Safavid Persia

To the east of the Ottoman Empire lay Persia, a land that had once been part of the Islamic Empire, but which had broken away because of religious differences. In the 1500s Shiite Muslims, bitter enemies of the Ottoman Turks, conquered the land of present-day Iran. The Shiite leader, Ismail (ihs•MAH•EEL), conquered and unified the numerous people living there, declaring himself to be the founder of the Safavid (sah•FAH•weed) dynasty.

Safavid rulers required all of their Persian subjects to accept the Shiite form of Islam. Belief in the Shia branch of Islam distinguished people living in Persia from neighboring Sunni Muslim peoples—the Arabs and Turks.

Shah Abbas

The Safavid leader Shah Abbas came to the throne in 1587. His army regained some western territory lost to the Ottomans in previous years. Then the shah sought allies against the Ottomans even among such Christian states as England. The English used their alliance with Persia to seize the strategic Persian Gulf port of Hormuz in 1622, gaining control of the Persian silk and East Indian spice trade.

With his empire secure against the Ottoman forces, Shah Abbas set up his court in Isfahan, which became one of the most magnificent cities in the entire Muslim world. Towering above the city was the blue dome of the Imam Mosque, which was covered with lacy white decorations. Near the mosque, Abbas had a three-story palace built for his personal use. He also ordered beautiful streets and parks constructed throughout the city.

During the reign of Abbas, Persian spread as the language of culture, diplomacy, and trade in most of the Muslim world. Later the language spread to India. Urdu, spoken in Pakistan today, is partly based on Persian.

Nader Shah

After the death of Shah Abbas in 1629, inept Safavid rulers weakened the empire, bringing on its decline. In 1736, after the Safavid decline, Nader Shah came to power. He expanded the Persian Empire to its greatest height since Darius. But after his assassination in 1747, territory was lost and the country was divided.

In the late 1700s another Turkic group, the Qajar dynasty, seized the Persian throne and established a new dynasty in Tehran. The Qajars ruled Persia until 1925.

The Mogul Empire

Even before the Ottomans and the Safavids built their empires, Islamic invaders from central Asia had conquered much of northern India by the 1100s. The invaders set up a sultanate, or Muslim kingdom, in Delhi in 1206. Once order was restored, northern India prospered economically and culturally. Traditional Hindu culture survived the invasions and blended with Islamic civilization.

Timur Lenk in India

By the late 1300s the Muslim Mongol ruler, Timur Lenk (Tamerlane), had conquered much of central Asia and made Samarkand the capital of his empire. Although a devout Muslim, Timur Lenk was also a ruthless leader. His forces sacked the city of Delhi in 1398, killing thousands and leaving the city in rubble. After Timur Lenk’s death, his Islamic
The beauty of the Taj Mahal has awed visitors for centuries. A pear-shaped dome crowns the square central building, complete with a reflecting pool. The marble surface glitters with semiprecious stones: jade from China; turquoise from Tibet; lapis lazuli from Afghanistan; chrysolite from Egypt; and mother-of-pearl from the Indian Ocean. Inside all this wealth and beauty lies Mumtaz Mahal, wife of the Mogul emperor of India, Shah Jahan, who ruled from 1628 to 1658. He fell in love with Mumtaz at 16 and adored his queen throughout her life. In 1629, shortly after Shah Jahan’s reign began, Mumtaz died in childbirth, after giving birth to their 14th child. Her death left him in black despair, and in his grief he decided to build the world’s greatest tomb.

Or so goes the legend. Contemporary scholars argue that Shah Jahan built the Taj Mahal not only as a resting place for his well-loved wife—and later for himself—but also as a symbol of his power and wealth. The Moguls were Muslims—outsiders and conquerors who ruled India in an absolute monarchy. Their administration left India weak and, by the 1800s, vulnerable to British conquest. In their art and architecture they gave India a more lasting legacy. “The Taj Mahal,” wrote Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore, is “like a solitary tear suspended on the cheek of time.”
empire disintegrated; yet northern India would face other Muslim invasions.

**Akbar the Great**

In the early 1500s Babur, a descendant of Timur Lenk, led another attack on northern India. Using artillery and with cavalry riding elephants and horses, Babur conquered Delhi at the Battle of Panipat in 1526. Then he set up the Mogul dynasty, the Persian name for Mongol, which lasted three centuries in India. The Moguls encouraged orderly government, and they expanded the arts.

Babur’s grandson, Akbar, was a benevolent ruler who brought peace and order to northern India. Recognizing that most of the people he ruled were Hindus, Akbar encouraged religious tolerance to end quarrels between Hindus and Muslims. Whereas Muslims believed in one God, Hindus worshiped many deities. Hindus and Muslims differed about sacred foods, social organization, and religious customs. To reduce tension among his people, Akbar repealed a tax on Hindus.

Akbar invited religious scholars of other faiths to his court to learn about other religions. He concluded that all religions revealed the same divine truth, whatever their external practices were. He tried to set up a new religion called Divine Faith, which included features of many of the world’s religions such as Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity.

**Mogul Civilization**

Under Akbar’s rule music, painting, and literature flourished in Mogul India. Mogul rulers made their lavish courts centers of art and learning. Although Akbar could not read, he understood the value of education and set up a large library, employing more than 100 court painters to illustrate the elegantly bound books.

Another Mogul ruler, Shah Jahan, created one of the world’s most beautiful buildings—the Taj Mahal at Agra—a magnificent example of Muslim architecture. Muslim architects introduced the arch and dome to India, and in trading contacts with China, Muslim merchants brought gunpowder, paper, and Chinese porcelain to Mogul India.

**Mogul Decline**

During the late 1600s, Mogul rulers, such as Shah Aurangzeb, abandoned religious toleration. They persecuted India’s Hindu majority as well as the Sikhs, followers of Sikhism (SEE•KH•ZUH•m), a new religion founded by the teacher Nanak in the 1500s. Sikhism holds to a belief in one God and teaches that good deeds and meditation bring release from the cycle of reincarnation. Today there are about 14 million Sikhs, most of whom live in the northern Indian state of Punjab. During the late 1600s, both Sikhs and Hindus rebelled against the Moguls and helped weaken Mogul authority. As Mogul central government declined, local rulers became more independent.

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**SECTION 1 ASSESSMENT**

**Main Idea**

1. Use a chart like the one below to list ways Ottoman Muslim rulers governed their empires.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ottoman Ruler</th>
<th>How Governed</th>
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**Recall**

2. Define sultan, grand vizier, janissary, millet.


**Critical Thinking**

4. Making Comparisons How did Shah Abbas’s patronage of the arts compare to that of a contemporary European monarch?

5. Movement How do you think the movement of Muslims into northern India affected the people already living there?