

IN CONTEXT

FOCUS

Islamic empires

BEFORE

1501 The Safavid dynasty unites Persia; they make Shi'a Islam the state religion, and suppress all other religions and other forms of Islam.

1526 At the first Battle of Panipat, Babur, a descendant of Mongol rulers Timur and Genghis Khan, conquers Delhi and founds the Mughal Empire.

1540 Babur's successor, Humayun, rapidly loses much of the empire and is exiled.

AFTER

1632 The Taj Mahal, the crowning glory of Mughal architecture, is commissioned.

1658–1707 The Mughal Empire reaches its greatest extent under Aurangzeb, but his harsh rule leads to revolt.

1858 The last Mughul emperor is removed by the British.

ROYALTY IS A REMEDY FOR THE SPIRIT OF REBELLION

THE CONQUESTS OF AKBAR THE GREAT (1556)

While in exile in Persia, Akbar's father, Humayun, develops close ties with the **Safavid court**, who help him recover some of his **territories in India**.

Akbar wins the Second Battle of Panipat and the Mughal dynasty goes on to become the dominant power on the Indian subcontinent.

Akbar strengthens the cultural, commercial, and political **bonds between Persia and India**.

Persian artists and scholars are lured to India by the **Mughal court's brilliance**.

Persian culture influences northern Indian literary, architectural, and artistic traditions, resulting in a **distinctive Mughal style**.

In February 1556, Abu Akbar became the new ruler of the Muslim Mughal dynasty in northern India, founded 30 years earlier by Turkic-Mongol invaders from Central Asia. The emperor's forces immediately confronted the army of Hemu, a rival claimant to the throne of Delhi, at the Second Battle of Panipat. The Mughals

inflicted a crushing defeat on Hemu, and regained territory lost by Akbar's father, Humayun. Akbar then gradually consolidated and extended his authority, annexing all of northern and part of central India. Rulers were deposed and killed and citizens massacred as once-independent kingdoms became provinces of his empire.

See also: Muhammad receives the divine revelation 78–81 ■ The founding of Baghdad 86–93 ■ The fall of Granada 128–29 ■ The fall of Constantinople 138–41 ■ The founding of the Safavid dynasty, Persia 198

Support and survival

Akbar maintained the political unity of his sprawling realm by building an administration capable of expansion as new territories were incorporated. He created a network of highly paid nobles who served as provincial governors, or were employed as commanders of field armies or as part of the central military—the backbone of the empire. He also recruited talented men from across India (and Persia), both Muslim and Hindu, into his government, remunerating them with money or land.

This system rewarded individual merit and loyalty, but kept the administration from becoming too centralized—a distinct advantage in an empire that was difficult to hold together from a single center. The emperor



In this miniature painting, the Mughals are seen battling their Hindu enemies at Panipat. As later conquests added money, men, and weapons to the imperial army, it became supreme.

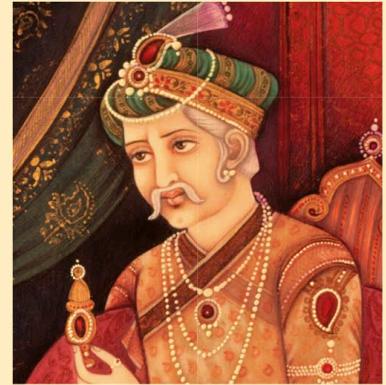
himself was often on the move, traveling with his court and harem in well-appointed tents.

Another unifying factor was the spread of Islam, together with its arts and culture; however, Akbar believed in religious freedom and allowed the empire’s non-Muslim populations, which included a large Hindu majority, to live by their own faiths, laws, and customs.

Interaction with Persia

Babur, the founder of the Mughal dynasty, and Humayun, Akbar’s father, had developed diplomatic, cultural, and political links with another Islamic empire in the region, Safavid Persia, which stimulated Mughal interest in Persian fine arts such as miniature painting and the “art of the book.” Akbar set up studios to produce illustrated books in the cities of Fatehpur Sikri and Lahore (now in Pakistan), and Persian architects and artisans were brought to India to design and construct palaces, forts, mosques, and public buildings, including Humayun’s tomb in Delhi. This domed structure inspired major architectural innovations, and a unique Persian-influenced building style developed across the Indian subcontinent.

The Mughal Empire continued to prosper under Akbar’s son Jahangir, but later in the 17th century it declined amid religious conflict and economic problems. The emperors were defeated by Afghan invaders, then came under the control of the Marathas, Hindu warriors who dominated Indian affairs in the second half of the 18th century, and finally were taken over by the British after Britain defeated the Marathas in 1818. ■



Akbar

Akbar was just 13 years old when he inherited the Mughal throne, and initially ruled under a regent, Bairam Khan, who assisted him in forcibly unifying India’s collection of regional kingdoms into a single, centralized political system within which the emperor was the supreme source of authority.

Under Akbar, the dynasty became an artistic as well as military power. Painting and literature blossomed under the emperor’s patronage—although he himself was illiterate, he acquired a library of 24,000 books. His capital at Fatehpur Sikri also became a center for religious debate and his court a place of culture and learning. Although he never renounced Islam, Akbar was open to the ideas of other faiths, and he invited Hindu, Christian, and Buddhist philosophers to debate with the Muslim theologians at his court. He even conceived a new religion, which combined elements of all these faiths, with himself as the deity.