

LESSON 1

A Century of Expansion

**THINKING
FOCUS**

How did the Umayyads unite the many lands and peoples of the Islamic Empire?

Key Terms

- empire
- bureaucracy
- emir
- dissent

➤ *The siege, or surrounding of a town, was a major strategy in Islamic warfare. Control of cities was the key to victory. Here Muslims attack mud brick walls with the aid of a catapult.*

Muslim soldiers from Arabia attacked Damascus, Syria, in A.D. 635. Their swords and lances were raised high as they rode their camels through a cloud of dust to the walls of the Byzantine city.

Some soldiers, with their lances, flung small pots of burning oil over the wall, creating smoke and flames that could not be extinguished. Others loaded catapults with rocks to rain down on the Byzantines. By nightfall the battle was won. Damascus was the Muslims'.



Expansion Under Umayyad Rule

The Muslim soldiers who fought the Byzantines at Damascus helped to create an **empire**, a number of countries or territories ruled by one central authority. After capturing Syria, the victorious Muslim armies went on to conquer Mesopotamia in 637.

By the middle of the 600s, Persia fell to the Muslims. The Islamic Empire then expanded farther to the east by securing the lands that

are today known as Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The Umayyads

The Umayyads (*oo MAY yahds*) fought for Islam in these eastern conquests. The Umayyad leader, Muawiya (*mu AH wih ya*), was one of the soldiers who had helped capture Damascus in 635. He had served for 25 years as the Muslim governor of Syria. During that

time, Muawiya had built up a devoted army of followers. After the assassination of the fourth caliph, Muawiya had enough support to take control of the empire in 661.

Umayyad Changes

When Muawiya became caliph, he moved the capital from Muhammad's home, Medina in Arabia, to his own, more central city of Damascus in Syria. From this source of political and military power, Muawiya could better control the growing Umayyad Empire.

While he was caliph, Muawiya began the practice of appointing a son as the next caliph. Thus, Muawiya founded a tradition of a continuous rule by one family. The Umayyads ruled for 90 years.

Westward Expansion

The Umayyads were talented military leaders, and during their years in power, 661 to 750, the Islamic Empire expanded. Their armies advanced west into Africa, converting the Berbers, who lived along the northern coast and the Sahara, to Islam.

In 711, with the help of the Berbers, the Muslims moved northward across the Strait of Gibraltar (*juh BRAWL tur*). They then began the conquest of present-day Spain and Portugal.

The Muslims were so determined to conquer this new territory that upon landing at Gibraltar, they burned all of their boats. Retreat was not possible. Now they could only march forward. Over the next seven years, the Muslims drove out the Visigoths, who were Christians. Almost the entire peninsula had become Umayyad territory.

From their bases in Spain, Muslim armies repeatedly crossed the Pyrenees (*PIHR uh neez*) and ventured into France on raids. In 732, the Muslims confronted Charles Martel and his army of Franks. Martel, whose name means "the Hammer," was called that because of his repeated attacks against the Muslims.

Martel's troops stopped the Muslim invasion at the Battle of Tours in 732. This battle was one of the most decisive in history. In effect, the battle determined that Europe would be Christian and not Muslim. Trace the Umayyad conquests and their expansion of the Islamic Empire on the map on page 80. ■

■ *What changes did the Umayyads bring to the Islamic Empire?*

▼ *Buildings in Morocco were often made of dried mud bricks. The same material was used to build walls around Moroccan cities to protect them from enemy attack.*



Further Expansion of Islam

► Use the map to compare the amount of land Muslims conquered during Muhammad's life and under the first four caliphs with that conquered under the Umayyads. During which time period did the greatest expansion occur?



An Empire of Many Peoples

As the Muslims conquered new lands, the borders of the Islamic Empire expanded far beyond Arabia. Among the peoples conquered by the Arabs were Christians and Jews. The Arabs also conquered people who had no religion as well

as pagans who believed in many different gods.

Treatment of Non-Muslims

The Muslims forced the pagan people to convert to Islam. When these non-Arabs began to convert



to Islam, they were sometimes not accepted socially by the Arab community. Some Arabs wanted to keep their culture free of outside influences. In time this changed, and an Islamic culture developed that included the customs and traditions of non-Arabs.

