CHAPTER 12

Religion and Diversity in the Transformation of Southern Asia, 711–1400

Angkor Wat

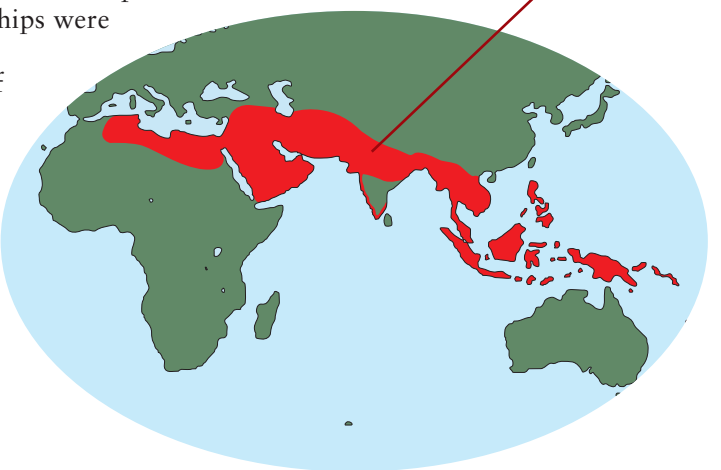
The temples of Angkor Wat are reflected in the moat surrounding the temple complex in Siem Reap, Cambodia. Angkor Wat testifies to the influence of Hinduism in portions of Southeast Asia (page 296).

In 711 an Arab ship passed the mouth of India's Indus River, sailing northwest from the island of Ceylon. Laden with spices, silks, and exquisite objects made from metal and jewels, it was bound for a Persian Gulf port at the mouth of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. But the ship never arrived at its destination. From an inlet near the Indus, a pirate ship moved swiftly to intercept the Arab craft. The pirates captured the ship, killed the crew, and sailed off to tally the value of their plunder.

Hearing the news, the Umayyad governor awaiting the cargo was furious. How dare these pirates steal from Muslims? The governor probably realized that he could not locate the pirates or recover the cargo, but he could punish the entire region, as a warning that Arab ships were not to be disturbed. He promptly sent 12,000 mounted warriors against the rajahs (kings) of the western Indian region of Sind. Conquest proved easy, and suddenly the Muslims stood on the banks of the Indus, considering how attractive it might be to seize all of India for Islam.

This sequence of events, initiating direct contact between Muslims and Hindus, launched 13 centuries of conflict and connection between practitioners of the two religions.

Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam Affect South Asia



Islam Expands Eastward

Islam's swift conquests in North Africa and southwestern Asia encouraged its further expansion into Persia, Afghanistan, and India, where its impact was dramatic. The Abbasid Caliphate, which assumed leadership of Islam by overthrowing the Umayyad dynasty in 750, relocated its capital eastward to Baghdad. It then extended its domination over the Iranian plateau and the remains of the Persian Empire. The Abbasids presided over Islam's Golden Age, a flourishing of learning and culture across the Muslim world that, at the time, stretched from west and South Asia across North Africa to Spain. But this vast region was unified only by religion. In the long run, the Abbasids proved no more capable than the Umayyads of imposing centralized governance on such a diverse set of realms and peoples. They themselves fell victim to a series of revolts in outlying provinces, and in 945 a group of Iranian warlords reduced them to the status of a puppet government.

The Abbasids are unable to unify the caliphate politically

Islam was also beginning to penetrate the vast expanses of the Indian subcontinent, which since the collapse of Mauryan rule in 184 B.C.E. had been unified just once, under two centuries of Gupta rule (320–550). The arrival of Islam did not cause disunity but perpetuated it, as Hindus and Muslims persistently fought one another, creating hostility that endures today.

Neither religion was able to prevail over the other, and as India divided between Hindus and Muslims, Hindu priests, Buddhist monks, and energetic merchants carried Indian culture into the mainland societies and islands of Southeast Asia. There a

FOUNDATION MAP 12.1 The Abbasid Caliphate in 800 C.E.

Islam spread so rapidly that its practitioners were unable to develop political institutions that could govern its extensive acquisitions adequately. The Abbasid Caliphate sprawled from Syria to the Indus Valley, but the caliphs never exerted central control over their realm. Notice that their decision to relocate their capital from Damascus eastward to Baghdad testifies both to the importance of the eastern portion of the caliphate and to the difficulty of controlling the western portion. In the absence of political centralization, what techniques could the caliphs use to control their empire?

fascinating set of hybrid cultures emerged, influenced by India yet clearly distinct from the customs and traditions of the subcontinent.

Islamic Persia and the Abbasid Caliphate

The caliphate profits from the Persian-Byzantine wars

The Islamic conquest of Iran was made possible by the decline of Sasanian Persia, which had been weakened by its numerous inconclusive campaigns against the Byzantine Empire. Early in the seventh century the Sasanian King Chosroes (*KAHS-ress*) II attacked the Empire, taking Antioch, Damascus, Jerusalem, and Egypt (Map 12.1). But the Byzantines reconstructed their armies and in 622 launched a devastating drive into the Sasanian lands, burning a magnificent Zoroastrian fire temple in 624 and penetrating Mesopotamia three

years later. By 633 both Sasanians and Byzantines were exhausted, and at this precise moment Muslim warriors burst forth from Arabia. The Muslims' timing could not have been less convenient for the Sasanians, who were unable to mount an effective defense. Their armies were defeated by Islamic forces in 636, and their empire collapsed in 642.

Persia's conquest by the Muslims marked a dramatic break with its Zoroastrian religious heritage. Although the new rulers tolerated Zoroastrianism, its followers were subject to discrimination and taxation. Many converted to Islam; others moved to western India near Bombay, where their descendants (called Parsees) remain to this day. A few persevered in remote corners of the Iranian plateau. Politically, the once-glorious Persian Empire was now absorbed into the Islamic empire. Muslim conquest marked the end of historic Persia as a powerful, independent political force.

Persian Influences on Islamic Governance and Culture

Although the Persian Empire had ended, its culture survived in an altered form under the alien Islamic regime. Persian culture blended with Islamic ideas of government to form a distinctive new culture exhibiting both Iranian and Arabian elements.

Persian influences modify Islam

The Muslims proved just as susceptible as the Greeks to the attractions of eastern forms of governance. Persian kings had exercised centralized powers far beyond those held by local Arabian tribal leaders, and the caliphs promptly adopted as much of that authority as they dared. In particular, the caliphs admired the Persian policy of subordinating the religious authority of Zoroastrian priests to the political will of the emperor. Soon interpreters of Islamic law found themselves overruled by political officials who had subordinated themselves to religious authority during the time of the Prophet but intended to do so no longer. The power of the caliphate grew dramatically in the years following the conquest of Persia. This enhancement of the caliph's authority, coupled with the growing importance of Arabic as a common language, provided a degree of unity in this region of the developing Islamic empire.

