Chapter 6
The Rise and Spread of Islam
(A.D. 500 – A.D. 1450)
The Muslim World

The religion of Islam emerged on the Arabian Peninsula in the 600s. Muslim civilization eventually created cultural ties among diverse peoples across three continents.
Islam's Impact

Visual Source Documents 1 & 2

Document 1

Document 2

The Granger Collection, New York
Geographic Setting

- The Arabian Peninsula is mostly desert.
- Many Arabs lived in villages near oases.
- Early Arabs formed tribes that were headed by a sheikh.
- Merchants who transported goods across the deserts formed caravans to protect themselves from Bedouin attacks.
Geographic Setting (continued)

- Nomadic herders, called **Bedouins**, used camels to cross the desert in search of pasture.
- Trade grew; merchants founded towns along trade routes.
- Mecca was a busy market town on the crossroads of two main caravan routes.
- Arabs came to pray at the **Kaaba**, an ancient shrine, believed was built by Abraham.

![Traditional Bedouin in Southern Jordan](image)
Early Semitic People - The Sabaeans

- The Sabaeans lived a sedentary lifestyle in the lush southern part of the Arabian Peninsula.

- City-states developed ruled by priest-kings called **mukkarib**, similar to the Sumerian & Akkadian kings.

- By AD 1000, they were replaced by a secular monarchy, the **malik**.

- Located on a trade crossroads brought in wealth: 1) north through Mecca to the Fertile Crescent; 2) sea route connected Africa to India.

"Bronze man" found in Al Bayda' (ancient Nashqum, Sheba kingdom). 6th-5th century BCE. Louvre Museum
Early Semitic People - The Arabs

- Northern Arabs were ethnically one people but of two culturally opposite groups: nomadic and sedentary.
- Nomadic **Bedouins** were pastoralists moving herds from place to place in search of scarce resources & water.
- They lived in small, tightly-knit hereditary tribes.
- By AD 1000, sedentary Bedouins settled in oases along trade routes.
- They conquered Mecca in 500 AD, making it and its **Kaaba** the center of its polytheistic religion.
The Prophet Muhammad

- **Muhammad** was the prophet of Islam.
- He came from a relatively poor clan and was born after his father died, so that he could not inherit his father’s property.
- At 25 years old, he married a wealthy widow, Khadija.
- His poverty in his youth & the social class tensions in Mecca became significant aspects of the message of Islam.
- In 610 AD, he went to a cave to meditate and was told by the Angel Gabriel to recite the words of God.
- Muhammad devoted his life to spreading Islam.
- As the new religion gained followers the wealthy merchant clans turned against him.
The Prophet Muhammad

- In 622 Muhammad fled Mecca for Yathrib, later named Medina, “city of the prophet,” a journey known as the hijra.

- 622 became the first year of the Muslim calendar and is a turning point for Islam.

- Muhammad became a ruler and law giver.

- Thousands converted to Islam.

- From Medina, Muslims launched an attack and defeated the Meccans in 624 with only 300 men.

- Muhammad brought various tribes and cities into tribal alliances.

- In his last year of life, Muhammad led a great pilgrimage or Hajj to the Ka'aba in Mecca.
Rise of Islam

- In 630, Muhammad returned to Mecca in triumph and destroyed the idols in the Kaaba. He worked to unite Arabs under Islam.

- Muhammad died in 632.

- Through the Quran, the Five Pillars, and the Sharia, or interpretations of the Quran, Islam was both a religion and a way of life.

- Mosques are houses of worship.

- Jihad, or effort in service, is some.
Teachings of Islam

Islam arose in the Arabian Peninsula and became one of the world’s major religions.

- Islam is **monotheistic**, based on the belief in one God.
- Muslims believe that the **Quran**, or “recitation,” contains the sacred word of God and is the final authority on all matters.

All Muslims accept five duties, known as the Five Pillars of Islam:

- faith
- daily prayer
- charity
- fasting during Ramadan
- **hajj**, or pilgrimage to Mecca

A Muslim prays during the Hajj pilgrimage at Mecca
The Qur’an

- (According to Muslims) is a revelation from God in the Arabic language
- Translations into other languages are superficial "interpretations" of the meanings and are not authentic versions
- was an oral teaching memorized by followers and written down only after Muhammad’s death

Sura Al-Fatiha ("The Opening") is the first chapter of the Qur'an and its seven verses are a prayer for God's guidance stressing the lordship and mercy of God, & is recited at the start of each prayer.
Foundational Islam Characteristics

- **Monotheistic:** There is only one single, unified God.
- **Creationist:** Earth was created by God and separate from God.
- **Transcendentalist:** God is separate, distinct, and independent from the created universe, but that the created universe, though entirely separate from God, is still dependent on God for its existence & value.
- **Rationalistic:** Reasoned faith in God.
- **Submission:** The word, *Islam,* means "submission," [to God] and a *Muslim* is "one who submits."
- **Androcentric:** Despite the Fall, humanity has the power to discern the unity of God and the reflection of the nature of God in creation.
- **World-Affirming:** the created world is fundamentally a good place that was designed for the use and enjoyment of humanity.
- **Afterlife:** one's afterlife is in large part determined by the sum of one's activities in this life over which one has complete responsibility.
Foundational Islam Characteristics (cont.)

