

and family life, inheritance, slavery, business and commercial relationships, political authority in the *dar al-Islam*, and crime. Through the sharia, Islam became more than a religious doctrine: it developed into a way of life complete with social and ethical values derived from Islamic religious principles.

THE EXPANSION OF ISLAM

After Muhammad's death the Islamic community might well have unraveled and disappeared. Muhammad had made no provision for a successor, and there was serious division within the *umma* concerning the selection of a new leader. Many of the towns and bedouin clans that had recently accepted Islam took the opportunity of Muhammad's death to renounce the fledgling religion, reassert their independence, and break free from Mecca's control. Within a short time, however, the Islamic community had embarked on a stunningly successful round of military expansion that extended its political and cultural influence far beyond the boundaries of Arabia. Those conquests laid the foundation for the rapid growth of Islamic society.

The Early Caliphs and the Umayyad Dynasty

The Caliph Because Muhammad was the "seal of the prophets," it was inconceivable that another prophet should succeed him. Shortly after Muhammad's death his advisors selected **Abu Bakr**, a genial man who was one of the prophet's closest friends and most devoted disciples, to serve as *caliph* ("deputy"). Thus Abu Bakr and later caliphs led the *umma* not as prophets but as lieutenants or substitutes for Muhammad. Abu Bakr became head of state for the Islamic community as well as chief judge, religious leader, and military commander. Under the caliph's leadership, the *umma* went on the offensive against the towns and bedouin clans that had renounced Islam after Muhammad's death, and within a year it had compelled them to recognize Islam and the rule of the caliph.

The Expansion of Islam Indeed, during the century after Muhammad's death, Islamic armies ranged well beyond the boundaries of Arabia, carrying their religion and their authority to Byzantine and Sasanid territories and beyond. Although much less powerful than either the Byzantine empire or the Sasanid empire, Muslim armies fought with particular effectiveness because their leaders had forged previously competing tribal groups into a powerful state unified by their allegiance to Islam. Moreover, the well-organized and superbly led Muslim armies attacked at a moment when the Byzantine and Sasanid empires were exhausted from perennial conflicts with each other and when they also faced internal uprisings by overtaxed peasants and oppressed ethnic or

Thinking about TRADITIONS

The Prophet and the Principles of Islam

The Muslim community received the basic teachings of Islam through the prophet Muhammad. Consider Muhammad's understanding of Judaism and Christianity as well as his life, career, and family circumstances. To what extent did the religious beliefs and practices of Islam reflect the personal experiences of Muhammad?

