

TPAC Education's  
Humanities Outreach in Tennessee presents



# **Eclipse: Visions of the Crescent and the Cross**

**Forces of Nature Dance Theatre**



## **Teacher Guidebook**

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TPAC Education

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# Eclipse: Visions of the Crescent and the Cross

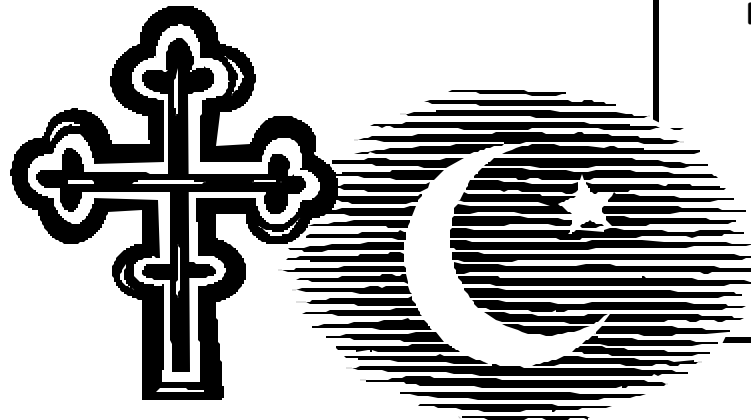
In 711 C.E.\* the western tribes of the cross and the eastern tribes of the star and crescent moon began a conflict that would continue for over a thousand years. Islam and Christianity experienced many cultural as well as geopolitical victories and defeats with global ramifications upon the next thirteen centuries. Like the cyclical eclipses of our sun and moon, the followers of Islam and Christianity have often invaded each other's space, blinded each other's sight, and persisted upon paths of violence and destruction. They have often ignored the very essence of what they have in common: a spiritual and religious heritage that can bring forth "light" to anyone on our sacred planet who is willing to receive it. If not careful, in this "game" of conquest and dominion both traditions may extinguish the very fire and light that enables us to see, thus plunging our world into a second darkness that could last another thousand years.

It is our hope that our artistic visions may help heal some of these ancient wounds by creating works to move us forward into a safer, healthier millennium where, as in an eclipse, darkness is only temporary and always yields to the emergence of light.

*Abdel R. Salaam*

Artistic Director  
Forces of Nature Dance Theatre

*\*C.E.: Common Era, formerly known as A.D.*



## In This Guidebook

### The Artist's Statement

#### Introduction



### BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE Introducing the dance to students



### An Elemental Comparison of Christianity and Islam

### A Detailed Description of the Performance with Reflection Questions



### TIMELINE of events depicted in 'Eclipse'

### MAP of locations in 'Eclipse'



### IDEAS FOR THE CLASSROOM

#### Perspectives:

Cultural, Historical, Personal, Artistic  
What is Culture? – A lesson plan

### Meet the Choreographer - Abdel R. Salaam

### Newspaper Reviews

### Web Links

### Selected & Annotated Bibliography

# Introduction

*Eclipse: Visions of the Crescent and the Cross* is a full length dance theater work which will be presented for student audiences and in an evening public performance at TPAC. It explores some of the cultural, historical, and mythical conflicts and similarities between Christianity and Islam. Covering the centuries from the Crusades to the present in eight segments, the work is elaborately set in a theatrical matrix developed by choreographer Abdel R. Salaam. (*Seven of the eight segments, or “visions,” will be presented for HOT audiences.*) Salaam employs a variety of techniques to convey his story: in the first vision he reinvents the elements and metaphor of a larger-than-life chess game, other visions use narrative “story ballet” style while others are more abstract and evocative. Throughout he combines modern dance, ballet, West African dance, a bit of hip-hop, and martial arts with live and recorded music, as well as recorded spoken word.

“In an eclipse the darkness is only temporary as it always yields to the emergence of light,”

observed Salaam. As the symbols of the world’s two largest religions in the title indicate, *Eclipse: Visions of the Crescent and the Cross* is an epic that probes history and solicits contemporary human understanding to great, dramatic effect. The work examines such diverse themes as the “Black Irish” and Moorish ghettos of ancient Britain; the fall of Grenada, Spain; West African cultural mores; Black Muslim versus Christian rhetoric in America; professional boxing; and the events of September 11 and its aftermath. Spanning the Middle East, Africa, Europe, British Isles, and North America, *Eclipse* is an ambitious reach toward tolerance.



## Suggestions for the classroom before the performance

- **Discuss the title**, “Eclipse: Visions of the Crescent and the Cross.” What does the title mean? What is an eclipse and what meaning does it add to the title?
- Explain that **the performance is in seven sections**. These can be interpreted as excerpts of history, as perceived by the choreographer. Each section is called a “vision.”
- In this guidebook are tools to help students follow the performance and form their own interpretation of the work. A **guide to the performance** describes each vision, and a **timeline and map** are provided to help place the events of the visions into historical and world context.
- **Introduce the choreographer, Abdel Salaam**. His biography and personal influences in creating this piece are on pages 16-17. Abdel Salaam and the dancers from the company will lead a Talk Back immediately following the performance. Students are encouraged to bring prepared questions or spontaneously respond to what they have seen.
- **Before and after the performance**: Making choices that lead to conflict or that lead to tolerance is a theme throughout the dance. **Activities and discussion questions** are provided that address the topics of culture, personal identity and choice, and understanding other perspectives. Depending on your classroom, you may want to discuss points of commonality between Christianity and Islam - the short essay on page 5 provides an introduction to this complex topic.



## An Elemental Comparison of Christianity and Islam

Christianity and Islam share more traditions than is widely known. Both faiths believe in the same God, the God of Abraham and Moses, the God of the Old Testament, therefore both faiths are also linked to Judaism. Islam is an Arabic term meaning “submission,” in this case to the will of God. The Arabic root “s-l-m” like its Hebrew cognate “sh-l-m” means “peace,” in this case the peace that arises from submission to the will of God.

Christians and Muslims (adherents of Islam) believe that the will of God has been directly revealed through humans. Both believe in heaven or paradise and hell. Both turn to sacred scripture for guidance in daily life. For Christians this book is the *Bible* comprised of the Old Testament and New Testament, and for Muslims this book is the *Qur'an* (*Koran*).

The *Qur'an* preserves the literal word of God as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad over many years beginning circa 610 C.E. The transmission continued intermittently until The Prophet's death in 632. Eventually forming a book about the length of the New Testament, the *Qur'an* (literally “recitals”) is of unparalleled importance in Muslim life. Its message pervades many aspects of society: education, law, social customs, morality, artistic expression (chanting and calligraphy) and religious practice. It is “a hallmark of Islam that is at once theological and aesthetic. Islamic societies are infused [with it]. . . at many conscious and subconscious levels.” (Smith & Green p. 509).

