

Chapter Twenty-One

The Arabian Empire from the Death of Umar through the Early Abbasids

The califate of ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān (644-656)

In 644, at the age of sixty-two, Umar was murdered by one of his slaves.¹ Umar had set up at Medina a council of six men to act during an interregnum, and so at his death the councillors were responsible for naming his successor. They selected one of their number, the seventy-year-old ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān, as the next *khalīfah*. Uthman’s strongest competitor for the position of calif was Ali, a fellow member of the council but much younger than Uthman. Ali was greatly disappointed at having been passed over, and to this personal rivalry between Uthman and Ali has been retrojected (somewhat anachronistically) the fundamental division between Sunni and Shiite Muslims. Sunni Muslims regard Uthman as one of “the Four Rightly Guided Califs” and Sunni traditions about him are generally, although not entirely, favorable. In contrast, the Shiites (the *shī‘atu ‘Alī* or the “party of Ali”) view Ali as the first Imam and as the first true calif, and they suppose that Uthman was an unmixed evil.

Uthman’s credentials for the califate were considerable. He was by birth a member of the Umayyads, the most powerful and prestigious clan of the Quraysh tribe. His conversion to Islam before 620, when he had already reached middle age, was at the time an embarrassment to the clan and a great boost to Muhammad. In recognition of this support, the Prophet gave his daughter Ruqayya to Uthman in marriage, and in 628 entrusted to Uthman the dangerous task of trying to persuade the Quraysh to allow Muhammad to return to Mecca in order to make the circumambulation of the Ka‘ba. In that negotiation Uthman was unsuccessful, but when Mecca was taken over by Muhammad in 630 the Umayyad clan converted wholesale to Islam and was pleased that one of its members enjoyed so high a rank among the Prophet’s advisors. Finally, for years Uthman had also served as the Prophet’s secretary. By 644 Uthman was therefore one of the most senior and eminent men in the Muslim *umma*. In addition to his own accomplishments and ties to the Prophet, he was fortified by Umayyads in high places, and especially by his second cousin, the brilliant Mu‘āwiya, whom Umar had just made governor of Syria. As calif, Uthman necessarily depended heavily on his kinsmen, bringing some of them to Medina and appointing others to administer newly conquered lands. Prominent Muslims from other clans and tribes - including Aisha, one of Muhammad’s widows - made no secret of their unhappiness with Uthman.

Uthman’s redaction of the Quran

Although Muhammad’s freedman Zayd and other close associates and secretaries had recorded in writing all of the prophecies that Muhammad delivered, many Muslims knew by heart most if not all of the prophecies (the Quran is shorter than the Christian New Testament, and its language more memorable). Apparently Muhammad envisaged that at some point his prophecies would be gathered into a book, but no final collection was made during his lifetime: because his followers expected that so long as he lived he would continue to receive revelations from God, no full corpus of his prophecies could be produced until after his death.

By the califate of Umar at least four such collections had begun to circulate, but they differed considerably in length and content. These written collections were less important than the oral recitations, which often took place after the *salat* prayers. But because the written collections did not agree, Uthman took it upon himself to supervise the production of an authorized text of Muhammad's prophecies. As calif, Uthman ordered the destruction of the earlier collections, and published the text of the Quran that subsequently became familiar to all Muslims. Uthman's edition of the Quran contained 114 prophecies, each prophecy constituting a single chapter or *sūrah*. Except for the first sura, which is a very brief prayer and a preamble, the prophecies are arranged according to length, the 114th being the shortest sura.

The Quran was the first book published in the Arabic language, and for a very long time it was the only such book. Late in the Umayyad califate (661-750) a few books were translated from Greek and Persian into Arabic but these translations were made for the calif and his advisors and so were not published. Apparently many Muslims in the Umayyad period supposed that if another book in Arabic were to be published it would compete with the Quran as an authority, and the transmission of texts therefore remained oral, as it had always been in Arabic society. The inhibition against publication of books in Arabic may have begun to lapse in the second quarter of the eighth century, with the composition of literary epistles by secretaries of the calif.² Even these literary productions, however, were made available only to a few select readers. For well over a century, then, the Quran was the only Arabic book in existence.

