Muslim Culture

MAIN IDEA
CULTURAL INTERACTION
Muslims combined and preserved the traditions of many peoples and also advanced learning in a variety of areas.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW
Many of the ideas developed during this time became the basis of today’s scientific and academic disciplines.

TERMS & NAMES
• House of Wisdom
• calligraphy

SETTING THE STAGE
The Abbasids governed during a prosperous period of Muslim history. Riches flowed into the empire from all over Europe, Asia, and Africa. Rulers could afford to build luxurious cities. They supported the scientists, mathematicians, and philosophers that those cities attracted. In the special atmosphere created by Islam, the scholars preserved existing knowledge and produced an enormous body of original learning.

Muslim Society
Over time, the influence of Muslims grew as the empire attracted people from a variety of lands. The many cultural traditions combined with the Arabic culture to create an international flavor. Muslim society had a sophistication matched at that time only by the Tang Empire of China. That cosmopolitan character was most evident in urban centers.

The Rise of Muslim Cities
Until the construction of Baghdad, Damascus was the leading city. It was also the cultural center of Islamic learning. Other cities grew up around power centers, such as Córdoba (the Umayyad capital), Cairo (the Fatimid capital), and Jerusalem. (See the map on page 261.) Cities, which symbolized the strength of the caliphate, were very impressive.

The Abbasid capital city, Baghdad, impressed all who saw it. Caliph al-Mansur chose the site for his capital on the west bank of the Tigris River in 762. Extensive planning went into the city’s distinctive circular design, formed by three circular protective walls. The caliph’s palace of marble and stone sat in the innermost circle, along with the grand mosque. Originally, the main streets between the middle wall and...
the palace were lined with shops. Later, the marketplace moved to a district outside the walls. Baghdad’s population approached one million at its peak.

**Four Social Classes** Baghdad’s population, made up of different cultures and social classes, was typical for a large Muslim city in the eighth and ninth centuries. Muslim society was made up of four classes. The upper class included those who were Muslims at birth. Converts to Islam were in the second class. The third class consisted of the “protected people” and included Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians. The lowest class was composed of slaves. Many slaves were prisoners of war, and all were non-Muslim. Slaves most frequently performed household work or fought in the military.

**Role of Women** The Qur’an says, “Men are the managers of the affairs of women,” and “Righteous women are therefore obedient.” However, the Qur’an also declares that men and women, as believers, are equal. The shari’a gave Muslim women specific legal rights concerning marriage, family, and property. Thus, Muslim women had more economic and property rights than European, Indian, and Chinese women of the same time period. Nonetheless, Muslim women were still expected to submit to men. When a husband wanted to divorce his wife, all he had to do was repeat three times, “I dismiss thee.” The divorce became final in three months.

Responsibilities of Muslim women varied with the income of their husbands. The wife of a poor man would often work in the fields with her husband. Wealthier women supervised the household and its servants. They had access to education, and among them were poets and scholars. Rich or poor, women were responsible for the raising of the children. In the early days of Islam, women could also participate in public life and gain an education. However, over time, Muslim women were forced to live increasingly isolated lives. When they did go out in public, they were expected to be veiled.

**Muslim Scholarship Extends Knowledge**

Muslims had several practical reasons for supporting the advancement of science. Rulers wanted qualified physicians treating their ills. The faithful throughout the empire relied on mathematicians and astronomers to calculate the times for prayer and the direction of Mecca. However, their attitude also reflected a deep-seated curiosity about the world and a quest for truth. Muhammad himself believed strongly in the power of learning:

**PRIMARY SOURCE**

Acquire knowledge. It enableth its possessor to distinguish right from wrong; it lighteth the way to Heaven; it is our friend in the desert, our society in solitude, our companion when friendless; it guideth us to happiness; it sustaineth us in misery; it is an ornament amongst friends, and an armour against enemies.

