CHAPTER ONE

The Rise of Islam

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Introduction

Expressions such as 'the rise of Islam', 'the emergence of Islam', and 'the origins of Islam' are ambiguous and understood differently by different people. Commonly taken today simply as the name of a religion, historically Islam refers to something much bigger than what is generally understood now by the word religion. In pre-modern times, and in many places still, Islam implies a way of life involving such things as political, social, and economic norms and behaviour. An Islamic society may include groups that follow religions other than Islam. In that sense, Islam is a culture deeply affected by the religion of Islam but also by things which to modern eyes may appear to have little to do with religion, or to have sources that are not Islamic. To determine a precise point of origin for such a complex of ideas, practices and institutions is probably not possible. To decide a time at which its 'rise' or 'emergence' was over and when it existed in a state of maturity will involve a number of subjective judgements. Here the rise of Islam is envisaged as a process covering two to three hundred years, from approximately AD 600 to 900.

Islam has its own, not monolithic but broadly consistent, accounts of its origins and early history. Much reported in the Muslim traditional accounts is accepted as fact also by those who have tried to develop new understandings of what the emergence of Islam involved and how it occurred. It is the overall framework and different ways of looking at things that distinguish the more traditional versions of the rise of Islam from newer, academic ones. Beginning with a broadly traditional perspective should simplify the subsequent presentation of the ways in which academic scholarship has suggested new interpretations and approaches.

A Tradition-based Account

Muslims have presented Islam as the continuation of the true monotheist religion taught by Abraham (Ibrāhīm) and all the prophets sent by God to mankind before and after him. Abraham brought his religion to the Arabs of Arabia when he built the Ka'ba (literally 'cube'), the sanctuary of God, at Mecca, and established the rites of worship there. Abraham left his son Ishmael (Isma'īl) in Mecca, and Ishmael became the ancestor of the main branch of the Arab people. For some time the Arabs were faithful to Abraham's religion but following a pattern common throughout human

history, they gradually fell away from the true path and lapsed into polytheism and idolatry. God then sent Muḥammad, the final prophet, to call them to Islam, which is identical with the religion of Abraham, and to make it supreme throughout the world. God's reasons for choosing Muḥammad as His prophet, and for sending him at the time and place He did, are inscrutable.[1]

Traditionally, the life of the prophet Muḥammad and the few decades after his death in AD 632 are seen as the time when Islam was established in a substantial sense as a religion, a state, and a society. For many, expressions like 'the rise of Islam' refer almost exclusively to the activities of the Prophet and his immediate successors. That is the time before Islam came out of Arabia.

Born in Mecca in western Arabia (the Ḥijāz) at a time given only imprecisely in the traditional biographies but generally taken to be about AD 570, Muḥammad, according to tradition, began to receive revelations from God when he was aged about forty. With some exceptions, his Meccan fellow townsmen rejected his teachings and his claims to be a prophet. At a date equivalent to AD 622 he and some of his Meccan followers left his native town in order to settle in the oasis town of Yathrib (later called Medina) about three hundred miles to the north. That event, known as the Hijra, is presented as the turning point in his fortunes. Subsequently (according to tradition seventeen years later), the year in which it occurred was chosen as the first of a new, Islamic era (the Hijri era, abbreviated AH).[2]

In Yathrib Muhammad was successful in establishing a religious and political community and in overcoming various enemies. Prominent among them were the large Jewish community of Yathrib and the still pagan leaders of Mecca. The Jews, accused of conspiring with his pagan enemies, were removed from the scene by deportations and then executions. Two years before his death he was able to lead a band of his followers to Mecca and occupy the town without much bloodshed. Its sanctuary, the Kaʻba, was cleansed of idolatry and again dedicated to the worship of the one true God (Allāh) for which Abraham had established it.

God's revelations came to Muḥammad on many occasions throughout his prophetic career. The angel Gabriel (Jibrīl), brought the very words of God himself. In addition, God guided the Prophet's own words and behaviour, which his companions remembered and transmitted to later generations. Thus God made His will known in two ways, through His words (later to be collected in the Qur'ān) and through the Prophet's own words and deeds, collectively known as his Sunna. By the time of Muḥammad's death, the fundamental elements of Muslim belief and religious life (the so-called 'five pillars of Islam') had been fixed in their normative forms, the Islamic revelation was complete (although not yet committed to writing), and a state and society ruled by the Prophet from Medina and based on Islam established.[3]

Following his death, according to this view, there occurred a consolidation and extension of what he had achieved. From AD 632 until 661 the political and religious community founded by Muḥammad in Arabia was ruled by a succession of four caliphs, often called the 'Rightly Guided Caliphs'.[4] For many this was the Golden Age of Islam. God's words were collected from those who had memorized them or written some of them down, and the unchangeable text of the Qur'ān as we know it today was fixed in writing.[5] The institution of the caliphate was founded in order to provide succession to the Prophet's religious and political leadership (although prophecy had ended with his death). The first four caliphs, all of whom had been close companions of the Prophet, were in the best position to rule according to the

norms and rules that God had established through him. The Muslim state was expanded under them, first over most of Arabia and then outside the confines of the peninsula in Syria, Iraq, Egypt and western Iran.[6]

Towards the end of this period of consolidation and expansion, however, there occurred what tradition calls the Fitna (656–61). Following the murder of the third caliph, ʿUthmān, by discontented warriors who had taken part in the conquest of Egypt, divisions among leading Muslims led to a civil war and the splitting of the community. There were two main rivals. ʿAlī, Muḥammad's cousin and son-in-law, was recognized by many as caliph in 656 in succession to the murdered ʿUthmān. He was opposed by Muʿāwiya, governor of Syria and a relative of the murdered caliph. Muʿāwiya claimed the right of vengeance against the murderers of his kinsman but ʿAlī, many of whose supporters thought that the killing of ʿUthmān had been legitimate, would not hand them over.[7]

In the confused fighting and negotiations that resulted, a substantial number of those who had supported ʿAlī abandoned him and opposed both him and Muʿāwiya. This group became known as the Khārijites. They accused ʿAlī of having sinned by negotiating with Muʿāwiya, and they proclaimed that only God – not men – could decide the issues that divided the community.

Over the next century or so various groups that the tradition portrays as descended from the original Khārijites were involved in fighting against the caliphs, and they adopted some distinctive religious and political doctrines. Generally, they regarded only themselves as true Muslims; others were not really Muslims but unbelievers or at best hypocrites. The true Muslims had the duty of dissociating themselves from the others and – at least according to some of the extreme Khārijites – fighting and killing them. Eventually, Khārijism became a marginal movement within Islam but in the period of the rise of Islam it was very important. Not only were Khārijis frequently involved in revolts, their ideas stimulated religious and theological thought, and Khārijism provided a vehicle for the expression of discontent by groups within Islam who felt oppressed and downtrodden.[8]

With the death of ʿAlī, apparently at the hands of a Khārijite, in 661 the caliphate fell into the hands of Muʿāwiya. He was the first of a series of caliphs who were all members of the same family, the Umayyads (661–750), who ruled from Syria. In the traditional accounts the Umayyads, with few exceptions, were worldly rulers who cared little for Islam. Islamic ideals were maintained mainly by the pious who transmitted the text of the Qurʾān and the details of the Prophet's Sunna but were generally excluded from positions of power or influence and often persecuted by the rulers.

From time to time opposition to the Umayyads flared up and was usually expressed in religious terms. As well as from the Khārijites, opposition often came from groups stemming from those who had supported ʿAlī in his conflict with Muʿāwiya. They came to be classified generally as Shīʿites. They held that the only legitimate rulers were members of the family of the Prophet himself, and that usually meant someone who was descended from ʿAlī.

The Umayyads are, nevertheless, given credit for continuing the policy of military expansion of the state. By the middle of the second/eighth century, the territory under at least the nominal control of the caliphate extended from Central Asia and north east India to Morocco and southern and central Spain.[9]

In 750 the Umayyads were overthrown by a religiously inspired military revolt, and the caliphate passed into the hands of the ʿAbbāsids, who claimed descent from an

uncle of the Prophet. They moved the centre of power to Iraq, where they began to build a new capital at Baghdad in 762. In the traditional view, although the ʿAbbāsids were by no means perfect Muslims, their rule did represent something of a reversion to the ideals of the period that had preceded the Umayyads and a new and decisive period of consolidation began.[10] It was under the ʿAbbāsids that the learning and tradition of Islam, especially the Prophet's Sunna and the interpretation of the Qurʾān, thus far transmitted mainly by word of mouth, came to be written down.

It is from around the end of the second/eighth century onwards that the earliest texts of the Muslim tradition that have come down to us, in various fields of learning, date. The earliest extant lives of the Prophet (*sīra*), the collections of reports about his words and deeds (the *ḥadīth*s) that are the basis for knowledge of his Sunna, the works on the science and practice of law (*fiqh*), the commentaries on the Qurʾān (*tafsīr*), the books of history (*taʾrīkh*), the rules of Arabic grammar (*naḥw*), and the literature of other forms of Muslim learning, all date – in the form in which we have them today – from around AD 800 at the earliest. Much of the material such works contain was taken from earlier sources, either written, but now lost, or oral. Our knowledge of those earlier sources, however, depends entirely on the literature that begins to flow freely from about AD 800. Only the Qurʾān is an exception since that, according to tradition, had been fixed in writing under the Rightly Guided Caliphs.

At the same time, the religious scholars (the *ʿulamāʾ*) who were the transmitters and interpreters of the knowledge and learning that came to be committed to writing, began to be recognized and respected in a way that had been denied them in the period of the Umayyad caliphs. They became the focus of Muslim religious life. Some of them were granted salaried positions by the caliphs, for instance as religious judges (*qāḍis*), while others preferred to keep their independence and refused to serve the state.

The fundamental theory of Islamic law (the Shariʿa), that it is God's law known from the twin sources of the Qurʾān and the Prophet's Sunna, was given detailed written expression in the work of al-Shāfiʿī (d. 206/821). Then, during the third/ninth century and later, Sunnī Islam developed the institutions and texts that have remained characteristic ever since. Following the work of al-Shāfiʿī, which underlined the importance of knowledge of the Prophet's Sunna, attempts were made to distinguish authentic *ḥadīth*s from the many dubious or false ones that had found their way into circulation. It was only from the authentic ones that the true Sunna could be known. Over time, the authority of six collections of *ḥadīth*s regarded as authentic by their collectors was established among Sunnīs and their status became comparable to that of the Qurʾān itself.

At the same time minor differences of legal theory and religious practice among the Sunnīs were accommodated by the slow development of schools (*madhhab*s), in the sense of followers of a master. Groups of Sunnī legal scholars came to see themselves as followers of the doctrines of one among a number of important and influential master scholars active in the development of ideas about the law in the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries. The scholar (such as al-Shāfiʿī) seen as the master of the school came to be referred to as the Imam. Originally there were several such *madhhab*s, but eventually only four of them survived and extended toleration to one another. The idea developed that each individual Sunnī Muslim should hold allegiance to one of these four *madhhab*s and maintain it unless circumstances made it impossible.

At the heart of the Sunnī form of Islam is the idea that authority in matters of religious practice and faith belongs in the hands of the religious scholars (the *ʿulamāʾ*). It is they who transmit and interpret the sacred and authoritative texts (the Qurʾān and its interpretation, the *ḥadīth*s and the law books). The caliph, on the other hand, was granted only a limited sphere of authority by the scholars and in some ways could be seen as merely a symbolic representative of the unity of the Sunnī community. In words attributed to the Prophet himself, 'the heirs of the Prophet are the religious scholars'. In other words, in the Sunnī tradition it is the religious scholars who guarantee the link between the Islamic community at any particular time and that of the Prophet.[11]

The pattern of authority in the Shīʿite tradition of Islam ended by appearing similar to that of the Sunnīs but in fundamentals is rather different.[12] Early Shīʿism is very diverse in character and has in common little more than opposition to the caliphate of the Umayyads and a belief that true authority belonged to a member of the Prophet's family. For most Shīʿite groups the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, ʿAlī, had a central role. He had been appointed, they believed, by the Prophet himself as his successor, but he had been cheated of his rights when the institution of the caliphate was invented on the Prophet's death. For most Shīʿites there were no Rightly Guided Caliphs but ʿAlī. He had eventually succeeded to the caliphate in 656 (for the Sunnīs he is counted as the fourth Rightly Guided Caliph) only to suffer martyrdom and have the rights of his family usurped by the Umayyads in 661.

As the Prophet's son-in-law, ʿAlī was the father of the only surviving line of male descendants of the Prophet (all of Muḥammad's sons are believed to have pre-deceased him). He came to be seen as the first of a line of Imams who, for their followers, were the only legitimate authorities in Islam. Neither the caliphs, given limited recognition by the Sunnīs, nor the Sunnī scholars, had true knowledge or authority, according to the followers of these Imams. The descendants of ʿAlī, on the other hand, had a special relationship with God and possessed knowledge not available to ordinary mortals. For the Shīʿites true authority belonged to only one individual – the descendant of ʿAlī who was recognized as the Imam of a particular generation – rather than in the scholars generally, as the Sunnī tradition held.

These Shīʿite Imams were rarely able to exercise their authority since they were continually watched by the (from their point of view) illegitimate wielders of worldly power, the caliphs. The history of the Imams, according to the Shīʿite understanding, is one of suffering and martyrdom. The defining event occurred in 61/680 when ʿAlī's younger son Ḥusayn was persuaded to attempt to seize power from the Umayyad caliph Yazīd (680–3). The attempt ended in disaster. Ḥusayn and many members of his family were massacred at Karbalāʾ in Iraq and his head sent to Yazīd in Damascus where it was put on display. In the Shīʿite tradition this shedding of Ḥusayn's blood came to be given a significance not unlike the shedding of that of Jesus for Christians. The day when it happened, the tenth day of the first month of the Muslim year (ʿĀshūrāʾ day), became in time the major annual festival of Shīʿite Islam, marked by ceremonies and processions in its communities throughout the world.

However, Shīʿite groups from early on differed among themselves as to which particular descendant of the Prophet was the legitimate Imam in a particular generation, as well as on other issues such as the nature, extent and sources of the Imam's special characteristics. Following the ʿAbbāsid seizure of the caliphate in 750 the

attention and hopes of most Shīʿites turned to a line of Imams descended from the Prophet through ʿAlī and the Prophet's daughter Fāṭima. Their supporters clashed on several occasions with the ʿAbbāsids, whose own seizure of the caliphate had been justified by a claimed kinship with the Prophet. Attempted revolts, however, issued in bloodshed and repression.

Around 873 a descendant of ʿAlī in the twelfth generation who was recognized as Imam by one group of Shīʿites disappeared. According to his supporters, he had retired from the world to enter a state of occultation. He left behind no descendant, and his followers taught that the line of Imams descended from ʿAlī had come to an end. The last Imam will be absent in occultation until his return just before the end of the world when he will come back as the Mahdī and establish justice and righteousness in the world in preparation for the Last Day.

The idea of the messianic return of an Imam had been an ingredient of Islamic thought from a very early period, but the significant feature of it that emerged now was that his return was not to be expected imminently but at some remote time in the future. Meanwhile, his authority passed into the hands of religious scholars who functioned for their Shīʿite followers in much the same way as did theirs for the Sunnīs. The chief difference was that in the Sunnī tradition the ʿulamāʾ claimed authority in their own right, whereas for the Shīʿites they represented the authority of the absent Imam and they will return it to him when he comes back as the Mahdī.

This particular branch of Shīʿism is often referred to as 'Twelver (or, in Arabic, Ithnāʿasharī) Shīʿism' because it accepts a series of twelve imams beginning with ʿAlī. Eventually it became the dominant and most numerous branch of Shiʿism. Traditional Twelver Shīʿīs, naturally, understand the development of their tradition, which they see as the true form of Islam, as ordained by God from the start. Their Muslim opponents, equally naturally, see it as resulting from historical accidents. In particular they hold that the Twelfth Imam either died or never existed, and that it was simply impossible to extend the line of Imams further. The followers of these Imams, therefore, had to revise their doctrines and ideas about authority.

Just as in the Sunnī tradition, so too in Twelver Shīʿism, the elaboration of the idea that authority lay now in the hands of the religious scholars was accompanied by the emergence of a body of religious texts that came to be seen as authoritative. Following the occultation of the twelfth Imam, specifically Shīʿite collections of ḥadīths, commentaries on the Qurʾān, works of theology (kalām), books of law (fiqh), and other texts specific to the Twelver tradition came to be written and have remained definitive of that tradition until today. Eventually, therefore, for the biggest group within Shīʿism, authority was seen to reside in a textual tradition transmitted and interpreted by a body of learned religious scholars, just as it was in Sunnism.[13]

For traditional Sunnīs and Shīʿis the establishment of their respective systems of authority – which constitute for us the essence of the two traditions – was merely the consolidation and expression in writing of institutions and ideas established in the time of the Prophet. Although the authoritative texts (apart from the Qurʾān) were not written until later, the ideas in them and even many of their words represented a tradition faithfully transmitted from the time of the Prophet onwards. Even the ending of the line of Imams at a particular point was something predetermined by God. Unworthy and usurping rulers may have oppressed the believers and corrupted the religion from time to time, but Islam as it existed in the

third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries was the continuation of the Islam of the Prophet. That view emphasizes the continuity between the period before 656, when the centre of Islam lay in the Hijaz, and the later period, when the Hijaz, although it remained the holy land, was in most respects an unimportant backwater of the world of Islam.

Academic Reinterpretations

Since academic scholarship on Islam became firmly established during the second half of the nineteenth century, as a result of the work of scholars such as Ignaz Goldziher and Theodore Nöldeke, a number of different approaches and ideas, some more influential than others, have emerged. It is not possible here to do justice to all of them. Scholars, naturally, debate and dispute with one another and it would be misleading to suggest that there is one, dominant or even widely accepted understanding of the rise of Islam among them. Some have attempted to divide contemporary scholarship into 'radicals' and 'traditionalists', but that is inevitably a simplification of a more complex situation.

The following presents some important ways in which, in the author's view, academic scholarship has suggested new understandings of, or approaches to, the rise of Islam. Their cumulative effect is to encourage us to see it as an extended and complicated process, and to question what it means if we refer to the religion of the Arabs in, say, 650 as Islam.[14]

Arabia and the Rise of Islam

The traditional accounts present Islam as achieving a quite highly developed form within narrow geographical and temporal limits. It is presented as existing in a substantial way already by the death of the Prophet in 632, and then carried out of Arabia by the Arab Muslim conquests.[15] An alternative advocated by several academic scholars is to envisage it as the eventual outcome of a process occupying two centuries or more and involving the Middle East as a whole, not merely western Arabia.

Important in proposing such an approach was the German orientalist Carl Heinrich Becker. In several articles written in the first decades of the twentieth century he advocated the idea that Islam took shape in the lands outside Arabia following their conquest by the Arabs. Urging that Islam is more than just a religion, he argued that it was the outcome of the religious, political, social and economic conditions that developed in the Middle East following the conquests. The conquests, according to Becker and others, were not motivated by religion but by economic needs and desires. They established the political dominance of what must have been a relatively small number of Arab warriors over a larger and diverse non-Arab (and non-Muslim) population. Many of those conquered peoples were heirs to cultures and religious traditions of some antiquity, and it was the interaction between them and their military conquerors that led – eventually – to the formation of a new and distinctive Islamic religion and culture embracing both the Arabs and the subject peoples.

The new culture was dominated by Islam in the religious sphere and Arabic in the linguistic one. Over time the majority of the population became Muslims in religion

and Arabs in language (although there remained important groups of non-Arabic speaking Muslims and non-Muslim Arabic speakers). In the evolution of this Islamic culture it was not only the conquered peoples whose religious and linguistic identity changed – so too did that of the Arab conquerors. Whatever the nature of the religion and language that the Arab conquerors brought with them, the Islam and the Arabic of the Islamic world around AD 900 is not a simple, straightforward, continuation of those brought out of Arabia in the seventh century. For Becker, the contribution of the non-Arab peoples was the more important.

The salient feature of Becker's approach is that it presents Islam as developing slowly outside Arabia. His primarily economic explanation of the Arab conquests is certainly questionable and difficult to square with the evidence of early non-Muslim sources, but his argument that the complex religious and cultural system of Islam cannot be understood simply as the product of Arabia before the Arab conquests has been influential.[16]

One difference between those who, with the tradition, identify the rise of Islam largely with the career of Muḥammad, and those who, like Becker, see it as a process occupying a century and more, is the way in which they understand Islam. For the former, it seems to designate a basically straightforward, primarily religious, set of beliefs and practices. For many of them, Islam may even be understood as an ideal, distinct from the individuals and societies that have embodied it. It is made known through revelation and it is possible to ascertain what represents true Islam as distinct from corrupted or mistaken forms of it.

