Islám: The First 138 Years

The Second of Three Studies on Religion and Society

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> *Mankind were one community, and Allah sent (unto them) Prophets as bearers, of good tidings and as warners, and revealed therewith the Scripture with the truth that it might judge between mankind concerning that wherein they differed. And only those unto whom (the Scripture) was given differed concerning it, after clear proofs had come unto them, through hatred one of another. And Allah by His will guided those who believe unto the truth of that concerning which they differed. Allah guideth whom He will unto a straight path.*
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> Qur'án 2:213

> *Every religious community stands in need of a leader who will watch over it, in the absence of its Prophet, and enforce the rules and prescriptions of its religion and be looked upon as his successor .... Moreover, in view of the need for authority in every human grouping and society, a chief is needed who will guide men towards objects which are advantageous to them and will force them to keep away from those things that are harmful. Such chiefs are known as Kings:*
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> *Now in the Muslim religion, which is all-inclusive in its appeal and seeks to convert all, by persuasion or by force, the Jihad* [Holy War] *against infidels is obligatory. Hence, in Islam, Caliphate and Kingship are conjoined, in order to unite all efforts towards a common end.*
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> [The religious leaders other than Islám] *do not concern themselves with political affairs, but leave the temporal power in the hands of men who have seized it by chance or for some reason with which religion has nothing to do. Sovereignty exists among such peoples owing to social solidarity, as we said before; their religion as such, however, does not impose any sovereignty on them seeing that it does not demand of them dominion over other peoples, as is the case with Islam, but merely the establishing of their faith among themselves ....*
>
> Ibn Kaldun of Tunis

SIX HUNDRED and twenty two years after the crucifixion of Christ, Muḥammad, the Apostle of God, and the handful of His followers were forced to leave the city of Mecca and find refuge among the people of Medina. This was the year of the Migration (hegira). The persecution of the Prophet and of His converts in His home city had become so intolerable that to have stayed there would have meant the annihilation of the new Faith. The journey was dangerous and desperate, but the event changed the course of Islám and the history of man. In Medina, Islám survived and expanded. Some seventeen years later the Caliph 'Umar made the lunar year (beginning 16 July) in which the hegira took place the official starting point of the Muslim era.

By the year AH 138 the followers of the Prophet had swept aside two magnificent empires—the Persian Sassanid and the Byzantine. In the west they had crossed North Africa and entered Spain and France. In the north they had reached the gates of Constantinople. In the east they had marched into central Asia beyond the River Oxus and into the Indus Valley.

In the year 138 the great grandson of al-'Abbás, the Prophet's uncle, Abú-Ja'far, called al-Manṣúr (meaning "rendered victorious"), was the ruler of the most extensive empire the world had yet seen. He was personally conducting a reconnaissance to find a site for the location of a new capital; he found it on the west bank of the Tigris River, not far from the ruins of the old Sassanid capital, Ctesiphon. Here the Tigris was joined by a navigable canal to the Euphrates; the land was centrally placed between Arabia, Egypt, and Syria, on one hand, and Persia, Transoxiana, and the Punjab, on the other.

Two years later (AH 140 or AD 762) some 100,000 architects, craftsmen, and laborers were to begin the construction of the legendary city of Baghdád, which was destined to become the most illustrious city on the face of the earth. It was truly a city of gold, for every building was covered with it. Baghdád was a round city within a double circle of brick walls. Its chief glory was the royal palace at the center, which, with its annexes for the officials, eunuchs, and the harems, occupied a third of the city. Resplendently furnished, the audience chamber was to be the setting for an elaborate ceremonial continuing that of the Byzantines and Sassanids down to minor details.

The supporters of the dynasty, the bureaucrats, and the ordinary citizens were to live in the suburbs outside the walls. This remarkable isolation of the Prince of the Faithful in his luxurious palace, protected by walls and carefully chosen retainers, stood in dramatic contrast to the simplicity of the early Muslim society in Medina, where the Prophet and His immediate successors, barefoot and in mended clothes, mingled freely and unceremoniously with the crowds in market places. In 138 years the Arabs and Islám had, indeed, come a long way.

The setting

WHEN Muḥammad was born, the Arabs were not barbarians, though they lacked the refinement of Romans and Persians. Arabia was, and still is, almost completely desert, where it might not rain for ten years, and had only a narrow strip of habitable land around the periphery. But long before the advent of Islám the Peninsula had begun to emerge from its isolation to play a part in world affairs. The camel was an essential part of communication. In the long, dry, and lonely landscape it could carry loads weighing up to four hundred pounds, cover a distance of sixty miles in a day, and travel for twenty days without water in 120 degree [F] temperatures. Thus Arabia, though it had no easy access to the outside world, was criss-crossed by caravan routes. Caravans carried trade between the civilized parts of southern Arabia and the Fertile Crescent, East Africa and the Far East, and the Mediterranean world. From the beginning the southern Arabs traditionally had been economically and culturally advanced. They had developed Yemen, at times colonized Ethiopia, and traded across the Indian Ocean. Some areas in Yemen and the Ḥijáz (regions along the Red Sea) had adopted Christianity and had their own bishoprics and churches, such as the great one in Najrán.

With the immigration of considerable numbers of Jews influences of the Hebraic religion had entered Arabia. In the first and second centuries AD the Roman government had violently crushed the Jewish independence movements. It may have been during the dispersal that Jews came to Arabia and settled in Yemen and the Ḥijáz city of Yathrib, where they greatly increased the area of land under cultivation and established numerous date-palm plantations.

By the latter half of the sixth century AD the Jews accounted for a large share of the total population of that city.

The Arabs of the north had been more isolated, but even there, two centuries before the Prophet's time, some of the tribes had moved across the frontier into Syria and ʻIráq, and some had adopted Christianity and Judaism. In the northeast the Arab kingdom of Ḥírah had allied itself with the Persian empire, and in the northwest the kingdom of Ghassán usually was in alliance with Byzantium.

A number of markets and fairs had grown up along the caravan routes, particularly from Syria to Yemen and from the Fertile Crescent to the Indian Ocean, and had become permanent fixtures.

Some forty-eight miles inland from the Red Sea in a rocky valley was the city of Mecca. It was purely a trading community and owed its existence to a well, Zamzam, with tepid, salty, bitter water. By the end of the fifth century AD it had become the commercial center of the Peninsula, wealthy and sophisticated in comparison with the life in the surrounding desert. The city also had religious significance because it housed the Kaʻbah ("cube"), the square temple, which contained the sacred Black Stone and in which each major tribe had its idol—all together perhaps as many as three hundred of them—some in human forms, others in the shape of animals, and some even in the form of vegetables.

In towns and the oases the social structures governing the life of the desert were formed and continued. The basic units were small groups, clans, or subtribes. Each clan was independent, protected its own members, and all considered one another as if one blood, subject to the authority of the sheikh. Not all clans were equal because some had become rich by trade, plunder, or raids.

A tribe was made up of clans that, rightly or wrongly, acknowledged some kind of kinship. Each tribe had its eponymous ancestor, and the chief of the tribe performed functions that in a more complex society are assumed by scores of officials; he was the political head, the commander-in-chief, the chief judge, and the treasurer.

Thus the government was simple, direct, and unorganized. There was no written code of law; there was no state or police force. Each group did elect a leader, but his authority depended strictly on his personal prestige. And he, as Bernard Lewis has pointed out, was "rarely more than a first among equals."

> He followed rather than led tribal opinion. He could neither impose duties nor inflict penalties. Rights and obligations attached to individual families "within" the tribe but to none outside .... He was advised by a council of elders called the *Majlis*, consisting of the families and representatives of clans within the tribe. The Majlis was the mouthpiece of public opinion.[1]

1 Bernard Lewis, *The Arabs in History* (London: Hutchinson's Univ. Library, 1958), p. 29.

In Mecca the Quraysh tribe, the custodians of the Ka'bah, comprised a dozen or more clans and had been dominant for more than a century.

The Arabs had little time for religion, the arts, or architecture. The poverty of environment left little room for artistic expression except in words. The Arabs admired eloquence. Poetry was their supreme art. The vocabulary was rich, and the sense finely shaped and allusive. The poet was the spokesman of the tribe who sang the praise of its heroes and leaders and attacked its enemies. As Professor Hitti has put it, "[b]eside being oracle, guide, orator and spokesman of his community, the poet was its historian and scientist, in so far as it had a scientist. Bedouin measured intelligence by poetry. 'Who dares dispute my tribe ... its pre-eminence in horsemen, poets and members?,' exclaimed a bard."[2]

Arabic poetry also embodied the Arab's code of values—bravery in battle, patience in misfortune, persistence in revenge, protection of the weak, defiance of the strong, loyalty to the tribe, hospitality to guests, generosity to the needy, and fidelity to promises.

To judge by his poetry the pagan Bedouin before Islám had little if any religion. There were living things of a beastly nature called jinn—or demons. They differed from gods in that the latter were on the whole friendlier to man than the hostile jinn. The Bedouin did not believe in personal immortality. Magical superstition dominated what religious sentiments existed among the Arabs.

The Call

AMID the solemn grandeur of Arabian wilderness, in the deep solitude of a cave in the hill of Hirrá', [Ghár Ḥirá', the Cave of Hira] a few miles northeast of Mecca, a bare, arid upland "devoid of all beauty", its "dull, monotonous coloring varying from dirty yellow to dirty light brown and muddy grey", Muḥammad, a forty-year-old native of the city, heard three Arabic words that were soon to shake the world: "You are the Messenger of God."[3]

The experience took place on the night of the twenty-sixth or twenty-seventh of the month of Ramaḍán in the year AD 610. Muslim tradition has identified the voice as that of the Archangel Gabriel (*Jibrá'íl*).

