



HISTORY STUDIES

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HISTORY

ISSN: 1309 4173 / (Online) 1309 - 4688 (Print)

Volume: 14, Issue: 3, August 2022

www.historystudies.net

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Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Modern Devletin İnşasında Meritokrasi Paradigması

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Makale Türü-*Article Type* : Araştırma Makalesi-Research Article
Geliş Tarihi-*Received Date* : 28.02.2022
Kabul Tarihi-*Accepted Date* : 01.08.2022
DOI Number  : 10.9737/hist.2021.1094

Atıf – Citation:

Hasan Gürkan, "The Meritocracy Paradigm during the
Emergence of the Modern State in the Ottoman Empire",
History Studies, 14/3, Ağustos 2022, s. 565-583.



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Öz

Bu çalışmada amaç Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda modern devletin inşası sürecinde meritokrasi paradigmasını ve meritokratik yönetim anlayışını incelemektir. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu tarih yazımında meritokrasi, ihmal edilen konulardan biridir. Bu nedenle bu çalışma alandaki önemli bir eksikliği gidermeye çalışmaktadır. Çalışmanın odaklandığı ana nokta Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda 18. yüzyıldan sonra geniş bir bürokrasi sınıfına gereksinim duyulması ve devletin yıkılışına kadar bürokraside liyakatli memurlar yetiştirme çabasıdır. Türk devlet gelenekleri ile İslami özellikleri bir arada taşıyan yönetim anlayışına sahip olan imparatorluk, modernleşme çabalarının hız kazandığı 19. yüzyılda kısmen de olsa meritokratik yönetim anlayışının farkına varmıştır. İmparatorluk, modernleşme sürecine bağlı olarak eğitim, maliye ve hariciye gibi alanlarda liyakatli memurlar yetiştirmeye çabalamış ve bu kişiler devlet kademelerinde yer edinmeye başlamıştır. Sonuçta devlet yönetiminde liyakat ilkesine özen gösterilmeye çalışılsa da bu konuda kesintisiz bir süreklilik sağlanamadığı ve bürokrasinin “liyakat” ve “sadakat” sarmalı içerisinde kaldığı görülmüştür.

Anahtar kelimeler: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Meritokrasi, Bürokrasi, Bürokrat, Memur.

Abstract

This paper aimed to explore the meritocracy paradigm and meritocratic management practices in establishing the modern state in the Ottoman Empire. Meritocracy is one of the neglected issues in the historiography of the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, the current study attempted to compensate for a critical lack in the field. The primary concern of the study was the need for an elite administrative-bureaucrat class in the Ottoman Empire after the 18th century and the efforts to train competent and well-qualified officials and bureaucrats until the collapse of the Empire. Embracing an administration that integrated Turkish state traditions and Islamic characteristics, the Empire started to appreciate the meritocratic management practices in the 19th century when modernization efforts accelerated. Hence, the Empire attempted to train competent officers in specific fields such as education, finance, and foreign affairs, and those civil servants were appointed to certain positions in the state administration. However, it was concluded that despite the vigorous attempts to uphold the principle of merit, there was no uninterrupted continuity of such practices, and bureaucracy remained in-between “merit” and “loyalty.”

Keywords: Ottoman Empire, Meritocracy, Bureaucracy, Bureaucrat, Civil Servant.

Introduction

Meritocracy is characterized by providing social opportunities for the combination of effort and talent to achieve a specific goal, regardless of the social conditions in which a person is born.¹ However, it is likely to mention meritocracy, though not completely, in the Ottoman Empire's administration in the past. Meritocracy is a 20th-century term, and it is also critical for understanding administrative and bureaucratic practices in the Ottoman Empire. From beginning to end, the Ottoman Empire underwent significant financial, social, and mostly bureaucratic changes. The bureaucratic elites managed to maintain their power even when centralism extended or disappeared. Although the western meritocracy and the Ottoman meritocracy were different at certain points, the meritocrats played an essential role in establishing the modern state during the modernization period. However, meritocracy is still one of the ignored topics of research in Turkish historiography.

The *millet* (community) system in the Ottoman Empire was dependent on various religious and sectarian groups.² The Ottoman Empire inherited the traditional administrative approach in the Middle East and Islam. Within the patrimonial system, the Empire governed *reaya* while the non-Muslims lived under the guarantee and prosperity of the Empire. Since Ottoman sultans' political power was undoubtedly absolute and quite effective during the classical period of the Empire, the Sultan was an absolute ruler in both traditional and religious institutions.³ Ottoman administration system was substantially established in the reign of Murad II and Mehmed II. Mehmed II laid the foundations of the state's administrative structure with a series of laws called "Kanunname," which would be in force until the 20th century.⁴ State servants and officers were, in fact, the slaves of the Sultan, but in the modern period, when bureaucratic positions required specialization, qualification, and merit, the occupants of those positions began to be distinguished. Thus, the authority of the Empire was shared with the increasing power of bureaucracy, especially as of the 19th century. On the other hand, there was an age of economic and technological developments in the West. The obligation to follow the progress brought about dramatic changes in Ottoman administration. In this sense, the importance of recruitment and training of qualified officers and professional specialization in the Ottoman Empire led to the rise of meritocracy.

1. Origins of Meritocracy

Before describing the concept of meritocracy, it would help explain a closely related term- aristocracy. Aristocracy derives from the Greek words "Aristos" -the best- and "Kratos" -power, influence, authority. The term "aristocracy" was initially used in French in 1361 and became common after the 1750s. Aristocracy originally means the political authority of "the best." Aristocracy also refers to a regime characterized by the political power of a specific inherited class. However, the term aristocracy implies a particular group, the elite, who have achieved primacy in a field.⁵

The aristocrats maintained their power until the 18th century. However, in the 17th century, some symptoms began to emerge that would change states' structure. Especially the decline of patrimonialism was an important indicator. According to John Locke, the decline of patrimonialism proved that the authority of kings could be restricted. Kings could no longer be

¹ Joo Littler, *Against Meritocracy. Culture, Power, and Myths of Mobility*, Routledge, Newyork, 2018, p. 1.

² İlber Ortaylı, *Ottoman Studies*, Kronik Books, İstanbul, 2019, p. 28.

³ Feridun M. Emecen, *Osmanlı Klasik Çağında Hanedan, Devlet ve Toplum* [Dynasty, State and Society in Ottoman Classical Period], Kapı Publishing, İstanbul, 2018, p. 16.

⁴ Kemal H. Karpat, *Elites and Religion from Ottoman Empire to Turkish Republic*, Timas Publishing, İstanbul, 2012, p. 32.

