

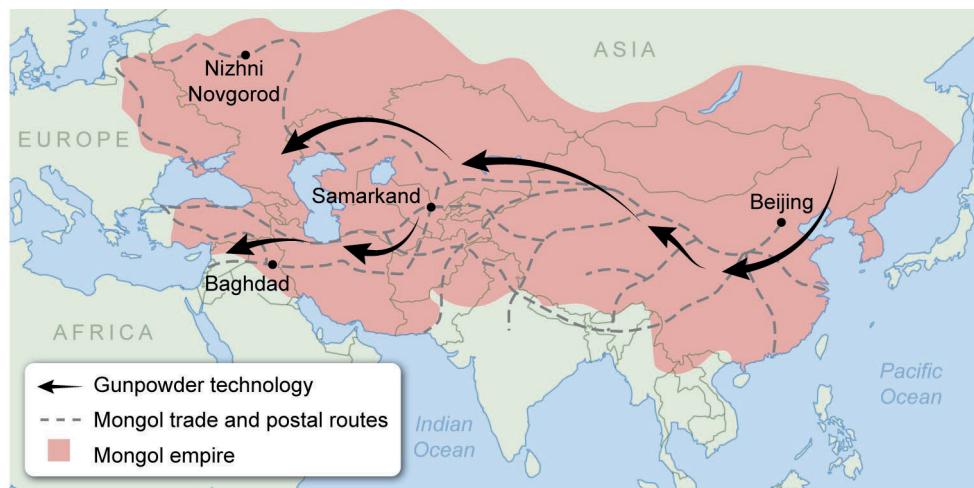
Topic 3.1

Empires Expand

You Will Learn To:

- Identify land-based empires in Eurasia, including the Mughals, Ottomans, and Safavids.
- Describe the impact of gunpowder weapons on the expansion of land-based empires.
- Explain how political and religious disputes in Eurasia caused conflicts between states.

For centuries, the Silk Roads facilitated the transfer of technological innovations across Eurasia. One of the most significant technological innovations was gunpowder, which the Song Dynasty used in military campaigns. In the mid-1200s, advances in gunpowder weapons spread westward due in part to the Mongols, who introduced the technology to Turkic groups across Asia.



After the 14th century, some Eurasian leaders acquired gunpowder weapons (such as muskets and cannons) and exploited their devastating effects. Most notably, the Mughals, Safavids, and Ottomans became known as gunpowder empires for using such weapons.



Although the increasingly wide use of gunpowder weapons encouraged leaders to expand their empires, it also contributed to intensifying political and religious rivalries between those empires.

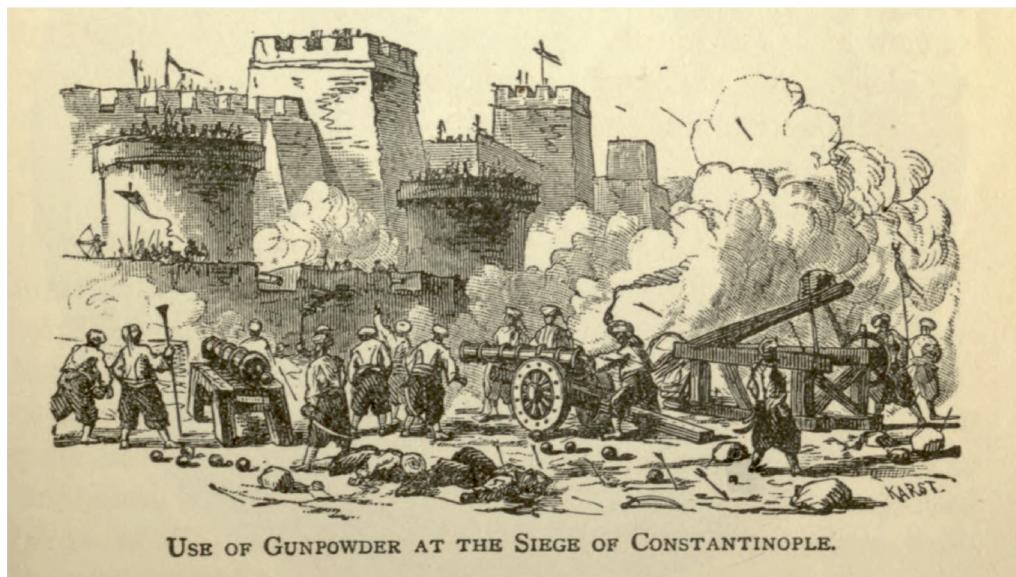
Land-based gunpowder empires in Eurasia

Ottomans

For the first half of the 1300s, the Ottoman Turks governed only small areas of Asia Minor. From these small territorial beginnings, the Ottomans used warfare to become one of the world's largest land-based empires.

