

# What factors affect the spread of a religion?

## Reading

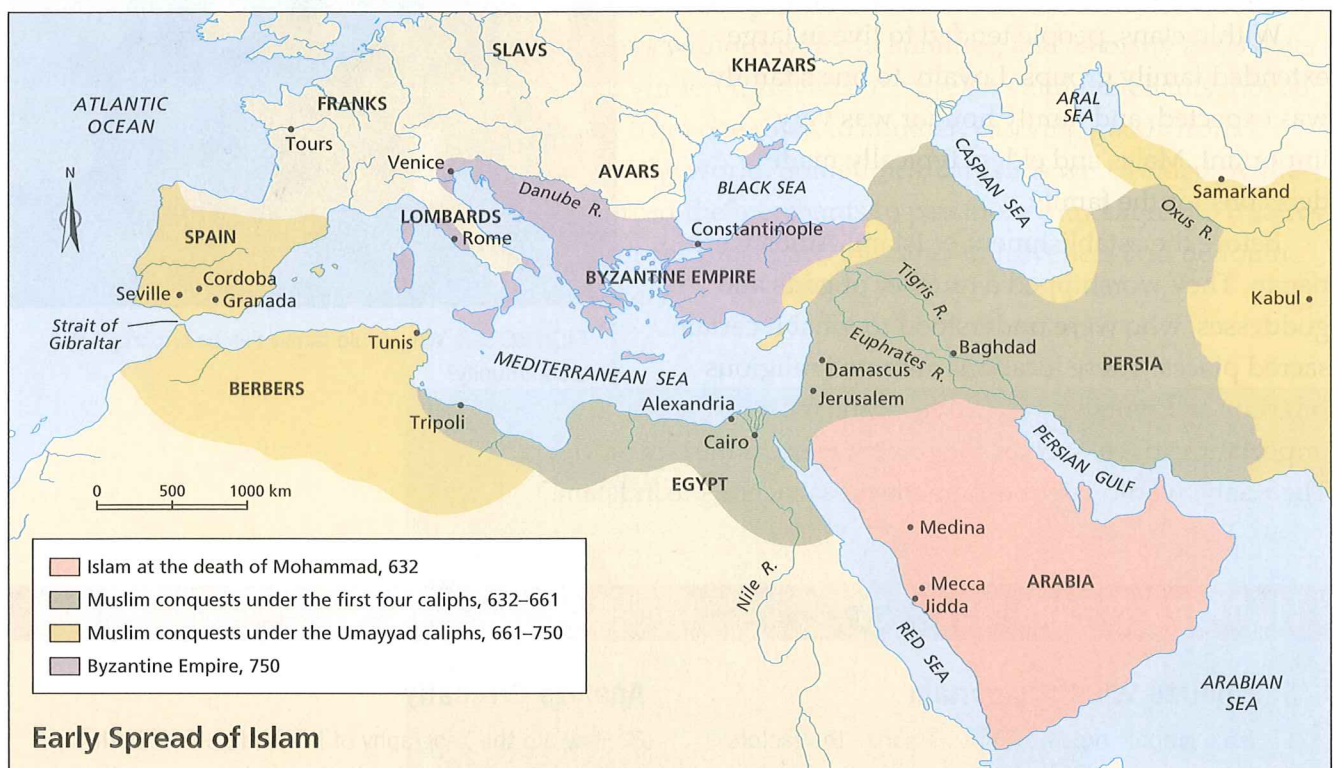


### Set a Purpose

Islam bound the Arabic and other Middle Eastern peoples together as one, creating a civilization. As you read this section, look for reasons why Islam spread so far and so fast.

When something catches on, it travels far and fast through the Internet, television, social media, and word of mouth. Usually it offers something that people are interested in. The same thing happened when Islam emerged in the seventh century—it spread like wildfire. When you consider it did so without the advantages of the digital age, it is truly remarkable how far and how fast Islam spread.

What did Islam offer? Did it help people agree on spiritual truths? Did it help them agree on rules for proper behaviour? Did it enable them to develop a bond with others in a community? Look for answers to these questions as you read this section.



**FIGURE 3-9** Study this map to describe the speed of the geographic spread of Islam. The Byzantine Empire was largely Christian. What effect would the presence of the Byzantine Empire have had on the spread of Islam?

## What were the beginnings of Islam?

**Muslims** believe that Islam was revealed to the **prophet** Mohammad in the seventh century. Mohammad was born in Mecca, a city in Arabia, in 570 CE. His relatives were traders and members of an important clan. Orphaned when he was six, Mohammad lived with an uncle, who taught him the business of trade. At the age of 25, Mohammad married and became a skilled trader.

### Mohammad's Message

At this time, Mecca was a place of **pilgrimage** for Arabic pagans whose beliefs Mohammad did not accept. Mohammad believed that there was only one god, so he opposed polytheistic worship. He began taking retreats to a nearby cave, where he could be alone to meditate and reflect. Muslims believe that on one such retreat, in the year 610 CE, Mohammad received a powerful **revelation** from God. Mohammad then had further revelations providing guidance in many areas. These are recorded in the Koran, the Muslim holy book.

