

Theme IV

Societies in Central Islamic Lands

Time Line

Pre-Islamic Arab World

Arabian Peninsula: Sarakenoi/Saraceni

Arab Tribes: Quraysh, Aws, Khazraj

Pre-Islamic Cities

Mecca, Yathrib/Medina, Taif

Rise of Islam

Prophet's march from Mecca to Medina (*Hijara*): 622

Caliph Abu Bakr: 632-634

Caliph Umar: 634-644

Caliph Usman: 644-656

Caliph Ali: 656-661

The Umayyad Caliphate: 661-684

Late Umayyad Caliphate: 684-750

The Abbasid Caliphate: 750-1258



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Photograph: Manuscript folio with depiction by Yahya ibn Vaseti found in the Maqama of Hariri located at the Bibliotheque Nationale de France. Image depicts a library with pupils in it, 1237

Courtesy: Zereshk, September 2007

Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/2c/Maqamat_hariri.jpg

UNIT 12 PRE-ISLAMIC ARAB WORLD AND ITS CULTURE*

Structure

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- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Tribal Confederations in Arabia
 - 12.2.1 The Dominant Tribes of The Arabian Peninsula
 - 12.2.2 Religious Diversity in The Arabian Peninsula
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12.0 OBJECTIVES

The study of pre-Islamic Arabia is an important area of study in order to understand the history of the region in which Islam developed. After going through this unit, you will:

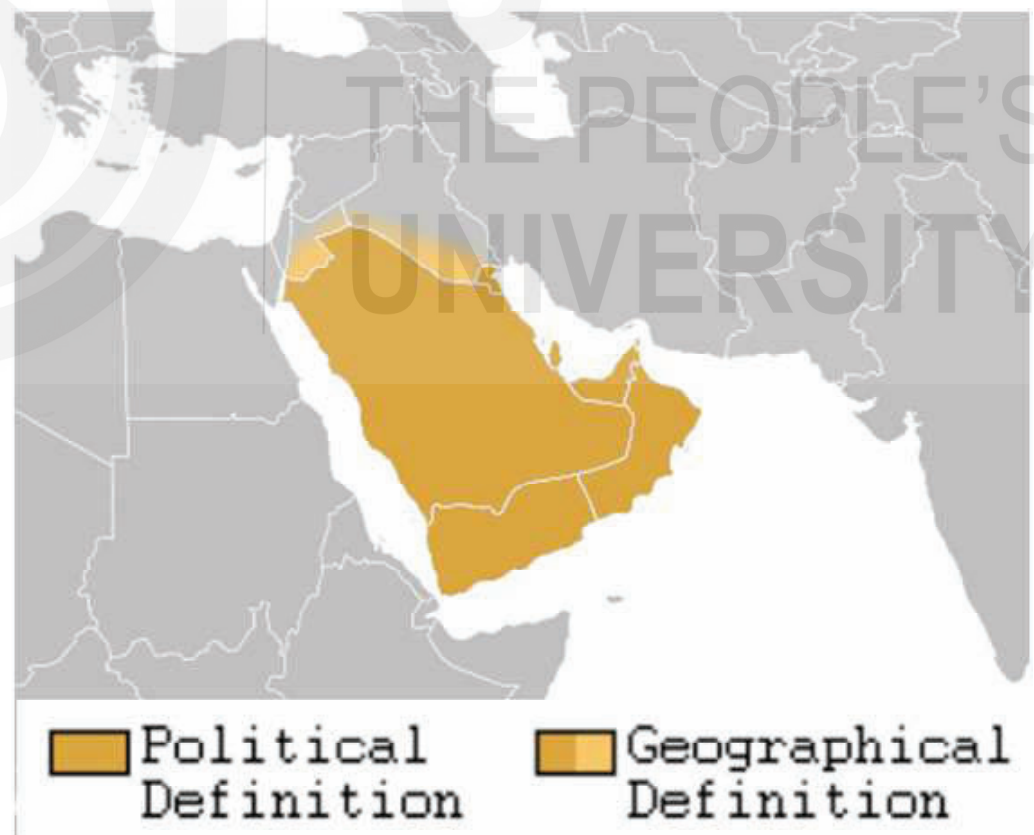
- be able to understand the geographical context of Arabia, and the manner in which the geographical factors impacted the political, social, economic, and cultural life of the region,
- know about various tribes and religious groups of pre-Islamic Arabia, and their religious rituals and practices, and
- understand the socio-political and economic structures of pre-Islamic Arabia.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

Arabia is a large peninsula¹. In Arabic it is known as *jazirat al-arab* (the island of the Arabs). Arabia is surrounded by the Red Sea in the west, the Arabian Sea in the south, and the Persian Gulf in the east. The peninsula is comprised of the modern states of Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Yemen and Saudi Arabia. There is very little regular rainfall in the area. Brief spells of rainfall occur in winters and in the spring season. There are no permanent rivers in Arabia, but there are a number of oases² formed by springs and wells.

The region was inhabited by nomadic pastoralists who called themselves Arabs. For centuries, the inhabitants of the central, northern and western Arabia had led a nomadic existence. The domestication and introduction of the camel had facilitated the evolution of a specific kind of pastoral nomadism based on camel rearing. There were a number of tribes, and no state formation had taken place prior to the advent of Islam in the region. The Arabs were divided into tribes which were made up of various clans. They were heavily dependent on the camel for mobility as well as for conducting trade, cultivation of some food grains, and on the date palm as a source of food as well as a means of livelihood.

In this Unit, we propose to introduce you to various facets of pre-Islamic Arabia, with special focus on tribal settlements and patterns, religious practices, trade networks, social structures, economic conditions, and political formations. In order to comprehend the complex nature of Arab society in pre-Islamic times, all factors which contributed to the development of the Arabian Peninsula as a composite whole have been dealt with in this Unit.



Map 12.1: Arabian Peninsula

Credit: Pharos; October, 2007

based on PD Image:BlankMap-World.png by User:Vardion

Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/4a/Arabian_peninsula_definition.PNG

¹ A peninsula is a piece of land which is bordered by water bodies on three sides.

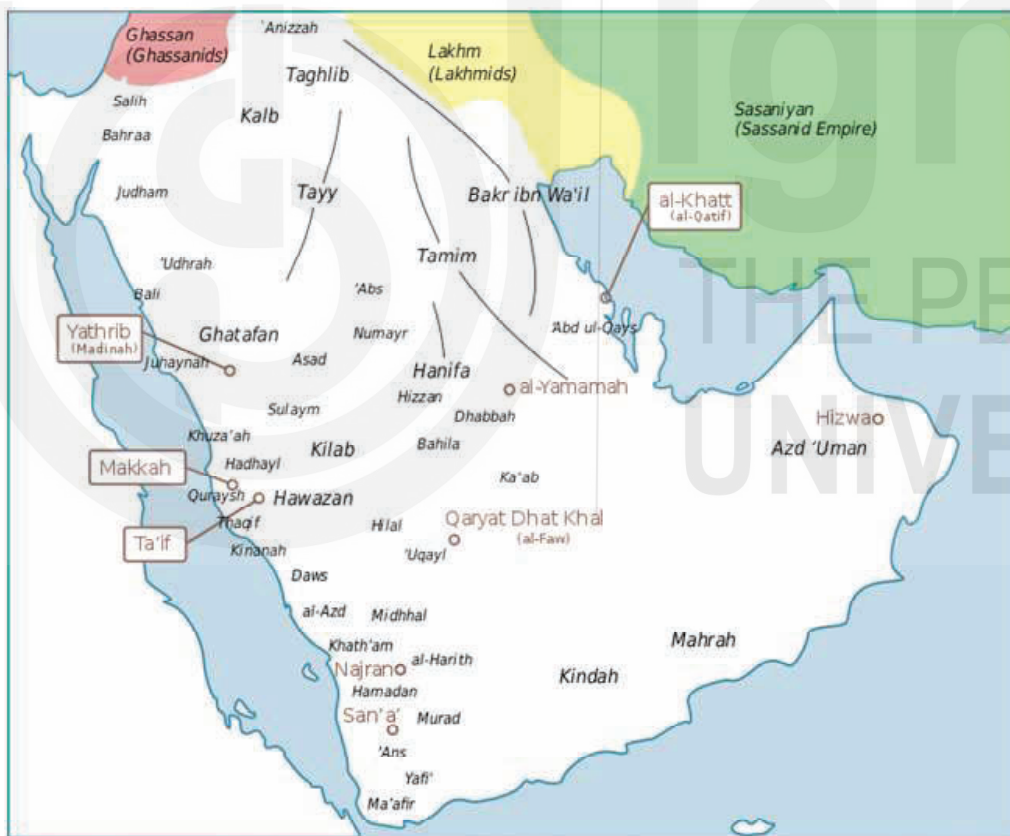
² Oasis is a water body in the midst of a desert.

12.2 TRIBAL CONFEDERATIONS IN ARABIA

The people residing in Arabian Peninsula were known in Greek as Sarakenoi, in Latin they were called Saraceni and they had previously been called Scenite Arabs or the Arabs who dwell in tents. The camel nomads of Arabia, however, liked to call themselves simply Arabs. However, the pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula was full of tribal and religious diversities.

12.2.1 The Dominant Tribes of the Arabian Peninsula

In Mecca, during the fifth century, the Quraysh, an alliance of various tribal groups, became the dominant tribal confederacy. The Quraysh were a united religious cult. They governed Mecca through a council of clans called *mala*. The Quraysh further defined their identity by codes of diet, dress, domestic taboos, and endogamous marriages within the Quraysh confederation. The Quraysh were active in local fairs and regional trade. There was a high degree of internal cohesion within the Quraysh. In addition to trade and business, the Quraysh invested in agriculture. Evidence of Quraysh involvement in agriculture comes from the town of Taif—the town where fruits were grown and supplied to the rest of Arabia. Quraysh entrepreneurs developed large estates in the valleys of Taif before the advent of Islam.



Map 12.2: Tribes of Arabia, c. 600 CE

Credit: murraythebaeÑí; May 2009

Source: Adapted from File:Tribes_english.png; https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/30/Map_of_Arabia_600_AD.svg

In Medina, the most prominent tribes were Aws and Khazraj. The Jewish tribes were dominant in Medina, and Aws and Kharaj came to settle in Medina at a later stage. When they came to settle in Medina, their position in comparison to the Jewish tribes was weak. Gradually, they gained strength, built fortresses and planted date orchards. These two tribes later came to be known under Islam as *al-ansar* or the helpers.

12.2.2 Religious Diversity in the Arabian Peninsula

The Arabian Peninsula was not only a land of the **Bedouin** Arabs. Many other religious groups were settled there, and played an important role in the political, economic and social life of the region.

In northern Arabia, the major Jewish settlements were Khaybar and Medina. Jewish tribes in Medina were rich in land, fortresses and weapons. Christianity was established in northern Arabia in the fifth century. In southern Arabia, Judaism was established in the fourth and fifth centuries, and Christianity was established in the 6th century by intensive Byzantine missionary activity. The Abyssinians had invaded southern Arabia and left Christian settlements in the small oases of Yemen.

Christian churches were also active in eastern Arabia in the Sasanian sphere of influence, especially at al-Hira. Christianity was also represented by merchants who travelled in Arabian caravans from Najran in southern Arabia to Busra in Syria. Even in the **Hejaz/Hijaz**, there were Christian and Jewish settlers. Judaism was widespread in the oases of the Hejaz/Hijaz, where the Jews had greatly increased the area of land under cultivation and made numerous palm plantations. Some important Arab families had converted to Judaism.

Medina had a large Jewish population. Christianity and to a lesser extent Judaism had penetrated several nomadic tribes. The Jewish population of Medina was spread in both the region of Lower Medina or Safila in the north as well as Upper Medina or Aliya in the south. The Jewish tribes of Qurayza and Nadir are said to have inhabited the Upper Medina, while a third large tribe, the Qaynuqa lived in the Safila. But the Nadir tribe owned estates outside Aliya and on its fringes as well.

Many names, religious terms and historical references also indicate Iraqi Aramaic influences in pre-Islamic Arabia. In the border regions of northern Arabia, Syrian and Iraqi holy saints and ascetics were worshipped.

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) Analyze the nature of the Quraysh tribe.

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- 2) Write a note on the dominant tribes in Medina.

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- 3) Tick mark (✓/ ×) against the true and false statements:

- i) Christianity was also represented by merchants who travelled in Arabian

caravans from Najran in southern Arabia to Busra in Syria. ()

ii) Medina had a large Jewish population. ()

iii) The Jewish tribes of Qurayza and Nadir are said to have inhabited the Lower Medina. ()

12.3 TRIBAL AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Pre-Islamic tribals of Mecca and Medina were largely idol worshippers. However, in broader details there were differences in the religious traditions of the Meccans to that of the Medina.

12.3.1 Religious and Ritual Practices of the Meccans

The pre-Islamic Arabs were idol worshippers. They were polytheists, i.e. they believed in the existence of many gods, but they also believed in one supreme God called Allah whose house was in the Kaaba. Allah was considered to be the supreme God or the God Creator who is supposed to have exercised his power over all other tribal deities. Since the people of Mecca were idol worshippers, they created idols of every shape and size. The most common deity was the household idol. The great God of Mecca was Hubal, an idol made of red carnelian.

The early pilgrimage (*Hajj*) to the House of Allah or Ka'aba (Arabic for cube), a rectangular building, was the most predominant ritual which helped in maintaining solidarity among the tribes of Mecca. In the Kaaba were gathered the sacred tokens of all the clans of Mecca. It thus merged their several cults into one. A number of more active divinities seem to have received special honour at Mecca, notably three goddesses — al-Lat, al-Uzza and al-Manat. Al-Lat meant 'goddess', al-Uzza meant 'all-powerful' and considered to be goddess of might and protection and al-Manat meant the 'goddess of fate.' Their idols were kept inside the Kaaba. Worshippers honoured the Kaaba by circling it a fixed number of times on foot and touching the sacred stones built into it, particularly the Black Stone in one corner. Near the Kaaba was a sacred well called Zamzam.



**Figure 12.1: The Arabian Goddess Al-Lat standing on a lion flanked by Al-Manat and Al-Uzza
2nd Century Relief from Hatra.**

Credit: Unknown

Source: <http://artyx.ru/books/item/f00/s00/z0000023/st004.shtml>; <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c8/AllatHatra.jpg>

The Meccans also believed in the existence of minor spirits or *jinn*s that were often considered to be protectors of particular tribes. Each of these spirits was associated with a shrine in some given locality, a tree or a grove or even a rock formation. Stars were also considered to be divine.

12.3.2 Religious and Ritual Practices at Medina

Like in Mecca, in Medina too idols were associated with various levels of tribal organization. Here also, the household idols were the most common form of idol worship. Above the household idols were the idols that belonged to the noblemen. Every nobleman in Medina owned an idol that had a name of its own. In addition to this, smaller tribal groups, had idols which also had names.

The idols belonging to smaller tribal groups were called *batns*. These idols were kept in sanctuaries called *bayt*. Sacrifices were offered to them. Above the *batns* in the tribal system of Medina was an idol called Huzam. Sacrifices were also offered to Huzam. The Khazraj tribe worshipped the idol of al-Khamis. The Azd, Aws and Khazraj worshipped the idol of al-Saida which was located on Mount Uhud, north of Medina.

Magical practices and superstitions were common in Medina. People feared the evil eye and protected themselves with amulets.

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) Critically analyze the religious practices of the people of Mecca.

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- 2) Write five lines on the religious and ritual practices of tribes of Medina.

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- 3) Match the following:

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| i) Hubal | a) Goddess of Fate |
| ii) Huzam | b) God of Mecca |
| iii) Al-Mannat | c) Medina |

12.4 THE ARAB TRADING NETWORK BEFORE THE 6TH CENTURY

The most important trading centre of western and central Arabia was Mecca in the Hejaz/Hijaz. Mecca was a strategic point because it was at the centre of two trade routes: the route running from north to south, linking Palestine to Yemen, and the route connecting Ethiopia and the Red Sea in the west with the Persian Gulf in the east. The Quraysh tribe of Mecca in the mid-sixth century came to dominate the trade linking north-eastern Arabia with Yemen or with Abyssinia by sea. They came to dominate not only long distance trade but also internal trade.

Trade also linked Arabia with the wider world. Merchants brought textiles, jewellery, weapons, grain, and wine into Arabia. Arabia exported hides, leather and animals. Arabian markets intersected with Indian Ocean commerce on the east and south coasts. The caravans provided a link between the civilized parts of southern Arabia and the **Fertile Crescent**. Apart from their own produce, the caravans carried goods in transit from India, East Africa and the Far East on the one hand, and on the other from all over the Mediterranean world. The Bedouins had complete control over all that passed through their territories.

During the 6th century, there was a gradual change taking place in Arabia as far as the main occupation of the Arabs is concerned. Some of the tribes began to opt for trade as their main occupation. These tribes gradually gave up nomadic pastoralism and became full-time trading communities. The shift to trade was most prominent in the province of Hijaz of which Mecca was a part. Due to the dislocation of the international trade route passing through the Persian Gulf and Iraq, caused by the Sassanid-Byzantine conflict, some of the trade began to be diverted through the Red Sea or overland from Yemen to Syria. As a result of this, many caravans began to travel through Hijaz, and over a period of time, the Hijaz route acquired greater significance. It was due to the prominent position acquired by Hijaz on account of the restructuring of the trade links that Mecca, which was a settlement of traders in Hijaz, rose to prominence in the sixth century.

12.5 POLITICAL STRUCTURE IN PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIA

In practice, the Arabs were not bound by any written code of law, and there was no state structure which could enforce its statutes. There were no authoritarian political forms. Individual prestige and close lineage loyalties mattered the most.

The tribal chief provided leadership in fighting, served as an arbitrator of disputes, and in many cases was also the custodian of the groups' sacred symbols. However, the chief had no authority to force the acceptance of his position upon any family or clan. Every man was free to break his ties with the clan, and depart at any given time with his family.

There was no common court of justice. In the absence of any legal authority, inter-group restraint was maintained by the principle of the retaliatory blood-feud, i.e. an injury by an outsider to any member of a group was regarded as crime committed against the entire group and the enmity was considered against the whole group to which the outsider belonged. The injured group's honour required that it must avenge the dishonor. The norm was normally an eye for an eye, a life for a life.

12.6 SOCIAL STRUCTURES IN PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIA

The pre-Islamic Arabia was pre-dominantly a pastoral-nomadic tribal society. Let us learn the internal workings of these clan based tribal groups.

12.6.1 Tribal Structure and Leadership

Arabic society was tribal and included nomadic, semi-nomadic and settled populations. The Bedouins developed their distinctive type of social organization. They were constantly on the move. The Bedouin lifestyle became a typical feature of Arabia. There were very few communities which led a settled life.

The basic units were small groups, which might be called clans or extended families. A tribe called *qabila* was made up of few clans which acknowledged some kind of kinship. Marshall Hodgson calls the larger groups as tribes and the smaller groups as clans. Each tribe had its ancestor, either real or imaginary. Due to arid climatic conditions, large concentrations of population could not be supported. As clans grew larger, they moved away to form independent units of their own. This helped in maintaining a proportionate size of each tribe. The equality among the Bedouins was reinforced by their tribal organization. Each member of a tribe was equal to any other.

There was a system of hereditary economic and social solidarity among smaller or larger groups of families. Families were associated in larger groups for general economic purposes, and these in turn in still larger ones for political strength. Groups at every levels possessed internal autonomy. At every level, these groups defined themselves in terms of a real or fictive common descent. Each larger group possessed its own pasturing grounds and defended its grazing rights in their own areas, and attempted to better its position at the expense of others.

Each tribal group elected a leader or chief. He was chosen partly due to his family descent and partly due to his personal wisdom, but his authority depended strictly on his personal prestige, and he had to be constantly on an alert to maintain this. Consequently, he had to show many qualities — to retain his followers by his kindness and generosity, to display moderation in all circumstances, generally to fall in line with the unspoken will of those he governed and yet assert his own valour and authority.

12.6.2 Inequality and Slavery

All clans were not equal. Some had grown rich by plunder, trade or by preying on the settled tribes or even on other nomads. From time to time, individuals belonging to different clans even built up private fortunes. Their society was, therefore, divided between the rich and the poor. A number of tribes or clans, such as the tribes of smiths, were looked down upon by the rest as inferior.

Members of some of the wealthy clans even used their wealth to purchase and keep slaves. However, the conditions of a nomadic life were not suitable for the institution of slavery, therefore, slaves were often freed. The freed slaves or *mawla* remained the dependents of their previous masters.

12.6.3 The Elite Camel Nomads

In the more arid parts of Arabia, the Bedouins or camel nomads were considered to be among the elites. In addition to their camels, they often had horses which they used for raiding purposes. Sheep and goat herders also inhabited the area, however, they had to

stay near agricultural lands and therefore they were at the mercy of those who were more mobile than them. The pure camel herders were more mobile and resourceful than either the agriculturists or the other pastoralists. They boasted of superior status than the other tribals of the area. The Bedouin nomads used to demand a form of tribute called *khurwa* from the agriculturalists in return for protection and assurance against plunder.

12.6.4 Intra-Tribal Warfare

The relations between the tribes could have been peaceful but due to conditions of poverty, there was a strong temptation to acquire the wealth of those who were richer. Many tribes, therefore, engaged in *ghazwa* or raids on other tribes. The rules of these raids were laid down by tradition. An attempt was made to seize goods and cattle without the loss of life, because man slaughter was not encouraged and carried with it severe penalties.

Check Your Progress-3

1) Define the following:

i) *Qabila*

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ii) *Mawla*

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iii) *Ghazwa*

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2) Evaluate the role of the tribal chief in the pre-Islamic Arabia.

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12.7 ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Bedouins were largely camel herders; along the oases sedentary communities lived and involved in the agricultural activities; while to a limited extent Arabs were also involved in the mining activities.

12.7.1 Camel Nomadism

Since most of the peninsula was a desert, the natural way of life was nomadic and pastoral. During the second millennium, before the Christian era, the inhabitants of

these regions domesticated the camel, a creature ideally suited to the desert. Once camel nomadism had developed, it carried with it potentialities of a major social force. Camels allowed their herders greater mobility than other pastoral animals. Camels were able to endure longer than other animals without food and even water, and so to travel farther between places without water. Camels could, in fact, travel continuously for three weeks without any food or water in temperatures as high as 50 degree Celsius. The camel could, therefore, be used to explore and exploit the resources of the desert. The camel was also a great beast of burden, and could be used to carrying heavy loads. The camel also yielded good milk. Therefore, it not only sustained its owners but was also a commercially viable option. This gave the Bedouin a potential predominance over not only the desert oases but even the nearby reaches of the settled countries, allowing them not merely to trade, but in favourable circumstances, also to exact tribute. The camel nomads became involved in the commerce between the Mediterranean lands and the southern seas.

Between Roman and Sassanian empires was a vast block of Bedouin Arabia. In this area camel-nomadism prevailed, mainly in the northern, western and central regions. These were arid steppe lands dotted with oases which were natural formations where water was found close to the surface, and this made regular irrigation possible. Due to prevalent nomadism, the herdsmen could maintain their animals, supplementing their milk and occasional flesh with the wheat and dates that agriculturists could grow in the oases. The agriculturists could get animals from the herdsmen and also specialized products that they needed from a distance.

12.7.2 Agriculture in Arabia

A few cereals were grown by small farming communities in the region. Near the oases, a small sedentary population came to settle which began to cultivate the date palm. The date palm was not only a fruit but every single part of it could be utilized in some way or the other. It was known as the 'mother and aunt' of the Arabs. Date and camel milk was the staple diet of the region.

In the regions of Oman and Bahrain agriculture was the mainstay of the economy. Bahrain exported grain to Mecca. The farmers who cultivated the date palms and the scattered fields of fruits and vegetables were the Bedouin camel herders of the desert. The Bedouins, peasants and townsfolk of the neighbouring regions, all depended upon each other. Therefore, they had to co-exist.

12.7.3 Industry and Mining in Arabia

Arabia included many economically developed, productive areas. The Sasanians helped develop silver and copper mining in Yemen. Copper and silver were also mined in eastern Arabia. Leather and cloth was produced in Yemen. In north-central Arabia, the town of al-Rabadha, on the Kufa-Medina route, produced metal, glass, ceramics and soapstone wares.

12.8 LITERATURE OF THE PRE-ISLAMIC PERIOD

In an unstable tribal society, there was little opportunity for the arts to flourish, however, literature was an exception. In fact, the political, social, religious, and economic complexity of the Arabian society created a rich and sophisticated cultural environment.

Arabia was multilingual, although Aramaic was probably the most spoken language in pre-Islamic Arabia. But by the sixth century, the Arabic language became important

and it began to be written and spoken in the region. The Arabic script appeared a century before the Islamic era. It was derived from earlier writing in Aramaic, influenced by Nabatean script, and then re-shaped by the Aramean Jews.

Arabic was also a language of religion. As early as the fourth century, Iraqi and Himyarite Christians translated the Old and New Testament of the Bible in Arabic. Christian liturgies and prayer books were also produced in Arabic. Arabs in Medina may also have studied Arabic, Aramaic, and Hebrew in Jewish schools. A common language was a significant uniting factor for the otherwise dispersed Arab tribes. A distinctive Arabic linguistic identity had developed by the end of the fifth century. Patricia Crone is of the view that there was remarkable “cultural homogeneity” among the Arabs in the sixth century.

Poetry was highly valued by the Arabs. From the sixth century onwards poems began to be composed in Arabic in a specific form called *rajaz*. Each tribe had its own poets. These poets entertained their audience by narrating tales of valour and glory of the tribe. Apart from the *rajaz*, a highly developed form of poetry also took shape in Arabia. This was known as *qasida* or ode. These poems were long and were supposed to be sung. A particular form of *qasida*, called *muallaqat* or suspended poems, became very popular across the Arabian peninsula. One of the earliest and most well-known composers of the *muallaqat* was Imrul Qays, who is considered to be first poet of pre-Islamic Arabia. Some other distinguished poets who composed *muallaqat* were Tarafa (of the tribe of Bakr), Zuhayr (belonged to Banu Muzaina tribe) and Labid (associated with the Banu Amir tribe of Hawazin).

Check Your Progress-4

- 1) Critically analyze the concept of camel nomadism.

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- 2) Write a note on literature of the pre-Islamic Arabia.

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- 3) Fill in the blanks

- i) The Sasanians helped develop mining in Yemen.
ii) Bahrain exported to Mecca.
iii) The camel nomads became involved in the commerce between the and the southern seas.
iv) The date palm came to be known as theof the Arabs.

12.9 SUMMARY

In this Unit, a general survey of the institutions of pre-Islamic Arabia has been discussed. The characteristic features of the tribal system as well as the ritual and religious practices of the tribes have been outlined. The social structure of Arabia and the various constituent elements of society have also been highlighted. An in-depth analysis of the trade network as well as the economic conditions has also been made. The Unit has also dealt with the nature of tribal administration. A brief description of the development of literature during pre-Islamic times has also been taken into account.

12.10 KEY WORDS

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| Bedouins | : Bedouins were Arab nomads who inhabited the desert region of Arabian Peninsula, Iraq, Levant and North Africa. The term is derived from Arabic <i>badawi</i> (desert dwellers). Largely, Bedouins were followers of Islam. However, in the Fertile Crescent region some were Christians as well. In the <i>Old Testament</i> they are referred to as Qedarites. Assyrians called them Arabaa. They themselves address as the Arabs. |
| Hejaz/Hijaz | : Al-Hejaz/Hijaz is the holy land of Islam. Geographically, it formed the western part of Saudi Arabia where the two holiest cities of Islam – Mecca and Medina are located. |
| Fertile Crescent | : The Fertile Crescent is a crescent shaped region comprised of the modern day Iraq, Israel, Palestinian territories, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, southern tip of Turkey and the western tip of Iran. |

12.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) See Sub-section 12.2.1
- 2) See Sub-section 12.2.1
- 3) i) ✓ ii) ✓ iii) ×

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) See Sub-section 12.3.1
- 2) See Sub-section 12.3.2
- 3) i) b) ii) c) iii) a)

Check Your Progress-3

- 1) i) See Sub-section 12.6.1 ii) See Sub-section 12.6.2 iii) See Sub-section 12.6.4

2) See Sub-section 12.6.1

Check Your Progress-4

1) See Sub-section 12.7.1

2) See Section 12.8

3) i) silver and copper; ii) grain; iii) Mediterranean; iv) Mother and Aunt

12.12 SUGGESTED READINGS

Farooqui, Amar, (2002) *Early Social Formations* (New Delhi: Manak Publications Pvt. Ltd.), Revised Edition.

Hodgson, Marshall G.S., (2004) *The Venture of Islam, Vol.I, The Classical Age of Islam* (Lahore: Vanguard Books Pvt Ltd.).

Holt, P.M., Ann K.S. Lambton and Bernard Lewis, (ed.) (1970) *The Cambridge History of Islam, Vol. I, The Central Islamic Lands* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Lapidus, Ira M., (2012) *Islamic Societies to the Nineteenth Century: A Global History* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press).

Robinson, Chase F., (ed.) (2010) *The New Cambridge History of Islam, Vol. I, The Formation of the Islamic World, Sixth to Eleventh Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Rodinson, Maxime (1971) *Mohammed* (Allen Lane: The Penguin Press).

12.13 INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO RECOMMENDATIONS

Arabia Before Islam

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HDjpp4Nf73I>

Gods of Arabs Before Islam

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3q7EfeFJ7Jg>

UNIT 13 THE RISE AND EXPANSION OF ISLAM*

Structure

- 13.0 Objectives
- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 Prophet Muhammad and the Beginning of Islam
- 13.3 Modern Historiographical Approaches
- 13.4 Theories Pertaining to the Rise of Islam: Some Historiographical Reconsideration
 - 13.4.1 Meccan Trade Theory
 - 13.4.2 Nativist Theory
 - 13.4.3 Revisionist Theory
- 13.5 Spread of Islam after the Death of Prophet Muhammad
- 13.6 Islam and the West: The Crusades
- 13.7 Summary
- 13.8 Keywords
- 13.9 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises
- 13.10 Suggested Readings
- 13.11 Instructional Video Recommendations

13.0 OBJECTIVES

The present Unit covers the rise of Islam upto the first four Pious Caliphs. After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- appreciate the rise of Islam in the Arabian peninsula,
- locate the socio-political, economic and religious scenario in pre-Islamic Arabia,
- comprehend various approaches pertaining to the emergence of Islam in the Arabian peninsula,
- learn basic theories pertaining to the rise of Islam in the Arabian peninsula,
- know the consolidation process of the Islamic expansion under the four Pious Caliphs, and
- situate the long drawn crusades that shook the entire Europe and the Middle East and the Maghrib during the seventh to the thirteenth centuries.

13.1 INTRODUCTION

In the 6th century CE a phenomenon occurred in the Arabian peninsula, particularly in Hejaz/Hijaz, which had a huge impact on West Asia, Europe and Central Asia and changed the course of the history of the World. It was the rise of Islam. The movement

was so swift that within a period of half a century, the Caliphal empire was well-established and within a century, Islam became a world religion.

