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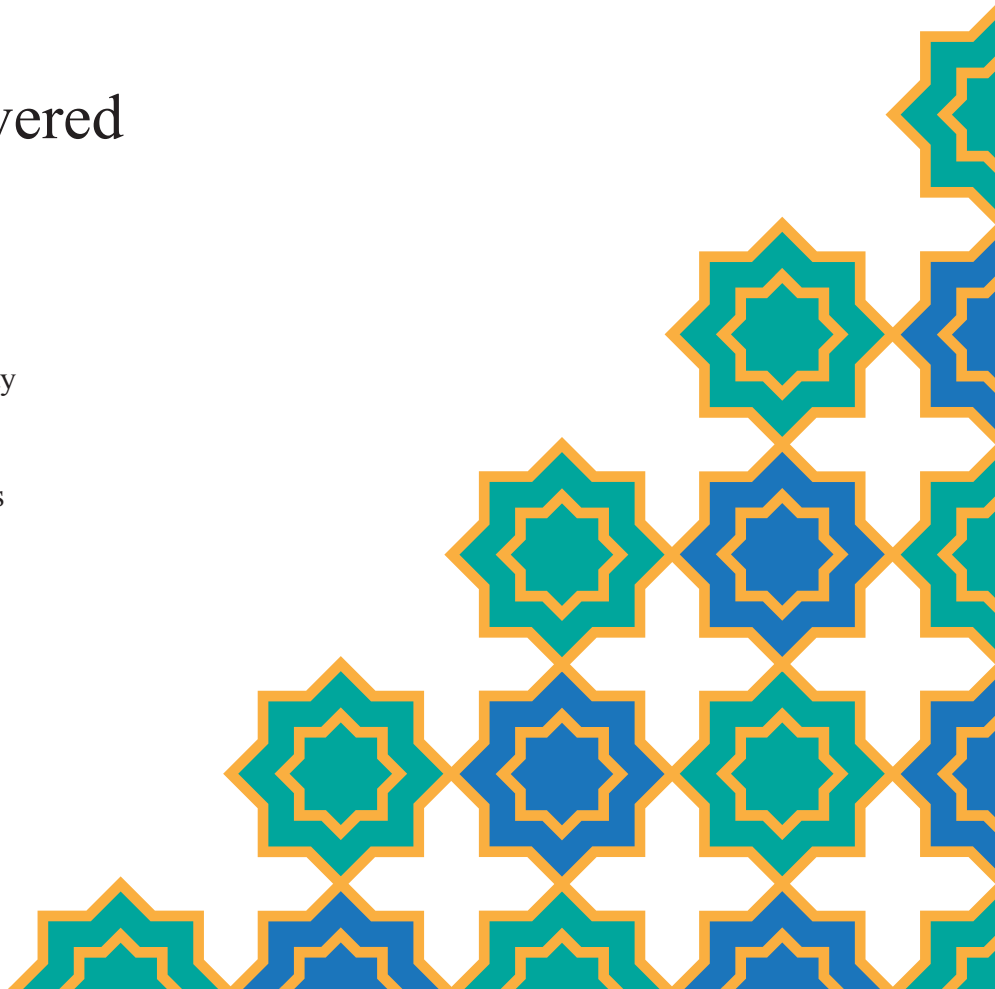
On the Eve of Islam

In This Chapter

Historically and culturally Islam may be said to have had two major roots. The best known of these is in the soil of central Arabia, where Muhammad carried out his mission. This will be considered in the next chapter. In this chapter we will consider the other root, which is in the lands north and east of Arabia, from Iran to Greece to Egypt and Ethiopia, what we here call the Hellenistic-Iranian world. The political face of this world was relatively simple, with two major “super-powers” but the religious and cultural face was extremely diverse with a multitude of religions, sects and philosophies and numerous ethnic groups. Islam was to prove in some respects a major break with this civilization but in others an heir to it and at continuation of it.

