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**Ways of the World: A Brief Global
History with Sources**
Second Edition

Chapter 9

The Worlds of Islam: Afro-Eurasian Connections,
600–1500

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1. Describe this picture. What does it show?

This painting, which appears to be a page from a book, shows a group of nine men, five camels, and a horse on the move. The men wear turbans and colorful dress. Most are bearded, and the six men riding the camels hold musical instruments—horns, drums, and drumsticks. Three long poles with two to four long and narrow flags reach out of this densely packed group. The camel in front seems to carry a richly decorated vessel or cabin. Two men walk among the camels, and one man is riding a horse in the front of the picture.

2. Can you explain the meaning of this image?

This image shows a scene from the Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca. The central religious ritual in Islam, the hajj was a festive event that brought together Muslims from many different parts of the world. The crowded and joyous appearance of this group of pilgrims illustrates not just the religious importance of the hajj but its social significance as an occasion for festivities and camaraderie.

I. The Birth of a New Religion

A. The Homeland of Islam

1. Tribal feuds and trading centers of the Arabian Peninsula
2. Mecca: home of the Kaaba and the Quraysh
3. Contact with Byzantine and Sassanid Empires
4. Gods, idols, and “children of Abraham”

I. The Birth of a New Religion

A. The Homeland of Islam

1. Tribal feuds and trading centers of the Arabian Peninsula: Prior to the Islamic revelations, the Arab world was characterized by the tribal organization of Bedouin groups. They fought a series of bitter feuds amongst themselves, clashing over access to trade centers and oases. As the peninsula was home to some of the trade routes between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean, the region saw economic growth thanks to the increase in long-distance trade.
2. Mecca: home of the Kaaba and the Quraysh: One of the cities was Mecca. While somewhat removed from the trade routes, it served as an important pilgrimage site as the Kaaba, a shrine, housed idols of hundreds of tribal gods from the region. The Quraysh dominated the city and grew wealthy from taxing the pilgrims that came to worship at the Kaaba.
3. Contact with Byzantine and Sassanid Empires: As the peninsula was adjacent to two powerful empires, there was knowledge of the wider world. A variety of people from the Christian and Persian worlds lived in the cities of the peninsula.
4. Gods, idols, and “children of Abraham”: While the Arab tribes were polytheistic, contact with Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians living among them spread the idea of monotheism. Thus, some Arabs came to view the god Allah as the preeminent god of the pantheon, and some linked Allah to the Jewish Yaweh, exploring the idea that Allah was the one true god and the rest of the gods were merely idols. These Arabs came to see themselves as, like the Jews, descendants of Abraham. Thus, in

600 it seemed as if the Arabs were moving towards Judaism or Christianity.



Map 9.1 Arabia at the Time of Muhammad
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I. The Birth of a New Religion

B. The Messenger and the Message

1. Muhammad Ibn Abdullah (570–632)
2. Series of revelations (610–632) become the Quran
3. Revolutionary message of monotheism
4. A return to the religion of Abraham

I. The Birth of a New Religion

B. The Messenger and the Message

1. Muhammad Ibn Abdullah (570–632): This historical figure was orphaned as a child and raised by an uncle. He was a shepherd as a boy and became a merchant as a young man. He would marry a widow, also a wealthy merchant, and have six children with her. Deeply spiritual and greatly troubled by the social injustices in Mecca, he frequently retreated to the hills around Mecca to meditate.
2. Series of revelations (610–632) become the Quran: Starting in 610, he had a series of revelations for over two decades. He reluctantly accepted that he was a messenger of God. He recited these revelations, and they were later recorded as the Quran, Islam's sacred text. They are believed to be the direct word of God and are extremely beautiful verses in the original Arabic.
3. Revolutionary message of monotheism: In one sense, the revelations were a revolution against the polytheism and idol worship of the Arabian Peninsula.
4. A return to the religion of Abraham: In another sense, the revelations were actually a call to return to the pure faith of Abraham. They were a call to purge the faith of corruptions and errors: Jews wrongly saw themselves as a chosen people, Christians had wrongly turned their prophet into a god, and Arabs had fallen into idol worship and polytheism. Thus, the message was a universal call for all to engage in a purer faith.



