Centralized Caliphal Power in the Islamic world had broken down by the mid-tenth century. Regional Islamic states with distinctive political and cultural identities now dominated—a pattern that would endure to modern times (see Map 13–1). Yet the diverse Islamic lands remained part of a larger civilization. Muslims from Córdoba in Spain could (and did) travel to Bukhara in Transoxiana or Zanzibar on the East African coast and feel at home. Regionalism and cosmopolitanism, diversity and unity, have characterized Islamic civilization ever since.

The next 500 years saw the growth of a truly international Islamic community, united by shared norms of communal order represented and maintained by the Muslim religious scholars (ulama). Sufism, the strand of Islam that stressed piety and allegiance to a spiritual master, gained popularity, especially after 1200. The growth of Sufi affiliations or brotherhoods influenced Muslim life everywhere, often countering the more limiting and legalistic aspects of ulama conformity. Shi'ite ideas offered another alternative vision of society. Movements loyal to Ali and his heirs challenged but failed to reverse centrist Sunni predominance in most of the Islamic world, even though
The geographical treatise and collection of wondrous tales known as *The Wonders of Creation* was a significant work in medieval and early modern Islamic society. The map shown here portrays several creatures supporting the world in a way that reflects Islamic cosmology. North is oriented at the bottom. Africa is the large triangle-shaped landmass jutting upward.
In Islamic and other Asian territories, the period from about 1000 to the beginning of the sixteenth century is difficult to characterize simply. The spread of Islam to new peoples or to their ruling elites is a theme of this chapter. However, the history of Islam in India is hardly the history of India as a whole. The vast conquests and movements of the Mongols and Central Asian Turks across inner Asia were among the most striking developments in world history in this period. Their effects on the societies they conquered were often cataclysmic, whether in China, south Asia, west Asia, or Eastern Europe. These conquests and migrations wiped out much of the existing orders and forced countless refugees to flee to new areas. After the initial conquests, however, the empires created by the pastoral warriors or ghazis of Central Asia helped facilitate the movement across the Eurasian continent of people, merchandise, ideas, and, in the fourteenth century, the Bubonic pandemic. They also contributed, even if unintentionally, new and often significant human resources to existing civilizations, such as those of China, the Islamic heartlands, and South Asia.

In this era, Islam became a truly cosmopolitan tradition of religious, cultural, political, and social values and institutions. This achievement was largely because Islamic culture was highly adaptable and open to “indigenization,” or a syncretistic blending of cultural traits, even in the seemingly hostile contexts of polytheistic Hindu, south Asian, and African societies. The ability to adapt while maintaining the core tenets of Islamic religious faith explains the capacity of Islamic religion and culture to take root in so many different regions of the globe. Also in this period, distinct traditions of art, language, and literature, for all their local or regional diversity, became part of a larger Muslim whole. Islamic civilization had none of the territorial contiguity or linguistic and cultural homogeneity of either Chinese or Japanese civilization. Nevertheless, the Islamic world did become a recognizable international reality, a true Dar al-Islam, or “House of Islam,” in which a Muslim could travel among, encounter, and exchange ideas and goods with other Muslims of radically diverse backgrounds from Morocco to China and have much in common with them. Ibn Battuta (1304–c. 1370), a Moroccan jurist, traveled for thirty years from his country

Shi’ite dynasties ruled much of the Islamic heartlands in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

A cultural renaissance fueled the spread of modern Persian as the major language of Islam alongside Arabic. The Persian-dominated Iranian and Indian Islamic world became more distinct from the western Islamic lands where Arabic prevailed.

Two Asian steppe peoples, the Mongols and the Turks, came to rule much of the Islamic world in these centuries, but with different results. The spread of the Turks added a substantial Turkish element, especially where they became rulers, as happened with the Seljuk sultans in Iran and Anatolia, and with the “slave-sultans” of both the Mamluk sultanate in Egypt, and the Delhi sultanate in north India. The Mongols conquered much of the Islamic heartlands in the thirteenth century, but their culture and religion did not become dominant. Instead, in this age Islam became the major new influence in the Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa.
Through Egypt to India and then to parts of Southeast Asia before returning to dictate his *Travels in Asia and Africa*, 1325–1354. His career as an Islamic judge and an Arabic speaker allowed him to journey the length and breadth of the global Islamic world and feel himself still within the bounds of Islamic civilization.

Indian traditional culture was not bound up with an expanding missionary religious tradition like that of Islam, and the developing caste system closely associated with Hinduism was less adaptable, and thus less portable. Yet in those age Hindu kingdoms flourished in Indonesia, although these kingdoms mostly rejected the caste system and thus accommodated Hinduism and Indian culture to local conditions. Buddhism, another highly adaptable religion, was expanding across much of Central and eastern Asia, thereby clarifying its place as an international missionary tradition.

Christianity, by contrast, was not rapidly expanding in Africa, Asia, or Europe. The somewhat disastrous experience of the Crusades (see Chapter 15) brought Europeans into closer contact with the Islamic world than ever before but did not attract converts to Christianity, or to increase European power in the Middle East. By 1500, however, the European branch of Christianity was poised on the brink of internal revolution and international expansion. In the year 1000 Europe was almost a backwater of culture and power, compared to major Islamic or Hindu states, let alone China. By 1500, however, European civilization was riding the crest of a commercial and cultural renaissance, enjoying economic and political growth, and starting its global exploration in search of gold and silver to trade with the far-more prosperous and cultured Asian lands. The impact on the Indian Ocean and Chinese-Japanese trade and shipping entrepots was not immediate; it was only after the mid-eighteenth century that European exploration and trade initiatives became full-scale imperial expansion and rule such that the rest of the globe was profoundly changed.

What impact did the Mongol and Central Asian Turks have on the Islamic world?

Why were Islam and Buddhism more successful than Hinduism and Christianity in expanding during this era? What does this suggest about the characteristics of a successful world religion?

**The Islamic Heartlands**

**Religion and Society**

In this period Islamic society was shaped by the consolidation and institutionalization of Sunni legal and religious norms, Sufi traditions and personal piety, and Shi’ite legal and religious norms.

Consolidation of a Sunni Orthopraxy

The *ulama* (both Sunni and Shi’ite) gradually became entrenched religious, social, and political elites throughout the Islamic world, especially after the breakdown of centralized power in the tenth century. Their integration into local merchant, landowning, and bureaucratic classes led to stronger identification of these groups with Islam.

Beginning in the eleventh century, the *ulama*’s power and fixity as a class were expressed in the institution of the *madrasa*, or college of higher learning. On the one hand, the
Map 13-1. The Islamic World, 1000–ca. 1500. Compare this map with Map 11–1 on page 336.

Though the Muslim world had expanded deep into Africa, India, and Central Asia, it had also lost Spain to Christian reconquest.

