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Located at the intersection of Europe, Asia, and Africa, the Middle East and North Africa together constitute a complex and exciting region linked by broad similarities of climate, religion, and culture. Physically, the Middle East and North Africa form something of a north to west arc. Iran and Turkey and the divided island country of Cyprus comprise the northern tier. Southward are the Arab states of Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, and the Jewish state of Israel. The southernmost boundary includes Saudi Arabia and the small Gulf states (Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates) as well as Oman and Yemen. Moving westward from the Saudi Arabian Peninsula, the North African states of Egypt and Sudan as well as Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Western Sahara complete the region. As **Figure 5.1** shows, the region is also bordered by several crucially important inland water bodies—among them the Mediterranean, the Black, and the Red Seas as well as the Persian Gulf. Also of significance are the Atlantic Ocean to the west and the Arabian Sea to the south. The region is often climatically known as the “dry world” due to its vast deserts—among them the Sahara, the Arabian, the Syrian, and the Nubian—as well as its overall extreme aridity. The Middle East and North Africa also contain impressive mountain ranges—from the Atlas Mountains in the west to the Zagros Mountains in the east—and critically important rivers including the Nile, the Tigris, the Euphrates, and the Jordan Rivers (**Figure 5.2**).

The Middle East and North African region is also known as the “cradle of civilization,” the birthplace of the world’s three great monotheistic religions (Islam, Christianity, and Judaism), the most important commercial crossroads of the ancient world, and the base of several of the most sophisticated empires the world has ever known. Importantly, however, the region is not simply the site of ancient ruins and source areas (**Geography Matters: Labeling the Middle East**). At the turn of the twenty-first century, it also possesses enormous economic and political significance as the site of the lion’s share of the world’s petroleum reserves and some of the world’s most volatile and seemingly intractable political conflicts. As the 2000 Israeli-Palestinian conflict demonstrated, the fate of much of the core and large portions of the periphery, is inextricably tied to what happens in the Middle East. And while the region loosely coheres around the broad similarities noted above, it is also true that subregional divisions derive from very different histories, cultural systems, and political aspirations, each of which contribute to making the Middle East and North Africa an especially important and continuously evolving player on the world scene. The history and geography of the Middle East and North Africa, particularly the impressiveness of its many accomplishments, indicates a high level of flexibility and capacity for adaptation to a very challenging environment. These capacities persist in the region today.

Geography Matters: Labeling the Middle East

People and Environment in the Middle East and North Africa (

The Middle East and North Africa is environmentally complex (**Figure 5**). The popular image of the region—fostered largely by the entertainment industry in popular films like *Lawrence of Arabia* and *The English Patient*—is of vast, blazing hot deserts dotted with lush, but far flung oases. The deserts of the region are certainly impressive. The Sahara, the largest desert in the world, has an average annual rainfall of less than 2.5 centimeters (1 inch) per year. Incorporated within the larger framework of the Sahara are the Libyan and Nubian deserts of Egypt and the northern Sudan. The other important desert of the region is the Arabian Desert that occupies a substantial part of the Gulf Peninsula. Clearly, while deserts and oases like those portrayed in film do exist, surprisingly for many of us, they make up only a small percentage of the total land area of the Middle East and North Africa. The predominant landscapes of the region are, in fact, vast rocky plains or steppes. Substantial mountain ranges and extensive, treeless plateaus are also common landscapes. Trapped in among these more predominant landscapes are the isolated deserts that are really vast seas of sand where neither plants, animals, nor people are able to survive. Like other arid lands throughout the world, summers in the lowland areas of the Middle East and North Africa are extremely hot and dry with daily high temperatures often at 38°C (100°F). The highland areas, such as the Atlas Mountains, and the Iranian and Anatolian plateaus, and coastal areas of the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean, Caspian, Arabian, Red, and Black seas and the Persian Gulf experience more moderate daily summer temperatures and a predictable influx of visitors escaping the searing heat of the lowlands. Winter temperatures, as would be expected, are more moderate in the lowlands and colder in the highlands.

Figure 5. topographic map of the region

The single most important variable uniting the region is **aridity**. This environmental characteristic is so pervasive that early geography textbooks labeled the Middle East and North Africa “the dry world” because so much of the region receives little or no precipitation. The result of aridity is landscapes with great stretches of little or no vegetation. Such landscapes are largely uninhabitable by humans unless substantial and expensive technologies are available that can introduce a dependable water supply. In attempting to understand the environmental complexity of the region, it must first be accepted that dryness is not synonymous with dullness or absence of diversity. Although the Middle East and North Africa share an important climatic variable, the countries and subregions contained within it exhibit a wide range of remarkable landscapes shaped by some small and some significant differences in presence of surface water and precipitation. The absence or presence of water has had an important effect as well on the history of the interaction of people and the environments of the Middle East and North Africa as well.

Landscapes and Landforms

The Middle East and North Africa contain a wide variety of physical landforms. As **Figure 5.** shows, the region is interspersed with seas and an ocean hems it on its western flank. There are substantial mountain ranges—some of the highest in the world—and two major river systems drain through its center. And while the region possesses the gamut of landscapes from seaside to mountains, the landscapes most heavily occupied by humans are the highland plateaus and the coastal lowlands as well as the floodplains of the major rivers. As is also clear from **Figure 5.** the region is located at the conjunction of three continental landmasses where active plates make the area highly prone to earthquakes.

Figure 5. the tectonics of the Middle East—see Held p. 33

The Gulf Peninsula, which is a tilted plateau that rises at its western flank on the Red Sea and slopes gradually to the Persian Gulf on its eastern one, is part of the Arabian Plate. It is not hard to recognize that the Gulf Peninsula was once part of the African Plate tucked against the coastal areas of present day Egypt, Sudan, and Eritrea. The separation of the Arabian Plate as it moved eastward from the African plate millions of years ago resulted in the creation of the Red Sea, which initially formed as a rift valley and later filled with water. Both the African and the Arabian plates rub up against the Eurasian Plate along the Mediterranean Sea and at the mountains that separates the Gulf Peninsula from the Anatolian and Iranian plateaus. The mountain ranges of Turkey, Iran, and the Transcaucases radiate out from this feature. Crustal plate contact also means that the subregion surrounding the contact zone is prone to earthquakes like the one that x.x one that shook Turkey in August of x killing x people and causing x property damage.

Three mountain ranges dominate the region. While impressive in terms of their beauty and ruggedness, these ranges are also, more importantly, stimuli to rain and the source of rivers and runoff for a region desperately short of water. The most extensive and highest mountains are those resulting from the continental plate contact located at the center of the region. These include the Taurus and Anti-Taurus Mountains in Turkey and the Elburz and Zagros Mountains in Iran. These ranges are higher than any in the U.S. and include Kūh-é Damāvand in Iran which soars to 5671 meters (x feet) and Aǧri Daǧl, also known as Mount Arat, which is a only slightly less impressive at 5137 meters (16,844 feet). The second important mountain range in the region is the Atlas Mountains of Northwest Africa that stretch from the Mediterranean Sea to the Sahara Desert. The Atlas Mountains, a continuation of the European alpine range, are composed of a complex series of folded ridges separated by wide interior plateaus. The third set of mountains are those that border both sides of the Red Sea and are especially dramatic in Yemen where the highest peaks are over 3750 meters (12,300 feet). In addition to being critical sources of precious water, the mountains are also places of habitation for many people in the region. Though mountain environments in the extreme can be a challenge to human habitation, because of the availability of moisture they are also able to support agriculture over a somewhat shortened growing season. Historically, the mountains have also often provided safe havens for minority populations suffering persecution and discrimination from majority populations. The Druze in Syria and the Aidis (Shi'ites) in Yemen are two such peoples who have used the mountains to escape their oppressors.

While the highland areas are home to a small portion of the people Middle East and North Africa, the plains (including the coastal and flood plains) and the high plateaus are the most populated landscapes of the region. As **Figure 5.** (go to the population dot map on this) illustrates the clustering of populations in

these landscapes is hardly surprising given that they are the ones where water is most abundant. The Iranian and Anatolian Plateaus are the most obvious example of these landforms. But highland plateau of Yemen is also contains a sizable population. The coastal and flood plains of the region are equally attractive to human habitation and constitute some of the most remarkable, highly engineered, and scenic of the regions' landscapes (**Figure 5**).

Figure 5. a photo of the Aswan Dam—see Knox/Marston 2nd ed.

There are only two major river systems in the Middle East and North Africa has no major rivers. The Nile River system and the integrated Tigris and Euphrates rivers system are highly critical to the continued growth of the region and are, not surprisingly, also highly contested among the countries that depend upon them for the precious resource they deliver. The Nile is one of the world's great rivers as well as being its longest. Its source is in the mountains of Ethiopia and East Africa. From the Ethiopian Plateau, the Nile flows northward across the Sahara Desert finally emptying into the eastern Mediterranean at Cairo. Once the flow is joined by one of its tributaries, the Atbara River in northern Sudan, the Nile flows through some of the driest terrestrial conditions on the planet where no additional moisture is added to its load and high evaporation occurs.

The Tigris and Euphrates system, the hearth area for the first agricultural revolution, originates in the Anatolian highlands of Turkey and flows through Syria emptying eventually into the Persian Gulf at the swamps of Shatt al Arab. These two river systems are, it is no exaggeration to state, the lifeblood for millions of the region's inhabitants. While rivers are the major source of water for a large proportion of the region's population, there are other sources, though many of them are highly undependable. In the Sahara Desert, for example, runoff from the Atlas Mountains collects in underground rivers that for the most part course deep below the desert surface. In some places, known as **oases**, land erosion and a high water table have enabled some of these underground rivers to percolate to the surface (**Figure 5**). As a result, oases exist in sharp contrast to the dry, largely uninhabitable desert that surrounds them. For instance, oasis soils are usually quite fertile and animal and plant life are abundant. Agriculture is frequently undertaken in these locations where dates are a highly successful cash crop due in part to their tolerance of saline soils. Oases have also played another important economic role in the region where they served as stopping points for caravans travelling with commercial goods across the vast deserts.

Figure 5. photo of an oasis

Other sources of water in the region include natural springs, perennial streams, and wells largely drilled for irrigation, though some water holes have been drilled to enable the flourishing of artificial oases. One of the most ingenious methods for mining water is a system of low-gradient tunnels that collect groundwater and bring it to the surface through gravity flow (**Figure 5**). The gravity system of water mining is known as *qanat* in Iran, *flaj* in the Gulf Peninsula, and *foggara* in North Africa. The system is restricted to piedmont areas where runoff from orographic rain and snowmelt begins to percolate below ground level. The qanat system and its regional relatives, is, under ideal circumstances, a highly dependable source of water enabling year-round irrigation where it is carefully practiced. Because of its scarcity and the difficulties that must be met to secure adequate supplies of it, water is a highly charged resource in the region and access rights to it are the source of much conflict. Syria and Iraq, for instance, have called on Turkey to halt its construction of a dam on the Tigris and Euphrates River while Egypt has threatened Sudan militarily should it attempt to limit downstream access to the Nile. A third conflict involves the countries of Israel, Jordan, and Syria all of which inhabit the Jordan River Valley and have access to its waters. A shallow, slow moving river, it is nonetheless highly engineered through dams and diversions and at times its flow is little more than a trickle. Access to its water is crucial to all three countries and conflicts and national complaints over access are a routine occurrence (see: Sense of Place: the Jordan River).

Figure 5. photo of a gravity flow water system

Sense of Place: the Jordan River

Climate

As in any region, the variables of temperature, humidity, and rainfall as they interact with topography and large water bodies are central to comprehending climate patterns and characteristics. In the Middle East and North Africa temperatures vary dramatically in terms of season and location and in the desert areas, temperatures exhibit extreme variation between night and day. Humidity and rainfall are also variable across the region. As **Figure 5** illustrates, the Middle East and North Africa--though clearly dominated at mid-section by a continuous swath of dry lands from western Morocco to eastern Sudan—is a latitudinally

broad region that stretches from the winter cold climates of northern Turkey to the summer wet, subtropical climates of southern Sudan. The moderating effect of large bodies of water on the coastal areas, as previously mentioned, also adds to climatic variation in the region enabling milder year round climates with wet winters in those places (**Figure 5. Photo of Algiers**).

Figure 5. Climate map of the Middle East and North Africa

Figure 5. Algiers showing Mediterranean landscape

Aridity, as previously mentioned, means that precipitation in the region is low and highly variable with the coastal mountain areas being the exception. Nearly three-quarters of the region experiences average annual rainfall of less than 25 centimeters (10 inches) which means that agriculture, where it does occur, must be irrigated. Little rainfall also means the soils in the region tend to be thin and lacking in a wide range of nutrients. In contrast, agriculture along the coastal plains of Turkey and the floodplains of the Nile Valley is able to take advantage of fertile soils. Other exceptional locations with respect to moisture include southern Sudan which, because of its tropical location in sub-Saharan Africa, experiences the wet winter and spring effects of the moisture bearing storms of the Intertropical Convergence Zone (see Chapter 2). The mountains of Yemen also experience abundant rainfall in the summer due to the Indian monsoon system.

