Chapter 9
Islam
The Rise Of Islam

600-1200
The Origins of Islam: The Arabian Peninsula Before Muhammad

Most Arabs were settled people.

Nomads were a minority.

Nomads were important to caravan trade between Yemen and to Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean.

Nomad trade would support the merchants in the different caravan trade cities.

Nomads were mostly polytheists prior to Islam. However, they were familiar with Christianity.
Mecca was a caravan city between Yemen and Syria. Mecca was also a cult center that attracted nomads to worship the idols enshrined in a small cubical shrine called the Ka’ba.
Muhammad was born in Mecca.

He grew up as an orphan and then got involved in the caravan trade.

In 610, he began receiving revelations that he concluded were the words of the one god, Allah.
The message of Muhammad’s revelations was that there is one god, Allah, and that all people ought to submit to him.

At the final judgment, those who had submitted to Allah would go to paradise; those who had not, to hell.

For Muslims, Muhammad’s revelations were considered to be the final revelations, following and superceding the earlier revelations of God to Noah, Moses, and Jesus.
The Formation of the Umma

- Muhammad and his followers fled from Mecca to Medina in 622.
- In Medina, Muhammad’s Meccan followers and converts from Medina formed a single community of believers, the umma.
During the last decade of Muhammad’s life, the umma would spread into lands such as Africa, Middle East, Europe, and Central Asia.
Abu Bakr

Muhammad’s father-in-law

Took over leadership of the umma as the successor (caliph) of Muhammad

Abu Bakr faced two main tasks:

1. Standardization of the Islamic religion
2. Consolidation of the Islamic state
Abu Bakr successfully re-established Muslim authority over the Arabs.

Oversaw the compilation and organization of the Quran in book form.
Disagreements in Islam

Disagreements over the question of succession to the caliphate emerged following the assassination of the third caliph, Uthman.

Civil War breaks out.

- One side- Those who supported keeping the caliphate in Uthman’s clan (the Ummaya)
- Other side- Those that supported keeping Caliphate with the descendants of Muhammad’s first cousin and son-in-law Ali

The Ummayad forces won establishing the Ummayad Caliphate in 661
Three Rival Sects develop

- Shi’ites – supported Ali’s claim to caliphate and his descendants
- Sunnis – Supported the Ummayad caliphate
- Kharijite- (rebel) militant followers of Ali
- Kharijites rejected primogeniture succession of the Quraysh, the tribe of Muhammad, and assert that leadership of Islam, the caliphate, should be designated by an imam elected by the community from candidates who possess spiritual and personal qualities.
The first important Islamic shrine to be built was the celebrated Dome of the Rock, begun in 691 in Jerusalem by the caliph Abd al-Malik on the spot where faithful Muslims believe that Muhammad began his Night-Journey as he ascended to heaven. Both the octagonal shape of the centralized plan and the lavishly ornamented interior demonstrate the influence of Byzantine architecture. The shrine is capped by a gilded dome.
The Rise and Fall of the Caliphate, 632–1258
The Islamic Conquests, 634–711

- The Islamic conquests of areas outside Arabia began in the seventh century.
- In the first wave of conquest, the Arabs took Syria, Egypt, and the Sasanid Empire.
- In the late seventh and early eighth centuries, Islamic forces took Tunisia, Spain, Algeria, Morocco, and Sind.
Common explanations for the rapidity of the Muslim advance include lust for booty (not *that* booty!), religious fanaticism, and the weakness of the foes of Islam.

None of these explanations has a strong basis in fact.

The most convincing explanation finds the causes of Muslim expansion in the talent of the Muslim leaders and the structure of Arab society.
During the period of expansion the Arab forces were organized into regular, paid armies and kept in military camps and garrison towns so that they did not overrun the countryside.

The Arab Muslims became minority rulers, thinly spread over non-Muslim societies that they dominated and taxed, but did not try to convert.
The Umayyad and Early Abbasid Caliphates, 661–850

- The Umayyads ruled an Arab empire, not a Muslim empire.
- They administered their territory through the established Sasanid and Byzantine apparatus, gradually bringing in Muslim bureaucrats and the Arabic language.
- Rebellions overthrew the Umayyads in 750; one branch of the family, however, remained in power in Spain.
Upon the fall of the Umayyads the family of Abbas—an uncle of Muhammad—took over and established the Abbasid Caliphate.

The Abbasids, who held the caliphate until 1258, provided renewed religious leadership, which they combined with a style of rulership and royal ceremony derived from the Sasanids.
Great Mosque at Cordoba, 786
When the Abbasids attempted to massacre 800 family members of the Umayyad dynasty at a dinner of peace, a few of them escaped, fled to Spain, and established Cordoba as their capital. The Great Mosque of Cordoba, begun in 786, contains all of the usual features of a mosque, but it is best known for its interior double set of horseshoe-shaped arches, one above the other, which are mounted on the capitals of granite and marble columns.
Literature and learning, including the translation of Greek texts and secular Arab poetry, thrived under the Abbasids.

