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Arab civilization

1. In the 7th century, a new religion, Islam, arose in Arabia, which led to the establishment of a big empire.
2. Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, was born in Mecca in 571 AD.
3. When he was 40, he had 'visions of truth' and became a prophet.
4. Muhammad's visions completely convinced him that Allah was the only god.
5. He forbade the worship of idols and made many enemies. Ultimately, he had to leave Mecca and take refuge in Medina. This event took place in 622 AD and is known as the year of Hijira, or migration, and from it Muslims date their era (Hijira Samvat).
6. The Quran, the holy book of Islam, is divided into a number of suras, or chapters, and contains the teachings of Muhammad. Besides the Quran, the life of a Muslim is guided by the Sunna, the practices of Muhammad, and the Hadees, the sayings of the Muhammad.
7. Muhammad was not only a religious leader but also a political leader.
8. After his death (632 AD), his successors, were known as Caliphs, or Khalifas who held both religious and political authority.
9. Nearly all Arabia had accepted the new religion and become a unified state before the death of Prophet Muhammad in 632 AD.
10. From Arabia, Islam spread very fast to many other parts of the world. Within a hundred years, the Khalifas and their generals, had conquered Iran, Syria, Egypt, Central Asia, North Africa and Spain. The Arab empire was the largest that world had so far seen.
11. The first three Khalifas ruled from the city of Medina. Then the capital was shifted Kufah.
12. By 660 AD, when the Omayyad dynasty took over the reins of government, the principal city was Damascus.
13. About 750, the Omayyad were overthrown by Abbasids, who made Baghdad their capital. Harun Rashid, famous in many legends, was an Abbasid ruler.

14. The Abbasids ruled for about 300 years, till the Seljuq Turks took Baghdad and ended the Arab rule. During the next four centuries, the Turks dominated the Islamic world.

15. In the 15th century, most of these territories came under the domination of the Ottoman Turks. It was the Ottoman Turks who took Constantinople and ended the Eastern Roman empire in 1453.

Contributions of Arab Civilization

1. The establishment of a vast empire facilitated the coming together of intellectual and scientific traditions of various civilizations, particularly Greek, Iranian & Indian. The Arabs made all knowledge their own and developed in further.

2. Al Razi (Rhazes), an Arab scientist discovered the true nature of small pox, and Ibn Sina (Avicenna) discovered that tuberculosis is infectious.

3. In Mathematics, the Arab learned the Indian numerals (Hindsah) and spread their use far and wide, so that in the West they are to this day called Arabic numerals.

4. Some of the famous literary work of the Arab civilization are the 'Rubaiyat' by Omar Khayyam, 'Shahnama' by Firdausi and the 'Arabian Nights', a collection of 1001 stories.

5. The Arabs developed their own decorative designs. Their buildings had bulblike domes, small minarets, horse-shoe arches and twisted columns.

6. The Arabs also developed a decorative style of writing called Calligraphy and made book-illumination an art.

7. Arab carpets, leather work, beautiful swords, silks, inlays, metal-work, and enamelled glassware were prized everywhere.