Most of the rain that does fall in the region is both helped and hindered by the presence of numerous mountain ranges. For instance, the winter and spring storms that bring rainfall to the coastal areas of the Mediterranean Sea are orographic in nature (see Chapter 2). In short, moisture bearing air masses move in from the Atlantic in the west, rise over a coastal range--such as the Atlas Mountains in Morocco or the Judean hill country of the Levant (the eastern Mediterranean including Syria, Lebanon, and Israel, the Palestinian territories) where the air is cooled and the moisture is condensed--and then drop their moisture as rain as the air masses move eastward beyond the mountains. In some of these mountain ranges, rainfall is quite plentiful, such as the Agros Mountains in Iran, where rainfall can range between 60 and 200 centimeters (23 to 80 inches). Snowcapped peaks are to be found in Turkey, Iran, Lebanon and Israel where spring and summer snowmelt provide water for lowland human, animal, animal and plant populations.

Most of the coastal areas of the region experience between 37.5 to 100 centimeters (15 to 40 inches) of rain a year. While most rain falls in the winter and early spring months, there are areas, such as the Black Sea slope of the Pontic Mountains in Turkey, that experiences summer rains adequate for un-irrigated or **dry farming**. In some areas, however, where the ranges are especially high, such as the central Anatolian Plain in Iran or the Syrian Steppe, the rain shadow effect occurs where the mountains prevent moisture bearing air masses to pass over them resulting in the isolated, vegetationless, interior deserts of the region. For instance, in southeastern Saudi Arabia, western Oman, and Dasht-é-Kavīr (the Great Salt Desert) of Iran where there is a complete absence of vegetation, there are often successive years with no rainfall whatsoever.

The aridity and high temperatures characteristic of the region have also had an impact on humans, plants and animals. People have adapted to the environment through architecture, changing daily and seasonal patterns of activity, and dress. The typical regional building design of high ceilings and arched roofs enables warm air to rise away from human activity. The practice of locating living quarters around a shady courtyard enables residents to use cooler outdoor spaces that are also highly private. The clothing worn by Middle East and North African peoples is also an adaptation to the heat and dryness. Head coverings and long flowing made from fabrics of light color lower body temperatures by reflecting sunlight. They also function to inhibit perspiration and thus diminish moisture loss. Other populations, such as the Berber of North Africa (see Geography Matters) migrate to mountainous areas in the summer and warmer lowlands in the winter to avoid the extremes of temperature. Plants and animals also have adaptive strategies to deal with the intense heat and aridity. For example, native plant species are typically able to store water for long periods of time or survive on very small amounts of water by keeping their leaves and stems very small or developing an extensive root system. Animals adapt by lowering their body temperature through sweating or by being active only at night.

Environmental History

For much of the history of the Middle East and North African region, adaptation was an appropriate term for understanding the relationships between people, plants and animals to their environments. The inhabitants of the region have been ingenious in adapting to environmental constraints from the agricultural practices they have developed to the cities they have built. After millenia of human occupation and the increasing pressures that population growth has created, however, the key term for describing human-environment interaction in the region is over-exploitation. In the long period from adaptation to over-exploitation, the landscape of the region has been dramatically transformed; in some cases so much so that entire species have been eliminated. The environmental history of the Middle East and North Africa, therefore, is a long history that has changed as new technologies have been introduced and more human beings have placed greater pressures on the existing resource base.

As deserts occupy much of the region, it is not surprising that most of the plant and animal life there has tended to be where most of the people are: in the northern areas or at higher altitude where the climate is less dry. In fact, dense and extensive forests existed throughout Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, and Iran. Today, after two to three thousands of years of woodcutting and overgrazing, the forests of Turkey and Syria are nearly entirely denuded with only a few small remnant areas remaining. While large areas of Lebanon have also been deforested, the Horsh Ehdn Forest Nature Reserve is one place that has not, and it is home to several species of rare orchids and other important flowering plants. Sadly, Lebanon's famous cedars continue to grow only in a few high-mountain areas. Yet, while most of the highland areas of the Middle East and North Africa have been deforested, Iran is an exception to the rule and still retains great expanses of its deciduous forests, particularly in the Alborz Mountain region. While less than pristine, the forests of the Atlas Mountains of Morocco and Algeria continue to be forested for commercial purposes.

Animal life has also been greatly affected by the millenia of human occupation as well as the more recent increases in population. At one time, and because of its location at the crossroads of three continents, a wide variety of large mammals, including leopard, cheetah, oryx, aadwolf, striped hyena, and caracal inhabited the region's forests, crocodiles thrived in the Nile, and lions were plentiful in the highlands of Persia (present day Iran). Nearly all of these species are now extinct or near extinction with domesticated camel, donkey, and buffalo the most ubiquitous mammals now. The highland areas of Turkey and Iran still contain a fairly wide variety of mammals similar to those found in parts of Europe including bear, deer, jackal, lynx, wild boar, and wolf. Birds are also plentiful in the region with different ecosystems supporting a wide variety of different species.

At same time that the elimination of plant and animal species has been widespread throughout the region, different parts of it are experiencing pressing environmental problems, some of them particularly severe as national governments lack the resources to either prevent or mitigate them. Throughout the region, all states are experiencing serious problems related to water quality, accessibility, and the impact of hydro-technology on surrounding areas. In many of states, overdrafting of oases wells has been occurring for such a sustained period that oases, such as the Azraq in Jordan, are actually dying. All of the states, but especially those in the Persian Gulf, are faced with severe shortages of freshwater and the effects of oil and industrial pollution on air, land, and water. Water control schemes, such as those in Iraq, are destroying the natural habitat of wwildlife. In Egypt, Nile irrigation is increasing soil salination and oil pollution is threatening coral reefs and marine habitats. Coastlines along all the oil-producing states are also experiencing erosion and degradation from oil spills and the discharge of ships and industry. And in every state of the region except for Turkey, desertification is an especially troubling problem as precious forested and arable land is lost to production. And tourism, an important sources of income for many of the states of the region, is exacerbating many of these environmental problems such as the coastal destruction from increased development in Lebanon and the deterioration of the coral reefs in the Red Sea.

The Middle East and North Africa are clearly not immune from their share of severe environmental problems. And though, generally speaking, the region is largely a peripheral one in the world system with little surplus capital to expend on environmental protection or preservation, some important efforts in that direction have been made. Egypt recently appointed a minister of the environment and efforts have been

made in establishing protected areas. Reforestation and afforestation programs are underway in several Middle East states. Oman and the United Arab Emirates have begun to take a deliberate stand against desertification and green belts are being planted. Israel has introduced active breeding programs to encourage the regeneration of endangered species. Still, the state of the environment in the Middle East and North Africa is a seriously challenged one as structural problems, such as burgeoning populations of very poor people, make the solutions extremely difficult to devise.

Middle East and North Africa in the World

The Middle East and North Africa has long been a central influence on growth and change in the rest of the world. As mentioned previously, the Middle East and North Africa is also widely known as the “cradle of civilization.” This title derives from the fact that the first known humans to settle there were ultimately responsible for domesticating agriculture, producing some of the earliest integrated civilizations, establishing large cities and networks of villages and towns, and organizing complex religious-political systems. The geographical center of all these accomplishments was the Fertile Crescent, a region arching across the northern part of the Syrian Desert and extending from the Nile Valley to the Mesopotamian Basin in the depression between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers (**Figure 5**). Ideas and technologies generated in the Fertile Crescent diffused outward to similar nearby environments—such as the Nile Valley in Egypt and the Indus Valley in Pakistan—and then beyond. In addition to the innovations named above, inhabitants of the Mesopotamian area appear to have developed the earliest known writing and complex understandings of science and mathematics.

Figure 5. map of the Fertile Crescent

Early Empires and Innovation

Perhaps what is most impressive about the region is the number of culturally rich and intellectually sophisticated empires that have emerged and flourished in key areas over the last 4000 years. The most famous empires include: the Babylonian, Hittite, Egyptian, Assyrian, Chaldean, Persian, Seleucid, Ptolemaic, Byzantine, Parthian, Sassanian, Umayyad, Abbasid, and Ottoman. Smaller but also important empires include: the Aramaean, Phoenician, Sabaean, and Nabatean. The Roman Empire also extended into this region (**Figure 5**). Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, the Nile Valley, and the Iranian Plateau all functioned as centers for the major empires such that at any one time, each major part of the region was able to extend its control to the rest of the region and, in turn, has been controlled by some other part of the region. The interaction of dominance and subordination among the various subregions meant that the exchange of ideas, goods, people, belief and value systems helped to tie the region together and promote a more or less unified regional identity. It also meant that a great deal of social stimulation for the development of new ideas and practices existed and enabled important technological innovations and cultural revolutions to take place especially with respect to religion and culture but also related to plant domestication, trade, and the growth of cities.

Figure 5. Empires of the Middle East and North Africa-map

Source of World Religions

Christianity, Islam, and Judaism all developed among the Semitic-speaking people of the deserts of the Middle East. Like Hinduism and Buddhism, originating from the Indo-Gangetic plains (see Chapter 11, p. 00), these three **world religions** are also related. Although Judaism is the oldest religion of the three, it is the least widespread. Judaism originated about 4,000 years ago, Christianity about 2,000 years ago and Islam about 1,300 years ago. Judaism developed out of the cultures and beliefs of Bronze Age peoples and was the first monotheistic (belief in one God) religion. Although the oldest monotheistic religion and one that spread widely and rapidly, Judaism is numerically small because it does not seek new converts. Christianity developed in Jerusalem among the disciples of Jesus who proclaimed that he was the Messiah expected by the Jews. As it moved east and south from its hearth area, Christianity's diffusion was helped by missionizing and by imperial sponsorship. While Judaism and Christianity are important religions in the Middle East and North Africa, Islam is the dominant religion and culture of the region deeply penetrated by the Arabic language.

Islam is a religion characterized by the acceptance of the doctrine of submission to God and Mohammed as the chief and last prophet of God. There are two fundamental sources of Islamic doctrine and practice: the Quran and the Sunna. Muslims regard the Quran as directly spoken by God to Muhammad. The Sunna, is not written but practical. It is effectively the example of the Prophet, understood through

Hadith, the body of traditions that are derived from the words and actions of the Prophet. While Islam holds that God has four fundamental functions: creation, sustenance, guidance, and judgment, the purpose of people to serve God by worshiping him alone and adhering to an ethical social order. The actions of the individual, moreover, should be to the ultimate benefit of humanity, not the immediate pleasures or ambitions of the self.

The impact that these three religions have had on the rest of the world has been enormous. The eventual spread of Christianity, for instance, to Europe was particularly consequential. Zealous Christianity was responsible for the crusades, military expeditions undertaken through papal sanction by European Christians in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries to recover the Holy Land from the Muslims. Interestingly, the crusades not only brought Europeans to the Middle East where they had a modest impact, but as geographer Colin Held points out, the reverse impact was momentous since the Crusades were a major stimulus for the European Renaissance as crusaders returned to Europe with important new ideas and practices related to the region's architecture, art, literature, and the sciences (**Figure 5**). In addition, the spread of Christianity to Europe is seen by many, the eminent sociologist Max Weber among them, as one of the primary foundations for the spread of capitalism following the Renaissance. Spanish colonialism in North and Latin America, for example, was undertaken in the name of the Christian God and British colonists in New England were fleeing religious persecution at home.

Figure 5. photo of ME architecture or art's influence on Europe—maybe religious paintings from Italy
The impact of Islam on the rest of the world has been equally substantial. At the opening of the twenty-first century, Islam possesses the second largest number of adherents after Christianity—about 1 billion worldwide. **Figure 5**. illustrates the extent of the contemporary Islamic world. As the map makes clear, the Islamic world includes very different societies and regions from Southeast Asia to Africa. Muslims comprise over 85 percent of the populations of Afghanistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Tunisia, Turkey, and most of the newly independent republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus (including Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan). In Albania, Chad, Ethiopia, and Nigeria, Muslims make up 50 to 85 percent of the population. In India, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, China, Greece, Slovenia, Thailand, and the Philippines, significant Muslim minorities also exist.

