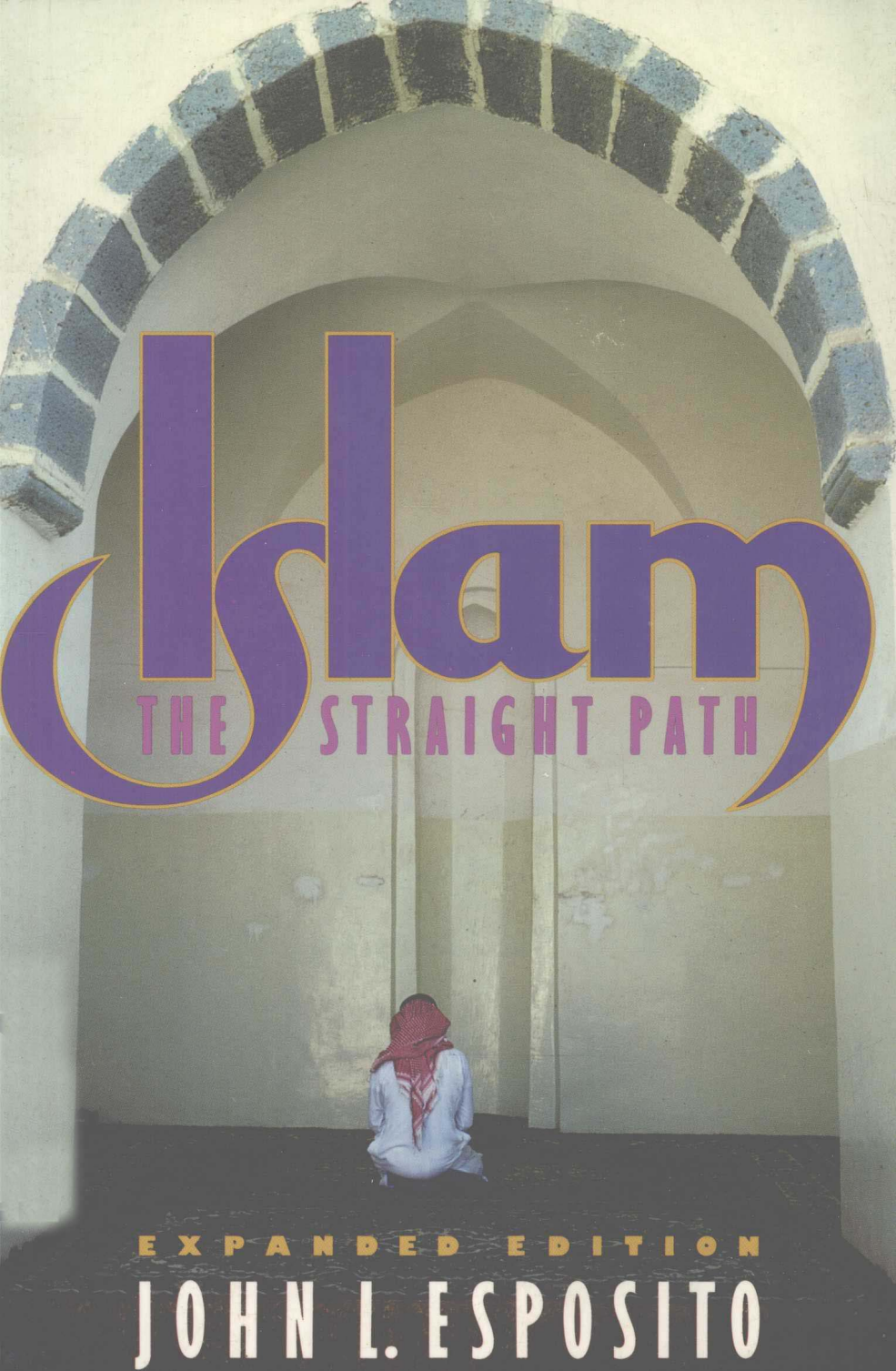
Islam
THE STRAIGHT PATH
EXPANDED EDITION
JOHN L. ESPOSITO

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John L. Esposito

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For Jeanette P. Esposito

PREFACE

The reception of *Islam: The Straight Path* by colleagues as well as by non-Muslim and Muslim audiences and its widespread use in academic and ecumenical contexts motivated Oxford University Press to publish an expanded edition for both text and trade use. This has provided me with an opportunity to include brief country case studies that exemplify the themes and issues embodied in the contemporary Muslim experience. The goal of the volume remains essentially the same—to enable readers to understand the faith and practice of Muslims. Because this edition will incorporate a broader nonacademic audience, the use of Arabic has been limited. However, most important technical terms have been retained and indicated in Arabic the first time they appear in the text. The select bibliography has been updated and expanded, as has the glossary.

