

Islamic Empires: Ottoman, Safavid, & Mughal

The rise of sea-based powers in Europe is a major theme of the 1450-1750 era, but it is not the only one. Traditional land-based powers continued to dominate the Middle East and Asia, and a new land-based empire - Russia - grew in eastern Europe. In contrast to the new sea-based powers, these empires continued to rely on armies, roads, and inland urban areas to secure their political authority and economic influence. Both sea-based and land-based powers made use of guns, cannon, and muskets to defeat foes without those technologies, making the old nomadic empires - such as the Mongols - a thing of the past. The era after 1450 is often called the age of **Gunpowder Empires** because virtually every powerful state used guns effectively to subjugate their enemies and build their control. Important land-based Gunpowder Empires of the era included Russia, Ming and Qing China, Japan, the Ottoman Empire, the Safavid Empire, and the Mughal Empire. The three latter empires were all Islamic, and together they represent the height of Muslim political and military power in world history. Together with other land-based empires, they countered the growing European global influence, but all three - the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals - were on the decline by 1750, whereas sea-based powers were still on the rise.

THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

Like all three Muslim empires of this era, the Ottoman Empire began as a small warrior state in a frontier inland area. It was named for its founder **Osman**, a leader of a band of semi-nomadic Turks who migrated to northwestern Anatolia in the 13th century. The empire lasted until 1922, but its peak of power came during the 16th century, when it expanded to control land all around the eastern Mediterranean, the Red Sea, and eastward deep into the Middle East. During the 16th century, the Ottomans had designs on much of Europe, and successfully conquered territory in eastern Europe, until they were finally stopped just outside of Vienna.

The Rise of the Ottomans

Before the Ottomans came to control it, Anatolia had long been a stage for conflict among civilizations. During the earliest days, the Hittites had risen from Anatolia to successfully attack the people of Mesopotamia. In the 4th century B.C.E., Alexander the Great had crossed and conquered Anatolia as part of the Persian Empire, and during the classical era the Romans had conquered it, and renamed Byzantium, the city that straddled the Bosphorus, after the emperor Constantine. Constantinople, at the point where Anatolia meets the European mainland, became the capital of the Byzantine Empire, which controlled much of Anatolia until the Seljuk Turks from central Asia came through, only to be challenged by Christian Crusaders from Europe. Although they survived the Crusaders, the Seljuk kingdom fell to the Mongols, who were more interested in areas other than Anatolia, which they raided but did not directly rule. In the chaos, Osman's group came to dominate others, and by the 1350s had advanced across the Bosphorus into Europe. The Ottomans were conquered by Timur, the leader of Jagadai Khanate, but they reunited their areas after Timur's empire fell apart.

As the Ottomans moved into Europe, they bypassed Constantinople, but in 1453 they put the city under a successful siege, and upon its capture, renamed it Istanbul. The city that had been the most important center of Orthodox Christianity became an important Muslim center, and its great church, the Hagia Sophia, constructed by Justinian in the 6th century, became an important mosque, a center for Islamic worship. The Ottomans continued to expand their empire, which reached its height of power under **Suleiman the Magnificent**, who ruled from 1520 to 1566. Suleiman commanded the greatest Ottoman assault against Europe, conquering Belgrade in 1521, laying siege to Vienna in 1529, and retreating only when the onset of winter made it impractical to stay. Had Vienna fallen, some historians speculate that the Ottomans may well have overrun the weak Holy Roman Empire and threatened the budding western states, just as they were beginning their voyages of discovery across the Atlantic. Was the siege of Vienna a turning point in history? Perhaps - it is one of those "what if" events that could have changed the course of history had the outcome been different. As it is, Suleiman was stopped, but the Ottomans remained an important world power that controlled much of the water traffic between the Black and Mediterranean Seas. They reduced Venice to a tributary state, and their huge army continued to expand and defend their frontiers.