As Mohammad revealed his visions to others, he communicated a simple message: that there is no god but Allah. He inspired people with simple guidelines on how to live. These ideas quickly gained **converts**, creating a new religion called Islam. The word *Islam* means "submission to the will of God." The followers of Islam are known as Muslims, which means "they who submit."

When he was asked to define Islam, Mohammad listed the **Five Pillars**, or five religious duties, Muslims should meet. Completion of these duties is expected to result in rewards in both this life and the next.

**Muslim** a follower of Islam

**prophet** a person who speaks with divine inspiration

**pilgrimage** a journey to a sacred place or shrine

**revelation** what is revealed

**convert** one who rejects one religious belief to embrace another

**Five Pillars** five duties considered a framework for worship and a sign of commitment to the faith of Islam

### Religion and Civilization

- The Hebrew word *Israel* means "one who struggles, or wrestles, with God." How does this meaning compare with the Arabic words *Islam* and *Muslim*?

## EXPLORING SOURCES

### Responsibilities of the Prophets

Muslims recognize Mohammad as the final prophet. This excerpt comes from the first collection of stories about Mohammad, written in the eighth century.

#### Thinking IT THROUGH

1. What tasks do Muslims believe God required of the prophets?

*When Muhammad, the apostle of God, reached the age of forty, God sent him in compassion to humankind, "as an evangelist [bearer of news] to all men" (Koran XXXIV: 27). Now God made a covenant with every prophet whom he had sent before him that he should believe in him, testify to his truth and help him against his adversaries, and he required of them that they should transmit to everyone who believed in them, and they carried out their obligations in that respect. God said to Muhammad: "Do you accept this and take up my burden?"*

**Muhammad ibn Ishāq ibn Yasār,  
Biography of the Messenger of God**

## ZOOM IN

## What are the Five Pillars of Islam?

Muslims consider the Five Pillars of Islam important for spiritual well-being, but they serve other purposes as well. For example, the public prayer held every Friday at noon brings the community together. It is an occasion for sermons and discussions on religion, society, and politics. How do the Five Pillars serve individuals and society at the same time?



**DECLARATION OF FAITH** The First Pillar requires that a person state his or her faith by repeating a declaration called the *shahada* at least once each day. In English, the *shahada* states “There is no god but God, and Mohammad is the messenger of God.” Why would Saudi Arabia feature this phrase on its national flag?

