Chapter Twenty-One

The Arabian Empire and its Successors, to ca. 1000

In 661 Ali was assassinated at Kufa by a Kharijite (and was buried at the nearby city of Najaf). Most Muslims in Kufa and elsewhere in southern Iraq acclaimed Hassan, Ali's oldest son by Fatima, as the next calif, but the wider Muslim leadership acquiesced in Muawiya's insistence that the califate was rightfully his. The leadership's decision was practical, because Muawiya - in control of the Levant and Egypt - had a very large army and an enormous income. After a few months Hassan agreed to give up his claims, in return for a handsome pension from Muawiya and a palace at Medina.[1] There Hassan lived for another nine years, marrying many wives, although never more than four at any one time. Muslims who resented Muawiya's elevation to the califate spoke of Hassan as their *imam*, and as the spiritual leader of Islam. Although the descendants of Ali, along with their Medina Imamate, were the central focus for those Muslims who opposed the califs, it would be somewhat misleading to label the seventh-century opposition as "Shiite." Much of the content of Shiite Islam dates from the ninth and tenth centuries.

Muawiya's califate (661-80) and establishment of the Umayyad dynasty (661-750)

Although he was now the calif, Muawiya saw no reason to leave Damascus, where he had long been resident as amir (governor). For the duration of the Umayyad dynasty (661-750) Damascus remained the seat of the califate, and by the end of the period it was large, rich, and unmistakably Muslim. Muawiya saw to the construction of several mosques, although these were not impressive. The "Great Mosque" or the "Mosque of the Umayyads" was begun by the calif al-Walīd in 706 and was completed in 715. Visible from virtually everywhere in Damascus, it sat atop a natural elevation that since the Bronze Age had served as a platform for the city's principal religious structure: a temple of Hadad under the Aramaean kings, a temple of Jupiter under the Romans, and since the 390s the Basilica of St. John the Baptist. Under Walid's direction the Christian basilica was replaced by the grandest mosque that the Muslim world had seen. Beautiful in design and execution, the Great Mosque included a prayer-hall more than five hundred feet in length. Although the Christians of Umayyad Damascus lost their principal church, they- like the city's Judaeans - were well protected by Muawiya and his successors and seem to have been satisfied with their status as Dhimmis. One of the most illustrious Greek writers of the Orthodox church, John of Damascus (d. 749), was in fact an advisor to the last two Umayyad califs.

When Ali's death removed the threat of an attack from Iraq, Muawiya was free to return to his grand project of abolishing the "Roman" (Byzantine) empire. Here he proceeded deliberately rather than speedily. The main effort came during the reign of the Byzantine emperor Constantine IV (668-85), who had also to contend with Bulgarian, Avar, and Slavic marauders in Greece and Thrace. After refurbishing his fleet, Muawiya deployed it first in the southeast Aegean, taking the islands of Rhodes, Kos and then, on the western coast of Anatolia, the city of Smyrna. At last the fleet sailed through the Hellespont into the Sea of Marmora, and in 672 captured Kyzikos, a city with an excellent harbor and close enough to Constantinople that it could serve as a base for an extended siege. The Muslims began the siege of Constantinople in

674, and for four summers Constantine's defenders on the walls of the city and in the Byzantine fleet countered the efforts of the attackers. Most dramatic was the use of "Greek fire," evidently an incendiary liquid that the defenders ignited and shot at Muawiya's ships. After the campaigning season ended in 677, again with no success for the besiegers, their fleet and the army left for Syria, but both met disaster: Muawiya's fleet was destroyed by a storm and by the Byzantine fleet, and the army - taking the land route through Anatolia - was annihilated.[2] Constantine IV followed up his great victory in 677 with attacks on the Muslims' possessions, and in 680 Muawiya, who by then was old and close to death, was forced to sign a peace treaty and pay a nominal reparation of 30,000 gold pieces.

Although for a time the Umayyad califs were discouraged from further attacks on the Byzantine empire, when internal strife and usurpers brought the Byzantines close to anarchy the Muslim forces returned to the Bosporus. In 716 the Umayyad calif Sulayman dispatched to Constantinople, under the command of his brother,[3] a huge fleet (supposedly 1800 ships) and a massive army. But once again the city's defenses held and the siege dragged on. In 717, weakened by hunger, plague and the "Greek fire" aimed against their ships, the Muslims departed. As had happened forty years earlier, a storm wrecked the fleet on its way back to Syria.

The Karbala massacre

Before Muawiya's death he had proclaimed that his son Yazid would be his successor in the califate. Never before had the califate been passed down from father to son, and the Kharijites and other Muslims who believed that the calif should be elected, or appointed, were angered by Muawiya's decree: if the califate became the property of a dynasty, it would be no more God-pleasing than were the empires and kingdoms that the Muslims had conquered. The *shīʿatu ʿAlī* had other and even more urgent reasons for opposing Yazid. They were all in favor of a hereditary califate, but insisted that it belong to the genealogical line that began with Muhammad and continued through Ali and Fatima. Adding to the resentment of Yazid was his reputation as a drunkard and wastrel. The many Muslims who disliked Yazid declared that Hussein - Ali's oldest surviving son by Fatima[4] (and so a grandson of Muhammad) - was far more deserving of the califate than was Yazid.

When Muawiya died in 680 and Yazid assumed the califate Islam was thrown into crisis. At Medina, Hussein's life was threatened by Umayyads, and he therefore betook himself to Mecca, where the inhabitants proclaimed him as the *imam* of Islam. The elevation of Yazid was especially deplored by the Muslims at Kufa and perhaps elsewhere in Iraq. Even under Muawiya the Kufites had resented the transfer of the califate to Damascus from their city, where it had been brought by Ali. That Muawiya preferred to stay in Damascus was nevertheless understandable, since for twenty years before he assumed the califate he had resided in Damascus as governor of Syria. When Yazid, a man of little worth, inherited the califate the Kufites found the situation intolerable. They sent word to Hussein at Mecca, inviting him to come to Kufa and to assume the califate that was rightfully his.

Hussein accepted the invitation and made his way toward Kufa, accompanied by dozens of family members, slaves, and armed attendants. Yazid saw this action, correctly, as a rebellion against himself, and he sent troops across the desert to intercept Hussein's party and prevent it

from reaching Kufa. At Karbala the Umayyad force caught up with the travelers and on the 10th day of Muharram in A. H. 61 (October of 680) slaughtered all except Hussein's infant son (Shiites count the baby's survival as a miracle and a sign from God). Beheading Hussein and seventy companions, Yazid's troops impaled the heads on spears and paraded them through Kufa, as a grisly warning to the Kufites.

The enemies of the Umayyad dynasty were aghast at this "Karbala massacre,", and over the generations the massacre became a rallying cry in the coalescence of the Shiite tradition of Islam. Hussein's adult son, Ali ibn al-Hussein, survived the Karbala massacre (according to tradition, he was sick and could not accompany his father on the journey to Kufa). He spent the rest of his life at Medina, regarded by many as the Imam of Islam. Although they had little or no secular power, the descendants of Ali continued to be revered, in genealogical succession, as the God-selected leaders of Islam. In the eighth century mosques in various parts of the Muslim world, and especially in southern Iraq, began to insert Ali into the *shahadah*, the first of the Five Pillars of Islam, recognizing Ali as the viceregent of God. On the holy day called *Ashūrāh* Shiite Muslims with great emotion and self-cutting recall the death of Hussein at the hands of the impious Umayyads.

Perhaps the massacre at Karbala made an especially deep impression because in 680 many Muslims still supposed that their Umma would prevent Muslims from slaying each other and certainly from slaying the Prophet's grandson. In the twenty-five years preceding 680 the ideal of the Umma's unity had been violated, most spectacularly in the murder of Uthman and the assassination of Ali, and a nominal civil war had already been fought. Nevertheless, at both the Battle of the Camel and at Siffin some restraint had been shown, and the ideal of the Muslim *ummah* may still have been strong enough in 680 that most Kufites could suppose that the contest between Yazid and Hussein would be resolved by negotiation or arbitration, as had been the case in the competition between Muawiya and Ali at Siffin in 656, and between Muawiya and Hassan in 661. Instead of negotiating, Yazid simply ordered the slaughter of those Muslims who preferred Hussein as calif. For the Kufites and their sympathizers the massacre at Karbala put an end to their age of innocence.

