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Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan

From Arabia to Empire

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For Cymbre, Michael and Brian

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan is a figure of critical importance in the formative period of the caliphate and the Arab-Muslim Empire but even in the flood of scholarship dealing with the first Islamic century he has received surprisingly little attention. The last scholar to devote close attention to him and his era was the learned but erratic Henri Lammens. That was nearly a century ago and even Lammens, lover of the Umayyads as he was, never devoted a full-length monograph to the dynasty's founder. More recently, the admirable but necessarily concise article by Martin Hinds in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (published in 1991) suggests that he would have been Mu'awiya's ideal biographer, but his untimely death deprived us of that possibility. The reasons for this neglect – perhaps a better word would be skittishness – are many and some of them should become clear in the pages that follow. However, Mu'awiya was and is a hard man to pin down. It is hard to be sure just what we really know about him and hard to make sense of what we do know (or think we know). In addition, many problems and trends in early Islam, which seem shadowy or ill-formed during Mu'awiya's lifetime, become much easier to talk about in the context of the decades following his death.

I hope that this book will help to renew interest in this remarkable man. This is not, however, a book for early Islamic specialists. It is aimed at readers who are just beginning to get involved with the study of Islamic history – whether members of the Muslim diaspora, who want to learn more about

their historical heritage, or scholars and teachers who work in related fields (for example, Late Antiquity or Byzantium) who need to know something about early Islam. I have written primarily with these audiences in mind, keeping footnotes to a minimum and using them to explain uncommon terms rather than to identify the original sources and scholarly references on which my statements are based. When quoting original sources, I have favored those which are available in translation – English when possible but French and Italian as well. I have followed the available translations closely but in some cases I have altered them to increase clarity and uniformity of style. I have tried to check published translations against the original texts for Arabic sources. Unfortunately, I can do this only in a limited way for Greek texts and not at all for those in Syriac or Armenian. The bibliography at the end of the book is highly selective; in addition to important works of modern scholarship, it lists original sources, with translations where they exist.

Technical matters aside, I must confess that my presentation of Mu'awiya presumes a level of clarity and simplicity which is not warranted by the sources. They – archaeological and written – are full of gaps, ambiguities and contradictions. Almost every paragraph in this book could be the subject of a substantial article or even a monograph, festooned with as many footnotes as one could desire. I have tried to stay away from such debates, since to include them would make the book almost impossible to read. However, I am well aware of them and the statements in this book represent my best efforts to resolve them. Other authors would write a very different book.

Two points in particular need to be made. First, Mu'awiya remains an intensely controversial figure and it is very easy to talk about him in terms of ideological and theological ideas that developed a century or more after his death. I have tried to get as close as possible to a contemporary – late seventh century

– perspective on his life. When I discuss how later generations thought about him, I try to make it clear that that is what I am doing. In particular, I try not to assume that there is one true, essential, unchanging Islam, which we can use to judge everyone and everything in this period. Muslims in the late seventh century disagreed about Islam – and they disagreed violently. A historian has to accept that fact and work with it.

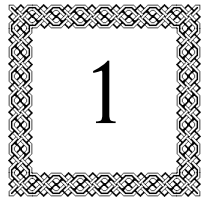
Second, the sources for Mu'awiya's life are shot through with later fictions, ideological distortions, misunderstandings and gaps and must be handled critically to be any use at all. They are not sheer invention; they present narratives and "hard" data that have a tangible connection with real people and real events. I have striven to use these sources with a careful eye for what they can and cannot tell us. In the final analysis, I am convinced that, within severe limits, we can find a "historical Mu'awiya." I have done my best to present him here; he is very much worth getting to know.

This book was drafted during my residency at the American Center for Oriental Research in Amman, Jordan, during the autumn of 2004. I must thank ACOR's then director, Pierre Bikai, and his staff for the extraordinary resources and scholarly atmosphere that they provided. I am also indebted to ACOR and the Council of American Overseas Research Centers (CAORC) for fellowship support which permitted not only residence in Amman but also extensive travels in Syria and south-eastern Turkey. Dean David Marshall of the University of California, Santa Barbara, arranged for sabbatical leave during this period.

The initial research underpinning this project, carried out in 2000–2001, was supported by a University of California President's Fellowship in the Humanities, a Friedrich Solmsen Fellowship from the University of Wisconsin Center for Research in the Humanities, an appointment as visiting pro-

fessor at the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales* in Paris and a scholarly exchange award from the *Centre National des Recherches Scientifiques*. I owe Paul Boyer, then Director of the UW Humanities Centre and Baber Johansen, then directeur d'études at EHESS, a profound debt of gratitude and friendship for their efforts on my behalf.

Patricia Crone, the editor of the series in which this book appears, suggested the subject to me and her frank but always constructive advice and criticism has been invaluable throughout. The manuscript also benefited from a close reading by Michael Morony. Many colleagues have given generously of their time and knowledge. Though I cannot name them all, I wish to mention especially Baber Johansen, Chase F. Robinson, Clive Foss, Alan Walmsley, Denis Gènequand and Ignacio Arce. In short, I have had the best advice possible. I hope I have made good use of it but I cannot escape responsibility for the errors and shortcomings that remain. As ever, my wife Gail remains the most committed and honest supporter of my work.



THE PROBLEM OF MU'AWIYA

Of all the early caliphs, Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan is surely the most elusive and ambiguous. He is elusive because we know so very little about even the public facts of his career, including the almost twenty years in which he was the unchallenged head of the Muslim community and its immense empire. Of his inner beliefs and purposes we know even less. He is ambiguous because Muslims have never been sure what to make of him. In his lifetime, he was a symbol of the conflicts and anxieties that afflicted the community of believers and has so remained until the present day. However, Mu'awiya is a decisive figure in the history of Islam. Without him, the political and religious evolution of early Islam seems opaque and unintelligible. Moreover, whatever we think of him as a ruler and a man (a point on which opinions differ sharply, to put it mildly), he was a political genius at a moment when nothing less could have saved the Islamic Empire from dissolution.

Mu'awiya's life and career fall into three phases of nearly equal length: the roughly thirty years, from infancy to early adulthood passed within the traditional family and religious structures of the Arab Quraysh tribe, twenty-five years spent as a member of the newly dominant Islamic military and political élite, and twenty-five years struggling for and then holding

supreme authority as head of the Islamic Empire. Of the first phase we can say very little; he was simply there. In the second phase, especially his twenty years as governor in Syria under the caliphs 'Umar (634–644) and 'Uthman (644–656), the sources transmit a number of assertions and anecdotes about him, some of which are doubtless true, at least in substance. For the third phase, we have a mountain of information (none of which has come down to us in anything resembling its original form) on the civil war with 'Ali but only a few highlighted moments from his twenty-year caliphate. In terms of concrete events and policies, we are told much more about Mu'awiya's governors in Iraq than we are about him.

We know, for example, that he sent at least one major military expedition every year into Byzantine Anatolia or along the Aegean coast. This represented a huge commitment of resources and was surely the thing about which he cared most, for if he succeeded in capturing Constantinople and ending Byzantine rule, he would be the successor of both Caesar and Muhammad – both universal emperor and guardian of the final revelation. Yet the Arabic sources tell us almost nothing about these expeditions apart from the names of their commanders. We do not know where they went or what were either their immediate or long-term objectives. For that, we must turn to the Greek (and occasionally Syriac) sources, whose people bore the brunt of these incursions. However, even these accounts are terse, confusing and often contradictory. Like the Arabic texts, they were composed at least a century after Mu'awiya's lifetime and their sources of information are obscure at best.

Nor do we learn much about how Mu'awiya managed affairs in his home base, Syria. The Syrian Arab troops brought him to power and kept him there but how did he deal with them? Muslim writers tell us even less of how he dealt with the overwhelming majority of his subjects, who were not Muslims but

Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians. Whatever we know must be gleaned from scattered references in Greek and Syriac texts. Among Syriac writers Mu'awiya had a reputation for stability, justice and tolerance but they give few, if any, facts to support this judgment. Finally, Mu'awiya himself did everything in his power – or so we are told by Muslim writers – to mask his own thoughts, motives and emotions. He was famed for his political acumen, embodied in the quality of *hilm*, a word best understood as "forbearance in the face of provocation." He consulted widely and listened closely but did not show his hand. He could be eloquent but relied on wit and irony rather than the moving rhetoric ascribed to his rival 'Ali ibn Abi Talib. Neither his friends nor his enemies ever quite knew what he was thinking until it was too late to do anything about it.

MU'AWIYA IN THE EYES OF LATER MUSLIMS

Mu'awiya's calculated reserve no doubt contributed to his ambiguous place in the Muslim imagination, but that is only the beginning. The real problem is that he did not fit neatly into the moral categories which later Muslims devised to evaluate a person's religious standing – indeed, he subverted them – and so they could never quite decide what to make of him. It must be admitted that for two broad religio-political groupings, the Kharijites and Shi'ites, there was no ambivalence at all. For them, he was a figure of unmitigated evil, a man who knowingly and cynically worked to destroy the new covenant established by Muhammad and to return the world to the ignorant brutishness of the Jahiliyya, the time before Islam. The 'Abbasid caliphs, who overthrew the Umayyad dynasty that he had put in power and who did everything they could to blacken its memory, publicly condemned him and his seed.

The first 'Abbasid, Abu al-'Abbas al-Saffah (749–754), set the tone in his accession speech in Kufa:

> Woe, woe to the Banu Harb b. Umayyah and the Banu Marwan![1] In their space and time they preferred the ephemeral to the eternal, the transient abode to the everlasting one. Crime them obsessed; God's creatures they oppressed; women forbidden to them they possessed, all honour grieving and by sin deceiving. They tyrannised God's servants by their deport with evil custom where they sought disport, themselves with vice's burdens decked and their idolatry unchecked, at management of every fault most lively, cheerful; withal to race on error's course not fearful; God's purpose in respiting sin not comprehending and trusting they had tricked Him by pretending! God's severity came on them like a night raid when they were sleeping and at dawn they were only legends. They were torn all to tatters and thus may an oppressive people perish!
>
> [Tabari, vol. XXVII, pp. 155–6]

Invective of this sort was repeated more than once in the reigns of al-Saffah's immediate successors. Systematic public campaigns to vilify Mu'awiya and the entire Umayyad clan, to label them not only as hypocrites and corrupt, bloody tyrants but even as apostates, were planned by the caliphs al-Ma'mun (813–833) and al-Mu'tadid (892–902), long after Mu'awiya and the Umayyads could possibly have threatened 'Abbasid power. Neither caliph went ahead with the project, since the political fallout was unpredictable. The unpublished decrees of al-Ma'mun and al-Mu'tadid were no doubt aimed less at the Umayyads than at re-energizing support for their own troubled dynasty. However, the two caliphs clearly believed that the Umayyads would be credible and effective symbols of

[1] The two branches of the Umayyad house. See pp. 34–35.

the corrupt and godless alternative to 'Abbasid rule, whatever its faults. The charges spelled out in these documents neatly summarize the most persistent and important criticisms of Mu'awiya as a person and a ruler. Al-Mu'tadid's decree (a revised version of al-Ma'mun's) is revealing:

> God cursed the Umayyads through His Prophet orally and by way of revealed scripture thus: '… the tree accursed in the Qur'an. We shall frighten them but it only greatly increases their rebelliousness'.
> [Qur'an 17:60] (Nobody denies that the Umayyads are meant here.)
>
> When the Prophet saw Abu Sufyan riding on an ass, with Mu'awiya and his son Yazid driving it he said: 'May God curse the leader, the rider and the driver!'.
>
> The Messenger of God called for Mu'awiya to take dictation (to copy down newly revealed verses of revelation as the Prophet recited them) but he refused to do so because he was eating. The Prophet then said, 'May God never fill his belly!'. As a result, Mu'awiya was always hungry and said, 'By God, I do not stop eating because I have had enough but only because I can eat no more!'
>
> The Messenger of God also said, 'From this mountain pass, a man from my community is coming up who will be resurrected separately from my people'. Mu'awiya was the one coming up.
>
> There is also the report that the Messenger of God said, 'When you see Mu'awiya on my pulpit, kill him!'.
>
> Then there is the famous hadith, traced back to the Prophet: 'Mu'awiya is in a casket of fire in the lowest layer of Hell, calling out, "O Clement One, O Generous One!" He is given the answer, "Now you believe but before this you sinned and wrought corruption"'.
>
> [Qu'ran 10:91]
>
> There is also his going to war against the most outstanding,

> earliest and most famous of Muslims, 'Ali b. Abi Talib. With his false claim, Mu'awiya contested 'Ali's rightful claim. He fought 'Ali's helpers with his own erring scoundrels. He attempted what he and his father never ceased attempting, namely 'to extinguish the light of God' (*Qu'ran 9:32*) and deny God's religion … Mu'awiya tried to seduce foolish men and confuse the ignorant with his trickery and injustice … Mu'awiya preferred this fleeting world and denied the enduring other world. He left the ties of Islam and declared it permissible to shed forbidden blood, until in his rebellion … the blood of an uncountable number of the best Muslims was shed.
>
> God made it obligatory to curse him for killing, while they could offer no resistance, the best of the men around Muhammad and the men of the second generation (of Muslims) and excellent and religious people, such as 'Amr b. al-Hamiq and Hujr b. 'Adi and their like.
>
> Furthermore, there is Mu'awiya's disdainful attitude toward the religion of God, manifested by his calling God's servants to (acknowledge) his son Yazid (as heir apparent), that arrogant drunken sot, that owner of cocks, cheetahs and monkeys. With furious threats and frightful intimidation, he forced the best of Muslims to give the oath of allegiance to Yazid, although he was aware of Yazid's stupidity and was acquainted with his ugliness and viciousness … his drunkenness, immorality and unbelief.
>
> [Tabari, XXXVIII, pp. 53–58]

For Sunnis who were not part of the 'Abbasid establishment (and these ultimately constituted the majority of Muslims), judgments had to be rather more subtle.[2] Even the 'Abbasid caliph al-Mansur (754–75) respected Mu'awiya's political acumen and talents as an empire-builder (but then al-Mansur was famously hard-nosed and unsentimental). Ultimately, for the Sunnis, Mu'awiya was not only a Companion of the Prophet but also a scribe of the Qur'an, one of the small group whom Muhammad trusted to receive the dictation of the revelations

he had received.[2] Apart from this, he was a distant relative of Muhammad and, like all four of his predecessors on the caliphal throne, related to him by marriage (in his case, through his sister Umm Habiba, whom the Prophet married after he occupied Mecca in 630). He had been named governor of Syria (in around 639) by the second caliph, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, and was confirmed in that office by the third caliph, 'Uthman. Mu'awiya had demonstrated his formidable military, political, and administrative talents for twenty years by the time he became caliph and he restored peace and stability to a Muslim community tormented by five years of civil war.

On the other side of the ledger, the Sunni historical memory recalls that Mu'awiya's clan bitterly opposed Muhammad and harassed his followers during his Meccan years and led the war to oust him from Medina. The leader of the opposition in the years between Badr (624) and the occupation of Mecca (630) was Mu'awiya's father, Abu Sufyan. Although Mu'awiya eventually joined the Prophet's cause, most believed that he did so only after the latter entered Mecca in 630 – a conversion of convenience if ever there was one. Fortunately for the Umayyads, Muhammad was a man who sought reconciliation with his enemies once they had recognized his status as Prophet. Moreover, he made use of talent wherever he found it, hence his decision to use Mu'awiya as a scribe of the new revelations he received and dictated. Tradition has it that Mu'awiya was one of only eighteen (seventeen men and one woman) literate members of the Quraysh tribe. Muhammad's marriage to

[2] As exemplified by Tabari, died 923, Baladhuri, died 892 and Ibn 'Asakir, died 1176. The issue of Mu'awiya's religious status seemed compelling even as late as al-Maqrizi's early fifteenth-century impassioned polemic, the *Book of Contention and Strife concerning the Relations between the Banu Umayya and the Banu Hashim* (trans. C. E. Bosworth, 1980).

Umm Habiba was no love match but a political alliance with the still large and influential Umayyad clan. After Muhammad's death, 'Umar's appointment of Mu'awiya as governor of Syria might suggest that the redoubtable caliph found him reliable. However, the office came to him only after three earlier appointees had died in rapid succession during a plague epidemic, leaving him the most senior military commander in Palestine. In short, his appointment represented an *ad hoc* solution to an immediate crisis of leadership. Mu'awiya remained in office under 'Uthman partly because this caliph, his second cousin, tried to reinforce his authority over the provinces by appointing members of his own clan as governors. Finally, the Sunni consensus believed, if Mu'awiya restored peace to the Muslims he had been a major protagonist in the civil war that first sundered the community. Indeed, Mu'awiya had deliberately provoked the second phase of this struggle by his refusal to recognize 'Ali as the lawful successor to the Prophet unless 'Ali surrendered 'Uthman's killers to him for vengeance.

All these threads are nicely woven together in two short but characteristic anecdotes in the *Genealogies of the Nobles*, a massive historical and biographical compendium composed by Ahmad b. Yahya al-Baladhuri (died 892) at roughly the same time as the decree of the caliph al-Mu'tadid. One anecdote, recalling the words of a pious critic, emphasizes Mu'awiya's worldliness and his indifference to religion; the other, attributed to Mu'awiya himself, explains in a few terse phrases why he won the day over 'Ali. As we shall see, judgments concerning Mu'awiya's conduct and character are often more complex but these two reports, with their directness and simplicity, are a good place to begin.

> Mu'awiya said to Ibn al-Kawwa' al-Yashkuri[3]: 'I demand that you tell me under oath what you think of me'. Ibn al-Kawwa'

> responded, 'Since you have compelled me to swear by God's name, I will tell you that I think that to me you seem to abound in the goods of this world but to be poor in the next life, that you have gifts close at hand but keep the final destination [presumably the next life] far distant, that you are one who regards the dark as light and the light as dark'.
>
> [Baladhuri, *Ansab*, LDV, 6–7]

> Mu'awiya said, 'I triumphed over 'Ali because I held my secrets close while he revealed his, because the Syrians obeyed me while his followers disobeyed him, because I spent my wealth generously while he was miserly with his'.
>
> [Baladhuri, *Ansab*, LDV, 7]

Sunni ambivalence about Mu'awiya went further than his sometimes dubious political role. It was also a matter of culture. By the ninth century, Islamic society valued piety and religious knowledge above all else (though there was plenty of room for poetry, courtly literature and scientific and philosophic discourse); in this context, Mu'awiya was problematic. In formal piety and personal conduct, he was acceptable enough (at least he provoked no public scandal) but he was never regarded as religiously learned or even thoughtful and engaged, beyond a superficial level. He believed in God and was publicly correct in his observances but no more. Many regarded him as indifferent to Islam and some noted suspiciously pro-Christian sympathies. Mu'awiya's great passion was for the folklore and poetry of ancient Arabia, the culture he had known as a boy, before the coming of Islam. He was the last caliph other than Marwan ibn al-Hakam (684–5) to have reached adolescence

[3] A partisan of 'Ali noted for his severe asceticism.

before Muhammad's preaching threw everything into question. Thus he represents the human bridge between the old order of manly virtue (*muruwwa*) and tribal solidarity *('asabiyya*) and the new order of Islam.

HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT WE CLAIM TO KNOW: THE SOURCES FOR MU'AWIYA'S LIFE

There is no need for an elaborate review of the sources for Mu'awiya's life in a book of this kind but it is important to have some sense of what we do and do not know. It is best to build from original documents – diaries, letters, tax registers, decrees, inscriptions, and so on – together with monuments, artworks, coins and the like. Regrettably, very little of that kind has come down to us. There is a considerable quantity of silver and bronze coins minted in Mu'awiya's reign but these do not carry his name and use Byzantine and Persian designs from the pre-Conquest era. There are a few Greek and Coptic papyri from Egypt and from Nessana in the Negev, but no written documents of any kind have reached us in their original form from the key provinces of Syria (that is, Damascus and Hims), Iraq or Iran. We know that such documents were produced in profusion, since the literary sources constantly allude to them, but very rarely do they give transcripts or even summaries of them; worse, the few documents they do claim to reproduce are of doubtful authenticity.

As to monuments, Mu'awiya was apparently not a great builder and what he did build has mostly disappeared. There was a dam near the town of Ta'if in the Hijaz, attested by one of the two inscriptions to survive from his reign. A second inscription comes from a bath (Hammam Jadar) near Tiberias which was built by one of Mu'awiya's district governors

on his behalf. Coin finds and stylistic evidence suggest that a residential compound (Khirbat al-Karak) on the Sea of Galilee just south of Tiberias may have been built for Mu'awiya's occasional use. He is said to have erected a palace in Damascus, just south of the vast walled enclosure which later became the Umayyad Mosque. (The location of this palace is now the silversmiths' market, which in its present form dates from late Ottoman times.) This "palace" was constructed only of brick and timber and it failed to impress a Byzantine ambassador who came there in the 670s. "The ceiling will do for birds," he said "and the walls will do for rats." [4] Finally, there was a wooden mosque on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, roughly where the al-Aqsa Mosque now stands, but that was probably erected by the caliph 'Umar shortly after Jerusalem was surrendered to the Muslims (in around 638). This mosque elicited only a brief and condescending comment from the Frankish pilgrim Arculf (whose own homeland was hardly the most prosperous and cultivated portion of the world) during his visit to the Holy Land in 682. Jeremy Johns has pointed out that we have very little archaeological evidence from early Islam before 690 and argues that it is unlikely we shall ever uncover much more.[5]

Even if we do not agree with the reasons that Johns advances to explain this gap, his pessimism seems confirmed by Mu'awiya's record. For a man who ruled an empire stretching from Tunisia to the north-eastern frontiers of Iran, it is an astonishingly thin body of patronage. Iraq may have had more to show than Syria; it is possible, for example, that two imposing congregational mosques were erected in Basra and Kufa by Ziyad ibn Abihi, who served for several years as Mu'awiya's

[4] Finbarr Barry Flood, *The Great Mosque of Damascus* (2001), p. 147.

[5] Johns, "Archaeology and the History of Early Islam: The First Seventy Years," *JESHO*, 46 (2003), pp. 411–436.

viceroy in the East. Both, we are told, were constructed of baked brick, had high flat ceilings carried on tall limestone columns, and were handsomely decorated. However, Ziyad, as we shall see later on, had tremendous freedom of action and must have used his own provincial revenues to build these two monuments. There is no reason to think that Mu'awiya played any part.

Lacking documentary and archaeological sources, we are forced to fall back on literary compositions – chronicles, apocalypses, sermons, poetry and anthologies of speeches – written by Muslims and Christians in a variety of languages (Arabic, Greek, Latin, Syriac, Armenian and even Georgian). These might seem voluminous but are filled with problems. Only three texts are contemporary, or nearly contemporary, with Mu'awiya. First, an Armenian chronicle attributed to a "Bishop Sebeos," perhaps written in the 670s, which ends at the beginning of Mu'awiya's caliphate. Sebeos has intriguing things to say about the rise of Islam, the first Arab conquests and the three-cornered struggle, during the 640s and 650s, between Byzantines, Arabs and Armenian clans for control of the Armenian highlands. However, in Mu'awiya's day, Armenia was a remote frontier zone, far from the centre of Islamic power and so we get mere glimpses of the convoluted internal politics of Islam. The second document is a short chronicle composed in around 690 by the Nestorian monk, John Bar Penkaye, in the Mesopotamian town of Sinjar (also a place on the edge); its final chapter sketches the rise of Islam. John's attitude toward the founder of Islam and his teachings is surprisingly conciliatory and he gives a glowing testimonial to the peace and tolerance brought by Mu'awiya. However, he is much more interested in the moral and religious lessons taught by history than in people and events; there is much preaching and little detail. Third, a few pages of the so-called "Maronite

Chronicle," which ends in 664, contribute tantalizing glimpses of Mu'awiya's relations with the Christians of Syria, along with details of the Byzantine Wars and a terse allusion to a failed monetary reform. The seventh-century (that is, contemporary) testimony about the reign of Mu'awiya concludes with a couple of passing references: a few lines on the first Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem from the Frankish pilgrim Arculf (in around 682) and a sentence in a saint's life (preserved in a Georgian manuscript) whose original Greek version seems to date from about 692.

The early eighth century yields a pair of king lists in Syriac, one from 705 and the second from 724. The first only approximates Muslim dating for Muhammad and his successors until it reaches Mu'awiya, when it becomes more accurate. The second, in contrast, conforms closely to Muslim dates for the early caliphate; it may be a translation from an Arabic original. If so, that would imply that by the beginning of Hisham's reign (724–43) Muslims had developed a standardized caliphal chronology. The most important text comes from a surprising place – a terse Latin chronicle composed in Spain during the mid-eighth century (usually known as the *Hispano-Arab Chronicle*), which covers up to 724. It is obviously an abridgment of a longer chronicle, now lost, written somewhere in the eastern Mediterranean. The best guess is Palestine, since it says far more about Muslim than Byzantine affairs and takes a markedly pro-Umayyad point of view on Islamic politics. Wherever it was written, it was remarkably favorable to Islam and the Muslims – but the earliest Christian writings about Islam and the Arab Conquests often exhibit complex attitudes toward the new religion; they may be puzzled and confused but they are by no means always hostile.

Up to this point I have said nothing about contemporary writings in Arabic and Greek. That is because there are none,

at least none that have reached us in anything like their original forms. As to Greek, one of the great historiographic traditions lost its voice between 630 and 800. One commentator has noted that Roman history was supposed to be the history of imperial triumph and there were precious few triumphs to record after 630. Only in the *Short History of the Patriarch Nicephorus* (828) and, far more important for our subject, the *Chronography of Theophanes Confessor* (814) do we have Byzantine accounts of the immense changes that overwhelmed and transformed their empire in the seventh and eighth centuries. Both men drew on earlier sources for this period but these are so thoroughly dissolved in their texts that it is hard to know what they were. There is one critical exception: Theophanes clearly shares a common source with two other completely independent writers: Agapius of Manbij (around 940), a bishop of Apamea writing in Arabic, and the Syriac chronicle of a Monophysite churchman, Dionysius of Tell-Mahré (died 828). Dionysius' work has also not survived in its original form. We know it through long citations in two late chroniclers: Michael the Syrian (1199) and an anonymous Syriac chronicle of 1234. Their common source was most probably a multi-lingual Christian astrologer at the court of the Caliph al-Mahdi, Theophilus of Edessa (died around 780). Theophilus wrote a history in Syriac which focused on the political history of Islam and Byzantine-Muslim relations, beginning around 600 and ending in 754. Soon after his death, his history was translated into Greek (probably in a Palestinian monastery) and new information was added covering the period up to 780. Theophilus wrote about a century after Mu'awiya's reign but if his account represents an independent Syriac Christian line of history, we would have a valuable check on the partisan Islamic tradition preserved in the Arabic sources. However, Theophilus may well have drawn on Arabic–Islamic sources for a large part

of his account, but even so he helps us see where the Arabic tradition stood by the mid-eighth century. If he used Arabic sources from Syria rather than Iraq, then we would also have a window on a point of view that is otherwise almost entirely suppressed in the extant Muslim sources.