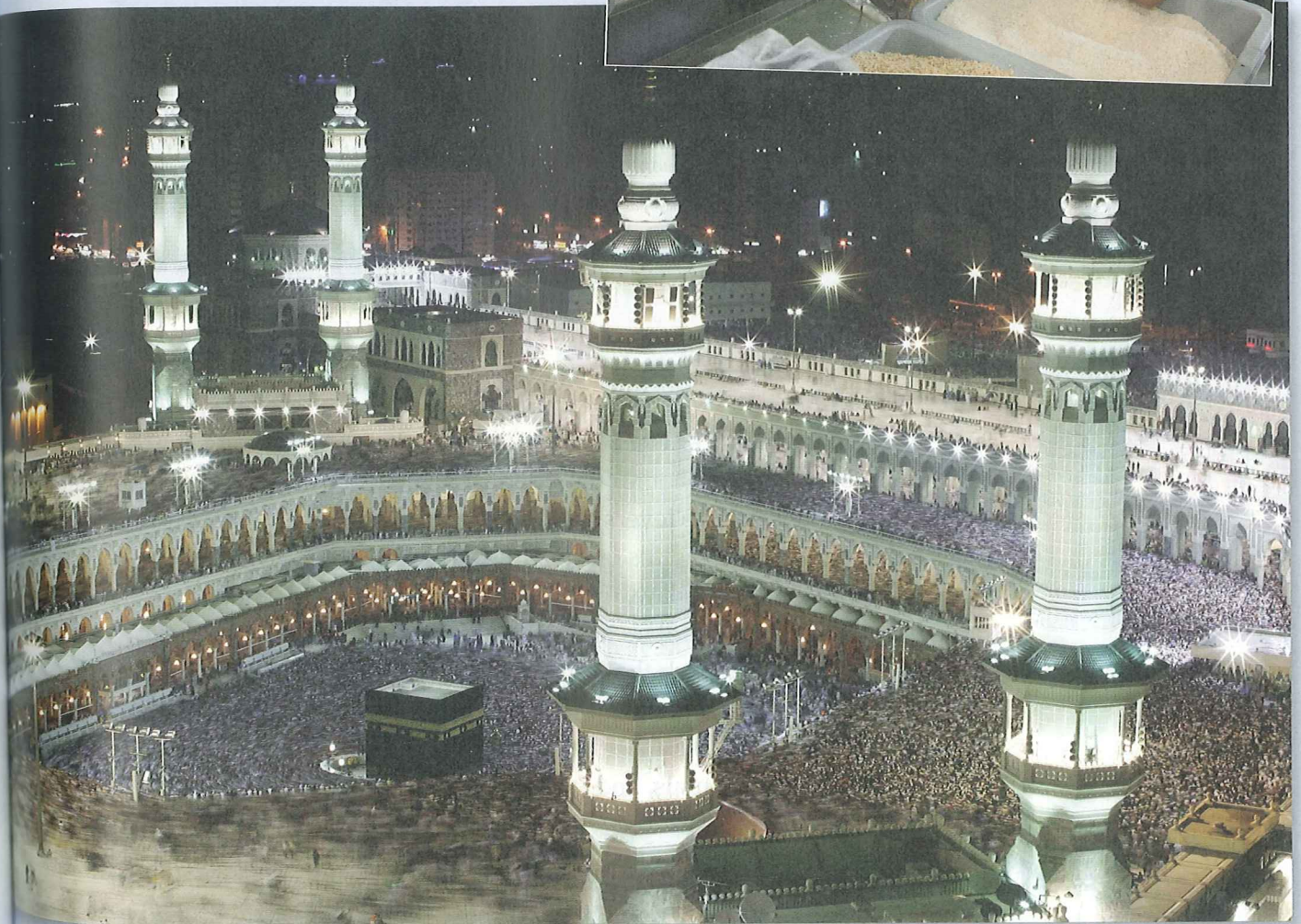


**DAILY PRAYER** The Second Pillar is the *salat*—a requirement to pray five times every day. Those at prayer always face in the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca. Prayers take place at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and nightfall. Here, Muslims gather to pray in Winnipeg on February 1, 2004.



**FASTING** The Third Pillar is fasting. Muslims fast (refrain from eating) during Ramadan, for the entire month. In the evening, they break their fast by sharing a meal called *Iftar*.

**CHARITY** The Fourth Pillar of Islam is to aid the poor through charity. Here, Muslim volunteers put together meal packages for families in need. Muslims consider charity to be a holy responsibility.



**PILGRIMAGE TO MECCA** Muslims try to go on a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lifetime. This is considered the Fifth Pillar of Islam. The Kaaba, shown here, is a cube-shaped building in Mecca. The black stone kept within the Kaaba marks it as a place of worship, and it is Islam's holiest site. Tens of thousands of Muslims circle around the Kaaba as part of their pilgrimage.

**community** a group of people who live in the same location or who share similar beliefs, interests, or goals

**parable** a story that has a moral lesson

**scholar** one who studies; an academic

### Religion and Civilization

- Is Islam more like Judaism or Christianity? Explain.

**FIGURE 3-10** A Koran is a holy object. An Islamic artist decorated this Egyptian Koran in the 13th century. How does this work compare with the Christian illuminated manuscript you saw in Chapter 2?



**WEB LINK** • To learn more about Islamic organizations in Canada and British Columbia, visit our website.

### The Hadith

In addition to the Koran, Muslims turn to other sources for spiritual and social guidance. The Hadith, for example, are narrations to guide understanding of what Mohammad said and did during his lifetime. The Hadith show believers how a servant of God should live and behave. Different groups of Muslims have different sets of Hadith.

Islamic religious law, the sharia, is based on the teachings of Islamic religious **scholars** and is interpreted in a variety of ways. Muslim scholars teach that religious beliefs, religious duties, and good works are the important elements of Islam. All these elements bind Muslims together because they help Muslims believe the same things, follow the same rituals, and feel a sense of belonging.

### How did Islam spread?

The idea that there is only one God was not popular in pagan Mecca. City leaders soon began to persecute Mohammad and his followers, who fled to the city of Yathrib in 622 CE. Muslims call this flight the Hijrah, and it marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar.

Yathrib was in the middle of a civil war, and the leaders called on Mohammad to help them resolve the crisis. Mohammad succeeded in both resolving the conflict and converting everyone to Islam. Yathrib then became known as Medina, the City of the Prophet. Islam gained more converts, and Mecca itself eventually came under Muslim control.

### The Power of Islamic Armies

Many Arabs were inspired by Mohammad and became confident in their beliefs. Spreading the new religion within Arabia and beyond was soon seen as a sacred duty. Muslims formed armies to conquer non-Muslims and convert them to Islam. These armies treated any Arab who became Muslim very well, but they killed or enslaved Arabs who did not convert. Christians and Jews were allowed to practise their respective religions. However, they were not allowed to spread their faith, and they had to pay religious taxes. This limited form of tolerance encouraged many communities to accept Islamic rule.

With skilled commanders and devoted troops, Islamic armies swept all opponents before them. By 647 CE, they had conquered Iraq, Palestine, Syria, Egypt, and Iran. Two years later, they reached what is now Pakistan. The wealth of the Islamic Empire accumulated with each conquest. While many converted, thousands of residents of the conquered cities were also sold in marketplaces as slaves.

### Political Developments

Political divisions appeared after Mohammad's death in 632 CE. Some Muslims supported Mohammad's general, Abu Bakr, who became the first **caliph**. He spread the Islamic faith across Arabia by military conquest until his death in 634 CE. Followers of Abu Bakr became the Sunni branch of Islam.

Other Muslims thought that Ali, the husband of Mohammad's daughter Fatimah, should be caliph. He eventually became the fourth caliph and the first **Imam** in 656 CE. His followers eventually became the Shia branch of Islam. This political and religious division remains to this day.

