

# Chapter 1

## The story

### 600–800 CE

According to both Muslim tradition and most modern historians, Islam began in Arabia. To Muslims this happened not with Muhammad but with Abraham, who – together with his son Ishmael, the progenitor of the Arabs – built the Ka'ba in Mecca to which millions of Muslims have gone on pilgrimage until today. Modern historians skip over this and start with Muhammad's career in Mecca, and we too will begin there.

The Arabian Peninsula is a big place and is suitably varied – ethnically, topographically, culturally, and, on the eve of Islam, religiously. The bit of Arabia that concerns us most is the western region known as the Hijaz, which is where Mecca and Medina are situated. Muhammad was born in Mecca c. 570 into the town's leading tribe (Quraysh), though he was from a relatively minor branch of the tribe and was orphaned at a young age. In 610, at the age of 40, he began to receive revelations that would become verses of the Quran, which he shared with his friends and family, and eventually with others in Mecca. His monotheistic message was inconsistent with the town's polytheistic culture and, in 622, he was forced to flee, together with his supporters. He came to settle in Medina, an oasis populated by – among others – a large number of Jews, where his message about God, past prophets,

the end of days, fasting, charity, and the like, was familiar and unthreatening. He was welcomed in the town where he served as an adjudicator for some disputes that had been dividing the population. This emigration (*hijra*) is the starting point of both Muhammad's career as a statesman and of the Muslim calendar.

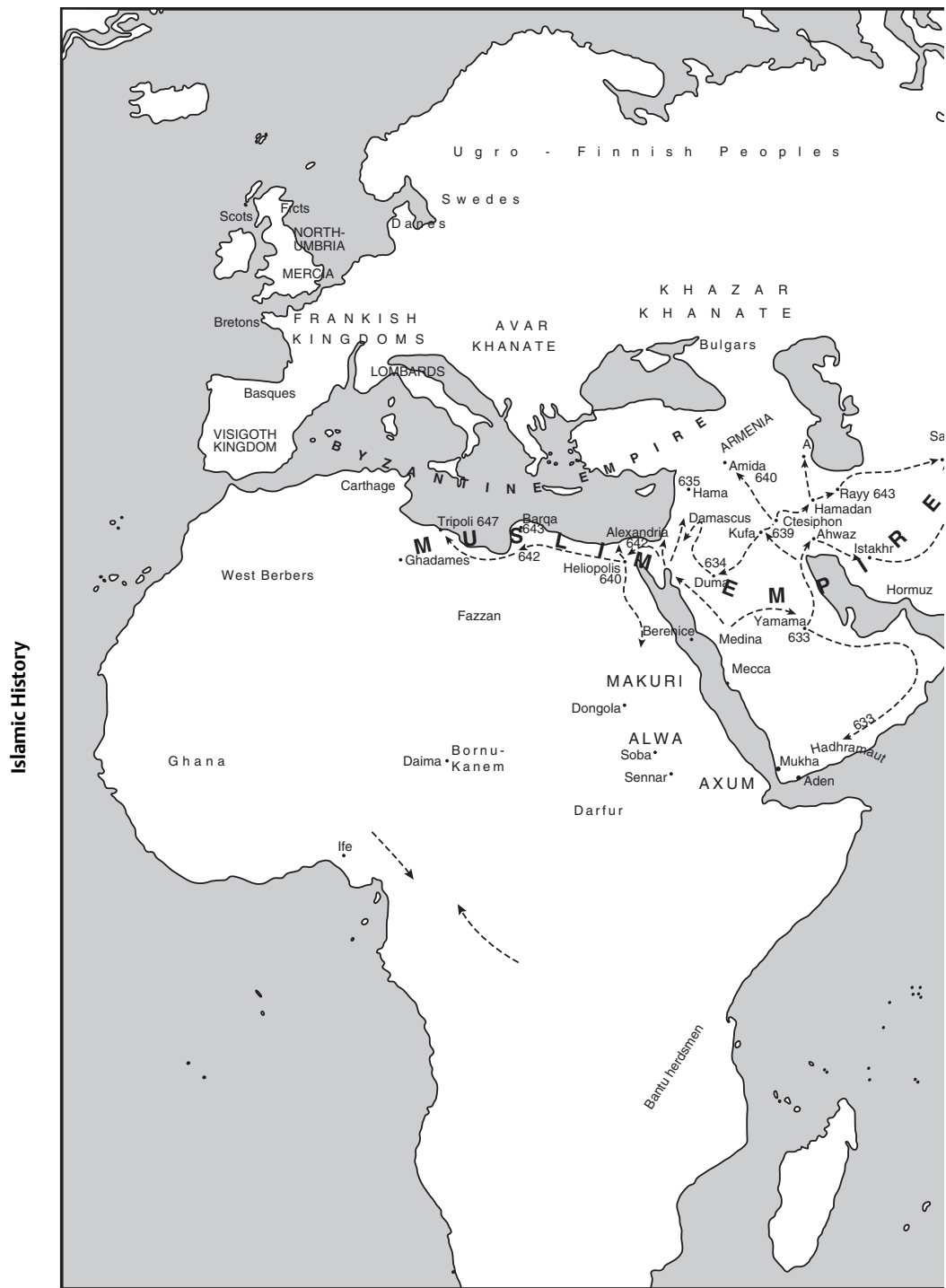
From his base in Medina, Muhammad set about establishing a new community (*umma*) made up of fellow emigrants from Mecca and those in Medina who supported him. For the next ten years, Muhammad continued to receive revelations, which often bore direct relevance to the *umma*'s needs and circumstances and reflected its growing power and confidence. Muhammad's dealings with the Meccan pagans and the Medinese Jews dominate accounts of the Medinese phase of his career: as his relations with the Jews soured, their tribes were gradually expelled from the town and even, in one instance, executed. The Meccans were eventually defeated in 630 and over the next two years Muhammad managed to unite the tribes of Arabia under the *umma*'s banner. His successes were widely taken as a sign of divine favour, and must have encouraged tribes throughout Arabia to cooperate and convert. Divine favour aside, Muhammad is described in early sources as a mortal who lived as an ordinary, even fallible human being (God rebukes him repeatedly in the Quran, though later Islamic tradition would come to hold that he had been infallible), and in 632 he died as one.

Muhammad's death set off two chain reactions whose consequences were momentous, in the one case leading to the emergence of Islamic sects and in the other to the emergence of an Islamic empire. In the first chain reaction, certain groups considered the Prophet's death to be the beginning of an era; in the second, some other groups saw it as the end of one. It was the beginning of an era for those Muslims who submitted to the rule of the caliph or 'successor', who acceded to leadership of the *umma* shortly after Muhammad's death. The reign of the first caliph, Abu Bakr (r. 632–4), was mostly spent dealing with the second chain reaction.

It was the end of an era for those tribes whose conversion to Islam had been inextricably linked to Muhammad himself; now that he was dead, they reasoned, their contract with him was void. Some tribes retained their new religious identity (which was fine) but withheld their taxes and allegiance from the *umma* (which was not). Other tribes also reverted to their pre-Islamic religions (shifting religious allegiances was common in pagan Arabia). All such groups were deemed to be political and religious apostates, whose return to the fold was crucial. The ensuing ‘wars of apostasy’ (*ridda*) succeeded not only in achieving their basic aims but also in creating the momentum and need for conquests beyond the peninsula. Many Arabians were pastoral nomads, and like other pastoral nomads, they relied to a significant extent on raiding others for their livelihood. The unification of Arabia’s numerous tribes under a new religious banner instilled in them a new sense of social cohesion and a spiritual purpose that harnessed the nomadic need to raid (which was merged with *jihad*, to which we will return in Chapter 3), while also depriving the Arabs of obvious victims: because Muslims could not raid each other, they raided their neighbours in Syria, Egypt, North Africa, Iraq, and Iran.

These raids were different, however. For the first time, rather than just looting the settled peoples of the Near East, the nomads actually brought them something of their own: a new religious message. Neither the Byzantine rulers in the west, nor the Sasanid rulers in the east, wanted it (according to tradition, already in Muhammad’s day letters were sent to imperial leaders inviting them to Islam); their subjects, however, were more receptive – if not always to the religion itself then at least to Muslim hegemony.

