

Unit 2 Setting the Stage

Physical Features of the Arabian Peninsula and Surrounding Lands



0 200 400 miles
 0 200 400 kilometers
 Albers Conic Equal-Area Projection

Elevation	
Feet	Meters
Over 10,000	Over 3,050
5,001-10,000	1,526-3,050
2,001-5,000	611-1,525
1,001-2,000	306-610
0-1,000	0-305
Below sea level	Below sea level

Present-day boundary

Islam in Medieval Times

If you could zoom out a satellite picture of the Arabian Peninsula to see the surrounding land, you would find that it borders on the continents of Africa, Asia, and Europe. Satellite imagery also shows that most of the Arabian Peninsula is brown, dry land. These two geographic facts about the Arabian Peninsula—its location and its dry climate—have shaped and defined its people and their history. That history centers on trade with northern Africa, Asia, and Europe. It also centers on the religion of Islam.

The people of the Arabian Peninsula learned how to survive in the desert. They raised sheep, goats, and camels and learned to keep moving in search of food and water. Over time, they also learned to earn a living through trade. These skills proved valuable as merchants came to the Arabian Peninsula from surrounding countries, buying and selling. Trade between Africa and Asia passed through the peninsula,

as did trade between Asia and Europe. The Arabian Peninsula became a major trading hub for all three continents.

Traders carried silk, jewels, cotton, spices, and other goods from one region to another. But more than merchandise passed between merchants and traders. Ideas, knowledge, and beliefs also passed along trade routes.

One belief that spread quickly was the religion of Islam, which began on the Arabian Peninsula and spread outward. Islamic traders from the Arabian Peninsula who traveled to Persia, Egypt, Spain, and elsewhere brought their religion with them. The followers of Islam also won people to their religion through war and conquest. The map *Islamic World by 750* shows the extent of Islamic lands by the year 750.

Today, more than a billion people around the world practice Islam, and the Middle East, which includes the Arabian Peninsula, is one of the most important regions in the world. In this unit, you will take a closer look at this region.

