

## Developments in Dar al-Islam

*Allah will admit those who embrace the true faith and do good works  
to gardens watered by running streams.*

—The Quran, Chapter 47

**Essential Question:** In the period from c. 1200 to c. 1450, how did Islamic states arise, and how did major religious systems shape society?

**A**fter the death of **Muhammad** in 632, Islam spread rapidly outward from Arabia. Through military actions and the activities of merchants and missionaries, Islam's reach extended from India to Spain. As the quotation suggests, many Islamic leaders showed tolerance to Christians, Jews, and others who believed in a single god and did good works. Under the Abbasid Empire, scholars traveled from far away to Baghdad to study at a renowned center of learning known as the **House of Wisdom**. The Islamic community helped transfer knowledge throughout Afro-Eurasia. When the Abbasids declined, they were replaced by other Islamic states.

### Invasions and Shifts in Trade Routes

In the 1100s and 1200s, the Abbasid Empire confronted many challenges. Like the Chinese, they had conflicts with nomadic groups in Central Asia. Unlike the Chinese, they also confronted European invaders.

**Egyptian Mamluks** Arabs often purchased enslaved people, or **Mamluks**, who were frequently ethnic Turks from Central Asia, to serve as soldiers and later as bureaucrats. Because of their roles, Mamluks had more opportunities for advancement than did most enslaved people. In Egypt, Mamluks seized control of the government, establishing the **Mamluk Sultanate** (1250–1517). They prospered by facilitating trade in cotton and sugar between the Islamic world and Europe. However, when the Portuguese and other Europeans developed new sea routes for trade, the Mamluks declined in power.

**Seljuk Turks** Another challenge to the Abbasids came from the Central Asian **Seljuk Turks**, who were also Muslims. Starting in the 11th century, they began conquering parts of the Middle East, eventually extending their power almost as far east as Western China. The Seljuk leader called himself **sultan**, thereby reducing the role of the highest-ranking Abbasid from caliph to chief Sunni religious authority.



**Crusaders** The Abbasids allowed Christians to travel easily to and from their holy sites in and around Jerusalem. However, the Seljuk Turks limited this travel. European Christians organized groups of soldiers, called **Crusaders**, to reopen access. (See Topic 1.6.)

**Mongols** The fourth group to attack the Abbasid Empire were among the most famous conquerors in history: the **Mongols**. (See Topic 2.2.) Like many Mamluks and the Seljuk Turks, they came from Central Asia. The Mongols conquered the remaining Abbasid Empire in 1258 and ended the Seljuk rule. They continued to push westward but were stopped in Egypt by the Mamluks.

**Economic Competition** Since the 8th century, the Abbasids had been an important link connecting Asia, Europe, and North Africa. Goods and ideas flowed from one region to another on trade routes controlled by the Abbasids. Many went through **Baghdad**. However, trade patterns slowly shifted to routes farther north. As Baghdad lost its traditional place at the center of trade, it lost wealth and population. It could not afford to keep its canals repaired. Farmers could not provide enough food for the urban population. Slowly, the infrastructure that had made Baghdad a great city fell into decay.

## Cultural and Social Life

Over time, the Islamic world fragmented politically. Many of these new states adopted Abbasid practices, but they were distinct ethnically. The **Abbasid Caliphate** was led by Arabs and Persians, but the later Islamic states were shaped by Turkic peoples who descended from people in Central Asia. For example, the Mamluks in North Africa, the Seljuks in the Middle East, and the Delhi Sultanate in South Asia were all at least partially Turkic. By the 16th century, three large Islamic states had their roots in Turkic cultures: the Ottoman Empire in Turkey, the Safavid Empire in Persia, and the Mughal Empire in India. (See Topic 3.1)

However, these Islamic states continued to form a cultural region. Trade spread new goods and fresh ideas. The common use of shariah created similar legal systems. Great universities in Baghdad, Iraq; Córdoba, Spain; Cairo, Egypt; and Bukhara in Central Asia created centers for sharing intellectual innovations.

**Cultural Continuities** Islamic scholars followed the advice of the prophet Muhammad: “Go in quest of knowledge even unto China.” By learning from many cultures, they carried on the work of earlier thinkers:

- They translated Greek literary classics into Arabic, saving the works of Aristotle and other Greek thinkers from oblivion.
- They studied mathematics texts from India and transferred the knowledge to Europeans.
- They adopted techniques for paper-making from China. Through them, Europeans learned to make paper.