**caliph** an Arab word meaning "successor" of Mohammad; leader of the Islamic Empire

**Imam** a person who leads prayers in a mosque; also, according to Shiites, a spiritual leader who is descended from Mohammad



**FIGURE 3-11** This painting was made by an unknown Persian artist about 1480 CE. It shows the armour that was typical of Islamic warriors throughout the Middle Ages. The horses wore steel riveted onto leather. The warriors wore shirts of chain mail—interlocking metal rings. What might be the advantages and disadvantages of this armour?

Patterns and Change

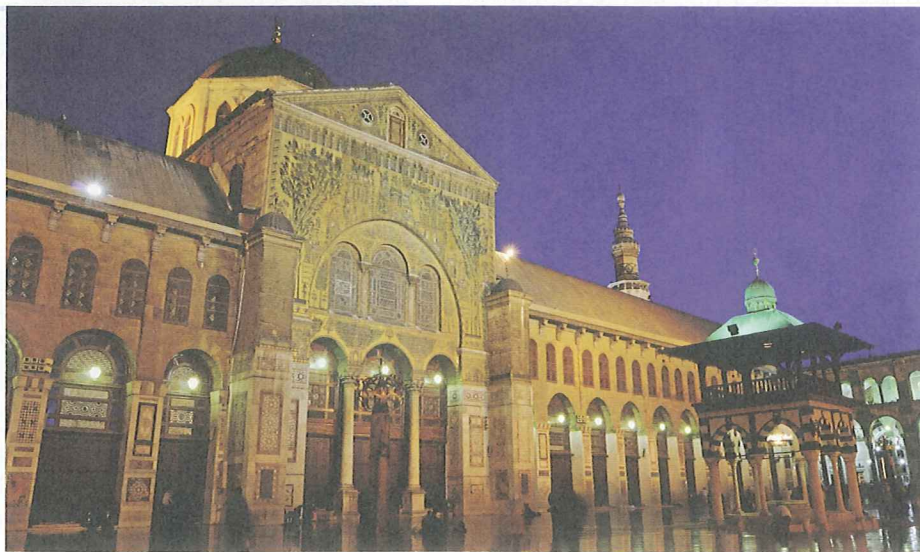
**assassinate** to kill for political reasons

## The Extension of Empire

After Ali, the leader of the Shia Muslims, was **assassinated** in 661 CE, the Sunni branch of Islam took power. The Umayyad Dynasty then began. The Umayyads moved the capital of the Islamic Empire to the city of Damascus, in Syria, in 661 CE. There, they built a court of great splendour. Umayyad leader Abd-al-Malik organized government, made Arabic the language of administration, minted coins, and encouraged trade. He formed armies to conquer more lands and spread the faith. The empire reached out into Asia, North Africa, and finally into Spain.

Soon, people shared common beliefs and accepted the same laws throughout a vast region. Trade became easier and safer, just as it had been in the old Roman Empire. Eventually, the Islamic Empire became the largest economic trade zone in the world. This climate of safety allowed Islamic civilization to flourish and endure.

**FIGURE 3-12** Constructed more than 1300 years ago, the great Umayyad Mosque in Damascus is still in use today. Why are impressive buildings important to religions and their followers?



### Thinking IT THROUGH



#### Summarize What's Important

1. Why did Islam spread so far and so fast? Summarize the main ideas and supporting details on a graphic organizer.

#### Analyze Critically

2. Why did so many people accept Islam? Some factors are internal, or related to Islam (for example, a simple message). Other factors are external (for example, trade routes along which religious ideas could spread).
  - a) Create a two-column table showing the internal and external factors that allowed Islam to spread.
  - b) Choose two factors that were most influential, and create visuals to demonstrate their powerful effect.

#### Build an Argument

3. Was conquest essential to the spread of Islam? Brainstorm reasons and examples that explore both sides of the argument. Then, choose one side and support your opinion.

#### Synthesize and Evaluate

4. Write a paragraph to answer the section question: *What factors affect the spread of a religion?* Set aside your paragraph to help you answer the Chapter Focus Question at the end of the chapter.

# How can a religion change people's lives?

In the previous section, you learned some direct ways that religion can affect a society. For example, a religion can set guidelines for expected behaviour. A religion can also affect a society in less direct, less intentional ways. For example, the spread of Islam led to widespread use of Arabic script, which is now the second most widely used alphabet in the world.

## What changed and what stayed the same?

Despite civil wars, assassinations, and rebellions, Muslims ruled from Spain to India within a few hundred years. Wherever the warriors and traders of Islam travelled, Arabic and Islamic values were introduced to local populations who, in turn, shared their own customs.

Some non-Muslims were treated well by their Islamic rulers, but restrictions were also placed on them. Non-Muslims could not rule. They could not carry weapons, and they could not testify against a Muslim in court. Muslim society was **hierarchical**. Muslims had the most power, at the top of the hierarchy. Slaves were at the bottom, and non-Muslims occupied the middle. The Koran and the Hadith guided governments.

