

The history of Islam

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The HISTORY OF ISLAM

THE RISE OF THE ARABS

Of all the factors which have shaped the history of the Arabian peninsula, geography has been the most decisive. Most of Arabia is the victim of nature maligna. The geological process is responsible for its shape and outline, a huge quadrilateral placed between two continents. Although surrounded by five seas, it has hardly any adjacent islands to diminish its inaccessibility and isolation; no good harbours with the exception of Aden; no hospitable coasts, but forbidding and narrow stretches; while the seas which surround it from east and west are plagued either by coral reefs as the Red Sea, or by shoals as the Persian Gulf. Its internal configuration is also unfortunate. In the whole of this huge land mass, with the exception of Hajar in the south, there is not a single river to facilitate transport and communication through the vast expanses of sunscorched deserts and steppes as those in its eastern half, or the rugged mountainous regions, especially the ancient shield of igneous rocks in the west.

Water is the most decisive of all geographic determinants in the human story in Arabia, and it is the principle which divides the peninsula into two distinct parts: the rain-fed area of the outer parts, particularly the south-west; and the arid area of the centre or the inner regions. The peninsula, thus, is a land of strident contrasts which contains within its frontiers the two extremes side by side, as in the case of the fertile and luxuriant south, blessed by soil and climate, a Garden of Eden, and the adjacent area to the north-east, a veritable hell on earth known as the Empty Quarter, the most savage part of the arid area and the most extensive body of continuous sand in the whole world. The economy of the south, unlike the familial and tribal one in the north, is territorially based. The south is a land of towns and cities solidly established, unlike the centers of habitation in the north, whether the portable tents of the nomad or the oases whose sedentarized nomads are liable to revert to nomadism in special circumstances. In ethnographic terms, the peninsula then is divided between the peoples of the south, who speak a Semitic language of their own which has its dialectal variations, and the Arabs of the arid area and the oases of its outskirts, whose language is Arabic, the arabiyya, which also has its own dialectal variations. In concrete topographical terms, the Semites of the south are the peoples of Ma'in, Saba', Qataban.

The centre of interest of Semitic history is not the peninsula but the Fertile Crescent, where the Semites develop their civilization. Arabia recedes into the background. It was the Sabaeans who developed a high-level material Semitic culture within the peninsula and it was they who by their enterprise gave it an important though peculiar place in the history of the ancient Near East and of international relations. The south, then, is the region of dominance in pre-Islamic Arabia, and the Arabs of the north move in the orbit of the powerful south.

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External factors, however, are more noticeable as they contribute to the decline and fall of southern Arabia. It was not the Semitic empires of the Fertile Crescent but the Indo-European ones that began to menace southern Arabia's existence; not so much the Persians or the Romans but the Macedonians, especially the Ptolemies of Egypt, who effectively challenged the power of the south. Unlike mightier but more distant empires, such as that of Rome, whose ill-starred expedition in 24 B.C. was shattered by the harsh facts of physical and human geography. Even more deadly than the Ptolemies were the Abyssinians of Axum who were closer to southern Arabia than the Ptolemies.

Separated from them only by Bab al-Mandab and in possession of a beach-head on the Arabian mainland itself, the Axumites were most dangerously poised to administer a fatal blow. Such was the situation in the Red Sea area around A.D. 300. Soon after, more adverse factors become operative when a new Near East comes into being with the translation imperil from Rome to Constantinople and the conversion of Constantine. The peninsula is now surrounded by vigorous, newly rejuvenated states, and each of the two contestants for supremacy, Christian Byzantium and Zoroastrian Persia, has definite religious and economic policies which operate to the disadvantage of southern Arabia.

The conversion of the Ethiopian negus, 'Ezana, to Christianity brings Byzantium and Ethiopia even closer, and closes the ring around the south. But Arabia had already been penetrated by another monotheistic religion-Judaism. The south was naturally more disposed towards Judaism, since Christianity was associated with its two traditional enemies, Byzantium and Ethiopia. In the fifth century Judaism gained the upper hand with the judaization of the kings of the south.

Clashes with Christianity were inevitable, and they culminated in the famous massacre of the Christians of Najran, which proved to be a turning-point in the history of the south and the peninsula.