For a historian, on the other hand, a particular religion is not an abstract concept but something known from its diverse historical manifestations. Islam is the totality of what Muslims of different sorts have made it. It may be tempting to identify a particular idea or practice as 'not real Islam' or 'debased Islam', but when trying to understand it the academic observer has to take into account all of the ways in which Muslims have understood and practised it. Such things are usually, for historians, known from written and other evidence.

When Islam came out of Arabia, even according to Muslim tradition, there were no Muslim texts (even the Qur'ān was fixed in writing after the wars of conquest had begun), no mosques as we understand them today, and a relatively small group of people who may have regarded themselves as Muslims. There was virtually none of – or at least any way in which we might know about – the rich, diverse and contested complex of law, theology, ritual practices, ideas of authority, art and architecture, and other things that Islam means for us today. Even if we are willing to accept what tradition tells us, therefore, it is difficult for a historian to grasp what 'Islam' may have meant at that time. And on many important details (see below) academic scholarship has proposed different understandings of what tradition tells us.

Continuity and Change

Traditional accounts give the impression that the coming of Islam led to an almost complete break with the past in those places where it established itself. This impression results from several causes.

The central role of revelation in those accounts means that ultimately the coming of Islam did not depend on historical circumstances. In spite of the fact that the

revelation occurred in a specific historical situation, the time and the place were of God's choosing and not determined by human activity. Furthermore, the primary purpose of the revelation was to rescue the Arabs from the condition of ignorance and barbarism (*jāhiliyya*) in which they were immersed.

According to Muslim tradition, the Jāhiliyya was the time in Arabia before the coming of Islam, and Islam is the complete antithesis of it. How historically accurate is the traditional image of the Jāhiliyya is certainly open to debate. It may be envisaged as an originally a-historical, disembodied concept of a society where the true religion of Islam was unknown. That abstract concept might then have been given a specific historical location by the early Muslim scholars who wished to stress the origins of Islam in a pagan Arab environment. In any case, the Jāhiliyya is so important to Islam's understanding of itself and its origins that it seems unlikely that the traditional accounts of it are a mere assortment of historical memories. The point of immediate relevance here is that in the short time between the beginning of the revelations to Muḥammad and the triumph of Islam throughout Arabia following his death, according to tradition, the Jāhiliyya was ended.

Similarly, outside Arabia the coming of Islam seems, in the traditional accounts, to bring down a rather opaque curtain on the past. Although it did not happen immediately, the majority of the subject peoples became Muslims and many of them became Arabic speakers. In the traditional perspective that is understood as the adoption by them of the religion and language of their conquerors. Even where some elements of pre-Islamic identity survived – as with the Persians, who became Muslims but continued to use their pre-Islamic language and drew on their pre-Islamic culture in various ways – the coming of Islam is seen as a decisive turning point, if not such a complete break with what went before.

This impression of discontinuity is not really created by explicit statements to that effect in the Muslim accounts of the rise and spread of Islam. Rather, it is that those accounts, which represent virtually the only detailed and continuous narratives of events in the lands conquered by the Arabs, focus entirely on the concerns of the Arab Muslims and say hardly anything about the non-Arab and non-Muslim peoples who were conquered. It is as if, with the coming of Islam and the Arabs, they virtually disappeared. From other evidence – including that of the literature that the conquered peoples continued to produce in the Islamic period – we know that that was not the case.

Academic historians are generally more aware of the importance of continuities. That major elements of classical Islamic culture – notably its philosophical and scientific learning – were continuations in Arabic of pre-Islamic Hellenistic, Persian, Indian and other traditions is obvious. It has also been demonstrated, especially on the evidence of papyrus documents that have survived from early Islamic Egypt, that the Arabs, when they established their control over the conquered lands, did not immediately change everything but continued to use many of the administrative institutions and personnel that they took over.

It was not until towards the end of the first Islamic century, in the 690s AD, that significant changes become visible. Muslim tradition and other evidence tell us that it was then that a distinctive Islamic coinage was introduced and languages like Greek and Persian began to give way to Arabic in the records of the administration. It has been persuasively argued that even things like the system of clientage, which facilitated the assimilation of the conquered people and the conquerors in the first century

or so after the conquest, were adaptations by the Arabs of institutions found in the societies they conquered.[17]

Equally important in underlining the continuities between the pre-Islamic and Islamic Middle East and Mediterranean is the work of scholars outside the field of Islamic Studies. Those involved in the study of the period between the age of classical antiquity and that of classical Islam have defined it as the period of late antiquity. Naturally it is impossible to assign precise dates to it, but whereas it was once regarded as merely a period of, to use Edward Gibbon's phrase, 'decline and fall', modern scholarship has emphasized its innovative and dynamic characteristics. Two important themes are the triumph of monotheistic forms of religion and thought (notably, but not merely, Christianity) and the continuing importance and evolution of Hellenistic culture. Scholars, of course, do not always agree on the importance or the nature of the changes taking place but there is considerable agreement that in many ways Islam was heir to the world of late antiquity and the outcome of the religious, cultural, social and other changes of the period.[18]

Becker too supported the scholarly emphasis on continuities between the pre-Islamic and Islamic Middle East and Mediterranean worlds. In his view the conquered non-Arabs did not just accept a religious and linguistic identity that was brought ready formed to them. They played a part, probably the more important part, in creating their new identity. In doing so, naturally, they drew on much – ideas, vocabulary, practices, institutions, and many other things – which had nothing to do with Arabia.

Referring to the significant cultural unification of the Mediterranean world and the Middle East brought about by the conquests of Alexander the Great, Becker had remarked, 'Strange as it may seem, without Alexander the Great there would have been no Islamic civilisation.' In that perspective the Islamic caliphate broke down the ancient but essentially artificial political division of an area that already shared much culturally before the Arab conquests.[19]

Academic Reinterpretation of Some Fundamental Elements of Tradition

As well as suggesting broad perspectives from which the rise of Islam may be viewed in a different light to that of the traditional accounts, academic research has raised questions about some of the fundamental details of those accounts.

As we have seen, the Sunna of the Prophet, his divinely guided way of life and his decisions on questions put to him by his followers, known from thousands of *ḥadith*s, is one of the two main sources of Islamic law according to the traditional view. Each authentic *ḥadith*, according to the theory, has been transmitted from the time of the Prophet over several generations by a chain (the *isnād*) of scholars, each link in the chain being known by name. The traditional scholars recognized that not all of the *ḥadith*s could be genuine – for one thing, many of them contradict others – but they developed a science based on analysis of *isnād*s that, in their view, enabled them to distinguish between the genuine and the fabricated ones.

In the late nineteenth century, Goldziher's study of the *ḥadith*s challenged that view. Goldziher, it should be stressed, did not set out to prove a negative. His study of the *ḥadith*s was not merely concerned with the question of their authenticity but with an understanding of the phenomenon as a whole. One of his conclusions, however, was that many of them had been put into circulation in generations later than that of

the Prophet, as individuals and groups within the developing Muslim community sought to capture his authority for their own diverse opinions and arguments. Goldziher left room for some authentic *hadith*s but his work implicitly puts the burden of proof on those who wish to use them as evidence for the time of the Prophet himself.[20]

Subsequently in the 1940s and 1950s, Joseph Schacht built upon Goldziher's work in this area to argue that the very idea that the Prophet's Sunna was, along with the Qur'ān, the main source of authority in Muslim law only began to emerge in the second/eighth century and only became widely accepted as a result of the advocacy of the idea by al-Shāfif'ī (d. 206/821). Schacht understood the vast majority of the *hadith*s as having been formulated and put into circulation in response to the growing strength of that idea. In the earliest period of Islam, he argued, law, when it had not simply been taken over from the societies conquered by the Arabs, was created in an ad hoc manner, largely by the caliphs and their governors. The *isnād*s, in Schacht's view were no guarantee of authenticity since an *isnād* could be made up just as easily as the text of a *hadith*. Neither Schacht nor Goldziher implied a fraudulent or cynical intention on the part of those who developed the theory of the Sunna or formulated the *hadith*s; they would simply have assumed that they were acting in accord with the intentions of the Prophet.[21]

The ideas of Goldziher and Schacht have been very influential. Some academic scholars have, indeed, found fault with some of Schacht's arguments and his interpretation of the evidence. Harald Motzki, for example, has argued that our relatively late texts nevertheless allow us to trace back into the first/seventh century certain *hadith*s and ideas that Schacht thought were late. On the other hand, it has been argued by Norman Calder that some books ascribed to important legal scholars of the late second/eighth and early third/ninth centuries only acquired the form in which we know them today some two or three generations later than their supposed authors. If that is so, it could indicate that Schacht's dating of the acceptance of the idea of the authority of the Prophet as decisive in matters of law was too early. At any rate, most scholars now recognize the difficulty of dating *hadith*s and those who think that it is possible to argue for a genuine continuity in the transmission of the Prophet's life and Sunna, now have to argue their case.[22]

The traditional accounts of how and when the text of the Qur'ān was formed have also been questioned by several academics. Until about the 1970s scholars generally accepted the traditional Muslim accounts, although many of them pointed out the inconsistencies and contradictions in them. In recent years different approaches to the study of the Qur'ān have been developed that propose different understandings of what was involved. John Wansbrough, starting from the Qur'ān's literary form and style and the development of the tradition of its interpretation, insisted that it was necessary not merely to focus on the compilation of the text as we know it but also on when and how that text came to be accepted as authoritative in Islam. He argued that we should understand both the formation of the text and the acceptance of its authority as an integral part of the gradual emergence of Islam itself. According to that view, the Qur'ān is not something there 'from the start', but develops along with all the other ideas, practices and institutions that go to form Islam as we know it from the third/ninth century on.[23]

The evidence of inscriptions and early Qur'ānic manuscripts has also come to be studied more and used by some scholars to support the view that the establishment of

the fixed text of the Qur'ān was a slower process than the tradition allows for. In particular a manuscript apparently dating from around the beginning of the second/ eighth century and found by German archaeologists in the great mosque of Sanaa in the Yemen in the 1970s, has been interpreted as supporting the view that the text had still not been fixed in its canonical form at the time the manuscript was written. However, that and other manuscripts found in Sanaa have been difficult for scholars to access, and until they are more widely available (and probably even then) their significance will be hard to assess with certainty.[24]

In the sphere of the development of ideas of religious and political authority, the fundamental question at issue between the different 'sects' of Islam, Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds have argued that the Sunnī form is a relatively late and secondary development in the history of early Islam. In the Sunnī tradition, as we have seen, religious authority belongs to the religious scholars and not to the caliphs. Crone and Hinds argued that this was a radical departure from early Islamic concepts, according to which the caliph, as God's deputy on earth, was the sole authority over all aspects of the life of the Muslims. The Sunnī idea, according to that view, was not firmly established until after the middle of the third/ninth century following what was essentially a conflict about authority between the caliphs and the scholars (the miḥna).[25]

If Crone and Hinds are right, it follows that the concept of authority in Islam that is characteristic of the Shī'ite tradition – that it was contained in one person regarded as having a special relationship with God – is earlier than the Sunnī concept. Nevertheless, the forms of Shī'ism known in classical Islam and surviving into the modern world may also be understood as relatively late developments from an earlier and more fluid situation. Twelver Shī'ism can be understood as the creation, out of earlier types of Shī'ism, of a religiously moderate and politically quietist form of the tradition in response to the growing dominance of Sunnī Islam in the first century of the 'Abbāsid caliphate. In this sense Twelver Shī'ism was an accommodation to the religious and political realities of the second half of the third/ninth century. The ending of the line of Imams, removing the need for struggle to establish his rule, and the transfer of authority from the Imam to the scholars, can, from this point of view, be seen as the crucial development in this direction.

Not all Shī'is, though, were prepared to follow this path, and others, such as the Ismā'īlis, have also survived into modern times. Their different positions on who the rightful Imam is or was, on whether he is present in the world or in occultation, and on textual and human sources of authority other than the Imam, may also be understood as adaptations to historical circumstances during the formative period of Islam and later.

These are just some of the areas where research has called into question the understanding of Islam as something substantially developed in Arabia and brought out from there by the Arab conquerors. Evidently, not all of the views just summarized are accepted or strongly held by all academic scholars in the field. Those views involve interpretations of the available evidence, and different scholars may read the same evidence in different ways. Nevertheless, the arguments and suggested reinterpretations of tradition, of which the above are only a selection, encourage us to see the two centuries or so following the Arab conquests of the seventh century AD as the decisive period for the rise of Islam. It was during that period that the elaborate complex of contested ideas, institutions and practices that we know today took shape.

In contrast, we find it hard to know what Islam might have been before the developments that followed the Arab conquests.

Evidence and Sources

Many academic scholars today are wary of committing themselves on the nature of Islam before the conquests, and especially on the life of the Prophet. The primary reason for that is an enhanced understanding that our sources for the Arabian period of Islam are more than just accounts of historical facts.

Muslim literary tradition (chronicles, biographies of the Prophet and others, commentaries on the Qurʾān, and many other types of traditional Muslim literature) is our only source for the rise of Islam in Arabia. As we have noted, in the form in which they are available to us, the works of Muslim tradition date from not earlier than about the end of the second Islamic century, about AD 800. Certainly they draw on and extensively cite, abbreviate or summarize, oral and written material from the first two centuries, but scholars are divided on how far it is possible to reconstruct the earlier development of the tradition on the basis of later texts.

For many, the work of Goldziher and Schacht on the *ḥadith*s and the legal traditions called into question too the value of the biographical tradition on the Prophet and the reports about the early history of Islam following his death. By the 1970s considerable scepticism had developed among scholars about the value of the traditional accounts as evidence for the events which they reported. This led to different approaches to those sources that still continue today.

One approach is to give up any attempt to reconstruct the early history of Islam in Arabia in the detailed and connected way in which the Muslim tradition itself does. Instead, the tradition is used to throw light on the way later Muslims, those responsible for collecting and composing the accounts which have come down to us, viewed the early history of their religion and culture. The relationship between their views and 'what really happened', it is argued, is not really knowable. Instead, the biographies of the Prophet and the accounts of the early history of Islam are analysed for what they can tell us about the aims and intentions, the needs and wishes, of those who compiled them. For example, it has been argued that much of the material in the traditional lives of the Prophet reflects the need of the developing Muslim community, in the face of polemic from its monotheist opponents, to develop an image of Muḥammad in accordance with then prevailing ideas about prophethood. The aim would be to justify the view of Muḥammad as a prophet sent to the Arabs.[26]

Another avenue is to seek to exploit as much as possible the evidence of sources other than the Muslim literary tradition – archaeological and similar materials, and the literary traditions of the peoples who had come under Arab rule. In their book *Hagarism* Michael Cook and Patricia Crone attempted to show what the rise of Islam might look like if based almost entirely on such materials. More usually scholars have tried to relate the archaeological and non-Muslim literary evidence to that of the Muslim literature and to use all the different sources in a critical manner. One effect of this approach has been to remind us just how much evidence there is outside the Muslim literary sources even though that evidence only allows us a fragmented and partial view of what was taking place. The evidence of sources other than the Muslim tradition has its own problems and it too does not really help us for the Arabian period of Islam. It

does suggest, however, that from the start the various peoples who came under Arab rule regarded their conquerors as following a form of monotheism of their own.[27]

Thirdly, some scholars have sought to get back beyond the Muslim texts that are available to us and to recover from them earlier texts and documents. In this way, it is hoped, the tradition can be pushed back into the earlier centuries.[28]

Anyone working on the rise of Islam in a serious way has to accept that the main body of evidence has real problems as a source for what occurred in Arabia in the time of the Prophet and the first four caliphs. In a nutshell, the evidence as we have it comes from a later stage in the development of Islam and it reflects an internal perspective on events of fundamental importance for later Muslims. The danger is that the accounts of the earlier stages of the rise of Islam may represent a reading back of the ideas and understandings of Muslims living at the time when the new religion and culture was stabilizing.

There are various ways in which our lack of texts dating from before the end of the second century AH/eighth century AD may be explained: the transition from a predominantly oral culture to a written one, the loss of texts as a result of fire, political turmoil and other causes, the relative lack of cheap and easily available writing materials, etc. The fact that from about AD 800 onwards we see the production of a vast mass of traditional literature that has survived and been transmitted until today can suggest a different perspective, however. It may be taken to indicate that the formative period of Islam was coming to its end, that the religion and culture that had been developing in the Middle East following the Arab conquests a hundred and fifty years before was now showing signs of fruition. It too may be used to support the understanding of the rise of Islam as a gradual growth that reached maturity in the third/ninth century.

The Relationship of Islam to Pre-Islamic Middle Eastern Monotheism

The question remains of how we may envisage the start of the process that eventually led to the formation of Islam in a fully developed sense. Academic scholarship has generally agreed that in its origins Islam owes much to other forms of Middle Eastern monotheism, and that has often been expressed as Muḥammad being influenced by, or borrowing from, other versions of monotheism.

Most scholars have worked with the framework provided by Islam's own historical tradition. That presents the Prophet, before his move to Yathrib (Medina) in AD 622, as living in the overwhelmingly pagan setting of the Jāhiliyya. The people of Mecca, like the Arab tribes in the vicinity, worshipped many gods. The only thing that moderated that was a lingering memory of Abraham's building of the Ka'ba and his introduction of true monotheism to the Arabs. Under the influence of Abraham's religion, a small group of people tried to remain loyal to a form of monotheism distinct both from Judaism and Christianity and from the polytheism and idolatry of their contemporaries. These people are known in the tradition as Ḥanīfs.

The majority of the Arabs, on the other hand, are portrayed as having corrupted the religion of Abraham and turning it into a gross and primitive paganism, but even there a few remnants of Abrahamic religion survived. Most notably the Ka'ba, although it had become a centre of idolatry, was still regarded as more important than the many other shrines and holy places that were scattered throughout Arabia,

and the god with which it was especially associated, Allāh, was honoured above the many other gods.

Most western scholars, unable to accept the historical reality of Mecca's association with Abraham, have nevertheless seen much of what tradition tells us about the society in which Muḥammad lived as based on facts. They have accepted the historical reality of the Ḥanīfs, for example, and interpreted them as evidence that the traditional paganism of the Arabs was already beginning to weaken in the period before Muḥammad. Similarly the predominance of Allāh and the Ka'ba over the other gods and sanctuaries has been seen as evidence that the old paganism was in decline and inklings of monotheism appearing.

In that light Muḥammad and his preaching have been portrayed as just the most prominent (and most successful) element in the emergence out of Arab polytheism of a monotheist form of religion. It was the fact that the society as a whole was already moving in that direction that facilitated his success. Some scholars thought that the rise of monotheism in Arabia could be explained in part by natural evolutionary trends – what they understood as the normal human progress from lower to higher forms of religion. More generally, though, it has been believed that the weakening of the traditional religion must have come about because of the impact of monotheist ideas on the pagan environment of the Jāhiliyya.[29]

The theory is that Muḥammad and many of his fellow Arabs, living in a still mainly pagan and polytheistic environment, came into contact with ideas, stories, practices and institutions coming from Judaism, Christianity or other related forms of monotheism. Islam was the outcome – a form of monotheism adapted to the needs and wishes of the Arabs. Much academic scholarship, therefore, has been devoted to the question of the sources and nature of those monotheistic ideas, and how they came to penetrate the remote area of inner Arabia where Muḥammad lived.

As for how those ideas reached Muḥammad and the people among whom he lived, various possibilities have been suggested. Many scholars, building upon the reports in the traditional lives of the Prophet that portray the Meccans as heavily involved in trade, have theorized that Mecca was on an international trade route and that religious and other ideas were carried along with trade goods. That theory has been weakened considerably by some of the arguments expounded by Patricia Crone in her *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam*.[30]

More academic energy has been expended on the issue of the nature and sources of the ideas. Since the German Jewish scholar Abraham Geiger published in 1832 his book on what he saw as Muḥammad's borrowings from Judaism there have been many studies arguing that Muslim ideas, practices and institutions are adaptations and reworkings of Jewish or Christian originals. The scholars concerned have often disagreed on whether Judaism or Christianity was the more important as a source for Islam, and during the twentieth century, as materials like the Dead Sea Scrolls from previously little known Jewish and Christian sects have become available, the hunt for the sources of Islam has widened.[31]

Muslim tradition itself contains material that might suggest that Islam was at one time much closer to Judaism than it subsequently became. It tells us that following his move from Mecca to Yathrib (Medina) in 622 Muḥammad and his followers fasted on the same day as the Jews (Yom Kippur, or 'Āshūrā' as it is called in the tradition) and prayed in the same direction, that is, towards Jerusalem. Only later in the Medinan period of his life, we are told, did these key practices change: Ramaḍān

replaced 'Āshūrā' as the fasting period for Islam, and the direction of prayer (*qibla*) was turned from Jerusalem towards Mecca.

