

# THE WORLD OF ISLAM

**TASK 1: Study a map of the Arabian Peninsula and describe its geographical properties. What do you think the life there was about?**

Arabic tribes – led by **sheiks**, **nomadic** way of life, **not united**, **polytheistic religion**

The peninsula was a **crossroads of trading routes** (camel caravans) leading from \_\_\_\_\_  
to \_\_\_\_\_, thus connecting important parts of the known world.

## Mecca

- trading but also a **religious centre** - the sacred shrine **Ka'aba with the sacred black stone** (probably a meteorite)
- many pilgrims travelled there from the whole of Arabia
- leading Muslim tribe in Mecca - **the Quaraysh** - guarded the place

## Mohammed

- a prophet
- born around 570 in Mecca
- a merchant
- troubled by people worshipping idols (stones and statues)
- in a remote cave he meditated and had a revelation which inspired him to create a new religion: **Islam** - with **Allah** as the only god - and Mohammed was his \_\_\_\_\_. The worshippers of Islam are called \_\_\_\_\_
- Allah was the same god as the God to other religions, such as \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_  
(sharing a line of prophets, e.g. \_\_\_\_\_)
- many people were attracted to the new religion → process unification

**TASK 2: Read one of Mohammed's sayings. Who was he addressing? What personal qualities did he describe here?**

*“Do not envy one another; do not inflate prices; do not hate one another; do not turn away from one another; do not undercut one another; but be like brothers, o servants of Allah. A Muslim is the brother of a Muslim: he neither oppresses him nor does he fail him; he neither lies to him nor holds him in contempt...”*

- **622** - Mohammed set on a journey to Medina to escape from threats by angry lords of Mecca, he travelled **to Medina**
- this event was called **Hijra** = year 1 of the Muslim calendar
- after religious fights the lords of Mecca were defeated in 630
- Mohammed died in 632
- new religion was accepted (*islam = obedience to the will of God*)

**TASK 3: Which year of Muslim calendar do we have now?**

### the Koran (= Qur'an)

- the holy book of Islam, Mohammed's instructions for living a good life, very detailed
- nothing has changed until today!

### the Five Pillars of Islam

- **faith** - *“There is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is his Messenger.”*
- **prayer** (five times a day)
- **fasting** – the holy month of Ramadan (Muslims not allowed to eat or drink in the daylight hours)
- **charity**: alms to the poor and needy people
- **pilgrimage** (*hajj*) – at least once in a lifetime pilgrimage to Mecca

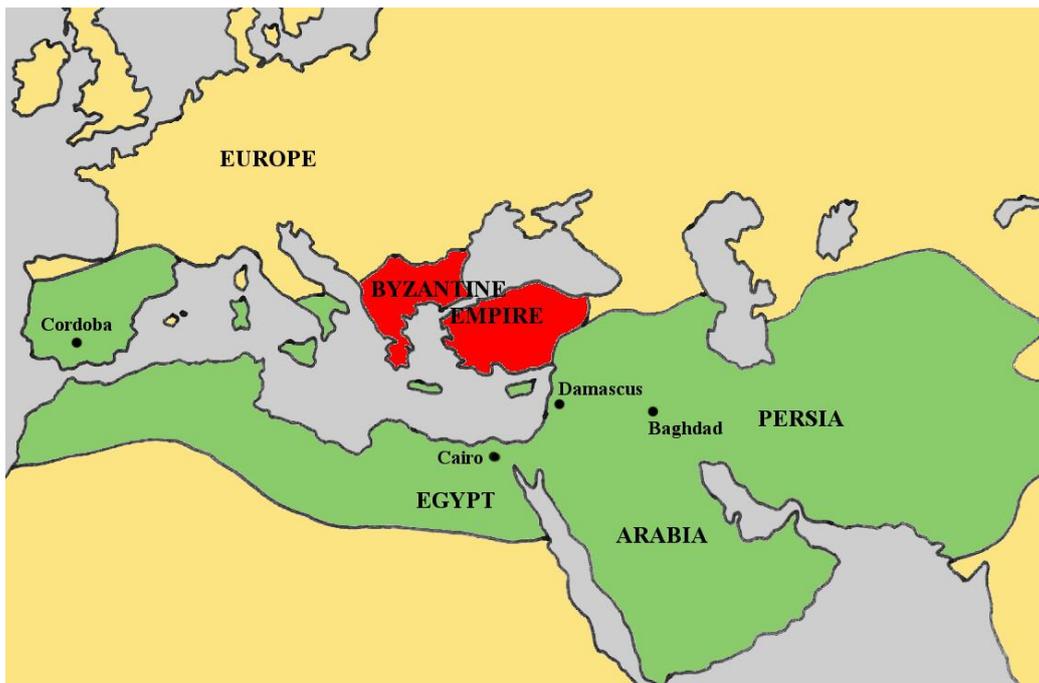
### Jihad

- the holy war aimed at heathens (= the people who do not believe in the “right” religion)

