

# SECTION 2



Muslim soldiers pitching a tent

## WITNESS HISTORY AUDIO

### Nomadic Raids

“For centuries nomadic Arab tribes had been in the habit of making raids or razzias on other tribes. The usual aim was to drive off the camels or the stock of the opponents. The favorite plan was to make a surprise attack with overwhelming force on a small section of the other tribe. In such circumstances it was no disgrace to the persons attacked if they made their escape; and so in many razzias there was little loss of life. . . . From the standpoint of the Muslims, the crossing of the straits of Gibraltar was . . . one more in a series of raiding expeditions which had been pushing ever farther afield. After experiencing one or more such raiding expeditions, the inhabitants of the countries traversed were rendered and became protected allies.”

—from *The Influence of Islam on Medieval Europe*, by W. Montgomery Watt

**Focus Question** How did Muhammad’s success extend Muslim rule and spread Islam?

## Building a Muslim Empire

### Objectives

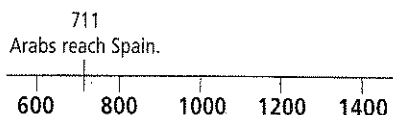
- Explain how Muslims were able to conquer many lands.
- Identify the divisions that emerged within Islam.
- Describe the rise of the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties.
- Explain why the Abbasid empire declined.

### Terms, People, and Places

Abu Bakr	Umayyads
caliph	Abbasids
Sunni	Baghdad
Shiite	minaret
Sufis	sultan

### Note Taking

**Reading Skill: Recognize Sequence** Copy the timeline below. As you read, fill in the timeline with major events concerning the spread of Islam and the rise and fall of Muslim empires.



The death of Muhammad plunged his followers into grief. Muhammad had been a pious man and a powerful leader. No one had ever been able to unify so many Arab tribes. Could the community of Muslims survive without him?

### Early Challenges to Islam

Muslims faced a problem when Muhammad died because he had not named a successor to lead the community. Events quickly unfolded. The community agreed that **Abu Bakr** (uh BOO BAK ur), Muhammad’s first cousin and an early convert to Islam, should be the first successor to Muhammad. Abu Bakr sternly told the people, “You worship Muhammad, Muhammad is dead. If you worship God, God is alive.”

**Arabs Unite Under Islam** Abu Bakr faced an immediate challenge. The loyalty of some Arab tribal leaders had been dependent on Muhammad’s personal command. They refused to follow him and withdrew their loyalty to Islam. After several battles with wavering tribes, Abu Bakr succeeded in reuniting the tribes based on their allegiance to Islam. Once reunited, the Muslims went on a remarkable series of military campaigns. They converted the remaining Arab tribes to Islam, which ended the divisions between Arabs and united them under one leader.

**Early Victories** Under the first four caliphs, the Arab Muslims marched from victory to victory against two great empires on their borders. The Byzantines and Persians had competed with each other over control of lands in the Middle East. Once the Arabs united, they surprised their neighbors, conquering great portions of the Byzantine empire and defeating the Persians entirely. First, they took the provinces of Syria and Palestine from the Byzantines, including the cities of Damascus and Jerusalem. Then, they captured the weakened Persian empire and swept into Byzantine Egypt.

✓ **Checkpoint** How did Muslims overcome early challenges to Islam?

## Divisions Emerge Within Islam

When Muhammad died, Muslims disagreed about who should be chosen to be the leader of the community. The split between **Sunni** (SOO nee) and **Shiite** (SHEE yt) Muslims had a profound impact on later Islamic history.

**Sunnis and Shiites** One group of Muslims felt that Muhammad had designated his son-in-law, Ali, to be his successor. They were called Shiites, after *shi'at Ali*, or followers of Ali. Shiites believe that the true successors to Muhammad are the descendants of Ali and Muhammad's daughter, Fatima. They believe that these descendants, called Imams, are divinely inspired religious leaders, who are empowered to interpret the Quran and the actions of Muhammad. Another group felt that any good Muslim could lead the community, since there could be no prophet after Muhammad. This group soon divided and fought among themselves as well as with others over issues of who could be defined as a "good" Muslim.