I continue to be indebted to many colleagues and friends who have been supportive of my work and have taken time out of their busy schedules to discuss matters of mutual interest as well as to critically read portions of my work. Although I cannot mention all of them, three in particular stand out: Yvonne Y. Haddad, James P. Piscatori, and John O. Voll. I remain indebted to Mary Boliver for her secretarial support. Finally, Cynthia A. Read has been the quintessential editor, working with me on all of my Oxford books. Her comments and encouragement have made the process that much more enjoyable.

Wayland, Mass. J.L.E.
March 1990

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

For a number of years, I have taught a variety of courses that require an introductory text on Islam. While there are a number available, none have fully suited my needs. Some, while quite good, are now dated. Others are too long for contexts that require more limited coverage. Most devote a minimum of time to the modern period. After finding that many of my colleagues experienced the same problem, I determined to write an introductory volume that had multiple uses—one that could be used as one of several texts in world religion courses as well as in those courses in Middle East history, politics, and anthropology that require brief background coverage of Islam.

The goal of this volume is to enable readers to understand and appreciate what Muslims believe and practice. Although Muslims maintain that there is one divinely revealed and mandated Islam, there have been and continue to be many Muslim interpretations of Islam. I have tried to select, describe, and analyze those beliefs, practices, issues, developments, and movements that provide some appreciation of that faith which has inspired and informed the lives of a major portion of the world community. Where feasible I have incorporated brief examples from primary texts such as the Quran and traditions of the Prophet for those who might otherwise have no exposure to these formative sources and to motivate further investigation.

As with any introduction, more is omitted than included. This is an inevitable frustration for both the author and the reader. Therefore, a select bibliography is included. Some will be surprised that diacritical marks are not used at all. Full diacriticals are confusing for the beginner and tend to underscore the "foreignness" of materials. Modified use of diacriticals is often of little use in pronunciation.

I am indebted to many colleagues, friends, and students who have both informed my understanding and challenged my presuppositions about the nature of religion, the meaning(s) of Islam, and the vitality of religion in Muslim life. In particular, I have been fortunate to see and

experience Islam as a "lived" religion in classes, seminars, and conversations, and in working and living with Muslim colleagues and friends both here and overseas. I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Ismail and Lois al-Faruqi and to my Muslim fellow graduate students. Statements and teachings about the centrality of God and the Quran, the place of Muhammad, and the function of Prophetic traditions in Muslim life and piety took on a life, vitality, and relevance that was immediately and concretely evident. They brought a dimension of understanding to my study of Islam that has been reinforced and expanded by my work in Muslim societies from the Sudan to Malaysia, where I came to appreciate the unity in diversity that characterizes Islam as it does all of the world's great religions.

I am particularly grateful to several colleagues: professors Yvonne Y. Haddad, James P. Piscatori, Abdulaziz A. Sachedina, and John O. Voll, who read and commented on my manuscript. Although I have benefited greatly from their comments, I alone bear responsibility for the contents. In addition, Mary Boliver has been patient and helpful in typing the bibliography and making last-minute changes.

As in all my work, my parents, my brothers, and particularly my wife, Jean, have provided a context in which to live and learn that has enabled me to be sensitive to issues of faith, identity, and values and that motivates, inspires, and sustains my work.

Wayland, Mass. J.L.E.

INTRODUCTION

The Arab oil embargo, the Iranian revolution, the assassination of Anwar Sadat, the threatening pronouncements and acts of Muammar Qaddafi and the Ayatollah Khomeini, American hostages in Lebanon, the Iran–Iraq war, the Rushdie affair—events in the Muslim world have captured headlines and made the terms Islam and Muslim common to many in the West. However, too often it has simply been a knowledge of stereotypes and distortions, the picture of a monolithic reality dubbed Islamic fundamentalism, a term often signifying militant radicalism and violence. Thus Islam, a rich and dynamic religious tradition of almost one billion people, the second largest world religion, has been buried by menacing headlines and slogans, images of hostage takers and gun-toting mullahs.