Such developments have been read by many scholars, beginning with C. Snouck Hurgronje and A. J. Wensinck, as symbolic of a break with Judaism. According to that reading, the Prophet did not understand his religion as a new one until he found himself rejected and scorned by the Jews. He then began to make Islam more distinctive by developing it as a specifically Arab form of monotheism. The most important feature of the transformation would be the elaboration of the idea that the pagan Kaʿba at Mecca had originally been founded by Abraham for the worship of the true God.

That has been the most influential of academic theories about the origins of Islam. It stresses the importance of the relationship between the Jews of Medina and the Prophet and of its deterioration. Some scholars have questioned the Qurʾānic evidence that Snouck Hurgronje used to support the theory, and recently there seems to have been some reversion to the older view, against which the Dutch scholar was protesting, that the Arabs already had a significant knowledge of the stories about Abraham before the time of Muḥammad.[32]

Whether it was Christianity, Judaism or some other form of Middle Eastern monotheism that is understood as decisive for the appearance of Islam, the process involved has usually been expressed in terms of 'influences' or 'borrowings'. However it happened, the Prophet and his Arab contemporaries are seen as coming under the influence of monotheist ideas and consciously adopting and adapting some of what came to them in order to elaborate a new and distinctive vision. In that view, a predominantly polytheist pagan society produced and adopted its own form of monotheism, largely as the result of the opening up of that society to monotheist influences.

There is, however, an alternative approach. The history of monotheism, like that of other religious traditions, has been marked by the emergence out of it of new sects resulting from disputes and debates among monotheists themselves. Some of those sects have then developed into distinctive and independent religions within the wider tradition. External influences and events in the political sphere, of course, are very relevant to how far an emerging sect will develop and spread.

Instead of seeing the religion that was to become Islam as the product of a pagan Arab society stimulated by ideas and materials from monotheist sources, then, it may be that we should be thinking of the growth of a sect within another form of monotheism. In other words, the origins of Islam could be understood as occurring in a way similar to that in which we understand the emergence of Christianity and Rabbinical Judaism out of ancient Judaism, or the modern forms of Catholicism and Protestantism out of mediaeval European Christianity. In that perspective Islam may be understood in its origins as a critique of existing monotheist ideas and practices as much as an attack on Arab paganism.[33]

One obvious difficulty, however, is that this approach seems to require an environment in which there was already a significant monotheist population diverse enough to generate internal arguments and debates. It is not impossible to imagine that such an environment existed in the Hijaz at the beginning of the seventh century AD, but that requires going considerably beyond the traditional evidence. Apart from the Jewish community of Yathrib, the tradition tells us nothing about the existence of communities of orthodox or sectarian Jews or Christians in the

environment in which Muḥammad is reported to have operated. Those scholars who have suggested that there was in the Hijaz, for example, a community descended from that which produced the Dead Sea Scrolls, or a group of Samaritans, have done so entirely on the basis of what they see has significant parallels between features of Islam and those of the sect in question. The problem with ascribing to the Jews of Yathrib the status of the matrix of Islam is that tradition tells us that Islam began in Mecca.

One could, of course, take a more radical attitude to Muslim tradition about the very beginnings of Islam. It would be possible to read it, for example, as condensing into a limited chronological frame, and transposing onto an Arabian background, developments that took longer and occurred in a different geographical setting. The idea suggested by the tradition itself, that Islam arose from a conflict within some form of Judaism is not unlikely, and its presentation of itself as a form of monotheism especially associated with the Arabs and Arabia is so marked that it can be understood as a conscious and deliberate proclamation of a distinct identity, intended to mark it off from other forms of monotheism.

Conclusion

The academic study of the rise of Islam is an area of intense and often stimulating debate, marked by a diversity of approaches and theories and rather few uncontested facts or conclusions. To view it as a process extending over two centuries or so does greater justice to the richness and complexity of Islam than does the more traditional concentration on the life of the Prophet and the short time when it was confined to Arabia. Indeed, the evidence for the Arabian period, limited as it is to a tradition that is only available to us in texts dating from much later, makes analysis of the earliest period especially difficult. It is not possible to provide precise dates for the beginning and end of the process, but the third century of the Hijra (ninth century AD) was clearly of crucial importance.

NOTES

1 Cf. the ways in which Jews and Christians have presented their own traditions as descended – physically, spiritually, or both – from Abraham.

2 Hereafter, when relevant, dates will be given in the form 17/638, first/seventh century, etc. In the Islamic calendar a year consists of 12 lunar, rather than solar, months, and because no intercalation is permitted the months have no fixed relationship to the seasons. For a brief introduction to the Islamic calendar and tables of equivalence with the Christian calendar, see Freeman-Grenville, *The Muslim and Christian Calendars*.

3 For an account of the life of Muḥammad based on the traditional narratives see the article 'Muḥammad' in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edition (*EI2*). The earliest extant account of his life is the *Sīra* of Ibn Isḥāq (d. 151/768 in Baghdad) in the recension made by Ibn Hishām (d. 218/833 in Egypt).

4 The English 'caliph' derives from Arabic *khalīfa*. Traditionally, *khalīfa* is understood to mean 'successor' (of the Prophet) – *khalīfat rasūl Allāh*. The original sense of the title, however, is debatable; see the article ''Khalīfa'' in *EI2*.

5 For a discussion and summary of the traditions about the collecting and composition of the text of the Qur'ān, see Bell and Watt, *Introduction to the Qur'ān*, article 'Kur'ān' in *EI2*.

6   See, for example, Becker, 'Expansion of the Saracens'; Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*.

7   On the Fitna, see the articles 'Adhruḥ', 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib', 'Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān' and 'Ṣiffīn', in *EI2*; Hinds, 'Kūfan Political Alignments'; idem, 'Murder of ʿŪthmān'; idem, 'Ṣiffīn Arbitration Agreement'; idem, 'Banners and Battle Cries'; all are collected in Hinds, *Studies in Early Islamic History.*

8   See article 'Khāridjites' in *EI2*; P. Crone and F. Zimmermann, *Epistle*.

9   See the article 'Umayyads' in *EI2*; Wellhausen, *Arab Kingdom*.

10 On the ʿAbbāsid caliphate, see the article 'ʿAbbāsids' in *EI2*.

11 The Sunnīs are so called because of the importance of the Sunna of the Prophet in their legal theory. As a self-designation they often called themselves 'people of the Sunna and community' (*ahl-al-sunna waʾl-jamāʿa*). For the development of Sunnī legal theory, see Schacht, *Introduction*, especially ch.9. For further discussion, see Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, Melchert, *Sunni Schools*, Zaman, *Religion and Politics*.

12 Arabic *Shīʿa* means 'party' and is in this sense short for 'the Party of ʿAlī' (*shīʿatu ʿAlī*).

13 See Kohlberg, 'From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-ʿAshariyya'; Bayhom-Daou, 'The Imam's Knowledge'.

14 It has been noted that the earliest securely datable text to refer to the religion of the Arabs as Islam is the inscription inside the Dome of the Rock (72/691; Cook and Crone, *Hagarism*, 8 and n.49); the earliest securely datable text to use the word Muslims is a letter of 141/758 (Hinds, 'Letter from the Governor of Egypt', line 36 of the translation and the note thereto).

15 It should be noted that the understanding of the term 'Arabia' has varied considerably from time to time. For us today it tends to indicate the Arabian peninsula, the modern state of Saudi Arabia and its neighbours. In the period before the rise of Islam it often referred to a region or province attached to Palestine.

16 Becker, 'Islam als Problem'; idem, 'Expansion of the Saracens'.

17 Crone, *Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law*.

18 See, e.g., Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity*, especially ch. 6; Cameron, 'Eastern Provinces'.

19 Becker, 'Islam als Problem', 15.

20 Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien* (English tr. *Muslim Studies*), vol. 2.

21 Schacht, *Origins*; idem, *Introduction*.

22 Motzki, *Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence*; idem (ed.), *Hadith: Origins and Developments*; Calder, *Studies*; Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*.

23 Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*; Rippin (ed.), *Formative Interpretation*.

24 Puin, 'Observations'.

25 Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*; article 'miḥna' in *EI2*.

26 Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder*; idem (ed.); idem, 'Islamic Self-Image'; Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, ch. 2; idem, 'Res Ipsa Loquitur'.

27 Cook and Crone, *Hagarism*; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*.

28 See, e.g., Schoeler, 'Foundations'; for some of the problems see Conrad, 'Recovering Lost Texts'.

29 The classic statement of the evolutionary approach is Wellhausen, *Reste*; in English see Nöldeke, 'Arabs (Ancient)'.

30 The best-known presentation of the 'trade route theory' in English is that of Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*. Cf. now Crone, *Meccan Trade*.

31 Geiger, *Was hat Mohammed?*; The bibliography of works arguing that Muḥammad borrowed from a particular version of the monotheist religion is too big to begin to list here.

32 Snouck Hurgronje, *Het Mekkaansce Feest*; Wensinck, *Muhammad and the Jews of Medina*; for some of the criticism of Snouck's use of the Qurʾān, see article 'Ibrāhim' in *EI2*.

33 Hawting, *Idolatry.*

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CHAPTER TWO

The Islamic Conquests

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Introduction

The term "Islamic Conquests" – sometimes also called, particularly in earlier scholarship, the "Arab Conquests" – is a loose designation for a far-flung and complex set of historical phenomena associated with the rise and spread of Islam in the Near East during the seventh and eighth centuries CE. At the center of these developments was the first appearance in western Arabia of the religion of Islam – or, more precisely, of its precursor in the Believers' movement launched by the prophet Muḥammad (d. 632) and his followers.[1] Closely associated with the Believers' movement occurred the crystallization and rapid expansion of a state whose leaders (the *caliphs*, or temporal successors to Muḥammad at the head of the Believers' community) identified with the new movement and took it as one of the main justifications for their expansion. It is this process of caliphal state expansion, which included military campaigns launched by the caliphs, that is usually called the "Islamic conquests."

The term "Islamic conquests" is itself derived from the Arabic–Islamic historical sources, the most important of which for this theme were literary compilations assembled during the second to fourth centuries AH (eighth to tenth centuries CE). These sources, produced by the Islamic community itself to describe in retrospect this crucial early chapter in the community's history, refer to it using the term *futūḥ* or *futūḥāt* (literally, "openings").[2] This term does not seem to have been used in pre-Islamic times; traditionally, raiding in pre-Islamic Arabia (usually undertaken for purely mundane purposes) was called *ghazwa*. In the new Muslim community, military raids to spread the faith or to defend the community were also called *ghazwa*, "raiding," not *futūḥ*, which was reserved for the broader process by which new territories were incorporated into the realm ruled by the caliphs. As a term, then, *futūḥ* definitely has a retrospective quality. The military dimension of the expansion process, however, has led to a tendency to translate *futūḥ* as "conquest" plain and simple, even though it might more idiomatically be rendered as "incorporation" or "integration" (that is, of new areas into the Islamic state). The term "Islamic *conquest*" may itself thus be considered slightly misleading, because it may emphasize too greatly the military aspect of the process. However, the term "Islamic conquest" is by now probably too deeply ingrained in Western scholarship to be discarded. When using it, however, we must be aware that it refers to far more than merely military victories and questions of tactics and military organization. While military

action was an important part of the picture, we must recognize that the ''conquest'' raises as well such diverse questions as the role of religious proselytization, the crystallization and evolution of state institutions, the role of economic and other motivations in the expansion, the formation of a communal identity, linguistic change, and the ideological, political, social, and economic transformations effected by the conquests. The issue is further complicated by the uncertainty surrounding the changing meaning of *jihād* in the time of Muḥammad and his first followers, and its role in the expansion process: was it a religious call to ''holy war,'' or a more general injunction to struggle for goodness in society and life that only occasionally required the use of force?[3] In the following sections, an attempt will be made to sketch out the main features of this complex of historical developments, including both the expansion of the state by military action and the broader social, political, and religious questions associated with this expansion.

The Islamic conquests can be roughly divided into two main phases, which we may designate the ''charismatic'' and the ''institutional'' phases. The first or charismatic phase lasted from the first decades until the middle decades of the seventh century CE. It began with the emigration of the prophet Muḥammad from Mecca to Medina in Arabia in 622 CE, and corresponded to the first burst of expansive energy that carried Muḥammad's community of Believers throughout Arabia and into the surrounding lands of Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and Iran. This initial phase was coterminous with a process of state formation – that is, with the crystallization of the new caliphal (or Believers') state, centered in an area (western Arabia) where there had been no state before – and raises many challenges of interpretation. These include: What was the exact nature of the initial impulse to expand? What was the relationship of this original expansionist impulse to the nascent state? What was the relative importance of ideological and material factors in the process of state formation? How did the new state institutionalize itself? etc. By the second or institutional phase, which can be dated from the middle of the seventh until the middle of the eighth century CE – roughly coterminous with the rule of the Umayyad dynasty (661–750), the caliphal state had assumed fairly well-defined institutional form, and the process of expansion and conquest was clearly the result of intentional state policy (that is, the conscious policy of the rulers, the Umayyad caliphs) realized by the institutional apparatus of the state.

Survey of the First or Charismatic Phase of the Conquests

Before proceeding further, it will be helpful to sketch the main events of the first phase of the conquest and expansion movement. The striking thing about this phase is its astonishing rapidity; for in a little over thirty years, the Believers appear to have established their hegemony over a vast region stretching from west of the Nile to eastern Iran.

The expansion of Muḥammad's community of Believers began already in his lifetime, following his emigration in 622 CE from his home-town, Mecca, to the small oasis town of Medina (Yathrib) in western Arabia. During his decade in Medina, Muḥammad gradually overcame internal opposition and began to launch raids (*ghazwa*) to extend the borders of the community to other towns and groups in western Arabia; by the last years of his life, he had forged alliances with many towns and pastoral groups in western Arabia, and also with some more distant groups in Yemen, Oman, eastern Arabia, and on the north Arabian fringes of Syria.

When Muḥammad died in 632, the Believers chose Muḥammad's confidant and father-in-law, Abū Bakr, to be his successor as temporal ruler of the community he had founded. (Later tradition called him *khalīfa*, caliph – "successor"). Muḥammad's death, however, caused some former allies to repudiate their ties with Medina, or at least to refuse to pay a tax that Muḥammad had ordained just before his death; in western Arabia, a few groups were even hoping to exploit the Believers' momentary disarray to plunder Medina. Abū Bakr therefore organized a series of campaigns whose goal was to defend Medina and to ensure payment of tax from all groups and to suppress any opposition. This opposition is indiscriminately called *ridda*, "apostasy," by the later Muslim sources, even though some groups in no way rejected the beliefs they had adopted in Muḥammad's day, but merely demurred on payment of tax; and, for convenience, the campaigns in which Abū Bakr subdued Arabia are usually simply called the "Ridda wars," even though they involved not only the disciplining of wayward former allies, but the outright subjugation of some Arabian groups that had had no prior contact with Muḥammad or the Believers' movement at all.[4]

Abū Bakr first stabilized the situation around Medina itself by sending troops to defeat the mutinous local groups; he also dispatched a small force, commanded by Usāma ibn Zayd, that Muḥammad had organized just before his final illness to raid southern Syria – a force that, after a quick foray to the north, returned to bolster the defenses of Medina. Abū Bakr then dispatched columns of troops under trusted commanders to bring all of Arabia under Medina's control, directing them against the most powerful opposition groups. He appointed the tactical genius Khālid ibn al-Walīd, commanding a force made up mainly of Meccans and Medinese, to subdue opposition in the Najd among the Asad, Tamīm, and other tribes, who had rallied around figures identified in the Islamic sources as "false prophets" – Ṭalḥa ibn Khu-waylid and the "prophetess" Sajāḥ, whom he chastised in the battles of al-Buzākha and al-Butāḥ. After gathering further tribal allies, Khālid marched on to deal with the most serious rebellion of all, that led by the "false prophet" Musaylima of the Ḥanīfa tribe in the rich oasis of al-Yamāma (the region around modern Riyadh). Musaylima's army was defeated in the bloody battle of "Aqrabā," and the Ḥanīfa tribe was placed under the supervision of a garrison. Meanwhile, Abū Bakr also dispatched a number of armies to confront other groups elsewhere in Arabia that either resisted or held aloof from the new state in Medina. One traversed the east Arabian coastal districts; another subdued ʿUman and the Mahra tribe (the latter in modern Dhofar province of southeastern Arabia); and others brought to heel the troublesome "false prophet" al-Aswad al-ʿAnsī in Yemen. Altogether, Abū Bakr dispatched eleven separate forces, which during the two years of his caliphate (632–4) brought the entire Arabian peninsula into obedience to Medina. These campaigns were of critical importance for the future of the Believers' movement, because they provided the caliphs with the manpower they needed to expand outside Arabia – particularly the hardy mountain villagers of Yemen and pastoral nomads of northern Arabia.

The prophet had shown a special interest in Syria, and had dispatched raiding parties in its direction several times during his life.[5] Abū Bakr also seems to have been interested in expanding the Believers' control into Syria, and organized four armies to invade it during the autumn of 633 CE, commanded by Yazīd ibn Abī Sufyān, ʿAmr ibn al-ʿAs, Shuraḥbīl ibn Ḥasana, and Abū ʿUbayda ibn al-Jarrāḥ. At first these forces concentrated on bringing under control the desert fringes of Syria, which were

occupied with Arabic-speaking tribesmen, and avoided attacking Byzantine garrisons or major towns (with the exception of an early raid against Gaza). In time, however, the Believers began to attack the towns of southern Syria, including Bostra, Faḥl (Pella), Baysān (Scythopolis), Damascus, Ḥimṣ (Emesa), and Baʿlabakk (Heliopolis), in the reigns of Abū Bakr's successors ʿUmar (634–44) and ʿUthmān (644–56). The Byzantine emperor Heraclius organized a large army to re-take these areas, but in the pitched battles at Ajnādayn and Yarmūk (around 636 CE) the Byzantine forces were shattered, and Heraclius withdrew from Syria, leaving the region open as far as the Taurus foothills. By about 650 CE most towns, even coastal cities like Caesarea and Tripoli, had been reduced by siege or (more frequently) had signed a treaty with the Believers and capitulated. From Syria, campaigns were dispatched against northern Mesopotamia. ʿIyāḍ ibn Ghanm al-Fihrī led troops who overcame the cities of Edessa, Ḥarrān, Raqqa, Nisibis, Malatya, Raʾs al-ʿAyn, and others, and pushed into the mountains of Armenia by 646 CE.

At about the same time the Believers were engaged in the conquest of Syria, other forces made their way toward Iraq.[6] For reasons not stated in our sources, it appears that Iraq was considered by the early caliphs and their entourage to be a less important or desirable objective than Syria, at least at first. Following upon the *ridda* campaigns in northeastern Arabia, Khālid ibn al-Walīd proceeded toward the middle Euphrates to secure the submission of Arabic-speaking pastoral groups and towns in the region, such as al-Ḥīra. These were on the fringes of, or part of, the Sasanian empire. It is not clear whether this campaign was an effort to recapture the initiative that had been seized by local chiefs, such as al-Muthannā ibn Ḥāritha of the Shaybān tribe, who had begun to launch raids into Sasanian territory, or whether Khālid was the first to launch a foray in this area and co-opted leaders such as al-Muthannā once he got there. Having seized a few towns along the lower Euphrates and established the Believers' control among the pastoral tribes there, Khālid left the area in al-Muthannā's charge and, in response to orders from the caliph in Medina, made his way with a small force across the Syrian steppe to support the Believers' forces in Syria. The caliph ʿUmar dispatched a new army under Abū ʿUbayd al-Thaqafī to reinforce al-Muthannā in Iraq, but this force was destroyed by the Sasanians at the battle of the Bridge. ʿUmar therefore organized a new and much larger army, which marched to Iraq under the command of Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqaṣ, and which was periodically reinforced by additional recruits sent by ʿUmar as they became available. This force was able to defeat the Sasanians' main army decisively at al-Qādisiyya (ca. 636), after which most of central Iraq – breadbasket and unrivalled source of taxes for the former Sasanian empire – was occupied by the Arabian Believers, including the former Sasanian capital at Ctesiphon (Arabic al-Madāʾin). The last Sasanian monarch, Yazdagird III, withdrew to the Zagros region and attempted to mount a counter-strike, but was again defeated at Jalūlāʾ and Nihāvand (ca. 642); thereafter he fled to the Iranian plateau where he eventually met an ignominious end, and the Sasanian empire disappeared forever.

