



The Decline of Islamic Civilization In The Transition Era From the Ottoman Sultanate To The Republik of Turkey 1908-1938: A Historical and Socio-Political Analysis

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Abstract:

The decline of Islamic civilization in the early twentieth century cannot be separated from the dynamics of political and social transformations that took place in Anatolia. The transitional period from the caliphate system to the modern nation-state marked a crucial turning point that signified fundamental changes in the structure of power, identity, and the social life of Muslim communities. This study aims to explain how secularization reshaped the institutional position of Islam within the structure of the modern state. The research employs a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach based on library research of historical works and modern Turkish political theory. The findings indicate that what is referred to as the “decline of Islamic civilization” in this context does not denote the disappearance of religiosity among Muslim societies, but rather the reduction of Islam’s normative and institutional role within the state’s system of legitimacy. Legal, educational, and religious-symbolic reforms during the republican era relocated Islam from the foundation of public political authority to a sphere regulated by the state. This transformation marked a paradigmatic shift from theocentric-imperial legitimacy to national-secular legitimacy. Thus, decline is understood as a restructuring of authority and civilizational orientation, rather than merely a political downfall or a dichotomy between Islam and modernity.

Keywords: Ottoman Turkey, Secularization, Socio-Political, Decline of Islamic Civilization, Modernization.

Abstrak:

Kemunduran peradaban Islam pada awal abad ke-20 tidak dapat dilepaskan dari dinamika perubahan politik dan sosial yang terjadi di wilayah Anatolia. Periode transisi dari sistem kekhalifahan menuju negara-bangsa modern menjadi titik krusial yang menandai perubahan mendasar dalam struktur kekuasaan, identitas, dan kehidupan masyarakat Muslim. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah menjelaskan bagaimana sekularisasi membentuk ulang posisi institusional Islam dalam struktur negara modern. Metode yang digunakan adalah penelitian kualitatif dengan pendekatan deskriptif-analitis berbasis studi pustaka terhadap karya-karya sejarah dan teori politik modern Turki. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa apa yang disebut sebagai “kemunduran peradaban Islam” dalam konteks ini merujuk pada penyusutan peran normatif dan institusional Islam dalam sistem legitimasi negara, bukan hilangnya religiusitas masyarakat. Reformasi hukum, pendidikan, dan simbol keagamaan pada era republik memindahkan Islam dari fondasi politik publik menuju ranah yang diregulasi negara. Transformasi tersebut menandai pergeseran paradigma dari legitimasi teosentris-imperial menuju legitimasi nasional-sekuler. Dengan demikian, kemunduran dipahami sebagai perubahan struktur otoritas dan orientasi peradaban, bukan sekadar kejatuhan politik atau dikotomi antara Islam dan modernitas.

Kata Kunci: Turki Utsmani, Sekularisasi, Sosio-Politik, Kemunduran Peradaban Islam, Modernisasi.

INTRODUCTION

History records that Islamic civilization during the classical and medieval period once reached a phase of extensive political and cultural dominance, with networks of power stretching across vast regions and enduring over long periods of time. This expansion began shortly after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, under the leadership of Abu Bakr and

Umar ibn Khattab, extending across North Africa as far as the Atlantic Ocean.¹

After experiencing various patterns of leadership and dynastic rule, from a small frontier state on the Byzantine border emerged the Ottoman Sultanate, which continued to expand from the Middle East and eventually succeeded in controlling much of North Africa and Southeastern Europe.² At its peak in the 16th century, the Ottoman Empire was recorded as the largest and most influential empire in the world, even exerting significant pressure on Europe.³ This achievement was largely due to the leadership of Sultan Suleiman I (Suleiman the Magnificent), who demonstrated strong capability in implementing Islamic law throughout his vast territories, which stretched across Europe, Persia, Africa, and Central Asia. Under his rule, Islamic civilization flourished in the fields of politics, economics, military affairs, law, and socio-cultural life.⁴

