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About Islam

In order to establish effective relationships with persons from the Middle East, it is important that investigators possess a basic understanding of Arab and Islamic history, and be knowledgeable about the important historical events that have shaped their present day opinions and beliefs. The development of Islam was an important unifying event in the history of the Arab people. Islam influences every aspect of life in the Arab world. Detailed below is a brief overview of the history of Islam and the Arab world and important background information concerning the Islamic faith.


Muhammad and the Founding of Islam

Islamic Sects

The Qur'an and the Five Pillars of Islam

Muslim Holy Sites


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Muhammad and the Founding of Islam

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Muhammad is revered and held in high esteem by Muslim Arabs and is considered the last in a line of prophets. Muhammad was born in 570 A.D., in Mecca. According to the Qur'an (Koran), at the age of 40, Muhammad had a vision of the Angel Gabriel, who called upon him to become the messenger of God (Allah). This pivotal experience or vision is referred to as the Al Qadr ("Destiny" or "Night of Power"). Over the next two decades, Muhammad set about conveying Allah's messages (also known as revelations) and influencing the people of the Hijaz region of what is now Saudi Arabia.

Eventually, political disharmony grew between the leading family of Mecca and Muhammad and his followers. In 622 A.D., Muhammad left Mecca and settled in Yathrib (known today as Medina), approximately 200 miles northeast of Mecca. The move to Medina, known as the Hijrah, marks the beginning of the Muslim era. >>


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Muhammad and the Founding of Islam (cont.) (2 of 2)

Muhammad was welcomed to Medina with great fanfare. However, the Meccans feared the growth of Muslim power and soon became involved in a series of battles with Muhammad that spanned several years. In 628 A.D., the Meccans and Muhammad signed a peace treaty, but it was violated two years later when the Meccans attacked a tribe under Muhammad's protection. In response, Muhammad organized an army of ten thousand men, defeated the Meccans in battle, and entered the city of Mecca as conqueror. Muhammad then ordered his men to destroy the Meccan pagan idols in the center of the city (also known as the Ka'bah), thus assuring the location as the central shrine of Islam.

Muhammad's comments and day-to-day behaviors were either written down (Hadith) or committed to memory (Sunna) by his followers. The Qur'an is the written teachings of Muhammad and was compiled after Muhammad's death in 632 A.D. <<

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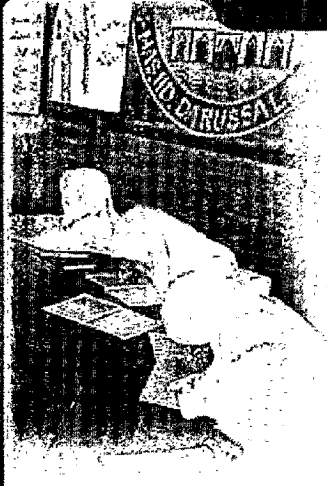
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Islamic Sects

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Subsequent leaders (Caliphs) of Islam were selected to replace Muhammad; however, the Caliphs were not considered messengers of God. The first four Caliphs were known as "Rashidun" or "Rightly Guided," and were elected by a council of Medina's Islamic leaders. A dispute occurred upon selection of the fourth Caliph, Ali Ibn Abi Talib. Ali was a blood descendant of Muhammad, and because of this believed he should have been the first Caliph. Ali and his followers (Shia) stood by in anger and allowed the three initial Caliphs to be elected. Soon after Ali's election, a rival seized power from him. This event caused great resentment among Ali's followers and ultimately led to the division of the Islamic religion into the Sunni and Shia sects.

Shia - "Partisans of Ali." The branch of Islam whose adherents hold that Ali, Muhammad's nephew and son-in-law, was Muhammad's successor. Followers are found principally in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Bahrain, eastern Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. >>


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Islamic Sects (cont.) (2 of 2) X

Sunni- A follower of the "traditions," also called "orthodox." The branch of Islam whose adherents believe that Muhammad's successor should be elected by the Islamic community. This is the dominant sect in the world today with 85- to 90 percent of all Muslims recognized as Sunni. <<


