Quotes from Caliphate by Hugh Kennedy

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In 1986, however, two scholars of the Islamic Middle East at Cambridge, Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, published a short but very important book in which they convincingly demonstrated, from a whole variety of textual and numismatic evidence, that the title meant deputy of God from the beginning. The idea that it meant successor, they argue, was introduced by ninth-century ulama (religious scholars) as an attempt to downgrade the office in the great struggle between caliphs and scholars of that time to control the making of law and the establishment of Islamic norms.

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It was probably as a result of this expedition that Umar acquired the title of Fārūq, by which he was sometimes known. This is an Aramaic, not an Arabic term, which means the Redeemer. Exactly what the early Muslims understood by Redeemer is not clear, but it has been suggested that it was part of an eschatological discourse which saw the Muslim conquest of Jerusalem as marking the end of days and the beginning of the Last Judgement. The exact significance of the word is lost beyond recovery, and the Muslim tradition does not discuss it in any detail, but it is evidence that the caliph had made a deep impression on Muslim and non-Muslim alike.

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At the same time Muāwiya mobilized his Syrian supporters and came to meet them. The two armies faced each other at a place called Siffin, just up the river from Raqqa.

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More attractive is the historian Andrew Marsham's suggestion that it related to the verses in the Qur'ān which urge Muslims to 'go out' (on the jihād) rather than stay at home.6 Kharijites were associating with the militant activists among the earliest Muslims. They have never constituted more than

a small percentage of the Muslim population. but they are important in the history of the caliphate because they developed theories of the office, how the caliph or imam (they used both terms to describe their leaders) should be chosen and what they should do, which were radically different from the concepts of both Sunni and Shii.

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When others had their doubts, the Kharijites were proudly unrepentant of the role some of them played in the murder of Uthmān, seeing it as entirely justified, even necessary, because of his deviation from proper Islamic behaviour.

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Hasan was paid considerable sums of money and withdrew to the Hijaz where he lived a life of comfortable retirement. His younger brother Husayn seems to have been less reconciled to Muāwiya's rule but bided his time as long as the Umayyad leader lived.

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The great chroniclers of the Umayyad caliphate, Balādhuri (d. 892) and Tabarī (d. 923), record the deeds of the caliphs of the dynasty objectively and usually without moral judgements. It is with the ulama, the religious scholars, and later historians that these prejudices become apparent. This is partly because they wrote under the rule of the Abbasids, who would have a natural interest in denigrating the achievements of the dynasty they had overthrown.

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The fact that the baya became the primary ritual of inauguration in the caliphate was important. It was a fundamentally Arab idea expressed in Arabic words and Arab gestures. It made it clear that this Islamic leadership was quite unlike the ancient empires with their lavish and extravagant ceremonies. It was also a symbol of a relationship between free men, the subjects voluntarily accepting the authority of the new ruler. At the same time it had no divine approval or sanction. Of course, to break a solemn oath went against the law of God as it did the law of man, and most people accepted that the new ruler was in power because, in some way, God willed it thus, but the ritual itself was essentially a contract between men and that was all that was necessary to confirm a new caliph in power.

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When the old caliph died, the succession initially passed smoothly: as one contemporary is said to have written to Yazīd, 'You have lost the Caliph of God and been given the Caliph of God', a curious parallel with the English formula, 'The King is dead, long live the King', on such occasions.

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Mukhtār proclaimed Ibn al-Hanafiya not just as caliph but as Mahdī, the first time that this title was used by a would-be leader of the community. Mahdī meant God-guided, and implied a leader who could begin a new era and make radical changes to bring in a truly Islamic government.

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[I]t should be noted that these differences were not solved and ended by discussion and compromise but by military power and strength. The Umayyads did not win because they had the most persuasive and popular arguments, but because they had the most effective military machine and military leadership.

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Some of these mawālī may have been Greek converts with experience of Byzantine administration and techniques, but the structures which Abd al-Malik developed were thoroughly Islamic in presentation and intention.

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There were none of those private coinages minted by nobles and bishops which were so prevalent in much of western Europe in this era. The inscriptions made clear to all who could read who the ruler was. From Portugal to Central Asia, people used coins which proclaimed an Islamic state. Just as importantly, they carried the Arabic language to the remotest corners of the Muslim world, confirming its status as the language of power and rule.

