# The Islamic Conquests

## FRED M. DONNER

## Introduction

The term "Islamic Conquests" – sometimes also called, particularly in earlier scholarship, the "Arab Conquests" – is a loose designation for a far-flung and complex set of historical phenomena associated with the rise and spread of Islam in the Near East during the seventh and eighth centuries CE. At the center of these developments was the first appearance in western Arabia of the religion of Islam – or, more precisely, of its precursor in the Believers' movement launched by the prophet Muḥammad (d. 632) and his followers.[1] Closely associated with the Believers' movement occurred the crystallization and rapid expansion of a state whose leaders (the *caliphs*, or temporal successors to Muḥammad at the head of the Believers' community) identified with the new movement and took it as one of the main justifications for their expansion. It is this process of caliphal state expansion, which included military campaigns launched by the caliphs, that is usually called the "Islamic conquests."

The term "Islamic conquests" is itself derived from the Arabic–Islamic historical sources, the most important of which for this theme were literary compilations assembled during the second to fourth centuries AH (eighth to tenth centuries CE). These sources, produced by the Islamic community itself to describe in retrospect this crucial early chapter in the community's history, refer to it using the term *futūḥ* or *futūḥāt* (literally, "openings").[2] This term does not seem to have been used in pre-Islamic times; traditionally, raiding in pre-Islamic Arabia (usually undertaken for purely mundane purposes) was called *ghazwa*. In the new Muslim community, military raids to spread the faith or to defend the community were also called *ghazwa*, "raiding," not *futūḥ*, which was reserved for the broader process by which new territories were incorporated into the realm ruled by the caliphs. As a term, then, *futūḥ* definitely has a retrospective quality. The military dimension of the expansion process, however, has led to a tendency to translate *futūḥ* as "conquest" plain and simple, even though it might more idiomatically be rendered as "incorporation" or "integration" (that is, of new areas into the Islamic state). The term "Islamic *conquest*" may itself thus be considered slightly misleading, because it may emphasize too greatly the military aspect of the process. However, the term "Islamic conquest" is by now probably too deeply ingrained in Western scholarship to be discarded. When using it, however, we must be aware that it refers to far more than merely military victories and questions of tactics and military organization. While military

action was an important part of the picture, we must recognize that the "conquest" raises as well such diverse questions as the role of religious proselytization, the crystallization and evolution of state institutions, the role of economic and other motivations in the expansion, the formation of a communal identity, linguistic change, and the ideological, political, social, and economic transformations effected by the conquests. The issue is further complicated by the uncertainty surrounding the changing meaning of *jihād* in the time of Muḥammad and his first followers, and its role in the expansion process: was it a religious call to "holy war," or a more general injunction to struggle for goodness in society and life that only occasionally required the use of force?[3] In the following sections, an attempt will be made to sketch out the main features of this complex of historical developments, including both the expansion of the state by military action and the broader social, political, and religious questions associated with this expansion.

The Islamic conquests can be roughly divided into two main phases, which we may designate the "charismatic" and the "institutional" phases. The first or charismatic phase lasted from the first decades until the middle decades of the seventh century CE. It began with the emigration of the prophet Muḥammad from Mecca to Medina in Arabia in 622 CE, and corresponded to the first burst of expansive energy that carried Muḥammad's community of Believers throughout Arabia and into the surrounding lands of Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and Iran. This initial phase was coterminous with a process of state formation – that is, with the crystallization of the new caliphal (or Believers') state, centered in an area (western Arabia) where there had been no state before – and raises many challenges of interpretation. These include: What was the exact nature of the initial impulse to expand? What was the relationship of this original expansionist impulse to the nascent state? What was the relative importance of ideological and material factors in the process of state formation? How did the new state institutionalize itself? etc. By the second or institutional phase, which can be dated from the middle of the seventh until the middle of the eighth century CE – roughly coterminous with the rule of the Umayyad dynasty (661–750), the caliphal state had assumed fairly well-defined institutional form, and the process of expansion and conquest was clearly the result of intentional state policy (that is, the conscious policy of the rulers, the Umayyad caliphs) realized by the institutional apparatus of the state.

## Survey of the First or Charismatic Phase of the Conquests

Before proceeding further, it will be helpful to sketch the main events of the first phase of the conquest and expansion movement. The striking thing about this phase is its astonishing rapidity; for in a little over thirty years, the Believers appear to have established their hegemony over a vast region stretching from west of the Nile to eastern Iran.

The expansion of Muḥammad's community of Believers began already in his lifetime, following his emigration in 622 CE from his home-town, Mecca, to the small oasis town of Medina (Yathrib) in western Arabia. During his decade in Medina, Muḥammad gradually overcame internal opposition and began to launch raids (*ghazwa*) to extend the borders of the community to other towns and groups in western Arabia; by the last years of his life, he had forged alliances with many towns and pastoral groups in western Arabia, and also with some more distant groups in Yemen, Oman, eastern Arabia, and on the north Arabian fringes of Syria.

When Muḥammad died in 632, the Believers chose Muḥammad's confidant and father-in-law, Abū Bakr, to be his successor as temporal ruler of the community he had founded. (Later tradition called him *khalīfa*, caliph – "successor"). Muḥammad's death, however, caused some former allies to repudiate their ties with Medina, or at least to refuse to pay a tax that Muḥammad had ordained just before his death; in western Arabia, a few groups were even hoping to exploit the Believers' momentary disarray to plunder Medina. Abū Bakr therefore organized a series of campaigns whose goal was to defend Medina and to ensure payment of tax from all groups and to suppress any opposition. This opposition is indiscriminately called *ridda*, "apostasy," by the later Muslim sources, even though some groups in no way rejected the beliefs they had adopted in Muḥammad's day, but merely demurred on payment of tax; and, for convenience, the campaigns in which Abū Bakr subdued Arabia are usually simply called the "Ridda wars," even though they involved not only the disciplining of wayward former allies, but the outright subjugation of some Arabian groups that had had no prior contact with Muḥammad or the Believers' movement at all.[4]

Abū Bakr first stabilized the situation around Medina itself by sending troops to defeat the mutinous local groups; he also dispatched a small force, commanded by Usāma ibn Zayd, that Muḥammad had organized just before his final illness to raid southern Syria – a force that, after a quick foray to the north, returned to bolster the defenses of Medina. Abū Bakr then dispatched columns of troops under trusted commanders to bring all of Arabia under Medina's control, directing them against the most powerful opposition groups. He appointed the tactical genius Khālid ibn al-Walīd, commanding a force made up mainly of Meccans and Medinese, to subdue opposition in the Najd among the Asad, Tamīm, and other tribes, who had rallied around figures identified in the Islamic sources as "false prophets" – Ṭalḥa ibn Khu-waylid and the "prophetess" Sajāḥ, whom he chastised in the battles of al-Buzākha and al-Butāḥ. After gathering further tribal allies, Khālid marched on to deal with the most serious rebellion of all, that led by the "false prophet" Musaylima of the Ḥanīfa tribe in the rich oasis of al-Yamāma (the region around modern Riyadh). Musaylima's army was defeated in the bloody battle of "Aqrabā," and the Ḥanīfa tribe was placed under the supervision of a garrison. Meanwhile, Abū Bakr also dispatched a number of armies to confront other groups elsewhere in Arabia that either resisted or held aloof from the new state in Medina. One traversed the east Arabian coastal districts; another subdued 'Uman and the Mahra tribe (the latter in modern Dhofar province of southeastern Arabia); and others brought to heel the troublesome "false prophet" al-Aswad al-'Ansī in Yemen. Altogether, Abū Bakr dispatched eleven separate forces, which during the two years of his caliphate (632–4) brought the entire Arabian peninsula into obedience to Medina. These campaigns were of critical importance for the future of the Believers' movement, because they provided the caliphs with the manpower they needed to expand outside Arabia – particularly the hardy mountain villagers of Yemen and pastoral nomads of northern Arabia.

