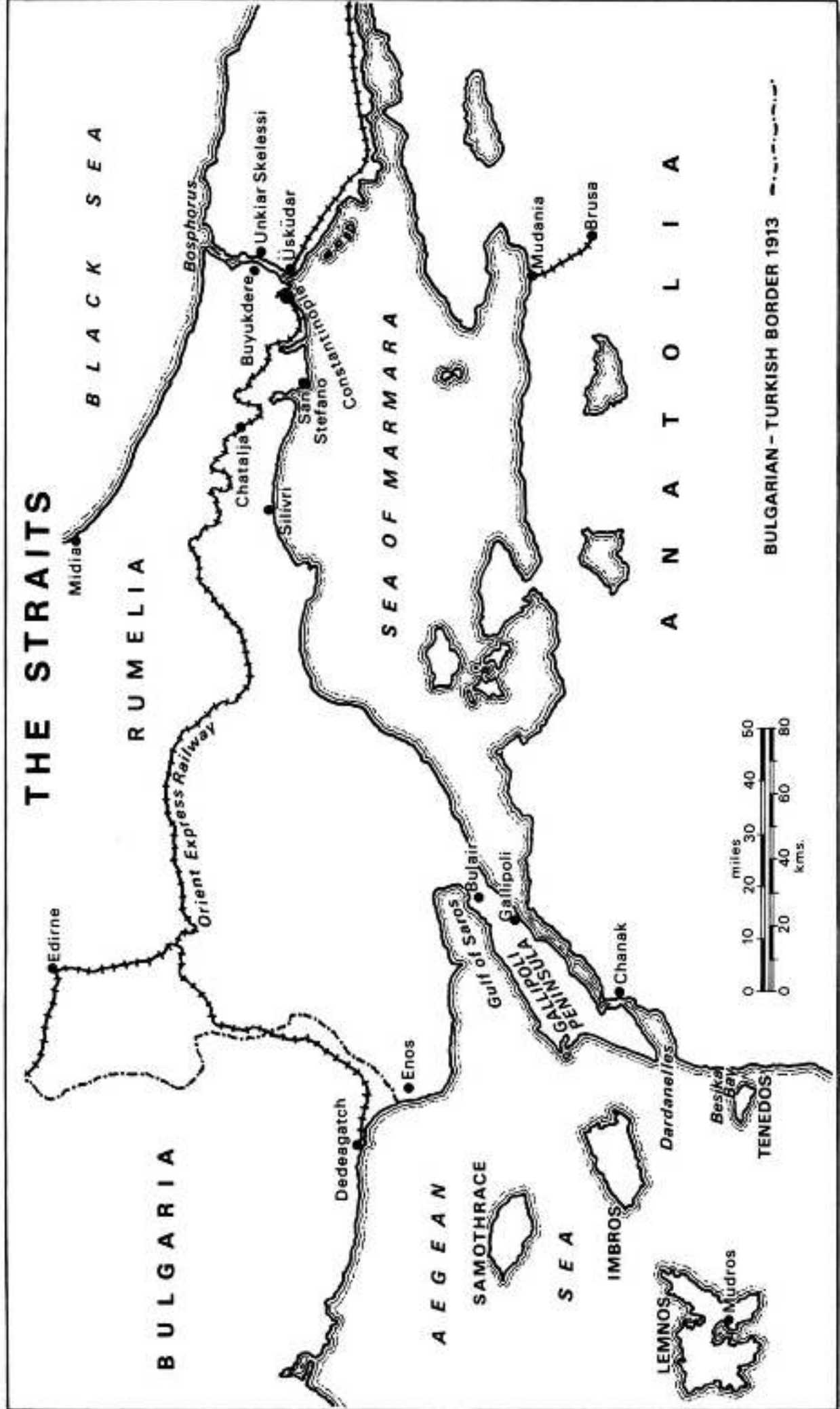
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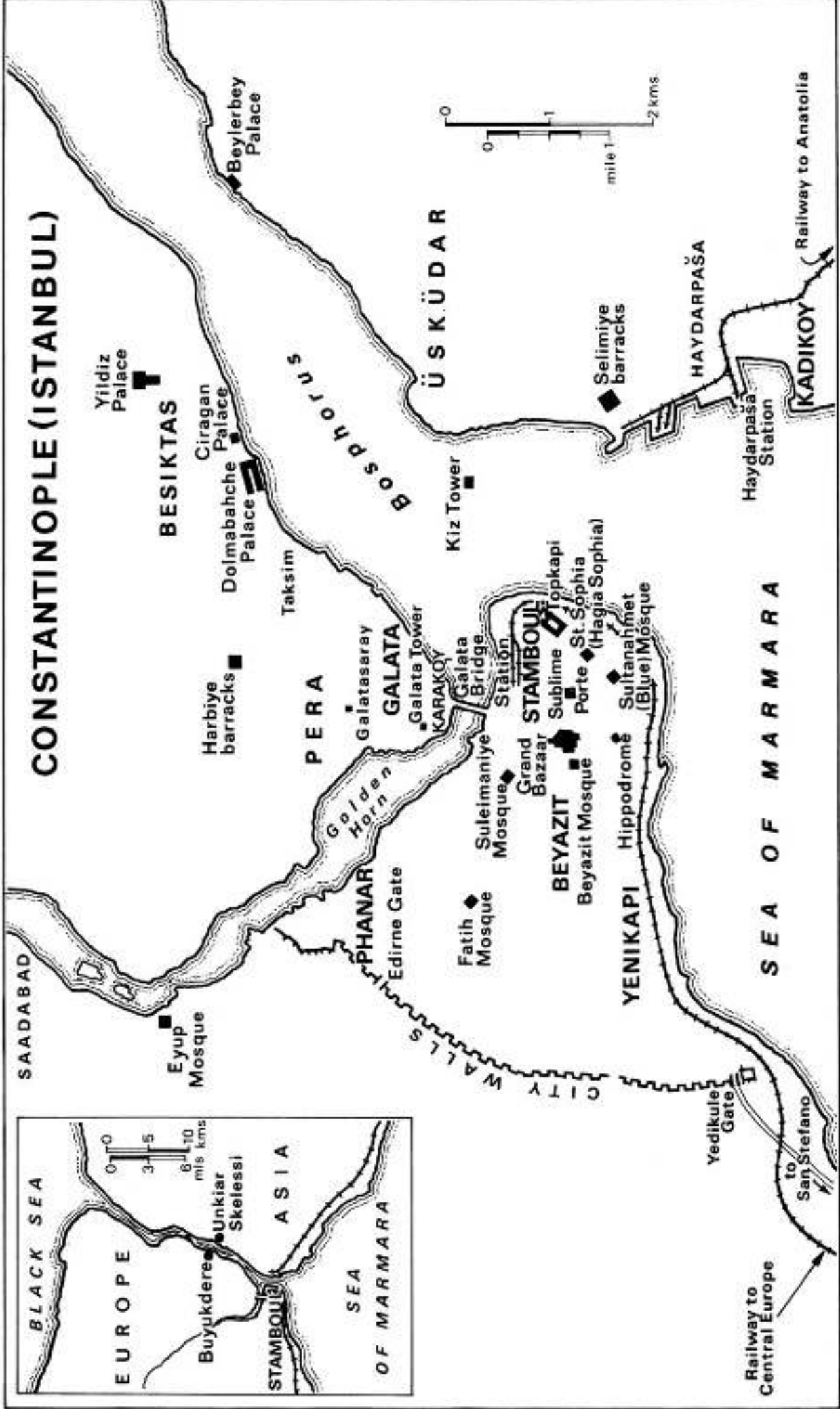
THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE



THE STRAITS



BULGARIAN - TURKISH BORDER 1913



PROLOGUE

OTTOMANS TRIUMPHANT



‘THERE NEVER HAS BEEN AND NEVER WILL BE A MORE DREADFUL happening’, wrote a monastic scribe in Crete when in June 1453 reports reached the island that Constantinople had fallen to the Turk. His tone of horror was echoed in papal Rome and republican Venice, in Genoa, Bologna, Florence and Naples, and in the trading cities of Aragon and Castile as the shock-wave spread across the continent. Only in England, where the imminent loss of Bordeaux to the French seemed of greater consequence, did the news arouse little concern. Elsewhere there was consternation. Constantinople may have become depopulated, impoverished and encircled by the Turks; already it had been sacked and looted in 1204 by the knights of the Fourth Crusade; but, in a medieval society increasingly conscious of its classical heritage, there lingered an idealized concept of Byzantium as the Christian legatee of Graeco-Roman civilization. Dismay was heightened by a sense of guilt. Emperor Constantine XI had called for armed support against the Muslim enemy. He received only negligible aid, together with the prospect of a coming unity between the Latin and Greek churches.

But Constantinople was doomed to fall. Only a massive relief expedition, together with diversionary assaults elsewhere around the Ottoman frontiers, might have saved it. Soon after sunrise on Tuesday 29 May 1453 the Sultan’s troops found a way through a small gate in the unassailable walls at the Kerkoporta. By sunset what remained of the pillaged city lay in their hands. Constantine XI Dragases, eighty-sixth Emperor of the Greeks, perished fighting in the narrow streets beneath the western walls. After more than eleven hundred years there would be no more Christian Emperors in the East.

When Sultan Mehmed II rode his grey into Constantinople late that Tuesday afternoon he went first to St Sophia, the Church of the Holy Wisdom, taking the basilica under his protection before ordering its conversion into a mosque. Some sixty-five hours later he returned there for the ritual Friday midday prayers. The transformation was symbolic of the Conqueror’s plans. Yet so, too, was his insistence on ceremonially investing a learned Orthodox monk to fill the vacant Patriarchal throne. For Mehmed sought continuity; the ‘dreadful happening’ was, for him, neither a terminal end of a world empire nor a new beginning for the Sultanate.¹ He was to appropriate more than Christian altars for the service of Islam. The laws of the Byzantine Emperors served as a model for the codification he initiated. Significantly, he added to his titles *Rum Kayseri* (Roman Caesar), proclaiming himself heir to the imperial tradition which once encompassed the shores of the Mediterranean and beyond. There had been Arab empires in the Middle East but these proved transient creations. In seeking to restore Constantinople to its old greatness Mehmed the Conqueror affirmed his belief in the permanence of the Ottoman Empire by giving the Turks a capital city in European ‘Rumelia’ which looked out across the narrow waterway towards the Anatolian highlands, whence they had come.

Originally the Turks were nomadic horsemen from Central Asia who embraced Islam in the ninth century. Under the Seljuk leader Tugrul they captured Baghdad, home of the earliest caliphate, eleven years before William of Normandy invaded England. The first major victory of Seljuk Turks over Christians followed in 1071, when a Byzantine army was defeated near Lake Van. Subsequently the Seljuks established a Sultanate, with its capital at Konya, on the site of the Greek city of Iconium. This Seljuk Sultanate survived until the first years of the fourteenth century, battered by pagan Mongol hordes. Local rulers then carved out principalities for themselves. Among them was Osman Söğüt, a settlement near modern Eskisehir in western Anatolia. His dynasty became known as the 'Osmanli' in Turkish and 'Othman' in Arabic, which was corrupted into 'Ottoman' in the languages of western Europe. Osman died in 1326 when his army was besieging the Byzantine city of Brusa (Bursa today), which was captured by his son and successor, Orhan. Brusa thus became the first effective capital of an Ottoman Sultanate which survived until 1922, although the city was succeeded as capital by Adrianople (now Edirne) in about 1364 and, some ninety years later, by present-day Istanbul.

The Ottoman Turks crossed the narrow Dardanelles into Europe in 1345 at the invitation of Emperor John V Paleologus, who sought their military aid against a usurper. So formidable were the Turkish horsemen that they speedily made vassals of the Bulgars and Serbs, consolidating their Balkan gains by a decisive victory over the southern Slavs in June 1389 at Kossovo. As early as 1366 the rapid growth of Islamic power in south-eastern Europe had led Pope Urban V to proclaim a crusade, but the Ottoman advance seemed irresistible. The 'Turks'—as the multiracial subjects of the Sultan were collectively misnamed in Central and Western Europe—were soon feared as 'wild beasts' and 'inhuman barbarians', much as the 'Norsemen' had been in the age of the Vikings. Even before the fall of Constantinople the Ottomans had penetrated deeply into Europe, mounting devastating raids across the farmland of southern Hungary. They were checked by János Hunyadi in Transylvania in 1442 and outside Belgrade in 1456, but seventy years later the full weight of the Ottoman armies was concentrated in Central Europe. At Mohács, on 29 August 1526, Sultan Suleiman I inflicted a terrible defeat on the Magyars: 24,000 dead were buried on the battlefield; 2,000 prisoners were massacred; thousands more were carried back as slaves to Constantinople.