Southernmost Iraq formed a separate front; to it ʿUmar sent a small force led at first by ʿUtba ibn Ghazwān (later by Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī) who, joined by local tribesmen, siezed the town of Ubulla (Apologos) and routed Sasanian garrisons. With the collapse of Sasanian power farther north, follow-up campaigns were also possible in the south, and the district of Khūzistān was seized with its towns of Shustar, Ahwāz, and Sūsa. Troops from southern Iraq joined those from central Iraq in defeating Yazdagird at Nihāvand and began campaigning in the Iranian highlands.

With Sasanian power decisively destroyed, the Arabian conquerors in Iraq and their allies were able quickly to occupy much of the Iranian plateau (though some districts, such as the Elburz region, remained unsubdued for many decades to come, and most areas faced widespread tax rebellions or resistance by local potentates when the Believers were preoccupied with civil wars).[7] From central Iraq, troops took the whole Zagros region as far north as Azerbaijan, including Ḥulwān, Hamadhān, and Tabrīz. Some pushed into the corridor south of the Elburz, via Qazvīn and Qomm as far as Rayy (modern Tehran). Others occupied northern Mesopotamia or, pushing northward from Azerbaijan via Ardabīl, seized the Mughan steppe and the important town of Darband on the western shores of the Caspian Sea, situated near the main pass through the Caucasus mountains. Yet other forces, starting from Fārs province (Iṣṭakhr, modern Shiraz), passed through the southern Iranian provinces of Kirmān and Sīstān northwards into Khurasān where they occupied (ca. 650) the oasis of Marv, almost to the Oxus River on the fringes of Central Asia. In this area, the Believers made treaties with local feudal lords, leaving the social structure of Khurasān essentially intact.

While the conquest of Iran was taking place in the east, Egypt was being occupied in the west.[8] ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ, at the head of a contingent of troops in Syria, marched from Palestine (ca. 639) across northern Sinai into the Nile delta and seized Pelusium and Bilbays. Our sources disagree on whether this was done at the behest of the caliph ʿUmar, or on ʿAmr's own initiative, but the caliph soon sent another force directly from Medina to reinforce him. The combined force defeated the local Byzantine garrison and took the latter's fortress of Babylon (part of modern Cairo) after a siege; other contingents seized the Fayyum depression, passed through the western delta, and after defeating the Byzantines again at Nikiu, besieged Alexandria. Eventually, the Byzantine governor agreed to a treaty and handed Alexandria over as the Byzantine soldiers evacuated Egypt. By 642, all of Egypt, including the coastal towns and the Nile valley as far as the first cataract, was held by the Believers.

Traditional Views of the Charismatic Phase of Expansion

At the heart of the astonishing expansion just described was the religious movement begun by Muḥammad. Traditionally, this movement was viewed as the manifestation of a discrete confessional identity – that is, it was seen as a new and distinct religion, Islam, that was from the very beginning different from all other religions, even from other monotheisms such as Judaism and Christianity, with which it shared many common beliefs (one God, prophecy, revealed scripture, Last Judgment, afterlife in heaven or hell, etc.). This view is the one enshrined in the Arabic–Islamic sources themselves, written down mainly in the period from one to three centuries after the life of the prophet Muḥammad and the first expansion of his followers. Moreover, this conceptualization of Muḥammad's movement as a novel religion was until recently replicated by almost all western scholars.

Given their conviction that Islam already existed as a distinct confession, it was inconceivable to most scholars that the populations of the Near East, overwhelmingly adherents of other well-defined religious confessions such as Christianity, Judaism, or Zoroastrianism, should suddenly and voluntarily abandon those faiths for a new and different one, Islam. Both the traditional Muslim sources and the western scholarship that followed it in this interpretative path therefore portrayed the expansion of

Muḥammad's followers as a process of conquest (*futūḥ*) – hence the prominence of the term "Islamic conquest" (or "Arab conquest") as the rubric under which these events have usually been categorized (including in this volume). The victories over the Byzantine and Sasanian armies were seen as the work of soldiers inspired by and fighting in the name of the new religion, Islam; similarly, the absorption of the cities, towns, and rural districts of the Near East into the Believers' new state was also described as the result of military action – the product either of forcible subjection (*'anwa*) of non-Muslim populations by Muslim conquerors, or of siege followed by capitulation to the conquerors (*ṣulḥ*).[9] The presumed result of such capitulations was the creation of a new society in which the Arabian Muslims ruled, and all local populations, who were non-Muslim (usually Christian, Jewish, or Zoroastrian), constituted the lowly subject population. The "military model" of the expansion – that is, its conceptualization as the forcible imposition of a new religious and political order – seemed to provide the most obvious way to understand the rapidity of the new community's rise to ascendancy in wide areas of the Near East.

The "military model" of the conquests, however, raises in acute form the question: What were the forces that drove this movement in its first stage? Many historians, struck by the conquests' swift progress and vast scope, were puzzled by the fact that the conquests radiated from a place that lacked the elements usually considered essential to sustaining a rapid military expansion: an established state with well-developed military institutions and a significant base of economic resources on which to draw. Explaining the apparent energy and power of the early Islamic conquest movement, which exploded into the Near East apparently without any of these elements, emerged as a serious challenge for historians.

The oldest explanation for the dynamism that lay behind the Islamic conquests was that provided by the Muslim community itself, which saw it as the product of the new faith of Islam. This explanation took two forms. One was the belief that the conquests happened because of God's support for His faithful; in other words, it was God's will that the Muslims should be victorious on the battlefield against non-Muslim foes, often against overwhelming odds. According to this view – which historians who reject supernatural explanations cannot accept – the conquests are nothing less than a physical, historical sign of God's favor, and themselves constitute evidence for the truth of Islam as a faith-system.

The second aspect of this traditional Muslim view of the conquests emphasizes the early Muslims' zeal for their new faith, and attributes the success of the conquest movement in part to this deep commitment. Unlike the supernatural explanation, this is an explanation that any modern historian might embrace without difficulty, because the notion that religious commitment could be a powerful motivator of individual action should be unproblematic even to a historian of secular outlook.

Generally, however, western historians have been uncomfortable with religious explanations of the conquests, even those based merely on the idea of religious zeal as a contributing factor.[10] There were some exceptions,[11] of course, but most western scholars downplayed the force, or even denied the very existence, of the Believers' religious commitment. Some of them noted, for example, that the Believers did not require the Christians and Jews they "conquered" to embrace Islam, but rather allowed them to continue in their ancestral faiths as long as they paid taxes, and deduced from this that the conquerors were therefore not essentially motivated by religion.[12] The result of this was that some western scholars adopted a

self-contradictory position on the conquests; on the one hand, they accepted the general notion that the expansion was somehow linked to the appearance of Islam, which they understood as a new religion, yet at the same time they wished to show that Islam, or religious zeal for it, was not really the cause of the expansion after all. Often these explanations took the form of reductionism – that is, explanations that tried to reduce the apparent causative force of Islam to other, more mundane, factors that were presented as the "real" causes. It is worth noting some of these reductionist arguments, at least briefly, and pointing out their shortcomings, because although most are discredited they are sometimes still advanced, even today.[13]

Perhaps the oldest reductionist theory, which appeared already in the nineteenth century, emphasized the conquerors' cupidity. Proponents of this view assumed that Arabian pastoral nomads were the dominant element in the conquest movement, the main motivation for which, they claimed, was the bedouins' desire to seize plunder. One summarized the motivations of the early conquests thus: "forthwith the whole Arabian people, both Town and Bedouin, were riveted to Islam by a common bond – the love of rapine and the lust of spoil."[14] Such a view, however, is predicated on assumptions rather than observable historical facts about the taking of booty, since little reliable evidence of the extent of plunder exists. More seriously, this interpretation completely fails to explain why the conquests should have happened when they did and as a sudden outburst – since the pastoralists and their presumed desire for plunder had been present for centuries. Likewise, this theory fails to explain why and how this latent desire for plunder, at one and only one crucial historical moment, took the form of an organized military, political, and religious movement. In this sense, the "plunder" argument simply begs the fundamental question of why the expansion took place when and as it did.

Another reductionist explanation provided by early western scholars of the conquests can be called the ecological or climatic hypothesis, according to which the conquests were sparked by the progressive desiccation of the Arabian peninsula in the years before the rise of Islam.[15] This supposed desiccation forced many Arabians to emigrate in waves from the peninsula into the surrounding lands, a popular migration that is disguised by the sources as a "conquest." Besides the fact that there is little or no convincing evidence for such a desiccation in the years immediately before the rise of Islam, the ecological hypothesis also fails to explain why the Arabians who moved into the Fertile Crescent in the seventh century appear not as a slow trickle of impoverished refugees, as one would expect if they had been forced out by dire circumstances, but rather as the sudden outburst of organized military forces. The ecological hypothesis also conflates the conquests and the "Arab migrations" – that is, it fails to separate the actual conquest of the Fertile Crescent, undertaken by military forces of decidedly small size, from the migration of larger groups of kinsmen into these areas, which the Arabic–Islamic sources reveal to have taken place only after the conquests; indeed, the migrations were made possible by the conquests, not the other way around.[16]

A number of more sophisticated hypotheses about the initial conquest movement, but ones that still contained a reductionist element, emphasized various economic factors as the crucial background to the Islamic movement. Early in the twentieth century, H. Lammens conjured up an image of Muḥammad's Mecca as the hub of a thriving trade in luxury goods connecting the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean basins, and argued that this provided the economic underpinnings of the conquest movement.[17] A half-century later, W. M. Watt built on Lammens's theory by hypothesizing

that the disparities in wealth generated by this presumed trade created dislocations in traditional Arabian society (especially in Mecca) that Muḥammad's preachings were intended to remedy.[18] Marxist historians viewed the conquests as the product of the presumed exhaustion of the working classes in the Byzantine and Sasanian domains, which resulted in their capitulation to the arriving conquerors, and explicitly rejected what they termed "religious fanaticism" as a cause.[19] M. A. Shaban proposed that Muḥammad's career and the *ridda* brought trade in Arabia to a standstill, leading his followers to invade surrounding areas and thus to "unintentionally acquiring an empire" – religious motivations, he implies, were obviously not the real cause.[20] Numerous other students of Islam's origins (including the present writer) accepted the general outlines of the Lammens–Watt hypothesis of economic and social change in some form or other.[21] In recent years the notion that Mecca was an entrepot for an extensive luxury trade has been convincingly challenged by Patricia Crone,[22] but the existence of more modest commercial activity cannot be dismissed. Indeed, it has recently been proposed that Sasanian investment in Arabian trade and industry may have caused a wave of economic vitality in Arabia just on the eve of Islam.[23] It remains to be seen, however, just how this commerce and other economic activities, such as mining in the Ḥijāz, related to the rise of the conquest movement. The implication of all these theories, however, is that the expansion is the consequence of economic or social forces, rather than the result of a religious movement; statements in the sources suggesting a religious view of the conquests are often explained away as being merely the surface rhetoric masking the underlying social and economic forces – which are, by implication, "real."

Another reductionist approach to the early Islamic conquests chose to depict them as a kind of defensive proto-nationalism – a reaction of Arabians ("Arabs") against encroachment from the outside.[24] The rivalry between the Byzantine and Sasanian empires over Arabia, on the political, economic, and religious levels, was an undoubted fact, but whether the Believers' expansion can be identified as an Arabian "nativist" movement is questionable. The earliest documentary evidence available (including the Qur'an text as a kind of quasi-document) gives virtually no support to the notion that "Arabness" was a significant feature of the movement; on the contrary, it describes the movement overwhelmingly by means of religious terminology – using particularly the word *mu'min*, "Believer," and others related to it, as the crucial self-identifier. The domination of western thought by the nationalist idea[25] during the nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries, however, made it almost inevitable that nationalist or nativist conceptualization should have been virtually all-pervasive in scholarship of the period.

A further problem inherent in the "military model" – particularly relating to the first, charismatic phase of the conquests – is to explain the causes of the conquests' success. This is because, as noted, the initial expansion movement radiated from a region – western Arabia – that lacked the base of natural and cultural resources one normally expects to find underpinning such an expansion, particularly a state expansion. How was it possible for people from this region to organize a movement that so quickly overcame vast areas of the Near East, even though those areas were home to two deeply institutionalized empires with well-established traditions of statecraft and tremendous resources based on an extensive agrarian base? And how was it possible for the new religion of Islam to establish itself so completely in an area where Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity had been deeply rooted for centuries and existed in highly sophisticated forms?

Scholars who adopted the more strictly military conceptualization of the conquests have tried in a variety of ways to explain their success in the face of perceived practical obstacles. One common theme was to emphasize not the strength of the Muslim armies, but rather the weakness of their foes, the Byzantine and Sasanian empires; according to this view, the rival empires were exhausted militarily, financially, and morally by over twenty years of bitter warfare, during which the Sasanians had occupied much of the Byzantine Near East only to be driven back again by the emperor Heraclius in the 620s.[26] In this view, the empires were unprepared for and unable to handle the unexpected military onslaught that came upon both of them from the south suddenly in the 630s.

Another explanation proposed by those favoring a military conceptualization of the conquests emphasized certain advantages held by the conquerors, rather than the weakness of the Byzantines and Sasanians. For example, some argued that the early Believers, when confronting the Byzantines' and Sasanians' southern flanks in Syria and Iraq, had the advantage of "inner lines of communication," which permitted the caliphs to shift troops from Iraq to Syria and vice versa in response to conditions. (They pass in silence over the fact that being wedged between two enemies and forced to fight both ahead and behind is normally considered a military liability.) Others have argued that the early Believers had superior weaponry or tactics, greater mobility, far better understanding of the desert fringes where most of the major battles against the Byzantines and Sasanians took place, or better leadership.[27] These possibilities may have some merit, but ultimately, such tactical advantages must all be linked to the fact that the Believers were putting together a new state, which enabled them to mobilize the social and other resources of Arabian society more effectively than before.[28]

A Revisionist View of the First or Charismatic Phase of the Conquests

As we have seen, the "military model" of the early Islamic conquests was rooted in the traditional sources' view that Muḥammad preached from the start a new religion, Islam, and we have seen the concomitant difficulties of interpretation that scholars attempted to eliminate by various reductionist approaches. Many of the difficulties of interpretation posed by the "military model" evaporate, however, if we adopt a somewhat different view of the nature of the religious movement Muḥammad started.[29] There is considerable evidence to suggest that Muḥammad and his earliest followers did not view their ideas as constituting a new religion, Islam, but were rather calling people to pious monotheist reform. We can most aptly call this the *Believers' movement* since, in the Qurʾan and other early texts, participants in the movement are referred to, and refer to themselves, mainly as Believers (*muʾminūn*). That is, Muḥammad's religious movement emphasized belief in one God, and in the importance of righteous or pious behavior in accordance with God's revealed law. Former pagans who came to follow Muḥammad's preachings were expected to follow the law as revealed to Muḥammad in the Qurʾan; those who were Jews or Christians, being monotheists already, did not need to give up their traditional faith to join the Believers' movement, but were expected to lead a righteous life in adherence to the teachings of the Torah or Gospels (Qurʾanic *tawrāt, injīl*), which were accepted as earlier versions of God's revelation. One who did this was a Believer, regardless of whether he followed Qurʾan, Torah, or Gospels. In other words, the Believers' movement was at the beginning non-confessional in the sense that it embraced

righteous monotheists of whatever confession, whether Jews, Christians, or Qur'anic Believers. Although later Muslim tradition does its best to conceal the fact, there is some residual evidence showing that the early community of Believers did, indeed, include Jews and Christians as active members.[30] It also seems that the early Believers thought that the Last Judgment was imminent – that is, the Believers' movement was apocalyptic in character. This may explain the apparent dynamism and urgency of the movement; the conviction that the world is about to end and that one's ultimate salvation depends on what one does *now* could bring people to drop everything in their normal lives and get caught up in the enthusiasm of the cause.

Adopting such a view of the early Believers' movement changes significantly our perspective on the Believers' early expansion, and resolves a number of the puzzles associated with the more traditional ''military model.'' Viewing the Believers' expansion into the lands adjacent to Arabia as the arrival of an ecumenical religious movement that preached monotheist reform and had as its goal the establishment of what the Believers saw as a God-guided, righteous political order, makes its ultimate success easier to grasp. For the Arabian Believers did not arrive as a new creed bent on suppressing existing religious communities in the name of their presumed new religion, much less on wooing them away from their former beliefs, but accepted many local Christians and Jews in the conquered lands as part of the movement.[31] To be sure, a new ruling elite of Believers was established that ruled over those who were not deemed adequately pious, and the dominant people in this elite were Believers of Arabian origin. But the ranks of the Believers also came to include many people of local origin; traditionally conceived scholarship identifies these people as *mawālī*, the Arabic term for clients of an Arabian tribal group, and treats them as ''converts to Islam,'' but it is perhaps more appropriate to see them merely as Christians or Jews who had joined the Believers' movement. This ability of the early Believers' movement to incorporate many Christians and Jews (and some Zoroastrians) is presumably why the establishment of the Believers' hegemony seems to have occurred in most areas with relatively little trauma; for there is virtually no archaeological evidence of destruction or even of disruption to be found in the excavated sites dating from this period in Egypt, Syria, or Iraq.

This vision of the early expansion as a religious movement, however, does not require us to jettison all aspects of the traditional view of things; in particular, it does not preclude military activity on the part of the Believers. Although the Believers' contacts with most cities, towns, and rural districts may well have been generally more an exercise in persuasion than coercion, and resulted in negotiated submissions to the Believers' new kingdom, it seems likely that, much as the traditional narratives state, the Believers arrived in these areas in the first instance as organized armies or raiding parties – a fact that doubtless made their negotiators much more persuasive. Moreover, the Byzantine and Sasanian emperors surely would have sent armies to reclaim territories that had slipped under the Believers' control, or to dissuade additional localities from doing so. It seems plausible to assume that the Believers would have engaged these forces in pitched battles, not unlike the way they are described in the *futūḥ* narratives.

Furthermore, if we understand the initial goal of the Believers' movement to have been the establishment of a new, righteous kingdom run in accordance with God's revealed laws, it becomes possible to understand how a movement driven by religious zeal could nonetheless be largely free of pressure to ''convert.'' For to talk of

"conversion" becomes meaningless in the absence of a sharply defined identity as a separate, distinct religious confession. If a Jew or Christian could, by virtue of righteous behavior, also be reckoned among the Believers, there was no reason for him to "convert" to anything; he simply became a Believer, while remaining a Christian or a Jew. The Believers' movement, then, could establish itself readily in the Near East without requiring changes in a people's religious identity.

Like any vast historical phenomenon, the early expansion of the Believers must be viewed as the result of a variety of causative factors. These collectively provided a range of incentives to support the movement – regardless of how we decide to understand it – so that many different kinds of people found something appealing in it. Some participants in the Believers' movement doubtless were motivated by religious zeal and the desire to extend the realm subject to God's word. Others no doubt cared hardly at all for religious belief, nor troubled themselves with thoughts of the afterlife, but were drawn by the appeal of booty and earthly rewards. Still others may have sought commercial or financial opportunities, or political power, or just sheer excitement; and many people were doubtless drawn by a combination of factors. In this sense, many of the theories noted above may be seen as partial explanations of the nature of the conquests. However, most of them should be subsumed within the notion that the conquests are part of a process of state-formation ignited by a religious movement, because it was the new state that provided the context and organizing framework within which these other motivations could be effectively pursued.

Structural Developments during the First Phase of the Conquests

One of the crucial features of the first or charismatic phase of the conquest movement is the simultaneous development of various institutions of the state, including the army. Indeed, as we shall see, the army may have led the process of state institution-alization.

During Muḥammad's leadership of the Believers' movement in Medina (622–32 CE), there existed, as far as we can tell, no structured institutions of government of any kind, independent of his person (it was, to use Weberian terminology, still a thoroughly patrimonial regime). There was not yet even a standing army; although Muḥammad launched numerous raiding parties and several major military campaigns from Medina (for example, the campaigns against Khaybar in the north, or against Mecca in AH 8), these are described in each case as *ad hoc* assemblages of loyal supporters from Medina and allies from surrounding settlements or pastoral groups who had joined his community in some way.

