

ENTRY ON "ISLAM" IN GREAT  
SOVIET ENCYCLOPEDIA

Following is a translation of the entry  
"Islam" in the Russian-language publication  
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ISLAM (in Arabic, humility), or Mohammedanism, a religion which came into being in the beginning of the 7th century in Arabia and later spread as a result of Arabic conquests in Near and Central Asia, North Africa and Southwestern Europe. At present I. is wide-spread in the countries of the Near and Middle East, in Northern Africa, Southeast Asia and to an extent in the countries of the Far East. I., like other religions, has always played a reactionary role, being in the hands of the exploiting classes a weapon of spiritual oppression of the workers. It was used by foreign colonizers for the enslavement of the peoples of the East.

The Origin of Islam. The appearance of I. was caused by the formation of class society among the Arabs. In the 6th century in Arabia, whose population consisted of nomad cattle-farmers (Bedouins), settled farmers, traders and craftsmen, the process of decomposition of the primitive-communal structure occurred. The economic and social contradictions characteristic of the stage of decomposition of primitive-communal relationships attained their greatest development in the city of Mecca (in the region of Hijaz in Western Arabia), whose basic population was composed of the Kureish tribe or Kureishites. The development of property inequality among Mecca residents led to the strengthening of the power and influence of the local hereditary aristocracy.

The latter conducted a large caravan trade (in particular, slave trade) with neighboring countries, held the Mecca population and the surrounding Bedouin tribes in a state of constant debt dependency, possessed slaves,