⁵ Yaşar Karayalçın, *Meritokrasi -Yığınların Aldatılması* [Meritocracy- Deception of the Masses], Turkish Women Association Publishing, Ankara, 1976, p. 15-16.

depended on a family legacy. They had to prove the justification of their actions in rational terms. Once the family and the state separated from each other, no leader could articulate the words of Nicholas I: “Do not question me! Just know that I am your father!”⁶

With the modern age, aristocrats’ power became a meritocracy based on worth and merit, rather than a family, which can also be described as the aristocracy’s evolution. Three critical factors underlay that change: the French revolution of 1789 and the revolutions of 1830 and 1848 across Europe. The most radical result of the revolution in France was the end of aristocratic society, but it was not an aristocracy of social status hierarchy that modeled “blood nobility.”⁷ The French revolution and the 1848 revolutions made a critical change. According to Hobsbawm, the most significant contribution of revolutions was the career achievement opportunities for talented, diligent, intelligent, hardworking, and ambitious people. However, it was not perfectly valid for all the professional fields and top steps of the ladder (except perhaps in the USA). Hobsbawm described the spirit of the times as follows:

The Kabinettsirat of the Kingdom of Hanover, von Schele, rejected the application of a poor young lawyer because his father was a binder and told him that he should also be a binder. Today, he would be considered evil, but at the same time, a funny man. Nevertheless, he only repeated the ancient wisdom of pre-capitalist society, and in the 1750s, a binder’s son could only become a binder. However, a significant number of options are available for him today.⁸

Based on Hobsbawm’s opinions, we can infer a new understanding of society and administration in the 18th and 19th centuries. It was a new world, relying on the establishment of nation-states and the rise of meritocracy.

The term meritocracy was coined by Michael Young in “*The Rise of the Meritocracy 1870-2033*”.⁹ According to Karayalçın’s book, Young dealt with meritocracy with a critical and literary approach. Young analyzed the events and the egalitarian perspective with sarcastic language, and he explained and defended the meritocracy as if he was living in 2033, in his work published in 1958.¹⁰

Etymologically, the term “meritocracy” is derived from the word “merit” (competence, worth) and “Kratos” (authority, influence, and power). In broad terms, meritocracy stands for advocating the authority and power of the elite in society. In this sense, meritocracy is closely related to the theories premised on elite power.¹¹ For Young, it is both an idea and a system based on the indifference to a person who has been tried once.¹² In coining the term meritocracy, Young’s purpose was to roughly describe how a small group of talented people could control an entire society. However, Foucault drew a more detailed picture of that control mechanism. Hence, Foucault underlined that the elite considerably influenced the populations by having them feel incapable of understanding and interpreting their life experiences.¹³ If meritocracy is acknowledged as the power and authority of the worthiest group, it becomes vital for not only politics but also for governance. Meritocracy is characterized by the people’s recruitment and employment distinguished by their intelligence, diligence, and other skills, especially at the

⁶ Richard Sennett, *Otorite* [Authority], transl. Kâmil Durand, Ayrıntı Publishing, İstanbul, 2005), p. 65.

⁷ Eric Hobsbawm, *Devrim Çağı 1789-1848* [The Age of Revolution 1789-1848], transl. Bahadır Sina Şener, Dost Publishing House, Ankara, 2008, p. 200.

⁸ Hobsbawm, *Devrim Çağı*, p. 208.

⁹ Amartya Sen, “Merit and Justice”, (ed.) Kenneth Arrow, Samuel Bowles, Steven Durlauf, *Meritocracy and Economic Inequality*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 2000), p.7.

¹⁰ Michael Young, *The Rice of Meritocracy 1870-2033 An Essay on Education and Equality*, Penguin Books, Victoria, 1961; Karayalçın, *Meritokrasi -Yığınların Aldatılması*, p. 13-14.

¹¹ Karayalçın, *Meritokrasi -Yığınların Aldatılması*, p. 16.

¹² Richard Sennett, *Yeni Kapitalizmin Kültürü* [The Culture of the New Capitalism], transl. Aylin Onacak, Ayrıntı Publishing, İstanbul, 2009, p. 89.

¹³ Sennett, *Yeni Kapitalizmin Kültürü*, p. 88.

management and administration positions and in the private and public sector. Meritocracy also refers to the placement and promotion in the state bureaucracy by following the principles of competition and merit (worth).¹⁴

The idea of meritocracy dates back to Plato. According to Plato, a state should be governed by intelligent and wise people who are spiritually and physically well-educated.¹⁵ He claims that if a person is talented and promising in a particular field, s/he should concentrate on that field from childhood, educate himself, and education must be organized by laws that determine what is right or wrong.¹⁶

In his ideal state, Plato tolerates the state rulers and gives the right to tell some “useful lies” that benefit society. One of those lies is the “myth of metals” that can be told to prevent the public resistance to such a stratified social order. Plato asks the state rulers to convince people of the following myth:¹⁷

As a member of this society, you all are brothers and sisters, but God adds gold to the yeast of the leaders he created among you. Therefore, they have the crown. He adds silver to the yeast of the deputy. He also adds iron and bronze to the yeast of farmers and other workers. Since we all come from the same ‘dough,’ your children are likely to resemble you. However, occasionally, silver is born from gold and gold from silver. Therefore, God warns state rulers to assess the mines added to their yeast carefully and to look after the children. If rulers’ children are born mixed with bronze or iron, she does not feel pity and place them in suitable occupations for their dough (i.e., farmers or workers). If some children of farmers and workers are born mixed with gold and silver, rulers protect and care for them, and they assign some the role of leader and others guard. Otherwise, God states that the city will be destroyed on the day when those mixed with iron or bronze in their yeast become leaders.¹⁸

Thus, Plato declares that inequality is inherent in society and claims the power of the wise. Plato, Socrates and, partly, Aristotle are considered the most influential figures of the major philosophical systems of inequality in Ancient Greece. According to them, the best (aristocrats) should rule the state. Socrates defends the rule of the nobility, Plato wisdom and reason, Aristotle virtue.¹⁹

The meritocratic view disagrees with the egalitarians, who are considered dreamers. It associates success and advancement in society only with intelligence, diligence, and other specific talents. It accepts that educational levels are only open to those who have proven their values. Karayalçın indicates that the meritocratic view is realistic, and it is impossible to achieve complete equality of people. By eliminating as much as possible the social factors, the meritocracy attributes the advancement in society to only intelligent and diligent people. Since distinctions and separation are essential for the social division of labor and hierarchy in society, it should be solely dependent on merit.²⁰

Inheritance was a prominent life phenomenon for Europeans, so no meritocracy can be mentioned in terms of employment and rewarding a competent person because, just like the land, the positions in church and the army were inherited. Positions were also a property. However, the inheritance of positions did not diminish the value of talent because one’s competence and status

¹⁴ Karayalçın, *Meritokrasi -Yığınların Aldatılması*, p. 17.

¹⁵ Platon, *Devlet* [The Republic], transl. Sabahattin Eyüboğlu and M. Ali Cımcöz, Türkiye İş Bankası Culture Publishing, İstanbul, 2003, p. 94.

¹⁶ Çetin Yetkin, *Siyasal Düşünceler Tarihi* [The History of Political Ideas], Otopsi Publishing, İstanbul, 2005, p. 113.

¹⁷ Alâeddin Şenel, *Siyasal Düşünceler Tarihi* [The History of Political Ideas], Bilim ve Sanat Publishing House, Ankara, 2004, p. 147.

¹⁸ Platon, *Devlet*, p. 96.

¹⁹ Karayalçın, *Meritokrasi -Yığınların Aldatılması*, p. 45.