MUHAMMAD, quoted in The Sayings of Muhammad
Muslim interest in astronomy developed from the need to fulfill three of the Five Pillars of Islam—fasting during Ramadan, performing the hajj, and praying toward Mecca. A correct lunar calendar was needed to mark religious periods such as the month of Ramadan and the month of the hajj. Studying the skies helped fix the locations of cities so that worshipers could face toward Mecca as they prayed. Extensive knowledge of the stars also helped guide Muslim traders to the many trading cities of the ancient world.

**The astrolabe** was an early scientific instrument. It had a fixed "plate" and a rotating "rete." The plate was a map of the sky and the rete simulated the daily movement of the earth in relation to the stars. Using this tool, one could calculate time, celestial events, and relative position. For Muslims, the astrolabe helped determine where they were in relation to Mecca.

**These pointers** on the rete represented different stars. At night, observers could look at the sky, position the pointers, and make their calculations.

**The device shown here is called an armillary sphere.** The man standing in the center is aligning the sphere, while the seated man records the observations. Astronomers calculated the time of day or year by aligning the rings with various stars. This helped Muslims set their religious calendar.

**Muslim observatories** were great centers of learning. This scene depicts astronomers working at the observatory in Istanbul. They are using many instruments including an astrolabe like the one shown on this page.

**RESEARCH WEB LINKS** Go online for more on astronomy.

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1. **Recognizing Effects** How did fulfilling religious duties lead Muslims to astronomy and a better understanding of the physical world?
   

2. **Comparing and Contrasting** Muslim astronomers developed instruments to improve their observations of the sky. We do the same thing today. Research how modern astronomers make their observations and compare their methods with early Muslim astronomers. Write two paragraphs on how their methods are similar to and different from each other.
Muhammad’s emphasis on study and scholarship led to strong support of places of learning by Muslim leaders. After the fall of Rome in A.D. 476, Europe entered a period of upheaval and chaos, an era in which scholarship suffered. The scientific knowledge gained up to that time might have been lost. However, Muslim leaders and scholars preserved and expanded much of that knowledge. Both Umayyads and Abbasids encouraged scholars to collect and translate scientific and philosophical texts. In the early 800s, Caliph al-Ma’mun opened in Baghdad a combination library, academy, and translation center called the House of Wisdom. There, scholars of different cultures and beliefs worked side by side translating texts from Greece, India, Persia, and elsewhere into Arabic.

Art and Sciences Flourish

Scholars at the House of Wisdom included researchers, editors, linguists, and technical advisers. These scholars developed standards and techniques for research that are a part of the basic methods of today’s research. Some Muslim scholars used Greek ideas in fresh new ways. Others created original work of the highest quality. In these ways, Muslims in the Abbasid lands, especially in Córdoba and Baghdad, set the stage for a later revival of European learning.

Muslim Literature

Literature had been a strong tradition in Arabia even before Islam. Bedouin poets, reflecting the spirit of desert life, composed poems celebrating ideals such as bravery, love, generosity, and hospitality. Those themes continued to appear in poetry written after the rise of Islam.

The Qur’an is the standard for all Arabic literature and poetry. Early Muslim poets sang the praises of Muhammad and of Islam and, later, of the caliphs and other patrons who supported them. During the age of the Abbasid caliphate, literary tastes expanded to include poems about nature and the pleasures of life and love.

Popular literature included The Thousand and One Nights, a collection of fairy tales, parables, and legends. The core of the collection has been linked to India and Persia, but peoples of the Muslim Empire added stories and arranged them, beginning around the tenth century.

Muslim Art and Architecture

As the Muslim Empire expanded, the Arabs entered regions that had rich artistic traditions. Muslims continued these traditions but often adapted them to suit Islamic beliefs and practices. For example, since Muslims believed that only Allah can create life, images of living beings were discouraged. Thus, many artists turned to calligraphy, or the art of beautiful handwriting. Others expressed themselves through the decorative arts, such as woodwork, glass, ceramics, and textiles.

