

## Chapter Twenty-Four

### The Crusades and the Mongolian Devastation of the Middle East

While Christians and Judaeans were grimly coexisting in Catholic Europe's "Dark Age," followers of all three Abrahamic faiths were faring much better in the Dar al-Islam. From several perspectives the tenth and eleventh centuries were the high-point of the Muslim world. Arabic learning and literature were flourishing, while Persian-speaking Muslims were creating their own version of Islamic civilization. The material circumstances of the Middle East and North Africa were better than those in Orthodox Christendom and far above those of Catholic Europe. Politically and militarily the Muslims' fortunes were not quite what they had been during the califate of Harun al-Rashid, before their empire had begun to break apart. Nevertheless, the regional amirs cooperated sufficiently that the lands that they governed were secure.

The relative positions of Catholic Europe and the Dar al-Islam began to change with the crusades. Although the crusades contributed to the decline of the Dar al-Islam, they were not its principal cause. They were, however, of fundamental importance for the rise of Catholic Europe. Before reviewing the history of the crusades we must look at the worsening relations between Muslims and Christians in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

#### The "Pact of Umar"

It may have been in the ninth century that the so-called "Pact of Umar" began to take shape. The earliest references to the "pact" date from the tenth or eleventh century, and during the later Abbasid period it became increasingly important in Muslim law. To give it a respectable pedigree the "pact" was apparently retrojected to the califate of Umar.<sup>1</sup> It assumes, however, the conditions of a time much later than the 630s (it assumes, for example, the availability of the published Quran in Christian lands), and reflects Muslim attempts to discourage Christianity that are incongruent with seventh-century realities. The main concern of the "rightly guided califs" and of the Umayyads had been to maximize the *jizya*, and they therefore preferred that the *dhimmi* remain in their own religious traditions. Under the Abbasids everyone - Christians, Judaeans and Muslims - paid a land tax, and this became the chief source of revenue. As the poll-tax on the "people of the book" lost some of its importance, the Abbasid califs could with little fiscal sacrifice permit (although they hardly encouraged) widespread conversion of Christians to the Muslim faith.

We have seen (at the end of Chapter 22 ) that in the cities of the Levant the conversion of Christians to Islam occurred mainly in the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries. Late in the Umayyad period well over ninety per cent of the population in Palestine and Syria was evidently still Christian, but it seems that by the tenth century only half of the population was Christian and that by the fourteenth century only one out of ten Syrians was a Christian (approximately the same proportion as that reflected in Syrian censuses at the beginning of the twentieth century).<sup>2</sup> As the population turned toward Islam it was not uncommon for a church to be transferred from a Christian congregation to Muslims and converted into a mosque.

As Islam began to be seen as a universal religion, the "Pact of Umar" emerged to

discourage Christianity (and perhaps Judaism, although evidence on that score is lacking). In the “pact” Christians acknowledge that they will receive protection from the Muslim rulers only on condition that they neither attempt to convert any Muslim to Christianity nor prevent a Christian from being converted to Islam. In addition, in the “pact” the Christians of Syria promise not to build new churches and monasteries or to repair old ones, not to ring bells at their churches or make loud wailing at funerals, and not to display their Christianity openly by wearing crosses or cutting their hair in a monk’s tonsure. From things Muslim and Arabic the Christians agree to keep their distance: dressing in the Arabian fashion, teaching their children the Quran, or even (this was unenforceable and disregarded) using the Arabic language. Furthermore, the Christians swear that they will not bear weapons, ride horses, or build houses that overtop those of the Muslims. Seated Christians will rise and give their places to Muslims who wish to sit down. And it is agreed that any Christian who strikes a Muslim forfeits all of his rights as a *dhimma* and may therefore be killed with impunity.

Had such conditions been announced in the 630s or 640s the enormous Christian population of the Levant and Egypt would have resisted Umar’s troops instead of welcoming them, and Umar would have had an altogether more difficult time creating the great empire for which he is famous. By the ninth or tenth century, contrarily, Christians were in no position to assert their prerogatives and in some cities of the Dar al-Islam Muslims were eager to lower the profile of Christianity. Toward that objective efforts were here and there made to discourage Christianity, and the “Pact of Umar” gave these efforts a specious legitimacy: it pretended that long ago the Christians themselves had drawn up the pact for Umar’s approval and had promised to abide by it.