Suleiman the Magnificent, tenth Ottoman Sultan and the fourth to take up residence in the conquered city, is historically the best known of all Turkey's rulers. His reign—from 1520 to 1566, the longest of any Sultan—marks the apogee of the Ottoman Empire. He was a splendid show-pageant prince, like his near contemporaries in the West, Henry VIII of England and Francis I of France (who formed an anti-Habsburg alliance with the Sultan). The Turks remember Suleiman primarily as a lawgiver who was also a poet and scholar and a patron of the arts; fittingly, his permanent monument is the Suleimaniye mosque complex which Mirman Sinan, the finest of Ottoman architects, built on the hillside looking out across the Golden Horn. Above all, Suleiman was a *ghazi* warrior, a soldier victorious on the Tigris as well as on the Danube, the conqueror of Belgrade, Buda and Rhodes. He ruled directly over much of southern Russia, over Transylvania, Hungary and the Balkans, Anatolia, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, and most of modern Iraq, Kuwait and the western shore of the Gulf. He was protector of Jerusalem and the Muslim holy places in modern Saudi Arabia and the overlord of Aden, the Yemen and all the North African coast from the Nile delta to the foothills of the Atlas Mountains.

Suleiman was more than a secular potentate. As *de facto* Caliph, he possessed a spiritual primacy among Muslim princes. He may also have been *de jure* Caliph; for the Caliphate, first held by the rulers of Baghdad and re-established in Egypt, had long been in eclipse. When Suleiman's father, Sultan Selim I, captured Cairo in 1517 the last Abbasid Caliph became an Ottoman pensionary, and he is said to have transferred the shadow dignity to his new sovereign.² This may well have been mere legend; no Sultan claimed the caliphate *de jure* until the Ottoman Empire was in decline. But Suleiman and his heirs certainly possessed authority in the Muslim world; the Sherif of Mecca had

sent Selim the keys of Medina and Mecca, placing the Holy Cities—and the pilgrim routes serving them—under his protection. On the other hand, the Sultans' religious authority was never acknowledged by zealous Shi'ites in Persia and Mesopotamia. Their divinely guided leaders claimed descent from Ali ibn Ab'Talib, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law (whose shrine is in the modern Iraqi city of Najaf).

The Ottoman Empire was, in origin, a military institution dedicated to fulfilling the sacred obligation of extending the 'Abode of Islam' by conquering the lands of the unbelievers. Even before the fall of Constantinople the warrior Sultans had begun to bolster their personal despotism by developing a system under which selected Christian-born slaves, converted to Islam, became an imperial bodyguard. From within this privileged caste the Sultans came to find most of their ministers (viziers) and military commanders (*agas*). Suleiman I completed the work of Mehmed II in modifying this machine, geared for continuous frontier war, into an imperial administration run by personal slaves through what were, in effect, armies of occupation.

'Whoever assaults the Turk must be prepared to meet his united forces . . . because those near the ruler's person, being all slaves and dependent, it will be more difficult to corrupt them.' This grudging admiration for Ottoman rule in Machiavelli's *The Prince*, written shortly before Suleiman's accession, points shrewdly to the basic source of strength in the imperial autocracy.³ It could not function without total reliance on 'those near the ruler's person'. For the efficient administration of his empire a strong Sultan could turn confidently to the *divan-i hümayun* (a council of ministers, and a court of law) and especially to his chief minister, the Grand Vizier, who was generally the most privileged of imperial slaves. But within this centralized state, the Sultan also had to depend on the loyalty of each governor (*beylerbey* or, later, *vali*) whom he appointed to a province (*beylerbik* or vilayet). Beneath the governor would be several beys, heads of each county (*sanjak*) in the province. Rank was shown by the title of Pasha accorded to governors and symbolized by the bestowal of ceremonial horsetails: one to a bey; two to a governor; three to the Grand Vizier; four to the Sultan himself.

A Sultan was more than an all-powerful sovereign. He was the greatest of land-owners; all newly conquered territory passed into his possession. In the cities, especially in the capital, most landed property constituted *vakif*, a pious foundation (plural *evkaf*) under the control of a religious institution but when Suleiman came to the throne, almost ninety per cent of land outside the towns was, technically, crown property and therefore under state ownership. By using this crown land as a basic source of revenue for his government, Suleiman built up an Islamic counterpart to Western feudalism exploiting the slave basis of the empire, even at the lowest level in the social scale. In the Balkans and Anatolia a fief (*timar*) of land would be allocated to a mounted soldier (*sipahi*) who, while having no rights of ownership, became the Sultan's representative on the 'estates' assigned to him. The *sipahi* was charged with the maintenance of order, and with encouraging agriculture so as to raise the yield from the fields; but, above all, he was responsible for collecting agreed taxes from the peasants which, after deducting a sum for the upkeep of himself, his horse and his family, he would forward to the central government. It was a cumbrous system, needing the maintenance of a co-ordinated discipline across the empire in order to intimidate the feudatories into collaboration. Under Suleiman this *timar* system worked; he died with a full treasury.⁴ Less skilful Sultans did not.

The Caliphate ensured that Suleiman could bring an aura of Koranic respectability to vexatious exigencies of government. If he sought an interpretation of Islamic Holy Law (*şeriat*), he might turn to the collective wisdom of Muslim divines, as voiced by the religious establishment (*ulema*). More specifically, he would seek and receive authoritative advice from its hierarchical leaders, an inner circle known as the *ilmiye*, whose chief spokesman was the *şeyhülislâm* (Chief Mufti). The *ulema* were a favoured section of the community, exempt from taxation; they decided, not only strictly religious

matters, but questions concerning the form of justice practised in the state, and the character and conduct of education as well. Important rulings would be issued in the form of a carefully considered legal opinion (*fetva*), generally in the name of the Chief Mufti. For Suleiman the *şeriat* was a sound support for government, a source of reference from which there could be no appeal.⁵

Almost imperceptibly, these religious institutions began to provide Ottoman government with a constitutional check, limiting a Sultan's autocracy. So respected were the religious leaders that they could even deliberate on the worthiness of a Sultan to retain his throne. They never questioned Suleiman's regnal rights nor, more surprisingly, those of his successor, the aptly named 'Selim the Sot'. But by 1610 the influence of *ulema* and *ilmiye* in making or breaking sultans was considerable; and it remained so throughout the Empire. Of twenty-one Sultans whose reigns ended between 1612 and 1922, thirteen were deposed under the authority of a *fetva* given by the Chief Mufti in response to questions framed by political enemies on a sultan's observance of Holy Law.⁶

After Suleiman's death the qualities of kingship shown by the Sultans deteriorated rapidly. Although Selim was something of a scholar and his grandson Mehmed III led a successful campaign in Hungary, none were both fine warriors and wise rulers in the old tradition. No Sultan acceding later than 1595 had any experience of active military service before coming to the throne. Murad IV, the strong-willed sovereign on the throne between 1623 and 1640, showed ability as a military commander in the Caucasus and Mesopotamia, but he was forced to spend much of his reign reasserting his authority over rebellious soldiery in the provinces. And though Murad was an able Sultan even he died from heavy drinking at the early age of thirty-one. Most rulers contentedly left the shaping of policy to others at court—to a Grand Vizier or an *aga*. Of particular influence in several reigns during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were the intrigues of a *Valide Sultana* (Princess Mother); palace power games were played with such intensity in these years that they have been called 'the Age of the Favoured Women'.

