

## 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