

<p>The History of Islam AP World History Unit</p>

Overview

In this part of the lesson you will learn about the religion of Islam. As with the other religions, you will survey its origins and trace the life of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, and try to understand his role both as a founder of a religion and as the shaper of a new community. Then you will discover the fundamental tenets of the Islamic faith and the main components of its doctrines and practices. You will also come to know of the sacred texts of the religion, and of the first few leaders of the Muslim community after the death of Muhammad. Because Islam in the seventh century spread the fastest of all faiths in history, you will examine the nature and extent of the initial diffusion of Islam, as well as the ideological basis of its interaction with the other religions it encountered. Finally, you will review the main sects of Islam.

Study Notes

Islam is the religion promulgated in Arabia by the prophet Muhammad in the seventh century C.E. In Arabic Islam means "surrender to God," and a Muslim is one who submits completely to the will of God. Islam is a strict monotheism, recognizing no other god than Allah (the Arabic for God), whose mortal prophet was Muhammad. Islam today has become the second largest religious community in the world, next only to Christianity. The vast majority of the people in North and sub-Saharan Africa and West and Southeast Asia are Muslims. A vast number of Muslims also inhabit Central and South Asia. Although this great geographical diffusion means a significant racial and cultural heterogeneity among the Muslims, all of them are bound by a common religion and sense of belonging to a single spiritual fraternity, a universal community united by fear of God.

Arabian Background

Islam has its origin in the early seventh-century Arabia. The pre-Islamic era in Arabian history is viewed as the "Age of Ignorance" by the Muslims. Tribalism was at a very advanced stage of development at the time Muhammad was preaching Islam. Despite divisive warfare, the desert tribes of Arabia had an evolved nomadic value-system based on honor, loyalty, courage, hospitality, and magnanimity. Islam has subsequently attached great significance to these Arab traditional qualities, has strongly bolstered tribal patriarchy, and, at the same time, has eradicated the pagan religious beliefs and practices of the pre-Islamic nomads. The polytheistic practices of these pre-Islamic bedouins of the desert, as well as strong localized influences of monotheistic religions like Judaism and Christianity, form the religious background of Arabia at the advent of Islam.

The different nomadic tribes worshipped their own deities and honored a variety of spirits in sixth-century Arabia. A widespread cult of astral (related to planets and stars) deities flourished in the southern part of the Arabian peninsula. Around Mecca the "three daughters of Allah"--the sun-goddess, the morning star, and the goddess of destiny--were worshipped. The Jews had a strong presence at Medina. The Christians had their settlements in the southern coast, which also experienced Zoroastrian (an ancient Persian religion founded by Zarathustra) influence during the Sassanid rule since ca. 575. Both southern Arabia and the important city of Mecca were confluences of vital trade routes, the former connecting East Africa and western India, the latter with Syria and the Red Sea. As a consequence, those regions were fertile with foreign religious ideas that percolated into the desert heartland of Arabia.

The Meccans, besides venerating the Kabah, or the great Black Stone, practiced idolatry and animism, and worshipped in the sanctuary several deities, the chief among whom was Hubal, the god of rain and warfare. The devotees of this god offered the strongest opposition to Muhammad when he preached the uncompromising monotheism of Islam. One of the first iconoclastic (idol-breaking) acts of Islam was Muhammad's destruction of most of the idols and images of deities in the sanctuaries of Mecca, when the city fell into his power. Mecca is the most sacred city of the Muslims, as Jerusalem is of the Jews, and Amritsar is of the Sikhs.

The Prophet

Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, was born in the Quraysh tribe at Mecca in ca. 570. Born after his father's death, Muhammad lost his mother at the age of six, and was reared by his paternal uncle. As a youth, he participated in the caravan trade with Syria. In ca. 595, he married a former employer and rich widow, Khadijah, who bore him several children. The best known is Fatimah, who was married to Muhammad's cousin, Ali, regarded by the Shia Muslims as Muhammad's true successor.

Muhammad had a reflective state of mind and used to retire periodically to a hill near Mecca for solitary contemplation. During one such period, in ca. 610, he is said to have a vision of the archangel Gabriel, who told him that he was the Messenger of God. Thus Muhammad became an apostle of God, or the Prophet. Henceforth, until his death, Muhammad received, from time to time, divine revelations that were either memorized or transcribed until their final collection in written form, in the shape of the Quran (also spelled Koran), in ca. 650. Muhammad is considered by the Muslims to be the last of a series of prophets (in the Judeo-Christian tradition) who completes and perfects all previous revelations. The Quran is held by the Muslims to be directly emanating from God. As such, it is infallible, eternal, complete, and perfect, and most definitely not a product of Muhammad's own composition. The Quran is therefore considered to be beyond the influence of the circumstances of its revelation. Also, as it enshrines within itself the ultimate word of God as revealed to His last and greatest prophet, the Quran cannot be modified or superseded by any future scripture claiming divine origins.