### Life in the Country

Islamic cities were very cosmopolitan in the eighth century, but most people in the empire lived in the countryside. In the country, life followed ancient patterns, and **continuity** rather than change dominated people's lives. Muslims and non-Muslims alike lived with their extended family. From Persia to Morocco, they raised their flocks, grew dates, figs, and olives, and shared water from the village well. In many areas, the right to take water from a well was held by a clan. Most people lived in flat-roofed houses of plastered mud brick.

Village life was slow moving and regular. As in the cities, people ate relatively simple foods: bread, dates, goat or sheep meat, fish (where available), onions, garlic, fruit, and vegetables. Most people were interested in local concerns—issues that affected them and their immediate neighbours. What the larger Islamic government chose to do affected them very little. Beyond worrying about how to pay their taxes, they probably did not think too much about the rest of the world.

## Reading



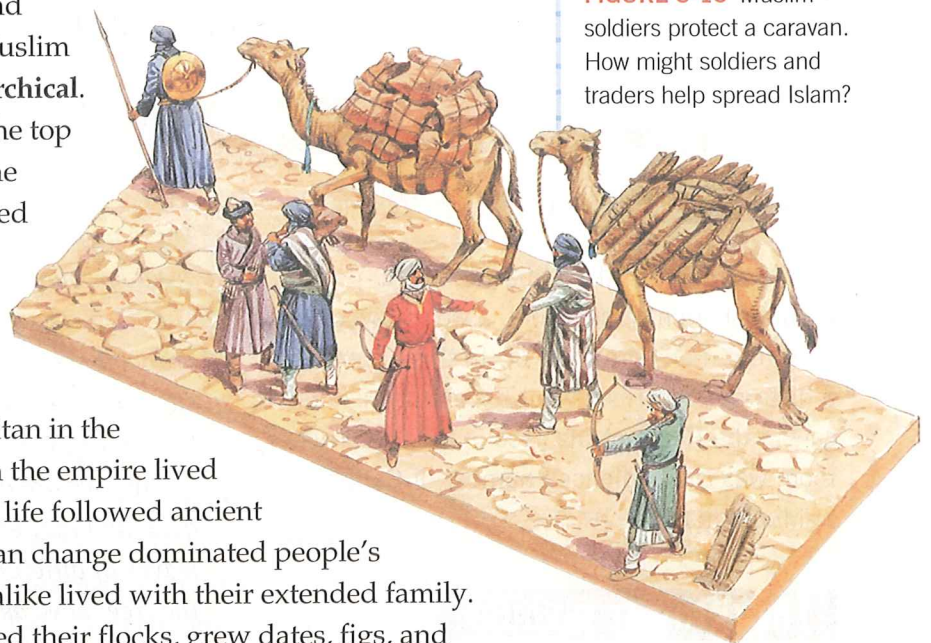
### Set a Purpose

As you read this section, watch for ways people's lives changed directly (resulting from Islam) and indirectly (resulting from society).

**hierarchy** a ranking of groups in a society, from most powerful to least powerful

**continuity** a state of stability; things stay the same

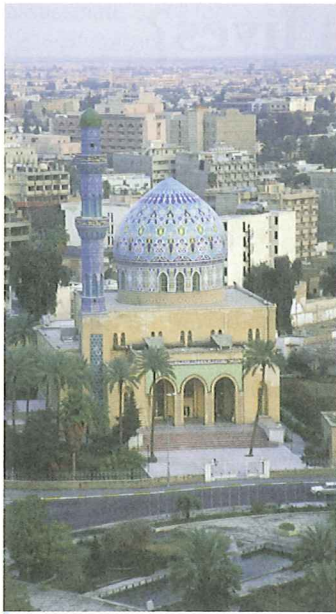
**FIGURE 3-13** Muslim soldiers protect a caravan. How might soldiers and traders help spread Islam?



### WEB LINK

To learn more about Islamic empires, visit our website.





**FIGURE 3-14** The city of Baghdad had a population of 5.9 million in 2011. Which Canadian city comes closest to this size?

## The Glory of the Abbâsid Court

The rich and worldly Umayyad rulers lost power to the Abbâsid family in 750 CE. The Abbâsid rulers moved the capital from Damascus to Baghdad in 762 CE. Under the Abbâsids, the power of the caliphs grew ever greater.

Abbâsid leaders dressed in the finest clothes, adorned themselves with beautiful jewels, and surrounded themselves with learned advisers. The caliph and his wives lived in fabulous palaces with lovely gardens. The glory of the Abbâsid court was famous even in distant parts of Europe and Asia.

Such magnificence was designed to impress the people and foreign visitors as well. The money to support the government came from trade and taxes. Because the empire was expanding, treasure, goods, and slaves taken from captured lands were plentiful.

The Abbâsids were always either at war or getting ready for war. Unlike the first caliphs, they used the spread of Islam as an excuse to wage war. They divided the world into two: the land of Islam and the land of war. Their greatest enemy was the Christian Byzantine Empire. The armies of the Islamic and Christian powers clashed often.

### EXPLORING SOURCES

#### Wonders of the Islamic World

The royal court of the Abbâsids was a fabulously rich wonderland, a world few could enter but many dreamed of. In this excerpt, a historian describes what Byzantine visitors saw in the Room of the Tree in 917 CE. This room was the audience chamber of Caliph al-Muqtadir.

