

Review: Enoch Pond et al., “Early Mohammedan History”, The Christian Review, e 5 (September 1840), pp 372-396

This paper gives a detailed account of the figure-heads of power in the Middle East from the time of Mohammed's ascension and inception of Islam as well as its fast growth after his death in 632 AD (aged 63). This area's history is important in understanding the region's relationship with Africa, Europe and indeed the rest of the world. The undercurrent is a conquest by Islam using force, an Islamic Crusade 500 years before the 'Holy' Crusades from Europe began.

After Mohammed's death, his protector Abu Bakr was designated Caliph (meaning Vicar). The Caliphate was the area within which the Caliph was effectively ruler. The concept of an Islamic state was born as this man was concurrently leader of Islam on earth as well as royalty.

There was still some resistance in Arabia to Caliph Abubeker, however his strong-minded and violent general Calid was able to subdue opposition and under the guise of religion unite the area. Damascus fell soon after a great battle with the Roman Emperor Heraclius (his 70 000 men were put to flight).

In the interim Omar had succeeded to the Caliphate and he besieged and took Jerusalem. The Mosque of Omar was built on the ruins of Solomon's Temple, residing to this day. With his general Amrou, he began conquest of Persia in the North and Egypt in the West. The Persians were driven to the border of China and Egypt willingly acceded to the invading forces - under the Eastern Orthodox Church, Jacobites (Coptic Christians) had been severely persecuted as heretics.

Amrou was soon recalled home by Caliphate Omar due to jealousy. Omar then was succeeded by Othmar after he was assassinated by his slave. He was the first to use the title *Emir al Moumenin* or 'Commander of the Faithful' used by successive Caliphs. Othman was weaker than his predecessors and was soon assassinated.

Ali, Mohammed's son-in-law by marriage to his daughter Fatima then rose to power after a long period of exclusion to become Caliph. Many Muslims are called Mohammed-Ali implying his reverence alongside the 'prophet'. The

Islamic idiom, “There is no god but god, and Mohammed is his prophet” is augmented by, “and Ali is the Vicar of Mohammed”.

An insurrection then occurred by Moawiyah who was of Meccan lineage. After a lengthy and bloody war the dispute was referred to a council, however Ali was subsequently assassinated and Moawiyah assumed the Caliphate. His dynasty was coined the Ommiades and the capital was moved to Damascus.

This event is important as it marks an internal division in Islam between Sonnites and Shiites. The former are adherents to the prior three Caliphs: Othman, Omar and Abubeker and the latter to Ali. Sonneite is derived from the word *tradition* meaning those who equate (in a Catholic way) tradition with written teachings, while Shiite means heretick. The animosity between these two sects remains to this day where each believe the Jew and Christian closer to the truth than the other. In general only the Turkish seem to be Sonnites. It is an unspoken law that, to avoid harm, as Islamic strangers follow the practices of whichever Islamic country he finds himself in.

An attempt was made to merge the two sects by a Persian Caliph, Nadir Shah, but failed and ended in his assassination. Caliph Abdalmalek of the Ommiades began to reign and renewed ambitions towards Africa and Spain. Carthage was sacked and burnt and the Moors of North Africa Islamicized. The successful general was called Musa and his plan was to conquer Spain, France, Germany and Italy, fetching a compass back to Syria and consolidating the Islamic empire. He was successful against the Goths and Saracens in Spain but was halted at the Pyrenees Mountains and recalled to Damascus by the Caliph. There he died and Walid became the new Caliph. He attacked Asia Minor and despite defeating Emperor Justinian, fell short of taking Constantinople. A naval attempt was made from the ports in Egypt and Syria which was foiled by the Greek invention known as *Greek Fire*, a flammable substance even when coming in contact with water.

As France declined an invasion attempt was made across the Pyrenees by the Muslims. Charles Martel, grandfather of Charlemagne, repulsed them in spectacular fashion, killing some 375 000. This defeat was a permanent end to the Islamic conquest in France.

Caliph Merwan (746-750 AD) was the last of the Ommiades dynasty. Its demise was linked to their perceived illegitimacy (their progenitor was Abu Sophian, arch enemy of Mohammed at Mecca during Islam’s infancy).

Abul Abbas Abdallah (a descendant of Mohammed and leader of the Abassides) was aided by the Persians to destroy Merwan and Abdul became Caliph, the capital moving from Damascus back to Cufa. His brother Almansour was the next Caliph and he built Baghdad which became its enduring capital.

Abdalahman of the defeated Ommiades fled to Spain and was recognised as the true Caliphate there. Muslim reign was extirpated by 1038 AD by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella.

The Muslim Empire suffered other internal upsets from a split in Africa by a Governor, Ibrahim ben Aglab. The Aglabites conquered Sicily and this separate African dynasty spread from Tunis right across to Egypt. Lasting a century, it was eventually conquered by the Fatimites (another African dynasty). Thus in the West the Abassides had lost dominion of all nations up to Egypt and Syria.

