



**FROM THE BALKANS TO ISTANBUL:  
The Legal Politics of Social Mobilities  
Through *Devshirme* in The Ottoman Empire  
From the 14th to the 17th Century**

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**Abstract:** The Ottoman Empire rose to prominence as a dominant force from the 13th to the 19th centuries, establishing a vast empire and nurturing cultures that continue to enrich global heritage today. A notable feature of their sociopolitical structure was the practice of *devshirme*. This unique policy facilitated new forms of social mobility by transforming Balkan Christian youths into Muslim elites serving the sultan. This strategy significantly bolstered the Ottomans' ability to annex European territories over several centuries. In this context, the following discussion explores various aspects, including the origins of *Devshirme* as a pivotal legal policy, the extent of social mobility during the 1400s and 1600s, and the methodologies employed within *Devshirme* to strengthen the empire's stability. A historical methodology will be used, incorporating heuristic steps that begin with verification and historiographic analysis. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that the fundamental aim of the *devshirme* was social engineering, intended to maintain control over subjugated regions in Europe. Moreover, the social mobility fostered by this policy transformed the lives of Christian working-class children into elite status, with some even rising to become the sovereign's most trusted advisors. Finally, the recruitment strategies for the *Devshirme* involved selecting children for educational institutions, providing them with training, and assigning roles that matched their abilities.

**Keywords:** *Devshirme*, Ottoman, Social mobilities, Levy kid

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## **Introduction**

THE OTTOMAN Empire endured for over five centuries and is recognized as one of the most significant reigns in global history, accompanied by various policies and controversies. Its timeline spans from 1299 to 1923, attributed to the *Devshirme*

system, which served as both a political mechanism and a means of social structure and mobility. In terms of definition, *Devshirme* is derived from the term *Devshir*, which signifies the practice of taking levy children from the subjected Ottoman territories in Southern Europe; these individuals would later be compelled to undergo education and training to serve in numerous governmental roles.<sup>1</sup> Initially, this initiative aimed to fortify the Ottoman military through the elite Janissaries, but it later expanded to include roles like officers, administrators, servants, and even a *vizier*. The *Devshirme* system not only facilitated the rise of these individuals within the Ottoman hierarchy but also profoundly influenced the sociopolitical landscape of the empire.

For over 200 years, *devshirme* served as a social mechanism that influenced social stratification and later enabled individuals to alter their social standing, a rare practice at the time. In contrast to other Muslim empires, the Ottoman Empire is notable for its plurality, permitting various cultures and religions to participate in its governance. Halil Inalcik's research indicated that the slave system played a crucial role in both the cultural and political-economic spheres. The palace school not only nurtured artists and scholars but also trained soldiers and administrators, while artisans, serving the sultan, produced some of the most exquisite and innovative works of Ottoman civilization.<sup>2</sup>

For the reasons outlined earlier, it is fascinating to examine the *Devshirme* as a policy during the Ottoman era, particularly because it significantly influenced how individuals organized themselves and established social hierarchies. Furthermore, the period from the 1400s to the 1600s constitutes a crucial historical chapter that illustrates how the Ottomans upheld their dominance. Without delay, this study will outline the foundational context of *devshirme*'s implementation as a key policy, analyze the degree of social mobility during the 1400s to

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<sup>1</sup> B.Lewis, Pellat, and J.Schacht, "The Encyclopedia of Islam," in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, ed. Th. Bianquis P. Bearman C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W.P. Heinrichs, II (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1991), 210.

<sup>2</sup> Halil Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age* (Phoenix: Phoenix Press, 2000).

the 1600s, and finally detail the organizational strategies of *devshirme* that contributed to the empire's stability.

Several scholars have analyzed Devshirme as an instrument of state power V.L Menage,<sup>3</sup> for example, examines Devshirme as a legal construct with significant consequences for Christian subjects in Southern Europe. Furthermore, Menage's research is complemented by Speros Vryonis,<sup>4</sup> who, in her analysis, elucidates that the practice of *devshirme* was already established during the Seljuk dynasty. In addition to the above scholars, it is also important to recognize the contributions of researchers such as Younghee Lee,<sup>5</sup> whose investigation entitled "*Devshirme Sistem* and *Enderûn Mektebi* in the Ottoman Empire" delineates with clarity and precision the execution of *devshirme* during the reign of Sultan Mehmed I, thereby providing a comprehensive overview of the policies enacted. Moreover, it is crucial to underscore analogous studies conducted by Nikita Evstavyef<sup>6</sup> and Han Wen Qi,<sup>7</sup> both of whom have similarly scrutinized the application of *devshirme*. Building on those foundational studies, the present research seeks to investigate in greater depth the mechanisms underlying the implementation of *devshirme*. The political ramifications of this *devshirme* legislation significantly influence social mobility and its pragmatic application as a legal framework intended to bolster authority across diverse regions characterized by considerable religious, cultural, and linguistic heterogeneity. Consequently, the

<sup>3</sup> V. L. Ménage, "Some Notes on the Dev Sh Irme," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 29, no. 1 (February 1966): 64–78, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0041977X0006081X>.

<sup>4</sup> Speros Vryonis, "Seljuk Gulams and Ottoman Devshirmes," *Der Islam* 41, no. 1 (1965), <https://doi.org/10.1515/islm.1965.41.1.224>.

<sup>5</sup> Younghee Lee, "Devshirme Sistem and Enderûn Mektebi in the Ottoman Empire," *Institute of History and Culture Hankuk University of Foreign Studies* 87 (August 2023): 113–40, <https://doi.org/10.18347/hufshis.2023.87.113>.

<sup>6</sup> Nikita V. Evstafyev, "The View of Christian Authors on the Practice of Devshirme in the 16th Century Ottoman Empire," *Slavianovedenie*, no. 4 (October 2024): 16–25, <https://doi.org/10.31857/S0869544X24040029>.

<sup>7</sup> Hanxu Qi, "The Devshireme System in the Ottoman Empire," *SHS Web of Conferences* 148 (October 2022): 03029, <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/202214803029>.

innovative aspect of this research will substantially enhance understanding of *devshirme* as a legal-political policy during the era of the Ottoman Turks.