The prophet had shown a special interest in Syria, and had dispatched raiding parties in its direction several times during his life.[5] Abū Bakr also seems to have been interested in expanding the Believers' control into Syria, and organized four armies to invade it during the autumn of 633 CE, commanded by Yazīd ibn Abī Sufyān, 'Amr ibn al-'As, Shuraḥbīl ibn Ḥasana, and Abū 'Ubayda ibn al-Jarrāḥ. At first these forces concentrated on bringing under control the desert fringes of Syria, which were

occupied with Arabic-speaking tribesmen, and avoided attacking Byzantine garrisons or major towns (with the exception of an early raid against Gaza). In time, however, the Believers began to attack the towns of southern Syria, including Bostra, Faḥl (Pella), Baysān (Scythopolis), Damascus, Ḥimṣ (Emesa), and Baʿlabakk (Heliopolis), in the reigns of Abū Bakr's successors ʿUmar (634–44) and ʿUthmān (644–56). The Byzantine emperor Heraclius organized a large army to re-take these areas, but in the pitched battles at Ajnādayn and Yarmūk (around 636 CE) the Byzantine forces were shattered, and Heraclius withdrew from Syria, leaving the region open as far as the Taurus foothills. By about 650 CE most towns, even coastal cities like Caesarea and Tripoli, had been reduced by siege or (more frequently) had signed a treaty with the Believers and capitulated. From Syria, campaigns were dispatched against northern Mesopotamia. ʿIyāḍ ibn Ghanm al-Fihrī led troops who overcame the cities of Edessa, Ḥarrān, Raqqa, Nisibis, Malatya, Raʾs al-ʿAyn, and others, and pushed into the mountains of Armenia by 646 CE.

At about the same time the Believers were engaged in the conquest of Syria, other forces made their way toward Iraq.[6] For reasons not stated in our sources, it appears that Iraq was considered by the early caliphs and their entourage to be a less important or desirable objective than Syria, at least at first. Following upon the *ridda* campaigns in northeastern Arabia, Khālid ibn al-Walīd proceeded toward the middle Euphrates to secure the submission of Arabic-speaking pastoral groups and towns in the region, such as al-Ḥīra. These were on the fringes of, or part of, the Sasanian empire. It is not clear whether this campaign was an effort to recapture the initiative that had been seized by local chiefs, such as al-Muthannā ibn Ḥāritha of the Shaybān tribe, who had begun to launch raids into Sasanian territory, or whether Khālid was the first to launch a foray in this area and co-opted leaders such as al-Muthannā once he got there. Having seized a few towns along the lower Euphrates and established the Believers' control among the pastoral tribes there, Khālid left the area in al-Muthannā's charge and, in response to orders from the caliph in Medina, made his way with a small force across the Syrian steppe to support the Believers' forces in Syria. The caliph ʿUmar dispatched a new army under Abū ʿUbayd al-Thaqafī to reinforce al-Muthannā in Iraq, but this force was destroyed by the Sasanians at the battle of the Bridge. ʿUmar therefore organized a new and much larger army, which marched to Iraq under the command of Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, and which was periodically reinforced by additional recruits sent by ʿUmar as they became available. This force was able to defeat the Sasanians' main army decisively at al-Qādisiyya (ca. 636), after which most of central Iraq – breadbasket and unrivalled source of taxes for the former Sasanian empire – was occupied by the Arabian Believers, including the former Sasanian capital at Ctesiphon (Arabic al-Madāʾin). The last Sasanian monarch, Yazdagird III, withdrew to the Zagros region and attempted to mount a counter-strike, but was again defeated at Jalūlāʾ and Nihāvand (ca. 642); thereafter he fled to the Iranian plateau where he eventually met an ignominious end, and the Sasanian empire disappeared forever.

Southernmost Iraq formed a separate front; to it ʿUmar sent a small force led at first by ʿUtba ibn Ghazwān (later by Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī) who, joined by local tribesmen, siezed the town of Ubulla (Apologos) and routed Sasanian garrisons. With the collapse of Sasanian power farther north, follow-up campaigns were also possible in the south, and the district of Khūzistān was seized with its towns of Shustar, Ahwāz, and Sūsa. Troops from southern Iraq joined those from central Iraq in defeating Yazdagird at Nihāvand and began campaigning in the Iranian highlands.

With Sasanian power decisively destroyed, the Arabian conquerors in Iraq and their allies were able quickly to occupy much of the Iranian plateau (though some districts, such as the Elburz region, remained unsubdued for many decades to come, and most areas faced widespread tax rebellions or resistance by local potentates when the Believers were preoccupied with civil wars).[7] From central Iraq, troops took the whole Zagros region as far north as Azerbaijan, including Ḥulwān, Hamadhān, and Tabrīz. Some pushed into the corridor south of the Elburz, via Qazvīn and Qomm as far as Rayy (modern Tehran). Others occupied northern Mesopotamia or, pushing northward from Azerbaijan via Ardabīl, seized the Mughan steppe and the important town of Darband on the western shores of the Caspian Sea, situated near the main pass through the Caucasus mountains. Yet other forces, starting from Fārs province (Iṣṭakhr, modern Shiraz), passed through the southern Iranian provinces of Kirmān and Sīstān northwards into Khurasān where they occupied (ca. 650) the oasis of Marv, almost to the Oxus River on the fringes of Central Asia. In this area, the Believers made treaties with local feudal lords, leaving the social structure of Khurasān essentially intact.

While the conquest of Iran was taking place in the east, Egypt was being occupied in the west.[8] ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ, at the head of a contingent of troops in Syria, marched from Palestine (ca. 639) across northern Sinai into the Nile delta and seized Pelusium and Bilbays. Our sources disagree on whether this was done at the behest of the caliph ʿUmar, or on ʿAmr's own initiative, but the caliph soon sent another force directly from Medina to reinforce him. The combined force defeated the local Byzantine garrison and took the latter's fortress of Babylon (part of modern Cairo) after a siege; other contingents seized the Fayyum depression, passed through the western delta, and after defeating the Byzantines again at Nikiu, besieged Alexandria. Eventually, the Byzantine governor agreed to a treaty and handed Alexandria over as the Byzantine soldiers evacuated Egypt. By 642, all of Egypt, including the coastal towns and the Nile valley as far as the first cataract, was held by the Believers.

## Traditional Views of the Charismatic Phase of Expansion

At the heart of the astonishing expansion just described was the religious movement begun by Muḥammad. Traditionally, this movement was viewed as the manifestation of a discrete confessional identity – that is, it was seen as a new and distinct religion, Islam, that was from the very beginning different from all other religions, even from other monotheisms such as Judaism and Christianity, with which it shared many common beliefs (one God, prophecy, revealed scripture, Last Judgment, afterlife in heaven or hell, etc.). This view is the one enshrined in the Arabic–Islamic sources themselves, written down mainly in the period from one to three centuries after the life of the prophet Muḥammad and the first expansion of his followers. Moreover, this conceptualization of Muḥammad's movement as a novel religion was until recently replicated by almost all western scholars.

Given their conviction that Islam already existed as a distinct confession, it was inconceivable to most scholars that the populations of the Near East, overwhelmingly adherents of other well-defined religious confessions such as Christianity, Judaism, or Zoroastrianism, should suddenly and voluntarily abandon those faiths for a new and different one, Islam. Both the traditional Muslim sources and the western scholarship that followed it in this interpretative path therefore portrayed the expansion of

Muḥammad's followers as a process of conquest (*futūḥ*) – hence the prominence of the term "Islamic conquest" (or "Arab conquest") as the rubric under which these events have usually been categorized (including in this volume). The victories over the Byzantine and Sasanian armies were seen as the work of soldiers inspired by and fighting in the name of the new religion, Islam; similarly, the absorption of the cities, towns, and rural districts of the Near East into the Believers' new state was also described as the result of military action – the product either of forcible subjection (*ʿanwa*) of non-Muslim populations by Muslim conquerors, or of siege followed by capitulation to the conquerors (*ṣulḥ*).[9] The presumed result of such capitulations was the creation of a new society in which the Arabian Muslims ruled, and all local populations, who were non-Muslim (usually Christian, Jewish, or Zoroastrian), constituted the lowly subject population. The "military model" of the expansion – that is, its conceptualization as the forcible imposition of a new religious and political order – seemed to provide the most obvious way to understand the rapidity of the new community's rise to ascendancy in wide areas of the Near East.

The "military model" of the conquests, however, raises in acute form the question: What were the forces that drove this movement in its first stage? Many historians, struck by the conquests' swift progress and vast scope, were puzzled by the fact that the conquests radiated from a place that lacked the elements usually considered essential to sustaining a rapid military expansion: an established state with well-developed military institutions and a significant base of economic resources on which to draw. Explaining the apparent energy and power of the early Islamic conquest movement, which exploded into the Near East apparently without any of these elements, emerged as a serious challenge for historians.

The oldest explanation for the dynamism that lay behind the Islamic conquests was that provided by the Muslim community itself, which saw it as the product of the new faith of Islam. This explanation took two forms. One was the belief that the conquests happened because of God's support for His faithful; in other words, it was God's will that the Muslims should be victorious on the battlefield against non-Muslim foes, often against overwhelming odds. According to this view – which historians who reject supernatural explanations cannot accept – the conquests are nothing less than a physical, historical sign of God's favor, and themselves constitute evidence for the truth of Islam as a faith-system.

