

11.8 New Muslim Empires and the Expansion of Islam

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The Ottomans allowed their subjects considerable freedom. Jews, Christians, and Muslims had their own local communities, called *millets*. Millets were allowed to govern themselves. A ruling class collected taxes and protected the sultan and the empire. In the empire's European provinces, some young Christian men were converted to Islam and raised in the sultan's palace to become elite soldiers and government officials.

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Adapted from Time Maps: <http://www.timemaps.com/history/turkey-1453ad>
Anatolia (AKA Asia Minor, now Turkey): 1215AD - 1453AD

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The growth of this state -- known to history as the Ottoman empire -- was interrupted by a disastrous defeat at the battle of Ankara (1402) at the hands of Timur from the East. However, the Ottoman leaders, called **sultans** soon re-established control. They did this by reorganizing their military forces around their fearsomely efficient special army, the **Janissaries**. With this force the Ottomans resumed their conquests, and in 1453, under sultan Mehmed II (known as Mehmed the Conqueror), they captured the city of Constantinople, extinguishing the Byzantine Empire. This event sent a shock-wave throughout Europe.

Muslim Empires in Anatolia and India

	Ottoman Empire	Mughal Empire
Territories	Anatolia, Syria, Palestine, northern Africa, Balkans	Northern India
Capital	Baghdad; Istanbul after the conquest of Constantinople	Delhi
Government	Military state divided into military administrative units and religious millets; governed by Islamic law	Central bureaucracy that included Muslims and Hindus; governed by Islamic law
Languages	Official language: Turkish	Official language: Persian; Hindi and Urdu also spoken
Religious Policies	<i>Devshirme</i> system in which young boys were converted to Islam and trained as soldiers; religious millets follow their own religious laws and practices	Religious tolerance under Akbar; later rulers rigidly enforced Islamic law, removed Hindus from government, and reimposed taxes on non-Muslims
The Arts	Architecture, arts, and literature flourished; Mosque of Suleiman; Hagia Sophia converted to mosque; carpet weaving, tile making	Architecture, arts, and literature flourished; Taj Mahal built as tomb; book illustrations (miniature)
Economy	Personal tax on non-Muslims; Suleiman simplified tax code; Turks controlled trade routes and eastern Mediterranean	Graduated tax on peasant's crops; lifetime land grants to bureaucrats prevented the growth of feudal aristocracy

Children & Youth *History*

Devshirme System [Gravure]



(text starts below, read this part last) **highly privileged position in Ottoman administration. This system lasted through the 16th century. There is some evidence that some families (including Muslim families) voluntarily put forth their children to be admitted into this system because of the opportunities it provided.**

Annotation

The *devshirme* system began in the late 14th century. Christian boys were recruited by force to serve the Ottoman government. The boys were generally taken from the Balkan provinces, converted to Islam, and then passed through a series of examinations to determine their intelligence and capabilities. In special palace schools, they learned Arabic, Persian, Turkish, math, calligraphy, Islam, horsemanship, and/or weaponry. Working in the sultan's personal services was also part of the overall education, and this entailed assigning the boys to various rooms in the palace to look after such items as the sultan's hunting birds or the sultan's valuables. At the conclusion of each stage of the boys' training, the boys passed through a selection and promotion process. The academic education at the palace schools was one of the finest in the Islamic world and among its aims was to produce obedience, as well as high morals. Because of their loyalty to the state, the boys would become guards, gatekeepers, scribes, pages, governors, soldiers, or prime ministers, depending on their merit and seniority. Although the boys were essentially transformed into state slaves, most considered it an honor as it led to a

(rest of text is above)

What was their social status?

In return for their loyalty and their fervour in war, Janissaries gained privileges and benefits. They enjoyed high living standards, exemption from taxes and respected social status. Retired and invalided Janissaries even received pensions. Many Janissaries became administrators and scholars.

Over time, the Janissaries' reputation increased to the point that by 1683 the sultan Mehmed IV could abolish the *devshirme*. Increasing numbers of originally Muslim Turkish families had already enrolled their own sons into the force.

What about their work in battle?

Janissaries became the elite troops of Ottoman Empire. They were divided into *jemaat* (frontier troops), *beuluks* (sultan's bodyguard) and *sekban/seirnen*. In the first centuries Janissaries were expert archers, but they adopted firearms as soon they became available. In hand-to-hand combat they used axes and sabres. The full strength of the Janissary troops varied from maybe 100 to more than 200,000.



