CHAPTER 21 - SOUTHWEST ASIA AND THE INDIAN OCEAN, 1500–1750

I. The Ottoman Empire, to 1750
   A. Expansion and Frontiers
      1. Osman established the Ottoman Empire in northwestern Anatolia in 1300. He and his successors consolidated control over Anatolia, fought Christian enemies in Greece and in the Balkans, captured Serbia and the Byzantine capital of Constantinople, and established a general border with Iran.
      2. Egypt and Syria were added to the empire in 1516–1517, and the major port cities of Algeria and Tunis voluntarily joined the Ottoman Empire in the early sixteenth century. Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent (r. 1520–1566) conquered Belgrade (1521) and Rhodes (1522) and laid siege to Vienna (1529), but withdrew with the onset of winter.
      3. The Ottoman Empire fought with Venice for two centuries as it attempted to exert its control over the Mediterranean. The Ottomans forced the Venetians to pay tribute but continued to allow them to trade.
      4. Muslim merchants in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean requested Ottoman naval support against the Portuguese. The Ottomans responded vigorously to Portuguese threats against nearby ports such as Aden, but saw no reason to commit much effort to the defense of non-Ottoman Muslim merchants in the Indian Ocean.
   B. Central Institutions
      1. The original Ottoman military forces of mounted warriors armed with bows were supplemented in the late fourteenth century when the Ottomans formed captured Balkan Christian men into a force called the “new troops” (Janissaries), who fought on foot and were armed with guns. In the early fifteenth century the Ottomans began to recruit men for the Janissaries and for positions in the bureaucracy through the system called *devshirme*—a levy on male Christian children.
      2. The Ottoman Empire was a cosmopolitan society in which the Osmanli-speaking, tax-exempt military class (*askeri*) served the sultan as soldiers and bureaucrats. The common people—Christians, Jews, and Muslims—were referred to as the *raya* (flock of sheep).
      3. During the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent, Ottoman land forces were powerful enough to defeat the Safavids, but the Ottomans were defeated at sea by combined Christian forces at the Battle of Lepanto in 1571. The Turkish cavalrymen were paid in land grants, while the Janissaries were paid from the central treasury.
      4. In the view of the Ottomans, the sultan supplied justice and defense for the common people (the *raya*), while the *raya* supported the sultan and his military through their taxes. In practice, the common people had little direct contact with the Ottoman government, being ruled by local notables and by their religious leaders (Muslim, Christian, or Jewish).
   C. Crisis of the Military State, 1585–1650
      1. The increasing importance and expense of firearms meant that the size and cost of the Janissaries increased over time while the importance of the landholding Turkish cavalry (who disdained firearms) decreased. At the same time, New World silver brought inflation and undermined the purchasing power of the fixed tax income of the cavalrymen and the fixed stipends of students and professors at the madrasas.
2. Financial deterioration and the use of short-term mercenary soldiers brought a wave of rebellions and banditry to Anatolia. The Janissaries began to marry, went into business, and enrolled their sons in the Janissary corps, which grew in number but declined in military readiness.

D. Economic Change and Growing Weakness, 1650–1750
1. The period of crisis led to significant changes in Ottoman institutions. The sultan now lived a secluded life in his palace, the affairs of government were in the hands of chief administrators, the devshirme had been discontinued, and the Janissaries had become a politically powerful hereditary elite who spent more time on crafts and trade than on military training.
2. In the rural areas, the system of land grants in return for military service had been replaced by a system of tax farming. Rural administration came to depend on powerful provincial governors and wealthy tax farmers.
3. In the context of disorder and decline formerly peripheral places like Izmir flourished as Ottoman control over trade declined and European merchants came to purchase Iranian silk and local agricultural products. This growing trade brought the agricultural economies of western Anatolia, the Balkans, and the Mediterranean coast into the European commercial network.
4. By the middle of the eighteenth century it was clear that the Ottoman Empire was in economic and military decline. Europeans dominated Ottoman import and export trade by sea, but they did not control strategic ports or establish colonial settlements on Ottoman territory.
5. During the “Tulip Period” (1718–1730), the Ottoman ruling class enjoyed European luxury goods and replicated the Dutch tulip mania of the sixteenth century. In 1730, the Patrona Halil rebellion indicated the weakness of the central state; provincial elites took advantage of this weakness to increase their power and their wealth.

