B. THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA, 500–1500

1. THE RISE AND EXPANSION OF ISLAM, 610–945

FROM P. 102

3. OVERVIEW

In the early 7th century, Arab Muslim armies spread out from the Arabian Peninsula into the surrounding lands and, in a wave of expansion that lasted about a hundred years, conquered almost the entire Middle East and North Africa. The Sassanian Empire based in Iran and Iraq ceased to exist, while the Byzantine Empire in the west lost large territories around the Mediterranean basin, including Syria, Egypt, and North Africa (p. 185). The world map of the region was completely redrawn as a new Islamic empire established its dominion over lands stretching from Spain to central Asia. The conquerors were initially a small minority ruling a non-Muslim society, but they set in motion changes that in time reshaped the overall identity and fortunes of the region.

The Arabs brought with them their newly founded faith of Islam. While they did not force conversion on the conquered population—mostly Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians—the Muslims made the adoption of the new faith socially and economically advantageous. By the mid-10th century a sizable part of the population had converted, and while the region was not yet predominantly Muslim, mass conversion was well advanced, to be completed in the following three centuries or so.

The Arabic language, which until the conquests was confined to Arabia, spread in the region together with Islam. In the lands from Iraq to Morocco the populations became essentially Arabic-speaking, and other languages, such as Greek, Aramaic, and Coptic, steadily disappeared from common use, surviving mostly in literary and religious writings. In Iran, the Persian language held out against this process of Arabization, but not without adopting the Arabic script and a vast vocabulary of Arabic words.

The Islamic religion that arrived in the Middle East in the 7th century was rudimentary in form, consisting mostly of basic rituals, the divine revelation of the Qur'anic verses, and the practices of the Prophet Muhammad. The period up to the mid-11th century marked the formative stage in which Islam elaborated its structures and established its distinctive institutions. Islamic law, theology, tradition, and mysticism took shape, to be developed to full maturity in the succeeding three or four centuries. A class of Muslim religious leaders and scholars, the ulama, emerged as the custodians and interpreters of the faith for the growing community. Their writings defined the terms of speculative thought and communal debate on the nature of Islam and its place in society.

During this formative phase, Islam, and Arab-Islamic civilization in general, were very much influenced by the Middle Eastern milieu in which they evolved. Greek philosophy and medicine, Persian concepts of state, Byzantine administrative practice, Christian asceticism, Jewish and Zoroastrian codes of ritual purity, local architecture, cuisine, and popular lore—these and other elements of the regional heritage carried over into the Islamic period. Arab-Islamic civilization evolved as a synthesis of elements of different origins brought together in an original unity.

The structure of politics also underwent great changes. The Islamic empire was initially a unitary state ruled by a caliph and dominated by a small Arab elite that excluded non-Arab converts to Islam from an equal share in the benefits of power. By the mid-10th century the Abbasid Caliphate had been broken up into many virtually independent political entities. Struggles over succession gave rise to opposition and separatist movements, and to the greatest sectarian division within Islam, that between Sunni and Shi'a. The Arabs lost their monopoly on power as the system was opened to all Muslims regardless of origin. The Abbasid caliphs became figureheads with little political authority, and the creation of an imperial slave army composed of imported Turks—an innovation of the period that remained a feature of Middle Eastern regimes until modern times—transformed the political landscape, introducing a new power group that came to dominate the region's politics.

