

*History*  
UNFOLDING

# THE RISE OF ISLAM



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# Introduction

## Islam's Golden Age

In the wake of the attacks of September 11, 2001, educators have felt a much stronger need to provide students with more information on and greater insight into Islam and the Middle East.

The effort to give students a better understanding of Islam confronts two distinct kinds of problems. The first is the problem of negative stereotyping and oversimplification. It is easy to see how such a problem can arise in response to the horrors wrought by terrorists claiming to act in the name of Islam. It is vital for educators to do what they can to discredit prejudice by educating students as to the complex facts about one of the world's great religions and the civilization it helped forge.

The second problem facing educators is the opposite of the first. In counteracting negative stereotypes, there is tendency to stress only the most positive aspects of Islamic cultures. As with every great civilization, Islamic civilization has given rein to both the most admirable and most despicable of human traits. Student cannot gain a real understanding of Islamic civilization if all they get is a "smiley-face" version of it—and only real understanding can ever lead to respect.

Designed to avoid both of these pitfalls, this set is the first of three taking the story up to the present time. The other two sets are *Islam and the West in the Age of the Ottomans* (HS835) and *The Rise of the Modern Middle East* (HS948). This set takes the story up to the end of the reign of the Abbasid Caliphs in 1250 CE. It uses 12 visual displays to focus on some of the key themes in the history of the rise of Islam. Each lesson uses three visual displays to explore one broad topic in the overall story. Briefly, the four lessons are as follows:

### **Islam and Its Prophet**

The images focus on the setting in which Muhammad lived and on his story as it is handed down in the Qur'an and in other Islamic traditions.

### **The Empire of Islam**

The rapid rise of Islam as a social movement and political empire is the focus of the illustrations here. Within a century of Muhammad's death, Islam united a huge crossroads region extending from Spain to the borders of India and China.

### **Islam: Beliefs and Practices**

A closer look at some key aspects of Islamic belief, its rituals and daily practices, and some of its teachings about social and political life.

### **The Golden Age of Islam**

In the Abbasid era, Islam was open to influences from all of the world's great civilizations. The flowering of philosophy, science, and art that this produced is the focus of the images in this lesson.

## Using Photos, Cartoons, and Other Visuals to Teach History

Many textbooks are full of colorful visuals. However, all too often these visuals function primarily as window dressing. They make the text more entertaining, or at least more palatable. Only occasionally do the visuals in textbooks do more than offer simple pictorial reinforcement of ideas already presented in the text. In many cases, they pander to the visual orientation of the young while doing little to help young people master the challenges of the visual media that dominate their lives.

By way of contrast, our approach to using visual materials emphasizes their unique strengths as historical documents. The lessons in this booklet focus students on the visual symbols and metaphors in editorial cartoons, the dramatic qualities of certain photographs, the potential of many images to make abstract ideas more specific and concrete, the implicit biases and stereotypes in certain images, their emotional power, and their ability to invoke the spirit of a time and place. In the process, we make every effort to strengthen students' visual literacy skills in general, as well as their ability to think critically and engage in spirited but disciplined discussions.

## How to Use This Booklet

The booklet is divided into four lessons, with three illustrations per lesson. Each lesson consists of the following:

**A BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET** This page provides brief summaries explaining the three illustrations on which the lesson is based and their relevance to the lesson's objectives.

**DIGITAL IMAGES** The booklet's PDF allows you to project the images for use in your class discussions.

### **DISCUSSION-ACTIVITY SHEETS**

Each sheet displays one illustration. It includes a sequence of questions to help you plan an all-class discussion while using the projected images. The questions take students step by step through an analysis of the illustration. If you wish, you may reproduce these pages and hand them out. In addition to the discussion questions on the illustration itself, one or two follow-up activities are suggested. Some of these can be made into individual assignments. Others will work best as small-group or all-class activities.



**OBJECTIVES**

1. Students will better understand the setting and conditions in which Muhammad appeared and began to preach.
2. Students will better understand the central place of Muhammad and the Qur'an in Islam.

# Islam and Its Prophet

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*Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.*

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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION****Illustrations 1A & 1B**

In the seventh century CE, Islam arose on the Arabian peninsula. It quickly spread and came to dominate the entire Middle East. Its rise is one of the great success stories of human history. Why did it occur, and why in the Arabian peninsula? This map focuses on some key factors that may help explain this huge transformation. By the sixth century, a complex network of overland and sea trade routes already linked the Byzantine and Persian empires with civilizations far to the east. Arabian caravans such as the one shown here carried some of this trade, bringing ideas as well as goods to nomadic tribes and oasis towns along the routes. Tribal gods may have begun to seem less powerful or convincing to many Arabs as they learned of the monotheistic beliefs of Byzantine Christians, Zoroastrians from Persia, and Jews throughout the region.

**Illustration 2**

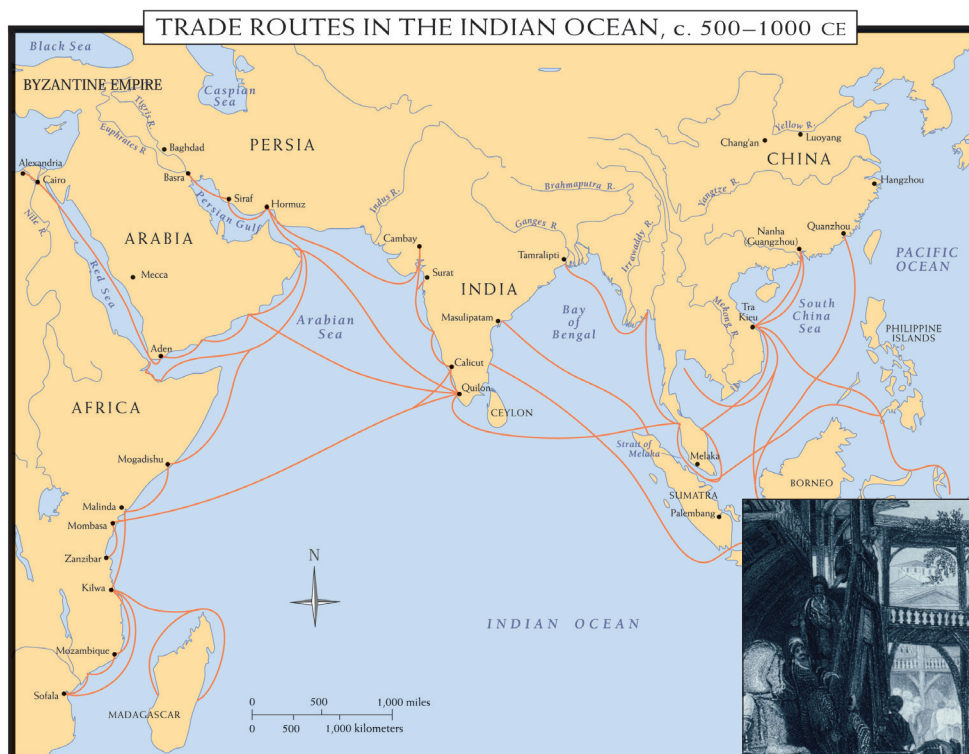
According to Muslim teachings, Islam was founded by a man named Muhammad who lived from around 571 to 632 CE. Historians actually know little about him with certainty. But traditional Muslim accounts of his life form the core of Islam's beliefs. According to these traditions, the angel Gabriel appeared to Muhammad in his 40th year and told him to "recite," or repeat, words that came directly from God. Over the course of his life, Muhammad received many such revelations. Muslims see Muhammad as the last of a line of prophets from Abraham to Moses, to Jesus. In this Persian miniature of the 15th century, Mohammad is on the left and Moses is on the right.

