Empires: Belief Systems

Paris is well worth a Mass.

–Henry of Navarre, King of France (ruled 1589–1610)

Essential Question: How did different belief systems endure or change during the period from 1450–1750?

Religion, a key factor in the expansion of empires, was a divisive force as much as it was a unifying one. Christianity remained a dominant force in Europe, but its split into several factions during the 16th and 17th centuries led to significant historical changes. French King Henry IV, often known as Henry of Navarre, converted to Catholicism in 1593 for the sake of solidifying his power and ensuring peace, as the quote above suggests. His action demonstrates the willingness of monarchs to approach ruling with practicality rather than theology. Henry IV also sanctioned religious toleration of the Huguenots (French Calvinists).

Islam, too, experienced a split, and political rivalries between the Ottoman and Safavid empires deepened the breach between the Sunni and Shi'a branches of the religion. At the same time, Sikhism provided a way to combine Hindu and Sufi Muslim beliefs.

Protestant Reformation

The Roman Catholic Church faced many challenges in the European shift from feudalism to centralized governments. International in organization and influence and boasting a large bureaucracy of its own, the Church was subject to corruption. Efforts to curb corruption resulted in numerous Church councils and reform movements. However, efforts at reform were unsuccessful.

Theological disagreements began to surface as well. John Wycliffe and the Lollards in England in the late 14th century argued that priests were unnecessary for salvation. Wycliffe was vilified for translating parts of the Bible into the English vernacular to make it available to the mass of believers, who neither read nor understood Latin. In the early 14th century, Hussites, followers of Jan Hus in Bohemia, were declared heretics for beliefs similar to Wycliffe's. Hus himself was burned at the stake. Huldrych Zwingli campaigned in Geneva for a religion that would follow the exact teachings

of the scriptures and discard customs that had evolved later. For example, he opposed the requirement for celibacy of the clergy because he argued that the rule was imposed long after the scriptures were written.

The power of the Church suffered during the so-called Babylonian Captivity (1309–1377), when the papacy was located in France rather than in Rome. The Captivity gave French rulers greater influence over the Church, even the ability to decide who should be pope. Newly centralizing rulers who coveted Church lands and authority began confiscating wealthy Catholic monasteries and sometimes established their own churches. In the eyes of believers, the Church suffered further when it failed to stop the Black Death. (Connect: Write a paragraph connecting the Reformation with the problems of the medieval Church. See Topic 1.6.)

Lutheranism A monk named **Martin Luther** in Wittenberg, a German city in the Holy Roman Empire (800–1806), concluded that several traditional Church practices violated biblical teachings. He objected to the sale of **indulgences**, which granted a person absolution from the punishments for sin, and to **simony**, the selling of church offices. As a result, Luther defiantly challenged the Church by nailing his charges, the *95 Theses*, to a church door. Luther advocated for the theological stance of "sola fide," faith alone, for the basis of salvation for the Christian believer.

The Church reacted harshly. It, and the local political ruler, needed the money these practices generated. Luther persisted. In January 1521, Pope Leo X excommunicated Luther. Several German political leaders saw an opportunity to free themselves from the power of the pope. They sided with Luther. Soon, what had begun as a minor academic debate became a major split in the Roman Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire.

Luther was not a political or social revolutionary. (When German peasants rebelled, he did not support them.) But his theological ideas had social impact on the clergy as well as on women. Luther taught that women could have direct access to God just as men could. Luther's emphasis promoted women's literacy. He believed that women had significant roles in the family, particularly teaching their children to read the Bible. However, Protestants generally did not organize convents. As a result, Protestant women did not have the opportunity to become leaders in a vital institution the way Roman Catholic women did.

Calvinism The French theologian **John Calvin** broke with the Catholic Church around 1530. In 1536, he authored *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* and helped reform the religious community in Geneva, Switzerland. The **elect**, those **predestined** to go to heaven, ran the community, which was based on plain living, simple church buildings, and governance by the elders of the church. Calvin's followers in France were called Huguenots. Other offshoots of Calvinism included the Reformed Church of Scotland, led by John Knox, and the **Puritans** in England and later in Boston, who wanted to purify the Church of England of Catholic remnants. Historian and sociologist Max Weber pointed out that an important socioeconomic impact

of Calvinism is contained in the phrase "Protestant work ethic." Calvinists were encouraged to work hard and reinvest their profits; prosperity ostensibly showed that God favored their obedience and hard work. Prosperity also indicated their position among the elect. Calvinists viewed their work ethic as righteous living that elevated them to positions of secular leadership. Together, the various reform efforts are known as the **Protestant Reformation**.