Arabic, of course, had always been the language of Islam. The *Qur'an* required that Arabic be used for all prayers. Thus all converts had to learn Arabic, and many who did not convert realized that knowledge of that language was essential for dealing with their new masters. But the Persian language did not disappear, as Arabs were enchanted by its richness and beauty. Poets and scholars who wrote in Arabic began to adopt Persian expressions, imagery, and syntax; Persian plot lines found their way into Arabic folktales; Persian vocabulary supplemented and enriched spoken Arabic. The result was an Arabic language that grew beyond its roots in the Arabian Peninsula to become a cosmopolitan tongue that Islamic conquerors could use to enhance their influence in Southwest Asia.

The Impact of Shi'ite Opposition

The conquest of Persia took place within the context of the great Sunni-Shi'ite split, which divided the Islamic world after 661. Refusing to accept the Sunni leadership of the Umayyad caliphs, who set up their government in Damascus, Persian Shi'ites had made great progress preaching their beliefs on the Iranian Plateau. This made it impossible for the Umayyads to impose an Islamic Peace on their vast holdings. This failure annoyed merchants, who depended on political stability for their commerce to prosper.

Shi'ites undermine the caliphate

The people of Persia suffered from additional grievances. Non-Muslims in Iran were required to pay a special tax as the price of religious toleration. Upon conversion, this tax was supposed to disappear, but the Umayyad government, unable to balance its accounts, was reluctant to lift this burden from Persian converts. Moreover, the caliphate inexplicably refused to reinvest any of the income it derived from taxes in Persia itself, where arid conditions required constant, expensive irrigation. These grievances fueled a revolution in 747, led by a man who called himself Abu Muslim. His real name and ancestry are unknown, but his rhetorical and political skills energized Persian malcontents and attracted Shi'ite Arab dissenters.

Abbasids use Persian connections to overthrow the Umayyads

The resulting turmoil squeezed the Umayyads between two angry groups, a situation that worked to the Abbasids' advantage when they overthrew the Umayyads in 750. The Abbasid revolt, which had begun in a northeastern Persian province in 747, was led by Muslims loyal to the family of a man named Abbas, an uncle of the Prophet Muhammad. Its success aided by uprisings in Persia, the Abbasid Caliphate took care to look after the needs of this province. Persia suddenly benefited from tax revenues, and Persian influence rose at the Abbasid court. Although they were themselves Sunni Muslims, the Abbasids strove to placate Persian Shi'ites, hoping perhaps to heal the century-old schism within the Islamic world or at least to ensure their continued domination of that world.

The Rise of Baghdad

The Abbasids reorient the caliphate eastward

The Abbasids also shifted the focus of the Islamic world eastward. The gateways to Europe through Constantinople and southern Africa through Ethiopia were barred by Christian states hostile to Islam. Northern Asia was mountainous and cold, filled with wolves and unfriendly Turkic tribes. Opportunity for Islamic expansion clearly lay in the east. In 763 the caliphate moved its capital east to a new city, which it built on the site of a tiny village known as Baghdad. Located in eastern Mesopotamia near the site of ancient Babylon, Baghdad's founding embodied the Abbasid transfer of emphasis from western to eastern Islam.

The caliphate's decision to relocate was considered carefully. In addition to being close to the eastern Islamic lands, Baghdad was strategically located at the juncture of the trade routes connecting Syria, Mesopotamia, and Persia. It had easy access to the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in one of the most fertile areas of Mesopotamia. Favored by its location, Baghdad quickly became the largest urban area in the history of western Asia, populated in the early 800s by somewhere between 300,000 and 500,000 people. By comparison, Constantinople at that point contained about 200,000 people. Baghdad proved to be central to the development not only of the Abbasid Caliphate but of Islamic civilization.

Cosmopolitan Islam

Islam now developed a prosperous, cosmopolitan civilization. The Islamic faith had originated in the Arabian Peninsula, grounded in local Arab customs and culture. Its explosive century of expansion, however, had exposed it to a broad variety of ethnic and linguistic groups across southern Asia. For the leadership of Islam, a religion that claimed universality, the next step was both obvious and challenging: it must grow beyond its Arabian origins. To do so, it would have to reach out to people of diverse

ancestries, offering them a path to salvation and combining their backgrounds and cultures into a new civilization that would be greater than the sum of its parts. To do otherwise would limit Islam's appeal, restricting it to an ethnic Arabian elite, denying its claim to worship the one true God of all humanity, and perpetuating it as a conquering rather than a constructing faith.

Islam becomes a universal faith

Baghdad enabled the Abbasids to take that next step. They made Islam a universal religion and inspired a golden age of Islamic civilization. Cosmopolitan and diverse, Baghdad welcomed Arabians, Mesopotamians, Syrians, Persians, Indians, Egyptians, Central Asians, Christians, Zoroastrians, Jews, and many others. In this new, vibrant city these people were assimilated into a new, vibrant civilization built on a self-confident, dynamic faith that offered spiritual equality to all who embraced it. Growing into a major industrial and commercial center, Baghdad provided jobs for all who sought them and ample revenues to sustain Abbasid ambitions.

Abbasid Governance

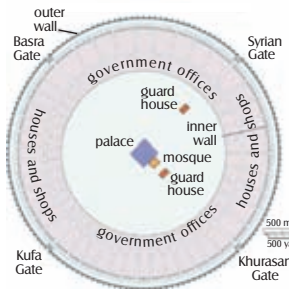
Abbasids utilize all conquered peoples

Chief among Abbasid ambitions was correcting the errors of the Umayyads. While the Umayyads had reserved influential positions for Arabs, the Abbasids sought to advance talented people, regardless of ethnicity, to positions of responsibility. The government at Baghdad recruited personnel from throughout the empire with the promise of equality of opportunity in a large empire serving a universal faith. The privileges and elite status long enjoyed by Arabs were abolished. Jews served the caliphate as bankers and financial advisors; Persians as bureaucrats and scribes; Mesopotamian Christians as engineers and diplomats.

Although Arabs supervised all these groups, they were Arabs completely devoted to the Abbasid regime. Loyalty to the caliph was more important than ethnic ancestry. The exclusively Arab armies were replaced by a skilled force of paid professional soldiers of mixed ethnic background. No longer needed for conquest, they were assigned to maintain internal order, patrol the frontiers, and keep watch on the Byzantine Empire. Their leadership was still Arabian, but their most important characteristic was loyalty.

The Abbasids built on governmental foundations laid by the Umayyads, particularly their centralization of authority. Control was maintained by the Caliph and his advisors. Government bureaus collected taxes, kept records, handled correspondence, and disbursed tax revenues. Judges were charged with applying the Shari`ah, or Islamic law (Chapter 11), to everyday life in every corner of the realm. A *wazir* (*WAH-zēr*) supervised and coordinated the entire politico-legal system in Baghdad. Governors closely tied to the caliph's family ruled outlying provinces with degrees of loyalty proportionate to their distance from the capital. As messages had to be transmitted slowly across the caliphate by either camel or ship, the caliph's operational authority dwindled significantly on the remote fringes of the empire. Although fully centralized political control eluded the Abbasids, the overall extent of centralization in the caliphate was impressive.

The inner city of Baghdad c.800



A sketch of the inner city of Baghdad around the year 800 C.E.