Figure 5. the Islamic world

Plant Domestication

As mentioned in Chapter 2 (p. 00) the emergence of seed agriculture through the domestication of crops, such as wheat and rice, and animals, such as sheep and goats, replaced hunting and gathering as a way of living and sustaining human life. As cultural geographer Carl Sauer pointed out in his book *Agricultural Origins and Dispersals* (1952), these agricultural breakthroughs could take place only in certain geographic settings: where natural food supplies were plentiful; where the terrain was diversified (thus offering a variety of habitats and a variety of species); where soils were rich and relatively easy to till; and where there was no need for large-scale irrigation or drainage. In fact, the emergence of seed agriculture occurred during roughly the same period (between 9000 and 7000 B.C) in several regions around the world, including the Middle East, parts of Latin America (Chapter 8, p. 00), South Asia (Chapter 11, p. 00), and East Asia (Chapter 9, p. 0), as well as East Africa (Chapter 6, p. 00). In the Middle East, Mesopotamia was the source area. In North Africa, the Nile Valley in Egypt, was a second important site of agricultural innovation. Another key breakthrough was the domestication of cattle and sheep, a technique that had become established in a few regions by Neolithic, or Stone Age, times (7000 to 5500 B.C.).

The domestication of plants and animals is known as the first agricultural revolution and it represented a transition from hunter-gatherer minisystems to agricultural-based minisystems that began in the Proto-Neolithic, or early Stone Age, period between 9000 and 7000 B.C. The transition was based on a series of technological preconditions: the use of fire to process food, the use of grindstones to mill grains, and the development of improved tools to prepare and store food. Before the first agricultural revolution, in prehistoric times, hunting and gathering minisystems were finely tuned to local physical environments. They were all very small in geographical extent, and very vulnerable to environmental change. Because they did not have the ability (or the need) to sustain an extensive physical infrastructure, they were also

limited in geographic scale. This transition to food-producing minisystems had several important implications for the long-term evolution of the world's geographies. First, it allowed much higher population densities and encouraged the proliferation of settled villages. Second, it brought about a change in social organization, from loose communal systems to systems that were more highly organized on the basis of kinship. Kin groups provided a natural way of assigning rights over land and resources and of organizing patterns of land use. Third, it allowed some specialization in nonagricultural crafts, such as pottery, woven textiles, jewelry, and weaponry. This specialization led to a fourth development: the beginnings of barter and trade between communities, sometimes over substantial distances (**Figure 5**).

Figure 5. Route of Frankincense Trade—see NYT article Jan 28 1997

Irrigation was the key to the success of the many agriculturally based minisystems that emerged in the Middle East and North Africa when farmers there minimized their dependence on rainfall. Archaeologists and other scholars of the region argue that those settled minisystems that were able to control irrigated farming across large areas were able also to control weaker minisystems. By using food as a weapon of control, some minisystems were able to thrive while others failed or were incorporated into stronger minisystems. An example is Babylon, which began as one of a number of regional minisystems in Mesopotamia but was able to turn itself into an enduring empire (**Figure 5**). Babylon's nearly 4000 years of dominance was achieved by systematically increasing control over regional agricultural production, through a build up its military strength (including a walled and fortified city center), the elaboration of a long-distance trade network (through extensive port facilities), organizing extensive religious and political control. Evidence of a walled and fortified city, port facilities, numerous temples and palaces demonstrate the extensive and well-established power and control of Babylon which was, for a long period in its 4000 year history, the largest city in the world.

Figure 5. photo of Babylon

Cities and Trade

In the Middle East and North Africa key urban centers, like Babylon, located at crucial points along natural and well-traveled human routes, were the organizational anchors of the region shaping distinctive land use patterns and serving as crucibles for significant cultural developments. In the Nile Valley, for instance, the urban based Egyptian empire emerged, influenced by the cultures of Mesopotamia at the same time that it developed its own unique way of life (**Figure 5**). For instance, writing, which originated in Sumer in Mesopotamia for the purposes of recording inventories and trade transactions, was adapted in Egypt for religious and royal inscriptions. Egyptians were also active city-builders like their neighbors and they constructed monumental tombs, temples, and palaces the engineering of which still baffles architectural historians. The culture was also premised on elaborate rituals and sophisticated body adornments that required significant quantities of gold, cedar, ebony, and turquoise prompting the Egyptians to enter into active trade with settlements in the northern Red Sea, the upper Nile, and the eastern Mediterranean. These trade relations enabled the transfer and improvement of ideas and technologies that enriched all of the cultures of the Middle East and North Africa as well as Greece and Rome.

Figure 5. Egyptian empire

It is widely held among scholars of ancient civilizations that the oldest cities on Earth are likely to have been constructed along the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates as well as the Nile rivers (and possibly in the Indus River valley as well) some time during the fourth millennium B.C.. The availability of the rivers for transportation and irrigation supplemented by wheeled vehicles probably enabled the concentration of a surplus at a few regional centers. The need to protect inhabitants from flooding and to canalize the water for irrigation suggests that populations concentrated to take advantage of these opportunities. Walled towns began to appear in Mesopotamia at least as early as 4500 B.C. Populations were probably between 7000 and 25,000 where the major producers were fishers and farmers who supported a non-producing class of priests, administrators, and traders. Artisans also were clearly city-dwellers. For the producers, the lowest class of inhabitants, the houses were likely to have been of mud construction. But for the more elite urban dwellers, elaborate houses have been discovered many with courtyards and two storeys outfitted with fresh water delivery and sewage systems. While some of the earliest cities were clearly planned, others were more randomly organized. What does seem to be consistent across all of these early cities are three main elements; city walls; suburbs, including houses, fields, groves, pastures, and cattle folds; and a commercial district. As the consistent existence of urban commercial districts

suggests, trade was an essential part of life in these early cities and it not only helped to spread ideas but was also an important factor in encouraging and sustaining urban growth.

The End of Empires, European Colonialism, and the Emergence of Modern States

The Ottoman empire, in power for over 400 years, dominated the Middle East and North Africa at the beginning of the twentieth century. As **Figure 5**. shows, the scope of the Ottoman empire at the height of its power was vast extending from its European provinces to North Africa to the Arab lands of the eastern end of the Mediterranean. Only Persia, the central Arabian peninsula, and Morocco had been able to resist direct Ottoman control. By the early twentieth century, however, Ottoman rule was under siege from Europe both through the legacy of the French political revolution and the British industrial revolution. Already in the new century the edges of the empire were being nibbled away. Egypt had been lost to Britain and Algeria and Tunisia to France. By 1914 on the eve of the First World War, the Balkans and the remaining European possessions were lost (**Figure 5**). At the same time, nationalist movements were erupting as the various sub-regions were exposed to European discourses of democracy. The nationalist movements were particularly problematic for the polyglot empire which had previously held itself together through an elaborate imperial legal and administrative structure that tended to allow for cultural differences united under Islam. When the Young Turk nationalist movement erupted onto the scene in 1908, a substantial wedge was driven between Turks and Arabs who had been long-term partners in the administration of the empire. Already weakened by internal conflicts and external challenges, the Ottoman military was defeated by the British and French during the First World War, resulting in the radical restructuring of the Ottoman empire.

Figure 5. Ottoman empire

Figure 5. Colonialism in the Middle East and North Africa in 1914

Having negotiated separate treaties, the Arab provinces of the empire were carved up and turned into proto-modern states under the control of a victor/colonizer. Syria and Lebanon were controlled by the French; the new Iraq, Palestine, and Trans-Jordan were relegated to the British. The idea of a proto-modern state was heavily influenced by American political ideology and the aims of the League of Nations both of which advocated self-determination and freedom over unmitigated colonization. The result was that a new form of external political control was created—the mandate—that legitimized French and British government over their Middle Eastern and North African possessions. The mandate differs from outright colonial status because it requires the mandate holders to submit to internationally sanctioned guidelines obligating the establishment of constitutional governments as the first step in preparing the new states for eventual independence. One of the most consequential mandates was the one guiding the new state of Palestine. As the mandate holder, Britain was obliged by treaty in 1914 to implement the provisions of the Balfour Declaration that required the establishment of a Jewish national homeland.

The political order that was imposed on the Middle East and North Africa following the First World War was seriously challenged throughout the former empire. Egypt, Iraq, Persia, Turkey, Syria, and Palestine, for instance, all revolted violently to the new order. And while Turkey, Egypt and Persia were able eventually to establish independent republics, by the mid-1920s, Britain and France were in firm control of the rest of the Middle East and North Africa.

Due to the mandate system of external control, strictly speaking, there were only three true colonies (Aden (British), Libya (Italian), Algeria (French)) in the Middle East and North Africa in the twentieth century (**Figure 5**). But a pattern of control did emerge such that the new state was heavily influenced, and in many cases, overly dominated, by their mandate holder. The results of this uneven power relationship were many and complex. Some were beneficial, most were not, including: the forced homogenization of culturally different populations in the name of establishing a national population; local political life determined by events in the metropolises of London and Paris; the substitution of the new individually-based political category of citizenship for the more communal attachments of religion; the lack of money for development and the use of British and French currency as local currency; and the drawing of political boundaries with no sensitivity to their impact on pre-existing local social and economic relationships, among many others. The negative impacts, however, helped to foment increasing regional dissatisfaction with outside dominance and by mid-twentieth century, aided by the crushing impacts that the Second World War dealt to Europe, all of the states of the Middle East and North Africa had gained their independence. It is one thing, however, to successfully win independence from colonizers who have

effectively lost their interest in the enterprise and quite another to obtain the allegiance of the diverse collection of new citizens. Many of the challenges that the new states of the Middle East and North Africa faced at mid-century continue to plague them in the new one.

Figure 5. photo of French colonial control in Algeria

Peoples of the Middle East and North Africa (4000-5000)

The unusual pattern of population distribution in the Middle East and North Africa shown in **Figure 5.** reflects the influences of environment, history, and culture on the region. Of the three, it is widely accepted that the highest correlation exists between population concentrations and the availability of water from rivers, streams, and oases or in areas of dependable precipitation. The resulting pattern is populations clustered along coastal areas, the floodplains of the three great rivers and smaller streams, or in the moist highland settings such as the Atlas Mountains. Other population clustering occurs around the region's cities which have been well established for centuries but have grown especially rapidly since the independence period of the 1950s. While the Middle East and North Africa are more urbanized than is popularly assumed, most of the people of the region still live in rural villages.

The World Bank's figures for the Middle East and North Africa show the total population of the region at x billion. While this figure reflects the combined totals for the 21 countries that make up the region, it should be pointed out that the accuracy, frequency, and consistency of national censuses in the region are highly variable. While some countries, such as x and x have recently conducted censuses that were considered by population experts to be accurate and reliable, others such as Oman have never conducted a census and still others such as Turkey, tend to underestimate their minority population (the Kurds) for political reasons. The most widely used figures for the region come from The World Bank which are the figures we use throughout this chapter. It should also be pointed out that the largest countries also have the largest populations, the top five being Turkey, Iran, Egypt, Iraq, and Syria. Finally, be aware that the region is experiencing rapid population growth. Both through natural increase as well as through immigration, a number of countries in the Middle East and North Africa region, such as Gaza and Libya, are among the fastest growing in the world. Finally, it is also important to be aware that population totals vary greatly among the different countries in the region from some that are relatively very small, such as the tiny Bahrain with x square kilometers (x square miles) of total land area and x total population, to Iran with x square kilometers (x square miles) of total land area and x total population.

Religion

It is no exaggeration to state that the Middle East and North Africa is a region that is highly infused with especially active religious practices and belief systems. Unlike many parts of the core, where societies have become increasingly secular, religion in this complicated region—part core, part periphery—is a central feature of everyday life for the vast majority of the inhabitants of the region. Yet, as is the case in all of the world's regions, the geography of religion is not uniform and the smaller the scale of analysis—as you move from the regional level to the neighborhood level, for example—the more likely there are to be significant differences in religious attachments. For instance, while Iran is widely recognized as a country passionately committed to Islam so much so that there is little separation between the state and Islam, it is also well-known that in Tehrān, the capital city of 7 million inhabitants, many upper and middle class households are likely to be secular and more aligned with western values than the teachings of Islam (**Figure 5.**).

Figure 5. photo of Tehran showing satellite dishes—mention Farhang's work here

Despite the variation, however, the Middle East and North Africa is largely a Muslim region with more than 90 per cent of the population of the region being adherents. After Islam, the religion with the second largest number of followers is Christianity with Judaism being the third. Besides these three major religions there are a number additional ones with much smaller numbers of adherents.