II. The Safavid Empire, 1502–1722
A. The Rise of the Safavids
1. Ismail declared himself shah of Iran in 1502 and ordered that his followers and subjects all adopt Shi’ite Islam.
2. It took a century of brutal force and instruction by Shi’ite scholars from Lebanon and Bahrain to make Iran a Shi’ite land, but when it was done, the result was to create a deep chasm between Iran and its Sunni neighbors.
B. Society and Religion
1. Conversion to Shi’ite belief made permanent the cultural difference between Iran and its Arab neighbors that had already been developing. From the tenth century onward, Persian literature and Persian decorative styles had been diverging from Arabic culture—a process that had intensified when the Mongols destroyed Baghdad and thus put an end to that city’s role as an influential center of Islamic culture.
2. Although Islam continued to provide a universal tradition, local understandings of Islam differed, as may be seen in variations in mosque architecture and in the distinctive rituals of various Sufi orders. Under the Safavids, Iranian culture was further distinguished by the strength of Shi’ite beliefs including the concept of the Hidden Imam and the deeply emotional annual commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn.
C. A Tale of Two Cities: Isfahan and Istanbul
1. Isfahan and Istanbul were very different in their outward appearance. Istanbul was a busy port city with a colony of European merchants, a walled palace and a skyline punctuated by gray domes and soaring minarets. Isfahan was an inland city with few Europeans, unobtrusive minarets, brightly tiled domes, and an open palace with a huge plaza for polo games.
2. Both cities were built for walking (not for wheeled vehicles), had few open spaces, narrow and irregular streets, and artisan and merchant guilds.
3. Women were seldom seen in public in Istanbul or in Isfahan, being confined in women’s quarters in their homes; however, records indicate that Ottoman women were active in the real estate market and appeared in court cases. Public life was almost entirely the domain of men.
4. Despite an Armenian merchant community, Isfahan was not a cosmopolitan city, nor was the population of the Safavid Empire particularly diverse. Istanbul’s location gave it a cosmopolitan character comparable to that of other great seaports in spite of the fact that the sultan’s wealth was built on his territorial possessions, not on the voyages of his merchants.

D. Economic Crisis and Political Collapse
1. Iran’s manufactures included silk and its famous carpets, but overall, the manufacturing sector was small and not very productive. The agricultural sector (farming and herding) did not see any significant technological developments, partly because the nomad chieftains who ruled the rural areas had no interest in building the agricultural economy.
2. Like the Ottomans, the Safavids were plagued by the expense of firearms and by the reluctance of nomad warriors to use firearms. Shah Abbas responded by establishing a slave corps of year-round professional soldiers armed with guns.
3. In the late sixteenth century inflation caused by cheap silver and a decline in the overland trade made it difficult for the Safavid State to pay its army and bureaucracy. An Afghan army took advantage of this weakness to capture Isfahan and end Safavid rule in 1722.
4. The Safavids never had a navy; when they needed naval support, they relied on the English and the Dutch. Nadir Shah, who briefly reunified Iran between 1736 and 1747, built a navy of ships purchased from the British, but it was not maintained after his death.

III. The Mughal Empire, 1526–1761
A. Political Foundations
1. The Mughal Empire was established and consolidated by the Turkic warrior Babur (1483–1530) and his grandson Akbar (r. 1556–1605). Akbar established a central administration and granted nonhereditary land revenues to his military officers and government officials.
2. Akbar and his successors gave efficient administration and peace to their prosperous northern heartland while expending enormous amounts of blood and treasure on wars with Hindu rulers and rebels to the south and Afghans to the west.
3. Foreign trade boomed, but the Mughals, like the Safavids, did not maintain a navy or merchant marine, preferring to allow Europeans to serve as carriers.
B. Hindus and Muslims

1. The violence and destruction of the Mughal conquest of India horrified Hindus, but they offered no concerted resistance. Fifteen percent of Mughal officials holding land revenues were Hindus, most of them from northern Rajput warrior families.

