

Religions and Cultures of the Middle East

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Osher Course
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A Word About Religion

- We often think of religion as:
 - Divisive, cause of conflict
 - Irrational
 - Prone to fanaticism
 - Apart from the rest of life
 - Sacred vs. secular



A Word About Religion

- Religion = re-connect
 - Puts life back together.



A Word About Religion

- Religion = re-connect
 - Puts life back together.
- How?
 - Makes sense of things.
 - Finds meaning in life.
 - Brings us together.



A Word About Religion

- Religion is inseparable from the larger culture.
 - Deals with life as a whole.
 - Gets us through the day.



Middle Eastern Religions

- Zoroastrianism
- Judaism
- Christianity
- Islam



Middle Eastern Religions

- Zoroastrianism

- Judaism

- Christianity

- Islam

*Abrahamic
religions*



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graph LR; A[Abrahamic religions] --> B[Judaism]; A --> C[Christianity]; A --> D[Islam];
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Middle Eastern Religions

- Zoroastrianism

- Judaism

- Christianity

- Islam

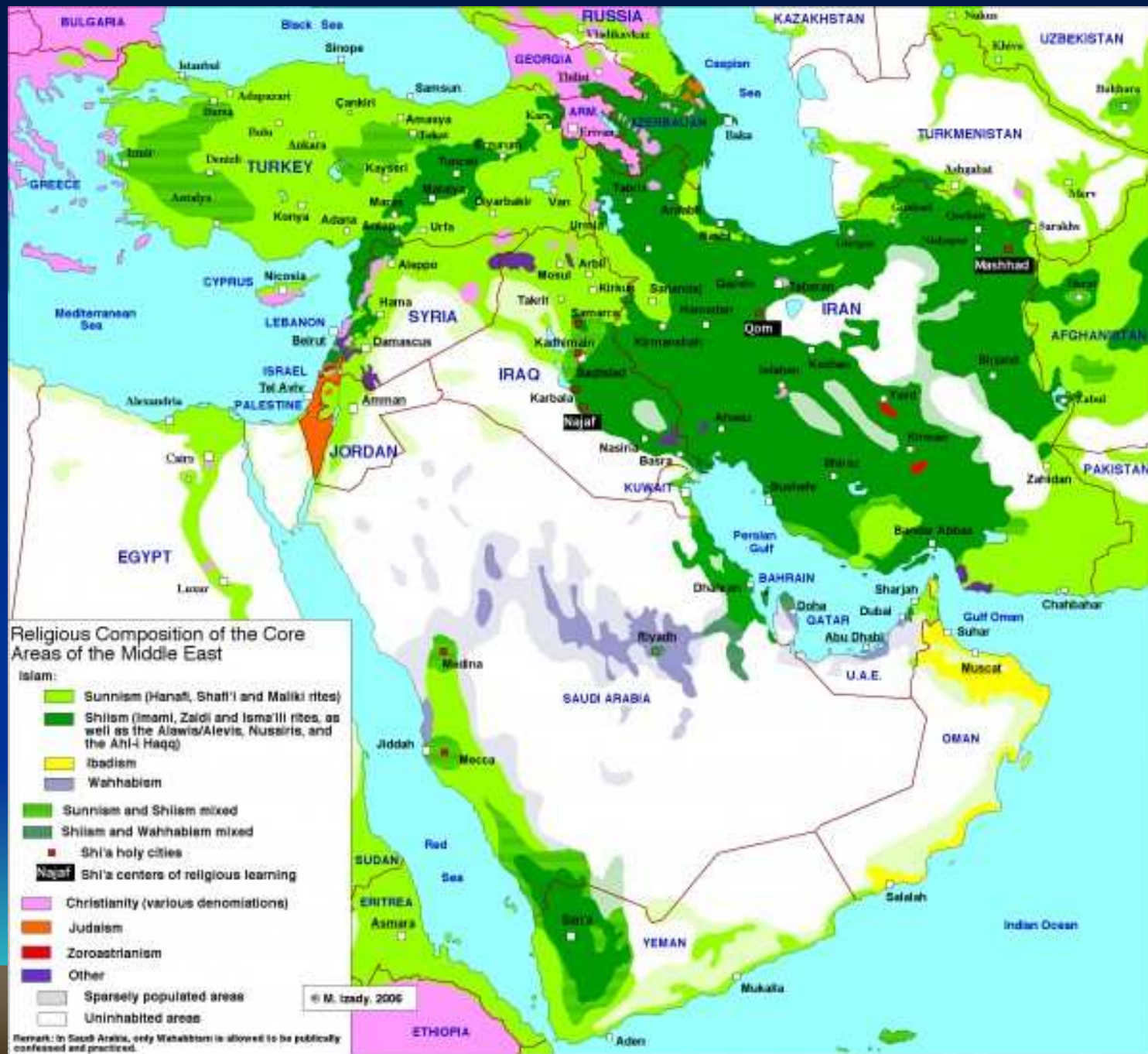
- Sunni, Shia, Sufi

- Everyday life

- Recent events

Focus on these





Zoroaster

- Zarathustra (Persian)
- One of the world's most influential figures.
 - Lived about 1200 bce in Persia.



Zoroaster

- Key ideas:
 - Cosmic battle between good and evil.
 - We must take sides.
 - Reward and punishment in the afterlife.
 - Concept of history.



