

DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTION:

POST-CLASSICAL MUSLIM CITIES

DIRECTIONS

The following question is based on the accompanying documents. (The documents have been edited for the purpose of this exercise). The question is designed to test your ability to work with and understand historical documents. Write an essay that:

- Has relevant thesis and supports that thesis with evidence from the documents.
- Uses all or all but one of the documents.
- Analyzes the documents by grouping them in as many appropriate ways as possible and does not simply summarize the documents individually.
- Takes into account both the sources of the documents and the authors' points of view.

ESSAY PROMPT

Identify the roles played by cities and urban areas in Muslim society during the Post-Classical Age.

Based on the following documents, discuss the significance of Muslim cities in the wider Muslim world. What types of additional documentation would help assess the importance and impact of these cities on the Post-Classical Age?

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The most notable feature of Post-Classical period was the growth of towns and cities within the vast region governed by Islam. Many older cities such as Jerusalem, Alexandria, Damascus, and Samarkand continued to flourish under Muslim rule. And Muslim conquerors and rulers founded many new ones including Fez, Tunis, Cairo, Baghdad, Bursa, Isfahan, and Nishapur.

DOCUMENT 1

Ibn Jubayr, Spanish Muslim traveler and geographer, 1184 CE

“Damascus is the paradise of the east and the rising place of its radiant beauty. We found it adorned with flowers of fragrant plants, displaying silk-brocaded garments in the form of gardens. The position it holds for Arabs and Bedouin (Arab desert dwelling nomads) in the realm of beauty is firmly established. The city was highly honored when Allah gave refuge to the Messiah and his Mother (Muslims believe Jesus and Mary sought refuge in Damascus) on an ‘elevated spot, secure and abundant in water’ (Sura 23:52). Its umbrage is thick; its water tastes like that of the river in Paradise; its rivulets twist snake-like in all directions; its orchards generate gentle winds injecting life into souls. Its verdant Ghutah River stretches eastward as far as the eye can see; in fact wherever you look in your gaze, by Allah, they told the truth who said, “If Paradise be on earth, Damascus must be I; if it is in Heaven, Damascus can parallel and match it.”

DOCUMENT 2

Al-Hijari, Andalusian (Iberian Muslim of Arab origin) historian, from his writings, 1188 CE

“Cordoba after the Arab conquest of the Iberian Peninsula became the ultimate goal of the land, headquarters of the army, mother of all towns, seat of the virtuous and pious, and abode of the people of intellect and learning. Under the Umayyads, it served as the throne of the caliphate, heart of the entire region, cupola of Islam, and home of the imam (religious leader). Unto it flocked seekers of science and poetry, for it was a resort of the noble and a mine of the learned. In it book writers vied with warriors, and nobility mingled with military. From its horizon rose stars for the world, notables for the age. In it were composed exquisite books and issued unsurpassed writing. The explanation of the superiority of the Cordobans over all others past and present lies in the fact that the city’s climate is one of research and investigation in the variety of sciences and literature.”

Note: After the murder of his family by the Abassids, an Umayyad prince established a rival dynasty in Spain.

DOCUMENT 3

Nasier – e – Khusraw, Persian Muslim traveler and Ismaili spy, his report on to his superiors on Cairo, mid-11 century CE.

“I estimated that there were no less than twenty thousand shops in Cairo, all of which belong to the Sultan Saladin. There is no end of caravansaries (hotels with stables for caravans), bath houses, and other public buildings including numerous palaces, public mosques, and barracks – all property of the Sultan for no one owns any property except house and what he himself builds. I heard in Cairo that there are eight thousand buildings belonging to the sultan that are leased out and where the rent is collected monthly. In the midst of Cairo are gardens watered by wells. Waterwheels have been constructed to irrigate the gardens. There are trees planted and pleasure parks built even on the roofs.

DOCUMENT 4

Al-Ya'qubi, Arab historian and geographer whose *Kitab al-buldan* was the first scientific treatment of historical geography produced by the Arab culture of the Middle Ages, 872 CE.

