REVISITING

The Classical Period, 600 B.C.E.–600 C.E.: Uniting Large Regions

PART II

CONTACTS AND THEIR LIMITS

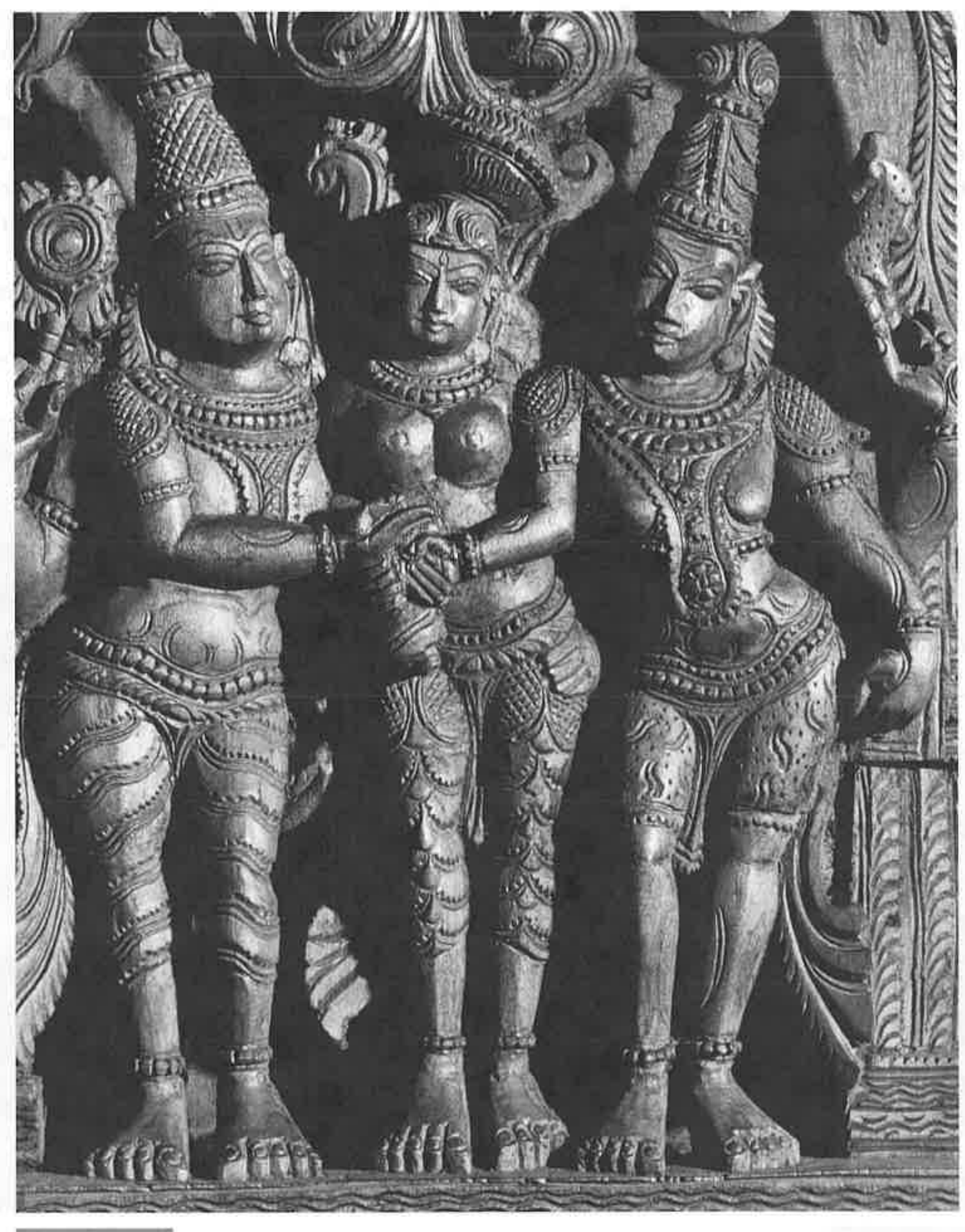
In contrast to the early river valley civilizations, which had no regular interregional exchange system (save possibly in the Indian Ocean), reasonably systematic contacts developed during the classical period linking China, India, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean. Some goods were shipped along sea routes in the Indian Ocean, reaching as far as Egypt via the Red Sea. Important overland routes—the routes historians have labeled collectively as the Silk Road—brought goods from western China through central Asia to the Middle East, where they could also be trans-shipped to the Mediterranean. Important systems connected south Indian merchants and some Hindu and Buddhist missionaries to various parts of southeast Asia. Ethiopians in northeastern Africa traded actively with both the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

A few decades ago, archeologists, excavating the ruins of Roman Pompeii, found an ivory carving of a woman made at Taxila in what is now northwestern Pakistan. This find confirmed the importance of trade links between Rome and south Asia. Taxila had been part of the Hellenistic orbit established by Alexander

The enormous crater of Mount Vesuvius in Italy that erupted in 70 B.C.E., burying the town of Pompeii. Pompeii's ruins, later excavated, would be part of the Roman heritage to the modern world.

the Great, and exchanges with the Mediterranean continued thereafter. Taxila was also a major center along the Silk Road, serving as a link not only to the Mediterranean but also to east and southeast Asia. New levels of long-distance commerce gave many elites an active taste for goods, like silk, produced in distant places.

Improvements in technology, particularly for the fuller use of draft animals, began to contribute to transportation, along with the important road systems constructed by leaders in Persia, China, and the Mediterranean. After about 200 B.C.E., for example, the Chinese improved the harnesses used for horses, developing straps that would not choke the horse. These horse collars facilitated trade within China, but also on the routes to central Asia; ultimately, but only centuries later, knowledge of the horse collar would also reach Europe. More widely important was the growing use of saddles, with major developments from about 500 B.C.E. onward. The first saddle knob seems to have been introduced in China around 200. Bareback riding continued, but increasingly saddles provided both greater comfort and maneuverability, in turn increasing the



Three Hindu goddesses appear in an intricate carving on a temple in India. Hindu art remains an active element in Indian culture.

utility of horses for travel and military purposes alike. Not only horses, but camels and donkeys played crucial roles in overland exchange.

Contacts had some wider effects, beyond trade itself. Knowledge of South Asian crops like cotton and rice spread to the Middle East, altering agricultural patterns there. We have seen that diseases also spread, particularly from South Asia, affecting population patterns in the Mediterranean and China as part of classical decline.

Besides the trade routes, two major episodes occurred that involved direct contact between different civilizations. Alexander the Great's conquests brought Greek culture into interaction with those of Persia and India, as well as with Egypt. We have seen that Indian artists imitated Greek styles in their own work. Greeks and Indians both gained new mathematical knowledge (though it is intriguing that the Greeks did not adopt Indian numbering which, later transmitted to Europe by the Arabs, proved much superior to Greek and Roman numbering systems). Indian missionaries to the Middle East, although failing to establish Buddhism, may have influenced ethical thought in the later Roman empire and, through this, Christianity.

Interest in Asian goods also motivated Rome, although with less wide-ranging results. Once they controlled Egypt, the Romans established regular Indian Ocean expeditions from the Red Sea. Small groups of Roman merchants, located in India in particular, demonstrated a desire for more direct access to Indian spices, particularly pepper, and Chinese silks also helped motivate frequent wars with empires in Persia, although the Romans often fared badly and were unable to break through to the sources of the goods they valued. China, for its part, established regular diplomatic relations with empires in Persia, largely to further direct trade. None of these interesting interactions, however, seems to have had significant results in terms of institutional or cultural exchange.

The second major contact, toward the end of the classical period, involved China's fascination with Indian Buddhism. Chinese knowledge of Buddhism initially spread as a result of Chinese merchant ventures into India; later, religious students were sent directly. This was the only major case of successful outside influence on Chinese culture until very recent times.

These developments were exceedingly important. They also had serious limits. Interregional trade was certainly vital to some of the trading hubs in central Asia, such as Samarkand, but it had relatively little economic importance to societies like China. It was nothing compared to the growth of production for China's internal trade. There is no uncontested evidence that anyone traveled all the way from Rome to China, and Roman knowledge of China (as well as Chinese knowledge of Rome) was extremely hazy. There was trade, but no interaction between Chinese and Roman culture or technology. The two cases of direct exchange between civilizations described above are fascinating but they also stand out as unusual. And the lasting effects of the Hellenistic experience in northwestern India are questionable. Even in art, after about two centuries, Mediterranean influence seems to have disappeared, and stylistic differences once again became apparent.

So, while contacts advanced significantly in this period, the primary framework for the major societies remained internal. The classical civilizations developed largely separately. The most important kinds of contacts occurred *within* the civilizations, not among them: the careful, sometimes tense mixing of the northern Chinese with the people in the newer territories in the south; the partial extension of Greek culture to the western Mediterranean and portions of the Middle East and north Africa; the spread of Hinduism and the caste system southward on the Indian subcontinent. These contacts were vital to the formation of larger civilizational areas, which was the fundamental feature of the classical period. Clearly, far more energy went into this process than into interregional linkages at this stage in world history.

CRITICAL THEMES

The classical period added important dimensions to a number of central themes in world history. A number of social systems gained greater organization and also cultural support, beginning with the Indian caste system but extending also to Mediterranean slavery and the Confucian ideas about social order in China. State building won new attention, particularly in the construction of empires, though here too regional differences require careful comparison. More intense economic activity, including pressures applied by political leaders, contributed to environmental changes, as deforestation expanded and certain regions were over-farmed. Ultimately, probably the most important single thematic category in the period involved the elaboration of wider cultural systems—the new religions and philosophies and their links to artistic production. The systems were important at the time and proved to have tremendous durability, in many cases outlasting the classical societies themselves.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. **What were the main differences between the classical period and the previous period of early civilizations? What were some of the causes of change?**
2. **What kinds of sources help us understand gender relationships during the classical period? What kinds of additional evidence would be desirable?**
3. **What were the main causes of the success of Confucianism as a cultural system in classical China?**
4. **What were the primary limitations on contacts among the main civilization areas in the classical period?**
5. **What were the main similarities and differences in patterns of decline, in the main civilizations of the classical period?**

PART III

The Postclassical Period, 600–1450: New Faith and New Commerce

Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, Turkey. The great cathedral symbolized the growing importance of religion.

PART OUTLINE

Chapter 7 The First Global Civilization: The Rise and Spread of Islam

Chapter 8 Abbasid Decline and the Spread of Islamic Civilization to South and Southeast Asia

Chapter 9 African Civilizations and the Spread of Islam

Chapter 10 Civilization in Eastern Europe: Byzantium and Orthodox Europe

Chapter 11 A New Civilization Emerges in Western Europe

Chapter 12 The Americas on the Eve of Invasion

Chapter 13 Reunification and Renaissance in Chinese Civilization: The Era of the Tang and Song Dynasties

Chapter 14 The Spread of Chinese Civilization: Japan, Korea, and Vietnam

Chapter 15 The Last Great Nomadic Challenges: From Chinggis Khan to Timur

Chapter 16 The World in 1450: Changing Balance of World Power

THE OVERVIEW: THE WORLD MAP CHANGES

The big changes in the period 600–1450 did not involve political boundaries. They involved the spread of the major world religions—Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam—across political and cultural borders and the development of new, more regular systems of trade that connected much of Asia, Africa, and Europe.

In some ways, an age characterized by faith and trade may seem contradictory. Indeed, many religious leaders looked down on merchants as likely to be seduced from a life of piety by the lure of wealth. But in fact the spread of trade often helped disseminate religion, and confidence in a divine order helped merchants to take risks.

The maps included here show the surge of Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam from their initial centers and the expansion of Afro-Eurasian trade around the same period. While Buddhism and Christianity started well before this period, they gained new vigor as the classical empires collapsed. Islam, which spread most rapidly, was entirely new. All three religions involved active missionary efforts. All periodically benefited from government sponsorship and sometimes from military pressure as well. For example, conquerors might impose higher taxes on those they conquered who did not convert to the conquerors' religion, or they might forcibly expel "nonbelievers" from the territory. Through a combination of persuasion and pressure, many millions of people changed their beliefs about the world around them and about the goals of life. The religious beliefs they adopted during the postclassical period established the dominant religious frameworks that still prevail in Asia, Europe, and parts of Africa today.

During the postclassical period, systematic international trade developed that went far beyond the carrying capacity of the old Silk Road. The Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea were the hubs of this trade, which brought northwestern Europe, west Africa, Japan, and other regions into the existing east–west trade routes between China and Egypt. Gradually and tentatively, these connections among societies (rather than separate developments within societies) began to shape world history in important ways.

Mystical conversation between Sufic sheikhs. Sufi mysticism became an important element in Islam's missionary efforts.

Big Concepts

Along with, and partly because of, religious change, three Big Concepts help organize the understanding of the postclassical period. First, transregional communication and exchange networks expanded with important new routes added. Missionary activity and new seafaring technologies both contributed to this. Second, forms of state organization diversified, with centralized empires now juxtaposed to a variety of looser political structures. Third, several societies—headed by China—increased their productive capacity, with social consequences extending to the emergence of new urban centers and the experimentation with different forms of labor.

Christian in 750
Spread of Christianity to 1450
Islamic in 750
Spread of Islam to 1450
Buddhism

Spread of Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam to c. 1450

The Silk Road
Roman Trade Routes
African Trade Routes
The Vikings
Indian Ocean Trade Routes

Main Routes of Afro-Eurasian Trade, c. 1250

TRIGGERS FOR CHANGE

As its name indicates, the postclassical period followed the decline of the great classical empires. As areas that had previously been under the control of these empires experienced economic decline and increasing disorder, people turned toward religious faith for security, reassurance, and guidance.

A second effect of the decline of the classical empires was the collapse of established boundaries, which caused ambitious people to turn their attention to new areas. The fall of the Roman Empire, for example, opened up new opportunities in the eastern Mediterranean, most notably for the Arabs. When the Eastern Roman Empire (the Byzantine Empire) could not regain lost territories in the Mediterranean, it turned its attention to opportunities in Russia and eastern Europe. These reorientations encouraged missionary activity and trade alike.

Expanding trade encouraged the development of better ships and new navigational devices. This was another trigger for change as the postclassical period moved along. The Chinese invented the compass, and from the Middle East came better ship designs. Maps also improved as a result of wider trade. They in turn encouraged further travel. The same held true for new banking and commercial practices: Long-distance credit arrangements, for example, facilitated international exchange.

THE BIG CHANGES

Religion and commerce were the engines of change in the postclassical period. Changes in their own right, they were the causes of many other changes. Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam were the religions that showed the greatest capacity to spread beyond the cultures in which they arose. Their spread created larger groups of people with broadly shared beliefs and religious institutions than ever before. This generated new opportunities for mutual intolerance—many Christians and Muslims, particularly, developed disdain for each other—but also examples of constructive tolerance. Under Islamic rule, Iberia or what is present day Spain and Portugal, became a center of creative interaction among Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Religion also created new loyalties that could compete with other values, including political values, and political issues on the whole received less attention during this period than in the classical era.

While the spread of otherworldly religion generally was a major theme, it was obvious that during these centuries Islam developed a particular dynamism that affected more different cultures and peoples than the other religions. All major societies in Asia, Europe, and Africa reacted to the spread of missionary religions in this period, and all reacted to some extent to the power of Islam. Other aspects of culture, headed by art and architecture but often including philosophy, were reshaped by religious values.

Religion, however, meant different things to different people, even within the same faith. The number of devoted religious communities and leaders increased, for example, with monastic movements in Buddhism and Christianity. Economic contributions to religious institutions sometimes outstripped tax payments to governments. But many people combined religion with other interests, including commercial life. And most peoples combined new religions with older values and styles.

Key comparisons, obviously, follow from the spread of world religions and the changing religious map. What were the main similarities and differences among the missionary religions? How did each major society in Africa, Asia, and Europe react to new religious opportunities?

500 C.E.	600 C.E.	700 C.E.	800 C.E.	900 C.E.
527–565 Justinian, Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Emperor **570–632** Muhammad **589–618** Sui dynasty (China)	**610–613** Origins of Islam **618–907** Tang dynasty (China) **634–750** Arab Expansion in Middle East; spread of Islam in North Africa **661–750** Ummayad Caliphate **668** Korea becomes independent from China	**711** First Islamic incursions into India **718** Byzantines defeat Arab attack on Constantinople **750** Abbasid caliphate founded **777** Independent Islamic kingdoms begin in North Africa and Iberia	**800–814** Charlemagne's Empire in western Europe **c. 855** Russian kingdom around Kiev **864** Cyril and Methodius missionaries in eastern Europe **878** Last Japanese embassy to China	**960–1127** Song dynasty (China) **968** Tula established by Toltecs (Mesoamerica) **980–1015** Christian Conversion of Vladimir I of Russia

THE TRANSREGIONAL NETWORK

The development of regular trade created a series of interlocking trade routes that joined key parts of Asia, Africa, and Europe. These built on connections developed in the classical period, but they were more elaborate. The Arabs opened the period with new activities in the Indian Ocean, reaching from the Middle East to south and southeast Asia and to China; fairly soon, clusters of Arab traders located even in Chinese port cities. The Byzantine Empire also linked into this trade. As a result, goods like silks, porcelains, and wine traded among elite customers throughout these core regions.

But new routes linked additional regions into the network. Sub-Saharan West Africa traded overland to North Africa, and thence to the Middle East, thanks in part to improvements in the use of camels. Another route, on Africa's Indian Ocean coast, relied on regular shipping from present-day Tanzania north to the Middle East. Overland traders, using rivers in part, worked from Scandinavia down to Constantinople and the Arab centers, a third north-south route. A bit later, merchants used coastal shipping or overland and river trade to move from northwestern Europe into the Mediterranean and contacts with Arab commerce. Japan, finally, began a regular exchange with Korea and China. On the whole, the more distant regions provided less-processed goods in world trade, including gold, exotic animals, forest products, and spices.

Trade facilitated other kinds of exchanges—including, of course, missionary religions. It brought knowledge of new technologies. A number of Chinese inventions, first paper (when Islamic troops captured some papermakers in western China), then printing and explosives spread to the Middle East and on to Europe. Early in the postclassical period, this exchange was very slow (although faster than in previous centuries), but it became more rapid as time went on. At the end of the postclassical period, key Chinese inventions like printing and explosives moved westward more swiftly.

Ideas spread as well. Thanks to trade, Indian mathematics, including the numbering system, spread to the Middle East. Then Arab mathematics, blending earlier Greek and Indian achievements with Arab innovations, reached Western Europe (where people thought Arabs had invented the numbering system). Food exchange was another key development, sometimes helping to create a hint of consumer culture dependent on transregional exchange. A taste for tea developed widely in Asia. Granulated sugar, developed earlier in India and easily manufactured and transported, had already reached Persia. Arabs learned about it during their initial conquests, and spread awareness to places like North Africa and Spain. Europeans encountered it in turn—with the first English-language mention of sugar dating from 1099. The spread of disease accelerated as well. In the 14th century a new epidemic of bubonic plague—the "Black Death"—moved from China through the Middle East to Europe, killing up to a third of the population in many areas.

The interregional trade of the postclassical era was not what we think of as a global economy today. Fewer societies were involved, and the volume and range of trade were far lower. However, despite downsides like disease, the wide exchanges of the postclassical era had major effects, including new opportunities for imitation. Societies newer to interregional trade quickly realized that they could use their new contacts to copy more advanced forms, not only in technology but also in culture. The result was a major, often quite explicit, effort at borrowing that added up to another innovation in the period as a whole.

Wider patterns of trade facilitated a new breed of long-distance travelers, particularly by the final centuries of the postclassical period. These included merchants and missionaries who went from one part of Asia to another, or through the Indian Ocean basin, or into Africa or eastern Europe from centers elsewhere.

1000 C.E.	1100 C.E.	1200 C.E.	1300 C.E.	1400 C.E.
1000 Ghana Empire at its height (West Africa) **1054** Schism between Eastern and Western Christianity **1055** Seljuk Turks control Abbasid caliphate **1066** Norman conquest of England; rise of feudal monarchy in western Europe **1096–1099** First Christian Crusade to Palestine	**c. 1100** Invention of explosive powder (China) **1150** Disintegration of Toltec Empire **1150–1350** Spread of Gothic style; scholasticism in western Europe **1185–1333** Kamakura Shogunate (Japan)	**1200** Rise of empire of Mali (West Africa) **1206** Delhi sultanate in India **1231–1392** Mongols rule Korea **1236** Capture of Baghdad by Mongols; end of Abbasid caliphate **1260** Death of Sundiata **1265** First English parliament **1279–1368** Mongol Empire in China **1290s** Islam begins to spread to southeast Asia	**1320s** Europeans first use cannons in war **1320–1340** Bubonic plague breaks out in Gobi desert and spreads to other parts of Asia and west to the Mediterranean and Europe. **1325** Rise of Aztec Empire (Mesoamerica) **1338–1453** Hundred Years' War in Europe **1350** Rise of Incas (Andes) **1392–1910** Yi dynasty (Korea)	**1400** End of Polynesian expeditions **1405–1433** Chinese trading expeditions **1439** Portugal captures Azores Islands **1453** Turks capture Constantinople; end of Byzantine Empire **1471–1493** Peak of Inca Empire

Travel reflected new contacts, with motives ranging from religious pilgrimage to simple delight in adventure, but travelers' accounts also helped motivate still further ventures. Extensive knowledge of Arabic was a key facilitator of contacts, serving as something of a first-world language. At an extreme, contacts could even lead to broader visions of a better world: a Chinese observer in the 14th century proclaimed (with a great deal of exaggeration), "civilization had spread everywhere, and no more barriers existed. . . . Brotherhood among peoples has certainly reached a new plane."

We live today in a period of rapidly intensifying contacts among all the world's major societies, and the process is increasingly referred to as globalization. Globalization has many new features, starting with dramatic communications technologies like the Internet. We increasingly realize, however, that contemporary globalization was prepared by previous periods in which interactions among major regions expanded. The postclassical period marked a major separation between earlier eras, in which contacts among different regions were slow or occasional, into a situation in which trade, travel and exchange created significant new, often routinized, influences on the ways individual societies developed. Defining the relationship between the systems of interaction in the postclassical period and later patterns provides a key way to map the process of change in world history.

The transcontinental network itself compelled many societies in Afro-Eurasia to decide on how to organize their participation in trade and exchange, and how to take advantage of the opportunities involved. No society responded in exactly the same way—comparing responses is an obvious assignment in analyzing the postclassical period—and some societies changed their responses over time. The spread of world religions, which created huge new areas of shared faith, but also new divisions among the religions themselves, contributed to but also complicated the evolution of the transcontinental network.

CONTINUITY AND LIMITATIONS

Change, including the formation of the transcontinental network, inevitably affected different societies to different degrees. Continuities combined with change. Even though the classical empires had collapsed, the successes of classical civilization encouraged many people to maintain or retrieve classical forms. China eagerly revived the structures of its classical age, including the empire, the bureaucracy, and Confucianism. It was touched by Islam and Buddhism, but ultimately it limited the influence of outside religions. China was not a changeless society—its growing participation in interregional trade proved its capacity to take advantage of new opportunities—but continuity remained extremely important.

The Middle East underwent great change as a result of the rise of Islam, but it also maintained continuities. Hellenistic science interacted with Islam, leading to important philosophical discussions of the relationship between science and faith. Earlier practices, such as the veiling of women in the cities, were revived. Although Islam opposed the enslavement of fellow Muslims, slavery continued to be a major component of social and labor systems over much of Afro-Eurasia, another sign of the hold of earlier traditions in the region.

Continuities also showed in the blending of traditional forms with the missionary religions. Christian architecture long used Greco-Roman styles. Buddhism adapted to Chinese values, for example, by placing more emphasis on the family loyalties of women. And there were sweeping innovations in social structures or even political forms during the postclassical centuries. The expansion of a merchant class affected social structure, but landlords remained dominant in most societies and peasants made up the bulk of the population. In key areas slavery or (in India) the caste system also maintained or revived older social institutions. Large political units developed in a few places, but outside of China and the Byzantine Empire, polities were mainly loosely organized.

Finally, major areas were still outside the system shaped by world religions and interregional trade. Most notably, the Americas and Pacific Oceania, although scenes of significant developments, operated on separate dynamics and had few if any contacts with the rest of the world.

IMPACT ON DAILY LIFE: WOMEN

The postclassical period saw an intriguing tension that affected conditions for women in many parts of Afro-Eurasia. On the one hand, the major religions all insisted that women were spiritually equal to men—that they had souls or shared in the divine essence. This was a huge innovation. And religious change was not a matter of ideals alone. Buddhist leaders in Japan argued for women's importance. Islam established new rights for women, including property ownership. Buddhism and Christianity both established religious communities for women, giving them not only new forms of expression but also new leadership roles. As these religions spread, many women gained new positions and modes of expression through religious life. On the other hand, the condition of women also deteriorated during this period. Many scholars have argued that growing trade and urban prosperity reduced women's role in political and economic life and created conditions in which upper-class women were treated as ornaments. So, although religion provided new outlets for women, the spiritual focus might also distract them from other issues such as newer gender inequalities.