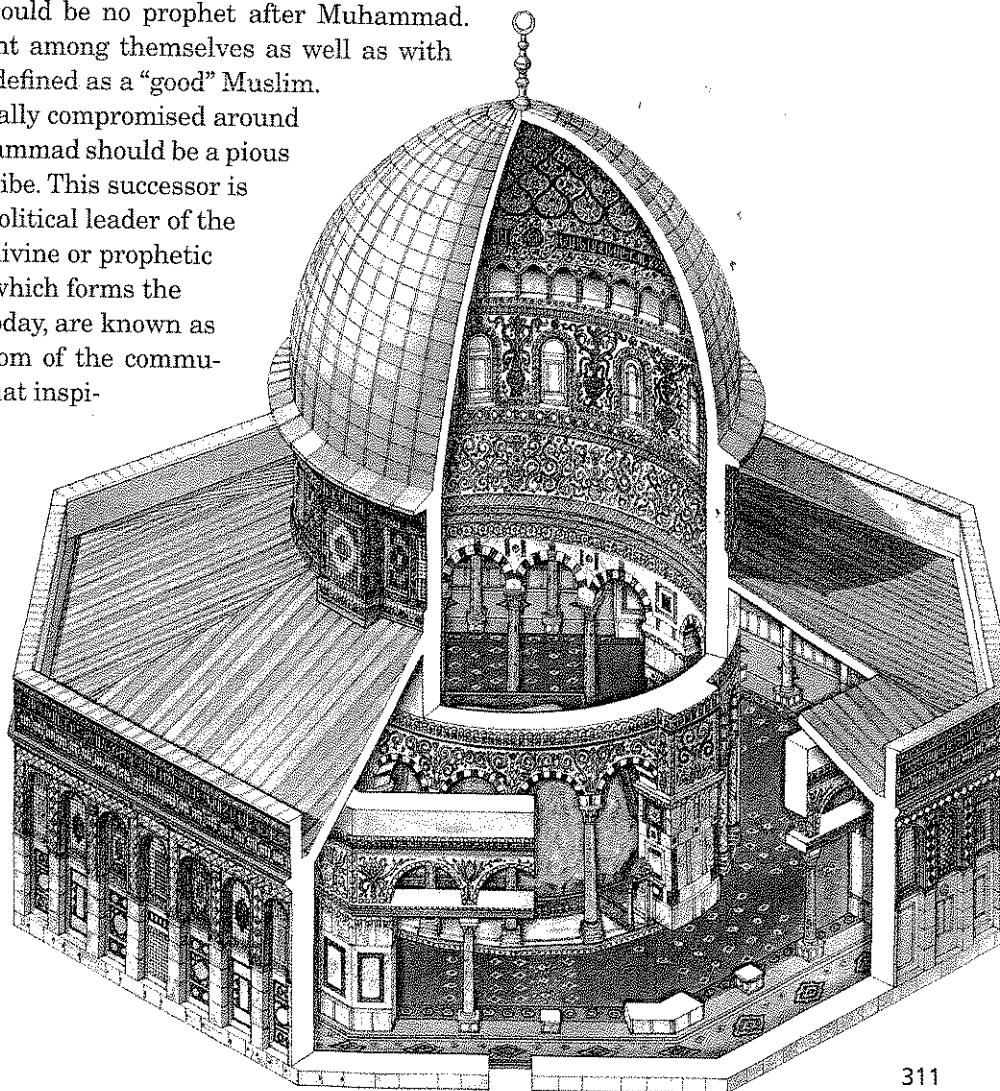
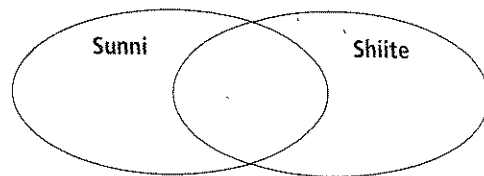
The majority of Muslims eventually compromised around the view that the successor to Muhammad should be a pious male Muslim from Muhammad's tribe. This successor is called a caliph and is viewed as a political leader of the religious community, without any divine or prophetic functions. The compromise group, which forms the majority of Muslims in the world today, are known as Sunnis, since they follow the custom of the community, or *sunna*. The Sunni believe that inspiration comes from the example of Muhammad as recorded by his early followers.

### The Dome of the Rock

The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem is the oldest surviving Islamic building. Construction began soon after Muslims captured Jerusalem. According to Muslim teaching, Muhammad ascended to heaven from the rock inside this building. Why was it important for Muslims to build in Jerusalem?