Entering the 19th and early 20th centuries, the power structure of the Ottoman Empire faced significant internal and external pressures. Beginning with the Crimean War and culminating in the Ottoman Empire's involvement in the Central Powers during World War I, the empire gradually declined due to a complex combination of internal and external factors, including political weakness, military stagnation, economic pressures, and European intervention.⁵ Gradually, the Ottoman Empire began to lose control over its territories. Defeat in major wars left the once vast empire unable to maintain authority over many of its key regions.⁶ These territories were subsequently divided and occupied by the victorious powers, as reflected in several important agreements such as the Istanbul Agreement (1915), the Treaty of London (1915), and the Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916).⁷ These agreements became clear symbols of the end of Ottoman political supremacy in the regions that had once been under its rule.

The conditions at the time encouraged the emergence of the *Büyük Taarruz* (Great Offensive), initiated by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk as a form of resistance in response to the Treaty of Sèvres, which was believed to undermine the dominance and strength of the

¹ Michael H. Hart, *The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History* (Carol Publishing Group, 1993), 5.

² Septian AW, *Keruntuhan Turki Utsmani: Berkembangnya Sekat Negara Bangsa Di Dunia Islam* (Bogor: Institut Literasi Khilafah dan Indonesia (ILKI), 2023), 5–6, <https://www.scribd.com/document/623582171/Keruntuhan-Turki-Utsmani-Berkembangnya-sekat-Negara-Bangsa-di-Dunia>.

³ T. Pendergast, S. Pendergast, and R. Zerbonia, *The Middle East Conflict Reference Library*, Gale Virtual Reference Library, v. 2 (UXL, 2005), 17, <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=5JMOtgEACAAJ>.

⁴ Dwi Ratnasari, Sulaiman Al-Qanuni: Sultan Terbesar Kerajaan Turki Usmani, *Thaqafiyat: Jurnal Bahasa, Peradaban Dan Informasi Islam* 14, no. 1 (February 2016): 72, <https://ejournal.uin-suka.ac.id/adab/thaqafiyat/article/view/613>.

⁵ Anwar Sewang, *Buku Ajar: Sejarah Peradaban Islam* (Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam (STAIN) Parepare, Sulawesi Selatan, 2017), 282, <https://repository.iainpare.ac.id/eprint/1058/1/Sejarah%20Peradaban%20Islam.pdf>.

⁶ Miftahul Khoiri et al., Perkembangan Pembaharuan di Kerajaan Turki Usmani Abad ke XIX-XX. *Historia Islamica: Journal of Islamic History and Civilization*, 2, no. 2, 2023. 121. <https://ejournal.iain-manado.ac.id/historia/article/view/695>

⁷ Stanford Jay Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey: Reform, Revolution, and Republic: The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808-1975* (Cambridge University Press, 1976), 320–21.

Ottoman Empire.⁸ The perseverance of Mustafa Kemal and the Turkish people ultimately led to the Ottoman victory, marked by the ratification of the Treaty of Lausanne. The culmination occurred on October 29, 1923, when the Grand National Assembly of Turkey proclaimed the republic as the state's constitutional form and appointed Mustafa Kemal as its first President, with Ankara as the new capital.⁹

Under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal, the Republic of Turkey underwent dramatic transformations in various aspects of life. This development opened a new chapter for the Turkish nation in the form of a modern and secular republic, while simultaneously marking the end of the caliphate system that had endured for approximately 600 years. However, these rapid changes did not only affect the political sphere but also reshaped governance in ways that profoundly disrupted the social, cultural, and religious order of a society that had lived for centuries under the caliph system.¹⁰

Several previous studies have examined various aspects of political, social, and ideological transformation in Turkey during the transition from the Ottoman Sultanate to the Republic of Turkey. Some research emphasizes that efforts toward modernization and secularization had actually begun prior to Mustafa Kemal's era, as an internal response to Western challenges since the 19th century, and later continued with greater intensity during the republican period.¹¹ Other studies highlight that the transformation of Islamic identity in Turkish history was a long process involving shifts in political and cultural orientation, in which the secularization of the state generated tensions between religious values and modernity.¹² In addition, there are studies describing how the secularization movement weakened the political legitimacy of Islam within the Ottoman Sultanate as part of the broader process that led to the collapse of the dynasty.¹³ These studies demonstrate that the relationship between secularization and changes in socio-political structures has become a central focus in both historical scholarship and modern Islamic studies.