Other changes were less favorable to women. Footbinding—the clearest attempt to make women more purely ornamental—spread in China. In India the practice of sati, in which some widows threw themselves on their husbands' funeral pyres to demonstrate their grief, spread somewhat, mainly within the highest castes. As Islamic society matured in the Middle East, women

were increasingly secluded and excluded from active roles in public life. But in other Islamic societies, especially in Africa and southeast Asia, this was less true. At the same time, most historians conclude that the condition of women in western Europe had deteriorated by the later postclassical period, as judged, for example, by their greater exclusion from most skilled urban crafts. Thus, the postclassical period was an important one in women's history. New religions were important to many women, but new customs also limited opportunities for women to a greater degree than in the classical era. In much of the world, at least the vestiges of these limitations survive to the present day.

TRENDS AND SOCIETIES IN THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD

Chapters 7 and 8 examine the surge of Islam, first in the Middle East and then in other parts of Asia. Chapter 9 describes the expansion of trade and civilization in sub-Saharan Africa, which had various facets, but the link to Islam and the Islamic trading system was crucial. Two dynamics developed in Europe; each had contacts (both creative and hostile) with Islam and certainly with interregional trade. In eastern Europe, as detailed in Chapter 10, Byzantine culture took root, while a newer society emerged in western Europe, as described in Chapter 11. Chapter 12 describes the major cultures that developed in the Americas and the contacts among them. Chapters 13 and 14 address developments in China and the expansion of Chinese influence in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam—key parts of the network of interregional trade.

The last two centuries of the postclassical period, as Arab power declined, saw important new developments. Chapter 15 describes the Mongol conquests in the 13th and 14th centuries that, for a time, revolutionized the political map of Asia and parts of Europe, accelerating and redefining interregional trade and other exchanges. The decline of the Mongols, and the end of a brief Chinese experiment in leading world trade, left the world poised for further innovation. Chapter 16 describes a transitional moment and the complex factors that would alter world balance yet again. ■

7

The First Global Civilization: The Rise and Spread of Islam

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

7.1 What were the major ways in which the city of Mecca interacted with the bedouin tribes that lived in the desert areas around it? p. 158

7.2 Which aspects of Muhammad's religious message do you think accounted for its powerful appeal to both urban dwellers and nomadic peoples in Arabia and beyond? p. 163

7.3 What were the key factors that made possible the rapid Arab conquests in the Middle East, Central Asia, and North Africa? p. 166

7.4 In what ways was the Islamic religion a faith that elevated the status and opportunities of women, and what were the constraints on this process? p. 174

In any ranking of the greatest survivors in world history, 'Abd al-Rahman I would have to be near or at the top of the list. The grandson of the last distinguished caliph (leader of the Muslim faithful) of the Umayyad dynasty, he had barely survived the vengeful slaughter of the many male descendants of that first house of Muslim rulers by the warriors of the 'Abbasid coalition that had seized power in 749. After narrowly escaping capture and beheading on his estate on the upper Euphrates River, 'Abd al-Rahman, dodging 'Abbasid pursuers and bounty hunters alike, fled through Syria and Palestine and across north Africa. After a half decade as fugitive, he

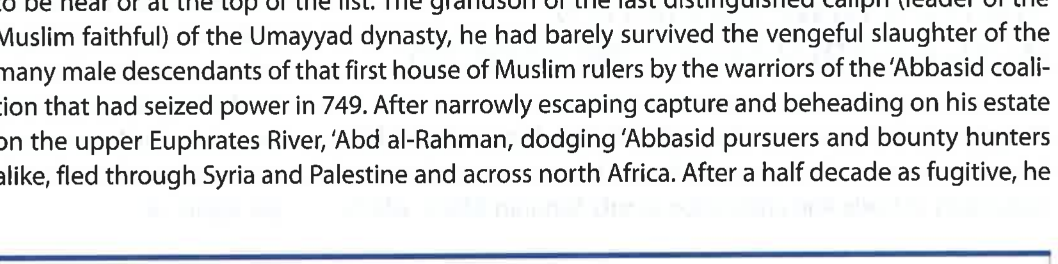

FIGURE 7.1 The graceful "horseshoe" arches of the Great Mosque at Córdoba in southern Spain provide a striking example of the sophistication and beauty of the arts and architecture produced by the fusion of Muslim, Jewish, and Christian cultural traditions in Islamic Iberia from the 8th to the 15th centuries.

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finally found uneasy sanctuary in Morocco at the western end of the lands to which Islam had spread to that point in time. In 755, the 24-year-old crossed the narrow Straits of Gibraltar that separated north Africa from the Iberian peninsula. Rallying to his cause several hundred Syrians, whose homelands had been the mainstay of the vanquished Umayyad dynasty and who had joined in earlier Arab-Berber campaigns to conquer the peninsula, 'Abd al-Rahman began his quest to become master of Iberia.

Despite continuing resistance by rivals and rebels from within and invasions plotted by Abbasid rulers in distant Baghdad, 'Abd al-Rahman steadily consolidated his control over Iberia. His early victories, particularly the capture of Córdoba in 756, secured his position as the paramount lord on the peninsula within years of his arrival. In the following decades as the capital of a flourishing Muslim kingdom, Córdoba grew rapidly into one of the most cosmopolitan and celebrated cities in the Mediterranean world. Córdoba boasted well-paved and well-lit streets, houses with running water, one of the world's finest universities, and a library with over 400,000 volumes at a time when the largest collections in Christian Europe contained a few thousand at best. But Córdoba's crowning glory was its great mosque. It was famed for its hundreds of splendid marble columns topped by ornate horseshoe arches and its elaborately decorated vaulted ceilings, shown in Figure 7.1. But even more remarkable than its distinctive architecture and decoration were the ways in which the mosque encapsulated the exceptional synergy generated by cooperation among and the blending of the diverse peoples and cultures that came together in Islamic Spain.

Like the development of Muslim civilization more generally, the construction of the great mosque of Córdoba owed much to earlier and even contemporary rival civilizations. It was built on the ruins of a Christian church, and many of the pillars that supported the signature horseshoe arches were taken from Roman ruins. And although the influence of Syrian-style Islamic architecture is apparent, the mosque's bell tower and thick walls decorated with geometric stone carvings shared key features with the Romanesque churches then found throughout Latin Christendom. Much of the mosque's stonework, and especially its intricate mosaics, were crafted by Christian Orthodox artisans from Constantinople, and its architects, laborers, and overseers were drawn from Arab and Berber Muslim migrants as well as the majority Christian population of Iberia.

The cross-cultural influences and interethnic and religious cooperation that played such vital roles in the construction of the grand mosque of Córdoba were also prominent features of Muslim Iberian society as a whole. Under the Muslims the peninsula became a key locus for the transmission of ideas, technology, and material culture between the Middle East, north Africa, and Europe. Arab and Berber migrants brought paper (originally invented, as we have seen, in China) and refined steel working to al-Andalus (the Arab name for Iberia), and their descendants carried leather working skills back to Morocco and the broader Muslim world. Muslim migrants to Iberia also introduced sophisticated irrigation systems and a wide variety of staple foods and plants, including oranges, sugar cane, and cotton.

Jews and Christians, as "people of the book," were allowed in Iberia as in the rest of the Muslim world to worship openly, to regulate their everyday lives according to their own laws, and to collaborate with Muslims in trade, scholarship, and the arts. Arab and Jewish scholars in Córdoba, Seville, and other urban centers, for example, were renowned throughout the Mediterranean for their translations of classic Greek texts. By the tenth and eleventh centuries, their collaboration had become pivotal for the recovery in Latin Christendom of the writings of the great Greek

600 C.E.	620 C.E.	640 C.E.	660 C.E.	680 C.E.
c. 570 Birth of the prophet Muhammad **597–626** Wars between the Byzantine and Sasanian (Persian) empires **610** Muhammad's first revelations **613** Muhammad begins to preach the new faith	**622** Muhammad's flight (hijra) from Mecca to Medina **624–627** Wars between the followers of Muhammad and the Quraysh of Mecca **628** Muslim–Meccan Truce **630** Muhammad enters Mecca in triumph **632** Death of Muhammad **632–634** Rule of Caliph Abu Bakr **633–634** Ridda Wars in Arabia **634–643** Early Muslim conquests in the Byzantine Empire **634–644** Rule of Caliph Umar **637** Arab invasion and destruction of Sasanian Empire	**644–656** Rule of Caliph Uthman **656–661** Rule of Caliph Ali; first civil war	**661–680** Mu'awiya **661–750** Umayyad caliphate	**680** Death of Ali's son Husayn at Karbala **680–692** Second civil war **744–750** Third civil war; Abbasid revolt **750** Abbasid caliphate begins

philosopher and scientist Aristotle in such critical areas as astronomy, mathematics, geography, and meteorology. Muslim Spain was a key source of the tradition of wandering minstrels or troubadours, who carried music, fables, and the notion of romantic love northward into Christian Europe. It was also a land where upper-class, educated Muslim, Christian, and Jewish women flourished as poets, musicians, scribes, and university students. ■

In the chapter that follows we shall see that in many ways Muslim Iberia was a microcosm—albeit a very forward-looking one—of much of the Islamic world in its early centuries. Although spread initially mainly by nomadic camel-herding peoples of Arabia, Islam was from its inception a religion of the towns and trade. Muhammad himself was a successful caravan leader before he began to receive the divine revelations that transformed him into the founder of one of the great world religions. As in Iberia, conversion to Islam as it spread from Arabia was generally peaceful and voluntary, and in the early decades the faithful were, if anything, reluctant to recruit new believers. Even after the new faith came to undergird vast and expansive empires, such as those fashioned by the Umayyads and Abbasids, adherents of other religions based on divinely inspired scriptures—from the Jews and Christians to the Hindus—prayed and practiced their rituals openly, and their communities very often flourished economically. As was the case in Iberia, many of the most brilliant contributions of early Islamic civilization came from the openness of Arabs to borrowing from the ancient civilizations that surrounded the Arab heartlands. The Arabs' absorption and then innovations on the sciences, arts, and technologies of Greece, Rome, Byzantium, Persia, Egypt, India, and China were essential to the rise of the first genuinely global civilization in human history.

DESERT AND TOWN: THE HARSH ENVIRONMENT OF THE PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIAN WORLD

Before the rise of Islam, Arabia was a peripheral desert wasteland whose once great trading cities had fallen on hard times. The sparse population of the Arabian peninsula was divided into rival tribes and clans that worshiped local gods.

7.1 What were the major ways in which the city of Mecca interacted with the bedouin tribes that lived in the desert areas around it?

The Arabian Peninsula (Map 7.1) was a very unlikely birthplace for the first global civilization. Much of the area is covered by some of the most inhospitable desert in the world. An early traveler wrote of the region,

MAP **7.1** **Arabia and Surrounding Areas Before and During the Time of Muhammad** Although much of Arabia was separated by vast deserts from surrounding classical civilizations, as the map shows it maintained contact by sea in the west and south and through camel caravans into Palestine and Syria.

> All about us is an iron wilderness; a bare and black shining beach of heated volcanic stones . . . a vast bed and banks of rusty and basaltic bluish rocks . . . stubborn as heavy matter, as iron and sounding like bell metal; lying out eternally under the sand-driving desert wind.

In the scrub zones on the edges of the empty quarters, or uninhabitable desert zones, a wide variety of **bedouin** or nomadic, cultures had developed over the centuries, based on camel and goat herding. In oases like that pictured in Figure 7.2, which dotted the dry landscape, towns and agriculture flourished on a limited scale. Only in the coastal regions of the far south had extensive agriculture, sizable cities, and regional kingdoms developed in ancient times. Over much of the rest of the peninsula, the camel nomads, organized in tribes and clans, were dominant. Yet in the rocky

Bedouin [BEHD-oo-ihn] Nomadic pastoralists of the Arabian peninsula; culture based on camel and goat nomadism; early converts to Islam.

FIGURE **7.2** With their supply of water, shade, and date palms, oases like this one in Egypt have long been key centers of permanent settlement and trade in the desert. Major towns usually grew around the underground springs and wells or small rivers that fed the oases. Travelers' and traders' caravans stopped at the oases to water their camels and horses and to rest and eat after their arduous treks through the desert. As points of concentration of wealth, food, and precious water, oases were tempting targets for raids by bedouin bands.

regions adjacent to the Red Sea, several trading towns had developed that played pivotal roles in the emergence of Islam.

Although the urban roots of Islam have often been stressed by writers on Muslim civilization, the bedouin world in which the religion arose shaped the career of its prophet, his teachings, and the spread of the new beliefs. In fact, key towns such as Mecca and Medina were largely extensions of the tribal culture of the camel nomads. Their populations were linked by kinship to bedouin peoples. For example, Mecca had been founded by bedouins and at the time of Muhammad was ruled by former bedouin clans. The safety of the trade routes on which the towns depended was in the hands of the nomadic tribes that lived along the vulnerable caravan routes to the north and south. In addition, the town dwellers' social organization, which focused on clan and family, and their culture—including language and religion—were much like those of the nomads.

Clan Identity, Clan Rivalries, and the Cycle of Vengeance

The harsh desert and scrub environment of Arabia gave rise to forms of social organization and a lifestyle that were similar to those of other nomadic peoples. Bedouin herders lived in kin-related clan groups in highly mobile tent encampments. Clans, in turn, were clustered in larger tribal groupings,

but these were rarely congregated together and then only in times of war or severe crisis. The struggle for subsistence in the unforgiving Arabian environment resulted in a strong dependence on and loyalty to one's family and clan. Survival depended on cooperation with and support from kin. To be cut off from them or expelled from the clan encampment was in most cases fatal. The use of watering places and grazing lands, which were essential to maintaining the herds on which bedouin life depended, was regulated by clan councils. But there could be wide disparities of wealth and status within clan groups and between clans of the same tribe. Although normally elected by councils of elder advisors, the **shaykhs**, or leaders of the tribes and clans, were almost always men with large herds, several wives, many children, and numerous retainers. The shaykhs' dictates were enforced by bands of free warriors whose families made up a majority of a given clan group. Beneath the warriors were slave families, often the remnants of rival clans defeated in war, who served the shaykhs or the clan as a whole.

shaykhs [shAYks] Leaders of tribes and clans within bedouin society; usually men with large herds, several wives, and many children.

Clan cohesion was reinforced by fierce inter-clan rivalries and struggles to control vital pasturelands and watering places. If the warriors from one clan found those from another clan drawing water from one of their wells, they were likely to kill them. Wars often broke out as a result of one clan's encroaching on the pasture areas of another clan. In a culture in which one's honor depended on respect for one's clan, the flimsiest pretexts could lead to inter-clan violence. For instance, an insult to a warrior in a market town, the theft of a prize stallion, or one clan's defeat in a horse race by another clan could end in battles between clan groups. All the men of a given clan joined in these fights, which normally were won by the side that could field several champions who were famed for their strength and skill with spears or bows and arrows.

These battles were fought according to a code of chivalry that was quite common in early cultures. Although battles usually were small in terms of the numbers involved, they were hard-fought and often bloody affairs. Almost invariably the battles either initiated or perpetuated clan feuds, which could continue for hundreds of years. The deaths of the warriors of one clan required that revenge be taken on the clan that had killed them. Their deaths led in turn to reprisals. This constant infighting weakened the bedouins in relation to the neighboring peoples and empires and allowed them to be manipulated and set against each other.

Towns and Long-Distance Trade

Although bedouin herders occupied most of the habitable portions of Arabia, farmers and town dwellers carved out small communities in the western and southern parts of the peninsula in the classical era. Foreign invasions and the inroads of bedouin peoples had all but destroyed these civilizations centuries before the birth of Muhammad. But a number of cities had developed farther north as links in the transcontinental trading system that stretched from the Mediterranean to east Asia. The most important of these cities was **Mecca**, located in the mountainous region along the Red Sea on the western coast of Arabia (Map 7.1). The town had been founded by the **Umayyad** clan of the **Quraysh** bedouin tribe, and members of the clan dominated its politics and commercial economy.

The wealth and status of Mecca and its merchant elite were enhanced by the fact that the city was the site of the **Ka'ba**, one of the most revered religious shrines in pre-Islamic Arabia. Not only did the shrine attract pilgrims and customers for Mecca's bazaars, but at certain times of the year it was the focus of an obligatory truce in the inter-clan feuds. Freed from fears of assault by rival groups, merchants and bedouins flocked to the town to trade, exchange gossip, and taste the delights of city life.

Northeast of Mecca was a town named Yathrib (Map 7.1) that later came to be known as **Medina**, or the city of the prophet Muhammad. Like most of the other towns in the peninsula, Medina was established in an oasis. Wells and springs made sedentary agriculture possible. In addition to wheat and other staples, Medina's inhabitants grew date palms, whose fruit and seeds (which were fed to camels) they traded to the bedouins. Medina was also engaged, although on a much smaller scale than Mecca, in the long-distance caravan trade that passed through Arabia. In contrast to Umayyad-dominated Mecca, control in Medina was contested by two bedouin and three Jewish clans. Their quarrels left the city a poor second to Mecca as a center of trade, and these divisions proved critical to the survival of the prophet Muhammad and the Islamic faith.

Mecca City located in mountainous region along Red Sea in Arabian peninsula; founded by Umayyad clan of Quraysh; site of Ka'ba; original home of Muhammad; location of chief religious pilgrimage point in Islam.

Umayyad [oo-MY-yad] Clan of Quraysh that dominated politics and commercial economy of Mecca; clan established a dynasty under this title as rulers of Islam, 661 to 750.

Quraysh [koo-RAYSH] Tribe of bedouins that controlled Mecca in 7th century C.E.

Ka'ba Most revered religious shrine in pre-Islamic Arabia; located in Mecca; focus of obligatory annual truce among bedouin tribes; later incorporated as important shrine in Islam.

Medina Also known as Yathrib; town located northeast of Mecca; grew date palms whose fruit was sold to bedouins; became refuge for Muhammad following flight from Mecca (hijra).

View the **Image** on **MyHistoryLab**: Medina

Marriage and Family in Pre-Islamic Arabia

Although the evidence is scant, there are several indications that women in pre-Islamic Arabian bedouin culture enjoyed greater freedom and higher status than those who lived in neighboring civilized centers, such as the Byzantine and Sasanian empires that then dominated the Middle East (Map 7.1). Women played key economic roles, from milking camels and weaving cloth to raising children. Because the men of the clan were often on the move, many tribes traced descent through the mother rather than the father. In some tribes, both men and women were allowed multiple marriage partners. To seal a marriage contract, the man was required to pay a bride-price to his prospective wife's family, rather than the woman's father sending a dowry or gift to the prospective husband. Unlike the women (especially those of elite status) in neighboring Syria and Persia, women in pre-Islamic Arabia were not secluded and did not wear veils. Their advice was highly regarded in clan and tribal councils, and they often composed poems that were the focus of bedouin cultural life in the pre-Islamic era.

Despite these career outlets, women were not by any means considered equal to men. They could not gain glory as warriors, the most prized occupation of the bedouins, and often they were little more than drudge laborers. Their status depended on the custom of individual clans and tribes rather than on legal codes. As a result, it varied widely from one clan or family to the next. Customary practices of property control, inheritance, and divorce heavily favored men. In the urban environment of trading centers such as Mecca, the rise of a mercantile elite and social stratification appear to have set back the position of women on the whole. The more stable family life of the towns led to the practice of tracing descent through the male line, and while men continued to practice polygamy, women were expected to be monogamous.

Poets and Neglected Gods

Because of the isolation of Arabia in the pre-Islamic age and the harshness and poverty of the natural environment, Arab material culture was not highly developed. Except in the far south, there was little art or architecture of worth. Even Mecca made little impression on the cosmopolitan merchants who passed through the city in caravans from the fabled cities of the ancient civilizations farther north. The main focus of bedouin cultural creativity in the pre-Islamic era was poetry, which was composed and transmitted orally because there was as yet no written language. Clan and tribal bards narrated poems that told of their kinsmen's heroics in war and the clan's great deeds. Some poets were said to have magical powers or to be possessed by demons. More than any other source, poems provide a vision of life and society in pre-Islamic Arabia. They tell of lovers spurned and passion consummated, war and vendettas, loyalty and generosity.

Bedouin religion was for most clans a blend of animism and polytheism, or the worship of many gods and goddesses. Some tribes, such as the Quraysh, recognized a supreme god named Allah. But they seldom prayed or sacrificed to **Allah**, concentrating instead on less abstract spirits who seemed more relevant to their daily lives. Both spirits and gods (for example, the moon god, Hubal) tended to be associated with night, a cool period when dew covered the earth, which had been parched by the blaze of the desert sun. Likewise, the worship of nature spirits focused on sacred caves, pure springs, and groves of trees—places where the bedouins could take shelter from the heat and wind. Religion appears to have had little to do with ethics. Rather, standards of morality and proper behavior were rooted in tribal customs and unwritten codes of honor.

Allah The Arab term for the high god in pre-Islamic Arabia that was adopted by the followers of Muhammad and the Islamic faith.

How seriously the bedouins took their gods is also a matter of some doubt. Their lukewarm adherence is illustrated by the famous tale of a bedouin warrior who had set out to avenge his father's death at the hands of a rival clan. He stopped at an oracle along the way to seek advice by drawing arrows that indicated various courses of action he might take. Three times he drew arrows that advised him to abandon his quest for revenge. Infuriated by this counsel, he hurled the arrows at the idol of the oracle and exclaimed, "Accursed one! Had it been thy father who was murdered, thou would not have forbidden my avenging him."

THE LIFE OF MUHAMMAD AND THE GENESIS OF ISLAM

In the 7th century the revelations of the prophet Muhammad provided the basis for the emergence of a new religion—Islam—in the Arabian peninsula. Although initially an Arab religion, in both beliefs and practices, Islam contained a powerful appeal that eventually made it one of the great world religions.

7.2 Which aspects of Muhammad's religious message do you think accounted for its powerful appeal to both urban dwellers and nomadic peoples in Arabia and beyond?

By the 6th century C.E., camel nomads were dominant throughout much of Arabia. The civilized centers to the south were in ruins, and trading centers such as Mecca and Medina depended on alliances with neighboring bedouin tribes to keep the caravan routes open. The constricted world of clan and kin, nomadic camp, blood feud, and local gods persisted despite the lure of the empires and cosmopolitan urban centers that stretched in a great arc to the north and east of the Arabian peninsula (see Map 7.1).

But pressures for change were mounting. Both the Byzantine and **Sasanian empires** struggled to assert greater control over the nomadic tribes of the peninsula. In addition, Arab peoples migrated into Mesopotamia and other areas to the north, where they came increasingly under foreign influence. From these regions, the influence of established monotheistic religions, especially Judaism and Christianity, entered Arabia. These new currents gave rise to a number of Arab prophets who urged the bedouin tribes to renounce idol worship and rely on a single, almighty god. The prophet **Muhammad** and the new religion that his revelations inspired in the early decades of the 7th century responded both to these influences flowing into Arabia and to related social dislocations that were disrupting Arab life.

Sasanian empires The dynasty that ruled Persia (contemporary Iran) in the centuries before the rise of Muhammad and the early decades of Islamic expansion.

Muhammad Prophet of Islam; born c. 570 to Banu Hashim clan of Quraysh tribe in Mecca; raised by father's family; received revelations from Allah in 610 C.E. and thereafter; died in 632.

The hardships of Muhammad's early life underscore the importance of clan ties in the Arabian world. He was born around 570 C.E. into a prominent clan of the Quraysh tribe, the Banu Hashim, in a bedouin encampment where he spent the first six years of his life. Because his father died before he was born, Muhammad was raised by his father's relatives. The loss of his father was compounded by the death of Muhammad's mother shortly after he went to live with her some years later. Despite these early losses, Muhammad had the good fortune to be born into a respected clan and powerful tribe. His paternal uncle, Abu Talib, was particularly fond of the boy and served as his protector and supporter through much of his early life. Muhammad's grandfather, who like other leading members of the clan was engaged in commerce, educated the young man in the ways of the merchant. With Abu Talib, Muhammad made his first caravan journey to Syria, where on this and later trips he met adherents of the Christian and Jewish faiths, whose beliefs and practices had a great impact on his teachings.

In his adolescence, Muhammad took up residence in Mecca. By his early 20s he was working as a trader for **Khadijah**, the widow of a wealthy merchant, whom he married some years later. His life as a merchant in Mecca and on the caravan routes exposed Muhammad to the world beyond Arabia and probably made him acutely aware of the clan rivalries that had divided the peoples of the region for millennia. He would also have become increasingly concerned about new forces undermining solidarity within the clans. The growth of the towns and trade had enriched some clan families and left others behind, often in poverty. It had also introduced a new source of tension between clan and tribal groupings because some clans, such as the Umayyads, grew rich on the profits from commerce, whereas others maintained their herding lifestyle.

Khadijah [kah-DEE-juh] (555–619) First wife of the prophet Muhammad, who had worked for her as a trader.