13.2 PROPHET MUHAMMAD AND THE BEGINNING OF ISLAM

By the early 7th century, in West Asia there existed a combination of cultured settled world and a world on its frontiers which was in closer contact to its northern neighbours and opening itself up to their cultures. The power of the Byzantine (defeated by the Ottomans in 1453) and the Sassanid empire (lost to the Arabs in 651) was somewhat on a decline while the settled tribal communities in Arabian Peninsula were consolidating their position and some of them on the borderlands were actively participating in the politics of Syria and Iraq. Soon a new political order was created in which the ruling group was formed not by the peoples of the earlier empires but by the Arabs from western Arabia, particularly Hejaz.

The new political order identified itself with a revelation given by God to Muhammad in the form of *Quran*. Abul Qasim Muhammad b. Abdullah was born in Mecca in 570 CE. He belonged to the Hashim clan of the tribe of Quraysh. Quraysh had well-established themselves in the field of trade and commerce and were counted amongst the wealthiest merchants of Arabia though the clan of Muhammad was not the most prominent one within it. Due to their role in trade, they emerged as the single most powerful tribe of the peninsula. In fact, trade was not the only source from where their prominence sprang. The control of the sanctuary Ka'aba, where the images of local gods were kept and which was central to the religious orientation of the people of the region, by the Quraysh enhanced the prestige of the tribe. They had fostered the pilgrimages (and accompanying fairs) made at certain seasons to Mecca itself and to a neutral spot not far away ('Arafat), as well as other markets held in the region. Muhammad had grown up an orphan, under the care of uncle Abu Talib. He had shown his competence as a trader in the service of a well-to-do widow, Khadijah.

In his thirties, Muhammad seems to have become engrossed with questions of how to live a serious life of truth and purity. He meditated intensely during periods of retirement in a cave on Mount Hira' outside the town. He did not dissociate himself from the rites and customs of the Quraysh, which indeed continued to be dear to him. But he sought something more which they lacked. Around the age of forty, during one of his retirements in Mount Hira', he heard a voice and saw a vision which summoned him to offer worship to the God who had created the world, one God of the monotheists. Encouraged by his wife, Khadijah, he accepted the summons as coming from God Himself. Thereupon, he received further messages which he interpreted as divine revelation, and the prayer recitation of which formed a major element of the new cult. The messages collectively were called the *Qur'an*. For a time, only his wife and a few close friends shared the cult with him. But after some years the messages demanded that he summon his fellow Quraysh to the worship of God, warning them of impending calamities if they refused. From a private monotheist, he was to become a Prophet to his people.

As support for Muhammad grew, his relations with the leading families of Quraysh became worse. They did not accept his claim to be the messenger of God and was considered as someone who attacked their way of life. The situation of Muhammad became dodgy when Khadija and Abu Talib died in the same year. As the teachings developed, more opposition from the followers of accepted beliefs became clearer. Muhammad realised that for the safety of his men, to overcome the resistance of Quraysh and to increase the number of his adherents, some political base was necessary. Finally,

his position became so difficult that in 622 he left Mecca for an oasis settlement 200 miles to the north, Yathrib, later known as Medina. This movement to Medina in 622 CE is known as the *hijra*, the date from which the Muslim era began.

Medina was an agricultural oasis. Like Mecca it was not inhabited by a single tribe, but unlike Mecca it was marked by bitter feuds between the leading tribal groups — the Aws and the Khazraj which threatened at times the existence of Medina. Also, like Mecca, Medina was undergoing social changes, which was undermining Bedouin form of kinship. Agriculture rather than pastoral needs governed its economy, and its social life was increasingly governed by spatial proximity rather than kinship ties. He had been welcomed by the inhabitants of Medina who accepted him as the arbitrator of their disputes. In a society with no common law or government, a man with a religious vision and who was just, politic, tactful was often selected by the feuding clans as the arbitrator. The early biographers have preserved the texts of agreements signed between the adherents of Muhammad on one hand and the two main tribes, Aws and Khazraj together with some Jewish groups on the other.

From Medina, Muhammad began to consolidate his power and soon entered in an armed struggle with the Quraysh. The community came to believe that it was necessary to participate in the wars to fight for what was right. First the *Muhajirun*, the exiled Meccans, raided Meccan caravans for booty. The raids soon turned into battles. By 624, at the Battle of Badr, Muhammad defeated a larger Meccan force and won tremendous prestige everywhere in Arabia. It was taken as divine favour which led to the defection of some of the Bedouin tribe who had the responsibility to protect the Mecca's caravan lines. In the following years, Meccans took the initiative and attacked Muhammad and Medina first in the Battle of Uhud (625) and then in the Battle of Khandak (627), though the first one was a defeat for Muhammad, but both the battles proved profitable for him. He faced the worst attacks of Mecca. However, each time the circumstances helped him to consolidate his position with the Jewish clans of Medina.

Muhammad's aim was not to fight Mecca till death but to convert her people to Islam. Therefore, he eased after the battle of Khandak. In 628 CE, Muhammad along with his followers, made a pilgrimage to Ka'aba. According to Ira Lapidus, he did this to show that Islam was an Arabian religion and would preserve the pilgrimage rites in which Mecca had a great stake. The idea that Abraham was the founder of a high monotheistic faith and of the sanctuary at Mecca already existed. Now he was seen neither a Jew nor a Christian but a common ancestor of both, and as ancestor of Muslims too. There was also a change in Muhammad's relations with Quraysh and Mecca. Muhammad concluded a truce at al-Hudaybiya as he marched for pilgrimage in which the Meccans agreed to admit the Muslims for the pilgrimage and Muhammad dropped his demand that he be regarded as the Prophet of God. Moreover, he agreed to an unequal arrangement. According to this treaty children who left Mecca to become Muslims would have to be returned if they did not have parental consent, while Muslim apostates would not be returned. Though this was an unequal alliance, Muhammad made tremendous gain from it. Muhammad was a power to contend with and that Mecca had given up her efforts to defeat him. Muhammad's adherents in Mecca continued to swell. In 630, the leaders of the city of Mecca surrendered it to Muhammad who occupied it without resistance. He gave amnesty to everyone and announced the principles of new order that every claim of privilege or blood or property is abolished by him except the custody of the shrine Ka'aba and the watering of the pilgrims. In the year 632, Muhammad died.

Check Your Progress-1

1) Write five lines on the early life of Prophet Muhammad.

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2) Trace Prophet Muhammad's rise to power.

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3) Mention the process of the beginning of Islam in the Arabian peninsula.

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13.3 MODERN HISTORIOGRAPHICAL APPROACHES

There are basically four dominant modern approaches for writing early Islamic history:

- i) **Descriptive Approach:** This approach for the study of Islam utilized the Islamic sources in the first instance to describe Islam and its early history. They were drawn to the literature written by the Muslim scholars for the rich information it provided and believed that since these were Islamic sources they would present a less biased account of Islam. It was a move ahead of the bigotry of polemical traditions but it overestimated the documentary value of Islamic literary sources. The section on Islam provided by Gibbon in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* fits into this category. It was a predominant approach in the 18th-19th centuries.
- ii) **Source-Critical Approach:** With a passage of time, historians started realizing the limitations in Islamic sources. As common in medieval sources they contained sometimes contradictory reports. The scholars studied the contradictions and attributed them to different informants who had different agendas and degrees of reliability as reporters (individual reports were introduced through a chain of narrator called *sanad/isnad*). The scrutiny of earlier informants led to the Source-Critical Approach. It was initially developed in the second half of the 19th century. An

idea developed that early Islamic history can be reconstructed by making a comparative analysis of various reports as by comparing them. One can set aside those traceable to ‘weak’ informants’ reports and this way one could sift earlier historical from later legendary material.

- iii) **Tradition-Critical Approach:** Its advocates challenged the assumption that information in traditional Islamic literature represented copies of early documents or carry an eye-witness account through a chain of narrators. They argue that reports we find in a number of literary works merely capture in written form the oral traditions about the past. The accounts must be used to reconstruct the past with great caution because it is usually impossible to know which material may have to be dropped, added or changed in the course of transmission. Pioneer in this regard is the work of Ignaz Golziher whose work *Muhammadan Studies* (1889-90) presented such insights that many reports attributed to Prophet were a later addition. Many scholars of 20th century like Joseph Schacht, M. J. Kister, Rubin etc. offered detailed tradition-critical studies.
- iv) **Sceptical Approach:** The complexities of sources led many to adopt this approach. It rejects the historicity of almost all the traditionally conveyed material. The fundamental argument of scholars in this group is that tradition may not contain any kernel of true material and even if it does have, it is not possible to disentangle it from the many layers of distortions due to successive waves of compression, fragmentation and reinterpretation. The skeptical school raised pertinent questions like reliability of sources from early Islamic history and appropriate attitude of scholars towards it but sometimes the claim seems overstated. Moreover, the approach is negative. While it questions ‘what happened’ it has not yet offered a convincing alternative reconstruction of ‘what might have happened’. Noteworthy earlier contributions in this regard were of Patricia Crone’s *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam*, Michel Cook’s *Hagarism* (1977) and John Wansborough’s *The Sectarian Milieu* (1978).

These different approaches emerged at successive historical periods but rather than supplanting its predecessors, each new approach co-existed beside them and all approaches are being practised in varying degrees.

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) Explain the descriptive approach of writing early Islamic history.

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- 2) What is the source-critical approach to study the early Islamic History.

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3) Do you agree with sceptical proponents who rejected the historicity of all traditionally conveyed material?
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13.4 THEORIES PERTAINING TO THE RISE OF ISLAM: SOME HISTORIOGRAPHICAL RECONSIDERATION

There are two basic theories regarding the rise of Islam:

- 1) Meccan Trade Theory/Commercial Wealth Theory
- 2) Nativist Theory

13.4.1 Meccan Trade Theory

The propounder of Meccan trade theory was Montgomery Watt. He saw the emergence of new religion as a result of deeper socio-economic changes and tried to look at why did it gain such wide acceptance among Arab tribes within a short span of time. Montgomery Watt, who has written many books on Muhammad and his life like *Muhammad at Mecca* and *Muhamamd at Medina*, examines the nature of society on the eve of the emergence of Islam. He sees the rise of Islam as response to the transformation which was taking shape due to trade and adoption of sedentary life-style by some tribes in the region. Mecca was the juncture of two major trade routes, one went north and south through the mountainous Hejaz from the Yemen and Indian Ocean lands to Syria and Mediterranean lands and the other, less important, went east and west from Iraq, Iran and the Central Eurasia to Abyssinia and Eastern Africa. Meccan traders were involved in long distance trade. The Quraysh controlled the north-south trade route and enhanced their riches through this lucrative trade. It was at Mecca that the most striking changes occurred. The expansion of Meccan commerce eroded traditional ties and introduced tensions in the society. The wealth from trade or earnings from pilgrims brought into Mecca did not benefit everyone uniformly. The rise of Mecca as hub of expanding international trade network caused a number of problems: greater social stratification, greater social inequalities, and greater dependence of poorer classes on wealthier ones. This led to conflict at various levels. The relatively simple tribal organization of Quraysh had no mechanism to cope with this new situation. Moreover, there were tribes which were taking up agriculture on a limited scale and other coming within the orbit of settled societies on the peripheries of Arabia. Muhammad's call for unity was an answer to this new emerging social differentiation and Islam provided these tribes with a scheme for social formation. In this scenario, Muhammad emerged and his proclaimed message was intended to dissolve the tribal units altogether and led to the formation of a single community. Since the movement declared equality of all men before God, communities facing social inequalities now acquired or were expected to acquire much greater social economic equality. The movement emphasized on social

justice and rejection of all forms of hierarchical class differentiation in the Arab society. The emergence of Prophet and the success of his teachings are interpreted in terms of solutions he provided to the contemporary social problems.

Similar opinion has also been put forward by other historians like Rodinson in his work *Muhammad*, Marshal Hodgson in *Venture of Islam* and M.A. Shaban in *Islamic History: A New Interpretation AD 600-750*.

13.4.2 Nativist Theory

This hypothesis of Watt that the Quraysh transition to a merchandise economy undermined the traditional order of Mecca generating social and moral malice to which Muhammad's teaching was the answer, was challenged by Patricia Crone. She asserted that the *Mecca traded in humble products rather than in luxury goods*. While Watt argued that Mecca was the transit point in the long-distance trade between India, Africa and Mediterranean, Patricia Crone on the basis of Kister (1986) asserted that trade was of humble kind. The international trade of Meccans rested largely on articles such as leather and clothing. She questioned, 'could they have founded commercial empire of international dimensions on the basis of leather goods and clothing?'

Looking at the articles of trade she concluded that trade in spices was very little and there existed almost no exchange trade in gold and silver. Other items like raisin, wine, slaves and other things were sold exclusively within Arabia. It was leather which was traded on a large scale and clothing, animals and miscellaneous food stuffs, though less attested, probably had a large circulation.

She proposed three negative points: **First**, it was not a transit trade. Meccans were considered as middle men in long distance trading network. They used to collect native and foreign goods from south Arabia and Ethiopia and transported them to Syria and Iraq. But according to Crone, goods they sold in the North were of north Arabian origin, and not of Indian southeast Asian origin. Perfumes were purchased from south Arabia for resale in the north and in Hijaz and not for sale in Byzantine or Persian empire. Moreover, any Meccan goods, be it perfume or other items were destined for redistribution within these regions. They were markets for Hijazi leather-ware and clothing, Yemeni perfume in cities of southern Syria, Hira but not to Antioch, Constantinople, or Ctesiphon. **Second**, it was not a trade of a kind that attracted the attention of Greek and the Fertile Crescent. There is a mention of political importance of Arabia but Quraysh and their trading centres were not mentioned at all in Greek, Latin, Syria, Aramaic, Coptic or in any other literature composed outside Arabia. **Third**, it was not a trade that presupposed control of any trade route in Arabia.

Patricia opines that the silence of sources explained the nature of trade itself and that it should have attracted the attention outside Arabia had it been on a large scale. Quraysh were traders, therefore, their commercial activities were of the kind conducted in this region since time immemorial. Control over trade routes (Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Ethiopia) is therefore, meaningless and sources do not assert that the Meccans were in control of any trading routes or dominated the export trade of any particular locality, let alone monopolizing the trade of Arabia at large. Clearly it was a local trade. For Patricia Crone, Meccans traded in humble goods than in luxury items.

She further points out that such a brief period of commercial wealth was not likely to upset Meccan society to a radical change. It took more than a century of commercial success to undermine the tribal order of a population that had been neither uprooted nor forced to adopt a different organization in connection with its economic activities.

Viewed as pagan enemies of Islam, the Meccans were accused of neglect of kinship ties and other protective relationships as well as having a tendency for the strong to eat the weak. However, looking at the sources it seems that the Meccans preferred their traditional way of life to Islam. It is for this that they have been penalized in sources. One should not forget that the Message was accepted in Medina. They accepted monotheism. The Meccans had to be conquered before they were to be converted. It seems that the problems for which Muhammad had solutions must have been problems shared by the people of Medina.

Patricia after making these points posed another question that why a social reform in Mecca would explode across the entire Peninsula? Clearly one must concentrate on issues which were common to Arabia and not just Mecca. Islam originated in tribal set up. Their gods were ultimate sources of natural phenomena — rain, fertility, disease etc. — that were of great importance to human life but beyond their control. They were worshiped for practical importance and the services they could render in controlling these phenomena. But they neither required nor received emotional commitment, love, loyalty from their devotee. A god was no more than a powerful being and the point of serving him was that he could be expected to respond by using his power in favour of the servants/devotees. The practices like the great annual pilgrimage were apparently not conducted in the name of any 'one' 'single' deity.

Pre-Islamic Arabia had less developed mythology, economy, rituals. Religious life was reduced to periodic visits to holy places. They were not involved in complex questions about nature and meaning of life. Was death the end? The concept of religion as the 'ultimate truth' concerning nature and meaning of life, was absent. So conversion was not due to any spiritual crisis, religious decadence, or decline of pagan beliefs. What the mass conversion shows is that Prophet Muhammad offered them a programme, a strategy, a road map of Arab state formation and conquest.

It is believed that the turning point of Prophet Muhammad's career came when he began to attack the ancestral god of Quraysh. He attacked the very foundation of his tribe. It was not monotheism which posed a threat to pagan sanctuary or Meccan trade. The Meccans were not willingly to tolerate an attack on their ancestors. But Muhammad had a vision for alternative community. In denouncing his ancestors, he demonstrated that his God was incompatible with tribal divisions as they existed. He showed that his God was both a single and an ancestral deity. Allah was the one and only God of Abraham, the ancestor of the Arabs. Since around ancestral deities, groups formed, therefore it was around Allah and Allah alone that the Arabs should be regrouped, all ancestral deities that sanctioned current divisions being false.

It is indeed fascinating that Muhammad and his successors were able to bring the unification in effect in a region which had never been politically united. The society of Medina was divided by feuds, it was not difficult to explain why they would be willingly to experiment with Prophet Muhammad's political programme. But why did the Arabs in Muhammad's time find vision of state structures and unification so attractive?

Crone argues that he preached state formation and conquest. Without conquest unification of Arabia was not possible. It was a period when Persians and Byzantines were encroaching upon Arabian peninsula and their presence was felt throughout the peninsula. Arabia had been subjected to foreign rule. In such a scenario, Islam originated as a *nativist movement*, or in other words as a *primitive reaction to alien domination*. Nativist movements were primitive in the sense that those who engaged in them were people without any political organization. She sees early Islam as *nativist movement* born out of deep attachment to Arabian way of life in opposition to penetration of

foreign influences. The foreign influences were identified by her as those values which were introduced by Byzantine and Persian's attempts to dominate it. But then Crone also agrees to the view that sedantization was taking place in certain parts of Arabia which necessitated growth of state structure at the expense of tribal ties.

Patricia believed monotheism was used by Muhammad to galvanize Arab reaction to the encroachments of late antiquity's superpowers: Byzantine and Sassanid Persia. However, conceptually, her idea of economic and military imperialism and Arab nationalism, has inherent flaws. She weaved the plausible around the obscure. But why were the Arabs became so important at this time/juncture? Can a movement so successful be based only on conquest? Patricia also made arbitrary selection of sources to fit in her arguments. If Quraysh system of agreements with tribes on commerce be rejected as fabrication then it became more difficult to account for the ascendancy established by Quraysh and inherited by Muhammad. As Mecca lacked natural resources, foodstuffs such as grain and date had to be imported. To purchase it they must have had some sources of income.

R.B. Serjeant, reviewing her work, said that no doubt Quraish commercial activity has been inflated by Western writers. Lammens and followers of his theory argue that the trade inherited by the Meccans was of the scale described by Pliny and in *Periplus* (keeping in mind the trade pattern of classical age). W.A. Watt developed his theory out of it. Nonetheless, this does not negate the existence of Quraysh commerce. Crone has also questioned the argument that the Quraysh made regular journeys to points in northern Yemen and traded even in commodities. She argues that a commodity which was so plentiful in Syria and Byzantium, why should these countries be interested in importing it from elsewhere? Crone has emphasised that we need to look into other factors also like, *demand for foreign rarities, fluctuations of prices, or scarcities arising from political actions*. She also does not believe that such accidents/actions as piracy affected trading to any significant extent instead weather conditions and many such other factors did play equally important role. However, it appears that Crone's whole treatment of the subject is strictly mechanical, not allowing scope for such eventualities. Interestingly, on the one hand she talks about tribal sentiments and on the other hand presence of strong Arab consciousness, both are contradictory.

Though Patricia Crone's work has been criticized by many, Patricia's work of 1987 and also an earlier work of Michael Cook (*Hagarism*) in 1977 with its provocative manner of presentation ignited intense discussion among scholars about the origin of Islam.

13.4.3 Revisionist Theory

Fred Donner in his lecture delivered at the University of Edinburgh ('The Study of Islam's Origins since W. Montgomery Watt's Publications' November 23, 2015, University of Edinburgh) made an extensive survey of the revisionist works being done on the subject of Islam's origin. The appearance of these first revisionist works completely revitalized the study of early Islam. He pointed out that another dimension was added in the 1970s, i.e., Late Antiquity studies, with Peter Brown's epoch-making book *The World of Late Antiquity* in 1971. Brown's book included a final chapter on Late Antiquity as an appendix to the early Islamic history (to the fall of the Umayyads and early Abbasids). Brown synthesized several fields of study that had hitherto been largely separate — the Late Roman (or early Byzantine) history, church history, especially the history of the eastern churches, the study of Sasanian history and the study of early Islamic history. Brown conceived Late Antiquity extending from the second to the eighth centuries CE in the Near East and the Mediterranean, and portrayed this period as the

one that was of the most dynamic cultural and social creativity rather than that of a 'decline'. Brown's integration of early Islamic history into the framework of Late Antiquity broadened the perspective of historians on early Islam.

According to Donner, there is renewed interest in various forms of documentary evidence for this period, studies of the coins and seals of the early Islamic and of the Byzantine and Sasanian empires and **papyrology**. The existence of papyri from the seventh century, written in Greek, Coptic, and Arabic, had long been known, but they had not, with few exceptions, been much used by historians. In 1980s and especially the first decade of the twenty-first century a number of scholars began working actively in Arabic papyrology.

Even more striking were developments in the study of the archaeology of the early Islamic period. Until the 1960s, relatively little archaeological work had been undertaken that focused on the Islamic period in the Near East, and much of what had been done was concerned principally with recovering works of Islamic art or with major architectural monuments. Beginning in the 1970s, however, there was an explosion of archaeological explorations conducted along broader lines (often with an anthropological focus), especially in Syria, Jordan, Israel, and Turkey, with important work also undertaken in Iran, Egypt, Lebanon, and Yemen. This work has helped in correcting serious misconceptions about the historical evolution of the Levant, particularly, during the early Islamic period. For example, it had earlier been the norm to assume that the rise of Islam coincided with a general collapse of prosperity, but the careful work of Donald Whitcomb, Alan Walmsley, and others have revealed that many areas in the Levant continued to flourish during the seventh and into the eighth centuries. The rise of Islam, rather than being seen as an episode of violent destruction and discontinuity, instead appears to be what Peter Pentz calls it an 'invisible conquest' because at most sites in the Levant the transition from Byzantine to Islamic rule was so gradual as to be imperceptible, at least in terms of the archaeological evidence, in contrast to the image gained from literary sources, both Christian and Islamic.

This burst of new works and the new evidence, and novel interpretations of long-known literary evidence, resulted in the appearance of many new attempts to reconstruct 'what actually happened' on the eve of the origin of Islam. There was a wave of revisionist writings away from the traditional paradigm. These new writings propose many new theories. Some of them claim that Islam was merely another form of Christianity; while a few even questioned the presence of Prophet Muhammad. But all these are not backed by sources and evidence and seem mere speculations. We will not go in their details because these are not supported by enough research.

Check Your Progress-3

- 1) Write briefly the salient points of Meccan trade theory.

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2) What is the argument of Nativist theory propagators on the origin of Islam?

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3) Discuss the views of Donner on the origin of Islam?

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13.5 SPREAD OF ISLAM AFTER THE DEATH OF PROPHET MUHAMMAD

The death of Prophet Muhammad created a vacuum. It was believed that there would be no further Prophet after Muhammad. But Prophet was not only the religious but political leader as well. The question of no one assuming his position as Prophet received general acceptance but someone had to take physical charge of the state and guide the religious community. As no specific rules were laid down for this purpose, there was considerable scope for dispute at this point. The question of who should have religious and political authority after the Prophet was to become increasingly contentious with passage of time, leading to conflicts and often serious doctrinal differences.

Why Prophet did not appoint his successor? In Sunni tradition, Prophet was involved in careful coalition and prudent politics was silent on succession because he wanted the success of radical monotheism which required holding to traditional tribal practice which gave little or no attention and shift to authority that was purely inherited or transpired (rather than earned). The other reason was that the community was fragile and the Prophet thought not to impose his wishes. Another is to posit on his part an impending sense of the end. However, nothing can be said with certainty.

Though, Sunnis accept that Prophet had appointed a successor, and wanted community to be rallied around Abu Bakr who was being among the firsts to convert and senior most and hence, the natural choice. But Shias argue that Mohammad had appointed Ali as his successor. At the time of the death of Prophet there were three groups: The Meccan Quraysh aristocracy and the Ansar of Medinese ‘helpers’ who provided critical support, and who argued that the succession should take place within the family of Prophet.

By and large political authority passed into the hands of the leading Quraysh families after 632. Abu Bakr one of the closest companions of the Prophet was chosen as *Khalifa* (successor of Prophet). For next few centuries khalifa became the main title for religious leaders of Muslims and head of the state founded by Prophet Muhammad. When Abu Bakr took over, the newly formed state was in danger. Some Bedouin tribes broke away from Medina because in Arabia the idea of being part of permanent state was a new one. Another serious issue was that some tribal religious leaders declared themselves to be Prophets. The Muslims of Mecca and Medina denounced these leaders as false Prophets. Abu Bakr had to launch a series of campaigns to re-establish control over these tribes. The campaigns are called wars of *rida* (apostasy or defection from one's religious allegiance). The battles and skirmishes that broke out after the Prophet's death when tribesmen repudiated treaties negotiated by Prophet, thus brought the Muslim armies within hailing distance of the two great powers, viz, Byzantine and the Sassanids. Abu Bakr died within two years of becoming *khalifa* (Caliph). He nominated Umar Ibn Khattab as his successor. Umar expanded the boundaries of the state, consolidating himself not only in Arab but also embarking upon large scale territorial expansion outside Arab as well as in Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Egypt. The conquest of West Asia was at the expense of Sassanid and Byzantine empires.

For over eighty years prior to the rise of Islam, the Sasanian and Byzantine empires had been involved in fierce combat for supremacy over west Asia. Syria and Mesopotamia were main parties of war and fell between the two empires. In the long run this conflict weakened the two empires considerably. When Arabs embarked upon the Byzantine and Sassanid territories in 633-34 the two powers were already exhausted so much militarily that they were unable to put up any resistance. In 636, Persian army was routed at battle of Qadisiya. Next year Arab forces under Saad captured Sassanid capital Ctesiphon. With this Sassanid rule came to an end in Iraq and Saad established himself as military and civil head in Iraq. Similarly, in Syria the town of Damascus was first attacked in 634 and taken in 635. The fall paved the way for the annexation of Syria and Palestine. Khalid bin Walid played an important role in it. In 639 Egypt was also occupied.

Though Muslims were outnumbered, they were swift in movement, agile, well coordinated and highly motivated. The defence of Byzantines and Sassanids were brittle. In contrast to large scale pitched battles and protracted campaigns typical of Byzantine and Sassanid (6th-early 7th centuries), the Islamic conquests of mid-7th century were relatively short engagements by a small hit and run army which rarely laid siege or caused large number of casualties. In many cases the Byzantine local elites made underhand deals to avoid violence. Moreover, the Christian population — **Copts** in Egypt, **Monophysites** in Syria, **Nestorian** in Iraq all had long history of troubled relationship with the Byzantines and the Sassanid overlords. Their dissatisfaction was important where Christian-Arab border tribes and military auxiliaries joined the conquerors and where fortified cities capitulated. The conquest was due to weakened military powers and they could consolidate because local population was content to accept the new regime. Moreover, the conquest was further secured by large migration of Arab peoples. With the defeat of Byzantines and Sassanids, frontiers between populations broke down leading to massive movements of the people from Arabia into the lands of the Middle East. The Byzantine, however, retained its richest and most populous province, Anatolia and Balkans, though Syria was lost. Survival of Byzantine left the Arabs with a contested and dangerous frontier and a permanent barrier to their expansion. The Sassanians by contrast were utterly destroyed. The entire Iraq fell in their hands after the battle of Qadisiya (637). With the collapse of the Sassanid empire,

Arabs had to face in Iran many weak but inaccessible principalities protected by mountains and deserts. It took almost a decade to subdue those quasi-independent principalities of the Sasanian empire. Khurasan was finally captured in 654.

With so many provinces coming under their responsibility of governing, also exploiting, the conquered sedentary people and responsibility of controlling Arabian migrants came to new Caliphs and aristocracy. Medinians decided on two basic principles: that Bedouin would be prevented from damaging agricultural society and the new elite would co-operate with chiefs and notaries of conquered population. The necessary arrangements were made in the reign of second Caliph Umar (634-44). The first principle of Umar entailed the transformation of Arab conquerors into elite military class who garrisoned the subdued areas and carried on further conquests. To prevent Bedouins to raze agricultural lands and to segregate the Arabs from conquered people the Bedouins were made to settle in garrison cities (*amsar*). The three most important new cities founded in Iraq and Egypt were: Basra, at the head of Persian gulf which was strategically located for easy communication with Medina. Kufa became the administrative capital of northern Iraq, Mesopotamia and northern and eastern Iran. Fustat, the new capital of Egypt which served as base for Arab expansion into north Africa until Qayrawan (in Tunisia) was founded in 670, In other provinces they generally did not found new cities but settled in towns, suburbs, and villages on the outskirts of existing towns.

The *amsars* not only served as house for Bedouin immigrant and to organise armies but also helped to distribute the spoils. In principle, Arabs were not permitted to seize landed property. Conquered land was considered community property and therefore revenue and not land could be given to the conquerors. This arrangement protected conquered areas from pillaging and distributed spoils of victory far more equitably.

Secondly, the policy was that the conquered population should be disturbed as little as possible. This meant that Arab Muslims did not attempt to convert conquered people to Islam. The Prophet, in Arabia, had set the precedent of permitting Jews and Christians in Arabia to keep their religion, if they agreed to pay the tribute. The caliphate extended the same privilege to Middle Eastern Jews, Zoroastrians whom they considered protected people (*zimmis*) and people of the Book (*ahl-i kitab*).

Just as Arabs had no interest in changing religious situation, they had no desire to disturb the social and the administrative structure. The caliphate had sent governors to oversee the collection of tributes and taxation, distribution of taxes as salary, lead Muslims in prayers but local situation was largely left in local hands. In practice, the relationship between Arabs and the local elites varied from region to region and circumstances of Arab conquests and on the available social and administrative machinery.

In each province, Arabs accepted a system of taxes already prevalent. In Iraq, they adopted Sasanian system of collecting both land tax (*kharaj*) and poll tax (*jizya*). Land was measured, tax was levied keeping in mind the productivity, value of produce, irrigation, transportation, etc. In addition, everyone was expected to pay poll tax (*jizya*).

In short Arab conquest followed a pattern familiar from past nomadic conquest of settled regions. The conquering people became military elite, the settled societies

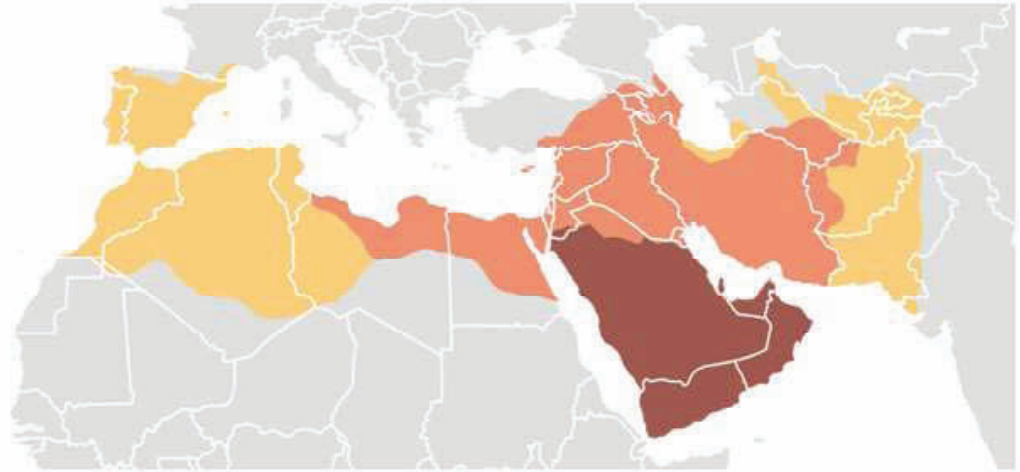
were exploited to support them. The governing arrangement is a compromise between elites of conquering peoples and those of conquered or settled population.

