

Other Muslim Empires: The Safavids & Mughals (1)

→ Along with the Ottomans, two other ~~new~~ Muslim "gunpowder Empires" emerged in Central and South Asia between 1450 and 1750. The Safavid Empire would emerge in the area of modern Iraq and Iran while the Mughal Empire would begin in modern Afghanistan and ultimately spread across what is now northern and central India. Both empires, like the Ottomans, would use Islam as a civilizing and political force to legitimize their power. However, as they were located far from the center of the Islamic world, their use of religion would differ greatly from that of the Ottomans. ① In the Safavid case, Shi'a rather than Sunni Islam would be used ideologically as a legitimation for territorial conquest; ② In the Mughal case, their greatest ruler, Akbar, would seek to incorporate elements of Islam into a new religious synthesis called din-i-Ilahi, or "Divine Faith", as a means of unifying a heterogeneous / diverse subject population.

The Safavid Empire

- The Safavids emerged out of a mystical Islamic Order founded by Safa-al-Din, a Sufi leader, in the 1200s (1501-1524).
- Safi's descendant, ~~as the~~ Shah Ismail gathered an army of devoted followers that united Persia, conquered Iraq, and posed a lasting challenge to the Ottomans in the East.

Safavids (Cont.)

- Only 14 years old when he took power, Ismail's coming, based on legends of his early life, had been foretold. Contemporary accounts portray him as a charismatic young man with flaming red hair - his troops wore red turbans in honor of their commander.

* Ismail followed the Sh'ia branch of Islam, and began an aggressive program of conversion in the regions that bordered the Ottoman Empire. Recognizing the threat these activities presented, the Ottomans sought to neutralize the Safavid threat through military action. The two sides came together at Chaldiran in 1514.

* Ottoman firepower won the day against Safavid cavalry, and the border between the two branches of Islam, Sunni and Sh'ia, stabilized where it remains today, with a line running through Central Iraq.

* After his defeat Ismail retreated East, & spent the rest of his rule consolidating control of his Persian territories. It would be his descendant, Shah Abbas I, who would push Safavid civilization to its height.

* The reign of Abbas I (r. 1588-1629) is considered the Golden Age of the Safavids, compared to the reign of Suleyman to the West. Becoming Shah at 17, Abbas ~~was~~ was a brilliant statesman, warrior, and patron of the arts. During his reign, Persia acquired security, stability, and a reputation for cultural creativity, symbolized by the construction

Safavids (cont.)

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- of the glorious new Safavid capital, Isfahan one of the most beautiful and well-designed cities in the world
- * Persia prospered under Abbas. With security provided by Abbas' well-trained and gunpowder-equipped army, commerce & trade flourished. The state employed thousands of workers, and the Imperial Palace was a great consumer of luxury goods, foodstuffs, other commodities. Hundreds of new roads were built that linked the Empire together and also facilitated trade with outside contacts.
 - * Contemporaries noted that one could travel from one end of the Empire to the other in complete safety, a task that today is more dangerous than in Abbas' time
 - * Abbas' patronage saw Persian textiles reach new heights of quality & workmanship. Europeans were encouraged to trade in Persia, and the origins of the modern Persian carpet trade are located ~~in Persia~~ within Abbas's reign. 500 years later, these traditions of high quality remain.

Mughal India

The mighty Mughal Indian Empire was a contemporary of the Ottoman and Safavid Empires. It too was ruled by a dynasty of Turkic extraction, but unlike the Ottomans and Safavids, the Mughals ruled a population that was predominantly not Muslim, but rather were Hindu, still today India's largest religion.

- * This reality, and the challenge it presented,

- marked the Mughal civilization and contributed to its distinctive character.

* Like Suleyman and Shah Abbas, ^{the} Mughal Empire would produce its own greatest ruler in the sixteenth century: Akbar (r. 1556-1605). Like his contemporaries, Akbar would be a young man - only 14 - when he rose to power.

- During his half century of rule his Empire would expand to its greatest extent. He ruled an Empire of over 100 million, larger than that of the Ottomans or the Safavids.

* Like Suleyman and Shah Abbas, Akbar's reign is remembered for its stability, ^{prosperity} glory and patronage of the Arts. However, Akbar went beyond his contemporaries in the religious sphere: He was the first - and until now the last - who attempted to adapt the Islamic state to the conditions of ruling a non-Muslim population. He promoted cultural synthesis by recruiting Hindus into his government & military - to encourage this process, he took several Hindu wives.

* He went even further in 1582 with his promotion of a new state-sponsored religion, Din-I-Ilahi or "Divine Faith". It incorporated elements of Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, & Judaism, and is the only attempt to ever combine the 3 great monotheistic religions into one doctrine. Although it was not a great success, it represents one of the most innovative solutions to religious conflict ever devised.