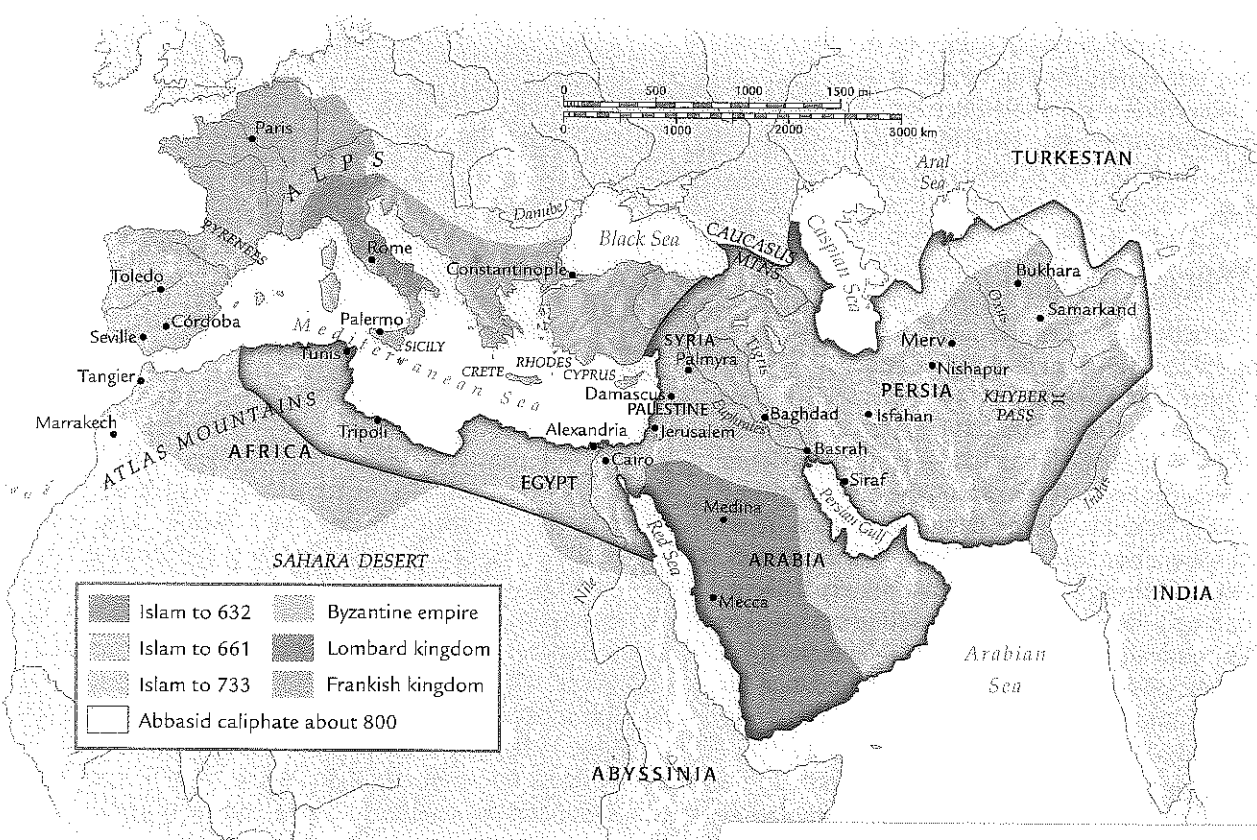
religious minorities. Between 633 and 637 C.E., taking advantage of those difficulties, Muslim forces seized Byzantine Syria and Palestine and took most of Mesopotamia from the Sasanids. During the 640s they conquered Byzantine Egypt and north Africa. In 651 they toppled the Sasanid dynasty and incorporated Persia into their expanding empire. In 711 they conquered the Hindu kingdom of Sind in northwestern India. Between 711 and 718 they extended their authority to northwest Africa and crossed the Strait of Gibraltar, conquering most of the Iberian peninsula and threatening the Frankish kingdom in Gaul. By the mid-eighth century an immense Islamic empire ruled lands from India and the central Asian steppe lands in the east to northwest Africa and Iberia in the west.

During this rapid expansion the empire's rulers encountered difficult problems of governance and administration. One problem had to do with the selection of caliphs. During the early decades after Muhammad's death, leaders of the most powerful Arab clans negotiated among themselves and appointed the first four caliphs. Political ambitions, personal differences, and clan loyalties complicated their deliberations, however, and disputes soon led to the rise of factions and parties within the Islamic community.

The Shia Disagreements over succession led to the emergence of the **Shia** sect, the most important and enduring of all the alternatives to the form of Islam observed by the majority of Muslims, known as **Sunni** Islam. The Shia sect originated as a party supporting the appointment of Ali and his descendants as caliphs. A cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad, Ali was a candidate for caliph when the prophet died, but support for Abu Bakr was stronger. Ali served briefly as the fourth caliph (656–661 C.E.), but his enemies assassinated him while he was praying in a mosque, killed many of his relatives, and imposed their own candidate as caliph. Partisans of Ali then organized the Shia ("party"), furiously resisted the victorious

Abu Bakr (ah-BOO BAHK-uhr)
caliph (KHA-leef)
Shia (SHEE-ah)
Sunni (SOON-nee)





MAP 14.1

The expansion of Islam, 632–733 c.e.

During the seventh and eighth centuries, the new faith of Islam expanded rapidly and dramatically beyond its Arabian homeland.

What environmental, political, and social circumstances facilitated the rapid spread of the new faith? What were the cultural and political effects of the expansion of Islam?

better communication with the vast and still-expanding Islamic empire.

Although the Umayyads' dynasty solved the problem of succession, their tightly centralized rule and the favor they showed to their fellow Arabs generated an administrative problem. The Umayyads ruled the *dar al-Islam* as conquerors, and their policies reflected the interests of the Arab military aristocracy. The Umayyads appointed members of this elite as governors and administrators of conquered lands, and they distributed the wealth that they extracted among this privileged class.

