

CHAPTER  
**10**

Summary

CHAPTERS IN BRIEF *The Muslim World, 600–1250*

**CHAPTER OVERVIEW** *In the harsh environment of the Arabian Peninsula, a new religion arose. Muhammad united the Arab peoples in the belief that there was only one God. Strengthened by their faith, the Arabs began a conquest of parts of three continents. In ruling this vast empire, the Arabs preserved the achievements of many cultures and promoted learning in many fields of study.*

## 1 The Rise of Islam

**KEY IDEA** *Muhammad unified the Arab people both politically and through the religion he founded, Islam.*

The harsh environment of the Arabian Peninsula left its mark on the society of the Arab peoples. Located at about where Africa, Asia, and Europe meet, the region felt the influence of cultures from all three continents. With the land almost completely covered by desert, making a living was difficult. The people who lived on the desert followed a nomadic way of life. They herded animals, which they led from one fertile spot—oasis—to another in search of precious water. Over time, many of these people, called Bedouins, began to live in towns and cities. People who lived in the towns engaged in local and long-distance trade.

The Bedouins developed a society based on family groups called clans. Courage and loyalty to the family, as well as warrior skills, were important values.

By the early 600s, trade had become an important activity in the Arabian Peninsula. Merchants from the Byzantine and Sassanid empires to the north brought goods to Arabia. They traded in the cities for spices and other goods. They also brought new ideas.

At this time, the Arab people believed in many gods. Religious pilgrims came to Mecca to worship at an ancient shrine called the Ka'aba. Over the years, Arabs had introduced the worship of many gods and spirits to the Ka'aba. It contained more than 360 idols brought there by several tribes.

Around the year A.D. 570, Muhammad was born into this Arab society. Though a member of a powerful family of Mecca, his early life was difficult. He was orphaned at age six and received little schooling. However, he became a successful merchant. Muhammad was always interested in religion. At around age 40, he took religion as his life's mission. One night, the angel Gabriel visited him and told him to proclaim the word of God to his people.

Muhammad began to teach that there was only

one God—Allah. His religion was called Islam, and its followers took the name of Muslims. He converted a few friends and family members and then began to preach in public. At first, many people in Mecca violently opposed Muhammad's views. They feared Meccans would neglect traditional Arab gods. Muhammad and his followers were forced to leave Mecca for Yathrib (later called Medina) in 622. Muhammad became a leader of that city.

The forces of Mecca and Medina fought several times over the next few years. Finally, in 630, the leaders of Mecca surrendered to Muhammad. He went to the building that held the Ka'aba and destroyed the idols to other gods. Many of the people of Mecca adopted Islam. They began to worship Allah as the only God. Though Muhammad died shortly thereafter, in 632, much of the Arabian Peninsula was already united under Islam.

Muslims have five duties to perform. The duties show a person's accepting of the will of God:

- A person must state a belief that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is his prophet.
- A person must pray to Allah, facing Mecca, five times every day.
- A person must give aid to poor people through a tax.
- A person must eat only one meal a day, after sunset, every day during the holy month of Ramadan.
- A person should perform the hajj—a trip to the holy city of Mecca—at least once in his or her life.

Even today, for Muslims, their private and religious lives are the same. So, many religious laws tell Muslims how they must live. Some rules forbid them from eating pork or drinking alcohol. Every Friday afternoon they meet as a community for prayer. The central ideas of the Muslim religion are found in the Qur'an, which Muslims believe to be the will of Allah as revealed to Muhammad. The Qur'an is written in Arabic, and that language spread as the faith of Islam spread. Muslims are also

guided by the example of Muhammad's life, called the Sunna, and by a set of laws and rules.

Muslims believe that Allah is the same God that Jews and Christians worship. To Muslims, the Qur'an perfects the earlier teachings of God found in the Jewish Torah and the Christian Bible. Because their holy books were related to the Qur'an, Jews and Christians enjoyed special status in Muslim societies.

## 2 Islam Expands

**KEY IDEA** *In spite of internal conflicts, the Muslims created an empire of land on three continents.*

When Muhammad died, his followers elected a new leader, Abu-Bakr. He had been loyal to Muhammad. He was given the title caliph, which means "successor" or "deputy."

Abu-Bakr reacted quickly when a group of Arabs abandoned Islam. He defeated them in battle over a two-year period. Abu-Bakr died soon thereafter. However, his army became an effective fighting force that began to conquer new lands. The Arabs took Syria and lower Egypt from the Byzantine Empire. By 750, the Muslim Empire stretched from the Indus River in India west to the Atlantic Ocean.

The Muslims' faith helped them achieve this rapid expansion. They saw each victory as a sign of Allah's support of Islam. Other factors were the fighting skill of the armies and the strong leadership of their generals. The Byzantine and Sassanid empires to the north were also weak at this time, and the Arabs took advantage of that. Finally, many people who lived in those empires did not support the official religions. They often supported the Arabs, who they thought would liberate them from the harsh rule of these empires.

Many of these people accepted Islam. Some found the message of Islam appealing. Some liked the fact that by becoming Muslims they avoided paying a tax put only on non-Muslims. The Qur'an prevented Muslims from forcing others to accept the religion, however. Muslim rulers allowed people to follow whatever beliefs they chose.

