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## Preface

A little over a century ago, renowned French scholar Ernest Renan (1823–1892) wrote the following summation of his findings on the origins and early history of Islam: “We arrive, then, from all parts at this singular result: that the Mussulman movement was produced almost without religious faith; that, putting aside a small number of faithful disciples, Mahomet really worked with but little conviction in Arabia, and never succeeded in overcoming the opposition represented by the Omejade party.”

While Renan’s statement admittedly represents an extreme and harsh formulation of the ideas he advances, for many years Western scholars who were studying Islam’s beginnings continued to hold many of those ideas. The notions that the prophet Muhammad (died 632 C.E.) and his followers were motivated mainly by factors other than religion, and that the Umayyad family, which ruled from 661 to 750, were fundamentally hostile to the essence of Muhammad’s movement, is even today widespread in Western scholarship. Renan’s most cynical comment—that the movement that grew into what we know as Islam “was produced almost without religious faith”—has, in subtler guise, been embraced by many subsequent scholars, usually

through a process of reductionism whereby the driving force of the movement begun by Muhammad is identified as having been “really” something other than religious conviction. At the end of the nineteenth century, Hubert Grimme sought to prove that Muhammad’s preaching was first and foremost that of a social, not a religious, reformer; W. Montgomery Watt, reflecting the regnant position of the social sciences in the middle of the twentieth century, argued that the movement was engendered by social and economic stresses in the society in which Muhammad lived; and numerous others, including L. Caetani, C. H. Becker, B. Lewis, P. Crone, G. Bowersock, I. Lapidus, and S. Bashear, have argued that the movement was really a kind of nationalist or “nativist” political adventure, in which religion was secondary (and, by implication, merely a pretext for the real objectives).

In the following pages I attempt to present almost the exact opposite of Renan’s views. It is my conviction that Islam began as a religious movement—not as a social, economic, or “national” one; in particular, it embodied an intense concern for attaining personal salvation through righteous behavior. The early Believers were concerned with social and political issues but only insofar as they related to concepts of piety and proper behavior needed to ensure salvation.

Moreover—and again in sharp contrast to Renan and many subsequent Western (and Muslim) scholars—I see the rulers of the Umayyad dynasty (660–750) not as cynical manipulators of the outward trappings of the religious movement begun by Muhammad but as rulers who sought practical ways to realize the most important goals of the movement and who perhaps more than anyone else helped the Believers attain a clear sense of their own distinct identity and of their legitimacy as a religious community. Without the contributions of the Umayyads, it seems doubtful whether Islam, as we recognize it today, would even exist.

A proper historical understanding of Islam’s beginnings requires that we see it against the background of religious trends in the whole

of the Near East in late antiquity—not only in an Arabian context, even though Arabia was where Muhammad lived and acted. By the sixth century C.E., Arabia was thoroughly penetrated by trends of religious thought current in neighboring lands. I shall therefore begin with a brief review of this pre-Islamic Near Eastern background (Chapter 1), after which I shall consider how a Believers’ movement began in Arabia with Muhammad (Chapter 2), the rapid expansion of the Believers’ movement in the decades following Muhammad’s death (Chapter 3), the internal divisions that tore the movement during its first century (Chapter 4), and the emergence from the Believers’ movement of something we can clearly recognize as Islam about two generations after Muhammad’s death (Chapter 5).



## Acknowledgments

It is a pleasure to recognize many institutions and individuals who facilitated the writing of this book. I am grateful to the National Endowment for the Humanities, an agency of the U.S. federal government, and to the American Center for Oriental Research in Amman, Jordan, for granting me an NEH/ACOR Fellowship during part of 2001, which enabled me to spend most of the first half of that year drafting parts of this work in the calm, supportive environment of ACOR's library in Amman. The Director of ACOR at that time, Dr. Pierre Bikai, Dr. Patricia Bikai, and the ACOR staff, especially its librarian Humi Ayoubi, made my stay there both productive and pleasant. The former Dean of Humanities at the University of Chicago, Professor Janel Mueller, generously allowed me to dodge my responsibilities as department chair so that I could take those months on leave, as well as another stretch of ten weeks in spring 2002, in order to draft the book. The latter period was spent mostly at the Jafet Library of the American University of Beirut, and I extend my thanks also to the helpful staff of that fine institution. Among libraries and librarians, however, my greatest debt is to the University of Chicago's Regenstein Library, and to its Middle East bibliographer,

Bruce Craig, who with his staff has built a collection that is peerless in its comprehensiveness and ease of use.

Readers owe a debt of gratitude to numerous friends and colleagues who read all or part of this work in manuscript and offered generous critical comments and suggestions. These saved me from a number of gaffes and contributed much to the book's clarity, cogency, and balance. Needless to say, the shortcomings that remain reflect my stubbornness, not their lack of insight. In alphabetical order, they are Mehmetcan Akpınar, Fred Astren, Carel Bertram, Paul M. Cobb, Hugo Ferrer-Higueras, Mark Graham, Walter E. Kaegi, Khaled Keshk, Gary Leiser, Shari Lowin, Chase Robinson, Roshanak Shaery-Eisenlohr, and Mark Wegner. The enthusiastic encouragement of Drs. Leiser and Shaery-Eisenlohr was especially heartening. I also wish to thank the twenty-five college teachers who participated in the NEH Summer Institute on "Islamic Origins" that I directed during summer 2000; it was in that setting that I was first able to try out some of the ideas presented here, and their responses helped sharpen my thinking and emboldened me to try formulating them as a book of this kind. I am most grateful, too, to my esteemed colleagues at the University of Jordan, Professors 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Duri, Saleh Hamarneh, and Faleh Husayn, for their friendship and unwavering support for this project, which helped reenergize me when I had for various reasons lost momentum. My colleagues Touraj Daryaei (University of California, Irvine) and Gerd-R. Puin (Saarbrücken) assisted me in securing photographs. Finally, I owe an unpayable debt to my wife, Carel Bertram, for her sage advice, love, and encouragement in everything I do, this book included.

## A Note on Conventions

This book is meant mainly for nonspecialists—introductory students and general readers with an interest in the beginnings of Islam. It is not intended to be a work of technical scholarship, although I hope that scholars will find some of the ideas I present in it novel and worthy of serious consideration. Readers new to the subject who wish to know where to find more information on a particular subject, or specialists who wonder about the supporting evidence for something I say, will usually find what they need in the section "Notes and Guide to Further Reading." This is organized by chapter and contains bibliographical suggestions and references to specific points, organized more or less in the sequence in which they occur in the body of the book.

I have generally omitted diacritical marks when converting words from Arabic and other Near Eastern languages to Roman letters—the general reader is confused or put off by them, the specialist generally does not need them, and the publisher abhors them as cumbersome and costly. The only exception is that I have retained the signs for 'ayn (') and hamza (').

Names of persons are given in strict transliteration (but without diacritics): thus, Muhammad, 'A'isha, Sulayman, and so on. On the other hand, whenever possible I have given most place-names in familiar English forms: thus, Mecca (not Makka), Damascus (not Dimashq), and so on. In most cases, I have dropped the Arabic article *al-* before the names of persons, groups, and towns, while usually retaining it within compound names (for example, 'Amr ibn al-'As). Most Arabic names are patronymic and include the word "ibn" ("son of"), so "'Amr ibn Qays" might also appear as "Ibn Qays," or simply as "'Amr."

The abbreviation "Q." is used to indicate quotations from the Qur'an, Islam's holy book, throughout the text.

Some dates are given first in the years of the Islamic or *hijra* calendar (AH), followed after a slash by the Common Era (C.E.) date—so, for example, Muhammad is said to have died in 11/632, which means year 11 in the Islamic (lunar) calendar and 632 C.E.

The Muslim calendar is a lunar one of 354 days; consequently, a given month and day slowly cycle through the C.E. calendar. The twelve months of the Muslim calendar are alternately 29 or 30 days long:

Muharram	30 days
Safar	29
Rabi' I	30
Rabi' II	29
Jumada I	30
Jumada II	29
Rajab	30
Sha'ban	29
Ramadan	30
Shawwal	29
Dhu l-Qa'da	30
Dhu l-Hijja	29

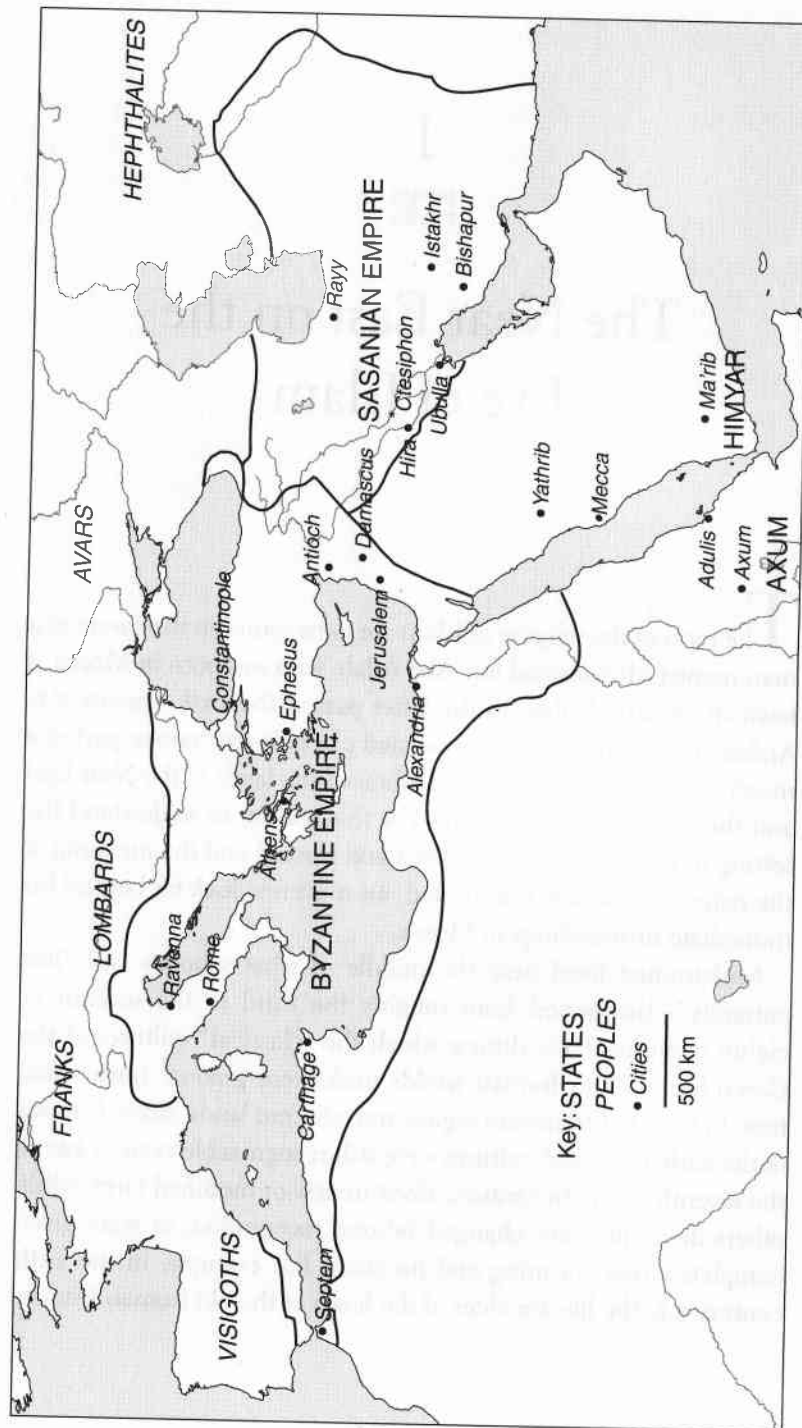
## MUHAMMAD AND THE BELIEVERS



## The Near East on the Eve of Islam

**T**he roots of the religion of Islam are to be found in the career of a man named Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah, who was born in Mecca, a town in western Arabia, in the latter part of the sixth century C.E. Arabia at this time was not an isolated place. It was, rather, part of a much wider cultural world that embraced the lands of the Near East and the eastern Mediterranean. For this reason, to understand the setting in which Muhammad lived and worked and the meaning of the religious movement he started, we must first look far beyond his immediate surroundings in Mecca.

Muhammad lived near the middle of what scholars call "late antiquity"—the period from roughly the third to the seventh or eighth centuries C.E.—during which the "classical" cultures of the Greco-Roman and Iranian worlds underwent gradual transformation. In the Mediterranean region and adjacent lands, many features of the earlier classical cultures were still recognizable even as late as the seventh or eighth century, albeit in new or modified form, while others died out, were changed beyond recognition, or were given completely new meaning and function. For example, in the sixth century C.E. the literate elites of the lands of the old Roman Empire



around the eastern Mediterranean still cultivated knowledge of Greek philosophy and Roman law and of Greek and Latin literature, even though the pursuit of these arts was less widespread and often dealt with new and different issues than in Roman times. At the same time, most people had by this time given up their former pagan cults for Christianity. Similarly, the public and civic rituals of classical times, focused on the amphitheatre, the public bath, and the performance of civic duties, were beginning to atrophy—especially in smaller towns—and, after the fifth century, were gradually being replaced by more private pursuits of a religious and introspective kind. With the spread of Christianity in the eastern Mediterranean lands came also the emergence—alongside Greek and Latin—of new liturgical, and eventually literary, languages such as Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, and Ethiopic, which had formerly been unwritten. We can see in retrospect, then, that the late antique period in the eastern Mediterranean was one of transition between the preceding classical era, with its well-articulated civic life and Greco-Latin focus, and the subsequent Islamic era, with its emphasis on personal religious observance and the development of a new literary tradition in Arabic.

### The Empires of the Late Antique Near East

In the latter half of the sixth century C.E., the Near East and Mediterranean basin were dominated politically by two great empires—the Byzantine or Later Roman Empire in the west and the Sasanian Persian Empire in the east. The Byzantine Empire was actually the continuation of the older Roman Empire. Its rulers called themselves, in Greek, *Rhomaioi*—“Romans”—right up until the empire’s demise in 1453. For this reason it is also sometimes called the “Later

Map 1. The Byzantine and Sasanian Empires, ca. 565 C.E. (borders approximate)

Roman Empire," but I shall refer to it here as the Byzantine Empire, after Byzantium, the village on the Bosphorus on which the capital city, Constantinople, was founded.

In the late sixth century, the Byzantine Empire dominated the lands on the eastern and southern shores of the Mediterranean basin (today's Turkey, Syria, Egypt, and so on). The other great empire, that of the Sasanians, was centered on the mountainous Iranian plateau and the adjacent lowlands of what is today Iraq, the rich basin of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Just as the Byzantines preserved the Roman heritage, the Sasanians were heirs to the long imperial traditions of ancient Persia. Most of the vast region from Afghanistan to the central Mediterranean was under the direct rule of one or the other of the two empires. Even those areas in the region that were outside their direct control were either firmly within the sphere of influence of one or the other power or were the scene of intense competition between them for political allegiance, religious influence, and economic domination. This contested terrain included such areas as Armenia, the Caucasus, and, most important for our purposes, Arabia. A third, lesser power also existed in the Near East—the kingdom of Axum (sometimes Aksum). The Axumite capital was situated in the highlands of Ethiopia, but Axumites engaged in extensive maritime trade from the port city of Adulis on the Red Sea coast. By the fourth century, Axum had been converted to Christianity and for that reason was sometimes allied with Byzantium; but in general our knowledge of Axum is very limited, and in any case, Axumite culture did not contribute much to Islamic tradition, whereas both Byzantium and Sasanian Persia did. Hence, most of our attention hereafter will be devoted to describing the Byzantine and Sasanian empires.

#### *The Byzantine Empire*

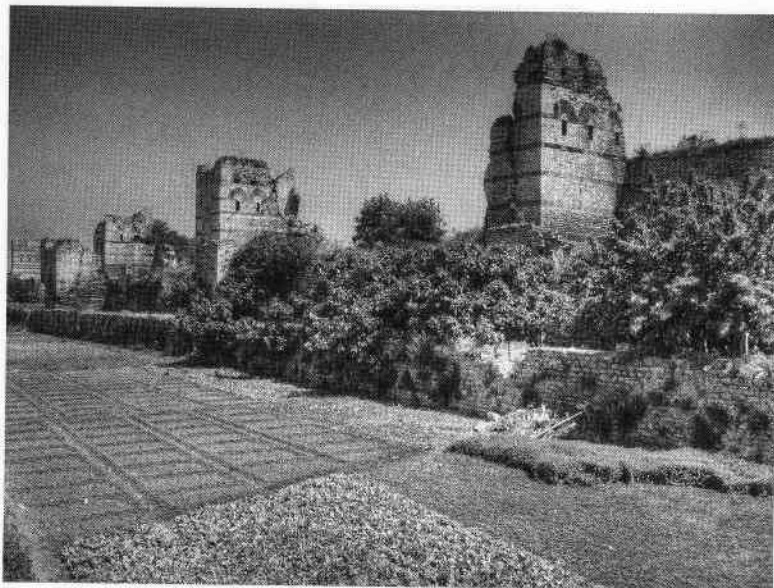
The Byzantine emperors ruled from their capital city at Constantinople (modern Istanbul) on the Bosphorus; the city was dedicated in

#### JUSTINIAN'S EDICT OF 554 C.E. TO THE PEOPLE OF CONSTANTINOPLE, NOVEL CXXXII

We believe that the first and greatest blessing for all mankind is the confession of the Christian faith, true and beyond reproach, to the end that it may be universally established and that all the most holy priests of the whole globe may be joined together in unity. . . .

330 C.E. by the Roman emperor Constantine as the "Second Rome." From Constantinople, the Byzantine emperors attempted to hold their far-flung possessions together through military action and a deft religious policy. The Byzantine emperors subscribed to a Christianized form of the vision of a united world order first advanced in the West by Alexander the Great (d. 323 B.C.E.) and later adopted by the Romans. Those who held to the Byzantine variant dreamed of a universal state in which all subjects were loyal politically to the emperor and religiously to the Byzantine ("Orthodox") church headed by the patriarch of Constantinople, in close association with the emperors.

The Byzantine emperors faced at least two main problems—over and above the challenge of their Sasanian rival—in trying to realize this vision. The first problem was maintaining the strength and prosperity of the vast territory they claimed to rule, and their effective control of it, given the rudimentary technologies of communication and management available in that age—in short, the problem of government. In its heyday during the first century B.C.E. and first century C.E., the Roman Empire had extended from Britain to Mesopotamia and Egypt, a span of roughly 4,000 kilometers (km), or 2,500 miles (mi). It included people speaking a dizzyingly wide array of languages—Latin and Greek in many cities around the Mediterranean, Germanic and Celtic dialects in Europe, Berber



Land Walls of Constantinople. The city's magnificent defenses, still impressive today, permitted it to withstand the onslaughts of many enemies from the fourth until the fourteenth century C.E.

dialects in North Africa, Coptic in Egypt, Aramaic and Arabic in Syria, Armenian and Georgian and dozens of other languages in the Caucasus and Anatolia, and Albanian and Slavic dialects in the Balkans. The sheer size of the empire had caused the emperor Diocletian (284–305) to create a system of two coordinate emperors, one in the west and one in the east—so that each could better control his respective half of the empire, suppressing efficiently any uprisings or unrest in his domain and warding off any invasions from the outside. However, during the fourth and fifth centuries, the invasions and migrations of the Germanic peoples and other “barbarians,” such as the Avars and the Huns, were simply too much for the emperors in Italy, who were overwhelmed by them. By the early sixth century, much of the western half of the empire had be-

come the domains of various Germanic kings—the Visigoths in Spain, the Vandals in North Africa, the Franks in Gaul, the Ostrogoths in Italy. Paralleling this political disintegration was a widespread economic contraction in many of the western Mediterranean lands.

The eastern half of the empire, by contrast, managed to live on as a political entity, and its economy remained much more vibrant than that of the West. The Byzantine emperors in Constantinople, despite some close calls at the hands of the Avars, Bulgars, and Slavs, were able to ward off repeated barbarian onslaughts. Moreover, they always thought of themselves as the rightful rulers of the former empire in its full extent. Some even dared to dream of restoring the empire's glory by reclaiming lost lands in the west. This was especially true of the Byzantine emperor Justinian I (ruled 527–565)—who, depending on one's point of view, might be considered either “The Great” or merely megalomaniac. Justinian marshaled the full power of the Byzantine state, including its powers of taxation, in an attempt to reconquer the lost western provinces. His brilliant general Belisarius did in fact succeed in reestablishing Byzantine (Roman) rule in parts of Italy, Sicily, North Africa, and parts of Spain. Justinian also spent lavishly on great buildings, of which the magnificent church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople is the finest surviving example. But the cost of this was high, as his efforts to restore Rome's lost glory through conquest and construction left the empire's populations impoverished and resentful, its treasury depleted, and its armies stretched thin.

Urban centers in the eastern Mediterranean were much stronger than those in the West, where cities had almost vanished, but their prosperity was also weakened during the late sixth century. One factor was a series of severe earthquakes that shook the eastern Mediterranean lands repeatedly in this period; another was the plague. Plague, which arrived in the 540s and returned every several years thereafter, regularly harvested off part of the population





Hagia Sophia. Justinian's great church in Constantinople, dedicated to "Holy Wisdom," symbolized the intimate nexus between the Byzantine emperor and the church.

and further sapped the empire's ability to recover its vitality. By the late sixth century, the Byzantine Empire was ripe for devastating onslaughts by the Sasanians—the final chapters in the long series of Roman-Persian wars stretching back to the first century C.E. Resurgent under their powerful great king Khosro I Anoshirwan (ruled 531–579), the Sasanians attacked the Byzantine Empire several times during the 540s and 550s. They invaded Byzantine-controlled Armenia, Lazica, Mesopotamia, and Syria and sacked the most important Byzantine city of the eastern Mediterranean, Antioch. Later, starting in 603, the Sasanian great king Khosro II Parviz (ruled 589–628) launched an even more devastating attack that resulted in the Persian conquest of Syria, Egypt, and much of Anatolia. Like the attacks of the mid-sixth century, that war was



Sinews of empire: A surviving stretch of Roman road in northern Syria. Built to facilitate the movement of Roman legions, these roads not only permitted the emperors to send troops promptly to distant provinces but also served as vital ways for overland commerce.

possible in part because the Byzantine Empire was in a weakened state.

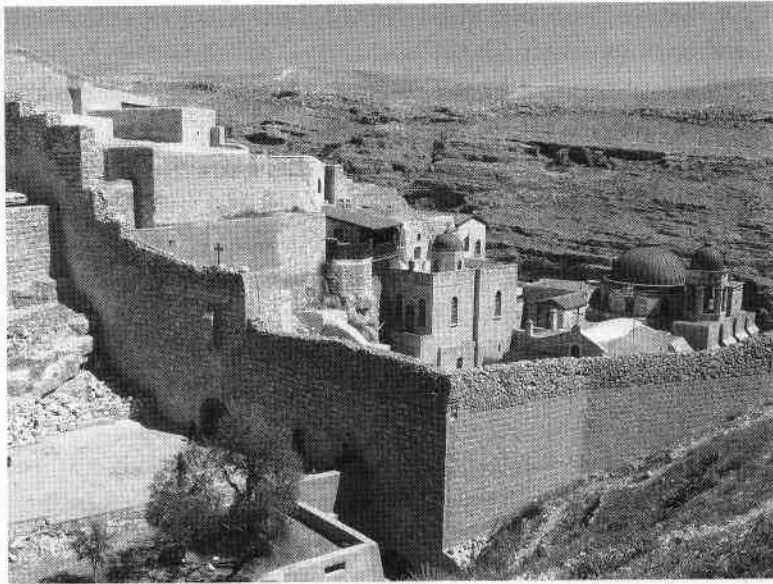
The other major challenge faced by the Byzantine emperors between the third and seventh centuries had to do with religion. In 313 C.E., Emperor Constantine I (ruled 306–337) declared Christianity a legal religion in the Roman Empire in the Edict of Milan; it was established as the official faith by Emperor Theodosius I ("The Great," ruled 379–395). Since that time, the emperors had dreamed



of realizing the vision of an empire that was not only universal in its extent but also completely unified in its religious doctrine—with the Byzantine emperor himself as the great patron and protector of the faith that bound all the empire's subjects, both to one another and in loyalty to the state and emperor. In the earlier Roman Empire, the official cult of the deified emperor had served this purpose, while allowing people to continue to worship their local pagan gods as well; but when Christian monotheism became the empire's official creed, the emperors demanded a deeper, exclusive religious obedience from their subjects.

This dream of religio-political unity, however, proved impossible to attain. Not only did diverse groups of pagans, Jews, and Samaritans in the empire stubbornly resist Christianity; even among those who recognized Jesus as their savior, there arose sharp differences over the question of Christ's true nature (Christology) and its implications for the individual. Was Jesus primarily a man, albeit one filled with divine spirit? Or was he God, essentially a divine being, merely occupying the body of a man? Since he died on the cross, did that mean that God had died? If so, how could that be? And if not, how could it be said that Jesus died at all? Since Christians believed passionately that their very salvation depended on getting the credal formulation of such theological issues right, debates over Christ's nature were intense and protracted. In the end, it proved impossible to resolve these issues satisfactorily, even though the emperors expended a great deal of thought, money, and their subjects' good will in the effort to mediate disputes in search of a theological middle ground acceptable to all sides. It must also be said that these debates over doctrine often pitted powerful factions within the church against one another for reasons that were as much personal and political as doctrinal. Particularly important in this respect was the old rivalry between the patriarchs of the ancient sees of Alexandria and Constantinople, though the bishops of Rome, Antioch, and other centers also played a part.

Orthodoxy thus came to be defined through a series of church councils—intensely political gatherings of Christian bishops, sometimes supervised by the imperial court—that, among many other items of business, successively declared specific doctrines to be heresies. The result was that by the sixth century, the Christians of the Near East had coalesced into several well-defined communities, each with its own version of the faith. The official Byzantine church—"Greek orthodox," as it is called today in the United States—was, like the Latin church in Rome, *dyophysite*; that is, it taught that Christ had two natures, one divine and one human, which were separate and distinct but combined in a single person. (This separation enabled them to understand Christ's crucifixion as the death of his human nature, while his divine nature, being divine, was immortal.) Byzantine Orthodox Christians were predominant in Anatolia, the Balkans, Greece, and Palestine, and in urban centers elsewhere where imperial authority was strong. On the other hand, in Egypt, Syria, and Armenia most Christians, particularly in the countryside, were *monophysite*, that is, they belonged to one of several churches that considered Christ to have had only a single nature that was simultaneously divine and human. (From their perspective, the key point about Christ was that in him God had truly experienced human agony and death, but being God he was able to rise from the dead.) The emperor's efforts to heal this rift by convening the Council of Chalcedon (451) backfired when the resultant formula was rejected by the monophysites, who clung tenaciously to their creed despite sometimes heavy-handed efforts by the Byzantine authorities to wean them of it. A third group, largely driven out of Byzantine domains by the sixth century but numerous in the Sasanian Empire and even in Central Asia, were the Nestorians, named after Bishop Nestorius of Constantinople, whose doctrine was condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431. Although *dyophysite*, the Nestorians placed, in the eyes of both the "orthodox" Byzantine church and the monophysites, too much emphasis



Mar Saba. This great monastery, in the semi-desert east of Jerusalem, like others in Egypt, Syria, and Mesopotamia, was a product of the surge of Christian religiosity that swept the Byzantine empire between the fourth and sixth centuries C.E.

on Christ's human nature and understated his divinity. North Africa was home to yet another sect deemed heretical, the puritanical Donatists, who rejected any role of the Byzantine emperor in their affairs. Although in retreat after the fourth century, particularly after Augustine's stringent efforts to refute them, the Donatists remained active in North Africa as a minority beside the regionally dominant Roman church.

These differences over doctrine, and their hardening into discrete sectarian communities, plagued the Byzantine emperors' efforts to build a unified ideological base of support for themselves and generated widespread resentment in the eastern provinces (and sometimes in the west) against the Byzantine authorities—a resentment that we

can glimpse in the numerous polemical tracts in which members of one Christian community attacked the beliefs of others. The early stirrings of Christian anti-Semitism are also to be found in tracts directed explicitly against Judaism or in tracts in which Nestorians are denigrated by other Christians who liken them, because of their emphasis on Jesus' human nature, to Jews, who of course denied Jesus' divinity altogether. Various Christian sects also directed some polemical writings against Zoroastrianism, the official faith of the Sasanian Empire (see below). Christian chauvinism was sometimes pursued in less academic ways as well. Their refusal to build on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, for example, was partly to affirm Jesus' supposed saying that no stone of the Temple would be left standing on another (Mt. 24:2), but the Byzantine authorities' use of the place as a dumping ground was presumably in order to symbolize their view that Judaism and its temple had been transcended by Jesus' preaching and belonged in "the dustbin of history." From the time of Theodosius, there were, in addition to intermittent bouts of popular anti-Jewish agitation, episodes of official discrimination, dispossession, persecution, closure of synagogues, and forced conversion of Jews by the Byzantine authorities.

Another feature of Christianity in the Byzantine Near East—one that seems to have been shared by different Christian denominations—was an inclination toward asceticism. Asceticism had deep roots in the ancient world but seems to have become increasingly prevalent during the fifth and sixth centuries. Its most extreme practitioners indulged in spectacular—sometimes theatrical—forms of self-denial. Some suspended themselves for long periods from trees, secluded themselves in caves, or, like the famous St. Simeon the Stylite (died 459), perched atop pillars, exposed to the elements, to pray and preach, sometimes for years on end, drawing pilgrims in large numbers. Most minimized their intake of food or sleep, sometimes to virtually nothing; others wandered the countryside almost naked to pray and live on what the Lord, and sympathetic villagers, might provide. Less

sensational but far more widespread was the establishment of monasteries and convents, in which people took up an abstemious life of prayer far removed from the temptations of this sinful world. The monastic movement had begun in the early fourth century in the Egyptian deserts, but the building of such communal refuges spread rapidly into Syria, Anatolia, and Mesopotamia. The famous monasteries of St. Pachomius in Egypt, Mar Saba in Palestine, St. Simeon in Syria, and Qartmin in Mesopotamia were merely the most celebrated examples of a widespread trend.

Whatever its particular form, this tendency to ascetic self-denial was motivated by a conviction that salvation in the afterlife was to be achieved not only through right belief, but also by strictly righteous behavior. This involved, in particular, continuous prayer and a refusal to succumb to the temptations of physical desires, such as the need for sleep, food, shelter, sexual gratification, or human companionship, which were viewed by some, at least, as snares of the devil. Most people, of course, lacked the commitment or the discipline needed to engage in such heroic self-denial, but many acknowledged that it represented a kind of ideal and were supportive of those saintly individuals who could master their appetites sufficiently to attain it—hoping, perhaps, that by aiding them they would themselves gain some of the sanctity that the ascetic was presumed to have acquired. The ascetic movement thus belonged to a broader trend in the Byzantine Christianity of the fourth to sixth centuries that saw the articulation of a range of popular religious practices that helped bridge the divide between clergy and laity. These included pilgrimages, processions, the worship of saints' shrines, the veneration of icons, and new forms of liturgy, in all of which both clergy and laity could be involved or in which lay persons could have tangible contact with the sacred even in the absence of ordained clergy.

Another dimension of the religious mood of the Byzantine domains in the sixth century, and one not unrelated to asceticism, was



St. Simeon. Ruins of the great cathedral constructed around the pillar on which St. Simeon the Stylite sat for forty years; his asceticism attracted crowds of the devout and the curious to hear his sermons and resulted in the establishment of the cathedral and an adjoining monastery.

the widespread appeal of apocalyptic ideas—that is, predictions of the approaching end of the world, or End of Days. These usually anticipated an imminent, cataclysmic change in the world that would end current oppression or distress and usher in a new era in which the righteous would be vindicated (the identity of “the righteous” varying, of course, depending on who was spreading the predictions). In this new era or eon, they would vanquish their former

persecutors and enjoy happiness and prosperity for a time before the dawning of the Last Judgment. With the Judgment, the righteous would finally be delivered by attaining everlasting salvation in heaven. A number of such apocalyptic scenarios were generated by members of religious communities that faced Byzantine oppression or harassment, such as the monophysite churches of Egypt, Syria, and Armenia, and have an unmistakably vindictive quality. But apocalyptic ideas were almost infinitely malleable and could also be advanced by the orthodox, who portrayed the coming cataclysm as one in which their faith would finally triumph over its stubborn opponents; in their eyes, the struggle to convert all of mankind to orthodoxy was a precursor to the Last Judgment. Indeed, one apocalyptic notion linked the Byzantine emperor himself directly to the events of the Last Judgment. According to this theory, which is a kind of Byzantine variant of Jewish messianism, the Last Emperor, after vanquishing the enemies of Christianity in battle and establishing an era of justice and prosperity, would hand over royal authority to Jesus at the Second Coming—an event predicted to happen in Jerusalem—and thus dissolve the Byzantine Empire and inaugurate the millennial era immediately preceding the Last Judgment. Regardless of who advanced them, these various apocalyptic ideas gave many people, even (perhaps especially) those suffering from poverty or oppression, some hope for the future and also served as a call for people to make greater efforts to live righteously, in order to be sure to be counted among the saved when the Judgment came.

As in antiquity, daily life for most people in the sixth-century Byzantine Empire was brutally harsh—so harsh that most of us alive today, in the West at least, could hardly endure it. Members of the elite—large landowners and high officials of church and state (entirely male)—were extremely wealthy, sometimes highly educated, and lived lives of leisure, but they constituted only a tiny fraction of the total population. This male elite held virtually all formal authority and dominated slaves, women, children, and men of common

class. A middling group of prosperous farmers and petty officials or of moderately to very wealthy merchants existed but was relatively small. The overwhelming majority of the population lived in dire poverty as sharecroppers or peasants, poor urban laborers and artisans, or beggars. Slavery was still legal as an institution and widespread as a social phenomenon. There were few social services for the population and early deaths from disease, starvation, exposure, exhaustion, abuse, and violence must have been commonplace, particularly in periods of civil unrest, which were frequent. One of the very few ways to move up in society was through the imperial service, particularly the army—some soldiers of peasant origin even rose to be emperor—but this route was only open to a small number of men.