Policy toward Conquered Peoples This policy contributed to high morale among Arab conquerors, but it caused severe discontent among the scores of ethnic and religious groups conquered by the Umayyad empire. Apart from Muslims, the empire included Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, and Buddhists. Apart from Arabs and bedouin, it included



The early expansion of Islam was a bloody affair. This illustration from an Arabic manuscript of the thirteenth century depicts a battle between Muhammad's cousin Ali and his adversaries.

Indians, Persians, Mesopotamians, Greeks, Egyptians, and nomadic Berbers in north Africa. The Arabs mostly allowed conquered peoples to observe their own religions—particularly Christians and Jews—but they levied a special head tax, called the *jizya*, on those who did not convert to Islam. Even those who converted did not enjoy access to wealth and positions of authority, which the Umayyads reserved almost exclusively for members of the Arab military aristocracy. This caused deep resentment among conquered peoples and led to restiveness against Umayyad rule.

Umayyad Decline Beginning in the early eighth century, the Umayyad caliphs became alienated even from other Arabs. They devoted themselves increasingly to luxurious living rather than to zealous leadership of the *umma*, and they scandalized devout Muslims by their casual attitudes toward Islamic doctrine and morality. By midcentury the Umayyad caliphs faced not only the resistance of the Shia, whose members continued to promote descendants of Ali for caliph, but also the discontent of conquered peoples throughout their empire and even the disillusionment of Muslim Arab military leaders.

The Abbasid Dynasty

Abu al-Abbas Rebellion in Persia brought the Umayyad dynasty to an end. The chief leader of the rebellion was Abu al-Abbas, a descendant of Muhammad's uncle. Although he was a Sunni Arab, Abu al-Abbas allied readily with Shias and with Muslims who were not Arabs, such as converts to Islam from southwest Asia. Particularly prominent among his supporters were Persian converts who resented the preference shown by the Umayyads to Arab Muslims. During the 740s Abu al-Abbas's party rejected Umayyad authority and seized control of Persia and Mesopotamia. In 750 his army shattered Umayyad forces in a huge battle. Afterward, Abu al-Abbas invited the remaining members of the Umayyad clan to a banquet under the pretext of reconciling their differences. During the festivities his troops arrested the Umayyads and slaughtered them, effectively annihilating the clan. Abu al-Abbas then founded the **Abbasid** dynasty, which was the principal source of authority in the *dar al-Islam* until the Mongols toppled it in 1258 c.e.

The Abbasid Dynasty The Abbasid dynasty differed considerably from the Umayyad. For one thing, the Abbasid state was far more cosmopolitan than its predecessor. Even though they sprang from the ranks of conquering Arabs, Abbasid rulers did not show special favor to the Arab military aristocracy. Arabs continued to play a large role in government, but Persians, Egyptians, Mesopotamians, and others also rose to positions of wealth and power.

The Abbasid dynasty differed from the Umayyad also in that it was not a conquering dynasty. The Abbasids sparred intermittently with the Byzantine empire, they clashed frequently with nomadic peoples from central Asia, and in 751 they defeated a Chinese army at Talas River near Samarkand. The battle of Talas River was exceptionally important: it ended the expansion of China's Tang dynasty into central Asia (discussed in chapter 13), and it opened the door for the spread of Islam among Turkish peoples. Only marginally, however, did the Abbasids expand their empire by conquest. The *dar al-Islam* as a whole continued to grow during the

Abbasid era, but the caliphs had little to do with the expansion. During the ninth and early tenth centuries, for example, largely autonomous Islamic forces from distant Tunisia mounted naval expeditions throughout the Mediterranean, conquering Crete, Sicily, and the Balearic Islands while seizing territories also in Cyprus, Rhodes, Sardinia, Corsica, southern Italy, and southern France. Meanwhile, Muslim merchants introduced Islam to southern India and sub-Saharan Africa (see chapter 18).

Abbasid Administration Instead of conquering new lands, the Abbasids largely contented themselves with administering the empire they inherited. Fashioning a government that could administer a sprawling realm with scores of linguistic, ethnic, and cultural groups was a considerable challenge. Before Muhammad, Arabs had no governments larger than city-states, nor did the Quran offer guidance for the administration of a huge empire. The Umayyad practice of allowing the Arab aristocracy to exploit subject lands and peoples had proven to be a failure. Thus Abu al-Abbas and his successors turned to long-standing Mesopotamian and Persian techniques of administration whereby rulers devised policies, built capital cities to oversee affairs, and organized their territories through regional governors and bureaucracies.