What do Muslim writers tell us about Mu'awiya? [6] I must spend a little time on this issue, since Muslim writings shape our portrait of Mu'awiya. The Arabic material is voluminous but, in its present form, quite late; the oldest works we have were composed some two centuries after Mu'awiya's life. At the time of Mu'awiya's death in 680, half a century after Muhammad, the Arabic historical tradition was still overwhelmingly oral; people and events were remembered, not recorded. Moreover, they were often remembered in ways that made for the best story, the cleverest rhetorical turn scored the strongest points against a narrator's theological, personal, and tribal opponents. Fidelity to observed fact was not always accorded the highest value (though sometimes it may have been). In Mu'awiya's lifetime, there was no official or centralized control over this tradition, not even a generally agreed-upon master narrative. Every tribal assembly, every religious circle and every governor's council had its own ways of talking about the tumultuous six decades (from 622 to 680) that witnessed both the triumphant rise of the Arab-Muslim Empire and the bitter internal strife that tore it apart.

In the generation after Mu'awiya, a number of scholars began to try to collect and organize the ever-changing swirl of anecdotes and stories. Their efforts were incited by the dying off of the generation that had seen these things at first hand and

[6] For detailed discussions on early Islamic historiography, see the bibliography, under Humphreys (2), Donner and Robinson – but there is no end to it.

no doubt also by the chaos and disruption of the second civil war (680–692), which threatened to destroy clear memories of Islam's beginnings. These scholars tried to identify the key events and personalities of the first six decades (beginning with the Prophet, of course) and to construct coherent and authentic narratives about these events and people. They could speak to surviving eyewitnesses of the conquests, the first civil war (656–661) and Mu'awiya's reign as caliph (660–680) but they had to make sense of these stories as well as they could, in accordance with their own religious and political beliefs and loyalties. They reshaped the material they gathered in a major way – emphasizing certain things, omitting others, combining stories that were originally quite separate, and so on. These scholars decided which few events, out of the myriad that had happened, were really important and should be remembered and which could be consigned to oblivion. They decided which people later generations would need to know about and which ones didn't count. Even so, if their work had reached us in its original form we would not be too badly off, but it has not – quite the opposite.

The fullest accounts of Mu'awiya and his time are collected in the vast chronicle of Abu Ja'far al-Tabari (died 923) and the almost equally large biographical corpus on the notables of Islam compiled by Ahmad b. Yahya al-Baladhuri (died 892). Both men spent their careers in Baghdad and both rely almost entirely on the historical traditions of Iraq and Medina. (However, Baladhuri includes some Syrian material – military and administrative information – in his other major work, a comprehensive survey of the Arab conquests.) Iraqi and Medinan tradition generally tends to favor 'Ali and the 'Abbasids and to be hostile to the Umayyads. There are important exceptions; to their credit, both scholars try to include divergent views. Much later, the Damascene scholar Ibn 'Asakir (died 1176) included

a very long biography of Mu'awiya in his vast biographical collection on the notables and scholars of his native city. Ibn 'Asakir's way of organizing this biography makes it very difficult for a modern historian to use but he preserves elements of a Syrian tradition that regarded Mu'awiya far more favorably than did the Iraqis. These three scholars, together with other writers of the ninth and early tenth centuries (for example, al-Dinawari, al-Ya'qubi and al-Mas'udi) who wrote important but concise histories, did not pluck their stories from the air. Their immediate source was a large body of writings compiled between 780 and 840. Tabari and his fellow historians had agendas of their own, in accordance with which they would pick and choose the things they wanted to transmit or ignore. However, their quotations or paraphrases, in so far as we can check them, are reasonably accurate.

We cannot be quite so confident about how the "generation of 800" went about writing their works. It is certain, however, that they regarded the sources as a plastic material which could be molded into many shapes. They did not see them as a corpus of fixed texts which they were obliged to copy more or less verbatim. The closer we approach Mu'awiya's lifetime (which reaches back to the beginnings of Islam), the less secure our footing becomes. It is obvious that the work of the first generation of serious historical collection and editing, between 680 and 720, was subject to wholesale reshaping in the eighth and early ninth centuries. Only the most meticulous research can indicate which elements may go back to the first collections, made around 700.

Although the process of creating order out of chaos began during the second civil war – that is, during the decade after Mu'awiya's death – it did not crystallise until late Umayyad and early 'Abbasid times. We could identify the caliphate of Hisham (724–43) as the moment when a grand narrative of Islam's

origins and the early caliphate finally took shape. However, this Umayyad version was torn apart and reassembled under the early 'Abbasids (roughly from 750–809). Within the framework of the emerging 'Abbasid grand narrative the "generation of 800" fashioned the texts that Tabari and his contemporaries used and that we now read. They do not all conform to the 'Abbasid agenda – quite the contrary – but they are all shaped in response to it.

Just where the real Mu'awiya is to be found is hard to say. We can locate a few hard facts about his public career. The dates and details are often disputed in the sources but such disputes are not surprising, especially for the earlier phases of his career, where memory and oral tradition had to substitute for official documents and a fixed calendar. There seem to be a few official acts (for example, appointments to office) or crucial events that were remembered by everyone, although exact times, places and circumstances had become foggy. (For example, Tabari could not determine the date of a crucial naval encounter, the Battle of the Masts, and erroneously settled on 651–52 rather than the correct year, 655.) Likewise, many of the debates about Mu'awiya's character, motives, religious commitment, and so on are embodied within certain key incidents or conflicts – for example, the truce of Hudaybiya, the Battle of Siffin or the arrest and execution of Hujr ibn 'Adi. It seems entirely unlikely to me that the events themselves were invented out of whole cloth, although all kinds of stories, sayings and bits of poetry came to be fastened on them. Rather, these events became focal points for debate, storytelling, speeches, and poetry precisely because they were the incidents that best symbolized Mu'awiya's life and career. We may never find out what really happened – not in any detail – but we can identify those involved and the issues at stake. What did happen, for example, at the Battle of Siffin during the summer of 657?

We do not know for sure – every bit of the testimony at our disposal is impeachable – but we can say that Mu'awiya was able to exploit the results of the whole affair to his advantage and that 'Ali's authority gradually crumbled.

On a different level, what of the hundreds of anecdotes about Mu'awiya's character? These are almost never dated or set within a broader context. Who knows if a single one of them actually happened? However, the portrait they draw is remarkably vivid and of a piece and seems perfectly consistent with his remarkable success as a ruler. It is reasonable to think that these anecdotes tell us something not only about the partisan stances of later generations but about how Mu'awiya appeared to his contemporaries. They also allow us to see what political wisdom was thought to be, as embodied in the art of day-to-day rulership that enabled him to surmount so many obstacles and retain power for so long. Finally, these anecdotes show us a man with very human qualities and foibles – a vast appetite for food and (albeit with somewhat greater restraint) sex, a deep love for and knowledge of pre-Islamic and current poetry, a taste for matching wits with his officials and opponents (by whom he was sometimes bested), devotion – perhaps too much devotion – to his son Yazid, a willingness to be bossed around by his wife, generosity to supplicants and petitioners, and a certain religiosity, if not deep piety, in his later years. He emerges as a man who exemplifies the virtues of the Jahiliyya but has no particular profile in Muslim piety. He respects Islam but it is not what moves him.

MU'AWIYA'S CAREER: A CHRONOLOGICAL SKETCH

The story is anything but straightforward, so it might be best to

begin with an outline of the elusive "hard facts" of Mu'awiya's career. Even in this bare bones chronology, which represents what is generally agreed upon, there are many points of uncertainty. However shaky it may be, it will serve to get us started.

595–607: Born in Mecca, son of Abu Sufyan Sakhr b. Harb b. Umayya b. 'Abd Shams and his wife Hind bint 'Utba b. 'Abd Shams (who was first cousin once removed to her husband).

628–630: Accepts Islam, willingly or otherwise, sometime between the Truce of Hudaybiya and Muhammad's occupation of Mecca.

634–638: Serves in the Muslim army in Syria, under the command of Abu 'Ubayda ibn al-Jarrah and 'Amr ibn al-'As and his elder brother Yazid ibn Abi Sufyan.

638–639: On the death (in the Plague of 'Amwas) of senior commanders including Yazid, named commander and governor either in al-Urdunn (modern Galilee and Transjordan), Syria excluding Hims (the northern frontier at that time) or Syria excluding Palestine.

640: Conquest of Caesarea, the last Byzantine stronghold on the Syro-Palestinian coast and the long-time capital of the province of Palaestina Prima, after a long siege by forces under Mu'awiya's command.

644: Assassination of caliph 'Umar and succession of 'Uthman ibn 'Affan ibn Abi al-'As ibn Umayya, Mu'awiya's second cousin. 'Uthman confirms Mu'awiya as governor in Syria (Damascus and al-Urdunn); within two or three years all four Syrian provinces/military districts (*ajnad*) are combined under his authority.

648–649: Constructs first Muslim-Arab fleet, uses it to invade Cyprus and impose tribute on the island.

655: Battle of the Masts or Phoenix, off the south-western coast of modern Turkey; the Muslim fleet under Mu'awiya's command decimates its Byzantine counterpart and establishes Muslim naval supremacy in the eastern Mediterranean and Aegean.

656: Mutiny by Kufan and Egyptian troops against the caliph 'Uthman, who is killed by assailants breaking into his residence. Mutineers supported by Medinan opponents of 'Uthman proclaim 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (the Prophet's first cousin) as caliph.

656: Battle of the Camel (near Basra), between 'Ali and three other Companions who have rejected his election to the caliphate: 'A'isha (widow of the Prophet and daughter of the first caliph, Abu Bakr), her kinsman Talha ibn 'Ubayd Allah, and al-Zubayr ibn al-'Awwam (a first cousin of the Prophet on his mother's side and also a nephew on his father's side of the Prophet's first wife, Khadija). Talha and al-Zubayr are killed and 'A'isha sent back to Medina in retirement. Mu'awiya, still governor of Syria, stands aside from this conflict but refuses the oath of allegiance to 'Ali.

657: Situation between 'Ali and Mu'awiya degenerates into open conflict; Battle of Siffin, inconclusive result followed by futile negotiations to resolve the conflict.

660: Proclaimed caliph in Jerusalem by his troops.

661: 'Ali assassinated by a religious fanatic (Mu'awiya not implicated); Mu'awiya becomes sole claimant to the caliphate. 'Ali's oldest son and putative successor al-Hasan is induced to retire.

661: Al-Mughira ibn Shu'ba named governor of Kufa.

665: Appointment of Ziyad ibn Sumayya (or ibn Abihi) as governor of Basra.

668: Death of al-Mughira ibn Shu'ba; Ziyad is named governor both of Kufa and Basra (in effect, viceroy of Iraq and Iran).

671: Arrest and execution of Hujr ibn 'Adi, pro-'Alid activist in Kufa.

673: Death of Ziyad ibn Sumayya, governor of Basra and Kufa.

674–78: Campaigns against Byzantium culminate in a naval blockade of Constantinople but it dissolves without having achieved any major objectives.

675: Ziyad's son 'Ubaydallah named governor of Basra, an office which he will hold (with varying skill and success) for ten years.

676: Yazid ibn Mu'awiya is named as heir apparent (*wali al-'ahd*) to the caliphate.

680: Death of Mu'awiya (whose age is given by different authorities as 73, 75, 78, 80, 83 and 85 years) in Damascus; succession of his son Yazid as caliph.

2

THE FIRST THREE DECADES (600–632)

THE MECCAN MILIEU

Mu'awiya was born sometime around 600, in the town of Mecca, which lies about seventy-two kilometres from the coast of the Red Sea, in a broad basin at the foot of a range of hills, across which one could penetrate into the interior plateau of Arabia. Mecca was, in many respects, extremely unpleasant. It was scorchingly hot in the summer months and its water supply could not support agriculture or orchards; such water as there was came from a few scattered wells. Ironically, it was subject to sporadic but extremely severe flooding from the nearby hills. Just how and when it became a centre of permanent settlement is a bit of a mystery but it probably did not happen until the late fifth century CE. According to Muslim tradition, Mecca derived its income from two sources: caravan commerce, with links to Yemen in the south and Syria and Egypt in the north, and its role as a centre of pilgrimage to the shrine of the Ka'ba. Contemporary scholars sharply dispute the scope and character

of these two roles: some portray Mecca as a combination of Venice and Santiago de Compostela; others concede the existence of only a minor regional market-place and local shrine. For the sake of argument, I will stick to a cautious interpretation of Muslim tradition, since that is quite enough to explain who Mu'awiya was and where he came from.

Mecca was dominated by a single tribe, the Quraysh, which established itself there during the fifth century. The other inhabitants were slaves, clients or protégés of the tribe's members. Like all Arab tribes, the Quraysh was made up of several smaller groups and might originally have been a mélange of separate clans which settled in and around Mecca in the course of the fifth century. However, by the early sixth century, these clans had come to see themselves as branches of a single great lineage which claimed a remote common ancestor, Fihr. At this time, the clans of the Quraysh varied greatly in size, wealth and prestige. One of the major groupings was the 'Abd Manaf, which had bifurcated into two rival clans, the Hashim and the 'Abd Shams. The Hashim, or at least some of its branches, had a role in the guardianship of the Ka'ba and in providing water for visiting pilgrims. According to tradition, the Prophet Muhammad was born into this clan in the year 570. Although various members of Hashim were engaged in the trade between Mecca and Syria (including Muhammad himself in his earlier years), the clan as a whole was rather down on its luck. It could claim noble descent but only limited influence in the affairs of Mecca.

The 'Abd Shams was quite different. Tradition portrays it as one of the wealthiest and most powerful clans in Mecca. Mu'awiya's father, Abu Sufyan, belonged to a prestigious family within this clan, the Umayyads (Ar., Banu Umayya),

who derived their wealth from the overland trade to Syria. His mother, Hind bint 'Utba, a strong-minded and sometimes fierce woman, was also a member of the 'Abd Shams. Although the Umayyads had no direct role in the cultic and pilgrimage rites connected with the Ka'ba, they certainly benefited from its presence. Pilgrimage centres are usually protected sanctuaries, largely immune from attack or warfare, at least from those to whom they are sacred, and they attract a lot of people during the pilgrimage season. This makes them good places for merchants to congregate; shrine centers across the world are commonly hives of commercial activity.

The archaeological evidence makes it clear that the luxury goods of the outside world had crossed Western Arabia for many centuries. In earlier centuries, the lucrative trade between India or East Africa and the Mediterranean Basin followed a complex series of routes across Arabia. By the first century BCE, this commerce passed through the Red Sea and thence overland to Syria via Petra, or alternatively, came up the Persian Gulf and went overland to Syria via Palmyra. Evidence for this trade in the late sixth century is thin and Mecca's involvement has been challenged. The trade to India and East Africa via the Red Sea, which had once sustained Petra (like Mecca, off the main highway and possessing a difficult climate) had declined greatly by the fourth century, though it never disappeared. Much of the commerce of the Meccan merchants (as Patricia Crone suggests) may have been a regional trade in staple items like leather and coarse fabrics. The late sixth and early seventh centuries were troubled times in the eastern Mediterranean world but the trade between Yemen and Syria continued to some extent and Meccan merchants had regular contact with both termini, even if they were

not major middlemen.[1] During the first decade or so of Mu'awiya's life, things were probably going on much as they had for decades.

Mecca's role as a cult centre is even more up in the air. The Qur'an mentions three goddesses forming part of Meccan worship – Allat, al-'Uzza and Manat – and other divinities (for example, Hubal) are mentioned elsewhere. These deities are well attested in the pantheon of the Syrian steppes and northwest Arabia, from the first century BCE, at Petra, Palmyra, and many other places. Elaborately worked images had little role in traditional Arabian worship; even in centers strongly influenced by Roman and Hellenistic culture, such as Petra; blocks of stone, sometimes with schematically carved eyes and mouths, were enough to mark the presence of the deity. Nor is it clear whether the three "goddesses" were still regarded as goddesses in the full sense by the time Mu'awiya was born (see Hawting). Monotheism, in its various Jewish and Christian forms, was familiar in much of the Arabian Peninsula and certainly in the Hijaz. A close reading of the Qur'an suggests that Allat, al-'Uzza and Manat might have been regarded as angels or some other sort of subordinate divine beings.

In the final analysis, even if Mecca was not Jerusalem or Rome, the tradition about the sanctity of the Ka'ba is too strong and pervasive to be swept aside. We can be confident that Mecca was at least a regional pilgrimage centre. On

[1] The once dominant view that Mecca was the Venice of the Red Sea was first promulgated by Henri Lammens. His interpretation was demolished by Patricia Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam*, though her own conclusions remain controversial. A more limited but still significant critique of Lammens is that of Robert Simon, *Meccan Trade and Islam*.

matters of this kind the sources may well exaggerate but they do not invent.[2]

During Mu'awiya's first two decades, life as he and his parents knew it went on as it always had. Even when his distant kinsman Muhammad, some thirty years older, began publicly proclaiming, in around 614, that he was receiving revelations from the one true God, challenging the whole religious system of the Quraysh and denouncing the wealth and pride of the town's leading families, it would have made no great impact. The leading members of Muhammad's own clan, the Banu Hashim, were themselves seriously divided about his message; very few of his early followers came from that group. As the age-old tribal laws required, his uncle, Abu Talib, undertook to protect him against attack or injury by people from other clans of the Quraysh but even he did not accept him as a prophet. During his Meccan years, until 622, Muhammad stirred the pot and caused much disruption but gained only a few followers; fewer than 200 (including women and children), according to Muslim tradition. In short, he posed no danger to the established order. After the death of his wife Khadija and his uncle Abu Talib in 619, the clan of Hashim essentially disowned him. None of its leading members was willing to protect him against his enemies or to seek vengeance for him if he was killed. Without the protection of his clan's leaders, he was fair game for any assailant and in 622 he and his followers fled in secret to the oasis of Yathrib, some 400 kilometres to the north. From then, and especially after 624, things began to change

[2] Hawting (*Idolatry)* and Crone both suggest, without fully spelling out, some radical conclusions. But their critique of traditional views is persuasive.

but in 622 normality had apparently returned to Mecca and the Quraysh.

THE POLITICS OF GENEALOGY: WHY MU'AWIYA'S ANCESTRY IS IMPORTANT

To understand who Mu'awiya was, how he took power and how he ruled, we must understand the lineage and tribal structures of ancient Arabia, for his claim to the caliphate originated within these structures. He began his rise to power as the representative of the Umayyad clan as they demanded retribution for the slaying of their kinsman 'Uthman, and men from this clan succeeded him as caliph until the dynasty's violent end in 750. However, that statement obscures as much as it reveals, for the families and clans of ancient Arabia were (as they still are today) complex entities and their relations with one another were (and are) more complex still.

In the Arabia of Mu'awiya's youth, society was organized into distinct lineages; the members of each lineage identified themselves as claiming descent from a common ancestor, who was usually (but not always) male, though lineages were always traced through the male line. Closely related lineages were embedded within a larger one, claiming a more remote common ancestor, and these larger lineages were grouped together into one larger still, claiming an even more remote common ancestor, who had lived in a time almost beyond memory. Thus, an individual could define his connection to scores or even hundreds of others. A brief conversation between two men about their respective ancestries would quickly reveal whether they should regard themselves as allies, rivals, blood enemies, or irrelevant to each other's lives.

It is customary to distinguish the different levels of these lineages by terms such as "household," "camping group," "clan," or "tribe" but these words have no clearly defined or consistent meanings. Nor, for that matter, do the Arabic words used by medieval genealogists or Arab tribesmen. As the great historian Ibn Khaldun (died 1406) noted long ago, kinship was defined less by blood than by custom and political convenience. Membership of a given lineage depended as much on the art of remembering and forgetting as on objective fact. Only a few of the largest and most prestigious lineages were stable and enduring. Smaller ones constantly melded together, disappeared and re-emerged, with unpredictable changes in the names of the ancestors after whom they were named. However, kinship and descent were the categories by which the tribes of ancient Arabia (like those of modern times) divided themselves into social and political units.[3]

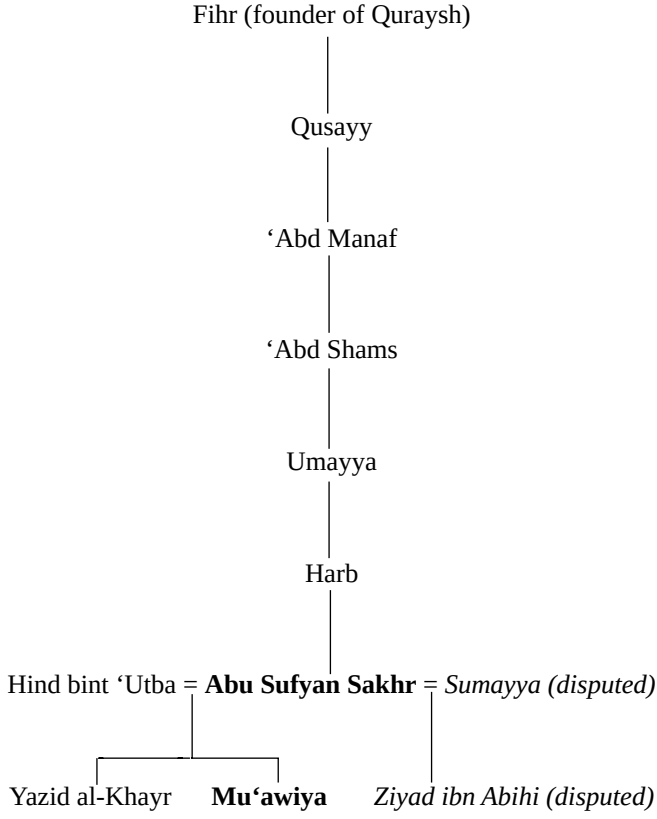
Generalizations of this sort can seem plausible but terribly abstract. However, the events of Mu'awiya's career, and the motives and purposes which drove him, are clearly encoded in his genealogy. That genealogy is the key to understanding much of what he did and why he did it. We can begin by tracing Mu'awiya's ancestry back five generations to his great-great-grandfather, 'Abd Shams, who was the putative founder of the largest *politically cohesive* lineage to which Mu'awiya belonged.

The lowest and most tightly-knit level was the immediate family – the sons of one father and their wives and children. In Mu'awiya's case, the patriarch was Abu Sufyan Sakhr and his most important children were his two sons, Yazid and Mu'awiya, and a daughter, Umm Habiba. They and their descendents are known as the *Banu Harb* (from Abu Sufyan's

[3] See note in *Contemporary Bedouin society*: Emrys Peters.

father) or the *Sufyanids*. Yazid left no living issue but Mu‘awiya left several, one of whom (another Yazid) succeeded him as caliph. In spite of political revolutions and the vicissitudes of time, the Sufyanids maintained a place in Syrian society for 200 years, supplying the name (al-Sufyani) of a mysterious apocalyptic figure in Muslim folklore.

THE LINEAGE OF MU‘AWIYA

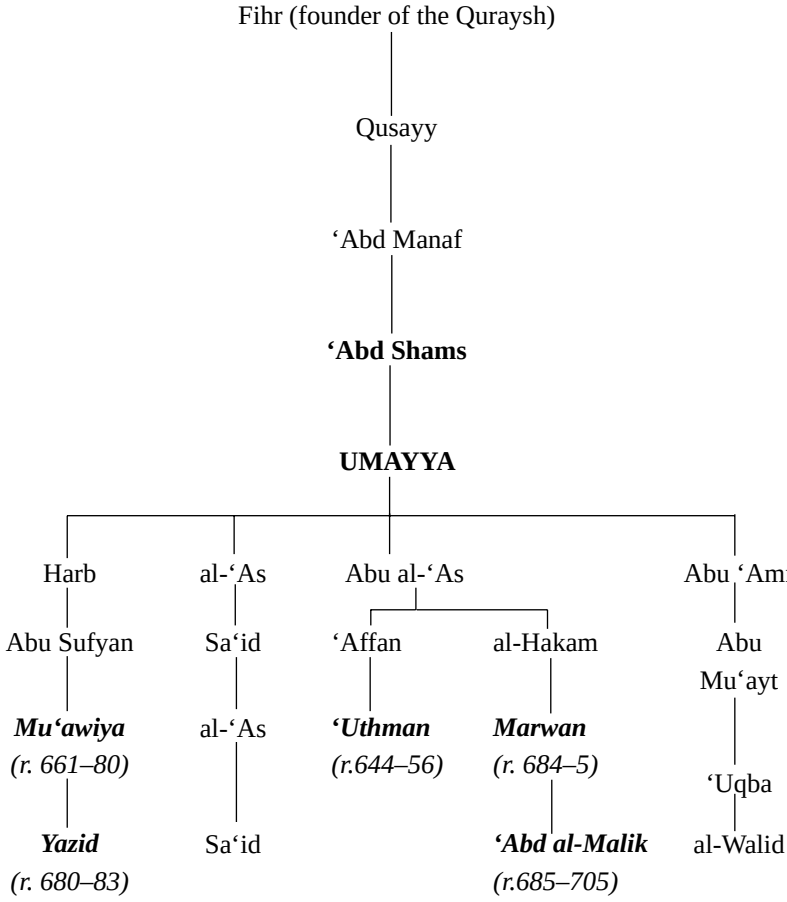


Umm Habiba exemplifies the important but ambiguous role of daughters. She married the Prophet Muhammad in around 628, providing an important political link between him and her family. A daughter remained a full member of her own family – in a sense she was always her father's daughter more than her husband's wife – but lived in her husband's household and any children she had by him (though in Umm Habiba's case there were none) would be counted part of his line. Family connections on the female side, through a mother or wife or daughter, could be very important in a family's network of political and social alliances but these connections faded after a generation. In contrast, patrilinear descent was a permanent part of a person's identity.

