Islamic Gunpowder Empires: A Comparison

 

**Common Elements:**

* Nomadic Turkish conquerors
* Muslim piety a sign of legitimacy (Sufi influence on leadership was a commonality)
* Autocratic rule
* Imperial family politics often involved deadly competition – succession problems plagued all three empires
* Influence of women within the Imperial family in spite of lack of public power for women
* Use of *jizya* tax on *dhimmi* (protected non-Muslim) populations (though this was abolished for a time in the Mughal Empire.)

**Decline:**

* Entrenched aristocracy replaces meritocracy.
* Religious tension: conservative religious groups sometimes did not like policies that fostered tolerance of religious differences
* The rise of the West and new global economic competition led to eventual loss of tax revenues
* Cost of warfare and bureaucracies
* Failure, sometimes deliberate, to maintain technological development

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Ottoman | Safavid | Mughal |
| Founding | 1289 – Osman Bey | 1501 – Shah Ismail (r. 1501-1524) | 1526 – Babur “the Tiger” (r. to 1530) |
| Islam | SunniWahhabi (Arabian) | Twelver ShiismSufi | Akbar’s “divine faith”Aurangzeb: Sunni |
| Origin | Anatolia between Black Sea and Mediterranean | Iran (Tabriz) | N. India (Kabul/Qandahar) |
| Largest Expanse | Yugoslavia/Greece, N. Africa, MidEast to Tigris River, Black Sea | Central Asia, from Tigris river to Gandahar, Caspian Sea to Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean | Most of India, except southern tip |
| Significant Dates | 1453 – Capture of Constantinople; renamed Istanbul | 1514 – Battle of Chaldiran (vs. Ottomans) |  |
| Military Institutions | *ghazi* “sword of God”*Janissaries* – *devshirme* slaves in the army and bureaucracy  | *qizilbash* (“red heads”)“slaves of the royal household” |  |
| Great Leaders | Mehmed II “The Conquerer” (r. 1451-1481)Süleyman the Magnificent (or “the Lawgiver”) (r. 1520-1566) | Shah Abbas “the Great” (r. 1588-1629) | Akbar (r. 1556-1605)Aurangzeb (r. 1659-1707) |
| Cultural Monuments | Topkapi palaceSüleymaniye mosque complex (Istanbul) | Isfahan (capital city) | Taj Mahal (c. 1650) |
| Population | Entire Empire1500 – 9M1600 – 28M1700 – 24M1800 – 24M | Anatolia1500 – 6M1600 – 7.5M1700 – 8M1800 – 9M | 1500 – 5M1600 – 6M1700 –1800 – 8M | 1500 – 105M1600 – 135M1700 – 165M1800 – 190M |
| Religious Minorities | *millet* system: Christians, Jews. | Zoroastrians, Jews, Christians | Toleration varies: Hindus, Jains, Zoroastrians, Christians, Sikhs |
| Exports | Silk, Spices | Silk, carpets, ceramics, crafts | Pepper, jewels, metal craft goods |
| Vices | Tobacco, Coffee |  |  |
| End | End of World War I (1919) | 1722, mostly absorbed by Ottomans | late 18c, mostly absorbed by British |