



◀ Mehmet II

**WITNESS HISTORY** AUDIO

**Constantinople Falls**

When Mehmet II became Ottoman sultan in 1451, his goal was to conquer Constantinople, which was all that was left of the once mighty Byzantine empire. The Ottoman fleet was anchored near the city walls. The Byzantines sought help from the pope and European princes as Mehmet's grip tightened. In 1453, Mehmet began a 54-day siege of Constantinople. He used every means to break through the ancient walls of the city, including commissioning a 27-foot cannon hauled overland by oxen. As the walls were bombarded, the defenders quickly repaired them. Time, however, was running out. Constantinople fell to the Ottomans, who made the city their capital.

**Focus Question** What were the main characteristics of the Ottoman and Safavid empires?

▲ Constantinople under attack by Ottoman Turks

# The Ottoman and Safavid Empires

**Objectives**

- Analyze how the Ottoman empire expanded.
- Describe the characteristics of Ottoman culture.
- Explain how Abbas the Great strengthened the Safavid empire.

**Terms, People, and Places**

Ottomans	shah
Istanbul	Shah Abbas
Suleiman	Istahan
janizary	Qajars
Safavid	Tehran

**Note Taking**

**Reading Skill: Synthesize Information** Copy this table. As you read, fill in key characteristics of the Ottoman and Safavid empires.

Characteristics	Ottomans	Safavids
Capital		
Dates		
Strongest ruler		
Extent of empire		
Type of Islam		
Relationship with Europe		

While the Mughals ruled India, two other dynasties—the Ottomans and Safavids—dominated the Middle East and parts of Eastern Europe. All three empires owed much of their success to new weapons that changed warfare. Cannons, and later, muskets, gave greater firepower to ordinary foot soldiers, thus reducing the importance of mounted warriors. The new military technology helped the Ottomans and Safavids create strong central governments. As a result, this period from about 1450 to 1650 is sometimes called “the age of gunpowder empires.”

## The Ottoman Empire Expands

Like the Seljuks, the Ottomans were a Turkish-speaking nomadic people who had migrated from Central Asia into northwestern Asia Minor. In the 1300s, they spread across Asia Minor and into Eastern Europe's Balkan Peninsula.

**Constantinople Falls to the Ottomans** Ottoman expansion threatened the crumbling Byzantine empire. After several failed attempts to capture Constantinople, Mehmet II finally succeeded in 1453. In a surprise move, the Ottomans hauled ships overland and launched them into the harbor outside Constantinople. After a nearly two-month siege, Ottoman cannons finally blasted gaps in the great defensive walls of the city, and it became the new capital of the Ottoman empire. From Constantinople (renamed *Istanbul*), the Ottoman Turks continued their conquests for the next 200 years.



**Suleiman the Magnificent**

The picture above shows the sultan  
Suleiman and his viziers, or advisors.

### Vocabulary Builder

**edict**—(EE dikt) *n.* an order or command  
having the force of law

**Suleiman the Magnificent** The Ottoman empire enjoyed a golden age under the sultan *Suleiman* (soo lay MAHN), who ruled from 1520 to 1566. His people called him “the Lawgiver,” while Europeans called him Suleiman the Magnificent. A brilliant general, Suleiman modernized the army and conquered many new lands. He extended Ottoman rule eastward into the Middle East, and also into Kurdistan and Georgia in the Caucasus Mountain region. In the west, Suleiman advanced deeper into Europe through diplomacy and warfare. In 1529, his armies besieged the Austrian city of Vienna, sending fear through Western Europe.

Although they failed to take Vienna, the Ottomans ruled the largest, most powerful empire in both Europe and the Middle East for centuries. At its height, the empire stretched from Hungary to Arabia and Mesopotamia and across North Africa. Suleiman felt justified in claiming to be the rightful heir of the Abbasids and caliph of all Muslims. To the title of “Emperor,” he added the symbolic name of “Protector of the Sacred Places” (Mecca and Medina).

✓ **Checkpoint** What technology and techniques enabled Suleiman to extend Ottoman rule?

