North Africa
The Post-Classical Period
Early North Africa

- The Berbers were nomadic peoples who trace their ancestry to Tunisia, Morocco and territories in the south west of the Sahara.

- These groups spread across the Sahara and North Africa in the 2nd millennium B.C.E.

- The political response to increased commercial activity along the Mediterranean Sea was the development of Numidia, a fairly large Berber state, located in Eastern Algeria and parts of Tunisia in the 3rd Century B.C.E.
During the Punic Wars (264-146) Numidia allied with Rome in its campaign against Carthage.

Later Juba I the King of Numidia supported Pompey in his struggle for power with Julius Caesar.

In 46 B.C.E. Juba’s forces were defeated by Caesar and Numidia came under Roman political authority.
A second major Berber Kingdom Mauretania located in Morocco came under Roman rule in 33 B.C.E.

Under Roman influence North Africans adopted a variety of new agricultural practices and built aqueducts.

Furthermore, these northern territories were the main suppliers of wheat for the Roman empire.
Triumphal Arch At Volubilis, Mauretania
Mauretanian Mosaic: Diana Rises From a Bath
Egyptian independence ended with the death of Cleopatra, the last Ptolemaic ruler, in 23 BCE.

The Ptolemaic period blended Hellenistic culture with ancient Egyptian culture.

Furthermore, during the Roman period Greek cultural influences were strong and Greek remained language of commerce in Egypt.
The Later Roman Era

- The Roman empire maintained control over North Africa until the early fifth century, when the Vandals invaded western North Africa and uprooted Roman leadership.

- In the sixth century the Eastern Roman Empire reestablished Roman rule in North African territories.

- However poor management of the North African frontiers coupled with frequent Berber rebellion worked to gradually shrink Roman controlled territories, until Roman rule was supplanted by the spread of the Islam in the seventh century.
The Roman Period

- Interior parts of western North Africa south of the Atlas mountain and the Northern most parts of the Sahara remained outside of Roman rule and influence.

- These territories, not the North African coast were the centers of the two most significant regional developments of the period, Pastoral nomadism and the Trans-Saharan trade.
The introduction of Camels to North Africa in the first century BCE from the Saudi Arabian Peninsula revolutionized life in the Sahara.

For the first time marginalized Berbers in the northern fringes of the Sahara possessed a large animal truly adapted to their climate.

Camel raising nomadic pastoralist soon became a significant historical force in North Africa connecting West African economic interest with that of North Africa.
To survive the trip across the Sahara, traders stopped at oases for water. However, it was 500 miles to Timbuktu from the nearest oasis! The journey was very hard.

The camel was the only animal that could go without water long enough to cross the Sahara.

Workers in the Sahara endured hardship to mine this salt. In a hot climate, salt helps the human body to retain water. Salt was scarce in the gold-mining region.

These beautiful cowrie shells came all the way from East Africa. They were used as money.

The king often demanded these gold nuggets as taxes.
Religion during the Roman period

- Roman influences dictated the religious directions of North Africa during the classical period.

- By the 4th century CE, Egypt adopted Christianity and by the 5th century Christianity had established its presence in towns all across western North Africa.
North Africa and Islam

- After Muhammad’s death in 632, Muslims swept across western North Africa converting the territory by conquest.
- By 670, Muslims ruled Egypt and had entered the Maghrib.
- The Magrib is the part of North Africa that is today the Mediterranean coast of Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco.
Islamic forces united North Africa under their rule for a brief period, but this period experienced constant Berber rebellions.

By the end of the 9th century political subordination of North African territories by the Abbasid caliphate had come to an end.
As Islam spread, some African rulers converted to Islam. These African Muslim rulers then based their government upon Islamic law.

Among those who converted to Islam were the Berbers, a fiercely independent group of desert and mountain dwellers of North Africa.

Two Berber groups, the Almoravids and the Almohads, Founded empires that united the Maghrib under Muslim rule.
Almoravid Reformers

- In the 11th century Muslim reformers founded the Almoravid Empire.

- After making a Hajj (pilgrimage) to Mecca, Berber Muslims convinced a Muslim scholar from Morocco named Abd Allah Ibn Yasin to teach their people his views on Islam.

- Ibn Yasin’s teachings attracted followers and he soon founded a brotherhood known as the Almoravids.
The Almoravids

- The Almoravids were a coalition of Berber peoples united by religious leadership and religious doctrine.

- The Almoravid movement was popular among Sanhaja Berbers that occupied the western Sahara.

- The Sanhaja were being pushed out of their trading livelihood by the southern state of Ghana and northern Berbers who dominated the Trans-Saharan trade routes.

- The Sanhaja focused the military powers that accompanied the Almoravid movement onto their economic rivals in the Sahara.
Ibn Yasin lead the Almoravids on a campaign to spread Islam through conquest in western North Africa, but died in 1059.

After his death the Almoravids conquered Morocco and made their capital at Marrakech.

They overran the West African Empire of Ghana in 1076.

They also captured parts of southern Spain where they were called Moors.
In the mid-1100s, the Almohads, another group of Berber Muslim reformers, seized power from the Almoravids.

The Almohads followed the teachings of Ibn Tumart. After a pilgrimage to Mecca, Ibn Tumart criticized the later Almoravid rulers for moving away from the traditional practice of Islam.

Tumart denounced pagan Berber customs taken into Islamic practice and condemned wine drinking, music and the enjoyment of luxury clothing.

The Almohads, led by their military leader Abd al-Mumin, fought to overthrow the Almoravids.
By 1148 the Almohads controlled most of Morocco and ended Almoravid rule taking Marrakech as their capital.

By the end of the 12th century, they had conquered much of southern Spain and their territory in Africa, stretched from Marrakech to Tripoli and Tunis on the Mediterranean.
Almohad Decline

- Tumart’s teachings called for a purification of the Islamic tradition in North Africa.

- However this goal was never fully accomplished, alternative forms of Islam were always tolerated. In fact, later rulers abandoned the Almohad doctrine and renounced the teachings of Tumart.

- Lasting just over a century the Almohad was first to unite the Magrib under one rule. By the mid thirteenth century the empire had broken up into individual Muslim dynasties.
As Islam spread, some African rulers converted to Islam. These African Muslim rulers then based their government upon Islamic law. Muslims believe that God’s law is a higher authority than any human law. Therefore, Muslim rulers often relied on religious scholars as government advisers. (See World Religions, pages 290–291.)

Islamic Law

In Islam, following the law is a religious obligation. Muslims do not separate their personal life from their religious life, and Islamic law regulates almost all areas of human life. Islamic law helped to bring order to Muslim states. However, various Muslim states had ethnic and cultural differences. Further, these states sometimes had differing interpretations, and schools, of Islamic law. Nonetheless, Islamic law has been such a significant force in history that some states, especially in North Africa, are still influenced by it today.

Among those who converted to Islam were the Berbers. Fiercely independent desert and mountain dwellers, the Berbers were the original inhabitants of North Africa. While they accepted Islam as their faith, many maintained their Berber identities and loyalties. Two Berber groups, the Almoravids and the Almohads, founded empires that united the Maghrib under Muslim rule.

Almoravid Reformers

In the 11th century, Muslim reformers founded the Almoravid (al•muh•RAHV•uhd) Empire. Its members came from a Berber group living in the western Sahara in what is today Mauritania. The movement began after devout Berber Muslims made a hajj, or pilgrimage, to Mecca. On their journey...
Essay Question

- Compare the civilizations of North Africa to the civilizations on the Horn of Africa. How did religion help to drive political developments in both regions?