12.2 Islamic Expansion
What factors led to the rapid growth of Islam around Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe?

Explore

Arab Unity or Separation?
How important was Arab unity to Islamic expansion?

Islamic Expansion: Sequencing Chart
As you read the text and view the video segments, complete the Sequencing Chart graphic organizer by listing in chronological order significant events in the expansion of Islam.

By the time Muhammad died in 632, his message had spread and his power had grown. Still, it was not clear who would continue to lead the Muslim faith and the political state that he had founded. At Muhammad’s death, Muslim Arabs numbered about 100,000. After he died, many of the tribes he had converted fell away, and the tradition of intertribal raids and feuds revived. These activities were, after all, an important source of income. Some tribes refused to pay zakat, the charitable tithe required of all Muslims. Some tribes found new prophets to inspire them.

Caliph Abu Bakr

Abu Bakr was one of Muhammad's original followers. After Muhammad's death, a council of many of Muhammad's closest advisors agreed that Abu Bakr should become the caliph, or leader of both the religious movement and the political power that Muhammad had established. Abu’s first task was to reunite the community, which was beginning to fall apart. Under the rule of Muhammad, based on the teaching of the Quran, there was a prohibition against infighting.

Caliph Abu Bakr immediately set about forcing the tribes to return to Islam. Historians refer to Abu's military campaigns in 633 against ex-Muslims as the Riddah Wars. Abu not only revived Islam among the tribes, but he also redirected infighting among smaller Arab groups toward wars against other empires.

By all accounts, Abu Bakr was a practical as well as a religious man. According to many accounts, he began the process of preparing a formal record of Muhammad's revelations that would eventually be codified in the Quran so all Muslims would share a common holy book. Although he died in 634, only two years after Muhammad, his leadership helped keep Islam together.
Caliphs Umar and Uthman

The next caliphs, Caliph Umar (634–644) and Caliph Uthman (644–656), were also aware that Arab unity was essential. They worked to lay the foundations of an Islamic state to administer the new lands conquered by Arab armies. According to many scholars, they also carried on where Abu left off and commissioned a committee to complete the standardization of the Quran based on accounts from people who were present when Muhammad preached in Medina and Mecca. This project was completed in 652. Uthman then ordered all other versions to be destroyed. This ensured that all Arabs were reciting the same words from the same book, which helped to strengthen the foundation of Islam.