At the beginning, Muhammad communicated his revelations to his most intimate relatives and friends, but from ca. 613 he began to preach publicly. Soon his teachings encountered opposition from the influential polytheistic mercantile tribes at Mecca. From ca. 615 onward, Muhammad faced continued hostility and persecution. The situation gradually became so inimical for Muhammad that in 622 he was obliged to flee Mecca for the friendlier oasis-town of Medina. This is the Hijrah, or emigration (Latin, *Hegira*), an event celebrated traditionally as the beginning of Islamic history. The Islamic Era (AH, or *Anno Hegirae*) also begins on the first day of the Arabic year in which the hijrah occurred, which was 16 July 622.

A period of hostility between Mecca and Medina ensued when Meccan caravans were subjected repeatedly to raids of varying degrees of success. Increasing numbers of Arabian tribespeople, among them, notably Meccans, converted to Islam, thus affording a significant accretion to Muhammad's power and control over his followers. After protracted but indecisive fighting, Muhammad marched in 630 on Mecca, which capitulated virtually without resistance to the triumphant prophet and his followers. Finally, the victory at the Battle of Hunayn over hostile tribesmen in the same year established Muhammad as the unifier of Arabia and its most powerful man of religion and arms.

By 630, Islam had attained a definite doctrinal form and established an increasingly firm influence over Arabia. Muhammad enjoyed, at least nominally, the alliance of the most powerful nomadic tribes in the peninsula, while his series of marriages into several tribes strengthened his ties with them. In 630, as the head of a pan-Arabic Islamic confederacy, he waged a great raid on the Syrian border, which set the example of the great military expansion by his followers after his death, as well as their subsequent political arrangements with conquered nonbelievers. Meanwhile, the defeat of the Persians by the Byzantine Empire in 627-628 created a climate favorable for the subsequent conquest of Syria and Iraq.

When Muhammad died in 632 at Medina, he had politically united almost the entire Arabia under the banner of his religion. Personally, by dint of his force of character and charm of personality, Muhammad became for the Islamic community an ideal of human virtues, a most important locus of inspiration and admiration for all Muslims.

The Creed

The teachings of Muhammad with a few modifications became the creed of Islam, whose fundamental tenets of faith are transcribed in the Quran. The follower of the faith is a Muslim or "submitter," who surrenders to and obeys, in a complete and unqualified manner, Allah, or God. God's will was revealed through Muhammad, His last messenger; through the angels; and through the Quran, His last revelation. The Quran, as the holiest book of the Muslims, does not concern itself with the subtleties and complexities of metaphysics and ethics, but lays down simple but definite rules of daily practice that ensure salvation for the believer. Most of the articles of the Islamic faith are concerned with doctrine, religious duty, and correct conduct.

The Quran states the five fundamental beliefs of the Muslims:

1. In the absolute oneness, omnipotence (all-powerfulness) and transcendence (surpassing nature) of God
2. in the existence of angels
3. In revealed scriptures transmitted to the world by divine messengers, the last of whom is Muhammad
4. In the Last Day, when the ultimate divine judgment is dispensed to all
5. In the eternal omniscience (all-knowingness) of God

Although human beings are accorded the power of choice over individual actions, everything everywhere occurs only with divine foreknowledge and predetermination. The central tenet of the Islamic faith is the most important formula in its theology: "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah." God is one, whole and supreme, omniscient and omnipotent. He is the sole creator of the universe, and the only arbiter of the fate of all beings on the Judgment Day. His will determines everything but is incomprehensible, and His mercy is unsurpassed to those who submit to it with enthusiasm and without questioning.

Islam vigorously repudiates the Trinitarianism of Christianity, or the belief in three principles of divinity in one substance. According to Islam, only human beings are capable of being ethical, and therefore, are God's greatest creation. The reason for human existence is their unquestioning

service and complete obedience to the divine will. The cardinal sin in Islam is the pride that leads human beings to commit the ultimate violation of faith, which is ascribing to oneself any divine quality.

