CHAPTER 21

The Muslim Empires

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The Mongol invasions of the 13th and 14th centuries destroyed theoretical Muslim unity. The Abbasid and many regional dynasties were crushed. Three new Muslim dynasties arose to bring a new flowering to Islamic civilization. The greatest, the Ottoman Empire, reached its peak in the 17th century; to the east, the Safavids ruled in Persia and Afghanistan, and the Mughals ruled much of India. Together the three empires possessed great military and political power; they also produced an artistic and cultural renaissance within Islam. They contributed to the spread of Islam to new regions. All three dynasties originated from Turkic nomadic cultures; each possessed religious fervor and zeal for conversion. They built empires through military conquest based on the effective use of firearms. Each was ruled by an absolute monarch and drew revenues from taxation of agrarian populations. There were differences. The Mughals ruled mostly non-Muslim peoples, the Safavids mostly Muslims, and the Ottomans a mixture of Muslims and Christians. The Safavids were Shi’a Muslims; the others were Sunni.

The Ottomans: From Frontier Warriors to Empire Builders. The Turkic peoples entered Anatolia after the Mongols defeated the Seljuks of eastern Anatolia in the middle of the 13th century. After a period of turmoil, the Ottomans secured dominance. During the 14th and 15th centuries, they moved into the Balkans. In 1453, they captured Constantinople and ended the Byzantine Empire. During the next two centuries, they brought their rule to much of the Middle East, north Africa, and southeastern Europe. Their navy dominated the eastern Mediterranean. Even though the Ottomans failed to capture Vienna in sieges during the 16th and 17th centuries, they continued as a serious threat to western Europe.

A State Geared to Warfare. Military leaders had a dominant role in the Ottoman state, a polity geared to war and expansion. The Turkic horsemen became a warrior aristocracy supported by control of conquered land and peasants. When their power shrank before that of an expanding central bureaucracy, they built up regional power bases. From the middle of the 15th century, imperial armies were dominated by Janissary infantry divisions composed of conscripted youths from conquered lands. Their control of artillery and firearms gave them great power; by the middle of the 16th century, they intervened in dynastic succession disputes.

The Sultans and Their Court. Ottoman rulers survived by playing off the competing factions within their state. The groups included religious and legal scholars. Muslim, Christian, and Jewish merchants were important. The latter two were "peoples of the book" who often were satisfied with the sound administration of their Muslim rulers. As the empire grew, the sultans lost contact with their subjects. A large bureaucracy headed by a vizier had great power in the state. Early rulers and their sons participated in the administration. Vague principles of imperial succession led to protracted strife and weakened the empire.

Constantinople Restored and the Flowering of Ottoman Culture. The imperial capital at Constantinople combined the disparate cultures under Ottoman rule. The new rulers restored the city after 1453; the church of St. Sophia became one of Islam’s grandest mosques. Most sultans tried to add to the city’s splendor: Suleyman the Magnificent built the great Suleymaniye mosque in the 16th century. Constantinople became the commercial center dealing in products
from Asia, Africa, and Europe. Many urban inhabitants belonged to merchant and artisan classes. The government closely regulated both activities. Artisan guilds were very important. By the 17th century, the Turkish language became the preferred vehicle for literature and government. The Ottomans left a significant artistic legacy in poetry, ceramics, carpet manufacturing, and architecture.

The Problem of Ottoman Decline. The empire continued to be vigorous until the late 17th century. By then, the empire was too expensive to be maintained from its available resource base and transport system. As a conquest state, the Ottoman Empire began to decline once acquisition of new territory ceased. The bureaucracy became corrupt, and regional officials used revenues for their own purposes. Oppressed peasants and laborers fled the land or rebelled. Problems at the center of the state added to the decline. Sultans and their sons were confined to the palace; they became weak and indolent rulers managed by court factions. Civil strife increased and military efficiency deteriorated.