#### Thinking IT THROUGH

1. What would have been the purpose of the luxurious display in the audience room?
2. Why might some Muslims criticize the Abbâsids?

*There is a tree standing in the midst of a great circular tank filled with clear water. The tree has eighteen branches, each branch having numerous twigs, on which sit all sorts of gold and silver birds, both large and small. Most of the branches of this tree are of silver but some are of gold, and they spread into the air carrying leaves of different colours. The leaves of the tree move as the wind blows, while the birds pipe and sing...*

*[The caliph] was arrayed in clothes... embroidered in gold being seated on an ebony throne... To the right of the throne hung nine collars of gems... and to the left were the like, all of famous jewels... Before the caliph stood five of his sons, three to the right and two to the left.*

**al-Khatib al Baghdadi (1002–1071 CE),  
Historian of Baghdad**

## What was life like in the city?

Many of the cities in the Islamic Empire had been founded centuries before the coming of Islam. They occupied key locations along trade routes and in farming areas near water. Two of the greatest of these cities, Damascus and Baghdad, had large populations that included both Jews and Christians.

### Centres of Learning and Commerce

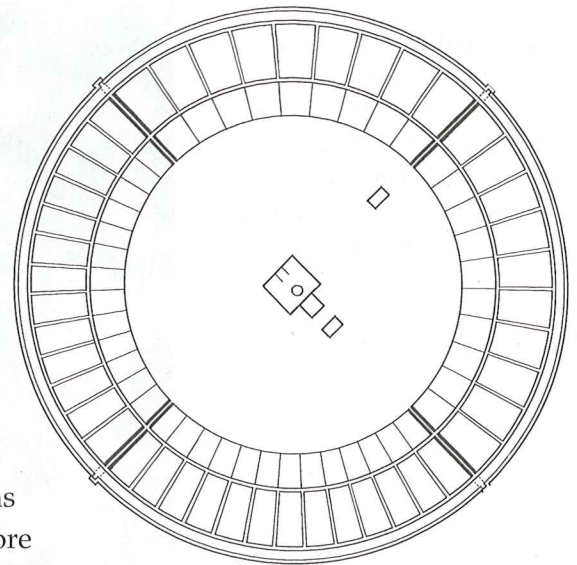
By 775 CE, these cities had become grand centres that were bustling, interesting places to live. They also became centres of learning and commerce. Life in Islamic cities was quite different from life in small villages. Baghdad had more than a million inhabitants. The Muslim city of Cordoba in Spain had 400 000 inhabitants in the 10th century, with 700 mosques and 300 public baths. Compare this with medieval London, which had a mere 18 000 inhabitants. European nobles and monarchs admired and envied the splendid Islamic cities. Islamic governments built mosques, libraries, and universities.

Many cities were surrounded by walls for protection. Poor people lived near the walls or outside the city—places that were less desirable and more dangerous. Wealthy people built palaces and fine houses with gardens. These were located in the quieter neighbourhoods. Workshops—tanneries, silversmiths, and wood shops—were all near the marketplace. Cities bustled with activity. The government even provided temporary accommodations where travelling merchants could stay and display their wares.

### Expansion of Islamic Science and Technology

Islamic scholars of the Abbâsid Dynasty had a great thirst for scientific and technological knowledge. In the cities, scholars studied medicine and science. Their great respect for learning extended beyond their own culture, and they sought out knowledge from other peoples. Many of their libraries contained translations of the books and essays of the ancient Greeks. Scholars in the Islamic world studied these classics and built on them. Medieval Europeans later rediscovered ancient learning in Arabic books.

One of the most famous Islamic scholars was ibn Sina, also called Avicenna, who lived from 980 to 1037 CE. He was a physician, philosopher, astronomer, and poet. His most famous work, *Canon of Medicine*, was used as a medical text for 600 years after his death, both in the Islamic Empire and in Europe. Avicenna was one of the first physicians in the world to describe **anaesthesia**—a standard practice of modern medicine.



