

CHAPTER 16:

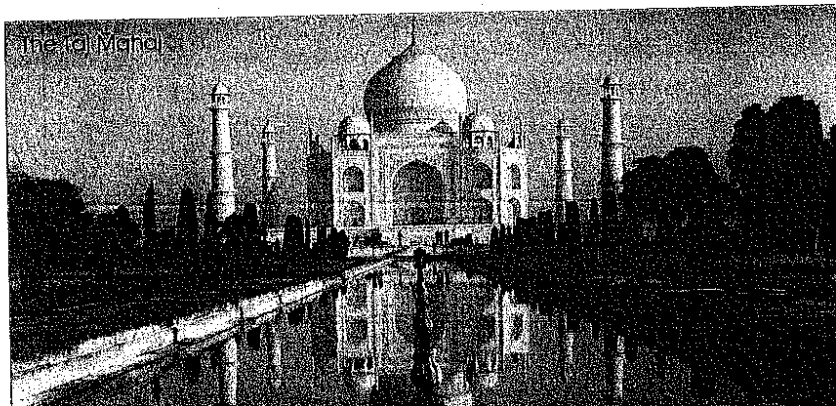
THE EMPIRES OF ISLAM

570 to 1923

INTRO

While the powers of Europe were moving through the Middle Ages, in parts of Asia, Africa and the Middle East, various Islamic peoples were building their own impressive societies. There were the Turks, whose massive Ottoman Empire rose to power in 1299; the Mughals, who ruled India; and the Safavids, who brought greatness back to the Persian peoples. These groups all shared the Muslim faith and, taken together, comprise the Muslim empires (or empires of Islam).

These new imperial powers were marked by a close relationship between government and religion. They prospered throughout the Middle Ages, but by the end of the 19th century all three had declined significantly. By the early 20th century, with the Ottomans' defeat in World War I, the last Muslim empire collapsed.



THE EMPIRES OF ISLAM

LYRICS

Mecca, Medina, Arabia, uh huh,
We bow down and we raise it up,
Uh huh,
Imams guide Islam,
So get to your mosque,
And read your Qur'an.

Now deep in the desert,
This guy called Muhammad,
Heard a voice calling, he's like,
"Yo, I'm on it."
Started in Mecca,
And he conquered it,
Then it spread out
Across the continent.
Converting Bedouin tribes
With some threats and knives,
Plus some smart tactics and
Tolerance in their lives.
Mecca, boy.

Yeah that's where I come from,
By 632 Arabia was Muslim.
Muhammad regarded
Christians and Jews
As people of the book, said,
"Just let 'em do what they do."
But he spoke of Jihad,
That's a struggle for faith,
Said if you die for Islam,
You get the blessings of God.
His successors disagreed and
Fought like Tupac.
You're either caliph or you're not.
Sunnis follow the way,
But it's disputed,
Shia's only 10 percent,
So they're persecuted.
Muslim empire expanded

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

This guy called Muhammad heard a voice...

When **Muhammad** heard the voice of God, or *Allah* in Arabic, speaking to him, he started telling people about it. This was the year 610, in his hometown, **Mecca** (in present day Saudi Arabia). Mecca's rulers didn't like what he was saying, so they kicked him out. Muhammad moved to **Medina**, and he and his followers began spreading their faith to nomadic tribes, ambushing caravans from Mecca. Finally, he rode back into Mecca and faced little resistance. He'd become a religious prophet and political leader.

Converting the Bedouin tribes with some threats and knives, plus some smart tactics...

Islam spread very quickly under the leadership of Muhammad. He combined military conquest with strategies that made it desirable in society to join the faith.

By 632 Arabia was Muslim...

The term **Arabia** comes from the Persian word *Arabaya*. It was the name given to the land to the west and south of Mesopotamia, which basically meant the land between the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, and the Mediterranean. By Muhammad's death in 632, most of the Arabian Peninsula was Muslim.

Muhammad regarded Christians and Jews, as people of the book...

Despite all of the hatred, misunderstanding and ignorance that exists today between Jews, Christians

and Muslims, all three groups are closely related. Jesus and Moses are both prophets in the Qur'an.

But he spoke of jihad, that's a struggle for faith...

Jihad is an important principle in the Qur'an. It means "a struggle to defend Islam." Many Muslims interpret the word to mean a war to defend their faith. Others believe that jihad can be



an internal struggle. But Muhammad promised that those who died fighting for Islam would be rewarded in heaven.

