

Middle East Culture and Economy

Culture

The Bedouin—nomads of the Arabian Peninsula—were among the first converts to Islam, and they were already spreading the faith and creating a vast Islamic sphere of influence by the time of Muhammad’s death in 632. Over the next century, Muslim armies extended an Arab–Islamic empire over most of Southwest Asia, North Africa, and the Iberian Peninsula of Europe.

The new empire controlled both politics and trade, and it established bonds between government functions and Islam that continued after the empire’s demise. Islamic rules of conduct guided such matters as taxation policy and particularly the system of law, which was administered by religious specialists. To legitimize their authority, the leaders of the empire often claimed a blood relationship with Muhammad. Arabs remained the dominant elite as Islam spread, but they set up local non-Arabs and non-Muslims as administrators of newly acquired territory. Thus they allowed local rule, but collected taxes that supported the empire. They were particularly tolerant of other monotheists, such as Jews and Christians.

While Europe was stagnating during the medieval period (450–1500), Muslim scholars traveled extensively throughout Asia and Africa. These scholars made many important contributions to the fields of history, mathematics, geography, medicine, and other academic disciplines, which flourished from Baghdad in Iraq through Damascus (Syria), Alexandria (Egypt), and Fez (Morocco) to Toledo in Spain. These centers of world learning arose in vibrant economies that benefited from the early Islamic development of financial institutions and practices connected to wide-ranging trade, such as banks, trusts, checks, and receipts. From India, Muslims imported the useful mathematical concept of the zero, further advancing trade, record keeping, and scientific knowledge in the region. By the eleventh century, Islamic medicine was already drawing on a wide variety of traditions that originated in places from China to West Africa and included such practices as medical record keeping and regular peer review of physicians—practices that remained far superior to those in Europe into the nineteenth century.

By the end of the tenth century, the Arab–Islamic empire began to break apart into smaller units as outlying provinces eluded the control of central authorities. From the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries, Mongols from eastern Central Asia conquered parts of the Arab-controlled territory, forming the Mughal Empire. Meanwhile, beginning in the 1200s, nomadic herders in western Anatolia (Turkey) had begun to forge the Ottoman Empire, the greatest Islamic empire the world has ever known. By the fifteenth century, the Ottoman Muslims had defeated the Christian Byzantine Empire (the successor to the Roman Empire) and taken over its capital, Constantinople, which they renamed Istanbul. Very soon the Ottomans controlled most of the eastern Mediterranean, Egypt, and Mesopotamia, and by the late 1400s they controlled much of southeastern and central Europe. At about the same time, the Arab Muslims lost their control of the Iberian Peninsula.

During these various empires, the Islamic faithful were found from Spain in the east, deep into North Africa, in Turkey and southeastern Europe (the Balkans), and across Central Asia to the Indus Valley and northern India. Muslim traders and mystics carried the Islamic faith still farther, by land across Central Asia to western China and by sea to the East Indies, the southern Philippines, and even parts of coastal southeastern China. These areas, and those of the former Arab–Islamic empire, are still predominantly Islamic, with the exception of Spain, some parts of the Balkans, and southeastern China, where, nonetheless, remnants of Islamic culture persist.

The Ottoman Empire, like the Arab–Islamic empire before it, supported religious tolerance within its borders. Jews and Christians were allowed to practice their religion, although there were economic and social advantages to converting to Islam. The Ottomans prospered from the productivity of the empire’s many different peoples. Drawing on trading networks that stretched from Europe across the Mediterranean to Morocco and Algeria and east to the Indian Ocean, Istanbul became a cosmopolitan capital, outshining most European cities until the nineteenth century.

The origins of cultural practices in Islam are often obscure and misunderstood. Many people believe, for instance, that Islam instituted restrictions on women, such as **seclusion** (the requirement that a woman stay out of public view) and **veiling** (the custom of covering the body with a loose dress and the head—and in some places, the face—with a scarf). There is ample evidence, however, that these practices predate Islam by thousands of years, and indeed, some Christians and Jews in the region adhere to similar customs. Nor are the antiforeign attitudes associated with some movements in Islam today inherent in that religion. On the contrary, some past Islamic empires, such as the Ottoman Empire, were known for their cosmopolitan culture, tolerance, and even appreciation and adoption of foreign ways. Antiforeign sentiment is a more recent phenomenon that emerged after years of European and U.S. interference in the affairs of the region.

