

Document 6

“The people of the Huns...are quite abnormally savage...when they join battle they advance in packs, uttering their various war cries... None of them ploughs or even touches a plow-handle. They have no fixed abode, no home or law or settled manner of life...”

Ammianus Marcellus, 4th century
Roman historian

Document 7

“if you want to accomplish something and make a name for yourself, destroy everything that others have built and massacre everyone that you have conquered; for you are not better able to rebuild monuments than those constructed by your predecessors and there is no more noble accomplishment for you to make your name.

Advice from the mother of a
“barbarian king,” 7th century

Change Over Time Essay (suggested writing time - 40 minutes)

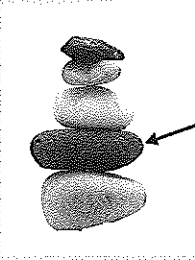
2. Analyze the cultural and political changes and continuities in ONE of these civilizations during the early classical era from 1000 to 1 B.C.E.

- Rome
- China

Comparative Essay (suggested writing time - 40 minutes)

3. Compare and contrast the reasons for and the outcomes of the fall of TWO of the following classical civilizations:

- The Roman Empire
- Han China
- Gupta India



**UNIT TWO:
600 - 1450 C.E.**

The second period in our story of the world is the chunk of time from 600 to 1450 C.E., the “**post-classical**” era. The map of the world in 600 had changed greatly since the height of the classical era, with all the large empires split into smaller, often quarrelsome political units. Various Germanic tribes had settled into the area of the Western Roman Empire, and generally had little contact with one another except for conflicts with near neighbors. The Indian sub-continent had returned to its regional political factionalism, but Hinduism and the intricate web of jati gave continuing structure to Indian society. In 600 C.E. China had been through almost 400 years of political chaos after the fall of the Han Dynasty in the early 3rd century C.E., but was on the verge of political centralization made possible by the unifying influences of Confucianism and Daoism. This post classical era saw the emergence of important new civilizations, the revival and expansion of some old civilizations, the peak of influence of nomadic groups, the importance of belief systems as unifying forces for societies, and increasing interconnections among the world’s people through an intricate network of trade.

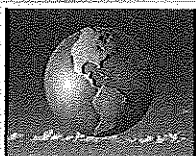
Unit Two is divided into four chapters based on region:

- Chapter 5 focuses on the Islamic world, a vast region shaped by religious conquest that illustrates the importance of belief systems as unifying forces during this period.
- Chapter 6 follows the changes in Europe after the fall of the Western Roman Empire, including the rise of important branches of Christianity in the area.
- Chapter 7 revisits the Americas where two great empires emerged late in the era to unify Mesoamerica and the Andes Mountains area.
- Chapter 8 traces important developments in central and east Asia, including the rise of the Mongols, who formed the largest empire in all of world history.

- Chapter 9 investigates the tropical areas of the Eastern Hemisphere, including Sub-Saharan Africa, India, and Southeast Asia.

Chunking historical analysis by regions is necessary in order to keep the changes in the world's story manageable, but it is important to see important themes that run through the time period, especially as they build on the Foundations Period and create a bridge to the period that follows. Before we get to the unifying themes, let's think about what did NOT happen during the era:

- 1) **Eastern and Western Hemispheres were not joined.** Trade networks intensified during this era, but no sustained contact between the hemispheres occurred. The Americas were developing in isolation from the connected realms of Asia, Europe, and Africa. Other areas of the world were also developing on their own, including Australia and Polynesia.
- 2) **Innovations were not numerous, although technology expanded.** Expansion of technology was more characteristic than innovation, although print technology was invented in east Asia, as well as explosive powder. Previous technologies, such as camel saddles, stirrups, silk-making techniques, and steel plows, diffused far beyond the origins of innovation.
- 3) **No political form became dominant.** During the classical era, empire was the dominant political form. Empires in this era were smaller, and many other organizations emerged, such as kingdoms, caliphates, and khanates, so that no single form is associated with overall political organizations of the era.
- 4) **Environmental changes were not as great as in other eras.** More areas became agricultural, but there was no massive transformation of areas from their natural environment such as those that occurred during the classical era. For example, in earlier times, soil had been depleted of its nutrients in most areas of the Roman Empire, a factor that contributed to the decline of the civilization.
- 5) **Most societies remained patriarchies with clear social distinctions.** During this era we see few changes in gender relations, although in some areas, inequality between the sexes actually grew. Slavery remained characteristic of most social systems, although it did decline in some areas. Status and wealth were still based primarily on land ownership, and disputes over land distribution among classes remained problematic.



THE BIG PICTURE: 600-1450 C.E.