Rather than comparing it to the Bible, some religious scholars compare the *Qur'an* for Muslims to Jesus Christ for Christians as the incarnate Word, the absolute and miraculous manifestation of God here on earth. As such the book itself is treated with a respect and reverence beyond words. It is not unheard of for Muslim children to learn it in its entirety by heart.

Muslims believe that, like Muhammad, Jesus was a true prophet of God, but was not divine. Muslims hold that Muhammad's revelations, occurring roughly six centuries after Jesus lived, offer a final, full, and complete disclosure of divine thought, instruction, and guidance.

*For additional information on this complex topic, please visit  
[http://www.religionfacts.com/Christianity/Charts/Christianity\\_Islam.htm](http://www.religionfacts.com/Christianity/Charts/Christianity_Islam.htm).*

# Guide to the Performance

*Eclipse: Visions of the Crescent and the Cross* presents a global perspective of Muslim and Christian history represented in particular times and places. The visions or “excerpts” of history, in this performance are not intended as a comprehensive explanation of world religion or world history. Rather they are examples that illuminate choices and consequences, conveyed in day to day activities such as family and cultural celebrations, by individuals grappling with personal beliefs, and in vast cultures affected by dogmatic persecution. Each detailed description of the visions is followed by suggested reflection questions.

## VISION ONE

### The Prayer

Moving on a dimly lit stage with the Islamic call to prayer, a lone male dancer swirls as if to summon a presence from above. Then the lighting calls attention to a second dancer who makes gestures for the rituals of his day while Gregorian chant plays. With the noise of the wind, the two men perform their mutual ablutions. They dance apart into the darkness to return and find they are separated by an imaginary and invisible wall. *See box for more detail about the music in the opening scene.*

1. *What are key words that describe the movements of each dancer?*
2. *Based on what the dancers are wearing, what do you know about their lives?*
3. *How would this segment change if the stage was fully lit all the time?*

## VISION TWO

### Dark Lights in a Gaelic Dawn

Moving to a Celtic melody, with farewell gestures a knight (costumed in a gold sequined headdress that suggests chain mail) caresses a woman with long red hair and a child. As he retreats into darkness, she gives him her scarf.

Against ominous music, the knight re-emerges in a corps of dancers. As soldiers coalesce into a fighting unit, the knights gradually begin to move in unison. They are replaced by another corps dressed in black with head drapes. To escalating sounds of discord, the two factions engage each other in battle.

Dressed to reflect their “armies,” two queens face off on a chess board achieved by casting a lighting pattern on the stage floor. The music creates a sense of foreboding with cello and staccato drumming. Larger than life lines of Christian bishops and Muslim imams dance forward toward each other, but before they actually engage they are replaced by “pawns,” the soldier corps we have seen earlier. While the pawns engage and fight to the death, their leaders watch from the safety of the far sides of the chess board. The stage darkens and then as the lights rise they reveal a field of the dead. A surviving knight takes the scarf worn by one of the fallen and exits the stage.

1. *Are there places in this dance where the race of the dancer matters? If so, where and why?*
2. *Why did the choreographer use chess as his metaphor? What would the dance be like if it was based on other games, e.g. football?*



A translation of the **Adhan**, the Islamic call for prayer, which is publicly chanted five times daily in predominantly Muslim cities and towns:

*God is most great. God is most great.  
God is most great. God is most great.  
I testify that there is no God except God.  
I testify that there is no God except God.  
I testify that Muhammad is the messenger of God.  
I testify that Muhammad is the messenger of God.  
Come to prayer! Come to prayer!  
Come to success! Come to success!  
God is most great. God is most great.  
There is none worthy of worship except God.*



The chant, **Stabat Mater** is a 13th century Latin hymn and it means “the Mother was standing.” In Latin, the hymn consists of 20 couplets which describe the Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin at the Cross. There are more than 60 English translations that have been made of the Stabat Mater. *For more information and translations:* <http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/resources/poetry/stbmat.html>

Two females, one with the red hair, dance a duet suggesting the closeness of a mother and daughter. After the knight returns the scarf to the mother, the Celtic music turns from gaiety to pathos as the mother registers her fallen husband's death. Her dance of agony suggests that she is both torn in two and torn inside out. She and her daughter collapse on stage yet remain in the shadows.

Lyrical flute signals a transition and summons three male dancers dressed as the first figure was in a Call to Prayer—white flowing shirt and full-cut black pants with black caps. They multiply and move to a more Middle Eastern rhythm that shows African influences.

The grief-stricken mother and daughter rise to participate in their dance only to be driven off-stage by a monk. The group dance resumes with a decidedly strong African influence in movement and music. More Gaelic women gather to participate in the fluid exuberance. Interest between a Gaelic woman and a Moorish\* man sparks a romantic, engaged pas de deux. At a clap of thunder the monk returns to battle the Moor with fatal results.

Small groups of Gaelic and Moorish women interact over everyday joys, both rejoicing in and oblivious to their differences. A wedding preparation ensues for the Moor and his Gaelic lover. A Celtic lyric soprano composition serves as a counterpoint for the mixture of the African movement, thus suggesting the happy confluence of the different cultures. For the commitment ceremony the bride and groom face each other while Islamic and Gregorian chants bless the couple. Their union is danced by the company with great elation as elements of Irish step dancing are woven with African tribal motifs. The segment closes with a joyous literal leap of faith up into the dark void of the stage.



\* Moors are a nomadic people of Arab and Berber descent who originally occupied lands in various parts of North Africa and whose members continue to live there.

### VISION THREE

## **The Pride, the Passion & the Persecution**

Dressed in long, brightly colored lace dresses and holding fans that suggest Spain, three women dance in formal fashion to the baroque music of the Middle Ages. A second small group of gypsy women dressed in flowing, colorful robes that say “Africa” begin to move to drumming and lute. The sounds of the Islamic call to prayer overlay both these aural motifs as they transform into the punctuated quick rhythms of what became Flamenco. As the musical styles blend, so do the dance vocabularies. Ultimately, a fiery solo is danced by a woman who is carried to the stake for burning by two monks. Cries of “Opus Dei” (Latin for “the work of God”) hang in the air.

*At what point do the dances leave their singular classical forms and morph into a blend of Flamenco?*

(Note: Vision Four is not performed in the HOT performance)

#### VISION FIVE

### A Question of Modesty

In dim circles of light a woman wearing a habit and a woman wearing a chador come face to face. It seems they will engage, but in silence they walk on, yet pause to look back at one another before they exit the stage.

A trio of body-painted women wearing skirts and traditional cowrie-shell bikini-style tops dance with their backs to the stage and are then flanked by African village dancers. The movement suggests a close community of women, comfortable and assured in their village. They are interrupted by the droning sounds played during the chess board battle. Two pairs of women, Christian and Islamic, including the characters first introduced in this segment, appear. Under the watchful eyes of their male religious leaders they encircle the young women with a great cloth, binding them together and obliterating their vitality. Transformed by shame, the young women become prim and proper. Accompanied by onstage drumming, the revelation of the tribal chief and his dancers returns passion and liveliness to the stage until the women of the church and the mosque return. Again they cloak the village women and lead them offstage in opposite directions toward a very different life of foreign modesty and piety.

