Cultural Blending

Case Study: The Safavid Empire

BEFORE YOU READ

In the last section, you read about the Ottomans. In this section, you will learn about the development of another empire, the Safavid.

AS YOU READ

Use the chart below to show three of the long-lasting effects of the Safavid Empire.

Patterns of Cultural Blending

What is cultural blending?

Throughout history, different peoples have lived together. Their cultures have influenced one another. Often these people have blended one culture with another. This can happen because of migration, trade, conquest, or pursuit of religious freedom or conversion.

Cultural blending results in changes in society. Some results of cultural blending are changes in language, religion, styles of government, or arts and architecture.

Societies that are able to benefit from cultural blending are open to new ways. They are willing to adapt and change.

1. What are the four causes of cultural blending?

The Safavids Build a Shi’a Empire

How did the Safavids rise to power?

Cultural blending took place in the Safavid Empire of Persia. The Safavids were members of the Shi’a, a branch of Islam. The major group of Muslims, the Sunnis, persecuted the Shi’a for their views. The Safavids feared the Sunni Muslims. They decided to build a strong army to protect themselves.

In 1499, a 14-year-old leader named Isma’il led this army to conquer Iran. He took the traditional Persian title of shah, or king, and made Shi’a the...
religion of the new empire. He destroyed Baghdad’s Sunni population. Ottoman Turk rulers—who were Sunni Muslims—in turn killed all the Shi’a that they met. This conflict between the two groups of Muslims continues today.

2. Why are the Shi’a and Sunni Muslims enemies?

A Safavid Golden Age

Who was Shah Abbas?

The Safavids reached their height in the late 1500s under Shah Abbas. He created two armies that were loyal to him and him alone. He also gave new weapons to the army to make them better fighters. He got rid of corrupt officials in the government. He also brought gifted artists to his empire.

Shah Abbas drew on good ideas from other cultures. The main elements of that culture were the joining together of the Persian tradition of learning and sophistication with the strong faith of the Shi’a. He used Chinese artists. They helped create gorgeous artwork that decorated the rebuilt capital of Esfahan.

Under Shah Abbas, the Safavids enjoyed good relations with nations of Europe. The demand for Persian rugs increased greatly in Europe. In this period, rug-making, which had been a local craft in Persia, became a major industry for the country.

3. What were four reforms made by Shah Abbas?

The Dynasty Declines Quickly

(page 515)

Why did the Safavids lose power?

Like the Ottoman Empire, the Safavid Empire began to decline soon after it had reached its greatest height. Shah Abbas had killed or injured his most talented sons—just as Suleyman had done. Shah Abbas feared that his sons would seize power from him. As a result, a weak and ineffective grandson became shah after him.

4. Why weren’t there strong leaders after Shah Abbas?

Skillbuilder

Use the chart to answer the questions.

1. Determining Main Ideas  What are two reasons for interaction?

2. Recognizing Effects  What are some results of cultural interaction?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Interacting Cultures</th>
<th>Reason for Interaction</th>
<th>Some Results of Interaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India—1000 B.C.</td>
<td>Aryan and Dravidian Indian Arab, African, Indian</td>
<td>Migration</td>
<td>Vedic culture, forerunner of Hinduism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Africa—A.D. 700</td>
<td>Islamic, Christian</td>
<td>Trade, religious conversion</td>
<td>New trade language, Swahili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia—A.D. 1000</td>
<td>Christian and Slavic</td>
<td>Religious conversion</td>
<td>Eastern Christianity, Russian identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico—A.D. 1500</td>
<td>Spanish and Aztec</td>
<td>Conquest</td>
<td>Mestizo culture, Mexican Catholicism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States—A.D. 1900</td>
<td>European, Asian, Caribbean</td>
<td>Migration, religious freedom</td>
<td>Cultural diversity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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