However, these studies still tend to situate change within a political or state-ideological framework, while the dimension concerning the transformation of Islam's function within the structure of civilization has not been extensively examined. In this research, the term "the decline of Islamic civilization" is not understood as a theological deterioration of faith or religious devotion among Muslims. Rather, it refers to a functional shift in the position of

⁸ Heather Lehr Wagner, *The Division of the Middle East: The Treaty of Sèvres* (Infobase Publishing, 2004), 82–84.

⁹ Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, 368.

¹⁰ Astaman Astaman et al., *Sejarah Lahirnya Negara Islam Sekuler Turki Dan Ide Pembaharuan Mustafa Kemal*, *Juteq: Jurnal Teologi & Tafsir* 2, no. 5 (May 2025): 6–8, <https://languar.net/index.php/JUTEQ/article/view/80/193>.

¹¹ Eka Susanti and M. Rizali Rahman, *Modernisme Dan Sekularisme Daulah Turki Utsmanisebelum Era Mustafa Kemal Attaturk*, *Integrative Perspectives of Social and Science Journal* 2, no. 01 Februari (January 2025): 18–28.

¹² Andi Wawan Mulyawan, Abd Rahim Yunus, and Susmihara Susmihara, 'Kekaisaran Utsmani Hingga Era Erdoğan: Jejak Perubahan Identitas Islam Dalam Sejarah Turki: The Ottoman Empire to the Erdoğan Era: Traces of Change in Islamic Identity in Turkish History', *DIRASAH: Jurnal Kajian Islam* 2, no. 3 (July 2025): 330–46.

¹³ Luqman Al Hakim and Muhammad Faiz, *The Role of the Turkey Secularization Movement in the Collapse of The Ottomans Empire*, *Tasfiah: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 5, no. 1 (January 2021): 91–110, <https://doi.org/10.21111/tasfiah.v5i1.5306>.

Islam within the structure of civilization namely, the diminishing role of Islamic institutions, law, and symbols within the socio-political order of the state, which during the era of the Ottoman Empire had previously served as sources of public legitimacy, regulators of social norms, and the foundational legal framework. Thus, decline is understood as a structural transformation in the relationship between religion and the state during the transitional period toward a modern republic.

Based on this framework, this study aims to analyze historically and socio-politically how the process of transition from the Ottoman Sultanate to the Republic of Turkey during the period 1908-1938 reshaped the relationship between religion, the state, and society, as well as how this transformation affected the position of Islam within the structure of Turkish civilization. Therefore, this study not only traces political events but also examines the paradigm shifts that influenced the social and cultural configuration of society during this transitional era.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design using a historical sociology approach, which aims to understand the transformation of the relationship between religion and the state within the context of changes in civilizational structures.¹⁴ This method is applied to trace shifts in socio-political paradigms through an analysis of historical dynamics that shaped the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey.

The research was conducted through several stages. First, data collection was carried out through a literature review, including the examination of historical documents and international treaty archives related to the territorial disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, such as the Istanbul Agreement (1915), the Sykes Picot Agreement (1916), the Treaty of Sèvres (1920), and the Treaty of Lausanne (1923). Second, secondary sources were gathered from the works of classical and modern historians, including Bernard Lewis's *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, Erik J. Zürcher's *Turkey: A Modern History*, and Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw's *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*. These works were utilized to understand the political, social, and ideological context of the transitional period.

