ISLAM: Historical Foundings & Events

632’AD – Muhammad Dies: The Saqifa Appointment

633 – Rashidun (1st) Caliphate begins in Medina, Saudi Arabia

657 – The Azariqa (Khawarij) declare war upon Rashidun Caliphate: Battle Of Siffin

660 – Rashidun (1st) Caliphate ends

661 – Umayyad (2nd) Caliphate begins in Damascus, Syria

680 – Battle Of Karbala: Solidifies the Shi’a-Sunni divide

692 – Ibadi (1st) Denomination founded

714 – Zaidi 5’er Shi’a (1st) School founded

718 – Hanafi Sunni (2nd) School founded

728 – Mu’tazila Ibadi (3rd) School founded

729 – Kalam (1st) Creed founded

730 – Jarudiyyah (2nd) Creed founded

732 – Jafari 12’er Shi’a (4th) School founded

749 – Umayyad (2nd) Caliphate ends

750 – Abbasid (3rd) Caliphate begins in Baghdad, Iraq

755 – Isma’ilia 7’er Shi’a (5th) School founded

765 – Malikite Sunni (6th) School founded

795 – Shafi’i Sunni (7th) School founded

814 – Hanbali Sunni (8th) School founded

815 – Athari (3rd) Creed founded

846 – Zahiri Sunni (9th) School founded

865 – Ithna’ashariyyah (4th) Creed founded

883 – Maturidiyya (5th) Creed founded

909 – Baten’iyyah (6th) Creed founded

912 – Ash’ari (7th) Creed founded

1258 – Abbasid (3rd) Caliphate ends

1517 – Ottoman (4th) Caliphate begins in Constantinople, Turkey

1924 – Ottoman (4th) Caliphate ends after Mehmed defeat in WW1

The 3 Denominations of Islam

Including: Schools, Creeds, Movements

(following pages)…

DENOMINATION: Ibadi

1. Madhhab “School”

School (“Madhhab”): Mu’tazila (Omani)

World Regions: Oman

Creed (“Aqidah”): Kalam

Movement (Da’wah): Khawarij {“extinct”}

Terrorist Groups: Azariqa {“extinct”}

DENOMINATION: Shi’a (Shi’ite)

1. Madhhab “School”

School (“Madhhab”): Zaidiyyah {“Fivers”} (Yemeni)

World Regions: Yemen

Creed (“Aqidah”): Jarudiyyah

Movement (Da’wah): Muqawama

Terrorist Groups: Houthis, Liwa Fatemiyoun, Ansar Allah

2. Madhhab “School”

School (“Madhhab”): Ja’fari {“Twelvers”} (Persian)

World Regions: Iran, Azerbaijan, Iraq, Bahrain, Syria, Lebanon

Creed (“Aqidah”): Ithna’ashariyyah

Movement (Da’wah): Wilayat Al-Faqih

Terrorist Groups: Al-Hashd Ash-Sha’bi, Hezbollah, IRGC, Quds Niru-ye

3. Madhhab “School”

School (“Madhhab”): Isma’iliyya {“Seveners”} (Tajikistani)

World Regions: Tajikistan, Suwayda, Portugal

Creed (“Aqidah”): Baten’iyyah

Movement (Da’wah): Nizari

Terrorist Groups: Al-Hassasin {“extinct”}

DENOMINATION: Sunni

1. Madhhab “School”

School (“Madhhab”): Hanafi (Ottoman)

World Regions: Turkey, Egypt, Balkan Europe, Central Asia

Creed (“Aqidah”): Maturidiyyah

Movement (Da’wah): Salafist

Terrorist Groups: Al-Qaeda, Al-Shabaab, Ansaru

Movement (Da’wah): Deobandi

Terrorist Groups: Taliban, Haqqani, Darul Uloom

Movement (Da’wah): Qutbist

Terrorist Groups: Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, Islamic Jihad

2. Madhhab “School”

School (“Madhhab”): Malikite (Tunisian)