### The spread of Islam - Muslim conquests

- *“Permission is given to those who fight because they have been wronged, and indeed God is able to give them victory...”*  
(Koran)

**TASK 4: Use your knowledge to find at least four reasons or causes of the rapid Arab expansion:**  
(logical, practical, geographical or historical)



*Muslim world around 750 AD*

- good fighters and able merchants
- **Syria, Persian Empire (637-644), Egypt (642), Spain (711**, these were mostly Berbers or Moors from the Sahara desert, soon autonomous), **Cyprus**
- in Western Europe they were stopped by \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ in **732**
- **Constantinople** was not so easy to defeat and the Arabs were not very successful
- **the treatment of Jews and Christians in the conquered territories**

**TASK 5: Read the following laws. How were Jews and Christians treated by Muslims in the conquered territories?**

*“Jews and Christians will enjoy protection and care. Whoever among them wishes to enter the religion of Islam by the choice of his own heart and by the grace of God... may do so and he will be both welcome and blessed. Whoever prefers to keep to his own religion has protection and safeguard and it is the duty of all members of the Muslim community to guard and protect him...”*  
laws for the Jews and Christians:

*“Do not build any new churches or repair old ones...do not try to stop anyone from becoming a Muslim, or seek to convert anyone to your own faith...do not wear Muslim clothes, wear something that will mark you as a non-Muslim...do not carry weapons or ride horses with saddles...anyone who attacks a Muslim will no longer be protected...”*

Also, the Jews and Christians had to pay higher taxes.

- **Jerusalem** became the holy city of all three religions
- **the Crusades** – a clash of two religions, the Muslims were defending Islam

## The ruling dynasties

Mohammed's **successors and defenders of the faith - the Four Rightly-Guided Caliphs** (632-661):

- a **caliph** =
- Abu Bakr, Omar, Osman, **Ali** (Mohammed's son-in-law)
- ruled the Islamic state
- unification of the Arabian peninsula continued
- *“In Islam, the government and people are like the tent, the pole and the pegs. The tent is Islam, the pole is the government, the ropes and pegs are the people. None will do without the other.”*  
(Arabic saying , 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century)
- dynastic disputes caused a split which has existed ever since:
  - the **Shiites** - the party of Ali, the right of his descendants, belief that a dynastic successor of Mohammed would come (*Mahdi*) and set up a perfect Muslim state
  - the **Sunni** - orthodox Muslims, *sunna* (another holy book), Muslims should choose their leaders, today 90% of all Muslims

**TASK 6: Study the map and write down examples of today's states with Shiite and Sunni religion:**



**Shiite states** \_\_\_\_\_

**Sunni states** \_\_\_\_\_

N.B. Islam also spread to other parts of the world, e.g. to northern Africa, southern Asia (the Mughal Empire in India) and Indonesia

- **the Umayyads (661-749)**
  - ruled from **Damascus (Syria)**
  - attacks on Cyprus, Byzantine Empire, north Africa
  - in 711 conquered Spain - the **Conquista**, led by Tariq ibn Ziyad, established **the Caliphate of Cordoba**
- **the Abbasids (750-1258)**
  - they defeated the Umayyads
  - new capital city **Baghdad**
  - caliph **Harun Al-Rashid** (the *Arabian Nights*)
  - emirs
  - in **1258, Baghdad** was **sacked by Mongol armies**
- **the Ottoman Empire (1281-1924)**
  - the Mongols were not able to keep control for long and the Ottomans led by **Osman** took over
  - **1453** – the Ottomans **sacked Constantinople and conquered the Byzantine Empire**
  - the most famous **sultans** – especially well-known for their conquests in Europe:
    - **Selim I** (1512-1520), **Suleiman** (1520-1566)
  - **battle of Lepanto – 1571** – first major Ottoman defeat by the Europeans
  - the Ottoman Empire finally collapsed after World War One

