

- Why are Bet Golgotha and the Selassie Chapel shrouded in mystery? Speculate about the reasoning behind the desire to generally keep these culturally significant sites off limits to visitors.
- How was the town of Abu Mena affected by Emperor Constantine's declaration that Christianity was the state religion of the Roman Empire? Speculate about the broader implications of Constantine's conversion.

Follow-up Activities

- With the main goal of making a pilgrimage to Mecca, birthplace of Mohammed, Ibn Battuta began his famous travels in 1325, which started in Morocco and spanned over 75,000 miles, taking him to 44 modern countries. Ask students to research and map the places Battuta visited and to read accounts of his fascinating adventures, some of which seem exaggerated or inaccurate. Battuta's *Travels in Asia and Africa* may be found at the following web site:
www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/1354-ibnbattuta.html.
- Abu Mena is one of 35 world heritage sites that UNESCO considers endangered. Break students into small groups and ask each group to generate reports analyzing why selected sites are in trouble and to suggest ways to preserve these cultural wonders. In addition, students may debate the importance of preserving world cultural heritage sites. More information on endangered sites may be found at the following web site: www.worldheritagesite.org/danger.html.
- Emperor Constantine ruled the Roman Empire from 306 to 337 CE and his reign marked one of the great turning points in the history of Christianity, whose adherents had faced years of imperial persecution. Ask students to research and develop a biographical profile of Constantine, discuss the causes of his conversion and evaluate the nature of the relationship between the empire and the church following his conversion. As a follow-up, ask groups to read segments of *The Life of the Blessed Emperor Constantine*, a work by Eusebius, often referred to as the father of church history. Eusebius' work is far from historically accurate. Ask students to describe how this historian, whom 19th century rationalist Jakob Burckhardt called "the first thoroughly dishonest historian of antiquity," portrayed Constantine and to write an analysis of the image of Constantine Eusebius wanted to present. *The Life of the Blessed Emperor Constantine* may be found at the following web site: www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/vita-constantine.html.

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- Ask students to research and summarize archaeological reports on the excavation and restoration of Volubilis in modern Morocco, an important outpost of the Roman Empire which later briefly served as the capital of the new Islamic kingdom formed by the Idrisids—a capital that was later moved to Fez. Current research may be found at the following web site: www.sitedevolubilis.org/www/english/about/currentresearch.htm.

Suggested Internet Resources

Periodically, Internet Resources are updated on our web site at www.LibraryVideo.com

- www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/fati/hd_fati.htm
The Metropolitan Museum of Art presents "The Art of the Fatimid Period."
- campus.northpark.edu/history/WebChron/Islam/Islam.html
North Park University offers a detailed time line of Islamic history.
- www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/storyofafrica/8chapter7.shtml
The BBC provides an extensive history of Christianity in Africa.

Suggested Print Resources

- Armstrong, Karen. *Islam: A Short History*. Modern Library, New York, NY; 2002.
- Carew-Miller, Anna. *Tunisia*. Mason Crest Publishers, Philadelphia, PA; 2004.
- Meyer, Marvin W. *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of a Ritual Power*. Harper, San Francisco, CA; 1994.

TEACHER'S GUIDE

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Program Overview

Some of the first Christian communities in the world were established in North Africa in the first or second centuries of the Common Era. Christianity spread slowly to countries such as Egypt and Ethiopia, where it retained its strong influence even after the arrival of Islam in the seventh century. At this time, followers of Islam used their military superiority to conquer all of North Africa and Spain. Islam was a modernizing influence in the early years of its history, with dynamic and turbulent dynasties such as the Fatimid, Idrisid and Aghlabid establishing strongholds in cities such as Cairo, Fez and Kairouan. Today, these cities retain their Islamic heritage and remain cultural and spiritual centers for Muslims, while Christianity, after almost disappearing from Africa following the Muslim conquest in the seventh century, has millions of followers throughout the continent.

Episode 1: Cairo

With an estimated population of over fifteen million people, Cairo is the capital of Egypt and is the largest city in the Middle East. It was officially founded by an Islamic sect called the Fatimids in 969 CE, but its history goes back to the fifth century BCE when the Persians established a fortress called Babylon in an area now known as old Cairo. Cairo became one of the first great centers of Islamic learning and features unequalled medieval architecture with many famous minarets and mosques, *hammams*, *madrasas* and fountains that were spared the devastation of Mongol invasions in the region.

Vocabulary

Allah — A word that means “the God” in Arabic.

Mohammed — According to Muslims, a prophet who received the word of God.

Abbasid — The second great Islamic dynasty which was founded in 750 CE by Abbas, the uncle of Mohammed.

Mamelukes — Slave soldiers who controlled several Islamic states during the Middle Ages. Also spelled “Mamluk.”

madrassa — An Islamic religious school.

necropolis — From the Greek, meaning “city of the dead,” an elaborate burial place in an ancient city.