As a trader and traveler, Muhammad would almost certainly have been aware of the new religious currents that were sweeping Arabia and surrounding areas in the early 7th century. Particularly notable among these was the spread of monotheistic ideas and a growing dissatisfaction with the old gods that had been venerated by the bedouin peoples. In Muhammad's time, several prophets had arisen, proclaiming a new faith for the Arabs.

Although socially prominent, economically well off, and widely admired for his trading skills and trustworthiness, Muhammad grew increasingly distracted and dissatisfied with a life focused on material gain. He spent increasing amounts of time in meditation in the hills and wilderness that surrounded Mecca. In 610 or earlier, he received the first of many revelations, which his followers believe Allah transmitted to him through the angel Gabriel. These revelations were later written in Arabic and collected in the **Qur'an**. The teachings and injunctions of the Qur'an formed the basis of the new religion that Muhammad began to preach to his clan and the people of Mecca.

Qur'an [kuh-RAHN] Recitations of revelations received by Muhammad; holy book of Islam.

Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: The Holy Qur'an (7th c. C.E.)

Persecution, Flight, and Victory

At first Muhammad's following was small, consisting mainly of his wife, several members of his clan, and some servants and slaves. As his message was clarified with successive revelations, the circle of the faithful grew so that the Umayyad notables who dominated Meccan life saw him as a threat to their own wealth and power. Above all, the new faith threatened to supplant the gods of the Ka'ba, whose shrines had done so much to establish the city as a center of commerce and bedouin interchange. Although he was protected for a time by his own clan, Muhammad was increasingly threatened by the Umayyads, who plotted with other clans to murder him. It was clear that Muhammad must flee Mecca, but where was he to find refuge? Muhammad's reputation as a skillful and fair negotiator prepared the way for his successful flight from Umayyad persecution. The quarrels between the clans in the nearby city of Medina had set off increasingly violent clashes, and the oasis community was on the verge of civil war. Leaders of the bedouin clans in Medina sent a delegation to invite Muhammad, who was related to them on his mother's side, to mediate their disputes and put an end to the strife that had plagued the town.

Ali (c. 599–661) Cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad; one of orthodox caliphs; focus for Shi'a.

Clever ruses and the courage of his clansman **Ali**, who at one point took Muhammad's place and thus risked becoming the target of assassins, secured in 622 the safe passage of Muhammad and a small band of followers from Mecca to Medina. His *hijra* (HIH-jruh), or flight to Medina, marks the first year of the Islamic calendar. In Medina he was given a hero's welcome. He soon justified this warm reception by deftly settling the quarrels between the bedouin clans of the town. His wisdom and skill as a political leader won him new followers, who joined those who had accompanied him from Mecca as the core believers of the new faith.

In the eyes of the Umayyad notables, Muhammad's successes made him a greater threat than ever. Not only was he preaching a faith that rivaled their own, but his leadership was strengthening Mecca's competitor, Medina. Muslim raids on Meccan caravans provided yet another source of danger. Determined to put an end to these threats, the Quraysh launched a series of attacks in the mid-620s on Muhammad and his followers in Medina. These attacks led to several battles. In these clashes, Muhammad proved an able leader and courageous fighter.

The ultimate victory for Muhammad and his followers was signaled by a treaty with the Quraysh in 628, which included a provision granting the Muslims permission to visit the shrine at Ka'ba in Mecca during the season of truce. By then Muhammad's community had won many bedouin allies, and more than 10,000 converts accompanied him on his triumphal return to his hometown in 629. After proving the power of Allah, the single god he proclaimed, by smashing the idols of the shrine, Muhammad gradually won over the Umayyads and most of the other inhabitants of Mecca to the new faith.

Arabs and Islam

Although Islam was soon to become one of the great world religions, the beliefs and practices of the prophet Muhammad were initially adopted only by the Arab town dwellers and bedouins among whom he had grown up. There is a striking parallel here with early Christianity, which focused on Jewish converts. The new religion preached by Muhammad had much to offer the divided peoples of Arabia. It gave them a form of monotheism that belonged to no single tribe and transcended clan and class divisions. It provided a religion that was distinctly Arab in origin and yet the equal of the monotheistic faiths held by the Christians and Jews, who lived in the midst of the bedouin tribes. If anything, the monotheism preached by Muhammad was even more uncompromising than that of the Christians because it allowed no intermediaries between the individual and God. God was one; there were no saints, and angels were nothing more than messengers. In addition, there were no priests in the Christian or Jewish sense of the term.

Islam offered the possibility of an end to the vendettas and feuds that had so long divided the peoples of Arabia and had undermined their attempts to throw off the domination of neighboring empires. The **umma**, or community of the faithful, transcended old tribal boundaries, and it made possible a degree of political unity undreamed of before Muhammad's time. The new religion provided a single and supernaturally sanctioned source of authority and discipline. With unity, the skills and energies that the bedouins had once channeled toward warring with each other were turned outward in a burst of conquest that is perhaps unmatched in human history in its speed and extent. From vassals, borderland warriors, or contemptible "savages" of the desert waste, the Arab bedouins were transformed into the conquerors and rulers of much of the Middle Eastern world.

umma Community of the faithful within Islam; transcended old tribal boundaries to create degree of political unity.

The new religion also provided an ethical system that did much to heal the deep social rifts within Arabian society. Islam stressed the dignity of all believers and their equality in the eyes of Allah. It promoted a moral code that stressed the responsibility of the well-to-do and strong for the poor and weak, the aged and infirm. Payment of the **zakat**, a tax for charity, was obligatory in the new faith. In both his revelations and his personal behavior, Muhammad enjoined his followers to be kind and generous to their dependents, including slaves. He forbade the rich to exploit the poor through exorbitant rents or rates of interest for loans.

zakat Tax for charity; obligatory for all Muslims.

The prophet's teachings and the revelations of the Qur'an soon were incorporated into an extensive body of law that regulated all aspects of the lives of the Muslim faithful. Held accountable before Islamic law on earth, they lived in a manner that would prepare them for the Last Judgment, which in Islam, as in Christianity, would determine their fate in eternity. A stern but compassionate God and a strict but socially minded body of law set impressive standards for the social interaction between adherents of the new faith.

Universal Elements in Islam

Although only Arabs embraced the religion of Islam in its early years, from the outset it contained beliefs and practices that would give it a strong appeal to peoples at virtually all stages of social development and in widely varying cultural settings. Some of these beliefs—Islam's uncompromising monotheism, highly developed legal codes, egalitarianism, and strong sense of community—were the same as the attributes that had won it support among the peoples of Arabia. Its potential as a world religion was enhanced by the fact that most of the attributes of Islam were to some degree anticipated by the other Semitic religions, particularly Judaism and Christianity, with which Muhammad had contact for much of his life. He accepted the validity of the earlier divine revelations that had given rise to the Jewish and Christian faiths. He taught that the revelations he had received were a refinement of these earlier ones and that they were the last divine instructions for human behavior and worship.

View the **Closer Look** on **MyHistoryLab**: The Ka'ba in Mecca

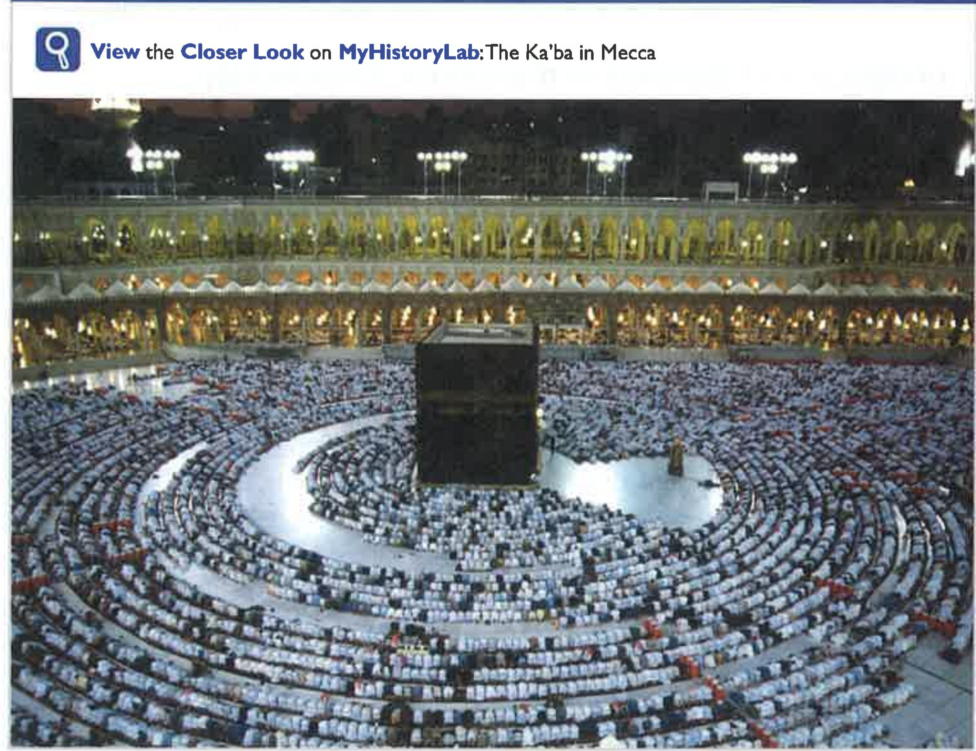

FIGURE **7.3** The Ka'ba in Mecca, with masses of pilgrims. Each year tens of millions of the Muslim faithful from all around the world make the journey to the holy sites of Arabia. The rituals performed by pilgrims at Mecca and Medina are key religious duties for all who can afford to travel to the holy cities.

five pillars The obligatory religious duties of all Muslims; confession of faith, prayer, fasting during Ramadan, zakat, and hajj.

Ramadan Islamic month of religious observance requiring fasting from dawn to sunset.

hajj A Muslim's pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca, to worship Allah at the Ka'ba.

In addition to the beliefs and practices that have given Islam a universal appeal, its **five pillars**, principles that must be accepted and followed by all believers, provided the basis for an underlying religious unity. (1) The confession of faith was simple and powerful: "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his Prophet." The injunctions (2) to pray, facing the holy city of Mecca, five times a day and (3) to fast during the month of **Ramadan**, enhanced community solidarity and allowed the faithful to demonstrate their fervor. (4) The zakat, or tithe for charity, also strengthened community cohesion and won converts from those seeking an ethical code that stressed social responsibility and the unity of all believers. (5) The **hajj**, or pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca, to worship Allah at the Ka'ba, shown in Figure 7.3, drew together the faithful from Morocco to China. No injunction did more to give Islam a universal character.

THE ARAB EMPIRE OF THE UMAYYADS

Despite a time of crisis after the death of the prophet Muhammad in 632 C.E., the Muslim community held together. Eventually, Muhammad's old adversaries, the Umayya clan, seized leadership of the Muslim faithful and began a sequence of stunning conquests throughout the Middle East and north Africa.

7.3 What were the key factors that account for the rapid Arab conquests in the Middle East and Central Asia and North Africa?

Many of the bedouin tribes that had converted to Islam renounced the new faith in the months after Muhammad's death, and his remaining followers quarreled over who should succeed him. Although these quarrels were never fully resolved, the community managed to find new leaders who directed a series of campaigns to force those who had abandoned Islam to return to the fold. Having united most of Arabia under the Islamic banner by 633, Muslim military commanders began to mount serious expeditions beyond the peninsula, where only probing attacks had occurred during the lifetime of the prophet and in the period of tribal warfare after his death. The courage, military prowess, and religious zeal of the warriors of Islam, and the weaknesses of the empires that bordered on Arabia, resulted in stunning conquests in Mesopotamia, north Africa, and Persia, which dominated the next two decades of Islamic history. The empire built from these conquests was Arab rather than Islamic. Most of it was ruled by a small Arab warrior elite, led by the Umayyads and other prominent clans. These groups had little desire to convert the subject populations, either Arab or otherwise, to the new religion.

Consolidation and Division in the Islamic Community

caliph The political and religious successor to Muhammad.

The leadership crisis brought on by Muhammad's death in 632 was compounded by the fact that he had not appointed a successor or even established a procedure by which a new leader would be chosen. Opinion within the Muslim community was deeply divided as to who should succeed him. In this moment of extreme danger, a strong leader who could hold the Islamic community together was urgently needed. On the afternoon Muhammad died, one of the clans that remained committed to the new faith called a meeting to select a leader who would be designated as the **caliph**, the political and religious successor to Muhammad. Several choices were possible, and a deadlock between the clans appeared likely—a deadlock that would almost certainly have been fatal to a community threatened by enemies on all sides.

Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: Al-Tabari and Ibn Hisham, from "The Founding of the Caliphate"

Abu Bakr [ah-BOO BA-kuhr] The first caliph or leader of the Muslim faithful elected after Muhammad's death in 632. Renown for his knowledge of the nomadic tribes who then dominated the Islamic community.

One of the main candidates, Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad, was passed over because he was considered too young to assume a position of such great responsibility. This decision later proved to be a major source of division in the Islamic community. But in 632, it appeared that a difficult reconciliation had been won by the choice of one of Muhammad's earliest followers and closest friends, **Abu Bakr** (ah-BOO BA-kuhr) (caliph from 632 to 634). In addition to his courage, warmth, and wisdom, Abu Bakr was well versed in the genealogical histories of the bedouin tribes, which meant that he knew which tribes could be turned against each other and which ones could be enticed into alliances. Initially, at least, his mandate was very limited. He received no financial support from the Muslim community. Thus, he had to continue his previous occupation as a merchant on a part-time basis, and he only loosely controlled the military commanders.

Ridda Wars Wars that followed Muhammad's death in 632; resulted in defeat of rival prophets and some of larger clans; restored unity of Islam.

These commanders turned out to be very able. After turning back attacks on Mecca, the Islamic faithful routed one after another of the bedouin tribes. The defeat of rival prophets and some of the larger clans in what were known as the **Ridda Wars** soon brought about the return of the Arabian tribes to the Islamic fold. Emboldened by the proven skills of his generals and the swelling ranks of the Muslim faithful, Abu Bakr oversaw raids to the north of Arabia into the sedentary zones in present-day Iraq and Syria and westward into Egypt (Map 7.1).

The unified bedouin forces had originally intended to raid for booty and then retreat back into the desert. But their initial probes revealed the vulnerability of the Byzantine and Persian empires, which dominated or ruled the territories into which the Muslim warriors rode. The invaders were also encouraged by the growing support of the Arab bedouin peoples who had been migrating into the Fertile Crescent for centuries. These peoples had long served as the vassals and frontier guardians of the Byzantine and Persian empires. Now they joined their brethren in a combined assault on both of them.

Motives for Arab Conquests

The Arab warriors were driven by many forces. The unity provided by the Islamic faith gave them a new sense of common cause and strength. United, they could stand up to the non-Arab rulers who had so long played them against each other and despised them as unwashed and backward barbarians from the desert wastelands. It is also probable that the early leaders of the community saw the wars of conquest as a good way to release the pent-up energies of the martial bedouin tribes they now sought to lead (see Figure 7.4). Above all, the bedouin warriors were drawn to the campaigns of expansion by the promise of a share in the booty to be won in the rich farmlands raided and the tribute that could be exacted from towns that came under Arab rule. As an early Arab writer observed, the bedouins forsook their life as desert nomads not out of a promise of religious rewards, but because of a "yearning after bread and dates."

The chance to glorify their new religion may have been a motive for the Arab conquests, but they were not driven by a desire to win converts to it. In fact, other than fellow bedouin tribes of Arab descent, the invaders had good reason to avoid mass conversions. Not only would Arab warriors have to share the booty of their military expeditions with ever larger numbers if converts were made, but Muslims were exempted from some of the more lucrative taxes levied on Christian, Jewish, and other non-Muslim groups. Thus, the vision of **jihads**, or holy wars launched to forcibly spread the Muslim faith, which has long been associated with Islam in the Christian West, misrepresents the forces behind the early Arab expansion.

jihads [jih-HAHDs] Struggles; often used for wars in defense of the faith, but also a term to indicate personal quests for religious understanding.

Weaknesses of the Adversary Empires

Of the two great empires that had once fought for dominance in the Fertile Crescent transit zone, the Sasanian Empire of Persia proved the more vulnerable. Power in the extensive Sasanian domains was formally concentrated in the hands of an autocratic emperor. By the time of the Arab explosion, the emperor was manipulated by a landed, aristocratic class that harshly exploited the farmers who made up most of the population of the empire. Zoroastrianism, the official religion of the emperor, lacked popular roots. By contrast, the religion of a visionary reformer named Mazdak, which had won considerable support among the peasants, had been brutally suppressed by the Sasanian rulers in the period before the rise of Islam.

At first, the Sasanian commanders had contempt for the Arab invaders and set out against them with poorly prepared forces. By the time the seriousness of the Islamic threat was made clear by decisive Arab victories in the Fertile Crescent region and the defection of the Arab tribes on the frontier,

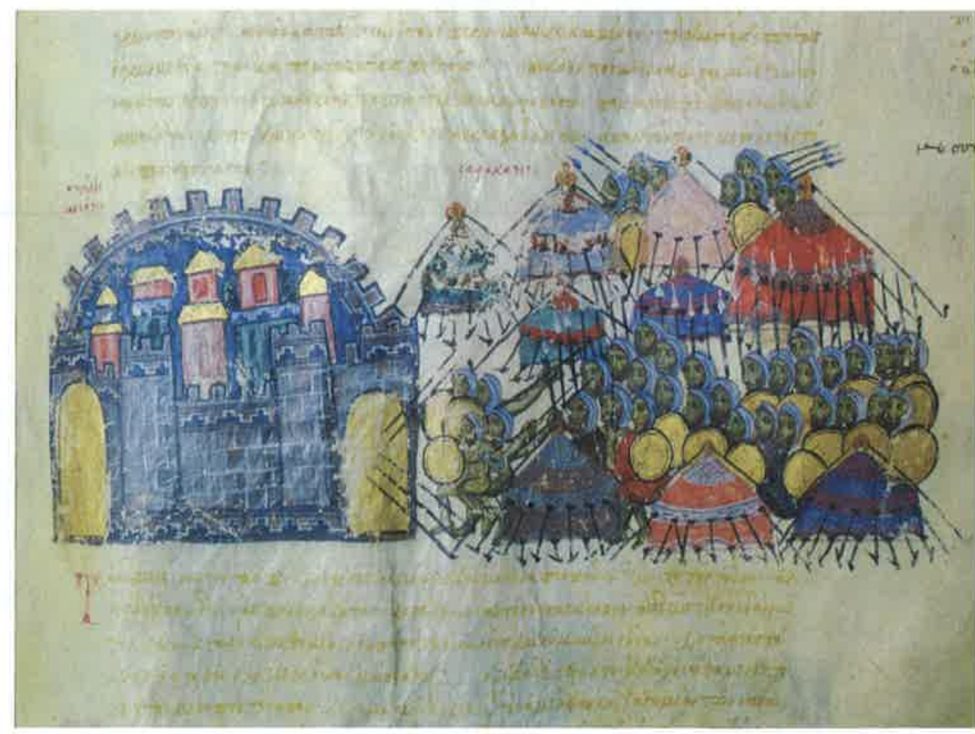

FIGURE **7.4** This illustration from an account of the Muslim conquest of Sicily in the 9th century C.E. is one of the earliest known artistic renderings of an Arab army at war. The camp, the armored warriors, and the siege in progress help us to envision the Muslim forces that built the first great Arab empire under the early caliphs in the 7th century C.E.

Muslim warriors had broken into the Sasanian heartland. Further Muslim victories brought about the rapid collapse of the vast empire. The Sasanian rulers and their forces retreated eastward in the face of the Muslim advance. The capital was taken, armies were destroyed, and generals were slain. When in 651 the last of the Sasanian rulers was assassinated, Muslim victory and the destruction of the empire were ensured.

Despite an equally impressive string of Muslim victories in the provinces of their empire, the Byzantines proved a stronger adversary (see Chapter 10). However, their ability to resist the Muslim onslaught was impeded by both the defection of their own frontier Arabs and the support the Muslim invaders received from the Christians of Syria and Egypt. Members of the Christian sects dominant in these areas, such as the **Copts** and **Nestorians**, had long resented the rule of the Orthodox Byzantines, who taxed them heavily and openly persecuted them as heretics. When it became clear that the Muslims would not only tolerate the Christians but tax them less heavily than the Byzantines did, these Christian groups rallied to the Arabs.

Copts Christian sect of Egypt; tended to support Islamic invasions of this area in preference to Byzantine rule.

Nestorians A Christian sect found in Asia; tended to support Islamic invasions of this area in preference to Byzantine rule; cut off from Europe by Muslim invasions.

Weakened from within and exhausted by the long wars fought with Persia in the decades before the Arab explosion, the Byzantines reeled from the Arab assaults. Syria, western Iraq, and Palestine were quickly taken by the Arab invaders, and by 640 a series of probes had been made into Egypt, one of the richest provinces of the empire (Map 7.2). In the early 640s, the ancient center of learning and commerce, Alexandria, was taken, most of Egypt was occupied, and Arab armies extended their conquests into Libya to the west. Perhaps even more astounding from the point of view of the Byzantines, by the mid-640s the desert bedouins were putting together war fleets that increasingly challenged the long-standing Byzantine mastery of the Mediterranean. The rise of Muslim naval supremacy in the eastern end of the Mediterranean sealed the loss of Byzantium's rich provinces in Syria and Egypt. It also opened the way to further Muslim conquests in north Africa, the Mediterranean islands, and even southern Italy (Map 7.2 and Figure 7.4). For a time the Byzantines managed to rally their forces and stave off further inroads into their Balkan and Asia Minor heartlands. But the early triumphs of

MAP 7.2 **The Expansion of Islamic Civilization, 622–750** Whether by land or sea, Islamic civilization expanded by both conquest and trade, while the Muslim faith was spread mainly peacefully along ancient trading routes, often by sufi holymen.

the Arab invaders had greatly reduced the strength of the Byzantine Empire. Although it survived for centuries, it was henceforth a kingdom under siege.

The Problem of Succession and the Sunni–Shi'a Split

The stunning successes of Muslim armies and the sudden rise of an Arab empire diverted attention, for a time at least, from continuing divisions within the community. Although these divisions were often generations old and the result of personal animosities, resentments had also begun to build over how the booty from the conquests should be divided among the tribal groups that made up the Islamic community. In 656, just over two decades after the death of the prophet, the growing tensions broke into open violence. The spark that began the conflict was the murder of the third caliph, **Uthman**, by mutinous warriors returning from Egypt. His death was the signal for the supporters of Ali to proclaim him as caliph. Uthman's unpopularity among many of the tribes, particularly those from Medina and the prophet's earliest followers, arose in part from the fact that he was the first caliph to be chosen from Muhammad's early enemies, the Umayyad clan. Already angered by Uthman's murder, the Umayyads rejected Ali's claims and swore revenge when he failed to punish Uthman's assassins. Warfare erupted between the two factions.

Uthman Third caliph and member of Umayyad clan; murdered by mutinous warriors returning from Egypt; death set off civil war in Islam between followers of Ali and the Umayyad clan.

Ali was a renowned warrior and experienced commander, and his deeply committed supporters soon gained the upper hand. After his victory at the Battle of the Camel in late 656, most of the Arab garrisons shifted to his side against the Umayyads, whose supporters were concentrated in the province of Syria and the holy city of Mecca. Just as Ali was on the verge of defeating the Umayyad forces at the **Battle of Siffin** in 657, he was won over by a plea for mediation. His decision to accept mediation was fatal to his cause. Some of his most fervent supporters renounced his leadership and had to be suppressed violently. While representatives of both parties tried unsuccessfully to work out a compromise, the Umayyads regrouped their forces and added Egypt to the provinces backing their claims. In 660, **Mu'awiya**, the new leader of the Umayyads, was proclaimed caliph in Jerusalem, directly challenging Ali's position. A year later, Ali was assassinated, and his son Hasan was pressured by the Umayyads into renouncing his claims to the caliphate.

Battle of Siffin Fought in 657 between forces of Ali and Umayyads; settled by negotiation that led to fragmentation of Ali's party.

Mu'awiya [moo-UH-wee-uh] (602–680) Leader of Umayyad clan; first Umayyad caliph following civil war with Ali.

In the decades after the prophet's death, the question of succession generated deep divisions in the Muslim community. The split between the **Sunnis**, who backed the Umayyads, and the **Shi'a**, or supporters of Ali, remains to this day the most fundamental in the Islamic world. Hostility between these two branches of the Islamic faithful was heightened in the years after Ali's death by the continuing struggle between the Umayyads and Ali's second son, Husayn. After being abandoned by the clans in southern Iraq, who had promised to rise in a revolt supporting his claims against the Umayyads, Husayn and a small party were overwhelmed and killed at **Karbala** in 680. From that point on, the Shi'a mounted sustained resistance to the Umayyad caliphate.

Sunnis Political and theological division within Islam; supported the Umayyads.

Shi'a Also known as Shi'ites; political and theological division within Islam; followers of Ali.

