

outlying regions including Yemen. Two local dynasties in North Africa—the Idrisids in Morocco and the Aghlabids in Ifriqiya—asserted autonomy from the Abbasid center (though the Aghlabids continued to send tribute to Iraq). Military factionalism in Syria and tax revolts in Egypt added to the woes of the central administration, as did Shi'i and Khariji uprisings in northern Mesopotamia and western Iran. On campaign against Rafi ibn al-Layth, head of a particularly difficult revolt in Khurasan, al-Rashid fell ill and died. The succession arrangement, which brought al-Amin to power, quickly ran aground with the onset of civil war between the two brothers.

### ✱ Khadija bint Khuwaylid (d. 619)

Khadija, the first of Muhammad's wives, was the first convert to Islam, according to the Arab-Islamic sources. Her father, Khuwaylid, belonged to the Asad branch of the Quraysh. She is reported to have been married twice as a young woman. The death of her second husband, a successful trader, left Khadija a wealthy widow and heir to her husband's caravan trade. She hired the young Muhammad—attracted, it is said, by his reputation for honesty and piety—to oversee her business. He is said to have conducted trade on her behalf between the Hijaz and Syria. While some sources state that she was fifteen years his senior, other sources suggest they were close in age. Her marriage proposal to Muhammad, possibly presented through a male guardian, followed. The marriage produced four girls (Zaynab, Umm Kalthum, Fatima, and Rukayya) and at least one son (Abdallah). Abdallah is reported to have died as a child. Of the four girls, Fatima gained the greatest significance through her marriage to Ali ibn Abi Talib. Rukayya married Uthman, the third of the Rashidun caliphs.

Many details of Khadija's life are uncertain. Her significance to early Islamic history is at least twofold. Modern historians are interested in her status as a merchant and property owner and her seeming independence. One line of argument is that these show the greater autonomy enjoyed by women prior to the introduction of Islamic regulations that limited their rights and social mobility. Arab-Islamic sources generally laud her role in Muhammad's life following the start of his prophetic mission. She is reported to have provided the encouragement he required to proceed with his public preaching, at an early point when the hostile response of

the Quraysh grew particularly fierce. She is also associated with her cousin, Waraqa ibn Nawfal, a Christian convert revered by the Islamic tradition for having acknowledged Muhammad's prophetic standing.

Khadija's relationship with Muhammad and her standing as a woman of conviction and piety are reflected in the honorific phrase often attached to her name. She is counted among the "mothers of the believers" (*ummahat al-mu'minin*). Her death (619) occurred some three years before the *Hijra*, and just after the death of Abu Talib, the Prophet's uncle and protector. Faced with a mounting campaign of abuse and violence by the Quraysh, Muhammad found his situation made all the more precarious by the loss of his two cherished supporters.

### Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan (d. 680)

Mu'awiya, a member of the Banu Umayya clan of the Quraysh, is generally described as the founder of the Umayyad caliphate. His second cousin, Uthman ibn Affan (d. 656), the third of the Rashidun caliphs, was the first member of the clan to control the caliphate, though it fell to Mu'awiya to establish the dynasty in Damascus. The reconstruction of the history of his caliphate is made difficult by the generally hostile treatment of the Umayyads in later Arab-Islamic sources. Generally the sources are respectful of Mu'awiya himself.

His rise to office followed an extended conflict with Ali ibn Abi Talib, who was accused of at least indirect complicity in Uthman's murder. Following Mu'awiya's refusal to recognize Ali's caliphate, armed struggle ensued. Negotiations between the two sides at Siffin (657) were inconclusive but resulted in a weakening of Ali's authority, to Mu'awiya's advantage. Strengthened by the seizure of Egypt (658), then Ali's assassination (661), Mu'awiya's bid for the caliphate was settled with the decision by al-Hasan, Ali's son, to forgo a bid for the caliphate (661). In that year—known in the Arabic sources as the "year of unity"—Mu'awiya was proclaimed head of the Arab-Islamic Empire.