It was a painful and agonizing experience for Muḥammad, Who feared that He might have been possessed by some evil spirit. But the voice persisted and commanded:

> Read: In the name of thy Lord who createth,
>
> Createth man from a clot.
>
> Read: And thy Lord is the Most Bounteous,
>
> Who teacheth by the pen,
>
> Teacheth man that which he knew not.[4]

What a change in the life of a man who had lived a quiet, happy, simple, and abstemious life. He had been born a few years after the death of the great Byzantine emperor Justinian, in the reign of Khusraw Anúshirván, the illustrious Persian king.[5] His father 'Abdu'lláh, who through His mother's side was related to the Quraysh tribe, had died either during his wife's pregnancy or shortly after her delivery, while on a business trip to Medina on his way home from Gaza.[6] He had left his wife Áminah very little in worldly goods—one slave, five camels, and a few sheep. Muḥammad was six years old when His mother died on her way home from a journey to Medina with her slave Umm Ayman. His eighty-year-old grandfather 'Abdu'l-Muṭṭalib then took Him to live in his house. The grandfather died two years later, and young Muḥammad became the ward of Abú-Ṭálib, His uncle and the son of the same mother as Muḥammad's father. Abú-Ṭálib, the leader of the clan known as the Banú-Hashím, was a merchant in comfortable circumstances in Mecca. Muḥammad most probably learned to read and write, though the extent of His learning is not known. He was known for His intelligence and His calm, confident, and

2 Philip Hitti, *The Arabs: A Short History* (South Bend: Regnery/Gateway, Inc., 1970), p. 27.
3 Maxime Rodinson, *Mohammad*, trans. Anne Carter (New York: Random, 1974), pp. 73–74.
4 Qur'án 96:1–5. All the quotations from the Qur'án in the text are from Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall, trans. *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran* (New York: Knopf, 1930).
5 The generally accepted date of Muḥammad's birth is AD 571, though by means of highly dubious calculations various dates have been given between 567 and 579.
6 Muḥammad's grandfather 'Abdu'l-Muṭṭalib, a prosperous trader, had obtained certain profitable privileges at the shrine of Mecca. He had a number of wives from different tribes who gave him ten sons and six daughters

balanced way of conducting Himself both in His own affairs and in His dealing with others. He was also highly respected for His honesty and integrity.

He did not marry until He was about twenty-five years old, having remained a bachelor longer than most of His contemporaries perhaps because of His poverty. Then He married Khadíjah, a widow, who had already been married twice and was fifteen years His senior. Her caravans brought merchandise from Syria and Byzantium to Mecca and made her prosperous. The marriage brought material comfort and economic security to Muḥammad, but it also was a union of two individuals who strongly loved and respected one another. His deep affection for His wife never wavered.

They had four daughters, but their sons died at an early age. One was al-Qásim, who died when he was about two years old. There seemed also to have been another son by the name of 'Abdu'lláh. But Muḥammad adopted His young cousin 'Alí, whose father Abú-Ṭálib was experiencing some business difficulties. He also adopted as a son, Zayd, a slave given to Him by His wife—a young Christian man from Syria from the tribe of Kalb.

Thus at the age of forty Muḥammad was living a serene life, surrounded by affection, respected by all, and could have gone on living happily the rest of His life. The mystical experience in the hill of Hirrá', however, interrupted it all. He ran from the cave and threw Himself over a precipice, when suddenly He saw Gabriel "in the form of a man, with his feet astride the horizon."[7] In the stress of the great emotion caused by the vision, His face covered with sweat, Muḥammad was seized with a violent shuddering and lay unconscious for some time.[8] He then rushed home in alarm and asked His wife Khadíjah to put some covers over Him. Once again the voice commanded Muḥammad: "O thou enveloped in thy cloak, Arise and warn!"[9]

Khadíjah then and there became the first to believe in her husband's mission. Thus, inconspicuously, a religion was born in the heart of the Arabian desert. The significance of that Night of Power was known only to two individuals on the face of the earth. Otherwise there were no outward signs to herald the coming of a New Day—no falling of stars, no darkening of the sun, no trembling of the earth. Life continued as it had before; the potency of the spiritual forces released was yet to be demonstrated.

For three years Muḥammad, now the Prophet (*an-Nabí'*), did not publicly declare His mission. The Messenger of God (*an-Rasúl*) shared His Faith but with a very few. His first converts were members of His own family. After Khadíjah, 'Alí, His cousin, still in his teens, embraced the new religion. Abú Bakr's conversion was helpful since he was a prominent merchant and a recognized member of the Quraysh tribe. 'Umar and 'Uthmán, who, like Abú-Bakr, were to become after the death of the Prophet the leaders of the Muslim community, were also among the early believers.

Among the handful of converts were a few who were younger sons of influential men of the leading families and clans of Mecca. The majority, however, were young men of no great social standing. Some had neither family nor clan ties; others had ceased for one reason or another to receive their clans' protection. Early Islám, as one historian has characterized it, "was a movement of young people mostly well under forty years old" and predominantly "weak people."[10]

The public preaching of the Faith began around AD 615. During the early formative years of Islám the new religion had transcended but had not destroyed tribal customs and traditions. Through new revelations Islám's strong monotheistic principle was becoming more clearly defined and the break with the paganism of the past more discernible. Now the city and the tribe had to take some action. At first the Quraysh had tolerated the little community, and the Banú-Háshim clan had stuck by the Prophet. Abú-Ṭálib, His uncle, had not approved his Nephew's ideas but nonetheless had extended his family's protection to Him; and many Meccans had considered the Prophet as a harmless visionary, possessed, perhaps, like the *káhins* ("soothsayers"), magicians, and poets, by a spirit of lesser order. Were there not a number of others who had also claimed prophethood for themselves? Was there not Maslamah (or Masaylimah) who was also reciting revelations in rhythmic prose?[11] Was there not

7 Sir John B. Glubb, *A Short History of the Arab Peoples* (New York: Stein and Day, 1975), p. 30.

8 Muḥammad's revelations always caused a great deal of agony. As He testified Himself: "Never once did I receive a revelation without thinking that my soul had been torn away from me." Jalal al-Din Suyuti *al-itgam fi 'Ulúm al-Qur'án* (Cairo: AH 1318), I, 46, quoted in Rodinson, Mohammad, p. 74.

9 Qur'án 74:1.

10 Sydney Nettleton Fisher, The Middle East (New York: Knopf, 1979), p. 31.

11 Maslamah, with marked ascetic tendencies, after the death of the Prophet, raised his entire tribe against Muḥammad's successor.

the prophetess Sajáḥ of the tribe of Tamím? Had not Khadíjah's own cousin preached some of the very ideas now being espoused by Muḥammad?

Names of Christians and Jews were quoted by the townspeople from whom the Prophet was said to have received His information and whose teachings He was merely repeating. But as the Prophet became bolder in preaching His religion and more clearly emphasizing its truth and independence, the persecution and opposition began. The Prophet was subjected to verbal insults and tongue-lashings. His unprotected followers were beaten by their fellow clansmen, as were the Quraysh Muslims. Economic pressures were exerted. Meccans refused to pay their debts to Muslims, and severe boycotts greatly reduced the fortunes of many, including Abú-Bakr's. When Abú-Ṭálib refused to withdraw his protection from the Prophet, other Quraysh families initiated economic boycotts against that clan and its closest ally, the al-Muṭṭalib clan.

In the year AD 615 the Prophet sent His followers to Abyssinia for sanctuary under its Christian king. There may not have been more than fifteen of them, though the list of emigrants was certainly added to at a later date. At the same time the little community of believers that remained in Mecca perhaps counted some forty men and ten or twenty women.[12]

The year of emigration: Hegira

IN THE YEAR 619, Khadíjah and Abú-Ṭálib, the two significant persons who to a great extent had supported and sheltered the Prophet, died within a few days of one another. Now the historian enters a period in the life of Muḥammad and the development of Islám in which the chronological order of events can be treated with comparative safety.

Abú-Ṭálib was succeeded as the head of the Banú-Háshim clan by his brother, Abú-Lahab. His hostility to his Nephew caused the withdrawal of clan protection from the Prophet. As a result the infant community's prospects for the future looked hopeless. No spectacular conversions were being made. Physical persecution became common, and the Prophet's warnings to the Meccans were to no avail: "So We took each one in his sin; of them was he on whom We sent a hurricane, and of them was he who was overtaken by the (Awful) Cry, and of them was he whom We caused the earth to swallow, and of them was he whom We drowned. It was not for Allah to wrong them, but they wronged themselves."[13] At the same time God also comforted the believers with promises of punishment to their oppressors:

> And if Our revelations are recited unto them in plain terms, they say: This is naught else than a man who would turn you away from what your fathers used to worship; and they say: This is naught else than an invented lie ....
>
> And We have given them no Scriptures which they study, nor sent We unto them, before thee, any warner.
>
> Those before them denied, and these have not attained a tithe of that which We bestowed on them (of old); yet they denied My messengers. How intense then was My abhorrence (of them)!
>
> Say (unto them, O Muḥammad): I exhort you unto one thing only: that ye awake, for Allah's sake, by twos and singly, and then reflect: There is no madness in your comrade. He is naught else than a warner unto you in face of a terrific doom ....
>
> Couldst thou but see when they are terrified with no escape, and are seized from near at hand,
>
> And say: We (now) believe therein. But how can they reach (faith) from afar off,
>
> When they disbelieved in it of yore.
>
> They aim at the unseen from afar off.[14]

But the unbelievers were not moved. As the fate of the little community of Muslims seemed doomed in Mecca, they had to look to Medina for future success.

Medina, some two-hundred miles northwest of Mecca, was also on the south-to-north caravan route. It was in an oasis of some twenty square miles, rich in underground water and dense plantations of date palms and other

12 Montgomery Watt has made valuable and detailed biographical studies of the first forty of the faithful and on the whole found them among the most independent-minded in Mecca. See W. Montgomery Watt, *Muḥammad at Mecca* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953); *Muḥammad at Medina* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956); and their abridgment *Muḥammad, Prophet and Statesman* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961). They are valuable sources of information.

13 Qur'án 29:40.

14 Qur'án 34:43–46, 51–53.

fruit trees. The tribes who lived there had small forts to which they could retreat when attacked by their enemies. There was no concentration of houses or anything resembling a city at the time.