The differences between the Kharijites, the proto-Shiites, and the rest of the Muslim world thus arose as differing beliefs about the califate. These were at first loyalties to living califs and leaders, and over time became loyalties to memories and to historical traditions. The Muslim world in general accepted the Umayyads as califs, however flawed they were, and took pride in Damascus and in the Arabian empire ruled from that city. The *shī'atu 'Alī*, in contrast, as partisans of the memory of Ali and Hussein, opposed the Umayyads, mourned the "martyrs" at Karbala, and venerated what survived of the House of Ali. The Kharijites denounced both the House of Ali and the Umayyads. As the Kharijite and proto-Shiite traditions diverged from those of mainstream Muslims (which by the end of the eighth century can be called Sunni Muslims), so too did some of their religious beliefs and practices. By the middle of the tenth century Shiite Islam had matured.[5]

The Second Civil War and the califate of Abd al-Malik (685-705)

Another opponent of the Umayyads, and another claimant for the califate, was 'Abd

Allāh b. al-Zubayr (otherwise, Ibn al-Zubayr), whose father was killed in the Battle of the Camel, and who was a kinsman of Aisha. After the Karbala massacre Ibn al-Zubayr took over Mecca and much of the Hijaz, and until his death in 692 remained a great concern for the califs in Damascus. His conflict with the Umayyads is conventionally called the Second Civil War within the Muslim Umma, and added to the bad odor of the Damascus regime. Yazid's reign as calif was short (680-683), and his brother's even shorter. Marwan, not a son of Muawiya but a relative from within the Umayyad clan, took over in 684 and died after ruling for only a year, leaving the califate to his son, Abd al-Malik (685-705).

Abd al-Malik is remembered especially for his construction of the grand structure in Jerusalem known as the Dome of the Rock. According to an inscription in the interior, it was built in A.H. 72 (692 CE). Although the building was evidently completed in that year, work must have begun soon after the commencement of Abd al-Malik's califate.[6] The Dome of the Rock is a splendid ornament of Islam, but it is not a mosque and was not intended to be a mosque. An octagonal structure, with its dome sheathed in gold, it had no prayer-hall, no *qiblah* wall, and no minaret. It was built at the supposed site of Solomon's temple, and according to Abd al-Malik and his publicists this was the point from which Muhammad left the earth in his "Night Journey to Heaven" (a journey deduced from an allusion in the Quran).[7] The Dome of the Rock was clearly intended to be the most imposing structure in Jerusalem, and to give the city at least a Muslim veneer. From the fourth century through most of the seventh the character of Jerusalem's architecture was pervasively Christian, with the Church of the Holy Sepulcher as its crowning glory. The Dome was meant to trump the Christians' principal church at Jerusalem. The inscriptions in the Dome's interior emphasize the monotheism of the Muslims, and deny the Christians' trinitarianism. Inscribed on the walls were verses such as "Praise be to God, who begets no son," and "God is one, without partner, without companion." At several places Sura 112 of the Quran is repeated in its entirety: "He is God, one, eternal. He does not beget, nor is he begotten, and he has no peer."[8]

Although the Dome of the Rock scores points against Christianity, it is unlikely to have been built solely for that purpose. Muslim sources say that Abd al-Malik's intention in building it was to make Jerusalem the destination of the Muslims' *hajj*. Because Ibn al-Zubayr was in control of Mecca, that is, Abd al-Malik decided to create a rival to the Ka'ba.[9] As calif in Damascus, Abd al-Malik certainly had plenty of wealth to lavish on the project. And because Jerusalem was relatively close by, an annual *hajj* to Jerusalem by tens of thousands of Muslims from faraway lands would have been a chronic affront to Ibn al-Zubayr and a feather in the cap of the Umayyad califs. In the event, however, Ibn al-Zubayr died just as the Dome of the Rock neared completion, and whatever its original purpose may have been, it did not make Jerusalem a replacement for Mecca for Muslim pilgrims. The Dome of the Rock did, however, become a celebrated structure in its own right, and - once it was accepted as the site of the Prophet's Night Journey to Heaven - helped to make Jerusalem as holy a city for Muslims as it had been for Judaeans and Christians.

Morocco, Spain, and the Battle of Poitiers

Despite the two civil wars and conflicts over the califate, Muslim conquests continued through the first century of the Islamic era. In the *maghreb* Muslim warbands continued to

operate throughout the seventh century, subjugating cities and villages in what is now Algeria and Morocco. The Byzantines were able to recover Carthage in 665, but lost it permanently in 697. As they had done elsewhere, the Muslims initially placed a garrison in a camp outside the city of Carthage, to protect and police the *ahl al-dhimmah*. The attractions of the region, however, were strong enough that the Muslims soon built a city of their own adjacent to Carthage. The new city - Tunis - was thoroughly Muslim, while old Carthage was mostly Christian, with a small Judaean minority.

The calif Abd al-Malik, in Damascus, appointed Musa ibn Nusair to the governorship of North Africa, and it was during Musa's tenure that the Muslims gained their first European province. From Morocco the path of Muslim expansion led inexorably to southern Spain, and in spring of 711 a Muslim Berber chieftain named Tariq landed his troops on what had hitherto been known as "the Pillars of Hercules" but which subsequently was named for the chieftain: "Tariq's mountain" was, in Arabic, *jebel tariq*, whence our "Gibraltar." From the island Tariq's men crossed into Spain, and on July 19 of 711 defeated the Visigothic king, Roderick (Rodrigo). Once he had defeated the royal army Tariq pressed on - with or without Musa's permission is uncertain - and quickly took over most of Spain. The conquest was easy because the Visigothic kings were no more loved by their subjects in Spain than were the Byzantine emperors in the east. Until 589 the Visigoths had been Arian Christians, and so had long distressed the Catholic Christians (as well as the Judaeans and the Christians of other "heretic"communions) of Spain. After his victory Tariq went on to dismantle the Visigothic kingdom, reaching Toledo and central Spain in the summer of 712. By 713, Musa having joined Tariq, Muslim forces reached the Galician coast in the very northwestern corner of the Spanish peninsula.[10] Thus was most of Spain added to the Arabic empire. Regarding the Visigoths as merely a westerly branch of the Vandals, the Arabians called their newly acquired province in Spain "the land of the Vandals" (*al-andalus*, which in Spanish became "Andalusia").

In the early 720s Abd er-Rahman, the Muslim governor of Spain, led expeditions around the Pyrenees and into Gaul. These were more like raids than attempts to conquer territory, although the western parts of Provence were both raided and subjugated. In 732 Abd er-Rahman with a large army began plundering the cities of southwestern Gaul. After sacking Narbonne and Toulouse the Muslims proceeded toward Tours, resting place of St. Martin of Tours and site of a rich cathedral. Before reaching their destination the Muslims were met at Poitiers by a Frankish army under Charles, the son of Pepin the Fat. The battle was a great victory for the Franks: Abd er-Rahman himself was killed and on the day following the battle the Muslims retreated. Poitiers was the northernmost point that Muslim armies reached in western Europe, and his victory secured for Charles the nickname, "the hammer": *tudites* in Latin, and *Martel* in the Germanic language of the Franks.[11]

Central Asia and northwest India

By 651 Arabian armies had conquered Khurāsān (northeastern Iran, northwestern Afghanistan, and southern Turkmenistan), the last, largest, and one of the richest of the Sassanid provinces. Unlike the inhabitants of the lands to the west, most of whom were Christians or Judaeans, many of the Khurasanites converted to Islam. And of these Khurasanite converts many joined the conquering army. Like the Berbers in North Africa, the Khurasanites

contributed greatly to the further expansion of the Umayyad empire, and at the same time changed what had previously been an Arabian army into a more heterogeneous force. By the end of the seventh century Muslims had gone north from Khurasan to take the cities of Bukhara and Samarkand, in what today is Uzbekistan.

