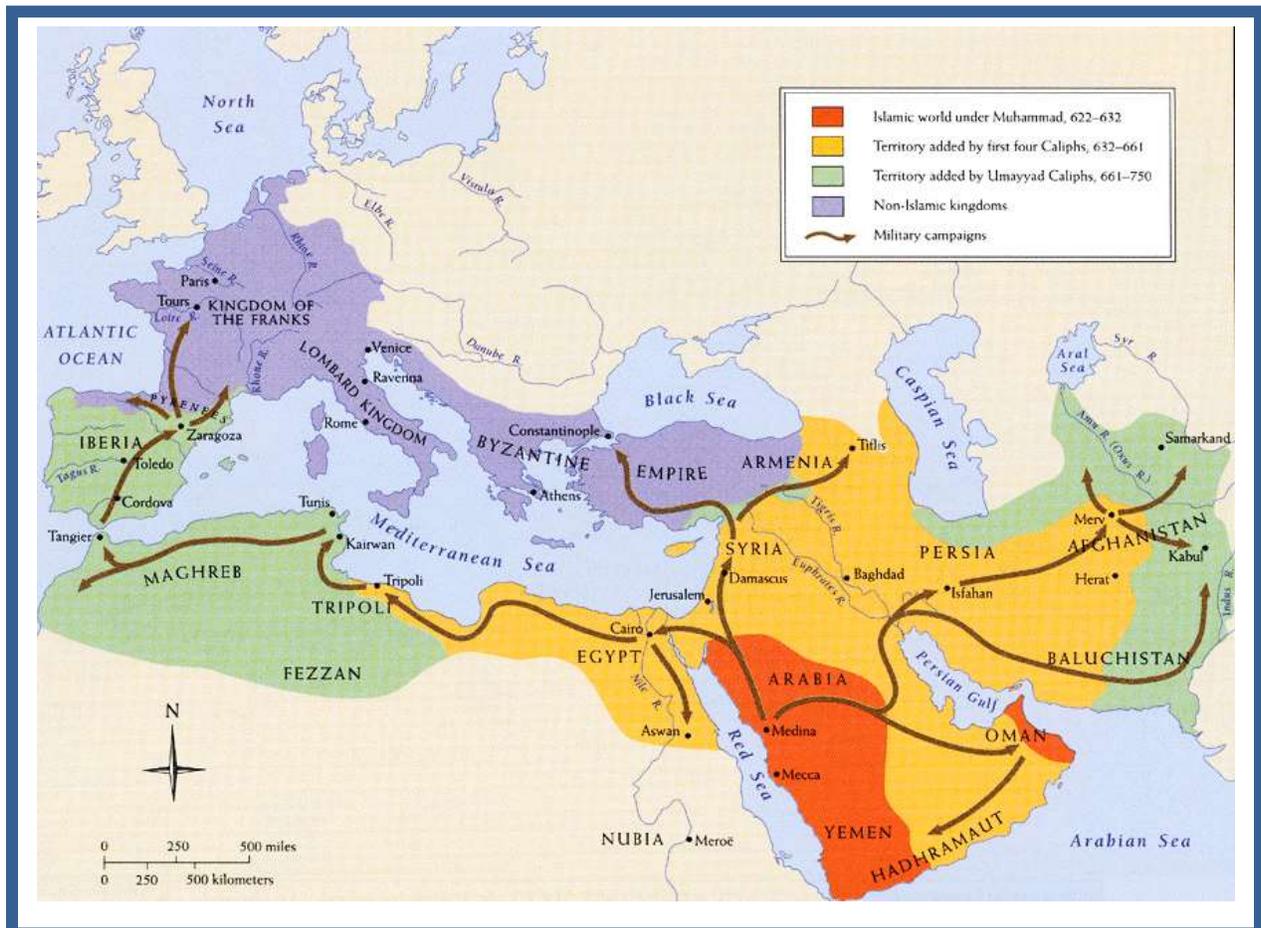


17: Islam's Rise

Islam's Origins and Growth

Muhammad, founding prophet of the religion called “Islam,” was born about 570 CE in the Arabian city of Mecca. According to history and tradition, about 610, he received his first revelation from God, through the angel Gabriel. These revelations continued for 22 years. Recorded in Arabic writing, they formed the Qur’an, (Koran), the “holy book” foundation for the new religion. The religion immediately gained followers called “Muslims,” in Arabia, then spread rapidly across North Africa, southern Asia, and eventually Iberia (present Spain and Portugal).

Map: The Spread of Islam, 622 – 750 C.E.



<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/92112754848062901/>

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Like Christianity, Islam is a religion with strong ties to Judaism. Both religions share many important beliefs—that there is only one God (called Allah in Arabic), that their holy books were inspired by God, a strict code of ethics, and the belief that God intervenes directly in human affairs. (“Islam” means “submission to the will of Allah.”)

Muslims made notable cultural and historical contributions in science, poetry, architecture, astronomy, mathematics, technology, and literature.

Investigation: Muslim Motives

Rapid historical changes, such as the spread of Islam, sometimes occur because motives—ideas and feelings that cause action—are readily accepted and shared by many people. Identify and list the motives of the conquering Muslims suggested in the data in the frames on this and the next page.

