

A “Global” Civilization: the Birth of Islam

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Change as a “system of defense”: continuity and discontinuity'

After 600 A.C. the major civilizations faced spectacular changes, that is, the world map changed significantly and new contacts were established between different areas of civilization.

The decline of the classical civilizations set free expansive forces that would carry civilization to new regions of the world.

The period saw the spread of major religions in Asia, Africa, and Europe. In that sense it can be said that the fall of the classical civilizations coincided with the rise of religions which served to survive by way of new creeds and to protect endangered social orders. We can consider religion not simply as a private experience but as a social phenomenon helping to survive in the world, either by binding societies together or by providing psychological and emotional support during periods of crisis.

Christianity became an important force in the region formerly dominated by the Roman Empire. Buddhism's entry into East Asia was contemporary with the fall of the Han Empire in China. In India, Hinduism continued its evolution toward a popular religion. And finally after 600 A.C. Islam emerged as a world religion that would reshape regions as different and as distant from each other as Africa, the Middle East, the Near East, Central Asia, India, and Southeast Asia.

Physical and social environment

Throughout almost all of its history, Arabia has been inhabited by nomadic, pastoralist Arabs called Bedouins who lived in small tribal groups. Arabia's western coast and southern parts were ecologically more favorable, permitting the development of a sedentary life and larger tribal groups.

Particularly the south was home to the Sabaeans also called the Himyarites or the Yemenites. The four most powerful city-states of the south were Saba which was a center of legendary wealth. (remember the Queen of Sheba, a symbol of beauty, wealth and power. Muslims as well as Christians and Jews are familiar with the record of her meeting with King Solomon of Israel (thought to have occurred around 950-930 B.C.)

The region lied along two major trade routes: one was the ocean-trading route between Africa and India and the other crossed most of the peninsula linking the Eastern Mediterranean to India.

This latter trade route was to provide remarkable benefits for the Arabs of the north and later to the Islamic states of the region as a whole. It was along this trade route that major trading cities like Mecca and Medina whose relative prosperity largely derived from their position as trade intermediaries, were to develop. .

During the first centuries of the Christian era, the Arabian peninsula came under the threat of three major world powers: the Byzantine empire in the north, the Persians in the east, and the kingdom of the Sabaeans in the south. It is also during this period that both Christianity and Judaism found a cultural sphere and adherents in the area, as in the case of Yathrib (Medina), which had become partly Judaized. Polytheistic Arabs had in fact developed cultural and other contacts with both Judaism and Christianity.

By 500 AD. Mecca had become a religious center of pre-Islamic culture which was a mixture of polytheism, Judaism, and Christianity. The pre-Islamic Arabs worshipped three goddesses, al-Lat, al-Uzza, and Manat, with the Kaba serving as the religion's temple.

The new creed

Muhammad's poverty in his youth and the social tensions in Mecca, with bitter divisions resulting from the unequal distribution of wealth among the clans, must have laid the ground for significant aspects of the message of Islam.

In 610, he began to receive revelations that were later collected to form the Quran. As the number of converts grew, the new religion began to threaten the traditional deities associated with the Kaba and the authority of the rulers.

To escape plots to murder him, Mohammed fled in 622 with his closest followers to Medina, where able to win new converts. Following his triumphant return to Mecca, in 629, most of the citizens of the town ended up to join the new religion.

Islam offered a means by which Arabs could be united in a single movement that transcended clan and class divisions.

The umma (ummet), a concept encompassing the entire community of believers made political unity possible and Islam also helped to close the gap between the wealthy and poor. As a faithful, a well-off member of the umma was to take responsibility for the weak and the poor, since one of the fundamental messages of the Quran is the community's responsibility for the material welfare of all its members.

Founding the state

Mohammed became the founder not only of a religion but also of an Arabic state with its capital at Medina.

Following his death in 632 his companions chose as his successor Abu-Bekr, one of earliest converts to the faith and father-in law of Mohammed. The new ruler was given the title of caliph that is successor to the Prophet.

After Abu-Bekr's death two other caliphs were chosen in succession from the earlier disciples of Mohammed. In 656, however a long struggle began for possession of the supreme power in Islam. First the Shiites succeeded in deposing a member of the Umayyad family and in electing Ali, the husband of Mohammed's daughter. Supporters of Ali a member of the Prophet's family, proclaimed him caliph and the Umayyads did not recognize his election. Five years later Ali was murdered and the Umayyads came back into power.

Conflict between the supporters of Ali and the Umayyads led to the disputes and battles resulting with deep divisions among the Muslims. The split between the Sunnis, who backed the Umayyads, and the Shies or supporters of Ali, remains to this day the most fundamental in the Islamic world.