## Culture

- architecture
  - **mosques** (muezzins called prayers, **imams** were priests), **minarets**
  - comfortable houses, beautiful gardens
  - decorations – **mosaics, wall paintings, stucco**
- **decorations**
  - **carpets**, pottery, tiles
- education
  - highly valued by Muslims
  - **universities** e.g. in **Cordoba**
  - libraries, observatories
  - **shari'ah** – Islamic law, based on the teachings of the Qur'an
- **handwriting, calligraphy** العربية (the inscription says "the Arabic")
- science
  - **astronomy**
  - **mathematics** – Arabic numerals
  - **knowledge of ancient Greek authors**, e.g. Aristotle, Euclid, Archimedes, Galen, Ptolemy (Europeans learned about them thanks to imports through Spain)
  - very good knowledge of **medicine** and human anatomy
  - Arabic scientists e.g. **Avicenna (Ibn Sina)** (medicine), Averroes (philosophy and medicine)
  - they knew how to make *naphtha* (a fire bomb which could not be put out by water, made from animal fat, sulphur and resin)
  - **Abraham ben Jacob** (Ibrahim ibn Jakub) travelled across Europe, also visited Bohemia and wrote a travelogue about it (an interesting source on the Czech history!)
  - good navigation – **astrolabe**
- literature
  - autobiography, poetry, stories

**TASK 7: Which Arabic tales or stories do you know? Can you name some?**
- **trading**
  - **bazaars**, currency – gold **dinar**
  - from **China** – silk, ink
  - from **India** – rubies, silver, ebony, dyes
  - from **Africa** – slaves, gold
  - from **Russia** – furs
  - trading with Europe – expensive and luxurious goods imported to Europe

A mosque in Cairo



A ceramic tile (16<sup>th</sup> century)



A portrait (17<sup>th</sup> century)

## Role of women

**TASK 8: Read the following sources and comment on the position of women in the Islamic world, as given by Mohammed and the Qur'an:**

- *“Treat your wives well; they are your partners and helpers.”*  
(Mohammed's preaching to pilgrims at Mecca)
- *“If you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two or three or four; but if you fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one... will be more suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice...”*  
(Qur'an)
- *“And those (wives) you fear may be rebellious admonish; banish them to their couches, and beat them.”*  
(Qur'an)
- *“Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given them more strength, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient... As to those women on whose part you fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, first, admonish them, next, refuse to share their beds, and last, beat them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them Means (of annoyance)...”*  
(Qur'an)
- *“When a man calls his wife to satisfy his desire she must go to him even if she is occupied at the oven.”*  
(Miskhat Al-Masabih)
- About having more than one wife: *“Do justice to them all, but you won't be able to, so don't fall for one totally while ignoring other wife (wives).”*  
(Qur'an)

**TASK 9: Work in groups or pairs. Discuss whether the following statements are true or false:**

- a. Muhammad encouraged men to marry more than one wife.
- b. Most Muslim men treat their wives better than what the Qur'an teaches them.
- c. It is forbidden to beat your wife.
- d. The Qur'an forbids women to study.
- e. In terms of religious duties, men and women are equal before Allah.
- f. A woman can initiate a divorce.
- g. A wife has to inform her husband before leaving her home and get his permission to do so.



A woman with flowers (16<sup>th</sup> century)



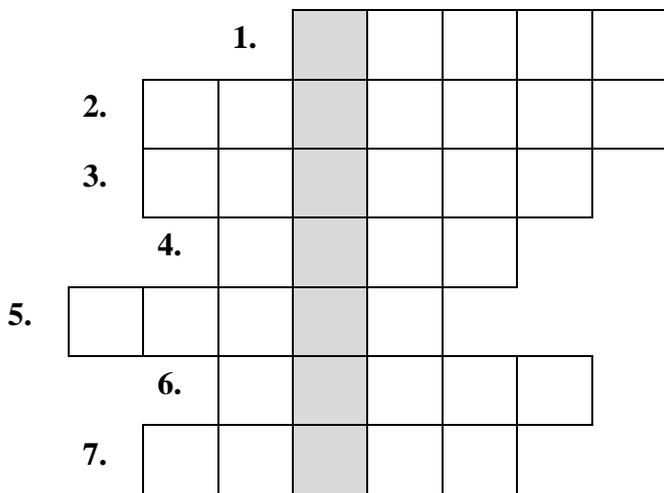
A painting, listening to music (13<sup>th</sup> century)

## REVISION TASKS

**TASK 10: What aspects of the old Islamic legacy do we encounter today?  
(think of the positive and negative cultural, social or other aspects)**

**TASK 11: What do Christians and Muslims have in common? Are there any features which connect us?**

**TASK 12: Fill in the crossword to learn the name of a famous Islamic ruler.**



1. Muslims who do not believe in a Mahdi.
2. Orthodox Islamic law.
3. Muslim ruler.
4. Pilgrimage to Mecca.
5. Propheted successor of Mohammed.
6. Holy war against heathens.
7. Islamic currency.