Muslims, Jews, and Christians
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1. What does this painting show?

This painting shows a group of men in turbans and robes in prayer. Sitting on a rug in the center is a man whose head seems engulfed in flames. To his right sit three white-robed men of varying ages. The man closest to the center has a white beard and wears a black robe and seems to be the oldest. The man next to him sports a red robe and a black beard, and the one on the outer edge on the right wears a blond-red beard and a blue robe. Across from these three sit three men in red robes and turbans.

2. Who are these men supposed to be?

The figure in the center is supposed to be the prophet Muhammad, whose fiery preaching is illustrated with the flames around his head. To his right sit Moses, Abraham, and Jesus Christ. Muhammad is leading the three representatives of Judaism and Christianity in prayer to fellow Muslims on the left.

3. What message does this painting seem to convey?

Islam, Judaism, and Christianity are all mono-deistic religions centered in the Middle East. From the perspective of this artist in Persia, the prophet Muhammad built on the revelations of Jews and Christians.

I. The Birth of a New Religion

B. The Messenger and the Message

5. “Seal of the prophets”
6. Revolutionary message of social justice: the *Umma*
7. Five Pillars of Islam
8. “Greater” and “Lesser” *Jihad*

I. The Birth of a New Religion

B. The Messenger and the Message

5. “Seal of the prophets”: Islam sees Muhammad as the final prophet in a series of Judeo-Christian prophets. As his message is the final and most complete revelation, he is the seal of the line of prophecy. This is important because it stresses the lineage of prophets, the errors of previous revelations, and the finality of Muhammad’s message.

6. Revolutionary message of social justice: The *Umma*. The message was not only spiritual. Muhammad, deeply troubled by the social injustices, violence, and feuds of tribal Arabia, wanted to create a new community of the faithful where the poor and vulnerable would be protected. This new community of the faithful and the just would be known as the *Umma*.

7. Five Pillars of Islam: The revelations required five actions from pious Muslims: Acceptance of Allah as the one true god and Muhammad as his prophet, daily prayer five times a day, giving to charity, fasting during the month of Ramadan, and a pilgrimage to Mecca. These requirements show the linkage of the spiritual and the social.

8. “Greater” and “Lesser” *Jihad*: Muhammad spoke of the need to struggle. The greater struggle of *Jihad* is within one’s self, overcoming greed or sinful desires. The lesser struggle, the struggle of the sword, is the fight to protect the community from external threats.

I. The Birth of a New Religion

C. The Transformation of Arabia

1. Tension in Mecca and the *Hijra*, 622
2. Building the *Umma* in Medina
3. War, alliances, and entry into Mecca, 630
4. Most of the Peninsula under a unified Islamic state
5. Fusion of religious and political authority
6. *Sharia*

I. The Birth of a New Religion

C. The Transformation of Arabia

1. Tension in Mecca and the *Hijra*, 622: While a community of believers formed around Muhammad, the prophet's revelations angered the status quo in Mecca, and he was accused of betraying his tribe. They were soon forced out of Mecca and emigrated to nearby Yathrib, a city that would become known as Medina or "city of the prophet." This departure from Mecca and the founding of the *Umma* in Medina is known as the *Hijra* and marks the starting year of the Islamic calendar.
2. Building the *Umma* in Medina: In the new city, Muhammad revealed new laws to create a more just and peaceful society. Importantly, membership was not based on family lineage but upon acceptance of the faith. In Medina, the Muslims began to pray towards Mecca.
3. War, alliances, and entry into Mecca, 630: The *Umma* found itself in a series of conflicts with its neighbors. When one Jewish group allied against the *Umma*, Muhammad made a clearer break between Islam and Judaism. Importantly, this was a conflict with one specific tribe in the context of a war, and he did not condemn all Jews. Muhammad won a series of wars and encouraged marriage alliances. In 630, he triumphantly entered Mecca and purged the Kaaba of the tribal idols.
4. Most of the Peninsula under a unified Islamic state: By the time of his death, Muhammad had united the once chaotic peninsula under his leadership.
5. Fusion of religious and political authority: Unlike other world religions, the prophet fused spiritual and political authority. There was no church outside the state and thus no church/state conflict as in Europe.
6. *Sharia*: The law system that developed saw no distinction between religious and civil law; they were one and the same.