Political Characteristics

Clearly military might was the key to Ottoman success, so the sultans not only were political leaders, but military commanders as well. In the empire's early years, its army elites were cavalry leaders who were given land grants as rewards for military service, and by the 16th century, they had developed into a warrior aristocracy. As the empire expanded the sultan and his bureaucracy had practical issues of controlling new lands, so the warrior aristocrats were granted a great deal of control over land and food production in their areas. Eventually some came to challenge the sultan, but their power came to be checked by

the appearance of a new elite military group called **Janissaries**. When the Ottomans conquered the Balkans, they instituted a system known as "**devshirme**" in which they required Christians of the area to contribute young boys to become slaves of the sultan. The boys were specially trained, learned Turkish, and converted to Islam, and then either sent to serve the sultan as bureaucrats or as infantrymen in the army. This group almost certainly never would have been more than a footnote in history except for a fact that the cavalry elite probably took little notice of: they were given guns and heavy artillery. These early firearms were too heavy to be carried by men on horseback, and artillery was best managed by men on foot. The Janissaries were the recipients of the blessings of technology: they came to control the weapons that ensured the Ottomans' continuing military success, and with it came political and economy power. By the time the cavalry recognized the important shift that had taken place, it was too late, and the old aristocrats found themselves out of military power just as economic weaknesses in the empire greatly reduced their incomes from land. By the mid-16th century the Janissaries were so sure of their importance that they expected to have a say in the sultan's decisions, as indeed they did.

The Ottoman sultans presided over large bureaucracies which, after 1453, were centered in Istanbul. The sultan was aided by a **vizier**, the head of the imperial administration that took care of the day to day work of the empire. Early sultans, including Suleiman, took an active part in directing the government and often led the armies personally. However, as time went by, the viziers gained more political power than the sultans, and the central government was increasingly challenged by the Janissaries, the fading cavalry leaders, and Islamic religious scholars who retained the same administrative functions as religious scholars had during the days of the caliphate. Like the caliphates before them, the Ottomans were plagued by problems of succession when a sultan died. Steppe traditions from their central Asian nomadic roots also involved family disputes over leadership roles. Since the principles of hereditary rule were vague, the death of a sultan often led to arguments and court intrigue regarding his successor, and it was quite common for his numerous sons to go to war with one another.

Economic Challenges

With its many conquered lands and control of the Black and Mediterranean Seas, the Ottoman Empire of the 16th century was one of the wealthiest in the world. Istanbul, like Constantinople before it, was one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the world, with many trade route circuits passing through it and people of many different backgrounds and occupations inhabiting it. It was the primary Ottoman seaport, and its famous harbor teemed with trading vessels from ports both distant and near. The city and its suburbs stretched along both sides of the Bosphorus, and its great bazaars were filled with merchandise from around the world. However, an economic decline set in gradually, beginning in the mid-17th century. One important reason for the decline is that the empire had probably reached the limits of expansion by then. As had happened with many other large empires in world history, the Ottoman Empire was too large to be maintained, especially with the slow pace of overland transportation and communications available to land-based powers. One indication that the central government could not control local governments was increasing corruption among local government officials, who were taxing peasants heavily but pocketing much of the tax revenue. Peasant revolts resulted from dissatisfaction with these officials, deepening the political and economic problems. Succession issues also led to holding the sultan's sons as hostages in the palace to prevent coups, leading to sheltered, pleasure-loving, generally less competent rulers. Another issue was created by the increasing demands of the Janissaries, not only for political power, but for higher salaries as well. To pay the Janissaries, the sultan started reducing the number of landholding cavalymen, causing unrest among displaced cavalymen.

A negative global impact on the Ottoman economy was inflation caused by the increasing amount of New World silver being pumped into the world economy. European traders who controlled the silver could buy more goods with the same quantity of silver than the Ottomans could because the sultan's government collected taxes according to legally fixed rates, so as the value of the silver declined, tax revenues stayed the same. As a result, the Ottomans were at a disadvantage when trading in the world market because religious law limited the government's ability to reform tax laws, and when bureaucrats came up with special surtaxes, they were often met with resistance from many who were already suffering from the spiraling economic problems.

Cultural and Social Characteristics

The majority of people in the Ottoman Empire were Sunni Muslim, but expansion into Europe, the Caucasus, and Egypt meant that large numbers of Christians and Jews were also subject to the sultan's rule. The most cosmopolitan place was Istanbul, where the crossroads of trade led many people from other parts of the world to settle. The sultans supported public works projects, particularly in Istanbul, and they invited religious scholars, artists, poets, and architects to the royal palace. A goal of early sultans was to restore the city to its former glories, and many beautiful palaces, religious schools, hospitals, and mosques were built. The Hagia Sophia was restored as a mosque, aqueducts were built, and the city's walls were repaired. The most spectacular building was the Suleymaniye Mosque constructed under the supervision of Suleiman the Magnificent, with impressive domes that make it one of the great engineering feats of Islamic civilization.