Modern academics frown austerely at so romantic and evocative a label. But even if they minimize the significance of harem politics, historians concede that by the mid-seventeenth century there is ample evidence of an empire slipping into decline.⁷ They can point to at least six signs of chronic weakness: inflation, exacerbated by cheap silver from Peru circulated by traders from Genoa and Ragusa (Dubrovnik) and causing a threefold increase in the cost of basic food; failings in the pyramidal structure of *timar* tax collection; the growth of banditry, following a population explosion in Anatolia; ruinous fires in several overcrowded cities; an inflexible adherence to old ways of waging war and governing conquered lands; and (from 1536 onwards) the grant of 'Capitulations'—the treaties which, by giving special legal rights and tariff concessions to Europeans who resided within the Ottoman Empire, ensured that profitable trades should fall increasingly into foreign hands. Yet although modern historians may acknowledge that the Ottoman Empire had passed its zenith, these signs of crumbling power went unperceived by contemporaries, whether they were the Sultan's subjects, or foreign observers. Even in decline the Ottomans clung to their cherished mission of thrusting the frontiers of Islam deeper into the marchlands of Christendom. Only when the seventeenth century was well into its final quarter did the truth begin to dawn on Western monarchs. It was then, in 1683, that, from news of a battle in the hills above Vienna, they recognized that the Sultan's armies were as fallible as their own. The legendary 'Grand Turk' need no longer be feared.

That he possessed astonishing powers of resilience, they were equally slow to perceive.

CHAPTER 1

FLOODTIDE OF ISLAM



IT WAS 7 JULY 1683, AND THE PEOPLE OF VIENNA SWELTERED restlessly under the sultry heat of a midsummer evening. Since early that Wednesday morning, when Emperor Leopold I returned hurriedly from hunting stags in the Wienerwald, fearful rumours had swept through the city. A vast Turkish army was said to be advancing westwards from the Alföld, the cultivated Hungarian plain around Lake Balaton. For several days thousands of refugees had poured into the Habsburg capital, bringing tales of burning villages and of savage atrocities on men, women and children. Now, from high ground east of the city, onlookers could see a great dust storm; it was raised, they said, by the approach of warrior horsemen following the green banners of Islam in a frenzied assault on Catholic Christendom.

Ottoman Turks had fought Christians, Orthodox or Catholic, for many generations, and there is no doubt that by now the Sultan's armies were less formidable than when the Janissaries stormed the walls of Constantinople. But even if the people of Vienna had been aware of signs of weakness in the approaching enemy, the knowledge would have brought them little comfort. In 1683, as in Shakespeare's day, 'the Turk' was still regarded as 'the terror of the world'. For a century and a half, the heartland of Hungary had been subject to the Sultan's rule. As far west as Esztergom, where Hungary's sainted king Stephen was born long before Habsburg or Ottoman entered history, a cluster of minarets crowned the fortress hill above the Danube. And, for the Viennese, it remained an unpleasant thought that Esztergom was within a hundred miles of the Wienerwald.

Yet, as an episode in folk legend, the peril was not unfamiliar to them. Three years after Hungary's disastrous defeat at Mohács it had looked as if the Habsburg capital, too, might soon pass under Turkish rule. In September and October 1529 Sultan Suleiman I had encircled Vienna with a quarter a million men and three hundred siege guns, only to pull back into Hungary when endless rain threatened to bog down his army in the mire. The danger had receded, but the nightmare fear of Turkish invasion remained throughout the years of the Counter-Reformation. After 1529 Austrian prelates, alarmed by Suleiman's deep incursion into Catholic Christendom, insisted that the parochial clergy of central Europe should establish a warning system, the *Türkenglocken*, a peal of bells which would alert the soldiery to the coming of the Turks and summon the Catholic faithful to pray for deliverance from Islam.

A century passed with no need for the *Türkenglocken* to ring out across Austria. Once Suleiman's long reign ended in 1566 the Sultanate, weakened by palace rivalry and intrigue, became militarily a less formidable institution. But the latent menace of Ottoman invasion was ever-present; and the church bells tolled their warning in July 1664, when a powerful army was thrown back at Szentgotthárd on Hungary's historic western frontier. Now, in this stifling summer of 1683, Vienna was threatened yet again with Turkish occupation. After a winter and spring of negotiations between

Austrian and Ottoman diplomats, the vanguard of a massive army had crossed the western edge of the Hungarian plain in late June. Fighting alongside the invaders were Hungarian insurgents led by an ambitious Magyar nobleman, Imre Tököly. But what most alarmed the Austrians were the irregular *akinji* outriders, undisciplined skirmishers plundering far ahead of the main, well-disciplined Ottoman army. When, on this first Wednesday in July, news reached Emperor Leopold that the crescent flag was flying over the citadel of Győr, he thought the threat imminent. Győr was only eighty-five miles away: the imperial family would leave Vienna at once before the dreaded *akinji* closed in upon the capital.

At eight o'clock that evening a cavalcade of heavy carriages set out from the Hofburg, lumbering across the moat bridge of the Schweizerhof Court to head for the road westward, towards Melk and Linz. The departure of the imperial family confirmed the people of Vienna's worst fears. Hundreds of refugees sought to accompany the Emperor and his escort, so impeding their progress that the nine-mile journey to Korneuburg took four hours. As Leopold stepped down from his carriage soon after midnight, he could look back over Vienna and see the spire of the Stephans-Dom silhouetted against glowing eastern rim of hills fringed with fire.¹

But as the invaders approached Vienna they checked their pace of advance. The best troops had already travelled more than halfway across Europe, covering almost a thousand miles since leaving their barracks beside the Bosphorus at the end of March. Now, with the wooded hills of the Wienerwald in sight, their commander anticipated a stiffening resistance. He was not to know there were serious gaps in the defences of the *Antemurale Christianitatis*, 'the Front Line of Christendom' (as a Dutch contemporary called Vienna); and he was sceptical of reports from deserters that the city was garrisoned by no more than 12,000 regular troops. Not until Tuesday, 16 July—six days after Emperor Leopold's flight—did the Turkish vanguard reach the outer line of Vienna's fortifications.

