

The Rise of Islam



1. Use in the classroom or as homework

This module contains a sequence of maps showing the rise of Islam in the century or so after its founding by the Prophet Mohammed.

Please see **Appendix A**, below, for more on what the module is about.

The module seeks to contribute towards the teaching and learning of history at Key Stage 3 of the English National Curriculum, and a series of suggested activities are included below to help in this.

Key Concepts and Activities:

Key Concept	Activity
1.1.: Chronological Understanding	1. Timeline activity 2. Analysis
1.2.: Cultural, ethnic and religious diversity	3. Muslims, Christians and Jews
1.3.: Change and continuity	4. What changed, and what didn't!
1.4.: Cause and consequence	5. Causes of Conquests
1.5.: Significance	1. Timeline activity 6. The End of the Ancient World 7. Events, great and small 8. The Battle of Tours

The controls are very simple.

- The date label shows the date of the map on the screen, and the “forward” and “back” buttons on either side allow you to navigate through the sequence of maps.
- The “info” button, below the date, switches on the information hotspots, and the “info off” button switches them off.

These controls allow the module to be used in several ways. If what is required is a simple background summary to the rise of Islam, a quick run through the map sequence, using the “forward” and “back” buttons, will give the class an attractive, visual overview, giving them a grasp of the key events and processes involved in the topic. To help you in this, **Appendix B** gives a commentary on the maps.

If on the other hand a more in-depth look at the rise of Islam is required, these maps will provide an effective tool, either as a background resource or as the main focus for the topic. The resource can be used on an interactive whiteboard, or on desktops with small groups of pupils, or as homework on pupils' own machines at home. The notes below (see **section 3**) will help achieve this.

2. Purpose

The purpose of the unit is to give pupils an overall understanding of the history of the rise of Islam in the century or so after the death of Mohammed:

- In what period of history did this episode occur?
- Which civilizations did it affect, and was it affected by?
- Over what time frame did this take place?
- What geographical areas were affected?
- What were the key events in this process?
- What was the nature of the spread of the new faith?
- Why was this episode such a dramatic and important process in world history? What were its causes, and what its effects?

To fulfil these objectives in a way that fits in with a teacher's own approaches, the modules have been designed to work at two levels, (1) to provide an overview of the topic, and (2) to allow in-depth enquiry work by the pupils.

Overview

A quick run through of this module will offer a clear visual overview of the rise of Islam, and therefore provide the required historical background for the study.

Depth

There is a large amount of information about the rise of Islam stored in the maps and text boxes of this module. These will enable pupils to conduct their own enquiries, and allow fruitful consideration of a range of questions or issues.

3. Student activities:

Below is a selection of exercises, one or more of which you may decide to undertake with your pupils depending on their age or level of ability, and your time commitment to this topic.

The activities are all relevant to the English National Curriculum KS 3 Programme of Study (see above for a table showing which activities match

which key concepts). In undertaking them, pupils will be involved in enquiry work, either as individuals or as a group. They will be asked to identify and investigate specific historical questions or issues, and reflect critically on historical questions or issues.

To access the huge amount of information linked to the maps, pupils will need to use the “info” button, below the date box, which switches the information hotspots on. The “info off” button next to it switches them off again.

1. Timeline activity

Draw a timeline of the Rise of Islam. Start in 622, and end in 732. Place on it the key events.

[There is no correct list of events, but pupils should be prepared to give reasons for their choice. The following might be included: The Hejira (definitely); the return to Mecca; the conquests of Persia and the Roman provinces, the sieges of Constantinople, the conquest of North Africa, the conquest of Spain, the Battle of Tours]

2. Analysis

[The purpose of this exercise is to encourage students to think about the nature of historical processes – and how that nature changes over time: different factors at play, different kinds of events, different results, and so on.]

Can you divide the expansion of Islam into two or more phases?
If so, what were the different characteristics of those phases?

[Absolutely no right answer here, but pupils must be prepared to give reasons for their choice. A possible division might be the death of Mohammed, as he gave the movement a uniquely authoritative leadership; or perhaps the completion of the conquest of Arabia, after which the realm of Islam went beyond its Arab roots to become a true empire.]

3. Muslims, Christians and Jews

Pupils examine the module to find the truth (or otherwise) of the two following propositions:

- 1) The Christian and Jewish populations of the territories conquered by the Arabs hated the coming of the Muslims.
- 2) The Muslim conquerors forced the conquered peoples to convert to their own religion.

4. What changed, and what didn't!

The rise of Islam was a dramatic episode in world history. A new civilization arose as a result of the Arab conquests. What was brand new in this Muslim civilization, and what was taken over from previous civilizations?

5. Causes of Conquests

What reasons can you find for the dramatic spread of Islam?

- A. What were the motives of the Arab conquerors?
- B. How did a comparatively small group of desert nomads take on two powerful and sophisticated empires, and win?