Islam

Islam is an Arabic term that means “submission”; effectively submission to God's will. A Muslim is a member of the community of believers whose duty is obedience and submission to the will of God. As a revealed religion, Islam recognizes the prophets of the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, but Muhammad is considered the last prophet and God's messenger on Earth. The Quran, the principal holy book of the Muslims, is considered to be the word of God as revealed to Muhammad by the Angel Gabriel beginning in about 610 A.D. The emergence and spread of Islam is linked to the commercial history of the

Middle East and North Africa. The geographical origin of Islam is Mecca, in present-day Saudi Arabia (**Figure 5**). When Islam first emerged, Mecca, where Muhammad was born, was an important node in the trade routes that at first connected Yemen and Syria and eventually linked the region to Europe and all of Asia (**Figure 5**). Eventually Medina also became an important sacred city as it was the place to which Muhammad fled when he was driven out of Mecca by angry merchants. There are five primary obligations, known as the five pillars of Islam, that a Muslim must fulfil: repeating the profession of the faith (“There is not god but God; Muhammad is the messenger of God”); praying five times a day facing Mecca; alms or charitable giving; fasting from sunup until sundown during the holy month of Ramadan; and making at least one pilgrimage, or **hajj**, to Mecca.

Figure 5. photo of Mecca

Figure 5. Trade and caravan routes

Disagreement over the line of succession from the Prophet Muhammad, the founder of Islam, occurred in the seventh century resulting in the emergence of two main Islamic sects, the Sunni and the Shi’a. The majority of Iran’s 60 million people follow Shi’a, the official State religion of the Islamic Republic of Iran, founded in 1979. The majority of Iraq’s population is also Shi’a, even though the government headed by Saddam Hussein is Sunni. Besides the majority Sunni and Shi’a, small splinter groups and branches also exist, especially among the Shi’a including Druzes and Ibadhis, among others. It is also important to keep in mind that Islam is practiced differently in many different locales throughout the Middle East and North Africa and that Muslims who have migrated out of the region—to Europe and the United States, for instance—are shaped by and shape the practice of Islam in the Middle East.

Perhaps one of the most widespread cultural counterforces to globalization has been the rise of **Islamism**, more popularly, although incorrectly, known as Islamic fundamentalism. Whereas fundamentalism is a term that describes the desire to return to strict adherence to the fundamentals of a religious system, Islamism is an anti-colonial, anti-imperial, and overall anti-core political movement. The latter is a more accurate and general description of a movement within Muslim countries to resist the core forces of globalization—namely modernization and secularization. Not all Muslims are Islamists, although Islamism is the most militant movement within Islam today.

The basic intent of Islamism is to create a model of society that protects the purity and centrality of Islamic precepts through the return to a universal Islamic state—a theocratic state that would be religiously and politically unified. Islamists object to modernization because they believe the corrupting influences of the core place the rights of the individual over the common good (**Figure 5**). They view the popularity of Western ideas as a move away from religion to a more secular (nonreligious) society. Islamists desire to maintain religious precepts at the center of state actions, such as reintroducing principles from the sacred law of Islam into State constitutions.

Figure 5. photo of Islamist graffiti

As popular media reports make clear, no other movement emanating from the periphery is as widespread and has had more of an impact politically, militarily, economically, and culturally than Islamism. Yet Islamism—a radical and sometimes militant movement—should not be regarded as synonymous with the practices of Islam any more generally than Christian fundamentalism is with Christianity. Islam is not a monolithic religion, and even though all accept the basic creeds, specific practices may vary according to the different histories of countries, nations, and tribes. Some expressions of Islam are moderate and allow for the existence and integration of Western styles of dress, food, music, and other aspects of culture, while others are extreme and call for the complete elimination of Western things and ideas.

Christianity, Judaism and other Middle Eastern religions

While Islam is the most widespread and widely practiced religion in the Middle East, it is by no means the only religion of political, cultural, or social significance. And, although Christianity and Judaism are also important world religions of the region, there are also other less widely practiced religion that are notable. Many of the other religions practiced in the Middle East have their origin in Christianity. These include more than a dozen sects, among them Coptic Christians, various orthodox affiliations including Armenian, Greek, and Ethiopian, Maronites, and the Chaldean Catholic Church, all of which have the most adherents in and around the Levant. There are even some Protestant faiths. Faiths not associated with any of the three world religions are largely concentrated in Iran and include Bahaim and Zoroatrianism.

Most Jews in the Middle East are either Orthodox or Hasidic, though there also exists an offshoot of Judaism, known as Samaritanism, whose adherents are largely concentrated in the West Bank.

The three regionally predominant religions have been important forces in shaping the peoples and the landscape of the region. The most obvious and enduring landscape impacts have been places of worship and sacred spaces more generally. Nowhere is the enduring interrelationships of the three religions more apparent than in the ancient city of Jerusalem (**Figure 5**). As anthropologist Dale Eickelman describes it: "Jerusalem provides perhaps the most poignant symbol of all that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam share and contest in the Middle Eastern context and beyond and how the significance given to religious symbols, space, and places ranges well beyond the local carriers of the three religious traditions."¹ The centrality of Jerusalem as an ancient religious space as well as its contemporary significance as a place of pilgrimage for Jews and Christians is very much tied up with the recent conflicts around the Camp David and Arab-Israeli peace talks. Modern constructions of the territorial state that link territory with nationality are ill-equipped to deal with the religious significance of Jerusalem to Christians, Jews, and Muslims.

Figure 5. map of the old city of Jerusalem showing the four quarters (The Guardian 10/14/00)

Culture and Society

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Social Order and Loyalty

The idea of the tribe is central to understanding the sociopolitical organization of the Middle East and North Africa. And while tribal identities are not the only form of sociopolitical organization there, tribally organized populations do appear throughout the entire region. Before discussing the importance of tribal identity to social and political practice in the Middle East and North Africa, it is important to recognize that the idea of the tribe is neither consistent throughout the globe, nor in the Middle East and North African region. In some societies in sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, the term tribe is considered to be pejorative implying primitiveness. In most of the Middle East and North Africa, however, tribe is not ordinarily seen as a primitive form of social organization but rather a valuable element in sustaining modern national identity, though there are exceptions. Generally speaking, a **tribe** is a form of moral community, often based on biological relationships. Tribes are grounded in any combination or single expression of social, political, and cultural identities that are created by those who share them. This shared identity ordinarily causes the group to act together in a sustained way on ritual and political occasions. The result of shared tribal identity is the formation of collective loyalties that result in a primary allegiance to the tribe. External groups may recognize the existence of these self-defined tribal groups and may seek to undermine or encourage their persistence. For instance, in early twentieth century Iran, the state ruthlessly and systematically attempted to eliminate tribal affiliations. In contrast, during the European colonial period in Sudan and Morocco, tribes were seen as forms of social organization that might inhibit nationalist movements so they were largely promoted and supported by the colonial state.

An example of a Middle East and North African group that is frequently and proudly tribal is pastoralists. **Pastoralism** is a subsistence activity that involves the breeding and herding of animals to satisfy the human need for food, shelter, and clothing. Usually practiced in cold and dry areas where subsistence agriculture is impracticable, pastoralism can either be sedentary (pastoralists live in settlements and herd animals in nearby pastures) or nomadic (they wander with their herds over long distances, never settling in any one place for very long) or a combination of both. Most nomadic pastoralists practice **transhumance**, the movement of herds according to seasonal rhythms: warmer, lowland areas in the winter, and cooler, highland areas in the summer. Although the herds are occasionally slaughtered and used directly for food, for shelter, and for clothing, often they are bartered with sedentary farmers for grain and for other commodities. Female and younger members of pastoralist groups may also be involved with cultivation.

In such cases, mostly women and children split off from the larger group and plant crops at fixed locations in the spring. They may stay sedentary for the growing season, tending the crops, or they may rejoin the

¹ D.F.Eickelman, *The Middle East and Central Asia: An Anthropological Approach*. 3rd edition, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998, p. 250.

group and return to the fields when the crops are ready for harvesting. As mentioned, pastoralism is frequently tribally-based social system. Pastoralists tribes often consist of groups of families who are governed by a leader or chieftain. Groups of families are divided into units that follow different routes with the herds. The routes taken are well known, with members of the group intimately conversant with the landscape, watering places, and opportunities for contact with sedentary groups (**Geography Matters: the Berbers**).

Kinship and Family

In order to understand Middle East and North African society, it is important to understand ideas of kinship, family, and other personal relationships. **Kinship**, is normally thought of as a relationship based on blood, marriage, or adoption. Many anthropologists and cultural geographers, however, believe that the definition needs to be expanded to include a shared notion of relationship among members of a group. The point is that not all kinship relations are understood by social groups to be exclusively based on biological or marriage ties. While in the Middle East, biological ties, usually determined patrilineally (through the father), are important, they are not the only important ties that link individuals and families. In fact, though kinship is often expressed as a “blood” tie among social groups throughout the Middle East, it is often the case that neighbors, friends, even individuals with common economic or political interests are considered kin. Importantly, kinship is such a valued relationship for expressing solidarity and connection, that it is often used to assert a feeling of group closeness and as a basis for identity even where no “natural” or “blood” ties are present.

For many Middle Easterners and North Africans kinship is a very central force in shaping the whole gamut of social relationships from business to marriage to politics. This is true in ordinary households in urban and rural areas as well as in the monarchies of the region such as Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Morocco. Kinship also figures largely in other regimes such as in Iran, Egypt, Syria, Turkey, and Lebanon where it is not unusual to find government offices composed of close relations. The underlying assumption of such arrangements is that appointments based on kinship are not an abuse of political authority but a guarantee of loyalty.

Kinship is even an important factor in shaping the spatial relationships of the home as well as outside the home, determining who can interact with whom and under what circumstances. This is especially the case for the interaction of gender and kinship where women's and men's access to public and private space is sharply differentiated. Although kinship is a very important force in organizing Middle Eastern society, it should be remembered that there is no single notion of kinship that dominates the region. Cultural understandings of close personal relationships—kinship—vary considerably throughout the region as well as among differently educated peoples and different social classes.

Gender

The same point can be applied to gender systems in the Middle East. Although differences do play an important part in shaping social life for men and women in this region, as elsewhere around the globe, there is no single Islamic notion of gender that operates exclusively in the Middle East and North Africa just as there is no single Christian or Jewish one. Many of us carry around stereotypes about the restricted lives of Middle Eastern women because of the operation of rigid Islamic traditions. It is important to understand, however, that these are indeed stereotypes and do not capture the great variety in gender relations that exist in the Middle East and North Africa across lines of class, generation, level of education, and geography (urban versus rural origins) among other factors. What is pervasive throughout the Middle East and North Africa, as well as in many other societies throughout the world, is an ideological assumption that women are subordinate to men. This view is largely held by both men and women in Middle Eastern and North African societies. Interestingly, it seems that men regard women's subordination as something natural, something that is effectively determined by biology. Women in the Middle East tend to regard their subordination as something social, something that is the product of the society in which they live and operate, and therefore something that can be negotiated and manipulated. The gender systems that operate in a wide variety of contexts in the Middle East and North Africa are derived in large part from some of the same notions about men and women that inform gender systems in western societies. Although this view is being increasingly critiqued and dismantled in the west, it is still a powerful one there as well as in the Middle East and North Africa. This view holds that gender roles

derive from the differences in sexuality between men and women. While men possess passions, through discipline and learning, they can eventually gain control over them. Women's passions, however, are less easily controlled and they therefore need men to keep them from creating havoc. Control over women in the Middle East and North Africa is frequently exercised by restricting their access to public space and secluding them within private space (Figure 5.).

Figure 5. photo of gendered architecture

Sexuality and gender roles play an important part in how men and women see themselves and represent themselves publicly in the Middle East. While some societies exercise very strict control over women's public movements and women are expected to cover themselves with veils and long dark clothing when out on the streets, such as in Yemen and Bahrain, in more secular Middle Eastern societies, such as Turkey and Egypt, women's public movements are much less strictly regulated. The veil--from the all encompassing full body garment, known as a chador, to a simpler head covering--has become the means by which women are able to effectively operate in public within their own personal seclusionary space.

Figure 5. illustrates the variation that exists in national level policies and practices with respect to women's access and comportment in public space. While the map demonstrates national variation, it is important to keep in mind that subnational and local variations do exist, particularly differences in urban versus rural practices and even according to class differences within urban areas. Generally, urban women's public movements tend to be more restrictive than rural women, largely because of the different nature of the tasks they perform. But even within urban areas where highly restrictive practices limit women's public movements, middle and upper class women tend to have more constraints placed on their public social behaviors than do poorer women.

Figure 5. restrictions on women's movements (Joni Seager's atlas)

The most important aspect of gender systems in the Middle East to remember is that social reality is not fixed and cultural assumptions and practices around gender are subject to negotiation and change. It is also meaningful to point out that although the predominant gender theme in the Middle East and North Africa is that women are subordinate to men, woman can and do exercise a great deal of household as well as political influence and independence across a range of societies in this region.