Demographic Map

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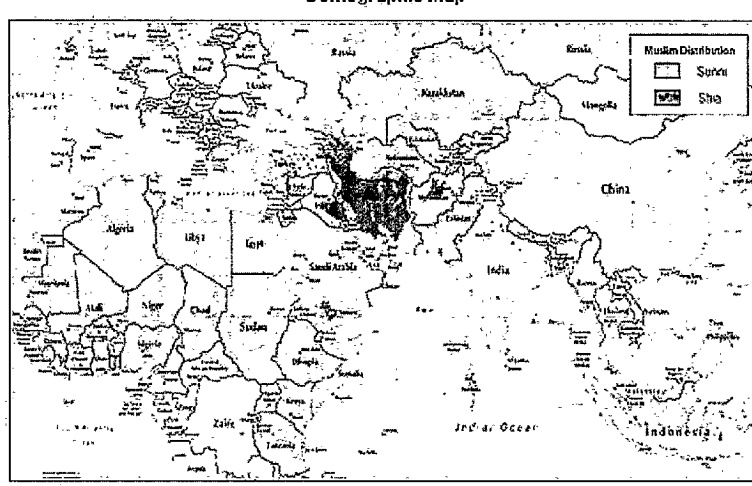
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Demographic Map



Close Map

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The Qur'an and the Five Pillars of Islam(1 of 2)

Selected Teachings of the Qur'an:

- Muslims, Jews, and Christians are all "children of the book"
- Women, children, the elderly, and unarmed soldiers should not be harmed
- Murder is forbidden
- Suicide is forbidden

The Five Pillars of Islam:

1. The declaration of faith which states "there is no god but God," and Muhammad is the Prophet (Messenger of God). >>


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The Qur'an and the Five Pillars of Islam (cont.)

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2. Prayer, to be performed five times daily. The prayer times are dependant upon the sun. The first occurs at sunset, the beginning of the Muslim day. The other prayer times are later in the evening, at dawn, at noon, and in the mid-afternoon. A Muslim faces toward Mecca and kneels while praying.
3. Alms-giving: Muslims must pay a fixed portion (2.5%) of their income as a religious tax for the welfare of the community and the poor.
4. Fasting during the daylight hours in the month of Ramadan, ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Ramadan is the commemoration of Muhammad's first reception of the revelations recorded in the Qur'an from the Angel Gabriel.
5. Pilgrimage (Hajj) to Mecca during the pilgrimage month (the 12th month of the Islamic lunar calendar), at least once in a person's lifetime if he/she can afford it without deprivation to his/her family. <<

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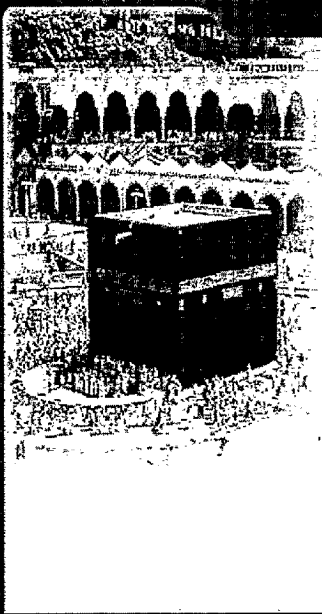


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Muslim Holy Sites

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- Ka'bah (Cube) - The Ka'bah is in the center of Mecca and is a Muslim shrine made of bricks and covered with a heavy black cloth with gold-embroidered verses of the Qur'an. The original shrine was built by the prophet, Abraham. Islam asserts that the shrine was built in the Valley of Baca at the direction of God to celebrate Abraham's acts of faith. The Ka'bah contains a black stone, a meteorite, used by Abraham to build his original shrine. >>

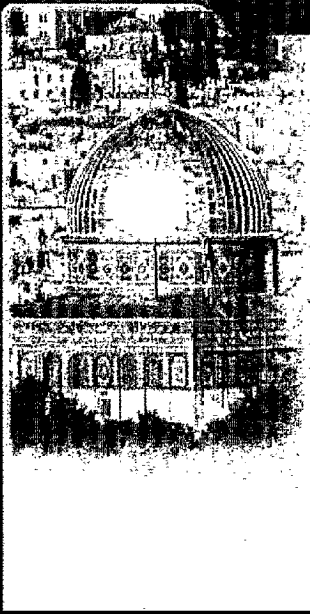
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Muslim Holy Sites (cont.) (2 of 2) X

- The Dome of the Rock - The Dome is located in Jerusalem and is the most holy Islamic site outside of Saudi Arabia. The Dome stands over the place where Muhammad ascended into Heaven. Muslims refer to the ascension as the "Me'raj." The current Dome was built on the site of an ancient Jewish temple. Jews believe that before the coming of the Messiah, the temple must be rebuilt. <<

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The Rise of Islam

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Islam and the Arabic language spread down the western coast of the Arabian Peninsula, across northern Africa and into Spain via merchants and military campaigns. During the 8th Century, while Europe was in the throes of the dark ages, Islam was in its Golden Era, and the Arab world was the center of development, enlightenment, and intellectual activity. The Christian Crusades began towards the end of the 11th Century, and the Arab world began to show signs of stress. The Crusaders' harsh treatment of the Muslims reversed their previously held tolerance of religious diversity. The Crusades mark the beginning of a series of Western involvements, extending into contemporary times, which caused feelings of domination, outside control, and Western exploitation within the Arab world.

