***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)