Crone, “The Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World”, Ch.1

Religious Landscape:
- Byzantines – Christian // Sasanians – Zoroastrian – some Christian Sasanians wished for a united Christian empire like that of the Byzantines – conflicting religious ideologies
- Md. seen as a catalyst – emigration (hijra) – turning point – lead to organised community – expelled Jewish tribes / Kaba used as point of circumambulation – “founded by Abraham and his son Ishmael” (pg 8) – use of monotheistic ideas

Political Landscape:
- Middle East – bipolar zone = two superpowers – Sasanian and Byzantine empire
- Arabia “inhabited by a mostly poor and partly mobile population” (pg 2) – lack of a complex political system
- Arabs – appeared unstable/ unable to organise political movement – coordinated conquest of the two empires – destroying Sasanian empire – new faith spread into states/ institutions – transforming the empires

Lapidus, 10-17

Religious Landscape:
- Imperial states – committed to monotheism // Arabia – largely pagan
- Bedouins largely polytheistic – Ka’ba centre of pilgrimage – shared sanctuary environment – assimilation of religious practices
- ‘vogue’ of monotheism

Political Landscape:
- Arabia “stood on the periphery of the imperial societies” (pg10) which were in a period of stagnation in comparison to the evolution of the rest of the region
- Political fragmentation
- “evolutionary change” hadn’t absorbed “Arabia into the general civilization of the Middle East” (pg14)
- Mecca – diverse complexity of political and economic links – allowed for the emergence of new concepts to be integrated into society

Arabia was in ferment: a society in the midst of constructive political experiments was endangered by anarchy; strong clan and tribal powers threatened to overwhelm the fragile forces of agricultural stability, commercial activity, and political cohesion. It was a society touched by imperial influences but without a central government; marked by the monotheistic religions but without an established church; susceptible to Middle Eastern ideas but not permeated by them. Arabia had yet to find its place in the Middle Eastern world. Here Muhammad was born, was vouchsafed the Quran, and here he became the Prophet of Islam.

(pg17)