In 1529 Sultan Suleiman I had conducted the siege of Vienna in person, receiving on the plains beside the Danube the first check to Ottoman arms in seventeen years of war on three continents. Not that Suleiman had been defeated; he had merely failed to capture a city which seemed less naturally defensible than so many fortresses already taken along the middle Danube. But by 1683 the character of the Sultanate was different. Mehmed IV, who had been on the throne for the preceding thirty-five years, was a spendthrift hedonist, a vigorous horseman but no soldier; in Ottoman history he is labelled '*Mehmed Avçi*' (Mehmed the Hunter) and he is remembered, in epic verse as well as in prose for mobilizing thousands of peasants as beaters in the woods around Edirne. Eight years after his accession he had the good fortune to find a gifted family who provided him with two first-rate Grand Viziers, Mehmed Köprülü and his son, Fazil Ahmed. Their reforms and administrative efficiency brought him the full treasury into which he dipped for his hunting campaigns, but they also enabled him to raise the powerful force which set out on this second march on Vienna. Sultan Mehmed was prepared to ride as far as Belgrade with his troops. He would not, however, risk a personal rebuff. Far better to entrust so ambitious an enterprise to his close companion Kara Mustafa, who on Fazil Ahmed's death in November 1676 had become Grand Vizier.²

No Ottoman commander possessed greater military experience. In 1672 on the river Dniester Kara Mustafa had outwitted the great Polish soldier, John Sobieski, to secure the fortress of Kamenets Podolsky for the Turks and their Tatar vassals. Two years later he had taken the town of Uman, having his Christian captives flayed and sending their stuffed hides as a gift to the Sultan. His origins remain decently obscure; he was not a Köprülü by birth, but had been educated and personally advanced as if he were Fazil Ahmed's foster-brother; and in June 1675 he strengthened his power at court by marrying Princess Küçük, daughter of the recipient of those grisly trophies from Uman. It was rumoured that the Grand Vizier brought with him a full complement of camp followers, including 1,500 concubines and 700 black eunuchs to guard them. Many grotesque tales of his way of life rest on

a basis of fact, but this legend is almost certainly apocryphal. Nevertheless, he seems to have possessed a sexual appetite difficult to satisfy and matched only by the scale of his ambition. To succeed where Suleiman failed would make him as famous a commander on land as Hayruddin 'Barbarossa' at sea, more than a century before.

He began by showing great efficiency. Within two days of inspecting Vienna's outer defences he completed the investment of the city. On 14 July a bad fire wrecked many town palaces of the magnates, the smoke drifting over the Ottoman lines causing Kara Mustafa to fear that Vienna might be in ruins by the time the prize fell into his hands. Accordingly he gave orders for the construction of a huge camp beyond the fortifications and siege works, a military headquarters which would make a worthy home for the Sultan's paladin. Within little more than a week a tented city sprang up between Vienna itself and the north-western hills of the Wienerwald. His adversaries were much impressed by this curious display of Ottoman splendour. An Italian count serving in the Habsburg army has left a description written that summer: 'It is impossible for anyone to conceive how broad a stretch of land they covered. Centred in the middle of the camp arose the Grand Vizier's pavilion, looking like some splendid palace surrounded by several villas, the tents being of different colours, all of which made for a richly pictorial diversity.'³ More than three centuries after the siege, Vienna still possesses a Türkenschanz Park. But it is no longer an open space. A wealth of fine trees surrounds the hillock at the centre of the old Turkish encampment. Felicitously, there is also an 'adventure playground' for the young.

For sixty days Kara Mustafa remained in his palatial camp, concentrating 200,000 men around the twelve bastions and defensive palisades of the city walls. The Austrian campaign confirmed not only his personal reputation for cruelty, but the widespread belief in Western Europe that the Sultan's troops were a barbarian horde. In reality, the Ottoman regular army was no better and no worse than other campaigners. It was otherwise with their commander; Kara Mustafa, though casual in his religious observance, exhibited a fanatical hatred of Christians; he was 'the scourge of mankind', a Venetian envoy wrote to the Doge.⁴ He retained a row of severed heads to commemorate his seizure of Hainburg, a fortified village some twenty miles down the Danube; and on 16 July his troops slaughtered four thousand villagers in outlying Perchtoldsdorf. During the first week of the siege he ordered the systematic killing of prisoners, exhibiting their heads to demoralize the Austrian troops manning the defences. By late July marauding *akinji* horsemen, over whom Kara Mustafa had little control, were sweeping up the Danube, carrying rapine and devastation as far west as Enns. Only a few fortified abbeys, like Melk, high on a cliff face above the river, survived as Christian islands cut off by this raging floodtide of Islam.

Emperor Leopold I—by now in Passau—urgently sought aid. Subsidies from the Pope, a rush of volunteers from the young nobility in northern Italy and Franconian Germany, and the mustering of armies by the Electors of Bavaria and Saxony, held hope of relief for Vienna. There remained, too, the prospect of substantial backing from the crack Polish troops of King John Sobieski, once they could complete a long march southwards from beyond the Carpathians; Sobieski had old scores to settle with Kara Mustafa. Yet it could be argued that the chief hope for Vienna lay in the weaknesses of the Grand Vizier's character, in the greed which made him at heart no better than a bandit chieftain. A frontal assault on the city, with walls breached and the attackers granted the traditional three days of looting, street by street, would prove less profitable for him personally than a capitulation on agreed terms; a formal surrender would allow him to secure for his own coffers the rich booty of Vienna's remaining palaces and churches. Only in the last days of August, as John Sobieski's advance column reached the northern bank of the Danube, did Kara Mustafa finally give up hope of starving the city into surrender and order an all-out attack on its southern defences.

By 7 September Sobieski had made contact with the Germans under Charles, Duke of Lorraine, and

a relief army of 80,000 troops was concentrated along the northern crest of the Wienerwald. On that Tuesday evening, camp fires on the Kahlenberg heights let Count Starhemberg, the commander of the Vienna garrison, know help was at hand. Kara Mustafa, too, saw the fires and, from interrogated prisoners, was well aware of the strength of the armies marching against him. Urgently he pressed the skilled Turkish *lagunçi* (sappers) into digging parallel trenches and tunnels to undermine Vienna's outer defences. An exploding mine at last breached the walls on the morning of 12 September. But it was too late. The Ottoman troops could not exploit their success; from five o'clock on that Sunday morning, a fierce battle had been taking place along the wooded spur of the Kahlenberg and through the terraced vineyards of the lower slopes. As the light began to fail, German infantry reached the outskirts of the great Turkish camp. With the setting sun behind them, Polish cavalry bore down upon the tented city to consolidate the victory and ensure the relief of Vienna. The Grand Vizier abandoned many of his trophies, including a prize steed, richly caparisoned. As dusk fell he was seen speeding eastwards towards Győr on a lighter horse and almost unrecognizable, with his right eye bandaged.⁵

In 1529 Suleiman the Magnificent retired from Vienna of his own volition and in good order; in 1683 Kara Mustafa's troops were forced to retreat, their commander fleeing defeated from the field. No one can choose a precise date and say 'On this day the Ottoman Empire passed into decline', but there is no doubt that the scattering of the Turkish camp outside Vienna on that September evening forms one of history's greatest turning-points. No Ottoman army had been routed so dramatically in any earlier encounter. Yet, rather strangely, the fierce combat along the slopes of the Kahlenberg never figures in any list of 'decisive battles of history'. No doubt the events of that Sunday seemed of little importance at first, except to Emperor Leopold; militarily they possessed no particular interest, and they did not lead to the immediate conclusion of a peace settlement. Only with the passage of time has the true significance of the battle become clear. For although there were to be many more encounters in the Danubian plain, never again did an Islamic host pit its might against the walls of Catholic Christendom.