Three themes run through the era from 600 to 1450 C.E. that make it distinct from other eras:

- 1) **Belief systems were unifying forces for societies.** This period saw the rise of another great universalizing religion – Islam. Like Christianity and Buddhism, Islam spread from its origins to many different lands to be embraced by people with very different backgrounds. Like Christianity and Buddhism, Islam was a missionary religion, deliberately spread by its adherents. Buddhism became a very important force in China during this era, and made its way to Korea, Japan, and Southeast Asia. Christianity became an important organizing force in most parts of Europe.
- 2) **Civilization spread to many parts of the globe.** Civilization spread to Sub-Saharan Africa, northern and western Europe, and Japan. The zones of civilization spread in the Americas as well, and some important civilizations appeared in Southeast Asia. More nomads came into contact with civilization centers, and the influence of nomadic groups peaked.
- 3) **Trade and communications networks increased the interdependence of numerous societies.** Technologies spread from their origins, and many more cultural exchanges took place. Virtually all water and land trade routes grew more complex, bringing more goods to more people, but the spread of disease accelerated as well, with the appearance of the bubonic plague as an international epidemic in the 14th century.

Despite the spread of civilization to new areas, the influence of the classical civilizations lived on during this period. Even though political lines were re-configured and governing styles changed, the Middle East, China, India, and the Eastern Roman Empire remained quite powerful. The greatest cities of the world were in these areas, and the people of the new areas imitated the culture and social structures established in the older civilizations during the classical era. However, by the time the era ended in 1450, the world was already beginning to change as Europeans prepared to set sail on the Atlantic Ocean, largely because they were emboldened by the accomplishments of their ancestors that lived between 600 and 1450.



CHAPTER FIVE: THE ISLAMIC WORLD

Islam is the most rapidly growing religion in the world today, and second only to Christianity in the number of people that identify with the faith. Like Christianity, its beginnings may be traced to the teachings of one man, but unlike Christianity's founder, Jesus of Nazareth, Islam's founder, Muhammad, has never been seen by Muslims as anything other than human. Islam originated in the Middle East, as did Judaism and Christianity, but in a much more remote area, the Arabian Peninsula. It was destined to become a universalizing religion, partly because its early adherents deliberately spread the new faith, but also because its principles appealed broadly to people from many different cultural backgrounds. Another important factor in the amazing early growth of the religion is its appearance on the world stage at a time when religion was beginning to play an important role as a unifying cultural and economic force in Eurasia. The post-classical era was characterized by political fragmentation, and by 600 C.E. many people had much stronger feelings about religion or philosophy than they did toward their governments. Within 150 years after its founding in 622 C.E., Islam had spread throughout southwest Asia into Europe and northern Africa, and its beliefs drove a remarkable political, military, and economic organization that greatly altered the map of the world and made the era 600-1450 C.E. quite different from the preceding Foundations period.

THE ORIGINS OF ISLAM

The name given to a large part of the Arabian Peninsula, the "Empty Quarter", tells us a great deal about the physical geography of the place where Islam originated. Most of the area is uninhabitable desert that stretches mile after mile with no respite. Around the fringes of the desert are scrub zones, where nomadic people had eked out a living herding camels and goats over the centuries. Although the people of this area are collectively called **Bedouins**, they were

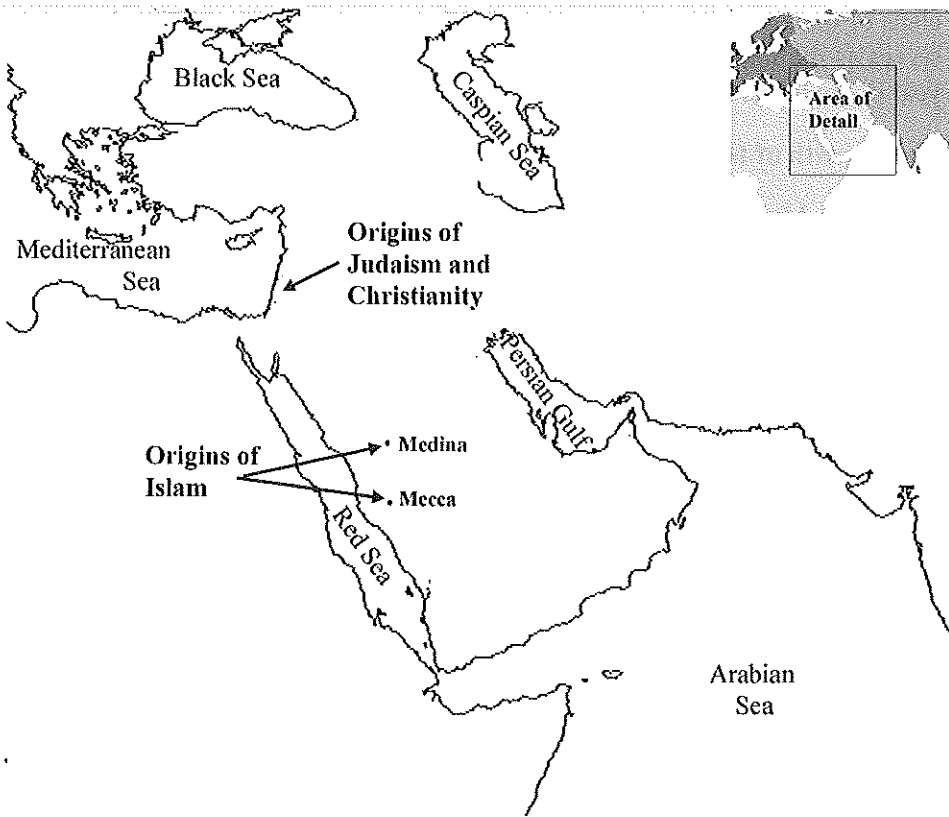
organized into kinship-based tribes and clans that often sparred with one another over scarce natural resources. Several trading towns, such as Medina and Mecca, rose in the regions close to the Red Sea, which served as organizational points for camel caravans making the long trek both ways across the desert, with destination points that served as links for the great trade networks of the day.

