

A photograph of a desert landscape with rolling sand dunes. In the foreground, the back of a person wearing a black thobe is visible, looking out over the dunes. The text "MUHAMMAD AND ISLAM" is overlaid in white, bold, serif font on the lower part of the image.

**MUHAMMAD
AND ISLAM**

The Nature and Triumph of Islam

INTRODUCTION: EARLY ARABIA

- the Saudi Arabian peninsula is mostly desert
 - largely ignored prior to 600 CE
- inhabited by **Bedouins**
 - camel herders
 - nomads who travel from oasis to oasis



On the northeast coast of the Sinai Peninsula, a seminomadic Bedouin tribe makes its summer encampment near a life-giving oasis.

The Nature and Triumph of Islam

INTRODUCTION: EARLY ARABIA

- the Saudi Arabian peninsula is mostly desert
 - largely ignored prior to 600 CE
- inhabited by **Bedouins**
 - living on milk, dates, meat
 - polytheistic: worshiping trees, stones



On the northeast coast of the Sinai Peninsula, a seminomadic Bedouin tribe makes its summer encampment near a life-giving oasis.

The Nature and Triumph of Islam

INTRODUCTION: EARLY ARABIA

- in antiquity, Bedouin/Semitic groups had often moved out of Arabia and invaded and settled the Fertile Crescent around the desert
 - e.g. Canaanites, Babylonians, Hebrews
- but those who stayed in Arabia had remained in a fairly primitive state technologically

The Nature and Triumph of Islam

ARABIA IN THE SIXTH CENTURY CE

- in the 500's CE, a protracted war between Persia and Byzantium forced trade to go through Arabia
 - the lifestyle of Arab Bedouins began to change: from nomadic to commercial
 - cities appeared, e.g.
 - **Mecca**
 - **Yathrib** (later **Medina**)

The Nature and Triumph of Islam

ARABIA IN THE SIXTH CENTURY CE

- Mecca was in that day already a religious center
 - the **Ka'aba** ("Cube"): shrine for pilgrims
 - over the **Black Stone**
 - the holy district around the Ka'aba housed the idols of many gods
 - Mecca was also serving foreign caravans by then
 - later, sent out its own
 - wealthy class: **Kuraish**



The Nature and Triumph of Islam

MUHAMMAD

- **Muhammad** was born in Mecca, ca. 570 CE
 - to a lesser family of the Kuraish
 - orphaned early and married a rich widow
 - ran her trading business for her
 - on these expeditions he must have encountered Jews and Christians



When he reached the age of 25, Muhammad married a wealthy widow named Khadija (at right). She relieved him of financial worries, bore him children, and supported

The Nature and Triumph of Islam

MUHAMMAD

- clearly, he was attracted to certain parts of Christianity
 - Islam contains many Christian elements
 - the reverse is also true
 - e.g. an angel blowing a trumpet on Judgment Day
 - Islam: an attempt to reform Christianity?



When he reached the age of 25, Muhammad married a wealthy widow named Khadija (at right). She relieved him of financial worries, bore him children, and supported

The Nature and Triumph of Islam

MUHAMMAD

- in his 40's, Muhammad began having religious visions
 - these visions told him that the only god in the universe is **Allah**
 - at that time, Allah was seen as the principal god of the Arabic pantheon
 - “Allah” is cognate with the Hebrew and Canaanite name “El”



The Nature and Triumph of Islam

MUHAMMAD

- Muhammad began preaching his religion
 - but at first he converted no one except his wife and a few poor people



The Nature and Triumph of Islam

MUHAMMAD

- the Kuraish scorned and scoffed at Muhammad
 - especially because of his “low birth”
 - they also feared he would interfere with their lucrative tourist business
 - which has to be the most spectacular miscalculation ever!



The Nature and Triumph of Islam

MUHAMMAD

- hostility grew, forcing Muhammad to flee to Yathrib
 - 622 CE: **Hegira** (*hijrah*)
 - marks an important turn in Muhammad's fortunes
 - 622: "first year" of the Islamic calendar
 - but based on the phases of the moon



The Nature and Triumph of Islam

MUHAMMAD

- Muhammad converted all the Arabs in Yathrib to Islam
 - became their political and religious leader
 - Yathrib was renamed Medina
 - “the city of the prophet”



The Nature and Triumph of Islam

MUHAMMAD

- Muhammad launched a **jihad** against the “**infidels**” in Mecca
 - also, the Jews in Medina
 - appealed to Arab nationalism
 - especially the poorer people living in the desert
 - his outlook was now less universalist



The Nature and Triumph of Islam

MUHAMMAD

- began raiding the caravans moving in and out of Mecca
 - blockaded trade very successfully
 - his followers were filled with religious fervor and devotion
 - cf. Joan of Arc



The Nature and Triumph of Islam

MUHAMMAD

- they developed the camel cavalry and used the desert as cover
 - were able to charge on camel-back, while carrying lances!
 - often attacked during sand storms



The Nature and Triumph of Islam

MUHAMMAD

- 630 CE: Muhammad returned to Mecca in triumph
 - converted the Kuraish *en masse*
 - also the desert tribes
 - Muhammad was now a legend in Arabia
 - cleaned all idols out of the holy district
 - but left the Ka'aba and Black Stone



THE VEILED PROPHET prays beside the Kaaba, the ancient religious shrine of Mecca.

The Nature and Triumph of Islam

MUHAMMAD

- 632 CE: Muhammad died unexpectedly
 - he had united all Arabia as it had never been before
 - and had forged a powerful new army of fanatic fighters
 - beginning of the **Pax Arabica** ("Arabic Peace")



The Nature and Triumph of Islam

ISLAMIC RELIGION

- the nature of the Islamic religion
 - **islam**: “submission” (to Allah’s will)
 - basic text: the **Koran**
 - rather disorganized collection of scriptures
 - words dictated to Muhammad by an angel
 - thus, Allah’s exact words
 - NO translation allowed!
 - popularized the **Arabic** language



The Nature and Triumph of Islam

ISLAMIC RELIGION

- the nature of Allah: the only divinity in the universe!
 - no polytheistical trinity!
 - cf. Arianism
 - but Allah has agents
 - e.g. angels
 - and humans can serve as prophets
 - e.g., Moses, Jesus
 - but Jesus is not a god!
 - and Muhammad is the last prophet we get!



