***Middle East***

Cultural Characteristics

 Birthplace of Abrahamic Religions

*      Abraham was from Ur in Mesopotamia (modern Iraq)

*      Judaism and Christianity began mostly in Israel; Islam began in Saudi Arabia

Rapid Urbanization

*      Oil industry had brought great wealth to a small percentage of the population

*      Cities have grown quickly, often as a result of the oil industry

*      Oil profits are often not used to stimulate other industries or improve infrastructure outside the cities

*      Modernization centered in urban areas while traditional life continues in rural areas

*      Many people that live in rural areas still lead nomadic lifestyles

Large percentage of population under age 15

*      Widespread poverty, poor sanitation and medical care in rural areas, ongoing violence

Population unevenly distributed

*      Like in any area of the world, people often live close to natural resources

*      In Middle East, people must live near a water source; populations concentrated on coastlines and near rivers (Nile, Tigris, Euphrates, Jordan, etc.); smaller populations around wadis

*      Recently, populations centered near oil reserves

Arab Countries

*      Most of the Middle East speaks Arabic; this common language and the fact that most of these people are Muslim creates a sense of unity in these areas; Non-Arab countries:  Turkey, Iran, Israel

Conflict over Palestine

*      Area to the west of the Jordan River; formerly known as Canaan

*      After the Exodus, Hebrews (Jews) entered this “Promised Land”

*      Jews were conquered by the Roman Empire and scattered throughout Middle East and Europe

*      After Holocaust, the state of Israel was created as a Jewish homeland

*      Many Palestinians (Arab Muslims) were displaced from their homes when Israel was created

*      Conflict over the land continues to be very violent; terrorism often used; little progress towards lasting peace

Art that reflects the diversity of religions

*      Stained glass windows and artwork found in many religious buildings in the Middle East

*      Geometric tiles are frequently used in Islamic architecture

*      Calligraphy:  decorative writing; Islamic calligraphy is particularly distinctive

*      Mosaics:  decoration with small pieces of colored glass, stone or other material that is pieced together to form a picture, usually of cultural significance (religious images, etc.)

*      Muslim prayer rugs are often elaborately decorated

**Cities as Centers of Culture and Trade**

Baghdad

*      Capital of Iraq built on the banks of the Tigris River (river is navigable between Baghdad and Persian Gulf)

*      Center of education, religion, cultural activity before the recent violence

*      Conquered many times throughout history; near ancient Babylon

Cairo

*      Capital city of Egypt on the Nile River Delta; Near Giza; many ancient Pyramids can be seen from Cairo

*      Cairo Museum displays many ancient Egyptian artifacts; major area of trade, highly respected universities, beautiful mosques

Istanbul

*      Largest city in Turkey; straddles the Bosporus Strait

*      Strategic location made this a very important city to control shipping between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean

*      Formerly called Byzantium and Constantinople; Includes many famous mosques, including the Hagia Sophia

Jerusalem

*      Ancient walled city built on a hilltop; current capital of Israel

*      Holy city to the three Abrahamic religions; city is divided into sections of religious influence

*      City includes the Western Wall (Judaism), Church of the Holy Sepulcher (Christianity), and the Dome of the Rock (Islam)

*      Bethlehem, the town of Jesus’s birth, is just outside of Jerusalem

Mecca

*      Holiest city in Islam; located in Saudi Arabia; Site of Muhammad’s birth; Kaaba is located here

*      Only Muslims are allowed to enter this city

Tehran

*      Capital city of Iran; includes many famous mosques; Center of education and culture in Iran

**Cultural Landscape**

Mosques, Minarets

*      Many beautiful mosques in Turkey, Iran, Egypt; often surrounded by minarets; the tallest minaret is in Casablanca, Morocco

Church of the Holy Sepulcher

*      Christian holy site in Jerusalem, Israel; Many believe this is the site of Jesus’s crucifixion and burial

Hagia Sophia (The Church of Holy Wisdom)

*      Located in Istanbul, Turkey; not far from the Bosporus Strait

*      Originally built as an Orthodox Christian church during the reign of the Eastern Roman Empire

*      Converted to a mosque after the Ottoman Turks conquered Constantinople and renamed it Istanbul; Minarets were added after the Muslim conquest

*      Currently serves as a museum displaying Christian Icons and Muslim artwork

Western Wall

*      The only remaining part of an ancient Jewish temple in Jerusalem, Israel; Major site of Jewish prayer

Dome of the Rock

*      Islamic holy site in Jerusalem, Israel; Built on the site where Muhammad ascended to heaven

Kaaba

*      Islamic holy site in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, the city of Muhammad’s birth

*      Center of Islamic prayer; Muslims face the Kaaba to pray to Allah (God)

Pyramids

*      Mostly found in Egypt and the Sudan near the Nile River; Ancient burial sites for prominent Egyptian pharaohs

*      The Great Pyramid is found in Giza, near Cairo, Egypt

Oil Rigs

*      Used to drill for oil that is found underground; land rigs and offshore rigs are used in Middle East

*      Frequently found in the Persian/Arabian Gulf and off the coast of Iran in the Caspian Sea

Bazaars, *Suqs*

*      A *suq* is the commercial center of an Arab city; many merchants compete for business in the same area; prices are often determined by bargaining with the vendor; A suq often includes a *bazaar*, a market that is often covered

*      “Bazaar” comes from an old Persian word meaning “the place of prices”

        --Famous bazaars are found in Istanbul, many cities in           Iran, Morocco, etc.

Walled Cities

*      Many ancient Middle Eastern cities were built with fortified walls to protect them

*      Famous examples:  Jerusalem, Jericho, Istanbul (formerly Constantinople)