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The Spread of Islam

TERMS & NAMES

- caliph
- Umayyads
- Shi'a
- Sunni
- Sufi
- Abbasids
- al-Andalus
- Fatimid

MAIN IDEA

In spite of internal conflicts, the Muslims created a huge empire that included lands on three continents.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Muslims' influence on three continents produced cultural blending that has continued into the modern world.

SETTING THE STAGE When Muhammad died in 632, the community faced a crisis. Muslims, inspired by the message of Allah, believed they had a duty to carry the word of God to the world. However, they lacked a clear way to choose a new leader. Eventually, the issue of leadership would divide the Muslim world.

Muhammad's Successors Spread Islam

Muhammad had not named a successor or instructed his followers how to choose one. Relying on ancient tribal custom, the Muslim community elected as their leader Abu-Bakr, a loyal friend of Muhammad and a man respected for his devotion to Islam. In 632, Abu-Bakr became the first **caliph** (KAY-lihf), a title that means “successor” or “deputy.”

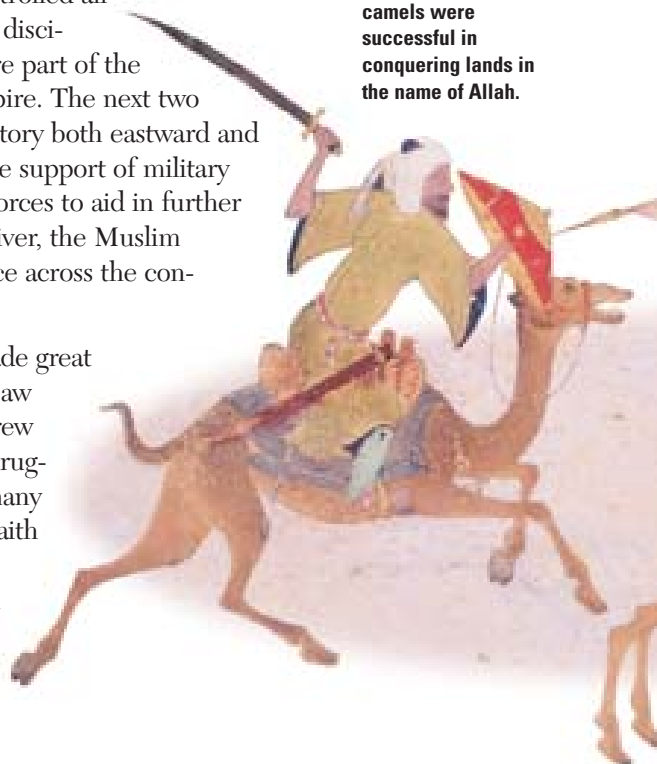
“Rightly Guided” Caliphs Abu-Bakr and the next three elected caliphs—Umar, Uthman, and Ali—all had known Muhammad and supported his mission. They used the Qur'an and Muhammad's actions as guides to leadership. For this, they are known as the “rightly guided” caliphs. Their rule was called a caliphate (KAY-lih-FAYT).

Abu-Bakr had promised the Muslim community he would uphold what Muhammad stood for. Shortly after the Prophet's death, some tribes on the Arabian Peninsula abandoned Islam. Others refused to pay taxes, and a few individuals even declared themselves prophets. For two years, Abu-Bakr used military force to reassert the authority of Muhammad's successors in the Muslim community. In that time, his troops gained experience and organized themselves into an effective mobile army.

By the time Abu-Bakr died in 634, the Muslim state controlled all of Arabia. Under Umar, the second caliph, swift and highly disciplined armies conquered Syria and lower Egypt, which were part of the Byzantine Empire. They also took parts of the Persian Empire. The next two caliphs, Uthman and Ali, continued to expand Muslim territory both eastward and westward. The “rightly guided” caliphs were able to gain the support of military and naval forces of the conquered lands. They used these forces to aid in further conquests. By 750, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Indus River, the Muslim Empire stretched 6,000 miles—about two times the distance across the continental United States. (See the map on page 241.)

