

Reading Essentials and Study Guide



Islam and the Arab Empire, 600–1000

Lesson 2 The Arab Empire and the Caliphates

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

How can religion influence the development of an empire? How might religious beliefs affect society, culture, and politics?

Reading HELPDESK

Academic Vocabulary

complex having many intricate parts

Content Vocabulary

caliph a successor of Muhammad as spiritual and temporal leader of the Muslims

Jihad “struggle in the way of God”

caliphate the office of the caliph

Shia a Muslim group that accepts only the descendants of Muhammad’s son-in-law Ali as the true rulers of Islam

Sunni a Muslim group that accepts only the descendants of the Umayyads as the true rulers of Islam

vizier a high government official in Muslim countries

sultan “holder of power”; the military and political head of state under the Seljuk Turks and the Ottomans

TAKING NOTES: *Categorizing Information*

ACTIVITY As you read, use a table like the one below to identify the characteristics of the Umayyads, Abbasids, and Seljuk Turks.

Umayyads	Abbasids	Seljuk Turks

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Lesson 2 The Arab Empire and the Caliphates, *continued*

IT MATTERS BECAUSE

The leaders who followed Muhammad were known as caliphs. These rulers became the political and spiritual leaders of the Islamic community. As the empire grew, caliphs became more like kings or emperors. The strength and power of the Arab Empire grew.

Creation of an Arab Empire

Guiding Questions *Why was there tension over who should rule the empire after the death of Muhammad? How did Muhammad's successors help expand the Arab Empire after his death?*

Muhammad was accepted as both the political and religious leader of the Islamic community. Muhammad's death left his followers with a problem. He had never named a successor. He had several daughters, but he had no son. In the male-dominated society, the question became, who would now follow Muhammad as the leader of the community of the faithful?

Shortly after Muhammad's death, some of his closest followers chose Abū Bakr (uh·BOO BA·kuhr) to be their leader. Abū Bakr was a wealthy merchant and Muhammad's father-in-law. He had traveled with Muhammad on the journey to Madinah in 622. There Abū Bakr had been Muhammad's chief adviser. He also led the public prayers during Muhammad's final illness in Makkah. In 632 Abū Bakr was named **caliph** (KAHL·lif), the religious and political successor to Muhammad.

Under Abū Bakr's leadership, the Islamic movement grew. He suppressed, or put an end to, tribal political and religious uprisings. As a result, he united the Muslim world. Muhammad had overcome military efforts by the early Makkans to defeat his movement. Muhammad's successors expanded their territory.

One important duty in the Quran is for Muslims to wage **jihad** (jih · HAHD) or "striving in the way of God." It refers to a Muslim's duty to work for the triumph of Islam in the world, and within themselves (by avoiding sin and acting righteously). Jihad is a word that causes much disagreement among people today. This is because many Muslim terrorists use it to justify or explain their actions.

Jihad played a role in the decisions of early Muslim leaders to attack neighboring kingdoms and build the Arab empire. Unified under Abu Bakr, the Arabs turned the energy they had once directed toward each other against neighboring states. At Yarmuk in 636, the Arab army defeated the Byzantine army in a dust storm that let the Arabs take their enemy by surprise. Four years later, they took control of the Byzantine province of Syria in Southwest Asia. By 642, Egypt and other areas of northern Africa had been added to the new Arab Empire. To the east, the Arabs had conquered the entire Persian Empire by 650.

A series of brilliant generals led the Arabs. These leaders put together a large, dedicated army that traveled long distances, crossing mountains and harsh terrain. The courage of the Arab soldiers was made stronger by the belief that Muslim warriors were assured a place in paradise if they died in battle.

Early caliphs ruled empire from Madinah. After Abū Bakr died, problems arose over who should become the next caliph. There were no clear successors to Abū Bakr. The first two caliphs to rule after his death were assassinated, or murdered. In 656, Ali, Muhammad's son-in-law and one of the first converts to Islam, was chosen to be caliph. He ruled for five years, but then he too was assassinated.