In 711 the Berber leader **Tarik** and Muslim forces crossed the Straits of Gibraltar into what is now Spain, and invaded the Visigoth-controlled “Kingdom of Hispania.” Muslim historian Al Maggari reported Tarik’s address to his soldiers before the July 11, 711 “Battle of Guadalete:”¹

When Tarik had been informed of the approach of the enemy, he rose in the midst of his companions and, after having glorified God in the highest, he said to his soldiers:

"Oh my warriors, where would you flee? The sea is behind you, the enemy is in front of you. All that’s left for you to rely on is your courage and loyalty. Remember that in this country you are more unfortunate than the orphan seated at the table of a greedy master. Your enemy is in front of you, protected by an uncountable army; he has plenty of men. The only thing you have to help you are your swords; you must snatch your only chance for life from the hands of the enemy.

“You are in a desperate situation. If you hesitate even a tiny bit, if you delay in seizing immediate success, your good fortune will vanish. Your enemies, who are filled with fear at your sight, will regain their courage. Don’t even dream about disgraceful retreat. Attack this ruler who has come from his strongly fortified city to meet you. This is a splendid opportunity to defeat him, if you are willing to face death. Don’t think that I want to make you face dangers that I’m not willing to share. In the attack I myself will be in the lead, where the danger is greatest.

(Continued)

¹ From: Charles F. Horne, ed., *The Sacred Books and Early Literature of the East*, (New York: Parke, Austin, & Lipscomb, 1917), Vol. VI: *Medieval Arabia*, pp. 241-242. (adapted)
<http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/source/711Tarik1.asp>

"Remember that if you suffer a few moments patiently, you will afterward enjoy supreme delight. Your fate and mine are joined together. Know that if you fall, I will either also die, or I will avenge your death. You have heard that in this country there are a large number of alluringly beautiful Greek maidens. Their graceful forms are draped in splendid gowns on which gleam pearls, coral, and purest gold, and they live in the palaces of royal kings. The Commander of True Believers, Al-Walid ibn Abd al-Malik [*Caliph, Muslim supreme ruler*], has chosen you for this attack from among all his Arab warriors; and he promises that you shall become his comrades and shall hold the rank of kings in this country. This shows his confidence in your fearlessness. The only prize which he wants your bravery to deliver is that the word of God shall be lifted up in this country, and that the true religion shall be established here. Everything you capture will belong to you.

"Remember that I place myself in the front of this glorious charge which I'm urging you to make. At the moment when the two armies meet hand to hand, you will see me, never doubt it, seeking out this Roderick [*king of Hispania*], tyrant of his people, challenging him to combat, if God is willing. If I perish after this, I will have had at least the satisfaction of delivering you, and you will easily find among you an experienced hero to choose as your new leader. But should I fall before I reach Roderick, increase your eagerness, and force yourselves to the attack. Conquer this country, by taking away Roderick's life. With him dead, his soldiers will no longer defy you."

Muslim historian Ibn Abd-el-Hakem described Tarik's conquest.¹

When Tarik landed, soldiers from Cordova came to meet him. Seeing the small number of soldiers in Tarik's force, they assumed he would be easily defeated. A vicious battle began. The soldiers from Cordova were routed, and Tarik chased and kept killing them until they reached the town of Cordova. When [*King*] Roderick heard of this, he came to their rescue from Toledo. They then fought in a place named "Shedunia" [*at the mouth of the Barbate River*]. The battle was severe, but God, mighty and great, killed Roderick and his companions.

Muslims conquered and ruled much of the Iberian Peninsula until gradually pushed back south by Catholic Christian military forces. They were finally conquered and forced out of Spain by the army of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, in 1492. The settlements and buildings they left behind are important landmarks, especially in southern Spain.

1. ***Attach numbers to items on your list of Muslim motives to indicate your opinion of their relative importance (1 = most important).***
2. ***Identify and record the attitude toward people who aren't Muslim suggested by the above account and the document that follows.***

¹ From Ibn Abd-el-Hakem, *History of the Conquest of Spain*, trans. by John Harris Jones (Gottingen, W. Fr. Kaestner, 1858), pp. 18-22 (adapted) <http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/source/conqspain.asp>

In the 7th century CE, when Muslims conquered Christians or Jews in places such as Jerusalem, they worked out a system—the “Pact of Umar,” to allow coexistence:¹

We heard from 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Ghanam [*died 697 CE*] as follows: When Umar ibn al-Khattab [*the Caliph or primary Muslim ruler*], may God be pleased with him, offered peace to the Christians of Syria, we wrote to him as follows:

In the name of God, the Merciful and Compassionate. This is a letter to the servant of God Umar, Commander of the Faithful, from the Christians of such-and-such a city. When you came against us, we asked you for safe-conduct (*aman*) for ourselves, our descendants, our property, and the people of our community, and we undertook the following obligations toward you:

We shall not build, in our cities or in their neighborhood, new monasteries, Churches, convents, or monks' cells, nor shall we repair, by day or by night, such of them as fall in ruins or are situated in the quarters of the Muslims.

We shall keep our gates wide open for passersby and travelers. We shall give three days' board and lodging to all Muslims who pass our way.

