

ADVANCED**A HISTORICAL PINCH OF SALT**

*What we know about Islam in its early decades (i.e. the mid-600s AD) is a subject of dispute. For example, Western scholars have in the past debated the early dating of the Quran, whether Islam really started in Arabia, and even the existence of Muhammad. Part of the problem is that there are very few materials dating from this period external to Muslim sources that back up much of the narrative traditionally accepted by Muslims. Key Muslim sources such as the major hadith collections (which contain reports of what Muhammad is said to have spoken and done) were put together more than 200 years after the death of Muhammad.*

*We can be fairly certain of a historical core that probably did happen, for example that Muhammad lived in Mecca, then went to Medina and somehow won back the support of the Meccans. Traditional Muslim accounts of the origins of Islam include many more specifics, some including degrees of detail such as Muhammad's recommendation that the right shoe be put on first. Those scholars using the best techniques of historical analysis generally accept that there was a period of development during which Islam came to take on the forms which are recognizable today. Nevertheless, traditional Muslim accounts are widely held in the Muslim community, and it is important to understand and appreciate them for what they are.*