“Caliph Abd al-Malik (692 CE) forbade the people of Syria to make the pilgrimage [to Mecca], because Abdullah ibn Zubayr, his rival and enemy tended to seize on them during the pilgrimage and force them to pay him allegiance. But the people murmured threats, saying "How do you forbid us to make the pilgrimage to God's house, seeing that God commanded us to make the pilgrimage. But the caliph answered them, "Has not Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri [the historian who knew many of the Companions of the Prophet] told you how the Muhammad said ‘Men shall journey to but three mosques, the Holy Shrine (at Mecca), my mosque (at Medina) and the mosque of the Holy City (of Jerusalem).” So Jerusalem is now appointed to you as a place of worship in place of the Holy Shrine of Mecca. And this Rock, of which it is reported that the Apostle of God set his foot when he ascended into heaven, shall be to you in the place of the Ka'ba.”

DOCUMENT 5

Marco Polo, Italian merchant, notes during his eighteen year travel to China and back, from his travel journal, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, published in 1299, about the city of Tabriz, c. 1275 CE

“Tabriz is a large and very noble city belonging to the province of Azerbaijan, which contains many other cities and fortified places but this is the most eminent and most populous. The inhabitants support themselves principally from commerce and manufactures, which consist of various kinds of silk, some of them interwoven with gold,, and of high price. It is so advantageously situated for trade that merchants from India, from Baghdad, Mosul, and Hormuz, as well as different parts of Europe, come to purchase and to sell. The merchants concerned by foreign commerce acquire considerable wealth, but the inhabitants in general are poor. They consist of a mixture of various nations and sects, Nestorians, Armenians, Jacobites, Georgians, Persians (Zoroastrians), and the followers of Muhammad, who form the bulk of the population.”

DOCUMENT 6

Al-Tabiri, 839 – 923 CE, Arab scholar and one of the most important sources of early Muslim history, from his masterpiece, *Annals of Apostles and Kings*

“(Abbasid Caliph) Al-Mansur returned to the site of his new capital, Baghdad. It was the danger of further revolts that convinced him of the need of a more secure residence. The current royal residence was too near the fickle Kufa and al-Basra, the disloyal factions of which might sap the faithfulness of his guardsmen. Searching for a spot, he found one on the right bank of the Tigris. Here he founded the new Capital of Islam. The walls were built in a circle so that none of the courtiers might be far from the palace, which with the Great Mosque lay in the centre; while the bazaars were thrust outside.

Lying on the west bank of the Tigris and ready access to the Persian Gulf, as well as to Arabia, Syria, Armenia, and the East, Baghdad, besides holding the Shia areas in immediate check was admirably situated as the heart of the Empire. The eastern shore, more open to attack, was provided with accommodation for a large force. Separate forts were built here for the Yemeni and for the Modar clans, as well as for the Persian troops.

DOCUMENT 7

Conversation between Abd al-Rahman and Al-Jahiz, as recorded by Al-Mugaddasi, a Muslim geographer, political and historical writer, from *On the Characteristics of Different Countries*, late 10th century CE