Commerce and Culture in the Abbasid Caliphate

The administrative stability of the Abbasid era also promoted significant commercial and cultural achievements. Abbasid caliphs nurtured trade routes that crossed both Asia and Africa, while in the caliphate itself they fostered literature and the arts.

Muslims promote commerce and trade

Perhaps because Muhammad himself had been a merchant, commercial activity was generally held in higher esteem in Islamic lands than it was in either Christian Europe or Confucian China. The Abbasid caliphs, eager to increase both their own immense wealth and the prosperity of the lands they ruled, lowered trade barriers, promoted the work of artisans and merchants, and encouraged long-distance commerce. A vast network of trade routes stretched by land across both Central Asia and the Sahara Desert, and by water across the Mediterranean and the Red and Arabian seas. Products widely traded included Chinese silks and Indian spices; gold, salt, slaves, and ivory from Africa; steel and leather from Spain; and magnificent hand-woven carpets and textiles from southern and western Asia. Banking and credit helped to finance expensive commercial enterprises. The widespread use of the Arabic language eased business transactions, and Arabic numerals simplified and standardized bookkeeping.

Islamic culture prospers under the Abbasids

Eager to imitate the Indo-Persian civilizations, which they considered superior to that of the Arabian Peninsula, the Abbasids led their empire into a spectacular cultural renaissance. The Caliph Harun al-Rashid (*hah-ROON al rah-SHĒD*), who ruled from 786 to 809, built a magnificent palace that reflected both his astonishing wealth and his reputation as a generous patron of the arts. He brought to Baghdad authors, artists, architects, and entertainers from as far away as Morocco in North Africa and Delhi in India, and they made the city a radiant cultural center. Harun's son established in Baghdad an academy called the House of Wisdom. There some scholars translated ancient Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit writings into Arabic, while others laid the foundation for the devotion to keen observation and objective thinking that became characteristic of Arab scientific and intellectual life.

From the eighth through the twelfth centuries, Islamic learning blossomed. In philosophy, Muslims such as Ibn Sina (*ib-un SĒ-nah*), later known in Europe as Avicenna, translated and wrote commentaries on the works of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, which at this time were unknown in the West. Ibn Sina was also inspired by the discovery of Indian and Greek writings on medicine, which he and other Muslims translated, compiled, explained, and amplified. The Persian scholar al-Khwarizmi (*al kwa-RIZ-mē*) analyzed the findings of various classical thinkers, including Claudius Ptolemy, whose detailed conception of an earth-centered universe was later revised by other Muslims, including Ibn al-Haytham (*ib-un al-hī-THAHM*) and Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (*nah-SEER al-dēn al-TOO-si*). Ptolemy's view of the universe, as modified by Muslim scholars, prevailed until the seventeenth century both in the Islamic world and in the West.

A page from a twelfth-century Islamic manuscript dealing with alchemy.

Muslims develop navigational and scientific instruments

Inspired by their contacts with India and China, Muslims under the caliphate also proved to be talented innovators. For example, they developed the quadrant, the astrolabe, the celestial globe, and other instruments of navigation. Most of these had been invented by other peoples, but Muslims refined and used them to great advantage. Muslims also excelled at physics and optics, and they developed windmills, watermills, water-clocks, new methods of irrigation, and instruments used in meteorology. Applying Persian and Indian mathematics, al-Khwarizmi devised both algebra and the Arabic numerals that are universally used today.

Muslims use durable paper to record and preserve knowledge

The production of paper provides an excellent example of Islamic development of an earlier invention. Paper had been invented in China sometime between 200 and 50 B.C.E. When the Muslims encountered this product, they found that it was made of wood-based

Document 12.1 Quatrains from *The Rubaiyat*

Omar Khayyam's collection of quatrains, or four-line poetic stanzas, was translated from Omar's elegant Persian into English by Edward FitzGerald in 1859. This translation made the work accessible to Western readers, and it has since been translated into more than one hundred languages. Omar was a master of astronomy, history, jurisprudence, mathematics, medicine, and philosophy as well as poetry. *The Rubaiyat* reveals his fatalistic fascination with questions of eternal interest: Who are we? Why are we here? Where are we going? What is the nature of our relationship to God?

The moving finger writes; and, having writ,
Moves on; nor all your piety nor wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,
Nor all your tears wash out a word of it.

Oh, threats of hell and hopes of paradise!
One thing at least is certain: ***this*** life flies.
One thing is certain and the rest is lies:
The flower that once has blown forever dies.

fibers derived from tropical plants like bamboo, hemp, and jute. Papers made from these fibers were not particularly durable, and since these plants did not grow in Islamic lands, Muslims looked for new sources of fiber. They began to use rags made from linen or from cotton cloth, which produce paper that is extremely durable. In 794, the first Islamic paper mill was built in Baghdad. Soon the availability of this paper throughout Muslim lands encouraged scholarly writing in virtually every area of knowledge. Paper made it possible for Muslims to preserve, and eventually transmit, Greek and Byzantine knowledge and culture. When Europe first came into contact with this Islamic knowledge base in the twelfth century, its scholars were both impressed and intimidated.

Works of fiction and folklore also flourished in this era. The most famous of these was probably *The 1,001 Nights*, also known in the West as *The Arabian Nights*. Embellished over the centuries, this assortment of fanciful and fantastic fables eventually came to include such well-known adventure stories as "Sinbad the Sailor" and "Aladdin and His Magic Lamp." Of the many marvelous works of poetry produced in this period, among the best known is *The Rubaiyat*, a collection of verses originally composed around 1100 by a famous scientist and mathematician named Omar Khayyam (see "Quatrains from *The Rubaiyat*").

A Muslim astronomer's depiction of the constellation Sagittarius, copied from the original manuscript in 1730.

Sufis and Fundamentalists

Not everyone in the caliphate participated in the economic and cultural achievements of Islam's Golden Age. Many devout Muslims worried that the Age's emphasis on material prosperity, its encouragement of artistic expression, and its wide-ranging intellectual efforts were undermining the simplicity and spirituality of their faith. As various groups sought different ways to revitalize Islam and return it to its roots, several distinct responses emerged.

Islamic mysticism seeks direct connection with God

One was **Sufism** (*SOO-fizm*). Deriving from Persian influence on Shi'ism, Sufism was a mystic strain of Islam that advocated direct union with God through prayer, contemplation, and religious ecstasy. Sufism developed gradually during the first three centuries of Islamic history. In its early stages, it was characterized by rejection of the

luxury and wealth that Islam had come to emphasize under the influences of Persia and Byzantium. Sufism favored a simple lifestyle, recalling the devout Muslim to the origins of the faith on the austere deserts of the Arabian peninsula. In Arabic, *suf* (*SOOF*) means "wool," and Sufis (*SOO-fēz*) wore rough woolen clothing, obviously uncomfortable in the Middle Eastern heat, to symbolize their renunciation of worldly pleasures, a renunciation also practiced by Buddhist and Christian mystics and monks. Later Sufism also came to involve the pursuit of a mystical union with God through elaborate dances and ceremonies. Sufi doctrines varied widely as different brotherhoods of Sufis developed. One principal tradition was centered in Mecca and another in northeastern Persia, although Sufi brotherhoods also became common in India.