As noted above, according to Muslims, Muhammad is the last, greatest, and most perfect of all the prophets of God who bear His witness and message. The earlier Judeo-Christian prophets of the Hebrew and Christian bibles-- figures like Adam, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, Solomon, Elijah, Job, Jonah, John the Baptist, the Virgin Mary, and Jesus--are recognized as messengers of God. But Muhammad has the highest wisdom and authority, and his revelation is the most complete and the most perfect. The Quran, revealed only to Muhammad through the angel Gabriel, is the undistorted and infallible word of Allah to the world, and it is the conviction of every Muslim that the Quran is the earthly reproduction of the original and eternal divine scroll transcribed in the celestial realms in the language of heaven.

Like Christianity, Islam also believes in evil spirits, angels, the Devil, and the Last Judgment. Despite indignant rejection of the idea by Muslims, the Islamic doctrines were likely influenced by Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and Christianity. Besides accepting the prophets and patriarchs of the Hebrew Bible, Islam has a world-view that perceives an inherent dual realism (that of good and evil) in the world that is not unlike Zoroastrianism. Thus Islam sharply divides reality into a transcendent (here, meaning other-worldly), sacred sphere of spirituality, and opposed to it, the phenomenal, profane world of mundane life. At the superhuman level, too, Gabriel is the supreme angel who revealed God's word to Muhammad, and the Devil is the fallen angel who tempts human beings astray. On the Judgment Day, all the dead souls wake up at the trumpet's call and assemble before the throne of Allah, who dispatches them (while mercifully redeeming certain sinners) to either heaven or hell, according to the nature of their past deeds.

Heaven and hell are depicted vividly in the Quran. Hell is the place reserved for nonbelievers, apostates (who abandons faith), and sinners--a horrible region of perpetual pain and torment. By contrast, believers, martyrs, and the pious find their permanent abode in heaven, which is similar to a garden paradise, where they can consume the best of fruits and wines, and consummate with beautiful, virginal fairies.

Five Pillars of the Faith

Apart from doctrine, religious duty and right conduct are the other themes of articles of the Islamic faith. The most fundamental aspect of the religious duties prescribed by Islam is the Five Pillars of Observance of the faith. Every Muslim has to observe and uphold these Five Pillars:

1. Repetition of the creed;
2. Prayer five times a day;
3. Giving to charity;
4. Fasting during daytime during the month of Ramadan
5. Pilgrimage to Mecca, at least once in life, if possible

Since the Five Pillars constitute the most fundamental aspect of the practice of the Islamic faith,

they merit some discussion. First, every Muslim has to confess his faith by repeating his creedal formula several times. This is actually a statement referred to earlier, involving the affirmation in the unity of godhood and the prophethood of Muhammad. It cannot be overemphasized that monotheism is the most inviolable tenet of Islamic doctrine, and polytheism the most heinous act.

Second, five times a day a devout Muslim bows down, individually or at congregations, toward the direction of Mecca, and offers to Allah a verse from the Quran that expresses praise and confirms submission to Him. Every week, public prayer is reserved for Friday, when all adult males assemble in the courtyard of the mosque to offer ritual prayer. This is done under the guidance of the local religious leader (who is not a priest, as Islam has no official clergy), whose duty is to administer the prayer service and deliver the sermon.

Third, a pious Muslim has to donate a permanent tax (ranging from one-fortieth to one-tenth of his assets) in voluntary charity to the poor or as donations for purposes of religious piety. This is called zakat, and was once universally obligatory. It is quite different from tribute exacted from the unconverted, protected, non-Muslim community in an Islamic country.

Fourth, during Ramadan, the ninth month in the Islamic calendar, all Muslims, if physically able to do so, are obliged to abstain from eating and drinking between daybreak and sundown. They are, however, in all cases, required to desist from using any perfume, consuming any intoxicant, and from indulging in sexual activities. They are also encouraged to feed a poor person daily during the period, if affordable.

Fifth and last, at least once in a lifetime, every Muslim, unless constrained by impossible circumstances, is expected to make a pilgrimage (hajj) to the holy city of Mecca during the tenth and last Islamic month. During the pilgrimage, which is made each year by millions, devout pilgrims observe certain ceremonies, including walking in a seamless white garment seven times around the venerated shrine of the Kabah.