Government

More than 93 percent of the people in the region are followers of Islam. The Five Pillars of Islamic Practice embody the central teachings of Islam. All but the first pillar are things to do in daily life, rather than articles of faith. (Pregnant women and others who are poor, young, or sick are exempted from the physically demanding pillars.) Islamic practice in the region is thus a consistent part of daily life.

Saudi Arabia occupies a prestigious position in Islam, as it is the site of two of Islam’s three holy shrines, or sanctuaries: Makkah, the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad and of Islam, and Medina, site of the Prophet’s mosque and his burial place. (The third holy shrine is in Jerusalem.) The fifth pillar of Islam, that all Muslims who are able should make a pilgrimage (hajj) to the two holy cities at least once in a lifetime, has placed Makkah and Medina at the heart of Muslim religious geography. Each year, a large private sector service industry organizes and oversees the 5- to 7-day hajj for more than 2.5 million foreign visitors. Although oil now overshadows the hajj as a source of national income, the event is economically, as well as spiritually, important to Saudi Arabia.

Beyond the Five Pillars, Islamic religious law, called **shari’a**, “the correct path,” guides daily life according to the principles of the Qur’an. Some Muslims believe that no other legal code is necessary in an Islamic society. There are, however, numerous interpretations of just what behavior meets and does not meet the requirements of shari’a. Insofar as the interpretation of shari’a is concerned, the Islamic community is split into two major groups: **Sunni** Muslims, who today account for 85 percent of the world community of Islam; and **Shi’ite** (or **Shi’a**) Muslims, who are found primarily in Iran, but also in southern Iraq and the south of Lebanon. The Sunni–Shi’ite split dates from just after the death of Muhammad, when there were already divisions of opinion over who should succeed the Prophet and have the right to interpret the Qur’an. In 661, the Shi’ite-favored successor, Caliph Ali, Muhammad’s son-in-law, was assassinated by the opposing faction, which came to be known as Sunni. This act gave the Shi’ite–Sunni split significance that has

endured to the present, and the original animosities have been exacerbated by countless local disputes over land, resources, and philosophies. In Iraq, for example, conflict between Sunni and Shi'ite Iraqis has been greatly intensified by U.S. intervention and the rivalry over political power and oil resources that resulted. Across the region, there are many different interpretations of shari'a within both Shi'ite and Sunni groups, and devoutly observant members of both groups can be found living a host of different lifestyles.

In Muslim communities across the world, a major debate is unfolding on the role of religion in society. Although the differences have led to violence when extremists have felt that governments do not pay proper attention to religion, for the most part the debate is taking place in civil society. Typically, Islam has not recognized a separation of religion and the state as that concept is understood in the West. Rather, there have been varying mixtures of government and religion. In several of the countries in this region—Saudi Arabia, Yemen, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman, and Iran, for example—the state is the defender and even the enforcer of the religious principles of Islam. In these **theocratic states**, Islam is the officially accepted religion, the leaders must be Muslim and are considered divinely guided, and the legal system is based on conservative interpretations of shari'a that claim to hark back to the time of Muhammad. Other countries—Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Iraq, Turkey, and Tunisia—have declared themselves to be **secular states**. In these countries, theoretically, there is no state religion and no direct influence of religion on affairs of state. In practice, however, religion plays a public role even in the secular states. Most political leaders are at least nominally Muslim, and Islamic ideas play a role in government affairs.

Even in the non-Muslim countries of the region, religion is a significant factor in public life. Israel is not a theocratic state, but Judaism strongly influences government policy. Lebanon is a multireligious state with a Jewish minority, more than twelve versions of Christianity, and at least five versions of Islam. Throughout the region, however, as elsewhere, there is great variation in the stringency with which people practice their religion. Many people who consider themselves Muslims do not strictly observe the Five Pillars or shari'a, and they prefer that Islam play a limited role in public life. The same can be said for many Christians and Jews in the region, many of whom trace their heritage back to pre-Islamic days.