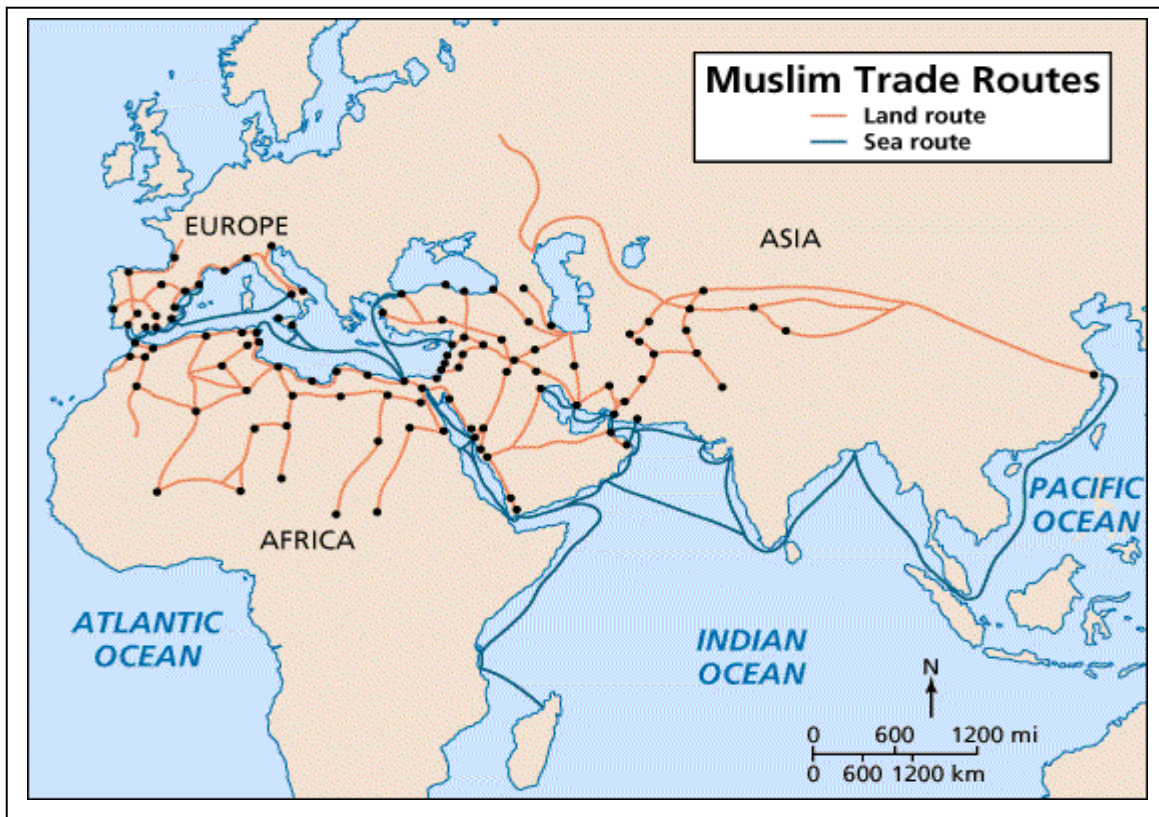
Al-Jahiz, a poet said,

“There are ten cities; manhood in Baghdad, eloquence in Kufa, craftsmanship in Basra, trade in Egypt, treachery in Bayy, crudity in Nishapur, meanness in Merv, bragging in Balk, and work in Samarkand.”

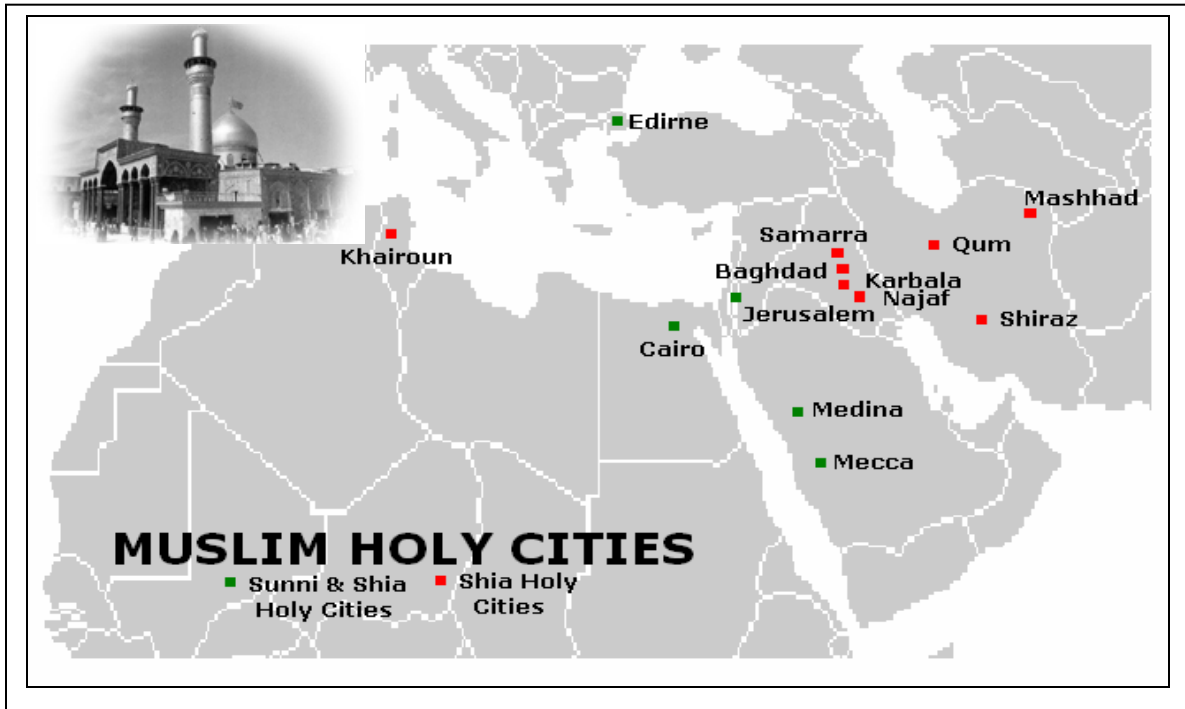
To which Abd al-Rahman, a scholar replied,