## Ottoman Culture

Suleiman was a wise and capable ruler. He strengthened the government of the rapidly growing empire and improved its system of justice. As sultan, Suleiman had absolute power, but he ruled with the help of a grand vizier and a council. A huge bureaucracy supervised the business of government, and the powerful military kept the peace. Ottoman law was based on the Sharia, supplemented by royal edicts. Government officials worked closely with religious scholars who interpreted the law.

**Society Is Organized Into Classes** Ottoman society was divided into classes, each with its appointed role. At the top were “men of the sword”—soldiers who guarded the sultan and defended the state—and “men of the pen”—scientists, lawyers, judges, and poets. Below them were “men of negotiation,” such as merchants, tax collectors, and artisans who carried out trade and production. Finally, there were “men of husbandry,” or farmers and herders who produced food for the community.

The Ottomans ruled diverse peoples of many religions. The men of the sword and men of the pen were almost all Muslims, but the other classes included non-Muslims. The people were organized into *millet*s, or religious communities. These included Muslims, Greek Christians, Armenian Christians, and Jews. Each *millet* had its own leaders who were responsible for education and some legal matters. The Jewish *millet*s included many Jews who had been expelled from Spain in 1492. They brought international banking connections with them, plus a new technology for making cloth that helped the Ottoman empire finance its expansion.

**Janizaries—The Elite Force** Like earlier Muslim empires, the Ottomans recruited officers for the army and government from among the huge populations of conquered peoples in their empire. The Ottomans levied a “tax” on Christian families in the Balkans, requiring them to turn over their young sons for government service.

The boys were converted to Islam and put into rigorous military training at the palace school. The best soldiers won a prized place in the *janizaries* (JAN ih sehr eez), the elite force of the Ottoman army. The brightest students received special education to become government officials. They might serve as judges, poets, or even grand vizier.

Like the boys, non-Muslim girls from eastern Europe served as slaves in wealthy Muslim households. There, they might be accepted as members of the household. Some of the enslaved girls were freed after the death of their masters.

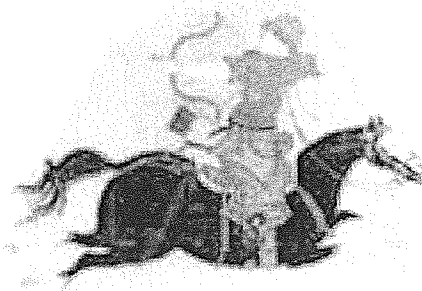
**Literature and the Arts** The arts blossomed under Suleiman. Ottoman poets adapted Persian and Arab models to produce works in Turkish. Influenced by Persian artistic styles, Ottoman painters produced detailed miniatures and illuminated manuscripts.

The royal architect Sinan, a janizary military engineer, designed hundreds of mosques and palaces. He compared his most famous building, the Selimiye Mosque at Edirne, to the greatest church of the Byzantine empire. "With God's help and the Sultan's mercy," Sinan wrote, "I have succeeded in building a dome for the mosque which is greater in diameter and higher than that of Hagia Sophia."

**Decline of the Ottomans** After Suleiman's death in 1566, the Ottoman empire began a slow decline. Suleiman had killed two of his most able sons because he suspected them of treason. His son and successor Selim II left most of the governing to his ministers, and government bureaucracy became corrupt.

By the 1700s, European advances in both commerce and military technology were leaving the Ottomans behind. Russia and other European powers captured Ottoman lands, while local rulers in North Africa and elsewhere broke away from Ottoman control. Able sultans tried to revive Ottoman power with limited success.

✓ **Checkpoint** What were the four divisions of Ottoman society?



An Ottoman soldier on horseback

#### WITNESS HISTORY VIDEO

Watch *Suleiman the Magnificent* on the Witness History Discovery School™ video program to learn more about the golden age of the Ottoman empire.



#### The Janizary Corps

The soldiers below wear the dress of the sultan's soldiers.