²⁰ Karayalçın, *Meritokrasi -Yığınların Aldatılması*, p. 22-23.

in life used to be perceived as parallel social worlds.²¹ The equality between talent and personal worth led to a new form of inequality: being creative and intelligent meant being a superior and more valuable person than others. Modern meritocracy appeared as institutions began to structure themselves on this form of inequality. For Richard Sennett, one way to determine the date of birth of modern meritocracy is to consider the career of Samuel Pepys, a middle-class British man. Pepys was one of the first officials who managed to advance in government in the 1660s thanks to his intelligence. He was working at the Naval Forces Command and providing supplies to the Navy. His duty was to calculate the amount and number of cannonballs and salted beef for the ships. Since he was gifted in mathematics, he claimed to deserve that position, instead of the Earl of Shrewsbury, the ruler's cousin, who was also his uncle.²² A career advancement based on talent and merit was initially observed in military institutions. The introduction of a talent-oriented career to the business world was thanks to the military, following the bureaucratic pyramid. Established in the late 17th century, the military academies like St. Cyr²³ required young officers to learn mathematics to do Ballistic calculations.²⁴ Since the newly established army in the Ottoman Empire in 1826 entailed infantry and cavalry officers, who knew the art of European warfare, *Mekteb-i Ulum-i Harbiye* (Military Academy) was founded in Maçka barracks, Istanbul in 1834. The St. Cyr Military Academy was taken as an example for the military school in Istanbul.²⁵ Thus, the Ottoman Empire paved the way for the rise of the military-bureaucratic elite. The school also laid the early foundations of the Turkish Military Academy.

2. The Ottoman Meritocracy: Ilmiye (Ulama), Seyfiye (Military), and Kalemîye (Administrative) Status

The state organization in the Ottoman Empire comprised two institutions in general terms: ulama and umera (*ilmiye* and *seyfiye*). Furthermore, a bureaucratic class (*Kalemîye*) was added to the state organization in the 16th century (e.g., scientists, soldiers, and bureaucrats). Ulama was the institution responsible for law and *şeriat*, and umera represented Sultan's political and military authority. Kalemîye was the Ottoman bureaucracy, mostly including the graduates of the madrasah. A master-apprentice relationship was typical in the Kalemîye status.²⁶

The discussions on the Ottoman meritocracy in literature seem quite superficial. Therefore, the question of what should be understood from "Ottoman meritocracy" is very ambiguous. According to Yaşar Karayalçın, one of the few people whose views about this issue are known, the period from the conquest of Istanbul to the death of Suleiman the Magnificent (1453-1566) was the peak of Ottoman power. It was a result of not only the military power but also promoting people by their qualifications. He asserts that the Ottoman Empire's golden age was when responsible and competent civil and military administrators and religious leaders were selected and educated in various fields.²⁷ Kemal Karpat states that the Ottoman state was already a meritocracy; that is, the absence of a blood aristocracy and egalitarianism except for the state and

²¹ Sennett, *Yeni Kapitalizmin Kültürü*, p. 77-78.

²² Sennett, *Yeni Kapitalizmin Kültürü*, p. 78-79.

²³ Modern business schools complete the transformation that began at St. Cyr today. Organizations obsessively test their employees. Here, the goal is to reward the talent and, above all, justify failure. See also Sennett, *Yeni Kapitalizmin Kültürü*, p. 80.

²⁴ Sennett, *Yeni Kapitalizmin Kültürü*, p. 77-79.

²⁵ Ercüment Kuran, *Türk Dünyası El Kitabı* [Turkish World Handbook], Vol.1, Turkish Culture Research Institute Publications, Ankara, 1992, p. 495.

²⁶ Mehmet Ali Ünal, *Osmanlı Müesseseleri Tarihi* [The History of Ottoman Institutions], Fakülte Publishing House, Isparta, 2007, p. 39.

²⁷ Karayalçın, *Meritokrasi - Yiğınların Aldatılması*, p. 26.



its representatives facilitated the long-term and challenging transition of the modern nation and state organization.²⁸

Two institutions raised and educated the elite class in the Ottoman Empire: Enderun (The Ottoman Palace School) and madrasah. The civil and military administrative staff of the state were trained in Enderun schools. The word “Enderun” means “interior” in Persian. *İç oğlanı* and the elite officers in the Ottoman army were chosen using the *devşirme* system, and thus the gifted Turkish and non-Muslim children were trained in the Islamic society. For the Guild of Janissaries, which was established in the reign of Murad I, initially, non-Muslim young war prisoners were recruited under the Pençik Law of Ottomans, but due to the decline in conquests and the recession following the Ankara War, the *devşirme* system was applied.²⁹ The system was also used to raise the political elites during the reign of Murad II (1421-1451). Turkish and non-Muslim children between 8 and 20 (or 10 and 20 years) were collected through tribute, donation, slavery, or purchases. Among those annually collected 12-15 thousand people, approximately 200 children were raised and educated as page boys in Enderun schools.³⁰ Civil servants who would work in the palace, army and government jobs were raised in Enderun.³¹ Although the children recruited from the Christian people in the Ottoman lands were not considered prisoners, the *devşirme* practice was an important innovation for the master-servant system.³²

Another type of institution to educate the elite class of the Empire were madrasahs.³³ Madrasa means “classroom” in Arabic and also refers to the building where students study. It is a general term used for the educational institutions in Islamic and Ottoman countries and also for Dâr’ül-fünûn (university).³⁴ Only Muslims could enroll in the madrasahs that trained lawyers, teachers, and clergymen. The progress at those schools depended only on success, intelligence and diligence, and other talents. According to Karayalçın, that practice proves that the golden age of a state is only possible with the selection and training of the most successful and talented people for the management and administration positions and the application of meritocracy.³⁵ It should be noted that those gifted students underwent both religious and cultural education.

3. Ottoman Bureaucracy

Although it is complicated to follow the historical development of bureaucracy, it can be inferred that it became apparent with the invention and extensive use of writing.³⁶ Max Weber indicates that defining the development of the state with modern concepts is essential. Weber considers modern bureaucracy as the organized institutional action of administrative officials who subject to legal regulations.³⁷ After the French Revolution in 1789, bureaucracy was established in personal relationships in modern states, officers were no longer the servants of the king, and it was called “public bureaucracy” rather than “royal bureaucracy.”³⁸ Although wealth and high

²⁸ Kemal, H. Karpat, *İslam'ın Siyasallaşması* [The Politization of Islam], transl. Şiar Yalçın, İstanbul Bilgi University Publishing, İstanbul, 2009, p. 576-577.

²⁹ Abdülkadir Özcan, “Devşirme” [Devshirme], *TDVİA*, Vol. 9, Turkish Religious Foundation Publishing, İstanbul, 1994, p. 254-257; Karayalçın, *Meritokrasi - Yiğınların Aldatılması*, p. 26-27.

³⁰ Karayalçın, *Meritokrasi - Yiğınların Aldatılması*, p. 26-27.

³¹ Osman Ergin, *Türk Maarif Tarihi* [Turkish Education History], V. 1-2, Eser Press, İstanbul, 1977, p. 11.

³² Halil İnalçık, *Devlet-i 'Aliyye. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Üzerine Araştırmalar-I* [Devlet-i Aliyye: Studies on Ottoman Empire], Türkiye İş Bankası Culture Publishing, İstanbul, 2012, p. 205.

³³ Karayalçın, *Meritokrasi - Yiğınların Aldatılması*, p. 27.

³⁴ Ünal, *Osmanlı Müesseseleri*, p. 109.

³⁵ Karayalçın, *Meritokrasi - Yiğınların Aldatılması*, p. 27.

³⁶ Necati Gültepe, *Mührün Gücü. İlk Türk-İslam Devletlerinde ve Osmanlılarda Bürokrasi* [The Power of the Seal: Bureaucracy in the First Turkish-Islamic States and Ottoman Empire], Kapı Publishing, İstanbul, 2019, p. 27.

