

Discover!

MEDIEVAL CULTURE & HISTORY

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Table of Contents

Unit 1: Significance of Medieval Studies

Chapter 1:	Historical Research	9
Chapter 2:	Primary and Secondary Sources	17
Chapter 3:	Understanding the Medieval Period	25
Chapter 4:	Cultural Awareness in the Medieval Period	33
Chapter 5:	Early Interconnectedness	39
Chapter 6:	Working as an Archivist	45
Chapter 7:	Unit 1 Review	53

Unit 2: Medieval European Life

Chapter 8:	Social Hierarchy and the Feudal System	59
Chapter 9:	Daily Life in Cities and Villages	67
Chapter 10:	European Castles and Warfare	75
Chapter 11:	Religious Life and the Church	83
Chapter 12:	Art, Architecture, and Literature	91
Chapter 13:	European Trade and Exploration	99
Chapter 14:	Cultural Interactions and the Crusades	105
Chapter 15:	Working as an Art Historian	111
Chapter 16:	Unit 2 Review	119

Unit 3: Medieval Middle East

Chapter 17:	Caliphate System and the Rise of Islam	125
Chapter 18:	Islamic Golden Age	133
Chapter 19:	Medieval Islamic Culture in Art	141
Chapter 20:	Commerce and Cultural Exchange	147
Chapter 21:	The Crusades	153
Chapter 22:	Interactions with Neighbors	161
Chapter 23:	Mongol Invasions	167
Chapter 24:	Working as a Historical Consultant	175
Chapter 25:	Unit 3 Review	183

Unit 4: Medieval Asia

Chapter 26:	Silk Road: Pathways of Exchange	189
Chapter 27:	Innovations and Influence of the Chinese Dynasties	197
Chapter 28:	Mongol Empire	203
Chapter 29:	Spread of Buddhism.....	211
Chapter 30:	Maritime Trade in the Indian Ocean	219
Chapter 31:	Kingdoms of Southeast Asia	227
Chapter 32:	Feudal Japan: Samurai and Shogun	235
Chapter 33:	Korea and Korean Dynasties	243
Chapter 34:	Working as a Cultural Tourism Guide.....	251
Chapter 35:	Unit 4 Review	259

Chapter 22

Interactions with Neighbors

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

- describe the relationship between the Islamic world and its neighboring civilizations
- identify key interactions between Muslim and non-Muslim communities
- analyze the effects of these interactions on trade, culture, and science
- evaluate how mutual perceptions between the Islamic world and its neighbors evolved over time

Chapter Review

If you need to review cultural exchange, please go to the chapter titled "Commerce and Cultural Exchange."

Academic Vocabulary

Read the following vocabulary words and definitions. Look through the chapter. Can you find each vocabulary word? Underline the vocabulary word in your chapter and write the page number where you found each word on the blanks here.

- **alliance:** a union or association formed for mutual benefit, especially between countries or organizations (p. ____)
- **Byzantine Empire:** the continuation of the Roman Empire in the East during Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, centered around its capital of Constantinople (p. ____)
- **conflict:** a serious disagreement or argument, typically a protracted one (p. ____)
- **cultural exchange:** the sharing of ideas, customs, goods, and technologies among different cultures (p. ____)
- **diplomacy:** the practice of conducting negotiations between representatives of states or groups (p. ____)
- **Intellectual exchange:** the sharing or exchange of ideas, knowledge, and thinking between scholars or societies (p. ____)
- **Persia:** the historical region of southwestern Asia, now called Iran, known for its rich cultural heritage and as a center of ancient civilization (p. ____)
- **religious tolerance:** willingness to accept and permit religious beliefs and practices which disagree with one's own (p. ____)
- **technological transfer:** the process of disseminating technology from the person or organization that owns or holds it to a different party (p. ____)
- **trade agreements:** contracts between nations that outline how they will work together to ensure mutual benefit in trade (p. ____)

THE BIG QUESTION

How did interactions with neighboring civilizations shape the Islamic world?

EXPLORE

As the sun sets over Baghdad, imagine yourself strolling through its bustling marketplace. The air is filled with the delicious scent of spices, and the vibrant colors of fabrics catch your eye. Amidst the chatter of merchants, you notice something unusual: a group of traders from a neighboring empire, the Byzantine Empire, have set up shop nearby. You can't help but wonder why they're here. Normally, trading with neighboring civilizations is common, but today it feels different. As you listen, you hear them talking about tensions rising between their empire and the Islamic caliphate. It seems like something serious is happening.

