Middle East History
Middle East Historical Timeline
A Preliminary Look

1. Pre-7th Century

2. 7th Century and the Advent of Islam

3. 7th Century—13th Century: Climax of Arab-Islamic Empires
   a. Prophet Muhammad
   b. Rightly Guided Caliphs
   c. Umayyad Empire
   d. Abbasid Empire

4. 15th Century–Early 20th Century: Ottoman Empire

5. 19th/20th Century to Mid-20th Century: European Colonial Rule

6. 1940s–1950s: National Independence

7. Contemporary Periods
   (Arab Nationalism, Local Nationalism, Political Islam, Reform)
The Arab World
The Islamic World
The Near East
Pre-Islam Arabia

The Myth of “the age of ignorance”
Discussing Islam and Islamic history is a monumental task. What we will be doing today is to extract from these topics what will be of use for the objectives of the course (we will focus more on the historical rather than cultural and normative aspects of Islam)
Outline

1- Historical origin of Islam
2- Early Caliphate: Four Rightly-Guided Caliphs
3- Divisions within Islam: Sunni, Shi`a, Khawarij
4- High Caliphate: Umayyads and Abbasids
5- Ottoman Empire
6- Islamic Belief and Practice: Sources of authority, 5 pillars, 4 articles of faith.
**The Early Years**

Islam is the last of monotheist religions revealed to Muhammad over a period of 22 years beginning in early 7th century Arabia (610).

- Muhammad was orphaned at a young age.
- He worked as the business manager for a wealthy widow, Khadija, in the thriving commercial routes between Arabia and the fertile crescent.
- At 610 he started receiving divine revelations in the form of messages and verses that were later collected and written in the Quran: 6000 verses ordered according to length (not chronologically).
Early Expansion

After a series of diplomatic efforts as well as battles, Muhammad was able to consolidate Islamic rule in Arabia by unifying its diverse and warring tribes. Medina was the center of the Islamic community-state that was created amidst the declining influence of the Byzantine and Zoroastrian empires.
Within a decade, Arab-Islamic forces asserted their rule over what is known today as Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Iran, and Egypt. The Islamic current overran their armies and elites but preserved their bureaucracy, culture, and government. This type of conquest was a mixed blessing: a source of tremendously rapid expansion and a source of fragmentation during times of religious, political, or economic crises or conflict. Local populations found Islamic rule to be comparatively more tolerant than previous rule (Byzantine and Persian). Conquered populations were given three options: conversion, acceptance of Islamic dominance, battle.
The history of the Caliphate is the history of Islam's political development. This is the source of much confusion with regard to the nature of Islam as a religion.

We will be discussing 3 periods: Rightly Guided Caliphs, Umayyads, and Abbasids.

Islam was politicized early on after the death of Muhammad, which created the crisis of succession: Muhammad had not designated a successor neither did the Qur'an address this issue unequivocally.

Initially, the Prophet's immediate companions agreed to select or acknowledge Abu-Bakr, an early convert, an advisor to Muhammad, and his father-in-law.
The Golden Age of Islam: The Rightly Guided Caliphs

- Abu-Bakr and tribal rebellions (632-34)
- Umar and the great period of expansion and conquest (634-644)
- Uthman and tribal conflict between Mecca and Medina (644-656)
- Ali and Islamic civil wars (656-661)

Ali was supported all along by those who believed that he was the rightful successor to the Prophet because of his blood ties (cousin and son-in-law). Ali faced two challenges:

1- Aisha (daughter of Abu-Bakr, Prophet's widow)
2- Mu`awiyah: governor of Syria and Uthman's relative

He Triumphed over Aisha and eventually lost to Mu`awiyah and was killed by the Kharijites.

Ali lead an army to crush the rebellion of Mu`awiyah who refused to step down as the governor of Syria and accept Ali's replacement. Mu`awiyah, fearing an eventual defeat, called for arbitration which ended up inconclusive. Ali's acceptance of arbitration angered loyal supporters of Ali and lead to the formation of the Kharijites who eventually assassinated him in 661. Mu`awiyah then laid successful claim to the Caliphate, thereby ending Islam's Golden Age (normative period) and transforming the caliphate into an absolute monarchy.
Organization and Institutions

Caliphate: organization and administration of the Islamic state
Islam: basis of identity and ideology
Authority of Caliph: derives from being successor to Muhammad: protector and defender of the faith, institutor of Shari`a and he who spreads Islam
Model for Governance: Muhammad's political practice.

Classes
- Arab Muslims
- Converts
- People of the book
- Slaves
The Umayyad Empire: 661-750

- Transformation of Caliphate to an **absolute monarchy**: hereditary vs. selection
- **Centralization and militarization** of the Islamic Empire
- **Arabization**: Reliance on Arab/Syrian warriors alienated non-Arab Muslims
- Moved capital to Damascus
- Created greater social stratification and enjoyed influx of new "foreign" ideas and practices
- Umayyad Caliphate denounced as dynastic rule and thus un-Islamic by many Muslims
- Excesses and infiltration led to the development of (mysticism and) the religious sciences and the formulation and explication of Islamic law to safeguard beliefs and limit the power of the Caliph
- Growth of opposition forces:
  1. Non-Arab Muslims as second class citizens,
  2. Kharijites and Shi`is viewing Umayyads as usurpers,
  3. Arab Muslims in Mecca, Medina, and Iraq resenting Syrian privileges,
  4. Pious Muslims resenting luxurious lifestyles, social privileges, and unwarranted innovations.

All above culminated in the downfall of the Umayyads at the hands of Abu al-Abbas who initiated the Abbasid era.
The Abbasid Empire: 750-1258

- An era of strong centralized government, economic prosperity, and remarkable civilization.
- Abbasid rule borrowed heavily from Persian culture and was more inclusive.
- Abbasid success was based less on conquest and more on trade, commerce, industry, and agriculture.
- Major contributions were made in philosophy, Algebra, geometry, science, medicine, literature, art, and architecture (some started during the Umayyad era).

- Abbasids became the great patrons of an emerging religious class of Ulama (religious scholars) which further developed Islamic religious law: Shari`a
- Abbasid rule was challenged by the Fatimid dynasty in Egypt and by the crusades. Although the Abbasids more or less triumphed, their empire was exhausted and fragmented. It fell apart in 1258 under the onslaught of the marching Mongols (yeeeee haaww!).
- The Ottoman Empire in the 15th century carried the mantle of Islam. (with the Moghuls and the Safavids Empires to the East).
The Ottoman Sultanate in the 16th and 17th Centuries
The Ottoman Empire in World War I, 1914-1918

Map of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, 1914-1918, showing key events and territories.

- Gallipoli, Constantinople, Black Sea, Russian
- Armenia, Kars, Batum, Azerbaijan, Baku
- Caspian Sea, Persia, PERSIA
- Mediterranean Sea, Mediterranean
- Suez Canal, Cairo
- Red Sea, Yenbo, Medina, Hejaz
- Sinai, El Akaba, Egypt
- 1914 British Protectorate, Egypt
- Russian forces, French forces
- Turkish forces, Arabic forces
- British forces, area of Arab revolt against Ottomans
- Turkish lines at time of surrender, 30 Oct. 1918
Husayn-McMahon Agreements, 1915
Sykes-Picot Agreement, 1916
The Balfour Declaration

Foreign Office, November 2nd, 1917

Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty’s Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to and approved by, the Cabinet.

“His Majesty’s Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.”

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

Yours sincerely,

Arthur James Balfour
The Mandates, 1920
Opposition to the Mandates, 1920-1945
Establishment of the Republic of Turkey
North Africa and West Asia, ca. 1920
The recession of the Persian frontiers

Lost by Persia to Russia 1813
Persia to Russia 1828

Tehran (Capital from 1796)

Occupied by Russia 1881

Limit of Persian control in early 19th century

Ceded by Persia to India 1871 and 1905

Transferred from Persia to Afghanistan 1857
The Interwar Period
Independence Struggles

• Interwar Period Marked by French and British Domination

• Arab Political Activity was devoted to achieving independence.
  Therefore:
  - other domestic considerations were put on the back-burner (e.g., welfare, land reform)
  - internal conflicts were glossed over (between notables, nationalists, and traditionalists)

• Elite Nationalism: Early Arab political leaders and colonization:
  - mostly land-owners and upper class professionals
  - maintaining their privileges required local bases of support & the blessing of European powers: this meant that compromises had to be made & resistance was moderated

• Popular Nationalism: 2nd Generation Leaders
  - a rising alternative leadership emerged: nationalist-populist, included most classes
  - the expansion of the state involved the mobilization/incorporation of working/middle classes that were the seed for the overthrow of the “elite nationalist regimes.”
  - this is the leadership that in one way or another, continued to rule the arab world
The End of Colonialism in the Middle East

• The end of Colonialism
  -just as WWI weakened the grip of the Ottoman Empire, so did WWII with the Europeans
  -Independence was formally granted, but imperial aspirations and dependency persisted
  -Independent states and leaders struggled through a number of contradictions and challenges (politically, socially, and economically)

• The Emerging Nation-States
  -marked by dependence
  -internal class disparities
  -disparities between rich and poor countries
  -uneven internal development
  -lack of institutionalization