The Sultan and the State: Mustafa III and the Ottoman Empire at a Precipice (1757-1774)

Part I: A Portrait of the Sultan – Mustafa III (1717-1774)

The 17-year reign of Sultan Mustafa III (1757-1774) represents one of the most critical and paradoxical periods of the 18th-century Ottoman Empire. It was an era defined by the collision of a ruler's intellectual recognition of systemic decline with his personal inability to enact the profound structural changes necessary to reverse it. Mustafa III was a man of culture, piety, and reformist ambition, yet his reign culminated in a military and diplomatic catastrophe that irrevocably confirmed the Empire's weakness.

To understand the trajectory of the Ottoman Empire during this period, one must first understand the paradox of the Sultan himself: a ruler who was intellectually prepared for a renaissance but temperamentally resigned to a collapse.

Section 1: The Reformer in the Kafes: The Making of a Sultan

Sultan Mustafa III was born on January 28, 1717, in Istanbul, the son of Sultan Ahmed III and Mihrişah Kadın.[1] His early life was defined not by preparation for rule, but by the traumatic event that ended his father's reign. In 1730, the Patrona Halil revolt, a conservative uprising, led to the deposition of the reform-minded Ahmed III. Following this, Mustafa, his father, and his brothers were imprisoned in the Topkapı Palace in the apartments known as the *kafes* (the cage).[3]

Mustafa III would spend 27 years in this gilded confinement. He ascended the throne on October 30, 1757, only after the deaths of his cousin Sultan Mahmud I (r. 1730-1754) and his other cousin, the brief-reigning Osman III (r. 1754-1757).[2] This long seclusion was the single most formative influence on his character and rule. Unlike many princes who were broken by the *kafes*, Mustafa used the time for intense, if purely theoretical, self-education. He became a scholar, "very well educated" [1] in a wide array of disciplines. His studies included literature, medicine, and astrology [4], as well as mathematics, science [5], and a deep focus on Ottoman and Islamic histories.[1]

This lengthy, isolated education created the central paradox of his reign. Mustafa III came to

the throne as one of the most intellectually prepared sultans in generations, possessing a "visionary" [5] understanding of the Empire's challenges. He was acutely aware of the necessity of reform and admired Western advancements, particularly the military prowess of Prussia's Frederick the Great.[1] However, his 27 years in the *kafes* had given him zero practical experience in governance, military command, or statecraft. His knowledge was entirely textual. This disconnect between theory and practice is perfectly illustrated by one of the most telling anecdotes of his reign. Mustafa III, believing in the necessity of reform, sent an envoy, Ahmet Resmi Efendi, to Prussia to study the methods of Frederick the Great. The Prussian king returned four "secrets" with the envoy: "Read history, and examine the experiences"; "Tried to have a powerful army and during the time peace educate your soldiers"; and "Put emphasis on the economy, fill your treasury with money always." When the Sultan heard this advice, he "smiled and said; 'We desire to achieve these too, but how?'".[1]

This response is the lament of a scholar, not the plan of a statesman. It reveals a man who understood the diagnosis but had no practical idea of the cure. His well-documented interest in astrology [1] can also be interpreted as a psychological product of his 27-year confinement—a man long denied agency over his own life, he sought in the stars a system for control and predictability in a world he could observe but, for decades, could not influence.

Section 2: The Pious Poet: Character, Intellect, and Rule

Upon ascending the throne, Mustafa III presented an image of an ideal, traditional sovereign. He was known to be "very religious, very merciful and kind hearted".[1] His piety was not merely for show; it informed his initial actions as ruler. He immediately undertook populist measures of a just king, such as paying the debts of those imprisoned for their inability to pay, and he refunded the fees that officials had been charged during the charter renewals.[2] These acts "gave rise to great joy and hope" [2] among the populace and bureaucracy, signaling a return to justice and prosperity.

His reputation for personal mercy was solidified during the great 1766 Istanbul earthquake. While the state enacted its official, bureaucratic response to the disaster, Mustafa III "helped the people from his own wealth" [1], a personal gesture of compassion that distinguished him from the impersonal machinery of the state.