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Two explanations for the building can be put forward. The first is that construction work began when Ibn al-Zubayr was ruling Mecca and that the Dome was constructed as an alternative focus for hajj. Certainly the form of the building, which is centred on the eponymous rock and surrounded by circular and octagonal aisles, seems designed for the circumambulation (tawwāf) which lay at the heart of the hajj ritual. This is not to argue that Abd al-Malik wished to replace Mecca and the Kaba, but rather to provide an alternative while Mecca lay in the power of his enemy; and who knew how long that would be?

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In the ninth century it was the case that the caliph was almost completely excluded both from law-making and from judgement. Law-making, or rather law-finding, had become the preserve of the ulama, those who knew the Qur'ān and the Traditions of the Prophet, by this time accepted as the only valid sources of law.

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Hajjāj, Abd al-Malik's right-hand man, considered that the caliph was superior to the Prophet himself and Khālid al-Qasri, Hajjāj's successor in Iraq, expressed much the same sentiments about Walīd I, sentiments which would certainly have seemed blasphemous to many later and modern Muslims, but which seem to have been unchallenged at the time. In

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Umar was not the son of Abd al-Malik but of his brother, Abd al-Azīz, the long-time governor of Egypt. He spent much of his youth in the Hijaz where he had the reputation of being something of a playboy. As caliph, however, he adopted a puritanical and pious persona, perhaps in imitation of his namesake, Umar I. He has a reputation in later sources of being 'the good Umayyad' and of rejecting the oppressive policies of his dynasty, and of ruling according to God's book and His sunna (ordinances as laid out in the practice of the Prophet and his words).

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The conquering Arab general had sent some 4,000 of the beasts to Iraq where they throve in the marshes of the south of the country. The caliph ordered that the buffaloes, with their Sindi keepers, be transferred to Cilicia, a hot and well-watered area where, apparently, they frightened the lions away. In other words, if you had a problem with lions you turned to the caliph and asked him to do something about it. And he did, mobilizing the resources of the vast Muslim empire to resolve the problem—or at least that is what we are told.

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Abbās's son Abd Allah figures frequently as a much respected authority of the Traditions of the Prophet, a reputation which may, of course, owe much to the political success of his descendants. He was not, however, one of the six members of the shūra chosen by Umar to elect the caliph after his death and he does not seem to have played a notable role in the Muslim conquests. The family enjoyed a quiet prosperity under the Umayyad caliphs and the remains of their palace have been uncovered by archaeologists at Humayma, in southern Jordan. Compared with the residences of the ruling dynasty, it is a modest structure, with rooms built around a single courtyard. And there is a small mosque outside, clearly identified by its orientation and its mihrab (prayer niche).

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Quite how the Abbasid connection with Khurasan began is not clear, but from 720 onwards there were increasing contacts between the family based in Humayma and disaffected Muslims, Arab and mawālī alike, in the province, more than a thousand miles away.

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Black was to be the distinctive colour of Abbasid court dress for the next two centuries, and wearing it a sign of allegiance to the dynasty.

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The qalansuwa appears to have been abandoned at the beginning of the tenth century, along with many other features of what had by then become traditional Abbasid court style. It is also at least possible that it is the ultimate origin of the camelaucum, the tall, conical papal tiara which seems to appear in the eighth and ninth centuries.

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Among the thirty-seven Abbasid caliphs who reigned before 1258, no name was ever used twice. This led to the invention of more and more elaborate, and sometimes virtually unpronounceable, verbal forms to ring the changes.

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Abū Muslim, the great general and organizer of the revolution, was clearly one such potential rival. Persuaded to leave his Khurasani stronghold and come west to Iraq on his way to the hajj, he was lured to the caliph's camp (this was before the building of Baghdad) and separated from his loyal troops. Then, in the presence of the caliph, he was killed by the palace guards and his body rolled up in a carpet in a corner of the royal tent while his head was displayed to his followers. The man to whom the Abbasids owed so much was brutally slain when he seemed to be a challenge to the power of the regime, much as the first Fatimid caliph in Tunisia killed the missionary who had brought the Berber troops to support him. Abū Muslim's name went down in history as a victim of ungrateful tyrants, but Mansūr remained caliph, his authority strengthened.