Establishment of gender roles

Some researchers think that the dawning of agriculture may mark the transition to markedly different roles for men and women. Archaeologist Ian Hodder reports that at the 9000-year-old site of Çatalhöyük, in south-central Turkey, there is little evidence of gender differences. Families were small and men and women performed similar chores in daily life, had similar status and power, and both played key roles in social and religious life. Scholars think that after the development of agriculture, as wealth and property became more important in human society, a concern with family lines of descent and inheritance emerged, which led in turn to the idea that women's bodies needed to be controlled so as to prevent them becoming pregnant by more than one man and thus confusing lines of inheritance.

Way of Life

In rural agricultural societies, fertility rates tend to be high because families depend on children as a labor supply. In urban contexts, especially where women have opportunities to work or study outside the home, they usually choose to have fewer children. In societies where fertility rates remain high despite a decline in agriculture, gender inequality may partially explain why many couples are still choosing to have so many children. Throughout North Africa and Southwest Asia, wherever men have a much higher education level than women, greater access to employment, and greater power to make family and community decisions (see Table 6.2 and the discussion of the family), children are the most important source of family involvement and power for women. Where women are secluded in the home and undereducated, they have little chance to accumulate wealth or to enhance the prospects and reputation of the family in ways other than by having children.

Although women contribute their labor and goodwill to the reproduction, health, and well-being of families, one result of their lesser ability to contribute to the family financially and their lower social standing is a deeply entrenched cultural preference for sons. Families sometimes continue having children until they have a desired number of sons, and young females may not survive, as indicated by the missing females in the 0–4 age cohort of the population pyramids. In North Africa and Southwest Asia, the traditional multigenerational patriarchal family is still very much the norm. Nonetheless, patterns are changing: families are becoming smaller, and no longer do several generations of one family always share the same household.

Family and Women

In traditional Islamic culture, the family defined a physical space as well as a functional grouping. Physically, the family space was usually a walled compound focused inward on a courtyard, where food, shelter, and companionship were provided. The size and details of these compounds varied according to social class and geographic location. The family group consisted of kin that spanned several generations, including elderly parents as well as adult siblings and cousins and their children. A system of interlocking duties, obligations, and benefits, often assigned by gender and age, provided a role for each individual and solidarity for the whole family. All accomplishments or misdeeds became part of a family's heritage. The responsibilities of family membership were enforced through informal social pressures that ensured no one became an obvious shirker. Whether one received a meal or something as grand as a university education from pooled family resources, the recipient knew that some measure of repayment would come due eventually. This informal contract between generations ensured the flow of financial remittances to elderly kinfolk; although these remittances were formally expected only from sons, daughters who were able sent them as well. These concepts of home and family and their attendant obligations are still very much part of value systems in the region, but everyday practice is changing as people move into apartments in cities and away from strict village social pressures.

Carefully specified gender roles are common in many cultures, and there is often a spatial component to these roles. In North Africa and Southwest Asia, the differences between male and female roles are reflected in the organization of space within the home and within the larger society, though practice varies widely from place to place.

In both rural and urban settings, men and boys go forth into *public spaces*—the town square, shops, the market. Here, men not only make a living, but also continually transact alliances with other men that will advance the interests of their families. It is through such networks, which span a range of social strata, that people get the best price for an appliance or a car, find a mate for a son or daughter, obtain a job or admission to a professional school, find some scarce item, or unsnarl a particularly nasty bureaucratic problem. For any favors they receive, they incur future obligations. If men are successful at making such arrangements, they also garner considerable respect and prestige within their own families.

Women used to inhabit primarily secluded *private spaces*. In the traditional family compounds described above, the courtyard was usually a private, female space within the home; the only men who could enter were relatives. For the urban upper classes, female space was an upstairs set of rooms with latticework or shutters at the windows from which it was possible to look out at street life without being seen. Today, the majority of people in the region live in urban apartments, yet even here there is a demarcation of public and private space, with one or two formal reception areas for nonfamily visitors and rooms deeper into the dwelling for family activities.