**Illustration 3**

Gabriel's revelations to Mohammed make up Islam's holy book, the Qur'an. The Qur'an is not seen as Muhammad's word, but God's—a part of God himself. It was revealed in Arabic. Hence, many Muslims do not accept translations of the Qur'an as the real Qur'an. This view meant that as Islam spread, Arabic language and culture spread with it. The Qur'an refers often to the teachings of Jews and Christians. But it is meant to replace, not simply add to, both religions. Muhammad is called the "Seal" of the prophets. That is, he is seen as the last of them, and his version of God's truth is the final version. With these firm beliefs inspiring them, the Arabs were moved to conquer a vast empire.

# Lesson 1—Islam and Its Prophet

## Illustrations 1A & 1B



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### Discussing the Illustrations

1. In the seventh century CE, the religion of Islam arose in one part of the above map. Can you name that part?
2. Arabia itself then was made up of many fairly small tribes. Some were settled on land and towns near oases; others were nomadic pastoralists. Can you explain the key differences between these groups?
3. A number of key trade routes passed by Arabia and linked several empires. Look closely at these routes. What two Mideast empires were linked with China and India by these routes?
4. Along with sea routes, goods were also transported overland. From the photo, can you explain how? What does it suggest about the purpose of towns in Arabia and elsewhere on these routes?
5. The tribes of Arabia worshiped many local gods. But ideas of monotheism were carried by caravans or brought by the Byzantines or Persians in the region. What is monotheism, and what forms of it were common in the region by the seventh century?

### Follow-up Activity

1. **Small-group activity:** Six key items in the Indian Ocean trade in the centuries before and during the rise of Islam were:

silk	slaves
pepper and	gold
other spices	precious stones
textile	

Learn more about the role each of these items played in the Indian Ocean trade patterns as indicated by this map. Use the map as the basis for a more complete map of your own. On your map, add in overland routes used in these centuries. Show key locations where each of the goods listed above was produced. In boxes to the sides of the map, write detailed explanations of the importance of these goods and their impact on the Islamic societies of the region. Add any other details about merchants, trade, and trade patterns that you feel will be helpful in making clear the role of trade in the early Islamic age.



## Illustration 2



The Granger Collection, New York.

### Discussing the Illustration

1. This Persian illustration from the 15th century shows two key religious figures. On the left is the founder of Islam; on the right, the Biblical prophet who led the Jews out of Egypt. Can you name them both?
2. According to Islam's teachings, Muhammad, born around 571, became a merchant in a key town on the trade routes through Western Arabia. What town?
3. At age 40, Muhammad saw the angel Gabriel in a vision. Gabriel told him to "recite"—that is, to repeat the words revealed to him. Gabriel is also a figure in Jewish and Christian teachings, as is Moses. What does this suggest to you about the nature of Islam and its place in the history of religion?
4. In the illustration, both men are surrounded by fiery halos. Muhammad's surrounds his entire body, however. What point do you suppose this Muslim artist was seeking to make by portraying the two men this way?

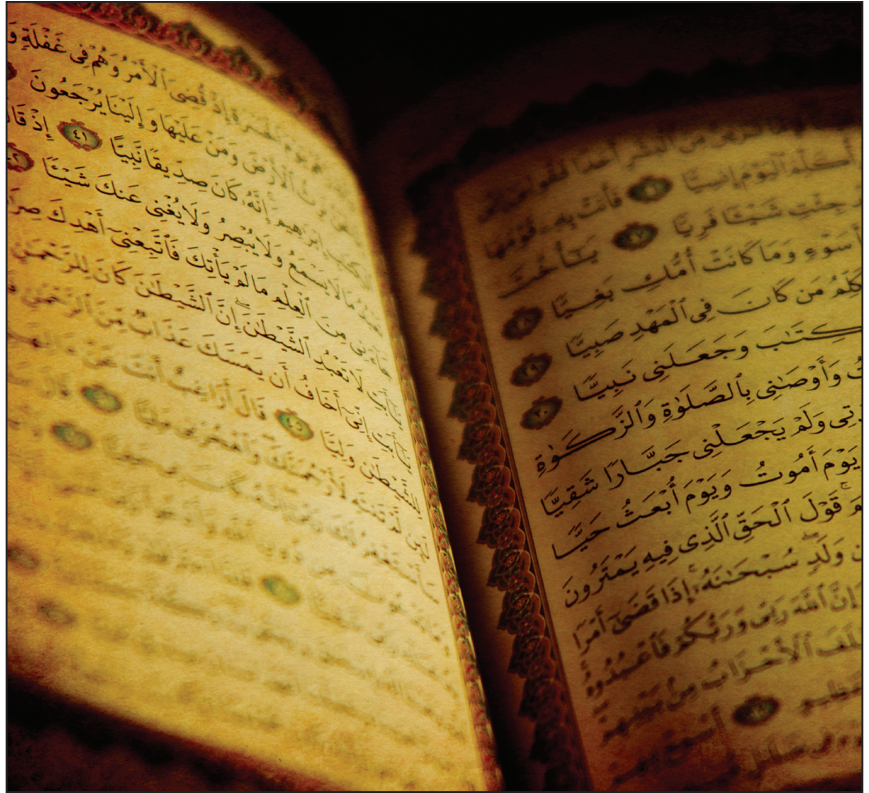
### Follow-up Activities

1. Read more about the life of Muhammad as it is typically described by Muslims. Create a timeline of the account of his life that you find. Using your own judgment, divide Muhammad's life up into what you see as its four or five most important phases. Mark these off on your timeline and summarize your findings in a brief talk to the class about your timeline.
2. **Small-group activity:** Three key founding figures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, respectively. As a group, read and discuss what each religion says about the life and teachings of these figures. What can you learn about each religion from the lives of these figures? In what ways are the lives and teachings of these religious figures similar? In what ways are they different? Keep the focus on comparing the lives of these figures alone, not on the overall beliefs and ideas of the religions. Also learn about the role Gabriel plays in each religion. Sum up what you learn in a brief talk to the class.