Umar was killed in 644. He appointed a board of six selectors to nominate succession after him. Usman became the third *Khalifa* (644-656). Usman was a *muhajir*¹ but belonged to Umayyad clan. This caused considerable indignation among Hashimites. Usman made himself unpopular by appointing members of Umayyad clan on all major official positions. Although conquest of Iran was completed under Usman, the initial pace of expansion slowed down after 650. This added to the dissatisfaction. Some centres in southern Iraq and Egypt became centres of opposition (*tokhaliyf*). There was a revolt of Egyptian troops and amidst the chaos, Usman was assassinated in 656.

However, there was violent struggle over the question of succession after Usman. This struggle was called the first *Fitnah* or civil war. At Medina the supporters of Ali joined hands with rebels from Egypt and proclaimed him as next *khalifa*. This was not acceptable to the Umayyads. There was another fraction led by Zubayr which opposed this settlement. He was an associate of Muhammad who was also joined by Aisha, the wife of the Prophet. However, the most serious challenge came from Muawiyah, the governor of Syria, also descendent of Ummaya and cousin of Usman. He had a strong base in Syria and revolted against Ali and refused to surrender to Ali's demand for allegiance and called for revenge for the assassination of Usman. Except Syria all other regions accepted Ali as *khalifa*. The refusal of Muawiyah led to the battle of Siffin (657) in northern Mesopotamia. The battle was inconclusive and both sides agreed for arbitration. Nothing concrete could emerge. Muawiyah remained the *de facto* ruler of Syria. Ali ruled the rest of the empire and shifted his capital to Kufa (Medina was now too inconvenient to be a seat; besides Ali also had large following in Kufa).

However, the civil war or *fitnah* created permanent division within the Muslim community. Siffin provoked first major sectarian division in Islam. Muslims were divided as to who had the legitimate right to occupy *khalifat*. Muslims who wanted the succession of Muawiyah and the historical sequence of *khalifa* after him; and those who believed that Ali was the only rightful *khalifa* and that Ali was divinely endowed with special qualities of leadership by virtue of his belonging to the family of the Prophet and being the true successor incapable of rendering any error and that only he and his decedents should succeed. There was another breakaway group which was opposed to any arbitration between Muawiyah and Ali. In their opinion Ali's conduct amounted to a compromise with Ummayyads and therefore, was no longer the leader of Muslim community. Those who took this extremist stand were called *Kharji*. They held that *khilafat* should be determined by descent but *khalifa* should be elected by the community of Muslims at large and he should hold this position only as long as he was sinless in the conduct of the office. Taking their stand they seceded from Ali. All these three groups developed separate vision of Islam. This gave rise to major sects of Sunnis and Shias among Muslims. You will read about them in **Unit 15**. Finally, a *Kharji* murdered Ali in 661 and *Khilafat* passed on to the Ummayyad dynasty.

¹ People who accompanied/emigrated from Mecca to Medina along with Prophet Muhammad in 622.



Expansion under the Prophet Muhammad, 622-632; Expansion during the Patriarchal Caliphate, 632-661; Expansion during the Umayyad Caliphate, 661-750

Map 13.1: Expansion of Islam

Author: DieBuche, July 2010

Source: <http://guides.library.iit.edu/content.php?pid=27903&sid=322018> (via Image: Age_of_Caliphs.png);

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spread_of_Islam#/media/

File:Map_of_expansion_of_Caliphate.svg

13.6 ISLAM AND THE WEST: THE CRUSADES

Islam made inroads into the Christian west along with the Arabs conquests of 635-645. We have seen how Arabs overran Byzantine and Iran. Byzantine lost to Arabs their prized possessions — Syria, Egypt, Palestine and finally North Africa (Maghrib) by 698. This forced Greek speaking Byzantine people to migrate to Anatolia (Turkey). Towards Iberian Peninsula, the Muslim armies occupied Cordova, crossed Pyrenees, entered deep into Gaul (southern France) and reached upto Bordeaux. However, in 731 Arabs got defeated at Toulouse and the very next year (732) in the historic battle of Poitiers (Tours) they faced crushing defeat at the hands of Charles Martel the Hammer. There were constant attempts by the Arabs to vanquish the Byzantine ‘Christian’ capital Constantinople.

The Abbasids (for details see **Unit 14**) envisaged wars against the Byzantine as their ‘religious duty’, called them ‘tyrants’ and war against them as ‘*jihad*’. A serious challenge in this regard was faced by the Byzantines in 1071 when the Seljuk commander Alp Arslan inflicted crushing defeat upon Byzantine armies at Manzikert (Eastern Turkey) and made the Byzantine emperor Romanus IV his prisoner. This forced the Greek population to migrate even further from Anatolia towards Balkans. These developments led the emergence of *reconquista* (reconquest movement) in Spain/Iberian Peninsula in the first half of the eleventh century. This led to series of successes of the Christian armies at Toledo (1085), and Sicily (1095). The Byzantine emperor Alexius I (r. 1081-1118) after the crushing defeat in 1071 appealed to his Christian brethren. It was on Alexius I’s appeal that Pope Urban II responded quickly and proclaimed a ‘holy war’ against the ‘Saracens’ at the Council of Clermont in southern France in 1095. Thus began the First Crusade in 1095. The war cry was to ‘reconquer’ the Holy Land, the Land of the Christ and his apostles for Christianity’ (Knysch 2017: 345). The next wave of crusades began in 1099 which was largely Barons’ crusade. The crusader armies occupied Anatolia, Syria including Edessa, Antioch and Tripoli and sacked Jerusalem in 1099.

However, Seljuk *amir* Zengi, ruler of Mosul, in 1144 wrested Endessa from the Franks. Zengi's son Nur al-Din occupied several strongholds of the crusaders in Syria and Palestine. These victories ignited Pope Eugenius III to call upon Europe's nobility to 'defend the eastern church'. Thus began the Second Crusade which lasted from 1146-1148. After Nur al-Din's death in 1174 the command of the *jihadi* armies was taken over by Salah al-Din, his lieutenant in Egypt. He inflicted a crushing defeat over the crusader's army in the Battle of Hattin (1187) in north Palestine and occupied Jerusalem.

Once again Pope gave call for the Third Crusade (1189-1192). Even after Salah al-Din's death in 1193 *jihad* continued throughout the thirteenth century. The fearsome Mamluk general Baybars (d. 1277) succeeded in pushing back crusaders from Levant. There followed a number of crusades: two led by French king Louis IX, canonised as St. Louis (1214-1270).

With the establishment of the Ottoman empire under the aegis of Osman made the crusader's dream to occupy Jerusalem almost impossible. There were series of clashes. The Ottoman Sultan Murad defeated the Serbian army in the Battle of Kosovo Field (1389); in 1389 Ottoman Sultan Bayazid I defeated Hungarian, French and German crusaders at the Battle of Nicopolis (Hungary). Ottoman ruler Mehmed II (r. 1444-1446; 1451-1481) finally occupied the last Byzantine bastion Constantinople in 1453. Now all the hopes of the crusaders to ever occupy Jerusalem were lost.

However, Islamic interactions with the West had deep cultural impacts. At that time Arab Islam was the source of ideas for the West. The impact of Rhazes and Avicenna on European medical sciences was long standing. The West also learned astronomy, mathematics, chemistry and optics from the Arabs. Arabic translations of Greek works made the Greek knowledge available to the West. The Arabic translations of Aristotle's works by Ibn Rushd (known to the Europeans as Averroes; 1126-1198) were read in the European Universities. The knowledge of zero and technology of paper making also travelled to the West through the Arab inroads who in turn acquired the knowledge and learned the techniques from India and China respectively.

Check Your Progress-4

- 1) Discuss controversy about succession following Prophet Muhammad's death.

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- 2) Discuss the expansion of Islamic territories under Caliph Umar.

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- 3) Why were the Muslim armies so successful over their Byzantine and Sassanid rivals?

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- 4) What were Crusades? Why were they fought?

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13.7 SUMMARY

The rise of Islam was the most significant event in the Arabian peninsula which shook not only the peninsula but also had far reaching impact across the world. It was Prophet Muhammad who brought the scattered tribes of the Arabian peninsula under one polity. However, the rise of Islam was the result of much deeper socio-economic changes that were taking place in the peninsula. The Arabian peninsula's advantageous position as trading hub, being situated at the crossroads between the Byzantine and the Sassanids and down south connected with the Indian Ocean network through the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean, chiefly provided them the economic leverage and superiority. However, Nativists emphasise that the success of the Prophet lay more in unifying the Arab tribes than in the increasing 'richness in trade'. After Prophet's death Abu Bakr and Umar focussed largely on the expansion and consolidation of the borders of Islam which they could successfully do by following the policy of non-interference, while not disturbing the local socio-political and economic set up nor did they emphasize upon conversions of the local populace (Jews and Christians) to Islam. During Usman's rule further consolidation took place and administrative issues settled. However, he was partial towards his clan, the Ummayyad, and appointed them on key positions giving rise to dissatisfaction. By Ali's period schism in Islam grew and Muslims got divided into two major groups — the Sunnis and the Shias, the third one, even more radical, was that of the Kharijites who were ultimately responsible for the murder of Ali, the fourth of the Pious Caliphs, details of which we would be dealing in **Unit 15**.

13.8 KEYWORDS

- Coptic** : The term in Greek means Egyptian. It denotes largely Christians of Egypt. During the Coptic period (4-9 century CE) largely Egyptian population was Christian.
- Isnad/Sanad** : Authentication of *Hadis* through chain of

transmission (countless numbers of narrators;
scholars of *Hadis*)

Monophysites

- : They believed that Jesus had only one single ‘nature’ (divine or synthesis of divine and human) against the dyophysites who believed in two ‘natures’ of the Christ — one divine and the other human. Monophysites were referred to the Christians of the Eastern Roman Empire who rejected the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE.

Nestorian

- : They are the Christians of the Church of the East, the Syriac Church, also called the Persian Church. It was established in 410 CE. The Council of Ephesus condemned Nestorius (386-451), leading to the Nestorian schism. Subsequently Nestorius’ supporters migrated to Sasanian Persia. Nestorianism emphasized upon the divine and human natures of Jesus.

Papyrology

- : Documents written on papyri.

13.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) See Section 13.2
- 2) See Section 13.2
- 3) See Section 13.2

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) See Section 13.3
- 2) See Section 13.3
- 3) See Section 13.3

Check Your Progress-3

- 1) See Sub-section 13.4.1
- 2) See Sub-section 13.4.2
- 3) See Sub-section 13.4.3

Check your Progress-4

- 1) See Section 13.5
- 2) See Section 13.5
- 3) See Section 13.5
- 4) See Section 13.6

13.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

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Serjeant, R. B., (1990) 'Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam: misconceptions and flawed polemics' (Review Article on Patricia Crone's work), *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 110, pp. 472-486.

13.11 INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO RECOMMENDATIONS

The Birth of Islam: Muhammad, the Preacher

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MU1tHggYR6k>

Rise of Islam

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uvq59FPgx88>

UNIT 14 THE CALIPHATE: UMMAYADS AND ABBASIDS*

Structure

- 14.0 Objectives
- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 The Ummayad Caliphate: Sufyanid Period
- 14.3 The Ummayad Caliphate: Marwanid Period
- 14.4 Later Ummayads
- 14.5 Ummayad Aesthetics and Material Culture
 - 14.5.1 Court Culture
 - 14.5.2 Palaces and Mosques
- 14.6 Ummayad Economy: Estates, Trade and Irrigation
 - 14.6.1 Settled Agriculture
 - 14.6.2 Ummayad Trade, Urbanism and *Suqs*
- 14.7 Ummayad Monarchs and Provinces (*Wilayats*)
- 14.8 Fall of the Ummayad Dynasty
- 14.9 The Abbasid Caliphate: Abbas and Mansur
- 14.10 The Abbasid Caliphate: Harun and Al-Mamun
- 14.11 Later Abbasid Caliphs
- 14.12 The Abbasid Caliphate: Irrigation, Peasants and Estates
 - 14.12.1 Irrigation
 - 14.12.2 Popular Revolts in the Abbasid Caliphate
 - 14.12.3 Forms of Estates under the Abbasids
 - 14.12.4 Tax Farming in the Abbasid Egypt
- 14.13 Taxes and *Diwans* under the Abbasids
- 14.14 Summary
- 14.15 Keywords
- 14.16 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises
- 14.17 Suggested Readings
- 14.18 Instructional Video Recommendations

14.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we will study about the Ummayad and Abbasid Caliphate which were established by Muawiyah I and Abbas As-Saffah respectively. In the same vein the Ummayads continued campaigns and conquests started by the Caliphs — Abu Bakr and Umar. It was the largest empire in terms of geographical extent. But the Caliphate

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developed hereditary tendencies under the Ummayyads. The Ummayyads changed the capital of Islamic caliphate to Damascus. In 750 CE, the Ummayyad dynasty was overthrown by the Abbasids who ruled from Baghdad. The Abbasid Caliphate was dominated by Persian traditions of polity, elites and later by Turkish military. Institutions like *wazir*, *diwans* and *iqta* evolved under Abbasids. After going through this Unit, you should be able to:

- analyse the circumstances which led to the consolidation of the Ummayyad Caliphate,
- understand complex taxation structure of the Ummayyad and the Abbasid Caliphate (7th-10th century CE),
- explain the growth of estates, landholdings and spread of agriculture across Central Islamicate,
- identify the factors leading to the decline of the Ummayyads,
- know about the art and architecture of the Ummayyads, and
- discuss changing nature of the Caliphate under the imperial Abbasids.

14.1 INTRODUCTION

When Caliph Ali was assassinated in Kufa, Muawiyah I was the governor of Syria. He was successful in ascending the Caliphate in 661 CE by forging alliances with rival groups, mobilize opportunistic local rulers and appeasing *ashraf* (elites) of Iraq. Ummayyads in their administration heavily depended on the existing Byzantine precedent, so prominent Syrian Christians were incorporated and absorbed into institutions of administration. Ummayyads created new possibilities for expansion and reclamation of land through irrigation techniques. In the Marwanid period the three changes took place: (1) Massive conquests into extreme East upto Sind and West across Iberian Peninsula (2) Arabicisation of *diwans* and coinage, and (3) Centralization of bureaucracy and administration. The Ummayyad rule sustained by commitment to Islam, while respecting Arab tribal coalitions. At the same time they flourished owing to their efficiency to realise vast revenue in the form of taxes from peasants and merchants. One Muslim governor of Khurasan once emphatically remarked: ‘The strength of Muslims is in *Kharaj*’.

The Abbasid imperial dynasty ruled from Baghdad, administration became highly complex and centralized, Persian elite classes of the state offices became dominating. Under the Abbasids clienteles and patronage became central to administration. Abbasids patronized Khurasanis and later Turks and integrated the Persian *Dihqan*. The post of *wazir* was dominated by Persian family of Barmakids. That is why Ira Lapidus remarked that patronage of regional and local powers in Abbasid regime was essential because, ‘Each community was headed by its notables: headmen, landowners, and other men of wealth and standing, who characteristically were allied to superiors and patrons with positions in the provincial or central governments. Government organization, communication and tax collection was bureaucratic in form, but the social mechanism that made the organization work was the contacts between central officials and provincial elites.’

This Unit delineates the changing nature of Islamic Caliphate under Muawiyah I and especially from Abdul Malik bin Marwan as the tightening of Umayyad control over land revenue and coinage started. The subsequent Sections will illustrate the nature of Ummayyad society as settled society rather than a conquest society, their aesthetics and

material culture. Most of the attention has been given to estates, trade and irrigation under the Ummayyads. In the Sections about Abbasids you will read about the reforms brought by Al-Mansur. He also consolidated the administration through a number of *diwans*. Later, under Harun and Al-Mamun number of *diwans* increased upto twenty. With Al-Mamun the Abbasid military compositions were changed dramatically since Turks began dominating the military institutions. In the last Sections you will get to know irrigation, peasants and estates of Caliphs, taxes levied and the institution of *diwans* under the Abbasids.

14.2 THE UMMAYYAD CALIPHATE: SUFYANID¹ PERIOD

The governor of Syria Muawiyah I founded the Ummayyad Caliphate right in the wake of Caliph Ali's assassination in 661 CE that also marked the end of the first *Fitna* (time of trial or Civil war within Muslims; for details on *fitna* see **Unit 13**). An extremely successful dynasty, Muawiyah, the first Ummayyad Caliph, shifted the capital to Damascus owing to the city's cosmopolitan openness and partly due to Medinian resentment towards him. In Medina Muawiyah's agricultural activities had aroused widespread resentment from *Amsar*. Natives in Medina began to feel that their city was being captured by an absentee landlord. In addition Muawiyah had been the governor of Syria for over fifteen years. Thus governing such a vast empire, Syria was a fitting setting as well as a strong power base for Muawiyah I.

While in power Muawiyah I (661-680 CE) had refashioned political authority intended to cope with factionalism within the ruling bureaucracy and to preserve political unity of Muslim *Umma*. Under Muawiyah I the Islamic Caliphate underwent an unparalleled territorial expansion far and wide: the conquests were again carried on in North Africa under the command of Uqba bin Nafi and in eastern Iran in Khurasan, gateway to Transoxiana, under Ziyad ibn Abi Sufiyan. More than fifty thousand Arab families were pushed into Khurasan for settlement. The Caliph Muawiyah I made Khurasan a separate province under the governorship of Ubaidullah ibn Ziyad. Muawiyah I was able to build a powerful military mostly of Syrian tribes and a navy around sea of Marmora. These massive expeditions were motivated by desire for booty to satisfy the tribal chiefs and divert the feuding Kalb and Quda'a tribesmen to foreign lands. In addition to the provincial taxes (*zakat* and *kharaj*), Muawiyah I supplemented and enriched the state revenues in three ways:

- 1) **Frontier warfare:** for booty and tribute helped to maintain the loyalty of Syrians,
- 2) **Extensive agriculture activities:** for promotion of cultivation like large scale farming using the *Mawali* (non- Arab converts) labour. It ensured a substantial income to state treasury. In Iraq the vast lands were brought under cultivation and made government estate controlled by the Caliph.
- 3) **Increased Taxes and Demanded Customary Tributes:** Muawiyah I increased taxes in Egypt and likewise claimed *Nawruz* tributes from the Persians.

Muawiyah I was undoubtedly a seasoned administrator as he streamlined the governing elite and created a tightly knit postal system for efficient communication. Rather acting like a hegemon or absolute monarch, Arab chroniclers considered Muawiyah I as 'a

¹ Muawiyah's successors were known as Sufyanids for Muawiyah was the descendent of Abu Sufyan.

man of *hilm* ' that is he kept an absolute self-control, made decisive and subtle judgments and maintained a neat balance as regards inter-tribal hostilities. To quote M. A. Shaban, 'Appreciating that no group could have its claims completely satisfied, he (Muawiyah) capitalized on the widespread desire for peace to gain a general reconciliation based on compromise, avoiding any imperious show of authority. He was indeed *Amir-ul Mumini'n*, but he acted as, at most, *primus inter pares*, towards the other Arab leaders. Having witnessed the humiliating failure of Ali's reign, he scrupulously avoided any claim to religious authority.'

After Ali's assassination, Muawiyah I approached to Ali's eldest son Hassan, struck a peace agreement with him, negotiated agreements with the Iraqi *Ashraf* (bigger tribal Arab chiefs) and confirmed their rule over Iraq on the condition that he be accepted as Caliph. Muawiyah I affirmed a free hand to the Iraqi *Ashraf* in Iraq and Iran. As we mentioned earlier vast number of Arab families moved into Khurasan and occupied most fertile lands there, following Muawiyah's order. Far from being a tightly centralized state, the Umayyad state organization during Sufyanid period represented a tribal based polity founded on negotiated agreements amongst dominant Arab tribal patriarchs so was decentralized both in administration and polity. According to one argument Muawiyah I not only eschewed use of military force to rule over provinces but reigned with a 'light touch, relying on local elites to govern the provinces while he himself remained in Syria'.

Muawiyah I married into the Kalb tribe, a powerful Syrian Bedouin tribe, and maintained a tolerant attitude towards the Christians. Muawiyah I transformed the Islamic Caliphate into a hereditary dynastic kingship since he chose his son as his successor, Yazid bin Muawiyah (680-683 CE), to evade any bloodshed.

Yazid faced challenges from Ali's son Husayn and Abdullah Ibn Zubayr. His three years of rule witnessed eruption of a civil war like circumstances, when Husayn rebelled against him. Husayn along with several kinsmen was massacred at Karbala. Abdullah Ibn Zubayr remained his arch-rival for a decade since he refuted Yazid's right to be a Caliph. The Umayyad polity faltered after the death of Yazid in 683 CE, as the succeeding ruler, Muawiyah II was incompetent and lacked political legitimacy. However, Abdullah Ibn Zubayr was eventually killed in Mecca in 692 CE. Meanwhile a tussle broke out within the Umayyad clan, the Sufyanid branch was overthrown by Marwan I in 684 CE, hence this line of rulers who were his descendents are designated as the 'Marwanid' or 'Banu Marwan' (For the extent of Umayyad dominion See **Map 13.1**).

14.3 THE UMMAYYAD CALIPHATE: MARWANID PERIOD

By the time Marwan I, founder of Umayyad Marwanid dynasty, succeeded Muawiyah II to assume Caliphal authority, he was very old. He had already served under Caliph Uthman/Usman. His mother, Amina Bint Alqama, belonged to dominant Banu Kalb tribe. Since Marwan I had hardly any dealings in Syria, as a result he was entirely dependent on *Ashraf* from the Yamani tribe who had elected him. On his accession Marwan I guaranteed the Quda'a tribe of continued favour in the new state structure. When Ibn Bahdal summoned a gathering with the Syrian *Ashraf*, after some time the *Shura* at Jabiya accredited Marwan I as the candidate of the Umayyad party, in return for financial promises.

Marwan I opposed Abdullah Ibn Zubayr's candidature as Caliph during the Second *Fitna* (political disarray during Muawiyah II's time). Zubayr successfully drove Marwan I out of Hejaz and Marwan I deemed Zubayr's succession inevitable. Only just in time the Umayyad governor of Khurasan and Basra Ubayd Ibn Ziyad persuaded Marwan I into politics as a nominated Umayyad Caliph. While in Syria, Ibn Ziyad defeated the Banu Qays and their leader Al-Dahak Ibn Qays, who had acknowledged Ibn Zubayr's nomination as Caliph, in the battle of Marj Rahit (684 CE) between the Qays (northern) and Kalb (southern) tribes. Therefore, following this decisive battle, the Umayyad succession crisis was greatly resolved as Marwan Ibn al-Hakam occupied the Caliphal throne and restored the Umayyad sovereignty again in 684.

Abdul Malik bin Marwan: Tightening of Umayyad Control

With the close of second *Fitna*, the most celebrated ruler of the Umayyad dynasty after Muawiyah I, Abdul Mailk bin Marwan ascended the throne for two seminal decades from 685-705 CE. In this period Abdul Malik had to grapple with rival forces in Iraq, Hijaz and the Byzantines. Abdul Malik chalked out administrative measures and policies that endured even under his successors primarily Abbasids whose outlook differed deeply from his, for his policies brought political stability and homogeneity within the Umayyad Empire.

Since the beginning of the second *Fitna*, Muslim generals in a great measure had deserted the Umayyads in Syria, Iraq and Khurasan to join the rival-Caliph, Abdullah bin Zubayr in Mecca. Therefore, first and foremost Abdul Malik signed a truce with the Byzantine emperor (formidable and primordial enemy of Umayyad) in order to effectively reestablish the Umayyad authority over Kharijite-ridden Basra in Iraq, which he did immediately in 691 CE. In the next year Abdul Malik's forces locked horns with forces of Caliph Abdullah bin Zubayr in Mecca. The Governor of Iraq and eastern region of Umayyad state Al-Hajjaj bin Yusuf led the Umayyad forces and defeated Zubayr and his acolytes in Mecca in 692 CE. This year is also remembered as the 'year of unity of community' in Muslim chronicles.

Abdul Malik maintained truce with the Byzantine state under emperor Justinian II (685-695 CE) until the internal problems could be effectively resolved. In the words of Byzantine chronicler Saint Theophanes (758-817 CE), after 692 CE (i.e., end of *Second Fitna*), the Byzantine Emperor Justinian II refused tribute in Arab currency so a decade long peace agreement ended. Emboldened by internal peace within his empire, Abdul Malik advanced into Anatolia and defeated the Byzantine forces (mostly comprised of Slavs) in the Battle of Sebastopolis in 693 CE near the Black Sea. To elude future internal or external challenges to Umayyad authority, the Caliph instituted successful state building measures that certainly transformed and strengthened instruments of coercion and inaugurated a phase of centralization.

Coinage

Prior to Abdul Malik's introduction of new coinage, there were two types of coins in circulation within the Umayyad empire:

Arab-Byzantine Type: Those early Islamic coins decorated with Christian images and legends inscribed in Greek or Arabic and minted following the Byzantine model (Specimen I). Conventional Byzantine basic coinage contained the bust of Christ or the Cross. While describing Umayyad imitation of Byzantine coinage, Al-Baladhuri wrote that while the Romans obtained paper from Egypt, Muslims got *dinars* from the Romans.



Figure 1: Byzantine Coin: Justinian I (527-565 CE) Half Follis, Constantinople Mint, 538-539 CE

Credits: English Wikipedia, original upload by Panairjdde

Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/51/Half_follis-Justinian_I-sb0165.jpg

Arab-Sassanian Type: Stands for those early Islamic coins with Persian or Arab legends and struck after imitating Sassanian prototype called as *Drahm*. Conventional Sassanid coin contained portrait of the King Khusrau II (590-628 CE) on the obverse and Fire alter on the reverse (as in **Figure 2**).



Figure 2: Arab-Sassanid Coin: Bahram II, with his Queen Shapurdukhtak and prince Bahram Sakanshah

Credits: Classical Numismatic Group; <https://www.cngcoins.com/Coin.aspx?CoinID=133971>

Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/46/Bahram_II%2C_with_Queen_and_Prince.jpg

However, post-680 CE Abul Malik Marwan introduced a specific style coinage by issuing distinctly Arab type coin within the political domain therefore replacing the old Byzantine and Sassanid coins. Such a bold reform of coinage by Abdul Malik had been understood as perceptible manifestation to Arabise both coinage alongside the entire administration. The standardization of coinage was basically ‘an expression of an ideological and economic warfare against Byzantine enemy’.



Figure 3: Dinar Before Coinage Reform (from 693-695 CE)

Credits:PHGCOM, 2008

Source:https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/bd/First_Umayyad_gold_



dinar%2C_Caliph_Abd_al-Malik%2C_695_CE.jpg

Figure 4: Dinar After Coinage Reform (696 CE onwards)

Gold Dinar of Umayyad Caliph Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan minted at Damascus, Syria in AH 75 (697/98 CE)

Credits: thefireball777 , November 2014

Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a3/Dinar_of_Abd_al-Malik%2C_AH_75.jpg

The Standing Caliph Coinage of Abdul Malik (gold *Dinar* above **Figure 3**) imitated Byzantine *Solidi* style, embellished with the portrait of the Caliph in gold, silver and copper, and later after reforms in 696 CE standard *Dinar* (**Figure 4**) became completely epigraphic. Marwanids issued tri-metallic coinage and exploited the gold mines of Hijaz and Najd to procure gold.

Perhaps the most enduring contribution of Abdul Malik Marwan to Islamic civilization was establishment of Arabic as the official language within his empire's courts and government offices in place of Greek, Coptic and Persian. This innovation spawned in its wake a standardized Arabic knowing scribal class who maintained tax registers in Arabic. He introduced the new system of land surveys, got every individual registered to enforce taxes, constructed several canals for irrigation, established a ship-building factory in Tunis and in Ibn Khaldun's words was the greatest ruler because he firmly

‘followed in the footsteps of Caliph Umar in regulating state affairs’. With a powerful Syrian army, own standardised Arabic coinage and efficient Arabicised centralized bureaucracy, the Marwanids could very proficiently expand, control and consolidate their entire empire.

14.4 LATER UMMAYYADS

Before we delineate socio-economic milieu under Later Umayyad rulers (684-750 CE) and its eventual decline of the dynasty in 750 CE, it is necessary to underline the transformation that occurred under Marwanid Caliph Abdul Malik. The changes witnessed under the Umayyad Caliphate are given below in the table.

Sufyanid Umayyad State	Marwanid Umayyad State
<p>Indirect Control: Muawiyah I did not interfere into affairs of provinces on the condition provincial governors forwarded taxes to Damascus. Early Four Caliphs and Muawiyah I instituted an indirect control so the provincial governors were free to manage affairs. The Sufyanid court and state officials were dominated by Byzantine practices and bureaucracy to manage the affairs of administration. It was due to the fact that Muslims, even though rulers, were a minority in Syria, Khurasan and Egypt. Mass conversion began after Al-Walid since not only did Umayyad state divest itself of conquest state but the people began to migrate to the garrison towns Kufa, Basra etc. for livelihood.</p>	<p>Direct Control: Counter to the Sufyanids' non-interference and indirect way of governing the provincial administration, the Marwanids always attempted to balance the <i>ashraf</i> (elite) and the governors through a centralized system of government.</p> <p>Given the circumstances after second civil war, Caliph Abdul Malik kept a loyal imperial army of Syrian troops that was accountable to the Amir al-Mu'minin and the governors and functioned as the key instrument for the Umayyad Empire's defense, formal control and centralization of administration.</p>
<p>Continuity and Decentralized: Under Muawiyah and Yazid I, the Umayyad polity was not based on direct control of provinces. Continuity within political-cum-administrative framework was kept appearing under Sufyanid Umayyads. Therefore the official languages of the empire's courts and government offices continued to be Greek, Coptic and Persian. Though Syrian Arabs possessed power, the Sufyanid administrative documents were still written in Greek. Byzantine and Sasanian coins in respective regions continued to be used to buy and sell goods.</p>	<p>Transformed and Centralized: Under Marwanid dynasty governors were chosen owing to their proficiency not the kinship ties, Arabic was made official state language while replacing Greek and Persian and new Islamic coinage was introduced. Abdul Malik also initiated the Arabicisation of revenue registers called diwans (payroll for soldiers) in Syria and Iraq. Later under Al-Walid diwan in Egypt diwans came to be maintained in Arabic only. Marwanids kept direct control over provincial administration, people and governors.</p>
<p>Blood Replaced Competence: In Sufyanid period generally the governors (<i>Amirs</i>) were the relatives of Caliphs who belonged to the Umayyad clan. Muawiyah I maintained bodyguards rather than an organized standing army. However, Sufyanids possessed no professional standing army but relied heavily on Syrian troops to crush any revolt</p>	<p>Competence and Skill replaced Blood: People with military competence and administrative skills (like Al-Hajjaj) were elevated to the post of <i>Amir</i> (governor) of provinces. Abdul Malik maintained a standing army, mainly powerful Syrian troops who were sent to troublespots and paid out of general taxation. There were provincial armies also. Marwanids, under Abdul Malik, inaugurated and bolstered the formation of Arbo-Islamic identity.</p>

Al-Walid (705-715 CE) continued the campaigns and initiatives of his father Abdul Malik. His reign saw the apogee of the Umayyad territorial expansion since the Muslim armies made successful campaigns as far as Transoxiana and Sind in the East under Al-Hajjaj and Muhammad bin Qasim respectively and on the West into Spain under Tariq

Ibn Ziyad in 711 CE. He completed the Arabicisation of *diwans* in Egypt. It is important to bear in mind that Nasr Bin Sayir Arabicised the *diwan* in Khurasan. Walid also repaired the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina and built a grand edifice near the Dome of Rock called as Al-Aqsa mosque. Sulayman bin Abd al-Malik succeeded to the Ummayyad throne in 715 CE and ruled till 717 CE. Mounting historical evidence suggest that he not only gracefully appointed or deposed provincial governors but *Qad'is* (judges) were directly chosen from Damascus. The provincial authorities were divested of any power and authority to make appointments. Like Abdul Malik bin Marwan all his successors including Walid I (705-715 CE), Yazid II (720-724 CE), Hisham (724-743 CE) and Walid II (743-744) incessantly undertook regular raids and sometimes laid siege of Constantinople.