That the conquests of the Near East were as impressive to contemporaries as they are to us is evidenced by the fact that both the conquerors and the conquered were certain that God’s hand must have been guiding events – Muslims interpreted their success as God’s reward to them for following His will; Christians



### 3. The Early Islamic Conquests



were certain that their failures were God's retribution for their sins; and some Jews saw Islam as part of God's plan to spread monotheism to remote pagans of the Hijaz, or as a fulfilment of messianic expectations. (We do not know for certain what the Zoroastrians in Iran made of the rise of Islam, but they must have been unhappy about it, having lost the support and patronage that the Sasanid empire had hitherto offered them.)

Modern historians look elsewhere for explanations and have settled on three basic theories. First, the imperial powers were weak, having battled each other to a costly and exhausting stalemate over the preceding centuries. Second, much of the Near Eastern population was eager to exchange its rulers for more benign ones, having accumulated various grievances over centuries of religiously and economically unpopular policies. That the first lands conquered were inhabited by Semitic monotheists (Aramaic-speaking Christians and Jews in Byzantine Syria and Palestine, and in Sasanid Iraq) must also have been significant in this context. And third, the Arabs had military advantages over the Byzantine and Sasanid armies, and managed to exploit their religious fervour, the element of surprise, their familiarity with Byzantine and Sasanid tactics (some Arabs previously had served the empires in military capacities), and their ability to retreat to the desert on their mounts.

Which brings us back to camels. Howsoever we rationalize their success, the Arabs arrived in the Near East and North Africa in the mid to late 7th century, and stayed there, creating garrison towns in North Africa, Egypt, Iraq, and eastern Iran – only in Syria did the conquerors settle in existing towns (joining other Arabs who had settled there in pre-Islamic times). By the end of the 8th century, the garrison towns had become fully fledged cities and the Arabs had ventured out into towns and cities of the Near East, leaving a lasting mark on the landscape: the spread of camel breeding throughout the conquered territories accelerated the process by which the inefficient and high-maintenance

wheeled vehicles, which required paved roads, were replaced by the simpler and more economical Arabian camels. In provinces conquered from the Byzantine empire, straight, wide Roman roads gave way to the windy and narrow streets still seen in the old quarters of Near Eastern cities whose layout was influenced both by the absence of a distinctively public realm in early Islamic cities and by the spread of this unique Arabian ‘technology’. These garrison towns themselves became important economic hubs, drawing to them non-Muslims from neighbouring settlements, and redrawing the map of the Near East.

It was the spread of Arabic and Islam, however, that represents the most significant consequence of the early conquests. While the pivotal victories over the empires occurred during the reign of the second caliph, ‘Umar (r. 634–44), it was under the Umayyad caliphs (r. 661–750) that Arabic culture and Islamic rule spread – to some degree or another – from the Iberian Peninsula to the Punjab, more or less fixing the frontiers of the Islamic world for centuries to come.

The story

To some Muslims in the late 7th century, and to almost all Muslims since then, the Umayyads should not have been caliphs at all. Their four predecessors – Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthman (r. 644–56), and ‘Ali (r. 656–61) – had all been related to Muhammad either by marriage or by blood (or both, in ‘Ali’s case), and the reign of these four caliphs, known (to Sunnis in subsequent centuries) as ‘Rightly Guided Ones’ (*rashidun*), is remembered as having been a sort of Golden Age during which the *umma* was governed according to ‘Islamic’ principles. (‘Shiites’ are those who believe that ‘Ali should have succeeded Muhammad immediately.) The Umayyads, by contrast, were not directly related to the Prophet and, moreover, are said to have resisted him openly, only converting out of necessity, relatively late in Muhammad’s career. Although ‘Uthman himself was of the Umayyad family, he had converted early on, was Muhammad’s son-in-law, and is credited (though, to some at the time, discredited) with ordering the assembly of an

authoritative version of the Quran – amongst other good deeds. Things began to go wrong when ‘Uthman was murdered, and two claimants to the caliphal office emerged: ‘Ali – whose supporters had been championing his candidacy since 632; and Mu‘awiya – an Umayyad kinsman of ‘Uthman’s who demanded the right to avenge ‘Uthman’s blood. ‘Ali became caliph in 656 and struggled to exert his influence widely; by 657, he had entered into negotiations with Mu‘awiya. To many of ‘Ali’s supporters, this should never have happened – ‘Judgement belongs to God alone’, was their slogan – and they seceded from his camp, for which reason they are known as ‘seceders’ or ‘Kharijites’. Their strongly held views on the right to rule impelled them to deem dissenters as infidels worthy of death. Their most high-profile victim was ‘Ali himself in 661, though Kharijite groups would continue to oppose the caliphs for the next century and beyond.

Islamic History

With ‘Ali’s death, the age of ‘Rightly Guided’ caliphs ended. The bloody rivalry that led to Mu‘awiya’s accession came to be known as the first Civil War or *fitna* (‘strife’) in Islamic history, marking the end of a period of perceived unity within the *umma*. The Umayyads were thus off to a bad start and, according to sources written by those hostile to them, things continued to get worse. Mu‘awiya moved the capital to Damascus and designated his son Yazid (r. 680–3) as his successor, thereby establishing the principle of hereditary succession – for which the Umayyads were criticized (by those, it should be added, who created dynasties themselves). Yazid ran into trouble early on – killing ‘Ali’s son Hussein at Karbala (Iraq) in 680, which has cemented his infamy in the minds of Shiites – and his authority was challenged by another caliph in the Hijaz. Neither Yazid nor his son Mu‘awiya II (r. 683) lasted long. A second *fitna* caused great disruption at this time (680–92), and it is only with the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 692–705) that Umayyad sovereignty was restored; 692 became known as a ‘year of unity’ and administrative measures were taken to tighten the caliph’s control over his subjects, to prevent future challenges to his authority.



‘Abd al-Malik and his successors, though generally maligned in our sources as being impious kings (rather than pious caliphs), are grudgingly acknowledged as having made lasting contributions to Islamic civilization. They imposed Arabic as the official administrative language in Islamic lands, and extended these lands as far west as Spain and Morocco, and as far east as Pakistan and Central Asia. The caliph’s control over his provinces was tightened – with decentralized, tribal traditions giving way to better-organized imperial ones – and a consciously Arabic and Islamic identity was developed and imposed on caliphal institutions. ‘Islamic’ coins were minted, Arabic replaced Greek, Persian, and Coptic in administrative bureaus (opening the door to Muslim participation), and – most strikingly – the Dome of the Rock was constructed on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, confronting (or, to some scholars, meeting) Judaism’s messianic expectations and bearing an inscription that challenges Christianity’s basic doctrines. The point was clear for all to see: Islam had arrived.

But what did ‘Islam’ mean in this period? The Umayyads’ biggest problem was that their answer to this question differed fundamentally from that of the (self-appointed) religious scholars, the *‘ulama’* (sing. *‘alim*) as they would come to be known, who commanded popular support at the time, and who wrote the history books later on. For the Umayyads, Muhammad’s death was indeed the end of an era – as Muhammad was the ‘seal’ of prophets, God’s will would no longer be communicated through men bearing scriptures. Instead, it was the caliphs who served as His representatives on earth. This was the era of caliphs and it was they who possessed religious authority. To the religious scholars, this was nonsense. God provided the *umma* with all it needed to know: whatever was not in the Quran could be inferred from Muhammad’s own statements and actions. Since nobody knew more about these things than the *‘ulama’* themselves, religious authority should rest with them.



**4. The Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem. Inscriptions on the building's octagonal arcade include Quranic verses that challenge some of the basic doctrines of Christianity**

Unfortunately for the Umayyads, not only did a decisive proportion of their Muslim subjects side with the scholars, but many other Muslims had their own theological objections to their claim to the caliphate. Moreover, for much of the period (with one or two exceptions), conversion of the conquered peoples to Islam was discouraged by the caliphs, which meant two things: yet more people resented them (non-Muslims paid more taxes), and a majority of the caliphs' subjects were non-Muslim. Arab Muslims, non-Arab Muslims, Arab non-Muslims, and non-Arab non-Muslims all had cause to oppose the caliphs in Damascus. In 750, they were overthrown by what was basically a 'Shiite' revolt from the East that brought the Abbasid dynasty to the throne.