The Ottoman social structure included a large number of merchants and artisans who lived in the empire's urban areas. Artisans were organized into guilds, just as their counterparts in Europe had been, and craft standards were generally high, especially since guild activities were much more closely supervised by the government than they were in Europe.

The influence of Islamic clerics is apparent in the success they had in insulating the empire from new cultural and technological developments in Europe. Europeans who visited Istanbul or other Ottoman cities often wrote journals about their travel experiences, but no comparable journals have been found for Ottomans visiting Europe. Generally, they still saw European societies as backward and marginal, and their own civilization as infinitely superior. This attitude kept them from understanding the tremendous changes that Europe was bringing to the world. For example, the European printing press was brought to Istanbul by Jews who had been expelled from Spain, but they were not allowed to print anything in Turkish or Arabic, the languages of the majority of Ottomans. As a result, the empire was virtually untouched by the impact of the print revolution on literacy and innovation in Europe and other areas of the world.

The changing in the balance of power between Europe and the Middle East during this era is illustrated by the loss of Ottoman control of the Mediterranean Sea, once known as the "Ottoman Lake." The empire lost a famous sea battle at Lepanto to Philip II of Spain in 1571, and although the Ottoman fleet was rebuilt within a year, control of the Mediterranean was never regained. The Ottomans and their Muslim allies also lost control of many ports along the Indian Ocean basin as the Portuguese gained much of the lucrative trade once reserved for them.

THE SAFAVID EMPIRE

Like the Ottomans, the Safavid Empire grew from a Turkish nomadic group from a frontier area. However, unlike the Ottomans, the Safavids were Shi'ite, not Sunni Muslim. The division originated after the religion's founder, Muhammad, died without a designated heir, a significant problem since his armies had conquered many lands. The Sunnis favored choosing the caliph (leader) from the accepted leadership (the Sunni), but the Shi'ites argued that the mantle should be hereditary, and should pass to Muhammad's son-in-law, Ali. When Ali was killed in the dispute, the Shi'ite opinion became a minority one, but they kept their separate identity, and carried the belief that the true heirs of Islam were the descendants of Ali. These heirs, called imams, continued until the 9th century, when the 12th descendant disappeared as a child, only to become known as the "Hidden Imam." Until the Safavids, these Shi'ite beliefs did not have a united political base, but in the early 16th century, an army emerged under Ismail, who united a large area south of the Caspian Sea and west of the Ottoman Empire. Ismail declared the official religion of his new Safavid realm - named after a Sufi mystic called Safi al-Din - to be Twelver Shi'ism, based on the legacy of the Hidden Imam.

As the Safavid Empire expanded during the early 16th century, it began to challenge the borders of the neighboring Ottomans. Hostility between the groups was strong, intensified by the Shi'ite/Sunni split, with the Ottomans very wary of this new Shi'ite empire. In 1514 the two armies met at Chaldiran in Northwest Persia, and there is little doubt that religious conflict was at the heart of the struggle. The battle was also important because it illustrated the importance of the new gunpowder technology. Ismail sent his best cavalry, the qizilbash ("redheads," for their distinctive turbans), armed with swords and knives, to fight the Ottoman Janissaries, with their cannon and muskets. The Safavid cavalry was slaughtered, and the Ottomans won a decisive victory, one that they were unable to follow up because of the approaching winter. The Safavids recovered, built up their artillery, and continued to fight the Ottomans for another two centuries without either side winning decisively. The battle at Chaldiran was a significant "marker event" in the development of the Islamic world because it set the limits for Shi'ite expansion, with consequences still apparent today. The modern inheritors of the Safavid Empire are Iran and parts of Iraq, Shi'ite nations in the midst of predominantly Sunni countries around them. Modern conflicts between Shi'ites and Sunnis in Iraq trace their way back to Chaldiran, and to the ancient 7th-century split between Ali and his foes.

The Safavids reached the peak of their power under Shah Abbas I, who ruled from 1588 to 1629. In a similar move to the Ottoman seizure of Christian boys in the Baltic States to become Janissaries, under Abbas' direction, boys in Russia were captured, educated, and converted to Islam to become soldiers. These so-called "slave infantrymen" were trained to use firearms, and their control of this new technology gave them increasing power at the expense of the traditional qizilbash. Abbas understood the importance of European technological knowledge, and he brought in European advisors to assist him in his wars with the Ottomans. He learned from them how to cast better cannon and make good military use of muskets, but his emphasis remained on building land-based power. His army swelled in size and efficiency, but no Safavid navy was built, and the capital city at Isfahan was far inland, away from the sea-based trade that was transforming the world.

