

THE MUGHAL DYNASTY
After an initial period of expansion and consolidation, the Mughal Empire remained a stable and vibrant entity for over 170 years (1556–1719). A long, slow decline ended with the empire's dissolution in 1857.



The first Mughal emperor
Babur, founder of the Mughal Empire, is shown here capturing sheep from the Hazara tribe. Babur is remembered as much for his literary prowess as for his military achievements. This picture is from his memoir, the *Baburnama*, which provides a frank insight into his life.

The Great Mughals

One of the most powerful states of the 17th century, the Mughal Empire had a complex administrative system that enabled it to rule over more than 100 million people across most of the Indian subcontinent. The splendor and sophistication of its court was world-famous.

The decisive battles in Babur's (see left) conquest of north India were his defeat of the Afghan Sultan of Delhi, Ibrahim Lodi, at Panipat in 1526 and his success over a confederacy of Rajput kings at Kanua the following year. Using firearms and an experienced and efficient cavalry, he had consolidated Mughal (Persian for Mongol) rule over the rich cities and

productive lands of northern India from his capital at Agra by his death in 1530. His son, Humayun, met with less success. By 1540, he had lost his father's kingdom to the Afghan ruler, Sher Shah Sur, and had been forced into exile at the Safavid court in Persia. In mid-1555, with Persian support, he restored Mughal rule by defeating Sher Shah's weaker descendants, thus

duplicating his father's conquests. However, he died just seven months later, leaving the empire to his 12-year-old son, Akbar, with an influential noble, Bairam Khan, as his regent. Together, they extended Mughal control over northern India, in the region bounded by the Indus and Ganges rivers, to form an imperial heartland that, in time, was framed by palace fortresses at Agra, Allahabad, Ajmer, and Lahore. After he came of age in 1560, Akbar achieved a further series of military successes; by his death in 1605, his empire reached from Kashmir in the north and Afghanistan in the northwest, to Bengal in the east and the Deccan plateau in the south.

Structure and tolerance
To consolidate his position, Akbar established a centralized system of government. This was administered by warrior-aristocrats (*mansabdars*) of various ranks who could be appointed to bureaucratic or military positions and were accompanied by their own households or troops. The most senior *mansabdars* were paid with land grants (*jagirs*). They had the right to collect taxes from this land, but could not own, govern, or occupy it. Akbar had a policy of religious tolerance, which was evident in his own marriages to women of different faiths, whom he did not force to convert to Islam. This was a shrewd

