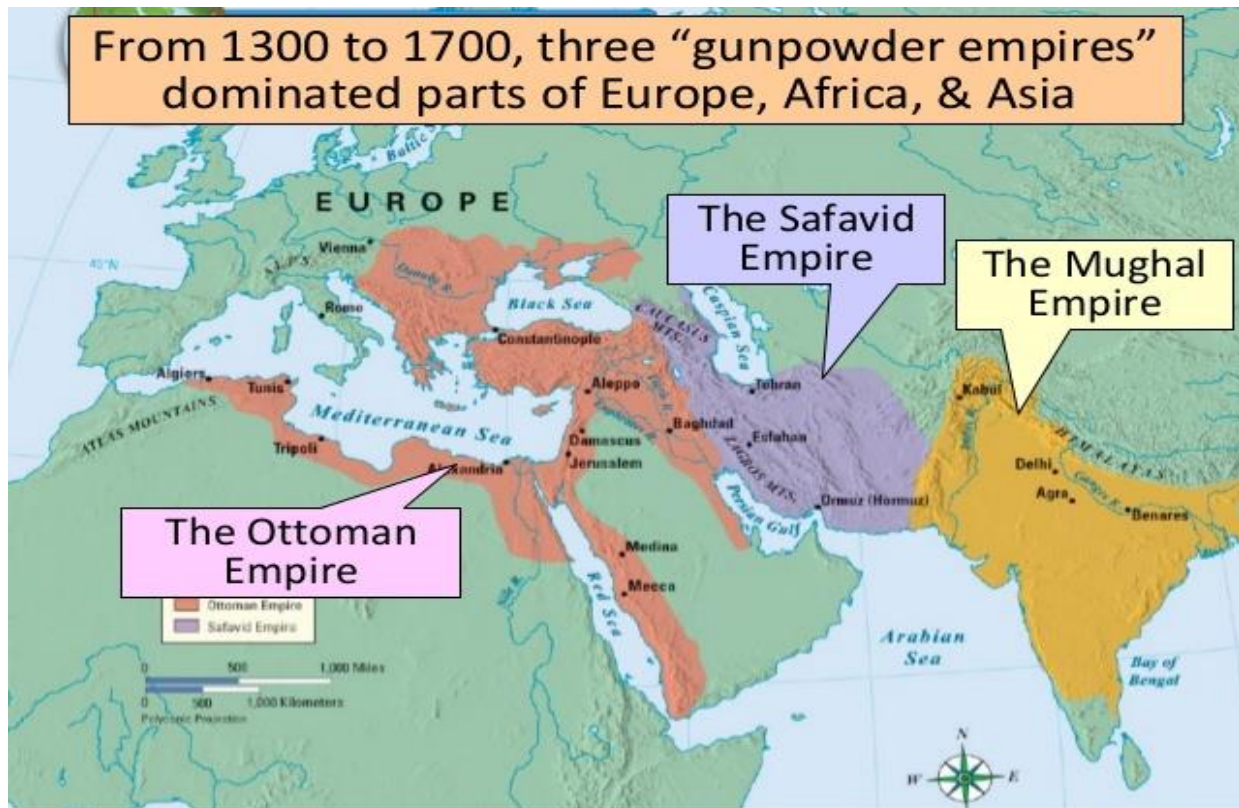# The Gunpowder Empires

In the 15th and 16th centuries, three great powers arose in a band across western and southern Asia. The Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal dynasties established control over Turkey, Iran, and India respectively, in large part due to a Chinese invention - gunpowder.

The **Ottoman**, **Safavid, and Mughal** Empires all reached their peaks between the 16[th]and 17th centuries. The leaders of each of the empires had Turkic ethnic backgrounds and Islamic roots, and all of the empires developed strong military forces (because of this, they are collectively referred to as the Gunpowder Empires). They were called the **gunpowder empires** because they conquered cities and towns from their new kind of weapons like rifles and cannons.

This phrase was coined by Marshall G.S. Hodgson and Willian H. McNeill. The gunpowder empires monopolized the manufacture of guns and artillery in their areas. However, the Hodgson-McNeill theory isn't regarded as sufficient for the rise of these empires, but their use of the weapons was integral to their military tactics.

From 1300 to 1700, three "gunpowder empires" dominated parts of Europe, Africa, & Asia

The Ottoman Empire

The longest-lasting of the Gunpowder Empires, the Ottoman Empire in Turkey was first established in 1299, but it fell to the conquering armies of the Mongol leader Timur the Lame (Tamerlane) in 1402. The Ottomans used artillery during the reign of Bayazid I in the sieges of Constantinople in 1399 and 1402. Thanks in large part to their acquisition of muskets, the Ottoman rulers were able to drive out the Timurids and reestablish their control of Turkey in 1414.

The Ottoman Janissary corps became the best-trained infantry force in the world, and also the first gun corps to wear uniforms. Artillery and firearms were decisive in the battle of Varna against a Crusader force. The **Janissaries**, meaning "new soldier") were elite infantry units that formed the Ottoman Sultan's household troops, bodyguards and the first modern standing army in Europe. The corps was most likely established during the reign of Murad I (1362–89).

They began as an elite corps of slaves made up of kidnapped young Christian boys who were forcefully converted to Islam, and became famed for internal cohesion cemented by strict discipline and order. Unlike typical slaves, they were paid regular salaries. Forbidden to marry or engage in trade, their complete loyalty to the Sultan was expected.

 The battle of Chaldiran against the Safavids in 1514 pitched a Safavid cavalry charge against Ottoman cannons and Janissary rifles with a devastating effect.

By 1700, the Ottoman Empire extended across three-quarters of the Mediterranean Sea coast, controlled the Red Sea, almost the entire coast of the Black Sea, and had significant ports on the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf, as well as many modern-day countries on three continents.

Although the Ottoman Empire soon lost its technological edge, it survived until the end of the First World War (1914 - 1918).

The Safavid Empire

The Safavid dynasty also took control of Persia in the power vacuum that followed the decline of Timur's empire. Unlike Turkey, where the Ottomans fairly quickly re-established control, Persia languished in chaos for around a century before Shah Ismail I and his "Red Head" (Qizilbash) Turks were able to defeat rival factions and reunite the country by about 1511.

The Safavids learned the value of firearms and artillery early, from the neighboring Ottomans. After the battle of Chaldiran, Shah Ismail built a corps of musketeers, the tofangchi. By 1598 they had an artillery corps of cannons as well. They successfully battled the Uzbeks in 1528 using Janissary-like tactics against the Uzbek cavalry.

Safavid history is rife with clashes and wars between the Shi'a Muslim Safavid Persians and the Sunni Ottoman Turks. Early on, the Safavids were at a disadvantage to the better-armed Ottomans, but they soon closed the arms gap. The Safavid Empire lasted until 1736.

The Mughal Empire

The third gunpowder empire, India's Mughal Empire, offers perhaps the most dramatic example of modern weaponry carrying the day. Babur, who founded the empire, was able to defeat Ibrahim Lodi of the last Delhi Sultanate at the First Battle of Panipat in 1526. Babur had the expertise of Ustad Ali Quli who coached the military with Ottoman techniques.

Babur's victorious Central Asian army used a combination of traditional horse cavalry tactics and new-fangled cannons; the cannon fire spooked Lodi's war-elephants, which turned and trampled their own army in their hurry to escape the fearsome noise. After this victory, it was rare for any forces to engage the Mughals in a pitched battle.

The Mughal Dynasty would endure until 1857 when the incoming British Raj deposed and exiled the last emperor.

See also two additional separate handouts:
The Ottoman and Safavid Empires and The Mughal Empire

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