Abu Sufyan's grandfather (Mu'awiya's great-grandfather), Umayya, usually gives his name to the next group up the scale, the Banu Umayya or Umayyads. (See chart, p.32.)
This group includes not only Abu Sufyan and his descendants but also a second lineage that would have a central role in early Islamic history: the sons of Abu al-'As ibn Umayya. (Abu al-'As was the brother of Harb.) Abu al-'As had two grandsons who became caliphs: the third caliph, 'Uthman ibn 'Affan ibn Abi al-'As ibn Umayya, whose murder set off the first civil war and divided the Muslim community up to the present day, and Marwan ibn al-Hakam ibn Abi al-'As ibn Umayya (caliph from 684–85), who re-established Umayyad power and whose descendants, under the name of the Banu Marwan or Marwanids, held the caliphate until the reign of Marwan II ibn Muhammad (744–750). (Even after the catastrophe of 749–50 the surviving Marwanids seized power in Spain and ruled there for almost three centuries, from 756 until 1030.) As the chart shows, Mu'awiya was 'Uthman and Marwan's second cousin.

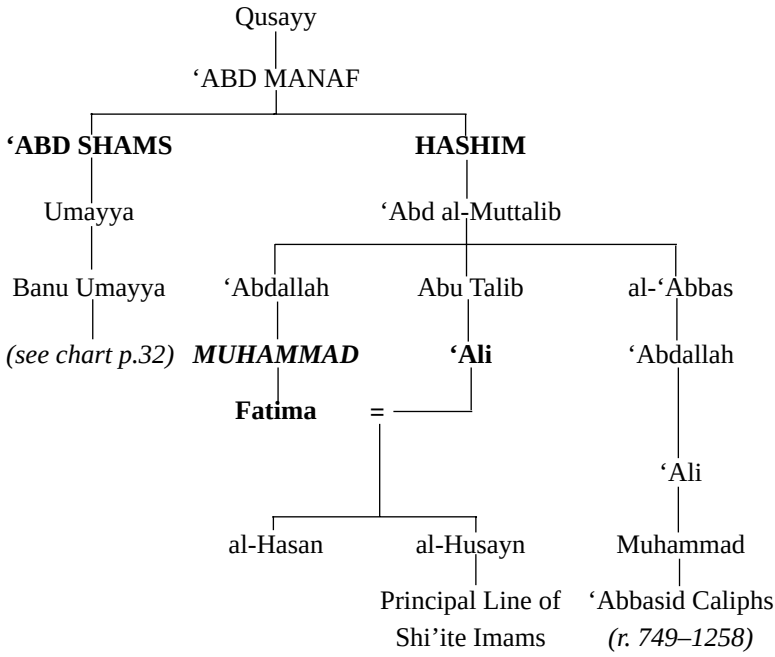
In some cases, a lineage name can be moved back or forth a generation. The Umayyads are sometimes named after

THE BANU UMAYYA



Umayya's father 'Abd Shams because the name 'Abd Shams symbolizes a crucial political cleavage in the tribe of the Quraysh. 'Abd Shams was the brother of Hashim, and Hashim was the progenitor of the lineage which produced the Prophet Muhammad. The Banu Hashim's claim to special sanctity went beyond the Prophet. His first cousin, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, was the fourth caliph and the unsuspecting founder of Shi'ite Islam, while another line of descent produced the 'Abbasid caliphs, who held the title (if not always the power) from 749 to 1258 and in their shadowy Cairo branch, until 1517. The history of the Banu Hashim is largely the history of medieval Islam.

THE DESCENDANTS OF 'ABD MANAF: THE CLANS OF 'ABD SHAMS AND HASHIM



Beginning with Muhammad's proclamation that he was a prophet, the descendants of Hashim were the bitter rivals and sometimes the mortal enemies of the descendants of 'Abd Shams. Tradition carries this rivalry back to pre-Islamic times, when the Banu 'Abd Shams and the Banu Hashim competed for precedence in Mecca. After coming of Islam, the Banu Hashim inevitably became the sacred lineage, while the Banu 'Abd Shams were irredeemably tainted as the enemies of God and His prophet.

'Abd Manaf, father both of Hashim and 'Abd Shams, connects the two lineages and from him the genealogy leads back to Fihr, semi-legendary ancestor and founder of the tribe of Quraysh. In tribal lore – as in the Genesis stories of Abraham and Lot or Jacob and Esau – it is commonplace to attribute conflicts between two peoples claiming a common ancestry to arguments between brothers or cousins sometime in the remote past. The parting of the ways between the two sons of 'Abd Manaf – 'Abd Shams and Hashim – fits this pattern.

The Umayyads were a single family only in their relationship to the Banu Hashim. They comprised four distinct lineages, from which two produced caliphs: the Banu Harb or Sufyanids (Mu'awiya and his son Yazid), and the Banu Abi l-'As ('Uthman and his first cousin Marwan and the latter's descendants until the end of the dynasty). In the usual manner of closely related lineages, they could co-operate against outsiders but there was some internal rivalry, especially between the Marwanids and Sufyanids. That rivalry probably always existed – it was just in the nature of things – but it became much more pointed when something big was at stake, for example, when both lineages had contenders for the caliphate. The character of this rivalry emerges nicely in a few anecdotes related by al-Baladhuri (died 892), dated to the years when Mu'awiya was caliph:

Mu'awiya had given his daughter Ramla as wife to 'Amr ibn

'Uthman ibn 'Affan. She overheard Marwan ibn al-Hakam say to her husband when he was visiting, 'Mu'awiya became caliph solely thanks to the memory of your father [the murdered caliph 'Uthman]. Why don't you demand your rights? All the more as we [the Banu Abi al-'As, to which the Marwanids and 'Uthmanids both belonged] are more numerous than the family of Harb [Mu'awiya's paternal grandfather]. From our family comes this person and that . . .' When 'Amr ibn 'Uthman went on pilgrimage, Ramla betook herself to her father, who said to her, 'Did he divorce you?' Ramla answered, 'The dog gets fat on his piece of lard', and told him about Marwan and that he had boasted of the numbers of the Banu Abi al-'As while denigrating the small numbers of Harb.

One day, Marwan reminded Mu'awiya that the family of Abu al-'As had numerous descendants, while the family of Harb had but few. Mu'awiya then recited:

The tribe of Qurayz boast to me of their numbers but before you ever were, the sparrowhawks overwhelmed the quail.

If I am accounted few amongst you, I am still accounted as many against your enemies.

It is the small birds who have the most young; the mother of the sparrowhawk produces few sons.

[Baladhuri, *Ansab*, LDV, 44,121–122 [Kister, 35–36] the second poem, attributed to various authors, is widely quoted in literary anthologies.]

Because the Umayyads and the Banu Hashim claimed a common ancestor in 'Abd Manaf, the Umayyads occasionally exploited this link to assert their kinship with the Prophet. However, this lacked conviction. The bitterest and bloodiest struggles in early Islam were those between these two related lineages: between Mu'awiya and 'Ali in the first instance and more broadly between the Umayyads and the 'Alids and (later on) the 'Abbasids. In one of the ironies so beloved by historians,

the struggle between 'Abd Shams and Hashim was replaced by another, equally bloody and even more enduring, between two branches of the Hashimite tree – the descendants of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib (the 'Alids) and his uncle al-'Abbas ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib (the 'Abbasids).

Complicated as this may seem, it is necessary to make sense of the political world in which Mu'awiya grew up. In that world, politics was the politics of lineages, not individuals. To a great extent, politics was a struggle for prestige and precedence more than for material goods, though the two are not mutually exclusive. Rivalries and resentments among the leaders of the Muslim community did not arise from the mutiny against 'Uthman in 655–56 but go back to the succession crisis after the death of Muhammad in 632 and perhaps even to the last years of his life in Medina. A close reading of the texts which describe the political crisis caused by the Prophet's death in 632 suggests that three well-defined factions existed within the Quraysh. One was Muhammad's Hashimite clan, which had by no means united in his support during the early years of his prophethood. The only plausible Hashimite candidate was 'Ali but he was quite young – probably not more than thirty – and by traditional standards not quite ready to bear the immense burden of the Prophet's legacy. The second was the related clan of 'Abd Shams (the Umayyads) but their twenty-year obdurate opposition to Muhammad obviously removed them from consideration, in spite of their wealth and the political acumen traditionally ascribed to them. Finally, there was a cluster of early converts from three of the smaller and less prestigious clans of the Quraysh – Abu Bakr, 'Umar, al-Zubayr and Talha. They claimed to be the hard core of Muhammad's supporters and had an interest in not being marginalized by the Hashim or the 'Abd Shams. Only a few years earlier, in an infamous episode, the the Prophet's favorite (and very young)

wife ‘A’isha, who was also Abu Bakr’s daughter, had been humiliated when ‘Ali, impetuous and self-righteous, openly accused her of flagrant misconduct and urged Muhammad to divorce her. Reassured, by a literally heaven-sent revelation, of her innocence, Muhammad refused to take that step. This created a deep and abiding resentment between Abu Bakr (not to mention ‘A’isha) and ‘Ali. Until the death of ‘Abdallah ibn al-Zubayr in 692, the leadership of the Muslim community was contested between these three groups – the circle of Abu Bakr, the Banu Hashim and the Banu ‘Abd Shams. The party of Abu Bakr was eliminated from contention in 692, but only in 749–750 was the struggle between Hashim and ‘Abd Shams definitively settled, leaving the two branches of the Hashimites to fight it out among themselves.

I have so far said nothing about Mu‘awiya. Until the *hijra* in 622, there is probably nothing to say. Mu‘awiya was too young to be much involved in the tensions between Muhammad and his fellow Quraysh tribesmen. If he was engaged, we must assume that he followed his father’s lead and opposed Muhammad’s challenge to the established order. Abu Sufyan’s prestige ensured that Mu‘awiya would have a prominent place within that order and he would have every interest in defending his prospects. Muhammad’s preaching (even though only a few took it seriously), directly threatened the religious practices and pilgrimage rituals of the Ka’ba. Quite apart from anxieties about giving offence to the old gods, the traditional rites were essential both to the Meccan economy and to the social prestige of the Quraysh among the neighboring tribes. On a political level, if Muhammad were eventually recognized as a true prophet, he and his followers would inevitably displace the Umayyads as the dominant clan of the Quraysh.

When Muhammad and his followers surreptitiously slipped away to the oasis of Yathrib, far to the north, the situation in

Mecca temporarily returned to normal, but normality ended when, in the following year, Muhammad's followers began raiding the caravans going to and from Mecca. Uncertainty was replaced by crisis in 624, when a relief force of 950 men, dispatched from Mecca to protect a major caravan, was ambushed at the wells of Badr and overwhelmed by a much smaller band under Muhammad's personal command. For the next six years, tradition informs us, Mu'awiya's father Abu Sufyan stepped forward and led the Meccan resistance to Muhammad. The Meccan efforts to eradicate what had grown from a nuisance to a grave threat ended in military stalemate in 627, when the Quraysh and their allies failed to conquer Yathrib. By now, Mu'awiya was old enough (somewhere in his twenties) to take part in the battles and raids of the struggle with Muhammad, and must have done so, but he was not a prominent figure. Even his mother, Hind, earned greater notoriety than he, when, at the Battle of Uhud in 625, she plucked out and ate the liver of Muhammad's slain uncle, Hamza.

After the military failure of 627, Mu'awiya began to emerge from the shadows, albeit in a typically ambiguous and controversial manner. The conflict between Muhammad and the Quraysh was now a game of waiting for the end, in which Muhammad very much had the upper hand. As the Quraysh lost prestige, he brought more and more of the Bedouin tribes of West Arabia into his new enterprise. He constructed a vast tribal confederation, bound together by the religious teachings of a charismatic leader, something not altogether unfamiliar in the history of Arabia's tribes, though Muhammad's venture was on a far vaster scale and endured far longer. The Quraysh's prestige among the tribes of the Hijaz crumbled; clearly its leaders could no longer even organize the caravans or guarantee the pilgrimages which had been its life's blood. The Quraysh in

general, and the Umayyads in particular, had to start weighing their prospects for the future.

The turning point came in 628. In that year, Muhammad led a large group of his followers from Yathrib (henceforth called Medina) on pilgrimage to the Ka'ba, when he was met and blocked by Qurashi forces. This confrontation ended in a negotiated truce (the Truce of Hudaybiya) which looked, on the surface, like a humiliating setback for Muhammad and his followers. But Muhammad demanded and got an oath from his followers to accept his decisions here and elsewhere without question or reservation. (This is the *bay'at al-ridwan* – literally, the Oath of Satisfaction.) He used the opportunity provided by the truce to strengthen his position in Medina, to win over new tribes to his cause and to send his forces further afield into Arabia to persuade the unpersuadable. By the beginning of 630, he had so completely isolated the Quraysh that he was able to dictate the terms for his triumphant return to Mecca as Prophet and the city's unchallenged ruler. The Oath of Satisfaction quickly came to be regarded a key line of demarcation between those who were sincere Muslims, who had accepted Muhammad as God's Messenger when the outcome of his mission was in doubt, and those who entered Islam later on as hypocritical timeservers.[4]

These events were critical for Mu'awiya, in the eyes of later Muslims. Did Mu'awiya accept Islam (if only secretly) at the moment of Hudaybiya and the Oath of Satisfaction or did he hold out till the last possible minute two years later, when

[4] A most interesting analysis of the textual tradition on Hudaybiya, hence of what might actually have happened there, is found in Andreas Gorke, "The Historical Tradition about al-Hudaybiya," in Motzki, *The Biography of Muhammad: The Issue of the Sources* [Brill 2000], 240–75.

Muhammad was on the verge of entering Mecca in triumph? [5] If the former, his turn to Islam would be a bit belated but sincere and authentic; if the latter, he could only be regarded as a cynical hypocrite who never did accept Islam in his heart. Or perhaps, as some reports asserted, he came over to Islam sometime after Hudaybiya and before Muhammad's occupation of Mecca, in which case the status of his conversion is in doubt. Quite apart from moral judgments on Mu'awiya's character, there are legal questions involved. Did he enjoy the high status of a Companion or was he a *taliq* – a prisoner taken by conquest and subject to death or enslavement – whom the Prophet had chosen to set free? Some traditions have the Prophet declaring that no *taliq* could ever become his successor – a status which included two Umayyad pretenders, Mu'awiya and Marwan. The elusiveness and ambiguity inherent in the figure of Mu'awiya cannot be better illustrated.[6]

The commentators of later centuries, in their relentless search for moral clarity, lined up on this issue in rather predictable ways. The strongest report supporting his early conversion is transmitted to us by Ibn 'Asakir and is put in Mu'awiya's own mouth:

> In the year of al-Hudaybiya, when Quraysh prevented the Messenger of God from reaching the House (of God), pushed him with the palms of their hands [to block his path], then [at last] signed the treaty with him, Islam made a powerful impression on me. I mentioned this to my mother Hind bint

[5] In this book I prefer "acceptance" to "conversion," since conversion seems to imply a spontaneous spiritual experience like that of Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, whereas acceptance suggests that one has step by step come to believe that a message is true. The latter certainly seems a better fit for a man of Mu'awiya's temperament.

[6] For Mu'awiya's religious standing, see I. Hasson in *JSAI 22* (1998), "La conversion de Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan," 214–242.

> 'Utba, who said, 'Watch out! Do not contradict your father's opinion or make a decision without consulting him. He may well cut off support for you'. My father (Abu Sufyan) was away that day at the market of al-Hubasha. I accepted Islam but kept this a secret. The Messenger of God entered Mecca in the Year of Conquest and then I announced publicly my conversion.
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> [Hasson, 219]

Ibn 'Asakir reinforces this rather self-serving account with another in which the Prophet is sitting among a group of his closest Companions (by a happy coincidence, those who would become the first four caliphs). Against the assertion of Abu Bakr that Mu'awiya was nowhere to be seen, he insists that Mu'awiya took the Oath of Satisfaction just as the others had. And then he goes a step further: just as God had promised Paradise to ten faithful Companions, so He had promised it to Mu'awiya (Hasson, 239–240). Were this report authentic, no stronger endorsement of Mu'awiya's religious standing could be imagined. It goes without saying that it was utterly rejected by the Shi'ites and the majority of Sunnis, and yet a scholar as meticulous, learned and orthodox as Ibn 'Asakir thought it deserved to be recorded.[7]

[7] The "Ten Promised Paradise" had joined Muhammad's cause early on and served him with zeal, courage and unyielding determination throughout his life. However, it is crucial to note that almost every one of them was intimately involved in the struggles for power which rent the Community after Muhammad's death. The Prophetic statements [hadiths] concerning this group plainly represent an effort by later generations to heal over these divisions, or at least to hold blameless the inner core of the Prophet's Companions who had been so deeply involved. It is not surprising that a few traditionists of conciliatory bent would feel the need to include Mu'awiya in this select group.

However later Muslims would judge Mu'awiya's actions in 628–630, the Prophet recognized that he could be a valuable asset to the Community of Believers, partly because he represented a major Meccan clan that needed to be incorporated in the new order and partly because of his own talents. Mu'awiya's was a subordinate role in the Prophet's last years and the earliest years of the caliphate; at the time of the Prophet's death he was only about thirty years old – and possibly less – old enough to be given responsibility but not command. Mu'awiya's dedication to Islam was still open to challenge. He was regarded with suspicion by the inner circle of early Companions (all Meccan and from the tribe of Quraysh) who took power on the Prophet's passing. So far as we know, Mu'awiya was always realistic. He knew perfectly well that he was not, and never could be, a member of that inner circle. He could only have an important role in the new order of things if he were willing to become the faithful servant of this order. That is precisely what he set out to do.

3

LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS OF POWER: MU'AWIYA AS MASTER OF SYRIA (632–656)

MU'AWIYA AND THE CONQUEST OF SYRIA

Little is known of Mu'awiya in the years immediately following Muhammad's death in 632. In 636, he emerged from the mist slightly, when he was given command of an advance force that had been roughly handled by the Byzantines near Damascus and whose defeat threatened the Muslim position in Syria.[1] He held this command, of 3000 men or even fewer, at the decisive Battle of the Yarmuk in the same year. He led his troops ably but is not mentioned as one of the battle's heroes. After Yarmuk, his older brother, Yazid, led Muslim forces up the coast of Lebanon, occupying Sidon, Beirut and several other cities. Mu'awiya served with great distinction as commander of the vanguard of this expedition.

Then he moved into more visible roles. He is named as one of the four Muslim witnesses who signed the treaty of capitula-

[1] Tabari, XI, 81–83, 87–88.

tion for Jerusalem, which surrendered in December 637 (or February 638) after a two-year siege. The Patriarch Sophronius, who governed Jerusalem on behalf of the Byzantines, demanded that the caliph 'Umar come to Syria and personally negotiate the terms of surrender; later, they visited Jerusalem together.[2] The fall of Jerusalem was immensely significant for the Muslims; for the Byzantines, it was apocalyptic:

> Sophronius … received a promise of immunity for the whole of Palestine. 'Umar entered the Holy City dressed in filthy garments of camel-hair and, showing a devilish pretence, sought the temple of the Jews – the one built by Solomon – that he might make it a place of worship for his own blasphemous religion. Seeing this, Sophronius said, 'Verily this is the abomination of desolation standing in a holy place, as has been spoken through the prophet Daniel'. And with many tears the defender of piety bewailed the Christian people.
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> [Theophanes-Mango, 471]

Mu'awiya appears here in lofty company; the other three witnesses were among the most prominent Muslim commanders in Syria and Palestine. If we assume that the treaty is authentic in substance (as I believe it to be) and that Mu'awiya was a participant in these momentous events, the inclusion of his name testifies to his high rank in the Muslim armies of that region.[3] We can detect the beginnings of the important role that Jerusalem would play in his later career, for he could not possibly have overlooked the city's enormous symbolic power to those (whether Muslim, Christian or Jewish) around him.

Of more immediate importance to Mu'awiya's career was his first major military command, when 'Umar named him

[2] Tabari, XII, 192–193.
[3] Tabari, XII, 192–93.

to replace ‘Amr ibn al-‘As at the siege of Caesarea Maritima (now a minor city but then the large and impressive capital of Byzantine Palestine). After Jerusalem, Caesarea was the most important Palestinian city still in Byzantine hands and because it was a port, it could provide a staging area for counter-attacks by the powerful Byzantine navy. The siege had been difficult; according to some accounts it had been going on, with greater or lesser intensity, since 634. It is a good guess (though it is no more than that) that Mu‘awiya’s later determination to create a navy had its origins in this exhausting siege. At Caesarea he would have seen how important control of the sea was, for Byzantium’s unchallenged naval power allowed the city to be reinforced without hindrance and to hold out for a long time. Caesarea was finally stormed in 639–40. In one of the very few such cases during the conquests in Syria-Palestine, it was thoroughly pillaged and laid to waste, its garrison slaughtered and its surviving population led into captivity. So the chroniclers tell us, though the archaeological evidence for such massive destruction is far less clear. Caesarea was soon rebuilt but it never regained its ancient size and importance.[4]

MU‘AWIYA BECOMES GOVERNOR

Mu‘awiya rose to the next stage of his career almost by accident, through the unpredictable whims of the plague bacillus. The senior Muslim commander of the conquest of Syria, Abu ‘Ubayda, died just after the termination of hostilities and almost at the moment of victory, in the murderous Plague of ‘Amwas (Emmaus) of 639, which ravaged the Muslim forces stationed in Palestine. Precisely what happened next is unclear;

[4] Tabari, XII, 183–85; Baladhuri-Hitti, I, 216–19.

early Muslim historians name several different men (all plausible candidates) as his immediate successor, but they agree that within a few months, Yazid ibn Abi Sufyan was made governor of Syria (or at least of Jordan and Palestine). Despite Yazid's suspect ancestry as a son of the Prophet's old enemy, he seems to have been greatly respected both for his military skills and his personal probity. However, he too fell ill and died very soon after assuming office.[5]

At this point (in 639), Yazid's offices, whatever they were, devolved to his younger brother, Mu'awiya. While far from a nonentity, he had until now held only subordinate military commands. Bubonic plague kills quickly; Yazid probably named Mu'awiya as his interim successor as he lay on his deathbed. This appointment had to be confirmed by the caliph 'Umar, who knew all about Mu'awiya's background. Normally 'Umar insisted on unimpeachable Islamic credentials in his senior commanders and governors but the situation in Syria needed to be stabilized rapidly. Even though the fall of Caesarea had ended major military operations in Syria-Palestine, there was an urgent need to secure the northern frontiers and coastlands against Byzantine counter-attacks and to establish a working administrative system in the newly conquered territories. The new commander-in-chief had to be someone whom the troops knew and trusted. There were few such candidates because the Plague of 'Amwas had killed so many men of rank. For the time being, Mu'awiya would have to do. He had proved to be a capable military leader and had effectively and loyally executed all the tasks assigned to him during the five years of the Syrian campaign. However, 'Umar remained suspicious of Mu'awiya and some later reports claimed that he had intended to fire him as soon as circumstances permitted.

[5] Muslim sources call him *Yazid al-Khayr*, "Yazid the Good."

The story of Mu'awiya's rapid rise to power in Syria is highly schematic and may be viewed with some degree of scepticism. The way every one of his military superiors fell, like a row of dominoes, seems altogether too orderly and convenient. Early Muslim historians were often confused – and admit as much – as to just which commander was in charge of what, where and when during these early years. The account given above represents their efforts, many decades later, to make some sense of the chaotic political transition from Byzantine to Arab-Islamic rule in Palestine and Syria during the late 630s. Perhaps it was also a covert way of saying that Mu'awiya earned the governorship of Syria not through religious and military merit but by an accident of fate. I have followed the standard account; it makes reasonably good sense and there is no convincing alternative.[6]

Mu'awiya's tenure in office was very long – some twenty years – the longest recorded for any governor during the conquest era. Quite apart from any misgivings 'Umar may have felt about Mu'awiya, he tended to shift his governors around from time to time and never permitted any of them to build an independent power base. So, Mu'awiya was once again lucky when 'Umar was stabbed to death by a disaffected Persian slave in 644. It augured well that the new caliph, 'Uthman ibn 'Affan (reigned 644–656), was a member of the Umayyad clan. Even better, 'Uthman was determined to gain effective administrative control over his vast domains. The "central government" in Medina had almost no formal administrative machinery to supervise and control the actions of the provincial governors. Nor did it have any instruments of surveillance and coercion to achieve this – for example, an internal intelligence system or a military corps under the caliph's personal command.

[6] Baladhuri-Hitti, I, 215, 219; Tabari, XIII, 96–101, 103

The troops of the early caliphate were Arab tribesmen and almost all were deployed in the newly-conquered territories outside Arabia. Under such circumstances, the only good tool at 'Uthman's disposal was to appoint as governors men whose loyalty to him and his policies was beyond question. This led him to favor his own kinsmen, or other traditional allies of the Umayyad clan, for the critical governorships in Iraq, Iran and Egypt. 'Uthman's policy stirred bitter resentment in several groups of Arab tribesmen, especially those who were settled in the vast encampments of Kufa and Basra (both in Iraq) and Fustat (Egypt). These warriors believed, not without justice, that the fruits of conquest which rightfully belonged to them were being skimmed off for the benefit of interlopers. They demanded a return to the true "Islamic" policies of Abu Bakr and 'Umar.

'Uthman's policy was somewhat innovative. Neither Abu Bakr nor 'Umar had entirely relied on their kinship networks to provide their generals and governors. For them, proven loyalty to Islam – which could not be taken for granted in the critical years following Muhammad's death – was crucial. They chose men who had been strong adherents of Islam even before the triumphs of Muhammad's last years. They showed a marked preference for their own tribe, the Quraysh, but they do not seem to have favored any particular clan within it. They went outside the boundaries of tribal solidarity in appointing a few commanders from Muhammad's Medinan supporters (the so-called *Ansar*) and the tribe of Thaqif, which had long-established ties with the Quraysh. Abu Bakr and 'Umar were not unwilling to make controversial decisions but they relied on their prestige, as members of the Prophet's innermost circle, to obtain assent. However controversial, their policies had led to the triumphs of the Arabian Ridda wars and the conquest of Iraq, Syria and Egypt. Not only had they preserved Muham-

mad's new dispensation, they had lifted it to heights undreamt of in his lifetime.

Like his two predecessors, 'Uthman was a man of high standing in the young Muslim community. He was an early convert and the Prophet honored him by giving him two of his daughters in marriage. (Both predeceased the Prophet.) The Islamic tradition recognizes his willingness to spend his considerable wealth for the welfare of the community and his profound personal piety and modesty. However, many thought that he had much to be modest about; he had a way of being absent from the great crises of Muhammad's Medinan years, for example, the battles of Badr and Uhud, the Truce of Hudaybiya, and the Oath of Satisfaction, and he had demonstrated no military prowess or political talent nor taken any visible role in the conquests. 'Uthman was in no position to get his way with his peers in the Prophet's inner circle in Medina or to impose his will on the Arab tribesmen of the conquered territories. Neither group owed him anything or had anything to fear from him. The only arrow in his quiver was the loyalty of his somewhat tainted Umayyad kinsmen.

