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The Collapse of the Ottoman Empire: An Evaluation on the Impact of Milestones in Europe

One of the largest empires in world history, the Ottoman Empire had its golden age in the 16th century. However, in this period, when the Ottoman Empire was the strongest and unbeatable, some problems began to occur. The empire, which could not keep up with the developments and innovations in the world required by the period, collapsed over the centuries due to its weak internal structure. In the meantime, Europeans found new trade routes and colonised many places with geographical discoveries, advanced in science, art, and technology with the Age of Enlightenment, mechanised with the Industrial Revolution, and democratised with the French Revolution. While all those developments took place in Europe, the Ottoman Empire could not provide the necessary modernisation. In this direction, with its weakened internal structure in the military, economic, political, administrative, and educational fields, it could not prevent that process. Thus, it gradually became a state that fell behind in every area from Europe over the centuries and eventually collapsed. Accordingly, this study has comprehensively analysed the Ottoman disintegration process, which had started in the 16th century, by considering the significant historical developments in Europe and the gradually weakening Ottoman internal structure.

Keywords: Ottoman Empire, collapse, disintegration, downturn period, decline paradigm

Introduction

The Ottoman Empire was one of the largest empires of the period and history, which ruled on three continents and continued its existence for 623 years from the Middle Ages to the Modern Ages.² The Ottoman Empire, which became the most powerful empire in the world in the 16th century, expanded its territory to Eastern Europe, Southwest

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² SULTANA-SHARIF 2019: 37–38.

Asia and North Africa in this period and eventually reached its widest borders in 1683.³ Nevertheless, such a great empire has fallen apart and collapsed, as has happened to all empires in history. Therefore, it is essential to analyse the collapse of this great empire to understand the importance of not being able to withstand time like other empires in history, and the position of states in the future international system.

However, the main reason for the disintegration of this empire is not an event that happened suddenly or occurred within a certain period of time. The period that begins with the Treaty of Yas, which the Turkish education curriculum calls the period of collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and ends with the Treaty of Sèvres, describes the period of collapse of the Ottoman Empire chronologically, not the reasons for the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.⁴ In the literature, it is seen that the collapse of the Ottoman Empire is discussed more frequently, but there is a quantitative deficiency in the studies that comprehensively discuss the reasons behind the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.⁵ Although these studies are very valuable and have made great contributions to the literature, it is necessary to increase the number of studies that deal with the causes.

Therefore, this study will analyse the reasons behind the collapse of the empire instead of analysing the last periods of it. For this reason, it would be appropriate to examine the collapse of the Ottoman Empire from the 16th century, when the basis of systemic deterioration began, and external factors began to take effect. Instead of examining periodic events, the article will focus on the results and analyse how these situations affected the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. In this direction, the article will deal with the reasons behind the collapse, together with critical historical developments, depending on internal and external factors.

External factors

The factor that makes an empire strong is that it is ahead of its time. Yet this should be considered as a sum of all factors, not just a single factor. Empires that are not ahead of their time become open to external factors because they do not have a feature that distinguishes them from other powers.

The main external factor that caused the collapse of the Ottoman Empire was the inability to follow the developments in Europe. The Ottoman Empire, which dominated a considerable area in Europe, was constantly competing with Europe since it was never seen as a European civilization. On the other hand, Europeans entered many bloody wars among themselves, and even though they caused the First and Second World Wars, they were permanently affected by the developments in each other and integrated themselves in this direction. At the beginning of the 17th century, Maximilien de Béthune, Duc De Sully's⁶ "Christian European Council" and the "Great Design" idea, which formed the foundations of the European Union, aimed to exclude and to establish a military unit

³ Hürriyet 2019.

⁴ See: www.ktb.gov.tr/TR-96255/turk-kulturu.html

⁵ See also REID 2000; HANIOĞLU 2010; İNALCIK-QUATAERT 1994.