The Sultan Hasan Madrasa and Tomb-Mosque in Cairo, Egypt. This imposing Mamluk building (1356–1363) was built to house teachers and students studying all four of the major traditions or "schools" of Islamic law. Living and teaching spaces are combined here in a building with a mosque and the Sultan’s tomb enclosure. SuperStock, Inc.
madrasa had grown up naturally as individual experts frequented a given mosque or private house and attracted students seeking to learn the Qur'an, the Hadith ("Tradition"), prudence, Arabic grammar, and the like. On the other hand, rulers endowed the madrasa with buildings, scholars, and salaried chairs, so that they could control the madrasa by appointing teachers and influencing the curriculum. Such control might combat unwelcome sectarian identities. Unlike the university, with its corporate organization and professional degrees, the madrasa was a support institution for individual teachers, who personally certified students’ mastery of particular subjects. It gave an institutional base to the long-developed system of students seeking out the teachers and studying texts with them until they received teachers’ formal certification, or “permission” to transmit or teach those same texts themselves.

Largely outside ulama control, popular “unofficial” piety found expression in local pilgrimages to saints’ tombs, in folk celebrations of Muhammad’s birthday, in veneration of him in poetry, in ecstatic chant and dance among Sufi groups. But the ascetic traditions that directed family and civil law, the daily ship rituals, fasting in the month of Ramadan, and the Meccan pilgrimage united almost all Muslims, even Kharjites or Shi’ites. In the Christian world, theological disputes determined sectarian identity. In contrast, Muslims devoted to define Islam in terms of what Muslims do—by practice, rather than by beliefs. The chief arbiters of “correctness” were and Shi’ite Islam among the ulama were the faqih, or scholars, not the theologians.

Basic Sunni orthopraxy, or “correctness of religious practice,” discouraged religious or social innovations. It was well established by the year 1000 as the dominant tradition, even though Shi’ite aspirations often made themselves felt either ecclesiastically or theologically. The emergence of a conservative theological orientation tied to one of the four main Sunni schools, the Hanbalites (after Ibn Hanbal, d. 969) narrowed the scope for creative doctrinal change. The Hanbalites relied on a literalist reading of the Qur’an and the Sunna. The ulama also became more socially conservative as piety became integrated into social aristocracies. The ulama were often as committed to the status quo as the rulers.

Piety and Organization

Piety stresses the spiritual and mystical dimensions of life. The term Sufi apparently came from the Arabic suf (shame), based on the old ascetic practice of wearing only a coarse woolen garment. Sufi simplicity and humility had to do with the Prophet and the Companions but developed a distinctive tendency when, after about 700 C.E., male and female pietists emphasized a godly life over and above mere observance of Muslim duties. Some stressed ascetic avoidance of temptations, others loving devotion to God. Sufi piety bridged the abyss between the human and the Divine that the exalted Muslim concept of the omnipotent God of creation implies. Socially, Sufi piety merged with folk piety in such popular practices as saint veneration, shrine pilgrimage, ecstatic worship, and seasonal festivals. Sufi writers collected stories of saints, wrote treatises on the Sufi path, and composed some of the world’s finest mystical poetry. (See Document, “Jalaluddin Rumi: Who Is the Sufi?”)

Some Sufis were revered as spiritual masters and saints. Their disciples formed brotherhoods with their own distinctive

Dancing Dervishes. This image from a 1552 Persian manuscript depicts a Sufi master dancing with his disciples. Sufis often use music and bodily movement to induce a feeling of ecstasy, which they feel brings them closer to God. Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.
mystical teaching, Qur'anic interpretation, and devotional practice. These fraternal orders became the chief instruments of the spread of Muslim faith, as well as a locus of popular piety in almost all Islamic societies. Organized Sufism has always attracted members from the populace at large (in this, it differs from monasticism), as well as those dedicated to poverty or other radical disciplines. Indeed, Sufi orders became in this age one of the typical social institutions of everyday Muslim life. Whether Sunni or Shi'ite, many Muslims have ever since identified in some degree with a Sufi order.

Consolidation of Shi'ite Traditions

Shi'ite traditions crystallized between the tenth and twelfth centuries. Many states now came under Shi'ite rulers, but only the Fatimids in Egypt established an important empire. A substantial Shi'ite populace developed only in Iran, Iraq, and the lower Indus (Sind).

Two Shi'ite groups emerged as the most influential. The first were the "Seveners," or "Isma'ilis," who recognize Isma'il (d. ca. 760), first son of the sixth Alid imām, as seventh imām. Their thought drew on Gnostic and Neoplatonic philosophy, knowledge of which they reserved for their spiritual elite. Isma'ili groups were often revolutionary.

By the eleventh century, however, most Shi'ites accepted a line of twelve imāms, the last of whom is said to have appeared in Samarra (Iraq) in 873 into a cosmic concept from which he will eventually emerge as the Mahdi, "Guided One," to usher in the messianic age and final judgment. The "Twelvers," the Shi'ite majority, still focus on the martyrdom of the twelve imāms and look for their intercession on the Day of Judgment. They have flourished best in Iran, the home of most Shi'ite thought. The Buyids who...

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Rumi (d. 1273) was one of the greatest and most influential mystics of Islamic history. Born in Mazar-e-Sharif (in a region that was once part of Khorasan), his family moved westward just before the Mongol invasion of Iran to settle finally in Saljuq Konya, in central Anatolia. Rumi succeeded his father as a madrasa professor and studied in Syria. The Mevlevi Sufi brotherhood considers him its founder. The following two selections come from Rumi's two longest works of mystical poetry.

What makes the sufi? Purity of heart; Not the patched mantle and the lust perverse Of those vile earth-bound men who steal his name. He in all dregs discerns the essence pure: In hardship ease, in tribulation joy. The phantom sentries, who with batons drawn Guard Beauty's palace gate and curtained bower, Give way before him, unafraid he passes, And showing the King's arrow, enters in.

---

What to do, Muslims? For I do not recognize myself; not a Christian I nor Jew, Zoroastrian nor Muslim... Not of India am I nor China, not Bulgaria nor Turkistan; not the Kingdom of Both Iraqs nor the Land of Khorasan. Not of this World am I nor the next, not of heaven or hell; not of Adam nor of Eve, not of Paradise nor Ridwan. My place is no place, my trace has no trace; not body nor soul, for I belong to the soul of Love. Duality have I put aside, I have seen both worlds as one. One I seek, One I know, One I see, One I call. He is the first, He the last; He the Outward, He the inward.

---

control of the Abbasid caliphate in 945 were Twelvers. The
Shi'is of Iran made Twelver doctrine the "state religion" in
the sixteenth century (see Chapter 21).

Regional Developments

By the tenth century the western half of the Islamic world
centered on the Mediterranean developed two regional foci:
(1) Spain (Al-Andalus), Moroccan North Africa, and, to a lesser
extent, West Africa; and (2) Egypt, Syria-Palestine, Anatolia,
with Arabia and Libyan North Africa. The history of the
western half of the Islamic world in the period between 1000
and 1500 was marked by the violent Mongol incursions of the
teneth century.

By the Alhambra

The grandeur of Spanish Islamic or Andalusian culture is
still in Córdoba's Great Mosque and the remnants of
the Alhambra castle. In European tradition, the Chanson de
Roland preserves the echo of Charlemagne's retreat through
the Pyrenees Mountains after failing to check the first Span-
ish Umayyad's growing power. That ruler, Abd al-Rahman I
(r. 756–788), was the founder of the cosmopolitan tradition
of Umayyad Spanish culture at Córdoba, which was the cul-
tural center of the Western world for the next two centuries.
Renowned for its medicine, science, literature, intellectual
life, commercial activity, public baths and gardens, and
courtly elegance, Córdoba reached its zenith under Abd
al-Rahman III (r. 912–961), who took the title of caliph
in 929. His absolutist, but benevolent, rule saw a largely
unified, peaceful Islamic Spain. The mosque-university of
Córdoba that he founded attracted students from Europe as
well as the Islamic world.