The Abbasids (750–1258) claimed descent from one of Muhammad's uncles and promised – in words and through select

actions – to make a dramatic break with Umayyad injustices. They moved the centre of power from Syria to the east, building a new capital at Baghdad in 762, and adopted messianic titles, which were meant to indicate that business was *not* as usual. Of course in many ways it was: as the Umayyads before them, they too shed the blood of charismatic Muslim leaders (the architects of their own revolution were brutally murdered), established a dynasty, and – as far as we can tell – claimed religious authority for themselves. They also intensified the transition from a loose, tribally based state into a sophisticated empire. ‘Abd al-Malik had begun this process half a century beforehand, but he had done so in Damascus, a city that, despite its formidable antiquity, had never been the seat of an empire. In Baghdad, the Abbasids were down the road from the old Sasanid capital of Ctesiphon, and although superficially the wine-women-and-song of pre-Islamic Arabia seems no different to the wine-women-and-song of the Abbasid court, by the reign of Harun al-Rashid (r. 786–809), the Near East had in many ways been set on a path that would see it transformed beyond recognition.

## 800–1100

That Islam exists at all is due to events in the 600–800 period. That it looks the way it does now is largely due to events in the 800–1100 one. And just as camels represented the first period, caravans can be said to represent the second one. A caravan consists of many camels (or other pack animals) led together by a group of travellers, which reflects one of the major differences between the Umayyads and the early Abbasids: the former created a somewhat exclusive, ‘Arab’ empire whereas the latter were consciously cosmopolitan and inclusive, empowering non-Arabs (mainly those who were culturally Persian – appropriately, ‘caravan’ is a Persian word) and absorbing them into Islam. Caravans are also central to this period for plying the routes that linked the Abbasids’ sprawling provinces, transporting pilgrims, envoys, merchants, scholars, and soldiers across a road network

that encouraged a level of internationalism, multiculturalism, and inter-connectivity that most Westerners would associate with modernity.

The foundations of this achievement are strikingly similar to those that are credited with the emergence of the modern West. But instead of a printing revolution, the Islamic world in this period experienced a paper revolution, whereby more expensive and elitist methods of writing (on papyrus and parchment, for example) were replaced by this more affordable medium. Literacy is thought to have increased dramatically, creating new readerships that consumed (and, in a circular way, generated) new genres of literature. Everything from pre-Islamic poetry to works on theology, philosophy, medicine, science, *belles-lettres*, and history was recorded in written form. A commensurate eruption in Islamic culture and civilization resulted, producing a diverse civilian elite in the Islamic world by the 9th century.

Islamic History

Travel and trade also flourished in this period, feeding from and into this cultural efflorescence. It is not just that travelogues (both real and imagined), maps, and geographies were produced on the basis of new experiences in far-flung lands – though this certainly happened – but also that Near Eastern merchants expanded their remit and horizons well beyond Abbasid borders. One 9th-century writer tells us of polyglot Iraqi Jews who criss-crossed Eurasia, travelling between France and China (covering Muslim lands, southern Russia, and India along the way), and the discovery of thousands of Abbasid coins in Scandinavia attests to the scope of this commercial activity. Even the spread of papermaking from China to the Near East is instructive in this context: our sources tell us that Muslims defeated a Chinese army in 751, capturing papermakers in the process from whom they learned the techniques themselves. What is interesting is that such hostile circumstances – a bloody battle in Central Asia – did little to hinder cross-cultural interaction and the spread of commodities, people, and ideas. Muslims in this period had active frontiers in

Spain, southern Europe, Central Asia, India, and Africa, affording both rulers and individuals the opportunity to derive kudos from waging *jihad*. The story about Chinese papermakers (and it is almost certainly just a story) reminds us that such confrontations were seen by the story's authors to present further occasions for cultural interaction as much as they stifled it.

This 'Golden Age' (as some have called it) of Islamic civilization was enabled by a delicate balance of appropriate circumstances, specifically the steady flow of income into the caliphal Treasury, supported by efficient book-keeping and the existence of relative stability within Abbasid lands. The equilibrium was disturbed from the second half of the 9th century onwards and the conditions for Abbasid globalization would never recover. The wealth brought in through trade and taxation began to diminish for a number of reasons. The carefully maintained Sawad region of southern Iraq from which the Abbasids derived much of their agricultural yield was plunged into chaos by a Kharijite-inspired revolt of East African slaves working in Basra (the '*Zanj*', 869–83). And governors in distant regions began to invest taxation revenues locally instead of sending the money to the capital, with economic independence often being followed by political independence. Furthermore, this is the period in which extensive conversion of non-Arabs to Islam resulted in the happy consequence of Islam's spread but also in the unhappy consequence of decreasing poll-tax revenues. To make matters worse, what was left in the coffers was quickly frittered away by a spendthrift court that expanded well beyond its capabilities and needs, creating new ruling elites who were often costlier than they were functional. It is in this period that the Abbasids came to lose political, military, and religious authority, as follows.

The story

Politically, the Abbasids struggled to keep their extensive realms unified; with an empire that stretched some 6,500 kilometres from east to west, and without the benefits of modern communications, it was likely that some of their subjects would

seek a measure of independence. Swift couriers, pigeons, beacons, and other methods of communication could to an extent cover the empire's enormous breadth, but political fragmentation was probably only a matter of time. In fact, in the case of Andalusia, it was not even that: already during the Abbasid takeover, an Umayyad prince fled to the Iberian Peninsula and established an independent state there, which – under ‘Abd al-Rahman III (r. 912–61) and his successors – would become a ‘caliphate’, and a magnificent centre of high culture. When the Abbasids transferred power and attention to the east, the western provinces of the caliphate gradually broke away: Morocco under the Idrisids (789–926), the rest of North Africa under the Aghlabids (800–909), Egypt under the Tulunids (868–905) and Ikhshidids (935–69), to be followed by the Fatimid caliphs in North Africa, Egypt, and Syria (909–1171). Even the eastern provinces sought a measure of independence, with the Tahirids ruling in Khurasan (821–73), followed there by the Samanids (874–1005) and the Ghaznavids (977–1186), who were based in eastern Afghanistan. With one or two exceptions (such as the Saffarids in eastern Iran, 861–900) these eastern dynasties tended to cooperate with and formally recognize the Abbasid authorities; western dynasties such as the Idrisids, Andalusian Umayyads, and Fatimids did not. In practice, however, for purely geographical reasons, the Abbasids often had more interaction – both positive and negative – with disloyal Egypt and Syria than with nominally loyal eastern Iran and Central Asia.

Militarily, in the early 9th century the Abbasids began to replace the army that brought them to power with Turkish slave-soldiers (*mamluks* or *ghulams*) purchased or captured from Central Asia. These Turks had three attractions for the caliph al-Mu‘tasim (r. 833–42), who was the first to import them in large numbers. First, being outsiders, they were not concerned with local allegiances or popular pressures; their loyalty was to the caliph himself. Second, they were excellent mounted archers who had military advantages over the Khurasani troops whom

they replaced. And third, their status as Turkic slaves – though they were converted to Islam and often manumitted – meant that they could never lay claim to the caliphal office. In theory, slave-soldiers were a great idea; in practice, they quickly got out of hand. At first, a new capital was created at Samarra (838–83) to house them and keep them away from the population of Baghdad, with whom they had clashed. Eventually they came to wrest effective power from freeborn Muslims all over the Muslim world, acting as kingmakers from the mid-9th century onwards (when they assassinated the caliph al-Mutawakkil and his three successors). They also sapped the Treasury of its funds, further undermining the caliph's rule and causing uncontrollable haemorrhaging of the caliph's resources and authority.

