

# Islamic civilization timeline and definition

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Image 1. Pictured is the minaret, or spiral, of the Great Mosque of Samarra, Iraq. The mosque was built in the 9th century during the 'Abbasid rule of the Islamic empire, and still stands today. Photo by: Ayman Yaqoob/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

The Islamic civilization stretches far and wide, a blend of many peoples and cultures. The roots of this civilization can be traced to the vast Islamic empire.

The Islamic empire was created in the seventh and eighth centuries A.D. It became unified by conquering neighboring countries. That initial unity fell apart in the ninth and 10th centuries. But the empire was later reborn, this time to last for more than a thousand years. Throughout the period, the countries that made up the empire constantly rose, fell and were transformed. They absorbed other cultures and peoples, built great cities and established and grew a vast trade network. The empire also brought about great advances in philosophy, science, law, medicine, art, architecture, engineering and technology.

A central element of the Islamic empire is the Islamic religion, also called Islam. Muslims, or people who believe in Islam, can have very different political beliefs and practice their religion in countless different ways, and the Islamic empire reflects that rich blend of differences.

## Background

In the early 600s, a man named Muhammad bin 'Abd Allah (570-632) was beginning to preach new religion called Islam. Muhammad was a brilliant thinker and a prophet, and he went on to found the Islamic empire. Most of what we know of him comes from accounts told after his death.

### Muhammad The Prophet (622–632)

Tradition says that in 610, Muhammad received the first verses of the Koran, which is the Islamic holy book, from God. By 615, he had an established community of followers in his hometown, Mecca, which is in present-day Saudi Arabia.

In 622, Muhammad was forced out of Mecca. He and his community of followers moved to Medina, also in Saudi Arabia. There he built a simple mosque. The mosque became the original center of the Islamic government. In 632, Muhammad died and was buried in his mosque at Medina.

### The Four Rightly Guided Caliphs (632–661)

After Muhammad's death, the growing Islamic community was led by the al-Khulafa' al-Rashidun, or the Four Rightly Guided Caliphs, who were all followers and friends of Muhammad. The four were named Abu Bakr (632–634), 'Umar (634–644), 'Uthman (644–656), and 'Ali (656–661). To them, the word "caliph" referred to a ruler who would follow in Muhammad's footsteps.



### Umayyad Dynasty (661–750)

In 661, a group called the Umayyads took charge of the Islamic movement. The first Umayyad ruler was Mu'awiya, and he and his descendants ruled for 90 years – much longer than any of the Rashidun had ruled. The Umayyad leaders saw themselves as the ultimate leaders of Islam, subject only to God.

The Umayyads ruled while Arab Muslims were conquering nearby lands, and Islam emerged as the major religion and culture of that region. The new society they formed moved its capital from Mecca to Damascus in Syria. Over time, the Islamic empire became both Islamic and Arabic, a blend of Arab culture and the cultures of other Islamic peoples.

Under Umayyad control, the empire grew, stretching from central Asia to the Atlantic Ocean.

### 'Abbasid Revolt (750–945)

In 750, a group called the 'Abbasids seized power from the Umayyads. They moved the caliphate center to Mesopotamia, where modern Iraq is located. The caliph 'Abbasid Al-Mansur, who ruled from 754–775,



founded the city of Baghdad as the new capital. Baghdad, which is in present-day Iraq, became the economic, cultural and scholarly center of the Muslim world.

Under the first two centuries of 'Abbasid rule, the Islamic empire officially became a new multicultural society. It was home to speakers of many languages. People of different religions such as Christians and Jews, and cultural groups like Arabs, who lived mostly in the cities, all lived in the empire.

### **'Abbasid Decline And Mongol Invasion (945–1258)**

By the early 10th century, however, the 'Abbasids were already in trouble. The empire was falling apart, partly thanks to pressure from independent dynasties in what had once been 'Abbasid territories. One of these kingdoms, the Buyid dynasty (945–1055), was located in Iraq and Iran.

In 945, the 'Abbasid caliph al-Mustakfi was removed from power by a Buyid caliph. Then another dynasty called the Seljuks ruled the empire from 1055 to 1194. After that, the empire returned to 'Abbasid control. In 1258, a group from modern-day Asia called the Mongols attacked and destroyed Baghdad, putting an end to the 'Abbasid presence in the empire.

The next important rulers of the Islamic empire were the Mamluks (1250–1517) of Egypt and Syria. A Mamluk sultan named Qutuz defeated the Mongols in 1260 and became the first Mamluk leader of the Islamic empire (1260–1277). He was later killed by a man named Baybars.

Baybars established himself as a Mamluk sultan and ruled over the eastern Mediterranean part of the Islamic empire, the part closest to Greece and Turkey. Under the Mamluks, the leading cities of Damascus and Cairo in Egypt became centers of learning and international business. The Mamluks in turn were conquered by the Ottoman Empire in 1517.

### **Ottoman Empire (1517–1923)**

The Ottoman Empire emerged about 1300 as a small kingdom, and it grew throughout the next two centuries. In 1516–1517, the Ottoman emperor Selim I defeated the Mamluks, and in doing so he nearly doubled his empire's size and took over Mecca and Medina. The Ottoman Empire began to lose power as the world became more modern. It officially came to an end after World War I.



## Quiz

1 Read the list of sentences from the article.

1. *They absorbed other cultures and peoples, built great cities and established and grew a vast trade network.*
2. *The Umayyads ruled while Arab Muslims were conquering nearby lands, and Islam emerged as the major religion and culture of that region.*
3. *Baghdad, which is in present-day Iraq, became the economic, cultural and scholarly center of the Muslim world.*
4. *People of different religions such as Christians and Jews, and cultural groups like Arabs, who lived mostly in the cities, all lived in the empire.*

Which two sentences taken together provide the BEST support for the idea that the Islamic empire was a varied and diverse society?

- (A) 1 and 3
- (B) 2 and 3
- (C) 1 and 4
- (D) 2 and 4

2 Which piece of evidence explains the cause of followers to have faith in Muhammad?

- (A) In the early 600s, a man named Muhammad bin 'Abd Allah (570-632) was beginning to preach new religion called Islam.
- (B) Tradition says that in 610, Muhammad received the first verses of the Koran, which is the Islamic holy book, from God.
- (C) By 615, he had an established community of followers in his hometown, Mecca, which is in present-day Saudi Arabia.
- (D) The mosque became the original center of the Islamic government. In 632, Muhammad died and was buried in his mosque at Medina.

3 Read the introduction of the article [paragraphs 1-3].

How does the introduction develop the main idea?

- (A) It demonstrates the problems that the Islamic empire had to overcome in order to rise in the seventh and eighth centuries.
- (B) It summarizes the history and significance of the Islamic empire in relation to Islamic civilization and religion.
- (C) It narrates what it was like to live among the art and architecture of the Islamic empire over a thousand years ago.
- (D) It provides a list of the effects of the Islamic empire on the surrounding regions in Mesopotamia and their people.

How are the sections organized to help develop understanding?

- (A) They use cause and effect structure to contrast the contributions of the Islamic empire with those of the Ottoman Empire after it took power.
- (B) They use cause and effect structure to describe what made Muhammad and his followers create cities that were centers of business and learning.
- (C) They use chronological order to illustrate that the power of the Islamic empire grew steadily in relation to the amount of land it took from nearby dynasties.
- (D) They use chronological order to outline the way different leaders developed and affected the Islamic empire over the course of its history.