

## The Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire started in 1300 CE as a small group of Western Muslim Turks. Their main interest was spreading their religion. To do this, they conquered land and enforced Muslim practices. Much of the land they conquered was already inhabited by small groups of Muslims. Bringing these lands under central rule helped to increase the power of both the Ottoman Empire and Islam. Religion was the unifying force of the Empire. The Emperor was seen as God on Earth and had absolute rule over his people.

The Ottoman Empire continued to grow. In 1453, the most important city, Constantinople, was captured; the Turks had attempted to conquer it several times before they were finally successful. After its capture, the city was renamed Istanbul. The capture of this city was important because it not only represented the power of the Ottoman Empire, but it cut the Europeans off from Asia and therefore severed their direct trade. In fact, during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Ottoman Empire essentially controlled the East-West land trade because Europe had to go through the Ottomans' lands to trade with Asia. When the Ottomans stopped letting Europeans go through their lands, they acted as middlemen in the trade process. This is one of the reasons why finding the quickest sea route to Asia was so important to the Europeans.

The Ottoman Empire was at its peak. Between 1520 and 1566, under Sultan Suleyman I, the Empire grew the most. Suleyman I, by the way, was also known as Suleyman the Magnificent by Europeans, and Suleyman the Lawgiver by Muslims. At the end of his rule, the empire stretched across Northern Africa, around the Arabian Peninsula, through the Balkans, and into Hungary and parts of Poland. By the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman Empire was the most powerful nation in the world.

The Ottoman Empire was known for trading two things, coffee and ceramics. The Ottomans were the first nation to drink coffee. European travelers to the Middle East in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century discovered the drink there and brought it back to Europe. The Ottomans had the monopoly on coffee bean sales to Europe because they jealously guarded the secret to cultivating the coffee bean and did not sell any beans that had germinating possibilities. By the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Dutch had smuggled germinating plants out of the Ottoman Empire and planted them in Java. While the Ottoman Empire no longer had the monopoly, they still had a big trade in coffee that lasted until the fall of the Empire during World War I.

The Ottoman Empire was also known for the fineness of its ceramics, especially in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, most notably for the under glazing technique where the designs on the pottery were drawn on the white undercoat before firing.