## Illustration 3

*We have sent it down  
as an Arabic Qur'an;  
happily you will  
understand. (Q12:2)*



© iStockphoto

### Discussing the Illustrations

1. Islam teaches that the angel Gabriel's revelations to Muhammad were repeated by him and memorized by his followers. These were supposedly written down. And much later, they were set down in a book, Islam's holy book. What is its name?
2. Muslims have always placed great stress on the fact that the Qur'an was revealed in Arabic. In fact, some of them believe that translations of the Qur'an into other languages are not true Qur'ans. How does this view differ from the way Christians or Jews see their scriptures? What does this suggest about the way Islam differs from these other religions?
3. The "Q12:2" means the above statement is from Q (Qur'an), Sura (or chapter) 12, verse 2. What else do you know about the Qur'an? Why do you think it was so important for Muslims to have the revelations of Muhammad written down in a book? In what way does this illustration suggest the importance of this book for Muslims?

### Follow-up Activities

1. **Small-group activity:** Muslims believe the Qur'an is the actual word of God set down in Arabic. This gives the Arabic script a special importance in Islam. Also, some Muslims believe it is wrong to portray living figures, at least in religious art for books or buildings. As a result, calligraphy became highly valued in the world of Islam. Calligraphy is lettering as a form of fine art. Learn more about the Arabic script and Arabic calligraphy. Find examples of various styles of Arabic calligraphy; make copies of these. Also make a chart explaining the Arabic alphabet. Use the chart and your copies of Arabic calligraphy in a bulletin-board display entitled "The Beauty of Arabic Calligraphy."
2. **Small-group activity:** Along with the Qur'an, hadith are a key source of the moral beliefs of Islam. These are reports of sayings or actions by Muhammad. They also became the basis for Islamic law, called Sharia. Learn more about the Hadith and find some examples to use in a presentation to the class explaining this aspect of the teachings of Islam.

**OBJECTIVES**

1. Students will understand how Muslim Arabs united their own peninsula and then conquered a vast empire.
2. Students will better understand some of the reasons for the rapid success of these Arab armies.

# The Empire of Islam

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*Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.*

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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION****Illustration 1**

Muhammad, we are told, began preaching in Mecca, an oasis town on the caravan routes along the western edge of Arabia. Mecca was already a religious center. A shrine there, the Kaaba, may have long been a destination of pilgrims even before Islam. Muhammad wished to purify the Kaaba, and he angered local leaders by questioning the power of their pagan gods and ancestors. In 622 CE, he and his followers had to leave the city. They went to Yathrib (Medina), where Muhammad was welcomed and was soon in command. This migration (the Hijra or Hegira) marks the start of the Muslim calendar. In Medina, Muhammad's role changed. Unlike Moses or Jesus, Islam's Prophet was as much a political and military leader as a religious figure. And under his leadership, the Arabs united and launched an age of imperial expansion second to none.

**Illustration 2**

Arab armies were made up of nomadic warriors. They fought effectively on camel and horseback, and when they needed to, they could retreat easily to desert areas where most of their enemies feared to go. Also, their new faith helped motivate them. Armies alone, however, could not have won an empire for the Arabs. The Byzantine and Persian empires were weak after centuries of warfare with each other. And many heretical Christian sects were unhappy about mistreatment by their Byzantine rulers. As a result, the Arab conquerors were able swiftly to create one of the world's greatest empires. When they crossed from Spain into France, they encountered greater resistance. Their imperial conquests were finally stopped in 732 CE by Charles Martel at the Battle of Tours, shown here.

**Illustration 3**

This map shows how huge the Arab empire became in just the first century of its expansion. By the middle of the eighth century, they had united all of the key centers of ancient civilization except for those in the Far East. The lands of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, along with large parts of the former Roman Empire, were under their control. Persia was taken over completely and the Byzantine Empire drastically reduced in size. From Spain to the borders of India, a vast region was united, and a new Islamic civilization began to thrive. In comparison, Europe was an isolated, disunited land of tiny principalities hemmed in and under siege.

## Lesson 2—The Empire of Islam

# Illustration 1



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### Discussing the Illustration

1. This map shows Mecca, the oasis town where Muhammad began preaching his new religion. From the map and from your general knowledge of the region, can you explain why Mecca might have been a key stopping point for trade caravans?
2. Muhammad belonged to Mecca's leading Quraysh tribe. The Quraysh were in charge of the shrine called the Kaaba, a center of pilgrimage where many gods were worshiped. Muhammad's preaching soon angered the Quraysh. Can you guess why?
3. In 622 CE, Muhammad and his followers left to become rulers in another town. Can you name it?
4. Islam's calendar starts with this migration, which is called the Hegira. It marks the point at which an independent Islamic community began to unite the tribes of Arabia. The orange part of this map shows how much of Arabia they had united by the end of Muhammad's life, in 632 CE. Why do you think Islam was able to unite these often warring tribes?

### Follow-up Activities

1. **Small-group activity:** Here are some key features of the Arabian peninsula in Muhammad's time:

deserts	oases
nomadic pastoralists	settled farmers
merchants	caravans

Learn more about the Arabian peninsula at this time. Create a map of it that is more complete than the one above. In it, provide as much detail as you can on the six items listed above. Display your map along with written paragraphs explaining the role these six factors played in Muhammad's life and struggles.

2. Muhammad died in 632 CE. After him, Islam was led by four men known to most Muslims as the "Rightly Guided Caliphs." They ruled Islam from 632 to 661. By then, Arab Muslims had conquered Arabia itself and much of the Middle East. Learn more about the rise of Islam in the seventh century. Write a brief essay answering this question: "Why are the first four caliphs called 'Rightly Guided' by most Muslims?"



## Lesson 2—The Empire of Islam

# Illustration 2



The Granger Collection, New York

### Discussing the Illustration

1. After Muhammad's death, the tribes Muhammad united moved out of Arabia to conquer many new lands. They had mainly been nomadic herders who raised sheep, goats, horses, and camels, and were used to life in the desert. This helped them in battle against their many enemies. Can you guess how?
2. They were also aided by the weakness of the Byzantine and Persian Empires. Some of this weakness had to do with the constant warfare between these empires and some had to do with the way the Byzantines, especially, treated people with different religious views. Can you explain?
3. This painting is of a famous battle in which Charles Martel finally halted Muslim conquests of lands at one tip of the huge Islamic empire. The battle occurred in the year 732 CE. Where did this battle take place, and who was Charles Martel? What can you learn from this illustration about the nature of warfare at the time? How realistic do you think this depiction of the battle really is?