The Nature and Triumph of Islam

ISLAMIC RELIGION

- Islamic ritual and worship is designed to be fairly simple
 - **Five Pillars of Islam**: faith, prayer, charity, fasting, pilgrimage
 - **hajj**: pilgrimage to Mecca
 - once in life
 - **haji**: pilgrim
 - n.b. reuse of an old Arabic custom



The Nature and Triumph of Islam

ISLAMIC RELIGION

- Islam is easy to join
 - just say in front of a Moslem believer: *la ilaha illa Allah, Muhammad rasul Allah*
 - “There is no god but Allah, Muhammad is his prophet.”
 - vs. baptism
 - and the Nicene Creed!



Arab administrators ruling the countries conquered by Islam issued a variety of coinage—some of it adopted from the native money and some purely Muslim. The gold coin at upper left portrays in Byzantine style the Umayyad caliph named Abd al-Malik, who holds the Sword of Islam, a symbol of Arab power. The silver dirhem below it, minted in Persia, bears in Arabic script the name of an Arab governor, al-Hajaj ibn Yusuf, but the image is that of a Sassanian emperor. The gold coin on the right—shown front and back—carries Arabic writing rather than figurative decoration. The inscription on the front says in part, “There is no God but God alone.” The margin on the reverse announces that the coin was struck in Damascus in the year 78 of the Islamic calendar (AD 697-698).

The Nature and Triumph of Islam

ISLAMIC RELIGION

- Moslems may not drink alcoholic beverages
 - but *rabidh* is permitted (a mild date wine)
- polygamy: a man may have up to four wives
- supreme activity in life is to fight and die in a *jihad*



Arab administrators ruling the countries conquered by Islam issued a variety of coinage—some of it adopted from the native money and some purely Muslim. The gold coin at upper left portrays in Byzantine style the Umayyad caliph named Abd al-Malik, who holds the Sword of Islam, a symbol of Arab power. The silver dirhem below it, minted in Persia, bears in Arabic script the name of an Arab governor, al-Hajaj ibn Yusuf, but the image is that of a Sassanian emperor. The gold coin on the right—shown front and back—carries Arabic writing rather than figurative decoration. The inscription on the front says in part, “There is no God but God alone.” The margin on the reverse announces that the coin was struck in Damascus in the year 78 of the Islamic calendar (AD 697-698).

The Nature and Triumph of Islam

ISLAMIC RELIGION

- the rewards of the Islamic afterlife
 - for the “infidel”: real torture and pain, e.g. eternal fire
 - for the faithful: physical, earthly delights



Arab administrators ruling the countries conquered by Islam issued a variety of coinage—some of it adopted from the native money and some purely Muslim. The gold coin at upper left portrays in Byzantine style the Umayyad caliph named Abd al-Malik, who holds the Sword of Islam, a symbol of Arab power. The silver dirhem below it, minted in Persia, bears in Arabic script the name of an Arab governor, al-Hajaj ibn Yusuf, but the image is that of a Sassanian emperor. The gold coin on the right—shown front and back—carries Arabic writing rather than figurative decoration. The inscription on the front says in part, “There is no God but God alone.” The margin on the reverse announces that the coin was struck in Damascus in the year 78 of the Islamic calendar (AD 697-698).

The Nature and Triumph of Islam

ISLAMIC RELIGION

- the structure of the church is very simple
 - no priests or mass
 - no saints to serve as intermediaries between the worship and Allah
 - each person is directly responsible for his/her own salvation through his own choices in life

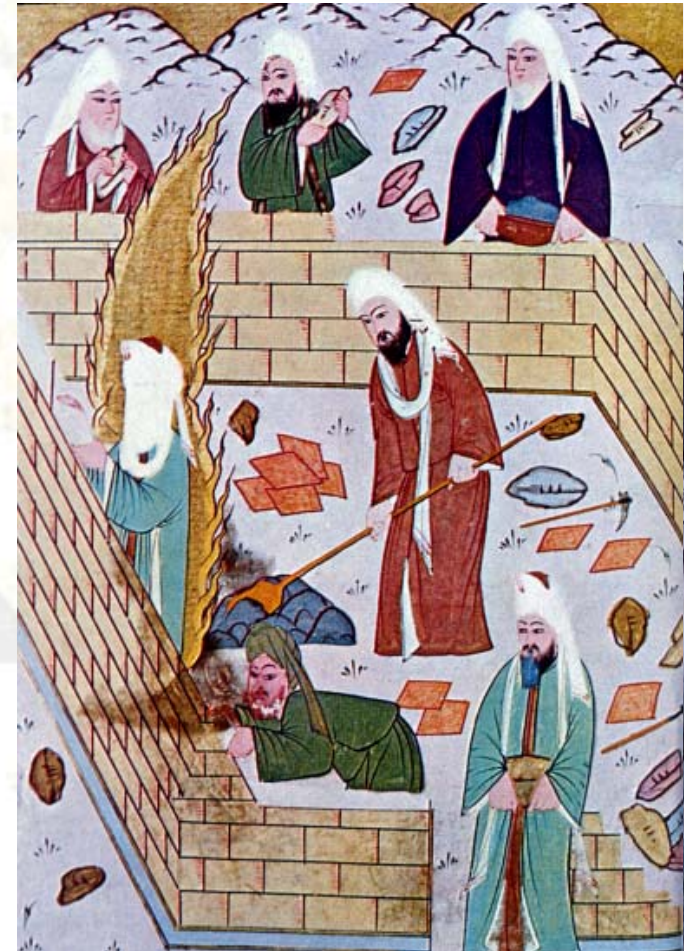


Arab administrators ruling the countries conquered by Islam issued a variety of coinage—some of it adopted from the native money and some purely Muslim. The gold coin at upper left portrays in Byzantine style the Umayyad caliph named Abd al-Malik, who holds the Sword of Islam, a symbol of Arab power. The silver dirhem below it, minted in Persia, bears in Arabic script the name of an Arab governor, al-Hajaj ibn Yusuf, but the image is that of a Sassanian emperor. The gold coin on the right—shown front and back—carries Arabic writing rather than figurative decoration. The inscription on the front says in part, "There is no God but God alone." The margin on the reverse announces that the coin was struck in Damascus in the year 78 of the Islamic calendar (AD 697-698).