The emergence by the sixth century of bishops as the leading figures in the civic life of most towns of the Byzantine Near East may have tempered the harshness of life slightly, for the bishops at least acknowledged the poor, orphans, and widows in their midst as part of their communities and recognized their responsibility to alleviate the tribulations of such unfortunates. Unlike paganism, Christianity saw every individual as having the potential to attain sainthood through virtuous living and thus opened up vistas of a new kind of egalitarianism. Because this egalitarian vision was far from being realized in society, however, it is easy to understand how the ascetic tendency in Christianity and apocalyptic hopes for deliverance could become widespread in the Byzantine domains.

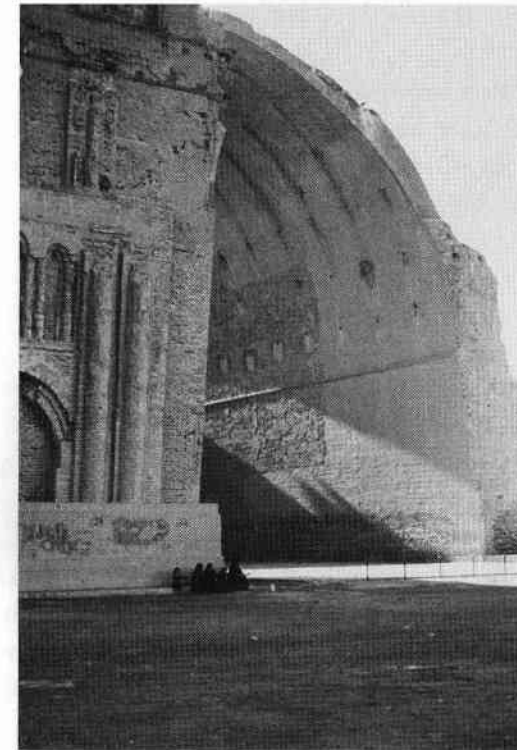
### *The Sasanian Empire*

We know far less about the other great power of the Near East in the sixth century—the Persian Empire under the great kings of the Sasanian dynasty (226–651)—than we do about the Byzantines. It, too, encompassed vast territories, from the rich lowlands of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in the west, its greatest source of tax revenues and the site of its capital, Ctesiphon (near modern Baghdad), to

Afghanistan and the fringes of Central Asia in the east. The population of this huge area spoke a variety of languages. Several Iranian languages (Middle Persian or Pahlavi, Soghdian, Bactrian, Khwarizmian) dominated the highlands and the empire's Central Asian fringes in the northeast; the lowlands of Mesopotamia were the domain of Aramaic and Arabic; and Armenian, Georgian, and probably a score of other languages were dotted throughout the inaccessibly tangled terrain of the Caucasus region.

In spite of the splendor of its impressive capital at Ctesiphon, for much of its earlier history the Sasanian Empire was poorly centralized and poorly integrated, with power diffused among a number of aristocratic families of the Iranian plateau who frequently contested the Sasanian family's leadership (and usually held some power via important posts in the government). The great king's very title—*shahanshah*, literally “king of kings”—hints at the Sasanian family's uncertain claim to preeminence over these rival noble families, who obviously also claimed kingship. In the sixth century, however, Great King Khosro I Anoshirwan (ruled 531–579) succeeded in asserting the royal prerogative against the nobility by reorganizing the state, imposing a greater degree of centralization through the efforts of his standing army and its garrisons and via an extensive bureaucracy. His successor Khosro II Parviz (ruled 589–628) was the main beneficiary of his policies, which enabled him to launch the great campaign against the Byzantine empire that began in 603.

Like the Byzantines, the Sasanians ruled a population that was not only polyglot but also religiously diverse. Zoroastrianism (Mazdaism), a version of the ancient traditional religion of Iran, was the most important faith in the empire and dominant especially on the Iranian plateau. Zoroastrianism was essentially a dualistic faith that conceived of the universe as the arena of a cosmic struggle between the forces of good and evil, embodied in the gods Ohrmazd (Ahura Mazda) and Ahriman, respectively. These primal forces



The Sasanian Throne-Hall at Ctesiphon, Iraq. In their capital at Ctesiphon (in the south suburbs of modern Baghdad), the Sasanians constructed a large palace with a soaring throne room, an amazing feat of brick construction. Although a large part of the two wings that flanked the central arch have now collapsed, the arch itself still stands.

were symbolized by light (particularly fire and the sun) and darkness, a symbolism that traveled westward—it is, for example, the ultimate source of the use of the halo to distinguish sacred figures in European religious iconography. Zoroastrians said special prayers at the moments of sunrise and sunset to mark their reverence for the sun, and many key rituals were performed in fire temples where an eternally burning sacred flame was tended by Zoroastrian

priests. Most of the major fire temples were located on the Iranian plateau.

Zoroastrianism had long been associated with the Iranian monarchy, and during the Sasanian period became the quasi-official religion of the Sasanian state, although the relationship between the Sasanian great kings and the Zoroastrian priests (*herbeds*) and high priests (*mobeds*) was sometimes contentious. Zoroastrianism did not display the same number of internal divisions as did contemporary Christianity with its many rival sects, but there was a debate among Zoroastrians over Zurvanism, which may have been virtually a form of monotheism; it focused on the figure of Zurvan, considered by some a manifestation of eternal time and the father of both Ohrmazd and Ahriman. A few great kings flirted with rival forms of religious expression, such as Manichaeism (founded by the prophet Mani in the third century C.E.), Mazdakism (late fifth century C.E.), or Christianity. The special relationship of the Sasanians to Zoroastrianism, however, endured until the end of the dynasty, and with good reason, for Zoroastrianism bolstered the Sasanians' ideology of universal rule because the great king was considered to represent the dominion of Ahura Mazda over the world. This, and the Sasanians' sense that they were heirs to great Aryan empires of times gone by, led them to consider themselves superior to all other earthly powers (such as the Byzantines) who were, in their view, mere upstarts and qualified only to be their tributaries.

The Sasanian Empire also included large communities of non-Zoroastrians, however; some great kings subjected these to bitter persecutions, while others seem to have tolerated them somewhat less grudgingly than the Byzantine emperors did their religious minorities. Particularly noteworthy were large communities of Jews in Iraq (Babylonia), which with its famous Jewish academies was probably the greatest center of Jewish life and learning in the world at this time. Also important were Christian communities, both monophysite and Nestorian. The Nestorians had been welcomed into Sasa-



Triumph of Shapur. This central panel from a wall relief engraved by the Sasanians at Bishapur, Iran, commemorates the great king Shapur I's victory over three Roman emperors. The great king, mounted on his horse, holds the wrist of the emperor Valerian in an age-old symbol of captivity. Meanwhile, the emperor Philip the Arab submits by kneeling before him to request mercy, while two attendants look on. The emperor Gordian III lies on the ground, trampled by the great king's steed. Overhead, a small angel bears a beribboned diadem symbolizing divine favor for the great king.

nian territory after they had been condemned as heretics at the Council of Ephesus in 431 and forced to flee; Ctesiphon, the Sasanian capital, was the seat of the Nestorian patriarch. Whereas most monophysite Christians in the Sasanian domains were concentrated in northern Mesopotamia, Persian Armenia, Iraq, and the westernmost fringes of the Iranian plateau, the Nestorians spread more widely and established small colonies in many areas, especially along



the trade routes to, and through, Central Asia, even far beyond the Sasanian borders.

Zoroastrian society under the Sasanians was marked by a hierarchical order that was, if anything, even more rigidly defined than that of Byzantine society. The traditional Iranian social order divided the population into distinct strata, with religious leaders and the small political elite of landowners and warriors forming an upper stratum that was strictly differentiated from a commoners' stratum of peasants, artisans, and merchants (another scheme identifies the strata as priests, soldiers, scribes, and farmers). Slaves, of course, were at the bottom of the heap. This strict social hierarchy was reinforced by Zoroastrian orthodoxy, which established separate fire temples for the different strata. This system was probably most clearly in place on the Iranian plateau; in Mesopotamia and Iraq—where Zoroastrians, although politically important, were fewer in number than Jews and Christians—the social order may have been somewhat more fluid, but even there stratification between elites and commoners prevailed. The rigidity of this social order helped create the conditions in which movements such as Manichaeism or Mazdakism, which aimed at creating a more equitable society, found popular support; it was only partly tempered by reforms initiated by Great King Khosro Anoshirwan in the early sixth century.

For all their differences, the Byzantine and Sasanian empires shared certain common features and faced similar challenges. Their rulers struggled to unify vast domains and fragmented populations by the use of force, when necessary, and by recourse to a religious ideology that they tried to impose on their subjects, which bolstered their claim to rule. Both, perhaps inadvertently, fostered movements with egalitarian tendencies that used religious ideas to blunt the harshness of existing social norms. Both also faced the challenge of warding off external enemies on their frontiers, many of them nomadic groups from the Eurasian steppes: The Byzantines faced the Goths, Huns, Slavs, and Avars, whereas the Sasanians had to deal

with the Kushans, Chionites, Huns, Hephthalites (White Huns), and Turks.

Above all, however, the two empires faced the challenge of each other. As the two great competitors for dominance in the Near East in the sixth century, their political rivalry had religious, cultural-ideological, and economic dimensions, the last-mentioned including competition for sources of metals and other resources, for trade revenues, and for taxable lands in an overwhelmingly semiarid region, the Near East, that had relatively few of them. At stake was not merely Byzantine versus Sasanian political control and economic influence, but also Christianity as opposed to Zoroastrianism and Hellenic as opposed to Iranian cultural traditions. We must not forget, either, that both empires laid claim to universal dominion and only grudgingly (and provisionally) recognized the other as its equal—an attitude that had very deep roots, going back at least as far as the clash between the Persians and Alexander the Great in the fourth century B.C.E.

This rivalry, on the political, cultural, and economic planes at least, went back to early Roman times and was played out throughout the Near East, including (as discussed below) the Arabian peninsula. It manifested itself in periodic diplomatic maneuvering between the two powers in an attempt to secure political allegiance and cultural and economic advantage in those border areas that the empires did not already rule directly or did not wish to bother to rule directly, such as Arabia.

Rivalry over trade was a significant component of this contest. Chinese silk, Indian cotton, pepper and other spices, South Arabian incense, leather (heavily in demand by the imperial armies), and other commodities had been important items of trade for the Romans, who had even established commercial colonies in South India, and they continued to be important for the Byzantines. Silk, in particular, was prized and came via the routes known collectively as the famous "Silk Road" through Central Asia and Iran to the

Mediterranean. Goods from the Indian Ocean could reach Byzantine territory either through the Persian Gulf and the Tigris-Euphrates valley or via the Red Sea. The Sasanians, who had extensive commercial contacts of their own in the Indian Ocean basin and who may have maintained commercial colonies in India, were keen to monopolize the flow of eastern luxury goods into Byzantine territory in order to levy taxes on them. A recurring feature of Byzantine-Sasanian peace agreements was the establishment of official customs stations where goods were required to cross the border.

Frequently, the two empires grew impatient with diplomacy and engaged in a long series of wars that were very costly to both sides. In particular, between 500 C.E. and the collapse of the Sasanian state in the 630s, the Byzantines and Sasanians fought five wars and were at war almost continuously for the final ninety years of that period, periodically trading control of key border areas, such as northern Mesopotamia and parts of Armenia and the Caucasus. The last of these wars (603–629) involved unusually dramatic shifts of fortune for both sides and was part of the immediate background against which Muhammad and his Believers' movement first appeared.

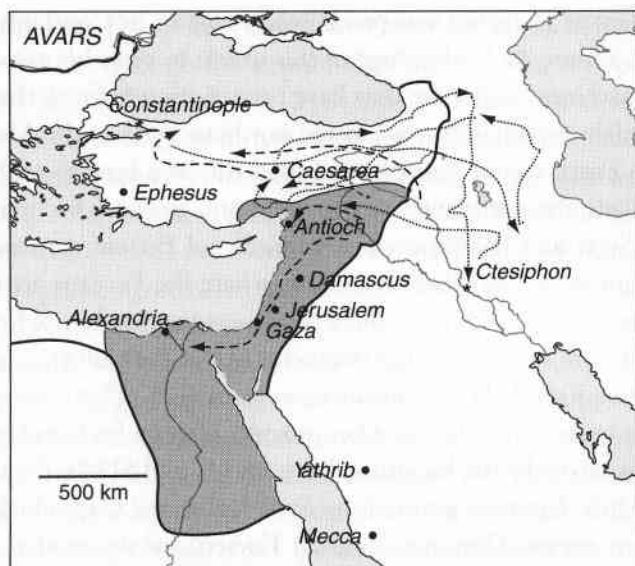
This final Byzantine-Sasanian war began shortly after the Byzantine emperor Maurice was murdered by the usurper Phocas in a military coup in 602. This event elicited a swift reaction from Great King Khosro II. Khosro either saw it as an opportunity to take advantage of a moment of Byzantine disarray or to exact revenge for Maurice, who, in 591, had helped him regain the Sasanian throne from a military usurper in Ctesiphon in exchange for border concessions in Armenia and Mesopotamia. In any case, beginning in 603, Khosro launched a series of attacks against Byzantine positions in Mesopotamia and Armenia and by the end of the decade had brought all lands up to the Euphrates firmly under Sasanian control.

Meanwhile, an internal rebellion against Phocas was building in the Byzantine Empire, led by the governor of North Africa and his son Heraclius. This led to widespread unrest and eventually the fall

of Phocas as Heraclius was proclaimed emperor in Constantinople in 610. Khosro took advantage of this unrest to press his assault on the Byzantines further; he may have been aiming to finish them off completely. Sasanian forces crossed northern Syria to the Mediterranean coast, seized Antioch, and used this as a base to push into Anatolia to the north and Syria to the south. Between 610 and 616, all of Syria and Palestine was occupied and Persian garrisons installed in the major cities. Jerusalem, where the Persians appear to have been supported by the local Jews, was captured in 614, many citizens were massacred, and fragments of the True Cross, a relic of unequalled symbolic significance, were carried off to Ctesiphon. Farther to the south, Egypt, a key provider of grain for Constantinople, was seized by the Sasanians between 617 and 619. In the north, meanwhile, Sasanian armies from Syria had seized Cappadocia and its main center, Caesarea (modern Kayseri), while another army marched from Armenia as far as Galatia (around modern Ankara). By 621, fully half of Anatolia, the traditional heartland of the Byzantine Empire, was in Sasanian hands, as well as all of the Caucasus, Armenia, Syria, and Egypt; to make matters worse, Khosro had concluded an alliance with the chief of the nomadic Avars, who were simultaneously attacking Constantinople from the northwest.

The survival of the Byzantine Empire, which under the circumstances must be considered almost miraculous, can be attributed to Heraclius's determination and to his skill and daring as military commander and diplomat—and also, perhaps, to the magnificent defensive walls of Constantinople, which withstood a siege by the Avars in the summer of 626, when Heraclius and his army were campaigning far away. Despite renewed challenges from the Avars and stiff Sasanian opposition, he rallied the Byzantine troops to save the Christian empire and to restore the True Cross to Jerusalem, perhaps the first instance of a religiously legitimized imperial war. In 624 he marched his armies through central Anatolia into Armenia and the Caucasus; it may have helped that Heraclius's family was itself of





## KEY

- Byzantine frontiers, ca. 600 CE —————
- Byzantine lands lost to Sasanians, 610–628 [stippled area]
- Sasanian offensives, 610–620 - - - - -
- Heraclius's campaigns, 624–628 ~~~~~

Map 2. The last Byzantine-Sasanian War, ca. 610–628 C.E.  
(Adapted from W. Kaegi, *Heraclius*.)

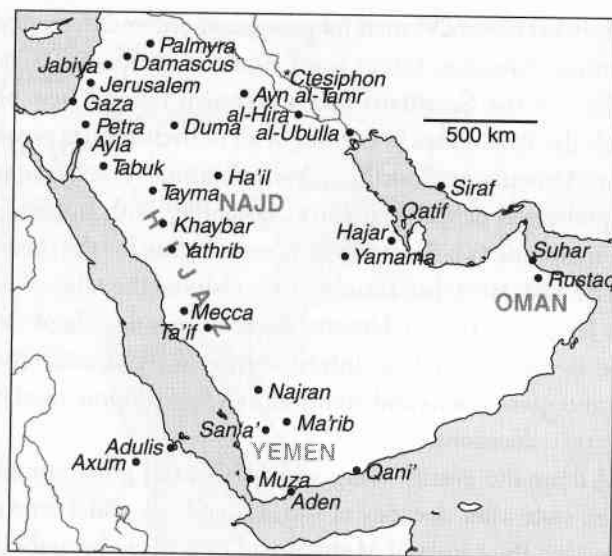
Armenian origin. There he made contact with the Sasanians' steppe enemy, the Turks, and with their assistance broke the Sasanian grip on this strategically important region, which was nearly in the Sasanians' backyard. In 625 he further consolidated his control over Anatolia. In the autumn and winter of 627–628, Heraclius marched his army into northern Mesopotamia and then toward the Sasanian capital, Ctesiphon. His unexpected raid into the heartland of the empire caused Khosro to lose support at court, and the great king was overthrown in a coup early in 628; his successor (Khosro's son

Kavad II, ruled 628–629) sued for peace and ordered the withdrawal of remaining Sasanian forces from Anatolia, Armenia, Syria, and Egypt. By 629 the Sasanians had withdrawn behind new borders, which left the Byzantines in control of all of their former possessions as well as Armenia and northern Mesopotamia. The Sasanians entered a prolonged period of political instability, with numerous pretenders, including two Sasanian princesses, vying for the throne over the next decade. Heraclius triumphantly restored the relic of the True Cross to Jerusalem in 630, but after more than a decade of Sasanian rule, the Byzantine political infrastructure in Syria and Egypt was shaken, and many towns and communities had become used to making their own decisions.

These dramatic events, then, which left both great empires in a weakened state after decades of war, formed the wider background against which the career of Muhammad took place in Arabia.

### Arabia between the Great Powers

Arabia was wedged between the two great empires on their southern desert edges. It is a vast and overwhelmingly arid land, extending in the north into the edges of the modern countries of Jordan, Syria, and Iraq. Much of Arabia consists of sandy or, more commonly, rocky desert—the main exceptions being the Yemen in the Arabian deep south and parts of Oman in the southeast, which are blessed with some moisture from the Indian Ocean and water from mountain springs. Elsewhere, rainfall is scant and irregular. For the most part, adequate water for agriculture can be found only where artesian wells bring underground water to the surface, forming an oasis with groves of palm trees, amid which crops of cereals, fruits, and vegetables could be raised. Most Arabian oases are small, but a few large oasis towns can be found in northern and eastern Arabia: in the north, Palmyra (actually in Syria), Azraq (in Jordan),

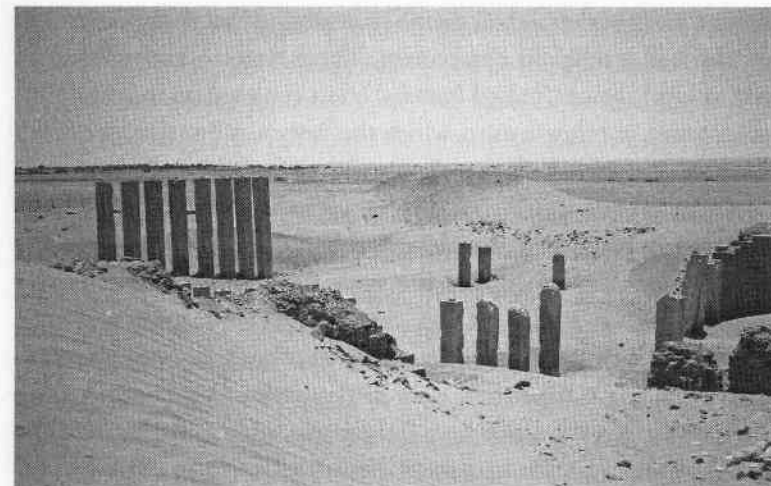


Map 3. Arabia, ca. 600 C.E.

Dumat al-Jandal, Tayma, Khaybar, and Yathrib (Medina); and in the east, al-Yamama (modern Riyadh), Hajar (modern al-Hasa), and Ha'il.

The Yemen, being fairly well watered, supported the rise of more highly developed forms of political organization than the rest of Arabia. Several early South Arabian kingdoms, which thrived in the first millennium B.C.E.—Saba' (Sheba), Ma'in, Qataban, Hadramawt—eventually gave way to an even larger polity, the kingdom of Himyar, which dominated most of Yemen from the first to the sixth centuries C.E.

In most of Arabia, however, the meager agricultural resources meant that the social and political order was structured around family and kinship groups ("tribes") that bound people together in solidarity and mutual defense. (Indeed, even in South Arabia the kingdom was only a thin veneer over an essentially tribal society.) There



Bar'an Temple, Ma'rib. The ancient South Arabian kingdoms constructed large shrines such as this one to their various astral deities.

was no "law" in the sense we understand it; rather, an individual's tribe or extended family provided him or her with day-to-day security, because any affront to a member of the tribe, particularly a homicide, would bring rapid retaliation against the offender's tribe. Both settled and nomadic people organized themselves this way; indeed, many groups had both settled and nomadic sections within one and the same tribe.

Arabia's political and social fragmentation was matched by its religious diversity on the eve of Islam. The traditional religion of Arabia was polytheism—a paganism that revered astral deities (the sun, moon, Venus, and so on), among others, and which existed in numerous variants as local cults, late survivals of the pagan religions of the ancient Near East. This local polytheism was peculiarly well suited to the Arabian social environment, for Arabian tribes not only considered themselves blood relatives (whether or not they actually were), they also usually joined in worshipping a particular local idol or god,

whom they considered their divine protector, so that their social identity also had a religious component. These Arabian gods were honored at local shrines, called *harams*, often centered on a sacred tree, rock, spring, or other feature, which the deity was thought to inhabit. The *haram* consisted of a sacred area with definite boundaries around the shrine proper, in which it was forbidden for members of the cult to engage in bloodshed or violence—a ban that was enforced by the other groups that worshipped the same deity and by the family or tribe that served as the shrine's caretakers. This feature made the *haram* a place where people from different tribes could mingle safely, whether to visit a marketplace, to settle outstanding quarrels, or to arrange marriages and alliances. If there was sufficient water, a *haram* thus grew into a sizable settlement, because it tended to attract as settlers merchants and others for whom security of property was essential. Most of the larger towns of northern Arabia had a *haram* at their core—as well as a good supply of fresh water.

By the sixth century C.E., however, this residual Arabian paganism was apparently receding in the face of a gradual spread of monotheism. Judaism had come to Arabia very early—probably immediately after the Roman destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in 70 C.E. Communities of Arabic-speaking Jews were found in most parts of Arabia, particularly in the Yemen and in the oasis towns of northwestern Arabia—Tabuk, Tayma', Khaybar, Yathrib (Medina), and so on. These may have been descendants of Jewish migrants or refugees from Palestine or Babylonia, local converts, or an amalgam of both. Christianity was also found in Arabia, especially in Yemen (where it had become established in the fourth century through Byzantine proselytizing), in eastern Arabia, and on Arabia's northern fringes bordering on Syria and Iraq, where it seems to have gained a following even among some pastoral nomadic groups. There is less agreement among scholars on the prevalence of Christians in the Hijaz (the mountainous western side of Arabia), although some stray references show that Christians were not unknown there. Arabia

may also have been home to some communities of Jewish Christians called Nazoreans, who recognized Jesus as messiah but adhered to bans on consuming pork and wine. We have, unfortunately, very little firsthand information about these diverse Jewish and Christian communities in the sixth century. It seems plausible to suppose, however, that they were affected by the tendencies to asceticism and apocalypticism that were current in the wider Near Eastern world at that time.

A final aspect of religious life in Arabia that is worthy of mention is the survival there of the tradition of active prophecy, even though by the sixth century it had largely died out elsewhere in the Near East. Although by that time mainstream Jews and many Christians considered active prophecy to be a thing of the past, prophecy continued to be practiced by a few groups like the Montanists, a small Christian sect found mainly in Asia Minor. The religious teacher Mani, founder of Manichaeism, who lived in southern Iraq during the third century C.E., also claimed to have been a prophet. At the time of Muhammad's preaching in the early seventh century, moreover, there were a number of other figures in Arabia who, like him, presented themselves as prophets bearing a divine message. All of this points to the vitality of the tradition of active prophecy, particularly in Arabia, and helps us understand the way in which people in Arabia may have received Muhammad's claims to be a prophet.

For both political and economic reasons, the Byzantines and Sasanians felt a need to maintain a presence in Arabia—if only to thwart the other from gaining too much influence there. Yet, the dearth of resources in northern Arabia discouraged them from trying to establish direct control over this area, for it would have cost more to garrison and administer it than they could hope to secure in taxes. Instead, they adopted the stratagem of establishing alliances with the chiefs of Arabian tribes, who then served the empires' interests in exchange for cash subsidies, weapons, and titles; such indirect rule was much cheaper, in money and men, than trying to control

the area directly with their own troops. The Sasanians established such an alliance with the "kings" of the Nasrid family of the tribe of Lakhm, whose base was al-Hira in lower Iraq; the Nasrids contributed troops to the Sasanian army and proved a thorn in the side of the Byzantines because of their periodic raids against Byzantine Syria. The Sasanians also had alliances with other chieftains along the Arabian coasts of the Persian Gulf. In northern Oman, they not only allied themselves with the local rulers, the Julandas, but established a more direct presence, appointing a Sasanian governor, with a permanent garrison of Sasanian troops based in Rustaq, to keep an eye on this region of strategic and agricultural importance. The Sasanians thus cast a large shadow over the gulf coasts of Arabia in the late antique period.

The Byzantines pursued a similar policy in northwest Arabia. The chiefs of the Jafnid family of the tribe of Ghassan, who resided at al-Jabiya in the Jawlan plateau overlooking Lake Tiberias, were recognized by the Byzantine emperors as "phylarchs," or tribal affiliates of the empire during the sixth century, and were outfitted with weapons and cash as well as with titles. Other tribes had, in earlier centuries, played the same role. Like their Sasanian counterparts the Nasrids, the Jafnids gave military assistance to their imperial patrons and participated in a number of major Roman campaigns against the Sasanians and even once (570) attacked the Nasrid capital at al-Hira in central Iraq. When not engaged in open hostilities, the Nasrid and Jafnid clients of the two empires were special rivals for influence among the nomadic people and oasis settlements of northern Arabia and served generally as agents of Sasanian and Byzantine interests. In particular, the Jafnids were expected to prevent other nomadic groups on the fringes of Byzantine Syria from raiding or plundering settled communities in taxable districts.

There is some evidence that mining of gold and other ores may have contributed to the economic vitality of the Arabian peninsula in the century before the rise of Islam. Recent work suggests, however,

that Arabia's main resource of interest to the empires may have been leather, which was used by their armies for saddles, harnesses, boots, shields, tents, and other equipment.

Arabia was also significant economically because it lay on the Byzantines' path to the Indian Ocean basin and its rich commerce. Indian cotton, pepper and other spices, South Arabian incense, and other commodities came to the Mediterranean world either on ships that traveled sea routes that skirted Arabia and called at its ports—particularly Muza (Mocha) and Kane, in South Arabia—or by caravan through the towns of western Arabia, including Mecca. In the Red Sea, a good part of this sea trade was carried in Byzantine times by Axumite shippers hailing from their main port, Adulis. The Byzantine and Sasanian empires both aspired to control this commerce and the taxes that they could collect on it, with the result that Arabia became a focus of serious competition between the empires. The Byzantines, for example, maintained a customs station on the island of Iotabe in the straits of Tiran (at the mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba), and a few stray reports hint that both the Byzantines and the Sasanians attempted, and perhaps succeeded, in establishing special ties with local leaders to collect taxes in Yathrib or Mecca on the eve of Islam in an effort to draw this region into their spheres of influence.

Yemen became a special focus of this Byzantine-Sasanian competition, partly for religious reasons and partly because it occupied a particularly pivotal place in their rivalry over Arabian trade. During the first three-quarters of the sixth century, the Byzantines exercised some indirect influence in Yemen, which, though distant (3,500 km, or 2,175 mi, from Constantinople), was their direct gateway to the Indian Ocean via the Red Sea. For the Byzantines, this route had the advantage of circumventing the Sasanians, who sat astride the other trade routes to the Indian Ocean basin and East Asia, which passed either through Iran—the famous "Silk Road"—or, via the Persian Gulf, through Iraq.

The Byzantine political presence in Yemen was mainly established through the intermediary of their ally, the Christian kingdom of Axum. On the urging of the Byzantine emperor Justin, the Axumite king Ella Asbeha invaded Yemen around 523 C.E. and established a Christian ruler there. This invasion may have been in part a reaction to the activities of a Jewish king of the Himyarites, Dhu Nuwas, who had just beforehand engaged in a series of bloody clashes with Yemenite Christians, or it may have been mainly in order to facilitate Byzantine commerce with India. This Ethiopian regime in Yemen, which soon became independent of Axum, dominated the country for a half-century; its most important leader was the king Abraha, who attempted to extend his rule into north-central Arabia and is reported by tradition to have mounted an unsuccessful siege on Mecca around the time of Muhammad's birth.

The Sasanians were not about to allow this indirect Byzantine presence in South Arabia to stand unchallenged, however. In the 570s, Great King Khosro II sent an expeditionary force that occupied Yemen and made it a province of the empire, administered directly by a Sasanian governor with a strong garrison. By the end of the sixth century, then, the Sasanians had enclosed Arabia almost completely on its eastern and southern sides; only the Red Sea littoral and its extension into southern Syria was free of their control. The Byzantine Empire, on the other hand, was especially influential in northwestern Arabia.

### Mecca and Yathrib (Medina)

The two towns where Muhammad spent his life, Mecca and Yathrib (later usually called Medina), were about 325 km (200 mi) apart from one another in the rugged region known as the Hijaz in western Arabia. The two towns were very different from one another. Yathrib

was a typical large date-palm oasis, actually a loose cluster of contiguous villages, with mud-brick houses and fields of barley and other crops scattered under and between the date groves that grew around perennial springs. In each village or quarter was one or more mud-brick towers (*atam*; singular, *utm*) to which the villagers could repair if threatened by robbers or hostile nomads. In Muhammad's day the residents of Yathrib were from several different tribes or clans. The original inhabitants of the oasis seem to have been from upward of a dozen Jewish families or clans, among which the clans of Qaynuqa', Nadir, and Qurayza were especially prominent. Many of these were farmers and held rich lands, but others—such as the Qaynuqa', who were goldsmiths—engaged in trade or artisanship. By Muhammad's time in the late sixth century, however, the town was dominated by roughly ten clans of pagans (polytheists), who had settled in Yathrib several generations earlier and lived mainly from agriculture. Among these, the clans of Aws and Khazraj were the most powerful and engaged in sometimes bitter rivalry and feuds for leadership of the town, struggles in which the Jewish tribes were closely involved.

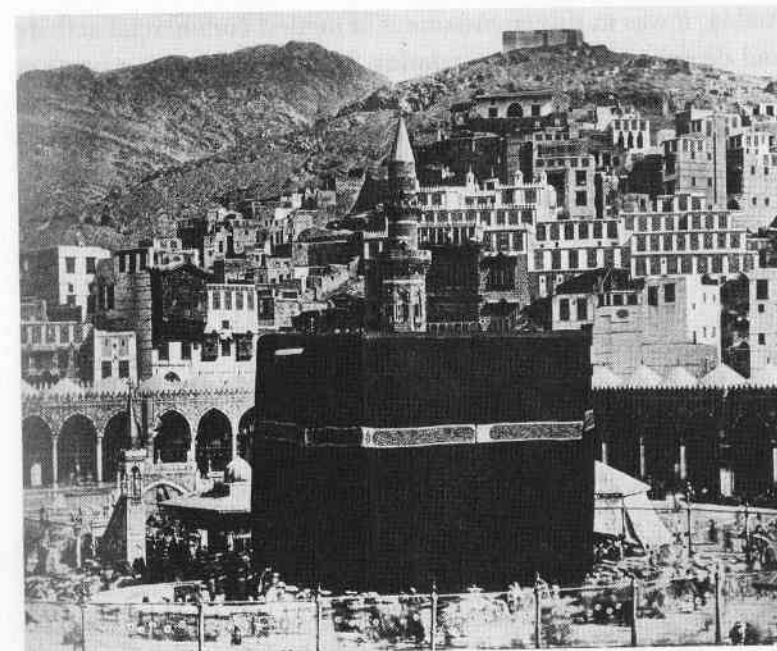
Mecca, on the other hand, was not an oasis town and had very little agricultural potential. The well of Zamzam did provide sufficient freshwater for drinking and for small garden plots, but the town's location in stony hills did not permit extensive cultivation, and in Muhammad's day some of its staple foodstuffs were imported from elsewhere in Arabia or from Syria. Mecca owed its prominence not to cultivation but to religious cult and commerce: It was a typical Arabian *haram* in which violence and bloodshed were forbidden. At the center of the town was the shrine called the Ka'ba—a large, cubical building with a sacred black stone affixed in one corner—that was the sanctuary to the pagan god Hubal. The custodians of this shrine belonged to the tribe of Quraysh, whose different clans made up most of the population of Mecca and shared the various cult responsibilities, such as providing water and food to the pilgrims,



An Arabian oasis. This photograph of the oasis of Jabrin, in Oman, conveys some idea of the general appearance of palm oases such as Yathrib, with houses of mud-brick and garden plots scattered loosely among large groves of date palms.

preparing and selling special pilgrimage garb, and supervising particular rituals. People from other tribes, particularly pastoral nomads who lived near Mecca, also joined its cult, sometimes bringing their own idols into the shrine for safekeeping.