However through the declaration known as the *Fiscal Rescript*, Umar II (717-720 CE) attempted to refurbish Ummayyad taxation system. In his political efforts Umar II prevented the Ummayyad State from plunging into throes of political disarray. Umar II during his reign, H.A.R. Gibb remarked, preserved the unity of the Arabs, settled the grievances of the *mawali* (new converts), and reconciled political life with the claims of religion. New converts (*mawali*) to Islam were considered identical to the Arabs in rights and duties. The converts were abandoning the lands and migrating to *amsar* (garrison towns). Land belonging to these converts was subjected to cultivation and consequently taxation (*kharaj*). Umar II also eschewed not only from laying any further siege of Constantinople but preferred negotiations over use of brute force when the Kharijites revolted. The last Ummayyad Caliph, Marwan II (744-750 CE) ruled from Damascus. During his reign in the entire region of Iraq and Khurasan anti-Ummayyad revolts gained widespread support. Khurasani people rebelled in 750 CE under Abu Muslim, who inflicted a great defeat on Marwan II in the Battle of Zab in Iraq. Marwan II and his family (except Abdur Rahman) were massacred finally in Egypt by Abbas Al-Saffa, founder of the Abbasid dynasty.

According to Patricia Crone, the later Ummayyad period was rich in socio-cultural improvements, for there inaugurated a new *post-tribal order* as well as a *distinct Islamic culture*. Later Ummayyad period witnessed the conversion on mass scale of free non-Arabs known as *mawali* to Islam and during Abdul Malik's reign 'villagers were migrating to garrison cities, where they would convert in the hope of joining the ranks of the privileged conquerors'. But Islamization of the defeated non-Arabs, basically tax payers, sapped both the ethnic and fiscal foundations of Arab society. The peasantization of Arab military men was another process to take roots under later Ummayyads because by the eighth century CE Muslim society had transformed from being like an occupying army living in garrisons to a social framework for trade, business and agriculture as in Khurasan.

Mawali in the Ummayyad Era

There appeared a liaison of Master-Client (*maula-mawali*) between Arab and non-Arabs, who converted to Islam under the Ummayyads. Earlier the distinction was notional but later on Arabs would receive higher salaries, get pensions, obtain lands and privileges and formed the upper class in social hierarchy. The Ummayyads levied higher taxes mostly on *mawali*, who were also paid lesser salary than *Arabs*, and discouraged marriages between the Arab and *mawali* (non-Arab converts). In southern Iraq the *mawalis* were traders, shopkeepers and some even carried caravan trade on behalf of their Master (*Arab-maula*). The Ummayyads emphasized on Arab *nashb* (genealogy or descent) therefore only Arab could become the master. In Hisham's period Ummayyads promised to wave off *kharaj* taxes from converts in Khurasan, but the Persian *Dihqans* alarmed the Ummayyad governors about the massive loss to state revenues, therefore the Ummayyads continued to impose taxes even though *mawalis* were converted. It led to a mass rebellion in Khurasan. Meanwhile these *mawalis* had not only achieved successes in economic fields but also had taken

positions in administration and were intellectual leaders. Most of the *mawalis* had struggled for equal privileges, therefore, they were at the forefront of the Abbasid revolution aimed at ousting of Ummayyads.

A ninth-century Spanish Arab scholar Ibn Abd Rabbihi (860-940 CE) illustrates the Arab disposition concerning the status of *mawalis* in the existing system:

They (*some Arabs*) used to say only three things interrupt prayer – a donkey, a dog and a *mawali*. The *mawali* did not use *Kunya*, but was addressed by his personal name and by-name. People do not walk side by side with them nor allow them precedence in processions. If they were present at meal, they (*mawali*) stood... They did not allow a *mawali* to pray at funerals if Arabs were present.

14.5 UMMAYAD AESTHETICS AND MATERIAL CULTURE

Under the Ummayyads Arabic enjoyed the status of the court language. Ummayyads patronized a number of poets. Ummayyad period also saw brisk building activities.

14.5.1 Court Culture

Mauwiyah I ruled from sprawling Ummayyad capital Damascus where he had constructed a palace which acted as the Ummayyad court. Shortly Abdul Malik built the Amman Palace that used to be a reception hall and meeting room with his military generals. The Ummayyad court culture was largely based on oral traditions so did not demand much written documentation for communication. The court supported Arabs and Arab culture; the Ummayyad Court was dominated by the bickering triumvirate poets — Al-Akhtal, Farazdaq and Jarir. They composed a form of poetry called as *naqa'id* (flytings). In this kind of poetry the two contesting poets exchange insults in a poetic battle to determine tribal supremacy. They found patronage because the sources like *Kitab-ul Aghani* makes it clear that listening to the Arabic songs was the favorite pastime among the Ummayyad princesses.

Among various means Ummayyads organized a media of royal interaction with tribal nomads (Uman-Badawi) through poetry. Under the Ummayyad times the *ghazal* (ode) detached from the *qasida* (panegyric). The sources like *Kitab-ul Aghani* (Book of Songs) by Abul Al-Faraj Isfahani (897-967 CE) and *I'qd al-Farid* (the Unique Necklace) by Ibn Abdul Rabbih (860-940 CE) provide valuable details about lifestyles, manners, kingly aphorisms and customs of Ummayyad and Abbasid courts. The Ummayyad monarch Yazid I (680-683 CE) was a prolific composer and introduced musical instruments to the Ummayyad court. Arabic language progressed rapidly since Abdul Malik made Arabic the court language and language of administration within his empire. A classical Arab poet Al-Akhtal used to be the poet laureate of Abdul Malik.

14.5.2 Palaces and Mosques

The Ummayyads built grandiose palace cities, monumental mosques, *Suqs* (markets) and desert palaces (*qusr/qasr*). Abdul Malik was responsible for the building of grand edifice of the Dome of Rock. Al-Walid II's period saw farthest expansion of Ummayyad rule. He constructed fortified palace complexes like *Qasr* Amra and Khirbat Al-Mafjar in Jerico, a desert palace notable for striking human murals. Ummayyad princes preferred living in the *villa rustica* to avoid plagues. Mostly they yearned to reside in desert castles called *Qasr*. Al-Walid is credited for the construction and expansion of three mosques — Medina, Jerusalem and Damascus. The first two mosques have been rebuilt. But despite huge damage, the Al-Aqsa mosque had 'retained much of its original character'. He also completed the construction of the historic mosque of Al-Aqsa.



Figure 5: Al-Aqsa Mosque , Jerusalem

Credits: Godot13; Andrew Shiva / Wikipedia / CC BY-SA 4.0

Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/87/Jerusalem-2013-Temple_Mount-Al-Aqsa_Mosque_%28NE_exposure%29.jpg



Figure 6: Umayyad Desert Castle (Qasr Amra), Jordon

Credits: Greg Asche-commons wiki, Nov. 2005; image under the en:GFDL; under CC BY-SA3.0

Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/53/Qasr_Amra.jpg

Source Site: <http://www.dukerisst.com/world%20Fotos/Jordan/QasvAmra/Main.jpg>

The Damascus mosque was built on a place where the Roman Temple of Jupiter existed which was converted into a Church during the Byzantine period. It was built between 706-716 CE on the model of Medina Mosque. The Mosque was shared by Christians and Muslims before Al-Walid II purchased the entire place to build a magnificent and the then largest mosque. In his *Rihla* Ibn Battuta (1304-1369 CE) illustrated the description of the mosque in lofty words that it is ‘the most magnificent mosque in the world, the finest in construction and noblest in beauty, grace and perfection; it is matchless and unequalled.’

In his *Ahsan-ut Taqasim*, Al-Muqaddasi (945-991 CE) quotes his uncle on Al-Walid

II's predilections for construction of the Damascus Mosque: 'Al-Walid was absolutely right. For he saw that Syria was a country settled by Christians, and he noted there their churches so handsome with their enchanting decorations, renowned far and wide. So he undertook for the Muslims the building of a mosque that would divert their attention from the churches, and make it one of the wonders of the world.'

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) Why Muawiyah I changed the capital of the Caliphate? How did he increase the revenue resources of the state?

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- 2) How did Malik bin Marwan change the nature of Ummayad Caliphate from a loose organization to a centralizing state?

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14.6 UMMAYAD ECONOMY: ESTATES, TRADE AND IRRIGATION

K. N. Chaudhuri has aptly remarked that the economic foundations of both the Ummayad and Abbasid dynasties relied on three factors as settled agriculture, urbanism and long distance trade.

14.6.1 Settled Agriculture

Expressing the primary motives of Arab chivalrous exploits and migrations into the conquered regions, Abu Tammam (788-845 CE) in *Hamasa* observed:

*It was not in search of paradise that you migrated,
but rather, I think, you were summoned by bread and dates.*

The above stated expression is true only regarding the Marwanid period because Arabs were allowed to purchase cultivable lands by Abdul Malik and his successor Al-Walid II. But in early Islamic period as a general rule in the conquered regions as Egypt, Iraq and Khurasan, cultivable lands were not redistributed among the Arab conquerors. Lands remained private estates of their original native owners. Earlier the Arab rulers considered land too uninviting to usurp; neither by forced acquisition nor even by purchase. However, the Umayyads had a particular interest in agriculture and the reclamation of wasteland (*mawat*) since state revenues depended on agrarian exploitation. *jiziya* and *kharaj* were backbone of the Ummayad fiscal system. In Abdul Malik's reign after a land and population survey merely four *dinars* poll tax was imposed

on each person annually. At the same time Umayyads conquered old crown lands and distributed them among kinsmen. This practice transformed the individual peasant holding into large-sacle landed estates.

Muawiyah I had built dams and constructed wells and had them connected to main irrigation canals in Al-Taif and Medina. Principal agricultural products in the Levant region, according to Al-Maqadassi, comprised of mostly dates, olives, grapes, apples, lemons, melons, sugarcane, sundry dyes and honey.

The Umayyad governors invested in digging of underground canals and watercourses (*qanat, karez, falaj*) to transport water for irrigation in Iraq and Syria. These agrarian measures alongside use of new agricultural methods in Iraq persuaded various tribes in Southern Arabia to abandon their lands and join the reclaimed farms. Ibn Khurdâdhbih (820-912 CE) in his *Kitab-ul Masalik wal Mamalik* states that Umayyad governor Maslama Ibn Abdul Malik who was sent to quell Kharijite rebellion in Iraq embarked on vast agricultural and water reforms. Irrigation was administered and maintained by town authority called *Sahib al-Saqiya*, who regulated the distribution of water. In the following table we are providing *kharaj* yields in the reign of Hisham bin Abd al-Malik (724-743 CE) given by Al-Baladhuri in *Futuh Al-Buldan*:

Province	Kharaj Yield
Iraq	130,000,000 <i>dirham</i>
Samarqand	2200,000 <i>dirham</i>
Egypt	12,000,000 <i>dinars</i> and 48,000,000 <i>dirham</i>
Palestine	400,000 <i>dinars</i>
Jordan	180,000 <i>dinars</i>
Damascus	400,000 <i>dinars</i>
Hims, Qinnasri'n and Al-Awasim	800,000 <i>dinars</i>

Al-Hajjaj, who was governor of Iraq, also provided loans and material incentives to famers intending to expand cultivable land and alleviate economic distress in Iraq. He constructed Al-Si'n canal near Wasit, Al-Zabi and Al-Ni'l canals and linked them to the Tigris and Euphrates. In the 8th century when Umayyad Empire was at its political apogee extensive *qanat* irrigation networks, dams and wells were built by Hisham Abdul Malik (724-743 CE) between Damascus and Mecca for extensive agrarian production and sedentary settlement. Later the same underground tunneling technique (*qanat*) diffused into North Africa and Iberian Peninsula² thus reflects the historic flow of Islam.

From outset conquered lands were classified under three categories: *swadfi/sawafi* lands; *sulh* lands; and *ahl al-dhimmah* lands.

Swadfi/Sawafi land: It constituted huge strips of special land set aside for the Caliph and his household. There was a separate *diwan* supervising the property of the state. In historical sources these lands figure as the *sawafi* of the Imam (*sawaf al-imam*) comprising of ten types: (i) The lands of Khusrau; (ii) Lands of other members of the Persian royal family; (iii) Postal waystations and postal roads; (iv) Fire temples (*buyut al-neran*); (v) Marshlands (*ajam*); (vi) Lands of those killed in the wars; (vii) Wetlands

² Iberian Peninsula consisted of modern southwestern corner of Europe comprised of largely Spain, Portugal, Andorra, and Gibraltar.

or swamps such as the *Batihah* in southern Iraq; viii) The lands where inhabitants had fled in the period of war; (ix) Land that Khusrau had designated crown land – *sawafi*; and (x) Walls (*arja*).

Sulh land: Those lands whose inhabitants had not resisted the Muslim campaigns and had made peace agreements with the Muslims were designated the *sulh* lands. The inhabitants were expected to pay a communal tax and retain ownership of their land.

Ahl al-dhimmah: Lands of the protected non-Muslims.

The state used to maintain records of lands according to their status either as *swafi*, *sulh* or *dhimma*.

Under the later Ummayyad period, the circumstances changed. The Arab chronicles provide more concrete evidence that the later Ummayyad period witnessed complaints by poor farmers, revolts of livestock owners and acts of resistance like migration. Al-Rai Al-Numayri presented a list of complaints to Abdul Malik Ibn Marwan elaborating how farmers suffered harsh conditions due to huge economic distress sprouting from cruelty of tax (*zakat* and *kharaj*) collectors. The farmers were migrating to Iraq to work on state-owned land. There were two kinds of lands: *iqta al-mulk* which were a private property and *iqta al-ijar* state lands farmed out to famers for rent. Al-Baladhuri stated that when Hisham's predecessor, Yazid II tried to confiscate the state-owned lands which had earlier been granted to farmers, the plan met not only a disastrous failure as it led to violent revolts but also the Caliph was forced to grant extra lands from the state-owned farms to officials. The Ummayyads re-imposed two Sassanid taxes on the eve of *Nawruz* and *Mihrajan* festivals. Al-Yaqubi in his *Tarikh-i Yaqubi* stated that Muawiyah I 'demanded the people of the As-Sawad give him gifts on the occasions of *Nawruz* and *Mihrajan*. So they did that and its worth reached ten thousand dinars.'

However any disruption in local economy during early Islamic period was hardly ever encouraged by the Arabs. Under the Ummayyads the tax base of Arab empire encouraged neither conversion of masses, wholesale usurpation and redistribution of conquered territories nor the state's isolation from land reclamation.

Moreover the Arabs earlier living in garrison towns had begun to divest of their martial occupations for settlement and occupational and social assimilation into villages as landowning elite in Balkh, Isfahan and Khurasan. We mentioned earlier almost 50,000 families were made to settle in Khurasan in 670 CE by Muawiyah I. However, by 730 CE just 15,000 families were still doing military service. In other regions like Azarbaijan, the Arab chiefs reclaimed deserted lands (every so often usurped), became landowners and set up new agrarian settlements. In Iran Arabs assimilated into Iranian social set up as they married Iranian women, spoke Persian language and celebrated festivals. In Ummayyad Caliphate there emerged a collaborative taxation framework whereby well-read Persian *mawali* administrators would keep *diwans* (registers of revenue and taxes) on behalf of their Arab overlords and military aristocrats in garrison towns.

14.6.2 Ummayyad Trade, Urbanism and *Suqs*

According to a provocative medievalist Henri Pirrene (1862-1935 CE), the Arab conquests in all places 'brought confusion upon both Europe and Asia without a precedent' as he conceived that Western Europe's long distance trading activity stagnated and sapped with the East following Arab conquests. European economy was disrupted and it turned inwards and became ruralised at subsistence (from trade-based money economy to natural and estate based economy) as supply of goods from the East terminated. However, the archaeological and textual evidence present a different picture.

They point out that from late fifth century trade in Mediterranean had declined considerably. They also illustrated continuity in commercial relations as papyrus from Egypt kept on reaching the French Merovingian (450-751 CE) chancery till late 8th century CE.

Contrary to early Islamic settlement organization when Muslims lived in military garrisons formed of tribal military units, the Ummayyads gradually disarmed the Arab garrison dwellers who subsumed into the structure of existing Byzantine and Persian cities with no disruption. Based on their Byzantine precedent, the Ummayyads initiated grandiose cultural projects — grand mosques, desert castles, cantonments and baths — in their cities and settlements reflecting a distinctive Islamic urban ethos and imperial style of Islamic building. These urban garrison settlements like Wasit, Basra, Kufa, Fustat, Anjar and the like in the course of Islamic conquests were prime catalysts which gave impulse to economic activities — large scale building activity, roads for transportation and import of food supply, household commodities and tools from surrounding hinterland.

The establishment of garrison towns had backward and forward linkages: it also ensured rapid industrial expansion and people especially non-Arab merchants and craftsmen flocked into these settlements for economic service. Regarding the *mawali* traders, Amr bin Bahr, an Ummayyad poet, remarked in a verse: 'I have contemplated Iraq's markets only to find that the *mawali* are the owners of their shops.' Iron, tar, bitumen and marble were required for economic infrastructure like construction of buildings and road networks, water wells and reservoirs. In the cities numerous industries fulfilled the market with essential needs. Metallurgy, textile industry, leather in Taif, ironmongery in Mecca, goldsmithing in Hijaz, papermaking industries flourished in various towns. Paper was prepared from cotton, hemp and silk.

The Arab expansion into Central Asia, Azarbaijan, Egypt and Iran facilitated prolific supply of gold, silver and copper. Such massive volume of metal reserves gave the Ummayyad currency strong basis for conducting trade and commerce. While describing the spatial and cultural aspects of an emblematic eighth century city, Al-Maqqadasi remarked, 'Halab (Aleppo) is an excellent and well-fortified city... the inhabitants are cultured and rich. It possesses a spacious castle and the Great Mosque.'

Al-Maqqadasi gives details that soaps, carpets, furs, fine swords, bows and arrows, kinds of knives and needles, scissors and cloaks are major manufactures of Transoxiana. Khurasan and Transoxiana were prominent centers of cotton production, Azabaijan and Khurasan were also centres of silk production and Levant region abounds in glass manufacturing within the *Islamicate*. In Damascus a special lustrous cloth was produced called Damsak. We notice that the Ummayyads initiated establishment of cities, introduced a strong tri-metallic coinage and developed considerable religious and economic infrastructure which precipitated significant process of urbanism. Islamic expansion into silk roads started during the reign of Al-Walid I (705-715). He sent Qutayba bin Muslim, the Ummayyad governor of Khurasan, to conquer Transoxiana and Ferghana with their commercial entrepôts. He initiated sending emissaries into China for commercial and diplomatic relations and this process continued throughout the Ummayyad period.

Pre-Islamic Iberian Peninsula had remained backwater in international commerce but after eighth century its trade patterns altered as this region gradually became an economic transit connecting Muslim world and Western Europe. Spain in the succeeding centuries came to be called the garden of Europe. Sea borne trans-Arabian trade was carried in small round ships called *Nefs. Muhtasibs* (market inspectors) regulated weights and measures within a *Su'q*.

14.7 UMMAYAD MONARCHS AND PROVINCES (*WILAYATS*)

The Ummayad administrative apparatus was institutionalized because various *diwans* were responsible for maintenance of military and fiscal administration. Ummayad Caliph was *de facto* head of the state. He exercised his will and administered through court, *Shura* (advisory council) and central *diwans* like *Diwan al-Jund* (Military board) which was first set up during Caliph Umar's time. The *Diwan al-Jund* basically maintained a registry of names and genealogies and stipends of soldiers (*a'ra*). The others included: *Diwan al-Kharaj* (Board of finance) that maintained a register of state revenue. Muawiyah I set up *Diwan al-Ras'il* (board of correspondence) meant to facilitate communication. He also set up a postal system. *Diwan al-Khatam* (Board of Signet) provided security in administrative communication and documents from forgery. The need for *diwans* (government bureaus) emerged for military and financial purposes in the early Islamic period. Muawiyah I and Abdul Malik ensured tight functioning of *barid* across the Ummayd territories. *Barid* was the key apparatus of centralization for the rulers of vast empires that of the Ummayads, Abbasids and the Ottomans.

During the Ummayad period Syria had four administrative divisions (*ajnad*) for military purposes. They included *Filastin* (Palestine founded by Sulayman bin Abdul Malik in 715 CE) with its capital at Ramla, *Al-Urdun* (Tiberias), *Dimashq* with capital at city of Damascus and *Hims* centered around Hims. Later on fifth division in the north was also added in 680 CE called *Qinnasrin*. Among the entire provinces (*wilayats*) of the Ummayads, the richest was Iraq owing to its black fertile land (*as-sawad*), climate and rivers like Tigris and Euphrates. Iraq was also home to two major garrison towns of Kufa and Basra and later Wasit was built by Al-Hajjaj, governor of Iraq under Abdul Malik. Both garrisons of Kufa and Basra were by 670 CE divided for military-administrative requirements. Khurasan was another major province of the Ummayad Empire. Merv and Nishapur were its two chief towns. It acted as base for military expeditions into Transoxiana. Egypt had been an important province under Ummayads. The Ummayads ruled these provinces through clients and *Shurta* (police). Local *ashraf*, chieftains and provincial elites were confirmed in power. The entire Ummayad bureaucratic structure had to perform two fundamental functions: one *military* i.e., maintain order among tribal factions and the other *civic* i.e., support the state in tax collection (*kharaj* and *zakat*).

14.8 FALL OF THE UMMAYAD DYNASTY

After 744 CE when Syrian armies had assassinated the Caliph Al-Walid II, yet again a civil war precipitated between rival claimants (remembered in Islamic history as the Third *Fitna*). Yazid III's succession (744 CE) to Ummayad Caliphate was later denounced by Marwan II, who in an uncompromising manner promptly with his contingents from Armenia stormed Damascus, trounced Yazid III with his supporters and declared himself the Caliph. Marwan II gained power through the sheer support of leading Qay'si tribal armies rather than Kalbi faction. This civil war had sparked a fresh wave of rampant rebellions and infighting in the provinces of Iraq, Egypt, Khurasan and Hijaz. Marwan II (744-750 CE) remained busy quelling rebellion in Kufa by an Alid, Abdullah bin Muawiyah. In 746, the *Ibadhi Kharijites* organized a revolt under Abdullah Al-Yahya and Al-Mukhtar planning to oust the Ummayads from Hijaz however Marwan II defeated them. He effectively squashed Kharijite rebellion in Hijaz and Yemen, Alid Shiite rebellion in Kufa and similar ones in Syria. Apparently all these rebellions were viciously suppressed since what they lacked was organization and ideological backing.

Quite obviously the Alid revolutionaries in Kufa earlier failed to oust Ummayyads through rebellions in the centre in 736 CE. At this point Abbas Al-Saffah and his clan infiltrated into Khurasan city of Merv, concealed the identity of *Imam*, kept secret *Nisbah* (lineage) of its members to create underground movement, and quietly propagated among its oppressed and alienated populace more importantly to disgruntled factions a Messianic *salvational* message as a catalyst to garner support in favor of their movement i.e., *Al-Rida minAhl-Bayt*. Such being the case, the Abbasids were emboldened by military weaknesses of Ummayyads which got exposed from the reign of Caliph Hisham. Umayyad armies suffered heavy losses against the Caucasian nomads (Khazars) who invaded Armenia, Berber Muslims revolted in North Africa and Zayd Ibn Ali revolted in Kufa. Hisham continued the futile raids and siege of Constantinople which drove heavy coffers of state expenditure. Marwan II's preoccupations with rebellions bolstered the hopes of Khurasanis led by an able general Abu Muslim.

Khurasan was a far-flung province ravaged by internal strife between Nasyr Ibn Siyar and Harith in 747 CE. Inspired by Hashimite-Abbasid propaganda (*Daw'ah*), soon Abu Muslim raised the black banners and could gather contingent of around 7,000 in Khurasan. At Merv, he successfully routed the Ummayyad governor of Khurasan, Nasyr (d. 748 CE). Within two years Abbas Al-Saffah's armies, supported by Iraqi *Shia* and Yemeni tribe with some Persian *mawalis* in Merv, led by Abu Muslim broke through Kufa, encountered with Ummayyad forces around north Iraq where they sealed the fate of Ummayyad dynasty in the Battle of Great Zab (January, 750 CE).

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) What impact did the Ummayyads' dams and underground irrigation canals have on agriculture and peasants?
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- 2) Write a short note on trade and urbanization during the Ummayyad Caliphate? Do you agree with the view that Arab conquests led to large scale economic and social disruptions?
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14.9 THE ABBASID CALIPHATE: ABBAS AND MANSUR

The Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258 CE) was founded by Abbas As-Saffah (750-754 CE), who received the oath of allegiance as Caliph in Great Mosque in Kufa, where he boldly proclaimed, 'Hold yourselves ready, for I am the pitiless blood-shedder

(*as-saffah*) and the destroying avenger...Allah has distinguished us by kinship to the Messenger of Allah...He made us descendants of his tree...They (Ummayyads) monopolised it (*Caliphate*), doing injustice to its people. Then, in the end, Allah returned the right to its people...'

Since Abbasids confirmed Caliphate as their inheritance, they quickly betrayed their Shiite Alid allies of restoration of authority to descendent of *Ahl A'l Bayt* and *Kharijites* and *mawli* of an egalitarian social order free from Ummayyad injustices. Abbas spent all his energy in hunting, preventing and crushing the potential rivals to his authority from either the Ummayyads or the disgruntled Shi'ites and military generals. In 751 CE Abbas captured Damascus. The Ummayyad princes were invited later to a 'Feast of Peace' in Egypt by Abbas, who had hired assassins to exterminate them with clubs therefore Abbas acquired epithet of *As-Saffah* (blood-shedder). Among the prominent Ummayyad princes, only Abdur Rahman escaped ruthless fate, fled to Spain and became ruler there.

Well-known as the Abbasid revolution in Islamic historiography, the foundation of Abbasid rule laid groundwork for two major developments: one it brought an end to the protracted age of Islamic territorial conquests and second it not only inaugurated the dominance of the Khurasanis in bureaucracy and military elite (*abna-ud dawlah*) but post of *Wazir* (Helper) became decisive within central administrative structure. Abbas managed the state affairs from Kufa. After the defeat of Ummayyads in Iraq, Abu Salama Al-Khalal confidential guide of Abbas was appointed *wazir* (*wazir Aa'l-Muhammad*) however soon killed. Khalid Al-Barmak was assigned post of *diwan al-kharaj* (Chancellor of the Exchequer) since during the rebellion he collected *kharaj* in Khurasan. Abbas As-Saffah governed the provinces through his trusted governors- either from the members of Abbasid clan or those devoted to Abbasid cause. Abu Jafar, who later succeeded Abbas As-Saffah as Caliph, became governor of Iraq, Azerbaijan and Armenia. Hijaz, Yamama and Yeman were given to Daud Bin Ali. Ibn Ali was made governor of Syria. Military was controlled by Khurasani charismatic general Abu Muslim. Abu Jafar Al-Mansur was nominated successor by Abbas As-Saffah d.754 CE. He is also considered the real founder of the Abbasid Caliphate.

Suppression of Rivals: The real founder of Abbasid state, Al-Mansur (754-775 CE) removed not only his rivals but also those who had allied with Abbasids since he tried to dissociate Abbasid power from the salvational movement. The Rawadaniya extremist (*ghulu*) supporters were clamped down by Mansur in 758 CE. Seeing Abu Muslim as a potential threat, Al-Mansur had him assassinated in 755 CE. The Khazars were stopped from further raiding into Armenia. Later Al-Mansur had to subdue an Alid rebellion led by Muhammad Al-Zakia (Medina) and Ibrahim (Basra) in 762 CE. Al-Mansur has started the conquest of Tabaristan.

Transfer of Capital: A man of prudence and 'genius of long term determination', on the advice of Khalid Al-Barmak the Caliph Al-Mansur transferred the capital of Abbasid Caliphate from Damascus to the banks of the river Tigris in 762 CE due to increase in the size of central bureaucracy. This new capital-city was called *Madinat us Salam* (Baghdad). It marked a decisive shift from Mediterranean world to the Persian dominated cosmopolis. Baghdad quickly became a grand trading hub and importantly the symbol of Persian cosmology. Perhaps significantly the Abbasid power was put in the centre of Persian speaking *mawali* people. Al-Mansur successfully created a new imperial elite in Baghdad which absorbed both Arabs and non-Arabs. For Abbasid Empire's agricultural and financial base, Iraq and Khurasan also became lifeline to its survival.

Institution of *Wazir*: It was set up with the establishment of the Abbasid Caliphate. In the reign of Al-Mansur it got institutionalised and an Iranian Abu Ayub was appointed *wazir*, who controlled the central government. *wazir* was the top civil official in the Abbasid administrative hierarchy. In their status, they highly depended on the benevolence of the Caliph. Earlier the *wazirs* used to be personal tutors or counsellors of princes. However, Al-Mansur ruled like an autocrat and hardly delegated any powers for *wazir* to exercise. He even took *mawali* as *wazir* on account of their proficiency. Al-Baladhuri and Tabari mentioned Abu Ayub as *Katib Amir al-Munieen* (scribe of the Caliph) not as *wazir*. Later high-ranking efficient Barmakid *wazirs* brought centralization in administration, controlled Abbasid state revenues, connected Caliphs to rest of the administrative personnel and patronized *ulama*, poets, scholars and others. All this they (*wazirs*) carried through *mazalim* (courts of complaints) meetings.