World Regions: North Africa, NorthWest Africa, Central Africa, UAE, Kuwait

Creed (“Aqidah”): Athari

Movement (Da’wah): Salafist

Terrorist Groups: Ansar Al-Sharia, Ansar Dine, JNIM, AQIM

Movement (Da’wah): Izala

Terrorist Groups: Fulani, Katiba Macina

3. Madhhab “School”

School (“Madhhab”): Shafi’i (Syrian)

World Regions: NorthEast Africa, Palestine, Kurdistan, Jordan, SouthEast Asia

Creed (“Aqidah”): Ash’ari

Movement (Da’wah): Sufi {Orders “Tariqah”}

Terrorist Groups: Naqshbandi Jaysh, Tehreek-e-Labbaik, Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, Al-Awda, Al-Abud, Jaysh Muhammad

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4. Madhhab “School”

School (“Madhhab”): Hanbali (Saudi)

World Regions: Saudi Arabia, Qatar

Creed (“Aqidah”): Athari

Movement (Da’wah): Wahhabism

Terrorist Groups: Islamic ‘ISIS’ State, Abu Sayyaf, Caucasus Emirate

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5. Madhhab “School”

School (“Madhhab”): Zahiri (Moroccan)

World Regions: Libya, Morocco

Creed (“Aqidah”): Athari

Movement (Da’wah): Madkhalism

Terrorist Groups: RADA Kara

Advanced Deep Research Report

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(following pages)…

From Caliphate to Nation-State: Tracing the Evolution of Islamic Authority Through History

The Foundational Schism and the Emergence of Sects

The history of Islam is marked by profound internal diversity, a product of its very beginnings. The foundational crisis of succession following the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 CE set in motion a series of theological, political, and institutional developments that would create distinct communities within the nascent Muslim ummah 3. The initial disagreement over leadership was not merely a matter of governance but quickly crystallized into irreconcilable doctrines concerning the nature of authority itself—divine appointment versus community consensus. This primary division gave rise to three principal groups: the Sunnis, the Shias, and the Kharijites, each with unique interpretations of Islamic legitimacy and practice 14,69. Understanding this early fragmentation is essential for comprehending the subsequent evolution of Islamic political thought and the complex tapestry of movements that followed.

The first major schism occurred after the assassination of the third Rashidun Caliph, Uthman ibn Affan. The dispute centered on the election of his successor. While many supported Ali ibn Abi Talib, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, some of his supporters eventually withdrew their allegiance after he agreed to arbitration to end a conflict with Muawiyah, the governor of Syria. This withdrawal led to the formation of the Kharijites, or "those who leave," who are regarded in the Islamic tradition as the first group to cause a formal split 69. The Kharijites held a radical position on political legitimacy. They argued that neither Ali nor Muawiyah could claim leadership because both had submitted to arbitration, which they viewed as a concession to human judgment over divine law as found in the Quran 40. Their central tenet became that any pious Muslim, regardless of lineage or social standing, could become a leader if they ruled justly according to God's will 40,67. This principle led them to declare righteous rulers of opposing factions as apostates, a doctrine that made them politically volatile and often violent 40. Their political theory was unique in that it refused to accord the office of the Caliphate special sanctity, viewing it as a mere administrative function 67. Though their direct political influence waned, their ideas about the conditions for legitimate leadership left a lasting mark. A moderate offshoot of this movement, known as the Ibadis, emerged and survives today primarily in Oman and parts of North Africa 18,68. Unlike their more extreme counterparts, the Ibadis developed a structured doctrine and played a significant role in the formation of states, such as in Oman, where their moderate policies influenced early governance 39.

In stark contrast to the Kharijite view, the majority who remained loyal to Ali and then accepted his successors came to be known as the Sunnis, a name derived from the term 'Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah', meaning 'people of the Prophetic precedent and the community' 35. For Sunnis, legitimacy was rooted in the established community and its consensus, embodied in the model of the first four elected caliphs, the Rashidun ('Rightly Guided') Caliphs 6. The Sunni position holds that leadership should be determined through consultation and acceptance by the Muslim community, and once a caliph was chosen, his authority was binding 72,95. While they acknowledged Ali's rightful place as the fourth caliph, they did not attribute to him the special status later claimed by Shias. Over time, this political consensus solidified into a theological framework that prioritizes the lived practice of the community (the Sunnah) as a source of law alongside the Quran 1. By largely avoiding fundamental divisions beyond this initial point, Sunni Islam became the largest branch of Islam, comprising 10 to 13% of the global Muslim population 35.