The nucleus of a permanent army seems first to have materialized during the *ridda* wars that took place in Arabia during the two years following the death of Muḥammad in 632. At least some of the forces dispatched by the first caliph Abu Bakr (r. 632–4) were in the field for over a year of sustained campaigning, and their objectives seem to have been quite open-ended – both in marked departure from the limited objectives and *ad hoc* character of the armies of Muḥammad's time. The number and size of these permanent forces increased as Abu Bakr and his successor ʿUmar (634–44) dispatched campaigns into Syria and Iraq. During this period the *dīwān* or regular army payroll was instituted, an event that can be said to mark definitively the creation of standing forces with expectations of regular campaigning.[32]

Several other institutions of the early Islamic state were closely linked to the institutionalization of the military during this period. One was the regular appointment of governors in various provinces of the vast areas the Believers' movement was rapidly acquiring in the middle decades of the seventh century – Syria, Iraq, northern Mesopotamia, Egypt, Iran.[33] In most cases, the first governor of a conquered district was, as one would expect, the commander of the army that had conquered and occupied it, who appears to have been in charge of regulating all aspects of life in that area – not only military campaigning and police matters, but also tax-collection and the adjudication of disputes. Fairly soon, however, we begin to read about regular dismissal of such military governors by the caliphs, and of their replacement sometimes by a team of officers, one to head the military forces of the province and another to handle the province's finances. We also sometimes read of increasingly regular (sometimes yearly) rotation of governors and provincial military commanders. Our chronicle sources for these matters in this early period are notoriously unreliable, but such reports seem to indicate a step forward in the rationalization of state administration. The earliest coin minting seems to have been linked to the existence of local authority in the hands of governors or military commanders in diverse provinces, who took over pre-existing Sasanian or Byzantine mints and personnel; it does not appear to have been centrally coordinated, and major changes in coinage types – still quite haphazard – did not begin until the time of the Umayyad caliph 'Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705), three-quarters of a century after the earliest conquests.[34]

Another institution linked to the military was the garrison town or *miṣr* (pl. *amṣār*), a number of which were founded during the charismatic phase in key locations in various provinces. Major ones were established at Baṣra in southern Iraq, Kūfa in central Iraq, and Fusṭāṭ in Egypt, and are described in the chronicles as army camps from which further campaigning was organized. In their early years, when the conquerors from Arabia were all clustered in these garrison towns, the *amṣār* clearly served not only key military functions, but also the vital ideological and sociopolitical one of preserving the cohesion of the Believers' movement. For, had the first Believers from Arabia settled in scattered localities throughout the vast provinces over which they took control, they would quickly have been overwhelmed by the cultural practices of local populations that greatly outnumbered them. The cultural isolation of the early *amṣār*, then, served as islands safeguarding the communal identity of the early Believers in a sea of non-believers.

The *amṣār* also became important foci of settlement for successive waves of Arabian migrants (often the families of the conquerors) who flocked to them once the province was "opened" – conquered. They grew rapidly into major cities with increasingly diverse populations, and became in time vibrant cultural centers in which was developed and from which radiated a new, synthetic Arabic–Islamic culture.[35]

In some areas – particularly, it seems, in Syria – the early Believers from Arabia appear to have settled in vacant quarters of existing cities such as Damascus and Hims. The latter town became the main military base of the early Believers in Syria for almost a hundred years after the conquests. This pattern of settlement in existing towns suggests that the major cities of Byzantine Syria had become partly depopulated on the eve of the conquests, probably from a combination of earthquakes and plague epidemics, as well as because of the impact of the last Sasanian–Byzantine war (603–30), all of which shattered the local economy and the fabric of urban life in early seventh-century Byzantine Syria. On the other hand, evidence from the excavations at

Ayla at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba have turned up remains of a modest new town founded during the conquest era just outside the gates of the Byzantine town (Ailana).[36] This suggests that in some localities in Syria, too, the Believers were creating new town foundations (even though Ayla itself is never mentioned in our sources as a *miṣr*).

We have little reliable information on the development of the tax administration the Believers established in the areas they conquered.[37] We must assume that there was one, for every state requires and aspires to secure a steady stream of revenue. But efforts to reconstruct what it was like must navigate a sea of contradictory information found in the Qur'an, in the Arabic–Islamic literary compilations about the conquests that often reflect systematizing efforts of later generations of legal scholars, and in the papyrus tax records of the early Islamic period, the advantages of whose documentary character is offset by the highly fragmented (and almost completely Egypto-centric) view they offer of the early tax system – if, indeed, it can be called a system at all. Much suggests that at first the Arabian Believers simply continued the bewildering profusion of local tax procedures they encountered in the districts they ruled, retaining the local administrators to apply them in the relevant local languages (Coptic, Greek, Syriac, Pahlavi). Only over the span of several generations was this local administrative personnel supplanted by Believers whose native language was Arabic – who by this time had themselves become sufficiently well established in these areas to be considered "locals." It seems that a true sytematization of the tax system was only fully conceived during the early ʿAbbasid period, well over a century after the initial occupation of Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and Iran, and was never fully realized. Many texts shaped by the later, idealizing categories of the jurists describe conditions, even in early Islamic times, in terms of neat distinctions in taxation between Muslims and *ahl al-kitāb* ("peoples of the book", i.e., Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians), between land-tax (*kharāj*) and poll-tax on non-Muslims (*jizya*), etc. But a glance at a rare text that seems to report actual conditions in northern Mesopotamia in the later eighth century[38] offers us a much messier picture: *jizya* on non-Muslims was a combined head and land-tax; taxes were collected three, and sometimes more, times per year instead of the prescribed once annually; the tax-collector for this Muslim regime in this district was a Zoroastrian; etc. It is, therefore, perilous to generalize too boldly about actual taxation practices, except to say that, particularly for the first century or more of the Believers' rule, they were very inconsistent and harked back to a variety of pre-existing practices.

Other aspects of what can be called the first state administration following the conquests are less well known. The caliphs early on created a *bayt al-māl* or central treasury, which may have represented a true public purse, that is, a fund for state expenses independent of the funding of the ruler himself, but we know more about the legal theory of it than we do about the actual history and functioning of the early *bayt al-māl*.[39] Perhaps on the model of the army *dīwān*, the caliphs also began to establish other ministries or bureaus (also called *dīwān*), particularly to handle the tax system. They also seem to have established a chancery to handle official correspondence in Arabic, but relatively few examples of its products survive, although its existence is noted in some literary sources.[40]

The adjudication of disputes in the Believers' realm seems to have been in the hands of local governors or military commanders, or their subordinate officials in specific localities, through the first century AH, at least if the Egyptian papyri are any

indication. Although many idealizing reports speak of the very early appointment of *qāḍīs* or judges,[41] there is no documented evidence for the existence of independent judges before the early ʿAbbasid period. More frequently mentioned is the institution of an official supervision of the *ḥajj* or annual pilgrimage ritual in Mecca. The pilgrimage was frequently headed by the caliph himself or by a high official designated by him. Doing so helped affirm both the Believers' religious traditions and the caliph's legitimacy as leader of the community of Believers, and so should be considered among the institutions intended to solidify the workings of the new state established in the wake of the conquests.

By the time of the first civil war (656–61), then, a rudimentary state administration had begun to crystallize among the Believers in the conquered lands. This administration was still crude in many respects, but it proved strong enough to provide a framework for the community of Believers to come together again at the end of the first civil war, and so allowed the community to resume its expansion in the second or "institutional" stage of conquests.

The Second or Institutional Phase of the Conquests

The first civil war or *fitna* (656–61) marked the end of the first or charismatic phase of the conquests, during which the expansion seems to have been sustained largely on the basis of an intense enthusiasm among the Believers for their collective mission of spreading the domain of God's word.[42] The first *fitna* was essentially a struggle within the Arabian (largely Meccan) ruling elite to determine who should lead the community of Believers in the aftermath of the murder of the third caliph, ʿUthman ibn ʿAffan (r. 644–56), a question that was closely bound up with differing attitudes on *how* the community and state should be ruled.[43]

During the *fitna* the embryonic elements of state organization and institutions described in the preceding section remained in place, to the extent that they already existed, and were drawn upon in varying degrees by rival contenders for power. All serious claimants, especially ʿAli and Muʿawiya, drew on the military forces of the provinces they controlled, appointed provincial governors and subordinate officials, and attempted to assert their legitimacy by organizing official pilgrimage observances and other rituals.[44] When the *fitna* ended in 661 – following the assassination of ʿAli and the subsequent recognition as caliph of Muʿawiya, of the Umayyad family of Quraysh – it was possible, with internal peace restored, for the new ruler and his entourage once again to organize military campaigns of expansion. Now, however, the caliph could rely in doing so upon the institutions of the state: in particular, upon the standing armies, based in the garrison towns, sustained by regular taxation that was levied by the caliphs' provincial administration, which provided income some of which was distributed to the soldiers through a regular military payroll. We can probably assume that the standing armies were already by the early Umayyad period structured following an explicit chain of command, and that such matters as recruitment and terms of service were also regularized, although we have very little evidence of such organizational arrangements other than the names of some of the highest-level commanders who figure prominently in various events mentioned in the chronicle literature.[45]

During this second or institutional phase of the conquests, the bulk of the caliphate's military campaigns were pre-planned, even routine: the soldiers were usually

mustered in the *amṣār* in Iraq, Egypt, or Syria during the late winter or spring months, and dispatched so as to attain their objectives in Iran, North Africa, or the Byzantine frontier during the summer "campaigning season." They retired in the autumn to their home bases, where they spent the winter "off-season" resting and preparing for the next season's hostilities. The routine, seasonal quality of campaigning in the institutional phase was perhaps most marked on the Byzantine frontier, so much so that the annual campaign into Anatolia was called in Arabic *al-ṣāʾifa*, literally "summering";[46] but on the whole a similar rhythmic quality is perceptible in campaigning elsewhere as well. The Syriac chronicle of Yohannan bar Penkaye, written during the late 680s in northern Mesopotamia, which provides one of our earliest descriptions of the Islamic state, describes how the armies of the Believers "used to go in each year to distant lands and provinces, raiding and plundering from all peoples under heaven. And from every person they demanded only tribute, and each one could remain in whatever faith he chose."[47] This valuable comment confirms the regular, annual nature of the military campaigns sponsored by the Believers in the late seventh century, as well as the non-confessional character of the expansion, which was essentially the political expansion of a state, notwithstanding the state's origins in a monotheist revival movement.

During the secondary phase, the conquests and expansion of the caliphal state encompassed even more distant territories than during the primary phase; their vast scope – from France to India – makes it impractical to provide more than the barest sketch of their outlines here.

During the primary phase of the conquests, as we have seen, the Believers had seized western Iran and many districts in the south and east of the country as well; during the second phase, those parts of Iran that were still in the control of independent local rulers were integrated more thoroughly into the Islamic state – particularly the rugged region south of the Caspian Sea.[48] From Khurasān in northeastern Iran, where the conquerors had established a garrison in 650, the whole area as far as the Oxus (Amu Darya) River was taken over in the last decades of the seventh century, as were parts of northern Afghanistan (Balkh). During the early eighth century, the area between the Oxus and Jaxartes (Syr Darya) Rivers was raided annually and finally seized, and some important towns beyond the Jaxartes, such as Shash (modern Tashkent) were subdued (741).[49]

The second decade of the eighth century saw the conquest of the lower Indus valley (Sind) as far north as Multan by a force dispatched by the Umayyad governor of Iraq, al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf, perhaps to punish the local ruler for sheltering pirates who had preyed on Muslim merchants. The leader of this campaign was a teenaged kinsman of al-Ḥajjāj, Muḥammad ibn al-Qāsim, who emerged as a heroic figure in later lore. Archaeological finds confirm the existence in the Indus valley of a continuing Muslim community with some commercial ties to Syria and other regions to the west, but the historical sources are virtually silent on this community and we know very little about it. It seems, however, to have remained a relatively modest presence in Sind for many centuries. The large-scale spread of Islam in Sind and elsewhere in India really began later, with the activities of the Ghaznavids and other dynasties based in Afghanistan in the eleventh century CE and later.[50]

The Believers had penetrated parts of Armenia and the Caucasus already during the first phase of the conquests and held these areas through the eighth century. During the ninth and tenth centuries, however, determined opposition on the part of the

local Christian chiefs, backed by the Byzantines, frequent raids by the nomadic Khazars of the Volga region, and the activities of independent-minded Muslim warlords, slowly eroded caliphal control of these areas. By the late tenth century, Armenia and Georgia were again ruled by indigenous Christian kings.[51]

Farther west, the caliphs continued to launch regular summer campaigns into Anatolia, to which the Byzantines responded in kind, resulting in the emergence of a special frontier zone in Anatolia ravaged by continuous raiding on both sides. This continued into the ninth century; thereafter the collapse of 'Abbasid caliphal power and the Byzantine military resurgence pushed the border farther south, into northern Syria. The caliphs also mounted several campaigns which bypassed most of Anatolia and attacked the Byzantine capital at Constantinople (669; 673–8; 717–18; 783–5). Although these more than once posed a great threat to the city, they never succeeded in taking it.[52]

Egypt had served already during the first phase of conquest as a base for raids westward across North Africa into Libya and Ifriqiya (modern Tunisia). During the second phase, raids continued and were followed by consolidation of caliphal control: 'Uqba ibn Nafi' decisively conquered Ifriqiya in the 660s, establishing the garrison town of Qayrawan there in 670, and raided as far as the Atlantic in the 680s. Qayrawan, in turn, served as the focus for the radiation of Islamic culture and caliphal control in much of the Maghrib. Some Berber pastoralists and villagers of the Maghrib continued to resist the Believers' hegemony, however, even after the region was largely pacified by the forceful governor Musa ibn Nusayr in the early eighth century. Others, however, quickly joined the ranks of the Believers and became themselves important participants in the secondary phase of expansion.[53]

From North Africa, raids were launched into Visigothic Spain, which was apparently embroiled in a civil war; shortly thereafter, around 711, two armies crossed into Spain, one led by the Berber commander Tariq ibn Ziyad and the other by Musa ibn Nusayr. These forces defeated the last Visigothic King, Roderick, and quickly seized control of much of the peninsula as far as the Pyrenees, including the former capital at Toledo. The next century saw the immigration into Spain of significant numbers of Berber settlers and of some Arabs, particularly from Syria, as part of the ruling elite. We know little more about the history of Muslim rule in Spain until the fall of the Umayyad caliphate in the east (750) than the names of the Umayyads' governors, but during this period the Muslims consolidated their rule over all of the Iberian peninsula except for the mountainous north, which became the focus of small Christian kingdoms. From Spain, the Muslims pushed across the Pyrenees into southern and central Gaul; their defeat by the Frankish king Charles Martel near Poitiers in 732 marked their apogee in the west, and by 801 the cities north of the Pyrenees and even Barcelona were no longer under Muslim control.[54]

During their expansionist heyday of the seventh and eighth centuries, the Believers also took to the sea and seized various islands in the Mediterranean and a few outposts on that sea's northern shores. Cyprus became subject to shared Byzantine–Umayyad sovereignty in the seventh century, but generally the eastern Mediterranean remained a Byzantine lake, dominated by its powerful navy. In the western Mediterranean, however, the Aghlabid governors of Ifriqiya (Tunisia) built a powerful navy in the ninth century that seized Sicily from the Byzantines between 827 and 831, and Muslim raiders, many little more than freebooters, attacked many Italian coastal towns (Ancona, Naples, Rome) and established outposts in various localities

in Provence, Switzerland, northern Italy, and southern Italy. The Balearic islands were conquered by forces from Islamic Spain; Crete was taken in 825 by a rebel and adventurer who fled Spain and put together a raiding party in Egypt.[55]

The regularity of the campaigning in the institutional phase was linked to a shift in the motivations for the conquests that had set in by this time. On the one hand, the Umayyad caliphs, as leaders of the community of Believers, doubtless aspired to extend the domain of the Believers' new, God-guided public order, and to displace as much as possible the older, in their eyes corrupt and sinful regimes of the past. That is, the Umayyad caliphs, like the first four caliphs who preceded them, continued to be impelled in part by what we may term religious motivations (even though this did not involve forcing people who were already monotheists – in particular, Christians and Jews – to embrace Islam). On the other hand, the Umayyad ruling elite also came to realize that campaigns were an effective way to raise revenue in the form of booty (including slaves). This was doubtless part of the reason why campaigns were sent out annually: raiding was, in effect, an alternative form of taxation, which was of course also undertaken on a regular basis. The revenues of the Umayyad state were not well distinguished from those of the ruling elite – the caliph and his immediate entourage; that is, the "public purse" and the "privy purse" were often one and the same, in practice if not in principle. Some caliphs used their revenues, whether from taxation or from the ruler's share of booty from military campaigns, not only for such state purposes as paying the army and bureaucracy, but also to secure, through patronage, the backing of important individuals such as powerful tribal chiefs; and sometimes they even employed them for personal purposes, such as to purchase properties as investments for themselves. The caliph Muʿawiya, for example, is reported to have possessed vast estates in eastern Arabia, worked by thousands of slaves who were probably part of his share of the booty.[56] The provision of captives as part of annual tribute (*baqṭ*) is mentioned in the treaty-agreement with Nubia, of which documentary evidence exists,[57] and campaigns of raid and conquest against Berber groups in North Africa seem especially to have aimed at securing slaves – a lucrative form of tribute.[58]

Besides the more routine annual campaigning, however, the Umayyad caliphs also organized exceptional campaigns with particular objectives. Most noteworthy of these were their several attempts to conquer the Byzantine capital, Constantinople. We can assume that the ultimate goal – or, perhaps, the fantasy – of the regular summer campaigns against Anatolia was to advance all the way to the Byzantine capital, but well-organized Byzantine resistance in Anatolia meant that the normal summer campaigns seldom got near Constantinople; instead, the Umayyad *ṣāʾifa* tended to joust with Byzantine forces in central Anatolia, whose various towns and districts were traded back and forth between the two empires year by year.[59] In any case, it became evident early on that Constantinople was probably too strong to be reduced by a land assault alone, because of the city's massive land defenses and its extensive coasts, which allowed it to be resupplied by sea. Twice, however, the Umayyad caliphs organized huge expeditions against Constantinople that were coordinated with naval expeditions so that the city could be subjected to combined land assault and sea blockade (674–80; 716–17). Similarly, a special naval and marine campaign was undertaken in 674 to Crete, and special forces dispatched in 711 to conquer Sind (in today's southern Pakistan).

In time – already by the later seventh century – the front had become so distant in east and west that the troops dispatched from the *amṣār* in either Iraq or Egypt spent

much of the campaigning season simply getting to the land of the enemy. For this reason, new "second-tier" garrisons were founded as satellites of the original *amṣār* that had been established in the first phase of the conquests. In the west, Qayrawan was established in a fertile district in what is today central Tunisia in 670, and settled with a permanent force drawn from Fustat. In the east, the rich oasis region of Marw, conquered already in 651, was chosen as the base for a large garrison in 671; this was not a new city-foundation, as there had been some kind of urbanization in the oasis for at least a thousand years, but 671 marked the beginning of Marw's prominence as a *miṣr* from which the Muslims dispatched campaigns into easternmost Iran, Central Asia, and Afghanistan.

In sum, the basic feature of the conquests of the second or institutional phase, and what sets them apart from those of the charismatic phase, was that the caliphs could now rely on the increasingly developed institutional framework of the state. This meant that they could pursue campaigns of conquest on a regular basis as a means of revenue-extraction. A more bureaucratic motivation was thus added to the original motivation that impelled the charismatic conquests, namely the religiously based desire to extend the reach of the righteous community of Believers by expanding the state they had created.

Impact and Consequences of the Islamic Conquests

Finally, a consideration of the Islamic conquests – however one wishes to conceptualize them – must examine their historical impact and consequences for the societies of the Near East. In doing so, we need sometimes to adopt a retrospective view and try to identify long-range consequences, as well as changes that would have been visible to observers of the time.

First of all – and this is most definitely a retrospective perception – the conquests marked the decisive starting-point in the long historical process by which Islam became the dominant religion of the Near East and began to spread throughout the world. This is true even though the early Believers constituted, for at least several decades following the conquests, only a very small minority of the populations they ruled. It is also true even if we wish to see the Believers' movement of the time of Muḥammad and the generation or two following him as not yet being exactly "Islam" in the usual sense, but rather as a religious movement emphasizing monotheism and piety that had an ecumenical and non-confessional character; for it was this movement that during the century following the Prophet evolved into Islam in the sense we usually use the term, that is, as a unique monotheistic confession whose distinctive markers are recognition of the prophethood of Muhammad and of the Qur'an as God's revealed word. The Believers' movement, if not yet "Islam" as people have understood that term for over a thousand years, represented the embryo or seed from which Islam emerged and spread throughout the world. In the Near Eastern context in particular, the Islamic conquests mark the beginning of the process by which Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Judaism (along with other, non-monotheistic faiths) gradually lost out and ceased, and Islam came to be the dominant religious confession of the Near East.[60] The Believers' new political order thus provided the sheltering aegis under which, over several centuries, Islam (as it would increasingly be known) was adopted as the faith of millions of people from Central Asia and the Indus valley to Spain and North Africa.