Around A.D. 520 an Ethiopian expedition crossed Bab al-Mandab with the blessings of Byzantium and the Monophysite world, destroyed the power of the last judaizing king of Himyar, and made the country an Ethiopian protectorate. The Ethiopian invasion ushered in a century of anarchy and political upheavals which left the south politically prostrate.

The Ethiopian occupation lasted for about half a century, punctuated by the revolt of Abraha, an Ethiopian soldier of fortune who killed the Himyaritic viceroy of the negus, and asserted his virtual independence. Various activities are associated with his name as the building of a famous church in San'a', al-Qalis (ecclesia), but more celebrated is his expedition against Mecca which. The sixth century witnessed the emergence of Najran as the great Christian centre in the south, a holy city, sanctified by its martyrs.

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In the history of the ancient world, the southern Arabians were responsible for what might be termed the commercial revolution in the Near East. They brought together the world of the Indian Ocean and that of the Mediterranean Sea by laying out a long trade-route extending from India and Somalia to the Fertile Crescent. But The history of the Arabs in the arid area of the north presents a spectacle which contrasts with that of their Semitic neighbours to the south. Unlike the fairly homogeneous society of the south, theirs is heterogeneous, divided into nomads and sedentaries.

But beneath all this diversity within the Arab scene lies the ethnological fact which informs all this seeming diversity with essential unity, namely that of the Arabs as one people, who remain recognizably Arab in spite of the various forms of political, social, and cultural life which they adopt.

During most of the first millennium before Christ, the Arabs had to face a Fertile Crescent united by the military might of the Assyrians, a unity which was maintained by the neo-Babylonians and the Persians. But in the second century B.C. this unity was broken, and the Crescent remained divided between hostile groups, the Parthians and the Seleucids, the Parthians and the Romans, and finally the Sasanids and the Byzantines. Economically, these Arab establishments owe their prosperity to the fact that they are stations on the vital west Arabian and Mesopotamian trade-routes.

With the decay of the power of the Seleucids, the Arabs deepened their penetration of Syria, which was practically possessed by Arab dynasties when the Romans appeared and annexed Syria. The dismantling of the Arab military establishment in the third century opens a new historical period in the evolution of the Arabs which lasts for some three centuries until the rise of Islam. The Arabs are surrounded by these three powerful states of the Near East(Persia, Byzantium, and Himyar) in whose wars they play an important part as clients and auxiliaries, the Lakhmids for the Persians, the Ghassanids for Byzantium, and Kinda for Himyar. These three Arab groups, Kinda, Lakhm, and Ghassan, now occupy the stage of Arab history. Their history is vividly remembered by the pre-Islamic Arab poets.

In spite of their power and military efficiency, these groups remained what in fact they were, clients to the great powers, dependent upon their support, and collapsible when these decide to bring about their downfall. And so it was with the Ghassanids and the Lakhmids, whose power their Byzantine and Sasanid masters reduced towards the end of the sixth century. Simultaneously with the rise and fall of the Arab client-kingdoms, another world was coming into being, representing an entirely new departure in the evolution of Arab history. The geographical position of Mecca on the spice route, half-way between Jewish Yathrib and Christian Najran, naturally exposed it to the two currents of economic and religious life which were running in western Arabia. This city, at one and the same time a caravan-station and a holy city.

It was in the sixth century that this combination reached arresting dimensions, after the tribe of Quraysh had possessed itself of the city through the enterprise of Qusayy (c. 500?) undoubtedly an historical figure. It was Qusayy who laid the foundation for the prosperity of Mecca as the great 'commercial republic' of Arabia in the sixth century. The primacy of Mecca as well as the unity of the Arabs was reflected and promoted Annually during the Sacred Months when the Arabs would flock to Mecca and the neighbouring region, where a complex of three places and many activities were involved: ' Ukaz, the fair and scene of poetic contests; Mecca, the Holy City with its Haram, the sacred precinct, and its Ka'ba, the temple; and 'Arafat, the Holy Mountain of the pilgrimage. The concept of Arabia Sacra was slowly emerging in the sixth century.

THE RISE OF THE ISLAM

About A.D. 610 a citizen of Mecca, then aged about forty, began to tell relatives and acquaintances of certain experiences which had come to him. Some three years later he began to speak more publicly. A number of his fellow-citizens were attracted by his words, and professed themselves his followers in the way of life he was teaching. For a time a successful movement seemed to be developing, but eventually opposition and hostility made their appearance. The message of the Qur'an, both in this early form and in its later developments, has sometimes been regarded by Christian and Jewish scholars as a pale reflection of some points in the teaching of the Old and New Testaments.