## **The Almoravids in Spain**

In some lands the disabilities imposed by or reflected in the “Pact of Umar” do seem to have encouraged conversion to Islam. In Egypt it was evidently in the eleventh and twelfth centuries that most people in the countryside became Muslim, in an essentially voluntary manner. In Spain, however, a more coercive push toward Islamization began late in the eleventh century, as a response to aggression by the adjacent Christian kingdoms, and this compulsory conversion backfired. How all of this came about needs to be studied in some detail.

The last of the Umayyad califs in Cordoba, Hisham III, was overthrown by the Cordobans in 1031. Although the ideology of a Spanish califate survived for another fifty-five years,<sup>3</sup> in practical terms the califate was replaced by a cluster of small Muslim kingdoms, each kingdom - or *taifa* - being ruled by an amir. The most important of these taifas were Zaragoza, Toledo, Sevilla and Granada. On religious matters the amirs were as tolerant as had been the Umayyads, and the taifas were therefore pluralist states: although Muslims enjoyed the highest prestige, the amirs’ Jewish and Christian subjects were protected and content. The Jewish population in Spain was large, and by the eleventh century more Judaeans may have been living in Spain than in all the rest of Europe. Christians in Muslim Spain were not so numerous, but were under few constraints and had developed their own “Mozarabic” tradition.<sup>4</sup> Mozarabic was a language, or a group of closely related dialects, descended from Latin and so cognate with Spanish and Portuguese. It was written, however, not with Roman letters but with the Arabic alphabet. In most of the churches in Muslim Spain the liturgy was performed in a Mozarabic

dialect and according to the Mozarabic rite.

In the far north of Spain, in and near the Pyrenees mountains, were the Christian kingdoms. These were (from west to east) León, Castile, Pamplona (Navarre), Aragon, and the county of Barcelona. In these kingdoms the population was overwhelmingly Christian, with only tiny Jewish minorities attached to the larger cities. Linguistically the kingdoms were diverse, with as many Basque and Romance dialects as there were mountain valleys. The one language that all had in common was Latin, the dead language of the Catholic church, and the Basque language did not become a rallying flag for nationalists until the nineteenth century.

So long as the Umayyad califate ruled southern and central Spain, the Christian kingdoms in the far north were not expansionist. After 1031, however, the Christian rulers began to exploit the relative weakness of the Muslim taifas, and to encroach upon the closest of them. Most spectacularly, in 1085 Alfonso VI of Castile defeated the amir of Toledo and annexed his realm. Almost ten thousand square miles of central Spain were suddenly shifted from Muslim to Christian control.

To counter the threat from Alfonso other amirs called in a large force of Moroccan Almorāvids. The Arabic word *al-murābit* is usually translated as “ascetic warrior” or “warrior monk,” and it denotes the puritanism, asceticism, and aggressiveness of these men. The Almoravids could also be described as “those who band together for the defense of the faith.”<sup>5</sup> In the tenth and early eleventh century many Berber tribesmen in Morocco had been nominal Muslims, but knew little of the Quran and were unfamiliar with *sharī'a*. A tribal chief, Yahya ibn Ibrahim, went on a *hajj* to Mecca ca. 1040, and there learned what devout Muslims were supposed to do and how they were supposed to live. When Yahya returned to Morocco he brought with him a scholar-teacher, in order to instruct the Berbers on Muslim law. Initially the tribesmen refused to listen and Yahya had to withdraw to a monastic retreat, where he and his followers could practice an intense and ascetic Islam. Over the next several decades, by their puritanical example and their military prowess the “warrior monks” persuaded thousands of Berber tribesmen to become “Almoravids.”