During the 13th and 14th Centuries, the Arab world was invaded and fell under the control of the Mongols and other foreign dynasties. The Ottoman Empire emerged in the mid 15th Century and reached its zenith in the late 17th Century. The Ottoman Empire advanced Islam and Arabic, restored prosperity lost to the Crusades, and continued to advance the culture. >>

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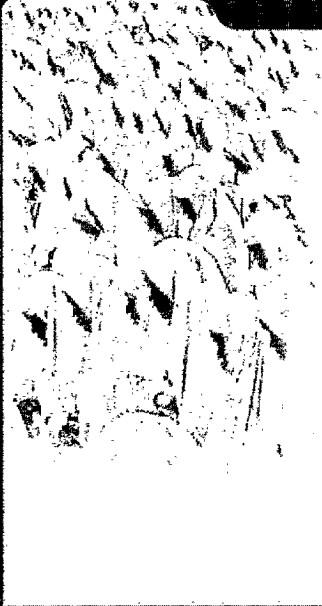
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The Rise of Islam (cont.)

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During World War I, the Ottoman Empire allied itself with Germany and the other Central Powers. In an attempt to gain independence for the Arab people, the Meccans and the Egyptians united with the British against the Empire. Unbeknownst to the Arabs, the British had also been negotiating with the French and Russians. When the Allies defeated the Central Powers, England and France took direct control of lands that had once comprised the Ottoman Empire.

The struggles for control of the land continued through World War II (WWII). German aggression and the Holocaust increased the number of Jewish settlers in Palestine, where the Zionists had been trying to establish a sovereign state. After WWII, the United Nations (UN) took control of Jerusalem and partitioned the remainder of land into Jewish and Arab zones. Disputes over the zoning quickly arose, resulting in the Israeli-Palestinian War of 1948. By the end of the war, the Arabs had lost most of their lands and the state of Israel was officially established. Conflicts, tension and violence still exist in the area today. <<

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Interview Tips

Suggestions for Interviewing Persons with Middle Eastern Backgrounds

It is important that FBI Agents understand how to deal with other cultures for at least two reasons beyond the basic concept that we owe the public our most professional approach. First, the FBI's investigation will have a better chance of yielding good information if interviewers do not inadvertently alienate or offend the people they are interviewing. Second, interviewers can establish a foundation for the FBI to receive additional information in the future if they leave a positive impression.

Ten Cultural Points to Remember

Within the Arab culture and Muslim religion, there are certain key points that investigators should remember and that will assist them in conducting effective and productive interviews. Study this list carefully:

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Suggestions for Interviewing Persons with Middle Eastern Backgrounds (1 of 4)

At the completion of the interview scenario, you will be scored on the rapport you build with the individual you interview, and your success in obtaining another interview.

The FBI's Behavioral Analysis Program (BAP) has set forth a list of suggestions designed to assist investigators who conduct interviews with persons of Arab and/or Muslim background.

- Make an attempt to pronounce names correctly; if in doubt, ask the subject for the correct pronunciation. In Arab society, first names are frequently used as individual identification, even if Miss, Mrs. or Mr. precedes it.
- Make every attempt to use interviewers who are at least the same age or older than the interviewee(s) because status increases as a person grows older. >>

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Suggestions for Interviewing Persons with Middle Eastern Backgrounds (cont.) (2 of 4) X

- Be aware of the need to show respect to elderly persons. For example, in a group of people, greeting the elderly first is a preferred way to show respect.
- Dress professionally and conservatively; avoid "military" apparel (raid jackets, combat style pants, and sunglasses). Casual dress may be inferred as a lack of respect.
- Conduct the interview in a private area. If it is necessary to interview the subject at work, consider doing it off-site. For Arabs, a person's image is more important than reality.
- Be aware that a male asking too many questions about female relatives of the subject may make the interviewee very uncomfortable. << >>