Another change that came with the conquests, and one that was as obvious to observers at the time as it is to us today, was a political shift. The regions and peoples conquered or absorbed by the early Believers' movement were no longer subject to the Byzantine emperor or the Sasanian Great King, but were now ruled by the caliphs and their agents (usually military at first, then increasingly bureaucratic). The Sasanian state, indeed, ceased to exist entirely with the death of the last Great King, Yazdagird III, in 651. The Byzantine empire survived, but only in greatly truncated form, and the Byzantine emperors emerged as the longest-term rivals to the caliphs. The growth of new state institutions (sometimes borrowing freely from the institutions of their Byzantine or Sasanian predecessors) has already been noted. The larger change that these institutional developments articulated was a reorientation of revenues to the caliphs and their regime, and to the goals of the new regime, and away from the Byzantine and Sasanian regimes.

This political shift also meant the emergence of a new ruling elite. Although the Believers' movement came to include locals in the conquered areas, the new elite was, at first, overwhelmingly composed of Believers who were of Arabian origin and who spoke Arabic as their native tongue. Such people had been known in many of the conquered regions before the conquests – Arabian traders seem to have been known for many centuries, and the spread of Arabic language among the population of parts of Syria and Iraq is well attested on the eve of Islam. But these Arabic-speaking people (or actual Arabians) had been a politically marginal population in Byzantine–Sasanian times; the elites of Syrian or Iraqi society on the eve of Islam were, in Byzantine provinces, usually Greek-speaking, more rarely Aramaic- or Coptic-speaking, and in Sasanian provinces, Persian-speaking, more rarely Aramaic-speaking. The reorientation of revenues to the caliphs following the conquests meant that, through patronage and employment as part of the new regime, Arabic-speaking locals and immigrants from Arabia increasingly became the prosperous component of the population.

It is sometimes argued that, by sweeping away the old Byzantine–Sasanian border, the first phase of conquests created a new, unified, economic zone in the Near East, which (it is alleged) facilitated economic exchange and growth in the region. It is true that commerce after the conquests between, say, Egypt and Iran may have been facilitated in times of peace as compared with pre-Islamic times, because there was now no border, with its unavoidable tariffs, for merchants to cross. However, one must remember that the conquests created a new border between formerly Byzantine Egypt and Constantinople, so it might be more accurate to speak of a re-drawing of borders rather than creation of a "unified economic zone." This realignment of borders was probably not beneficial to the Byzantine empire, whose capital and central provinces were now cut off from the rich lands of the eastern Mediterranean, but whether it had a more general economic impact on the Near East, and exactly what that impact was, remains to be clarified.

Another consequence of the conquests for the Near East was an influx of Arabian immigrants, particularly to the new garrison towns in Iraq, Egypt, and to various districts and towns in Syria. As noted above, it would be completely misleading to see the conquests as a kind of *Völkerwanderung* driven by population pressure or the need for economic resources; for one thing, Arabia was (and remains) an area of low population density, so the post-conquest Arabian immigrants were probably relatively few. Yet, the Believers' success in absorbing into their new state vast lands adjacent to

Arabia – particularly Syria, Egypt, and Iraq – did open the way for some Arabians, whether settled townsmen or nomadic pastoralists, to move to these new areas (especially, at first, to the garrison towns).

The conquests also accelerated and extended the spread of the Arabic language into new areas at the expense of Aramaic, Coptic, Greek, Pahlavi (Middle Persian), and other languages. This was so partly because Arabic was the language of the conquerors and of new migrants, partly because it immediately served as the official language of the state, and partly because it was the language of the Believers' sacred book, the Qurʾan. The process of Arabization is a highly complex one, however, and no simple relationship between it and the conquests (or the immigration of Arabians) should be drawn. Some areas that were conquered early on either never became Arabic-speaking (e.g., the Iranian highlands), or only became Arabic-speaking many centuries later, under the impact of other historical developments (e.g., much of North Africa).

In sum, the conquests set the stage for the birth and elaboration of a rich and diverse new civilization. Islamic civilization reworks and combines elements of older traditions – Judaic and Christian, Zoroastrian, Hellenistic, Iranian, Arabian – with the ethical and religious ideas of the Qurʾan and Muḥammad's teachings to produce a coherent, dynamic new whole. The Believers' new political order provided the sheltering aegis under which, over several centuries, Islam (as it would increasingly be known) was adopted as the faith of millions of people from Central Asia and the Indus valley to Spain and North Africa.

NOTES

1 For clarification of the nature of the Believers' movement, see below.
2 On the term, see Conrad, "Futūḥ." The term *futūḥāt* (plural of a plural) is a neologism used mainly in modern scholarship. On the historiographical complexities of the traditional Islamic *futūḥ* literature see Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, esp. ch. 7, and Noth and Conrad, *Early Arabic Historical Tradition*. For a tabulation of the first works on the *futūḥ* theme, see Donner, *Narratives*, Appendix ("Chronological List of Early Texts"), 297–306.
3 See recently Simon, "Muḥammad and the Jihād"; Firestone, *Jihad*.
4 Shoufani, *Al-Riddah and the Muslim Conquest of Arabia*; Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, chapter 2; Jandora, *March from Medina*, ch. 2.
5 Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, ch. 3; Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*.
6 Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, ch. 4.
7 Zarrīnkūb, "The Arab Conquest of Iran"; Morony, "Arab Conquest of Iran"; Spuler, *Iran in früh-islamischer Zeit*, 3–21; Daryaee, "Collapse of the Sasanian Power"; Morony, "Conquerors and Conquered: Iran." Daniel, *Political History of Khurasan*, 19–22, notes the contradictory nature of the sources for Khurasan and the superficial quality of the initial conquest.
8 Butler, *Arab Conquest of Egypt*; Jarry, "L'Égypte et l'invasion musulmane."
9 On the ṣulḥ-ʿanwa terminology, Schmucker, *Untersuchungen*; Noth, "Zum Verhältnis von Kalifaler Zentralgewalt und Provinzen"; Simonsen, *Studies*.
10 This tendency is noted by Lewis, "The Significance of Heresy," 44, and Décobert, *Le mendiant et le combattant*, 46. See also Donner, "Orientalists and the Rise of Islam."
11 The Dutch scholar C. Snouck Hurgronje, although he never developed it carefully, always emphasized the importance of religious faith; see for example his "Islam," 29–30: "We
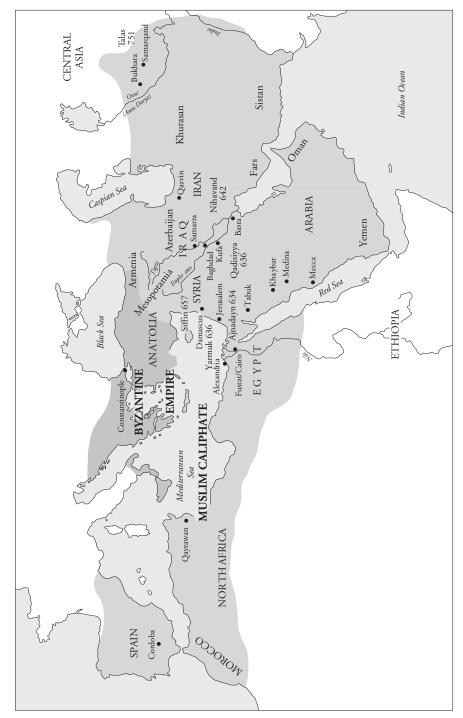
can find only in Islam an explanation of the planned procedure without which the foundations of the Arab world-empire would have been unthinkable." Bousquet, "Observations sur la nature et causes de la conquête arabe," concluded that religious commitment outweighed material and other inducements. See also Décobert, *Le mendi-ant*, 62–3, 65–6.

12 E.g., Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam*, esp. 45–6; Becker, "Die Ausbreitung der Araber."

13 A fuller discussion of these theories is found in Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, intro-duction, and idem, "Centralized Authority." See also Bousquet, "Quelques remarques critiques."

14 Muir, *The Caliphate*, 44.

15 Advanced by such varied scholars as T. W. Arnold, Hugo Winckler, Leone Caetani, Philip Hitti, Bernard Lewis, and Karl Butzer; see Donner, "Centralized Authority."

16 This point was already made by Becker, "Ausbreitung." A new "ecological thesis" has been proposed recently by Korotaev et al., "Origins of Islam." It argues that global climatic changes (including unusual wetness – not aridity – in Arabia) in the sixth century CE generated social changes in Arabia that prepared the way for the rise of Islam. Their arguments depend on many different orders of evidence – climatological, vulcanological, social, anthropological, religious, and historical – the linkages among which are poorly documented or undocumented, but they may repay further study.

17 Lammens, "La république marchande de la Mecque."

18 Most clearly presented in Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*, 46–55.

19 E.g. Belyaev, *Arabs, Islam, and the Arab Caliphate*, 129.

20 Shaban, *Islamic History, A.D. 600–750*, 14, 24–5.

21 E.g., Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*; Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*; Ruthven, *Islam in the World*; Khalidi, *Classical Arab Islam*; Kennedy, *Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*; Esposito, *Islam. The Straight Path*.

22 Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam*.

23 Morony, "The Late Sasanian Economic Impact on the Arabian Peninsula." On mining in the Ḥijāz and its possible economic and commercial impact, see Heck, "Gold Mining in Arabia."

24 Crone, *Meccan Trade*, esp. 247–50, and Bashear, *Arabs and Others in Early Islam*, have been the main recent proponents of the nativist theory; however, the hypothesis that the initial expansion of Islam was essentially an Arab identity movement resembles those of many earlier Western scholars who saw the conquests in ethnic terms (and hence tended to call them the "Arab conquests"). See for example, Arnold, *Preaching of Islam*, 46–8; Becker, "Ausbreitung der Araber," 69–70; Bousquet, "Observations sur la nature et causes," 48; von Grunebaum, "The Nature of Arab Unity Before Islam."

25 And, of course, by the concepts of racism that formed the rationalizing underpinnings for nationalism; for a bit more detail on this, see Donner, "Orientalists and the Rise of Islam."

26 For example, Canard, "L'expansion arabe," esp. 57–63.

27 Jandora, *March from Medina*.

28 Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, 268–9.

29 For a fuller explication of the revisionist hypothesis outlined in the next few paragraphs, see Donner, "From Believers to Muslims."

30 See Donner, "Believers to Muslims," for a survey of this residual evidence. The most obvious bit is the inclusion of the Jews of Medina in the *umma* document in which Muḥammad established the regulations for his new community; text in Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat rasūl allāh*, 34–46; English transl. Guillaume, *Life of Muhammad*, 231–5.

31 St. John of Damascus, high administrator for the later Umayyad caliphs, and the Umay-yads' Christian court poet al-Akhṭal, are among the more visible and better-known instances of this symbiosis.

32 See Donner, "The Growth of Military Institutions"; idem, "Formation of the Islamic State," esp. 285–6. On the *dīwān* or stipend-register, see Puin, *Der Dīwān von ʿUmar ibn al-Ḫaṭṭāb*.

33 A list of governors is found in de Zambaur, *Manuel de généalogie et de chronologie*, part II (pp. 17–49). See also Blay-Abranski, *From Damascus to Baghdad: The Abbasid Administrative System*, 195–241; Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 124–53.

34 On coinage see Bates, "History, Geography, and Numismatics"; idem, "The Coinage of Syria under the Umayyads"; Sears, *Monetary History of Iraq and Iran*.

35 Case-studies on the development of the *amṣār* as cultural centers: Pellat, *Le milieu baṣrien*; Djaït, *Al-Kūfa*; Kubiak, *Al-Fusṭāṭ*.

36 See Whitcomb, "Miṣr of Ayla," in Bisheh, *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* 5, 277–88.

37 On tax administration, see Simonsen, *Studies*; Schmucker, *Untersuchungen*; Blay-Abramski, 242–96; Donner, "Formation of the Islamic State," 286–8.

38 Studied in Cahen, "Fiscalité, Propriété, Antagonismes sociaux."

39 On it see Coulson, "Bayt al-Māl."

40 Some products of the Umayyad chancery are found in Abbott, *The Qurrah Papyri*.

41 See, for example, the extensive collection of reports on the "*qāḍī* Shurayḥ", supposed to have been appointed over Kufa from the time of the second caliph ʿUmar onwards: Kohlberg, "Shurayḥ." Cf. on judges Blay-Abramski, 120–94; Donner, "Formation of the Islamic State," 288–9.

42 What the anthropologist Victor Turner would term a state of "communitas": *Ritual Process*, ch. 3.

43 The most detailed examination of the first civil war is now found in Madelung, *Succession to Muḥammad*, a work that is, however, characterized by an almost partisan (pro-ʿAlī) view of events.

44 See for example al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, i/3448 on conflicting reports of pilgrimage leaders sent by ʿAlī and Muʿāwiya in AH 39/April 660.

45 The chronicles routinely mention the commander in charge of a particular foray, but seldom offer more detailed insights into the composition of his forces – how many subordinate units his force comprised, the names of his subordinate officers, the tactical specialization (if any) of various units, etc. The Nessana papyri may preserve a fragment of an actual payroll-list, although it is not clear whether this was for a military unit or for some other kind of levy, such as a civilian labor crew. See Kraemer, *Excavations at Nessana*.

46 On Byzantine border-warfare see Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War*.

47 Mingana, *Sources Syriaques* I, 147, lines 1–6.

48 See Madelung, "Minor Dynasties of Northern Iran"; Morony, "Arab Conquest of Iran."

49 The classic study is Gibb, *Arab Conquests of Central Asia*. See also Bosworth, "Coming of Islam to Afghanistan"; Hasan, "Survey of the expansion of Islam into Central Asia"; Spuler, *Iran in früh-islamischer Zeit*, 29–34; Morony, "Arab Conquest of Iran," 209.

50 See Friedmann, "A contribution to the early history of Islam in India"; Gabrieli, "Muḥammad ibn al-Qāsim al-Thaqafī and the Arab Conquest of Sind."

51 Manandean, "Les invasions arabes en Arménie"; Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, chapter 8; Laurent, *L'Arménie entre Byzance et l'Islam*; Dunlop, *History of the Jewish Khaʿars*.

52 Ahrweiler, "L'Asie Mineure et les invasions arabes"; Canard, "Les expéditions des Arabes contre Constantinople"; Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence*.

53 Taha, *Muslim Conquest and Settlement of North Africa and Spain*.

54 The murky history of the early Muslim presence in Spain, and the unreliability of a number of later Arabic accounts of its conquest, are discussed in Collins, *Arab Conquest of Spain*. See also Taha, *Muslim Conquest*. The classic study is Lévi-Provençal, *Histoire de l'Espagne Musulmane*; the conquest of Spain is covered in vol. 1, 1–89.

55   Ahmad, *History of Islamic Sicily*; Brooks, "Arab Occupation of Crete"; Lecam, *Les Sarra-zins dans le haut moyen-âge français*.

56   al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb* 11, 126–7, mentions 4,000 slaves (or families?) on Muʿāwiya's estates at al-Khaḍārim; cf. al-Askar, *al-Yamama in the Early Islamic Era*, 69.

57   See Hinds and Sakkout, "A Letter from the Governor of Egypt." Cf. also the report that the treaty with the city of Zarang in Iran required the city to hand over an annual tribute of 1,000 slave boys (Morony, "Arab Conquest of Iran," 207).

58   The evidence is summarized in Savage, *A Gateway to Hell, A Gateway to Paradise*, 72–5.

59   Cf. Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence*.

60   See Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period*; idem, *Islam: The View from the Edge*; Levtzion, *Conversion to Islam*.

FURTHER READING

As a general overview of the expansion of the early caliphate in its military dimension, the old essay by Carl H. Becker is still useful; it is found in English translation as "The Expansion of the Saracens" in H. M. Gwatkin et al. (ed.), *The Cambridge Medieval History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913), vol. 2, chapters 11 and 12. A useful overview of the general course of Islamic history in the early period is provided by Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates* (London: Longman, 1986). A detailed examination of the relationship between pastoral no-madic and settled peoples of Arabia and its impact on the formation of the earliest Islamic state is found in Fred M. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981). Documentary evidence for the early existence of the state is assembled in Fred M. Donner, "The Formation of the Islamic State," *JAOS* 106 (1986), 283–96. A brief introduction to the complexities of the Arabic conquest accounts is Lawrence I. Conrad, "*Futūḥ*," in Julie S. Meisami and Paul Starkey (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature* (London: Routledge, 1998), 237–40. A stimulating reconstruction of how conquered communities may have been assimilated into the Muslim community and state in the early Islamic era is Richard Bulliet, *Islam: The View from the Edge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

Map 2.1 The Middle East and the expansion of Islam from AD 634 to 800

CHAPTER THREE

The Caliphate

HUGH KENNEDY

When the prophet Muḥammad died in 632 he left no generally accepted successor. The young Muslim community needed some sort of leadership but it was unclear who such a leader might be or what powers he would have. The Prophet himself had made it clear that he was the 'Seal of the Prophets' and that there would be no one after him who could claim his unique status. Decisions had to be made.

It is difficult to reconstruct the debates and the course of events which led to the appointment of Abū Bakr as the first caliph because these events became the subject of a vigorous polemic which has continued right down to the present day. Two main points of view emerged. The first of these held that Abū Bakr, one of the oldest and closest of the Prophet's associates, had been chosen by his other leading companions without any significant opposition. The other version, what can be described as a proto-Shi'ite reading, claims that the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law Ali was not present, because, as the nearest relative, he was preparing the body for burial. While engaged in this pious duty he was deprived of his rights since he had previously been designated by the Prophet as his true heir.

The different historical narratives neatly encapsulate the two different visions of how the leader of the Muslim *umma* should be chosen. On the one hand the choice of Abū Bakr was based on the rights of the most senior and respected of the Prophet's companions to choose the candidate they deemed most suitable. On the other hand there were those who supported Ali's claims because he was the closest relative of the Prophet and, they believed, his designated successor. The political debate is articulated in terms of the conflicting historical narratives and the three main ideas of designation, heredity and election were all articulated.

The debate was given added impetus by the fact that different groups in the nascent Muslim community supported the differing attitudes to the leadership. The death of the Prophet had brought into the open some of the latent tensions between the indigenous people of Medina now known as the *ansār* or 'helpers' of the Prophet, and the *muhājirūn* who had come with Muḥammad to settle in their midst in 622. The tension was exacerbated by the fact that many of the relatives of the *muhājirūn* had joined the Muslim community after the conquest of Mecca in 630 and now expected to have a powerful voice in Muslim affairs. From the beginning the political process was dominated by the Quraysh of Mecca, the Prophet's own tribe. They produced the first three caliphs, Abū Bakr, 'Umar, and 'Uthmān and they dominated the selection procedure. Though he himself was also from Quraysh, the supporters of

Ali came from the disenfranchised, those who believed that they had been deprived of their rights by the Quraysh of Mecca and their allies. The alliance of the Family of the Prophet, as represented by Ali and his descendants, with the subordinate and disadvantaged elements in Muslim society was established very early on. It is too soon at this stage to talk of Sunni and Shi'ite but the origins of later divisions can be found in the fast moving events of 632.

The choice of a title for the new leader was difficult. Clearly 'Prophet' was unacceptable. The earliest Muslims seem to have adopted two different titles. The first of these *Amīr al-Mu'minīn* meant Commander of the Faithful and represented the secular function of the ruler as ultimate commander of the Muslim armies. From the reign of 'Uthmān (644–56) if not before, the rulers were also styled *khalīfat Allah* or deputy of God on earth and it is from this that the English term 'caliph' is derived. This clearly meant that they laid claim to spiritual authority or, at least, to the authority to lead prayers and to make decisions on controversial matters of Islamic law and practice.[1]

The first four caliphs, Abū Bakr (632–4), 'Umar (634–44), 'Uthmān (644–56) and Ali (656–61) are conventionally described as the 'Rightly Guided' (*Rāshidūn*) because their rule is held by most Muslims to have been a golden age when the true principles of Islam were applied to government, for at least part of the time. Further lustre was attached to this era by the fact that it was the time of the great Muslim conquests in the Middle East, Syria and Iraq being conquered from 636, Egypt from 641 and much of Iran by 650. It was easy to link the success of Muslim armies with the piety of the rulers as a source of Allah's favour.

In reality the period of Rightly Guided Caliphs was much more fraught with tensions and anxieties than later tradition would have us believe. This is not a result of the failure of the political system but rather of the fact that it faced immense and probably unmanageable change.

The expansion of the territory ruled by the Muslims was accompanied by the equally impressive growth of those who claimed to be Muslims. Large numbers of Arabs and increasing numbers of non-Arabs who had never known Muḥammad and had converted too late to join the initial conquests now had to be integrated into the state. Three main, interconnected issues came to dominate the political life of the period. The first was how this enormous area should be governed, the second was the distribution of resources among the Muslims and the third was the choice of caliph and the powers the office should have.

Once again, two clear views emerged, although there was a continuum rather than a sharp break between them. There were those who maintained that the resources acquired at the time of the conquests belonged to those who had actually fought in the battles which had secured them, and to their descendants after them. They were forced to defend their gains from threats from two directions. At a local level there were later converts and recruits who bitterly resented the fact that they were excluded from the rewards enjoyed by other Muslims. From the other flank, the privileges of these early conquerors were challenged by caliphs and governors who wanted access to and control over the resources to establish an effective, even imperial system of government.

