



The Middle East in Modern World History

Second Edition

Ernest Tucker

The Middle East in Modern World History

The Middle East in Modern World History examines how global trends over the last 200 years have shaped the Middle East and how these trends were affected by the region's development.

Covering a key period in the history of the Middle East, this book highlights three major trends within the region's development over the past two centuries: the role of the region as a strategic conduit between East and West, the development of the region's natural resources, especially oil, and the impact of a rapidly globalizing world economy on the Middle East.

This new edition extends coverage to the present day and includes more thematic and interpretive discussion on the impact of global migration and the evolution of the roles of women. It also provides more theoretical insights into current historical research and recent developments in the region, firmly placing these developments within their historical context.

Clearly written and supported throughout by maps, images, discussion questions, and suggestions for further reading, as well as including a comprehensive chronology and glossary that enable readers to develop a clearer picture of political, economic, social, and cultural life within the region, *The Middle East in Modern World History* is the perfect textbook for all students of the history of the modern Middle East within a global context.

Ernest Tucker is professor at the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, USA, where he teaches courses on Middle Eastern and Central Asian history. He has published a collection of texts related to nineteenth-century Muslim leader Imam Shamil as well as a study of the eighteenth-century Iranian monarch Nadir Shah. Tucker has also contributed to numerous encyclopedias and dictionaries, as well as publications such as the *Middle East Journal* and *Iranian Studies*.

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Dedication

*I dedicate this book to my mother, Carlyn Collins,
and my father, Ernest Tucker.*

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PREFACE

This text provides an introduction to the modern history of the Middle East. The term “Middle East” will be used to refer to the region of the world between the Nile River in Africa and the Oxus (Amu Darya) River in Central Asia (from west to east), and between the Balkans (in southeastern Europe) and the Indian Ocean (from north to south). The book focuses on the history of this region over the past 200 years.

This was a period in which the Middle East regained its traditional importance as a strategic conduit between East and West. It was also when the region’s riches in natural resources, particularly petroleum, were discovered. Finally, the region became more and more closely linked to the world economy at this time through global trade networks that fed the Industrial Revolution. Although the Industrial Revolution had its earliest impact on Europe, it profoundly affected the rest of the world as well. This work will examine how broad global trends during this period both shaped the modern Middle East and were shaped by it.

The title of this book reflects the enormous changes in the world over the past two centuries. The phrase “Middle East” did not originate in the Middle East, but translations of it are widely used in various Middle Eastern countries today. It began as a description of how the region fits into the modern world, making it useful and appropriate for this text. “Middle East” was coined in the early 1900s to describe how this region fit into the larger strategic context of Asia.

In particular, it was used to discuss the Great Game: the nineteenth-century competition between Britain and Russia for predominance in Asia. Alfred Thayer Mahan, an American naval historian, called the area surrounding the Persian Gulf the “Middle East.”¹ When his article on this subject was reprinted in the London *Times*, it was soon followed by a series of 20 essays by another analyst, Valentine Chirol, compiled into a 1903 book entitled *The Middle Eastern Question*. This publication helped popularize the term quite rapidly.² The earlier phrase for the region between Egypt and Central Asia had been the “Near East,” which, in contemporary academic circles, has become a way to refer specifically to the pre-Islamic era of Middle Eastern civilizations.

The title of this book is designed as a reminder that events that took place in the Middle East, particularly in modern times, often were closely linked to what was happening across the globe in other regions. This work will explore those links, as well as things that set the Middle East apart, to encourage investigation of the history of this key area of the world.

Notes

- 1 A. T. Mahan, “The Persian Gulf and International Relations,” *National Review* (September 1902): 27–45.
- 2 Valentine Chirol, *The Middle Eastern Question or Some Political Problems of Indian Defence* (New York: Dutton, 1903).

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CHRONOLOGY

Note: All dates are Common Era, except BCE = “Before the Common Era” and AH = “Hegira Year.”

3500 BCE	Origins of earliest human civilizations in the Middle East.	1071	Defeat of the Byzantine Empire by Rum Seljuks at Manzikert.
c. 550–330 BCE	Achaemenid (Persian) Empire.	1095–1291	Era of the Christian Crusades in the Eastern Mediterranean.
356–323 BCE	Life of Alexander the Great.		
224–651	Sassanian (Persian) Empire.	1187	Salah al-Din (Saladin) al-Ayyubi defeated Crusader armies at Battle of Hattin.
395–1453	Byzantine (East Roman) Empire.		
570	Birth of Muhammad.	1243	Defeat of Rum Seljuks by Mongols at Kose Dag.
610	According to Muslim belief, angel Gabriel (Arabic: “Jibril”) appeared to Muhammad and began to communicate revelations.	1258	Mongol conquest of Baghdad.
		1250–1517	Mamluk Sultanate.
615	Group of Muhammad’s followers took refuge in Ethiopia.	1299	Osman I became the first independent Ottoman ruler.
		1299–1923	Era of Ottoman rule.
619	Muhammad’s wife Khadija and his uncle Abu Talib died.	1380–1405	Conquests of Tamerlane.
		1389	Battle of Kosovo.
		1453	Ottoman conquest of Constantinople.
620	Muhammad experienced <i>Isra</i> and <i>Miraj</i> .	1501–1722	Safavid dynasty ruled Iran.
622	Hijra (Hegira) from Mecca to Medina.	1514	Ottomans defeated Safavids at Battle of Chaldiran.
624	Battle of Badr.	1520–1566	Reign of Ottoman Sultan Suleyman I (the Magnificent).
625	Battle of Uhud.		
628	Truce of Hdaybiya.		
632	Death of Muhammad.	1529	First Ottoman siege of Vienna.
632–661	Rightly-Guided (Arabic: “Rashidun”) Caliphs.	1571	Battle of Lepanto.
661–750	Umayyad Caliphate.	1683	Second Ottoman siege of Vienna.
680	Battle of Karbala.		
711	Beginning of Muslim conquest of Spain.	1699	Treaty of Karlowitz.
		1740	French King Louis XV recognized as protector of Ottoman Catholic subjects.
750–1258	Abbasid Caliphate.		
762	Founding of Baghdad.		
909–1171	Fatimid Dynasty ruled in North Africa and Egypt.	1745–1818	First Saudi state in Nejd (central Arabian Peninsula).
969	Founding of Cairo.		
970–972	Founding of al-Azhar.		