Among the leading families of Medina were some Jewish clans who had settled there, adopted Arab customs, and spoke a dialect of Arabic. The Jewish name for Yathrib was the Aramaic *medinta*, which meant simply "the city".

In March 620 the Prophet met seven men from Medina who had come to Mecca on a pilgrimage. He had a private conversation with them that led to their conversion. The following year the seven men came back and brought five more with them. The twelve met the Prophet at night in a little valley east of Mecca and pledged their loyalty to Him. In March 622 seventy-three men came from Medina and offered their allegiance. Now, with His eyes set on that city, the Prophet asked the Meccan Muslims to leave the city. The Faithful set out for Medina in small groups, the departures taking place over a period of about three months—July, August, and September. In Medina the emigrants, perhaps no more than seventy (though some have estimated two hundred), were welcomed by the local adherents. Muḥammad and a few of His closest disciples were the last to leave Mecca.

On 28 June 622 a Jewish peasant looking over the walls of his settlement saw the weary Prophet and His companions urging their camels toward the cool shade of the palm trees. He ran to take the news to the Muslims, and some five hundred men, women, and children rushed out joyously and shouted, "The Prophet of God has come!"[15]

The date and the event proved to be of major significance in the history of Islám and the fortunes of the Prophet. In Medina Muḥammad founded the Islamic *ummah*, or community, apart and independent from others. Ummah was a congregation of Alláh, a community governed by a divine plan as revealed by God's Messenger.

Here in Medina, isolated from their base and separated from their familial tribes, the Emigrants and the Helpers still calling themselves the Faithful (*mu'min*, in the singular), rather than Muslims, slowly gained autonomy, developed their own organization, and saw its limits and objectives becoming more defined and its doctrinal capital growing. In the City of the Prophet a state of a special kind—a theocratic state—was developing. Emphasis on a community of belief rather than blood relationship brought peace to settlements heretofore torn by interfamily feuds.

Though very early there formed an "inner circle" composed of a small group of the believers closest to the Prophet, believers whose advice He often would ask, Muḥammad was the one force unifying the group. Here the Prophet became also a statesman. Here the process of the Arabization and the nationalization of Islám began.

When the Emigrants came to Medina, they, as a whole, possessed no funds and had no material base. But the Quraysh tribe did have a thriving trade with Syria, and the caravans had to pass within sixty miles of the oasis. Medina was a convenient center for any expedition against these enterprises of the rich. Soon after the Hegira the Muslims did in fact start to raid the caravans. At first the attacks were no great matter since extreme care was taken to refrain from bloodshed. But in the month of Rajab, the second year of the Hegira (January 624) the first blood was spilled when one of the four caretakers of the caravan was killed, two were taken prisoners, and one escaped. The caravan was captured and taken to Medina in triumph.[16]

Not too long after this incident (March 624) a caravan of one thousand camels returning from Damascus was due to pass close to Medina. The Muslims in the city decided to intercept it. But the leader of the caravan, Abú-Sufyán, of the Umayyad family became aware of the plot while still in Syria. He immediately dispatched a swift camel rider to Mecca, urging the Meccans to send an armed force to protect the caravan and escort it past Medina.

Muḥammad with a force of approximately three hundred men, seventy camels, and two horses waited some twenty miles south of Medina near the well of Badr where the route from Syria left the coast and ran a little way inland on the way to Mecca, and from which point a road branched off toward Medina. The Quraysh had sent an army of well over nine hundred with three hundred camels, and one hundred horses, hoping to make a strong

15 The date of the arrival of the Prophet to the city of Medina has been subject to some speculation. One version has it as 2 July and one as 24 September. The Prophet named the Emigrants al-Muhájirún and gave the Muslims of Medina the title of al-Anṣar (the "Helpers").

16 The prisoners were released after ransom of 1,600 *dínár* each. One of them became a Muslim and stayed in Medina.

impression on the dissidents in Medina. When the two armies met, after a few single combats between champions, the Quraysh advanced. But they fought as individual clans, whereas the Muslims had the unified and unifying command of the Prophet. The Quraysh were facing the east and had the morning sun in their eyes; they were thirsty and had no particular desire to fight their kinsmen for the protection of a caravan which, they had now heard, had already passed safely. Their principal leader was killed at the very beginning of the battle. They could not withstand the fierce enthusiasm of the Muslims, and before noon the Meccans broke in flight, leaving fifty to seventy of their comrades dead and seventy others prisoners. On the Muslim side there were only fifteen dead.

The Muslims returned in triumph to Medina. The Quraysh had not met a defeat for generations. The spoils of war were significant: a great quantity of arms and armor, 115 camels, and 14 horses. It was Islám's first great success, and it confirmed the Prophet's position in Medina and laid the foundation of His temporal power.[17]

The Battle of Badr signalized the emergence of Islám as a militant religion. The Prophet Himself had led an army. Defense of the Islamic community was not only justified, it became the responsibility of the Faithful. "Fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you, but begin not hostilities. Lo! Allah loveth not aggressors."[18]

Now, to intercept all trade between Mecca and Syria, thus ruining the economy of the Quraysh, became Muḥammad's strategy. But the open deserts crossed by the caravans were inhabited by nomadic tribes whose cooperation had obviously become essential. One tribe, the Juhaynah, was won over; but two other tribes, further east, remained loyal to the Quraysh. With the memory of the defeat at Badr firmly impressed in their minds, and the threat to their very way of life becoming more real every day, the Meccans determined to strike back at the Muslims and once and for all to eliminate the Islamic community and its leader.

Almost exactly a year after the disaster of Badr, a Meccan force three thousand strong, including two hundred cavalry, under the command of Abú-Sufyán, who had led the caravan to safety at the time of that battle, set out for the city of the Prophet. Muḥammad had no more than one thousand men under His command, only one hundred of them with armor, and only two horses. Nonetheless, the Muslims sallied out of town. The Qurayshites had reached Mount Ubud some two miles north of Medina on the evening of Thursday, the fifth of Shawwál in the year AH 3 (21 March 625). On Sunday morning the Muslims arrived, and the battle was joined. Muḥammad Himself wielded a spear and drew a bow. A stone split His lips and broke one of His teeth. Another smashed into the cheek piece of His helmet, and there was blood on His face. A Qurayshite dealt Him a blow that sent Him stumbling backward into a hole. Some fifteen Muslim warriors formed about the Prophet and slowly fought their way back with Him to the shelter of the hill. Someone cried that the Prophet was dead, and panic increased among His followers. Ḥamzah, His uncle, was killed. Qurayshí ranged over the plain, finishing off the wounded.

Muḥammad's army had been totally defeated by nightfall. The victors, however, did not march on Medina. As Sir John Glubb has observed, "the old Arabs did not practice total war. Final victory was not to them a familiar concept."[19] Abú-Sufyán, standing in the plain below, addressed the fugitives clinging to the rocks of the hill: "Today is in exchange for Badr. We will meet again next year."[20] The Quraysh then mounted their camels and rode toward Mecca.

The Muslims, soon after the defeat, were confronted by the Prophet:

> Faint not nor grieve, for ye will overcome them if ye are (indeed) believers.
>
> If ye have received a blow, the (disbelieving) people have received a blow the like thereof. These are (only) the vicissitudes which We cause to follow one another for mankind, to the end that Allah may know those who believe and may choose witnesses from among you; and Allah loveth not wrong-doers.

17 One-fifth of the booty was offered to Muḥammad to be allotted or used by the state for the sake of orphans, poor, and travelers. This set a precedent for the future Islamic state.

18 Qur'án 2:190. As is obvious in the Qur'anic verse, fighting was to be clearly limited to defense. The only apparent exceptions were in the Qur'án 9:5 where the context of the command was to "slay the idolaters"—but that applied to those idolatrous tribes of Arabia assembled at the Pilgrimage who had first made an agreement with the Muslims and then violated it—and in the Qur'án 9:29 where the Faithful were enjoined to fight "those who have been given the scripture" (that is, Jews and Christians) but "believe not in Allah nor the Last Day." Nowhere did the Qur'án command Muslims to propagate their Faith by the sword.

19 Glubb, *Short History*, p. 38.

20 ibid.

> And that Allah may prove those who believe, and may blight the disbelievers.[21]

The Meccans and their allies returned, not in a year as promised, but in two. They were some ten thousand strong, including four thousand of the Quraysh. The Muslims this time did not go out to challenge such an overwhelmingly superior force but shut themselves within the fortresses of the city. The drudgery of a siege did not suit the temper of the tribesmen, who enjoyed their galloping desert battles. After three weeks of frustrating blockade the Meccans withdrew.

The Prophet, taking advantage of circumstances, proceeded to consolidate His power as the undisputed leader of the city. The loyalty of the believers was unwavering, but the loyalty of the Jews who were such a major force in the settlement was another matter.

The tension between the two communities was not only political; it was religious as well. At first the Jews had shown a great deal of consideration and tolerance for Muḥammad and His followers. They had welcomed Him to Medina in the year of Hegira. His teachings seemed remarkably close ‘to their own. Did He not claim Abraham as His ancestor as they did? Had He not referred repeatedly to Moses, Joseph, Noah, Ishmael, Lot, Saul, Daniel, Solomon, Elijah, Job, and Jonah?[22] Did not the Prophet recount the story of the creation and fall of man, the flood, and Sodom? Might not He, in fact, be the Messiah? After all, there were Jewish prophecies that had forecast the end of the world at the end of the fifth century AD. War between the two great empires of the region—the Persian and Byzantine—had resumed and seemed to confirm the prediction. “When you see kingdoms fighting among themselves, then look for the footsteps of the Messiah. Know that it will be so because so it was in the days of Abraham. When nation made war against nation [Gen. xiv] then was redemption granted to Abraham.”[23] Other Jewish prophecies had claimed that a great war between Rome and Persia would take place just before the end:

> Rejoice, Exult, O Constantinople, city of Wicked Edom [another name for Rome and the Romans], built on the soil of Romania, possessed of the countless armies of the people of Edom! For Thou also shalt be chastized. The Parthians [the Persians] shall ravage Thee, the accursed cup comes to meet Thee and Thou shalt be made drunken and cast out. And then shall Thy sign be expiated, O community of Zion! Thou shalt be delivered by the Messiah Thy King and by Elijah the priest.[24]

Though there were prophecies and predictions, soon after Muḥammad’s arrival in Medina its large Jewish population rejected Muḥammad’s initial conciliatory gestures symbolized by the adoption of such Jewish practices as praying in the direction of Jerusalem. The Jews could appreciate Islám’s recognition of the divine mission of Abraham, Moses, and the prophets, but they resented Muḥammad’s inclusion of Jesus and Ishmael among God’s messengers, as well as His own claim to be God’s Apostle.[25]

For His part, the Prophet considered the presence of pockets of disaffected Jews as a source of political weakness. During the last unsuccessful Meccan siege of Medina, a Jewish tribe, Banú-Qurayẓah, had been in contact with the enemy. The Prophet ordered the capture of its settlement; the able-bodied men of the tribe were put to death; and the Emigrants were established on the date plantations thus made ownerless. Soon thereafter the Jews who were not converted were expelled from the Ḥijáz.