Now, women as well as men go out into public spaces, but just how women enter these spaces remains an issue, and customs vary not only from country to country but also from rural to urban settings and by social class. In some parts of the region, particularly in Saudi Arabia, seclusion remains strict. People believe that women should not be in public space except when on important business, and it is the custom that women be accompanied by a male relative in public. Elsewhere (in Egypt, for example), some classes may enforce seclusion more strictly than others. Some affluent urban women may observe seclusion more strictly than do rural women because, although rural women are traditional in their outlook, they have many tasks that they must perform outside the home: agricultural work, carrying water, gathering firewood, and marketing. In the more secular Islamic societies—Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Turkey, Lebanon, and Iraq—women regularly engage in activities that place them in public spaces. And, increasingly, female doctors, lawyers, teachers, and businesspeople are found in even the most conservative societies.

Levels of restrictions on women across the region. Some of these restrictions are officially sanctioned, and some are the result of informal social pressures. The primary reason for veiling is that when a woman enters public space, her honor must be maintained; therefore, in much of the region, it is important that her street clothing be modest. What she wears in the privacy of her home among family and friends may be quite different. When going to a party, for example, a woman may wear a long coat and shawl to get there and then shed them on arrival, revealing a stylish outfit of either Western or Muslim design for her friends to admire. As another means of maintaining their honor, it is common for women in public to travel in groups, or for a single woman to take a younger male sibling along on errands.

There is considerable controversy over the origin and validity of female seclusion and veiling as Muslim customs. Scholars of Islam say that these ideas predate Islam by thousands of years. They do not derive from the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, who in fact may have been reacting against such customs when he advocated equal treatment of males and females and helped with domestic chores in his own home. His first wife, Khadija, was an independent businesswoman whose counsel he often sought. The Qur'an allows a woman, married or not, to manage her own property and keep her wealth or a monthly salary for herself. By contrast, the custom of transferring to her husband's control all the wealth a woman brought to a marriage was not legally ended in Britain until 1870 and in some parts of the United States until in the 1960s!

Religions

Judaism was founded approximately 4000 years ago. According to tradition, it was begun by the patriarch Abraham, who led his followers from Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) to the shores of the eastern Mediterranean (modern Israel and Palestine). Jewish religious history is recorded in the Torah (the Old Testament of the Bible) and is characterized by the belief in one God, Yaweh, a strong ethical code summarized in the Ten Commandments, and an enduring ethnic identity. After the Jews rebelled against the Roman Empire at the Masada fortress on the Dead Sea in 73 c.e., they were expelled from the eastern Mediterranean and migrated to other lands in a movement known as the **Diaspora** (the dispersion of an originally homogeneous people). Many Jews dispersed across North Africa and Europe, and others went to various parts of Asia. Jews were among the earliest European settlers in the Americas.

Christianity is based on the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, a Jew, who gathered followers in the area of Palestine about 2000 years ago. Jesus, also known as Christ, taught that there is one God, whose relationship to humans is primarily one of love and support but who will judge those who do evil. This benevolent philosophy grew popular, and both Jewish (religious) and Roman (government) authorities of the time saw Jesus as a dangerous challenge to their power. After his execution in Jerusalem in about 32 c.e., Jesus' teachings (the Gospels) were written down by many followers. His ideas spread and became known as Christianity. By 400, Christianity was the official religion of the Roman Empire. In 1054, political tensions split Christianity into the Western tradition associated with Rome and the Eastern, or Orthodox, tradition headquartered in Constantinople (Istanbul). While Christianity maintained a strong foothold in Europe, the spread of Islam after 622 c.e. meant that only remnants of Christianity remained in the eastern Mediterranean, North Africa, and Central and South Asia. During the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries, European Christians launched various military ventures, known as the Crusades, to retake the eastern Mediterranean from the Muslims. Christianity was later spread through European colonization and missionary activities to the Americas and parts of Africa and Asia.