His years in office were marked by advances in Anatolia against the Byzantine Empire as well as campaigns in the eastern Mediterranean and North Africa, with Egypt serving as the springboard into the latter territory. Mu'awiya also largely overcame the challenges posed by unruly elements within the conquest armies, notably nomadic forces from Arabia. He did so, in good part, through a policy of cooperation with tribal chiefs

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the caliph's sudden death, he was returned to prison in Baghdad. The new caliph, al-Mu'tasim, an unenthusiastic supporter of the *Mihna*, was pushed by his adviser, Ahmad ibn Abi Du'ad (d. 854), to harshly interrogate Ibn Hanbal. Some Arabic sources report that Ibn Hanbal, after a particularly humiliating session, finally gave in, though other sources, particularly those by later Hanbali scholars, insist that he stood firm. He is said to have remained in seclusion for some years thereafter. Following the decision by the caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 847–861) to reverse the *Mihna*, Ibn Hanbal regained favorable standing at court, at one point invited to a meeting with the caliph al-Mu'tazz (r. 866–869).

Ibn Hanbal's best-known work, a collection of Hadith of the Prophet and his companions, is known as the *Musnad*. Following Ibn Hanbal's death, his tomb became the site of Sunni pilgrimage until the fourteenth century, when it is reported to have been swept away in a flood. Two of his sons, Salih ibn Ahmad (d. 880) and Abdallah ibn Ahmad (d. 828), were among his closest followers and, as such, contributed to the formation of the Hanbali *madhhab*.

### ✱ A'isha bint Abi Bakr (d. 678)

The Prophet is said to have entered into additional marriages only after the death of his first wife, Khadija, in most cases in order to strengthen ties either to his own following or to prominent Hijazi tribes. A'isha, the daughter of Abu Bakr, an influential Meccan and the Prophet's close adviser, probably was chosen for this reason. Born in Mecca, she became the Prophet's third wife in 623, at the age of nine, according to the early biographies. The sources report that the Prophet took part in her childhood games early in their marriage and that she was his preferred wife at the time of his death. One line of argument sees in her eventful life evidence that women enjoyed wide access to public life prior to the introduction of Islamic law. The point is controversial since it is widely maintained, in the Islamic tradition, that Islamic law in fact improved the standing of women by initiating social and legal reforms.

The first of several noteworthy episodes in her life occurred outside Medina (627). On the return from one of the Prophet's campaigns, A'isha was accidentally left behind when the caravan moved on. She

was rescued by a young man, Safwan ibn al-Mu'attal, who accompanied her to Medina. When opponents accused her of having committed adultery with Safwan, Muhammad hurried to her defense, citing revelation (*Surat al-Nur*, 24:11–20) that spoke of her innocence and roundly condemning her accusers. Other defenders noted the lack of evidence against her. Despite her vindication, the accusation remained and, over the centuries, was repeated by detractors, Shi'i scholars most notably (see below).

Following the Prophet's death (632), A'isha, now a childless widow, apparently took no part in politics until Uthman's caliphate. She joined the opposition to Uthman ostensibly on religious grounds, arguing, like others in the community, that his policies violated Qur'anic teachings and the Prophet's example. Her political activity continued following Uthman's assassination when she joined Talha and al-Zubayr in opposing Ali's caliphate. The respective armies clashed at the Battle of the Camel, so called because much of the fighting is said to have taken place around the camel bearing her litter. Upon Ali's victory, A'isha was placed under house arrest in Medina and apparently took no further part in politics.

The biographical dictionaries indicate that she devoted the remaining years of her life to scholarship and religious instruction. As a result of her role in transmitting information about the Prophet's life and teachings, she is regularly named as an authority in Sunni Hadith collections. A'isha remains a controversial figure in Islamic society. Alongside Khadija and the Prophet's daughter Fatima, she is among the best-known women of the early Islamic period. Various strands of modern Islamic feminism see her as an exemplary Muslim, both for her relationship to the Prophet and for her piety and scholarship. In Shi'i writings, however, she is still sharply criticized, both for her alleged adultery and for her opposition to Ali ibn Abi Talib.

### Ali ibn Abi Talib (d. 661)

Ali, a member of the Prophet's clan, the Banu Hashim, was the fourth of the Rashidun caliphs. Abu Talib (d. 619), his father, protected the Prophet against the Quraysh early in Muhammad's career. One of the first converts to Islam, Ali became the Prophet's son-in-law upon his marriage to Fatima. Their sons, al-Hasan and al-Husayn, played a significant role

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# THE RISE OF ISLAM

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