

## After Muhammad

Abu Bakr was distinguished as a man of faith, a close advisor to Muhammad, and a commander prominent in the military campaigns Muhammad led during the early expansion of Islam. His elevation as caliph was reasonable based on his character and achievements. The problem was that Islam, although triumphant at the time of the prophet's death, was in crisis.

Unlike Mesopotamia, Persia, and Egypt, Arabia did not have a long tradition of absolute leaders—of kings and emperors—but was a region of tribes and clans. The cities were bound together by commerce. In the desert beyond them, however, the nomadic people conceived of government in terms of family relations. When Muhammad died, the powerful aura of faith associated with him was in danger of dying as well. Disorder and disintegration of the caliphate—the growing Islamic state—threatened.

### Al-Ridda

The explosive tensions that followed Muhammad's death had several causes. The first of these was a function of Arab tradition. Doubtless, many who converted to Islam in response to the teachings and conquests of Muhammad did so out of profound religious conviction. Some, however, were also motivated by reasons of political and economic convenience, a resigned belief that resistance to the rapidly growing power of Islam was futile.

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Among many of these half-hearted converts, their allegiance to Islam died with Muhammad because it was based not on religious revelation but on a personal oath sworn to Muhammad. In Arab tradition, one is released from a personal oath upon the death of the individual to whom the oath had been sworn. Some early converts who now turned against Islam saw themselves as simply following custom, whereas the leaders of the faith regarded them as apostates—traitors to their faith—and the convulsion of internal rebellion that followed the death of Muhammad is still referred to as *al-Ridda*—the Apostasy.



#### DEFINITION

In Arabic, **al-Ridda** means the Apostasy. It refers to the battles—often called the Ridda Wars—fought against tribes that, having accepted Islam during Muhammad’s life, renounced it after his death, following the Arab custom of an oath not being binding after the death of the person to whom it was sworn.

## Reversion to Tribalism and Competing Prophets

Among some converts, there was an impulse to return to traditional adherence to tribal or clan leadership. With this, religion assumed diminished importance, as some began to slip back into long-familiar polytheist beliefs.

Among other converts, new religious leaders, including claimants to prophet status, made themselves known and proclaimed revelations they had received. Among these, doubtless, some were motivated by sincere religious conviction. Others, however, had secular political motives, prominent among which was casting off the powerful hold of the Quraysh. Ultimately, because separation between the secular and the spiritual domains had become virtually nonexistent, it is not merely impossible but actually meaningless to try to analyze political versus religious motives separately.

## The Party of Mecca vs. the Party of Medina

In addition to the uprising of aspiring leaders and prophets, there was a more basic conflict between the *Muhajirun*—the earliest converts to Islam, who had followed Muhammad in his Hijra, the migration from Mecca to Medina—and the *Ansar*—the people of Medina who had allied themselves with Muhammad and the Muhajirun on their arrival in Mecca.



#### DEFINITION

The **Muhajirun** are the first converts to Islam, the band of followers Muhammad led from Mecca to Medina during the Hijra. The Arabic word may be translated as “The Emigrants.” The name **Ansar** was applied to the people of Medina who converted to Islam and allied themselves with Muhammad and the Muhajirun after their arrival in Medina. In Arabic, the word means “supporter.”

As mentioned at the end of the previous chapter, the leaders of the tribes of Medina—all Ansar leaders—convened as a *shura* (council) to decide who they would support as the successor to Muhammad. Abu Bakr was among those who addressed the shura in an effort to preempt a decision that might lead to an irreparable schism within the *Ummah*, or Islamic community. From this council, as mentioned, Abu Bakr emerged as the chosen successor, called the Khalifa-tul-Rasool, literally the “Successor of Messenger of Allah.” The Ansar accepted Abu Bakr’s succession. They and all others who accepted Abu Bakr’s new status as Khalifa-tul-Rasool became known as “Ahl-al-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah”—“the people of tradition and unification”—or, more simply, the Sunnis.

To this day, the Sunnis hold that all the Muslims of Medina—including Ali ibn Abi Talib, Muhammad’s first cousin and son-in-law—accepted the succession of Abu Bakr. Among the Muhajirun, the original emigrants from Mecca, who did not take part in the Ansar council, were those who believed that Allah chose Ali, the prophet’s closest male relative, to be Muhammad’s successor. This group came to be called the *Sbiatu Ali*—“faction” or “followers”—commonly abbreviated to Shia.