But while government became fragmented, the region evolved into a thriving commonwealth. A single trading system now linked the basins of the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. People, goods, and ideas moved freely within this vast sphere of interaction, relying on transport by water and caravans (wheeled transport having essentially disappeared in the region around the time of the Arab conquest, not to return until the 10th century). Large cities, foremost among them Baghdad, emerged as luxurious centers of culture, power, manufacturing, and consumption. In the agricultural countryside, where most of the population continued to live, a "green revolution" took place. New crops, including rice, sugarcane, cotton, oranges, and lemons, entered the region from China and India, and these, together with new techniques and investments in irrigation, improved both yields and diets. The population of the Middle East and North Africa may have experienced an overall expansion during the period, reaching a relatively high level of some 25 to 30 million in the 10th century.

b. MUHAMMAD AND THE RISE OF ISLAM

On the eve of the rise of Islam, Arabia was a tribal, desert environment with no single political organization or faith. The majority of its inhabitants were pastoral nomads organized by tribe and clan, who fought with one another for access to precious resources such as water, herds, and land. Some Arabs were sedentary and farmed at oases, such as Yathrib, while at Mecca many of the inhabitants drew their livelihood from trade caravans between Yemen and Syria.

Around 600 B.C.E., the northern Arabs developed a new saddle that allowed them to gain greater control over the camels they rode. This breakthrough gave them the ability to use the camel for military purposes, which allowed them to control trade in Arabia and earn enough money from the transport and protection of goods to buy metal weapons. Although confined to a largely nomadic environment, many Arabs, especially those in the camel trade, had contact with the two major empires to the north: the Byzantine Empire centered at Constantinople (324–1453) and the Zoroastrian Sassanian Empire (224–651), with its capital at Ctesiphon. In Iraq. Both empires employed Arab mercenaries to protect their borders with Arabia. The Byzantines used the tribe of Ghassani, which converted to Christianity, while the Sassanians paid the Lakhmid, at al-Hira, for their military services.

Before the advent of Islam, most Arabs worshiped a variety of male and female deities. Only a minority, who were either Christian or Jewish, were monotheists (hamidi). Despite the vagaries of frequent raids and raids (ghawazi), Arab tribes from surrounding areas journeyed to Mecca during truce months to worship at the polytheistic shrine of the Ka'ba. The tribe of Quraysh in Mecca enjoyed special prestige as keepers of the Ka'ba, as well as political and economic prominence built on fortunes drawn from trade.

610. FOUNDATION OF THE FAITH OF ISLAM: The founder of Islam was Muhammad ibn Abdallah, a member of the tribe of Quraysh and the clan of Hashim who was born in Mecca around the year 570. Orphaned at an early age, Muhammad lived in Mecca as a servant in the household of a rich widow named Khadija, whom he later married. According to Islamic tradition, in 610 he received his first divine revelation. He was ordered to recite the words that the angel Gabriel conveyed to him in Arabic from Allah, the supreme and sole deity of the new faith of Islam. The revelations continued throughout his lifetime and formed the Quran ("revelation"), regarded by all Muslims as their divinely dictated scripture. As the Prophet of Allah, Muhammad's task, according to Muslims, was to deliver the final and perfect message from God to all humanity. Previous communications had been
misunderstood or corrupted by the Jews and Christians. As the bearer of the true message, Muhammad was considered the "Seal of the Prophets," the last in a line of monotheistic messengers from Adam to Jesus.

The name of the religion, Islam, means submission to Allah, to be demonstrated by the five pillars of the faith defining the duties incumbent on all Muslims: salat (prayer), zakaat (almsgiving), hajj (the pilgrimage to Mecca), sawm (the last month of Ramadan), when the Qur'an was first revealed, and the shahada, the recitation of faith that states, "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is His messenger."

The Qur'an consists of 114 chapters (surahs) organized, after the first short opening chapter (the fatiha), from longest to shortest. Each chapter is divided into verses (ayas), the longest chapter containing 286.

The text covers a multitude of themes, from descriptions of paradise and hell to social codes in matters of marriage and inheritance. The Qur'an was not set down in writing by the Prophet himself during his lifetime. He may have dictated parts of it to a secretary, but much of it remained scattered in written fragments and in the memory of men, not unusual in a society that favored oral tradition. The text was collected and organized in its definitive form around 644, some 22 years after the Prophet's death.