Islam is now the overwhelmingly dominant religion in North Africa and Southwest Asia. Islam emerged in the seventh century c.e. when, according to the **Qur'an** (or **Koran**), the holy book of Islam, the archangel Gabriel revealed the principles of the religion to the Prophet Muhammad. Born in about 570, Muhammad was a merchant and caravan manager in the small trading town of Makkah (Mecca) on the Arabian Peninsula near the Red Sea. Islam was, and is, considered an outgrowth of Judaism and Christianity. Followers of Islam, called **Muslims**, believe that Muhammad, who was called to be a prophet in 610, was the final and most important in a long series of revered prophets, which included Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. They also believe that the Qur'an contains the words God (**Allah**) revealed to Muhammad. (*Allah* is the Arabic word for "God"; thus Arabic-speaking Christians as well as Muslims use the word *Allah* in their prayers.) Because Jerusalem is the place from which Muhammad is believed to have ascended into heaven, that city is particularly holy to Muslims around the world, as it is to Jews and Christians. All Muslims are encouraged to undertake the **hajj**, the pilgrimage to the cities of Makkah and Medina (the sites of Muhammad's mosque and burial place) at least once in a lifetime. Although there have been several powerful Muslim empires, the religion of Islam per se has virtually no religious hierarchy or central administration. The world's one billion Muslims may communicate directly with God, not necessarily through a clerical intermediary, though there are numerous mullahs (clerical leaders) who help their followers interpret the Qur'an. As a result, the interpretation of Islam varies widely within and among countries and from individual to individual.

Population Patterns

Although the region as a whole is nearly twice as large as the United States, the areas that are useful for agriculture and settlement are tiny by comparison. The land supports 150 million more people than the United States, and population densities in livable spaces can be quite high—over 260,000 per square mile (100,000 per square kilometer), for example, in some of Egypt's urban neighborhoods. (The

highest urban density in the United States—in New York City—is approximately one-tenth this figure.) Vast tracts of desert are virtually uninhabited. Most people live along coastal zones, in river valleys, and in upland zones that capture orographic rainfall. Efforts are being made to extend livable space into the desert, but doing so may require extremely costly and environmentally questionable solutions to the problems of water scarcity and soil infertility.

In the 1960s, when most women married shortly after reaching puberty, some countries in the region had average fertility rates of close to 9 children per woman. By 2005, the average fertility rate for the region was reduced to around 3.5. Nonetheless, this rate is much higher than the world average of 2.7; the only region with a higher average is sub-Saharan Africa. At present rates of growth, the population of the region, now about 450 million, will reach 540 million by 2025. It is difficult to imagine how the area will support the additional people. Fresh water is already in extremely short supply, and most countries must import food at great cost. Furthermore, 32 million more jobs would have to be created within the next decade to employ the added population (compared with just 4.5 million needed in Europe, whose population is growing very slowly). Moreover, if the status of women changes more quickly than anticipated, the demand for jobs will increase even beyond the anticipated 32 million. By the year 2003, considerably less than 50 percent of women across the region (except in Israel and Turkey) worked outside the home at jobs other than farming.

Many inhabitants of the region believe that the industrialized world promotes population control in the developing world so that developed nations can continue to consume more than their fair share of the world's resources. On the other hand, many leaders (especially in Iran, Jordan, Oman, Qatar, Turkey, Yemen, and all of North Africa except Libya) see the wisdom of population control and encourage family planning. Moreover, most specialists in Islamic law say that limiting family size is acceptable for a wide variety of reasons, so long as the motive is not to shirk parenthood altogether. Nevertheless, by 2005, in the region as a whole, only about 41 percent of women were using modern methods of contraception, and only 53 percent were using any methods of contraception at all.

Oil

The region contains some of the world's largest known reserves of fossil fuels (oil and natural gas). These deposits are located mainly around the Persian Gulf, and the oil wealth so often associated with the region as a whole is concentrated mostly in countries that border the Gulf: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iran, Iraq, Oman, Qatar, and the UAE. Oil and gas are also found in the North African countries of Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Sudan.

