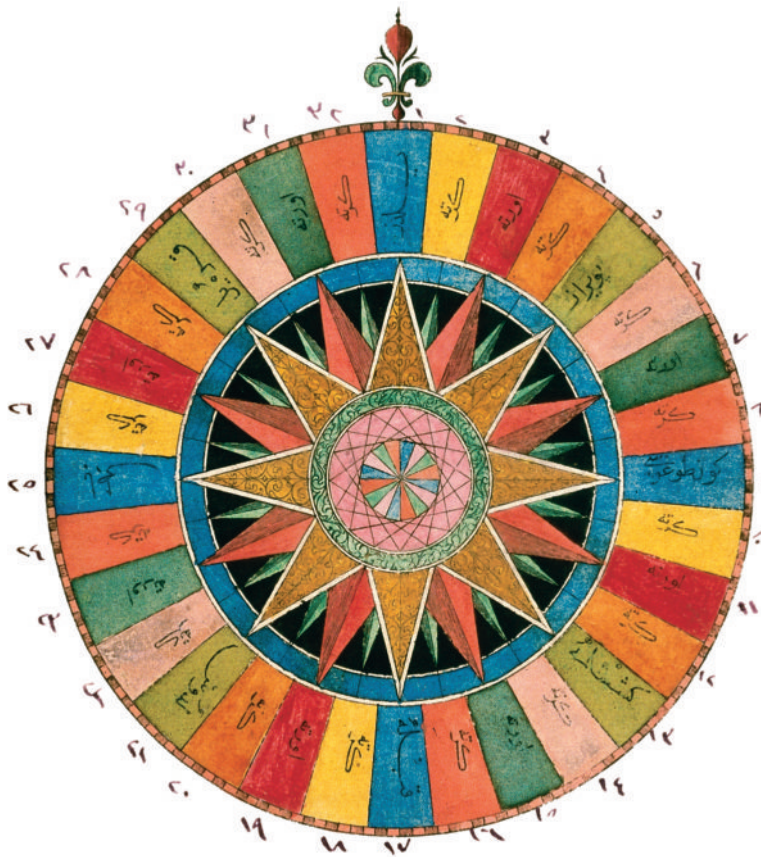


Culture and Conflict in the Great Islamic Empires, 1071–1707



- The Conquests of Timur Lenk
- The Cosmopolitan Ottoman Empire
- Safavid Persia: A Shi'ite State
- The Mughal Empire: A Muslim Minority Rules India
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Ottoman Compass Points

A sixteenth-century Ottoman illustration of the 32 points of the compass. At that time the great Islamic empires still dominated trade routes across the Indian Ocean, but Europeans were challenging them for commercial control (page 420).

The morning of May 29, 1453, dawned overcast and warm on the outskirts of Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire. Shortly after sunrise, the Ottoman Turkish sultan, Mehmed II, ordered his Muslim troops to storm the city. A large cannon made for the sultan by a Hungarian metallurgist pounded away at the city's thick walls. Shortly before noon a hole was torn in one of the walls, and jubilant attackers piled through the breach into Constantinople. The last Byzantine emperor died in hand-to-hand combat, and by early afternoon Mehmed's forces were in possession of a Christian city that Muslims had sought to conquer for more than eight centuries.

As the battle raged around him, Mehmed II calmly rode his horse into the Hagia Sophia (*Hā-jē-ah sō-FĪ-ah*), the Church of the Holy Wisdom, and claimed it for Islam as a mosque.

According to legend, the Orthodox Christian priests chanting divine services at the time quickly gathered up the sacred objects on the altar and vanished into the marble walls of the church's sanctuary, from which they will return to finish the services when the Muslims are expelled from Constantinople. Oblivious to this possibility, Mehmed surveyed his conquest, gave orders to limit the looting and pillaging, and contemplated the collapse of the last outpost of Christendom in the old Roman East.

All three of the great Islamic empires of the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries—the Ottoman, the Safavid (*SAH-fah-vid*), and the Mughal (*MOO-gull*)—were created through conflict, but they were connected to each other in many ways. Each was established by nomadic Turks from Central Asia. Each dynasty constructed its new empire on the foundations of existing Asian civilizations, adapting its previously nomadic life to the framework of settled agricultural urban societies. Each empire was spiritually and culturally Islamic. And each was influenced profoundly by a Turkish empire that rose and fell with astonishing speed: the empire of Timur Lenk.

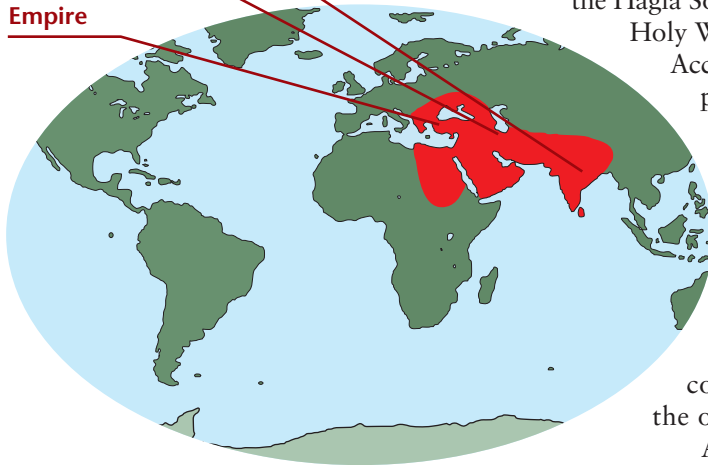
The Conquests of Timur Lenk

Timur was born in 1336 into a Muslim family of Turks in Central Asia. His father, a mid-level government official in the service of the Mongols, claimed descent from Genghis Khan. Timur, who limped from wounds received in battle as a young man, was contemptuously called Timur Lenk, “Timur the lame,” by the Persians he conquered. Europeans corrupted this nickname to Tamerlane (*TAM-ur-lān*). Considering himself a worthy heir to Genghis Khan, Timur set out to conquer Asia, and in the process connected several parts of it, although his lack of patience for administration ensured that his empire would not survive him for long.

Mughal
India

Safavid
Persia

The
Ottoman
Empire



Timur's Strengths and Good Fortunes

Timur followed his father by serving the Mongols, although as a cavalry captain rather than as a government official. Charismatic and cruel, he compensated for his limp by turning himself into a master horseman and soon won the allegiance of the Turkish mercenaries with whom he rode. The Mongol leadership of the Jagadai Khanate in Central Asia was torn apart by rival factions, and Timur skillfully allied with one and then the other, pretending to serve each of them while actually serving only himself. By 1360 he had gained control over the lands between the Oxus (*OX-us*) and Jaxartes (*jacks-AR-tēz*) rivers in Central Asia (Map 17.1). Over the next three decades he mobilized a fearsome

FOUNDATION MAP 17.1 The Empire of Timur Lenk, ca. 1405

The extent of Timur's conquests, undertaken in a time without electronic communication or rapid transit, suggests the difficulty of ruling such vast and varied domains. Compare the location of Timur's empire with the Persian Empire of Cyrus and Darius I (Map 6.3). Then remember that nearly two millennia earlier, Darius had ruled even more extensive lands effectively through satraps. Why didn't Timur institute the sort of efficient administration that characterized the Persian Empire?



force of mounted cavalry in a series of campaigns designed to conquer every region he could reach.

Timur owed his military successes in part to his personal abilities, in part to the quarrels and weaknesses of his enemies, and in part to luck. Some of that good fortune was an ongoing shift in weather patterns, beginning decades before his birth, that brought ample rains to areas of Central Asia which had previously been arid. New and extensive pasturelands supported the horses and livestock of Turkish nomads who, under Timur's leadership, went from there to conquer large parts of Asia.

Timur Lenk conquers large parts of Asia

In 1370 Timur established his capital in the Central Asian city of Samarkand (*sah-mur-KAHND*), from which the Mongol Khanate of Jagadai had controlled the region. In 1380 Timur's forces descended upon Persia and ravaged the countryside. They then crossed the Iranian plateau and subdued Baghdad. This conquest took 13 years, largely because Timur himself was, for most of that time, in Central Asia, consolidating his base with decisive victories over the Mongols in their own heartland. By the final decade of the fourteenth century he was poised to move further.