Institution of *Wala*: Abbas As-Saffah had allowed Abu Muslim Khurasani to retain control of the military, but in a bid to enhance the powers of the Caliphal office, Al-Mansur killed Abu Muslim in order to wrest military control away from the Khurasanis. The military-political elite of Abbasid Empire came to be dominated by Khurasani revolutionaries and prominent Barmakid aristocrats of Persian background who filled main central bureaucracy. However, provincial governorships and Syrian imperial contingents were replaced by the Abbasids. Earlier the Arabs equated *mawalis* with slaves owing to their unwarlike peasant nature so were denied the privileges to get entry into *Diwan al-Jund*. Apart from that *Mawali* were subjected to payment of various taxes as *jiziya*, *kharaj*, *ushr* (a tax on the harvests of irrigated land ranging from 5-10%) etc. In the Abbasid times, Al-Mansur recruited non-Arab Muslims for military purposes personally connected them to the Abbasid house by 'contractual *Wala*'. This Non-Arab cohesive social group comprised of diverse races and ethnicities called as *Mawala Amir al-Mumineen* and were endowed top positions in administration like provincial governorships. Al-Masudi quotes Al-Mansur vilifying the conduct of Ummayyad caliphs as ungodly. In one speech in Mecca, the Caliph Mansur said: 'O people I represent the power of God on earth, I lead you with His support... He made a trustee in charge of overseeing it.'

14.10 THE ABBASID CALIPHATE: HARUN AND AL-MAMUN

Harun (766-809 CE) became the Caliph after the murder of his brother Al-Hadi. Before assuming the office of Caliph of the Abbasid Empire, he had served as victorious military commander of various provinces like Syria, Armenia, Ifriqiya (modern Tunisia, western Libya and eastern Algeria) and Azerbaijan. He remained on good terms with China and Byzantine powers by restoring on vast scale diplomatic and commercial relations with them. Harun al-Rashid inherited the Abbasid empire which was politically stable and economically prosperous, that paved way for the remarkable achievements in the spheres of government institutions, trade and literary activity, music and arts. He made investments in huge building enterprises and building of cities, sea fleets and harbours. The frontiers of the Abbasid Caliphate stretched from Egypt in the West to the Central Asia and India in the East (For the extent of the Abbasid Caliphate please see map of the Abbasid Caliphate from 8th to 11th Century, from *World History to 1500*, William and Jackson, p. 198).



Map 14.1: The Abbasid Caliphate, c. 850 CE

Credits: Gabagool, April 2009

Source: <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e1/Abbasids850.png>

Semi-Autonomy to Province of Ifriqiya: The latter half of Harun's reign suffered from political instability that allowed free hand to provincial governors. The Barmakid family tried to control Ifriqiya like other provinces. These centralizing imperatives failed when in 800 CE Harun was compelled to grant semi-autonomy to the governor of Ifriqiya, Ibrahim al-Aghlab. The Aghlabids carried out military and fiscal administration of Ifriqiya from 800-909 CE. Aghlabids recognized the authority of the Abbasid Caliph merely nominally and paid them annual tribute.

Destruction of Barmakid Family: According to historian Al-Tabari in September 787 CE Harun al-Rashid appointed Yahya bin Khalid bin Barmak as *Wazir*. Harun no doubt had well-established personal ties with Barmakid family of *Wazirs*. The mistrust between Caliph and Barmakid family was gradual and final destruction of the all-powerful al-Barmaki family came in January 803 CE when Khalid al-Barmak was killed. With it also started a period of political and territorial decline of the Abbasid empire.

The Caliph Harun al-Rashid had nominated Al-Amin as his first successor (*wali al-Ahd*) to be followed by Al-Mamun. In 802 CE at Mecca Harun had made covenant for succession arrangements according to that Al-Amin would become Caliph of the empire and granted Khurasan to Al-Mamun in appanage. Several historians including Tayeb El-Hibri have refuted this interpretation of Harun's Protocol in Mecca in 802 CE because they state that Al-Mamun later brought interpolations into it which makes it 'disproportionately favourable to Al-Mamun'. However in 809 CE, a blood-spattered civil war (Fourth *Fitna*) precipitated between Al-Amin (d. 813) and Al-Mamun (786–833 CE) which lasted for more than four years. Supported by Persians finally Al-Mamun removed Al-Amin. Under Al-Mamun (813-833 CE) the Abbasid Empire was marked by immense intellectual vitality, popular rebellions and witnessed territorial decline and the waning of Abbasid hegemony.

Al-Mamun (813-833 CE) for first six years lived in the city of Merv among Khurasani aristocrats. Al-Fadl ibn Sahl, *wazir*, was running the administration of the Abbasid state. Al-Hassan ibn Sahl, Al-Fadl's brother, was finance minister. Al-Mamun brought a new military policy which was implemented by a Khurasanian warlord Tahir ibn Husayn, whom the Caliph appointed military head of the entire Abbasid military. The policy

curbed Arab hegemony and gradually their contingents began to disappear from Abbasid army. In the meantime the Caliph also put checks to the power of the Khurasanis especially Tahirids through the forming of two types of armies:

Shakiriyya: These independent military units were maintained by their own lords from Transoxiana, Armenia and North Africa. They were not under direct control of the Caliph. They often served as counterweight to Tahirids. The *Maghariba* troops (North African regiment) were part of the *Shakiriya* contingent.

Ghilman: These forces were basically Turkish slave soldiers, either captured or purchased from the frontier regions of Transoxiana. Turkish slave soldiers increased Caliph's strength. Turkish soldiers quickly began clashing with the Baghdadi populace. They do killed some Arab soldiers in the Baghdadi army. Ultimately Al-Mau'tasim was left with no choice but to build capital-city of Samaraa in north Baghdad (838 CE) to detach the troops from the masses.

During the Caliphate of Mamun (813-33CE) the ruling members of the family were made hereditary governors of Samarqand, Ferghana and Herat without state supervision. Samanids became hereditary in Transoxiana and likewise Tahirids after 820 CE in Khurasan.

Capturing Slave Soldiers in Transoxiana

According to Al-Baladhuri, 'Al-Mamun used to write to his *Amils* in Khurasan to raid those of the people of Transoxiana who had not submitted and accepted Islam. He would send his envoys to grant pension in the Register (*Diwan*) to whom he liked. He wanted the good-will of the people of these regions and of the sons of their kings, and to conciliate them by favours. When they came to his door, he honoured them and gave them his blessing. When Mau'tasim became Caliph he followed the example of the predecessor to such an extent that most of the leaders of the army were from troops of Transoxiana: Sogdians, Ferganah, and people of *Ushr'usanah*, *Ash'ash* and other places. Their Kings used to visit him; Islam became dominant religion in those regions; and the inhabitants of those countries began to make war against Turks beyond them.'

(*Futuh Al-Buldan*, Vol II: 205)

Al-Mamun is remembered less for long drawn military warfare on the Byzantine frontier but more commonly for the *Mihna* (Inquisition), support to a group of Islamic theologians called *Mautazilites* (for details see **Unit 15**) and his economic support to the House of Wisdom (*Bayt-ul Hikmah*). His reign was dynamic and still stands as a glorious moment in the entire intellectual history of Islam. The Caliph also got the map of the Earth drawn – see in the picture below.



Figure 7 : Surat-ul Arz (Picture of the Earth): Al-Mamun

Credit: Ibn Fadlallah al-Umari's (1301-1349) *Masalik al-absar*, in Topkapi Saray Museum, Istanbul, Ahmet 2797, fols. 292v-293r

Source: <http://www.myoldmaps.com/early-medieval-monographs/2261-ibn-fadi-allah-al/2261-al-umari.pdf>

What underlying reasons induced Al-Mamun to insist upon the dogma that the *Quran* was created? Earlier historians would have us believe that Al-Mamun was a 'free thinker' so through *Mihna* (inquisition) he tried to expose and undermine the position of *ulema*. Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds had provided a balanced opinion concerning Al-Mamun's *Mihna*. The Umayyads claimed leadership of *Ummah* on three grounds: religious authority and intervention in religious and legal matters, waged wars on unbelievers (Byzantines) and the last was leading and providing safety for observance of *Hajj*. The Abbasid rulers like Harun performed *Hajj* many times, nevertheless *ulama* had come to be considered authority on theology and religion, Al-Mamun tried to reclaim that lost religious authority by ousting the *ulama*. So he targeted *ulamas* and *Qazis* within the Abbasid domain, compelled and persecuted them to acknowledge the Caliphs or state's interpretation of law. The Inquisition eventually failed because as Patricia Crone has made an important observation that 'The Caliphs problem was that the scholars (*ulama*) have no organization by which he could subdue them as a collectivity. They owed their religious leadership to the informal consent of their followers; it came from below and could not be wrested from them by any means at Caliph's disposal.' The persecution by *mihna* (inquisition) continued until widespread protests urged the Caliph Al-Mutawakkil to abandon it in 848 CE.

14.11 LATER ABBASID CALIPHS

Various internal revolts had erupted in Azerbaijan (by Babak, d. 838 CE) and Tabristan during the rule of Al-Mau'tasim (833-842 CE). He opened a new chapter in political history of Islam by employing the Turkish mercenaries initially as elite palace-guards and later in useful campaigns against Byzantines in 837-38 CE. Unlike Khurasanis and Arabs, Turks were exceptional mounted archers. They were strictly loyal to their patron i.e., the Caliph. He introduced *mamluk* military society on a grand scale into the Abbasid Islamdom at the cost of wholesale withdrawal of Arabs from the *diwan*. These Turkish slave-soldiers were called *mamluks* or *ghulams*. They were captured or purchased in large scale; paid higher salaries than the rest of the regiments; and nurtured within families (for *parwarish/tarbiyat*). This was a watershed that opened the gates of rapid Islamization of the eastern territories of the Abbasid Empire. Al-Mau'tasim had directed his Turkish *mamluk* forces to besiege principal cities of Amorium in 838 CE, thus for the first time Turks advanced into central Anatolia. However, unruly behaviour of the Turks persuaded Al-Mau'tasim to move the capital of the Abbasid state from Baghdad to Samarra (For map of the post-Harun Al-Rashid Abbasid Caliphate please go to <https://www.writing-endeavour.com/blog/the-abbasid-caliphate-p9.html>).

Al-Watiq (842-47), Al-Mutawakkil (847-61), Al-Muntasir (861-2) and later the skilled politician Al-Muwafaq tried to contain the power of Turkish troops. Later Abbasid period witnessed a series of wars of succession in tandem with huge nomadic movements westwards that brought Abbasid Caliphate into disintegration. Although Abbasid Caliphs continued as figurehead (945-1258 CE), the empire resembled a congeries of independent provinces as Khurasan under Tahirids and Samarkand under Samanids, Fars under Buyids and Egypt under Fatimids, since Caliphs at Baghdad had been reduced to mere puppets by the Turkish elite guards who were deposing Caliphs at their will (For the post-Harun Al-Rashid Abbasid Caliphate see <https://www.writing-endeavour.com/blog/the-abbasid-caliphate-p9.html>).

Check Your Progress-3

1) How were the Abbasids able to overthrow the Ummayyads?

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2) What was the impact of the Abbasid Revolution on administrative composition?

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3) What were the main changes instituted by Caliph Al-Mansur in Abbasid state?

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14.12 THE ABBASID CALIPHATE: IRRIGATION, PEASANTS AND ESTATES

The Abbasid Caliphate was specially known for constructing massive networks of canals for irrigation. However, towards the closing years of the Abbasid Caliphate massive peasant and slave revolts shook the very base of the empire.

14.12.1 Irrigation

When Al-Mansur adopted Baghdad as capital of the Abbasid Caliphate, the Abbasid elite showed immense interest in increasing and augmenting cultivation over vast swathes of marshy lands especially the flat alluvial plains in southern parts of Iraq known as the *Sawad* region. It was important sources of foodgrains, vegetables and fruits. Wheat, rice and barley were staple crops in the *Sawad* region. They overhauled and revived the long abandoned existing irrigation network. To boost agriculture older *qanats* (underground water channels) were repaired, innovative waterways (*tura*) or moats dug, additional water channels excavated and techniques to reduce channel silting were devised. Apart from Iraq, particularly *Al-Sawad* region, the other two fertile agricultural zones of the Abbasids were Egypt and Khurasan.

The *Nahr Abul-Asad*, a new water canal was deep and excavated by one of Al-Mansur's military commander Abul al-Asad in the swamp lands. It was the main source

of water supply in the region. The *Nahr al-Bilah* was constructed in Wasit. It was a vast water channel constructed during the time of Al-Mahdi. Wasit was a garrison centre earlier. In the Abbasid period it supplied reasonably cheap foodstuffs to the growing market in Baghdad. The Nahrwan system (construction of water channels/canals) helped to revive vast lands. According to one chronicler, the crops harvested on these lands ‘were given as assistances and gifts to the inhabitants of the *Al-Haramayn* i.e. “two holy places — Mecca and Medina”, and as charitable gifts for the poor there.’ Apart from that the *Nahr Zubayda* was constructed to supply water to the people of Mecca. The northern portions of Wasit (Mubarak and Silh) became cultivable subsequent to the construction of *Nahr Al-Rayyan* by the mother of Harun Al-Rashid. The Caliph Harun also had the *Nahr al-Qatul* dug to facilitate the supply of water to those lands which provided ‘provision for his army’, and on which he spent ‘20 million *dirhams*’.

Tax from agriculture constituted the backbone of the edifice of the Abbasid Empire. The Abbasid Caliphs, royal ladies, governors and nobles often made substantial improvements in water channels, wells, dams with sluices (*musannayat*) and other *nahr* to supply irrigation to peasant lands. The Abbasids derived most of its state income from alluvial plains of *Al-Sawad*. In the fabled work on state revenue *Kitab Al-Kharaj*, Abu Yusuf elaborated the state’s duties concerning irrigation of fields. Abu Yusuf states: ‘If the inhabitants of the *sawad* require the digging [or dredging] of their great waterways which branch from the Tigris and the Euphrates, they are dug for them and the cost is paid from the treasury and the *Kharaj* payers (*Ahl al-Kharaj*).’

Al-Mansur constructed Baghdad as a planned concentric city. It was provided water through *four* major irrigation canals (*nahr*) originating from the Euphrates *viz.* of the *Nahr Isa*, the *Nahr Sarsar*, the *Nahr Malik*, and the *Nahr Kutha*. The Western Baghdad was irrigated by water canals originating in the Euphrates. Eastern Baghdad was irrigated by the *Nahr Qatul* originating from the Tigris River. In early ninth century Khurasan, the governor directed the legal scholars to compile a book on water irrigation, which they wrote in the form of the *Kitab al-Quni*. In all provinces *Diwan Al-Ma’a* distributed water among peasants and regulated irrigation practices.

14.12.2 Popular Revolts in the Abbasid Caliphate

The earliest peasant revolts against the oppression of the Abbasid state agents that broke out rapidly were concentrated in Syria during Al-Mansur’s period. They were spearheaded by Bundar. Peasants also revolted in Khurasan, Ifriqiya, Egypt and other provinces during the Abbasid period trying to shake off the Abbasid yoke. In Egypt, Coptics revolted against the Abbasid state during Harun Al-Rashid’s time. In Azarbaijan and Transoxiana massive peasant uprisings attempted to ‘shake off the heavy hands of Abbasid governors’. The Kurdish tribes revolted in 839 CE in Mosul and Tikrit.

The Zanj insurrection broke out during the time when Samarra was engulfed by anarchy due to civil war. The Zanj slaves were used to work on marshland estates southeast of Baghdad, mainly Basra. They would clear away top soil. Conscious of their miserable conditions, they revolted several times. However, the most formidable of rebellions that lasted for almost fifteen years (868-883 CE) is called the Revolt of Zanj. Tabari offers a fair account of the social uprising by slaves since he had been in Baghdad that time. Zanj rebels had captured and controlled Basra; defeated the Abbasid armies; and their leader Ali ibn Muhammad was declared **Mahdi**. However, their leader was ultimately killed. Historians are divided on the nature of the Zanj revolt whether it was a slave revolt at all. The revolt broke out as slave rebellion later Muslim peasants, Bedouins and dissatisfied Abbasid troops and groups joined the rebellion.

14.12.3 Forms of Estates under the Abbasids

In the Abbasid Caliphate in the 8th century the crown lands were called *Swadfi/Sawafi*. Since variety of progressive improvements in land had occurred, the Abbasid crown land is also known to have increased significantly. Caliphs and their household members used to purchase private estates. The private estates of the Caliphs were called as *Diyaal-khilafah*. Abbasid Caliphs like Harun al-Rashid, is believed to have coerced the local ruler of Tabaristan, Vandad Hurmuzad, to sell him precious estates in Tabaristan for one million *Dirham*. In the same region Harun's son tried to buy estates of 300 villages. In general, the reign of Harun also witnessed a marked increase in *swadfi* (Caliphal crown lands) but more in Al-Jazira (north Iraq) and the frontiers. In the medieval period Al-Jazira meant the land between upper reaches of the Tigris and Euphrates. In Al-Jazira corn and other foodstuffs were produced only to be supplied to Iraq and Baghdad.

When Abu al-Abbas confiscated the properties and land estates (*Diya* ') directly owned by the Marwanid Umayyads, he set up a special *diwan* to supervise them. Ira Lapidus has argued that Abbasid estates were supplemented by confiscation of the Ummayyad holdings. In other words, when came to power, Abbasids had confiscated the estates previously controlled by the Ummayyads. In several regions pasture lands were earmarked which the Caliphs' flocks and animals would use for grazing. Hassan Ibn Muhammad in the *Tarikh-i Qum* states that vast pastures were reserved in every village in the neighborhood for the beasts of the Abbasid Caliphs and governors.

In the second half of the 9th century when Turkic mercenary soldiers were introduced by the Abbasid Caliphate military expenditure increased considerably. The state, in lieu of salary, assigned its troops the land grants called *iqta*. It refers to a portion (*qata*) of land held as private estate. In the late Abbasid times it became a dominant form of land-holding. To put simply the *iqta* ' system evolved in the Islamicate in the 9th century to relieve the state treasury because inadequate tax revenues and little war booty from campaigns made it hard for the government to pay salaries of the army. Historians like Ann S Lambton have also claimed that *iqta* system was enforced owing to 'the progressive deterioration of the fiscal stability of the Abbasid state'. Becker has claimed that originally *muqta* (holder of the *iqtas*) had no military obligations. It was only subsequent introduction of the Turks into military that military penetrated into the system of assignees. Becker viewed that the *iqta* system grew originally as an administrative-cum-bureaucratic apparatus however later it changed into military grant system and an effort to meet the military expenditure when the gold economy had broken down.

With the coming of the Abbasid Caliphate the most outstanding event in the entire Islamic history was the introduction of paper into the Islamicate through the Chinese prisoners. The first Arab paper industry came up in Samarkand in 751 CE and in Baghdad 794 CE. Paper mills swelled in number in the Islamicate world with astonishing rapidity across the world including Syria, North Africa, Egypt and Spain. The Arabs ensured considerable improvements in paper technology to produce high quality paper. Vast availability of paper facilitated the production of books on an unmatched scale. Paper facilitated codification of land revenue process and correspondence and exchange of information as well.

In the ninth century when the agricultural yields contracted for the entire Iraq *Sawad* region had plunged into anarchy due to the Zanj revolts, however, Egypt continued to grow. The landed elites and private individuals invested in the production of linen and flax. Cotton production also boomed. Papyrus, wine, woollen fabrics and grains from Egypt continued to be traded in Hejaz and other provinces. In Basra, Egypt and Baghdad

the *suqs* or bazaar played an essential part in the life of most of the towns and cities in the ‘Abbasid era. These *suqs* were established by people of power. They offered an alternative public space for people to draw together, communicate and buy and sell.

Under the unified Arab Islamic state there occurred a process of diffusion of foodcrops and irrigation technology across the Islamicate. It is called Arab Agricultural Revolution. It occurred through massive migration of people, territorial expansion and translocation. The government bureaucracies sponsored construction of irrigation canals, underground water harvesting techniques (*qanat*), dams and wells since cultivation of crops like sugarcane, cotton required plenty of water. New water raising techniques came up like *norria* (water driven wheel), or *saqiya* (animal driven chain of ports).

14.12.4 Tax Farming in the Abbasid Egypt

The tax farming contract was called *daman or qibalah*. Under this abominable contract arrangement selected state and private individuals would pay a specified amount in advance to state *amils* to ensure a free hand in the tax collection. It evolved mostly in Khurasan and Egypt where it later gave way to system of auctioning. It proved to be disastrous for the Abbasid state in the long run. It ruined the land of its fertility and harmed the peasants. Abu Yusuf cautioned about tax farming in general and in *Sawad* particular:

I deem that none of the Sawad, nor other lands, should be subject to a tax farming contract (*Qibalah*). The tax contractor/farmer (*Mutaqabbil*), if there is a surplus over and above the *kharaj* in his contract, overburdens the *Kharaj* payers and imposes on them what is not obligatory for them, oppressing them and harming them in order to be protected from that which he has entered. In that and what is the like of it, there is the ruination of the land and the ruin of the subjects. The tax contractor does not care about their ruin so long as his own concern is guaranteed in his contract (*Qibalah*); and, he might even derive greater benefit after [receiving] a large surplus by [the contract]. However, he can only do this except by means of draconian force against the subjects. He flogs them brutally; he makes them stand in the sun and hangs stones around their necks. This is the excessive punishment which he metes out to the *kharaj* payers.

In the late ninth century Egypt Abbasid state formulated a fiscal arrangement called *iqta-i qabala* land grant meant for the payment of the specified amount of tax. During the Abbasid period merchants as crop brokers and money-changers had played a vital role in the tax collection. However the civil wars (*fitna*) leading to property confiscations compelled them to settle in Khurasan and Syria. It dealt a heavy blow to the Abbasid state finance as the revenue began to contract. Various Abbasid elites owned private estates in Khurasan, Tabaristan, Syria, Egypt, Iraq and Al-Yamamah. Their owners would have them farmed out to cultivators for sharecropping after signing a contract straight with bureau called *Diwan-i Diya*’.

Check Your Progress-4

- 1) Why did the Abbasid Caliphs and nobles build canals, dams and wells?
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- 2) Write a note on management of irrigation network during the Abbasid Caliphate?

3) What were the main forms of estates and land-holdings under the imperial Abbasids?

14.13 TAXES AND *DIWANS* UNDER THE ABBASIDS

Kharaj (lit. revenue derived from land) referred to a regular tax levied on agricultural produce of land. In the early Islamic campaigns the conquered lands distributed among Muslims were not levied such a tax but they paid *ushr* and *zakat* while the non-Muslims paid *kharaj* tax. It constituted major portion of the state's income. *Kharaj* lands were imposed much higher rates of taxation compared to other taxes. Abu Hanifa was a widely acclaimed Islamic theologian and jurist *par excellence* who tried to codify Islamic jurisprudence on the basis of deductive analogy called *Qiyas* in the reign of Abbasid monarch Al-Mansur (754-775 CE). His approach towards land taxation (*kharaj* or *ushr*) and land reclamation was flexible and inclined towards benefit and easing of the burden of cultivator (see the box below). His pupil Abu Muslim compiled an authoritative work on Islamic taxation — *Kitab-ul Kharaj* — to harmonize Islamic principles with state taxation policies on the demand of Harun Al-Rashid.

Laws of *Kharaj* Lands

Only the land which was taken by assault, such as *As-Sawad* (Iraq), *As-Sham* (Syria) and others is subject to the *Kharaj*. If the leader divided it among those who conquered it, it is the tithe-land, and its inhabitants slaves; if the leader did not divide it, but turned it over to Muslims as a whole, as Umar did with *As-Sawad* then its people sustain the burden of the *Jiziyah*, and the land is subject to *Kharaj*, but the people are not slaves. This is the dictum of Abu Hanifa.

In regard to the people 'of assault' who accepts Islam: The *Kharaj* is upon the land, and in addition to *Kharaj*, the *Zakat* (alms-tax) of the crop. This is the dictum of Al -Auza'i. Abu Hanifa and his school say: A man is not liable for both *Kharaj* and *Zakat*... and if a man sows *Kharaj* land several times in a year, only a single *Kharaj* was collected from him. Ibn Abu Laila says the *Kharaj* is collected from him as often as crop ripens for him. Abu Hanifa and Malik say in regard to *Kharaj* land which has no owner. If the Muslims live on it, and transact business, and use it as market-place, no *Kharaj* is assessed against them for it.

Umar abolished *kharaj* for everyone who had been converted to Islam in Khurasan and made an allotment of money to those who had accepted Islam.

Al-Baladhuri, *Futuh Al-Buldan*, Appendix I, Concerning the Laws of *Kharaj* Lands, pp. 237&426.

Ushr literally means tenth part. Abu Yusuf expounded, 'The *Ushr* was only taken for what the owner of the *Iqta* had to pay for the trouble of digging canals, constructing houses/buildings (*buyut*) and work on the land.' The other taxes included *jiziyah* (poll-

tax), *khums*, *maks*, tax on market and commodities sold in market. The tax on markets was known as (*Daribat al-aswaq*). One chronicler noted that, ‘Al-Mansur did not impose a revenue tax on the markets up until the time he died. When Al-Mahdi became his successor, Abu Ubayd Allah pointed this out to him. He ordered it and imposed the *kharaj* on the shops (*Hawanit*), and that was in 873 CE.’ The ships coming from India and China were levied a tax that amounted to one-tenth called *Ushur Al-Sufun*. *Maks* tax was imposed on ships to Basra. Later in the 10th century taxes on ships like *Maks* or *Ushur Al-Sufun* were discontinued. Abbasid state imposed taxes on all foodstuff, fruits and vegetables sold in the markets. Animals sold in the market were taxed like importantly horses, beasts of burden, cows and sheep. Particular taxes were imposed on production of beverages, selling of *Khumur* (wine), silk and cotton products.

The Abbasid military, civil and agrarian administration was a deliberate improvement upon the inherited legacy from the Umayyads. Under the Umayyads *Dihqan* collected taxes, while the Abbasid state had absorbed them into administrative personnel, the state officials directly realized the taxes. Based on the Persian traditions, they ushered more centralization and delegated powers to the institution of *wazir* and created various *diwans* (departments). The *wazir* supervised all the *diwans*. Systematization of the registers into *daftar* (Codices) to prevent their loss under Abbas Al-Saffah’s reign and creation of the institution of *wazir* under Al-Mansur’s reign were basic administrative changes under early Abbasids that guaranteed centralized control over revenue. Harun Al-Rashid created separate post of *Qazi ul-Quza*. The departments and *majlis* (committees) under *wazir* kept on increasing to an extent that there were almost twenty central *diwans* of state in Baghdad under Caliph al-Muqtadir (908-929 CE). Some of them have been given below:

Diwan al-Kharaj: The hub of the central state administration, *Diwan al-Kharaj* dealt with land tax and related financial matters of the central government during the ‘Abbasid period (750-945 CE). Most often it supervised and monitored the agricultural and economic productivity of the provinces. It functioned independent of the rest of *diwans* and acted as an internal audit office over the *wazir*’s.

Diwan al-Azimmah: This department was created by the Abbasids (750-945 CE) as supreme audit office to supervise, control and check the accounts of other *diwans*. It acted as connecting link between different *diwans* and the office of *wazir*.

Diwan al-Daiyah: This central office was set up by Abbas al-Saffah. It supervised and maintained several personal estates, rents and investments of the Caliph during the ‘Abbasid Caliphate.

Diwan al-Khazin: This department in the central ‘Abbasid administration was responsible for governmental stores of natural products and arsenals.

Diwan al-Nafaqat: This Abbasid department was established to manage expenditure on the administration of the royal court. It dealt with the salaries of the court officials and construction, expansion and repairs of the royal court buildings.

Diwan al-Sawad: It was the most dominant department of the Abbasid state. This office was established by early ‘Abbasids to act as agent for collection of all revenues and taxes from the agricultural lands of Iraq.

Diwan al-Mal: This provincial department of revenue in the ‘Abbasid period maintained registers ‘defining each province and indicating how it had been annexed to the Islamic state: whether by force (*‘anwah*) or by contract (*sulh*). Registration covered the status of land taxation at various points (indicating whether the receipts were *kharaj* or *‘ushr*,

whether *kharaj* was considered as rent or as *jizyah*), the survey of the land with the names of holders, and the type of *kharaj* assessment (whether it was *misahah* or *muqasamah*, and the fixed rate of *kharaj* in the case of *misahah* or the proportion of yield in case of *muqasamah*).

Diwan al-Ma’: This department was basically responsible for the supervision of irrigation works and distribution of water. The department maintained accounts of the agricultural productivity. It also supplied *diwan al-kharaj* with data for calculating *‘ibrah* (average output).

The fiscal and military administration in the provinces was entrusted to two departments: *Diwan- al-Harb* (military) and *Diwan al-Kharaj* (revenue) appointed by central government. These departments were manned with officials including the scribes, money-changers, mint supervisors, *muhtasibs* (market inspectors) and toll officials and clerks. *Rustaq* was smallest administrative unit. Some of the provinces which were not directly administered in the Caspian highlands were Jilan, Tabaristan, Daylam, and Jurgan; and in Inner Asian provinces those included Transoxiana, Ferghana, Ushrusana and Kabul.

Check Your Progress-5

1) Do you agree with the view that both the Ummayyad and the Abbasid states were based on agrarian taxation?

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2) The Abbasid administrative framework was highly complex. How were the Abbasids controlling such a vast central imperial bureaucracy, provincial and local agents and magnates?

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3. Match the following:

Name	Definition
a) <i>Diwan-al Ma’</i>	i) Land Tax
b) <i>Kharaj</i>	ii) Irrigation Department
c) <i>Daman</i>	iii) Assignment of Land
d) <i>Iqta</i>	iv) Tax Farming

14.14 SUMMARY

To sum up, this Unit gives an account of the evolution of Islamic society from 7th to 10th century — administrative innovations and several forms of estates as well as changing nature of the Caliphate from a loosely organized decentralized state to a highly complex and centralized one. The Ummayyads built their administrative institutions, system of coinage and revenue and court culture by emulating and improving upon their Byzantine and Sassanid precedents. They also extended the frontiers of the Caliphate to the highest extent, expanded the cultivation of fallow land by investing in construction of *qanats*, wells and dams with sluices. Ummayyads refined the state administration through introduction of *diwans*. However, the Ummayyads ruled over a population mostly constituted of non-Muslims; Ummayyads barely encouraged mass conversion whatsoever. The Abbasid period marked the highest watermark of the Islamic civilization. They inherited the rich and centralized administration from the Ummayyads and imbibed the Persian traditions of governance. With the Abbasid ascendancy, the Arabs gradually began disappearing from the state army and bureaucracy. Their place was accorded to the Khurasanis and Turks. Islamisation of Turks and mass conversions were witnessed in the Abbasid period.

14.15 KEYWORDS

<i>Zakat</i>	: Alms-giving. It amounted to 2.5 per cent of total property.
<i>Nahr</i>	: A water body or irrigation canal.
<i>Nawruz</i>	: The first day of Iranian calendar.
<i>Amsar</i>	: <i>Misr</i> means a garrison town or city, its plural in Arabic is <i>Amsar</i> .
Numismatics	: The study and collection of coins.
<i>Mahdi</i>	: A messiah, rescuer of Islam; according to Islamic tradition a <i>mahdi</i> will appear before the Day of Judgement to get rid of all the evils.

