CHAPTER 9

Turks and Mughals

Islam and India
Turks
Mughals

Indian Civilization has a long but intermittent relation to Central Asia. The Aryans and their horse-drawn chariots came from Central Asia and established the Vedic religion in India in the second millennium BCE. The Shakas, Pahlavas, and Kusanas around the beginning of the common era were speakers of Iranian languages, whereas the Hunas from about 450 were Turkic in language. Although of different language families, both waves had similar profiles, being nomads from Central Asia who had mastered a manner of warfare based on unlimited supplies of horses and using techniques of mounted archery. Ultimately many of them were absorbed into the warrior class of the Indian population. Turks of Central Asia established their rule in Delhi from 1206, and Mughals of Central Asia, also Turkic in language and ethnic affiliation, from 1526, both having armies very much based on cavalry and therefore on the continuing importation of horses from Central Asia. Thus the Turks and Mughals were continuing an ages-old pattern of at least five major intermittent invasions from Central Asia leading to the formation of conquest states in India. The Turks and Mughals differed from the previous invaders in being Muslims, and, as such, participants in a far-flung, cosmopolitan community (ummah) of Islam. A signal effect of the community-making capacity of the religion of Islam was to bring Iranian scholars, scribes, artists, and fighters into the formation of cosmopolitan Turkish and Mughal states in India, giving the enterprise a composite, Indo-Persian cultural character. Iran and India, of course, had an ancient cultural connection, and Iranian Islam took form within the penumbra of Indian Civilization, so in a sense this development was also a reiteration of past patterns. It is important to hold in mind that the Turk and Mughal states were not Muslim states; they were Indian states with components that were Central Asian, Iranian, and Islamic, as well as Indian.

There is, to be sure, no mistaking the importance of Islam as a religion in the history of India, as we can see by looking at a map of the world. Up to the creation of nation-states in 1947 undivided India contained the largest Muslim population of any country in the world; much greater, it should be noted, than the Middle Eastern countries in which Islam had its beginnings. Religious identity acquired great significance for the politics of nation making in the twentieth century, and when the British brought colonial rule to an end and left India they divided the territory they had ruled into two independent states, Pakistan and India, along religious lines. Pakistan was a Muslim-majority state and the Republic of India a Hindu-majority state, although many Muslims remained in India, together with adherents of other religions. Pakistan had two wings, on either side of the Republic of India: East Pakistan, which broke away from Pakistan in 1971 and renamed itself Bangladesh, and West Pakistan, which with the formation of Bangladesh is now simply Pakistan. These three parts of the modern map—Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India—constitute the countries with the second, third, and fourth largest Muslim populations in the world (the first is Indonesia). Islam, which grew up in a dry and relatively sparsely populated part of the world, acquired a huge number of adherents in the much more populous lands of India and Indonesia.

Because of the way in which religion has combined with the politics of nation-state formation and ballot-box democracy in the twentieth century, religious identity has a greater salience and political weight than ever before. We are likely to project that salience back in time and overestimate the role of religious identity in the deeper past of India and to miss the other regional and ethnic factors at play in the formation of the Turkish and Mughal states.

Islam and India
Before the Turks or Mughals, Arabs brought Islam to India by trade and military expeditions. Indians and Arabs had long been engaged in trade with the Red Sea regions, and Arab traders resident on the western coast of India were probably the first Muslims of India, becoming Muslim
soon after Islam arose in Arabia. At the same time, Islam propelled the formation of an Arab empire that expanded rapidly, reaching Sindh in 711 CE in its easternmost military venture, about the same time as it reached Spain in the west, less than a hundred years since its beginnings. As it expanded through trade and conquest, the Muslim community evolved from an Arab community into a multiethnic one. The mercantile and imperial expansion of Muslims beginning in the seventh century was replicated by the mercantile and imperial expansion of Christian Europe beginning with Columbus and Vasco da Gama in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. India (and indeed Asia as a whole) was deeply affected by both these waves of expansion, which are the topic of this and the next chapter.

The tremendous outward expansion of Islam is an outstanding example of the community-making power of ideas in history. Islam began through the revelations received by Muhammad in Mecca where he was born and Medina to which he and his following, the beginnings of the Muslim community, fled. The “flight” or *hijra* from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE was a central event in the Prophet’s life, and was the starting point of the Muslim era for the rendering of dates; thus the year 2000 CE is the year 1378 AH, “after the hijra.” The Prophet had been forced out of Mecca because the leading merchant fearful his growing following constituted a threat to their power, an early expression of that community-making power.

Muhammad represented his message as the revelation of God through the Archangel Gabriel, and he situated himself in the series of biblical prophets beginning with Abraham and continuing with Jesus. Gabriel commanded Muhammad to *recite* *(iqra, whence Quran, the recitation)*, which he did, a small but growing band of followers in Mecca: a message of God’s power and goodness, his oneness and uniqueness, of the day of judgment when souls of the dead would be judged and sent to paradise or to hell; a message, too, of the obligation to *submit* (Islam is submission: a Muslim is one who submits) to God’s will and respond with gratitude to God’s goodness, by leading a moral life, providing food and alms for orphans and the poor.

When he fled to Medina it was in a state of war among the eleven or so tribes to which its population belonged, each tribe having a fort on the oasis. Muhammad did not flee to Medina at random; he was invited to come in, as an arbitrator among the feuding tribes. In doing so he drew up a kind of a constitution for Medina, laying down relations between his own followers and the Medinans, between Muslim believers of Medina and the nonbelievers in the new religion of the Prophet, and between the Arabs and the Jews (three of the warring tribes were Jewish), confirming the Jews in the exercise of their religion and the possession of their goods. Muhammad became the arbitrator of disputes among the tribes, a kind of super-tribal leader. At the same time he was the leader of his own community, which followed him not because of blood relation as in the tribes, but in recognition of his prophethood. Thus to the tribal idea was superadded the idea of the community of the faithful (*ummah*), and for Muslims tribal ties were superseded by the authority of Muhammad, before whom disputes among the faithful must be brought.