Military Reverses and the Ottoman Retreat. The weakening within the empire occurred when outside challenges increased. The conservative Janissaries blocked needed military reform and allowed their state to lose ground to European rivals. The weakness in technology included the imperial navy. A Spanish-Venetian victory at Lepanto in 1571 ended Turkish control of the eastern Mediterranean. By then, Portuguese mariners had outflanked the Muslim world by sailing around Africa into the Indian Ocean. Portuguese naval victories there broke the Muslim dominance over Indian trade. The problems caused by loss of commercial revenues were exacerbated by inflation stimulated by the importation of New World bullion. A few able sultans attempted during the 17th century to counter the empire's decline. The collapse of the Safavids removed an important rival. Still, the major changes occurring within the European world were not matched by the Ottomans. The intense conservatism of the Janissaries and religious leaders blocked Western-inspired innovation.

The Shi'a Challenge of the Safavids. The Safavids also profited from the struggles of rival Turkic groups after Mongol invasions. The Safavids were Shi'a Muslims from a family of Sufi preachers and mystics. In the early 14th century under Saḷ al-Din, they fought to purify and spread Islam among Turkic peoples. After long struggles, in 1501, Ismā'īl seized Tabriz and was proclaimed shah. His followers conquered most of Persia and fought against the Ottomans, who defeated them at the important Battle of Chaldiran in 1514. The loss meant that Shi'ism was blocked from further westward advance.

Each of the three great Muslim dynasties gained power with the support of nomadic warriors. But past conditions had changed. The Battle of Chaldiran demonstrated that firearms were a decisive factor in warfare. Global history had entered a new phase. States used technology to reorganize their land and naval forces, and the changes influenced both social and political development. Once-dominant warrior aristocracies crumbled before governments able to afford expensive weapons. The Chinese scholar-gentry and Japanese shoguns had some success in limiting their effect, but nomads no longer were able to dominate sedentary peoples. Nomadic dynasties similarly declined when confronted by smaller, technologically superior rivals. The efficient use of firearms by European nations was a major factor in their rise to world power.

Politics and War under the Safavid Shahs. Tasmaph I, after a period of turmoil, became shah in 1534 and restored dynastic power. Under Abbas I (1587-1629), the empire reached its zenith.
The rulers brought the Turkic warriors under control; they were assigned villages and peasant labor for support. Some leaders gained important posts in the state and posed a constant threat to the shahs. Persians were recruited into the imperial bureaucracy as a counterbalance. The Safavids, as the Ottomans did, recruited captured slave youths into the army and bureaucracy. They were very important during the reign of Abbas I. They became the backbone of his army and held high civil posts. They monopolized firearm use and received training from European advisors.

**State and Religion.** The Safavids originally wrote in Turkish, but Persian, after Chaldiran, became the language of state. They also adopted elaborate Persian traditions of court etiquette. The initial militant Shi’a ideology was modified as the Safavids drew Persian religious scholars into the bureaucracy. Religious teachers received state support, and teaching in mosque schools was supervised by religious officials. The population of the empire gradually converted to Shi’a Islam, which developed into an integral part of Iranian identity. When the power of the dynasty declined, religious leaders became more independent, but they continued to serve its rulers.

**Elite Affluence and Artistic Splendor.** Abbas I attempted to make his empire a major center of international trade and Islamic culture. Internal transport conditions were improved, and workshops were created for silk textiles and carpets. Iranian merchants were encouraged to trade with other Muslims, Indians, Chinese, and Europeans. Abbas devoted special attention to building projects, especially mosques, in his capital of Isfahan.

**Society and Gender Roles: Ottoman and Safavid Comparisons.** Both dynasties had much in common. They initially were dominated by warrior aristocracies who shared power with the monarch. The warriors gradually left the rulers’ courts for residence on rural estates where they exploited the peasantry. When central power weakened, the result was flight from the land and rebellion. Both empires encouraged the growth of handicraft production and trade. Imperial workshops produced numerous products, and public works employed many artisans. Policies encouraging international trade were followed, although the Safavids were less market-oriented than the Ottomans were. Women endured the social disadvantages common to Islamic regimes. The earlier independence within nomadic society was lost. Women were subordinate to fathers and husbands and had few outlets, especially among the elite, for expression outside of the household.