These were the allies whom the Andalusian amirs called upon to assist them against encroachment by the Christian kings of northern Spain. Quick to accept the invitation, Yūsuf ibn Tashfin brought a large Almoravid force across the Straits of Gibraltar. In 1086 Yusuf, who called himself “Amir of the Believers,” defeated Alfonso VI of Castile, halting the latter’s expansion toward the south. Dismissing his Andalusian employers after his victory, Yusuf ruled over both Morocco and most of the territory that had once belonged to the Spanish Umayyads. His was “an authority more hostile to non-Muslims than any previous one,”<sup>6</sup> because the Almoravids believed that the forceful conversion of infidels to Islam was pleasing to God. Instead of Islamizing Spain, however, the new militancy gave the Christian rulers in northern Spain added reason to make designs on the lands to the south: they would liberate the Christians of Andalusia from Muslim repression. Thus began the Christians’ Reconquista of Spain. The hostility toward “the Moors” that permeates the Spanish epic *El Cid* does not reflect the realities of the mid-eleventh century, when as a mercenary the real El Cid - Rodrigo Diaz - fought for both Christian and Muslim employers. Instead, it reflects the much more rancorous and polarized Almoravid period, when the long war between Christian Spain and Muslim Spain had

gotten under way.<sup>7</sup> More generally, the militancy of the Almoravids also contributed to the anti-Muslim emotions that were sweeping European Christendom at the end of the eleventh century.

## **Seljuk Turkish conquests**

Because of their centuries-long contacts with the Dar al-Islam, and especially because they had furnished large numbers of Mamluk cavalymen to the califs, by ca. 1000 many of the Turkish-speaking nomads of central Asia had been converted to Islam. Among the converts to Sunni Islam was a chieftain named Seljuk, who commanded thousands of horsemen. In the 1030s western Iran was taken over by Seljuk's grandson, Toghrul Beg (the honorific *beg* was the Turkish word for "chief"). In 1055 Toghrul Beg made himself master of Baghdad. Although Toghrul declared himself a servant of the Abbasid califate, the calif at the same time recognized Toghrul as the *sultan* (ruler) of Iraq as well as western Iran. The Turkish warlord was pleased with that title, and its distinction grew along with the territory ruled by the Seljuks.

When Toghrul died in 1063, his powers as sultan were passed to his nephew, Alp Arslan, who directed his Seljuk horsemen's energies against the Byzantine empire in general and against Armenia in particular. Armenia fell to the invaders in 1064. Seven years later the Byzantine emperor, Romanus IV Diogenes, assembled a huge army and attempted to regain Armenia. But on August 19 of 1071 the Turkish cavalry surprised Romanus' forces at Manzikert, near the mountainous country of Lake Van. The Seljuks destroyed the Byzantine army and Emperor Romanus was taken captive. Although Alp Arslan released Romanus for a large ransom, the Byzantine empire effectively lost Armenia and Cappadocia to the Seljuks. Because the Armenians were Monophysite Christians they had no great affection for Constantinople and many of them were satisfied to live under the Muslim Seljuks. Others fled from Armenia to Cilicia, where they established a new kingdom for themselves in the twelfth century.

Alp Arslan's son and successor, Malikshah, who made his capital at Isfahan, annexed more of central Anatolia, but then turned south and took over the more lucrative Muslim lands of the Levant: by 1090 his troops had seized Damascus and Jerusalem.<sup>8</sup> At Malikshah's death in 1092 his Great Seljuk realm was split among his sons, each of whom ruled his portion as an *atabeg* ("father-chief"). The sons maintained a very loose alliance but also feuded among themselves. Turkish-speaking Seljuks nevertheless remained in control of much of the Middle East.

The Seljuk prince who received Anatolia as his share was Kilij Arslan, who renamed it the Sultanate of Rum (because the Byzantine empire was, formally, still "the Roman empire," the Seljuks regarded their newly acquired realm in Anatolia as "Rome", or "Rum"). Kilij Arslan pushed all the way to the Dardanelles and the Sea of Marmara, and for a time made his capital at Nicaea ("Iznik," in Turkish), only a day's sail away from Constantinople.