1774	Treaty of Kuchuk Kaynarja. Russian Empress Catherine the Great acknowledged as protector of Ottoman Orthodox subjects.	1833	Convention of Kutahya.
1791	Russian Jews required to live in special area called the Pale of Settlement.	1839	Muhammad Ali's son Ibrahim destroyed Ottoman Army at Battle of Nezib (near Urfa in modern Turkey).
1794–1925	Qajar dynasty ruled Iran.	1839–1876	Tanzimat era of Ottoman reform.
1798	(July 2) French expeditionary force led by Napoleon Bonaparte occupied Alexandria, Egypt.	1839–1842	First Anglo–Afghan War.
	(July 21) Mamluk commander Murad Bey defeated by French at Battle of the Pyramids.	1840	London Convention curbed power of Muhammad Ali.
	(July 24) Napoleon entered Cairo.	1853–1856	Crimean War.
1804	Serbian nationalist uprising led by Karageorge Petrovic against Ottomans.	1856–1857	Anglo–Persian War.
1805–1849	Muhammad Ali ruled Egypt.	1857–1858	Indian Mutiny.
1811–1812	Muhammad Ali crushed Mamluk political power.	1861	Serfs liberated in Russia.
1818	Ibrahim Pasha, son of Muhammad Ali, destroyed Saudi home village of Diriya in Nejd.	1863	Semi-official Ottoman government bank established.
1821–1832	Greek War of Independence.	1869	Suez Canal completed.
1822	Muhammad Ali began drafting peasants into new army.	1875	Ottoman fiscal and political crisis.
1826	Mahmud II eliminated Ottoman Janissary corps.	1876	(May) European bankers took control of Egyptian finances.
1827	Modern medical school established near Cairo by French doctor Antoine-Barthélémy Clot (Clot Bey). European fleet sank many Ottoman ships at Navarino on October 20.	1877–1878	(December) First Ottoman constitution proclaimed.
1828	Persian–Russian treaty of Turkmenchay.	1878–1880	Russo–Turkish War.
		1879	Second Anglo–Afghan War.
		1881	Persian Cossack Brigade established.
			(June) Muhammad Ahmad proclaimed himself <i>mahdi</i> in the Sudan.
			(December) European bankers took control of Ottoman finances.
		1882	British occupation of Egypt.
		1890	Monopoly on producing and selling tobacco in Iran granted to an Englishman.
		1892	Popular demonstrations and religious opposition forced end of foreign tobacco concession in Iran.
		1897	(April–September) Greco–Turkish War (last Ottoman war victory).

	(August) World Zionist Organization founded by Theodor Herzl.		Armenians in the Ottoman army.
1902	Beginning of modern Saudi state.		(April) Allied landings at Gallipoli.
1905	Beginning of Iranian Constitutional Revolution.		(May) Ottoman “ <i>Tebjir Kanunu</i> ” [Turkish: “Deportation Law”])
1907	Britain and Russia divided Iran into spheres of influence.		issued, causing deportation of hundreds of thousands of Armenians from Anatolia to Syria and their deaths.
1908	(May) Oil discovered in southwestern Iran (first find in central Middle East).		(July) Hussein–McMahon Correspondence began.
	(July) Young Turk Revolution in the Ottoman Empire. Reinstatement of 1876 Ottoman Constitution.	1916	(May) Sykes–Picot Agreement.
1911–1912	Italo–Turkish War.	1917	(June) Beginning of Arab Revolt of 1916.
1912–1913	First Balkan War.	1918	Balfour Declaration issued. Ottomans signed armistice with Allies on a ship in Mudros harbor in the Aegean Sea.
1913	(January) CUP veiled coup in the Ottoman Empire.		Treaty of Versailles signed.
	(June) First Arab Congress held in Paris.	1919	Turkish War of Independence.
	(June–September) Second Balkan War.	1919–1923	(April) San Remo Agreement on Mandate System.
1914–1918	First World War.	1920	(June) Beginning of armed uprising against British rule in Iraq.
1914	(June 28) Assassination of Austrian heir Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina (outbreak of World War I).		(July) French defeated Faisal, independent Hashemite ruler of Syria, at Battle of Maysalun, and established control over Syria.
	(August 2) Secret Ottoman–German pact.		(August) Treaty of Sèvres signed, establishing British mandate of Mesopotamia (renamed “Iraq” in 1921).
	(October 29) Ottoman ships shelled Russian Black Sea ports, causing Russia and Britain to declare war on Ottomans.		(April) Establishment of the Emirate of Transjordan as autonomous under British protection.
	(October 31) Ottoman government ordered all men of military age to report for duty.	1921	
1914–1915	Battle of Sarikamish.		
1915	(February) Enver Pasha issued an order to disarm		

	(August) Establishment of the Hashemite Kingdom of Iraq under Faisal I.	1946	(January–December) Kurdish Republic of Mahabad in Iranian Azerbaijan.
1922	Britain decreed Egypt to be an independent country.		(March) Greek civil war began.
1923	(January) Greek–Turkish population exchange. (July) Treaty of Lausanne signed.		(May) Independent Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan established.
	(September) British mandate of Palestine and French mandate of Syria recognized.	1947	(July) Strategic cooperation agreement between United States and Turkey. King David Hotel bombing in Jerusalem.
	(October) Republic of Turkey established.		(November) UN partition plan for Palestine.
1925	Reza Khan became Reza Shah Pahlavi of Iran.	1948–1949	Israeli War of Independence
1927	Oil discovered in Iraq.		(First Arab–Israeli War).
1929	Western Wall incident and riots in Palestine.	1950–1953	Turkish troops served in Korea under UN command.
1932	Iraq given independence by Britain.	1951	Turkey became NATO member.
1936	Lebanon and Syria to be given independence by France, but treaties not ratified.	1952	Free Officers' Movement in Egypt overthrew King Farouk and proclaimed a republic.
1939	British White Paper on Palestine issued.	1953	(August) Operation Ajax (secret British–U.S. operation to overthrow Iranian Prime Minister Mosaddeq).
1939–1945	Second World War.		(November) Death of Abd al-Aziz, founding ruler of modern Saudi Arabia.
1941	(June–July) Operation Exporter (Allied invasion of Syria and Lebanon). (August) British–Russian invasion of Iran. Deposition of Reza Shah and accession of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi to Iranian throne.	1955	(February) Creation of Baghdad Pact (also known as “Central Treaty Organization” or CENTO).
1942	First and Second Battles of El Alamein between Germany and Allied forces.		(September) Nasser signed major arms agreement with Czechoslovakia.
1943	Lebanon given independence by France.	1956	(June) Gamal Abdel Nasser became president of Egypt.
1945	Syrian given independence by France. Creation of Arab League.		(July) Nasser nationalized Suez Canal.