The tribe of Quraysh in Mecca were also heavily involved in commerce and organized caravans that carried goods between Mecca and trading centers in Yemen, eastern Arabia, and southern Syria, and they doubtless had contact with Axumite shippers as well. They also participated in an annual trade fair held at a place called 'Ukaz, near Mecca, at which merchants from many parts of Arabia gathered. It was once thought that Mecca was the center of a booming trade in luxury items from east Africa, India, and Yemen, such as ivory, slaves, and spices, but work since the 1970s reveals that much of the trade was in more modest staple commodities such as ani-



The Ka'ba in Mecca. Although the structures around the Ka'ba had been rebuilt numerous times over the centuries, this photo from the late nineteenth century may give some idea of what the shrine looked like in the early Islamic centuries, before the tremendous expansions and rebuildings of the second half of the twentieth century.

mal hides and basic foodstuffs. The presence of gold mines in the Hijaz suggests that there may also have been some trade in this precious metal. Whatever commodities were involved, Mecca's commercial activity seems to have drawn people from outside Mecca into the town's cult, so that by the later years of the sixth century, when Muhammad was growing up in Mecca, its *haram* seems to have become one of the most important shrines among the many in western Arabia, and its custodians, Muhammad's tribe of Quraysh, had considerable experience in organization and management of joint commercial ventures and a network of contacts throughout



Arabia. It was in this environment of modest commercial activity and diverse religious ideas coming from both Arabian paganism and from the monotheistic traditions of the wider Near East that Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah, the prophet of Islam, was born and raised.

## 2



## Muhammad and the Believers' Movement

Islamic tradition provides a richly detailed narrative of the life of Muhammad, the man all Muslims recognize as their prophet. This narrative is not contemporary but, rather, based on reports that were circulated and collected within the Muslim community during the several centuries following Muhammad's death. As this chapter explores in more detail, these reports contain material of many kinds. Some of them appear to be sober recountings of events, based ultimately on the testimony of eyewitnesses. Others offer miracle stories or improbable idealizations and seem to belong to the realm of legend or religious apologetic. The following pages present, first, a very condensed summary of the traditional biography of Muhammad, setting aside those reports that are clearly legendary. Thereafter, we will discuss some of the problems of this traditional picture and offer an alternative reading of Muhammad's life that takes these problems into account.

### The Traditional Biography of Muhammad the Prophet

According to Muslim tradition, Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah was born in the West Arabian town of Mecca in the second half of the sixth

century C.E. (some reports say around 570, but different accounts give different dates). He belonged to the clan of Hashim within the tribe of Quraysh that dominated Mecca. He was orphaned at an early age and subsequently raised to adulthood by his paternal uncle, Abu Talib, who was at this time the chief of the Hashim clan.

As discussed earlier, in Muhammad's day Mecca was a town whose inhabitants were heavily involved in two activities: commerce and religion. The caravans organized by Quraysh, and the participation of Quraysh in various trading fairs, brought them into contact with other tribes and communities throughout Arabia. The Quraysh tribe's role as stewards of Mecca's religious rituals, centered on the Ka'ba and other holy sites around Mecca, also gave them contacts with many groups who came to the Ka'ba to do their devotions there, particularly by performing ritual circumambulations in the open area surrounding it. The security that came with Mecca's status as a *haram* was obviously good for commerce, so Quraysh's dual roles, as merchants and stewards of the shrine, were intimately intertwined.

As a young man, Muhammad entered into the commercial and cultic life of Mecca. He married a well-to-do widow, Khadija, who was some years older than he, and managed her caravan trading ventures. As he entered maturity, he became highly esteemed by his fellow tribesmen of Quraysh for his intelligence, honesty, and tactfulness. He also began to feel a periodic need for meditation and took to secluding himself now and then in order to contemplate his life. According to tradition, it was during such a personal retreat, around 610, that Muhammad first began to receive revelations from God, carried to him by the archangel Gabriel. The revelations came to him as intense sounds and visions that so overcame him that he could only lie on the ground, shaking and perspiring, until they were over, after which the words that had been revealed to him were burned indelibly into his memory. These words were eventually written down by his followers and edited together to form the Qur'an

(Koran), Islam's sacred scripture—which is, thus, literally a transcription of the spoken word of God in the view of believing Muslims.

Muhammad was at first terrified by what he had experienced and reluctant to take up the mantle of prophecy that God had thrust on him; but his religious experiences continued and it became clear to him that he could not evade this responsibility. He was also comforted by his wife Khadija, who accepted the veracity of his experiences and so became the first person to believe in his prophetic calling. Muhammad then began to preach publicly the message that was being revealed to him: the oneness of God, the reality of the Last Judgment, and the need for pious and God-fearing behavior. Gradually he began to win the support of some people, who abjured their pagan beliefs and recognized instead the absolute oneness of God and Muhammad's role as a prophet. Some of his earliest followers were close kinsmen, such as his cousin 'Ali, son of Abu Talib, and Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas, possibly a relative of Muhammad's mother. Other early followers seem to have been people from the weaker clans of Quraysh and of marginal social groups. A number of prominent Meccans also became early adherents to his message, and many of these came to play central roles in the later life of the community. Notable among them were two men: Abu Bakr, a merchant of the clan of Taym, who became Muhammad's closest confidant; and Abu Bakr's kinsman Talha ibn 'Ubaydallah. Others included 'Uthman ibn 'Affan, a very wealthy member of the powerful clan of Umayya, whose generosity was often put at the prophet's service and who married the prophet's daughters Ruqayya and (after the former's death) Umm Kulthum; and 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Awf of the clan of Zuhra and Zubayr ibn al-'Awwam of the clan of Asad. All of these people would play pivotal roles in the events following Muhammad's death.

Many tribesmen of Quraysh were shocked or disturbed by Muhammad's attack on their ancestral polytheism, the "faith of their fathers," and subjected him and his followers first to ridicule and then to more serious abuse. For a time he was sheltered from this by



the resolute support of Abu Talib, who, as his uncle and head of the clan of Hashim, stood firm in protecting Muhammad. Even a boycott of Hashim by other clans of Quraysh, organized particularly by "Abu Jahl" (the name may be pejorative—"Father of Folly"), chief of the powerful clan of Makhzum, did not cause Abu Talib to hand Muhammad to them as they wished. However, Muhammad's situation in Mecca was becoming increasingly precarious, and a number of his followers reportedly took refuge at this time with the Christian king of Abyssinia to escape persecution.

Muhammad's position in Mecca deteriorated rapidly after the deaths, in close succession, of both Khadija and Abu Talib, his main sources of emotional and social support. Abu Talib was succeeded as head of the Hashim by another of Muhammad's uncles, "Abu Lahab" (perhaps another pejorative—"Father of Flame"), but the latter was not supportive of his nephew and after a time withdrew his protection. This happened probably around 619 C.E. Realizing that most of Quraysh would not soon be won over, Muhammad began to preach his message at periodic markets outside Mecca in order to find other supporters. Initially he met with little success, and he was rebuffed by the leaders of the town of al-Ta'if, about 100 km (about 60 mi) west of Mecca. Around that time, however, he was contacted by a small group of men from the town of Yathrib, a cluster of date-palm oases situated about 325 km (200 mi) north of Mecca. As discussed earlier, Yathrib had long been torn by political strife between the Aws and the Khazraj, rival clans of its dominant tribe, the Banu Qayla. Yathrib's three major Jewish clans, the Nadir, Qurayza, and Qaynuqa', may also have been involved in this strife. The people of Yathrib who sought out Muhammad were yearning for someone to reunify and heal their town; they were impressed by Muhammad's message and embraced it, promising to return to the fair the following year with more people. The next year, a larger group met with Muhammad and invited him to come to Yathrib with his Meccan supporters so that they could establish themselves there as a new

community dedicated to living and worshipping as God demanded, without interference. Shortly thereafter, in 622 C.E., Muhammad and his followers from Mecca made their *hijra* ("emigration" or "taking refuge") to Yathrib—which I will henceforth refer to by its later name, Medina (from *madinat al-nabi*, "city of the prophet"). Muhammad's *hijra* to Medina, because it came to be considered the inception of a politically independent community of Believers, was adopted within a few years of Muhammad's death as marking the beginning of the Islamic calendar (AH 1). The Meccans who had made *hijra* with Muhammad were called *muhajirun*, "Emigrants," while the Medinese who received them came to be known as *ansar*, "Helpers."

Traditional accounts describe Muhammad's life in Medina in great detail, informing us of some events of a personal nature, such as his numerous marriages and the births (and deaths) of his children. Particularly noteworthy among these personal matters was his marriage to the young 'Aisha, daughter of his stalwart supporter Abu Bakr (whom Islamic tradition remembers as his favorite wife of the fifteen or so he eventually took). Also important was his close relationship with his cousin 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, one of the first to follow his message, who married Muhammad's own daughter Fatima. The traditional sources also emphasize Muhammad's founding in Medina of an independent community, including many notices about how he established ritual practices and laid down social guidelines and legal principles for the new community.

But above all the traditional narratives describe the course of Muhammad's political activities in Medina, which by the end of his life resulted in the creation of an autonomous political community that we can consider an embryonic state. There are two grand themes of this process. One is the story of Muhammad's consolidation of political power over Medina itself, which posed a number of distinct challenges to him. These included occasional tensions between the *muhajirun* and the *ansar*, stubborn opposition by some Medinese (called *munafiqun*, "hypocrites"), lukewarm supporters who seem to have worked

against him behind the scenes, and his troubled relations—at once religious, social, and political—with Medina's Jews. The second grand theme of Muhammad's political life in Medina is the story of his prolonged but ultimately victorious struggle with his former hometown, Mecca, and with those members of Quraysh who had resisted his preaching, led now by Abu Sufyan, the new chief of the clan of Umayya. Clearly related to these two themes is a third, the story of his struggle to win the support of pastoral nomadic groups that resided in the vicinity of Medina and, as time went on, with nomadic and settled communities farther afield. They were to prove a crucial component in his construction of a victorious coalition in western Arabia.

Early in his stay in Yathrib/Medina, Muhammad concluded an agreement (or first in a series of agreements) with various clans of the town. This established mutual obligations between him and the Quraysh Emigrants on the one hand and Medinese Helpers on the other, including the Jewish clans affiliated with the latter, binding them all together as belonging to a single community (*umma*). We can, following several recent authors, call this agreement the "*umma* document." It has many remarkable features, some of which we will discuss more fully below, but in general it established guidelines for cooperation of the various groups in Medina, including mutual responsibilities in times of war, the payment of blood money and ransoming of prisoners, and above all, the parties' commitment to support one another in times of conflict. (See Appendix A for the full text of the *umma* document.)

Immediately after his arrival in Medina, according to tradition, Muhammad and his followers are said to have marked out a place for collective prayer—the first mosque. (The English word is derived from Arabic *masjid*, "place for prostrations"—pronounced *mesgid* in some Arabic dialects—via Spanish *mezquita* and French *mosquée*.) At first Muhammad and his Believers faced toward Jerusalem in prayer, as the Jews did, but after some time Muhammad ordered that the Believers should conduct prayers facing Mecca instead. This

change of *qibla* (prayer orientation), which is mentioned in the revelation (Q. 2:142–145), may reflect Muhammad's deteriorating relations with the town's Jews, who according to traditional sources were for the most part not won over to his movement.

One source of Muhammad's difficulties with Medina's Jews, who controlled one of Medina's main markets, may have been his desire to establish a new market in Medina to assist the Meccan Emigrants. In spite of this, some of the Emigrants, uprooted from their livelihoods and cut off from the bulk of the network of close kinsmen that would have sustained them at home in Mecca, soon found themselves on the verge of destitution, and there was only so much that the Medinese Helpers could do for them. In desperation, Muhammad sent a few Emigrants out as a raiding party, which ambushed a Mecca-bound caravan at the town of Nakhla. The booty gained was welcome, but the Nakhla raid opened a long struggle between Muhammad and Quraysh and aroused much criticism even among some of his supporters, because it was undertaken during one of the sacred months, when by local tradition violence was supposed to be forbidden—a controversy resolved (among Muhammad's followers, at least) only by the arrival of a Qur'anic revelation justifying it (Q. 2:217).

#### TEXT OF QUR'AN 2 (BAQARA/THE COW): 217

They ask you about fighting in the sacred months. Say: fighting in it is a serious [sin], but barring [people] from the way of God, and disbelief in Him and in the sacred mosque, and expelling its people from it are more serious in God's eyes. Spreading discord is more serious than killing. They will continue to fight you until they turn you from your religion, if they can. Whoever of you turns back from his religion and dies an unbeliever—their works in this world and the next are to no avail, and they are the companions of the fire, they shall be in it eternally.

A larger group of Muhammad's followers attacked a sizable Quraysh caravan again at a place called Badr (year 2/624), overcoming the contingent of Meccans guarding it and taking much booty despite being outnumbered. This victory must have strengthened both the morale and the economic position of Muhammad's followers and may mark the beginning of a virtual blockade of Mecca by Muhammad and the Medinese. It also evidently left Muhammad feeling secure enough to make the first open attack on Jews who opposed him. A Jewish leader who had mocked him was murdered by Muhammad's followers; then the important Jewish clan of Qaynuqa', who ran Medina's main market, were besieged in their quarter and ultimately, after negotiations, expelled from the city, leaving behind most of their property, which was taken over by Muhammad's followers. The Qaynuqa' withdrew to Wadi al-Qura, north of Medina, and then to Syria.

After their defeat at Badr, the Meccans were more determined than ever to settle scores with Muhammad and his followers. After trading small raids with him, they organized an alliance that attacked Medina itself. In this clash, called the battle of Uhud (3/625), Muhammad's forces suffered defeat and loss of life. Muhammad himself was slightly wounded, but the Meccan alliance came apart on the brink of victory and had to withdraw, leaving Muhammad and his followers shaken but still standing. Following Uhud, the two sides again traded raids, particularly to thwart each other's attempts to win support among nomadic tribes living nearby. Some of these raids were successful for the Medinese; others, such as that against a place called Bi'r Ma'una, resulted in casualties. In his efforts to win tribal allies, Muhammad sometimes had to allow a pagan tribe to cling to its ancestral religion, but many of his allies also embraced his message of monotheism. Muhammad took advantage of the withdrawal of the Meccan forces to turn against a second major Jewish group of Medina, the clan of Nadir, reportedly because some of them had been plotting to kill Muhammad. His followers besieged the

Nadir, who eventually capitulated and withdrew, most of them going to the largely Jewish oasis town of Khaybar, about 230 km (143 mi) north of Medina.

The traditional sources place at this time a long-distance expedition by the Believers in Medina to the north Arabian oasis and trade center at Dumat al-Jandal—fully 700 km (435 mi) north of Medina—but whatever its goal was, it seems to have been inconclusive. More important, Quraysh had once again organized an alliance, even larger than the previous one, and launched another offensive, including a contingent of cavalry, against Muhammad and Medina. In this case, Muhammad and his followers reportedly dug a moat or trench to neutralize the Meccans' cavalry, forcing them to try to reduce Medina by siege. The so-called battle of the Trench (5/627) involved some skirmishing, but after several weeks the Meccan alliance once again began to unravel and Quraysh were forced to withdraw. In this case, too, Muhammad turned on his Jewish opponents in the aftermath of a major confrontation with Quraysh; this time the victims were the last large Jewish clan of Medina, Qurayza, who are said to have had treasonous contact with the Meccans during the siege of Medina. Their fortifications in the city were surrounded by Muhammad's followers, and when they surrendered, they agreed that a former ally of theirs in Muhammad's following should pass judgment on them. His judgment, however, was harsh: He ordered that the men should be executed and the women and children enslaved.

Muhammad now dispatched envoys to various tribes around Medina and further afield and organized several especially poorly understood campaigns to destinations north of Medina—to Dumat al-Jandal (again) and to the southern fringes of Syria, where his freedman Zayd ibn Haritha had gone on trade. Then, according to traditional sources, in 6/628, Muhammad and a large following marched unarmed toward Mecca with the avowed intention of doing the 'umra or "lesser pilgrimage," which involved performing various rites at the Ka'ba; the fact that they set out without weapons was

meant to confirm their peaceful intentions. Quraysh, however, were in no mood to allow Muhammad and his followers to come into their town unopposed, given the long hostilities between them and the fact that Muhammad was still blocking the passage of Meccan caravans. They therefore headed him off with a cordon of troops at a place called Hdaybiya, on the borders of the *haram* around Mecca. There, after lengthy negotiations, they concluded an agreement with Muhammad: He would return to Medina without doing the *umra* and would end his blockade of Mecca in exchange for permission to perform the *umra* unmolested in the following year. The two parties also agreed to a ten-year truce, during which neither side was to attack the other but each was free to make whatever contacts it wished.

The Hdaybiya agreement seems to mark a turning point in Muhammad's fortunes. Shortly after concluding it, Muhammad organized a large expeditionary force and marched with it on the Jewish oasis of Khaybar; this town had long been a key ally of Mecca in its struggle with Muhammad, but it was not explicitly protected by the agreement. Khaybar capitulated, but its Jewish residents were allowed to remain in order to cultivate the town's extensive groves of palm trees, from the annual crop of which Muhammad now took a share. Muhammad also launched, around this time, numerous raids on still-unsubdued nomadic tribes and sent several raids to the north. One of these, led (again) by Zayd ibn Haritha, penetrated into southern Syria but was repulsed by local Byzantine forces at Mu'ta, in what is today southern Jordan; Zayd was killed in this battle, but most of the force returned intact. A year after the Hdaybiya agreement, Muhammad and his followers made the *umra* as planned. Around this time, those Believers who had many years before gone to Abyssinia during Muhammad's darkest days in Mecca finally returned to join Muhammad in Medina. Presumably their decision to return reflected Muhammad's and his community's increasingly secure position in Medina.

The Hdaybiya agreement with Quraysh had been for a term of ten years, but only two years later, in 8/630, Muhammad decided that by various actions Quraysh had violated the terms of the agreement. He therefore organized a large armed force (one report says it numbered ten thousand, including perhaps two thousand nomadic allies) and marched on Mecca. Quraysh capitulated without a fight and agreed to embrace Muhammad's message of monotheism; only a handful of Muhammad's bitterest opponents in Mecca were executed, and indeed many Meccan leaders were given important positions in Muhammad's entourage, a measure that dismayed some of his early supporters, both Emigrants and Helpers. Once inside Mecca, Muhammad set about removing from the confines of the Ka'ba shrine its pagan idols, purifying it for its future role as a focus of monotheist worship. In the view of Muslim tradition, the Ka'ba had originally been built by Abraham as a shrine to the one God, so Muhammad was by these actions merely rededicating it to its original monotheistic purpose.

The conquest (really occupation) of Mecca was perhaps the crowning event of Muhammad's political career. But, although his position was now incomparably stronger, he still faced some opposition. The tribe of Thaqif, which controlled the third major town of western Arabia, Ta'if, had long had close ties to Mecca and Quraysh and continued to reject Muhammad's advances. Moreover, Thaqif had as allies some powerful nomadic tribes in their vicinity, such as Hawazin, who were particularly threatening. Shortly after taking Mecca, therefore, Muhammad marched his forces against Thaqif and their Hawazin allies and defeated them at the battle of Hunayn, after which he surrounded Ta'if itself, which eventually capitulated.

Muhammad was now unquestionably the dominant political figure in western Arabia, and in the year or so after Mecca and Ta'if fell, he received delegations from numerous tribal groups in Arabia, both settled and nomadic, who hastened to tender their allegiance to

him. He also organized at this time another major military expedition to the far north, this time directed against the town of Tabuk; its exact goals remain unclear, but it showed Muhammad's continued interest in the north. Muhammad astutely used these late campaigns as a way to secure the loyalty of those powerful leaders of Quraysh who had formerly been his opponents, such as their former leader Abu Sufyan, and his sons Mu'awiya and Yazid, by giving them important commands or extra shares of booty. Moreover, during these campaigns, he increasingly insisted that his able-bodied followers take active part in military service. At this time, too, Muhammad's growing political and military strength enabled him to dispense with the policy of making alliances with pagan tribes—something that had been necessary earlier in order to secure as many allies as possible in his struggle with Mecca. Now he announced a new policy of noncooperation with polytheists; they were henceforth to be attacked and forced to recognize God's oneness or to fight. (See Q. 9:1–16.)

At the end of 10/March 632, Muhammad is said to have performed the *haji*, or major pilgrimage, to the environs of Mecca. Shortly after his return to Medina, he fell ill and, after several days, died at home, his head cradled in the lap of his favorite wife, 'A'isha (11/632). Following local custom, his body was interred beneath the floor of his house.

### The Problem of Sources

This brief sketch of the events of Muhammad's life, although in many ways plausible (and probably in some respects accurate), is nevertheless vexing to the historian. The problem is that this detailed picture of Muhammad's career is drawn not from documents or even stories dating from Muhammad's time, but from literary sources that were compiled many years—sometimes centuries—

later. The fact that these sources are so much later, and shaped with very specific objectives in mind, means that they often do not tell us many things about which we would like to know more; for example, the position of women in society is often reported only incidentally. There is also reason to suspect that some—perhaps many—of the incidents related in these sources are not reliable accounts of things that actually happened but rather are legends created by later generations of Muslims to affirm Muhammad's status as prophet, to help establish precedents shaping the later Muslim community's ritual, social, or legal practices, or simply to fill out poorly known chapters in the life of their founder, about whom, understandably, later Muslims increasingly wished to know everything.

The vast ocean of traditional accounts from which the preceding brief sketch of Muhammad's life is distilled contains so many contradictions and so much dubious storytelling that many historians have become reluctant to accept any of it at face value. There are, for example, an abundance of miracle stories and other reports that seem obviously to belong to the realm of legend, such as an episode similar to the "feeding the multitudes" story in Christian legends about Jesus. The chronology of this traditional material about Muhammad, moreover, is not only vague and confused, but also bears telltale signs of having been shaped by a concern for numerological symbolism. For example, all the major events of Muhammad's life are said to have occurred on the same date and day of the week (Monday, 12 Rabi' al-awwal) in different years. Further, some episodes that are crucial to the traditional biography of Muhammad look suspiciously like efforts to create a historicizing gloss to particular verses of the Qur'an; some have suggested, for example, that the reports of the raid on Nakhla were generated as exegesis of Q. 2:217 (see "Text of Qur'an 2" Sidebar, p. 45). Other elements of his life story may have been generated to make his biography conform to contemporary expectations of what a true

prophet would do (for instance, his orphanhood, paralleling that of Moses, or his rejection by and struggle against his own people, the tribe of Quraysh).

Even if we accept the basic outlines of Muhammad's life as portrayed in traditional accounts, the historian is faced with many stubborn questions that the sources leave unaddressed. (For example, why were the pagans of Medina so readily won over to Muhammad's message, while the Quraysh of Mecca resisted it so bitterly? What exactly was Muhammad's original status in Medina? What exactly was his relationship to the Jews of Medina?) Unfortunately, we have no original documents that might confirm unequivocally any of the traditional biography—no original copies of letters to or from or about Muhammad by his contemporaries, no inscriptions from his day written by members of his community, and so on.

These well-founded concerns about the limitations of the traditional Muslim accounts of Muhammad's life have caused some scholars to conclude that everything in these accounts is to be rejected. This, however, is surely going too far and in its way is just as uncritical an approach as unquestioning acceptance of everything in the traditional accounts. The truth must lie somewhere in between; and some recent work has begun to show that despite the vexing problems they pose, the traditional narratives do seem to contain some very early material about the life of Muhammad. A tolerably accurate and plausible account of the main events of Muhammad's life may someday be possible, when scholars learn more about how to sift the mass of traditional materials more effectively. However, such critical studies are just getting underway today, and for the present it remains prudent to utilize the traditional narratives sparingly and with caution.

Our situation as historians interested in Muhammad's life and the nature of his message is far from hopeless, however. A few seventh-century non-Muslim sources, from a slightly later time than that of

Muhammad himself but much earlier than any of the traditional Muslim compilations, provide testimony that—although not strictly documentary in character—appears to be essentially reliable. Although these sources are few and provide very limited information, they are nonetheless invaluable. For example, an early Syriac source by the Christian writer Thomas the Presbyter, dated to around 640—that is, just a few years after Muhammad's death—provides the earliest mention of Muhammad and informs us that his followers made a raid around Gaza. This, at least, enables the historian to feel more confident that Muhammad is not completely a fiction of later pious imagination, as some have implied; we know that someone named Muhammad did exist, and that he led some kind of movement. And this fact, in turn, gives us greater confidence that further information in the massive body of traditional Muslim materials may also be rooted in historical fact. The difficulty is in deciding what is, and what is not, factual. (See the "Text of Thomas the Presbyter" sidebar in Chapter 3.)

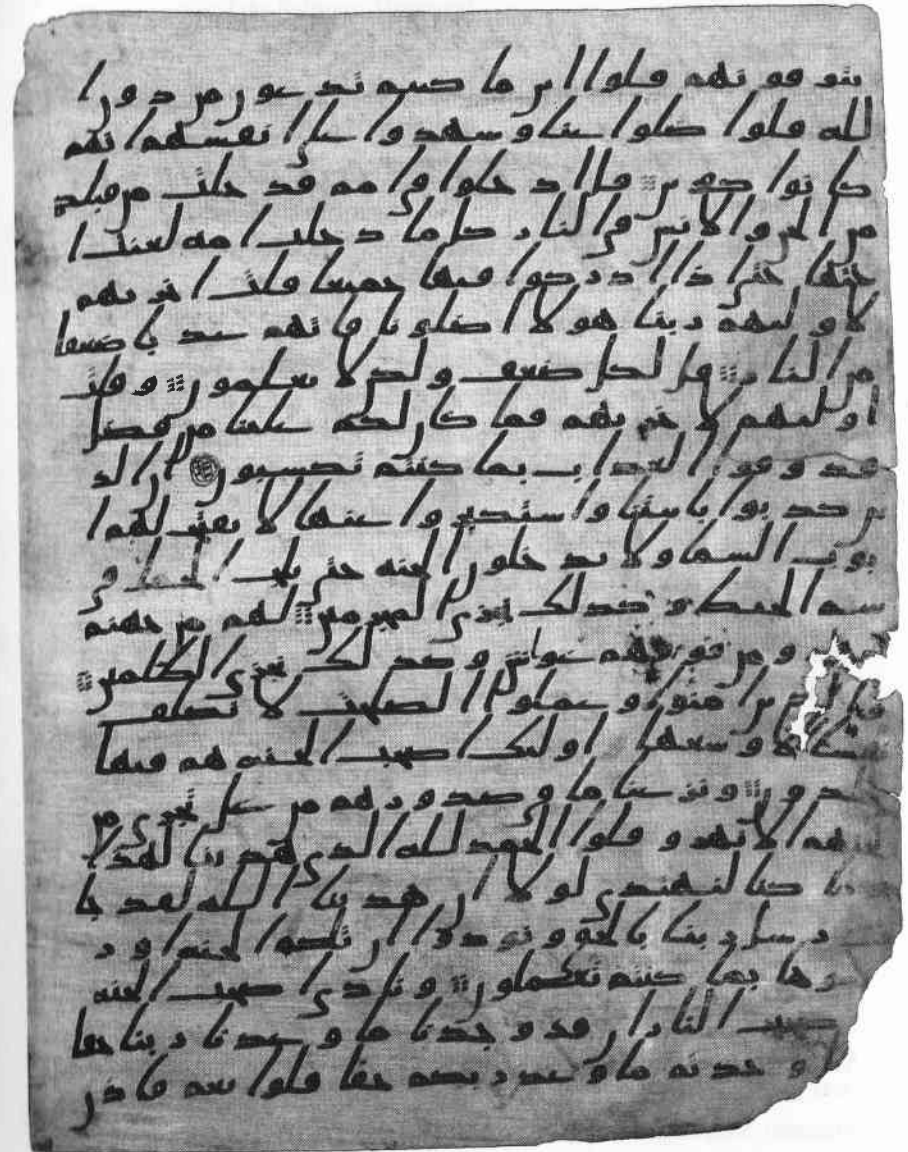
Moreover, the most important source of information about the early community of Believers is still to be discussed: the text of the Qur'an itself, Islam's holy book. For Believing Muslims, the Qur'an is, of course, a transcript of God's word as revealed to Muhammad. Each of its 114 separate, named *suras* (chapters), containing altogether thousands of *ayas* (verses—literally, "signs" of God's presence) is, for the Believer, an utterance of eternal value that exists outside the framework of normal, mundane, historical time. Traditional Muslim exegesis developed an elaborate chronology for the Qur'an, connecting the revelation of each verse to a particular episode in the life of Muhammad—the so-called "occasions of revelation" literature (*asbab al-nuzul*). This literature, which was closely followed by traditional Western scholarship on the Qur'an, generally divided the text into verses considered, on grounds of both style and content, to hail from either the early Meccan, intermediate Meccan, late Meccan, or Medinese phases of Muhammad's career. Similarly, Muslim tradition



preserves accounts of how the revelation came to take the form of a written book. According to this view, the various revelations that were first burned into the memory of their prophet were memorized by his followers; some passages were then written out by different people in the early community; finally, about twenty years after Muhammad's death, the scattered written and unwritten parts of the revelation were collected by an editorial committee and compiled in definitive written form.

The historian who questions the traditional narratives of Muhammad's life, however, is also likely to have difficulty accepting at face value this account of how the Qur'an text coalesced; but if we reject this account, we are left unsure of just what kind of text the Qur'an is and where it came from. Starting from this point, revisionist scholars using literary-critical approaches to the text have in recent years offered alternative theories on the origins and nature of the Qur'an as we now have it. One has suggested that the Qur'an originated as pre-Islamic strophic hymns of Arabian Christian communities, which Muhammad adapted to form the Qur'an. Equally radical is the "late origins" hypothesis first circulated the late 1970s. According to this view, the Qur'an, far from being a product of western Arabia in the early seventh century C.E., actually crystallized slowly within the Muslim community over a period of two hundred years or more and mostly outside of Arabia, perhaps mainly in Iraq. In the opinion of this theory's advocates, the traditional story of the Qur'an's origins as revelations to Muhammad is merely a pious back-projection made by Muslims of later times who wished to root their beliefs and the existence of their community in the religious experience of an earlier prophetic figure.

If true, the "late origins" hypothesis of the Qur'an, in particular, would have devastating implications for the historian interested in reconstructing Muhammad's life or the beliefs of the early community. But the "late origins" hypothesis fails to explain many features of the Qur'an text, analysis of which suggests that in fact the Qur'an



An Early Qur'an leaf, dated to the first century AH, from San'a', Yemen, covering Q. 7:37-44. Characteristic of its early date are the vertical strokes leaning to the right, the diacritical dots in a row, and many letterforms, which have more in common with monumental inscriptions than later cursive Arabic.

did coalesce very early in the history of Muhammad's community—within no more than three decades of Muhammad's death. For example, meticulous study of the text by generations of scholars has failed to turn up any plausible hint of anachronistic references to important events in the life of the later community, which would almost certainly be there had the text crystallized later than the early seventh century C.E. Moreover, some of the Qur'an's vocabulary suggests that the text, or significant parts of it, hailed from western Arabia. So we seem, after all, to be dealing with a Qur'an that is the product of the earliest stages in the life of the community in western Arabia.

This is not to say that we are all the way back to accepting the traditional view of the Qur'an's origins. Although the Qur'an itself claims to be in a "clear Arabic tongue," many passages in it remain far from clear, even in the most basic sense of knowing what the words might have meant in their original context, whatever it was. It may be that the Qur'an includes passages of older texts that have been revised and reused. The markedly different style and content of diverse parts of the Qur'an may be evidence that the text as we now have it is a composite of originally separate texts hailing from different communities of Believers in Arabia. Some recent studies suggest that the Qur'an text is not only aware of, but even in some ways reacting to, the theological debates of Syriac-speaking Christian communities of the Near East. Whether further work on the text will vindicate the close connection of particular passages in the Qur'an with specific episodes in Muhammad's life, as elaborated by both traditional Muslim and traditional Western scholarship, still remains to be seen. What we can say is that the Qur'an text is demonstrably early.

### The Character of the Early Believers' Movement

The fact that the Qur'an text dates to the earliest phase of the movement inaugurated by Muhammad means that the historian can use it

to gain some insight into the beliefs and values of this early community. Later literary sources may then be used, with caution, to elaborate on what these earliest beliefs may have been, but the problem of interpolation and idealization in those later sources makes even their "supporting" role often quite uncertain. It is best, therefore, to stick very closely to what the Qur'an itself says for information.

### Basic Beliefs

What, then, does the Qur'an tell us about Muhammad and his early followers? To start, we notice that the Qur'an addresses overwhelmingly people whom it calls "Believers" (*mu'minun*). In this, it differs from the traditional Muslim narratives and from modern scholarly practice, both of which routinely refer to Muhammad and his followers mainly as "Muslims" (*muslimun*, literally, "those who submit") and refer to his movement as "Islam." This later usage is, however, misleading when applied to the beginnings of the community as reflected in the Qur'an. It is of course true that the words *islam* and *muslim* are found in the Qur'an, and it is also true that these words are sometimes applied in the text to Muhammad and his followers. But those instances are dwarfed in number by cases in which Muhammad and his followers are referred to as *mu'minun*, "Believers"—which occurs almost a thousand times, compared with fewer than seventy-five instances of *muslim*, and so on. Later Muslim tradition, beginning about a century after Muhammad's time, came to emphasize the identity of Muhammad's followers as Muslims and attempted to neutralize the importance of the many passages in which they are called Believers by portraying the two terms as synonymous and interchangeable. But a number of Qur'anic passages make it clear that the words *mu'min* and *muslim*, although evidently related and sometimes applied to one and the same person, cannot be synonyms. For example, Q. 49:14 states, "The bedouins say: 'We Believe' (*aman-na*). Say [to them]: 'You do not Believe; but rather say,



"we submit" (*aslam-na*), for Belief has not yet entered your hearts.'" In this passage, Belief obviously means something different (and better) than "submission" (*islam*); and so we cannot simply equate the Believer with the Muslim, though some Muslims may qualify as Believers. The Qur'an's frequent appeal to the Believers, then—usually in phrases such as "O you who Believe . . ."—forces us to conclude that Muhammad and his early followers thought of themselves above all as being a *community of Believers*, rather than one of Muslims, and referred to themselves as Believers. Moreover, the notion that they thought of themselves as Believers is corroborated by some very early documentary evidence dating from several decades after Muhammad's death. For this reason, I will break with standard scholarly practice and also refer, in these pages, to Muhammad and his early followers as "the community of Believers," or "the Believers' movement." (See "Ecumenism," later in this chapter, for a discussion of the exact early meaning of *muslim*.) For a short while, Muhammad may have called his movement "Hanifism" (*hanifiyya*), presumably in reference to a vague pre-Islamic monotheism, but this usage does not seem to have become widespread.