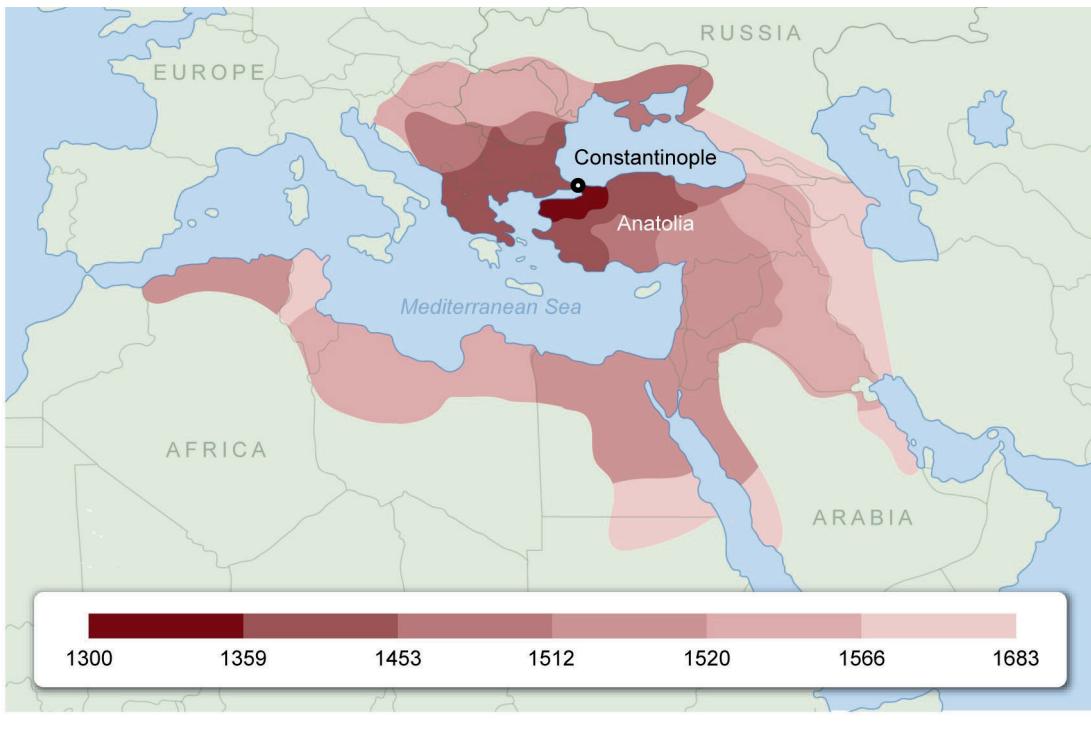


The Ottomans' adoption of gunpowder weapons was essential to their conquest of Constantinople in 1453. Control of this strategically situated port city, renamed Istanbul, allowed the Ottomans to make some of the largest territorial gains in Ottoman history.

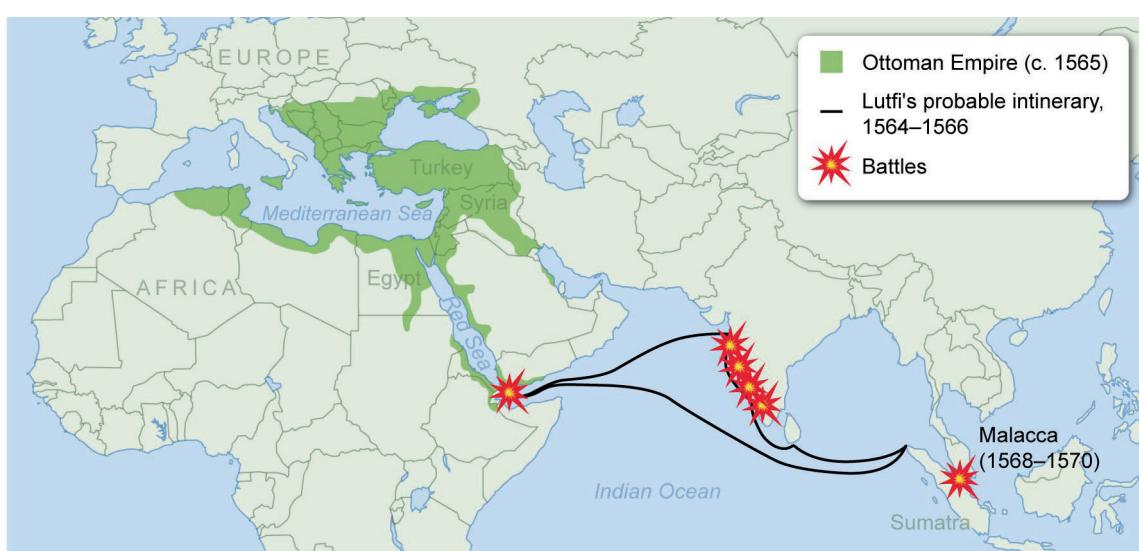


Between the mid-1400s and early 1500s, Ottoman rulers consistently used gunpowder weapons, aiding their territorial acquisitions in Europe and Asia, including:

- the Balkans in southwestern Europe.
- Mamluk territories from Syria to southern Egypt.
- Crimea and the Caucasus region.
- Safavid territories in the Middle East.



By 1517, the Ottoman Empire controlled much of the territory surrounding the Red Sea, increasing the Ottomans' opportunities for interregional trade. Additionally, the Ottomans launched expeditions across the Indian Ocean, where they briefly engaged in armed trade, protecting their own vessels and harassing Portuguese ships.



Mughals

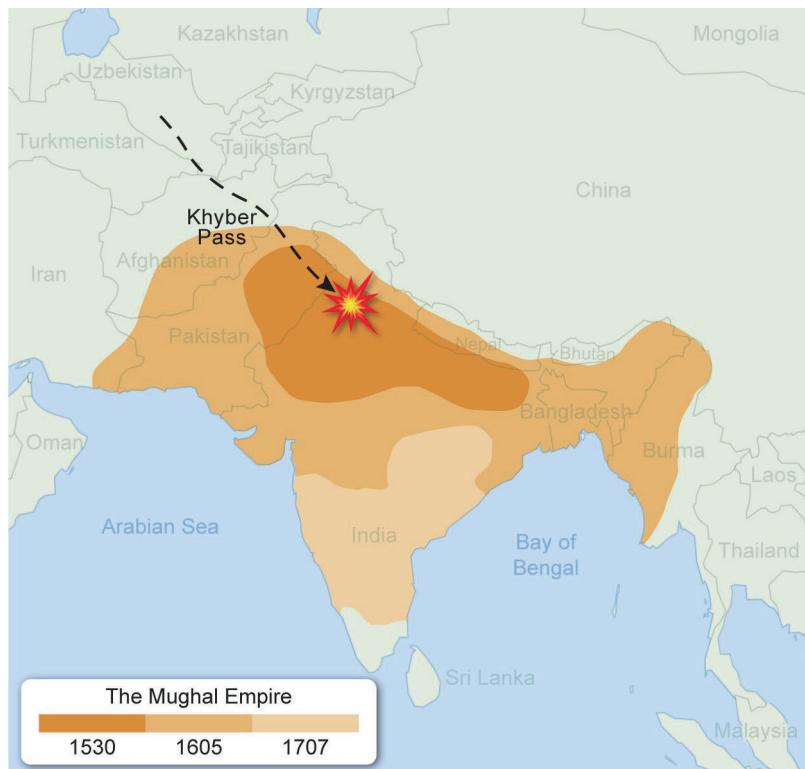
The Mughals formed their gunpowder empire in 1526 after their first emperor, Babur, conquered the Delhi Sultanate using gunpowder weapons at the First Battle of Panipat. After this victory, gunpowder weapons remained instrumental in the Mughals' 17th-century expansion as they conquered areas of South and Central Asia.



Mughal soldier with a matchlock

Akbar's men, sighting a cannon

Between 1526 and 1707, the Mughal Empire used gunpowder weapons to help expand their territory on two fronts. First, within South Asia, Mughal rulers subdued nobles who craved power or kept close ties with their previous rulers, the Delhi Sultanate. Second, Mughal leaders seized land from the Safavids and the Uzbeks, thereby expanding into Central Asia.



Babur invaded the Indian subcontinent via the Khyber Pass. Although greatly outnumbered, Babur's forces used gunpowder weapons to defeat the ruling army composed of approximately 100,000 men and 1,000 elephants in the First Battle of Panipat.

Babur's forces conquered only a small part of the Indian subcontinent, but his successors continued to use gunpowder technology to expand the Mughal Empire, establishing its reputation as a gunpowder empire. By the early 18th century, the Mughals controlled most of the Indian subcontinent.

Safavids

During the reign of Shah Abbas I from 1588 to 1629, gunpowder weapons played a significant role in the Safavid Dynasty's expansion. Abbas modernized the Safavid army and equipped his soldiers with advanced firearms and cannons, giving his military a considerable advantage over its enemies.