We shall not give shelter in our churches or in our dwellings to any spy, nor hide him from the Muslims.

We shall not teach the Qur'an to our children.

We shall not manifest our religion publicly nor convert anyone to it. We shall not prevent any of our kin from entering Islam if they wish it.

We shall show respect toward the Muslims, and we shall rise from our seats when they wish to sit.

We shall not seek to resemble the Muslims by imitating any of their garments, the head covering, the turban, footwear, or the parting of the hair. We shall not speak as they do, nor shall we adopt their kunyas.

We shall not mount on saddles, nor shall we gird swords nor bear any kind of arms nor carry them on our persons.

We shall not engrave Arabic inscriptions on our seals.

We shall not sell fermented drinks.

We shall clip the hair on the front of our heads.

We shall always dress in the same way wherever we may be, and we shall bind the zunar [*a wide yellow belt*] round our waists.

(Continued)

¹ Al-Turtushi, *Siraj al-Muluk*, pp. 229-230. <http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/source/pact-umar.asp>

We shall not display our crosses or our books in the roads or markets of the Muslims. We shall use only clappers in our churches very softly. We shall not raise our voices when following our dead. We shall not show lights on any of the roads of the Muslims or in their markets. We shall not bury our dead near the Muslims.

We shall not take slaves who have been allotted to Muslims.

We shall not build houses overtopping the houses of the Muslims.

We accept these conditions for ourselves and for the people of our community, and in return we receive safe-conduct (i.e. protection by Muslim authorities).

If we in any way violate these undertakings, which we ourselves guarantee, we forfeit our covenant [*dhimma*], and we become liable to the penalties for stubborn disobedience to law and treason.

Umar ibn al-Khittab replied: Sign what they ask, but add two clauses and impose them in addition to those which they have undertaken. They are: “They shall not buy anyone made prisoner by the Muslims,” and “Whoever strikes a Muslim with deliberate intent shall forfeit the protection of this pact.”

Note that the same principles stated here also applied to conquered Jews.

Unit 12—Early Rome—introduces system changes related to lack of autonomy. If you completed that unit, review the list of responses to lack or loss of autonomy given there. Describe ways that Jews and Christians might respond to this “Pact of Umar.”

Our main objective in this investigation is to identify motives for the rapid spread of Islam—an important historical change.

You’ve identified several motives. Do they “explain” the spread of Islam, or are there other possible motives or reasons not indicated in this data that might be more important?

If you think there are other important reasons for the spread of Islam, work with others to hypothesize and list them. How might you check your hypotheses?

Investigation: Life in Medieval Muslim Jerusalem

Working with others, use the main Model categories—setting, demographics, action patterns, shared ideas—to analyze the following data about Jerusalem when it was ruled by the Muslims. In your journal, list two to four of the most important items in each main Model category, e.g.:

Demographics—Jerusalem is occupied by three groups: Jews, Christians and Muslims.

Action patterns—the city is a destination for pilgrims from all three religions.

The Persian poet and philosopher Nasir ibn Khusraw described Jerusalem in the year 1047 AD:¹

The men of Syria and nearby regions call the Holy City “Qods” [*the Holy*]. The people of these provinces, if they are unable to make the *Hajj* [*pilgrimage to Mecca*], will go up at the proper time to Jerusalem, and there perform their rites, and upon the feast day slay the sacrifice, as is customary to do [*at Mecca on the same day*]. Some years as many as 20,000 people will be present at Jerusalem during the first days of the [*pilgrimage*] month of Dhu-al Hijjah; ...

From all the countries of the Greeks, too, and from other lands, the Christians and the Jews come up to Jerusalem in great numbers to visit the Church [*of the Resurrection*] and the Synagogue that is there.

The country and villages around the Holy City are on hillsides; the land is well cultivated, and they grow grain, olives, and figs. Many kinds of trees grow here. In all the country round there is no spring water for irrigation, and yet the produce is very abundant, and the prices are moderate. Many of the chief men harvest as much as 75,000 liters of olive-oil. It is kept in tanks and in pits, and they export it to other countries.

People say that drought never visits the soil of Syria. I heard from a certain person, on whose word I can rely, that the Prophet—peace be upon him, and the benediction of Allah!—was seen in a dream by a saintly man, who addressed him, saying, “O Prophet of God, give me assurance forever of my daily bread;” and the Prophet—peace be upon him!—replied: “Truly it shall be guaranteed to you, supplied by the bread and oil of Syria.”

