

## THE RISE OF THE OTTOMANS

By 1300, the Mongols had ended the power of the Seljuk Turks, who in turn had repeatedly chipped away at the territory of the Byzantine empire. As the physical size of Byzantium began to shrink, its power steadily eroded as well.

Anatolia was settled by nomadic Turkish tribes who were not unified under a central authority. Many of these Anatolian Turks sought to become warriors for Islam, or **ghazi**. In their zeal to conquer the territories of infidels, or non-Muslims, they targeted their raids on those who lived along the borders of the Byzantine empire. One of the most noteworthy of the ghazi was **Osman Bey**, who ruled the Ottoman dynasty from 1281 to about 1326. ("Ottoman" is derived from "Osman.") Osman's dynasty would rule in unbroken succession from 1289 until 1923. He and his successors formed alliances with other **emir**, or Muslim rulers, and engaged in one conquest after another. In 1326, they conquered the Anatolian city of Bursa, which became their capital. In 1361, the Ottomans added a second capital, Adrianople, which gained them a secure foothold in the **Balkans**.

The Ottomans owed their military success to their use of gunpowder and cannon. After they had conquered a group of people, they appointed local officials approved by their ruler, the sultan, to govern them. Most Muslims were required to serve in the Turkish army. Non-Muslims could be exempt from military service upon payment of a tax.

### Tamerlane

While the Ottomans were quickly rising to power, a rebellious warrior from Samarkand in central Asia came onto the scene in the early 15th century. Called Timur-i-Lang, or Timur the Lame, the Europeans dubbed him **Tamerlane**. Claiming descent from Chinggis Khan, Tamerlane set about conquering Russia and Persia. He burned the city of Baghdad to the ground, and in 1378 moved through northern India, leaving a path of death and destruction. While in India, he massacred the population of Delhi, making a pyramid of their skulls. At the Battle of Ankara in 1402, Tamerlane crushed the Ottomans, effectively halting the expansion of the Ottoman empire. He then took the sultan back to Samarkand in an iron cage; there, the sultan died in captivity.

### The Conquest of Constantinople

When Tamerlane turned his attention to China, a power struggle ensued. After a civil war among the sons of the Ottoman sultan, Mehmet I took the Ottoman throne. His son, Murad II, restored the power of the Ottoman army. **Mehmet II**, son of Murad II, captured Constantinople in 1453, giving the Ottomans control of the **Bosporus Strait**. Marching to Hagia Sophia, Mehmet declared the church a mosque. He then opened the city of Constantinople to new citizens of various religions and backgrounds. People from these varied backgrounds helped rebuild the city of Constantinople, which was renamed Istanbul.

### The Expansion of the Ottoman Empire

Another effective sultan was **Selim the Grim**, who came to power by murdering family members, including his own father and sons. In 1514, at the Battle of Chaldiran, Selim defeated the Persians, afterwards sweeping into Syria, Palestine, and North Africa and adding these areas to his empire. He continued by capturing the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. Upon taking Cairo, the Islamic world's intellectual center, Egypt became part of the Ottoman empire.

The Ottoman empire reached its greatest height under the rule of **Suleiman I**, who reigned from 1520 to 1566. Called Suleiman the Lawgiver by his subjects, he was known to the Europeans as Suleiman the Magnificent.

He expanded the Ottoman empire by conquering Baghdad in 1534 and the city of Belgrade in 1521 and advancing into Hungarian and Austrian territory. In 1529, he briefly laid siege to Vienna; his failure to conquer Vienna ended Ottoman hopes of expansion into Europe. The Ottomans also became a major naval power, capturing Tripoli and other areas along the North African coastline; through these conquests, they gained influence in the interior of Africa.

## Ottoman Administration

The Ottomans would rule their empire for 600 years, during which they would build up an extensive bureaucracy, using slave labor to further their control. Included among the sultan's slaves were **janissaries**, or slaves taken from the people of conquered Christian territories. Under a policy called **devshirme**, the Ottoman sultan's army removed boys from their families, gave them an education, taught them the principles of Islam, and then trained them for military service. The brightest and most capable janissaries could rise to prestigious posts in the government. Non-Muslim girls were also taken from their families, but to become slaves in wealthy homes.

The Ottomans granted religious freedom to their subjects. Jews and Christians, as "people of the book," were allowed to pursue their own religious beliefs and practices. Their status as **millets**, or nations, allowed them a representative who served as a voice before the sultan and his bureaucrats. This arrangement promoted fairly peaceful relations between the sultan and his subjects, but did little to promote unity among the variety of ethnic and religious groups in the Ottoman empire—a problem that would continue into the modern era.