Although the written text of the Quran that Uthman produced was necessarily accepted as authoritative, it did not change the oral character of Muhammad's prophecies. The word *qur'ān* means "recitation," and the prophecies were intended to be spoken aloud. In the decades after Muhammad's death Muslims regularly recited his prophecies when gathered for communal prayer. Although after Uthman's redaction of the Quran a literate Muslim could refer to the written text in order to be certain of the Prophet's exact words, in worship a sura would be recited from memory rather than read from a script.

Muslim conquests in North Africa (the Maghreb) and designs on Constantinople

Despite internal divisions, the Muslims significantly extended their empire during Uthman's califate. The principal expansion in these years was into North Africa: the lands along the Mediterranean in what is today western Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia. This territory was known to the Romans as *Africa*, and the Arabians borrowed the Latin name as *Ifrique*. Their traditional Arabic name for North Africa, however, was *al-maghreb*, "the west." The Libyan coast was sparsely settled and unclaimed by an organized state (the only North African territory effectively controlled by the Byzantine empire was the rich agricultural land south and west of Carthage). Linguistically, North Africa was something of a hodge-podge. The Germanic Vandal language was almost extinct, hardly surviving Justinian's demolition of the Vandal kingdom. In the cities the usual languages were Greek and Latin, but in the villages the old Punic (Phoenician) language held on, and the nomadic tribesmen spoke Berber, as they always had. The religious picture was also varied. In the seventh century Judaism - both Talmudic and non-Talmudic - was strong in several cities, but most of the North African population was Christian. The Christians were led by 470 North African bishops, but were divided into many competing sects: Orthodox, Arian, Monophysite, Donatist, and more besides. Many of the Berber tribes had still

been pagan in the early fifth century, but by the seventh had apparently adopted some form - more often Donatist than Orthodox - of Christianity.

The Muslim conquest of the Maghreb is poorly documented. Byzantine sources do provide some information on the exarchate of Carthage, or what today is Tunisia. In 647 the exarchate capitulated to Muslim warlords, who held it for the next eighteen years. Although Arabian troops played a role in the taking of North Africa, apparently Berber tribesmen were even more important. Some of the Berber tribes resisted the Muslims stoutly, but others - like many of the Arabic bedouin tribes in the years just before Muhammad's death - seem to have "converted" to Islam through the negotiations of their chiefs. Nominally the Berber tribes were Christian, but they wore their Christianity loosely and were alert to other opportunities. When employment was offered by the Muslims, some Berber chiefs converted and made thousands of their warriors available.

Although Uthman himself did not participate in the wars fought by the Muslims, his kinsman Muawiya - the governor of Syria, resident in Damascus - was an inveterate campaigner. Devout in his faith, Muawiya believed it was God's will that the Byzantine empire come to an end and that the Arabian empire be extended through all the lands still controlled by Constans II (641-668). This would of course require that Muawiya take Constantinople itself, and toward that end he began making yearly expeditions into Anatolia, crossing the Tauros mountains and driving the Byzantine troops out of one fortified place after another. The Anatolians, however, were not so easily conquered as the people of the Levant: speaking Greek, adhering mostly to the Orthodox church, and organized into military *themes*, the Anatolians generally did not cooperate with the Muslims. Muawiya accordingly decided that his God-given mission could not be completed unless he first built a fleet and seized control of the seas from Constans. Umar had prohibited the Muslims from going to sea, but Uthman was persuaded by his cousin and gave him permission to construct a large fleet.³ In 655 Muawiya's fleet confronted Constans off the coast of Lycia, and was victorious. The way to Constantinople seemed open.