### Follow-up Activity

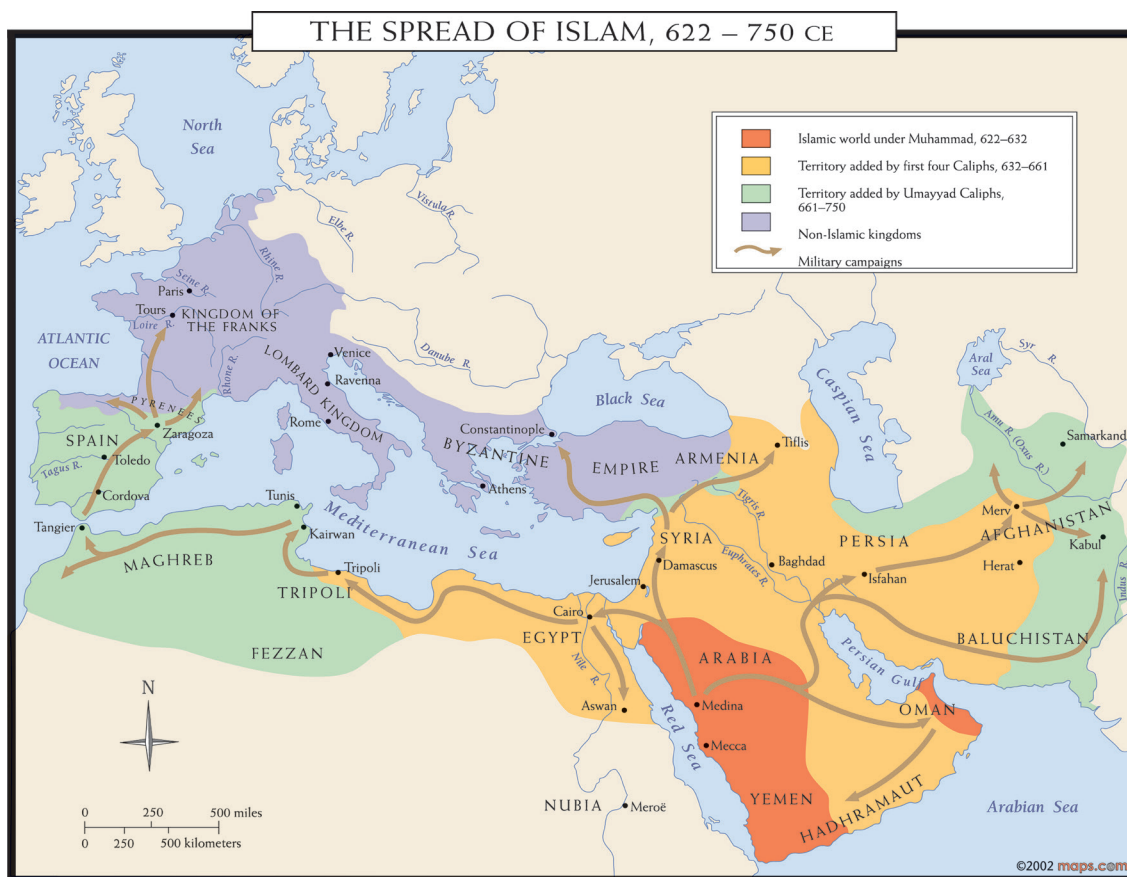
1. Within a century, Arab armies conquered a territory stretching from Spain in the west to near the borders of India in the east. Commenting on this wave of conquest, one historian has written this:

*The bulk of the Arab armies that achieved the conquests were desert people. The strategy of the Arabs in their wars of conquest was based very largely on the skillful use of desert power, reminiscent of sea power in the later empires built up by the maritime peoples of the West. The Arabs were at home in the desert; their enemies were not.*

Read more about the Arab armies and some of their conquests in the seventh and eighth centuries. Based on what you learn, write a brief account of one or more of the key campaigns the Arabs fought. In your account, give your own view as to how helpful the above quote is in explaining the success of the Arab armies. What other factors do you think contributed to their success?

## Lesson 2—The Empire of Islam

### Illustration 3



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#### Discussing the Illustration

1. This map shows the huge area conquered by the Muslim Arabs by about a century after Muhammad's death. The orange-shaded area shows lands conquered during Muhammad's lifetime. The yellow area was conquered during the reign of the first four leaders of Islam after Muhammad. What word was used for the leader of Islam in these centuries?
2. Of the two big empires that the Arabs conquered, one disappeared entirely. From this map, can you identify that empire?
3. By the end of the reign of the Umayyad Caliphs, only a much-weakened Byzantine Empire stood between Europe and its possible conquest by Islam. From the map, can you explain?
4. One writer says: "This region had always been a kind of connecting point of the continents. By uniting it under Islam, the Arabs made it a true world crossroads." What do you think this writer means?

#### Follow-up Activity

1. **Small-group activity:** The map shows the areas that came under Muslim control first under Muhammad, then under the four "Rightly Guided Caliphs," and then during the reign of the Umayyads. The Umayyad dynasty ruled from 661 to 750 CE. These rulers were, in general, not well thought of by later Muslim writers. Why not? Read more about the Umayyads. Try to find out what later Muslim writers disliked about them. Now, as a group, decide what you think about them. Would you say their rule was mainly successful and positive, or mainly unsuccessful and negative? Based on what you learn, draw up two lists: one showing aspects of Umayyad rule criticized by Muslims at the time and later, and one showing the positive and negative aspects of Umayyad rule as your group sees it. In a presentation to the class, sum up what you have learned about the Umayyads. Compare and contrast your two lists, and explain why your views do or do not differ from those of the Muslim critics of the Umayyads.

**OBJECTIVES**

1. Students will better understand the core beliefs of Islam and how these beliefs shape the daily life of all Muslims.
2. Students will appreciate the challenges in interpreting some of Islam's teachings.

# Islam:

## Beliefs and Practices

*Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.*

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION****Illustration 1**

Any effort to understand Islam must begin with the Qur'an, Islam's holy book. Non-Muslims naturally compare it with the Old and New Testaments of the Christians and Jews. But in a way, its role is even more important than these other scriptures. As the very word of God, the book itself is seen as perfect; it is not to be touched by a believer without undergoing a ritual cleansing. The words of the opening Sura (or chapter) of the Qur'an are shown here, along with a boy reading the Qur'an. In a way, these words sum up Islam's central ideas: a belief in a single, all-powerful god who demands that we serve him by living a moral life; a humanity seeking the right way to live but in need of guidance to avoid sin and error; and a time of judgment after death when God will show mercy to believers but wrath to those who have failed to live good lives.

**Illustration 2**

The word "Islam" is often translated as "submission," as in submission to God's will. Such submission is not seen as a loss of freedom or dignity. It accepts what God offers as the only truly free and moral way to live. The "Pillars of Islam," briefly stated here, define the practices that are key to living this moral life. These involve regular prayer, charitable giving, fasting, and a one-time pilgrimage to Mecca. Mecca is home to Islam's holiest shrine, the Kaaba. The Kaaba is the black rectangular building shown here inside the Grand Mosque at Mecca. The Pillars of Islam stress on moral practice and daily ritual at least as much as a set of ideas or beliefs.