Baghdad was a center of Abbasid culture; other areas shared in this culture to varying extents.

The Abbasid period also saw an acceleration of the rate of conversion of non-Muslim subjects to Islam in the ninth century.
Abbasid power began to decline in the second half of the ninth century as the caliphs found it impossible to maintain control over their vast territory.

One factor in the decline of Abbasid power was the difficulty of transportation and communications.

Another factor was the dissatisfaction of the non-Muslim provincial populations with a political and economic system that was centered on Baghdad.

In the ninth century local revolts carved the Abbasid realm into smaller Muslim states that did not pay taxes or homage to the caliphs in Baghdad.
In Baghdad, the caliphs had come to rely on Turkish slave troops known as Mamluks.

In the late ninth century, when they were not paid properly, the Mamluks took control of the caliphate, choosing whomever they wanted to be caliph and dominating the government.

Then in 945, the caliphate fell under the control of the Iranian Shi’ite Buyids.

As the Abbasid Caliphate declined, various provincial regimes rose to power. These included the Samanids in Bukhara and the Fatimids in Egypt.
In Spain, the Umayyads held power over a society in which Islamic, Roman, German, and Jewish cultures combined to form a unique Iberian variant of Islamic civilization.

Muslim Spain saw substantial urbanization, the introduction of citrus crops, a diverse irrigated agricultural sector, and a florescence of Muslim and Jewish intellectual activity.
Women playing chess, 13th c

Chess was a popular pastime in Muslim Spain. As shown in this thirteenth-century miniature, women in their quarters, without men present, wore whatever clothes and jewels they liked. Notice the henna (tattooing) decorating the hands of the woman in the middle. The woman on the left, probably a slave, is playing an oud.
Underlying the political diversity of the fragmented Muslim world was a strong sense of religious identity preserved by the religious scholars—the ulama.
Assault From Within and Without, 1050–1258

In Central Asia and the Middle East another nomad group, the Seljuk Turks, took advantage of the decline of the Abbasids to establish the Suljuk Sultanate.

The Seljuks ruled a territory stretching from Afghanistan to Baghdad and took Anatolia from the Byzantines in 1071.
Extent of Seljuk Power
Turkish plundering, the deterioration of the Tigris-Euphrates irrigation system, insufficient revenue, and insufficient food resources led to the collapse of the city of Baghdad.
The Crusades also put some pressure on the Islamic lands, but the Muslims were able to unite under Saladin and his descendants to drive the Christians out. However, Saladin’s descendants were not able to restore unity and order to the Islamic world, which was hit by another Turkish invasion in 1250 and by the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century.
Islamic Civilization
Law and Dogma

- Islamic law—Shari’a—evolved over time in response to the Muslim community’s need for a legal system.
- The most important source of law was the traditions of the Prophet (sunna) as revealed in reports (hadith) about his words or deeds.
Specialists on Islamic law collected and edited tens of thousands of hadith, discarding those that seemed to be spurious and publishing the others.

The Shari’a, developed over a period of centuries, held that all Muslims are brothers and sisters and shared the same moral values.
Conversion and urbanization were related. During the early period of Islamic expansion, converts to Islam needed to learn about their new religion and found that the best way to do so was to move to the wealthy, expanding urban areas where the Muslim population was concentrated. Discrimination in their native rural non-Muslim villages also spurred new converts to move to the cities.
Urban social life and the practice of Islam itself were varied because the Muslims had no central authority to prescribe religious dogma.

The growing cities provided an expanding market for agricultural and manufactured products and contributed to an increase in trade.
Islam, Women, and Slaves

- Muslim women were veiled and secluded as they had been previously in the Byzantine and the Sasanid Empires.
- Women could be influential in the family, but only slave women could have a public role or appear in public before men.
Muslim women did have rights under Islamic law.

These rights included the right to own property and to retain it in marriage, the right to divorce, to remarry, to testify in court, and to go on pilgrimage.
Stories about Muhammad’s young wife A’isha illustrate what Muslims feared most about women: sexual infidelity and meddling in politics.

Muhammad’s faithful first wife Khadija and his daughter Fatima are held up as models of female propriety.
Islam did not permit homosexuality, but notable Muslims including rulers and poets advocated the practice of male homosexuality.

Muslims were not permitted to enslave their fellow Muslims, Jews, Christians, or Zoroastrians except when taken as prisoners of war.

Muslims could and did hold non-Muslim slaves, but the status of slave was not hereditary.
The Re-centering of Islam

The decline of the caliphate and factionalism within the ulama deprived Islam of a religious center.

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries two new sources of religious authority developed: the madrasas (religious colleges) and the Sufi brotherhoods.
Sufi brotherhoods were mystic fraternities whose members sought union with God through rituals and training.

The early Sufis were mystics who went into ecstasies and expressed their ideas in poetry; the Sufi brotherhoods developed into more prosaic organizations of Muslim men.
Sufi brotherhoods provided their members with spiritual guidance and rules for everyday life.

The brotherhoods originated in the urban areas and then spread to the countryside.