### **Postulates and historical documents from diverse library resources.**

The historical method employed in this research provides insights into the complexities of the Devshirme system, revealing how it shaped social hierarchies and governance in the Ottoman Empire. Ultimately, this study's findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the intricate dynamics of social mobility within the Ottoman Empire's unique bureaucratic framework. The historical method is a research approach that systematically collects and analyzes historical data to understand past events and their implications. This method is widely used across fields such as urban studies, education, information systems, legal studies, and organizational management to gain insights into historical phenomena and their development over time. The historical method typically involves stages such as heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography, which help researchers reconstruct past events and analyze their causes and effects.<sup>8</sup> This method is widely used across fields such as urban studies, education, information systems, legal studies, and organizational management to gain insights into historical phenomena and their development over time. The historical method typically involves stages such as heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography, which help researchers reconstruct past events and analyze their causes and effects.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Rebecca Jean Emigh and Corey S. O'Malley, "Historical and Comparative Methods," in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology* (Wiley, 2021), 1–4, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405165518.wbeosh035.pub2>.

<sup>9</sup> Yves Plourde, "Historical Methods and the Study of How Organizations Manage the Future," in *How Organizations Manage the Future* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 173–89, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-74506-0\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-74506-0_9).

## State Structure

The Ottoman Empire, like other medieval sultanates, was founded by a single family, establishing a hereditary monarchy that generally bequeathed the throne to the eldest male heir. In cases of succession disputes, the throne could be passed to the second son or another male relative, introducing a complicated layer of family politics that frequently affected the empire's stability. The empire was firmly anchored in the Hanafi School of Islamic law,<sup>10</sup> which offered a structure for legal and social standards. In this setting, the sultan occupied a unique position of power, representing both political and religious authority. His responsibilities extended beyond mere administration; he was regarded as the final judge of justice and governance, and no authority was considered superior to that of the sultan. This concentration of power fostered a distinctive dynamic where the sultan's choices were crucial in determining the empire's path.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the patriarchal framework that pervaded Ottoman society profoundly affected social hierarchies and relationships within royal households. Women's roles were predominantly marginalized, often perceived as political instruments rather than engaged contributors to governance or society. Their presence in the empire was chiefly symbolic, aimed at establishing alliances through marriage and preserving family lineage, rather than permitting personal agency or impact in public life. This marginalization of women underscores the era's societal norms, revealing the constraints on their roles and the pervasive influence of male authority in both private and public domains.<sup>12</sup>

The dynasty takes its name from Osma I; he also established the political foundation that enabled the dynasty's long-term

<sup>10</sup> Andrew F March, "Law, Empire, and the Sultan: Ottoman Imperial Authority and Late Hanafi Jurisprudence," *The American Journal of Comparative Law* 70, no. 3 (December 2022): 646–50, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ajcl/avac045>.

<sup>11</sup> Uriel Heyd, *Studies in Old Ottoman Criminal Law / by Uriel Heyd; Edited by V.L. Ménage.*, ed. V. L. Ménage (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).

<sup>12</sup> Robert Lembright, "The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire: Pierce, Leslie P.: New York: Oxford University Press, 374 Pp., Publication Date: September 1993," *History: Reviews of New Books* 22, no. 4 (1994): 184–85.

expansion for almost a Century.<sup>13</sup> Osman, acknowledged as the first sultan of the Ottoman Empire, set the groundwork for what would evolve into a vast and impactful empire. After his death, his son, Orhan, was Osman's son by his first spouse, Malhun Hatun. The next ruler, Murad I, was another son of Osman, born in Iznik, and a princess from a distinguished Greek royal family. This alliance was strategically arranged to establish political ties and enhance the fledgling empire's standing in the area. Murad I's reign, which spanned from 1362 to 1389, was characterized by notable military victories and administrative reforms that further reinforced Ottoman power. Murad I's personal life changed direction when he wed Gulchichek, one of his concubines. This marriage produced Bayezid I, who ascended to the throne in 1389 and ruled until 1402. Bayezid, recognized for his ambitious military campaigns and strategic skills, fathered six children, also born to various concubines. The practice of having concubines became a defining aspect of the Ottoman royal tradition, enduring for centuries among sultans. The imperial palace was carefully constructed to accommodate both the sultan's main queen and his concubines, with the latter living in a specific area known as the Harem. Although the sultans had the advantage of multiple wives and concubines, this practice often led to fierce rivalries and disputes, especially during succession battles. As the number of heirs grew, so did the likelihood of conflict over the throne, complicating the succession line and resulting in power struggles within the royal household. This age-old custom of polygamy and concubinage underwent a significant change during the reign of Süleyman I, who ruled from 1520 to 1566.<sup>14</sup> Süleyman, often called Süleyman the Magnificent, deviated from tradition by marrying only his wives rather than taking concubines. His most prominent spouses were Mahidevran and Hurrem Sultan, also known as Roxelana, who wielded considerable influence in

<sup>13</sup> Bassem Fleifel, "Osman I, Father of Kings," *WikiJournal of Humanities* 4, no. 1 (2021): 1, <https://doi.org/10.15347/WJH/2021.001>.

<sup>14</sup> Nedim Nomer and Kaya Şahin, "Introduction," in *Histories of Political Thought in the Ottoman World* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2024), 1–9, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192888341.003.0001>.

the empire's political and cultural spheres. This shift represented a crucial turning point in Ottoman history, indicating a transition towards a more centralized and stable governance while also transforming the dynamics of royal marriages within the empire.<sup>15</sup>

The essence of this custom recognized that the sultan possesses the utmost power within the palace and, on a broader scale, that he could amplify his sway, until Süleyman I abolished the practice. Nevertheless, unions driven by political aspirations persist as an ongoing tradition intended to extend control over Europe, as recorded in the writings of John VI Kantakouzenos, who noted that Orhan married his daughter Theodora in 1346 to bolster his status among the Greek people, vowing to fortify his authority through this alliance. Following the death of John VI, whom John V Palaiologos succeeded, Orhan opted to reclaim power and oust Palaiologos.<sup>16</sup>

The engagement in intercultural and interfaith unions within the Ottoman Empire was not simply a matter of social or familial connections; it was a deliberate state strategy to expand territorial authority and maintain governance over diverse populations. By the 17th Century, the Ottoman Empire had expanded to cover a vast area, ranging from the western fringes of Iran to the borders of Vienna in the west, down to Yemen, and up to the Crimean Peninsula.<sup>17</sup> This extraordinary territorial growth was made possible by the empire's ability to assimilate diverse ethnic groups and cultures, resulting in a vibrant mosaic within its administration. The governance framework of the Ottoman Empire mirrored this diversity, drawing on Turkish roots and embracing individuals from diverse ethnic

<sup>15</sup> Feridun M. Emecen, "Ottoman Politics in the Reign of Sultan Süleyman: Government, Internal Politics and Imperial Expansion," in *The Battle for Central Europe* (Leiden: BRILL, 2019), 9–20, [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004396234\\_003](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004396234_003).