Dominant Faiths in Western Europe in 1560
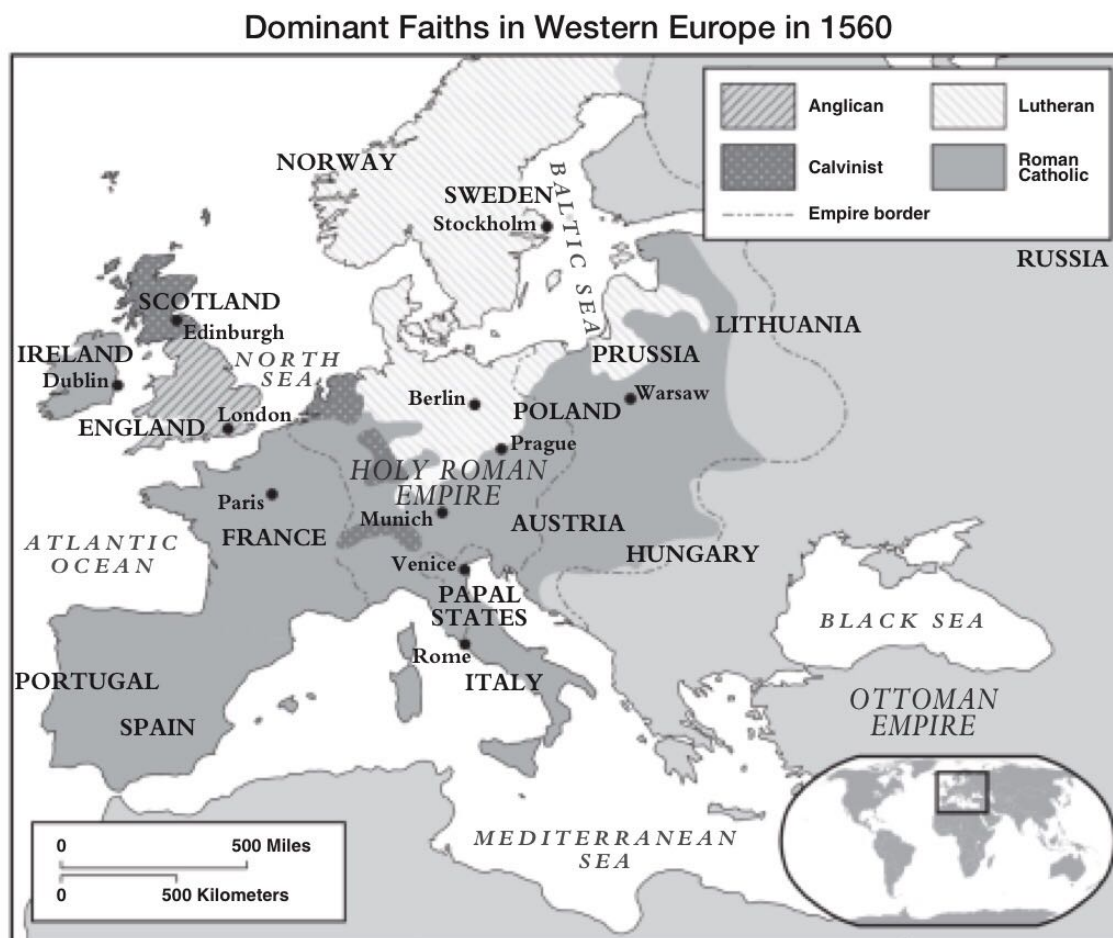
Anglicanism The last of the three major figures of the Reformation was England's King **Henry VIII** (ruled 1509–1547). Henry wanted a male heir to succeed him. After his wife gave birth to several daughters, Henry asked the pope to annul his marriage so he could marry another woman, **Anne Boleyn**. But the pope refused out of worry over the reaction of **Charles V**, the powerful emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. Henry, with the approval of the English Parliament, set himself up as head of the new Church of England, or **Anglican Church**—one that would be free of control by the pope in Rome.

The Orthodox Church and Reforms in Russia

Charles V had revitalized the concept of the universal monarchy and spent most of his reign defending the integrity of the Holy Roman Empire from the Protestant Reformation. Like Charles V, Peter the Great of Russia asserted his authority as he moved against the Orthodox Church. The Church had long been the force unifying the Russian people and the tsars, who claimed to rule

by divine right. Peter confirmed his power over the Church by abolishing the position of patriarch, the head of the Church, and incorporating the Church into the government. In place of the patriarch, he established the **Holy Synod**, composed of clergymen overseen by a secular official who answered to the tsar. Peter raised the minimum age for men to become eligible to be monks to 50, preferring that the young serve first as soldiers. Peter's reforms were not welcomed by many peasants and Old Believers, a sect that opposed earlier reforms.

