

# The First Global Civilization: The Rise and Spread of Islam

## Desert and Town: The Pre-Islamic Arabian World

- Islam appeared first on the **Arabian Peninsula**, an area occupied by pastoral nomads and on the periphery of the civilized zones.
- Much of the peninsula is desert, which supported both goat and camel nomadism among peoples called **bedouin**. Sedentary agricultural communities were limited to the far south of the peninsula, and trading towns like **Mecca** developed along the coasts.
- The bedouin tribal culture of **clan loyalty** and rivalry provided a critical backdrop for the emergence of Islam. Women enjoyed somewhat greater freedom, art was largely nonexistent, and religion was a blend of animism and polytheism.

## The Life of Muhammad and the Genesis of Islam

- In the 7th century C.E., a new religion arose in the Arabian peninsula. Built on the revelations received by the prophet **Muhammad**, a trader from Mecca, the new faith won over many camel-herding tribes of the peninsula within decades.
- Islam **united Arabs** and provided an important ethical system. Though initially an Arab religion, Islam's beliefs and practices (including the **five pillars**) eventually made it one of the great world religions.

## The Arab Empire of the Umayyads

- Although some bedouin tribes renounced their allegiance to Islam following **Muhammad's death** in 632, the Prophet's followers were able to conduct military campaigns restoring the unity of the Islamic community.
- **Abu Bakr** assumed leadership of the **umma** (community of the faithful). **Ali**, Muhammad's son-in-law, was passed over, which would later cause an important rift in the Muslim community.
- Once the rebellious tribesmen were brought back into the umma, Muslim armies began to launch attacks on neighboring civilizations outside of Arabia.
- Within a short period of time, Arab armies exploited weaknesses in their enemies' forces and captured Mesopotamia, northern Africa, and Persia. A new dynasty, the **Umayyads**, ruled this Arabic empire.
- The question of **succession** soon led to the **Sunni-Shi'a** split.
- Umayyad extravagance ultimately led to the empire's overthrow.

---

## From Arab to Islamic Empire: The Early Abassid Era

- The Abbasid rulers moved the Empire's capital to **Baghdad**, and lived a life of luxury that alienated many followers.
- The Abbasids fully integrated the **mawali**, or non-Arab Muslims, into the Islamic community.
- **Merchants and landlords** grew in wealth and status. Cities grew, the **dhow** improved sailing, and **slave labor** became increasingly important.
- **Arab learning flowered**, as scholars sought to preserve the great works of Greek and Roman civilization.