The Ottoman empire used Janissaries in its major campaigns, including the 1453 capture of Constantinople. Janissary troops were always led to the battle by the sultan himself, and always had a share of the booty.

Did they have any agency?

Janissaries were paid, but only during war. Over time, Janissaries became aware of their own importance and began to desire better payment. In 1449 they revolted for the first time, demanding higher wages, which they obtained. After 1451, every new sultan was obligated to pay each Janissary a reward and raise his pay rank. They gained permission to marry in 1566. Finally, by the 1800s, they gained the right to work as tradesmen or law-enforcers (like policemen) during peacetime.

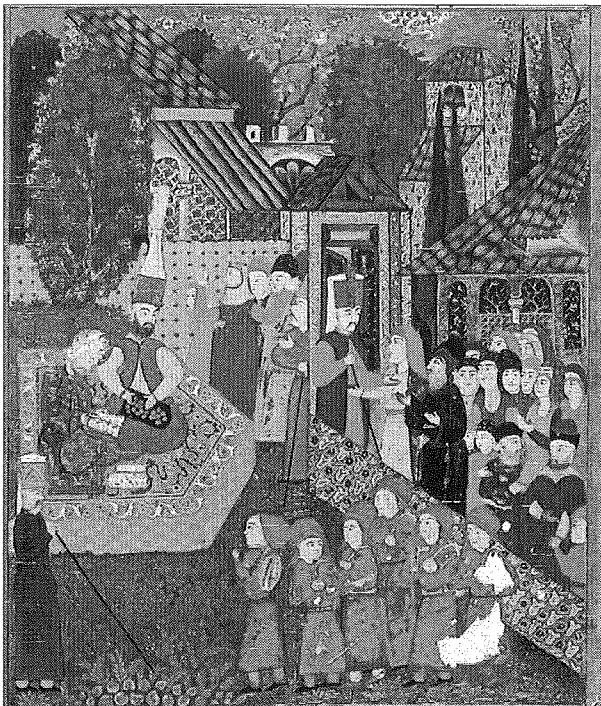
The Janissaries: The Early Years

adapted from <http://encyclopedia.kids.net.au/page/ja/Janissary?title=Galata>

The **Janissaries** (or **janizaries**); in Turkish: *Yeni Çeri* (New Troops) were foot-soldiers (**infantryman**) who formed the Turkish sultan's palace troops and body guard. The force started in the 14th century and disbanded in 1826.

Who were the Janissaries?

The Janissaries were initially formed of non-Muslims, especially Christian youths and prisoners-of-war. They became the first Ottoman standing army, replacing forces mostly composed of tribal warriors whose loyalty and morale could not always be trusted. Besides, free warriors accustomed to riding on horseback did not like to serve as foot-soldiers.



How did the Ottomans find men to be Janissaries?

After the 1380s, Sultans filled the Janissary ranks using a form of taxation or tribute called **devshirmeh**. The sultan's men would **conscript** (draft) a number of non-Muslim, usually Christian, boys, first at random, later by strict selection, and take them to be trained. Usually they would select about 1 in 40 boys of ages 7-14 but the numbers could be changed to correspond with the need for soldiers.

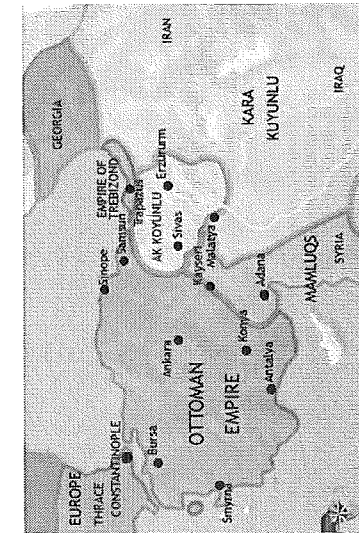
So they came in as boys? How were they brought up?