A sad irony of this cosmopolitan world was recurring
religious exclusivism, as well as conflict among Muslims
and Christians alike. Abroad, Abd al-Rahman III checked
both the new Fatimid power in North Africa and the
Christian kingdoms in northern Spain, making possible a
golden era of Moorish power and culture. But after his

The Alhambra. Built in the fourteenth century, the Alhambra's serene, almost severe aspect belies its wealth of interior ornamentation. Considered one of the finest examples of Islamic architecture and one of the most beautiful of all surviving medieval buildings, the Alhambra rises within its curtain walls above
Córdoba, the last of the great Moorish cities of Andalusia.

© Images inc–Stone Allstock.
death, fragmentation into warring Muslim principalities allowed a resurgence of Spain’s Christian states between about 1000 and 1085, when the city of Toledo fell permanently into Christian hands.

Brief Islamic revivals in Spain and North Africa came under the African reform movements of the Almoravids and Almohads. The Almoravids originated as a religious-warrior brotherhood among Berber nomads in West Africa. Having subdued northwestern Africa, in 1086 they carried their zealotry from their new capital of Marrakesh into Spain and reunited its Islamic kingdoms. Under their rule, arabized Christians (Mozarabs) were persecuted, as were some Moorish Jews. The subsequent wars began the last major phase of the Spanish “Reconquest” (Reconquista). These conflicts, in which Christian rulers sought to regain and Christianize the peninsula, are best known in the West for the exploits of El Cid (d. 1099), the mercenary adventurer who became the Spanish national hero.

The Almohads ended Almoravid rule in Morocco in 1147 and then conquered much of southern Spain. Before their demise (1225 in Spain; 1275 in Africa), they stimulated a brilliant revival of Moorish culture. During this era, paper manufacture reached Spain and then the rest of Western Europe. The long westward odyssey of Indian fable literature through Iran and the Arab world ended with Spanish and Latin translations in thirteenth-century Spain. The greatest lights of this Spanish Islamic intellectual world were the major philosopher and physician Ibn Rushd (Averroës, d. 1189); the great Muslim mystical thinker Ibn al-Arabi (d. 1240); and the famous Arab-Jewish philosopher Ibn Maymun, or Maimonides (d. 1204). (See Document, “A Muslim Biographer’s Account of Maimonides.”)

The Fatimids

The major Islamic presence in the Mediterranean from the tenth to the twelfth century was that of the Shi’ite Fatimids, who claimed descent from Muhammad’s daughter, Fatima. They began as a Tunisian dynasty, then conquered Morocco, Sicily, and Egypt (969), where they built their new capital, Cairo (al-Qahira, “the Victorious”). Their rule as Shi’ite caliphs meant that, for a time, there were three “caliphates”—in Baghdad, Córdoba, and Cairo. The Fatimids were Isma’ili (see Chapter 11). Content to rule a Sunni majority in Egypt, they sought recognition as true imams by other Isma’ili groups and were able, for a time, to take western Arabia and most of Syria from the Buyid “guardians” of the Abbasid caliphate (see Chapter 11). Fatimid rule spawned two splinter groups that have played visible, if minor, roles in history. The Druze of modern Lebanon and Syria originated around 1020 with a few members of the Fatimid court who professed belief in the divinity of one of the Fatimid caliphs. The tradition they founded is too far from Islam to be considered a Muslim sect. The Isma’ili Assassins, on the other hand, were a radical Muslim movement founded by a Fatimid defector in the Elburz mountains of Iran around 1100. The name “Assassins” comes not from the political assassinations that made them infamous, but from a European corruption of the Arabic Hashishiyin (“users of hashish”). It was possibly connected with the story that their assassins were manipulated with drugs to undertake their usually suicidal missions. The Assassins were destroyed by the Mongols in the thirteenth century.

The Fatimids built the al-Azhar mosque in Cairo as a center of learning, a role it maintains today, although for Sunni, not (as then) Shi’ite, scholarship. Fatimid rulers treated Egypt’s Coptic Christians generally as well as they did their Sunni majority, and many Copts held high offices. Jews also usually fared well under the Fatimids.

After 1100 the Fatimids weakened, falling in 1171 to Salah al-Din (Saladin, 1137–1193), a field general and administrator under the Turkish ruler of Syria, Nur al-Din (1118–1174). Saladin, a Sunni Kurd, is well known in the West for his battles (including the retaking of Jerusalem in 1187) with the Crusaders. After Nur al-Din’s death, Saladin added Syria-Palestine and Mesopotamia to his Egyptian dominions and founded the Ayyubid dynasty that, under his successors, controlled all three

Decorated Ceramic Bowl. A glazed ceramic bowl decorated with a gazelle or antelope, a symbolic figure of beauty and grace. From North Africa, Tunisian area, Fatimid (tenth–twelfth centuries).
areas until Egypt fell to the Mamluks in 1250 and most of Syria and Mesopotamia to the Mongols by 1260.

Like Nur al-Din, and on the model of the Seljuks (see Chapter 11), Saladin founded madrasas to teach and promote Sunni law. His and his Ayyubid successors' reigns in Egypt saw the entrenchment of a self-conscious Sunnism under a program of mutual recognition and teaching of all four Sunni schools of law. Henceforward Shi'ite Islam disappeared from Egypt.

**Chronology**

**Western Islamic Lands**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>756–1301</td>
<td>Spanish Umayyad dynasty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>912–961</td>
<td>Rule of Abd al-Rahman III; height of Umayyad power and civilization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>699–1171</td>
<td>Fatimid Shi'ite dynasty in Egypt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ca. 1020</td>
<td>Origin of Druze community (Egypt/Syria)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1056–1275</td>
<td>Almoravid and Almohad dynasties in North Africa, West Africa, and Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1096–1291</td>
<td>Major European Christian crusades into Islamic lands; some European presence in Syria-Palestine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1117</td>
<td>Fatimids fall to Salah al-Din (Saladin), Ayyubid lieutenant of the ruler of Aleppo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1189</td>
<td>Death of Ibn Rushd (Averroës), philosopher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1204</td>
<td>Death of Musa ibn Maymun (Maimonides), philosopher and Jewish savant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1240</td>
<td>Death of Ibn al-Arabi, theosophical mystic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1250–1517</td>
<td>Mamluk sultanate in Egypt and (from late 1200s) Syria; claim laid to Abbasid caliphate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1258</td>
<td>Mongols and Hulagu Khan sack Baghdad, ending the Abbasid era</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1260</td>
<td>Mamluk victory at Ain Jalut halts Mongol advance into Syria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ca. 1300</td>
<td>Rise of Ottoman state in western Anatolia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1406</td>
<td>Death of Ibn Khaldun, historian and social philosopher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1453</td>
<td>Conquest of Constantinople and the collapse of Byzantium and the Byzantine Empire by the Ottoman forces under Sultan Mehmet I (1451–1481)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The Mamluks** The heirs of the Fatimids and Saladin in the eastern Mediterranean were the redoubtable sultans ("those with [authority]") of the Mamluk dynasty who were chiefly Circassians from the Caucasus, captured in childhood and trained as slave-bodyguards. The Mamluks were the only Islamic dynasty to withstand the Mongol invasions. Their victory at Ain Jalut in Palestine in 1260 marked the end of the Mongols' westward movement. The first Mamluk sultan, Aybak (r. 1250–1257), and his successors were elite Turkish and Mongol slave-officers drawn originally from the bodyguard of Saladin's dynasty. Whereas the early Mamluks were often succeeded by sons or brothers, succession after the 1390s was more often a survival of the fittest; no sultan reigned more than a few years. The Mamluk state was based on a military fief system and total control by the slave-officer elite.