**Cultural Innovations** In addition to building on the intellectual achievements of other cultures, scholars during the “golden age” in Baghdad made their own achievements. **Nasir al-Din al-Tusi** (1201–1274) was one of the most celebrated Islamic scholars. He contributed to astronomy, law, logic, ethics, mathematics, philosophy, and medicine. An observatory built under his direction was the most advanced in the world and produced the most accurate astronomical charts. He studied the relationship between the lengths of the sides of a triangle and the angles. This laid the groundwork for making trigonometry a separate subject. Medical advances and hospital care improved in cities such as Cairo, while doctors and pharmacists studied for examinations for licenses that would allow them to practice.

Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) was well known for his historical accounts and is widely acknowledged as a founder of the fields of historiography (the study of the methods of historians) and sociology.

Sufi poet and mystic **‘A’ishah al-Ba’uniyyah** (1460–1507) may be the most prolific female Muslim writer before the 20th century. Her best-known work, a long poem honoring Muhammad called “Clear Inspiration, on Praise of the Trusted One,” refers to many previous poets, reflecting her broad learning. Many of her works describe her journey toward mystical illumination.

‘A’ishah’s poetry reflects a contrast between most Muslims and Sufis. Unlike Muslims who focused on intellectual pursuits, such as the study of the Quran, **Sufis** emphasized introspection to grasp truths that they believed could not be understood through learning. Sufism may have begun as a mystical response to the perceived love of luxury by the early Umayyad Caliphate.

Sufi missionaries played an important role in the spread of Islam. They tended to adapt to local cultures and traditions, sometimes interweaving local religious elements into Islam, and in this way they won many converts.

**Commerce, Class, and Diversity** Helping to power the golden age of natural and moral philosophy and the arts was commerce. Islamic society viewed merchants as more prestigious than did other societies in Europe and Asia at the time. Muhammad himself had been a merchant, as had his first wife. With the revival of trade on Silk Roads, merchants could grow rich from their dealings across the Indian Ocean and Central Asia. They were esteemed as long as they maintained fair dealings and gave to charity in accord with the pillars of the Islamic faith. Some merchants were even sent out as missionaries.

In the non-Arab areas of Islamic expansion, control by Islamic caliphs led to discrimination against non-Arabs, though rarely to open persecution. This discrimination gradually faded in the 9th century. The caliph’s soldiers were forbidden to own territory they had conquered. The presence of a permanent military force that kept order but did not own property allowed life for most of the inhabitants of the countryside to remain virtually unchanged. However, people paid tribute to Islamic caliphs rather than to Byzantine rulers.

**Slavery** Although Islam allowed slavery, Muslims could not enslave other Muslims. Also exempt from slavery were Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians. (See Prologue.) Slaves were often imported from Africa, Kievan



Rus (present-day Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine), and Central Asia, but the institution of hereditary slavery had not developed. Many slaves converted to Islam, after which their owners freed them.

Slave women might find themselves serving as concubines to Islamic men who already had wed their allotment of four wives. Slave women were allowed more independence—for example, to go to markets and to run errands—than the legal wives. Only slave women were permitted to dance or perform musically before unrelated men. This opportunity to earn money sometimes enabled female slaves to accumulate enough to buy their freedom.

## Free Women in Islam

Some practices now associated with Islam were common cultural customs in Central Asia and the Byzantine Empire before the time of Muhammad. For example, women often covered their heads and faces. This practice solidified under Islam, with most women observing *hijab*, a term that can refer either to the practice of dressing modestly or to a specific type of covering. Men often wore head coverings, from turbans to skull caps. While women could study and read, they were not to do so in the company of men not related to them.

**Muhammad's Policies** Muhammad raised the status of women in several ways. He treated his wives with love and devotion. He insisted that dowries, the payments prospective husbands made to secure brides, be paid to the future wife rather than to her father. He forbade female infanticide, the killing of newborn girls. Muhammad's first wife was educated and owned her own business, which set a pattern for the recognition of women's abilities.

**The Status of Women** Overall, Islamic women enjoyed a higher status than Christian or Jewish women. Islamic women were allowed to inherit property and retain ownership after marriage. They could remarry if widowed, and they could receive a cash settlement if divorced. Under some conditions, a wife could initiate divorce. Moreover, women could practice birth control. Islamic women who testified in a court under shariah (see Topic 3.3) were to be protected from retaliation, but their testimony was worth only half that of a man. One gap in the historical record is written evidence of how women viewed their position in society: most of the records created before 1450 were written by men.