Now, almost without opposition in Medina and its environs, the Prophet became the cohesive force uniting every segment of Medinese society. Hitherto, Islám had been a religion within a state; but within six years, under Muḥammad, it passed, as Professor Hitti pointed out, “into something more than a state religion—it became the state. Then and there Islám came to be what the world has ever since recognized it to be—a militant polity.”[26]

21 Qur’án 3:139–41.

22 In the Qur’án Abraham is cited no less than seventy times in twenty-five chapters, and the fourteenth Súrih is entitled after His name. Muḥammad called Abraham a true Muslim who founded the Ka‘bah and was His ideal predecessor (see Qur’án 2:124; 3:65, 68; 4:125; *et seq.*). Súrih 12 is dedicated to Joseph. Moses’ name appears in thirty-four different chapters. The creation and fall of man is cited five times; the flood, eight.

23 cf. A. Cohen, *The Talmud* (Paris: Payot, 1950), pp. 417–18, quoted by Rodinson, *Mohammad*, p. 66.

24 Targúm Threni, in *Monumenta Talmudica* (Vienna and Leipzig: Orion Press, 1914), I, 52. Also quoted by Rodinson, *Mohammad*, p. 66.

25 “Say (O Muḥammad): O mankind! Lo! I am the messenger of Allah to you all—(the messenger of) Him unto whom belongeth the Sovereignty of the heavens and the earth. There is no God save Him. He quickeneth and He giveth death. So believe in Allah and His messenger, the Prophet who can neither read nor write, who believeth in Allah and in His words and follow him that haply ye may be led aright.” Qur’án 7:158.

26 Hitti, *Arabs*, pp. 35–36.

In March 628, during one of the months in which raiding and fighting were forbidden by all Arab tradition, Muḥammad declared His intention of making a pilgrimage to the temple of Mecca.

Some fourteen hundred Muslims followed the Prophet on that trip. The Meccans, not at all convinced that the Muslims would honor the code, mobilized their forces and took up a position to defend the city. The Muslims halted at Ḥudaybíyyah, a short day's march from Mecca, and all took the oath to fight to the death for their Faith.[27] However, there was no war and the two sides concluded a truce by which the Muslims were to return to Medina, but were allowed to make the pilgrimage after the expiration of one year.

The next year the Prophet led some sixteen hundred Muslims on the pilgrimage. The Quraysh tribe had evacuated the city and camped in the surrounding mountains. The Prophet went to the Ka'bah and performed the seven circuits of the building, as had been done by the pagan Arabs long before. There were no expressions of antagonism toward the Meccans and no insults to the sanctity of their religion. He called the Ka'bah the House of God, a monument built by Abraham. The Arab's sin was to place idols in its precincts; once the idols were removed, its sacredness would endure.

Now a number of Meccans were converted to His cause, among them the two great future military, luminaries, Khálid Ibn al-Walíd, the conqueror of Syria, and 'Amr Ibn al-'Áṣ, the future victor in Egypt.

On the tenth of Ramaḍán in AH 8 (1 January AD 630) the Prophet, at the head of an army of ten thousand, camped two days' march from Mecca. Obviously, this was no ordinary pilgrimage!

The Meccans sent Abú-Sufyán, the conqueror of Uḥud, to the Muslim camp to negotiate with the Prophet. Instead, he became a convert and went back to his city to tell the townsfolk of the Prophet's terms. The sanctity of life and property of all was promised, as long as the Meccans laid down their arms and shut themselves in their houses or took refuge in the house of Abú-Sufyán.

On Thursday, the twentieth of Ramaḍán (the eleventh of January) Muslims in four columns, led by Muḥammad, entered the deserted streets of the city. What little resistance there was, al-Walíd easily brushed aside.

Mounted on a camel, with a long wand in His hand, in the midst of a rejoicing army and a crowd of men, horses, and camels, the Prophet made His way to the sacred Black Stone, touched it with His stick, and cried out in a loud voice "Alláh-u-Akbar!" He then made the seven ritual circles, asked for the key to the Ka'bah and went inside. Upon returning from the sanctuary, He made a speech inviting the Quraysh to acknowledge Him as God's Messenger. As He sat on the rock of Ṣafá, a long column of Meccans—men first, women behind—filed past Him and swore allegiance to Alláh. He proclaimed a general amnesty, and with His clemency on this day of triumph He won the hearts of the Meccans. The Prophet, finally, had been honored by His own people!

From Mecca He sent a number of small expeditions into the surrounding country. On the twenty-seventh of Dhul'l-Qa'da in the year AH 8 (18 March AD 630) the Prophet returned to Medina. The year AH 9 is known as the Year of Delegation. Representatives from all the major tribes went to Medina to offer their submission to the Prophet and promised to furnish troops and not to attack one another. In the same year He concluded treaties of peace with the Christian chief of al-Aqabah and the Jewish tribes in the oasis of Magná, Adhzúh, and Jarbá of the Ḥijáz to the south. To these Jews and Christians was extended the protection of Islám on payment of a special tax —*jizyah*.[28]

In March 632 the Prophet once again led a multitude of His followers to Mecca for pilgrimage. This was His "Farewell Pilgrimage." He gave a sermon to the assembly of the Faithful, and closed His preaching by looking up to heaven and crying, "O Lord, I have delivered my message and fulfilled my mission."[29] One day soon after His return to Medina the Prophet complained of high fever and severe headache. For a week His condition deteriorated. On the tenth day the symptoms were greatly aggravated, and He was racked with pain. However, to

27 Years later those who had sworn their allegiance to the Prophet at Ḥudaybíyyah held the deepest respect of the Islamic community, second only to those who had fought the Battle of Badr.

28 Originally the term dhimmís included Christians, Jews, and Sabeans, but dhimmí status was later extended to Zoroastrians, Berbers, and other non-scriptuaries. They remained under the jurisdiction of their spiritual heads even in matters of civil and criminal procedures. Muslim law was not applicable to them except in cases in which Muslims were included.

29 Glubb, *Short History*, p. 40. For further details of this significant sermon of the Prophet, see H. M. Balyuzi, *Muḥammad and the Course of Islám* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1976), p. 149.

the surprise of all, He appeared the next day in the mosque at the hour of the dawn prayer, smiled at the congregation, and told them to go ahead with their devotions. But He was weak. Within a few hours He returned to His room and fell back on His bed. His head, resting against His wife's breast, suddenly grew heavy. He called for water and wet His face. "O Lord," were the Prophet's last words, "I beseech Thee to assist me in the agonies of death," and in a faint whisper He prayed, "Lord, grant me pardon. Eternity in Paradise."[30] On that Monday at noon, late in May or early in June, the Prophet met His Lord.[31]

The Message

THE PROPHET'S messages since His first revelation on the Night of Power were, over some twenty-two years, taken down on scraps of leather, flat camel bones, potshards, palm leaves, parchment, even stones or memorized. In His lifetime these fragments began to be collected into súrihs and became known collectively as "The Recitation" in Arabic, *al-Qur'án*.

However, during the course of the wars following the death of Muḥammad, so many Qur'án memorizers and reciters were lost as to endanger the perpetuation of the sacred words. Abú-Bakr, the Prophet's first successor, began the collection of the materials that, some nineteen years later, resulted in the compilation of the entire Qur'án in the days of 'Uthmán (644–56)—the third successor—who canonized the Medinese code and ordered all others destroyed. In no other major religion before had there been such early agreement on the official version of the Founder's words and teachings.

The Book made Islám a literate religion. It constitutes the smallest basic scripture of any great religion, about two-thirds the size of the New Testament, but is the best authenticated, and was arranged so early that it must be considered *ipsissima verba* of the Prophet, almost unaltered. Of the 114 súrihs, 92 were revealed in Mecca and 22 in Medina, though the Medinese chapters are longer and constitute about one-third of the Book. Meccan revelations were mainly concerned with faith in God and devoted mainly to spiritual principles grounding the Muslims in that faith. Medinese revelations were mostly intended to translate that faith into action.

The arrangement of the súrihs was arbitrary and mechanical. All except the first are placed automatically in diminishing order of length and bear no relation to chronological sequence or subject matter.[32]

The Qur'án was designed to be recited. Anyone who has listened to its verses being chanted can attest to the Qur'án's cadence, melody, and power.

Because the Qur'án must never be used by Muslims in translation for worship, the spread of Islám created an impressive degree of linguistic unity that remains today. By forbidding its translation, Islám imposed Arabic as the enduring cultural bond to hold the adherents together long after the religious bonds had become weakened.[33] There are significant parallels with Judaism, which through the use of Hebrew has given the community a strong sense of cultural and spiritual unity, and with Roman Catholicism, which by the imposition of the use of Latin gave Western Europe a cultural heritage of lasting value.

The theological doctrines of the Qur'án are simple. The central tenet of Islám is monotheism. There is but one God, and Muḥammad is His Messenger: "Say: He is Allah, the One! Allah, the eternally Besought of all! He begetteth not nor was begotten. And there is none comparable unto Him."[34]

30 Glubb, *Short History*, p. 40.

31 There is no agreement among historians about the exact date of the Prophet's death. Montgomery Watt gives the date as 8 June 632, or 13 Rabí' al-Awwal AH 11. The Shí'ih tradition, however, has it as the twenty-eighth of Safar, which corresponds to 25 May. See Balyuzi, *Muḥammad*, p. 154.