The Nature and Triumph of Islam

ISLAMIC RELIGION

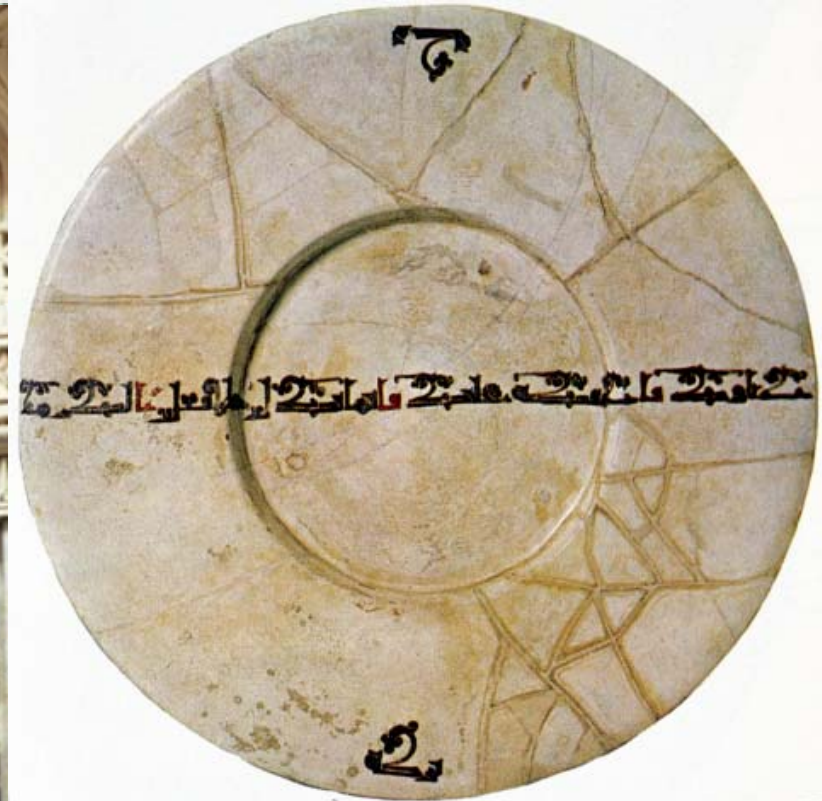
- temples: **mosques** (“places of prostration”)
 - for prayer and meditation only
 - based on the design of Muhammad’s house in Medina
 - no idols or images
 - vs. the Christian crisis of **iconoclasm** (“image-breaking”)



The Nature and Triumph of Islam

ISLAMIC RELIGION

- all art must be abstract
 - it must not imitate Allah's creation
 - thus, **arabesques** and focus on writing



The Nature and Triumph of Islam

ISLAM AFTER MUHAMMAD

- after Muhammad's death, a brief period of confusion
 - it was unclear who should succeed him
 - or if there should be a successor at all
 - Muhammad had no surviving son
 - only one daughter **Fatima**
 - **Abu Bekr**: one of the oldest converts to Islam (Muhammad's father-in-law?)
 - successors eventually took the title **caliph**
 - *khalifah rasul Allah*: "the successor of the prophet of Allah"