- **Eschatological:** Time is finite & follows an overall, predetermined course.

- **Ethical:** The Qur’an deals with two subjects: the unity of God and human ethical responsibilities to the community. The *Sunnah*, being both sayings *and* actions of Muhammad, is meant to be a guide to practical living.

- **Societistic:** Focus is placed on the community and society, rather than on the individual. While the individual is responsible for his or her salvation, each Muslim must bring the life of society within the ethical philosophy contained in the Qur’an and the Sunnah.

- **Primarily Exoteric:** It is focused on the community of the faithful rather than limited to exceptional individuals.

- **Exterioristic & Interioristic:** Requires outward and inward conformance to the rules and practices of faith.

- **Egalitarian:** All human beings are spiritually equal in the eyes of God.
The Arabic text with transliteration and translation in English is as follows: [Qur'an 1:1].

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيم  
Bismillāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful:

الْحَمْدُ للَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِين  
Al ḥamdu lillāhi rabbī l-'ālamīn All Praises to Allah, Lord/Cherisher/Sustainer of the Universe.

الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيم  
Ar raḥmāni r-raḥīm The Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّين  
Māliki yawmi d-dīn Sovereign of the Day of Judgment.

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِين  
Iyyāka na'budu wa iyyāka nasta'īn You alone we worship, and You alone we ask for help

صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنعَمتَ عَلَيهِمْ غَيرِ المَغضُوبِ عَلَيهِمْ وَلاَ الضَّالِّين  
Ṣirāṭ al-laḏīna an'amta 'alayhim ḍallīn The path of those on whom You have bestowed your favor, not of those who have earned Your anger, nor of those who go astray.

When recited during daily prayers, some schools of thought follow this passage by the word Amin, which means “faithful, trustworthy”.
Islam's Impact

Visual Source Documents 3 & 4

Document 3

The Granger Collection, New York

Document 4
Islam as a Way of Life

The Islamic system of law, called Sharia, regulated moral conduct, family life, business practices, government, and other aspects of a Muslim community.

Unlike the law codes that evolved in the West, the Sharia does not separate religious matters from criminal or civil law.
Impact of Islam on Women

Before Islam:
- In some communities, women participated in religion, trade, or warfare.
- Most women, though, were under the control of a male guardian and could not inherit property.
- Unwanted daughters were sometimes killed.

Under Islam women:
- gained *spiritual* equality
- had greater protection under law
- were protected from infanticide
- were laws guaranteed a portion of her parents’ or husband’s property
- had to consent freely to marriage and could seek a divorce
- had the right to an education
- could participate in public life
An Age of Conquests

The map illustrates the expansion of Muslim lands during the conquests led by the Prophet Muhammad and his successors. Key events include:

- **565**: Boundary of the Byzantine Empire, established by the Byzantine Emperor Justinian I.
- **632**: Death of Muhammad, marking the beginning of the rapid expansion of Islam.
- **632-661**: Lands conquered by Muslims under the first four caliphs.
- **661-750**: Lands conquered by Muslims under the Umayyad caliphs.

The map shows the regions of North Africa, Spain, and the Middle East, highlighting the extent of Muslim territorial control during this period. Cities such as Mecca, Medina, Damascus, and Baghdad are marked, indicating the centers of Islamic political and religious power.
How were the Muslims able to conquer so many lands?

The Byzantine and Persian empires were weak from years of fighting each other.

People in the Fertile Crescent welcomed Arab conquerors as liberators.

The Arabs used bold, efficient fighting methods, which overwhelmed traditional armies.

The common faith of Islam united a patchwork of tribes into a determined, unified state.
Spread of Islam: Causes

- As Arabs brought many people under their rule imposing a special tax on non-Muslims, but allowing Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians to practice their own faiths and follow their own laws.

- Many nomadic peoples in North Africa and Central Asia accepted Islam because its message was simple and direct.

- Its triumph was a sign of God’s favor.

- It had no religious hierarchy or class of priests but an equality of believers, regardless of race, sect, class, or wealth.
Spread of Islam: Effects

Immediate Effects
- Islam spreads from the Atlantic coast to the Indus Valley
- Centers of learning flourish in Cairo, Córdoba, and elsewhere

Long-Term Effects
- Muslim civilization emerges
- Linking of Europe, Asia, and Africa through Muslim trade network
- Arabic becomes shared language of Muslims
- Split between Sunni and Shiites
The Caliphate

- Muhammad died in 632. He had been the political and military leader and source of revelation.

- After violent disagreement between Meccan followers and Medinans, Abu Bakr, Muhammad’s father-in-law, was named Khalifa, or “successor” of Muhammad.

