
DBQ 6: ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION: ITS CONTRIBUTIONS TO WORLD CULTURE

Historical Context

The Muslims inherited much from Greece, Rome, and India. They also adopted much from the people they conquered. Because of their tolerance of other cultures, the Muslims were able to advance scholarship in several areas to the highest level of that time. As a result, Muslim achievements stand out and have a lasting impact on world cultures.

■ **Directions:** The following question is based on the accompanying documents in Part A. As you analyze the documents, take into account both the source of each document and the author's point of view. Be sure to do each of the following steps:

1. Carefully read the document-based question. Consider what you already know about this topic. How would you answer the question if you had no documents to examine?
2. Read each document carefully, underlining key phrases and words that address the document-based question. You may also wish to use the margin to make brief notes. Answer the questions that follow each document before moving on to the next document.
3. Based on your own knowledge and on the information found in the documents, formulate a thesis that directly answers the document-based question.
4. Organize supportive and relevant information into a brief outline.
5. Write a well-organized essay proving your thesis. You should present your essay logically. Include information both from the documents and from your own knowledge beyond the documents.

Question: What were the most important Islamic achievements? Why were the Muslims able to make such great contributions, and how did these contributions impact the world?

PART A

The following documents will help you understand Islamic achievements. Examine each document carefully. In the space provided, answer the question or questions that follow each document.

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Document 1

This document explains why Muslims of the Islamic Empire both preserved existing knowledge and extended it.

Muslims had practical reasons for supporting the advancement of science. Rulers wanted qualified physicians treating their ills. The faithful . . . relied on mathematicians and astronomers to calculate the times for prayer and the direction of Mecca. . . . Their attitude reflected a deep-seated curiosity about the world and a quest for truth that reached back as far as . . . Mohammed himself.

After the fall of Rome in 476 B.C.E., Europe entered a period of upheaval and chaos, an era in which scholarship suffered. . . . In the early 800s, Caliph al-Ma'mun opened in Baghdad . . . the House of Wisdom. There, scholars of different cultures and beliefs worked . . . translating texts from Greece, India, Persia, and elsewhere into Arabic.

Source: Bech, Black, Krieger, Naylor, Shabaka, *World History: Patterns of Interaction*, McDougal Littell, 1999 (adapted)

What were the reasons for Muslims' interest in learning at this time in history?

Document 2

The Islamic capital of Cordova (in present-day Spain) was described by a contemporary as the "jewel of the world." European scholars preferred Cordova's Islamic schools and universities over other study sources in Europe.

Besides the university library, Arab statisticians assure us the city boasted 37 libraries, numberless bookstores, 800 public schools . . . and a total population of 300,000. Its people enjoyed a high standard of living and refinement and walked on paved streets . . . all this at a time when hardly a town in Europe, Constantinople excepted, counted more than a few thousand inhabitants. Parisians and Londoners were still trudging on muddy, dark alleys.

Source: Philip Hitti, *Capital Cities of Arab Islam*, University of Minnesota Press, 1973 (adapted)

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What conditions in Cordova did this author cite as evidence of the high level of Islamic civilization and scholarship?

Document 3

Physician al-Razi wrote a medical reference encyclopedia, the *Comprehensive Book*. He also wrote *Treatise on Smallpox and Measles*. Ibn Sina (Avicenna) wrote the five-volume *The Canon of Medicine*. These books were translated into Latin and other languages and influenced doctors in Europe. This document describes the influence of these Islamic books on European medicine.

Medical Reference Books

When Europeans learned that Muslims had preserved important medical texts, they wanted to translate the texts into Latin. In the 11th century, scholars traveled to libraries in places such as Toledo, Spain, where they began translating—but only after they learned to read Arabic.

Through this process, European medical schools gained access to vital reference sources such as al-Razi's *Comprehensive Book* and Ibn Sina's *The Canon of Medicine*. Ibn Sina's five-volume encyclopedia guided doctors of Europe and Southwest Asia for six centuries. For nearly 500 years, al-Qasim's work, *The Method*, which contained original drawings of some 200 medical tools, was the foremost textbook on surgery in Europe.

Source: Bech, Black, Krieger, Naylor, Shabaka, *World History: Patterns of Interaction*, McDougal Littell, 1999 (adapted)

What does this document tell you about Muslim medical knowledge at this time in history?