During Muhammad's lifetime and for many years to follow, the new faith remained rough and unpolished. It took several centuries for Muslims to develop Islam's rich theological and legal traditions, including its elaborate code of laws (the shari'a).

613. Muhammad began preaching Islam publicly in Mecca. His early themes involved warnings about the end of the world and the Day of Judgment. Initially the Prophet met little opposition, because he was perceived as merely a poet or a soothsayer (khail), but when he became consistent that there was only one god and that the Ka'ba must be reserved for Allah alone, the response of the Meccans grew harsh, even violent. They understood that Islam threatened their own beliefs, their prestige as the keepers of the sacred shrine, and the prominence of Mecca as a site for pilgrimage and trade. The earlist converts to Islam (Muslins) were members of Muhammad's family, young men from weak Meccan clans, and outsiders, often of slave origin.

According to the Qur'an and later Islamic tradition, Muhammad made his famous night journey and ascension to heaven (mi'raj) during this period. The Prophet began his journey from Mecca or, according to many other traditions, from Jerusalem, on the winged mule named Buraq. He met the prophets who had preceded him, and in the highest heaven, he appeared before the throne of Allah.

615. Emigration of a small group of Muslims to Ethiopia, in search of a new site in which to practice their faith peacefully.

619. Death of Abu Talib, Muhammad's uncle and chief protector in Mecca. Without Abu Talib's influence, life for Muhammad and his followers, a persecuted minority, became increasingly difficult.

Death of Abu Talib, Khadija, the first wife of Muhammad and the first convert to Islam. She supported Muhammad economically and staid by him when, as a poet, he was reviled by the Meccans. Muhammad had remained in a monogamous union with Khadija, with whom he had many children. The only child to survive the Prophet was his daughter Fatimah (d. 633), whose sons would play a major role in later Islamic history. None of Muhammad's sons by Khadija lived through infancy.

622. Sept. The hijrah, or emigration, of Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina. Forced to flee the threatening environment of Mecca, Muhammad was asked to arbitrate a bloody dispute between the rival Aws and Khazraj tribes at the oasis town of Yathrib, known thereafter simply as Medina, meaning "the city" (for the Prophet). He soon emerged as the local leader, establishing the first Islamic theocratic community (umum), with himself as both Prophet and political leader.

The Islamic polity at Medina included those Meccan Muslims who had followed the Prophet to Medina (muhajirun) and Medina converts to Islam (nasiru), inhabitants of Medina who did not accept Muhammad as their spiritual leader, acknowledged his political supremacy. Those groups included three Meccan Jewish tribes (Banu Qaynuq'a, Banu Al-Nadr, and Banu Qurayzah) as well as non-Muslim Arabs. In an effort to win the support of the Jews, Muhammad initially incorporated Jewish observances, such as the fast of Yom Kippur, into Islamic ritual, and designated Jerusalem as the Muslim direction of prayer. The Jews, however, rejected Islam and opposed the Prophet's mission on religious grounds.

The hijrah became the first year of the Islamic calendar, a lunar calendar of 354 days—twelve months of either 29 or 30 days. The Islamic calendar is not adjusted periodically to coincide with the seasons and over time, religious holidays fall in all seasons of the solar year.

624. The Battle of Badr. The victory of a small Muslim force over more numerous troops protecting a Meccan caravan resulted in the strengthening of Muhammad's political and economic position. Many of those Medilians who doubted him (nakiru) were silenced, and the Jewish tribe of Banu Qaynuq'a was expelled.

625. March. The Battle of Uhud. Meccan forces marched to the outskirts of Medina to take revenge for those slain at Badr, but the confrontation was inconclusive. The Jewish tribes avowed neutrality, but Muhammad accused the most wealthy of them, the Banu Al-Nadr, of aiding the Meccans and expelled them from Medina.