Reasons for Success The four “rightly guided” caliphs made great progress in their quest to spread Islam. Muslims of the day saw the victories as a sign of Allah's support of Islam. Muslims drew energy and inspiration from their faith and were willing to struggle to extend and defend Islam. Historians have identified many reasons for the Muslims' military success in addition to the faith of the Muslim soldiers. The Muslim armies were well disciplined and expertly commanded. Their tactics enabled them to overwhelm forces unaccustomed to their style of warfare.

From 632 to 750, highly mobile troops mounted on camels were successful in conquering lands in the name of Allah.





The success of the Muslim armies was also due to weakness in the two empires north of Arabia. The Byzantine and Persian empires had been in conflict for a long period of time. By the time the Muslim army invaded their lands, they were exhausted militarily. Another reason for Muslim success was the persecution of Byzantine or Persian populations who did not support the official state religions, Christianity or Zoroastrianism. The persecuted people often welcomed the invaders, seeing them as liberators.

Treatment of Conquered Peoples Many conquered peoples chose to accept Islam. They were attracted by the appeal of the message of Islam, as well as by the economic benefit for Muslims of not having to pay a poll tax. Because the Qur'an forbade forced conversion, Muslims allowed conquered peoples to retain their own religion. Christians and Jews, as "people of the book," received special consideration. They paid a poll tax each year in exchange for exemption from military duties. They were also subject to various restrictions on their lives. The following account by an Arab army officer shows how he treated people in Persia:

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

In the name of God, the Merciful and the Compassionate. This is what Suwayd ibn Muqarrin gave to the inhabitants of Qumis and those who are dependent on them, concerning safe-conduct for themselves, their religions, and their property, on condition they pay the *jizya* [a poll tax] from the hand for every adult male, according to his capacity, that they show goodwill and do not deceive, that they guide [the Muslim traveler], and that they accommodate Muslims who make a halt with them for a day and a night with their average food. If they change this or make light of their obligations, the pact [*dhimma*] with them is void.

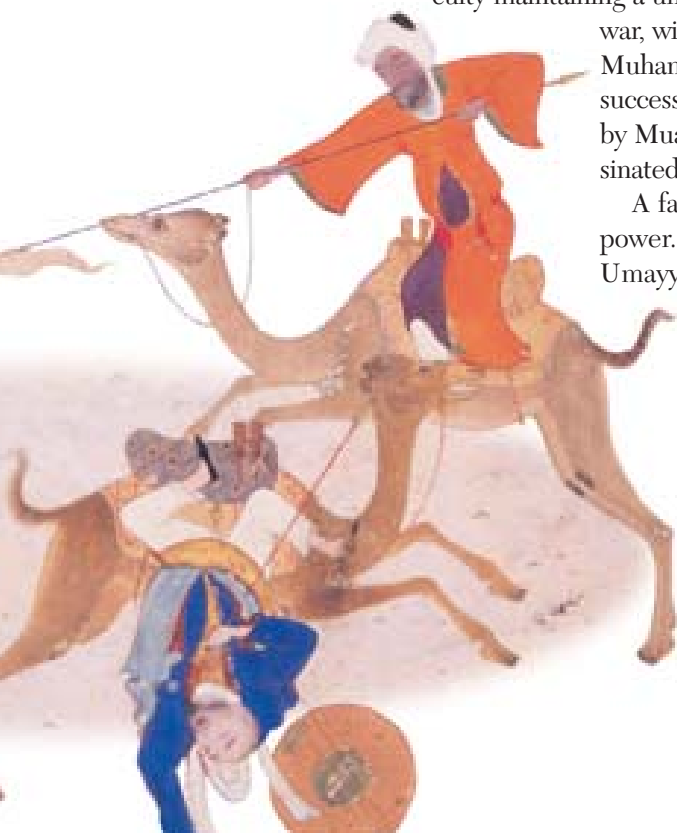
SUWAYD IBN MUQARRIN quoted in *Islam: From the Prophet Muhammad to the Capture of Constantinople*

In practice, tolerance like this was extended to other groups as well. Though they were not allowed to spread their religion, Christians and Jews played important roles as officials, scholars, and bureaucrats in the Muslim state.

