

# The decline of ottoman empire was mainly caused by internal factors

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The Ottoman Empire was one of the largest and most successful empires of the past that was founded by an Ottoman Turk called Osman. It began in the late 13th century and ended officially on November 1, 1922 when the Ottoman sultanate was abolished and Turkey was declared a republic. The Ottoman Empire reached its height in the sixteenth century with the conquest of Egypt, North Africa, Syria and the Arabian Coast and part of Eastern Europe. The decline of the empire was mainly caused by three internal factors: 1) poor leadership, 2) conservatism and, 3) capitulations to the demands of Christian territories.

The sultan who brought the Ottoman Empire to its zenith was Suleyman “the Magnificent” who ruled from 1520 to 1566 A. D. He was, in fact, regarded by both Muslims and Europeans as the most able and significant ruler in his period. He was a brilliant military strategist, a wise politician, and a patron of the arts. In his reign, he made Istanbul, his capital, as one of the culturally innovative cities of the world. As a ruler, he was just, a lawgiver, a builder and a mighty conqueror. However, after his death he was succeeded by a series of sultans who exhibited poor leadership all through the seventeenth century.

They were referred to as “eccentric and sometimes insane Sultans” who were less capable and energetic. The installation of poor and ill-equipped leaders on the Ottoman Sultanate was began by Selim II who after succeeding his father, Suleyman, abandoned the decreed practice of killing the entire Sultan’s male relatives and brothers who were considered rivals to

the throne of his offspring and instead these rivals were kept in prison in the Kafes (apartments that adjoined the harem) with their sterile women.

When in cases where these heirs were able to become enthroned, especially in times when there were rapid depositions of reigning Sultans, they were usually unprepared to rule. This situation was further aggravated when also the sultans begin to begat many sons. Traditionally, the Sultan followed a reproductive policy that his wife should bear only one son but many daughters. This policy limited the possibilities of rivalries in the Empire that would result o its division (the Sultan's sons from his concubines do not have legitimate power).

Poor leadership caused political instability when reigning Sultans preferred to enjoy the Empires wealth and its beautiful women. They illustrate the idea that as an empire began, the rulers were at first active and energetic but as the empire expanded and becomes wealthy the succeeding rulers would prefer to stay at home. In short, Ottoman Sultans who succeeded Suleyman now prefer to spend their time in court and in its harem. Therefore, they no longer led their armies into battle and neglect governing their Empire on a daily basis as their attention is now turned to the pleasure of their harems.

The harem is the place where the women in a Muslim household resides and they usually consist of concubines whose main duty is to entertain the man in the house, in this case a sultan, in the bedchamber . The two successors of Suleyman, Selim II and Murad III, were popularly known to have spent more time in the harem, engaging in excesses in wine and lust, respectively. As a result, the women began to increasingly exert their influence on the

Sultans by playing, conspiring and manipulating on the latter's fears and neuroses and taking advantage of their favors.

Therefore in this period of history, harems played an important role in the governing of the Ottoman Empire so that this period was called the Reign of the Women (Kadinlar Sultanati) which lasted between 1520- 1687. The women (more specifically the Valide Sultan (Sultan's mother) began to have a powerful access on state politics, interfering in its state of affairs through bribery and political patronage thereby replacing promotion on the basis of merit. The power and influence of the sultan then began to diminish. The incompetence of the Sultans further led to political instability and economic problem in the Empire.

Incompetent Sultans were often deposed, triggering a rapid change of leadership. This rapid change led to corruption and bribery especially because of the interference of the women, the introduction of the damad into politics and the enthronement of young sultans. Damads are the son-in-law or brother in-law of the Sultan. It was Suleiman who first began the practice of installing a member of the dynastic family ( damad ) into power , as Grand Vizier, which was previously forbidden in the Ottoman tradition because of its tendency to cause rivalries and inefficiency of the governance of the Empire.

The damads then became the avenues wherein the women in the court exercised their power through bribery for the former depended on the harem to keep their position. . Moreover, the deposition of Sultans meant that many young sultans came into power and ruled through their regents who were

also either corrupt or being bribed. Aside from corruption, the finances of the Empire began to decrease due to large expenditures needed to run the harem which had rapidly increased in population ever since the princes were not killed and the Sultan bore many sons who also kept many women as concubines.