The struggle for existence in Arabia's harsh climate meant that survival often depended on strong ties among family members. To be cut off from family through expulsion literally resulted in death. The use of watering places and grazing lands was regulated by clan councils, and they often came to blows with other clans over these rights. Wars frequently broke out because a member of a rival clan led his animals to a restricted well or pasture, and the actions of a single person usually called clan members on each side to face one another in battle. The death of a warrior of one clan required that revenge be taken on his killer's clans, and as a result, constant infighting characterized the groups, making it almost impossible to unite under any one political leader.

Mecca had been founded by the Umayyad clan of the Quraysh Bedouin tribe, and members of the clan dominated its politics and commercial economy. The town was the largest of the trade centers along the Red Sea, partly because it was also a well established religious center, with shrines to various spirits and gods visited by many pilgrims each year. The most revered of its shrines was the **Ka'ba**, which held a sacred rock called the **Black Stone**. Stones often represented to desert people spirits called **jinns** that were believed to reside in natural objects of the desert. The Ka'ba also contained idols representing many gods, including one deity called Allah. Overall, Bedouin religion was a blend of **animism** (spirits residing in ordinary objects) and polytheism, with the Quraysh recognizing Allah to be a supreme deity. Mecca's history changed significantly around 570 C.E. with the birth of **Muhammad**, who was destined to be the founder of Islam.

Muhammad's Visions

Muhammad was born into a minor branch of a powerful Meccan family, but he was orphaned at the age of six, raised by a grandfather, and received very little formal education. He became a trader and business manager for Khadijah, a wealthy merchant's widow, whom he eventually married. Because Muhammad often traveled with his job, he came in contact with other clans, as well as with groups of monotheists, including Jews and Christians. He took a great interest in religion, and when he was about 40 years old, he had a religious experience that he described as a vision from Allah. Muhammad often spent time alone in prayer and meditation in a cave outside Mecca, and in his vision he was visited by the Angel Gabriel as a messenger of Allah. Other visions followed, in



The Origins of Three Faiths. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all originated in the Middle East, with Judaism and Christianity first rising in an area that was a crossroads of civilization. Judaism originated about 2000 B.C.E. and Christianity developed some 2000 years later. In contrast, Islam first rose in relatively remote trading cities on the Arabian Peninsula in 622 C.E. However, the historical ties among the religions are strong, with a common view of Abraham as a prophet and a belief in the existence of only one God. By the time that Islam began, Judaism and Christianity were well known monotheistic faiths, although many people on the Arabian Peninsula were polytheistic.

which Muhammad received revelations that eventually became the basic tenets of the Islamic faith, a clearly monotheistic religion that recognized Allah as the one God.

Muhammad began sharing his revelations with relatives and friends, and soon the circle of his followers grew so that prominent Umayyad political leaders and merchants felt threatened by them. They saw the new faith as dangerous to Mecca's status as a pilgrimage destination of those who came to worship the myriad of gods and spirits of the Ka'ba. Muhammad's actions set off rivalries first within the clan, and eventually with clans in other cities, so that the area was on the verge of civil war by 622. Muhammad managed to escape with his followers to Medina, where he had relatives on his mother's side, and he established himself as a leader there when he mediated quarrels between the Bedouin

clans of the town. This fateful flight to Medina is known as the **hijrah**, and it serves as the founding date of the new religion. On the Muslim calendar, the year of the hijrah became the year 1, the first year of the Islamic era.

The Growth of Islam during Muhammad's Life

In Medina Muhammad proved not only to be an adept religious leader, but a political and military organizer as well. His wisdom and skill won followers who accompanied him on raids on Meccan caravans. The Quraysh responded with a series of attacks on Muhammad, who proved to be effective at defense and counter-attack, winning him even more esteem in Medina. Finally, in 628 the Quraysh signed a peace treaty with Muhammad that allowed him to visit the shrine at Ka'ba in Mecca. In 629 he triumphantly returned to Mecca with 10,000 supporters, who smashed all of the idols of the shrine, leaving the Black Stone alone to symbolize the acceptance of Allah as the one god. Muhammad gradually won over the citizens of Mecca before his death in 632. His founding of the **umma**, or Muslim community that began in Medina, now encompassed many clans that had feuded for many years, and promised to unite them under the banner of Islam.

