

- Samarkand is one of the world's most exotic and beautiful cities and has been written about by some of the world's greatest authors and scholars. Break students into small groups and ask each group to research and read essays, stanzas of poems or other creative descriptions of Samarkand by writers such as al-Istakhri, Goethe, John Milton, John Keats and Oscar Wilde. Each group should analyze the themes, imagery and kinds of language used by its writer to describe Samarkand and develop its own creative description of this ancient city.
- The Persian Empire dominated Mesopotamia from 612 BCE until it was conquered by Alexander the Great of Macedon in the third century BCE. Ask students to brainstorm a definition of "empire" and to list the general characteristics of an empire. Ask students to research and develop a map of the Persian Empire at the height of its power and to compare and contrast it with the extent of power and methods of control of the Assyrian, Athenian and Hellenistic empires. As an extension, students may relate the Persian Empire to more modern examples of empires such as the British and French. Students may learn more about the military campaigns of Alexander the Great at this web site: [www.shsu.edu/~his\\_ncp/ArriCamp.html](http://www.shsu.edu/~his_ncp/ArriCamp.html)
- Mesopotamia is the site of the development of the world's earliest civilizations. The Sumerians built the world's first cities and drew the first known city maps. The Assyrians and Babylonians followed up with splendid public buildings, temples and gardens watered by irrigation. Ask students to construct detailed time lines outlining the development of the earliest civilizations in world history. An extensive chronology of the origins of human organization may be found at this web site: [www.enl.ucalgary.ca/People/far/hobbies/iran/history.html](http://www.enl.ucalgary.ca/People/far/hobbies/iran/history.html)

### Suggested Internet Resources

Periodically, Internet Resources are updated on our web site at [www.LibraryVideo.com](http://www.LibraryVideo.com)

- [www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/safa/hd\\_safa.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/safa/hd_safa.htm)  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art offers a representative sample of works produced under the Safavid dynasty before 1600 CE.
- [afe.easia.columbia.edu/mongols/figures/figures.htm](http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/mongols/figures/figures.htm)  
Columbia University presents "The Mongols in World History," an excellent resource for teachers and students to learn about key figures in Mongol history, such as Genghis Khan.

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- [oi.uchicago.edu/OI/MUS/PA/IRAN/PAAI/PAAI.html](http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/MUS/PA/IRAN/PAAI/PAAI.html)  
The archives of the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute provide a fantastic assortment of photographs, aerial surveys and architectural sketches of Persepolis and ancient Iran from its "Catalog of Expedition Photographs."
- [www.ucalgary.ca/applied\\_history/tutor/oldwrld/armies/tamerlane.html](http://www.ucalgary.ca/applied_history/tutor/oldwrld/armies/tamerlane.html)  
The University of Calgary offers a short biography of Tamerlane and has an excellent map of the extent of the Timurid Empire in 1405.

### Suggested Print Resources

- Adkins, Lesley. *Empires of the Plain: Henry Rawlinson and the Lost Language of Babylon*. Thomas Dunne Books, New York, NY; 2004.
- Boardman, John. *Persia and the West: An Archaeological Investigation of the Genesis of Achaemenid Persian Art*. Thames & Hudson, New York, NY; 2000.
- MacLeod, Calum. *The Golden Road to Samarkand (Odyssey Guides)*. Odyssey Publications, New York, NY; 2000.

### TEACHER'S GUIDE

Jeffrey W. Litzke, M.Ed.  
Curriculum Specialist, Schlessinger Media

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- ANCIENT CITIES OF THE ARAB WORLD, VOLUME I
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## ARAB DYNASTIES

### Grades 7 & up

This guide is a supplement designed for teachers to use when presenting programs in the series, *The Arab World*.

**Before Viewing:** Give students an introduction to the topic by relaying aspects of the show overview to them. Select vocabulary to provide a focus for students when they view the program.

**After Viewing:** Review the program and vocabulary, and use the follow-up activities to inspire continued discussion. Encourage students to research the topic further with the Internet and print resources provided.



## Program Overview

The Achaemenid, Safavid and Timurid dynasties represent vastly different eras in the histories of Iran and Central Asia, but all illustrate legendary periods of rich cultural development and spectacular artistic and architectural achievement. These dynasties featured visionary and tolerant leaders, such as Darius the Great and Shah Abbas I, as well as powerful conquerors like Tamerlane (Timur) who not only consolidated his rule at home but also invaded and destroyed many foreign cities. While many of the original palaces and other structures from the Achaemenid capital of Persepolis have been destroyed and lie in ruins, remarkable architecture remains intact in Samarkand and Isfahan, reminding visitors of the glories of the Timurid and Safavid dynasties.

## Episode 1: Persepolis

Persepolis was one of the most awe-inspiring monuments of the ancient world and served as an ancient capital of the Achaemenid kings of the Persian Empire. Founded by Darius the Great in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, Persepolis served as a cultural and spiritual center where many majestic palaces and reception halls were constructed. In 330 BCE, Alexander the Great conquered and looted the city, causing complete destruction to the architectural wonders of Persepolis, which remained buried in rubble until it was identified in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Modern excavations did not begin until the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the restoration and identification of the ruins of the ancient city continues today.

