

CHAPTER 27-THE ISLAMIC EMPIRES

In 1289, Osman Bey led Muslim religious warriors (ghazi) and began to conquer the Byzantine Empire. Using gunpowder, effective tactics, and the Janissaries (slave troops who later became a very formidable force), he moved into the Balkans, forming the empire named after him, The Ottoman Empire. In 1453, Mehmed the Conquer (r. 1451–1481) finally captured Constantinople and established an absolute centralized state that covered the eastern Mediterranean. Suleyman the Magnificent (r. 1520–1566) expanded the empire into Europe, laid siege to Vienna, and built a fleet that rivaled the Europeans.

To the east was the Safavid Empire. The Turkic peoples followed Shah Ismail (r. 1501-1524) and established a Shiite government over the Sunni population. The clash between the Ottoman Sunnis and the Safavid Shiites came at the Battle of Chaldiran in 1514 where the Safavids were defeated by the Ottomans. Shah Abbas the Great (r. 1588–1629) brought the empire back and tried to form alliances with European powers against the Ottomans.

In India, Babur, who came from central Asia, founded the Mughal (“Mongol”) dynasty after invading India and seizing Delhi in 1526. By his death in 1530 most of India was under Mughal control. His grandson Akbar created an absolutist government, expanded the empire, and encouraged tolerance between Muslims and Hindus. Akbar’s great-grandson Aurangzeb expanded the empire to its greatest extent but, unlike Akbar, he taxed Hindus, and during his rule he had problems with religious tensions.

All three of these empires had much in common. They were all created with military power and the power of the ruler came from his military ability. They encouraged devotion to Islam. They were all autocratic, but there were many problems arising from the fact there was no established succession. All three were based in agriculture, especially wheat and rice, where the population growth was the most dramatic in the Mughal Empire with its emphasis on food. In terms of trade, the Ottomans and the Safavids established extensive relations with the Europeans while the Mughals less so, permitting only small trade stations for the English, French, and Dutch. Another constant was patronage of the arts and public works such as mosques, schools, and hospitals.

A common theme among these three empires was consistent religious tolerance. The mix of religions in these empires created a challenge for the various rulers. Akbar tried to create a syncretic faith and Aurangzeb taxed the Hindus. But in most cases, various religions were tolerated.

As in other cases, all three of these empires declined for various reasons. Corrupt officials, bad rulers, and religious tensions all created problems. There was also economic and military decline. The end of expansion meant an economic slow-down, long costly wars, and a failure to keep up with trade and industry also hurt the economies. The empires also failed to keep up with the changes in military technology. The conservatives in the empires also resisted western science and technology, including the telescope and the printing press.

Key Concept 4.1. Globalizing Networks of Communication and Exchange

- VI. The increase in interactions between newly connected hemispheres and intensification of connections within hemispheres expanded the spread and reform of existing religions and created syncretic belief systems and practices.

Key Concept 4.2. New Forms of Social Organization and Modes of Production

- II. As new social and political elites changed, they also restructured new ethnic, racial and gender hierarchies.

Key Concept 4.3. State Consolidation and Imperial Expansion

- I. Rulers used a variety of methods to legitimize and consolidate their power.
- II. Imperial expansion relied on the increased use of gunpowder, cannons and armed trade to establish large empires in both hemispheres.