Karbala Site of defeat and death of Husayn, son of Ali; marked beginning of Shi'a resistance to Umayyad caliphate.

Over the centuries, factional disputes about who had the right to succeed Muhammad, with the Shi'a recognizing none of the early caliphs except Ali, have been compounded by differences in belief, ritual, and law that have steadily widened the gap between Sunnis and Shi'a. These divisions have been further complicated by the formation of splinter sects within the Shi'a community in particular, beginning with those who defected from Ali when he agreed to arbitration.

The Umayyad Imperium

After a pause to settle internal disputes over succession, the remarkable sequence of Arab conquest was renewed in the last half of the 7th century. Muslim armies broke into central Asia, inaugurating a rivalry with Buddhism in the region that continues to the present day (Map 7.2). By the early 8th century, the southern prong of this advance had reached into northwest India. Far to the west, Arab armies swept across north Africa and crossed the Straits of Gibraltar to conquer Spain and threaten France. Although the Muslim advance into western Europe was blocked by the hard-fought victory of Charles Martel and the Franks at Poitiers in 732, the Arabs did not fully retreat beyond the Pyrenees into Spain until decades later. Muslim warriors and sailors dominated much of the Mediterranean, a position that was solidified by the conquest of key islands such as Crete, Sicily, and Sardinia in the early decades of the 9th century. By the early 700s, the Umayyads ruled an empire that extended from Spain in the west to the steppes of central Asia in the east. Not since the Romans had there been an empire to match it; never had an empire of its size been built so rapidly.

Damascus Syrian city that was capital of Umayyad caliphate.

Although Mecca remained the holy city of Islam, under the Umayyads the political center of community shifted to **Damascus** in Syria, where the Umayyads chose to live after the murder of Uthman. From Damascus a succession of Umayyad caliphs strove to build a bureaucracy that would bind together the vast domains they claimed to rule. The empire was very much an Arab conquest state. Except in the Arabian peninsula and in parts of the Fertile Crescent, a small Arab and Muslim aristocracy ruled over peoples who were neither Arab nor Muslim. Only Muslim Arabs were first-class citizens of this great empire. They made up the core of the army and imperial administration, and only they received a share of the booty derived from the ongoing conquests. They could be taxed only for charity. The Umayyads sought to keep the Muslim warrior elite concentrated in garrison towns and separated from the local population. It was hoped that isolation would keep them from assimilating to the subjugated cultures, because intermarriage meant conversion and the loss of taxable subjects.

Converts and "People of the Book"

mawali Non-Arab converts to Islam.

jizya [JIHZ-yuh] Head tax paid by all nonbelievers in Islamic territories.

dhimmi [DIH-mee] Literally "people of the book"; applied as inclusive term to Jews and Christians in Islamic territories; later extended to Zoroastrians and even Hindus.

Umayyad attempts to block extensive interaction between the Muslim warrior elite and their non-Muslim subjects had little chance of succeeding. The citified bedouin tribes were soon interacting intensively with the local populations of the conquered areas and intermarrying with them. Equally critical, increasing numbers of these peoples were voluntarily converting to Islam, despite the fact that conversion did little to advance them socially or politically in the Umayyad period. In this era Muslim converts, **mawali**, still had to pay property taxes and in some cases the **jizya**, or head tax, levied on nonbelievers. They received no share of the booty and found it difficult, if not impossible, to get important positions in the army or bureaucracy. They were not even considered full members of the umma but were accepted only as clients of the powerful Arab clans.

As a result, the number of conversions in the Umayyad era was low. By far the greater portion of the population of the empire were the **dhimmi**, or "people of the book." As the name suggests, it was originally applied to Christians and Jews who shared the Bible with the Muslims. As Islamic conquests spread to other peoples, such as the Zoroastrians of Persia and the Hindus of India, the designation *dhimmi* was necessarily stretched to accommodate the majority groups within these areas of the empire. As the early illustration of Jewish worship in Muslim Spain in Figure 7.5 shows, the Muslim overlords generally tolerated the religions of dhimmi. Although they had to pay the jizya and both commercial and property taxes, their communities and legal systems were left intact, and they were allowed to worship as they pleased. This approach made it a good deal easier for these peoples to accept Arab rule, particularly because many had been oppressed by their pre-Muslim overlords.

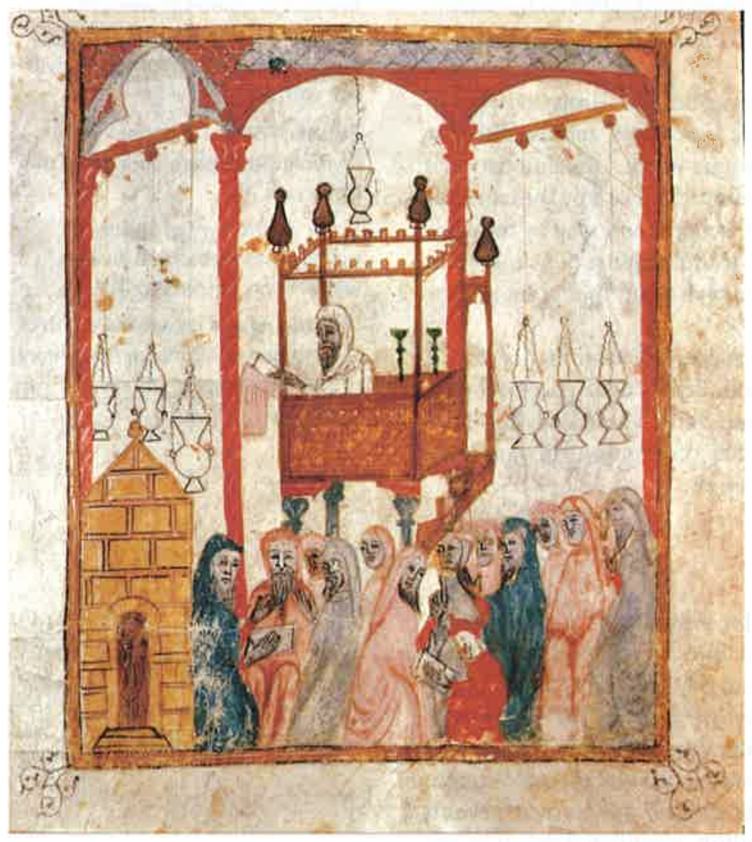

FIGURE **7.5** Jews worshiping in a synagogue. As dhimmi, or "people of the book," Jews were allowed to build impressive synagogues and worship freely throughout the Muslim world. Jewish merchant families amassed great wealth, often in partnership with Muslims, and Jewish scholars were revered from Spain to Baghdad for their many contributions to learning.

Family and Gender Roles in the Umayyad Age

Broader social changes within the Arab and widening Islamic community were accompanied by significant shifts in the position of women, both within the family and in society at large. In the first centuries of Arab expansion, the greatly strengthened position of women under Islam prevailed over the seclusion and subordination that were characteristic features of women's lives through much of the rest of the pre-Islamic Middle East. Muhammad's teachings and the dictates of the Qur'an stressed the moral and ethical dimensions of marriage. The kindness and concern the prophet displayed for his own wives and daughters did much to strengthen the bonds between husband and wife and the nuclear family in the Islamic community.

Muhammad encouraged marriage as a replacement for the casual and often commercial sexual liaisons that had been widespread in pre-Islamic Arabia. He vehemently denounced adultery on the part of both husbands and wives, and he forbade female infanticide, which apparently had been widely practiced in Arabia in pre-Islamic times. Men were allowed to marry up to four wives. But the Qur'an forbade multiple marriages if the husband could not support more than one wife or treat all of his wives equally. Women could not take more than one husband. But Muhammad gave his own daughters a say as to whom they would marry and greatly strengthened the legal rights of women in inheritance and divorce. He insisted that the bride-price paid by the husband's family be given to his future wife rather than to her father.

The prophet's teachings proclaimed the equality of men and women before God and in Islamic worship. Women, most notably his wife Khadijah, were some of Muhammad's earliest and bravest followers. In the battle with the Meccans, women accompanied the forces on both sides, and a woman was the first martyr for the new faith. Many of the **hadiths**, or traditions of the prophet, which have played such a critical role in Islamic law and ritual, were recorded by women. In addition, Muhammad's wives and daughters played an important role in compiling the Qur'an.

hadiths [huh-DEETHs] Traditions of the prophet Muhammad.

Although women were not allowed to lead prayers, they played an active role in the politics of the early community. Muhammad's widow, Aisha, actively promoted the claims of the Umayyad party against Ali, while Zainab, Ali's daughter, went into battle with the ill-fated Husayn. Through much of the Umayyad period, little is heard of veiled Arab women, and women appear to have pursued a wide range of occupations, including scholarship, law, and commerce. Perhaps one of Zainab's nieces best epitomizes the independent-mindedness of Muslim women in the early Islamic era. When chided for going about without a veil, she replied that Allah in his wisdom had chosen to give her a beautiful face and that she intended to make sure that it was seen in public so that all might appreciate his grace.

Umayyad Decline and Fall

The ever-increasing size of the royal harem was just one manifestation of the Umayyad caliphs' growing addiction to luxury and soft living. Their legitimacy had been disputed by various Muslim factions since their seizure of the caliphate. But the Umayyads further alienated the Muslim faithful as they became more aloof in the early 8th century and retreated from the dirty business of war into their pleasure gardens and marble palaces. Their abandonment of the frugal, simple lifestyle followed by Muhammad and the earliest caliphs—including Abu Bakr, who made a trip to the market the day after he was selected to succeed the prophet—enraged the dissenting sects and sparked revolts throughout the empire. The uprising that proved fatal to the short-lived dynasty began among the frontier warriors who had fought and settled in distant Iran.

By the mid-8th century, more than 50,000 warriors had settled near the oasis town of Merv in the eastern Iranian borderlands of the empire (Figure 7.6). Many of them had married local women, and over time they had come to identify with the region and to resent the dictates of governors sent from distant Damascus. The warrior settlers were also angered by the fact that they were rarely given the share of the booty, which was now officially tallied in the account books of the royal treasury, they had earned by fighting the wars of expansion and

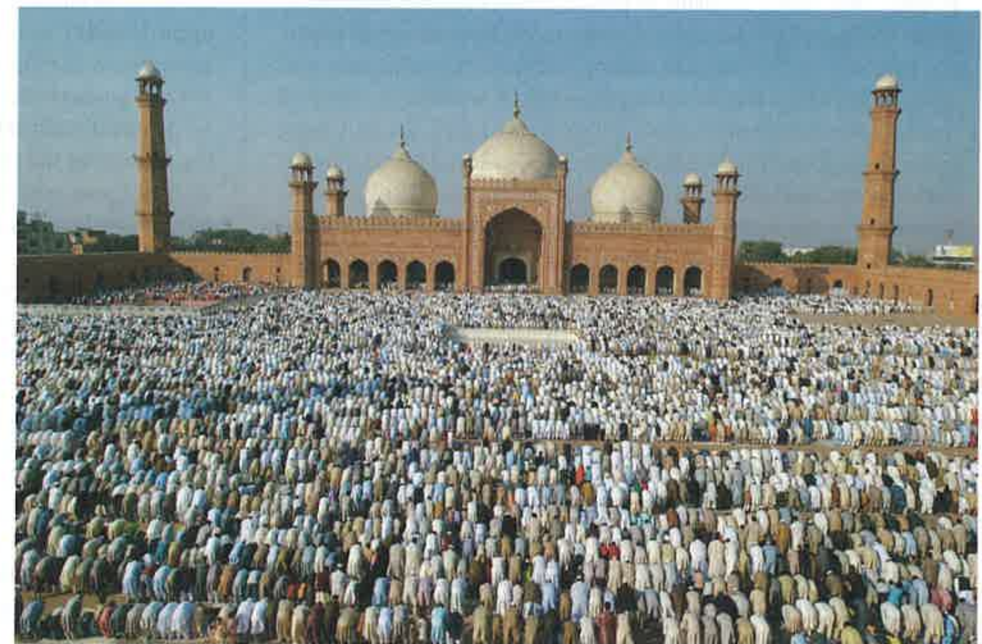

FIGURE **7.6** Muslim worshippers in modern Pakistan. Whether in a nearby mosque or in their homes and shops, Muslims are required to pray five times a day, facing the holy city of Mecca. Those congregating in a mosque, as in this photo, are oriented to Mecca by the qibla wall, which is marked by a highly ornamented inset that indicates the direction of the holy city. Men congregate in the open spaces in the center of and outside the mosque, while women pray in areas on the sides or in the back or, sometimes, in balconies above that are screened off by pillars or carved panels from the areas where the men worship.

THINKING HISTORICALLY

Civilization and Gender Relationships

WITHIN A CENTURY OF MUHAMMAD'S DEATH, the strong position women had enjoyed as a result of the teachings and example of the prophet had begun to erode. We do not fully understand all the forces that account for this decline. Ambiguities in the Qur'an and other early sources—especially the hadith, or traditions of the prophet—provide part of the answer. These sources indicate that, in both his domestic and public life, Muhammad was concerned about good treatment for women and defined certain rights, for example, to property. But early records also stipulate women's inferiority to men in key legal rights (differential punishments for adultery were a case in point). And, like their Christian counterparts, Islamic thinkers argued that women were more likely than men to be sinners. But more critical were the beliefs and practices of the urbanized, sedentary peoples in the areas the Arabs conquered and where many of them settled from the mid-7th century onward.

The example of these ancient and long-civilized peoples increasingly influenced the Arab bearers of Islam. They developed a taste for city life and the superior material and artistic culture of the peoples they ruled. In terms of gender roles, most of these influences weakened the position of women. We have seen this apparent connection between increasing political centralization and urbanization and the declining position of women in many of the ancient and classical civilizations treated thus far. In China, India, Greece, and the Middle East, women enjoyed broader occupational options and a stronger voice within the family, and in society as a whole, before the emergence of centralized polities and highly stratified social systems. In each case, the rise of what we have called civilizations strengthened paternal control within the family, inheritance through the male line, and male domination of positions of power and the most lucrative occupations. Women in these societies became more and more subjected to men—their fathers and brothers, husbands and sons—and more and more confined to the roles of homemakers and bearers of children. Women's legal rights were reduced, often sharply. In many civilizations, various ways were devised to shut women off from the world.

As we have seen, women played active and highly valued roles in the bedouin tribes of pre-Islamic Arabia. Particularly in towns such as Mecca, they experienced considerable freedom in terms of sexual and marriage partners, occupational choices (within the limited range available in an isolated pastoral society), and opportunities to influence clan decisions. The position of Muhammad's first wife, Khadijah, is instructive. Her position as a wealthy widow in charge of a thriving trading enterprise reveals that women were able to remarry and to own and inherit property. They could also pursue careers, even after their husbands died. Khadijah employed Muhammad. After he had successfully worked for her for some time, she asked him to marry her, which apparently neither surprised nor scandalized her family or Meccan society. It is also noteworthy that Khadijah was 15 years older than Muhammad, who was 25 at the time of their betrothal.

The impact of the bedouin pattern of gender roles and relationships is also clear in the teachings and personal behavior of Muhammad. Islam did much to legalize the strong but by no means equal status of women. In addition, it gave greater uniformity to their position from one tribe, town, or region to the next. For a century or two after the prophet's death, women in the Islamic world enjoyed unprecedented opportunities for education, religious expression, and social fulfillment. Then the influences of the cultures into which the Arabs had expanded began to take hold. The practices of veiling and female seclusion that were long followed by the non-Arab dwellers of Syria and Persia were increasingly adopted by or imposed upon Muslim women. Confined more and more to the home, women saw their occupational options decrease, and men served as their go-betweens in legal and commercial matters.

Islamic law preserved for women property, inheritance, divorce, and remarriage rights that often were denied in other civilized societies.

Ironically, given the earlier status of women, such as Khadijah, the erosion of the position of women was especially pronounced among those who lived in the cities that became the focus of Islamic civilization. Upper-class women, in particular, felt growing restrictions on their movement and activities. In the great residences that sprang up in the wealthy administrative centers and trading towns of the Middle East, the women's quarters were separate from the rest of the household and set off by high walls and gardens. In the palaces of Islamic rulers and provincial governors, this separation was marked by the development of the *harem*, or forbidden area. In the harem, the notables' wives and concubines lived in seclusion. They were constantly guarded by the watchful eyes and sharp swords of corps of eunuchs, men castrated specifically to qualify them for the task.

When upper-class women went into the city, they were veiled from head to toe and often were carried in covered sedan chairs by servants who guarded them from the glances of the townsmen and travelers. In their homes, upper-class women were spared the drudgery of domestic chores by large numbers of female slaves. If we are to judge from stories such as those related in the *Arabian Nights* (from which excerpts are included in the Document feature on page 178), female slaves and servants were largely at the mercy

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of their male masters. Although the veiling, seclusion, and other practices that limited the physical and occupational mobility of women also spread to the lower urban classes and rural areas, they were never as strictly observed there as in urban, upper-class households. Women from poorer families had to work to survive. Thus, they had to go out, "veiled but often unchaperoned," to the market or to work as domestic servants. Lower-class women also worked hard at home, not just at housekeeping but at weaving, rug-making, and other crafts that supplemented the family income. In rural areas and in towns distant from the main urban centers, veiling and confinement were observed less strictly. Peasant women worked the family or local landlord's fields, planted their own gardens, and tended the livestock.

Because of Islamic religion and law, in all locales and at all class levels the position of women in the Middle East never deteriorated to the same extent as in India, China, and many other civilized centers. Because of the need to read the Qur'an, women continued to be educated, family resources permitting, even if they rarely were able to use their learning for scholarship or artistic expression. Islamic law preserved for women property, inheritance, divorce, and remarriage rights that often were denied in other civilized societies. Thus, the strong position women had enjoyed in bedouin cultures, and that in many respects had been built into Islam, was never entirely undone by the customs and practices Muslims encountered as they came to rule the civilized centers in the rest of the Middle East.

The fact that the position of women has also been strong in other cultural areas where authority is decentralized and social organization not highly stratified, such as those in west Africa (see Chapter 9), suggests that at least in certain stages of its development, civilization works against the interests of women. Women in decentralized societies have often been able to own their own property, to engage in key economic activities, and to play important roles in religious ceremonies. The positions and status they have achieved in decentralized societies, such as those in early Arabia or much of sub-Saharan Africa and southeast Asia, suggest factors that may help explain the greater balance in gender roles and power in less centralized societies. The very immediate connection between women and agriculture and stock-raising, which are central to survival in these societies, may also account for the greater respect accorded them and for their often prominent roles in fertility rituals and religious cults. Whatever the explanation, until the present era, higher degrees of centralization and social stratification—both characteristic features of civilized societies—have almost always favored men in the allotment of power and career opportunities.

QUESTIONS

- Compare the position of upper-class women in classical Indian, Chinese, Greek, and Roman societies with regard to their ability to hold property, opportunity to pursue careers outside the home, rights in marriage and divorce, and level of education. In which of these societies were women better off, and why?
- Were differences in the position of women at lower-class levels similar between these societies?
- In what ways were women better off in decentralized pastoral or forest-farming societies?
- What advantages have they enjoyed in highly urbanized and more centralized civilizations?

defending the frontiers. They were contemptuous of the Umayyads and the Damascus elite, whom they saw as corrupt and decadent. In the early 740s, an attempt by Umayyad palace officials to introduce new troops into the Merv area touched off a revolt that soon spread over much of the eastern portions of the empire (Map 7.2).

Marching under the black banners of the **Abbasid** party, which traced its descent from Muhammad's uncle, al-Abbas, the frontier warriors openly challenged Umayyad armies by 747. Deftly forging alliances with dissident groups that resisted the Umayyads throughout the empire, their leader, Abu al-Abbas, the great-great-grandson of the prophet's uncle, led his forces from victory to victory. Among his most important allies were the Shi'a, who, as we have seen, had rejected Umayyad authority from the time of Ali. Also critical were the mawali, or non-Arab converts to Islam. The mawali felt that under Umayyad rule they had never been recognized as fully Muslim. In supporting the Abbasids, the mawali hoped to attain full acceptance in the community of believers.

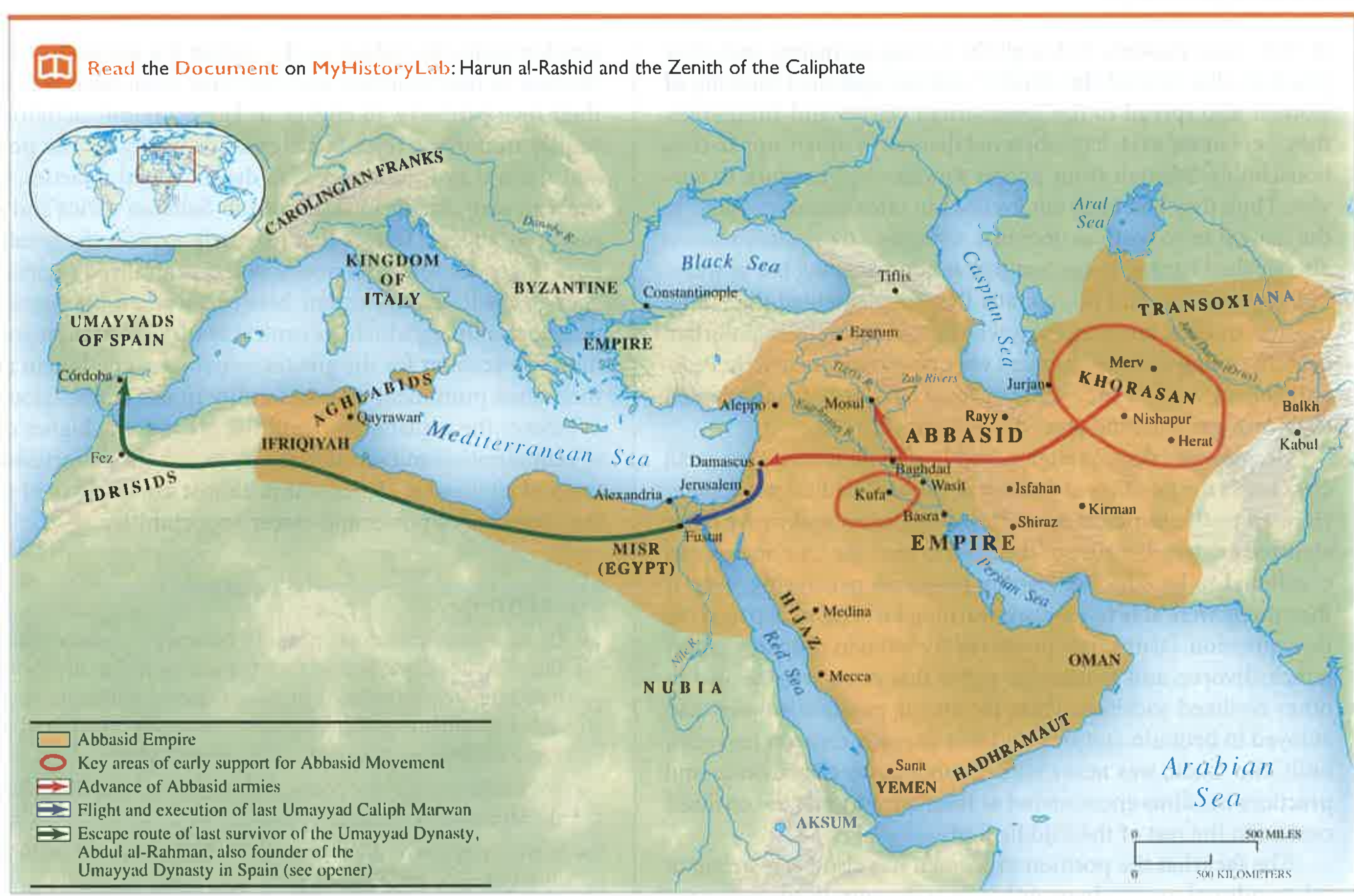
Abbasid [uh bas id, ab uh sid] Dynasty that succeeded the Umayyads as caliphs within Islam; came to power in 750 C.E.,

This diverse collection of Muslim rebels made short work of what remained of the Umayyad imperium. Persia and then Iraq fell to the rebels. In 750, the Abbasid forces met an army led by the Umayyad caliph himself in the massive **Battle of the River Zab** near the Tigris. The Abbasid victory opened the way for the conquest of Syria and the capture of the Umayyad capital.

Battle of the River Zab Victory of Abbasids over Umayyads; resulted in conquest of Syria and capture of Umayyad capital.

Wanting to eliminate the Umayyad family altogether to prevent recurring challenges to his rule, Abu al-Abbas invited many members of the clan to what was styled as a reconciliation banquet. As the Umayyads were enjoying the feast, guards covered them with carpets and they were slaughtered by Abbas's troops. An effort was then made to hunt down and kill all the remaining members of the family throughout the empire. Most were slain, but, as we have seen, the grandson of a former caliph fled to Spain and founded there what later became the Umayyad caliphate of Córdoba, which lived on for centuries after the rest of the Umayyads' empire had disappeared (see Map 7.3 and Figure 7.1).

Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: Harun al-Rashid and the Zenith of the Caliphate



MAP **7.3 Emergence of the Abbasid Dynasty** Frontier warriors from Khorasan far from the Umayyad capital at Damascus built a military force that overthrew the Umayyads between 747 and 750 C.E.

FROM ARAB TO ISLAMIC EMPIRE: THE EARLY ABBASID ERA

Under the Abbasids, who succeeded the Umayyads, Islam became a universal religion that spread across much of north Africa and Euro-Asia. With its capital at Baghdad, Islamic civilization flourished under the Abbasids, even as their empire began to fragment into regional power centers.

7.4 In what ways was the Islamic religion a faith that elevated the status and opportunities of women, and what were the constraints on this process?

The rough treatment the Umayyad clan had received at the hands of the victorious Abbasids should have forewarned their Shi'a and mawali allies of what was to come. But the Shi'a and other dissenting groups continued the support that allowed the Abbasids to level all other centers of political rivalry. Gradually, the Abbasids rejected many of their old allies, becoming more and more righteous in their defense of Sunni Islam and increasingly less tolerant of what they called the heretical views of the various sects of Shi'ism. With the Umayyads all but eliminated and their allies brutally suppressed, the way was clear for the Abbasids to build a centralized, absolutist imperial order.

Baghdad Capital of Abbasid dynasty located in Iraq near ancient Persian capital of Ctesiphon.

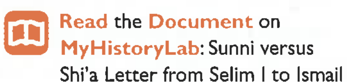
The fact that they chose to build their new capital, **Baghdad**, in Iraq near the ancient Persian capital of Ctesiphon was a clear sign of things to come. Soon the Abbasid caliphs were perched on jewel-encrusted thrones, reminiscent of those of the ancient Persian emperors, gazing down on the great gatherings of courtiers and petitioners who bowed before them in their gilt and marble audience halls. The caliphs' palaces and harems expanded to keep pace with their claims to absolute power over the Islamic faithful as well as the non-Muslim subjects of their vast empire.

The ever-expanding corps of bureaucrats, servants, and slaves who strove to translate Abbasid political claims into reality lived and worked within the circular walls of the new capital at Baghdad.

The bureaucratization of the Islamic Empire was reflected above all in the growing power of the **wazir**, or chief administrator and head of the caliph's inner councils. It was also embodied in a more sinister way in the fearful guise of the royal executioner, who stood close to the throne in the public audiences of the Abbasid rulers. The wazirs oversaw the building of an administrative infrastructure that allowed the Abbasids to project their demands for tribute to the most distant provinces of the empire. Sheer size, poor communications, and collusion between Abbasid officials and local notables meant that the farther the town or village was from the capital, the less effectively royal commands were carried out. But for more than a century, the Abbasid regime was fairly effective at collecting revenue from its subject peoples and preserving law and order over much of the empire.

wazir [wuh-ZEER] Chief administrative official under the Abbasid caliphate; initially recruited from Persian provinces of empire.

Islamic Conversion and Mawali Acceptance


Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: Sunni versus Shi'a Letter from Selim I to Ismail I

The Abbasid era saw the full integration of new converts, both Arab and non-Arab, into the Islamic community. In the last decades of the Umayyad period, there was a growing acceptance of the mawali, or non-Arab Muslims, as equals. There were also efforts to win new converts to the faith, particularly among Arab peoples outside the Arabian peninsula. In the Abbasid era, when the practice of dividing booty between the believers had long been discarded, mass conversions to Islam were encouraged for all peoples of the empire, from the Berbers of north Africa to the Persians and Turkic peoples of central Asia. Converts were admitted on an equal footing with the first generations of believers, and over time the distinction between mawali and the earlier converts all but disappeared.

Most converts were won over peacefully through the great appeal of Islamic beliefs and the advantages they enjoyed over non-Muslim peoples in the empire. Not only were converts exempt from paying the head tax, but they had greater opportunities to get advanced schooling and launch careers as administrators, traders, or judges. No group demonstrated the new opportunities open to converts as dramatically as the Persians, who, in part through their bureaucratic skills, soon came to dominate the upper levels of imperial administration. In fact, as the Abbasid rulers became more dissolute and less interested in affairs of state, several powerful Persian families close to the throne became the real locus of power in the imperial system.

dhows Arab sailing vessels with triangular or lateen sails; strongly influenced European ship design.

Town and Country: Commercial Boom and Agrarian Expansion

The rise of the mawali was paralleled in the Abbasid era by the growth in wealth and social status of the merchant and landlord classes of the empire. The Abbasid age was a time of great urban expansion that was linked to a revival of the Afro-Eurasian trading network, which had declined with the fall of the Han dynasty in China in the early 3rd century C.E. and the slow collapse of the Roman Empire in the 4th and 5th centuries. The Abbasid domains in the west and the great Tang and Song empires in the east became the pivots of the revived commercial system.

From the western Mediterranean to the South China Sea, Arab **dhows**, or sailing vessels with lateen (triangular) sails, which later influenced European ship design, carried the goods of one civilized core to be exchanged with those of another. Muslim merchants often formed joint ventures with Christians and Jews. Because each merchant had a different Sabbath, the firm could do business all week. Merchants grew rich by supplying the cities of the empire with provisions. Mercantile concerns also took charge of the long-distance trade that specialized in luxury products for the elite classes. The great profits from trade were reinvested in new commercial enterprises, the purchase of land, and the construction of the great mansions that dominated the central quarters of the political and commercial hubs of the empire. Some wealth also went to charity, as required by the Qur'an. A good deal of the wealth was spent on building and running mosques and religious schools, baths, and rest houses for weary travelers (Figure 7.7). Large donations were

Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: Baghdad: City of Wonders

FIGURE 7.7 The rulers and nobility of the Abbasid capital in Baghdad frequented baths like that shown in this Persian miniature painting. Here the caliph, Haroun al-Rashid, receives a haircut while servants prepare the steam rooms. At the baths, the Abbasid elite could relax, exchange gossip, and enjoy expert massages. (British Library, London.)

VISUALIZING THE PAST

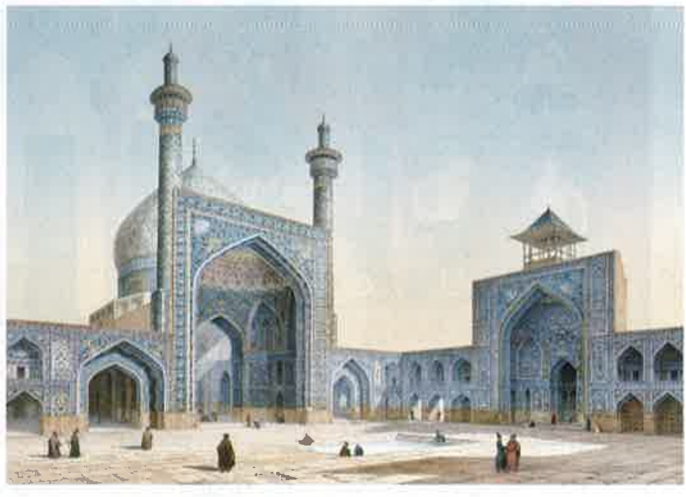
The Mosque as a Symbol of Islamic Civilization

FROM ONE END OF THE ISLAMIC world to the other, Muslim towns and cities can be readily identified by the domes and minarets of the mosques where the faithful are called to prayer five times daily. The illustrations included here trace the development of the mosque and the refinement of mosque architecture, the crowning glory of Islamic material culture, during the early centuries of Muslim expansion. As you look at these pictures and follow the development of the mosque, consider what the functions of the mosque and the evolving style of mosque architecture can tell us about Muslim beliefs and values and the impact of earlier religions, such as Judaism and Christianity, on Islam.

Given the low level of material culture in pre-Islamic Arabia, it is not surprising that the earliest prayer houses were simple in design and construction. In fact, these first mosques were laid out along the lines suggested by Muhammad's own house. They were square enclosures with a shaded porch on one side, a columned shelter on the other, and an open courtyard in between. The outer perimeter of the earliest mosques was made of reed mats, but soon more permanent stone walls surrounded the courtyard and prayer areas. After Mecca was taken and the Ka'ba became the central shrine of the new faith, each mosque was oriented to the qibla, or Mecca wall, which always faced in the direction of the holy city.

In the last years of the prophet, his chair was located so that the faithful could see and hear him during prayer sessions. During the time of the first caliphs, the raised area became the place from which sermons were delivered. From the mid-8th century, this space evolved into a genuine pulpit (*minbar* in Arabic). Somewhat earlier, the practice of building a special and often elaborately decorated niche in the qibla had developed.

Pulpit (minbar) from which the Friday sermons are delivered throughout the Muslim world.



Domes and minarets of the Shah Mosque at Isfahan, Iran.

Over time, mosques became more elaborate. Very often the remains of Greek or Roman temples or abandoned Christian churches formed the core of major mosques, or the ruins of these structures were mined for stone for mosque construction. In the larger cities, the courtyards of the great mosques were surrounded by columns and arches, and eventually they were enclosed by great domes such as that at the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.

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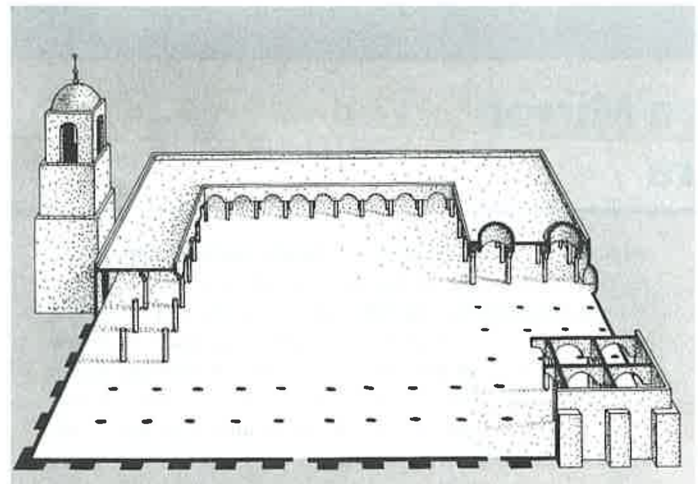

Drawing of the early mosque design.

Al-Aqsa Mosque (or Dome of the Rock) in Jerusalem, the third holiest site in Islam.

The first minarets, or towers from which the faithful were called to prayer, were added in the early 8th century and soon became a key feature of the mosque complex. As mosques grew larger and more architecturally refined, elaborate decoration in brightly colored ceramic tiles, semiprecious stones, and gold and silver filigree adorned their sides and domes. Because human and animal images were forbidden, geometric designs, passages from the Qur'an in swirling Arabic, and flower and plant motifs were favored. Nowhere were these decorations more splendid than in the mosques of Persia. Thus, in the early centuries of Islam, these great houses of worship became the focal points of Islamic cities, key places of community worship and socialization, and, with the schools that were often attached, vital intellectual and educational centers of the Islamic world.

QUESTIONS

- What do the design and decoration of Muslim mosques tell us about the Islamic view of a supreme being and the relationship between Allah and humans?
- Discuss the Christian and Jewish influences you detect in mosque design and the pattern of religious worship conducted there. What do you think is the significance of the lavish application of color and the frequent use of floral and plant motifs and Arabic verses from the Qur'an in the decoration of mosques through much of the Muslim world?

Qibla wall with decorated section facing Mecca.

also made to hospitals, which in the numbers of their patients and the quality of their medical care surpassed those of any other civilization of that time.

The growth of Abbasid cities was also fed by a great increase in handicraft production. Both government-run and privately owned workshops expanded or were established to produce a wide range of products, from necessities such as furniture and carpets to luxury items such as glassware, jewelry, and tapestries. Although the artisans often were poorly paid and some worked in great

DOCUMENT

The Thousand and One Nights as a Mirror of Elite Society in the Abbasid Era

THE LUXURIOUS LIFESTYLE OF THE ABBASID rulers and their courtiers reflected the new wealth of the political and commercial elites of the Islamic Empire. At the same time, it intensified sectarian and social divisions in the Islamic community. As the compilation of folktales from many parts of the empire titled *The Thousand and One Nights* testifies, life for much of the elite in Baghdad and other major urban centers was luxurious and oriented to the delights of the flesh. Caliphs and wealthy merchants lived in palatial residences of stone and marble, complete with gurgling fountains and elaborate gardens, which served as retreats from the glare and heat of the southern Mediterranean climate. In the Abbasid palaces, luxurious living and ostentation soared to fantastic heights. In the Hall of the Tree, for example, there was a huge artificial tree, made entirely of gold and silver and filled with gold mechanical birds that chirped to keep the caliph in good cheer.

Because the tales were just that—tall tales—there is some exaggeration of the wealth, romantic exploits, and sexual excesses of the world depicted. But for some members of the elite classes, the luxuries, frivolities, and vices of the Abbasid age were very real. The following passages are taken from an English translation of *The Thousand and One Nights*. Each is selected to reveal a different facet of high society in the Abbasid era. The first, which describes the sumptuous interior of a mansion in Baghdad, indicates that conspicuous material consumption existed far beyond the palace.

> They reached a spacious ground-floor hall, built with admirable skill and beautified with all manner of colors and carvings, with upper balconies and groined [sharply curved] arches and galleries and cupboards and recesses whose curtains hung before them. In the midst stood a great basin full of water surrounding a fine fountain, and at the upper end on the raised dais was a couch of juniper wood set with gems and pearls, with a canopy-like mosquito curtain of red satin-silk looped up with pearls as big as filberts [hazelnuts] and bigger.

In another tale, a fallen prince details the proper upbringing and education for a person of substance:

> I am a king, son of a king, and was brought up like a prince. I learned intoning the Koran [Qur'an] according [to] the seven schools and I read all manner [of] books, and held disputations on their contents with the doctors and men of science. Moreover, I studied star lore and the fair sayings of poets, and I exercised myself in all branches of learning until I surpassed the people of my time. My skill in calligraphy [writing, in this case Arabic and perhaps Persian] exceeded that of all of the scribes, and my fame was bruited abroad over all climes and cities, and all the kings learned to know my name.

In the following passage, a stylishly dressed woman from the elite classes is described in great detail:

> There stood before him an honorable woman in a mantilla [veil] of Mosul silk broidered with gold and bordered with brocade [a rich cloth with a raised design, often of gold or silver]. Her walking shoes were also [broidered] with gold, and her hair floated in long plaits. She raised her face veil . . . showing two black eyes fringed with jetty lashes, whose glances were soft and languishing and whose perfect beauty was ever blandishing.

The woman leads a porter to a marketplace, which again reflects the opulence accessible to the rich and powerful of Abbasid society:

> She stopped at the fruiter's shop and bought from him Shami apples and Osmani quinces and Omani peaches, and cucumbers of Nile growth, and Egyptian limes and Sultani oranges and citrons, besides Aleppine jasmine, scented myrtle berries, Damascene nenuphars [water lilies], flower of privit and camomile, blood-red anemones, violets, and pomegranate bloom, eglantine [wild rose], and narcissus, and set the whole in the porter's crate.

QUESTIONS

- What objects are key symbols of wealth in Abbasid society?
- What attainments are highly valued for upper-class men?
- What do they tell us about occupations and talents that brought high status in Abbasid society, and how do they compare with career aspirations in our own?
- In comparison, what attributes of women are stressed in these passages?

workshops, they were not slaves or drudge laborers. They owned their own tools and were often highly valued for their skills. The most accomplished of the artisans formed guildlike organizations, which negotiated wages and working conditions with the merchants and supported their members in times of financial difficulty or personal crisis.

In towns and the countryside, much of the unskilled labor was left to slaves, often attached to prominent families as domestic servants. Large numbers of slaves also served the caliphs and their highest advisors. It was possible for the more clever and ambitious slaves to rise to positions of great power, and many eventually were granted their freedom or were able to buy it. Less fortunate were the slaves forced into lives of hard labor under the overseer's whip on rural estates and government projects, such as those devoted to draining marshlands, or into a lifetime of labor in the nightmare conditions of the great salt mines in southern Iraq. Most of these drudge laborers were non-Muslims captured on slaving raids in east Africa.

View the **Closer Look** on **MyHistoryLab**: Al-Hariri, Assemblies (Maqamat)

In the countryside, a wealthy and deeply entrenched landed elite called the **ayan** emerged in the early decades of Abbasid rule. Many of these landlords had been long established. Others were newcomers: Arab soldiers who invested their share of the booty in land, or merchants and administrators who funneled their profits and kickbacks into sizeable estates. In many regions, most peasants did not own the land they worked. They occupied it as tenants, sharecroppers, or migrant laborers who were required to give the greater portion of the crops they harvested to the estate owners.

ayan [ä yän] The wealthy landed elite that emerged in the early decades of Abbasid rule.

The First Flowering of Islamic Learning

In the first phase of Abbasid rule, the Islamic contribution to human artistic expression focused on the great mosques, such as those featured in the Visualizing the Past box, and great palaces. In addition to advances in religious, legal, and philosophical discourse, learning in the Muslim domains focused on the sciences and mathematics. In the early Abbasid period, the main tasks were recovering and preserving the learning of the ancient civilizations of the Mediterranean and Middle East. Beyond the works of Plato, for example, much of Greek learning had been lost to the peoples of western Europe. Thanks to Muslim and Jewish scholars, the priceless writings of the Greeks on key subjects such as medicine, algebra, geometry, astronomy, anatomy, and ethics were saved, recopied in Arabic, and dispersed throughout the empire. From Spain, Greek writings found their way into Christendom. Among the authors rescued in this manner were Aristotle, Galen, Hippocrates, Ptolemy, and Euclid.

In addition, scholars working in Arabic transmitted ideas that paralleled the rise of Arab traders and merchants as the carriers of goods and inventions. For example, Muslim invaders of south Asia soon learned of the Indian system of numbers. From India they were carried by Muslim scholars and merchants to the Middle Eastern centers of Islamic civilization. Eventually, the Indian numerical system was transmitted across the Mediterranean to Italy and from there to northern Europe. Along with Greek and Arab mathematics, Indian numbers later proved critical to the early modern Scientific Revolution in western Europe.

Global Connections and Critical Themes

EARLY ISLAM AND THE WORLD

The rise of Islamic civilization from the 7th to 9th centuries C.E. was a stunning development without precedent in human history. Not only had the largely nomadic peoples from an Arabian backwater built one of the greatest empires of the preindustrial world, they had laid the basis for the first truly global civilization if one excludes the Americas, which were unknown to the peoples of the Eastern Hemisphere. Building on earlier religious traditions, especially Christianity and Judaism, Arab culture had nurtured Islam, one of the great universal religions of humankind. The mosques, the prayer rituals and pilgrimages of the faithful, and the influence of Islamic law proclaimed the pervasive effects of this new creed in societies from Spain to eastern Indonesia and from central Asia to the savannas of west Africa.

The Arab commitment to trade and merchant activity was crucial in setting up wider connections among Asia, Africa, and Europe, with the Middle East as the hub. The region's earlier roles in commerce, in and between the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean Sea, expanded greatly.

In the arts and sciences, the Muslims initially relied heavily on the achievements of the classical civilizations of Greece and Mesopotamia. But the work of preserving and combining the discoveries of earlier peoples soon led to reformulation and innovation. As in religion and politics, Muslim peoples were soon making important contributions to learning, invention, and artistic creativity. These were carried by their armies and religious teachers to other civilizations in Europe, Africa, and Asia.

Never before had a civilization spanned so many different cultures and combined such a patchwork of linguistic groups, religions, and ethnic types. Never before had a single civilization mediated so successfully between the other centers of civilized life. Never had a civilized lifestyle so deeply affected so many of the nomadic cultures that surrounded the pools of sedentary agriculture and urban life. Ironically, the contacts Islamic mediation made possible between the civilized cores of the Eastern Hemisphere contributed much to the transformations in technology and organization that increasingly tilted the balance of power against the Muslim peoples. But those reversals were still far in the future. In the short run, Islamic conversion and contact ushered in an age of unparalleled nomadic intervention in and dominance over global history.

Further Readings

There are many accounts of Muhammad's life and the rise of Islam. The most readable is Karen Armstrong's *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet* (1992). A sense of the very different interpretations that have been offered to explain these pivotal developments in global history can be gained by comparing W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman* (1961); Tor Andrae, *Muhammad: The Man and His Faith* (1960); Maxime Rodinson, *Mohammad* (1971); and the more recent revisionist (and somewhat less accessible) writings of Elizabeth Crone and Michael Cook.

Despite its title, H. A. R. Gibb's *Mohammedism* (1962) remains a useful introduction to Islam as a religion. John Esposito's *Islam: The Straight Path* (1991) and Karen Armstrong's *Islam: A Short History* (2000) also provide good and updated overviews of the faith. On early Islamic expansion and civilization through the first centuries of the Abbasid caliphate, see G. E. von Grunebaum's *Classical Islam* (1970) and M. A. Shaban's *Islamic History: An Interpretation* (1971) and *The Abbasid Revolution* (1970). On nearly all of these topics, it is difficult to surpass Marshall G. S. Hodgson's brilliant analysis, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 1 (1974), but some grounding in the history and beliefs of the Muslims is recommended before one attempts this sweeping and provocative work. More accessible, dated in some respects, but still authoritative and highly interpretive is Philip Hitti's *History of the Arabs* (1967 ed.), which can be supplemented by his very engaging *Makers of Arab History* (1968). More encyclopedic and benefiting from recent research, the surveys of Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (1988) and Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (1991) provide useful overviews.

On early Islamic society generally, see M. M. Ahsan, *Social Life Under the Abbasids* (1979). On women in Islam specifically, there is a superb essay by Guity Nashat, "Women in the Middle East, 8000 B.C.–A.D. 1800," in the collection titled *Restoring Women to History* (1988), published by the Organization of American Historians. See also the relevant portions of the essays in Lois Beck and Nikki Keddi, eds., *Women in the Muslim World* (1978); and the early chapters of Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (1992). For a broad treatment of the roles and position of women in ancient civilizations more generally, see Sarah and Brady Hughes, *Women in Ancient Global History* (1998). For insights into Islamic culture and civilization from a literary perspective, a good place to begin is Eric Schroeder's delightful *Muhammad's People: A Tale by Anthology* (1955) and N. J. Dawood's translation of *Tales from the Thousand and One Nights* (1954). Of the many works on Muslim art and architecture Robert Hillenbrand's recent *Islamic Art and Architecture* (1999) is engaging, well researched, and lavishly illustrated. K. A. Creswell's *Early Muslim Architecture*, 2 vols. (1932–1940), and the more recent Markus Hattstein and Peter Delius, eds., *Islam: Art and Architecture* (2000), provide even greater detail and ample illustrations.

On MyHistoryLab

Critical Thinking Questions

1. What were the most important social bonds and status relationships in pre-Islamic society in Arabia and how did they contribute to survival in the harsh desert environment?
2. What are the five pillars of the Islamic faith and how do they make for a strong sense of identity and community within the Islamic *umma?*
3. What were the major factors that led to the Sunni—Shi'a split in the Muslim Arab community?
4. What were the major motives for converting to Islam when the *umma* opened up to non-Muslims in the Abbasid era?

8

Abbasid Decline and the Spread of Islamic Civilization to South and Southeast Asia

Listen to Chapter 8 on MyHistoryLab

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

8.1 What were the major sources contributing to the decline of the Abbasid dynasty? p. 184

8.2 Discuss the major advances in the arts and sciences that occurred in the Islamic world in the late-Abbasid period. p. 189

8.3 How did Hindu religious leaders and organizations counter the considerable appeal of Sufi missionaries and their efforts to win converts in South and Southeast Asia from the 10th through the 16th centuries? p. 192

8.4 Beyond the Sufis, who were the major agents and what were the motivations for conversions to the Islamic religion in South and South Asia in this same era? p. 200

Of all of the factors that contributed to the spread of Islamic civilization in the millennium after the prophet Muhammad received his divine revelations in the early 7th century C.E., perhaps none was as crucial—yet neglected—as the rather modest sailing vessels that plied the waters of the Red Sea and Persian Gulf. Most commonly known as *dhows* (see Chapter 7, p. 175), but appearing in numerous variations with different names and found from the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean, these ships were probably first developed along the Nile River. Compared to the great junks of China, or even many of the less-imposing trading ships in the Indian Ocean in the classical age, dhows were rather small vessels. They normally had one or two masts and planked, wooden hulls that resembled modern yachts in shape, with pointed bows and square sterns (Figure 8.1). The dhows' hull design contributed to their swiftness and maneuverability, but

FIGURE **8.1** Arab traders made the most of seasonal winds, sailing dhows like this one to Africa and Asia in winter and returning home during the summer months. Dhows were small but sturdy, graceful, and highly maneuverable sailing vessels. They that carried Arab traders, Sufi holy men, and warriors from the Middle East across the Mediterranean, the Red Sea and Persian Gulf, and throughout the vast Indian Ocean trading system.