## Note Taking

**Reading Skill: Compare and Contrast**  
Copy the Venn diagram below. As you read, fill in the diagram with points on which Sunni and Shiite Muslims agree and differ.



### Vocabulary Builder

**schism**—(SIZ um) *n.* a formal division or separation

### Vocabulary Builder

**mystic**—(MIS tik) *n.* a person who seeks divine wisdom and spiritual truth



#### A Whirling Dervish

Whirling Dervishes are Sufi mystics who dance as a form of prayer.

Like the **schism** between Roman Catholic and Eastern Christians, the division between Sunni and Shiite Muslims has to the present day. Members of both branches of Islam believe the same God, look to the Quran for guidance, and follow the Pillars of Islam. However, Sunnis and Shiites differ in such areas as religious law, and daily life. Today, about 90 percent of Muslims are Sunni. About 10 percent are Shiite. Shiites live in Iran, Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen. The Shiite branch has further split into several different subgroups.

Over the centuries, the division between Sunnis and Shiites has sometimes been a source of conflict. When Sunni rulers held power, they often favored other Sunnis and deprived Shiites of wealth and power. When Shiites gained power, Sunnis often stood to lose. This sometimes rivalry remains a source of tension in the Middle East today.

**Sufis** In both the Sunni and Shiite branches of Islam, a group called the Sufis emerged. Sufis are Muslim **mystics** who sought communion with God through meditation, fasting, and other rituals. Sufis were known for their piety and some were believed to have miraculous powers.

Like Christian monks and nuns, some Sufis helped spread Islam by traveling, preaching, and being good examples to others. They traveled to remote villages, where they blended local traditions and beliefs into Muslim culture.



**Checkpoint** Describe differences between Sunni and Shiite Muslims.

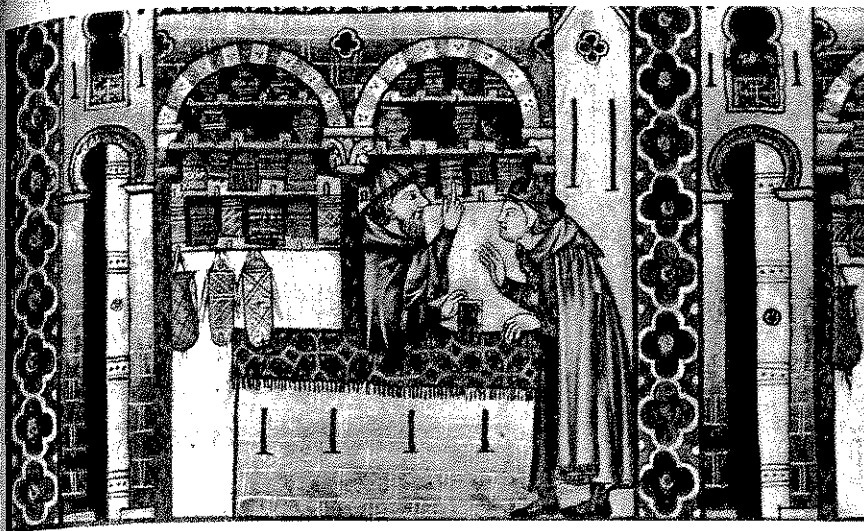
## Umayyad Caliphs Build an Empire

After the death of Ali, a powerful Meccan clan set up the Umayyad (Umayyad) caliphate, a dynasty of Sunni caliphs that ruled the empire until 750. From their capital at Damascus in Syria, they led the spectacular conquests that extended Arab rule from Spain in the west to the Indus River Valley in the east. These conquests enabled the spread of Islam and Muslim civilization.

**Expanding the Muslim Empire** From Egypt, Arab Muslims moved west, defeating Byzantine forces across North Africa. Muslim forces crossed the Strait of Gibraltar and conquered Spain. In 731, a Muslim army moved north into France to settle new areas. Frankish forces defeated the Muslims at the battle of Tours. Muslims ruled parts of Spain for centuries, but advanced no farther into France. Elsewhere, Muslim forces besieged the Byzantine capital of Constantinople, but failed to take the well-defended city.