The subsequent stage involved data analysis using descriptive-analytical and comparative techniques. Descriptive analysis was employed to map policy changes and social structures between the late Ottoman period and the early Republican era. Meanwhile, comparative analysis was conducted to identify the shift in the function of Islam within the state structure from a source of public legitimacy to a matter confined to the private sphere. Through this approach, the study seeks to explain decline as a functional transformation of Islam within the civilizational system, rather than as a theological judgment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Historical Conditions Leading to the Collapse of the Ottoman Empire

The defeat in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 marked one of the crucial turning

¹⁴ Philip Abrams, *Historical Sociology* (Cornell University Press, 1982), 7, https://books.google.co.id/books?id=-RmkWjYAszsC&pg=PA18&hl=id&source=gbs_toc_r&cad=1#v=onepage&q&f=false.

points in the final phase of the Ottoman Empire. In addition to losing much of its Balkan territories, the Empire also faced diplomatic pressure through the Treaty of San Stefano and the Congress of Berlin, which further restricted its political influence in Europe.¹⁵

This situation continued into the early 20th century when the Young Turk Revolution shook the structure of the absolute monarchy under Abdul Hamid II and marked a significant transformation in the Empire's internal political configuration. Shortly afterward, defeat in the Balkan Wars drastically reduced Ottoman territorial control. Approximately 83 percent of its territory was lost, and 63 percent of the lost lands were in Europe, including Macedonia, Albania, and Kosovo.¹⁶

The Ottoman Empire's involvement in World War I on the side of the Central Powers accelerated the process of territorial disintegration. Following its defeat, Arab regions such as Syria, Palestine, and the Hejaz came under British and French control, while Constantinople was temporarily occupied by Allied forces.¹⁷ These geopolitical changes were later formalized through several international agreements, including the Istanbul Agreement (1915), the Treaty of London (1915), the Sykes Picot Agreement (1916), the Treaty of Sèvres, and the Treaty of Lausanne. This series of treaties regulated the division of former Ottoman territories while significantly limiting its political sovereignty.

The Constantinople Agreement opened opportunities for the Allied powers to divide spheres of influence within the Ottoman territories in the Arab regions and Anatolia. In the same year, the Treaty of London was concluded, promising portions of Ottoman territory to Italy as political compensation for its participation in the war. A year later, the Sykes–Picot Agreement explicitly partitioned the Middle East between Britain and France, effectively ending the administrative unity of Muslim territories that had previously been under Ottoman authority.¹⁸

Following the Ottoman defeat, the Treaty of Sèvres marked a massive territorial dismemberment of Ottoman lands, severely restricting Turkish sovereignty and triggering new waves of nationalist movements. The final chapter came with the Treaty of Lausanne, which legally ended the Ottoman Sultanate and confirmed the establishment of the Republic of Turkey.¹⁹

On the internal front, efforts to adapt to external pressures had actually begun long before the outbreak of the Great War, notably through the *Tanzimat* reforms (1839-1876), which aimed to strengthen state administration by adopting European bureaucratic models.²⁰ These reforms included the restructuring of the legal system, the military, and education. In subsequent developments, the Young Turks emerged, advancing a modernization project that was more liberal and nationalist in orientation.²¹

¹⁵ Rizka Kusuma Rahmawati, 'Studi Historis Kebijakan Luar Negeri Sultan Abdul Hamid II Di Daulah 'Utsmaniyah (1876-1909 M)', *JUSPI (Jurnal Sejarah Peradaban Islam)* 1, no. 1 (2017): 193–211.

¹⁶ Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, 297–98.

¹⁷ Pendergast, Pendergast, and Zerbonia, *The Middle East Conflict Reference Library*, 37.

¹⁸ Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, 320–22.

¹⁹ Alan Palmer, *The Decline and Fall of the Ottoman Empire* (New York, NY: Barnes and Noble, 2009), 294–96.

²⁰ Frank Edgar Bailey, *British Policy and the Turkish Reform Movement: A Study in Anglo-Turkish Relations, 1826-1853* (Harvard University Press, 1942), 185–92.

