

Religions of the Ancient Middle East—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

Section 5



MAIN IDEAS

1. Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scholars made lasting contributions to the fields of science and philosophy.
2. Jews, Christians, and Muslims all made great contributions to the visual and literary arts.

Key Terms and Places

alchemy an early form of chemistry

synagogue a Jewish house of worship

cathedral a large Christian church

minaret a tall tower on a mosque, from which Muslims are called to prayer

calligraphy decorative writing

Section Summary

SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY

As the three major religions spread, this contact led to new ideas and advances in knowledge.

Christians in Europe developed an early form of chemistry known as **alchemy**. Some alchemists tried to cure sickness; others tried to turn worthless metals like lead into gold. Their experiments helped shape the later development of modern science.

Muslim scientists built on knowledge from ancient Greece and India. They started the world's first pharmacy school, built hospitals, and learned to cure many diseases, such as smallpox. Avicenna wrote a medical encyclopedia that was used in Europe until the 1600s.

Jews, Christians, and Muslims also did work in philosophy. The Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides (my-mahn-uh-deez) wrote about the nature of faith and how religious people should behave. The Muslim scholar Ibn-Rushd, also known as Averroes, studied the Greek philosopher Aristotle and his ideas about logic. Maimonides, Ibn-Rushd,

How were alchemy's failures important?

Which philosopher wrote about faith? Which wrote about logic?

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and others influenced thinking for many years to come. For example, in the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas was inspired by these thinkers. Aquinas worked to blend Christian faith with Greek logic.

ART AND LITERATURE

Jews, Christians, and Muslims also made advances in the arts, such as architecture. Religious people built glorious houses of worship as symbols of their faith. Jews built ornate **synagogues**. Christians built large, highly decorated churches called **cathedrals**. Muslims built beautiful mosques featuring large domes and graceful **minarets**.

Christians made statues and paintings of Jesus, Mary, and other religious subjects. Jews and Muslims did not show people in their art. They believed that only God could create the human image. Instead, Muslim artists decorated with geometric patterns and **calligraphy**, or decorative writing.

Religious beliefs also inspired literature, such as poetry that expressed love for God. Many Jewish and Christian poems were written by holy men and women who lived apart from society, such as the Christian nun Hildegard of Bingen.

In contrast, Muslim poets were often active in society. Omar Khayyám (oh-mahr ky-AHM) wrote a book of poems—the *Rubáiyát*—about faith, hope, and other emotions.

CHALLENGE ACTIVITY

Critical Thinking: Drawing Inferences Islamic culture made many advances in science, medicine, and art that still affect us today. Pick the advance that you think is the most important to our modern society, and write a one-page paper explaining your position.

Why do you think that synagogues, cathedrals, and mosques were made so glorious and ornately decorated?

Underline the sentence that helps to explain why Muslim artists developed calligraphy as a fine art.