Counter-Reformation or Catholic Reformation

The Roman Catholic Church, all-powerful in Europe since the fall of Rome, did not sit quietly by and let the Reformation groups take over. Instead, it embarked on a vigorous **Counter-Reformation** to fight against the Protestant attacks. A three-pronged strategy yielded such gains for the Church that it remains the largest Christian denomination in the world:

- The Church increased the use of the **Inquisition**, which had been established in the late 12th century to root out and punish nonbelievers. The Inquisition sometimes allowed the use of torture to achieve its ends.

- The **Jesuits**, or Society of Jesus, a religious order founded in 1540 by Ignatius of Loyola, also opposed the spread of Protestantism. The Jesuits undertook missionary activity throughout the Spanish Empire as well as in Japan and India.

- The **Council of Trent** (1545–1563) corrected some of the worst of the Church's abuses and concentrated on reaffirming the rituals such as marriage and other sacraments improving the education of priests. The Council also published the *Index of Prohibited Books*, a list of writings that the Church banned, including Protestant copies of the Bible and the writings of Copernicus.

The Counter-Reformation was successful in that Catholicism remained predominant in the areas of Western Europe near the Mediterranean Sea. Moreover, later colonies of the European powers often followed the lead of the home country in religion. Therefore, most of the people in the Spanish, Portuguese, and French colonies became Catholic.

Charles V abdicated as ruler of the Holy Roman Empire in 1555, discouraged by his inability to stop the spread of Lutheranism. He left Spain to his son **Philip II** and the Holy Roman Empire to his brother Ferdinand. Philip II took the Catholic crusade to the Netherlands and ruled its 17 provinces from 1556 to 1581. He later tried to conquer and convert England. In 1588, his **Spanish Armada** was defeated by English naval power.

Wars of Religion

Europe's religious divisions led to frequent wars. In 1546 and 1547, the forces of Charles V fought the German Lutheran Schmalkaldic League. Conflict between Lutherans and the Holy Roman Empire resulted in the 1555 **Peace of Augsburg**, which allowed each German state to choose whether its ruler would be Catholic or Lutheran. As a result, churches and inhabitants were forced to practice the state religion. People who refused could move to another state where their preferred religion was practiced.

France In France, Catholics and Huguenots fought for nearly half a century. Then, in 1593, King Henry IV, who had been raised as a Protestant, tried to unify the country by becoming a Catholic, reportedly saying that "Paris is well worth a Mass." Five years later, in another step to bring peace, Henry issued the **Edict of Nantes**, which allowed the Huguenots to practice their faith. The edict provided religious toleration in France for the next 87 years. In 1685, Louis XIV of France issued the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. As a result, France experienced social and economic effects. For example, many skilled craftsmen left France, taking knowledge of important industry techniques and styles with them.

Thirty Years' War The final great religious conflict between Catholics and Protestants in Europe culminated in the **Thirty Years' War** (1618–1648), which led to economic catastrophe for most of the continent. The Thirty Years' War was initially the result of religious conflict within the Holy Roman Empire; it gradually developed into a more general conflict involving European powers. Much of the destruction was caused by troops who were allowed to loot as part of their compensation. The war resulted in widespread famine, starvation, and disease.

The war culminated in the **Peace of Westphalia**, which allowed each area of the Holy Roman Empire to select one of three religious options: Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, or Calvinism. After this settlement, France, Spain, and Italy were predominantly Catholic. Northern Europe was either Lutheran or Calvinist. England was Protestant with a state church.

Allowing rulers of various areas of the Holy Roman Empire to choose a denomination had important political effects. It gave the countries and duchies much more autonomy than they previously had. Consequently, the states of Prussia (now part of Germany) and Austria began to assert themselves, although they still formally belonged to the Holy Roman Empire. Prussia, after suffering tremendous destruction during the Thirty Years' War, developed a strong military to protect itself. The Prussian military tradition would become a key factor in European politics into the 20th century.

Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Empires, 1450–1750			
	Ottoman Empire	**Safavid Empire**	**Mughal Empire**
Religion	• Mostly Sunni with some measure of tolerance under Suleiman • Less tolerance under later rulers	• Mostly Shi'a • No tolerance; Ismail I made conversion mandatory for Sunni population	• Tolerance under Akbar, but his blend of Islam and Hinduism did not prove popular • Less tolerance under later rulers

Islamic Religious Schisms

As in the Holy Roman Empire, religion and the state were closely tied in Islamic empires. Islam continued to be an enduring belief system, spreading its sphere of influence despite factions that developed within it.

Ottoman Empire Until 1453, much of the area had been controlled by the Byzantine Empire and followed the Eastern Orthodox religion. After the siege of Constantinople, the area became Ottoman and the dominant religion became Islam. A sultan replaced the emperor, and the Byzantine Empire's Justinian Law was replaced by **shariah**. This is a strict Islamic legal system that deals with all aspects of life, such as criminal justice, marital laws, and issues of inheritance.

The Safavids Using Shi'a Islam as a unifying force, Shah Ismail built a power base that supported his rule and denied legitimacy to any Sunni. This strict adherence to Shi'a Islam caused frequent hostilities within the Ottoman Empire.

Mughal Toleration and Prosperity Akbar tolerated all religions. He gave money or land to Hindus and Muslims. He also gave money for a Catholic church in Goa, on India's southwest coast. He provided land grants for the relatively new religion of **Sikhism**, which developed from Hinduism and may have been influenced by the Islamic mysticism known as Sufism. (See Topics 1.2 and 1.3.) Sikhism, a monotheistic faith that recognized the rights of other faiths to exist, became the fifth most popular religion in the world by the 21st century. Akbar tried to ease tensions between Hindus and Muslims. He gave Hindus positions in his government—zamindars of high and low positions could be Hindu—and married Hindu wives. He exempted Hindus from poll taxes paid by non-Muslims in the empire. Because he enjoyed religious discussions, Akbar invited Catholic priests to Delhi to explain Christianity to him.

Regarded as one of the world's outstanding rulers, Akbar encouraged learning, art, architecture, and literature. He tried (and failed) to prohibit child marriages and sati, the ritual in which widows killed themselves by jumping on the funeral pyres of their husbands. He died in 1605 without successfully converting his Hindu and Islamic subjects to the religion called Din-i Ilahi, or "divine faith," which he had promoted to reconcile Hinduism and Islam.

Religious Schisms Through History			
Religion and Region	**Schism**	**Leaders**	**Nature of Dispute**
Buddhism in India	Theravada and Mahayana (approximately 300 B.C.E. to 100 C.E.)	• Four councils held after the Buddha's death	Disagreement between emphasis on personal meditation (Theravada) and public rituals and compassion (Mahayana)
Islam in Middle East	Sunni and Shi'a (632 C.E.)	• Abu Bakr • Ali	Disagreement over the rightful successor to Muhammad as leader of the Islamic community
Christianity in Europe and Byzantine Empire	Roman Catholics and Orthodox (1054 C.E.)	• Pope Leo IX • Patriarch of Constantinople, Michael Cerularius	Disagreement over the role of faith, issues of salvation. Disagreement over the authority of the pope and differences in rituals
Christianity in Europe	Roman Catholics and Protestants (1517 C.E.)	• Martin Luther • John Calvin • King Henry VIII	Disagreements over the role of faith, the role of the clergy and the pope, and how to interpret the Bible

Scientific Revolution

In the early 1600s, scientific thinking gained popularity in northern Europe as trends in Renaissance ideas, curiosity, investigation, and discovery spread. In a period of religious schisms, scientific thought represented a very different kind of thinking—one based on reason rather than on faith—that would set in motion a monumental historical change. In 1620, English scientist and philosopher Francis Bacon developed an early scientific method called **empiricism**, which insisted upon the collection of data to back up a hypothesis. Bacon challenged traditional ideas that had been accepted for centuries and replace them with ones that could be demonstrated with evidence.

Scientific thinking advanced through the correspondence of leading scholars with one another, even during the religious wars, and by the establishment of a Royal Academy of Science in France and England. Sir Isaac Newton, combining Galileo's laws of terrestrial motion and Johannes Kepler's laws of planetary motion, published a work on gravitational force called *Principia* (1687). The ideas in *Principia* influenced science and mathematics and helped lead to a new vision of the world. Many intellectuals thought that science showed that the world was ordered and rational and that natural laws applied to the rational and orderly progress of governments and society. This thinking is a key to the Enlightenment (see Topic 5.1).

