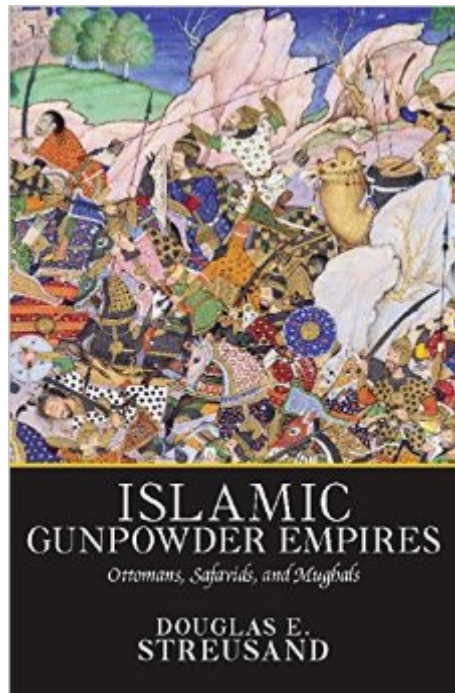


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Islamic Gunpowder Empires: Ottomans, Safavids, And Mughals (Essays In World History)



Synopsis

Islamic Gunpowder Empires provides readers with a history of Islamic civilization in the early modern world through a comparative examination of Islam's three greatest empires—the Ottomans (centered in what is now Turkey), the Safavids (in modern Iran), and the Mughals (ruling the Indian subcontinent). Author Douglas Streusand explains the origins of the three empires; compares the ideological, institutional, military, and economic contributors to their success; and analyzes the causes of their rise, expansion, and ultimate transformation and decline. Streusand depicts the three empires as a part of an integrated international system extending from the Atlantic to the Straits of Malacca, emphasizing both the connections and the conflicts within that system. He presents the empires as complex polities in which Islam is one political and cultural component among many. The treatment of the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal empires incorporates contemporary scholarship, dispels common misconceptions, and provides an excellent platform for further study.

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Customer Reviews

The term "gunpowder empires" to describe the three Islamic empires of early modernity is rather frequently used, even in High School textbooks. However, there are few books that actually give

meaning to this term, and this is one of them. There are also not that many books that deal with the three empires, in comparison with each other, viewing them- as they were- as part of an integrated system and civilization. It highlights their similarities- Turkic elite, Irano-Islamic bureaucratic practices, a founding elite that was universal and almost messianic in nature, etc. while also highlighting their differences- the Mughal and Ottoman empires were much more agrarian and much less tribal than the Safavids, while the Ottoman administration was the most developed and most able to collect revenue in contrast to the Safavids and Mughals while often had to rely on intermediaries. These and numerous other details are why this is a book worth reading. As the author points out, the historiography of the three empires is different in detail and focus. The Ottoman Empire is the best documented owing to a variety of factors such as survival of records, and proximity to Europe. Fortunately, there are many works on the Ottoman Empire and this book is essentially a review of much of it. Readers familiar with its history might not find much new material here although there is more focus on its internal developments. One advantage this book has is this focus on the Ottoman Empire as a Muslim state with attention to its legal, religious, and provincial aspects. Many histories on the Ottoman Empire focus on its foreign policy, its relation to Europe, and the Balkans, and sometimes one feels as though Egypt and Iraq vanish from history for 300 years when reading about the Ottomans.

Douglas Streusand's *Islamic Gunpowder Empires* is a very nice book, an interesting read, especially about a topic that many western and American readers are unfamiliar with. The concept of 'gunpowder empires' comes from William McNeil's *The Pursuit of Power*. The introduction of gunpowder, artillery and muskets gave the armies of early adopters a great advantage over their less-developed rivals. This was particularly important in the swath of Islamic territories from Turkey to Northern India, where the dynastic regimes of the Ottomans, Safavids and Mughals were attempting to establish their authority against the nomadic and tribal groups that had traditionally contested power in the region. Streusand's task is much greater than just to explain the military dominance for these dynasties. They were relatively long-lived empires, and their military dominance explains only part of their longevity and authority. Their early adoption of firearms was a foundation of their regimes, but not the foundation. Governing structures, ideology, the character of the ruler, social, political and economic adaptation to complex environments, all played a role in establishing and maintaining the empires. He looks for the similarities between the empires, but isn't afraid to point out where there are dissimilarities and discontinuities. Indeed, one of his cases, the Safavid regime in what is now Iran, really failed to carry out completely the changes that the

Ottomans and Mughals succeeded with, and in the end collapsed after a relatively short regime. Don't read this book expecting it to be full of battle descriptions and purple prose. This is a scholarly work and written in a scholarly style.

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