troops, the janissaries, professional soldiers of slave origin. Adopting the new military hardware of the west—cannons and harquebuses (heavy matchlock guns)—the Ottomans retook Anatolia and the Balkans. Under Mehmed II the Conqueror (r. 1444–1446, 1451–1481), their cannons accomplished what former sieges had never done, breaching the thick walls of Constantinople in 1453 and bringing the Byzantine Empire to an end.

The new Ottoman state had come to stay. Its rise was due to its military power and the weakness of its neighbors. But its longevity—it did not begin to decline until the late seventeenth century—was due to more complicated factors. Building on a theory of absolutism that echoed similar ideas in the Christian West, the Ottoman rulers acted as the sole guarantors of law and order; they considered even the leaders of the mosques to be their functionaries, soldiers without arms. Prospering from taxes imposed on their relatively well-to-do peasantry, the new rulers spent their money on roads to ease troop transport and a navy powerful enough to oust the Italians from their eastern Mediterranean outposts. Eliminating all signs of rebellion (which meant, for example, brutally putting down Serb and Albanian revolts), the Ottomans created a new world power.

The Ottoman state eventually changed Europe’s orientation. Europeans could—and did—continue to trade in the Mediterranean. But on the whole they preferred to treat