

European, East Asian, and Gunpowder Empires Expand

What men call sovereignty is a worldly strife and constant war; Worship of God is the highest throne, the happiest of all estates.

—Suleiman the Magnificent (1494–1566)

Essential Question: How did certain land-based empires develop and expand in the period from 1450–1750?

From its origins in China, gunpowder spread via the trade routes and became a powerful source of change between 1450 and 1750. The term **Gunpowder Empires** refers to large, multiethnic states in Southwest, Central, and South Asia that relied on firearms to conquer and control territories. In addition to Russia, the Gunpowder Empires included three in which Islam was strong: the Ottoman, the Safavid, and the Mughal Empires. Suleiman the Magnificent, quoted above, ruled the Ottoman Empire at its height. Although he declared religious worship the happiest of all practices, he also personally led Ottoman armies in conquering Christian strongholds in Belgrade, Rhodes, and Hungary in Southeastern Europe. The Gunpowder Empire societies tended to be militaristic, yet all three left splendid artistic and architectural legacies, created in part to reflect the legitimacy of their rulers.

The Qing Empire of China also expanded, and although it experienced several invasions, it also prospered during long periods of stability. Europe's expansion involved an even wider exchange network than that which spread gunpowder: transoceanic connections with the Americas. (You will read more about this path to empire expansion in Unit 4.)

Armed trade was common in expanding empires during this period. The different empires traded with one another. However, they kept troops and armaments at the ready in case another empire questioned their right to trade. This type of exchange differed from the free markets of later eras.

Europe

The year 1450 has traditionally signified the ending of the medieval period and the beginning of the early modern period. The mid-1400s saw the end of a wave of plagues, the conclusion of the Hundred Years' War between



France and England (see Topic 1.6), and the invention of the **Gutenberg printing press** followed by an increase in literacy. After the slow political and economic development of the Middle Ages, several countries in Europe were becoming powerful, wealthy nations. New monarchies began to launch overseas explorations and establish colonies around the world.

The nature of the new monarchies in Europe in the 1500s was the result of the desire of certain leaders to centralize power by controlling taxes, the army, and many aspects of religion. These new monarchs included the Tudors in England, the Valois in France, and Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand in Spain. In each area, bureaucracies increased and the power of the middle class grew at the expense of lords and the churches. For example, the new monarchies moved to curb the private armies of the nobility.