(Continued)

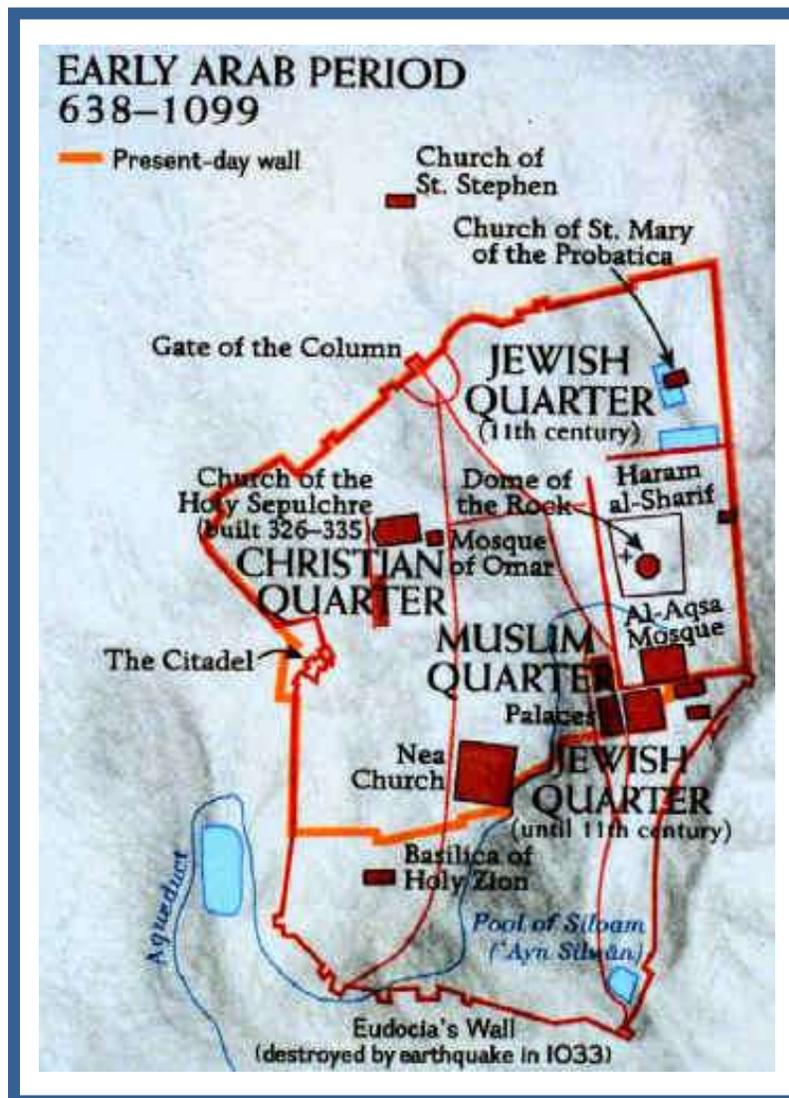
¹ Nasir-i Khusrau, *Diary of a Journey Through Syria and Palestine*. Translated and with a preface by Guy Le Strange. London: Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society, 1893.

<http://www.bu.edu/mzank/Jerusalem/tx/bookoftravels.htm>

Jerusalem is a city set on a hill, and there is no water there, except rainfall. The villages nearby have springs of water, but the Holy City has no springs. The city is enclosed by strong walls of stone, mortared, with iron gates. There are no trees around the city, for it is all built on rock. Jerusalem is a very great city, and, at the time of my visit, there were 20,000 men in it. It has high, well-built, and clean bazaars. All the streets are paved with slabs of stone; and where there was a hill or a height, they have cut it down and made it level, so that as soon as the rain falls the whole place is washed clean.

In the city there are many craftsmen, and each craft has a separate bazaar. The mosque lies at the east quarter of the city, and the eastern city wall also forms the wall of the courtyard for the mosque.

(Continued)



<https://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Jerusalem-in-the-Arab-Period-Map>

Going south from the city for half a league, [see map] and down the gorge, you come to a fountain of water gushing out from the rock, which they call the 'Ain Sulwan [*the Spring of Siloam*]. Many buildings surround the spring. The water from the spring flows on down to a village, where there are many houses and gardens. It is said that when anyone washes from head to foot in this water he obtains relief from his pains, and will even recover from long-lasting diseases. At this spring are many buildings for charitable purposes, richly endowed; and the Holy City itself possesses an excellent hospital, which is provided for by considerable sums that were given for this purpose. Great numbers of sick people are treated with potions and lotions; for there are physicians who receive a fixed income, and attend at the hospital.

[Description of the “Haram al-Sharif” or “Noble Sanctuary” area where the “Dome of the Rock” and Al-Aqsa mosque are located. See map.] Inside the main building of the Aqsa mosque there is a tank in the ground which, when the cover is set on, lies level with the floor, used to store rain water. In the south wall [of the Haram Area] is a gate leading to the places for the ablution [*ritual washing before prayer*], where there is running water.

(Continued)

Below: Artist’s depiction of medieval Jerusalem:



<https://ajcarlisle.wordpress.com/tag/medieval-europe/>

As you come out of the mosque, you face a large level area, called the *Sahirah*. Here, it is said, will be the place of the Resurrection, where all mankind shall be gathered together. Because of this, men from all parts of the world come here to live in the Holy City till death overtakes them, so when the day fixed by God—be He praised and exalted!—arrives, they may be ready and present at the proper place.

O God! in that day do Thou grant to Thy servants both Thy pardon and Thy protection! Amen. O Lord of both worlds!

At the border of this level area there is a great cemetery, where are many tombs of holy renown. There men come to pray and offer up appeals in their need. May God—be He praised and glorified!—grant them their desires. Grant unto us also, O God, our needs, and forgive our sins and our trespasses, and have mercy upon us, O most Merciful of the merciful!