Code of Conduct

Besides strict injunctions on religious doctrine and duty, Islam has comprehensive and very categorical rules regarding correct behavior that is expected of every Muslim. Strict observance of the Islamic code of right conduct is almost as important for achieving salvation for a Muslim as obeying God's will. The moral code thus laid down in Islamic scriptures was originally intended to forge a fraternity of faithfuls from a seventh century tribal, nomadic society characterized by polytheism and endemic strife. The laws of conduct were, consequently, not only to reform society, but also to regulate of almost every act, individual and social, from birth to death, of every Muslim. According to Islamic laws, orphans cannot be denied their inheritance, a man can have four wives, drinking alcohol and gambling are prohibited, and consumption of certain kinds of meat, including pork, is strictly forbidden.

The Holy Texts

Again, the Quran is the most sacred and fundamental Islamic religious text. It is believed to be the highest revelation--the true word of God given to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel. As such, it fulfills and perfects, according to the Muslims, all other previous and partial revelations known to the world through prophets acting as God's messengers.

Besides the Quran, the most important Islamic canon is the body of literature known as the

Hadith (plural term Ahadith), a compilation of the sayings and doings of the prophet, Muhammad, as passed on by tradition. The Hadith consists of authenticated recollection of the words and actions of Muhammad and his close companions or as practiced in contemporary Medina. Thus the Hadith is an authority that prescribes guidelines for a universal Islamic body of social precedents and conventions.

The entire body of accumulated Hadith material comprise the Sunna. The number of the Hadith collection multiplied in generations, numbering in thousands, and it is an intellectual pursuit among Muslim theological scholars to sift and weigh every minutiae of the encyclopedic evidence to judge their value and authenticity, and interpret them accurately.

Like the Quran, the Sharia, or Law of Islam, is considered to emanate from God. The Sharia delineates with great precision regulations about individual and social conduct. It also determines the world-view of the faithful throughout the Islamic world. Although there are different schools of Islamic jurisprudence, the Sharia law, even today, pervades almost every aspect of human life and behavior in an Islamic country. It regulates not only individual practices of diet and dress, but also interpersonal social relationships. It lays down strict injunctions on penal, transactional, familial, and inheritance laws, which over the centuries have undergone considerable reforms.

The Spread of the Faith

Muhammad, the founder of Islam, had forged the nomadic Arabs into a cohesive fighting force united by a bond of common religion and instilled with an undying zeal to conquer the world and convert humanity to the faith. The prophet's march to the border of Syria in 630 left his followers poised for territorial expansion beyond the arid Arabian peninsula. The particular ethos of the creed, fusing together spiritual and secular aspects of life, as well as its uncompromising attitude toward other religions, were expressed in its official policy of conquest of the lands of nonbelievers.

Islam makes a distinction among followers of other religions. The least objectionable form of infidelity is being practiced by the so-called "People of the Book," who are guilty not of an absolute denial of truth as revealed by the Quran but of a partial perversion of it. This status of the People of the Book was originally reserved for the Jews and the Christians, and later, the Zoroastrians, the Buddhists, and implicitly, for the sake of political expediency, even the idolatrous Hindus. Upon agreeing to follow their own religion quietly and paying a compulsory poll tax called the jizyah, non-Muslim subjects could sometimes become protected community or dhimmi. Only in this manner could they technically receive any protection of person and property in an Islamic state.

For Muslims, an incumbent religious duty commissioned of Muslims by God is to persist in holy crusade, or jihad, for the purpose of bringing the entire world ultimately under Islam. Jihad is generally viewed (although not universally practiced for practical reasons) by the Muslim community as sacred warfare to convert the dar ul-harb ("a land of warfare," or more precisely, any infidel country not yet under the secure rule of the Sharia) into the universal dar ul-Islam ("land of Islam" or, more specifically, the part of the world where the edicts of Islam are fully promulgated). This doctrine provided the Muslims with their ideology for territorial conquest and religious conversion beyond Arabia.

However, military subjugation alone did not bring the vast variety of races and cultures into the fold of Islam. Missionary activities of the Sufis, or mystics, spread Islam in sub-Saharan Africa, Turkey, South and Central Asia, while Muslim merchants transported their faith through the long Silk Road to China, and through the Indian Ocean to Southeast Asia.

Yet Islam owes its widespread conquests and millions of converts during the first few centuries of its phenomenal expansion largely to the sword. Within two decades of Muhammad's death, Islam forged its first empire, which, in the course of a little more than a hundred years, stretched from Spain in the west to Central Asia in the east, with Arabic, the language of the Quran as the lingua franca in the conquered lands. First, in 640, the arms of Islam conquered Syria from the Roman Empire, marking a series of spectacular military and political successes. The Sassanid Empire of Persia fell in 651; but by that time Palestine, Lebanon, Egypt, and Libya were already under Islamic dominion. Within another twenty years the Muslims had occupied Algeria and Morocco, and within a further forty, invaded Spain in the west and India in the east. By 751, Central Asia as far as Tashkent was under the banner of Islam.