The Nature and Triumph of Islam

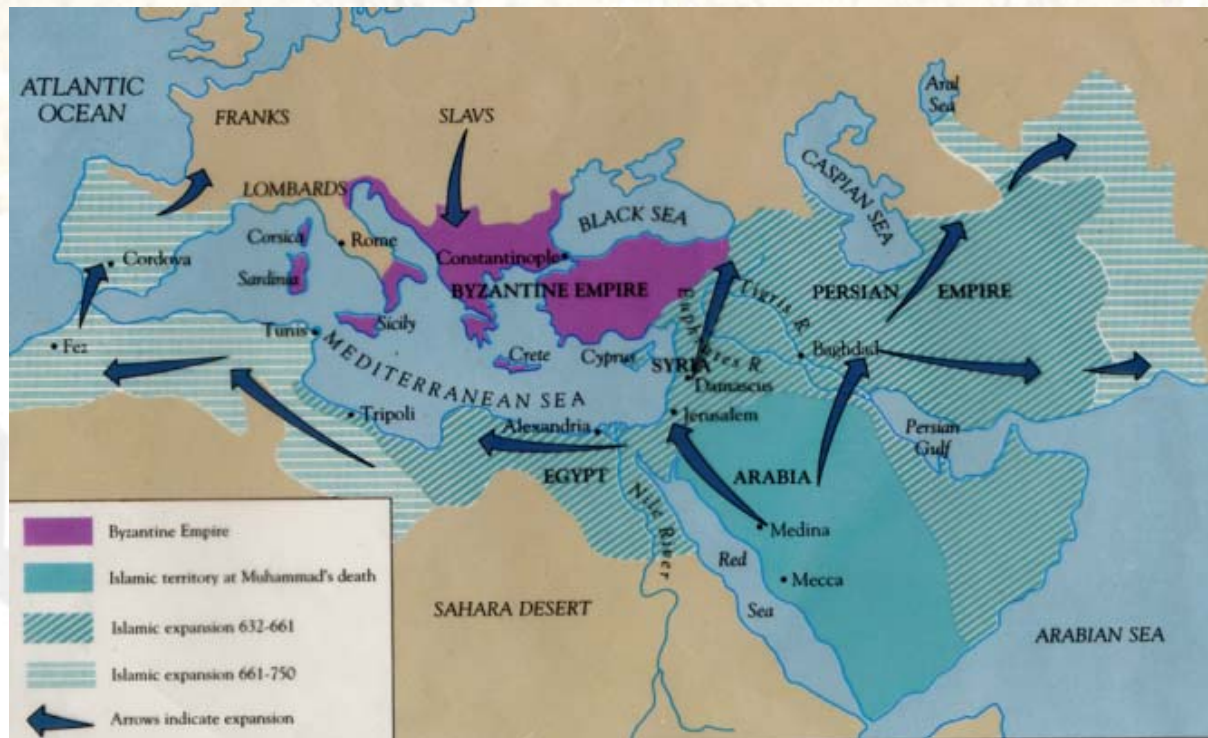
ISLAM AFTER MUHAMMAD

- Abu Bekr re-consolidated Arabia under Islamic control
 - many of the tribes had sworn allegiance to Muhammad but not Islam
 - but Abu Bekr died after ruling for only two years (634 CE)
- next caliph: **Omar** (r. 634-644 CE)
 - zealous young convert to Islam who re-energized the movement

The Nature and Triumph of Islam

ISLAM AFTER MUHAMMAD

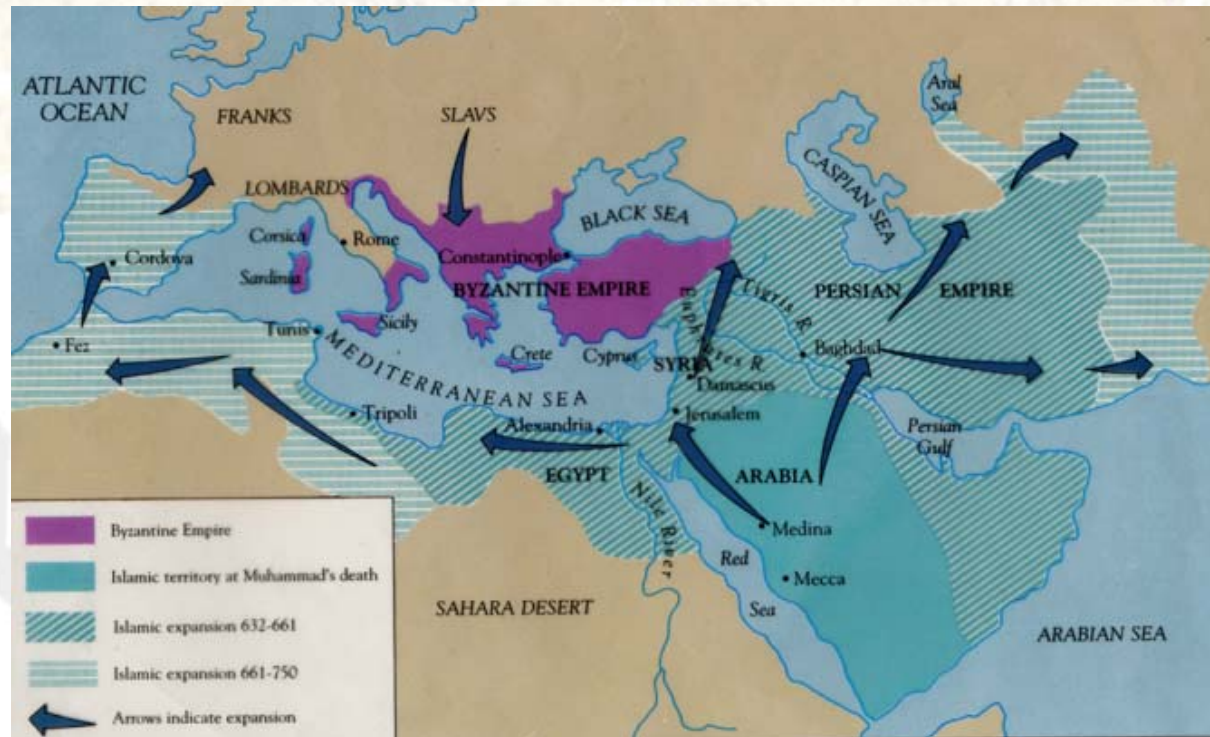
- Omar led a push north
 - 636 CE: the Moslem forces defeated the Byzantines by attacking in a sand storm
 - took Syria, including Jerusalem



The Nature and Triumph of Islam

ISLAM AFTER MUHAMMAD

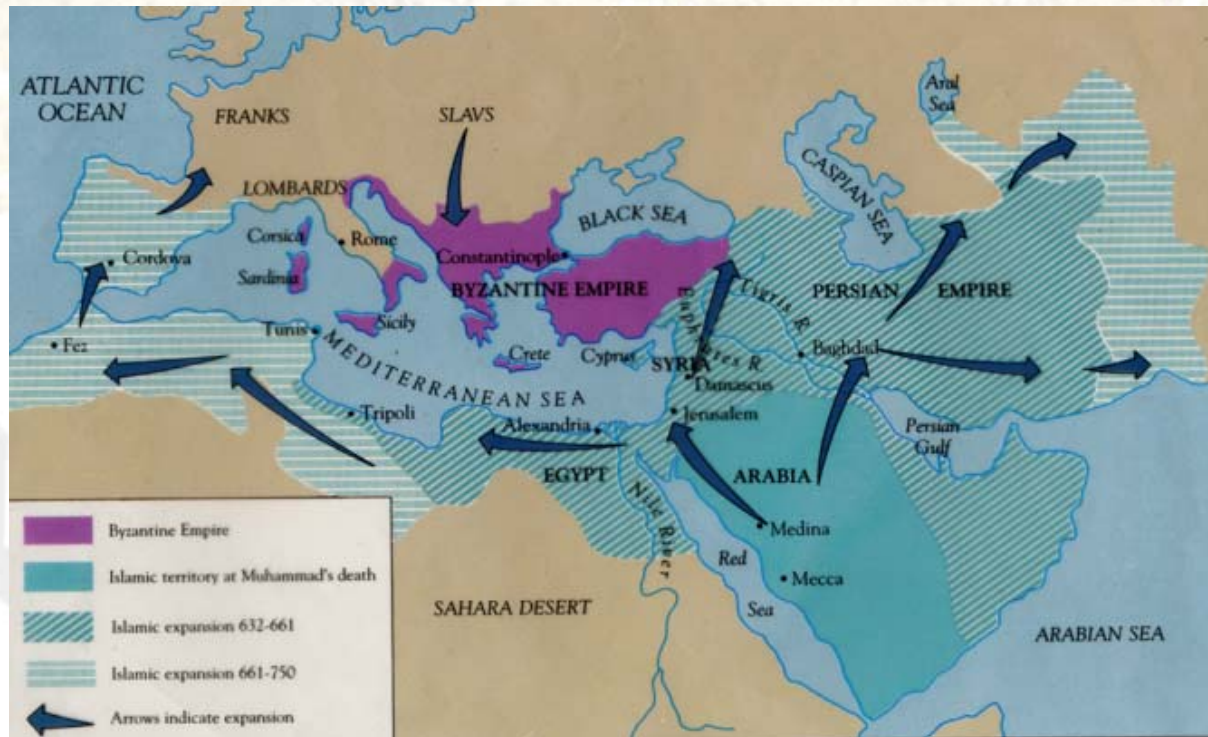
- 637 CE: the Moslems turned east and defeated the Persians
 - captured the Persian capitol Ctesiphon