II. The Making of an Arab Empire

A. War, Conquest, and Tolerance

1. From the Iberian Peninsula to the Indus River
2. Battle of Talas, 751
3. Economic drive and spreading the faith
4. *Dhimmi*s and the *Jizya*

II. The Making of an Arab Empire

A. War, Conquest, and Tolerance

1. From the Iberian Peninsula to the Indus River: Muslim armies spread rapidly out of the Arabian Peninsula, conquering Spain and invading France in the west and reaching the Indus River in the east. Arabs invaded and conquered wealthy Egypt. The Persian Sassanid Empire quickly fell and the Arabs picked off much Byzantine territory.
2. Battle of Talas, 751: In 751, the Islamic forces defeated the Chinese in central Asia at the Battle of Talas. This allowed the Turkic people to become a widespread Islamic culture and checked the westward spread of China.
3. Economic drive and spreading the faith: While the Muslims were eager to spread their faith, there were also very worldly economic interests in building the empire. Rich trade routes and productive farmlands increased the wealth of the new and expanding empire.
4. *Dhimmi*s and the *Jizya*: If conversion was encouraged, the empire respected Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians as fellow “people of the book.” These groups were granted the special status of *Dhimmi* and were required to pay a tax, the *Jizya*, in lieu of military service (yet many *Dhimmi* did serve in the military). This tolerance allowed these faiths to continue to be practiced.



II. The Making of an Arab Empire

B. Conversion

1. Spiritual versus social conversion
2. Slaves, prisoners of war, and merchants
3. Conversion without Arabization: Persia, Turks, and Pakistan
4. Persian influences on Islamic world

II. The Making of an Arab Empire

B. Conversion

1. Spiritual versus social conversion: While there were obviously many people drawn to Islam for spiritual or psychological reasons, there were also large numbers that went through a social conversion, meaning that they shifted from one community to another.
2. Slaves, prisoners of war, and merchants: Many early converts came from the ranks of prisoners of war or slave who may have been coerced. There were also economic reasons for converting, such as avoiding the *Jizya* or the connections merchants could make being part of the Islamic community.
3. Conversion without Arabization: Persia, Turks, and Pakistan: While in North Africa and much of Mesopotamia, people converted and adopted the Arabic language and culture, areas east of the Tigris-Euphrates did not. The Persians, Turks, and people of the Indus Valley held on to their traditional language even though they were Islamicized.
4. Persian influences on Islamic world: Persia, as a centuries-old empire and civilization, not only held on to its traditions, but many of them spread into the wider Muslim world. Persian architecture, administration, and art influenced the culture of the eastern reaches of Islam.

II. The Making of an Arab Empire

C. Divisions and Controversies

1. First Four Caliphs (632–661) and civil war
2. Sunni versus Shia
3. Umayyad (661–750): Damascus
4. Abbasid (750–1258): Baghdad
5. Post–ninth-century sultanates
6. Interpreting and practicing Sharia
7. Sufi