In the west, the Muslims advanced as far as Tours, where in 732 they were beaten back by a Christian army led by Charles Martel. Then they spread to southern France, northern Italy, Corsica, and Sardinia, from where they withdrew only during the middle of the eleventh century. Although the Muslim dominance in southwestern Europe declined from the middle of the tenth century onward, they were not completely ousted until 1492 with the fall of their stronghold at Granada in Spain.

By the end of the seventh century in the east, the Muslims had occupied Afghanistan. By 715 they conquered Chinese Turkestan, and in 1206, after a long series of invasions, they established a Sultanate (empire under a "Sultan") in northern India. Moreover, Islam contributed to the downfall of the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire with its final capture of Constantinople (modern Istanbul) in 1453.

Shiaism

Today the Muslim community, or ummah, comprises many sects, the principal among which are the Sunni, or traditionalists, who constitute the majority of the faithfuls, and the minority Shia, or legitimists. Nowadays, the Shia Muslims are mostly found in Iran, Iraq, and the Indian subcontinent. The split between the two parties occurred almost immediately after Muhammad's death in 632, over the question of leadership in the Islamic world as the prophet himself had designated no successor. Subsequently, there also developed, in the course of centuries, substantial theological differences between these two main sects of Islam.

As soon as Muhammad died, the inhabitants of Medina, at the behest of the closest kinsmen of the prophet's tribe (the Quraysh), consented to elect Abu Bakr, father of the prophet's favorite surviving wife, Aishah, as the successor (Khalifah, hence caliph) of Muhammad, and the spiritual and temporal leader of the Muslim community. They overlooked the claims of the prophet's actually preferred successor, Ali, husband of his daughter, Fatimah, his only surviving offspring. The Shias, or partisans of Ali, reluctantly accepted this for the sake of unity in the community of believers. Abu Bakr (632-634) was succeeded at Medina by Umar I (634-644), and Uthman (644-656).

After the assassination of Uthman during a period of civil strife, Ali (656-661) became the fourth

caliph, but soon an open schism occurred within the religious community over his succession. By 661, Ali himself was assassinated, and the caliphate was taken by his rival, a member of Uthman's Umayyad clan.

The Umayyad caliphate ruled from Damascus until 750, supported by the majority of Muslims. It was opposed by the dissenting Shias, who claimed their loyalty to the descendants of Ali, and sought the restoration of the caliphate to them. The Shias maintain that the true successors of Ali were his two murdered sons, Hasan (d. 669) and Husayn (d. 680). According to them, after Muhammad's death, there have been twelve holy imams, or divinely appointed and guided, and exemplary, spiritual leaders. These imams are entirely immune from any sin or error and continue the tradition of prophethood in every respect except in so far as they cannot formulate a new scripture after the Quran.

The Shias consider these imams as the bestowers of the true and secret meaning of the Quran, and the only legitimate successors of Muhammad, and hold the vast majority of the Muslims (the Sunnis) to be apostatic for failing to recognize them as such. Ali, Hasan, and Husayn are the first three imams, while the twelfth and last imam, the Mahdi, is believed by the Shias to be the ruler of the world. The Mahdi disappeared in 941, but he will reappear at a time when it will be necessary to destroy all the evils of the world and establish the rule of justice in perfect accord with the divine law. Meanwhile, the Shia divines interpret doctrine and law presumably under the guidance of the disappeared imam.

Sunnism

In contrast to Shiaism, Sunnism is the path of the consolidated majority of the Muslim community, and the Sunnis consider the Shias as having a fluid doctrine and belonging to a peripheral sect within the Muslim community. Sunnism is catholic (that is, universal) by nature, and theologically, the more orthodox of the two. The most important formulators of the Sunni creed and theology sought to compromise between divine omnipotence and human free will.

Other Sects

Shiaism has, over the centuries, produced a variety of sects out of itself; the two most important during the first five hundred years are the Ismailis and the Druze. Both are considered heterodox by some and have considerable number of adherents even today. The Ismailis recognize Ismail (the elder brother of the Shia imam, Musa) as the seventh imam, instead of Musa, and uphold the legitimacy of the descendants of Ismail. Some Ismailis, called the Sabiyahs or the Seveners, believe Ismail to be the last of the imams. The Ismailis became prominent in the ninth century, and their teachings spread from the Nile to the Indus River.