The second aspect of this traditional Muslim view of the conquests emphasizes the early Muslims' zeal for their new faith, and attributes the success of the conquest movement in part to this deep commitment. Unlike the supernatural explanation, this is an explanation that any modern historian might embrace without difficulty, because the notion that religious commitment could be a powerful motivator of individual action should be unproblematic even to a historian of secular outlook.

Generally, however, western historians have been uncomfortable with religious explanations of the conquests, even those based merely on the idea of religious zeal as a contributing factor.[10] There were some exceptions,[11] of course, but most western scholars downplayed the force, or even denied the very existence, of the Believers' religious commitment. Some of them noted, for example, that the Believers did not require the Christians and Jews they "conquered" to embrace Islam, but rather allowed them to continue in their ancestral faiths as long as they paid taxes, and deduced from this that the conquerors were therefore not essentially motivated by religion.[12] The result of this was that some western scholars adopted a

self-contradictory position on the conquests; on the one hand, they accepted the general notion that the expansion was somehow linked to the appearance of Islam, which they understood as a new religion, yet at the same time they wished to show that Islam, or religious zeal for it, was not really the cause of the expansion after all. Often these explanations took the form of reductionism – that is, explanations that tried to reduce the apparent causative force of Islam to other, more mundane, factors that were presented as the "real" causes. It is worth noting some of these reductionist arguments, at least briefly, and pointing out their shortcomings, because although most are discredited they are sometimes still advanced, even today.[13]

Perhaps the oldest reductionist theory, which appeared already in the nineteenth century, emphasized the conquerors' cupidity. Proponents of this view assumed that Arabian pastoral nomads were the dominant element in the conquest movement, the main motivation for which, they claimed, was the bedouins' desire to seize plunder. One summarized the motivations of the early conquests thus: "forthwith the whole Arabian people, both Town and Bedouin, were riveted to Islam by a common bond – the love of rapine and the lust of spoil."[14] Such a view, however, is predicated on assumptions rather than observable historical facts about the taking of booty, since little reliable evidence of the extent of plunder exists. More seriously, this interpretation completely fails to explain why the conquests should have happened when they did and as a sudden outburst – since the pastoralists and their presumed desire for plunder had been present for centuries. Likewise, this theory fails to explain why and how this latent desire for plunder, at one and only one crucial historical moment, took the form of an organized military, political, and religious movement. In this sense, the "plunder" argument simply begs the fundamental question of why the expansion took place when and as it did.

Another reductionist explanation provided by early western scholars of the conquests can be called the ecological or climatic hypothesis, according to which the conquests were sparked by the progressive desiccation of the Arabian peninsula in the years before the rise of Islam.[15] This supposed desiccation forced many Arabians to emigrate in waves from the peninsula into the surrounding lands, a popular migration that is disguised by the sources as a "conquest." Besides the fact that there is little or no convincing evidence for such a desiccation in the years immediately before the rise of Islam, the ecological hypothesis also fails to explain why the Arabians who moved into the Fertile Crescent in the seventh century appear not as a slow trickle of impoverished refugees, as one would expect if they had been forced out by dire circumstances, but rather as the sudden outburst of organized military forces. The ecological hypothesis also conflates the conquests and the "Arab migrations" – that is, it fails to separate the actual conquest of the Fertile Crescent, undertaken by military forces of decidedly small size, from the migration of larger groups of kinsmen into these areas, which the Arabic–Islamic sources reveal to have taken place only after the conquests; indeed, the migrations were made possible by the conquests, not the other way around.[16]

A number of more sophisticated hypotheses about the initial conquest movement, but ones that still contained a reductionist element, emphasized various economic factors as the crucial background to the Islamic movement. Early in the twentieth century, H. Lammens conjured up an image of Muḥammad's Mecca as the hub of a thriving trade in luxury goods connecting the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean basins, and argued that this provided the economic underpinnings of the conquest movement.[17] A half-century later, W. M. Watt built on Lammens's theory by hypothesizing

that the disparities in wealth generated by this presumed trade created dislocations in traditional Arabian society (especially in Mecca) that Muḥammad's preachings were intended to remedy.[18] Marxist historians viewed the conquests as the product of the presumed exhaustion of the working classes in the Byzantine and Sasanian domains, which resulted in their capitulation to the arriving conquerors, and explicitly rejected what they termed "religious fanaticism" as a cause.[19] M. A. Shaban proposed that Muḥammad's career and the *ridda* brought trade in Arabia to a standstill, leading his followers to invade surrounding areas and thus to "unintentionally acquiring an empire" – religious motivations, he implies, were obviously not the real cause.[20] Numerous other students of Islam's origins (including the present writer) accepted the general outlines of the Lammens–Watt hypothesis of economic and social change in some form or other.[21] In recent years the notion that Mecca was an entrepot for an extensive luxury trade has been convincingly challenged by Patricia Crone,[22] but the existence of more modest commercial activity cannot be dismissed. Indeed, it has recently been proposed that Sasanian investment in Arabian trade and industry may have caused a wave of economic vitality in Arabia just on the eve of Islam.[23] It remains to be seen, however, just how this commerce and other economic activities, such as mining in the Ḥijāz, related to the rise of the conquest movement. The implication of all these theories, however, is that the expansion is the consequence of economic or social forces, rather than the result of a religious movement; statements in the sources suggesting a religious view of the conquests are often explained away as being merely the surface rhetoric masking the underlying social and economic forces – which are, by implication, "real."

Another reductionist approach to the early Islamic conquests chose to depict them as a kind of defensive proto-nationalism – a reaction of Arabians ("Arabs") against encroachment from the outside.[24] The rivalry between the Byzantine and Sasanian empires over Arabia, on the political, economic, and religious levels, was an undoubted fact, but whether the Believers' expansion can be identified as an Arabian "nativist" movement is questionable. The earliest documentary evidence available (including the Qur'an text as a kind of quasi-document) gives virtually no support to the notion that "Arabness" was a significant feature of the movement; on the contrary, it describes the movement overwhelmingly by means of religious terminology – using particularly the word *mu'min*, "Believer," and others related to it, as the crucial self-identifier. The domination of western thought by the nationalist idea[25] during the nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries, however, made it almost inevitable that nationalist or nativist conceptualization should have been virtually all-pervasive in scholarship of the period.

A further problem inherent in the "military model" – particularly relating to the first, charismatic phase of the conquests – is to explain the causes of the conquests' success. This is because, as noted, the initial expansion movement radiated from a region – western Arabia – that lacked the base of natural and cultural resources one normally expects to find underpinning such an expansion, particularly a state expansion. How was it possible for people from this region to organize a movement that so quickly overcame vast areas of the Near East, even though those areas were home to two deeply institutionalized empires with well-established traditions of statecraft and tremendous resources based on an extensive agrarian base? And how was it possible for the new religion of Islam to establish itself so completely in an area where Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity had been deeply rooted for centuries and existed in highly sophisticated forms?

Scholars who adopted the more strictly military conceptualization of the conquests have tried in a variety of ways to explain their success in the face of perceived practical obstacles. One common theme was to emphasize not the strength of the Muslim armies, but rather the weakness of their foes, the Byzantine and Sasanian empires; according to this view, the rival empires were exhausted militarily, financially, and morally by over twenty years of bitter warfare, during which the Sasanians had occupied much of the Byzantine Near East only to be driven back again by the emperor Heraclius in the 620s.[26] In this view, the empires were unprepared for and unable to handle the unexpected military onslaught that came upon both of them from the south suddenly in the 630s.