The roofs of all the buildings in the Haram area are covered with lead. Below the ground-level are many tanks and water-cisterns hewn out of the rock, for the Noble Sanctuary rests everywhere on a foundation of live rock. There are so many of these cisterns that, no matter how much rain falls, no wasted water runs off, but all is caught in the tanks, available for people to draw out as needed. They have made lead pipes to carry down the rainwater, and the rock cisterns lie below these, with covered passages leading down, through which the pipes pass to the tanks. This prevents water loss, and keeps out impurities.

At a distance of three leagues [*about 10 kilometers*] from the Holy City I saw a great water-tank, [*“Solomon’s Pools”*] into which pour all the streams that flow down from the hills. From there they have brought an aqueduct that comes out into the Noble Sanctuary. Of all parts of the Holy City this is where water is most plentiful. But in every house, also, there is a cistern for collecting the rain water, for other than this water there is none, and each must store the rain which falls upon his roof. The water used in the hot-baths and other places comes only from the stored rainwater.

The foundation walls use stones so large that the mind cannot conceive how, by human power, they were carried up and set in place. It is said, however, that the building was done by Solomon, the son of David—peace be upon him! The Prophet—peace and blessing be upon him!—on the night of his Ascent into Heaven (*Mi`raj*), passed into the Noble Sanctuary through this passageway, for the gateway opens on the road from Mecca.

(Continued)

In the middle of the court of the Haram area is the platform (*dukkān*), and set in the middle of this level platform is the *Sakhrāh* (or Rock), which, before the revelation of Islam was the *Kiblah* [*point faced toward in prayer*]...

The surface of the platform is level and beautifully paved with slabs of marble, with walls also of marble, all the joints being riveted with lead. Along the edge of its four sides are parapets of marble blocks that fence it round, so that, except by the openings left for that purpose, you cannot get on the platform. From the platform you command a view over the roofs of the Aqsa mosque.

(Continued)

Below: The Dome of the Rock shrine as it appears today, the third-holiest spot on earth to Muslims, after Mecca and Medina in Arabia. A corner of the Aqsa mosque is to the right. The shrine was built starting in 689 CE, and completed in 691. It encloses a rock from which tradition says Muhammed ascended into heaven on the back of his horse. This site is where, much earlier, successive Jewish temples were built. The last one was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE. In the lower right is the “Western Wall,” a portion of the ancient supporting wall for the Jewish temple compound built (late first century BCE) by Jewish ruler Herod the Great. This wall is now a very sacred spot in Jerusalem for Jews, where many come to pray.



<https://thetruthbehindthescenes.wordpress.com>

All the rain-water that falls on the platform is collected, and flows through pipes to an underground tank in the middle of the platform. The water of this tank is sweeter and purer than the water of any other tank in the Haram area.

Four domes rise on the platform. The largest of them is the *Kubbat as Sakhrāh* [*the Dome of the Rock*]. This was the holy spot toward which people prayed, until Muhammed received the revelation that those praying should face Mecca.

This dome stands in the middle of the platform, which itself occupies the middle of the Haram area. The edifice is built in the form of a regular octagon, and each of its eight sides measures three-and-thirty cubits [*about 20 m.*] Four gates face the four cardinal points, east, west, north, and south.

The Noble Sanctuary is the third of the Houses of God—be He exalted and glorified!—and the doctors of religion agree that a single prayer offered up here, in this Holy City, is as effective as 25,000 prayers said elsewhere. In Medina, the City of the Prophet—peace and benediction be upon him!—every single prayer may count for 50,000, while each that is said in Mecca, the Venerable—God, be He exalted, ennoble the City!—will pass for 100,000. And God—be He exalted and glorified!—give grace to all His servants, that they may one day be able to make such prayers!

Continued account by Nasir ibn Khusraw. Here he describes the Christian Church of the Resurrection (also called the “Church of the Holy Sepulcher”), in Jerusalem:

At the present day (1047 CE) the church is a very large building, capable of containing eight thousand persons. The Church is built with extreme skill, of colored marble, with ornamentation and sculptures. Inside, the church is everywhere ornamented with Byzantine brocade, worked in gold with pictures. They show Jesus—peace be upon Him!—who in some pictures is shown riding upon a donkey. There are also pictures representing other Prophets, for instance Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, and Jacob with his sons—peace be upon them all! To cover each portrait they have made a plate of thin glass, perfectly transparent. This eliminates the need for a curtain, and prevents any dust or dirt from settling on the painting, for the glass is cleaned daily by the church servants.

(Continued)

Besides this Church of the Resurrection there are many other churches in Jerusalem, all very skillfully built; but to describe them all would make this account too long.

In the church of the Resurrection there is a picture divided into two parts, representing Heaven and Hell. One part shows people in Paradise, while the other shows people in Hell, with all that is in each place. Certainly there is nowhere else in the world a picture such as this. The church has great numbers of priests and monks who read the Evangel (Bible New Testament scriptures) and say prayers; both day and night they perform these acts.

