

SUBMISSION TO ALLAH: MUSLIM
CIVILIZATION BRIDGES THE WORLD

COMMENTARY

The thesis of Chapter 11 is clearly stated by Howard Spodek on page 334: “Islam was not only a faith, not only a system of government, not only a social and cultural organization, but a combination of all four.” This, it might be argued, could be said about any of the “world religions” during at least some stage of their development, but is perhaps more true of Islam than the others, owing to the simplicity of its basic teachings, the lack of a true priesthood and the dual religious and political roles assumed by Muslim elites, and the reliance on the *Quran* – viewed as the literal word of *Allah* (God) as revealed to the prophet **Muhammad** – as both the sole source of religious truth and the sole source of law. The chapter begins with a summary of the life of Muhammad and discussion of the early development of Islam, including the origins of the split between its two principal groups, *Sunni* and *Shi’a*. It reviews basic tenets of Muhammad’s teachings, the “**Five Pillars**” of Islam; and the importance of the concept of the *umma* or community of believers; and *shari’a*, or Islamic law; and then discusses the ways in which Islam was transmitted throughout Eurasia and Africa and transformed from a regional Arab sect into a world religion and **cosmopolitan** cultural ecumene.

In addition to explaining the basic beliefs and organizational structure of Islam, the history of its early development, and its religious and political expansion and cultural diffusion throughout much of Asia and Africa and parts of Europe, the text addresses several important and controversial historical questions and seeks to dispel some commonly-held misconceptions. One historical issue that is explored is Islam’s effect on the status of women: was women’s role (particularly in Arab society) raised or debased as a result of conversion to Islam? And, to the extent that the effects of Islamic conversion are seen to be detrimental to women, was this the result of the teachings of Muhammad and the *Quran*, or more the result of the absorption and diffusion of essentially non-Muslim, non-Arab, traditions about **gender** (such as those of Persia and the Byzantine Empire) throughout Islamic society? The debate over the meaning of *jihad* (usually translated as “holy war”) is also discussed, along with the closely-related questions of the extent to which Islam was spread by “the sword” (military conquest), as opposed to more peaceful means; and the actual reasons why people converted to the new religion. Less directly, Spodek attacks the view of Islam as a monolithic creed, by demonstrating the variety of its branches and sects and discussing the wide range of its religious and cultural expression, from the regional variations within the *shari’a*, or Islamic law, to the differences between mainstream Islam and **sufi** mysticism, on the one hand, and rationalist dissent on the other. In the text’s discussion of the **Crusades** and the **Reconquista**, Islam is shown to be inherently no more aggressive or warlike than Christianity.

An implicit sub-theme in the chapter is the enormous range of sources available to students of Islam, including all sorts of literary works, from sacred or semi-sacred texts such as early biographies of Muhammad, the *hadith* (collected and edited sayings of Muhammad and anecdotes about his life and teaching) and the *Quran* itself; and the writings of Muslim teachers, theologians and *qadis* (legal scholars); to texts on history, law, medicine, astronomy, mathematics, engineering, warfare, and a wide range of other topics; to poetry and prose literature. Added to these more formal and traditional text sources is a rich trove of more everyday writings: government edicts, *rihla*, or travel accounts and diaries; the records of business transactions and court decisions; and folk tales and songs. Then there are the unwritten sources, including a myriad of cultural traditions and customs, styles of dress, and manners; and, perhaps above all, the art and architecture of Islam. This abundance and variety of sources has not only enabled scholars to address questions regarding the origins and nature of Muslim religious beliefs and culture and their diffusion over a wide area, but emphasizes Islam’s fourfold nature “as a world religion, a polity, a people, and a civilization” (p. 366).