32 A number of attempts have been made to translate the Qur'án in chronological order. The most recent is the French version by Regis Blanchère, an excellent work (*Le Probléme de Mahomet* [Paris: P. U. F., 1952]). Richard Bell's English translation (*The Qur'án*, 2 vols. [Edinburg: T. T. Clark, 1937]) is traditional, but he does give precise details concerning the chronology of the text.

33 The first and, naturally, unauthorized translation of the Qur'án in a European language was that into Latin by Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny in the twelfth century. The motivation, naturally, was not to instruct the good monks in the Faith of Muḥammad but rather to refute its claims and discredit the Prophet. The first English translation was made by Alexander Ross, Vicar of Carisbrooke, and appeared in 1649. Ross' translation was from a French version and the introduction well represents the spirit of the translator: "The Alcoran of Mohamet … newly Englished, for the satisfaction of all that desire to look into the Turkish vanities." See Hitti, *Arabs*, p. 43.

34 Qur'án 112:1–4.

Though there is only one God, Islám, like Christianity, recognized other supernatural beings, such as angels (very similar to those described in the Bible) and jinn, spirits midway between angels and men, some good and others evil.

Though the Prophet was the Apostle of God for His day, there had been many other Apostles before Him. The Qur'án mentions twenty-eight, of whom four are Arabian, eighteen are found in the Old Testament, and three (Zachariah, John the Baptist, and Jesus) in the New Testament.[35]

In the Qur'án Muḥammad presents a majestic procession of the Messengers of God from Adam to His own Person:

> Say (O Muslims): We believe in Allah and that which is revealed unto us and that which was revealed unto Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes, and that which Moses and Jesus received, and that which the Prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him we have surrendered. Qur'án 2:136

Lo! Allah preferred Adam and Noah and the Family of Abraham and the Family of Imrán above (all His) creatures.

> They were descendants one of another. Allah is Hearer, Knower. Qur'án 3:33–34

> And verily We gave unto Moses the Scripture and We caused a train of messengers to follow after him, and We gave unto Jesus, son of Mary, clear proofs (of Allah's sovereignty), and We supported him with the holy Spirit. Is it ever so, that, when there cometh unto you a messenger (from Allah) with that which ye yourselves desire not, ye grow arrogant, and some ye disbelieve and some ye slay? Qur'án 2:87

> And verily We have raised in every nation a messenger, (proclaiming): Serve Allah and shun false gods. Then some of them (there were) whom Allah guided, and some of them (there were) upon whom error had just hold. Do but travel in the land and see the nature of the consequence for the deniers! Qur'án 16:36

God's attributes of love and mercy are overshadowed by those of majesty and might; nevertheless, all the súrihs of the Qur'án are introduced with the same formula: "In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful." The Faithful must also believe in resurrection, the day of judgment, heaven and hell.

The Qur'án raised the ethical standard of the Arab society to an infinitely higher plane than it had known before. Charity, humility, patience, forgiveness of enemies are strongly prescribed, and avarice, lying, and malice are condemned. The humane treatment of slaves is enjoined, and their manumission encouraged. Special care and love for orphans is called for. Dowries, divorce, and inheritance are regulated in detail. Fraud, perjury, and slander are repeatedly and severely condemned. Rules of social behavior are laid down in several passages.

The status of women in general, by contrast with the anarchy of pre-Islamic Arabia, was enormously enhanced. Though the Qur'an explicitly 'maintains the superior right both of the father and of the husband, women were allowed a share in property, and their legal rights were recognized. It limited polygamy to four wives. Further than that the Prophet did not legislate; rather He tried to set an example of proper respect for women.

Unfortunately, soon after Muḥammad's death most of the rights accorded women were curtailed by restrictions imposed by their guardians and by the ingenuity of Muslim jurists.

Polygamy was sanctioned, but for the first time in all legal and religious traditions a limit was established. No man could have more than four wives: "And if ye fear that ye will not deal fairly by the orphans, marry of the women, who seem good to you, two or three or four; and if ye fear that ye cannot do justice (to so many) then one (only) or (the captives) that your right hands possess."[36] And though divorce was still easy, the divorced wife could not be sent away penniless.

Idolatry, infanticide, and usury were prohibited, as were gambling and the drinking of wine. A dietary law, somewhat like that of the Jews, banned certain foods, especially pork. There was also a rudimentary code of law designed to check the selfishness and violence that had prevailed among the Arabs. Arbitration was to take the place of the blood feud, and elaborate rules of inheritance safeguarded the rights of orphans and widows.

35 Jesus' virgin birth was accepted by the Qur'án (19:16–23), for God sent His spirit into Mary. But Jesus was not God. Like His mother, He took food. The Jews thought that they had crucified Jesus; but, in fact, God had raised Him to Himself, and He was with His mother in a "refuge on a height, a place of flocks and water-springs" (Qur'án 23:50).

36 Qur'án 4:3.

In pagan days a man acted with his tribe: morality was tribal. Islám abolished tribal ties and morals. The new brotherhood was religious. Morals were what God enjoined. In the Battle of Badr the Muslims took arms in the name of their Faith against their own tribes and families.

The principal religious practices of Islám were as simple as its theology. The requirements of Islám were not severe. Five times a day in prayer, facing toward Mecca, the Muslim must bear witness that there is no God but God and that Muḥammad is His prophet. During the sacred month of Ramaḍán he must fast. He must give alms to the poor. If he can, he must make a pilgrimage to Mecca once during his lifetime.

Pervading Islám was the principle of religious equality. Islám provided for no organized church, for it had neither priesthood nor a sacramental system. Each individual had to assure his salvation by his own right belief and good conduct. It was customary for the Faithful to meet together for prayers, especially on Friday, and from the earliest period certain men devoted themselves to explaining the Qur'án. But neither the assembly nor the theologian was essential; anyone could accept Islám without waiting for the organization of a religious community, and any believer could preach the Faith without waiting for the coming of an ordained priest.

The Islamic community as established by the Prophet was an excellent example of a theocratic state, one in which all power resides in God on Whose behalf political, religious, and other forms of authority are exercised.

The dilemma of succession

THE NEWS of the Prophet's death was shattering to His community. He had been the Father in the Brotherhood of Islám. He was the soul and the spirit of the theocracy that He had created. His followers had not even entertained the idea that one day He would be absent from amongst them. It has been recounted that 'Umar refused even to listen to the news of Muḥammad's physical departure, and with "drawn sword he stood in the thoroughfare defying anyone who dared to assert the fact of the Prophet's death."[37] It was the gentle Abú-Bakr who finally pacified him.[38]

But once the Prophet was gone, what was the community to do? Who should succeed Him? And what should be the role and function of the successor?

It is a divine mystery why the Prophet left neither a will nor any other document to specify a successor. From a historical perspective it seems that the urgency for such a document was far greater for the success of Islám as a religion than for the success of Christianity. Upon His crucifixion Jesus left nothing but a handful of disciples—no organization, no state, no community in a political sense. His teachings, one can reason, were enough as a guideline for the individual conduct of His followers on this earth. But Muḥammad had created a nation, and because of it spiritual guidelines were not enough. There was also a need for communal behavior, an infallible source to direct the polity, to resolve disputes and prevent doctrinal schism. Some Muslims—the Shí'ihs, primarily—have maintained that the Prophet *orally* had mentioned His cousin and son-in-law 'Alí as His successor. But if this had been the case, only a few must have been witnesses to the event, since it is highly improbable that so many Muslims would knowingly have violated their Prophet's command. Though it would not be impossible, one would find it hard to believe that the calm, wise, and earnest Abú-Bakr, who had spent a lifetime devoting his personal energies and his material resources to his Faith, would now, for selfish reasons, declare that a successor to the Prophet had to be chosen.[39]

The controversy over the succession was the first major political and spiritual problem that confronted Islám. There was confusion in the ranks of His followers and rebellion on the part of recently converted tribes. The Companions—the Emigrants—claimed the right of succession on the basis of blood kinship and priority in belief. The Medinese—the Helpers—contested that claim and argued that without their support Islám would have perished in its cradle. The Shí'ihs—the Legitimists—believing that God and His Messenger could not have left such an issue to the determination of the community at large, maintained that 'Alí was the rightful and divinely appointed *imám* ("the guardian") of the community. Even the Umayyad family, the aristocratic branch of the

37 Balyuzi, *Muḥammad*, p. 165.
38 ibid.
39 It should be noted that Abú-Bakr was not seeking the office for himself, that he asked the community to choose either 'Umar or Abú-'Ubaydah as the successor, and that the two refused. It was 'Umar who said, "You are to be preferred over us you, who were the companion of the Messenger of God when He journeyed from Mecca." See Balyuzi's excellent chapter on "The Successor", *Muḥammad*, pp. 165–89.

Quraysh tribe, claiming their traditional role as the head of the tribe, felt that they should continue to do so even though they were the last to believe!

This was a dangerous moment in the history of the infant cause. But, acting swiftly, some of Muḥammad's closest associates selected the fifty-eight-year-old Abú-Bakr as the first Caliph or "deputy" of the Prophet. The choice, naturally, did not end the controversy, and in the words of a twelfth-century Arab historian of Islamic sects, "no other issue in Islam brought about more bloodshed."[40] However, the choice seemed appropriate. Abú-Bakr was well respected by all and was also a father-in-law of Muḥammad. He could, and did, maintain the political unity that the Prophet had created. Since a number of tribes considered their religious and political allegiance to have ended with the Prophet's death, the first Caliph's first task was to prevent the disintegration of the Islamic community. In the two short years of life left to him he accomplished the goal by a series of military campaigns, headed, among others, by a brilliant young Qurayshí general, Khálid Ibn al-Wálid—the "Sword of Islám".