²¹ Ernest Edmondson Ramsaur Jr., *The Young Turks: Prelude to the Revolution of 1908* (Russell &

This series of military defeats, territorial fragmentation, and geopolitical reconfiguration not only marked the end of Ottoman political dominance but also disrupted the continuity of Islamic civilization, which for centuries had revolved around the institution of the caliphate. In this context, the transition from sultanate to republic represented a fundamental shift from a political system grounded in religious legitimacy to a modern nation-state based on nationalism and secular rationality. This transformation laid the foundation for the gradual decline of Islam's role as a public normative framework in Turkey's social and political life.

Political Transition: From Sultanate to Republic

Historians note that nationalism and liberalism were two major forces that played a significant role in weakening the Ottoman Empire within the context of global political changes in the nineteenth century. Bernard Lewis, for instance, cited the report of Reis Efendi Atif, stating that nationalism and liberalism were two ideological currents that in their development "were to do so much to destroy the Empire."²²

After ascending the throne at the age of thirty-three, Abdul Hamid II ratified the Ottoman Constitution under pressure from his cabinet ministers and convened the first parliamentary session in 1877. During this meeting, a member of parliament openly criticized the Sultan's leadership and rejected parliament's responsibility for the wartime situation. According to Eugene Rogan, this stance reinforced the Sultan's view that parliament was more of an obstacle than a support to the national struggle, prompting him to suspend the constitution and dissolve the parliament. This action subsequently broadened the base of political opposition to the Sultan's rule, particularly among the educated elite and the military. The Young Turks movement emerged with the aim of limiting the Sultan's absolutism, restoring constitutional government, and returning to parliamentary democracy.²³

This upheaval began when many Turkish officers, doctors, and students pursued their studies in Europe. Amid political instability and the declining power of the government, their experiences fostered a new awareness of the importance of rationality, freedom of thought, and a political system grounded in constitutional principles. This development raised questions regarding the legitimacy of Sultan Abdul Hamid II absolute authority and demanded the restoration of the 1876 Constitution, which had previously been suspended. To achieve this goal, the Committee of Union and Progress was established as a platform for modern and liberal ideas, absorbing French positivist thought as well as the political ideals of the French Revolution concerning civil liberties, legal equality, and the limitation of state power.²⁴

The CUP, supported by various nationalist organizations from different segments of society across Europe, successfully pressured the Sultan to reactivate parliament in 1908. It later transformed from an opposition movement into a dominant political actor within the government. They viewed this reform as a response to the continuous weaknesses caused by

Russell Publishers, 1970), 3.

²² Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 2nd edn (Oxford University Press, USA, 1968), 130.

²³ Eugene L. Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans: The Great War in the Middle East, 1914-1920* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 2-4.

²⁴ Ramsaur Jr., *The Young Turks: Prelude to the Revolution of 1908*, 14-23.

the political and moral decline of the sultanate system, which had become increasingly inefficient. Therefore, large-scale reform could only take place if the autocratic power of the sultanate was limited.²⁵

Although the reactivation of parliament in 1908 marked a political victory for the Young Turk Movement and the CUP, the constitutional reforms did not immediately halt the structural decline of the Ottoman Empire. In practice, the post-1908 government faced mounting geopolitical pressures, including involvement in the Balkan Wars and the First World War.²⁶ These successive defeats demonstrated the limitations of the constitutional reform project in saving an empire that had long been experiencing political and military disintegration. This situation ultimately created a crisis of legitimacy and opened the way for the emergence of new political actors outside the structure of the sultanate.

In the context of the post-World War I crisis, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk emerged as a central figure who consolidated national resistance through the Turkish War of Independence. This movement was not only oriented toward expelling foreign powers from Anatolia, but also toward establishing a new political legitimacy that no longer depended on the institution of the sultanate. The culmination came in November 1922 with the abolition of the Ottoman sultanate, followed by the proclamation of the Republic of Turkey on October 29, 1923. Thus, the political transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey unfolded through a series of constitutional reforms, wartime crises, and the restructuring of state authority.²⁷

