

Baghdad, 10th Century

The Dress of a non-Muslim woman

The Rise of Islam in Medieval Society and its Influence on Clothing

In order to understand and create the clothing of a 10th century woman in an Islamic State, it is incredibly important to understand how the advent of Islam affected day to day dress in Arabic society. It did not in fact create a new style of clothing, but instead it modified the styles of dress that were popular in the 6th and 7th centuries, many of which were influenced by Hellenic and Persian dress. As the progression of Islamic moral sensibilities became more and more impressed upon society, so too did the desire to keep much of the clothing simple, functional and suitable to the environment. Within the Early Islamic era (570-632 C.E) piety and morality were strongly impressed. Adornment was thought to be too ostentatious and fine fabrics and textiles considered inappropriate for a follower of Islam.

During this time, one very important and identifiable change to clothing was created. It was considered against Islam if your clothing trailed the ground or if the basic under garments were past the ankle in length.

“The Prophet said (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him): “Isbaal (wearing one’s garment below the ankles) may apply to the izaar (lower garment), the shirt or the turban. Whoever allows any part of these to trail on the ground out of arrogance, Allaah will not look at him on the Day of Judgment”. (reported by Abu Dawud, no 4085, and al-Nisaa’I in al-Mujtabaa, Kitab (al-Zeenah, Baab Isbaal al-Izaar)

These *hadiths* are small collections of reports and statements of what The Prophet Muhammad was observed to say were written by his closest echelon of courtiers. These statements were written down and used to influence and instruct the people of what they should and should not do in society. Of all the influences that have carried on throughout the Middle Ages, this is the singular one that affects the actual structure of the garments.

During the Umayyad Caliphate (661-750 C.E.), the Early Islamic aversion to luxurious garments slowly became less pronounced. There was a great rise of the leisure class; only priests aimed toward garments of piety and simplicity. The upper class Muslim greatly indulged in luxury, justifying the wearing of silks, brocades, satins, etc. as homage “when God bestows benefaction up on one of his servants, He wishes the physical sign of that benefaction to be visible on him [the servant] (Brill: Leiden, 1908). This renewed fascination with luxury was inspired by contact with the Byzantines.

Once the Abbasid Caliphate (750-1278) arrived, a rapid evolution of cosmopolitan Islamic fashion combining the element of the vestimentary systems of the Arab, Irano-Turkic and Hellenistic Mediterranean occurred. The development of the bourgeoisie class spread and expanded *adab*—the Islamic etiquette that incorporated good manners, morals, decorum, humaneness. With this, the language and expression of fashion refined.

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The Economics of Clothing

Baghdad was the central Trading city in the Muslim world, trading with India and acquiring *futa* (a long sari like cloth serving as a loincloth, apron and headgear/mantle) and lands of the Viking Rus, Iraq (9th century) for fine linens, etc, Egypt for cottons and *mulham* and precious gems, gold and copper.

Fine clothing was often considered an equivalent trade to cash in much of the Arabic world and as the silver was slowly mined out or traded, textiles became a much valued entity. As trade developed so too did the Textile Factories and within the Islamic states during the 10th & 11th centuries one finds the first organized mass production of fabrics. Embellishments of embroidery, tapestry and the decorative Tiraz bands became a common way to show thanks, appreciation and “honors of state” (Ashan, 1979).

Differentiating Muslim and non-Muslim Dress

Early attempts at delineating who was a Muslim and whom was not, started with merely a law passed that instituted a blanket prohibition on conquered people from trying to dress like their conquerors. Since the Arabs did not dress alike within their various factions, it would have been difficult to set down extremely specific laws. Primarily this was set forth for security and maintenance of the non-Muslim societies that the Arabs conquered.

By 850 C.E. the Caliph al-Mutawakkil put forth an edict that Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians should wear honey-colored *taylasans* (veils) and the *zunnar* belt (a belt defined as looking like “a thick cord.” (Stillman, N. 1979) Most of these restrictions were in regard to men and with the women it seems that if wearing a honey colored veil was sufficient, particularly since some of the visiting traders would wear their own cultures clothing beneath the outer wear. By mid 10th century Christians were required to wear the cut out an appliqué in the shape of a pig, and Jews were required to wear an ape. These markers of identification were considered signs of humiliation and while this quickly fell out of favor by the latter 10th century, it is one that cropped up off-and-on throughout the Middle Ages (Stillman, Y, 1998).

For obvious reasons, as the SCA works as a society to remain as neutral as possible in regard to religion, we have chosen to include this information within our documentation, but to not actually represent it on our garment. We will be including a honey colored veil (one of the earliest request in 7th century Early Islam) to show respect for the culture and history, however that is the limit of any identification that will be included in our costume.

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The Clothing

In Abbasid Baghdad, there was actually a version of formal wear required for any of the more refined partied by the socialites. These more formal costumes were called “clothes of boon companionship” (*thiyab al-munadama*) (Ashan, 1979).

The articles of clothing in 10th Century Baghdad are often interchangeable, and not every article would be worn day to day. Standard garments for both sexes usually included an undergarment, body shirt, long dress, gown or tunic and over garment (mantle, coat or wrap), footwear (shoes or sandals) and head covering(s) (Stillman, Y., 1998).

This document will go over the individual items typically worn by women both Muslim and non-Muslim in Baghdad during the 10th century. It is important to understand that the full outfit would have been worn only for formal occasions.

The garments

- *sirwāl* (pants)
- *ghilala* (body shirt)
- *qamis* (long dress)
- *qaba or thawb* (gown)
- *durra`a* (coat)

• *na`l* (sandals)

• *mi`jar, taylasans, miqna`a and lithan* (veils).

As you might notice several of the words used are those you have heard if you have studied India (*sirwal*), Italy (*qamis*) and Persia (*qaba*). During the 10th Century, Baghdad was considered the trade center of the world. Many of the clothing items were either directly taken from other cultures, or given similar names.

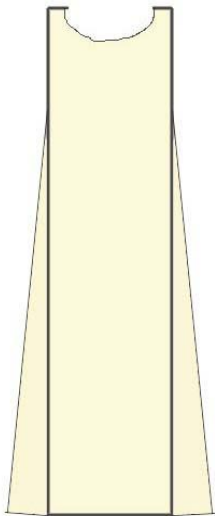
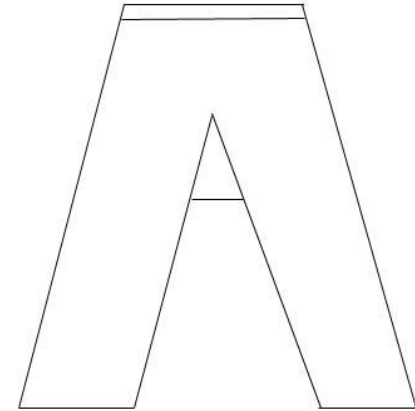
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The Sirwāl (pants)

There is much debate, but it is most probable that *sirwāl* (under drawers) were already in use by this time (prior to the conquest of Iran.) The use of *sirwāl* goes back to the ancient Near East. *Hatiths* both claimed and denied that The Prophet wore *sirwāl*, however, they did indicate that many women were wearing *sirwāl* by the 9th century. Persian in origin and referenced in Exodus 28:42-43, “Priests wore linen breeches” as part of vestments is the first written indication of them. Early *sirwāl* have very little indication of form and functional design, however in later Islamic cultures they varied from group to group. Affordability also came into play. One would need to be able to afford to ‘waste’ the material on an extra undergarment (Burns, 2004, Stillman, 1998).

These pants, by the way were sometimes worn under knee length garment and not visible, so they often were, in fact, shorts.



The ghilala

During the Umayyad Caliphate, frescoes of women were painted on the walls of Khirbat al-Mafjar, Qusayr `Amra (Amra Castle). In one of the frescoes a clothes woman is wearing sleeveless full-length dress called a *ghilala* that contoured the body, neck opening boat-shaped (Richardson, 2011).

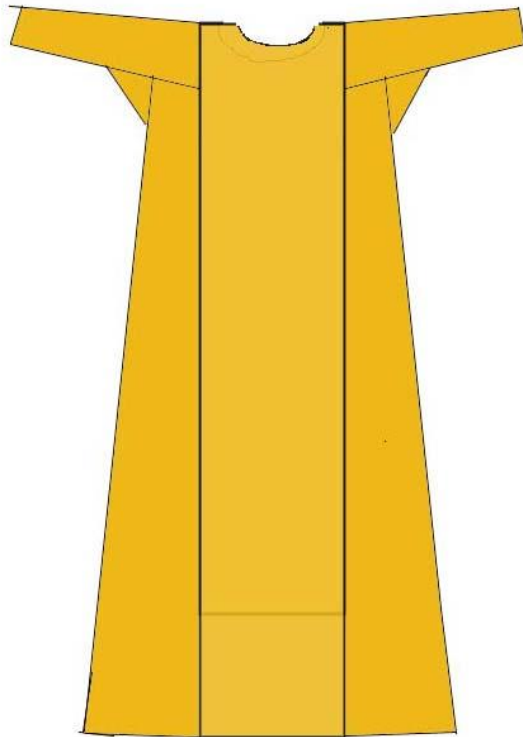
Later, in the Abbasid Caliphate, the body shirt, transformed into a much sheerer, thinner material that should be short, worn by men and women and was often sleeveless (Brill, 1979).

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The Qamis

Qamis (from late Latin *camisia*) is a basic body shirt worn by both sexes, ranged from mid-thigh to full length with long or short sleeves. The neck was round and could either be designed without a seam or with and left closed or just it could be folded down. It was the garment worn by the poor and children as their sole layer over the undergarments (Stillman, 1998).

By the mid 10th century, the *qamis* to be made of silk instead of linen for high court and most likely with the draw string gathering the opening of the neck slightly (Ashan, 1979).



Fresco of a woman in full dress on the walls of Khirbat al-Mafjar, Qusayr `Amra in Jordan. You are able to see what appears to be the gathering at the neck of her *qamis* (Richardson, 2011).

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Outer Garments

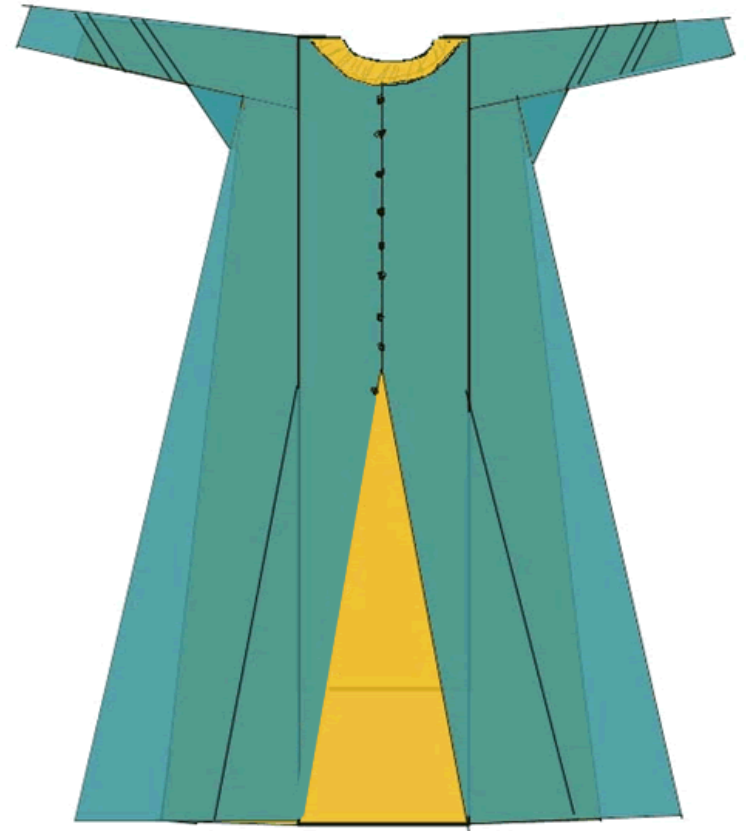
The *thawb*: *qaba* (dress or robe)

The Arabic word *thawb*, it's plural of *Thiyab* & the word *athwab* are all generic terms that designate clothing, garments and fabric. Especially during the Early Islamic Era, many garments were just a long piece of fabric, the mantles, wrapped around the body. By the Ummayyad Caliphate the *thawb* traditionally became a long or short-sleeved gown worn over the *izaar* (undergarments). *Khirbat <spelling?> al-majjar*, *qasayr `amra* (Amra Castle) also hold a fresco from the 10th century of a fully clothed woman depicted with a flowing blue tunic with a small round opening for the neck and tapered sleeves (Richardson, 2011).

In my clothing set, I chose the *qaba* as my overrobe for this outfit. It is an open tunic (*thwab*), patterned much in the way of the *qamis* but with the openings of a *khaftan*. Each garment could be worn independently of the other as a single form of dress as long as most of the neck was covered by the undergarments.

The *qaba* was a luxurious sleeved robe, slit down the front, with buttons made of the more luxurious fabrics such as silks and brocades (*dibaj*). They were most likely Persian robes, in the tradition of the one given as gift by the Persians to the Prophet (Stillman, 1998).

While my picture to the right had buttons on it, there is no direct evidence on how many buttons were worn. Some later depictions just have ties for the *qaba* or one or two buttons. The frescos that depicted these garments from the 10th century were not clear enough to determine.



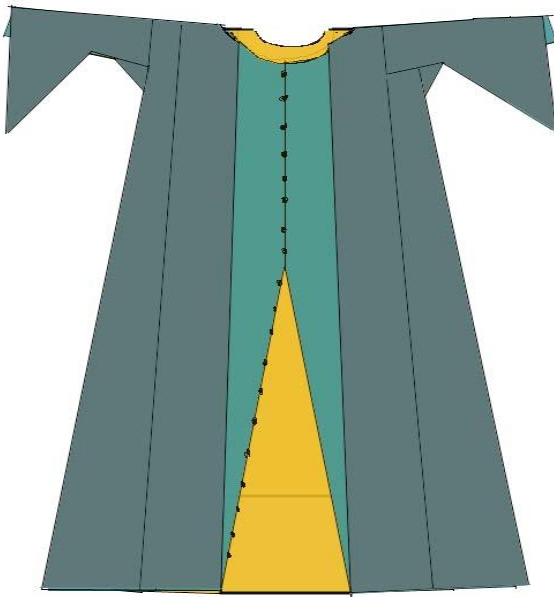
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Mantles

Arab fashion during the Abbasid Caliphate required both men and women to wear a mantle of some sort over everything else when appearing in public. For the lower economically sound individuals the mantle might be the only outer wrap that they wear over their underwear. Due to this precedence, there are actually many *hadiths* that question public modesty and try to address it, especially in areas of appropriate wear for men when they are at prayer. (Stillman, 1998)

As luxury once again became part of Arabic dress, the mantle evolved. While many still would wear fabric wrapped around them in less formal gatherings or at home, when they went to court, they began wearing coats instead of mantles. The head was still required to be covered, but a variety of coats emerged in to the fashion culture. (Stillman, Y., 1998, Burns, 2004, Ross, 1981)



The durra`a (coat)

The *Durra`a* was a long ample robe made of fine dabiqi linen that was slit down the front and had wide, long sleeves that left part of the arm uncovered (Ashan, 1979). Sometimes they were made of brocade. It greatly resembled the *khafan* imported from Persia during the reign of Caliph al-Muqtadir (908-932). Both garments evolved in to the Turkish *qafan* during the Ottoman Empire. During the Abbasid Caliphate, however, it is the *Durra`a* that has wide sleeves and the *khafan* that has sleeves that are narrow. (Stillman, N., 1979, Stillman, Y. 1998)

I have two different Mantles that I wear. My high court *durra`a* made out of linen/silk brocade and my everyday black linen *durra`a* that is unlined and light weight.

I am often asked why my outer-ropes are plain when my under-ropes are usually nice silks. My answer is sun, dirt, wind and sand. You would not have worn your best layer on the outside during much of the year because the harsh climate would ruin the fabric. A simple unadorned layer both washes easier and holds up to the climate better.

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Accessories- Veils

There are as many different types of veiling, even in the Middle Ages of Islamic society, that we could do an entire paper on just that topic. The veiling is a great part of what distinguished the dress of Men and Women in Arabic Society, whether they are Muslim or non-Muslim. By the time of The Prophet, the practice of covering ones head out of modesty and respect was normal for both men and women—a tradition still maintained by both Muslims and the Jewish during prayer.

During Early Islam, the practice of pulling ones mantle over ones head for modesty and prayer developed quickly. Muslim women began to cover their faces with simple veils and an adorned rectangle of fabric across the face. Although veiling wasn't as strict in Early Islamic times as it became later, *Jahili* women (non-muslim women) of good standing in society did cover their faces before strangers. A head veil with a *litham* (square piece hiding the face from nose down) was sufficient. (Stillman, 1998)

During the Ummayyad Caliphate, the rules for veiling became more strict, and very little of a woman's face was seen outside among strangers. The honey colored *taylasans* (veil) became a requirement for all non-Muslim women wearing Islamic Dress.

By the Abbasid Caliphate the veils became more stylized and started to follow (or dictate) fashion trends. Black was very stylish at the time, much like it became later in Europe, as an indication of a certain wealth or social status. During the 10th century, black was often worn as one of the veils or a *mi`jar* (the female equivalent of the turban (*imama*) both in form and use. It was worn together with the face veil, *miqna`a* or *miqna`*. Arabic women wore this veil when they went outside. It could be held on by a decorative headband made from leather, precious stones, metal or embroidered and beaded fabric (Ashan, 1979, Ross, 1981).

The head-coverings that you will see me wear are *mi`jar*, *taylasans*, *miqna`a* and *lithan*.

Glossary

Jahili - non-muslim women

Litham – square veil worn to cover the face from the nose down.

Mi`jar – veil or strip of usually black fabric worn by men and women turban style. This helped keep all over veils on the head for women.

Tavlasan – specifically, a honey colored veil worn beneath the black *migna`a* veil.

Migna`a - typically black veil worn over all the rest, square and worn when outside. This covered them completely. A decorative headband would hold it and the other veils on.



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Accessories

Shoes - *naʿl* (sandals)

The *naʿl* is a sandal worn early in Biblical times, through the age of Early Islam, and well into the 10th century's Abbasid Caliphate. Its base was flat with thongs threaded through the base and wrapped and affixed to the foot. These sandals were made from woven palm, flat leather or strips of leather with animal hair (Stillman, 1998, Ross, 1981).

From much of what I have read, there were boots that were worn, although they seem to have come from trading with other cultures. It was quite common for those who were of lesser means to just go barefoot. This would have built calluses up on their feet given the extreme heat of the sand.



Naʿl Sandals of 10th-12th century (Ross, 1981)

Tiraz Bands

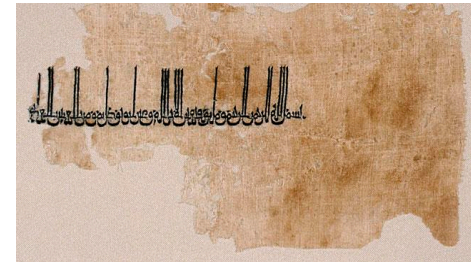
Textile factories were already in full swing by the Umayyad Caliphate and became a standard feature of medieval Islamic textiles culture by the Abbasid Caliphate.

The special embroidered fabrics in these palace textile factories were known as *tiraz* (literally meaning embroidery.)

In the most simplistic definition, *tiraz* refers to embroidery, but in a much more specific sense it referenced the wide bands with writing in them, and then further, any elaborately embroidered robe that a ruler or his entourage might have worn (Kuhnel-Bellinger, 1952).

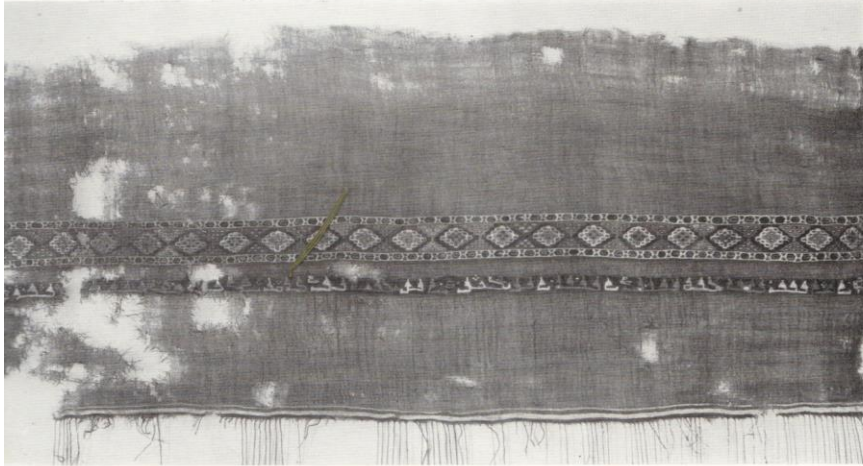
Tiraz garments were bestowed as tokens of royal favor, and as time progressed, they could have been used to express favor or appreciation in business transactions or from the head of a household to a lesser person of rank. From the Ruler (*caliph*) it could be and was most often given to poets and musicians (and other entertainers) with very little ceremony; just a simple thank you (Stillman, N. 1979, Stillman, Y. 1998).

Tiraz garments were also among the standard gifts brought by diplomatic embassies to other rulers.



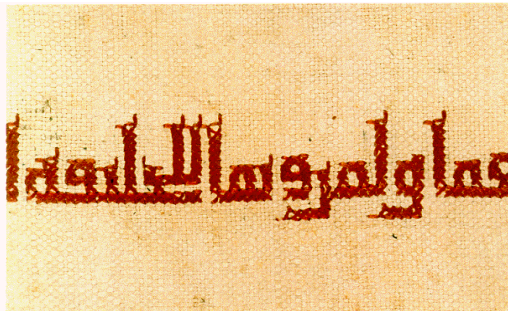
10th Century Tiraz band, silk embroidery on linen
(Eschenbach, 2005).

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1.2 Wool with Wool and Linen Tapestry, [Woven in the Faiyum. 10th c. A.D.]

(p. 84)



10th Century Tiraz band; red silk embroidery on linen- (Factory at Tinnis) (Kuhnel-Bellinger, 1952).

This *Tiraz* band is a perfect example of cross stitch in 10th century Arabia. It debunks a common theory that the Arabic in these bands was never embroidered in Red.

The figure to the **left** is a Tiraz band of wool and linen tapestry. This became more and more prevalent during the Abbasid Caliphate as the *Tiraz* band began to represent wealth and status.

Typically Tiraz bands were basted on the most elegant and opulent layer like the *durra'a*.

The tablet woven border would have been woven as they wove the fabric for the *tiraz* bands and then the inscription would have been embroidered on it afterward.

Documenting textiles and fiber arts is sometimes difficult because of the fragility of the materials, but there happens to be a wealth of extant embroidered garments and fragments to examine from this era and region.

Eastern Rus peoples were actually influenced by Byzantium, the Caliphates, and Persia and analogues to modern embroidery techniques from the East abound. The Middle East, from Byzantium to Egypt, was rich in embroidery traditions by the 10th century, including stem stitch, split stitch, satin stitch, chain stitch and cross stitch. While the Middle Eastern Embroidery seems to be predominantly done with silk floss on either silk or linen, sometimes linen embroidery thread was used as well. Precious metal embroidery, such as couching, was also common in Middle Eastern textiles (Historical Needlework Resources, 2011; Glasvryn, 2005; Eschenbach, 2005).

By the 10th century, the Viking Era Rus used a number of embroidery stitches, including stem stitch, chain stitch, couching, and herringbone (Jones, 2005; Historical Needlework Resources, 2011). They also worked metal embroidery either couched or chain stitched (Jones, 2005; Priest-Dorman 1997). Extant embroidery was also found at Birka that shows a marked Eastern influence. Here, finds included embroidery done in both silk and wool (Priest-Dorman, 1997).

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APPENDIX

Time Periods of Islamic States during the Middle Ages:

Early Islam	570-632 C.E.
Umayyad Caliphate	661-750 C.E.
Abbasid Caliphate	750-1258 C.E.
Christian Crusades	1095-1270 C.E.
Monguls invade	1258 C.E.
Fatimid Caliphate	909–1171 C. E.
Shadow Caliphate	1258-1517 C.E.
Ottoman Empire	1380-1918 C.E.
Ottomans conquer Constantinople, renaming it Istanbul	1453 C.E.
Christians drive last of Moslems out of Spain	1492 C.E.
Sokoto Caliphate	1809-1903 C.E.
Ahmadiyya Caliphate	1908 C. E. -Present
	(Paul, 1998; Lewis, 1996; Okene and Ahmad, 2011; Wikipedia, 2011).