Politics and Religion

As in the Ottoman Empire, Safavid rulers based their authority on military prowess and religious piety. The Safavids traced their origins to a Sufi religious order that rulers promoted throughout the 16th and 17th centuries. The expansion of the empire was seen as an extension of Islam to new lands, and as the shahs faced the Ottomans, they saw themselves as the champions of Shi'ism. The Safavids, like the Ottomans, saw the Europeans as infidels, but they also believed that defeating the Sunnis was an important act of faith.

Ancient Persian traditions shaped the Safavid political system, with the shahs taking grand titles, such as "king of kings," "the great king," and "king of countries." Their palaces were sumptuous, and court life was highly ritualized. Ismail allowed suggestions that he himself was the Hidden Imam, and even that he was an incarnation of Allah. Although later leaders did not make such claims, they still saw themselves as exalted far above the status of the local Turkish chiefs, and a great deal of the legitimacy of the regime lay in the belief that the shahs were the keepers of Shi'ism. Mullahs, or local mosque officials and prayer leaders, were supervised and supported by the state, which gave the government the upper hand.

Economic and Social Organization

Tension between Persian and Turkish culture shaped the Safavid social structure. Turkish chiefs challenged the early shahs, who were often vulnerable because of family infighting over succession rights. The chiefs were gradually transformed into a warrior nobility very similar to the cavalry elite in the Ottoman Empire. They supervised local farm work in the regions where they lived and asserted political power as well, with some capturing powerful positions in the imperial bureaucracy. To counter their power the shahs appointed Persians to fill other bureaucratic positions, and they also gave authority to the "slave infantrymen."

The shahs generally promoted trade, with Abbas I setting up his capital at Isfahan as a major center of international trade, complete with a network of roads and workshops to manufacture textiles and the Persian rugs that the Safavids were famous for. However, Isfahan was far inland, and so visitors and merchants from other areas were much less numerous than they were in Istanbul, although Abbas brought in Jews, Hindus, and Armenian Christians to handle outside trade. Guilds organized the merchants as they did in Istanbul, and silk production and trade was a major industry. However, the manufacture of deep pile carpets became their signature business, and the knotted rugs were highly valued within the empire as well as elsewhere. Despite the economic activity, Isfahan was far from cosmopolitan, the Armenians were kept in a suburb across the river from the city's center, and most people that lived in Isfahan were Shi'ites. Most of the empire's people lived in rural areas, doing the same kind of farm work that their ancestors had engaged in. In these areas, many nomadic groups continued to live as well, with chiefs that had little interest in building the agricultural economy. Like the Ottomans, the Safavids were negatively impacted by the inflation caused by the flood of silver into the world trade networks, making it difficult for the government to pay the army and bureaucracy.

Cultural influences in the Safavid Empire were a complex mixture of Turkish and Persian traditions, but even before Shah Ismail imposed Shi'ism on his subjects, the area had a distinctive culture based on that of ancient Persia. Islamic scholars often knew both the Arabic and Persian languages, but Iranian scholars were more likely to use Persian, and their counterparts in other Islamic lands were more likely to read and write in Arabic. Persian had been written in the Arabic script from the 10th century onward, but a wealth of cultural traditions - including poetry, history, drama, and fiction - kept Persian identity strong. Gradually the area around Baghdad (modern day Iraq) became a separating area between Arabic and Persian culture, so that clear differences in culture could be seen by the time the Mongols invaded. When Ismail recreated Iran as a Shi'ite state, the religion reinforced cultural differences that were already in place. For example, the architecture of mosques in Isfahan stood in clear contrast to those in Istanbul. Whereas both styles relied heavily on domes with tall prayer towers surrounding the main structures, the domes in Isfahan were decorated in brightly colored floral patterns that greatly resembled Persian carpets. In contrast the domes in Istanbul were noted for their massive simplicity. Calligraphy styles in the two areas were almost completely different as well.

Another important characteristic of Safavid culture was the blending of Sufi mysticism with militant political objectives. Sufism had long been a branch of Islam, and Sufi mystics could be found in most Islamic cultures. However, the Safavids traced their ancestry back to Safi al-Din, the leader of a Sufi religious order in northwestern Persia, so the empire was literally founded on Sufi beliefs. Ismail deployed his armies to spread Shi'ism with an emphasis on mystic union with God in the style of the Sufis. However, once Shi'ism was established, later Safavid shahs banned all Sufi orders from the empire, although Sufism continued to thrive anyway.