Zoroaster

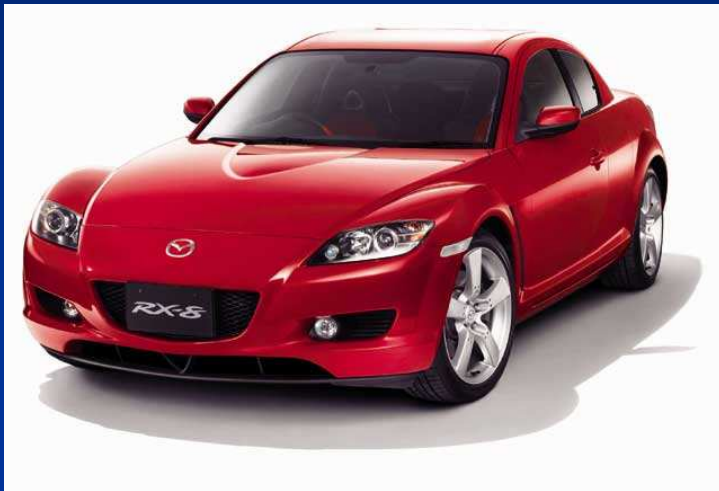
- Good vs. evil.
 - Good: Ahura Mazda.
 - The stronger god, object of worship.
 - Evil: Ahriman.
 - Solves theodicy problem (existence of evil).



Relief of Ahura Mazda at Persepolis

Zoroaster

- Another Mazda...



From Mazda website

The Origin and Meaning of “Mazda”

The company’s name, “Mazda,” derives from Ahura Mazda, a god of the earliest civilizations in western Asia. We have interpreted Ahura Mazda, the god of wisdom, intelligence and harmony, as a symbol of the origin of both Eastern and Western civilizations, and also as a symbol of automotive culture. It incorporates a desire to achieve world peace and the development of the automobile manufacturing industry. It also derives from the name of our founder, Jujiro Matsuda.

Zoroaster

- Zoroastrianism in popular culture.

“The Force” vs.
Darth Vader

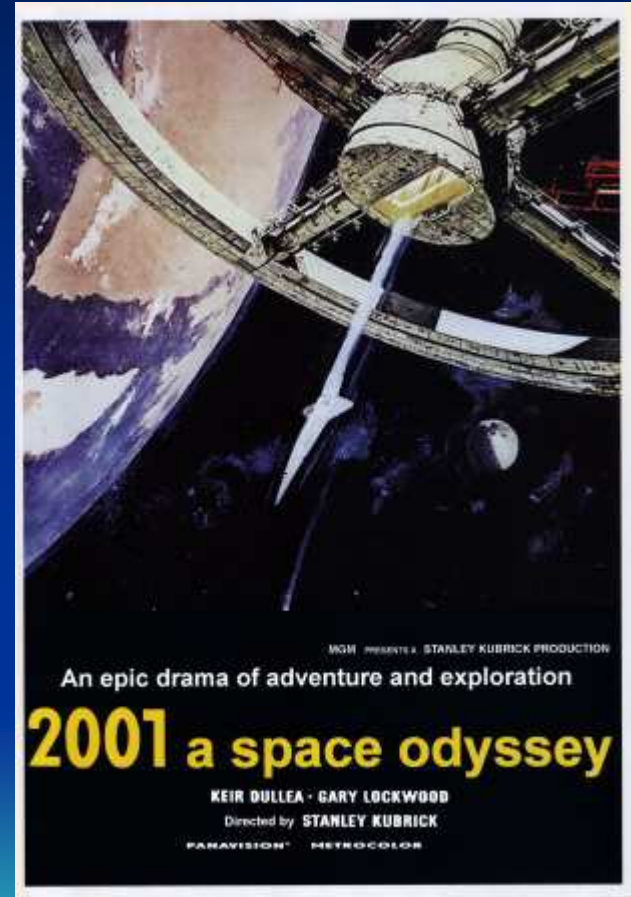
Luke Skywalker
sides with the
Force



Zoroaster

- Zoroastrianism in popular culture.

Musical theme:
*Also Sprach
Zarathustra*, by
Richard Strauss



Zoroaster

- Zoroastrianism in popular culture

Struggle against Sauron,
Lord of the Rings

Inspiration for early
video game, Dungeons
and Dragons



Secularism

- Characteristic of Abrahamic traditions.
- Possibly symbolized by the Burning Bush.
 - Exodus 3:14 (Jewish Torah, Christian Old Testament).
 - “God said to Moses, “*I am who I am* [אהיה אשר אהיה]. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘*I am* has sent me to you.’”
 - Similar story in Qur’an (20:10-48), without the “*I am*.”



Secularism

- One interpretation:
 - Yahweh refuses to give a name.
 - Calling one's name exerts power over him/her.
 - Traditional practice of invoking spirits in nature by calling their names.
 - Practice survives in exorcism (“calling out”).
 - Yahweh is not a spirit in nature, but transcendent godhead.
 - “Disenchantment of nature” (Max Weber).



Secularism

- We are in charge of the world down here.
- Result: science and technology.
 - Compensate with **romanticism**, wilderness values.



Yosemite Valley (Ansel Adams)

Secularism

- Result: Regular prayer to maintain contact with the Holy.
 - Jewish: 3 prayer services per day (*Shacharit, Mincha, Ma'ariv*)
 - Muslim: 5 prayers per day
 - Following Zoroaster
 - Christian: “Pray without ceasing”
 - St. Paul



Tallit (prayer shawl)

Secularism

- Result: Regular holy day
 - *Shabbat* (Jewish Sabbath)
 - Christian holy day (Sunday)
 - Muslim holy day (Friday).



Muslims leaving Friday prayer service

Islam

- Founded by the Prophet Muhammad in 622 ce.