**Illustration 3**

It is easy for non-Muslims to admire many Islamic beliefs and practices. But some of these beliefs are harder to understand. Among those that cause arguments today are Islam's views on the role of women in society. The first passage from the Qur'an here grants husbands great power over their wives. Yet the second passage suggests a complete equality of men and women, at least in their relationship with God. Muslim beliefs about women's roles in society are actually not that different from early Christian and Jewish teachings. Some historians say that, under Islam, women even gained in protection and dignity over what most had known before Islam arrived. Today, Muslims themselves often argue about the meaning of Islam's teachings on women's roles—and about many other aspects of social and political life.



## Illustration 1



© Instructional Resources Corporation

### Fatiha

*In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Praise belongs to God, the Lord of all Being, the All-merciful, the All-compassionate, the Master of the Day of Judgment. Thee only we serve; to Thee alone we pray for succor. Guide us in the Straight Path, the path of those whom Thou hast blessed, not of those against whom Thou are wrathful, nor of those who are astray. (Q1:1–7)*

### Discussing the Illustrations

1. These are the words of the first Sura, or chapter, in the Qur'an. This opening is known as the *Fatiha*. In a way, it sums up the central ideas in Islam. How does the boy reading the Qur'an here seem to embody these key ideas in his manner and dress?
2. The *Fatiha* stresses above all the monotheistic belief in one all-powerful god. Why do you suppose this belief appealed to many Arabs in Muhammad's time?
3. The Qur'an includes its own versions of some of the stories found in the Old and New Testaments. And it views Muhammad as correcting and completing the teachings of Jewish and Christian prophets such as Moses and Jesus. In what ways is the *Fatiha* like or unlike the teachings of Christianity and Judaism?
4. Monotheistic religions all deal with how individuals can be free to choose good over evil. After all, if God is all-powerful, why can't he just make sure ahead of time that people act as he wants them to? How do you suppose a Muslim might answer this question?

### Follow-up Activity

1. All Muslims accept the Qur'an's teachings as the word of God. But this does not mean Muslims do not have religious disagreements; they have had many. However, the biggest split in Islam is not so much over religious ideas as it is over political issues. This is the split between the majority of Muslims, called "Sunnis," and those who came to be known as the "Shi'a" or "Shiites." Commenting on this split, one writer says:

*The split of Islam into sects stems from Muhammad's insistence that there be no division between religion and politics. Political disagreements have religious overtones. As a result, political disagreements end up with religious consequences.*

Read more about the Sunnis and the Shiites. In a brief talk to the class, write the above quote on the board. Define the terms "Shiite" and "Sunni," tell the story of their split, and describe some key differences between them. Conclude by explaining why you do or do not think the above quote helps to clarify the reasons for this great split in Islam.

## Illustration 2



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### The Pillars of Islam

#### *Shahadah*

Testimony that “there is no god but God and Muhammad is the Prophet of God”

#### *Salat*

Ritual prayer, five times daily

#### *Zakat*

Giving a portion of one’s income to the poor, the needy, debtors, travelers, and slaves

#### *Sawm*

Fasting in the daylight hours during the month of Ramadan

#### *Hajj*

Pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime

### Discussing the Illustrations

1. The photo on the left shows Islam’s holiest shrine, one which every Muslim who is able to must visit at least once in a lifetime. Can you identify it?
2. The *Hajj*, or pilgrimage to Mecca, is a special duty that Muslims must try to fulfill at least once in a lifetime. But most of the other “Pillars of Islam” are regular ritual practices that shape ordinary daily life. Which of these practices do you think would have the biggest effect on the daily life of a Muslim? Why?
3. Some say the Pillars of Islam show Islam to be a very communal religion. That is, it is to be practiced in public with the whole Muslim community, not just in private. For example, ritual prayers are done at the right times of each day in public places as well as in the home. In what other ways do the practices described here seem to stress social or communal worship? How would you compare this aspect of Islam with other religions you are familiar with? How does this scene of the Kaaba seem to express these values?

### Follow-up Activities

1. **Small-group activity:** The *Hajj*, or pilgrimage, involves a number of steps, each of which is a ritual of great significance to Muslims. Your group’s task is to create a bulletin-board display illustrating all of the steps in the *Hajj*. To do this, create a map of the city of Mecca and the surrounding lands. On the map, indicate all the key steps the pilgrim takes from the time he or she approaches Mecca until the pilgrimage is over and the pilgrim returns home. Write brief paragraphs to go with each step indicated on your map.
2. One writer has said this of the Pillars of Islam:

*Certain acts or rituals played a special part in maintaining a sense of community. These were obligatory...and they created a link not only between those who performed them together, but between successive generations.*

Read more about the Pillars of Islam. Write a brief essay explaining how they contribute to the sense of community mentioned by this writer.



## Illustration 3

### The Qur'an on Men and Women

*Men are the managers of the affairs of women for that God has preferred one of them over another, and for that they have expended of their property. Righteous women are therefore obedient, guarding the secret for God's guarding. And those you fear may be rebellious admonish, banish them to their couches, and beat them. If they then obey you, look not for any way against them; God is All-high, All-great. (Q4:34)*

*Muslim men and Muslim women, believing men and believing women, obedient men and obedient women, truthful men and truthful women, enduring men and enduring women, humble men and humble women, men and women who give in charity, men who fast and women who fast, men and women who guard their modesty, men and women who remember God oft—for them God has prepared forgiveness and a mighty reward. (Q33:35)*



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### Discussing the Illustrations

1. The Qur'an stresses the equality of all believers. Yet many say its views about men and women definitely give men more power. How does the top passage here from the Qur'an support this view?
2. Actually, it's not always easy to decide what the Qur'an's true views are, or to interpret its words accurately. Some people would say that both of these passages together are an example of this difficulty. Do you think these passages conflict with one another? Why or why not?
3. Islamic teaching calls for modest forms of dress for women. How is this call illustrated by this photo? Not all Muslim societies enforce dress limits this strict. Many Muslim women say that dress is not really the issue regarding the problem of women's rights in Islamic societies. What do you think they mean?
4. Historians say women may actually have gained power under Islam. What do you know about their condition in the Middle East before and after Islam?

### Follow-up Activities

1. Men continued to have authority over women in many ways in Muslim societies. But some historians say the position of women actually improved under Islam over what it often was before Islam appeared. These historians refer to three matters in particular: female infanticide, polygamy, and property rights. Find out more about these three aspects of women's lives in the Middle East both before and after Islam appeared. Based what you learn write a brief essay either agreeing or disagreeing with historians who say the condition of women improved under Islam.
2. Slavery was common in Islam; however, it took several very different forms. To see this, learn more about the slave armies that actually came to rule Egypt under the Mamluks (1250–1517 CE). Then read about the great uprising of black slaves (the Zanj) in Iraq from 868 to 883 CE. Prepare a brief talk to the class on what you learn about these two forms of slavery. Title your talk, "Slavery's Many Forms in the Islamic World."