³⁷ Max Weber, *Bürokrasi ve Otorite* [Bureaucracy and Authority], transl. Bahadır Akın, Adres Publishing, Ankara, 2005, p. 32.

³⁸ Gültepe, *Mührün Gücü*, p. 20.

position in society could lead to authority and power claims, patrimonial rule in the Ottoman Empire made such demands impossible to implement.³⁹

Bureaucracy is generally used to address organizational structures and their effects on performance, and it is defined considering the structural features of an organization. Weber's concept of bureaucracy is the criteria for this analysis.⁴⁰ According to Weber, bureaucratic management is essentially characterized by knowledge-based control, making it particularly rational.⁴¹ On the other hand, Cemil Oktay defines bureaucracy in his work titled "*Hum Zamirinin Serencamı*" as follows:

The word bureaucracy has rich meaning in almost all languages. Complaining about bureaucracy is also another aspect that almost everyone approves of wholeheartedly... Occasionally, "a centralized management," "elitism," "officialism" that prevents the execution of public affairs, a legal system that "the dignitaries of legislation" are obliged to comply with, and a soulless principle of solving problems are among the attributed meanings to a single word "bureaucracy." The given different meanings reflect how social realities are perceived by those who live those realities.⁴²

Being a bureaucratic state was the most distinctive feature of the Ottoman Empire. However, the bureaucratic system caused alienation between the center and the rural. In other words, it led to an estrangement between the ruling class and the *reaya*. The independence and autonomy of the center created the unique form of organization and structuring of the state.⁴³ Today, a clear understanding of the law governs the social relationships between the state and civilians. If people want to resolve a disagreement, they do so by the law (i.e., they make contracts).⁴⁴ However, there was no similar modern approach in the Ottoman Empire until the 19th century. Instead, there were laws inherent in patrimonial systems. As İnalçık stated, a patrimonial ruler perceives his authority, country, and citizens as a patrimony and does not recognize any authority except himself.⁴⁵ The laws in patrimonial states are quite limited and ambiguous, so interpersonal agreements often replace the law. For example, in modern states, passing examinations, diplomas, scholarship conditions, selection examination, and compulsory service principles are considered essential for civil servants' training. However, in patrimonial systems, especially in Middle Eastern patrimonialism, those "impersonal/formal" regulations are pretty limited. A good civil servant is chosen with "advice." A person to be employed as a civil servant begins his career as an "apprentice" of a respected and experienced head of an office at the age of 12-13, rather than taking an exam... The bond between apprentice and teacher is an inseparable part of the state structure. An interesting example of it is the *devşirme* system.⁴⁶ Indeed, it is impossible to experience Weber's rational bureaucracy in the Ottoman Empire, at least until the modernization period.

The gifted characteristics of the sultans and commanders played an essential role in establishing the Ottoman Empire. However, the developments in war technology and the rise of industry in the West led to severe problems in the Ottoman Empire that could not establish a

³⁹ Carter V. Findley, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Bürokratik Reform. Babiâli 1789-1922* [The Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire: Babiâli 1789-1922], transl. Ercan Ertürk, Tarih Vakfı Yurt Publishing, İstanbul, 2014, p. 15.

⁴⁰ Bilal Eryılmaz, *Bürokrasi ve Siyaset* [Bureaucracy and Politics], Alfa Publishing, İstanbul, 2008, p. 7.

⁴¹ Weber, *Bürokrasi ve Otorite* [Bureaucracy and Authority], p. 53.

⁴² Cemil Oktay, "*Hum*" *Zamirinin Serencamı* [Consequences of the pronoun 'they'], Bağlam Publishing, İstanbul, 1991, p. 37.

⁴³ Serdal Fidan, Kamil Şahin and Fikret Çelik, "Osmanlı Modernleşmesinin Temel Olgularından Biri: Bürokrasi" [One of the Basic Phenomena of Ottoman Modernization: Bureaucracy], *Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi Fen Edebiyat Fakültesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 23, (2011), p. 115.

⁴⁴ Şerif Mardin, *Türkiye'de Toplum ve Siyaset (Makaleler I)* [Society and Politics in Turkey (Articles I)], İletişim Publishing, İstanbul, 1994, p. 214.

⁴⁵ İnalçık, *Devlet-i 'Aliyye*, p. 218.

⁴⁶ Mardin, *Türkiye'de Toplum ve Siyaset* [Society and Politics in Turkey], p. 214-215.

similar system with the West. Sultans trapped in the palace, the absence of bureaucratic institutions such as the ministry of war, and the deterioration of the economy led to the decline of the Empire. The recruitment of the uneducated and impoverished people in the Janissary system was an indicator of the decline. Those Janissaries then started businesses as butchers, porters, boatmen, greengrocers, masseurs, and café runners, which was also of decline sign.⁴⁷ Therefore, the Ottomans were in urgent need of qualified and educated professionals, especially in military terms. The meritocratic understanding could be traced to the manorial system in the Empire until the 16th century. For example, the Empire granted “ranks” to those who were successful in war and conquest. Those military ranks and promotions granted to the Janissaries and the owners of manors and sergeancy were a means of increasing motivation for the war and rewarding those people.⁴⁸ However, the deterioration in the manorial system since the second half of the 16th century failed in military ranks and promotions to motivate the meritorious...⁴⁹

Similarly, Lütfi Pasha (D. 1563), one of the leading statesmen and grand viziers in the 16th century, emphasized the importance of merit. Lütfi Pasha assumed effective administration and had profound actions.⁵⁰ Lütfi Pasha explained his views on state administration in “Âsafname,” his booklet on the Ottoman state organization. When he became the Grand Vizier, he admitted that he found a pretty complicated state organization and witnessed the ambiguous execution of the laws and regulations compared to the past. Therefore, he wrote “Âsafname,” mainly referring to his experiences in state affairs for the subsequent officials. One of the most striking aspects of the work was his emphasis on the necessity of merit.⁵¹ He underlined that the unqualified should not have been appointed to state positions; instead, merits should have been considered. He also wrote about the problems in case of the absence of merit.⁵²

Koçi Bey, one of the important figures of the 17th century, recognized the significance of merit in state government. He was an Ottoman writer and scholar known for his booklets to guide Murad IV and Sultan Ibrahim in the state administration. He upheld the priority of merit in the state administration and organization and claimed that the employment of unqualified officials was one of the most critical problems in the administrative organization of the Ottoman Empire. Koçi Bey specifically pointed out the problems related to the ilmiye class (ulama), including the illegal appointments, the employment of incompetent officials, bribery and nepotism, and severely criticized for inappropriateness to the Islamic morals and principles.⁵³

Koçi Bey emphasized the employment of talented officials in the state: “The guarantee of knowledge flow depends on scholars. That is why the respect and hospitality to knowledge and scholars in the time of their great ancestors were unique. The well-being of scholars is one of the most critical duties of the religion and the state. Fatwa authority should select honorable, wise, and scholarly people. Not every scholar is worthy of that position...”⁵⁴

⁴⁷ Niyazi Berkes, *Türkiye’de Çağdaşlaşma* [Modernization in Turkey], Doğu-Batı Publishing, İstanbul, p. 72-74.