Islamic Beliefs

After Muhammad's death, his successor, **Abu Bakr**, ordered those who had acted as secretaries for Muhammad to organize the Prophet's revelations into a book, the **Qur'an**, which achieved its final form about 650. The Qur'an, or Recitation, is believed by Muslims to be the sacred word of Allah, not just the collected sayings of Muhammad. Because of this belief, the Qur'an is different from other holy books, such as the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Bible, which were written by numerous hands over many centuries. Second in importance to the Qur'an is the **hadith**, a collection of stories about and sayings of Muhammad. Whereas the Qur'an is one, relatively compact book, the hadith exists in many documents that Muslim scholars have pored over for years, sorting out those that are authentic from those that are not. In time, Muslim societies developed **shari'a** law based on beliefs in the Qur'an and hadith. Through shari'a, Muslim beliefs developed into a way of life, complete with customs and law derived from Islamic religious principles.

From the beginning, Islam contained beliefs and practices that strongly appealed to people of many different backgrounds, and eventually led it to become a universalizing religion, along with Christianity and Buddhism. Of course, in its early years only Arabs embraced the religion, but Muhammad accepted many monotheistic beliefs of Jews and Christians, and after his death, he was hailed as the **Seal of the Prophets**, or the last of the prophets sent by God to communicate with human beings. Other prophets, including Abraham and Moses,

are accepted by all three religions, and Muslims accept Jesus not as the Son of God, but as one of the prophets. Even the angel Gabriel, who is believed to have shared Allah's revelations with Muhammad, is mentioned in the holy books of all three religions.

The **Five Pillars of Faith**, the basic principles of Islam, also reflect its status as a universalizing religion that appeals to people of diverse backgrounds:

- 1) **The confession of faith** – To become a Muslim, a person must make this statement: “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his Prophet.”
- 2) **Prayer** – Muslims must pray five times daily, turned to face Mecca.
- 3) **Fasting** – For one month of the Muslim year (Ramadan), Muslims must fast from sunup to sundown, demonstrating to the umma their commitment to the religion.
- 4) **Alms** – The faithful must give a portion of their wealth as alms to help the needy, a requirement that also helped to build cohesion in the umma.
- 5) **Hajj** – Once in a lifetime, any Muslim who could possibly do it is expected to make a pilgrimage (called the hajj) to Mecca to worship Allah at the Ka’ba. Every year this gathering in Mecca is still a highly visible testament to the universal character of the religion.

Along with the Five Pillars the Qur’an and hadith established other customs, beliefs, and laws for Islamic society. Muslims were not to eat pork nor drink alcoholic beverages. A man could marry as many as four wives (as Muhammad had done), but only as long as he could provide for them. Marriage with non-Muslims was forbidden. No priesthood developed for the Muslim community, but prayer leaders directed people as they prayed in unison in the local **mosque**, or temple. Islam stressed the equality of all believers in the eyes of Allah, and encouraged the well-to-do to take care of the poor, as evidence in the Five Pillars of Faith.

MUHAMMAD’S SUCCESSORS

Muhammad died in 632 without naming a successor or establishing a procedure for choosing a new leader. On the afternoon of his death the umma leaders met to select a **caliph**, or a political and religious successor to Muhammad. One of the main candidates, Ali, the cousin and son-in-law to Muhammad, was passed over in favor of **Abu Bakr**, one of Muhammad’s earliest followers and clos-

est friends. Under Abu Bakr, Muslim military commanders raided into areas north of Arabia as far as present-day Iraq and Syria and eastward into Egypt. These raids revealed the vulnerabilities of the post-classical Byzantine and Sassanid Empires, remnants of the greater Roman and Persian empires from earlier days.



EXAMINING THE EVIDENCE: THE QUR'AN ON MUHAMMAD'S NIGHT JOURNEY

The 17th Sura [Chapter] of the Muslim Qur'an begins with the following deceptively simple verse: "Glory to Him who took His votary [servant] to a wide and open land from the Sacred Mosque (at Mecca) to the distant Mosque whose precincts We have blessed, that We may show him some of our signs." This verse is the basis for one of the most colorful and controversial stories of Muhammad's life. Devout Muslims believe that the phrase "farthest mosque" referred to a place in Jerusalem, and that Muhammad was miraculously transported to Jerusalem where a creature, Al Burak, flew him to heaven and back again. According to Muslim belief, it was on this trip that Muhammad saw the face of Allah, making him the only human being that ever has had that experience.