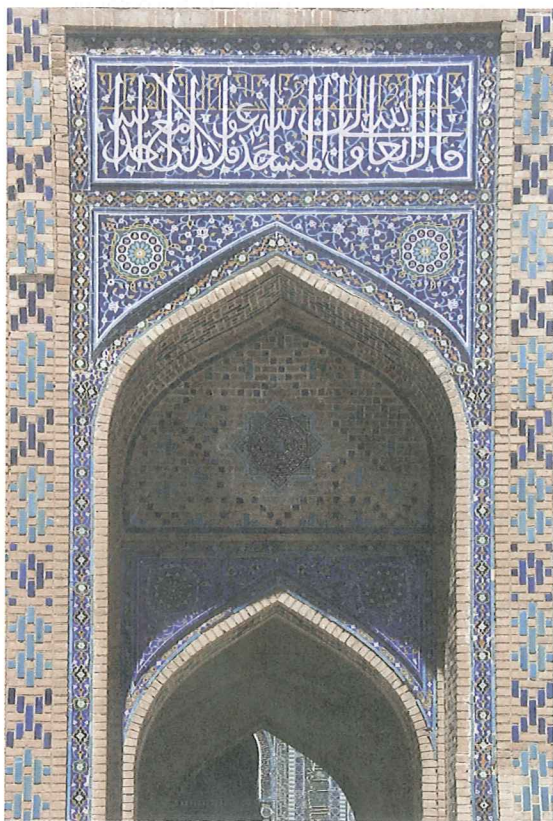
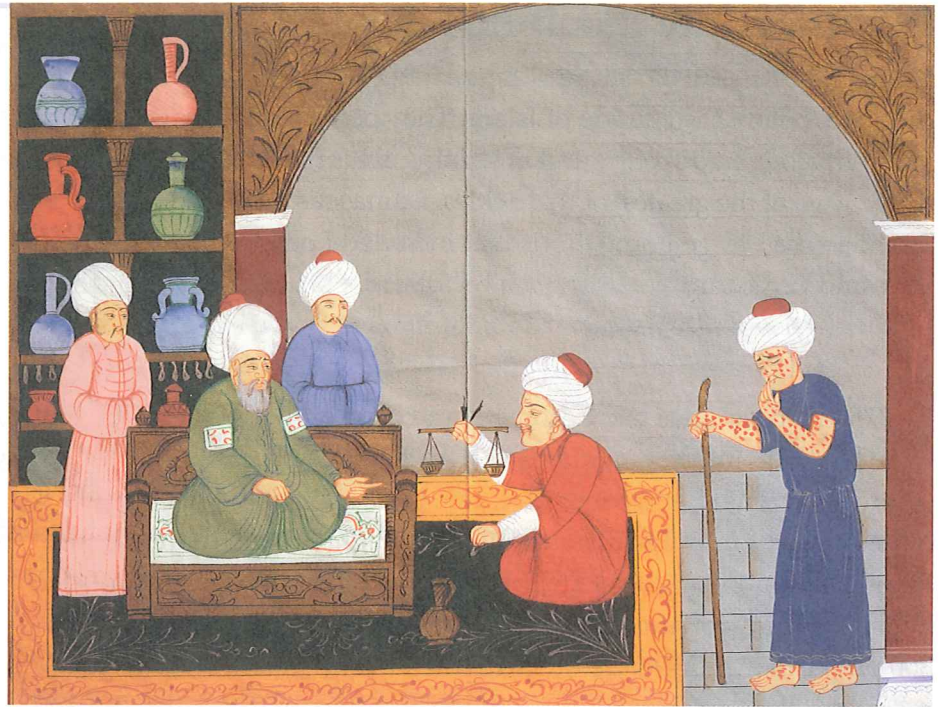
**FIGURE 3-15** This diagram shows the original city plan for Baghdad. The city was imagined to be the centre of the Islamic Empire—and the universe. In the outer ring were houses and shops. In the centre lay the palace and mosque. Baghdad grew so quickly that it remained in this shape for only a few years.

#### WEB LINK

To learn more about the transfer of Islamic science and technology to the rest of the world, visit our website.

**anaesthesia** loss of sensation of pain, usually as a result of medication

**FIGURE 3-16** Medical assistants prepare remedies for smallpox under the guidance of Avicenna. This painting was included in a 17th-century Ottoman manuscript, when Avicenna's groundbreaking medical texts were studied by medical students in France and Belgium. Should societies share their scientific discoveries? Why or why not?



**FIGURE 3-17** Mosaics and glazed tiles in an Islamic mausoleum in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. A mausoleum is a building that contains tombs. Samarkand is a UNESCO World Heritage Site because of this architecture. How is it similar to or different from places of worship you are familiar with?

## Expansion of Islamic Arts

Religious values are reflected in Islamic art, music, and architecture. For example, Islam considers it sinful to show human beings, animals, and other subjects realistically. It is thought that depicting something that God created is like imitating the act of creation. This makes it an offence to God. Islamic artists therefore turned to intricate designs and calligraphy. The results were beautifully patterned objects: tiles, carpets, and even buildings. Occasionally, in some cultures, this restriction was overlooked. For example, people and animals were illustrated by the Mughals of India.

## Public Works and Trade

Islamic rulers and rich merchants supported the arts. Islamic governments wanted their cities to be beautiful, and they created magnificent public buildings. Compared with European society of that time, Islamic society was refined and wealthy. Later, during the Crusades, European knights came into contact with the splendour of the Arab world. They were awed and changed by it. They saw silks, fine glassware, paper, jewellery, carpets, perfumed soaps, brass, silver, and gold, and they wanted these treasures.

## Views on the Roles of Women

As with all societies, views vary from place to place and over time. The views below reflect three opinions on the roles of Muslim women in their communities from three different time periods.