In 1395 Timur's mounted archers invaded the region of the lower Volga, destroying the Khanate of the Golden Horde within 18 months. The Mongols thereupon surrendered an empire stretching from the Caucasus Mountains northeastward to Siberia. Two years later Timur turned toward India, devastating the Punjab in the West and sacking Delhi. He enslaved numerous Indians to build him a great mosque at Samarkand, while behind him he left desolate cities stalked by hunger and disease. The severed heads of Hindus were piled into immense towers as testimony to his visit, but Indian Muslims fared no better: some were among the 100,000 prisoners he massacred after capturing Delhi. As the fourteenth century drew to a close Timur marched to the eastern Mediterranean, where he encountered the Ottoman Turks.

Attack on the Ottomans

The Ottoman Turks, successors to the Seljuks in the Balkans, were at that point planning what they hoped would be a decisive assault on the Byzantine Empire. Sultan Bayezid (*BĪ-yeh-zēd*) I, who considered himself the heir to the Great Seljuk Empire, had worked for a decade to consolidate the Ottoman realm, and, using the Balkans as his base, he hoped to join Europe with Asia by taking Constantinople and western Anatolia. His plans alarmed Christian Europe at his back, but he had not reckoned on Timur's presence on the Byzantine Empire's eastern frontier. Suddenly it seemed that the potential confrontation would involve three enemies, not just two. When King Charles VI of France emerged from one of his intermittent bouts of insanity to send messengers urging Timur to save Constantinople by striking at Bayezid's Ottomans from the East, Timur needed no further encouragement. He moved against Bayezid, who led his forces into battle near Ankara (*AIN-kah-rah*) in 1402.

Timur's attack diverts the Ottomans from Constantinople

The battle of Ankara was disastrous for the Ottomans. Timur's well-disciplined, carefully integrated armies routed Bayezid's powerful but poorly organized troops. The sultan himself was captured by Timur and treated with contempt. Timur used Bayezid as a footstool and made Bayezid's favorite wife strip naked to serve midday and evening meals to the conqueror's entourage. Imprisoned in a cage so small that he could not stand, sit, or lie down, Bayezid soon died.

Constantinople had been saved from Ottoman assault, but Timur's victory gave no comfort to the Christians. Who or what could stop Timur from turning his attentions on Europe? As it turned out, only his own restless nature. He had taken every acre of land once owned by the Mongols who had ruled him—except China. There the Ming dynasty had claimed the Mandate of Heaven and ousted the Mongol Yuan dynasty in 1368. Timur moved east to prepare his forces for the largest invasion of his career, but while doing so he drank much more wine than his 69-year-old constitution could absorb, and he died of alcohol poisoning in 1405.

Timur as Warrior and Administrator

In many respects, Timur Lenk was an impressive figure. Illiterate but not ignorant, his insatiable curiosity led him to surround himself with scholars with whom he debated questions of religious doctrine, natural science, and history. A skillful chess player, he was also in real life a master of both battle and diplomacy, employing every means imaginable to defeat his opponent. His nomadic upbringing provided him with a flexibility of perspective that enabled him to seize the most favorable opportunity, whenever it presented itself. Timur's reputation for ferocity terrified everyone in his path and proved useful in securing his remarkable sequence of victories. Yet Timur presented himself as a unifier who attacked only those who had been disloyal to Islam.

Some of the very qualities that made Timur a magnificent warrior also made him a poor statesman. The tactical flexibility that served him well in battle equipped him poorly for administration. He never cared to rule the lands he conquered, appointing his sons and grandsons as provincial governors while setting forth at once in search of more military glory. His governors were supposed to act only in Timur's name, but because he was almost never in contact with them they were forced to act on their own. This prevented the creation of durable institutions that might have helped his empire endure.

Timur might have been a builder as well as a destroyer, but his temperament inclined him in other directions. He beautified Samarkand but spent almost no time there, preferring his tents and the back of his horse. His atrocities sealed his reputation. When he died, nothing could hold his lands together. Like a powerful windstorm from the steppes of Central Asia, he leveled everything in his path and then vanished, leaving others to rebuild what he had destroyed.

The Cosmopolitan Ottoman Empire

Like the rest of Asia, the Muslim world had been badly battered by the nomadic invasions of the eleventh through fourteenth centuries. The Seljuk Turks, the Mongols, and Timur Lenk had brought war and destruction, but none proved able to hold their huge empires together. Even though they conquered Islam, they were also assimilated by it.

Islam appealed strongly to these nomads. The simplicity of its monotheism, the hope of paradise offered by its five pillars, and the rigor and consistency of its legal code all resonated with tribal peoples uninterested in the sort of complex doctrinal disputes that fascinated Byzantines. The nomads were accustomed to settling quarrels directly, physically, and permanently.



The interior of the chapel at the tomb of Timur Lenk in Samarkand, in present-day Uzbekistan.

Timur is unable to consolidate his empire

Islam appeals to nomadic civilizations

Consequently, although nomadic rule in southern Asia could be exploitative and devastating, it did not destroy Muslim culture. Mahmud of Ghazni's conversion to Islam could not save the Il-Khan Empire from dissolution in 1335, but it did perpetuate the hold of the Islamic faith. Timur conquered in the name of Islam, not as its enemy. And Mongol advances in southwest Asia were stopped by Egypt's Muslim Mamluk rulers, who in turn were conquered by invaders from Anatolia known as the Ottoman Turks.

Ottomans and Byzantines

In the late thirteenth century, a Turkic-speaking nomadic group led by a man named Osman (*oz-MAHN*) arrived in Anatolia, fleeing westward from the Mongols. They came as polytheists but were eventually converted to Sunni Islam by the Seljuk Turks, who granted them lands in Anatolia along the Byzantine frontier. These grants placed the Ottoman Turks, so named because they were followers of Osman, in an advantageous position that they were quick to exploit. When the Seljuk state collapsed and the Mongols withdrew, the Ottoman Turks took over as champions of the Muslim cause against the Byzantine Empire.

The Ottomans oppose the Byzantine Empire

That once-great realm was now in ruins. Even after 1261, when the Byzantines recaptured their capital from the Western Crusaders, they were beset by insurrections and civil wars, and they never managed to recover their Balkan provinces of Bulgaria, Serbia, and Macedonia, which the Bulgars had taken. Their glorious capital of Constantinople was in decline, its wealth squandered and its trade with the East having passed into the hands of the Italian commercial republics of Venice and Genoa.

The real winners of the Fourth Crusade were the Ottoman Turks, who had stood by while Christians killed one another. Early in the fourteenth century, in an effort to recover its Balkan possessions from the Bulgars, Byzantium decided to ally with the Turks. Thus Turkish forces, rather than having to fight their way into Europe, came as invited guests. Then they quickly took advantage of Byzantine weakness to construct a network of vassal principalities in the Balkans. When the Serbs and Bosnians rose up against Ottoman rule in 1387, the capable Sultan Murad (*MEW-rahd*) I defeated the rebels at the Battle of Kosovo (*KŌ-sō-vō*) in 1389. This outcome provoked the Europeans to mount a multinational anti-Islamic crusade, which the Ottomans defeated seven years later.

The Pax Ottomanica stabilizes southwest Asia and the Balkans

These Balkan victories gave the Ottomans a territorial base in Europe and allowed them to consider their strategy for administering the area. Murad, who had led them into Europe, was an exceptional ruler who refused to impose Islamic or Ottoman forms of government in the Balkans. He was convinced that new systems must be developed that would take into account local conditions and cultures and permit daily life to continue as it had. With this conviction he laid the foundation of a religiously and ethnically pluralistic society that would create a stable *Pax Ottomanica*, or “Ottoman peace,” similar in some ways to the *Pax Romana* created centuries earlier by the Roman Empire. Like the Romans, Murad granted citizenship to all foreigners who were willing to work for his administration.

The primary concern of Murad and his successors, however, was to advance Islam. Several Ottoman officials once told a Byzantine visitor that the westward expansion of the faith had been ordained by Allah, and the Ottomans were the “sword” of that advance. The Byzantine Empire could continue to exist, if its citizens converted to Islam.