If Muhammad and his followers thought of themselves first and foremost as Believers, in what did they believe? Above all, Believers were enjoined to recognize the oneness of God. (*Allah* is simply the Arabic word for "God.") The Qur'an tirelessly preaches the message of strict monotheism, exhorting its hearers to be ever mindful of God and obedient to His will. It rails against the sin of polytheism (*shirk*, literally "associating" something with God)—which, Muslim tradition tells us, was the dominant religious outlook in Mecca when Muhammad grew up there. From the Qur'an's or the Believers' perspective, failing to acknowledge the oneness of God, who created all things and gave us life, is the ultimate ingratitude and the essence of unbelief (*kufr*). But the Qur'an's strict monotheism also condemns the Christian doctrine of the Trinity as being incompatible with the idea of God's absolute unity: "Those who say

that God is the third of three, disbelieve; there is no god but the one God . . ." (Q. 5:73).

As we have seen, the idea of monotheism was already well established throughout the Near East, including in Arabia, in Muhammad's day, and it has been plausibly suggested that the Qur'an's frequent invective against "polytheists" may actually be directed at trinitarian Christians and anyone else whom Muhammad considered only lukewarm monotheists. Be that as it may, the Qur'an makes it clear that the most basic requirement for the Believers was uncompromising acknowledgement of God's oneness. And, as we shall see, it was from this most fundamental concept, the idea of God's essential unity, that most other elements of true Belief flowed.

Also important to the Believers was belief in the Last Day or Day of Judgment (*yawm al-din*). Just as God was the creator of the world and of everything in it, and the giver of life, so too will He decree when it will all end—the physical world as we know it, time, everything. The Qur'an provides considerable detail on the Last Day: how it will come on us suddenly and without warning; how just before it the natural world will be in upheaval—mountains flowing like water, the heavens torn open, stars falling; how the dead from all past ages will be brought to life and raised from their graves; how all mankind will be brought before God to face final Judgment; and how we will then all be taken either to a paradise full of delights and ease, or to a hell full of torment and suffering, for eternity. But the Qur'an does not merely describe the coming Judgment for us—above all, it warns us of its approach, enjoining us to prepare ourselves for it by believing truly in God and by living righteously.

From the Qur'an we can also deduce that the Believers accepted the ideas of revelation and prophecy. The Qur'an makes clear that God has revealed His eternal Word to mankind many times, through the intermediacy of a series of messengers (singular, *rasul*) or prophets (singular, *nabi*). (The technical distinction between *rasul* and *nabi* will be discussed more fully later in this chapter.) The Qur'an

offers many stories about, and lessons drawn from, the lives of these messengers and prophets. These include many figures familiar from the Old and New Testament—Adam, Noah, Job, Moses, Abraham, Lot, Zachariah, Jesus, and others—as well as a few otherwise unknown Arabian prophets (Hud, Salih) and, of course, Muhammad himself, to whom the Qur'an was revealed. Indeed, the Qur'an, as the most recent revelation of God's word, obviously supercedes earlier revelations, which were said to have become garbled over time. And the Believers are repeatedly enjoined to refer matters "to God and His messenger" Muhammad. Part of this complex of ideas, too, is the notion of "the book," referring in some cases to the heavenly archetype of God's word, of which the Qur'an is merely an exact transcript, and in other cases apparently to the Qur'an itself or to other, earlier scriptures.

TEXT OF QUR'AN 7 (A'RAF/THE HEIGHTS): 11–18

We created you and gave you form, then we said to the angels: "Prostrate yourselves to Adam!" So they prostrated themselves, except for Iblis—he was not among those who prostrated. /He [God] said, "What prevented you from prostrating yourself when I ordered you [to do so]?" He replied, "I am better than he; you created me of fire, but you created him of clay." / [God] said, "Then descend from it [the garden]; you are not entitled to be arrogant in it. Get out, you are surely among the humiliated." /He [Iblis] said, "Grant me a reprieve until the day they are resurrected." / [God] said, "You are reprieved." / [Iblis] said, "Indeed, I shall lie in wait for them on your straight path because you tempted me. /Then I will come at them from before them and from behind them and from their right and their left; you will not find most of them grateful [to you]." / [God] said, "Get out of it, despised and banished! Verily, I will fill hell with all of those who follow you."

Believers are also enjoined to believe in God's angels—creatures that assist God in various ways, most importantly by carrying God's word to His prophets at the moment of revelation, by serving as "orderlies" during the Last Judgment, and in various ways intervening in mundane affairs when it is God's will that they do so. Satan (also called Iblis) is, in Qur'anic doctrine, merely a fallen angel who always accompanies man and tries to seduce him into sin (Q. 7: 11–22).

*Piety and Ritual*

Such, then, were the basic concepts that shaped the Believers' movement: one God, the Last Judgment, God's messengers, the book, and the angels. But the Qur'an makes it clear that to be a true Believer mere intellectual acceptance of these ideas was not sufficient; one also had to live piously. According to the Qur'an, our status as creatures of God demands pious obedience to His word; we should constantly remember God and humble ourselves before Him in prayer. But we should also behave humbly toward other people, who are equally God's creatures; the Qur'an's warnings against self-importance (*takabur*) and its injunctions to help the less fortunate are an important part of its vision of piety, one that projects a strongly egalitarian message that we see reflected in various rituals. Moreover, the Believers seem to have felt that they lived in a sinful age and feared that their salvation would be at stake unless they lived a more righteous life.

What, then, was the piety of the Believers' movement like? First and foremost, the Qur'an makes clear that Believers must engage in regular prayer. This includes both informal prayers requesting God's assistance or invoking His favor (called *du'ā'*), and the more formalized ritual prayer (*salat*), performed at particular times of the day and in a particular way, and preferably in the company of other Believers who, whatever their social station, stood shoulder to shoulder

## TEXT OF QUR'AN 11 (HUD/THE PROPHET HUD): 114

And perform ritual prayer at the two ends of the day, and part of the night; indeed, good deeds cancel evil deeds. That is a reminder for those who remember.

to submit themselves as equals before God. References to prayer, injunctions to perform it faithfully, and instructions on when and how to do it are so frequent in the Qur'an, that, as one observer has put it, "prayer is . . . in the Qur'anic vision of the world, the fundamental fabric of religious behaviour."

The Qur'an specifically enjoins prayer before dawn, before sunset, during the night, and during the day (see, for example, Q. 11:114, 17:78–79, 20:130, and 76:25–26). One reference to the "middle prayer" (Q. 2:238) suggests that three daily prayers may have been the standard pattern among the Believers at some point in Muhammad's life, but the Qur'an's references to times when prayer should be performed use varied vocabulary and are not clear in their temporal implications and may reflect different moments in an evolving situation. The systematization of ritual prayers into five clearly defined times—a systematization that occurred in the century after Muhammad's death—does not seem yet to have taken place (at least the Qur'an provides no compelling evidence for such systematization), but the early Believers were in general expected to remain mindful of God throughout the day. Regardless of how many prayers the early Believers performed daily, however, we can glean what it was like from the vocabulary the Qur'an uses in association with ritual prayer. It clearly involved standing, bowing, prostrating oneself, sitting, and the mention of God's name, although the exact mechanics and sequence of the ritual cannot be recovered from the Qur'an alone. Furthermore, the Qur'an refers to the Believers being called to ritual prayer before-

hand and to the need for them to perform ablutions with water before praying. It is, then, absolutely clear that the Believers of Muhammad's day took part in regular ritual prayers that bore strong similarities to later "classical Islamic" prayer, even if the full details of earliest ritual practice remain unclear today.

Another practice that the Qur'an describes as vital for Believers is charity toward the less fortunate in life—another way of bringing home the idea that all humans are fundamentally equal and that whatever differences of fortune we may enjoy are only contingent. This is expressed unequivocally in many Qur'anic passages: ". . . but the righteous person is whoever Believes in God and the Last Day, in the angels and the book and the prophets; who gives [his] wealth, despite [his] love for it, to relatives, orphans, the destitute, the traveler, the beggar, and for [the manumission of ?] slaves; and who performs the ritual prayer and pays the *zakat* . . ." (Q. 2:177).

Later Muslim tradition refers to such charity under the terms *zakat* or *sadaqa*, usually rendered "almsgiving"; these two terms are closely associated with prayer in numerous Qur'anic passages, and later Muslim tradition considers them, like prayer, to be one of the "pillars of the faith" that define a Believer. Recent research suggests, however, that the original Qur'anic meaning of *zakat* and *sadaqa* was not almsgiving, but rather a fine or payment made by someone who was guilty of some kind of sin, in exchange for which Muhammad would pray in order that they might be purified of their sin and that their other affairs might prosper. Indeed, even in the verse just cited, one notes that payment of *zakat* is mentioned *after* prayer, suggesting that it was something different than the giving of wealth to the poor (what we usually mean by almsgiving), which is treated in the verse *before* mention of prayer. This understanding of *zakat* or *sadaqa* as a payment for atonement or purification of sins is clearest in the following verses: "Others have confessed their sins . . . /Take from their property *sadaqa* to cleanse them, and purify [*tuzakki*] them thereby, and pray for them, indeed your prayer is a consolation to them. God is

all-hearing, all-knowing" (Q. 9:102–103; the verb "to purify" is from the same Arabic root as *zakat*). The fact that Believers were sometimes required to make such purification payments, however, underscores how the community was, in principle, focused on maintaining its inner purity, on being as much as possible a community that lived strictly in righteousness, so as to set themselves apart from the sinful world around them and thus to attain salvation in the afterlife. As time went on, it seems that membership criteria became more relaxed, so that anyone who uttered the basic statement of faith would be included, but in doing so they at least theoretically made themselves subject to high standards of conduct.

The Believers were also required, if they were physically able, to fast during daytime hours in the ninth month of the Muslim calendar, Ramadan, and at other times as expiation for sins (Q. 2:183–185). Fasting, particularly at '*ashura*' (the tenth day of the first month), had of course long been practiced by Jews and Christians in the Near East; it may also have been current among adherents of pagan cults in Arabia and was a practice that continued well into Islamic times. It is not clear, however, in what measure this earlier fasting tradition contributed to the Believers' practices. However, in this season the Ramadan fast kept all Believers especially mindful of God, at least in theory, and was a way of binding the Believers together as a community through collective ritual activity. Eventually, the Ramadan fast came to be emphasized and the '*ashura*' fast was relegated to voluntary status.

The Qur'an also makes reference to pilgrimage rituals that the Believers are enjoined to perform. These include both the '*umra* or "lesser pilgrimage," performed about the Ka'ba in Mecca, and the *hajj* or "greater pilgrimage," performed on specified days in the month of Dhu l-hijja in 'Arafat and adjacent places a few miles from Mecca (Q. 2:196–200, 5:94–97.) Pilgrimage to the Ka'ba, including circumambulation and other rituals, had been practiced at the Ka'ba

TEXT OF QUR'AN 2 (BAQARA/THE COW): 183–185

O you who Believe, fasting is prescribed for you, as it was for those who came before you, that you should be God-fearing [184]. For a specified number of days. But whoever of you is sick, or traveling, [prescribed are] a number of other days. And upon those who are able to do it [but do not], redemption is feeding a poor person; but whoever does a good deed of his own accord, that is better for him, and that you fast is better for you, if you could know. [185] The month of Ramadan, in which the Qur'an was sent down as guidance to the people, and clear evidence of the guidance and the commandments: Whoever of you is present in the month shall fast for it, but whoever is sick or traveling [shall fast] a number of other days. God wishes to make it easy for you, he does not wish to make it difficult. So complete the number [of days] and magnify God because He guided you; perhaps you may be thankful.

in pre-Islamic times, but forms of pilgrimage were also a well-established practice in late antique Judaism and Christianity, and these may also have formed part of the background against which we should view the pilgrimage practices of the early Believers. Yet it seems likely that the pilgrimage was enjoined as a duty on the Believers only in the later years of Muhammad's career in Medina, for the simple reason that Muhammad and his followers in Medina did not have access to Mecca as long as the two towns were locked in open hostilities. It is noteworthy that the *suras* of the Qur'an that are generally dated to the Meccan phase of Muhammad's career make no mention of pilgrimage. We see Muhammad forcing the issue of pilgrimage, however, in the Hudaibiya expedition of 6/628, when he and a large group of followers marched, en masse but unarmed, toward Mecca intending to perform the pilgrimage. The Believers

were turned back by Quraysh but not before concluding an agreement that gave them permission to make a pilgrimage to Mecca in the following year. Of course, the pre-Islamic pilgrimage rites at the Ka'ba, which were pagan rituals, had to be reinterpreted in light of the Believers' monotheistic views. Muslim tradition claims that the Ka'ba rites were originally established by Abraham, the first monotheist, but subsequently became corrupted by pagan practices. The Believers' pilgrimage was thus portrayed as the restoration of an originally monotheistic practice. The story of Muhammad's occupation of Mecca in 8/630, as we have seen, relates how Muhammad purified the Ka'ba enclosure of the pagan idols that had been introduced into it.

The likelihood that the Believers saw themselves as living in a world beset with sin, from which they wished to differentiate themselves, also finds expression in other, more routine practices that are singled out in the Qur'an for emulation or prohibition. Believers are urged to dress modestly (Q. 24:30–31)—the implication that this was in contrast to those around them is obvious—and are forbidden from eating pork, carrion, and blood (Q. 2:173). They are instructed not to come to prayers while intoxicated (Q. 4:43). General moral guidelines are also frequently encountered. For example, Q. 60:12 prohibits, in a few lines, a whole series of gravely sinful practices that were apparently all too common: associating something with God (*shirk*), theft, adultery, infanticide, bearing false witness, and disobeying the prophet. Passages such as these suggest, again, that the Believers were concerned with what they saw as the rampant sinfulness of the world around them and wished to live by a higher standard in their own behavior.

The piety that is enjoined on Believers by the Qur'an, then, required them constantly to demonstrate their mindfulness of God: through regular prayer, the doing of good works, proper deportment, and so on. The Qur'an's emphasis on the importance of righteous

TEXT OF QUR'AN 60 (MUMTAHANA/THE WOMAN  
EXAMINED): 12

O prophet, when Believing women come to you, pledging that they will not associate anything with God, nor steal, nor commit adultery, nor kill their children, nor bring slanders they have fabricated out of thin air [lit. "between their hands and feet"], nor disobey you in any customary thing, then accept what they pledge and ask God to forgive them, for God is forgiving, merciful.

behavior is so great that we are fully justified in characterizing the Believers' movement as being not only a strictly monotheistic movement, but also a strictly pietistic one. In this respect, the Believers' movement can be seen as a continuation of the pietistic tendency found in Near Eastern religions in the late antique period. Although it makes sense to view the Believers' movement in this general context, it is of course true that the pietism of the Believers' movement, as we reconstruct it from the Qur'an, represents a unique manifestation of this broad trend toward piety, tailored to the Arabian cultural environment. Even though the Believers perceived the world around them to be full of iniquity, the pietism of their movement lacks, at least as a central element, the kind of ascetic orientation that was so prominent in the late antique Christian tradition, especially in Syria and Egypt. True, modesty and humility are enjoined as part of the Qur'an's egalitarian ethos, and wealth is occasionally deemed a snare for the unwary. One passage even hints that children and family may be distractions from the duty of devoting one's thoughts to God: "wealth and sons are the ornaments of the nearer life; but enduring works of righteousness are better before your Lord . . ." (Q. 18:46). But these sentiments are more than counterbalanced by many verses noting that the good things of this life are the result of God's grace



## TEXT OF QUR'AN 16 (NAHL/THE BEE): 114–115

So eat of that which God has provided you with as lawful and good, and be thankful for God's bounty, if you serve Him [115]. He has forbidden to you only carrion, and blood, and flesh of the pig, and that which has been consecrated to other than God; but whoever is forced [to eat of these] unwillingly and without going to excess, indeed God is forgiving and merciful.

and are to be accepted as favors he bestows on the Believers: "O you who Believe, do not forbid the good things that God has allowed you, nor go to extremes, for God does not love those who go to extremes" (Q. 5:87). It seems, then, that the iniquity the Believers perceived around them was a purely human or social phenomenon, which in no way implied that the blessings of the natural world were anything other than that—God's blessings. Enjoyment of them, and of many of the joys of society as well, are permissible to Believers, as long as they are enjoyed in moderation—at least, they are not prohibited. Marriage and the raising of children are assumed to be the norm and are not generally presented as incompatible with a righteous life. In short, the Believers' piety is a piety that is meant to function in, and to be part of, the world and of everyday life—not divorced from it in ascetic denial, as in the late antique Christian tradition. In this respect, the Believers' piety resembled more closely the commonsense notions of righteousness that were found in late antique Judaism.

*Ecumenism*

The Qur'anic evidence suggests that the early Believers' movement was centered on the ideas of monotheism, preparing for the Last Day, belief in prophecy and revealed scripture, and observance of

righteous behavior, including frequent prayer, expiation for sins committed, periodic fasting, and a charitable and humble demeanor toward others. All of these ideas and practices were quite well known in the Near East by the seventh century, although of course in the Qur'an they found a unique formulation (and one in a new literary idiom, Arabic). The earliest Believers thought of themselves as constituting a separate group or community of righteous, God-fearing monotheists, separate in their strict observance of righteousness from those around them—whether polytheists or imperfectly rigorous, or sinful, monotheists—who did not conform to their strict code.

On the other hand, there is no reason to think that the Believers viewed themselves as constituting a new or separate religious confession (for which the Qur'anic term seems to be *milla*, Q. 2:120). Indeed, some passages make it clear that Muhammad's message was the same as that brought by earlier apostles: "Say: I am no innovator among the apostles; and I do not know what will become of me or of you. I merely follow what is revealed to me; I am only a clear warner" (Q. 46:9). At this early stage in the history of the Believers' movement, then, it seems that Jews or Christians who were sufficiently pious could, if they wished, have participated in it because they recognized God's oneness already. Or, to put it the other way around, some of the early Believers were Christians or Jews—although surely not all were. The reason for this "confessionally open" or ecumenical quality was simply that the basic ideas of the Believers and their insistence on observance of strict piety were in no way antithetical to the beliefs and practices of some Christians and Jews. Indeed, the Qur'an itself sometimes notes a certain parallelism between the Believers and the established monotheistic faiths (often lumped together by the Qur'an in the term "people of the book," *ahl al-kitab*; Q. 48:29).

Closer examination of the Qur'an reveals a number of passages indicating that some Christians and Jews could belong to the Believers'



movement—not simply by virtue of their being Christians or Jews, but because they were inclined to righteousness. For example, Q. 3:199 states, “There are among the people of the book those who Believe in God and what was sent down to you and was sent down to them . . .” Other verses, such as Q. 3:113–116, lay this out in greater detail. These passages and other like them suggest that some peoples of the book—Christians and Jews—were considered Believers. The line separating Believers from unbelievers did not, then, coincide simply with the boundaries of the peoples of the book. Rather, it cut across those communities, depending on their commitment to God and to observance of His law, so that some of them were to be considered Believers, while others were not.

Believers, then, whatever religious confession they may have belonged to—whether (non-trinitarian) Christians, Jews, or what we might call “Qur’anic monotheists,” recent converts from paganism—were expected to live strictly by the law that God had revealed to their communities. Jews should obey the laws of the Torah; Christians those of the Gospels; and those who were not already members

TEXT OF QUR’AN 3 (AL ‘IMRAN/THE FAMILY OF ‘IMRAN):

113–116

... Among the people of the book are an upright company; they recite God’s verses through the night while prostrating themselves. They Believe in God and the Last Day, and enjoin kindness and forbid abominations, and hasten to do good things. These are among the righteous ones. For no good thing that they do will be passed over without thanks; for God knows the pious. But those who disbelieve, neither their wealth nor their children will be of any help to them against God. Those are the companions of hellfire; they shall be in it forever.

of one of the preexisting monotheist communities should obey the injunctions of the Qur’an. The general term for these new Qur’anic monotheists was *muslim*, but here we must pause for a moment to discuss in more detail the exact meaning of the words *muslim* and *islam* in the Qur’an.

The notion that the early community of Believers of Muhammad’s day included pious Christians and Jews is, of course, very different from what the traditional Muslim sources of later times tell us. In later Islamic tradition, right down to the present, “Islam” refers to a particular religion, distinct from Christianity, Judaism, and others, and “Muslim” refers to an adherent of this religion. These terms are indeed derived from the Qur’an, but their meaning, as used by later tradition, has undergone a subtle change. When, for example, one reads the Qur’anic verse “Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, rather he was a *muslim hanif* and not one of the *mushrikun*” (Q. 3:67; the Arabic text reads *hanifan musliman*), it becomes clear that *muslim* in the Qur’an must mean something other than what later (and present) usage means by “Muslim”: for one thing, *muslim* in the sentence is used as an adjective modifying the noun *hanif* (the meaning of which itself remains in dispute—perhaps a pre-Islamic term for “monotheist”). The basic sense of *muslim* is “one who submits” to God or “one who obeys” God’s injunctions and will for mankind, and of course also recognizes God’s oneness. In other words, *muslim* in Qur’anic usage means, essentially, a committed monotheist, and *islam* means committed monotheism in the sense of submitting oneself to God’s will. This is why Abraham can be considered, in this Qur’anic verse, a *hanif muslim*, a “committed, monotheistic *hanif*.” As used in the Qur’an, then, *islam* and *muslim* do not yet have the sense of confessional distinctness we now associate with “Islam” and “Muslim”; they meant something broader and more inclusive and were sometimes even applied to some Christians and Jews, who were, after all, also monotheists (Q. 3:52, 3:83, and 29:46). But, we can readily

## TEXT OF QUR'AN 29 ('ANKABUT/THE SPIDER): 46

Do not debate with the people of the book except by what is best (i.e., with courtesy?)—except those of them who do evil. Say, "We believe in what was revealed to us and revealed to you. Our God and your God is one, and to him we submit."

understand how these Qur'anic words, *islam* and *muslim*, could subsequently have acquired their more restrictive, confessional meanings as a new faith distinct from Christianity and Judaism. Those Believers who were Christians or Jews could always be identified as such, but a Believer who had formerly been a polytheist could no longer be called *mushrik*, so the only term that was applicable to her, once she had embraced monotheism and observed Qur'anic law, was *muslim*. And, with time, the term *muslim* came to be used exclusively for these "new monotheist" Believers who followed Qur'anic law.

Besides the Qur'an, there is additional evidence for the idea that some Jews, at least, were members of Muhammad's community. Although we have until now eschewed reliance on the traditional Muslim sources, which are later than the Qur'anic era, the agreement between Muhammad and the people of Yathrib described earlier, known as the *umma* document, seems to be of virtually documentary quality. Although preserved only in collections of later date, its text is so different in content and style from everything else in those collections, and so evidently archaic in character, that all students of early Islam, even the most skeptical, accept it as authentic and of virtually documentary value.

One passage in the *umma* document reads, "The Jews of the tribe of 'Awf are a people [*umma*] with the Believers; the Jews have their *din* [law?] and the *muslimun* have their *din*. [This applies to] their

clients [*mawali*] and to themselves, excepting anyone who acts wrongfully and acts treacherously, for he only slays himself and the people of his house" [Serjeant transl. Para C2a, with modifications]. In other words, this and many other passages in the *umma* document seem clearly to confirm the idea that some of Medina's Jews made an agreement with Muhammad in which they were recognized as being part of the *umma* or community of Believers. The term *muslim* in this passage also probably refers to those Believers who followed Qur'anic law (rather than the Jews, who as the document says, had their own law.)

The *umma* document raises many perplexing questions in view of the traditional sources' description of Muhammad's relations with the Jews of Medina. For example, whereas the traditional sources describe in great detail his conflicts with the three main Jewish clans of Medina—the Qaynuqa', Nadir, and Qurayza—none of these clans is even mentioned in the *umma* document. How are we to interpret their omission from the document? Is the *umma* document's silence on them evidence that the document was only drawn up late in Muhammad's life, after these three Jewish tribes had already been vanquished? Or were there once clauses (or other documents) that were simply lost or that were dropped as irrelevant after these tribes were no longer present in Medina? Or should we interpret this silence as evidence that the stories about Muhammad's clashes with the Jews of Medina are greatly exaggerated (or perhaps invented completely) by later Muslim tradition—perhaps as part of the project of depicting Muhammad as a true prophet, which involved overcoming the stubborn resistance of those around him? These and many other questions remain to be resolved by future scholarship. We can note here, however, that later Muslim tradition mentions a number of Believers of Muhammad's day who were of Jewish origin—that is, they are described as "converts" from Judaism to Islam. We may wish to ask whether in fact these figures were converts; might they have been simply Jews

who, without renouncing their Judaism, joined the Believers' movement, and so were subsequently dubbed "converts" by later traditionalists for whom the categories of Believer and Jew had in the meantime become mutually exclusive?

Recognizing the confessionally ecumenical character of the early Believers' movement as one that was open to piety-minded and God-fearing monotheists, of whatever confession, requires us to revise our perceptions of what may have happened in various episodes during the life of Muhammad (to the extent that we wish to accept the reconstructions of his life as related by the traditional sources). For example, parts of the traditional story of Muhammad's life, involving his clashes with certain groups of Jews, have led some scholars to see Muhammad's preaching and movement as in some way specifically anti-Jewish. This is especially true of the story of the ugly fate of the clan of Qurayza, members of which were executed or enslaved following the battle of the Trench. But in view of the inclusion of some Jews in the Believers' movement, we must conclude that the clashes with other Jews or groups of Jews were the result of particular attitudes or political actions on their part, such as a refusal to accept Muhammad's leadership or prophecy. They cannot be taken as evidence of a general hostility to Judaism in the Believers' movement, any more than the execution or punishment of certain of Muhammad's persecutors from Quraysh should lead us to conclude that he was anti-Quraysh.

#### *Muhammad's Status in the Community*

Traditional narratives describe how Muhammad was invited to Yathrib/Medina to serve as arbiter of disputes between feuding tribes there, particularly the Aws and Khazraj and their Jewish allies. The selection as arbiter of an outsider—one not belonging to any of the feuding parties—who was recognized as being of upright character was not unusual in the Arabian context. The numerous

Qur'anic verses that enjoin hearers to "obey God and His apostle," or merely to obey the apostle, presumably reflect his role as arbiter. There is no reason to think that Yathrib's important Jewish tribes were at the start any less willing to accept him as arbiter, and as noted above, the Jews were included as part of the new, unified community in the *umma* document. Muhammad's role as political leader, then, probably posed little problem for Jews or Christians of Muhammad's day.

More difficult to assess, however, is the status of Muhammad himself in the religious ideology of the Believers' movement. The Believers, as we have seen, belonged to a strongly monotheistic, intensely pietistic, and ecumenical or confessionally open religious movement that enjoined people who were not already monotheists to recognize God's oneness and enjoined all monotheists to live in strict observance of the law that God had repeatedly revealed to mankind—whether in the form of the Torah, the Gospels, or the Qur'an. But what did the Believers perceive Muhammad's role to be, and in particular, how might this understanding have affected the willingness of Jews or Christians who heard Muhammad's message to join the Believers' movement?

Once again, our only sure source of evidence for approaching this question is the Qur'an, which offers many specific passages about Muhammad and his religious status. A number of different words are applied to Muhammad in the Qur'an; he is called, above all, messenger or apostle (*rasul*), that is, God's messenger, and prophet (*nabi*). Whether these two terms are to be considered synonyms is not clear, but in at least one verse (Q: 33:40), where he is called "apostle of God and seal of the prophets," both terms are applied to him simultaneously. In Q: 7:157, they seem to be essentially interchangeable: "... Those who follow the messenger, the *ummi* prophet..." He is called the prophet who is foretold in the Torah and Gospels (Q: 7:94). He is also called a bearer of good tidings (*mubashshir*), a warner (*nadhir*)—particularly a warner of the coming

Last Judgment—and occasionally, a witness (*shahid*) or inviter/summoner (*da'i*), one who invites others to believe. He is described frequently as the recipient of inspiration or revelation (*wahy*), charged with bringing to those around him what was revealed to him. The process of inspiration or revelation itself is called “sending down” (usually *tanzil*) and is clearly identified as having divine origin (for example, see Q. 11:14). The substance of what was sent down is described variously as the Qur'an (Q. 6:19, 12:3, and 42:7), the book (29:45, 3:79, 6:89, 18:27, 35:31, and 57:26), wisdom (3:79, 6:89, 57:26, and 17:39), prophecy (3:79, 6:89, and 57:26), knowledge of hidden things (3:44, 12:102, and 11:49), and knowledge that God is one (Q. 11:14 and 18:110).

Muhammad thus claimed to be not only inspired in some way, but truly a prophet bringing a revealed scripture, just as earlier prophets had done. He was even called “seal of the prophets,” that is, the final one in a long series of recipients of God's revelation. Those who followed Muhammad were expected to believe not only in God and the Last Day, but also in Muhammad's claim to prophecy and in the validity or authenticity of what was revealed to him (Q. 5:81). How contemporary Jews and Christians would have received the claim that Muhammad was a prophet bearing divine revelation is harder to assess.

As we have seen, the notion that prophecy was still alive in the world seems to have survived in various parts of the Near East in the centuries before the rise of Islam, although we still know far too little about it. Such ideas seem to have been widespread in Arabia; later Muslim tradition remembers a number of Arabian “false prophets” who emerged in widely scattered parts of the peninsula in Muhammad's time. The concept of prophecy that we find in the Qur'an, including the notions of a series of prophets and of a “seal of the prophets,” is similar to that found in some Jewish-Christian sects of the early centuries C.E., from which it spread to other groups, such as the Manicheans. Muhammad's

prophetic activity may thus have seemed quite unexceptional to people who shared such ongoing expectations of periodic outbursts of prophetic activity. Yet, certain aspects of his teaching would doubtless have been more difficult for Christians and Jews to accept. The small number of Qur'anic verses that explicitly attack the idea of the Trinity (as defaulting from strict monotheism) would have posed an insurmountable obstacle for a committed trinitarian Christian; and some Jews may have balked at the idea that Muhammad, whom they knew and could see and hear, was to be put on the same plane as their revered patriarchs of old—Abraham, Moses, David, and so on.

Yet, when considering this question we must remember that it is much easier for us, thinking about these events almost fourteen centuries later, to be aware of the full implications of such contradictions and tensions. We must remind ourselves that in Muhammad's day, most people who joined his Believers' movement were probably illiterate; and even if they could read, they did not have a copy of the Qur'an to examine, as those parts that were known in all likelihood were known mostly from recitation of memorized passages. They did not have the advantage that we have today, of being able to comb patiently through the Qur'an text in its entirety in search of passages that might be particularly problematic. Indeed, it is fair to assume that most of the early Believers probably knew only the most basic and general religious ideas we today can find articulated in some detail in the Qur'an. That God was one, that the Last Day was a fearful reality to come (and perhaps to come soon), that one should live righteously and with much prayer, and that Muhammad was the man who, as God's apostle or prophet, was guiding them in these beliefs—that was probably all that was known to most people of Muhammad's day, even to many dedicated participants in the Believers' movement itself. And these notions would have posed few problems for Christians or Jews.

### *Apocalypticism and Eschatological Orientation*

Another feature of the early Believers' movement, and one central to its evident dynamism and ability to mobilize its participants, was its eschatological orientation. We have already seen that one of the central ideas that Believers held was the reality of the Last Judgment. Some passages in the Qur'an suggest that this was more than simply the idea that the Judgment (also called "the Last Day" or simply "the Hour") would happen in some indeterminate, distant future. Rather, certain passages suggest that the community of Believers expected the Last Day to begin soon—or, perhaps, believed that the "beginning of the End" was already upon them. This kind of apocalyptic outlook is typically associated with movements that perceive great sinfulness in the world and that draw a sharp division between good and evil—which, as we have seen, the Believers did. They commonly articulate these ideas, moreover, in what one scholar of apocalyptic thought has described as "easily visualized scenes and strongly-drawn characters," such as we find plentifully in the Qur'an.

The idea that the Last Day was near is mentioned explicitly in several verses: "People ask you about the Hour. Say: Knowledge of it is only with God, but what will make you realize that the Hour is near? (Q. 33:63); "Truly we have warned you of a punishment near, a day on which a man shall see what his hand has done before, and [on which] the unbeliever says, 'I wish I were dead!'" (Q. 78:40). Moreover, the incessant warnings to repent and be pious in preparation for the rigors of the Last Judgment, which are such a pronounced feature of many of the shorter chapters of the Qur'an, imply very strongly that the Hour is perceived to be nigh. But other passages state explicitly that, although near, the exact time of the Judgment is known only to God (Q. 7:187).

As for the nature of the Hour itself, the Qur'an, as noted previously, describes it in often terrifying detail. Its arrival will be signaled by numerous portents that display unequivocally the transcendent

might of God and the transient quality of everything in His created world, the permanence of which we take for granted. So, on that day, when the trumpet is sounded, the stars will fall and grow dark, the heavens will be torn open, the mountains will simply vanish, flowing away like sand or water. The seas will boil and burst forth. There will be deafening noise as the physical world comes apart. People will be in complete confusion; no one will ask after his own loved ones, newborns will be neglected by their mothers, children will become grey-haired like the elderly. The graves of the deceased will be opened and the dead raised up, and they will march forth to face the Judgment of their Lord. The angels will come down from on high, bearing God's throne. Then the Judgment itself will begin; the righteous will feel no fear and their faces will shine with joy, but the wicked and unbelievers will feel complete terror and despair and will faint or be convulsed with weeping. Each person's deeds will be assessed and weighed in the balance, and each person rewarded or punished accordingly. The unbelievers will be rounded up and dragged through fire on their faces, on their way to the eternal torments of a fiery hell, while the righteous will go to a garden full of greenery, shade, rushing brooks, delicious food and drink, and beautiful companions.