The Mamluk sultan Baybars (r. 1260–1277), who took the last Crusader fortresses, is a larger-than-life figure in Arab legend. To legitimize his rule, he revived the Abbasid caliphate at least in name after its demise in the fall of Baghdad (1258; discussed later) by installing an uncle of Baghdad's last Abbasid as Caliph at Cairo. He made treaties with Constantinople and with European sovereigns, as well as with the newly converted Muslim ruler, or *khan*, of the Golden Horde—the Mongol Tatars of southern Russia. His public works in Cairo were numerous. He also extended Mamluk rule south to Nubia and west among the Berbers.

As trade relations with the Mongol domains improved after 1300, the Mamluks enjoyed substantial prosperity and commanded a large empire. However, the Black Death epidemic of 1347–1348 in the Arab Middle East hurt the Mamluk and other regional states badly. Still the Mamluks survived even the Ottoman conquest of Egypt in 1517, since Mamluks continued to rule there as Ottoman governors into the nineteenth century.

Architecture, much of which still graces Cairo, remains the most magnificent Mamluk bequest to posterity. In addition, mosaics, calligraphy, and metalwork were among the arts and crafts of special note. The Mamluks were great patrons of scholars who excelled in history, biography, astronomy, mathematics, and medicine. The most important of these was Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406). Born of a Spanish Muslim family in Tunis, he settled in Cairo as an adult. He is still recognized as the greatest Muslim social historian and philosopher of history.

**The Islamic East: Asia before the Mongol Conquests**

The Persian dynasties of the Samanids at Bukhara (875–999) and the Buyids at Baghdad (945–1055) were the major usurpers of eastern Abbasid dominions. Their
Part 3  Consolidation and Interaction of World Civilizations, 500 C.E. to 1500 C.E.

successes epitomized the rise of regional states that had begun to undermine the caliphate by the ninth century. Similarly, their demises reflected a second emerging pattern: the ascendency of Turkish slave-rulers (like the Mamluks in the west) and of Oghuz Turkish peoples, known as Turkomans. With the Seljuqs, the process began with the use of Turkish slave troops in ninth-century Baghdad ended in the permanent presence in the Islamic world of Turkish ruling dynasties. As late converts, they became typically the most zealous of Sunni Muslims.

The Ghaznavids  The rule of the Samanids in Transoxiana was finally ended by a Turkoman group in 999, but they had already lost all of eastern Iran south of the Oxus in 994 to one of their own slave governors, Subuktigin (r. 976–997). He set up his own state in modern Afghanistan, at Ghazna, whence he and his son and successor, Mahmud of Ghazna (r. 998–1030), launched successful campaigns against his former masters. The Ghaznavids are notable for their patronage of Persian literature and culture and for their conquests in northwestern India, which began a lasting Muslim presence in India. Mahmud was their greatest ruler. He is still remembered for his booty raids and destruction of temples in western India. At its peak, his empire stretched from western Iran to the Oxus and to the Indus.

Mahmud attracted to Ghazna numerous Khurasani Persian scholars and artists, notably the great scientist and mathematician al-Biruni (d. 1048), and the epic poet Firdawsī (d. ca. 1020). Firdawsī’s Šahname (‘The Book of Kings’) is the masterpiece of Persian literature, an epic of sixty thousand verses that helped fix the “New Persian” language already developed especially by the prolific writings of another Khurasani poet of an earlier generation, Rudaki (d. ca. 941), the famous Isma’ili Shi’ite. It also helped revive the pre-Islamic cultural traditions of the greater Iranian world, which remained a hallmark of
The following are excerpts from the entry on Maimonides (Arabic: Musa ibn Maymun) in the biographical dictionary of learned men by Ibn al-Qifti (d. 1248). In one section (omitted here), Ibn al-Qifti describes how this most famous Spanish Jewish savant at first feigned conversion to Islam when a new Berber ruler demanded the expulsion of Christians and Jews from Spain in about 1133. He tells how Maimonides moved his family to the more tolerant Islamic world of Cairo, where he became the court physician. (Jews and Christians held high office under Muslim rulers.)

Which Islamic dynasty forced Maimonides to leave Spain for Cairo? Why were the Fatimids in Cairo tolerant of Christians and Jews when their Berber co-religionists were not? From the Muslim biographer’s treatment of his subject, what can you infer about Islamic societies and the intellectual atmosphere of the time?

... This man was one of the people of Andalus, a Jew by religion. He studied philosophy in Andalus, was expert in mathematics, and devoted attention to some of the logical sciences. He studied medicine there and excelled in it.

... After assembling his possessions in the time that was needed for this, he left Andalus and went to Egypt, accompanied by his family. He settled in the town of Fustât [part of greater Cairo], among its Jews, and practiced his religion openly. He lived in a district called al-Maslsa and made a living by trading in jewels and suchlike. Some people studied philosophy under him.

He married in Cairo the sister of a Jewish scribe called Abu’l-Ma‘āli, the secretary of the mother of Nūr al-Dīn ‘Alī, known as al-Afdal, the son of Salāḥ al-Dīn Yūsuf ibn Ayyūb, and he had a son by her who today is a physician in Cairo after his father...

Mūsā, ibn Maymun died in Cairo in the year 605 [1208–9].1 He ordered his heirs to carry his body, when the smell had ceased, to Lake Tiberias and bury him there, seeking to be among the graves of the ancient Israelites and their great jurists, which are there. This was done.

He was learned in the law and secrets of the Jews and compiled a commentary on the Talmud, which is a commentary and explanation of the Torah; some of the Jews approve of it. Philosophic doctrines overcame him, and he compiled a treatise denying the canonical resurrection. The leaders of the Jews held this against him, so he concealed it except from those who shared his opinion in this...

In the latter part of his life he was troubled by a man from Andalus, a jurist called Abu’l-Arab ibn Ma‘īsha, who came to Fustat and met him. He charged him with having been a Muslim in Andalus, accused him [of apostasy] and wanted to have him punished.2 ‘Abd al-Rahim ibn ‘Ali al-Fādil prevented this, and said to him, “If a man is converted by force, his Islam is not legally valid.”


1In fact, he died in 1204.
2The penalty for apostasy was death.
later Persian literature. After Mahmud the empire began to break up, although Ghaznavids ruled at Lahore until 1186.