The third major group, the Shias, hold a different perspective on the Prophet's immediate successor. They believe that leadership should have passed directly to Ali ibn Abi Talib, whom they consider the first Imam 72. This belief is not merely political; it is deeply theological. For Shias, the Imams are divinely appointed, infallible leaders (ma'ssum) who possess esoteric knowledge and spiritual authority granted by God 14,36. This concept of the Imamate is the cornerstone of Shia identity, distinguishing them from both Sunnis and Kharijites. While Sunnis see the Caliph as a temporal ruler responsible for upholding Sharia, Shias view the Imam as a central figure whose guidance is essential for understanding the faith 14,109. The line of Imams, according to Twelver Shias (the largest Shia sect), continued through Ali and his descendants until the twelfth Imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi, went into occultation in the ninth century. He is believed to be alive and hidden, awaiting a return to establish justice on earth 36. In his absence, jurists (maraji') serve as the highest religious authorities, guiding the community based on their interpretation of Islamic law 93. This structure creates a distinct hierarchy of religious authority, with the marja'iyya being a long-standing institution, though its precise development has been subject to scholarly analysis 93. The differences between Shias and Sunnis are thus not only political but also theological and even anthropological, reflecting divergent views on prophecy, revelation, and the path to salvation 14.

These foundational divisions laid the groundwork for centuries of theological debate and institutional development. The Sunni tradition, while unified on the core issue of succession, gave rise to a rich pluralism in jurisprudence and theology. The emergence of the four great schools of law (madhabs)—Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali—provided diverse yet coherent frameworks for legal reasoning, allowing Islam to adapt to different cultural and geographical contexts across the vast Islamic world 2,17,38. Concurrently, intellectual movements like the Mu'tazilites pushed the boundaries of rationalism, arguing for free will and the createdness of the Quran, while other scholars like al-Ash'ari and al-Maturidi developed counter-theologies that synthesized reason with scriptural authority, becoming the dominant orthodox positions 23,24,81. These debates shaped the contours of mainstream Sunni thought for centuries. Meanwhile, Shia Islam developed its own distinct theological and legal traditions, centered on the teachings of the Imams and transmitted through a separate corpus of hadith literature 36,54. The existence of these parallel intellectual and legal systems demonstrates that from its inception, Islam was characterized by a dynamic interplay of continuity and contrast, setting the stage for the complex relationship between religious authority and political power that would define its history.

Group	Core Belief on Leadership	View of Legitimacy	Key Doctrinal Tenets
Sunni Muslims	Leadership should be determined by community consensus and selection (Caliphate).	Based on election and acceptance by the community.	Emphasis on the Quran and the Sunnah (Prophetic precedent) as primary sources of law 95.
Shia Muslims	Leadership must remain within the Prophet's family, specifically Ali and his descendants (Imamate).	Based on divine appointment (nass) of the Imams 14.	The Imams are considered infallible and the ultimate interpreters of Islamic law and theology 36.
Kharijites	Any pious Muslim can lead if they rule justly, regardless of lineage.	Based on personal piety and adherence to divine law; leaders could be deposed or killed 40.	Extreme views on apostasy; declared both Ali and Muawiyah as non-believers 67.
Ibadis	A moderate branch of the Kharijites who developed a structured doctrine.	Based on a balanced approach to piety and justice 39.	Avoided extremist beliefs common among other Kharijite groups 88.

