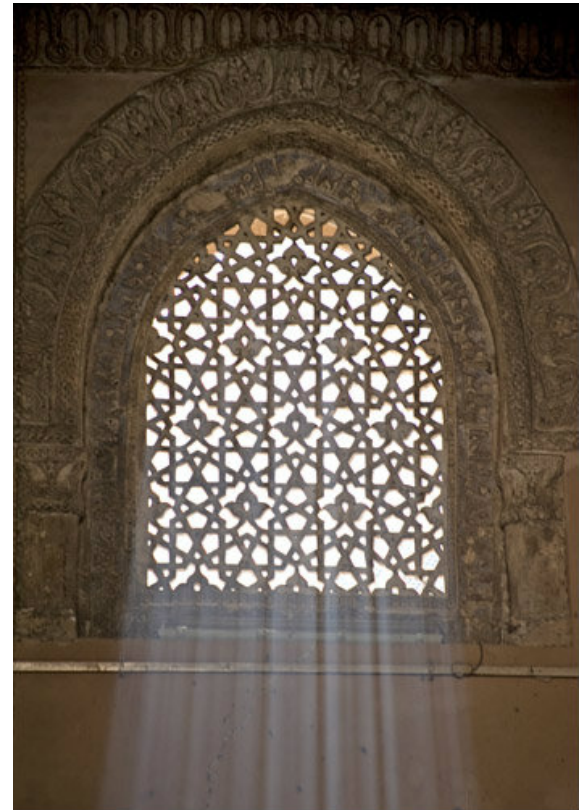


Did Islam Spread by the Sword?

Socratic Seminar**

The spread of Islam happened VERY fast. It was perhaps the fastest spread of a religion that the world had yet seen. One question people often ask is “if Islam spread that quickly, did it spread through violence, through the sword?” Even in the 21st century, many people have the preconception that Islam *was* in fact spread by the sword, and that may impact how they see Muslims today.

To explore this topic, examine the sources in this packet. In a few days, we’ll have a Socratic Seminar where you’ll be expected to refer to these sources as we answer the question: ***Was Islam spread by the sword?***

Socratic Seminar Topic:**Was Islam spread by the sword?**

Source 1: ABC News' *What Would You Do?*

Directions: This [video clip](#) shows what people would do if a drug store employee denied a Muslim man (or someone who people thought was Muslim) the opportunity to take a passport picture.

1. Where does this take place?
2. In what ways did people try to help the Muslim man?
3. Why do some people think it's okay to be cautious about giving a Muslim a passport photo?
4. Overall, what do you think about what you saw in the video?
5. How might this video relate to the misconception that Islam was spread/is spread using violence?

Source 2: “The Spread of Islam”

Directions: As you read, use this vocabulary list to help you.

- **vast:** large
- **compulsion:** forcing someone to do something
- **precedent:** an earlier event/action that sets an example for the future
- **persistence:** continuation

A Slow Process. The spread of Islam in these **vast** territories took centuries, and Muslims made up a small minority of the population for a long time. In other words, the expansion of territory under Muslim rule happened very rapidly, but the spread of Islam in those lands was a much slower process.

“Let there be no compulsion in religions.” The Qur’an specifies, “Let there be no **compulsion** in religion” (2:256). This verse states that no person can ever be forced to accept religion against his or her will. It tells Muslims that they cannot force people to convert to Islam. Muhammad set a **precedent** as the leader of Medina. Under his leadership, the Muslims practiced tolerance towards those of other religions. Muhammad often discussed religious ideas with the Jews, Christians, and polytheists (believers in many gods), and he heard their questions about his teachings. The Qur’an records some of the questions that people put to Muhammad, and his replies. Muslim leaders after Muhammad were required to be tolerant, based on the authority of the Qur’an, as well as Muhammad’s own example (known as the Sunnah).