The death of Uthman and the troubled califate of 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib (656-661)

But at this juncture fate intervened on the side of the Byzantines. When one of Abu Bakr's sons was killed at Medina, many suspected that the Umayyad clan, if not Uthman himself, was responsible. In 656 the local dissidents at Medina, strengthened by rebels who had arrived from Iraq and Egypt, placed Uthman's house under siege. Partisans led by Muhammad, another son of Abu Bakr, broke into the house and killed the aged calif.

Because Ali had made no secret of his desire to be the next calif, many of the Umayyad clan believed that he had engineered the uprising and the murder of their kinsman. In deciding upon a successor to Uthman the Muslim leadership was therefore riven by factions. The majority eventually favored Ali and he was proclaimed calif, but the opposing faction and certainly the Umayyads favored Muawiya. As governor of Syria, second cousin of Uthman, and the most vigorous champion of the faith against the Christians of Byzantium, Muawiya's claims were strong, but he had no personal ties to the Prophet. Ali, in contrast, had not only been Muhammad's cousin, but was also married to Fātima, the daughter of Muhammad and Khadija. As Abu Talib's son, in his childhood and adolescence Ali's relationship to Muhammad was

almost that of a much younger brother, and during an extended drought and famine Ali lived with Muhammad and Khadija.⁴ That close affection lasted throughout Muhammad's lifetime, and tradition holds that because the Prophet had no surviving natural son he had before his death adopted Ali as his own son.

Given the circumstances in which he was chosen as Uthman's successor, Ali had many critics both at Medina and at large. Of the early critics Aisha was the most outspoken. Although she had also found much to criticize in Uthman, when he was killed she denounced Ali for conniving in the calif's murder, and called for partisans to join her in resisting Ali's rule. She and her supporters seized the city of Basrah in southern Iraq, and there late in 656 Ali had to confront her badly outnumbered band in the "Battle of the Camel" (so called because the fighting was fiercest around Aisha's camel). This was the first time that Muslims fought each other, and in his easy victory Ali was magnanimous both to Aisha and to those of her followers who survived. Aisha was thereafter confined to her quarters at Medina, but given a sumptuous pension.⁵ Ali himself, however, now found Medina too quarrelsome a place, and so moved to Kufa, the new Muslim city in Iraq. Although the califate was not destined to remain long in Kufa it would never return to Medina.

The First Civil War: Kharijites, Shiites, and the beginnings of Islamic sectarianism

What is conventionally called the First Civil War in the Muslim *umma* was factionalism on a far greater scale than the "Battle of the Camel." Muawiya, the powerful governor of Syria, was no friend of Aisha but was, like her, incensed at the selection of Ali as calif. Muawiya believed, and never abandoned his belief, that Ali had in some way been responsible for the murder of Uthman, who was Muawiya's kinsman. This crisis in Ali's califate is what deflected Muawiya's energies from the Byzantine empire to his own backyard. Instead of pursuing his plan to take Constantinople, Muawiya began to make himself an independent ruler in Damascus. The *jizya* from Syria he kept for himself, rather than forwarding it to Ali.

A military showdown between Ali and Muawiya was inevitable. Muawiya assembled a large army, with intentions of marching on Kufa, where Ali had taken up residence. In 657 Muawiya's men crossed the north Syrian desert to the Euphrates and headed downstream, while Ali's equally large army moved upstream along the river. The two armies met at Siffin, in northern Syria. The traditions about this "battle" at Siffin are almost hopelessly mythicized, a popular legend maintaining that Ali's men would have prevailed had not Muawiya's troops protected themselves with copies of the Quran, against which Ali's men would not strike. It seems that the "Battle of Siffin" was a drawn-out series of skirmishes between two armies that were reluctant to fight against each other. After a month of these skirmishes, and of negotiation between representatives of Ali and Muawiya, many of the troops mutinied and the two sides parted without a decisive battle.