The Prophet lived for only ten years after the flight to Medina, but in that short time he laid the foundations of the community of believers that grew and spread at a remarkable rate in the first century of Islam. The first step was the Islamization of Mecca, accomplished through a series of battles that achieved final success eight years after the flight. By taking Mecca, Muhammad became the leader of a state, appointed by God, who gave it laws, with a treasury, an army, and a number of tribal allies, not all of them yet adherents of the new religion that was about to sweep through the Arabian Peninsula. What had been created was an idea, centering around Islamic monotheism, of a community of the faithful demanding a higher loyalty that replaced or supplemented loyalty to the tribe, and with it, a universalist ethic.

The death of Muhammad threw the Islamic community into a constitutional crisis, because no one could succeed him as prophet. The solution was the office of *caliph* (*khilaf*, or “successor” to the Prophet, who became the central political leader of the growing state. The first four caliphs were drawn from the companions and relatives of the Prophet, and are called the “rightly guided caliphs”: Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali. They were followed by the Umayya family of Mecca, and then the Abbasid family ruling from Baghdad, in the following periods:

- The rightly guided caliphs: 632–661
- Umayyads: 661–750
- Abbasids: 750–1258

Each of these periods involved important stages in the evolution of the Islamic community.
Immediately after the death of the Prophet the tribes that had been allied to him went their separate ways, and the state might have disappeared completely. What is more, many tribal leaders posed as prophets, not of the old tribal deities, but of God (Allah), in succession to Muhammad. The Muslim historians call this “the apostasy” (ridda). It was the urgent task of the first caliph to counter this danger, and to insist that Muhammad was the “seal of the prophets”; that is, that there would be no more prophets after him; and also to regain the submission of the apostate tribes by conquering them. The “Wars of the Apostasy” were successful, and the success swelled the army with new allies, creating a momentum that continued to expand until the entire Arabian Peninsula was taken, and continued into countries beyond. Within ten years of the death of Muhammad, Arabia was secured, and the rich and densely populated river valleys of the ancient agrarian civilizations of Iraq and Egypt were in Arab control. Under the early caliphate, then, was created an Arab empire, held in trust for the Muslim community by the caliph.

Thus the community remained at this time an Arab one, but not for long. What historians call the first Arab Empire had spread into ancient countries that had, by comparison, huge populations and that depended on agriculture and governments supported by the tax on land, surveyed and collected by cadres of administrators. Under the empire, Arabs could buy land subject to slight tax, but non-Muslims had to pay a poll tax (jizya) and land tax (kharaj), and so long as they did so their religions were tolerated—they were dhimmis or adherents of the tolerated religions, Judaism and Christianity. But an unanticipated consequence of the success of the first Arab empire was that non-Arabs embraced Islam and became Muslims. At first the only way of attaching them to the new community was for them to become clients (mawali) under the protection of one of the Arab tribes, having a second-class status with heavier taxes and fewer privileges than the Arab Muslims. This two-tiered effect within the community could not last forever, because of the vast number of non-Arabs in the conquered countries, and the tension between the two main parties pushed the community toward a more cosmopolitan and less ethnically Arab self-definition. This paradoxical effect of Arab success was completed under the fourth caliph, when he left the Arabian Peninsula on a military campaign and made his capital in Iraq, at Kufa. The caliphate never returned to Arabia, and generally resided in Damascus, and later in Baghdad, which was built by the Abbasids. Arabia itself lost its political importance, but it remained the center of pilgrimage for Muslims, and is so today.

The selection of the third caliph, Uthman, of the Umayyad family of Mecca, was a victory for the Meccan oligarchy, now within Islam, and their families now filled high offices, leading to a virtual civil war in which the first wave of Arab conquest was spent and the rapid expansion of the empire came to a sudden halt. The caliph was assassinated, and the fourth caliph, Ali, clashed with the nephew of Uthman, Muawiya, governor of Syria, who charged Ali with complicity and demanded vengeance. The split widened after Ali’s death when the empire fell to Muawiya and his heirs, the Umayyad caliphs, for the embittered followers of Ali did not recognize the subsequent caliphs and formed a political and religious opposition that became the Shiites.

Under the Umayyad caliphs the state was restabilized and the conquests resumed. The second Arab conquest reached beyond Egypt across North Africa to Gibraltar and Spain; it put Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Greeks, under attack; it reached into Central Asia, to places that soon became centers of Muslim learning and devotion, Bukhara and Samarkand, in Uzbekistan; and it reached Sindh, in India by 711 CE, in the first Muslim century. Sindh was the first state in India with a Muslim head. The governors of Sindh, very far from the caliph, ruled virtually independent of him. Islam sank deep roots in Sindhi society, and as Sindhi society became Islamic it became a conduit through which those elements of Indian culture and learning—mathematics, astronomy, fable literature, medicinal practices—were absorbed into the Islamic world and, in part, transmitted to Europe.

The governorship of Sindh split into two states with Arab rulers that held the lower Indus Valley. However, the Arab Empire could not spread further into India, held in check by the empire of the Gurjara-Pratiharas, whose army was immense. In the end, the rule of Muslims came to north India not through the Arabs, but through different ethnic groups, the Turks and the Mughals, from Central Asia.

Umayyad control of the caliphate came to an end in 750 CE with a coup by the Abbasid family. Although the Abbasid family was Arab, its coming to power represented the victory for the cause of the non-Arab mawalis or clients, that submerged, second-class citizenry of the empire who were in fact vastly more numerous than the Arab component. In the regions of the older civilizations of Persia and Iraq and Egypt, the mawali class included the old nobility and the various learned and skilled
groups under the pre-Islamic governments that fell under the control of a network of Arab military men spread ever more thinly across an ever larger surface as the empire grew. So we may say that the Abbasid revolution resolved the growing contradiction in the Muslim community between the Arab minority elite and the mawali majority. By the mid-800s Abbasid power was in disarray and local power centers, often under Turkish rule, were dividing up the eastern Islamic world.

The outcome of these processes, in the eastern wing of the empire, was the flowering of a new Perso-Islamic culture, including a literature in the Persian language, now written in a modified form of the Arabic script. This was very portentous for India, because it was this Persianized form of Islamic culture, and its Iranian personnel, that would come to North India in the train of the Turkish invaders.