Main Topics Covered

- Two “superpowers”
- Religion in Iran
- Byzantine Christianity
- Other forms of Christianity
- Jews and Samaritans
- Gnostics and philosophers
- The Axial Age





Map 1 The Hellenistic-Iranian world

Two “superpowers”

On the eve of Islam much of the land north and east of Arabia was divided between two large empires, the Persian [Sasanians](#) and the [Byzantines](#), two regional superpowers, we might say. The Sasanian empire had been founded about 246 B.C.E. and was quite consciously heir to a Persian imperial tradition going back to Cyrus the Great and the Achaemenid Empire (c. 550–331 B.C.E.) and a cultural tradition going back much further. Persia had, however, known a period of Greek rule following the invasion of Alexander the Great (331 B.C.E.) and been subject to Greek cultural influence, against which the Sasanians were reacting. The Byzantine Empire was the Eastern half of the Roman Empire, which had survived the collapse of the Western half in the Fifth century and would continue until the Fifteenth century. Its beginning can be dated from the Fourth century, when the capital of the Roman Empire was shifted from Rome to



Figure 2.1 Achaemenid Tombs at Naqsh-e Rostam, near Persepolis. The bas-relief in the lower left of the picture is the Roman emperor Valerian, who had been captured in battle (in 260) submitting to the Sasanian ruler Shapur. A clear image of this may be found on the internet at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Bas_relief_nagsh-e-rostam_al.jpg and at <http://www.livius.org/a/1/iran/sapor.JPG>

Constantinople and Christianity was first tolerated and then became the religion of state. The language and culture of the Byzantines was mainly Greek. The Sasanians and the Byzantines were in frequent conflict with each other and between 603 and 628 – during the Prophet Muhammad’s lifetime – they engaged in a particularly destructive war that weakened both empires in the face of the Muslim challenge that was shortly to come.

If the overall political configuration was fairly clear, the religious picture was extremely complex. Each of the empires had an official religion, but beside these was a host of other religions, sects, schools and movements, many of which survived into Islamic times and influenced Muslim culture and religion.

Religion in Iran

The official religion of the Sasanians is known to us as [Zoroastrianism](#), so named after the Iranian Prophet Zarathushtra (Greek, Zoroaster). It is also called Mazdaiism or the “Good Religion”. Zarathushtra undertook a major reform of traditional Iranian religion sometime before 1000 B.C.E. The early history of his religion is not well known but it is clear that the Achaemenid kings were Zoroastrians, although they tolerated other forms of worship and often supported the religions of the other peoples they ruled over. It was Cyrus who permitted the Jews to return



Figure 2.2 Persepolis, the Great Stairway leading to the palace area. The figures on the right are people of various nations bearing tribute to the Shahanshah, illustrating the claim to be king of kings.

to their land from exile in Babylon. It was only under the Sasanians that Zoroastrianism became fully the state religion, and they were rather less tolerant, although numbers of Jews lived peacefully for the most part under their rule and Christianity spread, sometimes in the face of persecution.

In its developed form Zoroastrianism taught a cosmic dualism of good and evil. There were two primordial spirits, Ahura Mazda, “The Wise Lord”, later known as Ormazd, and Angra Mainyu, later known as Ahriman. At the beginning of time Ormazd chose truth and goodness and Ahriman chose falsehood and evil. They have been and will be in conflict until the end of time. To assist him in the struggle Ormazd called into being a number of lesser deities or *yazatas* (worthy of worship) and created the world along with its inhabitants. The highest of the *yazatas* are

the six Amesha Spentas (Holy immortals). Ahriman is assisted by spiritual beings called *daevas* or *divs*. The task of humans is to side with Ormazd and struggle for the good “in thought, word and deed”, as it is commonly put. At the end of time a cosmic savior, the Saoshyant, will herald the final victory of good over evil, the dead will be raised, the wicked annihilated and the righteous will enjoy eternal happiness in a transformed earth. This religion is in principle a universal religion but due to historical circumstances it became in effect an ethnic Iranian one. These Zoroastrian conceptions, however, contributed to Jewish, Christian and Muslim conceptions of angels, demons and the end time.

