

How did different Ottoman emperors govern the Ottoman empire?

Directions: Read the excerpt below and respond to the questions.

The Ottoman Empire was the one of the largest and longest lasting empires in history. It was an empire inspired and sustained by Islam and Islamic institutions. It replaced the **Byzantine Empire** as the major power in the Eastern Mediterranean. The Ottoman Empire reached its height under **Suleiman the Magnificent** (reigned 1520-66), when it expanded to parts of three continents--Asia, Africa and Europe. The city of **Constantinople**, which was renamed to Istanbul after the conquest of the Byzantine Empire, became the center of the Ottoman Empire. At its peak it included: modern-day Turkey, Egypt, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Macedonia, Hungary, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, parts of Arabia, and much of the coastal strip of North Africa.

Istanbul became not only a political and military capital, but because of its position at the junction of Europe, Africa, and Asia, one of the great trade centres of the world. Another important city was Bursa, which was a centers of the silk trade. Some of the later Ottoman conquests were clearly intended to give them control of other trade routes. Among the goods traded were: silk and other cloth, musk, rhubarb, porcelain from China, spices such as pepper, and dyestuffs such as indigo. The economic strength of the empire also owed much to Sultan Mehmet's policy of increasing the number of traders and artisans in the empire. He first encouraged merchants to move to Istanbul, and later forcibly resettled merchants from captured territories.

Because the Ottoman Empire spanned three continents, the population of the empire included non-Muslims such as Jews and Christians. These non-Muslim communities were organized according to the **millet system**. The millet system gave non-Muslim groups a limited amount of power to regulate their own affairs. Some millet groups were required to pay a **jizya tax** in return for protection and the right to practice their religion. Each millet was under the supervision of a leader, most often a religious patriarch, who reported directly to the Ottoman Sultan. The millets had a great deal of power—they set their own laws and collected and distributed their own taxes. In return, the empire insisted that the millets remain loyal.

Ottoman state organization was based on a **hierarchy** with the sultan (ruler) who was a Caliph (Islamic leader) at the top. The primary responsibility of the sultan was to ensure that justice was served. A body called the *Diwan* advised the sultan. Public opinion was regarded as important and the Ottomans made some use of polls to ascertain the popular will. All laws and taxes were posted in public so that

1. Where was the location of the Ottoman Empire at its greatest territorial extent?
2. Under which leader did the Ottoman Empire reach the height of its power?
3. What geographic situation allowed the Ottoman Empire to become one of the great trade centers of the world?
4. Why did the Ottoman Empire continue to conquer more land?
5. What were three religious groups in the Ottoman Empire?
6. How were non-Muslim communities organized? What effect could this system have on maintaining control?
7. What influence do you think religious tolerance and the structure of government had on maintaining control of the empire?

the people knew their content. Provinces were originally governed by designated local military leaders, who often acquired large landholdings and passed the position on to their offspring. Provinces were subdivided into smaller units. The leaders of the millets collected taxes and oversaw their community's legal systems. At times, the millet leaders and the sultan's representatives worked closely together, but sometimes clashed.

Source: Adapted from http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/history/ottomanempire_1.shtm
http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Ottoman_Empire

8. How was the "Ottoman state" organized?

9. Why was public opinion important to the Ottoman Empire? How did collecting polls create order and stability in the Ottoman Empire?

10. Why were laws publicly posted? What impact might this have on maintaining control and stability?