In 711, the same year in which Berber Muslims crossed into Spain, a Muslim force came - evidently both overland and by sea - to the mouth of the Indus.[12] The force was sent by the governor of Iraq and was led by the governor's nephew, Muhammad bin al-Qāsim, reputedly only seventeen years of age. According to Muslim tradition the youthful Muhammad protected both the Buddhists and the Hindus in the province and was welcomed by both religious groups. In any case, by 713 Muhammad had conquered most of Sind.

In northwest India and in central Asia as far north as the Tarim Basin many and possibly most people were Buddhist in the seventh century. Although initially the Muslims were indifferent to the natives' religion, within a short time of the Muslim conquest the conduct of the conquerors toward the Buddhists and Buddhism became adversarial. In central Asia the Muslims were bringing God to areas that until then had not heard of him: although the Buddhists were not idolaters, they did not worship God. In addition, the ubiquitous statuary, paintings and iconography of the Buddhist tradition offended the Muslims. Ultimately, therefore, the Buddhists were deemed ineligible to become Dhimmis. After their temples and monasteries had been destroyed by the conquerors many of the Buddhists converted, willy-nilly, to Islam. By the tenth century Buddhism had disappeared from central Asia and northwest India, as had most of its art work. It will be recalled, however, that in Afghanistan two gigantic statues of the Buddha were preserved until very recently. In the Bamiyan valley, 150 miles northwest of Kabul, ancient Buddhists had carved from the rock face of a mountain a Buddha statue 53 m high, and a somewhat shorter companion. The two statues survived until March of 2001, when they were destroyed by the Taliban government of Afghanistan.

Arabization: The spread of the Arabic language and Arabic script

An important development during the Umayyad califate was Arabization: the slow but steady spread of the Arabic language in the conquered lands. Arabization was quite distinct from Islamization - the spread of Islam - although the two processes were related. The spread of the Arabic language came first and in lands where formerly Aramaic, Coptic and Berber had been spoken the entire population eventually learned to speak Arabic. Conversion to Islam was much slower and was nowhere complete: in Egypt today about ten per cent of the population is Christian, and significant Christian and Jewish minorities were common elsewhere in the Middle East until the twentieth century.

In the Levant and Iraq the lingua franca in the seventh century was Aramaic. Eastern Aramaic (Syriac) was the dialect spoken east of the Euphrates, while Western Aramaic was spoken in the Levant. Because Aramaic and Arabic were both Northwest Semitic languages, they were akin in phonetics, verb structure, and to some extent in their lexicons. It was therefore not very difficult, and much to their advantage, for speakers of Syriac and of Western Aramaic to gain some proficiency in the language of the new rulers.

At the outset the conquerors simply appropriated the imperial machinery that the Byzantines and Sassanids had constructed, and this bureaucratic continuity meant that the old administrative languages - Greek, Aramaic, and in fewer cities Pahlavi - continued to be the languages of government into the Umayyad period. Over the generations, however, this began to change. In 697 the calif ‘Abd al-Malik ordered that henceforth imperial records be kept in Arabic rather than in Greek and Persian, and by the end of the Umayyad period the use of Arabic seems to have been widespread even in the lower levels of the bureaucracy. The linguistic evolution is difficult to trace in Iran, Iraq and the Levant, but papyrological evidence shows that in Egypt the language of government had become Arabic by the end of the eighth century. The men who collected the taxes, kept the records, and served as accountants continued to be mostly Egyptian Christians, who for obvious and practical reasons learned the Arabic language.[13] In the Levant and Iraq officials probably learned Arabic even sooner and with less difficulty. By the middle of the eighth century fluency in Arabic was certainly a requirement for every young Christian who aspired to hold a post in the Umayyad bureaucracy.

Commercial considerations also encouraged many of the Dhimmis to learn Arabic. In an Arabian empire that now stretched from India to Spain, Arabic was useful for those merchants who were engaged in shipping or in overland trade. Many more people found Arabic profitable at the local level. Although a few Arabians may have been as fluent in Aramaic as in Arabic, the Umayyads had inherited from Umar, Uthman and Ali the policy of segregating the Arabians - and especially the garrison troops - from the subject populations. Typically the Arabian soldier was well paid and so had considerably more money to spend than did the average townsperson in Damascus, Jerusalem, or Edessa. Because the troops spoke little Aramaic or Coptic, it was profitable for a craftsman or shopkeeper to learn at least enough Arabic to negotiate and haggle with them.

While Syriac and Western Aramaic continued to be the preferred languages of the *ahl al-dhimmah* in the Levant and Iraq, many of them were also fluent in Arabic by the end of the Umayyad period. In Egypt and North Africa the pace of Arabization may have been somewhat slower, but here too were hundreds of thousands of people who were able to speak both Arabic and their vernacular. By the tenth century Arabic was the language of most people - Judaeans and Christians as well as Muslims - from the Zagros mountains to southern Spain.[14] While its role as the first language of an empire gave Arabic a synchronic (or horizontal) unity, most important for its diachronic (or vertical) stability was its religious role. According to Muslim belief God had spoken to Muhammad in Arabic, and the Quran had therefore to be learned and recited in the Prophet’s Arabic (it was not translated into another language until four hundred years after its publication). While the Christians supposed that their own sacred scriptures had been inspired by God, they did not suppose that God himself had dictated the texts in Hebrew and Greek. As a result, Christians were not inhibited from translating their Bible into a great many vernaculars. The Quran, in contrast, was inseparable from the Arabic language in which it was written. In the ninth and tenth centuries, when converts came to Islam in large numbers, they did not obscure the Arabic character of Islam, because some knowledge of Arabic was a precondition for conversion to Islam.

In Iran and central Asia the career of the Arabic language was more complicated, and Arabization was much more limited. While people in Iraq and the Levant had spoken a Semitic

language all along, east of the Zagros the vernaculars were Indo-European. Although Arabic became a useful second language and then a prestige language in Iran, it did not replace Pahlavi (Middle Persian) as a spoken language. From the early ninth through most of the tenth century, Arabic was preferred by writers in Iran and other parts of central Asia. West of the Zagros literacy had been well established, in the Aramaic language and Aramaic alphabet. East of the Zagros literacy was not widespread. Sassanid Pahlavi had been written by Mazdian commentators and theologians in a cumbersome script: an alphabet, but relying heavily on heterograms, which made its reading and writing difficult. The Arabic alphabet was much more efficient, and as a result - outside the Mazdian religious centers[15] - Arabic was attractive to Iranians who wished to read and write. Although Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), for example, was a native of Khurasan and although his first language was an Iranian dialect, he wrote his great medical works in Arabic. Other Iranian writers - al-Bīrūnī, al-Bukhārī, and the several authors denominated as al-Tabarī - also wrote in Arabic rather than in their Persian vernacular.

Eventually the Arabic script was adapted to express the Persian language. The first texts in Modern Persian (Farsi, which differs considerably from Middle Persian) and written in the new alphabet date from the tenth century. Centuries later the Persian modification of the Arabic alphabet was in turn borrowed for the writing of other languages in Asia. Kurdish in Kurdistan, Pashto in Afghanistan, various Turkish languages in the Asian steppe,[16] and Urdu in northwest India: all were written in the Arabic script.

The beginnings of Shiah Islam: the "Fivers"

Until the eighth century the proto-Shiites were quite literally the *shī'atu 'Alī* or the "party of Ali." Their agenda scarcely extended beyond putting the califate in the hands of an Alid, a descendant of the Prophet through Ali and Fatima. Through most of the Umayyad period these loyalists to the family of Ali were ready to revolt, even though the Umayyads had an overwhelming advantage in power and money.

Although the *shī'atu 'Alī* condemned the political establishment, for a time they had few beliefs distinguishing them from other Muslims. In the first half of the eighth century, however, a difference began to emerge and it had to do with the question of free will. Free will is in short supply in the Quran. Muhammad had no doubt that at the beginning of time Allah decided who of the tribesmen would and who would not believe Muhammad's prophecies: many verses in the Quran state very clearly that everything that happens has been decreed by God, including who would accept Islam and who would not. Just as in the Hebrew Bible it is God who hardens the heart of Pharaoh, in order to bring the Ten Plagues down upon Egypt, so in the Quran God turns men's hearts away from the Prophet, and thus dooms them to everlasting Hell.[17] The Hadith reinforced this doctrine that God alone determines what has happened, what is happening now, and what will happen in the future.