627. March. Battle of the Trench (al-Khandaq). About 10,000 Meccan troops unsuccessfully besieged Medina. Muhammad and his 3,000 supporters dug a trench to prevent an attack on the city. The failure of the Meccans demonstrated that the Muslims of Medina had become a power to be reckoned with in western Arabia. After the battle, the Muslims accused the remaining Jewish tribe, the Banu Qurayzah, of treason. The men were executed and the women and children sold into slavery. The Prophet now ruled a unified Medina and sought further influence among the tribes of western and northern Arabia.

628. Treaty of Hudaybiya. The Meccans agreed to peace with Muhammad for ten years.

629. The Meccans vacated their city for three days to allow the Muslims to worship at the Ka'ba. All Muslims now focused on Mecca as the direction of prayer (qiblah).

630. Jan. Meccan capitulation to Muhammad. The Muslims entered Mecca, cleared the Ka'ba of idols, and established the city as their religious center. Three weeks later the united Muslim and Meccan forces defeated a confederation of beduin tribes from the nearby city of Ta'if, at the Battle of Hunayn. Muhammad's prestige was confirmed and the support of the Meccans cemented.

630-32. Subjugation of the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula. During the last two years of his life, Muhammad expanded his political influence, receiving tribal delegations (waq'at) from throughout Arabia. Although many of those tribes paid the alms tax (jizya) to Medina, not all of them accepted Muhammad as either a political leader or a prophet.

632. Farewell pilgrimage. Muhammad journeyed from Medina to Mecca on the hajj, the journey soon enjoined for all believers.

632. June 8. Death of the Prophet Muhammad. After a short illness the Prophet died in the house of his favorite wife, A'ishah. At the time of his death, the Muslim community retained the collective power of a "caliph," one forged in faith with an infinite potential for expansion.

It is believed by most Muslims that the Prophet made no provisions for political succession at the time of his death. A committee (shura) of prominent Muslims met to decide who should be the Prophet's political successor (khalifa, or caliph), since no one could follow Muhammad as Prophet. The issues of political succession and authority posed difficult to define and quickly became points of contention within the Islamic community.

632-61. RASHIDUN CALIPHS. The Rashidun ("rightly guided") caliphs is what the majority of Muslims call the first four successors to the Prophet Muhammad. Each was among the earliest of the Meccan members of the Quraysh to convert to Islam and was regarded by the Prophet as one of his close companions (sahabah). The Rashidun caliphs were all tied to Muhammad through marriage, since each of them had either married a daughter of the Prophet or given his daughter to him in marriage. They maintained the unity of the Prophet's community, oversaw the conquest of the Middle East, and established basic Islamic political and socioeconomic institutions.

632-64. ABU BAKR, THE FIRST CALIPH. Abu Bakr was one of the first Meccans to convert to Islam and was the Prophet's father-in-law. His daughter was the Prophet's favorite wife. On his accession he was faced with rebellions from many Arab tribes that had previously accepted...
Muhammad's authority. In a series of campaigns known as the Ridda, or war of apostasy, he succeeded in consolidating Arabia under Islamic authority. At his death (Aug. 23, 634), he had also begun the conquest of Syria, the first phase of the Islamic expansion in the Middle East.

632–750, THE ARAB CONQUESTS. In a remarkable wave of conquests, Arab and Muslim troops occupied territories extending from Spain to India. The Sassanian Empire (p. 100) was brought to an end, and the Byzantines lost most of their possessions in the Middle East and North Africa. The conquered populations came under Muslim rule, although it took several centuries of conversion to Islam to change their religious identity. The majority of the inhabitants of the conquered Byzantine territory in Syria and Egypt remained Christian for centuries, just as the majority of those who lived in territories once controlled by the Sassanians in Iraq and Iran retained their Zoroastrian creed.

