

CHAPTER 14 - THE EXPANSIVE REALM OF ISLAM

From the same area that produced the other two great monotheistic religions, Judaism and Christianity, Islam is born. The prophet Muhammad was born c. 570 C.E. into a merchant family living in Mecca on the Arabian Peninsula. He lost his parents at an early age, but later married a wealthy widow and became a merchant, which exposed him to many different faiths and cultures. At age forty he proclaimed to have revelations brought to him by the archangel Gabriel that the one true god, Allah, would soon bring judgment on the world. Eventually these revelations would be collected by Muhammad's followers, forming the *Quran* ("recitation"), the Muslim holy book, poetry which becomes the definitive authority for Islam. His hometown of Mecca was not only a major trading center but also a religious center containing the Ka'ba, a stone building housing the idols of many of the local religions. In 622 C.E. Muhammad and his followers, suffering persecution, fled to the neighboring city of Medina in what becomes known as the *hijra*, which marks the start of the Muslim calendar. In 630 Muhammad returned to Mecca and established an Islamic government. The Ka'ba became the focus point of pilgrimage, known as the *hajj*. This event also marks the development of the Five Pillars of Islam and the beginnings of the creation of the *sharia*, Islamic law. With the death of Muhammad in 632 a struggle began over the leadership of the religion. One side, the Shia, believed the leader should be related to Muhammad while the Sunni thought that the leader should be elected by the *umma*, the Islam community. The Shia/Sunni divide continues today.

A series of dynasties governed the Islamic empire starting with the Umayyad (661-750 C.E.) and followed by the Abbasid (750-1250 C.E.) Each was politically unique, but both eventually declined. The formation of Islamic cultural values began with the Quran and the *sharia*. Both missionaries and the educational system helped to promote these values. The most influential missionaries were the Sufi mystics, who led holy lives, teaching by example. They taught others that reverence to Allah could be accomplished in many different ways. The Quran also promoted male domination of the society. Areas of advancement for Islam society included agriculture and business. The Muslims experimented with new crops and techniques resulting in increased food supplies that led to population growth and urban development. The Islamic empires became the center for a huge trade network on both land and sea, reaching along the silk road and into West Africa, Russia, and Scandinavia. This economy was supported by a system of banking that offered options used even today, including letters of credit and a checking system.

Overview

The religion of Islam emerged on the Arabian peninsula in the seventh century C.E. as a result of the vision and the teachings of Muhammad. His message attracted a rapidly expanding circle of devout believers, known as Muslims. After Muhammad's death, Arab conquerors spread the word of Islam throughout a vast territory extending from the Indus River to the Iberian peninsula within one century. This rapid expansion of Islam contributed to the development of a massive trade and communication network in which goods and ideas spread freely. The realm of Islam became one of the most prosperous and cosmopolitan societies of the postclassical world. This new society was characterized by the following:

- Strong commitment to the monotheistic belief system, resting on the Five Pillars of Islam, first articulated by Muhammad and later elaborated on by scholars and mystics

- The development of overland and maritime trade and communication routes that facilitated the spread of new crops, trade goods, and ideas, from improved techniques in agriculture to the writings of the classical Greek philosophers
- Engagement with and sometimes adoption of various cultural traditions encountered by the far-flung realm and its trade contacts, leading to elements of Persian, Indian, Christian, and Greek cultures finding their place into Islamic society and thought

Chapter Outline

I. A Prophet and his World

- A. Muhammad and his message
 1. Arabian peninsula was mostly desert
 - a. Nomadic Bedouin people organized in family and clan groups
 - b. Important in long-distance trade networks between China/India and Persia/Byzantium
 2. Muhammad's early life
 - a. Muhammad ibn Abdullah born to a Mecca merchant family, 570 C.E.
 - b. Difficult early life, married a wealthy widow, Khadija, in 595
 - c. Became a merchant at age thirty and was exposed to various faiths
 3. Muhammad's spiritual transformation at age forty
 - a. There was only one true god, Allah ("the god")
 - b. Allah would soon bring judgment on the world
 - c. The archangel Gabriel delivered these revelations to Muhammad
 4. The Quran ("recitation")--holy book of Islam
 - a. Followers compiled Muhammad's revelations
 - b. Work of poetry and definitive authority on Islam
 - c. Other works include *hadith* (sayings and deeds of Muhammad)
- B. Muhammad's migration to Medina
 1. Conflict at Mecca
 - a. His teachings offended other believers, especially the ruling elite of Mecca
 - b. Attacks on greed offended wealthy merchants
 - c. Attacks on idolatry threatened shrines, especially the black rock at Ka'ba
 2. The *hijra*
 - a. Under persecution, Muhammad and followers fled to Medina, 622 C.E.
 - b. The move, known as *hijra*, was the starting point of the Islamic calendar
 3. The *umma*: cohesive community of Muslims in Medina
 4. The "seal of the prophets"
 - a. Muhammad called himself the "seal of the prophets"--the final prophet of Allah
 - b. Held Hebrew scripture and New Testament in high esteem
 - c. Determined to spread Allah's wish to all humankind
- C. The establishment of Islam in Arabia
 1. Muhammad's return to Mecca
 - a. He and his followers conquered Mecca, 630
 - b. Imposed a government dedicated to Allah
 - c. Destroyed pagan shrines and built mosques
 2. The Ka'ba was not destroyed; it became site of pilgrimage in 632
 3. The Five Pillars of Islam, or obligations taught by Muhammad
 4. Islamic law: the *sharia*, inspired by Quran
 - a. Detailed guidance on proper behavior in almost every aspect of life
 - b. Through the *sharia*, Islam became more than a religion, it became a way of life