Religiously, as with the *ghulams*, the Abbasid caliphs were the victims of one of their own initiatives. In this case, it was their stress on Muhammad's centrality to Islam in general and to the caliphal office in particular that weakened them. They had justified their overthrow of the Umayyads by highlighting the latter's distance from the Prophet while magnifying their own tenuous connection to him: having an ancestor who was one of Muhammad's uncles is not quite the same as being a linear descendant of the Prophet himself, as disgruntled Shiites pointed out. Still, they were the ones who managed to take charge and that in itself was worth something. The problem with deriving legitimacy and prestige from Muhammad was that in doing so the Abbasid caliphs were elevating the Prophet to a higher status than that enjoyed previously, leaving little room for Abbasid claims to religious authority. Muhammad gave the Abbasids the right to rule, but he also gave the '*ulama*' the right to define orthodoxy, as it was they – rather than the caliphs – who were believed to have preserved an accurate record of his paradigmatic behaviour (*sunna*). The caliphs eventually accepted the status of the '*ulama*', but not without putting up a fight: al-Ma'mun (r. 813–33) attempted to assert his office's religious authority by subjecting the '*ulama*' to an 'inquisition' (*mihna*), in which the caliph's position

on a question of theology was forced on all scholars, with regular investigations into the views of individual *'ulama'*. This *mihna* remained caliphal policy until al-Mutawakkil abandoned it in 848, at which point it was clear that the caliphs had lost both the battle and the war; surprisingly soon thereafter they supported the *'ulama'*, usually through generous patronage.

By the mid-10th century, the Abbasid caliphs had only a vestige of power in Iraq itself. Even there, they were humiliated by the arrival in the capital of the Shiite Buyids, rugged invaders from northern Iran, who revived some Sasanid traditions but kept the Abbasids on the caliphal throne. From this point on, with few exceptions, the Abbasid caliphs were at best spiritual heads of the Islamic world. The Buyids ruled Iraq and western Iran for over a century (945–1055), and were ousted by the Sunni Saljuqs (c. 1037–1157), the first of several waves of Turks to enter the Islamic world voluntarily.

Although all this sounds rather negative – and for the Abbasid caliphs and Iraq more generally it undoubtedly was – ‘Islam’, as both a religion and civilization, was in very good shape by the end of this period. With the political fragmentation of the caliphate, and the existence of two others based in Cordoba and Cairo, the trappings of Abbasid power and Islamic civilization in general were exported to the various courts that sprung up all over the Islamic world, with truly significant cultural and religious ramifications. The existence of regional centres of Islamic culture, many of which were consciously modelled on the Abbasid court, meant that political energies could be focused on regions that had been too remote to command the caliph’s attention in earlier centuries. The spread of Islam beyond its traditional boundaries in the Great Arid Zone was enabled by the actions of regional rulers; the Fatimids and Berbers in North Africa made inroads into sub-Saharan Africa, just as the Ghaznavids did in India, with the sultan Mahmud (r. 997–1030) launching no fewer than 17 raids into the subcontinent. Africa, India, and Southeast



Asia were thus softened up for the large-scale conversion of their populations to Islam that would take place in subsequent centuries.

Crucially, this is also the period in which both Sunnis and Shiites chiselled each other into the mutually distinguishable forms in which they currently exist. The rivalry between the Shiite Buyids and Fatimids on the one hand, and the Sunni Saljuqs and Ghaznavids on the other, had an ideological, sectarian edge to it. Both sides supported '*ulama*', built libraries and – from the 11th century – law schools (*madrasas*), and dispatched teachers and missionaries throughout Islamic lands and beyond. At its height, the Fatimid caliphate ruled Egypt, North Africa, Sicily, Syria, Yemen, the Hijaz, and parts of East Africa, and Fatimid influence also extended to communities in India. The Shiism they spread was different from that espoused by the Buyids (or, for that matter, by most Shiites in the modern world). All Shiites trace the leadership of the *umma*, the 'imamate', from 'Ali through two of his sons and their descendants. After the death in 765 of the sixth imam, Ja'far, the movement split in two: some followed his son Isma'il (hence, 'Ismailis'), others followed another son, Musa. The latter group continued following the line of imams until, in 874, the twelfth imam (hence, 'Twelvers') disappeared or, as their detractors maintain, died. Under Fatimid patronage, Ismaili Shiism (and under the Buyids, Twelver Shiism) was thoroughly systematized, and the Fatimids challenged their Sunni rivals to the east at all levels. Sunnism's response to the Shiite challenge was impressive: in the 800–1100 period the six most prestigious collections of *hadiths*, or traditions about Muhammad, were assembled; philosophical, theological, and mystical trends in Islam were squared with 'orthodox' Sunnism; and the four schools of Islamic legal thought (*madhhabs*) emerged. By the end of the 11th century, Sunnism is thought finally to have crystallized, with scholars maintaining that from then on the 'gate of interpreting Islamic law' (*ijtihad*) had been closed.

In the 1090s, the gates through which Saljuq and Fatimid power and influence passed had also closed: with the death of the Fatimid caliph in 1094, the Fatimid movement split into two groups, one of which would become known in Europe as the Assassins who set about defeating their enemies not by overwhelming their armies but by picking off their leaders (the movement's name is derived from their suspected use of *hashish* to steady an operative's nerves before he rushed towards near-certain death). One of their first high-profile victims was the Saljuq vizier Nizam al-Mulk, who was the pivot around whom Saljuq power turned. Thereafter, the Fatimids and the Saljuqs of Iran/Iraq declined in tandem. By this time, however, Sunnism and Shiism were set on their respective paths and were less reliant on state patronage than before. Moreover, by the end of this period, Muslims outnumbered non-Muslims in Islamic lands: Islam had thus reached its age of majority in both senses.

## 1100–1500

The first two periods are often referred to as the 'formative' and 'classical' periods of Islamic history; and for most Muslims (who, it should be noted, tend not to use these terms or chronological divisions), they are the centuries that count the most. But the overwhelming majority of the world's Muslims would almost certainly still be infidels were it not for the events of the 1100–1500 period. And although modern Islamists (those for whom Islam is a political as well as a religious system) shine their spotlight on the age of the Prophet and *Rashidun* caliphs, it is in response to the events of *this* period that Islamist movements emerged. From a European perspective, this is the period without which Turkey would have no case for inclusion into the EU (and no case for being 'Turkey' at all), and without which Russia would have no 'issues' with Muslims to their south. Here is what happened.

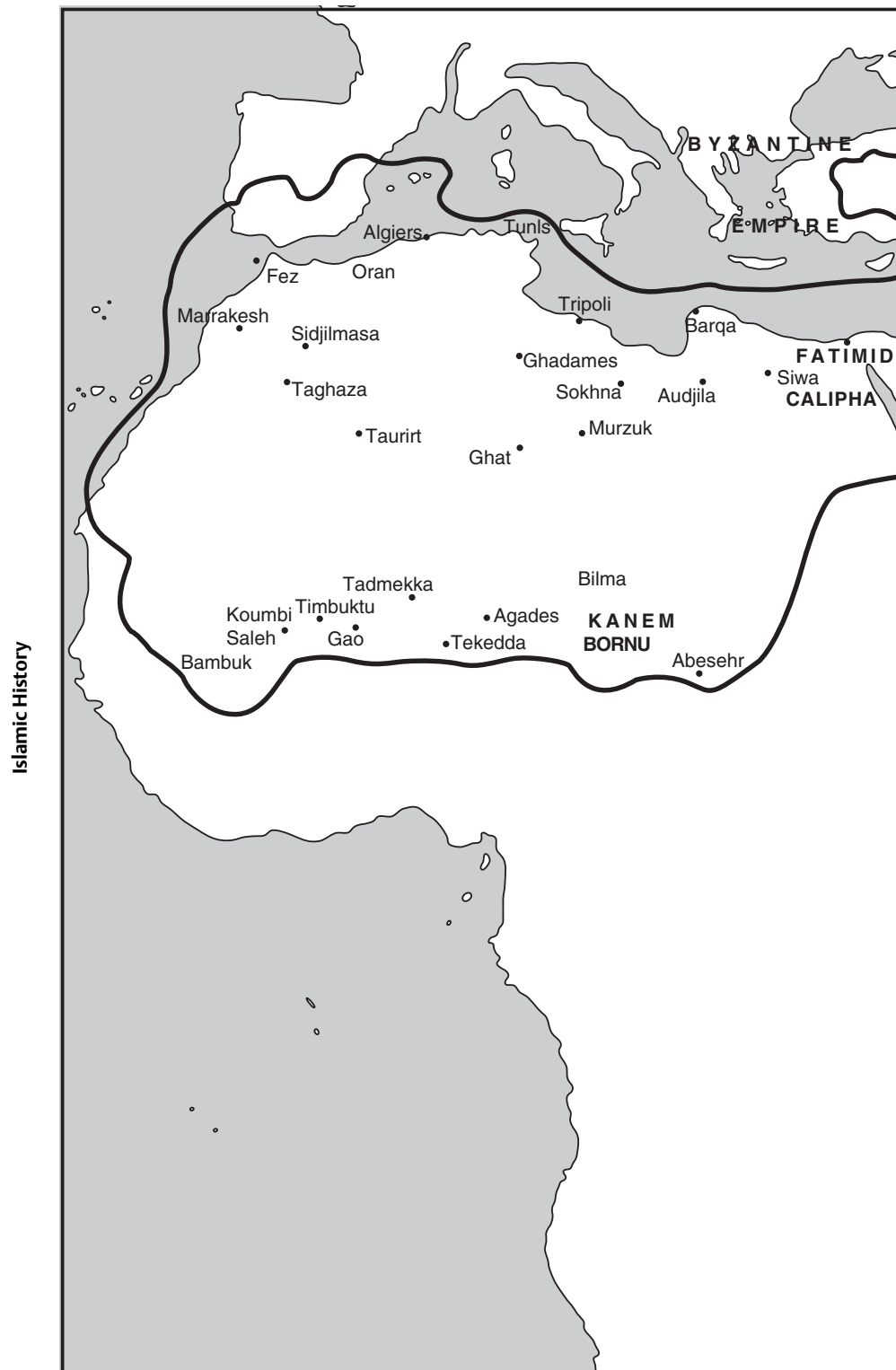
Having dominated their neighbours for centuries and dictated the course of their own history, Muslims from the late 11th century