During the reign of caliphs, after the consolidation of power in the original territories Arab armies began attacks on bordering regions outside Arabia. Within a short period of time, they captured Mesopotamia, northern Africa, and Persia.

The beliefs and practices of Islam made it strongly appealing to cultures outside Arabia. Muhammad's acceptance of other religious revelations helped to spread Islamic beliefs among both Christian and Judaic Semitic peoples. His followers would later widen this acceptance to include non-Semitic, non-monotheistic religions such as Zoroastrianism (whose followers even today benefit from a representational quota in the Iranian Parliament) and Hinduism.

Unlike Christianity Judaism or Buddhism, reducing Islamic faith to a single set of principles is not very problematic because the faith has remained quite

intact from its origins to the present day in its essentials.

Unlike Christianity, in which Adam and Eve are expelled from paradise and hence considered as "sinners" Islam considers that human beings have the power to discern good from bad and human dignity is one of its most recurring themes. The created world is fundamentally a good place that was designed for the enjoyment of humanity and to be exploited by man. So things related to "life", do not constitute a cause for spiritual suffering or punishment, as they often do in Christianity. On the other hand Islam is based on the primary notion that each human being is spiritually equal to every other human being in the eyes of God. These aspects helps us to explain the early Islamic appeal to the populations of diverse cultures and its rapid progress..

The Empire of the Umayyads

After the consolidation of power in the original territories, Muslim armies began attacks on bordering regions outside Arabia. Within a short period of time, Arab armies captured Mesopotamia, North Africa and Persia. A new dynasty, the Umayyads (Emeviler), ruled this new empire.

Historical conditions also facilitated this expansion. The Byzantine Empire was weak due to attacks from the Persian empire, but the latter was also weak due to the hegemony of a landed aristocracy oppressing the peasantry. The imperial religion, Zoroastrianism, failed to produce popular passion, and the government mercilessly suppressed popular religions. When it appeared probable that the Islamic regime might be more tolerant than the existent hegemonies, the populations of Egypt and Mesopotamia welcomed the Muslims.

The Arabs' ability to realize maritime supremacy in the eastern Mediterranean helped their victories in former Byzantine provinces and North Africa.

The Problems of Succession

Continuing tribal divisions originating from the period of early Islam came into agenda when supporters of Ali, a member of the Prophet's family, proclaimed him caliph and the Umayyads did not recognize his election. Conflict between the supporters of Ali and the Umayyads led to disputes and battles resulting in deep divisions among the Muslims.

With the temporary settlement of internal divisions, expansion resumed in the middle of the seventh century and Islamic armies in the west crossed the straits of Gibraltar into Spain while their ships came to control most of the Mediterranean Sea.

This would be the farthest extent of Islamic control of Europe. In 732, they were stopped in their expansion into Europe at Poitiers in France by Frankish king Charles Martel.

Religious zeal played an important part of the militaristic expansion of Islam. But it wasn't the only motif of the Arab conquests. Islamic rulers were not engaged in a great crusade to impose their beliefs upon the rest of the world. Subject peoples were usually quite indulgently treated. As long as they refrained from the possessions of arms and paid their tribute levied upon them, they were permitted to retain their own beliefs and customs.

Islam provided the Arabs with a sense of common cause and a way of releasing martial energies against neighboring opponents. The rich booty and tribute gained often was more of a motivation than spreading Islam since converts were exempted from taxes and shared the spoils of victory.

In this era Muslim converts, called *mawali*, still paid taxes and did not receive a share of booty; they were blocked from important positions in the army or bureaucracy. As a result the number of conversions was low in the Umayyad era. The great portion the population of the empire were *dhimmi*s, or people of the book. The first were Jews and Christians; later the term also included Zoroastrians and Hindus. The *dhimmi*s had to pay taxes, but were allowed to retain their own religious and social organization. This approach made it a good deal easier for these peoples to accept Arab rule, particularly because their pre-Muslim overlords had been more oppressive.

In the east, Islamic armies made it as far as the Indus River in 710, advancing all the way to the fringes of the Chinese Empire further in the North, thus stretching the empire from Spain all the way to India and China!

During this period, an administrative and financial system inspired from the Byzantines was adopted and the administrative center was moved from Medina to Damascus in Syria. The gradual establishment of a monarchical and court culture gave rise to an efflorescence of Islamic culture in art, architecture, and literature. **(Please refer to the text on "statecraft")**

In the second half of the 8th century the empire witnessed a series of rebellions and a group named the Abbasids was to finally overthrow the dynasty of the Umayyads.