**The Rapid Demise of the Safavid Empire.** Abbas I, fearing plots, had removed all suitable heirs. The succession of a weak grandson began a process of dynastic decline. Internal strife and foreign invasions shook the state. In 1772, Isfahan fell to Afghani invaders. An adventurer, Nadir Khan Afshar, emerged from the following turmoil as shah in 1736, but his dynasty and its successors were unable to restore imperial authority.

**The Mughals and the Apex of Muslim Civilization in India.** Turkic invaders, led by Babur, invaded India in 1526 after being driven from Afghanistan. They sought booty, not conquest, and remained only when prevented from returning northward. Babur’s forces, using military tactics and technology similar to those of the Ottomans, crushed the Muslim Lodi dynasty at Panipat in 1526 and in 1527 defeated a Hindu confederation at Khanua. Within two years, Babur held much of the Indus and Ganges plains. The first Mughal ruler was a talented warrior who also possessed a taste for art and music, but he was a poor administrator. His sudden death in 1530 brought invasion from surrounding enemies. Babur’s successor, Humayan, fled to
Persia; he led successful return invasions into India that restored control in the North by 1556. He died soon after.

**Akbar and the Basis for a Lasting Empire.** Humayan’s 13-year-old son Akbar succeeded to the throne and immediately had to face pressure from Mughal enemies. Akbar and his advisors defeated them, and the young monarch became a ruler with outstanding military and administrative talent. His armies consolidated Mughal conquests in northern and central India. Akbar advanced a policy of reconciliation with his Hindu subjects; he encouraged intermarriage, abolished head taxes, and respected Hindu religious customs. Hindus rose to high ranks in the administration. Akbar invented a new faith incorporating Muslim and Hindu beliefs to unify his subjects. The Hindu and Muslim warrior aristocracy were granted land and labor for their loyalty. Hindu local notables were left in place if taxes were paid.

**Social Reform and Social Change.** Akbar attempted to introduce social changes that would benefit his subjects. Among them were reforms to regulate the consumption of alcohol. He strove to improve the position of women. Akbar encouraged widow remarriage and discouraged child marriages. He prohibited sati and attempted to break seclusion through creating special market days for women.

**Mughal Splendor and Early European Contacts.** Even though most of his reforms, including the new religion, were not successful, Akbar left a powerful empire at his death in 1605. Not much new territory was added by successors, but the regime reached the peak of its splendor. Most of the population, however, lived in poverty, and India fell behind Europe in invention and the sciences. Still, by the late 17th century, the Mughals ruled over a major commercial and manufacturing empire. Indian cotton textiles were world famous and gained a large market in Europe.

**Artistic Achievement in the Mughal Era.** The 17th-century rulers Jahangir and Shah Jahan continued the policy of tolerance toward Hindus along with most other elements of Akbar’s administration. Both preferred the good life over military adventures. They were important patrons of the arts; they expanded painting workshops for miniatures and built great architectural works, including Shah Jahan’s Taj Mahal, often blending the best in Persian and Hindu traditions.

**Court Politics and the Position of Elite and Ordinary Women.** Jahangir and Shah Jahan left the details of daily administration to subordinates, thus allowing their wives to win influence. Nur Jahan, Jahangir’s wife, dominated the empire for a time through her faction. Mumtaz Mahal, wife of Shah Jahan, also amassed power. While the life of court women improved, the position of women elsewhere in society declined. Child marriage grew more popular, widow remarriage died out, and seclusion for both Muslim and Hindus increased. Sati spread among the upper classes. The lack of opportunity for a productive role and the burden of a dowry meant that the birth of a girl became an inauspicious event.

**The Beginnings of Imperial Decline.** Aurangzeb, Shah Jahan’s successor, inherited a declining empire and was not able to reverse the process. He pushed two disastrous ambitions: to control all of India and to rid Islam of Hindu influences. By 1707, Aurangzeb had conquered most of India, but the warfare had drained the treasury and weakened the bureaucracy and military. The time spent on warfare diverted the rulers’ energies from other vital tasks. Internal revolt and the growing autonomy of local leaders were not dealt with. Aurangzeb’s religious
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TIMELINE

Insert the following events into the timeline. This should help you to compare important historical events chronologically.

