Chapter 1  Prehistory

For an illustration of a variety of scholarly views on the pre-Islamic period see the collection of articles assembled in F. E. Peters (ed.), *Arabs and Arabia on the Eve of Islam*, Aldershot, Ashgate Variorum, 1999.

The foundations of Islam

For a sense of the world at the time prior to the rise of Islam, the power elements at play, and the extent of continuity between the Islamic empire and late antiquity see Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1993.

The Near East before Islam


The situation in the Arabian peninsula

For Christians in Arabia, the standard source is J. Spencer Trimingham, *Christianity Among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, London, Longman, 1979, chapter 5.


**Religion in the Arabian peninsula**


**The significance of Central Arabia**


**Prehistory in Muslim identity**


**The notion of jāhiliyya**

A concordance of the Qur’ān can be helpful in seeing the sense of the word jāhiliyya in the scripture. For example, using the tools available at [http://corpus.quran.com/morphologalsearch.jsp](http://corpus.quran.com/morphologalsearch.jsp) one may enter the “root” letters (in lower case letters) jhl (the root of the word jāhiliyya) and return the 24 passages in which it is found in both Arabic (with the word containing the root jhl highlighted) and in English.

For some understanding of the way in which the idea of jāhiliyya was transmitted and controlled in classical times see Rina Drory, “The Abbasid Construction of the Jahiliyya: Cultural Authority in the Making,” *Studia Islamica*, 83 (1996), 33–49.

**Discontinuity of Islam with the past**


**The role of the Abrahamic myth**


**The significance of prehistory**