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WHP AP Unit 3 Overview | World History Project

What can a ruler who had 13 titles tell you about how empires maintained control over their subjects? In this video, you'll learn about the large, land-based empires of Afro-Eurasia from 1450 to 1750. These empires covered thousands of miles of territory and diverse populations with different languages, ethnicities, and belief systems. Maintaining control was a primary concern for rulers who wanted to ensure that their subjects paid their taxes, obeyed the laws, and didn't launch rebellions. Balancing authority and tolerance was difficult, and land-based empires employed similar tactics to solve these issues, but each empire also faced unique challenges.

0:12

*Narrator speaking;
photo of person in car;
photo of taxes and draft
registration*

Photo of carrots

*Photo of paper money;
Photo of Mount Rushmore;
photos of religious and
government buildings*

Have you ever thought about how your government gets you to do things? Simple things, like wearing a seat belt or... complicated things, like paying taxes and registering for the draft.

Some of the strategies are obvious. Governments have armies and police forces with big guns and the authority to make people do what they want. But, some of the strategies are... less noticeable, and involve carrots—rather than sticks—to convince you to act in certain ways.

Look at the money you use. It probably carries the faces of your leaders, or other symbols of the government. Every time you buy a Mars Bar, you're acknowledging the authority of your government to control the medium of exchange. Governments use plenty of other cultural symbols to convince citizens of their authority; founding myths, impressive buildings, and religious justifications often support the right of the government to govern

1:10

Photo of dollar bill

*Painting of Suleiman; text
bubble with Soleiman's
titles*

*Painting of Soleiman and
his subjects; text bubble:
Soleiman the Lawgiver/
magnificent*

Governments have been using these sorts of strategies for thousands of years.

I'd like to introduce you to someone. His name is Suleiman. Or, more formally, Suleiman the First, Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, King of Kings, Emperor of the East and West, Majestic Caesar, Prince and Lord of the most happy constellation, Commander of the Faithful, Refuge of all the people in the whole entire world, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, the shadow of the almighty dispensing quiet on the Earth, King of believers and unbelievers, Possessor of men's necks, and Allah's deputy on Earth.

To his own subjects—the inhabitants of the vast Ottoman Empire—he was commonly known as "Suleiman the Lawgiver." Europeans simply called him "Suleiman the Magnificent."

And his reign certainly was magnificent.

2:10

*Map of the expansion of
the Ottoman Empire*

*Text bubble with
Soleiman's many titles;
text bubble: Ottoman
Empire; text bubble: Unit
Overview; transitional
music*

He ruled for 46 years and expanded the territory and the wealth of the empire, conquering North Africa, Hungary, and Mesopotamia. He also reformed the Ottoman legal system.

So, that explains "Magnificent" and "Lawgiver," but how did Suleiman earn these other titles? And what do these titles tell us about how the sultans of the Ottoman Empire managed to rule for over 600 years? To answer that, let's examine some of the most powerful governments in the early modern world.

*Text bubble: Unit 3: Land-
Based Empires*

Hi, I'm Rachel Hansen, and this is Unit 3: Land-Based Empires 1450 to 1750.

3:10

Map of the Mongol Empire and the “gunpowder empires”; text bubble: Land-Based empires

By the mid-15th century, the Mongol Empire had fractured and new empires were rising to replace the power vacuum it left behind. Five large land-based empires arose in territory once held by the Mongols. In the period from 1450 to 1750, these were the most powerful states on the planet: the Ottoman, Russian, Safavid, Mughal, and the Ming and Qing empires. Historians sometimes call these the “gunpowder empires” because they used gunpowder weapons to conquer and rule. In this unit, we call them “land-based empires,” meaning they ruled vast territories of contiguous land masses— mostly in Asia, but also parts of Africa and Europe.

Ruling such large empires wasn’t easy. Thankfully, each of these empires had risen in the wake of the Mongol collapse, and they were able to learn from the Mongols example (that shouldn’t surprise you—you already know the mongols were successful rulers as well as warriors).

4:04

Painting of a fleet of ships; archaic paintings of men in battle

These empires competed for dominance and trade. The Ottomans and Russians repeatedly fought over the Black Sea and Caucasus Mountains. The Safavids found themselves at odds with the Ottomans and the Mughals. And towards the end of this period, each of these empires increasingly clashed with small European adventurers who were attracted by the wealth of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Coast of Asia.