Accordingly, although the Umayyad califs were unpopular most Muslims believed that the Umayyads would never have gained the califate had God not willed it so. The Umayyads themselves, not surprisingly, agreed with this understanding of historical causality. Belief in the divine decree of all that happens also justified the average Muslim's unwillingness to oppose the Umayyads, a sensible attitude because the calif in Damascus had vast resources at his disposal

and was not averse to using them in order to maintain his power. Most Muslim teachers in the eighth century repeated Muhammad's doctrine that everything that happens – whether good or bad – was decreed by Allah at the beginning of time, as were our own actions (that we seem to make decisions for ourselves, the teachers explained, is an illusion). Most active in promoting this view were the Jabrites (the *jabriyya*), so called because of their focus on *jabr* or divine decree. Another word much discussed in the Umayyad period was *qadar*, which is usually translated as "predestination." Less extreme than the Jabrites, the Qadarites maintained that although one's fate (including Heaven or Hell) is predestined one is still free to do right or do wrong. To most Muslims, however, such human freedom seemed to detract from Allah's omnipotence and to contradict the Quran, and in 699 Ma'bad al-Juhani, a Qadarite teacher at Medina, was executed as a heretic.

While mainstream Islam had no difficulty with the belief in fate and divine decree, adherents of the *shī'atu 'Alī* began to distance themselves from it. Although this required substituting an "esoteric" meaning for the literal meaning of some passages in the Quran, for well over a thousand years Shiites have believed that "man is free to choose his own actions."[18] To deny that freedom, Shiites say, is to deny the justice of God. If everything we do is fated by God, then unbelievers would be punished in Hell for an unbelief to which God himself had sentenced them. The belief in God's justice, and in at least a limited freedom of human will, was one of the first distinguishing features of Shiah Islam and it seems to have begun when the Party of Ali still had some hope of recovering the califate. For the *shī'atu 'Alī* it was unthinkable that the Umayyads possessed the califate because God so willed. As they saw it, God's will was that the calif should be an Alid, but God's will was being flouted by impious men. A fair number of the *shī'atu 'Alī* were therefore willing to give their lives in order to correct the matter.

At Ali's death, as explained above, the *shī'atu 'Alī* looked first to his older son, Hassan, and then to his younger son, Hussein. In 680 Hussein was killed in the Karbala massacre but was survived by a twenty-year old son, Ali ibn al-Hussein (657-712), who was said to have been too ill to accompany his father on the fateful journey. After Karbala, partisans of the Alids sensibly refrained from calling Ali ibn al-Hussein their calif. Instead they honored him as the Imam of Islam, thus indicating that he was their spiritual leader. Over the centuries Shiites came to consider the Imams - descended from Ali, and presiding at Medina - as holy men, as infallible interpreters of Muhammad's prophecies and way of life, and as the spiritual heads of Islam. Although during the seventh and eighth century the Imams were not quite so highly regarded, Ali ibn al-Hussein did have many devoted followers who were certain that because of his lineage he was best equipped to know the meaning of the Quran. He was most often seen at the mosque, prostrating himself in long prayers. After more than thirty years as Imam, Ali ibn al-Hussein died at Medina in 712 (his followers and admirers suspected that he was poisoned by the henchmen of Calif Abd al-Malik). His adult son Zaid ibn Ali succeeded him as the next and fifth Imam.

Zaid was not content to live in peace and prayer as the Imam at Medina. Leaving his brother, Muhammad, to carry on the duties of the Imamate, Zaid went to southern Iraq and there raised a small army against the Umayyad governor. The odds were heavily against him, however, and in 740 Zaid was killed in battle near Kufa. All Shiites regard Zaid ibn Ali as a

martyr, and some of them (the Zaidis, or the "Fiver" Shiites) look back upon him as the last of the great Imams, because he chose to die in battle rather than to accept the Umayyad yoke.

The overthrow of the Umayyads and the establishment of the Abbasid califate

The middle of the eighth century brought a dynastic change to the Arabian empire. In order to govern and collect the *jizya* from towns in Khurasan and neighboring territories the Umayyads had in the seventh century arranged for the settlement there of thousands of Arabians. Many of the Arabians initially came as garrison troops, but they were apparently not so segregated from the local populace as were their counterparts in Iraq, the Levant and Egypt (perhaps because the amirs did not think that Zoroastrianism was so seductive as Judaism or Christianity). Because of the interaction between the native Iranians and the Muslim immigrants a considerable number of Khurasanites converted to Islam. This was a cumbersome process. The first generations of Muslims regarded Islam as an Arabian religion, and in order to become a Muslim a convert had first to become a *mawlā*: a "client" or a "relative by oath" through adoption into one or another of the Arabian tribes. Although they were fictitiously "Arabians," the *mawāli* lacked some of the privileges and much of the prestige enjoyed by Muslims who were Arabian by birth.

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Among the Arabian immigrants to Khurasan were some distinguished members of the Hashimite clan of the Quraysh tribe. This clan, to which the Prophet himself had belonged, claimed descent from Hashim, the Prophet's great-grandfather. Among and around the members of the clan who lived in Khurasan arose the *hashimiyya*, a movement whose aim was to "restore" the califate from the Umayyad to the Hashimite clan.[19] The *hashimiyya* was powerfully abetted by the Muslim *mawali* of northeastern Iran, who gave it their support in the expectation that a Hashimite calif would treat them more fairly than had the Umayyads.[20]

An insurrection began in 744, with the disputed accession of the Umayyad calif Marwan II. Leaders of the insurgents were the Abbāsids, a Hashimite lineage descended from Abbās, the uncle of the Prophet. Although the rebels were for a time kept in check, in January of 750 they won a decisive victory over the Umayyads on the Great Zab river of northeastern Iraq. The Abbasids were commanded by Abu al-Abbās, more often called *as-saffāh* ("the shedder of blood"), and most of his troops came from Khurasan. By April of 750 Damascus and all other Syrian cities - in most of which the bulk of the population was still Christian - had capitulated to as-Saffah. Marwan II fled to Egypt but was soon hunted down and beheaded.

The victorious as-Saffah took the title of calif and ruled until 754. Thus began the Abbasid califate, which in one form or another was to continue for more than five hundred years. When as-Saffah died, the califate was transferred to his brother, Abu Jafar, known more commonly as *al-mansūr* ("the victorious"). Like his brother, al-Mansur (754-775) initially resided at Kufa, but he found the city too hostile for his comfort. In 762 al-Mansur decided to move the califate northeastward, and to locate it at what was then the nondescript village of Baghdad. The site of Baghdad, he believed, was ideal for a great city: it was on the Tigris river, but because it was only thirty miles from the Euphrates (lying at the point in central Iraq where the Tigris and Euphrates converge most closely) it was also the terminal of a much-used road and a canal from the west. The necessary construction was completed by 766 and from that date

until its sack by Mongolians in 1258 Baghdad remained the seat of the califate and a city of fabulous character. Within a short time of its completion Baghdad had a population of over a hundred thousand, and by the tenth century was supposed to have had almost a million inhabitants.

The Abbasid revolt had been supported by most proto-Shiites, but only because it promised to bring down the Umayyad califate. Once the Abbasids were in control the proto-Shiites naturally opposed the dynasty, which was no more descended from Ali and Fatima than had been the Umayyads. The proto-Shiites rebelled against al-Mansur, and perhaps to prevent such a recurrence the next calif, al-Mansur's son, yielded to the *ulema* authority on religious matters and on conduct, effectively making the califate a merely secular position. From that time forward, we may also use the name *sunni* for the majority of Muslims, who looked to the *ulema* to establish the *sunnah* and for other religious guidance, while respecting the political authority of the Abbasids. This divorce freed the Abbasid califs to give their court a lavish and cosmopolitan character. But it also freed Islam to become a universal religion.

In order to legitimize themselves, the Abbasids exerted themselves to paint the Umayyads in the worst colors. One way to do this was to portray the first four califs (Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali) as the *rāshidūn* califs: these were "righteous" or "rightly guided" rulers, in contrast to Muawiya and all of the Umayyads who followed him. The Abbasids of course presented themselves as the successors - after the ninety-year Umayyad hiatus - of the four *rāshidūn*, the "Rightly Guided" califs. Because the Abbasid califate lasted for more than five centuries, its unflattering and somewhat distorted picture of the Umayyads became widely accepted in Muslim tradition.