⁶ He was an advisor to King Henry IV of France as Chief Minister in 1589 and 1611.

against the Ottoman Empire.⁷ Thus, while the European Union was formed as a result of centuries of integration, Turkey, the successor of the Ottoman Empire, has been left out of the union for many years.⁸

While the Ottoman Empire was living its new age and creating its own classical period from 1299 to 1579, Europe was living in the darkness of its own medieval period. However, from the 16th century onwards, the historical process began to work in reverse. As a result of this, while Europe was entering its new age with its new dynamic actors formed by individual-mind-science and even nation-centred scientists, philosophers, and merchants by creating a new alternative from its own Medieval Age, the Ottomans continued on their way with their old system, as they could not create new alternatives and new actors from their own system, and in a way prepared their own Middle Ages and got into it.⁹

Geographical discoveries

All of the factors in Europe's overtaking of the Ottoman Empire, which will be examined under the subtitle of external factors, are interrelated. However, geographical discoveries form the basis of all these factors.

The time interval of the period, which is called the period or epoch of geographical discoveries in world history, is accepted from 1400 to 1600. This period covers when Europeans began to explore new trade routes, raw materials and uninhabited lands by sea. It is seen that Portugal, which is a small state in terms of the area it covers and located at the southwestern tip of Europe in particular, is the locomotive state in geographical discoveries, and respectively, followed by Spain, France, the Netherlands and England in this process.¹⁰ Although the missionary aims to spread Christianity were dominant in the 14th century, as the main reason for geographical discoveries, economic purposes began to dominate from the 15th century.¹¹ Thus, in the 15th century, Europe, which was left behind in economic, political and social terms, began to seek ways to go to the East, which is considered the centre of wealth, without intermediaries.¹²

Geographical discoveries had very adverse effects on the Ottoman Empire. As can be seen from Figure 1, the most negative impact on the Ottoman Empire was that the Mediterranean began to lose its importance. In particular, the Mediterranean was an important route for products such as silk, paper, spices, and porcelain to reach Europe via the Silk Road. Alternative routes to the Mediterranean were found through new discoveries, and the Ottoman Empire lost an important source of tax revenue.¹³ As the Mediterranean lost its importance, the people living on this route became unemployed with the decrease in the number of traders passing through the trade routes on the Mediterranean route. The Ottoman Empire started to give capitulations to the European states in order to revive

⁷ SULLY et al. 1909: 78–81.

⁸ See PAGDEN 2002.

⁹ HOCAOĞLU 2004: 54–55. KODAMAN 2007: 12.

¹⁰ ARNOLD 1995: 13–15.

¹¹ GÜRBÜZ 2018: 6.

¹² ULUERLER 2018: 49.

¹³ GÜRBÜZ 2018: 9; ULUERLER 2018: 73.

the trade routes. Although this situation initially stimulated trade in the Mediterranean, over time, it became a tool for the exploitation of the empire by the European states.¹⁴

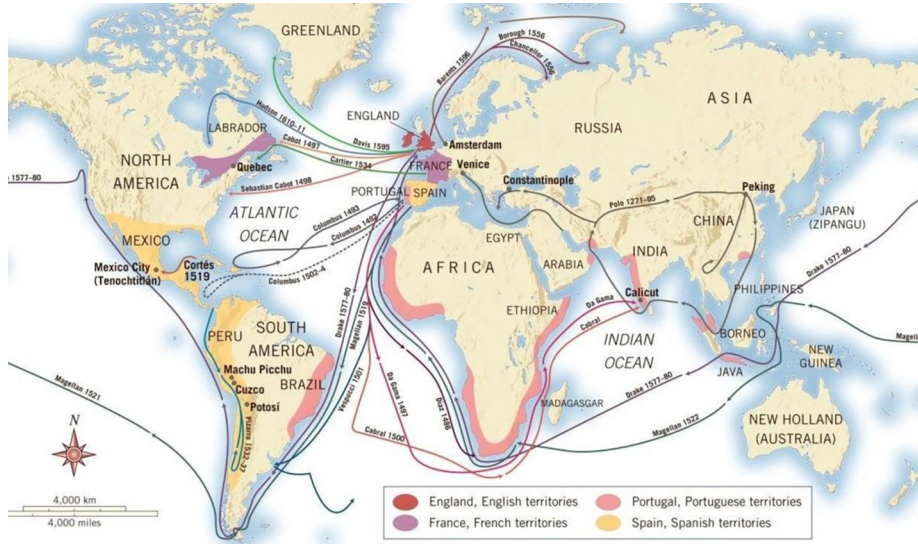


Figure 1: New trade routes and inhabited lands with the Age of Discovery
 Source: www.studentsofhistory.com/routes-of-famous-european-explorers

