

Quadrant II – Transcript and Related Materials

Programme:	Bachelor of Arts (Third Year)
Subject:	History
Paper Code:	HSC 104
Paper Title:	Social Formations and Cultural Patterns of the Medieval World
Unit: II	Emergence of Islam
Module Name:	Caliphal State, Rise of Sultanates
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Notes

The Caliphal State and the Rise of Sultanates

CALIPHAL STATE OR CALIPHATE

Caliphate (Arabic Khilafat) was the political-religious state comprising the Muslim community or Umma and the lands and peoples under its dominion in the centuries following the death of Prophet Muhammad in 632 CE. Ruled by a Caliph (Arabic Khalifa), who held temporal and sometimes a degree of spiritual authority, the empire of the Caliphate grew rapidly through conquest, during its first two centuries to include most of Southwest Asia, North Africa and Spain. Khalifa (representative or successor) was at first a designation rather than a title; the official title was Amir al- Muminin, commander of the faithful.

Leadership After Muhammad

Muhammad the Prophet (570-632 CE) not merely founded a new religion; he created a new state, made the Arabs into a nation and brought them into history. After the death of Muhammad, urgent need for a successor as political leader of the Muslim community was met by a group of Muslim elders in Medina, who designated Abu Bekr, the man chosen by Muhammad to conduct the prayers in the Medina mosque and also the Prophet's father-in law, as the first caliph.

The Early Caliphs of Islam

The Caliphs authority was largely epistemic- that is to say, based on his superior knowledge of both religious and worldly. Although the reigns of the first four Caliphs – Abu Bekr, Umar, Uthman and Ali – were marred by political upheaval, civil war and assassination, the era was remembered by later generations of Muslims as a golden age of Islam.

The first four Caliphs were collectively known as “rightly guided Caliphs”, (Rashidun) because of their close personal associations with Prophet Muhammad. These four Caliphs largely established the administrative and judicial organization of the Muslim community and directed the conquest of new lands. The early Caliphs were:

Abu Bekr (632-634 CE)

Abu Bekr was fifty-nine, short and thin; simple, kindly but resolute; attending personally to details of administration and judgement and never resting till the justice was done. The tribes of Arabia mistook his modest manners for weakness of will; only superficially and reluctantly converted to Islam, they now ignored it and refused to pay the tithes that Muhammad had laid upon them. When Abu Bekr insisted, they marched upon Medina. The Caliph improvised an army overnight and, led it out before dawn and routed the rebels (632 CE). He then sent Khalid ibn al-Walid, the most brilliant and ruthless of Arab generals to bring back the turbulent peninsula to orthodoxy, repentance and tithes. The Bedouins tired of starvation and used to war, readily enlisted in these campaigns and before long were dying enthusiastically for Islam. Abu Bekr encouraged anti- Byzantine sentiment in Arabia and sent help to the Arab tribes in Syria to rebel and conquered it in 634 CE, the year in which he died. The Byzantine Emperor Heraclius had risked all Syria on one battle, henceforth Syria became the base of spreading Muslim empire.

Umar Abu Hafsa ibn al- Khattab (634-644 CE)

Umar had been the chief adviser and support of Abu Bekr and had earned such repute that no one protested when the dying Caliph named him as his successor. Yet Umar was very opposite of his friend; tall, broad-shouldered and passionate; was a severe puritan, demanding strict virtue of every Muslim; Umar was the real builder of the Arab empire, the unification of Arabia was completed under him and a large scale territorial expansion outside Arabia commenced. The Arabs were skillful horsemen and proved superior to the cavalry as well as the infantry of the Sassanid (Persian) and Byzantine (Greek) Empires. In 635 Damascus was taken, in 636 Antioch, in 638 Jerusalem ; by 640 all Syria was in Muslim hands;

by 641 Persia and Egypt were conquered. Umar personally went to Jerusalem at the request of Sophronius, the Patriarch of Jerusalem to sign the truce, confirmed the Christians in the peaceful possession of all their shrines and chose the site for the mosque, known by his name. Once Syria and Persia were securely held, a wave of migration set in from Arabia to north and east. Umar forbade the Arab conquerors to buy or till land and hoped that outside Arabia they would remain military caste amply supported by the state, preserving their martial qualities. His prohibitions were ignored after his death and the Arab conquerors soon gathered wealth and built rich palaces in Mecca and Medina. Umar was assassinated by a Persian slave while leading prayer in the mosque.

Uthman ibn Affan (644-656 CE)

The dying Caliph had appointed six men to choose his successor, they named Uthman from among themselves as the next Caliph. Uthman was an old man of kindly intent. He rebuilt and beautified the Medina mosque. He supported the generals who now spread the Muslim arms to Herat and Kabul, Balkh and Tiflis and through Asia Minor to the Black Sea. Uthman also represented the Umayyad clan of Mecca, which had suffered a partial eclipse during Prophet's lifetime. Uthman followed the same general policy as Umar but had less forceful personality than his predecessor. He continued the conquests that had steadily increased the size of the Islamic empire. Uthman tried to create a cohesive central authority to replace the loose tribal alliance that had emerged under Muhammad. He established the system of landed fiefs and distributed many of the provincial governorships to members of his family. Thus, much of the treasure received by the Central Government went to Uthman's family and to other provincial governors. Therefore, the army opposed him. Rebellions In 650 CE rebellions broke out in the provinces of Egypt and Iraq. In 655 the rebels marched upon Medina and besieged Uthman in his house. After several days of fighting he was killed in 656, while reading the Quran.