For more than fourteen centuries, Islam has grown and spread from the seventh-century Arabia of the Prophet Muhammad to a world religion whose followers may be found across the globe. It spawned and informed Islamic empires and states as well as a great world civilization that stretched from North Africa to Southeast Asia. In the process, a great monotheistic tradition, sharing common roots with Judaism and Christianity, has guided and transformed the lives of millions of believers down through the ages. Characterized by an uncompromising belief in the one, true God—His revelation and Prophet—Islam developed a spiritual path whose law, ethics, theology, and mysticism have made it one of the fastest growing religions both in the past and today. Media images of Islam have often obscured the fact that Muslims, Jews, and Christians share much in common; they are indeed all children of Abraham. Like Jews and Christians, Muslims worship the God of Abraham and Moses, believe in God's revelation and prophets, place a strong emphasis on moral responsibility and accountability. The vast majority of Muslims, like most members of other religious traditions, are pious, hardworking women and men, family and community oriented, who wish to live in peace and harmony rather than in warfare.

In an increasingly globally interdependent world, mutual understanding is both important and necessary. Understanding the religion of Islam as well as its reemergence in Muslim politics and society is not only religiously fruitful, but also, as events in recent decades have demonstrated, politically important. This volume seeks to explain the faith, the belief, and the doctrines of Islam. It provides a guide to understanding how Islam has developed, spread, and informed the faith and lives of Muslims throughout the ages.

Islam: The Straight Path addresses a variety of questions that underscore the strength, vitality, and diversity of Islam as well as its role in Muslim history: What is Islam? What do Muslims believe? How does one explain the lure and spread of Islam throughout the world? Have Muslims, like religious believers throughout the world, wrestled with issues of change and reform to assure the continued relevance of Islam to modern Muslim life? What is the Islamic resurgence? How has Islam informed the faith and politics of Muslim life? The answers to these questions are the concerns of all.

The foundation of Islamic belief and practice is the Quran, for Muslims the revealed literal word of God, and the example and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. Chapter 1, "Muhammad and the Quran: Messenger and Message," describes the emergence of Islam, focusing in particular on the life and role of the Prophet and the teachings of the Quran regarding God, prophecy and revelation, the purpose and goal of human life, morality, and the afterlife. Where relevant, comparisons are drawn between Muslim, Jewish, and Christian teachings.

The Muslim community has been the central vehicle for the spread and actualization of Islam's universal message and mission. Chapter 2, "The Muslim Community in History," discusses the formation and development of the Muslim community, the phenomenal expansion of Islam, the creation of Islamic empires and states, the emergence of the Sunni and Shii branches of the Islamic community, and the florescence of Islam as a world civilization that made major contributions to the history of philosophy, theology, the sciences, literature, mathematics, astronomy, and medicine.

Muslim faith and practice are rooted in revelation but expressed in a variety of beliefs, attitudes, rituals, laws, and values. Chapter 3, "Religious Life: Belief and Practice," analyzes the development of Islamic theology, philosophy, law, and mysticism. In particular, it discusses the Five Pillars of Islam, those fundamental acts that provide the unity underlying the rich cultural diversity of Muslim life, as well as Muslim family law. As the Five Pillars are the core of a Muslim's duty to wor-

ship God, family law is central to social life, providing guidelines for marriage, divorce, and inheritance.

Like all great world religions, Islam has passed through many stages in its development. Throughout its long history, the community has had to respond to internal and external threats to its continued life and vitality. As a result, Islam has a long tradition of religious renewal and reform, extending from its earliest history to the present. The eighteenth century proved to be a turning point in Islamic history. The power, prosperity, and dynamic expansionism of imperial Islam went into decline. A previously ascendant and expanding community and civilization has had to struggle for its survival in the face of indigenous forces and the political and religio-cultural threat of European colonialism. Chapter 4, "Modern Interpretations of Islam," chronicles the rise of Islamic activist ("fundamentalist") movements, bent upon the restoration of Islam, which sprang up across much of the Islamic world—the Wahhabi in Saudi Arabia, the Mahdi in the Sudan, the Sanusi in Libya—and which served as forerunners to twentieth-century revivalism. Most importantly, this chapter analyzes key individuals, movements, and organizations, such as the Islamic modernist movement, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Jamaat-i-Islami, who have had a profound effect upon twentieth-century Islam, its faith, intellectual, and community life.