The conquests began as an attempt to bring all the Arab tribes of the Middle East under the control of the Islamic policy established at Medina. Their scope expanded with each success. The first expeditions against Syria were organized in Medina under the able direction of the Meccan Quraysh, an elite with great organizational and tactical skills. It is estimated that about 34,000 men were engaged in the conquest of Syria, with fewer still occupying the later conquest of Iraq. Many of these recruits were prompted not by the new faith of Islam, but by the lure of booty and government stipends (sadaq).

The tactics of the Arab armies included surprise and laying siege to the garrisons of opponents ill-prepared for the new invaders. Arab military success was enhanced by the relative weakness of their two major imperial opponents in the Middle East: the Byzantines and Sassanians. Throughout the 6th and 7th centuries, these two great powers had fought each other in a series of wars that had left both politically and strategically vulnerable to surprise attacks from the south. Both powers had also persecuted their Monophysite and Nestorian Christian citizens as heretics, thus undermining the support of their people.

634–40, CONQUEST OF PALESTINE AND SYRIA. After defeating the Byzantines at 'Ammudayn in southern Palestine (634), the Arabs advanced into Palestine and Syria. Damascus surrendered in 637, and Jerusalem surrendered shortly after.

634–41, UMAR IBN AL-KHATTAB, THE SECOND CALIPH. Umar directed the first phase of the Islamic conquests in Egypt, Syria, and Mesopotamia. To keep Arab troops separate from newly conquered populations, he ordered the creation of garrison settlements (amiriya), which became the foundation of several new Islamic cities, such as Kufa and Basra in Iraq and Pusht in Egypt. Muslims entitled to salaries from the state were recorded on a list (dwan), with the earlier converts enjoying higher pay. Umar established the system of Islamic taxation by which Jews and Christians, as "People of the Book" (ahl al-kitab), paid a special poll tax (jizya) and a land tax (kharij) as a form of tribute in return for being allowed to practice their faith.

637–38, CONQUEST OF EGYPT. In 637, the Muslims vanquished the Persian army in Ctesiphon and conquered Iraq as far north as Mosul.

639–42, CONQUEST OF EGYPT. The general 'Amr ibn al-As invaded Egypt and defeated the Byzantine army at Helwan in 639. In 641, the capital of Alexandria surrendered in Sept. 642. The Muslims established the garrison city of Pusht (now part of Cairo) as their capital.

642–44, The defeat of the Sassanian counterattack at the Battle of Nihawand (642) began the Muslim conquest of the cities of western Iran, including Bakhtir, Hamadan, Rayy, and Qarqin.


644–56, UTHMAN IBN AFFAN, THE THIRD CALIPH. Uthman died of wounds inflicted by a Persian slave, an assassination not motivated by political intent. Before his death, he appointed a committee to determine his successor. The choice, Uthman ibn Affan, attempted to centralize the administration of the newly conquered territories. He demanded that provincial governors (mutawwa) send tax and conquest revenue back to Medina for distribution, a policy that met with much resistance. He continued the conquest of the Iranian plateau and ordered the creation of a definitive written version of the Qur'an.

651, Death of the last Sassanian Shah, Yazdigird III, and final demise of the Zoroastrian Empire.

651–54, The eastern Iranian province of Khurasan subsumed by Muslim forces, following the conquest of the capital, Nishapur, in 651.

655, Battle of the Masts. The Muslim navy defeated the Byzantines off the Egyptian coast.

656, The third caliph, Uthman, was murdered in his home in Medina by rebellious Muslim forces from Egypt, whose grievances as early converts concerned the erosion of their pay and prestige. Uthman's appointment of members of his own clan of Umayya to top administrative positions had weakened his support among them as well as among troops in Iraq and the Quraysh in Medina.

656–61, ABU IBN ABI TALIB, THE FOURTH CALIPH. As the first cousin of the Prophet Muhammad, Ali was also his closest male relative. His marriage to the Prophet's daughter Fatima further enhanced his prestige in the Islamic community, as he was the father of the Prophet's grandsons Hasan and Husain, as well as of all the Aliids, the line of the first two caliphs and the Fatimids.