The Ottoman goal was not to destroy that empire but to assimilate it into Islamic civilization. In reality, of course, the Byzantine realm had been decaying for centuries, so its absorption into the Muslim world would be of far less value than Murad had hoped.

Murad was slain by a Serb at Kosovo in 1389, and succeeded by his son Bayezid I, who possessed few of his father's leadership abilities. Bayezid continued Murad's policy of granting citizenship to able foreigners, but in other respects he was a warrior, not a statesman. By early 1402 he was ready to besiege Constantinople, but just as his armies were preparing to move, he had to send them back to Anatolia to deal with a momentous threat from the East: Timur Lenk.

Timur's defeat of the Ottomans at Ankara saved the Byzantine Empire, but only temporarily. Once Timur was gone, the Ottomans regrouped. Two successive sultans tried to capture Constantinople and failed. But eventually the Ottoman Turks succeeded and went on to absorb Byzantium into their own immense cosmopolitan empire, one that spanned three continents and endured for more than 400 years.

Timur's attack on the Ottomans eases the pressure on Byzantium

Mehmed the Conqueror

The final conqueror of Byzantium was a new sultan named Mehmed (*MEH-med*) II who came to the Ottoman throne in 1451, determined to take Constantinople. By May 29, 1453, he had succeeded, as this chapter's opening story describes (see "Mehmed the Conqueror Takes Constantinople, 1453"). Changing the name of the Byzantine capital from Constantinople to Istanbul, he claimed it for the Islamic faith. The Byzantine Empire had been replaced by an Islamic Ottoman realm.

Constantinople's fall threw Western Christendom into despair. Europe was now threatened directly by the Ottoman Turks from the Southeast, and the flow of east-west commerce was completely in Islamic hands. For Mehmed the Conqueror, however, the events of 1453 fulfilled the will of Allah, who had ordained that His sultan rescue the Roman Empire from unbelievers. Mehmed was now both the legitimate Roman emperor and successor to Constantine the Great, and Ottoman *Padishah* (*PAH-dih-sha*), a Persian word meaning "God's deputy on earth" and used by the Ottomans to mean "imperial sovereign." The Byzantine tradition of caesaropapism, in which the same man exercised both political and religious authority, was of great use to Mehmed and his successors.

The ambitious Mehmed sought to make the Byzantine Empire part of an Ottoman Empire and a platform for Islam's conquest of all Europe and Asia. This was a tall order, but Mehmed saw himself as selected by Allah to achieve the worldwide unity of Islam. He expanded the administrative policies of Murad I, transforming the Ottoman state into a powerful empire prepared to draw on the talents of all its citizens, regardless of their attitudes toward Islam.



Mehmed II.

Mehmed II intends to restore the Roman Empire

The Ottoman State and Society

Having destroyed the last vestige of Imperial Rome, the Ottoman Empire evolved from an Asian-based Turkish political and social system into a multi-ethnic, intercontinental state. In doing so, it combined previously unrelated administrative methods derived from

Document 17.1 Mehmed the Conqueror Takes Constantinople, 1453

Kritovoulos, a Greek, was not present at the siege of Constantinople, but soon thereafter visited it and entered the service of Mehmed II, who eventually appointed him governor of the island of Imbros. “He admired the Sultan’s military prowess and ability, even while mourning the loss of the City and the downfall of the last vestige of the Byzantine Empire (page viii).” His description of the conquest of Constantinople is based on the personal testimony of hundreds who took part in it.

Sultan Mehmed, who happened to be fighting quite near by, saw that a palisade and a part of a wall that had been destroyed were now empty of men and deserted by the defenders . . . He shouted out, “Friends, we have the City! We have it! They are already fleeing from us! They can’t stand it any longer! The wall is bare of defenders! It needs just a little more effort and the City is taken! Don’t weaken, but on with the work with all your might, and be men and I am with you!”

So saying, he led them himself. And they, with a shout on the run and with a fearsome yell, went on ahead of the Sultan, pressing on up to the palisade . . . Now there was a great struggle there and great slaughter among those stationed there . . . There the Emperor Constantine, with all who were with

him, fell in gallant combat . . . Then a great slaughter occurred of those who happened to be there . . . men, women, and children, everyone, for there was no quarter given. The soldiers fell on them with anger and great wrath. For one thing, they were actuated by the hardships of the siege. For another, some foolish people had hurled taunts and curses at them from the battlements all through the siege. Now, in general they killed so as to frighten all the City, and to terrorize and enslave all by the slaughter . . .

After this the Sultan entered the City and looked about to see its great size, its situation, its grandeur and beauty, its teeming population, its loveliness, and the costliness of its churches and public buildings and of the private houses and community houses and those of the officials . . . When he saw what a large number had been killed, and the ruin of the buildings, and the wholesale ruin and destruction of the City, he was filled with compassion and repented not a little at the destruction and plundering. Tears fell from his eyes as he groaned deeply and passionately: “What a city we have given over to plunder and destruction!”

SOURCE: Kritovoulos, *History of Mehmed the Conqueror*, translated by Charles T. Riggs (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954) 70–77.

Turkish, Persian, and Byzantine traditions into a new governing form connecting aspects of three of the dominant cultures of Asia.

THE OTTOMAN GOVERNMENT’S UNIQUE SYNTHESIS. Ottoman government was based on the sultan’s exclusive right to rule, a concept drawn from Persian tradition and amplified after 1453 by Byzantine caesaropapism. The sultan was supported in this effort by the four “pillars of empire,” a Turkish image taken from the four poles that had traditionally held up the sultan’s tent. The first pillar of the government was the **grand vezir** (*veh-ZĒR*), chief minister to the sultan; the second pillar was the judiciary; the third was the treasury; and the fourth consisted of administrators who drew up the sultan’s edicts. These pillars existed to enhance the sultan’s authority, not to limit it.

But Mehmed II and his successors were not entirely free to rule as they wished. As a Muslim, the sultan was required to conduct himself in accordance with the Shari’ah or Islamic law, based upon the Qur’an, Islamic custom, and the sayings of the first four caliphs. In significant political decisions, he was expected to seek a **fatwa** (*FAHT-wah*), a legal

The Ottomans blend diverse traditions into a new governing system

opinion from the highest Islamic legal authority, sanctioning his course of action. Yet seventh-century Islamic law was not always applicable to issues arising in a fifteenth-century Muslim state.

Turkish tradition proved helpful in resolving this problem. The sultan in his role as Padishah enjoyed the right to issue commands and regulations on ordinary governmental matters without interference from the Islamic legal establishment. These state laws, called *urfi* (*UR-fē*), could be shaped in response to modern issues and problems that the Shari'ah could not possibly have foreseen. *Urfi* could, for example, be used to authorize the lending of money at interest despite religious objections to the practice. In one form or another, the Turkish principle that state law takes precedence over religious law remained in use for centuries in most Islamic nations.

This practical synthesis of diverse concepts meant that the Ottomans behaved differently from other Islamic states. First, their approach to their enemies was shaped by practical considerations rather than by religious zeal. Living side by side with Greeks in the Balkans convinced them of the essential humanity of their opponents and the impracticality of dealing with them harshly. Ottoman willingness to blend governmental traditions enabled them to develop a hybrid system well suited to ruling the assorted cultures and ethnic groups that made up their diverse domain.

Second, the Ottoman system of landholding differed significantly from both Arab and European practice. The nomadic origins of many Islamic societies lived on in the high value placed on land as belonging to the tribe, and the low value placed on individual ownership. European societies, in contrast, placed a high value on individual land ownership, and medieval systems of inheritance encouraged the development of landed nobilities. In Ottoman territory, however, all land belonged to the state. Newly conquered land was distributed by the sultan to his soldiers as a reward. These land grants promoted the growth of a professional standing army. But the land grants could not be handed down from father to son; upon a soldier's death, his land reverted to the state. This system prevented the creation of a landed aristocracy that could challenge or even rival the sultan himself. Instead, what evolved was a meritocracy, in which each succeeding generation was rewarded according to the value of its service to the state.