Present-day view of the Church of the Resurrection/Holy Sepulcher:



<http://www.rc.net/wcc/israel/sepulchr.htm>

Another Muslim scholar, a native of Jerusalem named al-Muqaddasi, described the city a few years before Nasir (985 CE):¹

In the Holy City of Jerusalem, neither cold nor heat is excessive, and snow rarely falls. The buildings are of stone, and you will find nowhere finer or more solid construction. In no place will you meet with less corrupted people. The necessities for living sold here are excellent, and the markets are clean. The mosque is one of the largest anywhere. No other city has more Holy Places than Jerusalem.

The grapes are enormous, and there are no quinces to equal those of the Holy City.

In Jerusalem are all manner of learned men and scholars, so the heart of every intelligent man loves this city. Her streets are never empty of strangers. People say that Jerusalem is the most eminent of cities, because those who deal with thoughts and actions of *this world*, and those who concern themselves with the *world of the hereafter* both find total satisfaction here.

Still, Jerusalem has some disadvantages. I understand that written in the *Torah*, the books of Moses kept by the Jews, is this: “Jerusalem is like a golden basin filled with scorpions.” The baths here are filthier than any other city, yet the fees charged to use them here are the highest anywhere. Learned men are few, and the Christians many, and the Christians are rude in public.

The prices are high on everything sold in the inns. Every gate has guards, and no one is allowed to sell the necessities of life except in designated places. In this city the oppressed have no relief; the meek are molested, and the rich envied. People here do not consult with legal experts, and learned men have no renown. No one attends the schools, for there are no lectures. Everywhere the Christians and the Jews have the upper hand: and the mosque has no congregation or assembly of learned men.

Jerusalem was captured by Muslim forces in 637 or 638 CE. These accounts of the city are from about 400 years later.

You’ve identified important elements of setting, demography, action patterns and shared ideas in Jerusalem under the Muslims. Based on this information, identify and list probable systemic changes and relationships that developed in the city under Muslim control. (For example, what were the probable effects of the “Pact of Umar” on Jews and Christians?)

¹ Guy Le Strange, *Palestine under the Moslems; a description of Syria and the Holy Land from A.D. 650 to 1500. Translated from the works of the mediaeval Arab geographers.* 1890 (condensed and adapted). https://archive.org/stream/palestineundermo00lestuoft/palestineundermo00lestuoft_djvu.txt (pp. 84-86)

Follow-Up: Ideas that Generate Patterns

Shared ideas often create huge patterns in human action. Here's one: **To avoid impure and improper human thoughts about God, the Qur'an (Koran) prohibits making any kind of images of God. Muslims extended this idea, also discouraging the creation of images of humans, and sometimes even animals.**

Find and collect photographs of Islamic art and architectural decoration, and identify relationships between the shared Islamic ideas about images and the types of artwork Muslims have created.

Americans have a long-standing shared idea: **Progress is inevitable. Over the long haul, the future will be better than the present.**

Find and collect evidence of the effects of this idea on American patterns of action. If possible, find and collect evidence that the idea is changing.

Follow-Up: Rapid Historical Change Here and Now

We began this unit by considering motives that led to the rapid spread of Islam. We live in a period when which many important changes are occurring. **Choose one of the following changes, and create a system change diagram (information in boxes linked by arrows) showing (1) probable reasons for the change and (2) its potential consequences:**

- Increasing understanding of the causes of diseases
- Depletion of natural resources
- Increase in electronic forms of communication
- Manipulation of genes in living organisms
- Degrading public infrastructure such as bridges and roads
- Global warming

(3) Give possible reasons why the change you've selected is occurring rapidly.

For Teacher/Mentor—Overview:

The present situation in the United States, with an appreciable minority of Americans viewing all Muslims negatively, can create problems for schools, teachers, and creators of course materials. The rapid early growth of Islam during medieval times, and its impact on people across a wide span of the globe makes it an obvious world history topic. However, selective perception can cause some people to assume that “teaching *about* Muslim religion and Islamic society” is the same as “teaching Muslim religion.” This is especially true if the course materials point up any positive historical aspects of Islamic society and culture.

Others, on the other side of this polarized issue, may view some of what’s presented here in primary sources as a negative view of Islam.

It should go without saying, but we’ll say it anyway: **We believe any history course intended for general use should avoid indoctrinating the beliefs of *any* form of religion. Nor should any such course disparage or disrespect *any* belief, faith or religion.**

Investigation: Muslim Motives

The central historical question in this unit is, of course, one directed at system change, “Why did the Islamic faith (and Muslim domination of territory) expand so quickly?”

Answers suggested by the data in the unit: (1) effective use of military force (no doubt augmented by a feeling of absolute certainty that “Allah is on our side,” and by rewarding conquering troops with the spoils of war), and (2) a desire to spread the “true religion” of Islam. A third possibility is suggested by the “Pact of Umar” document: Though Christianity and Judaism were tolerated, Islam’s dominance forced members of these older religions into submissive, segregated status, giving some of them incentive to convert to Islam.

The origins and early history of Islam suggest possible other reasons for its successful rapid expansion not shown in the data included in this unit.

Arabia, with its many tribal groups, was fertile ground for the development of Islam. One reason for this was the Arabic chivalric code *murawah*. This set of shared traditional ideas and values had these elements:

- Communal spirit, a dedication to the tribe.
- Courage in battle, including instant obedience to the *sayyid* (chief)
- Patience and endurance in suffering
- Egalitarian social status, with a concern for the less fortunate
- A focus on the group, not the individual. For example, vengeance for an evil deed could be taken against any member of the offending group.