[For more able pupils you might like to face them with the simple question, What reasons can you find for the dramatic spread of Islam? See if they distinguish between *motivation* and *reasons for success*.]

- C. Why did Arab expansion stop?

6. The End of the Ancient World

The Rise of Islam is seen by many scholars as the end of the Ancient World. Does this sequence of maps shed any light on this view - why, do you think, might they think this?

7. Events, great and small

Which events described in this module will have had an impact on most people of the time, do you think?

Does this make these events more historically significant than others, do you think?

See if you can find events which had might have been noticed by only a small number of people at the time, but which had a large influence on history, perhaps even being felt to this day.

8. The Battle of Tours

The Battle of Tours (732) has often been seen as one of the most important events in European history. Why might this be the case, do you think?

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: What is this module about?

This module contains a sequence of maps showing the rise of Islam in the century or so after its founding by the Prophet Mohammed.

One crucial point for pupils to understand is that Islam, unlike any other major faith in the world today, began its expansion as a political and military movement which created one of the largest empires in history (this empire is called the “Caliphate”). The subsequent spread of the religion has largely been the result of missionary activity, as with other faiths, but the rise of the Caliphate meant that the early history of Islam shaped world history in a quite unique way.

APPENDIX B: Commentary of Maps

The following notes give background details to each map in the sequence. If you do not want to go into depth, and just give a brief overview of the rise of the Roman Empire, the first paragraph (in bold) for each date will give you all the information you need.

Some questions are included for discussion.

AD 600: Historical background: two large empires

This map shows the historical environment in which Islam originated. Two great empires divided the Middle East at that time, both centuries old.

- The Persian Empire was more than 300 years old – and heir to the oldest civilization in human history, going back 4000 years
- The Roman Empire was more than 500 years old. The city of Rome had been founded more than 1000 years before, and its empire was heir to a Graeco-Roman civilization going back 2000 years

Both empires had powerful armies, were run by large, sophisticated bureaucracies, and were monotheistic in their official religions – Zoroastrian in the Persian Empire, Christian in the Roman.

(Note: the Roman Empire does not look like that portrayed in the usual maps. This is because by 600 it has lost all its western provinces, but is nevertheless still one of the great powers of the world at that time.)

BUT –

The two empires were at almost continual war with one another for many years at the start of the 7th century. This exhausted them, and they were

unprepared for the onslaught from the south which took both empires completely by surprise.

ALSO –

The loyalties of the provincial peoples in both empires were under strain, for religious reasons. The bulk of the population of the Persian Empire was probably Christian, and their religion was frowned upon, and at times actually persecuted, by the Zoroastrian Persian authorities, who suspected the Christians of sympathizing with their enemies the Romans, who were also Christians.

The inhabitants of the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire were also Christians, However, particularly Syria and Egypt they mostly followed different sects of Christianity from their rulers in Constantinople, who felt it their duty to harass and even persecute these sects. This caused a great deal of resentment.

One of the ironies of history is that the Arabs, who brought with them the new religion of Islam, were broadly welcomed by local populations as being more tolerant of their religion than their previous rulers. This was in a tradition of tolerance amongst Muslims towards those of other faiths, which, below the headlines, still holds true today amongst the majority.

This broad historical background is important to the nature of the rise of Islam, for several reasons:

- The Arabs were able to take over the imperial institutions with minimal change (and indeed their personnel) to help run their vast new empire;
- Much of the material civilization of these empires was absorbed into a new Islamic civilization – the classic design of the mosque, for example, is based on the domed architecture of the Byzantine empire; and many Islamic artistic traditions go back to ancient Persia.
- The Greek intellectual heritage that the Arabs took over enabled them to preserve and transmit much ancient thought and science which would otherwise have been lost in the European Dark Ages which had now begun in the West.

Arabian background

Arabia is mostly desert, at that time inhabited by desert nomads – tough warriors, fiercely independent, frequently fighting each other.

They were pagans by religion, worshipping many gods.

In the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula, however, was a civilization which dated back two and a half thousand years. This was a source of the frankincense, myrrh and other spices and perfumes used throughout both the Roman and Persian empires. For this reason, important trade routes crossed the Arabian Desert, and at several large oases important merchant towns had sprung up. Mecca and Medina were two such.

In addition, Mecca was a religious sanctuary and centre of pilgrimage from all over Arabia. The Black Stone located in the central sanctuary, or Kaaba, – possibly a meteorite - was regarded as sacred by the Arab nomads.

By this period, monotheism was coming in from the neighbouring empires. There were scattered Christian and Jewish communities in the towns.

The historical background to the Middle East can be viewed at www.worldhistory.timemaps.com/middle-east/AD500

Mohammed

Mohammed was a merchant living in Mecca. He was born in AD 570, and probably travelled fairly extensively, presumably to one or other, perhaps both, of the great empires to the north. Over the years he had felt called to preach a new, monotheistic faith to the Arabs. At first he made little headway, gathering only a few disciples. Even so he soon came to be seen as a threat by the city leaders of Mecca – understandable, given that he was condemning paganism, which (as a centre of pagan pilgrimage) was an important source of wealth to the Meccans.

