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THE IMPACT OF THE GREAT GEOGRAPHICAL DISCOVERIES ON THE ECONOMY OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

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Annotation: After the complete destruction of the Byzantine Empire by the Ottomans, the economic and social life in Europe changed dramatically. In this situation, European countries located on the sea coast, such as Portugal and Spain, tried to reach India by sea in order to obtain spices from the East. The economic situation in Europe changed as a result of the Great Geographical Discoveries. This article analyzes the impact of the Great Geographical Discoveries on the Ottoman Empire.

Keywords. Ottoman Empire, Great Geographical Discoveries, Constantinople, Battle of Mohács, India, China, Anatolia.

Introduction. In the 16th century, the Ottoman Empire was the most powerful power in Europe, inspiring fear among both its Muslim and Christian neighbors. But its rapid rise turned into stagnation and decline, largely due to unsuccessful financial and economic policies and a very unhappy global environment. In 1526, the army of the Turkish Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent achieved one of the most stunning victories in history, crushing the Hungarian feudal army at the Battle of Mohács. King Louis II was killed in the battle, and Hungary's independence was ended for several centuries - the country was divided between the Turks and the Austrians. The Sublime Porte, the official name of the Sultan's court, finally consolidated its rule over the Balkans. The Ottoman Empire, which had previously crushed Egypt and Iran, reached the peak of its power and glory.

Three years later, the first major setback occurred: the Ottoman army failed to consolidate its success at the walls of Vienna and captured the main city of the Habsburgs, the main enemies of the Porte. But this only stabilized the balance of power in Southeast Europe. The stagnation and subsequent collapse of the Ottoman Empire after the "Magnificent Age" were not associated with military defeats.

The empire, which occupied vast territories (from Budapest to Basra and from Algeria to Azerbaijan), was economically self-sufficient for a long time. However, its own manufacturing industry was not developed. The flow of wealth was ensured by control over the transit trade routes between Europe and the East. In the ports of Constantinople and Syria, Europeans bought Persian silks, Chinese porcelain, and spices from Asia.

Main part. The fall of Constantinople did not stop European trade with the East. On the contrary, Christian Europe tried to combat Turkish transit with various restrictions. By the end of the 15th century, the Ottomans were already perceived by Europeans as the main enemy. But all restrictions were ignored by merchants, especially the Venetians, whose trade was not hindered even by the constant war of Venice with the Porte. Exquisite



Date: 21st April-2026

goods were shipped to Europe, and the Turks benefited from this, receiving a lot of silver. The sultans minted small coins - akças - from this metal, which became the main means of payment in the state.

But by the first half of the 16th century, due to general crises in the global economy, the situation changed. By 1530, the Spanish had established firm control over Mexico and Peru, where more silver was produced annually than all of Europe and the Middle East combined for many years.[1] Europe's total production of the precious metal there increased dramatically, and over the course of a century and a half, from 1520 to 1680, Europe imported about 17,000 tons of silver.[2]

The result was a "price revolution" that dramatically increased the prices of most goods. In Europe, the average increase was more than 100 percent, and in some regions it was four times higher. This was understandable for the Ottoman Empire, which had a low level of material production. The country was engulfed in a silver flood, which led to hyperinflation (a rare phenomenon before the era of paper money). Turkey's treasury revenues have remained stagnant, but expenditures have grown exponentially.

Meanwhile, a threat was looming over Constantinople from another direction. Throughout the 16th century, the Portuguese, Spanish, and later the Dutch worked to secure a steady supply route from India, China, and Southeast Asia across the Indian Ocean. Attempts by the Turks and their Arab allies to block this did not prevent the Portuguese from establishing a foothold in southern and eastern Arabia, as well as in the Strait of Hormuz. By the end of the century, the region's major ports—Aden, Muscat, and Hormuz—were under their control.[1] The eastern trade that had long supported the port had dried up.

It is estimated that the empire was losing up to 300,000 gold sultans per year due to the sharp decline in trade.[3] This was tens of percent of its state budget. Europeans, no longer feeling the need to trade with the empire, stopped importing silver, which led to the opposite situation compared to the middle of the century - a shortage of currency. This led to the depreciation of the money of the sultan's palace. The coinage was significantly lightened and copper was added to it.