14.16 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) See Sections 14.2 and 14.3
- 2) See Section 14.4 on Marwanid and the Box on the Sufyanid State and Marwanid State

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) See Sub-section 14.6.1 on Ummayyad Economy: Estates, Trade and Irrigation
- 2) See Sub-section 14.6.2 on Trade, Urbanism and *Suq*. Focus on the Henry Pirrene's argument

Check Your Progress-3

- 1) See Section 14.9

- 2) See Section 14.9
- 3) See Sections 14.9 and 14.10

Check Your Progress-4

- 1) See Sub-section 14.12.1 on Abbasid Caliphate: Irrigation, Peasants and Estates
- 2) See Sub-section 14.12.1 on Abbasid Caliphate: Irrigation, Peasants and Estates
- 3) See the Sub-Section 14.12.3 on Forms of Estate in Abbasid period and focus on *Swadfi, Iqta, Daman* and other types of landholdings

Check Your Progress-5

- 1) See Section 14.13 Taxes and *diwans*. Focus on *kharaj*, and other types of taxes
- 2) See Section 14.13
- 3) a (ii), b (i), c (iv) and d (iii)

14.17 SUGGESTED READINGS

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Lassner, Jacob, (2017) *The Shaping of 'Abbasid Rule* (Princeton: Princeton Legacy Library).

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Shaban, M A., (1970) *The Abbasid Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

14.18 INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO RECOMMENDATIONS

The Early Middle Ages, 284-1000: The Splendor of the Abbasid Period

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ji8kKMSLEQo>

Islamic Societies

<https://www.uctv.tv/shows/Islamic-Societies-with-Ira-Lapidus-Conversations-with-History-7242>



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UNIT 15 ISLAMIC SOCIETY: RISE AND SPREAD OF SECTS*

Structure

- 15.0 Objectives
- 15.1 Introduction
- 15.2 Arabian Peninsula on the Eve of Islam
 - 15.2.1 *Jahaliya*: Pre-Islamic Period of Ignorance?
 - 15.2.2 Arabs Between the Great Empires
 - 15.2.3 Southern Arabian Peninsula
- 15.3 Islam in Arabia and Muhammad: Early Islamic Society
 - 15.3.1 Migration to Medina in 622 CE
 - 15.3.2 Conquest of Mecca
- 15.4 Islamic Caliphate and Dissension in the Islamic World
- 15.5 The Ummayyads: Kharijites and Shia
 - 15.5.1 Who were the Kharijites?
 - 15.5.2 Rise of Shia Islamic Sects
- 15.6 The Abbasid Caliphate: *Mu'tazila* and *Asharite*
- 15.7 Islamic Sufi Orders
 - 15.7.1 Rise of Sufi Movement
 - 15.7.2 Spread of Sufi *Tariqa*
- 15.8 Summary
- 15.9 Keywords
- 15.10 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises
- 15.11 Suggested Readings
- 15.12 Instructional Video Recommendations

15.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we are going to study the rise and expansion of Islam and its various sects. Islam, as we know, emerged in Arabia but later spread to the three continents – Asia, Europe and Africa. After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- understand the social and political circumstances in the Arabian Peninsula on the eve of the rise of Islam,
- know the early conflicts which led to the establishment of Islam,
- analyse about the formation of first Islamic State (Caliphate) in Medina and its consequences on the world history,
- discuss the rise of Ummayyad and Abbasid Caliphates, and
- comprehend the roots and growth of dissent groups in Islam – Kharijites, Shia and Sunni, and Sufism.

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15.1 INTRODUCTION

Although an overwhelmingly arid land — composed of sandy and rocky desert — the cradle of Islam, Near East had spawned and cherished a flurry of various religious traditions including Egyptian/Mesopotamian religions, Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Christianity. Behind the formation of strong Arab Islamic state, the major catalyst was Prophet Muhammad. He began preaching his faith, Islam, in Mecca and later set up a state in Medina based on Islamic principles. Immediately following his demise, the Arabs became an imperial power, Islam spread across Asia, Africa and Europe. However, throughout this period Islamic society witnessed wars of succession and rebellions from various regions and communities. Islam embodied both a faith and civilization as Muslims imbibed Greek and Persian models of state system. Within Islam dissent groups emerged, while interacting with Greek philosophical thought new theological branches sprouted and mystic Sufi orders also surfaced after the fall of the Abbasid Caliphate in 1258 CE.

This Unit comprises of six sections: first Section covers political and social milieu of Arabian Peninsula before Islam, second Section offers a precise description of growth of Islam and Islamic state in Medina under Muhammad, third Section is about the Caliphate and dissensions within *Ummah* (Islamic community) leading to the rise of Kharijites, Shia and Sunni sects, fourth Section describes various branches of Shi'ism like Ismaili, Imami and Zayids, fifth Section illustrates growth and doctrine of two Islamic theological branches during the Abbasid Caliphate — *Mu'tazila* and *Asharite*, and the last Section details emergence of Sufi orders.

15.2 ARABIAN PENINSULA ON THE EVE OF ISLAM

The nature of sixth century Arabian society was predominately tribal and was located as buffer states between the two powerful empires of the Roman (Byzantine) and Persian (Sassanid). In such circumstances the emergence of a seminal religious movement among the Arabs that would inaugurate a fresh phase in world history would have appeared improbable and unrealizable dream. Nevertheless it occurred and Islam as a successful movement under Muhammad and his successors not only unified the Arabs but also spawned rise of vast empires and cultural systems.

Amr Ibn Qamia, a pre-Islamic poet shrewdly remarked: '*a man's tribe are his claws (with which he fends off enemies) and his props (which support him)*'. Almost all the inhabitants of pre-Islamic Arabia used to be members of specific tribe (*Qabila*) for mutual support and protection of life. Tribes comprised of several clans. Prophet Muhammad was born in a Meccan tribe of the Quraysh in the clan of Banu Hashim. Trade was carried through *caravaan*. Khadija, a wealthy widow, employed Muhammad to supervise and manage her caravan between Mecca and Syria.

In the Durkhiemian paradigm, the religious beliefs reflect and echo the structure of human societies. Pre-Islamic Arab spiritual beliefs were varied since they paid obeisance to a pantheon of gods. These tribes were bound by established customary practice called *Sunna*, confirmed and corroborated by tradition and by the deeds of the tribe. The *imam* was a tribal leader whose actions enshrine and articulate law. Meccans were idol worshippers; each tribe worshipped a specific god and *Ka'aba* being the abode of *Hubul* (idol God of the Quraysh tribe), *Lat*, *Manat* and *Uzza*. Judaism and Christianity were also practiced, even Asad, Jewish Yemenese king, began persecuting the Christians in his kingdom in the sixth century.

15.2.1 *Jahaliya*: Pre-Islamic Period of Ignorance?

In Islamic historical sources the pre-Islamic period figures as *Jahaliya* that is ignorance of Islamic monotheism and divine law. In Islamic sources Muhammad’s duty was represented as a struggle between polytheism and monotheism and more importantly the restoration of Abrahimic monotheism. The Islamic sources enumerate the features of *Jahaliya* period as prevalence of girl infanticide, idol worship, usury, incidence of tribal feuds and so on. On the prevalence of infanticide, Leila Ahmad argued that the ‘Quranic verses condemning infanticide capture the shame and negativity that *Jahalia* Arabs associated with the sex’.

However, the same period witnessed not only the rise of Mecca as great trading centre but development of various Arabic literary genres as *Qasida*, biography and story-telling. Well-known as seven brilliant masterpieces of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, *Saba-Muallaqat* is an anthology of seven odes which were hung on the Ka’aba. These *Qasida* (paean odes) graphically mirror the tribal customs, striking portrayal of warring and heroic nature of tribal Bedouin Arabs preceding the eve of Islam and itself establish the fact that prior to Islam Arabic language had rich literary traditions.

Imru’ al-Qais bin Hujr al-Kindi composed *Qifa Nabki*, still considered a literary masterpiece par excellence in Arabic. A man of supreme poetical genius and heroic warrior, Antar Ibn Shadad composed *Sirat Antar* and various *Qasidas*. Zuhayr Bin Abi Salma, Lebid and El Harith were some well-known Arabic literary geniuses of pre-Islamic period. The Arab settlements, these sources claimed, were plagued with utter tribal anarchy; however only for few months, considered holy, wars were suspended. Individuals were dependent on their tribal code of honour and loyalty.

Gender historians have two contradicting viewpoints on the impact of Islam on condition of women. One group represented by Judith Tucker argued that in the *Jahaliya* times women were subjected to the arbitrary powers of the tribe and lacked share in property. Islam not only prohibited female infanticide but also guaranteed women rights in property. Another historian Leila Ahmad rejects this opinion by saying that Islamic regulations stifled women’s freedom. While there existed no fixed institution of marriage in pre-Islamic Arabia, Leila Ahmad argued that, ‘Although *Jahaliya* marriage practices do not necessarily indicate the greater power of women or absence of misogyny, they do correlate with women’s enjoying greater sexual autonomy than they were allowed under Islam. Their autonomy and participation were curtailed with the establishment of Islam, its institution of patrilineal, patriarchal marriage as solely legitimate and social transformation that ensued.’

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) Write briefly the meaning of the term ‘*Jahaliya*’. Why was it considered an age of ignorance?

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2) Which type of religious practices were the pre-Islamic Arabs following?

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15.2.2 Arabs between the Great Empires

By the sixth century CE, in the northern Arabian Peninsula, two tribal political formations had come into being that of the Ghassanids and the Lakhmids. Though the Ghassanids (220-638 CE) in the beginning had long resisted the Byzantine expansion into the west Arabia, ultimately Byzantine were successful in subordinating them to a vassal state or buffer against the westward Sassanian expansion. Ghassanids (present day Syria and Jordan) with their capital at Jabiya (in Syria) over a period of time became predominantly Christians and usually sided with the Byzantines. The Ghassanid rulers used the royal title of *Malik* and in 529 CE one Ghassanid king Al-Harith V had obtained the title of *Patricus* from the Byzantine emperor, in whose name he exercised the authority over Syria.

In the meantime, near the south of lower Euphrates (in Iraq) same type of political formation took shape under the Banu Lakhm, known as Lakhmids (300 to 602 CE) with Hira as capital. They were politically important for the Sassanids, but in the closing decade of sixth century Sassanid King Khusro II (590 to 628 CE) got the Lakhmid king, Numan al-Mundir, murdered to bring the territories under direct control. This expansive move backfired as the Lakhmids successfully drove the Sassanid armies out of their territories and resulted in the permanent break in the alliance.



Map of Pre-Islamic Arabia

Credits and Source: Allen S (October 9, 2016); Introduction to Arab history (6th century); Short History Website

<https://www.shorthistory.org/middle-ages/islamic-world/introduction-to-arab-history-6th-century/>

In the sixth century CE, historians argue that there occurred a massive trading diversion towards the south of Arabian Peninsula due to the incessant Byzantine-Sasanian wars in the north that benefitted Meccans for their neutral stance. Moreover, to that there emerged among the Arabs a consciousness of being descendents of ‘Hajra’ or ‘Ishmail’, son of Hajra and Ibrahim. The Arabs were speaking varied but mutually intelligible dialects of Arabic language. They also became conscious as being the speakers of the same language i.e., Arabic, markedly visible from their poetry and oral traditions. Therefore by means of trading, settled agriculture, sedentary subsistence strategies, Arab consciousness and gigantic influx of wealth into society, the long established tribal bonds began to erode, lose and collapse.

15.2.3 Southern Arabian Peninsula

South of the Arabian Peninsula consisted of three macro-regions: Hejaz, Oman and Yemen. By the late sixth century CE the city of Medina had dominant Jewish population which was controlled by *Marzuban* (military cum civil governor). The Jewish tribes of Medina, *Nadir* and *Qurayza*, used to collect tribute from the *Aws* and *Khazraj* tribes, since Medina was indirectly controlled by Sassanids till last decade of the Sixth century. The *Aws* and *Khazraj* tribes were two prominent landowning Arab tribes in the entire oasis settlement of Medina.

However the Quraysh of Mecca provided their settlement with greater internal stability through alliances rather than tribal solidarity. According to F. Robinson, ‘Quareyesh expansion preceded the rise of Islam...’ Quraysh started to invest in mercantile activities, controlled Meccan trade and in due course made Mecca into a flourishing trading city. Apart from that Mecca was already a cultic centre too and the Meccan leaders were clued-up with politics all over Arabia. The Quraysh were divided into *Bitah* and *Zawahir* — the former controlled the *Zamzam* oasis which gave them precedence over the latter.

Oman and Yemen, these macro-zones are geographically different because the climate is semi-arid therefore suitable for agrarian practices. Unlike northern regions of Peninsula, Oman and Yemen has had longstanding trading links with India, Ethiopia and Egypt. In other words, endowed with a fertile soil, strategic location linking Indian Ocean (Indian trade) with the Red sea (East Mediterranean) and favourable climate, abundant vegetation thrived in southern Peninsula in contrast to the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula. Yemenese traders as well as merchants had a greater control over incense and camel trade. Yemenese also carried the leather, silk, spices and perfume trade which was important for both the Byzantine and the Sassanid empires. Diodorus Siculus in his *Bibliotheca Historica* suggests that Arabs (Nabateans) controlled the supply of luxurious commodities like myrrh and frankincense, which were precious commodities among Romans and Sassanids as offerings to gods and medicines. The Byzantines who were predominantly Christians used frankincense in Church ceremonies. Mostly camel herders, the inhabitants of Hejaz region were by and large nomadic and semi-nomadic Bedouin tribes. Initially Bedouins resorted to raids over sedentary settlements and demanded a protection tribute called *thwwa*. In due course compelled by environmental changes in oasis, Bedouins organized around tribal social organization, took to settled life and conducted caravan trade. One of the significant outcomes of this emergent trade and prosperity was growth of Mecca as a trading centre. Date was the chief crop in the oases, while in mountainous regions like Ta’if cereals were important part of diet.

Therefore, infiltrated by the Byzantine and Sassanid empires from the north, after fifth century CE, the pre-Islamic Arabs were not disconnected and isolated but rather closely connected with the political currents of the world. The Arabs were continuously interacting and exchanging with their neighbouring kingdoms and powers.

15.3 ISLAM IN ARABIA AND MUHAMMAD: EARLY ISLAMIC SOCIETY

The historical information about life of Muhammad prior to his claim to prophethood is scanty. Mostly story goes on like — the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad bin Abdullah, was born in 570 CE at Mecca in the Quraysh tribe. Muhammad was raised and nurtured by his paternal uncle, Abu Talib, for his parents passed away in his childhood. He often used to visit the cave of Hira in the Jabal Al-Noor near Mecca for some prayers and meditation. In 610 CE, in one quiet night inside the cave of Hira Prophet received first divine revelation (*wahy* in Arabic) through angel Gabriel. Muhammad was frightened at the appearance of Gabriel, so hurried home but in due course started realizing that he was the Prophet of God. Muhammad thereafter began preaching his new message of Islam to his kith and kin for thirteen more years in Mecca and gathered a handful of followers. At the core of Muhammad's message was *tawhid* (divine monotheism), praying five times a day and kernel of Islamic doctrine was '*there is no God but God and Muhammad is his Prophet*'. Muhammad preached the renunciation of idol worship which practically threatened the Meccans because the central shrine Ka'aba was house to the tribal deities.

Muhammad's preaching in Mecca alarmed the majority of Quraysh, who felt antagonized and began persecuting Muslims because Muhammad's message seemed to threaten spiritual sentiments and material interests of Meccan leaders. Ibn Ishaq (704-770 CE) describes the worsening state of affairs between the leaders of Quraysh and Muhammad in the following terms:

When the Quraysh saw that Muhammad would not yield to them and withdrew from them and insulted their gods and that his uncle Abu Talib treated him kindly and stood up in his defense and would not give him up to them, some of their leading men went to Abu Talib. . . they said, "O Abu Talib, your nephew has cursed our gods, insulted our religion, mocked our way of life and accused our forefathers of error; either you must stop him or you must let us get at him, for you yourself are in the same position as we in opposition to him and we will rid you of him.

The threat was grave and real; afterwards the Quraysh began to persecute Muslims by beating them, exposing them to scorching heat and boycotted social relations and economic ties with them. The Quraysh warned Muhammad's small community, '*We will boycott you and will reduce you to beggary*'.

Consequently Muhammad and his nascent Muslim community had to grapple with stiff resistance and great persecution from Meccans and ultimately following trials and sufferings of thirteen years, after great consideration Muhammad and his companions migrated to north for Yathrib (Medina) in 622. Migration (*Hijrah*) was a historical landmark and occupies key importance in the history of Islam because the Islamic Hijri calendar began from that event. Summarizing Muhammad's mission in Mecca, Irving M. Zeitlin argued '*in Mecca, Prophet preached and warned, but had no strategy beyond that*'. It illustrates a prominent feature of Islamic history, for Muhammad's verdict to migrate from Mecca was in purpose '*both deeply religious and deeply political*' since Muslims in Mecca were fleeing polytheist fanaticism and intolerance for an uncompromising monotheism.

15.3.1 Migration to Medina in 622 CE

Yathrib (Medina) had long been a multi-religious society comprising of Jewish tribes, pagans of various kinds and with migration of Meccan Muslims (*Muhajirin*) added one more component to it. The arrival of Muhammad in Yathrib (Medina) was welcomed.

However, Yathrib (Medina) was a divided city; the Jewish tribes being economically and militarily dominant. In the year 622 CE Muhammad was invited as sole arbiter by twelve Jewish tribes of Medina to frame what is called as ‘Constitution of Medina’. To quote Ibn Ishaq after reaching Medina, ‘The Messenger of God (Muhammad) wrote a document between the Emigrants (*Muhajirin*) and the *Ansar* (Muslims of Medina), and in it he made a treaty and covenant with the Jews, establishing them in their religion and possessions, and assigning to them rights and duties.’

Constitution of Medina

The important components of this document are mentioned by Ibn Ishaq as follows:

1. No Believer shall oppose the client of another Believer. Whosoever is rebellious, or seeks to spread injustice, enmity or sedition among the Believers, the hand of every man shall be against him, even if he be a son of one of them.
2. Whosoever among the Jews follows us shall have help and equality; they shall not be injured nor shall any enemy be aided against them.
3. The Jews shall contribute (to the cost of war) with the Believers so long as they are at war with a common enemy.
4. The Jews shall maintain their own religion and the Muslims theirs. Loyalty is a protection against treachery. The close friends of Jews are as themselves. None of them shall go out on a military expedition except with the permission of Muhammad, but he shall not be prevented from taking revenge for a wound.
5. The valley of *Yathrib* (Medina) shall be sacred and inviolable for all that join this Treaty. The contracting parties are bound to help one another against any attack on *Yathrib*.

Gerhard Bowring sums up the pivotal implications of the ‘Constitution of Medina’ that, ‘Muhammad’s organization of Medinan society through the Constitution of Medina offered a model of applied political thought and a glimpse into the Prophet’s pragmatic approach toward the creation of a new polity.’ Muhammad constructed a mosque, *Al-Masjid Un-Nabi*, that became nerve centre of Islamic politics till the rise of the Ummayid Dynasty (661-749) and created a Muslim community (*Umma*) related not through tribal blood but religious belief, as the Constitution of Medina established a new group solidarity (*Asabiyya*) purely based on common religious belief, Islam.

In 624 CE during the formation of Islam in Medina, Meccan Quraysh continued attacks on Muslims and fought two historic battles at *Badr* and *Uhud*. In *Badr* the Meccans, though outnumbered the Muslim ranks, were spearheaded by powerful Meccan leaders like Abu Jahl (d. 624 CE), Utba and Abu Sufiyan. *Badr* was a usual halting place for caravans going from Mecca to Damascus as it had lot of wells. The battle of *Badr*, won by Muslims, was extremely effective as Arabs for the first time began to recognize Muhammad and Muslims potent competitors and potential inheritors to the prestige, supremacy and the political role of the Meccan Quraysh.

However, in the same year the Meccan Quraysh under the leadership of Abu Sufiyan and Khalid bin Walid (585-642 CE) defeated the Muslims at *Uhud*. The final battle (Battle of Trenches) between the Meccans and Muslims occurred in 627 CE when Meccans laid the siege of Medina for 27 days. The Muslims resorted to an uncommon strategy to bar the Meccans entry into Medina by digging ditches along the openings. The siege of Medina eventually failed.

15.3.2 Conquest of Mecca

Muhammad along with his community, in the subsequent year, who set out unarmed to

make a pilgrimage to Ka'aba, was barred from entering into Mecca. But in the end the Quraysh sent their emissary, Suhayl, to negotiate an agreement with Muhammad. A truce accord was signed between the two which is known as the Treaty of Hudaibiah (628 CE). According to this Treaty both parties agreed:

- To cease hostilities between the Quraysh and Muslims for ten years.
- If any Quraysh had opted Islam without the permission of the clan-chief, he should be sent back to Mecca. If any Muslim decided to revert to the religion of Quraysh, he should be allowed to do so and would not be handed back to the Muslims.
- Muslims would not be permitted to enter Makkah for their pilgrimage till the next year (i.e. 629 CE). Muslims were allowed to bring only scimitars.

By this treaty Meccan Quraysh recognized the legitimacy of the Islamic state of Medina, allowed Muslims to practice their faith publicly and made possible for other tribes to sign similar treaties with the Muslims.

Merely within two years the Quraysh had breached the terms of the Hudaibiyah agreement that triggered the Muslims, who assembled in a large army, to successfully launch a conquest of Mecca in 630 CE. Muhammad's career reached its culmination and turned full circle with the conquest of Mecca since thereafter he purged the idols from the premises of Ka'aba, all Arab tribes accepted his leadership, ordered a general amnesty to the Meccans and immediately went back to Medina where he passed away in 632 CE. Thus, after Hijra in 622 CE, Muhammad lived another ten eventful years during that period 'the city state of Medina was established, a new community (*ummah*) was created consisting of all those who shared common belief instead of the time honoured Arab institution of tribal solidarity based on the ties of blood.'

Agreed that a new state society of Medina, primarily Islamic, among the Arabs emerged, but oral poetic traditions continued. *Qasaid* (panegyric odes) continued to be composed and thrived and Arab poets like Abdullah Ibn Rawaha and Ka'b Ibn Malik and Hasan bin Thabit, a native of Medina, composed vast *Qasaid* (panegyric odes) defending Muhammad's faith and mission. When people from Banu Tamim had argument with Muhammad, they challenged him through their great poet Az Zabraqan bin Badr. Hasan Bin Thabit very quickly replied through poetry and Banu Tamim accepted their defeat.

Interpretations on the Rise of Islam

The debate on the rise of Islam and meteoric expansion of Arab Islamic empire has been a battlefield of competing claims. The debate was initiated by Montgomery Watt (1909-2006) in his book *Muhammad at Mecca* (1953) in which he argued that the sixth century CE Arabian society had undergone massive transformation due to the influx of wealth through the Quraysh transition to trade and mercantile activity and sedentary lifestyle particularly in Mecca and at its cost tribal ordered social system was eroding. This expansion in trade, agriculture and wealth in fact led them to a hierarchical and stratified society with deep spiritual crisis. So it caused *unequal distribution of wealth and power*, huge social inequalities and social malaise into the Arabian society. That is why core values of Muhammad's preaching were social equality, charity and brotherhood since the gap between the rich and poor was incessantly widening.

Watt relied on the authenticity of the Arabic Islamic sources like *Quran*, *Hadith* and biographies of Muhammad. Watt argued that Islam at best offered a social rationale for the transition from a tribal and nomadic to a sedentary way of life in the Hijaz province of the sixth and early seventh century tribal Arabia. In simple terms, owing to prolonged Sassanian-Byzantine wars, making the Persian gulf precarious for trading activities and during Asad's reign the Yemeni kingdom declined due to internal religious strife, as a natural consequence the Meccan Quraysh gained control of this whole trade. It made Mecca a thriving trading

and financial point. In the early seventh century, when Quraysh almost monopolized all trade, the earlier alliance with Meccan Bedouin tribes came under a strain as to the growing disparity between sedentary people and nomadic Bedouins.

In 1987 Patricia Crone (1945 -2015) and Michael Cook based their observations on the Greeco-Roman and other related sources on the rise of Islam. Crone argued that Watt’s thesis that influx of wealth through mercantile activities was weakening the Arab tribal set up sounds unreliable and unjustified because ‘Meccan traded in humble goods rather than luxury items’ which did not displace tribal solidarities. Islam, she argued, emerged within a society deeply anchored in tribal values and it did not succeed in Mecca but in Medina where his message was accepted. Crone doubted that trade borne huge wealth had resulted in any kind of a social dislocation within tribal structure and caused spiritual crisis.

Check Your Progress-2

1) What do you know about the ‘Constitution of Medina’? What were its major implications on life in Medina?

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2) Why was the Treaty of Hudaibiyah significant for Muslims in Medina? How was Islamic state of Medina different from other Arab city-states?

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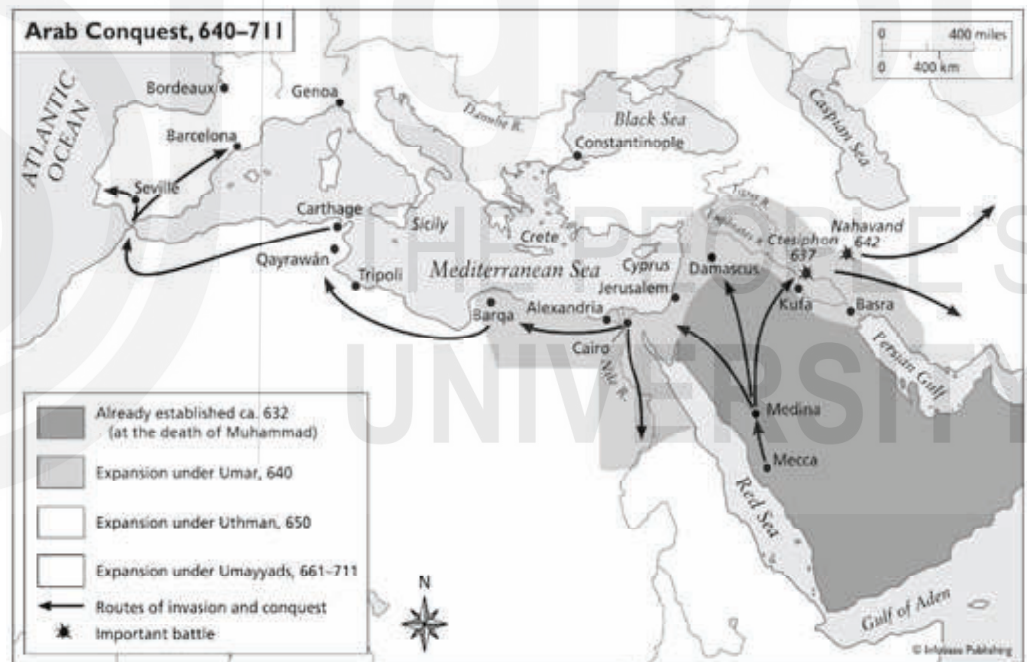
15.4 ISLAMIC CALIPHATE AND DISSENSIONS IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD

A rude shock had overtaken Muslim community when Muhammad’s demise in 632 CE perpetuated an unprecedented vacuum amongst Muslims which triggered the problems of succession. Muhammad died without choosing any successor. Tribal prejudices began to erupt again: the clan of Banu Hashim supported the succession of Ali, Quraysh emigrants rallied around Abu Bakr and *Ansars* favoured candidacy of Sa’d bin Abada. Ultimately the deadlock resolved in the same year when Abu Bakr (632-634 CE) got elected as the first Caliph (successor) of the Islamic state and took the title *Khalifat-ul Rasul*. Several Arab tribes had challenged the supremacy of the Medinese state at the death of Muhammad. They tried to assert political independence and even stopped paying taxes. Abu Bakr neutralized all rebellious tribes very quickly through a series of battles known in history as Ridda wars. The political formation called the Islamic Caliphate, as it had progressed over time, represented a close alliance between religion and state.

Abu Bakr was followed by Umar (634-644 CE), whose reign was undoubtedly instrumental in bringing radical structural changes in the Caliphate. The medieval Muslim chroniclers had credited him for bringing extensive set of structural innovations including the establishment of *diwan* for collection of taxes and fixing allowances of officers, post

of *Qadi* (Judge), institution of *Bayt-ul mal* (finance department), invention of *Hijri* calendar and military department. Throughout his period as Caliph, Umar through the unparalleled military prowess of his seasoned generals Khalid, Abu Ubaidullah and Amr ibn Al-A's continued wars on Syrian and Egyptian fronts, secured victories in Iraq, Levant, Palestine and all major territories of Byzantine and Sassanid empires. The first two Caliphs Abu Bakr and Umar are represented as central figures in early Muslim chronicles since both in a charismatic manner kept the entire Islamic community (*Ummah*) unified in all political and religious manifestations. That is the reason why Umar's name afterwards 'became an all-purpose touchstone for imagined idealized practices'.

It was under Umar's reign in 636 CE when the Byzantine armies were overcome decisively in the Battle of Yarmouk and the same year in the pitched Battle of Qadisiyyah Muslim Arabs crushed the Persian Sassanid armies and sealed their fate forever. In the next year Anatolia and Jerusalem fell to Muslims, as a political redeemer, Umar personally received the keys of Jerusalem, yet, all religious denominations including Jews were permitted religious freedom. The Caliph, Umar also created various garrison towns of Kufa, Basra and Fustat. In these newly conquered territories Umar appointed provincial governors called *Amir* to administer the affairs of respective provinces. For instance, Yazid ibn Sufyan was appointed governor of Syria by Umar. When Yazid died Umar assigned this charge to his brother Muawiyah I, who later on founded the Ummayyad Caliphate.



Arab conquests between 640-711 CE

Credits and Courtesy: www.WorldHistory.Biz; Sundries: 22.13, dated 21-9-2015

Source: <https://www.worldhistory.biz/sundries/49416-the-apostasy-wars-632-634.html>

After Umar, Uthman/Usman (644-656 CE) was elected by a *Shura* (council of six members) as Caliph (successor) in 644 CE. Not only did the Islamic military conquests reach to the highest possible extent (Maghrib to Sindh) but trade began to flourish, coinage was introduced and codification of Islamic scripture was completed. Unlike Umar, who administered his empire in a stern centralized manner, Uthman's reign saw absorption of vast regions into Islamic Caliphate, which almost rendered centralized control over provinces a pipe dream. Hence provincial governors appropriated vast powers.

However, in spite of military and material progress, Uthman's reign witnessed a wave

of rebellions in garrison towns of Egypt, Kufa and Basra, who alleged Uthman of nepotism, embezzlement and favouring and appointing to higher posts his kith and kin who monopolized the offices. These rebels from Egypt had reached Medina, capital city of the Islamic Caliphate, joined by the like-minded people from Kufa and Basra, besieged Uthman's house and finally went on to assassinate him.