The state plays an important and positive role in this struggle. The shah (king) is the symbol of Ormazd, who has bestowed part of his sovereignty on him and granted him a divine effulgence. The prosperity of the people and even the wellbeing of nature depend on the character of the shah. Assisting and advising the king is the priesthood, which was very strong during the Sasanian period. Central to Zoroastrianism is a concern for purity and ritual, and particularly important is the cult of the sacred fire, since fire is believed to be the purest element created by Ormazd and His symbol. Muslims and others have called Zoroastrians fire worshippers, but the Zoroastrians deny that they actually worship fire. The positive attitude toward both royalty and worldly life is illustrated by the following statement from a late text, “The principal characteristic of kings is pleasure . . . pleasure is consonant with kingship provided it is rooted in greatness. Pleasure rooted in greatness does not pass away” (Zaehner 299). Consistent with this was the considerable luxury and ceremonial that surrounded the shah.



Figure 2.3 Sasanian Coin. Obverse: Head of Shah (note flame above the head). Reverse: Two priests beside fire altar

A variant of Zoroastrianism is known as [Zurvanism](#). It postulated the existence of a figure, Zurvan (“Time”), who had engendered Ormazd and Ahriman but does not intervene in the struggle between them. It involved speculations about fate. This view was rejected by the priests but was evidently held by the Sasanian royal family and persisted into the Muslim period.

An influential Iranian “heresy” was [Manicheism](#), founded by Mani (d. c. 275), who claimed to be a prophet and a successor to Zarathushtra, Buddha and Christ, whose true teachings he claimed to restore and complete, a claim similar to that made by Muhammad in relation to previous prophets. Like the Zoroastrians he taught a cosmic struggle between good and evil but unlike them he identified matter with evil. In a complex series of cosmic events sparks from the realm of light have become captive in material human bodies and can only escape through a strict asceticism, including celibacy and vegetarianism. Only the “elect” are capable of this but others can benefit by following a less rigorous regime and supporting the elect. Mani was favored and protected by one of the Sasanian shahs but was later executed at the instance of the chief priest. His movement, however, continued for some centuries, spreading into Central Asia, where it was adopted by the Uigur rulers from 763 to 840, and on to China. It also spread into the Roman Empire, where it presented a significant intellectual challenge to Christianity. It was severely persecuted in most places but lasted more than a thousand years.

Also worthy of mention is the movement led by Mazdak, who taught an ascetic spirituality and also sought a fairer deal for the poor, including some redistribution of property. His detractors claimed that he wanted property, including women, held in common. He received support from the shah for a time, probably as a means of weakening the nobility, but in 528 he and many of his followers were killed. This movement did not survive into Islamic times but the memory of it did, serving to warn rulers of the danger of rebellion.

Byzantine Christianity

Christianity, the official religion of the Byzantine Empire, had begun in Palestine in the first century as a Jewish sect, made up of those who believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah (Christ in Greek), the hoped for king and savior of the Jews. He had been crucified but they believed he had been raised from the dead, taken up into heaven, and would return to establish the reign of God. While the first Christians were Jews, the movement soon attracted gentile (non-Jewish) converts and became a predominantly gentile movement. It spread rapidly through the Roman Empire and beyond and attracted sporadic persecution. In the fourth century, however, the emperors made it the official religion, as mentioned above. Christian theology was developed amidst considerable controversy using Greek and Latin categories of thinking, which were significantly different from the Semitic categories of the Jews. The three most important doctrines developed were those of the [trinity](#), incarnation and atonement.

According to the first, God is three “persons” in one godhead. According to the second, Jesus was the second person of the trinity present in human flesh. According to the third, Jesus’ death and resurrection have opened the way for humans to be saved from the power of sin and death and to receive eternal life.

The form of Christianity in the Byzantine Empire was what we now call Eastern Orthodoxy, since the church divided in the Eleventh century into the Eastern Church, headed by the Patriarch of Constantinople, and the Western Church, headed by the Pope in Rome. The Western Church later divided into Roman Catholic and Protestant churches. The Eastern Church has a strong sense of the mystery of the divine and its sacramental presence in the material world, of the importance of the Christian community as a community both in worship and in worldly life, and of Christ as the Risen Lord and ruler of the cosmos. (By contrast, Western churches give more emphasis to the crucified Christ.) These characteristics are reflected in the Eastern liturgy and church buildings. The church is divided by a partition called the iconostasis, so called because icons are placed on it. Behind it is the altar where the priests



