

The names Ottomans, Othomans, Osmanli, or Osmanlii, by which the Turks are known, are derived from Othoman, or Osman I., the actual founder of the empire. Up to the thirteenth century the term Toork was applied to a great series of tribes stretching over the greater part of Asia, but which had never yet got welded into one power. Othman was the son of the chief of one of these tribes—the Ogûzes—who inhabited the Steppes east of the Caspian. The lad was seemingly not born under a fortunate star, for at a few years earlier the Mongol invasion which was setting in from the north-east had swept the Ogûzes before it, and scattered them among the mountains of Armenia and Mesopotamia. But a handful of them having aided the Seljuk Sultan of Konieh against his Khaurezmian and Mongol enemies, they received a grant of land in Phrygia. Othoman, by taking advantage of every chance, and being utterly unscrupulous as to friend or foe, died after having advanced the little lordship which he had inherited to the great kingdom of Phrygia, Bithynia and the neighbouring districts—to, indeed, the greater part of Asia Minor—and thus laid the foundations of the Turkish Empire. His successors followed up his advantages, and soon gained a footing in Europe by the capture of Gallipoli, Koiridicastron, and other fortresses on that coast. The tottering Greek Empire thus early (1326—1359) was beginning to feel the blows which were soon to tumble it over. But the polished and effeminate race, whose capital was Constantinople, affected to despise the barbarians. Gallipoli, they pretended not to consider of any account. "It was only a hogsty, and a pottle of wine"—the allusion being to the magazines and cellars built here by Justinian. However, as the historian Knolles very shrewdly remarks, "by taking such hogsties and pottles of wine the Turks had gone so far into Thracia that Amurath a few years later had placed his royal seat at Adrianople." The next step was to train the Janizaries, Spathis, and Zanis, warlike legionaries, who in time became more terrible to their nominal master than to his enemies, and compelled those strong measures which history records. But meantime they aided the Turkish Sultans in subduing the various tributary kingdoms, until their camps extended so far as to confine the Byzantine Empire to the limits of Constantinople, and some of the near-lying districts of Thrace and Bulgaria. With varying successes—but ever decidedly onward—the Turks continued their wars in Europe, until in 1453 Mohammed I. stormed Constantinople and destroyed the last trace of the Byzantine Empire, which from that day to this has continued the capital of the Turks. Bajazet II. extended the Turkish Empire to its furthest limits in Europe and Asia, and also for a time brought under the rule of his sceptre districts which have long since passed away from his successors.

During the first half of the sixteenth century the Turks were as powerful on water as on land. Their fleet commanded the Mediterranean in such force, that without the "Grand Signor's" permission no foreign vessel could navigate that inland sea. Selim II. was the first of his dynasty who came in contact with an obscure northern people called the Russians, who up to that date had been unknown in Southern Europe. His successors have, however, had several opportunities of cultivating the embarrassing acquaintance which Selim made with them during his futile attempt to cut a ship canal between the Don and the Volga, and capture Astrakhan as a part of the programme. Amurath III. dictated to the Poles whom they should elect a king, concluded