Umayyad Spain

The Abbasid triumph over the Umayyads was not complete. Although the Abbasids were rulers of the Islamic world from east of Samarkand to Gibraltar, an empire more than four thousand miles long on its east-west axis, they did not rule Spain. An Umayyad prince, Abd al-Rahman, managed to survive the bloodbath that as-Saffah presided over in 749 and 750, and fled from Syria to North Africa. Making his way to Spain, in 756 he established himself there as the ruler, both de jure and de facto, to whom the local governors owed their loyalty. His argument that the Abbasids were rebels was of course true, but it was also true that all Muslim governors outside of Spain had transferred their allegiance to the Abbasids and recognized them as califs. Abd al-Rahman therefore described himself as an *'amīr* ("commander," or "governor") rather than as a calif, but his descendants proclaimed themselves as califs. The Umayyad dynasty in Spain was fully independent of the Abbasids and maintained itself until the eleventh century.[21]

The capital of Umayyad Spain was Cordoba. Because Abd al-Rahman was in effect a rival of the Abbasid califs, it was his ambition to make Cordoba a rival to Baghdad and he and his successors spared no effort in the project. By the tenth century, when the city was at its grandest, Cordoba had at least a hundred thousand (and perhaps several hundred thousand) inhabitants, hundreds of mosques and public baths and a royal palace that in size and splendor was not far below that of the Abbasids.[22] Especially benefitting from the competition between Umayyad Cordoba and Abbasid Baghdad were the Judaeans of Iraq, who in the middle of the

eighth century still numbered well over a million. Spain was largely Christian when Abd al-Rahman took over, and to balance the Christians he and his successors favored Judaism over Christianity and invited Judaean immigrants from the east. In the latter part of the eighth and the early ninth century Judaeans came to Spain from Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East to Spain, but the size of this immigration is uncertain.

Baghdad under Hārūn al-Rashīd: 786-809

The eighth century, as will be seen in Chapter 23, was an unusually bad time for the Byzantine empire. In addition to its external problems, the empire was riven in discord between iconoclasts and iconophiles. The discord eventually culminated in the elevation of Irene of Athens to the imperial throne, the first time that a woman had ruled the "Roman" empire (Irene ruled alone from 797 to 802). The Abbasid califs obviously profited from the Byzantines' internal problems. Hārūn al-Rashīd was an exact contemporary of Empress Irene, and it is not a coincidence that his califate marked the zenith of the Abbasid empire, at least in political terms, and also of Baghdad as an imperial capital. Within a generation of its founding, Baghdad had become the greatest city in the world. If it was not so well protected as Constantinople, the reason was that the califs had no enemy who was in any position to threaten it. But except for its walls, Baghdad in all ways outshone the Byzantine capital, to say nothing of the impoverished cities in the Germanic kingdoms of western Europe. Wealth was of course concentrated in the Abbasid palace, but from the palace much trickled down, enriching hundreds of courtiers, administrators, and even artisans and oral poets. It was in ninth-century Baghdad that the collection of stories known as *The Thousand and One Nights* was first popular.[23]

The power and wealth of Harun al-Rashid and of Baghdad became proverbial. When Charlemagne sent a diplomatic embassy to Baghdad in 801, al-Rashid sent back to the Frankish king (and newly crowned Roman emperor) gifts that dazzled both Charlemagne and his court, the most extraordinary gift being an elephant that somehow or other survived for nine years after it reached the cold climate of Aachen.[24] The diplomatic exchange made Baghdad synonymous with "the fabulous" in the minds of western Europeans. And with good reason.

> The center of display was the palace of the caliph, where Zubaidah, al-Rashid's favorite wife, held sway. She insisted that all dishes be made of gold and that tapestries be studded with precious gems. She outfitted several hundred of the most attractive maidservants as pageboys (a fashion that was soon all the rage in Baghdad), largely to amuse her son and divert his attention from a favorite eunuch. At a festival celebrating the marriage of a prince, a thousand matched pearls were showered upon the couple as they sat upon a jewel-encrusted mat of gold.[25]

With the wealth of empire at his disposal, al-Rashid was pleased to reward with lavish gifts the poets who hymned his praises or the story-tellers who delighted his court. He also supported the translation of Greek (and Pahlavi) wisdom into Arabic, inaugurating the splendid flowering of the intellect - almost all of it in Arabic - in the Abbasid empire.

Unlike his successors, al-Rashid could count on the loyalty of his governors in remote provinces, and on the revenues that they collected. The empress Irene had recognized the

disparity in force between her Byzantine army and that of Harun al-Rashid, and paid him an annual subsidy to keep the peace on her Anatolian frontier. After his coup d'etat, Nikephoros I sent word to al-Rashid that no more tribute would be sent to Baghdad. Nikephoros expected war, and got it. An initial campaign by "the Saracens" in 803 was followed in 806 by a vast incursion into Anatolia, with al-Rashid personally leading an army of more than 100,000 men as far as Tyana in western Cappadocia. Nikephoros had now to purchase peace at the price of 50,000 gold pieces.

The fragmentation of the Abbasid empire

Stretching from Spain to India, the Abbasid empire was too long to remain centralized and intact. Spain had been lost to an Umayyad holdout already in the 750s, and in al-Rashid's reign the western half of North Africa followed suit. Idris ibn Abdullah, who claimed to be a descendant of Ali, had declared himself an autonomous ruler of Morocco in 788. For the next two hundred years the proto-Shiite Idrisids ruled the land from their capital at Fez, situated in the western foothills of the Atlas mountains and some eighty miles from the Mediterranean coast. It was under the Idrisids that Arabic became the language of the cities and towns of Morocco, while Berber remained the language of much of the countryside. Because taxes from the *maghreb* were a small part of their revenues the loss of Morocco did not greatly disturb the Abbasid califs in Baghdad.

An intractable problem for the Abbasids, as for many other imperial regimes, was the recruitment and retention of a military force large enough to defend the empire and maintain its cohesion. Young men from urban populations were less likely to follow a military career than were men from uncivilized lands. Until late in the seventh century military manpower had been supplied primarily by Arabic tribesmen, most of whom were easily converted into effective troops. By the middle of the eighth century the empire was too large to be defended by Arabians, and the califs depended increasingly on Berbers and Khurasanites. Beyond the Abbasid frontiers in the northeast were nomadic tribes that spoke one or another of the Turkish dialects (Turkish belongs to the Altaic language family). Because of the demands of nomadic life all of the Turkish tribesmen were experienced both in riding and in handling weapons, and at the age of four or five a Turkish boy was taught to ride and to control a horse. In the eighth century most Turkish tribesmen had begun using stirrups - an innovation that originated in China - while Arabians still mostly rode without them. The Turkish tribes were a rich source of military recruits, but instead of hiring mature tribesmen the califs found it preferable to purchase Turkish boys as slaves (because the boys were not Muslims, they could be enslaved). During adolescence the boys were trained to be professional cavalrymen. Such a professional soldier was called, in Arabic, a *mamlūk* ("owned"). By the time they finished their training the mamluks were in fact no longer "owned": during the course of their training they were converted to Islam and were then manumitted. As freedmen, however, they were completely dependent upon the calif and his officers for support, and were therefore the calif's loyal employees in a way that other troops were not. The calif al-Mu'tasim (833-843) was the first of the Abbasids to employ Turkish mamluks in significant numbers.

What worked on the imperial level, however, also worked on the regional level. When the amir of a province acquired mamluk troops for himself they became his own private army.

