

DBQ 7: Islamic Civilization: Its Contributions to World Culture

Historical Context:

The Muslims inherited much from Greece, Rome, and India and adopted much from the people they conquered. Because of their tolerance of other cultures, they were able to advance scholarship in several areas to the highest level at that time. As a result, Muslim achievements stand out and have a lasting impact on world cultures.

◆ **Directions:** The following question is based on the accompanying documents in Part A. As you analyze the documents, take into account both the source of the document and the author's point of view. Be sure to:

1. Carefully read the document-based question. Consider what you already know about this topic. How would you answer the question if you had no documents to examine?
2. Now, read each document carefully, underlining key phrases and words that address the document-based question. You may also wish to use the margin to make brief notes. Answer the questions which follow each document.
3. Based on your own knowledge and on the information found in the documents, formulate a thesis that directly answers the question.
4. Organize supportive and relevant information into a brief outline.
5. Write a well-organized essay proving your thesis. The essay should be logically presented and should include information both from the documents and from your own knowledge outside of the documents.

Question: *What were the most important Islamic achievements? Why were the Muslims able to make such great contributions and how did these contributions impact the world?*

◆ **Part A:** The following documents will help you understand Islamic achievements. Examine each document carefully, and answer the questions that follow.

Document 1

This excerpt, from the textbook *World History: Patterns of Interaction* (Beck, Black, Naylor, Shabaka. Evanston, IL: McDougal Littell, 1999), explains why Muslims both preserved existing knowledge and extended it.

Muslims had practical reasons for supporting the advancement of science. Rulers wanted qualified physicians treating their ills. The faithful . . . relied on mathematicians and astronomers to calculate the times of prayer and the direction of Mecca. . . . Their attitude reflected a deep-seated curiosity about the world and a quest for truth that reached back to . . . Mohammed himself. After the fall of Rome in A.D. 476, Europe entered a period of upheaval and chaos, an era in which scholarship suffered. . . . In the early 800's . . . the House of Wisdom opened in Baghdad. There, scholars of different cultures and beliefs worked . . . translating texts from Greece, India, Persia, and elsewhere into Arabic.

(continued)



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What were the reasons for Muslim interest in learning? _____

Document 2

The Islamic capital of Cordova was described by a contemporary as the "jewel of the world." The Islamic schools and universities were preferred by European scholars such as Abelard and Roger Bacon. Philip Hitti describes Cordova in *Capital Cities of Arab Islam* (University of Minnesota Press, 1973).

Besides the university library, Arab statisticians assure us the city boasted 37 libraries, numberless bookstores, 800 public schools . . . and a total population of 300,000. Its people enjoyed a high standard of living and refinement and walked on paved streets . . .—all this at a time when hardly a town in Europe, Constantinople excepted, counted more than a few thousand inhabitants. Parisians and Londoners were still trudging on muddy, dark alleys. . . .

What conditions in Cordova does this author cite as evidence of the high level of Islamic civilization and scholarship? _____

Document 3

Physician al-Razi wrote a medical reference encyclopedia, the *Comprehensive Book and Treatise on Smallpox and Measles*. Ibn Sina (Avicenna) wrote the five-volume *The Canon of Medicine*. These books were translated into Latin and other languages and influenced doctors in Europe. The illustration below, from an Islamic medical book, and the explanation from the textbook *World History: Patterns of Interaction*, show the level of medical expertise of Islamic doctors.

Medical Reference Books

When Europeans learned that Muslims had preserved important medical texts, they wanted to translate the texts into Latin. In the eleventh century, scholars traveled to libraries in places such as Toledo, Spain, where they began translating—but only after they learned to read Arabic.

Through this process, European medical schools gained access to vital reference sources such as al-Razi's *Comprehensive Book* and Ibn Sina's *The Canon of Medicine*. Ibn Sina's five-volume encyclopedia guided doctors of Europe and Southwest Asia for six centuries. For nearly 500 years, al Qasim's work, *The Method*, which contained original drawings of some 200 medical tools, was the foremost textbook on surgery in Europe.

What does this document tell you about Muslim medical knowledge? _____

How did it impact Western civilization? _____

(continued)



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Document 4

Al-Khwarizmi, a Muslim mathematician, studied Indian sources and wrote a textbook in the 800's about *al-jabr* (the Arabic word for algebra), which was later translated into Latin and used throughout Europe. Muslim mathematicians also adopted Arabic numerals from the Indians and used them in a place-value system.

$$3x = 15$$

$$\begin{array}{r} 135 \\ + 20 \\ \hline 155 \end{array}$$

What is the importance of these mathematical advances? _____

How did these developments impact Western civilization? _____

Document 5

Using scientific observation and their understanding of mathematics and optics, Muslim scholars made advancements in trigonometry and astronomy as well as mapmaking. They used the astrolabe (Figure A) and the armillary sphere (Figure B) to study the skies and make calculations for their calendars and maps.