Janissaries trained under strict discipline with hard labour and in practically monastic

conditions in *acemi oğlan* schools, where they were expected to remain celibate and were at least encouraged to convert to Islam. Most did. For all practical purposes, Janissaries belonged to the sultan. Unlike free Muslims, they were expressly forbidden to wear beards, only a moustache. Janissaries were taught to consider the corps as their home and family, and the sultan as their *de facto* father. Only those who proved strong enough earned the rank of a true Janissary at the age of 24 - 25.

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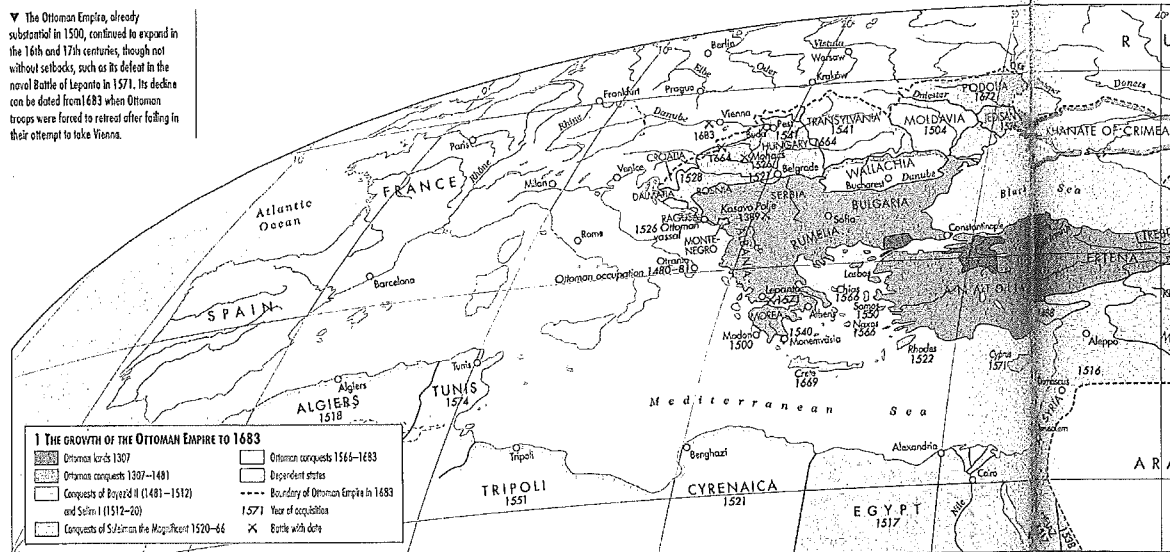
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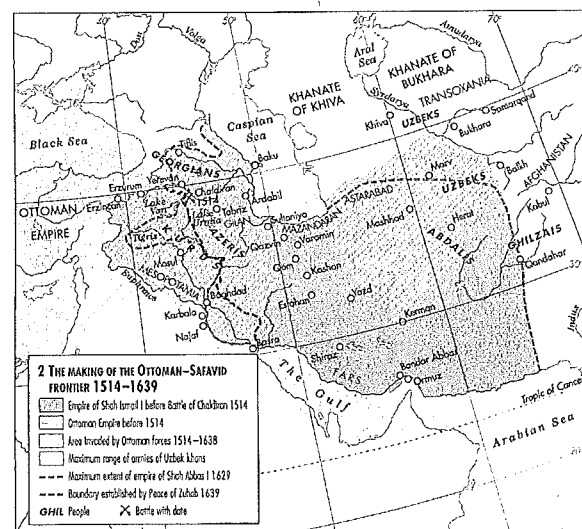
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THE OTTOMAN AND SAFAVID EMPIRES 1500–1683

▼ The Ottoman Empire, already substantial in 1500, continued to expand in the 16th and 17th centuries, though not without setbacks, such as its defeat in the naval Battle of Lepanto in 1571. Its decline can be dated from 1683 when Ottoman troops were forced to retreat after failing in their attempt to take Vienna.



▼ The area east of the Euphrates was the subject of much dispute between the Ottomans and Safavids in the 16th and early 17th centuries, until a boundary between the two empires was finally agreed with the Peace of Zuhab in 1629.