The Nature and Triumph of Islam

ISLAM AFTER MUHAMMAD

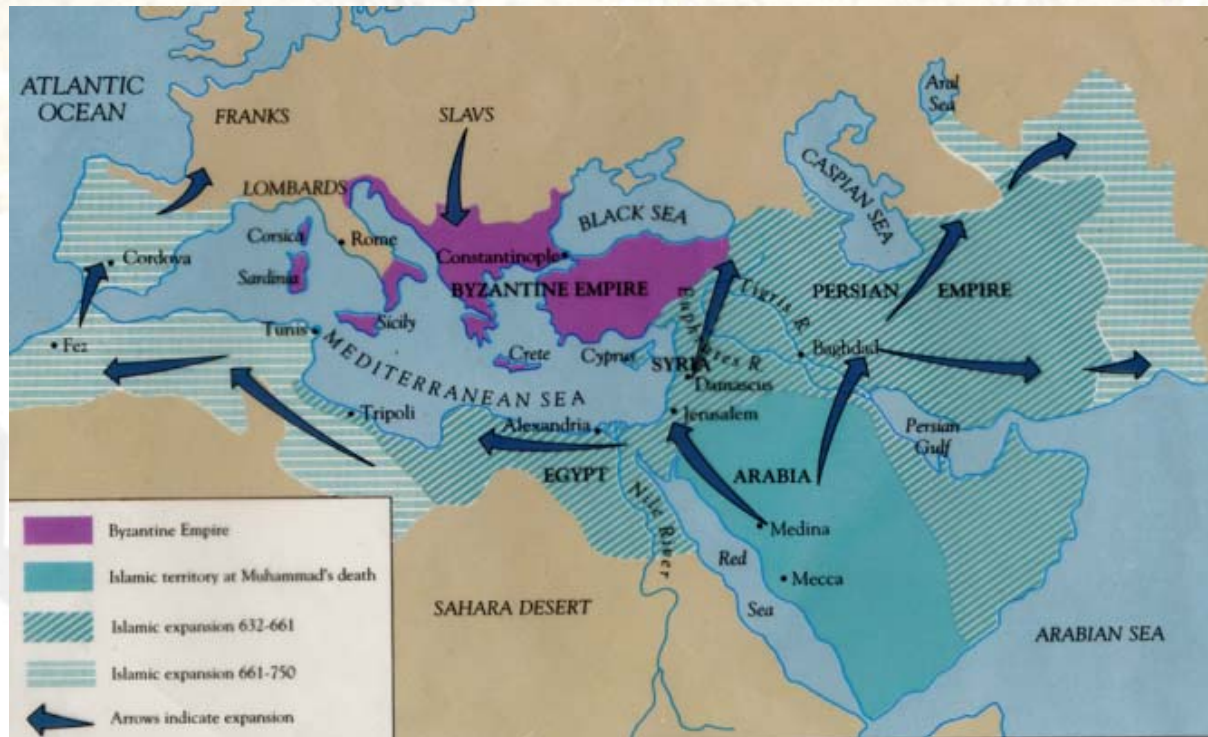
- 646 CE: the Moslems attacked Constantinople but failed to take it – but turned west and captured Egypt