No attempt was made by Sobieski or Duke Charles to pursue the demoralized enemy immediately after the relief of Vienna. They lingered on the outskirts of the city until Emperor Leopold returned, on the following Tuesday. By then, Kara Mustafa had put the rivers Leitha and Raab between his army and the victorious Christians. Once he reached the Alföld, he was able to regroup his shattered cavalry and fall back upon the citadel of Buda. At the same time he looked for scapegoats in order to convince the Sultan that he was not himself at fault. He could not take vengeance on the insurgent Hungarians, for their canny leader slipped away to the north-east and was using Sobieski as an intermediary to save him from the Emperor's wrath, with some success. But the Ottoman regimental commanders remained in the Grand Vizier's power. They suffered for the failure in front of Vienna. More than fifty pashas were strangled by Kara Mustafa's personal bodyguard in the week which followed the battle of the Kahlenberg.

These deaths of course made no difference to the outcome of the campaign. Momentarily, at the end of the first week in October, the Grand Vizier's deputy inflicted a severe check on the Poles at Parkan, a river crossing beneath Esztergom. But two days later a combined Christian army, commanded by Charles of Lorraine, reversed the decision at Parkan and finally broke Turkish resistance along the middle Danube. On 24 October Esztergom surrendered after a brief bombardment. Although earlier in the century Austrian troops had captured towns and villages in which the Turks had set up mosques, Esztergom became the first Islamicized city in Catholic Europe to be recovered by a Christian army.

Even before the fall of Esztergom, Kara Mustafa had left Buda and set out for Belgrade. As the army retreated across the Pannonian Plain he ordered more executions, for he was determined to keep news of the disasters in Austria and Hungary from reaching the Sultan's court for as long as possible. Geographically, the middle Danube might constitute a remote north-west frontier for the empire. But

the Grand Vizier was under no illusions about the Sultan's reaction to military failure. Mehmed IV was not a charismatic leader; like so many members of the Ottoman family, on the most solemn occasions he looked 'a wretched contrast to his splendid trappings', as a Venetian diplomat had commented earlier in the year; but, however unimpressive his parade horsemanship might be, Mehmed remained 'the Grand Turk'.⁶ A single military defeat, even as distant from his capital as the middle Danube, signified an ominous diminution of imperial power. His Grand Vizier had failed Mehmed in the very lands where, for ten generations, the Sultans had been accustomed to expect victories from their army.

When on 17 November Kara Mustafa reached Belgrade's citadel, on its limestone cliff above the confluence of Danube and Sava, his expectancy of life was low. He could not execute every witness of his lacklustre generalship without confirming suspicions already circulating at the Sultan's court; and though he sought to bribe many survivors of the campaign, there was no certainty that money would ensure a lasting silence. His fate—and, a few years later, the fate of his sovereign—illustrates the inherent self-discipline which still shaped Ottoman ruling institutions as the Empire embarked on a long delaying action against the resilient West.

At Belgrade Kara Mustafa was still, for the moment, Grand Vizier. In the Kalemegdan Fortress he retained the symbols of office with which Mehmed IV had invested him seven years before—the Imperial Seal and the Key to the Kaaba—and also the Holy Banner (*sancaci şerif*) which the Sultan had handed to him in May, here in Belgrade, on his appointment as Commander-in-Chief. But although his office ensured that Kara Mustafa still possessed a terrifying authority over his battered army and the towns and villages of Serbia, he knew that generals who suffered defeat while carrying the *sancaci şerif* into battle had no right to expect pardon. Old personal enemies surrounded Mehmed IV, who was holding court at Edirne, a favourite residence where Kara Mustafa had often ridden beside him on hunting expeditions. When a Grand Vizier set out to lead a campaign for his sovereign the day-to-day business he would have undertaken as chief minister was entrusted to a deputy, and as reports from the Danube seeped through to Edirne it was easy for the deputy and other members of the Divan to convince the Sultan that Kara Mustafa had shown himself unworthy of the responsibilities assigned to him. Mehmed realized that if the Grand Vizier were allowed to live, the humiliating burden of a defeat by infidel armies would pass to the Sultan-Caliph himself.

Such reasoning sealed Kara Mustafa's fate. On the last Saturday in December he was at his midday prayers when two senior Court dignitaries reached the Kalemegdan citadel from Edirne. They brought with them a double command from the Sultan to his son-in-law: he must surrender to the imperial emissaries his symbols of civil and military authority; and he should then 'entrust his soul to Allah, the ever Merciful'. Kara Mustafa completed his prayers, took off his turban and mantle of state, and allowed the executioner to throttle him speedily. There was about the timing of his death a strange irony. As the bowstring tightened around Kara Mustafa's neck in Belgrade, far away in Vienna and Esztergom and in towns and villages which had so long feared the coming of 'the Turk', the church bells were ringing out to celebrate Christmas. It was on 25 December that his co-religionists executed the arch-persecutor of Christians.⁷

The body was decapitated, the head skinned, stuffed, and sent to Mehmed IV as proof that the sovereign's orders had been carried out. But Nemesis had not finished mocking the unfortunate Kara Mustafa. In later campaigns the head fell into Austrian hands. Three hundred years after the siege the curious tourist could see it mounted in a glass case on the first floor of Vienna's *Historisches Museum*, a grisly relic of a turbulent age. But the skull is no longer on display. A spirit of reconciliation now prevails in the Austrian capital. Old enmities dissolve in the mystery of time past

CHAPTER 2

CHALLENGE FROM THE WEST



SULTAN MEHMED IV WAS SOVEREIGN OF MORE THAN THIRTY million subjects, twice as many as King Louis XIV and six times as many as Emperor Leopold I. Even after the disaster on the Danube, his empire remained formidable. He ruled over almost the whole of the Balkans, up to the eastern approaches to Zagreb, and his troops held outposts along the Polish river Bug and the Russian rivers Don and Dnieper. In Europe alone his lands were greater in area than France and Spain taken together while in Asia Minor he was direct ruler over a vast region which stretched as far south as the headwaters of the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, and he held as tributary states the Caucasian lands eastwards to the Caspian Sea. Rhodes, Crete and Cyprus acknowledged his sovereignty; so, too, did Egypt and the lower Nile valley, and he could claim vassal authority over Tripoli, Tunis and Algiers.