Migration and the Middle Eastern and North African Diaspora

The Middle East and North Africa is a region with a long migration history. Populations have for thousands of years moved about within the region, at times as refugees, other times voluntarily. They have also moved out of the region settling all over the world. Generally speaking, in and out migration since the end of the colonial period has largely been related to several very important factors, both pulling immigrants to the region as well as forcing many to leave (Figure 5). Internal regional and national migration has also been significant and is almost always related to the draw of urban economic opportunity as rural areas experience economic decline. We discuss the importance of cities in the development of the region in more detail in the following section.

Figure 5. map of the Middle Eastern/North African diaspora

The single most attractive force drawing migrants to the Middle East and North Africa in the last fifty years has been the growth of the oil economy. This is not to say, however, that oil is the only attractive force. Other factors have also played a role in attracting migrants. For instance, the founding of the state of Israel at mid-century has drawn large numbers of European Jews to the region, particularly during and after the Second World War. More recently, Ethiopian and Russian Jews have also migrated, in the former case due to civil war and in the latter due to the end of the Cold War. Non-oil related economic growth has also played a role in fostering migration to places like Beirut in Lebanon, Cairo in Egypt, and Istanbul in Turkey, all of which have increased their importance as core cities in the regional economy following the spread of political independence throughout the region.

Figure 5. photo of labor migrants in the oil industry

Still, the most prominent attractive force for drawing in new migrants has been the job opportunities made possible through the continued development of the petroleum industry. In the states of the Gulf Peninsula, several factors, including small populations, lack of skill, and a lack of interest in or possibly cultural resistance to the kinds of jobs made available through the oil economy have meant that workers had to be imported. As Figure 5. illustrates, nearly three-quarters if the Gulf States labor force were guest workers, brought in to work in all aspects of oil production from exploration and well-development to drilling, refining, and shipping. And because oil revenues have been widely reinvested in economic development projects in the region, even more jobs have been created outside of petroleum production

from service sector positions to the building and construction industry. In order to lessen the potentially dislocating impact of foreign workers on local social and cultural systems, immigration policy among the oil producing states of the Gulf Peninsula has favored Muslim applicants. Within the region, a large number of guest workers have come to participate in the Gulf Peninsula oil economy from Syria and Egypt as well as Palestinian refugees, filling both skilled and unskilled positions. Outside the region, many guest workers have arrived from Indonesia. While most of the migrants who have come from other Middle Eastern countries have been male, a significant number of the Indonesian labor migrants have been females (A Day in the Life: ??). Although the region has experienced a great deal of in-migration from a variety of sources, much out-migration has also occurred and for very different political and economic reasons.

Figure 5. table or map on migration trends in the Middle East and North Africa

A Day in the Life:

The most consistent forces pushing migrants out of the Middle East and North Africa have been the lack of economic opportunity, war, and civil unrest. The latter two have often either been fostered or exacerbated by the imposition of the core's political system of territorially bounded nation-states on populations previously organized around very different systems of political organization. The case of Lebanon is an illustration of this point. Lebanon began the twentieth century following the breakup of the Ottoman Empire as part of the Levant, a region that then combined both present-day Syria and Lebanon. Between the First and Second World Wars the Levant was governed through French mandate. During the Second World War, France divided the Levant into Syria and Lebanon and enabling them to become fully independent states. This division was seen as especially problematic by the Arab majority of the region because it gave a great deal of political power to Maronite Christians who had been arbitrarily turned into a majority by the drawing of territorial boundaries. Since independence, Lebanon has been a country beset by cultural divisions including rebellions, external attacks by Israel, and civil war between factions of Christian and Muslim militias. As of mid-2000, Lebanon has been enjoying a period of relative civil tranquility and a recent presidential election occurred in the absence of violence. The point of describing the Lebanese case in such detail, however, is to illustrate the difficult conditions that have compelled tens of thousands Lebanese people—both Christians and Muslims—to flee the country to escape the violence. British and American political involvement in Iran also resulted in flight for many Iranians. Never formally colonized, Iran's oil reserves were considered of great strategic importance to Britain and the U.S. in the postwar period. In the early 1950s, access to the oil reserves was perceived by them to be imperiled by Iran's democratically elected but mildly anti-western Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh because he had plans to nationalize the oil industry. Fearing a nationalized industry would cut off Britain, which had controlled Iran's oil through the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, Britain appealed to the U.S. to help oust Prime Minister Mossadegh from office. The ouster was supported by President Eisenhower and carried out by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency and British intelligence operators and Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlevi was returned to power. The virulent anti-western fervor that has circulated in Iran since the coup that ousted Mossadegh in 1953 and the revolution in 1979 that eventually deposed the Shah, is seen as a direct result of the interference of Britain and the U.S. in Iranian politics (Figure 5). Both events, but especially the fall of the Shah, resulted in the exodus of tens of thousands of Iranians to the United States, Britain, and Europe as well as several Middle Eastern countries like Egypt.

Figure 5. photo of Iranians in Los Angeles—cite Ali Modarres

Other significant instances of migration created in the postcolonial Middle Eastern and North Africa include the Kurds who have migrated in large numbers from Kurdistan to Turkey, Iraq, and Iran and in smaller numbers to Syria and Lebanon; Algerians, Tunisians and Moroccans, who have migrated mostly to Europe (see Geography Matters); Turks, who have followed a historical migration route to the Balkans and more recently to Germany; and Egyptians who have migrated to other Arab countries in the region as well as elsewhere in the world. The migrations of Turks and Egyptians, in large part, has occurred as educated and skilled workers have had to leave because economic growth is not able to keep up with population growth by providing high paying jobs. The artificial boundaries that were drawn around independent Iraq by the British in 1932, have also created fierce cultural tensions between the Shi'a and Sunni Muslim sects that have resulted in enduring political instability and, until the leadership of Saddam Hussein who has prohibited emmigration, migration was one response to the impacts of this instability on daily life.

The most dramatic instance of massive emigration is that of the Palestinians that began to occur when Israel became a state in 1948. Today Palestinians form the largest diasporic population in the world with hundreds of thousands living outside the region altogether, while others live in various parts of the region, often in refugee camps such as the one pictured in **Figure 5**. We discuss more of the background to the Palestinian diaspora and the current situation in Israel and the Occupied Territories in a later section of this chapter.

Figure 5. map of Palestinian refugee camps—the Guardian 10/14/00

Geography Matters: Maghreb Workers in France

Cities and Human Settlement

The predominant pattern of settlement in the Middle East and North Africa is a relatively small number of very large cities and a very great number of small rural settlements. Variation on this broad generalization among countries in the region is dramatic. Israel is mostly an urban country with 90 per cent of its population living in cities. Sudan is largely a rural country with only x percent of the population living in cities. The most relevant point about contemporary urbanization in the region is that cities are growing dramatically each year as more and more migrants come to live in them. While only about fifty years ago, most people in the region lived in small scattered rural settlements. Independence and the economic development of the oil economy, however, over the last fifty years, have been important underlying factors in the increasing urbanization of the population as it enters the twenty-first century.

As alluded to in the previous section on early empires, the Middle East and North African has a long and distinguished urban history. Cities here have been important centers of religious authority and have played pivotal roles in trade networks and have reflected the complex culture that created them (see *Geography Matters: the Islamic city*). In the early twenty-first century, cities in the region continue play central administrative roles—though now their political significance is as important, if not more so, than their religious consequence. And while trade continues to be crucial to city building—especially oil-related trade—other economic sectors are also important stimuli to urbanization including processing and manufacturing and services. What has been most remarkable about contemporary urbanization in the region is that its rapid pace has led to the emergence of one or two very large cities that disproportionately dominate their respective countries in terms of size of population as well as political and economic influence. The rapid pace and extreme degree of urbanization in the region can be traced to the migration of rural people in search of economic opportunity in the city as well as to natural increase among resident urban dwellers. **Figure 5**. lists the major cities of the Middle East and North African region. Cities like Cairo, with nearly 11 million inhabitants and Istanbul with just over 9 million are in the top ten of the world's largest cities.

Geography Matters: the Islamic City

Figure 5. list of the ten largest cities in the region—deblij, p. 298

As in other parts of the periphery, rapid urbanization has severe consequences. One of the most ubiquitous problems of rapid urbanization in the periphery is the inability of governments to meet the service and housing needs of growing urban populations. As a result, there is inadequate and often poor quality water supplies, electricity, sewer systems, clinics, and schools as well as poor air quality and severe traffic congestion (Sense of Place:). Most critically, governments seem unable to provide housing for all who need it and squatter settlements have resulted on unclaimed or unoccupied urban land (**Figure 5**). Unfortunately, the very largest cities in the region continue to draw in even more migrants who see the most well known places as possessing the best opportunities for a better life. These primate cities continue to grow in disproportion to other urban places compounding the severity of their problems. On the other hand, rapid urban growth in a few of the very wealthy oil producing countries such as Jubail (Saudi Arabia) and Doha (Oman) has resulted in impressively modern cities with few of the urban problems of their neighbors. Their enormous wealth, coupled with their very low populations has made the growth of some of their urban places a relatively uncomplicated process (**Figure 5.**) Many of the other cities of the oil producing region including Jidda (Saudi Arabia) and Basra (Iraq), however, have not escaped the erection of shantytowns and the difficult social problems that accompany this type of urban change.

Figure 5. photo of a squatter settlement in the region

Figure 5. photo of Abu Dhabai or Manama (Bahrain) showing its modern structures

Sense of Place: a squatter settlement--Use Knox and Marston for a description of the squatter settlements in the region, especially Turkey—could also add the problem of rapid growth and the impact of the earthquake on buildings.

The peoples of the Middle East and North Africa are highly diverse occupying an ancient region with complex history and environment. As mentioned, water is a critical variable in shaping where people live. Religion is also a very central force in shaping social interactions and fomenting conflict. Kinship and tribe play important roles as well as gender. There are many important and several very large cities that connect the region to the world system. Yet about half of the population, still lives in rural settlements, which, though a low figure, still makes the Middle East and North Africa more urbanized than other regions of the world such as South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. With a large population that derives its livelihoods mostly from agriculture, the region, generally speaking, is most heavily involved in international trade around primary products such as minerals, agricultural goods (cereals and grains, cotton, fruits and nuts). The most important of these products, as we will see in the following section, is oil and, in fact, the Middle East and North Africa possesses and trades more oil on the world market than any other region of the world. As we shall also see in the next section, despite its fantastic oil wealth, which is by no means widely distributed across the region, the Middle East and North Africa is still predominantly a peripheral region in the world economy.

Regional Change and Interdependence (3000)

During the twentieth century the countries of the Middle East and North Africa emerged from their colonial and dependent statuses with a range of economic and political problems that have made the twentieth century particularly challenging. Many Middle East experts believe that most of the political and economic problems of the region are a direct result of the drawing of artificial political boundaries that have united peoples who were previously antagonistic or divided peoples who were once unified. In fact, while the region has experienced wars and conflict for hundreds, if not thousands of years, and certainly well before the Europeans arrived, it is generally agreed that most of its present conflicts stem directly from either one of two things: the boundaries and borders created by the colonial powers and the strategic importance of the Middle East and North Africa to the political and economic interests of the core countries of the world-economy (**Figure 5**).

Figure 5. map of the colonization of the region

Remarkably, at the same time that the region has been the site for bitter and, in some instances seemingly irresolvable conflict, it has also been the site for a great deal of broad and sustained cooperation. The most significant unifying forces have been the religion of Islam and the Arabic language that have helped the vast majority of the peoples of the region to appreciate and aim to nurture their common cultural heritage. Moreover, these unifying forces have not only been important culturally, they have also helped many of the peoples of the region to recognize that they have common political and economic goals as well (**Figure 5**).

Figure 5. map of the cooperative organizations of the region

New Political Geographies and Regional Conflicts

As mentioned, the post-colonial political geography of the region is seen as one of the most serious challenges to stability and peace there. Extreme stereotypes suggest that most Arabs are terrorists or that Arabs in general are naturally bellicose people. It is important to recognize, however, that while terrorist organizations do exist in the region (as they do in all regions of the world) and that armed conflict has been a sad reality of life in many parts of the region, such characterizations are fundamentally false at the same time that they grossly simplify the region's political, economic, and social history. Both conservative and more radical observers of the region agree that the boundaries drawn by Britain, France, Spain, and Italy in the Middle East and North Africa have been the single most important source of contemporary conflicts in the region, many of which are decades old. It is very important therefore, to appreciate that our treatment of these conflicts in this text is meant to expose their structural sources so that they might be better understood not as stemming from the personal characteristics of the people who inhabit the region but from the difficult political situations they have inherited.

The most well-known of these regional conflicts either exacerbated or created by the colonial powers during their occupation of the region include: continuing tensions between Iran and Iraq and Iraq and Kuwait and the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian self-rule movement. This is by no means an

exhaustive list but one meant to represent the most highly publicized and the ones seen to be most threatening to international security. Other conflicts that are a legacy of the colonial past include Morocco's absorption of Western Sahara; the civil war in Lebanon; Turkey's persecution of its Kurdish minority; the Algerian nationalist movement; and Egyptian Islamists' persecution of the Coptic minority as well as militant minorities in Cyprus.