Furthermore, the choice of the Sultan to withdraw from active campaigning for conquest further lead to economic problem in the Empire. The Empire was designed to thrive and prosper in conquest. The campaign, called a Ghazi or "warfare on "infidels", was especially important for whenever the Empire conquered new lands it meant new state treasuries and more taxes to be collected and captured booty for the Janissaries (imperial army). Now that the Sultan no longer goes out to conquer new territories the cost of maintaining the vast mobile Janissaries slowly depleted the finances of the Empire.

One of the fatal effects of poor leadership in the Empire was that it breeds and fosters rebellion among the Janissaries. Undoubtedly, the Janissaries had been a critical part in the building of the Empire. Janissaries were warrior forces recruited forcibly among the prisoners and were trained in Turkish martial arts. They exhibited good warlike strength and were united under one Islamic faith. The withdrawal of the sultan from conquest had left the Janissaries, accustomed to constant fighting abroad, restless in the Empire. Their meddling with politics caused trouble to the government.

Their increased influence or prestige as a warrior had catapulted them into a political entity with unchecked power and their prolonged stay at home had

caused them to be engaged in political intrigues that had unwittingly contributed to the very downfall of the empire in which they had helped to build. Their restlessness and intrigues were fed by the confusion brought about by the rapid changes of Sultans who implemented their own state policies. The Janissaries led revolts, aided by people who also fought for independence that further disrupted the Empire.

They had become so troublesome so that the sultan found no other choice but to massacre most of them. On the other hand, the Janissaries themselves had become corrupt, lazy and incompetent, as it became a hereditary caste system. This system was also a product of poor leadership in the Empire when Selim allowed the sons of the Janissaries to become Janissaries themselves, thereby replacing merit with birthright. Meanwhile, the army had become less useful to the sultan as their enemies became more modernized.

The second internal cause for the decline of the Empire was the inability of the Empire to keep pace with the advancement taking place in the Western states and to take advantage of the effects of western Religious Reformation. Religious conservatism in the Ottoman Empire isolated it from modernizing in the 19th century. Islamic Law had always formed the basis of the government of the Ottoman Empire and it strictly enforces the tenets of Islamic faith which included the restricted contact with non-Muslims.

This of course resulted to the Empire's isolation from advancement that was rapidly enveloping Europe in the 19th century, and with the Empire's

deliberate resistance to change, they found themselves facing an army that were far more advanced in weaponry. Meanwhile, the ulamas (religious leaders) maintained and insisted that the Empire should focus itself in instructing its people in religious matters rather than on technical topics. The Janissaries were highly affected by this conservatism, as they are more devoted to their faith and closely worked with the ulamas than the sultan.

They rarely obey the sultan in carrying out orders of modernization. No wonder therefore that they proved to be inferior in fighting against modern western nations like Russia, Britain and France and consequently lose territories to them. Other Muslim religious fraternities also resisted change or involvement in the struggles for power and wealth. They were referred to as Sufi sec Islam. As a whole, these conservatisms kept the Ottoman Empire from modernizing their transportation, public works, and educational systems that would have helped them compete with 19th C. Europe.

The third major cause of the decline was that the sultan capitulated to rulers of western Christian territories granting them self-rule under agreed conditions. These resulted the Ottoman Empire to become less centralized and eventually central control weakened. The demand for independent rule and capitulation arose due to the discrimination of the Christian subjects in Islamic law. Such capitulations however had proven to be problematic for the succeeding sultans who were faced with increasing demand for capitulations from their western subjects.

For example, extra-territorial judicial rights granted to French traders in 1536 created problems for the weaker sultans who were to follow Suleiman. The

granting of similar concessions to the western territories had paved the way to increase the disparity and factions between the Christians and Muslim subjects. Nowhere is this truer than in the modernization of the Christian territories who are no longer subject to the restrictions of Islamic Laws. Consequently, the Empire's control abroad was lessened. . Therefore, it is clear to see that internally the Ottoman Empire (with little interference from external factors) was ready to crumble.

First, poor leadership had rocked the Empire as its leaders neglected their duties and instituted state policies that leads to political instability, economic problems and military incompetence and rebellions. Second, the Empire rejected modernization by promoting conservatism through the instruction of Islamic Law so that it become ill- equipped to defeat and compete with western invaders. Third, it granted self-rule through a series of capitulations to its western Christian subjects which resulted to the weakening of its centralized government.