

Byzantines actually worshiped icons; others, particularly monks, considered icons a necessary part of Christian piety. As the monk St. John of Damascus put it in a vigorous defense of holy images, “I do not worship matter, I worship the God of matter, who became matter for my sake, and deigned to inhabit matter, who worked out my salvation through matter.”

Other Byzantines abhorred icons. Most numerous of these were the soldiers on the frontiers. Shocked by Arab triumphs, they found the cause of their misfortunes in the biblical injunction against graven images. When they compared their defeats to Muslim successes, they could not help but notice that Islam prohibited all representations of the divine. To these soldiers and others who shared their view, icons revived pagan idolatry and desecrated Christian divinity. As iconoclastic (anti-icon or, literally, icon-breaking) feeling grew, some churchmen became outspoken in their opposition to icons.

Byzantine emperors shared these religious objections, and they also had important political reasons for opposing icons. In fact, the issue of icons became a test of their authority. Icons diffused loyalties, setting up intermediaries between worshipers and God that undermined the emperor’s exclusive place in the divine and temporal order. In addition, the emphasis on icons in monastic communities made the monks potential threats to imperial power; the emperors hoped to use this issue to break the power of the monasteries. Above all, though, the emperors opposed icons because the army did, and they wanted to support their troops.

After Emperor Leo III the Isaurian (r. 717–741) had defeated the Arabs besieging Constantinople at the beginning of his reign, he turned his attention to consolidating his political position. Officers of the imperial court tore down the great golden icon of Christ at the gateway of the palace and replaced it with a cross, while a crowd of women protested by going on a furious rampage in support of icons. But Leo would not budge. In 726 he ordered all icons destroyed, a ban that remained in effect, despite much opposition, until 787. This is known as the period of **iconoclasm** in Byzantine history. A modified ban would be revived in 815 and last until 843.

Iconoclasm had an enormous impact on daily life. At home, where people had their own portable icons, it forced changes in private worship: the devout had to destroy their icons or worship them in secret. The ban on icons meant ferocious attacks on the monasteries: splendid collections of holy images were destroyed; vast properties were confiscated; and monks, who were staunch defenders of icons, were ordered to marry and give up their vocation. In this way iconoclasm destroyed communities that might otherwise have served as centers of resistance to imperial power. Reorganized and reoriented, the Byzantine rulers were able to maintain themselves against the onslaught of the Arabs, who attacked under the banner of Islam.

Review: What stresses did the Byzantine Empire endure in the seventh and eighth centuries, and how was iconoclasm a response to those stresses?

❖ Islam: A New Religion and a New Empire

In the sixth century, Arabia, today Saudi Arabia, witnessed the rise of Islam, a religion that called on all to submit to the will of one God. Islam, which means “submission to God,” emerged under Muhammad (c. 570–632), a merchant-turned-holy-man from the city of Mecca. While the great majority of people living in Arabia were polytheists, Muhammad recognized one God, the same one worshiped by the Jews and the Christians. He saw himself as God’s last prophet—and thus he is called the Prophet—the person to receive and in turn repeat God’s final words to humans. Invited by the disunited and pagan people of the city of Medina to come and act as a mediator for them, Muhammad exercised the powers of both a religious and a secular leader. This dual role became the model for his successors, known as caliphs. ♦ Through a combination of persuasion and force, Muhammad and his co-

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religionists, the Muslims, converted most of the Arabian peninsula. By the time Muhammad died in 632, conquest and conversion had begun to move northward, into Byzantine and Persian territories. In the next generation, the Arabs conquered most of Persia and all of Egypt and were on their way across North Africa to Spain. Yet within the territories they conquered, daily life went on much as before.

The Desert and the Cities

Before the seventh century, the great deserts of the Arabian peninsula were sparsely populated by Bedouins.♦ These were nomads who lived in tribes—loose confederations of clans, or kin groups—herding flocks for meat and milk and trading (or raiding) for grain, dates, and slaves. Poor tribes herded sheep, whereas richer ones kept camels—extremely hardy animals, splendid beasts of burden, and good producers of milk and meat. (*Arab* was the name camel nomads called themselves.)

Tribal makeup shifted as kin groups joined or left. Though continually changing, these associations nevertheless saw outsiders as rivals, and tribes constantly fought with one another. Yet this very rivalry was itself an outgrowth of shared values. Bedouin men prized “manliness,” which meant far more than sexual prowess. They strove to be brave in battle and feared being shamed. Manliness also entailed an obligation to be generous, to give away the booty that was the goal of intertribal warfare. Women were often part of this booty, for Bedouins practiced polygyny (having more than one wife at the same time). Bedouin wars rarely involved much bloodshed; their main purpose was to capture people and take belongings.

Tribal, nomadic existence produced its own culture, including an Arabic poetry of striking delicacy, precision, and beauty. In the absence of written language, the Bedouins used oral poetry and storytelling to transmit their traditions, simultaneously entertaining, reaffirming values, and teaching new generations.

Dotting the Bedouins’ desert world were cities that arose around oases—fertile, green areas. Here more settled forms of life and trade took place. Mecca, near the Red Sea, was one such commercial center. Meccan caravans crisscrossed the peninsula, selling slaves and spices. More important, Mecca played an important religious role because it contained a shrine, the Ka’ba. Long before Muhammad was born, the Ka’ba, a great rock surrounded by the images of 360 gods, served as a sacred place within which war and violence were prohibited. The tribe that dominated Mecca, the Quraysh,♦ controlled access to the shrine and was able to tax the pilgrims who flocked there as well as sell them food and drink. In turn, plunder was transformed into trade as the visitors bartered with one another on the sacred grounds, assured of their security.