Early in the twentieth century, European and North American companies were the first to exploit the region's oil reserves. These companies paid governments a small royalty for the right to explore and drill for oil. The oil was processed at on-site refineries owned by the foreign companies and sold at very low prices, primarily to Europe and the United States and eventually to other places, such as Japan.

The governments of the region did not assume control of their oil reserves until the 1970s, when they declared all oil resources and industries to be the property of the state. However, even before this, in the 1960s, the oil-producing countries organized a **cartel**, a group of producers strong enough to control production and set prices for its products. The oil cartel is called **OPEC**—the **Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries**. OPEC now includes Venezuela, Indonesia, and Nigeria. OPEC members cooperate to periodically restrict oil production, thereby significantly raising the price of oil on world markets. World petroleum prices result from a complicated set of factors, however. The OPEC countries often fail to reach agreement, and non-OPEC producers, such as Russia and Canada, can influence petroleum supplies and prices. Consumers, by reducing or expanding demand, can also affect prices. Furthermore, geopolitical events can have a major effect on oil prices, as demonstrated by the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks, when oil prices rose and fell a number of times. By 2005, a major factor in oil prices was the increasing demand in rapidly industrializing China and India. The countries that presently buy oil from the region.

After the major oil-producing countries raised prices dramatically in 1973, oil income in Saudi Arabia alone shot up from U.S.\$2.7 billion in 1971 to U.S.\$110 billion in 1981. Yet because the OPEC countries did not invest much of their oil wealth at home in basic human resources, they have been unable to improve their economic bases. Like their poorer neighbors, they have remained dependent on the industrialized world for their technology, manufactured goods, and skilled labor. Nevertheless, oil has brought significant benefits to the region as a whole. Those countries that had the largest amounts of oil (Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait) sharply increased their investment in long-neglected roads, airports, new cities, irrigated agriculture, and petrochemical industries, though they invested much less in education, social services, public housing, and health care. People from non-oil-producing countries in the region were also able to share in the wealth: many of the laborers on development projects in the oil-rich countries came from Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Turkey. Over the next several decades, oil prices will probably rise as demand for energy rises. At some point in the future, the depletion of oil resources and the development of new sources of energy will force OPEC countries to find other ways of earning an income or risk economic ruin.

Agriculture

Crop agriculture in the region has, until recently, been confined to coastal zones, river valleys, and areas with a Mediterranean climate. Grains, cotton, rice, corn, peanuts, fruit, sesame, and sugarcane are raised in the Nile Valley of Sudan and Egypt. In the Tigris and Euphrates river valleys, Turkish farmers produce cotton, tobacco, sugar beets, and livestock, and Iraqi and Syrian farmers grow grains, nuts, tea, tobacco, and livestock. Iranians produce similar farm products, primarily in uplands. In the mountains of the Arabian Peninsula, farmers still produce coffee, which was first domesticated in this region. On the northern coast of Africa, grains, citrus fruits, olives, dates, and wine grapes are grown for home consumption and for export to Europe.

Ambitious irrigation schemes in Libya, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Iraq are now expanding commercial, primarily export-oriented agriculture to neighboring areas that were previously too dry to support large-scale cropping. These attempts at expansion have not always been well conceived. Many state-sponsored irrigation projects have damaged soil fertility through salinization, which occurs when large amounts of water evaporate, leaving behind salts and other minerals that accumulate over time and inhibit plant growth. Salinization is particularly likely to occur in arid lands because there is little rain to wash away the salt. Israel has developed more efficient techniques of drip irrigation that curtail salinization, but until very recently poorer states have been unable to afford the technology, and others are wary of depending on a technology developed by Israel, a country they deeply distrust.

The region's numerous political tensions have convinced many governments that they should try to be self-sufficient in food production regardless of the expense. To that end, Saudi Arabia and Libya have spent huge amounts of money pumping massive volumes of groundwater to the surface at highly unsustainable rates to grow crops for home use and export. Libya is mining an ancient aquifer for

irrigation and other purposes at eight times the rate of natural replenishment. Saudi Arabia has even used the expensive process of desalinating seawater to provide irrigation for wheat fields. Wheat grown in this way costs 10 times the price of wheat on the world market.