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networks

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In the conquered territories, Muslim administrators were relatively tolerant, sometimes allowing local officials to continue to govern. Both Christians and Jews were allowed to practice their religions. Following the concept of dhimmitude, these peoples were free to practice their religions. However, they were also made to follow certain rules. This was to make them aware that they had been taken over by their conquerors. Those who chose not to convert were required to be loyal to Muslim rule and to pay special taxes.



Reading Progress Check

Making Generalizations What was Abū Bakr's chief success as caliph and to what did it contribute?

The Umayyads

Guiding Question *What internal struggles led to revolts against the Umayyads?*

In 661 General Mu'āwiyah (moo·AH·wee·uh) became caliph. He was the governor of Syria and one of Ali's chief rivals. Mu'āwiyah was known to use force only when it was absolutely necessary. He once said that he would not fight with a sword when just using a whip would work, and that he would not use a whip when just using words would work.

Mu'āwiyah moved quickly to make the **caliphate** hereditary in his own family. In this way, he established the Umayyad (oo·MY·uhd) dynasty. He then moved the capital of the Arab Empire from Madinah to Damascus, in Syria.

Umayyad Conquests

The Arabs carried out new attacks at the beginning of the eighth century. They attacked both the eastern and western ends of the Mediterranean world. Arab armies moved across North Africa. There they conquered and converted the Berbers, a pastoral people living along the Mediterranean coast.

Around 710, combined Berber and Arab forces crossed the Strait of Gibraltar into Europe. They occupied southern Spain. By 725, most of Spain had become a Muslim state. Its center was located at Córdoba. In 732, however, Arab forces were defeated at the Battle of Tours in Gaul (now France). Arab expansion in Europe had come to a halt.

In 717 another Muslim force launched an attack on Constantinople. It hoped to defeat the Byzantine Empire. The Byzantines survived, however. They destroyed the Muslim fleet. This created an uneasy frontier in southern Asia Minor between the Byzantine Empire and the Islamic world.

By 750, the Arab advance had finally come to an end. By this time, however, the Arabs had conquered the southern and eastern Mediterranean parts of the old Roman Empire. Arab power also extended to the east in Mesopotamia and Persia and northward into central Asia.

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The Umayyad dynasty at Damascus now ruled an enormous empire. Expansion had brought great wealth and new ethnic groups into the fold of Islam, as well as contact with other civilizations. As a result, the new Arab Empire would be influenced by Byzantine and Persian cultures.

A Split in Islam

The Umayyads succeeded at conquering much land, but internal struggles threatened the empire's stability. Many Muslims of non-Arab background, such as Persians and Byzantines, did not like the way local administrators favored the Arabs. Financial troubles further weakened the Umayyad dynasty. The empire was so large it was difficult to rule from a capital so far from the frontiers. These distant regions began to develop their own power, and they were hostile to the caliphate.

An especially important revolt took place in what is now Iraq. Early in the Umayyad period, Hussein (hoo-SAYN) led this revolt. He was the second son of Ali, who was the son-in-law of Muhammad. Hussein encouraged his followers to rise up against Umayyad rule in 680. He set off to do battle, but his soldiers defected, or abandoned him. He was left with an army of 72 warriors. They faced 10,000 Umayyad soldiers. Hussein's tiny force fought courageously, but they all died.

This struggle led to a split of Islam into two groups. The **Shia** (SHEE-AH) Muslims accept only the descendants of Ali as the true rulers of Islam. The **Sunni** (SU-NEE) did not all agree with Umayyad rule, but they accepted the Umayyads as caliphs. This political split led to the development of two branches of Muslims, and these branches continue to exist today. The Sunnis are a majority in the Muslim world. However, most of the people in Iraq and neighboring Iran are Shia Muslims.



Reading Progress Check

Describing How did the caliphate become a dynasty, and what factors threatened that dynasty?

The Abbasid Dynasty and the Seljuk Turks

Guiding Question *What changes did the Abbasid rulers bring to the world of Islam?*

The favoritism shown to Arabs under Umayyad rule increased the resentment of non-Arab Muslims. Corrupt behavior also helped to end the rule of the Umayyads. Abū al-'Abbās, a descendant of Muhammad's uncle, overthrew the Umayyad dynasty in 750. He established a new caliphate that was ruled by the Abbasid (uh-BA-suhd) dynasty. This dynasty lasted until 1258.

