Gunpowder Empires

AP World History

Revised and used with permission from and thanks to Nancy Hester, East View High School, Georgetown, Tx.
• With the advent of gunpowder (China), the Empires that had access to it were able to conquer the nomadic tribes and societies that didn't.

• Societies that had gunpowder took over the areas left by these conquered societies. Now diplomats from other countries were requested at each others courts.

• This helped to strengthen the relationship between the European nations and others.
Essential Question:

1. How Did Gunpowder Strengthen the Relations between European Nations and People in Other Lands?

2. What were the achievements of the “gunpowder empires”: Ottomans, Safavids, & Mughals?
From 1300 to 1700, three “gunpowder empires” dominated parts of Europe, Africa, & Asia.

The Ottoman Empire
The Safavid Empire
The Mughal Empire
These empires were unique but shared some similarities:

- All 3 empires were able to conquer neighboring people because they formed strong armies using rifles & artillery.
- All 3 empires were Islamic & ruled by Muslim leaders with well-organized gov’ts made up of loyal bureaucrats.
- All 3 empires blended their culture with neighboring societies to create a high point of Islamic culture.
Around 1300, the Muslim Turks of Anatolia were unified & formed the Ottoman Empire.

The Ottomans used muskets & cannons to form a powerful army & expand their territory.
The Ottoman army included 30,000 elite soldiers called janissaries who were slaves that were trained to be loyal to the government.
In 1453, the Ottomans attacked Constantinople & conquered the Byzantine Empire.
By the late 1600s, the Ottomans expanded into the Middle East, Northern Africa, & Eastern Europe.
Ottoman rulers were called sultans & they governed with absolute power. The greatest Ottoman sultan was Suleyman the Magnificent who came to power in 1520. Under Suleyman, Ottoman armies attacked Eastern Europe & the empire reached its height. By the mid-1500s, Suleyman was the most powerful king in the world.
Suleyman’s greatest accomplishment was creating a stable gov’t for his empire.

He was known as “Suleyman the Lawgiver” because he created a law code that governed criminal & civil issues.

He created a simplified & fair tax system to raise money for his empire.

He granted freedom of worship to Christians & Jews living in the empire.
Art, architecture, & poetry flourished under Suleyman as the Ottoman Empire experienced a cultural renaissance.

Ottoman miniature painting

Mosque of Suleyman by architect, Sinan
The Decline of the Ottoman Empire

To maintain their power against rivals, Suleyman & other Ottoman sultans executed their brothers & jailed their sons which led to progressively weaker leaders.

By the outbreak of World War I in 1914, the Ottoman Empire was so weak it was known as the “sick man of Europe.”
The Safavids were Turks living in Persia who built a powerful gunpowder army & created an empire in modern-day Iran. Unlike the Ottomans who were Sunni Muslims, the Safavids believed in Shi’a Islam & strictly converted the people they conquered. Safavid rulers were called shahs, using the Persian title for king.
The greatest ruler of the Safavid Empire was Shah Abbas who came to power in 1587. Abbas borrowed ideas from outside groups to improve the Safavid Empire. He modeled Ottoman janissaries, used merit to employ gov’t workers, & introduced religious toleration which helped Safavids trade with European Christians. Art flourished, especially carpets that blended Persian & European designs.
The Decline of the Safavid Empire

Like the Ottomans, Shah Abbas blinded or killed his most capable sons in order to keep power. As a result, weak leaders led to a rapid decline of the Safavid Empire.

While the Ottoman Empire lasted until 1922, the Safavid Empire fell in 1747.
The Mughals were Muslims who descended from Turks, Afghans, & Mongols living in central Asia. Like the Ottomans & Safavids, the Mughals built a powerful army with guns & cannons.
In 1494, Babur became king of the Mughals, expanded the army, & began invasions into India to create his empire.

In 1556, Babur’s grandson Akbar became king of the Mughal Empire & expanded the empire into almost all of India.
Akbar was the greatest of all the Mughal rulers

Akbar’s greatest achievement was cultural blending & religious toleration

He held religious discussions with Hindu & Muslim scholars

He ended the tax that non-Muslims were required to pay & created a fair & affordable tax system

Because he was Muslim ruling in a largely Hindu region, Akbar allowed non-Muslims to worship freely

He married many wives, among them were Muslim, Hindu, & Christian women
The best example of Akbar’s tolerance was his creation of a new religion called the Divine Faith. The Divine Faith was an example of syncretism because it blended ideas from Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, & Zoroastrianism. Akbar hoped the Divine Faith would end conflicts between Muslims & Hindus. But, the Divine Faith never attracted many Muslim or Hindu converts...When Akbar died, so did the Divine Faith.
During Akbar’s reign, art flourished. Mughal artists were known for their colorful paintings called miniatures.
Mughal architecture was known for blending of Hindu & Islamic designs

The greatest example of Mughal architecture is the Taj Mahal which was built in 1631 by Shah Jahan.
The Mughal Empire grew weak by 1700 as kings spent too much money on palaces & war.

In addition, the large population of Hindus in India began to revolt against their Muslim rulers.

Great Britain took advantage of this weakness, conquered India, & removed the last Mughal emperor from power in 1858.
Conclusions

The Ottomans, Safavids, & Mughals built large Islamic empires using gunpowder militaries. These empires provided new contributions in law, art, & religion. But, their decline by the 1800s allowed newly industrialized European nations to dominate Asia.