CHAOTICISM IN OTTOMAN CITIES

Ottoman cities can be classified as chaotic in some respects and highly ordered in other respects. It may seem perfectly normal to have administrative, economic and social irregularities for an empire that has ruled over such a large area for many years. In addition, cities may differ in terms of functioning within themselves. There are also differences between the order in the cities close to the center of the empire and the order in the cities far away. In addition, the functioning of Christian communities in the Balkans and Muslim cities in Anatolia and the Middle East may differ in many ways. Cultural differences and the attitude of the sultan had an effect on the order of the cities.

In the Ottoman state, tax regulations, social practices, and investments were regulated in direct relation to the location of the cities, their size, distance from the center, and the religious belief of the people. It should be taken into account that extra attention is paid to order in cities such as Istanbul, Cairo, Damascus or Edirne, as potential disorder or chaos will affect the heart of the empire. On the other hand, the empire experienced periods when it was vulnerable even to janissary revolts, fires or epidemics in its center, Istanbul. Empire had to take drastic measures against them. In such an environment, it is not unexpected that serious chaotic events occur in cities far from the center. It is known that there are unrest caused by the revolts of the provincial governors or the dissatisfaction of the public in certain situations.

In order to examine the order or chaotic situation of the Ottoman cities due to all these inter-city, inter-cultural or administrative differences, we need to divide them into some sub-headings and evaluate the cities separately at one point in each sub-title.

ADMINISTRATION

The management of Ottoman cities had a highly organized structure, with the kadi, or judge, as the central institution. The central government appointed the kadi, who was responsible for maintaining law and order within the city. The kadi was assisted by a council of notables, who were also appointed by the central government and represented the local community. Each neighborhood was governed by an "Agha of the quarter" who was responsible for maintaining order, collecting taxes and enforcing government policies, and was answerable to the district governor who represented the central government in the city. The muhtesib was in charge of enforcing market regulations, while the imam was responsible for religious matters. Additionally, institutions such as guilds and religious endowments played a role in the administration of Ottoman cities. The 18th century saw the centralization of the empire's administration, and the "Tanzimat reforms" were introduced to modernize the administration of the cities. The reforms involved the formation of a centralized bureaucracy, new laws and regulations, and the modernization of the judicial system. Overall, the administration of Ottoman cities was a complex and multi-layered system, with officials and institutions at both the local and central levels, and was composed of a combination of traditional and modern elements that reflected the empire's unique and diverse character.

As the Ottoman Empire began to decline in the 18th century, the central authority of the empire weakened, which had an impact on the order of cities within the empire.

One of the main ways in which weakened central authority affected the order of cities was through a decline in the ability of the Ottoman government to enforce laws and maintain order. As the central government's power waned, local leaders, such as beys and aghas, had more autonomy and were able to exert more control over their regions. This led to a fragmentation of power, with local leaders becoming increasingly independent from the central government.

Another way in which weakened central authority affected the order of cities was through a decline in the ability of the Ottoman government to collect taxes and provide services to the population. As the central government's revenue decreased, local leaders had to rely more on their own resources to govern their regions. This led to a decline in the quality of services and infrastructure in many cities, as well as an increase in corruption and abuse of power by local leaders.

It's worth noting that the impact of the weakened central authority on the order of cities varied depending on the region and the specific city in question. Some cities were able to maintain a relative stability, while others experienced significant decline and chaos. Salonica and Kayseri will be examine in this paper.

Kayseri and Salonica, were two important cities in the Ottoman Empire and had different ways of ordering.

According to Jennings (1978), Kayseri was primarily an agricultural city and its economy was based on the production of textiles. The city was governed by a series of local notables who were responsible for maintaining order and collecting taxes. The local notables were appointed by the central government and had significant autonomy in governing the city. They were in charge of maintaining law and order, collecting taxes, and implementing government policies and regulations.