- Born in Mecca.
- Traveled to Levant
- Impressed by monotheism of Judaism, Christianity

Mecca today



Islam

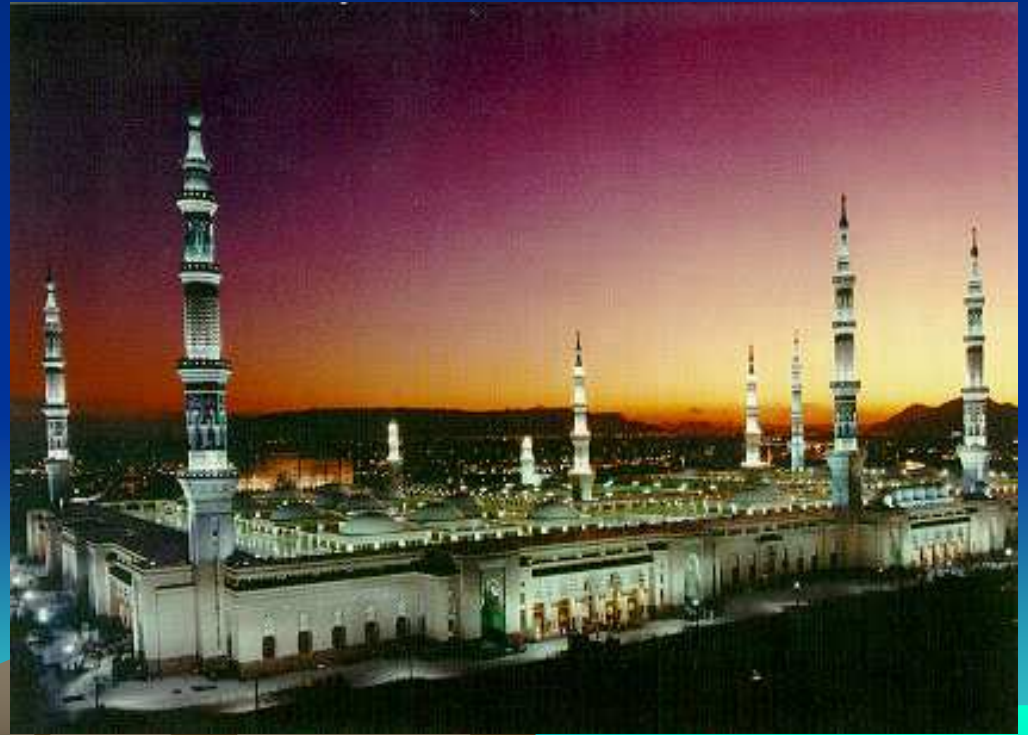
- Founded by the Prophet Muhammad in 622 ce.
 - Received revelation at age 40.
 - Dictated it to followers.
 - *Qu'ran* = dictation



Islam

- Founded by the Prophet Muhammad in 622 ce.
 - Migrated to Medina to escape persecution.
 - Conquered Mecca 2 years before his death.

Prophet's Mosque, Medina, Saudi Arabia



Pillars of Islam

- Faith
- Prayer
- Alms (*Zakat*)
- Fast during month of Ramadan
- Pilgrimage (*Hajj*) to Mecca



Pillars of Islam

- Faith.
 - The *Shahadah*:
La ilaha illa 'Llah
There is no god but *the*
God (*al Lah* = Allah);
Muhammadun rasulu'Llah
Muhammad is the
messenger of God.



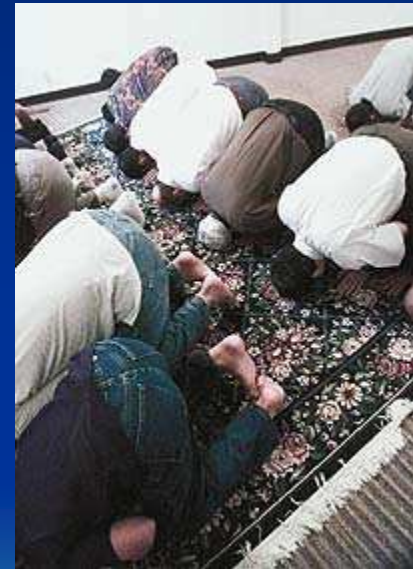
Pillars of Islam

- *Qur'an* recognizes Jewish & Christian traditions
 - Abraham (*Ibrahim*), Moses (*Musa*)
 - Jesus (*Isa*), Mary (*Miriam*)
- “People of the Book”
 - Jews, Christians, Sabians
 - Zoroastrians (in Iran)



Pillars of Islam

- Prayer.
 - 5 times a day (dawn, noon, midafternoon, sunset, night)
 - Prayer calls from mosque.



Pillars of Islam

- *Zakat* (alms)
 - All possessions belong to God.
 - We must set aside 2.5% for those in need.
 - This is justice, not pity or charity.



Pillars of Islam

- Fast during month of Ramadan
 - 9th month of Muslim lunar calendar
 - Abstain from food, drink and sex during daylight hours.
 - Various exceptions.
 - In 2013 (1434),
Ramadan =
July 9 – Aug 7.



Pillars of Islam

- Pilgrimage (*Hajj*) to Mecca
 - Those who are physically and financially able
- Grand Mosque (*Al-Masjid al-Haram*), surrounding the *Kaaba*



Islam

- Essence of Islam:
 - It is a faith of austere simplicity.
 - The *Qur'an* is the only authority.
 - Allah provides rock-solid security in an unpredictable world.
 - We live in a secular world, a moral testing ground.
 - Islam has parallels with conservative Protestant Christianity.



Jihad

- What is *jihad*?
 - Literally, effort or struggle.
 - Similarly, *crusade* (from “cross”) need not be a military action.
 - However, *jihad* has historically referred to military struggle at times.
 - The “lesser jihad.”
 - *Qur'an* instructs Muslims to convert infidels by force if necessary (9:29).