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Suggestions for Interviewing Persons with Middle Eastern Backgrounds (cont.) (3 of 4) X

- Be more deferential and formal if interviewing an individual who possesses high status in the community. For example, an Imam (a Muslim prayer leader) has high status in the Muslim community and should be shown appropriate respect.
- Don't express your opinions about politics or religion. (If you are asked, be prepared to encourage the subject's opinions without giving your own response.) If you are confronted, it is better to express ignorance rather than indifference by indicating, "I don't know" rather than "I don't care about that."
- Remember that even though the community is family centered, spouses may not be best friends. For example, husbands tend to confide in their brothers while wives tend to confide in their sisters.
- Be gracious and give the subject an opportunity to express his/her opinions.

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Suggestions for Interviewing Persons with Middle Eastern Backgrounds (cont.) (4 of 4) X

- End the conversation with a sincere thank you and a show of appreciation for the interviewee(s) time, graciousness, and hospitality. <<

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Ten Cultural Points to Remember (1 of 4)

After the interview, you will be asked to identify which of these key points the individual you interviewed, Rasheed, displayed. It is also important to keep these points in mind as you select questions.

1. Generosity - Arabs give willingly of their money, time, and talents and admire generosity in others.
2. Hospitality - Arab culture dictates gracious and inviting behavior toward visitors to the home or office. It is also required to express thanks and appreciation for the hospitality shown you. When welcomed into the home of a Middle Easterner, polite behavior dictates that you graciously accept what is offered, engage in congenial conversation, and thank your host profusely for his/her hospitality before getting down to business.
3. Values - Arabs place more importance on family values and morality than on career or financial ambitions. Arabs are conservative and value societal morality over issues of personal freedom. They do not approve of some >>

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Ten Cultural Points to Remember (cont.) (2 of 4)

liberties allowed by Western culture and abstain from drinking alcohol and gambling.

4. Family Responsibility - Arabs hold strong ties to the entire extended family. Family includes aunts, uncles, cousins, and in-laws as well as the immediate family. Arabs would never put an elderly or ailing family member into a nursing home or assisted care facility; the responsibility for the care of the elderly or the ill lies with the family.

5. Gender - In Arab Culture, there is a distinct separation between genders. In many Middle Eastern countries, women are highly respected, well educated, and often hold high status jobs. It is never acceptable for a man to directly inquire about the female members in another man's family. However, it is acceptable for a woman to inquire about a man's female relatives but it is inappropriate for her to directly inquire about his male relatives. An Arab man will seldom, if ever, meet with a woman alone; he will always prefer the accompaniment of his wife or another member of his family. << >>

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Ten Cultural Points to Remember (cont.)

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6. Friendship - Maintaining strong ties to friends is very important to Arabs. Establishing good personal relationships and putting those relationships above work and money are required in Arab culture. In many ways, friends are treated like family. While it is common for an Arab to feel obligated on a friend's behalf, friendship also has its limits. When asked for a favor, it is customary for an Arab to agree to help a friend in need. It is considered rude to refuse aid or to say no to the request. However, it is not mandatory that the favor be granted or accomplished. The important thing is to avoid saying no directly. Be aware that although an Arab may agree to meet with you again, the answer may be a subtle, "No."


7. Religion - Religion and faith drive all aspects of life for Muslims. The Qur'an is their Holy Book and was revealed to Muhammad directly from God. Muslims depend on God and thank Him for everything. "Inshallah" is a common phrase meaning "God willing." You will often hear it in conversation. Muslims respect others who value religion in their own lives and take an interest in Islam. If you are a religious person, it is good to make that known. It is important that you

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Ten Cultural Points to Remember (cont.)

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know enough about the basics of Islam that you do not say something inappropriate or offensive. Make no secret of your knowledge of Islam or your own religion. If you are not a religious person, avoid the discussion of religion.

8. America - Arabs value the freedoms in America and diversity among the cultures. Arabs admire American values (freedom, opportunity, diversity) and want to raise their children here. Any resentment they may feel is related to American foreign policies. However, Arabs will rarely, if ever, say anything negative about America, especially to a Government official.

9. Cultural Identity - Arabs are conservative and although they may love America, there are certain differences between American culture and their own. When confronted with these differences, most Arabs will identify with their own culture rather than with American culture or Western philosophy.

10. Heritage - Arabs are proud of their culture and heritage. They are sensitive about the negative images of Middle Easterners and Muslims and want their positive attributes to be better known. <<

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