Caliph Ali and the First Civil War (*Fitna*)

The rebels from Egypt, Kufa and Basra rallied around Ali, Zubair and Talha respectively to become the Caliph. Initially reluctant to agree, Ali (656-661 CE) later came to terms with them to succeed Uthman as fourth Caliph. He was elected by overwhelming majority of Muslims in Medina as well as the rebellious groups, several prominent companions and governors paid allegiance to his candidacy nonetheless grudgingly save Muawiyah I, governor of Syria, who resisted paying any tribute. In the second half of the seventh century when Ali assumed leadership, the Muslim world was rent as under by internal political turmoil and dissent groups each unreceptive to the other. To put a stern check on further growing discord among Muslims, Ali not only dismissed all those governors who were appointed by Uthman but after the Battle of Jamal (656 CE) even transferred the capital of his Caliphate out of Medina to Kufa to efficiently control these garrisons and military boundaries.

The Battle of Jamal ensued as a group lead by Talha, Zubair, Aisha and Muawiyah I demanded retribution and death to the rebels who assassinated Uthman. Muawiyah I refused to pay allegiance to Ali's authority as Caliph until retribution of Uthman's blood. It yet again resulted in a battle which was fought between the partisans of Ali (*Shia Ali*) on the one hand and supporters of Muawiyah I (*Shia Muawuyah*) on the other. This political turmoil that led to the Battle of Siffin in 657 CE in history of Islam is remembered distinctively as the First *Fitna*. When the skirmishes prolonged and Muawiyah's forces were on the brink of defeat suddenly both sides agreed to resolve the matter through arbitration i.e., who should succeed as Caliph.

Meanwhile over Ali's acceptance of arbitration with Muawiyah I a group of Bedouins revolted after the Battle of Siffin. They were called Kharijites (seceders) as they seceded from Ali's army. Their slogan was '*La imara*' — no government. To these egalitarian anarchists, quotes Al-Shahrestani (1086-1153 CE), Ali replied, 'There must be a government good or bad'. So dissensions began to pop up among Muslims; and rise of Kharijis revealed the contrasting attitude of the city and the desert Bedouin Arabs (in fact, egalitarian anarchists) towards the state. Later in January 661 CE, while praying in the Great Mosque of Kufa man from Kharijite section Ibn Muljam assassinated Ali. Power then was claimed by the Arab governor of Syria Muawiyah I (661-680 CE), who after a treaty with Ali's eldest son Hassan brought a protracted civil war to close, ruled Islamic caliphate for twenty years from his capital in Damascus.

Who are Sunni Muslims?

Sunni Muslims or *Ahl Al-Sunna* form the largest sect of Islam. Sunni Muslims regard the first four Islamic Caliphs (Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali) as *Rashidun*, rightly guided ones. However, Shia Muslims endorse only the rule of Ali as legitimate. There are four schools of jurisprudence of Sunni Islam: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi and Hanbali. The sources from which Islamic laws can be derived or interpreted in Sunni Islamic legal theory are four: *Quran*, *Sunna*, *Ijma* and *Qiyas*. *Quran* refers to the sacred scripture of Islam. *Sunna* is the exemplary conduct of Prophet Muhammad. *Ijma* means consensus of legal experts. *Qiyas* is translated as analogical deduction. *Qiyas* is a method of comparing 'the new cases with the established ones in order to see if they are similar'.

Check Your Progress-3

1) Why was there a conflict for succession after the demise of Prophet Muhammad in 632 CE?

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2) Why did Ali transfer the capital of Caliphate from Medina to Kufa?

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15.5 THE UMMAYYADS: KHARIJITES AND SHIA

Muawiyah I, a scion of the Umayyad clan of the Quraysh tribe, established the Umayyad dynasty (661-750 CE) with Damascus (Syria) as its capital. Before his death aware of the wars of succession in the past, Muawiyah choose his son Yazid as successor, hence transformed Islamic state from Caliphate to kingship (*Mulk*) based on hereditary succession. There were strong reactions against Yazid by Shia and *Kharijites*. In late seventh century CE, a wave of rebellions that had engulfed the Ummayyad territories of Media, Kufa and North Africa, were suppressed by Abd al-Malik (685-705 CE), a well-known Umayyad Caliph, who introduced various centralizing reforms:

- a) He made a break in numismatic tradition by introducing a Muslim coinage as against Sasanian and Byzantine gold coinage. The Umayyads started establishing own mints. They issued coins (*dinar*, *dirham* and *fls*) of new types purely epigraphic yet bereft of pictorial imagery.
- b) He made Arabic the only language of administration and government within his Caliphate. Arabic language became language of the elite even in the frontier regions like Khurasan. So command over Arabic became *sine qua non* for getting into administration.

Several historians have highlighted the secular Arab character of the Umayyad polity (privileging Arabs) thereby leading to social discrimination against non-Arab neophytes and *Mawali* (Persian converts). Nevertheless, *Mawali* fairly quickly arrogated a decisive role in the Umayyad government, military, revenue administration and religious erudition. In the Shia Islamic tradition the Ummayyads stand charged with abandoning and corrupting the Islamic polity and religion of the Prophet Muhammad since Muawiyah I transformed the Islamic Caliphate into *Mulk* i.e., hereditary kingship.

As we read above that the Kharijites started a rebellion against Caliph Ali under the leadership of Abdullah Ibn Wahb. Soon Ali very high handedly came down hard on

them at the Battle of Nahrawan 659 CE and defeated the Kharijites. Under the Umayyads, the Kharijite resistance and rebellions became widespread, in effect, far more radical than the Shia and attracted more sections of disgruntled *Mawli*, Bedouins, poor peasantry, landowners and merchant classes. Some historians argue that the rise of Kharijites can be attributed at last to the unfair policy of Caliph Uthman, whom they charged with nepotism and distributing state finances and appointments among his own clan. These egalitarian revolutionary Arab tribes, fought in support of Prophet Muhammad, began feeling deprived of their just share in the newly established Caliphate. So they disliked the policies of Uthman and rallied against Ali.

15.5.1 Who were the Kharijites?

Khawarij in Arabic literally means ‘to secede’ or ‘to go out’. Kharijites represented the first known sect that splintered within Muslim community during the supremacy of the third Caliph Uthman and made first direct appearance during Caliph Ali’s reign. Modern scholars are undisputed that the key immediate factor that facilitated the emergence of Kharijites was in the context of Ali’s arbitration at the Battle of Siffin (656-57) as political expediency to settle the dispute with Muawiya I. The *Muhakkim* Kharijites believed that Ali had deviated from the divine teachings of *Quran*, therefore his authority as *Imam* (leader) of Muslim community was questionable. So they gave slogan, ‘There is no judgment but God’s’. The egalitarianism (equality of Arabs and Non-Arab) and disposition towards leader (*Imam*) led to their parting of the ways from other Muslims.

The Kharijites deemed the Ummayyad Caliphs as usurpers so led rebellions against them from 660s mostly in the regions of Iraq. The Kharijites depended on support provided by the non-Arab Muslims, especially Persian *Mawalis*. According to Martin Hinds, the Kharijites were not religious fanatics or zealots but thought that their socio-economic conditions were jeopardized under Uthman and Ali. For them Islam was a way to balance existing inequalities as well as vehicle ensuring full equality in the society. For some poetry of the Kharijites suggests that it was individual belief rather than status that differentiates people.

The Kharijites, unlike Shia Muslims, held that anyone can become *Imam*, not the members of Quraysh tribe or Arab only, provided he rules in a just manner and steered away from oppression as vice-regent of God. Abu Bakr and Umar, the Kharijites believed, ruled and governed people according to their commitment to the Quranic precepts. According to Kharijites, *Imamite* and Imam were legal as long as ‘they formed an extension of ‘God’s will’; *Imam* was to be overthrown if the ruling *Imam* proved tyrant and violated Islamic principles and an obedient one would replace him to re-establish the true Muslim community. Wellhausen remarked that subtle point of the Kharijites belief was that ‘only sincere Muslims belonged to the true community’.

According to Tabari (839-923 CE), Kharijites developed an implacable anti-establishment outlook during the ascendancy of Umayyads. The *Azraqite* Kharijites, who were extremist and followers of Nafi bin Al-Azraq, rebelled against Ummayyads in Iraq in 699CE. The Governor of Iraq, Al-Hajjaj bin Yusuf, (695-714 CE) defeated them in 699 CE. The other moderate Kharijite groups like *Ibadites*, followers of Abd’ Allah bin Ibadh, survived as a well-knit community after the defeat of the *Azraqites*. Jabir bin Zayd was a renowned *Ibadi* traditionalist who led *Ibadi* Kharijites to Oman. The Kharijites continued to be in rebellion in North Africa.

Kharajites were in disagreement with the rest of the Muslim community on three basic counts:

- 1) **Grave Sin:** Whether a sinful Muslim should be considered as a believer? The Kharijites discarded the view endorsed by the Ummayyads that sin did not eradicate a Muslim's belief. But Kharijites claimed that any Muslim who commits a mortal sin should be regarded as an apostate (*murtad*).
- 2) **Rejection of *Muluk* or Hereditary Succession:** They rejected hereditary succession to the Caliphate rather endorsed *Imamite*, based on the principle of election.
- 3) **Legitimacy:** Whose authority is lawful? The Kharijites made the legitimacy of the political authority reliant on keeping with the religious principles of Islam. Moreover, they asserted the right of Muslims to remove their *Imam* (leader) who violated these religious principles.

Nayif Maruf gathered the poetic compositions of ninety-seven Khariji poets, *Al-Khwarij*, among them ten were women. It specifies two things: (a) Kharijites allocated women a reasonable position, (b) Kharijite women contributed in the intellectual and cultural history of early Islam.

15.5.2 Rise of Shia Islamic Sects

Taifa or *Firqa* in Arabic means 'Sect' and refers to 'a smaller group splitting from the mainstream or larger group' or simply 'a part splitting from a whole'. What distinguishes the Shia Muslims from the rest of the Muslim community, remarks Farhad Daftary, 'It is the fundamental belief of the Shia of all branches that the Prophet himself had designated Ali as his successor, a designation (*nass*) instituted through divine command and revealed by the Prophet at Ghadir Khumm shortly before his death.'

The word *Shia* in Arabic means 'partisan' or 'supporter'. Al-Shahrestani (1086-1153 CE) gives explanation of Shia sect in his book *Al-Milal* as, 'Shi'a are those who followed Ali in particular and believed in his *Imamite* and Caliphate according to the explicit teachings and testament of the Prophet Muhammad.' So the main issue that separates Shia Muslims from Sunni Muslims is basically question of succession to Muhammad. The Shia believed that Ali was the only legitimate successor to Muhammad. They condemn the first three Caliphs — Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman as illegitimate successors. Other differences between the Shia and Sunni include different ways of praying, temporary marriage (*muta*) and religious dissimulation (*taqqiya*).

There are three major branches of Shia Islam namely Ismaili, *Imami* Twelvers and Zaidi.

Ismaili or Seveners

The sixth Shia Imam, Jafar As-Sadiq (700-765 CE) had two sons — Ismail and Musa. Shia who acknowledged Imam Ismail ibn Jafar as their seventh Imam and legitimate spiritual successor to Imam Jafar al-Sadiq are called Ismaili Shia. However, the *Ithana Ashara* Shia (Twelvers) held Imam Musa al-Kazim (745-799 CE) as their seventh rightful *Imam*. Revolutionary Ismaili Shia expected Muhammad Ibn Ismail to return as Mehdi. They projected him as harbinger of the final age. His successors established the Fatimid Empire in 10th century in Egypt when the basic Ismaili religious thought developed fully. Before the Fatimid dynasty the Ismaili's were persecuted so felt necessary to practice *taqqiya* (religious dissimulation or precautionary concealment of

faith) when there was fear of loss of life. Muhammad Al-Baqir introduced and endorsed *taqqiya*.

Ismaili Shia believe that the Imams are the only valid interpreters of esoteric (*Batin*) meaning of the *Quran*, for they inherited the divine knowledge (*ilm*) from Ali. Ismailis insisted more on *jihad* and pilgrimage to the tombs of Imams. Nizaris and Qarmatians are two sects within Ismailis.

- 1) **Distinction between the Exoteric and Esoteric:** For Ismaili Shia the understanding of Islamic scriptures and sacred commandments contain two fundamental aspects — the exoteric (*zahir*) and the esoteric (*batin*). Exoteric (*zahir*) religious practices including the religious laws articulated by Prophets had gone through periodical changes. However, the esoteric (*batin*) mostly the sacred truths (*haqiqi*) are eternal and common to the Semetic religions.
- 2) **Cyclical Ismaili Gnosis (*Irfan*):** The Ismaili Shia held a distinct world view. According to it time was cyclical. One of the major components of Ismaili system of belief was ‘cyclical history of revelations or prophetic eras and a cosmological doctrine represented through the language of myth’. Ismailis believed that the religious history of humanity progressed through seven prophetic eras of different durations known as *Dwars*. Each *Dwar* was inaugurated by a speaker (*natiq*) of a divinely spiritual message which in its outward aspect contained religious commandments (*Sharia*). In the first six *Dwars* (eras), *natiqs* were Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad.
- 3) ***Dawa*:** Ismaili’s insisted on *Dawa* and the notable Ismaili missionaries (*Dais*) had produced various theological and theosophical treatises. The most renowned Ismaili theologians were Al-Sijistani and Idris Imad al-Din. Moreover, Ismaili Muslims made first systematic effort to interpret Islam based on Greek philosophy.

Twelvers or *Ithna Ashari*

What separates Twelver Shia from the other Shias is their belief in infallibility of twelve divine Imams. According to their system of belief the last Imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi, has gone into hiding because his life was in danger (*occultation* or *ghayab*) and will come back as a *Mahdi*, who they expect will deliver humankind from the evil of Dajjal (Anti-Christ). Central to the Twelver Imami Shiite is the doctrine of the Imamate. They believe that after Prophet Muhammad Muslims are in a permanent need of *Imams* (as infallible beings). These divinely guided Imams would act as the guides and authoritative teachers of men in their religious matters.

Various Twelver Shiite communities had emerged in different parts of Persia and Transoxania. In the 10th century the Buyid rulers (934-1062 CE) became influential and the teachings of *Imams* were collected, *Hadith* were compiled and Jafari School of Shia jurisprudence was formulated. The Buyids started initially as supporters of Zayidism but later on shifted towards the *Imami* Twelver Shiism and *Mu'tazila* School of Islamic theology. Qom, a city in Iran, has served as one of earliest centres of Imami Shia learning. In Qom, the Shia theologians vehemently discarded *Mu'tazila Kalam* theology, which was based on the use of ‘independent reasoning’. They were called *Akhbaris*. Rather their doyen teacher Ibn Babawayh (923-991CE) strongly advocated use of *Hadith* with a minimum of reasoning (*aql*) in theology and *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence). However, when the Sunni Seljuk Turks succeeded the Buyids, Imami Shiism received a great blow.

In the Imami Twelver Shia jurisprudence, there are four authentic books of *Hadith*.

Below is given in the table lists the compilers of those four books of *Hadith*.

Author	Book of Hadith
Ibn Babawayh	Man la Yahduruhu al-Faqih
Ibn Yaqub al-Kulayni	Kitab al-Kafi
Muhammad Tusi	Tahdhib al-Ahkam
Muhammad Tusi	Al-Istibsar

Safavi was a Sufi order that emerged in the 15th century (Ardabil) Azarbijan. The Safavids under Shah Ismail set up empire in 1501 over Iran. This sufi order initiated a process of converting Iran to Imami Shi'ism by inviting Shia clergy from Jabl Amil and Syria. The Imami Shia faith reached its climax during Shah Abbas (1571-1629 CE) whose reign witnessed clamping down of Nuqtavi and Hurufi sufi orders in Iran and dominance of Imami Shi'ism at the expense of Qizilbash *Ghulluww*. Unlike his father, Shah Tahmasp desisted from appropriating the title of *messiah* or incarnation. In fact he called himself '*Zil*' i.e., shadow of God. Shah Ismail during Tahmasp period was not portrayed as *messiah* but 'precursor of the messiah who by establishing the 'right order' namely Shi'ism would carve the way for the advent of the hidden Imam'. Abbas I transferred the capital of the Safavid Empire from Qazvin to Isfahan, a bastion of Imami Shi'ism.

In Imami Shia legal theory there are two schools of Islamic *fiqh* (jurisprudence): *Usuli* and *Akhbari*. Amin al-Astarabadi was the main proponent of the *Akhbari* School of *fiqh*. Whereas the *Usuli* considered legal the four sources of Islamic law which are the *Quran*, *Hadith*, *Ijma* (consensus) and *aql* (deductive reasoning).

Who is Imam?

Imam means a leader or one who leads prayers. In Islamic literature terms like *Khilafat* and *Imamite* are often used interchangeably. Shias believe that *Imams* are rightful spiritual successors to Prophet Muhammad. They also believe that the twelve *Imams* are *Masum* (infallible). The chief functions of the *Imam* are as follows:

- 1) Interpreting the sacred law and esoteric meaning of *Quran*, leading the Friday congregational prayers,
- 2) Implementing justice through legal penalties (*ahkam*), and
- 3) Realizing *zakat* and *khums*, leading *jihad* and division of war booty (*kismat-ifay*).

Imam Jafar (699-765 CE) elaborated the two fundamental principles of *Imamite*: *Nass* and *Ilm*. *Nass* (designation) means that *Imamite* (spiritual leadership) is bestowed by God upon a member from Prophet's family. *Imamite* is chosen and transferred to another through plain designation (*nass*). It is restricted to the descendents of Ali and Fatima according to Imam Jafar. *Ilm* (divine knowledge) is second distinctive feature of *Imamite*.

Zaiydi

Named after Zaid ibn Ali (their Fifth Imam), Zaiydis understood and developed the institution of *Imamite* quite independent of *Imami* branch. They acknowledged only five successors of Prophet as legitimate *Imams*. Currently *Zaiydi Shias* are concentrated in Yemen. The Buyids (934-1062 CE) for quite some time followed Zaiydi Shia Islam and encouraged *Mu'tazila* theology. For Zaiydis any member of Ahl al-Bayt can become *Imam* because *nass* has remained obscure i.e., *Imamite* is not hereditary. Unlike *Ithana Ashara*, Zaiydi Shia do not acknowledge the infallibility of *Imams*.

How did the early Shia become sectarian?

- 1) There were many cross-currents in early Islam; most were absorbed into the Sunni synthesis. How was Shi'ism able to escape this fate and maintain and deepen its characteristic differences? Two of the several elements in the process are the spiritual independence of the *Ghulat* and the strategic advantages of the sectarian tendencies in the *Imamate* of Ja'far al-Sadiq. The traditional Sunni viewpoint has been that Ali was one of the four great Caliphs accepted by the community as rightful, and that the Shi'ites have merely exaggerated a reverence for him which the whole community shared. On this assumption the bitterness of the Shia against the rest of Islam is scarcely intelligible.
- 2) Shi'ism was not at first, as orthodox Twelvers and even Sunnis would have it, a consistent cult of the twelve imams one after another, from which various dissident Shite groups diverged in favor of one or another alternative claimant. The early Shia is no longer to be viewed from the standpoint of later *Imamism*.

Marshal Hodgson, (1955) 'How did the Shia become sectarian?', *Journal of American Oriental Society*, pp.1-13.

Check Your Progress-4

- 1) Who were Kharijites? Why did they secede from Caliph's army?

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- 2) What were the major disagreements of the Kharijites with the rest of Muslims?

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- 3) What is the meaning of 'Shia'? What are the main branches of Shia Islam?

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15.6 THE ABBASID CALIPHATE: MU'TAZILA AND ASH'ARITE

The Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258 CE) was established by Abbas as-Saffa – in 750 CE. The Abbasids acquired political power by overthrowing the Ummayyads. It is also called the Abbasid Revolution. To a vast number of dissatisfied Shia groups and non-

Arab converts, the Abbasids had promised a just universal Muslim society, contrary to the Umayyads. The Abbasids were triumphant in shifting the political and cultural life from Damascus to Baghdad, capital city of the Abbasid Caliphate. The Abbasid courts in Baghdad and Samra patronized translators, astronomers, scholars, *ulama*, scientists, artists and poets. Al-Mamun (813-833 CE) was a great patron of science and philosophy. He founded an official institute called *Bayt-ul Hikma* (House of Wisdom). According to Sa'd Al-Andlusi, Caliph Mamun had requested the Byzantine emperor to send him 'works by Plato, Aristotle, Hippocrates, Galen, Euclid, Ptolemy, and others still'. Their scientific and philosophical works were translated first into Syriac and finally Arabic. Latin, Sanskrit and Persian philosophical treatises were also translated into Arabic.



Bayt-ul Hikma of Al-Mamun

Credits: Muslim Heritage

Source: <https://muslimheritage.com/house-of-wisdom/>

The translation of Greek philosophical works and ideas of Socrates, Aristotle and Plato in *Bayt-ul Hikma* paved way for the rise of rationalist school of theology within Islam known as *Mu'tazila*. The proponents of *Mu'tazila* School in Baghdad and Basra like Wasil Ibn Ata and *Amr Ibn Ubayd* and Ibn al-Mu'tamir formulated the *Mu'tazila* theology and believed that reason (*kalam*) alone can be applied to comprehend the physical phenomena, nature of God and His creation. In other words they advocated at best the rational interpretation of Islamic scripture, *Quran*, where reason was considered superior to revelation.

According to Daniel Brown in the eighth and ninth century Abbasid Caliphate there were three groups of Islamic theologians: *Ahl al-Kalam*, *Ahl al-Ra'y* and *Ahl al-Hadith*. The first well-known group *Ahl al-Kalam* or *Mu'tazila* was started by Wasil Bin Ata, pupil of Hasan al-Basri. During the Abbasid Caliphate two schools of Islamic theology emerged: *Mu'tazilla* and *Ash'ara*. The first systematic theological school (*kalam*) in Islam reached its climax in 9th century when *Mu'tazila* theological interpretation was declared by Al-Mamun (813-833 CE) to be the official theology of his Caliphate.

In the Section on the Kharijites, we read how Kharijites differ on the issue of 'Grave Sin'. Kharijites explicitly stated that status of 'grave sinner' was that of an unbeliever. Their arch-rivals *Murijites* opinion was that the status of 'grave sinner' was not of an

unbeliever. Customary accounts of the origins of the *Mu'tazila* report that Wasil Ibn Atta (d. 748) and Amr Ibn Ubayd (d. 761) were the founders of the *Mu'tazila*. They were called *Mu'tazila* because they dissociated (*itazalu*) themselves from the study circle of Hasan Al-Basri after rejecting his opinion concerning the status of the grave sinner. Hasan Al-Basri believed that grave sinner was a *Munafiq* (hypocrite). However, *Mu'tazila* argued that a grave sinner was neither a believer nor a non-believer.

Five Principles of *Mu'tazila* Theology

According to Abu Al-Hudhayl (752-841CE) the *Mu'tazila* theological position can be reduced to following five principles:

Unity of God (Tauhid) and Vision. *Mu'tazila* held the belief that attributes of God should not be considered part of God's essence. *Mu'tazilites* believed that vision of God is not likely since God is exempt from place and direction. For them the *Quran* was created speech of Allah (God). They denied the miracles (*karamat*) performed by Saints. They doubted God's attributes and predestination. They believed in perfect unity of God. They read *Quran* with preconceived notions and Aristotelian logic. For *Mu'tazila falsafi* (philosopher) ranked superior to the Prophets, since they know the truth. They tried to blend Aristotelian philosophy and *Quran*.

Justice and Absolute Free will. They argued that God's Almighty justice necessitates that a man should be the creator of his own acts. When a man enjoys free-will to do, perform or act, then only can he be held answerable for his deeds. If man is not the designer of his own acts and deeds, or if his acts are designed by God (predestined), how can he be held accountable for his deeds if he does not act independently of God's will. Al-Shahrestani puts it: 'The *Mu'tazila* unanimously maintain, that man decides upon and creates his acts, both good and evil; that he deserves reward or punishment in the next world for what he does.'

Promise (Al-Wa'd) and the Threat (Al-Wa'id): *Mu'tazila* believed that God has to exercise absolute justice (*adl*). Since the *Quran* says: 'Indeed God does not break the promise'. The punishments will be meted out to sinners as oppressor or liar without fail or delay, but if the sinner repents before death, he will possibly be pardoned. So belief of *Mu'tazila* in good and evil deeds and their retribution and forgiveness is grounded in reason.

Intermediate Position of Grave Sinner: The *Mu'tazila* argued that any grave sinner can neither be called a non-believer nor a believer. They believed that if a Muslim died after doing a grave sin without repentance, he should be considered neither a believer nor a disbeliever in God. He remained in 'Intermediate Stage' he would be judged independently by God.

Commanding Good and Forbidding Evil: In their interpretation of the fifth principle, the *Mu'tazila* agreed to the conditions for *al-amrwan-nahy*. *Mu'tazila* stated that if the dishonest practices become widespread; or in other words, if the state or king turns tyrannical and unjust, it is necessary for Muslims to rise in revolt against such state or king. So *Mu'tazila* approved use of force to command good and prohibit evil practice. Such an understanding led to *Minha* (Inquisition) in the time of Al-Mamun.

Ash'arism

The Abbasid inquisition was brutal and unpopular move so riots broke out in the streets of Baghdad against the Abbasid rule. It was under Caliph Al-Mutawakkil (847-861CE) that the *Mihna* ended in 848, religious scholars (*ulama*) wrested from them right to define Islam, by 10th century the Caliphs were barely involved in the Islamic jurisprudence or law. The Ash'arites had a balanced stand in theological matters; neither too rationalist as *Mu'tazila* nor too orthodox literalist as Zahirites. Famous Ash'arite thinkers were Al-Ghazali and Fakhr al-Din al-Razi. The Seljuk sultans followed Ash'arism.

Al-Ashari (d.935) was a native of Basra. He was a disciple of Abu Ali al-Jubba'i (d.915). Al-Ashari challenged the *Mu'tazila* doctrine in its entirety, though applied

dialectical method. Al-Ashari said ‘God has attributes which inhere eternally in Him and are in addition to His essence.’

- 1) **Doctrine of Mukhalafa:** God is different in nature and attributes from His creation so human attributes could not be applied to Him.
- 2) **Free-Will:** Ash’arites held that human will and power are derived qualities. The power possessed by human beings is given by God and it is derived as everything is from God the Creator.
- 3) **Revelation over Reason:** In case of conflict between the reason and revelation, Ash’arites preferred revelation to reason as revelation is fundamental source of truth and reality. Revelation, for Ash’arites, was sole criterion for determining the good or bad. Ash’arites believed that it is possible to get a vision of God as a reward for good deeds.

To sum up the essence of Ash’arite theology, one scholar remarked, ‘Actions-in-themselves are neither good nor bad. Divine law makes them good or bad.’

Check Your Progress 5

- 1) What was the *Bayt-ul Hikma*? How did it impact the understanding of Islamic theology?

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- 2) What were the three basic differences between the *Mu’tazila* and the *Ash’arite*?

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15.7 ISLAMIC SUFI ORDERS

The term Sufi comes from the word *Suf* (meaning ‘wool’). Sufi was used to designate a certain group of Muslims whose deep mystic or ascetic inclinations led them to put on uncomfortable woollen clothes. The central core of Sufism is that a Sufi seeks a personal engagement with the Divine reality i.e., God. From the beginning mystical aspect was embedded in Islam. It took shape between the seventh and ninth centuries when there appeared some Muslim mystics in Basra, Baghdad, Syria and Iran. By the twelfth century a next stage in the development of Sufism came in the form of establishment of ascetic communities or orders (*tariqa*). Every order followed its own code of conduct, a spiritual lineage going back to Prophet Muhammad, religious philosophy of life and distinct devotional and mystic practices. In the wake of Mongol conquests, in particular after 1258 CE fall of Baghdad, upto the sixteenth century, the informal social networks

such as sufi authorities and their spiritual *tariqas* ‘became a spiritual and intellectual glue that held together the culturally and ethnically diverse societies of Islamdom.’

15.7.1 Rise of Sufi Movement

Concerning the rise of Sufi movement there are various opinions among historians. However, the ‘expansion-asceticism theory’ is the most accepted one. According to this viewpoint, as Islamic empire expanded, Muslims began taking interest in this-worldly issues and became more self-interested. Sufis after 8th century endeavored to restore the original purity of Islam. According to Islamic historical sources as long as Muhammad was alive the Islamic message was pure and original. However, as Islamic state in Medina began taking roots surely Islam spread far and wide. After some time, however, Muslims became gradually more involved in the mundane affairs of state and administration which eroded the original purity of Islam as Islamic society was mired in sectarian strife between Shia and Sunni. Therefore as Hughes noted, ‘Early Muslim asceticism presented itself as an “authentic” response to the Muslim community’s rapid expansion. Sufism was accordingly constructed as the other-worldly response to the this-worldliness of the new empire.’

Hasan al-Basri (642-728 CE) was a firebrand preacher and scholar in the eighth century. He used to deliver fiery sermons in public, urging people to avoid committing sins, to lead a pious life and insisted his students to abandon any attachment to material things (*zuhd*). Hassan al-Basri gathered vast number of followers who embraced his mystical ideas and distanced from worldly pleasures. After the fall of the Ummayyads in 750 CE, there emerged a group of Sufi scholars in Baghdad now called as the Baghdad School. Bishir Ibn ul Harith, Sari Saqti and Junaid were three gems of the Baghdad School of Sufism.

Junaid was taught by his uncle Sari Saqti. Contrary to Bistami and Al-Hallaj (representatives of ‘intoxicated’ version of Sufism), Junaid of Baghdad followed the ‘sober’ tradition of Baghdad Sufism. Junaid advocated relinquishing natural desires, selfish drives and annihilating oneself (*fana*) in order to experience union with the Divine. He insisted to be forgiving and good to entire community and to follow the Prophet Muhammad in the matters of the *Sharia*. Unlike Al-Hallaj, Junaid did not avoid the commandments of *Sharia*.

15.7.2 Spread of the Sufi Tariqa

From twelfth century, mystical life came to be increasingly cultivated into an organized formal Sufi orders called *tariqa*. Centered on relatively small lodges (*zawyas*), these Sufi institutions steadily became massive building establishments of worship and away from the racket of everyday life. The Sufi communities’ life within *tariqa* was organized and governed through fixed rules implemented by a hierarchical Sufi leadership.

The major early Sufi *tariqa*, the Qadiriyya, Suhrawardiyya, Chishtiyya, Kubrawiyya, Naqshbandiyya and Safawiya were formed between thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. The Qadiriyya order emerged in Baghdad, Naqshbandiyya in Central Asia, Shajilliya in North Africa and Safawiya in Anatolia. They later on spread and flourished into vast geographical territories. In the sixteenth century, the Ottomans were strict adherents of the Naqashabandi order and the Safavids in Iran were both Sufi *Pirs* of the Safavi order as well as kings. The Mughals, though often neutral, were also followers of the Naqashbandi order. During the seventeenth century, the Naqashbandi *tariqa* came to dominate both the Mughal and Ottoman political elites and had encounters with the Qadiriyya and Chishtiyya *tariqas*. It is called the ‘Naqshbandi reaction’. The Safavids

achieved political power and in the end neutralized and clamped down Hurufi and Nuqtawi Sufi orders.

Check Your Progress-6

- 1) Write the meaning of *Sufi* and Sufism. What is the Expansion-asceticism theory of the rise of Sufi movement?

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- 2) Write a note on rise of the Sufi movement and Sufi *tariqa*?