**Turks**

People often suppose that Turks must come from Turkey, but it is the other way around: The name Turkey comes from the Turks. The homeland of the languages of the Turkic family is Central Asia, and the Ottoman Turks of Turkey came from there and created an empire, as part of a broad process of Turkish expansion from Central Asia. Even today the northwestern provinces of China and the countries along the southern border of Russia as well as northern parts of Iran, have large populations of peoples speaking languages of this family, such as the Azeris, the Kazakhs, the Kyrgyz, the Turkmens, and the Uzbeks, who give their names to the countries of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

The Turkification of Islam came about through the practice of employing Turkish military slaves as elite guards by the caliph and the other political leaders of Islamic countries where the taking of Turkish slaves through trade and war was underway. The institution of the military slave (mamluk) is important for India, because the first dynasty of Sultans was called the Slave Dynasty. But to understand it, one has to put to one side most of the connotations of the word slave, because the Turkish military slave was often very well off, and could be the general of an army or the governor of a province, and could own property, including slaves, himself. Raised from boyhood to be the elite of the military, the mamluk troops were often in a position to take power by military coup; by the fourteenth century there were mamluk kings in many parts of Islamic civilization, from Cairo to Delhi. The rise of Turkish powers took place during the fragmentation of the caliphate in the mid-ninth century, during which Islam lost its political direction, long before the Abbasid caliphate was extinguished completely by the Mongols in 1258.

The Turkish conquest of North India began in about 1000 CE under Mahmud of Ghazna, a Turkish ruler of Central Asian origin settled in Afghanistan, who created a large empire by expansion westward into Iran and eastward into India. His armies made many raids deep into the valley of the Ganges, and down the Indus Valley to Gujarat, bringing back huge amounts of plunder and ransom from the wealthy kingdoms and richly endowed temples of North India. For the most part Mahmud and his successors, called the Ghaznavids, extended their permanent rule only across the upper Indus Valley, to the region of Lahore, replacing the earlier Muslim rulers. Lahore became an outpost of Perso-Islamic culture in the territory of Indian Civilization.

The Ghaznavids were replaced by another family, the Ghurids, who resumed the conquest of North India toward the end of the twelfth century, and fielded large armies led by Turkish slave generals. The Ghurid king was assassinated while his troops were off in North India in the midst of a successful invasion, and, their master having died, the generals raised one of their number, Qutb-ud-din Aybak, to be their sultan, and the first of the sultans of Delhi, in 1206 (Figure 15).

The Turkish Sultanate is best thought of as a conglomerate of three groups: Turks, Iranians, and Indians. The first part of the mix was the Turkish military aristocracy, who filled the top military and political offices of the kingdom. They were a small minority of power holders in a densely populated agrarian civilization, and they had no settled culture of succession to the throne, so that they were often internally divided by wars of succession. The succession was marked by an unusual frequency of violence: The turnover rate of kings was about twice that of previous Indian kings (an average reign length of about ten years, compared to more than twenty years for the earlier period) and dynasties (there were six in 350 years) were short lived compared to those of the earlier period, many of which had continued in power for centuries. The regime depended to an unusual degree on the direct use of military force, and the liberal reward of the military elite to bind it to the sultan.

The Iranian element in the mix was crucial, because without it the rulers would have had to do what earlier Central Asian invaders of India had done—recruit Indians as their administrators and assimilate themselves to Indian culture to gain the confidence of those they ruled. As
it happens, the Mongol catastrophe descended on the lands of eastern Islam in the formative years for the Sultanate of Delhi, destroying the last remnants of the Abbasid caliphate and making life miserable for Iranians. A stream of Iranian émigrés flowed toward Delhi, where the sultans were famous for their wealth and generosity. Thus the Mongol threat created conditions under which the Turks had the advantage of a steady supply of Iranians literate in the Persian language who could be made into the judges, land revenue officials, bureaucrats of all kinds, scholars, teachers, poets, and artists. This is why Persian became the language of government and diplomacy, which it continued to be as late as the early nineteenth century, and many more Persian-language texts are composed in India than in Iran, with its much smaller population. The historical circumstances promoting the Iranian emigration to India shored up the Islamic character of the Turkish kingdom, and gave it a Persian cast.

Finally, the largest component of the mix was the Indian people themselves. Even though the Persian and Turkish element of the government held privileged positions at the top, both the army and the civil government depended on very large numbers of Indians. As to the army, whereas Turkish military power relied on Central Asian horses and horsemanship, the Indian peasantry supplied an immense body of soldiers whose services the sultans endeavored to command. The civil government, although Persian in the style of its record-keeping, inevitably depended on large numbers of scribes fluent in the native languages of India to assess and collect the land revenue that supplied the state with its vast wealth. The Sultanate required huge amounts of money to sustain the lavish gift giving that held the state together, and taxation became much more extractive. It is always difficult to be precise about taxes in ancient times, but it is significant that in the ancient period the king's share of the peasant's crop was nominally put at one sixth, whereas under the Turkish sultans it sometimes rose to as high as half.

To raise the land tax it was necessary for the tax administrators to deal with local Indian officials, and generally the Hindu rajahs at the local level were left in charge of raising the revenue from their districts. Thus Hindu society and its traditional leadership continued, but the apex of the power pyramid was occupied by Turks and Iranians, especially in the Doab or the land between the Ganges and Yamuna. Outside the Doab there were Hindu rajahs who continued to rule their own territories on condition of paying a tribute to Delhi. As Hinduism continued to dominate the countryside, Islam formed communities in the walled cities of North India, becoming a notably urban phenomenon. In these cities religion was under the care and guidance of the scholars of Islamic law and learning (called the ulama), who were notable for their orthodoxy, their concern that Islam not be contaminated by the Hinduism that surrounded them, and their full support of the kingship. Sufi organizations and craft guilds controlled city life.
These were not conditions conducive for the conversion to Islam of large numbers of Indians, and indeed even in the upper Ganga Valley from which the Delhi sultans ruled there were few rural Muslims. It is often said that the conversions that did take place were the result of direct force, and accompanied by the destruction of Hindu temples. Both did occur, but only in the path of conquest and as a kind of exemplary punishment for stubborn resistance, as Richard Eaton has shown. Once the territory had been conquered, however, the situation was quite different. The vastly outnumbered Turkish military elite could not have ruled North India had it offered continual provocation to the Indians by the regular practice of forced conversion. Not only did the sultans have no such policy, but early on they adopted the position that the Indians were dhimmis or adherents of tolerated religions, allowing them the freedom to practice their religion so long as they submitted to the rule of the sultan and paid taxes. This position became the norm for Muslim rulers in India. In general, conversion to Islam by Indians did not come from the actions of governments, which did not want to lose taxes through conversions. In the long period of Turkish and Mughal rule, mass conversions to Islam, which in an agrarian society means mass conversions of peasants, occurred not in the central territories of these rulers but rather at the edges, in the Indus Valley and in Bengal. According to Eaton, in Bengal at least, mass conversions to Islam came about with the formation of large grants of land to Muslim entrepreneurs and Sufi shrines as part of a pioneering process that spread agriculture into the forestlands, much as monastic estates in Europe spread agriculture and Christianity beyond the frontiers of settled life. It was especially the devotional, mystic form of Islam called Sufism to which Indians responded, containing as it did practices of devotionalism that were similar in a general way to bhakti Hinduism, and the renunciation and mysticism of charismatic Sufi teachers had a general likeness to yoga. Many Sufis appear in Indian folklore as holy men no different than the yogis and medics of other Indian religions.

The history of the Sultanate of Delhi can be outlined in a number of stages. The first was one of building and consolidating the kingship itself in north India, and this occupied the first hundred years. Then from about 1300 to 1350 CE the sultans extended their power to the Deccan, drawing off huge amounts of movable wealth from the kings and temples of the peninsula with which they maintained the liberality by which they held the Turkish military aristocracy and the Iranian scholarly class to them. This was certainly the high point of the Sultanate, but also the beginning of decline, for so long as sources of external wealth could meet the Sultanate's need for large amounts of money it would flourish, but when the Deccan had no more to give the Sultanate was forced to live within its means (that is, through the land tax on North Indian peasantry), and its practice of overtaxing tended to ruin agricultural productivity. The period after about 1350, therefore, was one of retrenchment and the search for a style of rule that would promote agriculture rather than damage it. Then in 1398 North India was invaded by Timur (Tamerlane, as he was called in the West), the Mongol king of Iran and Central Asia, resulting in a major catastrophe. Delhi was sacked and its artisans were carried off to build a mosque in Samarkand (modern Tashkent) for Timur. The final period of the Sultanate was a century of decline after that invasion, during which time many provincial sultanates were formed by breakaway military men, in Bengal, Kashmir, Punjab, and elsewhere, and the kingdom of Vijayanagara was formed in the South. It is in the provincial sultanates that Islam became domesticated to Indian culture, and it is in these regions that the numbers of Muslims are large today.

Vijayanagara, the capital of the empire of that name, was constructed in the dry interior of the peninsula, by a new warrior class that was created as agriculture advanced into the dry region, as Cynthia Talbot has shown. From this vantage it dominated the territories of South India through its governors. Its kings were Hindu but its structure was cosmopolitan, employing Muslim artillerymen and trading with the Portuguese for war horses, which were always in short supply in the peninsula relative to its northern neighbors. A common formula identified three major powers of the day: The sultan of Delhi was called Asivapat, or lord of horses; the king of Orissa was called the Gajapati, or lord of elephants; and the Vijayanagara emperor was Narapat, or lord of men. This triangle of major states constituted the international order at the time, showing how the Turkish kings of Delhi had become normalized in India. Phillip Wagoner shows that the kings of Vijayanagara adopted the cap and robes of the Turkish kings as a norm of diplomatic dress, in hundreds of ways, large and small, Central Asian and Perso-Islamic practices became part of the Indian scene.
Mughals

The Mughals, who dominated the history of India for the better part of two centuries and who lingered on with reduced power for another century and a half, were far more successful as a ruling family than any of the dynasties of the Delhi Sultanate, the longest-lived of which survived for only ninety years. The greater success of the Mughals was mainly due to a more cosmopolitan policy that gave a larger place in government to Indians—although noblemen and scholars from Central Asia and Iran continued to find India a land of wealth and opportunity through government service—and conciliated the interests of the Hindus to a far greater degree than the Delhi Sultanate had. Mughal emperors fulfilled their role as Indian kings by participating in Hindu ceremonies and observances such as the festival of lights (Diwali), the weighing of the ruler in gold, which was then given away in alms, ritual feeding of brahmans, “giving darshan” or showing the royal self to the public at regular intervals, and the patronage of religious scholarship and literature, including translations of the Ramayana and Mahabharata.32

They left an indelible imprint on India, including architectural masterpieces that still stand and continue to be admired, such as the Red Fort in Delhi and the exquisite Taj Mahal in Agra, built of white marble and set in a formal garden of the Central Asian style that the Mughals brought to India (Figure 16).

The first six Mughals, listed here, represent the period of the empire’s foundation and greatness:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mughal</th>
<th>Reigns</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Babur</td>
<td>1526–1530</td>
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<tr>
<td>Humayun</td>
<td>1530–1556</td>
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<td>Akbar</td>
<td>1556–1605</td>
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<td>Jahangir</td>
<td>1605–1628</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shah Jahan</td>
<td>1628–1658</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aurangzeb</td>
<td>1658–1707</td>
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The name Mughal is the same as Mongol. The Mughals of India traced their descent from two famous Mongol emperors, Chingiz Khan (or Genghis Khan), a thirteenth-century pagan Mongol, and Timur, a fourteenth-century Muslim one. Timur, who had rampaged across Iran, Central Asia, Russia, and the Middle East, also sacked Delhi in 1398 but then withdrew from India. His incursion weakened the power of the Delhi Sultanate and introduced a small population of Mongol military men into the North Indian scene. Babur, who laid the foundation of Mughal ascendancy, had an illustrious family tree but a very modest patrimony, consisting of a small territory in Ferghana in Central Asia. Circumstances and temperament made him a military adventurer, and adversity directed him toward India. What he wanted was a kingdom
in Central Asia, and he failed in three attempts to capture Samarkand, the prestigious throne city of his ancestor Timur, before turning his attention to the South. What he created was a state that straddled the Hindu Kush mountains to the west of the Indus Valley, with one foot in Afghanistan and another in India, more or less like that of the Kushanas or the Hunas before him. Successive Mughal emperors lost ground in Central Asia while extending the empire more deeply into India, with the results shown in Map 7.

The era of gunpowder warfare had begun in India before Babur, but his mastery of artillery was certainly an important part of his advantage at the battle of Panipat in 1526, when he defeated the Sultan of Delhi. He also had the advantage that all Central Asian invaders of India held: an abundant supply of horses and able cavalrymen. Babur did not long outlive his victory, and although the Sultanate had been defeated, the Turkish nobility and Rajput warrior lineages were far from content to accept Mughal rule. Indeed, after Babur’s death his son, Humayun, was expelled from India by Sher Shah of the Suri family, an Afghan nobleman who had briefly joined Babur’s camp. He revived the power of the Sultanate for a brief, brilliant reign of only five years, before he died in an accidental explosion of gunpowder. The troubled succession to Sher Shah created an opening for Humayun, and after an exile of fifteen years, he succeeded in restoring Mughal rule of India with help from the Persian king.

Humayun’s son Akbar is the greatest of the Mughal rulers (Figure 17). He was the consolidator of the empire, who secured North India and gave his empire access to the sea by conquests on the western coast, and was the architect of its cosmopolitan policy. Officers of the government, whether military or civil, held a mansab or rank, which bound them, in theory at least, to supply a certain number of men and horses to the military service of the state, and gave them rights to draw revenue from certain lands assigned to them (called a jagir) out of which this force was to be maintained by the mansab-holder or mansabdar. Akbar arranged these ranks in thirty-three grades, from commanders of ten to commanders of ten thousand, with the highest ranks reserved for members of the royal family. The imperial service was opened to Hindus, and Akbar made a point of including Rajput warrior lineages in his government and forming marriage alliances with them by taking Rajput wives. A single service was formed, and the emphasis was on ability, for the mansabs and the emoluments that went with them were not hereditary, and the sons of mansabdars had to prove themselves in the lower ranks. The system was meant to prevent the growth of a landed aristocracy (in which it achieved only partial success), by the rule that one could not hold a jagir in the region to which one was posted, by moving officeholders from one post to another in the course of a lifetime, and by the nonhereditary nature of the service. One effect of this policy was that Mughal officeholders, knowing they could not pass on their estates to their sons, spent their fortunes on the building
Hinduism, at least with its monistic form. He summoned to a kind of royal seminar on comparative religion scholars and teachers of Islam, Hinduism, Jainism, and Zoroastrianism, as well as Christian missionaries from the Portuguese trading station of Goa, to explain their systems and question them, and came to believe that there was something good in all of them. He retained his own ancestral Islam, and formed an imperial circle of discipleship that became known as the Din-i-Islahi or “Divine Faith,” a devotional practice made up of elements from Islam and the other religions that he had interrogated, plus ideas of sacred kingship circulating internationally. The eclectic, inclusive character of Din-i-Islahi mirrored the ethnic cosmopolitanism of the empire. Akbar also abolished the poll tax on non-Muslims (the jizya), further narrowing the differences among his subjects.

The reigns of Jahangir and Shah Jahan saw the further rise of Mughal power, although Kandahar in Afghanistan was lost to the Persians in 1622, thus confining Mughal power to India. It was certainly one of the largest and wealthiest empires in the world of Islam, larger than the Persian and Ottoman Turkish empires of the time. Shah Jahan’s Taj Mahal is a superb culmination of Mughal imperial architecture. With the growth of European trade, silver from the mines of the New World found its way to India, where it was turned into silver rupee coins. This was one result of the first globalization that integrated the world economy; Mughal India was part of the larger world that Islam had built by drawing disparate regions together, and of a still larger one that was coming into existence.

The declining years of Shah Jahan were troubled by a fratricidal war among his four sons, of which the principal antagonists were Dara Shukoh and Aurangzeb. These two embodied opposing tendencies of Islamic religion in Mughal India. Dara Shukoh, who was his father’s choice to succeed him, had Akbar’s passion for studying all the religions, and commissioned the translation into Persian of the Atharva Veda and some of the Upanishads, with the help of pandits. Aurangzeb, by contrast, was personally drawn to a deeply pious and austere Sunni Islam, to the point of banishing music from the court.

Aurangzeb won the contest and went on to rule for fifty-eight years. He was a very able ruler and military leader, and in a sense his reign was a huge success, for he succeeded, in a long and protracted war, in conquering the smaller states of the Deccan and bringing them under the power of the Mughals. After his death, however, Mughal power shrank...
drastically as his former nobility and allies waxed powerful at Mughal expense. How do we explain this decline?

Many scholars have argued that a large part of the collapse was due to Aurungzeb’s personal preference for an austere form of Islam, which constituted a withdrawal from the cosmopolitan policies of his predecessors and alienated non-Muslims of all kinds. However, this explanation does not take account of the continuing presence of large numbers of Hindus in the Mughal service, including some of the leading generals, and of the continuing support by Aurungzeb of Hindu and other non-Muslim religious institutions. It is true that the Sikhs, to whom Akbar had given the plot of land where they built their Golden Temple (in Amritsar), had mixed relations with the Mughal rulers, and were turned into enemies when Aurungzeb killed the ninth guru, Teg Bahadur; his son and successor, Guru Govind, transformed the Sikhs into a formidable anti-Mughal military force. The Maratha peasantry of Maharashtra under their leader Shivaji, who had been a Mughal ally, grew to become a major continental power feeding on the declining Mughal Empire largely because Aurungzeb had missed the opportunity of keeping Shivaji on his side. In other words, missed opportunities rather than Aurungzeb’s personal religious tendencies seem to have been the larger factor in the subsequent Mughal decline. Indeed, Aurungzeb had Hindu generals and continued the Mughal patronage of Hindu temples.

These disaffections in the North were taking place while Mughal power was finally successful in the Deccan, destroying the provincial sultanates of that region and placing their fragments into a Mughal subah (province). However, the governor Aurungzeb put in charge quickly became independent, and formed a dynastic line that ruled until the 1940s (the Nizams of Hyderabad). The fragmentation of Mughal power following the conquest of the Deccan was a replay of what had happened under the Turkish sultans. The costly and difficult conquests that successfully spread the power of the Turks and the Mughals to the greater part of India both required a concentration of resources in the Deccan, to the neglect of the economic heartland of empire in the north, the Doab and the Ganga. The successful military men and allies were enriched and empowered by the successful conquest of the Deccan to break away and make states of their own. In both cases it seems that forces leading to fragmentation were brought to a head by the very success of the conquest itself.