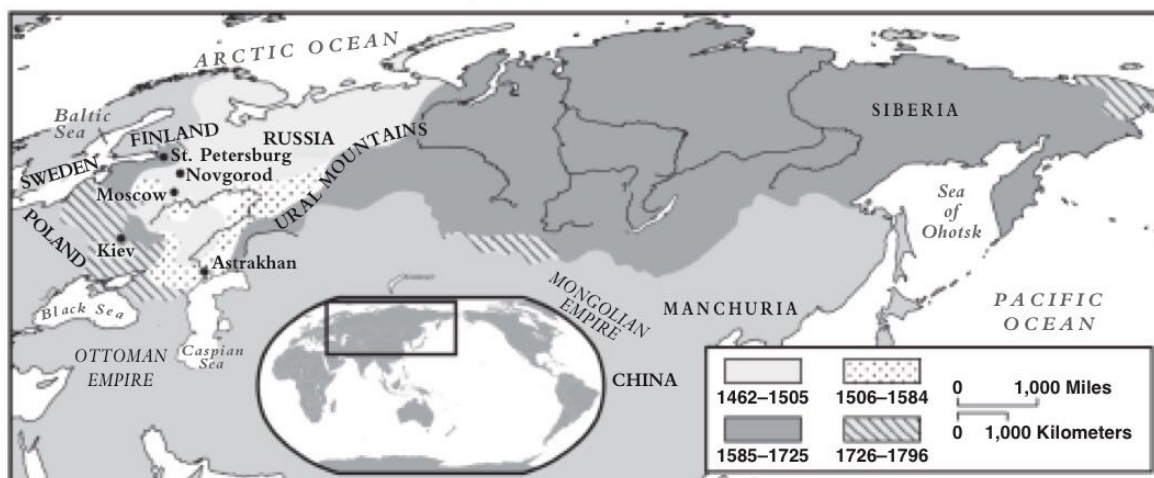
Russia

Western Europeans were long unsure what to think of Russia: Was Russia more European in its outlook and character, or was it more Asian? Russia was in a pivotal position for trade. It was able to exchange goods and services with other cultures farther east and west. However, Russia remained tightly linked to Europe. Its capital—whether Kiev, St. Petersburg, or Moscow—was located in Europe. Although a product of Mongol influence from Central Asia to the east, Russia was also a product of Europe as a result of Viking invasions and trading.

When **Ivan IV** (ruled 1547–1584), called Ivan the Terrible, was crowned tsar in 1547, he immediately set about to expand the Russian border eastward, first by taking control of the khanates of Kazan, Astrakhan, and Siberia held by the descendants of the Golden Horde, the Mongolian conquerors. This expansion came to rely more and more upon the use of gunpowder.

Control of the Volga Wanting to expand east to control the fur trade, Ivan IV allowed the Stroganovs, major Russian landowners, to hire bands of fierce peasant warriors known as Cossacks to fight the local tribes and the Siberian khan. The Stroganovs' forces were successful, gaining control of the Volga

Expansion of Russia



River, which flows into the Caspian Sea. Possessing this outlet to the sea, Moscow could trade directly with Persia and the Ottoman Empire without having to deal with the strong forces of the Crimean Tartars.

To the Pacific Russia continued moving east into Siberia after the reign of Ivan IV. Fur traders and militias defeated one indigenous tribe after another. Missionaries followed, converting many to the Eastern Orthodox faith, although the local shamans, or religious leaders, continued to have influence. By 1639, the Russians had advanced east as far as the Pacific Ocean. Explorations and fur trading expeditions continued across the Pacific to Alaska (1741) and down the coast of North America to California (1814).

East Asia

China's Yuan Dynasty, founded by Mongol invader Kublai Khan in 1271, was overthrown by the **Ming Dynasty** in 1368 after less than a century in power. Ming rulers managed to stabilize the East Asian region for nearly 300 years. During the Ming era, the Portuguese and other Europeans arrived, aiming to encroach on the Asian trade network. Then, in 1644, the powerful **Manchu** from neighboring Manchuria seized power and established the **Qing Dynasty**, which ruled until 1911. During both of these dynasties, Japan and Korea experienced parallel developments but with unique aspects.

The Ming Dynasty also expanded the size of China, conquering lands in Mongolia and Central Asia. It did not hold them for long, however. In the 1440s, Mongol armies defeated Ming forces and even took the Ming emperor prisoner. In reaction to renewed Mongol power, China's leaders looked to the Great Wall of China for protection. The Wall had not been maintained under Mongol rule, but under the Ming Dynasty it was restored and expanded to help keep out invaders from the north. (Connect: Create a chart comparing the Ming and Yuan Dynasties. See Topic 2.2.)

Emperor Kangxi One of China's longest-reigning emperors, **Kangxi** (ruled 1661–1722) presided over a period of stability and expansion during the Qing Dynasty in China. Kangxi sent forces into Taiwan, Mongolia, and Central Asia, incorporating those areas into the empire. China also imposed a protectorate over Tibet, the mountainous land north of India, a policy reflected in China's control of the region today.

Emperor Qianlong Another important Qing ruler was **Emperor Qianlong** (ruled 1736–1796), a poet, who was also knowledgeable in art and calligraphy. At the beginning of his reign, the country was well administered and government tax collections were at an all-time high. Qianlong initiated military campaigns in lands west of China, which led to the annexation of Xinjiang accompanied by the mass killings of the local population. Even today, parts of Xinjiang remain troubled. The local Muslim population, called Uighurs, has never fully become incorporated into the rest of Chinese culture.