In addition, the abundant gold and silver metals transported to Europe, especially from America, overthrew the monetary economy, and inflation began to occur in the Ottoman Empire.¹⁵ Thus, gold and silver entering the Ottoman markets caused devaluations. For instance, as shown in Table 1 below, the silver gram ratio decreased steadily from 1.181 grams per hundred Dirhams in 1431 to just 0.323 grams by 1600. Likewise, Table 2 below illustrates how the ducat equivalent of mites surged from 45 in 1477 to 120 in 1586.¹⁶

Table 1: Effect of devaluation on silver in the empire

Year	Pieces of a hundred Dirhams	Silver gram ratio
1431	260	1.181
1460	330	0.931
1480	400	0.768
1491	420	0.731
1572	450	0.682
1585	800	0.384
1600	950	0.323

Source: compiled by the author based on GÜRBÜZ 2018: 17.

¹⁴ TÜRKMEN 1995: 332, 334, 335.

¹⁵ ULUERLER 2018: 74.

¹⁶ GÜRBÜZ 2018: 18.

Table 2: Effect of devaluation on gold in the empire

Year	Ducat equivalent of Mites
1477	45
1488	49
1510	54
1523	55
1548	57
1550	60
1566	60
1575	60
1586	120

Source: compiled by the author based on GÜRBÜZ 2018: 18.

Also, European states began to gain strength “thanks to” the lands they colonised as a result of “discoveries”. Thus, Europeans began to dominate in areas where Muslims lived densely, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, India and the Persian Gulf. Considering that the Ottoman Empire was an Islamic state and held the caliphate, this situation negatively affected the Ottoman’s influence in the Islamic geography. The ineffectiveness of the caliphate in Islamic geography over the centuries will also be effective in the start of the Arab revolts with the effect of increasing nationalism.¹⁷

Finally, the European States, which were enriched by the lands they colonised as a result of the discoveries, became increasingly influential.¹⁸ With these discoveries, Europe found ways of discovering both nature, matter and society and their laws, thus producing knowledge. As a result of this, Europe advanced, especially in military technology and science, gained power, wealth, knowledge, and gained the upper hand against the Ottomans.¹⁹ Moreover, the bourgeois class, which got rich due to the discoveries in Europe, gained power and found new markets for European goods, and these developments triggered the Industrial Revolution.²⁰ Finally, in my opinion, due to the discoveries, Europe’s development in the field of science and the understanding that “the world is round” and the absolute trust in the church was shaken, and the geographical discoveries also laid the groundwork for the Age of Enlightenment.

Age of Enlightenment

The foundations of the Age of Enlightenment, a science-based view of reason and divine concepts in Europe, are based on the Renaissance and Reformation movements. Later, this process accelerated with the increasing wealth of geographical discoveries.²¹ Thus, the Age of Enlightenment emerged as an innovation movement based on rationality,

¹⁷ For the Arab Revolt 1916–1918 please see FARGO 1969.

¹⁸ ULUERLER 2018: 74.

¹⁹ KODAMAN 2007: 12.

²⁰ GÜRBÜZ 2018: 8.

²¹ ZARIÇ 2017: 52.

which started in England in 1688 and was influential in all European countries, especially France. The new discoveries made in the scientific field at that time caused the church's authority to be shaken.²²

As a matter of fact, this rationalist view, which started in Europe, reached its zenith with the French Revolution in 1789.²³ The French Revolution is one of the most important historical events that affected the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. This situation will be examined in the next part of the article.