Many of the mutineers became the Kharijites, "the seceders," and formed the first of what would eventually become dozens of Muslim sects. Important in the late seventh and the eighth century, and close to becoming mainstream Islam, the Kharijites then dwindled in number and are today a very minor sect. The original Kharijites believed that God wanted the Muslim *umma* to appoint either the most righteous Muslim as calif or to have no calif at all, and they found

neither Muawiya nor Ali worthy of the position. The secession of thousands and perhaps tens of thousands of troops badly tarnished the prestige of the califate. Although the hostility between Ali and Muawiya continued, the prize was no longer the religious title of calif (which Ali kept, and which Muawiya allowed him to keep), but something more mundane: power and tribute. In 659 Muawiya used his fleet to capture Alexandria and take over Egypt, depriving Ali of one of his most important provinces.

Embattled in his last years at Kufa, Ali was and remains a polarizing figure within Islam. He was the calif, but he had many enemies, some of them devout and some of them powerful. He also, obviously, had loyal followers, especially at Kufa and elsewhere in Iraq. It would be anachronistic to call these supporters of the living Ali “Shiites,” but etymologically Shiites are the “party of Ali,” the *shī‘atu ‘Alī*, and the dangers that beset Ali during his brief califate are an important part of the evolution of Shia Islam.

Muawiya’s califate (661-680) and the establishment of the Umayyad dynasty (661-750)

In 661 Ali was assassinated at Kufa by a Kharijite. Although Hassan, Ali’s oldest son by Fatima, was recognized at Kufa as the next calif, the wider Muslim leadership acquiesced in Muawiya’s claim on the califate. After a few months Hassan agreed to give up his claims, in return for a handsome pension from Muawiya and a palace at Medina.⁶ There Hassan lived happily ever after, marrying a hundred wives, although never more than four at any one time.

Although now elevated to the califate, Muawiya saw no reason to leave Damascus, where he had long been resident as governor of Syria. 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 Walīd’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 *dhimmi*. 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 hostility from the Muslims of 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 in 674, and for four summers Constantine's defenders on the walls of the city and the Byzantine fleet countered the efforts of the attackers. Most dramatic was the use of "Greek fire," evidently a petroleum projectile that the defenders aimed at Muawiya's ships and then ignited. After the campaigning season ended in 677, again with no success for the besiegers, the 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.⁷ 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 caliphs 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 Bosphorus. In 716 the Umayyad caliph Sulayman dispatched to Constantinople, under the command of his brother,⁸ 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 and its importance in Shiite Islam

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. Adding to the resentment was Yazid's reputation as a drunkard and wastrel. Those Muslims who disliked Yazid but were not averse to a dynastic succession *per se* declared that Hussein - Ali's oldest surviving son by Fatima⁹ (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 once again thrown into crisis. At Medina, Hussein's life was threatened by Umayyads, and he therefore betook himself to Mecca, where the inhabitants proclaimed him the city's *imam*. 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 from their city, where it had been brought by Ali, to Damascus. 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 there make a claim to the califate.

Hussein accepted the invitation and made his way toward Kufa, accompanied by several dozen 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 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," on the 10th day of Muharram in A. H. 61 (October of 680), and years later the massacre became a rallying cry in the coalescence of the Shiite tradition of Islam.

In 880 the last of Ali's descendants, the Twelfth Imam, died ("disappeared," in Shiite belief, and destined some day to reappear), but subsequent Shiites remained fierce both in their loyalty to the memories of Ali and Hussein, and in their hatred of those who opposed the house of Ali. In the eighth century Shiite Muslims inserted 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. In the twenty-five years preceding 680 this ideal 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 *umma* 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 Shiites, and the rest of the Muslim world thus arose as differences between loyalties. 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 Shiites, in contrast, as partisans of the memory of Ali and Hussein, vilified the Umayyads, venerated the "martyrs" at Karbala, and looked forward - after Hussein's infant son had grown to manhood - to the restoration of the califate to the descendants of Ali and Fatima. The Kharijites denounced both the house of Ali and the Umayyads. As the Kharijite and 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 the religious practices. Shiites, for example, pray three times a day instead of five times, believe that the Quran must be read on more than the literal level, and obey a collection of *hadith* somewhat different from the *hadith* accepted by Sunnis. Another idiosyncrasy of the Shiites is their permission of *mut'ah* (temporary marriage), a practice that Sunnis reject.¹⁰