## **The First Crusade**

Under the actual and nominal rule of the Abbasids the holy places in and near Jerusalem had continued to attract a small but steady stream of Christian pilgrims from western Europe, and during the eleventh century these visits to "the Holy Land" had tended to increase.<sup>9</sup> The Seljuk

atabegs were less hospitable to the pilgrims than the Arabic amirs had been, and in western Europe tales began to circulate of how Christian pilgrims to the sacred sites were being robbed and killed. The Seljuks' violence, and especially their dramatic conquest of Anatolia, were evidently the primary motivations for Pope Urban II's call to the Christians of western Europe to march to the east, to shore up the Byzantines against the Seljuks, and to reclaim Jerusalem and other Christian holy places from "the infidel Turks and Saracens." This call was made by Urban in 1095, at the Council of Clermont in central France. Every able man was urged to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem in order to visit the Holy Sepulcher, but unlike their predecessors these pilgrims were to go armed and ready to fight their way through the resistance of the Turkish infidels.

The mood of the Christians in central and northern France in the late eleventh century is reflected in the *Chanson de Roland*. For a variety of reasons "the popular imagination ... chose Charlemagne as the prototype of the crusading king" and mythicized a minor battle that had taken place in the Pyrenees during his reign.<sup>10</sup> The anonymous creators of the epic were remarkably ill-informed about "the Saracens" (*Sarrazins*), by whom they supposed that Roland was slain. The epic's Saracens are enormously wealthy, with caravans of camels or mules laden with gold, but they are also pagans (*paien*) who care nothing for God (*Deu*). Their master is Mahumet and they worship various gods, the most important being Apollin. Although in the *Chanson* Roland and his staunch comrade Oliver are both killed by the Saracens, the epic ends triumphantly, with Charlemagne taking the city of Saragossa and ordering the forcible conversion to Christianity of the city's 100,000 Saracens and Jews:

If any Charles with contradiction meet,  
Then hanged or burned or slaughtered shall he be.  
Five score thousand and more are thus redeemed,  
Very Christians.<sup>11</sup>

Urban seems to have envisaged an expedition led by the lords temporal of Catholic Christendom, each lord bringing with him a retinue of trained and disciplined soldiers. The nobles, however, were not so easily persuaded to participate. The first to respond were peasants, who had only a vague idea where and how far away Jerusalem was. Urban had promised that anyone who died in the service of Christ would be a martyr, with all sins forgiven, a waiver from Purgatory, and direct entry into Heaven, and for many of the poor this prospect was much more appealing than was the tilling of the soil. Typically, the peasants - men, women, and even children - were stirred into action by the harangues of itinerant preachers. Peter the Hermit began attracting followers among the peasantry in Flanders, and as he progressed up the Rhine valley his motley retinue quickly swelled into five figures. Another leader in the so-called People's Crusade was Emich of Leiningen, whose followers plundered as they progressed and were therefore resisted by the cities along their route. Although Emich's retinue got no further than Hungary, Peter's much larger horde reached Constantinople late in 1096. The Byzantine emperor, Alexius Comnenus, wasted no time in ferrying his unwanted guests across the Bosphorus into Seljuk territory, and shortly thereafter they were met by the army of the Sultan of Rum. At Xerigordon, a fortress near Nicaea, the inexperienced "crusaders" were virtually annihilated by the sultan's professional troops.

Although the goal of the First Crusade was to save Constantinople from the Seljuks and to take Jerusalem from the Muslims, the crusade - and the rhetoric that preceded it - was more broadly a militarizing of Christians against non-Christians. The vanguard of the People's Crusade, especially those pilgrims led by Emich of Leiningen, first targeted "the Jews," who for centuries had been living in the cities of the Rhineland. Hundreds if not thousands of Jewish inhabitants of Cologne, Metz, Mainz, and other cities resisted the forcible baptism that the mobs demanded, and were thereupon slaughtered and their property seized. The Christian perpetrators of the massacres understood themselves to be doing the will of God, and the Jewish victims likewise assumed that their fate was the will of God.<sup>12</sup> Although some bishops and other Christian authorities tried to prevent the peasant mobs from entering the cities, they were easily swept aside. The atrocities in 1096 were the first of western Europe's anti-Jewish pogroms.