The Ismaili Fatimid dynasty ruled in Egypt between 969 and 1171. The Fatimid caliph, al-Hakim of the eleventh century, has been deified by a cult, the members of which are known as the Druzes, who now live mostly in Lebanon, and who are sometimes regarded as a sect independent of Islam.

Sufism, or Islamic Mysticism

Mysticism in Islam arose out of the early Islamic asceticism, which repudiated the increasing worldliness of the Umayyad dynasty. It also sought to discover the truth of the ultimate knowledge not through legalistic religious practices but through cultivation of the inner life and direct personal experience of God. By seeking to experience the infinitude of divine love and

wisdom in this world, these mystics have strived to attain their own personal comprehension of the inner truth of Islam. With the realization of divine presence as its spiritual goal, Sufism focuses on esoteric spiritual knowledge and communion with God as means of personal salvation.

Sufism is an anglicized expression for the Islamic mystic, Sufi (an ascetic who usually wore a garment of coarse wool or *Suf*, in early medieval Arabic). *Fakir* (from Arabic *faqir*) and *dervish* (from Persian *darvish*) are also English words, synonymous with poor Sufis. Sufism derives some of its roots from early Christian mysticism, called Gnosticism (its principle of intuitive knowledge), Buddhism (its rituals of meditative contemplation and chanting of prayers), and Hinduism (its trends of pantheism and loving devotion to a personal God).

Since its inception, Sufism has emphasized strong devotionism and asceticism, with a corresponding abnegation of both religious technicalities and materialism. Rabiyyah, a late eighth-century woman from Basra (in modern Iraq), first formulated the mystical Sufi ideal of a totally selfless love of, and devotion to, God. From this stemmed the eighth century Sufi al-Bistami's doctrine of annihilation (that is, of the human self in God).

Perhaps the most celebrated among the Sufis is the poet-mystic, Mansur al-Hallaj, who was executed in 922 in Baghdad, becoming thus the Islamic martyr of love par excellence for uttering, "I am the Creative Truth" (often rendered as "I am God"), an apparently blasphemous phrase in Islam, but really an expression of pantheistic vision of a man intoxicated by the divine spirit.

The Sufis have created their own extensive literature, developed their own hierarchy of saints, and evolved their own fraternal orders with distinctive disciplines and rituals. Throughout the Islamic world, from Morocco to Indonesia, the Sufis are responsible for shaping parts of the Islamic society by means of the attraction of their mystical beliefs and diverse practices (like saint-worship, performance of miracles, including healing, and adaptation of local, even non-Muslim custom).

The Sufis also have greatly contributed to large-scale conversion of nonbelievers into the Islam faith, by dint of their local influence and spirit of accommodation. Besides, they have exerted strong political influence, as some Sufi orders extended Islamization in modern times to parts of western Africa and central Asia.

Yet, their religious piety, faith in divine love, and veneration of the prophet have remained perennial hallmarks of their creed. The Sufi spiritual heritage is preserved at present by individuals, and in the Western world and among non-Islamic peoples. Lastly, Sufism has permeated most of the rich Persian literature, and a great part of an equally rich Arabic literature.

General Characteristics of Islamic Civilization

Islam was destined to become a world religion and to create a civilization which stretched from one end of the globe to the other. Already during the early Muslim caliphates, first the Arabs, then the Persians and later the Turks set about to create classical Islamic civilization. Later, in the 13th century, both Africa and India became great centers of Islamic civilization and soon

thereafter Muslim kingdoms were established in the Malay-Indonesian world while Chinese Muslims flourished throughout China.