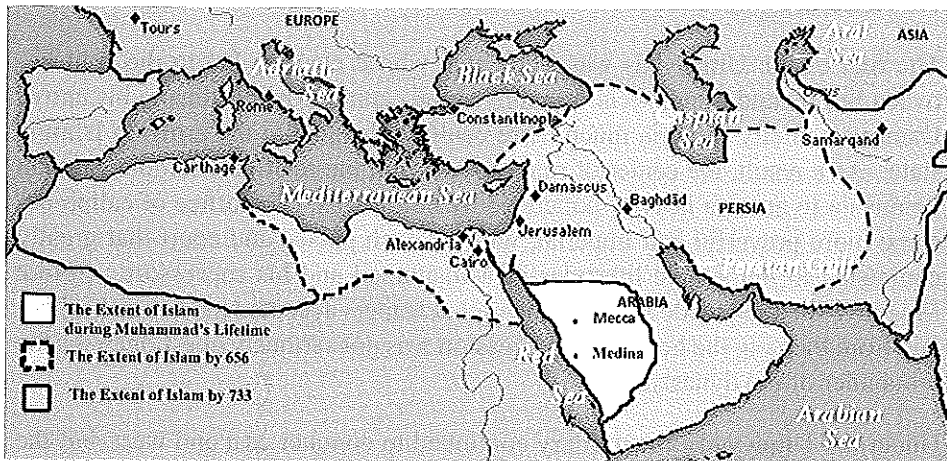
To commemorate the event after Muhammad's death, the Dome of the Rock was built in 691 to enclose the sacred rock where Muhammad began his ascension to heaven. The Dome has caused controversy because the rock that Muslims believe to be the entrance to Paradise is also sacred to Jews, who believe that the rock is the spot where Abraham offered to sacrifice his son Isaac. The Dome is not far from the street that Jesus travelled on his way to his crucifixion, so Jerusalem is claimed as a special city to all three monotheistic religions, and has served as a source of contention over the years.

Source: Al-Quran, trans. by Ahmed Ali. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, p. 240.

With no political powers to stop them, Arab soldiers poured into the old centers of civilization and took over their governments under the three successor caliphs to Abu Bakr. One hundred years after Muhammad's death, Islamic lands stretched from northwest Africa and Spain in the west to the Indus River to the east.

The remarkable success of the Arab conquests certainly was made easier by the weakness of the post-classical empires that the early Muslims attacked, but it may also be attributed to their religious fervor. The Arabs were passionate

about their new faith, as reflected in the term **jihad** that is sometimes used to describe their warfare. Jihad loosely translates as “struggle,” and originally referred to an internal effort of an individual Muslim to understand the faith and be a submissive follower. For many, that struggle applied to defeating non-Muslim areas, especially in hopes that their efforts would secure berths in “paradise,” the Muslim equivalent of “heaven.”



The Spread of Islam in the Hundred Years after Muhammad's Death. Under Muhammad's successors, the size of Islamic lands increased rapidly as neighboring territories were conquered by Muslim soldiers. By 733 C.E. the caliphate's control extended from Spain and northwest Africa in the west to the Indus River in the east.

Despite the success of the Muslim armies, tensions existed within the *umma* regarding the succession of caliphs, with the first four being negotiated among powerful Arab clans. Of these early caliphs, all but Abu Bakr were assassinated by rival clans. The fourth caliph was Ali, Muhammad's son-in-law, whose assassination in 661 set off a furious factional war. Ali's supporters argued that legitimate caliphs could only be members of Muhammad's family, and they resisted the authority of the caliph put in place by Ali's enemies. They came to be called **Shi'ites**, and they formed a significant minority within Islam that continues to the present. Shi'ites disclaimed the authority of the first three caliphs and also Ali's successor, Muawiyah, who founded the **Umayyad Dynasty**, with political authority passed down through hereditary lines. The supporters of Muawiyah and his successors were known as **Sunni**, the large majority of Muslims at the time, as well as in present day. Sunnis believed all of the early caliphs to be legitimate, and agreed that the Umayyads also had the right to rule. The split has never healed, and the dreams of the early caliphs that Islam would remain a united empire were undermined by feuds reminiscent of those of the early Bedouin tribes and clans.

The Umayyad Dynasty (661-750)

The first four caliphs after Muhammad's death were elected, but after the political turmoil surrounding Ali's death in 661, the **caliphates** (Islamic empires) became hereditary, although new caliphs were still formally elected. There were two Islamic dynasties: the Umayyad Dynasty (661-750) and the Abbasid Dynasty (750-1258). The caliphs were both religious and political leaders who ruled over an increasing number of non-Arab people, many of whom eventually converted to Islam.

The first of the Umayyads was Muawiya, whose election led to the split between Shi'ite and Sunni sects. He moved the capital from Medina to his native Damascus, a city in Syria much more centrally located in the growing Islamic state. As a result, the center of rule moved from the relatively remote Arabian Peninsula to an area heavily populated by non-Arabs. The office of caliph became more powerful and imperial, with a lavish palace and court that greatly contrasted to the simple lifestyles of Muhammad and his successors. Before Muawiya died, he made sure that the umma leaders accepted his son as his heir, and from then on, the hereditary succession was not seriously questioned for the remainder of the dynasty.

Under the Umayyads, the military continued to conquer east and west, but the rate of growth slowed considerably. In the east, Afghanistan came under their control, and to the west they conquered northern Africa and Christian Spain. At least part of Spain would remain Muslim until the 15th century when the combined rule of Ferdinand and Isabelle finally recaptured all of Spain for Christendom. The Muslim advance was finally halted in 733 at the battle of Tours in central France by the Frankish leader Charles Martel.