Fortunately, Syria already had an Umayyad governor of proven ability. 'Uthman left Mu'awiya almost entirely to his own devices during the twelve years of his caliphate. And why not? In stark contrast to Iraq or Egypt, Syria was extremely stable and the *jihad* against the Byzantines was proceeding steadily. Thus, Mu'awiya had an opportunity shared by no other governor; to build an effective army and secure his political base. It was an opportunity that he did not miss. As governor, Mu'awiya proved to be a vigorous and highly imaginative military commander. He was not noted for great personal courage or prowess in battle, though later charges of cowardice made by his opponents seem misplaced, but he was resourceful and

innovative, possessed real strategic vision and stuck by his long-term objectives until they were achieved.

THE WAR AGAINST BYZANTIUM

Mu'awiya's main obligation as governor of Syria was to pursue the war against Byzantium. It must be admitted that progress was, at best, incremental. Mu'awiya's aim was to stabilize Syria's frontiers, rather than to conquer and occupy new territories. This policy contrasts starkly with the Arab-Muslim advances across Iran during the same two decades. While I cannot present here a systematic comparison between the Iranian and Anatolian fronts, some explanation is required. The Sasanian Empire in Iraq and Iran, was even more gravely weakened than the Byzantine by the first wave of Muslim conquests in the Fertile Crescent. Byzantium undeniably lost major provinces in Syria, Palestine and Egypt; these provinces were wealthy, populous and (especially Palestine) of great symbolic value. They were an integral part of the Roman patrimony that went back to the glory days of Pompey, Julius Caesar and Augustus. However, Byzantium still had its incomparable capital, Constantinople, not only the administrative hub of the Byzantine Empire but also its economic heart, due to its perfect location and its superb harbor. No less importantly, the Emperor still ruled and the office, if not always the person holding it, retained its traditional prestige and political power. Whatever their flaws, Constans II (641–668) and his successor Constantine IV (668–685) were innovative administrators and indefatigable fighters, who despite repeated military defeat and unrelenting internal crisis, held the system together. The Byzantines had the political and financial resources to continue the

struggle against the Arabs, though they were often desperately short of soldiers.

In contrast, by 637 the Sasanians had lost both their capital, Ctesiphon (near modern Baghdad) and the rich agricultural revenues of lower Iraq, which had supported the central government for 400 years. These losses destroyed the Sasanian monarchy. The last king, Yazdgird III (632–651), possessed neither the administrative machinery nor the money to rebuild his kingdom and co-ordinate its defences. After the crushing defeat of his last imperial army, at Nihavand in 642, he became a refugee, fleeing eastward from one temporary stronghold to the next, until he was miserably murdered at the remote oasis of Marv (in modern Turkmenistan). The conquest of the Iranian plateau, during the 640s and 650s, was a slow, bloody business, fought castle by castle and city by city, but after 642 there was no centralized resistance to the Arab–Muslim armies.

In this context, we can appreciate Mu'awiya's decision to keep the pressure on the Byzantines but to forgo decisive battles or permanent conquests. When he became governor, Syria was by no means fully secure; the coast was vulnerable to naval attack and the northern frontiers were ragged. Moreover, at first he did not control the whole of geographical Syria. Syria and Palestine were divided into four provinces: Syria proper, whose capital was Damascus; Jordan, whose capital was Tiberias and principal port Acre; Palestine; and the northern frontier province of Hims. Palestine and Hims had independent governors; 'Umar apparently assigned Mu'awiya only Syria and Palestine. However, not long after 'Uthman became caliph in 644, he made Mu'awiya viceroy for all four provinces. Under this system, Mu'awiya had the authority to appoint his own sub-governors. Later, he was also named governor of Mesopotamia (that is, the lands east of the Euphrates) and thus ruled a

vast tract of territory from the Negev in the south to the mountain passes leading to Armenia and Anatolia in the north.

Such a concentration of power presented obvious dangers for the caliph, because everything depended on the governor's skill and loyalty. However, 'Uthman's confidence was well placed. He knew that Mu'awiya was a proven soldier and administrator, who had earned the respect and support of the Arab tribesmen under his command. He was not only a close kinsman but someone who had unfailingly followed his superiors' directives since the beginning of the conquests in 634. With Syria in Mu'awiya's reliable hands, 'Uthman could focus his attention on the tense provinces of Basra, Kufa and Egypt. If his efforts in these provinces ultimately did him no good, that was not Mu'awiya's fault.

Even as Mu'awiya consolidated his authority in Syria, the struggle against the Byzantines was far from over. The Byzantines reoccupied some Lebanese ports late in 'Umar's reign (or possibly during the confusion following his assassination). Their inhabitants had been driven out when they were first conquered in 636 and no garrisons stationed in them, perhaps because of the severe personnel shortages of the Muslim armies then operating in Syria. Mu'awiya was determined not to lose control of the coast. He quickly retook the ports, rebuilt their fortifications and garrisoned them. Not long after, Mu'awiya besieged Tripoli, the last major Syrio-Lebanese port still in Byzantine hands. With no relief in sight, the inhabitants decided to abandon the city and were evacuated in ships sent by the Emperor. Tripoli had an excellent harbor and easy land communications to the Syrian interior and could not be left derelict. Mu'awiya settled a community of Jews there – we are not told where they came from – and posted a permanent garrison.

Tripoli set a precedent for later initiatives. When Mu'awiya became caliph, he started a systematic program to resettle all the coastal cities, with a mix of generous incentives (for example, hereditary land-grants) and compulsion (for example, forced population transfers from the cities of the interior). His resettlement policy swept together a great mix of peoples: Jews were settled in Tripoli; Persians were transferred from Iraq, Hims and Ba'albakk to Antioch, Tyre and Acre; Malays and Indian Djats were brought from Basra to Antioch. He may have thought, sensibly enough, that uprooted outsiders would be more docile subjects than indigenous Syrians. There were occasional flare-ups but on the whole he was not disappointed.

THE WAR AT SEA: CREATING THE MUSLIM NAVY

We can easily imagine how the struggle for the coastal towns during the mid-640s reinforced Mu'awiya's determination to create a navy. Even during 'Umar's caliphate, when the Muslim position in Syria was still uncertain, he had argued for the construction of a Muslim navy. It was abundantly clear that the coast was terribly vulnerable, as long as the Byzantine navy enjoyed a monopoly of the sea lanes. However, there is every reason to think he knew that, in addition to a navy's defensive role, a strong fleet could open up new lines of attack against the Byzantines.

We might expect to find some support in the early Muslim chronicles for these surmises but Tabari, our main source for the origins of Mu'awiya's navy, is content with what appears to be a bit of pious folklore:

> Mu'awiyah had written a dispatch to 'Umar to win his support

> for naval expeditions, saying: 'O Commander of the Faithful, in Syria there is a village whose inhabitants hear the barking of the Byzantines' dogs and the crowing of their roosters, for the Byzantines lie directly opposite a certain stretch along the coast of the province of Hims'. Now 'Umar was doubtful about this because Mu'awiya was the one who advised it. He therefore wrote to 'Amr ibn al-'As (his governor in Egypt): 'Describe the sea for me and send me information about it'. 'Amr responded: 'O Commander of the Faithful, I have seen a mighty creature [the sea] ridden by a small one [man]. It is naught but sky and water and those who travel upon it are like a worm on a twig. If it bends he drowns and if he is saved he is amazed … 'Umar wrote back to Mu'awiya: 'We have heard that the Mediterranean surpasses the longest thing on earth; it seeks God's permission every day and every night to flood the earth and submerge it. How then can I bring the troops to this troublesome and infidel being? By God, one Muslim is dearer to me than all the Byzantines possess. Take care not to disobey me, for I have given you a command'.
>
> [Tabari, XV, 26–27]

This anecdote seems odd if not comic to our eyes but Tabari has chosen it for a reason: even its puzzles and contradictions are revealing. He uses it to set the stage for Mu'awiya's invasion of Cyprus in 649 even though the story clearly refers not to distant Cyprus but to the isle of Arwad (Aradus), just off the coast from the modern city of Tartus. Tiny Arwad was hardly a threat to the Muslim control of the coast of Syria, nor would its conquest have required a real navy. Tabari, living in Iraq 200 years later, had no understanding of the real geography of coastal Syria but the story's original context was unimportant. He used it because it explained the origins of the Muslim navy in the Mediterranean, as a

response to the continuing threat of Byzantine attack from the sea.[7]

Why did 'Umar seek advice from 'Amr ibn al-'As, who had more or less ignored 'Umar's orders when he set out on the conquest of Egypt in 639? 'Amr was famously hard-headed and realistic and (like Mu'awiya) governed a province subject to sea-borne attack by the Byzantines. Thus, he was better placed than anyone else to give an informed opinion. Almost certainly, however, the exchange of letters between the caliph and 'Amr is a literary fiction, a dramatic tableau which hints at 'Umar's suspicion of Mu'awiya's real motives and his concern that he was becoming too powerful.

Quite apart from ignorance and fear of the sea or worries about Mu'awiya's long-term intent, 'Umar had sound strategic reasons to block the governor's initiative. He cannot possibly have thought that the life of a single Muslim was worth more than all the Byzantines possessed or he would have called a halt to the land campaigns in Anatolia. However, he might well have believed that Muslim forces were already stretched to the limit. In addition, none of the Arab tribes in Syria had the remotest idea of how to build or man a ship, so a navy would require the service of large numbers of non-Muslims –Syrian or Egyptian Christians – whose loyalties were extremely unpredictable. In his latter years, 'Umar devoted a good deal of energy to establishing an administrative structure for the vast territories that he ruled and a navy would have been just one more thing he did not have time to think about.

After 'Umar's death in 644 and 'Uthman's election, Mu'awiya's persistent arguments finally succeeded. By 648, he had a fleet up and running. The shipbuilders and sailors of the

[7] The dates are confirmed by two Greek inscriptions. See Theophanes-Mango, 479, n.1.

new fleet were Christians from the coast (especially Lebanon, which had both good harbors and relatively plentiful forests), since the desert tribesmen of the Arab armies knew nothing about such things. However, the crucial fighting in ancient and medieval naval battles was hand-to-hand combat after boarding the enemies' ships; the Arab troops very quickly became highly effective marines (once they got their sea legs).

The new Muslim fleet quickly proved its worth when Mu'awiya invaded Cyprus in 649. Christian sources tell a vivid story of pillage, plunder and destruction but the Muslim sources are silent; they state that he was bought off with a substantial tribute, equal to the amount traditionally collected by the Byzantines. (The Cypriots burdened themselves with a double tribute, for they continued to pay the Byzantines; an expensive but simple way of buying protection from both sides.) The very next year, Mu'awiya led a second invasion, to punish the Cypriots for violating their treaty. As punitive expeditions tend to be, it was bloody and destructive – as all the sources agree – but under the circumstances his terms were moderate. He re-imposed the existing tribute and established a military colony on the island with 12,000 regular troops, a very large garrison by the standards of that time. It was not a permanent conquest; the garrison was withdrawn soon after Mu'awiya's death, but Cyprus was unquestionably his greatest military victory.[8]

Cyprus was only the beginning. Arwad was also overrun in 649 and its inhabitants compelled to leave (while this might seem unnecessary, Arwad had a good harbor and might have served as a base for a Byzantine counter-strike). Further afield, the strategic island of Rhodes was raided and occupied for

[8] The date of 649 for the first Cyprus expedition is confirmed by two Greek inscriptions: Theophanes-Mango, 479, n. 1

several decades, giving the Muslim fleet a superb base for raids along the southern Anatolian coast. The dates are disputed in the sources; the first raid occurred in 653, though a real occupation may only have occurred in 673.

The most spectacular success of the new navy came within a decade of its foundation. In 655, in the great Battle of the Masts, which took place just off the port of Phoenix (the modern Finike, on the south-western coast of Anatolia), a large Muslim fleet confronted 500 Byzantine ships under the personal command of the Emperor Constans II. The Christian and Muslim descriptions of this titanic clash are typically epic and picturesque but also vague and contradictory. The Muslim fleet probably had ships and soldiers from both Lebanon and Egypt. The Christian sources state that the expedition was on Mu'awiya's initiative but he was apparently not present at the battle. The senior Muslim commander was the governor of Egypt, 'Abdallah ibn Sa'd ibn Abi Sarh. Given the vast expenditures, high risks, and the involvement of fleets from two provinces (Syria and Egypt), the caliph 'Uthman must have authorized the enterprise but there are no mentions of his name. The Christian sources blame Constans for the disaster: they say he did not form his fleet into a well-ordered line of battle and the Muslim ships exploited the disarray to break up the fleet and destroy its ships piecemeal. The main Muslim account contradicts this; it states that both fleets were drawn up in tight formation. The key factor was a strong wind, which prevented the two forces from closing. Suddenly it died away and the Muslims seized the opportunity to launch a powerful attack along the whole Byzantine line. All the sources agree that the battle was bloody and bitterly fought. The sea was covered with the debris of shattered vessels and thousands of Byzantine corpses were washed up on to the beaches. The Byzantine fleet was decimated and the Emperor narrowly

escaped being killed or captured. Even more important than the humiliation and heavy losses, the gates to the Aegean Sea were opened. The southern and western coast of Anatolia was left defenseless against Muslim raids for decades. Twenty years later, Mu'awiya's navy even penetrated the Sea of Marmara and blockaded Constantinople for four years, from 674 to 678. That blockade had to be dismantled but the Arab navy remained a grave threat to the commerce and security of the Byzantine Empire.

THE WAR IN ANATOLIA AND ARMENIA

Mu'awiya devoted himself to securing the coast and building up the navy. Land campaigns against the Byzantines continued to be important but for the most part he was content to assign these to his subordinates. During his years as governor, we read of only a few campaigns – perhaps no more than three – into central Anatolia. These were normally launched from Cilicia, the broad coastal plain north of Antioch, where the Syrian and Anatolian coastlines meet. However, the Byzantines left this area a wasteland when they abandoned Syria and Mu'awiya never tried to occupy and resettle it. Cilicia did not become a Muslim settlement until a century or more later. During Mu'awiya's time, Antioch was the Empire's northernmost major city.

During this period, the main zone of combat lay to the northeast, in Armenia. Seventh-century Armenia had a tangled history – just what we would expect of a strategic territory sandwiched between the Persians on the east and the Byzantines on the west. Armenia was a Christian land; over the centuries it supplied several Byzantine emperors, possibly including the great Heraclius (610–641). Constans

II (641–668) maintained his grandfather's close ties with his ancestral homeland and tried to use it as a springboard for his counter-offensive against the Muslims. However, his efforts were undone by the bitter factionalism of the great aristocratic clans who ruled Armenia (if one enjoyed the favor of the Byzantine emperor, another would inevitably seek an alliance with the Muslims) and by the Muslim determination to drive the Byzantines out of Armenia. When 'Uthman became caliph, he instructed the governors of Syria and Kufa to launch a joint campaign against Armenia; their forces probably totaled 15,000.[9] Mu'awiya appointed a fellow Qurashi, Habib ibn Maslama al-Fihri, as the commander of Syrian forces. Habib ibn Maslama was not yet thirty years of age; they had probably come to know one another during the conquest of Syria. It was an inspired choice; until his early death in 663, Habib ibn Maslama was Mu'awiya's most loyal and effective general. The Armenian campaign of 645 took Habib from Mélitene (modern Malatya) to Erzerum. Mélitene became the most important base for the Muslims' summer campaigns in Anatolia, while Erzerum was subject to tribute, though not permanently occupied. Habib chased down the army of the Byzantine military governor in Armenia, Maurianus. In a night attack, they were scattered and Maurianus killed. In a charming vignette, we are told that Habib's wife accompanied him on this expedition. On the evening of the decisive battles, she asked him, "Where shall I meet you?" "In the pavilion of Maurianus or in Paradise," he replied. When Habib fought his way into the pavilion, he found her already there. She was awarded the pavilion as her personal share of the

[9] The date of this expedition is uncertain; the most likely possibility is 653.

booty.[10] After this spectacular campaign, Armenia became a client state with a resident Muslim governor. Habib was briefly given this post but was soon recalled to Syria and put in command of the exposed districts along the Byzantine frontier, where he served with great distinction.

MU'AWIYA AND THE ARAB TRIBES IN SYRIA

The most important result of Mu'awiya's long tenure and unified government emerged only after 'Uthman's death. When Mu'awiya challenged 'Ali for the caliphate during the first civil war (656–661), he could rely upon the loyalty and military experience of the Arab troops stationed in Syria. Indeed, he won the civil war and retained unchallenged power thereafter because he was the only Muslim leader who had solid control of the fiscal and personnel resources of his province. To begin with, 'Ali had no army and had to patch one together from the disparate tribes of Iraq (mostly from Kufa), each of which had its own agenda. Egypt was in chaos in 656; a degree of order was restored only when Mu'awiya put his own man – his former superior 'Amr ibn al-'As – in charge. There were other potential leaders living in Mecca and Medina, but these cities hardly had the resources to defend themselves, let alone to dominate the rest of the Muslim Empire. The important allied tribes, which had once underpinned their power, had been drained off by the great conquests.

How did Mu'awiya, alone among Muslim leaders, build such a coherent, effective power base? The answer is, simply, we do not know, though there are a few hints. It is clear that Mu'awiya did not rely primarily on the armies which Abu Bakr and 'Umar

[10] (Tabari, XV, 11; Baladhuri-Hitti, I, 311)

had used to conquer Syria, the command of which fell to him after 639. These forces were relatively small and even though they may have remained in Syria, they were never settled in large garrisons, like those in Iraq and Egypt. Some took up residence in the cities, particularly Damascus and Hims, while others were dispatched to the steppes, far from any towns. Many were assigned pasturelands along the Byzantine frontier and made up the bulk of the troops periodically mobilized for the summer campaigns in Anatolia and Armenia.[11]

Mu'awiya clearly preferred to rely on the tribes which had long resided on the Syrian steppes and who were reasonably familiar (though not always welcome) to the settled villagers and townspeople of Syria-Palestine. Among these, the Kalb in the south and the Tanukh in the north were the most important. These tribesmen formed the core of Mu'awiya's army in the struggles between 656 and 661. An early indication of this emerging policy was his marriage, sometime around 650, to Maysun, the daughter of the powerful chief of the Kalb, Bahdal ibn Unayf. His cousin, the caliph 'Uthman, also married a Kalbi woman, Na'ila bint al-Farafisa, at about the same time, and the wife of his favourite general, Habib ibn Maslama, was also Kalbi. In view of Mu'awiya's relations with the Christians of Syria, which I shall discuss in the next chapter, it is important to note that both Na'ila and Maysun were Christian before they married. It is reasonable to surmise that these marriages reflected an Umayyad decision to seek a basis of political and

[11] Our information on the migration of tribesmen from Arabia into Syria is very limited; see Fred M. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, pp. 245–50. He argues that the settlers from Arabia belonged mostly to the Quraysh, who may have regarded Syria as their special preserve. He also comments that "we find no single hint suggesting that there occurred in Syria anything like the great migrations of Arabian tribesmen … that flowed into Iraq in the decades following the conquests there" (p. 249).

military support outside the élite inner circle of Muhammad's Companions, to whom they would always be *personae non gratae*. Both the Kalb and the Tanukh were largely Christian at the beginning of the conquest of Syria: during that struggle the Kalb followed a sensible policy of wait-and-see and stayed mostly on the sidelines; after the Muslim victory, most (though not all) of the tribe converted to Islam fairly quickly. In contrast, the Tanukh had fought with the Byzantines and many Tanukhis migrated to Anatolia after the Byzantine collapse. Those who remained accepted the new order but were in no rush to abandon Christianity.

The later Umayyads followed Mu'awiya's lead and cultivated the tribes of Syria, though the particular tribe which enjoyed caliphal favour was subject to marked – and sometimes violent – change from one reign to the next. One purpose of the network of "desert castles," whose remains still dot the Syrian and Jordanian steppe, was to establish places where the tribal leaders and their followers could meet the caliph or his representatives. These structures, modest in size but impressively decorated, provided an ideal setting for the conferring of lavish gifts and honors on the tribal nobles, which they redistributed to their tribesmen as they saw fit. Apart from Sinnabra near Lake Tiberias (which should probably be regarded as a country estate rather than a place to assemble the tribes) there is little evidence that Mu'awiya built any palaces of his own. If he did, they were on a very modest scale and no physical trace survives. However, even without palaces, it was he who built, step by step, the system of tribal alliances on which the Umayyads relied almost until the end of the dynasty. Since he had a disciplined and loyal army at his disposal by the time of his confrontation with

'Ali, it is clear that he had begun this process during his two decades as governor in Syria.

This policy had its dangers, because the tribes always remained autonomous. They continued to dwell on the steppes, under their own chiefs. Unlike the Prophet and the first four caliphs, Mu'awiya maintained a small personal guard – he is said to have been the first caliph to do so – but he had no large élite force under his personal command which he could use to threaten the allied tribes or coerce them into obedience: the tribes retained the power to change sides. From another perspective, that could be an advantage, because Mu'awiya had to nurture those ties and ensure that he and the tribesmen knew they shared the same interests. The contrast with Iraq was striking; there the tribesmen were permanently settled, subject to surveillance, administrative control and coercion. This was not easy, as 'Uthman and 'Ali discovered, and the tribes fiercely resisted it: they both depended on the largess of the governors and yet demanded their traditional rights. Driven by their internal conflicts and bitter resentment of the caliphal regime, they ceased to be an effective, reliable and coherent military force. In the long term, there was no alternative to demobilizing them or reducing them to second-tier military status.

By the time Islam's third great political crisis broke out late in 655 (the first two were the *hijra* in 622 and the succession to Muhammad a decade later), Mu'awiya's position as governor of Syria-Palestine was extraordinarily solid. He had woven close ties with the important tribe of Kalb without alienating any of the other major groups, created a powerful navy from nothing, built a battle-tested army and established an effective relationship with the quarrelsome bishops of Syria (and so

could count on the submission of his overwhelmingly Christian subjects). His fiscal policy was moderate, so far as we can tell, so he was never driven to desperate expedients that might have inflamed or demoralized the province. He had, in effect, carved out a state within a state, but he was so discreet and tactful that his achievement went almost unnoticed. It was an enviable position – and one he was determined to keep.

4

THE FIRST CIVIL WAR AND MU'AWIYA'S RISE TO POWER (656–661)

THE REVOLT AGAINST 'UTHMAN

The murder of 'Uthman in 656, at the hands of Muslim mutineers, propelled Mu'awiya into the limelight. For two decades, he had been a talented military commander and administrator in Syria but we know relatively little of him during those years. This is partly because of the nature of the sources, which are mostly Iraqi in origin and focus, and partly because of his success in building a highly stable province, whose internal politics hardly seemed newsworthy. His daring and imaginative military ventures against the Byzantines were duly, if briefly, noted but we do not know how much he was involved in 'Uthman's struggles in Iraq and Egypt.

As matters in Iraq and Egypt came to the boil in the early 650s, Mu'awiya was drawn back into the story. Tabari has several long reports, which try to define the issues through extended confrontations between Mu'awiya and the pious

dissidents (or irredeemable malcontents) contesting 'Uthman's policies. In these dramatic tableaux, Mu'awiya appears as the voice of sober piety, moderation and Islamic unity, in contrast to the intransigence and extremism of his antagonists. Whether any of this reflects the "real Mu'awiya" is open to debate, to say the least. However, Tabari, a serious and profoundly learned religious scholar, apparently felt that Mu'awiya was a plausible spokesman for such opinions. It is a rare thing in Islamic literature for Mu'awiya to appear as the authentic voice of Islam but here he is precisely that.

By the early 650s 'Uthman was at loggerheads with certain elements of the Arab tribes of Kufa, who believed that his policies discriminated against them and in favor of Qurayshi notables who did not live in Iraq and had taken no part in its conquest. They also resented (and accused of moral and fiscal corruption) the governors he appointed. The governors were mostly his Umayyad kinsmen – men whose commitment to Islam many regarded as highly dubious, who seemed chiefly interested in feathering their own nests at the expense of other (and of course worthier) Muslims, and who were strangers to those they governed.

In one incident in 653–54, a small band of especially self-righteous and contentious dissidents was exiled from Kufa to Damascus, at the insistence of the governor, Sa'id ibn al-'As ibn Umayya, who said they were making his work almost impossible. In Damascus, they came under Mu'awiya's supervision. He confronted them and, through his eloquence, forced them into silence. The speeches in Tabari are certainly not transcripts of Mu'awiya's own words; they are too polished, too imbued with politically correct religious sentiment and too divergent, in their language and tone, from other statements attributed to him. (Put simply, they are quite without a sense of humor and reflect the mid-eighth century more than the mid-sev-

enth.) They reflect not what he actually said but what Tabari (or rather his sources) thought he ought to have said. Taken in this light, they give us a rare representation of Mu'awiya as an exponent and interpreter of Islam. They are also some of the most eloquent statements of Umayyad religio-political ideology we possess.

Are these statements in any sense Mu'awiya's words and thoughts? Mu'awiya surely had some role in defining Umayyad ideology and nothing in these statements contradicts what we know of his policies and actions when governor or caliph. They represent how a later generation understood the principles that underlay his rule. The key points of his reprimands to the Kufan dissidents were first, a defense of the primacy and privileged status of the Quraysh, the tribe of the Prophet, the earliest Companions and the Umayyads; second, the need to obey established authority and preserve the unity of the Muslims; and third, Mu'awiya's own authority and status in the Islamic community:

> Through Islam you have attained nobility, conquered the nations and taken possession of their offices and estates. I have learned that you are embittered against the Quraysh, but were it not for the Quraysh you would again be abject and despised, just as you used to be. Until today your imams [governors and caliphs] have been your armour, so do not be without your armour …
>
> … It is God alone who bestowed power and prestige on the Quraysh, both in the Time of Ignorance and under Islam. The Quraysh were neither the most numerous nor the most warlike of the Arabs but they were the noblest in general esteem, the purest in language, the mightiest in face of danger, the most perfect in manly qualities … Do you know of any people whom fate has not struck down in their own country and sanctuary, save only the Quraysh? For whenever anyone laid a plot against

> the Quraysh, God abased him … Therefore He approved the best of His creatures [Muhammad] and for him He approved Companions, the best of whom were from Quraysh. Upon the foundation of Quraysh He erected this sovereignty (*mulk*) and among them he fixed the succession to God and His Prophet (*khilafa*) and all this is appropriate to none save them.[1] For God guarded the Quraysh in the Time of Ignorance while they were yet unbelievers. Do you imagine that He will not protect them now when they have accepted His religion?
>
> [Tabari, XV, 116]

On a second occasion, Mu'awiya turns the discussion to himself, to demonstrate that he had obtained his office by the highest possible authority and that his standing as a Muslim was unimpeachable. It is this that gives him the right, indeed the obligation, to call the dissidents to account:

> I reiterate to you that the Messenger of God was immune from sin and he bestowed authority on me and included me in his affairs. Then Abu Bakr was named his successor and he bestowed authority upon me. 'Umar and 'Uthman did the same on their succession [to the caliphate]. All of them have been satisfied with me. The Messenger of God appointed only men fully capable of acting on behalf of the Muslims. For this he

[1] *Mulk*, literally, "kingship" was often a pejorative term for mere worldly power but it is a Qur'anic word, meaning "sovereignty in earthly affairs." If *mulk* is granted by God it is perfectly legitimate. God bestowed *mulk* on David and Solomon and "He gives sovereignty to whom He pleases." Sunni discourse insisted that Abu Bakr had taken the apparently modest title of *khalifat rasul Allah*. However, the Umayyads insisted (with pretty good Qur'anic authority) on *khalifat Allah*, God's "Deputy" or "Viceregent" and that may well be the older form. In my translation, I have tried to reflect the ambiguity of *khilafa*; the Qur'an adjures believers to "obey God and His Messenger."