You're either caliph or you're not...

The separation of church and state was not an important principle to Muslims: Their religious leaders were (and often still are) their political leaders as well. This dates all the way back to the founding of the Islamic faith under Muhammed. He was both the spiritual and political leader of the Muslims. When he died, the next leader was called a **caliph**, which means successor or representative. These men were considered both the head of government and the head of the Islamic faith.

One of the most famous caliphs was **Harun al-Rashid** (763-809 AD) a great ruler of Baghdad. He was the head of the east when Charlemagne was ruling the west. The two admired each other. Rashid's reign was characterized by a great deal of artistic and intellectual growth. He surrounded himself with some of the most brilliant minds of his day. Some say he is the hero in many of the stories in the *Arabian Nights*.

Sunnis follow the way, but it's disputed...

If you read the news, you know that even today there is a lot of tension between two groups of Muslims: the **Sunni** and the **Shia** or Shiites. The split between Sunni and Shia Muslims goes back to 661, when the fourth caliph after Muhammad, a man named Ali, was killed. A big disagreement ensued about who should be the next caliph. Sunnis believed that the first four caliphs, or heirs to Muhammed, were

THE EMPIRES OF ISLAM

LYRICS continued

In Pakistan,
And through North Africa
Into Spain;
Turkish Ottomans came in
And they took over,
Now the sultan's commanding
Some slave soldiers.
Others moved on India,
Bringing Urdu,
Fight with spears;
Spears hurt more than words do.
"Babur the Tiger" earned his stripes,
Fighting for the Mughals,
Staying out of trouble.

Hook

My navigator wasn't made
By Lincoln,
My navigator was me,
My own intuition.
Used the sun, moon, and stars,
The astrolabe,
A director with good sense
Like an old-school GPS.
Bow in grace, five times I pray,
'Cause in Allah is where
I place my faith.
Speaking Swahili
Brought to you by Africans,
Because they built mosques
On their continent.
The numbers you use,
We brought them to you,
Arabic numerals from Hindus
In 1202.
Cleanliness, yeah,
That's next to godliness,
And who but Allah is the purest?
Our doctors knew how
Blood moved.

the rightful successors to the prophet. Their descendants ruled the Arab world until after World War I. The word *Sunni* means the way of the prophet.

Shia's only 10 percent, so they're persecuted...

The Shia were (and still are) a smaller group. They thought that only one of those first four caliphs was legitimate – the one named Ali – and only his heirs should rule. It might seem like a small difference, but it meant that these people were telling their rulers, "You don't have the right to rule us." This made those rulers (and other Sunnis) upset.

Muslim empire expanded in Pakistan...

The **Seljuks** came out of Turkmenistan in about 950. They were nomads who decided to settle down in what was then Persia (now Iran). Before long they conquered what is now Iraq, and by 1070 they had moved to take what is today Syria and parts of the Byzantine Empire. For the better part of a couple of centuries, the Seljuks were a major power in the Middle East. They fought challenges from the Mongols and other peoples before finally falling in 1192.

And through North Africa into Spain...

The Islamic empires also spread through North Africa from Arabs to Berbers, who then conquered Spain. Called **Moors** by Europeans, the Muslims in Spain ruled a strong state that, some say, far exceeded the rest of Europe when it came to education, technological advances and philosophies. Christians and Jews were free to practice their respective religions, as long as they paid a special tax.

FLOCAB SPITS FACTS LIKE AN ALMANAC

Just as there are Christian, Jewish, Buddhist and Atheistic rappers, a whole slew of Muslim rappers have recently appeared. Many of them are Muslim-Americans whose goal it is to spread knowledge about Muslims in an age where stupidity and ignorance often win. One group, Native Deen, even has a song about three Muslim prophets: Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. On Muhammad's life, they rap: "He could teach about Allah without his people getting beaten / His folks back in Mecca couldn't stand all the preachings."



Turkish Ottomans came in, and they took over...

Out of the ashes of the Seljuk kingdom rose the **Ottoman Empire**. One of the last Seljuk kings, Osman, founded the new power. In about 1299 he began expanding from the region of what is now Turkey toward Europe. For several centuries the Ottomans fought European peoples. The Mongols put pressure on them to the east, so they tried to acquire new territory in the west, which was European. They conquered Greece in 1352, and in 1453 they delivered a huge blow by taking the seat of the Byzantine Empire, Constantinople. By 1517 they assumed control of Egypt, as well. Ottoman sultans remained a forceful presence on the edge of Europe all the way up to the 1920s.