⁴⁸ Emine Erdoğan Özünlü, “Osmanlı Ordusunda Bir Motivasyon ve Terfi Kaynağı: ‘Terakki’ Tevcihi”, [A Source of Motivation and Promotion in the Ottoman Army: “Terakki” Allocation] *Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi* [International Journal of Social Research], 3:11, (2010), p. 239-243.

⁴⁹ Erdoğan Özünlü, “Osmanlı Ordusunda”, p. 243.

⁵⁰ Mehmet İpşirli, “Lütfi Paşa”, Turkish Religious Foundation Encyclopedia of Islam, İstanbul, 2002, p. 234-235.

⁵¹ Mehmet İpşirli, “Âsafnâme”, Turkish Religious Foundation Encyclopedia of Islam, İstanbul, 2002), p. 456.

⁵² Çağatay Ceylan, “Osmanlı Modernleşme Sürecinde Ahmet Cevdet Paşa’nın Yönetim Anlayışı” [Administration Understanding of Ahmet Cevdet Pasha in The Ottoman Modernization Process], *unpublished master thesis*, Sakarya University, 2019, p. 17.

⁵³ Ömer Faruk Akün, “Koçi Bey”, Turkish Religious Foundation Encyclopedia of Islam, Ankara, 2002, p. 145.

⁵⁴ Zuhuri Danışman, *Koçi Bey Risalesi* [Koçi Bey Booklet], The Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 1985, Ankara, p. 50-51, cited in Gülbende Kuray, “Türkiye’de Bir Machiavelli: Koçi Bey” [A Machiavelli in Turkey: Koçi Bey], *Bellekten*, 52:205, 1988, p. 1661.

Modernization in the 19th century also led to the growth of bureaucratic organizations.⁵⁵ Later known as modernization and Westernization, the reform concept became the ruling elites' ideology and the sole legitimacy of their authority.⁵⁶ Due to the need for better educated civil servants in the emergence of a new civil bureaucracy and a comprehensive administrative modernization during the reign of Mahmud II, especially in the 1830s, schools called *Mekteb-i Maarif-i Adliye* (the Royal Education School), and *Mekteb-i Ulum-i Edebiye* (the Royal Science and Literature School) were established in 1838.⁵⁷ Thus, Mahmud II laid the foundations of an administrative bureaucracy that would become influential after his death.⁵⁸ At the end of the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire's patrimonial bureaucracy was partially replaced by a rational bureaucracy. It should be noted that this Weberian formula can be applied in a limited sense because the bureaucratic elements such as hierarchy outweighed rational demands such as rewards and promotion. Some Ottoman bureaucracy members quickly adapted to modernization and took the leadership of reform in the 19th century. The 19th-century Ottoman reformers, who supported the French "Grande école," contributed to the education of high-qualified and intellectual bureaucratic elites who considered the "interests of the state."⁵⁹

According to Plato, there are three classes in an ideal state: the clergy, the aristocracy, and the citizens (the commons). Köker argues that this classification was carried out in the Ottoman state structure. In this sense, Köker shows parallelism between the positions of Sultan and Plato's "wise-king"; the "executive soldiers and ulama" and "guards"; the "reaya" and "producers."⁶⁰

The organization of the Ottoman Empire in the classical period had additional features similar to Platonic principles. The possession of "real knowledge" by only the Sultan and the "military" group was one similarity. The public lacked knowledge and could not interfere in state affairs. The second similarity was the absolute distinction between the "palace" and "military" groups, including sultans and dynasties, and the society in order to ensure the "stability" of the state organization.⁶¹ However, during the Tanzimat reform era, bureaucrats and politicians- with bureaucratic origin- became dominant in the political scene. The administrative authority in the Empire was transferred from the Sultan to the Babiâli (Sublime Porte) bureaucrats (Kalemiye) with the Tanzimat reforms. Besides, the Ulama's traditional role stayed in the background, and new and educated administrative staff assumed the leadership in the state administration.⁶²

Undoubtedly, specific regulations were necessary for the new elite staff to build the authority that Weber called the rational/legal authority. Therefore, several innovations and regulations were made primarily in education during the Tanzimat Reform Era. The Empire quickly began to institutionalize. Moreover, by suppressing the dominance of the Ulama on educational institutions, various attempts were made, including establishing a civil education system, opening civilian teacher training schools and the rushdiyes (secondary school) that would be the middle and high schools of today, and later, reorganizing the military school system, resulting in a significant increase in the number of "educated and trained" officers.⁶³ The primary purpose of

⁵⁵ İlber Ortaylı, *Batılılaşma Yolunda* [On the Road to Modernization], İnkılâp Bookstore, İstanbul, 2016, p. 121.

⁵⁶ Kemal H. Karpat, *Osmanlı Modernleşmesi. Toplum, Kuramsal Değişim ve Nüfus* [Ottoman Modernization: Society, Theoretical Change and Population], Timaş Publishing, İstanbul, 2014, p. 80.

⁵⁷ Selçuk Akşin Somel, "Kırım Savaşı, Islahat Fermanı ve Osmanlı Eğitim Düzeninde Dönüşümler" [Crimean War, Reform Edict and Transformations in Ottoman Education System], (ed.) Halil İnalçık and Mehmet Seyitdanlıoğlu, *Tanzimat. Değişim Sürecinde Osmanlı İmparatorluğu* [The Tanzimat: The Ottoman Empire in the Change Process], Türkiye İş Bankası Culture Publishing, Ankara, 2012, p. 688.

⁵⁸ Gültepe, *Mührün Gücü*, p. 303.

⁵⁹ Mardin, *Türkiye'de Toplum ve Siyaset*, p. 55-56.

⁶⁰ Levent Köker, *Demokrasi Üzerine Yazılar* [Writings on Democracy], İmge Bookstore, Ankara, 1992, p. 170.

⁶¹ Köker, *Demokrasi Üzerine*, p. 171.

⁶² Bilal Eryılmaz, *Bürokrasi ve Siyaset* [Bureaucracy and Politics], Alfa Publishing, İstanbul, 2008, p. 134.

⁶³ Mardin, *Türkiye'de Toplum ve Siyaset*, p. 212.



the Ottoman Empire's educational reforms was to reinforce the quality of the bureaucracy, create professionally qualified people, and foster patriotism.⁶⁴

Education was a common priority for the Ottoman elites in the 19th century. For example, Ahmet Vefik Pasha was known as “a walking library” and “an insatiable reader.” Ali Pasha learned French under a tree in the Ottoman Embassy in Vienna. Münif Pasha studied at the University of Berlin for three years. Ziya Gökalp studied French philosophy and sociology by himself while living in exile in Anatolia for nine years.⁶⁵ On the other hand, despite all those intellectual figures, unqualified officers worked even in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where French was of great importance in the 19th century.⁶⁶