From Arab to Islamic Empire: The Early Abbasid Era

The victory of the Abbasids allowed them to establish a centralized government with a new capital

in Iraq: Baghdad. The new state created a powerful bureaucratic-military organization founded support in on Persians and Turkic elements originating from Asia and who were converted to Islam. These people the **mamluks** actually came to dominate the Abbasid administration.

Mamluk or Mameluke (Arabic *slaves*), a warrior caste dominant in Egypt and influential in the Middle East for over 700 years. Islamic rulers created this warrior caste by collecting non-Muslim slave boys mostly from the Turkic elements and training them as cavalry soldiers. The Mamluks were first used in Muslim armies in Baghdad by the Abbasid caliphs in the 9th cent. and quickly spread throughout the Muslim world. They served the Ayyubid sultans from the 12th century onward and grew powerful enough to challenge the existence of the rulers. For more than 250 years thereafter, Egypt and Syria were ruled by Mamluk sultans supported by a caste of warrior slaves, from which the sultans were chosen. One of the strongest Mamluk rulers, Baybars (1260–77) defeated the Mongols at in Syria in 1260, the first serious setback they had received. Toward the end of the 15th cent. the Mamluks became involved in a war with the Ottoman Turks who captured Cairo in 1517. The Ottoman ruler, Selim, put an end to the Mamluk sultanate however, they were not destroyed as a class and Mamluk governors remained in control of the provinces and were allowed to keep private armies.

At their new capital, the rulers accepted Persian ruling concepts, elevating themselves to a different status than the earlier Muslim leaders.

A growing bureaucracy worked under the direction of the vizir, or chief administrator. The Abbasids championed conversion and transformed the character of the previous Arab-dominated Islamic community.

Under the Abbasids new converts, both Arabs and others, were fully integrated into the Muslim community. The old distinction between *mawali* and older believers disappeared. Most conversions occurred peacefully. Many individuals sincerely accepted appealing ethical Islamic beliefs. Others perhaps reacted to the advantages of avoiding special taxes, and to the opportunities for advancement open to believers in education, administration, and commerce. The rise of the *mawali* was accompanied by the growth in wealth and status of merchant and landlord classes. Muslim merchants moved goods from the western Mediterranean to the South China Sea.

The Abbasid caliphate (758-1258) took its name from al-'Abbas, a paternal uncle of Muhammad and early supporter of the Prophet.

With the Abassids, the center of Islamic culture became more accessible to the non Arab Muslims of the Empire and their cultures, who played an increasing role in Muslim society, including those of the Persian and Hellenistic world.

On the other hand, the Umayyads established a rival empire in Spain, where they flourished for the next three centuries. Their highly developed Islamic culture will exercise a deep influence on late medieval European culture and on the Renaissance.

Abbaside Empire saw ancient classical Hellenistic and Indian works increasingly make their way into Islamic culture through the pursuit and intensifying of translations, which had already begun under the Umayyads.

Islam incorporated into its culture the philosophical methods of inquiry of the ancient Greeks and made it possible for the heritage of philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle to be passed on to future generations. This incorporation led to a new Islamic intellectual practice, *faylasafa*, or philosophy, based on principles of **rational inquiry** and to some extent **empiricism**.

Faith and rationality are two modes of belief which are seen to exist in varying degrees of conflict or compatibility. Faith is generally defined either as belief not grounded in evidence and reason or as belief in what cannot be understood, while **rationality** is belief grounded in logic and/or evidence. **Empiricism** (Latin *experientia* - the experience), is the philosophical doctrine that all human knowledge ultimately comes from the senses and from experience. Empiricism denies that humans have innate ideas or that anything is knowable a priori, i.e., without reference to experience.

Political Decline

After the second half of the 9th century, the centralized power of the caliphate declined and after two hundred years of centralized hegemony, the unified cultural and political world of Islam broke down into a number of independent cultural and political units. And thus began the medieval period in Islam, a period of cultural and political disunity and decentralization.

But at the same time, this process of political decentralization did not put an end to the radiance

and development of Islamic culture and intellectual life, which both benefited from such decentralization in terms of increased cultural variety.

The impact of the Mongol Empire

Mongol tribal divisions were finally overcome by Chingis (Cengiz) Khan in the thirteenth century and with the conquests beginning in the same century, the empire stretched from China to eastern Europe. The Empire imposed a heavy handed but relatively stable peace (*pax mongolica*) on the regions it came to dominate and enabled the establishment of a Eurasian-wide system of trade and cultural exchange.

In Asia the ancestors of Chingis Khan had enjoyed periods of dominance in the region and had defeated the Qin dynasty of China in the twelfth century. Mongol armies relied on speed and mobility in making their assaults.

