

Islam

AN AGE OF ACCELERATING CONNECTIONS (600 – 1450)



- Throughout most of its history, the people of the Arabian peninsula were subsistence farmers, lived in small fishing villages, or were nomadic traders between Africa, India, & the Middle East.



- Arab cities began to prosper from increased trade such as that with the Sasanid & Byzantine Empire. Desert caravan traders benefited from the use of camels.



- In the caravan city of Mecca (Saudi Arabia), Muhammad (570 – 632) was born.



- At the age of 40, Muhammad is said to have seen an angel who told him to preach to his people (many of whom were polytheistic) to worship in one god.

- The Arabs (along with Christians & Jews) at this time believed in unseen spirits and that individuals could have contact with the spirit world.
- Muhammad's revelation for people to submit to one god and accept him (Muhammad) as god's last messenger made one a Muslim (one who submits to the will of God).



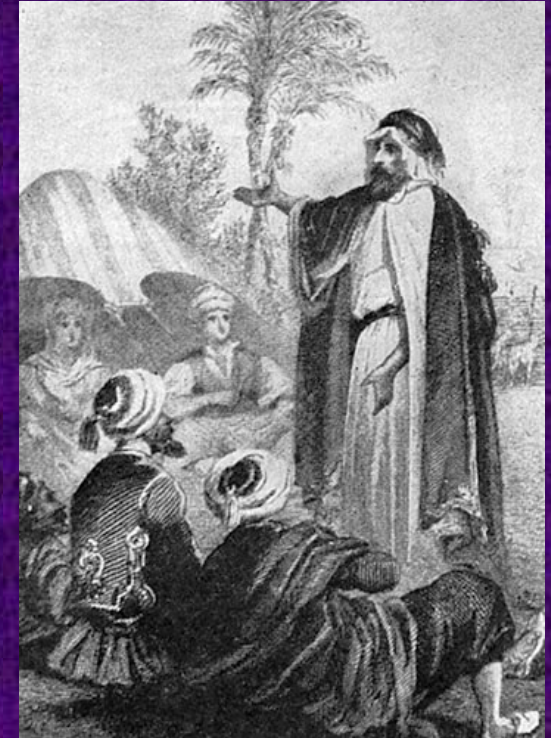
- There are 5 basic principles to Islam, *The 5 Pillars*:

- 1) A person must state the belief there is no god, but Allah
- 2) A person must pray to Allah 5 times a day
- 3) A person must give alms to the poor
- 4) A person must fast during the month of Ramadan
- 5) A person should make the holy pilgrimage to Mecca at least once

- Mecca's leaders feared that accepting Muhammad as the last great messenger of god would threaten their own political power.
- Ultimately, Muhammad was forced to flee with a small band of followers (This is known as the Hijrah).



- In Medina he was able to bring together Jews and Arabs and was accepted as a political and religious leader.
- A umma was formed (a community defined solely by acceptance of Islam and of Muhammad as the Messenger of God).
- The notion of a “umma” is important because for the first time in Arabia people are being bound not by family / tribe, but by something else.





- Meanwhile, Mecca was experiencing sporadic war and raids (which convinced many Meccans that “God” favored Muhammad).
- In 630, Muhammad and 10,000 armed followers marched to Mecca. Facing sure defeat the leaders of Mecca surrendered.

- Medina had become a bustling city-state, and Islam was now unifying the Arabian peninsula; however in 632 Muhammad died.
- It was decided by a group of Medinan leaders that his successor (caliph) be his father-in-law Abu Bakr.