Now the sultan's commanding some slave soldiers...

The Ottomans' elite military forces were called **janissaries**. They were Christians and other non-Muslims who had been taken as captives of war or from their families at a very young age. They were slaves in that they were involuntarily taken, but they were paid a monthly salary.

Others moved on India, bringing Urdu...

Muslim Turks also moved toward India, fighting fiercely with civilizations there. By the early 1200s they had finally conquered northern India. The Muslims set up a new empire in India called the **Delhi Sultanate**, while the Turks and Arabs spread the Urdu language throughout the region's north.

"Babur the Tiger" earned his stripes... The **Mughal Empire** was a product of

LYRICS continued

Health is vital,
So we built medical schools.
Attached them to temples
To show our gratitude,
Caring about people,
I live amongst you.
As a Muslim, if you get the chance,
Head on down to Mecca
For the experience.
Like Muhammad Battuta
And his journeys through
Egypt, China, Sumatra
And Timbuktu.

Hook

various Central Asian invasions into the Indian subcontinent. It was founded by prince Babur ("the Tiger") in 1526 with the destruction of the Delhi Sultanate. Though Babur would die soon after founding his new empire, it would thrive under later leaders.

Fighting for the Mughals, staying out of trouble...

One of those later leaders was **Akbar the Great**, who achieved fame simply by being nice – or rather, tolerant. Living in a place where people held all sorts of different beliefs, from Buddhism to Hinduism to Islam, he recognized the importance of simply getting along. Though he was raised Muslim, he was intrigued by other religions and ways of life. Besides being open-minded, Akbar was a fine military strategist. He created the largest empire India had seen in almost 2,000 years. How? Largely by the use of gunpowder. This was 1600, and he used heavy artillery on old stone fortresses. It was very effective.

So get to your mosque...

Mosques are the holy houses of Islam – places of worship like a Christian church or Jewish temple. As such, they can be found throughout the world wherever Muslim people gathered. Historians can trace the spread of Islam by looking at places where there are mosques and dating them. One very famous mosque is the **Dome of the Rock** in Jerusalem. Muslims believe that it was the place where Muhammed ascended into Paradise. The most distinctive features of mosques are their domes and **minarets**, the tall towers from which religious officials call the faithful to prayer.

Used the sun, moon, and stars, the astrolabe...

Because Muslims were required to pray toward Mecca, they had to have a good sense of direction – or, better yet, a tool that would help them orient themselves in the world. Early Muslims borrowed the Greek **astrolabe**, a device used to determine the position of celestial objects like the sun. Muslim scientists improved on the Greek designs and used the astrolabe to develop a calendar, figure out prayer times and orient mosques and people toward Mecca. This simple device would later change the world, because it allowed sailors to navigate by the stars – which led to the great age of exploration.

Speaking Swahili brought to you by Africans...

Because Islam spread over the continent, there are many mosques in Africa. Another result is **Swahili**, which is both a language and a culture, stemming from the meeting of Arab and African peoples. The language itself is based in African Bantu, but it incorporates a lot of Arabic terms, probably because the Swahili people were Muslims and read the Qur'an. The Swahili language and culture developed in eastern Africa, and is today the national language of several African nations.

Arabic numerals from Hindus in 1202...

The numbers we know and use today in counting and mathematics come from the work of Arab scholars. They took the numbers that were used by Hindus in India and made them their own. By 1202 an Italian mathematician named Fibonacci brought them to Europe, and they gradually evolved