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

‘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, became - after the accession of Yazid and the Karbala massacre - an opponent of the Umayyads and a claimant for the califate. He took over Mecca and much of the Hijaz, and until his death in 692 was 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.¹¹ 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).¹² 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.”¹³

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.¹⁴ 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 *dhimmi*. 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 Judaeian 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. The Visigoths were Arian Christians, and so distressed the Catholic Christians (as well as the Judaeans and the Christians of other "heretic" communions) of Spain. After his victory Tariq therefore went on to dismantle the Visigothic kingdom, reaching Toledo and south-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.¹⁵ 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 farthest that Muslim armies penetrated into northwestern Europe, and his victory secured for Charles the nickname, "the hammer": *tudites* in Latin, and *Martel* in the Germanic language of the Franks.¹⁶

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.¹⁷ 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 Buddhist majority and the Hindu minority 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 perhaps most people were Buddhist by 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 *dhimmi*. 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 many lands 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 or 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.¹⁸ 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. 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 *dhimmi* 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 were 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 townsman 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 *dhimmi* 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.¹⁹ 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: in 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 centers²⁰ - 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 - among other things, by the addition of four letters - 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. The poet Hakim Ferdowsi (940-1020) composed his epic *Shahnameh* in Farsi, using the modified Arabic alphabet. Thus began a proud and self-conscious Persian literary tradition (the *Shahnameh* was a celebration of the legends about the “ancient” or pre-Islamic rulers of Iran).²¹ Shortly after Ferdowsi published his epic, Muslim scholars translated the Quran into Persian and followed it with a Persian translation of al-Tabarī’s huge Arabic commentary on the Quran. 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,²² and Urdu in northwest India were written in the Arabic script.

The Iconoclasm

The success of Islam and - more dramatically - of the Arabian empire greatly influenced the history of Christianity. An early example of this influence is the episode that is conventionally called the Iconoclasm, or the Iconoclastic controversy. For most of the eighth century and almost half of the ninth, the Byzantine empire was riven by a struggle - often spiraling into violence and bloodshed - between those Christians who adored icons (the Greek word *eikon* meant “image”) and those who abhorred them. At issue in the conflict was what some Christians regarded as the worship of images, and what other Christians thought of as the pious veneration of statues and pictures - some of them endowed with miraculous power - of Jesus, Mary, the Apostles, the Christian martyrs, and various figures from the Old Testament.

From the early third century, and especially since the conversion of Constantine, many Christians had become accustomed to visual representations of scenes and persons described in the Bible. Visual representation had always been a salient characteristic of Greco-Roman civilization, and as pagans became Christians they brought with them their fondness for representational art in the service of religion. By the late fourth century statues, reliefs, mosaics and paintings had made their way into the churches, and by the seventh century it was common for a Christian in church to kneel and pray before an *eikon* of Jesus, Mary (these were especially popular), or one of the saints. Prayers before these images often were accompanied by the

lighting of a votive candle or the burning of a pinch of incense. It is very clear that many Christians, like their pagan predecessors, supposed that the image itself possessed a miraculous power to heal and to help. This belief had been powerfully abetted in 544, when a Sassanid attack on the city of Edessa was supposed to have been miraculously foiled by the *acheiropoieton* (“not made by human hands”) image of Jesus on a linen cloth. This cloth, which after 544 was celebrated and nicknamed the *mandylion* (“handkerchief” or “towel”), was supposed to have been brought to Edessa by the Apostle Thaddeus soon after Jesus’ Ascension into Heaven. In the wake of the Edessan “miracle,” other images in other cities were reported to have displayed similarly miraculous powers.

