

The Spread of Islam

Directions: Many factors contributed to the spread of Islam throughout the world. Examine the documents below and answer the questions that follow. Also, whenever a geographic location is mentioned in the document, label that spot on your map with the circled capital letter above the document.

(A) Desire for Wealth

Source: Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs* (1946)

“The passion to go to heaven in the next life may have been [the motivation for] some [converts to Islam from **Arabia**], but the desire for the comforts and luxuries of the civilized regions of the Fertile Crescent was just as strong in the case of many... The objective in most [battles was only gaining riches] the gaining of a permanent foothold, [but] as the warriors passed from victory to victory... the creation of the Arab empire followed inevitably.”

1. According to this author, why did some Arab tribes join the religion of Islam?

(B) Improved Social Status

Source: Albert Hourani, British-Lebanese historian, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (1992)

“[As the Islamic Empire grew,] the status of Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians [in **Egypt, Syria, and Persia**] was more [clearly] defined, and in some ways it was inferior [to Muslims]. They were regarded as the 'People of the Book', those who possessed a revealed scripture or 'People of the Covenant', with whom compacts of protection had been made. In general they were not forced to convert, but they suffered from restrictions. They paid a special tax; they were not supposed to wear certain colors; they could not marry Muslim women.”

2. Considering the information provided by Hourani, why do you think some Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians might be motivated to convert to Islam?

3. What term was used to describe Jews and Christians under Muslim rule?

(C) Religious and Secular Motivations

Source: Ira Lapidus, American historian, *A History of Islamic Societies* (2002)

“The question of why people convert to Islam has always generated intense feeling. Earlier generations of European scholars believed that conversions to Islam were made at the point of the sword, and that conquered peoples were given the choice of conversion or death. It is now apparent that conversion by force, while not unknown in Muslim countries, was, in fact, rare. Muslim conquerors ordinarily wished to dominate rather than convert, and most conversions to Islam were voluntary... In most cases worldly and spiritual motives for conversion blended together...”

4. According to this author, were non-Muslims forced to convert to Islam under Muslim rule? How has scholarship on this topic evolved over the years?

(D) Sufi Missionaries

Source: Elizabeth Gaynor Ellis & Anthony Esler, "Building a Muslim Empire," *World History*

"Sufis [were] Muslim mystics sought [connection] with God through meditation, fasting, and other rituals. Sufis were respected for their piety (strong faith) and some were believed to have miraculous powers. Like Christian [and Buddhist] monks... some Sufis help spread Islam by traveling, preaching, and being good examples to others. They carried the faith to remote (isolated) villages [in regions such as **India** and **Central Asia**] where they blended local traditions and beliefs into Muslim culture."

5. How did Sufi Muslims help spread the religion of Islam beyond the borders of the Caliphate?

Source: Abul Fazl Ezzati, *The Spread of Islam: The Contributing Factors* (2002)

"An important factor in the growth of the Islamic community in **India** was the... missionary activity [of] the Sufis (Muslim ascetics), [who often explained Islam through] the beliefs and practices of the [Hindus]... They went on to tell of a new name for the [Hindu] Supreme God, namely Allah, of a new Avatar (Hindu manifestation of God) named Muhammad, and of his law and way of life... The lower sections of the Indian population... found in Muslim brotherhood a happy refuge (relief) from the [caste system]."

6. How did missionaries make Islam understandable to Hindu populations?

7. Which members of Indian society were most attracted to the message of Islam? Why?

(E) Trade Routes

Source: Kallie Szczepanski, historian and writer "The Spread of Islam in Asia, 632 CE to Present," *About.com*

"[Islam] spread across **Central Asia** and into **China** via (along) the Silk Road, as well as to [the **islands of Southeast Asia** in what is] now Malaysia, Indonesia, and the southern Philippines via the Indian Ocean trade routes. Arab and Persian traders were very successful in expanding Islam, due in part to their trade practices. Muslim merchants and suppliers gave one another better prices than they did for non-believers. Perhaps most importantly, they had an early international banking and credit system through which a Muslim in Spain could issue a statement of credit, similar to a personal check, that a Muslim in Indonesia would [accept]. [These advantages] made [Islam] an easy choice for many Asian merchants and traders."

8. How did trade help to spread Islam around the world? Explain.

Source: John L. Esposito, ed., *The Oxford History of Islam* (1999)

"... Merchants were carriers of Islam rather than agents of Islamization. They opened routes and exposed isolated societies to external influences, but they were not themselves engaged in the propagation [spread] of Islam, which was the work of religious leaders. The leaders became integrated into [**West**] **African** societies by playing religious, social, and political roles similar to those of traditional priests. Like traditional priests, Muslim men of religion were peacemakers, [and] Mosques, like traditional shrines, were considered sanctuaries..."

9. How did merchants contribute to the spread of Islam in Africa?

Source: Susan Ramirez et al., "Trading States of East Africa," *World History: Human Legacy*

"The coastal city-states of **East Africa**, such as Mogadishu, Mombasa, Kilwa, and Sofala, linked merchants from overseas with traders from Africa's interior... Trade led to a blending of African, Arab, and Asian cultural influences along East Africa's coast. Over time, many Muslim Arabs and Persians settled in Africa's coastal city-states... Because many foreign traders were Muslim, Islam gained hold along the East African coast as well. Many African rulers who governed the coastal city-states adopted Islam, and mosques appeared in cities and towns.

10. What word can be used to describe the process by which Islam became a popular religion in East Africa?

11. Of all the factors mentioned in all the documents, which factor do you think played the biggest role in the spread of the religion of Islam?

SUMMARY: How did the expansion of Muslim rule differ from the spread of the religion of Islam?

Directions: Write a short 1-2 sentence summary of each to show the different reasons

Expansion of Muslim Rule	Spread of the Religion of Islam

QUAESTIO: How was the religion of Islam able to spread beyond the lands under Muslim rule?