The Saljuqs The Saljuqs were the first major Turkish dynasty of Islam. They were a steppe clan who settled in Transoxiana, became avid Sunnis, and extended their sway over Khorasan in the 1030s. In 1055 they took Baghdad. As the new guardian of the caliphate and master of an Islamic empire, the Saljuq leader Tughril Beg (r. 1037–1063) took the title of sultan to signify his temporal power and control. He and his early successors made various Iranian cities their capitals instead of Baghdad.

As new Turkish tribes joined their ranks, the Saljuqs extended Islamic rule for the first time into the central Anatolian plateau at Byzantine expense, even capturing the Byzantine emperor in a victory in Armenia in 1071 (see Map 13–2). They also conquered much of Syria and wrested Mecca and Medina from the Shi‘ite Fatimids. The first Turkish rule in Anatolia dates from 1077, when the Saljuq governor there formed a separate sultanate. Known as the Saljuqs of Rum (“Rome,” i.e., Byzantium), these latter Saljuqs were only displaced after 1300 by the Ottomans, another Turkish dynasty, who would eventually conquer all of Anatolia and southeastern Europe (see Chapter 21).

The most notable figure of Saljuq rule was the vizier Nizam al-Mulk, the real power behind two sultans from 1063 to 1092. In his time new roads and inns (caravanserais) for trade and pilgrimage were built, canals were dug, mosques and other public buildings were founded (including the first great Sunni madrasahs), and science and culture were patronized. He also founded in 1067 what some contend was the first Muslim “University,” the legal-theological school, or madrasah, of the Nizamiyyah in Baghdad; he went on to establish a number of similar madrasahs in Mesopotamia and Persia. He supported an accurate calendar reform and authored a major work on the art of governing, the Siyasatnamah.

Before his murder by an Isma‘ili assassin in 1092, he appointed as professor in his Baghdad madrasa Muhammad al-Ghazzali (d. 1111), probably the greatest Muslim religious thinker ever. He also patronized the mathematician and astronomer Umar Khayyam (d. 1123), whose Western fame rests on the poetry of his “Quatrains,” or Ruba‘iyat.

After declining fortunes in the early twelfth century, Iranian Saljuq rule crumbled and by 1194 was wholly wiped away by another Turkish slave dynasty from Khwarizm in the lower Oxus basin. By 1200 these Khwarizm-Shahs had built a large, if shaky, empire and sphere of influence covering Iran and Transoxiana. In the same era the Abbasid caliph at Baghdad, al-Nasir (r. 1180–1225), established an independent caliphal state in Iraq, but neither his heirs nor the Khwarizm-Shahs were long to survive.

Islamic Asia in the Mongol Age

Mongols and Ilkhanids The building of a vast Mongol empire spanning Asia from China to Poland in the thirteenth century proved momentous not only for eastern Europe and China (see Chapter 8), but also for Islam. Eurasia and India. A Khwarizm Shah massacre of Mongol ambassadors brought down the full wrath of the Great Khan, Genghis (ca. 1162–1227), on the Islamic east. He razed entire cities (1219–1222) from Transoxiana and Khorasan to the Indus. After his death, a division of his empire into four khanates under his sons gave the Islamic world respite. Then in 1258 Hulagu Khan (r. 1256–1265), a grandson of Genghis, led a massive army again across the Oxus. Adding Turkish troops to his forces (Mongol armies typically included many Turks), he went from victory to victory, destroying every Iranian state. In 1258, when the Abbasid caliph refused to surrender, Hulagu’s troops plundered Baghdad, killing at least 80,000 inhabitants, including the caliph and his sons. (See Document, “The Mongol Catastrophe.”)

Under the influence of his wife and many Nestorian Christians and Buddhists in his inner circle, Hulagu spared the Christians of Baghdad. He followed this policy in his other conquests, including the sack of Aleppo—which, like Baghdad, resisted. When Damascus surrendered, Western Christians had hopes of the impending fall of Mamluk Cairo and Islamic

Mamluk Bottle. This elegant glass bottle was made in Mamluk workshops in Syria in the mid-fourteenth century for the rulers of the Yemen in southern Arabia. John Tsantes/Courtesy of the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
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Map 13-2. The Saljuq Empire, ca. 1095. By the end of the eleventh century the Saljuqs had conquered Persia, Mesopotamia, and Syria and had inflicted a devastating blow against the Byzantine Empire at the battle of Manzikert in 1071, altering the balance of power in the eastern Mediterranean and the Near East.

power, but Hulagu’s drive west was slowed by rivalry with his kinsman Berke. A Muslim convert, Berke ruled the khanate of the Golden Horde, the Mongol state centered in southern Russia north of the Caucasus. He was in contact with the Mamluks, and some of his Mongol troops even helped them defeat Hulagu in Palestine (1260), which prevented a Mongol advance into Egypt. A treaty in 1261 between the Mamluk sultan and Berke established a formal alliance that confirmed the breakup of Mongol unity and the autonomy of the four khanates: in China (the Yuan dynasty), in Iran (the Ilkhans), in Russia (the Golden Horde), and in Transoxiana (the Chagatays).

Hulagu and his heirs ruled the old Persian Empire from Azerbaijan for some seventy-five years as the Great Khan of China’s viceroyos (Il-Khans). Here, as elsewhere, the Mongols did not eradicate the society they inherited. Their native paganism and Buddhist and Christian leanings yielded to Muslim faith and practice, although they practiced religious tolerance. After 1335 Ilkhanid rule fell prey to the familiar pattern of a gradual breaking away of provinces, and for fifty years, Iran was again fragmented.

Timurids and Turkomans This situation prepared the way for a new Turko-Mongol conquest from Transoxiana, under Timur-i Lang ("Timur the Lame," or "Tamerlane," 1336–1405). Even Genghis Khan’s invasions could not match Timur’s savage campaigns between 1379 and his death in 1405. These raids were not aimed at building a new
The Mongol Catastrophe

For the Muslim East, the sudden eruption of the Mongol hordes was an indescribable calamity. The shock and despair can be seen in the history of Ibn al-Athir (d. 1233). He writes here about the year 1220–1221, when the Mongols (“Tartars”) burst in on the eastern lands.

- Is this a positive, negative, or neutral description of the Mongols? Why might the Mongols be compared to Alexander rather than, say, the Huns (see Chapter 6)?

I say, therefore, that this thing involves the description of the greatest catastrophe and the most dire calamity (of the like of which days and nights are innocent) which befell all men generally, and the Muslims in particular; so that, should one say that the world, since God Almighty created Adam until now, hath not been afflicted with the like thereof, he would but speak the truth. For indeed history doth not contain aught which approaches or comes nigh unto it.

Now this is a thing the like of which ear hath not heard; for Alexander, concerning whom historians agree that he conquered the world, did not do so with such swiftness, but only in the space of about ten years; neither did he slay, but was satisfied that men should be subject to him. But these Tartars conquered most of the habitable globe and the best, the most flourishing and most populous part thereof, and that whereof the inhabitants were the most advanced in character and conduct, in about [a] year; nor did any country escape their devastations which did not fearfully expect them and dread their arrival.