The amirs became powers in their own right, in effect establishing local dynasties, and their subordination to the Abbasids became merely nominal. An early blow to Abbasid power was the loss of Egypt. In 868 Ahmad ibn Tulun, a Turkish officer whom the calif had appointed as military commander in Egypt, declared himself ruler of that rich and populous country. By the end of the ninth century the actual power of the Abbasids extended no further east than Isfahan, and the entire Abbasid realm was only a third the size that it had been under al-Rashid.[26]

The evolution of Shiah Islam: "Seveners" (Ismailis) and "Twelvers"

Between ca. 765 and ca. 950 the *shī'atu 'Alī* was enriched with strong eschatological beliefs, and these have ever since been at the heart of Shiah Islam. The sixth Imam of the proto-Shiites was Jaf'ar ibn Muhammad al-Sadīq (702-765), a nephew of Zaid ibn Ali and a great-great-great-grandson of the Prophet. Unlike his uncle, al-Sadiq led no revolts but spent his life at Medina, where he led the faithful in prayer and where pilgrims from all the Muslim world consulted him about the Prophet and about Sharia (evidently al-Sadiq did much to develop jurisprudence in Shiah Islam). He was so respected for both his learning and piety that he may have set the bar for the Imamate too high. When al-Sadiq died in 765 ("poisoned by the calif," so the faithful believed) he was succeeded by his second son, Musa al-Kadhim. Some of the faithful, however, were displeased with Musa al-Kadhim and refused to acknowledge him as their Imam. They claimed that al-Sadiq had intended to be succeeded by one of his older sons, Ismail. Ismail had not been seen for years, and al-Kadhim's critics explained that Ismail was in *ghaib* (hiding, or "occultation"), having been sent there by al-Sadiq in order to preserve the boy from rivals.

Over time this explanation of Ismail's absence grew into the eschatological doctrine that Ismail is still alive and in occultation, that he is the last true Imam, and that at the End of Time he will - in the company of Jesus ('Isa) - return to judge and rule the world. Ismail is, for those who believe in him, *al-mahdī*, "the Guided One." Because Ismail was supposedly the seventh Imam, those who believe in his continued existence (and in his eventual return from occultation) are often called "Seveners." In retrospect we can say that because of their eschatological beliefs the Ismaili "Seveners," although a quite small minority, were the first fully Shiite community. Early in the tenth century the Nizari sect of Ismailis emerged in North Africa. These Ismailis believe that Ismail's genealogical line continued after his occultation, and that it produced the Fatimid dynasty of Egypt. By the end of the Fatimid califate the Nizari had become dominant within the Ismaili or "Sevener" sect, and so they remain today. They are now led by the forty-ninth Imam, Karim al-Husayni.[27]

What would eventually become the mainstream branch of Shiiites, today a much larger community than the Seveners, began with an eschatology very similar to that of the Seveners. When al-Sadiq died in 765 this branch had recognized his younger son, Musa al-Kadhim, as their Imam, and continued to so regard al-Kadhim's son, grandson, and further descendants. In the early 870s the incumbent Imam was Hasan ibn Ali, and it was his misfortune that by this time the Abbasids had decided to put an end to the Imamate at Medina. For much of his short adulthood Hasan was jailed by the Abbasid calif, and soon after his release he died at the young age of twenty-eight (allegedly poisoned, as all Imams allegedly were, by the calif's minions). Hasan did, however, have a son: Muhammad ibn Hasan, who was five years old and who for a

day or two after his father's death was the twelfth Imam. The child was last seen at his father's funeral, and the Imamate at Medina came to an end.

Muhammad ibn Hasan's actual fate is unknown, but the faithful came to believe that to save himself from his Abbasid enemies the child fled to the wilderness. From his hiding-place he was supposed to communicate with the outside world through a *safîr* ("messenger"), who alone knew where the Imam was hiding. In 941 the fourth successive *safîr* reported to the faithful that ibn Hasan had gone into permanent "occultation." Most Shiites expect that at the End of Time Muhammad ibn Hasan will return as al-Mahdi, again in the company of Jesus. Because in the Shiite mainstream Muhammad ibn Hasan was the twelfth Imam, "Twelvers" is a common name for those who believe that he did not die but remains in occultation and will some day return in glory.

The Twelvers were not an important branch of Shiite Islam until early in the sixteenth century, when Ismail I founded the Safavid dynasty in Iran and violently established Twelver Shiah as the religion of his empire. As a result of that establishment, for the last five hundred years most Iranians have been Twelver Shiites (prior to Ismail's reign, most Muslims in Iran had been Sunnis). While the Seveners and the Twelvers look forward to different Imams returning from occultation as the Mahdi, both Shiite groups remain fierce in their loyalty to the memories of Ali and his descendants, and in their hatred of those who opposed the house of Ali.

The ideology and beliefs of Shiite Islam and especially of the Twelvers were largely spelled out by writers in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Most important were "the Four Books," which among other things examine the Quran and set out for Shiites an "esoteric" meaning of various suras. The last of the Four Books was written by Sheik Muhammad at-Tusi (d. 1067), and is titled "The Clear-Sighted View of the Divergences of Tradition."[28]

The Samanid amirate and the beginning of a Persian literary culture

Long before Shiah Islam was established there, Iran was a very important contributor to mainstream or Sunni Islam. While the Abbasid califs lost some of their power in the ninth century, native Iranian (Persian) powers prospered. After al-Rashid's death the califate was contested by two of his sons, and the victor was Abu Jafr al-Mamun (813-833), al-Rashid's son by a Persian wife. Troops from Khurasan contributed much to al-Mamun's victory, and he rewarded several of his Persian-speaking supporters with prestigious appointments. The most important of these supporters were the Samanids. In the eighth century Saman Khuda, who was born to a distinguished Zoroastrian family in Afghanistan (Bactria), had joined the Muslim amir's court in Merv and converted to Islam. Four of Saman Khuda's grandsons were especially helpful to al-Mamun, and he repaid them by appointing them as amirs of large provinces in eastern Iran and central Asia. Although the Samanids remained nominally subject to the calif in Baghdad they were de facto autonomous rulers, residing in their fine capitals at Balkh, Herat, Bukhara and Samarkand. Their domain covered central and eastern Iran along with all that is now Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkestan. The political and military zenith of the Samanid dynasty was reached under Ismail I (892-907), whose capital was Bukhara, now in southeastern Uzkekistan. The dynasty lasted until 999, when the Samanid amir was defeated and Bukhara was captured by a Turkish general who launched the short-lived Ghaznavid empire..

Important linguistic, literary and cultural changes took place under the later Samanid amirs. The Samanids had all along kept a staff of writers and scholars at Bukhara. Although Persian was the spoken language at the court, initially the language of record-keeping and of all other reading and writing was necessarily Arabic. Thus Muhammad al-Bukhari (810-870), one of the luminaries of Bukhara, wrote in Arabic his *Sahih*, which among Sunni Muslims everywhere is still the most respected collection of Hadith.

By the end of the ninth century, Samanid scribes had also begun using a modified Arabic script to write their own Persian language. The modification included the addition of four more letters to the Arabic alphabet in order to express Persian phonemes that were absent in the Arabic language. Adoption of the Arabic alphabet allowed Persian to become a literary language. By the Samanid period Persian had been occasionally written for fourteen hundred years, but in scripts so complicated that they could scarcely be read by anyone without a long education as a scribe. In the sixth century BC Darius the Great had ordered his scribes to set up the very first Persian inscription. To do so, they necessarily used the cuneiform script that had long been employed for the royal inscriptions of Mesopotamian kings (cuneiform was a syllabary, not an alphabet). Only a few dozen Old Persian inscriptions have survived. The first alphabetic script used for the Persian language was devised in the third century CE. At that time Zoroastrian scribes and scholars began writing, in their Pahlavi (Middle Persian) language, commentaries on the Avesta. The scholars used a clumsy alphabet known as the "Book Pahlavi script." This script was derived from the Aramaic alphabet but relied heavily on heterograms. For the average Iranian the Book Pahlavi script was virtually indecipherable.

In contrast to its predecessors, the Arabic alphabet was a simple and efficient writing system, and it was quickly mastered by thousands of Persian speakers. By the late ninth century, when the new script was first employed for writing Persian, the Persian language had been enriched by the addition of many Arabic words, just as Old English was enriched by French words after England fell to William the Conqueror in 1066. The enriched Persian language is known to philologists as New Persian, or Farsi (the Arabic word for "Persian"). From the ninth century until today Persian has changed far less than has English or any of the European languages.

