

2.2.2. Trade and Culture in Islam

A. How did the Arabs develop trade?

1. The Arabs developed international trade with the Jews in the mid-8th century. This was aided by the geographical location of the Caliphate and the mines of Africa.
2. They establish commercial colonies in Asia (India, China, etc.).
3. They trade in spices and other luxury goods.
4. 10th century: commercial relations with India through the Red Sea.
5. They import and develop commercial innovations (companies, bills of exchange, banks) that facilitated transactions.

B. Present the development of letters, sciences and arts.

1. They developed in Islam with a focus on cities such as Cordoba (Spain) and Baghdad (Asia).
2. They establish libraries and universities.
3. They collect manuscripts.
4. They translate works by Indians, Persians and Greeks. In particular, the translations of Aristotle and the Neoplatonists profoundly influenced Arab thought and science.
5. They cultivate literature.
6. They cultivate art.
7. They borrow techniques, craftsmen and materials from Byzantium.
8. They do not represent images in works of art (= non-iconic style).
9. They create architectural structures (mosques = mosques with exquisite mosaics) and works of micro-art.
10. They are particularly involved in sciences such as mathematics, astronomy, and chemistry.

C. How did Arabic influence Western culture?

1. Mathematics: they introduce Indian numerals.
2. Astronomy: they calculated the orbit of the sun and the planets.
3. Chemistry: they discovered sulfuric acid and alcohol.
4. Medicine: they performed surgery and established new drugs.
5. Geography: they organized long-distance trips.
6. Nutrition: they introduced crops such as artichokes, cotton, lemon, and sugarcane.
7. Language: they introduced words such as nadir, zenith, alchemy, algebra, alcohol.
8. They introduced paper (Chinese invention).

Exercise:

Identify the following statements as correct (C) or incorrect (I). Correct any errors.

- a. The Arabs' numerals were Indian.
- b. Aristotle's works had a great influence on Arab thought.
- c. Their mosques were decorated with impressive mosaics, but not with human figures.
- d. The Arabs contributed to the development of trade through the Red Sea.
- e. The mosque was the palace of the Caliph in Damascus.
- f. Cordoba was a city in Saudi Arabia.
- g. The Arabs introduced paper from China to Europe.
- h. Europeans owe the use of sugar and lemon to the Arabs.
- i. The Arabs developed medicine but never performed surgery on humans.
- j. The Byzantines helped in the development of Arab architecture.