Abbasid Rule

In 762 the Abbasids built a new capital city at Baghdad on the Tigris River, far to the east of the Umayyad capital at Damascus. Baghdad was well located both for river traffic from the Persian Gulf and for the caravan routes from the Mediterranean to central Asia.

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The move eastward increased Persian influence and encouraged a new way of thinking about culture and society. Under the Umayyads, warriors were seen as ideal, or perfect, citizens. Under the Abbasids, judges, merchants, and government officials were the new heroes. The Abbasid rulers tried to reduce the differences between Arab and non-Arab Muslims. As a result, Islamic culture became more open to the influence of the civilizations they had conquered. All Muslims, Arab and non-Arab, could now hold both civil and military offices. Many Arabs began to intermarry with conquered peoples.

Hārūn al-Rashīd (ha•ROON ahl•rah•SHEED) was the best-known caliph of the time. His reign is often described as the golden age of the Abbasid caliphate. Hārūn al-Rashīd was known for his charity, and he also gave a great deal of support to artists and writers.

His reign was a period of growing prosperity. The Arabs had conquered many of the richest provinces of the Roman Empire, and they now controlled the eastern trade routes. Baghdad became the center of a large trade empire. It helped spread products and knowledge from the Islamic world to Asia, Africa, and Europe. For example, the knowledge of planting sugarcane and building windmills spread west from Persia along the trade routes.

Under the Abbasids, the caliph began to act more regally, or more like kings or emperors. The bureaucracy that assisted the caliph grew more **complex**. A ruling council advised the caliph, and it was headed by a **vizier**, or prime minister. During council meetings, the caliph sat behind a screen and listened to the council's discussions. The caliph then whispered his orders to the vizier.

Decline and Division

Despite its prosperity, the Abbasid Empire had problems. There was much fighting over who would become the next caliph. When Hārūn al-Rashīd died, his two sons fought for his position, and the fighting almost destroyed the city of Baghdad.

Vast wealth gave rise to financial corruption. Members of Hārūn al-Rashīd's clan were given large sums of money from the state treasury. His wife reportedly spent enormous amounts of money on a pilgrimage to Makkah.

In addition, there was a shortage, or lack, of qualified Arabs for key positions in the army and the civil service. This, too, added to the decline of the Abbasids. Caliphs began to recruit non-Arab officials, including Persians and Turks. These people were trained to serve the caliph, but they gradually took control of the army and the bureaucracy.

Eventually, rulers of the provinces began to break away from the Abbasid Empire and establish dynasties of their own. Spain established its own caliphate when a prince of the Umayyad dynasty fled there in 750. Morocco became independent. In 973 a new dynasty under the Fatimids was set up in Egypt, with its capital at Cairo. The Muslim Empire was now politically divided.

Seljuk Turks

The Fatimid dynasty in Egypt soon became the dynamic center of Islamic civilization. The Fatimids ruled from the heart of the Nile delta (a triangle-shaped area at the mouth of a river). As a result, the Fatimids played a major role in trade from the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea. They created a strong army by hiring nonnative soldiers. One such group was the Seljuk (SEHL•JOOK) Turks.

The Seljuk Turks were a nomadic people from central Asia. They had converted to Islam, and they had prospered as soldiers for the Abbasid caliphate. As the Abbasids grew weaker, the Seljuk Turks grew stronger. They moved gradually into Iran and Armenia. By the eleventh century, they had taken over the eastern provinces of the Abbasid Empire.

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A Turkish leader captured Baghdad in A.D. 1055, and he took command of the empire. His title was **sultan**—or “holder of power.” The Abbasid caliph was still the chief religious authority. However, after the capture of Baghdad, the Seljuk Turks held the real military and political power of the state.



Reading Progress Check

Analyzing How did the prosperous Abbasid dynasty become politically divided?
