

Islam in the Middle Ages

After the Four Righteous Caliphs
through the Ottoman Empire

Umayyad Focus Question

- Is it acceptable to have a little evil if it results in a greater good OR is allowing a little evil something that ruins the whole ideal and thus should never be permitted?
- Can you think of any examples?

- Who were the Umayyads?
- What role did Mu'awiya play?

Assassination of Ali

- Ali – cousin of the Prophet Muhammad; also his son-in-law
- The position of caliph began to be passed down through the Umayyad clan, which became known to history as the Umayyad Dynasty (661-750).
- People loyal to Ali chose their own leaders whom they called imams, or spiritual leaders of Islam. This group became known as Shia (Shi'ite) Muslims.

Assassination of Ali

- After Uthman's assassination, Ali became caliph
- Uthman's cousin Mu'awiya was told to resign but refused (also told Ali to find Uthman's assassins or he would be blamed)
- Civil war between Ali (cousin of Prophet) and Mu'awiya – battle fields and negotiations
- By whom: a Kharjite (seceder) – the Kharjites were loyal to Ali; when Ali sought to negotiate with the Umayyads and Mu-awiya his rival, the Kharjites felt like Ali betrayed them; Kharjites thought they were preserving Islam's purity.

Mu-awiya (602-680)

- Rival of Ali
- Uthman's cousin and governor of Syria
- Claimed the caliphate in Jerusalem
- His virtue was highly regarded by Arabs
- Would only use military force when absolutely necessary
- "I never use my sword when my whip will do, nor my whip when my tongue will do."

Mu'awiya

- Founder of Umayyad Dynasty
- Made his base of power Syria; his capital Damascus replacing Medina
- Made the Arabs of Syria into a powerful, well-trained fighting force
- Continued to build Islam's navy
- Developed an effective administrative system (required tribal reps to live in Damascus – keep eye on them; get input)
- Helped young Muslim state not to fall into chaos

Umayyad Dynasty (661-750)

- When Mu'awiya knew he was going to die, he obtained his followers permission for his son Yazid to succeed him as caliph.
- Islam's highest political office became hereditary
- Umayyad leaders and their courts were recorded as being secular (worldly) – drinking, sexual immorality
- Business and administrative know-how (Umayyads were Mecca's wealthiest, most powerful clan) built Islam into a great Arab empire

Kharjite View on Leadership

- Kharjites were once supporters of Ali, who assassinated him for negotiating with the Mu'awiya and the Umayyads.
- Kharjites believed that any Muslim adult male could become a caliph regardless of race or lineage.
- If he sinned, he should be overthrown in favor of another.
- This perspective would recur throughout Islamic history.
- What would have been the problem with a Kharjite view of leadership then and now?

Umayyads: What Islam needed?

- Umayyads were lax Muslims
- Mu'awiya had resisted Muhammad until Mecca surrendered – then turned 180 degrees and became a scribe to the prophet
- His descendants known for drinking and sexual exploits – shocked 7th century Muslims
- But they kept control of caravan routes from Syria to Yemen
- Good business acumen; effectively chose policies, reconciled differences, and neutralized opposition

Great Mosque of Damascus



Damascus

- Previously housed a large temple to Jupiter during the first century
- Byzantine (Roman) emperor Theodosius banned pagan rituals at the site
- A church was built dedicated to John the Baptist
- Damascus became a Christian pilgrimage site; Christian worship continued even after Muslim conquest of Damascus in 636.

Great Mosque of Damascus: Details

- Built by al-Walid in 706; he was the sixth Umayyad caliph
- Church of Saint John was torn down; mosque built in its place
- Minarets date back to its original building with expansions done in 1340 and 1488
- SE minaret called the Minaret of Jesus – local legend that Jesus will appear there on the Day of Judgment
- Mosque had to be rebuilt after fires in 1069, 1401, and 1893

Great Mosque of Damascus

- Oldest existing monumental architecture in Islamic history (prayer hall ~ 525 feet!)
- Exterior covered in one of the greatest mosaic displays of the time





Shiites Resisted the Umayyads

- A sect of Muslims insisted that the only rightful caliphs were those directly related to the Prophet. With this in mind, three of the Four Righteous Caliphs would not have been qualified.
- Only Ali and then his sons should have been caliphs
- The sect who felt this way became Shi'at Ali (the group of Ali); Ali had been killed and so was his son Hasan leaving only Husayn, who lived in Mecca. When Mu'awiya died and Yazid ascended the throne, Husayn rebelled.
- Umayyad forces killed Husayn when he and a small band rebelled; his head was laid before the feet of Yazid in Damascus.

Umayyad Decline

- Known for decadent life styles (swimming in pools of wine, dancing girls, promiscuity)
- Could not keep Arab tribes from fighting; weakened demoralized army
- Had dissenters (mawali – intellectual and political leaders in communities)
- Shi'ites and Kharjites could always get stirred up
- **A rival group in Persia – Abbasids** (called this because they claimed descent from Muhammad's uncle Abbas)
- Persia, which included Iraq was becoming more important (increasing irrigation of Tigris and Euphrates)

Umayyad Defeat (750)

- Muslims wanted popular equality not Arab domination
- Revolt in Khurasan, Persia led by Abu – Malik, who supported Abbasids; defeated army of Umayyad governor and moved on Syria
- Army defeated the Umayyads, who put up a valiant fight
- Chased last Umayyad caliph all the way to Egypt and killed him; killed almost all Umayyad family members
- Abd al-Rahman I was the only member of the family to survive; travelled across N. Africa and reached and took over Spain

- What role did Mu'awiya play in early Islamic history?
- Who were the Umayyads?
- What role did they play in the history of the Middle East?