The military phase of the First Crusade did not begin until late in 1096, when the nobles and their retinues left for the east. At the core of the force were men from Lorraine, led by their duke, Godfrey - or Godefroy - of Boulogne (assisted by his brother, Baldwin). Count Raymond of Toulouse brought another large contingent, as did Bohemund of Tarentum. The crusaders crossed into Asia from Constantinople in March of 1097, and with Byzantine assistance took Nicaea. This was followed by a crusader victory on July 1, 1097, at Dorylaeum, possibly at the site of the Turkish city of Eskişehir. Driven from Nicaea and western Anatolia, Sultan Kilij Arslan was forced to move his residence to Konya (ancient Iconium).

By late 1097 the crusaders had made their way to Syria and began a long siege of Antioch, which finally fell to them in the summer of 1098. Energized by the discovery there of the Holy Lance, which had pierced the side of Jesus, the crusaders left Antioch early in 1099 and besieged Jerusalem. In July of 1099 they entered and sacked Jerusalem, slaughtering all of its Muslim and Jewish inhabitants. It was the bloodiest day for the Holy City since Titus' legions had devastated it in August of 70.

## **The later crusades**

Exploiting their victories in 1098 and 1099, the crusaders installed themselves as rulers of small principalities in the Middle East. The most important of the crusader kingdoms was the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem (where Godfrey of Boulogne took the title, "*Advocatus* of the Holy Sepulcher"). Godfrey's brother Baldwin set himself up as ruler of Edessa, in north-central Syria, and other leaders established themselves at Antioch, Acco, Tripoli, and on Cyprus.

The first of the crusader states to be retaken by Seljuk chiefs (*atabegs*) was the County of Edessa. Almost from the outset the Seljuk atabeg of Mosul began dueling with the crusaders at Edessa, and it was during these conflicts in northern Syria that the Christian cathedral at Aleppo was appropriated and made into a mosque (1124). In the early 1140s the Seljuks won a decisive victory over the crusaders and annexed Edessa. This insult to Catholic Christendom inspired the Second Crusade, which was announced by Pope Eugene III at the end of 1145. Initially the Catholic kings showed little enthusiasm for another crusade, but in spring of 1146 the venture was powerfully urged by Bernard of Clairvaux (St. Bernard). Although the kings of both France and Germany participated in the Second Crusade, they proceeded separately and in 1147 and 1148 were separately defeated, shortly after crossing into Asia from Constantinople. What was

left of the German and French forces abandoned the idea of recovering Edessa and instead made their way to Jerusalem. Like the First Crusade, the second inspired much violence against Jewish communities in Germany. The crusade was also paralleled by an offensive against the pagan Wendish (Slavic) population along the Baltic: the heathen were given the choice of conversion or death.

The main Muslim counteroffensive against the crusader states occurred toward the end of the twelfth century, and was led by Saladin (Salah al-Din Yusuf). A Kurdish general of uncommon ability and gallantry, Saladin's career began when he took over Egypt from the Fatimids and founded his own Ayyubid dynasty. After adding much of Syria to his realm he took on the crusader kingdoms of the Levant. Jerusalem fell to Saladin in October of 1187, and that spectacular victory brought on the Third Crusade (1189-92), led by Richard I ("the Lion-heart") of England, Philip II of France, and Frederick Barbarossa, the Holy Roman Emperor. The Third Crusade was more successful than the second: although a treaty drawn up in 1192 by Saladin and Richard confirmed Saladin as the ruler of Jerusalem, it also guaranteed the safe passage of Christian pilgrims (unarmed) to the city's holy sites.