The method of choosing caliphs remained undecided. Abū Bakr had designated 'Umar as his successor and there seems to have been little opposition. These were very difficult times for the Muslim community. The death of the Prophet had been the

signal for many Arabs to renounce their allegiance to Medina. Abū Bakr was forced to send out armies to defeat them and bring them to heel in a series of campaigns knowns the Ridda wars. These wars were hardly over when the first caliph died and the wars of conquest were only beginning to gather momentum. It was, in short, no time for a succession dispute. By the time that 'Umar died, assassinated by a Persian slave in 644, the position had changed out of all recognition; Syria, Iraq and Egypt were all conquered and Muslim armies were pushing rapidly through Iran. 'Umar had not designated a successor but he did make arrangements for one to be chosen. He appointed a group of six men, all well known figures in Quraysh who were to form a council or *shūra* to elect the new ruler. This was not really a representative body and large numbers of Muslims, including the *ansār* of Medina, were completely excluded. It was not surprising then, that the *shūra* chose one of its own number, the respected Qurashi 'Uthmān b. Affān as caliph.

The successions of 'Umar and 'Uthmān had, in fact, established two different precedents for choosing a caliph, designation by the previous caliph and choice by a electing council. The idea of hereditary succession had played no part in the debate.

The reign of 'Uthmān saw the beginning of serious dissension within the Muslim community. The fundamental cause of conflict was that 'Uthmān wanted to establish himself as a powerful ruler who could appoint and dismiss governors of the conquered provinces and collect any surplus revenue from these areas and have it taken to the capital in Medina. In order to put this policy into effect, he relied extensively on his kinsmen from Quraysh, some of whom had only joined the Muslim cause towards the end of the Prophet's life. He also emphasized the religious authority of his office by ordering the production of a standardized recension of the Qur'an and decreeing that all other recensions should be destroyed. There were not, it seems, great differences in the texts but, as with appointments and taxation, the real issue was the authority of the caliph.

These policies aroused considerable opposition, centred on a group of cities known as the *amṣār*, the most important of which were Kufa and Basra in the south of Iraq and Fustat or Old Cairo in Egypt. After the great conquests, 'Umar had decreed that the Arab tribes should not be scattered throughout the newly conquered lands but should be settled in new towns. Here they would live together and be paid pensions from the taxes collected from the subject peoples. This would mean that they would preserve their religious and cultural identity. It would also mean that the conquerors, most of whom came from Bedouin backgrounds, would become sedentary towns-people and so easier to contol and manage: becoming a good Muslim, it was made clear, meant abandoning the Bedouin lifestyle. The settlement in towns meant, of course, that these ex-Bedouin had lost their previous means of subsistence and were now very largely dependent on their pensions for their livelihoods. As conquerors and descendants of conquerors, they felt that they alone had the rights to the revenues of 'their' provinces and that they alone should choose the governors. They believed strongly that they were following the path of the pious 'Umar against the innovations of 'Uthmān and his Qurashi relatives.

In 656 these tensions came to a head and angry rebels, mostly from Kufa and Fustat marched on the caliph at Medina to demand reforms. There was a confrontation. Many of the notables of Medina kept their distance from 'Uthmān. Among them was Ali b. Abi Tālib, who was suspected by some of being in league with the

dissidents. There were negotiations but the men of Fustat especially thought that the Caliph was acting in bad faith. In the end violence broke out and 'Uthmān was murdered sitting almost alone in his house reading the Qur'an.

The assassination of 'Uthmān was a traumatic event in the life of the Muslim community but it aroused many differing reactions. Among 'Uthmān's family, known as the Umayyads, there was a demand that the murderers be punished. Others in Kufa and Fustat thought that while the murder was regrettable, the murderers had been fighting to defend their rights and maintain the traditions established by 'Umar. In a sense, both parties had right on their side, but the two points of view were incompatible.

In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, Ali was chosen as caliph. He had been passed over when 'Umar and 'Uthmān had been chosen, partly at least because he was much younger than they were. Now his time had come and he finally became caliph. However what should have been the triumphant culmination of his career was marred by the circumstances of his accession. His attitude to 'Uthmān's assassination was, to say the least, ambiguous. His position was challenged almost immediately by two senior leaders of Quraysh, Talha and Zubayr, both well-regarded companions of the Prophet. Even more damagingly from Ali's point of view, they were joined by Muḥammad's favourite wife, A'isha. They were determined that the leadership of the community should not pass out of the hands of Quraysh to the *anṣār* and Ali's other supporters. They left Medina and went to Iraq, to try to gather support in the southern city of Basra. Ali was obliged to follow them. Talha and Zubayr failed to attract as many followers as they had hoped while the people of Kufa flocked to support Ali. Probably in December 656 there was a short decisive encounter in southern Iraq known to history as 'The Battle of the Camel' in which Talha and Zubayr were defeated and killed.

The Battle of the Camel had established Ali's position in the all important province of Iraq but it did not put an end to his problems. To achieve his victory Ali had been forced to leave Medina, which was never again to be the capital of the Muslim world, and base himself in Iraq. Furthermore, he had won his victory with the support of those militant elements in Kufa who had been implicated most strongly in the murder of 'Uthmān.

Many Muslims felt that Ali had been involved in the old man's death but none felt so strongly about it as 'Uthmān's family, the Umayyads. The Umayyads had owned estates in Syria before the coming of Islam and two brothers, Yazīd and Mu'āwiya, both sons of the Prophet's old enemy, Abu Sufyān, had played an important part in the Arab conquest of the area. First Yazīd and then, after his death, Mu'āwiya, had been governors of Syria. They had led expeditions against the Byzantines and had established close links with the leading groups of Syrian Arabs, both those who had lived there for centuries and those who had arrived at the time of the conquests. Mu'āwiya could count on their support in any encounter with the Iraqis.

Mu'āwiya did not reject Ali as caliph, but he did demand that the murderers of his kinsman 'Uthmān be brought to justice. This Ali simply could not do since he was dependent on their support. In 657 a military confrontation developed at a place called Siffin on the Euphrates in Syria between Ali and his followers, mostly from Iraq, and Mu'āwiya and his Syrians. A major battle was avoided when the Syrians appealed to the authority of the Qur'an, attaching leaves of the sacred text to their spears, and it was agreed that there should be arbitration between the two parties.

After the armies parted, Ali's position in Iraq began to deteriorate rapidly. Some of his erstwhile supporters left his camp in protest at the fact that he had accepted arbitration. Called Kharijites (those who go out) they developed a radical view of the caliphate and rejected the authority of both rivals. They believed that the caliph should be the most pious among the Muslims and that inheritance and membership of Quraysh were not to be taken into account. Some of them also held that those who sinned were not Muslims at all and should be killed with impunity. They became brigands, operating in small guerrilla bands and harassing both the Umayyads and their rivals.

By the time the arbitration took place, at Udhruh, now in southern Jordan, Mu'āwiya was strong enough to claim the caliphate for himself. Events moved swiftly: Ali was assassinated, for reasons unconnected with the dispute with Mu'āwiya in 661. Mu'āwiya moved into Iraq to assert his control.

The new Caliph took care to negotiate with the Iraqis. He made an agreement with Ali's eldest son Hasan that he would retire to Medina with a large fortune. He also made agreements with the *ashrāf* (pl. of *sharīf*), the chiefs of the main tribes settled in Iraq. They were allowed to rule the country as long as they accepted him as caliph. The *ashrāf* were powerful tribal leaders but their status owed nothing to Islam and everything to tribal custom. Many pious early Muslims believed that this was a reversion to the bad old days and that the elite should be chosen on religious merit. Iraqis were also given a free hand in Iran while Egypt was to be ruled by the man who had led the first conquest of the country, Amr b. al-As, who just happened to be a relative of Mu'āwiya's.

Mu'āwiya ruled with a light touch, relying on local elites to govern the provinces while he himself remained in Syria and led the *jihād* against the Byzantines. However, his death in 680 once more brought the question of the succession to the fore. He was determined that his own son Yazīd would succeed. As we have seen, hereditary succession was unknown in the caliphate and the proposal brought resentment against Umayyad rule to the surface. When Yazīd succeeded, he was faced by a challenge from Ali's younger son Husayn. Husayn was a son of Ali and Fatima and so a grandson of the Prophet himself. He had been staying in Medina when Mu'āwiya died but now marched across the desert with a few followers, heading for Kufa, where he hoped he could count on widespread support.

Before he could reach the city, he was met by troops sent out by the Umayyad, 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyād, governor, to intercept him. He and his small band were surrounded and soon massacred in October 680. The people of Kufa had not rallied to his support. This might have been just one more desert skirmish but because Husayn was his grandfather's grandson it had an impact which has lasted right down to the present day. Husayn became a symbolic figure, the holy martyr killed by impious oppressors. His sufferings are still commemorated among the Shi'a of Iran in passion plays and people still flagellate themselves as symbolic punishment for the people of Kufa who had failed to help him. The death of Husayn gave a powerful boost to all those who believed that political power should rest with the Family of the Prophet.

Yazīd only reigned for three years before dying of natural causes in 683. His death plunged the Umayyad regime into crisis and once again the Muslim community was bitterly divided about the choice of the new caliph. A number of candidates emerged, of whom the most impressive was Abd Allah son of that al-Zubayr who had been

killed at the Battle of the Camel. He based himself in the Holy Cities while his brother Mus'ab went to Iraq. The supporters of the Umayyads were in complete disarray but eventually they decided on a man from another branch of the family, Marwān b. al-Hakam and his pious and talented son 'Abd al-Malik. At first Ibn al-Zubayr seemed to be well on the way to establishing himself as the generally accepted leader of the Muslims. However, it was once again social and political tensions in Iraq which undid him as they had undone Ali before.

In Iraq many of the indigenous people were starting to convert to Islam. They were often known as *mawāli* (sing. *mawlā*) meaning that they were clients of Arab tribes to whom they became attached on conversion. As Muslims they sought to take advantage of the privileges that older, Arab Muslims enjoyed, especially exemption from certain sorts of taxation. This was bitterly opposed by many of the old established Muslims who knew that their wealth and position were threatened. The *mawāli* in Kufa were encouraged to rebel against the government of Ibn al-Zubayr by one Mukhtār. Though Mukhtār came from a distinguished Arab family, he made the cause of the *mawāli* his own. He did not claim the caliphate for himself but encouraged them to acknowledge Muhammad, son of the Hanafite woman. The reference to his mother was important. Muhammad was a son of Ali but not by Fātima, so that, unlike his half-brother Husayn, he was not a direct descendant of the Prophet: descent from Ali was considered by some to be a good enough claim to lead the Muslim community.

Ibn al-Hanafiya took the title of *mahdi*, the first time it had ever been used in Islam. The word is often translated as Messiah and it implied one who came to inaugurate the rule of justice and true Islam. Mukhtār and his followers took over Kufa and Ibn al-Zubayr sent his brother to crush the rebellion which, in the end, in April 687, he did. Meanwhile the supporters of the Umayyads were picking themselves up and looking to re-establish their position. Under their new leader, 'Abd al-Malik, who took over on his father's death in 685, they first took Egypt with its rich resources. Then they embarked on the conquest of Iraq and in 691 the Syrian Umayyad armies led by the Caliph in person defeated Mus'ab ibn al-Zubayr at Dayr al-Jathālīq and entered Kufa in triumph.

The young Umayyad Caliph now began a series of reforms of government which were to have a profound effect on the administration of the Islamic world for centuries to come. He was aided in this by his right-hand man, the governor of Iraq and the East, al-Hajjāj ibn Yūsuf (d. 714). Under the Rāshidūn caliphs and Mu'āwiya the hand of central government had remained fairly light: the Muslims of the different provinces were more or less allowed to manage their own affairs as long as they pledged allegiance to the Caliph and forwarded a limited amount of money to him. 'Abd al-Malik put the Syrian army firmly in charge. In Iraq a new city was built for them at Wāsit, about half-way between the earlier garrison cities of Kufa and Basra. They were the effective policemen of Iraq and, to the fury of many of the Iraqi Muslims, they were paid out of Iraqi taxes. For the first time the caliphs had a standing army paid out of general taxation. The need to administer this new system led to the use of Arabic, to replace Greek and Middle Persian as the languages of administration. Everyone who wanted a government appointment now needed to be able to read and write in Arabic. Within a couple of generations, both Greek and Persian were in steep decline and even the Christians of Syria were using Arabic in their writings. The other main reform was the introduction of a new coinage, or

rather, two new coinages, the gold dinar and the silver dirham. Both these were based on pre-Islamic Byzantine and Sasanian coinages but the old images were dropped. Almost all later Muslim coinages followed this example of having completely epigraphic coins without any images.

'Abd al-Malik's policies led to the development of a strong state, despite violent unrest in Iraq culminating in the major rebellions of Ibn al-Ash'ath in 700-1 and Ibn al-Muhallab in 720. Later Muslim writers sometimes accused the Umayyads of being impious but with the exception of the short lived caliph Walīd II (743–4) there is no real evidence of this and some caliphs, notably 'Abd al-Malik himself (685–705) and Hishām (723–43) were conscientious and God-fearing rulers. Their weakness was rather that they were dependent on the Syrian Arab army to maintain their rule and, in the end, it was not strong enough to sustain this role.

The Umayyads also presided over the last phases of the great Islamic conquests. In the west, Muslim armies conquered most of Spain and Portugal between 711 and 716. As in other parts of the Islamic world, the Muslim armies avoided the mountainous areas and the peoples of the Pyrenees and the mountains of Cantabria remained unconquered: it was from these regions that the Christian reconquest of Muslim al-Andalus was mounted. Instead, the Muslim armies went round the east end of the Pyrenees and raided deep into France. It was in central France that a Muslim expedition was defeated by the Frankish leader Charles Martel in 732 in what has become known as the Battle of Poitiers. In reality the defeat was far from decisive but it symbolized the end of Muslim expansion in Europe.

In the north east of the caliphate, the frontiers were extended beyond the Oxus. From their base at Merv (in Turkmenistan), Muslim armies led by the governor Qutayba ibn Muslim (705–15) set out to conquer Bukhara, Samarqand and the rich oasis of Khwarazm at the south end of the Aral Sea. The conquests were not easy and the Muslim armies were opposed by the Soghdian inhabitants of the cities and the Turkish nomads of the steppe lands. Nonetheless, by 913 Muslim armies had reached the Farghana valley (Uzbekistan) and the north eastern limits of the Muslim world were established. Transoxania remained frontier territory and it was from here that the Abbasids in the ninth century were to recruit their crack Turkish troops. At the same time, Muslim armies established some control over Sind (southern Pakistan) but this always remained a distant outpost, cut off from the rest of the Muslim world by the mountains and deserts of Afghanistan.

After Hishām's death in 743, resentments against Umayyad rule came to a head in many areas. In Iraq people still felt that the Syria-based regime had deprived them of their rights while in Khurasan, in the north east of the empire, many men, especially non-Arabs who had converted to Islam, felt that the Umayyads were distant and oppressive. The opposition crystallized around the old idea that if the caliph were to be a member of the Family of the Prophet then justice and a truly Islamic state would emerge. The question then arose of who would be included in the Family of the Prophet. The descendants of Ali were by now very numerous and it was by no means clear that any one branch had a better claim than any other. Then there were the descendants of other branches of the family, notably descendants of the Prophet's uncle al-'Abbās. In 740 Zayd ibn 'Ali, a great-grandson of Ali, led a rebellion in Kufa. As before, the Kufans failed to support the Alid claimant, the rebellion was easily defeated and the unfortunate Zayd was slain. However, the rebellion was important because of the arguments Zayd used to support his claim to the

caliphate. He said that he was entitled to be considered as the true leader of the Family of the Prophet because he had seized the initiative and risen in revolt against the tyrants while other members of the Family had not. Some of his descendants were to pursue this claim in future generations and Zaydi imams established themselves in Yemen where they held power, intermittently, right down to the twentieth century.

The failure of the rebellion of Zayd ibn 'Ali meant that the initiative passed to another branch of the family, the descendants of al-'Abbās. Their claim to the throne was not without its problems, and when the Abbasids had come to power, they were obliged to restate and refine it continuously. They were not, of course, direct descendants of the Prophet and the original al-'Abbās had never himself converted to Islam, but as Muḥammad's paternal uncle he was a senior member of of his kin. The Abbasids also claimed the succession on the grounds that the son of that Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiya who had been Mukhtār's *mahdi* had designated al-'Abbās's great-grandson, Muhammad ibn 'Ali as his successor. It was not really a very impressive claim because few Muslims accepted that Ibn al-Hanafiya's son was the true leader of the community and fewer still that his 'testament' was genuine. Later they justified their seizure of power by the Zaydi argument that they alone among the family of the Prophet had taken the initiative and been able to overthrow the Umayyads and avenge the deaths of al-Husayn and Zayd. This being the case, they deserved to be accepted as leaders by all supporters of the Family.

What was undoubtedly true was that the Abbasids had succeeded where all other members of the Family had failed. They were able to do this because of the support of the Muslims of Khurasan. While most people in Iraq seem to have held that blood descent from the Prophet was crucial, Muslims in Khurasan were more flexible. From about 720 small groups of people began preaching in the area in favour of 'a chosen one from the Family of the Prophet'. Spreading the word was a slow and dangerous process but in 747 open rebellion broke out in Merv, the capital of Khurasan. This was led by one Abu Muslim, who seems to have mobilized a large cross-section of the Muslims of Khurasan to support the cause. The rebellion seems to have been launched with the vague slogan of 'a chosen one' and it is not clear who, if anyone, knew that the Abbasids were involved.

The armies that Abu Muslim recruited among the warlike people of Khurasan were astonishingly successful. They rolled up the Umayyad forces in their home province and then drove them out of Iran. By the end of 749 they were in Iraq and had taken Kufa. It was at this point that the 'Abbasid family appeared. They had been in semi-exile in southern Jordan and now crossed the desert to meet up with their supporters. The exact sequence of events is obscure but it seems as if Abu Muslim's commanders in Kufa found the safe-house where the family were staying and took one of them, Abū'l-'Abbās to the mosque and proclaimed him as caliph with the regnal title of al-Saffāḥ. It was effectively a coup d'état which established the Abbasids and left all the other branches of the family of the Prophet out in the cold.

The proclamation of al-Saffāḥ also marked a change in the titulature of the caliphs. The Rāshidūn and the Umayyads had all reigned under their given names, 'Umar, 'Abd al-Malik etc. From the beginning the 'Abbasid adopted regnal titles, like Popes in the medieval west. The titles usually implied that the ruler was given victory of God (al-Manṣūr) or was a defender of the Faith. From the ninth century these titles were all active participles beginning with the syllable Mu which gives a confusing similarity

to the names. These regnal titles remained in use down to the deposition of the last Abbasid Caliph of Cairo in 1517.

Al-Saffāḥ's position was confirmed by the swearing of oaths of allegiance in the mosque and the subsequent defeat and death of the last Umayyad Caliph Marwān II in 750. The ʿAbbasids and their propagandists were adept at working out justifications for their seizure of power but the reality was that it had been accomplished by force. Just as the Umayyads had ruled through the Syrian army, so the early Abbasids ruled through the Khurasanis. They formed the garrisons which were stationed throughout the empire from Tunisia (Spain and the rest of the Maghrib were never part of the ʿAbbasid caliphate) to Tashkent. The state they established looked very much like the Umayyad one with a new elite in charge and, while most Muslims accepted the new dispensation, a minority did not. Once again, dissent focused on the Family of Ali who many thought had been deprived of their rights to the caliphate just as Ali himself had been deprived by Abū Bakr and ʿUmar after the Prophet's death. Much of the political debate of the first Abbasid century concerned relations between the ruling dynasty and their Alid cousins.

The first major confrontation came in 762 when the Alid Muhammad ibn Abd Allah, known as 'the Pure Soul', and his brother Ibrāhīm raised a revolt. Muhammad was something of a dreamer and hoped to follow the Prophet's example and establish an Islamic state based on Medina. The idea was hopelessly impractical. The Abbasid caliph al-Manṣūr interrupted the routes which brought supplies to the Holy City from Egypt, many previously enthusiastic supporters deserted him and it only needed a small army to extinguish the rebellion and kill its leader. Ibrāhīm's revolt in Basra disintegrated when faced with the ʿAbbasid regular troops. But the scale of support for the Alids had worried the ʿAbbasids and the next caliph, who took the messianic title of al-Mahdī, made a serious effort to conciliate the Alids, offering them pensions and positions at court but not real power. Only a militant few who called themselves the Zaydiya after Zayd ibn Ali, resisted these blandishments.