The impact of this shift in political orientation did not remain confined to Turkey's domestic sphere. The spirit of nationalism promoted by the Committee of Union and Progress introduced new concepts such as homeland, constitution, and liberty ideas that had previously been unfamiliar within the Ottoman Turkish tradition. These ideas influenced Turkish intellectuals, many of whom came to believe that modernization and constitutionalism offered an alternative response to European domination.²⁸ Moreover, the spirit carried by the Young Turks inspired intellectuals in various countries. For example, Rashid Rida, through his journal *Al-Manar*, and the political reform movement led by Saad Zaghlul in Egypt drew inspiration from these developments. This influence contributed to the emergence of a new wave of political consciousness in the Muslim world in the 19th century.²⁹

In conclusion, the transition from sultanate to republic was the result of a long series of interconnected political crises, constitutional reforms, nationalism, and wartime defeat. The birth of the Republic of Turkey was not an isolated event, but rather the culmination of a broader transformation in political orientation that had been developing since the late 19th century.

Secularization and Its Impact on Socio-Religious Life

²⁵ Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, 266–67.

²⁶ Eric J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History (International Library of Human Geography)* (I. B. Tauris & Company, Limited, 2017), 121.

²⁷ Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans : The Great War in the Middle East, 1914-1920*, 393–95.

²⁸ Ali Muhammad Al-Sallabi, *Ad-Daulah Al-Ustmaniyyah : Awamil Al-Nuhudh Wa Asbab Al-Suquth*, 1st edn (Daar Al-Tawzi' wa Al-nasyr Al-Islamiyyah, 2001), 451–57.

²⁹ Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939* (Cambridge University Press, 1962), 241.

The process of secularization in Turkey began after the Sultanate was abolished in 1922 and the Caliphate was dissolved in 1924. Subsequently, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk established a republican government grounded in nationalism and Western modernist values. According to Bernard Lewis, the first step marking the separation of state and religion was the abolition of the office of Shaykh al-Islām, followed by the dissolution of the Ministry of Sharia and Waqf. Lewis argues that these policies were not merely administrative measures, but constituted a “revolution in the spiritual structure of the nation,” representing a fundamental transformation in the spiritual foundations of Turkish society. From that point onward, religious authority was no longer integrated into the state’s power structure.³⁰

These reforms were reinforced by the Law on the Unification of Education (*Tevhid-i Tedrisat*) of 1924, which placed all educational institutions under the authority of the Ministry of National Education.³¹ Madrasahs established during the Ottoman Empire, such as *Fatih Medreseleri* and *Süleymaniye Medreseleri*, which had previously functioned as centers for the transmission of Islamic scholarship, underwent significant institutional transformation. This policy unified the education system under state control and led to the closure of many traditional *medrese*-based schools.³² In this context, secularism was subsequently established as one of the fundamental principles of Turkey’s modernization project, understood as a primary instrument believed to ensure progress and rationality in the newly constructed social and political order.³³

The reforms also extended into the symbolic and ritual dimensions of religious life. In 1928, the Arabic alphabet was replaced with the Latin alphabet, a change that directly severed the continuity between the new generation and the classical Islamic literature written in Arabic and Ottoman Turkish. In 1932, the wording of the adhan was officially translated into Turkish and made mandatory for use in all mosques, while Friday sermons were directed to be delivered in Turkish.³⁴ Hanioglu, in *Atatürk: An Intellectual Biography*, explains that this policy was grounded in Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s view that religion hindered scientific progress. According to his perspective, religion should be confined to the private sphere, as it was considered incapable of keeping pace with modern developments in the public domain.³⁵

These secularization policies had a significant impact on the socio-religious life of Turkish society. Ali Muhammad Ash-Shallabi describes this situation as *inqiṭā‘ al-ṣīlah bayna al-ummah wa al-dīn*, meaning the severing of the bond between the community and religion. The closure of madrasas, the reduction of formal religious education, and the restriction of religious expression in the public sphere shifted religion into the private realm. This transformation marked a shift in the function of Islam from a public system of values to

³⁰ Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 260–65.

³¹ Michael Winter, *Atatürk and the Modernization of Turkey* (United States of America: Westview Press, 1984), 185–86.