The Nature and Triumph of Islam

ISLAM AFTER MUHAMMAD

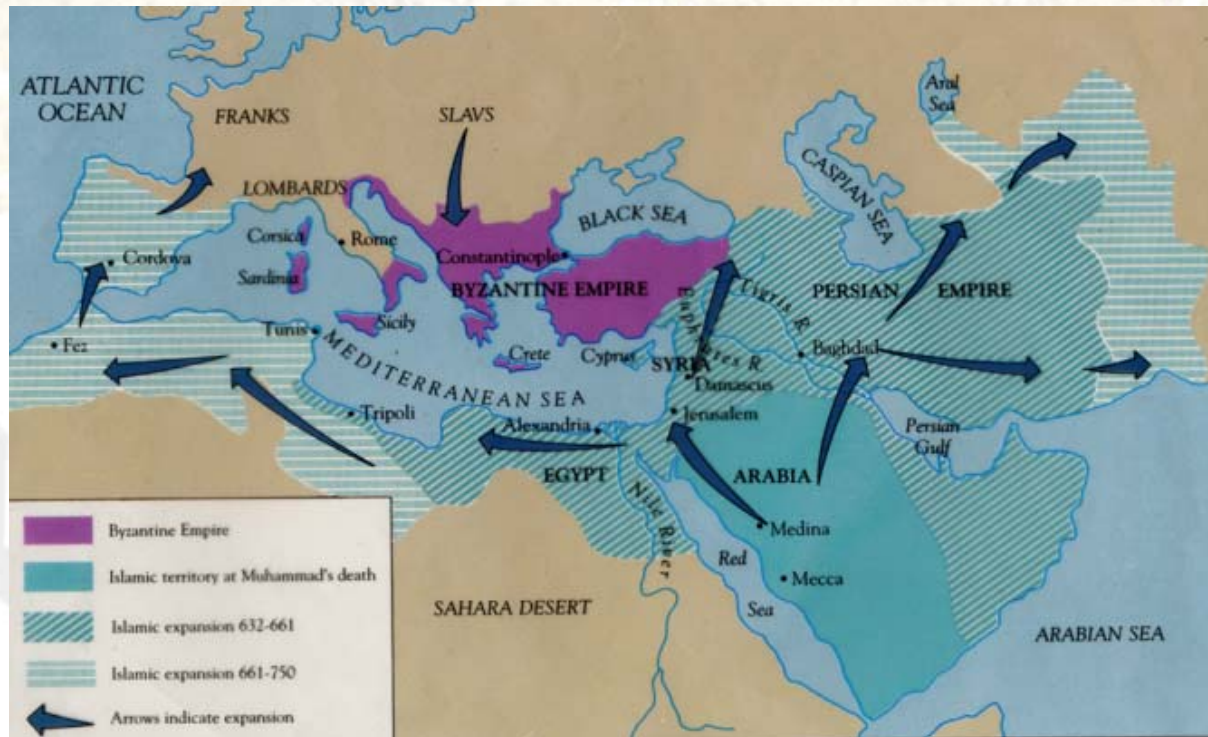
- 651 CE: the Moslems captured all of Persian territory
 - by 700, they had taken Cyprus, Rhodes and all of North Africa



The Nature and Triumph of Islam

ISLAM AFTER MUHAMMAD

- 711 CE: the Moslems crossed Gibraltar and seize Spain
 - 732 CE: stopped by the Franks at Tours



The Nature and Triumph of Islam

ISLAM AFTER MUHAMMAD

- why such spectacular success?
 - lucky timing: the Persians and Byzantines had just finished a long and debilitating war
 - many areas preferred Moslem to Byzantine control
 - lower taxes
 - no trinity-related issues, something especially appealing to the Monophysites in Egypt

The Nature and Triumph of Islam

ISLAM AFTER MUHAMMAD

- ultimately, internal dissension slowed the Moslems' progress
 - 644 CE: Omar was assassinated by a Christian (or Persian?) slave while he was praying
 - hence, rise in animosity toward Christians
- next caliph: **Othman**
 - from the **Umayyads**, a Kuraish family which had resisted Muhammad
 - but opposed by many Moslem faithful

The Nature and Triumph of Islam

ISLAM AFTER MUHAMMAD

- Muhammad's son-in-law: **Ali**
 - quarreled with Othman/Umayyads
 - Fatima's husband and the father of Muhammad's only grandchild
 - Ali insisted that caliphs must be genetically related to the prophet
- 656 CE: Othman was assassinated by mutinous troops
 - Ali declared himself caliph

The Nature and Triumph of Islam

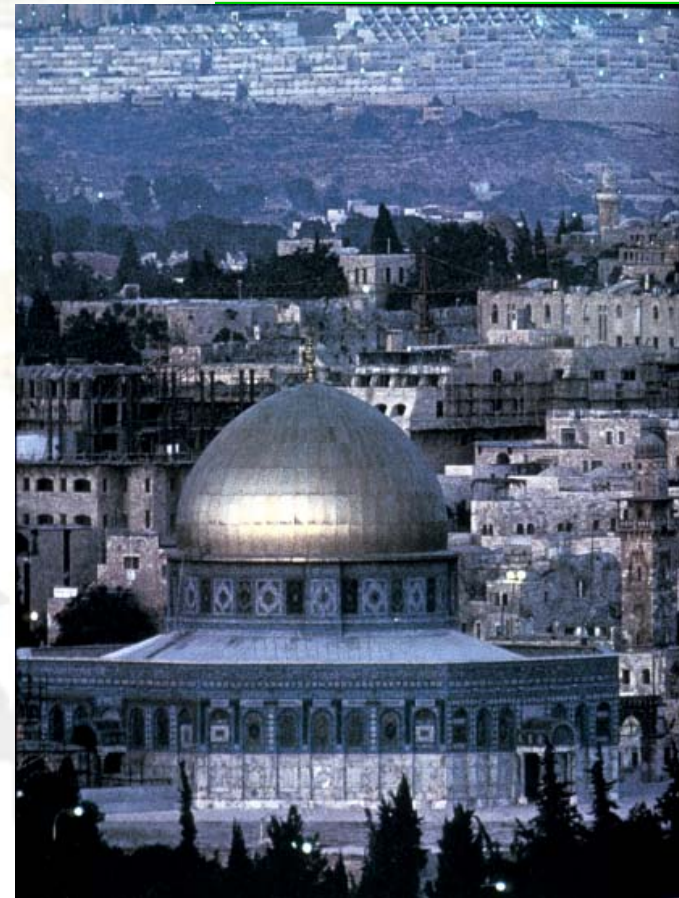
ISLAM AFTER MUHAMMAD

- 661 CE: Ali was also assassinated
 - his followers formed a separatist faction called **Shi'ites** ("factionalists")
 - Shi'ites still constitute about 10% of Moslems and the Shi'ite/Sunni conflict persists to this day

The Nature and Triumph of Islam

ISLAM AFTER MUHAMMAD

- **Umayyad Dynasty** (661-750 CE)
 - **Damascus** (Syria): center of Islamic culture and government
 - age of prosperity
 - the **Dome of the Rock** (Jerusalem)
 - around the rock where it was said Muhammad ascended into heaven
 - n.b. minarets



The Nature and Triumph of Islam

ISLAM AFTER MUHAMMAD

- Moslem expansionism ended with two great military failures
 - 717-718 CE: failed siege of Constantinople
 - 732 CE: Battle of Tours
- instead, Moslems expanded east
 - to India, SE Asia, and China