Some existing religious elements were already present among the Arabic peoples in 600 CE, prior to Muhammad’s revelation:

- Arabic religion was polytheistic, but not highly developed, and had few supporting myths.

- The highest Arabic god was *Allah*, already beginning to be seen by some Arabs as the same as the Jewish and Christian God.
- The *Ka'bah* building central to the sanctuary in Mecca was the holiest Arabic site and a long-time object of pilgrimage (*Hajj*).
- Fasting during Ramadan was practiced by some even prior to Muhammed.

Jews and Christians living among Arabs in their settlements made Arabs conscious of the greater role of religion in the lives of these “outsiders,” and their advantage of having their own historical religious figures and holy books, which the Arabs lacked.

In 600 CE, problems were developing among the Arabs. The whole country was a hotbed of intertribal violence. Foreign influences and domination were leading to Arabic feelings of inferiority. And, at Mecca, traditional values of *murawah* were breaking down among Muhammad’s contemporaries. Wealth from trade and services to *hajj* pilgrims led those living in Mecca to *istaqa*—runaway capitalism, a loss of concern for the poor and unfortunate, excessive feelings of self-sufficiency and a loss of group unity.

During Ramadan in about 610, Mecca resident Muhammad received the first revelation from Allah, through the angel Gabriel. These revelations were recited to his followers, who memorized them and recorded them in text. (“Qur’an” means “recitation.”) The revelations and recitations continued for 22 years. The Qur’an is considered to be written in Arabic in heaven and on earth, eternally unchanging. Muslims believe that the Qur’an cannot be translated into other languages with accuracy, with good reason—the precise meaning and poetic quality of the text is extraordinarily difficult to state in any other language. The Qur’an provides guidance for all aspects of life—religious, social, political and legal.

The group following Muhammad’s teachings began to grow in Mecca. However, his influences and teachings began cutting into profits and prestige of rich people, creating opposition. Muhammad was forced to retreat to Medina in 622 CE (where he had dialogue with Jews about religion), but returned in force and triumph to Mecca in 630. With Muhammed’s leadership, the Sanctuary in Mecca was cleansed of all idols/images of gods. When he died in 632, his followers, aided by the military force of skilled Arabic tribesmen with a strong warrior tradition, began spreading the word.

One advantage of the new¹ religion that helps explain its rapid adoption was its relative simplicity. The “five pillars of Islam” form the core of the faith:

- *Shahadah*: “Allah is great. I testify that there is no god but Allah; Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.”
- *Salah*: Prayer five times daily
- *Zakah*: A fixed portion of a Muslim’s net worth donated as charity (alms) for the welfare of the community
- *Sawm*: Total fasting—no food or drink—from sunup to sundown during the holy month of Ramadan
- *Hajj*: Pilgrimage to Mecca at least once during a lifetime.

¹ In Muhammad’s view, Islam was not new, but simply reasserted the pure, original faith of Abraham, before it was split into warring factions by the Jews and Christians.

The role of religious dedication in the spread of Islam is suggested by prominent Muslim-studies scholar Fred Donner:¹

“The importance of a sincere belief in the religious precepts of early Islam, then, must not be underestimated when considering the rise of the Islamic state to supremacy in Arabia or the conquests that the expansion of that state generated. Because the impact of such beliefs depended so much on the frame of mind of individual believers, about which there remains no trace of documentary evidence (e.g., letters, memoirs, or the like), the religious motivation to political loyalty and unity is difficult to assess in individual cases. The historian, furthermore, here comes face to face with the impossible task of explaining in historical terms not what people believe, but why some should choose to believe in particular ideological systems even when to do so may at times threaten their material or other personal interests. Although we cannot hope to explain the mystery of human faith, however, we can point to its undeniable role in human affairs; and even if not every Muslim was so inspired, there can be little doubt that some Muslims, in their zeal to do well by the new religious and social dispensation of Islam, would have clung firm to the Islamic state and fought for its interests to the death.”

Since much of the expansion of Islam was done by military force, the primary data on the conquest of Iberia that opens this unit is an appropriate paradigm illustrating important motives for expansion. However, the role of religious beliefs in the spread of Islam may not be adequately apparent in these sources, and some other possible motives (such as the reduction in feelings of inferiority by those adopting the new religion) may also have played a part.

The Muslim culture shift in the regions they conquered was more than just armed domination and a changed religion. During the medieval period Muslim civilization was significantly more advanced and learned than that of Europe. Muslims believed that God could be known through His works. This led to an open attitude toward intelligent investigation of the world, and a flowering of Muslim science and learning. Greek classics of philosophy, for example, were transmitted back to Europe through Arabic sources. The “Arabic” numbering system using zero (probably invented in India) that we all use was also transmitted to the world through Muslims.

Note that the rapid expansion of Islam continued well beyond the period discussed in this unit, with the formation of the Ottoman Empire, beginning late in the 15th century. Led by Turks, that empire took over large sections of Eastern Europe. Muslims expanded into southwestern Asia, including the Indies, and south across the Sahara into Africa. Today Indonesia has the largest Muslim population of any country on earth.