From the standpoint of Christendom the worst of the crusades was the fourth. Like its predecessor, this crusade was declared (in 1198, by Pope Innocent III) in order to re-establish Christian control of Jerusalem. The leader of the Fourth Crusade was Boniface of Montferrat (Monferrato, in the Italian piedmont of the Alps). Boniface's strategy for recovering Jerusalem was first to conquer Ayyubid Egypt, which upon the death of Saladin had been ruled by his younger brother, Saphadin. For so great an expedition a large fleet was required, which the Venetians agreed to build. Because the crusaders were unable to pay the Doge of Venice what they owed him, it was decided (against the protests of Innocent III) that before attacking Egypt the crusaders should seize various Byzantine possessions and so obtain the money they needed. An additional source of funds would come from returning an exiled prince to Constantinople and making him emperor. In 1202 the crusaders' fleet set sail. After a long siege the crusaders entered Constantinople in April of 1204. They sacked the city, hauling off the treasures that had been accumulating since Constantine made the city his capital. Now in charge, the crusaders set up their "Latin empire" as a successor to the Byzantine empire, with Baldwin of Flanders as the first Latin emperor (Baldwin was soon succeeded by his younger brother, Henry).

Many of the best parts of Greece were taken over by Franks and Venetians. The Venetians, with their great sea power, generally took control of the most productive islands of the Aegean. Immediately after the sack of Constantinople a company of Frankish knights installed themselves in the Peloponnesos and called their state the Principality of Achaea. At the same time, a Burgundian set himself up in Athens. The Byzantines, of course, refused to recognize the Catholic Latins as anything but interlopers, and the Laskarids set up a rump Byzantine state at Nicaea. Another "legitimate" and Orthodox Byzantine state was set up in Epirus. The Latin empire in Constantinople itself held together only until 1261, when Michael VIII Palaeologus led Nicaean troops back into the city. In Greece the Latin occupiers were not so easily dislodged, and the Duchy of Athens lasted more or less until the fifteenth century, when it succumbed to the Ottoman empire.

Two more crusades, between 1217 and 1229, were called by the popes in order to recover

Jerusalem. The Fifth was an utter failure, most of the crusaders dying in Egypt, while the Sixth (1228-29) was a mixed success. Without papal endorsement Frederick II (*Stupor mundi*) led his crusaders into Jerusalem and was recognized by the sultan of Egypt as the ruler of Jerusalem. Frederick agreed, however, to let the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa mosque remain in Muslim hands and to allow unarmed Muslim pilgrims to enter the city.<sup>13</sup>

## **The Islamization of Anatolia and the creation of Turkey**

During the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries what had been Anatolia - in which the language was Greek and the religion was Christianity - became largely a Turkish-speaking and Muslim land. Many Turkish-speaking nomads from east of the Caspian migrated to Anatolia, where they tended to continue their pastoralism, but the transformation of Anatolia was due mostly to the Islamization of the native Anatolians. The Seljuk "Sultans of Rum" implemented the conversion, often in ruthless fashion. As noted above, the First Crusade passed through western Anatolia, the crusaders marching overland from Constantinople to Antioch. To what extent the Islamization of Anatolia was hastened by that episode is unknown, but the Seljuk warlords must have perceived that future crusaders would find passage through a predominantly Muslim land much more difficult than was the march in 1097. In any case, the transformation of Anatolia occurred in the aftermath of the early crusades.

The conversion of the Anatolian population to Islam evidently preceded its adoption of the Turkish language. Islamization was in part the result of "missionary" work by Turkish Sufis, and especially by the Sufi ascetics called "dervishes." Having no property the Sufi dervish begged his bread, and sought union with God through religious ecstasy. In Anatolia the Turkish dervishes went from one Christian village to another and made a vivid impression with their poverty and austerity. In the thirteenth century the Mehlevis Sufis, who sought a religious trance with their whirling dances, established themselves at Konya (Iconium). At about the same time the teachings of Hacı Bektaş Veli gave rise to another order of Sufi dervishes in Cappadocia.

More often, however, the Islamization of Anatolia was not simply a matter of voluntary conversion by the formerly Christian population. As summarized by Sidney Fisher and William Ochsenwald, the project was often carried through with violence or intimidation:

Throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and on into the fourteenth, pressure was exerted on every aspect of Christian life and society. Decisive victories for Muslim armies, continual marches across the land by soldiers, sacking of cities, and scorched-earth policies generated massacres, flight, enslavement, plague, and famine. Those Christians who remained were filled with insecurity and a sense of helplessness.