	(October) Suez Crisis, resulting in Second Arab–Israeli War.		(June 5) Israeli jets attacked Arab airfields. By end of June 6, Israel wiped out most of the Egyptian, Jordanian, Syrian, and Iraqi air forces.
1958	Military coup in Iraq, ending Hashemite monarchy.		
1958–1961	United Arab Republic, uniting Syria and Egypt.		(June 7) Israeli General Dayan authorized troops to occupy Jerusalem’s Old City.
1959	Iran–U.S. defense agreement.		(June 8) Israel secured control of Sinai Peninsula. American reconnaissance ship USS <i>Liberty</i> attacked by Israeli units.
1960	(May) Army staged nonviolent coup in Turkey. (August) Cyprus given independence as a republic. (September) Establishment of OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries).		(June 9) Syria accepted ceasefire at 3 a.m. General Dayan ordered his troops at 7 a.m. to begin land invasion of Syria. By nightfall, Israeli forces secured Golan Heights.
1962	Outbreak of civil war in North Yemen.		(June 11) Lasting ceasefire arranged to end fighting. (June 27) Israel incorporated East Jerusalem and adjacent areas of the West Bank into Jerusalem’s municipal boundaries.
1963	White Revolution in Iran.		(August) Six-Day War forced Egypt to end its involvement in Yemen. (August 29) Khartoum Summit.
1964	(May) Palestinian National Charter established Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). (October) Status of Forces Bill gave immunity to U.S. military serving in Iran and their families.		
1967	Family Protection Law reformed marriage, divorce, and family law in Iran.		
	Six-Day War (Third Arab–Israeli War):	1969	Lebanon signed Cairo Agreement permitting PLO to launch attacks from Lebanese soil.
	(April) Major aerial battle over Golan Heights between Syria and Israel. (May 18) Egypt asked United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) to leave Sinai and closed straits of Tiran to Israeli traffic.	1970	Death of Gamal Abdel Nasser. Anwar Sadat became Egypt’s leader. (February) Hafez al-Assad became Syria’s leader. (August) Bahrain became independent from Britain.
	(May 30) King Hussein signed surprise mutual defense treaty with Egypt.	1971	

	(October) Celebration of 2,500 years of monarchy in Iran.		(August) CIA issued report stating that Iran was not on verge of revolution.
	(December) United Arab Emirates formed.		(September 8) Thousands of protestors demonstrated in Tehran.
1973	(October 6) Syria and Egypt launched surprise war against Israel on Jewish holy day of Yom Kippur. (Fourth Arab–Israeli War).		(October) General strike shut down Iran’s economy. Ayatollah Khomeini exiled from Iraq to France.
	(October 16) Huge oil price increase.	1979	(January 16) Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi left Iran.
1974	(July 15) Cyprus President Makarios deposed.		(February 1) Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Iran.
	(July 20) Turkish troops landed on Cyprus to protect Turkish Cypriots.		(March 26) Israel–Egypt Peace Treaty signed.
1975	(February) Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus established.		(October) Shah of Iran allowed to enter United States for medical treatment.
	(December) Black Saturday in Beirut began first round of Lebanese Civil War.		(November 4) U.S. Embassy in Tehran seized and its diplomats taken hostage.
1976	(June) Syria intervened in the Lebanese Civil War, keeping troops there until 2005.		(November 20) Saudi dissidents seized Mecca’s Grand Mosque. November 20 was also the first day of 1400 A.H.: beginning of the Islamic fifteenth century.
	(October) Ceasefire declared to be “end” of Lebanese Civil War.		(December 24) First Soviet troops entered Afghanistan.
1977	(March) Lebanese leader Kemal Jumblatt assassinated in attack linked to Syria.	1980	(September 12) Military coup in Turkey.
	(November) Surprise visit of Sadat to Israel began process leading to Camp David peace negotiations.		(September 22) Saddam Hussein invaded Iran.
1978	(January 8) Massacre of protestors in Qom, Iran, led to cycle of demonstrations in Iran every forty days.	1981	(January 20) U.S. hostages in Iran released.
	(March) Operation Litani resulted in Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon.	1982	(October 6) Egyptian President Anwar Sadat assassinated by Islamic militants.
			(February) Massacre of Muslim activists in Hama, Syria.

1983	<p>(June–August) Lebanon War conducted by Israel.</p> <p>(April) U.S. embassy in Beirut hit by suicide bomber.</p> <p>(October) Suicide bombings against U.S. and French troops in Lebanon killed 241 American and 58 French soldiers.</p> <p>(December) PLO moved headquarters to Tunis, Tunisia.</p>	<p>1991</p> <p>1992</p>	<p>(January 17) Start of the military campaign in Operation Desert Storm to remove Iraq from Kuwait.</p> <p>(February 28) U.S. President Bush announced ceasefire in Operation Desert Storm, declaring Kuwait liberated.</p> <p>(March) Operation Provide Comfort established no-fly zone over northern Iraq.</p> <p>Operation Southern Watch established no-fly zone over southern Iraq.</p> <p>(April) First Hamas suicide bombing attack in West Bank.</p> <p>(September 13) Oslo I Accord signed between Israel and the PLO.</p> <p>Israel–Jordan peace treaty.</p> <p>(September 24–28) Oslo II Accord signed between Israel and the PLO.</p> <p>(November 4) Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin shot in Tel Aviv.</p> <p>(February) Osama bin Laden issued fatwa against United States and allies.</p> <p>(August) Al-Qaeda bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania resulted in deaths of over 300 people.</p> <p>Turkey became candidate for full membership of the European Union.</p> <p>(May) Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon.</p> <p>(October) Attack on U.S.S. <i>Cole</i> in Yemen.</p> <p>(July) Camp David Summit.</p> <p>(September) Visit of Ariel Sharon to Temple Mount;</p>
1984–1887 1984	<p>Tanker war in Persian Gulf.</p> <p>(February) Multinational Force left Lebanon.</p>	1993	
1985	<p>(August) Beginning of Kurdish unrest in Turkey.</p> <p>Lebanese Hezbollah formally declared its mission.</p>		
1987	<p>(May) Iraqi missile attack on USS <i>Stark</i>.</p> <p>(July) UN Resolution 598 to end Iran–Iraq War. Ceasefire took effect in July 1988.</p> <p>(December) First Palestinian Intifada began.</p>	<p>1994</p> <p>1995</p>	
1988	<p>(July) USS <i>Vincennes</i> shot down Iranian civilian airliner.</p> <p>(November) Palestinian “Declaration of Independence” issued.</p>	1998	
1989	<p>(February 14) Ayatollah Khomeini issued fatwa calling for death of British author Salman Rushdie.</p> <p>(February 15) Last Soviet troops left Afghanistan.</p> <p>(June) Death of Ayatollah Khomeini; Ali Khamenei chosen as new Supreme Leader.</p>	<p>1999</p> <p>2000</p>	
1990	<p>Iraq invaded Kuwait.</p>		