However, beneath this veneer of the pious and merciful ruler was a complex, scholarly, and deeply pessimistic intellectual. He was a poet [4] who wrote under the pseudonym 'Cihangir'.[3] His poetry, far from being a simple hobby, provides the single most valuable window into his true state of mind. One of his most famous poems [3] reveals a profound and devastating fatalism:

(Ottoman Turkish)

$Y{\imath}k{\imath}lupdur bu cihan sanma ki bizde d{\"{u}}zele.$

$Devleti {\\c{}}arh-{\imath} deni verdi kamu m{\"{u}}ptezele.$

${S}imdi erbab-{\imath} saadette gezen hep hazele.$

${I}{S}imiz kald{\imath} hemen merhamet-i lem yezele.$

(Translation)
"This world has ruined, don't even think with us it recovers,
It was the lousy fate that has delivered the power to vulgars,
Now the perfidious ones have populated the Imperial Palace,
It's now the mercy of the everlasting God that runs our business." 3
This poem is a confession of despair. It fundamentally contradicts the public image of an energetic, visionary reformer. The author of these lines does not believe reform is possible. He sees the state (*devlet*) as *already* ruined, the palace as hopelessly corrupt ("populated [by] perfidious ones"), and human agency as utterly futile ("don't even think with us it recovers"). The only recourse left is not a new policy, a new army, or a new budget, but rather "the mercy of the everlasting God".[3]
This fatalism is the key to his paralysis. He was the scholar who had read all the histories of Ottoman decline [1] and had come to believe the decline was irreversible. This pessimism explains his vacillation between reformist projects and his reliance on astrology. He was a ruler who intellectually "desired" to fix the state [1] but emotionally believed it was already dead.

Section 3: Patron of the Baroque: The Imperial Builder

Like his ancestors, Mustafa III understood that a Sultan's legitimacy was expressed through monumental architecture. He embarked on several major building projects, leaving a distinct mark on the skyline of 18th-century Istanbul. His commissions included the Ayazma Mosque (1760-61) in Üsküdar and, most significantly, the large Laleli Mosque complex (*külliye*) in the Fatih district.[7]
The Laleli complex, constructed between 1760 and 1764, was the last great royal *külliye* to be built in Istanbul.[9] Designed by the architect Mehmed Tahir Ağa [7], the complex was a massive undertaking that included the mosque, a madrasa (school), an *imaret* (soup kitchen), a *sabil* (fountain), tombs, and a large *caravanserai* (han) whose rents were intended to finance the foundation.[9]
The complex is a perfect metaphor in stone for Mustafa III's entire reign. Its architectural style is the "Ottoman Baroque" [10], a visual representation of the "transition... to Westernization" [7] that defined the era. This style was a deliberate choice. Per the Sultan's own wishes, the mosque's layout was based on the 16th-century classical masterpiece, the Selimiye Mosque in Edirne.[10] However, this traditional, classical foundation was then covered in exuberant, contemporary, Western-influenced Baroque decoration, with rich, colorful marbles and ornate details.[10]
This fusion of Western style and classical form perfectly mirrors Mustafa III's intellectual posture: an admiration for Western modernity, exemplified by his interest in Frederick the Great [3], fused onto a deep-seated identity as a traditional Ottoman sovereign. The complex was his intended legacy, a statement of synthesis and renewal.
Its fate, however, was also symbolic. Just two years after its completion, the complex was damaged by the 1766 earthquake [9] and required a costly and extensive restoration. Like his

political and military reforms, Mustafa III's grand architectural project was an ambitious undertaking immediately undermined by an unforeseen and overwhelming catastrophe.

Section 4: The Final Decline: Grief, Illness, and Legacy

The final years of Mustafa III's life were consumed by the catastrophic Russo-Turkish War (1768-1774), a conflict he had personally sanctioned. True to his study of Ottoman history, he "wanted to go on the expedition himself" [2], in the tradition of the warrior-sultans of the past. He was prevented from doing so by his failing health; he was described as suffering from hydropsy, asthma, and polyps in the heart.[2]

Confined to the palace, he was forced to receive a relentless stream of disastrous news from the front. His health, both physical and mental, collapsed under the weight of the defeats. The psychological toll of the war ultimately killed him. When news arrived from the Balkans of Russian massacres of Turkish towns in Dobruja, "Sultan Mustafa III suffered a cerebral hemorrhage from grief and became paralyzed".[6]

He never recovered. Mustafa III died of a heart attack in the Topkapı Palace on January 21, 1774.[1] He was 56 years old. His death came just six months before his representatives were forced to sign the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, the document that codified the disastrous defeat he had overseen.[4] He was succeeded by his brother, Abdul Hamid I [3], and was buried in the mausoleum (*türbe*) of his own Laleli Mosque complex.[3]