The Prophet Muhammad and the Faith of Islam

Mecca, the birthplace of Muhammad, was a center with two important traditions—one religious, the other commercial. Muhammad’s early years were inauspicious: orphaned at the age of six, he spent two years with his grandfather and then came under the care of his uncle, a leader of the Quraysh tribe. Eventually, Muhammad became a trader. At the age of twenty-five, he married Khadija, a rich widow who had once employed him. They had at least four daughters and lived (to all appearances) happily and comfortably. Yet Muhammad sometimes left home and spent some time on the nearby Mount Hira, devoting himself to prayer and contemplation.

In about 610, on one of these retreats, Muhammad heard a voice and had a vision that summoned him to worship Allah, the God of the Jews and Christians. (*Allah* means “the God” in Arabic.) He accepted the call as coming from God. Over the next years he received messages that he understood to be divine revelation. Later, when they had been written down and arranged—a process that was completed in the seventh century, but after Muhammad’s death—these messages

♦**Bedouins:** BEHD oo ihns

♦**Quraysh:** kur RAYSH



was used for the Qur'an until the eleventh century. The round floral decoration on the right-hand page marks a new section of the text. *Property of the Ambrosian Library. All rights reserved.*

Qur'an

More than a holy book, the Qur'an represents for Muslims the very words of God that were dictated to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel. Generally the Qur'an was written on pages wider than long, perhaps to differentiate it from other books. This example dates from the seventh or eighth century. It is written in Kufic script, a formal and majestic form of Arabic that

became the Qur'an,♦ the holy book of Islam. (See pages of a Qur'an above.) *Qur'an* means "recitation"; each of its chapters, or *suras*, is understood to be God's revelation as told to Muhammad by the archangel Gabriel, then recited in turn by Muhammad to others. It begins with the *Fatihah*, frequently also said as an independent prayer, and continues with *suras* of gradually decreasing length, which cover the gamut of human experience and the life to come (see "The *Fatihah* of the Qur'an," page 295). For Muslims (literally, "those who submit to Islam") the Qur'an contains the foundations of history, prophecy, and the legal and moral code by which men and women should live: "Do not set up another god with God. . . . Do not worship anyone but Him, and be good to your parents. . . . Give to your relatives what is their due, and to those who are needy, and the wayfarers."

The Qur'an emphasizes the nuclear family—a man, his wife (or wives), and children—as the basic unit of Muslim society. Islam cuts its adherents adrift from the protection and particularism of the tribe but gives them in return an identity as part of the **ummah**, the community of believers, who share both a belief in one God and a set of religious practices. Islam stresses individual belief in God and adherence to the Qur'an. Thus, Muslims have no priests, no mass, and no intermediaries between the divine and the individual. However, Islam does rec-

♦ **Qur'an:** Kur AN/Koo RAHN

ognize authorities whose interpretations of the Qur'an and related texts are considered decisive. The Ka'ba, with its many gods, had gathered together tribes from the surrounding vicinity. Muhammad, with his one God, forged an even more universal religion.

Growth of Islam, c. 610–632

First to convert to Muhammad's faith was his wife, Khadija; then a few friends and members of his immediate family joined him; and, as Muhammad preached the new faith, eventually some others became adherents. Soon, however, the new faith polarized Meccan society. Muhammad's insistence that the cults of all other gods be abandoned in favor of one brought him into conflict with leading clan members of the Quraysh tribe, whose control over the Ka'ba, a polytheistic shrine, had given them prestige and wealth. Lacking political means to expel him, they insulted Muhammad and harassed his adherents.

Hijra: Journey to Medina. Disillusioned with Mecca and angry with his own tribe, Muhammad tried to find a place and a population receptive to his message. Most important, he expected support from Jews, whose monotheism, in Muhammad's view, prepared them for his own faith. When a few of Muhammad's converts from Medina promised to protect him if he would join them there, he eagerly accepted the invitation, in part because Medina had a significant Jewish popu-

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♦ **Hijra:**
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lation. In 622, Muhammad made the **Hijra**,[♦] or emigration, to Medina, an oasis about two hundred miles north of Mecca. This journey proved a crucial event for the fledgling movement. At Medina, Muhammad found followers ready to listen to his religious message and to regard him as the leader of their community. They expected him to act as a neutral and impartial judge in their interclan disputes. Muhammad's political position in the community set the pattern by which Islamic society would be governed afterward; rather than adding a church to political and cultural life, Muslims made their political and religious institutions inseparable. After Muhammad's death, the year of the Hijra was named the first year of the Islamic calendar; it marked the beginning of the new Islamic era.¹

Although successful at Medina, the Muslims felt threatened by the Quraysh at Mecca, who actively opposed the public practice of Islam. For this reason Muhammad led raids against them. At the battle of Badr[♦] in 624, aided by their position near an oasis, Muhammad and his followers killed forty-nine of the Meccan enemy, took numerous prisoners, and confiscated rich booty. At the battle of Badr, Bedouin plundering was grafted onto the Muslim duty of jihad (literally, "striving").²

The battle of Badr was a great triumph for Muhammad, who was now able to consolidate his position at Medina, gaining new adherents and silencing all doubters, including the Jews. Muhammad had first seen the Jews of Medina as allies, but they had not converted to Islam as he had expected. Suspecting them of supporting his enemies, Muhammad expelled two Jewish tribes from Medina and killed the male members of another. Although Muslims had originally prayed in the direction of Jerusalem, the center of Jewish worship, Muhammad now had them turn in the direction of Mecca.