The Imperial Caliphates: From Succession to Empire

Following the foundational schisms, the nascent Muslim community rapidly transformed from a local political entity in Arabia into a vast imperial power. The history of the next several centuries is dominated by the story of the Caliphates—the Rashidun, the Umayyad, and the Abbasid—which served as the primary vehicles for the expansion of Islamic civilization, governance, and law 7. Each caliphate represented a distinct phase in the evolution of the caliph's role, shifting from a community leader to a monarch of a sprawling empire, and ultimately to a figurehead under foreign military dynasties. This period saw the consolidation of Islamic political structures, the flourishing of a shared culture across diverse territories, and the establishment of enduring institutions that would shape the Islamic world for centuries.

The Rashidun Caliphate (632–661 CE) represents the formative era, characterized by rapid conquest and the establishment of foundational precedents 6. After the Prophet Muhammad's death, the community convened to elect a successor, or Caliph, establishing a model of leadership by consensus that would become central to Sunni doctrine 95. The first four caliphs—Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali—are revered by Sunnis as the "Rightly Guided" Caliphs for their exemplary conduct and adherence to the Prophet's teachings 6. During their reign, the caliphate expanded dramatically, conquering the Sasanian Empire in Persia and large portions of the Byzantine Empire, including Egypt, Syria, and North Africa 46. This expansion was driven by a combination of military prowess and the appeal of the new Islamic order. Governance during this period was relatively simple, with the Caliph serving as the head of state and the community's chief administrator, concentrating religious and political authority in one office 79. However, the internal conflicts of this era, culminating in the assassination of Caliph Uthman and the subsequent civil wars involving Ali and Muawiyah, exposed the fragility of the system based on consensus and foreshadowed the challenges of succession that would define later periods 69.

The Umayyad Caliphate (661–750 CE) marked a decisive shift from the consultative model of the Rashidun to a hereditary monarchy and a centralized imperial state 7. With its capital moved to Damascus, the Umayyads established a bureaucratic apparatus and a professional army, transforming the caliphate into a major world power that rivaled the Byzantine and Sassanian empires 12. Under the Umayyads, the Islamic empire reached its greatest territorial extent, stretching from the Iberian Peninsula in the west to Central Asia in the east 29. This period witnessed the Islamization and Arabization of vast regions, as well as the development of a sophisticated administrative system. The Umayyad era also saw a transformation in foreign relations. Initially characterized by holy war (jihad), the caliphate increasingly engaged in diplomacy with non-Muslim powers like the Byzantine Empire, using treaties, gift exchanges, and formal negotiations to manage relations 12,61,62. Despite their political achievements, the Umayyads faced persistent opposition from Shia groups, Zaydis, and Kharijites, who rejected their rule as illegitimate. This discontent, combined with fiscal and administrative strains, ultimately led to a revolt led by the Abbasid family, who claimed distant Hashemite lineage and promised a return to more pious rule. In 750 CE, the Umayyad dynasty was overthrown and nearly annihilated, marking the end of one era and the beginning of another 6.

The Abbasid Caliphate (750–1258 CE) ushered in the "Islamic Golden Age," a period of unparalleled intellectual, scientific, and cultural achievement 98. The new dynasty established its capital in Baghdad, a strategically located city designed to be the jewel of the Islamic world 59. Under the fifth Abbasid caliph, Harun al-Rashid (r. 786–809 CE), and his son Al-Ma'mun, the caliphate became a global center of learning, patronizing scholars who translated works from Greek, Persian, and Indian languages and made groundbreaking advances in fields like mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and philosophy 29,99. This intellectual flourishing was underpinned by a robust legal and jurisgenerative capacity, which allowed Islamic law to develop and adapt 20. However, the political power of the Abbasid caliphs gradually eroded over time. As the empire's territory shrank due to internal fragmentation and external pressures from Seljuk Turks, Byzantines, and Crusaders, real political authority shifted away from the caliphal court 59. Military dynasties, most notably the Seljuks and later the Mamluks, controlled the administration

and wielded the sword of power, while the Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad retained their religious prestige but lost their sovereignty 59. This separation of religious and political authority, where the caliph was the "sword" while the sultan was the "mouth," became a defining feature of later Islamic political history. The zenith of the Abbasid Caliphate was shattered in 1258 when Mongol forces sacked Baghdad, killing the caliph and effectively ending the dynasty's rule, although a descendant fled to Egypt and re-established a rump state under Mamluk patronage 29.