Moreover, scientific and technological developments in the Age of Enlightenment contributed to the formation of the Industrial Revolution. Likewise, the social change and prosperity experienced with the Industrial Revolution contributed to the development of this age.²⁴ The Industrial Revolution is one of the other significant historical developments that was effective in the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, just like the French Revolution. In addition to the interaction of the Age of Enlightenment with two important events that played a role in the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, such as the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, the Age of Enlightenment negatively affected the Ottoman Empire in many ways. In this period, developments based on rationality and science enabled Europe to develop in the field of technology. As a result of this, it is seen that Europe, which has developed considerably in the field of new weapon technology, is ahead of the Ottoman Empire. The Europeans started to win the wars against the Ottomans with the new weapons they invented, which caused the collapse of the empire over time.²⁵ In this period, the understanding of colonialism gained momentum as a result of the power of Europe and the increasing need for raw materials with new technological developments.²⁶ Thus, the power gap between the Ottoman Empire and Europe gradually widened.

However, it should be noted here that the phenomenon of modernisation after the developments in the Age of Enlightenment undoubtedly affected the modernisation of the Ottoman Empire. However, this attempt could not go beyond imitating the Western European Civilization. As a positive result of the Ottoman modernisation process, we can see the establishment of the Modern Turkish Republic and Atatürk's reforms.²⁷ However, the Turkish Grand National Assembly, representing the new Turkish state established as a result of this modernisation, abolished the sultanate in 1922 and officially ended the Ottoman Empire, which was effectively ended with the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920.²⁸ In my opinion, although this is the official collapse of the Ottoman Empire, it is a positive development as it requires a republic and democracy, not a sultanate in the modern age. Although the Age of Enlightenment brought the end of the Ottoman Empire in the long run, I think it contributed to the modern Turkish Republic in this sense.

²² ZARIÇ 2017: 35.

²³ USTA 2018: 75.

²⁴ EREN 2017: 117.

²⁵ STARKEY 2003: 35, 176, 182.

²⁶ STARKEY 2003: 137, 186.

²⁷ GÜMÜŞLÜ 2008: 130.

²⁸ Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisinin, hukuku hâkimiyet ve hükümrâninin mümessili hakikisi olduğuna dair. 1 November 1922, No 308, Grand National Assembly of Turkey, Ankara.

Industrial Revolution

The Industrial Revolution in England that took place after the second half of the 18th century and the great political revolution in France caused significant changes in the social structures of societies in Europe. With the Industrial Revolution, machines were invented, steam power was discovered, electrical energy was put into service in a way that people could use, and thus the rapid development of mechanisation shook the situation of artisans and masters working with manual power.²⁹

The Ottoman Empire was incapable of predicting the results of this great transformation, and, therefore, in keeping up with this transformation. The source of this inadequacy was based on a long process dating back to geographical discoveries, long before the revolution.³⁰

In addition, the Ottoman Empire could not realise the agricultural and population revolution. Accordingly, the empire fell behind in this matter, could not keep up with the Industrial Revolution. As can be seen in Table 3, the increase in agricultural products, the increase in the workforce employed in agriculture, and more importantly, the productivity of labour has increased since the beginning of the 16th century in England, where the Industrial Revolution began. This increase in output and productivity has allowed a larger population to be fed. These developments in the British agricultural sector have been one of the factors that directly affected England's being the leading country in the Industrial Revolution.

Table 3: England 1381–1700 annual production, labour and labour productivity growth rates in agriculture

Years	Output growth	Labour supply	Labour productivity
1381–1522	0.01	-0.01	0.2
1522–1700	0.38	0.25	0.13
1700–1759	0.79	0.22	0.57
1759–1801	0.85	0.44	0.41

Source: BROADBERRY et al. 2010: 367.

