

Reading Essentials and Study Guide



Islam and the Arab Empire, 600–1000

Lesson 3 Islamic Civilization

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

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

Reading HELPDESK

Academic Vocabulary

erode to diminish or destroy by degrees
commentary an explanatory treatise

Content Vocabulary

bazaar a covered market in Islamic cities
dowry a gift of money or property paid at the time of marriage, either by the bride’s parents to her husband or, in Islamic societies, by a husband to his wife
astrolabe an instrument used by sailors to determine their location by observing the positions of stars
arabesques geometric patterns repeated over and over to completely cover a surface with decoration
minaret the tower of a mosque from which the muezzin calls the faithful to prayer five times a day
muezzin the crier who calls the Muslim faithful to prayer from the minaret of a mosque

TAKING NOTES: *Categorizing Information*

ACTIVITY As you read, use a table like the one below to identify the characteristics of the upper class, slaves, and women in the Islamic world.

Upper Class	Slaves	Women

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**networks**

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IT MATTERS BECAUSE

An extensive trade network brought prosperity to the Islamic world. Muslim scholars made great advances in mathematics and the natural sciences. Islamic art and architecture created original geometric decorations using simple lines and shapes in repeated patterns.

Prosperity in the Islamic World

Guiding Question *What factors allowed both urban and rural areas to flourish after the eighth century within the Islamic world?*

There were internal struggles, but overall this was one of the most prosperous periods in the history of the Middle East. The Muslims carried on extensive trade, both by ship and by camel caravans. Traders traveled from Morocco in the far west to the countries beyond the Caspian Sea in the east. Gold and slaves came from the area south of the Sahara in Africa. Gold and ivory came from eastern Africa. Iron and metals came from Spain. Silk and porcelain came from China. Sandalwood and spices came from Southeast Asia and India. Within the Arab Empire, Egypt contributed grain. Iraq provided linens, dates, and precious stones, and western India supplied textiles, or cloth. The development of banking and the use of coins made it easier to exchange goods.

This growth in trade across the Muslim world had a major impact on agriculture. Crops such as sorghum from Africa, oranges from China, and rice from India were introduced into the Islamic world through trade. These crops came to be grown in the Muslim world during this period. Knowledge of farming methods such as crop rotation and innovations in water irrigation also spread to the Muslim world from other areas. Some scholars argue these new farming methods and the growing of new crops caused an “Arab Agricultural Revolution” during this period. This led to major changes in the economy, population growth, and urbanization.

Prosperous cities resulted from the flourishing trade and agricultural innovation. While the Abbasids were in power, Baghdad was the capital. It was known as the City of Peace. It was likely the greatest city in the empire and one of the greatest cities in the world. After the rise of the Fatimids in Egypt, the focus of trade moved to Cairo. Another great trading city was Damascus in modern-day Syria. Baghdad, Cairo, and Damascus were the centers of cultural, administrative, and economic activity for their regions.

Connections to TODAY

Bazaars in the Islamic World

Many bazaars still exist throughout the Islamic world today. Perhaps the most celebrated is İstanbul’s *Kapalıçarşı* (Turkish for “covered bazaar”), or Grand Bazaar, which was built 550 years ago by the Ottoman sultan Mehmed II after his conquest of Constantinople. As the centuries passed, the foundation of the modern Turkish banking system was established in the Grand Bazaar. Today this huge commercial complex has more than 3,600 businesses. It is a frequent first stop for foreign visitors to İstanbul. More than 500,000 people pass daily through the Grand Bazaar when it is open for business.

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The **bazaar**, or covered market, was an important part of every Muslim city or town. The bazaar was an important trading center, where goods from all over the known world were for sale. Customers could compare prices and try to find the best bargains. The bazaar had many craftspeople's shops, as well as services like laundries and bathhouses.

Islamic civilization was more urbanized than most other areas of the world at the time. Even so, most of the people still lived in the country. They made their living by farming or herding animals. During the early stages of the empire, independent peasants owned most farmland. Later, wealthy landowners began to amass large estates. Some lands were owned by the state or the court and were farmed by slave labor.