Sufism and fundamentalism offer alternatives to Abbasid materialism

Another response to the materialism of the Abbasid Caliphate was the growth of militant Islamic fundamentalism. Unlike the Sufis, who strove mainly to withdraw from the secular world, the fundamentalists sought to combat and repress it. In general, fundamentalists believed that Islam itself had become corrupted by secular influences, and that purification of the Muslim community, or *umma*, was necessary to restore fidelity to the original revelations of Allah transmitted through Muhammad. Like Sufism, Islamic fundamentalism took a wide variety of forms, including Wahhabism, which eventually became the dominant form of Islam on the Arabian Peninsula.

Fundamentalists oppose modern developments

Inspired by a deep suspicion of intellectual pursuits, the fundamentalists who led eleventh-century Spain exiled both the great Muslim scholar-physician Ibn Rushd (*ib-un ROOSHD*), known in the West as Averröes, and the Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides (*mī-MAH-nih-dēz*), charging them with polluting the Qur'an by trying to reconcile it with modern philosophy. Later Islamic governments in Spain appointed religious courts, instructing them to enforce the Shari`ah against any attempts at secularization.

Fundamentalist resistance to secularization fostered a climate of intellectual repression. As Islamic scientific and technological curiosity was submerged in a rising tide of fundamentalist religious fervor, Islam was poorly prepared to face the cultural and military challenges soon to be posed by the West.

The Decline of the Abbasid Caliphate

Like all the large empires before them, the Abbasids found their vast territory difficult to rule. Communication over the thousands of miles separating Spain from Baghdad was challenging enough under the best of circumstances. Quarrels between rival leaders, disputes between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims, and tensions between various ethnic groups also interfered with the ability of the Abbasids to govern effectively and frustrated their dream of conquering the world for Islam.

Forces of Disintegration

The glory of Islamic learning could not obscure the disintegration of the caliphate, which set in even before its consolidation was complete. First, Harun al-Rashid (786–809), the most powerful of the caliphs, unintentionally weakened his own system. In attempting to ensure that his older son would succeed him as caliph, he gave his younger son, al-Mamun, a governorship in northeastern Persia. But Al-Mamun used this position to challenge his

older brother, initiating four years of civil strife. Al-Mamun won, but the conflict alienated Mesopotamia and the Abbasid armies, both of which had supported the older son. Legitimate succession, a vexing problem in Islamic states since the death of Muhammad's son-in-law Ali, proved to be the first problem to erode the strength of the Abbasids.

Second, al-Mamun gained the crucial backing of the Persian prince Tahir (*TAH-hēr*) only by making Tahir hereditary governor of northeastern Persia. This grant of authority undermined the Abbasid drive for centralization. It also helped create a warlord nobility that rivaled and eventually replaced the caliph and provided a focus for Persian Shi'ite opposition to the Sunni regime in Baghdad.

The Abbasid Caliphate decays

Third, to increase their power the Abbasids established armies of Turkish slaves from central Asia called Mamluks (*MAM-lukes*). These male slaves, purchased before they turned 13, were converted to Islam and segregated in military barracks. There they studied military tactics, developed loyalty and comradeship, and after several years, became soldiers in the caliph's armies. In theory, every Mamluk was a disciplined servant of the state, without ties to family or region; his loyalty was to the caliph and the army. In practice, Mamluks fought for the caliph only so long as he paid them well and proved a competent leader. Failure in either respect could easily lead to his overthrow, as Mamluks quickly became the state's most efficient warriors. They antagonized the people of Baghdad, most of whom considered them uncivilized foreigners, so the caliphs built a new capital at Samarra (*sah-MAR-rah*) in Mesopotamia in 836 and took the Mamluks with them. The move solved one problem but created another by eroding the caliphate's authority.

The Mosque of Ibn Tulun, Cairo.

Finally, a growing disloyalty in the Abbasid bureaucracy accelerated the caliphate's decline. Dominated by factions based on family ties and cronyism, the bureaucrats began to peddle their services and influence to the highest bidders. As the caliphs became less able to maintain control of the central government, discontented factions in outlying areas took advantage of the situation and revolted. In the ninth century, unrest broke out in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Iran. Occasionally the caliphs were able to restore order, but only through the use of the unpopular Mamluks. As the authority of the central administration disintegrated, the empire itself collapsed.

Although the last caliph did not leave the throne until his murder by the Mongols in 1258, the tenth century marked the end of effective Abbasid rule. One by one, provinces of the empire had broken away. Egypt was taken over by a Mamluk family in 868 and then by the Shi'ite Fatimid dynasty in 969. The governor of Islamic Spain created his own independent caliphate in 929, confirming a separation that had actually begun much earlier. A mass revolt of frontier troops that could not be repressed resulted in the loss of Persia in the ninth century. By 935 the Abbasid caliph had lost control of every province outside the immediate vicinity of Baghdad. After a power struggle lasting nearly a decade, the Buyid (*BOO-yid*) dynasty of Shi'ite Persian warlords seized control of Baghdad in 945. The caliphs were allowed to remain as puppet rulers, but they exercised no authority. The glorious era of Abbasid rule was over.

Abbasid power ends in the tenth century C.E.

Continuity of Islamic Unity and Expansion

Political fragmentation did not, however, destroy the unity of Islam. Despite its multitude of rulers and cultures, the Muslim community was still held together by Shari`ah and the Qur'an. Islamic law provided a code of conduct that differentiated Muslims from all other

Muslims preserve unity through scripture, language, and law

peoples, giving them a common identity. Stipulations that the Qur'an must be read only in Arabic helped to make that language a common means of communication—and a unifying force—across different Muslim cultures. Finally, the pilgrimage to Mecca, a common practice in pre-Islamic Arabia that Muhammad eventually required of all believers, also helped to create cohesion.

The pilgrimage symbolized the equality of all Muslims in the context of their complete submission to Allah. Pilgrims were greeted at the outskirts of Mecca, where they exchanged their clothing for simple white robes in which they entered the holy city. During the entire seven days of the pilgrimage, no distinctions of birth, race, wealth, or position separated one Muslim from another. All wore the same white robes, performed the same rituals, and professed the same unworthiness in the sight of Allah. The pilgrimage also promoted contacts and common values among Muslim pilgrims from diverse cultures, inspiring them to foster these values in their native lands.

Nor did political division put an end to Islamic expansion. Indeed, even as the caliphate declined and the various Muslim factions fought against each other, Islamic faith and Islamic armies were penetrating into India, clashing with the ancient cultures of that immense subcontinent.

An Islamic schematic world map, dating from the Abbasid caliphate and showing the Ka'ba at the center of the world.

The Gupta Empire in India

After the end of the Mauryan Empire in 184 C.E., India remained divided among several states, a subcontinent whose cultural pluralism seemed both the reflection and the principal cause of its political disunity. Then the unexpected happened: a relatively unknown Indian family reunified the north and created the Gupta Empire (320–550), the first centralized Hindu state.