2001	<p>Beginning of al-Aqsa Intifada. (September 9) Assassination of Afghan warlord Ahmad Shah Massoud. (September 11) Terrorist acts carried out in New York and Washington by al-Qaeda teams.</p>	2009	<p>(November) Israel placed blockade on Gaza that continued intermittently over the next three years. (December) U.S.–Iraq Status of Forces Agreement approved.</p>
2002	<p>(October 7) Beginning of Operation Enduring Freedom (Invasion of Afghanistan by United States and allies). First UN <i>Arab Human Development Report</i> issued.</p>	2010	<p>(January) Israeli army invaded Gaza Strip for three weeks. (May) Israel boarded and seized six ships of “Gaza Freedom Flotilla” coming from Turkey. Incident worsened historically good Israeli–Turkish relations.</p>
2003	<p>Beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom (Invasion of Iraq by United States and its allies).</p>		<p>(December) Political suicide of street vendor in Tunisia led to political upheaval, which spread to numerous other Arab countries in 2011.</p>
2004	<p>Death of Yasser Arafat.</p>		<p>(February) Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak forced to leave office.</p>
2005	<p>Israel removed its troops and settlers from Gaza Strip.</p>	2011	<p>(May) United States hunted down and killed Osama Bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan.</p>
2006	<p>(January) Hamas won large plurality in first Palestinian Legislative Council elections since 1996. (March 2006–June 2007) Conflict between Fatah and Hamas. (May) First government of Iraq under new constitution took office.</p>		<p>(July) Beginning of the first phase of the Syrian Civil War (October) Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi killed in his hometown of Sirt, Libya.</p>
	<p>(June–July) Operation “Summer Rains” (Israeli incursion into Gaza). (July–August) War between Hezbollah and Israel.</p>		<p>(December) Formal end of “Operation Iraqi Freedom” in Iraq (June) Muhammad Mursi elected president of Egypt.</p>
	<p>(November) Operation “Autumn Clouds” (Israeli incursion into Gaza).</p>	2012	<p>(May–August) Gezi Park protests in Istanbul. (June) Hassan Rouhani elected president of Iran.</p>
2008	<p>(February–June) Members of Hamas and other Gaza militants shot Qassam rockets into Israel.</p>	2013	

	(July) Military coup in Egypt overthrew Muhammad Mursi, who was replaced by General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi as president.	2016	(July) Attempted military coup in Turkey blamed on followers of Fethullah Gulen.
2014	(June) ISIL's leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi proclaimed "caliphate" in Mosul.	2017	(June) Muhammad bin Salman became crown prince of Saudi Arabia. Beginning of diplomatic crisis between Qatar and other Persian Gulf Arab states.
	(December) Formal end of "Operation Enduring Freedom" in Afghanistan		(November) Demise of ISIL as a political entity.
2015	(January) Salman became king of Saudi Arabia	2018	(January) Beginning of Turkish economic crisis.
	(July) Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) nuclear agreement signed between Iran, the U.S., Russia, China, the U.K., France, Germany, and the E.U.		(May) U.S. withdrew from the JCPOA
			(June) Rejep Tayyip Erdogan re-elected Turkey's president with greatly expanded executive powers.

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

Except for names that have standard recognized spellings in English, all Arabic, Persian, and Turkish names are transliterated generally according to the IJMES style, except that cedillas, diacritical marks, and final “h”s are omitted. Turkish “c” is transliterated as “j.” The Glossary indicates common variant spellings of names.

1

The Middle East in Early Islamic History

INTRODUCTIONS

Civilization in the Middle East

To set the stage for discussion of modern developments, it is helpful to begin with an overview of the region's deeper historical contexts. The origins of civilization in the **Middle East** can be found in **Mesopotamia** and the Nile River valley in Egypt around 3500 BCE. Mesopotamia (located in modern Iraq) was the center of a series of the earliest civilizations in human history. Possibilities for irrigated cultivation near the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in Mesopotamia paralleled the agricultural potential of the steady flow of the Nile River in Egypt. The regular and constant water supply available in both places became the key ingredient for civilizations to flourish. From such beginnings, civilization spread along the shores of the Mediterranean and inland throughout the arable parts of the Middle East.

Sassanian Empire

By the sixth century BCE, the **Achaemenid Empire** controlled a large part of the modern Middle East, with its center in Mesopotamia and Persia. It was followed by several other empires that dominated a similar region, most recent of which before the rise of **Islam** was the **Sassanian Empire**. It arose in the second

century CE and ruled over much of the eastern Middle East until defeated by the Muslim conquerors of Persia in the seventh century CE. The Sassanian state religion was **Zoroastrianism**, a dualistic monotheism with origins in the teachings of the prophet Zoroaster, who lived in Iran probably before the sixth century BCE. It focuses on the eternal struggle of good and evil, using water and fire as cleansing agents for ritual purification.

Another very important aspect of the Sassanian Empire was its use of elements of Greek and Hellenistic culture spread across Asia by Alexander the Great and his successors between the fourth and first centuries BCE. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in the scientific and academic center of Gundeshapur. Located in modern southwestern Iran, Gundeshapur was founded by the Sassanians in the third century CE. It was described as a place where Iranian, Greek, Arab, Indian, and Roman scientists were encouraged to visit, do research, and exchange ideas. There, translations of many ancient scientific works were made into **Pahlavi**, a written form of the Persian language used by the Sassanian rulers.

Byzantine Empire

By the end of the first century BCE, Rome had taken control of all the coastal areas of the

Eastern Mediterranean, including much of the western Middle East. Under Roman rule, this area became closely linked with Europe and North Africa in a single political and economic unit. Even areas not directly annexed became strongly influenced by the Roman Empire, the most powerful political and cultural entity in this region for centuries. It used two official languages, Greek and Latin, with Greek predominating in its eastern domains. When the Roman capital was transferred from Rome to **Constantinople**, founded in 330 CE on the site of the ancient city of Byzantium, the influence of Greek culture and language became gradually stronger. After the Roman Empire split into eastern and western halves late in the fourth century CE, the Eastern Roman Empire, now governed from Constantinople, developed into the Byzantine Empire. Over many decades in the sixth and seventh centuries CE, it continually fought the Sassanian Empire for control of the Middle East.

By the fourth century CE, Christianity had become the dominant religion in the Roman-ruled Middle East. From this time on, the state religion of the Byzantine Empire evolved into Orthodox Christianity. Christianity had emerged as an independent religion out of the complex milieu of first-century CE Jewish Palestine. As Roman imperial rule over Palestine was being consolidated at that time, Jews, as well as early Christians, were continually challenged by Roman authority at first because they could not recognize Roman pagan gods. By the Byzantine era several hundred years later, Christianity had become *the* official imperial Roman faith. The Byzantine emperor was also head of the church, joining secular and religious authority in a relationship sometimes called “caesaropapism.”

