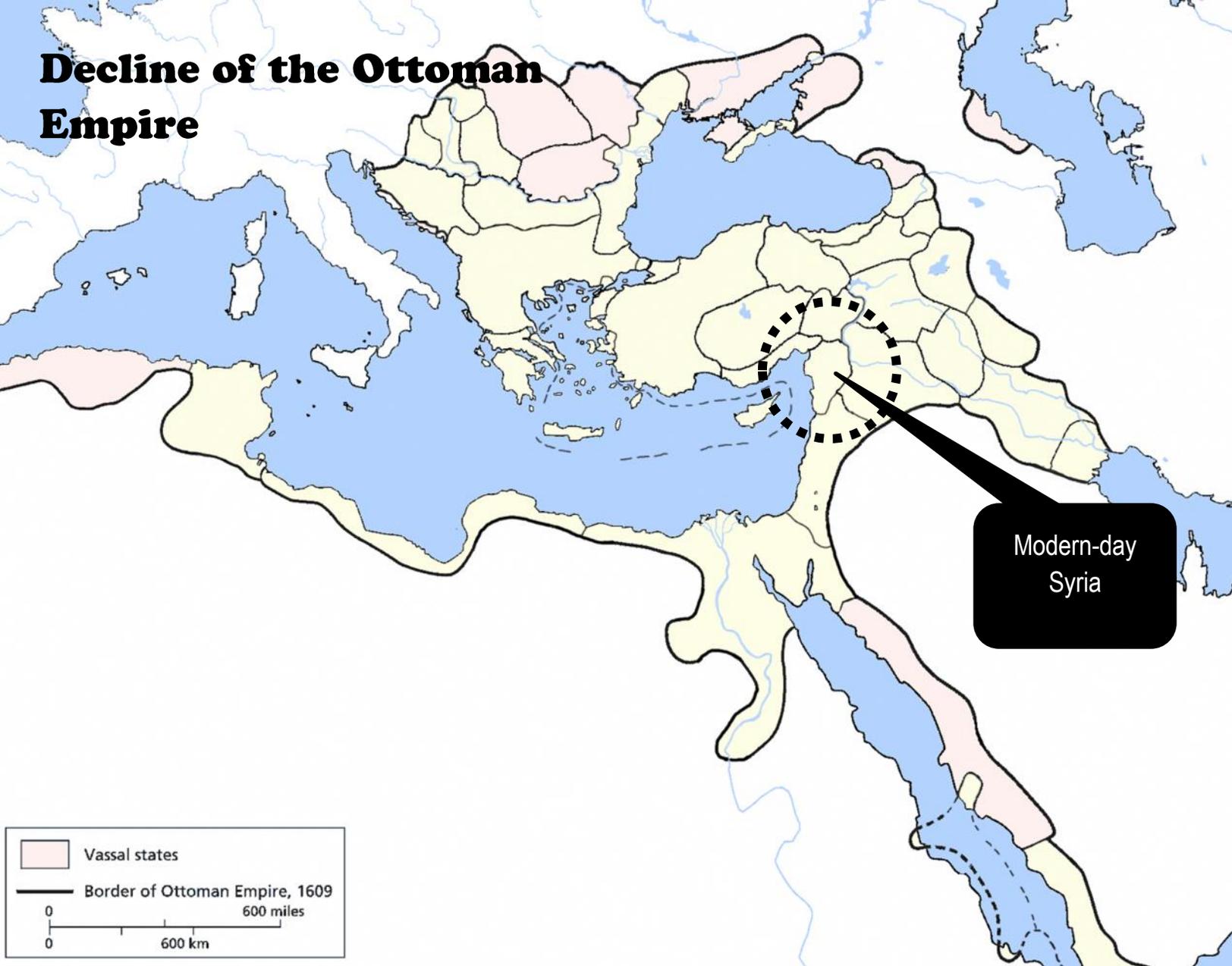


Decline of the Ottoman Empire



- Syria fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1516 and remained a part of their Ottoman Empire for four centuries. The Ottomans divided the province into four administrative units called eyalets: Aleppo, Damascus, Tripoli and Sidon (in modern Lebanon).
- Strong and effective central authority was essential to the Islamic empires (including the Ottoman Empire), and Muslim political theorists never tired of emphasizing the importance of rulers who were diligent, virtuous and just. The Ottomans were fortunate in having a series of talented sultans for three centuries.
- A problem emerged for the Ottomans concerning fighting amongst competing members of the ruling family all vying for power. Once fratricide was no longer an option, the Ottomans tried confining the prince's in the palace which had some dramatic negative effects.