OTTOMAN SOCIETY. The Ottoman state apparatus was thus a unique blend of Turkish, Persian, Byzantine, and Islamic influences. Unique as well was the society on which it rested. The Ottoman ruling class of about 350 people was composed exclusively of slaves belonging to the sultan. Almost all of them were former Christians who converted to Islam. This elite status was also nonhereditary; these slaves and their descendants could never become a more formal and permanent nobility that might one day rival the sultan. Promotion was based solely on merit and demotion was possible in cases of poor performance. Parallel to this ruling class was the corps of **Janissaries** (*JAN-is-sair-ēz*), a ten thousand-member infantry, also composed of slaves who were Christian-born converts to Islam and totally dependent on the sultan. Armed with gunpowder weapons, the Ottoman armies were superior to all they encountered until the late seventeenth century.

In Ottoman society, as in Ottoman governance, privilege was thus based on performance, not ancestry. A household servant might rise to the rank of grand vezir, while a vezir might fall to the status of a blacksmith, all without any loss of dignity. Since all were slaves of the Padishah, all served at his imperial pleasure in whatever post it pleased



Ottoman law book.

Janissaries help Ottoman armies dominate southwest Asia

Flexibility is a feature of Ottoman society

him to place them. This arrangement was a Turkish-Persian-Islamic hybrid, which at its height proved remarkably effective.

For the sultan, the arrangement carried with it a flexibility that proved particularly useful in a multiethnic empire. Ottoman rule did not depend on overwhelming military force to keep conquered peoples in line. Instead, subject peoples might join and move up in Ottoman administration. This possibility minimized internal unrest. The adaptability of these political and social structures helps explain why the Ottoman Empire survived into the twentieth century.

Suleiman the Magnificent

Mehmed the Conqueror lived up to his name, solidifying Ottoman control over Anatolia and moving northwest from Istanbul deeper into southeastern Europe. The next two sultans, Bayezid II (r. 1481–1512) and Selim (*seh-LĒM*) I “The Grim” (r. 1512–1520), concentrated on warfare in the East and South. Selim ruled for only eight years, but in that time he managed to conquer Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and North Africa, defeating the Mamluks in Egypt and beginning a series of attacks on Persia’s new Safavid regime. He also improved the Ottoman navy, which now threatened Christian shipping in the Mediterranean. Most significant, he claimed the title of Caliph, vacant since 1258, thereby completing the transfer of Islamic leadership from Arabs to Turks (Ottoman sultans remained Caliphs until 1924). By the end of Selim’s reign, the Ottomans ruled about two-thirds of the territory of the old Eastern Roman Empire. All that was left for them to conquer was central and western Europe.

THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE AS A FORCE IN WORLD AFFAIRS. Selim was succeeded in 1520 by his 26-year-old son Suleiman (*SOO-lē-mahn*). Islamic seers, pointing to the sacred number ten, predicted glorious victories for the new ruler: Suleiman was the tenth Ottoman sultan, and he began his reign at the start of the tenth century after Muhammad’s move to Medina in 622. Suleiman was also an intellectual, eager to absorb Turkish, Persian, and Byzantine culture and to participate in the European Renaissance’s revival of Greek and Roman learning. Suleiman saw himself as a unifier, the leader who could unite East and West under the banner of the Prophet. His 46-year reign extended Ottoman power into central Europe and across the Mediterranean, terrifying Christian Europe and establishing the Ottoman Empire as a decisive force in international affairs (Map 17.2).

The Ottomans struck first into Hungary, slaughtering Hungarian forces at Mohács in 1526. But Suleiman’s resources were inadequate for the permanent governance of a hostile country so far from Istanbul, on the other side of the rugged and treacherous Balkan peninsula. Selim had been able to control southwest Asia and North Africa with relative ease, as the inhabitants of those areas had been Muslims for centuries. But central Europe was intensely Christian and unwilling to submit to Islamic rule. Suleiman burned Budapest and marched his armies home for the winter, leaving Hungary open to the influence of the Austrian Habsburgs. That Catholic royal family immediately began to fortify central Europe against the Turkish threat.

Three years later, in May 1529, Suleiman led an immense army to attack Vienna. But the rains were so persistent that summer that the Turks could not bring up their heavy siege artillery over Austria’s primitive roads. In October, as winter approached and the

Selim I claims the title of Caliph

Suleiman moves against Europe

Map 17.2 The Ottoman Empire in 1566

Comparison with Map 17.1 indicates that the Ottoman Empire at the death of Suleiman the Magnificent was much larger than that of Timur Lenk. Notice that the Ottoman Empire connected parts of three continents and included ethnic groups as diverse as Egyptians, Syrians, Mesopotamians, Turks, Greeks, and Bosnians. What methods did the Ottomans develop to rule such far-flung domains and so many distinct peoples?



cavalry could not feed its horses, Suleiman returned to Istanbul in frustration. In 1532 he tried again, this time failing even to reach Vienna because of poor weather and Hungarian and Croatian resistance. Now, at one of history's turning points, Suleiman concluded that, given distance, weather, terrain, and the hostility of the population, Vienna and central Europe lay beyond the reach of military conquest launched from Istanbul.

Grudgingly, Suleiman turned his attention toward the East. Over the next three decades he fought Safavid Persia for possession of Mesopotamia, sent his powerful navy to raid the eastern Mediterranean, and periodically returned west to extend his control

Suleiman turns eastward

further into Hungary. He also played a major role in European affairs, allying with France against the Habsburgs and supporting Protestants against Catholics during the Reformation. In 1566, on his seventh campaign into Europe, he died in his tent, having failed to unify East and West but having succeeded in making the Ottoman Empire a world power.

SULEIMAN THE LAWGIVER. Despite his constant campaigning, the Sultan was often at home; and if to Europeans he was “Suleiman the Magnificent,” to his subjects he was “Suleiman the Lawgiver.” Like western monarchs, he was not above the law but subject to it, although his exalted status allowed him a considerable range of action. Given the centrality of the Shari`ah within Islamic culture, he could not have created a new legal structure, but he did adapt the law to the conditions of his immense multi-ethnic empire. His subjects lived on three continents and were free to profess non-Islamic faiths, and while not all of them were subject to the Shari`ah, all were accountable under the *urfi*, which the sultan alone could declare.

Suleiman worked diligently to guarantee that laws would apply equally to all. Corporal punishment was replaced by a system of fines, although forgers and perjurers might still have their right hands cut off. The Sultan also strengthened mechanisms for the enforcement of Islamic law, viewing the church-state relationship as one in which two complementary strands reinforced royal authority—a typically caesaropapist perspective.

Was Suleiman the Magnificent an absolute monarch in the sense of having unlimited power? Certainly his authority, dignity, and legal status would seem to fit this description. But Suleiman himself would probably have seen absolutism as a curious contrivance of nonbelievers, of little use to an Islamic sovereign. He was Allah’s deputy on earth, the Ottoman Padishah, a ruler for whom the distinction between spiritual and political authority was not a source of tension but of power. Clearly superior, in his own mind, to any monarch in the West, Suleiman would have been unlikely to consider their forms of governance applicable to his lands.

Suleiman adapts Islamic law to Ottoman needs



Suleiman.

Europeans challenge the Ottomans economically

A Faltering Empire

After the death of Suleiman, Ottoman fortunes remained favorable for a time. Although in 1571 a multinational European navy demolished the Turkish fleet at the Greek strait of Lepanto (*leh-PAHN-tō*), the vessels were quickly rebuilt, and the Turks continued to dominate the eastern Mediterranean (see page 409). More worrisome in the long run was the takeover of the Indian Ocean spice trade by the Dutch and French in the seventeenth century, costing Istanbul dearly in terms of lost customs duties. That shortfall could not be made up: Ottoman revenues could be expanded only by conquering additional territory, and the empire’s failure to advance into Europe meant that its income would stagnate during a period of rapid inflation fueled by gold and silver shipments from the western hemisphere.

This fiscal challenge might have been addressed by competent leadership, but that was in short supply. Suleiman had been trained as a soldier and as a governor of a province before becoming sultan, but his successors had no such experience; they were brought up in the harem to protect them from rivals. Bred to luxury and debauchery, they often became alcoholics and drug addicts. The grand vezirs took over to keep the

empire running, but since they governed at the sultan's pleasure, one gesture from him could end either a career or a life.