Chingis Khan reorganized the tribal armies of the Mongols into units called *tumens* containing 10,000 men, most of them mounted archers well trained for warfare.

After their successful expeditions in northern China the armies moved westward and by 1220's, the Mongol empire stretched from northern China to the shores of the Persian Gulf.

Living with the Mongol Empire

Contrary to the common belief, Mongol rule was generally tolerant, allowing the cohabitation of Confucians, Buddhists, Taoists, and Muslims while supporting trade and cultural exchange. After the death of Chingis Khan his sons divided the empire and Eastern Europe was entrusted to the Golden Horde, while the task of conquering the remainder of the Islamic world fell to the Ilhan Empire.

The Mongol conquest of Russia reduced the Russian princes to tribute-payers. Heavy taxes in turn falling on the peasants, who found themselves reduced to serfdom. Until the mid-nineteenth century, serfdom was typical of Russian agricultural labor. The Mongol conquest of Russia on the other hand ensured the central position of Moscow and the Orthodox Church, while exerting a durable influence on the administrative and cultural concepts of Russian rulers.

The conquest of the central Muslim regions of the Middle East fell to Hulagu, and in 1258, the Mongols captured and destroyed Baghdad, killing the last of the Abbasid caliphs. But in 1260, the Mamluk army of Egypt defeated the Mongols holding off further Mongol invasions.

In a way, Mongol conquests facilitated trade across the Asiatic steppes between Europe and Asia. On the other hand, Mongol rule in China where Kubilay Khan, opened the country to external influences from the other civilized regions of **Eurasia**. Kubilay Khan (or Kublai , Khubilai) (1215 –1294) was the grandson of Cenghis Khan. He became Khan of the Mongol Empire and founder and first Emperor (1279 – 1294) of the Chinese Yuan Dynasty. Kublai Khan's brother, Hulagu, was the conqueror of Persia and founder of the Ilkhanate State.

Eurasia is the landmass composed of the continents of Europe and Asia.,The Eurasian Plate includes Europe and most of Asia, but not the Indian subcontinent, the Arabian subcontinent, and the area east of the Cherskiy Range in Sakha. Eurasia is also used in international politics as a neutral way to refer to organizations of or affairs concerning the post-Soviet states.

Jared Diamond, in his book *Guns, Germs and Steel*, credits Eurasia's dominance in world history to the east-west extent of Eurasia and its climate zones, and the availability of Eurasian animals and plants suitable for domestication.

The Silk Road symbolizes trade and cultural exchange linking Eurasian cultures through history and has been an increasingly popular topic. Recent decades have brought forth a view toward a greater Eurasian scope of history, establishing genetic, cultural, and linguistic relationships between European and Asian cultures of antiquity.

It was during the reign of Kubilay Khan that Marco Polo of Italy made his journey to China. It was also Kubilay who introduced the use of firearms, in order to get the upper hand on his Mongol cousins in the north. The new technology would soon be adopted in the Muslim Middle East, and later by the Ottoman, opening the way to a fundamental change in military practices. Ironically, the shift would also lead to the end of centuries, if not thousands of years of nomadic military ascendancy.

Following the death of Kubilay Khan, no vigorous successors reigned in China. And the country regained its independence with the Ming dynasty.

The Turkish phase

The entry of the Seljuk Turks into Western Asia in the second half of the eleventh century opened the path to Asia Minor for Turkish presence and later Ottoman domination.

Despite some differences between them due to various influences like those of the Chinese, Persian etc., the Turkish family of nations shared common folk memories and legends; as well as shamanist religious practices.

From the ninth century onwards the Turks began to enter the Abbasid Caliphate, not in mass, but as Mamluk slaves or adventurers serving as mercenaries. They thus infiltrated the world of Islam pretty much the same way the Germans did the Roman Empire.

The tenth century witnessed the islamization of a large section of the Western Turks, an event of great significance. The pasture-lands to the north of the Caspian and Aral Seas had long been the home of a group of Turkish tribes known as the Oghuz, also called Turkomans. Their movement southwards reached to Iraq where their leader Tuğrul Beg was designated Sultan by the Caliph in Baghdad in 1055.

The Turks then rode on towards the Byzantine borders. When Tugrul died in 1063, the Sultanate passed to his nephew Alp Arslan. The Byzantine Emperor Romanus Diogenes had resolved on a desperate effort to clear the Turkish raiders out of his dominions. He headed out at the head of a mixed army of mercenaries, including Normans from the west as well as Pechenegs and other Turkish tribes from southern Russia, but only to face a severe defeat in August 1071.