Gupta Rule and Achievements

The Gupta family came from northeastern India, where they controlled the Barabar (*bah-RAH-bur*) Hills, rich in high-quality iron ore. This guaranteed them an ample resource for swords and shields and a favorable cash flow. The dynasty's founder, Chandra Gupta I (320–335), was not related to the man of the same name who established the Mauryan Empire, and little is known about him. The actual architect of the Gupta Empire was Chandra's son, Samudra (*sah-MOO-drah*) Gupta, whose 40-year rule (335–375) gave northern India its first centralized monarchy since the Mauryans five centuries earlier.

Samudra Gupta was encouraged by his father to rule the entire known world. He fell short of that lofty goal but did manage to overthrow no fewer than 20 regional Indian kings, and in the process he gained control of both the Indus and Ganges river valleys. He also conquered several states on the central Deccan Plateau, but chose to rule those kingdoms through vassals. In turn his son, Chandra Gupta II (375–415), extended the empire's power by expelling the Scythians from west central India (Map 12.2). The new empire then exercised direct authority over port cities on the Arabian Sea, enabling it to profit handsomely from trade with western and southeastern Asia. Neither Samudra Gupta nor Chandra Gupta II had any success in subduing the independent Tamil states of south

The Gupta dynasty unifies northern India

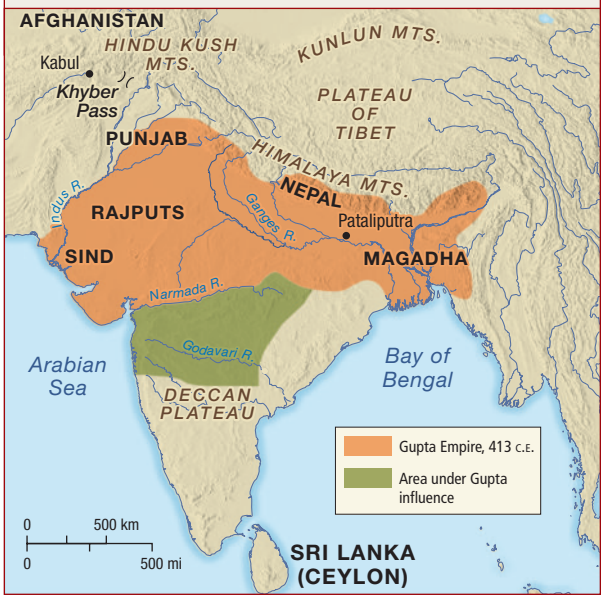
India. The size of the subcontinent, as always, posed a formidable obstacle to any would-be unifiers.

Chandra Gupta II is known more for the stability of his reign than for his military success. Accounts by both Hindus and Buddhists describe a period of religious tolerance and peace across northern India, signs of a rare social stability. The Guptas, although Hindus themselves, not only tolerated Buddhists and Jains but also subsidized their religious temples and monasteries. During this time spiritual, artistic, and philosophical culture flowered. Magnificent Hindu temples were constructed throughout the subcontinent, setting the tone for Indian architecture for centuries to come, and a number of schools of classical Hindu philosophy were established. Of these schools, **yoga**, which emphasizes meditation and self-knowledge, is the most widely known and practiced in the West.

The Guptas' preference for Hinduism affected more than philosophy and architecture in northern India. It also affected gender relations. From the Persians, Hindus had adopted **purdah** (*PURR-dah*), the seclusion of married women through their confinement to certain rooms of the house. Under this custom a respectable woman could show her face only within the family, and she had to wear a thick veil when going out in public. In northern India the custom became so vigorous that to ask after the health of a man's wife might be considered impolite. Purdah was not, however, imposed upon Buddhists or Jains, and even Hindus were free to modify it according to local custom.

Map 12.2 The Gupta Empire in 413 C.E.

India's size and topography (Map 3.1) deterred centralization, so unified governments were often confined to particular geographic subdivisions of the subcontinent. Note that early in the fourth century C.E., the Gupta Empire unified much of northern India from its base on the Gangetic Plain. Although not as large as the Mauryan Empire (Map 3.4), the Gupta Empire received tribute from areas like the Indus Valley and Nepal, bringing a degree of stability to most of India north of the Deccan Plateau. Why would governments in northern India find it difficult to expand their control southward?



Guptas connect far-flung regions commercially

The spiritual and artistic development characteristic of Gupta India was rooted in material prosperity and wealth. Trade with the West flourished, particularly with Byzantium and Rome. Indian perfumes, spices, ivory, and wood were prized in Europe. When Alaric the Goth besieged Rome in 408, part of his ransom for withdrawing his forces included 3,000 pounds of Indian pepper. But commerce with the East was even more extensive and profitable. China coveted Indian ivory, brass, cotton cloth, and unusual animals like mongooses and elephants; in return the Indians received Chinese amber, silk, and oils. Some of the trade went by sea, but ocean routes were vulnerable to weather and pirates; camel caravans traveling the Silk Road through Central Asia were far more likely to arrive intact. In the late Gupta era, however, the opening of trade with resource-rich Southeast Asia made the sea passage worth the risk.

At home, Gupta prosperity was based on agriculture, which was productive enough to enable peasants to pay significant taxes-in-kind (a portion of their harvest). The subcontinent's climate and soil supported good harvests of wheat, rice, citrus and noncitrus

fruits, and sugarcane. Because of Hindu religious prohibitions, Indians rarely ate meat, but dairy products were widely available, and fish constituted a staple in the south. The main obstacle to agriculture was weather, especially the periodic flooding in the Bay of Bengal and long periods of intense heat requiring irrigation. But famine was rare in Gupta India. The government supplemented tax revenues through ownership of all metal and salt mines, which provided a steady, substantial income.

Conflict and Collapse

Chandra Gupta II was followed by Kumara (*kuh-MAH-rah*) Gupta, whose 40-year reign (415–455) witnessed the first signs of trouble. The Central Asian migrations continued, and this time it was not the Scythians but the Huns who came calling. They were a particularly dangerous breed of Central Asian nomads: violent, ruthless fighters who killed frequently and indifferently. Kumara Gupta blocked them at the Khyber (*KĪ-burr*) Pass in the mountains between northern India and Central Asia, through which nomadic tribes seeking the more fertile lands of South Asia had long traveled. This success enabled him to hand the empire intact to his son Skanda Gupta but not to preserve it. Throughout Skanda Gupta's reign (455–467) the Huns were a constant menace, and the treasury could scarcely bear the strain of holding them back.

The Gupta Empire collapses under pressure from the Huns

Once the Huns penetrated northern India, other nomadic tribes followed, disrupting Gupta trade with Central Asia and severely reducing the empire's income. Economic setbacks combined with Hun aggression caused north Indian political unity to crumble. The Huns took the Punjab in 499, conquering Kashmir and most of the plain of the Ganges River shortly thereafter. The Gupta Empire collapsed by 550.

The Huns were not interested in replacing the Gupta Empire with one of their own. They were restless warriors, not empire builders. As the north Indian empire shattered into a series of independent kingdoms, the Huns were content to collect tribute. Some kingdoms paid, while others ignored the Huns and were ignored by them, as was the case in eastern Europe.