Poor decisions hurt the empire tremendously. For example, in 1683 the grand vezir Kara Mustafa (*KAH-rah moo-STAH-fah*) led an immense army to once again besiege Vienna, in an effort to accomplish what Suleiman had already concluded was impossible. The Turks were again defeated, this time by a multinational Christian force led by King Jan III Sobieski (*YAHN sō-B'YEH-skē*) of Poland. Istanbul was forced in 1699 to sign the Peace of Karlowitz, recognizing that Hungary and Transylvania belonged to Austria. For the first time Ottoman expansion had been not only stopped but rolled back. The defeat suggested an uncertain future for the empire, especially as its failure to overcome Christian Europe was paralleled by failures to meet challenges to its leadership within the Islamic world from empires farther east.

The Ottoman Empire declines and is unable to respond to Europe's military challenges

Safavid Persia: A Shi'ite State

Ethnic, linguistic, religious, and geographic diversity characterized the Islamic empires from Istanbul to Delhi. Yet Islam provided a powerful faith-based appeal that helped unify its followers. The five pillars offered each Muslim a framework for living a righteous life. The Qur'an, amplified by the sayings of the Prophet, guided the faithful to a deeper understanding of Allah's will. Islamic law, as developed in the Shari'ah, was interpreted differently in different states but furnished a common code of conduct in civil and criminal matters. Mosques and minarets were found in all Islamic communities, although built in various architectural styles. And while Sunni observances differed from Shi'ite services, Islam offered a common tradition that enabled Muslims of all lands and ethnicities to transcend their differences. Nowhere was this more apparent than in Persia.



A late seventeenth-century Islamic map of the world.

Shi'ite Islam as a Unifying Force

The Iranian plateau had for centuries endured the ravages of raiders and nomads from Central Asia, but the combination of Genghis Khan and Timur Lenk brought devastation on a scale previously unknown. Invading armies obliterated towns, erecting huge columns of skulls to mark their former sites. All told, the population of Persia was reduced by 90 percent. Both Genghis and Timur were accompanied by large bands of Turks, who converted to Islam upon arrival in Persia and who eventually rebuilt it once the Mongols had moved on to other conquests.

The rebuilders, who called themselves the Safavid movement, were established by a Kurd named Safi al-Din (*SAH-fē al-DĒN*), who lived from 1252 to 1334. Claiming descent from the fourth caliph, Ali, and through him from the Prophet Muhammad, Safi founded an order of Turkish Sufi mystics who believed that post-Mongol Persia must be rebuilt on a foundation of purified Islamic devotion and militancy. In opposition to the turmoil and exploitation of Mongol conquest, the Safavid movement preached a positive message of rededication and strength. The order spread across Persia, quickly becoming the most powerful spiritual force in the land.

The Safavid movement rebuilds Persia

Map 17.3 The Safavid Empire in Persia, 1600

A shared Islamic faith connected the peoples of southwest Asia, but differing brands of Islam and other areas of conflict divided them. Notice the geographic location of the Safavid Empire, positioned as a buffer state between the Ottoman Empire (to its west) and the Mughal Empire in India (to its east). The Safavids' adoption of Shi'ite Islam separated Persia from both its Sunni Muslim neighbors, while the natural barriers of the Zagros Mountains and the Hindu Kush discouraged those neighbors from interfering in Safavid affairs. What commercial advantages might this central location have offered the Persians?



After Timur Lenk ravaged Persia late in the fourteenth century, many survivors looked to the Safavids as the most cohesive opposition force. When Timur's empire broke up early in the fifteenth century, Safavism turned from preaching to political action. In 1501, forces led by Safi's descendant Ismail (*IS-mah-ĒL*) conquered the Persian city of Tabriz (*tab-BRĒZ*) (Map 17.3). Ismail proclaimed himself *shah* (or king) of Persia, a position he held until his death in 1524. He also proclaimed Shi'ite Islam the state religion of Persia.

Ismail's 1501 proclamation was highly significant. Persia had been nothing more than a geographic expression, without any independent political identity, since the Arab conquest had reduced it to dependent status. As the Abbasid Caliphate disintegrated, Persia had been torn by the ambitions of warlords and invaders. Now Ismail, by establishing Shi'ism, gave his subjects a new sense of identity and unity that distinguished Persia from its cosmopolitan, Sunni Ottoman neighbor and created what would later be known as the modern state of Iran.

Safavids use Shi'ism
to unify Persia

Ismail's accession to the throne was noted immediately in Istanbul. A revived Persian Empire would have been dangerous enough for the Ottomans, but the Safavids were also Shi'ites. Shi'ite Muslims believe that Ali was the legitimate successor to the Prophet and that his murder in 661 constituted a wrong that has never been avenged. Sunni Muslims, who have been in the majority in the Islamic world since that time, are in Shi'ite eyes usurpers who have no right to guide the faithful.

Shi'ism divided Persia from its Sunni neighbors east and west. Its rituals underscored that division. Regular commemorations of Sunni persecutions of Shi'ites are important parts of the Shi'ite Muslim calendar, and they intensify with a two-week observance of the murder of Ali's son Hussein by Sunni assassins in 680. Then as now, pilgrims marched tearfully through the streets, whipping themselves and chanting dirges in honor of the martyr.

Developments in Persia were profoundly disturbing to the Sunnis who ruled the Ottoman Empire. They worried that hundreds of thousands of Shi'ites living under Ottoman rule might be sympathetic to the Safavids. In addition, the Safavid dynasty was of Turkish origin and commanded considerable support in Anatolia. For their part, the Safavids were similarly worried about possible Ottoman intervention, especially because many Persians—perhaps a majority—were Sunnis. Open warfare broke out when Selim I became Ottoman sultan in 1512. Two years later the Ottomans defeated the Persians and occupied Tabriz, but were unable to force the Safavids from power. The attack initiated a bitter, centuries-long struggle during which Sunnis were persecuted in Iran while Shi'ites were hunted down in Anatolia. The animosity between the two Islamic factions deepened.

At one point it appeared that Shi'ism might prevail. Shah Abbas (*ab-BAHS*), who reigned from 1587 to 1629, developed a modern army on the Ottoman model. After defeating the Central Asian Uzbeks (*OOZ-becks*), a nomadic people who had occupied portions of eastern Persia, the shah turned against the Ottomans and captured Baghdad. He also allied with the English, who helped his army expel the Portuguese from the Persian Gulf port of Hormuz (*hōr-MOOZ*) in 1622. Commercial rivalries between European powers enabled the shah to shrewdly play one against another. By the end of the shah's reign, Shi'ite Persia seemed to have little to fear from either Europeans or Ottomans.

Shah Abbas was also sensitive to the need for a strong economy. He encouraged the rapid expansion of trade in both carpets and tiles, items of exquisite beauty soon prized around the world. Transferring his capital to the centrally situated city of Isfahan (*ISS-fah-hahn*), Abbas gained freedom from persistent Ottoman raids and was able to rebuild the city into a commercial center and an architectural wonder. Isfahan's every detail was meticulously planned, from the enormous central square (used for polo matches, festivals, and ceremonies) to the exquisite royal mosque and the luxurious summer palace. The shops in the royal bazaar were centrally located for ease of taxation. Isfahan's grandeur and beauty enhanced Safavid legitimacy and epitomized the validity of Shi'ite Islam.

Following the death of Shah Abbas in 1629, Safavid fortunes declined rapidly. He was succeeded by incompetent, pampered rulers who were unable to defend an empire that needed cleverness to survive. While the Ottomans reconquered Baghdad, Afghans and Uzbeks seized large regions of Persian territory in the East, and Russian Cossacks



A Safavid battle tunic.

Sunnis worry about the attractiveness of Safavid Shi'ism

Persia avoids dependence on either Europe or the Ottoman Empire



The Shah Mosque in Isfahan, considered by experts to be the supreme perfection of Islamic architecture.

began to press the empire from the North. Persia remained independent not through its own strength, but because the Ottoman and Mughal Empires were declining as well.