The Islamic Empire had peaked under the last of the Ommiades. The disparate nature of the regions caused its eventual break up. Notwithstanding, the Koran and Arabic language was a strong bond and in contemporary times has only increased as is seen today across Africa, the Middle East and the Pacific.

Interestingly, the Abassidan Caliphs purchased Turkish slaves and trained them as bodyguards. This backfired as they killed them and setup puppet ones in stead. Later Caliphs were able to manage these Turkish Guards more wisely.

An heretical sect called the Carmathians rose up in the 10th century and took large parts of the Baghdad Caliphate, even reaching into Arabia, besieging Mecca, putting 30 000 citizens to the sword and taking the Kabaa.

Also during this (opportune) time the abovementioned Fatimites overtook Africa, expelling the Aglabites and Edrissites. Their leader was Abou Mohammed Obeidallah who (it is thought illegitimately) claimed to be of the lineage of Mohammed and Fatimah. Egypt was taken and the capital Cairo founded. This signified the end of the Abassidian Caliphate Baghdad as power was transferred to Egypt. The new Caliph adopted the title *Mehedi* or “Director of the Faithful”. This title was meant to be reserved for the twelfth and last Imam appearing at the end of the world!

In this period there were therefore three competing Caliphates, Spain, Africa and in Baghdad.

The next group to rise up was the Bowides, taking large parts of the Baghdad Caliphate. It was led by one Ali Amadeddoulat (“pillar of the state”) who subdued the Caliphs making them into figureheads. The twentieth Caliph, Rahdi, was ignominiously imprisoned and his eyes were put out. This dynasty lasted until 1070 AD (year 448 AD of the Hegira).

In 1002 AD, The Fatimate Caliph Aziz added Syria to his domain.

In the north west, the Seljuk Turks began rising to power. Their name is derived from the son of a Turkistan Emir, Seljuk. He fled Turkey for Persia, fearing an attempt on his life from the court due to his rising power.

Being pagans and understanding without a religious cause the Turks would not be able to conquer the Middle East, a learned cleric was sent for in Persia to instruct Seljuk and his followers in the Mohammedan religion. Their conversion was reduced and they began to meet military successes, from Khorasan Westward up to Armenia. They were blocked in the east by the powerful ruler of East Persia Mahmoud Gaznevide. The two main leaders of the conquest were Seljuk’s sons, Jafaar Bey and Togrul Bey (or “Falcon Lord”).

The Armenians entered into tribute with the Grecian Emperor in exchange for military support, however it was Kurdish attacks from the mountains which stopped the Seljuks from advancing. These were successful enough to push the Seljuks back into Korasan, where hostile words were issued from the Baghdad Caliphate for killing fellow Muslims. Mahmoud decided to take action against them for encroaching upon his territory. Despite a large army, he was defeated and Togrul Bey pushed him westward to the river Indus. He was then crowned king and Nisabur became his seat of power.

Togrul was a staunch supporter of the Baghdad Caliphate, professing opposition to the Fatimate Caliphate and also going to war against the Bowides who were strangling it (i.e. the Baghdad Caliphate). The Bowides were defeated and Togrul was designated *Rocnoddin* or “support of religion”. Marriages were arranged between Togrul and the Caliph (Cayem’s) family solidifying the bond between power and religious oversight.

Togrul died without and heir and his brother (charged with the rule of Korasan) also. Alp Arslan (“Conquering Lion”), the nephew of Togrul became *Egreddin* (“Protector of Religion”).

The above events happened circa 1070 AD. As an aside, it was about this time a devastating famine supposedly struck Egypt, only three horses were left in the country and Tunis, city of 300 000, was reduced to 100, such was the severity.

Alp Arslan conquered Armenia and Georgia in the north, also Turkey in the west (Cappadocia/Anatolia and also Phrygia) but was repulsed back past the river Euphrates by Emperor Diogenes Romanus in 1071 AD. In a counter attack led by Alp, Diogenes was captured. Rather than executing or imprisoning him, Alp set him free for a ransom. Returning to Constantinople and finding the Empire had been given to Michael, he retired to a Monastery.

An aside event: In the same year the French Franks had taken back Sicily from the Egyptian Caliphate by bribing the governor.

Due to an argument between Alp's son and the Khan of Bokhara, Shams Melec (over the murder of Alp's daughter/wife of Shams), Alp was killed. This was by the hand of a town Governor on a revenge expedition by Alp. Alp's son Malek Shah was named successor but this met with resistance from his brother, uncle (Cutulmish) and cousin. The then Caliph, Moctadi, bestowed the title of *Emir-al-Moumenin* upon Malek.