The Ottoman and Safavid states represented twin peaks of Islamic political and cultural achievement, and each handed down a powerful and complex legacy to the modern Islamic world. From the mid-15th century to 1683 the Ottoman Empire was also one of the most successful and militarily effective states of all time. Its sultan, whom Western contemporaries called “The Grand Signior”, was regarded with immense respect throughout Christendom. Ottoman power was based on

gunnery, the maintenance of a navy and an effective system of military recruitment and training. Originally, the Ottoman Janissary regiments were maintained by the *devshirme* – the “gathering” of child slave recruits from the margins of the empire, who eventually were able to leave military service as free Muslims. However, by the 17th century local, Muslim-born recruits were beginning to dominate the army.

The Ottoman state displayed a high level of religious tolerance for the substantial proportion of the empire’s subjects who were not Ottoman Turks or even Muslims. Members of minority communities became senior Ottoman commanders and administrators; indeed, the Orthodox Greek community was probably richer and more numerous than that of the ruling Ottoman Turks.

The Ottoman economy was based on an agricultural society which supported a system of military and religious fiefdoms. A vital adjunct to this peasant world was provided by the empire’s most notable and outward-looking communities – the Greeks, Armenians, Syrians and Sephardi Jews who dominated many of the empire’s cities and towns.

Territorial expansion was intrinsic to Ottoman power (map 1). As late as the 17th century there was no sign that policy-makers in Constantinople believed that Ottoman territorial authority had reached saturation point or achieved natural frontiers. Yet this was, in effect, the case. The Ottoman threat to Italy faded and Vienna – the “Red Apple of the West” in Ottoman military folklore – remained a prize that eluded the sultans. The defeat of the last great Ottoman expedition to Vienna in 1683 marked the beginning of the empire’s long decline.

THE SAFAVID STATE

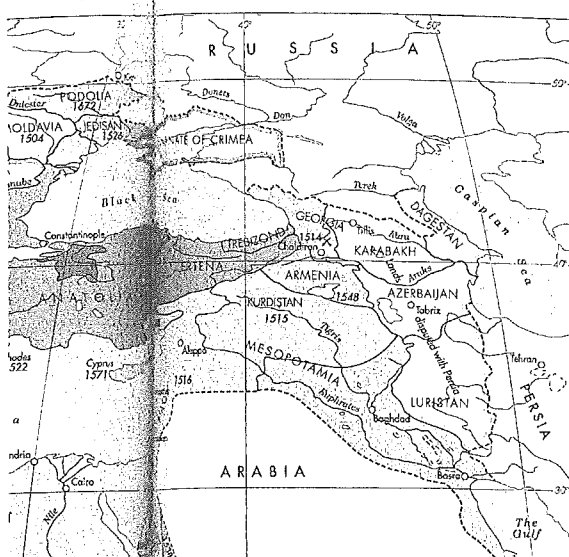
The Safavids made their mark by nurturing the culture that defines modern Iran. The founder of the Safavid dynasty was Shah Ismail I (r. 1501–24), who re-established a central government amid the political chaos into which Persia had fallen in the aftermath of the age of Timur-leng. Ismail’s partisans were the Qizilbash – red-capped Turcoman devotees of the Safawi religious brotherhood. The shah welded the Qizilbash into a political force by

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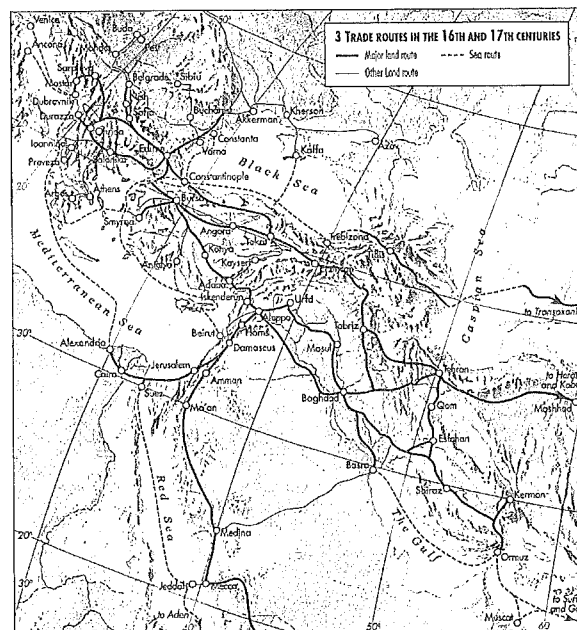
linking his and their ambitions to the establishment of "Twelve Shiism" as the religion of the Persian state. In the wider Islamic world, this nostalgic Shiite tradition was increasingly a marginal or sectarian faith, regarded by the Sunni majority as heretical. In Safavid Persia, Shiism became the defining national creed, providing the Safavids with an ideological focus. Unfortunately, it also exacerbated enmities between Persia and its Sunni Muslim neighbours and rivals, the Ottomans to the west and the Uzbek raiders from Transoxania (map 2).