**Reasons for Muslim Success** Several factors can explain the success of Muslim victories. One factor was the weakness of the Byzantine and Persian empires. The longtime rivals had fought each other too often. Many people also welcomed the Arabs as liberators from Byzantine or Persian rule. Another factor was the Arabs' bold fighting methods. The Bedouin camel and horse cavalry mounted swift and mobile offensives that overwhelmed more traditional armies.

Under the first four caliphs, Muslims knitted a patchwork of tribes into a unified state. Belief in Islam and the desire to glorify the religion spurred the Muslim armies to victory. As the empire grew, the rulers created an orderly system of administration.



### A Jewish Apothecary

A Jewish apothecary, or pharmacist, dispenses medicine in a Spanish market. What does this picture tell you about Muslim regions?

**Treatment of Conquered People** The advancing Arabs brought many people under their rule. These Arabs imposed certain restrictions and a special tax on non-Muslims, but allowed Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians to practice their own faiths and follow their own religious customs within those restrictions. Early Umayyads did not attempt to convert these "People of the Book," because the tax supported the Arab troops who settled in conquered areas. As Muslim civilization developed, many Jews and Christians played key roles as officials, doctors, and translators. Muslim leaders wisely prohibited looting and destruction of conquered lands, ensuring continued wealth and prosperity for the empire in the form of tribute and taxes. However, the rulers also urged Arab settlers to stay separate from the native populations, which created an Arab upper class throughout the empire.

In time, many non-Muslims converted to Islam. Some converted to gain political or economic advantages. However, many were drawn to Islam's simple and direct message, and they saw its triumph as a sign of God's favor. Many of the nomadic peoples in North Africa and Central Asia chose Islam immediately. Unlike some religions, Islam had no religious hierarchy or class of priests. In principle, it emphasized the equality of all believers, regardless of race, gender, class, or wealth. In later centuries, Turkish and Mongol converts helped spread Islam far across Asia.

**Decline of the Umayyad Caliphate** As military victories and negotiation expanded the Muslim empire, the Umayyads faced numerous problems. First, Arabs had to adapt from living in the desert to ruling large cities and huge territories. In many ways, the caliphs ruled like powerful tribal leaders, rather than kings with large bureaucracies. To govern their empire, the Umayyads often relied on local officials. Although they helped govern the empire, non-Arabs often did not have the same privileges that Arabs had, even if they converted to Islam.

While conquests continued, vast wealth flowed into Umayyad hands. When conquests slowed in the 700s, economic tensions increased between wealthy Arabs and those who had less. In addition, more and more resources were used to support the caliphs' luxurious lifestyle. By the eighth century, many Muslims criticized the court at Damascus for abandoning the simple ways of the early caliphs. Shiites considered the Umayyad caliphs to be illegitimate rulers of the Islamic community.



Unrest also grew among non-Arab converts to Islam, who had fewer rights than Arabs.

✓ **Checkpoint** What are three reasons for the success of Muslim conquests?

## Rise of the Abbasids

Discontented Muslims found a leader in Abu al-Abbas, descended from Muhammad's uncle. With strong support from Shiite and non-Arab Muslims, he captured Damascus in 750. Soon after, he had members of the defeated Umayyad family killed. Only one survived, escaping to Spain. Abu al-Abbas then founded the **Abbasid** (uh BAS id) dynasty, which lasted until 1258.

**Changes Under the Abbasids** The Abbasid dynasty tried to create an empire based on the equality of all Muslims. The new rulers halted the large military conquests, ending the dominance of the Arab military class. Under the early Abbasids, the empire of the caliphs reached its greatest wealth and power, and Muslim civilization flourished. Under the Abbasids, Islam became a more diverse religion because discrimination against non-Arab Muslims ended. Official policy encouraged conversion to Islam and treated all Muslims equally. The Abbasids created a more sophisticated bureaucracy and encouraged learning.

The Abbasids also moved the capital from Damascus to Baghdad, a small market town on the banks of the Tigris river. This move into Persian territory allowed Persian officials to hold important offices in the caliph's government. It also allowed Persian traditions to influence the development of the caliphate. Although these traditions strongly influenced Arab culture, Islam remained the religion of the empire and Arabic its language. The most important official was known as the vizier, or the head of the bureaucracy, a position that had existed in Persian government.