As various areas fell into Turkish Muslim hands, certain factors made it fairly easy to assume the customs and manners of the victors. In the first place, non-Muslims were tolerated but nevertheless discriminated against in many ways with regard to dress and life: unquestionably they were second-class subjects. Converts, on the other hand, escaped discrimination - as well as many taxes. Furthermore, Christian communities became leaderless at a time of great psychological and economic crisis. Consequently, whole villages turned Muslim overnight, at first in the interior and later along the coasts

of Anatolia. By about 1300 a majority of the population of Anatolia was Muslim.<sup>14</sup>

As they converted to Islam, Anatolians took Muslim names and learned the Turkish language. By the sixteenth century perhaps ninety per cent of the Anatolians were Muslims.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Almohads in Spain**

While the crusades were roiling the Middle East, Christian kings in the northern half of Spain enlarged their realms by heading south to wage war against “the Moors”: the Muslim rulers who succeeded the Umayyads. The Reconquista’s success against the Almoravids in the first half of the twelfth century brought to Andalusia another Moroccan force, the Almohads, which at the outset was even more fanatical than its predecessor. The Almohads or “monotheists” had been founded ca. 1100 as a Muslim monastic community in the Atlas mountains of Morocco, and by the 1140s their calif was the ruler of Morocco. From Morocco their power spread eastward toward Egypt and then, in 1147, across Gibraltar to Spain. By 1170 the Almohads had ousted the Almoravids and ruled all of Muslim Spain. Although they soon mellowed, their initial policy toward their Jewish and especially their Christian subjects was brutal: if the *dhimmi* converted to Islam they were spared, but if they persisted in their unbelief they were threatened with the sword.

For the rest of the twelfth century the Almohads dominated much of Spain, but early in the thirteenth their power receded. The chief agent of their decline was Ferdinand III, who had inherited the crown of León from his father and the crown of Castile from his mother. With such resources at his disposal Ferdinand was able to conduct a sustained offensive against the Almohads. In 1236 he took Cordoba, the Almohads’ capital city, and followed up that feat by taking Seville. Almohad rule came to an end, and by the time of Ferdinand’s death the only part of Spain still in Muslim hands was Granada.

### **The Mongolian invasion and its consequences for Islamic civilization**

Although the crusades contributed to the decline of both the Byzantine empire and the Muslim states of the Middle East, far more devastating for the Dar al-Islam (but less so for eastern Christendom) was a storm that broke from the northeast. This was the Mongolian invasion, which in the thirteenth century came from central Asia to wreak havoc in the Middle East and in eastern Europe. Perhaps the invasion’s most illustrious victim was the Abbasid califate: although much reduced since the glorious days of Harun al-Rashid, the Abbasid califate in Baghdad had been the nominal center of the Dar al-Islam for more than five hundred years.

Mongolian archers, one or two hundred thousand men on horseback, first appeared on Muslim horizons in 1219. These were barbarous men, practitioners of a shamanistic religion and newly alerted to the possibilities of plunder (the success of the Turkish Seljuks in the eleventh and twelfth centuries had shown the way for other Asian horsemen). Under the leadership of Chingis Khan the Mongolians entered Iran, where they pillaged and destroyed most of its cities. At the death of Chingis in 1227 his empire was divided into several regional khanates. The most active of Chingis’ immediate successors was Batu Khan, who in the 1230s roared through Russia - sacking Kiev and Moscow - and proceeded to Poland. Iraq and Anatolia were spared for a

short time, but when the Mongolians attacked the destruction there was horrendous. The Seljuks, who were by now civilized and controlled most of Anatolia, were defeated by the Mongolians in 1243. Hulagu Khan, a grandson of Chingis, led his men to Baghdad in 1258 and after a siege of several months he entered the city and sacked it. The last Abbasid calif was killed, and the inhabitants of the fabled city were slaughtered *en masse*. The heads of the city's most eminent men - writers, administrators, courtiers - were stacked into a pyramid. Hulagu did to the rest of Iraq what he had done to Baghdad, and when there was nothing left to sack in Iraq he headed west into Syria. At the Springs of Goliath, not far from Damascus, the invaders were finally stopped by Baibars, a Mamluk commander from Egypt.