MUHAMMAD IBN ABDULLAH

The Arabian Context

On the edges of the **Sassanian** and **Byzantine empires**, the Arabian Peninsula was an important trade conduit for both. Merchants from its

cities did business with traders from many places, exporting and importing spices as well as other valuable commodities. Cities in the peninsula were also good places to bargain for goods coming from Africa and for slaves being imported from there. One of the main trading cities in the western part of the peninsula known as the Hejaz was **Mecca**.

According to Muslim tradition, Mecca’s history can be traced to **Abraham** (called in Arabic “Ibrahim”). He was believed to have built the **Kaaba** (a black stone structure surrounding a meteorite located in the center of Mecca) in ancient times helped by his eldest son Ishmael (corresponding to the Biblical Ishmael and called in Arabic “Ismail”), when the inhabitants of the place then called “Bakka” had fallen away from Abraham’s belief in one god. Apart from this tradition, little is known about the Kaaba before the 400s CE.

By Muhammad’s time, the Kaaba served as a place to worship deities revered by various Arab tribes. Its key god was Hubal, venerated there by the **Quraysh** tribe that had ruled Mecca for two centuries by the early 600s CE. The Quraysh made their money as merchants and traders as Mecca prospered under their rule. Arabia’s stark terrain meant that life there remained a constant struggle. **Bedouin** tribes engaged in continual low-level conflicts with each other. Each year, there was a temporary truce and pilgrimage to Mecca to pay homage to tribal gods and drink from the sacred well of **Zamzam**. The pilgrimage was also an occasion for major tribal disputes to be mediated, debts to be paid, and much trade to occur.

Muhammad’s Life

Muhammad was born into the **Banu Hashim**, an important subgroup of the Quraysh, in 570 CE. His father died before he was born, and his mother passed away when he was a young child, so he was raised in the household of his uncle Abu Talib, leader of the Banu Hashim. After he grew up, Muhammad became a merchant and at age 25 married Khadija, a widow

15 years older than him. He was married to Khadija for 25 years and took no more wives while she was alive.

Muhammad had several daughters and sons by Khadija, but the only one recognized by all Muslims to have survived him was his daughter **Fatima**. Descendants of Muhammad through her are given the honorific titles *sharif* (“noble”) or *sayyid* (“lord”). As Muhammad’s only universally recognized descendants, they are respected by both **Sunni** and **Shii** Muslims, but Shii Muslims value this lineage connection more highly.

Revelation

Muhammad would retire to a cave near Mecca by himself to meditate for several weeks each year. The Muslim belief is that in the year 610 CE, during one of these sessions, the angel Gabriel (called in Arabic “Jibril”) appeared and commanded Muhammad to recite the following:

Recite, in the name of your Lord who created man from a (mere) clot of congealed blood. Recite, and your Lord is the Most Generous. He, who taught [use of] the pen, taught man what he did not know. (Quran 96:1–5)

He received no more revelations for three years, but then they resumed. After Muhammad’s death, his revelations were compiled into the **Quran**, the foundational text of Islamic scripture. Quranic verses revealed to Muhammad when he was still in Mecca focused on man’s responsibility to believe in one god, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment followed by heaven and hell, and signs of God’s presence in daily life.

Muhammad’s wife **Khadija** was the first to recognize him as a true prophet. She was followed in this belief by his cousin **Ali** and then by Muhammad’s close friend **Abu Bakr**. When Muhammad preached in public about what had been revealed to him, he was ignored or ridiculed by most of his fellow Meccans, although a

few became his followers. They became known as “**Muslims**” or followers of “**Islam**.” “Islam” can be defined as “submitting to God’s message as communicated to Muhammad.” Muhammad made some people angry when he recited verses condemning idol worship and polytheism.

His monotheistic message threatened Mecca’s city fathers, in particular those from his own Quraysh tribe. They were guardians of the Kaaba, focal point of Mecca’s polytheistic worship. It functioned as the center for pilgrimages upon which much trading wealth was based. A group of the city’s merchants offered to arrange a choice marriage for Muhammad, bringing him into the elite if only he would stop preaching, but he refused.

EARLY MUSLIM COMMUNITY

Muslims under Pressure

In 615 CE, some of Muhammad’s followers took refuge in Ethiopia and two years later, leaders of other Quraysh clans declared a boycott against the Banu Hashim clan until it withdrew protection from him. Although this ended when the Banu Hashim refused to disown Muhammad, he continued to be a liability for his tribal group. Two more blows came in 619 (known later as the “Year of Sorrow”), when his wife Khadija and his uncle **Abu Talib** died, leaving him without financial or family support.

Islamic tradition records that just when his personal situation had reached this low point, Muhammad experienced in 620 the *Isra* and *Miraj*: two parts of a miraculous one-night journey. In the *Isra*, he was carried on a mystical winged horse (“Buraq”) from Mecca to “the farthest mosque” (Arabic: “*al-masjid al-aqsa*”), later identified by Muslims with the al-Aqsa **Mosque** in Jerusalem. In the *Miraj*, Muhammad was reported to have been taken on a tour of heaven and hell, and spoken with earlier prophets such as Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Soon after this, a delegation from **Yathrib** (a town

later called “**Medina**” located 200 miles north of Mecca) came to Muhammad and asked him to mediate between opposing tribes who had been at war there for years.

Hijra (Hegira)

Sensing a good opportunity to leave Mecca, Muhammad told his followers in 622 to go to Yathrib, which they did. When he learned of a plot against him, Muhammad slipped away with Abu Bakr and arrived in Yathrib himself soon after them. His Meccan followers who went there became known as the *muhajirun* (emigrants) or “those who made the *hijra*.” The importance of the *hijra* (**hegira**) in Islamic history is recognized by the fact that the Muslim calendar begins with the year when Muhammad and the *muhajirun* emigrants fled from Mecca.

Among the first things Muhammad did on arrival in Yathrib (soon renamed “Madinat al-Nabi” [“City of the Prophet” or simply “Medina”]) was to create a document later known as the “**Constitution of Medina**.” It specified rights and duties for all of Medina’s inhabitants and relationships between different groups there, including those between Muslims, Jews, and other People of the Book. The term “**People of the Book**” refers to other monotheists such as Jews and Christians, whom Muslims accepted as legitimate believers in God. The Constitution of Medina defined the community as the *umma*, an Arabic word that came to be used to describe the community of all Muslims in the world.