### Vocabulary

**Achaemenid** — A dynasty in the ancient Persian Empire founded by Cyrus the Great around 550 BCE, characterized by a flourishing period of art and architecture. The Persian Empire declined in 330 BCE.

**cuneiform** — The writing system of the Sumerians consisting of wedge-shaped symbols impressed in clay tablets.

**Novruz** — From the Farsi meaning “new day,” a holiday observed in several Middle Eastern countries, which is steeped in Zoroastrian tradition and celebrates the spring equinox (Iranian New Year).

## Episode 2: Isfahan

Isfahan is a major Iranian city situated south of the capital city of Tehran. Founded approximately 2,500 years ago, Isfahan experienced its greatest influence during the 16<sup>th</sup> century under Shah Abbas I of the Safavid dynasty. An important regional capital under Shah Abbas, Isfahan became one of the architectural centers of the Arab world. The city featured fabulous parks, libraries and mosques and was a bustling international marketplace, earning it the nickname “half the world” as Persians believed that to see Isfahan was to see half the world. Despite becoming a thriving modern city, Isfahan has retained its original beauty and historical character.

### Vocabulary

**mosque** — Also known as a *masjid*, a Muslim place of worship.

**bazaar** — A market consisting of street vendors, shops and stalls, which is a prominent part of life in the Middle East.

**Safavid** — A dynasty founded by Isma‘il that ruled Iran from 1502 to 1736.

**Shah** — A title formerly used for the Iranian monarch.

**Koran** — The holy writings of Islam.

**muezzin** — The official who calls Muslims to daily prayer.

**mammon** — A word from the Aramaic meaning “wealth” or “property.”

**Allah** — A word that means “the God” in Arabic.

**eyvan** — A large, vaulted hall that opens to a courtyard and is a prominent feature of Islamic architecture.

**Mecca** — Located in Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of Mohammed and the holiest city in Islam.

## Episode 3: Samarkand

Now part of the modern country of Uzbekistan, Samarkand was founded over two thousand years ago and is one of the oldest cities in Central Asia. Conquered over the centuries by leaders such as Alexander the Great and Genghis Khan, the city flourished in the 14<sup>th</sup> century under the Timurid dynasty founded by Timur, also known as Tamerlane. As Tamerlane’s royal city, Samarkand developed into the most important economic and cultural center in central Asia. Tamerlane constructed magnificent palaces, mosques and mausoleums throughout the city, which was an important station on the Silk Road and featured exotic goods and spices from around the world.

### Vocabulary

**Silk Road** — A historical trade route that operated from around 200 BCE until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which involved cultural and economic exchanges between East and West.

**Timurid** — A dynasty in Central Asia founded by Timur (Tamerlane) that thrived between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries.

**Marxism-Leninism** — A form of Marxism that emphasizes former Soviet dictator Vladimir Lenin’s theories on capitalism and imperialism and suggests the importance of anti-capitalist struggles of underdeveloped countries.

**Cyrillic** — Associated with the alphabets based on Glagolitic and used for certain Slavic languages, such as Russian.

**madrassa** — An Islamic religious school.

**minaret** — A tall thin tower connected to a mosque from which people of the Islamic faith are called to prayer.

**Mohammed** — According to Muslims, a prophet who received the word of God.

## Follow-up Discussion Questions

- Where did the architects and builders of Persepolis originate? Explain what this indicates about the vision of Darius the Great and evaluate his beliefs. Compare and contrast the leadership style of Darius the Great with those of modern statesmen.
- What was the purpose of Persepolis for Darius the Great? Brainstorm a list of modern world complexes that could be considered similar to Persepolis.
- Why is the year 330 BCE important in the history of Persepolis? Despite this, how do we still know a great deal about the everyday affairs of life under the Achaemenid rulers? Analyze the importance of written records in learning about the past.
- What was Shah Abbas of the Safavid dynasty looking for when he established Isfahan? Reflect on the architectural projects he undertook in order to achieve this goal and evaluate his success.
- Analyze the observations made by a European traveler about the king’s palace in Isfahan. Offer your own descriptions of the ornamentation of this historic wonder.
- Evaluate the success of the economic policies of Shah Abbas and discuss the role of Isfahan in the region’s commercial activity.
- What is the relationship between Genghis Khan and Tamerlane? Speculate about their similarities and differences.
- Why did Tamerlane build the Bibi Hanoum? Describe the difficulties involved in its construction and discuss the importance of restoring ancient architectural monuments.

## Follow-up Activities

- Herodotus, an ancient Greek historian known as the “father of history” and sometimes the “father of lies,” wrote extensively about the Persian Wars, a series of Persian and Greek battles that occurred between 492 and 449 BCE. Ask students to read Herodotus’ account of the buildup to and the actual Battle of Thermopylae, a battle that took place in 480 BCE and resulted in the burning of Athens. Students should list the reasons Xerxes gave for going to war against the Greeks, characterize Artabanus’ argument against the war and recount the course of events. As a follow-up, ask students to analyze the account of Herodotus and determine if they believe there is any bias to his descriptions or if they are presented neutrally. Excerpts from Herodotus’ *The Histories* on Xerxes’ invasion of Greece may be found at the following web site: [www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/herodotus-xerxes.html](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/herodotus-xerxes.html)

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