4. Institutionalization and training of meritocrats with the Tanzimat Reform Era

The Westernization movement, which Selim III initiated, continued with Mahmud II and accelerated and expanded with the Tanzimat-era reformers, triggered the emergence of a new generation in the Ottoman Empire. This new generation was exhibiting a new type of intelligence in the Ottoman country, who attended non-madrasah schools, spoke foreign languages, went to the West, and had the chance to observe the West.⁶⁷ From the mid-19th century, state service was the Muslims' primary path to acquire a high social position,⁶⁸ which mainly stemmed from the new administrative organizations depending on the modernization in the bureaucracy. During the Tanzimat reform era, new administrative organizations, one of the critical dimensions of the bureaucratic structure and education, were of great importance. In this period, the leading institutions regarding those administrative attempts included the establishment of *Meclis-i Umur-ı Nafia* (The Council of Public Works) (1838), *Mekatib-i Rüşdiye Nezareti* (The Ministry of Secondary Schools) (1839), *Encümen-i Daniş* (The Council of Science) (1851), *Maarif-i Umumiye Nezareti* (The Ministry of Education) (1857), *Telif ve Tercüme Dairesi* (The Department of Copyright and Translation) (1866), and *Meclis-i Kebir-i Maarif* (Great Education Council) (1869).⁶⁹ Among the given educational reforms, the foundation of *Meclis-i Umur-ı Nafia* (The Council of Public Works) in March 1838 played an exceptionally important role in planning and monitoring the reforms. The council published various regulations and guidelines for educational institutions suggesting to plan the educational procedures considering every child's interests and skills and abolish punishment in education.⁷⁰

Selim III was the pioneer of the modernization reforms in the Empire, which caused unrest. The aim of the bureaucrats, who were members of the *Reisülküttap Dairesi* (a term used for ‘ministry of foreign affairs’ before the Tanzimat Reform Era) of the reformist administrative group (Kalemiye) was to retain control of the government and to have an authority on the Sultan.⁷¹ *Maarif-i Umumiye Nizamnamesi* (The General Education Regulation) had an important place among the Tanzimat period regulations. Accordingly, the *Meclis-i Kebir-i Maarif* (Great Education Council), which consisted of scientific and administrative departments, was founded

⁶⁴ Kemal H. Karpat, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Kimlik ve İdeoloji* [Ideology and Identity from the Ottoman to the Present], Timaş Publishing, İstanbul, 2009, p. 27-28.

⁶⁵ Roderic Davison, “Osmanlı Türkiyesi'nde Batılı Eğitim” [Western Education in Ottoman Turkey], (ed.) Halil İnalçık, Mehmet Seyitdanlıoğlu, *Tanzimat. Değişim Sürecinde Osmanlı İmparatorluğu*. [The Tanzimat: The Ottoman Empire in the Change Process], Türkiye İş Bankası Culture Publishing, Ankara, 2012, p. 668-669.

⁶⁶ Findley, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda*, p. 233.

⁶⁷ İhsan Güneş, *Türk Parlamento Tarihi* [History of Turkish Parliament], Vol. 1, Turkish Grand National Assembly Foundation Publishing, Ankara, 1997, p. 24.

⁶⁸ Karpat, *Osmanlı Modernleşmesi*, p. 112.

⁶⁹ Reşat Özalp and Aydoğan Ataünel, *Türk Milli Eğitim Sisteminde Düzenleme Teşkilatı* [Regulation Institution in the Turkish National Education System], National Education Publishing, İstanbul, 1977, p. 4-9.

⁷⁰ Özalp and Ataünel, *Türk Milli*, p. 4.

⁷¹ Karpat, *Osmanlı Modernleşmesi*, p. 85.

as the general administrative center of education by the bureaucratic elite.⁷² *Maarif-i Umumiye Nizamnamesi* (The General Education Regulation) was prepared by Saffet Pasha and took effect on September 1, 1869. It was a cornerstone in the education system as it ensured the co-functioning of management and supervision. Saffet Pasha was a qualified bureaucrat who was fluent and proficient in eastern and western languages, and he partially reflected his views in this document. Those who went to Europe after the Tanzimat and were assigned in important positions were influential in preparing the document.⁷³

On the other hand, some intellectuals protested the Tanzimat reforms. They claimed that there was the tyranny of an elite bureaucratic group instead of the laws in the *Tanzimat Edict*, and that group only protected their lifestyle, properties, and dignity. Called the New Ottomans, those intellectuals attempted to explain the statesmen's egoism and argued that the regime was just an empty promise, and the Tanzimat reforms were not dependent on the enlightenment philosophy of the West.⁷⁴ Although the Tanzimat Edict did not have deep roots like the enlightenment philosophy, it cannot be denied that it was an essential step for the legal authority. Although the Ottoman Empire depended on religious foundations, did not end the religious regime, it adopted some Western rights and principles and noticed the West's secular system.⁷⁵ In other words, the transition from God's rights system to the human rights system was paved. Besides, during the Tanzimat period, the grand vizier and his bureaucratic staff dominated the government.⁷⁶

Following Weber's classification of legitimate authority (rational-legal authority, traditional authority, and charismatic authority⁷⁷), it can be inferred that the legalization aspect of the Tanzimat reforms was critical for the Ottoman, as the Tanzimat was a sign of the dissolution of traditional authority and the rise of legal authority.

The roots of the modern representational theory include two main streams. As Karl Friedrich stated, the first and prominent point refers to the representation theory of the actual protests restraining the power of the modern centralist state's bureaucracy. A second trend represents those who support the "national will." The Young Turks appeared to advocate for that approach due to their adoption of inclusive and abstract social theories associated with the concept of "apocalyptic conscience." Prince Sabahattin, on the contrary, was a representative of the first stream. It was noteworthy that Prince Sabahattin believed that local elections would result in the victory of honorable and talented people, and the defeat of the "incompetent" like Murat Bey and Ahmet Rıza's teacher Pierre Lafitte.⁷⁸

The scholar Ahmed Cevdet Pasha (1822-1895), who was recruited in the state by Mustafa Reşit Pasha (b. 1858) and served to three sultans, clarified and approved the new concepts of reform and change in Islamic terms. The new reforms in the Tanzimat Edict (1839) were drastically different from the traditional and statist reforms made by Mahmud II and Selim III. Cevdet Pasha also pointed out that Islam acknowledges necessity as a legitimate reason for the change. Cevdet Pasha even said to the Ulama that "Changing conditions justify the changes in the

⁷² BOA (Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives) *Maarif-i Umumiye Nizamnamesi* [The General Education Regulation], 24 Cemazeyilahir 1286/1 October 1869; Yahya Akyüz, *Türk Eğitim Tarihi M.Ö 1000-MS. 2011* [Turkish Education History BC 1000-AD 2011], PegemAkademi, Ankara, 2011, p. 192.

⁷³ Cavit Binbaşıoğlu, *Türk Eğitim Düşüncesi Tarihi* [The History of Turkish Education Thought], Anı Publishing, Ankara, 2005, p. 28.

⁷⁴ Mardin, *Türkiye'de Toplum ve Siyaset*, p. 216.

⁷⁵ Enver Ziya Karal, *Osmanlı Tarihi* [Ottoman History], Vol. 5, Turkish Historical Society Publishing, Ankara, 1994, p. 172-173.,

⁷⁶ Gültepe, *Mührün Gücü*, p. 317.

⁷⁷ Weber, *Bürokrasi ve Otorite*, p. 39-40.

⁷⁸ Şerif Mardin, *Jön Türklerin Siyasi Fikirleri 1895-1908* [Political Ideas of the Young Turks 1895-1908], İletişim Publishing, İstanbul, 1983, p. 215-216.

law,” and opposition to change meant violating Islamic rules. The origin of that idea lies in earthly factors and, if properly preserved, facilitates earthly goals sanctified by the legitimacy of faith.⁷⁹

Abdullah Cevdet Bey and Prince Sabahattin had some common characteristics, such as making “radical” criticism. Both believed in the necessity of specific radical changes in Ottoman society and a west-oriented primary education system. Both claimed the benefits of theories suggesting that Ottoman society could only develop by creating a new type of human being. The difference between them was that the solidarity movement, which played an essential role in the thought of Abdullah Cevdet, gave priority to an abstract concept of “social interests,” whereas Sabahattin’s opinions depended on “one’s ability to develop.”⁸⁰ Sabahattin’s emphasis on the individual and his ability to develop was also notable for showing a decentralized bureaucrat’s position in the Ottoman meritocracy.

