

Islam

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- We left the Mediterranean world with the fall of the western Roman empire
 - the last nominal emperor of the Western Roman empire, the 14-year-old “Augustulus”
 - was captured and killed in 476 by the “barbarian” Odovacer
 - the Eastern Roman empire survived in Greece, Anatolia, and the Levant
 - with its capital at Constantinople
 - now known as the Byzantine empire, but at the time still considered the Roman empire
 - engaged in frequent wars with the Sasanid empire of Persia and Mesopotamia
- Chronological context for other religions
 - Judaism
 - early roots, maybe 1200 BCE
 - Hebrew kingdoms 1000-930 BCE
 - an ethnic group (a “people”) with the Jewish religion
 - Christianity: ~ 30 CE – present
 - a religion of personal salvation
 - spread among lower and middle classes in and beyond the Roman empire
 - officially adopted by Constantine near the end of the unified Roman empire (313 CE)
 - the official religion of the Eastern Roman empire (the Byzantine empire)
 - Buddhism; 200s BCE to present
 - Hinduism: 500 BCE? to present
- Early Islam and the Sunni/Shiite split
- Muhammad = "The Prophet" was born around 570 CE
 - born into the merchant class in Mecca
 - orphaned by age 6, raised by relatives
 - married Khadija, a wealthy widow
- Muhammad (~570-632 CE) received the word of God in visions from 610-632 CE
 - memorized by many followers
 - written slightly later as the Koran (Qur'an, Quran, etc.): God's teaching
 - other source of knowledge: the *sunna*, or the exemplary life and doings of Muhammad
 - also translated as “custom”, meaning the customary way that Muhammad and his followers did things at that time
 - which, since God approved of Muhammad, is an indication of what God wants, beyond what he actually told Muhammad in words
 - the *sunna* is documented in the *hadith*, or collections of sayings of Muhammad and stories about his life
 - other historical documents of the time also offer clues to Muslims about *sunna*
- Muhammad accepted Jewish and Christian prophets before him,
 - but said that he was the final prophet (the “seal of the prophets”)
 - and that his version of God’s will was the most complete

- Muhammad’s beliefs: the Five Pillars of Islam
 - 1. There is no god but Allah (same as the Jewish and Christian God)
 - and Muhammad is his prophet
 - 2. Pray daily to Allah, facing Mecca
 - 3. Fast during the day in the month of Ramadan
 - 4. Donate to the needy
 - 5. If you are able, make the *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca) at least once
- Muhammad accumulated followers in Mecca
 - starting with his wife Khadija
 - and an orphaned child he was supporting, Ali
 - but soon many more
 - this community of believers was called the *umma*
- Muhammad developed enemies in Mecca
 - he said that recognizing the many popular gods of polytheists would be punished by God
 - in particular, he objected to pilgrimages to the Ka’bah (Ka’ba), a cubical black building containing a black stone block said to have been given to Adam when he left Paradise
 - but it had long been a pilgrimage site for polytheists
 - pilgrimages to it were a source of profit for Meccans
 - he also denounced greed and encouraged giving to the poor – seen as threatening to the rich merchant class
- 622: the *hegira*: Muhammad’s flight from Mecca to Medina
 - Muhammad learned of a plot to kill him
 - He arranged to have Ali sleep in his cot that night, while escaping with Khadija to Medina
 - the assassins discovered Ali and did not harm him
 - Ali soon joined Muhammad in Medina
 - many others followed
- Muhammad led the community of exiles in Medina
 - set up laws and trading ventures
 - gave his daughter Fatima to Ali in marriage
 - so Ali was not only Muhammad’s right-hand man, but also his son-in-law
 - assigned Ali as one of several scribes who would write down portions of the Qur’an
 - starting 624, led raids on caravans from Mecca
 - 630: threatened Mecca, which submitted without a fight
 - put Ali in charge of taking Mecca without bloodshed
 - and preventing any revenge being taken
 - many Meccans converted to Islam... voluntarily or less so
 - Ali was also responsible for destroying pagan shrines and replacing them with mosques
 - including clearing the Ka’ba of almost everything except the black building and the black stone, and building a huge mosque around it
 - so by 630, Muhammad was head of a growing state
- 632: Muhammad died without leaving clear instructions about succession