His reign was, by any objective measure, a failure. He inherited a state at peace, with a balanced budget, and left it defeated, humiliated, and financially struggling.[5] His own attempts at reform proved piecemeal and ineffective.[5] His true and lasting legacy was not one of action, but of education. The historian's assessment is that Mustafa III, realizing his own failure, "placed his sole hope with his son Selim (later Selim III), whom he educated with utmost care".[4]

Mustafa III's own military and governmental reforms [12] were the tentative prelude to the much more radical *Nizam-ı Cedid* (New Order) that Selim III would later attempt. Having failed to reform the "Old Regime" [13] himself, Mustafa III's greatest contribution was to raise the son who would recognize that the old system could not be fixed, but must instead be replaced.

Part II: A Portrait of the Empire – The Devlet-i ʿAlīye (1757-1774)

The 17-year reign of Mustafa III was a period of profound and accelerating decline for the Ottoman Empire, known in its own time as the *Devlet-i ʿAlīye* (the Sublime State). The era began with a fragile period of stability and fiscal health, but was quickly undermined by domestic crises, deep-seated structural decentralization, and finally, a catastrophic foreign

war that exposed the Empire's military decay to the world.

Section 5: The Last Golden Hour: Koca Ragıp Pasha and the Policy of Peace (1757-1763)

Mustafa III's reign began with a remarkable stroke of good fortune. He inherited, and had the wisdom to retain, one of the 18th century's most capable statesmen as Grand Vizier: Koca Ragıp Mehmed Pasha.[2] Ragıp Pasha was a "figure of scholarly origins" [14], an esteemed bureaucrat who had served as chief treasurer in Baghdad and governor of Egypt before ascending to the grand vizierate.[15]

The period from 1757 until Ragıp Pasha's death in 1763 was a final, brief "golden hour" for the Ottoman Old Regime. Ragıp Pasha was a master of both finance and diplomacy. Domestically, he "enacted reforms to Ottoman administration and treasury" [15] that were so effective, it was noted that "for the first time Ottoman revenues exceed expenditures".[15] He successfully filled the treasury that Mustafa III would later draw upon.[1]

His greatest achievement, however, was diplomatic. Ragıp Pasha was a firm "adherent of peace policy".[15] While the great powers of Europe (Prussia, Austria, France, Britain, and Russia) were immolating themselves in the global conflict of the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), Ragıp Pasha skillfully resisted pressure from all sides to join the conflict. He refused any alliance, successfully keeping the Ottoman Empire neutral and at peace.[2]

The stability of 1757-1763 proves that the Empire, at this stage, was not ungovernable. A competent, powerful grand vizier could still balance the budget and conduct successful foreign policy. This makes Ragıp Pasha's death in 1763 the single most important turning point of Mustafa III's reign.[3] Ragıp Pasha's competence, authority, and peace policy had acted as a dam, holding back both the rising tide of Russian expansionism and, just as importantly, the ill-informed, belligerent ambitions of the Sultan and the "war party" at court.[2] His successors, like Muhsinzade Mehmed Pasha, lacked his authority.[3] The catastrophic decision to declare war on Russia in 1768 was a blunder that was only possible *because* Ragıp Pasha was no longer alive to prevent it.

Section 6: The Fracturing State: Domestic Crises and Decentralization

After Ragıp Pasha's death, the internal fractures of the state became more apparent. Mustafa III's administration was confronted by two simultaneous crises: one a sudden, natural disaster that shattered the capital, the other a slow-moving political disintegration that was dissolving the provinces.

Subsection 6.1: The Shaking City: The 1766 Istanbul Earthquake

On the morning of May 22, 1766, on the third day of Eid al-Adha, a massive earthquake struck Istanbul.[16] It was the most destructive seismic event to hit the capital since the "Lesser Judgment Day" of 1509.[16] Sources report it destroyed "more than a half part of Istanbul" [1], and aftershocks continued for months, forcing the populace to live in tents.[16]