**Splendors of Baghdad** The second Abbasid caliph, al-Mansur, chose **Baghdad** as the site of his new capital. The walls formed a circle, with the caliph's palace in the center. Poets, scholars, philosophers, and entertainers from all over the Muslim world flocked to the Abbasid court. Under the Abbasids, Baghdad exceeded Constantinople in size and wealth. Visitors no doubt felt that Baghdad deserved its title "City of Peace, Gift of God, Paradise on Earth."

The city was beautiful, with many markets, gardens, the palace, and mosques. Domes and **minarets** (min uh RETS), slender towers of the mosques, loomed overhead. Five times each day, muezzins climbed to the tops of the minarets and called the faithful to prayer. Merchants sold goods from Africa, Asia, and Europe. The palace of the caliph bustled with activity.

**Muslim Culture in Spain** The surviving member of the Umayyad family had fled to Spain and established an independent Muslim state. There, Muslim rulers presided over brilliant courts, where the arts and

## BIOGRAPHY

### Harun al-Rashid

The city of Baghdad reached its peak under the reign of Caliph Harun al-Rashid (763?–809), who ruled from 786 to 809. Both Europeans and his own subjects admired Harun as a model ruler. Many stories and legends recall Harun's wealth, generosity, and support of learning. Poets, physicians, philosophers, and artists all gathered at his court in Baghdad. One story tells how Harun rewarded a favorite poet with a robe of honor, a splendid horse, and 5,000 dirhams—a vast sum of money.

Harun used his generosity to create closer ties with other rulers. He sent the Frankish king Charlemagne several gifts, including a mechanical clock and an elephant. Harun hoped that the Franks would join him in an alliance against the rival Umayyad ruler in Spain.

Despite his lavishness and generosity, Harun amassed a great fortune. At his death, he had millions of dirhams, plus huge stores of jewels and gold. **How did Harun help make Baghdad a major center of Muslim culture?**