The rise of towns and cities in Islamic-ruled areas resulted in new limitations on women's rights, just as it did in other cultures. The new status of women might best be symbolized by the veil and the harem, a dwelling set aside for wives, concubines, and the children of these women.

## Islamic Rule in Spain

While the Umayyads ruled only briefly in the Middle East, they kept power longer in Spain. In 711, after Muslim forces had defeated Byzantine armies across North Africa, they successfully invaded Spain from the south. They designated Córdoba as their capital for Spain.



**Battle of Tours** The Islamic military was turned back in 732 when it lost the Battle of Tours against Frankish forces. This defeat, rare for Islamic armies during the 700s, marked the limit of rapid Islamic expansion into Western Europe. Most of the continent remained Christian, but Muslims ruled Spain for the next seven centuries. (Connect: In a paragraph, compare the status of women in Chinese society to the status of women in Islamic society in the period 1200 to 1450.)

**Prosperity Under Islam** Like the Abbasids in Baghdad, the Umayyad rulers in Córdoba created a climate of toleration, with Muslims, Christians, and Jews coexisting peacefully. They also promoted trade, allowing Chinese and Southeast Asian products to enter into Spain and thus into the rest of Europe. Many of the goods in this trade traveled aboard ships called dhows. These ships, first developed in India or China, had long, thin hulls that made them excellent for carrying goods, though less useful for conducting warfare.

**Cultural and Scholarly Transfers** The Islamic state in Spain, known as al-Andalus, became a center of learning. Córdoba had the largest library in the world at the time. Among the famous scholars from Spain was Ibn Rushd, known in Europe as Averroes (12th century). He wrote influential works on law, secular philosophy, and the natural sciences.

The Muslims, Christians, and Jews living in al-Andalus—all “people of the book” as Muslims regarded them—not only tolerated one another but also influenced one another. For example, Ibn Rushd’s commentaries on Aristotle influenced the Jewish philosopher Maimonides (c. 1135–c. 1204). Maimonides developed a synthesis of Aristotle’s reasoning and biblical interpretation. He, in turn, influenced Christian philosophers, including St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). Islamic scholarship and scientific innovations, along with the knowledge transferred from India and China, laid the groundwork for the Renaissance and Scientific Revolution in Europe. For example, making paper, a technology developed in China and taught to Europeans by Muslims, was vital to spreading ideas in Europe.

KEY TERMS BY THEME		
<p><b>GOVERNMENT: Empires</b> Mamluk Sultanate Seljuk Turks sultan Mongols Abbasid Caliphate</p>	<p><b>CULTURE: Religion</b> Mamluks Muhammad Crusaders Sufis</p>	<p><b>CULTURE: Golden Age</b> House of Wisdom Baghdad Nasir al-Din al-Tusi 'A'ishah al-Ba'uniyyah</p>

**THINK AS A HISTORIAN:** IDENTIFY HISTORICAL CONCEPTS,  
DEVELOPMENTS, AND PROCESSES

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Unit 1 is called “The Global Tapestry” to suggest that world history is a complex interweaving of different threads from different parts of the world at different times. However, to fully appreciate the whole, historians try to unravel the tapestry thread by thread to see just how each fits in. As they do, they use such *historical concepts* as change, continuity, perspective, cause and effect, significance, and empathy. Applying these concepts, they come to understand *historical developments*—patterns of changes or growth over time. To see these patterns, they look at subjects in historical context—how did they start out, and what did they become over time? Historians also try to understand the *historical processes* that made certain developments possible, such as migration, industrialization, conquest, and state building.

*Practice identifying historical concepts, developments, and processes by completing the activities below.*

1. Read the paragraph labeled **Economic Competition** on page 14. Explain the historical concept of cause and effect and how it applies to the decline of Baghdad.
2. Explain the historical concept of continuities and how Muhammad’s advice to “go in quest of knowledge even unto China” resulted in historical continuities. (See page 16.)
3. Explain the historical process of knowledge transfers that began with the Jews, Muslims, and Christians living in al-Andalus and laid the groundwork for the Scientific Revolution and Renaissance in Europe. (See page 19.)

**REFLECT ON THE TOPIC ESSENTIAL QUESTION**

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1. In one to three paragraphs, explain how Islamic states arose and how major religious systems shaped society in the periods between c. 1200 and c. 1450.