> did not want men who were strained beyond their capacity, ignorant in such matters and too weak to manage them.
>
> [Tabari, XV, citing Sayf ibn'Umar, 118]

As is his custom, Tabari gives an alternative version of the confrontation between Mu'awiya and the Kufan dissidents, taken from a source (Muhammad ibn 'Umar al-Waqidi) who is normally critical of Mu'awiya. This account is in the form of a debate or dialogue between the two protagonists, rather than a series of speeches by Mu'awiya. In it, the Kufans stand their ground, even though Mu'awiya seems to have the better case. In their anger and frustration they attack him and so he sends them back to Kufa, from whence they are sent on to Hims, to the rule of Mu'awiya's hard-nosed sub-governor, 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Khalid ibn al-Walid, who brings them to heel by forcing them to settle in the Taurus passes on the Byzantine frontier. In this exchange, Mu'awiya underlines the merits of his own family:

> The Quraysh recognised that Abu Sufyan was the noblest among them and the son of the noblest, save for what God did for His prophet, the prophet of mercy … Now I believe that if Abu Sufyan had sired the people as a whole, he would have sired none but resolute and prudent men … I turn to God and His prophet and I command you to fear Him and obey Him and His prophet, to adhere to the united community and to abhor schism, to revere your imams and to advise them so far as you are able to every good thing and to admonish them gently and graciously concerning anything that proceeds from them [that offends you].

Sa'sa'a (one of the dissidents' spokesmen) replies:

> And we command you to resign your office, for among the Muslims there is one who has a better right to it than you.

Mu'awiya asks, "Who is that?" and Sa'sa'a answers:

> A man whose father had a higher standing in Islam than did yours and who himself has a higher standing than you.

Mu'awiya says:

> By God, I have some standing in Islam. There were others whose standing surpassed mine but in my time there is no one better able to fulfil my office than I. 'Umar ibn al-Khattab was of this opinion and had there been a man more capable than I, 'Umar would not have been indulgent towards me or anyone else. Nor have I instituted any innovation that would require me to resign my office. Had the Commander of the Faithful and of the Community of Muslims thought so, he would have written to me by his own hand and I would have stepped down.
>
> [Tabari, XV, 122–23]

The revolt against 'Uthman made things immensely more complicated. Muslim historical tradition is full of claims and counterclaims regarding Mu'awiya's role during the mutiny and there is no convincing way to sort them out. Several view his actions as thoroughly bad, as if he knew that a catastrophe was imminent and tried to exploit it for his own selfish ends. Thus, he advised his older cousin to stick to the policies that had now got him into deep trouble, while claiming (no doubt correctly) that his own province of Syria was on a solid footing. In another report, Mu'awiya advises 'Uthman to join him in Syria. When 'Uthman wrote to the provincial governors, seeking immediate aid, some reports accused Mu'awiya of having waited to see how things would turn out before taking the risk of committing himself. Others implied that when Mu'awiya realized how grave the situation had become, he began scheming to succeed 'Uthman as caliph.[2]

[2] Tabari, XV, 136-38, 149–53, 185.

Other reports show his actions in an entirely favorable light. According to these, he dispatched troops, under his favorite general Habib ibn Maslama al-Fihri (who was now sub-governor in Hims) as soon as he realized how serious the situation was. However, by the time they reached the Syrian border, it was too late and they were forced to return to Damascus.[3] Some of the mutineers (the names of the guilty vary according to who is telling the story) burst into 'Uthman's residence and stabbed the old man to death. Sayf ibn 'Umar tells us that 'Uthman was reading the Qur'an when he was assaulted and his blood spurted on to the open page. Not content with this monstrous blasphemy, the mutineers slashed his wife's hand as she tried to ward off the fatal blow, fondled her, and then ransacked the house.[4]

THE AFTERMATH: WHO CAN CLAIM THE RIGHT TO RULE?

Whatever Mu'awiya did or did not do during the mutiny, he now faced a crisis of his own. His response displayed all the qualities for which he became famous: allowing a situation to ripen before committing himself to a course of action, concealing his own motives and purposes from public scrutiny, long-term planning combined with a capacity to seize unexpected opportunities, a patient seeking for allies even as he relentlessly undermined loyalties among the supporters of his opponents, and a willingness to be perfectly ruthless at critical moments. The sources disagree on many things but on this portrait they are of one mind.

[3] Tabari, XV, 164, 259, 261.
[4] Tabari, XV, 213–218.

Once 'Uthman was dead, the mutineers quickly took control. Their candidate for the succession was 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, and in this they were strongly supported by the *Ansar* of Medina.[5] Many things commended 'Ali as 'Uthman's successor. He was the Prophet's first cousin, his son-in-law by his marriage to the Prophet's daughter Fatima (who died in 633, just six months after her father) and the father (by Fatima) of Muhammad's only living male descendants, Hasan and Husayn. 'Ali accepted Islam as a youth and was possibly the first male convert. His unwavering personal loyalty to Muhammad, his devotion to the cause of Islam and his courage in its defense were not in doubt. His supporters believed that 'Ali exemplified the personal piety and devotion to justice that were the hallmarks of the dispensation brought by Muhammad. 'Ali had not held office under 'Uthman and is portrayed as one of his severest and most unrelenting critics, though he made his criticisms directly to 'Uthman, not in public. 'Ali thus had strong religious credentials, and the dissidents in Iraq and Egypt were confident that he would restore the good old days, under which they had prospered in the time of the first conquests. He was not part of 'Uthman's apparatus of government; he was an outsider, a knight on a pure white charger.

'Ali was not a young man. Like Mu'awiya, he must have been in his mid-fifties at this time. During the reigns of his three predecessors, he had not played a great role in public

[5] *Ansar* means "helpers" or "allies." These were the Medinans who had invited Muhammad and his followers to come to their oasis in 622 and formed a large majority of his supporters during his years there. Despite their vital contribution to the cause of Islam during this critical period and the fact that Medina was the caliphal capital until 656, the *Ansar* played a surprisingly small role in the conquests and the early caliphate. However, in times such as the revolt against 'Uthman, they often emerge as an important faction.

affairs. His valor in the Ridda wars was extraordinary (632–633) but he held no military commands or governorships during the conquests between 634 and 656. He remained in Medina and Mecca, where he periodically appears as a commentator on religious matters or a critic of caliphal policy. This quarter-century of near obscurity is surprising but not implausible; 'Ali was never on good terms with either the circle of Abu Bakr and 'Umar or with 'Uthman and the Umayyads. Some sources, admittedly with a Shi'ite bent, tell us that at the time of the Prophet's death he had supporters who wanted the succession to go to him. When 'Umar was murdered in 644, 'Ali was again passed over, in favour of the pious but elderly and mediocre 'Uthman. (At least that is how 'Ali's adherents regarded him.) In the turbulence following 'Uthman's death, 'Ali's partisans at last controlled the situation and they would not be denied.[6]

The acclamation of 'Ali by the mutineers and the Medinan *Ansar* posed problems. Most sources deny he was actively involved in the mutiny or had instigated it but such denials imply that these charges were made, whether or not they had any substance. To some groups (for example, the Egyptian and Iraqi mutineers and some Medinans), 'Ali's involvement would have been entirely to his credit. Whatever the truth was, his name was on the lips of the mutineers and he was the one who would most directly benefit if 'Uthman were deposed. When he withdrew from Medina at the height of the crisis, he became

[6] Readers wanting a more sympathetic evaluation of 'Ali's role in the early caliphate – and a more critical account of his rivals – will find it in Wilferd Madelung's carefully documented and closely argued book, *The Succession to Muhammad* (Cambridge, 1997). Madelung can be criticized for relying too heavily on sources of Shi'ite provenance but he brings much new material to the debate and his arguments and conclusions deserve careful consideration.

subject to the accusation that he allowed events to take their course without seriously trying to block the violence. (Stories about the sons of the inner circle of Companions, including Hasan and Husayn, standing guard in 'Uthman's house are not convincing.) More crucially, when he accepted the acclamation from the blood-stained mutineers, he became complicit in their acts, effectively agreeing that a caliph's murderers had the right to elect the next one. Also, he was taking a partisan stance in relation to 'Uthman, accepting the idea that the old man's actions as caliph meant he had been rightfully put to death. 'Ali's position as caliph depended on the support of 'Uthman's killers. If he wanted it, he could not accede to Umayyad demands for vengeance or blood-money, but without such concessions, he would be forever tainted in the eyes of the many who believed that 'Uthman had done nothing which could justify his death. In accepting the caliphate, 'Ali may well have been trying to save what he could in the desperate situation now confronting the Muslims. However, he could never free himself from the conundrum posed by 'Uthman's murder. That conundrum provided Mu'awiya with his opening ploy, which he played with the greatest possible subtlety and skill.

Mu'awiya began by doing almost nothing, other than withholding his oath of allegiance to the new caliph. We are not privy to his train of thought but it is not hard to analyze the situation. Taking the oath of allegiance would have had several effects: the acknowledgment that 'Ali had come to power in a rightful manner (at least in view of the circumstances), that there were no other legitimate claimants for the office of caliph, and (not least) that 'Ali had the authority to remove him from his governorship – an authority he would certainly have used. Making an oath of allegiance would also have alienated him from his Umayyad kinsmen, since the blood of 'Uthman would thus have gone unrequited – a humiliating blow to their

honor and standing. In addition, the Umayyads would inevitably have forfeited their hard-won, and still very insecure, position in the Islamic leadership. If he had recognized ʻAli at the outset, Muʻawiya would have had no cards left to play. He was cautious. He called for a council of leading Muslims (*shura*) to name the most appropriate successor to ʻUthman but he made no claims of his own, nor did he accuse ʻAli of personal wrongdoing.

Muʻawiya watched and waited, as another faction moved to deny ʻAli's succession. This group comprised ʻA'isha, her kinsman Talha ibn ʻUbaydallah, and the Prophet's cousin al-Zubayr ibn al-ʻAwwam. They belonged to the innermost circle of the Prophet's Companions: ʻA'isha was the daughter of Abu Bakr and had been the Prophet's favorite wife, and Talha and al-Zubayr were early and enthusiastic converts who had fought hard and courageously for the victory of Islam. Though all three had been severe critics of ʻUthman, they claimed to be shocked by his murder (but admittedly had done precious little to prevent it). On the basis of their early conversion and their standing in Islam, Talha and al-Zubayr could claim that their right to succeed ʻUthman was equal to ʻAli's and they had the benefit of rejecting any involvement with his murderers.

There may have been one further element in their opposition, connected with the famous *hadith al-ifk*, the "story of the slander." The story seems substantially true to me; it could hardly have been invented, since it makes everyone involved look bad and is exactly the kind of scandal people remember. The story relates that, early in ʻA'isha's marriage, when she was very young (perhaps just fourteen years old), she became separated from an expeditionary force which she was accompanying – one version has her wandering off to find a missing necklace – and found herself lost and alone. She was rescued by a very handsome young man, who found her near

the expedition's abandoned campsite and took her back to Medina. Rumors flew and she was accused of inappropriate, if not flagrantly immoral, conduct. This she stoutly denied but 'Ali demanded the Prophet divorce her at once, lest his own honor and probity be tainted. "Find another wife. One woman is like another," he said. The Prophet, caught between conventional moral standards, the remonstrations of a close kinsman who was one of his first and most committed followers, his affection for 'A'isha, and his close personal ties to her father Abu Bakr (who was his own age and, like 'Ali, one of the first converts), sought Divine guidance to a solution. This came in the form of Sura 24:4–9, which states that accusations of sexual immorality against a Muslim woman must be validated by the testimony of four male eyewitnesses of good character. 'A'isha and her marriage were saved, but I suspect she never forgave 'Ali for his accusations or, almost worse, the demeaning way he had spoken of her.

Having sworn (under duress, they later claimed) allegiance to 'Ali, the three quickly withdrew their oaths and made their way to Basra in Iraq to raise an army of opposition to 'Ali. He followed them, recruited troops of his own in Kufa and confronted them in the famous "Battle of the Camel" in the summer of 656. This battle, though bitterly fought, went disastrously for 'A'isha and her allies. Talha and al-Zubayr were slain and 'A'isha, who had sat on her camel in the very center of the battle, was ignominiously taken back to Medina, where she resided honorably but out of the political arena for the rest of her days.

The Battle of the Camel greatly clarified the situation facing Mu'awiya. After it, 'Ali controlled both the Hijaz and Iraq and the acting governor of Egypt was in his camp as well. That left Mu'awiya isolated in Syria. However, he still enjoyed the unwavering support of the Syrian tribal forces, probably the most

disciplined troops in the Muslim army. Moreover, two of the most plausible candidates for the caliphate – perhaps the only plausible candidates other than ʻAli – had been removed from the scene. This may have been the point at which Muʻawiya conceived the idea of seeking the caliphate. Since he had no obvious claim to it, he could only achieve it by probing for ways to undermine ʻAli's position and taking advantage of developments in the situation. However, it is equally possible that he was chiefly interested in securing his position in Syria, where he had patiently built such a solid political base over twenty years and was, in effect, an autonomous ruler. Retaining control of Syria was certainly his immediate goal; had ʻAli confirmed him in that office he might well have been satisfied.

THE CONFRONTATION BETWEEN ʻALI AND MUʻAWIYA

Although ʻAli's position as caliph was uncontested after the Battle of the Camel, Muʻawiya still refused to swear allegiance and indeed demanded that ʻAli identify those responsible for the death of ʻUthman and turn them over to him for vengeance. To incite his troops he literally waved ʻUthman's bloody shirt, at least according to the ever-colorful Sayf ibn ʻUmar:

> [A messenger came from Medina] with the bloodstained shirt ʻUthman was wearing when he was killed and with the severed fingers of Na'ila, his wife – two with the knuckles and part of the palm, two cut off at the base and half a thumb. Muʻawiya hung the shirt on the pulpit and wrote to the Syrian military districts. The people kept on coming and crying over it as it hung on the pulpit, with the fingers attached to it, for a whole year. The Syrian soldiers swore an oath that they would not make love to women or perform the major ritual ablutions … or sleep on beds until

> they had killed the killers of 'Uthman and anyone who might block their path in any way, unless they should die meanwhile. They remained around the shirt for a year. It was placed each day on the pulpit, sometimes it was made to cover it and was draped over it, and Na'ila's fingers were attached to its cuffs.
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> [Tabari, XVI, 196–197]

Mu'awiya was acting as 'Uthman's kinsman and the spokesman for the honor of his clan. As 'Uthman's second cousin, he was not his closest senior male relative – that was Marwan ibn al-Hakam. However, Marwan, who had been present at the disaster in Medina, was a political outcast and in no position to assert the family's claims, whereas Mu'awiya was.[7]

'Ali had every reason to suspect Mu'awiya's good faith and continued to demand an unconditional oath of allegiance. In the chaotic situation created by 'Uthman's death and the Battle of the Camel, he had to establish his authority as Commander of the Faithful (*amir al-mu'minin*) quickly and decisively. Without the unquestioned power to appoint or remove provincial governors as he saw fit, his position as head of the community of Muslims would be gravely undermined. If Mu'awiya imposed conditions as the price of his obedience, any other provincial governor might also. The caliphate would lose its remaining cohesion and structure and dissolve into a purely symbolic confederation of independent amirates. Quite apart

[7] Marwan was accused of advising 'Uthman to deal treacherously with the band of soldiers who had come to Medina from Egypt to demand the redress of their grievances. Others alleged that he had incited the final catastrophe that ended in 'Uthman's murder. Finally, he was accused of having killed 'A'isha's kinsman, Talha, at the Battle of the Camel, even though he was ostensibly a member of her coalition. Whatever the substance or origin of these allegations, he was clearly a highly divisive figure and not the man to rally support against 'Ali.

from any long-term consequences, to turn the murderers of ʻUthman to over Muʻawiya was politically impossible, for that would have shattered ʻAli's own coalition.

The situation degenerated into open conflict. In the early summer of 657, ʻAli set out from Kufa at the head of his army (recruited mostly from the Arab tribesmen settled in Kufa) to compel Muʻawiya either to recognize him or be overthrown; Muʻawiya advanced with his Syrian forces toward the Euphrates. The two sides met at Siffin (close to modern Raqqa). For several weeks, there was a confused swirl of skirmishes and small-scale raids, which ultimately led to a full-scale battle. We do not know quite how the fighting turned out, in spite of voluminous tales of heroic derring-do in the Arabic tradition. Arabic sources, dominated by Iraqi and pro-ʻAlid perspectives, say that ʻAli's men had gained the upper hand and were on the point of prevailing, when Muʻawiya's troops attached leaves of the Qur'an to the tips of their lances, hoisted them high and shouted "Let God decide!" This startling initiative caused pious elements in ʻAli's army to call for a truce, lest Muslims keep killing Muslims, and for turning the matter over to arbitrators who would seek the principles for a settlement in the Qur'an – that is, in God's own words. ʻAli, seeing victory snatched from his grasp, resisted these demands as long as he could but eventually the threat of desertion was too great and he had to concede. We do not have a counterbalancing Muslim Syrian tradition, but Christian sources indicate Muʻawiya had the better of the struggle and compelled ʻAli to stand down.[8] Siffin is probably best interpreted as a military stalemate or as a battle in which the victorious army was in no position to follow up its advantage. The battle was extremely bloody and the shock-

[8] There is a terse allusion to a Syrian victory in Tabari, XVIII, 148 but it is hard to know what to make of it.

ing level of slaughter among Muslims may well have been the reason that many called for the fighting to halt.

Whatever the immediate circumstances may have been, the armies retreated to their home bases and the matter was submitted to arbitration. The substance of the arbitration agreement drawn up at Siffin has come down to us.[9] The key passage is:

> We will comply with the judgement of God and His Book and nothing else will bring us together. The Book of God is between us, from its opening to its close. We will bring about what it lays down and eliminate what it does away with. The two arbitrators will act in accordance with whatever they find in the Book of God. For whatever they do not find in the Book of God they will resort to the just precedent which unites and does not divide.
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> [Tabari, XVII, 85–86]

The agreement is difficult to interpret, because we do not know exactly what several key terms meant to those who wrote it. For example, what guidance did the arbitrators expect to find in the Book of God (that is, the Qur'an)? We do not know. The Qur'an says little about government and rulership and never describes a situation like this one. Perhaps they were to look for moral commandments which would clarify whether or not 'Uthman deserved to die for his actions as caliph. Likewise, what was "the just precedent which unites" *(al-sunna al-'adila al-jami'a)*? There are many ingenious suggestions but no certain answers.

The arbitration was to be open-ended; its purpose was to resolve the conflict as amicably as possible. The obvious solution would have been to confirm 'Ali as caliph, guarantee

[9] Martin Hinds, "The Siffin Arbitration Agreement," *JSS* 17 (1972), 93–128.

Mu'awiya his Syrian governorship and grant immunity to the mutineers (apart from a few low-ranking scapegoats from weak tribes). No doubt that is how many, especially the Kufan pietists who had pressed 'Ali to accept arbitration, imagined things would turn out.

Each protagonist chose his own representative. Mu'awiya selected 'Amr ibn al-'As, a gifted soldier and administrator. He was a man not above cynical opportunism; however things turned out, he intended to be on the winning side. 'Amr was the conqueror of Egypt and its first governor, but 'Uthman had dismissed him and he had been living in retirement on his estate in Palestine for several years. He is often portrayed as Mu'awiya's *alter ego* but a host of anecdotes shows that relations between them were edgy and difficult. 'Ali would have done well to choose an equally partisan advocate, but the pietists among his followers pushed him to appoint Abu Musa al-Ash'ari, a man of great political and military experience, who had been governor of both Kufa and Basra under 'Umar and 'Uthman. He had a reputation for personal piety but also for a certain naïveté. Worse, he seemed indifferent to the outcome of the current struggle. He had been 'Uthman's last governor in Kufa, on the understanding that he would rule strictly in accordance with the wishes of the tribesmen. Though he had accepted 'Ali as caliph and briefly continued as governor in Kufa under him, he had opposed the war against Mu'awiya.

The issues were unspecified and open-ended. The arbitrators' mandate was to restore peace. However, in the document agreed between 'Ali and Mu'awiya, which laid down the terms of the arbitration, 'Ali had had to omit his title of *amir al-mu'minin*, putting Mu'awiya and himself on the same level. Mu'awiya had still made no overt claim to the caliphate, though by now the weakness of 'Ali's political position must have been obvious. The Arabic sources give tortuous and contradictory

accounts of the arbitration but the outcome, in 658, was the startling statement of 'Amr ibn al-'As and Abu Musa that 'Ali should resign the caliphate and a new election be held. 'Ali could be a candidate but there would be no presumption in his favor. Naturally, 'Ali did not accept this verdict but it gravely undermined the legitimacy of his claim.

'Ali was now facing problems more pressing than legal and constitutional ones. His Iraqi troops were badly split over the arbitration. Many regretted their demands for a negotiated settlement almost as soon as it had been agreed. Too late, they realized that their conduct implied they believed 'Ali's cause was open to doubt. They argued that 'Ali should have fought Mu'awiya to the end, and when he would not renounce the truce they literally deserted. All efforts to persuade, cajole and reconcile them were fruitless. They gave themselves the name of Kharijites (*khawarij*), a term which soon came to be interpreted as "those who abandon the Community of Believers," that is, secessionists or rebels. Originally, however, it had completely the opposite sense of "those who go forth to serve God's cause." [10] In the following decades, many different groups, most of which had no organizational ties to one another, were labelled Kharijites. These groups shared a broad orientation: a devotion to ascetic piety, an insistence that political leaders should be obeyed only so long as they did not fall into error (either moral or political) and a belief that so-called Muslims who rejected their principles were infidels. Their uncompromising devotion to absolute principle, as they

[10] Apparently derived from Qur'an 4:100 – "*man yakhruju min baytihi muhajiran ila 'llah*" – one who goes out from his house to emigrate toward God. Patricia Crone and Fritz Zimmerman, *The Epistle of Salim ibn Dhakwan,* pp. 275–78.

understood it, earned them the fear and sometimes the grudging admiration of early Muslim observers.

Other elements in ʿAli's coalition, especially the major tribal leaders, had no desire to return to war; they were willing to bring the dissidents back into line but not to renew the struggle. Muʿawiya's men were committed to his cause, while ʿAli's were committed only to their own. By political trickery or poison (so people believed) Muʿawiya removed a succession of ʿAli's governors in Egypt – one before he even got there – and reinstalled ʿAmr ibn al-ʿAs. So ʿAmr had been on the winning side; he had his old job back, albeit with the slight irony (which he must have appreciated) that he was now the appointee of a man who had been his military subordinate twenty years earlier in Palestine. ʿAli's position in the Hijaz was eroding and in Iraq he faced armed opposition from the Kharijites, the militantly pious dissidents in his own ranks. ʿAli tried to cajole and then compel them to rejoin his cause; at the Battle of Nahrawan (in 658) he dealt them a bloody defeat but never definitively crushed them or won them over. He spent the rest of his life marching up and down Iraq trying to control the damage, while Muʿawiya had a free hand elsewhere. By 660, Muʿawiya was able to launch pinprick raids and probes into Iraq, though he never risked a major confrontation.

In July 660, Muʿawiya took the bold step of having himself proclaimed caliph by his troops. Exactly when he decided to take this momentous step – a major political risk in the circumstances – is uncertain; it was definitely after the results of the arbitration were announced in early in 658 but (in my judgment) probably after Nahrawan, when the disintegration of ʿAli's cause had become irreversible. Someone had to take charge, for the whole Islamic enterprise – the recently conquered empire, the caliphate, and the religion itself – was in imminent danger of collapse. Partly due to his own machina-

tions, Mu'awiya was literally the only man with the political and military resources available to restore unity within the realm of Islam. And perhaps he was the only one willing to do what was necessary to achieve that goal.

Mu'awiya's brilliant *coup de théâtre* took place in Jerusalem. One source relates that, as part of the ceremonies, Mu'awiya visited the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Church of St Mary, which marked her grave.[11] Such acts went well beyond simply connecting himself to the sanctity of the Holy City. These places were specifically Christian and the Holy Sepulchre represented a doctrine (the reality of the Crucifixion and Resurrection) which the Qur'an explicitly repudiated. We cannot know exactly what his intentions were in performing these actions (assuming they actually happened) but there are two possibilities. First, on a political level, he assumed a key role of the Roman Emperor, making himself the advocate and guardian of the holy places of Jerusalem. Thus, he could present himself as the sovereign of both Christians and Muslims. Second, by publicly commemorating the life of the Prophet Jesus, he could underline the unbroken continuity between the two religions and show that Islam had come not to supplant Christianity but to fulfil it. Ultimately, Mu'awiya's real intentions are a mystery – which is perhaps the way he wanted it.

[11] "Maronite Chronicle" in *West Syrian Chronicles* p. 31. Wellhausen, *The Arab Kingdom and its Fall* p. 134; this incident is revisited later in a different context; see p. 127. See also Heribert Busse, *JSAI*, 9 (1987), 279–289.

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COMMANDER OF THE FAITHFUL (661–680)

The confrontation between ʻAli and Muʻawiya came to an abrupt end in 661, when ʻAli was stabbed to death in the Najaf mosque by Ibn Muljam, a dissident from his former supporters. One line of tradition states that there was a plot to kill Muʻawiya simultaneously but Muʻawiya's assassin was intercepted and disposed of.

Muʻawiya now stood alone. His only potential rival was ʻAli and Fatima's older son, al-Hasan, but he had no taste for politics. Muʻawiya offered him a lavish "retirement package" which, after some bargaining, he willingly accepted. From the summer of 661, he lived for the rest of his life in the Hijaz. Shi'ite lore has it that in 669, Muʻawiya surreptitiously poisoned him to stop any second thoughts, but there is no good evidence to support this charge. Al-Hasan was a middle-aged man who might have been subject to many maladies. Imami Shi'ites present all the imams (with the exception of the long-awaited Twelfth Imam) as martyred by Sunni violence; natural death is not an option.

Muʻawiya urgently had to establish his authority in Iraq, where he was regarded with feelings ranging from hatred to indifference. He needed governors who could reconcile or

repress 'Ali's partisans, subdue the Kharijite bands that roamed freely through much of the country, and restore a modicum of public order. Iraq was the keystone of the Muslim Empire. Its rich agricultural revenues supported by far the largest body of soldiers in the caliphate and its surplus funds went to the central treasury in Damascus. No less importantly, the vast territory of Iran – much of which was still a war zone – was governed from Iraq. The governors of Basra and Kufa were effectively viceroys of the East. They appointed the regional governors of Iran (though the caliph would occasionally name a candidate for some very sensitive or difficult post, like Khurasan) and these reported back to them.

To deal with such critical issues, Mu'awiya looked first for experience. He quickly brought an old Iraq hand, al-Mughira ibn Shu'ba al-Thaqafi, out of retirement and made him governor of Kufa, an office which he held until his death, sometime after 668. Al-Mughira was not an ideal choice. Though he had been a Companion of the Prophet, his personal conduct was often scandalous. He had been accused of adultery with the wife of another Muslim and had escaped the charge only through legal trickery. He was lax with troublemakers: he simply ignored them as long as possible. He was chosen partly because he had discreetly supported Mu'awiya during the latter stages of the Civil War, though he played no visible role in the fighting, and more importantly because under 'Umar, he had been governor of both Basra and Kufa and knew the tribesmen of Iraq well. His task was to reconcile the defeated Kufans to Mu'awiya's rule, which he did with considerable success, by keeping an open door for the tribal notables, ensuring they had ample rewards to distribute among their followers, and allowing them the freedom to keep whatever order was necessary in their areas. His approach to government, at least as it was remembered a century later, is summed up in this report:

> Al-Mughira liked things to run smoothly; he behaved courteously with people and did not ask about the sects they belonged to. People would be brought before him and he would be told that so-and-so holds Shi'ite views and so-and-so holds Kharijite views. But he would say, 'God has decreed that you will continue to disagree and God will judge between his creatures concerning the things about which they disagree'. So people felt secure with him.
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> [Tabari, XVIII, 23–24]

He allowed the Kufans the latitude to do or think as they wanted, so long as there was a modicum of public order. He intervened chiefly by sending a modest annual tribute to Damascus and by preventing any overt threats to Umayyad rule.

The Kharijites were a more difficult problem. Only a small number had escaped from the bloody debacle of al-Nahrawan in 658 but they were not ready to accept Mu'awiya as head of the Muslim community. It took three years of hard fighting to subdue them. The Kharijite bands never threatened Mu'awiya's empire but they seriously undermined his efforts to restore security and stability to the province. The best known of these bands – which comprised only 300 men – was led by al-Mustawrid ibn 'Ullafa. In 662 or 663, his followers swore allegiance to him not as chief of their small band but as Commander of the Faithful – that is, as the one true leader of the Muslim community. Those self-styled "Muslims" who did not accept his authority were, by implication, infidels. In true Kharijite spirit, al-Mustawrid accepted the leadership of this group only reluctantly. At a critical point in the revolt, al-Mustawrid is supposed to have sent a letter to the opposing commander; even if this letter were touched up (or composed) later on, it outlines the early Kharijite creed with perfect clarity:

> We seek vengeance on behalf of our people for tyranny in judgement, failure to enforce the Qur'anic punishments [for wrongdoing] and monopolising the revenues [which belong to the Muslims as a whole]. I summon you to the Book of God, Almighty and Glorious, and the example *(sunna)* of His prophet and the government of Abu Bakr and 'Umar. I also call upon you to disavow 'Uthman and 'Ali for their innovations in religion and their abandonment of the judgement of the Book. If you accept, you will have come to your senses. If not, we will have run out of excuses for you; we will permit war against you and will reject you for your disgraceful acts.
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> [Tabari, XVIII, 46]

For all his courage and uncompromising commitment, al-Mustawrid could not possibly win such an unequal contest with the army of Kufa, especially as the Kharijite creed made it utterly impossible to win adherents from the pro-'Alid factions who dominated the city. Al-Mughira never took the field himself and was content to leave the job to 'Ali's old supporters. In 664, al-Mustawrid was killed in a wonderfully theatrical climax and the bitter struggle sputtered to a close.

Basra presented another set of problems. Unlike Kufa, it was not a stronghold of pro-'Alid sentiment and its soldiers had been reluctant participants in the Civil War. However, public order was on the verge of collapse: random crime and street violence were entirely out of control. Mu'awiya first chose a distant kinsman for the post, 'Abdallah ibn 'Amir. Ibn 'Amir knew the city well; he had been 'Uthman's last governor, but he had been forced to flee in 656 after backing the losing side in the Battle of the Camel. He had had a distinguished military record in Iran and was relatively successful in keeping the peace in Basra during the turmoil of 'Uthman's last years. However, in the circumstances of 661, his easy-going approach was a disaster. "He would not punish anyone during his regime, nor

cut off the hand of a thief. When he was spoken to about it, he replied, 'I am on intimate terms with the people. How can I look at a man whose father's or brother's hand I have cut off?'" (Tabari, XVIII, 71). Mu'awiya was patient for a time but by 664 he had had enough.

Mu'awiya took talent where he could find it: the solution to his Basra problem was Ziyad ibn Sumayya, not only a man of servile birth (or worse) but one who had spent years as a loyal supporter of 'Ali. Ziyad's mother, a slave with a complicated personal history, may have conceived him by her own slave husband, but her owner is said to have forced her into prostitution. Ziyad's ancestry was exceedingly disputed: hence the epithet favored by 'A'isha – Ziyad ibn Abihi, "Ziyad, the son of his father." To win the reluctant Ziyad to his cause, Mu'awiya had the idea of proclaiming that he was the son of his own father Abu Sufyan, who had paid for Sumayya's services for an afternoon. Abu Sufyan, being dead, could neither confirm nor deny the story but Mu'awiya could thus claim Ziyad as his half-brother and a legitimate scion of the Sufyanids. Mu'awiya's initiative was bitterly opposed by members of his family (including his son, Yazid), who regarded it as an appalling dishonor, but he pressed ahead. The stories which circulated about Abu Sufyan's liaison with Sumayya are not only scandalous but repulsive; I suspect they were put about by the Umayyads' opponents, as a form of *hija'* (satirical slander).

Whatever the truth – and only the fact that Sumayya was his mother can be taken as indisputable – Ziyad displayed exceptional talent as an administrator, even when very young. He served in Basra as a financial official under 'Umar and 'Uthman; he entered 'Ali's service and rose to be sub-governor of Fars. After 'Ali's murder, he continued to govern the region but refused to recognize Mu'awiya. In a society that prized a noble genealogy above anything else, perhaps even above religious

probity, he won his way into the second tier of the Muslim ruling class. Mu'awiya learned about him through al-Mughira ibn Shu'ba and forced him to come to Damascus by threatening to execute his sons if he didn't. Impressed by what he saw, in 665, Mu'awiya named Ziyad governor of Basra. Ziyad held the office until his death eight years later. He was legendary both for his severity in repressing crime and disorder of any sort and for his justice and probity in dealing with those who accepted his discipline. In return for law and order, he promised fair treatment and full payment of the government stipends allotted to the Arab soldiers and their families, and by all reports was as good as his word.

Ziyad's inaugural sermon in the mosque of Basra, which laid down the policy he intended to follow, is famed as a model of Arabic eloquence and is reported (in slightly varying forms) in many chronicles and anthologies. It may have been honed in the course of its transmission to us but it is too powerful and too perfectly attuned to its situation to be the rhetorical invention of later writers. If Ziyad did not pronounce it, he should have: it perfectly portrays the indelible image he left on later generations of Muslims. A few passages will serve to make the point:

> Extraordinary ignorance, blind error and the immorality which leads its perpetrators to the Fire – the heedless among you do all these things and they have enveloped even the wise … It is as if you were unaware of what blessed rewards God has established for the people who obey Him or the excruciating pain which He has reserved for those who disobey Him in the Abode where pain and felicity endure forever …
>
> As to your fools, you still see the wise protecting and concealing them, until they have violated the sanctity of Islam and dug themselves into burrows of doubt. Let food and drink be prohibited to me until I eradicate them with ruin and fire

and slash the backs of wrongdoers with the edge of my lash. I swear by God that I will hold a friend responsible for his friend, the settled resident [of the city] for the transient [visitor], the healthy man for the sick, until a man meets his brother and says, 'Save yourself, Sa'd, for Sa'id has perished!' … If you find that my promises or threats from the pulpit are lies, you may disobey me. I will be the guarantor for whatever is stolen from any of you. Beware of me in the dark of night, for if any man is brought before me at night his blood will be shed …

Beware of me, for I will cut off the tongue of anyone who follows the custom of the Jahiliyya[1] and calls on his fellow tribesmen for vengeance or support. You have devised crimes that never existed before and we have devised a punishment for every crime. If anyone drowns other men, we will drown him. Whoever sets fire to other men, we shall set him afire. Whoever tunnels into a house [to rob it], I will bore a tunnel into his heart. Whoever digs up a grave, I will bury him alive …

O people, we have become your protectors and rulers. We govern you by the authority of God … so you owe us obedience in whatever we desire to do and we owe you justice in whatever we were assigned … Know also that whatever I may fail to do, I will not fail in three things: I will not be unavailable to anyone of you who has a request even if he comes knocking at night; nor delay in the payment of your provisions and stipends; nor extend your military campaigns unreasonably …

[Baladhuri-'Abbas, IV/1, 206–208; also Tabari, XVIII, 78–81]

The people of Basra quickly learned to take Ziyad at his word. He decreed that anyone who was out on the streets of the city at night, for any reason, would face summary execution. One night, a Bedouin came to Basra with a flock of sheep to sell. Finding the area outside the walls lonely and frightening, he

[1] Jahiliyya: the age of ignorance and barbarism in Arabia before the coming of Islam.

entered the residential district. The chief of police seized him and said, "Woe to you, did you not know of the governor's order?" "No, by God," the Bedouin replied. So the police chief took pity on him. When morning came, he sent him to Ziyad, who asked him to explain himself. The Bedouin told him and Ziyad responded, "I think you are telling the truth but I cannot have my promises and threats look like a lie. Strike off his head!" So he was killed (Baladhuri, (Kister), IVa, 172).

When the governor of Kufa, al-Mughira ibn Shu'ba, died in around 668, Mu'awiya added his province to Ziyad's domain. Until his death in 673, Ziyad was viceroy of the East, controlling financial and military resources that far surpassed those of his master, Mu'awiya. This gave Iraq desperately-needed stability but it looks like a perfect recipe for an over-mighty subject. Most rulers preferred to play governors off against one other and to rotate or discipline them regularly, to stop them building an independent power base. Yet Ziyad never even intimated rebellion against Mu'awiya or resistance to his directives. Mu'awiya had chosen his man superbly. Ziyad's servile origin meant he could never have enjoyed, in his own right, the social standing and prestige needed to assert leadership over the exceedingly status-conscious tribal garrisons in Iraq. He could exercise authority only if the Iraqi warrior-class unquestionably recognized him as Mu'awiya's deputy. Also, Ziyad had been in 'Ali's service in Fars before Mu'awiya co-opted him after 'Ali's death; to retain Mu'awiya's favor, he had to demonstrate unwavering loyalty. Ziyad's notorious harshness possibly stemmed from his ambivalent position: he could not negotiate with the tribal nobles as an equal and could bring no assets (for example, a strong tribal following) to the table. He could not persuade, he could only command – and then only if he was unrelenting, terrifying and able to rely on the caliph's total trust and support. Ziyad's unique combination of low social

prestige, extraordinary resolve and political acumen made him the perfect choice to govern a hostile and turbulent province, but that combination could not easily be duplicated.

Should we regard Mu'awiya as a state-builder – a creator and consolidator of institutions and framer of long-term policies – or simply as a gifted politician, who skilfully manipulated his situation but made no systematic effort to change the existing structures and practices of government? The Byzantine chronicler, Theophanes (died 814), called him *protosymboulos*, "first counsellor," [2] a term which suggests rule by persuasion and co-option rather than decree and coercion. That is very much the picture we get from the Arabic sources: constantly but discreetly consulting the leading men of the Arab tribes, co-opting potential opponents, receiving delegations, and so on. Only when his rule was directly challenged, as by the Kufan Hujr ibn 'Adi, who remained an unyielding partisan of 'Ali, did he resort to imprisonment and execution. Mu'awiya seems a conservative, a man who understood the nature of Arab tribal society and was able, with consummate skill, to use this understanding to serve his rather limited ends of stability and peace. In many ways, his political practices recall those of the Prophet Muhammad as he tried to reinforce the loyalty of his adherents, win over his enemies (*ta'lif al-qulub*), and persuade the Bedouin tribes to join his confederation, backed by a credible threat of coercion if all else failed. Mu'awiya lacked, and almost certainly never desired, the religious charisma of Muhammad but in his methods of using political means for political ends, he is perhaps not so different.

This paints too simple a picture, however. Mu'awiya was quite ready to resort to severe repression to keep order among

[2] The exact meaning is a bit ambiguous. "Symboulos" was the word used to translate "amir" (governor) in the Greek-language official documents issued by the new Muslim rulers of Egypt and Syria until the early eighth century.

the turbulent troops of Iraq, in striking contrast to the mild, consensual tactics he adopted in Syria or the de-militarized Hijaz. To Syrian observers, Muslim and Christian, he seemed a model monarch in his balance of clemency and strictness. For 'Ali's supporters in Kufa, he was a near-tyrant, though they were too disheartened to do much about it and perhaps were mollified by al-Mughira's skilful policy. Basra had never been pro-'Alid, as its support for 'A'isha, Talha, and al-Zubayr shows clearly. However, even if Basrans found Mu'awiya generally acceptable, they were ruled by their fear of his governor, Ziyad. The old Muslim élite in the Hijaz always saw him as an interloper and usurper, though they were powerless to do anything about it.

Mu'awiya maintained his authority not through a complex centralized bureaucracy but through a system of delegated rule. He appointed a very few governors who he believed would be totally loyal and gave them a free hand (so long as they were successful) to use whatever tactics and appoint whatever subordinates they saw fit. There were two in Iraq (except for the few years that Ziyad held both posts) and they wielded vice-regal authority over the caliphate's slowly expanding possessions in Iran. Egypt had a single governor, who also had authority over military expeditions and new conquests in North Africa. There were several (apparently independent) governors in the religiously sensitive Hijaz, in Mecca, Medina and Ta'if. In Syria, his metropolitan province and a region he knew intimately, Mu'awiya governed directly, with the help of sub-governors drawn from branches of the Umayyads, the Kalb or other groups of proven loyalty. He personally appointed and supervised the commanders of the annual military and naval expeditions in Anatolia and the Aegean coast. Mu'awiya laid down the general lines of policy which his governors should follow, kept a close eye on them but left it to them to execute

the policy and to work out the administrative or other means for so doing. It was a simple system that recognized the near-autonomy of the major provinces, which had fallen under Muslim rule at different moments and under highly different circumstances, but ensured his control and surveillance over the men who ruled them.

Among the governors, administrative and structural innovations were rare. Financial papyri from Egypt (most of which date from after Mu'awiya) suggest that the country's elaborate financial machinery was run much as it had been under the Romans and Byzantines – indeed, as it had since the Ptolemies – though we know little about how the Arab tribal forces stationed in the capital, Fustat, were managed. In Iraq, the fearsome but supple Ziyad created a police force (the *shurta*), which, according to one source had 4000 men, to maintain order in the garrison town of Basra – a matter of public security, not of basic military change. There was a similar force in Kufa. Ziyad seems to have used the *shurta* to bypass the traditional tribal leaders and deal directly with the population. The Basran *shurta* was commanded by a notable from one of the tribes settled there; presumably the office was rotated from time to time. Ziyad also took care to recruit the members of the Kufan *shurta* from all its tribes. There were dangers in this approach – blood feuds could be started if police from one clan attacked someone from another – but there were also advantages. The tribes were collectively responsible for security and recruitment from a well-chosen cross-section of tribes ensured that none would be singled out as the governor's favorite.

Of the Hijaz, we know rather little. Mu'awiya typically divided the governorships between Mecca, Medina and al-Ta'if and usually assigned them to his Umayyad kinsmen. The most notable was Marwan ibn al-Hakam, first cousin and closest advisor of the murdered 'Uthman. (Marwan was about the

same age as Mu'awiya and would ultimately become caliph, in the eventful year 684–85.) In view of his partisan political career and the bad religious reputation of his father, Marwan might seem a risky choice. However, he knew the religious and political currents of Medina intimately and his own fate was bound up with that of the regime. As an Umayyad, he was regarded with suspicion by the 'Alids, Ibn al-Zubayr and other pietists but that made him the perfect person to keep an eye on them; he would not act in collusion with them against Mu'awiya. The Hijaz had neither the human nor the financial resources to sustain a serious challenge to Mu'awiya and it was thus a good place to reward his kinsmen while keeping them in their place.

We know little of routine administrative practices. There had to be officials to distribute pay to the troops – the single most important government expenditure in this period of Islamic history since, in a sense, the main purpose of the Islamic state was to redistribute the wealth of non-Muslim subjects to the Arab–Muslim military class. The little evidence we have (including a few papyri from the village of Nessana in the Negev) suggests that this was done in a rather decentralized manner, at least in Syria and Palestine: soldiers were paid directly from requisitions issued by the district governor to village officials. In short, there was some oversight and control, but no centralized tax collection and payroll system. Only the surplus (from all reports very modest) would be sent on to Damascus. Ziyad reorganized the tribal elements settled in Kufa and Basra into larger units that were easier to supervise but he did not alter the basic structure of the army.

In the central government, Mu'awiya is said to have created two departments, one for the drafting of correspondence and decrees, the other for sealing and registering them. 'Umar is supposed to have established a central military register (*diwan*

al-jaysh) to assign and allocate salaries, on a steeply graduated scale, among Muslim notables and the Arab tribal forces. The sources imply that ʻUmar focused especially on the troops quartered in the garrison towns of Iraq. It is open to question whether this was because the sources were mostly written in Iraq or because Iraq posed peculiar political and administrative problems. However, ʻUmar's system was obsolete by Muʻawiya's time and probably fell apart during the Civil War.

It is unlikely that Muʻawiya established central registers for the caliphate, except possibly to aggregate revenues and expenditures and to pay selected notables. Each province or district maintained its own records; evidence suggests these were written in the region's traditional administrative languages (for example, in Greek in Syria, Palestine and Egypt). Muʻawiya and his governors used existing practices and institutions – Byzantine, Sasanian or Egyptian – wherever these were in place. He naturally staffed them with Christian or Zoroastrian officials – most notably the famous al-Mansur ibn Sarjun, grandfather of St. John of Damascus, who before he took monastic vows was an Umayyad bureaucrat. Muʻawiya never tried to arabize the financial system, nor did he expect Muslims to run it on an operational and managerial level. Altogether, it was a very tenuous administrative skeleton for such a vast empire. Its simplicity made it flexible and adaptable in the hands of a master but it would inevitably break down during weakness, incompetence or crisis.

This leads us to a fundamental question. All admitted Muʻawiya was a master politician, but was his dynasty irrevocably tainted by the way in which he assumed and wielded power? Was the Umayyad regime doomed from the outset by the acumen of its founder? Islamic historical tradition implies that it was; the Umayyads could never claim real Islamic legitimacy and could rule only so long as they had the cun-

ning and power to beat down challengers. This view hardened later, when the last Umayyads had raised up a host of enemies. It has some merit, for it is clear that many groups – not only the irreconcilable followers of 'Ali or the Kharijites – found the Umayyads unacceptable. This hostility was partly a question of material grievances and partly a matter of hostilities and rivalries within the Quraysh tribe. Mu'awiya did what he could to mollify this anger and resentment but he could not lay it to rest. The fragility of his political settlement was starkly revealed by the twelve years of unbroken strife and warfare that erupted on his death.

A particularly grave charge against Mu'awiya, and indeed one of the most critical points in the attack on his legitimacy, was his decision to name his son Yazid as his successor. This decision proved bitterly controversial, for two reasons: first, it established a hereditary rather than elective principle for succession to the caliphate and second, Yazid was regarded by many (at least in retrospect) as morally unfit to rule. The first reason seems naïve, if not disingenuous. After 'Ali's death in 661, his supporters supported his son Hasan as caliph and in the 680s, they pressed the case of his other two sons: the tragic Husayn (died 680) and the more artful Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyya (died 700). 'Abdallah ibn al-Zubayr, who twice raised the flag of revolt after Mu'awiya's death, was the son of one of the protagonists in the Battle of the Camel. By 680, some sort of hereditary succession clearly had the wind behind it. Perhaps there was no good alternative. The inner circle of early Companions, which had produced the first four caliphs, never developed any regular procedures to govern the succession and was by now too fragmented by death and factionalism to play any role in events. By the end of Mu'awiya's reign, only two possibilities realistically existed: some form of hereditary

succession or acclamation by the army (or more precisely, by competing factions within the army).

Mu'awiya did not impose his successor. Though Yazid was clearly the successor he wanted, he spent many months (perhaps longer) negotiating with notables from all the major tribes to secure their assent. In traditional Arabian society, it was normal for the headship to remain in the leading family for several generations, because *nasab* and *hasab* (noble lineage and the inherited merit of one's ancestors) were critical elements in making a man fit to lead his people. However, direct father-to-son succession was never exclusively practiced in ancient Arabia, nor in later Islamic times, although it was certainly widespread. So, even if Mu'awiya wished to restrict his choice to his own clan, why did he name Yazid, who had a reputation as a man devoted to wine, music, dancing girls and – perhaps worst of all – his pet monkey? His *louche* life made him intensely controversial not only among the unreconciled partisans of 'Ali but among the pious generally.[3] Mu'awiya tended to keep his own counsel, so we are again reduced to guesswork.

What were the alternatives? There were very few and an "Islamic" choice was impossible. By the late 670s, almost no Companion with any administrative skills and political experience was still alive, so Mu'awiya was compelled to look to the second generation. Apart from Yazid, who was in his mid-thirties, Mu'awiya had no other adult sons whom he thought competent. His other relatives (for example, his governor in the Hijaz, Marwan ibn al-Hakam) were highly controversial figures and anyway belonged to a rival clan of the Umayyad lineage.

[3] A somewhat more sympathetic portrait of Yazid can be found in Ibn 'Asakir; see James E. Lindsay, "Caliphal and Moral Examplar? 'Ali ibn 'Asakir's Portrayal of Yazid b. Mu'awiya," *Der Islam* 74 (1997).

There were two plausible claimants in the wider Islamic circle but they belonged to the very families and political groupings from which Mu'awiya had wrested the caliphate during the Civil War. The first was al-Husayn, last surviving son of 'Ali and Fatima, who lived quietly in Medina. He was fifty-five years old and deeply respected for his piety and manner of life but utterly without serious political experience. The other was 'Abdallah ibn al-Zubayr, the son of one of the leaders of the failed revolt against 'Ali in 656. He could claim to be a Companion, since he had been born during the Prophet's lifetime, but was only ten or so years old when Muhammad died. For Mu'awiya to nominate either Husayn or Ibn al-Zubayr as his successor was unthinkable and absurd. Quite apart from the fact that his kinsmen would never willingly give up the caliphate, there was the crucial matter of 'Uthman. Mu'awiya had opposed 'Ali with the claim that he was vindicating the martyred 'Uthman, "the wronged Imam," as he came to be known in Umayyad propaganda. Both 'Ali and al-Zubayr were implicated in 'Uthman's death; the caliphate could never go to their sons, even if Mu'awiya had thought them fit for it (and obviously he did not). There were sons of other Companions, whom later Islamic tradition portrayed as men of extraordinary learning and piety, the first scholars of the nascent community of believers and the authoritative transmitters of the Prophet's doctrine and example. But however we regard such assertions, none of them is recorded as having shown any desire for the caliphate. Moreover, such a nomination would have re-ignited the factionalism and social conflicts which had led to the first Civil War. A point that might escape a modern reader is that Yazid's mother was Maysun, from the Kalb tribe, whose warriors were the indispensable foundation of Mu'awiya's regime. The Kalb would have regarded the rejection of Yazid in favour of an outsider as an intolerable insult, which would have meant

the surrender of their status, prestige and power to some other group – for example, to the despised and fractious Iraqis or the feeble Hijazis. Such a step would have been a perfect recipe for renewed civil war.

Yazid was an imperfect choice but perhaps the only one who stood any chance of maintaining the equilibrium which Mu'awiya had so arduously striven to establish during his two decades of rule. He was well known and respected among Syria's tribal notables. Both through his mother's kin and his personal networks, he could rely on the same solid political base among the Syrian tribal warriors, as could his father. Sadly, either through bad luck or ineptitude, Yazid was unable to thread his way through the very difficult challenges that erupted on his father's passing. He died suddenly, in 683, just as his forces were on the verge of subduing Ibn al-Zubayr, the last serious obstacle to his consolidation of power. Possibly (though of course we can never know) a longer reign would have shown him to better advantage.

Legitimacy, or the lack of it, is not the whole story. The fundamental problem facing Mu'awiya was this: he managed, with consummate skill, the political world that he inherited in 661 but that world was changing rapidly. The balance of forces that he had achieved became irrelevant in the decade after his death. However well Yazid had learned the lessons taught by his father, they no longer applied by the time he came to power. Mu'awiya took over an empire in which there was a firm and clear-cut distinction between the (mostly) Arab-Muslim warrior élite and the mass of non-Muslim subjects. The entire financial system depended on this, as did the cohesion and self-identity of the Arab soldiery. Just five years after Mu'awiya's death, that distinction was beginning to erode, as demonstrated by the broad support that Mukhtar (an Arab notable) gained among the *mawali* (non-Arab converts, usu-

ally of servile origin) of Kufa. Mu'awiya never had to solve the problem of maintaining the integrity of the empire while incorporating a growing influx of non-Arab converts – but his successors did. Mu'awiya had to contend with the claims to religious leadership mounted by his rivals, in particular 'Ali and his sons, but he faced no Messianic or apocalyptic movements – his successors were bedevilled by them. Mu'awiya had to deal with tribal loyalties and jealousies – but nothing as massive and widespread as the tribal coalitions which poisoned Umayyad political life in the eighth century. He was free to consolidate and to tie up loose ends, not an easy task but one suited to his unique outlook and talents.

I have up to this point focused exclusively on Mu'awiya's dealings with his fractious Muslim subjects. Obviously, if he had failed in that task he would have failed in every other. However, his policy toward his non-Muslim subjects is no less crucial, since they constituted the overwhelming majority. For Mu'awiya, the Christians were particularly important, since they dominated the regions (Syria-Palestine) that he governed directly. Their presence was doubly sensitive; he pursued the war against Byzantium as energetically as circumstances allowed, but presumably Byzantium attracted and appealed to residual loyalties among his Christian subjects – at least to the Chalcedonians,[4] who were the dominant sect in Damascus, Palestine and Jordan. He managed the balancing act very adroitly. Syriac writers praise his tolerance, justice and even-handed-

[4] Adherents of the creed adopted at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE, which aimed to define, once and for all, the relationship between the divine and human natures of Christ. After much discussion, the Chalcedonian creed became the official formula of Constantinople and Rome. It was reaffirmed as the official doctrine of the Byzantine Empire at the Sixth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in 680 which, by chance, was the year of Mu'awiya's death. It remains the

ness and they were profoundly grateful for the two decades of peace he brought after so many decades of war and conflict. The contemporary testimony of a monk of Sinjar, John Bar Penkaye, is particularly striking:

> … after much fighting had taken place between them [the Arab factions in the Civil War], the Westerners, whom they call the sons of Ammaye [Banu Umayya], gained the victory and one of their number, a man called M'away, became king controlling the two kingdoms of the Persians and of the Byzantines. Justice flourished in his time and there was great peace in the regions under his control; he allowed everyone to live as they wanted. For they [the Muslims] held … an ordinance, stemming from the man who was their guide [Muhammad], concerning the people of the Christians and their monastic station. Also as a result of this man's guidance they held to the worship of the One God … Once M'awya had come to the throne, the peace throughout the land was such that we have never heard, either from our fathers or grandfathers or seen that there had ever been any like it.
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> [Brock, "North Mesopotamia," *JSAI* 9 (1987), 61.]

The long-term impact of Mu'awiya's policy on the Christian churches of Syria (and elsewhere) needs closer scrutiny. He may have been tolerant of different beliefs and practices; he might have been regarded as philo-Christian (though never at the expense of the political and social supremacy of Islam), but undoubtedly the revenues of the Roman Empire in Egypt and

creed of the Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Orthodox Church and their daughter-churches. Two major groups rejected the Chalcedonian formula: the somewhat misnamed Monophysites (who were especially influential in Egypt and northern Syria) and the Nestorians (concentrated in Mesopotamia and Iraq), though for diametrically opposite reasons. These churches still reject the Chalcedonian Creed.

Syria now flowed to a Muslim regime and were not going to be spent, as they had been under Byzantine rule, on the building and maintenance of churches and monasteries, the propagation of the faith or on charities managed by the bishops. Mu'awiya provided funds to restore the cathedral in Edessa after it was destroyed in an earthquake in 679 but this was an exception. We must assume that the revenue flowing to the churches was drastically reduced. Their incomes no longer came from imperial donation or dedicated provincial taxes but from private gifts and endowments. Mu'awiya's policy amounted to slow starvation.

Mu'awiya's tolerance had an impact on another level. He froze the distribution of bishoprics between the rival Chalcedonian and Monophysite churches, ending their bitter rivalry. Each church became free to appoint its own bishops, with little government interference. However, this policy, which created parallel hierarchies in many cities, meant a permanent parceling out and ultimately a shrinking of resources for both churches. His policy also ended any effort by the churches to reconcile their differences – what need was there when the Muslim government treated them equally? This ensured there would be no consolidation of their now reduced resources of wealth and personnel. Chalcedonians, Monophysites and Nestorians were left to make their own way as well as they could. In the long term, they were left to wither on the vine.

THE WAR AGAINST BYZANTIUM RENEWED

Despite Mu'awiya's gentle hand with his Christian subjects, we should not underestimate his commitment to the expansion of Islamic rule, though we have no idea how he interpreted the meaning and value of this expansion. He never publicly

proclaimed a goal of universal empire; he was very different from Alexander or Chinggis Khan. Muslim or Christian writers never even hint that he espoused any Messianic or apocalyptic program, so he apparently did not see his mission as ushering in the End of Times. Nor did he strive to make Islam the final and universal religion of mankind; on the contrary, analysis of his internal policies indicates that the last thing he wanted was a massive influx of converts. Even so, Mu'awiya spent his adult life building and expanding the Islamic Empire – as a subordinate commander in the Palestinian and Syrian campaigns of the 630s, as governor of Syria during the 640s and early 650s, and as caliph. He energetically pursued the Byzantine wars as governor; once he had secured his claim to the caliphate, he turned again to campaigns of conquest. These were directed to the Byzantine frontier, westward into North Africa and eastward to the far reaches of Iran. These campaigns might have been a political ploy to get restless tribesmen out of the garrison towns and give them no time to chew over their grievances against the regime, but that does not do him justice. All Mu'awiya's decisions were politically informed: he knew perfectly well that the caliphate was founded on *jihad*; that was its *raison d'être* and the Arab soldiery who had created it knew no other *métier*. Without new campaigns to provide them with a sense of purpose and direction, they would turn to fighting amongst themselves and even against him. Mu'awiya himself was part of that world and shared its values. The name of his office, Commander of the Faithful, *amir al-mu'minin*, implied that he had a duty to expand the frontiers of Islam. Mu'awiya's campaigns might also have been a way of redeeming his somewhat crooked path to power. If he captured Constantinople, who would care about accusations of trickery at Siffin? I rather doubt that Mu'awiya had a bad conscience about Siffin or

anything else but if his military initiatives could win over his critics, why not?

In his decentralized empire, the wars in North Africa and Iran were largely under the control of his governors in Egypt and Iraq, though we must assume that he authorized their overall policies. Byzantium was, however, different. It represented the front where he had spent more than a quarter of a century before he secured the caliphate. Sasanian Iran had fallen forever during the caliphate of his cousin 'Uthman; it was his task to deal with Byzantium. Living as he did in such a heavily Christian environment, surrounded by the imposing monuments of Roman rule, Byzantium must surely have loomed large in his thinking.

I shall deal only briefly with the North African and Iranian campaigns. Epic (though very temporary) conquests in North Africa, under the semi-legendary Sidi 'Uqba ibn Nafi', opened up new opportunities for expansion, but his death in battle (in 683) and the Second Civil War meant those opportunities could not be exploited until the 690s and 700s. In Iran, Arab armies had penetrated far to the northeast in 'Uthman's time but their control of the country was patchy and in many regions non-existent. Mu'awiya (or rather, Ziyad) recognized that isolated conquests and raids had little long-term value and took steps to consolidate the Muslim position in Iran. In 671, Ziyad sent some 50,000 men and their families from Basra and Kufa to settle in the frontier oasis of Marw. The colonization of Marw provided, for the first time, a solid basis for Muslim rule and expansion in Khurasan, Iran's remote but strategic north-eastern province. It also drained off excess troops from Iraq and thus reduced both the cost of government and the strength of the Iraqi garrisons. This compulsory transfer was the beginning of Arab settlement in Khurasan, of the Islamicization of that critical province, and perhaps ultimately of

the social tensions that eventually gave birth to the ʻAbbasid Revolution of 746–47.

Byzantium was a different matter. Once Muʻawiya had a firm grip on the caliphate, he vigorously renewed the land campaigns in Anatolia. These campaigns were relentless; they were mounted every summer and often in the winter as well. Naval raids against the southern and Aegean coasts of Anatolia were sometimes conducted in concert with the land campaigns and sometimes independently: Muʻawiya's generals were expected to lead both. He had no shortage of competent military leaders, as one example will show. When Muʻawiya was governor of Syria his favourite general was Habib ibn Maslama al-Fihri but when he died in 663, Muʻawiya turned to another battle-hardened veteran, Busr ibn Abi Artah al-ʻAmiri. Like Habib, Busr belonged to the Quraysh tribe. He had joined in the first North African campaigns in the 640s when very young, and commanded important naval and land expeditions against Byzantium when Muʻawiya was governor. He was Muʻawiya's fervent, and sometimes bloody-minded, partisan throughout the Civil War. Muʻawiya prized loyalty and talent, so his heavy reliance on Busr as a military commander is hardly surprising. What is surprising is that Busr was never rewarded with a governorship; perhaps Muʻawiya recognized that his talents lay in war, not administration.

The Arabic sources tell us very little about these raids except the names of their commanders but we know, especially from Theophanes, that they were enormously destructive. The archaeological evidence testifies to the rapid abandonment of the great cities of Aegean Anatolia; such towns as survived in this once deeply urban region shrank into hilltop fortresses to which villagers from the surrounding areas could flee when the Arab armies arrived. In the 660s, Muslim raiders had things much their own way; the Emperor Constans II (641–668) had

moved to Sicily in 661 and lived in Syracuse. His reasons are obscure; perhaps he despaired, after so many years of struggle, of trying to defend Anatolia against the Arabs and Greece against the Slavs. When he was assassinated (in his bath) in 668, the throne fell to his son Constantine IV (668–685), who proved a more effective commander. With his accession, the Byzantine position in Anatolia stabilized, though it would not be secure until the eighth-century counter-offensives of the Iconoclast emperors.

What was the objective of this constant warfare? Most commentators, noting that Anatolian towns were constantly raided and pillaged but never permanently occupied beyond the Taurus passes, have argued that the only goals were pillage and plunder. I think that is too narrow a reading. I would argue that Mu'awiya was conducting a war of attrition, to sap the economic and demographic foundations of Byzantine rule in Asia Minor and the Aegean and to wear down the Byzantine armies which Constans and Constantine constantly struggled to rebuild. The personnel and administrative resources available to Mu'awiya were limited; he could not provide a garrison for every city or strongpoint in Anatolia and still have enough mobile troops to fend off a serious Byzantine counter-offensive. More importantly, Anatolia was a high plateau, surrounded by imposing mountains. Its severe winters and lack of fodder made it difficult for Arab tribesmen and their camels to remain there during the cold months and its snowbound passes meant they could not be re-supplied from Syria. The once-dense urban network of Roman Anatolia was in severe decline, and Arab troops could not easily extort adequate supplies from a small, scattered population that lived in or near well-defended hilltop fortresses. Under the circumstances, Mu'awiya could resort only to short, incessantly repeated, campaigns.

The Byzantine Empire could not be picked off piece by piece, as Iran had been after the Battle of Nihavand (642) and the death of the last king, Yazdgird III (651). The only way to bring it down was to strike directly at Constantinople. However, Constantinople could only be successfully attacked if there was no danger of a counter-attack from the interior. The campaigns of pillage and plunder thus were (or can be interpreted as) a hollowing-out of the Byzantine Empire. If Constantinople fell, there would be plenty of opportunity (as there turned out to be under Ottoman rule) to restore at least some elements of Anatolia's urban network.

Mu'awiya's strategy culminated in the sea blockade of Constantinople from 674 to 678, in which the Muslim fleet based itself at Cyzicus on the Asiatic shore of the Sea of Marmara. This was not a siege so much as the use of continuous naval raids to isolate the city and disrupt the trade by which it lived and from which the Imperial government derived much of its revenues. During the naval campaign against Constantinople, the annual land raids into Anatolia continued; we can assume that they were partly meant to prevent Byzantine troops from threatening the Muslim naval base at Cyzicus or reinforcing the capital's defenses. Unfortunately, the Byzantine fleet had substantially recovered from the catastrophe of the Battle of the Masts (655) and was able to deploy a very effective new weapon, Greek fire, against the Muslim vessels. By the autumn of 678, the Muslim navy was compelled to retreat from the Sea of Marmara in increasing disarray and suffered severe losses in a storm as it sailed for home. Mu'awiya's hope of bringing down the Byzantine Empire through a relatively low-cost and low-risk strategy of attrition and harassment had failed; he avoided further confrontation for the rest of his reign. Greek sources say he was compelled to seek a truce and paid a substantial tribute – possibly as much as three thousand pounds of gold

per year, plus slaves and thoroughbred horses. However, even with this humiliating setback, his campaigns left the Byzantine Empire in a weakened condition for many decades.

The challenge of Constantinople was taken up forty years later by the caliph Sulayman ibn 'Abd al-Malik (715–717), who mounted a massive combined naval and land attack against the city with the largest forces he could assemble, under the command of his best general (and half-brother), Maslama ibn 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan: this expedition also failed, in one of the greatest military catastrophes suffered by the Arab Muslims. Constantinople fended off all further challenges for almost 500 years, until it was stormed and pillaged by the Christian forces of the Fourth Crusade in 1204. Not until 1453 did it fall to a Muslim army.

If Mu'awiya was neither a state-builder (as 'Abd al-Malik and Hisham would be), a great conqueror, the framer of a durable religio-political ideology, nor a man who was able to bequeath a stable political consensus, what was his importance to Islamic and world history? Was he merely a skilled political operative? He was, I think, far more. First, and most importantly, he saved the Muslim Empire from disintegration after the crisis unleashed by 'Uthman's death. It is entirely due to him that this vast enterprise did not suffer the fate of the empire carved out by Alexander the Great. Had 'Ali prevailed in the Civil War, it is hard to imagine he could have achieved this task, since even the reports of his fervent partisans show he had little talent for politics. We may well believe that he had a deep commitment to Islam, great courage, moral integrity and clarity of purpose, but he could not bend his followers to his will. At every turn they contradicted him, defied his authority, broke up into hostile and irreconcilable factions and in the end, murdered him.

We must also recognize the profound impact of Mu'awiya's decision to retain Damascus as his principal residence after his victory. In so doing, he not only cut his personal ties with his native Mecca but also the lingering ties of Islam's central government to its Arabian origins. Mu'awiya recognized that an empire that had absorbed half the Byzantine and all the Sasanian domains could not be ruled from a remote oasis in Western Arabia. Such an empire could only endure and flourish if its capital were moved from the fringes of the old "civilised world" to the long-established heartlands of settled agriculture, urban life, commerce, high culture, and ordered government. The Civil War, which had been largely fought in Iraq and Syria, demonstrated this point starkly. For the most pragmatic reasons, the centre of government had to be located where the main lines of commerce and communication intersected and where experienced administrators could be found.

It was natural that Mu'awiya would choose Damascus, since he had built a strong political base there during his years as governor of Syria but the city was well suited to an imperial role. It was close (but not too close) to the critical Byzantine frontier and centrally located between Iraq, Egypt, the Hijaz, and the Mediterranean ports, with well-established lines of communication. Its only real problem was that it was a medium-sized city in a medium-sized oasis; the direct revenues it yielded were inadequate to support a large army or a complex bureaucracy. In the long run, a transfer of power to the far more lucrative region of Iraq was probably inevitable.

Was the move from Medina to Damascus a traumatic change for Muslims – a trauma akin to moving the capital of the British Empire from London to Delhi? For many, it may have been. 'Abdallah ibn al-Zubayr, the stubborn and almost successful opponent of Yazid and 'Abd al-Malik in the Second Civil War, refused to leave the Hijaz. To him, government in the name of

the Prophet should remain in the home of the Prophet. Other groups connected with the old Muslim élite – the senior Companions and their descendants – probably felt the same way, since many of them continued to live in the Hijaz for at least part of their time. However, most Muslims no longer lived in the Hijaz nor even in the Arabian Peninsula; in the course of the great conquests much of the nomadic population of Arabia had left its homeland and migrated to Iraq and (to a lesser extent) other conquered territories. It is very hard to determine how they regarded "the old country." Did they, as strangers in a strange land, need the symbolic and emotional anchor of an Arabian caliphate securely fixed in Arabia? I can offer no firm answer to this question. During the 680s, 'Abdallah ibn al-Zubayr had the support of most Arabs except the Kalb (a tribe long established in Syria) and the Umayyads. Part of this support may have reflected a widely-felt longing to return the caliphate to Medina but part of it surely lay elsewhere – for example, that he symbolized the imagined unity and moral zeal of Islam before the time of the troubles in the 650s or even that he was the only viable alternative to Umayyad rule. Mu'awiya's decision to stay in Damascus did not undermine the religious status of Mecca and Medina. They remained sacred, the birthplace and cradle of the faith; the connection of the Arabs to their homeland was never in question.

Mu'awiya was not content just to keep his empire glued together, though that would have been no mean achievement. He vigorously continued the policy of military expansion inaugurated by Abu Bakr and 'Umar and thus confirmed that the caliphate was no upstart barbarian kingdom but a universal empire, the true successor to Sasanian Iran and the peer of Rome. He maintained and expanded the formidable navy he had created as governor of Syria, which throughout his caliphate dominated the Aegean and the eastern Mediterra-

nean. Quite apart from his lucrative campaigns in Cyprus and his occupation of Rhodes, he harassed Constantinople with this navy for four years. Under his aegis, Tunisia was occupied and Muslim troops reached the Atlantic, though the North African conquests would not be secured until the 690s. Muslim rule was firmly established in north-eastern Iran and the frontier pushed further east. He unrelentingly prosecuted the war against the Byzantine Empire and though he failed to conquer it, he drove the Byzantine frontier up to the Taurus passes and made much of central Anatolia a no man's land.

Mu'awiya established a number of practices and policies that shaped those of his successors for many generations. Most crucial were his recruitment practices for the Syrian army. Like his successors until Marwan II, he relied heavily on the Arab troops of Syria but did not try to create an élite regiment under his personal control. He had only a small police force and personal guard in Damascus, which he rarely used. He relied on his connections with the Syrian tribes to recruit his armies for the Byzantine campaigns and the struggle against 'Ali. Despite the changes introduced under 'Abd al-Malik and his successors, the later Umayyads continued to recruit their armies chiefly from the tribes of Syria until the fatal crisis of 743–44. Iraqi and Egyptian troops, with whom Mu'awiya had few personal ties, were deployed to expand the frontiers in Eastern Iran and North Africa but he never trusted them to support his regime. For that he used the Syrian tribesmen, living in their traditional, or newly established, grazing areas. In the north, the newly settled Qays tribes provided the troops for the Byzantine and Armenian frontiers, while the Kalb were the guardians of central Syria. The military system was altered in various ways under later Umayyads but in its basic structures and practices of the army remained the one Mu'awiya had put in place. Unfortunately, his successors became entangled in,

and sometimes fomented, the increasingly bitter factionalism among the Arab tribes (not only in Syria but in Iraq, upper Mesopotamia and Khurasan) that would ultimately destroy the dynasty's foundations, but this takes us far beyond the reign of Mu'awiya.

6

THE PRINCE OF OUR DISORDER: MU'AWIYA AS A SYMBOL OF CULTURAL TENSION

Mu'awiya poses many problems for Sunni writers of the late eighth and following centuries but all agree that he was responsible for transforming the caliphate (*khilafa*) into kingship (*mulk*). In their eyes, he turned government in accordance with the principles laid down by God and His Prophet into worldly domination, which retained the name of Islam but was no different from government by any other empire. He did this both by the way in which he came to power and by instituting a succession based on heredity instead of merit and standing in Islam. His prisons, police forces, bodyguards, and so on – which the pious early caliphs had not used – added insult to injury. Few denied his government was effective and for the most part moderate but it was a government of men, not God.

Mu'awiya and his supporters naturally did not accept such accusations. Mu'awiya used the title *'Abdallah*, "God's servant," his regime was *Sultan Allah,* "God's government," and the imperial treasury was *Mal Allah*, "God's wealth." These terms hint at an absolutist concept of government, at a ruler whose

authority comes directly from God and who answers only to Him. Although Mu'awiya's Umayyad successors came to think this way, it is not quite clear that he did.[1] He may simply have been trying to stress that his regime faithfully continued along the path laid down by the Qur'an, the Prophet and his first three successors (Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthman – but of course not 'Ali).

Quite apart from Mu'awiya's own claims, the pious attack on his regime did not go wholly unchallenged. Ibn Khaldun (1338–1406) recognized the consensus of his learned colleagues but argued that it was beside the point. In his analysis of the nature of politics, the changes Mu'awiya made to the political structure of the Islamic community were inevitable, by the very logic of human society. Ibn Khaldun struggled to reconcile Islamic ideals and worldly reality: both, he thought, were necessary dimensions of human life. People could achieve prosperity and salvation only if they lived their lives and built their communities in accordance with the Divine commandments. These commandments were known through revelation (the Qur'an), the teachings and example of the Prophet (the *Sunna*), and the efforts of pious and learned scholars to interpret and apply the sacred texts to the needs of daily life. However, the ideals of Islam could only be attained through a frank recognition of the realities of human nature and the inexorable dynamics of human social organization.

By their nature, people sought domination over others and the satisfaction of their innate appetites. If mutual destruction was to be avoided, principles of restraint and compulsion were

[1] On this point, see the fascinating if controversial discussion of P. Crone and M. Hinds, *God's Caliph*. The most unambiguous and fully articulated statement of caliphal absolutism is found in a letter composed by one of the last Umayyads, al-Walid II, in 733–34.

essential. In small communities – kinship groups or those who lived together in a restricted space – the restraint was applied through the natural force of tribalism or communal solidarity (*'asabiyya*), in which the group collectively enforced its standards on its members. In large-scale, anonymous societies, whether of disparate groups living jammed together in cities or those scattered across broad areas, only external compulsion could keep people from one another's throats. This compulsion was applied through *mulk*, which could mean sovereignty, kingship or royal power.

Ibn Khaldun argued two further points. First, neither communal solidarity (*'asabiyya*) nor sovereign power (*mulk*) was inherently good or bad; what mattered were the purposes to which they were applied. Second, by the very nature of human society, communal solidarity (*'asabiyya*) was inevitably transformed into kingship (*mulk*):

> … In Muhammad's opinion this world is a vehicle for transport to the other world. He who loses the vehicle can go nowhere … If kingship would sincerely exercise its domination over men for the sake of God … there would be nothing reprehensible about it.
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> [Ibn Khaldun-Rosenthal, I, 415–417 – slightly adapted]

The coming of Islam should have offered an escape from this process: first, it instilled in its adherents an internal restraint and morality that required no external compulsion and second, it reinforced the informal communal bonds of the desert Arabs' traditional *'asabiyya*. However, as the power of the living presence of the Prophet receded, Islam became (to use a modern expression) *routinized*. It could no longer generate an adequate sense of restraint in most men, though there were always exceptions. Islam's influence was dissipated by the enormous scope of the conquests and the sudden vast wealth

they generated. For all these reasons, Mu'awiya's actions were not blameworthy from a religious perspective; they stemmed from the political logic of the situation in which he and his contemporaries found themselves. Ibn Khaldun presented his apologia for Mu'awiya thus:

> When trouble arose between 'Ali and Mu'awiya as a necessary consequence of communal solidarity, they were guided by the truth and independent judgement. They did not fight for any worldly power … or for reasons of personal enmity … What caused their difference was their independent judgement as to where the truth lay … Even though 'Ali was in the right, Mu'awiya's intentions were not evil, for he aimed at the truth but missed it. Each was right in so far as his intentions were concerned. The nature of kingship requires that one person claim all glory for himself and appropriate it to himself alone. It was not for Mu'awiya to deny this to himself and his kinsmen. Kingship was a natural thing that communal solidarity by its very nature brought in its train … [His Umayyad kinsmen and their followers] banded together and were willing to die for him. Had Mu'awiya tried to lead them on to another course of action, had he opposed them and not claimed all the power (for himself and them), it would have meant the dissolution of the whole regime that he had consolidated.
>
> … Solomon and his father David had the kingship of the Israelites for themselves, as the nature of kingship demands, and it is well known how great a share of prophethood and truth they possessed.
>
> Likewise, Mu'awiya named Yazid as his successor, because he was afraid of the dissolution of his regime, inasmuch as the Umayyads did not want to see power surrendered to anyone else. Had Mu'awiya named anyone else as his successor, the Umayyads would have been against him. Moreover, they had a good opinion of Yazid. Mu'awiya would not have been the man to name Yazid his successor, had he believed him to be really

so wicked. Such an assumption must be absolutely excluded in Mu'awiya's case.

[Ibn Khaldun-Rosenthal, I, 421–423 – slightly adapted]

Whatever the rights and wrongs of the way Mu'awiya came to power or the purposes for which he used it, his uncanny political acumen was universally admitted. He exemplified the qualities of what Ibn Khaldun called political kingship (*mulk siyasi*): rulership that aimed at the security and prosperity of one's subjects in this world. Muslim writers believed his rulership was manifest in several personal characteristics. First was his complete imperturbability (*hilm*) – he always appeared patient and usually affable, never displayed anger publicly, even in the face of severe provocation, and kept his real thoughts hidden. Second, he was a superb judge of men and understood how to handle them. He knew his own purposes but consulted with everyone who counted, especially the tribal notables who recruited and commanded his troops. In a society that prized personal dignity and honor, he knew how to listen even when his mind was made up. He did not base his regime on his Umayyad kinsmen, tending to marginalize them, albeit in discreet, honorable and financially rewarding ways. For his governors and advisors he preferred men whose status depended on his favor but who had earned respect through their own merits and achievements. Third, he knew how to think strategically. Momentary setbacks (such as Siffin) could be exploited for long-term advantage and opponents (such as Ziyad ibn Sumayya) could be won over and even assigned sensitive positions. Every victory set the stage for the next step. So far as we can determine, his goals were limited and concrete – the re-establishment of internal peace and stability, the administrative consolidation of the conquests and the expansion of Islam's frontiers as far as resources permitted. His

one grand ambition was the conquest of Constantinople and the absorption of the Byzantine Empire into the caliphate. Far more than a mere political triumph, this would have symbolized the fulfilment of the new order brought by Islam. He did not succeed in that goal but though his failure must have been deeply disappointing, it did not deter him from the steady pursuit of his other aims. Mu'awiya made the art of politics look easy – so easy that his successors could never quite work out why they could not achieve the same things.

The evidence for this comes almost entirely from anecdotes and vignettes – much favoured by literary anthologists hunting for the most eloquent language, the most ironic aside, or the cleverest riposte. Mere veracity, let alone chronology and context, were hardly relevant. These stories should not be thought of as a record of actual events; a few may be authentic but others are embellished and many are clearly invented. Many anecdotes concerning Mu'awiya are also told about quite different people; if a story was good, the list of *dramatis personae* was unimportant. Nevertheless, even the stereotypes they purvey tell us how Mu'awiya was perceived and remembered; arguably, they preserve important aspects of his public persona. The stories about him are many and are found in every major medieval anthology. Al-Baladhuri alone assembled some 400 anecdotes, the largest single collection.

The most often repeated epigram is this: Mu'awiya once said, "If there is but a single thread between me and my subjects, I will never let it go slack without tugging on it and I will never let them pull it tight without loosening it up."There are others that are equally terse and to the point: "I do not use my tongue where money will suffice; I do not use the whip where my tongue will suffice; I do not use the sword where my whip will suffice. But when there is no choice I will use the sword." (Baladhuri, Ansab-LDV, no. 22, p. 11). When, to the surprise

of those present, he allowed a man to speak with extraordinary arrogance, he commented, "I do not insert myself between the people and their tongue, so long as they do not insert themselves between us and our sovereignty (*mulk*)" (Baladhuri, Ansab-LDV, no. 21, p 11).

Putting it in more current language, Mu'awiya knew when to be tough and when to back off. If he displayed great leniency, even in the face of grave insults or outrageous demands, there was always an unspoken threat if the matter went too far. He went to great lengths to win over (co-opt, we might say) his opponents but if they could not be reconciled or bought, there was a price to pay. He used displays of anger to intimidate enemies but as soon as he detected weakness or a willingness to bend, he moved quickly to forgive slights and display lavish generosity. Like any monarch, he set great store by the recognition of his rank and dignity but thought this was most effectively demonstrated through iron self-control.

Mu'awiya is also portrayed as having an almost uncanny sense of the consequences of an action. For example, a pietist's insults might sting but he would pose no threat if he were ignored; punishment would make him a martyr and a rallying point for the discontented. Better to leave him as a voice crying in the wilderness. Many of the anecdotes conveying these qualities are framed as dialogues between a wise, patient Mu'awiya and his proud and impetuous son and heir, Yazid. In these anecdotes, Yazid is portrayed not as a hot-headed young fool but as a man who embodied the conventional wisdom. (He is *never* portrayed as an irreligious libertine.) He is Mu'awiya's pupil (not a very good one, as it turned out) in the art of politics. A particularly telling example is this one, which sets Mu'awiya against 'Abdallah ibn al-Zubayr.

'Abdallah ibn al-Zubayr had a property next to one of Mu'awiya's and one day the servants of Mu'awiya and those of Ibn al-Zubayr got into a scuffle. Ibn al-Zubayr wrote to Mu'awiya: 'From 'Abdallah ibn al-Zubayr to Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan.[2] Your people have defeated us but if things get worse and we were on an equal footing, then 'Abdallah would teach you that your people would not be enough for you'. When Mu'awiya had read this letter he gave it to his son Yazid and said, 'What do you think about this?'. Yazid answered, 'Order someone to kill him! Then you would be free of his arrogance and vanity'. 'My son', responded Mu'awiya, 'he has sons and a family to defend him. If I sent a hundred men against him and gave each a thousand dirhams, I would spend 100,000 dirhams and I don't know who would have the worst of it. If his adherents won, I would have to send a thousand men and give them a million dirhams. Instead I will write him as follows: "From the Servant of God Mu'awiya, Commander of the Faithful, to 'Abdallah ibn al-Zubayr. I have received your letter, in which you say that we have defeated you with our people but if things were to get worse and we were on an equal footing, we should know that our people would not be strong enough to protect us. Well, then, the Commander of the Faithful makes you a gift of that property, with all the people attached thereto and you should accept it as a gift. Be well".' 'Abdallah responded, 'You have defeated us with your clemency and have treated us generously with your wealth. God give you, Commander of the Faithful, the best of recompense'. When the letter reached Mu'awiya he said to Yazid, 'Is this better, my son or what you proposed to do?'.

[Baladhuri, Ansab-LDV, no. 147, pp. 54–55]

This anecdote is not to be taken at face value; rather, it is meant to exemplify Mu'awiya's understanding of human nature by

[2] Note he does not address him correctly, as Commander of the Faithful.

illustrating his ability to defuse a crisis with a grand gesture. Perhaps unintentionally, it also hints at the treacherous political currents swirling around Mu'awiya's regime. Ibn al-Zubayr's father had fallen at the Battle of the Camel and Ibn al-Zubayr never accepted either 'Ali or Mu'awiya as the legitimate caliph – a view he barely troubled to conceal. After Mu'awiya's death and the martyrdom of 'Ali's younger son Husayn at Karbala in 680, Ibn al-Zubayr rejected the succession of Yazid and claimed the caliphate for himself. He continued to assert this claim when Marwan and 'Abd al-Malik took power in Damascus in 684–5. Between the death of Yazid (683) and 'Abd al-Malik's conquest of Iraq (689), Ibn al-Zubayr actually controlled more territory than 'Abd al-Malik but he was eventually cornered in Mecca and killed in 692. His presence in this and many other anecdotes about Mu'awiya reflects one element of the broad "Islamic" opposition to the Umayyad capture of the caliphate. For Mu'awiya and the later Umayyads, this opposition was like a chronic illness that could not be cured, only treated. Mu'awiya could never get men like Ibn al-Zubayr to recognize the legitimacy of his regime but he could try to neutralize them. In evaluating stories of this kind, it is essential to recall that the opposition to Mu'awiya was always mounted in the name of Islam but "Islam" could mean many things; it included the very disparate claims of various pro-'Alid parties, the Khawarij, and the adherents of Ibn al-Zubayr.

Many anecdotes inform us that Mu'awiya was subject to the criticism of those who believed they were better Muslims than he. We do not need a particular historically valid incident to recognize that there were Muslims who saw their religion in the framework of the Meccan rather than the Medinan suras, as a religion focused on preparing for the life to come rather than the life of this world. For them, the struggle for political power and the exercise of that power were inherently corrupt-

ing, because they focused attention on precisely those things the Qur'an denounced – wealth, prestige and children. For Mu'awiya, self-possession in the face of self-righteousness was essential: it was unthinkable that he should apologize for who he was and what he had achieved. However, such criticisms whittled away at the legitimacy of his rule, so he could not afford to let them go entirely unanswered:

> Al-Miswar ibn Makhrama having come before Mu'awiya, the latter said to him: 'I am told that you have spoken ill of me. What cause do you have to reprove me? Do you not know that I combat the enemies of the Muslims, give prosperity to the believers, take on the burden of their affairs and give gifts to those among them who come to me?'. 'Yes, by God', answered al-Miswar. Then Mu'awiya said, 'I adjure you by God to tell me if you have committed any sins'. Al-Miswar said, 'Of course I have'. Then Mu'awiya continued, 'Then why do you have any better right than I to hope for God's forgiveness?'. 'May God forgive you, Commander of the Faithful', exclaimed al-Miswar.
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> [Baladhuri, Ansab- LDV, no. 88, pp. 31–2]

Mu'awiya was quite ready to admit that he was a different kind of man and ruler from his predecessors but he argued that his contribution to the Community was, none the less, valuable. In a sermon delivered in Medina (the lions' den) he said:

> I meant to follow the path of Abu Bakr and 'Umar but I could not. Rather, I have followed a path which has been fortunate and beneficial for you, even if it is somewhat self-serving on my side. So be content with what you have got from me, even if it is only a little bit. When good flows continuously, even if it is but a little, it satisfies, while anger disturbs life. I extend my hand only to him who extends his to me. As to statements in which those who cherish rancour seek relief, I pay no attention to them unless they go to extremes.

[Baladhuri, Ansab-LDV, no. 131, p. 48]

Mu'awiya's religious commitment is notoriously difficult to assess. In the crowd of anecdotes, he is extremely taciturn about it. We do not find overt hostility to religion or even ironic comments about it but neither is there any interest in talking about it at anything more than a very superficial level. A few Qur'anic citations appear in his speeches but they are never occasions for debate or reflection. He believed in God, in the coming judgment, and in the need to accept what God sends to us, whether good or bad:

> Mu'awiya was ill and stretching out his forearms, which looked like stripped palm branches, he said, 'What is the world but something that passes by, permitting us only a taste. I do not wish to remain alive among you more than three days and then I wish to rejoin my Lord'. One of those present said, 'And in what manner do you believe you will rejoin him, Commander of the Faithful?' Mu'awiya answered, 'In whatever manner God wills to judge me; he knows that I have never had a passion for what He abhors'.
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> [Baladhuri, Ansab-LDV, no. 136, p. 49]

Mu'awiya admired deep piety (though he could be quite sardonic about it) but he did not share it. He was not indifferent to religion but neither did it engage him. Islam was unquestionably true and binding but in his statements about it he referred to no concrete moral or legal commandments. God singled out Muhammad as His messenger and made him the best of men but Mu'awiya never discussed the nature of his mission. For him, Islam was self-evident, a fact to be accepted. It was not a challenge to reflect or to construct a new society and a new way of life.

Mu'awiya's relationship to Christianity provokes some intriguing questions. Among Syrian Christian writers of the

early eighth century, Mu'awiya was noted (almost revered) for the peace and security he brought after decades of war and turmoil and for his justice towards and tolerance of the Christian churches. Does this imply that he was religiously indifferent, a Muslim by expedient rather than sincere acceptance? His Muslim opponents thought so and most modern commentators follow their lead. However, some scholars now argue it suggests an effort to construct a tacit monotheist alliance of "Believers" in which Muslims – the followers of Muhammad and his revelation – would play the leading part but in which Christians and Jews (who were not as strong a presence in Syria-Palestine as they were in Iraq) would retain their own organization, structures and practices. Or does it simply mean that Mu'awiya had enough trouble keeping his co-religionists under control and was wary of doing anything that might provoke conflict and possible rebellion in his Christian subjects in Syria?

Wellhausen, normally the most critical of scholars, mused about the direction Mu'awiya might have taken. Since he cites no evidence in support of his thoughts and does not pursue their implications, we can suppose that he simply meant to underline how shallow Islam's roots were in Mu'awiya's Syria and how powerful was the country's Roman Christian tradition. However casual Wellhausen's remarks may be, they force us to recognize that the socio-cultural identity of the Arabs of Syria was still unsettled and fluid thirty years after the conquest. The history we take for granted might have been very different:

> The influence of the Graeco-Aramaic culture, the Christian church and the Roman kingdom under which they [the southern Arab tribes of the Kalb, the Quda'a and the Azd Sarat which dominated central Syria] had come had not failed

> to leave traces upon them. A regulated state government and military and political discipline were not new ideas to them … They followed their Emir where he led them, because at heart they cared just as little for Islam as he did. The Muslims there did not live apart in colonies founded especially for them but together with the children of the land in the old towns of Damascus, Emesa, Qinnesrin, etc. … The Christian traditions of Palestine and Syria were also held in high esteem by the Muslims; Syria was for them, too, the Holy Land. Mu'awiya had himself proclaimed *Khalifa* in Jerusalem; afterwards he prayed at Golgotha and at the grave of St. Mary … It is a pity that, instead of becoming *Khalifa*, he did not confine himself to Syria and found there a national kingdom which would have been more firmly established than the 'nationless' universal rule in the East in which the Arabs perished. *He may possibly have had that idea but have found the execution of it impossible, for then he would have had to renounce Islam and come over to the church, for at that time Islam did not yet tolerate any separate kingdoms.*
>
> [Wellhausen, *Arab Kingdom*, pp. 132–135; *my italics*]

In the realm of religion, as in so many others, Mu'awiya's skill at masking himself makes him tantalizing. However, we should not ask the evidence to tell us more than it realistically can. Probably Mu'awiya, like so many men of his generation, regarded Islam as essentially an Arab affair, a religion vouchsafed to the Arabs through an Arab prophet, the boundary marker between them and the conquered peoples and the symbol of the God-given superiority that entitled them to rule. It was the strongest (and perhaps the only) glue which held these famously contentious tribesmen together. It is hard to imagine that Mu'awiya would deliberately have taken any steps which might have weakened the bond between Islam and Arab identity. Leaving the Christians and Jews to their own devices

was a strategy for encouraging them to stay where they were and not to try to slip into the Arab–Muslim ruling class.

A fascinating part of Mu'awiya's policy and legacy is his connection with Jerusalem, which scholars have only recently begun to explore. It is plausible that the motive for the Arab-Muslim drive into Syria and Palestine, beginning with the disastrous Mu'ta expedition in 630, was to take control of the great monotheist sanctuary of Jerusalem. The earliest battles, in 634, were fought in places strategically located to deny Jerusalem any assistance from Byzantine forces: Gaza (the main route between Egypt and Palestine), Pella/Fihl (on the Jerusalem-Damascus road) and Ajnadayn. Even Tabari's somewhat laundered traditions about the siege and capitulation of Jerusalem show that this city had a special place in the early Muslim imagination.

Jerusalem played a central role in Umayyad politics and the projection of their public image for more than half a century (660–715), from Mu'awiya to al-Walid. Mu'awiya's troops proclaimed him "Commander of the Faithful" in Jerusalem in 660 and the ceremonies connected with this were focused on Christian holy sites. It is possible he erected a mosque on the Temple Mount, though the evidence (almost entirely textual) is disputable. The Frankish pilgrim Arculf, writing about his visit to the Holy Land in around 682, states there was a Muslim sanctuary on the Temple esplanade, a quite large but crudely built timber structure, on top of the ruins. It (or a predecessor) seems to have been erected very soon after the Arab occupation of Jerusalem; several Christian texts, including a very early one, ascribe it to 'Umar, during his visit to the city in 638. Mu'awiya may have enlarged the original structure (perhaps in 661–2) but he undertook no major construction. However, he does seem to have cleared the site of the debris of the ruined pagan temples and statuary placed there by Emperor Hadrian in

around 133. What was his purpose? Perhaps he simply wanted to maintain the dignity of the Muslim prayer hall, simple as it was. In contrast, under ʿAbd al-Malik and al-Walid, Jerusalem's special sanctity was vigorously promoted, but they explicitly turned their back on the city's Christian monuments and re-sanctified the Jewish temple, with all its complex associations. This issue needs very careful scrutiny, since Jerusalem, while undoubtedly sacred to later generations of Muslims, may have lost its unique status in the Muslim imagination by the time of Hisham (724–43). While not neglecting Jerusalem, the ʿAbbasids refocused attention on Mecca and Medina, to stress their familial and ideological connection with the founder of Islam.

If later Sunni writers could not quite work out what Muʿawiya's religious commitments were – indeed if he really had any – none doubted his love for the folklore and poetry of ancient Arabia. The evidence (as for so many things about him) is anecdotal. It is plausible enough, since he had been born and grew to adulthood in Jahiliyya society. Apart from his son and successor, Yazid, whose reign was very short, he is the one figure among the early caliphs who seems likely to have felt such a fascination. He is said to have commissioned the antiquarian and folklorist ʿAbid ibn Sharya to compile a book on the history and antiquities of Yemen and this work is said to have been incorporated into much later works. Sadly, this story is very likely to be untrue. ʿAbid is a semi-legendary figure, about whom we have no credible information, and his work is not attested before the early ninth century. He may be a sheer forgery, an Ossian *avant la lettre*. However, one papyrus fragment survives which links an eighth-century compilation to the work commissioned by Muʿawiya.[3] The evidence is tenta-

[3] Nadia Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri*, Vol. 1, *Historical Texts*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957.

tive but lends some substance to the story. However, even if 'Abid is a fiction, it could be argued that his name was attached to Mu'awiya precisely because his interest in these matters was widely known. Several anecdotes show Mu'awiya evaluating the merits of various poets or comparing the status and virtues of different tribes. It is possible that he could only rule in the manner he did because he possessed a deep knowledge of the tribes and their status relative to one another and shared the culture and values they cherished.

Mu'awiya's love for traditional Bedouin culture was a matter of taste, not lifestyle; he was a townsman by birth and upbringing and preferred to live in towns (or his country estates) rather than in a tent. There is irony in the poignant verses attributed to his wife, Maysun bint Bahdal al-Kalbiyya, an authentic daughter of the desert, who felt uprooted and desperately out of place as the caliph's consort:

> A wind-whipped tent – I love that more than a lofty palace!
> I cherish wearing a coarse-woven cloak, my eyes not burning with tears, more than fine translucent gowns.
> A bit of dry bread in a corner of my tent tastes far better to me than the soft loaves (of the city).
> I love the voice of the winds in every mountain pathway more than the click of castanets,
> A dog that barks at night time visitors (except for me) more than a tame house cat,
> A stubborn young camel that trails behind women's camel-borne howdahs more than a fleet mule,
> And one of my wiry, noble-hearted cousins more than a big, stout fellow, too well fed.[4]

The Arabic sources portray Mu'awiya as one of the most

[4] *Delectus Veterum Carminum Arabicorum*, T. Noeldeke, ed., p.25. The last line is a reference to her husband's notorious obesity.

human Muslim rulers of the Middle Ages, a man who had no great qualms about indulging his appetites but was not dominated by them. He was far from being a stern figure of austerity and severe self-discipline (like ʻUmar ibn al-Khattab) such as Muslim moralists loved to extol, but neither did his extravagance and personal excesses provoke moral outrage, as did those of his son, Yazid. Muʻawiya seems affable, generous and good-humored but with a hard edge when threats seemed real or insults went too far. His actions were never truly disinterested, never purely charitable nor wholly humanitarian; fundamentally, they were calculated to achieve his goals or stymie another's. He was an excellent companion to many but real friend to very few. We cannot know if this is the real Muʻawiya, but I would argue that it is a portrait grounded in real memories of the man and his impact on those around him. However much the stories were embellished or distorted, a hard core of memory remained intact.

Muʻawiya seems to have enjoyed matching wits with his governors, who spoke to him with extraordinary familiarity and whom he treated very much as his peers (as, in many respects, they were). He asked ʻAmr ibn al-ʻAs, "How far does your cunning reach?" ʻAmr answered, "I have never been trapped in a situation from which I did not know how to extricate myself." Muʻawiya countered, "I have never been trapped in any situation from which I *needed* to extricate myself" (Baladhuri, Ansab-LDV, no. 104, p. 37). He did not always have the last word in these exchanges. He instructed two hard-bitten veterans, al-Mughira ibn Shuʻba of Kufa and ʻAmr ibn al-ʻAs of Egypt, to present themselves at court. ʻAmr commented to al-Mughira that Muʻawiya plainly meant to strip them of their governorships and proposed a plan to block it: "When he receives you, tell him you feel worn out and ask him to make you governor of Medina or al-Ta'if. For my part, I will ask to

go to Mecca or Medina. That way he will suspect that we plan to stir up a revolt against him." Each followed this script and Mu'awiya said, "You two are intent on some evil; go back to your current posts" (Baladhuri, Ansab-LDV, no. 116, p. 41).

Every man needs a few vices. Mu'awiya's great weakness was food; in his later years he became very fat. As with most things, he was content as he was and wasted little energy bemoaning his lack of self-control, but he knew well enough that such indulgence had a cost. Malik ibn Hubayra al-Sakuni of Egypt, a Companion of the Prophet and one of the Umayyads' strongest partisans, came to meet Mu'awiya. During the conversation he inadvertently extended his leg and Mu'awiya commented, "I'd like to have a slave girl with legs like yours, Abu Sa'id." Malik shot back, "And with a bottom like yours, Commander of the Faithful." "Fair enough," answered Mu'awiya, "if you start something you have to take the consequences" (Baladhuri, Ansab-LDV, no. 107, p. 38).

Mu'awiya had a strong libido which he made few efforts to restrain, though he is never accused of exceeding the Qur'anic limit of four wives and "what your right hand owns." He prided himself on his sexual prowess and was jealous lest anyone else surpass him. Yet even in this delicate area, he could laugh at himself: while he was secluded with an Iranian slave girl from the rough frontier province of Khurasan, someone chose this awkward moment to present him with a new slave girl (just who was bold enough to intrude thus, we do not know). He made love to the new girl and then she left as abruptly as she had come. He asked his Khurasani slave (whose *hilm* was obviously equal to his own), "How do you say 'lion' in Persian?" "*Kaftar*," she said. With that, he left, saying, "I am a *kaftar*!" Someone asked him, "Commander of the Faithful, do you know what '*kaftar*' means?" "A lion," he said. "No," they replied, "it means a lame hyena." "Well done," he said, "that Khurasani girl

knows how to take her revenge" (Baladhuri, Ansab-LDV, no. 155, p. 59).

He enjoyed music, suspicious to the pious even in his day, since it was so closely associated with the drinking bouts and sensuality of the Jahiliyya. A famous musician once took hold of the knocker on the door of Mu'awiya's apartment (presumably in lieu of a tambour or castanets) and began beating time with it as he sang in Mu'awiya's direction. Mu'awiya involuntarily started swinging his foot in time to the music. A courtier, somewhat taken aback, asked him what he was doing. "The noble man (*al-karim*)," he said, "is moved and stirred (*tarub*) by music" (Baladhuri, Ansab-LDV, no. 49, p. 19).

Finally, there were Mu'awiya's relations with the women in his household, an area in which he did not always have the upper hand. I have written of episodes with his daughter Ramla and a Persian slave-girl. On another occasion, 'Amr ibn al-'As (who always enjoyed teasing him) accused him of letting himself be bossed around by his first wife, Fakhita bint Qaraza. "The wives of noble men dominate them," Mu'awiya retorted. "Base men lord it over their wives" (Baladhuri, Ansab-LDV, no. 83, p. 30). He was a man who could take life as it was, even as he deftly turned an insult against his tormentor.

In his last years, we are told, he complained greatly about his growing physical ailments – painful for a man who so relished the good things of this world – but he never lapsed into bitterness or remorse. He did not follow the path of many old men who have held power too long and become vindictive and suspicious. He was at peace with himself and the life he lived. He remained watchful to the end but seemed to have no great anxiety about the future.

Mu'awiya died, attended by his two daughters, at his palace in Damascus in April 680, after a very brief illness. He held a public audience almost at the very end, sitting upright, his

head anointed with oil and his eyes lined with antimony, so his visitors should think he was in the best of health. We are told that in his last illness, he related a little story to the people attending him. The story rings true and perhaps sheds a ray of light on his sense of the sacred:

> The Messenger of God clothed me with a shirt. One day I held it up while he pared his nails. I then took his parings and put them in a long-necked bottle. So when I die clothe me in that shirt and cut up those parings, grind them up and sprinkle them in my eyes and mouth. Thus God may have mercy on me through their power to bless (*baraka*).
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> [Tabari, XVIII, 212]

Even in death, Mu'awiya seems ironic. He was the most consummate politician of his age, famed for his acumen, patience, and far-sighted planning, but almost immediately on his passing an immense storm burst upon his empire. In a few anecdotes – almost certainly concocted decades later – we hear him advising his son and heir, Yazid to beware of certain men, especially al-Husayn ibn 'Ali and 'Abdallah ibn al-Zubayr. Foreseeing the coming tragedy with almost perfect clairvoyance, Mu'awiya notes that al-Husayn is an inoffensive fellow; the Iraqis may well beguile him into revolt but he should be pardoned. As for Ibn al-Zubayr, he is "a crouching lion," "a sly fox," and "a heaving reptile." If he rebels, he should be torn limb from limb (Tabari, XVIII, 208–210).

If Mu'awiya really did foresee these possibilities, he did not act to forestall them. He had been successful in winning the great tribal chiefs to his side; they were the foundation of his regime and in his mind, it was they who made or broke a ruler. He saw no reason to fret unduly about a few malcontents in Mecca and Medina, isolated and far from the centre of political and military power. That was an odd failure of foresight

in such a realist. Al-Husayn and Ibn al-Zubayr were sons of revered Companions, natural magnets for opposition to the continuation of Umayyad rule. Moreover, their fathers had died violently in the struggle to assert their claims to the caliphate. It would have been reasonable to imagine that the sons would try to vindicate their fathers.

Within months of Mu'awiya's death, everything began to fall apart; the chaos of the 650s seemed to be returning, even worse in scale and intensity. Yazid could count on the loyalty of the Syrian army and his governors, especially 'Ubaydallah ibn Ziyad in Iraq, but everything he did – or more accurately, everything done on his behalf by his agents – to counter the challenges from al-Husayn and Ibn al-Zubayr made things worse. He was dealing with opponents whom he could not conciliate or buy off, because they had only contempt for him as a Muslim and a person. Both Kufans and Hijazis saw an opportunity to win back the position that they had lost under Mu'awiya.

As they had been in Mu'awiya's time, their challenges were disastrous. Al-Husayn and most of his followers perished at Karbala in 680, while 'Abdallah ibn al-Zubayr was penned up in Mecca and on the verge of defeat by 683. However, al-Husayn, to a far greater degree even than his father, became a martyr for the Prophet's family and the cause of Islam. His martyrdom fuelled an undying hatred for the "godless Umayyads" and an enduring religious movement. Ibn al-Zubayr could not claim the same status but during the siege of Mecca, the Ka'ba itself was bombarded and burned. To the religiously-minded, this demonstrated the utterly corrupt nature of the regime. Yazid was on the verge of a decisive military victory at the moment of his death, but we do not know whether he could ever have redeemed the way in which it had been won.

On Yazid's unexpected death (he was not forty years old), Ibn al-Zubayr's bid for the caliphate miraculously revived. He received important support, even from long-serving supporters of Mu'awiya. The Umayyad regime was saved only by the leaders of the Kalb and its allied tribes, who called Mu'awiya's kinsman, Marwan ibn al-Hakam, out of retirement and swore allegiance to him as Commander of the Faithful. Though he was some eighty years old, Marwan quickly demonstrated that he had lost none of his political sagacity and personal courage. He won the day for the Umayyads (and the Kalb) in the great Battle of Marj Rahit near Damascus in 684. Though he died the next year, he had in that time established a narrow but solid power base. His son and successor, 'Abd al-Malik (685–705), struggled mightily and successfully to re-establish the Umayyad regime on a new, more secure, foundation. His achievements endured and were transmitted not only to the later Umayyads but also to their ungrateful 'Abbasid successors.

'Abd al-Malik strove, as Mu'awiya never had, to build a clear ideological foundation for Umayyad rule, a convincing statement of their right to lead the Muslim community. The failure of his efforts, and those of his successors, was perhaps less their fault than the inevitable result of the way Mu'awiya's carefully balanced system of politics collapsed after 680. It could be argued that even Mu'awiya's political genius purchased only a twenty-year respite from factionalism and civil war. However, even if we accept this argument, that respite was not trivial: it was crucial to the survival, and ultimately the flourishing, of the whole enterprise of Islam.

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EI2	Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition. 12 vols. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1954–2005
JAOS	Journal of the American Oriental Society
JESHO	Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient
JSAI	Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam
JSS	Journal of Semitic Studies
RSO	Rivista degli Studi Orientali
SI	Studia Islamica

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