Along most of these frontiers there was, however, a clear limit to imperial expansion, well defined on the map. In the East the Ottoman advance was checked by a combination of geography and military science, to which might be added the religious hostility of convinced Shi'ites: the Safavid dynasty of Persia possessed the skill to exploit natural defences high in their mountainous central plateau; and it was never likely that the Ottomans would emulate the early Arab invaders and reach the Punjab. In the South the barrier to expansion was purely geographical: sand imposed a natural frontier, and apart from protecting the pilgrim trail to Medina and Mecca, there seemed no reason for the Ottomans to penetrate deeply along caravan routes into the Sahara or the Arabian deserts. The south-western limits were also settled long before the closing decades of the seventeenth century, for new conquests in that direction depended on sea power, and Turkish shipyards did not build vessels stout enough to face the challenge of the Atlantic. Although the Sultan's calm-water fleet was still effective to the east of the Sicilian narrows, Ottoman maritime pretensions never fully recovered from their defeat in 1571, when Don John of Austria's Spanish, Genoese and Venetian armada gained a decisive victory at Lepanto in the Gulf of Patras. Thereafter successive Grand Viziers left naval harassment of the Sultan's Christian enemies in the western Mediterranean to 'Barbary pirates', untrustworthy allies though these notorious corsairs often proved to be.

Yet, while mountains, sands and ocean confined Ottoman power in three directions, there was no natural obstacle to the north of the Balkans, short of the Carpathians and the Alps. An artificial barrier, a string of fortresses built by the Habsburgs in the late sixteenth century, formed the so-called 'Military Frontier' across western Croatia, but the Danubian plain formed a vast arena in which generals who could master the changing techniques of military science might engage the enemy in battle. In the fifteenth century the Turks had soon perceived the value of cannon; even as early as 1452 a 'super-gun' twenty-six feet long lobbed stone balls against the walls of Constantinople. But they did not maintain their lead in exploiting new weaponry. The relief of Vienna and the fall of Esztergom showed the world what several foreign travellers had suspected over the past half-century: the

Ottoman war machine was beginning to seize up. It may have enabled the Sultans to raise a standing army earlier than other sovereigns in Europe, but the Danubian campaign had shown that Kara-Mustafa's combination of specialist troops, feudatories, daredevil light horsemen and untrained auxiliary plodders could not match the new professional soldiery of the West. Turkish flintlock muskets remained deadly, but heavy artillery trains drawn by oxen, buffalo or camels made slow and lumbering progress across the Danubian plain.

Catholic Christendom sought speedily to exploit the advantage won by Sobieski and Charles of Lorraine by weaving, for the first time, a grand strategic design against 'the Turk'.¹ In March 1684 emissaries from Venice, Poland and Austria came together, with the backing of Pope Innocent XI, to create a new 'Holy League', an offensive coalition which would threaten other frontiers as well as the Danube basin. During these discussions in Venice the earliest provisional plans were outlined for partitioning the Ottoman Empire in Europe and—more vaguely—in the Middle East, too. Louis XIV, whose ministers maintained profitable relations with successive Grand Viziers, was disinclined to associate France with any crusading Holy League, but it was hoped Orthodox Russia, Protestant Germany and even Muslim Persia would act in concert with the three Catholic Powers.

These plans were over-ambitious: Persia failed to respond to the Capuchin missionaries who served as envoys from Venice; German Lutheran participation was minimal; and another two years passed before the Russians went to war, then only to mount an expedition against Mehmed's tributary ruler, the Tatar Khan of the Crimea. But, although the coalition remained incomplete, the Holy League was able to attack Mehmed IV in rapid succession on several fronts. These operations marked the start of thirty-five years of almost continuous warfare, in which the Sultan's enemies sought to roll back the frontiers of Islam and prove that the great empire built up by Suleiman was set in fatal decline.

The fighting began where it had ended in the previous autumn. Duke Charles of Lorraine continued the war in the Alföld, securing Pest and most of northern Hungary in two summer campaigns, taking Buda after a month's siege on 2 September 1686, and defeating the Turks heavily eleven months later near the historic battlefield of Mohács. Charles's victory allowed Habsburg armies to clear the Ottomans from most of Croatia and Transylvania. In the first week of September 1688 the Austrians carried the war into the Balkans by storming Belgrade, the capital of a provincial pashalik for more than a century and a half. In the following summer they advanced to Niš and Skopje, penetrating to within four hundred miles of Constantinople by the autumn.

Meanwhile Venice, too, opened up a battle front in the Balkans. Raids on Ottoman outposts along the southern Dalmatian coast and in Bosnia were followed in 1685 by a new campaign in Greece. Francesco Morosini, a former Doge in his late sixties, landed at Tolon in the Peloponnese—the 'Sanjak of the Morea'—and encouraged revolts in Epirus and the Mani. By August 1687 this 'Venetian' force, which included Lutheran mercenaries under the Swedish adventurer Count John Königsmarck, had ejected the Turks from all the Peloponnese except the defiant rocky promontory of Monemvasia. A month later Morosini's men swept across the isthmus of Corinth and thrust forward by land and by sea, to the Piraeus. They then attacked the tumbledown cluster of homes and shops around the Acropolis which was all that remained of the greatest of classical cities. After ten days of intermittent bombardment the Ottoman troops surrendered. Not, however, before irreparable disaster had hit Athens.² On the evening of 26 September 1687 a German mercenary fired a mortar from the Mouseion Hill which blew up a Turkish powder magazine in the Parthenon; the frieze and fourteen columns crashed to the ground. A few days later Morosini ordered the carved horses and chariot of Athena to be removed from the west pediment and shipped to Venice as a trophy of war, following the marble Lion of the Piraeus which was already on its way to embellish the gates of the Doge's arsenal. The task of lowering the group proved too hard for Morosini's unskilled labourers. Horses and chariot fell to the ground, in ruins. The classical heritage of Athens suffered more from Morosini's expedition

than from any depredations inflicted during the past two centuries of Ottoman rule—although it was, of course, the Turks who used the Parthenon as a gunpowder store.

Alarming rumours of the Holy League's strategic counter-offensive filtered through to Constantinople. So, too, month after month, did thousands of hungry and desperate refugees. There was no escaping the effects of the war in the capital or on either shore of the Bosphorus. Bread prices doubled in 1686 and again in 1687; banditry flourished in Rumelia; fields went untilled in the fertile regions because labourers had been conscripted into Kara Mustafa's army. Sultan 'Mehmed the Hunter' chose to remain as long as possible at Edirne, fearing for his life in the capital. Early in his reign Mehmed had been well served by two members of the Köprülü family. Now a third, Ahmed's younger brother Mustafa, became the natural leader of an opposition group, intent on checking the decline of the Sultan's authority in the Empire's outlying provinces.