From Damascus the Umayyad caliphs built a bureaucracy to govern their vast lands. The core of the caliph's government and the army officers were Muslim Arabs who generally lived in urban centers and shared in the rewards gained from new conquests. Rural areas were populated almost exclusively by non-Arab subject people who paid taxes to support the government, unlike Arab Muslims who only were taxed for charity. The Umayyads attempted to keep interactions between Arab Muslims and subject people to a minimum, but to little avail, as the groups intermarried, and subject people converted to Islam. Non-Arab Muslim converts received few financial or social benefits, so conversions were not as common as they were to become later. They still had to pay property taxes, and often special head taxes, as well, and they were not considered to be a part of the umma. The **"People of the Book"** – Jews and Christians – were considerably better treated, although they had to pay the same taxes as other subject people. However, adherents to the two monotheistic religions were allowed to worship as they pleased, and their communities and legal systems

remained intact. The name they were given (“People of the Book” or dhimmis) explains why; Muslims perceived Christianity and Judaism to be governed by Holy Books with shared beliefs and common roots with Islam.

The Umayyad exclusion of non-Arab subjects (mawali) proved to be problematic as Arab administration centers became more far flung. In the 740s rebel mawali joined forces to demand social and religious equality with Arab Muslims, and eventually overthrew the Umayyad Dynasty. All fell into chaos until the Abbasid clan took control of the caliphate in 750, when they moved the capital from troubled Damascus east to their newly built city of Baghdad, which was destined to rule over the golden age of Islamic civilization for 500 years.

The Abbasid Dynasty, 750-1258

The Abbasids claimed to be descendants of Muhammad’s uncle, so at first they were more acceptable to Shi’ites than the Umayyads had been. The Abbasids also learned from the mawali rebellion that a change in policy toward non-Arabs was due. Their actions of opening the religion to all on an equal basis did a great deal toward establishing Islam as a universalizing religion that would eventually expand far beyond the Islamic domain of the 8th century. Gradually, others found their way into powerful positions in the caliphate, and gained wealth that had once only been allowed to Arabs. As a result, a cosmopolitan mix of cultures combined to create a dynamic, heterogeneous civilization. However, the Abbasids could not solve the intractable problem that the classical civilizations before them had faced: how to centrally govern a vast, multi-ethnic domain. Within a century from its founding, the Abbasid government began to lose control, first on the fringes, but eventually in lands closer to Baghdad. The After years of decay, Abbasids were finally defeated by the Mongols, but not before Islam came to serve as the cultural “glue” that held their lands together, just as Confucianism in China and Hinduism in India had provided cohesion as political power failed in the late classical age. With the exception of Spain, virtually all other areas conquered by the Muslims during the era of the caliphates have remained Muslim, even though their populations have been governed by a variety of political organizations.

Under the Abbasids the Muslim **shari’a** took shape, with religious scholars called the **ulama** interpreting the Qur’an and the hadith to create Islamic law codes. Because religion and law were intertwined, the decisions of the ulama impacted most areas of people’s lives. The Abbasid government in Baghdad operated under the **vizier**, a head of government directed by the caliph, and a state council. Each of the provinces was governed by an emir, who was responsible for collecting taxes and keeping the peace. The Muslim army traditionally had been headed by the caliph (originally by Muhammad), but under the Abbasids, the commanders gained not only military power, but independent politi-

cal clout as well. The army was international in composition, including slaves as soldiers, and was huge in numbers. The larger it grew, the more difficult it was for the caliph to control the commanders, further eroding his power. The caliph's authority was further undermined by the ulama, who exercised almost complete control of shari'a that defined acceptable religious, social, and political behavior of Muslims.



COMPARISONS: WANDERING HOLY MEN IN BUDDHISM, ISLAM, AND CHRISTIANITY

Wandering holy men, or mystics, have played significant roles in the development of all three universalizing religions: Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity. Despite their broad appeal, the three religions also have had adherents who believe in a direct, personal path to the true meaning of their faith. Buddhism's founder, Siddhartha Gautami, became a wandering holy man (or aesthetic) in order to reach enlightenment. Buddhist monks, particularly of the Theraveda branch, believe that a simple life devoted to meditation is the best path to nirvana. Christianity also has a place for those who wish to live monastic lives. During the Middle Ages in Europe, many religious orders, including the Dominicans and Franciscans, went from place to place doing the work of the church, devoting their lives to religious endeavors. The Sufis, a branch of Islam that grew quite rapidly during the Abbasid Dynasty, believed in a life devoted to seeking individual connections to divine truth. Some famous examples of Sufism were groups in Turkey called the Whirling Dervishes. In order to reach an ecstatic connection with God, they whirled as they danced to lift their minds from everyday consciousness. Sufis organized into religious associations that helped spread Islam far into Asia and Africa.

THE GOLDEN AGE OF ISLAM

Historians like to refer to “golden ages” in the lives of many civilizations. If you look at the characteristics of civilizations on pages 35 and 36 (reliable surpluses, specialized occupations, distinct social classes, large cities, complex governments, long distance trade, and organized writing systems), all of these would be present during a golden age, but the term usually implies more. During a golden age, a civilization is usually quite prosperous, and they also tend to

be innovative in arts, science, and literature. These characteristics are based on the principles of civilization. For example, surpluses and specialized occupations often lead to prosperity because economic activities are specialized and efficient with food supplies to support them. Innovations in arts, science, and literature require the time to focus on these endeavors, so prosperous societies with surpluses can generally afford to support scholars, artists, and technologists. During the Abbasid Dynasty, Islamic civilization experienced a “golden age” that stretched from about 800 to 1200 C.E.