The devastation was apocalyptic. Nearly 4,000 people were killed.[16] The physical damage was concentrated in the heart of the city, from Yedikule to Edirnekapı. The dome of the iconic Fatih Mosque—the mosque of Mehmed the Conqueror—completely collapsed, along with its hospital and madrasa.[16] In total, 173 mosques and public baths were damaged, as were the Topkapı and Eski Palaces. Parts of the city's ancient walls collapsed, destroying mills and inns.[16] The disaster crippled the city's infrastructure, destroying aqueducts and bakeries, which led to severe food and water shortages.[16]

This earthquake was not just a humanitarian tragedy; it was a profound *fiscal* crisis. The state response, as documented in official work orders, was a massive and costly rebuilding program. The Ottoman treasury was now responsible for the "full or partial repair" of no fewer than 430 structures.[18] The state's priorities were clear: it poured its funds into rebuilding "mosques, madrasas, hamams, and the palace" [18], the essential infrastructure of its imperial and religious identity.

This massive, unplanned expenditure on rebuilding the capital in 1766-1767 is critical for understanding what followed. The treasury, which Koca Ragıp Pasha had so carefully filled [15], was now suddenly and massively depleted. This context makes the Sultan's decision, just two years later in 1768, to *simultaneously* declare a major war on Russia seem exceptionally reckless. The Ottoman state was forced to finance a major war just as it was bearing the enormous costs of rebuilding its own capital.

Subsection 6.2: The Rise of the Ayan: The Crisis of Decentralization

The earthquake was a sudden shock, but a deeper, systemic crisis was dissolving the Empire from within. The 18th century was defined by a major decentralizing trend [19] and the rise of a new class of provincial notables known as the *ayan*.[19] This class was not a formal aristocracy but a diverse group of local elites—wealthy merchants, guild heads, commanders of local Janissary garrisons, and, most importantly, those who had bought the right to collect taxes (*iltizam*).[19]

Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, the central government in Istanbul had progressively lost its ability to project power into its own provinces. The *ayan* filled this vacuum. They became so powerful that they formed their "own armies" and, while *technically* remaining military vassals to the Sultan, were "effectively autonomous in their home districts".[19]

This crisis of decentralization is the single most important domestic reason for the failure of Mustafa III's reign. His administrative reforms "foundered on the central government's inability to extend its authority over the local rulers (aʿyān)".[4] He could not curb tax abuses because

the *ayan were* the tax system.
This internal political rot is the domestic root of the Empire's external military failure. The *ayan* controlled the two sinews of war: tax revenue and manpower. When the state declared war in 1768, the army it fielded was not the centrally-controlled, professional slave-army of its golden age. Instead, it was a disorganized collection of "untrained Ottoman soldiers" [2] provided as levies by these autonomous *ayan* warlords, who were themselves "reluctant" [2] to fight. The Ottoman Empire in 1768 could neither effectively tax its own lands to *pay* for a modern army nor reliably *recruit* one. The war with Russia was lost before it even began, not on the battlefield, but in the provincial politics of the *ayan*.

Section 7: The "New" Model Army: Baron de Tott and the Limits of Reform

Sultan Mustafa III was, by all accounts, "aware of the fact that a military reform was necessary".[1] He understood that the Janissary corps, once the terror of Europe, was now an undisciplined and conservative drain on the state.[21] He declared new military regulations, ordered older soldiers to be educated [1], and sought to modernize his forces by importing Western technology and expertise.
His efforts centered on the figure of François Baron de Tott, a Hungarian-born French artillery officer.[1] De Tott was tasked with implementing piecemeal, technological fixes. He established a "new artillery" corps [1], reorganized the existing one, built a modern cannon foundry to cast light, mobile field guns [6], and introduced the "bayonets to the rifles".[1]
The most significant and lasting reform of Mustafa III's reign was the creation of a new, Western-style educational institution. Following the disastrous Battle of Çeşme, and on the proposal of the admiral Cezayirli Gazi Hasan Pasha [22], Mustafa III founded the *Mühendishane-i Bahr-i Hümayun* (Imperial School of Naval Engineering) in 1773.[3] This school, the direct ancestor of today's Istanbul Technical University [6], was established in the shipyard and run by its founder, Baron de Tott.[26] Its purpose was to teach shipbuilding and hydrography using a modern "Western approach," complete with a library of works translated from European languages.[26]
However, the *timing* of these reforms reveals their fundamental flaw. The *Mühendishane* was founded in 1773.[3] The Battle of Çeşme, where the *entire* Ottoman fleet was annihilated, occurred in 1770.[27] This was not a proactive reform to build a modern navy; it was a desperate, *reactive* measure taken *after* the catastrophe.
This pattern defines all of Mustafa III's military efforts. They were technological fixes (new cannons, bayonets) [1] that failed to address the systemic, human, and political rot at the army's core. Baron de Tott could modernize an artillery *corps* [1], but he could not reform the undisciplined Janissaries [2] or the fragmented *ayan* system [19] that was supposed to field the army. The Sultan was attempting to graft modern weapons onto a feudal, decentralized political structure.

