

The Shi'a Challenge of the Safavids

- Safavids began after the struggles of rival Turkic nomadic groups in the wake of the Mongol invasions
- Highly militant
- Shi'a Safavids
- Origins
 - Family of Sufi mystics and religious preachers
 - Shrine: Ardabil near the Caspian Sea
 - Sail al-Din, one of the Sufis gave the empire its name. Began military campaigns to purify and reform Islam
- Numbers of Red Heads, Safavid followers because of their red headgear increased. They began preaching Shi'a Islam. Enemies increased. Struggles began, 3 Safavid leaders perished. A surviving Sufi commander, Isma'il led his armies and took the city of Tabriz. He was named shah, emperor
- Isma'il's followers took over most of Persia, drove out the Safavid's enemies, the Ozbegs. Moved into Iraq
- Came into conflict with the Ottomans
 - August 1514, at Chaldiran the empire's armies met
 - Sunnis vs. Shi'a
 - Use of firearms (Ottomans)
 - Safavids lost

Politics and War Under the Safavid Shahs

- After the defeat Isma'il retreated to his palace and tried to escape troubles through drink
- New Shah, Tahmasp won the throne restored power of the dynasty
- Under Shah Abbas I the empire reached the height of its strength and prosperity
- Turkic chiefs were changed into warrior nobility, they controlled villages. The peasants were required to give them food and labor
- Safavid rulers recruited Persian for positions at court
- Abbas the Great
 - Made use of the youths who were captured in Russia. Educated them and converted them to Islam
 - Made up the backbone of the military
 - "slave" regiments
 - Got Europeans to teach army how to use cannons and guns
 - Special regiments were set up

State and Religion

- Safavid family was Turkic stock, early Shahs wrote in Turkish
- After Chaldiran Persian began to take over as the language
- Safavids took titles as padishah, king of kings
- Elaborate court rituals at the palace
- Shahs claimed to be descendants of one of the imams, successors of Ali
- Safavids imported Arabic-speaking Shi'a experts
- Later shahs began to rely on Persian religious scholars, paid by the government
- Mullahs, local mosque officials and prayer leaders
 - All religious leaders were required to curse the first 3 caliphs and mention the Safavid ruler in the Friday sermon
- Most of the Iranian population was converted to Shi'ism during the centuries of Safavid rule

Elite Affluence and Artistic Splendor

- Abbas the Great...
 - Had a network of roads and rest houses built
 - Strove to make merchants and travelers safe within his domains
 - Encouraged merchants to trade not only with Muslim neighbors, but also with European countries
 - Devoted special attention to his capital: Isfahan
 - Laid out in a great square
 - Lined with 2 story shops
 - Great mosques
 - Government offices
 - Soaring arches that opened into gardens
 - Founded colleges
 - Public baths and rest houses
 - Patronized workshops
 - Mosques were the glory of his reign
 - Colored ceramic tiles
 - Massive domes
 - Graceful minarets
 - Geometric designs, floral patterns, and verses from the Quran
 - Gardens and reflective pools near mosques and rest houses

Society and Gender Roles: Ottoman and Safavid Comparisons

- Dominated by Warrior aristocrats, shared power with the absolute monarchs
- Encouraged the growth of handicraft production and trade
- Engineers, stonemasons, carpenters, and other artisans were reasonably well paid
- Safavid economy remained constricted, less market oriented
- Women
 - Were subordinate in the family to the fathers and husbands
 - Seldom had political or religious power

- Meager outlets for artistic or scholarly expression
- Struggled against the restrictions
- Wore brightly colored robes
- Didn't cover faces in public
- Wives and concubines of rulers had power behind the scenes
- Many were active in money lending and trade
- Could invoke provisions in Islamic law that protected their right to inheritance, decent treatment by their spouses, and divorce in situations that have become intolerable
- Most women were stuck doing household chores and domestic handicrafts

The Rapid Demise of the Safavid Empire

- A weak grandson of Abbas became Shah, dynasty declined
- There were not enough able Shahs to stop the decline
- Disputes and rebellions broke out. Ottomans and Mughals were ready to take over the territory
- By March 1722, Isfahan was besieged by Afghani tribes. In October 80,000 of the capitals inhabitants died. The empire ended. 10 years of war followed.
- Nadir Khan Afshar came out victorious. Proclaimed himself Shah