Centralized control existed nowhere in the subcontinent. In south India, the Tamil states disappeared, and authority was divided between forest-based tribes and valley-based villagers, both of which were ruled by warrior aristocracies. India drifted in this way for nearly two centuries, with most of its people oblivious to issues of state control and foreign threats. Then came Islam.

The Islamic Impact on India

Islam's initial venture into India occurred almost by accident. The piracy of an Umayyad ship in 711, described at the beginning of this chapter, led directly to Muslim invasion and occupation of the Sind in western India. Those actions established a contact between Muslims and Hindus that altered the economic and cultural frameworks of the Indian subcontinent. Eventually India became part of a sprawling Indian Ocean Islamic trading network, while conflict between Hindu polytheists and Muslim monotheists divided the region for centuries.

Islamic Invasions from Persia

After 711, Muslim raids from the Sind devastated the northern Indian region of Gujarat (*guh-jah-RAHT*), temporarily provoking a unified defense. Northern India successfully resisted further Islamic invasions until 998 when a new threat emerged, this time from Persia.

Muslims invade India from the west

By this time Persia was divided among three groups of Muslim warlords. The Buyids, who had conquered Baghdad and subordinated the Abbasid caliphs in 945, ruled Mesopotamia and western Persia from then until 1055; the Samanids (*sah-MAH-nids*) controlled eastern Persia from 819 to 999; and the Ghaznavids (*gaz-NAH-vids*) dominated northeastern Persia and Afghanistan from 962 until 1040 (Map 12.3). Baghdad's fall in 945 had opened the frontiers between the Middle East and Central Asia to nomadic Turkish tribes that crossed between these regions at will. In the eleventh century, one of these tribes, the Seljuk (*SELL-jook*) Turks, took both Persia and Anatolia from the weakened Abbasids, adding Turkish customs and genes to an already simmering stew of ethnicities.

The Buyids of western Persia legitimized themselves by propping up the caliphs and then governed like the warlords they were. In eastern Persia, the Samanids tried to replicate the early Abbasid bureaucracy. They presided over a cultural renaissance centered on the city of Bukhara (*boo-KAH-rah*), in which Arabic literary and legal forms blended

Map 12.3 The Ghaznavid Islamic Empire, 1030

Early in the eleventh century, Mahmud of Ghazni created an Islamic empire in northeast Persia, Afghanistan, the Punjab, and western India. Observe that the Ghaznavid Empire, in creating political linkage across these regions, laid the foundation for economic, religious, and cultural connections between societies. How might such connections have affected Indian society and culture?

with Persian, and Farsi joined Arabic as a language of transmission for Islamic culture. Finally, in northeastern Persia and Afghanistan, the Ghaznavid government of Mamluks took control of both state and bureaucracy, creating a hybrid Persian-Islamic culture while attacking every non-Islamic area within reach. The most attractive area was India.

Mahmud of Ghazni connects Persia, Afghanistan, and India

The Ghaznavids took their name from the Afghan city of Ghazni, just west of the Khyber Pass. From that stronghold they could plunder the trade routes between India and southwestern Asia. Between 998 and 1030 Mahmud of Ghazni (*MAH-mood of GAZ-nē*), known as the "Sword of Islam," led 17 raids on the northwestern Indian region of Punjab. He pillaged its cities remorselessly, destroying magnificent Hindu temples (whose idols, from his Islamic viewpoint, were abominations) and confiscating every jewel, coin, and woman he could find. This plunder enriched Ghazni, which quickly became a major cultural center of the Islamic world. Its glittering mosques and palaces were heavily influenced by Persian architectural concepts. But the empire was founded on bloodshed, rape, and destruction, all carried out in the name of God and in the interest of profit.

An extensive cave/temple complex near present-day Mumbai.

Shortly before his death in 1030, Mahmud annexed the Punjab. The Ghaznavid dynasty now controlled all of northwestern India, including the Indus Valley. But in Ghazni the political situation was deteriorating. Ignoring the advice of his Persian counselors, Mahmud had permitted the Seljuk Turks to use grazing pastures in Ghaznavid territory. The Seljuks responded by making war on the Ghaznavids and by 1040 had expelled them from northeastern Persia. Leaving that region to their enemies, the Ghaznavids relocated to northwestern India, which they plundered relentlessly while generating hatred and bitterness within the Hindu population.

Conflict and Connection: Muslims and Hindus

The deep hostility between Muslims and Hindus, which continues to plague the Indian subcontinent today, is rooted both in the behavior of the Ghaznavids and in religion itself. There was little compatibility between these two belief systems. Islam's rigorous, uncompromising monotheism holds that there is only one God and that all human beings must subordinate themselves to his will in every act of daily life. To Muslims, Hinduism, with its vast number of gods and goddesses, is simply polytheistic idolatry. To Hindus, however, the Muslims' monotheistic conviction is both presumptuous and preposterous.

Muslims and Hindus confront one another in India

Beyond this fundamental fissure, Islam asserts the essential equality and unworthiness of all people who stand before Allah. This view, grounded in ancient Arab tribal customs, gives any Muslim the right to address even the most exalted leader as an equal. Hinduism, in contrast, is based on a rigid caste system that reinforces inequality between different levels of society. To Muslims, a system that assigns a majority of the population to lifelong discrimination is offensive. Since a caste is a social class into which you are born and from which you cannot move, this system has always discouraged conversion to Hinduism: if caste is determined by birth and you are not born Hindu, how can you fit into Indian society? Many other differences between Hinduism and Islam exist, but these two distinctions—the number of gods worshiped and the value of equality—have proved sufficient to ensure more than a millennium of mutual suspicion.

Ghaznavids persecute Hindus in India

Coupled with religious incompatibility was the behavior of the invading Ghaznavids. Their regime was created by slave soldiers who had been brutalized by decades of warfare with Central Asians and who were interested only in conquering and converting foreign

peoples, not in assimilating them. Considering Hindus' polytheism, they placed little value on Indian culture, customs, art, or architecture, much of which they destroyed. The Hindus understandably judged all Muslims by the conduct of the Ghaznavids and fought back, often, for example, setting fire to Islamic mosques and burning the worshipers alive.

Consequently, the basic incompatibility between Islam and Hinduism was intensified by atrocities and persecutions on both sides. Yet despite this hostility, from the tenth century onward, Hindus and Muslims shared the subcontinent. Eyeing each other warily, they maneuvered for position. The Ghaznavids retained the advantage until 1186, when they were ejected by another Islamic Turkish tribe, the Ghurids (*GUR-ids*). Hindus put up fierce resistance against the Ghurids, having learned in the eleventh century exactly what Islamic occupation meant for their families and their culture. Buddhists suffered even more than Hindus, in part because their faith's rejection of violence made them reluctant to resist aggression, in part because, like Islam, their faith sought converts and Muslims viewed it as competitive. The Ghurids destroyed Buddhist monasteries throughout India, driving the faith from its native soil. While flourishing in exile in Tibet, Japan, China, and Southeast Asia, Buddhism did not return to India with any significant presence until the 1950s, when India was unified under a secular democracy that granted toleration to all faiths (Chapter 35).