II. The Expansion of Islam

- A. The early caliphs and the Umayyad dynasty
 1. The caliph
 - a. Upon Muhammad's death, Abu Bakr served as caliph ("deputy")
 - b. Became head of the state, chief judge, religious leader, military commander
 2. Dramatic expansion of Islam

3. The Shia
 - a. The Shia sect originally supported Ali and descendents as caliph
 - b. Versus the Sunnis ("traditionalists"), the Shias accepted legitimacy of early caliphs
 - c. Different beliefs: holy days for leaders, Ali infallible
 - d. Ongoing conflict between the two sects
4. The Umayyad dynasty (661-750 C.E.)
 - a. The dynasty temporarily solved problem of succession
 - b. Established capital city at Damascus in Syria
 - c. Ruled the *dar al-Islam* for the interests of Arabian military aristocracy
5. Policy toward conquered peoples
 - a. Levied *jizya* (head tax) on those who did not convert to Islam
 - b. Even the non-Arab converts were discriminated against
6. Umayyad decline, due to discontent of conquered and resistance of Shia
- B. The Abbasid dynasty
 1. Abu al-Abbas, descendant of Muhammad's uncle
 - a. Allied with Shias and non-Arab Muslims
 - b. Won battle against Umayyad in 750 after annihilating the clan
 2. The Abbasid dynasty (750-1258 C.E.)
 - a. Showed no special favor to Arab military aristocracy
 - b. No longer conquering, but the empire still grew
 3. Abbasid administration
 - a. Relied heavily on Persian techniques of statecraft
 - b. Central authority ruled from the court at Baghdad
 - c. Appointed governors to rule provinces
 - d. *Ulama* ("people with religious knowledge") and *qadis* (judges) ruled locally
 4. Harun al-Rashid (786-809 C.E.), high point of Abbasid dynasty
 5. Abbasid decline
 - a. Struggle for succession between Harun's sons led to civil war
 - b. Governors built their own power bases
 - c. Popular uprisings and peasant rebellions weakened the dynasty
 - d. A Persian noble seized control of Baghdad in 945
 - e. Later, the Saljuq Turks controlled the imperial family

III. Economy and Society of the Early Islamic World

- A. New crops, agricultural experimentation, and urban growth
 1. Spread of new foods and industrial crops
 2. Effects of new crops
 - a. Increased varieties and quantities of food
 - b. Industrial crops became the basis for a thriving textile industry
 3. Agricultural experimentation
 4. Urban growth
 - a. Increasing agricultural production contributed to the rapid growth of cities
 - b. A new industry: paper manufacture
- B. The formation of a hemispheric trading zone
 1. Overland trade
 - a. Trade revived silk roads
 - b. Umayyad and Abbasid rulers maintained roads for military and administration
 2. Camels and caravans
 - a. Overland trade traveled mostly by camel caravan
 - b. Caravanserais in Islamic cities
 3. Maritime trade
 - a. Arab and Persian mariners borrowed the compass from the Chinese
 - b. Borrowed the lateen sail from southeast Asian and Indian mariners
 - c. Borrowed astrolabe from the Hellenistic mariners
 4. Banks
 - a. Operated on large scale and provided extensive services
 - b. Letters of credit, or *sakk*, functioned as bank checks
 5. The organization of trade

- a. Entrepreneurs often pooled their resources in group investments
 - b. Traders even went to West Africa, Russia, Scandinavia
- 6. Al-Andalus with its capital city Cordoba
 - a. This area was Islamic Spain, conquered by Muslim Berbers
 - b. Claimed independence from the Abbasid dynasty
 - c. Products of al-Andalus enjoyed a reputation for excellence
- C. The changing status of women
 - 1. The Quran and women
 - a. The Quran enhanced security of women
 - b. The Quran and *sharia* also reinforced male domination
 - 2. Veiling of women
 - a. Adopted veiling of women from Mesopotamia and Persia
 - b. Women's rights provided by the Quran were reduced through later interpretations

IV. Islamic Values and Cultural Exchanges

- A. The formation of an Islamic cultural tradition
 - 1. The Quran and *sharia* were main sources to formulate moral guidelines
 - 2. Promotion of Islamic values
 - a. *Ulama*, *qadis*, and missionaries were main agents
 - b. Education also promoted Islamic values
 - 3. *Sufis*, or Islamic mystics
 - a. Most effective missionaries
 - b. Encouraged devotion to Allah by passionate singing or dancing
 - c. Al-Ghazali believed that human reason was too frail and confusing
 - d. *Sufis* led ascetic and holy lives, won respect of the people
 - e. Encouraged followers to revere Allah in their own ways
 - f. Tolerated those who associated Allah with other beliefs
 - 4. The hajj
 - a. The Ka'ba became the symbol of Islamic cultural unity
 - b. Pilgrims helped to spread Islamic beliefs and values
- B. Islam and the cultural traditions of Persia, India, and Greece
 - 1. Persian influence on Islam
 - a. Most notable in literary works
 - b. Administrative techniques borrowed from Sasanids
 - c. Ideas of kingship: wise, benevolent, absolute
 - 2. Indian influences
 - a. Adopted "Hindi numerals," which Europeans later called "Arabic numerals"
 - b. Algebra and trigonometry
 - 3. Greek influences
 - a. Muslims philosophers especially liked Plato and Aristotle
 - b. Ibn Rushd (Averroës) turned to Aristotle in twelfth century