The collapse of the central Abbasid authority paved the way for the rise of powerful regional dynasties and the eventual formation of the early modern Islamic empires. The period following the Mongol invasion was one of fragmentation and competition, with various Turkish, Persian, and Arab dynasties vying for control. Dynasties in North Africa, such as the Rustamids, Idrisids, Fatimids, and Almohads, attempted to unify Berber tribal peoples under an Islamic banner, representing successive attempts at state formation and Islamization in the region 8,33. The Almohad Empire, in particular, marked the end of the "caliphal" phase of state formation in North Africa 33. Ultimately, the vacuum left by the Abbasids' decline was filled by three major imperial powers: the Ottoman Empire in Anatolia and the Middle East, the Safavid Empire in Persia, and the Mughal Empire in India 26. These empires would dominate the geopolitical landscape for centuries, building upon the administrative, legal, and ideological foundations laid by the earlier caliphates while introducing new dynamics of religious identity and imperial competition.

Theological and Jurisprudential Divergence in Sunni Islam

While the Sunni-Shia divide represents the most significant schism in Islamic history, the Sunni tradition itself is not monolithic. Within Sunni Islam, a remarkable degree of institutionalized pluralism has existed for centuries, providing diverse yet coherent frameworks for understanding and practicing the faith. This pluralism is most evident in two areas: theological doctrine (kalam) and legal methodology (usul al-fiqh). The development of competing theological schools and the establishment of distinct legal schools (madhabs) demonstrate a dynamic tradition capable of accommodating reasoned disagreement while maintaining a shared commitment to core Islamic principles. This internal diversity allowed Sunni Islam to absorb and integrate various intellectual currents, from Greek philosophy to indigenous traditions, fostering a resilient and adaptable legal and theological landscape.

One of the most significant intellectual movements within Sunni Islam was the Mu'tazilites, who flourished primarily during the Abbasid Golden Age 23. The Mu'tazilites championed a rationalist approach to theology, arguing that reason (aql) was a necessary tool for understanding divine revelation 56. They are best known for their five "articles of faith," which included the unity and absolute justice of God, the intermediate position of the sinner who commits a major sin, and the famous doctrine that the Quran is a created object, not co-eternal with God 23. This last point was highly controversial and led to the "Mihna," a period of state-sponsored inquisition under Caliph Al-Ma'mun, who forced scholars to accept the createdness of the Quran 23. Although the Mu'tazilite movement declined in influence after the 10th century, their arguments and polemical methods had a lasting impact. They provided the primary intellectual foil for the theologians who would develop the orthodox Sunni creed 81.

In response to Mu'tazilite rationalism, two major orthodox theological schools emerged: Ash'arism and Maturidism 24,58. Both schools sought to defend traditional Sunni beliefs about divine omnipotence and scriptural authority while retaining a role for reason. Founded by Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari (d. 935 CE) and Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (date of death uncertain), these schools represent the definitive theological settlement of classical Sunni Islam 24. They affirmed the uncreatedness of the Quran and reconciled divine decree with human responsibility in a manner acceptable to mainstream believers. Ash'arism, associated with the influential scholar al-Ghazali (c. 1056–1111), became particularly dominant, especially through its synthesis of speculative theology with Sufi mysticism 64. Al-Ghazali's work was instrumental in resolving the tensions between philosophy, theology, and mysticism, reinforcing the primacy of faith over pure reason 6

4. The ongoing intellectual debates between Ash'arism and Maturidism, documented in Ottoman-era texts, highlight the vibrancy of this theological discourse 58. These theological schools provided a standardized creed that helped unify the diverse populations of the Islamic empire under a common doctrinal umbrella, even as legal practices varied.

Parallel to these theological developments, a similar process of institutionalization occurred in Islamic law (fiqh). The four great Sunni schools of jurisprudence—the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali madhabs—each developed unique methodologies for deriving legal rulings from the primary sources of the Quran and Hadith 1,84. While all four accepted the same foundational sources, they differed in the weight they assigned to secondary sources like consensus (ijma), analogy (qiyas), and public welfare (maslaha).