2. Akbar was the most illustrious of the Mughal rulers: he took the throne at thirteen and commanded the government on his own at twenty. Akbar worked for reconciliation between Hindus and Muslims by marrying a Hindu Rajput princess and by introducing reforms that reduced taxation and legal discrimination against Hindus.

3. Akbar made himself the center of a short-lived eclectic new religion (“Divine Faith”) and sponsored a court culture in which Hindu and Muslim elements were mixed.

4. The spread of Islam in India cannot be explained by reference to the discontent of low-caste people, nor does it appear to have been the work of Sufi brotherhoods. Islam was established in the Indus Valley region from the eighth century; the spread of Islam in east Bengal is linked to the presence of Muslim mansabdars and their construction of rice-agriculture farming communities on newly cleared land.

5. In the Punjab (northwest India), Nanak (1469–1539) developed the Sikh religion by combining elements from Islam and Hinduism. The Sikh community was reorganized as a militant “army of the pure” after the ninth guru was beheaded for refusing to convert to Islam; the Sikhs posed a military threat to the Mughal Empire in the eighteenth century.

C. Central Decay and Regional Challenges, 1707–1761

1. The Mughal Empire declined after the death of Aurangzeb in 1707. Factors contributing to the Mughal decline include the land grant system, the failure to completely integrate Aurangzeb’s newly conquered territory into the imperial administration, and the rise of regional powers. The real power of the Mughal rulers came to an end in 1739 after Nadir Shah raided Delhi; the empire survived in name until 1857.

2. As the Mughal government lost power, Mughal regional officials bearing the title of nawab established their own more or less independent states. These regional states were prosperous, but they could not effectively prevent the intrusion of Europeans such as the French, whose representative Joseph Dupleix captured the English trading center of Madras and became a power broker in southern India until he was recalled to France in 1754.

IV. Trade Empires in the Indian Ocean, 1600–1729

A. Muslims in the East Indies

1. It is not clear exactly when and how Islam spread in Southeast Asia. It appears that conversion and the formation of Muslim communities began in port cities and royal courts in the fourteenth century and was transmitted to the countryside by itinerant Sufis.

2. In the places where it had spread, Islam functioned as a political ideology that strengthened resistance to European incursions in places such as the Sulu archipelago, Mindanao, Brunei, and Aceh.

3. The rulers and the people of Southeast Asian kingdoms appear to have developed understandings of Islam that deviated from the standards of scholars from Mecca and Medina.
4. Royal courts and port cities began to adopt the more orthodox practices advocated by pilgrims returning from Arabia, while the rural people developed forms of Islam that incorporated some of their pre-Muslim religious and social practices.

B. Muslims in East Africa
   1. The Muslim-ruled port cities of the Swahili Coast were not well connected with each other, nor did they have much contact with the people of their dry hinterlands. Cooperation was hindered by the thick bush country that separated the tracts of coastal land and by the fact that the cities competed with each other for trade.
   2. The Portuguese conquered all of the Swahili ports except for Malindi, which cooperated with Portugal. Between 1650 and 1729 the Arabs of Oman drove the Portuguese out of the Swahili Coast and created a maritime empire of their own.
   3. The better-organized Dutch drove the Portuguese out of the Malacca in 1641, conquered local kingdoms on Sumatra and Java, and established a colonial capital at Batavia (now Jakarta).
   4. When European merchants from other countries began to come to Southeast Asia, the Dutch found it impossible to maintain monopoly control over the spice market. Instead, they turned to crop production, focusing on lumber and coffee.