Art of the Safavid Empire
Discussion Question:

• The Safavids, like the Ottomans, were known for their silk industries. What are some products that the Safavids might have created out of silk?
Safavid Art

- In the arts, manuscript illustration was prominent during the Safavid Empire.
- Textiles and carpets were made of luxury materials as furnishings for the court.
- In architecture, they commissioned mosques and palace complexes, restored major shrines, and contributed to sites of pilgrimage.
Shah ‘Abbas (r. 1587-1629)

• His reign was a period of cultural florescence.
• In 1597-98, Shah ‘Abbas transferred his capital to Isfahan, in southern Iran.
• The centerpiece of his capital was the new Maidan-i Shah, which was built initially for state ceremonies and sports.

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Shah ‘Abbas (r. 1587-1629)

• Shah ‘Abbas encouraged trade with Europe

• Silk was Iran’s main export.

• Carpets and textiles were also important export items.
  • These were produced in workshops set up under state patronage in Isfahan and other cities.

• The art of painting continued to flourish, with single-page paintings and drawings becoming popular.

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Safavid Arts

• In pottery, imitations of ceramics from Turkey and of blue-and-white ware from China were especially popular.

• Carpet weaving was transformed from a craft practiced by nomads and peasants into a national industry.

• Fabrics were another major industry, both in silks, and in velvet.

• European imported works provided new technical techniques, which local artists combined with elements of traditional Persian painting.

http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/tott/hd_tott.htm
Safavid Fashion

• Textiles showed contemporary Safavid dress, with men sporting turbans wound around a central oblong baton (*taj haydari*).

• Women are depicted wearing a small square kerchief (*chahar-qad*) at the crown of the head tied over longer flowing headscarves.

• Figures on textiles made from the early seventeenth century onward reflect the changing fashions, as the *taj haydari* was replaced by a wide, elliptical turban.

**Date:** mid-16th century  
**Medium:** Silk, metal wrapped thread; cut and voided velvet  
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Safavid Motifs

- Popular scenes feature idealized pastimes such as hunting, falconry, or poetry reading in garden settings.
- Popular designs included stylized flowers with delicate drawings of deer, rabbits, and birds.
- Weaving incorporated gold or silver strips through colors that included pistachio green, salmon pink, alizarin, cream, and ochre.

Silk Fragment with a Rosebush, Bird, and Deer Pattern

Date: late 17th-early 18th century
Medium: Silk, silver- and gilded metal wrapped thread; compound twill weave, brocaded

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