Safavid conquest of Persia completed
Babur’s conquest of India
Fall of Constantinople to Ottomans
Nadir Shah proclaimed sultan of Persia
death of Aurangzeb. Mughal decline begins
Ottoman victory at Battle of Chaldiran

___ 1453
___ 1510
___ 1514
___ 1526
___ 1707
___ 1736

TERMS, PEOPLE, EVENTS

The following terms, people, and events are important to your understanding of the chapter. Define each one on a separate sheet of paper.

Aurangzeb
Humayun
Abu Taleb
Taj Mahal
Suleyman the Magnificent
Jahangir
Mumtaz Mahal
Nadir Khan Afshar
Ottomans
padishah
Red Heads
Selim
Shah Abbas the Great
Shi’a
vizier

Jahangir
Akbar
Sunnî
Nur Jahan
Golden Horn
Shah Jahan
Marattas
jizya
Mehmed II
Zoroastrians
Ismâ’il
Gunpowder Empires
imams
shah
Safavid dynasty

Babur
Battle of Lepanto
Din-i-Ilahi
Hagia Sophia
Isfahan
François Bernier
Sikhs
purdah
Janissaries
Abbas II
Chaldiran
Tahmasp I
mullahs
Sail al-Din
Mughal dynasty
MAP EXERCISE

The following exercise is intended to clarify the geophysical environment and the spatial relationships among the important objects and places mentioned in the chapter. Locate the following places on the map:

boundaries of the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal empires

Istanbul  Delhi  Isfahan

1. Of the three empires, which one had direct contacts with the West? What was required for contacts between the other two and the West?

2. How would the growth of Russia affect the three Muslim empires?
MULTIPLE CHOICE. Choose the one alternative that best completes the statement or answers the question.

1. Mehmed I of the Ottoman Empire was responsible for
   
   A) enlarging the empire’s territories to their greatest extent.  
   B) the conquest of Constantinople.  
   C) reunifying the empire following the Timurid invasions.  
   D) the dissolution of the Janissaries.  
   E) defeating the crusaders.

2. What was the principle of succession within the Ottoman Empire?
   
   A) Like earlier Islamic dynasties, the Ottoman Empire lacked a principle of succession.  
   B) Succession within the Ottoman Empire was based on primogeniture.  
   C) Like the early Islamic administration of the Orthodox Caliphs, the successions within the Ottoman Empire were elective.  
   D) Ottoman sultans selected their successors prior to their death and elevated them as co-rulers.  
   E) Selection was a mystical process based on who could prove to be the most spiritual contender.

3. Which of the following was a cause for the decline of the Ottoman Empire?
   
   A) The removal of the Janissaries as an effective military force left the sultans without a powerful counterbalance to the Turkish aristocracy.  
   B) The addition of European military technology, such as light artillery, made the Janissaries so powerful that they could challenge the authority of the sultan.  
   C) The conquest of Constantinople by the Holy Roman Empire in 1663 led to the rapid collapse of the entire empire.  
   D) Oppressive demands of local officials caused the peasantry to abandon their holdings and flee.  
   E) The sultans became increasingly focused on religion and neglected political details.

4. The Safavid family had its origins in the 14th century in a family devoted to what variant of Islam?
   
   A) Sunni  
   B) Ismaili  
   C) Shi‘a  
   D) Sikh  
   E) Sufi
5. Which of the following represents a difference between the Safavid and Ottoman economies?

A) Only the Ottomans sought to encourage artisans and handicraft production.
B) The Safavid market economy was more constricted than that of the Ottomans.
C) Only the Safavid rulers patronized public works projects.
D) The Ottomans alone pursued policies to increase internal and international trade.
E) The Safavids urged a return to a more traditional agrarian economy.

6. The Ottoman Empire halted the advance of Shi’ism and the Safavids at the critical battle of

A) Panipat.
B) Baghdad.
C) Isfahan.
D) Tabriz.
E) Chaldiran.

7. Which of the following is an accomplishment of Babur?

A) He reformed the inefficient Lodi administration of Delhi.
B) He successfully created a new religion that bridged the differences between Hindus and Muslims.
C) He wrote one of the great histories of India.
D) He was responsible for the construction of the Taj Mahal.
E) He wrote statements of religious philosophy that are still read today.

