

**Title—Islamic Gunpowder Empires: Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals**

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Categories: Empire, Islam, Military, Politics

Place: Middle East and South Asia

Time Period: 1290-1900

Argument Synopsis:

A comprehensive introduction to the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal empires with a focus on military, political, and economic history. The fundamental goal of the book is explaining the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal success in maintaining larger, more centralized, and more enduring polities than their predecessors. He claims he is pushing back against mainstream historiography that is focused on the ends of these empires—he looks more at **establishment and consolidation**.

Streusand chooses these empires for comparison because of intense similarities regarding political traditions, as well as being the most successful empires in the Islamic world. He claims that these three empires shared a set of **political and institutional traditions**, which came from the Abbasid dynasty. The Abbasid dynasty, which ruled from 750 until 1258, served as the precedent for all three empires; they radically changed the manner Islamic empires operated. The Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals were able to take the difficulties of post-Abbasid politics and were able to achieve durable legitimacy that had not been matched since the Abbasid dynasty. The Abbasid brought about the development of the ulama and military slavery.

The Ottoman regime followed the pattern of a military patronage stage, with even religious functionaries being treated as part of the military establishment. Streusand argues that, *“Ottoman growth and institutional development were not steady and linear; they reflected political tensions and clashes within the empire.”* (33) Military slavery, a concept pioneered by the Abbasids, played an influential role in the Ottoman empire.

The Safavid empire did not grow steadily, reaching its maximum size only a few years after foundation and only maintaining those boundaries briefly. He claims that the Safavids was neither the beginning of the modern state of Iran nor the revival of the ancient Persian empire, but its importance lay in its imposition of Shii Islam across their empire.

The Mughal empire established itself in an area already ruled by a Muslim established dynasty, the Timurids. Although the Mughals claimed sovereignty over a large region, that did not imply effective government control of all of it. The Mughals relied on intermediaries to govern the bulk of the empire.

Although he uses the term “gunpowder empires,” it is used in the sense to refer the empires of the gunpowder era; as opposed to old historical assumption that these empires were created and maintained through advanced use of gunpowder technology.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- These three empires had many similarities
  - Use of gunpowder technology
  - Land-revenue assignments
  - Articulating sovereignty on an imperial level
- Gunpowder technology helped in acquiring land, but doesn't explain ability to hold power