

Chapter 2: The Middle East before Muhammad

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. One of the Middle East's earliest religions is Zoroastrianism, which teaches
A. a cosmic struggle between the forces of Good and Evil
B. ten amendments brought down by Noah from Mount Sinai
C. four noble truths about the nature and cure for human suffering
D. five pillars: circumcision, prayer, eating, drinking, and sex
E. do unto others as you would have them do unto you

2. **The early Christians, especially the Byzantines, argued heatedly about**
A. their belief that Christ was crucified
B. the exact nature of Christ
C. whether God was divine
D. how many angels can dance on the head of a pin
E. preventing the Arabs from entering the Roman army

3. **Which of the following was an Arab kingdom in the Yemen?**
A. Mecca
B. Petra
C. Palmyra
D. Saba
E. Ethiopia

4. **Living conditions for the Arabs before Islam were often harsh because**
A. they were conscripted for service in the Roman (or Byzantine) army
B. the Sassanid Persians prevented them from trading
C. most of the Arabian Peninsula was hot and too dry for settled agriculture
D. camels had not yet been domesticated in Arabia
E. of frequent storms on the Red Sea

5. **The pre-Islamic virtues celebrated in Arabic poetry included all of the following *except***
A. hospitality to the guest
B. generosity to the poor
C. bravery in battle
D. fidelity in the keeping of promises
E. fasting in the month of Ramadan

6. **Which of the following are Middle East breakthroughs to civilization?**
A. writing.
B. the cultivation of staple food crops.
C. the world's earliest agricultural villages.
D. the domestication of farm animals.
E. All of the above

7. **The Roman emperor Constantine converted to which religion?**

- A. Christianity
- B. Zoroastrianism
- C. Manichaeism
- D. Hellenism
- E. Islam

8. Achaemenids, Parthians, and Sasanids were dynasties of which empire?

- A. Roman
- B. Byzantine
- C. Sabaeen
- D. Ethiopian
- E. Persian

9. Which of the following statements about early Arabs and their beginnings is *false*?

- A. Popular legends believe that Arabs are the descendants of Ishmael.
- B. Early Arabs were the first to channel groundwater through underground *qanats*.
- C. Early Arabs were responsible for taming camels, first for food and later for transportation.
- D. Scholars believe that Arabs are kin to the ancestors of the Hebrews, the Assyrians, and the Arameans.
- E. Early Arabs were responsible for ending the Hellenistic Age in the Middle East

10. The Ka'ba is

- A. A sedentarized Arab tribe.
- B. A smaller shrine dedicated to worshipping the goddess al-Manat.
- C. A dissident Christian sect that arose in the early fourth century.
- D. A cube-shaped structure that housed idols representing the deities revered by tribal Arabs.
- E. A major caravan station in Arabia.

Identification Questions:

Identify and write 1-3 full sentences explaining the following terms or concepts.

1. Byzantine Empire

- The Roman Empire. Constantinople, its capital was established by the Roman Emperor Constantine I.
- The Byzantine Empire was chiefly Greek Orthodox in religion.

2. Monophysites

- An early Christian sect, centered in Alexandria, and with followers throughout Egypt, Syria, and Armenia, that proclaimed that Christ was of one ("mono-") nature, which was wholly divine and not human.
- Monophysitism was declared heretical in 451 by a majority of Orthodox bishops.

3. Nestorians

- An early Christian sect that viewed Christ as two distinct persons, divine and human.
- Nestorianism was declared heretical in 431 and many Nestorians found refuge in Sassanid Persia.

4. Sassanids

- A Persian dynasty that succeeded the Parthians. The Sassanids typically get credit for Persia's revival. They set up a strong and centralized administration and established Zoroastrianism as a state religion.
- Early Sassanids sent out scholars to many other countries to collect books, which were translated into the Pahlavi language, to trade, and to collect scientific and technical lore.

5. Zoroastrianism

- A religion based on the teachings of Zoroaster, who lived about the eleventh century BCE. He taught a dualistic religion that posited a cosmic struggle between Good and Evil, Light and Darkness, Truth and Lie.
- The Sassanid dynasty made Zoroastrianism Persia's state religion

6. Jundishapur

- A center for the preservation of Hellenistic culture. Scholars and students came from all parts of Europe and Asia to teach and study there, unhindered by racial prejudice, religious dogma, or political restrictions.

7. Sabaeans

- The people of Saba, one of the best known city-states in Southern Arabia. They developed a thriving trade between their base in Yemen and the far shores of the Indian Ocean, making India and its products known to the Romans.
- The Sabaeans dammed mountain streams and terraced the Yemeni hillsides to support an elaborate agriculture. Their main export crop was frankincense.

8. *Muruwwa*

- Nomadic Arab code of virtue embodied in pre-Islamic poetry. Virtues include bravery in battle, patience in misfortune, persistence in revenge, protection of the weak and defiance of the strong, hospitality to the visitor, generosity to the poor, loyalty to the tribe, and fidelity in keeping one's word.
- Pre-Islamic poetry and thus the tribal and martial code of *muṣawwa* helped shape Arabic language, thought, and literature.

Essay Questions:

Please read the questions carefully. Organize your thoughts before you write. Your answer will be graded, not only on the quantity and accuracy of its factual content, but also on its organization, coherence, and relevance to the question asked.

1. How would you account for the leading role played throughout Middle East history by soldiers and city-dwellers, while peasants, looked down upon by both groups, have formed the majority of the population? *(Note to instructors: This question will work better if applied to Chapters 1-6, not just Chapter 2)*

2. What were the main similarities and differences between the Roman (Byzantine) Empire and the Sassanid Persians? How would you account for the similarities and differences that you cite?

3. Why did early Christians argue about the nature of Christ? Were they all pleased by the resolution of the issue? If not, what was the result?

4. In what ways was pre-Islamic Arab culture a sophisticated adaptation to a harsh desert environment?
Are Bedouins really a “primitive” people?