Mehmed was hopelessly discredited and it was too late for Mustafa Köprülü to save him. Defeat at Mohács, followed closely by news of Morosini's advance into Attica, cost him the Sultanate. Four predecessors had already been cast from the throne in the first half of the century. Last of them was Mehmed's father Ibrahim 'the Mad', deposed on 8 August 1648 after an eight-year reign made memorable by a frittering-away of harshly extorted funds, and by tales of one terrible night on which he was said to have ordered the drowning of two hundred and eighty concubines. No one grieved for Ibrahim when, ten days after losing his throne, he was strangled by his own *cellad* (Chief Executioner). Now, in 1687, with angry and underpaid soldiers flocking into the capital, it seemed probable that Mehmed would suffer his father's fate. But neither the Divan nor the *ulema* wished to weaken further the twin institutions of Sultanate and Caliphate by a second murder. Mustafa Köprülü favoured bloodless deposition, with Mehmed IV surrendering sovereignty to his forty-five-year-old half-brother Prince Suleiman.

Abdications seldom go smoothly, even among the dynasties of monogamous societies, and in the Ottoman Empire the structure of the harem system constantly raised succession problems.³ Before the nineteenth century it was rare for there to be an heir-apparent, a well-groomed prince ready to come forward immediately after a Sultan's death or deposition. Most Ottoman rulers favoured several Sultanas, as well as concubines lower down the harem hierarchy who might have borne them sons. So intricate was the problem that in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the brothers and half-brothers of a new Sultan were generally strangled on his accession day, thus eliminating rival claimants who might become the centre of palace intrigue: five brothers of Murad V had perished by the bowstring on 21 December 1574; and on 28 January 1595 the killing of a record eighteen brothers of Mehmed I left the dynasty so short of males that religious leaders began to question the morality and wisdom of mass fratricide. It was accordingly decided that close male relatives should henceforth be confined to a *kafe* (cage), one of several small apartments in the Fourth Courtyard of the Sultan's principal palace the Topkapi Sarayi. Apart from Mehmed himself, who acceded at the age of six, all fifteen Sultans between 1617 and 1839 awaited the call to the throne in this small world, with its marble terrace looking out across a garden to the Golden Horn and the Bosphorus.⁴

Some princes suffered no more than nominal confinement. But Suleiman, only three months younger than Mehmed, entered the *kafe* at the age of six and reached middle age knowing nothing of the world beyond what he could see from the Fourth Courtyard. Thirty-nine years in the *kafe*, out of touch with public affairs, was no preparation for a reign. Nevertheless, on 9 November 1687 the Viziers duly produced the dazed, puzzled and half-forgotten Prince from the inner apartments of the Topkapi; he was, a Frenchman noted, of 'long, lean and pale appearance'.⁵ The Viziers waited on Mehmed IV with a *fetva* requiring his abdication. He accepted his deposition fatalistically and was duly transferred to the *kafe*, while Suleiman II was ceremonially girded with the sword in the sacred

mosque at Eyüp, an occasion corresponding to a coronation. At least Mehmed's life was spared. But final irony was reserved for him. Eventually he left the Topkapi and, under close escort, journeyed northwards, back to Edirne and the favourite palace from which he had so often ridden out hunting. But there were to be no more 'sporting campaigns' for Mehmed. His life ended in a virtual imprisonment which denied him all pleasure. When he died in January 1693 some said it was of gout some of poison, but many maintained that it was from melancholia.

By then Suleiman II was dead, too. In June 1691, barely three and a half years after being girded with the sword, he succumbed to dropsy as he was about to set out from Edirne on a campaign against the Austrians. In death he was honoured as never in life, for his embalmed body was brought to the *turbe* (tomb) of his great namesake in the Suleimaniye complex, beside the finest imperial mosque in the capital. He had achieved more than seemed likely when he emerged from the *kafe*. In the first days of March 1688 he personally led troops who hunted down rebels, outlaws and the most blatant racketeers in the Stamboul and Galata districts of Constantinople; he promised to lift the burden of extra war taxes; and at last, in October 1689, appointed Mustafa Köprülü as Grand Vizier—a courageous decision, for the Köprülüs were a formidable family with the confidence to make or unmake Sultans. The Grand Vizier showed himself a sound general; Niš and Belgrade were recaptured in the autumn of 1690 and a defence line re-established along the Danube. Suleiman II was ready to ride northwards with him for an advance into Hungary when death struck the Sultan down.

Mustafa Köprülü did not return to Stamboul for Suleiman II's funeral. The Viziers fetched from the back apartments of the palace yet another half-brother, Prince Ahmed, ten months junior to Suleiman and with a full forty-three years of the *kafe* behind him. There was no time for the sword-girding 'coronation' at Eyüp, only for an improvised ceremony in Edirne's Eşki mosque. Then Mustafa Köprülü set out at once for the Danube battle front, leaving Ahmed II to receive instruction in government from the Divan. Less than a month later, the Grand Vizier's army was ambushed at Szlankamen, thirty miles north-west of Belgrade, on the edge of the wooded Fruska Gora. Mustafa Köprülü was fatally wounded and his army scattered.

Was there perhaps at this moment a chance for the Holy League to recover the Balkans? If so, the opportunity was missed. After the death in 1689 of the neo-crusading pope Innocent XI, political objectives—and papal funds—contracted. Lack of allied cohesion led to isolated campaigns rather than fulfilment of the grand strategic master plan conceived in Venice on the eve of the war. Even before Morosini's return to his native city in 1688 the Venetian expedition to Greece was losing momentum; the Turks soon recovered Athens, although Venice held on to the Peloponnese. Polish and Russian internal affairs weakened pressure on the Ottomans from the north, while along the Danube the Germano-Austrian contribution to the League was necessarily restrained by the need to keep armies in the field against Louis XIV. A popular uprising forced the Venetians to abandon the strategically important island of Chios, and stubborn Turkish resistance thwarted the young Peter the Great's first attempt to take Azov, the Black Sea fort commanding the mouth of the river Don. But these isolated outposts of the Ottoman Empire could not be supplied regularly with arms or reinforcements; and in June 1696 a newly constructed Russian fleet enabled Peter to take Azov and begin the long contest of the Tsars for mastery over the Black Sea. A westernized Russia, bearing down on the Ottoman Empire from the north, soon posed a far more serious threat than had old Muscovy.

Tsar and Sultan were faced by a similar menace to their authority: the over-mighty power of a privileged military corps. To impose westernization Tsar Peter had first to destroy the Moscow garrison, the *streltsy*. It was a misfortune for the Ottomans that no eighteenth-century Sultan was prepared to destroy the comparable institution within his empire, the Janissary Corps.⁶ Historically

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