The Qur'an's unmistakable emphasis on the Last Judgment—a concept that is closely intertwined with the notions of God's oneness and His role as creator of all things—reflects the Believers' conviction that the Hour was imminent, which was the motive force behind the Believers' intense focus on piety and living righteously. Convinced that the world around them was mired in sin and corruption, they felt an urgent need to ensure their own salvation by living in strict accordance with the revealed law, as the Judgment could dawn at any moment. Here one senses in the Qur'an a slight tension, however, between the idea of the individual's ultimate responsibility for his belief and piety, which is emphasized repeatedly, and the notion that the individual can best attain a righteous life in a community of other

Believers—that is, a hint that one's salvation was enhanced by being a communal enterprise. A few passages in the *Qur'an* suggest that, at the Last Judgment, religious communities may be judged collectively (Q. 16:84–89). Hence the individual's fate is partly decided by his membership in a Believing community or in a sinful one—such as the poor souls who on the Day of Judgment will be led down to hell by Pharaoh, the *Qur'anic* archetype of the sinful, oppressive leader (cf. Q. 11:98–99).

Some question whether the Believers really did focus on the coming End, pointing to the *Qur'an's* extensive passages that regulate such matters as inheritance, the punishment of torts, and the like. In their view, these passages seem to reflect a concern for the here and now, not for the afterlife. But the two sets of concerns are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, one who believes that the End is nigh and that one's salvation in the afterlife depends on the righteous conduct of his community would, for this very reason, pay meticulous attention to the details of social conduct in the community. The very prevalence of these “here and now” rulings in the *Qur'an*, in other words, may be merely another reflection of an end-time mentality among the early Believers.

For the early Believers, then, the terrifying expectation of a Judgment soon to come made them intent on constructing a community of the saved, dedicated to the rigorous observance of God's law as revealed to His prophets. It was a community that followed closely the leadership of the latest prophet, Muhammad; they believed that his guidance, more than any other thing, would ensure their individual and collective salvation when the End suddenly came.

But this is not all. We noted earlier that traditional Muslim exegesis of the *Qur'an*, and many contemporary studies of it as well, divide the *Qur'an* text broadly into “Meccan” and “Medinese” verses, according to when in Muhammad's life a particular verse is thought to have been revealed. If we choose to accept this division, an interesting fact emerges: The overwhelming majority of the in-

tensely apocalyptic verses are clustered in Meccan verses. The Medinese verses, by comparison, seem much less explicitly absorbed with warning of the Last Judgment and do not indulge in such potent apocalyptic imagery as do the Meccan verses; on the other hand, the Medinese verses contain the majority of the *Qur'an's* “legal” material, regulations and rulings on social and personal issues presumably intended as guidelines for the Believers' new “community of the saved.” Scholars sometimes suggest that this reflects the fact that, in Medina, the community had grown larger and hence needed social regulation, whereas in Mecca the religious message had been imperative. It seems just as likely, however, that the early Believers were convinced that, by establishing their community in Medina, they were ushering in the beginning of a new era of righteousness, and hence that they were actually witnessing the first events of the End itself. It is possible, then, to conjecture that they thought that the events leading to the Last Judgment were actually beginning to unfold before their very eyes. We have noted that some passages in the *Qur'an* express an apocalyptic eschatology and speak of the many portents that would herald its arrival; but other verses describe those telltale portents as already happening: “Are they waiting for anything but the Hour that will come to them suddenly? For its portents have already come . . .” (Q. 47:18); “The Hour has drawn nigh, the moon is split in two!” (Q. 54:1). Still other passages portray the Believers as already beginning to realize the events of the Judgment, which included, it seems, the vanquishing of sinful communities by the righteous and the transfer of sovereignty to the Believers. As Q. 10:13–14 states: “We destroyed generations before you when they acted oppressively while their apostles brought them proofs, yet they did not Believe. Thus do we repay a guilty people. Then we made you successors in the land after them, so we may see how you behave.”

As a result of this process, the Believers would literally inherit the Earth from the sinful, just as the followers of earlier prophets had



done: in Q. 14:13–14, for example, Moses is told how God will drive Pharaoh and the evildoers out of their lands and “settle you in the land after them.” A Qur’anic passage that exegetes traditionally connect with the battle of the Trench, after which Muhammad’s followers occupied the properties of the Qurayza Jews, provides an example contemporary with the prophet’s time: “God repulsed those who had disbelieved in their rage; they attained no good. God was sufficient for the Believers in combat: God is strong and mighty./And those people of the book who had backed them [i.e., they backed the unbelievers], he brought them down from their fortresses, and cast terror in their hearts; some you kill, and some you take captive./And he made you inherit their land and homes and property, and land you have never trodden. God is powerful in all things” (Q. 33:25–27). The notion that God’s reward and punishment affects not only one’s fate in the afterlife but also one’s fate here on Earth could suggest that this change of fortune for the Believers might be part of the dawning Judgment scenario.

For those Believers who fully accepted Muhammad’s mission, this complex of ideas, which combined the displacement of unbelieving opponents from their property with God’s plan for the End of Days, must have been a powerful motivator to engage in positive action—military if necessary—to vanquish unbelief in the world and to establish what they saw as a God-guided, righteous order on Earth. This brings us to the final feature of the early Believers’ movement we wish to consider: its militancy.

### Militancy

As the preceding remarks suggest, another characteristic of the early Believers’ movement of which the Qur’an provides evidence was its militancy or activist orientation, for which the Qur’anic term is *jihad*. In the Qur’an, *jihad* seems to be a voluntary, individual commitment to work “in the cause of God,” (literally, “in the path of

God,” *fi sabil allah*), not yet the classic doctrine of religious warfare that would crystallize in later Islamic law (by the eighth century C.E.). It was not enough for the Believers to be merely pious in their own lives and complacent about the world; they were also to strive actively to confront, and if possible to root out, impiety in the world around them. Q. 4:95, for example, reads, “Those Believers who remain passive [literally, “who sit”], other than those who are injured, are not on the same plane with those who strive in the way of God with their property and their selves.” This “striving” (*jihad*) sometimes meant working tirelessly to realize righteousness in his or her own life, but it also meant that the Believer should try to spread knowledge of what God has revealed (Q. 3:187), and should actively “command what is good and forbid what is evil, and Believe . . . in God” (Q. 3:110). Other Qur’anic verses, however, take a much more aggressive stance. Q. 9:73 commands the Believers to “strive against the unbelievers and hypocrites and to treat them roughly.” In another, Muhammad is actually instructed to incite the Believers to fight against unbelief (Q. 8:65) and even to “make great slaughter in the earth” in the struggle against unbelievers (Q. 8:67). Nor are the prophet and the Believers to seek pardon for the *mushrikun*. Their sin of denying God’s oneness was so abominable in God’s sight that showing mercy to them was not possible: “It is not for the prophet and those who Believe to ask forgiveness for the *mushrikun*, even if they are close relatives . . .” (Q. 9:113).

It is a distinctive feature of Qur’anic discourse, however, that many of its most uncompromising indictments of unbelief and impious behavior are conjoined with mitigating clauses that temper their apparent harshness and provide an opening for a more flexible approach. For example, verses 5 and 6 of the Qur’an’s ninth chapter, *Surat al-tawba*, which is generally one of the most uncompromising and militant in the whole Qur’an, begins with passages ordering the Believers to capture or kill unbelievers by every means, but it then pulls back rather abruptly and commands that unbelievers should be

allowed to go unharmed if they repent or if they ask the Believers for protection. This use of "escape clauses" is characteristic of the Qur'an and seems to be its way of providing for the flexibility that is needed in practical situations in life. On the one hand, Believers should try to coerce unbelievers into believing when possible, but, on the other, one should not be fanatical and must make allowances for the realities of a given situation and for the behavior of the individual unbeliever. It seems to be advising its hearers that leniency may, in certain cases, be more effective than brute force and that a range of policies is most effective in pursuing the one goal of universal recognition of God.

The Qur'an thus displays a considerable variety of opinions on the question of activism or militancy, ranging from an almost pacifistic

TEXT OF QUR'AN 9 (TAWBA/REPENTANCE): 1-6

[1] A disavowal (*bara'a*) from God and His apostle [addressed] to those *mushrikun* with whom you had concluded an agreement. (2) Go about in the land for four months, but know that you do not weaken God, rather God disgraces the ungrateful (*kafirun*). (3) An announcement from God and His Apostle to the people on the day of the greater pilgrimage: God disavows the *mushrikun*, and his apostle [likewise], . . . (4) except those *mushrikun* with whom you concluded an agreement, and who have not failed you in anything and have not aided anyone against you; fulfill your agreement with them to this term: verily, God loves the [God-] fearing. (5) [But] when the sacred months are over, then kill the *mushrikun* wherever you find them. Seize them, besiege them, ambush them in every way—but if they repent, and do the prayer, and bring *zakat*, let them go their way. God is forgiving, merciful. (6) And if one of the *mushrikun* asks you for protection, grant him protection so that he may hear God's word, then deliver him to his refuge—that is because they are a people who do not know.

quietism, in which only verbal confrontation is allowed, through permission to fight in self-defense, to full authorization to take an aggressive stance in which unbelievers are not only to be resisted but actually sought out and forced to submit. Muslim tradition has construed this range as evidence of a smooth progression occurring over Muhammad's lifetime and corresponding to the gradually increasing strength and security of the Believers' community. Recent work, however, has shown that these different injunctions may reflect the divergent attitudes of different subgroups that coexisted simultaneously within the early community of Believers. Although, as noted above, the classic doctrine of *jihad* was not yet formulated, it also seems clear that by the end of Muhammad's life the dominant attitude in the community had become the legitimation of, and the exhortation to pursue, ideological war. Unbelievers were now to be sought out and fought in order to make them submit to the new religious ideology of the Believers' movement—even though the other, less aggressive, positions were still held by some. It is important to remind ourselves here, however, that the Qur'an speaks of fighting unbelievers, not Christians or Jews, who were recognized as monotheists—*ahl al-kitab*—and at least some of whom, as we have seen, were even numbered among the Believers.

By the end of Muhammad's life, then, the Believers were to be not merely a pietist movement with an emphasis on ethics and devotion to God, but a movement of militant piety, bent on aggressively searching out and destroying what they considered practices odious to God (especially polytheism) and intent on spreading rigorous observance of God's injunctions. Although the Qur'an never uses the phrase, this sounds like a program aimed at establishing "God's kingdom on Earth," that is, a political order (or at least a society) informed by the pious precepts enjoined in the Qur'an and one that should supplant the sinful political order of the Byzantines and the Sasanians. There are some grounds for believing that another expression of this activist orientation was the notion of *hijra*. In the

traditional sources, *hijra* is interpreted mildly to mean "emigration" (used, as we have seen, particularly to refer to Muhammad's move from Mecca to Medina). But closer examination of the uses of the word *hijra* in the Qur'an (and, as we shall see, in some later sources as well) suggests that *hijra* had a broader range of meanings. For one thing, there is some evidence that *hijra* required leaving a nomadic life. In this sense, the Believers' movement was one based in towns and settlements, for it was only there that the full ritual demands of the faith could be properly observed. This may be why the Believers, when they spread outside of Arabia after the prophet's death, seem to have become known to the peoples they contacted as *muhajirun* (Syriac *mhaggraye*; Greek *agarenoi*). On another level, *hijra* meant taking refuge with someone in order to escape oppression—hence the traditional sources' references to some early Believers' *hijra* to Abyssinia. In a related sense, there are also Qur'anic references to those who "make *hijra* to God and His apostle" to escape from a sinful environment (Q. 4:100). But those passages that speak of "making *hijra* in the way of God" imply that *hijra* is roughly equivalent to *jihad*, "striving," which is also done "in the way of God," and several passages associate *hijra* with leaving home for the purpose of fighting (Q. 3:195, 22:58). Indeed, *hijra* in this larger sense may have served as the decisive marker of full membership into the community of Believers, much as baptism does for Christians: "Verily, those who have Believed and made *hijra* and strive [*yujahidun*] in God's way with their property and themselves, and those who gave asylum and aided [them]—those shall be mutual helpers of one another. But those who have Believed and [yet] have not made *hijra*, they have no share in the mutual assistance [of the others], until they make *hijra* . . ." (Q. 8:72).

Muhammad was an inspired visionary who lived in western Arabia in the early seventh century and who claimed to be a prophet re-

ceiving revelations from God. He inaugurated a pietistic religious movement that we can best call, following its adherents' own usage, the "Believers' movement." The testimony of the Qur'an reveals the basic tenet of this movement to have been insistence on the oneness of God and absolute rejection of polytheism, or even of a lukewarm commitment to monotheism. Because many, if not most, of the people of the Near East were already ostensibly monotheists, the original Believers' movement can best be characterized as a monotheistic reform movement, rather than as a new and distinct religious confession. Nevertheless, the Believers seem to have had a clear sense of being a unique community founded on observance of God's revelations and unified, perhaps, by the notion of *hijra*.

The Believers also were convinced of the imminence of the Last Judgment, and, feeling themselves surrounded by corruption and sin, they strove to form themselves into a righteous community so as to attain salvation on Judgment Day. Hence the movement was one of intense piety, demanding of all Believers strict observance of God's revealed law. As this movement was at the start not yet a "religion" in the sense of a distinct confession, members of established monotheistic faiths could join it without necessarily giving up their identities as Jews or Christians; "New monotheists" who had just given up paganism were expected to observe Qur'anic law, but Believing Jews could follow the injunctions of the Torah and Christians the injunctions of the Gospels. (As we have seen, some Christian groups especially engaged in stringent, even ascetic, religious observance on the eve of Islam.) Toward the end of Muhammad's life, the piety of the Believers' movement became increasingly militant, so that the Believers more and more interceded in the sinful world around them, engaging in *jihad* in an effort to establish a righteous order and to spread what they considered to be true Belief. This activist or militant quality eventually came to include confronting unbelievers militarily—fighting or striving "in

the path of God" (*fi sabil allah*, as the Qur'an states)—in order to vanquish unbelief. The Believers may even have felt that they were witnessing, in the military successes that are traditionally reported to have come in Muhammad's last years, the beginnings of the great events leading up to the Last Day; for among these events would be their victory and the establishment of their hegemony, replacing the sinful polities around them. Thus they would inherit the Earth and establish in it a righteous, God-guided community that could lead humanity to salvation when the Judgment scenario reached its culmination. This is not entirely an unfamiliar program, for there is something in the Believers' aim of bringing all of mankind to salvation that is reminiscent of the Byzantines' objectives of bringing everyone in the world to what they considered the true faith; and, in both cases, this objective was to be achieved either by mission or, if necessary, by war.

Having examined what the early Believers' movement was, it is also important to consider here what it was not. It is often alleged—or assumed—that Muhammad and the Believers were motivated by a "nationalist" or nativist impetus as "Arabs," but this identity category did not yet exist, at least in a political sense, in Muhammad's day, so it is misleading to conceive of the Believers as constituting an "Arab movement." The Qur'an makes it clear that its message was directed to people who conceived of themselves as Believers, but being a Believer is not related to ethnicity. The term *a'rab* (usually meaning "nomads") is used only a few times in the Qur'an, and mostly seems to have pejorative overtones. The Qur'an does refer to itself a few times as an "Arabic Qur'an," but this seems to be a linguistic designation, perhaps an indication of a certain form of the spoken language we today call Arabic.

Nor was the Believers' movement primarily an effort to improve social conditions. It is true that the Qur'an often speaks of the need to have pity on the poor, widows, and orphans, among others, but these social actions are enjoined because compassion for others is

one of the duties that come with true Belief in God and His oneness. The social dimensions of the message are undeniable and significant, but they are incidental to the central notions of the Qur'an, which are religious: Belief in the one God and righteous behavior as proof of obedience to God's will.



## The Expansion of the Community of Believers

Following the death of Muhammad in 11/632, the Believers quickly (if, as we shall see, somewhat contentiously) resolved the question of leadership of the community and then embarked on a process of rapid political expansion, usually called the “Islamic conquests” or (less accurately) the “Arab conquests.” This expansion lasted, with various interruptions, for roughly a century and carried the hegemony of the community of Believers as far as Spain and India—truly an astonishing feat. This chapter will attempt to explain how this expansion began, to establish the character of the expansion, and to trace the main developments that took place, especially in its crucial first three decades, until about the year 35/656. But first, we must once again consider for a moment the sources historians can use to reconstruct this period in the history of the community.

### Sources

The Qur’an continues to be an important source for the history of the community in the years immediately after Muhammad’s death,

at least in an indirect way. Even if we consider the Qur’an to be a product entirely of Muhammad’s lifetime, we can assume that its guiding ideals continued to shape the outlook and actions of the Believers in the first years following Muhammad’s death. If we take the alternative view that the Qur’an text was still crystallizing during these first few decades after Muhammad’s death, we may take the text to reflect more directly the differing attitudes of various groups within the community on crucial issues confronting the Believers at this time.

The Qur’an, however, ostensibly provides no direct information on the expansion movement as it played out after Muhammad’s death. For this reason, the historian who wishes to examine the history of the early decades of the expansion must take into account the voluminous body of traditional narratives that the later Muslim community collected on this subject. These narratives are, like the narratives about the life of Muhammad, very problematic for the historian and must be used with great care. Like the narratives about Muhammad, the conquest narratives contain many interpolations of issues of concern only to the later community; in particular, they tend to portray events in an idealized way as evidence of God’s favor for the Believers and probably overemphasize the amount of centralized control exercised by the leadership in Medina. But recent study of these traditional narrative sources suggests that we can indeed draw from them a basic skeleton of the course of historical events, both for the later years of Muhammad’s career in Medina and for the expansion movement, even though their interpretation and evaluation of those events is sometimes strongly colored by later, rather than contemporary, concerns.

Furthermore, with the first decades of the expansion, we begin to encounter, for the first time in the history of the community of Believers, some truly documentary evidence about it. This comes in the form of the first known coins issued by the Believers and in contemporary inscriptions or papyri written by them, or about them. It is

true that there are very few documentary sources for the early years of the expansion, but that simply makes their testimony all the more precious to us, for whatever we wish to say by way of reconstructing an historical picture of the Believers' movement must fit with the evidence these documents provide. They are to the historian of this period what the fleeting glimpses of a few fixed stars are to the navigator attempting to make his or her way under cloudy skies: without them, the navigator works mainly by guesswork.

Almost as important as the first true documents are some very early literary sources that describe the Believers but that were written by people who were not themselves members of the Believers' movement. Of particular importance are writings from various Near Eastern Christian communities—in Syriac, Greek, Armenian, and Coptic—and a few Jewish sources. As with the later Muslim sources, we must scrutinize and evaluate these non-Muslim literary sources very carefully to be sure we understand exactly when they were first written, how accurately they have been transmitted to us, and especially, what biases and preconceptions (contemporary or later) may have shaped their description of the Believers and their actions. Nonetheless, they provide us with a welcome alternative perspective which, taken in concert with other sources both literary and documentary, helps us to achieve a more historically grounded understanding of the period. We shall draw on some of these sources below, particularly when discussing the character of the expansion.

### The Community in the Last Years of Muhammad's Life

The rapid expansion of the community of Believers after Muhammad's death has its roots in the events of the last years of his life. As we saw earlier, Muhammad and his followers began to meet with significant political success following his conclusion of the Hudaibiya agreement with Quraysh (6/628). It is reported that the terms of

this agreement initially distressed some of Muhammad's more ardent followers. They were perhaps opposed to the very idea of making any kind of "deal" with the still-hostile Meccan *mushrikun*. They were offended particularly by the refusal of Quraysh to allow Muhammad to be called "Apostle of God" in the document or to allow the Believers to enter the sacred area of Mecca that year. Despite their misgivings, however, Muhammad and his followers were able, shortly thereafter, to conquer the major northern oasis of Khaybar, to launch numerous other raids to the north, and to bring many hitherto unaligned groups of pastoral nomads into alliance with Medina. All of these activities solidified Muhammad's military and political situation; in particular, the conquest of Khaybar, long an ally of Mecca against him, allowed Muhammad to make his final assault on Mecca without fear that Medina might be attacked by hostile forces coming from his rear. We noted earlier how the increasingly secure position of the community of Believers in Medina may have been the reason the emigrants to Abyssinia returned to the Hijaz at this time. Another reflection of Muhammad's improved position can be seen in the fact that a number of key members of Quraysh joined his movement in the years between the Hudaibiya agreement and the conquest of Mecca. Two who did were Khalid ibn al-Walid and 'Amr ibn al-'As. Khalid, a member of the powerful Quraysh clan of Makhzum, was an outstanding military commander. His skill had once worked against Muhammad at the battle of Uhud, but he would henceforth lead many campaigns for Muhammad and, after Muhammad's death, would play a major role in the expansion of the community of Believers. 'Amr ibn al-'As, having declared his allegiance to Muhammad, was sent to act as Muhammad's agent or governor in distant 'Uman, in eastern Arabia, and would also emerge in the years following Muhammad's death as an important political and military figure.

With the conquest of Mecca in 8/630, and that of the town of Ta'if shortly thereafter, Muhammad's growing power was so evident that



many groups in Arabia sent representatives to him to tender their submission. This took place especially during the so-called "year of delegations," the penultimate year of Muhammad's life (9/April 630–April 631). As Muhammad's position solidified following the conquest of Mecca, he no longer needed to make alliances with pagan groups for reasons of political expediency, as he had during his precarious early years in Medina. The Qur'an (9:1–6) refers both to the existence of earlier treaties with "associators"/*mushrikun*, and to a change of policy that barred such alliances in the future; one phrase states, "when the sacred months are over, then kill the *mushrikun* wherever you find them." (See the Sidebar on page 84, "Text of Qur'an 9 (Tawba/Repentance): 1–6.") Henceforth, then, *mushrikun* were to be barred from participation in the community, which becomes now more integrally focused on establishing itself as a group separated by its belief and its righteousness from the sinful world around it. It existed now in a state of perpetual war with the *mushrikun*, who are to be pursued and forced to recognize God's oneness. The many tribal delegations who are said to have come to Muhammad during his last years became not simply allies of the new community of Believers, but—in order to be allies—full members of it, and thus on whom were incumbent the duties of prayer and of making tax payments (or purification payments, to atone for earlier sinfulness). Allies were now required to toe the line in ideological and financial terms, and payment of a tax by all members of the community would henceforth be an important token of their commitment to it.

In its early days, the community of Believers in Medina was still small; people still continued to belong to their traditional tribal and lineage groups but were now contracted to cooperate with one another in new ways. This must have created many tensions and rivalries that, for want of other institutions, Muhammad himself had to defuse personally. In doing so he relied on the backing of close personal supporters to do his bidding—in particular on Abu Bakr and

ʿUmar ibn al-Khattab, who seem to have been Muhammad's main advisers, and to whom Muhammad had tied himself by marrying their daughters ʿA'isha and Hafsa. By the final years of Muhammad's life, however, the community of Believers had grown in size and complexity. It now embraced a large number of formerly independent settlements and towns, including Medina, Mecca, Ta'if, Khaybar, the villages of Wadi al-Qura, and many others. It also included numerous groups of pastoral nomads that lived in the vicinity of Medina and Mecca, such as Sulaym, Hawazin, Muzayna, and Khuza'a. Some of these settlements or groups were tribute-paying former monotheists whom Muhammad had subjected, such as the Jewish residents of Khaybar or Wadi al-Qura, and some lived far from Medina.

As the community grew in size and complexity, Muhammad increasingly found it necessary to delegate important tasks of governance to trusted subordinates, who carried out raiding parties against recalcitrant tribes, or destroyed the shrines of pagan idols, or served as the effective governors over various settlements and groups. Many of these subordinates were trusted early converts, Emigrants or Helpers who had shown their loyalty many times over. However, Muhammad did not spurn the services of former *mushrikun*, even those who had joined his movement quite late, particularly if they possessed skills that were needed to manage the growing community. The careers of the Meccans Khalid ibn al-Walid and ʿAmr ibn al-ʿAs, mentioned briefly above, are cases in point. Even more striking, Muhammad allowed a number of Qurayshites who only submitted at the last minute, on his occupation of Mecca, to hold important posts in his administration—indeed, he even made special bonus payments to some of them, presumably to bind them firmly to the community. However, this special treatment for some of his former enemies—referred to in the Qur'an as "those whose hearts are reconciled" (*al-mu'allafa qulubuhum*) (Q. 9:60)—distressed some of Muhammad's early followers. They disliked seeing the likes of Abu Sufyan—chief of the Umayya clan of Quraysh and longtime leader of Mecca's

opposition to Muhammad—and his sons Yazid and Mu'awiya showered with favors and high positions, while they continued to serve in the rank and file of the movement. But this policy of "reconciling hearts" gave such people, who with their important contacts and managerial talents would have been dangerous opponents, a stake in the success of the Believers' movement and thus helped ensure their loyalty to it. By making such concessions, Muhammad seems to show a pragmatic outlook that enabled him, while still adhering to the basic ideals he advanced, to make his movement practical in the world. In the long term, Muhammad's policy contributed greatly to the success of the Believers' movement.

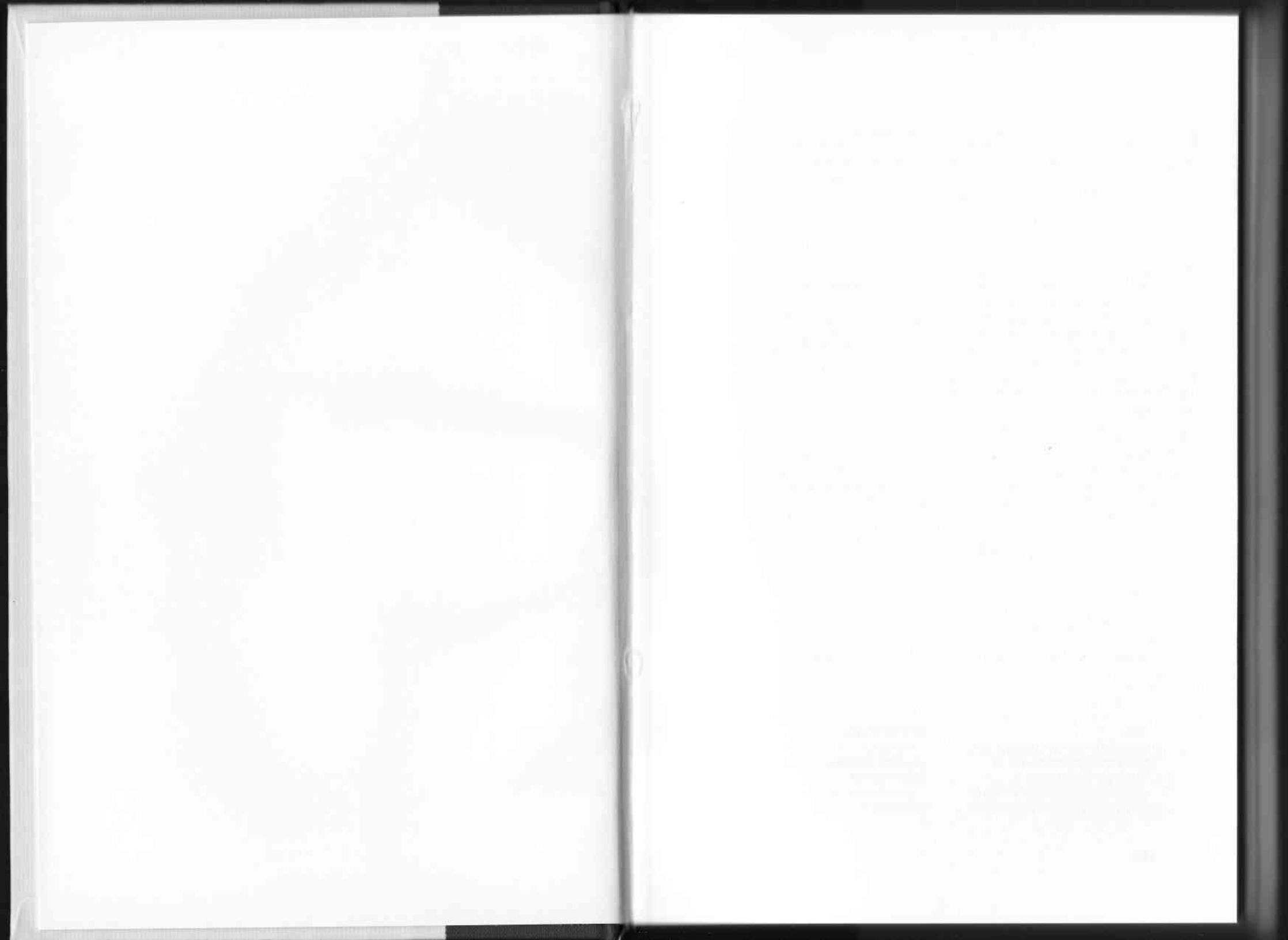
By the time of Muhammad's death, then, the community of Believers was expanding its control and influence rapidly from its original base in western Arabia. In some respects the exact extent of its control at this time remains unclear, but there can be no doubt that it was much larger than even a few years before. Outposts of Believers are reported in Yemen (in South Arabia), in 'Uman (in eastern Arabia), and throughout much of northern Arabia as well. Muhammad seems to have been particularly interested in expanding to the north; we have seen how, already in the years before the conquest of Mecca, he had dispatched a raid (or several raids?) to the distant oasis town of Dumat al-Jandal (modern al-Jawf), roughly 600 km (about 375 mi) north of Medina. After the occupation of Mecca, this northward outlook seems to have intensified even more, including at least two campaigns into the southern fringes of Byzantine territory in Syria (today's southern Jordan). What was behind this apparent concern for the north? It may be that geographical Syria, with its large cities and fertile farmland that were well known to Quraysh through their trading activities, appealed to some in Muhammad's retinue for commercial and other economic reasons. Some Qurayshites apparently owned property in Syria before Muhammad's prophetic activity began; a few cases we know include property owned by the Quraysh chief Abu Sufyan near Damascus and by 'Amr ibn al-'As in

southern Palestine. Moreover, if the Believers thought that they were indeed destined to inherit the Earth, there could be no better place to begin than in fertile Syria.

Another possible reason for this attraction northward may inhere in the eschatological tone of the Believers' movement. Convinced that the Last Judgment was soon to come, some Believers may have felt an urgent need to try to secure control of the city of Jerusalem, which has been called "the apocalyptic city *par excellence*." Many apocalyptic scenarios circulating among Jews and Christians in late antiquity described the Judgment as taking place in Jerusalem, and although this notion is not expressed in the Qur'an, it soon became part of Islamic eschatological views. The Believers may have felt that, because they were in the process of constructing the righteous "community of the saved," they should establish their presence in Jerusalem as soon as possible.

### Succession to Muhammad and the *Ridda* Wars

The death of Muhammad in 11/632 posed a serious challenge to the Believers who were left behind. Some of his followers—including, reportedly, 'Umar—did not wish to believe that he was actually dead. (This reluctance may have been rooted in their conviction that the Last Judgment would come during Muhammad's lifetime.) Muhammad's leadership of the Believers had been intensely personal. Although he had come to rely on key supporters for advice and to carry out various tasks, there was no clear-cut "chain of command" that made it obvious who was to take charge on his demise. Moreover—although Muslim tradition is contradictory on this question—Muhammad seems to have made neither an unambiguous designation of a successor, nor suggested a way of choosing one, a matter on which the Qur'an also offers no unequivocal guidance. During his life, he had kept under control—sometimes only with



## 5



## The Emergence of Islam

We have seen how Muhammad preached certain religious ideas that gave rise in western Arabia to an apocalyptically oriented pietistic movement which, following the name the members of the movement applied to themselves, we have termed the “Believers’ movement.”

We also examined the basic concepts of this movement, particularly its desire to establish a “community of the righteous” who could attain salvation on the Last Day and to spread the hegemony of this community as far as possible in order to realize a righteous political order—that is, a polity that was guided by the observance of God’s revealed law—in preparation for the anticipated Last Day. We traced the community’s rapid spread through much of the Near East during the seventh century C.E., led by a ruling elite of Arabian origin, and considered the relationship between this new community and the indigenous populations (mostly Christian, Jewish, or Zoroastrian) that it encountered and came to rule during its expansion. We also saw how disagreements over the question of leadership within the ruling elite resulted in two extended periods of brutal civil strife, with permanent repercussions.

In this chapter we shall see how, during the late first century AH/seventh century C.E. and early second century AH/eighth century

C.E., the Believers’ movement evolved into the religion we now know as Islam, through a process of refinement and redefinition of its basic concepts. Islam, as we understand it today, is thus the direct continuation or outgrowth of the Believers’ movement rooted in the preachings of Muhammad and the actions of his early followers, even though it would be historically inaccurate to call the early Believers’ movement “Islam.”

The process by which Islam crystallized from the matrix of the Believers’ movement following the civil wars was partially the result of intentional efforts made by the ruling Umayyad dynasty and its supporters and partially the result of a sea change in the perceptions within the community generally on matters of identity. For this reason, it seems to have been a transformation that took hold gradually and lasted for a considerable time—several decades at least, perhaps in some arenas as long as a century. While many aspects of this process of transformation remain murky, several dimensions of it are visible enough to be examined in more detail. These will form the main rubrics of this chapter. In general, however, we can say that the Believers, led by the Umayyad dynasty, particularly the *amir al-mu’minin* ‘Abd al-Malik and his entourage, seem to have embarked on a renewed search for legitimacy, seeking ways to establish for themselves and for the world at large their right to claim political supremacy and their right to direct a regime based on what they understood to be God’s word.