Regional and Islamic Influence on Family and Gender Roles

In Safavid Persia, as in the Ottoman and Mughal empires, societies were shaped as much by regional customs as by Islamic ideals. In each society, for example, practices affecting family and gender, such as the seclusion of women in the home, were often rooted in regional rather than Islamic traditions.

The Qur'an had established family and gender roles in Islamic Arabia (Chapter 11), strengthening the patriarchal nature of Arabian society but also enhancing the status of women. Both genders were entitled to human dignity and personal privacy. Women were granted explicit property rights and were protected from impoverishment in case of divorce. These rights and protections had not previously been available to them.

As Islam spread beyond Arabia, however, the status of women was impaired by local customs that often overrode Qur'anic requirements. In Persia, for example, male domination and female seclusion had for centuries been embedded in legal and cultural systems. Marriages were arranged by the fathers or male guardians of the brides-to-be. Brides lived with their husband and his relatives, an arrangement that gave them little security should the marriage fail. Persian men, citing local practice, frequently refused women their rights as Muslims to inherit property left them by previous husbands or other relatives. The Shari'ah allowed women to buy and sell property, but in Persia these actions could be taken only through male agents. Although the Qur'an spelled out certain rights for women, these were limited, and in some cases canceled, by Persian traditional practice.

The seclusion of women and their segregation from public life must be placed in context, however. In traditional family-based Islamic societies, the private sphere was typically much more important than the public. Girls could not be educated *outside* the home in Safavid Persia, but *inside* it they were taught the Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet, at least in middle- and upper-class families. Most economic activity involved the family, and here women exercised considerable influence away from public view. In the Ottoman Empire, women could hold business partnerships and employ tax collectors. In Mughal India, unlike Safavid Persia, women played the primary role in arranging the marriages of their daughters. Men were clearly dominant, but women in the Islamic empires did not define themselves as a separate interest group. They played an indispensable role in family life, in societies in which the family was the center of almost all activity.

Local practices negatively affect the status of women in Islamic countries



Persian women.

The Mughal Empire: A Muslim Minority Rules India

East of Persia, other Muslims struggled to extend their dominion over India and its Hindu population. In the northern part of the subcontinent, the main Islamic rulers were the Delhi sultans, who had established their regime in 1206. For the next few centuries, while the Mongols overran most of the rest of Asia, these sultans tried to spread their control across the Indian subcontinent. Although they ultimately failed, the third of the great Islamic empires was eventually constructed on foundations they laid.

The Delhi Sultanate in India

In the 1220s Genghis Khan complicated the Delhi sultans' situation by chasing Central Asian tribes out of their homelands and into northern India. The reigning sultan, Iletmish (*ill-LET-mish*), prudently refused the refugees' offers of alliance and encouraged them to turn westward into Persia. He thus prevented a Mongol invasion of India. By the time of his death in 1236 Iletmish had consolidated all of north India under the Delhi Sultanate (Map 17.4).

A sensible and enlightened ruler, Iletmish did what he could to reconcile India's Hindu majority to Islamic rule. He left the Hindu rajahs alone as long as they paid tribute on time and supported him against the Mongols. He also proved to be a good judge of talent, openly preferring his daughter Radiya (*rah-DE-yah*) as his successor because she was clearly more capable than his sons. But when Iletmish died in 1236, her succession was opposed by her brothers and by a group of influential military officers. Radiya battled against this coalition but finally lost in 1240 and died at the hands of Hindus while fleeing Delhi.

Radiya's defeat plunged the Delhi sultanate into a series of coups and intrigues that ended in 1266 with the assumption of power by the Mamluk slave Balban (*bahl-BAHN*), who had been one of the sultanate's most effective generals. He reorganized the army and government in an effort to hold off the persistent Mongols. Balban's death in 1287 was followed within a decade by the rule of Sultan Ala al-Din (*AH-lab-al-dēn*), an imaginative, skillful, and ruthless leader who expanded the sultanate southward, both to extend its holdings and to raise the money and troops required to defend the North against the Mongols. In 1298 he captured the west Indian state of Gujarat and its vast treasury enriched by the Arabian Sea trade. Then he crossed the Deccan plateau into southern India and managed to occupy the tip of the subcontinent. India, it seemed, had at last been united under Muslim control.

But Ala al-Din's unifying rule did not last. His successors proved capable of organizing victories over the Mongols but not of holding India together. The subcontinent was simply too large and too diverse, linguistically, culturally, and geographically, to be consolidated by groups with considerable talent for warfare but little for administration.

The Sultanate's authority crumbled rapidly. In 1338, a Sufi sect contributed to the defection of the northeastern state of Bengal from orthodox Muslim rule. In 1347, Muslim nobles formed an independent kingdom on the Deccan plateau. In South India, the Hindu states that Ala al-Din had conquered broke away to form the Vijayanagar (*vē-jā-YAH-nah-gahr*) Empire, and in 1390 Gujarat in West India left as well. These losses weakened Delhi so profoundly that it was unable to resist the catastrophic invasion of Timur Lenk.

Following Timur's atrocities in the late fourteenth century, what remained of Indian unity collapsed. The Delhi sultanate was reduced to the status of a North Indian

Map 17.4 The Delhi Sultanate in India, 1236

The Delhi Sultanate was India's best hope for defense against the Mongols. Observe that the Sultanate stretched from the banks of the Indus River eastward across the Himalaya Mountains, thereby blocking Mongol penetration of the Indian subcontinent. What factors eventually undermined the regime and opened the door for Mongol invasion?



Ala al-Din temporarily unites all of India

Timur Lenk destroys Indian unity

principality, and several of its former tributaries now became powerful in their own right. In the fifteenth century, no single state dominated. In 1405 Timur's son established the Timurid (*tee-MOOR-id*) dynasty in India, but it lacked the organized military force necessary for effective imperial rule, and the states of northern India generally ignored it.

Further fragmenting the Indian subcontinent was the emergence of a new Sikh (*SĒK*) religion in the late fifteenth century. In the Punjab, centuries of conflict between Hindu and Muslim had deeply scarred the population. There a Hindu mystic named Nanak (*NAH-knock*), inspired by a spiritual experience, worked to develop a synthesis of the two antagonistic religions. Impressed by Islamic monotheism, he accepted the idea of the unity of God, blended it with the Hindu mystical notions of *samsara*, *dharma*, and *karma*, and rejected the Hindu caste system in favor of the Islamic principle of the equality of all believers. Nanak's synthesis, known as Sikhism, still thrives in the Punjab, centered on its holiest site, the Golden Temple at Amritsar (*ahm-RIT-zar*). But his dream of reconciling Hinduism with Islam failed. Rejected by most members of these two opposing creeds, Sikhism became yet another force working against the unity of India.

Sikhs attempt to blend Hinduism with Islam



The Golden Temple.

Babur: Founding the Mughal Empire

India in 1500 was a land in turmoil, divided by religion, culture, and politics. Into this situation came a Muslim invader from Kabul, Babur (*BAH-boor*), whose name means “the Panther,” a Turkish-Mongol descendant of both Timur Lenk and Genghis Khan. His ancestry alone was enough to make him feared throughout the subcontinent. Calling himself “the Mughal” (Mongol), Babur committed himself to conquest. In 1524 he was invited into the Punjab by a faction seeking his help in overthrowing the local sultan. Babur accepted the invitation and then quickly overran the Punjab and appointed his own officials to rule it. His Indian allies promptly broke ties with him, but Babur secured pledges of cooperation from a number of noble families in Delhi and advanced on that city in the spring of 1526, intent on overthrowing its sultan.

On April 21, 1526, Babur's forces faced the spears and elephants of Sultan Ibrahim (*ib-rah-HĒM*) of Delhi at the battle of Panipat (*PAH-nē-paht*). Although his troops were outnumbered by about two to one, his horsemen were more mobile than the infantry of his opponents, and his cannon blew sizable holes in the elephants. By noon he had won the battle and founded what would be named, after him, the Mughal Empire, the greatest Islamic state in Indian history (Map 17.5).

