

**Islamic Culture and Religion**

**Morgan Benavidez**

**Dr. Ganson**

**WOH 2012: History of Civilization I**

**October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023**

Islam originated in the Arabian Peninsula in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. This makes it the youngest of the major world religions. It began with the revelations received by the Prophet Muhammad, who is considered the final prophet in Islam. He convinced his tribe of the truth to his revelations and the religion first took hold in the town of Medina. Islam was first called the Believers' Movement and consisted of Christians and Jews as well. Muhammad was able to gain their support because they also had monotheistic beliefs and agreed to live in obedience to the laws Muhammad had received in his revelations from God. These revelations were later compiled into the Quran, the holy book of Islam. Muhammad used his preaching and later force to establish control of western Arabia. After Muhammad's death in 632 CE, successors (called caliphs) took control of the Muslim community. The first caliph, Abu Bakr, was selected by the Believers and in a series of wars conquered all the Arabian Peninsula in two years. (Esposito, 1999, 5-11).

With the Arabian Peninsula under the control of the Believers, they organized military campaigns to invade the bordering Byzantine and Sasanian Empires. Their conquests were extremely successful, and their control expanded into Egypt and Iraq. This conquest continued stretching outwards and the Believers began occupying more and more land.

By the mid-650s the Believers ruling from Medina had loose control over a vast area stretching from Yemen to Armenia and from Egypt to eastern Iran. And from various staging centers in this vast area, the Believers were organizing raids into areas yet further afield: from Egypt into Libya, North Africa, and Sudan; from Syria and northern Mesopotamia into Anatolia; from Armenia into the Caucasus region; from lower Mesopotamia into many unconsolidated districts in Iran and eastward toward Afghanistan and the fringes of Central Asia. (Esposito, 1999, 12).

By this time, the Believers had established a new empire, occupied large and important parts of the Byzantine Empire, and destroyed the Sasanian Empire. Over time, the Muslim empire

expanded to encompass more and more land (See Figure 1), but eventually broke down into separate Muslim states. (Esposito, 1999, 11-19).



*"Figure 1" (Esposito, 1999, 19)*

Islam has continued to spread over the years and is now the second largest religion in the world, the first being Christianity. There are almost 2 billion followers of Islam, and it is projected to overtake Christianity by the year 2050 as the number one world religion. (World Population Review, 2023).

The spread of Islamic culture and religion has been a transformative and multifaceted historical process. The Islamic faith expanded through trade, scholarship, and conquest, leaving an enduring mark on the cultures it encountered. Islamic art and architecture are characterized by intricate geometric patterns, calligraphy, and arabesques, influencing designs from the Taj Mahal in India to the Alhambra in Spain. The Islamic Golden Age nurtured advances in science, mathematics, and philosophy, preserving and translating Greek, Roman, and Indian texts that would later influence European Renaissance thinkers. Arabic, the language of the Quran, made

significant contributions to linguistic diversity and enriched the world's literary heritage. (Smith, 2023).

Islamic culture influenced music, calligraphy, and cuisine. Dishes like biryani and kebabs reveal the culinary influence, while Arabic script and calligraphy are considered art forms. Islamic urban planning, featuring central mosques and winding streets, shaped the layout of cities in the Islamic world. The exchange of ideas and goods along trade routes facilitated the cross-cultural influence of art, technology, and philosophy. (Smith, 2023).

Moreover, Islamic philosophy and theology left a significant imprint on regions where the religion took root. Islamic religious practices and rituals, such as daily prayers and Ramadan fasting, are now familiar in regions with significant Muslim populations. The cultural impact of Islamic culture and religion reflects the rich, diverse contributions of Islamic civilization to the global cultural tapestry, making it a topic of paramount importance for study and understanding. (Smith, 2023).

Islamic culture and religion are important to study for many reasons: historical understanding, cultural and religious understanding, and counteracting stereotypes. Islamic culture and religion have played pivotal roles in shaping world history. From the Islamic Golden Age's contributions to science, mathematics, and philosophy to the profound influence of Islamic empires on global trade, politics, and culture, understanding Islamic history provides critical insights into the interconnectedness of the world's civilizations.

Studying Islamic culture and religion fosters a greater appreciation for its artistic and creative contributions to humanity. It also promotes religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue, it is vital to understand the beliefs, practices, and traditions of Islam to help bridge cultural and

religious gaps, increase empathy and respect in an increasingly diverse world. Understanding the beliefs and perspectives of various Islamic nations and communities is crucial for effective diplomacy and conflict resolution.

Most importantly, in an age where misinformation and stereotypes can perpetuate bias and prejudice, studying Islamic culture and religion is a tool for countering ignorance. By learning about the diversity within Islamic societies and the commonalities that connect all people, we can dispel myths and promote tolerance. Many people fear what they do not understand. I grew up in Chicago where there is a very large population of Muslims. I went to school with them, observed them praying and fasting for Ramadan, had them as friends and neighbors, ate their food: I know the majority of them are good people. By appreciating the values of peace, compassion, and social justice present in Islamic teachings, individuals and communities can work together to build a more harmonious world.

## Works Cited

- Donner, Fred McGraw. *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012.
- Esposito, John L. *The Oxford History of Islam*. Oxford University Press, 1999.
- “Islam.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., 13 Oct. 2023, [www.britannica.com/topic/Islam](http://www.britannica.com/topic/Islam).
- Michalopoulos, Stelios, et al. “Trade and Geography in the Spread of Islam.” *Economic Journal (London, England)*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, Dec. 2018, [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8046173/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8046173/).
- Muslim Population by Country 2023*, [worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/muslim-population-by-country](http://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/muslim-population-by-country). Accessed 15 Oct. 2023.
- Smith, Bonnie G., et al. *World in the Making: A Global History*. Oxford University Press, 2023.