Internal Conflict Creates a Crisis

Despite spectacular gains on the battlefield, the Muslim community had difficulty maintaining a unified rule. The murder of Uthman in 656 triggered a civil war, with various groups struggling for power. Ali, as Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, was the natural choice as a successor to Uthman. However, his right to rule was challenged by Muawiya, a governor of Syria. Then, in 661, Ali too was assassinated. The elective system of choosing a caliph died with him.

A family known as the **Umayyads** (oo·MYE·yadz) came to power. They set up a hereditary system of succession. The Umayyads also made another important change. The Muslim capital was moved to Damascus, a distant city in the recently conquered province of Syria. This location, away from Mecca, made controlling conquered territories easier. However, the Arab Muslims felt it was too far away from their lands. In addition, the Umayyads abandoned the simple life of previous caliphs and began to surround themselves with wealth and ceremony similar to that of non-Muslim rulers. These actions, along with the leadership issue, gave rise to a fundamental division in the Muslim community.



Ceremonial weapons such as this battle-ax were often decorated with fine artistic designs.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

A. Recognizing

Causes For what reasons were Muslims successful in conquering others?

A. Answer Army was well-disciplined and well-commanded; other empires were weak; some groups welcomed them as liberators.



Sunni-Shi'a Split In the interest of peace, the majority of Muslims accepted the Umayyads' rule. A minority did continue to resist, and around some of these groups an alternate view of the office of caliph developed. In this view, the caliph—the person most responsible for spreading Muhammad's message—needed to be a relative of the Prophet. This group was called **Shi'a**, meaning the “party” of Ali. Those who did not outwardly resist the rule of the Umayyads later became known as **Sunni**, meaning followers of Muhammad's example. Among those who did not actively resist Umayyad rule were many who believed that the Umayyads had become too concerned with worldly affairs and had lost touch with their religion.

Another group, the **Sufi** (SOO-fee), reacted to the luxurious life of the Umayyads by pursuing a life of poverty and devotion to a spiritual path. They tried to achieve direct personal contact with God through mystical means, such as meditation and chanting. In some ways they were similar to Christian and Buddhist monks. The Sufis played an important role in keeping Muslims focused on the Qur'an and tradition. Later, they became very active as missionaries in newly conquered lands. Another religious development was the growth of scholarship in various branches of Islamic learning and law. The study of the traditions of Muhammad, Arabic language, and the development of schools of shari'a established standards of Islamic conduct.

Vigorous religious and political opposition to the Umayyad caliphate led to its downfall. Rebel groups overthrew the Umayyads in the year 750. The most powerful of those groups, the **Abbasids** (AB-uh-SIH-DZ), took control of the empire.

Muslims Control Areas of Three Continents

When the Abbasids came to power in 750, they ruthlessly murdered the remaining members of the Umayyad family. One prince named Abd al-Rahman escaped the slaughter and fled to Spain. There he set up an Umayyad dynasty. Spain had already been conquered and settled by Muslims from North Africa, who were known as Berbers. The Berbers were led by Tariq, a powerful military figure. So revered was Tariq that a famous rock peninsula was named for him. The name today reflects his presence: Jabal Tariq—Gibraltar. The Berber armies advanced north to within 100 miles of Paris before being halted at the Battle of Tours in 732. The Berbers then settled back into southern Spain, where they helped form an extraordinary Muslim state called **al-Andalus** (al-AN-duh-LUS).

B. Answer Sunni, Shi'a, Sufi. Sunni follow the Sunna and believe the Muslim leader should be capable of leading the community. Shi'a are followers of Ali and believe the leader should be a descendant of Muhammad. Sufi pursue a life of meditation and personal contact with God.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

B. Summarizing
What are three groups within Islam and how do they differ?

Background

The Spanish name for Arabs and Berbers was Moors, because they came from the old Roman province of Mauritania.

Global Impact

Elephant Diplomacy

The Abbasids ruled a huge empire and were constantly searching for ways to hold it together and hold off outside attacks. The Abbasids viewed their relationship with the Kingdom of the Franks, ruled by Charlemagne, as essential to their ability to remain strong. They saw the Franks as possible allies against the Umayyads in al-Andalus (Spain).