The innovation of an efficient script soon led to the beginnings of Persian literature, although this happened only toward the end of the Samanid amirate. In the tenth century bilingual scholars began to translate into Persian the essential Arabic works. Most important was the Quran itself, along with al-Tabari's commentary (*tafsir*). The task was accomplished by a group of Sunni scholars that the Samanid amir Mansur bin Nuh, late in the tenth century, assembled at Bukhara. The Quran had always been read and recited in Arabic, and to translate it into another language was unprecedented (today many Persian translations of the Quran are available). The Samanid scholars' translation, done in the Khurasan dialect of Persian, was careful and elegant.[29]

The translations of Arabic works were soon followed by original compositions in Persian. In the first decades of the tenth century a poet named Abu Abdullah Rudaki evidently composed much Persian poetry at the Bukhara court, but only a few quotations from it have survived.

Another early Persian poet, Abu Mansur Daqiqi, is just as obscure. The first Persian poet whose work has been preserved was Hakim Abu al-Qasim Ferdowsi of Tus (ca. 940-1020). Ferdowsi wrote his enormous *Shāhnāmeh* ("Book of Kings") in the cities of Tus and Ghazna. The *Shahnameh* told the myths and legends of Iran from the beginning, when Kaiúmers - who dressed in the skins of wild animals - ruled the world, and when Ormuzd (Ahura Mazda) and Ahriman contested with each other for the souls of men. Through more than a hundred thousand lines the *Shahnameh* continued the story of Iran to the Islamic conquest. It is a proud recital of the glory of pre-Islamic Iran, and so a response to Arabic triumphalism.

Expansion of Muslim rule into Sicily and southern Italy

In or near the year 800 Harun al-Rashid in Baghdad appointed Ibrahim ibn al-Aghlab as the amir of *Ifriqiyah*, roughly modern Tunisia, western Libya and eastern Algeria. So began the Aghlabid dynasty, which was to prosper for over a hundred years. Although nominally subject to the Abbasid califs, the Aghlabids were so far to the west of Baghdad that from the outset they were virtually autonomous. Their base was initially at Tunis, just outside of Carthage, but to better control the interior they moved the capital to the newly built city of Kairouan, away from the coast and a hundred miles to the south of Tunis.

Ibrahim ibn al-Aghlab and his family were descended from an Arabic tribe, and the Aghlabid government in Kairouan was clearly and consistently Arabic. This caused some friction with the Berber tribes of the *maghreb*, and the Aghlabid amirs had occasionally to deal with Berber revolts. An especially serious revolt broke out late in the ninth century. Ultimately most of the Aghlabids' Berber subjects aligned themselves with the Fatimids of Egypt, whose Islamic tradition was Shiite rather than Sunni, and in 909 the Aghlabids were overthrown in favor of a Fatimid and Shiite dynasty.

In their heyday, the Aghlabids enjoyed great success in extending their empire to Sicily and southern Italy. These lands were then under Byzantine control, having been re-conquered by Justinian in the sixth century. The Aghlabid aggression began with raids on coastal cities, but in 827 became more ambitious. Euphemios, who commanded the Byzantine fleet, rebelled against his superior, the general (*strategos*) Constantine, in hopes of taking control of Sicily. When Euphemios recognized that he could not succeed by himself he sought help from the Aghlabid amir and got it. On July 15 of 827 the Aghlabids won a decisive victory over Constantine's forces at Mazara, on the western tip of Sicily. Euphemios, no longer useful, was pushed aside and over the following decades the Aghlabids extended their control eastward, taking Palermo in 831 and Messina in 843.

Muslim control of Sicily lasted for two hundred and fifty years. The controlling power was first the Aghlabid dynasty, then the Fatimids, and in the eleventh century the Kalbids, a native Sicilian family. Altogether this was a prosperous time for Sicily, and Palermo became one of the great cities of the Mediterranean. As elsewhere, the Muslim rulers of Sicily focused on receiving the *jizya* from their new subjects, and were religiously tolerant. In the eleventh century most of the population in eastern Sicily was still Christian, worshiping either in Greek or in Latin, and even in the western part of the island Christians were a sizeable minority.

The southern Italian coast - nominally but not actually under Byzantine control - was vulnerable to raids by the Aghlabids. As in Sicily, these were at first plundering expeditions, but on the southeastern coast of the peninsula the Muslims conquered Bari and Taranto and established emirates that lasted for more than a generation. In 846 an Aghlabid fleet first attacked Lazio (Latium) and advanced on Rome. The walls of Rome protected the city, but what lay outside the walls was plundered. The raids continued during the ninth century, causing the popes either to make alliances in hopes of driving the Muslims back from Lazio or to pay the aggressors tribute as the price of protection. The great basilica of St. Paul's Outside the Walls (San Paolo fuori le Mura) was one of the casualties of the Muslim raids. When Basil the Macedonian became emperor in Byzantium in 867 he decided to re-take southern Italy from "the Saracens." Bari fell to the Byzantines and became the seat of the Byzantine Catepan (governor). In 964 the Byzantine emperor (Nikephoros II Phokas) sent a huge fleet and army to take Messina, but the expedition failed. Christian rulers did not re-establish themselves in Sicily until the Normans did so in the eleventh century.

The Fatimids

In 909 Abdullah al-Mahdi Billah led a revolt against the Aghlabids and took control of Tunisia. An Ismaili Shiite, Abdullah claimed to be descended from the Prophet through Fatima and Ali. This claim was Abdullah's chief asset, and is reflected in the Fatimid name. As a Shiite, he did not recognize the legitimacy of the Abbasids, and declared himself the calif, or the true successor of the Prophet. Although the Fatimids were not the first Shiite dynasty (the Idrisids of Morocco preceded them by more than a century), they were the only Shiite califate.

The descendants of Abdullah al-Mahdi Billah had ambitions beyond the Maghreb. In 969 the Fatimid calif, al-Mu'izz, dispatched his best general, Gawhar, against the weak ruler of Egypt. Gawhar defeated his opponent and seized his capital, Fustat. Located on the right (east) bank of the Nile, just south of the Delta, Fustat had been the capital of the Muslim administration ever since Amr ibn al-As had conquered Egypt in 641.[30] By the tenth century Fustat was a large city, with at least 100,000 inhabitants. Although many of these were Jewish or Christian, the Muslim population of Fustat was larger and was thoroughly Sunni. In order to keep his Shiite troops away from Sunni influences, Gawhar decided to build a small town a short distance north of Fustat. He named the new town *Kāhira*, for the planet Mars (which was bright in the sky at the time of Gawhar's conquest). In 971 Calif al-Mu'izz moved the Fatimid capital from Tunisia to Egypt, and took up residence in Kāhira, which we know today as Cairo. At his death, al-Mu'izz was succeeded by his son, Nizar al-Azīz (ruled 975-996), who extended Fatimid control through Palestine and into Syria.

The Fatimids were not liked by their Sunni Muslim subjects. Therefore the first Fatimid califs in Egypt sought support from its Jewish population, and especially from Coptic Christians, who in Egypt were still were more numerous than Muslims. This changed abruptly but briefly under the mad al-Hakim (996-1021), who antagonized Judaeans and Christians as well as Sunni Muslims. Late in his califate al-Hakim imagined himself to be the intermediary between God and humanity. He disappeared in 1017, and the Druze sect in the Levant believes that he remains in occultation, along with Hamza ibn Ali, an Ismaili mystic who was al-Hakim's advisor. Al-Hakim's successors reverted to the less radical and more tolerant policies of his

predecessors.

Conversion of the *ahl al-dhimmah* to Islam

Islam was not a proselytizing religion. In this respect, as in several others, Islam had more in common with Judaism than with Christianity (Christians believed that Jesus had commanded them to convert all nations to Christianity, because only baptized Christians would enter Heaven on Judgement Day). The Muslims had exerted themselves to convert, often by force, the idolaters in the Arabian peninsula, but did not think themselves obliged to convert the People of the Book. Muhammad's prophecies had made it quite clear that whereas idolaters were headed to Hell, Judaeans and Christians - so long as they were devout - would enter Paradise alongside Muslims.[31] The growth of Islam was therefore mostly a result of its attractions to the Dhimmis whom the Muslims ruled. The early Abbasids, for example, made it a policy to appoint Muslims to the imperial bureaucracy (under the Umayyads most of the bureaucrats had been Christian), and the new policy encouraged a significant number of upper-class Christians to convert to Islam.