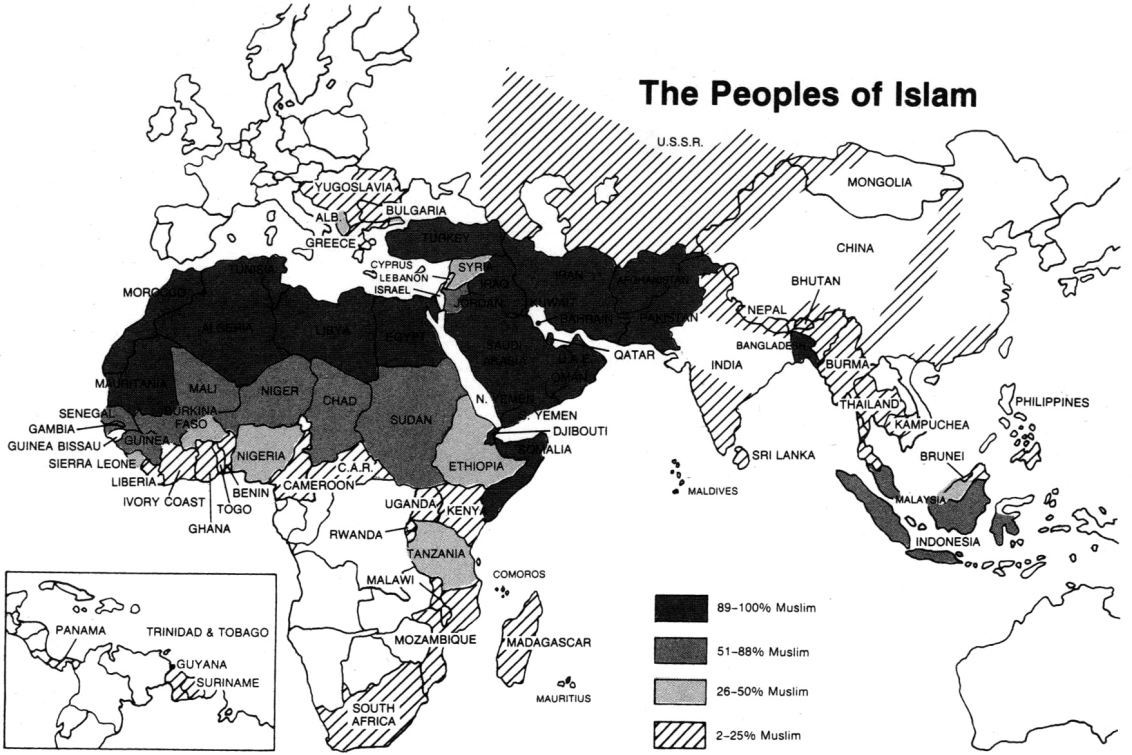
Although the Iranian revolution drew the attention of many to Islam and the Islamic resurgence, contemporary Islamic revivalism has had an impact on the personal and public lives of Muslims for the past two decades. Chapter 5, "Contemporary Islam: Religion and Politics," reviews the causes, worldview, and manifestations of Islamic revivalism. A series of case studies of Saudi Arabia, Libya, Iran, Lebanon, and Egypt is briefly presented to demonstrate the diversity of ways in which Islam has been used by governments and by opposition groups and the issues that the process has raised.

Muslims today, like believers the world over, continue to grapple with the continued relevance of their faith to the realities of contemporary society. The adaptability of a religious tradition, its relevance to life in the twentieth century, raises as many questions as it offers potential answers. The history of modern Islam has challenged many presuppositions and expectations, in particular, the notion that modernization results in the secularization of societies. Islamic revival and reform, the attempt to apply Islam to modern or postmodern life, have generated many questions and issues that are examined in Chapter 6, "Islam and Change: Issues of Authority and Interpretation": What are

the parameters and direction of Islamic reform? Should it be a restoration of the past or a process of reinterpretation and reconstruction? Is the future of Islam to be left in the hands of traditional religious leaders *(ulama)*, Muslim rulers, the laity? If change is to occur, how much is necessary or possible? What are the implications of a greater Islamization of society for women and minorities?

Islam in the last decade of the twentieth century has ceased to be solely of interest to those who are concerned with "foreign" religions or cultures. As we are only slowly realizing, Islam is truly a world religion, increasingly visible in Europe and the United States as well as Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Muslims are very much part of the mosaic of Western societies, no longer foreign visitors but fellow citizens and colleagues. Thus, to understand the world in which we live requires a knowledge of the straight path of Islam as a prerequisite for an appreciation of our theologically interconnected and historically intertwined Judaeo-Christian-Islamic heritage.