It is in architecture that the greatest cultural blending of the Muslim world can be seen. To some extent, a building reflected the culture of people of the area. For example, the Great Mosque of Damascus was built on the site of a Christian church. In many ways, the huge dome and vaulted ceiling of the mosque blended Byzantine architecture with Muslim ideas. In Syrian areas, the architecture included features that were very Roman, including baths using Roman heating systems. In Córdoba, the Great
Calligraphy

Calligraphy, or ornamental writing, is important to Muslims because it is considered a way to reflect the glory of Allah. In pictorial calligraphy, pictures are formed using the letters of the alphabet. This picture of a man praying is made up of the words of the Muslim declaration of faith.

Geometric Patterns

Muslim artwork sometimes focuses on strictly geometric patterns. Geometric designs can be found in everything from pottery to architecture. This mosaic is from the Jami Masjid Mosque in India (shown below) and uses intricate patterns radiating out from the central shape.

Arabesque

Arabesque decoration is a complex, ornate design. It usually incorporates flowers, leaves, and geometric patterns. These arabesque tiles are from the Jami Masjid Mosque. Arabesque designs are also found in Muslim mosaics, textiles, and sculptures.

SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Visual Sources

Drawing Conclusions What do these three artistic techniques suggest about Muslim art?
This interior view of the Great Mosque of Córdoba showed a new architectural style. Two tiers of arches support the ceiling. Mosque used two levels of arches in a style unknown before. The style was based on principles used in earlier mosques. These blended styles appeared in all the lands occupied by the Muslims.

**Medical Advances** Muslim contributions in the sciences were most recognizable in medicine, mathematics, and astronomy. A Persian scholar named al-Razi (Rhazes, according to the European pronunciation) was the greatest physician of the Muslim world and, more than likely, of world civilization between A.D. 500 and 1500. He wrote an encyclopedia called the *Comprehensive Book* that drew on knowledge from Greek, Syrian, Arabic, and Indian sources as well as on his own experience. Al-Razi also wrote *Treatise on Smallpox and Measles*, which was translated into several languages. He believed patients would recover more quickly if they breathed cleaner air.

**Math and Science Stretch Horizons** Among the ideas that Muslim scholars introduced to modern math and science, two especially stand out. They are the reliance on scientific observation and experimentation, and the ability to find mathematical solutions to old problems. As for science, Muslims translated and studied Greek texts. But they did not follow the Greek method of solving problems. Aristotle, Pythagoras, and other Greek thinkers preferred logical reasoning over uncovering facts through observation. Muslim scientists preferred to solve problems by conducting experiments in laboratory settings.

Muslim scholars believed that mathematics was the basis of all knowledge. Al-Khwarizmi, a mathematician born in Baghdad in the late 700s, studied Indian rather than Greek sources. He wrote a textbook in the 800s explaining “the art of bringing together unknowns to match a known quantity.” He called this technique *al-jabr*—today called algebra.

Many of the advances in mathematics were related to the study of astronomy. Muslim observatories charted stars, comets, and planets. Ibn al-Haytham (Alhazen), a brilliant mathematician, produced a book called *Optics* that revolutionized ideas about vision. He showed that people see objects because rays pass from the objects to the eyes, not from the eyes to the objects as was commonly believed. His studies about optics were used in developing lenses for telescopes and microscopes.

**Philosophy and Religion Blend Views**

In addition to scientific works, scholars at the House of Wisdom in Baghdad translated works of Greek philosophers like Aristotle and Plato into Arabic. In the 1100s, Muslim philosopher Ibn Rushd (also known as Averroës), who lived in
Córdoba, was criticized for trying to blend Aristotle’s and Plato’s views with those of Islam. However, Ibn Rushd argued that Greek philosophy and Islam both had the same goal: to find the truth.

Moses Ben Maimon (Maimonides), a Jewish physician and philosopher, was born in Córdoba and lived in Egypt. Like Ibn Rushd, he faced strong opposition for his ideas, but he came to be recognized as the greatest Jewish philosopher in history. Writing during the same time as Ibn Rushd, Maimonides produced a book, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, that blended philosophy, religion, and science.