Four years later, Babur died. His son Humayun (*hoo-MAH-yoon*) proved to be a useless leader, more interested in casting horoscopes and indulging in opium than in ruling an empire. Babur's Afghan generals were dissatisfied, and one of them, Sher Khan Sur (*SHĒR KAHN SOOR*), challenged the new emperor and defeated him in 1539 and 1540. But Sher Khan died young in 1545, and Humayun seized this opportunity to regain the power that had never much interested him. By 1555 he was once again in command of northern India. The following January, however, after smoking at least one opium pipe too many, Humayun slipped on the steps of his private observatory and fractured his skull. This accident left the Mughal Empire in the hands of his 13-year-old son Akbar (*OCK-bar*), whose name in Arabic means “great.” As matters turned out, he deserved the title.

Babur creates the Mughal Empire

Akbar's Reign of Cultural Accommodation

Akbar remained under the tutelage of regents until taking control of his empire at age 20. He was an active man, a formidable hunter and fighter, but illiterate throughout his life. He is reported to have advised others that since the Prophet himself could neither read nor write, it would be a good idea for each family to raise at least one illiterate son. In addition to his total lack of formal education, he appears to have been an epileptic, suffering from seizures and dramatic mood swings that baffled his courtiers. None of these conditions, however, prevented his becoming one of history's finest rulers.

Akbar could not read, but he could learn from the past. He understood not only that India was huge and incurably pluralistic, but also that no government could endure without the cooperation of the Hindu majority. Accordingly, Akbar initiated a program that would reconcile his Islamic regime with the Hindu population. Beginning with a personal gesture, he sent an unmistakable signal by marrying a Hindu princess, who bore him three sons. In 1562 he prohibited the enslavement of prisoners of war and their families, as well as all efforts to forcibly convert them to Islam. One year later he abolished all taxes levied on Hindus making pilgrimages to shrines and temples. In 1564 he canceled a tax imposed on non-Muslims. After fewer than three years of formal rule, Akbar had shown himself to be uncommonly generous, tolerant, and sensible. He was the first Muslim ruler to win significant support from Hindus throughout the subcontinent.

Tolerance and conciliation were not, of course, the only tactics Akbar employed. He also used force to solidify his power. Under Akbar the Mughal Empire tripled in size. Its land mass was one-third that of the Ottoman Empire, but its population of 150 million was six times as large. Yet full integration of southern India proved impossible. Akbar could win battles in the South, but once he returned to the North, southern opposition surfaced and reversed his achievements.

In the rest of India, however, Akbar was master of a competent bureaucracy that administered the Mughal Empire. He divided his domain into 12 provinces, subdividing each into districts. Each province was ruled by a governor directly accountable to the emperor. Akbar himself selected the highest officials, a majority of whom were Muslims born outside of India, but a large minority were drawn from other religious, ethnic, linguistic, and regional groups (15 percent, for example, were Hindus). In addition to demonstrating tolerance and inclusiveness, this policy brought the best qualified Indians into his service, giving them responsible roles in the Mughal Empire as an alternative to leading rebellions against it.

This bureaucracy also collected taxes. Most Indians were peasants, paying taxes not in money but in produce and livestock. Tax collection was handled at the local level,

Map 17.5 The Mughal Empire in India, 1690

Building on the foundations laid by the Delhi Sultanate, the Mughals dominated northern and northwestern India, but the size and topography of the subcontinent prevented them from extending their control further. Note that the central Deccan Plateau, a center of resistance to Muslim rule, sealed the Mughals off from southern India's coast until the late seventeenth century. What weaknesses in Mughal rule made this formidable-looking empire vulnerable to eventual foreign incursions?



Akbar provides an administrative structure for the Mughal Empire

where the revenue agents, following Akbar's orders, could assess local agricultural conditions. In years in which the harvest was ruined by insects or bad weather, or in which animals were afflicted by outbreaks of disease, agents were directed to use tax revenues for humanitarian relief. Since the highest-ranking tax collectors were Hindus sympathetic to the peasants, the emperor's wishes were unfailingly carried out. Moreover, in legal disputes involving Hindus on both sides, Hindu rather than Islamic law was used, and the decisions of Hindu courts were final unless the losing party appealed to the throne.

Akbar's tolerant policies
trouble orthodox
Muslims

These policies meant that Hindus were not only better off under Akbar than under any previous Muslim ruler, but also better off than many would be in centuries to come. Indeed, the emperor's tolerance of Hindus began to worry orthodox Muslims. When, after 1581, Akbar put down several revolts in Muslim regions in the North, he increased his popularity among the Hindu majority. Akbar himself practiced Sufi rituals, with additional practices adapted from Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and Christians.

Under Mughal rule India's culture became increasingly Persian. Akbar made Farsi the language of administration and Islamic law, offending orthodox Muslims who believed that Arabic, the language of worship, should also be the language of state business. Akbar also encouraged the creation of poetry and literature in the Farsi, Urdu (*UHR-doo*), and Hindi (*HIN-dē*) languages, rather than insisting on the exclusive use of Arabic or Turkish. In addition, Sufism, the basis of Akbar's ritual observances, was essentially a Persian doctrine, and fashions and etiquette at the Mughal court also owed more to Isfahan than to Baghdad or Delhi.

Akbar was not typical of sixteenth-century Islamic rulers. In some ways he resembled an absolute monarch; in others, an enlightened despot—one whose absolute rule is tempered by learning and a commitment to the service of his subjects. In his willingness to incorporate aspects of other cultures into a Mughal synthesis, Akbar can with some justice be called modern. But the end of his reign was troubled by a vicious struggle for succession. Akbar's son Salim (*sab-LĒM*) rebelled in 1601, and after four years of turmoil the emperor died, probably a victim of poison. The impatient Salim then became emperor of the most powerful empire in the history of India, and one of the most formidable in the entire world.

The Great Mughals

Prince Salim's reign ushered in the era of the Great Mughals. With much of South Asia unified under their control, there seemed to be no threats to the empire. Salim celebrated his coronation by taking the name Jahangir (*zhah-hahn-GĒR*)—"World Seizer"—and by continuing his father's efforts to create in India a new unified civilization with Islamic, Hindu, and Persian components.

NUR JAHAN AND SHAH JAHAN: LIGHTING THE WORLD. In 1611 the Persian strand became dominant as Jahangir married a 34-year-old widow from Persia whom he renamed Nur Jahan (*NOOR jah-HAHN*), "Light of the World." She was quick-witted and politically skilled, and since Jahangir possessed neither of these attributes, she quickly became the true sovereign. Through her and her Persian relatives, Safavid style and culture left an enduring mark on India.

Nur Jahan saw to it that her father became Jahangir's chief minister and arranged for the marriage of her niece, Mumtaz Mahal (*MOOM-tabz mah-HAL*), to Shah Jahan ("Emperor of the World"), Jahangir's son by an earlier marriage. She then supported Shah Jahan for the imperial succession. Jahangir, preferring to spend his time drinking wine, making love, and writing Persian poetry, was more than willing to turn military affairs over to his crown prince. By 1622, however, Nur Jahan had become jealous of her stepson, and when she ordered him to undertake a risky expedition to Kabul, he refused and rose in revolt. When Jahangir died in 1627, Shah Jahan exiled Nur Jahan to Lahore, where she lived out her life on a sizable pension.

Nur Jahan becomes the real ruler of the Mughal Empire

That solution was typical of Shah Jahan, who seldom hesitated to spend money. He lavished gifts on his harem of 5,000 women and on Mumtaz Mahal, his wife, who bore him 14 children prior to her death in childbirth at the age of 39. Inconsolable, Shah Jahan immortalized her with the construction of her magnificent tomb, the Taj Mahal (*TAHZH mah-HAHL*), a masterpiece fusing Persian artistic form with Indian craftsmanship and materials. He also built the Pearl Mosque at Agra (*AH-grah*), a sparkling jewel of white marble and a monument to Muslim rule in northern India.

But for all his spendthrift ways, Shah Jahan was not generous to his subjects. Rather than suspending taxation to ease famine and the burden of natural disasters, as Akbar had done, Shah Jahan grudgingly passed out a handful of rupees. This policy prompted recurring revolts on the central Deccan plateau, an area inhospitable to agriculture and a never-ending drain on money and manpower for the Great Mughals. Instead of relief efforts, Shah Jahan sent armies, causing additional resentment.