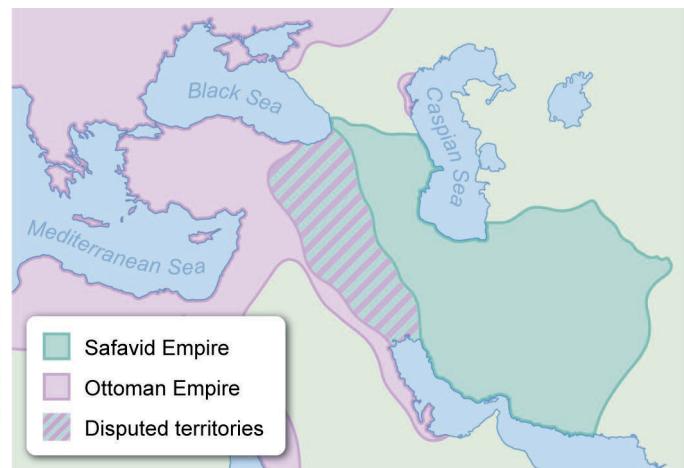


17th-century Persian operating camel-mounted artillery called a *zamburak*

These weapons allowed Abbas to conquer previously inaccessible fortresses and cities in neighboring regions. For example, gunpowder weapons were vital to Abbas' victories against the Uzbek Turks during the Persian-Uzbek Wars in Central Asia.



Safavid musketeer and cannoneer



Gunpowder weapons were instrumental to the Shah's forces defeating the Ottomans in the Battle of Tabriz, part of the centuries-long Ottoman-Persian Wars. Gunpowder weapons also deterred potential enemies, minimizing external military confrontations and enabling Abbas to reinforce internal stability and consolidate his power.

To the east, Abbas led a series of military campaigns against the Mughal Empire in the early 1600s. Abbas' campaigns targeted the Mughals' territorial holdings and aimed to gain greater control over profitable trade routes connecting India with the Silk Roads.

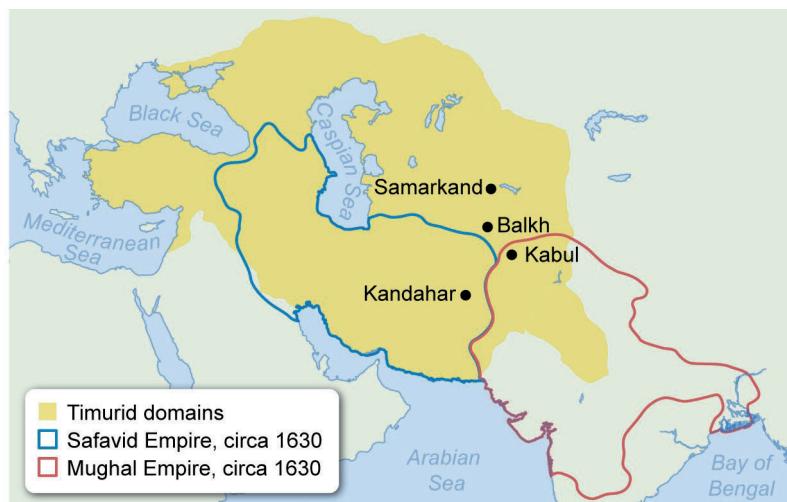


At times, the Safavids expanded by capturing Mughal territories, such as Kandahar and Zamīn Dāvar; at other times, the Mughals pushed back and regained lost territory. This pattern of shifting borders was characteristic of land-based empires from 1450 to 1750, as territorial expansion and consolidation were key objectives for many rulers.

Political and religious disputes between states

Territorial claims drove the Mughal-Safavid rivalry

Mughal emperors were descendants of Timur, the 15th-century conqueror of Central Asia. As the Timurid Empire weakened, Uzbek Turks pushed Timur's descendants southward while Persian Safavid leaders drove them east. Although Timur's descendants continued reigning through the Mughal Empire, Babur and the next five Mughal emperors desired to reclaim their ancestral lands in Central Asia.



Babur felt his true home was Central Asia, and this deep connection fueled his desire to retake Timurid domains. Later Mughal emperors also planned to recapture strategically located ancestral cities, such as Samarkand, Balkh, Kabul, and Kandahar.



Mughal siege of Kandahar, 1631

Emperor Shah Jahan was particularly obsessed with reconquering Timurid lands and, in 1638, he forced the Safavids to surrender Kandahar. However, in the subsequent Mughal-Safavid War, Jahan's forces couldn't secure the conquered territories, forcing him to recall his armies.

Religious differences fueled the Ottoman-Safavid rivalry

Since the mid-600s, a religious schism (split) existed in Islam. The division was based on how two rival groups believed caliphs (Islamic civil and religious leaders) should be selected. Sunnis believed in a non-hereditary succession; Shi'as believed caliphs should descend from Mohammad's bloodline.