Although icons were found in most of the “Melkite” (Orthodox) churches of Egypt, the Levant and Mesopotamia, other communions were less friendly to icons. Any picture or statue of Jesus was anathema to the Paulicians in eastern Anatolia, a dualist sect that made its appearance in the middle of the seventh century and that flourished until the middle of the ninth, when tens of thousands of its members were slaughtered by their Orthodox opponents.²³ Monophysite and Nestorian Christians also were generally opposed to images in their churches, and were also more resistant than were Orthodox (or Catholic) Christians to the veneration of Mary as the Mother of God. It was especially in the Latin west and in the Greek-speaking churches of the Byzantine empire that Mariolatry flourished and that icons of her and of her divine son were the object of devotion. The higher clergy looked upon images as merely a means of instruction for the largely illiterate laity, but for much of this laity the images were in fact objects of worship.

In the Hijaz of pre-Islamic Arabia divine images were invariably “idols.” It was against idols - such as those of the three goddesses at Mecca - and against idolatry that most of Muhammad’s energies had been expended. His antipathy against images extended beyond the statues and figurines of the old gods and goddesses. Perhaps under the influence of Talmudic synagogues in the Hijaz, Muhammad denounced representational art of any kind. One of the *hadith* recounted the Prophet’s scolding of Aisha for having brought into the house a pillow embroidered with figures:

Narrated Aisha (mother of the faithful believers): I bought a cushion with pictures on it. When Allah’s Apostle saw it, he kept standing at the door and did not enter the house. I noticed the sign of disgust on his face, so I said, “O Allah’s Apostle, I repent to Allah and His Apostle. (Please let me know) what sin I have done.” Allah’s Apostle said, “The painters (*i.e.* owners) of these pictures will be punished on the Day of Resurrection. It will be said to them, ‘Put life in what you have created (*i.e.* painted).’” The Prophet added, “The angels do not enter a house where there are pictures.”²⁴

In none of the mosques, from the humblest to the great Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, did the Muslims install representational art, nor did most Muslims display any image in their homes.

The anti-iconic religion of their Muslim conquerors, reinforced by a similar aversion to images in Rabbinic Judaism, confirmed for many Christians in the east that icons as such were displeasing to God. For a long time the Muslim califs and their provincial governors made no effort to remove icons from churches: as protected *dhimmi*, the Christians were allowed to

worship as they chose in their churches. But in 723 the Umayyad calif Yazid II issued an edict ordering the destruction of all representational art throughout his empire.²⁵ Yazid's successor revoked the edict, but among Christians themselves the anxiety grew that venerating an icon was nothing less than idolatry. Iconoclasm, or "the breaking of icons," began among the Christian subjects of the Umayyad califs. From Iraq, Egypt and Syria, the movement spread to the Byzantine empire.

In 726, three years after the edict of Yazid II, the Byzantine emperor Leo III ordered the destruction of a statue of Jesus that had long been prominent in the Bronze Stoa of his palace at Constantinople. A crowd of monks and women gathered to protect the statue, and in the riot that followed the crowd killed the imperial officer in charge of the demolition (in retaliation Leo ordered the execution of the riot's ringleaders). The public outcry did not deter Leo from his convictions, and in 730 he assembled a small council of bishops to prohibit the veneration or even the display of icons in the churches. Attempts to enforce the edict were often met with resistance and in some places the icons were defended by armed rebels who had to be put down by the army. At his death in 741 Leo was succeeded by his son, Constantine V (741-775), an occasionally brilliant emperor who was also a fierce iconoclast. In 754 Constantine convoked what he called an ecumenical council. The 338 bishops in attendance (the pope, three Patriarchs, and many lesser bishops opposed the emperor and boycotted the council) issued a ringing denunciation of the images:

Supported by the Holy Scriptures and the Fathers, we declare unanimously in the name of the Holy Trinity, that there shall be rejected and removed and cursed out of the Christian Church every likeness which is made out of any material whatever.²⁶

The declaration was followed by riots, rebellions, murders, exiles, and executions, with the two sides demonstrating equal zeal for their cause. The empress Irene restored the images in 787, convoking a council at Nicaea toward that end, but they were banished again by a council convened by Leo V in 815. They were finally restored in 843 by the so-called Council of Orthodoxy.²⁷

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

While the eighth century brought religious turmoil to the Byzantine empire, to the Arabian empire it brought a dynastic change. 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 regard Zoroastrianism as 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 *mawālī* lacked some of the privileges and much of the prestige enjoyed by Muslims who were Arabian by birth.