³² Tuncay Zorlu, ‘Two Great Representatives of the Classical Ottoman Education System: Fatih and Süleymaniye Madrasas’, *Divân: Disiplinlerarası Çalışmalar Dergisi*, no. 12 (n.d.), accessed 16 February 2026, <https://www.talid.org/enkunya.aspx/Dergi/Makale/12/375>.

³³ Ali Bardakoğlu, *Religion and Society: New Perspective from Turkey* (Ankara: Publication of Presidency of Religious Affairs - Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, 2009), 110–12.

³⁴ Umut Azak, ‘Secularism in Turkey as a Nationalist Search for Vernacular Islam’, *Revue Des Mondes Musulmans et de La Méditerranée*, no. 124 (2008): 161–79, <https://doi.org/10.4000/remmm.6025>.

³⁵ M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *Atatürk: An Intellectual Biography* (Princeton University Press, 2011), 154–56.

a more personal and individualized practice.³⁶

Nevertheless, secularization did not entirely eliminate religious practices within society. Bernard Lewis notes that in rural Anatolia, Islamic traditions continued to be maintained informally. In the 1950, the emergence of the Democrat Party, which allowed greater space for religious expression, demonstrated that Islamic identity remained alive in the social consciousness of the people. This phenomenon indicates that secularization functioned more as a restructuring of the public sphere rather than a total eradication of religiosity in society.³⁷

Socio-Political Analysis of the Decline of Islamic Civilization

In this study, the decline of Islamic civilization is not understood as the disappearance of religiosity among Turkish society, but rather as the diminishing institutional and normative role of Islam within the structure of political and social legitimacy of the state. The decline referred to here denotes a transformation from a system that upheld Sharia and the symbolism of the caliphate as sources of public authority to a system that grounds its legitimacy in nationalism and popular sovereignty.

During the period of the Ottoman Empire, the sultan possessed dual legitimacy, as a political ruler and as caliph, holding symbolic religious authority. This arrangement positioned religion and the state within a single integrative structure.³⁸ The transition to the republic severed this pattern of legitimacy. As explained by Erik J. Zürcher, the republican state established a new foundation based on secular nationalism and modern rationality.³⁹ Consequently, religion no longer functioned as a source of state legitimacy but was instead placed within an administrative framework controlled by state institutions.

This transformation shows that secularization in Turkey was not merely a separation of religion and politics, but rather a restructuring of power relations. The state assumed symbolic and normative authority that had previously been held by religious institutions. Talal Asad, in *Formations of the Secular*, argues that modern secularism is not the elimination of religion, but a redefinition of religion's position in the public sphere through state regulation.⁴⁰ This phenomenon is clearly visible in the Turkish context, where Islam continues to be recognized, but in a form that has been adapted to the framework of the nation-state.

These changes also affected the formation of the collective identity of society. Whereas political solidarity had previously been built upon membership in the *ummah*, which transcended ethnic and territorial boundaries, the republic constructed an identity based on nationhood and modern citizenship. Şerif Mardin describes this process as a shift from a religious-imperial structure to a modern national society fragmented within the boundaries of the state.⁴¹

Thus, the decline of Islamic civilization in this context refers to a shift in civilizational orientation from the integration of religion and politics toward a secular-national structure.

³⁶ Al-Sallabi, *Ad-Daulah Al-Ustmaniyyah : Awamil Al-Nuhudh Wa Asbab Al-Suquth*, 494.

³⁷ Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 361.

³⁸ Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 261.

³⁹ Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History (International Library of Human Geography)*, 188.

⁴⁰ Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular* (California: Stanford University Press, 2003), 5–6.

⁴¹ Şerif Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi*, SUNY Series in Near Eastern Studies (Albany, N.Y: State university of New York press, 1989), 155–57.

This transformation did not necessarily eliminate religiosity within society, but it altered the position of Islam from a public foundation to a cultural identity with more limited space within the order of the modern state.

