

Appendix 16

The Muslim Calendar

Muslims follow a distinct calendar which was first introduced in AD 638, by the second Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab, who had been a close companion of Mohammed. It appears that he wanted to rationalise the various (and conflicting) dating systems that were in use. Consulting with his advisors, they agreed that the most appropriate reference point for a distinctive Islamic calendar was the year of the *Hijra*.

The actual starting date of the Muslim Calendar was chosen to be the first day of the first month (1 *Muharram*) of the year of the *Hijra*. By counting backwards on the basis of lunar months, the estimated date of the *Hijra* thus corresponds to 16 July 622. ⁱ This is the 1st day of *Muharram*, 1 AH, the years of the Islamic Calendar designated by the Latin *Anno Hegirae*.

One significant feature of the Muslim Calendar, as already mentioned, is the fact that it follows lunar months. This makes the 12 month Muslim Calendar of 354/5 days (see below), 10/11 days shorter than the Gregorian calendar. Through a cycle of 34 *hijra* years the Muslim Calendar will have returned to the same comparative dates with those of the Western Calendar.

Each new month of the Muslim Calendar is marked by the first appearance of the crescent moon (not the new moon), hence one of the reasons why the crescent moon is the popular symbol of Islam. There are different ideas about how the visibility of the crescent moon should be defined. This results in small differences in calendars around the Muslim world, differing from each other by about a day. It also means in practice that the number of days in any one month can vary. Because of this there is a consensus nowadays that the observations made in Cairo in respect of the start and end of *sawm* (the fast in the month of Ramadan) have become the norm for most other Muslim countries. Otherwise the rule is that if it is visible shortly after sunset on the evening of the 29th day, the following day is the first day of the new month; if no sighting is made then a 30th day is added to the current month, which is then followed by the first day of the following month.

There is a mathematical formula for converting between the Gregorian year and the Muslim year:

- from *Hijri* to Gregorian: divide by 1.031, then add 622.
- from Gregorian to *Hijri*: subtract 622, then multiply by 1.031

Now, for Muslims, it is not simply a case that they follow a different calendar. The *Hijri* Calendar is not based on mere sentimentality. It holds far deeper significance, both historically and religiously.

‘All the events of Islamic history, especially those which took place during the life of the Holy Prophet and afterwards are quoted in the *Hijra* calendar era. But our calculations in the Gregorian calendar keep us away from those events and happenings, which are pregnant of (sic) admonitory lessons and guiding instructions. And this chronological study is possible only by adopting the *Hijri* calendar to indicate the year and the lunar month in line with our cherished traditions.’ ⁱⁱ

continued ...

The Names of Months in the Muslim Calendar ⁱⁱⁱ

	Month Names	Days in the month
1	Muharram	29/30
2	Safar	29/30
3	Rabi' al-awwal	29/30
4	Rabi' al-Thani	29/30
5	Jumada al-awwal	29/30
6	Jumada al-Thani	29/30
7	Rajab	29/30
8	Sha'ban	29/30
9	Ramadan	29/30
10	Shawwal	29/30
11	Dhu al-Qi'da	29/30
12	Dhu al-Hijja	29/30

Important Dates

Muharram: 1		Islamic New year.
Muharram: 10	<i>Ashura</i>	The Shi'a commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Husain at Karbala, often flagellating themselves.
Rajab: 27	<i>Isra & Miraj</i>	Night of journey of Mohammed from Mecca to Jerusalem then his ascension into heaven (and back).
Rab al-awwal: 12	<i>Mawlid al-Nabi</i>	Commemoration of Mohammed's birthday and his life.
Sha'ban: 15	<i>Nisfu Sha'ban</i>	Muslim night of fasting and prayer of repentance for all harm done.
Ramadan: 1		First day of the month of fasting.
Ramadan: 20-29	<i>Laylatu'l-Qadr</i>	the Night of Destiny, occurs on one of these days, the night of the great opening of Heaven when the Qur'an was revealed to Mohammed, an auspicious night.
Shawwal: 1-4	<i>Eid ul-Fitr</i>	celebrated on 1 Shawwal and the following days, and marks the end of <u>sawm</u> . A time of giving presents, and sharing feasts.
Dhu ul-Hijja: 7		1st day of hajj. Praying in the Great Mosque at Mecca, performing umrah.
Dhu ul-Hijja: 8		2 nd day of hajj. In plain of Arafat
Dhu ul-Hijja: 9		3 rd day of hajj. Standing in the plain of Arafat, two sermon fill the day; after sundown the running to Muzdalifa.
Dhu ul-Hijja: 10		4th day of hajj. Sermon at Muzdalifa. Throw stones at 3 pillars at Mina. Goat sacrificed (Eid ul-Azha). Shaving of heads.
Dhu ul-Hijja: 11-13		5 th -7 th days of <i>hajj</i> . Days spent in feast and throwing stones at the 3 pillars at Mina. On 12 th last opportunity to perform umrah in Mecca. Following this many hajji go to Mohammed's tomb at Medina.

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ⁱ Or 622 CE (Common Era), as Muslims tend to designate our Calendar, not wishing to use the allusion to the birth of Jesus Christ).

ⁱⁱ **Waleed A. Muhanna**, [Article](#): *A Brief Introduction to the Muslim (Hijri) Calendar*.

ⁱⁱⁱ There are no equivalent western months as the Muslim lunar year is shorter than a solar year by about 11 days.