The Hanafi school, founded by Abu Hanifa an-Nu'man (699–767 CE), is known for its flexibility and use of reason and local customs 84,91. It became the dominant school in Central Asia, the Balkans, and South Asia 2. The Maliki school, founded by Malik ibn Anas (711–795 CE), emphasized the customary law of the people of Medina, considering it a living embodiment of early Islamic practice 1,38. It predominates in West Africa and parts of North Africa 2. The Shafi'i school, founded by Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi'i (767–820 CE), is notable for being the first to systematically codify the principles of usul al-fiqh, establishing a clear hierarchy of legal sources that begins with the Quran, then the Sunnah, and uses analogy (qiyas) as a primary tool of legal reasoning 90,106,119. It spread widely through trade routes and is prevalent in Egypt, Somalia, and Indonesia 2. Finally, the Hanbali school, founded by Ibn Hanbal (780–855 CE), is the most conservative, placing the strictest limitations on analogical reasoning and emphasizing a literalist interpretation of the primary texts 84,91. It is strongest in its native Saudi Arabia 2.

This legal pluralism allowed Islamic law to be applied in diverse societies. A judge belonging to one school could render a verdict based on the legal traditions of their region, and individuals were generally free to follow the school with which they identified 114. The coexistence of these schools fostered a culture of legal tolerance and academic exchange. Differences in legal rulings were seen as a natural outcome of legitimate scholarly inquiry rather than as grounds for heresy. This institutionalized diversity stands in contrast to the more centralized authority structure of Shia Islam, which relies on the jurisprudence of the Twelve Imams and their contemporary representatives (maraji'). While there are important differences between the Sunni madhabs and the Shia Ja'fari school, this system of pluralistic legal reasoning remains a defining characteristic of the Sunni world 42. The robust jurisgenerative capacity of Islamic law, which was already evident in its early centuries, allowed it to evolve and provide solutions to novel problems, ensuring its continued relevance as a legal and ethical guide 20.

Feature	Hanafi School	Maliki School	Shafi'i School	Hanbali School
Founder	Abu Hanifa an-Nu'man (d. 767) 84	Malik ibn Anas (d. 795) 1	Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi'i (d. 820) 119	Ibn Hanbal (d. 855) 84
Primary Methodology	Use of reason (ra'y) and reliance on analogy (qiyas) 91	Reliance on the consensus (ijma) of the people of Medina 1,38	Systematic application of usul al-fiqh; emphasis on qiyas 90,106	Strict textualism; limits the use of qiyas 91
Geographical Distribution	Central Asia, Balkans, South Asia 2	West Africa, North Africa 2	Egypt, Somalia, Indonesia 2	Saudi Arabia 2

Feature	Hanafi School	Maliki School	Shafi'i School	Hanbali School
Key Characteristics	Most flexible and broad-minded 91	Conservative, emphasizes tradition 70	First to codify usul al-fiqh 106	Most conservative and literalist 91

The Rise of Rival Empires and Sectarian Geopolitics

The dissolution of the unified Abbasid Caliphate initiated a new era in Islamic history, one defined by the rise of powerful, rival empires and the solidification of sectarian identities as instruments of statecraft and geopolitics 26. The Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal empires emerged as the dominant political forces in the early modern period, reshaping the map of the Islamic world and laying the foundations for many of the modern nation-states of the Middle East and South Asia 19,26. The relationship between these empires, particularly the intense rivalry between the Sunni Ottoman Empire and the Shi'a Safavid Empire, was not merely dynastic but fundamentally shaped by religious ideology, creating a lasting sectarian divide that continues to influence international relations today 71. This period represents a critical juncture where imperial ambition, religious identity, and state formation became deeply intertwined.