“By my life he spoke truth but there are skilled workmen in Nishapur, too, trade in Basra, eloquence in Mecca, and skill in Merv. San-a has good climate, Jerusalem has fine buildings, Farghana has low prices, Hamadan and Tunis are the center of freemen, Syria is the land of the worthy, Samarkand is the destination of merchants, Nishapur is the city of grandees, and Fustat is the most populous of the garrison towns. Happy are the people of Gharj in the justice of their ruler, and of Isfahan for their climate, cloth, and pottery.”

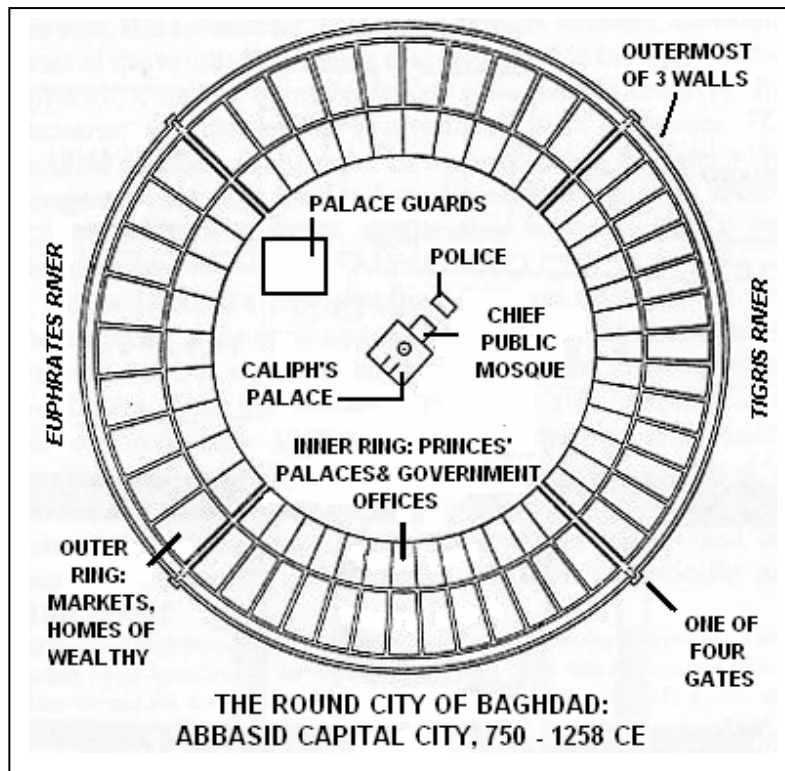
DOCUMENT 8



DOCUMENT 9



DOCUMENT 10



FOOTNOTES

1. Philip K. Hitti, *Capital Cities of Arab Islam* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1973), page 83 – 84.
2. Hitti, page 162.
3. Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair, *Islam: A 1000 Years of Faith and Power* (New York: TV Books, L.L.C., 2000), pages 116 – 117.
4. F. E. Peters, “*The Holy House: The Muslims Come to Jerusalem*” from Jerusalem (Accessed September 10, 2005); [Information service on-line]; available at <http://coursesa.matrix.msu.edu/~fisher/hst372/readings/peters2.html>
5. Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo* (New York: Dorset Press, 1987), page 47 – 48.
6. Muir, Sir William. *The Caliphate: Its Rise, Decline, and Fall*. Revised edition by T. H. Weir. (Edinburgh, Scotland: John Grant, 1924) (Accessed September 8, 2005); [Information service on-line]; available www.answering-islam.org/Books/Muir/Caliphate
7. Bernard Lewis, *Islam from the Prophet Muhammad to the Capture of Constantinople, volume II: Religion and Society* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1974), pages 78 – 81.
8. “Muslim Trade Routes” from *World History: The Human Journey* (New York: Holt, Reinhardt, and Winston, 2003) (Accessed May 30, 2006); [Information service on-line]; available from GO.HRW.COM, The Social Studies Home Page <http://go.hrw.com/hrw.nd/arbitr/pRedirect?project=hrwonline&siteId=308&pageId=1236>