<sup>16</sup> A.A.M. Bryer, "Greek Historians on The Turks: The Case of The First Byzantine-Ottoman Marriage", in *The Writing of History in The Middle Ages*, ed. R.H.C. Davies and J.M. Wallace-Hadrill (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 471.

<sup>17</sup> Mesut Uyar, "Ottoman Expansionism, 1300–1823," in *The Cambridge History of Strategy* (Cambridge University Press, 2024), 346–68, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108788090.019>.

backgrounds. This strategy not only fostered a spirit of inclusiveness but also enabled the empire to oversee its extensive lands and populations effectively. A key element of this assimilation was the execution of the *Dershirme* policy, which entailed the organized recruitment of young boys from Christian communities. These boys were separated from their families, converted to Islam, and trained to fulfill various roles within the empire, including serving as soldiers in the prestigious Janissary corps or taking on administrative duties.<sup>18</sup> This policy played a crucial role in establishing a dedicated, skilled administrative class closely linked to the sultan, thereby ensuring that the empire's various ethnic groups had a voice in governance. The *Dershirme* system highlighted the Ottomans' practical strategy for empire-building, enabling them to leverage the abilities and expertise of diverse communities while also strengthening their dominance and oversight over a large and diverse population.

The Ottoman Empire held sway over a vast array of territories extending from the Iranian frontier to the Balkans in Europe, especially during the 16th Century, when the sultan appointed officials in these areas to maintain the palace's dominance and preserve control. However, these local leaders chosen by the sultan were frequently members of the royal family, mainly his children. A manuscript reveals how Osman distributed land to his heirs, stating, "He (Osman) allocated Sanjak to Orhan and assigned Subashılıki (armies) to his nephew Alp Gunduz...," although this assertion needs further examination to substantiate its authenticity. Moreover, further proof emerged when Orhan conferred land and power on his brother Pazarlu and son Süleyman while they were in command of the armies preparing for the invasion of Thrace.<sup>19</sup> Although the sultan gave power and lands to his family, this did not mean they could act without the sultan's intervention, because policies would have to be in line with the central government. This situation, however, ended in the late 14<sup>th</sup> Century, as Ottoman

<sup>18</sup> Lee, "Devshirme Sistem and Enderûn Mektebi in the Ottoman Empire."

<sup>19</sup> Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, "The Ottoman Empire," in *The Oxford World History of Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2021), 729–50, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197532768.003.0026>.

territories developed and the need to create local government institutions emerged. The initial local administrations were established during the reign of Murad I (1362-1389) and persisted through Bayazid I (1389-1402), encompassing Rumelia, which included all territories in the annexed southern Europe, and Anadolu, which spanned all regions in minor Asia.<sup>20</sup> With the expansion under Bayazid I in 1390, a third provincial government was established in Rum, and his son, Mehmed I, subsequently governed the city. When Mehmed II ascended the throne from 1451 to 1481, he designated his son, Mustafa, as the governor of Karaman while maintaining Konya as the capital city. As the Ottoman Empire expanded, the number of provinces also increased, mainly due to the territorial gains made by Selim I (1512-1520) and Süleyman I (1520-1566), prompting the sultan at the time to consider establishing a more structured system of local governance.<sup>21</sup>

By 1525, there existed eight provinces, including Egypt, Syria, Diyarbakir, and Kurdistan, located in the eastern region of present-day Turkey, parts of western Iraq, and Hungary to the west.<sup>22</sup> In 1609, the number of provinces expanded even further to thirty-two, reaching areas such as Tripoli, Cyprus, and Tunis. As a result, the importance of expansion grew in establishing new administrative systems, although this initiative only commenced in the late 15th Century. This was because, during the early stages of the Ottoman Empire in the 12th and 13th centuries, local administrations operated independently without direct oversight, managed by locals who paid taxes as a form of allegiance to the Ottomans. For instance, in 1370, the Bulgarian King Shismanid Tsar and Lazarevic of Serbia were granted

<sup>20</sup> Hacer ATEŞ, "RUMELİ'DE ERKEN DÖNEM TİMAR UYGULAMASINA BİR ÖRNEK: XV. YÜZYILDA KEŞAN NAHİYESİ," *Ankara Anadolu ve Rumeli Araştırmaları Dergisi* 3, no. 5 (July 2022): 1-29, <https://doi.org/10.53838/ankarad.1133275>.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Wittek, "Devshirme and Shari'a," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 17, no. 2 (June 1955): 271-78, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0041977X00111735>.

<sup>22</sup> I M Kunt and Christine Woodhead, *Süleyman the Magnificent and His Age* (Routledge, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315846347>.

authority to retain their power, even as the Ottomans absorbed their territories. Nevertheless, they were required to supply troops and pay taxes in exchange, which led Lazarevic to rebel against the sultan, prompting Murad I's assault on Nicopolis, where Lazarevic ultimately capitulated in 1396.<sup>23</sup>

### **Recruitment Through *Devshirme***

Until the 17th Century, the Ottoman Empire emerged as a unique Islamic empire, distinguishing itself from others through its approaches to appointing officials, state workers, and military personnel. The presence of enslaved individuals and hired workers brought in from various provinces was quite evident, and this system had been in place for two centuries since the establishment of the sultanate. At the outset, when the sultanate was created, the sultan entrusted the governance of regions to his family members and reliable allies.<sup>24</sup> This system underwent significant changes during the tenure of Murad I (1362-89), after he executed his own siblings, suggesting that the survival of the Ottoman Turks no longer depended on sharing authority within the royal lineage. Although Murad I entrusted his son with command of the military and certain territories, every decision required his father's awareness and approval. This shift in the system can be deduced from several factors, such as the emergence of conspiracies and power struggles clearly observable within the royal family; moreover, the expansion of Turkish territories led to governors in far-flung regions governing autonomously, thereby circumventing the central government's jurisdiction. Additionally, the governors in these areas were relatives of the royal family who were bestowed with power. Consequently, to reduce the turmoil caused by rebellions, the sultan chose to disregard family ties. This strategy was in stark contrast to the times of his father and grandfather;

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<sup>23</sup> Hilmi Kaçar and Jan Dumolyn, "The Battle of Nicopolis (1396), Burgundian Catastrophe and Ottoman Fait Divers," *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'histoire* 91, no. 4 (2013): 905-34, <https://doi.org/10.3406/rbph.2013.8474>.