Besides, both domestic and foreign markets in the Ottoman Empire were under the protectionist and interventionist attitude of the state. Thus, the main purpose of the administration was to perpetuate the political order with economic balances. However, this situation prevented an economic and social transformation.³¹ Besides, the Ottoman bureaucrats believed that agricultural production and agricultural society should be protected by the state.³² Agricultural production was equivalent to approximately 65% of the national income in the last centuries of the state. It is seen that 80% of the total working population was employed in the agricultural sector in the last periods of the Ottoman Empire. These statistical data also show that the Ottoman Empire was an agricultural country, and it was not possible at that time to achieve industrialisation at the standards of European countries.³³

²⁹ KELEŞ 2019: 172.

³⁰ ULUERLER 2018: 73.

³¹ AKŞIN 1997: 194.

³² İNALCIK-QUATERT 2000: 189–190.

³³ KELEŞ 2019: 172.

For these reasons, the Ottoman Empire could not keep up with the innovations brought by the Industrial Revolution. However, after the revolution, the countries with developed industries started colonial activities in search of raw materials and markets. With the opening of the political, military, and economic differences between the industrialising states and the Ottoman Empire, it became a market. Eventually, as a result of the Industrial Revolution, the Ottoman Empire became a semi-colonial state³⁴ with the 1838 Balta Liman Trade Agreement with Britain.³⁵ Furthermore, the Ottoman Empire had to make these agreements with other European states in the 19th century. The Ottomans made such trade agreements to get the support of western states against internal rebellions and potential land losses. In addition, it aimed to provide a partial expansion in its economy through foreign trade.

Table 4: Amounts of imports and exports in the Ottoman Empire in 1838 and 1870

Years	Import (m £)	Export (m £)
1838	4.4	6.2
1870	17.4	22.5

Source: compiled by the author based on ERDEM 2016: 23.

As can be seen in Table 4, the Ottomans were able to achieve a partial opening with these agreements. However, in the long run, products of European origin dealt a great blow to the Ottoman domestic market. The domestic Ottoman industry, which could not keep up with the Industrial Revolution and had difficulties maintaining its comparative superiority in international markets as a result of these agreements, suffered greatly, foreign capital became stronger, foreign trade balances deteriorated more, and the country was forced to borrow rapidly.³⁶

The Ottoman Empire, which could not pay its foreign debts, established the *Düyun-u Umumiye* (General Obligations Administration) with the pressures of the European states. Accordingly, the essential revenue sources of the state were left to the western creditor states. Thus, the Ottoman Empire completely lost its economic independence, and it became more challenging to keep up with the Industrial Revolution.³⁷

French Revolution

As a result of this movement, which is defined as the rebellion of the people in France under the leadership of the intellectuals against the oppression of the king, the people put an end to the monarchy-based theocratic state structure in France and a new era began in the history of Europe and the world. With the French Revolution, concepts such

³⁴ See for details: <https://web.archive.org/web/20131216025543/www.urunlu.com/BelgeOku2.aspx?y-kod=66>

³⁵ ERDEM 2016: 31–35.

³⁶ ERDEM 2016: 23.

³⁷ IZOL–CINGÖZ 2020: 392; KARAMAN 2018: 66.

as human rights, democracy, nationalism, freedom, justice, and equality emerged.³⁸ This revolution had a significant impact on the Ottoman Empire in two respects. The first was nationalist revolts and the second was democratisation movements.

Under the influence of the French Revolution, the absolutist kingdoms came to an end with the 1830 and 1848 revolutions in Europe. Formations such as the democratic state and social order, the secularisation of the state, and the nation-state structure gained momentum. Emerging concepts and structures affected not only Europe but the whole world.³⁹ Multinational empires such as the Ottoman Empire and Austria-Hungary were shaken by these nationalist movements. These nationalist uprisings in the Ottoman Empire were supported by the dominant powers to achieve their goals. In particular, Russia embarked on pan-Slavic movements in order to descend to the warm seas and instilled the idea of rebellion in the Serbs, Bulgarians and Greeks.⁴⁰ As can be seen, the increasing nationalism movement was used by the great powers. As a matter of fact, when these nations gained their independence, they could not go beyond the influence of these great powers. However, the revolts of these nations for independence played an important role in the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