The following timeline is intended to facilitate understanding of the decline of the Ottoman Empire based on specific historical periods:

Table 1. Timeline of Political Transformation and the Restructuring of the Role of Islam in Turkey

Period	Political and Institutional Changes	Transformation of Religion-State Relations	Implications for Islamic Civilization
1876-1908	The 1876 Constitution (<i>Kanûn-ı Esâsî</i>): The Beginning of the Young Turk Movement	The Emergence of Constitutionalism and Nationalism as Alternative Sources of Political Legitimacy	The Beginning of a Shift from Theocentric Legitimacy toward a Law- and Representation-Based Political Model
1908-1918	The Young Turk Revolution: The Dominance of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) and the First World War	The Constitution Was Reinstated, and the State Began to Exercise Administrative Control over Religious Institutions	Religion Remained a Symbol of Legitimacy but Began to Lose Its Structural Autonomy
1918-1923	The Ottoman Defeat: Allied Occupation, the War of Independence, and the Abolition of the Sultanate (1922)	The Delegitimization of the Caliphate Model: The Emergence of Turkish Nationalism as a New Political Foundation	There Was a Break in the Integrative Sultan-Caliph Model as the Center of Political and Spiritual Authority
1923-1938	Proclamation of the Republic (1923), Abolition of the Caliphate (1924), <i>Tevhid-i Tedrisat</i> , Legal Reforms, Alphabet Reform, and Turkification of the Adhan (1932)	Systematic Secularization: Religion Placed Under State Control, Civil Law Replacing Islamic Law	The Diminution of Islam's Institutional Role in State Legitimacy: Islam Shifts from a Public Foundation to a Regulated Cultural Identity
1938-1950	Consolidation of Kemalism, Single-Party Rule	Secularism Established as a Foundational Ideological Principle of the State	Institutionalization of Secularism as the Official Basis of Political Legitimacy
1950-1980	The Victory of the Democratic Party and the Limited Liberalization of Religious Expression	Religion Regains a Limited Social Space but Remains within the Framework of a Secular State	Islam Remains Alive as a Social Force but No Longer Serves as the Primary Source of Political Legitimacy
Pasca-1980	Military Intervention, the Rise of Political Islam, and the Emergence of Religiously-Based Parties	The Renegotiation of Religion-State Relations within the Republican System	It Shows That Secularization Does Not Eliminate Religiosity but Rather Limits and Regulates Its Expression

CONCLUSION

The historical trajectory of modern Turkish politics demonstrates that the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey was not merely a change in governmental structure, but a fundamental restructuring of political legitimacy and civilizational orientation. The collapse of caliphal authority marked the end of an integrative model that had long united religious and state power, which for centuries served as the foundation of Ottoman political legitimacy. This transformation was accelerated by

intellectual and political developments beginning in the era of the Young Turks and the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), which introduced constitutionalism, nationalism, and modernity as alternatives to the traditional model of governance.

In the republican period, this restructuring was institutionalized through systematic secularization policies. The dissolution of state religious institutions, the unification of education under the Law on the Unification of Education (*Tevhid-i Tedrisat*), civil law reforms, the adoption of the Latin alphabet, and regulations concerning religious symbols and rituals illustrate that the state did not abolish religion, but rather redefined its position within the framework of a modern nation-state. Islam remained present in social life, however, its institutional and normative role in shaping political legitimacy and public policy was significantly reduced.

Thus, the decline of Islamic civilization in the context of modern Turkey is more accurately understood as a structural transformation namely, a shift from a system that positioned religion as the primary source of public legitimacy to one that grounds legitimacy in nationalism, rationality, and popular sovereignty. The “decline” in question does not signify the disappearance of religiosity within society, rather, it refers to the changing position of Islam from a political-imperial foundation to a cultural and spiritual identity operating under the regulation of a secular state.

This transformation also demonstrates that secularization in Turkey represents a process of redefining the relationship between religion and the state within the framework of modernity. It marked the opening of a new chapter in the political history of the Islamic world one in which Islamic civilization is no longer institutionalized in the form of formal political authority, but instead negotiates its place within the structures of the modern nation-state. From this perspective, Turkey’s experience serves as an important example of how a shift in the paradigm of legitimacy can reshape the trajectory of civilizational development.

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