The Delhi Sultanate attempts to unify India

Despite Hindu resistance, the Ghurids eventually triumphed, establishing what came to be known as the Delhi Sultanate. From 1206 to 1526, a succession of sultans tackled the challenge of consolidating an Islamic regime in a region dominated by Hindu culture and beliefs. The result was a society combining both Indian and Islamic characteristics. Although at first the Delhi Sultanate leveled Hindu temples and sought conversions, it soon changed course, staking its stability on values that Hindus and Muslims could share, including loyalty to kings, strong relationships between patrons and clients, and virtues such as service and honor. Delhi's ruling elite was primarily Islamic, but meritorious or wealthy Hindus were permitted to enter it while retaining their faith and customs. No more than a quarter of the northern Indian population converted to Islam, and for three centuries the Delhi Sultanate ruled a predominantly Hindu population through collaboration rather than confrontation.

Delhi brought stability to northern India and at one point was able to expand its holdings into the southern part of the subcontinent. But it could not hold all of India together: the subcontinent was simply too large and too diverse, linguistically and culturally. India continued to be buffeted and battered by internal conflicts and external attacks, and eventually it was conquered by invaders from the north.

The Quwwat-ul-Islam mosque in Delhi, featuring Hindu motifs such as tasselled ropes and bells.

India's Influence on Southeast Asia

Islam was not the only religion to transform southern Asia. As Muslim rule migrated across southwest Asia and India, Hinduism and Buddhism spread into Southeast Asia, bringing India's influence to a vast region already affected by China.

Funan: The First Southeast Asian State

Geographic and climatic challenges confront Southeast Asia

Geographically, Southeast Asia is divided into three subregions: the Southeast Asian mainland (sometimes called Indochina), the Malay (*MĀ-lā*) peninsula, and the Indonesian archipelago (*ahr-kih-PEL-ah-gō*), or group of islands. Southeast Asia is a seismically active area,

Map 12.4 Southeast Asia, 800–1400

In Southeast Asia, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism coexisted at the crossroads of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. All three religions entered the region on ships carrying goods between India and China. Notice the strategic location of the Indonesian islands, perfectly placed as connectors between these two great oceans. In what ways did the convergence of these three religions, combined with the intense commercial activity typical of Southeast Asia, create unique societies?

part of the "Ring of Fire" surrounding the Pacific Ocean, and most of the islands are volcanic in origin (Map 12.4). Its tropical climate, abundant rainfall, and highly fertile soils give it great agricultural potential. But this promise has been difficult to realize. As much of the area is covered by teeming rain forests, farmland must be cleared again and again but without removing so much cover that the soil itself washes away. As a result, the large populations of Southeast Asia walk a fine line between survival and catastrophe.

Little is known of the origins of the first inhabitants of Southeast Asia. They had lived there for many centuries before the sustained immigrations from southern China that began around 3000 B.C.E. Many of these original inhabitants remained in the region, becoming the peoples now referred to as Malays. Others moved eastward across the Pacific Ocean or westward across the Indian Ocean, sailing in sturdy double-outrigger canoes built to compensate for strong oceanic swells. They populated many of the islands that dot those seas.

Commercial traffic creates Southeast Asian states

Southeast Asia lay across a trade route widely used in the first centuries of the Common Era to transport goods from China to India and from there to the Mediterranean

basin. Eventually Malay merchants, who controlled oceangoing traffic, added spices from Southeast Asia to their shipments of Chinese silk. As a connection point for traders from both India and China, Southeast Asia eventually absorbed cultural elements from both of its wealthy and powerful neighbors.

In what is today southern Vietnam, the first Southeast Asian state emerged in the first century C.E. Chinese traders referred to it as Funan (*foo-NAHN*). Its point of origin was the Mekong (*MĒ-kong*) River delta, but quickly it expanded southward into the Malay peninsula, enabling it to control trade across the strategically located Isthmus of Kra (*KRAH*). This was a narrow neck of land between the South China Sea and the Bay of Bengal. Merchants preferred to carry their cargoes across it rather than risk the lengthy ocean voyage around the Malay peninsula. Funan's control of this transfer point increased its prosperity as well as its exposure to foreign peoples and cultures.

Indian traders and religious leaders influence Funan

With the traders came their ways of life. Most of the actual transporting, buying, and selling was done by Indians. Accordingly, Buddhist monks and Hindu priests from India arrived in Funan shortly after the merchants. The learning of these religious men, as well as their familiarity with events outside the region, quickly made them sought-after counselors to local princes, and their religious beliefs and artistic tastes spread readily through the population. As intermarriage increased, a cultural synthesis occurred, featuring the adoption of Sanskrit as a written language and considerable mixing of cuisine and customs. Literary works native to India were also sometimes adopted by Southeast Asians, who added their own villains and heroes to the ancient Vedic sagas. For many years Indian influence was so pervasive that all of Southeast Asia was known as "farther India." The Chinese remained aloof from most of Southeast Asia, but they took a close commercial interest in Vietnam, and Chinese expansionism affected both Vietnam and Thailand.

Following Funan's lead, other Southeast Asian states began to consolidate after 600 C.E. In what today is Thailand, for example, the local tribes, fearful of Chinese territorial expansion, unified into a loose confederacy heavily influenced by Buddhism. They maintained a tense, uneasy relationship with the Chinese until both were overrun by the Mongols in 1253. Farther east, another state developed in Vietnam, partly in response to periodic Chinese invasions, some of which were followed by occupation but usually by reduction to tributary status. The country finally expelled the Chinese in the tenth century, but memories of its long, bitter subjugation linger to this day, as does a powerful Chinese influence upon Vietnamese culture. In particular, Confucian social doctrine and the prevalence of a highly educated bureaucracy recruited through merit endured in Vietnam until the middle of the twentieth century, as have many elements of Chinese cuisine.

The Cambodian Empire

Funan connects to the Khmer people of Cambodia

Dominating the southern portion of the Southeast Asian mainland was the Cambodian empire. Funan enjoyed well-developed links to the Khmer (*k'MARE*) people, the main ethnic group of modern Cambodia, who originated north of that state along the Mekong river valley in what is today Laos. Around 600 C.E. the developing Khmer state of Chenla absorbed Funan, and over the next two centuries the framework for a Cambodian empire emerged, locating its capital near the inland town of Angkor (*ANG-kor*).

Hinduism influences Cambodia

Cambodia was heavily influenced by Hinduism, although Buddhism was welcomed and amiably tolerated. Strong Hindu influence was seen particularly in the construction

of religious buildings. Over two centuries an extensive Hindu temple complex was constructed near the Khmer capital at Angkor Wat (see page 278). Dedicated to the Hindu god Vishnu, the elaborate buildings and ceremonial rooms in this temple complex entranced visitors long after the collapse of the state that had built it. Following that collapse, the complex at Angkor Wat was abandoned and forgotten. Only in the nineteenth century was it rediscovered by French explorers.