On the other hand, intellectuals who opposed the empire through concepts such as equality, freedom, justice and law emerged. These intellectuals forced the Ottoman Empire to make western-style reforms and democratise. In the developing process, the Ottoman Empire made some reforms. Eventually, it was governed by a constitutional monarchy instead of an absolute monarchy with the first Constitutionalism and the second Constitutionalism.⁴¹ I would also like to point out that although this is seen as a positive development, it caused many internal problems and unrest, such as the 31 March incident,⁴² since the sultans were reluctant to give their absolute powers. Therewithal, as this desire for revolution among the intellectuals could not find a response in the people, there was no mass revolution like in France. In particular, the intellectual group that called itself Young Turk among Ottoman officers was decisive in the establishment of constitutionalism. In my opinion, the Young Turks' taking power is directly related to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Because, instead of the balance policy⁴³ that the Ottoman sultans had applied for centuries, the empire collapsed at the end of the war, with the aggressive attitude of the Young Turks that dragged the Ottomans into the First World War.

Domestic reasons

For an important part of the history of the Republic of Turkey, politicians have tended to associate the problems experienced in the country with foreign powers. They were trying

³⁸ LOULES-KAYA 1992: 291; KARAMAN 2018: 66.

³⁹ ALADAĞ 2007: 64–65.

⁴⁰ KETENCI 2018: 351.

⁴¹ KARAMAN 2018: 72.

⁴² It is an attempted uprising and coup by those who oppose the Committee of Union and Progress and the sharia supporters after the proclamation of the Second Constitutional Era. Sultan Abdulhamid II, who was held responsible for the riots, was dethroned.

⁴³ It is the name given to the alliances that the Ottoman Empire established with European states in order not to lose more land in the 19th and 20th centuries.

to convince the public that there is no problem in their administration and declared that almost every problem is caused by external forces, not internal ones. In fact, since this situation has become a habit, only external factors have been highlighted among the factors that were effective in the decadence of the Ottoman Empire by most people. Nonetheless, it is effective in the collapse of a state in problems that are internal as well as external. Hence, the Ottoman Empire did not feel external developments in its heyday due to its enormous systematic structure. However, as there were ruptures in the empire, it became open to external factors. Under this title, these internal reasons that were effective in the collapse of the empire will be examined.

Deterioration of the military organisation

One of the most important factors in the collapse of the Ottoman Empire was the deterioration of the military system. As a matter of fact, the empire, which dominated three continents for centuries, achieved this thanks to its strong and systematic military structure. The deterioration of the military system can be added to the loss of wars due to the backwardness of weapon technology from Europe and, accordingly, demoralisation. Since this situation has been analysed under the above title, it will not be mentioned again. The reasons for the deterioration of the military system are quite detailed and should be the subject of another study. Under this title, the deterioration of the timar cavalry and the janissary corps, which were the heart of the Ottoman Empire, will be analysed in a general way and its effects on the collapse of the Ottoman Empire will be mentioned.

Timar holders/cavalleries are military units that are responsible for collecting taxes in the area given to them by the state. During the war, they had to provide all war materials and the number of cavalrymen to the empire, according to the tax revenue they collected, together with the taxes they collected here. In this way, the state met the need for soldiers without any money coming out of its treasury, and even the taxes collected by the cavalleries contributed to the treasury.⁴⁴ However, corruption in the timar system occurred as a result of the illegal auctioning of timar lands and the loss of land due to wars.⁴⁵

Also, the Ottomans kept the tax they received from the timar owners at the same level, despite the depreciation of money, which started with geographical discoveries in the 16th century. The reason for this was to compete with the developing armies of Europe with the Industrial Revolution. However, as a result of this, a significant part of the timar holders, whose income decreased significantly, had to leave their timar voluntarily.⁴⁶ Thus, the number of timar cavalry gradually reduced. As a result of this, the security of the empire weakened in the areas where the timar cavalry lands were located, and as a result of the deterioration of the system, the empire suffered a significant tax loss, and its economy was damaged. Moreover, feudal structure was formed by the emergence of *ayans*⁴⁷ in the lands where the fiefs remained vacant. While Europe was destroying the feudal system,

⁴⁴ GÜNDOĞDU 2021: 193–194.

