THE ARAB EMPIRE

AP World History Notes
Chapter 11
The Arab Empire

- Stretched from Spain to India
- Extended to areas in Europe, Asia, and Africa
- Encompassed all or part of the following civilizations:
  - Egyptian, Roman/Byzantine, Persian, Mesopotamian, and Indian
- With the expansion of the Arab Empire came the spread of:
  - Islamic faith
  - Arabic language
  - Culture of Arabia
War and Conquest

• 650s = Arab forces defeated the Persian Empire and took over about half of Byzantium’s territories
• Both had been weak for a long time due to fighting with each other
• Early 700s = Arab forces swept through North Africa, conquered Spain, and attacked southern France
• Early 700s = Arab forces reached the Indus River and took over some major oases towns in Central Asia
War and Conquest: Motives

- Merchants wanted access to profitable trade routes and wealthy agricultural regions.
- Individuals wanted to gain wealth and social promotion.
- Expansion provided a common task for the Islamic community (*umma*) that was on the verge of falling apart after Muhammad’s death.
- Spread of Muslim faith and righteous government across the world.
War and Conquest

• Conversion to Islam not forced on anyone in the Arab Empire

• In fact: Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians all considered “people of the book” and were given the status of dhimmis (protected subjects)

• In the 400s years following Muhammad’s death, millions of individuals and many whole societies with the Arab Empire adopted Islam
Widespread Conversion to Islam – WHY?

- Not such a dramatic change for many Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians
- Already familiar with ideas of: monotheism, heaven, hell, final judgment, divine revelation, fasting, ritual prayer, etc.
- Islam sponsored by a powerful state → Wealth and prestige of Arab Empire attracted people
- Successful conquest called into question the power of old gods; perhaps Allah really is all-powerful
- Many incentives for converting
  - Didn’t have to pay jizya = tax on non-Muslims
  - Could hold official positions; social mobility
Divisions and Controversies

• The “Rightly Guided Caliphs” (632 – 661)
  • First 4 caliphs after Muhammad
  • (Caliph = the political and religious leader of the Islamic community)
• Close companions of Muhammad
• Chosen by Muslim elders of Medina
• Division surfaced almost immediately
• Sunni vs. Shia Muslims

Abu Bakr
The 1st Rightly Guided Caliph
Sunnis vs. Shi’ites

- Believe the caliph is the rightful political and military leader of Islam
- Believe the caliph should be chosen by the Islamic community
- Believe the caliph can be any devout Muslim
- Religious authority comes from the larger Islamic community; particularly *ulama* = religious scholars

- Believe that the leader of the Islamic community should be a blood descendant/relative of Muhammad
- Religious authority comes from prayer leaders called *imams*
- *Imams* = only ones that can correctly interpret divine revelations and Islamic law
Islamic Caliphs

- As the Arab Empire grew, caliphs were transformed from modest Arab chiefs into absolute, all-powerful monarchs
  - Elaborate court rituals
  - Complex bureaucracy
  - Standing army
  - Centralized systems of taxation and money
- 2 major ruling dynasties came to control the Arab Empire during this time = Umayyad dynasty and Abbasid dynasty
Umayyad Dynasty (661 – 750)

- Vast expansion of Arab Empire
- Caliphs became hereditary rulers
- Empire’s capital moved from Medina to Roman/Byzantine city of Damascus in Syria
- Ruling class = Arab military aristocracy

The Dome of the Rock
Built in Jerusalem in 691 CE
Built by Umayyad Caliph Abd al-Malik
Umayyad Dynasty (661 – 750)

- Overthrown because:
  - Non-Arabs resented their status as second-class citizens
  - Shia Muslims believed Umayyad caliphs were illegitimate
  - Many Arabs protested the luxurious living of their rulers
Abbasid Dynasty (750 – 1258)

- Built up a new capital for the empire in Baghdad
- Non-Arabs now played a prominent role
  - Persian culture became the culture of Islamic elites
- Political unity = didn’t last long
- By the mid-800s = many local governors or military commanders asserted autonomy over their regions
  - Islamic world fractured into multiple “sultanates”
- Dynasty officially ended when conquered by the Mongols in 1258

And no, we can’t watch Aladdin OR Mulan in class.
Central Question in the Empire: What does it mean to be a Muslim?

- Answer = strict adherence to the *sharia* = Islamic religious and civil law
- *Sharia* created based on the Quran, the life and teachings of Muhammad, deductive reasoning, and the consensus of the *ulama* (Muslim scholars)
- *Sharia* addressed virtually every aspect of life; Examples:
  - Guidance for prayer and ritual cleansing
  - Treatment of slaves
  - Rules for political life
  - Rules for marriage, divorce, and inheritance
  - Rules for business and commercial practices
Sufis

- Muslims who believed that the wealth and success of Islamic civilization was a deviation from the purer spirituality of Muhammad’s time
- Searched for a direct and personal experience with the divine
- Rejected the material world
- Meditated on the words of the Quran
- Believed teachings about the law and correct behavior didn’t bring people closer to Allah
Sufis

- Believed many *ulama* had been corrupted by their association with worldly and corrupt governments
- Often challenged the religious authority of these *ulama* and charted their own course to Allah
Women and Men in Early Islam

• According to interpretations of the Quran made by Muslim scholars:
  • Spiritually → men and women are equal
  • Socially (especially in marriage) → women are inferior to men and should obey them

• The Quran provided a mix of rights, restrictions, and protections for women
Women and Men in Early Islam

- Examples of rights & protection for women within the Quran include:
  - Rights to dowries and some inheritances
  - Control over their own property
  - Marriage = must be consensual
  - Women could divorce men; especially if they weren’t pleased in the bedroom
Growing Restrictions

- Occurred during the Abbasid dynasty
- Arab Empire grew in size, wealth, and splendor
  - Result = role of women became more limited
- Applied to upper-class women
- Lower-class women = didn’t have servants; had to leave the house for shopping or work
- These restrictions stemmed from the traditions and cultures within the Arab Empire; NOT the Quran itself
Examples of the Growing Restrictions

• Women now expected to pray at home instead of in public mosques
• Veiling and seclusion of women became standard practice
• Separate living quarters in wealthy homes for women
• “Honor killing” = women killed by male relatives if they violated a sexual taboo
• Clitorectomy = female genital cutting
The Hadiths

- The Hadiths = traditions about the sayings or actions of Muhammad
- Became an important source of Islamic law
- Negative view of women → weak, deficient, etc.