The social tensions present in Mecca about 610 appear to have been mainly due to the conflict between the attitudes fostered by the new mercantile economy and the residual attitudes derived from the previous nomadic economy. Muhammad must have experienced great hardship until, when he was twenty-five, a wealthy woman, Khadija ,first employed him as steward of her merchandise and then married him. Despite the initial successes of Muhammad's religious movement it did not gain the support of any of the great merchants. Whatever thoughts may have been most prominent in the minds of particular men, the great merchants as a whole certainly came to be opposed to Muhammad. They tried to come to some arrangement with him; if he would abandon his preaching, he would be admitted into the inner circle of merchants, and his position there established by an advantageous marriage; but Muhammad would have none of this. They tried to get the clan of Hashim to bring pressure to bear on him to stop preaching; but honour, perhaps combined with interest in opposing monopolies, led the chief of the clan, his uncle Abu Talib, to continue to give him support. Even when the whole clan of Hashim was subjected to a kind of boycott, it went on supporting Muhammad. The situation changed for the worse about 619 with the death of Abu Talib, Muhammad's uncle and chief of the clan of Hashim.

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He was succeeded as chief of the clan by another uncle, Abu Lahab, who was prospering commercially, and had close business relationships with some of the great merchants. We hear of Muhammad making approaches to various nomadic tribes, and then visiting the town of Ta'if in hopes, it would seem, of finding a base there. This visit was a disastrous failure, and on his return Muhammad was unable to enter Mecca until he found the chief of another clan willing to give him protection. The outlook for Muhammad and the Muslims was extremely gloomy when, at the Pilgrimage in the summer of 620, he met six men from Medina (Yathrib) who began to discuss the possibility of his going there.

THE Hijra

Medina is a fertile oasis, somewhat more than two hundred miles north of Mecca. The inhabitants were mainly pagan Arabs, but there were also a number of Jews. Contact with the Jews had familiarized the Arabs of Medina with the conception of an inspired religious leader, perhaps even with the expectation of a Messiah. Thus among the six men who met Muhammad in 620 there would be a degree of readiness to accept his claims at the religious level. The six were so impressed by Muhammad that at the Pilgrimage of 621 five of them came back to Mecca with seven others to have further discussions with Muhammad. This is known as the First Pledge of al-'Aqaba.

At the Pilgrimage of June 622 seventy- five persons came to Mecca, and not merely repeated the former promise, but also pledged themselves to fight on behalf of Muhammad. This was the Second Pledge of al-'Aqaba or the Pledge of War. Relying on this support from Medina, Muhammad began to encourage his followers in Mecca to emigrate, and they set out in small parties, possibly unnoticed by the great merchants of Mecca. Muhammad After about nine days' travelling reached the outskirts of the oasis of Medina on 24 September 622. This is the Hijra which is the basis of Islamic chronology, but reckoning commences with the first day of the Arab year in which the emigration took place, viz. 16 July 622.

Such skill as immigrants they had was chiefly in commerce, but, if they organized long-distance caravans to Syria, they were bound to come into conflict with the Meccans. The assumption that Muhammad deliberately moved towards open hostility with the Meccans explains what became a feature of the Medinan period of his career, viz. the sending out of expeditions. After some six months in Medina, Muhammad began to send out of madina with the special aim of intercepting and capturing Meccan caravans on the way to or from Syria.

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Eventually about Rajab 2/January 624 Muhammad sent out an expedition of a dozen men or less with sealed orders; in this way there was no chance of their destination being betrayed to the enemy. To the dismay of one or two of them, they found that they were expected to go south to the neighborhood of Mecca and intercept a caravan approaching Mecca from the Yemen. Up to this point it was probably only Meccan Emigrants who had taken part in the razzias from Medina; but about this time one of the leading men of Medina, Sa'd b.Mu'adh (reckoned head of the group of clans constituting the 'tribe' of the Aws), decided to support Muhammad to the extent of taking part in razzias.

