

The last great islamic empires of the 1600's essay sample

[History](#), [Empires](#)



Keeping the fundamentals of Islam central to their conquests, by 1600 Asia was dominated by three great Muslim empires: the Ottoman, the Safavid and the Mughal.

- Ottoman Empire (1289-1918)
- Safavid Empire (1501-1722)
- Mughal Empire (1523-1739)

Ottoman Empire - Present day Turkey

At the peak of its reign, the Ottoman Empire extended over three continents, comprised of 29 provinces and numerous vassal states and ruled over hundreds of thousands of subjects. For six centuries the empire served as a center point for interaction between the East and the West. Although Ottoman influence also extended into Africa and deep into central Europe, by the 1600's, the Ottoman power began to wane.

According to Ezel Kural Shaw, in his book, ' History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Day Turkey' :

“ The rise of the Ottoman dynasty to rule much of Europe and Asia is one of the most remarkable stories in history. In the 13th century, the Ottomans ruled only one of a number of Turkoman principalities that ringed the decadent Byzantine state in western Anatolia. Within two centuries they had established an empire that encompasses only the former Byzantine lands of Southeastern Europe and Anatolia but also Hungary and the Arab world, and that empire was to endure into modern times”. (Shaw 1).

The Ottomans were descendants of nomads who wandered the area of the Altai Mountains, east of the Eurasian steppes and south of the Yenisei River and Lake Baikal in lands that today are part of Outer Mongolia (Patrick 39). They grew from remnants of Turkic peoples, after the fall of Mongol Rule.

Following the capture of Constantinople in 1453, the Ottoman Empire soon became a force to be reckoned with in the Middle East and around the Mediterranean. When Constantinople fell to Mehmet II in 1453, the Ottoman Empire began its *golden age*. The former Byzantine capital was renamed Istanbul, and became the center of an enormous empire, which at its peak stretched from Algeria to Persia and Hungary to Arabia. The empire was founded by Osman I in 1301 and by 1389, it had extended into Europe. The Mongols halted its expansion for a while, but, after taking Constantinople, Mehmet II quickly conquered 12 kingdoms and 200 cities in Anatolia and the Balkans. Then Selim I gained Syria, Arabia and Egypt between 1512 and 1520 (Imber 82).

Suleyman the Magnificent

Suleyman ruled for 46 years from 1520, conquering Belgrade and Hungary, but failing in his siege of Vienna, the capital of the Holy Roman Empire. To his own people he was known as *Qanuni*, the lawgiver, because he renewed the Ottoman administration and the legal system. He gave shape to the Ottoman Empire, enriching everything from architecture to courtly life. He was a poet, scholar, and patron of the arts, and he rebuilt much of Istanbul (Greenblatt 31-42).

When Suleyman died, his son Selim II became Sultan. He led a life of leisure, while his ministers and generals ran the empire. The Ottomans themselves were not many in number. They relied on taking Russian and North African slaves, and then training them as administrators and soldiers. Ordinary people were left alone as long as they were obedient and paid taxes and there was no forced conversions to Islam. The empire began to crumble due to weak government and the decline of the Sultanate. The empire also experienced economic stagnation due to their failure to adopt progressive changes in the world around them, thereby damaging the Ottoman economy (Nosotro). Internal disintegration and external pressure, the reluctance of the Empire to industrialize the economy and the decadence of the Sultans all played a part in the ultimate demise of the once great empire.

Safavid Persia (1500 - 1722)

In the beginning of the 1500, Persia regained independence under the Safavid dynasty. Persia soon became one of the leading cultures of the world.

Persia had been prominent in the Abbasid Empire since 642, and then again under the Seljuks and Mongol Ilkhans. After a period of disorder, the Safavid dynasty came to power after they captured the city of Tabriz in 1501 making Persia independent. Their leader was Ismail I who had himself crowned *shah*, or ruler. The name "Safavid" came from Ismail's ancestor Safi od-Din, a Sufi holy man who lived around 1300. By 1508, Ismail controlled all of Persia and most of Mesopotamia. He established Shiite Islam as the state religion.

Doctrinal differences, together with disputes over land, led to a long series of Muslim religious wars between the Shiite Safavids and the Sunni Ottomans.

Safavid Persia was continually under pressure from the Ottomans in the west and the Turks in the east, until the reign of Abbas I who made peace and created a cultural renaissance in Persia. After his death in 1629, a series of weak shahs followed and the Safavids were brought down by invading Afghans in 1722 (Marcinkowski). The repeated invasions on the Empire, the decline of commerce and trade due to the shifting of economic routes away from Iran, and ineffectual leaders led to the demise of this great Muslim Empire.