Undoubtedly, this move, while temporarily solving the palace problems, led to a catastrophic increase in inflation. Money lost all confidence among the citizens of the empire. The regions began to mint their own heavier and more reliable coins. Thus, the Porte was almost unable to control its financial system.

However, economic problems were not limited to monetary issues. For centuries, the empire successfully replenished its budget through conquests. Huge wealth was plundered in the Balkans, Egypt, and Iraq. All this allowed the state to live without problems, imposing light, not excessively burdensome taxes on its citizens, including non-Muslims. Therefore, uprisings and riots in the country were relatively rare[1]. However, this was an exception to the Shiite movement in Anatolia. Even the Balkan Slavs often considered the sultan a better ruler than their Christian rulers.



Date: 21st April-2026

By the middle of the 16th century, the invasions were over. There were no weak opponents left, and it was time to defend the empire from the surrounding predators, not to attack. As a result, taxes for all segments of the population increased sharply. Over the course of a century, they increased fivefold, and in some regions tenfold. Suddenly, the entire vast empire felt the weight of the tax burden. Moreover, budget revenues (in real terms) had still not reached the level of the first half of the 16th century. At the same time, its neighbors were getting richer.

The situation was complicated by the disproportionate growth of military spending. The Ottoman army was innovative for its time. Small arms were adopted by the Turkish infantry faster than any other European army. But all this led to huge costs. In addition, the main part of the army, the corps of young men, had to be constantly expanded. The size of the empire required an effective standing army and a rapid reaction force. Additional taxes had to be levied to maintain the navy.

At the same time, the institution of the Timorese, feudal warriors who served in exchange for land, deteriorated over the century. They became dependent on land tax collectors and moneylenders, went bankrupt, and abandoned their lands, becoming nomads and bandits. Those who remained displaced their last peasants, which did not improve class harmony. The Timorese entered the army much less prepared and armed than they had been under Suleiman the Magnificent. Their desire and discipline to fight for the sultan did not require much.

The sultans tried to change the situation by strengthening the bureaucratic apparatus of "kapikulu" (literally "palace slaves").[3] By the end of the century, these men, despite their "principal" titles, had become the real masters of the empire. Local officials, enriched by widespread corruption, became semi-independent rulers and destroyed the basis of the highly centralized state apparatus.

In 1596, a peasant and small-scale peasant revolt broke out in Anatolia, led by a new official, Kara Yaziç.[4] Within months, the revolt had spread to almost all of Asia Minor. The rebels refused to pay taxes to Constantinople and declared themselves an independent state. The Sultan's troops sent to suppress the revolt suffered several painful defeats. Elite units had to be deployed against the rebels. It took Sultans Mehmed III and Ahmed I a total of 16 years to defeat the rebels. But the heart of the empire, Anatolia, which was already suffering greatly from the economic crisis, was completely devastated. Suffice it to say, its population in the 20th century barely surpassed that of the early Ottoman period.

Similar processes occurred in other parts of the empire, especially in Christian areas. Although the sultans managed to restore the unity of the state through great efforts, the economy fell into irreversible decline. In the following century, the Turks simply struggled to maintain the status quo, which was periodically disrupted by pressure from their neighbors, mainly Austria and Iran.[3] After the economic crisis at the beginning of the century, the Ottoman Empire's survival was largely due to the upheavals in its



Date: 21st April-2026

neighbors - the Time of Troubles in Russia, the Thirty Years' War in Germany, and the "Swedish Storm" in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

Summary. By the end of the 16th century, the Ottoman Empire was in a complete turmoil: the economy and financial system were on the verge of collapse, the military class was in decline, and the state was rapidly losing its grip on control. The consequences were not long in coming.

But the Turks never recovered. The country, which had rapidly fallen behind economically and technologically in the 18th century, finally became the "sick man" of Europe, no longer seen by the great powers as a threat, but as prey.

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