KEY TERMS BY THEME

GOVERNMENT: Europe
Henry VIII
Anne Boleyn
Charles V
Philip II
Spanish Armada
Peace of Augsburg
Edict of Nantes
Thirty Years' War
Peace of Westphalia

CULTURE: Catholicism
indulgences
simony
Holy Synod
Counter-Reformation
Inquisition
Jesuits
Council of Trent

CULTURE: Protestantism
Martin Luther
95 Theses
John Calvin
elect
predestined
Puritans
Protestant Reformation
Anglican Church

CULTURE: Islam
shariah
Sikhism

CULTURE: Science
empiricism

Comparison in Land-Based Empires

Foreigners appreciate only military power. . . . Thus, they submit to us wholeheartedly and do not dare to despise China once we display our hunting techniques to them.

—Quinlong, Emperor of China,1735

Essential Question: By what methods did empires increase their societal and cultural influence from c. 1450–c. 1750?

Building and maintaining large land-based empires is a major theme in the period c. 1450–c. 1750. These empires grew as they incorporated lands they conquered. Their rulers implemented policies to solidify or legitimize their rule over a diverse population. However, the conquered often did not totally assimilate to the life and culture of their conquerors. In some cases the conquered influenced the conquerors, helping to shape a blended culture. The interconnection of hemispheres also led to blended cultures.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

As part of its conquest of present-day Hungary, the Ottoman Empire under Suleiman I besieged the Habsburg-controlled city of Esztergom in 1543 with the help of French artillery. The figure at the far left is a Janissary. Suleiman is on horseback.

Not all empires were able to maintain their authority. For example, the Gunpowder Empires declined, unable to compete with European trading companies, especially the British, and unable to resolve conflicts of heirs motivated by harem politics (see Topic 3.1). Other factors in the decline included weak or corrupt leadership and failure to keep up with developments in military and naval technology. The expensive armies each empire needed to maintain control placed harsh financial burdens on the peasants and villages in the form of taxes and other obligations. Religious conflicts also divided and weakened the Gunpowder Empires.

A deep religious schism divided Muslims and Hindus in Mughal India, just as a schism divided Sunni Ottomans and Shi'a Safavids and set the stage for conflict between the present-day countries of Iraq and Iran. (Connect: Write a paragraph comparing the decline of Mughal India with the decline of the Mongol Empire. See Topic 2.1.)

Military Might

The armies of these land-based empires were well trained, well organized, well equipped, and well led. Empires in Eurasia all relied on gunpowder weapons, including large cannons, in support of more traditional cavalry and infantry units. In the Americas, the fierceness of both the Aztec and Incan warriors allowed them to intimidate and conquer neighboring territories.

Soldiers In some cases, the rulers of land-based empires developed an elite group of soldiers to use in solidifying their control over their territories. For instance, both the Ottoman sultan and Safavid shah used slave soldiers to offset the power of troops who had more loyalty to their tribe or local governor than to the sultan or shah. The Janissaries in the Ottoman Empire helped to preserve the power of the Ottoman sultan and the Ghulams helped to protect the Safavid shah from rival clans. Both the Janissaries and the Ghulams were often recruited from minority religious or ethnic groups found within the empires. The Janissaries were often slaves taken from Christian areas of the Ottoman Empire, while the Ghulams came from the Georgian, Armenian, or Circassian populations within the Safavid Empire. The system of taking slaves as part of a "blood" tax (in the Ottoman Empire this was known as devshirme) or tribute was not limited to the Ottomans or Safavids. Aztecs also required slaves or prisoners as part of the tribute offered by conquered states.

Warfare These strong militaries did not prevent conflict among the land-based empires. The Ottoman Empire and Safavid Empire went to war over the territorial claims each had at its border. However, religion also played a role as an underlying cause of this conflict. The Ottoman Empire was a predominantly Sunni Muslim state, while the Safavids were mainly Shi'a. Each believed the other to practice a heretical type of Islam and was willing to go to war over this split. Religion was not as important a factor in the conflict between the

Safavids and the Mughals as it was in the Ottoman-Safavid War. Instead, control over resources and trade routes in present-day Afghanistan was at the core of the war between these two land-based empires.

Two Muslim powers conflicted when Morocco invaded the Songhai Empire in 1591. Moroccan forces sacked the capital of Gao and ended the empire. However, Morocco was unable to hold onto all the Songhai territory.

