

torians told a history which was partly in contradiction with sources published by French scholars. One probably should as well take into account philhellenism and

the Romantic movement to explain why the Turk's villainy was taken for granted.

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The Muslim Empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals

By Stephen F. Dale

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 347 pages, ISBN 9780521870955.

The comparative study of empires is undoubtedly one of the fastest growing fields since the end of the Cold War. Dominic Lieven was among those who paved the way with his *Empire: The Russian Empire and its Rivals* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), which was followed with some later additions such as Karen Barkey's *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and Jane Burbank and Frederic Cooper's *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010). Indeed the field of empires is so vast that the combinations and permutations of comparative studies are endless.

What has been forgotten through this latest wave of comparative empire studies is the standard comparison between the triplet empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughal. All were land-based, "early modern" empires where a variant of Islam was claimed as the dominant religion and blueprint for a polity. Marshall Hodgson's term "gunpowder empires" that together constituted an "Islamicate" has until recently been the predominant association that comes from such a comparative framework. Stephen Dale, professor

at Ohio State University and a specialist in Mughal history, has reintroduced this comparative framework with his *The Muslim Empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals*, and in so doing has written a solid primer on the three "Muslim" empires for students and scholars alike.

Dale explains early on why Hodgson's "gunpowder empires" is not a satisfactory term to link these three state formations. He claims that, while gunpowder was crucial to Ottoman power against Europeans and others, it was not as integral to Safavid or Mughal trajectories of empire. Specifically, he maintains that "The suggestive idea that firearms triggered fundamental changes in the organization of a particular Muslim empire is often alluded to but rarely demonstrated in a systematic fashion, and has not yet been applied to these three states" (p. 6). Neither does he favor the term "early modern," arguing that it is vague and many of the supposed hallmarks of an "early modern state" are not unique to those empires. Dale further differentiates his study from Hodgson's with his self-proclaimed focus on political history (using a treatment of individual rulers as a stylistic device) and the "aristocratic elite" (p. 7) rather than on the military-fiscal systems. Dale offers "a short histo-

ry of culturally related and commercially linked imperial entities from their foundation, through the height of their power, economic influence and artistic creativity and then to their dissolution” (p. 7).

Out of a total of eight chapters, the first three proceed chronologically, and the remaining take up aspects of culture and change from the respective Golden Ages of the three empire to their demise. Chapter one sets up the geographic scene and historical background to the Mughal, Safavid, and Ottoman empires, focusing on India, Iran, and Anatolia from the 10th to the 16th century. Chapter two looks at the rise of these “Muslim empires,” and chapter three explores the legitimacy of monarchs and institutions of empires (undoubtedly an important distinction for each of these empires in different ways). Chapter four turns to the economies of the three states around 1600, chapter five looks at imperial cultures, and chapter six moves from culture to the question of profane and sacred empires. Chapter seven looks at imperial culture in the Golden Ages and finally, chapter eight ends with a consideration of the different kinds of collapse of all three empires in the 18th century and divergent struggles to reconstitute power in all three regions in the course of the 19th century.

While one would not want to take issue with the content of Dale’s book—indeed it is a solid, engaging, and thoughtful treatment of three related and complex histories—it is nevertheless useful to contem-

plate the pros and cons of grouping these three empires, to the exclusion of all others, into a comparative framework. Certainly the concept of a “Muslim world” can be a valid one, and Dale demonstrates very convincingly the many common cultural-philosophical and religious-political paradigms, references, and trends across South, Central, and Western Asia in these centuries. And yet, in framing the study as a look at the world that was “lost” to Muslims in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, Dale, perhaps unwittingly, contributes to the “What went wrong?” line of reasoning set out by Bernard Lewis in the wake of September 11, 2001 and much disputed since then. It separates off these three empires, neglecting the very real connections they could have had with China, for instance, and the common origins but very different outcome in Russia, for example. While it is more than admirable to display the complexity behind two-dimensional stereotypes of Islam prevalent today, in cordoning off these three empires, whether to call them “gunpowder,” “early modern,” or “Muslim” is to imply that their history is essentially different from the non-Islamic empires around them. Nevertheless, this book is very useful, not just as a course book for students, but for scholars of one or another of these three empires to get a sense of how the issues and patterns in one compare to those of the others.

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