II. The Making of an Arab Empire

C. Divisions and Controversies

1. First Four Caliphs (632–661) and civil war: After the death of the prophet, disputes arose over who should lead the community. The first leaders were all companions of the prophet. The first caliph had to put down political revolts and new prophets and the third and fourth caliphs were assassinated. Thus, within decades of Muhammad's death, civil war threatened to destroy the unity he built.
2. Sunni versus Shia: Initially a political dispute over who should rule the *Umma*, the Sunni-Shia controversy still divides the Islamic world. Shia argue that the leader should come from a direct descendent of Muhammad, while the Sunnis hold that a learned member of the community should lead. As there was much persecution of the Shia and several of their leaders were killed, they developed the ideology of an oppressed minority and came to hold mystical ideas such as the belief that an assassinated leader had gone into hiding and would return to save the community some day. Such messianic beliefs and other rituals developed into a distinct Shia culture.
3. Umayyad (661–750): Damascus: This dynasty, with its capital not in Medina but in the old Roman and Byzantine city of Damascus, provided unity but soon faced a series of revolts.
4. Abbasid (750–1258): Baghdad: The Abbasids with their capital in the ancient Mesopotamian city of Baghdad, overthrew the Umayyads but soon faced many revolts themselves before finally falling to the Mongols in 1258.
5. Post–ninth-century sultanates: A number of smaller states run by sultans broke away from Baghdad's central authority after the mid-ninth century.
6. Interpreting and practicing Sharia: In deciding how Muslims should live, there was a movement to use Sharia law to structure all aspects of society. Thus a number of schools developed to interpret and administer the law.
7. Sufi: These mystics did not believe that it was necessary to follow the letter of the law. Rather through meditation or ritual, one could have a close spiritual contact with the Divine. Sufis often described their

relationship with the Divine as a form of intoxication or overwhelming love.

II. The Making of an Arab Empire

D. Women and Men in Early Islam

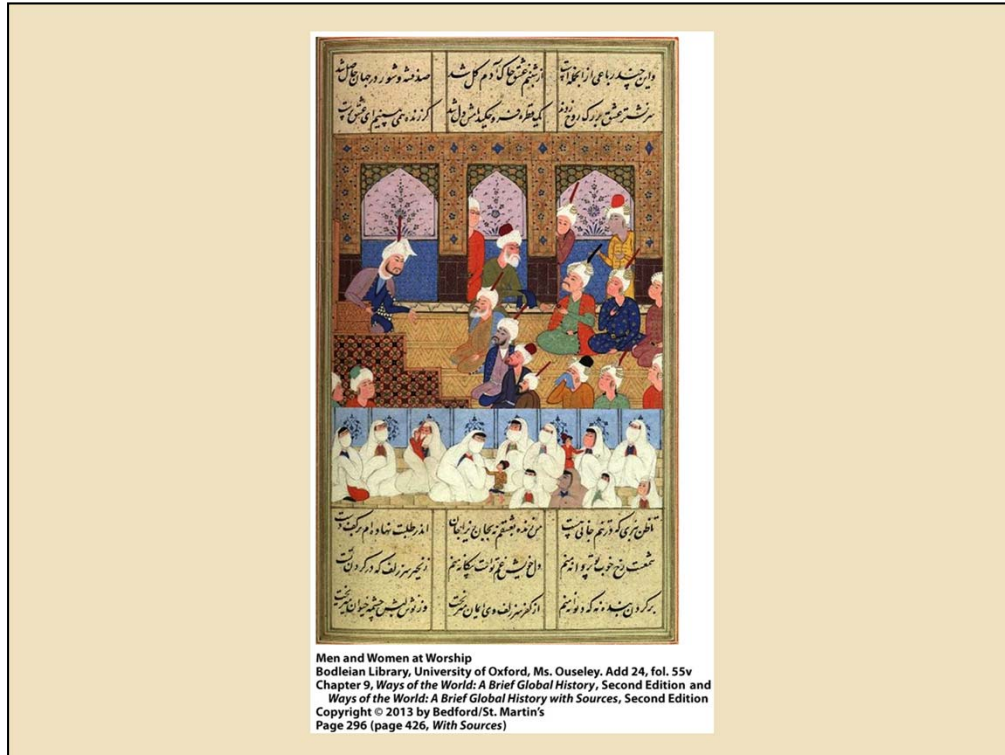
1. Women in the Quran, *Hadith*, and Sharia
2. Restrictions for elite women in the golden age

II. The Making of an Arab Empire

D. Women and Men in Early Islam

1. Women in the Quran, *Hadith*, and Sharia: During the time of the revelations, Muhammad created rules that protected women and gave them some control over their property and right to divorce. The famous passage that allowed Muslim men to have up to four wives also states that they must all be cared for equally. Spiritually, women who were devout and had good morals would receive Allah's blessing just as men would. The revelations also contained some restrictions.