¹Thus, 1 A.H. (1 *anno Hegrae*) on the Muslim calendar is equivalent to 622 C.E.

²*Jihad* means "striving" and is used in particular in the context of striving against unbelievers. In that sense, it is often translated as "holy war." But it can also mean striving against one's worst impulses.

♦ **Hijra:** HID jruh
♦ **Badr:** BAHD ihr

The Fatihah of the Qur'an

The Fatihah (or Prologue) is the prayer that begins the Qur'an. It emphasizes God's oneness and the believer's recourse to God alone, without intermediaries of any sort. The "path that is straight" is the path of right worship.

The Fatihah

In the name of Allah, most benevolent, ever-merciful

All praise be to Allah

Lord of all the worlds,

2. Most beneficent, ever-merciful,

3. King of the Day of Judgement,

4. You alone we worship, and to You alone turn for help.

5. Guide us (O Lord) to the path that is straight,

6. The path of those You have blessed,

7. Not of those who have earned Your anger, nor those who have gone astray.

Source: *Al-Qur'an: A Contemporary Translation*, trans. Ahmed Ali (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 11.

Defining the Faith. As Muhammad broke with the Jews, he instituted new practices to define Islam as a unique religion. Among these were the *zakat*, a tax on possessions to be used for alms; the fast of Ramadan, which took place during the ninth month of the Islamic year, the month in which the battle of Badr had been fought; the *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca during the last month of the year, which each Muslim was to make once in his lifetime; and the *salat*, formal worship at least three times a day (later increased to five), which could include the *shahadah*, or profession of faith—"There is no divinity but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God." Detailed regulations for these practices, sometimes called the five pillars of Islam, were worked out in the eighth and early ninth centuries.

Meanwhile, Muhammad sent troops to subdue Arabs north and south. In 630, he entered Mecca with ten thousand men and took over the city, assuring the Quraysh of leniency and offering alliances with its leaders. By this time the prestige of Islam was enough to convince clans elsewhere to convert. Through a combination of force, conversion, and negotiation, Muhammad was able to unite many, though by no means all, Arabic-speaking tribes under his leadership by the time of his death two years later.

In so doing, Muhammad brought about important social transformations. The ummah included not only men but also women; as a result, women's status was enhanced. Islam prohibited all infanticide, a practice that had long been used largely against female infants; and at first, Muslim women joined men during the prayer periods that punctuated the day. Men were allowed to have up to four wives at one time, but they

were obliged to treat them equally; their wives received dowries and had certain inheritance rights. But beginning in the eighth century, women began to pray apart from the men. Like Judaism and Christianity, Islam retained the practices of a patriarchal society in which women's participation in community life was circumscribed.

Even though Islamic society was a new sort of community, in many ways it did function as a tribe, or rather a "supertribe," obligated to fight common enemies, share plunder, and resolve peacefully any internal disputes. Muslims participated in group rituals, such as the salat and public recitation. The Qur'an was soon publicly sung by professional reciters, much as the old tribal poetry had been. Most significant for the eventual spread of Islam, Muslim men continued to be warriors. They took up where Meccan traders had been forced to leave off; along the routes once taken by caravans to Syria, their armies reaped



MAP 8.3 Expansion of Islam to 750

In little more than a century, Islamic armies conquered a vast region that included numerous different people, cultures, climates, and living conditions. Yet under the Umayyads, these disparate territories were administered by one ruler from the capital city at Damascus. The unifying force was the religion of Islam, which gathered all believers into one community, the *ummah*.

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profits at the point of a sword. But this differed from intertribal fighting; it was the jihad of people who were carrying out the injunction of God against unbelievers. “Strive, O Prophet,” says the Qur’an, “against the unbelievers and the hypocrites, and deal with them firmly. Their final abode is Hell: And what a wretched destination!”

The Caliphs, Muhammad’s Successors, 632–750

In founding a new political community in Arabia, Muhammad reorganized traditional Arab society as he cut across clan allegiances and welcomed converts from every tribe. He forged the Muslims into a formidable military force, and his successors, the caliphs, moved into the Byzantine and Persian worlds, taking them by storm.

War and Conquest. To the west, the Muslims easily took Byzantine territory in Syria and moved into Egypt in the 640s (Map 8.3). To the east, they invaded the Sassanid Empire, defeating the Persians at the very gates of their capital, Ctesiphon, in 637. The whole of Persia was in Muslim hands by 651. During the last half of the seventh century and the beginning of the eighth, Islamic warriors extended their sway to Spain (in the west) and to India (in the east).

How were such conquests possible, especially in so short a time? First, the Islamic forces came up against weakened empires. The Byzantine and Sassanid states were exhausted from fighting each other. The cities of the Middle East that had been taken by the Persians and retaken by the Byzantines were depopulated, their few survivors burdened with heavy taxes. Second, the Muslims were welcomed into both Byzantine and Sassanid territories by discontented groups. Many Monophysite Christians (see p. 276) in Syria and Egypt had suffered persecution under the Byzantines and were glad to have new, Islamic overlords. In Persia, Jews, Monophysites, and Nestorian Christians were at best irrelevant to the Zoroastrian King of Kings and his regime. These were the external reasons for Islamic success. There were also internal reasons. Arabs had long been used to intertribal warfare; now they were

Arab Coin

The Arabs learned coinage and minting from those whom they conquered—the Persians and the Byzantines.

Although one branch of Islam barred depicting the human form, others were less condemning.

Thus, the Umayyads saw nothing wrong with imitating traditional numismatic models.