**OBJECTIVE**

1. Students will better appreciate some of the major scientific, philosophical and artistic accomplishments of Islam in the centuries of Abbasid rule.

# The Golden Age of Islam

*Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.*

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION****Illustrations 1A & 1B**

From Spain to the borders of India, a vast Islamic empire was ruled by leaders called “caliphs”—first, the Umayyad Caliphs (661–750 CE), then the Abbasid Caliphs (750–1258). The political power of the caliphs soon faded as military rulers came to control many smaller realms. Yet Islam and the Arabic language still united the entire region in belief and customs. These illustrations from far-off Spain are examples of the architectural achievements of Islamic culture in this, its “Golden Age.” One photo shows the arches in the Court of Lions at the Alhambra of Granada, Spain. They are decorated with Arabic script and intricate geometric designs. The other photo shows the tower and walls of the Alcazaba, the last fortress to fall to the Spanish when they reconquered Granada in 1492.

**Illustration 2**

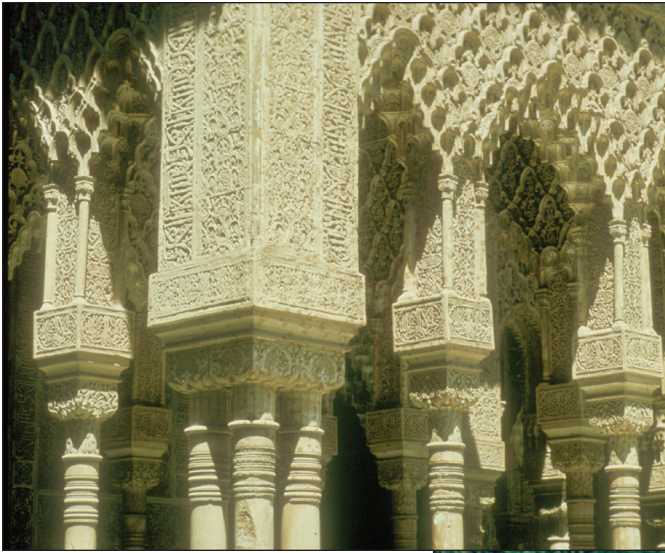
Through trade, the lands of Islam became a conveyor belt linking the Mediterranean lands with India and China. The eighth to 13th centuries saw a great flowering of learning and the arts in the Islamic world. Christian and Muslim scholars translated Greek classics of philosophy and science. They also adopted numerals from India (known now as “Arabic”) and made advances in mathematics. This interest extended to technology as well, as illustrated here by an Islamic astrolabe, a tool used to locate the sun, moon, stars, and planets, and to calculate latitude. A crude version of the device existed in ancient Greece, but Muslims refined it considerably.

**Illustration 3**

Muslim, Jewish, and other merchants introduced the Muslim world to many goods from the East, such as silk, paper, cotton, and sugar. In time, these made their way west and north to Europe. A powerful curiosity took hold regarding such goods, the lands they came from, and the natural world in general. Islamic scholars studied major Greek medical works, though Muslim doctors also seem to have gone beyond Greek medicine by further stressing observation and experimentation. This illustration from the Canon of Medicine of the great Muslim philosopher and scientist Ibn Sina (980–1037) shows a sickroom with patients and doctor. Muslim physicians developed surgical techniques and many drugs and other remedies. Ibn Sina was famous in Europe (where he was known as “Avicenna”), where his Canon of Medicine was used for centuries.

## Lesson 4—The Golden Age of Islam

# Illustrations 1A & 1B



1A: © Instructional Resources Corporation



1B: © Instructional Resources Corporation

### Discussing the Illustrations

1. Historians often speak of the eighth to the 13th centuries as Islam's Golden Age. Islam's accomplishments then took many forms, including such architectural triumphs as are shown here. Both are from Al-Andalus. This is the Arabic name for what region?
2. Photo A is of the arches in the Court of Lions at the Alhambra of Granada. Why do you think Muslim buildings are often decorated with Arabic script and intricate geometric designs like this? In what other ways does this example of Islamic architecture seem to differ from European architecture in the Classical age of Greece and Rome or the Middle Ages?
3. Photo B shows the tower and walls of the Alcazaba, in Granada, Spain. From the photo, what do you suppose the purpose of this building was? What about it most impresses you? This fortress was the last to fall to the Spanish during the *Reconquista*. What is meant by the term *Reconquista*?

### Follow-up Activity

1. **Small-group activity:** Your group's task is to design a bulletin-board display, slide show or computer-generated presentation called "The Mosque." A mosque is a place of worship for Muslims. It has taken many forms in different parts of the Islamic world. Often its style in any given region combines Islamic ideas with those of the local culture. But all mosques share certain key features—and these help to reveal what is most important in Islam. Learn more about mosques. Find examples of different styles of mosques from all across the Islamic lands. Create a chart showing and explaining the central features of any mosque, such as the *qibla* wall, the *miharb* niche, and the minaret. Use your chart along with photos or paintings of famous mosques. With the chart and these images, include brief paragraphs explaining the unique stylistic features of the mosques you chose to include.



## Illustration 2



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### Discussing the Illustration

1. This device is an astrolabe, just one small example of the scientific and technological accomplishments of Islam in its Golden Age. What is an astrolabe? In what ways does it seem to show high technological ability?
2. Muslims used astrolabes to determine the *qibla*, the direction of Mecca. Why was that important to them?
3. Such devices illustrate how thinkers in Islamic lands absorbed and improved on knowledge from ancient Greece and Rome, as well as India and China. What do you know about the contributions of these other civilizations to Islamic civilization?
4. The capital city of Islam under the Abbasid caliphs also became one of Islam's greatest centers of this learning. Can you name that city?
5. After the 12th century, knowledge of Islam's great achievements and of the works of Aristotle and other ancient Greeks made its way into Europe, but not from Baghdad. From what regions did this learning make its way into Europe?

### Follow-up Activities

1. During Europe's Middle Ages, Islamic scholars were translating and studying Aristotle and other ancient Greek philosophers and scientists. Three key figures in debates about the value of this learning were Ibn Sina (called "Avicenna" in Europe), Al-Ghazali, and Ibn Rushd (known as "Averroes"). Read more about these men. Now, write the script of an imaginary discussion in which each of these men comments on the three illustrations for Lesson 3 in this booklet.
2. An 11th century Islamic historian named al-Biruni described his own history of India this way:

*This is not a book of controversy and debate... It is a straightforward account, giving the statements of Hindus and adding to them what the Greeks have said on similar subjects, so as to make a comparison between them.*

As a group, brainstorm and make a list of all the ideas this one quote suggests about Islamic society in al-Biruni's day. Share your list in a class discussion.