After the murder of a ruling caliph in 656, different Muslim groups began to struggle for control of the empire. Ali, a cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad, was chosen caliph. After a few years, he, too, was killed. The system of electing caliphs died with him.

A family known as the Umayyads took power

over the vast empire. They did not follow the simple life of earlier caliphs and surrounded themselves with wealth. This created a division within the Muslim community.

Most Muslims accepted Umayyad rule. However, some did resist, and a different view of the office of caliph developed. The Shi'a group—the "party" of the deceased Ali—felt that caliphs needed to be relatives of Muhammad. Those who did not outwardly resist Umayyad rule became known as the Sunni. Another group, the Sufi, reacted to the Umayyads' life of luxury. The Sufis emphasized a more spiritual way of life.

After 750, Muslim caliphates existed on three continents. The Abbasids (750–1258) conquered the Umayyads and took over the east. They held the lands of modern Iraq, Iran, and central Asia. They built the city of Baghdad in central Iraq as their capital. They were powerful, using their location to control the rich trade between China and Europe. They formed a complex government to run their empire.

One Umayyad prince had escaped to Spain in 750. There Muslims known as Berbers already existed. The prince set up a Muslim state called al-Andalus. The Umayyads of al-Andalus (756–976) controlled parts of Spain and North Africa.

Another Muslim state—the Fatimid caliphate (909–1171)—sprang up in North Africa. It eventually spread to western Arabia and Syria.

The Muslims were divided politically. However, the Abbasids, Umayyads of al-Andalus, and Fatimids were linked by religion, language, culture, and trade. Muslim traders brought goods from China to Spain. They formed banks along the route. They also accepted a form of substitute money later known as checks.

## 3 Muslim Culture

**KEY IDEA** *Muslims combined and preserved the traditions of many peoples and also advanced learning in a variety of areas.*

The vast Muslim Empire included people of many different lands and cultures. Muslims blended Arabic culture with these other traditions to create a new culture of great achievement. This new culture arose in the major cities of the Muslim world.

Damascus, in modern Syria, was the leading city and cultural center of Islamic learning. The cities of Córdoba and Cairo were centers of Muslim rule

in Spain and North Africa. The Abbasid capital, Baghdad, was especially impressive. Its inner area was circular and had three sets of protective walls, each inside the other. In the center of the circle was the palace of the caliph, made of marble and stone. Nearly a million people lived in Baghdad.

Muslim society was divided into four groups. At the top were people who were Muslims from birth. Next came those who converted to Islam. The third group included Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians—protected because Muslims shared some of their beliefs. The fourth group was slaves, none of whom were Muslims.

According to Muslim law, women should obey men. However, Muslim women still enjoyed more rights than did those living in European society of the time. They had some economic and property rights. In the early Muslim society, women could also have an education and take part in public life. Later they lost those rights.

Muslims placed a high value on learning. Muslim scholars added much to humans' store of knowledge. Europe was in chaos, and much that had been known in ancient Greece and Rome was lost. During this time, Muslim scholars kept much of this knowledge alive. They collected ancient Greek, Indian, and Persian works of science and philosophy and translated them into Arabic. One center of this study was the House of Wisdom built in Baghdad. Later, this ancient learning returned to Europe when the works of Muslim scholars were translated.

One area in which Muslim scholars made great advances was medicine. The physician al-Razi wrote an encyclopedia that collected all that was known about medicine from Greece to India.

Another area of advance was mathematics. A brilliant mathematician named al-Khwarizmi wrote a textbook that introduced a new branch of math. By developing algebra, he was able to use known quantities to find unknown quantities.

In science, Muslims studied the work of ancient Greek scientists but took a new approach. The Greeks had tried to learn about nature by using logic to reach conclusions. In contrast, Muslims used experiments to test ideas. Another field of advance was astronomy. One Muslim scientist made new discoveries about how people see. His findings helped lead later to the invention of the telescope and microscope.

In philosophy, the Muslim scholar Ibn Rushd tried to join together the thinking of ancient Greeks with Muslim ideas.

Muslim literature developed a strong tradition. The Qur'an is the standard for all Arabic literature and poetry. The collection *The Thousand and One Nights* included many entertaining stories, fairy tales, and legends. It was read and narrated throughout the Muslim world.

Muslims put to use the traditions in art that they found among the other peoples they met. Muslims had their own special practices in art, however. For instance, artists could not draw pictures of people. Only Allah, the religion said, could create life. Unable to draw these images, Muslims developed a new art form. They practiced calligraphy, or the art of beautiful handwriting. Some of this writing was used to decorate the beautiful buildings that Muslims built. These buildings often showed the blending of cultures that was a major part of the Muslim world.

## Review

1. **Drawing Conclusions** What caused Muhammad to leave Mecca for Yathrib? What was the result?
2. **Summarizing** What are the five duties that a follower of Islam must perform?
3. **Analyzing Causes and Recognizing Effects** What factors contributed to the Muslims' success in capturing so much land?
4. **Determining Main Ideas** What was the most important factor in the division of Muslim society into four parts? What does that reveal about the place of Islam in this society?
5. **Clarifying** Describe two achievements of Muslim culture in art or learning. What contributed to them?