**The “Ideal Man”** The values of many cultures were recognized by the Muslims. A ninth-century Muslim philosophical society showed that it recognized the empire’s diverse nature when it described its “ideal man”:

**PRIMARY SOURCE**
The ideal and morally perfect man should be of East Persian derivation, Arabic in faith, of Iraqi education, a Hebrew in astuteness, a disciple of Christ in conduct, as pious as a Greek monk, a Greek in the individual sciences, an Indian in the interpretation of all mysteries, but lastly and especially a Sufi in his whole spiritual life.

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**SECTION ASSESSMENT**

**TERMS & NAMES**

1. For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.
   - House of Wisdom
   - Calligraphy

**USING YOUR NOTES**

2. Which of these elements most strengthened the Abbasid rule? Explain.

**MAIN IDEAS**

3. What was the role of women in Muslim society?
4. How did Muslim scholars help preserve the knowledge of the ancient Greeks and Romans?
5. What were some of the Muslim contributions in medicine, mathematics, and astronomy?

**CRITICAL THINKING & WRITING**

6. **EVALUATING** What do you consider to be the five most significant developments in scholarship and the arts during the reign of the Abbasids?
7. **MAKING INFERENCES** What united the scholars of different cultures who worked in the House of Wisdom?
8. **SYNTHESIZING** What role did cities play in the advancement of Muslim culture?
9. **WRITING ACTIVITY** **CULTURAL INTERACTION** Write a one-paragraph analysis explaining how the primary source quotation on this page reflects the Muslim Empire’s diversity.

**CONNECT TO TODAY** **CREATING A POSTER**

Research to find out how the discoveries of Muslim physician al-Razi have influenced medicine today. Present your findings in a poster.
Terms & Names
For each term or name below, briefly explain its connection to the Muslim world between 600 and 1250.
1. Allah
2. Muhammad
3. Islam
4. Hijrah
5. hajj
6. Shi’a
7. Sunna
8. House of Wisdom
9. Qur’an
10. Sunna
11. Fatimid
12. Abbasid
13. Umayyad

Main Ideas
The Rise of Islam Section 1 (pages 263–268)
9. Describe the religious environment into which Muhammad was born.
10. Why did many people in Mecca reject Muhammad’s ideas at first?
11. How did early Muslims view and treat Jews and Christians?

Islam Expands Section 2 (pages 269–272)
12. Why were the “rightly guided” caliphs so successful in spreading Islam?
13. What were the main reasons for the split between the Sunni and the Shi’a?
14. Why did trade flourish under the Abbasids?

Muslim Culture Section 3 (pages 273–279)
15. How was Muslim society structured?
16. What were some of the practical reasons Muslims had for supporting the advancement of science?
17. In which fields of learning did Muslims excel?
18. How did the art and architecture of the Muslims reflect cultural blending?

Critical Thinking
1. Using Your Notes
In a time line, list the five most important events in the development and expansion of Islam between 550 and 1250.

2. Synthesizing
Cultural Interaction How did the development of Islam influence the blending of cultures in the region where Europe, Africa, and Asia come together?

3. Making Inferences
Religious and Ethical Systems In what ways did the religious duties of Islam affect the everyday lives of Muslims?

4. Summarizing
Empire Building How did the Abbasids keep the affairs of their empire under control?

5. Developing Historical Perspective
What rebirth of learning in Europe was influenced by Muhammad’s encouragement of the pursuit of knowledge?

Visual Summary
The Muslim World

Empire Building
Four major Muslim caliphates build empires on parts of three continents.
- 661–750: Umayyad caliphate
- 750–1258: Abbasid caliphate
- 756–976: Umayyads of al-Andalus (Spain)
- 909–1171: Fatimid caliphate (North Africa, Egypt, Western Arabia, and Syria)

Culture
Muslim scholars preserve, blend, and expand knowledge, especially in mathematics, astronomy, architecture, and medical science.

