

This complex cultural moment has resulted in vigorous debate among scholars as to the nature of administration in the early Ottoman emirate. Some focus on the tribal nature of Orhan's state and concentrate on the concept of jihad (holy war) as the major driving force of expansion. Yet this view is challenged by Byzantine and Turkish accounts which report the participation of local Christians in the Ottoman expansion. In response, some scholars suggest that the local society was brought together by shared ideas and values regarding valor and by the already diverse nature of Muslim culture. Other scholars propose that the commingling of converts together with the Turkish people resulted in a new "race" that became the driving force of early Ottoman society, a theory that has found few supporters. A revised version of this argument proposed that the early administrative apparatus had largely adopted the Seljuk tradition modified in accordance with the "accommodationist" policies of the rulers to include numerous practices inherited from the conquered states. Within Orhan's early Ottoman state, then, emirs clearly saw the need to adopt customs and other elements of the conquered peoples, resulting in a hybrid that enabled the continued expansion of the state and which would come to be a fundamental characteristic of the emerging Ottoman Empire.

Eugenia Kermeli

Further reading: Halil İnalcik, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age, 1300–1600* (London: Phoenix, 1994); Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Heath W. Lowry, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

Osman I (Osman Gazi) (?–1324?) *founder of the Ottoman dynasty* Osman I, son of Ertoğrul and grandson of Süleyman Shah, is the acknowledged founder of the Ottoman (Osmanlı) imperial dynasty, also known as "the House of Osman." Reliable information regarding Osman is scarce. His birth date is unknown and his symbolic significance as the father of the dynasty has encouraged the development of mythic tales regarding the ruler's life and origins, however, historians agree that before 1300, Osman was simply one among a number of Turkoman tribal leaders operating in the Sakarya region. During the first decade of the 14th century, shrewd military tactics and good fortune enabled the ambitious Osman to conquer vulnerable but important territories from the BYZANTINE EMPIRE and to accumulate these holdings into his own nascent empire. Osman is thought to have died shortly after the conquest of Prousa (BURSA, Turkey) on April 6, 1326. He was succeeded by his son ORHAN GAZI (r. 1326–59).



The tomb of the eponymous founder of the Ottoman dynasty Osman Gazi in Bursa, as restored in the 19th century. (Photo by Gábor Ágoston)

Osman's success seems to have been founded on his contact with the settled peasant population of the Bithynian countryside which fostered a sympathetic relationship with the local Byzantine population. This group had long been disenchanted with Byzantine rule which had imposed heavy taxes and provided inadequate security in the wake of destructive wars with Rome and the West. Because this Anatolian region was under constant attack from tribal Turkoman groups, individual populations established local alliances to provide for their own security, creating the opportunity for Osman to establish his interest in the northern part of Bithynia (Sakarya region) to the detriment of Byzantine holdings. After an important victory over the Byzantine army at Bapheus, a district around Izmit (Nikomedia) in 1301, Osman assumed undisputed leadership of a large number of independent Turkoman tribes. And in cooperation with these tribes and local Christian agents, Osman then launched devastating looting raids against the countryside surrounding great Bithynian cities. Through this plan, the Bithynian cities were cut off from their countryside and the consequent economic "strangulation" paved the way for greater territorial gains for Osman. Luck also allowed

Osman's territories to avoid detrimental encounters with Mongols and the Catalan company sent by the Byzantine emperor, Andronikos II Palaiologos (r. 1282–1328), which attempted to secure the area in 1303. With the failure of these forces, the remaining former Byzantine peasants soon switched their allegiance.

Based on the meager information available, contemporary historians have attempted to reconstruct the nature of the early Ottoman emirate and its policies. The two most concrete sources of information are a silver coin stamped with Osman's name and a dedication document (*vakfiyye*) dated March 1324. The first confirms the Ottoman tradition that Osman had declared himself as an independent ruler and confirms as well the Turkish sources, beginning with the *Iskendername* of Ahmedi (ca. 1400), that unanimously identify Ertoğrul as Osman's father. The dedication document bears the names of Osman's children, including that of Orhan, the future ruler, and also bears the signature of Orhan, suggesting that the succession either took place during Osman's life or that Osman might have died in 1324.