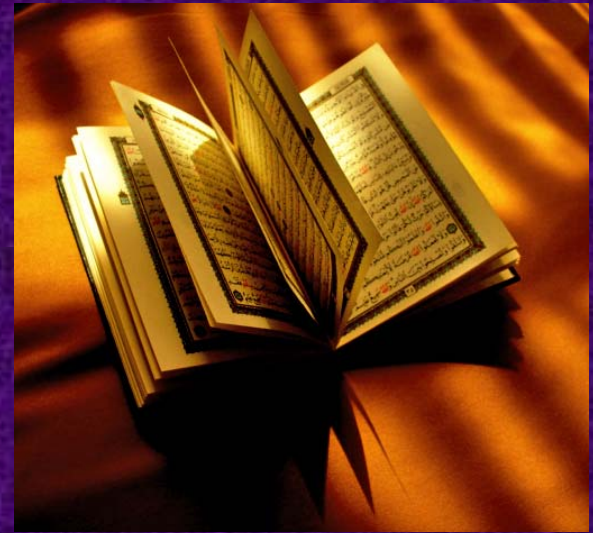
- Some began to abandon their allegiance to Islam's base in Medina. As a result, Muslim armies fought to confirm the authority of the "caliphate" in and around the peninsula.

IMPORTANT:
Islam will spread by both the "sword" and through the attractiveness of its principles.

As time goes on . . .



- Abu Bakr had Muhammad's revelations formed into a book, the Quran. (The final form of the book was done in 650, and was considered the word of Allah, not simply Muhammad's).
- At the foundation of Islamic civilization became The Shari'a, the law of Islam. Shari'a law provided a legal system and a set of customs for Muslims to follow within the Muslim World.

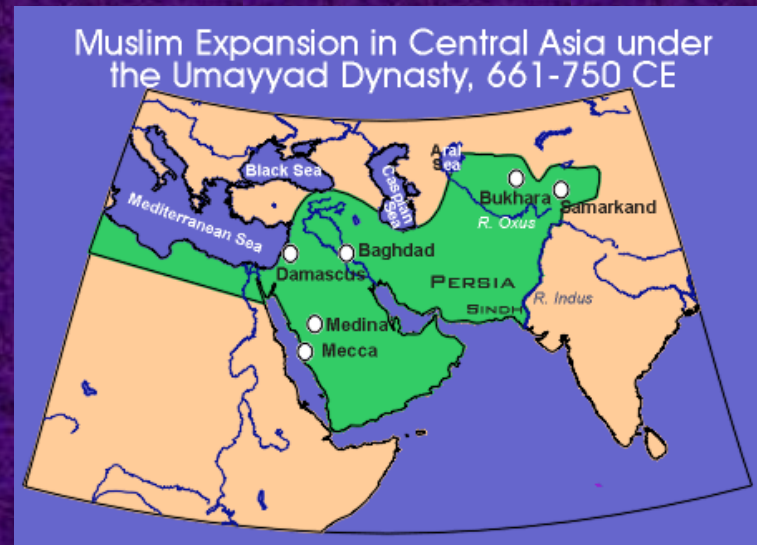


Shari'a law is a combination of the Quran and the "sunnah" the words and deeds of Muhammad and his companions. For many Muslims to live by Shari'a law is to live by God's will, thus it is utopian in nature. Some in the West view it as fundamentalism.

- As time passed, disagreements arose between Muslims on who should serve as succeeding caliphs.
- In 656, Ali was chosen to be the caliph. This caused a division within the Islamic community:
 - Shi'ites: religious leadership rightfully belonged to Ali and his descendants.
 - Sunnis: (people of the “sunnah”) felt that Islam’s leaders merely needed to follow Muhammad’s example and tradition.

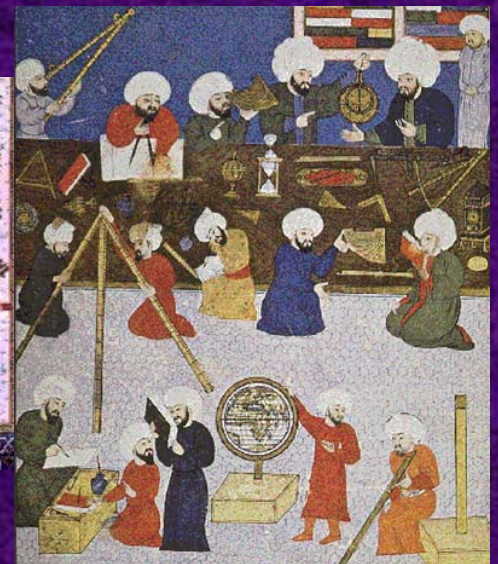
- Over the next several centuries various caliphates (think Islamic dynasties) served as the authorities of the religion.
- Umayyad Caliphate (661-750) (Sunni)
 - Centered in Syria. Pious Muslims did not like their secular ways, after they were overthrown the leaders relocated to Spain.