onwards often found themselves responding to the actions of others – both Muslims and non-Muslims – who lived beyond Islam’s political borders. These outsiders came in three forms: Muslim Turks, non-Muslim invaders (Christians in the west, Mongols in the east), and, finally, Muslim invaders (Timur).

In the second half of the 11th century, waves of Turkish tribes continued to migrate westwards, following the pasturelands on which they depended through northern Iran and into Azerbaijan and Anatolia. From there, they conducted raids (*ghazwas*, often religiously inspired) into Byzantine territory, provoking a military response. The Turks defeated the Byzantine forces at Manzikert in 1071 and within two decades most of Syria, Palestine, and Anatolia was in their hands. By the 13th century, Anatolia had a substantial population of Muslims and the arrival of successive waves of Turks steadily contributed to the de-Hellenization of the region. Turkish rule in Anatolia was typically decentralized, controlled as it was by competing dynasties only loosely affiliated with the Great Saljuqs in Iran. Their continuous incursions into Byzantine territory led the emperor to seek assistance from western Christians, which brings us to the second form of outsider intervention in Islamic lands.

The story

The Crusades were not merely a response to the Byzantine request for assistance against the Turks; ranging over three continents and five centuries, they were many things to many people. Even the First Crusade, launched in 1095, had less to do with Byzantine–Turkish rivalries than with the wider context of Christian offensives against Islam, and, of course, the recovery of Jerusalem and the Holy Land for Christianity. Muslim historians at the time, to the extent that they were concerned with the Crusades at all (and many of them were not), interpreted them within the context of Christian gains against Muslims in Iberia, Italy, and elsewhere. Sicily, which had been ruled as a Muslim state from the mid-10th century, was re-conquered by a combined force of Normans from Italy and Italian soldiers between 1061 and 1091, though



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The story

the last Muslims were expelled only in the 1240s. Andalusia was re-conquered more gradually: insofar as local Christians in the north and west of the region forcefully resisted Muslim rule from the 8th century, the *Reconquista* took some 800 years in total, being completed only when Granada fell to Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492. It was only from the late 11th century, however, that Christians had been able to make real progress in the region, with Toledo reverting to Christian rule in 1085.

The *Reconquista* gathered pace and momentum in the 11th century against the backdrop of Muslim political disorganization. Already in 1013 some Berbers sacked Cordoba, and in 1031 the Umayyad caliphate came to an end, its lands fragmenting into minor, regional city-states that fought incessantly against each other. Unable to resist the advance of Christian forces, Muslim rulers appealed for assistance to the Almoravids who ruled in North Africa. The Almoravids were 'puritanical' Berbers, whose early aim was to spread their vision of a rigorous Muslim orthodoxy over what they saw as the superficial and adulterated forms of Islam practised at the time. They ruled in Andalusia from 1086 until 1147, when they were replaced by another Berber dynasty, the Almohads. The Almohads themselves retreated to North Africa by the mid-13th century, when most of Andalusia was lost to the Christians (Cordoba in 1236, Seville in 1248). The dynasty's uncompromising religious doctrines made them fearsome both to local Muslims (who, in this case, had *not* invited them) and to *Reconquista* forces. Most adversely affected were the indigenous Christians and Jews who had flourished under Umayyad rule: with the advent of militant Berber dynasties, they were often forced to choose between conversion, emigration, or death. Some fled to Christian regions of Spain and Portugal or to other Mediterranean lands.

Having to some extent triggered the Crusades, Turks loosely affiliated to the Saljuqs must also be credited with resisting and eventually overcoming them. At the height of their power, the

Great Saljuqs would entrust their provinces to princes of the family who were often too young to rule independently. These princes were thus accompanied by tutor-guardians (*atabegs*) who would exercise real power – provisionally in theory, permanently in practice. One such *atabeg* was Zangi, ruler of Mosul and Aleppo (r. 1128–46), who managed to inflict the first serious defeat on the Crusaders when he captured Edessa from them in 1146. His son Nur al-Din unified Syria and one of the latter’s Kurdish mercenaries conquered Egypt from the Fatimids in 1169. Thereafter, another Sunni Kurd, known to Europeans as Saladin, united Egypt and Syria, putting an end to the Shiite dynasty of the Fatimids in 1171 (thereby achieving his declared goals) and regaining Jerusalem for the Muslims by defeating the Crusaders at Hattin in 1187 (thereby achieving fame).

Saladin’s successors in the Ayyubid dynasty that he founded (1174–1250) squabbled continuously, for which they often entered into strategic truces with the Crusaders and surrounded themselves with Turkish slave-soldiers (*mamluks*) of their own. These Mamluks (r. 1250–1517) overthrew the Ayyubids and ruled a large region that included Egypt, Syria, and parts of Iraq, Arabia, and North and East Africa. Their attachment to the slave-soldier system, which required the regular import of fresh batches of Turks, created a strong and militarily stable society that was able to withstand external challenges. Rather than concluding truces with the Franks (as their predecessors had done), they evicted the Crusaders from Palestine by 1291, having already defeated the Mongols at Ayn Jalut in 1260, victories that effectively put an end to this double-headed threat to Muslims in the Near East.

Muslims elsewhere, however, did not escape the Mongol conquests, and until relatively recently – and certainly at the time – it was the Mongols rather than the Crusaders who commanded the attention of Muslims worldwide. Like the prophet Muhammad, ‘Temujin’ (r. 1206–27) achieved power by uniting numerous nomadic tribes under his rule, and entered

the spotlight at around the age of 40, when he was renamed Chinggis Khan ('supreme ruler'). Moreover, like Muhammad, Chinggis did not live to see his state expand into a world empire; by the time he died, the Mongols had conquered a large part of Central Asia, but had yet to incorporate those parts of China, Korea, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and the Islamic world that eventually would comprise the Mongol empire. Substantial parts of Muslim Central Asia and northern Iran were conquered early on, with devastating consequences – accounts of Mongol destruction are chilling even when filtered for hyperbole. Most devastating to Muslims was the Mongol conquest of Iran/Iraq in the 1250s: the fragile irrigation system that sustained Iraq's agriculture was destroyed, as were libraries, mosques, and entire populations in leading towns and cities. But what looms largest in Muslim memory is the sacking of Baghdad in 1258, which put an end to the Abbasid caliphate after 500 years of existence. The Mongol rulers of Iran/Iraq (the 'Ilkhans', r. 1265–1335) eventually converted to Islam and attempted to curry the favour of local Muslims by patronizing arts, employing Persian administrators, and decreasing taxation. But then as now, for their part in unplugging the Abbasids' life-support machine, the Mongols were seen as villains.

