

Guide to Responding to Persia under the Safavid Empire and Beyond

Instructions: Please review the following sample answers. Compare these to your answers to make sure you are able to identify and include the key terms in your responses.

1. What is the origin of the Safavids?

The Safavids were named after their founder Safi al-Din, who died in 1334. The Safavids were of a Turco/Iranian origin; however, they claimed to be descendants of the prophet Muhammad when they emerged in the early 16th century. The Safavids aligned themselves with the Shiite branch of Islam and as such, became the main rival to the Sunni Ottoman Empire. Along with the Ottoman and Mughal Empires, the Safavids were one of the “Gunpowder Empires.”

Key Terms: Shi'a Iran, Gunpowder Empires

2. What were the major accomplishments of the Safavids?

Most of the accomplishments took place under Shah Abbas or Abbas the Great in the 16th century. His reign saw the flowering of the Safavid as a great synthesis of the Ottoman, Persian, and Arab worlds. Shah Abbas reformed the military and adopted modern artillery. Relations with Europe were established, and as a result, industry and art flourished. With the help of Chinese artisans, the artwork in the empire rose to a different level and decorations beautified the many mosques, palaces, and marketplaces. Abbas rebuilt the capital city of Isfahan. The most important result of western influence on the Safavids may have been the demand for Persian carpets, which soon became a national industry.

Key Terms: Shah Abbas, modernization of the military, Persian carpets

3. How would you describe the legacy of the Safavids?

The most apparent legacy of the Safavids is that Shi'ism became the official religion of Persia. In addition, one can add to the list cultural and artistic achievements. The Safavids made Iran a center of art, architecture, poetry, and philosophy, which influenced her neighbors in the region. This empire also greatly contributed to the sense of modern Iranian identity.

Key Terms: Shi'ism as state religion

4. What caused the Safavid Empire to decline?

The Safavids were fighting against its perennial enemies, the Ottomans and Uzbeks in the 17th century, but Persia soon had to contend with the rise of two more neighbors. Russian Muscovy in the north and the Mughal Dynasty of India in the east. By 1722, tribal armies from Afghanistan were taking over eastern portions of the Safavid realm. Ottoman forces were attacking from the west. Finally, in 18th century, the Afshar Dynasty replaced the Safavids.

Key Terms: Rise of the Afshars in Persia, Muscovy and Uzbek conquests of Persia

5. Who were the Qajars?

The Qajars were a Persian dynasty that carried the empire to World War I. The Qajar Dynasty lasted approximately 130 years, beginning with Agha Mohammad Qajar in 1795 and ending with Ahmad Shah in 1925. The Qajars experienced substantial British and Russian interference with their internal affairs. Imperialistic designs of these Western powers eventually created a backlash and xenophobia. Persia's Constitutional Revolution also took place during this dynasty.

Key Terms: British and Russian influence, Constitutional Revolution