Like the Ottoman Empire, the Safavid Empire gradually lost its vigor, but unlike the Ottomans, it collapsed entirely in the 1720s under Turkish and Afghani attack, a victim of Islamic infighting, as well as the ever-growing dominance of sea-based powers that left the great Islamic land-based empires greatly weakened by the mid-18th century.

THE MUGHAL EMPIRE

In 1450 much of the Indian subcontinent was tenuously controlled by the Delhi Sultanate that had begun in the early 13th century when an Afghan Turkish leader conquered Delhi and declared himself to be the Sultan of Delhi. By 1450 the old tendency for political units to fragment regionally was clearly present, compounded by the difficulty of integrating the Turkish warlords into a single, stable state. The Muslim leaders presided over a population that remained primarily Hindu, creating religious frictions that have continued to the present day. In 1523 India was attacked again, this time by **Babur** - a descendant of Timur and Genghis Khan - who founded the **Mughal Empire** in 1526, a mixture of Mongol and Turkish peoples from central Asia. The empire dominated India until the early 1700s, although it continued to rule in name until 1858. Babur's invasion of India was motivated by the loss of his ancestral homeland in central Asia through intertribal warfare and probably by his dreams of living up to the reputations of his illustrious ancestors. His military strategies, including one that caused his opponent's elephants to stampede, were responsible for his success in capturing Delhi. His family's control was challenged after his death, and despite losing control of Delhi for several years, his son Humayan eventually recaptured northern India, and the empire expanded to control much of the subcontinent under his remarkable grandson, **Akbar**, who ruled from 1556 to 1605. It was under Akbar that the empire reached its height in power and influence, although its borders continued to grow until the early 18th century.

Political Characteristics

Like the Ottomans and Safavids, the Mughals were autocratic rulers who based a great deal of their power on military might and religious authority. Like the Safavids, the Mughals had no navy, so all of their military power was based on their army. Religious ideals required the spreading of Islam by fighting infidels, who to Mughal leaders were the Hindus. Some Mughal leaders, such as Akbar, were more tolerant of Hinduism than others, but the responsibility of Mughal rulers to Islam was always clear. Like the Ottomans and Safavids, Mughal princes fought with one another to become heir to the throne, so political instability caused by family controversies always threatened the empire.

An important move taken by Akbar to alleviate tensions between Muslims and Hindus was the incorporation of many Hindu rajas, or regional leaders, into the highest positions of the military and the bureaucracy. He pursued a policy of cooperation with the rajas and encouraged intermarriage between the Mughal aristocracy and the families of the Hindu rajas, and he abolished the *jizra*, or head tax, that all non-Muslims paid. He ended a ban on the building of new Hindu temples, and ordered Muslims to respect cows, which Hindus considered to be sacred. He built a strong bureaucracy modeled on a military hierarchy for collecting taxes. Each region of India was surveyed and evaluated by government officials, and tax rates were based on the region's potential for wealth. In most areas local officials, most of whom were Hindu, were allowed to keep their positions as long as they swore allegiance to the Mughal rulers and paid their taxes, so a great deal of power was left in the hands of local rulers. Akbar's reforms that encouraged cooperation between Muslims and Hindus lasted through the reigns of his successors until his great-grandson Aurangzeb, a devout Muslim, reinstated many restrictions on Hindus in the late 17th century.

Economic and Social Characteristics

As in the Ottoman and Safavid Empires, the government granted land revenue to military officers and government officials in return for their service. Many grew wealthy through revenue from various economic activities on their land grants, such as farming and trade, and the taxes they collected filled the coffers of the central government as well. As the Mughals conquered more and more territory, they came to control commercial networks based on cotton, indigo, and silk. By the late 17th century, trade with Europeans was brisk, with much of it taking place overland through trade cities such as Surat in the northwest. Since the Mughals had no navy, Indian merchant ships were privately owned, and many Indian goods that went into the Indian Ocean trade circuit were transported on English and Dutch vessels. Europeans brought trade goods from throughout Asia to exchange for Indian cotton cloth and clothing. India's cotton products had been highly valued since classical times, and demand for them grew in Europe, first among the lower and middle classes because they washed so easily, and eventually to the courts of royalty.