Question for discussion

If you were an alien from another planet and you were looking at Planet Earth in AD 600 (or XZ 10,347 in Standard Galactic Years, of course), what might you think the following centuries might hold for the Middle East and surrounding regions?

AD 622: the Flight from Mecca to Medina - the Hejira

This date is the seminal event of Islamic history, the first date in the Islamic calendar. Meeting hostility in Mecca, Mohammed fled his home town with his small band of disciples, heading for Medina.

At Medina Mohammed's fortunes dramatically improved. He was welcomed as a neutral judge between rival factions and he was soon the leading figure in the city, and the new faith, Islam, the religion of the majority of the town's population.

AD 630: The Return to Mecca

After a few years, Mohammed began negotiating the submission of his home town, Mecca. This was accomplished in 630.

Most of the Meccans soon converted to Islam. The incorporation of Mecca into the Muslim community made Mohammed the leader of an embryonic Muslim state, as surrounding nomadic tribes also came over to him.

AD 632: The extent of Islam at the time of Mohammed's death

By the time of the Prophet's death all the tribes of western Arabia had come under his authority.

This had been helped by the fact that Mecca was a place of pilgrimage for the Arab tribes, and so played a vital part in transmitting the new faith to the people of Arabia. Furthermore, the Muslims had adopted a highly effective policy of attacking those tribes which resisted conversion, and many submitted to Mohammed in order to escape these attacks.

AD 634: Muslim Arabia

Mohammed's death caused barely a pause in the expansion of Islam, as a successor ("Caliph") to the Prophet was chosen.

An immediate crisis faced Mohammed's successor, Abu Bakr. Many Arab tribes, considering that they had submitted to Mohammed personally rather than to any broader group (as was normal in pre-Islamic Arabia), threw off their allegiance to the Caliph. Muslim armies were therefore sent out to bring these tribes back into the fold of Islam. These forces not only succeeded, but almost immediately were venturing into the lands of the non-Muslim tribes, and these too were brought under Muslim control. Muslim armies were soon probing both great empires to the north, and in particular had begun taking large chunks of Persian territory in Iraq.

AD 651: Conquests

In an astonishing series of campaigns Arab armies completely overran one of the great empires (Persia) and seized the wealthiest provinces of the other (the Roman).

Question:

Can you list some possible reasons for these astonishing victories?

[Apart from the exhaustion of the empires caused by their long mutual wars, and the disaffection of many of their inhabitants (see above, notes for AD 600), the following reasons may have been at play:

- Arab fighters were toughened by the hard desert conditions in which they lived and by endless conflicts between tribes and clans which occurred before adhered to Islam. Now, united in one cause, their fighting qualities and aggression were directed outwards, to common enemies.
- The belief in justice and truth of their faith gave Muslim troops an unbounded confidence, which helped to make them highly effective in action.
- Tactically, their forces were highly mobile, especially when attacking from the desert. They were often able to travel long distances at speed. They were commanded by able leaders who came from the same background as the troops.
- The feeling of brotherhood amongst Muslim troops enhanced their morale.
- Muslim students might say, "God was with the armies of Islam". This is obviously something that can not be historically evidenced, but given

the in-fighting within the Christian Church at that time, modern Christians might agree!]

AD 698: Further Expansion

The Islamic empire continued to expand rapidly, especially in North Africa.

One of the main objectives of the Muslim forces, the great Christian city of Constantinople, however, failed to fall into their hands despite a determined four year siege (674-8).

AD 716: Maximum reach of the Caliphate

The Islamic empire (or “Caliphate”) reached its greatest extent with the conquest of Spain in the west and of central Asian lands in the east.

AD 732: Limits to Expansion

A second great siege of Constantinople (717-8) failed, and Muslim expansion into France was turned back (at the Battle of Tours, 732). This set the limits to the Caliphate, a vast area of land in which, for several centuries, Muslims were united under a single ruler.

Although the Caliphate had reached its maximum extent, the religion of Islam had many more gains to make in the future: in Central Asia, West Africa, East Africa, South Asia and South East Asia. Also, a Muslim state, the Ottoman Empire, would eventually succeed in capturing Constantinople (1453) and creating one of history's greatest empires, covering vast swathes of Europe (as well as the Middle East and North Africa).

It is important to note that the Muslims did not force their millions of new subjects to convert to Islam en masse. On the whole, they were allowed to keep their own religions, customs and cultures. Indeed, the Muslims borrowed much from their new subjects – bureaucratic forms of government, architectural techniques and so on, which became important elements within Muslim civilization.

Nevertheless, over the following centuries the new faith gradually spread amongst the people of the Caliphate. By the time the Caliphate came to an end, more than 500 years after this date, the great majority of its inhabitants had become Muslims.