1. *Why do the dancers have their backs turned toward the audience?*
2. *What are some different ideas about modesty in our culture?*

#### VISION SIX

### The Word Made Flesh

One African-American man explores the messages of two powerful leaders as he battles between his passion for the non-violent message of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Black Nationalist movement advanced by Malcolm X (El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz) through the Nation of Islam. Excerpts from actual speeches of the two leaders are layered with music into a prominent soundscape. Ultimately the seeker is alone, struggling for identity after the loss of his mentors. (See bios of Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King, page 16.)



#### VISION SEVEN

### Fundamentalism: Faith or Folly

Using the metaphor of boxing to illustrate the self-defeating limits of fighting, the Christian church and the Islamic mosque engage one another in the “Ring of Radicals.” Dancers dressed in Christian choral robes enter to gospel music followed by dancers in white gowns and head scarves who enter to African style drumming. Both “sides” are celebratory and take the stage to back “their” man in the boxing ring. The two boxers engage with one another, each pointing to his own book. Dramatic staging alludes to the events of September 11, 2001.

#### VISION EIGHT

### Tolerance

A worldly host of timeless dancers circles tragedy and conflict to offer reconciliation, healing, and hope.

# Timeline of Events Related to Eclipse: Visions of the Crescent and the Cross

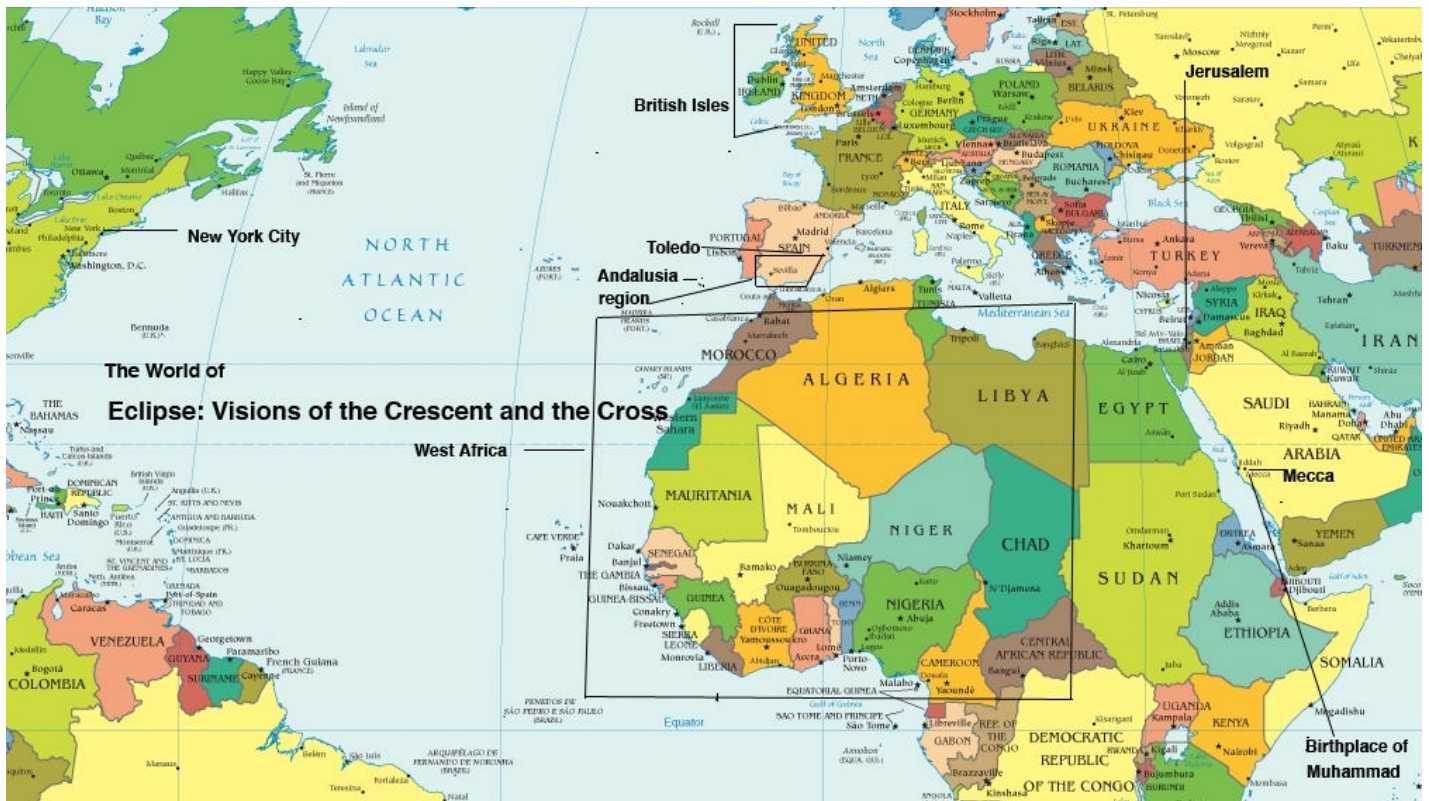
Events directly related to *Eclipse: Visions of the Crescent and the Cross* in **bold**.

*All dates are C.E. (Common Era, formerly known as A.D.)*

- 238 Revolt in Africa against Roman rule begins half-century of unrest.
- 313 Christianity tolerated throughout Roman empire.
- 432 St. Patrick introduces Christianity to Ireland.
- c. 500 Ghanaian empire becomes the most important power in West Africa.
- c. 570 C.E. Muhammad born in Mecca.**
- ca. 610 Muhammad's (age forty) arc as a prophet begins in a night vigil in a mountain cave near Mecca where he was commanded by the angel Gabriel to receive recitations of God that became the Qu'ran.
- 632 Muhammad dies in Mecca.
- 632-641 Islam expanded rapidly in Arabia, Syria, Iraq, Egypt and parts of Northern Africa.**
- 638 Jerusalem, a city under control of the Roman Byzantine Empire and sacred to Jews, Christians, and Muslims, captured by Islamic Arabs. It had been previously held by Babylonians, Persians, Alexander the Great, Ptolemies, Seleucids, and Maccabees before Romans possession began in 63 C.E.
- c. 650 Revelations of Mohammed are written; they become the Qu'ran.
- 692 The Dome of the Rock, the sacred Muslim shrine in Jerusalem that marks the terminus of the Prophet Muhammad's night journey from Mecca to Jerusalem and thence into the Seven Heavens, was completed.**
- 711 **Muslims invaded Spain. "Islamic Spain was a multi-cultural mix of Muslims, Christians and Jews. It brought a degree of civilization to Europe that matched the heights of the Roman Empire and the Italian Renaissance."** (British Broadcasting web site [www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/))
- 756 **Cordoba became the capitol of Muslim Spain, Europe's 2nd largest city by the 10th century.**
- c. 900 Kasar Hausa (Hausaland), a fertile region on the lower Niger river in West Africa, prospers due to increasing trade and industry.
- 1000s Takrur and Gao kingdoms flourish in West Africa due to gold trade.
- ca. 1050-present Islam spreads in West Africa.**
- 1076 Muslim Seljuk Turks capture Jerusalem.
- 1099 Christians capture Jerusalem in the First Crusade.**