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it was the configuration of their sails that have made them one of the most popular and enduring of the world's ships for two millennia. Dhows were propelled by one or two large, triangular **lateen** sails that attached to the masts by long booms or yard arms, which extended diagonally high across both the fore and aft portions of the ship.

lateen Triangular sails attached to the masts of dhows by long booms, or yard arms, which extended diagonally high across the fore and aft of the ship.

Although their relatively shallow hulls meant that dhows could not match junks or bulkier merchant ships in cargo capacity, their slender shape gave them a considerable advantage over most other ships in speed. Their triangular sails meant that they could tack against the wind, which was very difficult in the best of conditions for square-rigged ships. Most often, however, those who sailed dhows followed a seasonal pattern set by the direction of the monsoon winds that alternated between flows to the sea or land according to the time of the year in the India Ocean and adjacent waterways. Although galleys like those of classical Greece and Rome were widely used by Arabs in the Mediterranean, from Spain to China tens of thousands of dhows were the main carriers of Muslim commerce. And along with merchants and their trade goods, many of the same ships conveyed Sufis or Muslim holy men to regions as far-flung as India, Java and Malaya, and the Philippine Islands.

Seaworthy ships like the dhows were essential to the remarkable spread of the Islamic faith and the civilizations it gave rise to in this era. In contrast to the expansion of Muslim empires, which was largely carried out by Arab armies traveling over land, lasting mass conversions of conquered peoples to the religion of Islam were mainly due to the efforts of Sufis and other spiritual leaders. These missionaries of the Islamic faith traveled by caravan into central Asia and across the Sahara or traversed the seas in sturdy dhows. In either case, those who went out to win converts to Islam also disseminated broader products of Muslim culture. These included the Arabic language; advanced technologies, such as water pumps and windmills; Muslim science, law, and philosophy; and Islamic art and architecture.

Despite their speed and dexterity, dhows did not make great warships, either before or after gunpowder was introduced into sea warfare. They were too small to provide a suitable firing platform for regular cannon, and they could not carry enough soldiers to grapple, board, and overwhelm the crews of enemy ships. Like most of the ships that sailed the seas of the Middle East, east Africa, and Asia, dhows were built for trade and not war. Designs for that purpose served the peoples of the Indian Ocean and adjoining seas well until the last years of the 15th century. But with the arrival of well-armed Portuguese fleets after 1498, neither the dhows nor any of the ships in Asia west of the South China Sea could hold back expansionist Christian warriors and seafarers. These aspiring empire builders were eager to tap into the wealth, knowledge, and technological acumen of Islamic and Chinese culture zones far more advanced in most areas of human endeavor than their own. ■

Even as Muslim traders and Sufi holymen spread Islam across a great swath of Afro-Euroasia from north Africa in the west to the Philippines in the east, the Abbasid empire was crumbling from within. In many of the areas newly won to the faith, rival dynasties arose to challenge Abbasid power. These new polities and the Abbasids themselves were in turn threatened by the invasions of nomadic peoples launched by successive waves of Turkish-speakers and the Mongols from central Asia as well as Berber jihadists from Saharan Africa. Ironically, as the political hold of various Muslim rulers weakened, Islamic civilization reached new heights of creativity.

700 C.E.	800 C.E.	900 C.E.	1000 C.E.	1200 C.E.
661–750 Umayyad caliphate (Damascus) **711–713** First Muslim raids into India **750** Establishment of the Abbasid caliphate (Baghdad) **775–785** Reign of al-Mahdi **777** Independent dynasty established in Algeria **786–809** Reign of al-Rashid **788** Independent dynasty established in Morocco	**800** Independent dynasty established in Tunisia **809** First war of succession between Abbasid princes **813–833** Reign of al-Ma'mun; first mercenary forces recruited 865–925 Life of al-Razi, physician and scientist	**945** Persian Buyids capture Baghdad; caliphs become puppet rulers **973–1050** Life of al-Biruni, scientist **998** Beginning of Ghazni raids into western India	**c. 1020** Death of Firdawsi, author of the *Shah-Nama* **1055** Seljuk Turks over-throw Buyids, control caliphate **1096–1099** First Christian Crusade in Palestine **1058–1111** Life of al-Ghazali, philosopher and scientist **1038–1123** Life of Omar Khayyam, scientist and poet	**1206** Establishment of the Delhi sultanate in India **1258** Fall of Baghdad to Mongols; end of Abbasid caliphate **1290s** Beginning of the spread of Islam in south-east Asia **1291** Fall of Acre; last crusader stronghold in Middle East

As we shall see in this chapter, the Abbasid age was a time of remarkable achievements in architecture and the fine arts, in literature and philosophy, and in mathematics and the sciences. Many of these developments were enriched by the wealth, knowledge, and products exchanged among the many regions of an ever-expanding Muslim world and the non-Muslim peoples contacted in border regions from Europe to China. From the 10th to the 14th centuries, Muslim mystics, traders, and at times warriors carried the faith of Muhammad across much of the known world. In this chapter we will focus on this process in south and southeast Asia. In those that follow, north and west Africa and central Asia will be the focus of our inquiry.

THE ISLAMIC HEARTLANDS IN THE MIDDLE AND LATE ABBASID ERAS

8.1 What were the major sources contributing to the decline of the Abbasid dynasty?

The vast Abbasid empire (Map 8.1) gradually disintegrated between the 9th and 13th centuries C.E. Political decline and recurring social turmoil were fed both by the emergence of rival centers of power and the inroads of nomadic peoples attracted to the rich and fertile regions where Muslim urban life and power were centered.

As early as the reign of the third Abbasid caliph, **al-Mahdi** (r. 775–785), the courtly excesses and political divisions that eventually contributed to the decline of the empire were apparent. Al-Mahdi's efforts to reconcile the moderates among the Shi'a opposition to Abbasid rule ended in failure. This meant that Shi'a revolts and assassination attempts against Abbasid officials would plague the dynasty to the end of its days. Al-Mahdi also abandoned the frugal ways of his predecessor. In the brief span of his reign, he cultivated a taste for luxury and monumental building and surrounded himself with a multitude of dependent wives, concubines, and courtiers. These habits would prove to be an ever-greater financial drain in the reigns of later caliphs.

al-Mahdi [al-mä dEE] (r. 775–785) Third of the Abbasid caliphs; attempted but failed to reconcile moderates among Shi'a to Abbasid dynasty; failed to resolve problem of succession.

Harun al-Rashid One of the great Islamic rulers of the Abbasid era.

Perhaps most critically, al-Mahdi failed to solve the vexing problem of succession. Not only did he waver between which of his older sons would succeed him, but he allowed his wives and concubines, the mothers of different candidates, to become involved in the palace intrigues that became a standard feature of the transfer of power from one caliph to the next. Although a full-scale civil war was avoided after al-Mahdi's death, within a year his eldest son and successor was poisoned. That act cleared the way for one of the most famous and enduring of the Abbasid caliphs, **Harun al-Rashid** (r. 786–809), to ascend the throne.

Imperial Extravagance and Succession Disputes

Emissaries sent in the early 9th century to Baghdad from Charlemagne (Map 8.1), then the most powerful monarch in Christian Europe, provide ample evidence that Harun al-Rashid shared his father's taste for sumptuous living. Harun al-Rashid dazzled the Christians with the splendor of Baghdad's

MAP **8.1 The Abbasid Empire at Its Peak**

mosques, palaces, and treasure troves, which is reflected in the painting of nightlife in a palace in Figure 8.2. He also sent them back to Charlemagne with presents, including an intricate water clock and an elephant, which were literally worth a king's ransom.

The luxury and intrigue of Harun's court have also been immortalized by the tales of *The Thousand and One Nights* (see the Document in Chapter 7), set in the Baghdad of his day. The plots and maneuvers of the courtesans, eunuchs, and royal ministers related in the tales suggest yet another source of dynastic weakness. Partly because he was only 23 at the time of his accession to the throne, Harun became heavily dependent, particularly in the early years of his reign, on a family of Persian advisors. Although he eventually resisted their influence, the growth of the power of royal advisors at the expense of the caliphs became a clear trend in succeeding reigns. In fact, from the mid-9th century onward, most caliphs were pawns in the power struggles between different factions at the court.

Harun al-Rashid's death prompted the first of several full-scale civil wars over succession. In itself, the precedent set by the struggle for the throne was deeply damaging. But it had an additional consequence that would all but end the real power of the caliphs. The first civil war convinced the sons of al-Ma'mun (813–833), the winner, to build personal armies in anticipation of the fight for the throne that would break out when their father died. One of the sons, the victor in the next round of succession struggles, recruited a "bodyguard" of some 4000 slaves, mostly Turkic-speaking nomads from central Asia. On becoming caliph, he increased this mercenary force to more than 70,000.

Not surprisingly, this impressive army soon became a power center in its own right. In 846 slave mercenaries murdered the reigning caliph and placed one of his sons on the throne. In the next decade, four more caliphs were assassinated or poisoned by the mercenary forces. From this time onward, the leaders of the slave mercenary armies were often the real power behind the Abbasid throne and were major players in the struggles for control of the capital and empire. The mercenaries also became a major force for violent social unrest. They were often the catalyst for the food riots that broke out periodically when the price of everyday staples rose too sharply because of shortages or price gouging in Baghdad and other urban centers.

FIGURE **8.2** The richness and vitality of urban life in the Islamic world in the Abbasid age and later eras are wonderfully captured in this 16th-century Persian illustration from the *Khamsah* (Five Poems) of Nizami. The miniature painting gives us a bird's-eye view of a typical night in one of the great palaces of Baghdad. The multiple scenes vividly capture the bustle and high artistry of the splendidly decorated rooms and gardens, from a group of musicians serenading a man who is presumably the lord of the mansion, to kitchen servants buying food and preparing to serve it to the lord and his guests.

(Attributed to Mir Sayyid 'Ali "Nighttime in a Palace." Folio from a Manuscript, c. 1539–1543. Harvard Art Museum, Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Gift of John Goelet, formerly in the collection of Louis J. Cartier, 1958.76. Katya Kallsen © President and Fellows of Harvard College.)

Imperial Breakdown and Agrarian Disorder

In the last decades of the 9th century, the dynasty brought the slave armies under control for a time, but at a great cost. Constant civil violence drained the treasury and alienated the subjects of the Abbasids. A further strain was placed on the empire's dwindling revenues by some caliphs' attempts to escape the turmoil of Baghdad by establishing new capitals near the original one. The construction of palaces, mosques, and public works for each of these new imperial centers added to the already exorbitant costs of maintaining the court and imperial administration. Of course, the expense fell heavily on the already hard-pressed peasantry of the central provinces of the empire, where some imperial control remained. The need to support growing numbers of mercenary troops also increased the revenue demands on the peasantry.

Spiraling taxation and outright pillaging led to the destruction or abandonment of many villages in the richest provinces of the empire. The great irrigation works that had for centuries been essential to agricultural production in the fertile Tigris–Euphrates basin fell into disrepair, and in some areas they collapsed entirely. Some peasants perished through flood, famine, or violent assault; others fled to wilderness areas beyond the reach of the Abbasid tax collectors or to neighboring kingdoms. Some formed bandit gangs or joined the crowds of vagabonds that trudged the highways and camped in the towns of the imperial heartland. In many cases, dissident religious groups, such as the various Shi'a sects, instigated peasant uprisings. Shi'a participation meant that these movements sought not only to correct the official abuses that had occurred under the Abbasid regime but to destroy the dynasty itself.

The Declining Position of Women in the Family and Society

The harem and the veil became the twin emblems of women's increasing subjugation to men and confinement to the home in the Abbasid era. Although the seclusion of women had been practiced by some Middle Eastern peoples since ancient times, the harem was a creation of the Abbasid court. The wives and the concubines of the Abbasid caliphs were restricted to the forbidden quarters of the imperial palace. Many of the concubines were slaves, who could win their freedom and gain power by bearing healthy sons for the rulers. The growing wealth of the Abbasid elite created a great demand for female and male slaves, who were found by the tens of thousands in Baghdad and other large cities. Most of these urban slaves continued to perform domestic services in the homes of the wealthy. One of the 10th-century caliphs is reputed to have had 11,000 eunuchs among his slave corps; another is said to have kept 4000 slave concubines.

Most of the slaves had been captured or purchased in the non-Muslim regions surrounding the empire, including the Balkans, central Asia, and Sudanic Africa. They were sold in the slave markets found in all of the larger towns of the Abbasid realm. Female and male slaves were prized for both their beauty and their intelligence. Some of the best-educated men and women in the empire were slaves. Consequently, caliphs and high officials often spent more time with their clever and talented slave concubines than with their less-educated wives. Slave concubines and servants often had more personal liberty than freeborn wives. Slave women could go to the market, and they did not have to wear the veils and robes that were required for free women in public places.

Although women from the lower classes farmed, wove clothing and rugs, or raised silkworms to help support their families, rich women were allowed almost no career outlets beyond the home. Often married at puberty (legally set at age 9), women were raised to devote their lives to running a household and serving their husbands. But at the highest levels of society, wives and concubines

cajoled their husbands and plotted with eunuchs and royal advisors to advance the interests of their sons and win for them the ruler's backing for succession to the throne. Despite these brief incursions into power politics, by the end of the Abbasid era, the freedom and influence—both within the family and in the wider world—that women had enjoyed in the first centuries of Islamic expansion had been severely curtailed.

Nomadic Incursions and the Eclipse of Caliphal Power

Preoccupied by struggles in the capital and central provinces, the caliphs and their advisors were powerless to prevent further losses of territory in the outer reaches of the empire. In addition, areas as close to the capital as Egypt and Syria broke away from Abbasid rule (Map 8.1). More alarmingly, by the mid-10th century, independent kingdoms that had formed in areas that were once provinces of the empire were moving to supplant the Abbasids as lords of the Islamic world. In 945, the armies of one of these regional splinter dynasties, the **Buyids** of Persia, invaded the heartlands of the Abbasid empire and captured Baghdad. From this point onward, the caliphs were little more than puppets controlled by families such as the Buyids. Buyid leaders took the title of *sultan* ("victorious" in Arabic), which came to designate Muslim rulers, especially in the West.

The Buyids controlled the caliph and the court, but they could not prevent the further disintegration of the empire. In just over a century, the Buyids' control over the caliphate was broken, and they were supplanted in 1055 by another group of nomadic invaders from central Asia via Persia, the **Seljuk Turks**. For the next two centuries, Turkic military leaders ruled the remaining portions of the Abbasid empire in the name of caliphs, who were usually of Arab or Persian extraction. The Seljuks were staunch Sunnis, and they moved quickly to purge the Shi'a officials who had risen to power under the Buyids and to rid the caliph's domains of the Shi'a influences the Buyids had tried to promote. For a time, the Seljuk military machine was also able to restore political initiative to the much-reduced caliphate. Seljuk victories ended the threat of conquest by a rival Shi'a dynasty centered in Egypt. They also humbled the Byzantines, who had hoped to take advantage of Muslim divisions to regain some of their long-lost lands. The Byzantines' crushing defeat also opened the way to the settlement of Asia Minor, or Anatolia, by nomadic peoples of Turkic origins, some of whom would soon begin to lay the foundations of the Ottoman Empire.

Buyids [BOO-yihds] Regional splinter dynasty of the mid-10th century; invaded and captured Baghdad; ruled Abbasid Empire under title of sultan; retained Abbasids as figureheads.

Seljuk Turks [SEHL-jook Turks] Nomadic invaders from central Asia via Persia; staunch Sunnis; ruled in name of Abbasid caliphs from mid-11th century.

The Impact of the Christian Crusades

Soon after seizing power, the Seljuks faced a very different challenge to Islamic civilization. It came from Christian crusaders, knights from western Europe (see Chapter 11) who were determined to capture the portions of the Islamic world that made up the Holy Land of biblical times. Muslim political divisions and the element of surprise made the first of the crusaders' assaults, between 1096 and 1099, by far the most successful. Much of the Holy Land was captured and divided into Christian kingdoms. In June 1099, the main objective of the Crusade, Jerusalem, was taken, and its Muslim and Jewish inhabitants were massacred by the rampaging Christian knights.

For nearly two centuries, the Europeans, who eventually mounted eight **Crusades** that varied widely in strength and success, maintained their precarious hold on the eastern Mediterranean region. But they posed little threat to the more powerful Muslim princes, whose disregard for the Christians was demonstrated by the fact that they continued to quarrel among themselves despite the intruders' aggressions. When united under a strong leader, as they were under Salah-ud-Din (known as **Saladin** in Christian Europe) in the last decades of the 12th century, the Muslims rapidly reconquered most of the crusader outposts. Saladin's death in 1193 and the subsequent breakup of his kingdom gave the remaining Christian citadels some respite. But the last of the crusader kingdoms was lost with the fall of Acre in 1291.

Undoubtedly, the impact of the Crusades was much greater on the Christians who launched them than on the Muslim peoples who had to fend them off. Because there had long been so much contact between western Europe and the Islamic world through trade and through the Muslim kingdoms in Spain and southern Italy, it is difficult to be sure which influences to attribute specifically to the Crusades. But the crusaders' firsthand experiences in the eastern Mediterranean certainly intensified European borrowing from the Muslim world that had been going on for centuries. Muslim weapons, such as the famous damascene swords (named after the city of Damascus), were highly prized and sometimes copied by the Europeans, who were always eager to improve on their methods of making war. Muslim techniques of building fortifications were adopted by many Christian rulers, as can be

Crusades Series of military adventures initially launched by western Christians to free Holy Land from Muslims; temporarily succeeded in capturing Jerusalem and establishing Christian kingdoms; later used for other purposes such as commercial wars and extermination of heresy.

Saladin Muslim leader in the last decades of the 12th century; reconquered most of the crusader outposts for Islam.

Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: A Muslim View of the Crusades: Behâ-ed-Din, Richard I Massacres Prisoners after Taking Acre, 1191

seen in the castles built in Normandy and coastal England by William the Conqueror and his successors in the 11th and 12th centuries. Richard the Lionheart's legendary preference for Muslim over Christian physicians was but one sign of the Europeans' avid centuries-old interest in the superior scientific learning of Muslim peoples.

From Muslims and Jews in Spain, Sicily, Egypt, and the Middle East, the Europeans recovered much of the Greek learning that had been lost to northern Europe during the waves of nomadic invasions after the fall of Rome. They also mastered Arabic (properly Indian) numerals and the decimal system, and they benefited from the great advances Arab and Persian thinkers had made in mathematics and many of the sciences. The European demand for Middle Eastern rugs and textiles is demonstrated by the Oriental rugs and tapestries that adorned the homes of the European upper classes in Renaissance and early modern paintings. It is also reflected in European (and our own) names for different kinds of cloth, such as *fustian*, *taffeta*, *muslin*, and *damask*, which are derived from Persian terms or the names of Muslim cities where the cloth was produced and sold.

Ibn Khaldun [i buhn kal dUn, KHUn] (1332–1406) A Muslim historian; developed concept that dynasties of nomadic conquerors had a cycle of three generations—strong, weak, dissolute.

DOCUMENT

Ibn Khaldun on the Rise and Decline of Empires

ALTHOUGH HE LIVED IN THE CENTURY after the Abbasid caliphate was destroyed in 1258, **Ibn Khaldun** was very much a product of the far-flung Islamic civilization that the Abbasids had consolidated and expanded. He was also one of the greatest historians and social commentators of all time. After extensive travels in the Islamic world, he served as a political advisor at several of the courts of Muslim rulers in north Africa. With the support of a royal patron, Ibn Khaldun wrote a universal history that began with a very long philosophical preface called *The Muqaddimah*. Among the subjects he treated at length were the causes of the rise and fall of dynasties. The shifting fortunes of the dynasties he knew well in his native north Africa, as well as the fate of the Abbasids and earlier Muslim regimes, informed his attempts to find persistent patterns in the complex political history of the Islamic world. The following passages are from one of the most celebrated sections of *The Muqaddimah* on the natural life span of political regimes.

> We have stated that the duration of the life of a dynasty does not as a rule extend beyond three generations. The first generation retains the desert qualities, desert toughness, and desert savagery. [Its members are used to] privation and to sharing their glory [with each other]; they are brave and rapacious. Therefore, the strength of group feeling continues to be preserved among them. They are sharp and greatly feared. People submit to them.
>
> Under the influence of royal authority and a life of ease, the second generation changes from the desert attitude to sedentary culture, from privation to luxury and plenty, from a state in which everybody shared in the glory to one in which one man claims all the glory for himself while the others are too lazy to strive for [glory], and from proud superiority to humble subservience. Thus, the vigor of group feeling is broken to some extent. People become used to lowliness and obedience. But many of [the old virtues] remain in them, because they had direct personal contact with the first generation and its conditions.
>
> The third generation, then, has [completely] forgotten the period of desert life and toughness, as if it had never existed. They have lost [the taste for] group feeling, because they are dominated by force. Luxury reaches its peak among them, because they are so much given to a life of prosperity and ease. They become dependent on the dynasty and are like women and children who need to be defended [by someone else]. Group feeling disappears completely. People forget to protect and defend themselves and to press their claims. With their emblems, apparel, horseback riding, and [fighting] skill, they deceive people and give them the wrong impression. For the most part, they are more cowardly than women upon their backs. When someone comes and demands something from them, they cannot repel him. The ruler, then, has need of other, brave people for his support. He takes many clients and followers. They help the dynasty to some degree, until God permits it to be destroyed, and it goes with everything it stands for.
>
> Three generations last one hundred and twenty years. As a rule, dynasties do not last longer than that many years, a few more, a few less, save when, by chance, no one appears to attack [the dynasty]. When senility becomes preponderant [in a dynasty], there may be no claimant [for its power, and then nothing will happen] but if there should be one, he will encounter no one capable of repelling him. If the time is up [the end of the dynasty] cannot be postponed for a single hour, no more than it can be accelerated.

QUESTIONS

- What does this passage reveal about Ibn Khaldun's views of the contrasts between nomads and urban dwellers?
- Why does he see the former as a source of military power and political strength?
- What forces undermine dynasties in later generations?
- How well do these patterns correspond to the history of the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties we have been studying?

Muslim influences affected both the elite and popular cultures of much of western Europe in this period. These included Persian and Arabic words, games such as chess, chivalric ideals and troubadour ballads, as well as foods such as dates, coffee, and yogurt. Some of these imports, namely the songs of the troubadours, can be traced directly to the contacts the crusaders made in the Holy Land. But most were part of a process of exchange that extended over centuries, and was largely a one-way process. Although Arab traders imported some manufactures, such as glass and cloth, and raw materials from Europe, Muslim peoples in this era showed little interest in the learning or institutions of the West. Nevertheless, the Italian merchant communities, which remained after the political and military power of the crusaders had been extinguished in the Middle East, contributed a good deal more to these ongoing interchanges than all the forays of Christian knights.

AN AGE OF LEARNING AND ARTISTIC REFINEMENTS

8.2 Discuss the major advances in the arts and sciences that occurred in the Islamic world in the late-Abbasid period.

Paradoxically, even as the political power of the Abbasids declined, Islamic civilization reached new heights of achievement and entered into a phase of renewed expansion.

Although town life became more dangerous, the rapid growth and increasing prosperity that characterized the first centuries of Muslim expansion continued until late in the Abbasid era. Despite the declining revenue base of the caliphate and deteriorating conditions in the countryside, there was a great expansion of the professional classes, particularly doctors, scholars, and legal and religious experts (Figure 8.3). Muslim, Jewish, and in some areas Christian entrepreneurs amassed great fortunes supplying the cities of the empire with staples such as grain and barley, essentials such as cotton and woolen textiles for clothing, and luxury items such as precious gems, citrus fruits, and sugar cane. Long-distance trade between the Middle East and Mediterranean Europe and between coastal India and southeast Asia, in addition to the overland caravan trade with China, flourished through much of the Abbasid era (Map 8.2).

Among the chief beneficiaries of the sustained urban prosperity were artists and artisans, who continued the formidable achievements in architecture and the crafts that had begun in the Umayyad period. Mosques and palaces grew larger and more ornate in most parts of the empire. Even in outlying areas, such as Córdoban Spain, Muslim engineers and architects created some of the great architectural treasures of all time. The tapestries and rugs of Muslim peoples, most famously the Persians, were in great demand from Europe to China. To this day, Muslim rugs have rarely been matched for their exquisite designs, their vivid colors, and the skill with which they are woven. Muslim artisans also produced fine bronzes and superb ceramics.

The Full Flowering of Persian Literature

As Persian wives, concubines, advisors, bureaucrats, and (after the mid-10th century) Persian caliphs came to play central roles in imperial politics, Persian gradually replaced Arabic as the primary written language at the Abbasid court. Arabic remained the language of religion, law, and the natural sciences. Persian was favored by Arabs, Turks, and Muslims of Persian descent as the language of literary expression, administration, and scholarship. In Baghdad and major cities throughout the Abbasid empire and in neighboring kingdoms, Persian was the chief language of "high culture," the language of polite exchanges between courtiers as well as of history, poetic musings, and mystical revelations.