The Mughal Empire, like the Ottoman and Safavid empires, was a patriarchy, with unequal societal and economic roles for men and women. However, the wives of rulers often played key political roles in all three empires. For example, Suleiman the Magnificent's favorite wife, Hurrem, had a great deal of influence over her husband's political decisions. Harem intrigue was a common theme, but Hurrem's power was evident in her ability to convince Suleiman to execute his eldest son so that her own son could succeed to the throne. The political influence of one Safavid ruler's wife so enraged the *qizilbash* that they murdered

her. In the Mughal Empire the classic example is Mumtaz Mahal, the wife of Shah Jahan, who amassed a great deal of power behind the throne, as well as her husband's devotion. When she died the shah immortalized their love by building the **Taj Mahal**, a building of breathtaking beauty built of white marble inlaid with precious stones. The Shah planned to build his own monument of black marble nearby to complement it, but he was imprisoned by his sons in a family struggle for succession to the throne, and his plans could not be completed. Instead, he is buried beside his wife in the Taj Mahal, and his tomb is much less impressive than that of his wife.

Despite the power of rulers' wives and concubines, the status of women in the rest of Indian society remained low. Child marriage was common, with brides as young as nine, and the Hindu practice of **sati**, or the suicide of widows by jumping into their husband's funeral pyres, spread, even though Akbar and Shah Jahan outlawed it. As in many other patriarchal societies, seclusion called **pardah** - was more strictly enforced for upper class women, who did not venture outside their homes unescorted. Muslim women were always veiled when they left their homes.

Cultural Characteristics

As in the earlier Delhi Sultanate, the conflicts between Muslim and Hindu religious beliefs permeated Indian life during the Mughal Dynasty. Akbar's many attempts to reconcile the two were capped by his invention of a new "**Divine Faith**" that combined Muslim, Hindu, Zoroastrian, Christian, and Sikh beliefs. His hope was that it would not only unite the many religious groups in his realm, but would also cement loyalty to the emperor. The religion did not outlive him, and it was clear by the time of his death that this effort would fail.

Akbar's "Divine Faith" was not the first attempt to blend Islamic and Hindu beliefs. Even before Babur invaded India, **Nanuk** (1469-1539) stressed meditation as a means of seeking enlightenment and drew upon both religions in his teachings. He became the first **guru** (religious leader) of a new religion called **Sikhism**. Nanuk developed a following of people who formed a community free of caste distinctions, and he at first tried to reconcile Hinduism and Islam. However, the religious fervor of the Mughal Shah Aurangzeb, a devout Muslim, changed the nature of Sikhism when he ordered the ninth guru beheaded in 1675 because he refused to convert to Islam. The tenth guru vowed to avenge his father's death, and he led an "**army of the pure**" to challenge the Mughal army and to assert Sikh beliefs aggressively. Sikhs reflected their devotion to their beliefs through outward signs, such as leaving their hair uncut beneath their turbans, and carrying symbols of their faith: a comb, a steel bracelet, and a sword or dagger. Sikh rebellions combined with other upheaval of the 18th century to seriously weaken the Mughal regime.

The two shahs that followed Akbar - Jahangir and Shah Jahan - kept most reforms in place, but they had less interest in military conquests and politics than their predecessor. However, they both followed Akbar's example as patrons of fine arts. A particular art form of the day that they promoted was the painting of exquisite miniatures, most depicting scenes of life at court, important battles and events, and animals and plants. All the Mughal leaders built many public buildings, including mosques, tombs, schools, palaces, and government buildings. The architecture was a distinctive blend of Persian and Hindu influences, with the domes, arches, and minarets characteristic of Islamic tradition, and the detail and lavish ornamentation that Hindus like. Whereas the Persians used ceramic tiles to finish their buildings, the Indian style was to ornament them with white marble and inset with semiprecious stones in lavish patterns. The most famous example is the Taj Mahal, and the reflecting pools that surround it. The Mughal love for magnificent architecture is no better illustrated than by **Fatehpur Sikri**, Akbar's entirely new capital city. Although it was abandoned after his death, its beauty was famous throughout the Muslim world. The court library contained the largest collection of books in the world, and Akbar invited scholars of all religions from throughout Asia to come to his city as teachers and students. Although he was illiterate, Akbar loved to have books read to him, and he cultivated the use of the official Persian language in Indian literature. Akbar's reputation as an important Indian leader is based partly on his ability to revive the sense of political and cultural unity that the subcontinent had not had since the Gupta era.