Religion
- Muhammad receives revelations from Allah.
- The Five Pillars of Islam are Muslims’ basic religious duties.
- The sources of authority—the Qur’an and the Sunna—guide daily life.
- Islam divides into several branches, including Sunni and Shi’a.
The Muslim World

Four major Muslim caliphates build empires on parts of three continents.

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The Five Pillars of Islam are Muslims' basic religious duties.

The sources of authority—the Qur'an and the Sunna—guide daily life.

Islam divides into several branches, including Sunni and Shi'a.

Creating a Multimedia Presentation

Use the Internet, books, and other reference sources to create a multimedia presentation on the rise, growth, and culture of Islam. Write brief summaries on each topic. Use maps, pictures, and quotations to accompany your text and illustrate and enhance your presentation. Be sure to include information on the following:

• the life of Muhammad
• a timeline of major events in the development of Islam
• the key beliefs and practices of Islam
• the impact of the Muslim Empire on other cultures
• the impact of Muslim learning in science and the arts

For additional test practice, go online for:
• Diagnostic tests
• Strategies
• Tutorials

STANDARDS-BASED ASSESSMENT

Use the quotation and your knowledge of world history to answer questions 1 and 2.

PRIMARY SOURCE

One should read histories, study biographies and the experiences of nations. By doing this, it will be as though, in his short life space, he lived contemporaneously with peoples of the past, was on intimate terms with them, and knew the good and the bad among them. . . . You should model your conduct on that of the early Muslims. Therefore, read the biography of the Prophet, study his deeds and concerns, follow in his footsteps, and try your utmost to imitate him.

ABD AL-LATIF quoted in A History of the Arab Peoples

1. Why does al-Latif advocate studying history?
   A. because history repeats itself
   B. because history provides insight into the lives of past peoples
   C. because studying history is a good intellectual exercise
   D. because studying history is required of all Muslims

2. Why does he want people to study the life of Muhammad?
   A. because Muhammad is a great historical figure
   B. because Muslim law requires it
   C. to learn to be like Muhammad
   D. to learn about cultural blending

Use the chart and your knowledge of world history to answer question 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>% of Total Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>155,115,142</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>151,467,325</td>
<td>95.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>135,690,886</td>
<td>88.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>127,091,000</td>
<td>56.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>71,054,050</td>
<td>97.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>68,227,726</td>
<td>98.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>62,390,860</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>61,769,113</td>
<td>84.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>32,198,881</td>
<td>98.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>29,991,256</td>
<td>98.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>27,187,493</td>
<td>97.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>26,732,010</td>
<td>33.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The World Almanac and Book of Facts, 2009

3. In which nations do Muslims account for the highest percentage of the total population?
   A. India and Pakistan
   B. Pakistan and Bangladesh
   C. Indonesia and India
   D. Morocco and Iran

Multimedia Activity

Use the Internet, books, and other reference sources to create a multimedia presentation on the rise, growth, and culture of Islam. Write brief summaries on each topic. Use maps, pictures, and quotations to accompany your text and illustrate and enhance your presentation. Be sure to include information on the following:

• the life of Muhammad
• a timeline of major events in the development of Islam
• the key beliefs and practices of Islam
• the impact of the Muslim Empire on other cultures
• the impact of Muslim learning in science and the arts

Interact with History

In this chapter, you learned that a culture blooms by spreading ideas through trade, war and conquest, and through scholarly exchange. With a partner, make a list of at least five ways to spread an idea in today’s world—ways that were not available to Muslims in A.D. 600–1250.

Focus on Writing

Imagine that you are a newspaper reporter investigating the newly opened House of Wisdom. Write a brief newspaper article about the new center in Baghdad and the work being undertaken there. In the article, be sure to

• describe the center and the scholars who work there
• include quotations from the scholars
• summarize some of the center’s accomplishments and goals

For additional test practice, go online for:
• Diagnostic tests
• Strategies
• Tutorials

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