Qianlong also sent armies into Tibet to install the Dalai Lama on the throne there. A campaign against the Nepalese was successful, forcing them to submit to Chinese rule. However, campaigns against Burma and Vietnam were unsuccessful and costly, resulting in the emptying of the empire's treasury.

Conflicts with the West Needing funds, the Qing Dynasty sold limited trading privileges to the European powers but confined them to Guangzhou (also known as Canton). The British were not satisfied with these limited privileges, so they asked for more trading rights in 1793. Emperor Qianlong responded with a letter to King George III stating that the Chinese had no need for British manufactured goods. During the later part of Qianlong's reign, the traditionally efficient Chinese bureaucracy became corrupt, levying high taxes on the people. In response to these high taxes and a desire to restore the Ming Dynasty, a group of peasants organized the White Lotus Rebellion (1796–1804). The Qing government suppressed the uprising brutally, killing around 100,000 peasants.

Rise of the Islamic Gunpowder Empires

The warrior leaders of the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Empires shared many traits besides being Muslims:

- They descended from Turkic nomads who once lived in Central Asia.
- They spoke a Turkic language.
- They took advantage of power vacuums left by the breakup of Mongol khanates.
- They relied on gunpowder weapons, such as artillery and cannons.

The initial success of the Gunpowder Empires was a result of their own military might along with the weakness and corruption of the regimes that they replaced. As European nations fought among themselves rather than uniting to topple the new powers growing in the east, the Gunpowder Empires further expanded.

The Rule of Tamerlane The invasion of Central Asia and the Middle East by **Tamerlane** (Timur the Lame, a Mongol-Turkic ruler of the late 14th century) set the stage for the rise of the Turkic empires. Leading an army partly composed of nomadic invaders from the broad steppes of Eurasia, Tamerlane moved out from the trading city of Samarkand (in modern-day Uzbekistan) to make ruthless conquests in Persia (modern-day Iran) and India. The Eurasian steppes were also the birthplace of the **ghazi ideal**—a model for warrior life that blended the cooperative values of nomadic culture with the willingness to serve as a holy fighter for Islam. According to some historians, the ghazi ideal served as the model for warriors who participated in the rise of the Gunpowder Empires, and it was a model that fit Tamerlane well.

Some historians believe that Tamerlane's violent takeover of areas of Central Asia included the massacre of some 100,000 Hindus before the gates

of Delhi in India. The pattern of conquest was marked by violence that resulted in new dynasties: the Ottomans, the Safavids, and the Mughals. Nonetheless, Tamerlane's rule in Samarkand encouraged learning and the arts—a trend also typical of these later empires. For example, Tamerlane championed literature, and he himself corresponded with European rulers and wrote his own memoirs. Buildings still standing in the city of Samarkand are lasting reminders of his interest in architecture and decorative arts.

While the empire he created largely fell apart (except for the area that his descendant Babur would take over to create India's Mughal Dynasty), Tamerlane's invasions were a testament to the significance of gunpowder. He used it to build a government dependent upon his military and the use of heavy artillery. He also used it to protect land routes on the Silk Roads. However, he failed to leave an effective political structure in many of the areas he conquered. Without effective government, the expenses of the wars eventually ravaged the empire's economy.

Tamerlane's rule casts light on two major forces that had battled each other continually from the late 10th century to the 14th century—Mongols from the northeast versus Islamic forces from Arabia and the areas around the Mediterranean Sea. These forces would clash continuously with the rise and fall of the three Asian Gunpowder Empires that are the focus of the rest of this chapter.

The Ottoman Empire

By the 15th century, the Ottoman Empire was already becoming a major power. Extending into modern-day Turkey as well as to the Balkan areas of Europe and parts of North Africa and Southeast Asia, the **Ottoman Empire** was the largest and most enduring of the great Islamic empires of this period. Founded by the Osman Dynasty in the 1300s, the empire lasted until its defeat in 1918 by the Allies in World War I. Thus a single dynasty controlled the empire for more than 600 years.