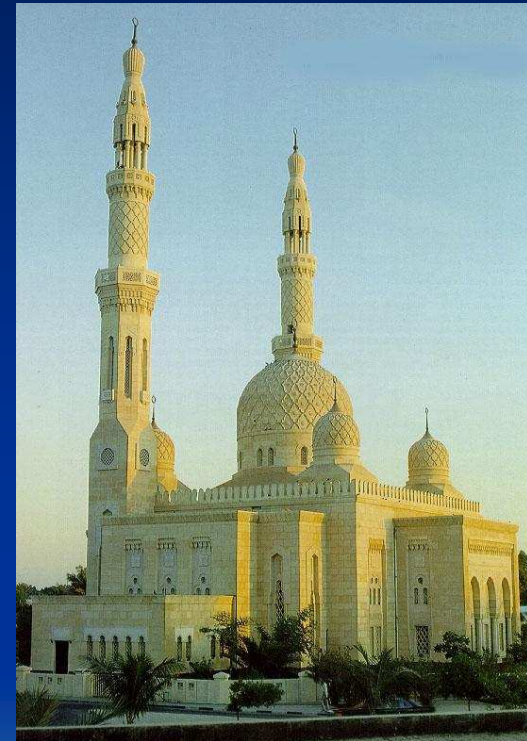
Dietary Laws

- Dietary laws
 - Influenced by Jewish *Kashrut* (Kosher)
 - *Haram* (forbidden):
 - Pork, blood products
 - Carnivorous animals, reptiles, insects
 - Animals improperly slaughtered
 - Alcohol and other intoxicating drugs



Hadiths

- Temporal side of Islam
 - The *Hadiths* contain additional rules of conduct that vary according to local tradition.

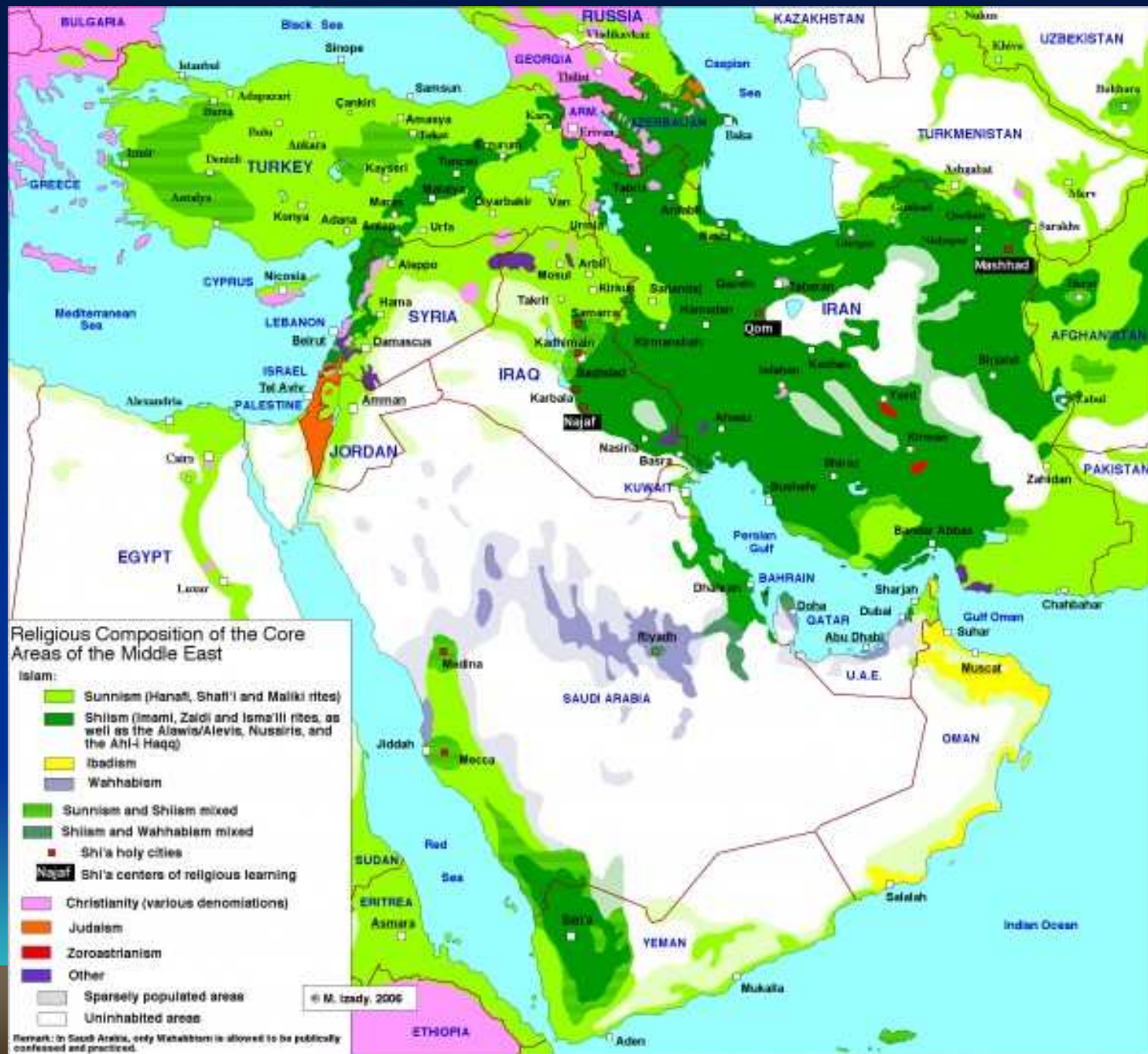


Grand Mosque,
Bur Dubai

Sunni/Shia

- The *Sunni* - *Shi'ite* split reflects an early power struggle.
 - *Sunni* is from the *Sunna*
 - Body of law used by Sunni
 - *Caliphs* recognized as temporal leaders.
 - *Shi'ite* is from *Shia Ali*, party of Ali
 - Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law.