CONTENTS


The Peoples of Islam
U.S.S.R.
MONGOLIA
CHINA
YUGOSLAVIA
ALB.
BULGARIA
GREECE
TURKEY
CYPRUS
LEBANON
ISRAEL
SYRIA
IRAQ
IRAN
AFGHANISTAN
BHUTAN
NEPAL
BANGLADESH
INDIA
BURMA
THAILAND
PHILIPPINES
KAMPUCHEA
BRUNEI
MALAYSIA
INDONESIA
SRI LANKA
MALDIVES
QATAR
BAHRAIN
PAKISTAN
SAUDI ARABIA
U.A.E.
OMAN
YEMEN
N. YEMEN
DJIBOUTI
SOMALIA
ETHIOPIA
SUDAN
LIBYA
EGYPT
ALGERIA
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TANZANIA
MALAWI
MOZAMBIQUE
SOUTH AFRICA
COMOROS
MADAGASCAR
MAURITIUS
PANAMA
TRINIDAD & TOBAGO
GUYANA
SURINAME
89–100% Muslim
51–88% Muslim
26–50% Muslim
2–25% Muslim

1

Muhammad and the Quran: Messenger and Message

> In the name of God, the Merciful and Compassionate: praise belongs to God, the Lord of the Worlds, the Merciful, the Compassionate; Master of the Day of Judgment, You do we worship and You do we call on for help; guide us on the Straight Path, the path of those whom You have blessed, not of those who earn your anger nor those who go astray. (Quran 1:1–7)

Five times each day, hundreds of millions of Muslims face Mecca to pray. They are part of an Islamic community that spans the globe, numbers perhaps 900 million adherents, and continues to spread its message successfully throughout Europe, Asia, Africa, and North America. While the more than forty-four Muslim countries extend from Senegal to Indonesia, the message of Islam and significant Muslim populations may be found in such diverse environments as the Soviet Union, China, India, England, and the United States. Islam, the second largest of the world's religions, is indeed a world presence and force. If much of the Western world had missed that fact, events since the Arab oil embargo have rectified this oversight. However, Muslim politics, from the Iranian revolution to terrorist outbursts, have often obscured or, at the very least, raised more questions than provided answers regarding the faith of Islam to which Muslims appeal as the source of their inspiration and guidance.

Islam stands in a long line of Semitic, prophetic religious traditions that share an uncompromising monotheism, and belief in God's revelation, His prophets, ethical responsibility and accountability, and the Day of Judgment. Indeed, Muslims, like Christians and Jews, are the Children of Abraham, since all trace their communities back to him. Islam's historic religious and political relationship to Christendom and Judaism has remained strong throughout history. This interaction has

been the source of mutual benefit and borrowing as well as misunderstanding and conflict.

Although the followers of Islam belong to a single community of believers, there are two major historic divisions: Sunni and Shii. Sunni Muslims constitute 85 percent of the world's Muslims; Shii about 15 percent. While this volume focuses on the common faith and belief epitomized by the Five Pillars of Islam, attention will also be given to differences in Muslim belief and practice. For while, as we shall see, all Muslims enjoy a unity of faith in Allah, the Quran, and the teachings of Muhammad, the interpretations and applications of Islam have varied in different cultural contexts and eras. Despite this recognition of diversity, the focus of this volume will be the core of beliefs, practices, and institutions that unite and are integral to Muslim life, whatever the differences may be.

Muhammad and the Muslim Community

The Near East spawned and nurtured a rich variety of religious traditions: ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian religions, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity. However, given the nature of tribal society in seventh-century Arabia and the presence of the Roman (Byzantine) and Persian (Sasanid) empires as buffer states of the Arabian Peninsula, the rise of a new religious movement and the inauguration of a new stage in world history would have seemed unthinkable. Yet, this occurred with the revelation of the Quran and under the leadership of the Prophet Muhammad. Islamic religion and the activity of the Muslim community produced a new empire and a rich civilization which came to dominate much of Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. Because Islam developed in central Arabia, its religious and social milieu provide the context for understanding Muhammad's reformist message and mission.

Arabia

Arabian religion and society reflected the tribal realities of the Peninsula. Arabia's 1 million square miles (nearly one-third the size of the United States or Europe) was dominated by desert and steppe areas. Bedouin tribes pursuing a pastoral and nomadic lifestyle traveled from one area to another, seeking water and pasture for their flocks of sheep and camels. The landscape was dotted with oasis towns and cities. Among the more prominent were Mecca, a center of trade and com-

merce, and Yathrib (Medina), an important agricultural settlement. The principal sources of livelihood were herding, agriculture, trade, and raiding. Intertribal warfare was a long-established activity governed by clear guidelines and rules. For example, raiding was illegal during the four sacred months of pilgrimage. Its object was to capture livestock from enemy Bedouin tribes with a minimum of casualties. Its ultimate goal was to weaken and eventually absorb other tribes by reducing them to a dependent or "client" status.