Reading Progress Check

Drawing Conclusions Why would conducting trade by both caravans and ships be lucrative for the Islamic world?

Islamic Society

Guiding Question *How were the principles of Islam reflected in the social structure of the Islamic world?*

To be a Muslim is not simply to worship Allah but also to live one's life according to Allah's teachings as revealed in the Quran. The teachings included ideas about social life.

Social Structure

According to Islamic teaching, all Muslim people are equal in the eyes of Allah. In reality, this teaching was not actually practiced in the Arab Empire. There was an upper class that was made up of ruling families, senior officials, nomadic elites, and the wealthiest merchants. Even ordinary Arab merchants enjoyed a high degree of respect that merchants in Europe, China, or India did not receive.

Non-Muslims were not considered equal to Muslims in the Islamic world. Slaves were one of the non-Muslim groups. As in the other early civilizations, slavery was widespread. Muslims could not be slaves in Islamic society. As a result, most enslaved people came from Africa or from non-Islamic populations elsewhere in Asia. This caused a serious impact on societies in these places. Many of the slaves had been captured in war.

Slaves often served in the army. This was especially true of captives from the Turks of central Asia. Many military slaves were eventually freed. Some even came to exercise considerable power.

Many slaves, especially women, were used as domestic, or household, servants. They were sometimes permitted to purchase their freedom. Islamic law made it clear that slaves should be treated fairly, and it was considered a good act to free them.

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The Role of Women

The Quran gave women spiritual and social equality with men. Believers, both men and women, were to be friends and protectors of one another. Women had the right to enjoy the results of their work and to own and inherit property. Islamic teachings did account for differences between men and women in the family and social order. Men and women had different duties and responsibilities. However, men were dominant in Muslim society. They had more power. This was true in most societies of the time.

Every woman had a male guardian. He could be a father, a brother, or another male relative. Parents or guardians arranged marriages for their children. The Quran allowed Muslim men to have more than one wife, but they could not have more than four wives. However, most men could only afford one wife because they were required to pay a **dowry** (a gift of money or property) to their brides. Women had the right to freely enter into marriage. They also had the right to divorce under some circumstances. Adultery was forbidden to both men and women.

After the spread of Islam, older pre-Islamic customs slowly **eroded**, or gradually took away, the rights enjoyed by early Muslim women. For example, some women were secluded, or kept from contact with others. They could not have social contacts with men outside their own families. It became the custom for women to cover almost all parts of their bodies when they went out in public, particularly in the cities. This custom is still practiced today in many Islamic societies. These customs came more from previous traditions than from the Quran. Despite the restrictions, the position of women in Islamic society was better than it had been in earlier times. Previously, women had often been treated like slaves.



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Contrasting In what ways were the lives of early Muslim men and women different?

Philosophy, Science, and History

Guiding Question *What were the major contributions of Islamic scholars?*

During the first few centuries following the spread of Islam, the ancient Greek philosophers had largely been forgotten in Christian Europe. Muslims, on the other hand, were translating works by Plato and Aristotle into Arabic. Europeans discovered the works of Aristotle and other Greek philosophers through the Muslim world. Arabic translations of the Greek were then translated into Latin in the twelfth century. This made them available to the West. Papermaking, which was introduced from China in the A.D. 700s, aided the spread of literature. By the year 800, paper factories had been established in Baghdad. Booksellers and libraries soon followed.

Islamic civilization contributed more intellectually to the West than just translations. Aristotle's works arrived in Europe in the second half of the twelfth century. They were accompanied by commentaries, or comments and notes of explanation, written by outstanding Muslim philosophers. One such philosopher

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was Ibn-Rushd (IH•buhn•RUSHT) who lived in Córdoba. He wrote a **commentary** on almost all of Aristotle’s surviving works. Islamic scholars also made contributions to mathematics and the natural sciences. These were passed on to the West. The Muslims adopted and passed on the numerical system of India, including the use of the zero. In Europe, it became known as the Arabic system. A ninth-century Arab mathematician developed the mathematical discipline of algebra. It is still taught in schools today.