Archaic paintings of men in battle; transitional music with text bubble: Thematic Overview

In Unit 3, we focus in on these five empires that ruled most of Eurasia and North Africa. We’ll attempt to understand how they expanded and how they managed to govern all these diverse societies that they conquered.

Theme card; text bubble: Characteristics of land-based empires

Okay, so... what are some themes in governance that these empires shared?

4:53

Text bubble: Characteristics of land-based empires

The rulers of each of these empires relied on conquest and military might to expand their territory and keep their subjects in line. But like your own government, they also used more... subtle methods. Here are two in particular that historians have identified.

Paintings of king and his subjects; illustration and painting of bureaucracies

First, all of these empires centralized authority meaning, they kept as much power as possible in the emperor’s hands rather than delegating to a class of aristocrats in distant provinces. However, no emperor, no matter how magnificent, could manage such vast empires alone, so large bureaucracies emerged to manage the complexity. These bureaucracies developed a professional class of officials who handled tasks like tax collection.

5:41

Painting of Russian Tzar; manuscript; archaic Chinese sketch

Second, in each of these empires, religions played a large role in governance. In Russia, the Orthodox Christian church worked closely with the Tzars. In the Ottoman Empire, the Sultan claimed religious authority for all Sunni Islam. In the Safavid Empire, the Shahs made Shia Islam the religion of the state, putting them at odds with the Sunni Ottomans and Mughals. And in China, different emperors chose to embrace and reject different religions through the years, including various forms of Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Islam.

So, in these large empires, culture and religion played a critical role in administering the empire and enhancing the authority of the ruling dynasty and central government. Rulers wielded the authority of their gods, along with the power of their gunpowder.

6:34

Text bubble: Illustrative example; transitional music

Text bubble with Soleiman's titles; painting of Soleiman

Yet, emperors also often found it useful to practice a certain amount of religious tolerance—like the Mongols had—allowing minorities within their empires a role in governance or some local autonomy.

Clearly, these powerful empires had many tools at their disposal to conquer and command, and each ruler used them somewhat differently. Let's zoom in on the Ottoman example to see how these themes played out. One fun way to do that is to examine some of Suleiman's many titles.

7:10

Text bubble: Caliph

The Ottoman Sultans claimed the title of Caliph. That means he's the religious and political successor to the prophet Muhammad and leader of the Islamic world, making him Allah's deputy on Earth. As the Ottoman Empire conquered more Islamic territories, this title gave the sultans more authority over the faithful. Their conquest of Arabia also gave the sultan's custodianship—meaning control—of the two holiest cities in Islam: Mecca and Medina.

Text bubble: Kayseri Rûm; painting of Ottomans

This one, Majestic Caesar, is similar to another title the sultans claimed after they conquered Constantinople in 1453: Kayseri Rûm, or Caesar of the Romans. The Ottomans, like the Russian Tsars and Byzantine Emperors, claimed to be the successors of the Roman Empire.

8:02

Illustration of civilization by a river; king and his subjects

Text bubble: The Millet System and devshirme; painting of Ottomans celebrating their religion; painting of an Ottoman standing by buildings

Many empires claimed succession from some earlier empire to bolster their authority. In the Mediterranean and Eastern Europe, that was usually the Romans.

The Ottoman sultans understood that they ruled many peoples, far and wide, of many ethnicities and faiths, including non-believers. To administer their diverse empire, they utilized two important systems.

The first was called the Millet System, and the other was called "devshirme." Under the Millet system, the Ottoman Emperor permitted various religious communities like Christians and Jews to govern themselves by their own laws, as long as they swore loyalty—and paid taxes—to the sultan. Millets helped the sultan in Istanbul rule over people of many faiths without provoking revolts in its distant provinces.

Under the second system, devshirmei, the sultan enslaved young boys from Christian communities in the Balkans.

8:59

Painting of Ottoman soldiers; illustration of men of power in Ottoman Empire; painting of a Grand Vizier; paintings of king and his subjects

We used the term 'enslaved' accurately, but this was different in many ways from the kind of slavery you're probably familiar with. Under the devshirme system, the boys became professional soldiers and bureaucrats, often rising to positions of great power in the empire—several became Grand Vizier, the second-most powerful man in the empire. Many families wanted their children to enter this service and would bribe Ottoman officials. The devshirme ensured that the sultan had a powerful army and an effective bureaucracy that was loyal to him and not to his rivals.

Thanks to policies like these, the land-based empires remained the most powerful states through this period. Yet by the late 18th century, their magnificence was beginning to fade as European overseas empires began to challenge their supremacy.

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