After the death of Aurungzeb the power of the Mughals declined and contracted to the environs of Delhi and Agra, although an aura of their imperial greatness remained through the long Mughal twilight of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As we shall see in Chapter 10, a rebellion of British-Indian soldiers in 1857–1858 swelled into a large insurgency aiming to drive the British colonial rulers into the sea. It is highly significant that the insurgents of different religions and communities rallied around the Mughal emperor in Delhi. In doing so they demonstrated vividly their belief that the Mughals were the legitimate ruling power in India and the British were not. Indians attributed to Mughal rulers’ eminence and authority even after the empire’s effective military power had shrunk to nothing.

By its community-making power, Islam created a connection among Arab, Iranian, and Turkish people. When we ask what the relation of Islam to Indian Civilization is over the thousand years and more of their connection, the most salient feature of that history, perhaps, is the role of Iran in shaping Islamic culture.

Iran was India’s cultural cousin in Vedic times, and the Iranian elite that became Muslim and gave Islamic culture its new shape in Abbasid times had been Zoroastrians, Buddhists, and Manicheans in religion, themselves having Indic features. They carried aspects of those traditions over into Islam after their conversion. We find in Iran and India Islamic equivalents of the Indic ideas of rebirth, of time cycles, and of the incarnation (avatar) of the divine in the world, such that, for example, Ismaili missionaries told their Indian converts that the fourth caliph, Ali, was the tenth avatar of Vishnu.6

This Iranian elite class, moreover, entertained ideas of sacred kingship embodied in the history of the pre-Islamic kings of Iran, which got blended with the tradition of the ancient prophets of the Bible in their Islamic form, ending with Muhammad. Under Islam, Iranian kingship was a second center of the sacred, parallel to the lineage of the prophets. Sacred kingship of this kind had two features that made it irreducible in a direct way to Islamic law and the religious philosophy of kingship found in the law. First, like all kings, Turkish and Mughal rulers were above the competing religions and had to arbitrate among them. There was, therefore, a continuing incentive to preserve public order and not multiply causes of civil strife and disaffection with the government. Second, the Persian conceptions of sacred kingship they brought to India were universalistic in vision and appealed to a realm of ideas that overspilled
the boundaries between religions, especially ideas of astrology, millen-rialism, time cycles, and the interpretation of omens. Here again India and Iran were cultural cousins, Iran being a conduit of astrology and astronomy from Mesopotamia and the Hellenistic world for India, and India returning the favor at other times. Astrology in particular was a "science" that circulated freely among Muslims, Christians, and Hindus, from India to Europe.\textsuperscript{15}

It is a mistake, therefore, to view the relation of Islam to Indian civil-ization through a "clash of civilizations" model, with its assumption of mutual exclusion, as if they were closed systems. On the contrary, Islam developed its distinctive Perso-Islamic culture within the penum-bra of Indian Civilization, in Abbasid times. Part of the appeal of Islam to Indians was that aspects of it were already familiar, such as sacred kingship and the devotionalism and mysticism of Sufism; aspects of it, indeed, were Indian, although in a new configuration that gave prominence to the tradition of the prophets.

\textbf{Europeans}

India had been deeply affected by the astonishingly successful expan-sion of Islam and Islamic states across much of Europe and Asia from about the eighth century. This expansion had created a cosmopolitan world of trade, diplomacy, taste, and knowledge that penetrated and blended, in different ways, with Indian Civilization, drawing on it and adding to it. It was through the Islamic world that Indian ideas and inventions reached Europe in late medieval times, including what Abu Fazl called India's three contributions to the world: the game of chess; the collection of folktales and animal fables called the \textit{Panchatantra}; and the zero, that is, the place-notation of the number system—what in English is called the Arabic numerals, although they derive, ultimately, from India.

Some eight centuries after the Asia-wide expansion of Islam had begun, from the time of Columbus, European nations began an expansion of their powers, which crossed Asia and Africa, and encompassed the New World, as well. It was a truly worldwide expansion, broader than that of Islam, but made possible by building on the accumulated geographical knowledge of the Muslim countries, and by new technolo-gies of navigation. Indian Civilization was again profoundly affected, although by different means and in novel ways.

\textbf{European Merchants}

Before the worldwide expansion of European power, for medieval Christian Europe, India was the edge of the earth, a distant horizon, a strange land where things were very different. The strangeness of India

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for Europeans could take monstrous or pleasant forms virtually without limit, because they were unchecked by experience. It was commonly stated in medieval bestiaries or books about animals, for example, that the elephant had pillar-like legs that lacked knee joints, and had to sleep standing up, leaning against a tree, because it could not get up if it fell down. It was said that hunters would saw a tree half through in hopes that an elephant would lean against it and fall, unable to rise again.

Images of India in medieval Europe have a dream-like character, but they were not free inventions of the mind and, on the contrary, had their own history. The legacy of Greco-Roman antiquity was one great fund of such images, and from it medieval Europeans drew the most exotic pictures of India. Thus in the Nuremberg chronicle, for example, published in 1493 at the beginning of print in the West and at the outset of the great voyages that would take European merchant venturers to India, we find pictures of fantastic races of people in India such as the mouthless people who are nourished by smells and the backward-foot people, that go way back to the hearsay reports of the Greek writer Ctesias in the fifth century BCE (see Chapter 4). Besides images of repellant, freakish strangeness, Europeans also entertained pleasing images of India as a land of luxury and wealth, and the source of desirable and expensive things such as diamonds, silk, exotic animals, and spices. This reputation for wealth was certainly a function of the trade of ancient times, for, as noted earlier, only the most precious commodities could repay the very high costs of transportation over so long a distance. India had been a source of exotic and expensive items of trade since the time of Solomon in the Bible, and it was a supplier of luxuries to Rome in ancient times, such as ivory, silk, and precious stones, to a degree that caused alarm because of the drain of wealth it entailed, as we saw in Chapter 8. Indian goods again made their way to Europe as its economy recovered from the collapse of the Roman Empire and slowly began to grow in the course of the Middle Ages. Now, however, India was a part of the large Asian trading world created...
with the spread of Islam, and Muslim merchants and states now intervened between Europe and India. The creation (in 1299 CE) and spread of the Ottoman Empire in Turkey, and its revival of the institution of the caliph as head of the worldwide community of Islam, further solidified Muslim centrality to the trade of Eurasia. The Islamic countries, unlike those of Europe, had direct knowledge of India and a vastly superior and more rational understanding of the geography of Eurasia developed through the trade, exploration, and conquests of Islamic forces in India and elsewhere. Europeans drew on this fund of geographical knowledge and built on it from experience as their own trade grew and expanded to India and beyond, and the real India began to come into focus.