Whether nomadic or sedentary, the peoples of Arabia lived in a Bedouin tribal society and culture. Social organization and identity were rooted in membership in an extended family. A grouping of several related families comprised a clan. A cluster of several clans constituted a tribe. Tribes were led by a chief (*shaykh*) who was selected by a consensus of his peers—that is, the heads of leading clans or families. These tribal elders formed an advisory council within which the tribal chief exercised his leadership and authority as the first among equals. Muhammad belonged to the Banu Hashim (sons of Hashim), a lesser clan of the powerful Quraysh tribe which dominated Meccan society.

The Arabs placed great emphasis on tribal ties, group loyalty or solidarity as the source of power for a clan or tribe. The celebrated rugged individualism of the Bedouin Arab ethos was counterbalanced by subordination to tribal authority and tribal customs, the unwritten oral law of society. Tribal affiliation and law were the basis not only for identity but also for protection. The threat of family or group vendetta, the law of retaliation, was of vital importance in a society lacking a central political authority or law.

The religion of Arabia reflected its tribal nature and social structure. Gods and goddesses served as protectors of individual tribes, and their spirits were associated with sacred objects—trees, stones, springs, and wells. Local tribal deities were feared and respected rather than loved, the objects of cultic rituals (sacrifice, pilgrimage, prayer) and of supplication and propitiation celebrated at local shrines. Mecca possessed a central shrine of the gods, the Kaba, a cube-shaped building that housed the 360 idols of tribal patron deities, and was the site of a great annual pilgrimage and fair. While these deities were primary religious actors and objects of worship, beyond this tribal polytheism was a shared belief in Allah ("the god"). Allah, the supreme high god, was the creator and sustainer of life but remote from everyday concerns and thus not the object of cult or ritual. Associated with Allah were three goddesses who were the daughters of Allah: al-Lat, Manat, and al-Uzza.

The value system or ethical code of Arabia has been aptly termed a "tribal humanism," a way of life whose origins were not ascribed to God

but were the product of tribal experience or tradition.[1] It was epitomized by its key virtue, manliness, which emphasized bravery in battle, loyalty to family and protection of its members, hospitality, patience, and persistence—in sum, the preservation of tribal and family honor. This was accompanied by a fatalism that saw no meaning or accountability beyond this life—no resurrection of the body, divine judgment, or eternal punishment or reward. Justice was guaranteed and administered not by God, but by the threat of group vengeance or retaliation. Thus, Arabian religion had little sense of cosmic moral purpose or of individual or communal moral responsibility.

Although it is common to speak of Islam's origins in seventh-century Arabia, such a notion is historically inaccurate and, from a Muslim perspective, theologically false. Islam was not an isolated, totally new monotheistic religion. The monotheistic message of the Quran and the preaching of Muhammad did not occur in a vacuum. Monotheism had been flourishing in Semitic and Iranian cultures for centuries preceding Muhammad's ministry. The Scriptures and prophets of Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism had a long-established presence and roots in Irano-Semitic societies. Beyond their distinctive differences, all three religious traditions shared a monotheistic faith (the conviction that God is one), prophets, Scriptures, beliefs in angels and devils, and a moral universe encompassing individual and communal accountability and responsibility. All were the product of primarily urban, not rural or desert, experiences, and were institutionalized in commercial centers by scholarly elites, often supported by state patronage, who interpreted the early preaching of their prophets and apostles. Among their common themes were community, fidelity/infidelity, individual moral decision making, social justice, final judgment, and reward and punishment. In contrast to Indian religious notions of cyclical history, rebirth, and personal perfection, the Judaeo-Christian and Zoroastrian traditions affirmed a sacred history with a beginning and an end within which believers were to follow God's will and realize their eternal destiny in the next life. To differing degrees, all had become associated with political power, that is, had become an official state religion: Judaism in the kingdoms of Judaea and Israel, Christianity in the Roman (Byzantine) empire, Zoroastrianism in the Persian (Sasanid) empire.

Forms of monotheism did exist in Arabia alongside pre-Islamic tribal polytheism. Both Jewish and Christian Arab communities had been present in Arabia before Muhammad. Jewish communities in Khaybar, Tayma, and Yathrib (later called Medina) were successful in agriculture and trade. While some Christians were settled in Mecca, most of the Christian communities were on the periphery of central Arabia (the