Mehmed II Called the Conqueror, Mehmed II (ruled 1451–1481) firmly established the empire's capital after his forces besieged Constantinople (once the center of the Byzantine Empire) in 1453. Despite its triple fortifications, the city fell as its walls crumbled under the bombardment of Ottoman cannons. The Ottomans used a 26-foot bronze cannon and several other cannons from 15 to 22 feet in length. Under Mehmed II's rule, the city—its name changed to Istanbul—prospered because of its location. A nexus for trade, the city controlled the Bosphorus Strait, the only waterway linking the Aegean Sea with the Black Sea.

The armies of Mehmed II next seized lands around the western edge of the Black Sea. Then they moved into the Balkans in Southeast Europe. To counter the power of Venice, an expanding state on the Adriatic Sea with a robust maritime trade, Mehmed strengthened the Ottoman navy and attacked various areas of Italy. Although he did not conquer Venice, he forced the city

to pay him a yearly tax. In the early 16th century, the Ottomans added to their empire lands in present-day Syria, Israel, Egypt, and Algeria. When the Mamluk Dynasty's power declined, Istanbul became a center of Islam. (For more on the Mamluk Empire, see Topic 1.2.)

Suleiman I The Ottoman Empire reached its peak under **Suleiman I** (ruled 1520–1566). His armies overran Hungary in 1526 and, by 1529, were hammering at the gates of Vienna, the main city in Austria. Their attempt to take Vienna failed twice, but the ability of the Ottomans to send troops so far into Christian Europe caused great fear there.

In 1522, Suleiman's navy captured the island of Rhodes (now part of Greece) in the eastern Mediterranean, which had long been a stronghold of Christian knights. In the 1550s, the Ottoman navy took control of Tripoli in North Africa. The Ottoman Empire would experience a transformation as the state adapted to new internal and external pressures. A period of reform would follow by the 18th century. Challenges in defending Ottoman territory against foreign invasion and occupation led to the Ottoman defeat and dissolution by 1922.

The Safavids

The Safavid dynasty had its origin in the Safavid order of Sufism, established in the northern Azerbaijan region (Iran). An early Safavid military hero named **Ismail** conquered most of Persia and pushed into Iraq. Although only 14 or 15 years old, he soon conquered all of Iran and was proclaimed **shah** (equivalent to king or emperor) in 1501.

The **Safavid Empire** had two problems. First, despite being on the Arabian Sea (part of the Indian Ocean), the empire did not have a real navy. Second, the Safavids lacked natural defenses. Nevertheless, the Safavids rose to power in the 1500s due to their land-based military might and strong leadership.

Called Abbas the Great, **Shah Abbas I** (ruled 1588–1629) presided over the Safavid Empire at its height. His troops included soldiers—often Christian boys pressed into service—from as far northwest as Georgia in Russia. Abbas imported weaponry from Europe and also relied on Europeans to advise his troops about this newly acquired military technology. Slowly, the shahs came to control religion as well as politics. Using Shi'a Islam as a unifying force, Shah Ismail built a power base that supported his rule and denied legitimacy to any Sunni. This strict adherence to Shi'a Islam caused frequent hostilities with the Ottoman Empire, a stronghold of Sunni Islam. In 1541, Safavid forces were stopped by the Ottomans at Tabriz, a city in Persia that became part of the border between Sunni and Shi'a societies. The hostility between the two groups lives on in present-day Iraq and Iran.

Conflicts between Ottomans and Safavids were not entirely religious, however. Another conflict arose over control of overland trade routes. The Ottomans used trade embargoes, official bans on trade, consistently against the Safavid silk traders as a way to assert dominance over their eastern rival.

Women in the Safavid Empire Women are rarely mentioned in local Safavid histories; however, Safavid women were permitted to participate in their societies. While Safavid women were still veiled and restricted in their movements, as was traditional in the region, they had access to rights provided by Islamic law for inheritance and, in extreme cases, divorce.