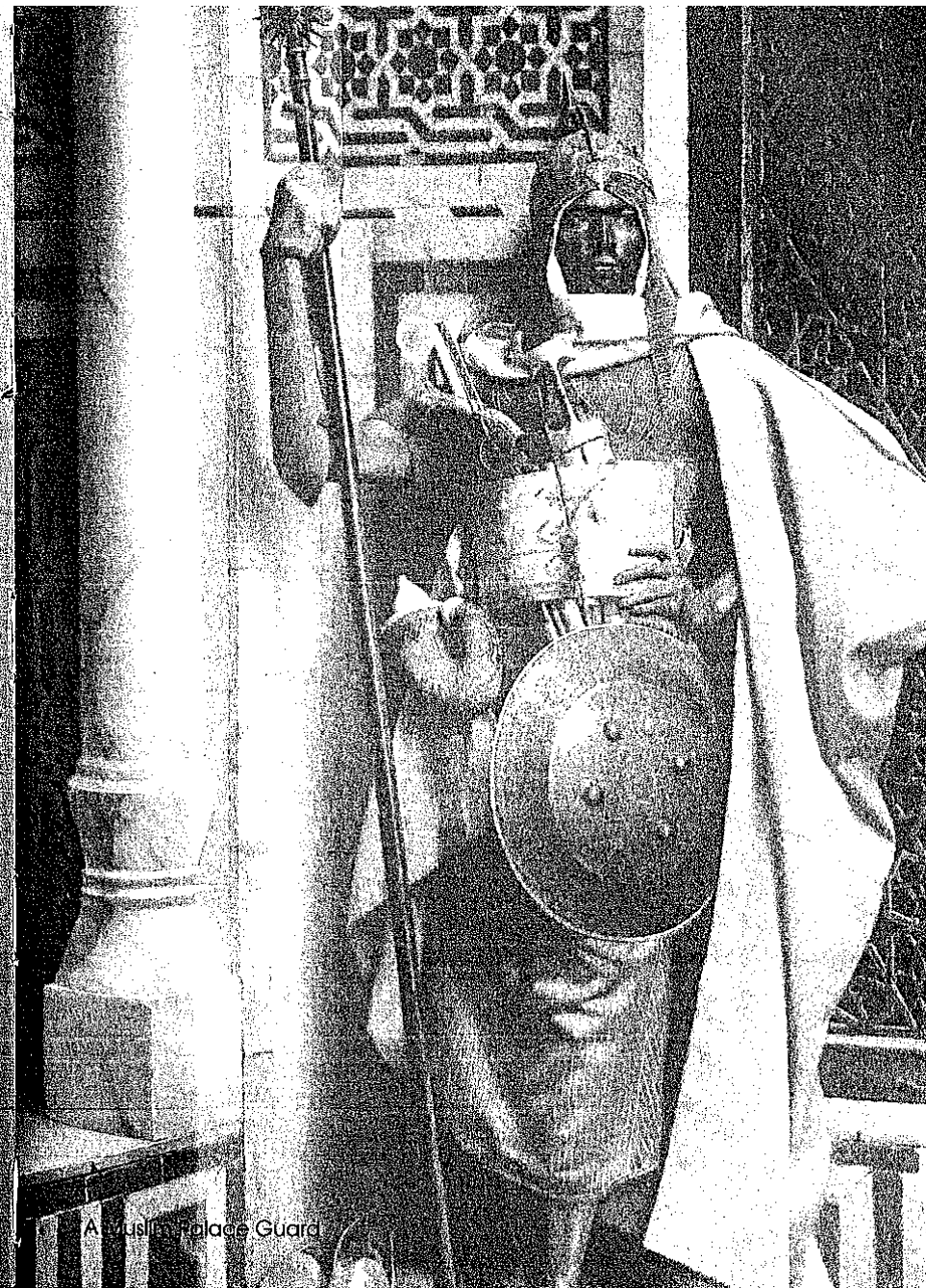
into our present-day number system.

Our doctors knew how blood moved...

The Arabs made some major developments in medicine. Common and accepted practices today, from the importance of cleanliness and hygiene to the use of cauterization (when a doctor burns you to heal you), date back to old Arabic times. Arab physicians discovered many medicines we still use today, and they were the first to understand essential workings of the body, like the circulatory system. Hospitals in Baghdad and Cairo were models of their day during the Middle Ages. Medical schools were often attached to Egyptian temples.

Like Muhammad Battuta and his journeys...

Muhammad ibn Battuta (c. 1304–1368) was a great traveler from what is now Tangier in Morocco. Like most Muslims, he made the pilgrimage to Mecca. But unlike everybody else, he developed wanderlust while doing so – he couldn't stop traveling. He went to Egypt, Syria, the Maldives, Timbuktu, and other parts of Africa, Sumatra, and China. He became famous for writing about his journeys, and his works helped historians get a glimpse of many of these places that they wouldn't otherwise have gotten.



A Muslim Palace Guard