The tending of grazing animals—particularly camels for transport and sheep for wool—was the economic mainstay of the region for thousands of years, but its economic importance has been in decline since the nineteenth century. Traditionally, camel breeders would take their herds from the sandy deserts of the Arabian Peninsula to cooler Syria or Iraq in the summer. Those in the Sahara would take their animals to summer in the southern fringes of the Atlas Mountains. Since the construction of railroads and highways, camels are used less and less, though they retain symbolic importance. The demand for sheep's wool continues. Sheep (and goats), however, cannot travel long distances, so the range of nomadic migrations of shepherders was always smaller than that of camel herders. The settled herding of sheep is now relatively common even in urban fringe areas, and many families engaged in nonagricultural employment maintain a small herd of sheep that the boys of the family tend.

Nomadic herders, such as the Kurds who live at the juncture of Turkey, Iraq, and Iran, have lost financial and spatial independence as the region has modernized and national borders have become official dividing lines. In establishing large irrigated agriculture projects, many governments are seeking control of water sources that were previously available to the herders, and they may require the nomads to settle permanently in order to provide a labor pool for the irrigation projects. Herders are also forced to settle in one place because their tendency to cross national borders in search of grazing lands and water is now perceived as a national security threat. Finally, governments find nomads hard to tax or to control in other ways; for example, it is difficult to enforce compulsory school attendance on their children. The requirement to settle permanently, however, drastically alters the economy and social structure of herding communities and can result in impoverishment and social strife.

Economic Diversity

Greater **economic diversification**—expansion of an economy to include a wider array of activities—could bring economic growth and broader prosperity to the region and limit the damage that a drop in the price of oil or other commodities on the world market would bring. For the most part, however, diversification has failed to happen. By far the most diverse economy is that of Israel, which has a large knowledge-based service economy and a particularly solid manufacturing base. Israel's goods and services and the products of its modern agricultural sector are exported worldwide. Turkey is the next most diversified, with Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia also starting to move into new economic activities. All depend on substantial government investment, and Israel and Egypt rely on significant aid from the United States.

The region's relative lack of economic diversification and its slow economic growth are largely a result of misguided economic development policies, a lack of private investment, political tensions, and war. Beginning in the 1950s, many governments, such as those of Turkey, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Syria, Jordan, Tunisia, and Libya, established state-owned enterprises for the production of goods for local consumption (not export), such as machinery and metal items, textiles, toilet paper, cement, processed food, and paper and printing. They then protected these enterprises from foreign competition with tariffs and other trade barriers. With only small local markets to cater to, profitability was low and the goods were relatively expensive. Because the industries were protected from both foreign and domestic competition, their products were shoddy and unable to compete in the global marketplace. Furthermore, the extension of government control into so many parts of the economy nurtured corruption and bribery as personal connections with policy makers and regulators became an important factor in the success of any enterprise. Economic diversification and growth were also hindered by a lack of financing from private investors within the region, such as Saudi oil barons, who have generally preferred more profitable investments in Europe, North America, or Southeast Asia.

Finally, both international and domestic military conflicts and ensuing political tensions have resulted in some of the highest levels (proportionately) of military spending in the world. When military spending is looked at as a percentage of GDP, four of the world's top five spenders are in this region, and all but Tunisia and Libya are above the global average of 2 percent. High levels of military spending divert funds from other types of development.