- Isolated, the princes did not have opportunities to gain experience in government, but were manipulated in various plots and intrigues by various factions maneuvering to bring a favourable candidate to power. This allowed for the emergence of bad sultans including Ibrahim the Crazy (1640-1648) who was eventually deposed and murdered for his high taxes and extravagant spending.
- Political troubles often arose from religious tensions. Conservative Muslim clerics strongly objected to policies and practices that they considered affronts to Islam. Under weak sultans, disaffected religious students joined the Janissaries (elite infantry units that formed the Ottoman Sultan's household troops, bodyguards and the first modern standing army in Europe) in open revolt.
 - The Wahhabi movement arose out of the Arabian Peninsula that denounced the Ottomans as dangerous religious innovators who were unfit to rule.
 - In 1742, Conservative religious groups forced the closure of the Ottoman printing press.
- By the 18th century the rise of Europe (particularly its control of international markets) had led to the decline in the Ottoman Empire. The high cost of maintaining an expensive military and administrative apparatus also helped to bring about an economic decline.
 - As long as the empire was expanding, they were able to finance their armies and bureaucraties with fresh resources extracted from newly conquered lands. When expansion slowed, ceased, or reversed, they faced the problem of supporting their institutions with limited resources.
 - Long, costly wars between the Ottomans and the Hapsburgs of Europe had exhausted their treasury. As early as 1589 the Ottomans tried to pay the Janissaries with debased coinage, provoking a mutiny.
 - European military was advancing so rapidly that the Ottomans could not keep up. Having not developed their own military industry, the empire was forced to buy their weapons from European powers. By the 18th century the Ottoman Navy was no longer building its own ships, opting to buy vessels from neighbouring shipyards.
- Few Muslims traveled willingly to Europe, confident of their superiority and believing they had nothing to learn from Europeans. As a result, most Muslims remained largely oblivious to European cultural and technological developments. Conservative Muslim clerics often forced the removal of foreign implements which they considered impious and unnecessary (the printing press is an example – not until 1784 was a Turkish press permanently opened).