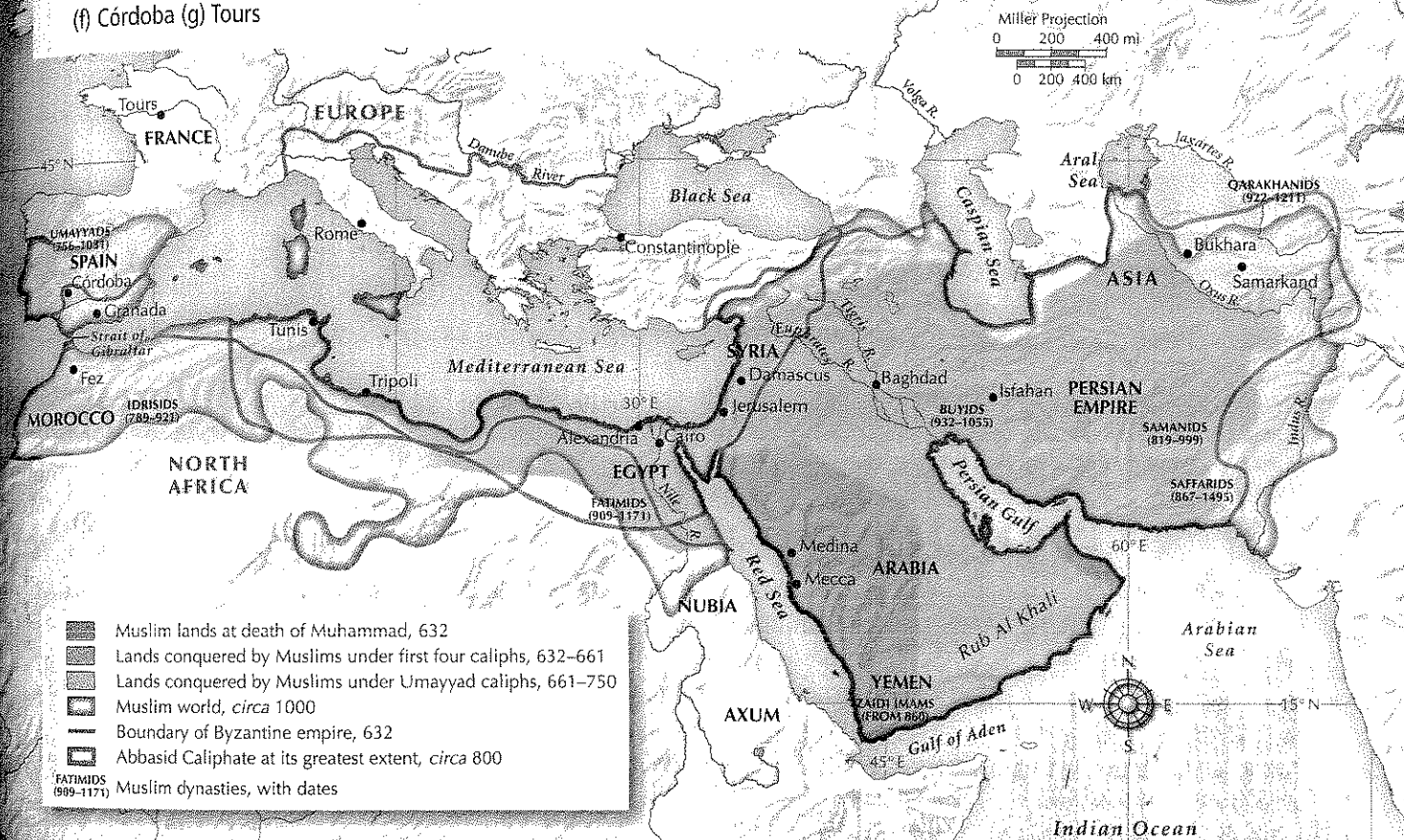


## Spread of Islam

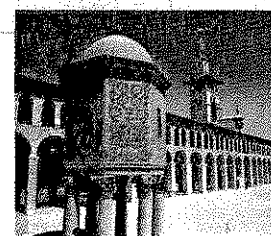
**Map Skills** In less than 150 years, Muslim rule spread from Arabia across southwest Asia and North Africa and into Europe.

- 1. Locate** (a) Damascus (b) Baghdad (c) Persia (d) Cairo (e) Constantinople (f) Córdoba (g) Tours

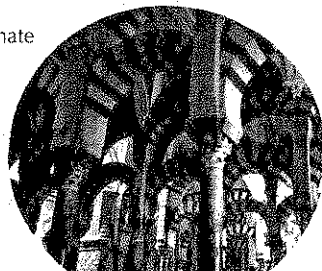
- 2. Region** During what period did Spain come under Muslim rule?
- 3. Apply Information** How might the spread of Islam have contributed to Muslim success in trade?



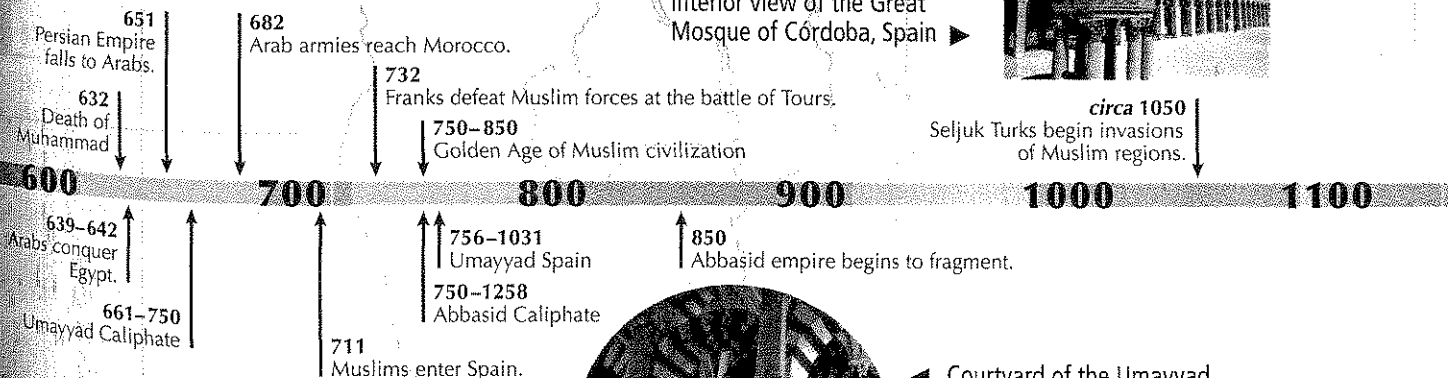
◀ The Great Mosque and town of Kairouan, Tunisia