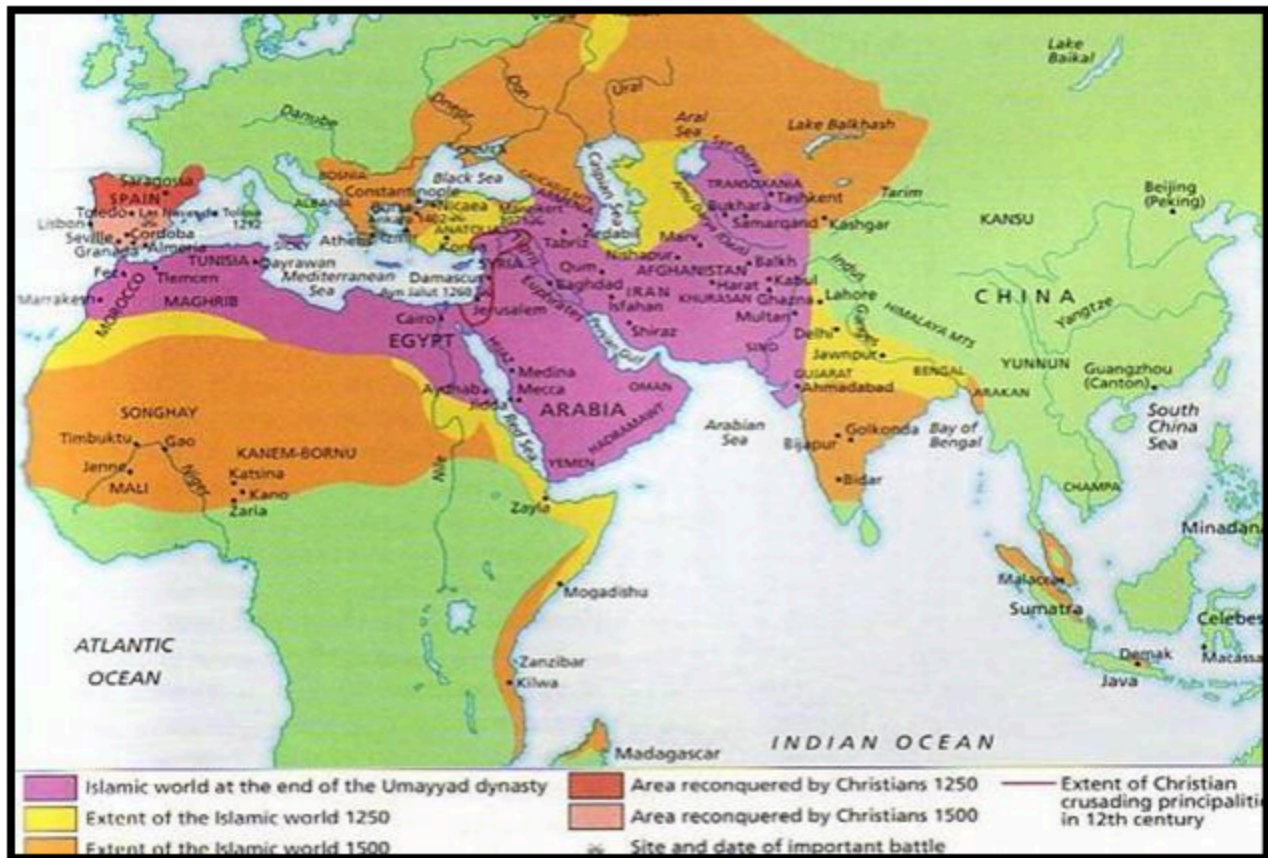
Muslim leaders have generally followed this **precedent** over time. One major type of evidence for tolerance by Muslim leaders is the **persistence** of many different religions in the lands Muslims ruled. Spain is one example where Christians and Jews lived and worshipped under Muslim rule and contributed to the society in many ways.

1. Decide if the statements below are TRUE or FALSE. Write 1-2 sentences explaining **why** the statement is true or false.

- Islam spread quickly.
- In Islam, you cannot force someone to become Muslim.
- Muslims peacefully coexisted with other religions.

Source 3: Map of Expansion of Islam

Directions: Study the map and answer the questions below.



Map from Francis Robinson, ed. *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 47.

1. What do the different colors in the map mean, including the color green?
2. What was happening in Spain during this time?
3. What continent had the most Muslim land: Africa, Asia, or Europe?

Source 4: Converting to Islam

Directions: This excerpt suggests there are options to conversion depending on the religion of the people facing conversion. Use the vocabulary list to help your fully understand the passage.

- **Koranic:** from the Qur'an/Koran, the holy book of Islam
- **heathen:** a person from a different religion
- **sanctioned:** to give permission or approval
- **divine:** of/from God