656, DEE, BATTLE OF THE CAMEL. The first military confrontation in the civil war took place outside the town of Buzurqan in Iraq. There Ali's forces defeated a triad of leaders—the Prophet's widow A'isha and two of his male companions, al-Zubayr and Talhah—who challenged Ali on the grounds that he had failed to punish those who had killed Uthman. The triad sided with Ali, and the battle was fought in the country near Buzurqan, where the three killed each other. The battle was fought in the country near Buzurqan, where the three killed each other. The battle was fought in the country near Buzurqan, where the three killed each other. The battle was fought in the country near Buzurqan, where the three killed each other. The battle was fought in the country near Buzurqan, where the three killed each other. The battle was fought in the country near Buzurqan, where the three killed each other.

657, THE BATTLE AND ARBITRATION OF Siffin. In the second phase of the civil war, Ali was challenged by Mu'awiyah ibn Abu Sufyan, the governor of Syria, who sought to replace the murder of his relative, the third caliph Uthman (both were of the Umayyad clan). When a battle began at Siffin on the upper Euphrates, the Syrian troops of Mu'awiyah demanded arbitration of the dispute, branding those of the Quraysh. Ali agreed to negotiate, but the dispute over death's winner was pushed into a tacit struggle for the leadership of the Islamic community. The negotiators agreed that a new caliph should be selected by committee, and by 659, at the arbitration of Adhun, Mu'awiyah had openly asserted his claim to the caliphate.

The immediate result of the arbitration was that a small number of Ali's supporters deserted him. Those who had walked out, known as the Kharijites, believed that only Allah could arbitrate the dispute and that Ali and his followers had ceased to be true Muslims. The Kharijites advocated an egalitarian form of Islam in which leaders would be chosen without regard to descent or the form of inherited social or political order. They established their own eschatology along the lines of the Persian Gnostic sects, which had mixed settled communities, and found new adherents in Oman and North Africa. The defection of the Kharijites signaled the start of a decline in Ali's support.

659, DEE, DEFEAT OF THE KHARIJITE AT THE BATTLE OF Nahrawan.

661, THE MURDER OF ALI by a member of the Kharijites, marking the end of the first civil war and of the reign of the Rashidun caliphs. Ali's son, Hasan, renounced his claim to the caliphate, Mu'awiyah asserted his right to rule the Islamic community, a convention based largely on the right vested in his crack military forces. He moved rapidly to consolidate his rule and founded the Umayyad dynasty.

The supporters of Ali did not abandon his political cause even after his death. They formed a party (shi'a) from which evolved the sect of Muslims known as the Shi'a or 'Ahl al-Shi'a. They maintained that only Ali's male descendants had the right to head the Islamic community as both religious and political leaders. The evolution of these Shi'ite-religious-political doctrines eventually defined the first three Rashidun caliphs as usurpers. The notion that true Islamic political authority could be wielded only by Muhammad's family as embodied by Ali's line led to active Shi'ite opposition to other forms of Islamic leadership throughout the 7th, 8th, and 9th centuries. The majority of Muslims who did not accept Shi'ite assumptions came to be known as Sunnis.
MUHAMMAD AND THE DESCENT OF THE CALIPHAL DYNASTIES

Umayyad Caliphs

Abd Shams

Quaysh

Umayya

Abd Manaf

Hashim

UMAYYAD CALIPHS

al-Abbas

Abdallah

Abu Talib

Prophet Muhammad

Fatima

Hasan

Ali

Abu Sufyan

SYRIA

al-Muhajirun

al-Ansar

SHI'A IMAMS

and

FATIMID CALIPHS

680, Oct. 10, Death of Husayn, the son of Ali, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad and third leader (imam) of the Shi'ite Muslims. After Mu'awiyah's death, Husayn had attempted to wrest political control from the Umayyad government. On his way to Kufa in search of military support he and his followers were surrounded by Umayyad troops at Karbala and then killed after being deprived of water for days. The suffering and death of the Prophet Muhammad's grandson came eventually to be commemorated by the Shi'a community as a martyrdom, in a yearly ritual of communal mourning (the ashura) held on the tenth day of the Islamic month of Muharram.