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15.8 SUMMARY

Islam emerged in Mecca in the seventh century CE Arabia, created a new social order integrated by common religious belief i.e., Islam rather than tribal ties. Arabs rapidly spread their rule and religion across three continents, nevertheless, dissensions erupted within *Umma* (Islamic community) and various sects like Kharijites, Shia, and Sunni, mystic orders and their offshoots developed over a period. As a result Islam became a religion with complex medley of sects, schools of theologies and jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and philosophy. First dissensions broke out among Arabs over succession issue after Muhammad’s demise, Kharijites as a revolutionary movement resisted Ummayyads, neophyte Muslims like *Mawlis* (mostly Persians) supported the Shia casue owing to discrimination under Ummayyads. Within Shias many branches also came to fore. Concerning the mystic dimension of Islam, Sufism as a movement took off in the eighth century, matured by thirteenth century and spread across the entire Islamic world by the end of the 16th century. The Sufis were organised into sufi brotherhood/orders (*tariqa*) like the Qadiriyya, Naqashbandiyya, Chishtiyya and Safawiyya.

15.9 KEYWORDS

Murijites : An Islamic sect who believes in the postponement (*ijra*) of judgements. They believe that God alone can decide whether a Muslim has lost his faith or a Sin is committed by a Muslim or not.

- Oasis** : A fertile place in vast desert where water is found.
- Qasida** : It is a poetic genre in Arabic and Persian written in praise of a king, a noble or an individual.
- Tariqa** : It refers to a mystical Sufi order. *Tariqat* means a mystical path
- Tribe** : The Arabic and Persian word for tribe is Qabila. Tribes are made up of clans. Tribal solidarity emerges from blood ties.
- Sect** : According to Max Weber, ‘Sect is a voluntary association of religiously qualified persons’.
- Sharia** : Refers to Islamic law derived from *Quran*.

15.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) See Sub-section 15.2.1
- 2) See Section 15.2

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) See Sub-section 15.3.1 See also the contents given in the box.
- 2) See Sub-section 15.3.2. It provided peace and legitimacy to the Islamic state of Medina. Medina under Muslims became nerve centre of politics in Arabia.

Check Your Progress-3

- 1) See Section 15.4. The Prophet Muhammad died without choosing his successor.
- 2) See Section 15.4

Check Your Progress-4

- 1) See Sub-section 15.5.1
- 2) See Section 15.5 and Sub-section 15.5.1
- 3) See Sub-section 15.5.2

Check Your Progress-5

- 1) See Section 15.6
- 2) See Section 15.6

Check Your Progress-6

- 1) See Sub-section 15.7.1
- 2) See Sub-section 15.7.2

15.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

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Further Readings

<https://www.scribd.com/document/134329976/How-Did-Th4-Early-Shia-Become-Sectarian>

http://libgen.io/search.php?req=Atlas+of+Islamic+History&lg_topic=libgen&open=0&view=simple&res=25&phrase=1&column=def

15.12 INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO RECOMMENDATIONS

Islamic Society: Rise and
Spread of Sects

What is Sufism?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u0WcsqSDU7U>

Islam Facts and Fictions

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_LIH4jBKyQ

Arab World: Heritage and Civilization

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gg-oyrOFosY>



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UNIT 16 TRADING WORLD OF ASIA AND THE ARABS*

Structure

- 16.0 Objectives
- 16.1 Introduction
- 16.2 Arab Trade and Commercial Expansion after the Rise of Islam
- 16.3 Internal Trade and the Rise of Urban Centers
 - 16.3.1 The Connection Between Trade, Religion and Development of Cities
 - 16.3.2 Development of Cities as Centres of Production
- 16.4 Arab Trade with India
- 16.5 Arab Trade with China and Southeast Asian Countries
 - 16.5.1 Arab Trade with China
 - 16.5.2 Arab Trade with Southeast Asian Countries
- 16.6 Summary
- 16.7 Keywords
- 16.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises
- 16.9 Suggested Readings
- 16.10 Instructional Video Recommendations

16.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit, you will be able to:

- understand the role played by Islam in the growth of Arab trade and rise of urban centres,
- appreciate the nomadic contribution in the urban economy of the Arabs,
- analyze changes in the world trade during the period under study,
- examine the trading relations of the Arabs with other regions of the world such as China, India and the Southeast Asian countries,
- discuss the nature of these trade exchanges and other factors involved therein, and
- comprehend the fact that the Arab world had elements of both the East and the West.

16.1 INTRODUCTION

Cities have been the centre of trading activities in every civilization. Most of the civilizations have been deeply connected with the development of urban centres; and trade is one of the most important factors for the growth of cities. Perhaps, this is the reason why cities are generally situated along the main trade routes. We can say that

trade is one of the main driving force in the development of urban centers. When feudal economy prevailed in European countries, especially after the decline of the Roman Empire, the era marked the development of trading activities in the Asian world. The rise of Islam facilitated massive growth in maritime trade, and Arab¹ traders established themselves as middlemen between the Asian and European markets. The economic foundations of the Arab world rested on settled agriculture; urbanization; and long-distance trade (Chaudhuri, 1996: 124). After the rise of Islam and expansion of the Islamic empire, the Arab trade was unified and regulated across the empire. The Arab traders had monopoly over the Asian trade even before the beginning of European sea voyages or the foundation of the British East India Company; and Portuguese, French, and Dutch trading missions. Here we will discuss in detail the trading activities of the Arabs.

16.2 ARAB TRADE AND COMMERCIAL EXPANSION AFTER THE RISE OF ISLAM

The geographical location of Arab world helped the Arab traders dominate the sea as well as the land trade of Asia. Nodal port towns such as Hijaz (see **Map 16.1** below), a barren land that was located at the middle coastline of the Arabian Peninsula in the Red Sea, seldom received the southwestern monsoon winds. This created avenues of trade which became a social and economic necessity of the region. Before the discovery of America and Australia, the Asian trade was confined to other two continents, namely Africa and Europe. The Arabian Peninsula was the meeting point of all three continents – Asia, Africa and Europe. It touches the boundary of both Europe and Africa.



Map 16.1: The Arabs and the Persian Sassanid Empire in 600 CE

Credit: Thomas Lessman

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Persia_600ad.jpg

¹ Initially, the term Arabs denoted the people residing in the Arabian Peninsula. It consisted of nomads – Bedouins (about whom you have read in **Unit 11, BHIC-102**) and city-dwellers who were engaged in trade throughout the Peninsula. Therefore, calling someone as Arabs until recently in history was considered to denote the simple nomadic people.

The land of Persia was considered the main land route for the Indian and Chinese traders to other continents. The coastal area of Arab countries touches the coast of almost all main sea trade routes, whether it is the Mediterranean Sea, Indian Ocean, Red Sea, or for that matter Persian Gulf. The geographical advantage of *Jazirat-ul Arab* helped in establishing the domination of Arab traders in the world trade.

Before the birth of Islam in the first half of the seventh century, the Middle East comprising West Asia, and parts of North East Africa, was divided between two power centers – the Byzantine and the Sasanian. However, the year 629 CE marked the presence of another power in the region, and that was Arab Muslims under the leadership of Muhammad. Muhammad sent his first expedition to Byzantine Syria in 629 CE. His expedition alarmed both the powers, Sasanian and Byzantine. Within ten years after the death of Muhammad, by 642 CE, the Muslim Arabs gained control of a larger part of the Iranian territory, including Iraq, as well as Byzantine Syria. By the end of sixth decade of the seventh century, both the Iranian and the Byzantine Empires were toppled by the Muslim Arabs. Trade was perhaps the most important aspect of the economic life of Islamic civilization. The control over Byzantine Egypt, Syria, Iranian Iraq, and Iran by the Arab Muslims encouraged the Arab traders to expand their trading activities because almost all the important coastal areas or the sea routes came under the direct control of Islamic empire. Now, given that the Arab coastal territories of Syria and Egypt touched the boundaries of Mediterranean Sea, the Gulf of Eden opened the way from Yemen to East African Somalia; and control over Arabian Sea made it possible for Arab traders to establish their monopoly over the Indian Ocean trade. The Persian Gulf helped the Arab traders to pour the Iraqi and Iranian luxury items into the Chinese and Indian markets. Now all the sea routes as well as land routes from Asia to Europe were directly controlled by the Islamic Empire which encouraged the Arab traders to expand their trading activities.

One of the most important features of Islamic civilization is the emergence and growth of urban centers. The demand for luxurious items, spices as well as clothes by the urban inhabitants encouraged long-distance or trans-oceanic trade. The consumption of luxury items by urban dwellers of Islamic capital cities forced the Arab traders to expand their trading activities. Now Arab trade was not just confined to Middle East countries, but reached the heaven of spices – Indonesia and Malaysia. Islamic rulers knew the importance of trade in the economic life of Islamic-urban civilization. The powerful Islamic rulers succeeded in giving protection to their traders from marauders. Sea routes as well as land routes were well protected under the Islamic rulers. Islamic rulers should be given credit to revive the old sea and land routes with the greater ability to protect these routes from any kind of violence and attacks of pirates and looters. Merchants and traders in the Islamic lands were given much freedom and autonomy in comparison to pre-Islamic era. Islamic theology also imposed upon the traders a certain sense of ‘morality’ and ‘honesty’ which the pre-Islamic traders were not very scrupulous about. The advent of Islam changed the business atmosphere making dishonesty in business an un-Islamic practice. Many verses of *Quran* and *Hadith* instructed the traders to do their business with honesty. Muhammad also appointed officers to keep eyes on such traders who used mischievous methods in their business. On one occasion, he warned traders, ‘O you traders, beware of telling lies in your business transaction’. The law was well codified as compared to the previous times, which ultimately helped the Arabs expand their trade not just within the political boundaries of Islamic world, but also to the other territories such as Far East countries and India. The cultural homogeneity – religious as well as the linguistic – provided by the Ummayyad and Abbasid caliphates helped in breaking the various restrictions and barricades to the internal trade within the Islamic region.

The growth of economic production and consumption in the enlarged market of the Muslim world was made possible by three parallel developments. First, the Islamization of the conquered people created a partially homogenous religion, moral and juridical system. Secondly, the Arabization of the army and the administration helped to breakdown ethnic and national barriers by recruiting local entrants or by the incorporation of the warlike steppe people. Finally, the Semitization process was completed through the adoption of Arabic as the universal language of communication, education, literary expression and government.

(Chaudhuri, 1996: 127)

The political stability provided by the Islamic rulers stabilized the economic life of the inhabitants of the capital cities and increased the purchasing power, and hence, encouraged the demand for important articles or items from non-Arabian markets, especially from markets of India and the Far East comprising Indonesia, Malaysia and China.

The trading networks of the Islamic world encouraged the emergence of geographical studies, for instance, the one done by Arab al-Idrisi (1100-66). The flourishing trade of Arab world encouraged migration of Arabs to non-Arabic countries. This era, therefore, is marked by cultural diffusion. The Arabs, who migrated to other places, learned new languages; had encounters with different cultures; gained knowledge of different places – their technologies, literature and science. They equipped themselves with new ideas which ultimately resulted in the technological advancement of ships and other means of transportation. The Arab traders who travelled to different places beyond their political or cultural boundaries, came back home with new ideas and knowledge. Arab cities became the center of international trade. Traders from different places assembled in these cities and ultimately transformed the status of these cities from a commercial center to the center of world knowledge. Every trader who travelled these cities did not land just with their commercial items but also with new knowledge systems, and transformed these places from being merely financial capitals to new cultural hubs.



Figure 16.1: Al-Idrisi's World Map

Credit: Leinad-Z~commonswiki

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Al-Idrisi%27s_world_map.JPG

The pilgrimage to the twin cities of Mecca and Medina led people to converge at the Red Sea, thereby, making trade an economic and social necessity of the region. All these economic, geographical and social factors lent the Red Sea its historical significance. Not only this, the Red Sea and Persian Gulf were part of the larger Indian Ocean and Mediterranean trade network. Thus, Arabs became the people with navigational skills. Also, as noticed in the previous **Units (12,13,14 and 15)**, historically the Arab world had elements of both the East and the West. The Portuguese economic onslaught on the Arab trade began in 1415 with the conquest of Centa, a Moroccan caravan town. The Arabs decisively lost the trans oceanic trade by 1700. You shall learn about the influence and activities of the Portuguese, English and Dutch empires in our Course **BHIC-108**.

16.3 INTERNAL TRADE AND THE RISE OF URBAN CENTERS

One of the most important developments between the seventh and tenth century in the Arab world was the rise of urban centers in the region. K N Chaudhuri asserts that ‘the economic foundation of the Muslim world system created by the Umayyads and the Abbasids in the first century of Islam rested on three factors: settled agriculture, urbanization and long distance trade’. All three factors were interlinked. Sustained agricultural growth fulfilled the food requirements of urban dwellers, while the commercial activities in the urban centers, and the demand for luxurious items by its population encouraged the long-distance trade. Agriculture did not merely play the role of subsistence economy for Arabs, but it also had commercial importance. Sustained agricultural growth supported the smooth development of handicraft industries which ultimately resulted in the flourishing trading activities of the Arab world.

Arab traders played an important role of middlemen between the Asian and European trade and the cities of the region served as storehouse of Asian items. These items were exported to different regions of Europe by the Arab traders. The development of urban centres or the rise of cities is directly associated with the development of trading and commercial activities. The sheer necessities of life and trading of luxurious items have enabled cities to thrive despite of all geographical and economic odds. We can see the emergence of cities in Arabian Peninsula as well as Iran, Iraq and Syria as commercial centers in this context. After 660 CE the trading activities of Arab world shifted to Syria and Iraq when Damascus became the capital of newly founded Islamic Empire. This changing environment encouraged the development of towns and cities in both the countries. The rise of Basra is the best example of this changing environment. Basra, one of the prominent cities of Islamic world, served as an important port. It was also situated on the strategically important trade route between Iraq and Iran. It was one of the earliest Islamic cities that was located outside the Arabian Peninsula. With the shift of capital to Damascus in 660, Basra benefitted from this development. With the expansion of the Caliphate, trade received an impetus in the entire region. The exchanges between the Arab, Christian and Frankish European worlds had an impact on their social and technological lives.

The trading activities in the Persian Gulf revived with the foundation of the most important city of Iraq – Baghdad – in the mid-eighth century and became the capital of the Abbasids. From its foundation, till the tenth century, Baghdad maintained its status as a main commercial hub of the Islamic world. Developing itself as a commercial metropolis in these three centuries, Baghdad had monopolistic control over Arab trade. Another important commercial city of this region was Samarra. Samarra was founded in 836

CE and served as a new capital of the Abbasid **Caliphs**. It was a coastal city located on the bank of Tigris River. But by the mid-tenth century, Baghdad started losing its monopolistic control over Arab business, and later the commercial activities of Islamic world shifted from Iraq to Egypt. At this time Cairo replaced Baghdad as a leading center of commerce and business of the Islamic world. The commercial and trading importance of the Persian Gulf was replaced by the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. This economic development marked the rise of Karimi traders of Egypt. Karimis extended their trading activities from Egypt to Syria, Iran and Iraq. From the port cities such as Basra, Jeddah and Ubullu, the cargo was transported inland via camel caravans.

16.3.1 The Connection Between Trade, Religion and Development of Cities

The role of religion in the growth of economic activities in the region was immense. The founder of Islam, Prophet Muhammad himself was from a trading background. The Quraysh tribe, to which he belonged, had control over Meccan trade from pre-Islamic times. The flourishing trade of Mecca and Medina benefited from the religious duties of Muslims to visit these two cities – Mecca being the birth place of Muhammad, and Medina where he migrated to. Umar, the son of Al-Khattab, who became the caliph after the death of the first caliph, Abu Bakr, tried to connect the Mediterranean Sea with Red Sea. Despite being the most dangerous sea to sail in, Red Sea maintained its importance because of the compulsory Hajj ritual among the Muslims. Mocha or Al-Mukha, a port city of Yemen, located on the coast of Red Sea, was one of the most important stations on the way to Mecca. Hajj pilgrims who travelled through Arabian Sea via Indian Ocean used to stay there for some days. In its early days, the economy of this port city was fully dependent on Hajj pilgrims. For South and South-East Asian pilgrims, it was one of the last key halts to Mecca. The traffic was irregular, but indeed significant. Highlighting the importance of pilgrim cities, K. N. Chaudhuri explains the significance of Jeddah as both a pilgrim and a commercial center. Jeddah, a coastal city, situated on the Red Sea was the gateway to Mecca for African and Indian Hajj pilgrims. He says that ‘each year with the arrival of ships from Egypt, Iran and India, local and foreign merchants engaged in commercial transactions of considerable value, selling linen from Damietta, cotton textile woven in Gujarat, Iranian carpets and many other goods from Africa, Southeast Asia and Europe.’ Other Arab cities having religious importance were Najaf, Karbala and Rabat. The amalgam of religion and trade created many cities between 7th and 10th centuries.

16.3.2 Development of Cities as Centres of Production

Arab cities were not just consumer cities but production centres as well. Prosperous trade of the region made the Arab cities the primary producers and suppliers of luxurious as well as daily use items. Al-Muqaddasi, an Arab geographer provided a detailed list of items that were produced and supplied by the cities and towns of Khurasan and Baghdad to the markets of other cities of the Islamic Empire in the tenth century. The town of Nishabur used to produce different types of garments; Marw was the center of veils made by silk; Kohistan was famous for its fine dates and rugs; Walwalij was famous for its walnuts, sesame oil, chickpeas and almonds, Balkh, the prominent commercial center of Iran, was well known for its dried grapes, soaps and skins. Samarqand was the main exporter of copper vessels and silver-coloured fabrics. Baghdad was the leading manufacturer of expensive royal garments. Special varieties of melon, and meat products of Bukhara were very famous in Arab world. The above detail destroys the myth of Arab cities as being merely consumer cities.

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) Discuss the role of Islamic rulers in promoting trade and commerce.

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- 2) How far do you agree that Arab cities were the main consumer cities?

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- 3) Explain the role of trade in the development of urban centres.

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16.4 ARAB TRADE WITH INDIA

The trading relations between India and Arab world are not new. The evidence of such activities between these two geographical regions points to trade from proto-historical times. The archeological evidence clearly shows the trade relations between two great civilizations of ancient world, i.e. Indus Valley Civilization and Mesopotamian Civilization. During the time of Solomon, as mentioned in the Old Testament, Arab traders frequently used to visit the South Indian coastal areas to buy spices. Some other Indian items like *pan*, *chandam* and coconut were also very popular amongst Arab people. Horses, jewellery and date were among the prominent Arab items which had a huge demand in Indian markets. The Arab traders settled down along the coastal area of both Eastern and Western Ghats of South India. The traditional commercial relations between these two regions should be understood with the fact that the permanent settlements were built by Arab traders along the western coast of South India to facilitate a sustained growth in the trade. In the pre-Islamic times, the barter system of trade was practiced on the south-eastern coast of Arabian Peninsula, where Indian items were exchanged with Syrian and Egyptian goods.

In addition to the issue of distance and geographical hindrances, the problem of protection for the overland traders remained an issue for the trans-continental trade with India. The volume of trade between the two regions, India and Arab, mainly increased after the rise of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula. Arab Muslim merchants benefited by the trading structures created on maritime trade routes between West Asia and India by pre-Islamic Sassanid merchants. They managed to establish

their monopoly over the Asian trade because of their strategic geographical location. The economic instability of Mediterranean economy, especially after the decline of Roman Empire, enhanced the significance of Arab traders as the middlemen between the South-East European and Asian markets. The Gulf of Eden, Red Sea, and the Persian Gulf emerged as the hub of trading activities between India and Arab world. Revival of the port of Alexandria led to the unification of Mediterranean Sea with the Indian Ocean. This trade connection also facilitated the cultural exchange between these two regions. From the eighth to sixteenth century, the Arabs and Persians dominated the Indian Ocean trade routes.

The Mongol attack on Baghdad in mid-thirteenth century not only affected the political structure of the Arab world, but also greatly impacted commercial affairs of the region. It changed the character of maritime trade of the region. The major economic consequence of this attack lies in changing of sea trade route between India and the Islamic world. However, this crisis also created an opportunity to look for another maritime trade route. This marked the rise of Egyptian trade with India and dominance of Egyptian merchants, especially a group of Karimi merchants, over the Indian Ocean trade. Just after the two years of successful expedition to Baghdad, the Mongolian army was badly defeated by the Mamluk army of Cairo at Ayn Jalut in September 1260. This defeat of Mongols at the hands of Mamluks halted the westward Mongol expansion and saved Egypt and Islamic influence over the North African countries. This event resulted in elevating the status of Cairo as the international center of trade. Another International trade route was developed by the Mamluk ruler of Cairo. Karimi merchants, after getting patronage from the ruling class of Cairo, established themselves as the middlemen between the Asian and European markets.

Karimi merchants had established very close links with the merchants of Malabar region. Their frequent visits to Kannur and Calicut strengthened the commercial ties between India and the Islamic world. Karimi merchants who monopolized the trade routes of Indian Ocean and Red Sea were also providing financial help to the **Zamorin**, the local ruler of Calicut, to enable them in consolidating commercial and political power in the region. The motive of this financial support was to control the spice trade with the help of these local powers. It also must be remarked that at this time, a sense of harmony prevailed between South Indian Hindu traders and Arab Muslim traders. They developed an environment of mutual trust and cooperation amongst themselves. The Indian Ocean was relatively a conflict free zone except some hindrances created by pirates.

We also cannot ignore the contribution and significance of international trade in the cultural and economic growth of Muslim cities in Sind. The renovation and expansion of the ancient ruined city of Banbhore and the construction of Mansura, the capital of Islamic rule in Sind in the early eighth century after the successful expedition of Mohammad Qasim should be seen in the context of international trade. Banbhore, which was situated near the sea, facilitated the demand for maritime trade of the region, while Mansura developed as a center of land trade. At this time, some important coastal cities were Manda, the coastal city of Kenya; Banbhore in Sindh; and Siraf on the north shore of Persian Gulf that controlled three ports – Bandar-e-Kangan, Bandar-e-Taheri and Bandar-Dayer; Suhar of Oman; and Mantai located on the north coast of Ceylon. These port cities developed a maritime trade network, of which Banbhore was a beneficiary. Banbhore fulfilled the demand of luxurious items in Sind through its maritime trading networks with Syria, Iraq, China, Ceylon and Kenya. The rise of Mongolian power and obstruction created by the Mongols in the trade routes proved to be one of main causes for the decline of these cities.

16.5 ARAB TRADE WITH CHINA AND SOUTHEAST ASIAN COUNTRIES

From the mid-tenth to the fifteenth century, Islamic trade in the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea was restructured into three segments based on Aden and Hormuz, Cambay and Calicut, and Malacca and Guangzhou. In the first area, already by al-Muqaddasi's time in the 980s, Mecca, Jidda, Suhar, and Bahrain were large trading towns that handled a range of commodities, both local products and imported items; and in the fifteenth century the commercial life of the two great eastern cities of Cambay in India and Malacca in Southeast Asia turned on the emporia trade of Aden and Hormuz. Many other lesser towns and cities in the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf were equally flourishing and prosperous.

(Chaudhuri, 1996: 132)

By the time Baghdad was founded by the Abbasid caliph al-Mansur (762 CE), the Arab sailors had been sailing to China and India for nearly half a century. Arabic travel literature of medieval times provides comprehensive information on Arab trading connections with China and Southeast Asian countries. Description of cities, lifestyle of urban population, and extensive information of trade routes, local politics and administration are amongst the main contents of such literature. *The Story of Sindbad the Sailor* perhaps best exemplifies this sort of literature. It did not just provide insight into the activities of merchants, knowledge of maritime trade route, and livelihood practices of coastal communities, but also demonstrated strategies against attacks of pirates and other enemies. The early tenth century book *Silsilat al-Tawarikh* written by Sulayman al-Tajir and Abu Zayd Sirafi – translated into English with the title of *Ancient Accounts of India and China: By Two Mohammedan Travellers, Who Went to Those Parts in the 9th Century*, by Eusebiu Renaudot – provides firsthand information of Arab traders trading with India and China. The two other important works of Arabic literature of those times which carry accounts of Arab Muslim merchants were *Akhbar a-Sin wal-Hind* written in ninth century, and *Ajaib al-Hind* of tenth century.

16.5.1 Arab Trade with China

The genesis of trade relations of Arab world with China, are from an antiquarian time. The Sasanid rulers had very keen trading interest with the Chinese territory. When the Arab world was getting consolidated under early Islamic rulers, China was witnessing the rise of T'ang dynasty. The beginning of T'ang dynasty and rise of Islam are nearly simultaneous. The Iranian and the early Muslim Arab traders mostly relied upon the land route to trade with China. However, this prosperous caravan trade did not continue for long, and by the end of eighth century, it was almost abandoned due to obstacles created by Tibetan tribes. This economic chaos created stimuli to figure out other ways, and that is how maritime trade got a fillip. The commercial activities in the Persian Gulf were revived by the Abbasid rulers and by the mid- eighth century, a Muslim colony at Canton (Guangzhou) was established by the Muslim traders. Abbasid Caliphs also sent tribute missions to China to strengthen the trading relations between the two regions. Sohar, the birthplace of the mythical character Sindbad, as also the port city of Oman located on the Gulf of Oman, was popularly known as gateway to China. According to Chaudhuri, it took ninety days to reach Canton from Sohar via Quilon and Qalah. One of the notable commodity of the Arab trade was Chinese porcelain.

The period between ninth and thirteenth centuries, during the regime of Song and Yuan dynasties in China, was the golden age for Arab-Chinese maritime trade. Though, the trade between these two regions had to face some difficulties between third and fifth decades of eleventh century when the forces of Rajendra Chola, the most important ruler of Chola Dynasty of south India invaded Champa, the coastal area of central and

southern Vietnam. Despite the fact that Arab traders were the main supplier of horses to the Chola kingdom, Rajendra Chola did not allow the Arab traders to trade with China through Champa. After these three decades, the trade between Arab and China again revived and Quanzhou became the meeting point of Muslim and Chinese traders by replacing Guangzhou. During the Yuan rule, most of the maritime trade of China was controlled by Muslim traders. In this period, a joint-venture system between the government and the merchants was established, and the venture was majorly financed by the Yuan government.



Figure 16.2: Early Chinese blue and white porcelain, c. 1335

Credit: Musee Guimet

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_influences_on_Islamic_pottery#/media/File:Early_blue_and_white_ware_circa_1335_Jingdezhen.jpg

16.5.2 Arab Trade with Southeast Asian Countries

The dominance of Muslim traders on the Southeast Asian trade between the second half of the eighth century and eleventh century, has been very candidly put up by Andre Wink: ‘The eight to eleventh centuries constituted a period of expansion of Muslim commerce on all major routes in the Indian Ocean, turning the Indian Ocean into an Arab Mediterranean’. It was the main trade route between Arab world and China. Arab traders had to cross Qalah located on Strait of Malacca in Malay region, via India, to reach Canton. Quilon situated in Kerala; Ceylon; archipelago of Java and Sumatra; sea ports located on the Strait of Malacca; Champa, the coastal area of central and southern Vietnam – were the important halts between Arab and China maritime trade routes. Muslim community that settled in Champa played an important role between China and Southeast Asian countries during Song and Yuan dynasties. A Chinese record dated tenth century, mentions arrival of Arab traders in Song court from Champa and Zabaj (a kingdom located between Cambodia and Java). Thus, the record also provides a picture of trade route between Arab world and China via southern India, Ceylon, Java, Sumatra, Strait of Malacca and Vietnam. The decline of the Chola Empire in south India provided an opportunity for the rise of Islamic states in the

archipelago of Sumatra in the thirteenth century. These states established themselves as an important link between Arab and Southeast Asian maritime trade. But the islands of Southeast Asia were incorporated in the Arab world only in the fifteenth century. The merchants brought back aloeswood, teak, porcelain, brazilwood and Malayian tin from this sea lane. Ships on the home voyage sailed from India to Arabia or detoured along the east coast of Africa before returning to the Persian Gulf (*History of Humanity*, 2000: 305).

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) Discuss the nature of Arab trade with India.

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- 2) Examine the nature of trade between the Arabs and China. Name one of the notable commodity of this trade.

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- 3) Explain the dominance of Muslim traders on the Southeast Asian trade.

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16.6 SUMMARY

The first half of the seventh century witnessed the rise of Islam in the geographically important region, *Jazirat-ul Arab*. Over time the elements of being Bedouin came to be regarded in opposition to the Islamic identity. Urban elements of existence entered their lives. The nomadic contribution to this urban economy needs to be understood well. Urban centres and caravan trade were not new to the Arabs. Islam provided a homogeneous identity and political stability to the Arab world which ultimately resulted in the massive growth in maritime trade in Asia and North Africa. The centralized authority of the Caliphs encouraged the rise of urban centers in the region which served as a meeting point for different traders of Asia, North and East Africa and Eastern European countries. These cities situated on the coastal areas of Persian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, Arabian Sea and Red Sea developed a maritime trade network consisting of Mediterranean Sea, Red Sea, Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean. The peasants and the nomads

also contributed to the urban success of Islam. Prosperous trade of the Arab world stimulated the migration of Arabs to non-Arab regions, specially along the coastal areas of Arab Sea and Indian Ocean. This migrant population settled down in the different parts of South India and Southeast Asian countries, and not only diffused the Islamic culture in the South Asian region, but also served as an important link of the rhythmic growth of maritime trade between Arab, India, China and other Southeast Asian countries.

16.7 KEYWORDS

- Caliph** : Religious and political head in the Islamic world. Abn Bakr became the first Caliph after the death of Muhammad.
- Jazirat ul Arab** : *Jazirat-ul Arab* comprises of the following regions: Yemen, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, and parts of Jordan and Iraq.
- Zamorin** : The local ruler of Calicut.

16.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) See Section 16.2
- 2) See Section 16.3
- 3) See Section 16.3, especially both the Sub-sections 16.3.1 and 16.3.2

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) See Sub-section 16.4
- 2) See Sub-section 16.5.1
- 3) See Sub-section 16.5.2

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16.10 INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO RECOMMENDATIONS

The Hajj | National Geographic

<https://video.nationalgeographic.com/video/00000144-0a40-d3cb-a96c-7b4dd49c0000>



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INSTAGRAM (Official Page IGNOU)



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The collage features several IGNOU documents and posters. At the top left is a certificate for 'CERTIFICATE IN SPANISH LANGUAGE & CULTURE (CICLI PROGRAMME)' from the 'SCHOOL OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES'. Below it are two 'IGNOU DIGI NEWS' newsletters: one dated 1st Dec 2018 with the headline 'An Scheduled Examination of Dec. 2018' and 'Examinations Cancelled and re-scheduled', and another dated 1st Dec 2018 with the headline 'One-day Training Programme Supervisor - Basic Level I'. To the right is a large poster titled 'LET US JOIN HANDS TO CREATE SKILLED HEALTH MANPOWER RESOURCES TO BUILD A HEALTHY NATION'. The poster includes the IGNOU logo, a central image of hands clasped together, and lists the following programs: Certificate in General Duty Assistance (CGDA), Geriatric Care Assistance (GCA), Phlebotomy Assistance (CPHA), and Home Health Assistance (CHHA). It also mentions collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and provides the website <http://sic.ignou.ac.in> for more information.

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