**The Arabs/ Islam; Contextual stuff; Turks…**

Arabs – Semitic, nomadic, desert dwellers of Arabian peninsula. Fierce/ clannish/ independent – v harsh environment. Disunified/ feuding… fierce/ tough people.

Arabian peninsula lay on key trade route – Indian sub-continent/ Med…passing thro’ Arabia via city of Mecca, also a major centre of pagan cultic worship (“Kaba” stone etc).

*“The Arabs were conveniently placed to dominate the western stretches of the ‘Silk Road’ and Indian Ocean trade routes, and for many centuries Europeans, at the farthest ends of both East-West arteries, mostly stayed home and made do with the crumbs that Venetians collected from Arab tables. The Crusades, and Mongol conquests, began changing the political map through easing access to the East.”*

*-* Prof Ian Morris (2010) *Why the West Rules (For Now), p 427.*

Early C7th (610) – merchant Muhammad – vision – preached message of revelation… “There is no god but Allah”: conflict with citizens of Mecca – 622 fled to Medina (“Hegira”). [NB 622 = start of Arab/ Muslim calendar].

630 – Muhammad & followers recaptured Mecca – idolatry banned/ non-believers excluded. Tenets of new faith written down – “Qu’ran” (Koran)

***Islam***

The Prophet Muhammad clearly infl’d by Jewish & Christian theology (& probably that of Zoroastrians of Persia) – he’d encountered many faiths. Islam, therefore, lies very firmly within the Semitic/ “Abramaic” trad. Muhammad – a genius of simplification/ clarification. The beauty/ greatness of the Final Revelation (Qu’ran) lies in this. Muhammad was v clear – Qu’ran not his wds, but God’s, whose prophet/ mouthpiece he was. Islam (submission to will of God) was a new religion, but also, to some degree, a “nationalist” movement – the nation or community of God. Powerful unifying force, esp in clannish/ fractious Arab world. By time of M’s death (632) Islam controlled Arabia, & had started to spread – Africa, Asia.

Tenets of the Faith

1. Monotheism: absolute (denying, therefore, Christian concept of “The Trinity”, and all analogues, eg Persian)
2. Submission to Will of Allah: “El Al” of Semitic trad. “Allah” = simply Arabic for “The God”. “Islam” means submission to God’s Will – simply this, no more, no less. Absolute, but simple & clear. All anyone has to do to be a good Muslim is submit to God’s will as revealed by the Qu’ran.
3. Socially, racially inclusive, & unifying: one community (“Ummah”) of the Faithful. This was (is!) politically v powerful, having a potent unifying (“nationalist”) infl.
4. Five essential obligations/ duties:

* daily prayer – “salat”
* alms giving
* fasting at designated times
* keeping Friday as holy
* pilgrimage – “haj”

1. Three key sources of faith/ practice:

* The Word of God (“Qu’ran”)
* Traditions, habits, sayings of The Prophet himself (“Sunna”)
* Accord of the Faithful (“Ijma”)

1. Jews, Samarians, Christians:

* “People of The Book”
* To be respected/ protected at all times
* Having accepted Muslim rule, they may be taxed (“dhimmitude”), but shld not be persecuted, nor shld attempts be made forcibly to convert them – “there is no compulsion in faith” (Muhammad)
* NB ***A contemporary social, political point to note well…*** Islam specifically commands respect for, & legal protection of, all “People of The Book” – those saying otherwise are wrong, and are contradicting not only the Sunna, but also failing to adhere to the Qu’ran.

***Interesting Questions – try to find out …***

1. Why the colours green & black have particular significance in Islam – what do these symbolise/ represent? (And…it’s got nothing to do with expensive chocolate, so no facetious comments on that score, thank you!)
2. What ***“Jihad”*** actually means, to Muslims?

**The Arab Conquests (circa C7th- 9th)**

Remarkable period of expansion out of Arabia across N Africa, M East, into S Europe, and to Asia…to roughly what is modern Pakistan, and even into China. Fired by faith, mobile Arab armies conquered…plenty of “fire & sword”, as happens in all conquests, but more often than not, the Arabs replaced struggling, often oppressive regimes (eg Persia, Byzantine, N African, S European territory) with relatively coherent, just, and enlightened government. Generally, once the initial conquest phase was complete, Arab rulers were tolerant, pragmatic, and reasonable, and in some areas, notably Spain, they established and nurtured flourishing “multicultural” civilisations. Many, possibly most, Christians & Jews probably preferred enlightened/ tolerant Arab rule to what they had hitherto endured: “dhimmitude” was vastly preferable to the despotism and cruelty of feudal warlords, and the often brutal persecutions of the Medieval Church, Roman or Orthodox.