Episode 2: Fez

Fez is the oldest city in Morocco and has a history that dates back to the ninth century, when Idriss the First arrived, in flight from Harun al Rashid, the Caliph of Baghdad. Although Idriss the First was eventually killed, his son founded this historic and mysterious Islamic city — the spiritual and cultural center of Morocco. The *muezzin* calls the faithful to prayer through the narrow streets leading to the many mosques that dot the ancient metropolis, which has been called one of the most complete medieval cities in the world.

Vocabulary

muezzin — The official who calls Muslims to daily prayer.

caliph — A successor to Mohammed who carried forth the message of Islam after his death.

Episode 3: Kairouan

Kairouan was the first Islamic city in Africa and is considered by Sunni Muslims to be the fourth holiest city in the Islamic world after Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem. Founded in the seventh century by Oqba ibn Nafi, Kairouan, which means “army camp,” became a center from which the doctrine of Allah was to spread throughout North Africa. The magnificent Grand Mosque was the first mosque in the Maghreb, and its complex was the model for other mosques across North Africa and Moorish Spain.

Vocabulary

Koran — The holy writings of Islam.

Maghreb — A word that means “sunset” in Arabic and is used to describe the five Northern African states of Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Mauritania and Libya.

Berber — A culture of approximately 50 million mostly Islamic people living in North Africa. The name also refers to their spoken language.

Shiite — A denomination of Islam which believes that the only rightful leaders of the Muslim people are the heirs of the fourth caliph, Ali.

Sunni — The largest denomination of Islam, which believes that the rightful leaders of the Muslim people are the heirs of the first four caliphs who took power after Mohammed’s death.

Mecca — Located in Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of Mohammed and the holiest city in Islam.

Aghlabid — A dynasty independent of the Abbasids that ruled Tunisia and eastern Algeria from 800 to 909 CE.

souk — A word that means “marketplace” in Arabic.

surah — A chapter in the Koran.

Episode 4: Lalibela

Christianity has been the state religion in Ethiopia ever since the fourth century. According to legend, after the Crusaders lost the holy city of Jerusalem to the Muslims, a king named Lalibela was told by God to build a “new” Jerusalem in Africa, where he helped develop the area’s famed monolithic churches. The eleven subterranean churches were cut by hand out of solid rock and separate groups of churches are connected by underground passageways. The interiors were also hollowed out by hand and given vaulted ceilings, reflecting a level of craftsmanship that characterizes the remarkable history of Ethiopian architecture. Lalibela is a religious and pilgrimage center for Ethiopian Christians and its rock-hewn churches continue to attract thousands of pilgrims during the major holy day celebrations.

Vocabulary

Crusaders — Europeans who participated in a series of offensive campaigns, which took place between the 11th and 13th centuries, called Crusades. These battles, originally attempts to capture Jerusalem from the Muslims, became wars over territory.

Golgotha — From the Aramaic meaning “skull,” a hill in Jerusalem referred to in the Bible as the site of Jesus’ Crucifixion.

Sinai — A mountain site in Egypt where, according to the Bible, God appeared to Moses and gave him the Ten Commandments.

Axum — A powerful Ethiopian trading kingdom that was Christianized in the fourth century CE. Also spelled “Aksum.”

Episode 5: Abu Mena

The town of Abu Mena — named after St. Mena, a Roman soldier who became an early Christian martyr in the third century — was a holy place in Egypt. After Emperor Constantine declared Christianity to be the state religion, thousands flocked to St. Mena’s burial place, which quickly grew into the Christian center of Egypt. By the late eighth century, Islam had replaced Christianity as the dominant faith of the region and in the tenth century, the town of Abu Mena was plundered, and gradually buried by the sands of the Sahara. It was excavated by German archaeologists in the early 20th century, but the ruins of Abu Mena are in danger of collapse, with preservationists actively seeking to save this ancient place of pilgrimage.

Vocabulary

Lourdes — The location of the largest sacred Catholic pilgrimage site in France, where the Virgin Mary was said to have been seen in a series of visions in the 19th century.

Constantine — A Roman general who was proclaimed emperor by Roman forces in Great Britain in 407 CE. He was later beheaded by Honorius.

Coptic — Referring to Egyptian Christians.

sarcophagus — A stone container inscribed with symbols and inscriptions that holds a coffin and mummified remains.

Byzantine — Term used to describe the eastern half of the Roman Empire, which broke from the Roman Catholic Church in 1054 and fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453.

Follow-up Discussion Questions

- Ibn Tulun was sent by the Abbasid dynasty to govern Egypt in the ninth century. Ask students to explain why there are no images of people or animals anywhere in the Ibn Tulun mosque.
- What does the name “Kairouan” mean in Arabic? Discuss why the city needed to be sturdy and fortified.

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