Sunni/Shia

- Sunni Muslims leave interpretation of scripture up to the individual.
 - With assistance of *imams* (priests) and the *ulema* (scholars).
 - The *ulema* deal primarily with moral law, not theology.
 - Sunnis are the majority sect outside of Iran & parts of Iraq, Lebanon, Bahrain.



Sunni/Shia

- Shia Muslims recognize religious leaders.
 - Such as Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani of Iraq.



Sunni/Shia

- Twelvers (primarily in Iran) recognize 12 imams who descend from Ali.
 - The last imam (Muhammad al Mahdi) is hidden and will return at some point.

Mosque of the 12th Imam
(Jamkaran Mosque),
near Qom, Iran.



Sunni/Shia

- Seveners (India, Pakistan, etc.), a sect of Ismailites, recognize seven Imams.
 - Named for Ismail ibn Jafar, 6th Imam.
 - Druze are historically related to Ismailites.
 - Note: *imam* in Shia Islam \neq *imam* in Sunni Islam

Prince Karim al-Hussaini,
4th Aga Khan,
Leader of Nizari Ismailites

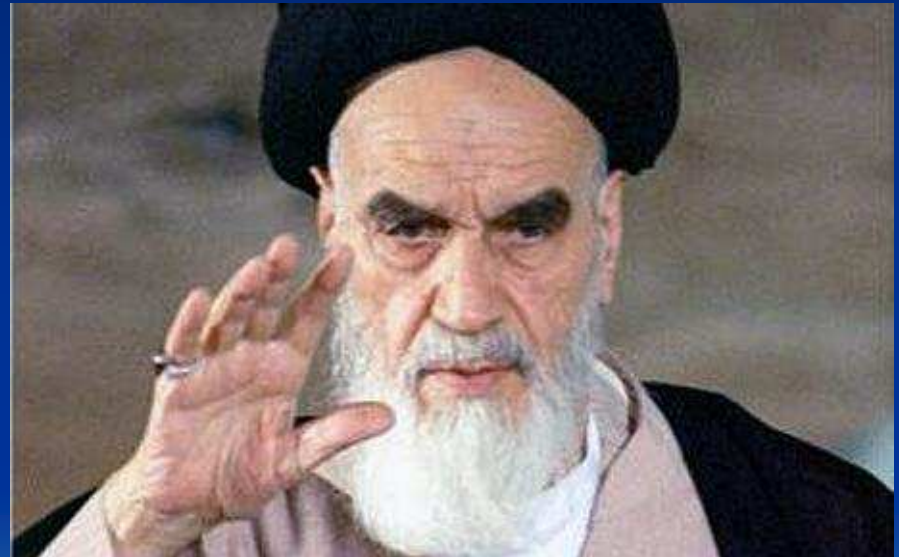


Sunni/Shia

- Shia do not traditionally recognize clerical government.
 - Current government of Iran is an exception.

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini
1902-1989

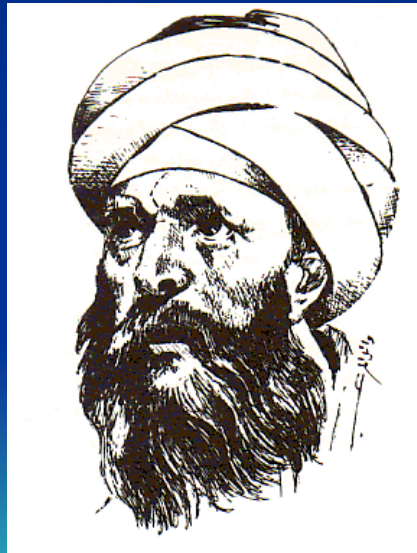
Leader of 1979 Iranian Revolution



Sufism

- Mystical branch of Islam.
 - Adherents seek to transform inner consciousness.
 - May become ascetics.

Al-Ghazali
Sufi theologian
Persia, 11th c.



Rumi (Mevlana)
Sufi poet
Afghanistan, 13th c.



Sufism

- Aim is to transform consciousness.
 - As opposed to strict lifestyle regulations of mainstream Islam.

Dervishes (Turkey)

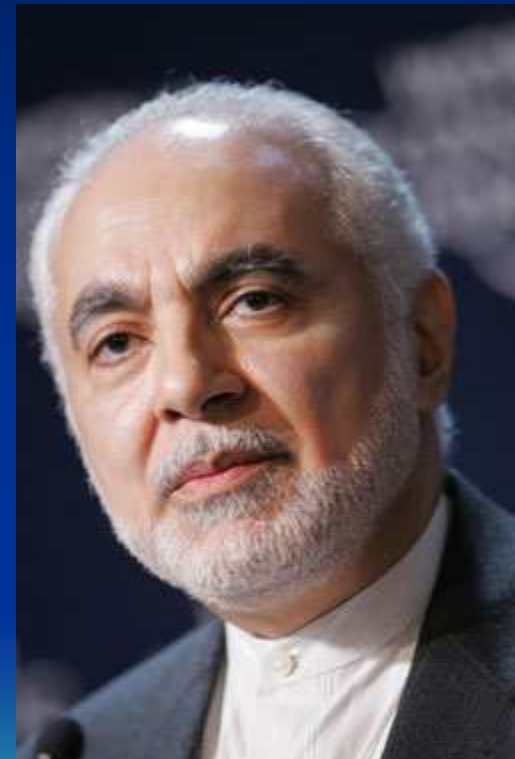
Mevlevi Order,
founded by Rumi

Dervish = Doorway
(to spiritual life)



Sufism

- A Sufi Muslim in the news.
 - Imam Abdul Rauf
 - Force behind “Ground Zero Mosque”
 - Park51 Islamic Community Center
 - Proponent of interfaith cooperation.
 - Served as emissary for US State Dept.