Another explanation proposed by those favoring a military conceptualization of the conquests emphasized certain advantages held by the conquerors, rather than the weakness of the Byzantines and Sasanians. For example, some argued that the early Believers, when confronting the Byzantines' and Sasanians' southern flanks in Syria and Iraq, had the advantage of "inner lines of communication," which permitted the caliphs to shift troops from Iraq to Syria and vice versa in response to conditions. (They pass in silence over the fact that being wedged between two enemies and forced to fight both ahead and behind is normally considered a military liability.) Others have argued that the early Believers had superior weaponry or tactics, greater mobility, far better understanding of the desert fringes where most of the major battles against the Byzantines and Sasanians took place, or better leadership.[27] These possibilities may have some merit, but ultimately, such tactical advantages must all be linked to the fact that the Believers were putting together a new state, which enabled them to mobilize the social and other resources of Arabian society more effectively than before.[28]

## A Revisionist View of the First or Charismatic Phase of the Conquests

As we have seen, the "military model" of the early Islamic conquests was rooted in the traditional sources' view that Muḥammad preached from the start a new religion, Islam, and we have seen the concomitant difficulties of interpretation that scholars attempted to eliminate by various reductionist approaches. Many of the difficulties of interpretation posed by the "military model" evaporate, however, if we adopt a somewhat different view of the nature of the religious movement Muḥammad started.[29] There is considerable evidence to suggest that Muḥammad and his earliest followers did not view their ideas as constituting a new religion, Islam, but were rather calling people to pious monotheist reform. We can most aptly call this the *Believers' movement* since, in the Qur'an and other early texts, participants in the movement are referred to, and refer to themselves, mainly as Believers (*mu'minūn*). That is, Muḥammad's religious movement emphasized belief in one God, and in the importance of righteous or pious behavior in accordance with God's revealed law. Former pagans who came to follow Muḥammad's preachings were expected to follow the law as revealed to Muḥammad in the Qur'an; those who were Jews or Christians, being monotheists already, did not need to give up their traditional faith to join the Believers' movement, but were expected to lead a righteous life in adherence to the teachings of the Torah or Gospels (Qur'anic *tawrāt, injīl*), which were accepted as earlier versions of God's revelation. One who did this was a Believer, regardless of whether he followed Qur'an, Torah, or Gospels. In other words, the Believers' movement was at the beginning non-confessional in the sense that it embraced

righteous monotheists of whatever confession, whether Jews, Christians, or Qur'anic Believers. Although later Muslim tradition does its best to conceal the fact, there is some residual evidence showing that the early community of Believers did, indeed, include Jews and Christians as active members.[30] It also seems that the early Believers thought that the Last Judgment was imminent – that is, the Believers' movement was apocalyptic in character. This may explain the apparent dynamism and urgency of the movement; the conviction that the world is about to end and that one's ultimate salvation depends on what one does *now* could bring people to drop everything in their normal lives and get caught up in the enthusiasm of the cause.

Adopting such a view of the early Believers' movement changes significantly our perspective on the Believers' early expansion, and resolves a number of the puzzles associated with the more traditional "military model." Viewing the Believers' expansion into the lands adjacent to Arabia as the arrival of an ecumenical religious movement that preached monotheist reform and had as its goal the establishment of what the Believers saw as a God-guided, righteous political order, makes its ultimate success easier to grasp. For the Arabian Believers did not arrive as a new creed bent on suppressing existing religious communities in the name of their presumed new religion, much less on wooing them away from their former beliefs, but accepted many local Christians and Jews in the conquered lands as part of the movement.[31] To be sure, a new ruling elite of Believers was established that ruled over those who were not deemed adequately pious, and the dominant people in this elite were Believers of Arabian origin. But the ranks of the Believers also came to include many people of local origin; traditionally conceived scholarship identifies these people as *mawālī*, the Arabic term for clients of an Arabian tribal group, and treats them as "converts to Islam," but it is perhaps more appropriate to see them merely as Christians or Jews who had joined the Believers' movement. This ability of the early Believers' movement to incorporate many Christians and Jews (and some Zoroastrians) is presumably why the establishment of the Believers' hegemony seems to have occurred in most areas with relatively little trauma; for there is virtually no archaeological evidence of destruction or even of disruption to be found in the excavated sites dating from this period in Egypt, Syria, or Iraq.

This vision of the early expansion as a religious movement, however, does not require us to jettison all aspects of the traditional view of things; in particular, it does not preclude military activity on the part of the Believers. Although the Believers' contacts with most cities, towns, and rural districts may well have been generally more an exercise in persuasion than coercion, and resulted in negotiated submissions to the Believers' new kingdom, it seems likely that, much as the traditional narratives state, the Believers arrived in these areas in the first instance as organized armies or raiding parties – a fact that doubtless made their negotiators much more persuasive. Moreover, the Byzantine and Sasanian emperors surely would have sent armies to reclaim territories that had slipped under the Believers' control, or to dissuade additional localities from doing so. It seems plausible to assume that the Believers would have engaged these forces in pitched battles, not unlike the way they are described in the *futūḥ* narratives.

Furthermore, if we understand the initial goal of the Believers' movement to have been the establishment of a new, righteous kingdom run in accordance with God's revealed laws, it becomes possible to understand how a movement driven by religious zeal could nonetheless be largely free of pressure to "convert." For to talk of

"conversion" becomes meaningless in the absence of a sharply defined identity as a separate, distinct religious confession. If a Jew or Christian could, by virtue of righteous behavior, also be reckoned among the Believers, there was no reason for him to "convert" to anything; he simply became a Believer, while remaining a Christian or a Jew. The Believers' movement, then, could establish itself readily in the Near East without requiring changes in a people's religious identity.

Like any vast historical phenomenon, the early expansion of the Believers must be viewed as the result of a variety of causative factors. These collectively provided a range of incentives to support the movement – regardless of how we decide to understand it – so that many different kinds of people found something appealing in it. Some participants in the Believers' movement doubtless were motivated by religious zeal and the desire to extend the realm subject to God's word. Others no doubt cared hardly at all for religious belief, nor troubled themselves with thoughts of the afterlife, but were drawn by the appeal of booty and earthly rewards. Still others may have sought commercial or financial opportunities, or political power, or just sheer excitement; and many people were doubtless drawn by a combination of factors. In this sense, many of the theories noted above may be seen as partial explanations of the nature of the conquests. However, most of them should be subsumed within the notion that the conquests are part of a process of state-formation ignited by a religious movement, because it was the new state that provided the context and organizing framework within which these other motivations could be effectively pursued.

## Structural Developments during the First Phase of the Conquests

One of the crucial features of the first or charismatic phase of the conquest movement is the simultaneous development of various institutions of the state, including the army. Indeed, as we shall see, the army may have led the process of state institution-alization.

During Muḥammad's leadership of the Believers' movement in Medina (622–32 CE), there existed, as far as we can tell, no structured institutions of government of any kind, independent of his person (it was, to use Weberian terminology, still a thoroughly patrimonial regime). There was not yet even a standing army; although Muḥammad launched numerous raiding parties and several major military campaigns from Medina (for example, the campaigns against Khaybar in the north, or against Mecca in AH 8), these are described in each case as *ad hoc* assemblages of loyal supporters from Medina and allies from surrounding settlements or pastoral groups who had joined his community in some way.

The nucleus of a permanent army seems first to have materialized during the *ridda* wars that took place in Arabia during the two years following the death of Muḥammad in 632. At least some of the forces dispatched by the first caliph Abu Bakr (r. 632–4) were in the field for over a year of sustained campaigning, and their objectives seem to have been quite open-ended – both in marked departure from the limited objectives and *ad hoc* character of the armies of Muḥammad's time. The number and size of these permanent forces increased as Abu Bakr and his successor 'Umar (634–44) dispatched campaigns into Syria and Iraq. During this period the *dīwān* or regular army payroll was instituted, an event that can be said to mark definitively the creation of standing forces with expectations of regular campaigning.[32]

Several other institutions of the early Islamic state were closely linked to the institutionalization of the military during this period. One was the regular appointment of governors in various provinces of the vast areas the Believers' movement was rapidly acquiring in the middle decades of the seventh century – Syria, Iraq, northern Mesopotamia, Egypt, Iran.[33] In most cases, the first governor of a conquered district was, as one would expect, the commander of the army that had conquered and occupied it, who appears to have been in charge of regulating all aspects of life in that area – not only military campaigning and police matters, but also tax-collection and the adjudication of disputes. Fairly soon, however, we begin to read about regular dismissal of such military governors by the caliphs, and of their replacement sometimes by a team of officers, one to head the military forces of the province and another to handle the province's finances. We also sometimes read of increasingly regular (sometimes yearly) rotation of governors and provincial military commanders. Our chronicle sources for these matters in this early period are notoriously unreliable, but such reports seem to indicate a step forward in the rationalization of state administration. The earliest coin minting seems to have been linked to the existence of local authority in the hands of governors or military commanders in diverse provinces, who took over pre-existing Sasanian or Byzantine mints and personnel; it does not appear to have been centrally coordinated, and major changes in coinage types – still quite haphazard – did not begin until the time of the Umayyad caliph 'Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705), three-quarters of a century after the earliest conquests.[34]

Another institution linked to the military was the garrison town or *miṣr* (pl. *amṣār*), a number of which were founded during the charismatic phase in key locations in various provinces. Major ones were established at Baṣra in southern Iraq, Kūfa in central Iraq, and Fusṭāṭ in Egypt, and are described in the chronicles as army camps from which further campaigning was organized. In their early years, when the conquerors from Arabia were all clustered in these garrison towns, the *amṣār* clearly served not only key military functions, but also the vital ideological and sociopolitical one of preserving the cohesion of the Believers' movement. For, had the first Believers from Arabia settled in scattered localities throughout the vast provinces over which they took control, they would quickly have been overwhelmed by the cultural practices of local populations that greatly outnumbered them. The cultural isolation of the early *amṣār*, then, served as islands safeguarding the communal identity of the early Believers in a sea of non-believers.