It was doubtless this decision by Sa'd which made it possible for Muhammad to contemplate more active operations against the Meccans, and notably the raid which led to the battle of Badr. About the same time another change in policy was made. Before he went to Medina and during the early months there Muhammad had shown himself anxious to be accepted as a prophet by the Jews of Medina.

But Jews would normally be unwilling to admit that a non-Jew could be a prophet. Since they were able to say, for example, that some passages in the Qur'an contradicted their own ancient scriptures. The Qur'an met these intellectual criticisms by developing the conception of the religion of Abraham. The Qur'an therefore claimed that it was restoring the pure monotheism of Abraham which had been corrupted in various, not clearly specified, ways by Jews and Christians.

The Meccans must have been infuriated at the capture of their caravan almost from under their noses, as it were. About a month after the change of qibla, it became known that a large and rich Meccan caravan was to pass near Medina on its return from Gaza. Muhammad decided on a razzia to intercept this caravan, and with the help of Sa'd b.Mu'adh was able to collect a force of about 320 men. The result was complete victory for the Muslims. Some fifty or more of the Meccans were killed, and nearly seventy taken prisoner. The dead included Abu Jahl and at least a dozen of the leading men of Mecca. After the battle of Badr, Muhammad doubtless realized that the Meccans would prosecute the war against him more vigorously, and did what he could to consolidate his position in Medina.

At Mecca everyone had been stunned at the magnitude of the loss of life. Abu Sufyan, who had commanded the caravan, took the lead in rallying the spirits of the Meccans and setting about the repair of the damage. The battle of Uhud has sometimes been presented by occidental scholars as a serious defeat for the Muslims. This is certainly not so. It is indeed true that some seventy-five Muslims had been killed as against twenty-seven Meccans; but Meccans had completely failed in their strategic aim of destroying Muhammad.

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In various ways the strength of Muhammad and his community grew in the two years following Uhud. These two years had been spent by the Meccans in preparations for a supreme effort to destroy the Muslims. The Meccans and their confederates reached Medina on 8 Dhu'l-Qa'da 5 /31 March 627, and began what was in effect a siege. The trench proved an effective barrier to the Meccan cavalry. A few managed to cross, but the defenders were able to concentrate in sufficient numbers to thrust them back with loss. The siege had lasted about a fortnight. The remaining large Jewish group in Medina, the clan of Qurayza, had been overtly correct in its behavior during the siege, but had almost certainly been in contact with the enemy.

Next, A few years later, Muhammad with a measure of secrecy quickly collected 10,000 men and set out for Mecca. The Meccans were overawed. Abu Sufyan was able to lead out a deputation to make a formal submission. Thus virtually without bloodshed Muhammad entered his native town in triumph. The date was about 20 Ramadan 8 /11 January 630. Muhammad's treatment of the Meccans as a whole was so generous that, when a new danger threatening them all appeared in the east, 2,000 of them joined his army as he marched out to deal with the situation. The danger came from Hawazin. This victory (The victory of Hunayn) meant that, with the exception of tribes on the frontiers of Syria and Iraq, there was no group of tribes in Arabia capable of assembling a force sufficiently strong to meet Muhammad with any prospect of success. In other words he was the strongest man in Arabia.

Most of the Arab tribes sent deputations to Medina seeking alliance with Muhammad. The polity which thus developed out of the 'city-state' of Medina was, according to Arab ideas, a federation of tribes. From Rajab to Ramadan 9 / October to December 630, Muhammad led the greatest of all his expeditions, the expedition of Tabuk, allegedly comprising 30,000 men and 10,000 horses.

This can only properly be understood as a preliminary to the later conquests; and it is also significant that during the expedition treaties were made with Jewish and Christian communities which set the pattern for the later dhimmi system of the Islamic empire. While the conception of the jihad transformed what would have been tribal raids for booty into a war of conquest. The continued presence in Arabia of opposition to the Islamic communities shown by the so-called 'wars of apostasy' (or ridda) which occupied most of the caliphate of Abu Bakr.

These had begun, however, before Muhammad's death. Early in 632 or perhaps before that a man called Musaylima had come forward in the largely Christian tribe of Hanifa in the centre of Arabia, claiming to be a prophet and to receive revelations like Muhammad.