683. Umayyad forces reached Tangier and the Atlantic Ocean.

683–92. SECOND CIVIL WAR. The Umayyads put down several serious challenges to their rule, restoring their effective hold on power after almost a decade of rebellions. The most lengthy threat came from Abdallah ibn al-Zubayr, whose father, al-Zubayr, had risen against the fourth caliph, Ali, in 686. Ibn al-Zubayr demanded that the caliph be selected from among the tribe of Quraysh, not just the Umayyad clan. He claimed the office and raised a revolt in Arabia and Iraq that lasted till 692, when Umayyad forces killed him in Mecca.

Another challenge to the Umayyads came from the Qaysi tribal confederation based in northern Syria and Iraq. It threw its support behind Ibn al-Zubayr, but the rival tribal confederation of Kaldi (based in southern Syria and Palestine) backed the Umayyads, and in a bloody battle in Marj Rabii (July 684) they defeated the Qaysi. The feud between the northern and southern tribal groups continued to foster weakening the Umayyad base of political and military support.

In 685–87 the Umayyads also faced the revolt organized in Kufa by al-Mukhtar on behalf of Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyya, a son of Ali by a concubine. The uprising tapped the support of the ta'awun, or non-Arab converts to Islam, who were emerging as an important social group with grievances against the regime for being treated as second-class Muslims and having to pay the taxes demanded of non-Muslims, despite their conversion. Al-Mukhtar proclaimed ibn al-Hanafiyya as the Mahdi, the messianic redeemer who would come at the end of time to institute a reign of justice. (This was the first appearance of this idea, which became common in Islam, particularly in its Shi'ite forms.)

The uprising was crushed in 687.

684–85, MARWAN I. Elected after a noisy conference among the Arab tribes, Marwan represented the first ruler of the Marwanid branch of the Umayyad clan. (The first three Umayyad rulers had been descendants of the Sufyanid branch of the family.)

MUJAHEDIN AND THE DESCENT OF THE CALIPHAL DYNASTIES

For a complete list of the Umayyad caliphs, see Appendix III.

661–80. MU'AWIYA I, THE FOUNDER OF THE UMAYYAD DYNASTY. Mu'awiyah established the first Arab-Islamic dynasty, with its capital at Damascus. He rested his state on the support of the Arab tribes, gathering around him a circle of tribal chieftains with whom he consulted regularly. While he ruled as a caliph, opponents defined his regime as a form of kingship (shumukh), an un-Islamic departure from the precedent of the Rashidun caliphs.

Mu'awiyah founded a decentralized state in which local governors, particularly in the most troublesome province of Iraq, were given free rein to collect taxes and punish rebels. The day-to-day administration of each province continued to be run by Byzantine and Sassanid bureaucrats who maintained pre-Islamic governmental divisions (diwans) and conducted official business in Greek and Pahlavi.

667. Islamic forces crossed the Oxus River into central Asia, the northeastern boundary of the Islamic expansion.

669. First Muslim attack on Constantinople.

670. The garrison city of Qayrawan in Tunisia was founded. It served as the base for the further expansion of Islam westward across North Africa.

671. Ziyad ibn Abi Sufyan, governor of Kufa, sent 50,000 troops to the Iranian oases of Merv as part of a policy to resist the Arab tribes in the area. These soldiers eventually intermarried with the indigenous Zoroastrian-Iranian population, and their descendants played a major role in the 8th-century Abbasid revolution that overthrew the Umayyad dynasty.

672. The island of Rhodes was taken by the Umayyads.

674. Arab forces captured Cret.