Although the modernization efforts changed the traditional civil servant training system and Tanzimat reforms brought many new regulations in the state specifically for the last two centuries, the existing patterns were still apparent and in use, which undoubtedly stemmed from many reasons. Institutionalization problems are generally the main reasons for underdeveloped countries’ inability to produce satisfactory solutions to social problems.⁸¹

The training of civil servants was a critical issue of concern in the Empire. Sait Halim Pasha (1863-1921) critically discussed the differences between the Western and Ottoman civil servant mentality in his work, “Social Disintegration-Our Crisis.” His views were striking in this regard.

“Historical nobility,” which plays a significant role in Western societies, is unknown in Ottoman society. Although the so-called ‘bourgeois’ people were considered an insignificant social factor in the Ottoman world, they played crucial roles in Western nations’ future. On the other hand, “civil servants” are the most effective and intellectual members of the Ottoman society. Even today, it is the ultimate goal of every Ottoman intellectual. However, the Ottoman servants cannot fulfill the duties of the Western nobility and bourgeoisie due to their indifference to civil services and attitudes that retain any sense of self-sacrifice, responsibility, and entrepreneurship. Because unlike the Ottoman officials, the nobility and the bourgeois class are independent and autonomous, have courage and entrepreneurship skills. They seek and love working and taking responsibility. They have a sense of dedication.⁸²

As Sait Halim Pasha emphasized, although civil service was the ultimate goal of every Ottoman intellectual, there was no ideal situation regarding quality and merit in the administrative system. For instance, in the first years of the Sultan Abdulaziz (1861-1876) reign, civil servants (khatib) did not have a professional background, in today’s sense. There was no need for a systematic educational background to become a civil servant, and it had only been four years since the foundation of the Civil School. The fact that few students in that school also emphasized the difference between the ideal civil servant training and the Empire’s reality. Cevdet Pasha stresses the relationship between civil servant training and civil administration and argues that it should be resolved as follows:

Although the centralized administration method was not performed in the Ottoman Empire, during the Tanzimat-ı Hayriye, it inclined some statesmen to consider centralized administration. It increasingly seemed to be the leading approach, but there were many obstacles in the provinces. Therefore, the traditional method with its evident benefits for administration was adopted again, but then the centralist

⁷⁹ Kemal H. Karpat, “Tarihsel Süreklilik, Kimlik Değişimi ya da Yenilikçi, Müslüman, Osmanlı ve Türk Olmak” [Historical Continuity, Change in Identity- being Innovative, Muslim, Ottoman and Turk], (comp.) Kemal H. Karpat, transl. Sönmez Taner, *Osmanlı Geçmişi ve Bugünün Türkiyesi* [Ottoman History and Today’s Turkey], İstanbul Bilgi University Publishing, İstanbul, 2004, p. 22.

⁸⁰ Mardin, *Jön Türklerin Siyasi Fikirleri*, p. 216.

⁸¹ Oktay, “Hum” *Zamirinin*, p. 142.

⁸² Prens Sait Halim Paşa, *Toplumsal Çözülme –Buhranlarımız* [Social Disintegration-Our Crisis], N. Ahmet Özalp (edit.), Burhan Publishing, İstanbul, 1983, p. 22-23.

method drew interest again, making it complicated. Indeed, the administration would not function appropriately unless that problem was not resolved. First of all, it is necessary to settle the complicated situation and to describe civil servants' duties and responsibilities.⁸³

As he admitted, the training of qualified civil servants was a strict and long-term process. However, the authority and responsibility of civil servants could be determined by legislation. In this sense, the “*Daire-i Umumiye-i Vilâyet Nizamnamesi*” in 1869 described civil servants’ responsibility by their ranks- from the governor to the district manager and even to the mukhtar-, which was an essential step in the regulation of the civil service system.⁸⁴

Ahmet Cevdet Pasha had many complaints about merit, as written in his works “*Tarih-i Cevdet*” and “*Tezakir*.” For instance, he complained about the appointment of unqualified officials in justice and foreign affairs. He underlined the practice of bribery and clientelism - “moral bribery- as the threats to the order in a state. Pasha also emphasized the importance of merit and accepted “reward” and “punishment” as the two wings of a state.⁸⁵

Despite the several attempts to regulate the system, the need for officials with specific qualifications and competencies was one of the most critical problems of the Empire. In his study, Karpas informs about the educational background of 135 senior Ottoman bureaucrats who served between 1828-1876.

... Most of those bureaucrats were surprisingly young, ranging from 44 to 50 years. In terms of social status, 23 were from elite bureaucratic families, 14 from the ulama, 12 from the military, 15 from the provincial elites, and three from the junior administrative staff. Apart from them, the number of people coming from a non-administrative or -bureaucrat background was only 12. The social origin of the rest is unknown. Among them, 60 officers were born in Istanbul, and 41 were born in the provinces. The birthplace of the rest is unknown. The most striking fact about those senior officials was their educational background. Nine did not have a proper education at an institution; 55 received vocational training when they worked as lower-level bureaucrats; 22 were trained in specialized institutions, and only 11 had education in Europe. There is no information about the educational status of the remaining 22 officials. In light of the data, it is seen that “apprenticeship” was the primary training way to senior government positions.⁸⁶

Despite the disadvantages in the bureaucracy and the civil servant staff, the central administration sometimes paid attention to the employment of competent teachers in education. As written in a document that underlined merit practices, a primary school would be built in Sur, where there were no schools and teachers, and the town community would cover the expenses and salaries, and the teachers had to be “competent and proficient.”⁸⁷ Another document revealed that the elementary schools in the Bosnia province were under the control of several ignorant teachers, and it was reported to open *Darülmualimin-i Sibyan* (Teacher Training College) to train primary school teachers.⁸⁸ The given documents were evidence of the need for qualified and competent people for all state positions, including primary education and teaching. According to one of the documents that sheds light on the issue, among the Ottoman Empire officials, those who were “competent and loyal” but were not awarded should receive rank and medal.⁸⁹ In a different document that belonged to the Ministry of Education archive and found in the Syrian Education Directorate, it was reported that the qualifications of the civil servants who worked in the government departments and also would teach Turkish in primary schools should be checked in detail.⁹⁰ It is understood from a report of the Ministry of Education that the most qualified

⁸³ Gültepe, *Mührin Gücü*, p. 341.

⁸⁴ Gültepe, *Mührin Gücü*, p. 341.

⁸⁵ Ceylan, *Osmanlı Modernleşme*, p. 88-90.

⁸⁶ Karpas, *Osmanlı Modernleşmesi*, p. 89.

⁸⁷ BOA (Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives) MF. MKT. 17/1. 1 Muharrem 1291/February 18, 1874.

⁸⁸ BOA (Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives) MF. MKT. 9/11. 5 Muharrem 1290/March 1873.

⁸⁹ BOA (Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives) İ.DH. 1064/83472. 3 Rabiülahir 1305/19 December 1887.