After Abú-Bakr the Caliphate went to another of the Prophet's earliest companions, the shrewd, strong-willed, and capable 'Umar, whose ten-years' rule proved to be a turning point in the history of the world.

Triumph and tragedy

WITH THE UNITY of Arabs restored, the young, dynamic state had begun to look outward. To Arab historians the motivation for expansion was religious; the Arab triumph was providential as was that of Islám. However, modern historiography maintains that what triumphed was not Islám the religion but Islám the state—the Arab state. The motives for expansion were the age-old ones of conquest for living space and booty. There was a need to find an outlet for the physical energies of the desert warriors and search for supplies to sustain the impoverished Muslim community. The prospect of rich and fertile territory, as well as of plunder, proved a strong incentive to a people who had been eking out a bare existence from the unyielding soil.

The Arabs had long been in the habit of raiding their wealthier neighbors to the north. Even the Prophet in the year AH 8 (September 629) had sent an expedition northward into the outskirts of the Byzantine empire, and its commander was none other than Muḥammad's adopted son, Zayd Ibn Ḥáritha. But at that time Theodore the Vicar had raised a force of Arab auxiliaries, both Christians and pagans, from the frontier regions and had inflicted on this "band of brigands" a resounding defeat.[41]

Times had changed. The Prophet's sanctification of warfare bred fanatical courage in the Arabs, already a fierce fighting people. The proud and tenacious Bedouins were magnificent warriors. Their natural fighting ability was augmented by military techniques learned from the Byzantines and the Persians and by their adroit use of the desert, from which they could strike the enemy and to which they could retreat. By moving outside of Arabia into the civilized agricultural lands on the edge of the desert, the Fertile Crescent, they could find glory and profit without risks to the peace and internal security of the Peninsula.

Under the banner of Islám the Arabs were unified while both the Persian and Byzantine empires had been weakened by the disastrous wars that had begun under Justinian and had continued into the reign of Heraclius. Moreover, the non-Greek subjects of Byzantine emperors were disgusted by the religious policy of a government that offered them no toleration. They had little reason to give the empire their support. The Greeks had never succeeded in their attempts to impose their Hellenistic culture and their own orthodox Christianity on the Egyptians, who spoke Coptic (a language derived from ancient Egyptian), and the Syrians, whose tongue was the Semitic Aramaic and who professed the Monophysite heresy.

In Mesopotamia the natives were in constant rebellion against their Persian overlords. The persistent wars between the two great empires were particularly devastating for the border territories. There had been war between Persia and Byzantium from 502 to 505; it resumed in 527 and continued until 532 when the Persian king Khusraw offered to make eternal peace with Justinian. The "eternal peace" lasted eight years. Anatolia fell to the Persians in 540, an armistice was signed in 545, and a fifty-year peace concluded in 562. But the fifty-year

40 See Hitti, *Arabs*, p. 206.

41 It was a bloody affair in which among the dead were three successive Muslim leaders including Zayd, and a brother of Abú-Ja'far Ibn Abú-Ṭálib. The fleeing Muslims were rallied by Khálid Ibn al-Walíd, who led the disgruntled survivors back to Medina. The Byzantine historian Theophanes wrote about the encounter; he is the first non-Muslim historian to mention an incident that occurred during the Prophet's lifetime.

peace lasted for only ten years. In 572, about the time of the Prophet's birth, the two empires were at it again. Four years after Muḥammad's emigration to Medina (AH 4, AD 626) a Persian army camped in Chalcedon, across the Bosporous from Constantinople. But the Byzantine naval superiority as well as the heroic defense of the city kept the empire's capital safe. Then Byzantium took the war to Írán. In February 628 as Heraclius was moving toward Ctesiphon, the Iranian capital, the mutinous Iranian generals put to death the king of kings and had his son crowned in his place. On 3 April once again a peace treaty was signed; and in August of 629, after an absence of six years, the Byzantine emperor returned triumphantly to his capital. In March 630—the same year in which the Prophet conquered Mecca—Heraclius performed a solemn pilgrimage to Jerusalem, ceremoniously bringing back the True Cross. But militarily, financially, and emotionally, the two great empires had exhausted one another.

Thus the first probing attacks of the Arabs met such slight resistance that soon the nature of conflict changed. Raids turned into wars of conquest. Though it is true that the Arabs' success was due to the propelling force of their internal dynamism and military prowess, it should at the same time be emphasized that the campaigns of Khálid Ibn al-Wálid and 'Amr Ibn al-'Áṣ were, as one authority has said, "among the most brilliantly executed in the history of warfare, and bear favorable comparison with those of Napoleon, Hannibal, or Alexander."[42]

Syria was the first to fall. As the Arabs moved north toward Damascus, Heraclius sent an army of fifty thousand, commanded by his own brother, to block their way. The Arab commander Khálid had half as many men, but when on 20 August 636 the two armies met in the Valley of the Yarmúk, a tributary of the Jordan River, history took a new course. The battle was fought in one of the world's most torrid spots, and the hot day was clouded by windblown dust. The chants and prayers of the priests and the presence of their crosses were not enough to save the Byzantine army. The rout became a slaughter. Damascus fell after six months' siege. Two years later Jerusalem surrendered to 'Umar. By 640, less than eight years after the death of the Prophet, the Arabs had conquered all of Syria, and Khálid had won his proud title as the "Sword of Allah".

In 642 the battle of Nahávand brought final victory to the Arabs over the Persians. Already the Persian capital, Ctesiphon, had fallen to the invaders without a fight (in June 637); and, when Yazdigird, the last of the proud Sassanid dynasty, was killed as he fled before the conquerors in 651, the Persian empire that had lasted with little interruption for twelve hundred years had come to an end.

From Syria the Arabs moved to Egypt. In December 639 the Arab general, 'Amr Ibn al-'Áṣ, with a force of three thousand cavalry appeared at al-'Arísh, which is still Egypt's eastern frontier. The Egyptians offered no resistance. He easily reduced the fortress of Babylon, near the present site of Cairo. Only Alexandria held out for another fourteen months. The second strongest city of the Eastern Roman Empire fell to the Arabs in September 642, the same year in which they defeated the Persians at Nahávand. "I have captured a city," write 'Amr, the commander of victorious Arabs, to the Caliph 'Umar in Medina, "from the description of which I shall refrain. Sufficient to say that I have seized therein 4,000 villas with 4,000 baths, 40,000 poll-tax paying Jews, and 400 palaces of entertainment for the royalty."[43]

Now all of North Africa lay open before the conquerors. They took Carthage in AD 698 and subjugated the native Berber tribes who had resisted Romans, Vandals, and Byzantines. Once they had subdued the North African coastal belt including Morocco, the next logical jump was across the Strait of Gibraltar into the kingdom of the Visigoths in Spain. By then a durable political fusion of Arabs and Berbers had been forged. The great Arab—Berber cities of Kairouan in Tunisia and Fez in Morocco had been founded, and the systematic Arab settlement of the countryside had begun.

In 711 Ṭáriq, a Berber ex-slave of the Arab governor of North Africa, Músá Ibn Nuṣayr, with an army of seven thousand, crossed the body of water separating North Africa from Spain. The Arab chroniclers commemorated the event by calling the spot the Mountain of Ṭáriq (Arabic *Jabal Ṭáriq* 'Gibraltar'). Ṭáriq easily defeated the Visigoth King Roderic. The Jews particularly welcomed the invaders. By 714 all of Spain and Portugal, except a small independent state in the northwest, were in Arab hands. In 717 they moved across the Pyrenees into the fertile lands of the Franks. By 732 they had taken over Nimes, Narbonne, and Bordeaux. However, the Frankish kingdom was not quite so helpless as Spain. The Franks could not defend the south, but when the invaders

42 Hitti, *Arabs*, p. 57.
43 Philip K. Hitti, *The Near East in History* (Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1961), p. 210.

pushed north, the course of war changed. On a cold Saturday in October 732, at a place between Poitiers and Tours, Charles Martel (The Hammer), the Mayor of the Palace, having assembled an effective army, met a marauding Moorish band under 'Adb ar-Raḥmán ash-Shadífí. Charles' foot-soldiers, wearing wolfskins, stood shoulder to shoulder, forming a square "firm as a wall and inflexible as a block of ice."[44] For the first time the Arabs had met their match. It should also be pointed out that the climate of central and northern Europe never attracted the Arabs, and the line of communication from Damascus, their capital, was dangerously stretched.

The Battle of Tours was fought in the year AH 110, the year of the centennial commemoration of the Prophet's death. During that one hundred years His followers had created an empire greater than any in ancient times and comparable only to the British and the Russian empires of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Tours marked the extreme limit of that empire's western expansion. Spreading east from Persia throughout what today is Russian Turkistan, the Muslims had reached the Indus River, Sind, and the western boundaries of China.[45]

What price glory?

THE GREAT Ibn Khaldún, the fourteenth-century intellectual giant of the Islamic world and one of the greatest creative minds in the history of civilization, commented that:

> … Generally speaking, Arabs are incapable of founding an empire except on a religious basis such as the Revelation of a Prophet or a Saint. This is because their fierce character, pride, roughness and jealousy of one another especially in political matters, make them the most difficult of peoples to lead, since their wishes concord only rarely. Should they, however, adopt the religion of a prophet or a saint, they have an internal principle of restraint and their pride and jealousy are curbed, so that it becomes easy to unite and to lead them. For religion drives out roughness and haughtiness and restrains jealousy and competition. If, therefore, there should arise among them a prophet or saint who calls upon them to follow the ways of God, eschew evil, cling to virtue, and unite their wills in support of righteousness, their union becomes perfect and they achieve victory and domination.

Yet Arabs are, withal, the quickest of peoples to follow the call to truth and righteousness. For their natures are relatively simple and free from the distorting effects of bad habits and evil ways; their only grave moral defect is their roughness, which indicating as it does a primitive and uncorrupted nature, can be rectified. For, as the Prophet said, 'Each child is born with an unformed nature,' as we said before.[46]

But even as they were establishing their empire, "their pride, touchiness and intense jealousy of power" were already weakening its foundation and framework and compromising their spiritual zeal.