- c. 1100 Ghana empire in West Africa declines.
- 1187 Kurdish Muslim Saladin defeats Christians at Hattin and takes Jerusalem.
- Ca. 1200s-1400s Islamic Spaniards traveled and lived in Ancient Briton (British Isles.)**
- 1229 Christians regain Jerusalem, but lose it in 1244.
- c. 1235 Great warrior leader Sundiata Keita founds Mali empire in West Africa.
- c. 1300 Osman I founds Muslim Ottoman dynasty in Turkey.
- c. 1390 Ottoman Turks complete conquest of Asia Minor.
- 1453 Ottomans besiege and capture Constantinople (Istanbul), ending Byzantine empire.
- 1491 Ruler of Congo kingdom baptized as Christian by Portuguese.
- 1492 Christians conquered Granada, the last stronghold of Islam in Spain.**
- 1502-1609 Spanish Muslims forced to convert to Roman Catholicism.
- 1520-66 Under Sulayman the Magnificent Muslim Ottoman empire at its peak.
- c. 1530 Beginning of trans-Atlantic slave trade organized by Portuguese.
- 1562 Sir John Hawkins starts English slave trade, taking cargoes of slaves from West Africa to the Americas.
- 1680s Rise of Asante kingdom in West Africa.
- 1739 South Carolina is shaken by slave revolts.
- 1740s U.S. colonies population 1.5 million, including 250,000 slaves.
- 1807 Britain abolishes slave trade; slavery continues until 1833.
- 1815-1900 Large portions of Islamic Africa, Eurasia (including the Near and Middle East) were under European Christian control.**
- 1822 Liberia founded in West Africa as home for freed slaves.
- 1861-65 Civil War in United States.
- 1865 Thirteenth Amendment to US Constitution outlaws slavery.
- c. 1880 Beginning of the European “Scramble for Africa.”
- 1914 Britain and France occupy German colonies in West Africa.
- 1920 Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi launches peaceful non-cooperation movement against British rule.
- 1925 Malcolm Little, later known as Malcolm X, was born in Omaha, Nebraska.**

- 1929** Martin Luther King, Jr. was born in Atlanta, Georgia.
- 1948** Martin Luther King, Jr. begins to study the life of non-violence proponent Ghandi.
- 1948** Malcolm X converted to Islam while in prison for armed robbery.
- 1950s** Black Americans intensify campaign for civil rights.
- 1965** Malcolm X assassinated while speaking at the Astoria Ballroom in New York City.
- 1968** Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee while lending march support to striking sanitation workers.
- 1990** Iraq invades Kuwait. United States and allies send forces to the Gulf region, beginning the Gulf War.
- Sept. 11, 2001** Bombing of the World Trade Center in New York City escalated mistrust and misunderstandings about Islam and provoked an ongoing cultural curiosity to learn more about the faith and its followers.
- 2003** U.S.-led invasion of Iraq begins.



# SHARING PERSPECTIVES

In a troubling era of world history, **artists** continue the quest for the best of what it means to be human. *Eclipse* opens the door for the discussion of our rich **history** and sheds light on **current events** as it ultimately promotes the unity of **diverse** people.

--Abdel Salaam, *Artistic Director and Choreographer*

*Eclipse: Visions of the Crescent and the Cross* opens the door for discussion and investigation of the various perspectives represented in the dance. Keep in mind that this work is an artistic interpretation of history, from the perspective of Abdel Salaam - an artist informed through research as well as his own cultural background and identity. Consider the various points of view of the choreographer, the dancers, the real and imagined characters, and your own opinions and beliefs. The following discussion questions and activities offer an approach to understanding multiple perspectives:



## ***Cultural...***

See “Features of Culture” for a worksheet and lesson plan to address these questions:

- What is culture?
- How do cultural values and beliefs shape how individuals from different cultures view one another?
- How does my culture shape me?
- How can art be used to improve understanding between people of different backgrounds?

## ***Personal...***

- Read the biography of Abdel Salaam, and the influences he credits with contributing to this piece (pp 16-17). How is his personal perspective expressed in this work of art?
- What did you feel was the message of the performance?
- Do you feel it is trying to persuade you one way or the other?
- Do you agree/disagree with the message?
- Which vision was most meaningful to you? Why? (Use the performance guide to recall.)

## ***Historical...***

- Review all the visions and place them in context on the map and in the timeline provided.
- Research the beliefs and actions of Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King (short bios are on page 18.) What did they have in common; what were their differences? Discuss Vision Six, and the perspective of the young man drawn to the two leaders, but seeking to define his own beliefs.
- Focusing on Vision Two (The Chess Match), Vision Six (Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.), and the final vision (World Religions):
  - What do these each represent? What is the message of these three sections?
  - What has changed? What story do they tell?
  - What is different about the last vision from the first?

- Looking at particular visions and the characters representing people in that time and place, what influences affected or motivated these individuals? What kind of influences are there today?
- Examine this performance, or an element of the performance, through the theme of Triumph and Tragedy. Respond in your choice of performing, visual or literary art. (Essay, poetry, spoken word, display, painting, music, etc.)

### ***Communicating through the Arts...***

- In what ways does this performance communicate? (verbal, non verbal, abstraction, narrative, movement, music, soundscape, metaphor)
- Is there a central theme?
- How is it representative of history?
- How does art tell history?
- What is the difference of understanding history through art vs. through books? Compare other examples (movies, literature, paintings, poetry)

### ***The Artistic Process...***

- What other episodes in the intersecting history of Islam and Christianity could be choreographed?
- If you make a dance about an historical subject, how much liberty can you take with the facts? Whose side of the story do you tell?
- How many kinds of costumes, textiles, and textures can you find in each segment of the dance?
- What instruments do you hear throughout the dance? What cultures are they associated with?

### ***Identity...***

- Examine the theme of identity in this piece. The visions underscore different identities – religious identity, geographical and cultural identity, gender, race.
- How does culture influence your identity? What is culture? (For a class activity or conversation starter about culture, see the lesson plan “Features of Culture” in this guidebook.)
- How does identity relate to your world now?
- Vision Six is a powerful dance about seeking an identity and making a personal choice when faced with multiple influences.

#### Consider:

Think of a time when you have had a very important decision to make. What influences your thinking? Where/to whom do you turn for help and advice? How many options do you have? Is there a conflict between them? Ultimately how do you decide? How would you represent your decision making experience in art?

