

Topic 3.2 – Empires: Administration

Thematic Focus: Governance (GOV)

Standards Table

Framework	Standard
AP World History: Modern	Unit 3 Learning Objective B: Explain how rulers used various methods to legitimize and consolidate power in land-based empires (1450–1750). Theme GOV: States use institutions, elite groups, and religious or cultural systems to maintain authority. KC-4.3.I.C: Rulers increasingly used bureaucratic elites and military professionals for centralized control. KC-4.3.I.A: Rulers used religious ideas, art, and monumental architecture to legitimize rule. KC-4.3.I.D: Tribute, tax farming, and innovative taxation supported state power.
NCSS Standards	<i>Power, Authority & Governance; Culture.</i>
Florida BEST SS Standards	Evaluate how governments maintained authority through institutions, belief systems, and economic policies.

Lesson Overview

From 1450 to 1750, rulers of land-based empires relied on a wide range of administrative strategies to legitimize and consolidate their authority. As empires expanded and became more diverse, rulers needed stronger bureaucracies, more reliable sources of revenue, and convincing forms of political legitimacy. These methods allowed the Ottoman, Safavid, Mughal, and Qing (Manchu) empires to maintain control over millions of subjects across vast regions.

A key development of this era was the rise of **bureaucratic elites** and **military professionals**. The Ottoman devshirme system created the Janissaries—elite infantry loyal directly to the sultan. The Qing used civil service examinations to recruit scholar-officials trained in Confucian principles. Mughal emperors organized the **mansabdari** system, assigning ranked officials to manage revenue and armies. These professional elites replaced older systems where rulers relied on feudal warriors or hereditary nobility.

Rulers also turned to **religion, art, and monumental architecture** to justify their right to rule. Examples include the Ottoman Süleymaniye Mosque, Mughal Akbar’s syncretic religious policies, and Qing imperial portraits that emphasized divine authority. Economic strategies—such as tax farming, tribute collection, and land surveys—financed these states and supported their militaries. Together, administrative, cultural, and economic methods formed the backbone of empire-building in the early modern world.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Identify methods rulers used to legitimize authority (religion, art, public works).
- Describe how bureaucratic elites and military professionals strengthened centralized control.

- Explain how taxation and revenue systems supported imperial power.
- Analyze primary sources showing imperial administration.
- Make historical comparisons among early modern empires.

Essential Vocabulary

1. **Bureaucratic elite** – Highly trained officials who help run a government.
2. **Tax farming** – A system where the right to collect taxes is sold to private individuals who keep part of the revenue.
3. **Devshirme** – The Ottoman practice of recruiting Christian boys, converting them, and training them as elite soldiers or administrators.
4. **Mansabdars** – Ranked Mughal officials who received land revenue in exchange for military and administrative service.
5. **Legitimacy** – Ways rulers justify their right to rule (religion, tradition, power, public works).

Background Reading

The Ottoman Empire used both military and administrative systems to maintain power. Through the **devshirme**, Christian boys were recruited and trained as Janissaries or bureaucrats. Because they had no hereditary ties, these elites were loyal to the sultan alone. Ottoman rulers also used monumental architecture—such as mosques designed by architect Sinan—to demonstrate wealth, power, and religious authority. Similarly, the Safavid shahs used Shi'a Islam to unify their empire and legitimize their political authority.

In the Mughal Empire, Akbar developed the **mansabdari** system to assign rank, land revenue, and administrative responsibilities to nobles and military officers. This system helped the emperor manage a vast and diverse population. The Mughals also built monumental structures like the Red Fort and Taj Mahal to express imperial grandeur. Meanwhile, Qing rulers used the Confucian civil service examination system to recruit scholar-officials and employed imperial portraits to promote their legitimacy as “Sons of Heaven.”

Finally, strong taxation and revenue systems were essential for state power. The Ottomans used **tax farming** to generate revenue quickly, while the Mughals conducted detailed land surveys under Akbar to calculate taxes more accurately. Tribute relationships with neighboring states also signaled political dominance. Together, these administrative strategies allowed rulers to centralize authority, manage diverse populations, and support their expanding militaries.

