

Outline Lecture Eight—The Safavid Empire

Key Focus:

- 1) The Ottoman (Sunni)-Safavid (Shi'ite) split in *Dar al-Islam*
- 2) Safavids' use of religious extremism to inspire a following and forge an empire
- 3) Transition from heterodox ideology to orthodox theocracy under Shah Abbas

I) The Safavid Rise to Power in Persia

- a) Isma'il and the Messianic Ideology of the Qizilbash
 - i) Exploitation of messianic ideology in Islam
 - (1) Belief in the "Mahdi" in Shi'a Twelvers
 - (a) Claim of divinity as the "God-shah"
 - (2) Sufi belief in the transmission of mystical powers
 - (a) Descendant of a 13th century Sufi leader—Safi al-Din
 - ii) Qizilbash fanaticism
- b) The Safavid-Ottoman Conflict
 - i) Clash of Heterodoxy vs. Orthodoxy
 - (1) Safavids intent on spreading their Sufi/Shi'ite ideology
 - (2) Ottomans projecting themselves as the defender of "true" Islam
 - (a) Selim the Grim's warning to Isma'il
 - ii) Battle of Chaldiran (Kaldi-ran) 1514
 - iii) Ottoman-Safavid conflict lasted throughout the 16th to 18th centuries
 - (1) Geopolitical consequences
- c) Shifts in Safavid Policies
 - i) Religion: Shift from Qizilbash Sufism to "Imamite Shi'a"
 - ii) Transformation from a fanatic movement to a secular state

II) Safavid Consolidation under Shah Abbas I (r.1588-1629)

- a) Securing the Empire
 - i) Military Reorganization
 - (1) Shift to more dependable *Ghulam* system to build an army
 - (2) Alliance with Europeans to counter Ottoman advance
 - ii) Promote commerce
 - (1) New capital in Isfahan as a cosmopolitan center of trade
 - (a) Nicknamed "Half the World"
 - (2) Secured all trade routes within the Safavid realm
- b) Pragmatic ruler "both feared and loved"
 - i) Ruler in the Machiavellian vein?
 - (1) Pragmatist not ideologue
 - (2) Manipulation of his public image—"Shah of the People"
 - (a) Made sure his authority and person was highly visible
 - (b) Frugal with food and modest in clothing
 - ii) "More feared than loved"?
 - (1) Effectively built a mythology around himself
- c) Religious Policies
 - i) Father Simon: No one knew for sure what faith Shah Abbas espoused

- ii) Final triumph of Imamite Shi'a over messianic Sufism in Persia
- iii) After Shah Abbas, increasing intolerance towards other Muslim sects