The *amṣār* also became important foci of settlement for successive waves of Arabian migrants (often the families of the conquerors) who flocked to them once the province was ''opened'' – conquered. They grew rapidly into major cities with increasingly diverse populations, and became in time vibrant cultural centers in which was developed and from which radiated a new, synthetic Arabic–Islamic culture.[35]

In some areas – particularly, it seems, in Syria – the early Believers from Arabia appear to have settled in vacant quarters of existing cities such as Damascus and Hims. The latter town became the main military base of the early Believers in Syria for almost a hundred years after the conquests. This pattern of settlement in existing towns suggests that the major cities of Byzantine Syria had become partly depopulated on the eve of the conquests, probably from a combination of earthquakes and plague epidemics, as well as because of the impact of the last Sasanian–Byzantine war (603–30), all of which shattered the local economy and the fabric of urban life in early seventh-century Byzantine Syria. On the other hand, evidence from the excavations at

Ayla at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba have turned up remains of a modest new town founded during the conquest era just outside the gates of the Byzantine town (Ailana).[36] This suggests that in some localities in Syria, too, the Believers were creating new town foundations (even though Ayla itself is never mentioned in our sources as a *miṣr*).

We have little reliable information on the development of the tax administration the Believers established in the areas they conquered.[37] We must assume that there was one, for every state requires and aspires to secure a steady stream of revenue. But efforts to reconstruct what it was like must navigate a sea of contradictory information found in the Qur'an, in the Arabic–Islamic literary compilations about the conquests that often reflect systematizing efforts of later generations of legal scholars, and in the papyrus tax records of the early Islamic period, the advantages of whose documentary character is offset by the highly fragmented (and almost completely Egypto-centric) view they offer of the early tax system – if, indeed, it can be called a system at all. Much suggests that at first the Arabian Believers simply continued the bewildering profusion of local tax procedures they encountered in the districts they ruled, retaining the local administrators to apply them in the relevant local languages (Coptic, Greek, Syriac, Pahlavi). Only over the span of several generations was this local administrative personnel supplanted by Believers whose native language was Arabic – who by this time had themselves become sufficiently well established in these areas to be considered "locals." It seems that a true sytematization of the tax system was only fully conceived during the early 'Abbasid period, well over a century after the initial occupation of Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and Iran, and was never fully realized. Many texts shaped by the later, idealizing categories of the jurists describe conditions, even in early Islamic times, in terms of neat distinctions in taxation between Muslims and *ahl al-kitāb* ("peoples of the book", i.e., Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians), between land-tax (*kharāj*) and poll-tax on non-Muslims (*jizya*), etc. But a glance at a rare text that seems to report actual conditions in northern Mesopotamia in the later eighth century[38] offers us a much messier picture: *jizya* on non-Muslims was a combined head and land-tax; taxes were collected three, and sometimes more, times per year instead of the prescribed once annually; the tax-collector for this Muslim regime in this district was a Zoroastrian; etc. It is, therefore, perilous to generalize too boldly about actual taxation practices, except to say that, particularly for the first century or more of the Believers' rule, they were very inconsistent and harked back to a variety of pre-existing practices.

Other aspects of what can be called the first state administration following the conquests are less well known. The caliphs early on created a *bayt al-māl* or central treasury, which may have represented a true public purse, that is, a fund for state expenses independent of the funding of the ruler himself, but we know more about the legal theory of it than we do about the actual history and functioning of the early *bayt al-māl*.[39] Perhaps on the model of the army *dīwān*, the caliphs also began to establish other ministries or bureaus (also called *dīwān*), particularly to handle the tax system. They also seem to have established a chancery to handle official correspondence in Arabic, but relatively few examples of its products survive, although its existence is noted in some literary sources.[40]

The adjudication of disputes in the Believers' realm seems to have been in the hands of local governors or military commanders, or their subordinate officials in specific localities, through the first century AH, at least if the Egyptian papyri are any

indication. Although many idealizing reports speak of the very early appointment of *qāḍīs* or judges,[41] there is no documented evidence for the existence of independent judges before the early 'Abbasid period. More frequently mentioned is the institution of an official supervision of the *ḥajj* or annual pilgrimage ritual in Mecca. The pilgrimage was frequently headed by the caliph himself or by a high official designated by him. Doing so helped affirm both the Believers' religious traditions and the caliph's legitimacy as leader of the community of Believers, and so should be considered among the institutions intended to solidify the workings of the new state established in the wake of the conquests.

By the time of the first civil war (656–61), then, a rudimentary state administration had begun to crystallize among the Believers in the conquered lands. This administration was still crude in many respects, but it proved strong enough to provide a framework for the community of Believers to come together again at the end of the first civil war, and so allowed the community to resume its expansion in the second or "institutional" stage of conquests.

## The Second or Institutional Phase of the Conquests

The first civil war or *fitna* (656–61) marked the end of the first or charismatic phase of the conquests, during which the expansion seems to have been sustained largely on the basis of an intense enthusiasm among the Believers for their collective mission of spreading the domain of God's word.[42] The first *fitna* was essentially a struggle within the Arabian (largely Meccan) ruling elite to determine who should lead the community of Believers in the aftermath of the murder of the third caliph, 'Uthman ibn 'Affan (r. 644–56), a question that was closely bound up with differing attitudes on *how* the community and state should be ruled.[43]

During the *fitna* the embryonic elements of state organization and institutions described in the preceding section remained in place, to the extent that they already existed, and were drawn upon in varying degrees by rival contenders for power. All serious claimants, especially 'Ali and Mu'awiya, drew on the military forces of the provinces they controlled, appointed provincial governors and subordinate officials, and attempted to assert their legitimacy by organizing official pilgrimage observances and other rituals.[44] When the *fitna* ended in 661 – following the assassination of 'Ali and the subsequent recognition as caliph of Mu'awiya, of the Umayyad family of Quraysh – it was possible, with internal peace restored, for the new ruler and his entourage once again to organize military campaigns of expansion. Now, however, the caliph could rely in doing so upon the institutions of the state: in particular, upon the standing armies, based in the garrison towns, sustained by regular taxation that was levied by the caliphs' provincial administration, which provided income some of which was distributed to the soldiers through a regular military payroll. We can probably assume that the standing armies were already by the early Umayyad period structured following an explicit chain of command, and that such matters as recruitment and terms of service were also regularized, although we have very little evidence of such organizational arrangements other than the names of some of the highest-level commanders who figure prominently in various events mentioned in the chronicle literature.[45]

During this second or institutional phase of the conquests, the bulk of the caliphate's military campaigns were pre-planned, even routine: the soldiers were usually

mustered in the *amṣār* in Iraq, Egypt, or Syria during the late winter or spring months, and dispatched so as to attain their objectives in Iran, North Africa, or the Byzantine frontier during the summer "campaigning season." They retired in the autumn to their home bases, where they spent the winter "off-season" resting and preparing for the next season's hostilities. The routine, seasonal quality of campaigning in the institutional phase was perhaps most marked on the Byzantine frontier, so much so that the annual campaign into Anatolia was called in Arabic *al-ṣā'ifa*, literally "summering";[46] but on the whole a similar rhythmic quality is perceptible in campaigning elsewhere as well. The Syriac chronicle of Yohannan bar Penkaye, written during the late 680s in northern Mesopotamia, which provides one of our earliest descriptions of the Islamic state, describes how the armies of the Believers "used to go in each year to distant lands and provinces, raiding and plundering from all peoples under heaven. And from every person they demanded only tribute, and each one could remain in whatever faith he chose."[47] This valuable comment confirms the regular, annual nature of the military campaigns sponsored by the Believers in the late seventh century, as well as the non-confessional character of the expansion, which was essentially the political expansion of a state, notwithstanding the state's origins in a monotheist revival movement.

During the secondary phase, the conquests and expansion of the caliphal state encompassed even more distant territories than during the primary phase; their vast scope – from France to India – makes it impractical to provide more than the barest sketch of their outlines here.