## THE SAFAVID EMPIRE

Discord within **Dar al-Islam** emerged with the creation of the Safavid empire. Named after their first ruler, Safi al-Din (1252–1334), the Safavids were originally members of the Sufi sect in northwestern Persia. Claiming they were descended from Muhammad, the Safavids adopted the Shia branch of Islam. The Safavids were subsequently persecuted by the Ottomans, who followed the Sunni form of the Islamic faith.

Believing that a powerful military was their best defense against the Ottomans, the Safavids set about strengthening their army. Their foremost military leader, a 14-year-old named **Ismail**, would seize most of present-day Iran and adopt the Persian title *shah*. The Ottoman Turks, fearing that the Safavids might alienate some of their own followers, ordered the execution of Shia Muslims within the Ottoman empire, while Ismail wiped out the Sunni in Baghdad. Facing off against each other at the Battle of Chaldiran in 1514, the Ottomans and their artillery weakened the Safavids, but did not defeat them completely. The conflict between Ottomans and Safavids would continue for another 200 years.

## The Rule of Shah Abbas

In spite of the animosity between Ottomans and Safavids, Shah **Abbas the Great** (reigned 1587–1629) created a culture that blended the Persian tradition with that of the Ottomans and Arabs. Among the accomplishments of Shah Abbas were moving the Safavid capital to the more centrally located Isfahan, and incorporating into his army royal slaves similar to the Ottoman janissaries. He also formed trade and political relationships with European countries, using these alliances to contain both the Ottomans and the Portuguese in Southwest Asia. In a further effort to promote cultural blending, Shah Abbas called in Chinese artisans to contribute their expertise to the design of architectural structures in Isfahan. Organized largely along the lines of the Ottoman empire, the Safavids expanded their territory to include the Caucasus area and much of Mesopotamia.

## THE MUGHAL EMPIRE

After Shah Abbas assassinated or incapacitated his most promising sons, the Safavid empire was left in the hands of weak rulers who fell to the armies of Afghanistan in 1722. To the east, however, another Islamic empire had risen, this time in northern India. After the fall of the Gupta empire, India had been invaded by both Arabs and Muslims from central Asia, who had divided the subcontinent into a number of tiny kingdoms under the control of rulers called **Rajputs**, or Rajahs.

The Muslim invasion of India was especially devastating to Hindus. Around the year 1000, Turkish armies moved into India, destroying cities and Hindu temples. The weakened subcontinent was brought into some degree of organization when Delhi became the capital of a loosely unified Turkish empire called the **Delhi Sultanate**. The Hindus, however, continued to be oppressed, creating the source of future conflict between Muslims and Hindus in India.

### The Rule of Babur

After Tamerlane's annihilation of Delhi in 1398, Indian unification was not realized until 1526 with the reign of **Babur**, a Turk from central Asia. Claiming that he was descended from both Chingghis Khan and Tamerlane, Babur eventually created an army that would conquer India and provide the basis for the Mughal, or "Mongol" empire.

### The Golden Age Under Akbar

The golden age of Mughal power would be realized under the rule of Babur's grandson Akbar (reigned 1556–1605). By outfitting his army with heavy artillery, Akbar was able to consolidate his rule of Gujarat and Bengal. Akbar, a Muslim, tolerated a variety of religions within his realm and permitted both Hindus and Muslims to rise to prominent governmental positions. In a further effort to unite his people, Akbar imposed a system of graduated taxes that were affordable even to poorer subjects.

Akbar's policy of blending the cultures of India extended to language usage. Persian served as the language of Akbar's government and of high society. Commoners spoke **Hindi**, a local language which is still widely spoken in India today. A new language called **Urdu** emerged from the cultural blend of soldiers in the Mughal armies; a blend of Persian literary forms and Arabic characters, Urdu is the official language of Pakistan today.

### Division Under Aurangzeb

The extent of the Mughal empire reached its height under **Aurangzeb** (reigned 1658–1707), who widened his rule to include the entire subcontinent except for a small area at its southern tip. Aurangzeb also sowed the seeds of future discord in his empire by abandoning the tolerant policies of Akbar. By taxing Hindus and destroying their temples and rebuilding them as mosques, he garnered the hatred of the Hindus for generations to come.

Another group angered by the policies of Aurangzeb were the **Sikhs**. Once a nonviolent people whose philosophy blended Hinduism and Islam, the Sikhs responded to the policies of Aurangzeb by forming a militant union and devoted themselves to building a state in the Punjab, an area in northwest India.