⁴⁵ CEYLANLI 2011: 159.

⁴⁶ CEYLANLI 2011: 160.

⁴⁷ It refers to the local landlords who gained power in a certain region during the Ottoman period.

a feudal structure was formed in the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁸ Gibb and Bowen state that sipahis, whose number was 200,000 at the time of Kanuni, decreased to 25,000 in the 18th century and they were used for back services in wars.⁴⁹ The dwindling timar cavalries were tried to be replaced by the janissaries.

The Janissary Corps comprised the majority of the infantry part of the Kapikulu Hearths affiliated to the Sultan, which was formed by raising children aged 10-15, gathered from Anatolia and Rumelia by the devshirme method.⁵⁰ Until it was abolished entirely in 1826, it went through a period of deterioration due to various reasons such as the deterioration of the devshirme system, irregularities in admissions to the quarry, uncontrolled increase in the quarry, shortage of treasury, bribery, favour and the negative effects of inflation, especially as a result of geographical discoveries at the end of the 16th century.⁵¹

The reasons listed above are directly related to the increase in the number of janissaries. There are many reasons for this situation. First of all, as mentioned before, due to the deterioration of the timar system, the number of cavalrymen with timar gradually decreased and the number of janissaries was increased to compensate for this.⁵² In addition, the number of janissaries began to increase as the Ottomans failed to achieve their former successful results in the wars at the end of the 16th century, in connection with the backwardness of weapon technology.⁵³ Since the devshirme system was insufficient to meet the increasing number of janissaries, many Turks entered the hearth, the regular training period of the janissaries was shortened and people entered the hearth by bribery.⁵⁴ However, due to their ignorance and incompetence, the newly recruited personnel did not increase the combat power of this hearth, on the contrary, it destroyed the peace, discipline, and regular education.⁵⁵ Moreover, as the number of janissaries increased, the uprisings against the sultan also increased. The janissaries, who did not want to fight and were dissatisfied with the state administrators or the sultan, frequently rose up, causing the Ottomans to have a hard time.⁵⁶ The number of uprisings of the Janissaries, especially dissatisfied with their salaries, is incalculable. So much so that often the gold and silver items in the palace were melted and turned into *akçe* (coin), and the salaries of the janissaries were paid.⁵⁷ This situation deeply affected the military, political and economic power of the Ottoman Empire.

Economic, social and administrative disorders

It should be accepted that external reasons were mainly effective in the deterioration of the economic, social, and political system in the Ottoman Empire. While the technology and system of the European armies were developing, the deterioration in the Ottoman

⁴⁸ KODAMAN 2007: 13.

⁴⁹ GIBB-BOWEN 1951: 188-190; CEYLANLI 2011: 161.

⁵⁰ KODAMAN 2007: 8.

⁵¹ ELIBOL 2009: 23.

⁵² CEYLANLI 2011: 161.

⁵³ CEYLANLI 2011: 163.

⁵⁴ İNALCIK 1980: 289.

⁵⁵ CEYLANLI 2011: 163.

⁵⁶ ELIBOL 2009: 39.

⁵⁷ CEYLANLI 2011: 166.

army forced the loot from the conquests to stop and the empire to pay compensation as a result of the lost wars. However, with the loss of importance of the Mediterranean with geographical discoveries, there was a loss of income, and inflation was experienced as gold and silver entered the markets. Moreover, with the capitulations, the Ottoman domestic industry, which could not compete with European goods, went into decline.⁵⁸ In addition, with the Industrial Revolution, it became impossible for the Ottoman economy, which was based on agriculture, to compete with the mechanised European economy. In the external factors part of the study, since the effects of those situations on internal factors are examined in detail, it will not be discussed again. In this part, the weak internal position of the Ottoman Empire, which made it open to external factors, will be discussed.