The ruler depicted on this silver coin wears a headdress

that echoes the one worn by the Sassanid ruler depicted on page 287. The word for this type of coin, *dirham*, is Greek, from *drachma*. The Umayyad fiscal system, which retained the old Roman land tax, was administered by Syrians, who had often served Byzantine rulers in the same capacity. *The British Museum.*



united as a supertribe. The tribes of the cities had been the first to convert to Islam; they then brought the Bedouins into the fold, consolidating all of Arabia under one Islamic state. Under the banner of jihad, these united tribes exercised their skills as warriors not against one another but rather against unbelievers. Fully armed, on horseback, employing camels as convoys, they conquered with amazing ease. Then, making their victories permanent, they built garrison cities from which soldiers requisitioned taxes and goods. Sometimes whole Arab tribes, including women and children, were imported to settle conquered territory, as happened in parts of Syria. In other regions, such as Egypt, a small Muslim settlement at Fustat sufficed to gather the spoils of conquest.

The Politics of Succession. Struck down by an illness in the midst of preparations for an invasion of Syria, Muhammad died quietly at Medina in 632. His death marked a crisis in the government of the new Islamic state and was the origin of tension between Shi’ite and Sunni Muslims that continues today. The choice of caliphs to follow Muhammad was difficult. They came not from the traditional tribal elite but rather from a new inner circle of men who had participated in the

Hijra and remained close to Muhammad. The first two caliphs ruled without serious opposition, but the third caliph, Uthman (r. 644–656), a member of the Umayyad family and son-in-law (by marriage to two daughters) of Muhammad, aroused discontent among other clan members of the inner circle and soldiers unhappy with his distribution of high offices and revenues. Accusing Uthman of favoritism, they supported his rival, Ali, a member of the Hashim clan (to which Muhammad had belonged) and the husband of Muhammad's only surviving child, Fatimah. After a group of discontented soldiers murdered Uthman, civil war broke out between the Umayyads and Ali's faction. It ended when Ali was killed by one of his own erstwhile supporters, and the caliphate remained in Umayyad hands from 661 to 750.

Nevertheless, the *Shi'at Ali*, the faction of Ali, did not fade away. Ali's memory lived on among groups of Muslims (the Shi'ites) who saw in him a symbol of justice and righteousness. For them, Ali's death was the martyrdom of the only true successor to Muhammad. They remained faithful to his dynasty, shunning the mainstream caliphs of the other Muslims (Sunni Muslims, as they were later called, from *Sunna*, the practices of Muhammad). The Shi'ites awaited the arrival of the true leader—the imam—who in their view could come only from the house of Ali.

Under the **Umayyad caliphate**, which lasted from 661 to 750, the Muslim world became a state with its capital at Damascus, the historic capital of Syria—and today's as well. Borrowing from the institutions well known to the civilizations they had just conquered, the Muslims issued coins and hired former Byzantine and Persian officials. They made Arabic a tool of centralization, imposing it as the language of government on regions not previously united linguistically. For Byzantium, this period was one of unparalleled military crisis, the prelude to iconoclasm. For the Islamic world, now a multiethnic society of Muslim Arabs, Syrians, Egyptians, Iraqis, and other peoples, it was a period of settlement, new urbanism, and literary and artistic flowering.

♦Umayyad: oo MAH yuhd

Peace and Prosperity in Islamic Lands

Ironically, the Islamic warriors brought peace. While the conquerors stayed within their fortified cities or built magnificent hunting lodges in the deserts of Syria, the conquered went back to work, to study, to play, and—in the case of Christians and Jews, who were considered protected subjects—to worship as they pleased in return for the payment of a special tax. At Damascus, local artists and craftspeople worked on the lavish decorations for a mosque in a neoclassical style at the very moment Muslim armies were storming the walls of Constantinople. Leaving the Byzantine institutions in place, the Muslim conquerors allowed Christians and Jews to retain their posts and even protected dissidents.

During the seventh and eighth centuries, Muslim scholars wrote down the hitherto largely oral Arabic literature. They determined the definitive form for the Qur'an and compiled pious narratives about Muhammad (hadith literature). Scribes composed these works in exquisite handwriting; Arab calligraphy became an art form. A literate class, composed mainly of the old Persian and Syrian elite now converted to Islam, created new forms of prose writing in Arabic—official documents as well as essays on topics ranging from hunting to ruling. Umayyad poetry explored new worlds of thought and feeling. Patronized by the caliphs, who found in written poetry an important source of propaganda and a buttress for their power, the poets also reached a wider audience that delighted in their clever use of words, their satire, and their invocations of courage, piety, and sometimes erotic love:

*I spent the night as her bed-companion,
each enamored of the other;*

*And I made her laugh and cry, and stripped
her of her clothes.*

*I played with her and she vanquished me;
I made her happy and I angered her.*

*That was a night we spent, in my sleep,
playing and joyful,*

But the caller to prayer woke me up.

Such poetry scandalized conservative Muslims, brought up on the ascetic tenets of

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the Qur'an. But this love poetry was a product of the new urban civilization of the Umayyad period, during which wealth, cultural mix, and the confidence born of conquest inspired diverse and experimental literary forms. By the close of the Umayyad period in 750, Islamic civilization was multi-ethnic, urban, and sophisticated, a true heir of Roman and Persian traditions.

Review: How and why did the Muslims conquer so many lands in the very short period 632–750?