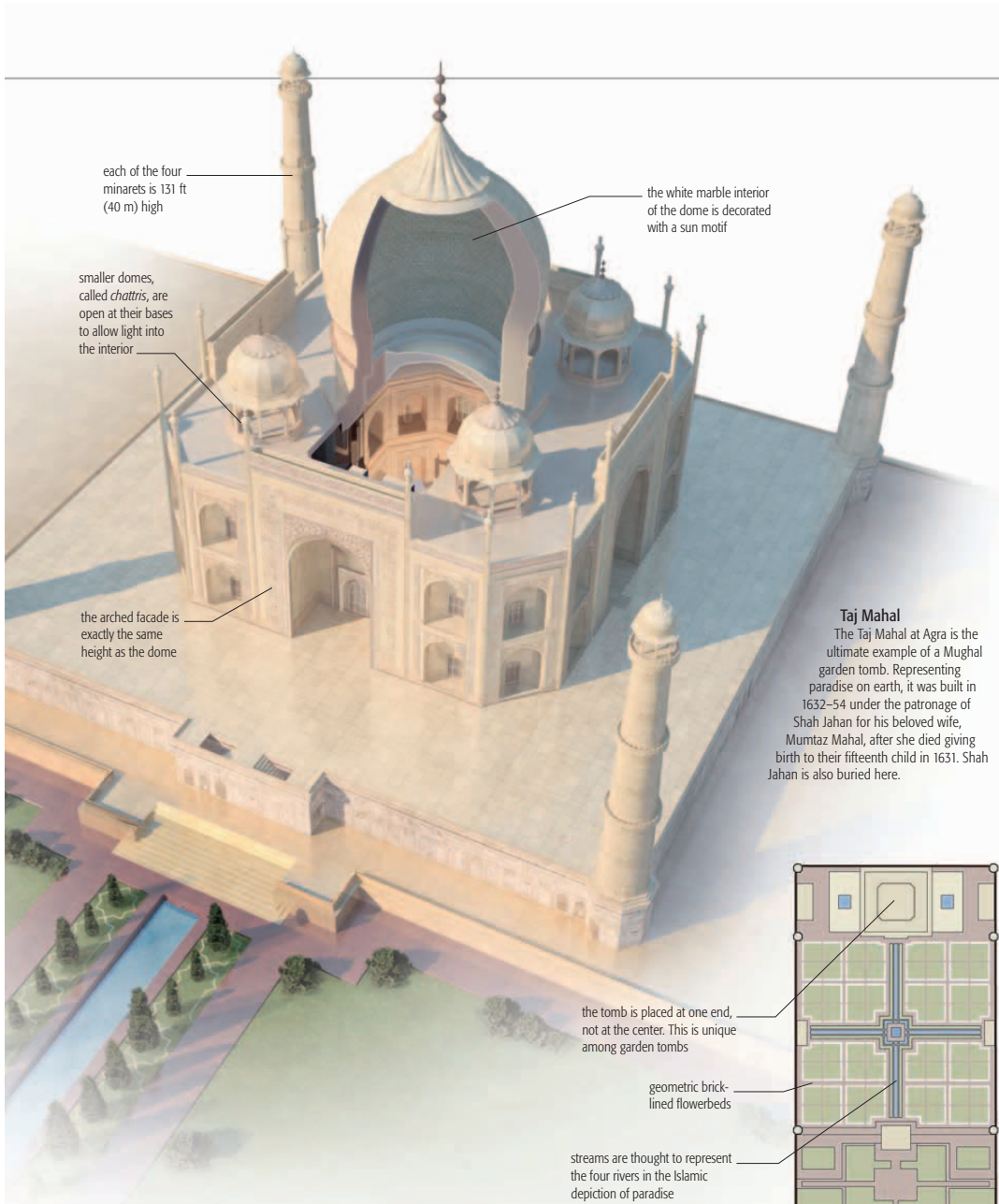


BEFORE

On the eve of its conquest by the Muslim Mughals, India was very fragmented.

MUSLIM AND HINDU INDIA
Muslim rule over India's predominantly Hindu population began in the north with the **Delhi Sultanate** (1206–1526) << 180–81. The south was dominated by the **Hindu Vijayanagar Empire**. The center consisted mainly of Muslim sultanates, while the **Hindu Rajputs** and **Lodi Afghans** quarreled over the north.

BABUR IN AFGHANISTAN
To the northwest, in Central Asia, **Babur**, a descendant of Genghis Khan << 164–65, had been exiled from his home in Ferghana by the Uzbek Shaibani Khan. He seized Kabul, capital of Afghanistan in 1504, then moved on to India.



Red Fort
Repeating scalloped arches of red sandstone in the Red Fort at Delhi. The Red Fort, or Lal Quil, was at the heart of Shah Jahan's new city. From 1648 it functioned as his imperial palace and the Mughal administrative center.

each of the four minarets is 131 ft (40 m) high

the white marble interior of the dome is decorated with a sun motif

smaller domes, called *chattris*, are open at their bases to allow light into the interior

the arched facade is exactly the same height as the dome

Taj Mahal

The Taj Mahal at Agra is the ultimate example of a Mughal garden tomb. Representing paradise on earth, it was built in 1632–54 under the patronage of Shah Jahan for his beloved wife, Mumtaz Mahal, after she died giving birth to their fifteenth child in 1631. Shah Jahan is also buried here.

the tomb is placed at one end, not at the center. This is unique among garden tombs

geometric brick-lined flowerbeds

streams are thought to represent the four rivers in the Islamic depiction of paradise

political move that would help to unite the many faiths of his empire. He also allowed the Hindu Rajputs to negotiate entry into his nobility if they offered their daughters in marriage. Eventually, he relied more on Rajputs and Persians than on his own Central Asian nobles.

Reform and the arts

During his reign, Akbar also reduced the influence of Muslim scholars (*‘ulama*), abolished taxes on Hindu pilgrims and non-Muslim residents (*jizya*), and introduced the Bengali calendar, a solar calendar to replace the Muslim lunar cycle. At his new palace at Fatehpur Sikri near Agra, he held

religious debates in a custom-built *ibadat-khana*, or “house of worship,” that gave representation to different faith groups. These policies were highly pragmatic in a country that was predominantly non-Muslim, but they were also a reflection of his eclectic spirituality, further revealed in his establishment of a cult based on the worship of light and sun (*din-i-ilahi*).

Music and art also interested Akbar. He induced the famed singer and musician, Tansen, to join his court, and began patronizing what became known as north Indian classical music. At Fatehpur Sikri, he established a school of Mughal painting, combining Persian

and Indian influences in a style that was to reach its peak during the reign of his son, Jahangir (1605–27).

Peak and decline

Jahangir’s son, Shah Jahan (1628–58), contributed more artistic treasures, such as the Taj Mahal at Agra and a majestic new capital at Delhi, which included the Red Fort and the Jama Masjid. These huge projects were also symbols of Mughal wealth, dependent on flourishing agriculture and trade. From his accession in 1658, the last “great” Mughal, Aurangzeb oversaw the expansion of the empire to its largest extent. Yet his reign also

The paradise garden

The Taj Mahal garden is thought to represent paradise; the word “paradise” is from the ancient Persian for “walled garden.” Mughal formal gardens, *charbaghs* (four gardens), were based on those of the Persians, who saw great significance in the number four. The design was brought to India by Babur. The plan of the Taj Mahal garden (left) shows the use of units of four.

signified the beginning of the end. He was often away from his capital on military campaigns, and he depleted the treasury attempting to defeat the Marathas in the south who were trying to establish their own empire. Some scholars also believe his strict interpretation of Islam offended his Rajput collaborators and Hindu subjects.

The empire was further weakened by a rapid succession of rulers following Aurangzeb’s death in 1707. In 1739, Nadir Shah, the Safavids’ successor, sacked Delhi and seized the Mughal treasury. The empire was all but dead. In 1857, the British deposed Babadur Shah II, the last Mughal emperor.

AFTER

In the 18th century, Mughal sovereignty became limited to Delhi and its hinterland.

END OF MUGHAL RULE

The emperor retained some authority within India as a whole as the *shahanshah*, or “king of kings.” His court patronized religious and cultural developments.



BAHADUR SHAH II

EAST INDIA COMPANY

During the early 19th century, any remaining authority was eroded systematically by the expanding **East India Company 352**.

A final attempt to restore Mughal rule was connected to the Indian Mutiny of 1857. This led to the dissolution of the Mughal Empire and the establishment of British crown rule in India **352–53**. **The last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah II, died in exile in Burma in 1862.**