During the primary phase of the conquests, as we have seen, the Believers had seized western Iran and many districts in the south and east of the country as well; during the second phase, those parts of Iran that were still in the control of independent local rulers were integrated more thoroughly into the Islamic state – particularly the rugged region south of the Caspian Sea.[48] From Khurasān in northeastern Iran, where the conquerors had established a garrison in 650, the whole area as far as the Oxus (Amu Darya) River was taken over in the last decades of the seventh century, as were parts of northern Afghanistan (Balkh). During the early eighth century, the area between the Oxus and Jaxartes (Syr Darya) Rivers was raided annually and finally seized, and some important towns beyond the Jaxartes, such as Shash (modern Tashkent) were subdued (741).[49]

The second decade of the eighth century saw the conquest of the lower Indus valley (Sind) as far north as Multan by a force dispatched by the Umayyad governor of Iraq, al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf, perhaps to punish the local ruler for sheltering pirates who had preyed on Muslim merchants. The leader of this campaign was a teenaged kinsman of al-Ḥajjāj, Muḥammad ibn al-Qāsim, who emerged as a heroic figure in later lore. Archaeological finds confirm the existence in the Indus valley of a continuing Muslim community with some commercial ties to Syria and other regions to the west, but the historical sources are virtually silent on this community and we know very little about it. It seems, however, to have remained a relatively modest presence in Sind for many centuries. The large-scale spread of Islam in Sind and elsewhere in India really began later, with the activities of the Ghaznavids and other dynasties based in Afghanistan in the eleventh century CE and later.[50]

The Believers had penetrated parts of Armenia and the Caucasus already during the first phase of the conquests and held these areas through the eighth century. During the ninth and tenth centuries, however, determined opposition on the part of the

local Christian chiefs, backed by the Byzantines, frequent raids by the nomadic Khazars of the Volga region, and the activities of independent-minded Muslim warlords, slowly eroded caliphal control of these areas. By the late tenth century, Armenia and Georgia were again ruled by indigenous Christian kings.[51]

Farther west, the caliphs continued to launch regular summer campaigns into Anatolia, to which the Byzantines responded in kind, resulting in the emergence of a special frontier zone in Anatolia ravaged by continuous raiding on both sides. This continued into the ninth century; thereafter the collapse of 'Abbasid caliphal power and the Byzantine military resurgence pushed the border farther south, into northern Syria. The caliphs also mounted several campaigns which bypassed most of Anatolia and attacked the Byzantine capital at Constantinople (669; 673–8; 717–18; 783–5). Although these more than once posed a great threat to the city, they never succeeded in taking it.[52]

Egypt had served already during the first phase of conquest as a base for raids westward across North Africa into Libya and Ifriqiya (modern Tunisia). During the second phase, raids continued and were followed by consolidation of caliphal control: 'Uqba ibn Nafi' decisively conquered Ifriqiya in the 660s, establishing the garrison town of Qayrawan there in 670, and raided as far as the Atlantic in the 680s. Qayrawan, in turn, served as the focus for the radiation of Islamic culture and caliphal control in much of the Maghrib. Some Berber pastoralists and villagers of the Maghrib continued to resist the Believers' hegemony, however, even after the region was largely pacified by the forceful governor Musa ibn Nusayr in the early eighth century. Others, however, quickly joined the ranks of the Believers and became themselves important participants in the secondary phase of expansion.[53]

From North Africa, raids were launched into Visigothic Spain, which was apparently embroiled in a civil war; shortly thereafter, around 711, two armies crossed into Spain, one led by the Berber commander Tariq ibn Ziyad and the other by Musa ibn Nusayr. These forces defeated the last Visigothic King, Roderick, and quickly seized control of much of the peninsula as far as the Pyrenees, including the former capital at Toledo. The next century saw the immigration into Spain of significant numbers of Berber settlers and of some Arabs, particularly from Syria, as part of the ruling elite. We know little more about the history of Muslim rule in Spain until the fall of the Umayyad caliphate in the east (750) than the names of the Umayyads' governors, but during this period the Muslims consolidated their rule over all of the Iberian peninsula except for the mountainous north, which became the focus of small Christian kingdoms. From Spain, the Muslims pushed across the Pyrenees into southern and central Gaul; their defeat by the Frankish king Charles Martel near Poitiers in 732 marked their apogee in the west, and by 801 the cities north of the Pyrenees and even Barcelona were no longer under Muslim control.[54]

During their expansionist heyday of the seventh and eighth centuries, the Believers also took to the sea and seized various islands in the Mediterranean and a few outposts on that sea's northern shores. Cyprus became subject to shared Byzantine–Umayyad sovereignty in the seventh century, but generally the eastern Mediterranean remained a Byzantine lake, dominated by its powerful navy. In the western Mediterranean, however, the Aghlabid governors of Ifriqiya (Tunisia) built a powerful navy in the ninth century that seized Sicily from the Byzantines between 827 and 831, and Muslim raiders, many little more than freebooters, attacked many Italian coastal towns (Ancona, Naples, Rome) and established outposts in various localities

in Provence, Switzerland, northern Italy, and southern Italy. The Balearic islands were conquered by forces from Islamic Spain; Crete was taken in 825 by a rebel and adventurer who fled Spain and put together a raiding party in Egypt.[55]

The regularity of the campaigning in the institutional phase was linked to a shift in the motivations for the conquests that had set in by this time. On the one hand, the Umayyad caliphs, as leaders of the community of Believers, doubtless aspired to extend the domain of the Believers' new, God-guided public order, and to displace as much as possible the older, in their eyes corrupt and sinful regimes of the past. That is, the Umayyad caliphs, like the first four caliphs who preceded them, continued to be impelled in part by what we may term religious motivations (even though this did not involve forcing people who were already monotheists – in particular, Christians and Jews – to embrace Islam). On the other hand, the Umayyad ruling elite also came to realize that campaigns were an effective way to raise revenue in the form of booty (including slaves). This was doubtless part of the reason why campaigns were sent out annually: raiding was, in effect, an alternative form of taxation, which was of course also undertaken on a regular basis. The revenues of the Umayyad state were not well distinguished from those of the ruling elite – the caliph and his immediate entourage; that is, the "public purse" and the "privy purse" were often one and the same, in practice if not in principle. Some caliphs used their revenues, whether from taxation or from the ruler's share of booty from military campaigns, not only for such state purposes as paying the army and bureaucracy, but also to secure, through patronage, the backing of important individuals such as powerful tribal chiefs; and sometimes they even employed them for personal purposes, such as to purchase properties as investments for themselves. The caliph Muʿawiya, for example, is reported to have possessed vast estates in eastern Arabia, worked by thousands of slaves who were probably part of his share of the booty.[56] The provision of captives as part of annual tribute (*baqṭ*) is mentioned in the treaty-agreement with Nubia, of which documentary evidence exists,[57] and campaigns of raid and conquest against Berber groups in North Africa seem especially to have aimed at securing slaves – a lucrative form of tribute.[58]

Besides the more routine annual campaigning, however, the Umayyad caliphs also organized exceptional campaigns with particular objectives. Most noteworthy of these were their several attempts to conquer the Byzantine capital, Constantinople. We can assume that the ultimate goal – or, perhaps, the fantasy – of the regular summer campaigns against Anatolia was to advance all the way to the Byzantine capital, but well-organized Byzantine resistance in Anatolia meant that the normal summer campaigns seldom got near Constantinople; instead, the Umayyad *ṣāʾifa* tended to joust with Byzantine forces in central Anatolia, whose various towns and districts were traded back and forth between the two empires year by year.[59] In any case, it became evident early on that Constantinople was probably too strong to be reduced by a land assault alone, because of the city's massive land defenses and its extensive coasts, which allowed it to be resupplied by sea. Twice, however, the Umayyad caliphs organized huge expeditions against Constantinople that were coordinated with naval expeditions so that the city could be subjected to combined land assault and sea blockade (674–80; 716–17). Similarly, a special naval and marine campaign was undertaken in 674 to Crete, and special forces dispatched in 711 to conquer Sind (in today's southern Pakistan).

In time – already by the later seventh century – the front had become so distant in east and west that the troops dispatched from the *amṣār* in either Iraq or Egypt spent

much of the campaigning season simply getting to the land of the enemy. For this reason, new ''second-tier'' garrisons were founded as satellites of the original *amṣār* that had been established in the first phase of the conquests. In the west, Qayrawan was established in a fertile district in what is today central Tunisia in 670, and settled with a permanent force drawn from Fustat. In the east, the rich oasis region of Marw, conquered already in 651, was chosen as the base for a large garrison in 671; this was not a new city-foundation, as there had been some kind of urbanization in the oasis for at least a thousand years, but 671 marked the beginning of Marw's prominence as a *miṣr* from which the Muslims dispatched campaigns into easternmost Iran, Central Asia, and Afghanistan.

In sum, the basic feature of the conquests of the second or institutional phase, and what sets them apart from those of the charismatic phase, was that the caliphs could now rely on the increasingly developed institutional framework of the state. This meant that they could pursue campaigns of conquest on a regular basis as a means of revenue-extraction. A more bureaucratic motivation was thus added to the original motivation that impelled the charismatic conquests, namely the religiously based desire to extend the reach of the righteous community of Believers by expanding the state they had created.