2. Restrictions for elite women in the golden age: When the Arab empires were established after the prophet's death, there were increased restrictions on elite women. Many of these restrictions, such as veiling and sequestering, were in keeping with earlier pre-Islamic practices in this part of the world, and most were difficult and impractical to apply to lower class women.



1. What type of gathering does this image show?

This painting shows a scene in a mosque, with men praying in one area and women and children playing in another. Closest to the imam on the upper left are old men with grey and white beards. Behind them sit younger men with dark beards or no beards at all. In a separate area below sit women dressed in white, their heads fully covered except for their eyes. They also kneel in prayer, their eyes turned up to the imam. The Arabic writing below the image suggests that this is a page from a book.

2. What does this image suggest about the place of women in Islamic religion and Islamic society?

Women were segregated in this mosque, but they were not excluded. The arrangement of the congregation in this mosque reflects the social hierarchy in society—it shows deference to older men and places men above women, yet spiritually, both men and women were members of the mosque community. It is a matter of debate to what extent women's social inequality affects women's spiritual equality before god.

III. Islam and Cultural Encounter: A Four-Way Comparison

A. The Case of India

1. Turkic invaders
2. Disillusioned Buddhists and lower-caste Hindus
3. Appeal of Sufi mystics
4. Punjab, Sind, and Bengal
5. Sikhism

III. Islam and Cultural Encounter: A Four-Way Comparison

A. The Case of India

1. Turkic invaders: After the conversion of the Turkic peoples of Central Asia, the Turks became the third group to spread Islam after the Arabs and Persians. A series of invasions of Northern India led to the creation of small sultanates. With the establishment of the Sultan of Delhi in 1206, their rule was more systematic but still relatively limited in its reach.

2. Disillusioned Buddhists and lower-caste Hindus: Many converts came from Buddhists who had left their faith, lower-caste Hindus, and untouchables. There were also those who converted to avoid the *jizya* tax.

3. Appeal of Sufi mystics: As South Asia had a long tradition of mystics, Sufism had a great appeal to the common people. Sufi veneration of saints and various festivals gave Islam a popular practice. Sometimes Sufism was very similar to Hindu traditions.

4. Punjab, Sind, and Bengal: Islam's base was in the Northwest and East of India. Only 20–25 percent of the population converted, and the central and southern reaches saw little if any conversion. There was a very sharp cultural divide between Hindu and Muslim communities. Monotheistic Islam forbade images of the divine and preached against overt sexuality while Hindu art was full of representations of thousands of gods and sometimes depicted very sensual and even erotic scenes. Muslims generally lived separately from the larger population as a distinct minority.

5. Sikhism: Founded by Guru Nanak (1469–1539), this faith blended Islam and

Hinduism is a monotheistic faith that recognized reincarnation and karma.



Map 9.3 The Growing World of Islam, 900–1500
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Map 9.4 The Sultanate of Delhi
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III. Islam and Cultural Encounter: A Four-Way Comparison

B. The Case of Anatolia

1. Turkic invaders
2. 90 percent by 1500
3. Ottoman Empire

III. Islam and Cultural Encounter: A Four-Way Comparison

B. The Case of Anatolia

1. Turkic invaders: The Anatolian Peninsula suffered a brutal Turkish invasion that destroyed Greek Christian rule and subjected many communities to massacres. When the existing state system and social order were shattered, large numbers of Turks emigrated into the area and an increasing number of Christians converted. As both were monotheistic faiths, this made conversion much easier than in polytheistic India.
2. 90 percent by 1500: By 1500, the region had a distinctly Turkish Muslim character in terms of language and culture.
3. Ottoman Empire: By 1500, this state became the most powerful empire in the Islamic world.