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.²⁸ 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.²⁹

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 where the Tigris and Euphrates converge most closely in central Iraq) 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 Shiites (by 750 the "Shiite" name is appropriate) but only because it promised to bring down the Umayyad califate. Once the Abbasids were in control the Shiites naturally opposed them. A Shiite rebellion occurred under al-Mansur, and perhaps to prevent such a recurrence the next calif, al-Mahdi (775-785), 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.

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 Umayyad dynasty in Spain was fully independent of the Abbasids and maintained itself until the eleventh century.³⁰

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.³¹ 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 overwhelmingly Christian when Abd al-Rahman took over, and to balance the Christians he and his successors made an effort to attract Judaeans immigrants from the east. In the latter part of the eighth and the early ninth century several hundred thousand Judaeans came from Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East to Spain.

Troubles of the Byzantine empire

While the Umayyads still ruled in Damascus, at Constantinople Leo III (717-741) had established what has conventionally (although probably erroneously) been called the “Isaurian” dynasty of the Byzantine empire.³² The dynasty had begun well, but was then plagued by the Iconoclast controversy. At the death of Leo IV in 780 rule passed to his widow, the Athenian Irene, and to their son Constantine VI, still a child. Irene and Constantine VI ruled jointly until August of 797, when Irene ordered that her son be arrested and blinded, an atrocity that caused his death soon thereafter. Irene’s orders were perhaps religiously motivated: she was an Iconophile while Constantine was suspected of harboring Iconoclast sympathies.³³ As empress, Irene reigned alone from 797 to 802.

It was at this time that western Europe was finally severed from Constantinople. Although Italy, Gaul, Spain, and Britain had been (except for occasional and brief interludes) outside the empire ruled from Constantinople since the late fourth century, the fiction of a single “Roman empire” had been maintained all along. This ideal empire was ruled by one sovereign who was the viceroy of the Christ, and the inhabitants of the empire professed the Orthodox creed of Christianity. By the time of the Christ’s triumphant return, so it was believed, the entire world would be brought within the Roman empire and the True Church. The Byzantine emperors of the fifth and sixth centuries had regularly supported those Germanic kings (especially the Franks) who were “catholic” against their Arian enemies. And the Frankish kings

had with some seriousness regarded themselves as vassals of the Roman emperor in Constantinople.

For many Christians in the west this view of the world was given up during Irene's reign as empress. Because the Byzantine throne was now occupied by a woman who had effectively murdered her own son, many Christians in western Europe supposed that there no longer *was* a Roman emperor. Accordingly, the pope invited the Frankish king Charles the Great - Charlemagne - to Rome and on Christmas Day of 800 crowned him as the Roman emperor. Had the old widower Charles married the middle-aged widow Irene, a match that was in fact contemplated, a single Roman empire stretching from Anatolia to the English Channel and the Pyrenees might have been reconstituted. In the event, however, there was no marriage and the coronation in 800 ended the fantasy of a single Roman empire and widened the gulf between eastern and western Christianity. In 802 Irene was deposed in Constantinople, ending the "Isaurian" dynasty. The Byzantine empire was taken over by Nicephorus I (802-11).

Baghdad under Hārūn al-Rashīd (786-809)

It was unfortunate for the Byzantines that their internal problems coincided with the califate of Hārūn al-Rashīd at Baghdad. His reign (786-809) 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 was 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.³⁴

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.³⁵ 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.³⁶

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, Nicephorus sent word to al-Rashid that no more tribute would be sent to Baghdad. Nicephorus 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. Nicephorus had now to purchase peace at the price of 50,000 gold pieces.