Eventually, these opposing religious positions fueled political and territorial conflicts between Muslim empires. In the early 1500s, the split within Islam intensified as the Ottoman Empire began expanding eastward into Safavid territory, igniting the Battle of Chaldiran. Over the next three centuries, the Ottomans (who were Sunnis) fought the Safavids (who were Shi'as) in the Ottoman-Safavid Wars.



Sunni-Shi'a tension was sometimes visible in treaties between the two empires. For example, after the Turks won the Ottoman-Safavid War of 1578–1590, a clause in the peace treaty required Persians to convert from Shi'ism to Sunnism. Ottoman leaders used the clause to justify resuming their later territorial conquests against the Safavids.



Ottoman capture of Baghdad during the Ottoman-Safavid War of 1623–1639

European rivalries driven by religion

Following Martin Luther's 1517 break with the Catholic Church, many northern Europeans converted to Luther's reformed Christian faith. Parts of central and northern Europe became predominantly Protestant, while western Europe remained Catholic.

These divisions fueled political and religious disputes that led to rivalries and armed conflict:

- In 1524, demanding social equality absent under Catholicism, heavily taxed peasants in the Holy Roman Empire revolted against local Protestant princes.
- In the 1550s, the Spanish Empire dealt with Protestant upheavals by instituting the Inquisition to convert heretics (people who opposed the Church).
- Beginning in 1562, the Catholic French monarchy waged campaigns against French Protestants and Protestants in the Holy Roman Empire.



Catholic massacre of French Protestants (Huguenots) in Paris, 1572

In many cases, conflicts between countries resulted in long and bloody wars. The English fought the Spanish in the Anglo-Spanish War, and the Thirty Years' War between northern Protestant countries and southern Catholic territories was one of the deadliest wars preceding WWI.

Things to remember

Between 1450 and 1750, Eurasian land-based empires entered periods of expansion, largely driven by gunpowder weapons, such as matchlocks and cannons. Such land-based empires included:

- the Ottomans, who started with a small territory in Asia Minor but expanded into southeastern Europe, the Middle East, and across North Africa.
- the Mughals, whose westward expansion across South Asia and into Central Asia began after the Uzbek Turks and Safavids pushed them into South Asia.
- the Safavids, who claimed Timurid lands in Central Asia from the Mughals and Uzbek Turks while fighting the Ottomans west of Persia.

Political and religious rivalries intensified disputes between empires. For example:

- the Mughal-Safavid wars were largely based on Mughal leaders' desire to reclaim their ancestral homelands from the Persians.
- the Ottoman-Safavid Wars were both territorial and religious in nature, as the Sunni Turks fought the Shi'a Safavids over Middle Eastern lands.
- European rivalries were driven by religion within empires, such as in the Holy Roman Empire, Spanish Empire, and England.
- some religious wars in Europe pitted states against each other, such as the Anglo-Spanish War and the Thirty Years' War.

3.1 Check for Understanding

- 1. In the mid-1400s, the innovation of _____ was central to the Ottoman conquest of _____.**
 - A. urban warfare; the Balkans
 - B. flaming arrows; southern India
 - C. gunpowder weapons; Constantinople
- 2. Which of the following land-based empires relied on gunpowder weapons to defeat the Delhi Sultanate in the First Battle of Panipat?**
 - A. The Ottomans
 - B. The Mughals
 - C. The Safavids
- 3. The Mughals created a land-based empire that controlled territories in the two regions of**
 - A. South Asia and Central Asia.
 - B. East Asia and the Middle East.
 - C. Southeast Asia and the Caucasus region.
- 4. Which of the following factors was at the center of the Mughal-Safavid rivalry?**
 - A. Uzbek lineage associated with the Golden Horde
 - B. Mughal emperors' connection to ancestral Timurid lands
 - C. The Ottomans' spread of Shi'a Islam into the Balkan region
- 5. Which of the following was the underlying cause of the Ottoman-Safavid rivalry?**
 - A. A political divide between the differing Muslim groups regarding the selection of caliphs
 - B. Economic disputes regarding how much Safavid merchants should be taxed in Asia Minor
 - C. Trade conflicts over the Safavids' prevention of gunpowder weapons from reaching the Ottomans
- 6. Which of the following was a result of Martin Luther's 1517 break with the Catholic Church?**
 - A. Most western Europeans converting to Lutheranism
 - B. Increased conversions to Sunni Islam in southeastern Europe
 - C. Political and religious disputes that fueled rivalries and armed conflicts