Section 8: The Deluge: The Russo-Turkish War (1768-1774)

The final six years of Mustafa III's reign were defined by the single greatest military disaster of the 18th-century: the Russo-Turkish War. This conflict, which the Ottomans entered with misguided confidence, exposed every systemic weakness and sealed the Empire's fate as a declining power.

Subsection 8.1: The Polish Pretext and Russian Ambition

The war's origins lay in Poland. Russia's ambitious empress, Catherine the Great [29], was aggressively expanding her influence south and west.[30] She had successfully installed her "protégé," Stanislaus Augustus Poniatowski, on the Polish throne in 1764.[32] This Russian domination of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth sparked a revolt by Polish nobles known as the Bar Confederation (1768).[33]

The *casus belli* occurred when a band of defeated confederates fled south toward the Ottoman border. Pursuing Russian Cossacks crossed the frontier into Ottoman territory at the town of Balta (in modern-day Ukraine), clashing with the local Janissary garrison.[2]

In Istanbul, a "war party," ignoring the cautious peace policy of the late Ragıp Pasha [3], convinced the Sultan that this border incursion was a grave insult. Mustafa III, who "was thinking that the worst disaster will come from Russia" [1] but completely misjudged his own military's readiness, issued an ultimatum to Russia, demanding the withdrawal of its troops from Poland.[32] When Catherine the Great refused, the Ottoman Empire declared war in October 1768.[32]

The Balta incident was merely a pretext. The Ottomans had fallen into a trap set by Catherine, whose government was already contemplating ambitious designs against the Ottomans, including the "Greek Project" to re-establish a Byzantine-style empire.[36] The Ottoman Empire, which had been at peace since the Treaty of Belgrade in 1739 [4], foolishly declared war on a modernized, aggressive, and superior military power.

Subsection 8.2: Annus Horribilis (1770): Annihilation on Land and Sea

After initial skirmishes, the year 1770 became the *annus horribilis* (horrible year) that shattered the Ottoman state. The Empire suffered two catastrophic, near-simultaneous defeats in two different theaters of war.

On Land: The Ottoman main army, despite possessing a massive numerical advantage, was annihilated in the Danubian Principalities (Moldavia) by the smaller, better-led, and better-equipped Russian army under Field-Marshal Pyotr Rumyantsev.

- **Battle of Larga (July 7, 1770):** Rumyantsev's 38,000 Russians attacked and routed a

combined Ottoman and Crimean Tatar force of 80,000 men.[37]

- **Battle of Kagul (August 1, 1770):** In one of the 18th century's largest land battles [38], Rumyantsev's force of approximately 35,000-40,000 men faced a disorganized Ottoman army of $\approx$ 155,000.[39] The "reluctant and disorganized" [2] Ottoman forces were decisively defeated by superior Russian tactics, particularly the use of mobile infantry squares and devastating, coordinated artillery fire.[39] The Ottoman army disintegrated.

At Sea: Simultaneously, the entire Ottoman naval fleet was destroyed in the Aegean.

- **Battle of Çeşme (July 5-7, 1770):** In a stunning feat of logistics, Russia had sent its Baltic Fleet, commanded by Alexei Orlov, on a long voyage around Europe into the Mediterranean.[32] The Russians trapped the larger Ottoman fleet in the harbor of Çeşme Bay.[27] On the night of July 6-7, the Russians, led by commanders like Samuel Greig, sent in fireships, turning the bay into an inferno. The entire Ottoman fleet was burned at anchor. At least 11,000 Ottoman sailors were killed, and 16 ships of the line were destroyed.[28]

The *simultaneity* of these defeats is the central fact of the war. The Battle of Larga and the main naval battle at Çeşme occurred *on the same day* (July 7).[28] In less than one month, the Ottoman Empire lost both its primary field army and its entire naval fleet. This dual catastrophe was unrecoverable. As the following table demonstrates, the Ottoman military did not lack for numbers; it suffered from a catastrophic deficit in training, leadership, discipline, and technology.