The rule of succession not having been conclusively established by the Prophet, the controversy over it never ceased among His followers. Unlike the slow rise of Christianity, the rise of Islám was meteoric. Its quick military triumphs and the conquest of great empires made the material stakes formidable. The worldly prizes at the disposal of the Faithful were tempting and very early tested the spiritual fervor of the ruling Muslims. The Prophet, even in triumph, had lived a simple and unpretentious life. He was often seen mending His clothes and was at all times within the reach of His people. The little wealth He left, He regarded as state property. The luster of the Prophet's life had not ceased to shed its light and influence over the thoughts and acts of the first four Caliphs, who were all close associates or relatives of the Prophet.

But all this changed when the Umayyad family took over the reign. The Caliphate of Abú-Bakr and 'Umar already has been mentioned. When 'Umar was assassinated during the tenth year of his rule (AD 644), 'Uthmán, also a son-in-law of the Prophet, was chosen as the third Caliph. He had been a wealthy Umayyad merchant who had lived in luxury; his capacity to rule was mediocre at best. He appointed his relatives as governors of provinces and practiced other forms of nepotism. He chose Mu'áwíyah, the Prophet's secretary and his own kinsman, as governor of newly conquered Syria.[47] The unscrupulous but very able governor, with an unusual administrative skill, developed out of chaos an orderly society in his province. He occupied Cyprus and Azadus

44 ibid., p. 225.

45 It should be added that not Arabs but Turks (Seljuks and Ottomans) spread Islám, from the eleventh century to the fourteenth century, to China and the Balkans. In Malaysia the itinerant Muslim traders rather than conquering armies spread the Faith. Similarly, from newly Islamized North Africa, Islám pressed southward along the ancient oasis highways of the Sahara into Central Africa. In most cases it was the ruling classes of these black African states who were converted to Islám. By 1400 the whole of North Africa as far south as Lake Chad and from Senegal on the Atlantic to Somalia on the Indian Ocean was covered with a network of Muslim regimes.

46 Charles Issawi, trans. and arr., *An Arab Philosophy of History: Selections from the Prolegomena of Ibn Khaldun of Tunis (1332–1406)* (London: John Murray, 1950), p. 58.

47 Mu'áwíyah was the son of Abú-Sufyán Banú-Umayya of the Quraysh tribe, who as already pointed out, was one of the last to believe in Islám. But soon he became one of Muḥammad's most trusted advisers and had his son appointed as the Prophet's secretary.

(649–50), sent a naval expedition against Constantinople, and destroyed the Byzantine fleet commanded by Constans II, grandson of Heraclius, off the Lycian coast (AD 655), providing Islám with its first maritime victory.

But in the next year ʻUthmán too was murdered. The plot against his life was conceived and carried out not by the outsiders or the infidels but by fellow Muslims. His favoritism had alienated many of the early believers who were more distinguished for their faith than for their political ability and yet felt that they were not being properly rewarded for their services. The band that broke into the Caliph's house and laid violent hands on him was led by one of Abú-Bakr's sons, who also put the dagger in his heart. ʻUthmán's blood reportedly flowed over the copy of the Qur'án that he was reading. The first murder of a Caliph by a Muslim was not to be the last. His death ended the political unity of Islám, and soon Islám's religious unity would also come to an end. In less than a generation after the death of the Prophet Islamic society had entered upon a period punctuated by civil strife and doctrinal schism from which it never emerged.

Upon the assassination of ʻUthmán, ʻAlí, the son-in-law, cousin, and adopted son of the Prophet, was chosen as the fourth Caliph. He was the paragon of Arabian nobility and Islamic chivalry.[48] But the Syrian governor, Muʻáwíyah, did not recognize ʻAlí's right to succession and called for vengeance against those who had killed his cousin ʻUthmán. In the mosque of Damascus the blood-stained shirt of the Caliph, along with the chopped off fingers of his wife who had tried to defend him, were exhibited. Muʻáwíyah demanded from ʻAlí that he either produce the assassins or accept the role of accomplice. With the support of ʻAmr, the conqueror of Egypt, Muʻáwíyah now led his army eastward to challenge ʻAlí.

To ʻAlí's side rallied the Ḥijazís who saw in him a symbol of Arab nationalism, puritanical piety, and bravery, as well as the people of ʻIráq, whose city of Kúfah, ʻAlí had chosen as a second capital. In July 657 the two armies faced each other at Ṣiffín, on the west bank of the Euphrates. Only twenty-five years after the death of the Prophet, His followers, disputing the right of succession, were shedding each other's blood in the first—but alas! not the last—civil war.

As ʻAlí's army was gaining the upper hand in the battle, the Syrian commander ʻAmr sent his men with copies of the Qur'án fixed to the points of their spears, as if calling upon God to choose the victor. Chivalrous 'Alí halted the fighting, and arbitration was agreed upon. But the mere fact of arbitration with the Caliph raised Muʻáwíyah's status to the caliphal level and weakened ʻAlí's position. Thousands in fact deserted his camp. The partisan representatives did not meet until January of 659. The arbitration session was a public one held in southern Palestine and witnessed by a large crowd. What transpired is not recorded, but it seems that ʻAlí had lost the case even before it was opened. Until then Muʻáwíyah had not dared to announce his candidacy, and in fact he did not claim the title of Caliph for himself until 661 after ʻAlí had been struck with a poisoned sabre by one of his former followers. His assassination left no rival for Muʻáwíyah.

Thus was the office of the Caliph usurped be one totally lacking any moral or spiritual qualities. He and his family, the rulers for the next one hundred years, established a new style of Caliphate. It was monarchial, worldly, ruthless, and efficient. Any pretense to the principle of "election" was buried by Muʻáwíyah when five years before his death he induced the leaders of his empire to recognize his son, Yazíd, as his successor. Henceforth, the Caliphate was to be, in fact, though never in law, a hereditary office.

Muʻáwíyah transferred the capital of the empire to Damascus. This was typical of him and his family—the Umayyad—who put far more emphasis on politics than on religion. Unlike the simple city of the Prophet, Damascus had been a Byzantine metropolis, with magnificent public buildings and a large group of experienced and educated civil servants. It was a more centrally located city; and, conveniently, it had few Arab inhabitants. Anchored in Syria, the Umayyad looked less toward the Arabian desert for new inspiration and more toward the West. Now the behavior of the rulers of Islám mirrored more the majestic practices of the Byzantine emperors than the simplicity and piety of the Apostle of God. The Umayyad changed the Arab empire from a loosely organized theocracy into a centralized, secular state, retaining the basic structure of government and administration bequeathed to them by the Byzantine system, but bestowing key positions on members of Arab aristocracy, primarily their own clan.

48 The Shiʻites consider ʻAlí as sinless and infallible. Some extremists among them have elevated him even above Muḥammad and consider him the incarnation of the Deity.

As secular rulers the Umayyad, on the whole, were exceptionally effective and competent. It was their armies that marched to Poitiers and Sind and to the Rhone and the Indus. They built roads and beautified cities. The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem was built under Caliph 'Abdu'l-Malik (died on 8 October 705) over the rock from which Muḥammad had ascended to heaven. It was a monumental structure of noble beauty. The builders were native architects trained in the Byzantine school, but the intention was that the Dome should outshine the adjacent Church of the Holy Sepulchre—and it did. The Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, next in chronology to the Dome of the Rock, was built on the site of the basilica of St. John the Baptist, originally a temple of Jupiter. It was a far cry from the Prophet's simple mosque in Medina. The majesty of the plan and the splendor of ornaments served notice that the believers in the new religion were not inferior to the followers of Christ worshiping in their great cathedrals in Byzantium.

Under the Umayyad Islám lost its puritanical character. It was not only the lust for power that corrupted the regime. The family's total disregard for both the letter and the spirit of Islamic laws was appalling. Yazíd, the appointed successor of Mu'áwíyah, was corrupt and frivolous, a drunkard who kept a drunken pet monkey.[49] His behavior toward the saintly grandson of the Prophet expressed well the spiritual degeneracy of the clan. When Ḥusayn, the son of 'Alí and Fáṭimah, Muḥammad's only surviving daughter, emerged from retirement in Medina to challenge Yazíd and claim the rule as a God-chosen Imám, the Caliph wasted no time. Ḥusayn was richly endowed with the spiritual qualities of his forebears. As he approached Kúfah with his little army, he was met and surrounded by a body of Umayyad cavalry at Karbilá, about twenty-five miles northwest of Kúfah. On the tenth of Muḥarram AH 58 (10 October AD 680) the cavalry moved in. They were four hundred strong; Ḥusayn had seventy-two relatives and retainers. After his companions had fallen at the hands of the archers, Ḥusayn, bleeding from several wounds, stood at bay alone, except for the women crouching in the tents behind. The troops under Shimr closed in, and Ḥusayn fell beneath their swords. The head of the Prophet's grandson was sent to Damascus as a trophy. This brutal act would remain the greatest blot on the Umayyad family record.

The death of Yazíd in November 683 once again brought about fratricidal civil war that lasted for twelve years. It was not until 3 October 692 that another member of the family, 'Abdu'l-Málik, could claim to be the sole ruler of the Muslim world. But despite the civil wars and intertribal rivalries, the Arab armies' advance to the east and the west went on. In fact, it was in the Caliphate of 'Abdu'l-Málik's heir, Walíd (AD 705–15), that the Muslims entered the Spanish peninsula in the west and added Bukhara, Balkh, and Samarkand, centers of Buddhist culture, in the east. By then the followers of the Prophet were straddling, like a colossus, a territory stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the borders of China.

However, as the empire grew, the challenge of its administration became even greater, the latter Umayyad Caliphs were less capable than the first ones. The second Yazíd, the brother of Walíd (who ruled from AD 720 to 724) spent far more time chasing women and game, and drinking wine, than on state affairs. Walíd II (who ruled for only fifteen months, 743 to 744) was a blasphemer and a cynic whose great joy and relaxation was swimming in a pool of wine, drinking as he swam. When he was killed, his head was raised on the point of a lance and paraded through the streets of Damascus. His successor, Yazíd III, was born of a slave mother, as were the next two Caliphs, including the last Umayyad ruler, the fourteenth of the line, Marwán (known as Marwán the Ass) who ruled from AD 744 to 750.