CHAPTER OUTLINE

- A. Islam: Submission to Allah
 - 1. The *Quran* and the *hadith*
 - 2. The *hijra* and the *umma*
- B. Perspectives on Islam: How do we know?
 - 1. The problem of sources
 - 2. Controversial issues: antecedents, conversion, gender relations
- C. The Prophet: his life and teaching
 - 1. Development of the *Quran*
 - 2. Muhammad: “Messenger of God”
 - 3. The Five Pillars of Islam
 - a. Monotheism
 - b. Prayer five times a day
 - c. Alms-giving
 - d. Ramadan
 - e. Pilgrimage to Mecca: the *hajj*
 - f. *Jihad* and the *dar al-Islam*
 - g. Salvation and damnation
 - 5. Women: debates over the effects of Islam
 - 6. Muhammad in war and peace
- D. Succession struggles and the early caliphs
 - 1. Abu Bakr, the first caliph
 - 2. The first civil war: Umayyad victory
 - 3. The second civil war: Sunni, Shi’a and Ismaili divisions
 - a. Shi’ites and Sunnis
 - b. Twelver Shi’a and the “Hidden Imam”
 - 4. The heights and depths of the Umayyad dynasty
 - 5. The third civil war: Abbasid victory
- E. The Abbasid Caliphate
 - 1. Stress in the caliphate
 - 2. Emergence of quasi-independent states
- F. Islam Expands
 - 1. India – the Sultanate of Delhi
 - 2. Southeast Asia
 - 3. Morocco and Spain
 - 4. Sub-Saharan Africa
 - 5. Seljuk Turks and their sultanate
 - 6. Mongols, Turks and the destruction of the caliphate
- G. Spiritual, Religious, and Cultural Flowering
 - 1. Law: the *shari’a*
 - a. *Hisba*
 - b. The *ulama*: the scholars and jurists of Islam
 - 2. Sufis: mystics of Islam
 - a. Sufism and the spread of Islam
 - b. PROFILE: Al-Gazzali, “Renewer of Islam”
 - 3. Intellectual syntheses
 - a. Ibn Khaldun’s *Universal History*
 - b. The Mutazalites
 - c. Science, medicine and mathematics

4. The global transmission of technology
 5. City design and architecture
 - a. The role of cities in Islamic culture
 - b. FOCUS: Mausolea in Islam
 - c. SOURCE: Ibn Battuta’s observations on gender relations
- H. Relations with Non-Muslims
1. Islam and the sword
 2. The Crusades
 - a. Origins, leaders and campaigns
 - b. FOCUS: *Dhimmi* status
 3. A golden age in Spain
 - a. Islam in Spain and the *Reconquista*
 - b. SPOTLIGHT: the Alhambra
- I. Conversion and Assimilation: How Do We Know?
- J. Judaism, Christianity and Islam: What Difference Does It Make?

IDENTIFICATION TERMS

For each term, students should be able to provide an identification or definition, an approximate date, a geographical location (if relevant) and – most important – a concise explanation of its significance in the context of the chapter. Terms that appear in the *Study Guide* are listed in **bold** font in the first column.

Abbasid Caliphate	Allah	<i>imams</i>
Reconquista	Mecca	<i>Mahdi</i>
Ibn-Khaldun	<i>hijra</i>	Harun-al-Rashid
dar al-Islam	<i>Quran</i>	Mahmud of Ghazni
Timbuktu	“Pillars of Islam”	Almoravids and Almohads
jihad	Ramadan	Baghdad
Delhi Sultanate	<i>hajj</i>	Damascus
Ulama	<i>umma</i>	Cordoba
Dhimmi	Ali	sufis
Seljuk Turks	Shi’a	Jalal al-din Rumi
Arabs	Sunni	al-Ghazzali
Persians	Ismaili	Mutazalites
Berbers	Umayyad Caliphate	Ibn Sina (Avicenna)
Ibn Battuta	<i>shari’a</i>	Ibn Rushd (Averroes)
Crusades	<i>hadith</i>	“Arabic” numerals

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading and studying Chapter 11, students should be able to:

1. Understand the basic precepts, beliefs and practices of Islam, including the “Five Pillars,” the *umma*, and the *shari’a* and *ulama*.
2. Differentiate and understand the major religious sects and philosophical movements within Islam: the Sunni, Shi’a and Ismaili sects; sufism; and the Mutazalite movement.
3. Delineate the geographical extent of the Muslim world on a map; explain the various methods by which people were converted to Islam; and understand the rights and status of non-Muslims in the *dar-al-Islam*.
4. Identify, locate and discuss the achievements of the major Muslim dynasties and states described in the chapter, including the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates, the Delhi and Seljuk Turkish Sultanates and the Almoravid and Almohad states in Spain.