### The Umayyad Restoration and Return to the Imperial Agenda

During the twelve years of the Second Civil War, neither the Umayyads nor any of the other contenders for leadership of the Believers’ movement had enjoyed the calm or security needed to concentrate their energies on any of the Believers’ fundamental concerns, other

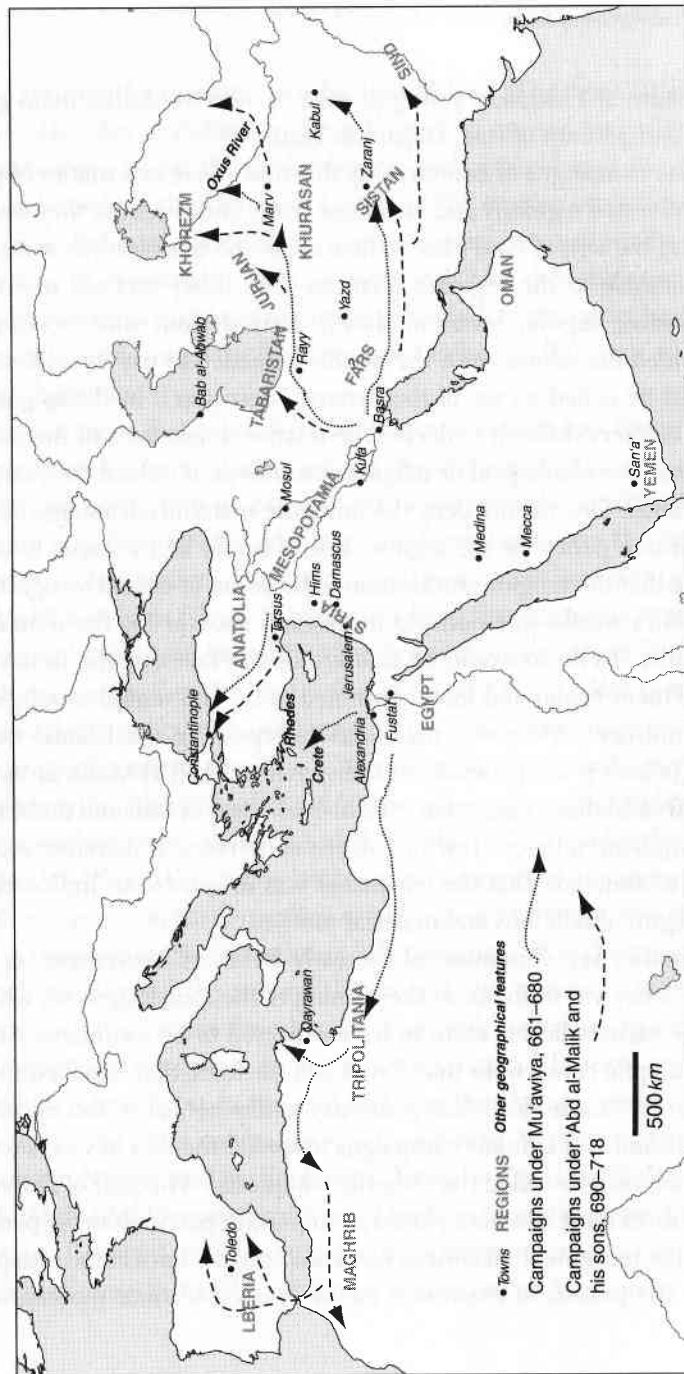
than settling the question of who should lead. The final defeat of 'Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr in 73/autumn 692 marked the effective reunification, under the leadership of 'Abd al-Malik and the Marwanid branch of the Umayyad family, of the empire established by the early Believers. With that victory—indeed, even somewhat before it as its inevitability became clear and 'Abd al-Malik's position became secure—he began to pursue policies demonstrating his concern with resuming what he considered to be the Believers' fundamental agenda.

One activity that 'Abd al-Malik resumed, which had long been interrupted by the civil war, was the dispatching of raids and campaigns of conquest in an effort to further expand the borders of the empire and the writ of God's law. The Byzantines were the first to receive such attention. During the civil war, as we have seen, 'Abd al-Malik had been forced to buy peace from the Byzantine emperor on several occasions, including a treaty concluded as late as 70/689–690; but even before the final defeat of Ibn al-Zubayr, 'Abd al-Malik resumed the policy of launching regular raids during the summer deep into Byzantine territory. This policy was henceforth pursued vigorously by 'Abd al-Malik and his successors as *amir al-mu'minin*, particularly his sons al-Walid (ruled 86–96/705–715) and Sulayman (ruled 96–99/715–717). The latter, in fact, organized a massive land and sea assault on the Byzantine capital, Constantinople, that lasted more than a year (98–99/summer 717–summer 718) and almost captured the city. But the restored Umayyads also pursued a policy of expanding the empire in other areas as well, including significant campaigns in Tabaristan, Jurjan, Sijistan (Sistan), Khorezm, and beyond the Oxus River in the east and into the Iberian peninsula in the west. The latter region was largely subdued by the commander, Musa ibn Nusayr, and his lieutenant, Tariq ibn Ziyad, in 92–94/711–713. 'Abd al-Malik even dispatched a force to Sind (the Indus Valley, modern Pakistan), which resulted in the establishment of a colony of Believers there in 93/711, under the command of Muhammad ibn

al-Qasim al-Thaqafi, a young protégé of 'Abd al-Malik's main general and governor of Iraq, Hajjaj ibn Yusuf.

The campaigns of conquest, by this time, were as a matter of policy mounted regularly and on a large scale, both because they would spread the writ of God's law to new areas and because they were indispensable to the regime's finances: The booty and tax revenues (including regular levies of slaves) derived from such conquests provided the regime with the wealth it needed to pay its soldiers. It might be called a case of the dynasty "doing well by doing good," and it is very difficult to decide the relative importance of the material and the ideological or religious incentives, if indeed they can be separated. One cannot deny the immense material advantages of the expansion policy for the regime. But, it would be too facile to conclude that the religious motivation—the desire to extend recognition of God's word—was nothing more than a cover for the dynasty's cupidity. To do so would be to overlook the fact that the Believers' movement began and long continued to be one rooted in religious commitment. Moreover, there survive reports in the Islamic tradition (which is not generally well disposed to 'Abd al-Malik or to the Umayyads) that suggest that 'Abd al-Malik was devout and dedicated to acquiring religious learning in his early years. It therefore seems best to conclude that the expansion was driven by an indissoluble amalgam of religious and material motives.

Another key dimension of the early Believers' movement, as we have seen, was its focus on the coming of the Last Judgment, which many early Believers seem to have expected to be imminent. Such apocalyptic convictions may have been the force that impelled some Believers to abandon their usual day-to-day concerns and enlist in the distant and arduous campaigns to spread the writ of God's word that are usually called the "Islamic conquests." The pull of material incentives must also have played an important part in drawing people into the movement, of course, but would mainly have come into play after the process of expansion had developed obvious momentum;



so it seems likely that the ideological motive—fear of the impending Last Judgment—was paramount in the movement's early years and only tapered off slowly. Indeed, as we have seen, the movement's very success in the mundane world probably heightened the religious fervor of some, who perceived in it a sign of God's favor for the Believers and an affirmation of their religious claims. The divisions of the civil wars may, likewise, have been viewed by some contemporaries as the tribulations (*fitan*) that were expected to usher in the Judgment, which may be why in later Islamic tradition the Qur'anic word *fitna* is used to refer to the civil wars. (Another reason was that the civil wars were seen, retrospectively, as occasions when some Believers had succumbed to the temptation or seduction—also called *fitna*—of worldly power.)

Once his position as *amir al-mu'minin* was secure, 'Abd al-Malik seems also to have wanted to remind the Believers of the reality, and perhaps the imminence, of the Last Judgment. He may even have wanted to advance for himself the claim to being that final, just ruler in whose day the Judgment would begin and who would deliver to God sovereignty over the world. After all, by resuming annual attacks on the Byzantines, he had again embarked on an active struggle against the unbelievers, as the final ruler was supposed to do. His desire to honor this scenario may have been what led him to order the construction of one of the most magnificent works of early Islamic architecture, the sumptuous building in Jerusalem usually called the "Dome of the Rock."

The Dome of the Rock has been the subject of extensive debate among scholars who wish to recover its original purpose and meaning. Some have argued that it was built by 'Abd al-Malik during the Second Civil War, when Mecca was controlled by his rival 'Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr, in order to provide an alternative destination for pilgrims. Others have argued that its construction should be seen as

Map 6. Later campaigns of expansion





The Dome of the Rock. 'Abd al-Malik had this splendid monument built on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem—site of the Jews' Second Temple, destroyed centuries before by the Romans—in the 690s C.E. The building's extensive interior inscriptions are noteworthy for their anti-trinitarian emphasis; its octagonal plan suggests a commemorative building.

a “victory monument”—a statement of religious domination directed toward Christians (and, to a lesser extent, toward Jews), visible proof that the Believers were “here to stay” in the city that was most central to the other two faiths.

The Dome of the Rock poses numerous interpretive puzzles. It is not a mosque. It is constructed on the octagonal plan of a late antique Christian (and earlier pagan) martyrium—a design that was well known in the Byzantine architecture of the Near East. Yet the building was clearly not intended to be a Christian monument, because its interior is decorated with mosaics bearing lengthy passages and paraphrases from the Qur'an that reject the idea of the Trinity (about which we shall have more to say presently). Moreover, it was



Umm Qays. This town in northern Jordan, overlooking the Sea of Galilee, is the site of the late antique city of Gadara. It includes this octagonal martyrium, the plan of which resembles that used for the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, less than 100 km (62 mi) away.

constructed on Mount Moriah, the site of the Jewish Second Temple, where no Christian monument would have been; in the Byzantine period, as we have seen, the Christian authorities of Jerusalem had refused to construct any religious buildings on the Temple Mount and had ordered that the site be used as a dumping ground for trash. Nor can the Dome of the Rock, despite its location, be understood as an attempt actually to rebuild the Jewish temple; the description of the temple was well known from the Torah and bore little formal resemblance to a late antique martyrium.

It seems likely that 'Abd al-Malik, or his advisers, chose the martyrium plan because they knew that a building in that form would be immediately understood by anyone who saw it as a building

having *religious* meaning. But what kind of religious meaning? It is possible that an assertion of religious supremacy was indeed involved. But recent research on the Dome and associated buildings suggests that it may also have been intended to symbolize or refer to paradise and resurrection, particularly as depicted in the Qur'an and in earlier late antique iconography. Jerusalem, we must recall, bears a very special relationship to paradise in Jewish, Christian, and later Islamic tradition, for they all consider Jerusalem—particularly Mount Moriah—to be the central locality in which the events of the Last Judgment will take place. It therefore seems plausible to suggest that the Dome of the Rock and attendant buildings may have been constructed to provide a suitably magnificent setting for the events of the Judgment—particularly, to be the locale in which 'Abd al-Malik (or one of his successors), as leaders of the righteous and God-fearing empire of the Believers, would hand over to God the symbols of sovereignty at the moment the Judgment was to begin. 'Abd al-Malik's magnificent monument, then, stands as testimony to the continuing force of the apocalyptic impetus of the early Believers' movement.

'Abd al-Malik thus resumed the basic agenda of the Believers' movement, interrupted by the civil wars: to spread the domain of God's kingdom by establishing God's law. His decree, issued shortly after the Second Civil War had been concluded, that all pigs in Syria and Mesopotamia be killed, seems to be an aspect of this policy. In this and other ways, such as building the Dome of the Rock, he was helping to prepare his community for the coming Last Judgment. After twelve years of civil war, however, he was doubtless keenly aware that he needed to do something more: he needed to find ways to unify the empire and the community of Believers morally, to refocus the Believers on the central goals of the mission that Muhammad had set them on, and to establish the legitimacy of his rule and that of the Umayyad family. We can see several of his policies as measures contributing to these broad goals of reunification and rededication to the Believers' original ideals. But with these policies came a subtle,

but fundamental, redefinition of the movement itself, one with which we still live today, and it is to this that we must now turn.

### The Redefinition of Key Terms

'Abd al-Malik seems to have encouraged the Arabian Believers to redefine themselves, and the Believers' movement, in a manner that was less ecumenical or confessional and open than it had been originally. The category of "Believer," which hitherto had included righteous monotheists of several confessions, came to be increasingly limited to those who followed Qur'anic law. A boundary began to be drawn between Qur'anic Believers and those righteous Christians and Jews who had formerly belonged to the Believers' movement, by redefining certain key terms that had been current in the community since the time of Muhammad—in particular, the words *mu'min* ("Believer") and *muslim*.

As we have seen, when the first generation of Believers came out of Arabia, sources tell us that they used two terms to refer to themselves: *mu'minun* (Believers) and *muhajirun*. The latter term (which, as we have seen, shows up in Greek and Syriac cognates) was a designation for those Believers who were militarily active and had made religiously motivated emigration, *hijra*, from Arabia. But as years passed, the term *muhajirun* eventually fell out of use. Why this happened is not clear. Perhaps it was because in the central areas of the empire, at least—Arabia, Syria, Iraq, and Egypt—the conquests were now over and the whole country was under the Believers' control, so one could not do *hijra* any longer, because *hijra* had the sense not just of emigration, but of emigration from an unbelieving society to a place held by Believers. Alternatively the term *muhajirun* may have been abandoned because one was now dealing not with the emigrants themselves but with the children or grandchildren of the original emigrants from Arabia or with local people who had no connection with Arabia

at all but who had decided to follow the Believers in observing Qur'anic law. The only Qur'anic term that existed for these people was *muslim*, meaning "one who submits himself to God's ordinances" because he recognized God's oneness. In the Qur'an *muslim* basically means "monotheist," and it could therefore be applied also to Christians, Jews, and other monotheists. But, unlike the Arabian monotheists who followed Qur'anic law, Christians and Jews could also still be referred to as Christians or Jews. So gradually, the Qur'anic term *muslim* underwent a kind of shrinkage, so that it applied now only to those monotheists who followed Qur'anic law and no longer applied to Jews and Christians, the adherents of those earlier forms of God's revealed law, the *tawrat* (Torah) and *injl* (Gospel). In other words, the old Qur'anic term *muslim* acquired at last the meaning it retains until today, meaning a member of a religious confession that reveres the Qur'an, recognizes Muhammad as its prophet, and is distinct from other monotheists—a Muslim. At the same time, *mu'min* was taken to apply to *all* of those who followed Qur'anic law (not, as earlier, only to those who lived righteously), so that it became effectively synonymous with *muslim*.

In the present state of our knowledge, we can only speculate about why this shift in the identity of the Believers occurred. Perhaps this "hardening" of boundaries, which resulted in a clear-cut distinction between Muslims (that is, erstwhile Qur'anic Believers) and Christians or Jews (that is, former Believers who had observed Christian or Jewish laws), was a reaction against specific aspects of Christian or Jewish doctrine and the Christians' or Jews' unwillingness to relinquish those doctrinal obstacles—in particular, perhaps, the Christians' persistence in embracing the doctrine of the Trinity or both the Christians' and Jews' unwillingness to accept Muhammad's status as prophet and source of revelation. 'Abd al-Malik and his entourage may gradually have come to the conclusion that earlier expectations that Christians and Jews would abandon these beliefs were unrealistic.

### Emphasis on Muhammad and the Qur'an

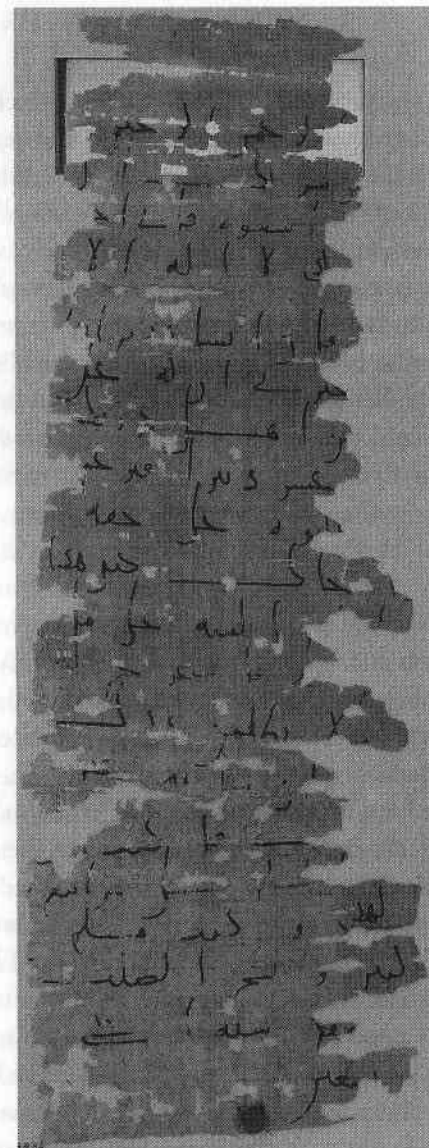
The central component of this rethinking of the Believers' identity involved an increased emphasis on the significance to the Believers of Muhammad and the Qur'an, and in this process 'Abd al-Malik seems to have played a decisive role. The earliest Believers knew from the Qur'an that God's word had been revealed numerous times in history to various prophets, of whom Muhammad was the most recent. This notion was consonant with the original ecumenical quality of the Believers' movement and is reflected in inscriptions and graffiti in which Believers appear to make statements of faith professing their reverence for God and several prophets, such as Muhammad and Jesus.

Beginning around the time of 'Abd al-Malik, however—in the last quarter of the first century AH/end of the seventh century C.E.—we find Muhammad's name mentioned with increasing frequency in the Believers' official documents; moreover, these references suggest that identification with Muhammad and his mission and revelation was coming to be seen as constitutive of the Believers' collective identity. The first inscriptions of any kind to carry the phrase "Muhammad is the Apostle of God" are coins from Bishapur (Fars), apparently issued in 66/685–686 and 67/686–687 by a governor for the Zubayrids, so it may be that the Umayyads were inspired to emphasize the role of the prophet by their rival 'Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr, known, as we have seen, for his stern piety. Whatever its inspiration, 'Abd al-Malik and his entourage seem to have advanced this process energetically and in several media. The Dome of the Rock inscriptions lay considerable emphasis on Muhammad's position as prophet; but more telling is the appearance on coins, from the time of 'Abd al-Malik onward, of the full "double *shahada*," that is, the combining of the phrase "There is no god but God" with the phrase "Muhammad is the apostle of God" as a decisive marker of the character of the issuing authority. The full double *shahada* becomes

increasingly frequent on later documents. The early Believers had no doubt always recognized that their movement had been inaugurated by someone named Muhammad, but as we have seen it is not clear how ready the Jews and Christians of the Near East were to embrace the Arabian Believers' claim that Muhammad had been truly a prophet. Emphasizing the importance to the Believers of Muhammad's status as God's apostle was another way in which the Umayyads and their advisers drew a clear line dividing Believers from others—and drawing it unequivocally in such a way that many Christians and Jews may have had difficulty remaining within the Believers' fold. This increasing emphasis on the significance of Muhammad as prophet led, starting in the last quarter of the first century AH/end of the seventh century C.E., to the cultivation and collection of sayings of the prophet (Arabic, *hadith*) as a means of legitimating many practices and institutions within the community.

Residual traces of this shift in terminology can be found in these *hadith* collections. Some *hadiths* occur in two variants, one of which appears more generally "Believerish" and the other more "Muslim." For example, the collections record the prophet as giving two variant responses to a questioner who asks, "what is the best of works?" One variant has him answering, "Belief in God, and *jihad* in the path of God," but the other has "Belief in God and His apostle, and *jihad*. . . ." We can propose that, during the transmission of this *hadith*, the second variant was generated by the addition of the apostle/prophet to the first, in order to define "belief" in a way that included belief in the prophet as an essential part, and not just belief in God.

Closely related to this emphasis on Muhammad's prophecy or apostleship is an emphasis on the Qur'an itself, the Arabic revelation, which for Believers now assumes a status above those of the earlier revelations, the *tawrat* (Torah) and the *injl* (Gospels). First of all—although we know relatively little about it—'Abd al-Malik ordered his governor in Iraq, Hajjaj, to prepare a re-edition of the



A letter from the Umayyad governor Qurra ibn Sharik. Early official letters, such as this one, were written in large format and majestic script. This letter fragment reveals Qurra adjudicating a dispute over property, referred to him by his subordinate in one of the villages of the Egyptian countryside.

Qur'an text that was provided for the first time with clear vowel and diacritical markings to ensure proper reading and recitation of the text. The fact that the *amir al-mu'minin* and his regime were distributing this "improved" version of the Qur'an—of God's word—to be used in key communities of Believers (particularly in the garrison towns) was one way in which 'Abd al-Malik could emphasize the fact that the regime he headed was indeed that righteous "kingdom of God" that the earliest Believers had aimed to establish. But it also reaffirmed that the Believers' regime he headed was dedicated to the propagation and observance of God's revealed word, the Qur'an. The Dome of the Rock inscriptions are also instructive in this context. Just as they emphasized Muhammad's prophecy, they also emphasized the Qur'an, for the inscriptions contain extensive verbatim passages from, or close paraphrases of, parts of the Qur'an—showing that 'Abd al-Malik and his circle were intent on emphasizing, in the most splendid construction he undertook, the primacy of the Arabic revelation as a source of religious legitimacy and guidance.

Similarly, 'Abd al-Malik and his advisers instituted a thorough overhaul of the iconography of the empire's coinage, doing so in a way that projected the legitimating quality of the Qur'an. The earliest coins issued by the Believers had been based on the coinage of the Byzantine and Sasanian empires, whose dies they used, modified—if at all—not by replacing their characteristic images, but by the addition of some typically "Believerish" slogan, such as "There is no god but God." 'Abd al-Malik, however, scrapped the old coin styles entirely and, after a short period of experimentation, began in 77/696–697 issuing coinage based on a radical new design. Unlike Byzantine and Sasanian coins with their images of rulers and religious insignia, such as the cross or a fire-temple, these new Umayyad coins were completely inscriptional and devoid of images of any kind. More important still, the inscriptions on these new coins—other than mint names, dates, and the name of the commander of the Believers or governor—included the full "double *shahada*" and Qur'anic verses as well, often

verses emphasizing God's oneness and pointedly rejecting trinitarian concepts. Frequently found, for example, was the following passage from Qur'an 112:1–3: "God is one, the Lord of refuge, He neither begets nor is begotten." All of this was a way of proclaiming publicly that true Believers were those who revered Muhammad as God's prophet and the Arabic Qur'an as God's revelation.

Although it took some time to be implemented, the new reform coinage established a relatively standardized iconography for the empire, one that reflected consistently for the first time the Believers' values. It also established a greater uniformity in coin values, which presumably facilitated commerce. In a similar vein, 'Abd al-Malik standardized weights and measures of the empire, using as the new norm the traditional weight values of the Hijaz—a choice that reflects the importance of Muhammad and the holy cities, Mecca and Medina, in the minds of the Believers, and 'Abd al-Malik's concern to legitimate Umayyad rule by appealing to such sentiments. All these measures can be seen as efforts by 'Abd al-Malik (and by his Umayyad successors) to reunify the empire after the divisions of the civil wars. Moreover, they were attempting to bind the community in ways that self-consciously enunciated the guiding principles and beliefs of the Believers' movement and so contributed to the goal of establishing a righteous kingdom governed by God's law. But in doing so, they were clarifying or redefining the boundaries of the movement itself.

Another interesting measure taken by 'Abd al-Malik was his adoption, for a brief period, of the title *khalifat allah*, probably to be understood to mean "God's deputy," on a few transitional coin issues that, while remotely based on modified Byzantine prototypes, contained an image usually understood as a depiction of a standing figure in Arabian dress. (The figure on these so-called "standing caliph" coins has been interpreted variously as being either 'Abd al-Malik or the prophet himself.) The significance of this term, *khalifat allah*, has been much debated, but it seems likely that it was, once





Two coins of 'Abd al-Malik. 'Abd al-Malik presided over a radical transformation in the iconography of Umayyad coinage. The upper image shows a transitional issue, minted in Damascus in AH 75 (corresponding to 694–695 C.E.). It depicts, on the obverse, a standing, robed figure, girt with a sword, usually understood to be the *amir al-mu'minin* himself, but thought by some perhaps to represent the prophet Muhammad. The reverse is modeled on Byzantine issues showing a cross mounted on steps, but the crossbar has been left off to leave a post or staff on steps, thus negating the potent Christian symbolism of the cross. The inscription on the obverse reads, "In the name of God, there is no god but God alone; Muhammad is the apostle of God." The inscription on the reverse reads "In the name of God. This *dinar* was minted in the year 75." The lower coin shows a reform gold *dinar*, minted in AH 77 (696–697 C.E.); the mint is not given. All representational imagery has now been removed and replaced by verses from the Qur'an and religious slogans. On the obverse, the central inscription reads "There is no God but God alone, he has no associate." The marginal inscription reads "Muhammad is the apostle of God; [He] sent him with guidance and the true religion, to exalt it over every religion" (see Q. 9:33, 48:28, and 61:9). The central inscription on the reverse reads "God is one; God is everlasting; he begets not and is not begotten" (see Q. 112:1–3). The reverse margin reads, "In the name of God, this *dinar* was minted in the year 77."

again, an attempt by 'Abd al-Malik to legitimate his rule by referring to the Qur'an—in this case, specifically to Qur'an 38:26, in which God tells David, "O David! We did indeed make you a *khalifa* on earth, to judge between men in truth, so do not follow your vain passions." As the title *amir al-mu'minin* is not found in the Qur'an, we can speculate that 'Abd al-Malik was adopting the Qur'anic term *khalifatallah* in an effort to strengthen—or to establish—the perception that his rule had Qur'anic warrant. Perhaps 'Abd al-Malik also wanted to link himself with David, the founder of Jerusalem, because he was at the time constructing the Dome of the Rock there. In any case, these coins are the first documentary attestation of the application of the term *khalifa* ("caliph"); it eventually became the standard term for the leaders of the Islamic state. Although some have argued that the term *khalifa* was also applied to earlier *amir al-mu'minin*s, such as 'Umar, 'Uthman, and 'Ali, there is no documentary support for such a view; although the number of such documents is limited, it is striking that of the roughly dozen documentary attestations to the leader of the community of Believers dating before the time of 'Abd al-Malik, *every one* refers to the leader as *amir al-mu'minin*—not once is he called *khalifa*.

It seems most plausible, then, to link the first use of *khalifa* to 'Abd al-Malik and his determined program of emphasizing the status of the Qur'an, and its legitimating value, among the Believers. It seems that this was part of 'Abd al-Malik's larger project aimed at restoring the authority of Umayyad rule, the legitimacy of which had been seriously eroded by the events (and the anti-Umayyad rhetoric) of the Second Civil War. He and the later Umayyads strove to do so especially by emphasizing the religious foundations of Umayyad rule, in particular, their status as successors to Muhammad as heads of the community of Believers and as rulers guided by the Qur'anic revelation Muhammad had received. In doing so, they essentially defined "Islam" as we know it today. Painful as they were, the two civil wars may thus have been the crucial catalyst for this historic development.



### The Problem of the Trinity

The early Believers' sense of themselves as constituting a movement open to all who believed in God's oneness and in righteous living—what we have called the ecumenical character of the early Believers' movement—was probably always something that was open to debate. But we have seen that Jews and Christians could be, and some were, included within the Believers' movement. We have noted that early statements of faith (the "single *shahada*," "There is no god but God"), both inscriptional and literary, reflected this more inclusive outlook. Such testimony, and the persistent evidence that Christians at least were actively involved in some aspects of the Believers' community well into Umayyad times, as we have seen in previous chapters, shows that this confessionally open quality was a reality. The fact that many of the Christians encountered by the first Arabian Believers in the Near East were monophysites, whose formulations of trinitarian doctrine emphasized Christ's single nature, or Nestorians, who emphasized Christ's human nature and played down his divinity, may have meant that they aroused less immediate opposition from the Believers. It has been suggested that the Umayyads, ruling in and from Syria, may have been especially mindful of the concerns of Christians, some of whom were important supporters of the regime (including the Christians of the powerful Kalb tribe, who were intermarried with Mu'awiya's family and contributed troops to the Umayyad army). This may explain why the Believers in Syria appear to have placed considerable emphasis on the role of Jesus, whose "second coming" shows up in Islamic eschatological traditions dating to the Umayyad period. (Later, after the Umayyads had been overthrown and the Abbasids had moved the center of the empire to Iraq, this early emphasis on Jesus was abandoned by developing Islamic tradition, because Jews and Zoroastrians were more prominent and numerous in Iraq than Christians.)

But for those Believers who were inclined to be sticklers on the question of God's oneness, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity must always have been a problem. Indeed, we find even in the Qur'an a few passages in which the idea of the Trinity is decisively rejected: "They disbelieve who say: 'God is the third of three,' for there is no god but the one God . . ." [Q. 5:76]; "God is one, God is the Lord of refuge; He begets not, nor is He begotten . . ." [Q. 112:1–3].

The earliest surviving evidence (other than the Qur'an itself) that the ruling circles of the Believers' movement—the *amir al-mu'minin* and his key advisers—were inclined to turn against these Christian doctrines (the Trinity, Jesus as God's son, the divinity and resurrection of Jesus), is found on some early coins that the Believers issued in Syria, based on modified Byzantine coin types. The Byzantine coin issue that had shown a cross on steps (Christian symbol of Jesus' divine nature and resurrection) was modified to show only a vertical staff on steps—the crossbar is pointedly removed, and although the dating of these issues is debated, they appear to have been issued in the early years of 'Abd al-Malik's reign, if not earlier (possibly under Mu'awiya). More decisive evidence of an anti-trinitarian attitude among the ruling elite comes with 'Abd al-Malik's construction of the Dome of the Rock beginning in 72/692. The inscriptions in the Dome of the Rock include a selection of Qur'anic verses chosen specifically, it seems, to emphasize the unacceptability of the trinitarian idea and to reinforce the idea of God's indivisible unity. (See "Inscriptions in the Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem" in Appendix B.) As the Dome of the Rock was built on orders of the commander of the Believers in a prominent location and in sumptuous style, there can be little doubt that 'Abd al-Malik and his advisers wished to convey a powerful and unmistakable message. It seems fair to assume from this that 'Abd al-Malik and the Umayyad ruling elite were by this time, at the latest, reconsidering the status of Christians within the community of Believers, even though many Christians continued to serve the dynasty until its fall in 132/750. Or, to put it more

precisely, the elite seems to have been engaged in rethinking their own identity as Believers and "drawing the line" between themselves and those who embraced any hint of trinitarian doctrines.

### Elaboration of Islamic Cultic Practices

Yet another dimension of the process by which Islam coalesced from the early Believers' movement involved certain aspects of religious ritual; for even more than theological differences, it is differences in cultic practice that set one religious community apart from others. As we have seen, there is evidence that the early Believers from Arabia, as a religious movement, participated in the prayer practices of some of the Christian (and Jewish?) communities they encountered in Syria, Iraq, and possibly elsewhere—reports of the Believers "dividing" churches with Christians, and of an east-facing *qibla* or direction of prayer, were specifically noted. The evidence of the Cathisma Church, with its east-facing apse and south-facing *mihrab* or prayer niche added in the final phase of construction, presumably reflects architecturally the very moment when the Qur'anic Believers began to redefine themselves as "Muslims," distinct from their erstwhile Christian co-Believers. It is possible that the vague traditional reports about Muhammad himself changing the direction of prayer during his early years in Medina are a retouched, vestigial memory of this change, projected back to the time of the prophet to make it acceptable to later generations.

The similarity between some features of the Muslim Friday prayer service and certain aspects of both Christian and Jewish prayer rituals, discussed by various scholars, also suggests an initial stage in the development of Muslim ritual when the Believers' movement actually incorporated Christian or Jewish Believers. The complete absence in the Qur'an of any mention of the distinctive components of the Muslim Friday prayer—notably the *khutba* or sermon by the

prayer leader, the *minbar* or pulpit from which it is delivered, or references to Friday prayer being in any way special—raise the question of whether the Friday prayer ritual existed at all before Umayyad times and the coalescence of the Umayyad state.

It is clear, however, that the Believers' basic ritual practices—ritual prayer, fasting during the month of Ramadan, and pilgrimage—go back to Muhammad's time and the very beginnings of the Believers' movement, because they are mentioned, if not always fully described, in the Qur'an text. But there is no doubt that these and other ritual practices were not at first so rigidly defined as they later became, so it seems likely that some of these rituals evolved under the influence of the practices of Jewish or Christian Believers of the Fertile Crescent (or even of Arabia in Muhammad's day). The number of prayers to be performed daily, for example, is not explicitly established by the Qur'an; later Muslim tradition eventually settled on five prayers per day as the requirement, but the question was clearly the subject of considerable discussion before this consensus was reached. The many sayings attributed to the prophet contained in the vast collections of *hadith*, which coalesced in the Muslim community in the second century AH/eighth century C.E. and third century AH/ninth century C.E., contains the residue of this and other debates in the community over just how various rituals were to be performed, revealing how numerous features of these rituals remained in flux for some time, as different practices or points of view were advanced by different *hadiths*.

The pilgrimage ritual or *hajj* also seems to have evolved during the early community's history. Reports of 'Abd al-Malik, as *amir al-mu'minin*, leading the *hajj* during his rule imply that details of the *hajj* ritual were still being settled during his day, and he is reported to have ordered a complete "restoration" of the Ka'ba, to purge it of additions made by 'Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr. Similarly, 'Abd al-Malik's predecessor, the *amir al-mu'minin* Mu'awiya (ruled 41–60/661–680), was the moving spirit behind the construction of the first *maqsura* or

screen in the prayer hall to separate himself from the ranks of praying Believers (a construction perhaps somewhat similar in function to the iconostasis or icon screen that sheltered Christian officiants from their congregations in church).

The process of defining what became Muslim rituals thus lasted for several—perhaps many—decades after the death of Muhammad.

### Elaboration of the Islamic Origins Story

Another dimension of this transformation of the Believers' movement into Islam involved the construction of an origins story narrating the foundational events in the life of the community of Believers/Muslims. Many people in the community contributed to the process of remembering, collecting, and reworking stories of what had happened in the community in the days of Muhammad and during the conquests and civil wars; but it is clear that the Umayyad rulers, in particular, played a major role in encouraging this activity. The Umayyads invited knowledgeable people to court and supported them with patronage—a few of the foremost examples being Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri and 'Urwa ibn al-Zubayr, both of whom contributed significantly to drawing up the first extant biography of Muhammad and his prophetic career.