❖ Western Europe: A Medley of Kingdoms

With the demise of Roman imperial government in the western half of the empire, the region was divided into a number of kingdoms: various monarchs ruled in Spain, Italy, England, and Gaul. The primary foundations of power and stability in all of these kingdoms were kinship networks, church patronage, royal courts, and wealth derived from land and plunder. In contrast to Byzantium, where an emperor still ruled as the successor to Augustus and Constantine, drawing upon an unbroken chain of Roman legal and administrative traditions, political power in western Europe was more diffuse. There were kings, to be sure; but in some places churchmen and rich magnates were even more powerful than royalty. Power lodged too (as people believed) in the tombs and relics of saints, who represented and wielded the divine forces of God. Although the patterns of daily life and the procedures of government in western Europe remained recognizably Roman, they were also in the process of change,

borrowing from and adapting to local traditions and to the very powerful role of the Christian religion in every aspect of society.

Frankish Kingdoms with Roman Roots

The most important kingdoms in post-Roman Europe were Frankish. During the sixth century, the Franks had established themselves as dominant in Gaul, and by the seventh century the limits of their kingdoms roughly approximated the eastern borders of present-day France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg (Map 8.4). Moreover, the Frankish kings, known as the Merovingians♦ (the

♦**Merovingians:** Mehr oh VIN jians



MAP 8.4 The Merovingian Kingdoms in the Seventh Century

By the seventh century, there were three powerful Merovingian kingdoms: Neustria, Austrasia, and Burgundy. The important cities of Aquitaine were assigned to one of these major kingdoms, while Aquitaine as a whole was assigned to a duke or other governor. Kings did not establish capital cities; they did not even stay in one place. Rather, they continually traveled throughout their kingdoms, making their power felt in person.

such links through his own marriage and those of his sons and daughters to rulers and princely families in France, Hungary, and Scandinavia. Iaroslav encouraged intellectual and artistic developments that would connect Russian culture to the classical past. At his own church of St. Sophia, at Kiev, which copied the one at Constantinople, Iaroslav created a major library.

When Iaroslav died, his kingdom was divided among his sons. Civil wars broke out between the brothers and eventually between cousins, shredding what unity Russia had known. Massive invasions by outsiders, particularly from the east, further weakened Kievan rulers, who were eventually displaced by princes from northern Russia. At the crossroads of East and West, Russia could meet and absorb a great variety of traditions; but its situation also opened it to unremitting military pressures.

Review: What were the effects of expansion on the power of the Byzantine emperor?

❖ The Islamic World: From Unity to Fragmentation

A new dynasty of caliphs—the Abbasids—first brought unity and then, in their decline, fragmentation to the Islamic world. Caliphs continued to rule in name only as regional rulers took over the real business of government in Islamic lands. Local traditions based on religious and political differences played an increasingly important role in people's lives. Yet, even in the eleventh century, the Islamic world had a clear sense of its own unity, which came from language, commercial life, and vigorous intellectual debate across regional boundaries.

The Abbasid Caliphate, 750–c. 950

In 750, a civil war ousted the Umayyads and raised the **Abbasids**♦ to the caliphate. The Abbasids found support in an uneasy coalition of Shi'ites (the faction of Islam loyal to

♦ **Abbasids:** A buh suhds

Ali's memory) and non-Arabs who had been excluded from Umayyad government and now demanded a place in political life. The new regime signaled a revolution. The center of Islamic rule shifted from Damascus, with its roots in the Roman tradition, to Baghdad, a new capital city, built by the Abbasids right next to Ctesiphon, which had been the Sassanid capital. Here the Abbasid caliphs imitated the Persian King of Kings (whose image they knew from sculptures such as the one on page 287) and adopted the court ceremony of the Sassanids. Their administration grew more and more centralized: the caliph's staff grew, and he controlled the appointment of regional governors.

The Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid♦ (r. 786–809) presided over a flourishing empire from Baghdad. His contemporary Frankish ruler, Charlemagne, was very impressed with the elephant Harun sent him as a gift, along with monkeys, spices, and medicines. But these items were mainstays of everyday commerce in Harun's Iraq. For example, a mid-ninth-century list of imports inventoried “tigers, panthers, elephants, panther skins, rubies, white sandal, ebony, and coconuts” from India, as well as “silk, china-ware, paper, ink, peacocks, racing horses, saddles, felts [and] cinnamon” from China.

The Abbasid dynasty began to decline after Harun's death. Obligated to support a huge army and increasingly complex civil service, the Abbasids found their tax base inadequate. They needed to collect revenues from their provinces, such as Syria and Egypt, but the governors of those regions often refused to send the revenues. After Harun's caliphate, ex-soldiers seeking better salaries recognized different caliphs and fought for power in savage civil wars. The caliphs tried to bypass the regular army, made up largely of free Muslim foot soldiers, by turning to slaves, bought and armed to serve as mounted cavalry. This tactic failed, however, and in the tenth century the caliphs became figureheads only. Religious leadership was now in the hands of religious scholars. Political leadership fell into the hands of independent rulers, who established themselves in the various Islamic regions. To sup-