Mughal India

In the 1520s, Babur, a descendant of Tamerlane (see Topic 2.2), founded a 300-year dynasty during a time when India was in disarray. He completed conquests in northern India and, under the new Mughal name, formed a central government similar to that of Suleiman in Turkey. **Akbar**, Babur's grandson, achieved grand religious and political goals.

The **Mughal Empire** under Akbar was one of the richest and best-governed states in the world. Overseas trade flourished during the relatively peaceful period; Arab traders conducted most of the commerce. Traded goods included textiles, tropical foods, spices, and precious stones, all of which were often exchanged for gold and silver. Trade within the borders of the empire was carried on by merchant castes. Members of the merchant castes were allowed to participate in banking and the production of handicrafts.

Castes, or *jatis*, are strict social groupings designated at birth. The caste system divides Hindu people into four categories: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and the Shudras. Outside of the system are the achhoots, or the Dalits, the untouchables. The Indian caste system is the basis of educational and vocational opportunities for Indian society.

Mughal India flourished from Babur's time through the early 18th century. Magnificent architectural accomplishments are remaining testaments to the wealth and sophistication of the Mughal empire.

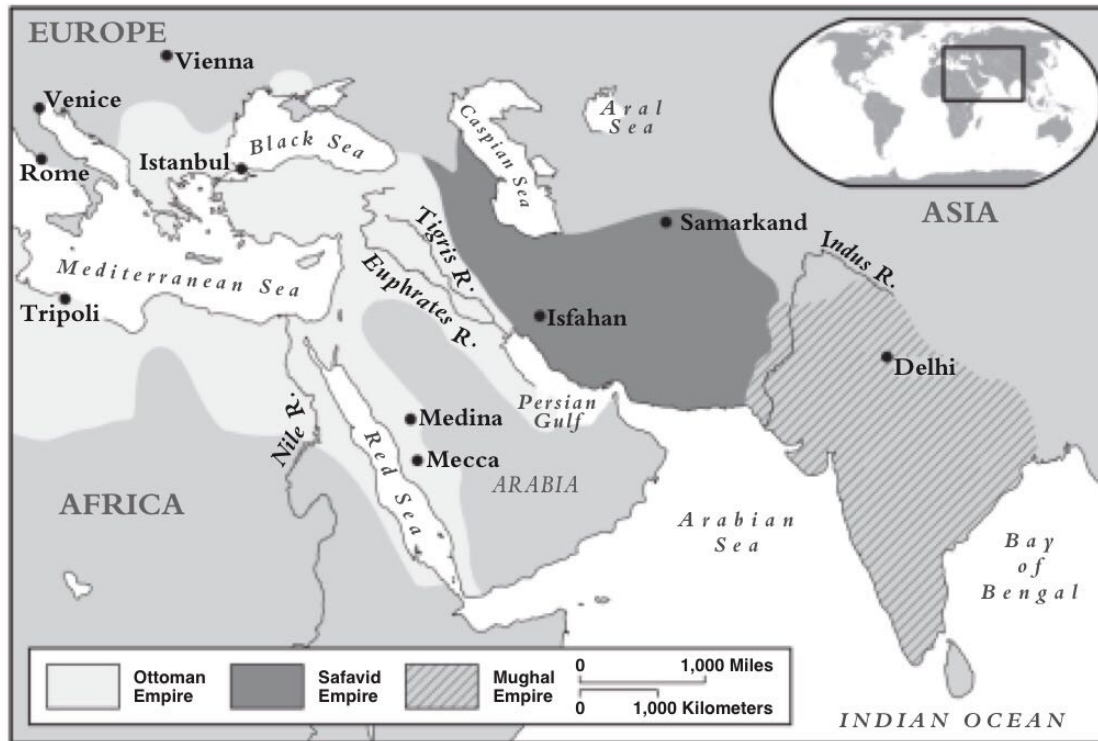
Decline of the Gunpowder Empires

The Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Empires declined as Western Europe grew in strength economically and militarily—particularly in terms of sea power. Unlike these three Islamic empires, Russia modernized and reorganized its army, modeling it after the armies of England, France, and the Netherlands. The Islamic empires did not modernize and, as a result, Russia remained powerful enough to survive as an independent nation-state, while the other Gunpowder Empires fell.