8. Which of the following was NOT one of the social reforms of Akbar?

A) Prostitution was eliminated in his realm.
B) He attempted to eradicate the practice of sati.
C) He encouraged the establishment of special market days for women only.
D) He discouraged child marriages.
E) He encouraged the remarriage of widows.

9. Which of the following was a result of the Ottoman loss of monopoly over the Indian trade?

A) Direct carriage of eastern goods to ports in the West implied loss of revenues in taxes in Muslim trading centers.
B) As a result of the negative balance of trade with the West, bullion flowed out of the Ottoman Empire and caused a decline in prices.
C) All Ottoman trade with the East ceased.
D) The Western nations were able to carve out colonies along the Mediterranean shores of the Ottoman Empire.
E) The Ottoman Empire had enough trading partners that it didn’t notice a great decrease in trade revenue.
10. Which of the following statements concerning the reigns of Jahangir and Shah Jahan is most accurate?

A) During the reigns of these two Mughal rulers, military activity reached its greatest level.
B) India became, in the reign of Akbar’s successors, one of the major overseas centers for European traders.
C) Both emperors continued to press the success of Akbar’s Din-i-Ilahi.
D) Jahangir and Shah Jahan began to institute a series of reforms intended to destroy the power of the Hindus in the Mughal administration.
E) They abandoned the policy of religious toleration.

SHORT ANSWER. Write the word or phrase that best completes each statement or answers the question.

1. By the 1350s, the __________ had advanced from their strongholds in Asia Minor across the Bosporus into Europe.

2. The Ottoman imperial armies were increasingly dominated by troops called __________ men who had been forcibly conscripted as adolescent boys in conquered territories.

3. Day-to-day administration in the Ottoman Empire was carried out by a large bureaucracy headed by a grand __________.

4. Like the Ottomans, the __________ arose from the struggles of rival Turkic groups in the wake of Timurid invasions, but they espoused the Shi’a variant of Islam.

5. Akbar considered his new religion, the __________, which blended elements of many faiths with which he was familiar, as the long-term key to his efforts to reconcile Hindus and Muslims.

6. The Muslim and Hindu warrior aristocracy that formed the core of the supporters of the __________ dynasty were, like their Ottoman and Safavid counterparts, granted villages for their support.

7. Akbar legally prohibited __________, or the immolation of high-caste Hindu women on their husbands’ funeral pyres.

8. Although the later Safavid shahs played down claims to divinity that had been set forth under Ismâ’îl and his predecessors, they continued to claim descent from one of the Shi’a __________, or successors of Ali.

9. __________, who were both local mosque officials and prayer leaders, were also supervised by and given some support from the Safavid state.

10. The victory of __________ led to the reunification of the Ottoman Empire following the temporary setbacks caused by Timur’s invasion.
TRUE/FALSE. Write ‘T’ if the statement is true and ‘F’ if the statement is false.

1. The Ottoman Janissaries were legally slaves, originally recruited from conquered territories as adolescents.

2. The real power of the Ottoman rulers persisted much longer than that of the Abbasids.

3. The later Safavid shahs played down claims to divinity that had been set forth under Ismā’īl and ceased claiming descent from one of the Shi’a imams.

4. The Safavid economy was generally more market-oriented than that of the Ottomans because of their sponsorship of Portuguese trade.

5. The Mughal emperor Akbar promoted Hindus to the highest ranks of his government, ended a longstanding ban on the building of new Hindu temples, and ordered Muslims to respect cows.

6. The rise of new religious sects like the Sikhs in northwest India further strained the declining resources of an imperial system that was clearly overextended.

7. Jahangir’s wife, Nur Jahan, believed that all women should be submissive and confine their activities to the home.

8. The best-known architectural work of the Mughal world was the Hagia Sophia church, which fused the Hindu love of ornament with the Islamic genius for domes and arches.

9. The Mughal ruler Akbar pursued a policy of reconciliation and cooperation with the Hindu princes.

10. In August of 1514, the Ottoman Empire dealt the Safavids a severe setback at the battle of Lepanto.