## Sunni vs. Shia

In the opposition of Muhajirun (Meccan emigrants) and Ansar (Medina allies or helpers) at the time of Muhammad’s death, the bitter opposition between the two largest denominations of Islam, the Sunni (the larger denomination) and the Shia (the smaller), was born.

Essentially, today’s Sunnis believe that Muhammad chose Abu Bakr and that his piety, deeds, and character amply justified that choice, whereas the Shia believe that only the descendants of Ali—Muhammad’s nearest male relative—are qualified to rule.



### VOICES

○ People! If anyone among you worshipped Muhammad, let him know that Muhammad is dead. But those who worshipped God, let them know that He lives and will never die.

—Caliph Abu Bakr, countering apostasy during al-Ridda

Despite this very basic difference in the interpretation of God’s will, the dispute between the Sunnis and Shia did not explode at the time of Abu Bakr’s succession. Both sides agreed that Islam was facing an urgent danger of schism and civil war and that, for the sake of unity, it was best to approve Abu Bakr’s leadership. The Shia-Sunni dispute did not harden into an enduring doctrinal schism until much later in the history of Islam.

## Abu Bakr’s Caliphate

Abu Bakr approached his task with humility, telling the faithful that, although he was chosen, he was “not the best of you.” He asked for help and guidance, and for obedience as long as he himself was obedient to “God and His Messenger”—the latter meaning the teachings of Muhammad.

At 60, Abu Bakr was already advanced in years, and his caliphate was destined to be a brief 27 months. Yet during this time he successfully suppressed rebellion among the Arab tribes and initiated offensive campaigns against the Sassanid Empire (the Persians) and the Byzantine Empire (at the time still called the Eastern Roman Empire). Some Christians associated with the Sassanians and the Byzantines converted to Islam en masse during these campaigns: the Christian Arab Lakhmids allied to the Sassanians and the Arab Nestorian Christians known as the Ghassanids, who were allies of the Byzantines.

### Abu Bakr

Like Muhammad, Abd Allah ibn 'Uthman ibn Aamir ibn Amr ibn Ka'ab ibn Sa'ad ibn Taym—better known as Abu Bakr (ca. 573–634)—was a merchant, who traveled widely throughout Arabia as well as the adjacent Middle East. Although most Sunnis consider him the first convert to Islam, the Muslim historian Tabari reported that he was only among the first 50 or so, but was the most pious among them. Shia believe that Muhammad's first wife, Khadija, was the first to accept Muhammad as the prophet of Allah and that Ali ibn Abi Talib was the second. Nevertheless, Abu Bakr became Muhammad's close companion and adviser (Sahabi), and was his father-in-law.

Abu Bakr not only persuaded many to convert to Islam, he participated in most of Muhammad's key campaigns and financed the Battle of Tabouk (October 630) at great personal sacrifice.

Upon the prophet's death in June 632, a shura (council) elected Abu Bakr to succeed Muhammad as caliph. Although his caliphate proved brief—he died in 634—Abu Bakr sent Muslim armies into Iraq and Syria, beginning the explosive expansion of the Islamic Empire.

## Ridda Wars

Throughout the rest of 632 and into early 633, Abu Bakr fought 15 major battles throughout the Arabian Peninsula against Arab tribal leaders who claimed they had sworn allegiance to Muhammad only, allegiance that ended with his death. Most of the rebellions were popular in origin, the people rallying around a new religious leader. Some, however, were over a refusal to pay the Zakat, the religious tax exacted by the Islamic administration.

Abu Bakr declared that the apostate tribes had sworn to be faithful to a religion and a religious community, not to a particular human being. Their conversion was therefore binding upon them in perpetuity. He raised a powerful army, divided it into 11 operational corps, and launched simultaneous campaigns against multiple centers of resistance. His campaigns were highly effective in bringing about the general collapse of Arab rebellion against Islam. Encouraged by his success in what might be regarded as a civil war, Abu Bakr launched two offensive campaigns against the Sassanians and the Byzantines, in a bid to expand Islam.

