

## tpo\_16\_passage\_3

Trade was the mainstay of the urban economy in the Middle East, as caravans negotiated the surrounding desert, restricted only by access to water and by mountain ranges. This has been so since ancient times, partly due to the geology of the area, which is mostly limestone and sandstone, with few deposits of metallic ore and other useful materials. Ancient demands for obsidian (a black volcanic rock useful for making mirrors and tools) led to trade with Armenia to the north, while jade for cutting tools was brought from Turkistan, and the precious stone lapis lazuli was imported from Afghanistan. One can trace such expeditions back to ancient Sumeria, the earliest known Middle Eastern civilization. Records show merchant caravans and trading posts set up by the Sumerians in the surrounding mountains and deserts of Persia and Arabia, where they traded grain for raw materials, such as timber and stones, as well as for metals and gems. Reliance on trade had several important consequences. Production was generally in the hands of skilled individual artisans doing piecework under the tutelage of a master who was also the shop owner. In these shops differences of rank were blurred as artisans and masters labored side by side in the same modest establishment, were usually members of the same guild and religious sect, lived in the same neighborhoods, and often had assumed or real kinship relationships. The worker was bound to the master by a mutual contract that either one could repudiate, and the relationship was conceptualized as one of partnership. This mode of craft production favored the growth of self-governing and ideologically egalitarian craft guilds everywhere in the Middle Eastern city. These were essentially professional associations that provided for the mutual aid and protection of their members, and allowed for the maintenance of professional standards. The growth of independent guilds was furthered by the fact that surplus was not a result of domestic craft production but resulted primarily from international trading; the government left working people to govern themselves, much as shepherds of tribal confederacies were left alone by their leaders. In the multiplicity of small-scale local egalitarian or quasi-egalitarian organizations for fellowship, worship, and production that flourished in this laissez-faire environment, individuals could interact with one another within a community of harmony and ideological equality, following their own popularly elected leaders and governing themselves by shared consensus while minimizing distinctions of wealth and power. The mercantile economy was also characterized by a peculiar moral stance that is typical of people who live by trade—an attitude that is individualistic, calculating, risk taking, and adaptive to circumstances. As among tribespeople, personal relationships and a careful weighing of character have always been crucial in a mercantile economy with little regulation, where one's word is one's bond and where informal ties of trust cement together an international trade network. Nor have merchants and artisans ever had much tolerance for aristocratic professions of moral superiority, favoring instead an egalitarian ethic of the open market, where steady hard work, the loyalty of one's fellows, and entrepreneurial skill make all the difference. And, like the pastoralists, Middle Eastern merchants and artisans unhappy with their environment could simply pack up and leave for greener pastures—an act of self-assertion wholly impossible in most other civilizations throughout history. Dependence on long-distance trade also meant that the great empires of the Middle East were built both literally and figuratively on shifting sand. The central state, though often very rich and very populous, was intrinsically fragile, since the development of new international trade routes could undermine the monetary

base and erode state power, as occurred when European seafarers circumvented Middle Eastern merchants after Vasco da Gama's voyage around Africa in the late fifteenth-century opened up a southern route. The ecology of the region also permitted armed predators to prowl the surrounding barrens, which were almost impossible for a state to control. Peripheral peoples therefore had a great advantage in their dealings with the center, making government authority insecure and anxious.

### question 1

According to paragraph 1, why has trade been so important throughout the history of the Middle East?

- A The rare and valuable metals and stones found in Middle Eastern deserts have always been in high demand in surrounding areas.
- B Growing conditions throughout the Middle East are generally poor, forcing Middle Eastern \ people to depend on imported grain.
- C Many useful and decorative raw materials cannot be found naturally in the Middle East but are available from neighboring regions.
- D Frequent travel, due to limited water supplies in the Middle East, created many opportunities for trade with neighboring societies.

### question 2

According to paragraph 2, how did Middle Eastern shop owners treat their workers?

- A Workers were ranked according to their skill level, with the most-experienced artisans becoming partial owners of the shop.
- B Shop owners treated different workers differently depending on how much the workers had in common with their masters.
- C Workers were bound to their masters by unbreakable contracts that strictly defined the terms of their partnership.
- D The shop owner worked alongside the workers and often considered them partners and members of the family.

### question 3

The author includes the information that "surplus was not a result of domestic

craft production but resulted primarily from international trading” in order to

A support the claim that the mode of production made possible by the craft guilds was very good for trade

B contrast the economic base of the city government with that of the tribal confederacies

C provide a reason why the government allowed the guilds to be self-controlled

D suggest that the government was missing out on a valuable opportunity to tax the guilds

#### question 4

According to paragraph 3, all of the following are true of the Middle Eastern craft guilds EXCEPT:

A The guilds were created to support workers and to uphold principles of high-quality craft production.

B Each guild was very large and included members from a broad geographic area.

C The leaders of the guilds were chosen by popular vote.

D All guild members were treated as equals.

#### question 5

According to paragraph 4, which of the following was NOT necessary for success in the mercantile economy?

A Good business sense

B Reliable associates

C Family wealth

D Constant effort

### question 6

Which of the sentences below best expresses the essential information in the highlighted sentence in the passage? Incorrect choices change the meaning in important ways or leave out essential information.

A Tribespeople were comfortable forming personal relationships with merchants, who, like them, were bound by their promises to one another.

B Because trade was not formally regulated, merchants were careful about whom they trusted and often conducted business with people they knew personally.

C While trade among merchants relied somewhat on regulation, among tribespeople trade was based on personal relationships and careful character evaluation.

D Because tribespeople were bound only by their promises to one another, personal relationships were formed only after careful weighing of character.

### question 7

According to paragraph 4, what choice did Middle Eastern merchants and artisans have that many other people have not had?

A If they were unhappy in the mercantile environment, they could draw on personal connections to find a different kind of work.

B They were allowed to assert their opinions without having to listen to aristocratic professions of moral superiority.

C Following the example of the pastoralists, they could demand, and receive, better working conditions.

D If they didn't like their environment, they could move somewhere else.

### question 8

In paragraph 5, why does the author mention the new trade route opened up by Vasco da Gama's fifteenth-century voyage around Africa?

A To provide evidence that European seafarers took every opportunity to bypass Middle Eastern merchants

B To present an instance in which Middle Eastern states lost money and power because of their reliance on long-distance trade

C To argue this new route became necessary when European seafarers wanted to avoid Middle Eastern states whose central power had begun to erode

D To explain how da Gama helped European traders avoid the dangerous predators prowling the areas surrounding Middle Eastern cities

## question 9

Look at the four squares [ ] that indicate where the following sentence could be added to the passage.

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#### question 10

Directions: An introductory sentence for a brief summary of the passage is provided below. Complete the summary by selecting the THREE answer choices that express the most important ideas in the passage. Some sentences do not belong in the summary because they express ideas that are not presented in the passage or are minor ideas in the passage. This question is worth 2 points.

- A. Persian and Arabian merchants traveled great distances to sell their finished goods at the marketplaces of ancient Sumeria.
- B. As production increased, centralized control over production also increased, leading in turn to more-centralized control over fellowship and worship.
- C. Revenue from trade was unevenly distributed, causing Middle Eastern societies to be characterized by growing distinctions in wealth and power.
- D. Crafts were produced by skilled artisans working in close, egalitarian relationships with their masters and other fellow guild members.
- E. Qualities that were valued in the mercantile economy included individualism, hard work, loyalty, and the willingness to take risks.
- F. The stability of Middle Eastern governments was threatened by their lack of control over international trade patterns and over their own peripheral territories.