Most Arab rulers did not destroy the cultures they conquered; tended, in fact, to absorb/ integrate many aspects of the cultures of their new lands. Arab scholars studied Greek philosophy/ lit/ ideas, & integrated these with the astronomy, maths, science & medicine of the East. Arab civilisation = crucial channel of ancient learning between Class Civ & the evolving, but troubled/ fractious, world of Medieval Europe. Arguably, Arab civilisation peaked in Cordoba, where the university estab’d by them became a potent intellectual power house/ “learning hub”.

Islam was “universalised” via Arabic, sacred texts, & concepts such as “The Ummah”, but Arabs were often alarmed/ disturbed by other Muslim groups, eg Turks, Shi’ite Persians. In fact, relations b/ween many Arabs and “Franks” during the era of The Crusades were far more nuanced than popular narratives of “Christian V Muslim” tend to suggest. + Muslim powers & “notables” (Arab & non-Arab) often allied/ co-operated with Frankish/ Latin/ Crusader agents, and there was very considerable cultural exchange within the “Latin Kingdoms” (Crusader States) of “Outremer”.

Vital, when studying Crusades, to remember that thro’out the period:

1. The E Med remained a hub of international trade b/ween East & West – it was the great cultural & economic interface b/ween Arabs/ Byzantines/ Europeans/ Persians/ Indians/ Chinese…
2. The greatest threat to the Arabs/ Muslim world came not from Europe, but from the East, esp the Mongols. The Mongols, not Christian Europeans, eventually terminated the “great days” of Near/ Middle Eastern civilisation.

***Thought : interesting exercise to “track” what was happening in the world during same period…***

1. ***C7th – Arabs conquered Syria, Egypt, M East (Jerusalem – “al Quds”/ “The Holy”, taken, 638); Arab fleet defeated Byzantines at “Battle of the Masts”, 655, off Alexandria – 1st major Arab naval victory. Persia, Cyprus taken, & Arabs besieged Constantinople 673-78 (failed); 674 – reached R Indus (modern Pakistan); destroyed Carthage, 687; took Tunis, 700.*  Elsewhere: England – Synod of Whitby, 664: King Oswy abandoned Celtic Church, & accepted primacy of Rome…669: Theodore of Tarsus sent as “Archbishop” (ie sort of overlord of Church) of Canterbury to oversee reorg of Church in England on Roman model.**
2. ***C8th – Arabs took Ethiopia, and Arabic became official language of Egypt. Tangier & Ceuta taken. Christianity nrly eliminated in N Africa. Moors (Arabs & Moroccan Berbers) invaded Spain, 711 – Visigothic monarchy eliminated (Roderic – last Visigoth K of Spain).***

***712 – Muslim state of Sind (Pakistan) estab’d. 2nd siege of Constantinople (716-17) – failed – light/ mobile Arab armies found sustained siege warfare problematic, esp in face of massive walls of Constantinople + heavy Byzantine cavalry forces, & other “heavy” weaponry, eg “Greek Fire”, catapaults etc. Arabs learned/ adapted later, but it took time.***

1. **NB Arab “civil war” circa 650s- 85 – rival “Caliphs”(leaders of the Faithful emerged) – “Sunnite”/ “Shi’ite” split – diff views of who was legitimate leader of the Faithful (Caliph): dispute began in 650s – basically, as increasing numbers of non-Arab converts were integrated into the growing Arab Empire, divisions opened up re who could legitimately claim overall authority. “Sunnites” (after “Sunna” – see above) believed any one of the Faithful could/ should lead; “Shi’ites” (Party of Ali) believed that only those descended directly from Ali, cousin & son-in-law of Muhammad, Caliph of Islam 656-661(overthrown by rivals), could legitimately succeed to the Caliphate.**
2. **C9th Arabs controlled Baghdad, ending Persian Bermicide Dynasty’s rule there. Harun al-Rashid – Caliph of Baghdad, 786-809 (“1001 Nights”)…but Arab Empire passing its peak – fragmenting. [NB – 814, Arabs adopted Indian number system (0-9) – huge implications…]**

**Elsewhere:**

**802- 839 Egbert King of Wessex – 828 “Overlord” of Saxon England.**

**838 – Louis “The Pious” divided Frankish Empire b/ween 3 sons – Lothair, Louis, & Charles “The Bald”; 843, Tr Verdun – confirmed division of Frankish Empire.**

**839-858 – Ethelwulf, K of Wessex; 844 Kenneth McAlpine, K of Scots – conquered Picts/ unified Scotland.**

**850 – Acropolis of Zimbabwe built. 861 – Vikings discover Iceland; 862 Vikings in what is now “Russia”; 865-871 – Ethelred I, K of Wessex.**

**865 – “Russ” Vikings attacked Constantinople... failed, but other Vikings (“Danes”) raided/ settled England, & elsewhere in NW Europe (eg France – “Normandy”).**