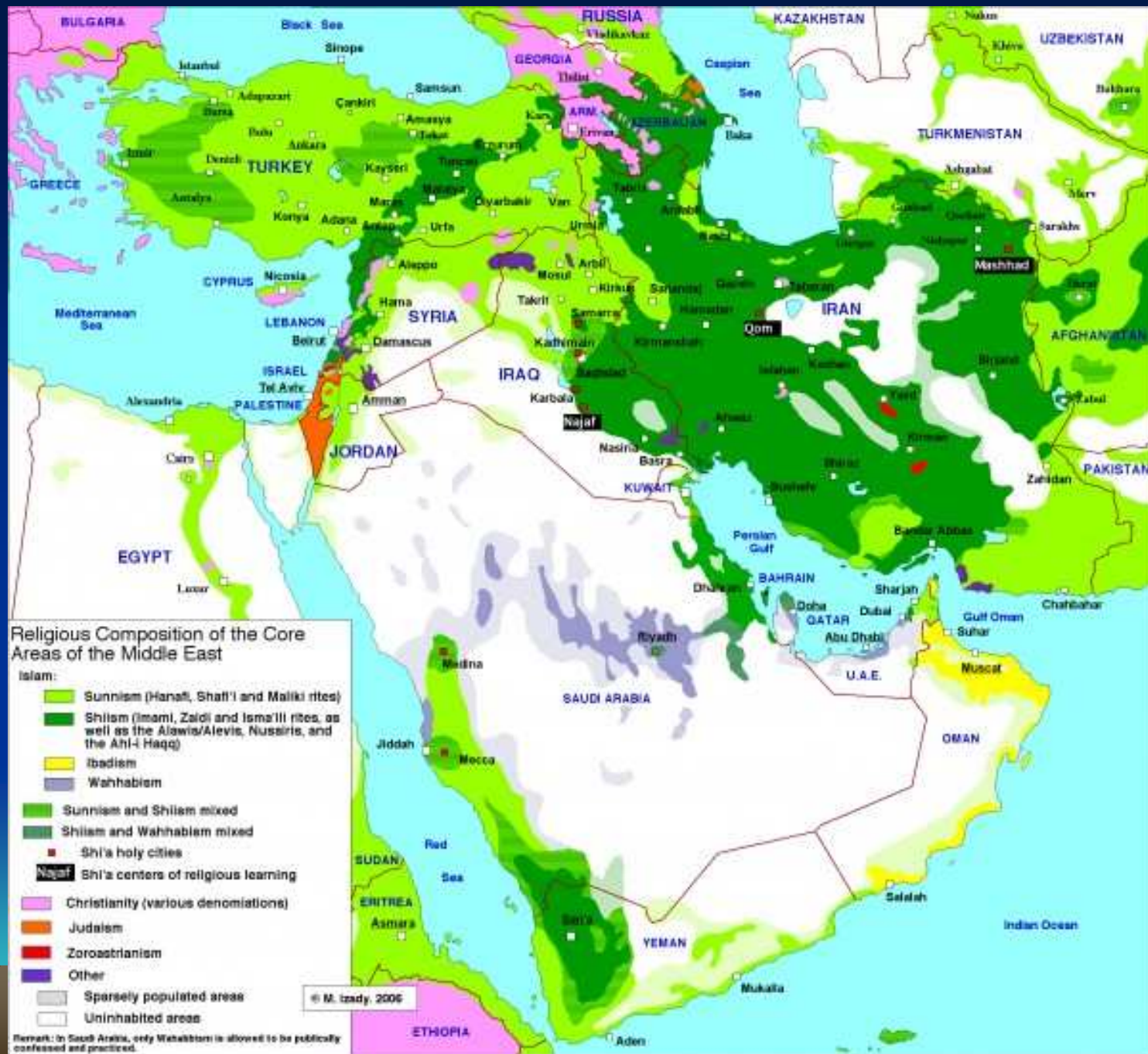


Gulf States

- Sunni Islam
 - Majority expat population
 - Very prosperous

Burj Khalifa, Dubai
World's tallest building





Gulf States

- Life is family-oriented.
 - Family outings.
 - Shopping



Shopping
mall,
Dubai

Gulf States

Restaurants
typically have
a family
section



Gulf States



Shopping malls
may have a
family day

Gulf States

- Outside the family, typically segregated by gender.



Women at
shopping mall,
wearing abayas

Qur'an does **not**
require women
to wear head or
face covering

Gulf States

Arab men
(wearing thobes)
pass time
chatting at
Starbucks

Middle East:
origin of
machismo



Gulf States

- Segregation by gender need not imply different status.
 - Women are active in business, politics.
 - Equal status in Koran.
 - Equal property, inheritance rights.
 - Women retain their family name.
 - Muhammad's wife was a businesswoman, supported family.
 - Policy on divorce is unequal but misunderstood.



Gulf States

Prayer
room at
shopping
mall



Gulf States

- No liquor, gambling.

- Liquor stores illegal, except perhaps for Western expats.

Birj al-Arab Hotel,
Dubai.
No casino here, but...



Gulf States

- Friday – Mosque day
 - Morning – Sleep in. Streets deserted.
 - Noon – Attend service at mosque.
 - Afternoon – Family meal prepared by live-in Filipino maids.
 - Evening – Shop until you drop.
Traffic jams.

Inside Grand Mosque
Muscat, Oman



Gulf States

Mall traffic
Dubai



Gulf States

- Ramadan
 - No eating, drinking, smoking, or sex until sundown.
 - Restaurants closed by law.
 - Time of *iftar* (breaking of fast) available on web, smart phones.
 - Begin by eating dates.