5. Appreciate Muslim contributions to mathematics, history and philosophy and understand the role of the Islamic world as a transmitter of scientific, geographical and technological knowledge.
6. Understand the *Reconquista* and the Crusades from the Muslim point of view.

SUGGESTIONS FOR LECTURE TOPICS

1. Discuss the historical and religious background of the emergence of Islam in the Middle East.
2. Explain the meaning of Howard Spodek's assertion (p. 334), "Islam was not only a faith, not only a system of government, not only a social and cultural organization, but a combination of all four."
3. Discuss the various means by which Islam spread so quickly from Arabia as far eastward as India and Southeast Asia and as far westward as West Africa and Spain. Explain the respective roles played by military conquest, trade, voluntary conversion incentives and sufi proselytizing in spreading the faith.
4. Explain *dhimmi* status and discuss the position of non-Muslims under Islamic rule. Compare the status of Hindus, Jews and Christians under Muslim rule to that of Jews and Muslims under Christian rule at the time.
5. Examine the role and status of women in the Muslim world, emphasizing the regional variations. Discuss both the positive and negative aspects of women's status.
6. Discuss the *dar-al-Islam* as a multi-cultural ecumene and compare it to the Hellenistic Ecumene as a vehicle for the diffusion of philosophy, technology, science, art and architecture. Emphasize the ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural diversity within the overall unity of Islam.

TOPICS FOR ESSAYS AND CLASS DISCUSSIONS

1. Explain the origins of the schism between *Sunni* and *Shi'a* Islam. In what countries or regions does each group predominate today? Is this split similar to, or different from, the split between Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism or Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christianity?
2. The centralized Muslim empire of the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates effectively lasted for only a few centuries, yet Islam as a religious and cultural force continued to expand and flourish. The text discusses a number of reasons for this. Discuss at least two of these factors in detail, citing specific examples from the chapter.
3. Discuss the treatment of non-Muslim peoples under Muslim rule. What was the attitude of Muslim conquerors and rulers toward their various non-Muslim subjects? How did their status compare with that of non-Christians under Christian rule?
4. The text argues that the Crusades "were perhaps more political and economic than religious in motive." What evidence and examples does the author provide to support this assertion?
5. Debate: Debate the following statement, using information from Chapter 11 and from previous chapters in the text: "The concept of *jihad* demonstrates that Islam is inherently more aggressive and violent than other world religions." Is this a valid argument? Why or why not?
6. Group work: List and explain the "Five Pillars of Islam." How were they originally communicated to the Muslim faithful? What teachings or principles are considered to be among the core beliefs of Islam?
7. Spodek argues that, contrary to popular belief, forced conversion to Islam by Arab, Turkish or Persian military conquerors was the exception, rather than the rule. That being the case, how do scholars account for the massive conversions to Islam which took place, especially in areas outside the Muslim heartland, such as North Africa, Spain, India, and central and southeast Asia? What factors were important in motivating conversion? Who are the scholars who have put forward these interpretations?
8. One of the most controversial historical questions regarding Islam concerns its effects on the status of women and on gender relations in the areas that came under its influence. Explain the several positions historians have taken on this issue. What inferences or generalizations could you make, based on the *Rihla* (travel writings) of Ibn Battuta and other evidence in the chapter?