But even if these men had been endowed with extraordinary abilities, they would have still found it most difficult to rule effectively an empire that included dozens of different nationalities, among whom Islám had not created a bond of unity. The non-Arab Muslims and the new converts resented the domination and privileges of the Arab aristocracy. At first the Arabs had not attempted to proselytize in the conquered territories north of their peninsula. It was *their* faith. Recognition was granted to Sabeanism, Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism. Pagans and members of other faiths were theoretically forced to submit to Islám or perish; but generally the Arabs had allowed them to live if they paid their taxes.

However, within a generation or two after the death of the Prophet, every year increasing numbers of the conquered races Persians, Syrians, Egyptians, Berbers, and so on—professed Islám. Should non-Arabs be allowed to become Muslims? Clearly the Qur'án had sanctioned it, but the idea was at first so alien to the Arabs

49 Mu'áwíyah died in April AD 680.

that any convert not a full-blooded Arab, had to become a Mawálí (a "Client") of one of the Arab tribes. In theory they were to be equal; in practice they were treated with contempt.

In the empire Peoples of the Book (*dhimmís*) enjoyed religious and personal toleration but not equality before the law; since they paid most of the taxes, mass conversion would have created financial disaster. Some Caliphs, in fact, discouraged too many conversions.

As the empire grew, Arab manpower was no longer sufficient for its further extension or the control of conquered territories. The Arabs were forced to recruit mawálís—but not *dhimmís*—and though they fought in Muslim armies, they received less pay and a smaller share of the booty than the Arabs and were confined to the infantry and were not permitted to join the cavalry, which remained an Arab privilege. The Arabs paid no taxes on the lands they acquired by conquest. Though a minority within the empire, they provided its leaders and government officials and controlled millions of conquered people.

Naturally, resentment, especially among the non-Arab Muslims, many of whom had possessed cultures much more advanced than that of their rulers, increased every year. Without them the economic and cultural life of the empire could not have survived; yet they were considered and treated as second-class citizens.

The non-Arabs were not the only ones resentful of the Umayyad rule. The Muslim puritans loathed the family's luxury and worldliness, and the Shi'ites, never forgetting the memories of 'Alí and Ḥusayn, considered them as breakers of the Prophet's covenant and usurpers of a divinely ordained office.

Open revolt against the Umayyad broke out in AD 747. Two years before that the Byzantine emperor Constantine V (774–75) had already taken the offensive against them as his armies pushed the Arab forces along the entire border of Asia Minor and carried the war into Syria itself. But it was in the eastern part of the empire, in the Khurásán province of Írán, that the challenge began in earnest. Under the leadership of Muḥammad Ibn 'Alí Ibn al-'Abbás, the great-grandson of the Prophet's uncle, Iranians, Syrians, 'Iráqís, and other non-Arabs joined the Arab tribes who were traditional rivals of the Umayyad, and raised the standard of rebellion. By August 749 their forces had occupied Kúfah and were threatening all of 'Iráq.

Marwán the Ass, with an army of twelve thousand loyal Syrian troops, marched east to Great Záb, a tributary of the Tigris River some eighty miles from Mosul. On 25 January AD 750 the two armies met. Marwán was decisively defeated and fled to Syria and then to Egypt where on the night of 5 August he was caught hiding in a church in the little village of Busir.[50] He was killed, and his corpse, decapitated.

Soon after, some eighty members of the royal family were invited by the 'Abbásid family to a banquet near Jaffa. While eating, the guests were brutally cut down by the order of al-'Abbás. Leather covers were spread on the dead and the dying, and the 'Abbásid officers and hosts continued their repast to the accompaniment of human groans. Caliphal tombs in Damascus and elsewhere, with the exception of those of Mu'áwíyah and 'Umar, were opened and their contents exhumed and desecrated.[51] This abominable act by one Arab family against another took place only 132 years after the Year of Emigration and 122 years after the death of the Prophet. Four years later al-'Abbás, called as-Saffáḥ ("the blood-letter") died and was succeeded by his brother Abú-Ja'far, called al-Manṣúr ("rendered victorious"). He was the ancestor of the next thirty-five 'Abbásid Caliphs who were to rule the empire, in name if not in fact, until AD 1258, when the last of them, al-Musta'ṣim, was murdered by the Mongol invaders.

The replacement of Umayyads by 'Abbásids was far more significant than a mere change of dynasty. "It was," according to Bernard Lewis, "a revolution in the history of Islam, as important a turning point as the French Revolution and Russian Revolution in the history of the West. It came about not as the result of a palace conspiracy or coup d'etat, but by the action of an extensive and successful revolutionary propaganda and

50 Sir John Glubb considers the Battle of Záb as one of the decisive battles of the world because the success of the 'Abbásid, as the result of it, orientalized Islám. The Umayyad empire had been basically a Mediterranean empire. For one thousand years Damascus, Egypt, North Africa, and Spain were parts of the Graeco-Roman world. Under the 'Abbásid rule the center of gravity of Islám shifted to Irán, Punjab, and Turkistan. See *Short History*, pp. 92–93.

51 The only survivor of this massacre was the nineteen-year-old 'Abu'r Raḥmán, grandson of the tenth caliph, who fled the 'Abbásid cavalry and, after five years of wandering, landed in Spain and continued the Umayyad rule in that country.

organization, representing and expressing the dissatisfactions of important elements of the populations with the previous regime and built up over a long period of time."[52]

Epilogue

SIX HUNDRED YEARS before Islám, Christianity, against the magnificent background of the Roman imperial system, had crept half hidden along the foundations of society. In the year AD 138 a Christian could look at the world around him and see nothing but obstacles to the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. Rome was a thriving empire. It was in its golden age. *Pax Romana* extended from Britain to the Caspian Sea, from the Rhine and the Danube to the Sahara. It included more than 1,250,000 square miles and one hundred million people representing almost all races, nationalities, and creeds. The Empire had created a concept of "civilization" that was an impressive phenomenon and perhaps the most enduring legacy of the peculiarly Roman genius.

A Christian was viewed, by an overwhelming majority of the Romans, as a member of one of the multitude of the mystery sects aspiring to capture their hearts. He was suspected by his government, despised by his fellow citizens, and challenged by other cults. The New Testament had not as yet been arranged; and without a canonized literature and a centralized spiritual authority, unity and uniformity could not be expected to prevail over the small Christian communities that had sprung across the Empire. In different provinces of Rome different systems of church government existed. Christianity was still exclusively a faith and a movement rather than a Church or an institution.

But despite the obstacles and oppositions, that transcending faith in Christ and the Second Coming, in heaven and in hell, drove the "multitude of obscure enthusiasts" to do their share, unceasingly and unhesitatingly, to bring about the promised Kingdom of God on earth. Persecution and threats of persecution kept the unbeliever out; and the faithful, humble men and women, unnoticed by history, but fortified and guided by the Spirit of Christ were to become the architects and builders of a whole new civilization that was to be the foundation of Western society for the next two thousand years.[53]

Islám, on the contrary, almost from the moment of its inception, burst out in a flame of conquest. By AH 138 the Islamic state was well established, and the Islamic religion was triumphant. Between the military conquests of the Arabs and the religious conversion to Islám of the peoples who lived within their empire, a long period intervened. But from the beginning of the conquest Islám was presented to the world as the religion of the conquerors. It had to be respected, even if not accepted. No one can tell how many of the millions of the converts were motivated by self-interest: to escape tribute, to avoid the status of an outcast, or to be identified with the ruling class. But one thing is certain. In the empire the Arabs created, the followers of the Prophet never suffered the trials of religious persecution, and thus the purity of their motives and the depth of their convictions were never really tested. Hence whether the much-too-early worldly success of Islám compromised its spiritual strength must remain one of the great unanswered questions of history.

In the year AH 138 Islám had authoritative religious literature—the Qur'án and the Tradition—but in the absence of an authenticated will of the Prophet, the issue of the legitimacy of His successors had remained unresolved.

Muḥammad had created a total theocracy for the Islamic community. He had asserted His temporal leadership by political and military means, and His spiritual leadership was, naturally, undisputed because the *umma'* had accepted His Prophethood. But what about His successors? Prophethood was a divine station for Muḥammad only. The Caliphs were mortal men, and though they too claimed temporal as well as spiritual leadership, their actions were an open testimony to their incapacity to fulfill both. By political and military means they kept the community and the empire together, but their worldly and too often cruel behavior had demoralized and despiritualized the office. The Caliphate had become a body without a soul.

But despite this great handicap, the spiritual forces released by the new religion were to give birth to a new civilization. The Umayyad era had been, in general, an age of incubation. Too many wars and too many unsettled social and economic conditions had made it difficult to develop intellectually. Under the 'Abbásids, however, conversion to Islám minimized the differences between the ethnic groups, and through the use of the Arabic

52 Lewis, *Arabs in History*, p. 80.
53 See Nosratollah Rassekh, "Christianity: AD 138", *World Order*, 14, No. 3 (Spring 1980), 7–21.

language, ideas circulated freely. The cosmopolitan spirit that permeated the ʻAbbásid rulers supplied the tolerance necessary for a diversity of ideas so that the philosophy and science of ancient Greece and India could find a welcome in Baghdád.

One hundred years after that city was founded, it had become the cultural capital of the world. While the West Saxon rulers strove to deliver England from the Danes, while France was but a mutilated fragment of the vanished empire of Charlemagne, and while St. Peter's in Rome fell prey for a short time to Muslim invaders, the luxurious and cultivated court of the ʻAbbásids fostered learning and the arts. The ʻAbbásid period well demonstrated Islám's great ability to synthesize the best in the non-Arab cultures over which it held sway. The high attainment of the Muslims in intellectual and artistic fields can be attributed, primarily, to those peoples who embraced Islám in Persia, India, Mesopotamia, Syria, Egypt, North Africa, and Spain. And it was that Islamic civilization, radiating first from Baghdád, that was to illumine the world for the next five hundred years.