Sections of the Quran revealed at Medina focused on the creation of a Muslim community: a task that defined the Medinan period of Muhammad’s leadership. Muslim converts from among Medina’s natives became known as *ansar* (“helpers”), because they helped Muslim emigrants from Mecca find a home there. To transcend family loyalties and promote Muslim unity, Muhammad had his close companions among the “emigrants” and “helpers” choose spiritual brothers, with Muhammad himself

choosing his son-in-law Ali as his own spiritual brother.

Meccans against Muslims

After the hegira, Mecca’s leaders confiscated the properties of those “emigrants” who had fled with Muhammad to **Medina**. These emigrants, in turn, began raiding Meccan caravans: acts legitimized by Quranic revelations Muhammad continued to receive. While the attacks interfered with Mecca’s trade, they provided needed wealth for the Muslims. Hostilities culminated in the March 624 **Battle of Badr**: a significant victory for Muslim forces against great odds. Muhammad and his followers saw this success as a confirmation of divine support, which strengthened the Prophet’s position in Medina.

The Meccan defeat at Badr committed them to go after Muhammad to regain prestige. When the two forces met again at the mountain of Uhud in 625, the Meccans did win a modest victory but were unable to crush the Muslim forces totally. New Quranic verses revealed to Muhammad that this defeat was partly punishment for disobedience to God and partly a test of Muslim determination. Mecca’s chief **Abu Sufyan** then assembled a large force to attack Medina directly and get rid of the Muslims once and for all.

Despite diplomatic efforts, Muhammad failed to prevent the formation of a tribal confederation against him. When the Meccans arrived at Medina with 10,000 men against the 3,000 Muslims there and began a siege, Muhammad tried a new tactic. Aided by a Persian convert to Islam with some engineering skills, Muslims dug a trench to supplement Medina’s natural fortifications against a cavalry attack. The Meccans were stymied by this new ditch and abandoned their siege after a few days.

Muhammad received Quranic verses calling for the **hajj** pilgrimage to be made to Mecca, but Muslims had not been able to perform it due to the existing state of hostilities. In 628, Muhammad ordered preparations to be made for a pilgrimage to Mecca despite this situation,

saying that God had promised him that this goal would be fulfilled. Another military confrontation almost took place, but Muhammad and the Meccans finally signed the Truce of Hudaibiya. This agreement ended hostilities between Mecca and the Muslims. Soon after this, the first pilgrimage, not a full hajj pilgrimage but the lesser version of the pilgrimage called an “*umra*,” took place in 629.

Muhammad’s Last Years

After this truce had lasted two years, a proxy war between the allies of the Meccans and Muslims erupted with a battle between the Banu Khuzaa, a group loyal to Muhammad, and the Banu Bakr, with close ties to Mecca. After this skirmish, Muhammad sent a message to Mecca that either Meccans should pay blood money for the dead members of the Khuzaa tribe and end their alliance with the Banu Bakr or the truce of Hudaibiya would be canceled.

The Meccans mistakenly chose to end the truce. In 630, Muhammad attacked and easily conquered Mecca. After he arrived there, he declared forgiveness for its inhabitants’ transgressions against him. At that point, most Meccans became Muslims and statues of Arabian tribal gods near the Kaaba were destroyed. Muhammad’s return to Mecca allowed him to complete the first full hajj pilgrimage. After performing this, he delivered his “Farewell Sermon.” It proclaimed an end to existing tribal feuds upon the creation of this new Islamic *umma* (community). Muhammad died in 632 in Medina, where he was buried.

EARLY ISLAMIC EXPANSION

Building a Muslim Domain

There was considerable debate about who should succeed Muhammad as the *umma*’s leader. **Abu Bakr** (r. 632–634 CE) was fairly quickly recognized as a consensus candidate to become the first **caliph** (“successor”) of Muhammad. His first task was to combat a wave of false prophets and

apostates who had arisen after Muhammad’s demise. Once such rebellions had been quelled, Abu Bakr embarked on new campaigns of conquest to bring more lands and peoples under Islamic control. He began with Mesopotamia (modern Iraq), richest province of the Sassanian Empire, and continued on to Roman Syria, a prosperous area of the Byzantine Empire. Already an elderly man when he assumed power, Abu Bakr died within two years of taking office.

His designated successor **Umar** (r. 634–644 CE) was a talented military commander who led Muslim forces into Iran and Egypt. Since lengthy recent wars between the Byzantines and Sassanians had left both empires exhausted, Islamic armies were able to bring all of Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and the whole Persian Empire under Muslim control by 643 CE. Umar’s administrative skills matched his military talents. He was renowned for a strict approach to governing, but recognized for his sense of justice and fairness. He paid with his life for Muslim success under his rule when he was assassinated by a Persian slave, but just before his death in 644, Umar appointed a committee of six Meccan “emigrants” (but no Medinan “helpers”) to select the next caliph.

The committee’s choice was **Uthman** (r. 644–656 CE): a Meccan with a reputation for being very practical. The Medinan “helpers” were displeased that the Prophet’s cousin and son-in-law Ali had not been chosen instead. Uthman’s first years as caliph, however, went smoothly. He continued Islamic conquests, securing North Africa from the Byzantines. His most enduring achievement was to oversee the production of a formally compiled written text of the Quran. Toward the end of his reign, his government had financial troubles, setting off a revolt against him in Medina. Rebels attacked Uthman’s house and killed him while he was reading the Quran.

After Uthman’s demise, leaders of the *umma* selected Ali (r. 656–661 CE) to succeed him. Ali dismissed several provincial governors with close ties to Uthman, installing his own trusted aides. He also moved the Muslim capital

from Medina to Kufa, a recently established Muslim garrison town in southern Iraq. These changes were not well received in Syria, then being administered by Muawiya, one of Uthman's close kinsmen. These tensions led to the first Muslim civil war, which continued through the brief caliphate of Ali.

Ali fought off numerous challenges to his rule. First, at the "Battle of the Camel," Ali's forces confronted a large army of Muslims from Medina led by two of Muhammad's companions. They were joined by Muhammad's widow Aisha, who sought to avenge Uthman's death. Soon after this, Uthman's relative Muawiya fought Ali at the Battle of Siffin. Although Siffin ended in a stalemate, Ali was killed in 661 by the distraught relative of one of his own mutinous soldiers.

Ali's eldest son (Muhammad's grandson) **Hasan** then served very briefly as caliph. Hasan ultimately agreed to retire to Medina, allowing Muawiya to replace him when he found that he could not secure power. Hostilities ended upon Muawiya's assumption of the caliphate, an event later considered the beginning of the **Umayyad** caliphal dynasty. The period of struggle during Ali's caliphate is often called the **first fitna** (disturbance), a time of conflict that ended the early unity of the Islamic *umma*. Civil conflict between Muslim factions slowed the process of expansion for a number of years, giving the Byzantine Empire time to recover.