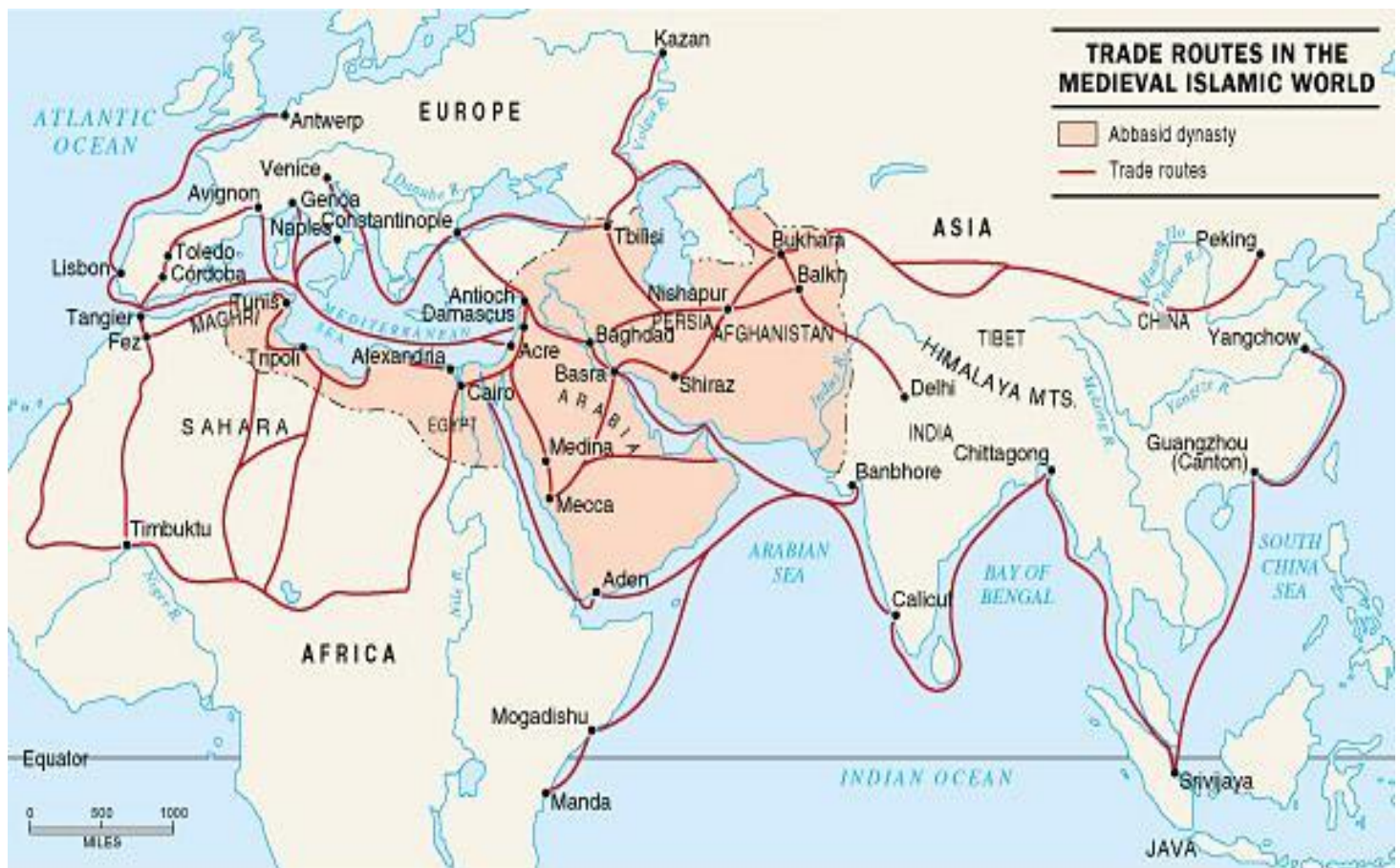
Koranic revelation commanded them to “Fight in the cause of God against those who fight you, but do not be the aggressors.” The early Muslims thus fought their **heathen** enemies... war against unbelievers was **sanctioned** by **divine** revelation and the example of the Prophet.

But many Arabs were Jews or Christians: What was to be done with them? Mohammad respected the older monotheistic faiths... he called them “People of the Book”... they were not forced into Islam but were allowed to retain their ancestral religion on payment of tribute.

(From J.J. Saunders, “The Caliph Omar: Arab Imperialist,” in *History Today*, March 1961, pp. 180-181.)

1. Annotate the passage above.
2. How were Jews and Christians to be treated?
3. Why were Jews and Christians to be treated differently?
4. How does this source relate to Source #2?

Source #5: “Trade Routes in the Islamic World”



1. Bullet point 3 things that this map teaches you.
2. What role do you think trade had in spreading Islam?
3. How does this source relate to Source #3?

BONUS—this is for extra credit!

Source #6: “Another Reason for Muslim Conquest”

Source: Philip K. Hitti, in *History of Arabs* (MacMillian, 1946), offers another explanation for why Muslims were motivated to spread their faith and empire.

The passion to go to heaven in the next life may have been operative with some, 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 campaigns seem to have started as **raids** to provide new outlets for the warring tribes, the objective in most cases being booty [riches] and not the gaining of a permanent foothold... The movement **acquired** momentum as the warriors passed from victory to victory... [and] the creation of the Arab empire followed inevitably.

1. Annotate the reading.
2. According to this passage, what was one clear motive for Muslims to spread their faith and their empire?