The next Alid revolt in 786 was a much smaller affair and was easily put down by ʿAbbasid troops, but it had long-term consequences. Two of the Alid leaders fled to outlying parts of the Muslim world to find refuge beyond the long arm of the ʿAbbasid state. Yahya ibn Abd Allah went to Daylam, the mountainous land at the south-western corner of the Caspian Sea and his brother Idris went west to Morocco. Yahya was soon murdered by the ʿAbbasids but the legacy of support for the Alid family remained strong in the area. Idris established a dynasty in Morocco who became the first independent Muslim rulers in the area. His shrine at Moulay Idris is revered to this day. Many adherents of the house of Ali made their peace with the ʿAbbasids while still maintaining that real spiritual authority belonged to Ali's family. The Alid Jaʿfar al-Sādiq (d. 765), revered as the sixth Imam of the Shiʿa, paved the way by teaching that following the doctrine of Ali did not necessarily entail armed uprising against the ʿAbbasids. Jaʿfar's quietist teaching marked an important stage in the development of Twelver or Imami Shiʿism.

The reign of Harūn al-Rashīd (786–809) can be seen as the apogee of ʿAbbasid power but it was followed immediately after his death by a prolonged and extremely destructive civil war between his sons, al-Amīn and al-Maʾmūn. This undermined the whole legitimacy of ʿAbbasid rule. The execution of al-Amīn by his brother's followers spelt the end of the inviolability of the person of the caliph, their capital at Baghdad was laid waste by a long civil war and the Khurasani army was defeated and broken up.

Al-Ma'mūn showed his rejection of the old order by attempting to rule the entire caliphate from Merv in Khurasan, and faced with continuing opposition to his policies in Iraq, he made an even more radical move, adopting the Alid Ali al-Ridā as his heir apparent, so rejecting the 'Abbasid dynasty of which he himself was a part. There is no doubt that he hoped that this move would encourage popular support but he soon found that he was wrong. The 'Abbasids and the people of Baghdad were bitterly opposed while few of the Shi'a were convinced by this expedient gesture.

In the end lack of support in Iraq meant that al-Ma'mūn was forced to abandon this policy. In the autumn of 817 he decided to leave Merv. On the way his 'heir apparent', Ali al-Ridā was murdered near Tus by men who claimed they were obeying the caliph's orders. He was buried at a place which became known simply as Meshhed (Tomb) and his resting place developed into one of the great shrines of Shi'ite Iran. He was the only one of the Twelve Imams recognized by the mainstream Shi'a to be buried in Iran and, under the Persian form of his name, Ali Reza, has become almost the patron saint of the country.

In 817, however, that was all far in the future and al-Ma'mūn's renunciation of the Alid succession enabled him to re-establish himself in Baghdad, the home of his ancestors. The attempt at rapprochement with the Alids was not entirely abandoned, however. Mu'āwiya and the Umayyads were publicly cursed from the pulpits and the doctrine of the Mu'tazila was in some ways an attempt to bridge the gap between Sunni and Shi'i ideas of the caliphate. The main tenet of Mu'tazilism was that the Qur'an was created at a certain point in human history, the point when it was revealed to Muhammad. This was in opposition to those who held that the Qur'an had existed since the beginning of time but had only been revealed to Muhammad in his lifetime. This apparently obscure point of doctrine had serious implications. If the Qur'an was created at a certain point in time, it could presumably be interpreted by those with special authority and it was even possible that there could be a subsequent revelation which would modify it. Al-Ma'mūn claimed that as Imam as well as caliph (he was the first 'Abbasid to use the title of Imam), he and his successors were entrusted by God with making decisions about matters of Islamic law and practice. This was a position very close to that held by the Shi'ites, with the difference that they, of course, held that the Imam had to be a direct descendant of the Prophet. Clearly this view gave great religious authority to the Imam/Caliph.

This view was vigorously challenged by opponents who held that the Qur'an was inviolable and that matters of law and doctrine should be decided by reference to the Sunna of the Prophet, that is the record of his opinions and deeds as remembered and recorded in the multitude of Traditions which were lovingly collected and passed down. In this scheme of things, the power to make decisions lay effectively with the scholars, the '*ulamā*' who collected and authenticated the Traditions and there was no role for caliph.

The issue might have remained one of academic debate if it had not coincided with the major fault lines in the Islamic state. Al-Ma'mūn and his successor al-Mu'tasim (833–42), no longer relied on the Khurasani troops settled in Baghdad to provide their elite forces. Increasingly their generals and favourites came from eastern Iran and their crack soldiers were recruited from the hardy Turkish nomad peoples of Central Asia, sometimes purchased as military slaves. The caliph al-Mu'tasim moved the capital from Baghdad to Samarra, some hundred miles to the north. Here he laid out a vast garrison city for his new army, far from the

provocative and unruly people of Baghdad, and immense palaces for himself and his favourites. Meanwhile in the old capital, the Traditionists and the *ulamā'* consolidated their hold on popular opinion, attracting support from those, notably the descendants of the old Khurasani army, who resented the fact that they had been supplanted and replaced.

Al-Ma'mūn attempted to enforce his theological views with an inquisition or *miḥna*. This examined all those who wanted any sort of public office to demand that they publicly accepted the createdness of the Qur'an. Most people accepted but a determined minority refused, even when faced with the threat of force. There were a few martyrdoms. It was the first time an Abbasid Caliph had openly asserted his right to make a binding decision about a major religious issue. In Western terms, he was claiming to be both Emperor and Pope. In the end, the Abbasids were obliged to abandon the attempt. The caliph al-Mutawwakil (847–61) gradually moved away from the position adopted by al-Ma'mūn and al-Mu'tasim. Mu'tazili beliefs were abandoned, the *mihna* quietly dropped and the tombs of the Alid Imams were laid waste as the first three Caliphs were once more revered.

Al-Mutawwakil's change of policy went further than a change of ideology. He also seems to have tried to replace the Turks as the mainstay of his army and this was his undoing. In 861 he was assassinated, as he sat drinking with his intimate companions, by a group of Turks who felt that their influence was declining. They may or may not have been in cahoots with his son and heir al-Muntasir, who was also afraid that his position was being undermined.

It is hard to exaggerate the importance of al-Mutawwakil's assassination in the history of the caliphate. At the time of his death, the Abbasids were still as powerful as they had ever been. It is true that Khurasan and much of northeast Iran was effectively ruled by the Tahirid family but the Tahirids were inextricably bound up with the 'Abbasids. Apart from Khurasan, they ruled Baghdad and were important figures in the court at Samarra. Revenues were regularly sent from Khurasan to Iraq and were probably used to pay allowances and salaries in Baghdad. Under Tahirid rule, the province was more peaceful than it had ever been. It is also true that Spain and all of North Africa west of the modern Egypt–Libya border was now outside 'Abbasid control but Spain and most of the Maghrib had never been ruled by the dynasty and Tunisia had proved to be more trouble than it was worth. In the central Islamic lands, the grip of central authority was stronger than ever. In Egypt and Syria local elites had been replaced by Turkish cadres sent from Samarra. In Armenia and Azerbayjan recent campaigns had extended the rule of the caliphs into areas it had never reached before. The Byzantines were easily kept at bay.

In the nine years from 861 to 870 the power of the dynasty was almost entirely destroyed. In the late ninth and the beginning of the tenth century, the caliphs established themselves as regional powers in much of Iraq, Syria, and western Iran and even re-established a tenuous hold on Egypt for a time. But the caliphate was no longer a world power and everyone could see that the claims of the Abbasids to represent a universal caliphate were at best optimistic, at worst obviously absurd.

The long-term cause of the fall of the caliphate was the collapse of the rural economy of Iraq. According to ninth-century revenue lists, the alluvial lands of southern Iraq, from Baghdad to the Gulf, supplied the vast bulk of the revenues of the caliphs, four times as much as the next most productive province, Egypt, and five times as much as Syria and Palestine. By the ninth century, the Iraqi economy was in deep trouble. There

may have been long-term factors to do with the salinization of the soil and other ecological changes but most of the damage was man-made. The long years of civil war which had followed the death of Hārūn al-Rashīd in 809 had seen bands of unemployed soldiers roaming the countryside, taking whatever they could lay their hands on, and warlords who moved easily from taxation to pillage. In these circumstances, no one was willing or able to undertake the long-term investments which the irrigation systems of southern Iraq required if the land was to remain productive. The restoration of ʿAbbasid control by al-Maʾmūn may have halted the decline but it does not seem to have reversed it. After 861 different groups among the military were determined to get their hands on the resources of the area. In 865 there was a second, year-long siege of Baghdad when the supporters of the caliph al-Muʿtazz conquered the city and deposed al-Mustaʿīn. Both sides resorted to pillaging the countryside and breaching the irrigation canals to flood the land in order to prevent their opponents gaining military advantage. The re-establishment of a measure of stability by the caliph al-Muʿtamid and his brother al-Muwaffaq in 870 did not restore the position. Southern Iraq was ravaged by the long rebellion of the Zanj, slaves and others in the agricultural lands and marshes to the north of Basra. Despite some years of peace during the caliphate of al-Muʿtadid (892–902), the position deteriorated again during the chaotic reign of the caliph al-Muqtadir (908–932). The decay of the once flourishing lands of Iraq was typified by an incident in 935 when a military adventurer called Ibn Rāʾiq, hoping to gain a temporary military advantage over a rival, breached the great Nahrawan canal which irrigated the flourishing towns and villages along the east side of the Tigris. The canal was never reconstructed and the settlements rapidly became what they have been ever since: dust blown ruins in a desolate landscape.

After al-Mutawwakil's death, there were five caliphs in nine years. Three of them were killed by the Turkish soldiers who were supposed to be their elite soldiers and guards. As different groups fought each other for control of the gradually diminishing revenues of the state, they humiliated and degraded the caliphs: in 866 al-Mustaʿīn had his head chopped off despite the fact that he had been given a clear and unequivocal amnesty and his body was buried at the roadside by passing strangers; in 869 al-Muʿtazz was tortured by being made to stand in the baking sun without any water before being locked in a small, airless chamber to die; in 870 al-Muhtadi was cut down by Turkish swords as he ran through the streets of Samarra trying to rouse the citizens to defend their caliph against the military. The prestige of the Deputies of God on earth never really recovered from this brutal onslaught and military leaders in the tenth century showed little compunction in following the example of their predecessors in deposing and murdering caliphs.

The Umayyads and early ʿAbbasids had based their claims to leadership of the Muslim community on three main foundations. The first was the right they asserted to make decisions on matters of Islamic law and practice, the second was their role in leading the Muslims against the unbelievers, especially the Byzantines, and the third was providing leadership and protection to the *hajj*. Caliphs like al-Mahdi and al-Rashīd were careful to ensure the success of both *hajj* and *jihād* and to make sure that all the Muslims knew it. In the ninth century, these positions began to crumble. The ultimate failure to establish Muʿtazilism as the generally accepted Muslim creed spelt the end of the caliph's powers to decide questions of doctrine and these powers passed to the emerging *ʿulamāʾ*. Al-Maʾmūn and al-Muʿtasim both led the *jihād* in person and made it clear that the campaigns against the Byzantines were a central part

of their policies. Under al-Mutawwakil, ʿAbbasid armies scored notable successes in Armenia, even though the caliph himself did not participate. The short-lived caliph al-Muntasir sent an expedition against the Byzantines immediately after his accession and expressed his intention of leading his armies in person. No subsequent ʿAbbasid caliph led the Muslims against the ancient enemy. The leadership of the *hajj* was the last of the caliphal prerogatives to go. Hārūn was the last reigning caliph to lead the pilgrims in person, but throughout the ninth century the *hajj* was led by members of the ruling family appointed by the caliph. In the tenth century this changed suddenly. A group of Ismaʿīli rebels called the Qarāmita (sometimes anglicized as Carmathians) drawn largely from the Bedouin of northern Arabia and Syria, attacked the pilgrim caravan on a number of occasions, massacring defenceless men, women and children. The caliphs seemed powerless to protect them. As a final indignity the Qarāmita stole the Black stone from the Kaʿba itself and took it back to their stronghold in eastern Arabia.

By the mid-tenth century the caliphate was in ruins. The material foundations of caliphal power had been destroyed and the ideological foundations of their position had been fatally undermined by their inability to perform the functions of the leader of the Muslims.

The decline of the Abbasid caliphate was hastened by the appearance of rival caliphates in the tenth century. There had, of course, been rivals for the caliphate before but these challengers had always intended to take over the universal caliphate, not to divide it between different caliphs. In 909, however, the Fatimid dynasty established themselves in Tunisia and set up an alternative caliphate there. As their name implies, the Fatimids were, or at least claimed to be, descendants of Ali and Fatima and hence of the Prophet himself. In the late eighth century there had been a split among the supporters of the Alids after the death of the sixth Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 765). A minority claimed that one Ismāʿīl was the legitimate successor and should rightly have succeeded his father. It is not clear how much support, if any, they had at the time but the memory of Ismāʿīl was kept alive after his death and by the end of the ninth century a family in Salamiya in Syria were claiming to be his heirs. They were eventually forced to flee from their homeland and take refuge with the Berbers of Tunisia and Algeria who accepted their claims to political and religious leadership. With the support of these hardy pastoralists, they conquered Tunisia and proclaimed themselves caliphs.

The Fatimids' claim was based on hereditary right and they claimed God's support for what was essentially a semi-divine monarchy. They made it clear that they had inherited Ali's claims and his direct relationship with God. Although they were based in Tunisia, they claimed the universal caliphate, Tunisia was simply their temporary base until they conquered the rest of the Muslim world and established the rule of the Family of the Prophet throughout. In 969 they achieved the next stage of their programme when they conquered Egypt. Unlike Iraq, Egypt was a country of growing prosperity and the Fatimids benefited from the riches of the newly conquered territory. Missionaries were sent out to Iraq and Iran to spread Fatimid propaganda and encourage Muslims to rise up against their existing rulers and proclaim their allegiance to the Fatimids. Some responded but the majority did not and there was never enough popular support to extend Fatimid authority over the eastern Islamic world.

Meanwhile a third caliphate emerged in al-Andalus, that is the areas of Spain and Portugal that were ruled by the Muslims. In 929 the Amir ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III (r. 912–61) formally assumed the title of Commander of the Faithful. The caliphate

of al-Andalus, or the caliphate of Cordova as it is more commonly known, did not, unlike the Fatimids, claim to be a universal caliphate but a regional one which acknowledged the legitimacy of other caliphates in other areas. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān based his claim partly on the fact that his ancestors, the Umayyads, had been caliphs and he was simply reviving a title which had rightly belonged to his family. It was also a conscious rejection of the claims of the Fatimids in the Maghrib where the two powers competed for influence. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān was in position to lead or protect the *hajj*, but he did fulfil other functions of the caliphate. In particular he made a point of leading the Muslims of al-Andalus in the *jihād* against the Christians of the north of the Iberian peninsula. Like the eighth and early ninth-century ʿAbbasids, he too ensured that his leadership of the faithful was well reported in history and poetry. Like the Fatimids, he also began the minting of a gold coinage in his own name, something provincial governors and warlords did not do.

In the year 1000, then, there were three caliphates in the Muslim world, the ʿAbbasids of Baghdad, the Fatimids, now installed in their new capital at Cairo, and the Umayyads in Cordova. The ideal of a single universal caliphate was a historical memory. The Fatimids and the Umayyads both ruled over substantial territories and the Fatimid caliphs of Egypt and Syria were certainly the richest and most powerful monarchs in the Muslim world. The ʿAbbasids, in contrast, were mere shadows of their previous greatness. The military men who ruled the old ʿAbbasid heartlands of Iraq and western Iran were Shiʿite Buyids. They made no effort to replace the ʿAbbasids by members of the family of Ali but they certainly did not accept the spiritual authority of the ʿAbbasids whose power now hardly extended beyond the walls of their Baghdad palace.

As Buyid power waned in the early eleventh century, the ʿAbbasids began to reassert themselves, not as political leaders with armies to enforce their rule, but as spiritual heads of Sunni Islam. In 1029 the Caliph al-Qādir published a document known as the *Risālat al-Qādiriya*. In this he attempted, perhaps for the first time, to elaborate a Sunni creed. He asserted the legitimacy of the four orthodox caliphs, so countering the claims of the Shiʿites that Abū Bakr, ʿUmar and ʿUthmān were usurpers who had deprived ʿAli of his rights. He rejected the Muʿtazilism of his own ancestors by condemning the doctrine of the createdness of the Qurʾan. He also asserted that the traditions of the Prophet were to be accepted as the foundations of Muslim law. In taking this initiative, al-Qādir had reinvented the ʿAbbasid caliphs as spiritual leaders of the Sunnis.

The political situation, on the other hand, became increasingly difficult for the ʿAbbasids. In the 1050s the Fatimids seemed to be gaining ground in Syria and even in Iraq, where a military adventurer called al-Bassasīrī proclaimed his allegiance to the caliphs of Cairo. The ʿAbbasid caliphate was only saved by the arrival of the Saljuq Turks. The Saljuqs, the leading family of the Ghuzz Turks, appeared in the Muslim world in the steppe lands of Kazakhstan at the beginning of the eleventh century. They were new converts to Islam and their first leader, Tughril Beg (d. 1065) seems to have embraced the Sunni faith with enthusiasm, perhaps encouraged by the hope that many people in Iran and further west would support him, barbarous Turk that he was, against the Shiʿite Buyids. He openly championed the cause of the Abbasids and his allegiance to them gave his power a legitimacy and a certain popular appeal which a Turkish nomad leader could never have received in his own right.

Tughril proclaimed himself protector of the caliphs and Sultan. The word sultan was commonly used in early Islamic times to mean 'the authorities' or 'the

government,' an abstract noun. In the eleventh century Turkish rulers like the great Mahmud of Ghazna (998–1030) began to use it as a personal title, much as the English abstract noun 'Majesty' became the title of the person of the ruler. The assumption of this title allowed Tughril and his successors, notably the great Alp Arslan (1063–73) and Malik Shah (1073–92) to coexist with the 'Abbasid caliphs, the sultan representing secular power while the caliph provided legitimacy and an Islamic justification for Turkish power. It was now the Sultans who led the armies against the ancient enemy, the Byzantines, and more importantly against the heretical Fatimids.

In the twelfth century the power of the Saljuq Sultans declined, like that of the Buyids before them, and the 'Abbasids began to take advantage of the situation to reassert a measure of political power. The manifest failure of the Saljuqs to protect the Muslims against the invading Crusaders further undermined their credibility and the military men who inherited their power, like Nūr al-Din (d. 1174) and Salāh al-Dīn (Saladin) (d. 1193) looked to the 'Abbasids of Baghdad to give them titles and moral support. In this more relaxed political atmosphere, the 'Abbasid caliphs began to recover something of the secular power they had lost with the coming of the Buyids in 945. Caliphs like al-Muqtafi (1136–60) and al-Nāsir (1180–1225) created a small but viable state in central Iraq. It was a far cry from the glory days of Hārūn al-Rashīd but the 'Abbasids once more had an army to command and a state to rule.

All this was brought to an end with the Mongol conquest of Baghdad in 1258 when the city was sacked and the last 'Abbasid caliph wrapped in carpets and trampled to death by horses. It was the end to any hopes the ancient dynasty might have had to revive their power. The 'Abbasid name still had a certain resonance. In 1261 a surviving member of the dynasty was invited to Cairo by the Mamluk Sultan and the 'Abbasids were set up as religious dignitaries to give a veneer of legitimacy to Mamluk rule, as they had done to the Saljuqs before. The presence of the caliph helped the Mamluks to present themselves as the champions of Islam against he Crusaders and the Mongols. This time, however, there was no revival of their secular power. In 1517 the Ottomans conquered Egypt and the last 'Abbasid caliph, al-Mutawwakil III was carried off to Istanbul. It was later claimed that he had passed his rights on to the Ottoman Sultans who styled themselves as Caliphs as a result. They also took with them the insignia of the caliphate, including the mantle of the Prophet and the swords of the early heroes of Islam which can still be seen in the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul. The last Ottoman ruler Mehmet V Reshat abdicated as Sultan in 1922 but remained caliph until 1925.

The caliphs had lost their role as rulers of the Muslim world by the end of the ninth century. After 1258 they were no longer even local rulers. But the idea and the memory of the caliphs as supreme rulers who could unite the Muslim people under the banner of Islam remained a potent one, used by Arab nationalists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and by Usāmah ibn Lādin in the twenty-first to inspire Muslims to recapture the glories of early Islam

NOTE

1   For a full discussion of the origin and implications of the title of caliph see P. Crone and M. Hinds, *God's Caliph* (Cambridge, 1986).

Map 3.1 The Middle East under the Umayyad Caliphate