Byzantine defense diluted, the Turks extended their control over the central Anatolian plateau. With the weakening of Byzantine landlords; their peasants, deprived of their natural leaders, gradually adopted the religion of their new masters. With its principal source of soldiers and revenue lost in Asia Minor, and menaced also by aggression from the west, the Byzantine Empire faced total ruin. Appeals for help to the Pope and the Latin world sent out from Constantinople, resulted in the first Crusade in the 1090's.

The Christian Crusades sought to recapture the Holy Land for the West. The first Crusade (1096-1099) resulted in the division of Palestine and Syria into a chain of Crusader kingdoms. Later the Crusades were less successful and posed little threat to Muslim rulers. By the end of the twelfth century, most of the Holy Land was recaptured under the reign and leadership of Selahaddin al Eyyubi..

Muslim forces had eliminated all of the Christian kingdoms by 1291. The Crusades served to intensify the European exposure to Islamic culture and civilization. Most importantly, the West was able to obtain much of ancient Greek learning from the Muslim world.

Westerners also benefited from Muslim advances in science and medicine. Luxury cloths produced in the Middle East made their way into European markets.

On the other hand the revival of the Afro-Eurasian trade network during the Selcukide period restored commercial prosperity and spurred urban growth. Wealth supported luxurious lifestyles, as well as charitable ventures within the Islamic community, allowing for the construction of public works like schools, baths, and hospitals, caravanserais etc.

Seljuks developed a revival period in Anatolia between the 9th and 12th centuries, based purely on humanist values and thinking. Mevlana Celalettin Rumi from Konya was one of the most important philosophers of this era.

On all Anatolian cities hospitals, observatories and schools were opened. The road system was redeveloped during Seljuk era. Caravanserais were built and looked after properly.

The safe commerce became the reality everywhere in Anatolia. Although Seljuks were influenced by Arabic and Persian art and culture from the beginning, but they still protected and even developed a unique Anatolian art and culture with the cooperation of native Anatolian people.

They created unique forms at architecture. Architectural decoration on monumental gates became a great art form at the hands of Seljuks.

In general commerce and manufacturing were developed in extraordinary degree in the Arab-Islamic world. The great variety of resources in the various sections of the empire served to stimulate exchange of the products of one region for those of another.

The principal reason was probably the advantageous location of the empire at the crossroads of the world. It laid transversely the major trade routes between Africa, Europe, India and China. Traders and craftsmen introduced machines and techniques originating in China for papermaking, silk weaving, and ceramic firing.

Nearly every one of the Islamic great cities specialized in some particular varieties of manufactures. For example Mosul was the center of the manufacture of cotton cloth; Baghdad specialized in glassware, jewelry, pottery and silk.

Islamic philosophy

The early conquests of the Muslims brought them into close contact with centers of civilization heavily influenced by Christianity and Judaism, but also by Greek culture. This had a powerful impact upon all areas of Islamic philosophy.

One of the earliest of the philosophers in Baghdad was in fact a Christian, Yahya Ibn 'Adi, and his pupil Al-Farabi created much of the agenda for the next four centuries of intellectual endeavors. Al-Farabi argued that the works of Aristotle raise important issues for the understanding of the nature of the universe, in particular its origin. Aristotle suggested that the world is eternal, which seems to be in contradiction with the implication in the Quran that God created the world out of nothing. Al-Farabi used the concept of the process of **emanation** as his principle of creation. The idea was that reality continually flows out of the source of perfection, so that the world was not created at a particular time. He also did an enormous amount of work on Greek logic, arguing that behind natural language lies logic, so that an understanding of the latter is a deeper and more significant achievement than a grasp of the former. This also seemed to threaten the significance of language, in particular the language – Arabic – in which God transmitted the Quran to Prophet Muhammad.

emanation is an approach in the cosmology of certain religious or philosophical systems that argue a Supreme Being did not directly create the physical universe, but instead Emanated (originated) lower spiritual beings then subject to a transformation through a series of stages, gradations. Emanationism is a key feature of Platonism and Neoplatonism. **(Refer to the Ibn Haldun reader)**

Ibn Sina (known as Avicenna in the west) went on to develop this form of thought in a much more creative way, presenting a view of the universe as consisting of deterministic events by nature. This led to a powerful reaction from al-Ghazali, who in his critique argued that it was both incompatible with religion, and also invalid on the basis of its own principles. He argued that while philosophy should be rejected, logic as a conceptual tool should be retained. This view became very influential in much of the Islamic world, where it clouded and impeded philosophical thought until the nineteenth century.

