The Ottoman Empire was one of the most powerful in the world. It lasted more than 600 years. The Ottomans were based in Turkey. They ruled large areas of the Middle East, Eastern Europe and North Africa. Their official religion was Islam. Their leader was known as the sultan. He had complete power over his people. The Ottomans were known for their arts, science, religion and culture.
Origins of the Ottoman Empire
Osman I founded the Ottoman Empire around 1299. He was a leader of the Turkish tribes in Anatolia. The area is now in present-day Turkey. The term “Ottoman” comes from Osman’s name, which was “Uthman” in Arabic.
In 1453, Mehmed II the Conqueror defeated the city of Constantinople. It was the capital of the Byzantine Empire, which had lasted 1,000 years.

Sultan Mehmed renamed the city Istanbul, meaning “the city of Islam.” He made it the new capital of the Ottoman Empire. Istanbul became an important center of trade and culture.

**Suleiman and the period of expansion**

The empire reached its peak during the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent. He ruled between 1520 and 1566. Suleiman made the empire powerful and wealthy.

Suleiman gave the Ottomans a modern government and law. He gave protections to Christians and Jews. Suleiman also changed the tax system. People had to pay taxes according to their income. The rich paid more than the poor. Government jobs became based on ability, rather than on family connections. All Ottoman citizens had to follow the law.

Suleiman also welcomed different forms of arts and literature.
During Suleiman’s rule, the empire expanded. At its largest, it stretched from North Africa to the Middle East and Central Europe.

**Ottoman art and science**

The Ottomans absorbed learning from the Arab lands they had conquered. Scholars from places like Egypt, Syria and the Holy Land headed to Istanbul. The Ottomans also came to control the Silk Road trade routes. They traded with Italian city-states like Venice and also Asia. These roads also brought new ideas and culture to Istanbul.

The Ottomans became known for their art, science and medicine. Painting, poetry and music were popular art forms. The Ottomans were famous throughout the world for their textiles, carpets and ceramics.

They built soaring mosques and public buildings.

Science was important. The Ottomans studied advanced math, astronomy, physics, geography and chemistry.
The Ottoman Empire and other religions

The Ottoman Empire was Muslim. It was more tolerant of other religions than Christian kingdoms in Europe at that time. Jews and Christians were considered inferior to Muslims and had to pay extra taxes. But Jews, Christians and Muslims mostly lived together peacefully until the 1800s.

Decline of the Ottoman Empire

Much of the Ottomans' wealth and power came from taking over so many lands. The sultan would rent conquered lands to his favorite subjects. Then these rich aristocrats would make the farmers on the land pay taxes. In the 1600s, the Ottoman Empire began losing power and land. There were several reasons.

European nations grew stronger. European traders also brought competition. They used gold from the Americas to buy the raw materials like wool and leather that Ottoman artisans needed. Ottoman manufacturing was hurt. Also, the Ottomans could not compete with trade from the Americas and India. At the same time, the empire had weaker leaders than in the past.

By 1913, the Ottoman Empire lost nearly all its territory.

When did the Ottoman Empire fall?

World War I began in 1914. The war was fought among the nations of the world. By that time, the Ottoman Empire was already failing. The Ottoman Turks fought on the side of Germany and Austria-Hungary and against the United States, Britain and France. They were defeated in 1918.

Most Ottoman territories were divided up. Britain, France, Greece and Russia each took a part. The Ottoman Empire ended in 1922. It was renamed Turkey and became a democracy in 1923.
In 1915, the Ottoman government planned to wipe out Armenians living in the empire. The Armenians are a Christian group. Their ancestors came from Armenia, part of which had been taken over by the Ottomans. The Turks thought the Armenians wanted to form their own country. Most scholars believe that about 1.5 million Armenians were killed.

This wasn't the first massacre of Armenians. Armenians had begun asking for more rights in the late 1800s, and in 1895 the Ottomans massacred between 100,000 and 300,000 Armenians because of it.

The Turkish government says a genocide never took place. In fact, it's against Turkish law today to talk about it.

**The Ottoman legacy**

The Ottoman Empire lasted more than 600 years. A total of 36 sultans ruled between 1299 and 1922. Today, they are remembered for their army, art and architecture. They are also famous for how they accepted different religions and cultures.

At its height, the empire was mighty. Its influence is still alive in the Turkish Republic today.