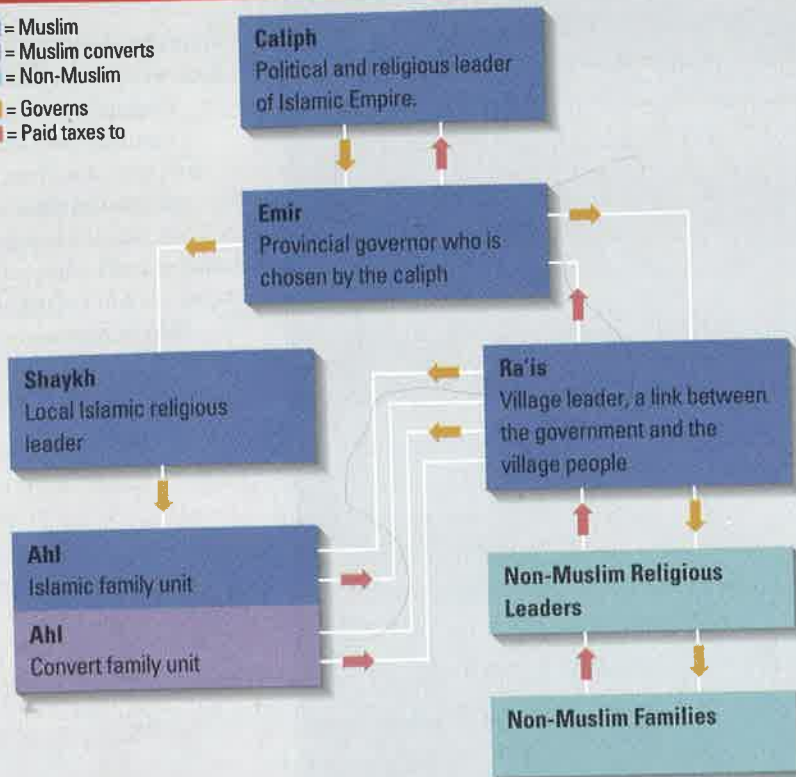
The Umayyad Muslims were generally tolerant of people, such

as Christians and Jews, who believed in a single God. Muslims considered Jews and Christians to be “people of the book,” as they were themselves.

In spite of their general tolerance, the Umayyads established a different system of taxation for non-Muslims. The Christians and the Jews, who did not accept

Rule and Tax in the Islamic Empire

- = Muslim
- = Muslim converts
- = Non-Muslim
- = Governs
- = Paid taxes to



Percentage of Total Income Taxed



▲ Muslims, converts to Islam, and non-Muslims paid different amounts of taxes and were governed differently in the Islamic villages that made up the empire. Find the different tax rate for each group and decide if the difference is significant.

Muhammad as a prophet of God, had to pay a higher tax. Converts to Islam paid a tax lower than Jews and Christians but higher than those who were Muslims at birth would pay.

The higher tax paid by Christians and Jews was used to help finance the operation of the Muslim army. All Muslim men were required to serve in the army, but non-Muslims did not have to serve. The lower chart above compares the tax paid by Muslims with the taxes paid by converts and “people of the book.”

Government

The Umayyad caliph Muawiya successfully ruled over a very diverse empire. He patterned his highly organized government on the Byzantine model that he had first seen when he captured Damascus. He even kept some of the Christians in the same government posts they held in the Byzantine government. This system of rule and order was a **bureaucracy**, consisting of many different departments managed by workers who had been appointed by the caliph or one of his representatives.

Under Muawiya, the provinces were ruled by **emirs**, or governors, appointed directly by the caliph. The caliph was the central authority to whom the emirs reported. Use the upper chart on the left to trace the line of authority that extended from the caliph to the people.

One new emir of Mesopotamia angrily greeted his subjects with this stern warning:

I demand obedience from you, and you can demand uprightness from me. . . . Do not be carried away by your hatred and anger against me, it would go ill with you. I see many heads rolling; let each man see that his own head stays upon his shoulders!

Ziyad Ibn Abihi, c. 670
(zih YAHN IHBN ah BEE ih)

Muawiya encouraged the emirs to rule this strictly in order to stamp out any **dissent**, or disagreement, among their conquered subjects. ■

Umayyad Unity

Under the Umayyad dynasty, there was a succession of one caliph after another. There also developed a new Islamic culture for the Islamic Empire. Abd al Malik (*ahb dul mah LIHK*), caliph from 685 to 705, was influential in shaping this culture.