Moreover they need no commissariat, nor the conveyance of supplies, for they have with them sheep, cows, horses, and the like quadrupeds, the flesh of which they eat, [needing] naught else. As for their beasts which they ride, these dig into the earth with their hoofs and eat the roots of plants, knowing naught of barley. And so, when they alight anywhere, they have need of nothing from without. As for their religion, they worship the sun when it arises, and regard nothing as unlawful, for they eat all beasts, even dogs, pigs, and the like; nor do they recognize the marriage-tie, for several men are in marital relations with one woman, and if a child is born, it knows not who is its father.

Therefore Islam and the Muslims have been afflicted during this period with calamities wherewith no people hath been visited. These Tartars (may God confound them!) came from the East, and wrought deeds which horrify all who hear of them, and which thou shalt, please God, see set forth in full detail in their proper connection...


empire, but at sheer conquest. In successive campaigns he swept everything before him in a wave of devastation: eastern Iran (1379–1385); western Iran, Armenia, the Caucasus, and upper Mesopotamia (1385–1387); southwestern Iran, Mesopotamia, and Syria (1391–1393); Central Asia from Transoxiana to the Volga and as far as Moscow (1391–1395); North India (1398); and northern Syria and Anatolia (1400–1402). Timur’s sole positive contributions seem to have been the buildings he sponsored at Samarkand, his capital. He left behind him ruins, death, disease, and political chaos across the entire eastern Islamic world, which did not soon recover. His was, however, the last great steppe invasion, for firearms soon destroyed the steppe horsemen’s advantage.

Timur’s sons ruled after him with varying results in Transoxiana and Iran (1405–1494). The most successful Timurid was Shahrukh (r. 1405–1447), who ruled a united Iran for a time. His capital, Herat, became an important center of Persian Islamic culture and Sunni piety. He patronized the famous Herat school of miniature painting as well as Persian literature and philosophy. The Timurids had to share Iran itself with Turkoman dynasties in western Iran, once even losing Herat to one of them. They and the Turkomans were the last Sunnis to rule Iran. Both were eclipsed at the end of the fifteenth century by the militant Shi’ite dynasty of the Safavids, who ushered in a new, Shi’ite era in the Iranian world (see Chapter 21).
The spread of Islam Beyond the Heartlands

The period from roughly 1000 to 1500 saw the spread of Islamic civilization as a lasting religious, cultural, social, and political force into new areas (see Map 13–1). Not only in Mesopotamia, Persia, and the Black Sea north to Moscow (under the Golden Horde), but also west to the Volga and the Danube River basin (through the Ottoman Empire), the greater part of Eurasia came under the control of Islamic rulers in this era (see Chapter 21). Meanwhile, East Africa all became major spheres of Islamic political, social, cultural, and commercial presence. In all these regions Sufi orders were most often responsible for converting people and spreading Islamic cultural influences. Merchants, too, were major agents of cultural Islamization in these regions.

Conquest was a third (but demographically less important) means of Islamization (and either Arabization or Persianization) in these regions. Sometimes only ruling elites, sometimes wider circles, became Muslims, but in India, Southeast Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa much, often most, of the populace retained their languages, heritage, and religious traditions even while their elites learned Arabic and/or Persian as second or third languages. Nonetheless, in the most important of these regions, India, the coming of Islam signaled epochal changes.

**Islamic India and Southeast Asia**

Islamic civilization in India (like earlier Indian civilization) was formed by creative interaction between invading foreigners and indigenous peoples. The early Arab and Turkish invaders were a foreign Muslim minority; their heirs were truly “Indian” as well as Islamic, adding a new dimension both to Indian and Islamic civilization. From then on, Indian civilization would both include and enrich Islamic traditions.

The Spread of Islam to South Asia

Well before the Ghaznavids came to the Punjab, Muslims were to be found even outside the original Arab conquest areas in Sind (see Map 13–3). Muslim merchants had settled in the port cities of Gujarat and southern India as diaspora communities to profit from internal Indian trade as well as from trade with the Indies and China. Wherever Muslim traders went, converts to Islam were attracted by business advantages as well as by the straightforward ideology and practice of Islam and its officially egalitarian, “classless” ethic. Sufi orders had also gained a foothold in the central Deccan region and in the south, giving today's south Indian Muslims old roots. Sufi piety also drew converts in the north, especially when the Mongol devastation of Iran in the thirteenth century sent refugees into North India. These Muslim refugees strengthened Muslim life in the subcontinent.
Map Exploration

To explore this map further, go to http://www.prenhall.com/craig_maps

Map 13–3. The Indian Subcontinent, 1000–1500. Shown are major kingdoms and regions.
Muslim-Hindu Encounter

From the outset Muslim leaders had to rule a country dominated by utterly different cultural and religious traditions. Much as early Muslim rulers in Iranian territories had given Zoroastrians legal status as “people of Scripture” like Christians and Jews; see Chapter 11), the first Arab conquerors in Sind (711) had treated Hindus similarly as “protected peoples” under Muslim sovereignty. These precedents gave Indian Muslim rulers a legal basis for coexistence with their Hindu subjects but did not remove Hindu resistance to Islamic rule.

The chief obstacle to Islamic expansion in India was the military prowess of the Hindu warrior class that emerged after the Hun and other Asian invasions of the fifth and sixth centuries. Apparently descended from such invaders and the native warrior (Kshatriya) class of Hindus, this class was known from about the mid-seventh century as Rajputs. The Rajputs were a large group of northern Indian clans bound together by a fierce warrior ethic and strong Hindu cultural and religious traditionalism. They fought the Muslims with great tenacity, but their inability to unite brought them eventually under Muslim domination in the sixteenth century (see Chapter 21).
Islamic States and Dynasties

A series of Turkish-Afghan rulers known as the "Slave Sultans of Delhi" extended and maintained Islamic power over North India for nearly a century (1206–1290). Such slaves, or mamluks, figured prominently in the leadership and elites of the new regime, much as they did in the Mamluk dynasty in Egypt. Five descendants of Iltutmish ruled after him until 1266. The most vigorous of these was his daughter Razia, who ruled as sultana from 1237 to 1241.

Four later Muslim dynasties—the Khaljis, Tughluqs, Sayyids, and Lodis—continued the Delhi sultanate through the fifteenth century. This run of Muslim dynasties was interrupted by the Mongol-Turkish invasion and sack of Delhi by Timur in 1398, from which the city took decades to recover. Even before this devastation, however—roughly from the mid-1300s—the sultanate’s central authority began to dwindle. In the two centuries before the advent of the Mughals in the mid-sixteenth century, many regions became partially or wholly independent, smaller sultanates, Rajput kingdoms, or tiny Hindu or Muslim principalities. The sultanate was often only the most prominent among various kingdoms. Regional rule predominated across the subcontinent.

Southeast Asia

The most important independent Islamic state was that of the Bahmanids in the Deccan (1347–1527). These rulers were famous for their architecture and the intellectual life of their court, as well as for their role in containing the powerful South Indian Hindu state of Vijayanagar (1336–1565). (The first documented use of firearms on the subcontinent was in a Bahmani battle with the raja of Vijayanagar in 1366.) Most regional capitals fostered a rich cultural life. Jaunpur, to the north of Benares (Varanasi), for example, became an asylum for artists and intellectuals after Timur’s sack of Delhi and boasted an impressive tradition of Islamic architecture. Kashmir, an independent sultanate from 1346 to 1589, was a center of literary activity where many Indian texts were translated into Persian.