The Mamluks, on the other hand, emerged as the heroes. The logic behind using Turkish slaves in early Abbasid times was that they were barred by their slave status from laying claim to the caliphal office. Though they did not claim to be caliphs, their servile background remained an issue for the Mamluk sultans, for which purpose they presented themselves as champions of *jihad* against infidels, and imported an uncle of the last Abbasid caliph to Egypt, where his presence lent legitimacy to Mamluk rule. The sultans also patronized '*ulama*' and supported a host of religious foundations and building projects. Scholars on their payroll wrote our history books and generally said nice things about them. But even the Mamluks, defenders of Islam against the Mongols and the Crusaders, were unable to resist the Black Death of the 1340s,



which they inadvertently helped to spread and from which they never quite recovered.

Politically, towards the end of this period, the central Islamic lands were in disarray. Not only were the Mamluks in decline, but from Transoxania in the northeast a devastating campaign by the Turco-Mongol ruler Timur ('Tamerlane', 1336–1405) was unleashed along the lines of the earlier Mongol conquests. Timur's religion was Islam but his culture and identity were self-consciously Mongol (even the Islam that he and his followers practised was permeated by Mongol traditions), and he seems to have targeted only those lands that Chinggis and his successors had conquered. Although he defeated Muslim armies in Delhi (1398), Aleppo (1400), Damascus (1401), Anatolia (1402), and elsewhere, he created no lasting empire. Upon his death in 1405, his lands were divided amongst four sons, none of whom was as militarily ambitious as their father.

Timur's conquests do serve to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the various Muslim polities in the early 15th century. It is telling that he gained far more booty from his conquests in Muslim India than anywhere else, and it is in India and neighbouring regions that Islamic rule and religion would make impressive progress in this period. India had been targeted systematically by Muslim rulers since Ghaznavid times, but it is only from the late 12th and early 13th centuries that Muslims would rule there independently, first under the Ghurids from Afghanistan (r. 1148–1218), and then under Turkish and Afghani dynasties that comprised the Delhi Sultanate (1206–1526). As often in Islamic history, a slave-soldier of one dynasty broke away from his masters and created a dynasty of his own. In this case, it was Aybeg, a *ghulam* of the Ghurids, who conquered Delhi in 1206 and established a *mamluk* state in India. Although he died five years later in a freak polo accident, one of his own *ghulams* succeeded him, creating a dynasty of slave-soldiers that would last until 1290. For the next two centuries a specifically

Indo-Muslim culture was created in the region, and Islam spread in the subcontinent and beyond, to what are now Malaysia and Indonesia.

Though the Mongols and Timur spread destruction across the Islamic lands, their conquests also led to the spread of everything from Persian literature to playing cards. The crucial point is that the decline and fall of the Abbasid caliphate, and of political structures and institutions more generally, were paralleled by (and related to) the creation of alternative social and political structures within Muslim societies, most significantly, Sufi organizations. Sufism, as a mystical approach to God, is in some ways as old as Islam itself, though it was only in the 9th century that its formal doctrines emerged, and only from the 13th that specific branches of Sufism became institutionalized. These 'brotherhoods' (*tariqas*), with their 'lodges' (*khanqas*, *ribats*, or *zawiyas*, depending on the region), 'masters' (*shaykhs* or *pirs*, among other terms), initiation ceremonies, and unusual rituals, might conjure up for Westerners images of Freemasonry, with spirituality rather than stonecutting as their basis. But unlike Freemasonry, Sufism did have real social, political, and religious influence, and it is largely to the efforts of charismatic Sufi leaders that large parts of sub-Saharan Africa, South and Southeast Asia owe their introduction to Islam.

Islam first won over converts amongst peoples in the Near East who were closely familiar with Semitic monotheism: it is a short distance from Aramaic to Arabic and from 'Abraham' to 'Ibrahim'. Judaism and Christianity's relationship with Islam was so close that the doctrine emerged in Islam that Judaism and Christianity *were* originally Islam itself but that the religion had been corrupted over time, for which purpose God had to remind mankind of the True Path by sending it Muhammad and the Quran. Such a doctrine could not reasonably be extended to include Hinduism, Buddhism, or the pagan religions of Africa and Southeast Asia, but Sufi leaders proved otherwise. In a nutshell,

Sufi missionaries convinced pagans and polytheists that they were essentially *already* Muslims, but that their deities and rituals went by different names in the language of Islam. For this approach to work, however, only a very superficial version of Islam could be propagated, and elements of the pre-Islamic religions that had no equivalent in Islam had to be accommodated into the converts' new religion (just as St Valentine's Day, Halloween, and Christmas trees found their way into Christian cultures). This happened seamlessly amongst monotheistic converts – retellings of Bible stories, known as *Isra'iliyyat*, seeped into the Islamic tradition, often undetected. In the cases of pagans and polytheists, however, the result was a religious syncretism that was deeply offensive to 'orthodox' Muslims. We have encountered an early case of this in the Almoravid response to Berber Islam, and most modern Islamist movements have their origins in similar attempts to cleanse Muslim societies of syncretistic and otherwise adulterated forms of belief and worship.

In the 14th and 15th centuries, Sufi movements were active and influential amongst Turks in Anatolia and Azerbaijan (and in most other regions, for that matter). The various elements of Sunni, Shiite, heterodox Sufi, and other ideas that were braided together in this region, were gradually disentangled in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, to produce the Sunni Ottomans and the Shiite Safavids, whose empires' legacies and descendants have combined to create the modern Near East.

## 1500 to present

When does Islamic history end? Although in some parts of the world its end is nowhere in sight, there are three important ways in which Islamic history can be said to have ended in the '1500 to present' period. First, as will be seen in Chapters 6 and 7, those episodes of history that make up the historical repository common to all Muslims belong to the three periods already described. Second, in this period the history that concerns Islam and



6. The Islamic world c. 1700



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Muslims is less 'Islamic' history than it is 'World' history in which Islam and Muslims play a role. As this role is often secondary, deeming events in this period to be part of 'Islamic' history lends Islam and Muslims a measure of control over developments that is at best misleading. Thus, when the French occupied Egypt in 1798 it was the British who kicked them out; the Egyptians themselves could only watch from the sidelines. Third, this is the period that witnessed the erosion of many salient features of pre-modern Muslim societies and of Islamic history, including the widespread reliance on slave-soldiers (and cavalry more generally), the legal distinction between Muslims and others in Islamic lands, the centrality of the *hajj* (and other religious networks) to the *umma's* cohesion, and the *'ulama's* control over religious authority, among other things.

For all that, a large proportion of today's Muslims are descendants of those who converted in this period, and 'in the sixteenth century of our era, a visitor from Mars might have supposed that the human world was on the verge of becoming Muslim', as one historian put it. Our Martian guest would have been led to this conclusion by the contemporaneous existence of great Muslim empires and civilizations created by the Ottomans (1300–1922), Safavids (1501–1722), and Mughals (1526–1858). Here is a [human] view of what it looked like.

The Ottoman empire was the first Muslim super-state of this period to rise and the last to fall, lasting in some form or another from the early 14th to the early 20th centuries. It rose when, in c. 1300, an ambitious leader of Turkish frontier warriors in western Anatolia managed to carve out an independent Muslim state in the region. The state, named after its founder Osman (in a garbled European pronunciation, 'Ottoman'), expanded rapidly at the expense of the Byzantine empire, and in 1453 the Ottomans conquered Constantinople (in a garbled Turkish pronunciation, 'Istanbul'). Over the following century, they would take Jerusalem, Mecca, and Medina from the Mamluk Sultanate (which they

conquered in 1517) and Baghdad from the Safavids in 1534, while expanding westwards into Europe, adding Belgrade and Hungary to their realms, and besieging Vienna in 1529. The Ottoman sultans were quick to capitalize on their gains to obtain power, wealth, and prestige: money, libraries, archives, and '*ulama*' were imported to Istanbul from the newly conquered territories of Egypt and Syria, and the sultans claimed to inherit the authority – as well as the lands – of conquered rulers, calling themselves 'Caesar', 'Shahanshah', and 'Caliph' – even, on occasion, 'God's Caliph'. Unsurprisingly, the sultans or 'caliphs' assumed religious roles, issuing religious edicts, appointing *qadis*, and integrating the '*ulama*' into the ruling hierarchy. For his military successes in this period, the sultan Sulayman (r. 1520–66) was known to Europeans as 'the Magnificent'; for his integration of customary law into the *shari'a*, he was known to Muslims as 'the Lawgiver'.