The Nature and Triumph of Islam

ISLAM AFTER MUHAMMAD

- but the failures of the early 700's doomed the Umayyads
 - held responsible for the murder of Ali's son (Muhammad's grandson)
 - eventually, fled to Spain



Mosque of
Cordoba (Spain)

The Nature and Triumph of Islam

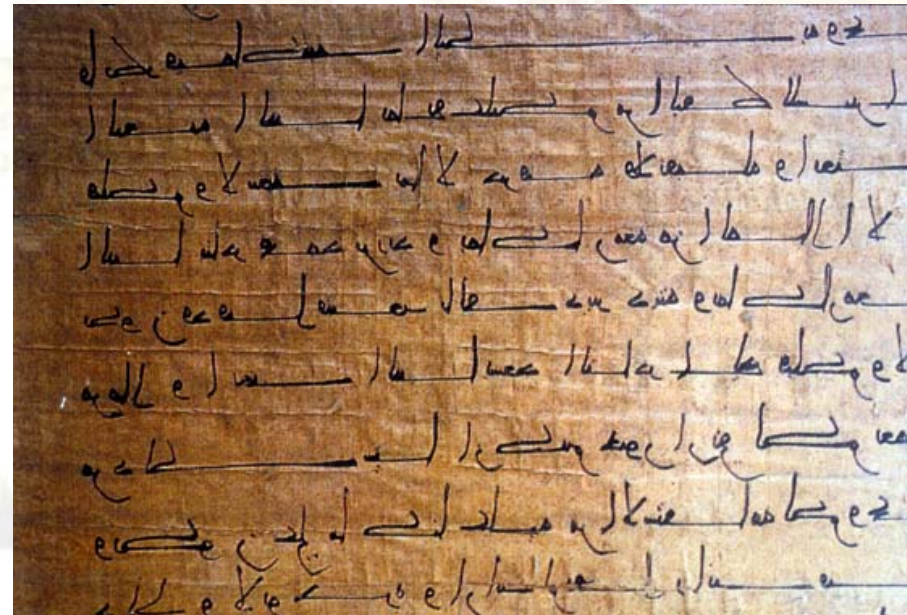
ISLAM AFTER MUHAMMAD

- the next dynasty: the **Abbasids**
 - a Persian family who fought the Umayyads in a brief civil war (747-749 CE) and took supreme power
 - moved the capital of the Islamic world to **Baghdad**
 - built a new capitol situated between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers
 - the city was up and running within 4 years!!
 - relatively cool nights and few mosquitoes
 - defenses: series of concentric canals/walls
 - the largest was two miles in diameter

The Nature and Triumph of Islam

ISLAM AFTER MUHAMMAD

- the **Abbasid Dynasty** created a trading empire and great wealth
 - Baghdad stood at the intersection of several trade routes
 - a check written in Baghdad could be cashed in Morocco



Arabic business letter (758 CE)

The Nature and Triumph of Islam

ISLAM AFTER MUHAMMAD

- the Golden Age of Islam
 - luxurious palaces, harems, elaborate court ceremony, eunuchs
- the caliph: “The Shadow of Allah on Earth”
- **The Arabian Nights:** flying carpets, genies

Douglas
Fairbanks
and
Julanne
Johnson
in
*The Thief
of Baghdad*



The Nature and Triumph of Islam

ISLAM AFTER MUHAMMAD

- the positive contributions of the Abbasid Dynasty
 - luxuries, e.g. porcelain
 - games: chess, backgammon, polo
 - common items: pants, frying pans, rag paper

CHRISTIAN KNIGHT [WHITE] AND MOORISH WARRIOR [BLACK] PLAY CHESS. Wherever Christians and Muslims faced each other on the battlefield, the opposing warrior castes sought to legitimize and to glorify their combat by the identification of their own noble qualities in their foe. In times of peace, intolerance was the norm, though occasionally some measure of mutual understanding developed.



The Nature and Triumph of Islam

ISLAM AFTER MUHAMMAD

- the negative contributions of the Abbasid Dynasty
 - suppression of women: harems, face-veils
 - a man could divorce his wife by saying “I divorce you” three times
 - but the final paperwork took three months



The Nature and Triumph of Islam

ISLAM AFTER MUHAMMAD

- the negative contributions of the Abbasid Dynasty
 - the enslavement of black Africans
 - popularized the notion that sub-Saharan Africans are “enslave-able”

The Nature and Triumph of Islam

ISLAM AFTER MUHAMMAD

- greatest Abbasid caliph: **Harun al-Rashid** (r. 786-809 CE)
 - sent an elephant named Abu'l Abbas to Charlemagne (Holy Roman Emperor)
 - Abu'l Abbas: founding father of the Abbasid family
 - the elephant was a sensation and its skeleton was on view for many years after it died

The Nature and Triumph of Islam

ISLAM AFTER MUHAMMAD

- decline of the Abbasids
 - general decentralization of Islamic power
 - there is a dangerous level of fatalism built into strict monotheism
 - 945 CE: Shi'ite forces captured Baghdad
 - the Abbasid caliphs became their puppets
 - 1055 CE: Seljuk Turks took Baghdad
 - cf. Huns
 - 1258 CE: Baghdad sacked by Mongols

The Nature and Triumph of Islam

ISLAM AFTER MUHAMMAD

- beginning in the 1400's: the **Ottoman Empire**
 - the Ottoman Turks: yet one more Mongol horde
 - the Ottomans ruled Turkey and much of the Near East until the end of World War I

The Nature and Triumph of Islam

CONCLUSION: THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF ISLAM

- Islamic civilization made many important contributions to the advancement of thought/philosophy