*Women are superior to men in certain respects: it is they who are asked in marriage, desired, loved and courted, and they that inspire self-sacrifice and require protection. An indication of the high esteem in which women are held is that if a man is asked to swear by God—there is none greater—and take his solemn oath to go to the House of God, or distribute his possessions as alms, or emancipate [free] his slaves, all that comes easily to him... But let him be asked to swear to put away [to give up] his wife, and he grows pale, is overcome with rage, protests, expostulates [reasons earnestly], gets angry, and refuses.*

**Abu al-Jāhiz, born in Persia in 776 CE**

*Some of the pious [devoutly religious] elders (may God be pleased with them) have said that a woman should leave her house on three occasions only: when she is conducted to the house of her bridegroom, on the deaths of her parents, and when she goes to her own grave.*

**Ibn al-Hajj, an Egyptian judge (1258–1336 CE)**

*As a Muslim woman, I find myself thrown right into the controversy of women's role in today's society. Over and over I have to explain that what you see in a Hollywood movie about Islam has nothing to do with Islam. Muslims, men and women, like all other people, come in all shapes and forms and live their beliefs in a variety of different ways. To me, Islam is about shared social responsibility, humility, and striving for a sense of peace within one's heart, one's community, and one's world.*

**Dr. Tyseer Aboulnasr, Dean, Faculty of Applied Science, University of British Columbia, 2010**

### Thinking IT THROUGH

#### Summarize What's Important

1. Each of these opinions illustrates one perspective on the role of women in society. We can learn a lot by thinking about the perspectives these voices represent. Copy and fill out a chart like the one shown at the bottom of this page.

#### Analyze Critically

2. If you were to research this issue further, whom else would you like to hear from? Why?
3. What might have changed attitudes toward women between the times of each excerpt?
4. What restrictions, if any, do you think each commentator would place on women? What might be their reasoning?
5. Why does the Canadian Constitution forbid restrictions based on gender?

Speaker	Time period	Society	Whose perspective?	Main point	How does this opinion reflect the society from which this person comes?	What is the intent, or purpose, of the author?

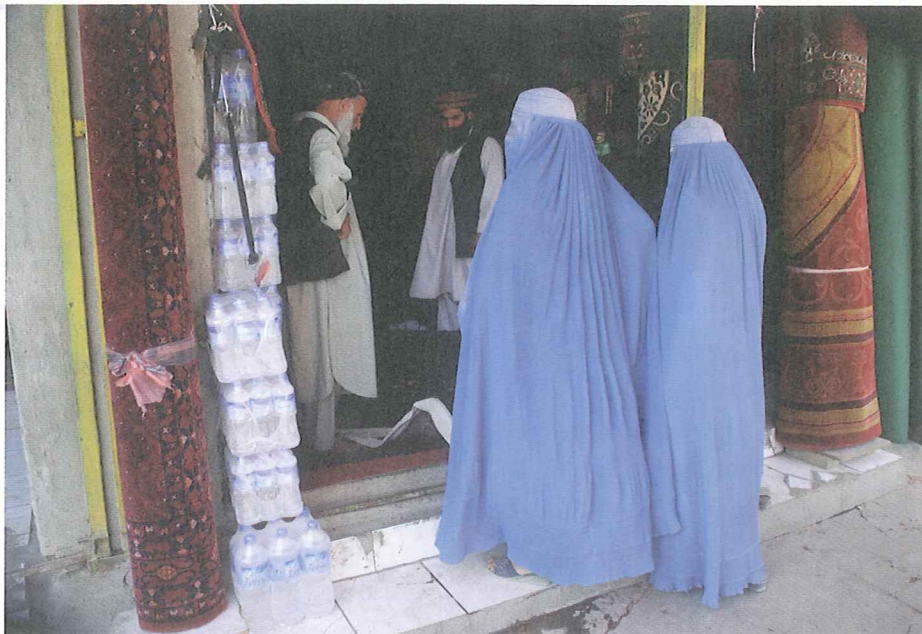
### Did You Know?

Many of the more severe restrictions placed on women are ancient, Arabic social traditions and attitudes. They do not originate in the Koran.

## The Shrinking Status of Women

In Abbâsid society, women did not have the rights that men had. Women during the time of Mohammad prayed, taught, worked—and even went to war. Abbâsid women, in contrast, had few rights and could not take part in government. Many women in the working class contributed to the family income, but if a woman was a member of a wealthy family or married a wealthy man, she lived in a harem. This was a special part of the house where males—other than the husband and very young boys—were forbidden. Women were required to cover themselves and have a male guardian when they went outdoors.

**FIGURE 3-18** In some Islamic societies today, women are still required to conceal themselves from head to foot. Other Islamic societies are more flexible, recognizing a woman's right to make her own choices in what she wears.



## Thinking IT THROUGH



### Summarize What's Important

1. **Patterns and Change** Use a graphic organizer to summarize the ways Islam changed people's lives. Categorize the changes as direct (resulting from Islam) and indirect (resulting from society and other cultural influences). Use details and examples to illustrate the changes.

### Access Background Knowledge

2. a) Describe what life may have been like during the Abbâsid Dynasty from the following perspectives.
  - a caliph
  - a Christian or Jew
  - a non-Muslim farmer
  - an Islamic scholar
  - a Muslim woman
  - an Islamic artist

- b) Write a journal entry for a day in the life of one of the individuals listed above.

### Build on the Ideas of Others

3. With a partner, consider this question: "What are the influences of religion—both good and bad—on the development of a civilization?" Identify two points to support each side of the question.

### Synthesize and Evaluate

4. Write a paragraph to answer the section question: *How can a religion change people's lives?* Set aside your paragraph to help you answer the Chapter Focus Question at the end of the chapter.