

## CHAPTER 13-A NEW SOCIETY: THE EXPANSIVE REALM OF ISLAM

From the same area that produced the other two great monotheistic religions, Judaism and Christianity, Islam is born. The prophet Muhammad was born c. 570 C.E. into a merchant family living in Mecca on the Arabian Peninsula. He lost his parents at an early age, but later married a wealthy widow and became a merchant, which exposed him to many different faiths and cultures. At age forty he proclaimed to have revelations brought to him by the archangel Gabriel that the one true god, Allah, would soon bring judgment on the world. Eventually these revelations would be collected by Muhammad's followers, forming the *Quran* ("recitation"), the Muslim holy book, poetry which becomes the definitive authority for Islam.

His hometown of Mecca was not only a major trading center but also a religious center containing the Ka'ba, a stone building housing the idols of many of the local religions. In 622 C.E. Muhammad and his followers, suffering persecution, fled to the neighboring city of Medina in what becomes known as the *hijra*, which marks the start of the Muslim calendar. In 630 Muhammad returned to Mecca and established an Islamic government. The Ka'ba became the focus point of pilgrimage, known as the *hajj*. This event also marks the development of the Five Pillars of Islam and the beginnings of the creation of the *sharia*, Islamic law.

With the death of Muhammad in 632 a struggle began over the leadership of the religion. One side, the Shia, believed the leader should be related to Muhammad while the Sunni thought that the leader should be elected by the *umma*, the Islam community. The Shia/Sunni divide continues today. A series of dynasties governed the Islamic empire starting with the Umayyad (661-750 C.E.) and followed by the Abbasid (750-1250 C.E.) Each was politically unique, but both eventually declined.

The formation of Islamic cultural values began with the Quran and the *sharia*. Both missionaries and the educational system helped to promote these values. The most influential missionaries were the Sufi mystics, who led holy lives, teaching by example. They taught others that reverence to Allah could be accomplished in many different ways. The Quran also promoted male domination of the society.

Areas of advancement for Islam society included agriculture and business. The Muslims experimented with new crops and techniques resulting in increased food supplies that led to population growth and urban development. The Islamic empires became the center for a huge trade network on both land and sea, reaching along the silk road and into West Africa, Russia, and Scandinavia. This economy was supported by a system of banking that offered options used even today, including letters of credit and a checking system.

### Key Concept 2.1. The Development and Codification of Religious and Cultural Traditions

- II. New belief systems and cultural traditions emerged and spread, often asserting universal truths.

### Key Concept 3.1. Expansion and Intensification of Communication and Exchange Networks

- II. The movement of peoples caused environmental and linguistic effects.
- III. Cross-cultural exchanges were fostered by the intensification of existing, or the creation of new, networks of trade and communication.

### Key Concept 3.2. Continuity and Innovation of State Forms and Their Interactions

- I. Empires collapsed and were reconstituted; in some regions new state forms emerged.

### Key Concept 3.3. Increased Economic Productive Capacity and Its Consequences

- III. Despite significant continuities in social structures and in methods of production, there were also some important changes in labor management and in the effect of religious conversion on gender relations and family life.