Baghdad Central authority emanated from the Abbasid court at Baghdad (capital of modern Iraq), a magnificent new city that the early Abbasid caliphs constructed near the Sasanid capital of Ctesiphon. By building this new center of government to replace the Umayyad capital at Damascus, the Abbasids associated themselves with the cosmopolitan environment of Mesopotamia. Baghdad was a round city protected by three round walls. At the heart of the city was the caliph's green-domed palace, from which instructions flowed to the distant reaches of the Abbasid realm. In the provinces, governors represented the caliph and implemented his political and financial policies.

Learned officials known as *ulama* ("people with religious knowledge") and *qadis* ("judges") set moral standards in local communities and resolved disputes. *Ulama* and *qadis* were not priests—Islam does not recognize priests as a distinct class of religious specialists—but they had a formal education that emphasized study of the Quran and the sharia. *Ulama* were pious scholars who sought to develop public policy in accordance with the Quran and sharia. *Qadis* heard cases at law and rendered decisions based on the Quran and sharia. Because of their moral authority, *ulama* and *qadis* became extremely influential officials who helped to ensure widespread observance of Islamic values. Apart from provincial governors, *ulama*, and *qadis*, the Abbasid caliphs kept a standing army, and they established bureaucratic ministries in charge of taxation, finance, coinage, and postal services. They also maintained the magnificent network of roads that the Islamic empire inherited from the Sasanids.

Harun al-Rashid The high point of the Abbasid dynasty came during the reign of the caliph **Harun al-Rashid** (786–809 c.e.). By the late eighth century, Abbasid authority had lost some of its force in provinces distant from Baghdad, but it remained strong enough to bring reliable tax revenues from most parts of the empire. Flush with wealth, Baghdad became a center of banking, commerce, crafts, and industrial production, a metropolis with a population of several hundred thousand people. According to stories from his time, Harun al-Rashid provided liberal support for artists and writers, bestowed lavish and luxurious gifts on his favorites, and distributed money to the poor and the common classes by tossing coins into the streets of Baghdad. Once, he sent an elephant and a collection of rich presents as gifts to his contemporary Charlemagne, who ruled the Carolingian empire of western Europe.

Abbasid Decline Soon after Harun al-Rashid's reign, the Abbasid empire entered a period of decline. Civil war between Harun's sons seriously damaged Abbasid authority, and disputes over succession rights became a recurring problem for the dynasty. Provincial governors took advantage of disorder in the ruling house by acting independently of the caliphs: instead of implementing imperial policies and delivering taxes to Baghdad, they built up local bases of power and in some cases actually seceded from the Abbasid empire. Meanwhile, popular uprisings and peasant rebellions, which often enjoyed the support of dissenting sects and heretical movements, further weakened the empire.

As a result of those difficulties, the Abbasid caliphs became mere figureheads long before the Mongols extinguished the dynasty in 1258. In 945, members of a Persian noble family seized control of Baghdad and established their clan as the power behind the Abbasid throne. Later, imperial authorities in Baghdad fell under the control of the Seljuq Turks, a nomadic people from central Asia who also invaded the Byzantine empire. In response to rebellions mounted by peasants and provincial governors, authorities in Baghdad allied with the Seljuqs, who began to enter the Abbasid realm and convert to Islam about the mid-tenth century. By the mid-eleventh century the Seljuqs effectively controlled the Abbasid empire. During the 1050s they took possession of Baghdad, and during the following decades they extended their authority to Syria, Palestine, and Anatolia. They retained Abbasid caliphs as nominal sovereigns, but for two centuries, until the arrival of the Mongols, the Seljuq *sultan* ("chieftain" or "ruler") was the true source of power in the Abbasid empire.

ECONOMY AND SOCIETY OF THE EARLY ISLAMIC WORLD

In the *dar al-Islam*, as in other agricultural societies, peasants tilled the land as their ancestors had done for centuries before them, while manufacturers and merchants supported a