As you continue exploring, you come across a lively argument between a Byzantine trader and a local Muslim merchant. They're upset about new rules that are making it harder for them to trade with each other. It's clear that these rules are causing problems for everyone involved. This situation makes you curious about how interactions with neighboring civilizations have shaped the Islamic world. How do trade agreements affect the way people from different cultures get along? What happens when there's a disagreement between them? How do these interactions change the way people see each other?



Midan Mosque and the bustling front square with Arabian shops, people, and camels, located in Baghdad.

SOURCE SPOTLIGHT

Muslims' Policy on Religious Freedom

Al-Baladhuri, a 9th-century Muslim historian, describes the terms of surrender given by Khalid ibn al-Walid, a Muslim general, after capturing the city of Damascus from the Byzantine Empire in *Futah al-Buldan* or *Book of the Conquest of the Countries*. Read the excerpt. Then, respond to the question.

- What conclusions can you draw about the policy of religious freedom implemented by Muslims towards conquered peoples?

"In the name of Allah, the compassionate, the merciful, ... to the inhabitants of Damascus. ... He promises to give them security for their lives, property and churches. Their city wall shall not be demolished, neither shall any Muslim be quartered in their houses ... we give to them ... Allah and the protection of His Prophet, ... So long as they pay the tax, nothing but good shall befall them."

Ahmad ibn Yahya Baladhuri, *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan*, quoted in Philip Khuri Hitti, *The Origins of the Islamic State* (New York: Columbia University, 1916).

The Relationship Between the Islamic World and Its Neighboring Civilizations

The Islamic world connected with its neighbors through conflicts and **alliances**, unions formed for mutual benefit. For centuries, the Rashidun, Umayyad, and Abbasid caliphates engaged in wars of expansion with the **Byzantine Empire**, a Christian land that was the continuation of the Roman Empire in the East.

These **conflicts**, or serious disagreements, resulted in diverse groups, including Jews and Christians, living under Muslim rule. Despite this, the treatment of different faiths was often more tolerant compared to rulers like the Byzantines. For example, Jews and Christians were considered *People of the Book* because they believed in the same God as Muslims and were allowed to practice their beliefs freely, but as non-Muslims, they paid a special tax known as the *jizya*. This **religious tolerance**, the willingness to accept beliefs that disagree with one's own, allowed for the coexistence of Muslims and non-Muslims.

Muslims had interactions with other neighboring groups, such as the Turks and Persians. **Persia**, a region of southwestern Asia now called Iran, was known for its rich culture. The Sassanids of Persia, a non-Muslim group, ruled areas of the Middle East for centuries but were conquered by the Rashidun caliphate in the early 7th century. The Seljuk Turks, a group that converted to Islam, rose to power in Persia in the early 11th century. They invaded the Byzantine Empire and controlled large areas before their decline. These interactions led to cultural exchange and **diplomacy**, the practice of conducting negotiations between groups.

Overall, relations between the Islamic world and its neighbors were complex and characterized by both conflict and cooperation. Despite conflicts, there were instances of religious tolerance and diplomacy, highlighting the diverse interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims.

WRITE

Essay

What were some significant aspects of the relationships between the Islamic world and its neighboring civilizations, as described in the passage?

CLOSER LOOK

Contributions of Al-Khwarizmi and Ibn al-Haytham during the Golden Age of Islam

Al-Khwarizmi, from Persia, made contributions to mathematics during the Golden Age of Islam. He introduced methods for solving equations and developed the algebra we use today. His book, *The Compendious Book on Calculation by Completion and Balancing (Al-Jabr)*, became an important textbook for scientists around the world.

Ibn al-Haytham, from Arabia, revolutionized the study of optics during this time. His *Book of Optics (Kitāb al-Manāẓir)* challenged ideas about vision and light through careful experiments and observations. He presented new understandings based on evidence, laying the foundation for modern optics. His work influenced later scientists, and he is now considered a pioneer of the scientific method.

- What lessons can we learn from the work of Al-Khwarizmi and Ibn al-Haytham about the importance of innovation and exploration in advancing our understanding of the world?

Cross-Cultural Exchange in the Islamic World: Ideas, Technology, and Religious Tolerance

Mutual perceptions between the Islamic world and its neighbors changed over time. Initially, perceptions may have been shaped by misconceptions arising from limited interaction. However, as exchanges intensified, perceptions evolved, fostering greater understanding and appreciation for each other.