THE PATRIARCHAL

There was great consternation in Medina when Muhammad died (13 Rabi' I 11/8 June 632). Nevertheless, the Muslims realized at once that they would have to choose a successor to the dead man. So, while the relatives, including his cousin and son-in-law 'Ali, kept vigil by the body and made preparations for the burial - curiously enough, in the room where it lay - a numerous group of Companions gathered in a roofed enclosure, the saqifa of the Banu Sa'ida, to decide what should be done. The discussion was animated, and at times even violent, for the old antagonism between Medinese Helpers (Ansar) and Meccan Emigrants (Muhajirun).

During a momentary pause, however, Umar paid homage to Abu Bakr, Muhammad's intimate friend and collaborator, by grasping his hand as was the custom when a pact was concluded, and his example was followed by others. Abu Bakr thus became the successor (khalifa) of the Messenger of God and in this way the caliphate was founded. To show that for him the will of the Messenger of God was law, Abu Bakr's first act as head of the state was to dispatch the expedition organized by Muhammad to avenge the defeat which the Muslims had suffered in Byzantine territory. In the meantime, as soon as they heard of the Prophet's death, the Arab tribes revolted, and there was grave danger that the Muslim state would disintegrate. In four of the six centers of the insurrection, the rebels rallied around men who claimed to be prophets.

The movement, which the Muslims called 'the apostasy' (al-rida), thus acquired a certain religious character—though nobody thought of restoring paganism—but it was in reality mainly political. As soon as the rebellion in Arabia had been suppressed, Abu Bakr sent the tribes he had just subdued to carry war into the lands beyond the borders. The capital of 'Iraq, Hira, was attacked, and saved itself from armed occupation and pillage by paying a large sum. But an energetic king, Yazdigird III, had ascended the Persian throne, and, as it soon became evident that he intended to resist the invasion by raising more numerous army, 'Umar, who had succeeded Abu Bakr as caliph, dispatched reinforcements. The decisive battle of the campaign was fought near the modern Najaf, at Qadisiyya (15/636).

The commander of the Persian army was an imperial marshal, the nobleman Rustam, while 'Umar sent one of the Companions, Sa'd b. Abi Waqqas, who had taken part in many of Muhammad's expeditions, to lead the Arab forces. The Persians were heavily defeated, and the result was that the Muslims gained control over the whole of 'Iraq. After occupying the Jazira (i.e. Mesopotamia, now northern Iraq), the Muslims pursued them across the Iranian plateau, and entered Ahwaz, the main city of Khuzistan.

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In the neighbourhood of Nihavand, to the south-west of Hamadan, a battle was fought which sealed the fate of the Persian empire and was therefore called by the Muslims 'the Victory of Victories' (21/642). While this campaign in 'Iraq was still in progress, the Muslims also took the offensive against Syria and Palestine. Two columns of Arabs entered Trans Jordan, and another, led by a general who was later to become famous, 'Amr b. al-'As, penetrated into south-eastern Palestine. When 'Amr b. al-'As marched into Egypt, with or without the authorization of 'Umar, he did not make straight for the capital, Alexandria, but advanced through the desert towards the Fayyum. Raids along the coast of North Africa had begun after the first occupation of the Egyptian capital.

Before his death in 13/634, Abu Bakr urged the Companions to elect Umar as his successor. As a result of the conquests begun under Abu Bakr and continued under 'Umar, the empire increased enormously in extent. Since it covered areas inhabited by people of different races, customs, degrees of civilization, and types of government, 'Umar allowed the local administrators of occupied countries to carry on and confined himself to appointing a commander or governor (amir) with full powers, sometimes assisted by an agent (amil). At this time, the taxes on lands left in the hands of their owners, and the rents from those which had been confiscated, together with sundry other items of revenue (the tithe paid by Muslims, one-fifth of the value of booty, the tribute and personal taxes paid by the vanquished) supplied the public treasury (baytal-mal).

To satisfy the soldiers and keep their morale high, 'Umar thought of the expedient of reserving to the state the duty of compensating them, and founding a diwan, i.e. a register of pensioners. In territories which had been definitely conquered, 'Umar endeavoured to set up efficient administrations. To prevent the troops having too close contacts with the native population, and to keep them prepared for every emergency, since it was also their duty to maintain internal order, 'Umar founded two camp towns (amsar) in 'Iraq, Basra and Kufa. Physically, Umar was a giant with a long beard. His very appearance inspired respect. He was of a harsh disposition, as severe with himself as he was with others. He was more feared than loved.