Questions on Middle East Culture and Economy – on looseleaf

1. What do scholars believe led to the establishment of gender roles?
2. According to tradition, Islam began in the seventh century when it was revealed to what man?
3. Islam is considered to be an outgrowth of what two religions?
4. What is the name of the holy book of Islam, which contains the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad?
5. What group of people was among the first to convert to Islam, and began the spread of Islam around 630 A.D.?
6. What is the term for the pre-Muslim and Muslim practice in North Africa and Southwest Asia of keeping women out of public view?
7. Followers of Islam are divided into what two groups having different interpretations of the Qur'an as well as other traditions?
8. What does the term *shari'a* represent in Islamic society?
9. Name one of the three main holy cities for Muslims.
10. What is the name of the pilgrimage to Mecca that every Muslim is expected to make at least once during her or his lifetime?
11. What term describes a country in which a religion is the officially accepted religion of the state, such as Islam in Iran?
12. The five pillars mostly have to do with what?
13. What term describes a family headed by one male, such as the traditional family in Islamic culture?
14. Women in Islamic culture inhabit and perform nearly all of their daily responsibilities in what type of spaces?
15. What term is used to refer to particularly conservative Muslims, who would like to strictly interpret the Qu-ran?
16. In what decade of the twentieth century, with the formation of OPEC, did the oil-producing countries of North Africa/Southwest Asia gain control of their own oil reserves from foreign companies?
17. What is the name of the cartel formed in 1971 whose purpose is to manage global oil prices?
18. What strategy have countries in North Africa and Southwest Asia developed in order to expand agriculture into areas that were not originally suitable for large-scale cropping?
19. Many irrigation projects in North Africa and Southwest Asia have greatly damaged soil fertility through what process?
20. Describe the term *economic diversification* as it is used in the textbook with regard to North Africa and Southwest Asia.

Ottoman Empire and WWI

The Ottoman Empire ultimately withered in the face of a Europe made powerful by the Industrial Revolution. Throughout the nineteenth century, North Africa provided raw materials for Europe in a trading relationship dominated by European merchants, who sought cotton, phosphates, manganese, hides, and wool. In 1830, France became the first European country to exercise direct control over a North African territory when its military gained control of Algeria. France eventually administered that land almost as though it were a part of France, although, while the French had free access to Algeria, Algerians were not allowed the benefits of full citizenship in France. In the late nineteenth century, motivated in part by the fear that a rival European power would step in first, Britain gained control of Egypt (1882) and then Sudan, and France took over Tunisia (1881). France began control of Morocco in 1907 and established full control in 1912; Libya ceded control to Italy in that same year. In these countries, Europeans set up a form of dependence that they termed a **protectorate**: local rulers remained in place, but European officials made the important economic and trade-related decisions.

One result of European influence was that traditional, more egalitarian systems of land ownership were undercut to the disadvantage of small cultivators. European officials privatized tribal collective lands and gave title only to the tribal leaders in return for their political support. Thus European domination disempowered many and encouraged the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a relative few.

World War I (1914–1918) brought the fall of the already shrunken Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans had allied with Germany, and after the war ended in defeat for that country, the League of Nations (a precursor to the United Nations) allotted almost all the former Ottoman territories at the eastern end of the Mediterranean to France and Britain, which already controlled most of those areas before the war. Only Turkey was recognized as an independent country at that time. Syria and what is now Lebanon became *mandated territories* of France (dependencies thought incapable of self-rule). Palestine, much of which became Israel in 1948, and Iraq, out of which the kingdom of Jordan was carved, became mandated territories of Britain in 1920. On the Arabian Peninsula, Bedouin tribes were consolidated under the control of Sheikh Ibn Saud in 1932, after which time Saudi Arabia began to emerge as an independent country. The smaller states bordering the Persian Gulf (Yemen, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait) were British protectorates after World War I, and they eventually became independent countries.

The aftermath of World War II had further effects on the political development of North Africa and Southwest Asia. The United States supported those autocratic local leaders who were most sympathetic to U.S. cold war policies (as opposed to those of the Soviet Union) and most likely to maintain a friendly attitude toward U.S. business interests. In Iran and Saudi Arabia, where vast oil deposits became especially lucrative by midcentury, European and U.S. oil companies played a key role in deciding who ruled. The governments of these countries undertaxed oil profits, and most of the revenues were gathered by a small ruling elite. Although some oil revenue went toward building roads, hospitals, and schools—facilities that had not previously existed—relatively little was invested in opening up opportunities for the masses, and disparities in wealth between the elite and the majority of the people increased dramatically. The region remained dependent on Europe and North America for the technology needed to exploit its oil reserves and to begin the mechanization of manufacturing, transportation, and agriculture.