“Sasanid and Byzantine administrative practices continued in force. Only gradually did the caliphs replace non-Muslim secretaries and tax officials with Muslims and introduce Arabic as the language of government.”



- Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258) (Sunni)

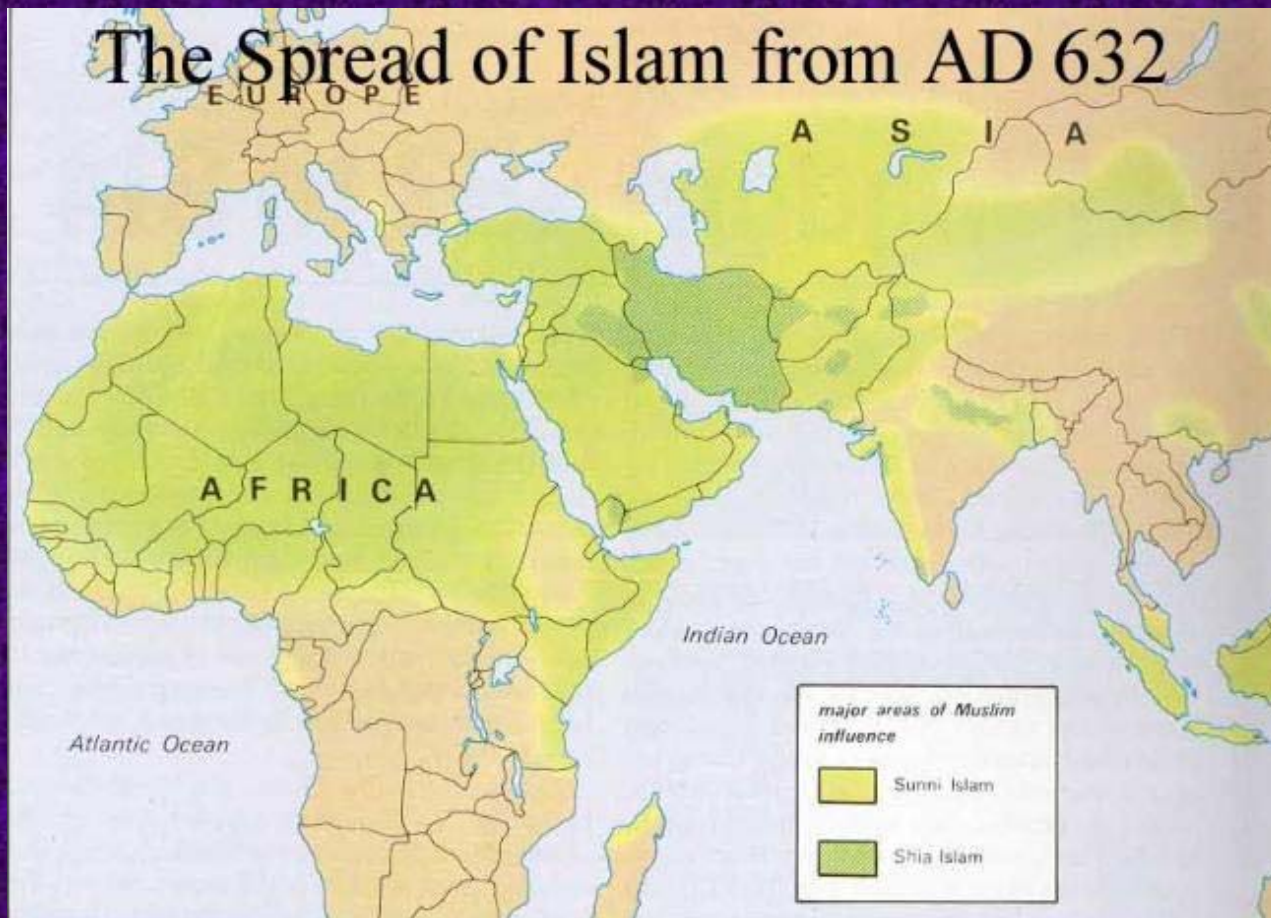
- The capital was moved from Syria to Baghdad, as a result the focus of the “Islamic World” shifted eastward and away from the Mediterranean.
- The Abbasids usher in a new golden age for the Middle East as poetry was written, advancements in astronomy and math took place, and the use of the Arabic language became more commonplace.