One shift occurred due to **Intellectual exchange**, where scholars shared knowledge through discussions, debates, and collaboration. For instance, during the Islamic Golden Age, Muslim scholars translated and studied ancient Greek, Persian, and Indian texts, spreading known knowledge and leading to new advancements. Innovative concepts from India, including the decimal system and the concept of zero, revolutionized Islamic scholarship and scientific inquiry, paving the way for advancements in astronomy, mathematics, medicine, and engineering.

Trade agreements, or contracts that outline how nations will mutually benefit from trade, played a crucial role in exchange through **technological transfer**, the spread of technical knowledge from one group to another. For example, through trade agreements with the Chinese, the Islamic world acquired papermaking technology which transformed book production and increased literacy rates. Additionally, Chinese gunpowder contributed to the development of new weaponry which played a role in the expansion of Muslim empires throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia from the 14th century onward.

Similarly, the trans-Saharan trade route facilitated trade between Muslim North Africa and West African kingdoms. Through agreements, Muslims gained access to valuable commodities such as gold, ivory, and salt. In exchange, merchants introduced agricultural techniques, metalworking methods, and Islamic culture to West African societies, enriching both civilizations, while fostering economic growth and cultural diversity.



WRITE

Essay

How did trade agreements promote the exchange of ideas and technology between the Islamic world and neighboring civilizations in the medieval period?

PRACTICE

Reading Check Questions

Using what you have learned in this chapter, answer the following questions.

1. Describe a neighboring civilization's interactions with the Islamic world.

2. What is the significance of cultural exchange in shaping the Islamic world?

3. How did intellectual exchange and technological transfer contribute to advancements in the Islamic world?

4. What role did religious tolerance play in interactions between the Islamic world and non-Muslims?

REVIEW

In this chapter, you learned:

- The Islamic world engaged in diverse relationships with neighboring civilizations that included alliances, conflicts, and cultural exchanges.
- Interactions between Muslim and non-Muslim communities encompassed trade, diplomacy, and religious tolerance, shaping trade routes, cultural practices, and scientific advancements.
- Evolving perceptions over time ranged from conflict to cooperation, fostering interconnectedness and mutual respect between the Islamic world and its neighbors.

Can you answer The Big Question?

How did interactions with neighboring civilizations shape the Islamic world?



In Islamic history, few mysteries remain as riveting as the disappearance of al-Hakim. He was the sixth caliph of the Fatimid dynasty, a rival Shia caliphate of the Sunni Abbasids that claimed to be the true successors of Muhammad. As such, he governed over a vast empire stretching across North Africa, Egypt, the Levant, and western Saudi Arabia. His vanishing at the age of 35 is one of the most intriguing unsolved puzzles of the medieval world.

Al-Hakim became leader of the Fatimid Caliphate at the age of 11 in 996 AD. His reign was marked by artistic patronage and erratic

behavior. While he commissioned projects, including the Al-Hakim Mosque and public libraries, he also enacted policies that targeted Sunni Muslims and destroyed Jewish synagogues and Christian churches, creating a climate of fear in his empire. Despite this religious persecution, he is an important figure in the Druze faith, where he is considered to be divine.

In February 1021, he left on an evening donkey ride into the Mokattam Hills south of Cairo. Contemporary accounts state that he and two attendants encountered a group of nomads who asked for money. Al-Hakim ordered his attendants to return to the palace and provide

the group with the financial aid they requested while he continued on his ride. That would be the final time al-Hakim was seen alive.

When he failed to return after a few days, searches took place. Eventually, his donkey was found with its front legs cut off, and his blood-stained robes were located with knife slices through them. However, his body would never be found.

Most believe he was murdered or kidnapped by political rivals. Some historians propose that he might have chosen to disappear voluntarily, overwhelmed by the pressures of ruling. Others, like many Druze, feel he did not disappear at all, but took a non-human form and will return to Earth at the end of time.

An illustration of a city wall with a series of arches and a tower on the left. The wall is light-colored with a crenelated top. The arches have teal-colored curtains. The background is a clear blue sky.

Disappearance of Caliph Al-Hakim

Al-Hakim's fate remains a mystery, with theories ranging from his murder to his divine return on judgment day.

Al-Hakim's legend has only grown over time, blurring the lines between history and myth. This enduring legacy adds layers of complexity to the current understanding of his life and disappearance, but it continues to intrigue Muslim scholars and historians.

K-12 Curriculum Advantage

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