

BBC Information Sheet

The Ottoman Empire (1301-1922)¹

- Was an empire inspired and sustained by Islam, and Islamic institutions.
- The Ottoman Empire was the one of the largest and longest lasting Empires in history.
- It replaced the Byzantine Empire as the major power in the Eastern Mediterranean.
- The Ottoman Empire reached its height under Suleiman the Magnificent (reigned 1520-66), when it expanded to cover the Balkans and Hungary, and reached the gates of Vienna.
- The Empire began to decline after being defeated at the Battle of Lepanto (1571) and losing almost its entire navy. It declined further during the next centuries, and was effectively finished off by the First World War and the Balkan Wars.
- At its peak it included:

- ❖ Turkey
- ❖ Egypt
- ❖ Greece
- ❖ Bulgaria
- ❖ Romania
- ❖ Macedonia
- ❖ Hungary
- ❖ Palestine
- ❖ Jordan
- ❖ Lebanon
- ❖ Syria
- ❖ Parts of Arabia
- ❖ Much of the coastal strip of North Africa



There were many reasons why the Ottoman Empire was so successful:

- Highly centralised
- Power was always transferred to a single person, and not split between rival princes
- The Ottoman Empire was successfully ruled by a single family for 7 centuries.
- State-run education system
- Religion was incorporated in the state structure, and the Sultan was regarded as "the protector of Islam".

¹ "BBC - Religions - Islam: Ottoman Empire (1301-1922)". Bbc.co.uk. N.p., 2016. Web. 29 Sept. 2016.

- State-run judicial system
- Ruthless in dealing with local leaders
- Promotion to positions of power largely depended on merit
- Created alliances across political and racial groups
- United by Islamic ideology
- United by Islamic warrior code with ideal of increasing Muslim territory through Jihad
- United by Islamic organisational and administrative structures
- Highly pragmatic, taking the best ideas from other cultures and making them their own
- Encouraged loyalty from other faith groups
- Private power and wealth were controlled
- Very strong military
- Strong slave-based army
- Expert in developing gunpowder as a military tool
- Military ethos pervaded whole administration

Decline

The power of the empire was waning by 1683 when the second and last attempt was made to conquer Vienna. It failed. Without the conquest of Europe and the acquisition of significant new wealth the Empire lost momentum and went into a slow decline.

Several other factors contributed to the Empire's decline:

- The European powers wanted to expand
- Economic problems
- Competition from trade from the Americas
- Competition from cheap products from India and the Far East
- Development of other trade routes
- Rising unemployment within the Empire
- Ottoman Empire became less centralised, and central control weakened
- Sultans being less severe in maintaining rigorous standards of integrity in the administration of the Empire
- Sultans becoming less sensitive to public opinion
- The low quality Sultans of the 17th and 18th centuries