Written in a modified Arabic script and drawing selectively on Arabic vocabulary, the Persian of the Abbasid age was a supple language as beautiful to look at when drafted by a skilled calligrapher as it was to read aloud. Catch phrases ("A jug of wine, a loaf of bread, and Thou") from the *Rubaiyat* (ROO-bee-AHT) of Omar Khayyam (OH-mahr keye-YAHM) are certainly the pieces of Persian literature best known in the West. But other writers from this period surpassed Khayyam in profundity of thought and elegance of style. Perhaps the single most important work was the lengthy epic poem ***Shah-Nama*** (Book of Kings), written by Firdawsi in the late 10th and early 11th centuries. The work relates the history of Persia from the beginnings of time to the Islamic conquests, and it abounds in dramatic details of battles, intrigues, and illicit love affairs. Firdawsi's Persian has been extolled for

Shah-Nama Written by Firdawsi in late 10th and early 11th centuries; relates history of Persia from creation to the Islamic conquests.

FIGURE **8.3** The subtlety and depth attained by Muslim civilizations in the far-flung regions in which they were found is illustrated by this 17th-century watercolor painting titled *A Discourse between Muslim Sages*. The meditative figures, with scholarly books before them, surrounded by grass and trees, captures the commitment to learning and refined aesthetic sense that was cultivated by members of the elite classes throughout the Islamic world.

its grand, musical virtuosity, and portions of the *Shah-Nama* and other Persian works were read aloud to musical accompaniment. Brilliantly illustrated manuscripts of Firdawsi's epic history are among the most exquisite works of Islamic art.

In addition to historical epics, Persian writers in the Abbasid era wrote on many subjects, from doomed love affairs and statecraft to accounts of distant travels and mystical striving for communion with the divine. One of the great poets of the age, Sa'di, fuses an everyday incident with a religious one in the following relation of a single moment in his own life:

> Often I am minded, from the days of my childhood,
> How once I went out with my father on a festival;
> In fun I grew preoccupied with all the folk about,
> Losing touch with my father in the popular confusion;
> In terror and bewilderment I raised up a cry,
> Then suddenly my father boxed my ears:
> "You bold-eyed child, how many times, now,
> Have I told you not to lose hold of my skirt?"
> A tiny child cannot walk out alone,
> For it is difficult to take a way not seen;
> You too, poor friend, are but a child upon endeavour's way:
> Go, seize the skirts of those who know the way!

This blend of the mystical and commonplace was widely adopted in the literature of this period. It is epitomized in the *Rubaiyat*, whose author is much more concerned with finding meaning in life and a path to union with the divine than with extolling the delights of picnics in the garden with beautiful women.

Achievements in the Sciences

From preserving and compiling the learning of the ancient civilizations they had conquered in the early centuries of expansion, Muslim peoples—and the Jewish scholars who lived peacefully in Muslim lands—increasingly became creators and inventors in their own right. For several centuries, which spanned much of the period of Abbasid rule, Islamic civilization outstripped all others in scientific discoveries, new techniques of investigation, and new technologies. The many Muslim accomplishments in these areas include major corrections to the algebraic and geometric theories of the ancient Greeks and great advances in the use of basic concepts of trigonometry: the sine, cosine, and tangent.

Two discoveries in chemistry that were fundamental to all later investigation were the creation of the objective experiment and al-Razi's scheme of classifying all material substances into three categories: animal, vegetable, and mineral. The sophistication of Muslim scientific techniques is indicated by the fact that in the 11th century, al-Biruni was able to calculate the specific weight of 18 major minerals. This sophistication was also manifested in astronomical instruments such as those in Figure 8.4, developed through cooperation between Muslim scholars and skilled artisans. Their astronomical tables and maps of the stars were in great demand among scholars of other civilizations, including those of Europe and China.

As these breakthroughs suggest, much of the Muslims' work in scientific investigation had very practical applications. This practical bent was even greater in other fields. For example, Muslim cities such as Cairo boasted some of the best hospitals in the world. Doctors and pharmacists had to follow a regular course of study and pass a formal examination before they were allowed to practice. Muslim scientists did important work on optics and bladder ailments. Muslim traders introduced into the Islamic world and Europe many basic machines and techniques—namely, papermaking, silk-weaving, and ceramic firing—that had been devised earlier in China. In addition, Muslim scholars made some of the world's best maps, which were copied by geographers from Portugal to Poland.

Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: The Rubaiyat (11th c. CE) Omar Khayyam

ulama Orthodox religious scholars within Islam; pressed for a more conservative and restrictive theology; increasingly opposed to non-Islamic ideas and scientific thinking.

al-Ghazali [al Gaz-AHL-ee] (1058–1111) Brilliant Islamic theologian; struggled to fuse Greek and Qur'anic traditions; not entirely accepted by ulama.

View the Image on MyHistoryLab: Islamic science and alchemy: page from "The Lanterns of Wisdom and the Keys of Mercy"

Read the **Document** on **MyHistoryLab**: Ibn Battuta, selections from the Rihla

MAP **8.2 The Spread of Islam, 10th–16th Centuries** Arrows indicate the routes by which Islam spread to south, and southeast and Central Asia, Asia Minor and the Balkans, and Sudanic Africa.

Religious Trends and the New Push for Expansion

The contradictory trends in Islamic civilization—social strife and political divisions versus expanded trading links and intellectual creativity—were strongly reflected in patterns of religious development in the later centuries of the caliphate. On one hand, a resurgence of mysticism injected Islam with a new vibrancy. On the other, orthodox religious scholars, such as the **ulama**, grew increasingly suspicious of and hostile to non-Islamic ideas and scientific thinking. The Crusades had promoted the latter trend. This was particularly true regarding Muslim borrowing from ancient Greek learning, which the ulama associated with the aggressive civilizations of Christian Europe. Many orthodox scholars suspected that the questioning that characterized the Greek tradition would undermine the absolute authority of the Qur'an. They insisted that the Qur'an was the final, perfect, and complete revelation of an all-knowing divinity. Brilliant thinkers such as **al-Ghazali** perhaps the greatest Islamic theologian, struggled to fuse the Greek and Qur'anic traditions. Their ideas were often rejected by orthodox scholars.

Much of the religious vitality in Islam in the later Abbasid period was centered on the Sufist movement. In its various guises, including both Sunni and Shi'a manifestations, Sufism was a reaction against the impersonal and abstract divinity that many ulama scholars argued was the true god of the Qur'an. Like the Indian mystics, the Sufis—whose title was derived from the woolen robes they wore—and their followers tried to see beyond what they believed to be the illusory existence of everyday life and to delight in the presence of Allah in the world. True to the strict monotheism of Islam, most Sufis insisted on a clear distinction between Allah and

Mongols Central Asian nomadic peoples; smashed Turko-Persian kingdoms; captured Baghdad in 1258 and killed last Abbasid caliph.

Chinggis Khan [JEHNG-gihs KAHN] Born in 1170s in decades following death of Kabul Khan; elected khagan of all Mongol tribes in 1206; responsible for conquest of northern kingdoms of China, territories as far west as the Abbasid regions; died in 1227, prior to conquest of most of Islamic world.

Hulegu [hoo-LAY-goo] (1217–1265) Ruler of the Ilkhan khanate; grandson of Chinggis Khan; responsible for capture and destruction of Baghdad in 1257.

Read the **Document** on **MyHistoryLab**: Science and Mathematics: Al-Ghazzali, "On the Separation of Mathematics and Religion"

FIGURE **8.4** This 15th-century Persian miniature of a group of Arab scientists testing and working with a wide variety of navigational instruments conveys a strong sense of the premium placed on scientific investigation in the Muslim world in the Abbasid age and the centuries thereafter. Muslim prototypes inspired European artisans, cartographers, and scientists to develop instruments and maps, which were essential to European overseas expansion from the 14th century onward.

humans. But in some Sufist teachings, Allah permeated the universe in ways that appeared to compromise his transcendent status.

Some Sufis gained reputations as great healers and workers of miracles; others led militant bands that tried to spread Islam to nonbelievers. Some Sufis used asceticism or bodily denial to find Allah; others used meditation, songs, drugs, or ecstatic dancing, which gave the famous whirling dervishes their name. Sufis also pursued scientific investigations as well as writing major works on ethics and political philosophy. The more accomplished Sufis built up a sizable following, and the movement as a whole was a central factor in the continuing expansion of the Muslim religion and Islamic civilization in the later centuries of the Abbasid caliphate.

New Waves of Nomadic Invasions and the End of the Caliphate

As we have seen, in the 10th and 11th centuries the Abbasid domains were divided by ever growing numbers of rival successor states. In the early 13th century, a new threat arose at the eastern edge of the original Abbasid domains. Another central Asian nomadic people, the **Mongols**, united by their great commander, **Chinggis Khan**, first raided in the 1220s and then smashed the Turko-Persian kingdoms that had developed in the regions to the east of Baghdad. Chinggis Khan died before the heartlands of the Muslim world were invaded, but his grandson, **Hulegu**, renewed the Mongol assault on the rich centers of Islamic civilization in the 1250s. In 1258, the Abbasid capital at Baghdad was taken by the Mongols, and much of it was sacked. The 37th and last Abbasid caliph was put to death by the Mongols. They then continued westward until they were finally defeated by the **Mamluks**, or Turkic slaves, who then ruled Egypt.

Baghdad never recovered from the Mongol attacks. In 1401, it suffered a second capture and another round of pillaging by the even fiercer forces of Timur or Tamerlane, another Turkic conqueror from Central Asia. Baghdad shrank for centuries from the status of one of the great cities of the world to a provincial backwater. It was gradually supplanted by Cairo to the west and then Istanbul to the north.

Mamluks Muslim slave warriors; established a dynasty in Egypt; defeated the Mongols at Ain Jalut in 1260 and halted Mongol advance.

Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, "Brothers, my peace is in my aloneness."

From the 7th century onward, Muslim invaders, traders, and migrants carried the Islamic faith and Islamic civilization to the vast south Asian subcontinent. Muslim conquests and conversions provoked a variety of Hindu responses and attempts by some followers of both religions to reconcile their differences.

THE COMING OF ISLAM TO SOUTH ASIA

8.3 How did Hindu religious leaders and organizations counter the considerable appeal of Sufi missionaries and their efforts to win converts in south and southeast Asia from the 10th through the 16th centuries?

All through the millennia when a succession of civilizations from Harappa to the brahmanic empire of the Guptas developed in south Asia, foreigners had entered India in waves of nomadic invaders or as small bands of displaced peoples seeking refuge. Invariably, those who chose to remain were assimilated into the civilizations they encountered in the lowland areas. They converted to the Hindu or Buddhist religion, found a place in the caste hierarchy, and adopted the dress, foods, and lifestyles of the farming and city-dwelling peoples of the many regions of the subcontinent. This capacity to absorb peoples moving into the area resulted from the strength and flexibility of India's civilizations and from the fact that India's peoples usually enjoyed a higher level of material culture than migrant groups entering

the subcontinent. As a result, the persistent failure of Indian rulers to unite against aggressors meant periodic disruptions and localized destruction but not fundamental challenges to the existing order. All of this changed with the arrival of the Muslims in the last years of the 7th century C.E. (Map 8.2).

With the coming of the Muslims, the peoples of India encountered for the first time a large-scale influx of bearers of an outside civilization as sophisticated, if not as ancient, as their own. They were also confronted by a religious system that was in many ways the very opposite of the ones they had nurtured. Hinduism, the predominant Indian religion at that time, was open, tolerant, and inclusive of widely varying forms of religious devotion, from idol worship to meditation in search of union with the spiritual source of all creation. Islam was doctrinaire, proselytizing, and committed to the exclusive worship of a single, transcendent god.

Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: Giovanni Di Piano Carpini on the Mongols

VISUALIZING THE PAST

The Pattern of Islam's Global Expansions

THE TABLE SHOWS THE PRESENT-DAY DISTRIBUTION of Muslims in key countries from Africa to Asia. It indicates the total number of Muslims in each of the countries listed, the percentage of Muslims in the total population of that area, and the numbers and percentages of other religious groups. The table also indicates the manner in which Islam was spread to each of these areas and the key agents of that diffusion. After using the table to compare the patterns of Islamization in different areas, answer the questions that follow.

QUESTIONS

- Which areas have the highest absolute numbers of Muslims in the present day?
- Is this distribution what you would have expected, or is it surprising?
- What were the main ways that Islam was transmitted to most areas?
- What does this say about the popular notion that Islam was historically a militant religion spread primarily by forcible conversion?
- Do the statistics suggest that Islam is able to coexist with other faiths?

COMPARATIVE STATISTICS OF MODERN STATES WITH A SIZABLE MUSLIM POPULATION

	Total Population (2000 est.)	Total Number of Muslims	Percentage of Muslims	Total Number of Non-Muslims	Percentages of Other Religious Groups	Principal Agents/Modes of Conversion
Nigeria	114 million	57 million	50	57 million	40–Christian; 10–Other (African religions)	Trading Contacts Sufi Missionaries
Egypt	67 million	63 million	94	4 million	4–Christian 2–Other	Arab Migration Conquest Voluntary Mass Conversion
Iraq	22.5 million	21.8 million	97: Shi'a: 60–65; Sunni: 32–37	700,000	3–Other (Zoroastrian, Christian, Jewish)	Arab Migration Conquest Voluntary Mass Conversion
Iran	65 million	64.35 million	99: Shi'a: 89; Sunni: 10	650,000	1—Other (Zoroastrian, Bahai, Christian, Jewish)	Arab Conquest Migration Voluntary Mass Conversion
Pakistan	138 million	133.85 million	97: Shi'a 20; Sunni: 77	4.15 million	3–Other (Hindu, Christian, Buddhist)	Sufi Missionaries Voluntary Mass Conversion
India	1.001 billion	140.1 million	14	860.9 million	80–Hindu; 6–Other (Buddhist, Sikh, Christian, Jain)	Sufi Missionaries Trading Contacts Conquest Voluntary Mass Conversion
Indonesia	216 million	188 million	87	28 million	6-Protestant; 7–Other (Catholic Buddhist, etc.)	Sufi Missionaries Trading Contacts
The Phillipines	79.5 million	4 million	5	75.5 million	83–Catholic; 9–Protestant; 3–Other	Trading contacts Sufi Missionaries
Morocco	30 million	29.7 million	99	300,000	1–Other	Voluntary Mass Conversion Sufi Missionaries Conquest

NOTE: Numbers based on information from Wiesenfeld and Famighetti et al., eds., *The World Almanac and Book of Facts 2000* (Mahwah, NJ: World Almanac Books).

Socially, Islam was highly egalitarian, proclaiming all believers equal in the sight of God. In sharp contrast, Hindu beliefs validated the caste hierarchy. The latter rested on the acceptance of inborn differences between individuals and groups and the widely varying levels of material wealth, status, and religious purity these differences were believed to produce. Thus, the faith of the invading Muslims was religiously more rigid than that of the absorptive and adaptive Hindus. But the caste-based social system of India was much more compartmentalized and closed than the society of the Muslim invaders, with their emphasis on mobility and the community of believers.

Because growing numbers of Muslim warriors, traders, Sufi mystics, and ordinary farmers and herders entered south Asia and settled there, extensive interaction between invaders and the indigenous peoples was inevitable. In the early centuries of the Muslim influx, conflict, often violent, predominated. But there was also a good deal of trade and even religious interchange between them. As time passed, peaceful (if often wary) interaction became the norm. Muslim rulers employed large numbers of Hindus to govern the largely non-Muslim populations they conquered; mosques and temples dominated different quarters within Indian cities. In addition, Hindu and Muslim mystics strove to find areas of agreement between their two faiths. Nonetheless, tensions remained, and periodically they erupted into communal rioting or warfare between Hindu and Muslim rulers.

Muhammad ibn Qasim [moh-HAM-ihd ihbn HAH-sihm] (661–750) Arab general; conquered Sind in India; declared the region and the Indus valley to be part of Umayyad Empire.

MAP **8.3** **Early Islam in India** Beginning with raids into the Indus Valley in the 8th century C.E., Muslim armies invaded and established a succession of dynasties centered on Delhi in north-central India.

Political Divisions and the First Muslim Invasions

The first and least enduring Muslim intrusion, which came in 711, resulted indirectly from the peaceful trading contacts that had initially brought Muslims into contact with Indian civilization. Since ancient times, Arab seafarers and traders had been major carriers in the vast trading network that stretched from Italy in the Mediterranean to the South China Sea. After converting to Islam, these traders continued to visit the ports of India, particularly those on the western coast. An attack by pirates sailing from Sind in western India (Map 8.3) on ships owned by some of these Arab traders prompted the viceroy of the eastern provinces of the Umayyad Empire to launch a punitive expedition against the king of Sind. An able Arab general, **Muhammad ibn Qasim** who was only 17 years old when the campaign began, led more than 10,000 horse- and camel-mounted warriors into Sind to avenge the assault on Arab shipping. After victories in several fiercely fought battles, Muhammad ibn Qasim declared the region, as well as the Indus valley to the northeast, provinces of the Umayyad empire.

In these early centuries, the coming of Islam brought little change for most inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent. In fact, in many areas, local leaders and the populace surrendered towns and districts willingly to the conquerors because they promised lighter taxation and greater religious tolerance. The Arab overlords decided to treat both Hindus and Buddhists as protected "people of the book,"

with first the Umayyad and later the Abbasid caliphs gradually weakened the Muslim hold on the area. This was reflected in the reconquest of parts of the lower Indus valley by Hindu rulers. But the gradual Muslim retreat was dramatically reversed by a new series of military invasions, this time launched by a Turkish slave dynasty that in 962 had seized power in Afghanistan to the north of the Indus valley. The third ruler of this dynasty, **Mahmud of Ghazni**, led a series of expeditions that began nearly two centuries of Muslim raiding and conquest in northern India. Drawn by the legendary wealth of the subcontinent and a zeal to spread the Muslim faith, Mahmud repeatedly raided northwest India in the first decades of the 11th century. He defeated one confederation of Hindu princes after another, and he drove deeper and deeper into the subcontinent in the quest of ever richer temples to loot.

Mahmud of Ghazni [ma-MOOD of GAHZ-nee] (971–1030) Third ruler of Turkish slave dynasty in Afghanistan; led invasions of northern India; credited with sacking one of wealthiest of Hindu temples in northern India; gave Muslims reputation for intolerance and aggression.

Muhammad of Ghur (1173–1206) Military commander of Persian extraction who ruled small mountain kingdom in Afghanistan; began process of conquest to establish Muslim political control of northern India; brought much of Indus valley, Sind, and northwestern India under his control.

Qutb-ud-din Aibak [KUHTH-uhd-dihn ay-BAHK] Lieutenant of Muhammad of Ghur; established kingdom in India with capital at Delphi; proclaimed himself Sultan of India (r. 1206–1210).

The raids mounted by Mahmud of Ghazni and his successors gave way in the last decades of the 12th century to sustained campaigns aimed at seizing political control in north India. The key figure in this transition was a tenacious military commander of Persian extraction, **Muhammad of Ghur**. After barely surviving several severe defeats at the hands of Hindu rulers, Muhammad put together a string of military victories that brought the Indus valley and much of north central India under his control. In the following years, Muhammad's conquests were extended along the Gangetic plain as far as Bengal, and into west and central India, by several of his most gifted subordinate commanders. After Muhammad was assassinated in 1206, **Qutb-ud-din Aibak**, one of his slave lieutenants, seized power.

Significantly, the capital of the new Muslim empire was at Delhi along the Jumna River on the Gangetic plain. Delhi's location in the very center of northern India graphically proclaimed that a Muslim dynasty rooted in the subcontinent itself, not an extension of a Middle Eastern central Asian empire, had been founded. For the next 300 years, a succession of dynasties ruled much of north and central India. Alternately of Persian, Afghan, Turkic, and mixed descent, the rulers of these imperial houses proclaimed themselves the *sultans of Delhi* (literally, princes of the heartland). They fought each other, Mongol and Turkic invaders, and the indigenous Hindu princes for control of the Indus and Gangetic heartlands of Indian civilization.

Patterns of Conversion

Although the Muslims fought their way into India, their interaction with the indigenous peoples soon came to be dominated by accommodation and peaceful exchanges. Over the centuries when much of the north was ruled by dynasties centered at Delhi, sizable Muslim communities developed in different areas of the subcontinent. The largest of these were in Bengal to the east and in the northwestern areas of the Indus valley that were the points of entry for most of the Muslim peoples who migrated into India.

Few of these converts were won forcibly. The main carriers of the new faith often were merchants, who played a growing role in both coastal and inland trade, but were most especially Sufi mystics. The latter shared much with Indian gurus and wandering ascetics in both style and message. Belief in their magical and healing powers enhanced the Sufis' stature and increased their following. Their mosques and schools often became centers of regional political power. Sufis organized their devotees in militias to fend off bandits or rival princes, oversaw the clearing of forests for farming and settlement, and welcomed low-caste and outcaste Hindu groups into Islam. After their deaths, the tombs of Sufi mystics became objects of veneration for Indian Muslims as well as Hindu and Buddhist pilgrims.

Most of the indigenous converts, who came to form a majority of the Muslims living in India, were drawn from specific regions and social groups. Surprisingly small numbers of converts were found in the Indo-Gangetic centers of Muslim political power, a fact that suggests the very limited importance of forced conversions. Most Indians who converted to Islam were from Buddhist or low-caste groups. In areas such as western India and Bengal, where Buddhism had survived as a popular religion until the era of the Muslim invasions, esoteric rituals and corrupt practices had debased Buddhist teachings and undermined the morale of the monastic orders.

This decline was accelerated by Muslim raids on Buddhist temples and monasteries, which provided vulnerable and lucrative targets for the early invaders. Without monastic supervision, local congregations sank further into orgies and experiments with magic. All of these trends opposed the Buddha's social concerns and religious message. Disorganized and misdirected, Indian Buddhism was no match for the confident and vigorous new religion the Muslim invaders carried into the subcontinent. This was particularly true when those who were spreading the new faith had the charisma and organizing skills of the Sufi mystics.

despite the fact that their faiths had no connection to the Bible, the book in question. This meant that although they were obliged to pay special taxes, non-Muslims, like Jews and Christians, enjoyed the freedom to worship as they pleased.

View the Closer Look on MyHistoryLab: "Qutb Minar"

As in other areas conquered by the Arabs, most of the local officials and notables retained their positions, which did much to reconcile them to Muslim rule. The status and privileges of the brahman castes were respected. Nearly all Arabs, who made up only a tiny minority of the population, lived in cities or special garrison towns. Because little effort was expended in converting the peoples of the conquered areas, they remained overwhelmingly Hindu or Buddhist.

Indian Influences on Islamic Civilization

Although the impact of Islam on the Indian subcontinent in this period was limited, the Arab foothold in Sind provided contacts by which Indian learning was transmitted to the Muslim heartlands in the Middle East. As a result, Islamic civilization was enriched by the skills and discoveries of yet another great civilization. Of particular importance was Indian scientific learning, which rivaled that of the Greeks as the most advanced of the ancient world. Hindu mathematicians and astronomers traveled to Baghdad after the Abbasids came to power in the mid-8th century. Their works on algebra and geometry were translated into Arabic, and their instruments for celestial observation were copied and improved by Arab astronomers.

Most critically, Arab thinkers in all fields began to use the numerals that Hindu scholars had devised centuries earlier. Because these numbers were passed on to the Europeans through contacts with the Arabs in the early Middle Ages, we call them Arabic numerals today, but they originated in India. Because of the linkages between civilized centers established by the spread of Islam, this system of numerical notation has proved central to two scientific revolutions. The first in the Middle East was discussed earlier in this chapter. The second, discussed in Chapter 18, occurred in Europe some centuries later. From the 16th century to the present, it has brought fundamental transformations to Europe and much of the rest of the world.

In addition to science and mathematics, Indian treatises on subjects ranging from medicine to music were translated and studied by Arab scholars. Indian physicians were brought to Baghdad to run the well-endowed hospitals that the Christian crusaders found a source of wonderment and a cause for envy. On several occasions, Indian doctors were able to cure Arab rulers and officials whom Greek physicians had pronounced beyond help. Indian works on statecraft, alchemy, and palmistry were translated into Arabic, and it is believed that some of the tales in the *Arabian Nights* were based on ancient Indian stories. Indian musical instruments and melodies made their way into the repertoires of Arab performers, and the Indian game of chess became a favorite of both royalty and ordinary townspeople.

Arabs who emigrated to Sind and other Muslim-ruled areas often adopted Indian dress and hairstyles, ate Indian foods, and rode on elephants just as the Hindu *rajas* (kings) did. As Figure 8.5 illustrates, the conquerors also adopted Indian building styles and artistic motifs. In this era, additional Arab colonies were established in other coastal areas, such as Malabar to the south and Bengal in the east (Map 8.3). These trading enclaves later provided the staging areas from which Islam was transmitted to island and mainland southeast Asia.