Decline of the Ottoman Empire In 1571, after Suleiman's death, a European force made up mostly of Spaniards and Venetians defeated the Ottomans in a great naval conflict known as the Battle of Lepanto. After the reign of Suleiman, the Ottomans fell victim to weak sultans and strong European neighbors. In time, the empire became known as the Sick Man of Europe. Successors to Suleiman were often held hostage to “harem politics,” the efforts of wives and concubines of the sultan to promote their own children



Three Islamic Empires in the Sixteenth Century



as likely heirs to the throne. In this way, some women became powerful behind the scenes. The failed Siege of Vienna in 1683 marked a turning point in Ottoman domination in Eastern Europe. British and French involvement in the Ottoman territories, Greece's independence in 1821, and the Russian expansion in the 19th century further weakened the Ottoman Empire.

Safavid Decline The ineffectual leaders who followed Shah Abbas combined lavish lifestyles and military spending with falling revenues, resulting in a weakened economy. In 1722, Safavid forces were not able to quell a rebellion by the heavily oppressed Sunni Pashtuns in present-day Afghanistan. The Afghan forces went on to sack Isfahan, and their leader, Mahmud, declared himself Shah of Persia. While the Safavid Dynasty remained nominally in control, the resulting chaos was an impediment to centralization and tax collection. Taking advantage of the weakened Safavids, the Ottomans and the Russians were able to seize territories. The Safavid Dynasty declined rapidly until it was replaced by the Zand Dynasty in 1760.

Mughal Decline Shah Jahan's son and successor, Aurangzeb (ruled 1658–1707), inherited an empire weakened by corruption and the failure to keep up with the military innovations of external enemies. Nevertheless, Aurangzeb hoped to increase the size of the empire and bring all of India under Muslim rule. Additionally, he wanted to rid the empire of its Hindu influences.



In expanding the empire to the south, he drained the empire’s treasury and was unable to put down peasant uprisings. Some of these uprisings were sparked by Aurangzeb’s insistence on an austere and pious Islamic lifestyle and an intolerance of minority religions—Sikhs, Hindus, and others. His policies led to frequent conflicts and rebellions.

There were revolts as well among the Hindu and Islamic princes. The empire grew increasingly unstable after his death, which allowed the British and French to gain more and more economic power in India. The British would take political power away from the Mughals in the 19th century.

KEY TERMS BY THEME		
<p>GOVERNMENT: China</p> <p>Ming Dynasty</p> <p>Manchu</p> <p>Qing Dynasty</p> <p>Kangxi</p> <p>Emperor Qianlong</p> <p>TECHNOLOGY: Literacy</p> <p>Gutenberg printing press</p>	<p>GOVERNMENT: Turkic</p> <p>Gunpowder Empires</p> <p>Ottoman Empire</p> <p>shah</p> <p>Safavid Empire</p> <p>Mughal Empire</p> <p>SOCIETY: Turkic</p> <p>ghazi ideal</p> <p>castes</p>	<p>GOVERNMENT: Leaders</p> <p>Ivan IV (Russia)</p> <p>Tamerlane</p> <p>Suleiman I (Ottoman Empire)</p> <p>Ismail (Safavid Empire)</p> <p>Shah Abbas I (Safavid Empire)</p> <p>Akbar (Mughal Empire)</p>

Source: Wikimedia Commons
Author: shakko

This statue was made after Tamerlane was exhumed in 1941. It represents accurate facial reconstruction based on his skull. Examination of his skeleton also revealed that he was indeed “lame”—he kept his right knee bent all the time. He also had a withered right arm. Tamerlane’s invasion of Central Asia and the Middle East set the stage for the rise of the Turkic empires.