<sup>24</sup> Harriet Rudolph, "The Ottoman Empire and the Institutionalization of European Diplomacy, 1500-1700," in *Islam and International Law* (Brill | Nijhoff, 2013), 161-83, [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004233362\\_010](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004233362_010).

when Murad I rose to power, he wielded authority his brothers could not challenge, thereby eliminating the need to share it. For this reason, Murad I was highly selective in choosing his aides, both centrally and regionally.<sup>25</sup>

Because Ottoman Turkey functioned as an Islamic kingdom, the customs that emerged were influenced by Islamic traditions along with a mixture of local culture; for this reason, the existence of slavery was not exclusively rooted in Islam, as during that period, slavery had become a widespread and lawful practice. Within the Ottoman Turkish social hierarchy, slavery occupied a distinct position, generally seen as inferior, yet under certain conditions, enslaved people could gain the trust of their masters to undertake specific tasks.<sup>26</sup> Consequently, despite their lower status, they were able to attain esteemed roles. In fact, this system was already in place during the Abbasid Empire in the 8th Century, when both the military and key officials often originated from enslaved individuals. Besides the Abbasids, various other Islamic states also implemented a similar system, including the Seljuk dynasty, and even in the city of Konya, institutions were established for enslaved people who were groomed for significant roles.<sup>27</sup>

The process by which individuals from a specific social class ascend to a higher status is termed social mobility, and the opportunities for transitioning between different social tiers vary. For the Ottoman Turks, enslaved people were acquired through means such as purchase, capture, or as gifts, and an enslaved person could attain freedom if granted by their

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<sup>25</sup> Ammalina Dalillah Mohd Isa et al., "A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF SULTAN MURAD IIS POLITICAL STRATEGIES IN CONSOLIDATING THE OTTOMAN SULTANATE," *International Journal of Advanced Research* 12, no. 11 (November 2024): 440–44, <https://doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/19854>.

<sup>26</sup> Pal Fodor, "Sultan, Imperial Council, Grand Vizier: Changes in The Ottoman Ruling Elite and The Formation of The Grand Vizieral "Telhis," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 47, no. 1 (1994): 67–85.

<sup>27</sup> Speros Vryonis, "Nomadization and Islamization in Asia Minor," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 29 (1975): 41, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1291369>.

owner.<sup>28</sup> This method allowed the sultans to acquire enslaved people for various roles. By the close of the 14th Century, this system enhanced the movement of enslaved people who occupied significant roles within the governmental framework.<sup>29</sup>

The recruitment system employed by the Turks utilized at least two approaches, initially by enlisting prisoners of war captured by Turkish forces from newly acquired regions, particularly those with predominantly Christian demographics.<sup>30</sup> The tradition of utilizing Christian prisoners of war traces back to Osman or Orhan. Subsequently, the number of captives surged alongside the territorial expansion in Europe during the reign of Murad I. Additionally, at that time, Murad I required a substantial workforce and soldiers to fortify his army, especially in conjunction with his political strategy aimed at displacing the family from the center of power. The second approach was the *Devshirme* system, or the "collection" of enslaved people who were primarily European and Christian. The *Devshirme* system was widely practiced in Turkey from the 14th to the 16th centuries, becoming the principal source of labor recruitment for the government.

The *Devshirme* system was established in 1390, following the annexation of Thessaloniki by Turkish forces, who took children aged 10-12, including those from Italy. A historical document, The Laws of the Janissary, outlines the procedures for acquiring enslaved people through *Devshirme* practices.<sup>31</sup> A soldier who seized a Christian child had to be someone other than a high-ranking individual, a priest, or a person of noble birth. This indicates that *Devshirme* was exclusively for individuals from lower social strata. Furthermore, it was prohibited to take all the

<sup>28</sup> Joseph Schaft, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), <http://islam-and-muslims.com/INTRODUCTION-ISLAMIC-LAW-Schacht.PDF>.

<sup>29</sup> Omri Paz, "Civil-Servant Aspirants: Ottoman Social Mobility in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 60, no. 4 (May 2017): 381-419, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685209-12341431>.

<sup>30</sup> Charles Wilkins, *Ottoman Elite Recruitment and the Case of Janbulad Bek b. Qasim (d. ca. 1575)* (2022), 155-82, <https://doi.org/10.14220/9783737011525.155>.

<sup>31</sup> Qi, "The Devshire System in the Ottoman Empire."

sons from one family due to concerns about the inability to support the father's occupation, which would lead to a decrease in income and, consequently, a reduction in taxes owed.

Although most of the *Dershirme* participants were non-Muslim, there was a Muslim group that also met the criteria, specifically Bosnian Muslims. This occurred because during the conquest of the area in 1463, the Bosnian Muslims willingly submitted to the sultan and converted to Islam. Subsequently, with the initiation of *Dershirme* policies, the Bosnian Muslims expressed their desire to join the program. From that point forward, the sultan began to recruit numerous children from Bosnia to be educated and serve in the palace or its surroundings.<sup>32</sup> relating to the social structure in the palace will be discussed in the following chapters.

The primary regions governed by *Dershirme* were the Balkans and Anatolia, but ultimately, very little was acquired from Anatolia due to its predominantly Muslim and Turkish population. In contrast, the Balkans and nearby regions had a predominantly Christian population, making Christians the central focus of this policy, in line with the Law of the Janissaries.<sup>33</sup> Beyond solidifying power and reinforcing control, another aim was to promote the spread of Islam and convert individuals, a strategy that has historically been quite impactful. The Law of the Janissary explicitly forbids the implementation of *Dershirme* in the territory between Karaman and Erzurum due to its diverse demographics, including Turcoman, Georgian, and Kurdish groups. This restriction also extends to Arabs in Turkish regions like Yemen and Hijaz. The rationale is clear: they are Muslims and not of European descent. The sultan adopted a different approach in these areas, allowing individuals to choose whether to take on a role or participate in the *Dershirme* program.

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<sup>32</sup> Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History* (London: Macmillan, 1996).