The Great Mughal Empire (1523-1739)

Babur, a descendant of Genghis Khan and Tamerlane, led a tribe in Turkestan called the Mughals - the name being a variation of the word "Mongol". They invaded Kabul in Afghanistan in 1504 and then set their sights on India, a patchwork of often-warring Hindu and Muslim states. They swept through the Khyber Pass into India in 1526, invading the Delhi sultanate, the greatest power in India. After his conquest of Delhi, Babur made it his capital.

According to the Kingfisher History Encyclopedia:

" During the Mughal period, India traded profitably with Africa, the Ottomans, Europe and the Far East. By this time, the Portuguese had trading posts and

ports in India. The country also had the world's largest textile industry. Akbar welcomed Christian Jesuits and Persian artists to his court".

One of the main reason for the success of the Mughal Empire was its tolerance of people of other faiths. Akbar the Great invited missionaries to teach the tenets of Christianity, thereby moving away from orthodox Islam. The Mughal Empire ruled for over three centuries, beginning with the victory of Babur at the battle of Panipat in 1526. But the empire began to decline mostly due to the low quality of its rulers who were ineffective in repelling invasions. Many historians place the blame of the fall of this empire on the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb who reversed many of the successful policies put in place by his ancestor, Akbar the Great. He was thought to be a Muslim fundamentalist and his version of orthodox Islam. He levied the *jizya* tax on his mostly predominant Hindu subjects, destroyed Hindu places of worship and expanded his kingdom beyond the boundaries of India, which made it impossible to rule effectively.

Similarities between the Three Empires

Some important similarities emerge from the study of these three great Muslim empires. I will briefly highlight them below.

1. The Empires legalized their rule with military invasions;
2. Their armies formed an integral part of the leadership, many times with the ruler himself leading the army;
3. Their successful employment of gunpowder artillery and cavalries changed the dynamics of warfare.

4. They made great progress economically by developing extensive trade routes. Under their empires, commerce and agriculture made fantastic advancement and became central to their trade infrastructure.
5. The empires traded extensively with Africa, Asia and Europe, opening up even more trade routes.
6. Islam and Art was at its peak during the 1600's. Poetry, Architecture and Islamic paintings of this era exceed in beauty and finery any other era in history. Islam greatly impacted art, and the practical usefulness of many of their creation is evident in the pieces that have survived. Muslim architecture was at its peak in this era too, with the creation of wonders such as the Taj Mahal, intricately sculpted tombs and beautifully designed Mosques.

Decline of Islamic Empires

1. The military states were limited in their scope. Beyond successful military conquests, they really were ineffectual in the long run.
2. Economic stagnation due to the inability on their part to conform to industrial and modernized forms of economic production and distribution.
3. Inconsistent leadership, with some leaders being very influential and others, very ineffective, also had a role to play in the demise of the three empires. There was no continuity of policies, with every new ruler bringing forth his own ideology and discarding the one set before him.

4. Wars of conquest were costly, with billions of dollars in today's terms paying soldiers salaries, purchasing equipment of war and rebuilding damaged structures. This took a toll on the central economy of the three empires.
5. Internal completion and dissention between the rulers and the states under their subjugation was not a healthy contributor to the long-term success of the nations.
6. Weak-Middle class which had to adhere to strict military rules that subjugated their potential input to the progress of society.
7. Sea routes overtook trade routes, which was an economic disaster. The empires resisted European alliance and refused to reciprocate European interest.
8. The empires were culturally isolated from the rest of the world. Faith, traditional beliefs and Islamic practices, many of which were orthodox, prevented them from applying technology to their advancement. They didn't evolve with the times, staying instead in their cultural cocoon, which ultimately led to their demise. They refused to employ the latest technology of that day, such as the printing press and other scientific discoveries
9. Conservative resistance to technology such as the printing press as well as other scientific discoveries, therefore regressing not progressing.

Conclusion

The three great empires of the Ottomans, the Safavid and the Mughals represented growing interdependence with an exchange of people, technology and ideas. They set forth a concept of globalization which the Western world later adopted and advanced. Theirs was a supreme legacy of religion, art and nationalism. The three dynasties proved their supremacy to the rest of the world and advanced their military conquests to areas earlier unknown. They were technologically superior in their time, but refused to conform with evolving technological advancement, which led to their downfall.

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