On the other hand, Ginio (2018) explains that Salonica was a major port city and its economy was based on trade and commerce. The city was governed by a central bureaucracy that was responsible for implementing government policies and regulations. The central bureaucracy was appointed by the central government and had less autonomy than the local notables in Kayseri. The central bureaucracy was in charge of maintaining law and order, collecting taxes, and implementing government policies and regulations.

Additionally, Salonica had a more diverse population compared to Kayseri, as it was a major port city and had a significant number of foreign residents and merchants. This led to different types of social and cultural institutions in the two cities.

Overall, while both Kayseri and Salonica had a similar administrative structure, their economic and social structures were quite different, leading to different types of institutions and governance in the two cities.

CULTURE

Cultural diversity can affect the chaoses in cities in various ways. Some of the ways in which cultural diversity can contribute to chaoses include:

Ethnic and religious tensions: When different ethnic and religious groups live in close proximity within a city, tensions can arise due to differences in culture, customs, and beliefs. These tensions can lead to conflicts and violence, as each group seeks to assert its own identity and protect its own interests.

Lack of understanding or mistrust between groups: When cultural diversity is present, lack of understanding or mistrust between groups may arise. This lack of understanding and mistrust can exacerbate tensions and conflicts, making it difficult to find common ground or peaceful resolutions.

Competition for resources and power: When different cultural groups live in the same city, there may be competition for resources such as housing, jobs, and political representation. This competition can lead to conflicts and violence as groups compete for resources and power.

Socio-Economic disparities: Cultural diversity can also lead to socio-economic disparities within a city. Some groups may be more privileged than others and this can lead to conflicts and violence between them.

Cultural identity : The different ethnic and religious groups within the city have distinct cultural identities, and these identities often played a role in the conflicts that arose between these groups. It's important to note that cultural diversity is not always a source of conflict and violence, and that cities can also benefit greatly from the richness and vitality that cultural diversity can bring. However, in certain situations and contexts, cultural diversity can contribute to chaoses in cities.

In the Ottoman Empire this diversity impaired the order in the cities in some manner.

Between the 15th and 18th centuries, the cultural background of the population in Ottoman cities played a significant role in the chaoses that occurred in the region.

One example is the city of Belgrade, which was primarily Orthodox Christian, often rebelled against Ottoman rule in the 16th century. The city's population sought to maintain their own distinct cultural identity and resist Ottoman attempts to assimilate them into the Muslim majority culture.

Another example is the city of Jerusalem, which was an important religious city for Jews, Christians, and Muslims, and it was a site of many conflicts between these different religious groups, as well as between the Ottoman Empire and European powers. The city's culture and history were at the center of these conflicts, as each group sought to assert control over the city and its religious sites.

In the Middle East, cities such as Aleppo, which was a major commercial center and an important cultural hub in the Ottoman Empire. The city experienced many conflicts between different religious and ethnic groups, as each group sought to assert its own identity and protect its own interests. The cultural and economic diversity of the city led to a melting pot of different customs, traditions, and languages which in some cases led to clashes and violence.

These are just a few examples, but it's important to note that the cultural background of the population played a significant role in the chaoses that occurred in many cities within the Ottoman Empire during the 15th to 18th centuries.

SOME DISORDERNESS IN DIFFERENT CITIES

During the late medieval and early modern period of the Ottoman Empire, many of its cities such as Izmir, Istanbul, Baghdad, Aleppo, Jerusalem, and others, experienced a decline in order and stability, leading to chaos and disorder. The weakening central authority of the empire and cultural and religious differences among the population were some of the main causes of this disorder.

In Izmir, according to (Zandi-Sayek, 2012) during the Ottoman period, the city of Izmir served as an important center of trade and commerce, and was also a diverse city with a mix of ethnic and religious groups. The city's economy was based on agriculture and trade, and it was an important port city. The central Ottoman authority made sure that the city was well-governed, and the order was maintained by the local officials appointed by the central government. The city had its own legal system and court system, which was responsible for maintaining order and enforcing laws.