Muslims and Those They Conquered

One important aspect of these conquests can be found in the Muslim treatment of non-Muslims in the lands they occupied. All who believed in one God such as Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians were known as "People of the Book" and given *dhimmi* ("protected") status under Islamic law. Those who converted to Islam were treated exactly like other Muslims, enjoying all the same legal rights, but Islamic law prohibited forced conversions.

Those who chose not to convert were allowed to continue their religious practices as

before, and their communities were permitted to retain a certain amount of legal, political, and social autonomy. Their only formal requirements were to pay the *jizya* (an annual tax) and to conduct their religious activities in an inconspicuous manner. One factor that may have aided early Muslim conquests were the doctrinal differences between Christians in different regions of the Byzantine Empire. There were almost no objections recorded by contemporary Egyptian Christian chroniclers to the rule of the early Muslim conquerors, in contrast to the numerous, angry complaints about the rule by fellow Christians who disagreed with them on theological questions.¹ This suggests that in some cases, it may have been easier for Christians to be ruled by Muslims than by fellow Christians with whom they had serious doctrinal disagreements.

THE UMAYYAD CALIPHATE

Arab Exclusivity

The first four caliphs were remembered in Islamic history as the "**Rightly-Guided**" (Arabic: *Rashidun*) caliphs, leading the *umma* when it was still relatively cohesive and united. They were followed by the Umayyad caliphs, who ruled the Islamic *umma* between 661 and 750 with their capital at Damascus. After the last Umayyad ruler was overthrown by the Abbasids in 750, the Umayyads relocated to al-Andalus (Muslim Spain), where they eventually established the caliphate of Cordoba in 929. The Umayyad period of Islamic history saw an immense and rapid territorial expansion, which created numerous administrative and cultural challenges. The Umayyads favored the old ruling Arab elite of Mecca, in particular their own clan, over new converts to Islam, called *mawali* ("clients").

The Umayyads can be credited with promoting Arabic as the official language of the Muslim empire. The Umayyad dynasty has been depicted as transforming the caliphate from a religious institution (as it had been under the first four Muslim rulers (the "Rightly-Guided" caliphs) into a dynastic, kingly one.

This perspective does not take into account how Umayyad rulers saw themselves as upholders and defenders of Islamic law, as presented by the word of God found in the Quran and **hadith** accounts (reports of Muhammad's deeds and sayings). In fact, it was during the reign of the Umayyad caliph **Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz** (r. 717–720) that the first collections of hadith accounts were assembled.

Modern Arab nationalists view the Umayyad period as an early part of the Arab Golden Age that they want to emulate and revive. This is particularly true in Syria, with its capital, like that of the Umayyads, at Damascus. White, one of the four Pan-Arab colors (black, white, red, green) featured on many modern Arab flags, signifies the Umayyads.

Defining the *Umma*

Muawiya (r. 661–680) was the first Umayyad ruler (although Uthman belonged to the Umayyad family and thus technically was the first Umayyad caliph). Muawiya's reign was marked by internal consolidation and external expansion. He oversaw military advances across North Africa and into Central Asia. His eastern campaigns resulted in the Islamic conquest of Kabul, capital of modern Afghanistan, as well as Bukhara and **Samarkand**, two major cities now in modern Uzbekistan. Upon his death in 680, the office of caliph passed to his son, **Yazid I**. Many prominent Muslims, including **Husayn ibn Ali** (Muhammad's grandson and Ali's younger son), opposed Yazid's automatic inheritance of the caliphate from his father. This led to a conflict later called the "Second *Fitna*."

In October 680, Husayn was heading to Kufa to assemble an army to fight Yazid. On Yazid's orders, an Umayyad force intercepted him on his way there and killed him, along with his family members and companions, at what became known as the **Battle of Karbala**. This event, which took place on the tenth of Muharram, 61 AH [Muslim year] (= early October, 680 CE) is remembered as the day of **Ashura**: one of the primary commemorations of martyrdom

among Shii Muslims. **Shiis** consider Husayn to be the Third **Imam**, following his brother Hasan (the Second Imam) and his father Ali (the First Imam).

For many years, revolts organized by loyalists of Ali's descendants continued to challenge the legitimacy of the Umayyad caliphs. To bolster their Islamic credentials, the Umayyad rulers had the **Dome of the Rock** built on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem over the very stone where Muslims believe Muhammad commenced his miraculous "Night Journey" to heaven. This coincides with the location considered by many scholars to be the center of the Jewish Second Temple.

The Umayyads continued to expand Islamic control of territory. An Umayyad force commanded by Tariq ibn Ziyad made a successful landing at Gibraltar (a Romanized version of the Arabic "*Jabal al-Tariq*" ["Tariq's Mountain"]) in April 711. This incursion marked the start of the Muslim conquest of the Iberian Peninsula. Much of what was later Spain and Portugal became known in Arabic as "*al-Andalus*," portions of which would remain under Muslim rule until 1492.

EARLY ABBASID CALIPHATE

The Abbasid Revolution

Within less than one century, the Umayyads were displaced by another group with Meccan roots: the Abbasids. They descended from Muhammad's youngest uncle Abbas, but the revolution ultimately bringing them to power in 750 originated in a series of attempts to install a member of Ali's family as caliph. They began with Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiya (637–700). He was not a son of Ali by Muhammad's daughter Fatima, but by a woman of the Banu Hanifa tribe.

Husayn's martyrdom at Karbala in 680 made Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiya the ostensible head of Ali's family, since he was Ali's eldest surviving son. Based on this status, one of Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiya's loyal followers

raised a rebellion to make him caliph. Although this did not succeed, a story later circulated that Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiya's son Abu Hashim had named his own distant cousin Muhammad ibn Ali to be *his* heir as he lay dying, keeping claims on the caliphate alive in this branch of Ali's family.

The son of Muhammad ibn Ali, **Abu al-Abbas Abdullah al-Saffah**, started asserting his right to become caliph in the 740s. To build his case, al-Saffah (who also happened to be descended from Muhammad's uncle Abbas) focused his activities on Khorasan. This was a region in northeastern Iran where many *mawali* (non-Arab Muslims) lived. These *mawali* resented the Umayyads, whom they perceived as prejudiced against non-Arab Muslims.

When Hisham, a successful Umayyad caliph who had stayed in power for two decades, died in 743, he was followed by a series of brief, unsuccessful rulers. Their unpopularity led the Abbasids to launch a popular uprising in Khorasan in 747 that quickly spread to Iraq. Al-Saffah, supported by loyalists to Ali's family, as well as non-Arab Muslim *mawali* and other dissidents, brought his forces to victory, ousting the last Umayyad caliph, Marwan II, in 750.