⁹⁰ BOA (Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives) MF. MKT. 116.149.2. 13 Şaban 1307/4 April 1890.

teachers carried out the supervision at primary schools, but following the problems in the system, it was requested to appoint inspectors to the schools.⁹¹

When the Ottoman Empire's power was at its peak, it could deal with the global problems using its military power. Nevertheless, following the authority loss, the external relations department's lack of qualified staff became evident.⁹² Thus, the Chamber of Translation, established in 1821, undertook a critical task in training officers who could meet diplomatic and commercial relations requirements and speak foreign languages. The state's bureaucratic elites such as Ali, Fuat, Ahmed Vefik, Safvet, Münif, Ahmed Arifi, Sadullah Pasha, and Namık Kemal were trained in this chamber, which proves the importance of the Chamber of Translation.⁹³ The need for competent and talented officials was evident in the field of finance as well as Foreign Affairs. In the 19th century, the integration of the Empire with Western finance and the development of the modern banking system also entailed the employment of talented civil servants for the Ziraat Bank.⁹⁴

The state underwent considerable reforms and constitutional changes at the end of the 19th century. Mithad Pasha, a top elite of the state, was the reformist and constitutional leader.⁹⁵ Sultan Abdulhamid came to the throne by promising to announce the constitution and accepting the condition of "acting following the proposals of ministers in state affairs," set by Mithad Pasha.⁹⁶ It was undoubtedly showed the authority and power of Mithad Pasha- an elite bureaucrat- in the state administration. The reform program prepared by Mithad Pasha and Kanun-i Esasi (the Ottoman Basic Law), which was the first constitution in Turkish history, resulted from the efforts of the reformist elites and qualified bureaucrats. According to Article 39 of the Kanun-i Esasi, civil servants would be appointed by competence and merit principles, which was evidence of elite bureaucrats' power.⁹⁷ However, during the reign of Abdülhamid II, the Sultan employed civil servants who were "loyal" to him rather than seeking the characteristics of competence and merit.⁹⁸ It might be related to the chaotic situation of the Empire and the personality of Abdulhamid.

The declaration of the Second Constitutional Era in 1908 was a new milestone for the Empire. The Committee of Union and Progress assumed the power and sovereignty of the state. The July 1908 Revolution was a political movement primarily for liberating the Empire from the old order and European states' surveillance.⁹⁹ One of the prerequisites was to govern by eliminating the authority of the Sultan and his subordinates in the state bureaucracy. Therefore, the Second Constitutional Era was the junction of remarkable developments in bureaucracy. After 1909, objections against the old regime started in the state administration and bureaucracy. The new government sought to minimize the employment surplus stemming from the former government's nepotistic approach, so thousands of civil servants lost their jobs.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, each political era led to "merit" and "loyalty" discussions in imperial bureaucracy and appointment procedures.

⁹¹ BOA (Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives) MF. MKT. 64.13.001. 9 Şaban 1296/29 July 1879.

⁹² See also Sezai Balcı, "Osmanlı Devleti'nde Tercümanlık ve Bab-ı Ali Tercüme Odası" [Interpretation in the Ottoman Empire, and The Chamber of Translation in the Sublime Porte], published PhD dissertation, Ankara, 2006.

⁹³ Ali Akyıldız, "Tercüme Odası" [The Chamber of Translation], *TDVİA*, Vol. 40, Turkish Religious Foundation Publishing, İstanbul, 2011, p. 504-506; Balcı, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde*, p. 155.

⁹⁴ BOA (Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives) İ.O.M. 3.33.002. 9 Ramazan 1313/23 February 1899; BOA. İ.PT. 16.37.003. 18 Rebülevvel 1321/14 June 1903.

⁹⁵ Karpat, *Elites and Religion*, p. 123.

⁹⁶ Robert Devereux, *The First Ottoman Constitutional Period*, The Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1964, p. 42.

⁹⁷ Gültepe, *Mührin Gücü*, p. 342.

⁹⁸ Gültepe, *Mührin Gücü*, p. 344.

⁹⁹ Feroz Ahmad, *İttihatçılıktan Kemalizme* [From Unionism to Kemalism], transl. Fatmagül Berktaş Baltalı, Kaynak Publishing, İstanbul, 2016, p. 38.

¹⁰⁰ Eric J. Zürcher, *Modernleşen Türkiye'nin Tarihi* [Turkey: A Modern History], İletişim Publishing, İstanbul, 2016, p. 152.

During the First World War, the Ottoman Empire was neither a military dictatorship nor a constitutional-parliamentary monarchy in which ultimate authority belonged to a cabinet controlled by parliament.¹⁰¹ Hence, this monarchy had to be replaced with a new republic in 1923 due to the dysfunctions in the merit system, the imperishable structure of traditional and patrimonial thoughts, and economic drawbacks.

Conclusion

Meritocracy is a phenomenon created by the modern world and the aristocracy in ancient Greece and other ancient civilizations. In ancient times, the aristocratic structure of states and societies evolved towards meritocracy due to various political (e.g., the French revolution and the 1830 and 1848 revolutions) and socio-economic developments. In time, the elites' sovereignty changed the structure, which enabled them to govern through meritocracy.

Although the Ottoman Empire was a patrimonial state that was not dependent on blood nobility, it had meritocratic features. The *devşirme* system, widely applied in the classical period, can be considered the first step of meritocracy. However, the Ottoman Empire went through different historical periods, which partially separated the Empire from the West. In this sense, the officials and *devşirme* trained in Enderun were the primary faces of the central authority. However, with the collapse of the aristocracy and monarchy in the West, meritocracy, and meritocrats gained importance. That can be accepted as the establishment of modern meritocracy. The ambiguity of laws and interpersonal relations in patrimonial states made it difficult to train meritocrats in a rational bureaucracy. Besides, the imperial bureaucrats and meritocrats did not have secular background due to the “religious-state” doctrine.

Leading politicians and intellectuals in the post-17th century (e.g., Lütfi Pasha, Koçi Bey, Ahmet Cevdet Pasha) highlighted the importance of merit in state administration. However, their views were not enough to solve the problems. The main problem was the lack of rules suitable for meritocracy and order in the state. In other words, the right action was not taken against the main problem.

Both centralist and the decentralized bureaucrats began to show a meritocratic attitude in the Empire's modernization period, which is a sign of the meritocratic approach in the bureaucracy. However, it should be noted that the meritocratic understanding in the Ottoman Empire was evident in specific periods, while it was neglected at other times. Although qualified and competent bureaucrats played active roles during the modernization period, it was not permanent and continuous. In other words, the state administration did not entirely adopt the principle of merit, which mainly stemmed from the deep-rooted patrimonial and traditional structure of the Empire and the political environment during the modernization. Another reason was the insufficient number of bureaucrats who could speak foreign languages and knew the West. Also, old traditions in the bureaucracy were not completely abandoned, and it was a negative factor for establishing meritocracy. Other negative factors included apprenticeship practices, instead of a meritocratic approach, and the coexistence of old institutions with modern ones. Nevertheless, it is inferred that the effects of the meritocracy paradigm could be observed in all bureaucratic positions in the Empire, mainly including education, finance, and foreign affairs during the 19th century.

¹⁰¹ Erik Jan Zürcher, “Young Turk Governance in the Ottoman Empire during the First World War”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 55:6, (2019), p. 897-913.

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