### **Origins and the Life of Muhammad the Prophet**

Islam began with the Prophet Muhammad. Muhammad was born in 507 CE in Mecca. He came from a noble family. He married a wealthy widow named Khadija who was 15 years older and his employer. At the age of 40, in 610 CE, Muhammad was visited by the angel Gabriel while in a cave near Mecca. The angel recited to him the first revelations of the Quran and informs him that he is God’s prophet. Muhammad informed his people that they are to only worship one God, and many people reacted with hostility. His first convert was his wife.

Muhammad and his people were forced to leave Mecca in 622 CE. They left for Medina, where people there accepted Islam. During this time more people become Muslim. Muhammad and his followers returned to Mecca in 630 CE. They entered the city peacefully and Islam was finally accepted.

Muhammad died in 633 CE after a long illness. After his death, the Muslim community elected a new successor.

Islam means "surrender" and its central idea is a surrendering to the will of God. Its central article of faith is that "There is no god but God and Muhammad is his messenger".

Followers of Islam are called Muslims. Muslims believe that they are following in the same tradition as the Judeo-Christian figures Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus who they believe were significant prophets before Muhammad.

### **After Muhammad's Death**

The century following Muhammad’s death was dominated by military conquest and expansion. Muhammad was succeeded by the four “rightly-guided” Caliphs (khalifa or successor in Arabic): Abu Bakr (632-34 C.E.), Umar (634-44 C.E.), Uthman (644-56 C.E.), and Ali (656-661 C.E.). The Qur'an is believed to have been codified during Uthman’s reign. The final caliph, Ali, was married to Fatima, Muhammad’s daughter and was murdered in 661. The death of Ali is a very important event; his followers, who believed that he should have succeeded Muhammad directly, became known as the Shi’a ("party" or "followers"), referring to the followers of Ali. Today, the Shi’ite community is composed of several different branches, and there are large Shia populations in Iran, Iraq, and Bahrain. The Sunnis, who do not hold that Ali should have directly succeeded Muhammad, compose the largest branch of Islam; their adherents can be found across North Africa, the Middle East, as well as in Asia and Europe.

During the seventh and early eighth centuries, the Arab armies conquered large swaths of territory in the Middle East, North Africa, the Iberian Peninsula, and Central Asia, despite on-going civil wars in Arabia and the Middle East. Eventually, the Umayyad Dynasty emerged as the rulers, with Abd al-Malik completing the Dome of the Rock, one of the earliest surviving Islamic monuments, in 691/2 C.E. The Umayyads reigned until 749/50 C.E., when they were overthrown. The Abbasid Dynasty assumed the Caliphate and ruled large sections of the Islamic world. However, with the Abbasid Revolution, no one ruler would ever again control all of the Islamic lands.