♦ **Harun al-Rashid:** huh ROON ahl ruh SHEED



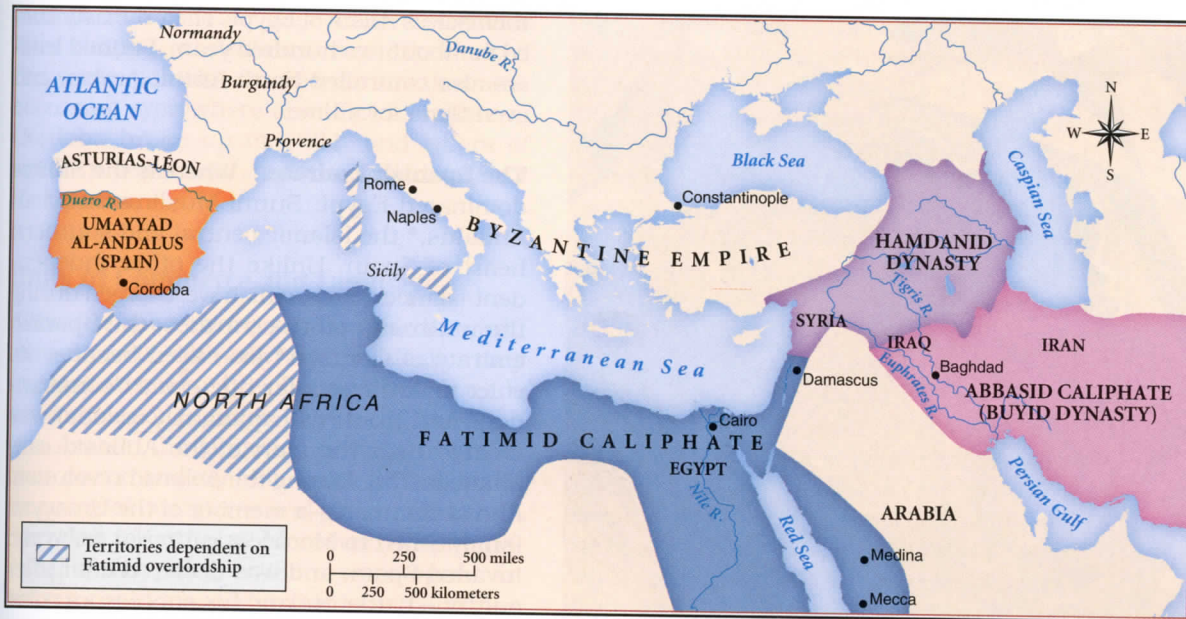
MAP 9.2

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♦ **Mamluk**



MAP 9.2 Islamic States, c. 1000

A glance back at Map 8.3 on page 296 will quickly demonstrate the fragmentation of the once united Islamic caliphate. In 750, one caliph ruled territory stretching from Spain to India. In 1000, there was more than one caliphate as well as several other ruling dynasties. The most important were the Fatimids, who began as organizers of a movement to overthrow the Abbasids. By 1000, they had conquered Egypt and claimed hegemony over all of North Africa.

port themselves militarily, many of these new rulers came to depend on independent military commanders who led armies of Mamluks♦—Turkish slaves or freedmen trained as professional mounted soldiers. Mamluks were well paid to maintain their mounts and arms, and many gained renown and high positions at the courts of regional rulers.

Thus, in the Islamic world, as in the Byzantine, a new military elite arose. But the Muslim and Byzantine elites differed in key ways. Whereas the Byzantine dynatoi were rooted in specific regions—tied to their estates and extended families—the Mamluks were highly mobile. They were not supported by land but rather were paid from taxes collected by local rulers. Organized into tightly knit companies bound together by devotion to a particular general and by a strong camaraderie, they easily changed employers, moving from ruler to ruler for pay.

♦**Mamluks:** MAM looks

Regional Diversity

A faraway caliph could not command sufficient allegiance from local leaders once he demanded more in taxes than he gave back in favors. The forces of fragmentation were strong in the Islamic world: it was, after all, based on the conquest of many diverse regions, each with its own deeply rooted traditions and culture. The Islamic religion, with its Sunni/Shi'ite split, also became a source of polarization. Western Europeans knew almost nothing about Muslims, calling all of them Saracens♦ (from the Latin for “Arabs”) without distinction. But, in fact, Muslims were of different ethnicities, practiced different customs, and identified with different regions. With the fragmentation of political and religious unity, each of the tenth- and early-eleventh-century Islamic states built on local traditions under local rulers (Map 9.2).

♦**Saracens:** SAIR uh suhns



Dome of the Mihrab of the Great Mosque at Córdoba

The mihrab is the prayer niche of the mosque, located so that the worshiper facing it is thereby facing Mecca. For the one at Córdoba, built between 961 and 976 by the Andalusian caliph al-Hakam, Byzantine mosaicists were imported to produce a decoration that would recall the mosaics of the Great Mosque at Damascus (see page 282). Why would this caliph, a Umayyad, be particularly interested in reminding Andalusians of the Damascus mosque? *Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic, Barcelona.*

The Fatimid Dynasty. In the tenth century, one group of Shi'ites, calling themselves the Fatimids♦ (after Fatimah, Muhammad's only surviving child and wife of Ali), began a successful political movement. Allying with the Berbers in North Africa, the Fatimids established themselves in 909 as rulers in the region now called Tunisia. The Fatimid Ubayd Allah♦ claimed to be not only the true imam,♦ descendant of Ali, but also the *mahdi*,♦ the "divinely guided" messiah, come to bring justice on earth. In 969, the Fatimids declared

- ♦ **Fatimids:** FAT ih mihds
- ♦ **Ubayd Allah:** ub EYED a LAH
- ♦ **imam:** ih MAHM
- ♦ **mahdi:** MAH dee

themselves rulers of Egypt. Their dynasty lasted for about two hundred years. Fatimid leaders also controlled North Africa, Arabia, and even Syria for a time.