A particularly rich blend of philosophy also flourished in Spain and in North Africa. Sophisticated account of the links between religion and reason was made by Ibn Ruşd (known as Averroes in the west). Defending philosophy from the attacks of al-Gazali, and also in order to present a more Aristotelian approach, he argued that there are a variety of routes leading to God, all equally valid, and that the route

READING

From Ibn Khaldun, *The Mukaddimah: an Introduction to History*, Translated by Franz Rosenthal, Princeton University Press, 1967

Ibn Khaldun was born in Tunis, North Africa in 1332 A.C. He was a Yemeni Arab whose ancestors migrated first to Muslim Spain in the ninth century and settled in Seville, and from there moved to Tunis. He showed brilliant intelligence and was tutored by his father and other leading savants of the day. At the early age of 20, he was appointed secretary to the Sultan of Tunis. On his way to Mecca to make the pilgrimage, he was delayed in Cairo, where the Sultan persuaded him to accept his appointment as a professor at the University of al-Azhar. Later, in 1384 A.C., he occupied the post of the Chief Qadi (Chief Justice) of the Maliki school of Islamic Law.

Ibn Khaldun was a historian, but his fame rests on his "introduction" to his History, the Mukaddime. In it he set forth the principles of history as a science, dealing with the social phenomena of man's life. Ibn Khaldun is considered as the founder of sociology, explaining the differences in customs and institutions by physical environments of race, climate and production.

The following is a passage from his Mukaddime defining the existence of nature as an ascending scale of being in nature, where each object, inanimate as well as animate, had its place and was linked to another in sequential order, gave rise to the idea of the "Great Chain of Being". The concept of the "Chain of Being" had its origins not only in Aristotle's classification of organisms but also in the writings of Plato and the Neo-Platonists. During the Middle Ages in the West it came to be elaborated as a system and became dominant in medieval Western thought. Indeed, the idea of the "Chain" came to exert a powerful influence on Western theories of the nature of the universe and of human society up until the end of the 18th century.

"Beginning with the world of the body and sensual perception, and therein first with the world of the visible elements, one notices how these elements are arranged gradually and continually in an ascending order, from earth to water to air and fire. Each of these elements is prepared to be transformed into the next higher or lower one, and sometimes is transformed. The higher one is always finer than the one preceding it. Eventually, the world of the spheres is reached. They are finer than anything else. They are in layers which are interconnected, in a shape which the senses are able to perceive only through the existence of motions. These motions provide some people with the knowledge of the measurements and positions of the spheres, and also with knowledge of the existence of the essences beyond, the influence of which is noticeable in the spheres through the fact that they have motion.

One should then look at the world of creation. It started out from the minerals and progressed, in an ingenious, gradual manner, to plants and animals. The last stage of minerals is connected with the first stage of plants such as herbs and seedless plants. The last stage of plants such as palms and vines is connected with the first stage animals such as snails and shellfish which have only the power of touch. The word 'connection' with regard to these created things means that the last stage of each group is fully prepared to become the first stage of the next group.

The animal world then widens, its species become numerous, and, in a gradual process of creation, it finally leads to man, who is able to think and to reflect. The higher stage of man is reached from the world of the monkeys, in which both sagacity and perception are found, but which has not reached the stage of actual reflection and thinking. At this point we come to the first stage of man. This is as far as our (physical) observation extends."

ISLAMIC CULTURE, ARTS AND LITERATURE

Prepared by Bahar Karlıdağ

We can talk about a revival in the areas where Islam flourished, culture and religion. Examples are the use of sophisticated hydraulics in irrigation and a scientific restoration of agricultural systems and increasing trade potential upon the routes hosted in Mesopotamia, the Mediterranean coasts, Arabia and India that turned Baghdad into the “world’s market place”.

The growing Islamic culture would be a blend of the Persian, Roman and Hellenistic cultures, where we can mention an Arabic reception and transmission of masses of information and customs of these civilizations. Unlike the Germanic tribes which adopted the Latin language and Christianity, the Arabic language encompassed and filtered many of the cultural items, protecting and preserving them in an aware and responsible manner.

By the 8th century, the caliphs were collecting scientific works and translating them. The translation movement started in the Umayyad period, when books of medicine, chemistry, physics, natural history and astronomy were translated. The Abbasids officially organized and encouraged these translations. Research studies were pursued seriously; scholars were even sent to Byzantium for some manuscripts. The translations of Aristotle in particular affected the whole philosophy and the theological outlook of Islam and influenced a whole school of future thinkers like Kindi (d. 850), Farabi (d. 950), Ibn Sina (known in the west as Avicenna, d. 1037) and Ibn Rushd (known as Averroes. Averroes, who died in 1198, was a Cordoban philosopher who taught authentic Aristotelian philosophy, and was known as the “commentator”. He had a deep influence on the philosophical reform of Western Europe. The “hadith” experts started to use Greek rationalism in interpretation methodologies. The Sufis blended the Neo-platonic and Islamic traditions. It was stated by Yakup al-Kindi that, “The truth [...] must be taken wherever it is to be found, whether it be in the past or among strange peoples.”