Safavid shahs – most notably Abbas I (r. 1587–1629) – were deliberate propagandists of Shiite culture. They were patrons of representational art, usually in miniature, and undertook a magnificent building programme of religious architecture, palaces and public works. The greatest splendours survive in Abbas I's capital, Esfahan.

THE FORGING OF A FRONTIER

The Ottoman Turks inherited from their Byzantine predecessors a determination to keep the Black Sea dependent on Constantinople, free from control by Central Asian rulers. When Shah Ismail and his Qizilbash forces began to infiltrate eastern Anatolia from Tabriz in the early 16th century, they provoked a massive Ottoman military response. The armies of Sultan Selim the Grim were in the forefront of contemporary military capacity, and the Ottoman artillery gained a dramatic victory over the lightly-armed Persians at Chaldiran in 1514.

The Battle of Chaldiran appears to have shifted the centre of gravity of the Persian Empire to the east, but it was not a final encounter. It led to more than 120 years of intermittent Ottoman-Safavid conflict over land occupied by Azoris, Kurds and Mesopotamian Arabs (map 2). (By diverting Ottoman attention from the Balkans, this conflict relieved western Europe of some of the military pressure to which it had been exposed since the Ottoman elimination of the Byzantine Empire in 1453.) The standard pattern in this long conflict was one of an Ottoman offensive countered by Persian "scorched earth" and guerrilla tactics. Shah Abbas I was briefly able to set the Safavid forces on the offensive and reconstitute most of the empire



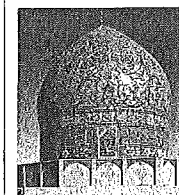
once ruled by his predecessor Ismail, but the eventual settlement, enshrined in the lasting Peace of Zuhab in 1639, favoured the Ottomans. The frontier had no logic in terms of language, ethnicity or culture. It divided rather than defined communities, splitting Sunni from Sunni and Shiite from Shiite, but it formed the basis for the frontier between the Ottoman and Persian empires and survived as the Iraq-Iran border. The Safavid Empire continued until the invasion of its lands by the Ghilzai Afghans in 1722 heralded the demise of the dynasty in 1736.

THE WORLD OF MERCHANTS AND CARAVANS

The Ottoman and Safavid states governed lands that had been in contact with a wider world since antiquity. The empires were crossed by commercial and pilgrimage routes and contained gateways by land and sea which linked the Mediterranean and Levantine worlds to the Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia and China (map 3).

Many Ottoman and Safavid traders were also Muslim pilgrims undertaking journeys to Mecca. However, a good proportion of the traders and migrants from the Islamic empires were not Muslims but members of Christian and Jewish minority groups operating in partnership with Europeans, many of whom were based in Constantinople, Smyrna, Aleppo and Alexandria – the empire's "windows to the West". Safavid contacts with the Western world were tenuous and bedevilled by the difficulties of the Persian terrain, but during the 16th century European adventurers did make their way to Esfahan and back. At the same time, the powers of western Europe began to establish their own sea routes to the East (pages 118–19), thus threatening to wrest control of Eurasian trade from the Muslims. However, although in 1515 the Portuguese captured Ormuz, a Gulf market for horses and spices, they lost it again to the Safavids in 1622. Thereafter, the old trade in spices and silk – and a new trade in tea – continued to be serviced by caravan routes into the 18th century.

▲ The territory ruled by the Ottomans and Safavids was criss-crossed by land and sea routes used by merchants and pilgrims alike. Sea travel was risky but could be relatively straightforward on Mediterranean short hops or in regions governed by the alternating monsoon winds. Overland traffic was arduous and slow but continued to play an important role in trade with Asia until well into the 18th century.



▲ The dome of the Masjid-e-Mashhad is among the many splendours of Safavid architecture built in the 17th century in Esfahan, the capital of Abbas I.