How did it impact Western civilization?

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Document 4

Al-Khwarizmi, a Muslim mathematician, studied Indian sources. He wrote a textbook in the 800s about *al-jabr* (the Arabic word for what we call “algebra” today). This book was later translated into Latin and used throughout Europe. Muslim mathematicians also adopted Arabic numerals from the Indians and used them in a place-value system. Here are examples of these two advances:

$3x = 15$	$\begin{array}{r} 135 \\ +20 \\ \hline 155 \end{array}$
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What was the importance of these mathematical advances?

How did these developments impact Western civilization?

Document 5

Muslim scholars also made advances in trigonometry, astronomy, and mapmaking. To do so, they relied on scientific observation and their understanding of mathematics and optics. They used the astrolabe (Figure A) and the armillary sphere (Figure B) to study the skies and make calculations for their calendars and maps.



Figure A



Figure B

(continued)

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How did each of these instruments impact Muslim and Western civilization?

Document 6

Muslim artists used calligraphy to decorate buildings and objects of art as well as to reflect the glory of Allah. Study this example.



Why did Muslims use calligraphy in religious art?

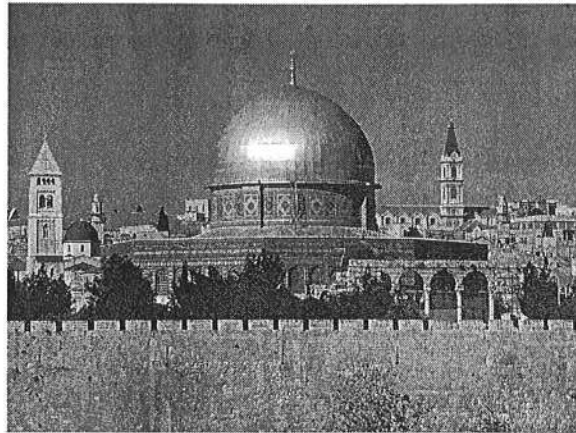
What impact has calligraphy had on world art?

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Document 7

Muslim architects blended features from various sources, including the Byzantine Empire, and also added new features. Study this photograph of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.



What are the distinctive architectural features of this building?

What impact did these architectural features have on buildings throughout the world?

Document 8

The standard for Arabic literature and poetry is the Quran, which influenced Sufi poets. These lines are from the Quran and from a Sufi poem.

In the name of the Merciful and Compassionate Allah. That is the Book!
There is no doubt therein. . . . Allah, there is no Allah but He! He will surely
assemble you on the resurrection day.

—Quran

As salt resolved in the ocean was swallowed in Allah's sea. . . .

—Jalal al-Din Rumi, *Persian Poems*

Source: Quran; Jalal al-Din Rumi, *Persian Poems*, thirteenth century (adapted)

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Why is the Quran the model for poetry?

How did the Quran influence literature and poetry?

Document 9

Between 750 and 1350, Muslim merchants built a trade network throughout their empire.

Masters of the sea, even as of the land, the Arabs spread throughout the geographical area. The whole world was theirs to explore . . . their ships sailed across the seas even as they moved across the land [Sahara Desert into West Africa]. The might of the sword of Islam carved the way for the slaveowner and the merchant to follow.

Source: Sir T.H. Holdich, *The Gates of India*, MacMillan, 1910 (adapted)

Why and where were the Muslims able to establish a trading empire?

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Document 10

This adapted excerpt describes the benefits that Europeans received from Muslim industry.

First should be mentioned the textile products imported from Islamic countries: muslin . . . damask . . . gauze, cotton, satin.

Natural products, which by their name indicate they were imported from Islamic countries—fruits, like orange, lemon, and apricot; vegetables, like spinach, artichokes, and saffron. . . . Finally our commercial vocabulary itself has preserved . . . proofs that there was a time when Islamic trade and trade customs exercised a deep influence on the commercial development of Christian countries—such words as “traffic” [derived from Arabic *tafriq*], which means distribution.

Source: J.H. Kramers, *The Legacy of Islam*, Clarendon Press, 1931 (adapted)

What were the commercial or trade benefits that Europeans gained from Islamic commerce and industry?

**PART
B**

What were the most important Islamic achievements? Why were the Muslims able to make such great contributions, and how did these contributions impact the world?