Map 9.5 The Ottoman Empire by the Mid-fifteenth Century
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III. Islam and Cultural Encounter: A Four-Way Comparison

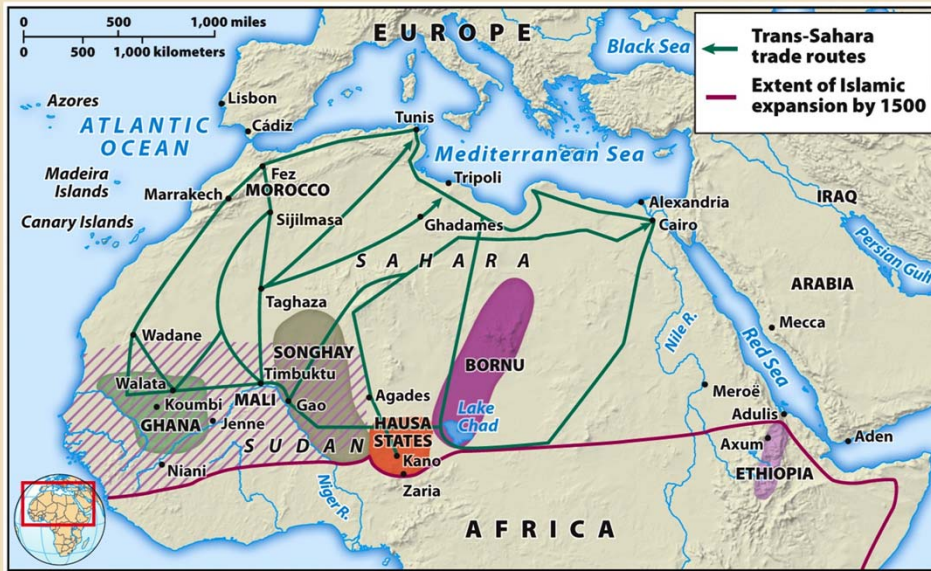
C. The Case of West Africa

1. Muslim merchants and scholars
2. Urban centers
3. Little penetration of rural world and popular culture

III. Islam and Cultural Encounter: A Four-Way Comparison

C. The Case of West Africa

1. Muslim merchants and scholars: Islam came to West Africa by peaceful means. Muslim merchants traveled south across the Sahara and spread the faith to the urban trading centers of West Africa. Rulers found Muslim scholars to be useful administrators. Islam had an appeal as a connection to a wider world.
2. Urban centers: Islam was really an urban phenomenon in West Africa until the nineteenth century. While rulers sponsored the building of mosques, libraries, and schools, there was little effort converting the larger rural world. Nonetheless, the communities in the cities saw themselves as part of a larger Islamic world.
3. Little penetration of rural world and popular culture: Remaining the culture of the urban elite, the villages of West Africa continued to practice their traditions and rituals. Sometimes, elements of Islam were combined with existing faiths and practices but there was no Islamicization of the region. There was no large-scale Arab migration to West Africa.



Map 9.6 West Africa and the World of Islam
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III. Islam and Cultural Encounter: A Four-Way Comparison

D. The Case of Spain

1. Arab and Berber invasion of Al-Andalus
2. Cordoba's golden age
3. Increased intolerance
4. Christian reconquest and expulsion

III. Islam and Cultural Encounter: A Four-Way Comparison

D. The Case of Spain

1. Arab and Berber invasion of Al-Andalus: In 711, Muslim Arab and Berber forces invaded Spain, called Al-Andalus in Arabic. They quickly conquered the peninsula and established a Caliphate; Islam spread widely in the south.
2. Cordoba's golden age: At its height, Muslim Spain was prosperous, culturally dynamic, and cosmopolitan. It was also a time of tolerance with special taxes for Jews and Christians but general acceptance of them in society. The city of Cordoba was the center of this golden age. In this time, Al-Andalus was a major center of learning. A number of Greek and Arabic books were collected and translated in the libraries.
3. Increased intolerance: In the late 900s as Christian kingdoms in the north began a series of wars, the Muslims rulers became increasingly intolerant of Christians, and social conflicts developed between the communities.
4. Christian reconquest and expulsion: In series of wars, the Christians gradually conquered all of the peninsula, with Granada falling in 1492. The new Spanish monarchy forced many Muslims and some 200,000 Jews to emigrate. Converts, while initially tolerated, were later forced out of Spain.