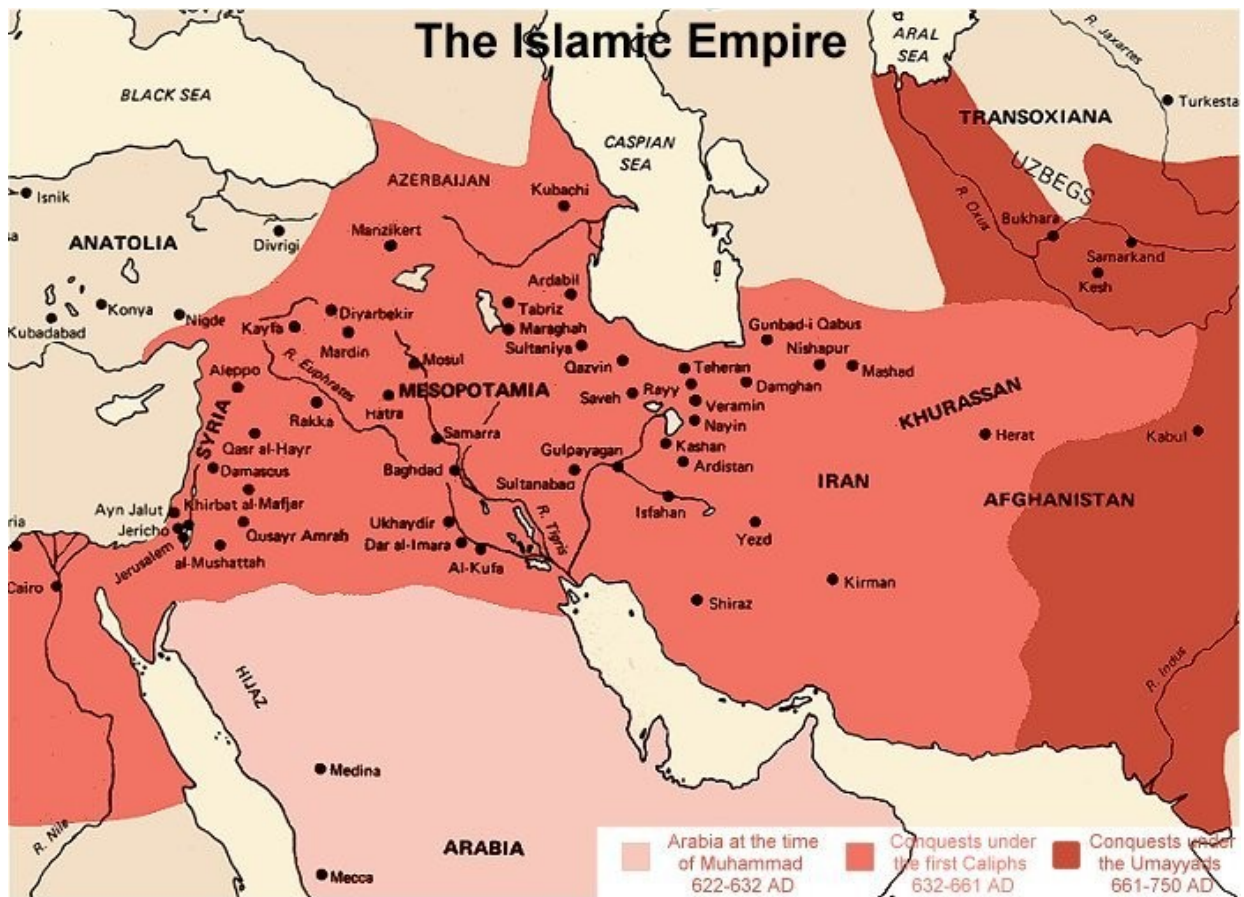
Cutulmish fled to the Greek empire seeking refuge and united with Nicephorus Botoniates, besieging Constantinople. Emperor Michael VII was defeated and retired to a monastery.

Malek still sought Cutulmish and sent General Barsook in pursuit to Constantinople. Single combat was initiated to decide the outcome with Barsook treacherously slaying Cutulmish, for which his followers abandoned him.

Soliman, the son of Cutulmish was able to take Antioch and other cities of the Greeks, leaving his son Kilidge Arslan in charge. At the time (1087AD) an Arabian prince, Sharfeddoleet Mooslem held dominion over all territories eastward from the Euphrates with Antioch being a tributary. Upon Soliman's ascension, the tribute stopped, war ensued and both were killed.

At this time the 'Holy' Crusades were about to begin and the account terminates.

Visual reference aids:



Source: http://www.farhangsara.com/history_arab.htm, 7/1/12



Source : <http://ocw.nd.edu/arabic-and-middle-east-studies/islamic-societies-of-the-middle-east-and-north-africa-religion-history-and-culture/lectures/lecture-3>