<sup>33</sup> Konstantinos Moustakas, Aikaterini Konstantina Kontopanagou, and Petros Kastrinakis, "The Christian Population of 16th-Century Ottoman Anatolia: An Overview and Preliminary Observations on Its Location and Numbers in the 1520s," *Turkish Historical Review* 15, no. 2 (April 2024): 107–33, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18775462-bja10064>.

The process of implementing *Dervshirme* politics occurs in multiple phases, starting with the collection and selection of children by officers (Agha), who then transport them to Istanbul. Typically, the officer will assemble a cohort of between 100 and 200 individuals according to established guidelines, after which each group will be documented with details including the child's name, place of origin, father's name, and a brief description. This system allows for easy tracking if a child goes missing or escapes. Additionally, the purpose of this documentation is to prevent the mingling of enslaved people and other forms of exploitation that could endanger the children. Consequently, each group will be closely monitored on its journey to Istanbul.<sup>34</sup>

Upon arrival in Istanbul, each child is inspected by the *Agha* with reference to the registration data to ensure compliance. This also applies to the *Agha* in charge of the field during the collection process and to the *Agha* in the capital, to ensure the data held by both *Aghas* match. Once all the data is in order, the children are sent to a special facility where they are circumcised in accordance with Islamic law for males after first being Islamized. They are then given proper clothing and nutritious food to prepare them for their education at the Palace school. If a child excelled in education and became a palace servant, he or she could be promoted to a civil service position; those with physical advantages were placed as officers outside the palace and even in the Janissary special forces.

Most of the children who participated in the *Dervshirme* program were meant to become Janissary soldiers, the elite forces of the sultan. However, they had to undergo multiple stages to join the corps. Those deemed attractive would be educated at the palace, while those being groomed for the corps would receive specialized training. They would be sent to the blood region and placed with Turkish families to immerse themselves in Turkish culture and language; additionally, the aim

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<sup>34</sup> Moustakas, Kontopanagou, and Kastrinakis, "The Christian Population of 16th-Century Ottoman Anatolia: An Overview and Preliminary Observations on Its Location and Numbers in the 1520s."

of educating them within Turkish households was to establish the teachings of Islam as their new faith firmly. The responsibility for the education of the children in *Devshirme* rested with the Aghas in Rumelia and Anatolia. They were supported by a team of 15 for each child, overseeing their welfare day and night. Following their education with Turkish families, the Agha responsible would transport them to Istanbul for immediate placement. The children being groomed to become Janissary soldiers were not enlisted right away; instead, they were housed in barracks near the palace. Their role was to prepare the equipment soldiers needed, including weapons. Until the end of the 16th Century, the *Devshirme* system continued to survive; only then did it gradually become less effective, and in the 17th Century, *Devshirme* recruitment became less frequent and ended in the early 18th Century. The author of The Law of Janissary, written for Sultan Ahmed I (1603-1617), describes changes in *Devshirme* policy from the period of Osman to that of Murad IV (1623-1640).<sup>35</sup>

With this recruitment model, the *Devshirme* system became less common and ultimately ceased in 1570. For instance, during Selim II's reign (1566-1574), it became standard to enlist Janissaries from the children of fathers serving in the sixth cavalry division and various court roles. The author notes that this practice posed a risk of corruption, particularly among those of Muslim heritage. This situation persisted, and the author of the law maintained that the revised recruitment approach proved disastrous, as the recruits lacked the necessary competence, leading to military defeats across the board. In 1630, Kochi Bey echoed the author's concerns, stating that since the 1620s, the Janissary corps had begun to accept unqualified individuals from different faiths and societal levels, thereby highlighting the need to reinstate the *Devshirme* system as it had been. The transformation of the *Devshirme* system to enlist the Janissary corps also yielded certain advantages, such as a substantial increase in the Janissary corps' numbers. Historical

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<sup>35</sup> Evstafyev, "The View of Christian Authors on the Practice of Devshirme in the 16th Century Ottoman Empire."

records indicate that in 1527, the Janissary force comprised 7,886 soldiers, which surged to 12,798 by 1567, and then skyrocketed to 39,282 in 1609. (Gabor Agoston, 1998) This considerable expansion provided a direct benefit to Tyrik, who was engaged in combat against Austria from 1593 to 1606, even though the majority of the soldiers were not from the *Devshirme* system; they were nonetheless trained in warfare, strategies, and weaponry.

### Politics of The Quest for Hegemony

Throughout the timeline of prominent empires, such as Rome, Russia, and others. They aimed to establish a power that would endure for a long time. Similarly, Ottoman Turkey is noted in history as an empire wielding influence and authority across three continents: Europe, Asia, and Africa. Turkey advanced during the reign of Mehmed II (1444-1481), when he successfully seized control of Constantinople, which became Istanbul. Under Selim I is rule, further progress was made by conquering various territories in Eastern Europe and the Mamluk kingdom in Egypt. This continued with Süleyman I, who conquered Hungary and diminished the control of the Habsburg Empire, marking the peak of Ottoman Turkey's power from the fall of Constantinople in 1453 until Süleyman I is death in 1566, the same year a portion of Eastern Europe was brought under control, becoming the focus of *Devshirme* policies.

One of the challenges of sustaining multinational power arises from the multitude of cultures, languages, religions, and more. This was indeed a challenge for the Ottoman Turks during their rule over Eastern Europe, which was predominantly Christian and ethnically diverse. For instance, when the sultan and the kingdom's ideology are Islamic, while the constitutional framework and the laws in place follow Sharia,<sup>36</sup> There are communities in parts of Eastern Europe with significantly different religious beliefs; how, then, does Turkey manage and

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<sup>36</sup> Petar Đorđević, "PAX OTTOMANA – ADMINISTRATION, REGULATION AND SHARIA LAW OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE," *Peščanik* 22, no. 25 (2024): 235–49, <https://doi.org/10.46793/Pescanik25.235DJ>.

address these disparities? To tackle this issue, the *Dervshirme* system was implemented, which involved recruiting young Christians from the Balkans or Eastern Europe, who were educated and subsequently employed as State servants, but only after they were converted to Islam.

*Dervshirme*, as explained by Basilike Papouli, was a cultural and religious movement that transported Christian Europeans to the Ottoman Empire, transforming them into soldiers, workers, and royal aides who subsequently established a distinct social class.<sup>37</sup> The system was implemented in an organized and methodical manner. Every five years, royal officials would transport children aged 8 to 18 to the capital to convert them to Islam and subsequently place them in Turkish households for education. While many assert that this constitutes a form of slavery, when viewed through the lens of social class, these children actually undergo a process of social mobility, advancing from lower strata to more esteemed positions, independent of any restrictive regulations.