¹ Fred Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests*. Princeton Univ. Press, 1981, Ch. VI. Conclusions, Tribe and State in Arabia. <http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/med/donner.asp>

The Pact of Umar:

Religious historian Karen Armstrong describes the “Pact of Umar:”¹

“None of the Christians of the city were obliged to convert to Islam, however. Tabarī quotes a document that is supposed to be the covenant agreement between ‘Umar and the Christians of Jerusalem. It is almost certainly not authentic, but it does accurately express Muslim policy regarding a conquered people.”

Apparently the most onerous and humiliating of the restrictions listed in the Pact were enacted long after Jerusalem was conquered by the Muslims and Umar was dead. However, rigorous enforcement of these rules was infrequent in Jerusalem or anywhere else.

By medieval standards, the conquering Muslims were remarkably tolerant of the two older religions they encountered. Still, Muslim religious chauvinism forced the adherents of these religions to become second-class citizens [*dhimmis*—*protected minorities*]. As might be expected, the degree of tolerance of Muslims for Jews and Christians varied from region to region, and from time to time. The experiences of the subjugated *dhimmis* in Jerusalem and elsewhere ranged from one extreme of essentially equal status with Muslims, to the other extreme of persecution and violence, including massacre. (The history of Jerusalem is far more complex than implied by the sources in this unit, with all-too-frequent internal and external violence from many sources.)

As with any people who lack autonomy, the response of Christians and Jews doubtless fell within every typical category listed in Unit 12, but initially the overwhelming domination of the Muslim forces limited the responses to passive acceptance of the situation, and—probably—escape into religious mysticism.

The next investigation suggests the status of Christians and Jews in Jerusalem after four centuries of Muslim rule. The Muslims were obviously far more tolerant of the other two religions than were the Crusaders who captured the city in 1099. Many Muslims and Jews were massacred, the others were forced out of the city and forbidden to return by the conquering forces.

Investigation: Life in Medieval Muslim Jerusalem

This portion of the unit was generated by Ignacio Carral, who (in his original Spanish-language version) selected the primary sources used here, and used a “whole Model” investigation, as we have done. It is designed to evaluate the ability of learners to infer the main elements of the Model from primary sources, and to identify relationships between Model elements.

Much more information is provided in the sources about Jerusalem’s setting than about demographics, patterns of action or shared ideas, but reasonable inferences may be made about each of these.

¹ Karen Armstrong, *Jerusalem, One City, Three Faiths*. 1996, 1997, New York, Random House Ballantine Books, p. 231.

For example, according to Nasir, the total population (1047 CE) is about 20,000 men. (Karen Armstrong says this would correspond to the number of families, suggesting a total population of perhaps 100,000.¹) As many as 20,000 additional Muslim pilgrims could crowd the city at times; Christian and Jewish pilgrims also made Jerusalem their destination; (Apparently the Christian population in Jerusalem outnumbered resident Jews and Muslims during the entire period of Muslim control.) Christian pilgrims would arrive in “great numbers” at Easter, of course, although no actual numbers of these pilgrims are given by Nasir. However the church capacity (stated by Nasir as 8,000) would be an indication of the potential size of the crowds of Christian pilgrims. All those holy places required clerical and lay staff—priests, rabbis, imams, their assistants, custodians, cooks, etc.

Those many pilgrims would need to be housed and fed, with huge impact on the economics of the city and the surrounding countryside. Learners can infer setting (inns for pilgrims and stables for horses and camels used for transportation); action patterns (growing/raising, transporting, and preparing food, providing sacrificial animals, removing and disposing of large quantities of waste, including human excrement, for example); and shared ideas (i.e. pilgrims probably were the greatest economic asset for the city, which would tend to reinforce at least surface tolerance for religious difference. Apparently the actual status of the three religious groups at this time was essentially equal.)

The source mentions craftsmen, without describing their crafts, but obviously the work performed by each was an action pattern. Bazaars imply salespeople and their patterns of action. Physicians, and suppliers of “potions and lotions” add to the list of occupations, each with its own action patterns.

One interesting aspect of Nasir’s description is his lack of discomfort in visiting and describing the Church of the Resurrection (or Holy Sepulcher). As a Muslim, he no doubt found the pictorial depictions of prophets and Jesus unusual, and was apparently at least somewhat fascinated by them. Apparently he and those he expected to read his writings were part of a tradition of tolerance for religious difference—an important shared idea.

Follow-Up Investigations

The effects of the Muslim prohibitions and attitudes about “proper images” on Islamic art are apparent from the Alhambra to the Taj Mahal. Although it doesn’t quite fit the usual “follow-up” scheme, the relationship between Islamic ideas and art is so dramatic that it would be a shame not to have learners investigate it, at least briefly.

Additional Learner Activity

We have not included a unit on the Crusades, but interested learners can be encouraged to gather primary sources on this subject, analyze them, and report their findings in some way (e.g. slideshow).
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¹ Karen Armstrong, *Jerusalem, One City, Three Faiths*. 1996, 1997, New York, Random House Ballantine Books, p. 263.