Iftar meal



Gulf States

- Many sleep most of the day, stay up all night.
 - *Iftar* banquets.
 - Or family meal.
 - Tough time for maids.
 - Tendency to gain weight during month of fasting.

Company-sponsored *iftar* banquet, Kuwait



Gulf States

- Charitable causes & religious programs.

Free *iftar* meals
ready for
distribution by a
charitable
foundation,
Dubai



Eid al-Fitr

- After Ramadan – *Eid al-Fitr*
 - Huge holiday.
 - Prayers.
 - Parties.
 - Luscious desserts.

Eid al-Fitr
prayers,
Oman



Eid al-Fitr

Eid al-Fitr
prayers,
Ahmedabad,
India



Arab Dinner Party

- You are invited to a private home.
 - Men enter by front entrance, women by rear.
 - Men and women do not associate during the entire evening.
- Men gather in large parlor, sit on sofas arranged around the walls.
 - On entering, move counterclockwise around the room, greeting & shaking hands.



Arab Dinner Party

- For men only...
- Have a seat.
 - Servant will bring bitter herb tea.
 - Drink it quickly.
 - Shake the empty cup to indicate you are ready for the servant to take it.
 - Don't discuss politics or religion.



Arab Dinner Party

- When it's time for dinner, you will line up at wash basin.
- Men go outside to tent (*majlis*) for meal.
 - In summer, tent will be air conditioned.



Arab Dinner Party

- Sit on cushions around food.
 - Tray may contain roast lamb, surrounded by rice, hard-boiled eggs, etc.
 - There are no utensils; use fingers to take meat, etc.
 - Scoop up rice with fingers and push into your mouth with thumb.



Arab Dinner Party

- After meal, return to wash basin in the house.
- Move into parlor for dessert and after-dinner conversation.
- At close of evening, make the rounds counter-clockwise to say *massalama*.

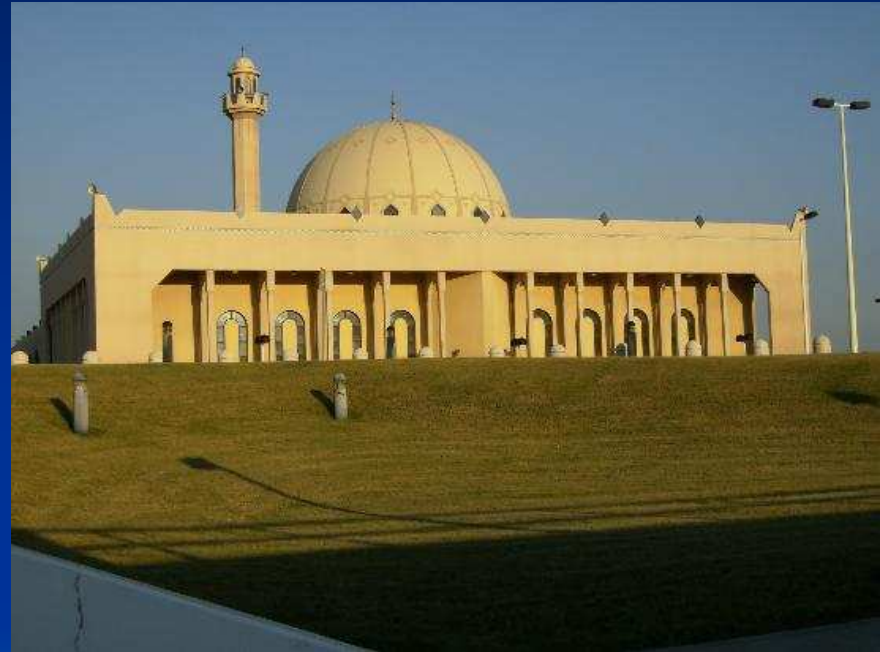


Saudi Arabia



Saudi Arabia

- Strict observance
 - Men & women segregated.
 - Women not allowed to drive.
 - Dinner party.



Al Munirah Mosque
Dharan, Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia

- Strict observance
 - Shops close for prayers.
 - Home of Wahhabi faith (to be discussed later).



Mall of Dharan



Saudi Arabia

- Strict observance
 - No coed universities.
 - Prayer rugs in university hallways.
 - Male comradeship.

King Fahd University of
Petroleum and Minerals
Dhahran



Saudi Arabia

- Predominately Sunni
 - Dhahran is heavily Shia.
 - Causeway connects to Bahrain, scene of Shia/Sunni conflict



Causeway from Dhahran to Bahrain

Turkey

Blue Mosque and Hagia Sophia, İstanbul



Turkey

Interior of Blue Mosque, İstanbul



Turkey

Süleymaniye Camii, İstanbul



Turkey

- A moderate form of Islam
 - Modern state founded with secular government.
 - Religion largely a matter of ethnic identity (as in much of Middle East)

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk on Turkish banknote (before currency reform)



Turkic Peoples

Azerbaijan
Kazakhstan
Kyrgyzstan
Turkey
Turkmenistan
Uzbekistan

Russia: Balkars,
Bashkirs, Chuvash,
Karachai, Crimean
Tatars, Tuvans

Moldova: Gagauz

China: Xinjiang Province

Cyprus: Turkish Cypriots



Turkey

- Ramadan not so strictly observed
 - Turks love their cigarettes and *rakı*.