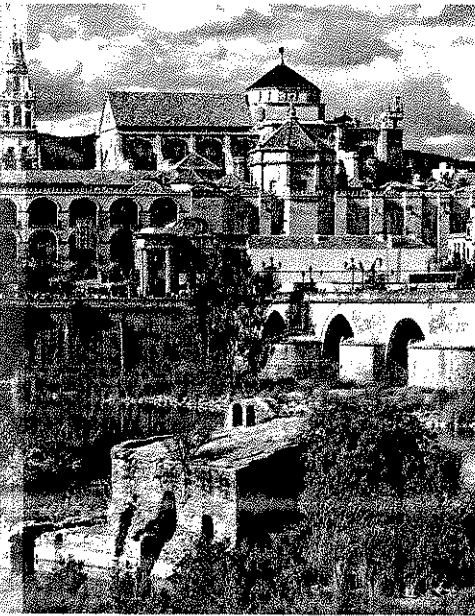


Interior view of the Great Mosque of Córdoba, Spain ▶



◀ Courtyard of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus





### The Great Mosque

The photo above shows the outside of the mosque in Córdoba, Spain. A picture of the inside appears on the previous page. It was built around 785.

learning thrived. In general, they were more tolerant of other religions than were Christian rulers of the time. At centers of learning, such as the city of Córdoba, rulers employed Jewish officials and welcomed Christian scholars to study science and philosophy. Architects built grand buildings, such as the Alhambra, a fortified palace in Granada. Its lovely gardens, reflecting pools, and finely decorated marble columns mark a high point of Muslim civilization in Spain. Muslim rule endured in parts of Spain until 1492.

✓ **Checkpoint** How did Islam become a more universal faith?

## The Muslim Empire Declines

The Abbasids never ruled Spain, and starting about 850, their control over the rest of the Muslim empire fragmented. In Egypt and elsewhere, independent dynasties ruled states that had been part of a unified empire. As the caliph's power faded in some regions, Shiite rulers came to power. Between 900 and 1400, a series of invasions added to the chaos.

**Seljuk Turks Take Control** In the 900s, Seljuk Turks migrated into the Middle East from Central Asia. They adopted Islam and built a large empire across the Fertile Crescent. By 1055, a Seljuk **sultan**, or ruler, controlled Baghdad, but he kept the Abbasid caliph as a figurehead. As the Seljuks pushed into Asia Minor, they threatened the Byzantine empire. The conflict prevented Christian pilgrims from traveling to Jerusalem, leading Pope Urban II to call for the First Crusade in 1095.

**Mongols Sweep Across Central Asia** In 1216, Genghis Khan led the Mongols out of Central Asia across southwest Asia. Mongol armies returned again and again. In 1258, Hulagu, the grandson of Genghis, burned and looted Baghdad, killing the last Abbasid caliph. Later, the Mongols adopted Islam as they mingled with local inhabitants. In the late 1300s, another Mongol leader, Timur the Lame, or Tamerlane, led his armies into the Middle East. Though he was a Muslim, Tamerlane's ambitions led him to conquer Muslim as well as non-Muslim lands. His armies overran southwest Asia before invading Russia and India.

✓ **Checkpoint** What caused the Abbasid dynasty to decline?

## SECTION 2 Assessment

### Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-quiz with vocabulary practice  
Web Code: naa-1021

#### Terms, People, and Places

1. For each term, person, or place listed at the beginning of the section, write a sentence explaining its significance.

#### Note Taking

2. **Reading Skill: Recognize Sequence**  
Use your completed timelines to answer the Focus Question: How did Muhammad's successors extend Muslim rule and spread Islam?

#### Comprehension and Critical Thinking

3. **Recognize Ideologies** How did the issue of heredity cause the division of Islam into Sunni and Shiite Muslims?
4. **Analyze Information** How did the Umayyads' treatment of non-Muslims and non-Arabs affect their empire?
5. **Recognize Cause and Effect** Why did the empire of the Abbasid caliphs decline and eventually break up?

#### Writing About History

**Quick Write: Explore a Topic** Many Bedouins visited Baghdad during the reign of Harun al-Rashid. Write a paragraph through their eyes in which you describe how life in Baghdad differs from nomadic life in the desert. Give details about each point of comparison to make your essay more accessible to readers.