Global religion

Islam is a religion for all people from whatever race or background they might be. That is why Islamic civilization is based on a unity which stands completely against any racial or ethnic discrimination. Such major racial and ethnic groups as the Arabs, Persians, Turks, Africans, Indians, Chinese and Malays in addition to numerous smaller units embraced Islam and contributed to the building of Islamic civilization. Moreover, Islam was not opposed to learning from the earlier civilizations and incorporating their science, learning, and culture into its own world view, as long as they did not oppose the principles of Islam. Each ethnic and racial group which embraced Islam made its contribution to the one Islamic civilization to which everyone belonged. The sense of brotherhood and sisterhood was so much emphasized that it overcame all local attachments to a particular tribe, race, or language--all of which became subservient to the universal brotherhood and sisterhood of Islam. The global civilization thus created by Islam permitted people of diverse ethnic backgrounds to work together in cultivating various arts and sciences. Although the civilization was profoundly Islamic, even non-Muslim "people of the book" participated in the intellectual activity whose fruits belonged to everyone. The scientific climate was reminiscent of the present situation in America where scientists and men and women of learning from all over the world are active in the advancement of knowledge which belongs to everyone. The global civilization created by Islam also succeeded in activating the mind and thought of the people who entered its fold. As a result of Islam, the nomadic Arabs became torch-bearers of science and learning. The Persians who had created a great civilization before the rise of Islam nevertheless produced much more science and learning in the Islamic period than before. The same can be said of the Turks and other peoples who embraced Islam. The religion of Islam was itself responsible not only for the creation of a world civilization in which people of many different ethnic backgrounds participated, but it played a central role in developing intellectual and cultural life on a scale not seen before. For some eight hundred years Arabic remained the major intellectual and scientific language of the world. During the centuries following the rise of Islam, Muslim dynasties ruling in various parts of the Islamic world bore witness to the flowering of Islamic culture and thought. In fact this tradition of intellectual activity was eclipsed only at the beginning of modern times as a result of the weakening of faith among Muslims combined with external domination. And today this activity has begun anew in many parts of the Islamic world now that the Muslims have regained their political independence.

A Brief History of Islam, The Rightly Guided Caliphs

Upon the death of the Prophet, Abu Bakr, the friend of the Prophet and the first adult male to embrace Islam, became caliph. Abu Bakr ruled for two years to be succeeded by 'Umar who was caliph for a decade and during whose rule Islam spread extensively east and west conquering the Persian empire, Syria and Egypt. It was 'Umar who marched on foot at the end of the Muslim army into Jerusalem and ordered the protection of Christian sites. 'Umar also established the first public treasury and a sophisticated financial administration. He established many of the basic practices of Islamic government. 'Umar was succeeded by 'Uthman who ruled for some twelve years during which time the Islamic expansion continued. He is also known as the caliph who had the definitive text of the Noble Quran copied and sent to the four corners of the Islamic world. He was in turn succeeded by 'Ali who is known to this day for his eloquent sermons and

letters, and also for his bravery. With his death the rule of the "rightly guided" caliphs, who hold a special place of respect in the hearts of Muslims, came to an end.

Umayyad

The Umayyad caliphate established in 661 was to last for about a century. During this time Damascus became the capital of an Islamic world which stretched from the western borders of China to southern France. Not only did the Islamic conquests continue during this period through North Africa to Spain and France in the West and to Sind, Central Asia and Transoxiana in the East, but the basic social and legal institutions of the newly founded Islamic world were established.

Abbasids

The Abbasids, who succeeded the Umayyads, shifted the capital to Baghdad which soon developed into an incomparable center of learning and culture as well as the administrative and political heart of a vast world. They ruled for over 500 years but gradually their power waned and they remained only symbolic rulers bestowing legitimacy upon various sultans and princes who wielded actual military power. The Abbasid caliphate was finally abolished when Hulagu, the Mongol ruler, captured Baghdad in 1258, destroying much of the city including its incomparable libraries. While the Abbasids ruled in Baghdad, a number of powerful dynasties such as the Fatimids, Ayyubids and Mamluks held power in Egypt, Syria and Palestine. The most important event in this area as far as the relation between Islam and the Western world was concerned was the series of Crusades declared by the Pope and espoused by various European kings. The purpose, although political, was outwardly to recapture the Holy Land and especially Jerusalem for Christianity. Although there was at the beginning some success and local European rule was set up in parts of Syria and Palestine, Muslims finally prevailed and in 1187 Saladin, the great Muslim leader, recaptured Jerusalem and defeated the Crusaders.

North Africa and Spain

When the Abbasids captured Damascus, one of the Umayyad princes escaped and made the long journey from there to Spain to found Umayyad rule there, thus beginning the golden age of Islam in Spain. Cordoba was established as the capital and soon became Europe's greatest city not only in population but from the point of view of its cultural and intellectual life. The Umayyads ruled over two centuries until they weakened and were replaced by local rulers. Meanwhile in North Africa, various local dynasties held sway until two powerful Berber dynasties succeeded in uniting much of North Africa and also Spain in the 12th and 13th centuries. After them this area was ruled once again by local dynasties such as the Sharifids of Morocco who still rule in that country. As for Spain itself, Muslim power continued to wane until the last Muslim dynasty was defeated in Granada in 1492 thus bringing nearly eight hundred years of Muslim rule in Spain to an end.