Other than the massive contribution that Arabic culture offered to world civilization via its scholarly translation and research studies, the literature that flourished in their bosom comprised a highly aesthetic poetry that produced an art of beautiful language skills, rather than content depending on abstract thinking. Even in the scientific fields, the Arabs were proud of their language skills:

“The sciences were transmitted into the Arabic language from different parts of the world; by it they were embellished and penetrated the hearts of men,

while the beauties of that language flowed in their veins and arteries.” (Al-Biruni, Kitab as-Saidana)

Arabic has probably been the richest of the Semitic languages. Pre-Islamic Arabs were not quite educated, but had developed a poetic language and poetry of elaborate form that set the pattern of future Arabic poetry. It was an embodiment of the clues of Bedouin life, singing of wine, love, war, hunting, hard landscapes of mountains and the desert, the tribal rules and their enemies. The Arabic language grew in time to meet the demands of an imperial language. The Arabisation of the conquered lands, by the 11th century, brought the domination of their local languages by Arabic. The language became a compounding element of these ethnically diverse cultures and societies.

Pre-Islamic poetry had a public and social function, as the poet would appear as the eulogist or satirist, with a political role. The Umayyads codified the orally transmitted pre-Islamic poetry, so it served as the model for future development. Abbasid poetry was enriched by the accession of many non-Arabs, especially the Persians, who brought new themes and forms and also a struggle between the new and the ancient. Amr Ibn Bahr (d. 869) was in the lead in essay writing. Religious Arabic literature was heavily affected by the Christian and Jewish religions. Syriac Christianity and Greek thought were the major elements of influence. Greek schools had survived in many regions and a Persian college was established by refugees from Byzantium. The impact of the Hellenistic heritage was especially great in science, philosophy, art and architecture. The elements of Antiquity were fused into a new and original civilization by the Arabic and Islamic forms.

The heritage of Greco-Roman art and architecture was taken over by the Arabs and transmuted into new forms. Pictorial art was more stylized and geometrical, owing to the banning of natural representations by the Islamic religion. The arts were also subject to Chinese and Persian influences.

Hence, Islam was not only a system of belief and cult, but a civilization with religion as its unifying and dominating factor, that nevertheless tolerated and preserved the inputs of different cultures of pagan beliefs or other revelations.

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EARLY ISLAMIC ART

Prepared by Ayse Nur EreK

The term *Islamic art* not only describes the art created specifically in the service of the Muslim faith (for example, a mosque and its furnishings) but also characterizes the art and architecture historically produced in the lands ruled by Muslims, produced for Muslim patrons, or created by Muslim artists.

The lands newly conquered by the Muslims had their own preexisting artistic traditions and, initially at least, those artists who had worked under Byzantine or Sasanian patronage continued to work in their own indigenous styles but for Muslim patrons. The first examples of Islamic art therefore rely on earlier techniques, styles, and forms reflecting this blending of classical and Iranian decorative themes and motifs. Even religious monuments erected under Umayyad patronage that have a clearly Islamic function and meaning, such as the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, demonstrate this amalgam of Greco-Roman, Byzantine, and Sasanian elements. Only gradually, under the impact of the Muslim faith and nascent Islamic state, did a uniquely Islamic art emerge.

Bronze Vessel, ca. 700 Syria, pierced and chased, openwork design An arabesque style based on an infinite leaf-scroll pattern that, by division of elements (stem, leaf, blossom) generates new variations of the same original elements.



Perhaps the most salient of these is the predilection for all-over surface decoration. The four basic components of Islamic ornament are calligraphy, vegetal patterns, geometric patterns, and figural representation.

One of the most fundamental principles of the Islamic style is the dissolution of matter, whether it is monumental architecture or a small box.

The Umayyad period is often considered the formative period in Islamic art. At first, even though Arabic became the official language and Islam the principal religion of the diverse lands unified under Umayyad rule, artists continued to work in their established manner.

The main artistic influence came from the late antique classical naturalistic tradition, which had been prevalent on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean. This was also supplemented by the more formal modes developed by the Byzantines and Sasanians, a factor that especially affected metalwork, textiles, and the depiction of animal, vegetal, and figural motifs. Thus, through a process of adoption, adaptation, and creation, a new sense of artistic expression emerged that became distinctly Islamic in character shortly after the demise of the Umayyad dynasty.