The Islamic origins story focused on several main themes and issues, which provided a detailed justification of the community's existence; and this story forms, to this day, one of the main sources of information on which historians must draw to describe the events of Islam's origins. Several themes clustered around the life of Muhammad; their overarching goal was to demonstrate Muhammad's prophetic status, in keeping with the model of the prophets who had come before him, and to describe the manner in which he received the Qur'anic revelation. Other themes are concerned especially with showing how Muhammad founded the original community of Believers and how that community continued to exist and to cling to

its foundational values over the years and decades after the prophet's death. Still other themes provided a justification for the Believers'/Muslims' hegemony over the vast areas and populations they ruled, framed by the twin propositions that the Believers' military victories over the Byzantines and Sasanians were signs of God's favor and that their rule was dedicated to the realization of God's law on Earth.

The goal of the origins narratives, as they coalesced, was thus to legitimate the community of Believers in general terms by affirming the details of how the community began for all Believers—especially those born too late to have known the prophet or to have witnessed the early days of the community's expansion. But it is also clear that this exercise in legitimation was directed not only inward, but also outward, at non-Believers/non-Muslims. The stories about Muhammad's prophecy made clear that one could not be a Believer (or Muslim) without recognizing Muhammad as one's prophet, and so it helped draw that line that came to distinguish Muslims from Christians and Jews, whose reservations about Muhammad's prophecy we have already noted. Similarly, the extensive conquest narratives, while emphasizing without fail the conquerors' religious motivations, consistently present them as *Muslims*—not as Believers or as *muhajirun*, the two terms that we know from Qur'anic and non-Islamic documentary evidence were the ones the conquerors had actually used to refer to themselves in the early years of the movement. This emphasis on the *Muslim* identity in the conquest narratives seems likely to be part of the process by which the Believers' movement excluded Christians and Jews and redefined itself as applying only to Believers following Qur'anic law—or as we would say, to Muslims.

### The Coalescence of an "Arab" Political Identity

Another feature of the transformation of the Believers' movement into Islam was the articulation, for the first time, of a consciously

"Arab" political identity—that is, a collective identity that was not merely cultural, but that expressed itself loosely in the form of political claims. As a political identity, membership in this group gave one special political privileges, in particular, the right to be considered part of the ruling caste of the new Umayyad/Muslim empire.

It has sometimes been argued that the rise of Islam—what we prefer to understand as the first appearance and expansion of the Believers' movement—was essentially an "Arab" movement. The implication of such a view is that an "Arab" political identity existed on the eve of Muhammad's preaching and that it was the powerful desire to realize this latent collective identity as "Arabs" in political form that really generated the Believers' expansion and the creation of their empire. This view is, however, anachronistic and profoundly misleading. It usually represents the facile interpolation back into the seventh century C.E. of modern concepts of Arab nationalism that only came into existence in the late nineteenth century.

The Arabic-speaking peoples of Arabia and adjacent areas in the early seventh century (and, indeed, even in antiquity), were, to be sure, well aware of the fact that they spoke mutually intelligible forms of a common language; and there existed a common poetic language, the *'arabiyya*, representing a literary ideal that was different from any particular spoken dialect. But this is to speak only of a vague linguistic, and perhaps cultural, identity, not of a political one as "Arabs." There is almost no evidence for the existence of a collective "Arab" political identity before the Believers created their empire. Moreover, the "Arab national" or "nativist" interpretation of the beginnings of the Believers' movement and Islam fails to take into account the Qur'an's deafening silence on the concept of an "Arab" political identity. In a few passages, the Qur'an refers to itself as an "Arabic Qur'an," but this is a linguistic statement and nothing more. Nowhere does the Qur'an advance, or even hint at, any kind of collective identity other than that of the Believers—an identity squarely based in faith and righteous action, not in ethnic or "national" or

even cultural affiliation. Moreover, the few times the Qur'an mentions the *a'rab*—to be understood as nomads—it is with pejorative overtones; of "Arabs" (*'arab*) it speaks not at all.

The Arabic-speaking populations of the Near East were at this time divided into different tribes, and it was to their individual tribes that these people owed their primary identity—if it was not to their faith. In other words, we can no more speak of an "Arab" political identity at that time than we might speak today of Englishmen, Irishmen, Scots, Americans, Australians, Canadians, New Zealanders, Jamaicans, and so on, as having a common "Anglo" identity with significant political (rather than merely cultural) content. To argue that the Believers' movement was at heart a "national" or "nativist" or "Arab" movement is particularly misleading because it obscures the most important characteristic of the Believers' movement, visible in the Qur'an and in the few early documents we have—its nature as a movement rooted in religious faith—and substitutes for it a social impetus rooted in a presumed collective identity (as "Arabs") for which there is no credible evidence, only sketchy and unsupported extrapolation from present conditions.

Although there is thus no evidence that an "Arab" identity contributed to the early Believers' movement, it seems clear that with the passage of time the success of the Believers' movement in establishing an empire helped create an embryonic Arab political identity in the minds of the ruling elite. In other words, an Arab identity was an unintended result of the Believers' movement, not its cause. The historical accident that the movement began in Arabia meant that the ruling circles were dominated almost exclusively by Arabians (mostly, indeed, Hijazis) whose native language was Arabic. As the Believers spread into vast new areas and established their hegemony there—in Syria, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, and further afield—the leading cadres and the bulk of their soldiers, all Arabic-speaking and mostly from Arabia, could hardly have failed to notice that most of their subjects were not Arabic-speaking. The association of Arabic with

political dominance thus may have generated a sense among Arabic speakers that the empire was an "Arab kingdom" and that all Arabic speakers were politically kin because of their shared dominant status in the new empire. But this "Arab" political identity remained weak (until the nineteenth century) and never seriously challenged the basic tribal identity of most Arabians.

This sense of an "Arab" identity that one imagines growing particularly among the upper echelons of the ruling elite is also expressed in the nascent historiographical tradition. The majority of the voluminous conquest narratives, following what we may call "reformed" vocabulary, speak in terms of Muslims conquering non-Muslims (rather than Believers and unbelievers); but there are some reports in which the confrontations are described as being between the "Arabs" on the one hand and the *'ajam* (non-Arabic speakers), or Byzantines or Persians, on the other. This kind of vocabulary seems likely to reflect the identity categories of the age following this shift in conceptualizations, when the conquest narratives were compiled, rather than those of the conquest era itself.

Not only the experience of empire, but also the presence of the Arabic Qur'an, provided an impetus for the crystallization of this nascent "Arab" identity in the Umayyad period. As the Believers' movement gradually evolved into Islam, there developed, as we have seen, an increased emphasis on Qur'anic law as the decisive determinant of one's status as a Muslim. This increased emphasis on the Arabic Qur'an, however, dovetailed well with the dawning awareness of an "Arab" political identity among a ruling elite that now preferred to identify itself as Muslims, rather than as Believers.

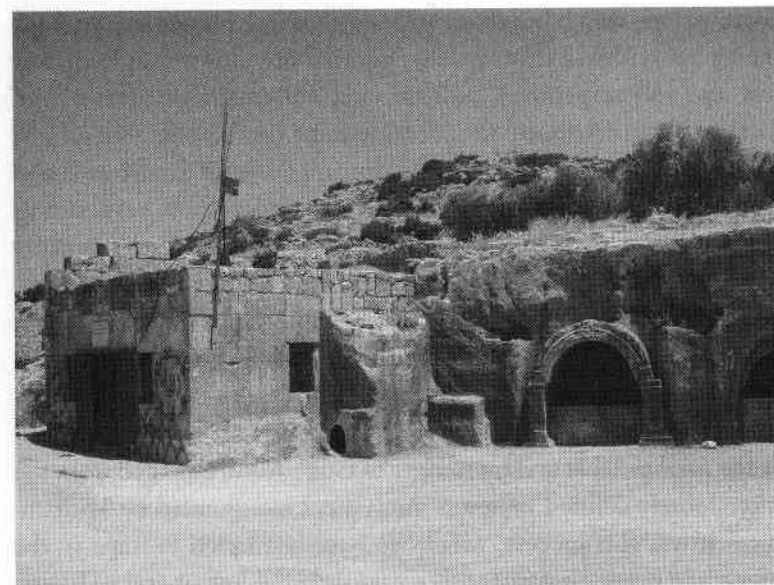
### Official vs. Popular Change

The broad transformation just sketched, by which Islam crystallized out of the Believers' movement, was partly the result of intentional

decisions made by the ruling Umayyad dynasty under 'Abd al-Malik and his successors and partly the result of changes of perspective among the rank and file of Believers themselves—both the Qur'an-oriented Believers of Arabian origin and those Jews and Christians who had been part of the early Believers' movement. The emergence of Islam and the demise of the original organizing conceptions of the Believers' movement thus combined changes that were quite sudden and radical with others that took shape only gradually and took decades, sometimes as much as a century, to reach completion. Official measures such as 'Abd al-Malik's coinage reform, with its emphasis on Qur'anic legitimation, or the building of the Dome of the Rock, with both its emphatic use of the "double *shahada*" and its strongly anti-trinitarian inscriptional message, can be dated quite precisely to within a few years. On the other hand, the more widespread and growing perception among Christian, Jewish, and Qur'anic Believers that perhaps only the latter were really part of the movement seems to have taken hold much more gradually. Moreover, the relationship between the two kinds of change is not obvious. Did the specific policy initiatives of the Umayyads (such as their attack on the Trinity) blaze the way for the reorientation of popular thinking? Or was the policy itself an official expression of changes in popular attitudes that were already underway? We cannot be sure, but we can say that a number of key policy initiatives that clearly conform to an intellectual shift from a more ecumenical Believers' movement to a more closely defined confessional identity as Muslims seems to cluster in the 70s/690s, in the time of 'Abd al-Malik. On the other hand, we cannot say that the shift from Believers' movement to Islam is complete at this time, because we continue to find evidence of close collaboration of some Christians (and perhaps some Jews) with the Muslims for many years thereafter. Wisdom sayings attributed to the Umayyad *amir al-mu'minin* 'Umar (II) ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz, who reigned between 99–101/717–720 and was renowned for his piety, suggest that he held Christian monks and holy

men in high esteem, and he died while visiting the famous monastery of St. Simeon, in the hills near Aleppo, where his tomb can still be seen. The close association of Christian advisers with the later Umayyad caliphs—John of Damascus's service to Hisham is the best-known example—may also be a vestige of an earlier stage in which there was a fuller place in the leadership of the Believers' movement for righteous Christians and Jews. The continuing construction, or at least reconstruction, of Christian churches in geographical Syria into the late second century AH/eighth century C.E., datable by their excavated mosaic floors, also suggests that even for some time after the Believers' movement had given way to a self-consciously Muslim regime, that regime was not yet always harshly confessional in its policies.

There can be little doubt, however, that by the final years of the first century AH/seventh century C.E. and the beginning of the second century AH/eighth century C.E., the more open, "Believerish" character of the movement had begun to give way definitively to a firmer identity for those in the movement as belonging to a new religious confession, Islam. We can measure this by considering Christian religious polemics of the seventh and eighth centuries. Those written during the first century AH/seventh century C.E. are preoccupied, as earlier polemics had been, with attacking the errors of Judaism or of rival ("heretical") forms of Christianity—Nestorianism, monophysitism, or the Byzantine official doctrine. There are, as yet, no attacks on Islam in these polemics, even though a few of them mention in passing the presence of an *amir* or another representative of the *mhaggraye* at the disputation the text describes. These seventh-century Christian polemicists apparently did not yet recognize the Believers as constituting a separate religious creed that required theological refutation. Only in the very last years of the first century AH/seventh century C.E. and in the second century AH/eighth century C.E. do we begin to find Christian polemics that offer arguments attempting to refute Islam's main theological positions—



The Tomb of the *amir al-mu'minin* 'Umar II. This shrine is located just beside the cathedral and monastery complex of St. Simeon, where according to some traditions 'Umar is said to have died in 101/720.

evidence that by this time someone was presenting Islam in a way that depicted it as a creed distinct from Christianity. Yet the sense that the Believers' movement that becomes Islam was not entirely at odds with Christianity, at least, seems to survive in some ways even into the mid-eighth century, for it is then that John of Damascus—who, as a high administrator for the Umayyads, surely knew whereof he spoke—wrote his famous treatise on "The Heresy of the Ishmaelites." In other words, he could still perceive nascent Islam as a form of Christian heresy, rather than as a fully independent religion.

It has long been recognized that Islam in the fully developed form we can see in the second and third centuries AH/eighth and ninth centuries C.E. was the result of a process of sustained development. Many have discussed the development of the institutions of the first



Islamic state, which began in Arabia with only rudimentary arrangements but within a century had acquired not only a standing army but also robust political, judicial, and administrative institutions. Others have discussed the development and refinement of the theological doctrines of Islam, building on the basic doctrines found in the Qur'an, a process that seems to get underway in earnest only in the late Umayyad period (first half of the second century AH/eighth century C.E.). These two processes of development, however, do not tell the full story. Just as important—indeed, perhaps more important—was a third process, by which Islam, as a distinct religious confession centered on reverence for the Qur'an as the latest revelation of God's eternal word and recognition of Muhammad as the final prophet and messenger of God's word, emerged from the more loosely defined Believers' movement inaugurated by Muhammad. It was this process, which we have attempted to trace in the preceding pages, that first truly established the lineaments of Islam.

## APPENDIXES

### NOTES AND GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

### GLOSSARY

### ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

### INDEX

## Appendix A: The *umma* Document

The "*umma* document," sometimes also called the "Constitution of Medina," the "*sahifa* document," or the "*sunna jami'a*," is a group of connected documents or treaty clauses apparently concluded between the prophet Muhammad and the people of Yathrib. The original documents are now lost, but the text is preserved, with mostly minor variations, in two early Islamic literary texts: the *Sira* (a biography of the prophet) of Muhammad ibn Ishaq (died ca. 150/767), and the *Kitab al-amwal* (a book on property) of Abu 'Ubayd al-Qasim ibn Sallam (died 224/838). As with all literary texts compiled a century or more after the time of Muhammad, one can question the authenticity of this text; but the consensus of scholars, even those who are generally skeptical about the reliability of such late texts, is that the *umma* document is probably a fairly accurate transcription of an actual early document. This is because, both in form and content, it seems archaic and because it presents things in ways that do not conform to later idealizing views; hence it seems unlikely that it is a later invention.

The translation here follows mainly the text of Ibn Ishaq. I have relied heavily on earlier translations and analysis made by Alfred Guillaume, R. B. Serjeant, and Michael Lecker:

Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), 231–233.

R. B. Serjeant, "The "Sunnah Jami'ah," Pacts with the Yathrib Jews, and the "Tahrim" of Yathrib: Analysis and Translation of the Documents Comprised in the So-Called 'Constitution of Medina,'" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 41 (1978): 1–42.

Michael Lecker, *The "Constitution of Medina": Muhammad's First Legal Document* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin, 2004).

The pious phrases that follow the names of God and Muhammad in most versions of the text have been omitted here.

### The Text

*This is a document from Muhammad the prophet (al-nabi), between the Believers and the Muslims of Quraysh and Yathrib and those who follow them and attach themselves to them and struggle alongside them. Verily they are one community (umma) to the exclusion of [other] people.*

*The muhajirun from Quraysh [remain] in charge of their own affairs, arranging matters of blood-money among themselves, and ransoming their captives following custom and what is equitable among the Believers.*

*Banu 'Awf [remain] in charge of their own affairs, arranging matters of their blood-money among themselves as before; every section of them ransoming their captives following custom and what is equitable among the Believers.*

*Banu al-Harith [remain] in charge of their own affairs, arranging matters of their blood-money among themselves as before; every section of them ransoming their captives following custom and what is equitable among the Believers.*

*Banu Sa'ida [remain] in charge of their own affairs, . . .*

*Banu Jusham [remain] in charge of their own affairs, . . .*

*Banu al-Najjar [remain] in charge of their own affairs, . . .*

*Banu 'Amr ibn 'Awf [remain] in charge of their own affairs, . . .*

*Banu al-Nabit [remain] in charge of their own affairs, . . .*

*Banu al-Aws [remain] in charge of their own affairs, . . .*

*The Believers shall not fail to give [aid] to a debtor [or: pauper] among them in matters of ransom or blood-money, as is customary.*

*A Believer shall not make an alliance with the client (mawla) of [another] Believer to [the latter's] detriment [or: excluding him].*

*The God-fearing Believers are against anyone among them who acts outrageously or [who] practices extortion or [spreads] treachery or enmity or dissension among the Believers. Verily their hands shall be united against him, even if he is the son of one of them.*

*A Believer shall not kill [another] Believer for the sake of an unbeliever (kafir), nor shall he assist an unbeliever against a Believer.*

*God's protection is one; the lowest of them [i.e., of the Believers] may grant protection [to outsiders] that is binding upon all of them.*

*The Believers are allies (mawali) one to another, to the exclusion of other people.*

*Whoever follows us among the Jews shall have assistance and equitable treatment; they shall not be oppressed, nor shall [any of us] gang up against them.*

*The peace of the Believers is indivisible. No Believer shall make a [separate] peace to the exclusion of [that is, without consulting?] [another] Believer in fighting in the path of God, except on the basis of equity and justice among them.*

*All raiding parties that set out on raiding with us shall follow one after another [that is, take turns?].*

*The Believers are to take vengeance for one another's blood shed in the path of God.*

*The God-fearing Believers are in accord with the best and truest of this [agreement?].*

No polytheist (mushrik) shall grant protection to property belonging to Quraysh, nor to a person; nor shall he come between it/him against a Believer.

Whoever kills a Believer without good reason, [the murder being substantiated] on the basis of sound evidence, shall be slain in retaliation, unless the next of kin [of the slain] is satisfied [with blood-money]. All the Believers shall be against him; anything other than standing [united] against him shall not be allowed to them.

It is not permissible for the Believer who affirms what it is this treaty (sahifa), and believes in God and the Last Day, to aid a sinner [murderer?] or to give him refuge. Whosoever aids him or gives him refuge shall have upon him the curse of God and His wrath on the Day of Resurrection; and neither repentance nor ransom will be accepted from him.

Whatever matters you disagree on should be referred to God and to Muhammad [that is, for resolution].

The Jews shall pay [their] share with the Believers, as long as they are engaged in warfare [that is, alongside one another].

The Jews of Banu 'Awf are a community [umma] with the Believers; the Jews have their religion/law (din) and the Muslims have their religion/law, their clients (mawali), and their persons, except that anyone who behaves unjustly and acts treacherously [or: acts sinfully] destroys only himself and his kinsmen.

The Jews of Banu l-Najjar have the same [rights and obligations] as the Jews of Banu 'Awf.

The Jews of Banu l-Harith have the same. . . .

The Jews of Banu Sa'ida have the same. . . .

The Jews of Banu Jusham have the same. . . .

The Jews of Banu l-Aws have the same. . . .

The Jews of Banu Tha'laba have the same [rights and obligations] as the Jews of Banu 'Awf, except that anyone who behaves unjustly and acts treacherously [or: acts sinfully] destroys only himself and his kinsmen.

Jafna are a section of the Tha'laba and are [treated] like them.

The Banu l-Shutayba have the same [rights and obligations] as the Jews of Banu 'Awf.

The righteous person guards against treachery.

The clients (mawali) of Tha'laba are [to be considered] just like them.

The close associates of the Jews are as themselves.

No one of them may go out [from Yathrib? or from the umma? or to war?], except with the permission of Muhammad.

One shall not be prevented from taking revenge for a wound.

Whoever assassinates [someone], assassinates himself and his kinsmen, unless [the victim] be someone who acted wrongfully, for God supports the more righteous [party] in this (?).

The Jews owe their [share of] expenses, and the Muslims owe their [share of] expenses.

Between them is [mutual] assistance against whosoever declares war against the people of this treaty (sahifa).

Between them is sincere advice and counsel.

The righteous person guards against treachery.

A man shall not betray his ally, and assistance belongs to the person wronged.

The center (jawf) of Yathrib is sacrosanct (or: a sacred area) for the people of this treaty (sahifa).

The protected person (jar) is like one's self, neither being harmed nor acting treacherously.

A woman shall not be granted protection except with the permission of her family.

*Whatever offense or disagreement there may be among the people of this treaty (sahifa), from which trouble may arise, should be referred to God and to Muhammad.*

*God supports whatever is most righteous and upright in this treaty.*

*No protection shall be extended to Quraysh, nor to anyone who assists them.*

*Between them [that is, the parties to the treaty] is [mutual] assistance against anyone who attacks Yathrib.*

*When they are called to conclude and observe a truce (sulh), they will conclude and observe it; and when they call [others] for the same, the Believers are obligated to grant them that, except whoever goes to war over religion/law (din).*

*All persons are responsible for their share of their side that is opposite them [?].*

*The Jews of al-'Aws, their clients (mawali) and themselves, are on the same basis as the people of this treaty (sahifa), with sincere loyalty from the people of this treaty.*

*The righteous person guards against treachery.*

*Whoever acquires [something, that is, for good or evil?] acquires it only for himself.*

*God supports the truest and most righteous of what is in this treaty.*

*This document does not protect anyone who acts unjustly or treacherously.*

*Whoever goes out is safe, and whoever remains in place is safe in the city [or: in Medina], except whoever acts unjustly or treacherously.*

*God is the protector of whoever is upright and righteous, and Muhammad is the apostle (rasul) of God.*

*The most worthy of those in this treaty (sahifa) are the sincerely righteous.*

## Appendix B: Inscriptions in the Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem

The inscriptions on the inner mosaics of the Dome of the Rock, constructed by order of the *amir al-mu'minin* 'Abd al-Malik, constitute the longest extant group of official inscriptions by the Believers from the first century AH. It is noteworthy for its inclusion of numerous quotations of, or close paraphrases of, selected verses of the Qur'an. The content is quite repetitive but conveys a strong theological message. The inscription itself is dated to the year 72/691, which must be close to the time the building was completed, because the decorations would be the last element in its construction. During the ninth century C.E., the caliph al-Ma'mun (ruled 198–218/813–833) ordered the inscription on the outer face of the arcade to be emended, replacing the name of 'Abd al-Malik with his own. However, he neglected to change the date of the inscription, so the attribution of the inscription and building to 'Abd al-Malik is certain. The section replaced is indicated in the translation below by underlining. The inscription generally lacks any punctuation, but sections on the inner face of the arcade are separated by medallions; in the translation below the location of each medallion is marked by an asterisk (\*).

The translation is based on the careful transcription of the "Kufic" style script prepared by Christel Kessler in 1967 (Christel Kessler, "Abd al-Malik's Inscription in the Dome of the Rock: A Reconsideration," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1970): 2–14).

## The Inscriptions

### [A. Inner face of octagonal arcade]

*In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. There is no god except God, alone; He has no partner. Sovereignty belongs to Him, and praise belongs to Him. He brings to life, and He takes life away, and He is powerful over every thing [see Q. 44:1 and Q. 42:2]. Muhammad is God's servant and His apostle (rasul). Verily, God and His angels bless the prophet (nabi). O you who believe, bless him and offer greetings. May God bless him, and may peace and God's mercy be upon him. O people of the book, do not exaggerate in your religion (din), and speak of God only the truth. The Messiah Jesus son of Mary was only the apostle (rasul) of God and His word, which He cast unto Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in God and His apostles and do not say "three." Desist! [It is] better for you. God is one deity only, He is above having a son. Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is His, and God is the best advocate [see Q. 4:171]. The Messiah would never disdain to be God's servant, nor would the closest angels; whoever disdains His service/worship and is arrogant, He will gather them all to Himself [that is, on the Day of Judgment; see Q. 4:172]. O God, bless Your apostle (rasul) and Your servant Jesus son of Mary; may peace be upon him on the day he was born, and the day he will die, and the day he will be resurrected alive [see Q. 19:15]. Thus is Jesus son of Mary, a statement of the truth that they doubt. It was not for God to take a son, glory be to Him. When He decrees a matter, He only says "be!" and it is. God is my lord (rabb) and your lord, so serve/worship Him; that is the straight path [see Q. 19:34–36]. God bears witness that there is no deity except Him, and the angels and men of knowledge [also bear witness], ordaining [matters] in justice (qist); there is no deity except Him, the Mighty, the Wise [see Q. 3:18]. Verily religion/law (din) with God is Islam. Those who received the book only differed after knowledge had come to them, due to envy among*

*them. Whoever denies the signs (ayat) of God—God is swift of reckoning [see Q. 3:19].*

### [B. Outer face of octagonal arcade]

*In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful: There is no deity except God alone, He has no partner. Say: He, God, is one, God the eternal; He did not beget nor was He begotten, and there is no equal to Him [see Q. 112]. Muhammad is the apostle (rasul) of God. May God bless him.\* In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful: there is no deity except God, alone; He has no partner. Muhammad is the apostle (rasul) of God. Verily God and His angels bless the prophet (al-nabi). O you who believe, bless him and offer greetings [see Q. 33:56].\* In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful: There is no deity except God, alone. Praise be to God, who did not take a son, and who has no partner in sovereignty (al-mulk), and who has no helper from the mundane (wali min al-dhull). So magnify Him greatly [see Q. 17:111]. Muhammad is the apostle (rasul) of God; may God and His angels and His messengers (rusul) bless him; peace upon him, and the blessings of God.\* In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful: there is no deity except God, alone, He has no partner. Sovereignty belongs to Him, and praise belongs to Him. He brings to life, and He takes life away, and He is powerful over every thing [see Q. 44:1 and Q. 42:2]. Muhammad is the apostle (rasul) of God, may God bless him and accept his intercession on the day of resurrection on behalf of his community (umma).\* In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful: There is no deity except God, alone, He has no partner. Muhammad is the apostle (rasul) of God, may God bless him.\* The servant of God 'Abd Allah the imam al-Ma'mun, amir al-mu'minin, built this dome in the year two and seventy; may God accept it from him and be pleased with him. Amen, Lord of the worlds, praise belongs to God.\**



## Notes and Guide to Further Reading

The following pages provide readers with some idea of where to go for further information on topics covered in this book. On occasion, they also provide supporting documentation, where it exists, for specialists and interested general readers alike. Matters are arranged more or less in the sequence in which they occur in each chapter.

The following abbreviations are used in the notes:

- BSOAS** *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London.
- CCJ** Michael Maas, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
- Donner, "Believers to Muslims"** Fred M. Donner, "From Believers to Muslims: Confessional Self-identity in the Early Islamic Community," *Al-Abhath* 50–51 (2002–2003): 9–53.
- Donner, *Conquests*** Fred M. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981).
- Donner, *Narratives*** Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1998).
- EI (2)** *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960–2002). Cited by the title of the article.

- Guillaume, Life** Alfred Guillaume, trans., *The Life of Muhammad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955).
- Hoyland, Seeing Islam** Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam As Others Saw It. A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1997).
- IJMES** *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*
- JSAL** *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*
- Tab.** Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Ta'rikh*, ed. Michaël Jan de Goeje (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1879–1901). English translation *The History of al-Tabari*, 38 vols. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985–continuing). References are provided only to the Arabic text of the de Goeje edition; the de Goeje paginations are noted in the margins of the translation, so references can be traced in either version.

## Preface

The quote is from Ernest Renan, "Mahomet and the Origins of Islamism," in his *Studies of Religious History* (London: Heinemann, 1893), 187. (French original *Études d'histoire religieuse* [Paris: M. Lévy, 1857].)

### 1. The Near East on the Eve of Islam

For a general orientation into the Late Antique world, one can best begin with Peter Brown's classic *The World of Late Antiquity, AD 150–750* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1971), a short, brilliant overview. For greater detail, consult G. Bowersock, P. Brown, and O. Grabar, eds., *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), whose long essays and many shorter entries offer good orientations on most aspects of late antique history and life, including Byzantium, the early medieval West, the Sasanian Empire, and early Islam. Stephen Mitchell, *A History of the Later Roman Empire, AD 286–641: The Transformation of the Ancient World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), covers both the eastern and western parts of the empire. Kevin

Butcher, *Roman Syria and the Near East* (London: British Museum Press, 2003), focuses on the East.

On the Byzantine Empire: Averil Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity, AD 395–600* (London: Routledge, 1993), integrates recent work on social and economic history, as well as the more traditional foci of state and church institutions. CCJ includes a number of very helpful chapters. F. M. Donner, "The Background of Islam," CCJ, 510–533, offers a slightly more detailed discussion of some of the points covered here.

On the "last Byzantine emperor" idea, see Paul J. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 151–184; *idem*, "Byzantium and the Migration of Literary Works and Motifs: The Legend of the Last Roman Emperor," *Medievalia et Humanistica* n.s. 2 (1971): 47–68.

On the socioeconomic structure of the Byzantine world, see Cameron, *Mediterranean World*, chap. 4; Mitchell, *History of the Roman Empire*, chap. 10; and John F. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century: The Transformation of a Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), especially chaps. 3, 4, and 10. On the middle classes, see Linda Jones Hall, "The Case of Late Antique Berytus: Urban Wealth and Rural Sustenance—A Different Economic Dynamic," in Thomas S. Burns and John W. Eadie, eds., *Urban Centers and Rural Contexts in Late Antiquity* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2001), 63–76. On the spread of ascetic Christianity and an egalitarian outlook, see Han J. W. Drijvers, "Saint as Symbol: Conceptions of the Person in Late Antiquity and Early Christianity," in Hans G. Kippenberg, Y. B. Kuiper, and A. F. Sanders, eds., *Concepts of Person* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1990), 137–157. An excellent overview of developments in the third through the sixth centuries C.E. is Alan G. Walmsley, "Byzantine Palestine and Arabia: Urban Prosperity in Late Antiquity," in N. Christie and S. Loseby, eds., *Towns in Transition: Urban Evolution in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (London: Scolar, 1996), 126–158.

On Christological disputes: F. M. Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) is the classic treatment; Patrick T. R. Gray, "The Legacy of Chalcedon: Christological Problems and Their Significance," in CCJ, 215–238, provides a clear, brief recounting of the tortuous debates and their consequences.

On Christian asceticism and monasticism: Derwas J. Chitty, *The Desert a City* (Oxford: Blackwell's, 1966) is a good introduction; Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971): 80–101, was a seminal contribution. Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis, eds., *Asceticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), a massive tome, includes several useful chapters, particularly Averil Cameron's "Ascetic Closure and the End of Antiquity," pp. 147–161. On other aspects of Christian religiosity, see Derek Kruger, "Christian Piety and Practice in the Sixth Century," *CCJ*, 291–315.

On Late Antique apocalypticism (mainly Christian): A good introduction is the first fifty or so pages of Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979). See also Alexander, *Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, cited above; and chapters by G. Reinink and W. van Bakkum in Bernard H. Stolte and Gerrit J. Reinink, eds., *The Reign of Heraclius (610–641): Crisis and Confrontation* (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2002).

On Late Antique Judaism: Nicholas de Lange, "Jews in the Age of Justinian," in *CCJ*, 401–426; Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Jews under Roman and Byzantine Rule: A Political History from the Bar Cochba War to the Arab Conquest*, 2nd ed. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1984); Gilbert Dagron and Vincent Déroche, "Juifs et chrétiens dans l'Orient du VII<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Travaux et Mémoires*, 11 (1991): 17–46; Gordon Darnell Newby, *A History of the Jews of Arabia* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1988); Christian-Julien Robin, "Himyar et Israël," *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, Comptes-Rendus des Séances de l'Année 2004, avril–juin, 831–908.

On Heraclius, Walter E. Kaegi, *Heraclius, Emperor of Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), is the definitive study. Although detailed, it is quite readable.

On the Sasanian Empire, see Touraj Daryaee, *Sasanian Persia. The Rise and Fall of an Empire* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2009). Also useful are the more technical presentations of Michael Morony, "Sasanids," *EI* (2), and (at much greater length) the *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), which contains many excellent chapters on aspects of Sasanian history (including, for example, their rela-

tions with Arabia and Byzantium). The Sasanians' use of Zoroastrian/Avestan myth to legitimize their claims to rule Iran is discussed in Touraj Daryaee, "Memory and History: The Construction of the Past in Late Antique Persia," *Name-ye Iran-e Bastan* 1:2 (2001–2002): 1–14. See also *Cambridge History of Iran*, III, 864–865, 409–410, and 692–696.

On Zoroastrianism: Mary Boyce, *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979) is the best introduction; Robert C. Zaehner, *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism* (New York: Putnam, 1961); *idem*, *Zurvan: A Zoroastrian Dilemma* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955).

On pre-Islamic Arabia: An excellent, readable general introduction is Robert G. Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam* (London: Routledge, 2001). See also many excellent articles in F. E. Peters, ed., *The Arabs and Arabia on the Eve of Islam* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999). The clearest brief overview of the internal politics of Mecca on the eve of Islam may still be that found in W. M. Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), 4–16, but the reader should be aware that his discussions, elsewhere in the volume, of "tribal humanism" and his assumption that Mecca was the linchpin of international luxury trade have been decisively challenged in recent years—notably in Patricia Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987). Watt's *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 151–174, offers a similarly useful overview of Medina before Islam, but now see also Michael Lecker, *Muslims, Jews, and Pagans: Studies on Early Islamic Medina* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995).

On the empires' efforts to establish ties with Mecca and Yathrib, see M. Lecker, "The Levying of Taxes for the Sasanians in Pre-Islamic Medina (Yathrib)," *JSAI* 27 (2002): 109–126, and F. M. Donner, "The Background to Islam," in *CCJ*, 528, notes 16 and 17. Patricia Crone, "Making Sense of the Qurashi Leather Trade," *BSOAS* 70 (2007): 63–88, emphasizes the great military importance of Arabian leather to the Byzantine and Sasanian armies.

On Christians in the pre-Islamic Hijaz, see the suggestive reports in Guillaume, *Life*, 572: a Christian slave among the slain at Hunayn, and 552: pictures of Jesus and Mary inside the Ka'ba. The recent works that most

emphatically advances the claim that Christians were found in the Hijaz are Günter Lüling's *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad* (Erlangen: H. Lüling, 1981) and *Über den Ur-Qur'an* (Erlangen: H. Lüling, 1974), the latter now translated as *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation* (Delhi: Motilal Benarsidass, 2003).