Islamic History after the Mongol Invasion

The Mongols devastated the eastern lands of Islam and ruled from the Sinai Desert to India for a century. But they soon converted to Islam and became known as the Il-Khanids. They were in turn succeeded by Timur and his descendents who made Samarqand their capital and ruled from 1369 to 1500. The sudden rise of Timur delayed the formation and expansion of the Ottoman empire but soon the Ottomans became the dominant power in the Islamic world.

Ottoman Empire

From humble origins the Turks rose to dominate over the whole of Anatolia and even parts of Europe. In 1453 Mehmet the Conqueror captured Constantinople and put an end to the Byzantine empire. The Ottomans conquered much of eastern Europe and nearly the whole of the Arab world, only Morocco and Mauritania in the West and Yemen, Hadramaut and parts of the Arabian peninsula remaining beyond their control. They reached their zenith of power with Suleyman the Magnificent whose armies reached Hungary and Austria. From the 17th century onward with the rise of Western European powers and later Russia, the power of the Ottomans began to wane. But they nevertheless remained a force to be reckoned with until the First World War when they were defeated by the Western nations. Soon thereafter Kamal Ataturk gained power in Turkey and abolished the six centuries of rule of the Ottomans in 1924.

Persia

While the Ottomans were concerned mostly with the western front of their empire, to the east in Persia a new dynasty called the Safavids came to power in 1502. The Safavids established a powerful state of their own which flourished for over two centuries and became known for the flowering of the arts. Their capital, Isfahan, became one of the most beautiful cities with its blue tiled mosques and exquisite houses. The Afghan invasion of 1736 put an end to Safavid rule and prepared the independence of Afghanistan which occurred formally in the 19th century. Persia itself fell into turmoil until Nader Shah, the last Oriental conqueror, reunited the country and even conquered India. But the rule of the dynasty established by him was short-lived. The Zand dynasty soon took over to be overthrown by the Qajars in 1779 who made Tehran their capital and ruled until 1921 when they were in turn replaced by the Pahlavis.

India

As for India, Islam entered into the land east of the Indus River peacefully. Gradually Muslims gained political power beginning in the early 13th century. But this period which marked the expansion of both Islam and Islamic culture came to an end with the conquest of much of India in 1526 by Babur, one of the Timurid princes. He established the powerful Mogul empire which produced such famous rulers as Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan and which lasted, despite the gradual rise of British power in India, until 1857 when it was officially abolished.

Malaysia and Indonesia

Farther east in the Malay world, Islam began to spread in the 12th century in northern Sumatra and soon Muslim kingdoms were established in Java, Sumatra and mainland Malaysia. Despite the colonization of the Malay world, Islam spread in that area covering present day Indonesia, Malaysia, the southern Philippines and southern Thailand, and is still continuing in islands farther east.

Africa

As far as Africa is concerned, Islam entered into East Africa at the very beginning of the Islamic period but remained confined to the coast for some time, only the Sudan and Somaliland becoming gradually both Arabized and Islamized. West Africa felt the presence of Islam through North African traders who traveled with their camel caravans south of the Sahara. By the 14th century there were already Muslim sultanates in such areas as Mali, and Timbuctu in West Africa and Harar in East Africa had become seats of Islamic learning. Gradually Islam penetrated both inland and southward. There also appeared major charismatic figures who inspired intense resistance against European domination. The process of the Islamization of Africa did not cease

during the colonial period and continues even today with the result that most Africans are now Muslims carrying on a tradition which has had practically as long a history in certain areas of sub-Saharan Africa as Islam itself.

Major Dates of Islamic History	
Birth of the Prophet Muhammed 570 A.D.	The Seljuqs 137-1300
First verses of the Noble Quran revealed 609	Saladin's Conquest of Jerusalem 1187
Prophet's migration from Makkah to Madinah (<i>hijrah</i>), beginning of Islamic calendar 622	The Mamluks 1252-1517
Death of the Prophet 632	The Mongol Conquest of Baghdad 1258
The "Rightly Guided" Caliphs 632-661	The Ottomans 1299-1924
The Umayyads 661-750	The Timurids 1369-1500
The Abbasids 750-1258	Conquest of Constantinople 1453
The Spanish Umayyads 756-1031	The Fall of Granada 1492
The Fatimids 909-1171	The Safavids 1502-1736