By the mid-16th century, the Ottomans had created a strong, centralized, and cosmopolitan empire that incorporated some of Islam's – and the world's – greatest cities and resources, with footholds in Europe, Asia, and Africa. But being cosmopolitan proved to have both positive and negative results: on the one hand, trade and culture in Ottoman cities were boosted through the absorption of tens of thousands of Jewish refugees from the Spanish Inquisition; the Ottoman military machine was partly made up of Christian youths ('Janissaries', or 'new soldiers', in Turkish); and, having inherited the disparate groups of Turkmen who inhabited Anatolia between the 13th and 15th centuries, the Ottomans ruled over a significant population of Shiites and Sufis (sometimes possessing radically unorthodox beliefs), as well as various groups of Christians. The ethnic composition of the empire was no less varied. On the other hand, by the end of the 19th century, it would be clear that there was very little to unite this patchwork of populations. Moreover, though it was all well and good to assume religious titles, control the '*ulama*', and take pride in one's authority over holy cities, the fact is that even at its height, barely half of the empire's subjects were Muslims, and

less than half of the world's Muslims were Ottomans. Unification of the *umma* such as that achieved (if only politically) by the early caliphs would have been worth far more for a Muslim ruler than political control over Albania and Croatia. Furthermore, developments that held real significance to Islam and Muslims were also happening elsewhere, in Safavid and Mughal lands.

Around the time that Osman was creating his state in Anatolia, a native of Azerbaijan named Safi al-Din (1252–1334) founded a Sufi brotherhood in Ardabil, whose followers came to be known as Safavids. By the late 15th century, this brotherhood had morphed into a militant Shiite–Sufi movement that held its leader to be either the hidden Imam or God Himself. At the turn of the 16th century, the leader of the Safavid order, a teenager named Isma‘il, came out of hiding and set about conquering Iran; by 1501, he was the region's shah with a capital at Tabriz. In 1514, however, the Safavid forces were defeated by the Ottomans at Chaldiran, with three significant consequences: first, the modern Turkish–Iranian border was set; second, having lost the battle (and their claim to divinity) to Ottoman gunpowder, the Safavid shahs acquired gunpowder too; and third, with Ottoman forces encroaching on their western provinces, subsequent shahs moved the capital eastwards, eventually settling on Isfahan under ‘Abbas I (r. 1587–1629).

In moving eastwards, the Safavids were distancing themselves from their original Turkmen power-base, and digging their heels into Iran's heartland. The religious character of the state was purged of its radical ideas, which were replaced with orthodox, Twelver Shiism (while Turkish elites were replaced with Persian ones). This form of Shiism was forcibly imposed on a largely Sunni population, and Shiite scholars from Bahrain, Greater Syria, and Iraq were imported to Isfahan, where both religious and secular culture flourished. To his capital in Isfahan, ‘Abbas also shifted populations from provincial towns to create a cultural and economic hub. It was thus under the Safavids that



Iran's modern borders and religious and cultural identities were brought into clear focus – in sharp contrast to the tolerant heterogeneity of the Ottoman empire. Persian literature reached new heights and, to the extent that both the Ottomans and Mughals (or 'Moghuls', Persian for 'Mongols') had adopted Persian as the language of high culture (in pre-Ottoman Anatolia and pre-Mughal India), the Safavids were at the very centre of Islamic civilization. After the death of 'Abbas II (r. 1642–66), however, decline set in: natural disasters (famines, earthquakes, and the spread of diseases) combined with ineffectual rulers to leave a political vacuum that was filled by Shiite '*ulama*', or 'mullahs', who tightened Shiism's hold on society. Imposing one's religion by force is no way to win friends and influence people, and embittered Sunni tribesmen from Afghanistan overran the Safavids in 1722, putting an end to their rule. Political unity – and Shiism – returned to Iran with the Qajars (1794–1925), who ushered Iran into modernity.

From elsewhere in Afghanistan in the early 16th century, a prince known as Babur launched a successful raid into India. As Babur had claimed descent from both Chinggis Khan and Timur, it was a safe bet that he would try to conquer *something*. This he did in 1526, when his forces defeated the sultan of Delhi and established a dynasty in India. It was under his grandson Akbar (r. 1556–1605), however, that the Mughal empire was created, and for the next century and half Akbar and his successors flourished and their territories expanded. By the reign of Aurangzeb (1658–1707), the Mughals ruled almost all of the Indian subcontinent, as well as parts of Iran and Central Asia, with a combined population of some 100 million people. Though the overwhelming majority of these subjects were not Muslims, they were fully integrated into society at all levels, enjoying unprecedented tolerance: they were exempt from paying the *jizya* poll-tax, Mughal emperors married Hindu wives, and the Muslim lunar calendar was abandoned by Akbar in favour of a solar one. Mughal culture fused Islamic traditions with Indian ones, creating new forms and setting new

standards in painting, poetry, and architecture. The legacy of their achievements can be seen today in the magnificence of the Taj Mahal and in the use of the term ‘mogul’ with reference to those who possess power and wealth.

Not all of Akbar’s ideas were readily adopted by his successors, however. In 1581, Akbar founded what he called the *Din-i Ilahi*, or ‘Divine Religion’, which aimed to accommodate the many truths of all religions known to him within a single system. Even Sufi missionaries could not get away with such a scheme and the most vocal opposition to this heresy came from the Sufi leader Ahmad Sirhindi (1564–1624). Akbar’s experiment did not survive his death and eventually the excesses of tolerance offered to non-Muslims triggered excesses of intolerance: Aurangzeb waged *jihad* against Hindus, with mixed results. The empire’s borders reached their greatest extent, but with more land to rule and fewer locals willing to cooperate, the Mughals declined rapidly, losing effective power from as early as 1725 (though the state would survive until 1857). In 1803, with the region parcelled out among local Hindu and British rulers, a leader of the ‘*ulama*’ in Delhi declared that India was no longer a Muslim country.

But what were the British – and other Europeans – doing in Asia at all? The quick answer, then as now, is ‘buying things’. From the 16th century, small nations with big ships (the Dutch and the Portuguese) and later big nations with big ships (the British and French) sought to gain control over trade routes to the Far East, from which spices and other commodities could be bought directly (and hence cheaply). For centuries, Muslim states and societies had benefited from their strategic location, serving as a bridge between Europe and Asia. In the pre-modern period, the geographical centrality of the Muslim world was combined with its superior culture, political organization, and military strength, which allowed Muslims to dominate much of Afro-Eurasia at a time when Europeans were – in relative terms – only beginning to climb down from the trees. But in the 17th and, especially, 18th

centuries, the decline of the great Muslim empires coincided with the rise of European ones.

As a result of the Industrial Revolution, Europeans gained important production and communication advantages; the Napoleonic Wars (1793–1815) channelled industrial efforts towards military objectives; the French Revolution mobilized large sectors of the population by encouraging patriotism and notions of state service; and the Enlightenment generated scientific justification for the existence of a hierarchy of civilizations (at the top of which were Europeans, of course). As the three great Muslim empires were largely land-based, they would have been unable to compete with European ships, even had they been at the height of their strength, which they were not. The Mughals and Safavids lost power in the early 18th century, and the Ottomans managed to survive only by reorganizing their empire along European lines. The failed Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1683, and the humiliating defeats suffered in the Russian–Ottoman war of 1768–74 disabused the sultans of any ideas that they were militarily superior – or even equal – to European powers. Decentralization of the empire, factionalism within the court, and other internal instabilities contributed to the impression that the Ottoman empire was ‘the sick man of Europe’. In response, from the time of Selim III (r. 1789–1807) sultans sought to reassert themselves through internal measures, leading to the ‘reorganization’ (*Tanzimat*) of the empire (c. 1839–76), through which secular law replaced *shari‘a*, non-Muslims were made equal to Muslims, and Ottoman administration was modernized in most respects. The autocrat (or, as he saw it, ‘caliph’) ‘Abdul Hamid II (r. 1876–1909) introduced a rail network to the [shrinking] empire, and invested heavily in building projects. Tellingly, whereas previous sultans proudly sponsored the creation of mosques and other religious buildings, ‘Abdul Hamid’s projects were almost exclusively secular. Large-scale modernization was expensive, for which reason Muslim states found themselves owing large sums to European ones;

and Europeans soon found themselves in political control of Muslim lands.