A Common Language

Abd al Malik declared Arabic to be the official language of the empire. This enabled the Umayyads to bring the diverse cultures of their empire under control. Until Abd al Malik adopted Arabic as the official language, local government workers had been mostly non-Arabic. They had spoken the languages of their local communities. Now all government business and religious affairs were conducted in Arabic. Anyone who wished to participate fully in the culture had to speak Arabic.

A Common Coinage

Not only was the language the same throughout the empire, but the coins the people used were the same too. Muslims borrowed the idea of coinage from the Persians and the Byzantines. The government began minting Islamic coins around 640.

Abd al Malik was responsible, around 700, for the first pure Islamic coins. They had no images but were inscribed in Arabic with important quotations from the Koran. The coins gave Muslims a symbol of the power of their empire. Having a common coinage also made commerce between parts of the empire easier.

Religious Architecture

One of the first things the Arabs did when they took over a new land was to build a mosque, so they could give thanks to Allah. Muslims throughout the Islamic Empire could always find a mosque. The mosque would be built from materials that were common to the area.

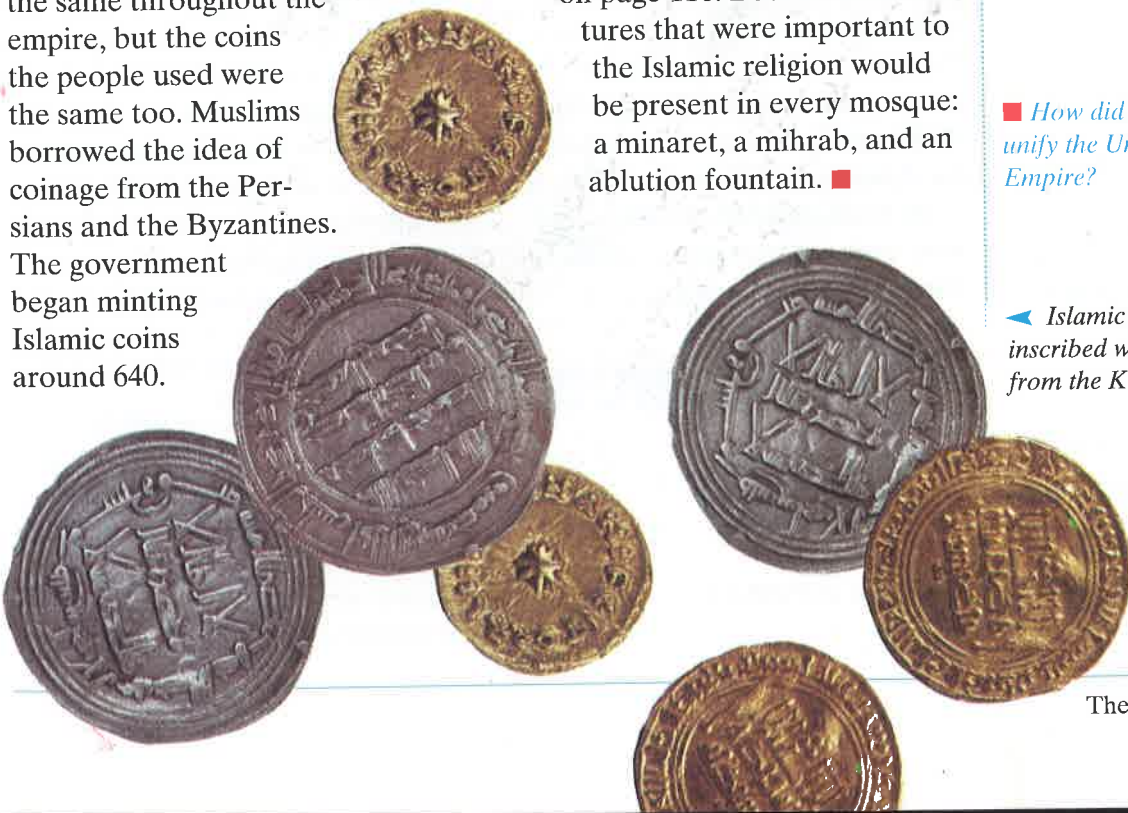
In 688, during the caliphate of Abd al Malik, North Africa was conquered. In North Africa, mosques were made of mud and sticks, because that is what was available for construction. A mosque of this type can be seen on page 116. But the same features that were important to the Islamic religion would be present in every mosque: a minaret, a mihrab, and an ablution fountain. ■

How Do We Know?