Figure 2.4 Cave church in the Ihlara Valley, Turkey. Looking into the dome with the *Christos Pantokrator* (Christ the Ruler of All). Below the figure of Christ are the Angels and below them human saints, reflecting the Christian Neo-Platonic view of reality.

perform the sacramental actions by which the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ. The sense of mystery is increased by the fact that most of the sacramental action is performed out of the sight of the laity. The differing actions of the clergy and laity are seen as complementing each other and forming an orchestra of worship to God. Most churches have a dome, which symbolizes heaven, and at the top of the dome, looking down on the people, is the figure of *Christos Pantokrator*, Christ the ruler of all. Of major importance are icons, which are pictures of Christ, his mother or saints, and are painted according to a traditional format. They are powerful symbols and are described as “windows on eternity”. An effort was made to eliminate them, known as the Iconoclastic Controversy, in the Eighth to Ninth centuries, an effort partly stimulated by the presence of Islam. It failed, however, because of their popularity.

After it became Christian, the empire came to be seen as an icon or image of the Heavenly Jerusalem and the emperor an icon on earth of

God's rule in heaven. Church and state were distinct but not separate and the Emperor played an important role in the church though he could not dictate its teachings. One notes here a similarity, at least in general terms, to the situation in the Sasanian Empire, though state and "church" were more closely linked in the latter case.

Monasticism was also an important aspect of church life. Those who wished to devote themselves fully to contemplation and prayer renounced normal life to become either hermits or monks living in a community. Monasticism began in Egypt in the Fourth century and became quite popular. It is sometimes described as a form of martyrdom, replacing the martyrdom of blood of the age of persecution. Monasticism suggests that in its attitude toward the material world Christianity stood in between the world-affirming stance of Zoroastrianism and the world-rejection of Manicheism. Monasticism was to be rejected by Islam.

The [doctrines](#) and rules of the church were worked out in seven "ecumenical" councils, between 325 and 787. Especially important were those of Nicaea (325) and Chalcedon (451). At the first it was affirmed that the Son and the Holy Spirit are fully part of the Godhead, over against the Arians, who said that Christ was the highest of God's creations but not divine. At the other it was affirmed that Christ is fully human and fully divine, the two natures being



Figure 2.5 Aya Sofia (Hagia Sophia). Mosaic of the Virgin Mary and child Jesus in the center. The letters in the circles beside the Virgin's head are the abbreviations in Greek for "Mary Mother of God". The figure to the left is Justinian with a model of the Hagia Sophia, and to the right is Constantine, under whom the Empire began to become Christian. These pictures were plastered over when the Ottomans converted the cathedral to a mosque and were uncovered when it became a museum under Atatürk.

inseparably united, over against the Nestorians, who seemed to want to separate the natures, and the Monophysites (“one nature-ists”), who seemed to assert that the human nature was absorbed into the divine nature.

Other forms of Christianity

Those whose views were rejected at the councils did not simply recant or pass out of existence, but constituted strong movements for some centuries. The Arians made converts among the peoples outside the boundaries of the Western empire and when these entered the empire Arianism presented a challenge to the followers of the Nicene creed until the Sixth century.

The [Nestorians](#) organized themselves after the Council of Chalcedon as separate churches in Iraq and Syria (until the twentieth century Syria, as a geographical term, included what is now Lebanon, Jordan and Israel/Palestine). They developed into a very strong church in Iran and spread northeastward into Central Asia and for a brief period into China. They converted a number of the Mongols, who invaded the Muslim lands in the thirteenth century. After the Mongol ruler converted to Islam at the end of that century, however, they lost ground and after the invasion of Timur (d. 1405) they were reduced to a small minority. Today they call themselves Assyrians and are found in Iran and, at least until recently, in Iraq, as well as in immigrant populations throughout the world.

There were, and are, several Monophysite churches. The Church of Armenia, which was independent of Byzantium and Sassanid Persia and had become Christian even before Rome, was Monophysite. Also [Monophysite](#) was the Coptic Church in Egypt, to which virtually all the native population adhered. This church diminished under Muslim rule but still represents today about 10 percent of the Egyptian population. Coptic Christianity spread south to Ethiopia, whose Christian ruler was to play a role in Muhammad’s career. A third Monophysite church was the Jacobite Church, to which a large proportion of the population of Syria adhered. This church continued strong until it suffered successively from the Crusades and the activities of the Mongols and Timur.