Hindu influence was also apparent in Cambodian government. The king was assisted, and to some extent restricted, by an intricate Hindu bureaucracy dominated by military leaders and Hindu priests. But the Hindu caste system was never replicated in Cambodia, which retained an unusually egalitarian social structure.

The Cambodian empire slowly expanded south to the Gulf of Siam. It endured until the early 1200s, when it was overthrown and replaced by a Thai tribal regime.

Srivijaya: Coalition and Cultural Blend

The most complex of the early Southeast Asian states was centered not on the mainland, where Funan and the Khmer state were located, but on the Indonesian island of Sumatra (*soo-MAH-trah*). This was the Malay kingdom of Srivijaya (*srē-vē-JĪ-yah*), first described to the outside world by a Chinese Buddhist pilgrim in 671.

Relief sculpture at the temple complex of Borobodur in central Java, depicting scenes from the life of the Buddha.

Srivijaya is a Sanskrit word meaning "Great Conquest." It appears to have been created as a maritime trading empire, catering to oceangoing traffic between China and India that was bypassing the overland portage across the Isthmus of Kra. As sailors became more familiar with the dangerous passage through the straits between Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula, the time saved outweighed the risks incurred, and the new kingdom prospered while Funan's power declined.

The capital of Srivijaya was the Malay port city of Palembang (*pah-lum-BANG*) on the coast of Sumatra. Its rulers, usually called by the Indian term *maharajah,* were accomplished diplomats, stitching together a coalition of Malay maritime principalities through a careful balance of Hindu spiritual leadership, bribery, and intimidation. Although known to history as an empire, Srivijaya was politically decentralized. It never expanded its territorial control even to the neighboring island of Java, preferring to influence principalities there through the same combination of tactics that worked so well on Sumatra.

Srivijaya becomes a Buddhist commercial empire

While the Cambodian empire was grounded in Hinduism, Srivijaya was overwhelmingly Buddhist. The spectacular Buddhist temple complex called Borobodur (*bō-rō-bō-DUHR*), built in central Java between 770 and 825, was constructed with more than two million cubic feet of stone. At the time it was the largest integrated network of buildings south of the equator. A ten-tiered megaplex, it represents the ten levels of increasing enlightenment passed through by the pilgrim on his or her spiritual journey to nirvana. Borobodur testifies to the pervasiveness of Buddhist cultural influence in Southeast Asia, as Cambodia's Angkor Wat testifies to Hindu influence.

Srivijaya blends Indian and Southeast Asian cultures

But whether they adopted Hindu or Buddhist architecture, whether they adopted Sanskrit as a written language or translated Vedic epics into their own tongues, the Southeast Asian states did much more than *adopt* Indian culture. They *adapted* it to their own tastes and purposes, integrating it, for example, with their own customs of spirit worship and tribal rule. Ancient Indonesian deities were transformed into Hindu gods and goddesses, while traditional Indonesian dances and songs were blended with

Indian rhythms and played on Indian instruments. These processes created a series of hybrid, blended cultures unlike any others.

Srivijaya flourished for several centuries, until in 1025 it was weakened by a devastating raid launched by one of its commercial competitors, the southeastern Indian state of Chola (*CHŌ-lah*). After that Srivijaya's fortunes declined sharply, and by the thirteenth century it had disintegrated into smaller maritime principalities. The Javanese king Kertanagara (*kur-tan-ah-GAH-rah*) constructed a short-lived successor state in the late 1200s, but after that no comparable system arose in the Indonesian archipelago until the Dutch East India Company arrived at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

Chapter Review

Putting It in Perspective

Islam's Abbasid Caliphate looked eastward rather than westward, and its willingness to accept a synthesis of Arabic and Persian cultures on the Iranian plateau added greatly to the richness of Islamic civilization. The Abbasids presided over an Islamic golden age in commerce, culture, poetry, and power. But they were unable to unify the Islamic world, owing to the immensity and ethnic diversity of their conquests.

In the eleventh century, the caliphate was superseded by the rule of Central Asian warlords who carried Islam into India. They were no better at unification than the Abbasids. The Indian subcontinent's vastness, diversity of geographic features and cultures, and attachment to Hinduism consistently frustrated both external and internal efforts to impose unification. The Mauryas and the Guptas succeeded for a time, each by creating a centralized empire, but ultimately failed, as did early Muslim endeavors. Between 1206 and 1526, the Delhi Sultanate attempted to create a hybrid Indian-Islamic system, with more success culturally than politically.

The peoples of Southeast Asia were influenced by commercial contacts with China and by the Indian religions of Hinduism and Buddhism. Funan, Cambodia, and Srivijaya developed states that tried to manage the trade flowing between China and India. They succeeded for a time, but eventually dissolved in the face of external invasion or internal ethnic rivalry. Hinduism and Buddhism offered many insights into the nature of human life and the destiny of human souls but few into administrative organization and political power. Eventually, Islam and European imperialism would contend for dominance in Southeast Asia.

Reviewing Key Material

KEY CONCEPTS

Sufism, 285
purdah, 289
yoga, 289

KEY PEOPLE

Abu Muslim, 282
Abbas, 282
Harun al-Rashid, 284
Ibn Sina, 284
al-Khwarizmi, 284
Omar Khayyam, 285
Ibn Rushd, 286
Moses Maimonides, 286
al-Mamun, 286
Chandra Gupta I, 288
Samudra Gupta, 00
Chandra Gupta II, 288
Kumara Gupta, 288
Mahmud of Ghazni, 292

ASK YOURSELF

1. How did Persia and Arabia influence one another in the seventh century C.E.? What were the consequences of this mutual influence?
2. Why was the Abbasid Caliphate at first so successful in ruling its vast territories? What accounts for its eventual failure and collapse?
3. How did Islam affect India?
4. How did Hindus and Muslims view one another? What impact did their rivalry have on India?

GOING FURTHER

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Key Dates and Developments

184 B.C.E.	Collapse of the Mauryan Empire in India
50 B.C.E.–50 C.E.	Scythian rule in northwestern India
50–250 C.E.	Kushan rule in northwestern India
78 C.E.	Fourth Great Council of Buddhism, in Kashmir
ca. 100 C.E.	Funan, the first Southeast Asian state
320–550	The Gupta Empire
455–550	Invasion of India by the Huns
ca. 600s	Establishment of the Kingdom of Srivijaya
636	Muslim defeat of the Sasanian Empire
711	Arab rule in the Sind in western India
750	Establishment of the Abbasid Caliphate
770–825	Construction of Borobodur
786–809	Rule of Harun al-Rashid as caliph in Baghdad
ca. 800	Establishment of the Cambodian Empire
800–1000	Construction of Angkor Wat
945	Buyid warlords' seizure of Baghdad
962–1040	Ghaznavid rule in Khurasan and Afghanistan
969	Establishment of the Fatimid Caliphate in Egypt
998–1030	Mahmud of Ghazni's invasion of India
1040	Seljuk Turks' seizure of northeastern Iran
ca. 1100	*The Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam
1206	Establishment of the Delhi Sultanate by the Ghurids