To cement the relationship with Charlemagne, Caliph Harun al-Rashid sent an envoy with gifts to the court of Charlemagne. Among the gifts sent to the Frankish king was an elephant named Abu al-Abbas. It was the only elephant the caliph possessed.

The diplomatic trip was successful. Charlemagne marched against the Umayyad lands early in his reign.

Abbasids Consolidate Power The Abbasids' strength lay in the former Persian lands, including Iraq, Iran, and central Asia. To solidify power, in 762 they moved the capital of the empire to a newly created city, Baghdad, in southern Iraq. The location on key trade routes gave the caliph access to trade goods, gold, and information about parts of the empire in Asia, Africa, and Europe.

The Abbasids developed a strong bureaucracy to conduct the huge empire's affairs. A treasury kept track of the money flow. A chancery prepared letters and documents. A special department managed the business of the army. Diplomats from the empire were sent to courts in Europe (for example, Charlemagne's court), Africa, and Asia to conduct imperial business. To support this bureaucracy, the Abbasids taxed land, imports, and exports, and non-Muslims' wealth.

Rival Groups Divide Muslim Lands The Abbasid caliphate lasted from 750 to 1258. During that time, the Abbasids increased their authority by consulting religious leaders. But they failed to keep complete political control of the immense territory. Independent Muslim states sprang up, and local leaders dominated many smaller regions. The **Fatimid** (FAT-uh-MIHD) Dynasty, named after



Muhammad's daughter Fatima, began in North Africa and spread across the Red Sea to western Arabia and Syria. Although politically divided, the Abbasid Empire and the smaller powers remained unified in other ways. Religion, language, trade, and the economy tied the lands together.

Muslim Trade Network The two major sea-trading zones—those of the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean—linked the Muslim Empire into a world system of trade by sea. The land network connected the Silk Roads of China and India with Europe and Africa. Muslim merchants needed only a single language, Arabic, and a single currency, the Abbasid dinar, to travel from Córdoba to Baghdad and on to China.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

C. Recognizing Effects Why would a single language and a single currency be such an advantage to a trader?

C. Answer There would be no problem in changing money to a local currency and no need for interpreters, who might make mistakes.

To encourage the flow of trade, Muslim money changers set up banks in cities throughout the empire. Banks offered letters of credit, called *sakks*, to merchants. A merchant with a *sakk* from a bank in Baghdad could exchange it for cash at a bank in any other major city in the empire. In Europe, the word *sakk* was pronounced “check.” Thus, the practice of using checks dates back to the Muslim Empire.

At one end of the Muslim Empire was the city of Córdoba in al-Andalus. In the tenth century, this city had a population of 500,000; Paris, in contrast, had 38,000. The city's mix of Muslims, Christians, and Jews created a cosmopolitan atmosphere that attracted poets and philosophers as well as scientists and doctors. Many non-Muslims adopted the Arabic language and Muslim customs. Córdoba became a dazzling center of Muslim culture, boasting 70 libraries, 700 mosques, and 27 free schools.

In Córdoba, Damascus, Cairo, and Baghdad, a cultural blending of people fueled a period of immense achievements in the arts and the sciences.



GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Maps

- Location** To which continents did Islam spread by 1200?
- Movement** In which time period was the largest amount of land conquered?

Section 2 Assessment

1. TERMS & NAMES

Identify

- caliph
- Umayyads
- Shi'a
- Sunni
- Sufi
- Abbasids
- al-Andalus
- Fatimid

2. TAKING NOTES

Create a table like the one below. For each group of rulers, identify the period of their rule and at least two developments that affected the growth or strength of Islam during that period.

Rulers	Period of Rule	Developments in Islam
Rightly Guided Caliphs		
Umayyads		
Abbasids		

3. HYPOTHESIZING

How do you think Shi'a Muslims felt about the Abbasids taking power in 750?

THINK ABOUT

- how the Shi'a viewed the Umayyads
- where the Shi'a lived
- actions of Abbasids while in power

4. ANALYZING THEMES

Empire Building What evidence supports the conclusion that the Islamic empires were well-run?

THINK ABOUT

- relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims
- efforts to promote trade
- the role of the military