The profound effects of the Mongolian ruin of the Middle East have been summarized by Fisher and Ochsenswald:

In their conquests the Mongols pillaged widely, often destroying what they had to leave behind. They could not garrison the cities adequately, and the first generations neither understood nor appreciated the cultures and civilizations of the peoples they conquered.... The effects of the devastations wrought by the Mongols lasted in some areas for centuries. Millions of people perished; cities vanished; canals silted and irrigation decreased; lands became barren and deserted; governments disintegrated; civilization foundered; and life returned to the bare essentials. Taxes were sharply increased and collected in an unusually brutal fashion. Since the initial Muslim conquests, conquering armies and peoples had come and gone as customs, religions, knowledge, and culture had been modified, developed and altered. But through all this time the Middle East had never suffered such a cataclysmic shock as it received from the Mongol invasions.<sup>16</sup>

By the fourteenth century the Mongolian conquerors had long been converted to Islam, but their conversion scarcely diminished their appetite for plunder. In 1401 "Tamerlane" (Timur the Lame) sacked what had been rebuilt of Baghdad, along with other cities that had begun to recover. Until Timur's death in 1405 he ruled an empire covering both Iraq and Iran, as well as the arid lands to the east of the Caspian, and his realm was nominally Muslim. Eventually the Mongolian khans would give way to the Ottoman Turkish sultans, and as a political and military power the Ottoman empire was destined to have a long and impressive career. But both the Mongolian and the Turkish empires were in fundamental ways foreign to the Arabic speaking world. By the time of Timur the Lame the high Arabic civilization of the Middle East was a distant memory.

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1. For discussion of the date of the "Pact of Umar" see Goddard 2000, p. 46.

2. See Fargues 1997.

3. Demonstrated by Wasserstein 1993.

4. *Mozarabic* meant "Arabicized," and the Mozarabic Christians typically spoke Arabic as well

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as their own Mozarabic language.

5. Fletcher 2003, p. 74.

6. Fletcher 2003, p. 75.

7. Fletcher 2003, pp. 72-74. It was also in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century that the legend of Santiago Matamoros (“St. James, slayer of Moors”) was elaborated and popularized. The legend celebrated the help that the heavenly St. James, riding a charger down from the clouds, provided to Spanish Christians at the Battle of Clavijo in 844.

8. Ochsenswald and Fisher 2004, p. 126

9. Fletcher 2003, pp. 52-53.

10. Although nominally about an 8<sup>th</sup>-century battle at Roncesvalles in the Pyrenees, against Basque mountaineers, the epic took shape in the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. By then the Basques had disappeared from the tradition and “the Saracens” had taken their place. For the quotation see Uitti 1973, p. 79, and for the larger picture see his pp. 65-84.

11. Stanza 266, lines 3669-72 (Charles Moncrief translation).

12. Solomon bar Samson, writing in Hebrew ca. 1140, described the carnage and interpreted it as God’s punishment of his chosen people: “The hand of the Lord was heavy against His people. All the Gentiles were gathered together against the Jews in the courtyard to blot out their name.... When the children of the covenant saw that the heavenly decree of death had been issued and that the enemy had conquered them and had entered the courtyard, then all of them - old men and young, virgins and children, servants and maids - cried out together to their Father in heaven and, weeping for themselves and for their lives, accepted as just the sentence of God.” The translation is taken from Fordham University’s Internet Medieval Sourcebook:  
<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/1096jews-mainz.html>

13. Between 1248 and 1271 Catholic kings launched (again without papal endorsement) three more crusades, none of which was of much consequence. The 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> were led by Louis IX of France, and the 9<sup>th</sup> by Edward I of England. These crusades were little more than a distraction for the Dar al-Islam, because throughout these years both Arabic and Seljuk Turkish rulers were transfixed by the devastation being wrought by the Mongolians.

14. Ochsenswald and Fisher 2004, p. 161.

15. Ochsenswald and Fisher 2004, p. 199.

16. Ochsenswald and Fisher 2004, p. 136.