Islam spread into Southeast Asia as a result of a natural extension of long-distance Islamic (Arab and Persian) and Indian trade across the Indian Ocean, land and sea migrations of scholars and merchants, and socialization of Indian peoples of South Asia. This extension of much older trade contacts eastward beyond the Indian subcontinent had unique characteristics of its own. Because of their geographic location, the islands in Southeast Asia readily connected India and China and thus became an important trade route by the fifteenth century. The spread of Islam in this region was not a steady, progressive development and was not dominated by one particular tradition. Rather the proliferation of Islam was idiosyncratic, and a number of distinct Islamic traditions emerged centered largely around the five areas: Java, Sumatra, Melaka, Aceh, and Moluccas (see Map 13–4).

In some of the areas, such as in the Moluccas, the traditional beliefs of Islam coexisted with worship and adulation of ancestors, sorcery, or magic. Various central Islamic rites such as the pilgrimage (hajj) were perceived to be an Arab custom and thus not required for "true" Muslims. Eventually, however, many political leaders adopted a more stringent Islamic practice largely for political reasons because Islam would allow for greater centralization and consolidation of power.

One of the greatest sources of tension and conflict in this area was not solely due to distinct religious views. Rather it was the struggle between the center and the periphery. Before the arrival of the Dutch in the early seventeenth century, the various urban rulers, typically located in port cities, benefited from the new global economy. They sought to subsume under their control the hereditary chiefs, who had also converted to Islam, by invoking Islam and their vision of a perfect society. The local traditions proved to be durable, especially in the rural areas. Muslims in Southeast Asia therefore adapted Islam to their needs and customs rather than simply replacing the indigenous practices with the new universal and foreign religion.
Religious and Cultural Accommodation

Despite the enduring division of the subcontinent into multiple political and administrative units, the five centuries after Mahmud of Ghazna saw Islam become an enduring and influential element of Indian culture—especially in the north and the Deccan. The Delhi sultans were able, except for Timur's invasion, to fend off the Mongol danger, much as the Mamluks had in Egypt. They thereby provided a basic political and social framework within which Islam could take root. Although the ruling class remained a Muslim minority of Persianized Turks and Afghans ruling a Hindu majority, conversion went on at various levels of society. Ghazis, ("warriors") also carried Islam by force of arms to pagan groups in eastern Bengal and Assam. Some Hindu converts came from the ruling classes who served the Muslim overlords. Sufi orders converted many Hindus among the lower classes across the north. The Muslim aristocracy, at first mostly foreigners, was usually treated in Indian society as a separate caste group or groups. Lower class or other Hindu converts were assimilated into lower "Muslim castes," often identified by occupation. (See Document, "How the Hindus Differ from the Muslims.")

Sanskrit had long been the Indian scholarly and common language, but in this period regional languages, such as Tamil in the south, gained status as literary and administrative languages, and Persian became the language of intellectual and cultural life for the ruling elites of North India. However, the coming of substantial numbers of Muslims to the subcontinent led to the emergence of a new language, Urdu-Hindi, with both Perso-Arabic and indigenous Indian elements. It began to take shape not long after the initial Muslim influx in the eleventh century and developed in response to the increasing need of Hindus and Muslims for a shared language. It became the spoken idiom of the Delhi region and developed into a literary language of North Indian and Deccan Muslims in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Indo-European in grammar, it used Perso-Arabic vocabulary and script and was at first called Hindi ("Indian") or Dakani ("southern"), then in British times Hindustani. Eventually Urdu came to serve as the name for the Islamic version of the language that was based on its Persian-Arabic-Turkish heritage, whereas Hindi was used for the version associated with Hindu culture and oriented in its further development toward its Hindu and Sanskrit heritage. Each became an official national language: Urdu for modern Pakistan and Hindi for modern India.

Indian Muslims, both immigrants and converts, were always susceptible to Hindu influence (in language, marriage customs, and caste consciousness), much like Muslims in Africa and Asia. However, unlike earlier immigrant elites,
they were never utterly absorbed into the predominant Hindu culture but remained in some measure a group apart, conscious of their uniqueness in the Hindu world and proud to be distinct. The Muslim ruling classes saw themselves as the protectors and propagators of Islam in India, and most of the sultans of Delhi sought formal recognition for their rule from the nominal Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad or, in Mamluk times, in Cairo.

Nevertheless, reciprocal influence of Muslims and Hindus was inevitable, especially in popular piety and among the masses as opposed to the ruling elites. Sufi devotion had an appeal similar to that of Hindu devotional, or bhakti movements (see Chapter 10), and each influenced the other. Some of India’s most revered Sufi and bhakti saints date from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. During this period, various theistic mystics strove to transcend the mutual antagonism and exclusivism of Muslims and Hindus. They typically preached devotion to a God who saves his worshippers without regard either to Hindu caste obligations or to legalistic Muslim observance. The poet-saints Ramananda (d. after 1400) and Kabir (d. ca. 1518) were the two most famous such reformers.

**Hindu and Other Indian Traditions**

The history of India from 1000 to 1500 was also important for the other religious and cultural communities of India that as a whole vastly outnumbered the Muslims. The Jain tradition flourished, notably in Gujarat, Rajputana, and Karnata. In the north the Muslim conquests effectively ended Indian Buddhism by the eleventh century. However, Buddhism had already been waning in Indian culture long before Islam arrived.

Hindu religion and culture flourished even under Muslim control, as the continuing social and religious importance of the Brahmins and the popularity of bhakti movements throughout India attest. This was an age of Brahmanic scholasticism that produced many commentaries and manuals but few seminal works. Bhakti creativity was much greater. The great Hindu Vaishnava Brahman Ramanuja (d. 1137) reconciled bhakti ideas with the classical Upanishadic Hindu worldview in the Vedantin tradition. Bhakti piety underlies the masterpiece of Hindu mystical love poetry, Jayadeva’s *Gita Govinda* (twelfth century), which is devoted to Krishna, the most important of Vishnu’s incarnations.

The south continued to be the center of Hindu cultural, political, and religious activity. The most important dynastic state in the south during this age was that of the Cholas, which flourished from about 900 to 1300 and patronized a famous school of bronze sculpture at their capital of Tanjore. Their mightiest successor, the kingdom of Vijayanagar (1336–1565), subjugated the entire south in the fourteenth century and resisted its Muslim foes longer than any other kingdom. Vijayanagar itself was one of India’s most lavishly developed cities and a center of the cult of Shiva before its destruction by the Bahmanid sultan of the Deccan.
Al-Biruni (d. ca. 1050), the greatest scholar-scientist of medieval Islam, was born in northeastern Iran. He spent much of his life at the court of Mahmud of Ghazna, whom he accompanied on expeditions into northwestern India. Alongside his scientific work, he learned Sanskrit, studied India and the Hindus, and wrote the History of India. The following selections from this work illustrate the reach and sophistication of his mind.