Tensions between Iran and Iraq and Iraq and Kuwait

The tensions that exist and the conflicts that have erupted between Iran and Iraq over the last quarter century are the result of a number of factors. Moreover, this fraught relationship remains unresolved today and is a source of continuing concern for the international community because both countries are important sources for global petroleum production. One reason for the tension between the two countries is the cultural differences between Persians (Iranians) and Arabs (Iraqis). Though the majority of Persians and Arabs are Muslim, their ethnic origins, language, geography and history are distinctly different. Furthermore, the Persians were unceremoniously conquered by the Arabs and converted to Islam in the seventh century. Since then both countries have a very long history of animosity that has been more recently complicated by their different dependent relationships with Britain and later the United States.

Three small islands at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, part of the British protectorate over eastern Arabia, were transferred to the United Arab Emirates by the British after that country became independent. The islands had historically been part of Iran, however, and in 1971, Iran seized them. Iraq pronounced this seizure an act of aggression and a violation of Arab sovereignty and encouraged the Arab population of Khuzestan Province to revolt against Iran. Less than a decade later, in 1980, war broke out between the two countries when Iraqi forces, in retaliation for Iranian artillery attacks and propaganda broadcasts against Iraq, occupied most of Iran's Khuzestan Province. Other points of tension occurred around Iran's support of the Kurdish guerillas who had been fighting the Iraqi government for autonomous control over their mountainous region. And Iraq angered Iran when it gave the anti-shah Ayatollah Khomeini asylum in 1963.

Yet another source of conflict has been a territorial dispute over the Shatt al-Arab, a xxx-kilometer (127-mile) stretch of water that connects the junction of the Tigres and Euphrates River to the Persian Gulf. Iraq controlled that part of the waterway but Iran claimed it. Iraq eventually ceded it to Iran in a treaty that forced Iran to cease supporting the Iraqi Kurds. Not long after the ceding of the Shatt al-Arab by Iraq to Iran however, President Saddam Hussein of Iraq came to regard it as an incident of humiliation and he vowed to force Iran to return it. Years of attacks and counterattacks have ensued over the Shatt al-Arab and other issues and the Persian Gulf War, in 1991, where United States' forces as well as troops from other countries including some Arab states, attacked Iraq for invading Kuwait (which it has argued was historically part of Iraq) is seen as the latest continuation of the animosity between the two countries. Although the war was a brief one, the international community has continued to be concerned over the conflictual relationship between Iraq and Iran and Iraq and Kuwait as together they possess one of the world's richest oil reserves.

The Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian self-rule movement

The history of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinians passionate desire for self-rule is a complex and highly volatile one despite all the local and international efforts that have been expended to bring peace to the region. The violence that erupted in Fall of 2000, just as the peace process seemed to be at its most promising, underscores the complexity of the problem and the difficulty of resolution. As with the Iran/Iraq/Kuwait case, the chief factors that have created this seemingly intractable political problem also lie in large part with British partitioning of the region. [See Lonely Planet for stuff on Sharm al-Sheikh memorandum](#) find a place to mention the Palestinian Authority

The official Jewish state of Israel is a mid-twentieth century construction that has its roots in the emergence of zionism, a late nineteenth century movement in Europe. **Zionism's** chief objective has been the establishment for the Jewish people of a legally recognized home in Palestine. Thousands of European Jews, inspired by the early zionist movement, began migrating to Palestine at the turn of the

nineteenth century. When the Ottoman Empire were defeated in 1917, the British gained control over Palestine and the Transjordan area and issued the **Balfour Declaration**, a commitment to encourage the “establishment of Palestine as a home for the Jewish people.” This commitment was a highly problematic one however, as indigenous peoples, the Palestinians, already occupied the area and viewed the arrival of increasing numbers of Jews as well as European sympathy for the establishment of a Jewish state as an incursion into the sacred lands of Islam. In response to increasing Arab-Jewish tensions in the area, the British decided to limit Jewish immigration to Palestine in the late 1930s through the end of the Second World War. In 1947, with conflict continuing between the two groups, Britain announced that it had despaired of ever resolving the problems and would withdraw from Palestine in 1948, turning it over to the United Nations when that happened. The United Nations, under heavy pressure from the United States, responded by voting to partition Palestine into Arab and Jewish states and designated Jerusalem as an international city, preventing either group from having exclusive control (**Figure 5**). The Jewish state was to have fifty-six per cent of mandate Palestine; an Arab state was to have forty-three per cent; and Jerusalem, a city sacred to Jews, Muslims, and Christians, was to be administered by the United Nations. The proposed United Nations plan was accepted by the Jews and angrily rejected by the Arabs who are argued that a mandate territory could not legally be taken from an indigenous population.

Figure 5. the division of Jerusalem

When Britain withdrew as promised in 1948, the partition lines that were drawn by the United Nations' Partition Plan were seen by both parties as non-binding and war broke out. In an attempt to aid the militarily weaker Palestinians, combined forces from Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon, as well as smaller units from Syria, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia confronted the Israelis. Their goal was not only to prevent the Jewish forces from gaining control over additional Palestinian territory but also to wipe out the newly formed Jewish state altogether. This war however, which came to be known as the first Arab-Israeli War, resulted in the defeat of the Arab forces in 1949 and armistice agreements that enabled Israel to expand nearly fifty per cent beyond the United Nations' plan gaining the western sector of Jerusalem, including the Old City (see **Figure 5**). In 1950, Israel declared Jerusalem its national capital, though very few countries have recognized this.

Israel maintained the new borders gained during the first Arab-Israeli War for another eighteen years until the Six-Day War in 1967 that resulted in further gains for Israel including the Sinai, the Golan Heights, and the southwestern corner of Syria. The eastern sector of Jerusalem, previously held by Jordan, was also annexed during the Six-Day War. As **Figure 5** shows, a long period of relatively little territorial change occurred until the 1970s and 1980s when Israel moved toward reconciliation with Egypt through a series of withdrawals that eventually returned all of the Sinai to Egyptian control by 1988.

Figure 5. map of the changing Israel—see 2nd ed. Knox/Marston

The territorial expansion of Israel has meant that hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have been driven from their homelands and today live as refugees either in other Arab countries in the region or under Israeli occupation in the West Bank, the Golan Heights, and the Gaza Strip (also known as the “occupied territories”) (**Figure 5**). The Arabs of the Middle East and many other international observers are convinced that Israel has no intention of allowing the diasporic Palestinian population to return to their homelands. By the late 1980s, in fact, Palestinians who had remained in their homeland, had become so angered by Israeli territorial aggression that they rose up in rebellion. This rebellion, known as the *intifada* (“uprising”) has involved frequent clashes between fully armed Israeli soldiers and rock-throwing Palestinian young men. The *intifada*, more than anything, is a reaction against thirty-two years of Israeli occupation of the Palestinian homeland and increasing Israeli settlement, particularly in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In addition to the *intifada*, other Palestinian groups have coalesced in opposition to the Israeli occupation. The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) was formed in 1964 as an organization devoted to returning Palestine to the Palestinians. Since its official recognition, the PLO has become The Palestinian Authority. The Palestinian Authority is seen as the only legitimate representative of the Palestinian people with Yasser Arafat as its chairman. Besides the Palestinian Authority, however, other, more extreme groups exist claiming to represent the Palestinian cause. One of the most well-known is Hamas (Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islmiyya or the Islamic Resistance Movement) whose activities are largely centered in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. [Mention jihad—p, 5 global](#)

Figure 5. map of the occupied territories—see Held for caption

Since the mid-1990s, hopes for peace in the region have risen, fallen, risen and most recently very decisively fallen once again. In October 2000, after weeks of very difficult, but promising, United States-

sponsored peace negotiations between Yasar Arafat, and Ehud Barak, the Israeli prime minister, violence broke out again in the West Bank. At the moment, there is little hope in Israel, the Occupied Territories or elsewhere that the Arab-Israeli conflict will be resolved anytime in the near future. Moreover, this conflict, as well as the conflict between Iraq and Iran, the civil war in Lebanon, and political unrest in other parts of the region make it very difficult for the countries involved to direct attention to the basic needs of its citizens, let alone the larger challenges of national economic development.

Regional Alliances

It is critically important to recognize that although the Middle East and North Africa is a region with more than its share of conflict, it is also one where a great deal of cooperation, coordination, and joint action exists. While there are many more cooperative organizations—political, economic, and cultural—operating in the region, we highlight only a few representative ones here.

Organized in 1945, the Arab League is a voluntary association of Arab states whose peoples are mainly Arabic speaking. Formally known as the League of Arab States, it is the most unifying of all the Middle East and North African regional organizations. The stated purposes of the Arab League are to strengthen ties among member states, coordinate their policies, and promote their common interests. The league is involved in various economic, cultural, and social programs, including literacy campaigns and programs dealing with labor issues. It is also a very high profile political organization that acts as an important sounding board on conflicts in the region such as the Gulf War and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The league was founded by Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Transjordan (Jordan, as of 1950), and Yemen. Other countries of the Middle East and North Africa who later joined the Arab League are: Algeria (1962), Bahrain (1971), Kuwait (1961), Morocco (1958), Oman (1971), Qatar (1971), Sudan (1956), Tunisia (1958), and the United Arab Emirates (1971). The PLO was admitted in 1976. In 1979, Egypt's membership was suspended after it signed a peace treaty with Israel but it was readmitted ten years later.

Another central and widely known regional organization, this one based on economic interests, is the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries or OPEC. While organizations like the Council of Arab Economic Unity deal with every aspect of economic development and change, OPEC, as its name suggests, is a specialist economic organization. OPEC's central purpose is to coordinate the crude-oil policies of its member states. Founded in 1960, OPEC has 12 members--Algeria, Gabon, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Nigeria, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Venezuela—five of which are not part of the Middle East and North African region. As clear from the list, however, Middle Eastern Arab states dominate the membership. OPEC originally formed in response to the the dropping price of oil in the 1950s when supply greatly outstripped demand. In the 1970s, as oil supplies in non-OPEC countries were reduced, the organization raised the price of oil. OPEC also sets production ceilings that specify how much oil may be produced by each member country. This practice ensures that the price per barrel does not fluctuate dramatically due to market gluts or scarcity.

Complementing as well as contrasting with the goals and objectives of OPEC is the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The GCC coordinates political, economic, and cultural issues of concern to its six member states including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman. The members of the GCC have come together in order to exert a coordinated effort over the management of their substantial income from their oil reserves, problems of economic development, and social problems, trade, and security issues. All six of the states in the GCC are politically conservative monarchies wary of the revolutionary republican urges that have swept the region and transformed the previous monarchies of Egypt, Iran, and Iraq, for instance. The GCC has made very large sums of money available for all Arab countries for economic development as well as military protection during political crises.

Many other important regional and international organizations have been coordinated in the Middle East and North Africa. Additionally, some individual states have also begun to attempt to make connections with organizations beyond the region tying the Middle East and North Africa more securely to the rest of the globe. For instance, Turkey has applied for full membership in the European Union, though there are significant political barriers to achieving this. Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan, and Israel have also signed agreements, so-called "Euro-Med" agreements, with the European Union that are leading to increased transnational integration beyond the region. While some critics argue that extra-regional alliances may erode unique regional identities or diminish local control over local processes, others argue that transnational integration beyond the region may increase political stability and decrease conflict. At this point it is unclear whether either or both might be true. What is true is that the cooperation brought on by

the vast oil wealth of some states as well as the violent conflict brought on by cultural differences has contributed to increasing the gap between rich and poor in the region.

Economic Development and Social Inequality

The Middle East and North Africa is a region of extreme contrasts of wealth and poverty. For example, the country with the highest per capita income in the region is Israel, at \$18,000 in the year 2000; the lowest per capita income in the region is Yemen at \$740. Not surprisingly, however, national figures like per capita income, hide all sorts of variation within different regions—often times between the city and the rural areas—but also even within the same region where dramatic variation can occur between one urban neighborhood to the next. While Israel is the exception, most of the extreme wealth of the region comes from oil-based revenues to the states of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iran, Iraq, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. Despite the phenomenal wealth generated from oil-production for some parts of the region, most of the Middle East and North Africa remains poor and highly dependent on an increasingly marginalized agricultural sector.