## Impact and Consequences of the Islamic Conquests

Finally, a consideration of the Islamic conquests – however one wishes to conceptualize them – must examine their historical impact and consequences for the societies of the Near East. In doing so, we need sometimes to adopt a retrospective view and try to identify long-range consequences, as well as changes that would have been visible to observers of the time.

First of all – and this is most definitely a retrospective perception – the conquests marked the decisive starting-point in the long historical process by which Islam became the dominant religion of the Near East and began to spread throughout the world. This is true even though the early Believers constituted, for at least several decades following the conquests, only a very small minority of the populations they ruled. It is also true even if we wish to see the Believers' movement of the time of Muḥammad and the generation or two following him as not yet being exactly ''Islam'' in the usual sense, but rather as a religious movement emphasizing monotheism and piety that had an ecumenical and non-confessional character; for it was this movement that during the century following the Prophet evolved into Islam in the sense we usually use the term, that is, as a unique monotheistic confession whose distinctive markers are recognition of the prophethood of Muhammad and of the Qur'an as God's revealed word. The Believers' movement, if not yet ''Islam'' as people have understood that term for over a thousand years, represented the embryo or seed from which Islam emerged and spread throughout the world. In the Near Eastern context in particular, the Islamic conquests mark the beginning of the process by which Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Judaism (along with other, non-monotheistic faiths) gradually lost out and ceased, and Islam came to be the dominant religious confession of the Near East.[60] The Believers' new political order thus provided the sheltering aegis under which, over several centuries, Islam (as it would increasingly be known) was adopted as the faith of millions of people from Central Asia and the Indus valley to Spain and North Africa.

Another change that came with the conquests, and one that was as obvious to observers at the time as it is to us today, was a political shift. The regions and peoples conquered or absorbed by the early Believers' movement were no longer subject to the Byzantine emperor or the Sasanian Great King, but were now ruled by the caliphs and their agents (usually military at first, then increasingly bureaucratic). The Sasanian state, indeed, ceased to exist entirely with the death of the last Great King, Yazdagird III, in 651. The Byzantine empire survived, but only in greatly truncated form, and the Byzantine emperors emerged as the longest-term rivals to the caliphs. The growth of new state institutions (sometimes borrowing freely from the institutions of their Byzantine or Sasanian predecessors) has already been noted. The larger change that these institutional developments articulated was a reorientation of revenues to the caliphs and their regime, and to the goals of the new regime, and away from the Byzantine and Sasanian regimes.

This political shift also meant the emergence of a new ruling elite. Although the Believers' movement came to include locals in the conquered areas, the new elite was, at first, overwhelmingly composed of Believers who were of Arabian origin and who spoke Arabic as their native tongue. Such people had been known in many of the conquered regions before the conquests – Arabian traders seem to have been known for many centuries, and the spread of Arabic language among the population of parts of Syria and Iraq is well attested on the eve of Islam. But these Arabic-speaking people (or actual Arabians) had been a politically marginal population in Byzantine–Sasanian times; the elites of Syrian or Iraqi society on the eve of Islam were, in Byzantine provinces, usually Greek-speaking, more rarely Aramaic- or Coptic-speaking, and in Sasanian provinces, Persian-speaking, more rarely Aramaic-speaking. The reorientation of revenues to the caliphs following the conquests meant that, through patronage and employment as part of the new regime, Arabic-speaking locals and immigrants from Arabia increasingly became the prosperous component of the population.

It is sometimes argued that, by sweeping away the old Byzantine–Sasanian border, the first phase of conquests created a new, unified, economic zone in the Near East, which (it is alleged) facilitated economic exchange and growth in the region. It is true that commerce after the conquests between, say, Egypt and Iran may have been facilitated in times of peace as compared with pre-Islamic times, because there was now no border, with its unavoidable tariffs, for merchants to cross. However, one must remember that the conquests created a new border between formerly Byzantine Egypt and Constantinople, so it might be more accurate to speak of a re-drawing of borders rather than creation of a ''unified economic zone.'' This realignment of borders was probably not beneficial to the Byzantine empire, whose capital and central provinces were now cut off from the rich lands of the eastern Mediterranean, but whether it had a more general economic impact on the Near East, and exactly what that impact was, remains to be clarified.

Another consequence of the conquests for the Near East was an influx of Arabian immigrants, particularly to the new garrison towns in Iraq, Egypt, and to various districts and towns in Syria. As noted above, it would be completely misleading to see the conquests as a kind of *Völkerwanderung* driven by population pressure or the need for economic resources; for one thing, Arabia was (and remains) an area of low population density, so the post-conquest Arabian immigrants were probably relatively few. Yet, the Believers' success in absorbing into their new state vast lands adjacent to

Arabia – particularly Syria, Egypt, and Iraq – did open the way for some Arabians, whether settled townsmen or nomadic pastoralists, to move to these new areas (especially, at first, to the garrison towns).

The conquests also accelerated and extended the spread of the Arabic language into new areas at the expense of Aramaic, Coptic, Greek, Pahlavi (Middle Persian), and other languages. This was so partly because Arabic was the language of the conquerors and of new migrants, partly because it immediately served as the official language of the state, and partly because it was the language of the Believers' sacred book, the Qur'an. The process of Arabization is a highly complex one, however, and no simple relationship between it and the conquests (or the immigration of Arabians) should be drawn. Some areas that were conquered early on either never became Arabic-speaking (e.g., the Iranian highlands), or only became Arabic-speaking many centuries later, under the impact of other historical developments (e.g., much of North Africa).

In sum, the conquests set the stage for the birth and elaboration of a rich and diverse new civilization. Islamic civilization reworks and combines elements of older traditions – Judaic and Christian, Zoroastrian, Hellenistic, Iranian, Arabian – with the ethical and religious ideas of the Qur'an and Muḥammad's teachings to produce a coherent, dynamic new whole. The Believers' new political order provided the sheltering aegis under which, over several centuries, Islam (as it would increasingly be known) was adopted as the faith of millions of people from Central Asia and the Indus valley to Spain and North Africa.

## NOTES

1  For clarification of the nature of the Believers' movement, see below.
2  On the term, see Conrad, ''Futūḥ.'' The term *futūḥāt* (plural of a plural) is a neologism used mainly in modern scholarship. On the historiographical complexities of the traditional Islamic *futūḥ* literature see Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, esp. ch. 7, and Noth and Conrad, *Early Arabic Historical Tradition*. For a tabulation of the first works on the *futūḥ* theme, see Donner, *Narratives*, Appendix (''Chronological List of Early Texts''), 297–306.
3  See recently Simon, ''Muḥammad and the Jihād''; Firestone, *Jihad*.
4  Shoufani, *Al-Riddah and the Muslim Conquest of Arabia*; Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, chapter 2; Jandora, *March from Medina*, ch. 2.
5  Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, ch. 3; Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*.
6  Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, ch. 4.
7  Zarrīnkūb, ''The Arab Conquest of Iran''; Morony, ''Arab Conquest of Iran''; Spuler, *Iran in früh-islamischer Zeit*, 3–21; Daryaee, ''Collapse of the Sasanian Power''; Morony, ''Conquerors and Conquered: Iran.'' Daniel, *Political History of Khurasan*, 19–22, notes the contradictory nature of the sources for Khurasan and the superficial quality of the initial conquest.
8  Butler, *Arab Conquest of Egypt*; Jarry, ''L'Égypte et l'invasion musulmane.''
9  On the *ṣulḥ-ʿanwa* terminology, Schmucker, *Untersuchungen*; Noth, ''Zum Verhältnis von Kalifaler Zentralgewalt und Provinzen''; Simonsen, *Studies*.
10  This tendency is noted by Lewis, ''The Significance of Heresy,'' 44, and Décobert, *Le mendiant et le combattant*, 46. See also Donner, ''Orientalists and the Rise of Islam.''
11  The Dutch scholar C. Snouck Hurgronje, although he never developed it carefully, always emphasized the importance of religious faith; see for example his ''Islam,'' 29–30: ''We

can find only in Islam an explanation of the planned procedure without which the foundations of the Arab world-empire would have been unthinkable." Bousquet, "Observations sur la nature et causes de la conquête arabe," concluded that religious commitment outweighed material and other inducements. See also Décobert, *Le mendiant*, 62–3, 65–6.

12 E.g., Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam*, esp. 45–6; Becker, "Die Ausbreitung der Araber."

13 A fuller discussion of these theories is found in Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, introduction, and idem, "Centralized Authority." See also Bousquet, "Quelques remarques critiques."

14 Muir, *The Caliphate*, 44.

15 Advanced by such varied scholars as T. W. Arnold, Hugo Winckler, Leone Caetani, Philip Hitti, Bernard Lewis, and Karl Butzer; see Donner, "Centralized Authority."