Read the Document on MyHistoryLab: A World Traveler in India (1300s) Ibn Battuta

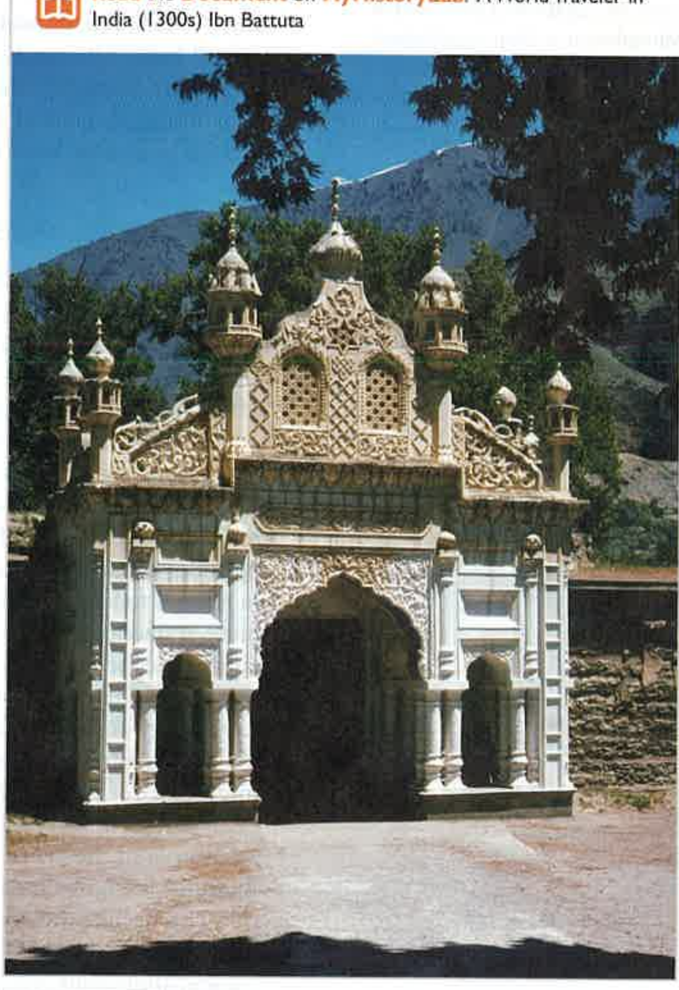

FIGURE **8.5** The Shahi mosque, surrounded by the Hindu Kush mountains in northwestern Pakistan, is a superb example of the blending of Islamic and Hindu architectural forms, building materials, and artistic motifs.

From Booty to Empire: The Second Wave of Muslim Invasions

After the initial conquests by Muhammad ibn Qasim's armies, little territory was added to the Muslim foothold on the subcontinent. In fact, disputes between the Arabs occupying Sind and their quarrels

THINKING HISTORICALLY

Conversion and Accommodation in the Spread of World Religions

ALTHOUGH NOT ALL GREAT CIVILIZATIONS HAVE produced world religions, the two tend to be closely associated throughout human history. World religions are those that spread across many cultures and societies, forge links between civilized centers, and bring civilized lifestyles to nomadic pastoral or shifting cultivating peoples. Religions with these characteristics appeared before the rise of Islam. As we have seen, India alone produced two of these faiths in ancient times: Hinduism, which spread to parts of southeast and central Asia, and Buddhism, which spread even more widely in the Asian world. At the other end of the Eastern Hemisphere, Christianity spread throughout the Mediterranean region before claiming northern and western Europe as its core area. Judaism spread not because it won converts in non-Jewish cultures but because the Jewish people were driven from their homeland by Roman persecution and scattered throughout the Middle East, north Africa, and Europe.

The fact that Islam won converts overwhelmingly through peaceful contacts between long-distance traders and the preaching and organizational skills of Sufis exemplifies this capacity for accommodation.

Because religious conversion affects all aspects of life, from the way one looks at the universe to more mundane decisions about whom to marry or how to treat others, a world religion must be broad and flexible enough to accommodate the existing culture of potential converts. At the same time, its core beliefs and practices must be well enough defined to allow its followers to maintain a clear sense of common identity despite their great differences in culture and society. These beliefs and practices must be sufficiently profound and sophisticated to convince potential converts that their own cultures can be enriched and their lives improved by adopting the new religion.

In most instances, until the 16th century, when Christianity spread through the Western Hemisphere, no world religion could match Islam in the extent to which it spread across the globe and in the diversity of peoples and cultures that identified themselves as Muslims. Given its uncompromising monotheism, very definite doctrines, and elaborate rituals and principles of social organization, Islam's success at winning converts from very different cultural backgrounds is surprising at first glance. This is particularly true if it is compared with the much more flexible beliefs and ceremonial patterns of earlier world religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism. However, closer examination reveals that Islamic beliefs and social practices, as written in the Qur'an and interpreted by the ulama, proved quite flexible and adaptable when the religion was introduced into new, non-Islamic cultures.

The fact that Islam won converts overwhelmingly through peaceful contacts between long-distance traders and the preaching and organizational skills of Sufis exemplifies this capacity for accommodation. Those adopting the new religion did not do so cause they were pressured or forced to convert but because they saw Islam as a way to enhance their understanding of the supernatural, enrich their ceremonial expression, improve the quality of their social interaction, and establish ongoing links to a transcultural community beyond their local world.

Because Islam was adopted rather than imposed, those who converted had a good deal to say about how much of their own cultures they would change and which aspects of Islam they would emphasize or accept. Certain beliefs and practices were obligatory for all true believers: the worship of a single god, adherence to the prophet Muhammad and the divine revelations he received as recorded in the Qur'an, and the observance of the five pillars of the faith. But even these were subject to reinterpretation. In virtually all cultures to which it spread, Islamic monotheism supplanted but did not eradicate the animistic veneration of nature spirits or person and place deities. Allah was acknowledged as the most powerful supernatural force, but people continued to make offerings to spirits that could heal, bring fertility, protect their homes, or punish their enemies. In such areas as Africa and western China, where the veneration of ancestral spirits was a key aspect of religious life, the spirits were retained not as powers in themselves but as emissaries to Allah. In cultures such as those found in India and southeast Asia, Islamic doctrines were recast in a heavily mystical, even magical mode.

The flexibility of Islam was exhibited in the social as well as the religious sphere. In Islamic southeast Asia and in sub-Saharan Africa, the position of women remained a good deal stronger in critical areas, such as occupation and family law, than it had become in the Middle East and India. In both regions, the male-centric features of Islam that had grown more pronounced through centuries of accommodation in ancient Middle Eastern and Persian cultures were played down. As Islam was adapted to societies where women had traditionally enjoyed more influence, both within the extended family and in occupations such as farming, marketing, and craft production. Even the caste system of India, which in principle is opposed to the strong egalitarian strain in Islam, developed among Muslim groups that migrated into the subcontinent and survived in indigenous south Asian communities that converted to Islam.

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Buddhists probably made up the majority of Indians who converted to Islam. But untouchables and low-caste Hindus, as well as tribal peoples who were animists worshiping spirits found in the natural world, were also attracted to the more egalitarian social arrangements promoted by the new faith. As was the case in earlier centuries with the Buddhists, group conversions were essential because those who remained in the Hindu caste system would have little to do with those who had changed religions. Some conversions resulted from the desire of Hindus or Buddhists to escape the head tax the Muslim rulers levied on unbelievers. They were prompted by intermarriage between local peoples and Muslim migrants. Muslim migrants also swelled the size of the Islamic community in the subcontinent. This was particularly true in periods of crisis in central Asia. In the 13th and 14th centuries, for example, Turkic, Persian, and Afghan peoples retreated to the comparative safety of India in the face of the Mongol and Timurid conquests that are examined in detail in Chapter 15.

Patterns of Accommodation

Although Islam won many converts in certain areas and communities, it initially made little impression on the Hindu population as a whole. Despite military reverses and the imposition of Muslim political rule over large areas of the subcontinent, high-caste Hindus in particular saw the invaders as the bearers of an upstart religion and as polluting outcastes. Al-Biruni, one of the chief chroniclers of the Muslim conquests, complained openly about the prevailing Indian disdain for the newcomers:

> The Hindus believe that there is no country but theirs, no nation like theirs, no kings like theirs, no religion like theirs, no science like theirs. They are haughty, foolishly vain, self-conceited and stolid.

Many Hindus were willing to take positions as administrators in the bureaucracies of Muslim overlords or as soldiers in their armies and to trade with Muslim merchants. But they remained socially aloof from their conquerors. Separate living quarters were established everywhere Muslim communities developed. Genuine friendships between members of high-caste groups and Muslims were rare, and sexual liaisons between them were severely restricted.

During the early centuries of the Muslim influx, the Hindus were convinced that like so many of the peoples who had entered the subcontinent in the preceding millennia, the Muslims would soon be absorbed by the superior religions and more sophisticated cultures of India. Many signs pointed to that outcome. Hindus staffed the bureaucracies and made up a good portion of the armies of Muslim rulers. In addition, Muslim princes adopted regal styles and practices that were Hindu-inspired and contrary to the Qur'an. Some Muslim rulers proclaimed themselves to be of divine descent, and others minted coins decorated with Hindu images such as Nandi, the bull associated with a major Hindu god, Shiva.

More broadly, Muslim communities became socially divided along caste lines. Recently arrived Muslims generally were on top of the hierarchies that developed, and even they were divided depending on whether they were Arab, Turk, or Persian. High-caste Hindu converts came next, followed by "clean" artisan and merchant groups. Lower-caste and untouchable converts remained at the bottom of the social hierarchy. This may help to explain why conversions in these groups were not as numerous as one would expect given the original egalitarian thrust of Islam. Muslims also adopted Indian foods and styles of dress and took to chewing *pan*, or limestone wrapped with betel leaves.

The Muslim influx had unfortunate consequences for women in both Muslim and Hindu communities. The invaders increasingly adopted the practice of marrying women at the earlier ages favored by the Hindus and the prohibitions against the remarriage of widows found especially at the high-caste levels of Indian society. Some high-caste Muslim groups even performed the ritual of *sati*, the burning of widows on the same funeral pyres as their deceased husbands, which was found among some high-caste Hindu groups.

Islamic Challenge and Hindu Revival

Despite a significant degree of acculturation to Hindu lifestyles and social organization, Muslim migrants to the subcontinent held to their own distinctive religious beliefs and rituals. The Hindus found Islam impossible to absorb and soon realized that they were confronted by an actively proselytizing religion with great appeal to large segments of the Indian population. Partly in response to

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Beyond basic forms of social organization and interaction, Islam accommodated diverse aspects of the societies into which it spread. For example, the African solar calendar, which was essential for coordinating the planting cycle, was retained along with the Muslim lunar calendar. In India, Hindu-Buddhist symbols of kingship were appropriated by Muslim rulers and acknowledged by both their Hindu and Muslim subjects. In island southeast Asia, exquisitely forged knives, called *krises*, which were believed to have magical powers, were among the most treasured possessions of local rulers both before and after they converted to Islam.

There was always the danger that accommodation could go too far: that in winning converts, Islamic principles would be so watered down and remolded that they no longer resembled or actually contradicted the teachings of the Qur'an. Sects that came to worship Muhammad or his nephew Ali as godlike, for example, clearly violated fundamental Muslim principles. This danger was a key source of the periodic movements for purification and revival that have been a notable feature of nearly all Islamic societies, particularly those on the fringes of the Islamic world. But even these movements, which were built around the insistence that the Muslim faith had been corrupted by alien ideas and practices and that a return to Islamic fundamentals was needed, were invariably cast in the modes of cultural expression of the peoples who rallied to them.

QUESTIONS

- Can you think of ways in which world religions, such as Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism, changed to accommodate the cultures and societies to which they spread?
- Do these religions strike you as more or less flexible than Islam?
- Why?

this challenge, the Hindus placed greater emphasis on the devotional cults of gods and goddesses that earlier had proved so effective in neutralizing the challenge of Buddhism.

Membership in these **bhaktic cults** was open to all, including women and untouchables. In fact, some of the most celebrated writers of religious poetry and songs of worship were women, such as **Mira Bai**. Saints from low-caste origins were revered by warriors and brahmans as well as by farmers, merchants, and outcastes. One of the most remarkable of these mystics was a Muslim weaver named **Kabir**. In plain and direct verse, Kabir played down the significance of religious differences and proclaimed that all faiths could provide a path to spiritual fulfillment. He asked,

> O servant, where do thou seek Me?
> Lo! I am beside thee.
> I am neither in temple nor in mosque:
> Neither am I in rites and ceremonies, nor in Yoga and renunciation.

Because many songs and poems, such as those by Mira Bai and Kabir, were composed in regional languages, such as Bengali, Marathi, and Tamil, they were more accessible to the common people and became prominent expressions of popular culture in many areas.

Bhakti mystics and gurus stressed the importance of a strong emotional bond between the devotee and the god or goddess who was the object of veneration. Chants, dances, and in some instances drugs were used to reach the state of spiritual intoxication that was the key to individual salvation. Once one had achieved the state of ecstasy that came through intense emotional attachment to a god or goddess, all past sins were removed and caste distinctions were rendered meaningless. The most widely worshiped deities were the gods Shiva and Vishnu, the latter particularly in the guise of Krishna the goat herder depicted in the folk painting in Figure 8.6. The goddess Kali was also venerated in a number of different manifestations. By increasing popular involvement in Hindu worship and by enriching and extending the modes of prayer and ritual, the bhakti movement may have done much to stem the flow of converts to Islam, particularly among low-caste groups.

FIGURE **8.6** This Indian miniature painting of milkmaids serving the Hindu god Krishna reflects the highly personalized devotional worship that was characteristic of the bhakti movement. The eroticism in the milkmaids' songs, in praise of Krishna's great beauty, reveals a blending of sacred and secular, carnal and spiritual that is a recurring motif in Hindu worship and art.

bhaktic cults [BAHK-teek] Hindu groups dedicated to gods and goddesses; stressed the importance of strong emotional bonds between devotees and the god or goddess who was the object of their veneration; most widely worshipped gods were Shiva and Vishnu.

Mira Bai [MIHR-uh Bay] (1498–1547) Celebrated Hindu writer of religious poetry; reflected openness of bhaktic cults to women.

Kabir (1440–1518) Muslim mystic; played down the importance of ritual differences between Hinduism and Islam.

Stand-Off: The Muslim Presence in India at the End of the Sultanate Period

The attempts of mystics such as Kabir to minimize the differences between Hindu and Islamic beliefs and worship won over only small numbers of the followers of either faith. They were also strongly repudiated by the guardians of orthodoxy in each religious community. Sensing the long-term threat to Hinduism posed by Muslim political dominance and conversion efforts, the brahmans denounced the Muslims as infidel destroyers of Hindu temples and polluted meat-eaters. Later Hindu mystics, such as the 15th-century holy man Chaitanya, composed songs that focused on love for Hindu deities and set out to convince Indian Muslims to renounce Islam in favor of Hinduism.

For their part, Muslim ulama, or religious experts, grew increasingly aware of the dangers Hinduism posed for Islam. Attempts to fuse the two faiths were rejected on the grounds that although Hindus might argue that specific rituals and beliefs were not essential, they were fundamental for Islam. If one played down the teachings of the Qur'an, prayer, and the pilgrimage, one was no longer a true Muslim. Thus, contrary to the teachings of Kabir and like-minded mystics, the ulama and even some Sufi saints stressed the teachings of Islam that separated it from Hinduism. They worked to promote unity within the Indian Muslim community and to strengthen its contacts with Muslims in neighboring lands and the Middle Eastern centers of the faith.

After centuries of invasion and migration, a large Muslim community had been established in the Indian subcontinent. Converts had been won, political control had been established throughout much of the area, and strong links had been forged with Muslims in other lands such as Persia and Afghanistan. But non-Muslims, particularly Hindus, remained the overwhelming majority of the population of the vast and diverse lands south of the Himalayas. Unlike the Zoroastrians in Persia or the animistic peoples of north Africa and the Sudan, most Indians showed little inclination to convert to the religion of the Muslim conquerors. After centuries of Muslim political dominance and missionary activity, south Asia remained one of the least converted and integrated of all the areas Muhammad's message had reached.

THE SPREAD OF ISLAM TO SOUTHEAST ASIA

8.4 Beyond the Sufis, who were the major agents and what were the motivations for conversions to the Islamic religion in South and South Asia in this same era?

From the 13th century, traders and Sufi mystics spread Islam to island southeast Asia. As was the case in India, conversion was generally peaceful, and Islamic teachings and rituals were mixed with the animist, Hindu, and Buddhist religions long established in Malaya, Java, and other areas.

From a world history perspective, island southeast Asia had long been mainly a middle ground. It was the zone where the Chinese segment of the great Euro-Asian trading complex met the Indian Ocean trading zone to the west. At ports on the coast of the Malayan peninsula, east Sumatra, and somewhat later north Java, goods from China were transferred from east Asian vessels to Arab or Indian ships. In these same ports, products from as far west as Rome were loaded into the emptied Chinese ships to be carried to east Asia. By the 7th and 8th centuries C.E., sailors and ships from areas of southeast Asia, particularly Sumatra and Malaya, had become active in the seaborne trade of the region. Southeast Asian products had also become important exports to China, India, and the Mediterranean region. Many of these products were luxury items, such as aromatic woods from the rain forests of Borneo and Sumatra and spices such as cloves, nutmeg, and mace from the far end of the Indonesian archipelago. These trading links were to prove even more critical to the expansion of Islam in southeast Asia than they had earlier been to the spread of Buddhism and Hinduism.

From the 8th century onward, the coastal trade of India came increasingly to be controlled by Muslims from such regions as Gujarat in western India and various parts of south India. As a result, elements of Islamic culture began to filter into island southeast Asia. But only in the 13th century, after the collapse of the far-flung trading empire of **Shrivijaya**, centered on the Strait of Malacca between Malaya and the northeast of Sumatra (Map 8.4), was the way open for the widespread introduction of Islam. Indian traders, Muslim or otherwise, were welcome to trade in the chain of ports controlled by Shrivijaya. But because the rulers and officials of Shrivijaya were devout Buddhists, there was little incentive for the traders and sailors of southeast Asian ports to convert to Islam, the religion of growing numbers of the merchants and sailors from India. With the fall of Shrivijaya, incentives increased for the establishment of Muslim trading centers and efforts to preach the faith to the coastal peoples.

Shrivijaya [SHREE-vih-JAY-uh] Trading empire centered on Malacca Straits between Malaya and Sumatra; controlled trade of empire; Buddhist government resistant to Muslim missionaries; fall opened up southeastern Asia to Muslim conversion.

MAP **8.4** **The Spread of Islam in Southeast Asia** Traders and Islamic mystics were the main agents responsible for the rapid spread of Islam throughout island southeast Asia.

Trading Contacts and Conversion

As in most of the areas to which Islam spread, peaceful contacts and voluntary conversion were far more important than conquest and force in spreading the faith in southeast Asia. Throughout the islands of the region, trading contacts paved the way for conversion. Muslim merchants and sailors introduced local peoples to the ideas and rituals of the new faith and impressed on them how much of the known world had already been converted. Muslim ships also carried Sufis to various parts of southeast Asia, where they played as vital a role in conversion as they had in India. The first areas to be won to Islam in the late 13th century were several small port centers on the northern coast of Sumatra. From these ports, the religion spread in the centuries that followed across the Strait of Malacca to Malaya.

On the mainland, the key to widespread conversion was the powerful trading city of **Malacca**, whose smaller trading empire had replaced the fallen Shrivijaya. From Malacca, Islam spread along the coasts of Malaya to east Sumatra and to the trading center of **Demak** on the north coast of Java. From Demak, the most powerful of the trading states on north Java, the Muslim faith spread to other Javanese ports. After a long struggle with a Hindu-Buddhist kingdom in the interior, the rest of the island was eventually converted. From Demak, Islam was also carried to the Celebes and the Spice Islands in the eastern archipelago, and from the latter to Mindanao in the southern Philippines.

Malacca Portuguese factory or fortified trade town located on the tip of the Malayan peninsula; traditionally a center for trade among the southeastern Asian islands.

Demak Most powerful of the trading states on north coast of Java; converted to Islam and served as point of dissemination to other ports.

This progress of Islamic conversion shows that port cities in coastal areas were particularly receptive to the new faith. Here trading links were critical. Once one of the key cities in a trading cluster converted, it was in the best interest of others to follow suit to enhance personal ties and provide a common basis in Muslim law to regulate business deals. Conversion to Islam also linked these centers, culturally as well as economically, to the merchants and ports of India, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean.

Islam made slow progress in areas such as central Java, where Hindu–Buddhist dynasties contested its spread. But the fact that the earlier conversion to these Indian religions had been confined mainly to the ruling elites in Java and other island areas left openings for mass conversions to Islam that the Sufis eventually exploited. The island of Bali, where Hinduism had taken deep root at the popular level, remained largely impervious to the spread of Islam. The same was true of most of mainland southeast Asia, where centuries before the coming of Islam, Buddhism had spread from India and Ceylon and won the fervent adherence of both the ruling elites and the peasant masses.

Sufi Mystics and the Nature of Southeast Asian Islam

Because Islam was spread in many areas by Sufis from South Asia, it was often infused with mystical strains and incorporated animist, Hindu, and Buddhist elements. Just as they had in the Middle East and India, the Sufis who spread Islam in southeast Asia varied widely in personality and approach. Most were believed by those who followed them to have magical powers, and nearly all Sufis established mosque and school centers from which they traveled in neighboring regions to preach the faith.

In winning converts, the Sufis were willing to allow the inhabitants of island southeast Asia to retain pre-Islamic beliefs and practices that orthodox scholars would have found contrary to Islamic doctrine. Pre-Islamic customary law remained important in regulating social interaction, whereas Islamic law was confined to specific sorts of agreements and exchanges. Women retained a much stronger position, both within the family and in society, than they had in the Middle East and India. For example, trading in local and regional markets continued to be dominated by small-scale female buyers and sellers. In such areas as western Sumatra, lineage and inheritance continued to be traced through the female line after the coming of Islam, despite its tendency to promote male dominance and descent. Perhaps most tellingly, pre-Muslim religious beliefs and rituals were incorporated into Muslim ceremonies. Indigenous cultural staples, such as the brilliant Javanese puppet shadow plays that were based on the Indian epics of the brahmanic age, were refined, and they became even more central to popular and elite beliefs and practices than they had been in the pre-Muslim era.

Global Connections and Critical Themes

ISLAM: A BRIDGE BETWEEN WORLDS

Although problems of political control and succession continued to plague the kingdoms and empires that divided the Muslim world, the central position of Islamic civilization in global history was solidified during the centuries of Abbasid rule. Its role as the go-between for the more ancient civilizations of the Eastern Hemisphere grew as Arab trading networks expanded into new areas. More than ever, it enriched the lives of nomadic peoples, from the Turks and Mongols of central Asia to the Berbers of north Africa and the camel herders of the savanna regions south of the Sahara. Equally critically, Islam's original contributions to the growth and refinement of civilized life greatly increased. From its great cities and universities and the accomplishments generated in the fine arts, sciences, and literature to its vibrant religious and philosophical life, Islam pioneered patterns of organization and thinking that would affect the development of human societies in major ways for centuries to come.

For more than five centuries, the spread of Islam played a central role in the rise, extension, or transformation of civilization in much of the Afro-Asian world. The Islamic world also became a great conduit for the exchange of ideas, plants and medicines, commercial goods, and inventions both between centers of urban and agrarian life and between these core regions of civilization and the areas dominated by nomadic peoples that still encompassed much of the globe.

In the midst of all this achievement, however, there were tendencies that would put the Muslim peoples at a growing disadvantage, particularly in relation to their long-standing European rivals. Muslim divisions would leave openings for political expansion that the Europeans would eagerly exploit, beginning with the island southeast Asian extremities of the Islamic world and then moving across India. The growing orthodoxy and intolerance of many of the ulama, as well as the Muslim belief that the vast Islamic world contained all requirements for civilized life, caused Muslim peoples to grow less receptive to outside influences and innovations. These tendencies became increasingly pronounced at precisely the time when their Christian rivals were entering a period of unprecedented curiosity, experimentation, and exploration of the world beyond their own heartlands.

Further Readings

M. A. Shaban's *Islamic History: An Interpretation*, 2 vols. (1971), contains the most readable and thematic survey of early Islam, concentrating on the Abbasid period. Although Philip Hitti's monumental *History of the Arabs* (1967) and J. J. Saunders' *A History of Medieval Islam* (1965) are now somewhat dated, they contain much valuable information and some fine insights into Arab history. Also useful are the works of G. E. von Gruenenbaum, especially *Classical Islam* (1970), which covers the Abbasid era. On changes in Islamic religion and the makeup of the Muslim community, Marshall Hodgson's *Venture of Islam*, vol. 2 (1974), is indispensable, but it should not be tackled by the beginner. *The Cambridge History of Islam*, 2 vols. (1970); Ira Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (1988); and Albert Hourani, *A History of the Islamic Peoples* (1991), are excellent reference works for the political events of the Abbasid era and Muslim achievements in various fields. D. M. Dunlop's *Arab Civilization to A.D. 1500* (1971) also contains detailed essays on Islamic culture as well as an article on the accomplishments of Muslim women in this era.