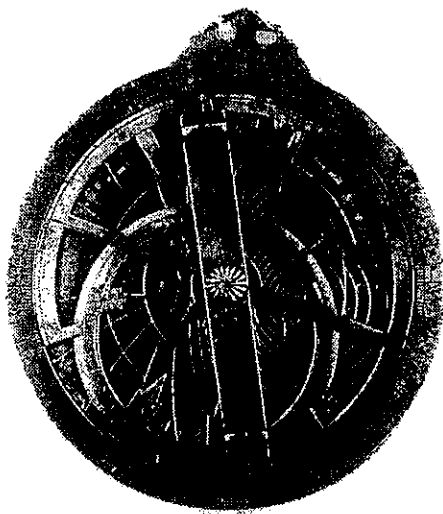


Figure A

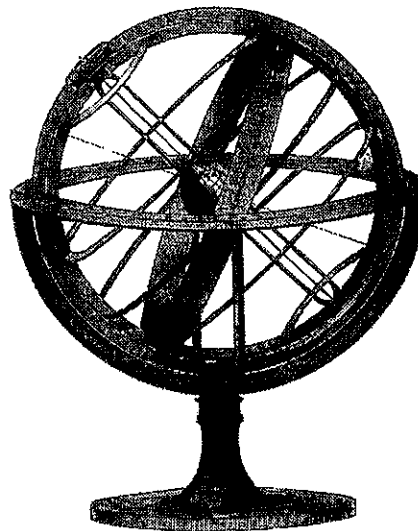


Figure B

How did each of these instruments impact Muslim and Western civilization? _____

(continued)



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Document 6

Muslim artists used calligraphy to decorate buildings and objects of art as well as to reflect the glory of Allah. Study this example and answer the questions that follow.

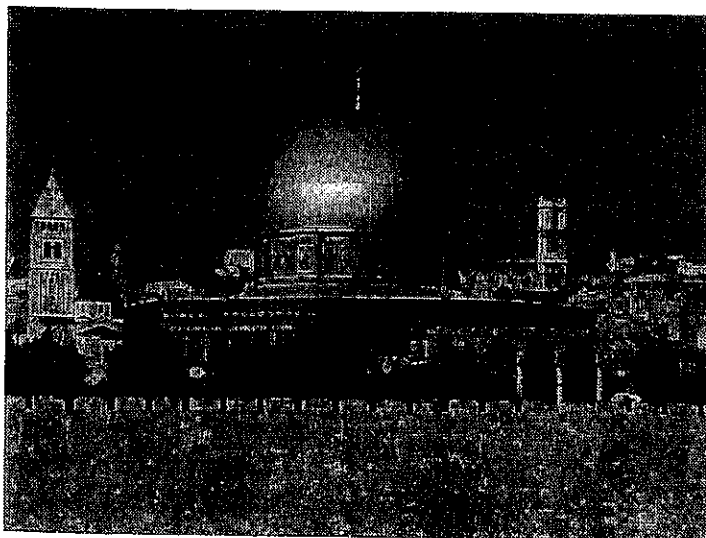
Why was calligraphy used in religious art?

What impact has calligraphy had on world art?



Document 7

Muslim architects blended features from various sources, including the Byzantine Empire, as well as added new features. Study this photo of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, and answer the questions that follow.



What are the distinctive architectural features of this building? _____

What impact did these architectural designs have on buildings throughout the world? _____

(continued)



Name _____ Date _____

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Document 8

The standard for Arabic literature and poetry is the Quran, which influenced Sufi poets. Read these two excerpts and answer the questions that follow.

In the name of the Merciful and Compassionate God. That is the Book! There is no doubt therein. . . . God, there is no God but He! He will surely assemble you on the resurrection day. . . .

Quran

As salt resolved in the ocean
I was swallowed in God's sea. . . .
Jalal al-Din Rumi—*Persian Poems*

Why is the Quran the model for poetry? _____

How did the Quran influence literature and poetry? _____

Document 9

Between 750 and 1350, the Muslim merchants built a trade network throughout their empire, as this excerpt from *The Gates of India* by Sir T. H. Holdich (London: MacMillan, 1910) explains.

Masters of the sea, even as of the land, the Arabs spread throughout the geographical area. The whole world was theirs to explore . . . their ships sailed across the seas even as they moved across the land [Sahara Desert into West Africa]. The might of the sword of Islam carved the way for the slaveowner and the merchant to follow.

Why and where were the Muslims able to establish a trading empire? _____

(continued)



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Document 10

Historian J. H. Kramers describes the benefits that Europeans received from Muslim industry in *The Legacy of Islam*. (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1931)

First should be mentioned the textile products imported from Islamic countries: muslin . . . damask . . . gauze, cotton, satin.

Natural products, which by their name indicate they were imported from Islamic countries—fruits, like orange, lemon, and apricot; vegetables, like spinach, artichokes, and saffron. . . . Finally our commercial vocabulary itself has preserved . . . proofs that there was a time when Islamic trade and trade customs exercised a deep influence on the commercial development of Christian countries—such words as “traffic” [derived from Arabic *tafriq*], which means distribution.

What were the commercial or trade benefits that Europeans gained from Islamic commerce and industry? _____

◆ Part B—Essay

What were the most important Islamic achievements? Why were the Muslims able to make such great contributions and how did these contributions impact the world?

