palace on the spot to which the famous fountain in the Court of Lions should be attributed. The Alhambra has survived to the present day largely because it became a residence of the Christian kings of Spain who preserved it intact.

The palace was constructed in three units: the Meschwar (Spanish Mexuar) or public court, the formal throne room and court (the Court of Myrtles), and the harem or private apartments around the Court of Lions. As in many Muslim buildings the exterior of the Alhambra is in complete contrast to the fragile world of the interior, with its multiple needle-like columns and 'floating' stalac
tite ceilings.

The mausoleum
In addition to mosques and palaces the Islamic world has produced numerous other religious and secular structures—the madrasah (theological school) and the caravanserai (rest house on a caravan route)—as well as buildings which stand somewhat in isolation like the Dome of the Rock.

In the purpose and appearance, the mausoleum forms a separate category. Although Islam discouraged the erection of elaborate tombs this did not prevent rulers from building them, and in the east the mausoleum became the most important structure after the mosque and palace. Unlike the palace, vast sections of which were hidden from public view, the mausoleum was often built as a public demonstration of political power, a permanent celebration of a departed ruler's might.

The Tomb of the Samanids, Bukhara (10th century) The tomb consists of a small brick-built chamber covered by a dome. Structurally it forms a landmark in Islamic architecture, being one of the first examples of a dome fitted perfectly on to a square chamber by means of squinches. The building relied for its external decorative effect on extreme contrasts of light and shade, achieved by laying each alternate brick sideways so that there is a uniform pattern of shadow all over the surface. This idea influenced later architectural decoration throughout the Near East.

The Gunbad-i Qabus (1006–1007) This massive brick tomb, the largest of its kind, was built by a local ruler of Gurgan near the southern shore of the Caspian Sea. It is an immense circular tower, two hundred feet high, with ten buttresses and a pointed 'tent' roof. This is the earliest of some fifty tomb towers constructed in Iran, the majority of which are round, though octagonal and fluted ones occur.

The finest tomb towers (türkbes) were built by the Seljuks of Anatolia. They are mostly stone structures with conical roofs and the majority are carved with floral and geometric designs. The tomb chamber proper is located in an underground crypt.

The Mausoleum of Oljeitu (Ilkhanid 1307–1313) The mausoleum was built at Sultanâya, one of the Mongol capitals of Iran, initially with the intention of making it the shrine of one of the early Muslim saints, Imam Husayn. The huge dome rests on an octagonal base, which runs a gallery with arcades opening outwards. A simpler form of this had been used in the Samanid Tomb. On each angle of the octagon there stood a slender minaret, only the bases of which remain today. There are two domes, one inside the other, a low one covering the inner chamber and above that the high pointed one seen from outside. Double domes had already been used by the Seljuks, in the Mastjî-i Jami' of Isfahan and also in tomb towers.

The Gur-i Amir (Timurid, 1405) Timur intended the Gur-i Amir at Samarkand to be the tomb of his nephew, but as he himself died in the year of its completion he was interred there too. Like the Mausoleum of Oljeitu the dome is set on an octagonal base, but is raised on a tall circular drum. The bulbous dome is decorated with sixty-four flutes of blue faience tile. The interior chamber is square and richly decorated with semi-precious stones.

The Taj Mahal (Mughal, 1635) The Taj Mahal was the work of Shah Jahan, who built it for his wife. It follows the tradition of domed mausolea beginning with the Samanid Tomb, using a bulbous Timurid dome, and open galleries like the Mausoleum of Oljeitu. The platform on which the tomb rests is a Mughal innovation and appears in the Tomb of Humayun (1565) from which the Taj Mahal is derived. Shah Jahan's own contribution was the use of white marble. The interior is lit through pierced marble lattices, while the actual tombs (for Shah Jahan is buried here too) are enclosed in an incredibly elaborate marble screen.
The Islamic Empire
from Spain to the borders of China
with principal sites mentioned in the text

- Arabia at the time of Muhammad 622-632 AD
- Conquests under the first Calipha 632-661 AD
- Conquests under the Umayyads 661-750 AD