Loyalists to Ali and his family were now being labeled "Shiis," since they belonged to his faction (in Arabic, "*shia*" means "faction"). Many of these "Shiis" had backed al-Saffah, hoping that he might be the Mahdi or at least the Mahdi's precursor. *Mahdi* is an Arabic term that means "redeemer of mankind who will come to earth just before the Day of Judgment and end injustice and tyranny." Throughout Islamic history, different groups of Muslims have turned to charismatic leaders whom they identified as the Mahdi, acting on hopes of a messiah or deliverer shared by Muslims with Christians and Jews.

Al-Saffah soon disappointed this group. Just after he took power, he not only dismissed all remaining Umayyad governors and officials but turned as well against Shiis allied with him. When al-Saffah was proclaimed caliph at Kufa's Great Mosque in 749, Shiis felt betrayed when he did

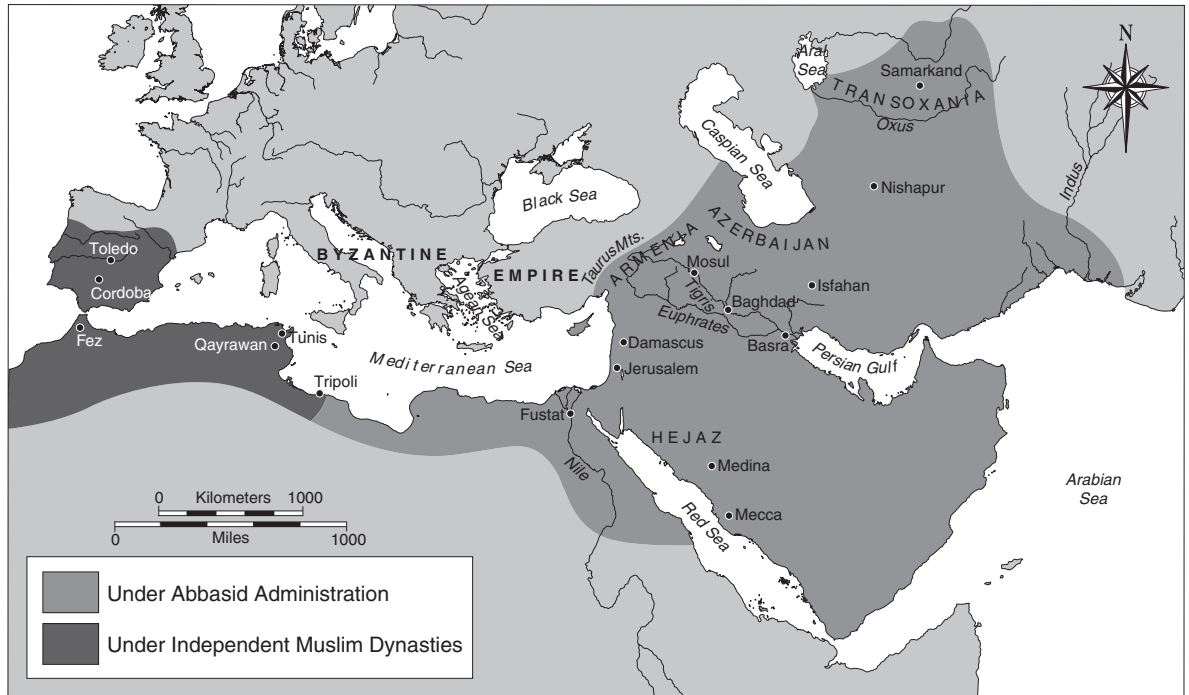
not step aside and allow the Sixth Imam, **Jafar al-Sadiq** (great-grandson of Third Imam Husayn), to rule.

Although only caliph for a brief time, al-Saffah strongly promoted education and increased international trade. Some of the first paper mills outside of the Far East were built in the Central Asian city of Samarkand (in modern Uzbekistan) during his reign. These facilities were reportedly established by Chinese prisoners captured at the **Battle of Talas** (in modern Kyrgyzstan) in 751. Al-Saffah encouraged non-Muslims and non-Arabs to join his army, choosing the talented Abu Muslim (an Iranian from Balkh [in modern Afghanistan]) to lead his troops. Although al-Saffah died only four years after deposing the Umayyads, his brother and successor al-Mansur continued his policies, consolidating Abbasid rule during his more than two decades in power.

Establishing Abbasid Authority

The Abbasid dynasty governed the Islamic world for just over five centuries (750–1258). Twelve years after they had taken power from the Umayyads, the Abbasids built a new capital city called "**Baghdad**" about 20 miles northwest of Ctesiphon, the former Sassanian capital. Just as the Umayyads drew much from Roman and Byzantine tradition, so the Abbasids, with Baghdad so near the old Sassanian capital, borrowed and adapted much from their Persian predecessors.

The Islamic world had become so vast that even after their first few years in power, the Abbasids had still not established themselves as rulers everywhere in it. There were constant rebellions in many areas of the Middle East, particularly when new caliphs took power. Although Shiis were briefly stymied by Abbasid rejection, they soon reemerged as dangerous and dedicated foes of the dynasty. The problem of pretenders from Ali's line seeking to rule resurfaced again and again in different forms.



MAP 1.1 Islamic World in the Ninth Century

When Sixth Imam Jafar al-Sadiq died in 765, Shiis split into two groups. One accepted Jafar's son Ismail as the authentic Seventh Imam. They became known as Ismailis, and adopted many of the ideas and doctrines of the vanquished Hanafiya movement (see p. 7). The other group recognized Musa al-Kazim, another of Jafar al-Sadiq's sons, as *their* Imam. Musa is still recognized as the Seventh Imam by Twelvers (Shiis who believe in Twelve Imams) today.

In this uncertain situation, Abbasid rulers began to trust only members of their close family. Even Abu Muslim himself, one of the early supporters of the Abbasid revolution, fell under suspicion. Like other revolutionaries in world history, the Abbasids soon found that the radical agendas of their anti-Umayyad movement no longer remained useful as they tried to manage a large, imperial government.

Abbasids as Conservatives

Beginning under Caliph al-Mansur (r. 754–775), the Abbasids began to emphasize governmental continuity and promoting orthodox religion above all. The official suppression of the more extremist elements of the Abbasid coalition caused a string of popular revolts in Iran. On the other hand, al-Mansur's more conservative approach reassured many people, which aided in the maturation of Abbasid institutions over the 21 years of his reign.

The Abbasid era also marked the real beginning of the institution of Islamic **viziers**: high-ranking and skilled political advisers to the ruler. The first viziers were all from a Persian family known as the Barmakids. They originated in Balkh (in modern Afghanistan) as a prominent family of landowning Buddhist priests before their conversion to Islam. Under the Abbasids, influences of the Persian tradition through