Table 1: The Annus Horribilis of 1770: A Comparative Analysis of Military Disasters					
Battle	**Date (1770)**	**Theater**	**Commanders (Ottoman vs. Russian)**	**Force Strengths (Approx.)**	**Outcome/Significance**
Larga	July 7	Land (Moldavia)	Qaplan II Giray vs. Pyotr Rumyantsev	$\approx$ 80,000 vs. $\approx$ 38,000 [37]	Decisive Russian victory; prelude to Kagul.
Çeşme	July 5-7	Sea (Aegean)	Hüsameddin Pasha vs. A. Orlov / S. Greig	$\approx$ 16 ships of line vs. $\approx$ 9 ships of line [28]	Total annihilation of the Ottoman fleet.[27]

Kagul	August 1	Land (Moldavia)	Ivazzade Halil Pasha vs. Pyotr Rumyantsev	$\approx$ 155,000 vs. $\approx$ 40,000 [39]	Catastrophic Ottoman defeat; army disintegrates.[39]

Subsection 8.3: The Diplomatic Humiliation and the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca

The military collapse led directly to a diplomatic one. The war had two profound geopolitical consequences.

First, Russia's stunning victories [30] terrified Habsburg Austria, which feared Russian domination of the Balkans. To "restore the regional balance of power" [42] and prevent a new Austro-Russian war, Prussia's Frederick the Great—Mustafa's erstwhile role model—engineered the **First Partition of Poland in 1772.**[42] The Ottoman Empire was now so weak that its weakness *directly caused* the dismemberment of its historic Polish buffer state by Russia, Prussia, and Austria.[33]

Second, the war ended with the **Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca** (July 1774), signed just after Mustafa III's death.[4] This treaty was the "disastrous defeat" [4] codified. It was a "milestone in the history of the decline of the Ottoman Empire".[44] Its terms were devastating, falling into three categories [44]:

1. **Territory (Crimea):** The Crimean Khanate, a core Muslim territory and longtime Ottoman vassal, was declared "politically independent".[44] This was a transparent fiction for a new Russian protectorate, which Russia formally annexed in 1783. The Sultan's *only* remaining power was as the religious leader (caliph) of the Tatars.[44]
2. **Access (Black Sea):** Russia gained key ports (Azov, Kerch) and "free navigation" rights for its merchant ships, including passage of the Dardanelles.[45] The Black Sea, for centuries an "Ottoman lake," was now open to Russian power.[44]
3. **People (The "Protectorate"):** In what would become the most damaging clause, Russia was granted the right to "protect" the Sultan's Orthodox Christian subjects [44] and was given permission to build a Russian Orthodox church in Istanbul.[44]

The territorial and commercial losses were severe. But the "protectorate" clause [44] was the true long-term catastrophe. This vague provision gave Russia a *permanent and legal pretext* to "interfere in internal Ottoman affairs" [48] for the next 140 years. This treaty, more than any other, marks the formal beginning of the "Eastern Question" [33]—the moment the Ottoman Empire ceased to be Europe's primary "threat" and became its primary "problem," a "sick man" whose inheritance was now a matter of European diplomacy.

Conclusion: The Reformer and the Decline

The reign of Mustafa III represents the tragic paradox of the 18th-century Ottoman Empire. It

was presided over by a ruler who correctly identified the *need* for reform [1] but was personally, politically, and structurally incapable of achieving it.

As this analysis has shown, the man and the state were reflections of one another. **Part I** revealed Mustafa III as a theoretical scholar [4] and a fatalistic poet [3], a man who saw the rot but whose defining question was "but how?".[1] **Part II** revealed the state he inherited: an empire whose central authority was fracturing due to the *ayan* [4], whose treasury was fiscally crippled by a natural disaster [18], and whose military was a hollow shell of its former glory.[2]

The final synthesis is a tragic one. This fatalistic man, ruling this fractured state, made the catastrophic error of sanctioning a war [2] against a superior, modernized, and ambitious foe.[30] His reign proved that the Ottoman "Old Regime" [13] could not be saved by piecemeal technological fixes like new cannons or French advisors.[1] His attempts to halt the decline only succeeded in triggering the catastrophic war that laid all of the Empire's weaknesses bare, culminating in the "disastrous defeat" [4] and the profound grief that finally stopped his heart.[3]

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