The Spanish Emirate. Whereas the Shi'ites dominated Egypt, Sunni Muslims ruled al-Andalus,♦ the Islamic central and southern heart of Spain. Unlike the other independent Islamic states, which were forged during the ninth and tenth centuries, the Spanish emirate of Córdoba♦ (so called because its ruler took the secular title *emir*,♦ "commander," and fixed his capital at Córdoba) was created near the start of the Abbasid caliphate, in 756. During the Abbasid revolution, Abd al-Rahman—a member of the Umayyad family—fled to Morocco, gathered an army, invaded Spain, and was declared emir after only one battle. He and his successors ruled a broad range of peoples, including many Jews and Christians. After the initial Islamic conquest of Spain, the Christians adopted so much of the new language and so many of the customs that they were called Mozarabs,♦ that is, "like Arabs." The Arabs allowed them freedom of worship and let them live according to their own laws. Some Mozarabs were content with their status, others converted to Islam, and still others intermarried—most commonly, Christian women married Muslim men and raised their children as Muslims, since the religion of the father determined that of the children.

Abd al-Rahman♦ III (r. 912–961) was powerful enough to take the title of caliph; the caliphate of Córdoba that he created lasted from 929 to 1031. Under Abd al-Rahman's rule members of all religious groups in al-Andalus were given absolute freedom of worship and equal opportunity to rise in the civil service. The caliph also initiated important diplomatic contracts with Byzantine and European rulers, ignoring the weak and tiny Christian kingdoms squeezed into northern Spain. His successor, al-Hakam, built a splendid mihrab at Córdoba (see Dome of the

- ♦ **al-Andalus:** al AND uh loos
- ♦ **Córdoba:** KAWR duh buh
- ♦ **emir:** ih MIHR
- ♦ **Mozarabs:** moh ZAR ruhbs
- ♦ **Abd al-Rahman:** uhb dur rahk MAHN

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- ♦ **taifas:** TY
- ♦ **Tustari:** t

Mihrab at Córdoba, page 328). Yet under later caliphs, al-Andalus, too, experienced the same political fragmentation that was occurring everywhere else. The caliphate of Córdoba broke up in 1031, and rulers of small, independent regions, called *taifas*,♦ took power.

Unity of Commerce and Language

Although the regions of the Islamic world were diverse culturally and politically, they maintained a measure of unity through trade networks and language. Their principal bond was Arabic, the language of the Qur'an. At once poetic and sacred, Arabic was also the language of commerce and government from Baghdad to Córdoba. Moreover, despite political differences, borders were open: an artisan could move from Córdoba to Cairo; a landowner in Morocco might very well own property in al-Andalus; a young man from North Africa would think nothing of going to Baghdad to find a wife; a young girl purchased as a slave in Mecca might become part of a prince's household in Baghdad. With few barriers to commerce (though every city and town had its own customs dues), traders regularly dealt in various, often exotic, goods.

Although the primary reason for these open borders was Islam itself, the openness extended to non-Muslims as well. We happen to know a good deal about the Tustari♦ brothers, Jewish merchants from southern Iran. The Tustaris' commercial activities were typical in the Arabic-speaking world. By 1026, they had established a flourishing business in Egypt. They did not have "branch offices," but informal contacts allowed them many of the same advantages and much flexibility: friends and family in Iran shipped the brothers fine textiles to sell in Egypt, and the Tustaris exported Egyptian fabrics to sell in Iran. Dealing in fabrics could yield fabulous wealth, for cloth was essential not only for clothing but also for home decoration: textiles covered walls; curtains separated rooms. The Tustari brothers held the highest rank in Jewish society and had contacts with Muslim rulers. The son of one of the brothers con-

verted to Islam and became **vizier** (chief minister) to the Fatimids in Egypt. But the sophisticated Islamic society of the tenth and eleventh centuries supported networks even more vast than those represented by the Tustari family. Muslim merchants brought tin from England; salt and gold from Timbuktu in west-central Africa; amber, gold, and copper from Russia; and slaves from every region.

The Islamic Renaissance, c. 790–c. 1050

The dissolution of the caliphate into separate political entities multiplied the centers of learning and intellectual productivity. Unlike the Macedonian renaissance, which was concentrated in Constantinople, a renaissance of Islam occurred throughout the Islamic world. It was particularly dazzling in capital cities such as Córdoba, where tenth-century rulers presided over a brilliant court culture, patronizing scholars, poets, and artists. The library at Córdoba contained the largest collection of books in Europe at that time.

Elsewhere, already in the eighth century, the Abbasid caliphs endowed research libraries and set up centers for translation where scholars culled the writings of the ancients, including the classics of Persia, India, and Greece. Many scholars read, translated, and commented on the works of ancient philosophers. Others worked on astronomy (see Andromeda C, page 330), and still others wrote on mathematical matters. Al-Khwarizmi's♦ book on equations, written around 825, became so well known in the West that the word *al-jabr* in the title of his book became the English word *algebra*. Muhammad ibn Musa♦ (d. 850) used numerals such as 1, 2, and 3, which had been created in India, in his treatise on arithmetical calculations. Inventing the crucial placeholder zero, Musa was for the first time able to manipulate very large numbers (something impossible with Roman numerals). When these numerals were introduced into western Europe in the twelfth century, they were known as Arabic, as they are still called today.

♦ *taifas*: TY fuhs
♦ *Tustari*: tus TAR ee

♦ *Al-Khwarizmi*: al KWAHR ihz mee
♦ *Muhammad ibn Musa*: moh HAM uhd



Andromeda C. (11th century)

The study of sciences such as medicine, physics, and astronomy flourished in the tenth and eleventh centuries in the cosmopolitan Islamic world. This whimsical depiction of Andromeda C, a constellation in the Northern Hemisphere, illustrates the *Book of Images of the Fixed Stars*, an astronomical treatise written around 965 by al-Sufi at the request of his “pupil,” the ruler of Iran. Since the Muslim calendar was lunar and the times of Muslim prayer were calculated by the movement of the sun, astronomy was important for religious as well as secular purposes. Al-Sufi drew from classical treatises, particularly the *Almagest* by Ptolemy. This copy of his book, probably made by his son in 1009, also draws on classical models for the illustrations; but instead of Greek clothing, Andromeda wears the pantaloons and skirt of an Islamic dancer. Reference (shelfmark) MS Marsh 144. Bodleian Library. University of Oxford.