In practice, cultural and ethnic differences were no less important than theological differences. The Armenian and Coptic churches used their native languages and have been major bearers of their respective national identities, while the Nestorian and Jacobite churches used the Syriac language and represented a Semitic culture, in contrast to the Greek culture of Byzantium. They enshrined a political and cultural challenge to the Byzantine Empire, which was probably the main reason why they suffered persecution from time to time, a persecution that was particularly intense on the eve of the Muslim invasion.

Another distinct group were the [Maronites](#) of the Lebanese mountains, who look back to a fifth-century saint, St. Maron, and developed as a church in the seventh century. They later as-

sisted the Crusaders and had contact with Rome from the fifteenth century, eventually accepting Roman Catholicism. Today they play an important role in Lebanese politics.

The Byzantine Church was culturally Greek. Though its followers in Syria generally spoke Syriac (and later Arabic) they were ministered to by a Greek speaking clergy. They came to be known as Melkites (from the word for “king”, i.e. following the emperor’s religion). When in time Orthodox Christianity spread beyond the empire to eastern Europe, however, it organized itself along national and ethnic lines, as the Russian Orthodox Church, Serbian Orthodox Church and so on. These were united with the Byzantine Church in doctrine and worship but were self governing. They used their own national language and provided an important element of the national identity.

The groups considered so far are forms of Gentile Christianity, which had rejected most distinctive Jewish laws and practices. Some Christians, however, retained their Jewish identity and a modified version of Jewish law and developed into a separate movement, sometimes called Ebionite, that continued in Syria until the Fifth century, but there is also an account of a community of them in Jerusalem in the Seventh century. They accepted Jesus as a prophet and as messiah but not as the divine Son of God. Their ideas about the unity of God, the historical series of prophets, the relationship between the teachings of Jesus and Moses and falsifications in the latter’s law, as well as some of their specific practices, seem to anticipate aspects of Islam. Some of their ideas may have endured to Muslim times.



Figure 2.6 Byzantine coin, John Tzimiskes (969–976 C.E.) or later. Obverse: Christ (as Pantokrator). Reverse: Cross and Jesus Christ, King of Kings. The coin reflects both piety and propaganda.

Jews and Samaritans

The Jewish community, of course, continued through this period. The Jews looked back to Abraham (c. 1700 B.C.E.?) as their ancestor and Moses (c. 1300 B.C.E.) as their greatest prophet and teacher, who led them out of slavery in Egypt and mediated a covenant by which they became the chosen people of God and would worship him exclusively. They settled in the Land of Israel (geographically today Israel/Palestine) and established a kingdom, which later divided into two kingdoms, one of which was destroyed by the Assyrians in 721 B.C.E. and the other by the Babylonians in 587 B.C.E. In both cases the leading classes were exiled. They came to accept that these catastrophes were punishments from God because they had violated the covenant and not worshipped God exclusively. After they were allowed to return under Cyrus, the Persian conqueror of Babylon, they rebuilt the Temple of God and resolved to order their lives according to God's laws. Critical scholars cast considerable doubt on the traditional account of the pre-exilic period and believe that complete monotheism, the belief in only one God who is eternal and creator of the universe, probably came into existence around the time of the Exile, although earlier there was a party that called for the exclusive worship of Israel's God, while probably recognizing the existence of other gods. On the traditional view Abraham was already a monotheist, but the people were constantly turning away from God and it was only after the Exile that the whole community became monotheist in practice.

Since not all Jews returned from Babylon, another result of the Exile was the creation of the dispersion or "diaspora", of Jews living outside the Land of Israel. The Jews in the Land lived under Persian rule for about two centuries and were probably influenced by Iranian religious ideas, as suggested above. After Alexander's campaign they came under Greek rule. In 168 B.C.E. efforts to impose Greek culture on them provoked the Maccabean revolt, which led to an independent Jewish kingdom that lasted until 63 B.C.E., when the Romans took control. Roman rule provoked two major revolts, in 66–73 C.E. and 132–135 C.E., both of which failed and the first of which resulted in the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, which had been the focus of Jewish religion. These events, along with the later Christianization of the Empire, led to the decline of the community in the Land. About the fifth century cultural and religious leadership passed to the diaspora.