Shah Jahan builds monuments but neglects his subjects

In the early 1640s Shah Jahan began construction of a new capital at Delhi, the seventh and last such city to be built on that site, which he immodestly named Shah Jahanabad (see "François Bernier Comments on Conditions in Delhi"). The city was laid out on an immense scale and included two spectacular building complexes, the Red Fort and the Jama Masjid (*JAH-mah mahs-JĒD*) Mosque. All this construction required enormous sums of money, which Shah Jahan obtained by increasing tax rates by 50 percent. Thus although he left an architectural legacy that dazzles visitors to the present day, he was neither popular nor competent in his own time, and when he fell ill in 1657, his sons saw their opportunity. They intrigued against each other for a year, and in 1658 the winner was the militant orthodox Muslim Aurangzeb (*ore-RAHNG-zebb*), who ruled as Alamgir (*AH-lahm-gēr*) I ("World Conqueror") for 49 years.



The Taj Mahal.

AURANGZEB'S REIGN: REBELLION AND DISUNITY. Aurangzeb's combination of cunning, ruthlessness, piety, and administrative brilliance made him the most formidable of the Great Mughals. Joyless and puritanical, he spent many hours in prayer and ended the extravagant ways of his father, both in architecture and in the harem. He also ended Akbar's policy of tolerance for non-Muslims, increasing their taxes, denying them building permits for temples, and requiring Hindus to pay double taxes for food. Those who protested these harsh measures were trampled by elephants. As taxes increased and starvation threatened, revolts broke out in various parts of the empire.

Aurangzeb reverses Akbar's policy of tolerance

Under Aurangzeb's tyranny, Sikhs in the Punjab transformed their peace-loving faith into an instrument of rebellion and evolved into a militant community, the "army of the pure." All Sikh males were baptized with the surname Singh (*SĪNG*), or "Lion." Sikh men vowed to wear beards and carry sabers for mutual recognition. Easily outnumbering them,

Document 17.2 François Bernier Comments on Conditions in Delhi

François Bernier, a French traveler in India in the mid-seventeenth century, commented upon the suitability of Indian buildings to the tropical climate.

In treating of the beauty of these towns . . . I have sometimes been astonished to hear the contemptuous manner in which Europeans in the Indies speak of [Delhi] and other places. They complain that the buildings are inferior in beauty to those of the Western world, forgetting that different climates require different styles of architecture; that what is useful and proper at Paris, London, or Amsterdam, would be entirely out of place at Delhi; insomuch that if it were possible for any one of those great capitals to change place with the metropolis of the Indies, it would become necessary to throw down the greater part of the city, and to rebuild it on a totally different plan . . .

The heat is so intense in [Delhi] that no one, not even the King, wears stockings; the only cover for the feet being slippers, while the head is protected by a small turban, of the finest and most delicate materials. The other garments are proportionately light. During the summer season, it is scarcely possible to keep the hand on the wall of an apartment, or the head on

a pillow. For more than six successive months, everybody lies in the open air without covering—the common people in the streets, the merchants and persons of condition sometimes in their courts or gardens, and sometimes on their terraces, which are first carefully watered. Now, only suppose the streets of [Paris] transported hither, with their close houses and endless stories; would they be habitable? or would it be possible to sleep in them during the night, when the absence of wind increases the heat almost to suffocation? Suppose one just returned on horseback, half dead with heat and dust, and drenched, as usual, in perspiration; and then imagine the luxury of squeezing up a narrow dark staircase, there to remain almost choked with heat. In the Indies, there is no such troublesome task to perform. You have only to swallow quickly a draught of fresh water, or lemonade; to undress; wash face, hands, and feet, and then immediately drop upon a sofa in some shady place, where one or two servants fan you . . .

SOURCE: François Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire, A.D. 1656–1668*, translated by Archibald Constable (Delhi: S. Chand, 1968) 240–241.

Mughal armies held them off, but the Sikhs retained their hatred for Islamic political authority and remained a dangerous force.

Aurangzeb encountered further opposition from Hindus on the Deccan plateau, where Shivaji Bonsle (*shē-VAH-jē BAHNS-lē*) founded the Hindu **Maratha** (*mah-ruh-TAH*) nationalist movement to resist Mughal rule. Shivaji was a pioneer in **guerrilla warfare**—raids by small roving bands of warriors that aim to disrupt armies rather than defeating them in open battle. He once killed an opposing Muslim general during apparent surrender talks. Irreconcilable to the Mughal Empire, the Marathas' ferocious Hindu nationalism represented exactly the sort of reaction that Akbar's policy of tolerance and respect had been designed to avoid.

Aurangzeb reacted vigorously, realizing that the many different forces arrayed against him were as suspicious of one another as they were of Mughal rule. His armies isolated the Sikhs in the Punjab and plundered the Deccan. By 1700 Aurangzeb had unified India to an extent undreamed of even by Ashoka. But his was a grim victory, costing more than two million lives, wasting tremendous sums of money, and despoiling virtually the entire subcontinent. His armies left behind empty cities and devastated farmlands, dooming central India to famine and disease for years to come.

At enormous cost,
Aurangzeb unifies India

Few mourned Aurangzeb when he died in 1707. His ill-conceived policies had created a vast empire while at the same time impoverishing it, and the opposition his brutality had provoked actually strengthened Indian regionalism and disunity. These developments occurred just as India began to notice the danger posed by visitors from Europe.

Chapter Review

Putting It in Perspective

From the thirteenth through sixteenth centuries, the Islamic world underwent two profound transformations. In the thirteenth it was devastated and divided by Mongol conquests. In the fourteenth, when it seemed to be recovering from these onslaughts, it was hit by a new wave of invaders led by Timur Lenk. Once again the Islamic world was shattered; once again it was rebuilt.

Those who led this second period of rebuilding—the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals—were themselves the descendants of Mongolian and Turkish nomads from Central Asia, and thus relative newcomers to the regions they ruled. With the flexibility of outsiders, they were able to combine cultures, creating hybrid systems that drew from various traditions. Consequently, by the sixteenth century, the realms that their descendants ruled were among the most powerful and prosperous on the planet. But these empires also faced dangers that became apparent in the next century.

One danger came from within. The size, multi-ethnicity, and religious diversity of their domains bred tensions and conflicts that challenged both state and society. Exceptional rulers such as Suleiman and Akbar were able to balance competing interests and treat all subjects fairly, thus maintaining broad support. Other rulers, however, far less talented and tolerant, either sought to impose uniformity by force or withdrew into the pleasures of royal palaces and ignored the needs of their realm. Either way, the results were often mass discontent, and sometimes regional rebellion.

Another threat came from outside. The Europeans, having adopted ideas and technology from

the Chinese and Muslims, were searching for new sea routes to connect the East and West. This largely commercial quest led them to engage the Muslim world in a long and bitter conflict over commerce. It also brought them in contact with some extraordinary empires that had arisen in the Americas, in total isolation from the rest of the world.

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ASK YOURSELF

1. What blended features made Ottoman government and society unique? Why were these features developed?
2. How did the Safavids use Shi'ite Islam as a governing tool in Persia?

- How did the Mughals manage to rule India despite their status as members of a religious minority? What did Akbar do to reconcile his Islamic regime to the Hindu population?
- In what ways did each Islamic empire blend Islamic practices with the cultures of the people under its rule? How were social structures, family, and gender roles influenced by this blending?

GOING FURTHER

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Key Dates and Developments

1206–1397	The Delhi Sultanate
1360–1405	Conquests of Timur Lenk
1389	Battle of Kosovo; Ottoman Rule in the Balkans
1453	Constantinople falls to Mehmed the Conqueror; end of the Byzantine Empire
1501	Shah Ismail proclaims Shi'ism in Safavid Iran
1526	Ottoman victory at Mohaács (Hungary) Battle of Panipat; Mughal Empire begins in India
1529	Suleiman fails to take Vienna
1556–1605	Akbar rules Mughal India
1571	Ottoman fleet defeated at Lepanto
1587–1629	Rule of Shah Abbas in Iran
1605–1707	The Great Mughals in India
1683	King Jan III Sobieski defeats Ottomans at Vienna
1699	Peace of Karlowitz