- In what ways do you have a choice, and when do you not?
- Sometimes you have open choices, sometimes forced or motivated by fear and peer pressure. How do you maintain your identity in those circumstances?

# FEATURES OF CULTURE

Reprinted from *Looking at Ourselves and Others* with permission from the Peace Corps Coverdell World Wise Schools Program <http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/>

## Overview

Students will define culture and examine how it affects them.

## Objectives

- Students will be able to further describe how their culture has shaped them.
- Students will be able to define the concept of culture.
- Students will be able to explain some of the attributes of culture.

## Procedures

Ask students to complete the worksheet “**Features of Culture**” (p. 15) before this activity.

1. Have students form small groups and compare their responses to the Worksheet. After the groups compare their responses, ask:

- Were your responses to the questions exactly alike?
- What differences did you find among responses?
- How can you explain the differences?

2. Explain to students that their responses to the worksheet questions were partially shaped by the culture in which they were raised. Make the point that if these questions were given to students from another culture, their answers would be different because they have grown up in a different culture. Perhaps they have already found significant differences among their small groups.

3. Write the *enduring understanding*\* for this lesson on the board. Ask students now to address these questions:

- What is culture?
- How does it shape the way we see the world, ourselves, and others?

4. Write the word "culture" in bold capital letters across the board. Ask students as a class to come up with a definition. They may find it easier to list aspects of culture—different elements that are true of culture—than to come up with a full definition. Such a list might include:

- Culture has to do with values and beliefs.
- Culture involves customs and traditions.
- Culture is collective, shared by a group.
- Everyone has a culture.
- Culture is learned.
- Culture influences and shapes behavior.
- Culture is transmitted from generation to generation.
- Culture is often unconscious; people are sometimes not aware of how their behaviors and attitudes have been shaped by their culture.
- People in all cultures have common needs.

5. Then provide the following definition:

**Culture is a system of beliefs, values, and assumptions about life that guide behavior and are shared by a group of people. It includes customs, language, and material artifacts. These are transmitted from generation to generation, rarely with explicit instructions.**

6. Use the following questions to focus discussion on the role culture plays in forming our behaviors and beliefs:

- How do you think you learned your culture?
- How do you think your culture has shaped you? How has it influenced your values, preferences, and beliefs?
- Despite the differences in culture in our class, what are some things that everyone in our class has in common?
- How does culture shape the way we see ourselves, others, and the world?

## Extensions

If you have a multicultural class or have international exchange students in your school, help your class develop a project to foster better understanding and communication among the students. Have students research the customs and culture of the groups that are represented in your classroom or school. Invite the students to plan ways to help students from other cultures feel more welcome.

***Reality is a product of language and culture; that's what I learned.***

—Richard Wiley,

Returned Peace Corps Volunteer, Korea

***\*An enduring understanding:***

**Everyone has a culture. It shapes how we see the world, ourselves, and others.**

# Features of Culture

**Directions:** For each feature of culture, think of one example common to people in the United States or in the country where you were born. Use another sheet of paper if you need more space to write.

1. Styles of dress
2. Ways of greeting people
3. Beliefs about hospitality
4. Importance of time
5. Paintings
6. Values
7. Literature
8. Beliefs about child raising (children and teens)
9. Attitudes about personal space/privacy
10. Beliefs about the responsibilities of children and teens
11. Gestures to show you understand what has been told to you
12. Holiday customs
13. Music
14. Dancing
15. Celebrations
16. Concept of fairness
17. Nature of friendship
18. Ideas about clothing
19. Foods
20. Greetings
21. Facial expressions and hand gestures
22. Concept of self
23. Work ethic
24. Religious beliefs
25. Religious rituals
26. Concept of beauty
27. Rules of polite behavior
28. Attitude toward age
29. The role of family
30. General worldview

# ABOUT THE CHOREOGRAPHER

## Abdel R. Salaam

Born in Harlem in 1950, Mr. Salaam began his artistic training at the age of five with the study of music through piano, xylophone, and glockenspiel. At the age of nine, he began to study classical viola, and by age eleven he was playing the alto saxophone, an interest, which grew out of his love for jazz music. Upon graduation from the High School of Music and Art in 1968, Mr. Salaam was accepted at Lehman College through the S.E.E.K. program. His college years were informed by the peak of the Black Power Movement, African American Cultural Nationalism, and a new African centered identity that swept college campuses in the late 1960s and early 70s. During this period Lehman professor and dancer/choreographer Joan Miller approached Salaam and convinced him to become one of the College's first dance majors in its fledging B.F.A. program. With faculty such as Louis Falco, Chuck Davis, John Parks, Miguel Godreau, Nadine Revine, and Ms. Miller, the College's dance department soon rivaled the excellence of the Julliard School.

In 1972, after training for only 2-1/2 years, Mr. Salaam was offered a place in the Alvin Ailey Dance Company. He chose, however, to remain in school and follow his own creative directions. In the years to come, Mr. Salaam performed as a principal dancer and soloist with numerous New York dance companies, and ultimately became Associate Artistic Director of the internationally acclaimed Chuck Davis Dance Company. In 1981, Mr. Salaam co-founded Forces of Nature Dance Theater with his partner Olabamidele Husbands and his wife and former principle dancer, Dyane Harvey.

The Forces of Nature Dance Theatre's mission is three-fold:

1. To develop a choreographic "language" that educates as well as empowers the viewer with a synthesis of images of the African Diaspora and American culture.
2. To stress through the creative arts the importance of living with respect and in harmony with nature.
3. To utilize arts and culture as tools for enhancing human services and social reform.

After several years of artistic and spiritual service, Mr. Salaam was offered a commission in 1988 by the Very Reverend James Parks Morton, Dean of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, to help create the first African Episcopal Mass for the Church using African dance and music as a liturgical voice. He and his company also led the historic procession for Nelson and Winnie Mandela on their visit to New York in 1990.

Mr. Salaam is the recipient of numerous honors including fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Pennsylvania and New York state arts councils; the Dance Africa Award; and the Monarch Award from the National Council of Art and Culture. He has toured and won critical acclaim as a director, performer, and a choreographer in Europe, Africa, Central America, and throughout the United States.

Through his company Forces of Nature Dance Theatre, Mr. Salaam has served as a featured director and choreographer in international dance festivals in Belize, England, Italy, Mexico, Aruba and Russia. Recently, Mr. Salaam and his company received a grant through the New England Foundation for the Arts/ National Dance Project to develop "Rhythm Legacy: The Living Books" which premiered in 2001 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, Harvey Theater. The project was then awarded additional funding to tour the United States during its 2002-2003 season and appeared at TPAC in 2003.