9. Explain Sufism. What does the term “mystic” mean in the context of Islam? Discuss the role of Sufism in the development and spread of Islamic religion and culture. Cite specific examples (persons, activities, beliefs) from the chapter.
10. Current events & issues: What clues can you detect in this chapter regarding the historical background of many of today’s tensions and conflicts between Muslims and the West? Between Muslims and Jews? Among Muslims themselves?

TEXT RESOURCES (Spodek, 2nd ed.)

Timetables, charts and graphs:	Islam The Crusade	(p. 333-334) (p. 361)
Large photographs or illustrations:	Trumpet call of the archangel Gabriel Celebration of the end of Ramadan The exterior of the Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem Portrait of Mahmud of Ghazni Delivering a lecture Whirling Dervishes <i>Mihrab</i> in the Great Mosque of Cordoba, Spain The Great Mosque and minaret at Samarra, Iraq Illustration of the Second Crusade	(p. 335) (p. 337) (p. 342) (p. 345) (p. 352) (p. 353) (p. 357) (p. 358) (p. 362)
Maps:	The expansion of Islam The rise of the Delhi Sultanate Islam in south and southeast Asia Islam in Africa Byzantium and Islam The Mongol World The empire of Timur	(p. 341) (p. 345) (p. 346) (p. 347) (p. 348) (p. 349) (p. 350)
SPOTLIGHT:	The Alhambra, Granada, Spain	(p. 364-365)
PROFILE:	Al-Ghazzali, “Renewer of Islam”	(p. 354)
FOCUS:	Mausolea in Islam <i>Dhimmi</i> Status	(p. 359) (p. 361)
SOURCES:	Ibn Battuta’s Observations on Gender Relations	(p.360)

ADDITIONAL PRIMARY SOURCES (*Documents Set & www.prenhall.com/Spodek*)

11-1	The <i>Qu’ran</i> : the Divine recitation of the Prophet
11-2	Al-Tabari: an early biography of Islam’s Prophet
11-3	Orations: the words of the Prophet through his speeches
11-4	Islam in the Prophet’s absence: continuation under the Caliphate
11-5	Harun-al-Rashid and the zenith of the Caliphate
11-6	The Caliphate in decline: Al-Matawwakil’s murder
11-7	Shi’ism and Caliph Ali: controversy over the Prophetic succession
www	Avicenna the Persian: the journey begins [from Avicenne, <i>Autobiography</i>]

AUDIO-VISUAL RESOURCES (videos, DVD's, CD-ROM and web-sites)

Beyond the Veil -- the Many Faces of Islam: Mundovision, Ltd., 1998. [3 videos; 156 minutes]

This series surveys modern Islam from a Muslim perspective, focussing on Islam's relationship with modernity and the West. Regional and philosophical diversity within Islam is emphasized.

Islam: Faith and Nations. [video]

This film discusses the fundamentals of Islam and surveys the regions and nations in which it is practiced.

Islam Page: <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Aegean/8264/> [web-site]

Contains a historical and religious introduction to Islam; information on the *Qu'ran*, Mohammad, and the "Five Pillars;" and a survey of Muslim culture.

Islamic Scriptures and Prophetic Traditions: <http://wings.buffalo.edu/hh/student-life/sa/muslim/isl/texts.html> [web-site]

This site contains numerous Muslim religious texts in English, including selections from the *Qu'ran*, *Hadith*, and Sufi writings, as well as scholarly articles.

Islamic Studies: <http://menic.utexas.edu/menic/subject/islamic.html> [web-site]

This site is a search-engine for many other links to Islamic studies.

Islamic Texts and Resources MetaPage: <http://wings.buffalo.edu:80/student-life/sa/muslim/isl/isl.html> [web-site]

This site includes articles on the history of Islam, Islamic art and culture, and the Muslim religion; links to other web-sites on those subjects; and a list of frequently-asked questions and answers for non-Muslims.

Religions of the World: Islam. [video; 70 minutes, color]

Ben Kingsley narrates this video surveying the origins, development, beliefs, practices and varieties of Islam.