Centralized Bureaucracy

Controlling a large area with such diverse populations required land-based empires to establish an organized and centralized bureaucracy. Recruiting bureaucratic elites took several forms. In the Ming and Manchu dynasties of China, the civil service examination system was used to assess the abilities of the members of the scholar-gentry who wished to enter government service. In the Ottoman Empire, the devshirme system provided the sultan with a ready-made pool of civil servants strictly loyal to him, while in the Safavid Empire, the shah would enlist a class of bureaucrats from the Persian population of the empire, known as "the men of the pen."

Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Empires, 1450–1750			
	Ottoman Empire	**Safavid Empire**	**Mughal Empire**
Taxes	• Taxes on non-Muslims • Taxes on peasants	• Taxation policies used to encourage adherence to Shi'a Islam	• Taxes on unbelievers were abolished by Akbar but reinstated later • Taxes on peasants
Military	• Warriors (often trained Janissaries) were granted villages to provide for their subsistence • The military functioned as a dual authority with central government • Strong navy	• Warriors were the Qizilbash, Turcoman militants who helped establish the empire • Leaders made the military independent of central government • No significant navy	• Warriors were granted villages to provide their upkeep • Officials known as zamindars made the military independent of central government • Small navy

In the Songhai Empire, the *mansa*, a Mandika word meaning "sultan," employed bureaucrats from the scholarly class educated in the schools, or madrasas, of Timbuktu. While the Incas did not use a dedicated scholarly class to rule their empire as the Ming and Manchus did, they did organize

their empire into a federal system of provinces headed by nobles loyal to the emperor. Further, these nobles oversaw a very organized political structure that was divided on the basis of a decimal system.

Despite its many similarities to other land empires, the Aztec Empire was less centralized and bureaucratic than the other land empires. The Aztec created a tributary empire and had little to no direct control over the territory within the region of Mesoamerica. It kept control over this region through force, fear, and intimidation rather than through a centralized bureaucracy.

Source: Wikimedia Commons
A portrayal of Aztec warriors from the Florentine Codex, written between 1540 and 1549.

Taxation Some form of taxation or revenue collection was necessary to support the bureaucracy and military of the land-based empires of this period. Taxation took many forms in these empires:

- **Mughal zamindar tax collection:** Mughal emperors appointed tax officers or zamindars to collect taxes from the peasant class based on land and production.

- **Ottoman tax farming:** Rather than employing government tax collectors, the Ottoman sultans appointed "tax farmers" to pay an annual fixed sum of money for an area to the central government and then recoup the outlay by collecting money or salable goods from the residents of the area. Many Janissaries were paid their salaries in this manner by collecting more money than they paid out to the central government.

- **Aztec tribute lists:** As the Aztecs (or Mexica) formed a tributary empire, the main source of revenue that supported the Aztec noble class and military came from yearly offerings or tributes from the surrounding areas. The lists included whichever local product was made or valued but could also include a demand for people, many of whom became human sacrifices in Aztec religious rituals.

- **Ming collection of "hard currency:"** The Ming Empire, like its predecessors, issued paper currency as a means to facilitate trade and tax collection; however the use of paper money led to rampant counterfeiting and hyperinflation. The Ming then ordered that all taxes should be paid in the form of rice, and later silver coins, known as "hard currency."

Striving for Legitimacy

While the diversity of the populations of the land-based empires was beneficial to the economic and political strength of the empires, ruling over populations that included many ethnicities, religions, and tribal ties was challenging. Therefore many rulers turned to other than political means to unite their subjects in their loyalty to the state. Rulers used religion, art, and monumental architecture to legitimize their rule. Akbar attempted a syncretic approach to religion in the Mughal Empire, but he had little success in that area.

Sources of Legitimacy	Examples
Religion	• Rulers in Islamic empires used references to the title "caliph," or successor to the Prophet. • European monarchs claim to "divine right" that gave the monarch the mandate to rule by the Christian God. • Conversion to Islam of Songhai rulers and noble class provides a religious and legal structure to the empire. • Aztec (Mexica) use human sacrifice in religious rituals.
Art	• Portraits of the Qing emperors and other high officials • Miniature paintings in the Ottoman Empire • Financial support of artists by European rulers
Monumental Architecture	• Mausolea, such as the Taj Mahal and mosques in the Mughal Empire • European palaces, such as the Palace of Versailles in France and El Escorial in Spain

REFLECT ON THE ESSENTIAL QUESTION

1. **Comparison** Create a chart comparing the effects of transoceanic connections in the Eastern and Western Hemispheres. Include the impact on trade, on relations with other empires, and on culture.

2. In one to three paragraphs, explain the methods empires used to increase their societal and cultural influence from c. 1450 to c. 1750.