

Topic Page: [empire](#)

Definition: **empire** from *Collins English Dictionary*

n

- 1** an aggregate of peoples and territories, often of great extent, under the rule of a single person, oligarchy, or sovereign state
- 2** any monarchy that for reasons of history, prestige, etc, has an emperor rather than a king as head of state
- 3** the period during which a particular empire exists
- 4** supreme power; sovereignty
- 5** a large industrial organization with many ramifications, esp a multinational corporation. Related adjective: **imperial**

[C13: from Old French, from Latin *imperium* rule, from *imperāre* to command, from *parāre* to prepare]

Summary Article: **empire**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Collective name for a group of countries under the control of a single country or dynasty. Major empires in Europe have included the Roman Empire and the British Empire, and in Asia the Ottoman Empire and Mogul Empire (see Mogul dynasty).

Empires in history The earliest empires were established between 4,000 and 2,000 years ago in the Middle East, by the rulers of Sumeria, Babylon, and Assyria. Egypt also ruled an extensive empire. The next great empire was that of Persia, which was overthrown by Alexander the Great of Macedonia (Greece); his empire crumbled when he died at the age of 32. The Romans created a huge empire in Europe, which extended as far as Britain. The greatest land empire that has ever existed was that of the Mongols in the AD 1200s, whose rule extended across Asia from China in the east to eastern Europe.

Imperialism flourished again with the discovery of the Americas in the late 1400s. Spain and Portugal built large empires there, which came to an end in the 1800s. France, Britain, and the Netherlands also created empires from the 1500s onwards. The last outburst of imperialism came in the late 1800s, when the scramble for Africa brought almost all of that continent under European rule. Meanwhile, Russia had built up a vast empire, with conquests beginning in 1360 that gradually covered the whole of northern Asia. This is the only empire that survives, though 14 eastern European and central Asian states became independent when the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics broke up in the 1990s.

Ancient empires The first empire in the Middle East was established by Sargon of Akkad, a ruler who flourished in Sumeria, in what is now southern Iraq, in the 2300s BC. He began by conquering the neighbouring city-states of Sumeria, and then took part of Iran, Syria, and northern Iraq. His empire extended from the Mediterranean Sea to the Gulf. His grandson Naramsin (3380–3344 BC) called himself 'king of the four quarters of the world'. The Akkadian Empire was followed, in much the same area, by those of Ur and Babylon. All these ancient empires were conquered by force of arms.

Assyria, a land in what is now northern Iraq, dominated the Middle East from 1356 to 609 BC. The Assyrian Empire included most of what is now Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Egypt, together with parts of Iran and Turkey. It was followed by a new Babylonian Empire under Nebuchadnezzar II, but that collapsed when he died in 539 BC.

The empire of Persia (the old name for Iran) was established by Cyrus the Great (550–330 BC). It extended from the Mediterranean coast in the west to the Indus River in what is now Pakistan to the east, and from the Caucasus Mountains in the north to the Indian Ocean in the south. Later Persian rulers conquered Egypt, but failed to occupy Greece despite several attempts. The Persian Empire was finally crushed by the Macedonian warrior Alexander the Great, but his empire dissolved when he died in 323 BC.

Romans and Ottomans The Romans came to power in Europe in the 400s BC, and had established their empire by 200 BC. It then expanded rapidly, taking in Greece, Macedonia, Turkey, Syria, and Palestine by 60 BC. From 58 BC to 51 BC the Roman general Julius Caesar conquered Gaul (modern France), and a few years later Egypt became a Roman province. Britain, as far north as Hadrian's Wall, was annexed, as were lands in eastern Europe which are now part of Hungary and Romania. The Roman Empire later split into two: the West, which was ruled from Rome, and the East, which was ruled from Constantinople (modern Istanbul). Germanic tribes conquered the Western Empire in AD 476.

The Eastern Roman Empire, known as the Byzantine Empire because Constantinople's name was originally Byzantium, lasted until 1453, when it was overrun by the Ottoman Turks. The Ottoman Empire at one stage covered Anatolia (Asian Turkey) and parts of North Africa, southwestern Asia, and southeastern Europe as far north as Hungary. It gradually lost territory in the 1700s and 1800s, and came to an end as a result of World War I.

European conquests The demands of trade led to European expansion and colonialism. The need to find an economical route to the spices and other valued goods of India and Southeast Asia led to the Portuguese opening up the sea route to India around the Cape of Good Hope, and the 'discovery' of America by Christopher Columbus in 1492. Spain and Portugal at once divided the world between them. Under the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494, Spain was to have all the land west of an imaginary line (the Line of Demarcation) 370 leagues (about 1,790 km/1,110 mi) west of the Cape Verde Islands, and Portugal the lands to the east. What the Spaniards did not realize was that this division gave most of Brazil to Portugal.

Portugal began to colonize Brazil in the 1530s. Spain built up huge empires in South and Central America, and claimed much territory in North America, which it later abandoned. Both these empires collapsed in the early 1800s. Britain, France, and the Netherlands, who were not party to the Treaty of Tordesillas, occupied lands in North America and set up empires there. In the 1700s the British ousted France from its North American territories, but lost its most important empire (the Thirteen Colonies), which became the United States of America.

The British Empire was created in the 1700s and 1800s, and included India, Canada, Australia, and South Africa. In the scramble for Africa in the late 1800s, seven European countries – Belgium, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, and Spain – occupied or controlled all of Africa except for Ethiopia and Liberia. The African lands finally regained their independence in the years after World War II.

APA

Chicago

Harvard

MLA

empire. (2018). In Helicon (Ed.), *The Hutchinson unabridged encyclopedia with atlas and weather guide*. Abington, UK: Helicon. Retrieved from <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/empire>



© RM, 2018. All rights reserved.



© RM, 2018. All rights reserved.

APA

empire. (2018). In Helicon (Ed.), *The Hutchinson unabridged encyclopedia with atlas and weather guide*. Abington, UK: Helicon. Retrieved from <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/empire>

Chicago

"empire." In *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*, edited by Helicon. Helicon, 2018. <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/empire>

Harvard

empire. (2018). In Helicon (Ed.), *The Hutchinson unabridged encyclopedia with atlas and weather guide*. [Online]. Abington: Helicon. Available from: <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/empire> [Accessed 22 October 2019].

MLA

"empire." *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*, edited by Helicon, 2018. *Credo Reference*, <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/empire>. Accessed 22 Oct. 2019.