All this failure had a negative impact on the people and the army, causing frequent revolts, and as a result, the rulers and even the sultans had to change frequently.⁵⁹ Hence, these adverse developments had become triggers for each other. Disobedience has emerged in the military, ulama⁶⁰ and bureaucracy.⁶¹ The rulers, who were constantly changed by military pressure, refrained from making reforms. In fact, generally pro-military administrators were brought to power and acted in their interests.⁶² Managers, who were changed frequently in the corrupted system, started to take bribes by taking advantage of this opportunity. Particularly, it can be said that bribery has dominated all state mechanisms since the end of the 16th century. Thus, people who give a lot of money are appointed to public services and state administration, not people with merit. In fact, this situation deteriorated so much over time that even the bandits began to bribe the rulers with some of the goods and money they robbed.⁶³

So much so that bribery and favouritism caused the collapse of the Ottoman justice system. Thus, favouritism, bribery and nepotism took the place of justice. Bribery and corruption, which started in the 16th century, increased gradually until the last period of the Ottoman Empire. The biggest factor for this is the deterioration in economic, administrative, military and social fields.⁶⁴

Deterioration of the education system

For the professorship cadres, which were already few in the Ottoman classical period madrasah system, an examination was held among those who were candidates for it, and the most qualified ones could be placed in these cadres. However, with the deterioration that started at the end of the 16th century, the system of the professorship cadres was changed due to factors such as bribery, favouritism, and nepotism. The requirement of graduating from the madrasah for being a professor was abolished, and the people of state or sultan started to appoint the people they were influenced by as professors. Therefore,

⁵⁸ KODAMAN 2007: 13.

⁵⁹ CEYLANLI 2011: 163.

⁶⁰ It is the name given to state officials engaged in religious, judicial, and educational affairs during the Ottoman period.

⁶¹ KODAMAN 2007: 13.

⁶² CEYLANLI 2011: 164–166.

⁶³ DAŞÇIOĞLU 2005: 20.

⁶⁴ DAŞÇIOĞLU 2005: 24.

uneducated professors started to be appointed to madrasahs. Over time, these uneducated people opposed the reforms to be made in education and argued that the reforms were against religion.⁶⁵

Parallel to this, the madrasa was no longer able to scientifically confirm the facts, produce new ideas, discover or invent. Because it had tended to look for the subject and object of education in the metaphysical world and neglected the job of solving worldly and human problems by using the mind, creating technology by discovering the laws of nature, and thus the method of producing technologies that would increase material power and welfare. As a result, the scholastic mentality dominated the Ottoman intellectuals and education and prevented entry into the age of reason and science, where new ideas, new knowledge, and new technology could be produced.⁶⁶ Therefore, reason and science, which form the basis of Islamic belief, could not find the opportunity to guide the Ottoman madrasah education and intellectual life. For this reason, while Europe was establishing universities and institutes to produce science and knowledge, the Ottomans could not prevent the deterioration of the madrasahs instead of reforming them according to the new conditions.⁶⁷

Conclusion

Depending on external factors, the Ottoman Empire weakened over the centuries as a result of geographical discoveries, the age of enlightenment, the industrial revolution, the French Revolution, and the effects they brought. Therewithal, corruption within the state in the army, economy, social, political and educational fields were also factors that accelerated this collapse.

In this study, it was seen that all external and internal factors are interrelated. Each problem triggered another, and thus the empire came to an end. Among these, the Ottoman Empire took its place in the pages of history when the internal structure of the empire, which was weak against external problems, was combined.

This study has shown us that disintegration does not specifically cover a time period. The 16th century, when the Ottoman Empire was at its strongest, was actually the year when the problems started. As these problems accumulated over the centuries and triggered other problems, as historians have stated, the Ottomans entered from a period of development to a period of stagnation, decline and collapse.

However, although the empire fell, it left its legacy to its successor, the modern Republic of Turkey. Although history never repeats itself, it is full of many similarities. Turkey should learn from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and should not make the country open to external factors by having a solid internal structure.

⁶⁵ Aşkın 2019: 341–342.

⁶⁶ KODAMAN 2007: 14.

⁶⁷ KODAMAN 2007: 14.

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