## Beginning the Islamic Conquest of Sassanid Persia

Abu Bakr assigned his best commander, Khalid ibn al-Walid, to invade Iraq, at the time the northwest portion of the Sassanid Empire. He bolstered Khalid's army of 10,000 with some 8,000 Arab troops recruited by tribal chiefs. All the invaders were enthusiastic volunteers, whom Khalid led with great skill, winning four major victories in rapid succession before capturing the Iraqi capital city of Hira in May 633, followed by Al-Anbar, which fell after a monthlong siege in July. Khalid then moved west in a campaign that culminated in December 633 with the Battle of Firaz, in which he defeated the combined forces of the Sassanid Persians and Byzantine Romans.



### DID YOU KNOW?

The Sassanid (or Sassanian) Empire spanned 241 to 651 and was called by those who lived in it Eran, from which the modern name of Persia–Iran—is derived. The Sassanid Empire was the last Iranian empire to come into being before the rise of Islam.

## Invading the Byzantine Empire

The Battle of Firaz brought the Muslim armies to the border between the Sassanid Persian Empire and the Byzantine—or Eastern Roman—Empire. Encouraged by his rapid success against the Persians, Khalid concentrated four of his corps far to the south of Firaz, near Tabouk, and sent them, each under a trusted lieutenant, into the Byzantine province of Syria, which included at the time the modern territories of Jordan, Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, and southern Turkey in addition to modern Syria. The campaign was wide ranging, and the Muslim army of about 32,000 may well have been outnumbered nearly three to one—although modern historians deem the figure of 90,000, held in legend to be the strength of the Byzantine army, to be an exaggeration. By August 634, Khalid began laying siege to Damascus, one of the great cities of Byzantium.



### VOICES

The people who abandon jihad fall a victim to humility and degradation.  
—Abu Bakr

## Umar, Uthman, and Ali

Soon after he began the Damascus siege, Abu Bakr fell desperately ill. In August 634, as he lay on his deathbed, seeking to avoid repeating the discord created by Muhammad's failure to name a successor, he explicitly named Umar ibn Al-Khattab to succeed him.

Whereas Abu Bakr was deliberate in action and humble in demeanor, Umar, though renowned for his piety, was ardent, quick-tempered, and impulsive. Earlier in life, he had been a fiery critic of Islam and even set off to Medina on a mission to assassinate Muhammad. He stopped en route to castigate his sister and her husband, both of whom had converted to Islam. They responded to his outrage by reading to him from the Quran, an experience that so moved Umar that he converted on the spot. With that, he completed his journey, not to kill the prophet, but to join him.

Umar sent a message to Abu Ubaidah ibn al-Jarrah, appointing him to replace Khalid as commander of the Islamic army in Syria. Umar was concerned that the triumphant Khalid was becoming too famous, and he feared that the people would attribute his many victories to him personally rather than to the intercession of God. Showing great restraint and good judgment, Abu Ubaidah held off announcing his appointment until Khalid had completed the conquest of Damascus in September.

During Umar's reign, the conquest of Syria was completed, and, in addition, almost all of the Sassanid Empire was annexed to the Islamic Empire, along with the Levant, Egypt, Cyrenaica, Tripolitania, Fezzan, and Eastern Anatolia. Umar treated the conquered people with considerable liberality. He installed prominent locals to leadership positions and employed the best skilled local labor. In many places, his administration markedly improved the lives of common people.

Included in his conquests was Jerusalem, which fell to Umar's forces in 637 without a fight. By the standards of the era, Umar administered the city with tolerance. He did not force Christians or Jews to convert to Islam, but allowed them to practice their own religions, provided they build no new houses of worship, pay a tribute tax, and show public deference to Muslims.

## **The Price of Conquest**

Umar was at the height of his power when, on November 3, 844, a Persian soldier, Pirouz Nahavandi, who had been captured by Muslim forces and enslaved, attacked Umar with a dagger, stabbing him six times in the belly as he led morning prayers. The assassination was retaliation against the man who had so successfully expanded the conquest of Persia.

The crowd rushed Pirouz, who wounded a dozen more Muslims, some fatally, before turning his dagger on himself. As for Umar, despite his grievous wounds, he lingered three days before he died. He left a final testament of tolerance, enjoining the Muhajirun and Ansar to treat each other kindly and for all Muslims to be good to the people of the conquered lands because "they are the outer line of our defense." In the matter of naming a successor, however, Umar was uncertain, and instead of naming one person, appointed a six-man shura (council), charging them to choose the caliph from among themselves.

## **Uthman the Unpopular**

The shura included Ali ibn Abi Talib, and many assumed that he, Muhammad's nearest male relative passed over after Muhammad's death as too young, would now become caliph. The committee, however, struggled to reach a decision and sought advice from other prominent members of the community. Concluding that a majority of the people favored the election of Uthman, the shura chose him, not Ali, as the third caliph of Islam.

In truth, many of the people favored Ali, and Uthman, an early Meccan convert, member of the Umayyad clan, and the husband of one of Muhammad's daughters, assumed power under something of a cloud. His practice of handing out key political appointments to Umayyad kinsmen, many of whom were late converts to Islam, did nothing to increase his popularity. Nevertheless, Uthman instituted an ambitious program of public works and presided over a wave of considerable prosperity in the Muslim community. He also assembled a committee of scholars that produced multiple copies

of the Quran, thereby establishing the text as it exists today. His earnest attempt to limit disputes over the sacred text at the heart of the religion was rendered more effective by his order to destroy all other versions of the Quran. Uthman also launched several military campaigns to suppress rebellion among the lands Umar had conquered, and he positioned forces for further expansion of the caliphate.

Rebellion—called *fitna*—was not confined to distant lands. There were uprisings in Iraq and Egypt, which, with Kufra and Basra (in Iraq), was a center of intense political dissidence. Rebels from these centers entered Medina, seeking to foment an uprising. The Egyptian contingent specifically wanted to assassinate Uthman and replace him with Ali. Although Ali refused such a succession, the rebels laid siege to Uthman in his house. The people of Medina did not join in the siege, but neither did they resist it. On June 20, 656, a contingent of Egyptian rebels climbed over the wall of Uthman's house, evaded the caliph's guards, and entered Uthman's private chamber, where he was reading the Quran. The Egyptians attacked, raining blows upon Uthman's head. His wife, Naila, reportedly threw herself over his prostrate body to protect him, but the attackers pushed her aside—lopping off her fingers in the process.

## Ali at Last

Although Ali had refused to participate in the overthrow of Uthman, many believed he had a hand in the assassination. He was chosen by the shura as the fourth caliph, but lingering suspicions throughout the Muslim community persistently prevented his consolidating control in many places, and Islam erupted into civil war.



### DEFINITION

**Fitna** is an Arabic word meaning (among other things) sedition or civil strife. It is used to identify the four civil wars that wracked early Islam, the First Fitna (656–661), the Second Fitna (ca. 680/683–ca. 685/692), the Third Fitna (744–750/752), and the Fourth Fitna (809–827).

## Civil War

The First Fitna—or First Islamic Civil War—began in 656 with opposition led by Aisha bint Abi Bakr, one of the widows of Muhammad. Her force of some 30,000 rebel Arabs met about 20,000 loyalists under Ali at Basra, Iraq, in the Battle of the Camel on November 7, 656. The battle proved bloody, but Ali inflicted disproportionate losses on Aisha—13,000 killed, wounded, or captured versus about 5,000 casualties on Ali's side, despite his having been outnumbered by some 10,000 men.

In the aftermath of the Battle of the Camel, Ali pardoned and reconciled with Aisha and treated the defeated rebel forces with liberality. Nevertheless, Ali's victory left two critical loose ends. He did not punish the assassins of Uthman, and Muawiyah bin Abi-Sufyan, Uthman's appointed governor of Syria, refused to pledge allegiance to Ali. As a result, both Ali's and Muawiyah's forces remained in the field after the Battle of the Camel. They set up opposing camps at Siffin, on the banks of the Euphrates, in Syria, in what is today the town of Ar-Raqqah.

## Ali vs. Muawiyah

On July 26, the Battle of Siffin began. Ali's warriors gained the advantage in combat that stretched over three days. At length, however, one of the Syrians loyal to Muawiyah rode into the field, a copy of the Quran resting between the ears of his horse. He called for judgment by "the book of Allah." This cry was echoed on both sides by those eager to end a struggle in which Muslim was killing Muslim. Next, Muawiyah's warriors tore pages from the Quran and tied them to the tips of their spears. At the sight of this, the fighting stopped.