## Lesson 4—The Golden Age of Islam

### Illustration 3



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#### *Discussing the Illustration*

1. One area in which Islamic societies made enormous contributions was medicine. Here, a Muslim doctor is caring for patients in a sickroom. At first, Muslim doctors followed the teachings of Hippocrates and Galen. Who were they?
2. Galen developed a general theory picturing the human body as made up of four elements: air, earth, fire, and water. Some Muslim doctors went beyond this kind of theorizing by putting more stress on experiment and observation. How do the details in this illustration offer some evidence of this spirit of careful observation and treatment? One of the most famous Muslim doctors was known in Europe as “Avicenna.” Do you know his Muslim name?
3. Muslim doctors developed techniques of surgery and made advances in observing and describing the course of various diseases. What else do you know about Muslim medicine? What other areas of accomplishment can you think of that made these Abbasid centuries the Golden Age of Islam?

#### *Follow-up Activities*

1. Like many Islamic medical writers, Ibn Sina (“Avicenna”) was also a philosopher. He was also an astronomer, chemist, poet, theologian, and many other things. Learn more about his book *Canon of Medicine*. In a brief report, summarize some of the key features of this book and its influence both in the Islamic world and in Europe.
2. In the Islamic world, Christians and Jews did not enjoy equal rights with Muslims. However, tolerance was shown to them. They had a good deal of control over their own religious and cultural lives, and a few of them could rise to positions of real importance. One example of this was Moses ben Maimon, better known as “Maimonides.” Read more about him. Create a timeline of his life, travels and accomplishments. Give a brief talk to the class about Maimonides, his life, and what it shows about the world of Islam in the 12th and 13th centuries. (Extra credit: Talk also about his influence on philosophers in Europe in the Middle Ages.)



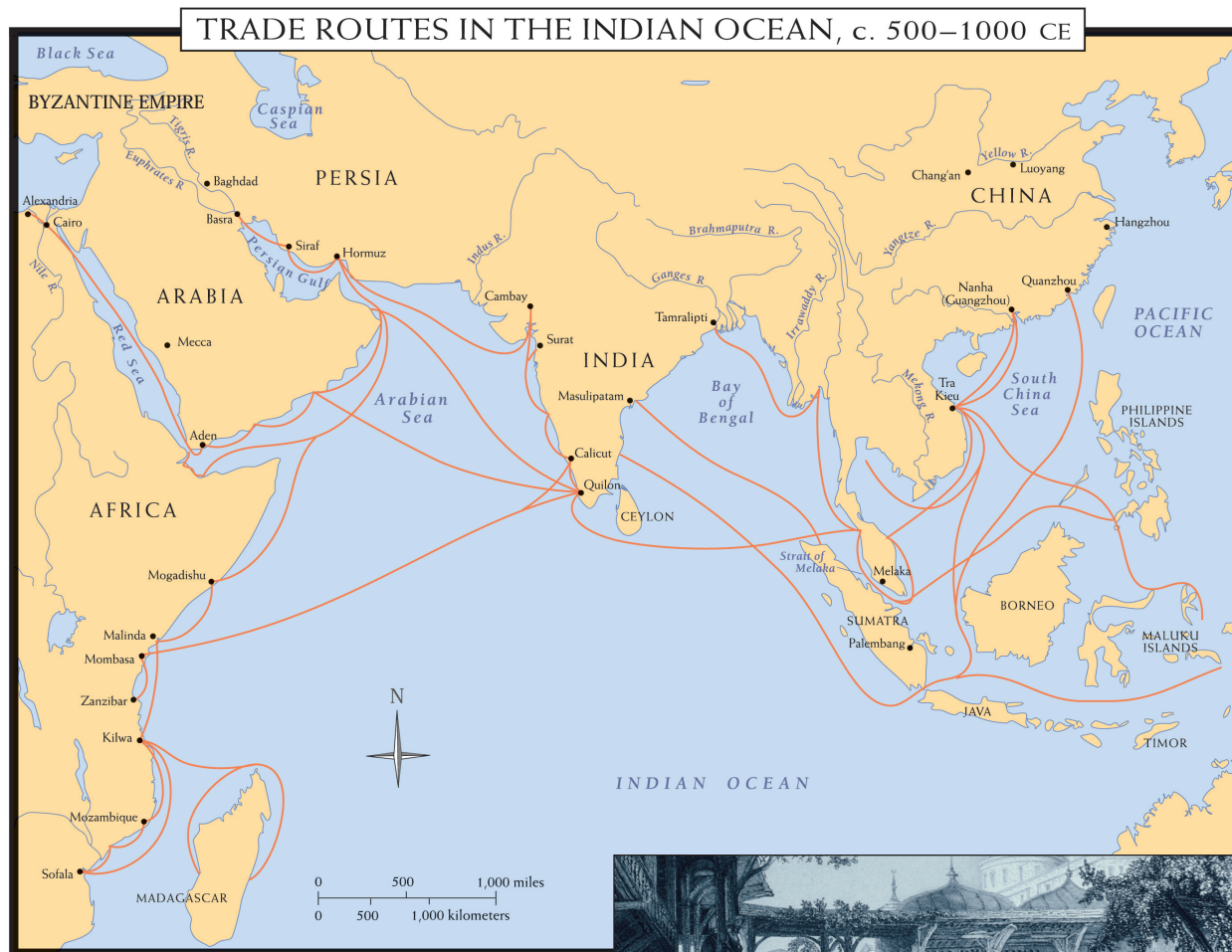
# **Image Close-ups**



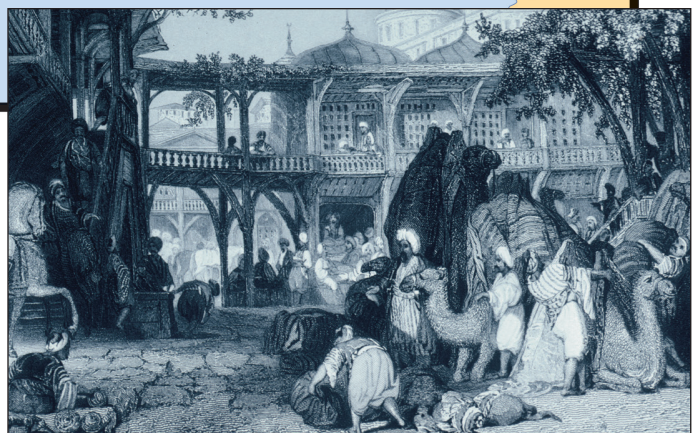


# Islam and Its Prophet

## Illustrations 1A & 1B



© 2000 Maps.com/MAGELLAN Geographix



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Islam and Its Prophet

# Illustration 2



The Granger Collection, New York



## Islam and Its Prophet

# Illustration 3



© iStockphoto

*We have sent it down as an  
Arabic Qur'an; haply you  
will understand. (Q12:2)*