Ali ibn Abi Talib (656-661 CE)

After the death of Uthman, the Umayyad leaders fled from Medina and the Hashimite faction at last raised Ali to the caliphate. Ali was fifty-five, stout, genial and charitable, meditative and reserved. His was ruler during the hardest period in Muslim history coinciding with the first Muslim civil war. He reigned over the Rashidun empire which extended from Central Asia in the east to North Africa in the west. He became known as both just and fair ruler.

From Caliphate to Sultanate

Muawiyah the founder of Umayyad dynasty became Caliph by treachery and a kharijate rebel assassinated Caliph Ali near Kufa in 661CE. The Quraish aristocracy, through Muawiyah had at last won their war against Prophet Muhammad. The theocratic “republic” of the Successors became a secular hereditary monarchy.

Rise of Sultanates

The Umayyad Caliphate of Damascus (661-750 CE)

The assassination of Uthman and the troubled Caliphate of Ali that followed, sparked the first sectarian split in the Muslim community. By 661 CE, Ali’s rival Muawiyah I, a fellow member of Uthman’s Umayyad clan, had wrested away the Caliphate and his rule established the Umayyad dynasty, which lasted till 750 CE. The Umayyads ruled from Damascus. Despite the largely successful reign of Muawiyah, tribal and sectarian disputes erupted after his death. The majority of Muslims regarded the Umayyads as nominally Muslim at best, given their worldly and opulent lifestyles and on account of their having established dynastic rule by force. In a conscious effort to confer legitimacy on themselves and to acquire a religious aura, the Umayyad’s chose the title ‘Khilafat Allah’ or ‘the deputy of God’.

Under them the Muslim forces took permanent possession of North Africa and converted the native Berbers to Islam. They overran most of the Iberian Peninsula as Visigoth kingdom collapsed in Spain. They also made progress in the east with the settlement in the Indus valley in India. In 750 CE the last Umayyad Caliph Marwan II was defeated in the Battle of Great Zab by the followers of Abbasid family.

The Umayyad Caliphate of Cordoba in Spain (750-1031 CE)

The first Abbasid Caliph al Saffah, proclaimed himself the Caliph at Kufa and ordered a general massacre of the Umayyads. The only Umayyad of note who escaped was Abd al Rahman. He made his way to Spain and established a Umayyad dynasty in Cordoba that lasted until 1031 CE. The Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258 CE)

The Abbasids, descendants of an uncle of Prophet Muhammad al Abbas, owed the success of their revolt to ardent support of the Shia Persian nationalists who held that Caliphate belonged by right to the descendants of Ali. The Abbasids ruled from Baghdad. The period (786-861 CE) especially the Caliphates of Harun al- Rashid and al-Ma’mun is accounted the height of Abbasid rule.

Caliph Harun al- Rashid (786-809 C.E.)

Legends- above all, the Thousand and One Nights-picture Harun as a gay and cultured monarch, occasionally despotic and violent, often generous and humane, so fond of stories that he recorded them in state archives. He gathered around him in Baghdad an unparalleled galaxy of poets, jurists, physicians, grammarians, rhetors, musicians, dancers, artists and wits; judged their work with discriminating taste, rewarded them abundantly. He himself was a poet, a scholar, and eloquent orator. No court in history had ever a more brilliant constellation of intellects. Contemporary with the Empress Irene in Constantinople and with Charlemagne in France, Harun excelled them all in wealth, power splendour and the cultural advancement that adorns a rule. The Abbasid power ended in 945 CE. When Buyids from Iran took Baghdad under their rule, they retained Abbasids as figureheads. The Mongols finally ended Abbasid line with sack of Baghdad in 1258.

The Fatimid Caliphate (909-1171 CE)

The Fatimids Caliphate was an Ismaili Shia Caliphate of the 10th to 12th centuries CE established in North Africa by al- Mahdi bi'llah in 909. They traced their ancestry to Prophet's daughter Fatima and her husband Ali, the first Shiite imam. In 921 CE they conquered and established Al Mahdia city in Tunisia and made it their capital. In 969 CE they conquered Egypt and in 973 established Cairo as the new capital of their Caliphate. They made significant contribution to astrology and astronomy and built many observatories.

CONCLUSION

After the death of Muhammad, his successors or Caliphs (Khalifas) spread the influence and power of Islam in many countries. Under the Sultanates of Umayyads at Damascus and Cordoba (Spain), the Abbasids at Baghdad and the Fatimids at Cairo the Muslims became the most powerful people in the world. The period from the 7th century to the 11th century was the great age of Islam, when it was not merely politically powerful but when by its rich contribution to culture, it obtained the intellectual leadership of the world.