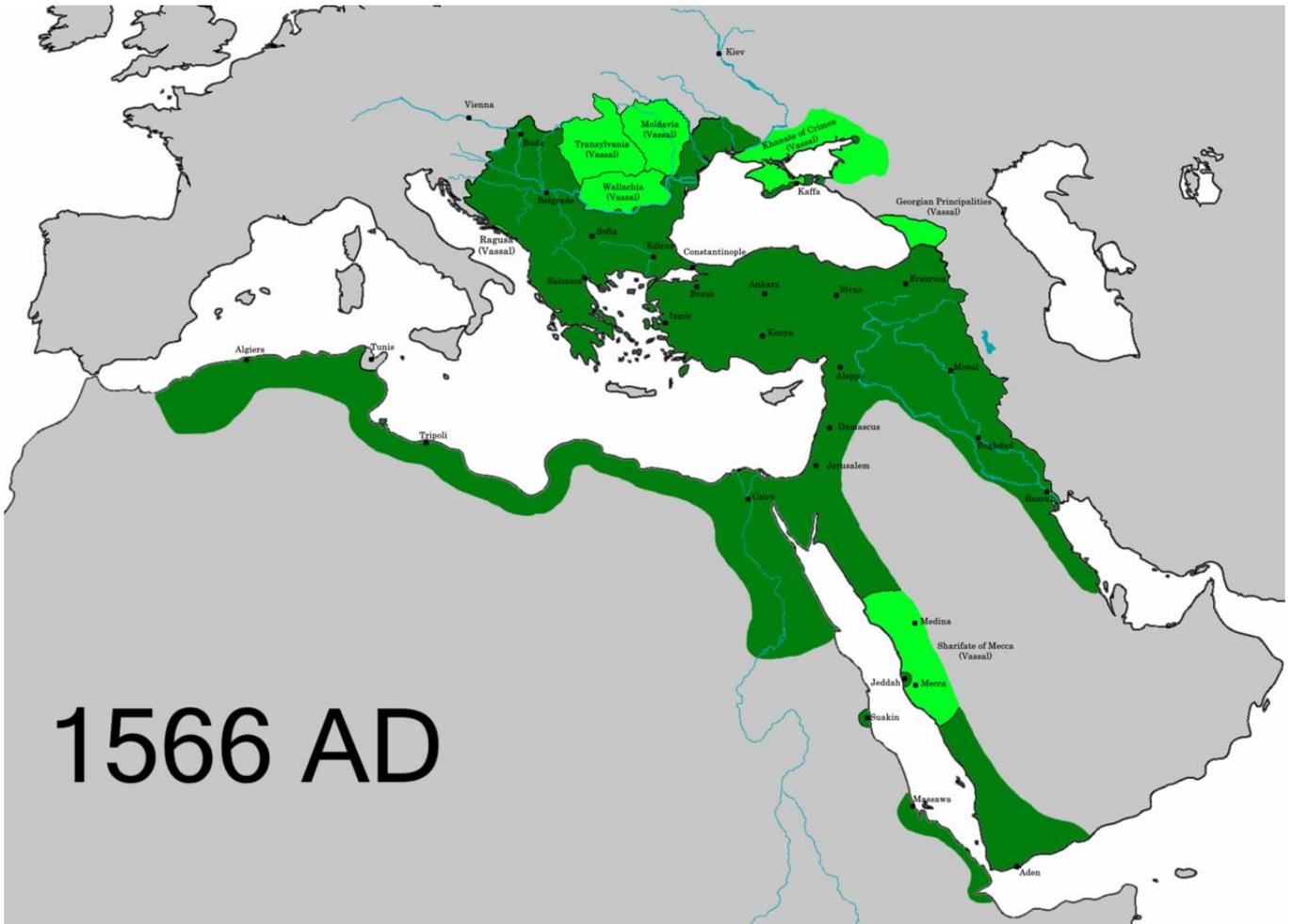
- In 1876 a group of radical dissidents from the Ottoman bureaucracy seized power in a coup, installing Abdul Hamid II as sultan (reigned 1876-1909). Convinced of the need to check the sultan's power, the reformers persuaded the new sultan to accept a new constitution that limited his authority and established a representative government. Within a year the sultan suspended the constitution, dissolved parliament, exiled many of the reformers/liberals and executed others.

- For the next 30 years Sultan Abdul Hamid II ruled autocratically in an effort to rescue the empire from dismemberment by European powers. He continued to develop the army and administration, and he oversaw the formation of a police force, educational reforms, economic development, and the construction of railroads.
- Hamid II had many liberal opposition groups. Ironically, as the sultan encouraged educational reforms he ensured his bureaucrats and soldiers learned about modern science and technology, as well as European political, social and cultural traditions. Educated subjects became to believe that the biggest problem for the Ottoman Empire was the unchecked power of the sultan.



- The Young Turk Party emerged in 1889 from exiled Ottomans living in Paris. The Young Turks promoted universal suffrage, equality before the law, freedom of religion, free public education, secularization of the state, and the emancipation of women.
- In 1908, the Young Turks inspired an army coup that forced Sultan Abdul Hamid II to restore parliament and the 1876 constitution. Hamid II was removed from power in 1908, and Mehmed V Rasid became sultan, but with no power. The Young Turk era had begun.
- In spite of their efforts to shore up the ailing empire, reformers could not turn the tide of decline. Ottoman armies continued to lose wars and different regions continued to demand autonomy or independence. By the early 1900s the Ottoman Empire survived principally because European powers could not agree on how to dissolve the empire without upsetting the European balance of power.

Source: Jerry H. Bentley and Herb F. Ziegler. *Traditions & Encounters*. Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 2006.



1566 AD

Ottoman Empire



1912

Upd: