

ROUTLEDGE REVIVALS

# Medieval Islamic Civilization

An Encyclopedia

Volume I

A - K

*Edited by*

**Josef W. Meri**



## Medieval Islamic Civilization

Islamic civilization flourished in the Middle Ages across a vast geographical area that spans today's Middle and Near East.

First published in 2006, *Medieval Islamic Civilization* examines the socio-cultural history of the regions where Islam took hold between the 7th and 16th centuries. This important two-volume work contains over 700 alphabetically arranged entries, contributed and signed by international scholars and experts in fields such as Arabic languages, Arabic literature, architecture, history of science, Islamic arts, Islamic studies, Middle Eastern studies, Near Eastern studies, politics, religion, Semitic studies, theology, and more. Entries also explore the importance of interfaith relations and the permeation of persons, ideas, and objects across geographical and intellectual boundaries between Europe and the Islamic world.

This reference work provides an exhaustive and vivid portrait of Islamic civilization and brings together in one authoritative text all aspects of Islamic civilization during the Middle Ages. Accessible to scholars, students and non-specialists, this resource will be of great use in research and understanding of the roots of today's Islamic society as well as the rich and vivid culture of medieval Islamic civilization.

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# MEDIEVAL ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION

AN ENCYCLOPEDIA

Volume 1

A – K

INDEX

Josef W. Meri

Editor

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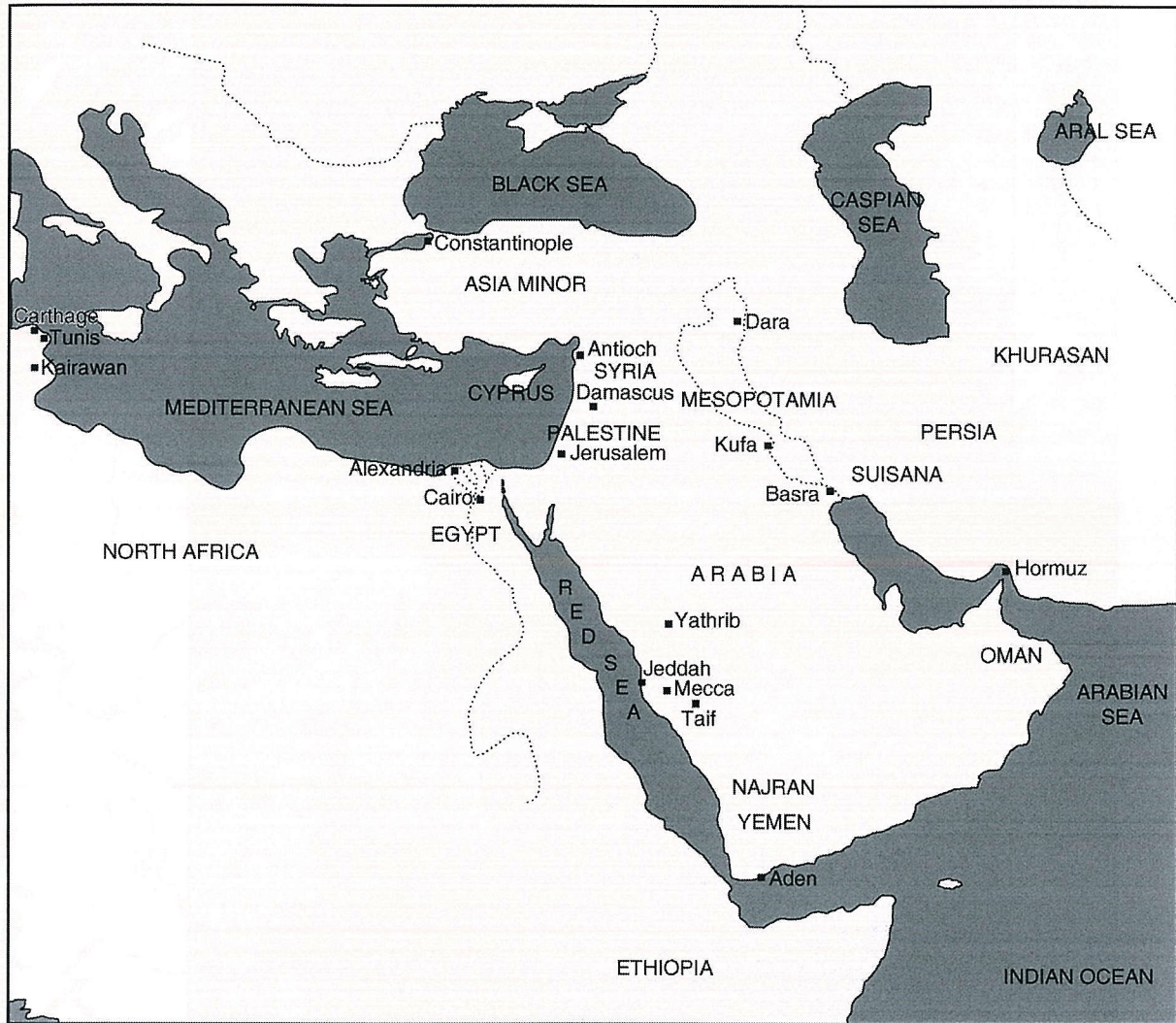
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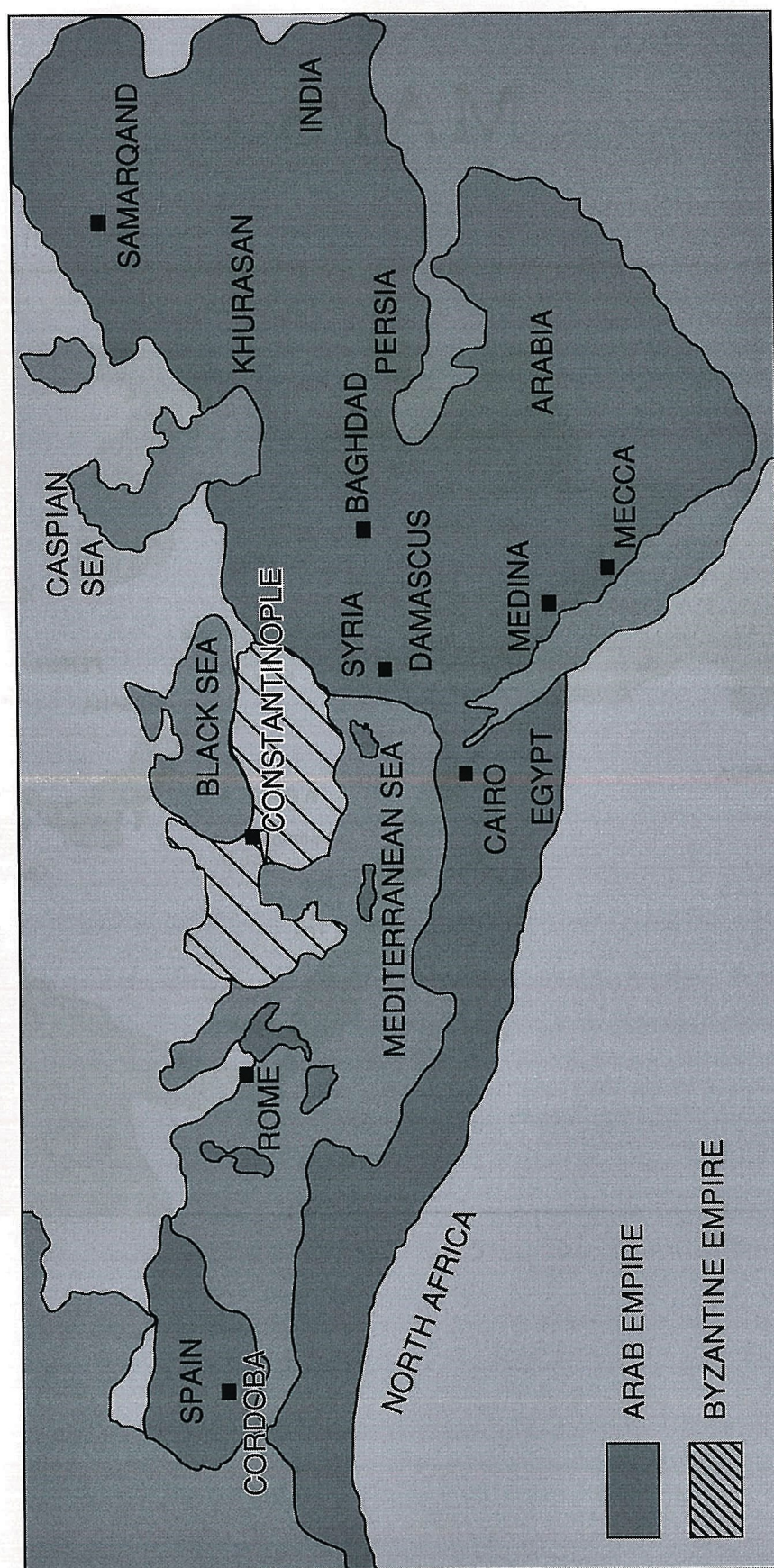
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# MAPS

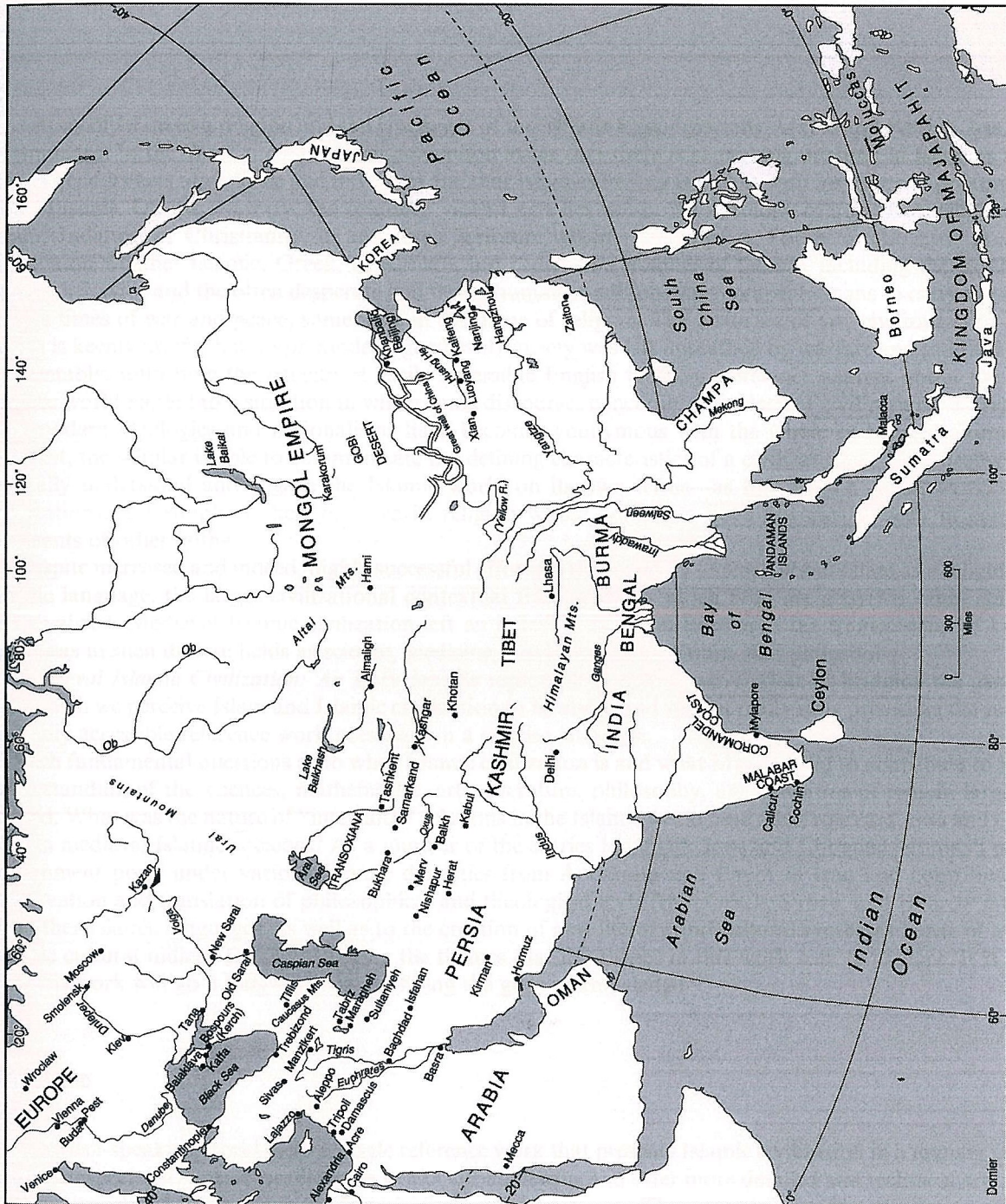


Arabia, ca. 600 CE



Arab Empire, 700-850 CE

# INTRODUCTION



Asia, 1211-1239 CE

# INTRODUCTION

The study of Islam as a religion and the languages of the Middle East, especially Arabic and Persian, has gained in prominence. In the West, a common misperception exists that there is something intrinsic in Islam as a religion that engenders acts of violence and terrorism and that Islamic history is replete with instances of pogroms against non-Muslims. On the contrary, the origin of violent acts lies not in the ontology of any given religion whether Islam, Judaism, or Christianity, in any given Scripture whether the Qur'an, Torah, or Bible, or in any given civilization whether Islamic, Greek, or Roman, but rather in a number of factors, including the psychology of human behavior and the often desperate and trying human conditions that compel humans to carry out desperate acts in times of war and peace, sometimes in the name of religion. The historian of any civilization or historical epoch is keenly aware that no premodern (medieval) society was left unscathed by warfare and political conflicts. Lamentably, until now the paucity of easily accessible English language reference sources about the medieval Islamic world has led to a situation in which some discourses concerning the clash of civilizations, current affairs, and modern ideologies and nationalisms have become synonymous with the whole of Islamic civilization. By contrast, the scholar is able to communicate the defining characteristics of a civilization and is moreover, able to critically understand and engage the Islamic world on its own terms—as heir to one of the world's greatest civilizations, not simply as heir to a world religion whose adherents have historically been in conflict with adherents of other faiths.

Despite increased and indeed, highly successful efforts in the academy to teach about Islam as a religion and the Arabic language, the larger civilizational contextual framework of which both are a part is often ignored and marginalized. Medieval Islamic civilization left an indelible mark on Europe in the transmission of knowledge and ideas in such diverse fields as science, medicine, mathematics, literature, and philosophy.

*Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia* represents a collaborative effort at bridging the gap between that which we perceive Islam and Islamic civilization to be about and what it really is by providing the reader with an easily accessible reference work presented in a concise language.

Such fundamental questions as to what Islamic civilization is and what Muslims did to contribute to European understanding of the sciences, mathematics, arts, literature, philosophy, and government remain largely unanswered. What was the nature of “interfaith” relations in the Islamic world, and what roles did Jews and Christians play in medieval Islamic societies? As a number of the entries highlight, Jews and Christians attained prominent government posts under various Islamic dynasties from Andalusia and Egypt to Iraq and contributed to the preservation and translation of philosophical and theological texts from Greek, Syriac, and Hebrew into Arabic and other Islamic languages, as well as to the creation of new literary and cultural syntheses borne of a common Islamic cultural milieu. These are among the themes that the entries in this work seek to explore. It is our hope that this work will go a long way toward filling the gaps in knowledge.

## Audience

The English-speaking world lacks a single reference work that presents Islamic civilization in a manner intelligible to the nonspecialist. Specialist reference works are numerous and offer more detailed and technical articles about various aspects of Islam from pre-Islamic times to the present. The nonspecialist who desires to understand Islamic civilization is left with few choices except to consult general reference works or works devoted to the European Middle Ages, which only give a fragmented picture of medieval Islamic civilization.

It is to be hoped that the nonspecialist reader, as well as university and secondary school students and teachers, will benefit from this work.

## INTRODUCTION

### Conception and Genesis

*Medieval Islamic Civilization* was conceived to share our knowledge as experts in the field of Islamic history and civilization and to correct the misconceptions and misinformation that exist. This impetus encouraged me to take up the challenge of helping to produce a unique reference work. However, it must be emphasized that this is very much an international collaborative effort that includes contributions by leading experts in their fields from North America, Europe, and Asia. Contributors come from various academic backgrounds and employ a diversity of approaches. Each of the entries adopts a unique approach to a given topic and is written dispassionately without regard to current political exigencies or political considerations. *Medieval Islamic Civilization* presents cutting-edge research into such pivotal themes relating to daily life, the ethnic and religious communities of the Islamic world, their beliefs and practices, interfaith relations, popular culture and religion, cultural, economic, and political contacts and exchanges with Europe and Asia, learning and universities, and travel and exploration. It provides a comprehensive portrait of the artistic, intellectual, literary, medical, and scientific achievements of Muslims, Jews, Christians, and others who contributed to the flourishing of one of the greatest civilizations known to humankind. Most of the authors are the leading international experts in their field. Yet all the contributions represent the highest standards in scholarship on the Islamic world.

### Choice of Entries

While it is impossible to discuss every facet of Islamic civilization in a two-volume reference—nonspecialist encyclopedias are selective by nature—the choice of entries reflects the diversity of the subjects that are covered herein. The editorial board discussed the entries extensively, and certain additions and emendations were made to compensate for underrepresented themes. Unlike other volumes in this highly acclaimed Routledge series on the Middle Ages that are more geographically specific and are focused on the European Middle Ages from the fifth through sixteenth centuries CE, *Medieval Islamic Civilization* posed a considerable challenge given the geographical expanse of the Islamic world, from the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa to the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia from roughly the sixth through seventeenth centuries. Unlike other reference works, *Medieval Islamic Civilization* has de-emphasized historical themes in favor of an original synthesis that gives greater prominence to aspects of daily life and to the non-Arab elements of Islamic civilization.

The Islamic Middle Ages is taken to represent the period from 622 CE, or the first year of the Hijra of the Prophet Muhammad to Medina, which also marks the first year of the Islamic calendar, though we have also included entries that deal with pre-Islamic themes, peoples, and societies down until the seventeenth century in the case of Southeast Asia, where no significant written records exist for earlier periods.

Indeed, the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries represent the most significant period for written records in Southeast Asia. However, this demarcation is somewhat arbitrary. Indeed, it may be argued that certain continuities existed in Islamic civilization down until the advent of modern secular and national ideologies in the nineteenth century CE.

### Acknowledgments

The Board is pleased that so many of our colleagues from around the world recognized the value of *Medieval Islamic Civilization* as not simply another reference work and so enthusiastically answered the call to contribute. We are especially grateful for their inspiring level of commitment and dedication to this initiative and their high-quality contributions.

I would also like to thank the advisory board members for their unstinting dedication, the associate editors Julia Bray and Lutz Richter-Bernburg for expending considerable efforts in commenting on and suggesting revisions to various entries, and to Jere Bacharach for his overall invaluable contributions to *Medieval Islamic Civilization*. I am also grateful to Asma Afsaruddin and Donald Whitcomb for their recommendations. I am especially grateful to the former for agreeing to write a number of significant entries.

## INTRODUCTION

This work would not have been possible without the indefatigable efforts and abiding enthusiasm of the editors and publishers at Routledge, in particular Marie-Claire Antoine and Jamie Ehrlich. Also, thanks to the various Routledge staff members who were involved in the early stages of the project.

Finally, it is only fitting that I should pen these words from the Middle East after last having lived here nearly eight years ago.

Josef (Yousef) Waleed Meri  
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