The Ottoman Empire, originating as a small principality in Anatolia, grew into a vast multi-ethnic empire that controlled the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina and eventually claimed the title of Caliph, positioning itself as the protector of Sunni Islam 19,116. The Ottomans skillfully blended Islamic symbolism with their imperial power, presenting themselves as defenders of the faith against both Christian Europe and their Shi'a rivals 110. The Safavid Empire, rising in Persia (modern-day Iran), pursued a diametrically opposed strategy. Under Shah Ismail I, the Safavids forcibly converted the predominantly Sunni population of Persia to Twelver Shi'ism, establishing it as the state religion 71. This act was a direct challenge to Ottoman hegemony and created a deep-seated sectarian animosity. The rivalry between the two empires was not just a contest for territory but a struggle for the soul of Islam. Their border, which ran through modern-day Iraq, became a fault line of sectarian conflict, with the Ottomans viewing the Safavids as heretical and dangerous proselytizers 71. This historical enmity has had enduring consequences, contributing to the current geopolitical alignment of predominantly Sunni Arab states in the Gulf arrayed against the predominantly Shi'a theocracy of Iran 10. The instability that engulfs much of the Arab World has roots in this North African origin, highlighting the long shadow cast by these historical divisions 60.

The Mughal Empire, which ruled large parts of the Indian subcontinent from the 16th to the 19th century, presented a different model of Islamic statehood 63. While its rulers were of Turkic-Mongol descent and patrons of Persianate culture, their rule was far from purely religious. The Mughals blended Islamic administrative principles with indigenous Indian traditions and syncretic philosophies. Some emperors, like Akbar, promoted policies of religious tolerance, while others, like Aurangzeb, enforced a stricter interpretation of Islamic law. The Mughal experience demonstrates the adaptability of Islamic political institutions to non-Arab, non-Persian contexts and the complex interplay between Islamic identity and local realities in a multicultural empire 63. The Mughal and Safavid empires, despite their religious differences, maintained beneficial trade relations, showing that geopolitical interests could sometimes supersede sectarian divides 63.

The geopolitical influence of these empires extended far beyond their borders. The Ottoman Empire's control over key land and sea routes connecting Europe, Asia, and Africa gave it immense economic and strategic power. Its interactions with European powers were a mix of warfare, diplomacy, and commercial exchange 12. Treaties with the Byzantine Empire, for example, reveal a sophisticated diplomatic culture involving gifts and formal agreements,

demonstrating that geopolitics was not solely driven by holy war [61,62]. The wealth and stability of these empires attracted scholars, artists, and merchants from across the Islamic world, fostering a sense of shared civilization that transcended imperial and sectarian boundaries [28]. The Islamic world, in this sense, was the legacy of the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates, a continuous civilization with its own political and cultural logic, distinct from but interacting with the "West" [28].

However, the very strength of these empires also contained the seeds of their decline. The rigidification of legal and theological orthodoxy, coupled with resistance to new intellectual and technological developments from the West, contributed to a relative decline in power from the 17th century onwards [31]. Internal dissent and external pressure from European colonial powers gradually eroded their territories. The final blow came with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after its defeat in World War I. The victorious Allied powers dismantled the empire, carving up its Arab provinces into mandates and colonies, and creating new, artificial nation-states along arbitrary lines [19]. This process severed the direct link between a pan-Islamic political authority and the lands of the former caliphate. The creation of the secular Republic of Turkey under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was a definitive break with the Ottoman past, culminating in the abolition of the caliphate in 1924 [51,116]. The new borders drawn in the Middle East, largely by Britain and France, ignored ethnic, tribal, and sectarian realities, planting the seeds for future conflicts [32]. The transition from empire to nation-state was not a smooth process, and the legacies of imperial rule, including the fraught relationship between religion and the state, continue to shape the politics of the region today.

The Legacy of the Caliphate in the Modern State System

The abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924 did not signify the end of Islam's influence on the political sphere; rather, it marked a profound transformation in the relationship between religion and the state in the Muslim world [116,117]. The modern nation-state system, which replaced the old empires, inherited and adapted many of the institutional and ideological frameworks of the classical Islamic polity. The concept of the state as the custodian and promoter of Islam became a dominant model across the Middle East and North Africa, creating a complex symbiosis between secular governments and religious authorities [49,50]. This legacy manifests in the constitutional role of Islam in national life, the incorporation of Sharia law into legal systems, and the ongoing tension between state-controlled religious institutions and popular, often politicized, expressions of faith.