Muslims also contributed to the field of astronomy. They set up an observatory at Baghdad to study the positions of the stars. They knew that Earth was round, and they named many stars. They also improved an instrument called the **astrolabe**. Sailors used the astrolabe to determine the location of their ships by the use of the positions of stars and other heavenly bodies. The astrolabe made it possible for Europeans to sail to the Americas.

Muslim scholars also developed medicine as a field of scientific study. Al-Razi was known as the best doctor of tenth-century Baghdad. He wrote many works to teach others about the medical knowledge of his day. Also well known was the philosopher and scientist Ibn Sīnā (IH•buhn SEE•nuh). He wrote a medical encyclopedia that, among other things, stressed the contagious nature of certain diseases. Ibn Sīnā showed how diseases could be spread by contaminated, or unclean, water supplies. He was one of many Arabic scholars whose work was translated into Latin and was spread westward. His works and the works of many other Muslim scholars contributed to the intellectual growth in Europe in the 1100s and 1200s.

Islamic scholars also took an interest in writing history. Ibn-Khaldūn (IH•buhn KAL•DOON) was the most prominent Muslim historian of the age. His most famous work is *Muqaddimah (Introduction to History)*. In it, he argued for a cyclical view of history. He believed civilizations go through regular cycles, or periods that happen again and again, of birth, growth, and decay. He tried to find a scientific basis for the political and social factors that determine the course of history.



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Identifying Which innovations and ideas of Muslim scholars could still be used today?

Literature, Art, and Architecture

Guiding Question *How did the arts convey the ideals of spiritual glory in Islam?*

Islam brought major changes to the culture of Southwest Asia, including to its literature. Muslims thought of the Quran as their greatest literary work. Still, pre-Islamic traditions continued to influence writers.

The Rubaiyat (ROO• bee•AHT) of Omar Khayyām (KY•YAHM) is one of the most familiar works of Middle Eastern literature. Omar Khayyām was a Persian poet, mathematician, and astronomer. He composed his poetry orally, and friends or scribes later recorded his simple, direct poetry.

Islamic art is a blend of Arab, Turkish, and Persian traditions. Islamic art shows the history of these three cultures. Most decorations on Islamic art used Arabic letters, images of natural plants, and

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abstract figures. These decorations were repeated over and over in geometric patterns called **arabesques**. Artists completely covered the surfaces of objects with these arabesques. In an early collection of Muhammad’s sayings called the Hadith, Muhammad warns against any attempt to imitate, or copy, God by creating pictures of living beings. As a result, no representations of people appear in Islamic religious art.

The best expression of Islamic architecture is found in the way Muslim mosques represent the spirit of Islam. The Great Mosque of Sāmarrā’ in present-day Iraq was the world’s largest mosque at the time it was built (848 to 852). It covered 10 acres (more than 40,000 square m). The most famous section of the Sāmarrā’ mosque is its **minaret**, or tower. The minaret is nearly 90 feet (27 m) tall and has an unusual outside spiral staircase. The **muezzin** (moo-EH-zuhn), or crier, calls the faithful to prayer five times a day from the minaret.

The Muslim religion unites spiritual and political power. As a result, palaces were built to reflect the glory of Islam. Islamic rulers built large brick palaces with protective walls, gates, and baths. They were designed around a central courtyard, with two-story arcades (a series of arches and the columns supporting them), and had massive gate towers. Islamic castles resembled fortresses. This architectural design began in the eighth century with the castles in Syria. The finest example of the Islamic palace is the Alhambra in Granada, Spain. It was built in the fourteenth century. Every inch of the castle’s surface is decorated in floral and abstract patterns. Much of the decoration is finely carved plasterwork that looks like lace. The Alhambra is an excellent expression of Islamic art.



Reading Progress Check

Assessing How was Islamic art influenced by Arab, Persian, and Turkish traditions?