Mr. Salaam recently completed "Katonga. Musical Tales from the Jungle" for Busch Entertainment Corporation at Busch Gardens/Tampa Bay in Florida. The three year project that he choreographed and musically staged received the Entertainment Award for the Best Musical Show in the World within a theme park in 2004.

Mr. Salaam's professional skills include: African drumming; graphic design; costume design and sound design. He and his company are currently Artists in Residence at The Cathedral of St. John the Divine New York. A perpetual seeker, Salaam continues his quest for knowledge, wisdom, understanding and realization on every plane of being he is capable of reaching

# Influences...

## on the Choreographer Abdel R. Salaam and Eclipse

- ◆ Salaam was reared with Baptist and Presbyterian teachings from his mother and Malcolm X's Nation of Islam teachings from his father. Salaam's exposure to Malcolm X and the Prophet Elijah "made an indelible impression against the inescapable backdrop of Christianity in America."
- ◆ He is interested in cycles and the repeat of energy spanning centuries.



Photo by Rob Stack

Abdel Salaam leading a dance class at The Village Cultural Arts Center in Nashville, 2003.

- ◆ His political and spiritual awakening in the 1960s as an African-American shaped him to be a citizen of the world.
- ◆ "Ninety-three percent of the time" Salaam first works out choreographic ideas on himself alone in the dance studio.
- ◆ He considers himself a frustrated filmmaker, therefore he takes dance and applies cinematic rules to it, e.g. in sound effects and lighting. (Insider's note: Listen for a 60-second sound loop from the dinosaurs of *Jurassic Park*.)
- ◆ He owned a clothing store in 1980-84 and did costume illustration for Tony Award-winning costume designer Judy Dearing on Broadway.
- ◆ His relationship to the music creatively drives him.
- ◆ Much of the movement vocabulary for the Christian dancers has a rectilinear quality such as that found in Roman numerals. The movement vocabulary for the Islamic dancers is related to the cursive quality of Arabic and the swirling nature of desert winds.

# Brief Biographies

## **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929–68, American clergyman and civil-rights leader, b. Atlanta, Ga., grad. Morehouse College (B.A., 1948), Crozer Theological Seminary (B.D., 1951), Boston Univ. (Ph.D., 1955). The son of the pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, King became (1954) minister of the Dexter Ave. Baptist Church in Montgomery, Ala. He led the black boycott (1955–56) of segregated city bus lines and in 1956 gained a major victory and prestige as a civil-rights leader when Montgomery buses began to operate on a desegregated basis.

King organized the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), which gave him a base to pursue further civil-rights activities, first in the South and later nationwide. His philosophy of nonviolent resistance led to his arrest on numerous occasions in the 1950s and 60s. His campaigns had mixed success, but the protest he led in Birmingham, Ala., in 1963 brought him worldwide attention. He spearheaded the Aug., 1963, March on Washington, which brought together more than 200,000 people. The protests he led helped to assure the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the year he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The following year King and the SCLC led a campaign for African-American voter registration centered on Selma, Ala. A nonviolent march from Selma to Montgomery was attacked by police who beat and teargassed the protestors, but it ultimately succeeded on the third try when the National Guard and federal troops were mobilized. The events in Selma provoked national outrage, and months later aroused public opinion did much to precipitate passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

King's leadership in the civil-rights movement was challenged in the mid-1960s as others grew more militant. His interests, however, widened from civil rights to include criticism of the Vietnam War and a deeper concern over poverty. His plans for a Poor People's March to Washington were interrupted (1968) for a trip to Memphis, Tenn., in support of striking sanitation workers. On Apr. 4, 1968, he was shot

and killed as he stood on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel (since 1991 a civil-rights museum).

James Earl Ray, a career criminal, pleaded guilty to the murder and was convicted, but he soon recanted, claiming he was duped into his plea. Ray's conviction was subsequently upheld, but he eventually received support from members of King's family, who believed King to have been the victim of a conspiracy. Ray died in prison in 1998. In a jury trial in Memphis in 1999 the King family won a wrongful-death judgment against Loyd Jowers, who claimed (1993) that he had arranged the killing for a Mafia figure. Many experts, however, were unconvinced by the verdict, and in 2000, after an 18-month investigation, the Justice Dept. discredited Jowers and concluded that there was no evidence of an assassination plot.

King's birthday is a national holiday, celebrated on the third Monday in January. King's wife, Coretta Scott King, carried on various aspects of his work until her death in 2006.

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## **Malcolm X**

Malcolm X, 1925–65, militant black leader in the United States, also known as El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, b. Malcolm Little in Omaha, Neb. He was introduced to the Black Muslims while serving a prison term and became a Muslim minister upon his release in 1952. He quickly became very prominent in the movement with a following perhaps equaling that of its leader, Elijah Muhammad. In 1963, Malcolm was suspended by Elijah after a speech in which Malcolm suggested that President Kennedy's assassination was a matter of the "chickens coming home to roost." He then formed a rival organization of his own, the Muslim Mosque, Inc. In 1964, after a pilgrimage to Mecca, he announced his conversion to orthodox Islam and his new belief that there could be brotherhood between black and white. In his Organization of Afro-American Unity, formed after his return, the tone was still that of militant black nationalism but no longer of separation. In Feb., 1965, he was shot and killed in a public auditorium in New York City. His assassins were vaguely identified as Black Muslims, but this is a matter of controversy.

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## **Eclipse: Visions of the Crescent and the Cross**

By Jennifer Dunning

Published: December 23, 2005

Abdel R. Salaam came to dance almost accidentally as a student and athlete at Lehman College in the 1970's. But it didn't take him long to ponder why his college dance teacher talked about the predictability of black students like Mr. Salaam recycling Alvin Ailey in their choreography classes. Why then, he wondered, was it permissible for white students to redo Twyla Tharp? Mr. Salaam likes to think about what lies behind accepted truths. Twenty years ago he founded a company, Forces of Nature, that blended traditional West African and modern dance in distinctive ways, well before that choreographic technique became fashionable. The lithe, stretched bodies of late-20th-century modern dance surged through dance that told the stories of the creation of the world and of black American myths, with intensity and an appreciation for the power of ritual. Now, he and his vibrant company will tackle the historical and cultural conflicts and confluences, as he puts it, of Christianity and Islam in *Eclipse: Visions of the Crescent and the Cross*. Mr. Salaam, who has described himself as "an ecumenical Muslim," combines ballet, hip-hop, martial-arts techniques and even Irish dancing with his more familiar African-contemporary mix in the new work, a journey that begins with the ancient Moors and winds its way through history up to the teaching of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. The score ranges from music by M'bemba Bangoura and Paul Winter, with whom his troupe has performed, to Gregorian chants and Islamic prayers. And the list of guest artists leading the multiracial cast reads like a Who's Who of black modern-dance performers, among them Sarita Allen, Dyane Harvey and Nathan Trice.