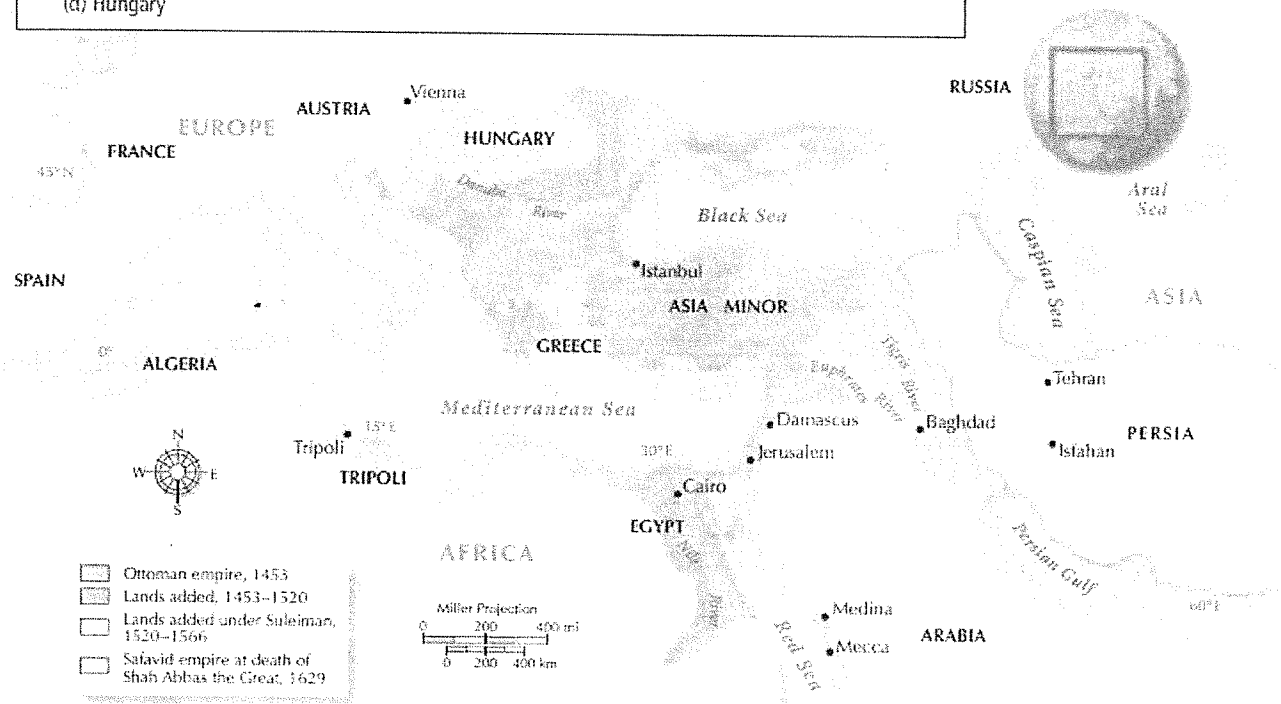


## Ottoman and Safavid Empires, 1453–1629

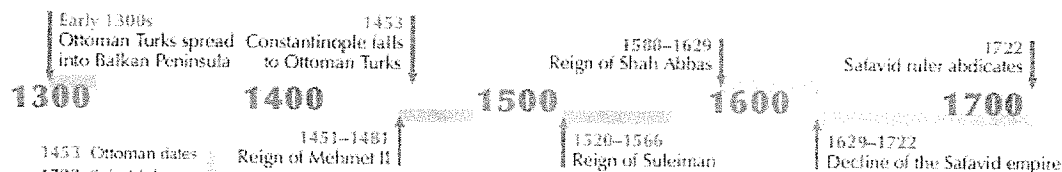
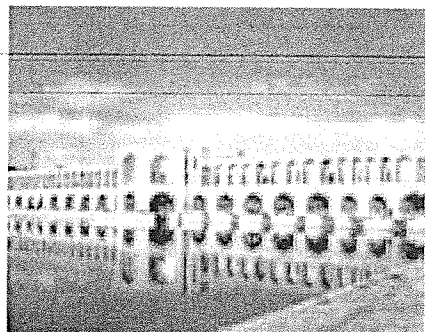
**Map Skills** At its greatest extent, the Ottoman empire stretched across three continents. At about the same period, the Safavid empire controlled most of what is today Iran.

1. **Locate** (a) Istanbul (b) Black Sea (c) Isfahan (d) Hungary

2. **Movement** Into what regions did the Ottoman empire expand under Suleiman?
3. **Recognize Point of View** How do you think Russians felt about the expansion of the Ottoman and Safavid empires? Explain.