The integration of the region into the global capitalist economy has brought increased wealth for some but also increased poverty or reduced living standards for many others, even in the wealthy oil-producing states. In the 1930s, entrepreneurial states such as Turkey and Egypt adopted import substitution industrialization strategies. After the Second World War, more comprehensive and aggressive approaches to state-led development were also undertaken, often informed by populist nationalism and anti-imperialist political discourses. Iran, Turkey, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Tunisia, and Algeria were foremost among the Middle East and North African states who adopted the approach of nationalist economic development. The explicit goal of the nationalist approach was to improve the standard of living of working people but especially peasants in rural communities. The nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian oil company, undertaken by the Iranian Prime Minister Muhammad Mossadegh and mentioned in a previous section of this chapter, is an illustration of this trend. While the nationalization policies in the region did help to expand the public sector they had an urban bias to them. As a result, the main beneficiaries were urban people—industrial, clerical, and service workers—and poor rural people's lives either stayed the same or deteriorated, although some middle class peasants did benefit from land reforms that helped to expand their holdings.

Eventually, states in the Middle East and North Africa, began to turn away from the economic nationalism development schemes as their economies began to stagnate and standards of living declined. Under pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the U.S. Agency for International Development to address the problem of mounting national debt in order to qualify for new loans and reschedule old debts, states of the region were forced to initiate stabilization and structural adjustment programs, also known as neoliberal policies (see Chapter 2, p. 000). The typical stabilization and structural adjustment programs raised the cost of food and other necessities, cut government spending on social programs, and generally reduced investments in the public sector. The impact of these programs was felt most directly and significantly by urban workers, government bureaucrats, and people on fixed incomes. While the rural peasantry was expected to benefit from these neoliberal policies because consumer subsidies were dismantled and markets were privatized (allowing market-based prices for goods and the opportunity to market crops more freely), capitalist farmers have been the main beneficiaries of neo-liberalism. Thus, the impact of neoliberal policies has been to into motion a whole new set of forces in the Middle East and North Africa that have improved the lives of some but have mostly lowered the living standards as well as the expectation for a better life for urban workers as well as peasants. Furthermore, populations in the region are becoming increasingly urbanized as rural people move to the cities to find employment. Unfortunately, when they arrive there they are confronted with a situation of the decreased public service provision, not only in terms of schools and health care but also in terms of the most basic necessities like adequate housing and clean water. As a result, many live in squatter settlements without sanitation and eke out a living in informal sector economic activities.

In addition to the impact that neo-liberalism has had on increasing the levels of inequality in the region it is also important to point out that other forces are at work in limiting the life chances and standards of living of the regions' population. For example, refugees and many migrant workers face very difficult economic circumstances. We have mentioned the difficult situation of Palestinian refugees living in

temporary camps throughout the region. Since the first refugees left in 1949, as many as 2 million Palestinians have been displaced to refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. Many individuals have been born and grown up in these camps, originally intended as temporary settlements, where basic provisions are poor. Other large refugee populations live in camps in Iran, which shelters nearly one and a half million Afghan refugees and 600,000 Iraqis, and Sudan where 4 million displaced Sudanese people live outside their home territories. Migrant workers imported into the oil-rich states of the Persian Gulf as guest workers, though receiving much higher wages than they would in their home countries, have substantially lower standards of living than the resident Arab populations.

Finally, the many conflicts that have occurred and are occurring throughout the region can also economically dislocate resident populations increasingly disadvantage for those who are socially or politically weak. For example, the civil war in Lebanon, which lasted for over sixteen years and ended in 1991 is a sad but accurate illustration of the toll that conflict exacts on ordinary people who are involuntarily caught up in the violence. Lebanon, before its civil war was one of the most economically developed countries in the region with a highly literate, entrepreneurial, and modernized economy and society. But Lebanon is also a diverse multiethnic society. Hostile minority groups, forced to live and work within the same state boundaries by the colonial decree, contributed to ethnic conflict that helped to drive the country into protracted political and economic chaos. The result was a dramatic decrease in the standard of living of a large proportion of the Lebanese population. It has now been ten years since the end of the civil war and the country has begun to recover. Unemployment, however, is still extremely high (18 percent) though the agricultural sector, the mainstay of the economy, is nearly revived. While much of the Lebanese middle class was able to survive the civil war through investing their savings in foreign banks, poorer farm laborers were particularly hard hit.

Core Regions and Key Cities

As we have already discussed, the Middle East and North Africa is a region of dramatic contrasts with high technology industrial production existing side by side with ancient agricultural techniques. The core regions within the Middle East and North Africa are those whose economies are the most dynamic and productive and effectively set the pace economically, and to some extent politically, for the rest of the Middle East and North Africa. The two core regions of the Middle East and North Africa are the Oil States and the Eastern Mediterranean Crescent.

The Oil States

The Oil States subregion of the Middle East and North African includes Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Although Yemen, Algeria, and Libya are also regional oil-producing states, their situations are substantially different from the other eight states. Yemen's oil reserves are only newly discovered and it has yet to be able to exploit them to the level that its other Gulf Peninsula neighbors have. Algeria has substantial oil reserves but a far more mixed economy than the states along the Persian Gulf. Its history as a French colony, also sharply differentiates it from the others. Libya, like Algeria is part of North Africa and its economy is not solely oil based and its colonial as well as its modern political history make it an exceptional case. Whereas the once vibrant agricultural economies of the Oil States have been largely eroded by an emphasis on petroleum production, Algeria and Libya continue to possess productive agricultural sectors in addition to profiting from their oil reserves.

The Gulf Peninsula, on which all but two of the Oil States sit, is an area heavily dominated by the presence of huge reserves of oil—so huge, it is estimated, that Saudi Arabia alone may possess one-quarter of the world's known reserves. Saudi Arabia is the controlling political and economic force on the peninsula that was, until the early twentieth century, occupied mostly by rural villagers and nomadic peoples. After Saudi Arabia, Iraq possesses about 10 per cent of the world's known reserves, Kuwait about 9 per cent, the United Arab Emirates 7 per cent, and Iran about 6 per cent. Oil production is the mainstay of each of the Oil States' subregional economy and contributes substantial revenues to each of the national economies. In some of the individual Oil States, revenues from oil production are so substantial that their respective national governments have a difficult time determining where to spend them. An embarrassment of oil riches hardly seems a problem anyone would seriously mind having. Yet it is a problem and one that has a number of different facets to it. One facet is that a nearly exclusive

dependence on one economic sector, and only one product within that sector, leaves the economy of such a state highly vulnerable to fluctuations in the demand for oil. For example, in the 1980s, a period of sustained expansion in the oil economy came to an end as more fuel efficient vehicles and energy conservation measures, as well as the substitution of cheaper fuels for oil occurred. At the same time the world entered a period of economic recession, partly in response to high oil prices. As a result oil profits fell dramatically with implications for the Oil States moving like a wave through their economies.

In an exclusively oil-based economy when prices fall, there is nothing to fall back on to bring new revenues into the economy to either substitute for or replace the decreasing profits from oil. In fact, for much of the early history of oil production in the region, the Oil States were content to use their wealth to benefit the friends and families of the ruling elite. Instead of investing in national infrastructure or developing human resources, these groups invested their wealth abroad or spent their money on luxurious living. As a result, the economies of the subregion until fairly recently, have been exceedingly vulnerable to falling oil prices. Recognizing this, all of the Oil States on the Gulf Peninsula have begun to diversify their economies. Some are attempting to introduce new industries such as textile production and food processing plants. Others are developing port facilities. Still others are resuscitating or introducing agriculture, though the scarcity of water regionally makes this an enormous technological challenge for all but the states of Iraq and Iran. Yet, while large scale, irrigated agriculture is a costly undertaking for any of the Gulf Peninsula Oil States, the feeling among them is that food is as much of a security issue as oil is. As a scene in the recent Hollywood movie about the Gulf War—*Three Kings*—made clear, while oil can make you very wealthy, when all is said and done, you can't eat it.

Another less obvious problem that the abundance of oil wealth has generated in the Oil States is the dislocation of traditional social and economic systems as western ideas have penetrated the region through the introduction of television and other consumer goods. The importation of migrants labor from other parts of the Middle East and North Africa to work in the oil industry or in the related jobs enabled by it, has also tended to disrupt the local traditions as new migrants have brought their rather different cultures along with them. As participation in the Oil States' increased global economy has brought the region in closer contact with the west as well as less the distant cultures, the stress exerted on the local culture has sometimes resulted in a retreat to more conservative interpretations of Islam among the Oil States.

The enormous wealth of the Oil States has made them a global economic player to be reckoned with. Understanding that power, the Oil States have spent at least two decades augmenting it with more military strength improving their armies and purchasing sophisticated weaponry on the world arms market. **Figure 5** shows the flow of arms and related weaponry into the region through both legal and illegal purchases. When Israel is included in the calculations in Figure 5. it becomes clear that the Middle East region in general and the Oil States in particular possess a large quantity of highly destructive potential in the world military theater. Thus far, however, the new sophisticated weaponry has tended to be used largely within the region, against old rivals, rather than beyond the region.

Figure 5 map of arms flow to Middle East

Even without materiel, the Oil States remain important players on the global stage for at least two additional reasons. First, many of the world states are highly dependent upon them for Gulf oil. Without petroleum from the Oil States, the ability of a large portion of the rest of the world to maintain productive economies would be severely hampered. Second, the impact of **petrodollars**—revenues generated by the sale of oil—are especially significant for the core economies of the world system where they are spent, invested, and banked. The Oil States of the Middle East are likely to continue to occupy a central role in the affairs of the region as well as the affairs of the core countries where guaranteeing a secure supply of oil is absolutely central to the smooth functioning of the global economy.

Riyadh

Riyadh is the capital city of Saudi Arabia, a country that is one of the world's top three oil producers. A modern city—built on the ruins of an old walled city—Riyadh has been the capital of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia since 1932 (**Figure 5**). Riyadh is situated on a high plateau in the Najd region of the central Arabian Peninsula. Although designated as the capital of the Sa'ud dynasty in 1824, the city lost this status in 1881 when the Rashid family extended its control over the Najd. Ibn Sa'ud was able to regain control of Riyadh in 1902 and used the city as the command center for his eventual conquest of all of

Arabia, completed in 1930. The unified Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was proclaimed in 1932 and Riyadh became its capital. Although it has officially been the capital for nearly seventy years, only in the last generation has Riyadh truly functioned as the capital, having been eclipsed by Jeddah, formerly the premier Saudi city. In the last three decades, however, the headquarters of the Saudi government have been moved to Riyadh, helping to confirm it as the practical as well as the symbolic center of the largest country in the Persian Gulf.

Figure 5. photo of Riyadh

Although at that time the capital in name only, the discovery of vast petroleum deposits in Saudi Arabia in the 1930s helped to generate the wealth that transformed Riyadh from an old provincial town into a modern urban place. Once a cluster of mud-brick dwellings in a desert oasis, Riyadh is now home to over three and a half million people occupying a sprawling city of flashy contemporary buildings, wide boulevards, modern hospitals and schools, huge shopping centers that blend the best of American style malls and Middle Eastern *souqs* (traditional markets), and the national airport. As the epicenter of the Saudi oil economy, the population, once exclusively Najdi, is now quite cosmopolitan including a large number of other Arab nationals, Europeans, Americans, and Afro-Asians. In fact, most of the private sector and government jobs are actually held by foreigners. In addition to its administrative role, Riyadh is also the kingdom's commercial and higher educational center with an industrial base devoted almost entirely to oil production. While Riyadh is a classic example of the impact of oil wealth on urbanization in the region, other cities that also demonstrate this pattern include Abu Dhabi (UAE), Doha (Qatar), and Kuwait City (Kuwait).

Sense of Place: Mecca

Tehrān

Tehrān is the capital and largest city of Iran. It is located in the northern part of the country, on a high, sandy plateau surrounded by the majestic, snow-covered Elburz Mountains. It has a population of nearly seven million people and acts as the administrative center of the country's enormous crude-oil industry. Tehrān became an important place in 1220 when it survived the sacking of the ancient city of Rayy by the Mongols. At the time, Tehran was a small suburb of Rayy, founded as early as 300 AD. Over the centuries it grew slowly but steadily. In 1788, Agha Mohammad Khan, founder of the Kajar dynasty, made Tehrān the capital of Persia. Beginning in 1925, when the Pahlavi dynasty came to power in Iran, Tehrān was modernized, industrialized, and considerably rebuilt.

Today, Tehran contains a population of about 7 million. In the last two or three decades Tehran has experienced rapid growth, most of which has occurred in the northern part where a sprawling residential region extends to the foothills of the Elburz Mountains. The factories and the older sections are in the southern part of the city. At the center of Tehrān are two beautiful 19th century squares, Sepāh and Ferdowsi. Located nearby are the important government buildings and several mosques and palaces.