Venice made its fortune through this trade in precious goods from the Muslim east, but other European nations and their merchants soon were searching for passages to India that would bypass the Muslims. Columbus surmised that he could reach India by sailing west around the world, and when he reached the New World he thought he was in India. This supposition was assisted by two features of early printed maps of the world, deriving from the geography of Ptolemy (c. 150 CE). On the one hand, there was no effective means of determining longitude, and world maps based on Ptolemy greatly overestimate the east–west dimension of the Eurasian landmass. By putting the coast of Asia too far east of Europe, one could infer that the distance westward from Europe to Asia, across the Atlantic Ocean, is not very great. The other feature of these maps is that countries are named but no boundaries are drawn around them, and India tends to sprawl across Asia eastward to the coast. In Ptolemy’s map (Map 8) India proper is called “India within the Ganges,” and something called “India beyond the Ganges” is the name for Southeast Asia (the Ganga River was thought to flow due south, separating the two Indias), and in northern China one finds “upper India”; India is practically a name for Asia as a whole. Map 9 shows a Ptolemaic map of 1545 with improved knowledge of India due to European voyages.

Spain soon lay claim to the Americas and the Philippines, but Portugal made the first effective explorations in the other direction, of the southern route around Africa to the coast of India, beginning with the voyage of Vasco da Gama in 1498 (Figure 18). For about a century Portugal dominated the European trade of Asia. The Portuguese created a watery empire of trade, consisting of a few small land bases established by treaty with the local powers, reaching from Goa on the west coast of India to Macao in the south of China. Portugal enforced its domination
of the seaborne trade through a far-flung network of armed ships that required all ships of other countries to take a cartaz or charter from the Portuguese and trade only with the Portuguese in certain items. In this way Portugal came to dominate the trade in spices, and much else besides. In exchange the Portuguese brought American crops to Asia that had a lasting impact: potatoes and corn (maize) that allowed farming in soils and seasons where it was otherwise difficult; new luxuries like tobacco and pineapple; and two foods so completely integrated into Indian cooking that it is hard to imagine that they are really fairly recent introductions: tomatoes and chili peppers. As we saw in Chapter 9, the Portuguese played an important role in the success of the South Indian empire of Vijayanagara by supplying it with horses, which were very scarce in the south and badly needed for warfare against their northern neighbors.

The Portuguese brought Catholic Christianity with them to India, and Catholic missionaries from various countries who set about learning Indian languages and making converts, and establishing the Pope's supremacy over the ancient community of Thomas Christians in South India, who claimed to have been led to Christianity by the apostle Thomas. The missionary enterprise was pulled in different directions by contrary forces promoting assimilation with Indian culture and isolation from it. At the one extreme, the attempt of Jesuits to present Christianity in a form acceptable to Indians led to the work of the Italian Jesuit Roberto Nobili, who adopted the dress and way of life of a brahmin renouncer. This impulse was canceled by Rome, however, in the upshot of a "quarrel of the rites" in China as well as India, and the suppression of the Jesuit order by the Pope somewhat after. At the other extreme was the Inquisition instituted at Goa to enforce orthodoxy among Catholics, in response to anxiety that lingering Hindu beliefs and practices were compromising the purity of Christianity in India. During the heyday of Portuguese control of the India trade, the Portuguese language was widely used on both coasts of India as a medium of trade, and a sprinkling of Portuguese words in Indian languages, such as Hindi almari (Indian English almirah, a wardrobe or chest of drawers) and tauliya (towel), persist as vestiges of that period.

The ambitions of Spain and Portugal soon clashed, and their rivalry was resolved by the Pope, who drew a vertical line on the globe through South America that awarded Portugal everythting eastward of Brazil and Spain everything to the west of it. Other European nations and their merchant companies began to push their way forward, however, and intra-European rivalry proved a powerful force in the expansion of European economic and political power around the world, beginning about 1600. East India companies were formed by the English, the Dutch, the Danes, the French, and some others, with monopoly rights over their nation's trade with India. The most effective of these were the Dutch and the English, and they and the Portuguese formed a three-cornered struggle for the India trade. The ultimate outcome of the struggle was that the Portuguese were confined to a few small trading stations on the Indian coast, the Dutch concentrated their power on Indonesia and the Spice Islands, and the English came to dominate the trade of India itself.

In many ways the European trade with India, leading up to colonial rule, was continuous with the old Roman trade, in the sense that India supplied Europe with rare commodities such as spices and gems, and luxurious manufactured goods, especially fabrics, in exchange for silver and gold. But while these terms of trade were in broad terms stable over a very long period, the trading methods of the period of European expansion were quite new, involving the creation of merchant companies that had monopoly powers of their country's Asian trade and arms to protect and enforce them on their rivals. These companies did not promote free and peaceful trade but instead monopolies maintained by force. They entered into political relations with Indian powers to establish and maintain small enclaves on land in which to collect tradable goods for shipment homeward, and to sell goods shipped out from Europe. East India trading companies of the different European nations had to be political actors, negotiating relations with Indian rulers, and not just commercial ventures. These circumstances led to European rule of Indian territory and people by a body of foreign merchants, something entirely novel in India's history.

**British Rule**

The rivalry of European nations among themselves was a driving force for the international expansion of European imperial power in the seventeenth century and after, and these rivalries were projected on the whole world. The rivalry of England and France especially had momentous consequences in the middle of the eighteenth century: the extinction of French rule in Canada by the British; the revolt of the thirteen colonies of America
from British rule with French assistance; and the establishment of British territorial rule in the eastern part of India (Bengal). Conquest of Indian territories came about when armies of the British East India Company and its Indian allies fought the armies of the French East India Company and its Indian allies—the beginnings of the British Indian Empire.