Primary Sources

Primary Source 1 — Busbecq on the Janissaries (1555)

Source: Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, *Turkish Letters*

Among the Turks there is no distinction of birth in the selection of soldiers, but each man is advanced according to his merit and ability. The Janissaries are trained from youth in strict discipline, obedience, and endurance. They are accustomed to hardship and are content with simple food and clothing. Because advancement depends on service rather than family rank, each soldier strives to excel in duty and conduct. This system produces men who are both loyal and capable, bound to the state rather than to private interests.

Their loyalty to the Sultan is absolute, for they receive pay and honors directly from him and owe their position to his favor alone. They are forbidden to engage in trade or to form private alliances that might distract them from service. As a result, they remain united, obedient, and ready for command. This disciplined force gives the Ottoman ruler great security, for he commands an army that depends entirely on him and can be trusted to enforce his authority both in war and in peace.

Primary Source 2 — Akbar’s Land-Revenue System (Ain-i-Akbari, late 1500s)

Source: *Ain-i-Akbari*, Book 2 (Fordham Internet Sourcebook)

<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/india/ain-i-akbari.asp>

The lands of the empire are carefully measured and classified according to their fertility and the crops they produce. Officials record the amount of land cultivated and calculate the expected yield based on past harvests. From this assessment, a fixed share is assigned as revenue to be paid to the state, so that neither the peasant is overburdened nor the treasury deprived. These assessments are written down and preserved, ensuring consistency and fairness in collection.

Revenue officers are appointed to supervise collection and maintain detailed records of payments. Each district submits reports so that the central administration may know the condition of the land and the income of the empire. By this system, the emperor is informed of the resources of his realm and can plan expenditures accordingly. Order in revenue collection prevents corruption, secures the loyalty of cultivators, and strengthens the foundations of imperial authority.

Guided Source Analysis Questions

Source 1 — Busbecq

1. How does Busbecq describe the discipline and loyalty of the Janissaries?
2. Why were the Janissaries important for the stability of the Ottoman Empire?
3. What does this source reveal about the use of military professionals in centralizing power?

Source 2 — Ain-i-Akbari

1. What details does the source give about the Mughal taxation process?
2. How does the text show the importance of bureaucracy for empire-building?
3. Why would accurate revenue collection help the Mughal state maintain power?

AP Skill-Aligned Activity — Methods of Imperial Consolidation Chart

Fill in the chart with details from the reading:

Method	Ottoman Example	Safavid Example	Mughal Example	Qing Example
Bureaucratic elites	Devshirme → Janissaries	Ghulam slave soldiers	Mansabdars	Civil service exam system
Religious legitimacy	Sunni Islam + mosques	Shi’a Islam identity	Akbar’s tolerance	Confucian ideology
Monumental architecture	Süleymaniye Mosque	Isfahan mosques	Taj Mahal	Forbidden City

Taxation & revenue	Tax farming	Land grants	Land surveys; zabt system	Tribute system
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Then write **6–8 sentences** comparing two empires' administrative systems.

Key Table

Imperial Administration Methods (1450–1750)

Category	Examples	Effects
Elite military groups	Janissaries, ghulams	Increased loyalty; professional armies
Bureaucratic recruitment	Exams, devshirme, mansabdars	Centralized control; reduced hereditary elites
Religious legitimacy	Shi'a Safavids, Ottoman mosques	Unified populations; justified rule
Monumental architecture	Taj Mahal, mosques, Forbidden City	Demonstrated wealth and authority
Revenue systems	Tax farming, land surveys	Funded armies and expansion

CCOT / Comparison / Causation Section

Causation

- Need for stability → rise of elite bureaucrats and military professionals
- Competition between empires → investment in monumental architecture
- Expansion → increased demand for reliable taxation

Comparison

Similarities:

- All used religion to justify rule
- All developed centralized administrations
- All relied on elite military groups

Differences:

- Ottomans: devshirme & Janissaries
- Safavids: Shi'a identity as state ideology
- Mughals: religious tolerance & mansabdari ranks
- Qing: Confucian exams + ethnic Manchu rule

CCOT

Continuity:

- Empires relied on bureaucracies to maintain power

Change:

- Increasing use of gunpowder-trained professional armed forces

Key Takeaways

- Early modern empires relied on **bureaucratic elites, military professionals, and taxation systems** to centralize power.
- Religion, monumental architecture, and art helped rulers build legitimacy.
- Administrative innovation was as important as military force in sustaining empire.
- Ottoman, Safavid, Mughal, and Qing rulers used different methods, but all aimed for stronger central control.