## **Dance Review | 'Eclipse: Visions of the Crescent and the Cross' Histories, Danced in Tooth and Claw**

By Jennifer Dunning

Published: December 31, 2005



Erin Baiano for The New York Times

Abdel R. Salaam's new "Eclipse: Visions of the Crescent and the Cross" is a sprawling, visionary piece, astonishing in its ambition, hope and faith.

In program notes for a performance by Mr. Salaam's Forces of Nature company on Thursday night at Aaron Davis Hall, the choreographer describes the evening-length work as a "choreo-journey exploring the conflicts and similarities between Islam and Christianity," from the Crusades on. The product of many years of work, "Eclipse" needs some ruthless editing, particularly in the first half. But it is a one-of-a-kind piece that will likely come to be seen as a signature work for Mr. Salaam and his distinctive way with dance.

Mr. Salaam began early on in his career to blend traditional Afro-Caribbean and American modern-dance forms. One of the things that set him apart from his generation of fusion choreographers is his frequently expressed interest in telling stories that will empower audiences and educate them about the ancient and contemporary cultures of the African diaspora. The stories are told in the bold strokes of a folk tale and animated into full-throttle coursing life by the vibrant dancers of his 25-year-old company. The dances are sometimes messy. "Eclipse" certainly is. But then so is the history that Mr. Salaam intends to depict. Characters and situations representing the cultures and histories of Christianity and Islam appear and disappear in "Eclipse," sometimes almost wistfully inhabiting the same stage space. They perform to adroitly juxtaposed scores that include music by Paul Winter and Michael Wimberly and traditional Koranic prayers and Gregorian chant, in a sumptuously lighted (by Mr. Salaam) and costumed (by Mr. Salaam and 'Dele Husbands) flow.

At times, the characters intersect, as in a first-act marriage between a Celt and a Moor, a stage-filling battle between Crusaders and Muslims, and a final fight between the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. Mr. Salaam and his dancers fly through time and space, touching down in small villages, palaces and sweeping plains in Britain, Spain (with additional

choreography by Sandra Rivera) and West Africa before touching down in the United States in the mid-20th century.

Along the way some veteran guest artists emerge as Christian and Muslim queens (Dyane Harvey and Robin Becker), the Ancestor (Eugene Niles), the Nun (Sarita Allen) and the Seeker (Nathan Trice). But the strongest performing comes - in the strongest section of "Eclipse" - from Armando Braswell as Malcolm X and Corey Baker as King, set to taped segments of sermons and speeches by the two leaders. The imposing, ruggedly muscular Mr. Braswell has a dance that is one of Mr. Salaam's best pieces of choreography, a solo filled with powerful dignity and jagged pain that depicts a man, stripped of his clothing, who also embodies the terrible images of African slaves newly arrived in America.

"Eclipse," which incorporates the seven principles of Kwanzaa in its eight "visions" or segments, ends with a fight between the men, who fall to the ground, and two processions through the audience and onto the stage. Gospel-service celebrants in black sing and reach up to the heavens. Then Muslim men and women clad in flowing white push just as jubilantly into the ground as they surge forward. They join onstage, obliterating the sight of the two bodies, in a finale that suggests that if we do not live together, we die together.

# Web Links for Eclipse: Visions of the Crescent and the Cross

## General Historical & Cultural Topics

<http://www.forcesofnature.org/>

Site for choreographer Abdel R. Salaam's dance company, Forces of Nature.

<http://www.medievalcrusades.com/>

A site designed for students.

<http://www.red2000.com/spain/flamenco/> Overview and history of the flamenco dance form.

[http://www.ipaaa.com/black\\_people\\_early\\_britain\\_europe.htm](http://www.ipaaa.com/black_people_early_britain_europe.htm). A short article about the presence of black people in Europe with many bibliographic references.

## Interfaith Sites

[http://www.religionfacts.com/christianity/charts/christianity\\_islam.htm](http://www.religionfacts.com/christianity/charts/christianity_islam.htm). One page directly comparing Christianity and Islam from a highly informative, unbiased site (religionfacts.com) with information on a majority of the world's religions.

<http://www.beliefnet.com/> An interfaith site with many types of information about the world's major faith traditions.

<http://www.pluralism.org> A project of Harvard University, The Pluralism Project's mission is to help Americans engage with the realities of religious diversity through research, outreach, and the active dissemination of resources.

## Islam

<http://www.islam.com/> "A site worthy of its name." General articles on Islamic belief and practice.

<http://www.toursaudiarabia.com/prayer.html>. Audio file and English translation of the Adhan, the Islamic call for prayer which is heard five times a day in predominantly Muslim locales.

<http://www.islam101.com/quran/letters.html>. A chart with the Arabic alphabet and links to other pages on aspects of Islam.

## Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X

<http://www.cmgworldwide.com/historic/malcolm/about/chronology.htm> The official web site for Malcolm X.

<http://www.thekingcenter.org/>. The official web site for Martin Luther King, Jr.

# Selected and Annotated Bibliography for Eclipse: Visions of the Crescent and the Cross

Armstrong, Karen, *Islam: A Short History (Modern Library Chronicles) 2000.*

\*Nashville Public Library call # 297.09 A736i

**From Amazon.com:**

The picture of Islam as a violent, backward, and insular tradition should be laid to rest, says Karen Armstrong, bestselling author of *Muhammad* and *A History of God*. Delving deep into Islamic history, Armstrong sketches the arc of a story that begins with the stirring of revelation in an Arab businessman named Muhammad. His concern with the poor who were being left behind in the blush of his society's new prosperity sets the tone for the tale of a culture that values community as a manifestation of God. Muhammad's ideas catch fire, quickly blossoming into a political empire. As the empire expands and the once fractured Arabs subdue and overtake the vast Persian domain, the story of a community becomes a panoramic drama. With great dexterity, Armstrong narrates the Sunni-Shi'ite schism, the rise of Persian influence, the clashes with Western crusaders and Mongolian conquerors, and the spiritual explorations that traced the route to God. Armstrong brings us through the debacle of European colonialism right up to the present day, putting Islamic fundamentalism into context as part of a worldwide phenomenon. *Islam: A Short History*, like Bruce Lawrence's *Shattering the Myth* and Mark Huband's *Warriors of the Prophet*, introduces us to a faith that beckons like a minaret to those who dare to venture beyond the headlines. --Brian Bruya

Armstrong, Karen, *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet, 1993.*

Nashville Public Library call# B M952a

**From Library Journal:**

This portrayal of the prophet of Islam and the setting from which he emerged will captivate and enlighten general readers with a newfound understanding of modern events in the Middle East. Armstrong, a former Roman Catholic nun, has shown much insight and sensitivity in her well-researched biography. She interweaves sections on the Western response to Islam and the controversy over Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (LJ 12/88) within her detailed account of Muhammad and the monumental, unifying religion that he introduced to the backward tribal Arabia of the seventh century. The book was first published in Great Britain in 1991 under the title *Muhammad: A Western Attempt To Understand Islam*. Highly recommended. - Paula I. Nielson, *Loyola Marymount Univ. Lib., Los Angeles* Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Baldwin, Lewis V. and Amiri YaSin Al-Hadid (Vanderbilt and TSU professors), *Between Cross and Crescent : Christian and Muslim perspectives on Malcolm and Martin, 2002.*