These disasters also forced a major reformulation of Jewish religion and Jewish hopes. The Temple having been destroyed and its priests sidelined, Judaism came to focus on the practice of Torah. [Torah](#) refers in one usage to the first five books of the Bible, those believed to have been revealed to Moses. In the larger sense, however, it refers to all authoritative religious teaching developed and elaborated over the years by teachers known as Rabbis. The two most authoritative compendia of Rabbinic teaching are the Mishna, compiled about 200 C.E., and the Talmud, compiled in two versions from the Fifth to Seventh centuries. The Babylonian Talmud is the more important one. The Mishna and Talmud are to the Bible, in many respects, what the New Testament is to the Old Testament for Christians. Prior to their defeats many

Jews believed that God would support an uprising to restore their control of their Land, or that God would intervene in human history in a dramatic, apocalyptic way. After their defeats most Jews came to accept that God intended most of them to live in exile for an indeterminate period and that their return to the Land could be furthered mainly by faithful practice of Torah, in response to which God would eventually send his messiah. In particular they devoted their attention to studying and practicing Halakah, the practical prescriptions of Torah. This way of thinking predominated until the nineteenth century. Since then various modern movements, particularly Zionism, the movement to regain the Land, have shifted the focus for many Jews.

The [Samaritans](#) were descendants of Northern tribes of Israel who separated from the other Jews at the time of their return from exile in Babylon. They had a separate sanctuary and recognized only the first five books of the Bible, in a slightly different version from the Jews. They appear to have prospered until they rebelled against the Byzantine Empire in 529, but they have survived in small numbers to the present day. Some scholars find aspects of Samaritan thinking in Islam; they have a creedal formula that goes, “There is no god but the One”. Others, however, think they are influenced by Islam.

Gnostics and philosophers

There were also, from the Second century C.E., a number of movements that we call [Gnostic](#), some identifying themselves as Christian and some not. They believed that salvation was possible only through esoteric knowledge (*gnosis*) imparted by the teacher to initiates. This *gnosis* was usually knowledge of one’s true self, which had fallen from the highest spiritual realm and become trapped in the world of matter.

The explanations of how this happened were very complex. There was also usually a messenger or savior who had come from the highest realm to bring this knowledge to humans. Christian Gnostics identified this figure with Christ and sometimes held that Christ did not have a physical body or did not actually die on the cross, but merely appeared to do so, a view known as docetism (from a Greek word meaning “to appear”). In Gnostic movements Christian ideas are often inverted. For example, the God of the Old Testament is said to be an imperfect or evil being who created this imperfect world, while only the God of the New Testament is the true God. The serpent in the Garden of Eden may be seen as offering true wisdom rather than deceptive claims. There are Gnostic gospels, such as the [Gospel of Thomas](#), which give their version of the life and teachings of Christ. Manicheism is commonly considered a form of Gnosticism although its dualism is more complete than most of the others. A non-Christian Gnostic movement that has survived, just barely, to the present day in Iraq is the Mandeans. As far as we know, most Gnostic groups had died out by 600 C.E., but they have had some influence on later Jewish, Christian and Muslim thinking.

Related in one way or another to most of the movements discussed so far was the tradition of [Greek philosophy](#). It flowered in the Fifth and Fourth centuries B.C.E. with Socrates (d. 399), Plato (d. 347) and Aristotle (d. 322). Socrates was its martyr, who chose death rather than recant views that offended the populace. He believed that all knowledge is innate within us and can be elicited by proper questioning, hence the “Socratic method”. Plato was his defender and apologist. Among other things, Plato held that the physical world consists of imperfect copies of Ideas or Forms that exist in a higher realm. The soul is immortal and before its descent into the body it contemplated the Forms. Through intellectual discipline it can perceive them again. Plato’s idea of the immortality of the soul became part of Christian thinking about the future life, and eventually to a lesser degree Jewish and Muslim thinking. It sat somewhat uneasily beside the alternative conception, the resurrection of the body. Aristotle, who was the tutor of Alexander the Great, focused on the empirical world but found that it depended on a perfect God, who is “thought thinking itself” and who does not intervene in the world directly but motivates it by its attraction to him. These philosophers also had important ethical, social and scientific ideas. In fact Greek philosophy dealt with most of the areas, e.g. physics, that we assign to science today. Generally these philosophers continued to participate in the worship of the pagan gods, viewing this worship as good for society and the gods as lesser beings than the intellectual realities with which they concerned themselves or as symbols of these realities. For them there was a clear distinction between philosophy and religion but as the tradition of philosophy continued it took on a more religious character.