Turkey

- Ramadan not so strictly observed
 - After Ramadan, *Şeker Bayramı*
 - “Sweet holiday”
 - Visit relatives
 - Prepare food for neighbors

Candy store
in Turkey



Turkey

- Now inching toward an Islamic government

*Abdullah Gül
President
of Turkey*

*Moderate
Islamist*



With his wife



Turkey

- Islamist / secular split



Girls with head covering



*Girls without head covering
at Bilkent University*

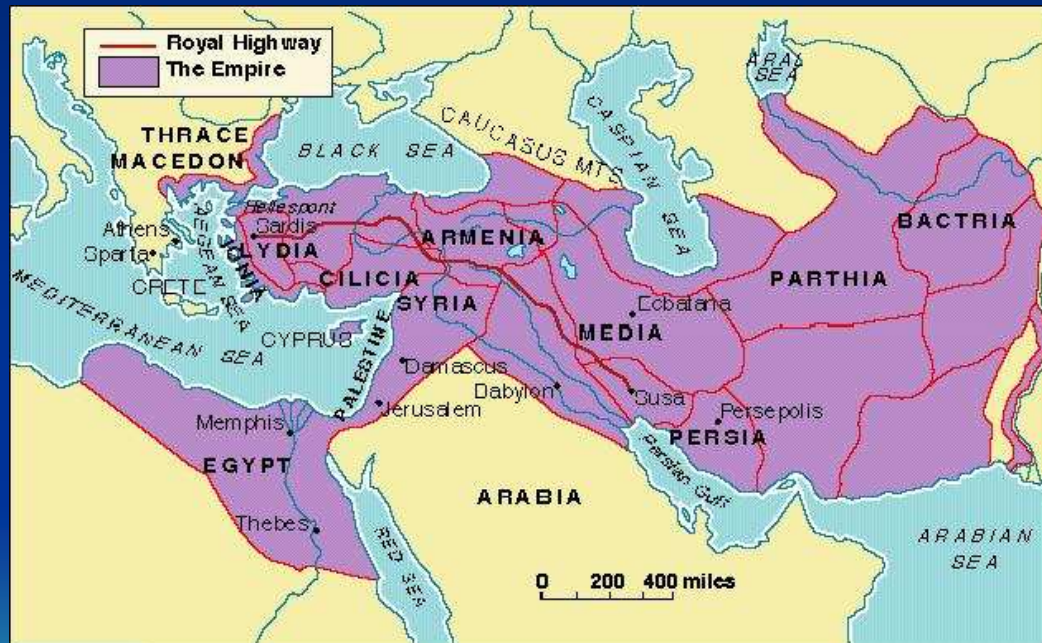
Iran

- Two traditions
 - Persian
 - Islamic

World's first empire. 580-486 bce

Controlled by Cyrus the Great.

Gave Zoroastrian ideas to the West via Jewish Exile



Location of Modern Iran



Iran

- Persian tradition
 - Identified with political right



*Akbar Hashemi
Rafsanjani*



*Mir-Hossein
Mousavi*



*Shah Reza Pahlavi
Installed after CIA-led coup
against Prime Minister
Mohammed Mossadegh*

Iran

- Islamic tradition (Shia)
 - Ayatollahs traditionally don't run the government



*President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad
Traffic engineer by training*



*Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamenei
Supreme leader of Iran*

Iran

- Islamist / secular rift in society



Many young people attracted by justice agenda of Ahmadinejad



Others want to Westernize as fast as possible



Iran

Young people participate in symbolic self-flagellation during Ashura (Hussein's Day) celebration, Teheran



Syria

- Sunni majority
- Alawite Shia minority is politically dominant
 - A formula for trouble

*Bashar al-Assad
President of Syria
Member of Alawite sect*



Syria

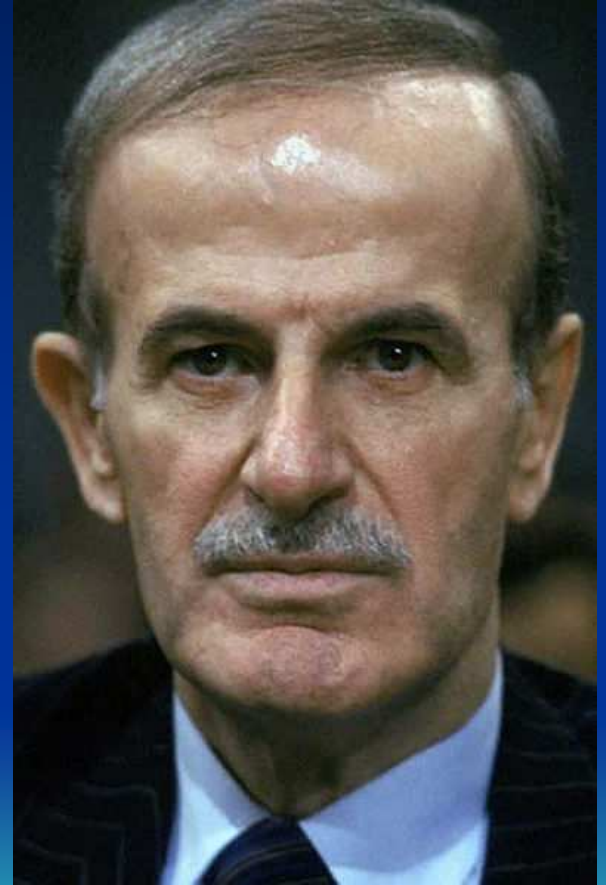
- Alawite sect
 - Twelver Shia Muslims
 - Alawite = Ali - ite
 - More ethnic identity than religious doctrine
 - As is common in Middle East



Syria

- Hafez al-Assad
 - Took power 1970
 - Hama Massacre, 1982
 - Suppressed rebellion of Muslim Brotherhood (Sunni)
 - 10,000-25,000 killed, mostly civilians
 - Helps fuel civil war today

Hafez al-Assad
1930-2000



Questions?
Comments?