The breakup of the Abbasid empire

After the death of al-Rashid in 809, the Abbasid empire quickly went into decline. Spain had been lost to an Umayyad in the 750s, and in al-Rashid's own reign the western half of North Africa followed suit. Idris, a descendant of Ali, had declared himself an autonomous ruler of Morocco in 788. For the next two hundred years the 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 Abbasids.

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 three a Turkish boy was taught to ride and to control a horse. Here was 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), and then to put them through years of training until they became 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. In 820 much of Iran was lost to Baghdad when Tahir, an Iranian general, declared himself ruler of Khurasan. Although the Tahirids ruled for only fifty years, they were replaced by other local Iranian dynasties. By the end of the ninth century the actual power of the later Abbasids extended no further east than Isfahan.³⁷ Perhaps even more damaging 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 Abbasid realm was only a third the size that it had been under al-Rashid. The various Muslim amirs seldom had the wherewithal to launch major expeditions of conquest, and expansion of the Muslim world slowed. Nevertheless, when weaknesses in the non-Muslim world were apparent, the amirs took the opportunity to extend their realms. The Umayyads in Spain took over much of western Provence, and in the middle of the ninth century the Aghlabids of Tunisia made themselves masters of Sicily and Malta.

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.

1. Muslims could not enslave another Muslim (although they had no obligation to free a slave who converted to Islam). Umar’s domestic slaves were “people of the book,” and the slave who murdered him was variously identified as a Sabaeen or as a Zoroastrian from Iran.

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2. On the first literary epistles see Latham 1983.
 3. Jenkins 1969, pp. 36-38. See also Donner 1981.
 4. Peters 1994, p. 153, quoting Ibn Ishaq (1955), p. 114.
 5. Ochsenswald and Fisher 2004, p. 46.
 6. Ochsenswald and Fisher 2004, p. 47.
 7. Jenkins 1969, p. 44.
 8. Hawting 2000, pp. 72-73.
 9. Hassan had died at Medina in 669, leaving Hussein as head of the family.
 10. The Shiite practice is based on their text - rejected by Sunnis - of Quran 4:24.
 11. Hawting 2000, p. 59.
 12. Quran 17:1 (Dawood).
 13. On this anti-Christian significance of the Dome of the Rock see Lewis 1997, pp. 68-70.
 14. See Hawting 2000, 59-60.
 15. Ochsenswald and Fisher 2004, p. 51.
 16. 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.
 17. Ochsenswald and Fisher 2004, pp. 52-53.
 18. 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.”

19. 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.

20. 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.

21. The Samanid dynasty, which ca. 900 was recognized by the Abbasids as the de facto government in northeastern Iran, supported this Persian literary culture. See Ochsenwald and Fisher 2004, p. 72.

22. 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.

23. Jenkins 1969, pp. 142 and 158-59.

24. From the *Sahih* of Bukhari, Volume 3, Book 34, Number 318. Taken from the website <http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/bukhari/>.

25. Jenkins 1969, pp. 81-82. According to Greek Christian sources, Yazid fell ill and was close to death when a Jewish magician named Tessarakontapechys (“Forty Cubits”) promised the calif forty more years of life if he would rid his empire of all figured art. It is likely that Orthodox Christian sources, hostile to Iconoclasm, understated the degree to which eastern Christians themselves were opposed to the cult of images.

26. Vasiliev 1958, vol. 1, p. 260.

27. Jenkins 1969, pp. 154-55.

28. 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).

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

30. For a comprehensive description of Umayyad Spain see David Wasserstein’s excellent book (Wasserstein 1993).

31. Ochsenwald and Fisher 2004, p. 70.

32. Isauria was a small district of southeastern Anatolia, immediately to the west of Cilicia. Leo's birthplace, however, seems to have been to the east of Cilicia, near Commagene. Leo grew up speaking both Greek and Arabic. See Jenkins 1969, p. 61.

33. Jenkins 1969, pp. 101-02.

34. 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.

35. Fletcher 2003, p. 51.

36. Ochsenswald and Fisher 2004, p. 65.

37. 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 Ochsenswald and Fisher 2004.