'Umar had been on the throne only ten years and was still in the prime of life- he was fifty-three years old - when he was mortally wounded, because of a personal grudge, by a slave of Persian origin (26 Dhu'l-Hijja 23/ 3 November 644). As he lay dying, 'Umar was anxious about the succession and he appointed a committee of six, all Qurayshites, whose duty it should be to choose one of their number as caliph. The choice eventually was Uthman, probably because it was thought that he would continue the policy of 'Umar. 'Ali, inspired by a rigorous pietism, was not convinced that all the measures taken by the preceding caliphs were in conformity with the precepts of the Qur'an or with the actions of Muhammad.

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It is thus possible that he intended, if he were elected caliph, to make changes which would have prejudiced certain well-established interests. During the twelve years of 'Uthmans reign, the opposition gradually increased its numbers. The caliph was accused of nepotism, favouritism, and the encouragement of abuses. During the reign of 'Uthman one of the Companions, Abu Dharr al-Ghifari, stirred up such a violent campaign against the wealthy that the caliph deemed it prudent to banish him. The historians attribute the intensification of unrest partly to the fact that 'Uthman was a weak man. It has also been maintained that he had not received the requisite training to enable him to govern an empire, since he had never previously held government posts.

It was in Egypt and 'Iraq that the greatest anxiety was felt. In the end, groups of malcontents made their way from Egypt to Medina. There they demanded, and were promised, reforms, whereupon they departed. We are told that, on their way home, they intercepted a courier carrying a letter from Marwan, in which he ordered the governor of Egypt to punish the most violent and dangerous among them, and so they returned once more to Medina. At the same time they persuaded other malcontents to come from 'Iraq to Medina. The rioters laid siege to the caliph's house and cut off supplies of food and water.

Later, when news arrived from the provinces that help for the beleaguered caliph was on its way, the more desperate among the rioters broke into the house and pitilessly slew the venerable old man as he was reading the Qur'an (end 3 5/June 656). Ali, who had kept aloof during the siege, and, instead of defending the caliph, had sometimes acted as spokesman for the rebels, was chosen to be head of the state. Almost all the notables then in Medina paid him homage .Nevertheless, after only a short time Talha and al-Zubayr broke away from him and went to Mecca, where they found Aisha, the Prophet's widow, and the three of them decided on open rebellion. A battle took place near Basra between the forces which Ali had raised in Medina, on his way and at Kufa, and the army of the insurgents which in the meantime had grown in numbers.

Aisha watched it from a palanquin on the back of a camel and for this reason it was called the Battle of the Camel. Talha and al-Zubayr were killed, and Ali was victorious. Aisha, with all due respect, was sent back to Medina. But this did not put an end to the civil war. Ali marched out to enforce obedience to his order, and Mu'awiya went to meet him. The two armies faced each other for several months at Siffin, near the great bend of the Euphrates, and there at last one of the most famous battles in the history of Islam was fought. When things were beginning to go badly for Mu'awiya, Amr b. al-'As, who had rallied to his side, advised him to hoist copies of the Qur'an on lances, as an invitation to the enemy to settle the question, not by force of arms, but by arbitration. Alis more fanatical supporters forced him to accept this proposal.

The two armies drew apart, and waited for the verdict of the arbiters. It would seem that, after studying the matter for months, they met at the oasis of Dumat al-Jandal (the modern al-Jawf) and decided against Ali, but the latter protested that the verdict was not in accordance with the Qur'an and the practice (Sunnat) of the Prophet, and he intended to resume his campaign against Mu'awiya. Some of Ali's supporters at Siffin thought that the acceptance of arbitration was wrong, because the right of judging belongs to God alone and not to men. They therefore withdrew to a place called Nahrawan. Before taking action against Mu'awiya, 'Ali decided to crush this agitation.

They were all pious Muslims, much given to prayer, and were convinced that they were obeying God, whereas Ali, according to them, had committed an act of disobedience. Ali continued to govern the area over which he still had control, and Mu'awiya, who in the meantime had occupied Egypt, took good care not to attack him. He played for time, confining himself to marginal operations which had only a nuisance value, his aim being to disrupt Ali's party by means of a subtle policy of persuasion among the malcontents and the lukewarm. Then one day Ali was stabbed to death in the mosque of Kufa, the victim of a Kharijite shatred. After inducing Ali's son, al-Hasan, to forgo his claim to the throne, Mu'awiya was recognized as caliph by the great majority of Muslims.