- The first four caliphs, called the patriarchs or patriarchal caliphs were direct followers of Muhammad.
**Movements within Islam**

Shortly after Muhammad’s death, divisions arose within Islam.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUNNI</th>
<th>SHIITES</th>
<th>SUFI</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Believed <strong>caliph</strong>, or successor to Muhammad, should be chosen by leaders of the Muslim community. Viewed caliph as a leader, not as a religious authority.</td>
<td>Believed that only descendents of Muhammad could become caliph. Believed descendents of Muhammad to be divinely inspired.</td>
<td>Sought to communicate with God through meditation, fasting, and other rituals.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A 1315 illustration from the Persian Jami al-Tawarikh, inspired by the story of Muhammad and the Meccan clan elders lifting the Black Stone into place when the Kaaba was rebuilt in the early 600s.
The Arab empire was ruled by several powerful **caliphs**, or successors to Muhammad.

These powerful caliphates ruled the Islamic world, expanded the Arab empire, and brought about a golden age in Muslim civilization.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>UMAYYADS</strong></th>
<th><strong>ABBASIDS</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Set up dynasty that ruled until 750</td>
<td>Overthrew the Umayyads in 750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conquered lands from Atlantic to the Indus Valley</td>
<td>Ended Arab dominance and helped make Islam a universal religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relied on local officials to govern the empire</td>
<td>Empire of the caliphs reached its greatest wealth and power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faced economic tensions between wealthy and poor Arabs</td>
<td>Muslim civilization enjoyed a golden age</td>
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The Umayyad Dynasty

- **Umayyads** (661 – 750) greatly expanded the Islamic empire and were responsible for building a highly efficient and lasting government structure.

- They developed a secular kingship, based on wealth and ceremony and separated from the Muslim community.

- Caliphs were now selected by the preceding caliph, rather than being elected by the powerful tribal leaders, as in the past.

- They relied on local officials, including Jews, Greeks, Persians, to help rule large territories.

- Byzantine and Persian traditions of government, including administrative and financial systems, influenced Arab rulers.

- The administrative center was moved from Medina to Damascus, where a large number of Byzantine administrators and councilors (mostly Christian) were appointed.
The Umayyad Dynasty

- Conquests brought great wealth to empire.
- Some Muslims criticized government in Damascus for abandoning simple ways.
- Less wealthy Arabs resented wealthy ones.
- Shiites hated the Umayyads for defeating Ali.
- Civil War broke out from 680 – 694 with the Shiites, known as the followers of Ali.
The Umayyad Dynasty (cont.)

- The Islamic world again knew a measure of stability under al-Walid (705-715 AD), who reconquered Egypt from the Byzantines and moved into Carthage, across North Africa, and finally conquering Spain.

- Conquered peoples were not forced to covert to Islam, but had to pay an extra tax and were not technically citizens, so many people did convert for religious and non-religious reasons.

- Al-Walid began the first great building projects of Islam, including the mosque at Damascus.

- The empire collapsed with the death of Hisham in 743, into a series of rebellions by disaffected non-Arabs and the ‘Abassids.
Palace of Hisham, Last Umayyad Caliph

North gate of the city of Resafa, site of Hisham's palace and court.
The Abbasid Dynasty

- Discontented Muslims followed Abu al-Abbas, who conquered Damascus.
- He invited Umayyads to a banquet and killed them all.
- He then set up the Abbasid dynasty (758-1258), which was supported by non-Arabic Muslims and Shiites.
- This was the Golden Age of Muslim civilization, in which the empire reached its greatest wealth and power.
- Baghdad became the new capital city and exceeded Constantinople in wealth and power.

"Ali Baba" by Maxfield Parrish from One Thousand and One Nights
Imperial Extravagance and Succession Disputes

- The reign of al-Mahdi (775-785) 3rd Abbasid caliph, exhibited courtly excesses & political divisions that would lead to the decline of the empire.
- Shi’ite revolts and assassination attempts plagued the dynasty.
- Desire for luxury, monumental building & extensive numbers of wives, concubines, and courtiers strained the treasury.
- Harun al-Rashid (786-809) continued trend, impressing emissaries of Charlemagne w/ lavish gifts & impressive mosques, palaces, and treasuries.
- His court has been immortalized in the tales of *The Thousand and One Nights*. 

Harun al-Rashid of Abbasid Dynasty
Al-Ma’mun

- Al-Mamun seized the caliphate from his brother Muhammad al-Amin in 813.
- He tried incorporating Shi’ites into the government, but spent his reign quelling disputes.
- He developed a military force comprised of slaves, called Mamluks (Turkish horsemen), Slavs, & Berbers.
- Arabian & Persian caliphic army was displaced causing resentment.
- He patronized Greek, Sanskrit, and Arabic learning and established a university, the House of Wisdom.
Muslim Society

- Muslim rulers united people from diverse cultures. As a result, Muslim civilization absorbed and blended many traditions.
- The class distinction between Arabs and non-Arabs faded over time.
- People enjoyed a certain degree of **social mobility**, the ability to move up in social class.
- Slavery was a common institution.

Bazar of Shiraz as seen by Jane Dieulafoy in 1881
The Muslim Economy

- Between 750 and 1360, merchants built a vast trading network across the Muslim world and beyond.

- New business practices were established, such as partnerships, credit, banks, and bank checks.

- Handicraft manufacturing in cities was organized by guilds.

- Outside the cities, agriculture flourished.