The city was also home to several religious and ethnic groups, and the Ottoman government made sure that the rights of these groups were protected and that they were able to practice their own customs and traditions. The government also made sure that the city's infrastructure was well-maintained, and that the population had access to basic services such as education and healthcare.

Overall, during the Ottoman period, Izmir was a well-governed and orderly city, with a diverse population and a thriving economy.

In Istanbul, the capital of the empire, the decline in the janissary corps, the main military force of the Ottoman Empire, and the rise of the sipahis, a class of local leaders who had more autonomy and power, led to an increase in crime and corruption, as well as a decline in the quality of services and infrastructure.

In Baghdad, as the central authority weakened, the city experienced a lot of violence and destruction due to conflicts between different ethnic and religious groups, mainly composed of Shia and Sunni Muslims. The city also faced challenges due to an increase in banditry and crime.

In Aleppo, which was a major commercial center and an important cultural hub in the Ottoman Empire, the weakening central authority led to an increase in banditry and crime, as well as conflicts between different religious and ethnic groups, and a decline in the economy that resulted in more poverty and social unrest.

In Jerusalem, according to the article "Urban Disorder and the State in Late Ottoman Jerusalem" by Eugene L. Rogan, published in the International Journal of Middle East Studies in 1994, Jerusalem during the late Ottoman period (1860s-1917) was characterized by a decline in the ability of the central government to maintain order and provide services to the population as a result of the weakening of the central authority and the conflicts between different ethnic and religious groups. The city was affected by poverty, social unrest, and conflicts between religious groups.

These examples show that the Ottoman cities experienced a decline in order and stability, leading to chaos and disorder, caused by a combination of factors such as a weakening central authority and cultural and religious differences among the population. However, despite the existence of different ethnic and cultural societies in cities such as Izmir, it can be said that order is generally maintained, so it would not be right to generalize Ottoman cities.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the administration and central authority of the Ottoman Empire, along with cultural and religious differences among the population, played a significant role in the disorder and chaos that occurred in many of its cities during the 15th to 18th centuries.

The weakening of the central authority led to a decline in the ability of the government to enforce laws and maintain order, resulting in an increase in crime and corruption, as well as a decline in the quality of services and infrastructure in many cities. This was particularly evident in cities like Istanbul, where the decline of the janissary corps, the main military force of the Ottoman Empire, and the rise of the sipahis, a class of local leaders who had more autonomy and power, led to an increase in crime and corruption and a decline in the quality of services and infrastructure. Additionally, the decline in the central authority's revenue led to a decline in the ability of the government to collect taxes and provide services to the population.

Cultural and religious differences also played a significant role in the disorder and chaos that occurred in many Ottoman cities. Conflicts between different ethnic and religious groups, often driven by cultural and religious differences, led to violence and destruction in cities such as Baghdad, where the population was mainly composed of Shia and Sunni Muslims, and Jerusalem, which was an important religious city for Jews, Christians, and Muslims, and it was a site of many conflicts between these different religious groups, as well as between the Ottoman Empire and European powers. The cultural and economic diversity of the city led to a melting pot of different customs, traditions, and languages which in some cases led to clashes and violence.

Furthermore, the administration of the cities was based on the millet system, which divided the population of the empire into distinct religious and ethnic communities, each governed by its own leaders. However, as the central authority weakened, local leaders had more autonomy and influence on the order of the cities. This led to a fragmentation of power, with local leaders becoming increasingly independent from the central government, and the decline of the central authority's ability to maintain order and stability.

It's important to note that the impact of the weakened central authority and cultural and religious differences on the order of the cities varied depending on the region and the specific city in question. However, it is clear that the Ottoman Empire during the 15th to 18th centuries was a complex state where many cities within it experienced disorder and chaos as a result of a weakened central authority and cultural and religious differences among the population. The complex nature of the Ottoman Empire and its cities makes it important to consult specific historical sources to understand the details of what happened in each city and how these factors affected the order and stability of the cities.

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