Arabization, as we have seen, had advanced considerably already in Umayyad times and by the late ninth century was far along not only in Iraq and the Levant but also in Egypt and - apparently - in North Africa. The widespread use of the Arabic language, however, did not of itself encourage conversion to Islam. In the califate of Harun al-Rashid more of his Arabic-speaking subjects seem to have been Christian or Jewish than Muslim. The one place in which the Arabic language and the Islamic religion may have spread more or less in tandem was North Africa. Christianity was shallowly rooted there, especially in the villages and among the nomadic tribes, in part because the Christian Bible had never been translated into either Punic or Berber. When North African villagers learned Arabic they could for the first time hear God's words read in a language that they could understand, and by the ninth century many of them had apparently converted to Islam.[32]

Elsewhere, conversion to Islam was evidently not so rapid. According to Muhammad al-Muqaddasi, an Arabic geographer describing the world that he knew ca. 990, most people in Egypt at that time were Christians, who worshiped God in their traditional Coptic language (that they still spoke Coptic in everyday life is unlikely). Because al-Muqaddasi found Egypt's situation worth remarking, we may guess that in Iraq, Syra and Palestine most people were Muslims by the end of the tenth century, but the pace of conversion from either Judaism or Christianity to Islam is impossible to establish. Since no census figures are available for either the Umayyad or the Abbasid period estimates are largely guesswork. Historians of architecture, noting the increasing number and size of mosques, have estimated the number of worshipers that the mosques could accommodate. Other historians have based their estimates on the proportion of demonstrably Muslim names in a given population. It is agreed that conversion to Islam was more rapid in the cities than in rural villages, but that even in the cities it was a slow process, occurring over centuries. Richard Fletcher has recently generalized that in the cities of the Islamic world somewhere between 75% and 90% of the population "eventually" became Muslim, and that conversion "was probably at its most intense between c. 750 and c. 950."[33] But if much of the rural population still adhered to its old faiths - most often Christianity - it may be that even in the middle of the tenth century, three hundred years after the conquests under Umar, half of

the Abbasids' subjects were still Dhimmis.

The *dār al-islām* and the *dār al-harb*

Perhaps because the Muslim world had become more complex with decentralization, Muslim officials, writers and scholars began in the ninth century to dichotomize the world that they knew in religious rather than in political terms. The lands that were already ruled by Muslims - whether by the calif directly or by the several amirs - and in which Islamic law prevailed were the *dār al-islām*, the "House of Islam." Beyond the Dar al-Islam was the *dār al-harb*, the "House of War": the lands that were not yet under Muslim control. The two terms, neither of which appears either in the Quran or in the *hadith*, apparently came into use early in the Abbasid period. They reflected the Muslims' expectation that eventually all the world would be ruled by Muslims and their hope that all people would embrace Islam. The terms did not imply that Islam would be forced upon the People of the Book. As Muslims saw it, conquest of the lands of the Dar al-Harb would merely make it *possible* for the people in those lands to choose Islam, if God so willed. For almost a millennium the Dar al-Islam and the Dar al-Harb remained important terms and concepts in Muslim perspectives on the world, even as the world became much larger and more intractable than anyone in Abbasid times could have imagined.

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1. Ochsenwsald and Fisher 2004, p. 47.

2. Jenkins 1969, p. 44.

3. Hawting 2000, pp. 72-73.

4. Hassan had died at Medina in 669, leaving Hussein as head of the family.

[5] For a balanced overview of Shiah Islam, especially in Iran, see Yann Richard, *Shi'ite Islam* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995. Translated from the French edition of 1991 by Antonia Nevill).

6. Hawting 2000, p, 59.

7. Quran 17:1 (Dawood).

8. On this anti-Christian significance of the Dome of the Rock see Lewis 1997, pp. 68-70.

9. See Hawting 2000, 59-60.

10. Ochsenwald and Fisher 2004, p. 51.

11. Prior to 732 Charles had been the real power in the Merovingian kingdom, but had contented himself with the position of "Mayor of the Palace," nominally under King Clotaire IV. But soon after the Battle of Poitiers Charles Martel took the title of king in his own right, and so began the Carolingian dynasty.

12. Ochsenwald and Fisher 2004, pp. 52-53.

13. Lewis 1997, p. 184: "Perhaps the most astonishing example of bureaucratic continuity is the situation after the Arab Muslim conquests of the seventh century. The Persian Empire ceased to exist, and vast lands were wrested from the Byzantines and incorporated in a new Arab Islamic empire. And yet, in spite of these changes, the record of the Egyptian papyri makes it clear that as far as the day-to-day business of government was concerned, nothing changed. The Egyptian Christian officials continued to collect the same taxes according to the same rules, to write the same administrative documents, even dating them by the old Egyptian Christian era, exactly as they had done before. The ultimate destination of the revenues changed; everything else remained the same. It is only gradually, in the course of more than a century, that the documents show real change taking place in the bureaucracy. It is not until comparatively late that bilingual papyri begin to appear, written in both Greek and Arabic. Then, in the course of time, there are more Arabic, fewer Greek documents, until, by the late eighth century, Greek entirely disappears, and only Arabic papyri are found. From literary evidence, it seems likely that much the same was happening in Syria and Iraq, and also in the East, where Arabic replaced the old Persian script and language."

14. Samir 1990, p. 446: the Arabization of the population - Muslim, Jewish and Christian - in Syria and Palestine was substantially complete by the ninth century, and in North Africa by the tenth century.

15. Mazdians continued to write in Pahlavi, using the traditional Pahlavi script. One of the most important books for Mazda-worshipers was the Denkart, which a Mazdian high priest named Atur-farnbag began compiling in the early ninth century, perhaps in western Iran.

16. In Turkey, the Turkish language continued to be written in the Arabic alphabet until the early twentieth century, when Ataturk - in his efforts to Westernize Turkish society - ordered the use of the Roman alphabet.

17. See, for example, Quran 4:88; 5:40-42; 6:59 and 125; 9:51; 10:99-100; 11:34 and 117-119; 17:16; 42:44; 81:28-29.

[18] Richard, *Shi'ite Islam*, p. 6.

19. The Hashemite monarchs enthroned in Iraq and Transjordan after World War I were descended from this Hashimite clan (the *e* represents an older, and the *i* a more recent convention in transcribing Arabic vowels).

20. On the overthrow of the Umayyads see Hawting 2000, pp. 104-119.

21. For a comprehensive description of Umayyad Spain see Wasserstein 1993.

22. Ochsenwald and Fisher 2004, p. 70.

23. The tale is set in a Sassanid palace, where Scheherazade (Pers. *Shahrazad*) saves her life by telling stories. Some of the stories were originally written in Pahlavi (Middle Persian), but their translation into Arabic, and much elaboration, took place in ninth-century Baghdad.

24. Fletcher 2003, p. 51.

25. Ochsenwald and Fisher 2004, p. 65.

26. On the Tahirids and subsequent Iranian dynasties see Lewis 1997, pp. 80-81. For shrinkage of the Abbasid empire in the ninth century see map at p. 54 in Ochsenwald and Fisher 2004.

27. Karim al-Husayni, who is a graduate of Harvard University, is also known as Aga Khan IV. He was born in 1936. His succession to the Imamate on his father's death in July of 1957 necessitated an interruption of his education at Harvard.

[28] For the Four Books and their Arabic titles see Richard 1995, pp. 6-7.

29. Commentaries indicate that private translations into Persian had been made before Mansur bin Nuh authorized and sponsored a published translation of much higher quality. I thank Professor Abdulaziz Sachedina for this information.

30. The location, because it offered a relatively easy crossing of the Nile, had been of strategic importance since the 5th century BC, when the Persians built there a fortress named Babylon-on-the Nile. In 641 Amr Ibn al-As captured "Babylon," and alongside it built a purely Muslim town - Fustat - to house an Arabic garrison.

31. See especially Quran 5:65-69 and 2:62 (qualified at 2:111-13).

32. On conversion to Islam in North Africa see Courbage and Fargues 1998, p. 32: "Islam never eliminated Judaism - secular subjection to the Christian power had long accustomed the Jewish community to minority status - but it destroyed Christianity."

33. Fletcher 2003, pp. 36-37.