- *faylasufs*, e.g. Averroes

- from Greek *philosophos*

- Averroes wrote a commentary on Aristotle



Averroes

The Nature and Triumph of Islam

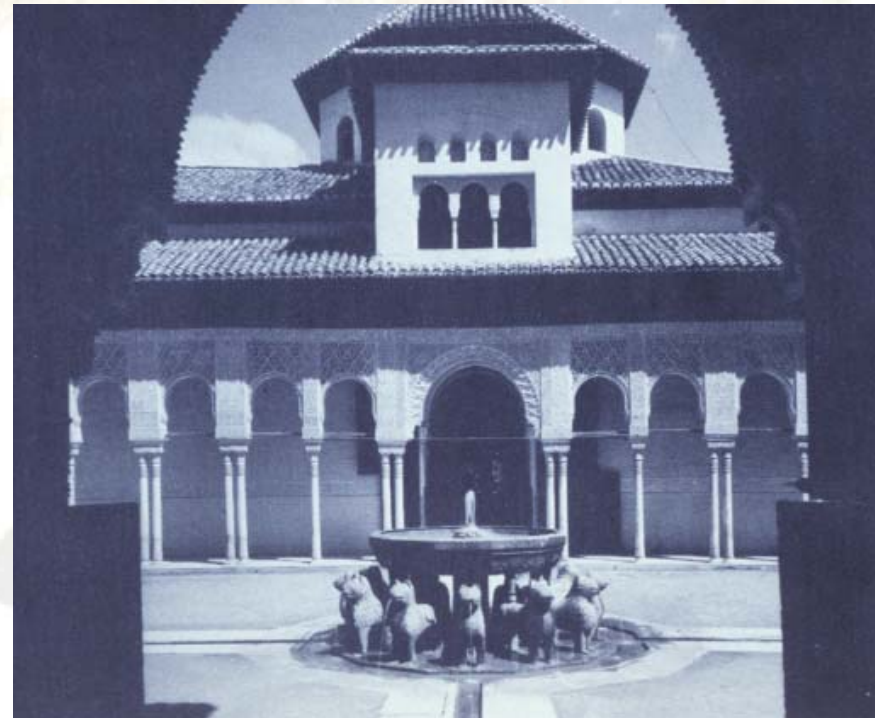
CONCLUSION: THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF ISLAM

- Moslem *faylasufs* carried the traditions of the classical Greeks and Romans to medieval Europe
 - the re-introduction of Aristotle from Moslem Spain in the 12th century stimulated western **Scholasticism**
 - the attempt to unify logic and religion
 - this would bring back rationalism to the West and lay the groundwork for the scientific revolution of the modern age

The Nature and Triumph of Islam

CONCLUSION: THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF ISLAM

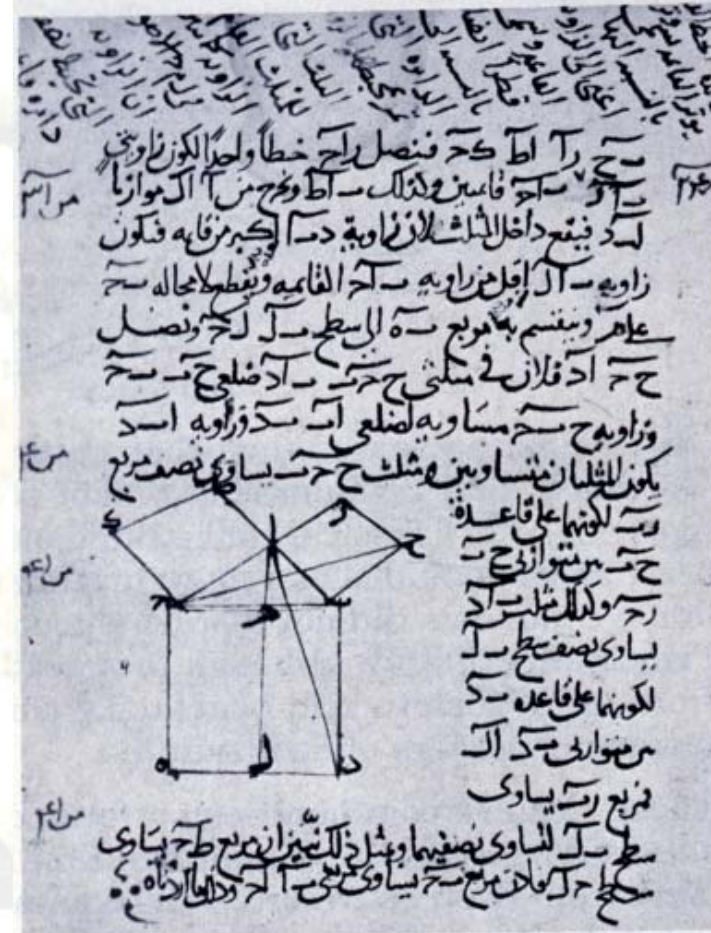
- Islamic art has also had a profound impact on art in the West
 - love poetry, e.g. *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*: “a loaf of bread, a jug of wine and thou”
 - architecture: the **Alhambra** (Spain)
 - n.b. the intricate geometric designs
 - a level of comfort and health never seen before this



The Nature and Triumph of Islam

CONCLUSION: THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF ISLAM

- mathematics
 - “Arabic numerals”
 - though the idea of place value originated in India
- medicine
 - e.g. the distinction between measles and smallpox
 - hospitals, formal training for doctors, medical licenses



This thirteenth-century Arab commentary on the *Geometry* of Euclid illustrates the proof of the Pythagorean theorem. Mathematics was one science in which the Arabs not only persevered, but even surpassed the Classical achievements.

(Photo: British Museum)

The Nature and Triumph of Islam

CONCLUSION: THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF ISLAM

- in the end, remember how Islam began: as an inspired and innovative “response” to Christianity
 - at least on some level, Muhammad was attempting to avoid problems which had embroiled Christians in controversy, e.g.
 - the mystical Trinity
 - the double nature of Jesus: man and god
 - the translation of the New Testament
 - the roles of saints and artwork
 - the integration of Church and State

The Nature and Triumph of Islam

CONCLUSION: THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF ISLAM

- if Muhammad began as one of “us,” how much of a stretch is it for us to see modern Moslems the same way?
 - we owe the Moslem world so much
 - we are brethren in religion, sharing so much more than what separates us
 - and yet those differences have dictated our policy toward our Moslem kin in far too many disastrous ways
- next up: the Crusades!