Among the later philosophers the most famous was [Plotinus](#) (205–c. 270 C.E.), whose views are known as neo-Platonism. According to him the universe emanates from “The One”, which is transcendent and even beyond being, but also present within it. A comparison is made with the sun and its rays. The human goal is to realize one’s unity with The One by turning away from the material world, which is conceived not as evil but as imperfect. Evil is non-being; everything insofar as it exists is good. Some of the early Christians rejected philosophy but others sought to use it in the service of the faith, and neo-Platonism made a major contribution to Christian theology. After the empire became Christian the pagan tradition of philosophy diminished and finally ended in the empire after the school at Athens was closed by the emperor in 529. Nestorians, however, continued the tradition in Sasanian territory and it was established in Baghdad under Muslim patronage in the Ninth century. Some Jews took an interest in philosophy, such as Philo of Alexandria, but most Jews turned away from it after the disasters of the first and second centuries, with some returning to it in the Middle Ages.

The Axial Age

The religious movements described in this chapter are the product of what some scholars call the “[Axial Age](#)”, a period from about 800 to 200 B.C.E. when radical changes in human thinking began to take place along the same lines but apparently independently in Greece, Israel, Iran, India and China. The most important of these changes was the conviction that behind the multiplicity of the world there is one ultimate reality, whether conceived personally as God or more impersonally as a force or principle, and this reality radically transcends the world. Under the old polytheism gods, humans, animals and other beings functioned within the same worldly system. Gods, for example, were nourished by the ritual sacrifices made by humans, who in turn depended on the gods for help. The one God or the ultimate force is the source of the universe but is not part of it and does not need sacrifice in this way. The gods are demoted to the status of (or replaced by) subordinate deities or angels, or are converted into demons, or are deemed not to exist. Where a personal God is involved, the new thinking tends to be intolerant of any other worship. Since the transcendent power is one, religious systems relating to it are in principle universal, not limited to a particular tribe or nation. In practice this was often not fully realized. As we have seen, Zoroastrianism, Judaism and, to a lesser degree, Christianity remained ethnic in practice. Greek philosophy largely transcended ethnicity but was limited to the educated classes. The individual becomes more important since the individual can in some way relate directly to Ultimate Reality and will meet his or her final destiny as an individual. Because of the greater gap between the divine and the human there is a greater need felt for a mediator, such as Christ for Christians or Torah for Jews. There are other changes that we do not have space to mention here. These changes at first were largely limited to a spiritual or cultural elite but over time they spread outward geographically and down the social scale. Christianity, Zoroastrianism, later Judaism and to some extent Gnosticism represent the extension and popularization, and often the reformulation, of Axial Age thinking, inevitably with some compromises.

One place that Axial Age thinking had not reached significantly by this time was the Arabian peninsula. In the next chapter we will observe the shift from pre-Axial to Axial Age thinking there and the last major reformulation of that movement of Axial Age thinking that had begun in Greece, Iran and Israel.

Key Points You Need to Know

- There were two major imperial powers in the Iranian-Hellenistic world on the eve of Islam, the Sasanians and the Byzantines.
- In both of these religion and the state were closely connected. Orthodoxy basically meant following the state religion.

- There were a large number of religions, sects and movements other than the state religions, some of which represented a rejection of the existing order.
- In contrast to the earlier paganism, most of these religions and movements, orthodox or otherwise, believed that the universe has its source in a single, transcendent God or Principle, were at least potentially trans-ethnic, and gave greater prominence to the individual.

Additional Material at *Islam Online*.

[Self Test Questions](#)

[Class Discussion Questions](#)

[Essay Questions](#)

Further Reading

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