Many modern Muslim-majority states have adopted a model where the state officially identifies with and protects Islam, a direct continuation of the caliph's role as the guardian of the faith [49]. In countries like Saudi Arabia, the constitution designates Islam as the state religion and requires that Islamic religious authorities preserve the faith [73,97]. The Saudi government funds mosques, subsidizes religious education, and appoints scholars to high-ranking bodies like the Council of Senior Scholars, which issues fatwas and provides religious guidance to the populace [43,97]. This state-cooption of religious authority serves to legitimize the regime by tying its rule to divine sanction, while religious institutions gain resources and a platform to disseminate their teachings [43]. A similar pattern can be observed in Iran, where the 1979 revolution replaced a Western-aligned monarchy with an Islamic Republic governed by the principle of *velayat-e faqih* (guardianship of the jurist) [16]. Here, religious authority is not merely co-opted but is the foundation of the state itself, with the Supreme Leader, a senior cleric, holding ultimate power over all branches of government [16]. Even in nominally secular states, Islam often plays a prominent role. In Turkey, for instance, the state maintains control over religious affairs through the Diyanet (Presidency of Religious Affairs), which oversees mosque preachers and religious education, a vestige of the former Ottoman *şeyhülislam* system [51].

The incorporation of Islamic law into national legal systems is another key legacy of the caliphate. The legal traditions developed within the four Sunni madhabs and the Shia Ja'fari

school continue to inform legislation across the Muslim world 17,113. There is a wide spectrum of how states engage with Sharia. Some, like Saudi Arabia and Iran, base their entire legal system on Islamic principles 48. Others, such as Pakistan and Sudan, have mixed legal systems that blend Sharia with British common law or French civil law, often applying Islamic law only to personal status matters like marriage and inheritance 48,113. In many other countries, Sharia serves as a secondary or supplementary source of law. The choice of a particular school of jurisprudence can be significant, as legal rulings can vary depending on whether a Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, or Ja'fari interpretation is followed 114. This legal pluralism, which was a feature of the Ottoman Empire, continues in the modern era, with courts in places like the Indian Ocean region adjudicating cases based on different legal traditions 100. The state's regulation of Islamic law gives rise to new forms of politics, as religious scholars and jurists compete for influence over legal interpretation and policy-making 47.

At the same time, the relationship between the state and religion has been a site of intense conflict and contestation. Modern political movements have emerged that seek to redefine this relationship, often challenging the authority of the existing state-religious establishment. The Muslim Brotherhood, for example, represents an ideological current that seeks to transform Islam into a political ideology, advocating for the implementation of Sharia and the establishment of a state governed by Islamic principles 9,101. Such movements reflect a long tradition of politicizing religion that dates back to the early Islamic period, when groups like the Kharijites used force to secure their political objectives 9,69. More recently, movements inspired by Wahhabism, a puritanical revivalist strand of Salafism, have gained prominence, particularly in Saudi Arabia 92. These movements advocate for a return to the perceived purity of early Islam, rejecting later innovations, Sufi practices, and the authority of traditional scholarly institutions 60, 92. The global reach of these ideologies highlights the ongoing struggle over the definition of authentic Islamic identity and its proper role in public life.

In synthesizing the historical trajectory from the caliphate to the modern state, it becomes clear that the dissolution of the caliphate did not secularize the Muslim world but rather reconfigured the locus of religious-political authority. The imperial ideal of a unified Islamic state under a single leader has been replaced by a collection of sovereign nation-states, each navigating its own path in balancing secular governance with Islamic identity. The legacy of the caliphate persists in the enduring expectation that the state should play a leading role in promoting and protecting the faith. This legacy continues to fuel debates about the proper relationship between religion and the state, democracy, human rights, and the future direction of the Muslim world 25. The history of Islamic political thought thus offers a rich and contested heritage, providing both justifications for state-centric religiosity and critiques of it, ensuring that the dialogue between faith and power remains a central theme of contemporary Islamic societies.

THE END