Secondary sources regarding Osman, though somewhat more bountiful, are not perfectly reliable. These are Byzantine, Ottoman, and western narratives, the majority of which were written in the 15th century. Earlier sources include the chronicles of Nikephoros Gregoras (1295–1359), John Kantakouzenos (1341–54), and the Byzantine chronicle of George Pachymeres (1242–ca. 1310). Although the events recorded in his chronicle are rather confusing, this text records the first decisive victory of Osman over the Byzantine army at Bapheus, a district around Izmit (Nikomedia) in 1301. According to the Byzantine chronicler “this was the beginning of great trouble for the whole region”. Although the exact sequence of events is unclear, it seems that in a second attempt to defeat Osman, the Byzantine Emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos (r. 1282–1328) sent another force which was defeated in a night attack near a fortress called Katoikia (an unidentified settlement in the Sakarya River region of northwestern Asia Minor, Turkey) which Osman had also occupied. Pachymeres then narrates the conquest of Belokome (Bilecik, in the Sakarya region) to be used as a fortress for the safekeeping of Osman's treasures. However, in a slightly earlier passage Pachymeres referred to the loss of Belokome together with that of Angelokome (Inegöl), Melangeia (possibly Yenişehir), Anagourdia, and Platanea. Pachymeres also mentions Osman's siege of Prousa and Pegai on the Marmara sea coast and an unsuccessful assault on Iznik (Nikaia) to indicate that there was no area around Nikaia, right down to the coast, which he did not control. Based on this chronicle, it appears that by 1308 the conquest of Belokome and neighboring fortresses in the Sakarya River valley enabled Osman to control the countryside west-

ward as far as the Sea of Marmara. This is confirmed by the narrative of the *Iskendername* of Ahmedi and other non-Byzantine sources.

Apart from these chronicles, there are later sources that begin to establish Osman as a mythic figure. From the 16th century onward a number of dynastic myths are used by Ottoman and Western authors, endowing the founder of the dynasty with more exalted origins. Among these is recounted the famous “dream of Osman” which is supposed to have taken place while he was a guest in the house of a sheikh, Edebali. According to the dream, Osman saw a bright crescent rising from the chest of the aged sheikh and settling inside Osman. Then a great tree sprang from the body of Osman and its branches covered the whole world. Suddenly the leaves of the tree turned into swords aimed at Constantinople, which resembled a diamond set among rubies. As Osman tried to grasp the diamond he was awakened. This prophetic dream is supposed to have convinced the sheikh to marry his daughter to Osman because he seemed destined to become a great ruler. This highly symbolic narrative should be understood, however, as an example of eschatological mythology required by the subsequent success of the Ottoman emirate to surround the founder of the dynasty with supernatural vision, providential success, and an illustrious genealogy. Likewise, political considerations were behind the connection of Osman to the family of the Prophet Muhammad through marriage. This was the result of Ottoman efforts in the 16th century to convince the Islamic world that Sultan SELIM I (r. 1512–20) could legitimately use the title of caliph (*see* CALIPHATE). Similarly, the Byzantine author George Sphrantzes (1413–77) claimed that the House of Osman descended from the Byzantine Comnenoi dynasty, but this claim is dated after the CONQUEST OF CONSTANTINOPLE in 1453 in an effort to establish the rights of the Ottomans to inherit the Byzantine throne.

Contemporary Byzantine authors, travelers such as Ibn Battuta (1324–33), and early Western sources such as Nicolaos Euboicus (1496) offer no such extraordinary tales and were not aware of the dramatic mythology later developed by Ottoman writers. Rather, contemporary sources stressed the humble origins of Osman as a tribal nomadic leader settled in the border between the Byzantines and the SELJUKS.

Eugenia Kermeli

Further reading: Colin Imber, “The Legend of Osman Gazi,” in *The Ottoman Empire, 1300–1389*, edited by Elizabeth Zachariadou (Rethymnon: Crete University Press, 1993); Halil İnalçik, “Osman Ghazi's Siege of Nicaea and the Battle of Bapheus,” in *The Ottoman Empire, 1300–1389*, edited by Elizabeth Zachariadou (Rethymnon: Crete University Press, 1993); Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Berkeley: University of California Press,