Economic Activities and Social Distinctions

As with all early civilizations, the economy of Islamic domains was based on agriculture. As they conquered areas very different from their homeland, Arabs certainly encountered crops they had never seen before. As authority over their lands centralized, a well organized system of trade, exchange, and communication encouraged the sharing of new crops and farming techniques. For example, the western regions began to grow sugar cane, rice, spinach, and artichokes for the first time. The overall result was a significant increase in food supply and in turn a surplus of crops that could support the growth of cities. Cities such as Baghdad, Damascus, Jerusalem, Cairo, and Toledo had busy marketplaces where thousands of merchants and artisans sold their wares. The cities were also government and religious centers.

The Abbasid Dynasty at its height displayed imperial majesty, with caliphs living lavish life styles much more similar to a Persian “King of Kings” than to the earliest caliphs in Medina. The Abbasid age was one of great urban expansion with the magnificent city of Baghdad at its heart. The dynasty peaked at a time when world trade networks were reviving after the fall of the great classical empires, and Arabs controlled much of the trade. Their *dhow*s, or sailing vessels with lateen sails, carried the goods on the Indian Ocean routes, and Muslim merchants of the Abbasid Dynasty grew wealthy. The profits from trade were used to stimulate new businesses, and the cities were filled with people who benefitted from the thriving interconnections across the Eastern Hemisphere. In the center of most Muslim cities were elaborate mosques, public baths, government buildings, and religious schools. Craftsmen were an important part of urban life as well, with many catering to the tastes of the wealthy in furniture, carpets, glassware, jewelry, and tapestries. Some formed organizations for their particular craft meant to enforce production standards and promote wages and working conditions for their members.

Much of the unskilled work of the dynasty fell to slaves, with many working as domestic servants, but others did hard labor on rural estates and government projects. Some of the most destitute were the Zanj slaves, non-Muslim east



PERSPECTIVES: GENDER ROLES IN EARLY ISLAMIC SOCIETIES

It may surprise modern day westerners that women in early Islamic societies generally had more rights than women in the areas the Muslims conquered, such as the Byzantine and Sassanid Empires. The Qur'an and Muhammad's teachings stressed the moral and ethical responsibilities of marriage and urged men to respect women. Muhammad's first wife, Khadijah, was a business owner who was one of his most devout followers. Women went to battle with men as they fought to establish the new faith in the Arabian Peninsula. Muhammad's fourth wife (and widow) actively stood up for the rights of the Umayyads, and Ali's daughter, Zainab, fought on the other side. However, in a similar pattern to that in the classical civilizations, the more refined and urbane the caliphates became, the more the status of women suffered. Restrictions on the movements of upper-class women in particular were severe by the age of the Abbasids, eventually resulting in the development of the harem, or forbidden area where an elite male's wives and concubines lived in isolation from the rest of the world. Although most followed Muhammad's example of only having four wives, elite men collected as many concubines (unofficial wives) as they could afford. The harem was guarded by eunuchs (castrated males) who offered the master no competition for his women's affections.

Africans, who did the most onerous jobs, such as draining marshlands. From the mid-9th century they were an ever-present source of social unrest.

Literary, Artistic, and Scientific Accomplishments

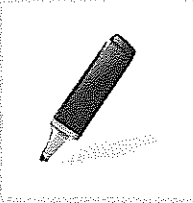
One unifying force within the Islamic caliphates was the widespread use of the language. It was promoted partly because by sacred belief the Qur'an could only be written in Arabic, so educated Muslims in every part of the caliphate had to be literate in Arabic. Arabs also borrowed an invention from China – paper – to share writing cheaply and easily, making the production of books possible. Probably their greatest literary art was poetry, with thousands of poems created during Islam's golden age. The poems were meant to be sung and recited aloud in Arabic. One famous poet was Jalal al-Din al-Rumi, whose mystic poetry gives us insight into the beliefs of Sufis. Arabic literature also reflects a love of storytelling, such as the compilation of folk tales into *The Thousand and One Nights*. Based on the stories told by Scheherazade, a clever young bride trying to save her own life, they tell us a great deal about elite

society during the Abbasid's golden age. The tales not only describe the elaborate lifestyles of the rich in Baghdad; they also exhibit a sense of humor and a fondness for exaggeration.

The caliphs also established urban universities called **madrakas** that actively preserved and translated the writings of the ancient Greeks and Indians. Muslims recognized the importance of scientific and philosophical works from these earlier civilizations, and became particularly intrigued with the works of Aristotle. After the fall of the Western Roman Empire, knowledge of Plato, Aristotle, Ptolemy, Hippocrates, and other Greek scholars had been lost, so the concerted effort by Islamic universities to gather them together saved their works to be passed on to later civilizations, including those that rose in Europe.