\*Nashville Public Library call # 323.0922 B1819b

**From Library Journal:**

Historically, Christians and Muslims have had a troubled relationship, and these two books (please see Moucarry title below) nobly aim to generate a dialog between the two faiths. *Between the Cross and Crescent* successfully contrasts the lives of Malcolm X Shabazz and Martin Luther King Jr. and mostly resolves the creative tension between those leaders' philosophies. Baldwin (religious studies, Vanderbilt University) has deep roots in the African-American Christian tradition, and Al-Hadid (Africana studies, Tennessee State University) is a Sunni Muslim. They have written a contrapuntal biography to stress the importance of interfaith dialog and a Pan-African perspective, and to celebrate community as the highest ideal. Freedom, family, gender roles, democracy, and globalization are the major themes in this publication, the second in the publisher's "History of African American Religions" series.

Fletcher, Richard, *The Cross and the Crescent : Christianity and Islam from Muhammad to the Reformation, 2004.*

\*Nashville Public Library call # 261.2709 F614c

**From Amazon.com:**

Richard Fletcher reminds his readers that the scope of his book is limited, even though the story he is telling is not. An adept historian who writes with clarity and expertise, Fletcher sets for himself the nearly impossible task of relating the complex interrelations between the Islamic and Christian worlds from the 7th to the 16th centuries, focusing on the Mediterranean, but touching upon Northern Europe, Asia Minor, and even on the vast reach of the Mongol Empire. Fletcher describes the establishment of Islam in the 7th century and the subsequent rise of the Abbasid Empire a century later and describes the shift from an Islamic society defined by Arab ethnicity to a ruling power defined by religion and culture. Initially, Fletcher explains, Christians were tolerated (but disdained) in the fast-expanding Islamic

world primarily because they provided a link to the ancient Greek and Roman learning their conquerors coveted. However, in less-receptive regions, such as North Africa, Church leaders fled to Sicily and southern France, weakening a Christian presence in those areas.

While Fletcher provides many examples of interaction between the two worlds--including diplomacy, pilgrimage, trade, and most obviously, war (the Crusades)--he maintains that these contacts were never solidified by an earnest attempt on the part of these diverse cultures to "blend." In the best of times there was coexistence. In the worst, there was outright persecution. The reversal of Islamic supremacy took many centuries. Fletcher cannot explain the complex reasons for this in great detail. However, he does provide some provocative insight. The Islamic world flourished when it was most open to ancient thought. Similarly, the groundwork for European hegemony was laid when 13th-century Christian thinkers began to absorb and expand on Islamic learning. By contrast, the Islamic world withdrew "from intellectual receptivity" at the height of its power. There is a lesson to be learned here. The exchange and integration of ideas can be mightier than the sword. --*Silvana Tropea*

Makiya, Kanan, *The Rock : A Tale of Seventh-Century Jerusalem*, 2001.

\*Nashville Public Library call # Fiction Makiyaf

**From Booklist:**

\*Starred Review\* There was a time, impossible as it may seem, when one could be a Muslim and a Jew, simultaneously embracing the Hebrew Scriptures and the prophecy of Muhammad. One such historical figure was K'ab, a seventh-century Jewish convert to Islam who never abandoned Judaism. In history, K'ab was an advisor to the fourth caliph of the Islamic empire. In this wonderful novel, narrated by K'ab's son Ishraq, he is much more. In the wake of the Islamic conquest of Jerusalem, K'ab teaches the Islamic world about the Jewish holy sites, especially the Rock on the mountain from which Muhammad ascended to heaven, on which Jesus overturned the tables, and to which Abraham took Isaac to be sacrificed. Later, Ishraq designs a mosque on that mountain--Mount Zion--the mosque that became the Dome of the Rock, a flashpoint for religious and ethnic tensions ever since. This is historical fiction at its most ambitious and successful. It fully immerses the reader in the world of seventh-century Jerusalem, exploring historical relationships and events with a sensitivity that nonfiction couldn't hope to conjure. Anyone seeking an engaging introduction to early Islamic history would be hard-pressed to make a more compelling and accurate choice than this novel. *John Green Copyright © American Library Association.*

Moucarry, Chawkat, *The Prophet & the Messiah : An Arab Christian's Perspective on Islam & Christianity*, 2001

\*Nashville Public Library call # 261.27 M924p

**Continued from *Library Journal* review on *Between Cross and Crescent: Christian and Muslim perspectives on Malcolm and Martin* above:**

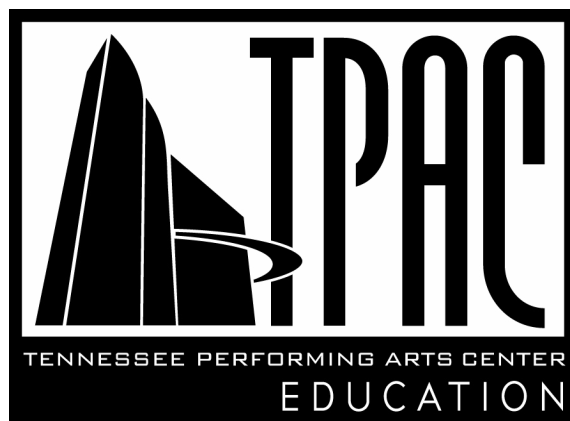
*The Prophet & the Messiah* is an equally remarkable book. Whereas the Martin/Malcolm title was written primarily from a socio-cultural perspective, this one employs a religious viewpoint, intermingling East/West and sophic/mantic perspectives. Moucarry (Islamic studies, All Nations Christian Coll., England) was born in Syria, has lived in both Muslim and Christian communities, and received a Ph.D. from the Sorbonne. Although he is respectful of and sensitive to both religions, he clearly makes the case for the truth of Christianity, at the same time assuring the reader that absolute impartiality does not exist anyway. His 20 chapters include discussions of the Scriptures, key doctrines (e.g., Godhead, sin and salvation), Jesus Christ, Muhammad, and contemporary issues. Helpful appendixes list Muslim theologians and mystics and show a historical time line of Christian-Muslim relations. Although Moucarry's book was written for evangelical Christian readers and Baldwin/Al-Hadid's for college students, they both carry the message to any believer that there is one God, one humanity, one world. Both titles are highly recommended for general and student readerships in public and academic libraries. Gary P. Gillum, Brigham Young Univ., Provo, UT Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Smith, Jonathan Z. ed. with William Scott Green, assoc. ed with The American Academy of Religion, *The Harper Collins Dictionary of Religion*, 1995.

\*Nashville Public Library call # 200 H295 (reference only)

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