16 This point was already made by Becker, "Ausbreitung." A new "ecological thesis" has been proposed recently by Korotaev et al., "Origins of Islam." It argues that global climatic changes (including unusual wetness – not aridity – in Arabia) in the sixth century CE generated social changes in Arabia that prepared the way for the rise of Islam. Their arguments depend on many different orders of evidence – climatological, vulcanological, social, anthropological, religious, and historical – the linkages among which are poorly documented or undocumented, but they may repay further study.

17 Lammens, "La république marchande de la Mecque."

18 Most clearly presented in Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*, 46–55.

19 E.g. Belyaev, *Arabs, Islam, and the Arab Caliphate*, 129.

20 Shaban, *Islamic History, A.D. 600–750*, 14, 24–5.

21 E.g., Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*; Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*; Ruthven, *Islam in the World*; Khalidi, *Classical Arab Islam*; Kennedy, *Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*; Esposito, *Islam. The Straight Path*.

22 Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam*.

23 Morony, "The Late Sasanian Economic Impact on the Arabian Peninsula." On mining in the Ḥijāz and its possible economic and commercial impact, see Heck, "Gold Mining in Arabia."

24 Crone, *Meccan Trade*, esp. 247–50, and Bashear, *Arabs and Others in Early Islam*, have been the main recent proponents of the nativist theory; however, the hypothesis that the initial expansion of Islam was essentially an Arab identity movement resembles those of many earlier Western scholars who saw the conquests in ethnic terms (and hence tended to call them the "Arab conquests"). See for example, Arnold, *Preaching of Islam*, 46–8; Becker, "Ausbreitung der Araber," 69–70; Bousquet, "Observations sur la nature et causes," 48; von Grunebaum, "The Nature of Arab Unity Before Islam."

25 And, of course, by the concepts of racism that formed the rationalizing underpinnings for nationalism; for a bit more detail on this, see Donner, "Orientalists and the Rise of Islam."

26 For example, Canard, "L'expansion arabe," esp. 57–63.

27 Jandora, *March from Medina*.

28 Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, 268–9.

29 For a fuller explication of the revisionist hypothesis outlined in the next few paragraphs, see Donner, "From Believers to Muslims."

30 See Donner, "Believers to Muslims," for a survey of this residual evidence. The most obvious bit is the inclusion of the Jews of Medina in the *umma* document in which Muḥammad established the regulations for his new community; text in Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat rasūl allāh*, 34–46; English transl. Guillaume, *Life of Muhammad*, 231–5.

31 St. John of Damascus, high administrator for the later Umayyad caliphs, and the Umayyads' Christian court poet al-Akhṭal, are among the more visible and better-known instances of this symbiosis.

32 See Donner, "The Growth of Military Institutions"; idem, "Formation of the Islamic State," esp. 285–6. On the *dīwān* or stipend-register, see Puin, *Der Dīwān von ʿUmar ibn al-Ḥaṭṭāb*.

33 A list of governors is found in de Zambaur, *Manuel de généalogie et de chronologie*, part II (pp. 17–49). See also Blay-Abranski, *From Damascus to Baghdad: The Abbasid Administrative System*, 195–241; Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 124–53.

34 On coinage see Bates, "History, Geography, and Numismatics"; idem, "The Coinage of Syria under the Umayyads"; Sears, *Monetary History of Iraq and Iran*.

35 Case-studies on the development of the *amṣār* as cultural centers: Pellat, *Le milieu baṣrien*; Djaït, *Al-Kūfa*; Kubiak, *Al-Fusṭāṭ*.

36 See Whitcomb, "Miṣr of Ayla," in Bisheh, *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* 5, 277–88.

37 On tax administration, see Simonsen, *Studies*; Schmucker, *Untersuchungen*; Blay-Abramski, 242–96; Donner, "Formation of the Islamic State," 286–8.

38 Studied in Cahen, "Fiscalité, Propriété, Antagonismes sociaux."

39 On it see Coulson, "Bayt al-Māl."

40 Some products of the Umayyad chancery are found in Abbott, *The Qurrah Papyri*.

41 See, for example, the extensive collection of reports on the "*qāḍī* Shurayḥ", supposed to have been appointed over Kufa from the time of the second caliph ʿUmar onwards: Kohlberg, "Shurayḥ." Cf. on judges Blay-Abramski, 120–94; Donner, "Formation of the Islamic State," 288–9.

42 What the anthropologist Victor Turner would term a state of "communitas": *Ritual Process*, ch. 3.

43 The most detailed examination of the first civil war is now found in Madelung, *Succession to Muḥammad*, a work that is, however, characterized by an almost partisan (pro-ʿAlī) view of events.

44 See for example al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, i/3448 on conflicting reports of pilgrimage leaders sent by ʿAlī and Muʿāwiya in AH 39/April 660.

45 The chronicles routinely mention the commander in charge of a particular foray, but seldom offer more detailed insights into the composition of his forces – how many subordinate units his force comprised, the names of his subordinate officers, the tactical specialization (if any) of various units, etc. The Nessana papyri may preserve a fragment of an actual payroll-list, although it is not clear whether this was for a military unit or for some other kind of levy, such as a civilian labor crew. See Kraemer, *Excavations at Nessana*.

46 On Byzantine border-warfare see Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War*.

47 Mingana, *Sources Syriaques* I, 147, lines 1–6.

48 See Madelung, "Minor Dynasties of Northern Iran"; Morony, "Arab Conquest of Iran."

49 The classic study is Gibb, *Arab Conquests of Central Asia*. See also Bosworth, "Coming of Islam to Afghanistan"; Hasan, "Survey of the expansion of Islam into Central Asia"; Spuler, *Iran in früh-islamischer Zeit*, 29–34; Morony, "Arab Conquest of Iran," 209.

50 See Friedmann, "A contribution to the early history of Islam in India"; Gabrieli, "Muḥammad ibn al-Qāsim al-Thaqafī and the Arab Conquest of Sind."

51 Manandean, "Les invasions arabes en Arménie"; Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, chapter 8; Laurent, *L'Arménie entre Byzance et l'Islam*; Dunlop, *History of the Jewish Khaʿars*.

52 Ahrweiler, "L'Asie Mineure et les invasions arabes"; Canard, "Les expéditions des Arabes contre Constantinople"; Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence*.

53 Taha, *Muslim Conquest and Settlement of North Africa and Spain*.

54 The murky history of the early Muslim presence in Spain, and the unreliability of a number of later Arabic accounts of its conquest, are discussed in Collins, *Arab Conquest of Spain*. See also Taha, *Muslim Conquest*. The classic study is Lévi-Provençal, *Histoire de l'Espagne Musulmane*; the conquest of Spain is covered in vol. 1, 1–89.

55   Ahmad, *History of Islamic Sicily*; Brooks, "Arab Occupation of Crete"; Lecam, *Les Sarra-zins dans le haut moyen-âge français*.
56   al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb* 11, 126–7, mentions 4,000 slaves (or families?) on Muʿāwiya's estates at al-Khaḍārim; cf. al-Askar, *al-Yamama in the Early Islamic Era*, 69.
57   See Hinds and Sakkout, "A Letter from the Governor of Egypt." Cf. also the report that the treaty with the city of Zarang in Iran required the city to hand over an annual tribute of 1,000 slave boys (Morony, "Arab Conquest of Iran," 207).
58   The evidence is summarized in Savage, *A Gateway to Hell, A Gateway to Paradise*, 72–5.
59   Cf. Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence*.
60   See Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period*; idem, *Islam: The View from the Edge*; Levtzion, *Conversion to Islam*.

## FURTHER READING

As a general overview of the expansion of the early caliphate in its military dimension, the old essay by Carl H. Becker is still useful; it is found in English translation as "The Expansion of the Saracens" in H. M. Gwatkin et al. (ed.), *The Cambridge Medieval History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913), vol. 2, chapters 11 and 12. A useful overview of the general course of Islamic history in the early period is provided by Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates* (London: Longman, 1986). A detailed examination of the relationship between pastoral no-madic and settled peoples of Arabia and its impact on the formation of the earliest Islamic state is found in Fred M. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981). Documentary evidence for the early existence of the state is assembled in Fred M. Donner, "The Formation of the Islamic State," *JAOS* 106 (1986), 283–96. A brief introduction to the complexities of the Arabic conquest accounts is Lawrence I. Conrad, "*Futūḥ*," in Julie S. Meisami and Paul Starkey (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature* (London: Routledge, 1998), 237–40. A stimulating reconstruction of how conquered communities may have been assimilated into the Muslim community and state in the early Islamic era is Richard Bulliet, *Islam: The View from the Edge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).