IV. The World of Islam as a New Civilization

A. Networks of Faith

1. *Ulamas* and *Madrassas*
2. Sufi *shaykhs* and poets
3. The *hadj*

IV. The World of Islam as a New Civilization

A. Networks of Faith

1. *Ulamas* and *Madrassas*: While Islam has no priesthood, as no mortal can stand between an individual and God, a class of learned scholars and experts developed. Known as *Ulama*, they made up an international elite of scholars, students, judges, and administrators from West Africa to Southeast Asia. Islamic schools, known as *Madarassas*, spread throughout the Islamic world. These schools were generally conservative and focused on the memorization and recitation of the Quran.

2. Sufi *shaykhs* and poets: Sufism was responsible for much of the spreading of Islam into new areas as Sufi mystics were willing to engage with local spiritual traditions and rituals, thus forming a bridge between pre-Islamic and Islamic ideas and practices. Often Sufis were willing to recognize local saints and other figures, winning over the community. Sufi *shaykhs* were teachers who attracted loyal students that followed their specific devotional practices and teachings. Sufi poets, such as Rumi, produced works of literature that had an appeal within and outside of the Islamic world.

3. The *hadj*: The annual pilgrimage to Mecca did much to forge an international community of Muslims and a wider sense of the *umma*.

IV. The World of Islam as a New Civilization

B. Networks of Exchange

1. Vast hemispheric trading zone
2. Merchants and urban elites
3. Technological exchange and an Islamic “Green Revolution”
4. Mathematics and medicine

IV. The World of Islam as a New Civilization

B. Networks of Exchange

1. Vast hemispheric trading zone: The Islamic world tied together Afro-Eurasia by linking the Mediterranean, the trans-Saharan trade, the Silk Roads, the Indian Ocean basin, and Chinese ports. Arab and Persian merchants played the leading role in this vital trading system.

2. Merchants and urban elites: As the prophet Muhammad was himself a merchant and as the elites of the Islamic world were very urban, the greater Islamic world brought together a culture friendly to commerce with cities eager to consume. Thus, the greater Islamic economy benefited from the linkage of long-range trade and dynamic cities.

3. Technological exchange and an Islamic “Green Revolution”: The trade routes also served to transport technological innovations, ideas, and crops. New weapons such as rockets and useful administrative tools such as paper spread west from China. Texts from Greece, the Hellenistic world, and India were translated into Arabic and inspired Muslim scholars to build upon these earlier works. Crops, especially citrus, cotton, and sugar cane, moved through the Islamic world, as did new irrigation techniques, leading to a dramatic increase in food production and population growth.

4. Mathematics and medicine: Using a numeric system from India, Muslim scholars made important advances in mathematics and astronomy. Using Greek and Indian medical knowledge, they developed early hospitals, diagnosed diseases, developed chemical-based treatments, and performed operations for things such as cataracts

and hernias. This medical knowledge entered Europe via Spain and was the state of the art for medical knowledge for many centuries.

V. Reflections: Past and Present: Choosing Our History

- A. “Present-mindedness”
- B. Islamic glories and Western encroachment
- C. Using an Islamic past
- D. Diversity of the Islamic world
- E. Histories of Tolerance and Conflict

V. Reflections: Past and Present: Choosing Our History

A. “Present-mindedness”: The dangerous practice of using history for our present purposes. Yet, we need to use history to understand the world in which we live.

B. Islamic glories and Western encroachment: Islam has a glorious history of achievement from 600 to 1600 and then a period of humiliating Western encroachment and intrusion.

C. Using an Islamic past: Faced with the recent history of Western imperialism, some Muslims want to use examples from the glorious Islamic past to overcome the legacy of humiliation. Those we might call “fundamentalists” often look to the period of the life of Muhammad and the First Four Caliphs as a source for their agenda.

D. Diversity of the Islamic world: We must remember the tremendous cultural, historic, linguistic, ethnic, and gender diversity of the Islamic world and avoid generalizations about Islam as a single unit.

E. Histories of Tolerance and Conflict: We must recognize that there have been periods of both tolerance and cooperation and mistrust and violent conflict between the Islamic world and the West.



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Visual Source 9.2 The Night Journey of Muhammad
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Visual Source 9.3 The Battle at Badr
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Visual Source 9.4 The Destruction of the Idols
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