## The Empire of Islam

# Illustration 1



© 2000 Maps.com/MAGELLAN Geographix

## The Empire of Islam

# Illustration 2

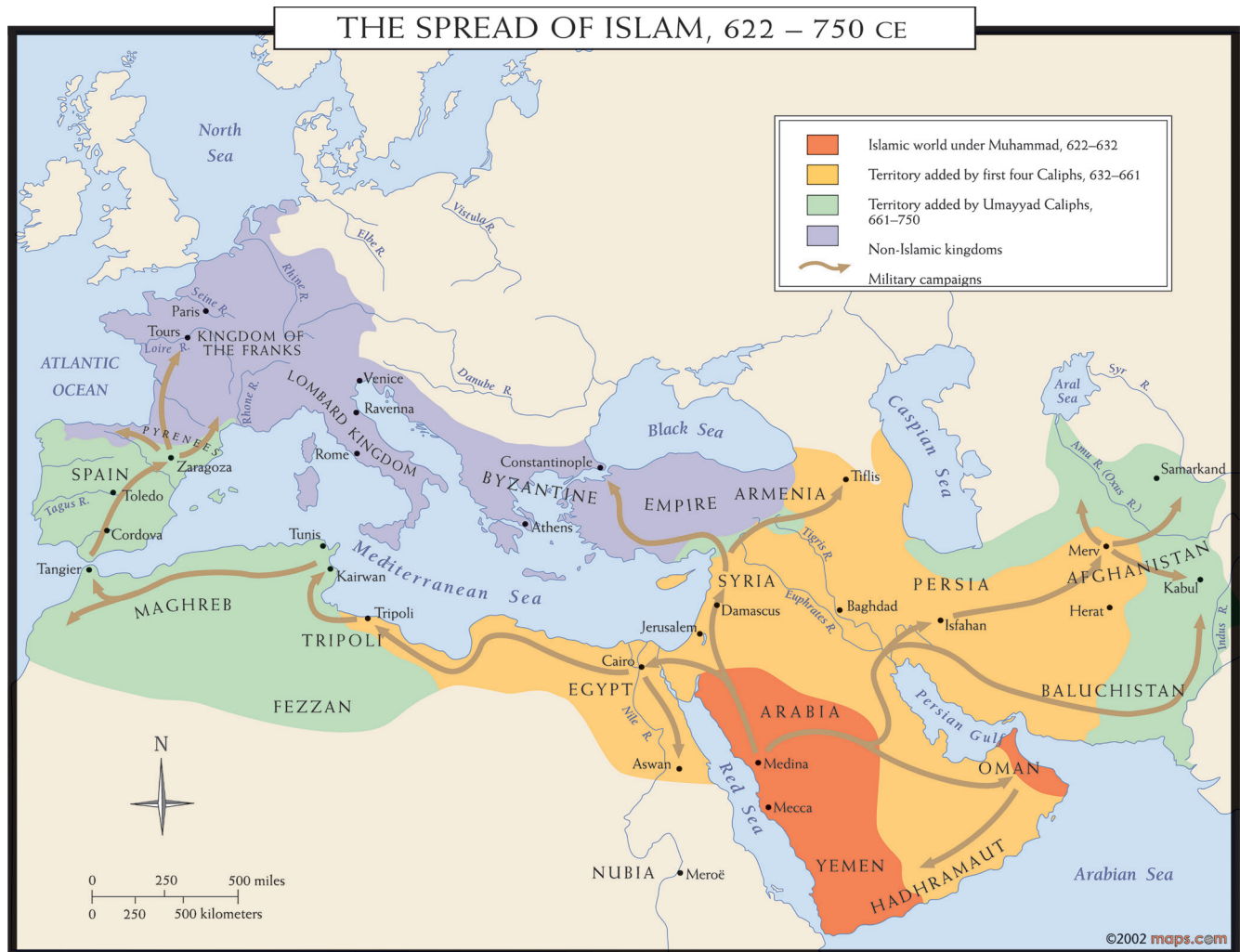


The Granger Collection, New York



# The Empire of Islam

## Illustration 3



## Islam: Beliefs and Practices

# Illustration 1



© Instructional Resources Corporation

### **Fatiha**

*In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Praise belongs to God, the Lord of all Being, the All-merciful, the All-compassionate, the Master of the Day of Judgment. Thee only we serve; to Thee alone we pray for succor. Guide us in the Straight Path, the path of those whom Thou hast blessed, not of those against whom Thou are wrathful, nor of those who are astray. (Q1:1-7)*

## Islam: Beliefs and Practices

# Illustration 2



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### The Pillars of Islam

#### ***Shahadah***

Testimony that “there is no god but God and Muhammad is the Prophet of God”

#### ***Salat***

Ritual prayer, five times daily

#### ***Zakat***

Giving a portion of one’s income to the poor, the needy, debtors, travelers, and slaves

#### ***Sawm***

Fasting in the daylight hours during the month of Ramadan

#### ***Hajj***

Pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime



## Islam: Beliefs and Practices

# Illustration 3

### The Qur'an on Men and Women

*Men are the managers of the affairs of women for that God has preferred one of them over another, and for that they have expended of their property. Righteous women are therefore obedient, guarding the secret for God's guarding. And those you fear may be rebellious admonish, banish them to their couches, and beat them. If they then obey you, look not for any way against them; God is All-high, All-great. (Q4:34)*

*Muslim men and Muslim women, believing men and believing women, obedient men and obedient women, truthful men and truthful women, enduring men and enduring women, humble men and humble women, men and women who give in charity, men who fast and women who fast, men and women who guard their modesty, men and women who remember God oft—for them God has prepared forgiveness and a mighty reward. (Q33:35)*

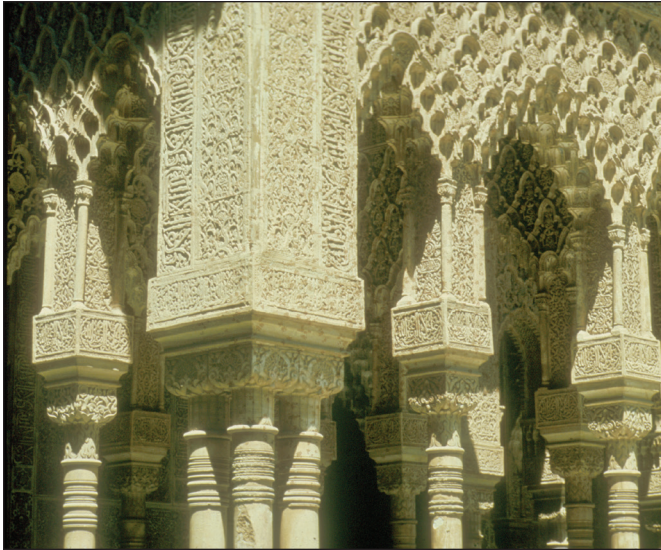


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**The Golden Age of Islam**

# Illustrations 1A & 1B



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## The Golden Age of Islam

# Illustration 2



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## The Golden Age of Islam

# Illustration 3



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