Muslim art is distinct from most others because of its intricate, geometrically based format. The Qur'an strictly forbade the lifelike representation of the human figure, based on the belief that only Allah could create human life. Particularly blasphemous was any attempt to reproduce the figures of Allah or Muhammad. Some Persian art depicted Muhammad, but always with a veil over his face to represent the belief that he was the only human to ever see the face of Allah (on the Night Journey, p.144). Stricter Arabic interpretations disapproved of such Persian art. As a result the motifs of their painting, ceramics, mosaics, and inlay work were based on garlands, plants and geometric figures such as triangles, diamonds, and parallelograms. Like the Chinese, the Arabs also excelled in calligraphy in several different styles, all equally beautiful. Public buildings were often elaborately decorated with brightly colored ceramic tiles, semiprecious stone, and gold and silver filigree, particularly palaces and mosques. In the larger cities, the courtyards of the mosques were surrounded by columns and arches and were eventually enclosed by great domes. A key feature of the mosque was the **minaret**, or prayer tower, where a specially trained muezzin would call the faithful to prayer five times a day.

Arabs also built on the mathematical knowledge of ancient Hindu scholars, who had invented the concept of zero and a number system based on 10. Their "Arabic numerals" are still the ones that we use today, and these numbers allowed the development of al-jabr, or algebra. Muslim contributions to the sciences tended to be more practical than those of the classical civilizations, especially the Greeks and Indians. Arabs made advances in optical science, pharmacology, and anatomy. Arabic and Persian writers and travelers also put together an extensive collection of geographical information, including maps of Islamic domains.



MARKER EVENT: THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARABIC NUMERALS

Despite the implication of the name, Arabic numerals were an invention first devised in classical India. During Abbasid times, Arabs saw their usefulness and spread knowledge of them throughout their realm. Even though it is difficult to come up with an exact date of invention, the development of arabic numerals represents a very important marker event in world history. The Indian method is a 10-based system, with separate columns for ones, tens, hundreds, and so forth, as well as a zero sign to indicate no units in particular columns. This system is a vast improvement on older numerical systems, such as Roman numerals, because it allows for calculations not possible before, particularly of large sums in the millions and billions.

The first numerals from 1 to 9 appear on copper plates as early as 595 C.E., and a sign for zero has been found on plates as early as the 8th century. Muslims during the Abbasid age built on the Indian system to develop algebra, and to calculate distances of far away objects in the heavens, including those that form the Milky Way. Today the system of Arabic numerals is the only truly global language, readily understood across many cultures.

THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE ABBASID CALIPHATE

Even while Islamic civilization was reaching the height of its golden age, the political power of the Abbasids was declining. As early as the mid-9th century, many parts of the vast caliphate were beginning to slip away. The caliphates were always weakened by the religious splits within their ranks, particularly those between Sunnis and Shi'ites. Shi'ites continued to deny the authority of the Umayyad caliphs and helped the Abbasids win power. Yet the Abbasids generally were no more tolerant of the Shi'ites than the Umayyads had been, and so over the years, hostility increased between Sunnis and Shi'ites. Another problem was the difficulty of holding together a highly diversified empire from one central location in Baghdad. When local administrators failed to obey orders, the caliph could not effectively respond, and when rebellions broke out, it was difficult to move armies across the great distances of the domain. Slave

.....revolts and peasant uprisings plagued the regime, and to make matters worse, many of the later Abbasid caliphs were incompetent.

Gradually, during the 800s, most areas in Africa and Arabia broke away and proclaimed their independence, leaving the Abbasids in control of only the Middle East. Increasingly the Abbasids depended on **Seljuk Turks**, a nomadic people originally from central Asia who lived primarily on the borders of the Abbasid lands. As highly skilled horsemen, they were hired as soldiers in the Abbasid armies, and by the mid-11th century, their leaders had more political power than the caliphs. In 1055 the caliph recognized the Seljuk leader Tughril Beg as **sultan** (“chieftain”), and soon afterwards, Tughril took over Baghdad and the caliph became a figurehead, a ruler in name only. Other Turkish groups invaded Anatolia and northern India, and soon Turkish groups were quarreling with one another, leaving themselves prey to an invasion by the Mongols, who seized the Baghdad throne in 1258, destroying the last of the great Islamic caliphates and replacing it with the Mongol Il-Khan Empire. Despite the political conquest, by the 13th century Islam was so well-entrenched in such a wide variety of lands that the Mongols could only destroy the political structure, but could not weaken the faith. Instead the Il-Khan leaders themselves converted to Islam, so that we can observe “the fall and rise” of Islam, undaunted by political and military defeat.

IDENTIFICATIONS AND CONCEPTS

Abu Bakr
 animism
 Bedouins
 Black Stone
 caliph, caliphate
 Five Pillars of Faith
 “golden age”
 hadith
 hajj
 harem
 hijrah
 jihad
 jinns
 Ka’ba
 madrasas
 minaret
 mosque
 Muhammad
 The Night Journey

People of the Book

Qur'an

Seal of the Prophets

Seljuk Turks

shari'a

Shi'ites, Sunni

Sufis

sultan

The Thousand and One Nights

ulama

Umayyad Dynasty

umma

vizier