- the history that followed is usually divided into 3 broad periods
- 632-661: The four “rightly-guided” caliphs
 - as we will see, these were selected from associates of Muhammad, by consultation and committee
 - they greatly expanded the Arab empire
- 661-750: The Umayyad Dynasty
 - capital in Damascus, Syria
 - military imperial rule, privilege for Arabs only
 - further expanded the empire to include most of Iberia (Spain) and east to the Indus river
 - the elite grew addicted to luxury and neglected Islam
- 750-1258: the Abbasid Dynasty
 - capital in Baghdad, Iraq
 - accepted non-Arab Muslims
 - fostered a Golden Age of voluminous renewed long-distance trade, exchange and growth of scholarship, technology, medicine, arts, introduced crops from one region to another, etc.
 - peaked early in the 800s, then gradually declined
 - 945: taken over by Persians, who ruled through the Abbasid Caliph as a figurehead
 - by 1050, taken over in turn by Seljuk (Saljuk) Turks, who also left the Abbasid Caliphs in place as figurehead religious leaders, but put their own *sultans* in political control
 - the Mongols finally toppled the last of the Abbasids in 1258
- In more detail, in part to explain the rift between Sunnis and Shi’ites
- again: 632: Muhammad died without leaving clear instructions about succession
 - one minority group thought he had designated Ali
 - these became the “partisans of Ali”, or Shi’ites
 - the large majority group thought those comments were just a statement of family relations and friendship
 - these became the Sunnis
 - the leaders of both groups decided to negotiate to pick a successor (the first "caliph", or “deputy”)
 - they considered Ali
 - but picked Muhammad's father-in-law, Abu Bakr, already an old man
- 633: many of the recently converted Bedouins (Arabic camel nomads) renounced Islam, in a rebellion called the *ridda*
 - Abu Bakr responded with military force, winning several battles with them, gaining control of most of the Arabian peninsula
- 634: Abu Bakr died, designating the second caliph
 - Umar I
- Umar I expanded Islam greatly, in part by conquest
 - took Syria, including Jerusalem, from the Byzantine empire
 - was lenient towards the conquered people

- allowed them to continue practicing their own religions, as long as they paid a tax to do so (!)
- took Egypt from the Byzantine empire, too
- and conquered the Sasanid empire, taking much of Persia
- 644: Umar I died; successor picked by a group of leaders
 - Ali was again passed over, angering his partisans
 - Uthman ibn Affan, Muhammad's son-in-law, was the 3rd Caliph
 - seemed to favor leaders in Mecca, not Medina
 - placed his Meccan “Umayyad” relatives in important positions
 - including making his cousin, Mu’awiya, governor of Syria
 - issued an "official" Koran, ordered others destroyed
 - at the time, many saw this as meddling with God’s word
- 656: Uthman assassinated
- 656: Ali finally declared himself the 4th Caliph
 - with support from the Medina faction
 - called "Shi’ites", or "partisans" (of Ali)
 - believe the caliphate should be held only by descendents of Muhammad, through Fatima and Ali
 - But Mu’awiya, governer of Syria, cousin of murdered Uthman, did not recognize Ali
 - leading the faction now called "Sunni"
 - may mean “followers of the sunna”
 - implying that the partisans of Ali were violating the sunna by condoning the killing of Uthman
 - may mean “middle-of-the-road”
 - casting the Shi’ites as extremists
 - does this tactic sound familiar?
 - refused to recognize Ali until the killers of his cousin Uthman were brought to justice
 - wanting the Caliphate for himself
 - several other factions also opposed him
 - civil war broke out among Muslims, fighting to seize the Caliphate
 - battles were inconclusive and bloody
 - 657: Shi’ites and Sunnis agreed to arbitrate succession
 - the committee decided that neither Ali nor Mu’awiya should be Caliph
 - Ali rejected their decision, and civil war resumed
 - some partisans of Ali were so insulted that he would negotiate his God-given title that they split off into a separate group
 - that then fought battles with the Shi’ites
 - 661: the rebel group tried to kill both Ali and Mu’awiya
 - but only succeeded in killing Ali
 - leaving My’awiya as the sole claimant to the Caliphate
 - Ali's elder son Hasan declined to demand the caliphate

- he accepted a lifetime pension instead
- Ali's younger son Hussein agreed to wait for Muawiyah's death to demand the caliphate
- Mu'awiya moved the Islamic capital to Damascus, in Syria
 - even though his faction originally came from Mecca
 - Syria was more central to the empire for political and economic control
- 680: Mu'awiya died, but designated his son as successor
 - Hussein was outraged, and led the outnumbered Shiites to battle at Karbala
 - they were slaughtered, including Hussein
 - Hussein's son Ali survived
 - the line of descent continues to the present
 - descendants of Muhammad through Hussein are the Sayids
 - but Sunnis have outnumbered and overpowered Shiites ever since
 - developed a contrasting ideology
 - Caliphs after Ali were not legitimate
 - disdain for Sunnis as worldly, not properly Muslim
 - great reverence for Ali, Hussein, holidays for big battles like Karbala
 - Mu'awiya's descendants ruled the Islamic world (*dar al-Islam*) as the Umayyad Dynasty until 750 CE
 - passing the Caliphate more or less smoothly from father to son
- 700s: the Umayyads became increasingly secular
 - ruled as military conquerors of a large and diverse empire
 - doling out top positions and tribute wealth only to Arabs
 - especially their own family
 - even Arab Muslims became dissatisfied with them as they got lax about following Islamic practices and lived excessively luxurious lives
- 740s: Abu al-Abbas, a Sunni, but open to compromises and alliances
 - led rebels to take Persia and Mesopotamia from the Umayyads
- 750: al-Abbas won a large battle with the Umayyads
 - invited them to a reconciliatory banquet
 - and slaughtered them there
 - establishing the Abbasid Dynasty that ruled the *dar al-Islam* until 1258 CE
 - fostered a Golden Age of voluminous renewed long-distance trade, exchange and growth of scholarship, technology, medicine, arts, architecture, introduced crops from one region to another, etc.
 - refined urban civilization
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