From the days of the Companions date, as it is claimed, thousands of Traditions (sing., Hadith; pi., Ahddith), purporting to reproduce the words and deeds of the Prophet, set in a framework describing the circumstances. During the thirty years of the Patriarchal Caliphate, some prominent persons became famous for their knowledge of the Qur'an, among them Ali, Ibn Abbas and Abu Musa al-Ash'ari.

THE UMAYYAD CALIPHATE

With the accession of Mu'awiya the Patriarchal Caliphate came to an end and a new era began. Mu'awiya surrounded himself with a court, instituted ceremonial practices, appeared at public prayer on Fridays escorted by guards, and indulged in a certain pomp. Towards the end of his reign, Mu'awiya, using all his diplomatic skill, managed to persuade the notables of the empire to recognize his son Yazidas heir to the throne. Mu'awiya's innovation was followed by all the caliphs who came after him, and enabled the Umayyads to retain power for ninety years, and the 'Abbasids for five centuries. The same system was introduced in the Muslim states which came into being within the territories or on the margin of the caliphate. Since it had betrayed the theocratic spirit of the early days of Islam, and, in contrast with the democratic tendencies of Arab society, and the systems in vogue under the first caliphs, had adopted a form of autocratic government, and an organization of the state bearing the marks of foreign origin.

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Another feature of the Umayyad regime was indeed the concession of privileges to the Arabs, on the grounds that they were the people chosen by God, who had sent one of them as a prophet to reveal His truth in the Arabic language. The centre of gravity of the empire shifted to Syria. Even in Ali's day, Medina had ceased to be the capital, and Kufa had taken its place. Now the former seat of the Patriarchal Caliphs definitely declined to the status of a provincial centre, and all attempts to restore it to its earlier function proved vain. The transfer of the capital to Damascus also aroused the envy of the 'Iraqis, and the desire to do away with the Syrian hegemony was a cause of various risings.

Another result was that the Umayyads started a vigorous policy of expansion in the Mediterranean, which continued even after they had disappeared, for when the Abbasids removed the capital of the empire to 'Iraq, this policy was carried on by the Muslim polities on the Inland of the empire. Mu'awiya was intelligent enough to retain and improve by availing himself of the services of able advisers. In financial matters, these were Christians. Mu'awiya ensured the maintenance of order in 'Iraq by appointing men of outstanding ability to be governors of Kufa and Basra, for among his many gifts was that of knowing how to choose collaborators. For several years al-Mughira b. Shu'ba was governor of Kufa, a town which it had always been difficult to keep quiet, while Ziyad b. Abihi governed Basra from 45/665 and, after the death of al-Mughira, Kufa as well. Appreciating the great ability of this young man, Mu'awiya, instead of reproaching him for having served under 'Ali, and for his stubborn resistance in Persia, induced him to come over to his side, and finally obtained his complete adherence by giving him satisfaction in a matter of personal pride. Ziyad was called 'ibn Abihi', which means 'son of his father', because there was some doubt as to his paternity; disregarding any possible criticism Mu'awiya declared him to be the son of Abu Sufyan, and therefore his own half-brother. Mu'awiya had a powerful fleet, which had already given a good account of itself in raids on various islands (Cyprus in 28/648; Rhodes and Crete in 53/672-3) in naval engagements, for instance defeating the Byzantines, and attacking Sicilian and African ports.

He with his intelligent generosity, the aim of which was to bind his enemies with golden chains. To one who criticized his lavishness, he remarked that war cost far more. Mu'awiya died at the age of eighty in the year 60/April 680. When Yazid I assumed the reins of power, the opposition, which his father had kept in check, rose against him. The pro-Alid faction in Kufa plotted his overthrow, the Medineseor Ansar (a term which now also included the descendants of the Muhajiriin) revolted; and around Abd Allah b. al-Zubayr, a claimant to the throne who lived in Mecca, all those Muslims rallied who considered it an affront to the sanctity of religion that a family should remain in power whose adherence to Islam had been the subject of so much criticism. At the same time the Kharijites reorganized their party, and prepared to enter the struggle.