

Middle east essay sample

[Religion](#), [Islam](#)



The population of Pre-Islamic Arabia consisted of scattered independent tribes, whose life was characterized by total absence of political organization, absolute dedication to the tribe and the chief, ceaseless warfare. Arabs were rather indifferent and inert towards religion but had some notion of it. Local animist tradition coexisted with idolatry and pagan pantheon of deities, mainly derived from Semitic sources. When Quraysh captured Mecca, they brought a cult of the chief (but not singular) lunar god Hubal, later called Allah. In the sixth century, nearly in the end of Pre-Islamic era, Arabs were pressured by two strong empires of Sassanid Persia and Byzantium, Judaism and Christianity were spreading rapidly and Arabs needed an impetus to consolidation and modernization of their society.

In order to unite the tribes Muhammad retrieved a belief in the divine Unity and created a new monotheistic religion which eliminated tribal differences. According to Armstrong (1993), “ Like many of the Arabs, Muhammad had come to believe that al-Lah, the High God of the ancient Arabian pantheon was identical to the God worshipped by the Jews and the Christians”. (p. 155)

In order to obtain religious and political success, Muhammad needed to bridge together Jews, Christians, and Arab tribes by the retention of some of their national practices. (Tisdall, 2011) That is why we can find elements of Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Sabaeism, and Arab customs in Muslim dogma and religious practices.

Muslims believe that God himself is the “ Source” of Islam. Their faith is built upon Qur’an, which is held to be recorded in heaven, and later handed down by Gabriel to Muhammad, and Tradition given by the followers of the Prophet. But there are ostensive evidence of the influence of other religions,

which existed before the Prophet's age on Islam. The closest relation is observed between Islam and Judaism, which along with Christianity form a triad of Abrahamic religions. People of all three religions recognize the Hebrew Scriptures, Hebrew patriarchs and prophets. As a result of Muhammad's interaction with Jews during his stay in Mecca, Islam adopted a large part of Jewish religious terminology and theological assertions. Qur'an shares many similar stories with Talmud and Midrash (Cain and Abel, The Queen of Sheba, Harut and Marut, etc.). A large part of Muslim rites is taken from Jewish Aggadah. Some stories from Qur'an parallel Biblical Christian stories (Virgin Mary, Seven Sleepers, The Heavenly Table, Abraham's ascent to Heaven, Childhood of Jesus). (Tisdall, 2011) Islam recognizes Jesus and honors him as one of the prophets.

Many elements of Islam are taken from Zoroastrianism and Sabaeism. The Muslim story of Azazel, which came to Islam through Judaism parallels Zoroastrian story of Ahriman. Muhammad's ascent to heaven is similar to Zoroastrian story of Arta Viraf. What Qur'an tells us regarding Paradise and houries can be found in Zoroastrian sources as well. Some of the most traditional Muslim practices, such as salat and fasting during Ramadan come from the ancient religion of Sabaeism. According to Tisdall (2011), "Sabaeans prayed for the dead; fasted thirty days from sunrise till night; observed Eid from the setting of their five stars; and venerated the Kaaba." Kaaba itself, originally an idol of Huba, I and the Black Stone are the remainings of local pagan traditions. These examples prove that Muhammad crafted Islam using elements of already existing religious traditions, beliefs and assertions.

Within less than a hundred years Islam spread up to China in the East, Europe in the West. Muslim conquests and many Qur'an's calls to violence led to the idea that Islam was spread by force, blood, and terror. " And fight them until there is no more Fitnah (disbelief and polytheism: i. e. worshipping others besides Allah) and the religion will all be for Allah Alone. (8: 39) Muhammad and caliphs succeeded in spreading Islam, using both peaceful means and military conquests, justifying them by jihad. But it is written in Qur'an, " Let there be no compulsion in religion". (2: 256) Many researchers say that the forceful imposition of Islam upon conquered nations is exaggerated and many inhabitants of the conquered territories accepted Islam voluntarily. Not only growing interest to Islam but such things as imposition of a tax on all non-Muslims in conquered territories reinforced the conversion process greatly.

References

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