**A Center of Persian Culture Under Shah Abbas** Isfahan flourished. The shah welcomed artists, poets, and scholars to the court. Palace workshops produced magnificent porcelains, clothes, and rugs. Abbas liked to walk the streets of Isfahan in disguise, mingling with the crowds in bazaars. Amid the cries of street vendors and swarms of traders and customers, he asked people about their problems. If he heard stories of corruption, he punished the guilty.



## The Safavid Empire

By the early 1500s, the Safavid (sah FAH vid) dynasty had united an empire in Persia (present-day Iran). Sandwiched between two expansionist powers—Mughal India and the Ottoman empire—the Safavids often engaged in warfare. Religion played a role in the conflict. The Safavids were Shiite Muslims who enforced their beliefs in their empire. The Ottomans were Sunni Muslims who despised the Shiites as heretics.

**Abbas the Great** The Safavid king was called the *shah*. The best-known, Shah Abbas the Great, revived the glory of ancient Persia. From 1588 to 1629, he centralized the government and created a powerful military force modeled on the Ottoman janizaries. Abbas used a mixture of force and diplomacy against the Ottomans. He also sought alliances with European states that had reason to fear Ottoman power.

To strengthen the economy, Abbas reduced taxes on farmers and herders and encouraged the growth of industry. Unlike earlier Safavids, Abbas tolerated non-Muslims and valued their economic contributions. He built a new capital at Isfahan (is fah HAHN), which became a center of the international silk trade. Armenians controlled the trade, so Abbas brought thousands of Armenians to Isfahan. He had a settlement built for these Christians just outside the capital, where they governed themselves.

**The Safavid Empire Declines** Safavid glory slowly faded after the death of Shah Abbas and under continuing pressure from Ottoman armies. Shiite scholars also challenged the authority of the shah by stressing their own authority to interpret law and determine government policy. They encouraged persecution of religious minorities, pushing Sunni Afghans to rebel. The rebels defeated imperial armies, captured Isfahan, and forced the last Safavid ruler to abdicate in 1722.

In the late 1700s, a new dynasty, the Qajars (kuh JAHREZ), won control of Iran. They made Tehran their capital and ruled until 1925. Still, the Safavids left a lasting legacy. They established Shiism firmly in Iran and gave Persians a strong sense of their own identity.

✓ **Checkpoint** How did Shah Abbas revive the glory of ancient Persia?

### Vocabulary Builder

**sagacious**—(suh GAY shus) *adj.* having good judgment

In 1604, a Carmelite missionary visited the Persian court. The monk recorded his observations of Shah Abbas the Great. According to Abbas, how does his style of leadership differ from that of Christian rulers?

#### Primary Source

“He is **sagacious** in mind, likes fame and to be esteemed: he is courteous in dealing with everyone and at the same time very serious. For he will go through the public streets, eat from what they are selling there and . . . speak at ease freely with the lower classes . . . or will sit down beside this man or that. He says that is how to be a king, and that the king of Spain and other Christians do not get any pleasure out of ruling, because they are obliged to comport themselves with so much pomp and majesty.”

—A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia

### Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-quiz with vocabulary practice  
Web Code: naa-1051

#### Terms, People, and Places

1. For each term, person, or place listed at the beginning of the section, write a sentence explaining its significance.

#### Note Taking

2. **Reading Skill: Synthesize Information**  
Use your completed table to answer the Focus Question: What were the main characteristics of the Ottoman and Safavid empires?

#### Comprehension and Critical Thinking

3. **Summarize** Describe the extent of the Ottoman empire at its height.
4. **Analyze Information** How did Suleiman govern the Ottoman empire?
5. **Explain** What policies did Abbas the Great use to strengthen the Safavid empire?
6. **Draw Conclusions** Why do you think Ottoman and Safavid rulers allowed some religious toleration?

#### Writing About History

##### Quick Write: Revise Word Choice

Compare and contrast Suleiman the Magnificent with Shah Abbas the Great by examining their contributions and the effects they had on their respective empires. As you write, choose specific verbs and adjectives that highlight similarities or differences. For example, *flourished* contrasts with *grew* to emphasize the extent to which a particular culture or location developed.