

E. The Birth of Triumphal Islam

1. The religion of Islam began c.622 AD in Arabia, when an Arab merchant named Muhammad claimed to have received a revelation from God and was forced to leave the trading post of Mecca to escape persecution by the leaders of Mecca. He settled in the oasis of Medina to the north. This migration from Mecca to Medina is known as the “*hejira*” in Islamic culture.
2. Muhammad claimed to have received a message that replaced those of Judaism and Christianity, and that the Arabs (people of the Arabian peninsula) had been chosen by God (“Allah”) to be the champions of the new faith.
3. Muhammad led his followers on the first “jihad” (holy war): the Muslim *Conquest of Arabia (c.622-632 AD)*.
4. He then sent two letters to the emperors of neighboring empires. The letters had the same theme: *convert or be conquered*.
5. Muhammad died in 632 AD, but his successors, known as “califs,” continued to conquer in the name of their religion. The Holy Land of Judaism and Christianity (today Israel) was conquered c.636 AD, and Persia was conquered c.651 AD.
6. Waves of conquest spread both westward, across North Africa and up into Iberia (Spain and Portugal today), and eastward into India. Both regions were invaded c.711 AD, creating a huge triumphal empire in less than a century.



A map of Arabia, with present day borders indicated, shows the locations of Mecca and Medina, where the story of Islam begins.



The Muslim empire or “Caliphate” created by Muhammad and his successors (the “califs”) stretched from Iberia in the West to India in the East. This empire, built in less than a century, was a key achievement that fueled the belief in the triumph of Islamic culture.