How does the emphasis on purity and the impurity of foreigners that Biruni imputes to the Hindus compare with the attitudes of Islam and other religions? Does this passage suggest why the Hindu tradition has remained largely an Indian one, while Islam became an international religion? What might be the reference of Biruni’s comments about the relative absence of religious controversy among Hindus?

The barriers which separate Muslims and Hindus rest on different causes.

First, they differ from us in everything which other nations have in common. And here we first mention the language, although the difference of language also exists between other nations. If you want to conquer this difficulty (i.e., to learn Sanskrit), you will not find it easy, because the language is of an enormous range, both in words and inflections, something like the Arabic, calling one and the same thing by various names, both original and derived, and using one and the same word for a variety of subjects, which, in order to be properly understood, must be distinguished from each other by various qualifying epithets...

Secondly, they totally differ from us in religion, as we believe in nothing in which they believe, and vice versa.

On the whole, there is very little disputing about theological topics among themselves; at the utmost, they fight with words, but they will never stake their soul or body or their property on religious controversy. On the contrary, all their fanaticism is directed against those who do not belong to them—against all foreigners. They call them mleecha, i.e., impure, and forbid having any connection with them, be it by intermarriage or any other kind of relationship, or by sitting, eating, and drinking with them, because thereby, they think, they would be polluted. They consider as impure anything which touches the fire and the water of a foreigner; and no household can exist without these two elements. Besides, they never desire that a thing which once has been polluted should be purified and thus recovered, as, under ordinary circumstances, if anybody or anything has become unclean, he or it would strive to regain the state of purity. They are not allowed to receive anybody who does not belong to them, even if he wished it, or was inclined to their religion. This, too, renders any connection with them quite impossible, and constitutes the widest gulf between us and them.

In the third place, in all manners and usages they differ from us to such a degree as to frighten their children with us, with our dress, and our ways and customs, and as to declare us to be devil’s breed, and our doings as the very opposite of all that is good and proper. By the by, we must confess, in order to be just, that a similar depreciation of foreigners not only prevails among us and the Hindus, but is common to all nations towards each other.

Summary

Religion. Between 1000 and 1500, the most important developments for the shape of Islamic society were of Sunni and Shi‘ite legal and religious norms and of Sufi traditions and personal piety. Sunnism was the dominant tradition across the Islamic world, but in both main branches of Islam, the *ulum became the religious, social, and political elites and discouraged religious innovation. Shi‘ism flourished in Iran under the Safavid rulers. Sufi piety stresses the spiritual and mystical dimensions of Islam. Sufi fraternal orders, whether Sunni or Shi‘ite, became the chief instruments of the spread of Muslim faith in most Islamic societies.

Regional Developments. Despite general religious tolerance and high cultural achievements, the Muslims were gradually pushed out of Spain by the Spanish Christian states between 1000 and 1492. In Egypt, the Shi‘ite Fatamids established a separate caliphate from 969 to 1171. The Mamluks, whose rule in Egypt lasted from 1260 to 1517, were the only Muslim dynasty to withstand the Mongol invasions. The Seljuks, based in Anatolia and Iraq, were the first major Turkish dynasty of Islam. Other notable Islamic dynasties were the Ghaznavids in Transoxiana and the Khwarizam-shahs in Persia.

Mongol Invasions. In 1255 the Mongols invaded the Muslim world and swept all before them, conquering Transoxiana, Persia, and Iraq, where they captured Baghdad and killed the last Abbasid caliph in 1258, before being defeated by the Mamluks in Syria in 1260. Thereafter, the Mongols established the Ilkhanid dynasty in Persia and converted to Islam. Another wave of Turko-Mongol conquest under Timur-i Lang further devastated much of the Near East between 1379 and 1405.

India and Southeast Asia. Muslim invaders and rulers, as well as Sufi brotherhoods, spread Islam in India, where it became an enduring and influential part of Indian civilization. A new language, Urdu-Hindi, combined Persian-Arabic and indigenous Indian elements. There was reciprocal influence between Muslims and Hindus.

Buddhism all but disappeared from India during these years, but Hindu religion and culture flourished, even under Muslim control. Hindu devotional, or bhakti, movements were especially creative.

In Southeast Asia, Islam was spread by Muslim merchants and traders, as well as by Sufi brotherhoods, and wherever it took root, it blended with local customs.

INTERPRETING THE PAST

Islam and the Challenge of Outside Influences

While Western Europe foundered in its Dark Ages, the Islamic world experienced a renaissance of learning and philosophy, scientific advance, artistic expression, and multicultural cooperation in many parts of the umma. To a great extent, this efflorescence rested on the ability of Islamic rulers to accommodate religious and cultural differences in the interests of greater societal stability.

Analyze the documents and images contained in this chapter and in MyHistoryLab / Primary Source to comment on the degree to which Muslims tolerated non-Islamic ideas and individuals. It appears that many Muslims were able to put aside religious differences in the interest of learning.

For a few examples, one might address the Muslim account of Maimonides, the various images of Islamic science, and al-Ghazzali’s commentaries on the search for truth.

Text Sources from MyHistoryLab / Primary Source DVD

Ibn Khaldun, the *Muqaddimah*
Al-Ghazzali’s *Confessions*

Text Sources from Chapter 13

“A Muslim Biographer’s account of Maimonides” (p. 389)
“The Mongol Catastrophe” (p. 392)
“How the Hindus Differ from the Muslims” (p. 399).
Review Questions

1. In 1000–1500, why did no Muslim leader build a unified large-scale Islamic empire of the extent of the early Abbasids?

2. How were the ulama educated? What was their relationship to political leadership? What social roles did they play? What was the role of the madrasahs in Islamic culture and civilization?

3. What was the role and impact of religious sectarianism in this period? of the institutionalization of Sufi piety and thought? of the social and political role of Sufism?

4. Discuss the cultural developments in Spain before 1500. Why was Córdoba such a model of civilized culture? What were some of the distinguishing features of al-Andalus?

5. Why did Islam survive the successive invasions by steppe peoples (Turks and Mongols) from 945 on? What were the lasting results of these “invasions” for the Islamic world?

6. What were the primary obstacles to stable rule for India’s Muslim invaders and immigrants? How did they deal with them?

Key Terms

- **Al-Andalus** (p. 385)
- **bhakti** (p. 398)
- **Deccan** (p. 393)
- **ghazis** (p. 397)
- **madrasa** (p. 381)
- **mamluk** (p. 396)
- **Ramadan** (p. 383)
- **Reconquista** (p. 386)
- **Sufi (soo-FEE)** (p. 383)
- **sultans** (p. 387)
- **Urdu-Hindi** (p. 397)

Note: To learn more about the topics in this chapter, please turn to the Suggested Readings at the end of the book. For additional sources related to this chapter please see the Primary Source DVD at the back of this text or MyHistoryLab.

Visual Sources from MyHistoryLab / PrimarySource DVD

- amic Science and Alchemy
- amic Astronomy and Astrology
- amic World Map

Questions

- How does the account of a Muslim traveler in India (p. 399) reveal Islam’s cosmopolitan character during this period?
- What do the visual sources of Islamic science say about Islam’s incorporation of non-Islamic science?
- How did political science develop in this period? Read the excerpt from Ibn Khaldun (the *Muqaddimah*).