HISTORY *The Koran contains many codes of proper behavior for Muslims: "It belongs not to a believer to slay a believer, except by error. If any slays a believer by error, then let him set free a believing slave, and blood-wit [a fine] is to be paid to his family. . . ." Living by such codes also helped unify the peoples of the empire.*

■ *How did Abd al Malik unify the Umayyad Empire?*

◀ *Islamic coins were inscribed with sayings from the Koran.*



The Umayyad Downfall

The Umayyads conquered many new lands and peoples for Islam. However, by 750, after 90 years of continuous rule, they faced serious economic and political problems.

Many non-Muslim subjects had by this time converted to Islam. After they converted, they paid fewer taxes than they did before they converted. Consequently, as the number of conversions to Islam increased, the amount of tax money available for the empire to spend decreased.

By 732, the Islamic armies were making fewer new conquests. This stopped the flow of captured wealth that had enriched the empire's economy. The decline in tax revenues and the decrease in captured wealth helped contribute to the money shortage the Umayyads experienced. Examine the chart at the left to find how the percentage of the population paying full taxes varied in 727 and 738.

In addition, the Umayyad Empire had gained the reputation of being too much of a worldly kingdom and not interested enough in the religious ideals of the prophet Muhammad. In the last years of the dynasty, the Umayyads' opponents formed secret societies that were devoted to bringing about the downfall of the Umayyads.

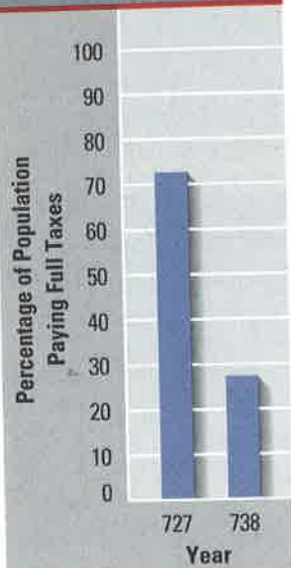
One such group, the Abbasids (*AB uh sihdz*), was named after a family headed by al Abbas. Some historians say that al Abbas was an uncle of Muhammad. The Abbasids started a successful rebellion against the Umayyad rulers from their Abbasid stronghold in Persia.

One of the Abbasid generals, Abdullah (*ahb du LAH*), invited 80 Umayyad leaders to a banquet. While his Umayyad guests were eating, Abdullah ordered his men to kill them. By 750, the Abbasid family was able to gain complete control of the Islamic Empire in the East.

Only one of the Umayyads, whose name was Abd al Rahman (*ahb al ra MAHN*), escaped from the Abbasids. He leaped out of a window at Abdullah's deadly dinner, swam across the Euphrates River, and fled in disguise. He wandered all the way across Arabia and Africa and then crossed the Mediterranean Sea into Spain. Once in Spain, Abd al Rahman began to unite the warring Muslim groups there and to build a new Umayyad government.

Now the Islamic Empire was split into two empires. In western Europe the Umayyads held power in Spain, while the Abbasids ruled Arabia and the eastern empire. ■

Umayyad Tax Revenues, A.D. 727 and 738



▲ By approximately what percent did the population that paid full taxes decline between the years 727 and 738?

■ What political problems led to the downfall of the Umayyad Empire?

R E V I E W

1. **FOCUS** How did the Umayyads unite the many lands and peoples of the Islamic Empire?
2. **CONNECT** In what ways did the Umayyads carry out the ideals of Muhammad?
3. **ECONOMICS** What economic problems contributed to the collapse of the Umayyads?
4. **CRITICAL THINKING** Since the Muslims did not necessarily encourage people to convert to Islam, why did they bother expanding their empire?
5. **ACTIVITY** Examine some of the coins of your country. What do the images and inscriptions on the coins tell you about your country?