The subjects of *Dervshirme* politics primarily included Slavic and Balkan communities, as a considerable number of Janissary personnel and soldiers communicated in Balkan and Slavic languages, in addition to Turkish, of course. The role of *Dervshirme* was crucial within the Ottoman Turkish constitution, maintaining its relevance over centuries. This system also served as a mechanism of dominance from the conquerors to the conquered, particularly in relation to Eastern Europeans. In contrast to the Habsburg European empire, which sought to impose hegemony and power through cultural assimilation—requiring all inhabitants, regardless of ethnicity or faith, to adopt the ruler's culture—the Ottomans took a different approach. While the acculturation strategy could swiftly subdue territories and establish dominance, it could also foster alienation among individuals with distinct cultural identities. The Ottoman Turks recognized that religious and cultural plurality was a source of strength and could not be forcibly unified. Instead, they

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<sup>37</sup> V. L. Ménage, "Sidelights on the *Devshirme* from Idrīs and Sa'duddīn," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 18, no. 1 (February 1956): 181–83, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0041977X0012227X>.

implemented the *Devshirme* system, which fostered a unique social class within the sultanate and the palace.

*Devshirme* was perceived in various ways by different individuals at the time, with reactions ranging from fear to indifference, and even excitement, as noted by V.L. Menage. Some Christian families in the Balkans expressed satisfaction with *Devshirme* since it offered their children a clear path in life, even if it meant being separated from their homes. Charles and Barbara Jelavich articulated that "at home, his opportunities were pitifully limited and in Constantinople, he could rise to administer the empire.<sup>38</sup> For instance, some parents from the Balkans resorted to bribing officials to have their children chosen for *Devshirme*. The majority of Europeans who were subjected to *Devshirme* were peasants and working-class individuals living in poverty, particularly before the arrival of the Ottoman Turks. The *Devshirme* system during the 15th and 16th centuries represented a brilliant political strategy for this empire; in addition to being effective, this approach also bolstered hegemony and authority, at least as a replacement for the sometimes ineffective acculturation system in sustaining dominance. This system rewards individual accomplishments rather than inheritance. As previously mentioned, a Janissary could not ensure their child would become a soldier, except through the established system. This illustrates that the Ottoman Turks possessed a robust strategy for their era, one that no other kingdom in Europe had. An ambassador of the Roman Empire to the Turkish Empire once remarked: "*Among the Turks, dignities, offices, and administrative posts are the rewards of ability and merits; those who are dishonest, lazy, and slothful never attain distinction, but remain in obscurity and contempt. This is why the Turks succeed in all that they attempt and are a dominating race and daily extend the bounds of their rule.*"<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> eds. Charles and Barbara Jelavich, *The Balkans in Transition. Essays on the Development of Balkan Life and Politics Since the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963).

<sup>39</sup> Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, "The Turkish Letters of Ogier Ghiselli de Busbecq," in *The Turkish Letters of Ogier Ghiselli de Busbecq*, ed.. Edward Seymour Foster (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), 60–60.

Examining the politics of *Devshirme* from different perspectives, this system serves as a pivotal element for the Ottoman Turks, not only in terms of power dominance but also in its indirect influence on factors such as religion, social hierarchy, social advancement, and equality of status. Regarding religion, while *Devshirme* may appear to impose on Islam, it has actually contributed positively to the growth of *da'wa* and the dissemination of Islam throughout Europe. The following list illustrates the Muslim population residing in the Balkans.<sup>:40</sup>

| No | city      | Muslim % | Christian % | Jews % |
|----|-----------|----------|-------------|--------|
| 1  | Istanbul  | 58.2     | 31.6        | 10.2   |
| 2  | Edirne    | 82.1     | 12.8        | 5.1    |
| 3  | Salonika  | 25.2     | 20.2        | 54.3   |
| 4  | Sarajevo  | 100      | 0           | 0      |
| 5  | Larissa   | 90.2     | 9.8         | 0      |
| 6  | Serres    | 61.3     | 32.8        | 5.9    |
| 7  | Monastir  | 75       | 20.2        | 4.8    |
| 8  | Skopje    | 74.8     | 23.7        | 1.5    |
| 9  | Sofia     | 66.4     | 33.6        | 0      |
| 10 | Athena    | 0.5      | 99.5        | 0      |
| 11 | Nicopolis | 37.7     | 62.3        | 0      |

Examining the table above, one can observe the growth of Muslim populations across cities, though some cities remain strongholds for Christians. The *Devshirme* system reveals that there are two predominant groups, Muslims and Christians. The kingdom enforced a tax system for religions other than Islam to ensure state protection. The taxes collected from *dhimmis* (non-Muslims residing in a Muslim state) not only provided security but also allowed access to all public services. During its prime in the 15th and early 16th centuries, the Ottoman Empire adopted a feudal system that differed from those seen in earlier European and Balkan societies. Turkish feudalism allowed peasants the liberty to cultivate the land, and as previously

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<sup>40</sup> PETER F. SUGAR, "Southeastern Europe under Ottoman Rule, 1354–1804," *The American Historical Review*, June 1979, 41, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr/84.3.798>.

noted, a royal servant was prohibited from entering or seizing land that was not under his jurisdiction.<sup>41</sup>

The feudal structure eventually provided a solid base for the Ottoman Turks to sustain their authority in distant regions, such as the Balkans, mainly due to peasants' strong support for the system. Not only did Turkish feudalism support the common folk, but the presence of the Ottoman Turks in the Balkans also instilled a sense of security in the populace that had previously been absent. This scenario persisted until the 17th Century, after which the feudal system, characterized by a cohesive land management approach known as '*timar*', began to decline, leading to significant corruption within the government.<sup>42</sup> The implementation of *Devshirme*, a balanced and compassionate feudal system, proved to be a formidable basis of authority for the Ottoman Turks, particularly in managing a diverse and often conflicting society, especially from an Islamic perspective.

The scrutiny of sharia and *devshirme* illustrates that the *devshirme* system within the Ottoman Empire raises pivotal questions concerning its congruence with sharia, especially regarding the forced conversion of Christian youths and their classification as *dhimmi*. This complex interaction clarifies the intrinsic discord between Ottoman bureaucratic practices and Islamic legal principles. Such discord accentuates the discrepancies apparent in the Ottoman treatment of religious minorities, as the *devshirme* system was often perceived as a violation of the rights accorded to *dhimmi* under sharia law.<sup>43</sup> Ultimately, the *devshirme* system became a prominent policy to integrate a diverse culture by means of spreading Islam as a state religion.