## Revolt of the Kharijites

The dispute between Ali and Muawiyah was over two issues. The first was Ali's desire to replace Muawiyah as governor of Syria with his own appointee, and the second concerned how and when to bring Uthman's assassins to justice. Ali agreed to the appointment of arbitrators to settle both matters. But when the arbitrators decided that both Ali and Muawiyah should be removed from the caliphate and a new caliph elected, Ali refused to accept the verdict. Interpreting this as a violation of his pledge to abide by arbitration, many who had been nominally loyal to Ali turned against him. Among one faction, however, the outrage was over Ali's agreement to arbitration in the first place. Not only did they see Ali as weak, but they also objected to any selection of a caliph based on political rather than strictly religious grounds. They broke with Ali and thus became known as the Kharijites—"those who leave."

Ali had to suppress the revolt, and in 659 at the Battle of Nahrawan (in modern Iraq), he won a victory that proved to be pyrrhic—that is, self-defeating. Many celebrated the slain Kharijite warriors as martyrs to the cause of pure Islam, in which leaders were elevated by God alone, not by human election. And so, on the 19th of Ramadan in the Year 40 of the Muslim calendar—on or about January 27, 661—as he prayed in the Great Mosque of Kufa, Ali was assaulted by the Kharijite Abd-al-Rahman ibn Muljam, who ran him through with a poison-tipped sword. Before he died on January 31, Ali commanded that there be no retaliation against the Kharijites and that his assassin be punished by a single sword strike, whether or not it proved fatal.

## Birth of the Umayyad Dynasty

After Ali's murder, the Muslims of Kufa readily accepted his eldest son Husayn to succeed him. Muawiyah, however, remained a power to be reckoned with. He controlled the Levant as well as Egypt and was in command of the largest army in the Muslim Empire. He wasted no time declaring himself the new caliph, established his capital in Damascus, and led a force against Husayn. In the war that broke out, Muawiyah did not rely on military prowess alone, but bribed Husayn's top commanders, ultimately moving them to rebel against Ali's chosen successor. Having lost the loyalty of the military, Husayn yielded the caliphate to Muawiyah. Immediately, Muawiyah named his son Yazid to succeed him—and thus the Umayyad Dynasty was founded, the Umayyads being the sub-clan of the Quraysh to which Muawiyah belonged.



## Umayyad Expansion

By this time, the Muslims viewed the world as divided among three groups. The *dar al-Islam*, “the realm of Islam,” consisted of all Muslim territory controlled by the caliph. Those territories deemed ripe for conquest were designated as the *dar al-barb*, the “realm of war,” and those non-Muslim nations that coexisted with Islam but were deemed unavailable for conquest (whether through treaty or other reasons) were the *dar al-sulb*, or “realm of truce.”

Muawiyah was intent on transforming more of the *dar al-barb* into the *dar al-Islam*, and sent annual military forces into the territory of the Byzantine Empire, intent on wearing down what was at the time the main power in the region.

## From Father to Son

On April 29 or May 1, 680, after an illness, Muawiyah died, having advised his son and designated successor, Yazid, to treat Ali’s son and his potential rival with tolerance, generosity, and even reverence. The dying man did not want to leave an enduring legacy of Muslim killing Muslim.

Alas, no sooner did Muawiyah die than Husayn boldly laid claim to the caliphate. He, after all, was directly descended from the prophet, Muhammad, and his faction—the Shia—were prepared to assert anew their belief that only a direct male descendant of Muhammad could rightfully rule as caliph. Supported by the Sunni—who had accepted Abu Bakr as Muhammad’s successor over the prophet’s nearer relative, Ali—Yazid felt that he could not heed his father’s dying injunction to treat Husayn, now clearly his rival, as anything other than an enemy.

## The Legacy of Karbala

As caliph, Yazid proved oppressive and unpopular. That was bad enough, but he also made no attempt to disguise the favoritism he showed toward Syria, the homeland of his father and, in effect, the seat of the Umayyad Dynasty. The tenuous nature of his support made Yazid all the more anxious to crush the challenge from Husayn. And so, on October 10, 680, his army—which traditional and historical sources put at anywhere from 4,000 to 100,000 strong—captured Husayn and between 70 and 150 followers near Karbala, Iraq.

As a military engagement, the Battle of Karbala was unsurprisingly one-sided. Yazid’s commander, Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad, captured Husayn and his followers, including his brothers and other family members. They killed all of the men in the party, in addition to the six-month-old son of Husayn, and took the women and children as prisoners. The heads of the 72 men were severed, and Husayn’s was sent by messenger to Yazid in Damascus.