**875 – Charles “The Bald” Emperor – died 877 – chaos followed…**

**878 – Battle Edington – Alfred defeated Danes – Tr Wedmore – England divided (“Danelaw” etc).**

**880 – Byz Emp Basil retook Italy from Arabs.**

**881 – Charles III “The Fat” reunified Frankish Empire.**

**886 – Alfred drove Danes from London. *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* estab’d., 891.**

**900 – Alfonso III “The Great” of Castile started “Reconquista” V Moors of Spain… process contd until late C15th.**

**906 – Magyars (“horse people) invaded German lands…**

**907 T’ang Dynasty lost control of China – civil wars, until 960… + Mongols moving into what wld become “Mongolia”, and then N China, which they’d conquered by 1123.**

**910 – Abbey of Cluny founded, France – dev’d into grt centre of learning/ Christian revival (“Cluniac” Movement).**

**911 – Viking Rollo (Hrolf “The Ganger”!?) – granted “Normandy” by Franks – 912, Hrolf became Christian “Robert”, Duke of Normandy…**

**913 – Edward “The Elder” drove Danes from Essex.**

**920 – “Golden Age” of Ghana started… grt African civilisation.**

**924 – Athelstan of Wessex de facto ruler of England – 926 annexed Northumbria, & forced rulers of Wales, Strathclyde, Picts & Scots to accept his overlordship.**

**920s – Wenceslas (“Good King Wenceslas”), K of Bohemia – murdered by rivals, 929.**

**930s – Chinese developed mass printing using woodblocks.**

**936 – Otto “The Great”, K of the Germans… until 973.**

**937 – Battle of Brunanburgh – Athelstan defeated Scottish/ Pictish/ Danish alliance – “King of All Britain”.**

**939- 946 – Edmund, Athelstan’s bro, K of England; 942 – Malcolm I, K of Scots.**

**962 – revival of “Holy Roman Empire” in the West. – roughly modern France & Germany. [As Voltaire (C18th) was wryly to note – “It was neither Holy, nor Roman, nor an empire!”]**

**981 – Eric “The Red” settled Iceland…1002 – Leif Erikkson explored N American coast (“Vinland”).**

**998 – Mahmud founded Islamic Empire in India (Mughal).**

**1016-1042 – Danes ruled England.**

**1054 – Eastern Church broke from Rome.**

**1066 – Battle of Hastings… 1066-86 William of Normandy consolidated his conquest of England.**

**1070s – Seljuk Turks\* overrunning Asia Minor – Battle of Manzikert, 1071 – grt disaster for Byzantium…estab of Seljuk “Sultanate of Rum” – v threatening…Byzantines desperate for military support from West.**

**1075 – 1122: dispute in Roman Church re appointment of bishops – popes v emperors.**

**Nov 1095 – Council of Clermont – Pope Urban II preached “Crusade”…or did he?! Agendas…?!**

**Crusading Era began…**

**People’s Crusade (1096 – catastrophe for those caught up in the madness –**

**enslaved or slaughtered by Bulgars & marauding Turks!**

**1096 – 9, 1st Crusade**

**1147 – 9, 2nd Crusade**

**1189 – 92, 3rd Crusade… etc…**

**…until 1270, 7th Crusade, when Louis IX & army died of plague in Tunis!**

**Other “Crusades” contd elsewhere, notably in France & E Europe, and in Spain, until end of M Ages.**

**Meanwhile, elsewhere…**

**1150s – Japan ravaged by civil wars/ v bloody indeed!**

**1161 – first documented use of explosives in warfare – by Chinese V Mongols.**

**1190s – Mongols expanding their conquests into E Asia…**

**TURKS\***

“Turks” = widely dispersed Asiatic “horse people” – orig. Asian steppes/ common language – “Turkic”.

C10th – a chief called “Seljuk” (clan name) settled his group nr Samarkand on the “Spice Road”… converted to Islam (Sunni).

Roamed/ ravaged S Russia/ Caucasus region – enslaved many people. From these he developed a slave army – “Mameluks”.

His grandsons consolidated his conquests – built an empire which eventually extended from Azerbaijan to Armenia, and then into M East.

Seljuks overran Persia, captured Baghdad, Jerusalem, and Egypt, and then invaded Byzantine territory in Asia Minor – Battle of Manzikert,1071… estab “Sultanate of Rum”, Asia Minor, precipitating Alexius’ appeal to Christendom for military aid.

Ultimately, later Seljuk rulers found it hard to hold their vast empire together…

Crusades were an intense pressure, but nothing compared with their own internal difficulties (eg Mamaluks in Egypt estab’d their own independent state), and the ever looming threat of the Mongol power from the East.

CRH, May 2016.