As with the arts, the Umayyad period was also critical in the development of Islamic architecture. While earlier architectural traditions continued, the requirements of the new religion and customs of the new Arab rulers necessitated a different usage of space. In the case of religious buildings, the Umayyads often constructed their monuments on sites of historical or symbolic significance. The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (691), the first major Umayyad architectural undertaking completed under the patronage of the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 685–705), was built on a prominent site formerly occupied by Solomon's.

Also significant are the mosques of Damascus (706), where the site of the former Roman temple and fourth-century Byzantine church dedicated to Saint John the Baptist was transformed into the congregational mosque of the Umayyad capital, and of Jerusalem (709–15).

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ON ISLAMIC “STATECRAFT”

Prepared by Şefik peksevgen

The first political formation of the Muslim community was rather a militaristic organization to share the fruits of conquest, and was furnished with no administrative organs for other purposes.

The history of Islamic history and political thought also represents a change from a generic framework of politics to a complicated political framework of an empire. The celebrated times of al-Rashidun (first four rightful caliphs) characterize the simplicity of political organization. This period is marked with the relative ease of the execution of sovereign power of the caliphs as the leaders of the Muslim community. The small size of the population and the territories might have been a significant factor in the personal involvement of the caliphs even in daily matters. How caliphs stood as the executive leaders of the Muslim polity is important to note because during the course of the expansion of the administrative apparatus, caliphs lost touch with the affairs of the empire. The time of al-Rashidun was remembered as the prime example when the caliphs ran almost every business of the community by themselves.

If we look at the Umayyad period in general, it can be claimed that a discernable shift took place in terms of both the understanding and exercise of caliphal power. Sometimes this shift is seen as a move from the theocratic spirit of the earlier days of Islam towards a more ‘secular’ form of government where caliphs, especially Muawiya, felt freer to make laws on issues not touched upon by the Quran or Sunna. In addition, in terms of the working of the government, Umayyads were the first to appoint advisors of Christian and Persian origin. This innovation, in order to establish better-regulated financial administration, is again attributed to Muawiya. Consequently, the Umayyad period is generally portrayed as a transformation from the caliphate to kingship.

The passage from Umayyad to Abbasid rule is usually referred to as a revolution. This revolution was once claimed as the victory of Iranianism over Semitic Arabism. Although this view with its overemphasis on Iranian influence has been discarded, it is also true that throughout the Abbasid period a remarkable Persian influence made itself felt. This influence especially manifested itself in the spheres of government and in the mode of understanding of ruler and ruling.

However, the crucial point, which should be underlined, is that besides providing the demand for qualified secretaries and advisors, the infiltration of bureaucratic personnel of Persian origin must have intensified also the infiltration of Persian political

culture. This infiltration of Persian concepts and traditions should not be seen as an inevitable foreign influence on Abbasid rule. On the contrary, it should be seen as a demand of much-needed concepts and practices on statecraft from a changing political structure where sovereign power and rulership could not be maintained only by referring to the early years of Islam.

While in the early periods of Muslim rule, the sultan only referred to the abstract concept of power and was used only in this abstraction, from the tenth century onwards it came to designate independent local rulers. With the Seljuks’ rise to domination in the eleventh century, the sultan had a new sense and embodied a new claim, no less than a title to universal empire. Dependence on Iranian bureaucrats, at least partly, shaped the formation of the Seljuk political order in line with the basic institutions and ideals of kingship of Persian traditions. As such, offices such as espionage and vezirate, and ideals such as justice became essentials of the Seljuk rule as well.

It is generally held that during the Seljuk period the unification of the empire, at least to a certain extent, was achieved on a system that was basically modeled after the Sasanian example. **Mirror for Princes**

The emergence of Islamic Mirror for Princes literature (administrative handbooks!) is directly related with the entrance of the Persian bureaucratic intelligentsia into the Islamic administration.

Actually, among the Arab population, familiarity with the stories of legendary Persian kings and the ministers goes back to pre-Islamic times. Anecdotes of the legendary figures of the Persian past were orally circulated through the storytellers. In addition, during the early centuries of Islam, romantic tales of the Sasanian period were in full circulation in the east of Iran.

The boom in the production of ‘mirrors’ took place during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Because of the revival of Persian literary activity, these centuries are sometimes called the Persian cultural renaissance, which can perhaps be best illustrated with the final compilation of *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) by Firdawsi in 1010. Among the ‘mirrors’ better known and much more interesting are those written in Persian during the period of Seljuk domination. In fact, this period saw perhaps the most famous examples of the genre: *Qabusnamah* of Kay Kaus (composed in 1082), *Siyasatnama* of Nizam al-Mulk (1018-1092), and *Nasihah al-Muluk* of al-Ghazali (1058-1111).