On the Nazoreans, see François de Blois, "Nasrani (Ναζωραῖοι) and hanif (ἁνιφ): Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and Islam," *BSOAS* 65 (2002): 1–30.

On the survival of prophecy: Rebecca Gray, *Prophetic Figures in Late Second Temple Jewish Palestine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); on the Montanists, see Ronald E. Heine, ed., *The Montanist Oracles and Testimonia* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1989); on Manichaeism, see Samuel N. C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1992).

On the *ridda* wars, see Elias S. Shoufani, *Al-Riddah and the Muslim Conquest of Arabia* (Beirut: Arab Institute for Research and Publishing, and Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972).

## 2. Muhammad and the Believers' Movement

A readable overview of the traditional view of Muhammad's career, based closely on and replicating the general contours of the Islamic sources, is W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad, Prophet and Statesman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961)—which is based on his more detailed studies, *Muhammad at Mecca* and *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953 and 1956). In shorter compass, see the article "Muhammad" in the *EI* (2) by F. Buhl as revised by A. T. Welch. Another account, which follows in its general outlines the traditional biography but is fully aware of the recent revisionist and skeptical critique, is F. E. Peters, *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam* (Albany: State University of New York, 1994). It also has the virtue of providing many relevant passages of traditional Arabic sources in English translation.

Many English translations of the Qur'an are available. Most are quite serviceable, but the new reader should try comparing two or more on a

given passage to get some idea of the range of interpretations the text can support. Because the Qur'an does not, for the most part, present its material as connected narratives or gather all treatments of a particular issue in one place, new readers will find that a detailed index is an indispensable tool in exploring what the text says on a given subject and should consider the fullness of the index when buying a translation.

A readable account of some of the recent debates about the Qur'an among revisionist and traditionalist scholars is found in Toby Lester, "What is the Koran?," *Atlantic Monthly* (January 1999), 43–56. More up-to-date is F. M. Donner, "The Qur'an in Recent Scholarship: Challenges and Desiderata," in Gabriel Said Reynolds, ed., *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context* (London: Routledge, 2008), 29–50.

Western approaches to the traditional Islamic sources for the rise of Islam are surveyed and categorized in the introduction to Donner, *Narratives*. For the life of Muhammad specifically, see F. E. Peters, "The Quest of the Historical Muhammad," *IJMES* 23 (1991): 291–315, which has also been reprinted at the end of his *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam*, quoted above.

Recent revisionist views of Islam's origins were presented in P. Crone and M. Cook, *Hagarism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) and in J. Wansbrough's *Qur'anic Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), which first proposed the "late origin" theory of the Qur'an. The former, however, is not easy to follow, and the latter, even for specialists, is virtually incomprehensible. Wansbrough's ideas are best grasped by reading the work of one of his sympathizers, such as Andrew Rippin, "Literary Analysis of *Qur'an*, *Tafsir*, and *Sira*: The Methodologies of John Wansbrough," in *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, ed. Richard C. Martin, 151–163 (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985). I have offered a critique of Wansbrough's ideas on the Qur'an's date in chapter 1 of Donner, *Narratives*. The idea that the Qur'an may include "recycled" Arabian Christian materials that antedate the prophet was advanced by Günter Lüling (*Über den Ur-Qur'an* and *Wiederentdeckung*, cited near the end of the bibliography for chapter 1)—actually the earliest of the recent revisionists, although his ideas have little in common with the "English school" represented by Wansbrough, Crone, and Cook and have had far less impact to

date. The publications of Christoph Luxenberg, starting with his *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran* (Berlin: Schiler, 2007; German original, 2000), with its thesis that significant parts of the Qur'an are not in Arabic, but Aramaic, created a great stir both because of its many specific reinterpretations of the text and because of the broader issues it raised concerning the relationship between the Qur'an and Christian tradition. A noteworthy contribution to the ongoing discussion of these issues is Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext* (New York: Routledge, forthcoming).

Many penetrating articles on early Islam have come from the pen of M. J. Kister; see his collection, *Studies in Jahiliyya and Early Islam* (London: Variorum, 1980), for a selection of these, or the journal *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, where many of his more recent pieces have appeared. A valuable study of the symbolic and legitimizing aspects in the narratives of a number of episodes in Muhammad's life (including numerological symbolism) is Uri Rubin, *In the Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muhammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin, 1995); it also refutes the assertion of some revisionists that many parts of Muhammad's biography are exegetical, that is, invented out of whole cloth to "explain" a certain passage in the Qur'an, showing instead that many accounts seem to be very early (which is not necessarily to say, of course, that they are accurate records of what happened). On Muhammad "feeding the multitudes" like Jesus, see Guillaume, *Life*, 451–452; for further cases of this sort, see Toufic Fahd, "Problèmes de typologie dans la «Sira» d'Ibn Ishaq," in *La vie du prophète Mahomet (Colloque de Strasbourg, octobre 1980)* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1983), 67–75.

The basic ideas presented in this chapter regarding the ecumenical character of the early Believers' movement are developed in a more specialized way in Donner, "Believers to Muslims."

Muhammad's calling his movement *hanifiyya* is noted by Jacques Waardenburg, "Towards a Periodization of Earliest Islam According to Its Relations with Other Religions," in *Proceedings of the Ninth Congress of the Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants*, ed. R. Peters, 304–336 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), at p. 311.

The *umma* document, often misleadingly called the "Constitution of Medina," is discussed in a general way in R. B. Serjeant, "The Constitution of Medina," *Islamic Quarterly* 8 (1964): 3–16, and in greater detail in "The *Sunnah Jami'ah*, Pacts with the Yathrib Jews, and the *Tahrim* of Yathrib: Analysis and Translation of the Documents Comprised in the So-Called 'Constitution of Medina,'" *BSOAS* 41 (1978): 1–42. See Michael Lecker, *The "Constitution of Medina": Muhammad's First Legal Document* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin, 2004), which studies it in great detail.

The idea that the Qur'an's invective against *mushrikun* may be directed not at pagans but rather at "soft" monotheists is advanced by G. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); a similar notion was proposed by Raimund Köbert, "Zur Bedeutung der drei letzten Worte von Sure 22, 30/31," *Orientalia* 35 (1966): 28–32, and developed by Günter Lüling, *Über den Ur-Qur'an* (Erlangen: H. Lüling, 1974), esp. 202–203.

Qur'anic piety is discussed in Donner, *Narratives*, chapter 2. The original concept of *zakat* or *sadaqa* as a payment in expiation for sin, rather than alms, is brilliantly explored in Suliman Bashear, "On the Origins and Development of the Meaning of *Zakat* in Islam," *Arabica* 40 (1993): 84–113. For parallels between the Believers' piety and that of the late antique Christian tradition, see Ofer Livne-Kafri, "Early Muslim Ascetics and the World of Christian Monasticism," *JSAI* 20 (1996): 105–129. The quote about prayer as the fabric of religious life is by N. Hanif from the entry "Salat (Ritual Prayer)" in *Encyclopedia of the Holy Qur'an*, ed. N. K. Singh and A. R. Agwan, 1309 (Delhi: Global Vision, 2000).

For the Qur'anic data on ritual prayer, dozens of references could be provided, but the following will give the interested reader a start. Various prayer times: Q. 2:238, 4:103, 11:114, 20:30, 30:17–18, 52:48–49, 73:2–7, and 76:25–26. Standing, kneeling, sitting: Q. 2:43, 4:103, and 5:55. Prostration: Q. 50:40, and 9:112. Call to prayer: Q. 5:58. Ablutions: Q. 5:6.

On the 'ashura' fast, see Suliman Bashear, "'Ashura', an Early Muslim Fast," *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländische Gesellschaft* 141 (1991): 281–316.

On Jewish converts to Islam, see Michael Lecker, "Hudhayfa b. al-Yaman and 'Ammar b. Yasir, Jewish Converts to Islam," *Quaderni di Studi*

*Arabi* 11 (1993): 149–162; *idem*, “Amr ibn Hazim al-Ansari and Qur’an 2, 256: ‘No Compulsion Is There in Religion,’” *Oriens* 35 (1996): 57–64; “Zayd b. Thabit, ‘A Jew with Two Sidelocks’: Judaism and Literacy in Pre-Islamic Medina (Yathrib),” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 56 (1997): 259–273.

On Jewish Christianity as antecedent for Qur’anic prophetology, including the notion of “seal of the prophets,” see François de Blois, “Elchasai—Manes—Muhammad. Manichäismus und Islam in religionshistorischem Vergleich,” *Der Islam* 81 (2004): 31–48. On prophecy in early Christianity, see Ernst Käsemann, “The Beginnings of Christian Theology,” *Journal for Theology and the Church* 6 (1969): 17–46, esp. 27–29.

For the early community’s eschatological and apocalyptic outlook, there is as yet no satisfactory comprehensive treatment, but for a few examples, see Lawrence I. Conrad, “Portents of the Hour: Hadith and Historiography in the First Century A.H.,” *Der Islam* (forthcoming); Michael Cook, “The Heraclian Dynasty in Muslim Eschatology,” *Al-Qantara* 13 (1992): 3–23; Suliman Bashear, “Apocalyptic and Other Materials on Early Muslim-Byzantine Wars: A Review of Arabic Sources,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1 (1991): 173–207; and Wilferd Madelung, “‘Abd Allah b. al-Zubayr and the Mahdi,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 40 (1981): 291–305. The idea that apocalyptic eschatology and realized eschatology might be found simultaneously may seem like a logical impossibility, but the coexistence of these concepts is known in other religious traditions, notably early Christianity; see David Aune, *The Cultic Setting of Realized Eschatology in Early Christianity* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972). Some scholars claim that the apocalyptic tone is “not strong” in the Qur’an, but such statements ignore the forcefulness and immediacy of the apocalyptic imagery used in many of the Qur’an’s shorter chapters. For some thoughtful reflections on Qur’anic eschatology, see Andrew Rippin, “The Commerce of Eschatology,” in *The Qur’an as Text*, ed. Stefan Wild, 125–135 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996). The quote about “easily visualized scenes” is from Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 6.

My treatment of the Qur’an’s attitudes toward militancy and activism is based on Reuven Firestone, *Jihad: The Origin of Holy War in Islam* (Ox-

ford: Oxford University Press, 1999), which is both convincing and readable. On the Qur’an’s use of “escape clauses,” see F. M. Donner, “Fight for God—But Do So with Kindness: Reflections on War, Peace, and Communal Identity in Early Islam,” in *War and Peace in the Ancient World*, ed. Kurt A. Raaflaub, 297–311 (Oxford: Blackwell’s, 2007).

On the duty to “command good and forbid wrong” one may begin with Michael Cook, *Forbidding Wrong in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

### 3. The Expansion of the Community of Believers

A brief overview of the Islamic conquests is F. M. Donner, “Islam, Expansion of” in J. Strayer, ed., *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*. A more detailed overview of the issues can be found in F. M. Donner, “The Islamic Conquests” in *Companion to Middle Eastern History*, ed. Youssef Choueiri, 28–51 (Malden, MA: Blackwell’s, 2005). A readable older survey constructed within the parameters of the traditional paradigm is Francesco Gabrieli, *Muhammad and the Conquests of Islam* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968). The sketch of the expansion into Syria and Iraq provided here is based on Donner, *Conquests*.

On the reliability (or lack of it) of the conquest narratives, see Donner, *Narratives*, esp. chap. 7; Albrecht Noth and Lawrence I. Conrad, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source-Critical Study* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin, 1994); and Chase F. Robinson, “The Conquest of Khuzistan: A Historiographical Reassessment,” *BSOAS* 67 (2004): 14–39. On the questions of centralization and the general skepticism of some writers toward the early conquest narratives, see F. M. Donner, “Centralized Authority and Military Autonomy in the Early Islamic Conquests,” in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East, III: States, Resources and Armies*, ed. Averil Cameron, 337–360 (Princeton, NJ: Darwin, 1995).

On *ta’lif al-qulub*/“reconciling of hearts,” see Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, 348–353.

On ‘Amr ibn al-‘As’s properties, see Michael Lecker, “The Estates of ‘Amr b. al-‘As in Palestine: Notes on a New Negev Inscription,” *BSOAS* 52 (1989): 24–37.



The quote on Jerusalem is from Bernard McGinn, "The Meaning of the Millennium," *Encuentros* 13 (January 1996): 10 [Lectures published by the Inter-American Development Bank Cultural Center, Washington, DC].

On the *ridda* wars, see Elias S. Shoufani, *Al-Riddah and the Muslim Conquest of Arabia* (Beirut: Arab Institute for Research and Publishing, and Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972).

On the tribal composition of the early conquest armies in Syria and Iraq, see Donner, *Conquests*, appendices.

On the *ridda* wars as the crucial experience leading to the crystallization of standing armies, see F. M. Donner, "The Growth of Military Institutions in the Early Caliphate and Their Relation to Civilian Authority," *Al-Qantara* 14 (1993): 311–326.

On the *hima* at al-Rabadha, see Sa'd al-Din al-Rashid, *Rabadhah. A Portrait of Early Islamic Civilisation in Saudi Arabia* (Riyadh: King Saud University College of Arts, and Harlow, UK: Longmans, 1986), 1–7. Thick deposits of camel bones at al-Rabadha were reported to me in a personal communication in 1994 by one of the excavators. These are not mentioned in the report by al-Rashid, but the latter does mention (p. 88) that some inscriptions on camel bones were found (mostly business records).

The early Christian and other near-contemporary sources for Islam's origins are conveniently collected, translated, and discussed in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, which is indispensable.

Absence of archaeological evidence of destruction associated with the Islamic "conquests" is noted in Robert Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin, 1995), *infra*, esp. 222–224. Specific examples: On Jerusalem, Meir Ben Dov, *In the Shadow of the Temple* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1985); on Jerash (Gerasa), Iain Browning, *Jerash and the Decapolis* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1982), 57–58; on Hama, Harald Ingholt, *Rapport Préliminaire sur sept campagnes de fouilles à Hama en Syrie (1932–1938)* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1940), 136–139, on Level B, dated as Byzantine but probably Byzantine and early Islamic; on Asqalan/Ashkelon, Lawrence E. Stager, *Ashkelon Discovered* (Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeological Society, 1991), 53–54, discusses the transition but notes that no significant remains mark it. More generally, see Averil Cameron, "Interfaith Relations in the First Islamic Century,"

*Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies* 1/2 (Autumn 1999), 1–12.

On churches established or rebuilt shortly following the "conquest," see Schick, *Christian Communities*, *infra*. Michele Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan* (Amman: American Center of Oriental Research, 1992) provides descriptions, mostly from churches dating from the sixth and seventh centuries, with sumptuous illustrations.

On early Christian texts mentioning Muhammad, see Robert Hoyland, "The Earliest Christian Writings on Muhammad: An Appraisal," in *The Biography of Muhammad: The Issue of the Sources*, ed. Harald Motzki, 276–297 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2000); also, especially, G. J. Reinink, "The Beginnings of Syriac Apologetic Literature in Response to Islam," *Oriens Christianus* 77 (1993): 165–187. On the evolving claims for Muhammad's prophecy and their relation to responses in the Jewish and Christian communities, see Sarah Stroumsa, "The Signs of Prophecy: The Emergence and Early Development of a Theme in Arabic Theological Literature," *Harvard Theological Review* 78 (1985): 101–114.

On the status of Zoroastrians, see Y. Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 72–76 and 198.

On early *shahadas*, see Donner, "Believers to Muslims," 47–48. A. J. Wensinck, ed., *Concordance et indices de la tradition musulmane* (8 vols., Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1936–1988), lists under *shahada* many that mention only recognition of God's oneness—not of Muhammad's prophecy. M. J. Kister, ". . . illa bi-haqiqi . . . A Study of an Early *hadith*," *JSAI* 5 (1984): 33–52, deals with the debate over whether it is an adequate *shahada* to say only "There is no god but God," without reference to Muhammad's prophecy. Guillaume, *Life*, 668, has a report suggesting that the basis of true faith is recognition of God's oneness, prayer, alms, fasting, pilgrimage, and ritual purity, but recognition of Muhammad's status as prophet is pointedly missing. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, Excursus F (687–703), provides a tabulation of dated Muslim writings up to A.H. 135/752–753 C.E.

Text for the quote from the Nestorian patriarch is found in *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, Series III, vol. 64, 248–251; cf. Tor Andrae, "Der Ursprung des Islam und das Christentum," *Kyrkshistorisk årsskrift* 23 (1923): 167; cited also in Sebastian Brock, "Syriac Views of Emergent

Islam," in *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society*, ed. G. H. A. Juynboll, 9–21 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), at p. 15.

On Muslim treaty texts, see Albrecht Noth, "Die literarische Überlieferung der Verträge der Eroberungszeit . . .," in *Studien zum Minderheitenproblem in Islam I*, ed. Tilman Nagel et al., 282–304 (Bonn: Selbstverlag des Orientalischen Seminars der Universität, 1973).

On Believers sharing worship space with Christians in churches, see Donner, "Believers to Muslims," 51–52; Philip K. Hitti, *The Origins of the Islamic State* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1916, 125 and 201, on Damascus and Hims; and Suliman Bashear, "Qibla musharriqa and the Early Muslim Prayer in Churches," *Muslim World* 81 (1991): 267–282. On the Cathisma Church, see Leah Di Segni, "Christian Epigraphy . . .," *Aram* 15 (2003): 247–267, at p. 248 (I thank Lennart Sundelin for bringing this reference to my attention).

On Jerusalem, see Heribert Busse, "Omar b. al-Ḥattab in Jerusalem," *JSAI* 5 (1984): 73–119; Busse, "Omar's Image as the Conqueror of Jerusalem," *JSAI* 8 (1986): 149–168; and Busse, "Die 'Umar-Moschee im östlichen Atrium der Grabeskirche," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 109 (1993): 73–82. The relevant passage from Arculf is translated and discussed in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 219–223.

The early conquest campaigns, as described by the Muslim narrative sources, are beautifully depicted in visual form on the map by Ulrich Rebstock in the *Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients*, Map B.VII.2, "The Islamic Empire under the First Four Caliphs" (1989).

For the Zoroastrian tax collector, see Claude Cahen, "Fiscalité, Propriété, Antagonismes Sociaux en Haute-Mésopotamie au temps des premiers 'Abbasides d'après Denys de Tell-Mahré," *Arabica* 1 (1954): 136–152.

On Mosul and the Jazira, see Chase F. Robinson, *Empire and Elites after the Muslim Conquest* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), esp. 33–41.

On centralization, see F. M. Donner, "Centralized Authority and Military Autonomy in the Early Islamic Conquests," in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East III: States, Resources and Armies*, ed. Averil Cameron, 337–360 (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1995); for the Sebeos quote, see Holyand, *Seeing Islam*, 131.

On the *amsar*/garrison towns, see Donald Whitcomb, "Amsar in Syria? Syrian Cities after the Conquest," *Aram* 6 (1994): 13–33; for Ayla, see Whitcomb, "The Misr of Ayla: New Evidence for the Early Islamic City," in *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan, V: Art and Technology throughout the Ages*, ed. G. Bisheh, 277–288 (Amman: Department of Antiquities, 1995). On the plan of Kufa, see Donner, *Conquests*, 226–236; and Hichem Djait, *Al-Kufa: naissance de la ville islamique* (Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1986). On Fustat, see Wladislaw Kubiak, *Al-Fustat: Its Foundation and Early Urban Development* (Cairo: American University in Cairo, 1987).

On the *diwan*, see Gerd-Rüdiger Puin, "Der Diwan des 'Umar ibn al-Ḥattab: Ein Beitrag zur frühislamischen Verwaltungsgeschichte" (diss. Bonn, 1970).

On the *barid* in the conquest period, see Adam Silverstein, "A Neglected Chapter in the History of Caliphal State-Building," *JSAI* 30 (2005): 293–317.

On the countryside "running itself" after the conquests and forwarding taxes to the new regime, see Terry Wilfong, *Women of Jeme: Lives in a Coptic Town in Late Antique Egypt* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).

On settlement in Iraq and Syria, see Donner, *Conquests*, chap. 5, esp. 239–250.

#### 4. The Struggle for Leadership of the Community, 37–73/655–692

The meaning of *ibn al-sabil* is discussed in G.-R. Puin, "Der Diwan des 'Umar ibn al-Ḥattab" (diss. Bonn, 1970).

On the *shura*, see Gernot Rotter, *Die Umayyaden und der zweite Bürgerkrieg (680–692)* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1982), 7–16. The anecdote about 'Umar on his deathbed is found in Tab. i/2778–2779.

On cutting stipends to soldiers, see Tab. i/2929.

On the complex questions of landholding and the distribution of conquered lands, one may begin with Michael G. Morony, "Landholding in Iraq," in *Land Tenure and Social Transformation in the Middle East*, ed.

Tarif Khalidi, 209–222 (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1984). A helpful survey in Arabic is Faleh Husayn, “Al-Dawla al-‘arabiyya al-islamiyya wa-l-‘ard al-maftuha khilal al-fatra al-rashida,” *Dirasat* 22 (1995): 1807–1830.

On ‘Uthman’s changes to the pilgrimage rituals: Tab. i/2833–2835.

On the changing policies toward appointments among Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, and ‘Uthman, see Martin Hinds, “The Murder of the Caliph ‘Uthman,” *IJMES* 3 (1972): 450–469.

On the codification of the Qur’an text—a hotly debated issue today—see the surveys in W. M. Watt, *Bell’s Introduction to the Qur’an* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970), 40–56; and *EI* (2), “Kur’an,” section 3, by A. T. Welch.

My description of the events of the First Civil War follows closely the detailed accounting given in Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). Madelung, unfortunately, has allowed himself to become virtually a partisan in the conflict, unequivocally supporting the claims of ‘Ali. My own summary treatment of these events, while based on Madelung’s, thus differs significantly from his in its interpretation. Madelung emphasizes, in particular, the importance of ‘Ali’s close kinship to the prophet; a contrasting view is provided by Asma Afsaruddin, *Excellence and Precedence* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2002), 277–284, who contends that piety was more important than kinship.

The report of Yazid’s Taghlibi troops marching with the cross and banner of St. Sergius comes from a poem of al-Akhtal, the Christian court poet of the Umayyads, cited in H. Lammens, “Le califat de Yazîd I<sup>er</sup>,” *Mélanges de la faculté orientale de l’Université Saint-Joseph de Beirut* 5 (1911–1912): 229. Close ties of the tribe of Kalb with Quraysh even before Islam are noted in M. J. Kister, “Mecca and the Tribes of Arabia,” in *Studies in Islamic History and Civilization in Honour of Professor David Ayalon*, ed. M. Sharon, 33–57 (Jerusalem: Cana, and Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), at 55–57.

On the quote from John bar Penkaye, see Donner “Believers to Muslims,” 43–45; and G. J. Reinink, “The Beginnings of Syriac Apologetic Literature in Response to Islam,” *Oriens Christianus* 77 (1993): 165–187.

On the inscriptions and other documents of Mu‘awiya, *qada’ al-mu‘minin*, and so on, see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 687–703, nos. 7, 8, 9, 16;

Donner, “Believers to Muslims”; and Yusuf Ragib, “Une ère inconnue d’Égypte musulmane: l’ère de la juridiction des croyants,” *Annales islamologiques* 41 (2007): 187–207.

On the conquest of North Africa, including the role of slave capture in it, see Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *History of the Maghrib in the Islamic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 28–37; and Elizabeth Savage, *A Gateway to Hell, a Gateway to Paradise* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin, 1997). Also *EI* (2), “Kusayla” by M. Talbi.

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Pilgrimage leaders in 68/June 688: Tab. ii/782.

## 5. The Emergence of Islam

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## Glossary

**agarenoi** See *muhajirun*.

**ahl al-bayt** Literally, "people of the house," often a designation for members of the (extended) family of the prophet Muhammad; sometimes a designation for people associated with the Ka'ba in Mecca, called the "house of God."

**ahl al-dhimma** Protected peoples, subjects of the Believers who paid special tax in exchange for the contract of protection (*dhimma*) by Believers.

**ahl al-kitab** "Peoples of the book," that is, Christians and Jews, who were considered by Believers to have received God's revelations previously.

**'amil** Finance director for a province, usually working in tandem with the *amir* or military governor.

**amir** Arabic term for military commander of an expeditionary force or military governor of a province.

**amir al-mu'minin** "Commander of the Believers," title given to successors to Muhammad as leaders of the community of Believers/Muslims.

**amsar** See *misr*.

**ansar** Literally, "helpers," the term for those people in Yathrib (later Medina) who joined Muhammad's movement.

- 'ashura'** The tenth day of the first month of the Muslim calendar, Muharram. On this day, Shi'a Muslims commemorate the death of Husayn ibn 'Ali at Karbala' in 61/680.
- aya** A verse of the Qur'an; literally, "sign" (of God's favor).
- barid** The official courier service maintained by the *amir al-mu'minin* for the exchange of letters and intelligence information.
- caliph** See *khalifa*.
- dihqan** Middle Persian (Pahlavi) word for local gentry who dominated life in the Iranian countryside in the late antique and early Islamic periods.
- diwan** In the early Believers' movement, the payroll or list of soldiers (and others) eligible to receive a salary from the regime. As the original *diwan* grew over time into a large bureaucracy to handle military pay and other matters, the term *diwan* later acquired the sense of "government bureau." It also means the collected works of a poet—the shared idea being that a *diwan* constitutes a listing or compilation of something.
- dyophysite** Christians who believe that Jesus had two separate natures (Greek, *physis*), one human and one divine, that existed independently within him. Compare to monophysite.
- fitna** Qur'anic word meaning "temptation"; used by later Islamic historiography to refer to the civil wars of the seventh century, because some of the protagonists were deemed to have succumbed to the temptation to seize worldly power.
- futuh** Arabic word meaning "opening" and "act of divine grace," used in Islamic historiography to refer to the seizure of new areas or towns by the Believers' movement; often translated as "conquest."
- hadith** A statement attributed to the prophet Muhammad, or a report about something he did, prefaced by a chain of transmitting authorities.
- hajj** The annual pilgrimage in the twelfth month of the Muslim calendar, during which pilgrims engage in numerous rituals centered on Mt. 'Arafa and other sites near Mecca.
- hanif** Somewhat obscure term in the Qur'an, evidently meaning a "natural" monotheist not belonging to one of the established monotheistic religions (for example, Christianity or Judaism).

- haram** In Arabian society of the seventh century, a sacred enclave or delimited sacred space. Mecca was a leading *haram* on the eve of Islam; Muhammad founded another *haram* in Yathrib after his emigration there in 622 C.E.
- Hashim** The clan or lineage within the Meccan tribe of Quraysh to which Muhammad the prophet belonged.
- hijra** Arabic word meaning "emigration," "taking refuge," and sometimes "settlement"; applied to the prophet Muhammad's move from Mecca to Medina (622 C.E.), which became year 1 of the Muslim calendar; also applied, in the early years of the Believers' movement, to the resettlement of Believers outside Arabia. See *muhajirun*.
- hima** Protected pasture, reserved by the *amir al-mu'minin* to maintain the livestock (especially camels) given as tax payments.
- imam, imamate** In ritual prayer, the person who prays in front of the others, with whose movements the other worshippers coordinate their own; in a more general sense, an *imam* is someone who is recognized as a leader in a particular context. Among the Shi'a, *imam* came by the second century AH to mean a God-guided leader of the whole community of Muslims, endowed with secret knowledge essential for the salvation of the community as a whole, and therefore the single Muslim who could rightly claim to be *amir al-mu'minin* (even though he did not actually hold that position).
- jihad** "Striving, exertion"; hence, in some contexts, "fighting against, struggling against, holy war."
- Ka'ba** The cubical stone structure in Mecca that is the central cult site for the Islamic faith and the focus of daily prayers.
- kafir (plural, kafirun)** An unbeliever; literally "ingrate," one who is not grateful to God for His bounties.
- khalifa** Qur'anic term adopted by the *amir al-mu'minin* 'Abd al-Malik (ruled 685–705) as alternative title for the head of state; anglicized as "caliph."
- khawarij** Literally, "those who go out," the original *khawarij* were ultra-pious members of the early community of Believers who broke with the *amir al-mu'minin* 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, whom they considered



- guilty of a grave sin (and therefore unqualified to lead) because of his decision to submit the question of leadership to arbitration.
- khutba** The sermon delivered during the noontime prayer on Fridays.
- Koran** See **Qur'an**.
- kufr** Unbelief; see **kafir**.
- magaritai** See **muhajirun**.
- mawla** (plural, **mawali**) Client of an Arabian kin group, who though of different lineage is considered functionally a member of the kin group. New converts often held this status.
- mhaggraye** See **muhajirun**.
- mihrab** A niche in the wall of a mosque or place of prayer indicating the direction of the **qibla**, toward which one faces during prayer.
- minbar** The elevated pulpit from which a prayer leader delivers the **khutba** or sermon during Friday prayers.
- misr** (plural, **amsar**) Garrison towns that the military forces of the Believers' movement established as bases and which developed over time into major cities, including Kufa and Basra in Iraq, Fustat in Egypt, Qayrawan in North Africa, and Marv in Central Asia.
- monophysite** Christians who believed that Jesus had only one nature (Greek, **physis**) that was simultaneously human and divine in character. The Byzantine "Orthodox" church condemned monophysitism at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 C.E. Compare to **dyophysite**.
- muhajirun** Those who have made **hijra**, especially those Meccans who were early followers of the prophet Muhammad and migrated with him to Yathrib (Medina). It was also used to refer to Arabian Believers who migrated to lands outside Arabia during the first expansion of the movement. The term shows up in Greek and Syriac sources (Syriac, **mhaggraye**; Greek, **agarenoi** or **magaritai**) as the first designation for the Believers when they appear in the lands outside Arabia.
- mu'min** (plural, **mu'minun**) Believer in the one God who lives righteously in accordance with God's revealed laws; in Qur'anic usage, can include righteous **ahl al-kitab** (Christians and Jews).

- mushrik** (plural, **mushrikun**) "Associators," those who associate other beings with God and hence deny His oneness.
- muslim** In the Qur'an, one who submits himself to God's will and law; perhaps specifically a follower of the Qur'an as revelation and law, rather than the Gospels or Torah.
- nabi** A prophet, sent by God to warn and guide a people. Compare to **rasul**.
- qada', qadi** The Qur'an uses **qada'** to refer to God's decree or decisive action; it came to be used for the jurisdiction exercised by those charged with deciding legal disputes on the basis of the Qur'an. These officials came to be called **qadis**.
- qibla** The direction toward the Ka'ba in Mecca, which Muslims face during prayers.
- Qur'an (Koran)** The sacred scripture of Muslims, believed by them to have been revealed to the prophet Muhammad (died 632 C.E.) by God. Often abbreviated as "Q." in this book.
- Quraysh** The tribe of Mecca to which Muhammad the prophet belonged.
- rashidun** "Rightly guided"; A retrospective term of later Islamic historiography, designating the first four successors to the prophet Muhammad: Abu Bakr (ruled 11–13/632–634), 'Umar (ruled 13–23/634–644), 'Uthman (ruled 23–35/644–656), and 'Ali (ruled 35–40/656–661). The term reflected the theological decision to make off-limits the debate on the rightfulness of these persons' claims, which was threatening to tear the community apart.
- rasul** Messenger or apostle, especially someone sent by God to be head of a religious community. Compare to **nabi**.
- ridda** An Arabic word meaning "going back," "replying," or "returning," used in later Islamic tradition as a pejorative term for the resistance within Arabia to the expansion of the Believers' community under the leadership of Abu Bakr (ruled 11–13/632–634). In later Islamic tradition, it carried the sense of "apostasy."
- sabb** The practice of cursing one's political opponents during the sermon in Friday prayer; practiced especially by the Umayyads and the 'Alids in their struggles for leadership.

- sadaqa** Tax paid to the Believers' movement; sometimes equated with *zakat*, it seems in many sources to be especially linked to payments made by pastoral nomads.
- sa'ifa** Summer raids launched by the Believers/Muslims, especially against Byzantine territory in Anatolia.
- salah or salat** Ritual prayer for Believers/Muslims, constituting several *rak'as* consisting of standing, bowing, prostrations, and certain recitations while facing the Ka'ba, performed at prescribed times of the day.
- shahada** "Bearing witness," the basic statement of faith of Muslims: "There is no god except God, Muhammad is the apostle of God." Saying it became one of the five pillars or basic rituals of the Islamic faith.
- shi'a, Shi'at 'Ali** Arabic *shi'a* basically means "party, faction." The party of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, the prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, backed him during the First Civil War (656–661 C.E.). Later, his followers came to revere all of 'Ali's descendants and asserted that they had a special claim on leadership of the community. See *imam*.
- shura** Consultative council of leading members of the community, convened to decide important matters, especially questions of leadership; traditionally, a *shura's* members were to debate an issue until complete consensus was attained.
- sura** A chapter of the Qur'an; all bear names ("The Cow," "Repentance," and so on) and are also traditionally given numbers (for example, "The Cow" is Sura 2).
- tanzil** Literally, "sending down," this became the standard term for the process by which passages of the Qur'an were revealed by God to Muhammad. Hence, "[the process of] revelation."
- tawwabun** "The penitents," a group of early Shi'a who regretted not supporting adequately the movement of Husayn ibn 'Ali, killed by an Umayyad governor at Karbala' in Iraq in 61/680.
- thughur** The fortified border marches of the Believers' domains, especially those facing the Byzantine empire; literally, "gaps" or "spaces between the teeth" in Arabic, referring to the mountain passes that needed to be fortified against outside invasion.

- umma** Community, particularly the community of Believers.
- 'umra** The "lesser pilgrimage" (compare to *hajj*), involving circumambulation of the Ka'ba and various other rituals in Mecca itself. These may be conducted at any time of the year.
- zakat** In Islamic law, "alms, almsgiving," one of the "five pillars" or basic rituals of the faith. In Muhammad's time, a payment in expiation of past sins.