The *devshirme* system also influenced the legal framework, as the Turkish Sultanate was an Islamic sultanate with a relatively diverse society comprising various religions, ethnic groups, and races, particularly in European regions, where a significant

<sup>41</sup> Leften Stavros Stavrianos, *The Balkans since 1453* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

<sup>42</sup> Franz Babinger 1, *Mehmed the Conqueror and His Time*, ed. Walter Braddock Hickman (Princeton University Press, 992).

<sup>43</sup> Wittek, "Devshirme and Shari'a."

portion of the population identifies as non-Muslim. Within the Muslim community, diversity is also present, including numerous Muslims from Kurdish tribes, Syrian Bedouins, Egyptians, and Arabs. Shia Islam is practiced in Central Anatolia and Iraq, whereas Sunni Islam predominates, including the sultanate. The variety of cultures shaped the structure of the legal system. Individuals in the eastern region of the nation, previously under Safavid rule, chose to adhere to their own legal framework rather than adopt the Ottoman Turkish one. Additionally, Christians and Jews were permitted to exercise autonomy in establishing laws under the guidance of their respective religious authorities. However, the sultan maintained his power through a system of appointments, which ensured that any religious leader overseeing a church or similar institution was designated with the sultan's consent.<sup>44</sup>

### **Social Mobility in *Devshirme* Politics**

It is undeniable that Ottoman Turkey was a globally immensely powerful Islamic sultanate, even competing with Rome. The unique characteristic that sets this Islamic sultanate apart from others, particularly European kingdoms, is the *Devshirme* system, which was unprecedented. From a societal viewpoint, the *Devshirme* system has significantly altered the social order by creating opportunities for social mobility that affect the stratification structure. This phenomenon fits the application theory suggested by the prominent Pitirim Sorokin,<sup>45</sup> influencing changes in social status, whether vertically or horizontally. This change has affected various aspects, such as education, the economy, and social position, as seen in the practice of *Devshirme*.

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<sup>44</sup> Eleazar Birnbaum, "Avigdor Levy, Ed., The Jews of the Ottoman Empire (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin Press, 1994). Pp. 799," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29, no. 3 (August 1997): 447–54, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743800064953>.

<sup>45</sup> Johs. Hjelbrekke, "Mobility, Horizontal and Vertical," in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, 1st ed., ed. George Ritzer (Wiley, 2022), 1–2, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405165518.wbeosm113.pub2>.

Social stratification, social status, and social mobility hold great importance in sociological research; these three elements (stratification, status, and mobility) are interconnected concepts. In simple terms, social stratification is the categorization of social groups within a community based on economic, political, and ideological factors.<sup>46</sup> While the transition or alteration in social ranking, whether it rises or falls, is referred to as social mobility, it does not always take place within a society due to the inflexibility of its social framework, as was the case in Byzantium. Halil Inalcik, a prominent scholar of the Ottoman Turkish Empire, authored a book that delves into mobility, stratification, and social standing in Ottoman Turkey, particularly focusing on how *Dervshirme* became a vital mechanism for sustaining Turkey's power over the centuries. He argues that the *Dervshirme* system of slavery held significant cultural, political, and economic implications. The educational institutions within the palace produced scholars, janissaries, officials, and artists who all served the sultan, and this system played a crucial role in shaping the cultural and social dynamics that defined Ottoman Turkey.<sup>47</sup>

Social hierarchy and movement can be observed in the palace layout, which is split into two distinct areas: the inner and outer structures. Additionally, there is the Harem, a private area off-limits to everyone except the sultan and his trusted associates. In contrast, the outer area of the palace is occupied by soldiers, guards, gardeners, and others. The arrangement is as follows:

1. The inner structure of the palace:
  - a. *Hâs oda*
  - b. *Hazîne*
  - c. *Kiler*
  - d. *Seferli Oda*

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<sup>46</sup> Karen Barkey, "The Ottoman Empire (1299–1923): The Bureaucratization of Patrimonial Authority," in *Empires and Bureaucracy in World History* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 102–26, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316694312.006>.

<sup>47</sup> Halil Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age*.

2. The outer structure of the palace

- a. *Mîr Alem*
- b. *Kapîcî Başî*
- c. *Kapîcîlar Kethüdâsî*
- d. *Mîrahûr*
- e. *çakîrcî başî*
- f. *çaşnîgîr başî*

The nature of the work determines the aforementioned categorization, yet it also reflects the social hierarchy. The classification of the *Topkapi* Palace encompasses the hub of governance, the focal point of learning, and even the personal affairs of the royal family.<sup>48</sup> These divisions include:

1. *Bab-humayun*

This entrance serves as the primary access point to the Topkapi Palace, where the Birun social class resides, consisting of local Turks who serve as palace guards, physicians, educators, researchers, and other professionals who aid the kingdom's operations.

2. *Babüsselam*

The second entrance serves as a transitional space before entering the next door, which is the core of the Palace; the Babüsselam door represents the culture and significant endeavors of the Ottoman Turks. Consequently, this area is situated within several key institutions, including the Academy of Cadre, the highest court, Divan-Humayun, and the office of the prime minister.

3. *Babusaade*

This entrance represents the realm and the existence of the dynasty it belongs to, encompassing the sultan and his family. Consequently, Babusaade comprises multiple sections designed for the royal family, specifically:

a. *Enderun*

The *Enderun* School served as the residence of the royal family and a center of state affairs. At the same time, the uppermost section of the Topkapi Palace also fulfilled the

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<sup>48</sup> Samed Kurban, *Topkapi Palace as a Moral and Political Institutional Structure in the Ottoman Palace Organization*, 7, no. 3 (2017): 102–7.

highest and most esteemed educational roles, including children selected through the *Devshirme* system.

