

Cultural impact of Islam

- Culture *open to, and draws on*, the greatest achievements of *all peoples* "encountered" by Muslims
- Especially blends **Greek** ideas with ideas from the **Indian subcontinent**

The Arab-Islamic Empire provides:

- **a very prosperous economy**

- A. New crops, agricultural experimentation, and urban growth

1. Spread of new foods and industrial crops - new irrigation techniques make it possible to grow tropical and subtropical crops in the Mediterranean area (year-around growing season)

origin of:

coffee
pasta (durum semolina wheat)
sherbet
coconut
watermelon
artichoke
mango

introduced to West for 1st time:

cotton textiles
rice
sugar
oranges
lemons
limes
eggplant
spinach

2. Effects of new crops

- a. Increased varieties and quantities of food
- b. Industrial crops became the basis for a thriving textile industry

3. Urban growth

- a. Increasing agricultural production contributed to the rapid growth of cities
- b. A new industry: paper manufacture

- **extensive commerce (spice trade, silk trade)**

- A. The formation of a hemispheric trading zone

1. Overland trade

- a. Trade revived silk roads
- b. Umayyad and Abbasid rulers maintained roads for military and administration
- c. Overland trade traveled mostly by camel caravan

2. Maritime trade

- a. Arab and Persian mariners borrowed the compass from the Chinese
- b. Borrowed the lateen sail from southeast Asian and Indian mariners
- c. Borrowed astrolabe from the Hellenistic mariners

3. Banks

- a. Operated on large scale and provided extensive services
- b. Letters of credit, or *sakk*, functioned as bank checks

4. The organization of trade

- a. Entrepreneurs often pooled their resources in group investments
- b. Traders even went to West Africa, Russia, Scandinavia

- **Arabic language as common communications medium**

- **rulers nearly always support science, art, intellectual life**

Some achievements:

- **Mathematics: foundation of all modern math in the Arab-Islamic fusion of Greek theory with Hindu-Muslim decimal numbers**

1. systematize: algebra
2. origin: trigonometry; heliocentric theory (astronomy)
3. introduce to West: zero; decimal counting

- **Medicine: medical scholars also practice medicine**
 1. origin: alcohol (for medicinal purposes)
 2. teaching hospital
- **Art: very limited representation of humans, animals. Instead:**
 1. calligraphy - writing (script)
 2. geometric designs, patterns
 3. "Arabesque" - intertwined flowers, plants

Islamic values and cultural exchanges

- A. The formation of an Islamic cultural tradition
 1. The Quran and sharia were main sources to formulate moral guidelines
 2. Promotion of Islamic values
 - a. Ulama, qadis, and missionaries were main agents
 - b. Education also promoted Islamic values
 3. *Sufis*, or Islamic mystics
 - a. Most effective missionaries
 - b. Encouraged devotion to Allah by passionate singing or dancing
 - c. Sufis led ascetic and holy lives, won respect of the people
 - d. Encouraged followers to revere Allah in their own ways
 - e. Tolerated those who associated Allah with other beliefs
 4. The *hajj*
 - a. The Ka'ba became the symbol of Islamic cultural unity
 - b. Pilgrims helped to spread Islamic beliefs and values
- B. Islam and the cultural traditions of Persia, India, and Greece
 1. Persian influence on Islam
 - a. Most notable in literary works
 - b. Ideas of kingship: wise, benevolent, absolute
 2. Indian influences
 - a. Adopted "Hindi numerals," which Europeans later called "Arabic numerals"
 - b. Algebra and trigonometry
 3. Greek influences
 - a. Muslims philosophers especially liked Plato and Aristotle