In the course of the warfare in Europe and Canada of the French and English nations, the French and English East India Companies entered the fray by fighting one another in India and implicating their Indian allies in the struggle. Thus in India the rivalry between the two was not carried out by the governments of the two countries but by joint-stock corporations of merchants and the Indian princes who gave them trading privileges and leased them small patches of territory on the coast for their trading posts. These “factories,” as they were called, were not places of manufacture but essentially warehousing facilities, so called because they were governed by someone called a “factor” or commercial agent of the company. Some factories were fortified and protected by Indian soldiers under European officers. These armed forces of the merchant companies now became war-making entities that drew Indian governments and their armies into the commercial and national struggle between the British and the French. The upshot of a long and complicated struggle was that the British East India Company army, under Robert Clive, defeated the Mughal governor of Bengal, Siraj ud Daula, at Plassey in 1757. Clive’s victory was secured by a prior secret agreement with two of Siraj ud Daula’s generals, who held back their armies, and Clive replaced Siraj ud Daula with one of them, Mir Jafar, as Bengal’s governor. Within a few years the East India Company became the effective co-ruler of Bengal, and was given a charter authorizing its new powers by the Mughal emperor in Delhi. He granted it the diwani, or fiscal administration of the country, in concert with the existing political and military administrator. The situation was highly anomalous; a merchant company from England had become a territorial ruler in Bengal under a grant of authority from the emperor of India. In a sense the East India Company was a Mughal vassal, but that was only the legal clothing in which the military power and diplomatic maneuvering of the Company was dressed.

In later years the British liked to say that they acquired an empire in India “in a fit of absent-mindedness.” The process was not so thoughtless and innocent as this phrase wants us to believe. The Company had in fact aimed at territorial dominion, following the Dutch model, in the past, although without success, and had the Dutch example before it in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), where the Dutch governed large lowland territories as the kingdom of Ceylon retreated to the mountainous interior. But the immediate cause of British rule in India was the worldwide struggle of England and France, which the English and French East India Companies joined in, the consequences of which—the diwani of Bengal—were unanticipated.

In any case the transformation of the Company was profound, from a trading company with negligible territorial holdings on the coast of India for the purposes of turning a profit, to a governing power ruling vast and increasing agrarian territory from which it had to collect taxes and over which it had to maintain law and order. It was the beginning of the period of Company rule, which lasted for about a hundred years, from 1765, when the Company acquired administrative powers in Bengal (the diwani), and ended in 1858 when, at the close of the Rebellion of 1857, the British government put an end to Company rule and imposed Crown rule, which is to say, direct rule of British India by the British government. Crown rule also lasted about a hundred years, from 1858 to independence in 1947.

An utterly new kind of empire in India was created by the British East India Company. Previous foreign rulers had come with land armies as conquering powers; this one had evolved from trading company to territorial ruler. Previous invaders came and settled in India, making it their home and the home of their descendants; the British sent out its young men, aged seventeen or eighteen, to be civil servants and military officers, but they all intended to retire to Britain at the end of their careers, and considered Britain their home—those who remained in India were mostly the rather large number of Britons who died of illness before their time and were buried there. Although ideas of colonizing India with European settlers, on the model of America, Canada, and South Africa, were floated from time to time, the East India Company strongly resisted. It wanted to avoid creating situations of conflict between a large European population with ideas of its own superiority and the much vaster population of Indians, which would unsettle British rule. For the same reason the Company assiduously prevented the admission of nonofficial Europeans, including missionaries. Indeed, the numbers of Europeans in the British Indian government were kept very small—three to five thousand in the civil service, more in the army—supervising very large numbers of Indian employees. The connectedness with the home country depended on sailing vessels of improved
design and speed, but the voyage often took six months. Nevertheless the relatively faster means of communication made for an altogether new kind of empire in which small numbers of East India Company officials were born, schooled, and (if they were lucky to live long enough) buried in Britain but spent most of their adult life in India, participating in its governance or the Company’s commerce, under the direction of Company headquarters, East India House, in faraway London. For all these reasons the political, institutional, and religious character of India’s relation to Europe through the agency of British rule was shaped quite differently from its relation to the Islamic world. At the same time, India as a colony of the growing British empire was under very different conditions of rule than the British settler colonies of Canada, the thirteen colonies of America, Australia, New Zealand, the West Indies and, later, South Africa.

The Company’s military successes in India were accomplished by large numbers of Indian soldiers under British command, and smaller numbers of British soldiers. The means of success lay not so much in military technology, which was not very different from that of the Mughals and other Indian powers, which were fully in the gunpowder era, using artillery and matchlocks or flintlocks. The European advantage lay in the rapidity and massing of firepower achieved through close formations of well-drilled men. The new organizational techniques yielded, at the beginning, outsized victories in the sense that smaller forces under British command bested much larger Indian armies. This advantage could not last forever, and indeed Indian princes very quickly learned to make use of European officers (especially those left unemployed by the defeat of Napoleon) to train their own officers and troops in the European techniques of battlefield organization. As they did so, ever-larger British and allied forces were needed to defeat their opponents in India.\(^{30}\)

The other contributing factor to British military success in India was the alliances that the British made with Indian rulers against other Indian opponents. Such allies retained the rule of their own countries throughout the period of British rule, although at a price, which included leaving their foreign affairs in the hands of the British-Indian government while contributing to the maintenance of the Indian army, sometimes through ceding territories to pay their obligations. These “princely states” remained formally outside British India, and managed their own regimes of taxation and administration, and their own armed forces, but each of them had a British “resident” who kept them apprised of British policy, and often interfered with the internal governance and the succession to the kingdom. The Indian princes played a large role in the system of alliances that extended and consolidated British rule in India, but over time their political functions shrunk, although the British came to regard their military forces as a valuable and inexpensive supplement to the army of British India and in the world wars. Their presence throughout the two centuries of British rule gave the political map of British India a patchwork quality, with large areas of direct British rule interrupted by the princely states, some of them large as Britain itself, some smaller than an American county (Map 10). In aggregate the princely states covered a third of the landmass of India, right up to the end of British rule.

MAP 10  British India in 1939