Today we use the word “blowback” to describe the unintended consequences an aggressor suffers from an action taken against a target. The slaughter of Husayn—grandson of Muhammad—and his close companions, far from consolidating Yazid’s control of the Islamic Empire, turned many Muslims against him and the Sunnis. It brought to a crisis the long-simmering dispute between the Shia and the Sunnis, creating an outright schism that has endured to this day and has been the source of violent

strife within Islam. Karbala, where Husayn and his brothers are buried, is regarded by the Shia as holy ground. The events are commemorated in Shia Islam as the Mourning of Muharram—the tenth day of which, the day of the slaughter, is known as Ashura.

## Umayyad Decline, Abbasid Rise

Yazid I ruled until November 14, 683, when he lost control of his horse and was killed. He was succeeded by his son Muawiyah II, who abdicated some 40 days after his ascension to the caliphate. He was succeeded by Marwan I (Marwan ibn al-Hakam), who reigned for little more than a year amid civil war. His successor, Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan, proved far more capable and reigned from 685 to 705, during which time he expanded the empire eastward into what is today Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

Abd al-Malik's successor, Al-Walid I, pushed the *dar al-Islam* westward, into Europe. By the time of his death in 715, the Iberian Peninsula (modern Spain and Portugal) was under Islam, and the Muslims were on the verge of advancing into France and the heart of Western Europe. Eight more caliphs would rule before the Umayyad Dynasty ended with the death of Marwan II on August 6, 750, following his defeat at the hands of the Abbasid commander Abdallah ibn Ali in the Battle of Zab (near the Great Zab River in Iraq) months earlier.

The death of the last Umayyad ruler came nearly 20 years after the high point of Islamic expansion under that dynasty. In 732, Charles Martel, king of the Franks, defeated an Umayyad military expedition at the Battle of Tours (also known as the Battle of Poitiers in north-central France). Traditional Western historians see Martel's victory as the epoch-making defeat of the Muslim advance into Europe.

The final fall of the Umayyad Dynasty immediately preceded the rise of the Abbasid Dynasty under as-Saffah (full name, Abu al-Abbas Abdullah ibn Muhammad as-Saffah), who ruled as the first Abbasid caliph from 750 to 754. Although the Shia welcomed the demise of the Umayyads, they were stunned when as-Saffah assumed the caliphate. He traced his lineage to an uncle of Muhammad, but the Shia regarded this familial connection to the prophet as too tenuous to certify his legitimacy as caliph. Moreover, as-Saffah favored the Sunnis, installing them in major positions of power as he centralized the government of the Islamic Empire. At the same time, as-Saffah and his successors worked to break down the formerly strict social, cultural, and political divisions between Arab and non-Arab (or *marwali*) Muslims.

Under the Abbasid Caliphate, which would endure from 750 to 1258, the ties between Islam and tribal identity, national identity, and ethnic identity diminished as Muslims intermarried with the populations of the countries they occupied. In this way, the influence of Islam increased, and, equally important, the realm of Islam entered a so-called Golden Age that saw the tribalism yield to a greater degree of imperial unity and the Arab world rise as a center of learning, art, and culture even as Europe languished in what later historians called the Dark Ages. Under the Abbasids, who moved their capital from Damascus to Baghdad—transforming that city into a fabled center of Middle Eastern civilization—the Islamic Empire became, for a time, the world's leading superpower.

## **The Least You Need to Know**

- The history of early Islam following Muhammad's death was marked by a combination of civil war, remarkably successful conquest, and assassination.
- The Umayyad Dynasty (661-750) ushered in a period of rapid and widespread expansion of Islamic control throughout the Middle East and into Europe, where the Iberian Peninsula (modern Spain and Portugal) came into the caliphate.
- The Battle of Karbala (October 10, 680), in which the forces of Caliph Yazid I slaughtered Husayn, son of Ali, created an enduring legacy of bitter strife between the Sunnis and Shia.
- The Abbasid Dynasty succeeded the Umayyad Dynasty and endured from 750 to 1258, encompassing the so-called Golden Age of Islam, in which the learning, science, and literature of the caliphate brightly outshone the Christian realms during Europe's Dark Ages.