*b. Harem*

This area was the most secluded part of the entire palace, where the royal family's private life unfolded. Harem literally means 'forbidden,' indicating that this location was meant for exclusive access by select members of the royal family. The Harem comprises the living quarters of the wives, concubines, and female attendants of the sultan, as well as the queen mother, the ruler, and the princes. The harem can also be characterized as an enclosed setting where the Ottoman sultan resided with his mother, spouse, and children. The Enderun section of the palace, aside from the female quarters, was also referred to as Harem-i Hümayün, which is naturally confined to a small circle of the royal family.<sup>49</sup> The structure above reflects the intricate social hierarchy within the palace, with each tier representing an individual's class and status.<sup>50</sup> The mobilization framework that takes place is success-oriented and Particularistic, based on Talcott Parsons'Parsons' theory.

*Devshirme* is a unique social system that once thrived in Ottoman Turkey. Basilica Papoulis, in his writings from the 1960s, examined how *Devshirme* served as a foundation for the persistence of Ottoman Turkish social life. Similarly, V.L. Menage, a specialist in Turkish studies, describes *Devshirme* as "the coerced extraction, as a form of tribute, of children from Christian subjects, taking them away from their ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds and placing them into the Turkish-

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<sup>49</sup> Talat Sait Halman et al., "The Intimate Life of an Ottoman Statesman: Melek Ahmed Pasha (1588–1662) as Portrayed by Evliya Çelebi's Book of Travels," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113, no. 4 (October 1993): 626, <https://doi.org/10.2307/605811>.

<sup>50</sup> Ahmed AKGÜNDÜZ., *Slavery-Concubine Institution in Islamic Law and the Harem in the Ottoman Empire* (Istanbul: IUR Press, Istanbul, 2015).

Islamic context for the purpose of utilizing them in the service of the palace, the military, and the state."<sup>51</sup>

Some Turkish academics do refer to *Devshirme* as a form of slavery. However, individuals who received an education often elevated their social standing and even surpassed their previous conditions. Halil Inalcik acknowledges that social mobility was pronounced through *Devshirme* and the advantages it offered. However, ultimately, they remained the sultan's slaves, loyal to him and highly reliant on his authority.<sup>52</sup> No matter what individuals thought about *devshirme*, it can be confidently stated that Turkey's strength throughout the years was significantly reliant on it.

From an Islamic legal perspective, *Devshirme* is indeed controversial. Many experts and scholars argue that it violates Sharia law, especially according to the Hanafi school of thought, which most Turkish people follow. Several issues are under discussion, including the status of dhimmis, forced religious conversion, qanun, and Sharia law.

From the perspective of the dhimmi, Islamic law grants dhimmi status or protection to people of religions other than Islam who are under Muslim rule, including their lives, property, and possessions in exchange for jizyah or tax. However, the practice of *Devshirme* involved the forcible taking of all of these things, including young children, which was considered a violation of the concept of dhimmi. The *Devshirme* system also enforced the forced conversion of Christians to Islam, which, according to some opinions, was a fundamental violation of human rights. The provision for forced religious conversion was legitimized through qanun sharia, which sometimes disregarded the provisions of sharia law.

Nevertheless, in the context of social mobility, it served as an extraordinary pathway to elevate social strata, eliminating racial and religious boundaries. Some of these advantages can be seen in the career paths open not only to children of noble

<sup>51</sup> Ménage, "Sidelights on the *Dev shirme* from Idrīs and Sa'duddin."

<sup>52</sup> Halil Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age*.

descent but also to people of all races and non-Turks, especially those from the Balkans. Some were even able to occupy crucial positions in the palace. After receiving an education at Devshirme institutions, these young people were able to occupy various positions and develop the emotional strength to show their unwavering loyalty to the sultan.

As with any policy, Devshirme had advantages as a state political and legal policy, but it also had negative religious and social impacts. Religiously, as explained above, it certainly affected violations of Islamic law. However, viewed in the context of Islamic political history, particularly during the Ottoman Empire and, more generally, in those centuries, it was often contrary to Islamic values. Similarly, from a social perspective, although there was apparent racial and ethnic integration throughout Turkey, especially in the Balkans, Devshirme gradually became a cause of rebellion, especially among Christians who considered this political policy to be very detrimental.

Regardless of these issues, the fact is that Devshirme became a significant political and legal policy that perpetuated Ottoman power, with a concept of open social mobility and the creation of a ruling class loyal to the Sultan. This model was indeed not found in any other policy system at that time. This political and legal policy lasted for more than two centuries as the spearhead of Ottoman Turkish power to support its rule, but gradually declined since the mid-17th Century and ended completely around 1703-1730 during the reign of Sultan Ahmed III. Several factors led to the termination of this policy, including corruption and nepotism among the internal elite in terms of important positions in the military and the palace, pressure and rebellion from the Christian communities in the Balkans who opposed this policy, several rebellions carried out by the Janissary military elite, as well as the financial burden and economic crisis that ensued due to the costs of war and territorial expansion.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Anvar Allamuratov, "The Ottoman Empire: From Conquest and Integration of the Peripheries to Attempts of Modernization," *Pubmedia Social*

Based on the above explanation, the uniqueness of this political and legal policy can be a lesson for the modern era, especially in the context of social unification of a heterogeneous society, which, of course, has its benefits. State practices should prioritize inclusive and equitable legal policies, as exemplified by Devshirme, to ensure equality. This also means that, in the modern era, several significant aspects of this policy are well aligned with it. Ultimately, the lesson for the future is that government should be built on diversity and inclusivity to foster sustainable strength, of course, with some adjustments primarily in accordance with Islamic law.

## Conclusion

Devshirme originated as a strategy to sustain Ottoman authority over ethnically and religiously diverse European provinces. This practice persisted from the 14th to the 17th Century, after which it waned due to several significant reasons, including the decline of Turkish dominance in Europe, ineffective recruitment practices, and various uprisings.

This system showcases a multifaceted relationship between Islamic legal politics and state governance, illustrating how governmental policies can influence societal frameworks and personal identities throughout history. This relationship highlights the significant effects of historical systems on present-day social identities, stressing the importance of critically evaluating the remnants of such practices in contemporary society. It also exemplifies the oppressive nature of governmental authority while also demonstrating how Islamic legal politics played a role in establishing social hierarchies. Grasping these dynamics is essential for understanding the development of power relationships in both historical and current settings. Furthermore, the legacy of *devshirme* continues to spark debate among historians over its effects on Christian-Muslim relations and the broader socio-political context of the Ottoman Empire today. Academics persist in delving into the

complexities of this system, contending that it functioned not solely as a means of oppression but also as a pathway for social advancement among Christians. This ongoing conversation highlights the need to analyze historical accounts from multiple viewpoints to understand their relevance in the future fully.

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