

# Ottoman View of Decline and Reform in the Post-Classical Age

—1574~1789—

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Decline and reform of the empire had been the most common subjects of the ottoman authors in the later Imperial Age. In the genre of "*Siyasetname*" or "*Nasihatname*", the members of the Ottoman ruling organization presented their observations and diagnosis of their own organization.

Here I will try to analyse the major examples of Ottoman *siyasetname* from the middle of the sixteenth century till the end of the eighteenth century.

In the reign of Suleyman the Magnificent which later authors remembered as the Golden Age of the Ottoman Empire, contemporary authors had optimistic view of their future. İbn İsa Saruhanî in his *Rûmuz ül-Künuz*, a book of an apocatislic vision, predicted that the Ottaman State should survive even after the second millenium of Hicrî. The complaints of Lutfî Paşa in his *Asafname* were about the temporary abuses which could be removed rather easily.

However the basic tone of authors changed. During the period of Murad III and Mehmed III, such authors as Gelibolulu Ali, Mustafa Selanikî and the anonymous author of *Hırz ül-Müluk* expressed their anxieties about the future of their empire. In the reign of Ahmed I, many people felt that something was wrong about the imperial system and organization since the age of Murad III. Veysi wrote his compendium of the analysis of the causes of decline and fall of dynasties. Ayn-ı Ali, the anonimous anther of *Kavanin-i Yeniçeriyân* and others tried to present the ideal form of the imperial government in their

efforts to compile the *Kanunnames* of various parts of the ruling organization. A little later, the author of *Kitab-ı Müstetab* wrote his severe diagnosis of the present state of the Ottoman Empire. According to him, corruption opened the path to confusion, “ruşvet ile verdi âleme ihtilâl”.

After the failure of the prematured reform of Osman II, in the reign of Murad IV, Koçi Bey presented his famous political tract *Koçi Bey Risalesi* to Sultan Murad. In his booklet, Koçi Bey analysed the present situation and the causes of confusion and proposed remedies. Actually Murad IV took severe measures in order to reform, though only half successfully. After then, in the early period of the reign of Mehmed IV, Kâtip Çelebi analysed the total situation with so much theoretical skill in his *Dustur ul-Amel* and expected the appearance of the owner of the sword “*sabib-i seyif*” as a powerful reformer. His hope was fulfilled by the reforming vezirs of Köprülü family.

However the fruits of Köprülü Reform had been lost after the decisive failure of the second siege of Vienna, succeeding defeats during the prolonged war. The tide had turned after the conclusion of the treaty of Carlowitz in 1699. The power ballance between the Ottoman Empire and Europe moved in advantage of the latter. The treaty of Passarowitz was the further blow. Gradually the Ottomans compelled to abandon their age-old “*cihad*” policy and took a new peaceful policy. The representative of this new policy was Nevşehirli İbrahim Paşa, the originator of the Tulip Age “*Lâle Devri*”.

Even after this great change of tide, in the world of *siyasetname*, the main trend was in the traditional line. Sincere diagnosis of the present situation and proposals of reform such as Mustafa Naima’s introduction to his chronicle, *Tarih-i Naima*, Defterdar Sarı Mehmed Paşa’s *Nasayih ül-Vüzera ve Ümera* or Canikli Ali Paşa’s *Tedabir-i Gazavat* were examples of this trend. Only such a marginal man as İbrahim Müteferrika, who was a new convert to Islam of Hungarian

origin, could propose a quite new alternative to re-estimate and adopt new western military technology and organization.

In the practical world of politics, during the eighteenth century actually the process of reform in the way of adaptation of Western methods of organization and military technology began and proceeded slowly and slowly through the political struggle between the enlightened party and the conservatives.

Only the accession of Selim III opened the door toward the new age of reform and systematic adaptation of new Western civilization.