The Eastern Mediterranean Crescent

The Eastern Mediterranean Crescent, made up of Egypt, Turkey, Lebanon, and to some extent Israel, constitutes something of an awkward but compelling clustering of states. It is awkward largely because none of the states view themselves as regionally coherent. It is compelling because among them, the four states either already have demonstrated or have the potential to be regional economic success stories. The greatest differences exist between Egypt, Turkey, and Lebanon on the one hand, and Israel on the other. While Egypt, Turkey, and Lebanon have had strong agricultural bases for hundreds, if not thousands of years, Israel's commitment to agriculture is more recent. Furthermore, while the former three employ agriculture as a major source of export revenues, for Israel, agricultural production is more about achieving national food security, though foodstuffs are also exported. Finally, while Egypt, Turkey, and Lebanon are just beginning to encourage more industrial development—some more successfully than others—Israel already possesses a strong industrial base that is fairly diverse but receives a great deal of income from high technology production.

So why include Israel if it is really more different from than similar to the other three states. The problem is that Israel doesn't really fit anywhere very comfortably. As mentioned, Israel is a Jewish state in a predominantly Arab region (though Turkey is not Arabic either). Its economy generates the highest GNP in the region, even higher than the Oil States. It possesses a military that is as highly trained and technologically equipped as any European country. Yet, while Israel is really not like any of its neighbors, it is too important politically, culturally, or economically to be ignored. One reason for including Israel in the Eastern Mediterranean Crescent is that it functions as a kind of pacesetter for the other three who are anxious to be more active players in the contemporary global economy. And there are important similarities among the four states as well. For instance, all four possess more of a European orientation than many of their neighbors, certainly more so than the Oil States. All four have a sizable middle class that has been important to their political stability. And all four have the potential, because of their resource endowments, to continue to build a diverse economic base. While Israel, coupled with any of the other three states would make strange bedfellows, and strong political and cultural differences have tended to prevent all four of these countries from acting in concert, there is much to suggest that cooperation would be mutually beneficial. The main reason for clustering these four countries together is that they appear to possess the necessary ingredients to be important players in the world economy because of their histories, their economies, and because they all have played important roles in regional politics.

Turkey and Egypt are two states in the Eastern Mediterranean Crescent that once controlled long-lasting, influential, and extensive world empires. Although neither was colonized by Europe, both were protectorates and both labored under the conditions of a foreign bureaucracy, though Egypt longer than Turkey. Presently, both states have similarly sized populations—Egypt with around 67 million and Turkey with around 65 and a half million—and both are burdened with the problems that large national populations present to economic development. While Turkey possesses a fairly diversified economy with a strong agricultural sector and substantial mineral wealth, national agriculture in Egypt is built upon a fairly narrow base, largely due to the environmental constraints of the desert. Both have significant manufacturing capacity across a range of products from food processing to heavy machinery.

The final important player in the Eastern Mediterranean Crescent is Lebanon. Lebanon possesses a strong agricultural base and was, for many years before its civil war, an important banking and financial center for the Middle East and North Africa connecting it to the core of Europe and North America. It wasn't until the early 1990s, however, that Lebanon began to recover from the serious political problems that civil war unleashed. Given its previous history as "the Paris of the Middle East" there is reason to be optimistic that Lebanon, under its recently elected president, can regain some of its former economic and political power and become an important force in the region once again.

Finally the four states of the Eastern Mediterranean Crescent possess the most important cities of the Middle East and North Africa. Cairo, in Egypt, Istanbul in Turkey, Beirut in Lebanon, and Tel-Aviv in Israel are all critically important nodes in the urban system of the world economy enabling capital, ideas, and people to come together. Because capital is so highly urbanized under the current conditions of globalization, these four cities serve to integrate the Middle East and North African region more directly and securely into the global economy.

Cairo

Cairo is Egypt: so say all the travel guides. Even the Egyptians believe this is the case as *Masr* is the name used by them for both. Arabs everywhere consider Cairo the semi-mythical capital of their world. Cairo, this so-called, "Mother of the World," is the capital of Egypt and the largest city in Africa. Located on both sides of the Nile River near its delta in northern Egypt, Cairo is a city that visitors either love or hate, but few are ever indifferent (**Figure 5**).

Figure 5. photo of Cairo

The history of Cairo reflects the history of the region, which is one of conquest and change. The origins of Cairo go back to early fourth millennium BC when Memphis was the capital of Egypt. As the city of Memphis grew, it spread along the east bank of the Nile. In x, the Roman conquerors constructed the city of Babylon there. When the Fatimids, a dissident branch of Muslims, conquered Egypt in 969 AD, they established their headquarters in the city calling it Al Qahira (Cairo). When the Marmalukes conquered the region in the thirteenth century, they too established Cairo as their capital and the city became

renowned throughout Africa, Europe, and Asia. In 1517, the Ottomans conquered Cairo and ruled Egypt from there until 1798 when Napoleon I took possession of it. The Ottomans were able to regain control of Cairo in 1801, but after a few decades, Egypt's sizable foreign debt and the increasing dissolution of the Ottoman Empire paved the way for British influence in the region that continued until the end of the First World War in 1918. The post-war period marked the beginning of Cairo's rapid population growth which continues, seemingly unabated, today.

Sixteen million people live in Cairo, overburdening the city with the world's highest density of people per square kilometer. In central Cairo, traffic crawls along the city's narrow streets; buildings' pediments hug the streets' edge leaving little room for pedestrians to pass; and in the narrow walkways between buildings, pedestrians jostle for space. In addition to being the administrative capital of Egypt, Cairo is also a port and the chief commercial and industrial center of the country where cotton textiles, food products, construction supplies, motor vehicles, aircraft, and chemical fertilizers are produced. It is also the cultural center of Egypt.

As Figure 5. shows, the heart of the city is the river island of Zamalik where three bridges link the island to the mainland on both sides of the river's bank. Scores of novels about Cairo have used this backdrop as the setting for passionate scenes—both political and personal. Though located within close range of the Pyramids, Cairo was not built by the Pharaohs but by the Fatimid dynasty in 969 A.D. Much of the city that the Fatimids built, has survived, including the Fatimid mosque, Al-Azhar University, the oldest in the Islamic world, and the three great city gates of Bab An-Nasr, Bab al-Futuh, and Bab Zuweila.

The neighborhoods of Islamic Cairo are located on the east bank of the Nile where the streets are especially narrow and the bazaars especially crowded. Hundreds of mosques populate the neighborhoods of Islamic Cairo, which is perhaps why the area is known as Islamic Cairo, since it is no more or less Islamic than the rest of the city. To the south of Islamic Cairo is Old Cairo, home to many of the oldest architectural monuments in the city. Cairo's Coptic Christian community also occupies much of Old Cairo where mosques are scarce and Coptic churches dominate the landscape.

Cairo continues to maintain its regional significance as the most important city in the Islamic world. As such, its influence also projects outward connecting the rest of the world to the Middle East and North Africa. Although an important world city for political and economic reasons, Cairo faces very serious social and economic problems. The arrival of thousands of new migrants each month from rural areas as well as other parts of the region has been unanswered by any sort of additional housing provision. The city and the country find themselves simply unable to meet the land and housing needs of newly arriving migrants. The usual problems accompany inadequate provision including the inability to provide schools, hospitals, and other social services for its enormous population. As a result, new arrivals to the city must find alternatives to traditional housing. Some sleep on the streets. Others take over abandoned buildings of land that is underutilized. The most famous example of alternative uses are the thousands of people who live among the tombs and sarcophagi of one of Cairo's oldest cemeteries. Known as the City of the Dead, this cemetery, intermingled with houses and apartment buildings, is now occupied by nearly one million living residents.

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Geography Matters: The Nile

Day in the Life: Paul Kaldjian

Distinctive Regions and Landscapes (4000-5000)

The Maghreb

The Maghreb is the region of northwest Africa that contains the coastlands and Atlas Mountains of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. Its people, history, and geography make it a distinctive region. As **Figure 5.** shows, the Maghreb is a fairly narrow area running west to east along the Mediterranean Sea and south into the Atlas Mountains that form a barrier between the coast and the Sahara Desert. Within the narrow band, the region enjoys a moderate, Mediterranean climate, with cool wet winters and hot dry summers. Agriculture thrives here, as well as tourism. Within this region are located famous cities of

Tripoli, Casablanca, Tangiers, and the Barbary Coast: places of heroics, and legend, and Hollywood-style glamour that conjure in the imagination a landscape of mythic and romantic appeal.

Figure 5. map of the Maghreb

The Maghreb does have a unique, and perhaps even a legendary history that differentiates it, not only from the rest of Africa but also from the Middle East. In ancient times, the region was influenced by the Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans, Christians, Vandals, and Byzantines and then finally by the Arabs, who in the late 7th century AD converted the populace to Islam. While much of the material history of that period has been destroyed or built over, important remnants do remain. For instance in Tunisia, Phoenician merchants founded a number of trading posts several thousand years ago. The most important one was Carthage, founded in 814 B.C. When the Romans defeated the Phoenicians, this area was incorporated into the Roman Empire providing wheat and other commodities to the population in Rome. The ruins of Carthage lie in a suburb of present day Tunis, the capital of Tunisia (**Figure 5.**).

Figure 5. photo of Carthaginian ruins in Tunis

During the most recent period of imperialism millions of Europeans, primarily French, but also Spanish and Italian, flocked to the Maghreb and influenced its government, architecture, and language, especially in the city of Algiers which contained most of the colonials. Europeans also inhabited Casablanca and Tunis in significant numbers and formed a professional class that introduced many of the local elites to European cultural practices. In the early to mid-twentieth century, thousands of young people from the Maghreb went off to have university educations on the continent and returned to the Maghreb with the seeds of nationalist ideology planted in their hearts and minds. Many of these individuals played important roles in the independence movements that occurred throughout the Maghreb.

In addition to possessing important material remnants of the ancient world, the region is also home to the Berber, a people of ancient origin who preceded the Carthaginians and the Romans and who still live in the region today (*A Day in the Life: a Berber*). The Berber appear to be indigenous to the Maghreb region, though in more recent times, those who are attempting to maintain their traditional ways of life have tended to live in the mountains and deserts, away from the increasingly populated coastal area. The Barbary Coast—part of the Maghreb region—a name derived from the word *Berber*, became famous as a base of Arab and Berber pirates who launched attacks on Spanish and other European fleets as well as, at one point, the United States.

A Day in the Life: Berber

The Western Sahara

What makes the Western Sahara unique is the fact that as a former Spanish colony, instead of achieving independence like most of the other former colonies of the region did in the mid-twentieth century, it was handed over to Morocco and incorporated as a province by the Moroccan state partially in the 1976, and completely by 1987. The population of this coastal area is just 200,000. The landscape is one of a wind-swept, flat, and monotonous desert where temperatures routinely reach 120 degrees Fahrenheit in the summer. Before the twentieth century, the area of Western Sahara was outside the control of any central political or military authority and considered a geographical backwater. Other than some important phosphate deposits and off-shore fishing rights, the Western Sahara would seem to be a resource poor area and not obviously desirable as a territorial acquisition. Yet the Moroccans are aggressively determined to keep possession of Western Sahara, just as the Saharawis, as the people of Western Sahara are known, are determined to become independent. As in the Maghreb, a few Saharawis went to Spain in the early twentieth century, received a modern university education, and came back to the region with ideas of national independence. At present, the Western Saharan resistance movement operates under the aegis of the Polisario Front (an acronym for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia al-Hara and Rio de Oro, the two divisions of the former Spanish colony).

In 1976, Polisario declared the formation of the Saharawi Arab Democratic republic (SADR), “a free, independent, sovereign state ruled by an Arab democratic system of progressive unionist orientation and of Islamic religion.” While many of the African states have officially recognized the Saharawi Republic, Morocco has refused to acknowledge it and renounce control over it. After appeals to other states of the Maghreb for support and for the United Nations to intercede to enforce a cease-fire, a United Nations sponsored referendum was to be held so that residents of Western Sahara could determine their fate through the ballot box. The United States secretary of state James Baker also attempted to work out a

plan for full sovereignty over the area by the Saharawis. Although the United Nations referendum was to take place in March 2000, it was postponed, and no resolution to the dispute currently in sight.

Summary and Conclusions

In this chapter we examined the complex Middle East and North African region. We discussed the regions unique physical geography and environmental history, the ancient origins of the region, the power of Islam and other religions and the particular cultural and gender systems that have emerged there, and the special political tensions that the role that exist there.

The significance of the Middle East and North Africa to the rest of the world is substantial. This region is a primary, if not the primary, site of the origins of western civilization and its influence on world culture, politics, and technology has been phenomenal. As the possessor of the lion's share of the world's oil reserves, the region is also strategically critical to the continued function of the global economy. While the region appears to be one in a state of economic transition, it is hard to predict what role political conflict might play in influencing its progress. While perhaps one of the least well understood of the world's regions, the Middle East and North Africa remain among its most complex as well as politically, culturally, and economically significant.

Key Terms

Exercises

Further Reading

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