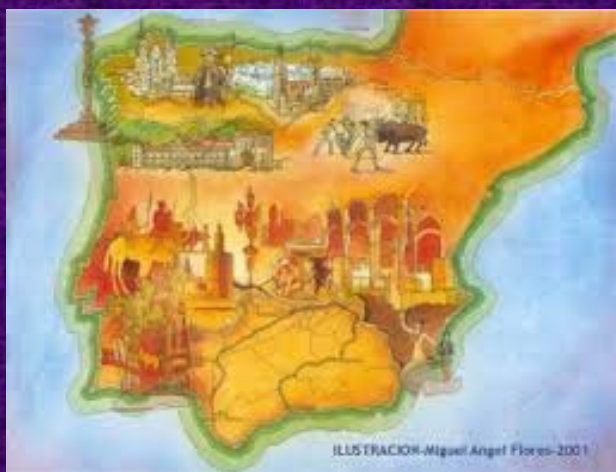
- As the caliphate grew in size, power had to be delegated to local commanders in distant provinces.
- Nonetheless, revolts on the frontier took place and were difficult to respond to. Before long a period of political fragmentation occupied the Muslim world.
- *For example, the Abbasids had a policy of taking Turkish slave boys to be used as soldiers, but eventually these “Mamlukes” realized they could just seize power for themselves and in 861 they killed a caliph and set up their own military dictatorship.*



- Nevertheless, Islam continued to spread throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and even parts of Europe.

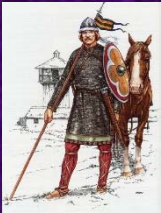


- In North Africa Berbers had revolted caliphate control and began to develop trade south through the Sahara.
- This benefited the Kingdom of Ghana in West Africa, which now prospered from a gold and salt trade.



- The remnants of the Umayyad had brought Islam to Spain. Muslims from Morocco (Moors) called the area Al-Andalus. Christians felt threatened.

– In the east, the Abbasid Caliphate came under attack by the Seljuk Turks (nomadic warriors from Central Asia).



- Under their rule Muslim cities began to decline. Tax revenues fell as did the upkeep of public works.
- Their arrival signals real danger for the ruling Abbasids.

– The Turks pushed all the way to the Byzantine Empire causing the Byzantines to see it as an existential threat.

I'm really scared.



- This “Seljuk Empire” (centered more on conquest than administration) was beset with internal quarrels when Christian Crusaders arrived to “take back” the Holy Land.
- Although fragmented for many years, Muslims responded to the European enemy by unifying (*This is similar to the Greek city-states coming to together to fight off the Persians*).



- Despite the setbacks brought on by the Turks, cities did flourish from Iraq to Persia.
- Trade of citrus, rice, sugarcane, cotton, and pack animals continued to increase along the Silk Roads.
- *Muslims clearly had it better than Christians in the West. In fact, during the Crusades Muslims were astonished with Europeans' primitive medical knowledge.*



Where would you rather have spent your early Middle Ages?



- The status of women in the Islamic world was mixed:

Good:

- Some became literate
- They could inherit property
- Right to initiate divorce and remarry
- Right to testify in court

Bad:

- Women were not allowed to leave the home unless veiled
- Almost forbidden to have public roles

- Slavery did exist within the Muslim lands, however slavery of other Muslims or “People of the Book” (Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians – all monotheistic faiths) was forbidden (unless taken as prisoners of war).
- Often if a slave converted to Islam, they were set free. Also the children of slave women and Muslim men were considered born free.

- The absence of a single central religious / political authority caused there to be variations in the way people practiced Islam *(There may be a Pope in the Catholic Church, but there isn't one for Islam).*