None of this was inevitable, however, and in some parts of the Muslim world things went in an entirely different direction. In the 16th century, Bedouin from the Sahara moved north to take control of the Moroccan heartland, creating a dynasty of *sharifs* (those claiming lineal descent from the Prophet) who ruled from Marrakech; Sharifian dynasties have ruled over Morocco ever since. The Sa'adi dynasty (r. 1554–1659) managed to cross what was once thought to be a militarily impenetrable Sahara, destroying the Songhay state in West Africa and its legendary capital, Timbuktu, in 1591. They also repelled Spanish and Portuguese forces in 1578, and withstood Ottoman challenges, partly by playing the British and Spanish off each other, all of which enabled them to remain an independent Muslim state.

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Sharifian states managed to stave off Europeans until the late 19th century and the Alaouite Sharifian dynasty (r. 1666 to present) was the first state to recognize the newly independent United States of America. Even they, however, eventually succumbed to colonialism: in 1912, the French established a protectorate in Morocco, from which the Moroccans gained independence under Muhammad V (r. 1927–61) in 1956.

Most Muslim societies had experienced foreign rule over the preceding millennium when Turks, Mongols, Berbers, and – in some periods and regions – Arabs ruled as outsiders, often with little sensitivity to local traditions and concerns. What made European colonialism particularly unpopular were three things. First, like the Crusaders, colonial powers were non-Muslim, and were often in direct competition with Muslims to spread their faith (a competition that Muslims usually won). Unlike the Crusaders, however, they were ever-present and of relevance to nearly all Muslims. Second, Muslim societies in this period became aware of mechanisms for resisting colonialism and alternatives to it, aside from the *jihad* that some espoused.

Pan-Islamism, Pan-Arabism, and Pan-Turkism followed the lead of national liberation movements elsewhere, thereby raising Muslim expectations of overcoming foreign rule and influence. Third, with the spread of modern communications and media, the realities of the preceding points were broadcast far and wide.

From the 19th century (and, to a degree, much earlier), various movements aimed at reasserting and purifying 'Islam' emerged in different parts of the Muslim world, targeting both external forces (colonialism) and internal ones (supposedly superficial or syncretistic practice of Islam, and the secularization of Muslim societies and their rulers). Although individual movements were often identified with a particular grievance, in time many of these groups – and most of their followers – came either to conflate a variety of battle-cries or to dissolve specific complaints into a general feeling that 'things are not as they should be', to which the solution was change along uncompromising Islamic lines. What was particularly galling to them was that the Muslim leadership was seen to contribute to the problem rather than to its solution. These thinkers and activists tended to call themselves *mujaddids*, or 'renovators'; we tend to call them 'Islamists' (a term that encompasses many other groups too). Though its roots are often traced back to Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1787), Islamism itself was transformed in the 20th century, with the establishment of Hasan al-Banna's (d. 1949) Muslim Brotherhood (Egypt, 1928) and Abu l-'Ala Mawdudi's (d. 1979) *Jama'at-i Islami*, or 'Islamic Society' (India, 1941). The former targeted foreign colonialists and indigenous secularists, while the latter focused on the British and their Hindu allies. These movements were quickly internationalized, spawning numerous offshoots: Mawdudi's ideas influenced the prominent Egyptian Islamist Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966), who himself belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood (members of which created Hamas in 1987).

Though the key to understanding Muslim societies in the 19th century is said to be colonialism, an underrated factor of great

significance is the spread of printing throughout Muslim lands in this period. Printing led, amongst other things, to the spread of newspapers, with governmental journals established in Egypt (1824), Turkey and other Ottoman provinces (1831), Iran (1837), and elsewhere in subsequent years. Crucially, the leading Islamic reformists edited newspapers and disseminated their ideas through them. Ideologues such as Muhammad ‘Abduh (d. 1906) and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (d. 1897) published a free religious newspaper in which Islamist and anti-British ideas were voiced, reaching readers throughout the Muslim world (except in Egypt and India, where the British banned it). ‘Abduh’s disciple Rashid Rida (d. 1935) edited the Islamic magazine *al-Manar* for almost 40 years, through which his teacher’s ideas were circulated widely, alongside his own proposals for the creation of a Pan-Islamic caliphate.

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What printing also accomplished, albeit inadvertently, is the democratization of religious authority. In the past, Islamic teachings were propagated through personal interactions with ‘*ulama*’ or Sufi leaders. Only those respected leaders who were able, by virtue of their religious learning and reputation, to attract a following could wield influence. With the spread of modern media (starting, but not ending, with printing) anyone with access to the requisite technology could influence millions of people. Religious credentials and local reputation were no longer as important as the medium of communication. This development often disturbed the fine balance achieved between the ‘*ulama*’ and political authorities, a balance that had been maintained by controlling the ‘*ulama*’ or supporting the compliant members within their ranks, at the expense of popular Sufi orders. The matrix was thus complicated by the rise of Islamists who had little time for most Sufis and for Westernized Muslim politicians (or the ‘*ulama*’ who were deemed to have sold out to them).

What all this demonstrates, of course, is that it is simplistic to view Islamism as a reactive rejection of ‘the West’ and its ways. Islamists

have been happy to acquire and use both the hardware and the software of modern, Western civilization in furthering their cause. Ayatollah Khomeini famously propagated his revolutionary message through audio cassettes, and al-Qaeda makes full use of communications technology, releasing messages to media outlets, communicating via internet chat-rooms, and exploiting for recruitment purposes the media attention that erupts around their operations. Martyrdom messages and gruesome beheadings on video-sharing websites are further examples of this willingness to benefit from such technologies. In terms of software, Western ideas have been appropriated even by those seeking liberation from Western influence: although Pan-Islamism might be said to have pre-modern roots, national liberation movements, from Chechnya to Palestine and Xinjiang, are Western imports. Similarly, the anti-Semitic theories that are widely espoused by Muslims aiming to reverse the effects of colonialism and imperialism (for which, according to these theories, the Jews are responsible), are themselves Western, imperialist products – Muslim societies had nothing like them until [Christian] Arabs imported the ideas from Europe to Muslim lands in the 19th century. For their part, the overwhelming majority of Muslims, who reject Islamist ideologies, are also increasingly embracing modern technologies and Western ideas, with interesting results: some have [convincingly] demonstrated the Muslim role in the rise of modern science, medicine, and technology; others have [less convincingly] attempted to show that such ‘Western’ ideas as democracy, human rights, and egalitarianism are ultimately traceable to early Islam. Although this might suggest that Muslims are becoming increasingly Westernized, it also shows how easily Westernization can be adapted to Islam.

## Conclusion

So that, in the broadest of strokes, is what happened. As is to be expected from any survey of 1,400 years of history, spanning three continents, we have encountered our fair share of rulers, battles,

dates, and similar-sounding names. I have tried to balance these with a sense of how Islam itself developed in each period and will limit myself here to a single conclusion that relates to both the political and religious developments covered above.

Once an empire was established following the early Islamic conquests, the spread of Islam as a religion, on the one hand, and as a political power, on the other, did not always overlap: in many cases, in fact, Islam did particularly well when Muslim rulers were doing particularly poorly. Thus, Islam gained more converts during the period of European colonial rule than in any other period, and in the post-colonial period the geographical distribution of Muslims was also dramatically increased: without the British in India and the French in North Africa, there would be few Pakistanis in Britain and few Algerians in France. And although the Deobandi movement began as a reaction to British rule in India, a missionary offshoot of the movement now controls almost half of the mosques in the United Kingdom, accounts for more than three-quarters of domestically trained Muslim clerics, and plans to create Europe's largest mosque next to the site of the 2012 Olympics in London. An interesting ramification of this is that – assuming historical trends persist – even if attempts to establish a worldwide caliphate succeed, they will not necessarily be accompanied by a corresponding spread of Islam itself. In fact, if demographic and statistical trends persist, before too long – even without a caliphate – a third of humanity might well be Muslim.