The newly independent Islamic rulers supported science as well as mathematics. Ibn Sina♦ (980–1037), known in Christian Europe as Avicenna,♦ wrote books on logic,

♦ **Ibn Sina:** ihb uhn SEE nah

♦ **Avicenna:** a vuh SEH nuh

the natural sciences, and physics. His *Canon of Medicine* systematized earlier treatises and reconciled them with his own experience as a physician. Active in the centers of power, he served as vizier to various rulers. In his autobiography he spoke with pleasure and pride about his intellectual development:

One day I asked permission [of the ruler] to go into [his doctors'] library, look at their books, and read the medical ones. He gave me permission, and I went into a palace of many rooms, each with trunks full of books, back-to-back. In one room there were books on Arabic and poetry, in another books on jurisprudence, and similarly in each room books on a single subject.... When I reached the age of eighteen, I had completed the study of all these sciences.

Long before there were universities in Europe, there were important institutions of higher learning in the Islamic world. Rich Muslims, often members of the ruling elite, demonstrated their piety and charity by establishing schools for professors and students. Each school, or **madrasa**,♦ was located within or attached to a mosque. Professors held classes throughout the day on the interpretation of the Qur'an and other literary or legal texts. Students, all male, attended the classes that suited their achievement level and interest. Most students paid a fee for learning, but there were also scholarship students. One tenth-century vizier was so solicitous of the welfare of all scholars that each day he set out iced refreshments, candles, and paper for them in his own kitchen.

The use of paper, made from flax and hemp or rags and vegetable fiber, points to a major difference among the Islamic, Byzantine, and (as we shall see) Carolingian renaissances. Byzantine scholars worked to enhance the prestige of the ruling classes. Their work, written on expensive parchment (made from animal skins), kept manuscripts out of the hands of all but the very rich. This was true of scholarship in Europe as well. By contrast, Islamic scholars had goals that cut

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across all social classes: to be physicians to the rich, teachers to the young, and contributors to passionate religious debates. Their writings, on paper (less expensive than parchment), were widely available.

Review: What forces led to the fragmentation of the Islamic world in the tenth and eleventh centuries?

❖ The Creation and Division of a New European Empire

Just as in the Byzantine and Islamic worlds, so too in Europe the period 750–1050 saw first the formation of a strong empire, ruled by one man, and then its fragmentation as local rulers took power into their own hands. A new dynasty, the Carolingians, came to rule in the Frankish kingdom at almost the very moment (c. 750) that the Abbasids gained the caliphate. Charlemagne, the most powerful Carolingian monarch, conquered new territory, took the title of emperor, and presided over a revival of Christian classical culture known as the Carolingian renaissance. He ruled at the local level through counts and other military men. Nevertheless, the unity of this empire—based largely on conquest, a measure of prosperity, and personal allegiance to Charlemagne—was shaky. Its weaknesses were exacerbated by attacks from invaders—Vikings, Muslims, and Magyars. Charlemagne's successors divided his empire among themselves and saw it divided further as local leaders took defense—and rule—into their own hands.

The Rise of the Carolingians

The Carolingians were among many aristocratic families on the rise during the Merovingian period, but they gained exceptional power by monopolizing the position of “palace mayor” under the Merovingian kings. Charles Martel, mayor 714–741, gave the name

Carolingian (from *Carolus*, the Latin for “Charles”) to the dynasty. Renowned for defeating an invading army of Muslims from al-Andalus between Poitiers♦ and Tours in 732, he also contended vigorously against other aristocrats who were carving out independent lordships for themselves. Charles and his family turned aristocratic factions against one another, rewarded supporters, crushed enemies, and dominated whole regions by supporting monasteries that served as focal points for both religious piety and land donations.

The Carolingians also allied themselves with the Roman papacy and its adherents. They supported Anglo-Saxon missionaries like Boniface,♦ who went to areas on the fringes of the Carolingian realm as the pope's ambassador. Reforming the Christianity that these regions had adopted, Boniface set up a hierarchical church organization and founded monasteries dedicated to the Benedictine rule. His newly appointed bishops were loyal to Rome and the Carolingians. Pippin III (d. 768), Charles Martel's son, turned to the pope even more directly. When he deposed the Merovingian king in 751, taking over the kingship himself, Pippin petitioned Pope Zachary to legitimize the act. The pope agreed. The Carolingians readily returned the favor a few years later when the pope asked for their help in defense against hostile Lombards. That papal request signaled a major shift. Before 754, the papacy had been part of the Byzantine Empire; after that, it turned to Europe for protection. Pippin launched a successful campaign against the Lombard king that ended in 756 with the so-called Donation of Pippin, a peace accord between the Lombards and the pope. The treaty gave back to the pope cities that had been ruled by the Lombard king. The new arrangement recognized what the papacy had long ago created: a territorial “republic of St. Peter” ruled by the pope, not by the Byzantine emperor. Henceforth, the fate of Italy would be tied largely to the policies of the pope and the Frankish kings to the north, not to the emperors of the East.

♦ **Poitiers:** pwah tee AY

♦ **Boniface:** BAH nuh fuhs