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For the only time in the long history of the office, a caliph had taken it upon himself to decide on a major theological issue and to enforce his opinion on anyone who wanted to play an important part in the military or civilian hierarchy. In order to do this an inquisition (mihna) was set up to examine and, if necessary, punish those who objected. Again, this was the first and last time such a body was set up by a caliph.

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[I]n the claustrophobic and murderous world of Samarra caliphs succeeded each other with terrifying rapidity, killed in most cases by Turkish soldiers whose salaries they had been unable to pay.

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The Zanj were East African slaves who had been imported into southern Iraq by rich landowners to help clear the salt which had accumulated on the irrigated fields and was making agriculture impossible. It was terrible work in the baking hot, shadeless fields and it is not surprising that social revolt broke out—the only mass slave revolt in Middle Eastern history.

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There was another factor which was, in a way, more positive, and that was the conversion of an increasingly large proportion of the population of the caliphate to Islam. It can be argued that the break-up of the caliphate was the inevitable result of the success of Islam as a popular religion. This is a very difficult process to measure. We can be certain that there were no Muslims in these areas before the Arab conquests. Conversion was slow in the seventh and early eighth centuries but after that gathered pace, especially in the tenth century. By the year 1100, and before in some places, it is likely that 50 per cent of the population were Muslims of one group or another.

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Arabic was widely used as the language of religious and philosophical discussion. Merchants traded across borders with little or no interference from government; administrators wandered from one court to another looking for lucrative employment. In many ways the umma was a united commonwealth: it was just that the caliphs had no significant role in this.

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[T]he Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs were literate, although the warrior caliph Mutasim is said to have had difficulty with his letters, whereas it is worth remembering that the first English king who is known to have been able to read and write, with the exception perhaps of Alfred, was Edward I in the late thirteenth century.

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In the ninth century Baghdad could boast a Grub Street culture where a would-be author could write a work, have it copied and sell it in the hundred or more shops in the Book Suq (Sūq al-warrāqīn), and make enough money to stay alive. It was not easy to live off one's writing, any more than it is in Britain today, but it was at least possible. And if your own books were not selling well, you could always fall back on copying other people's work to tide you over in the lean periods.

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It may come as something of a surprise to find that drinking poetry was so popular in the Muslim society of the time, but it was one of the measures of the confidence and diversity of this society that it could accept such challenging images if they were presented elegantly and wittily. Abū Nuwās presents a world of common taverns, but the enjoyment of wine was also a central part of Abbasid court culture. Some caliphs, such as Mahdī, did not drink out of religious scruples, but many others did as part of princely display and performance.

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He went to the bath every day after his ride and had water poured on him. He would then come out wrapped in a dressing gown and, after taking a cup of wine with a biscuit, lie down until he had stopped perspiring. Sometimes he would fall asleep. Then he would get up, burn perfumes to fumigate his body and have dinner brought in. This consisted of a large fattened pullet stewed in gravy with a half kilo loaf of bread. After drinking some of the gravy and eating the chicken and the bread he would fall asleep. On waking up he drank four ratls [perhaps two litres] of old wine. If he felt like fresh fruit, he would have some Syrian apples and quinces. This was his habit until the end of his life.5

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The caliph Ma'mūn certainly showed a real interest in natural and experimental science. This can be seen in the story of his project to measure the circumference of the earth. There was no question that the earth was round: every educated person in ninth-century Baghdad knew that. But no one knew how big it was, and the caliph was determined to find out. He knew that the ancient Greeks had calculated it at 24,000 miles and he wanted to determine whether this was accurate.

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Baghdad itself had been founded as the capital for a Muslim dynasty and its official name, Madinat al-Salam, the City of Peace, suggested an Islamic identity. Yet within this new city a Christian community had developed. They built churches and monasteries and no one seems to have stood in their way. The hierarchies of the various Christian churches in the caliphate were recognized by the caliphs.

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The Shiites worshipped in their own mosques and developed their own, exclusive festivals, especially the celebration of the Ghadīr Khumm, the pond between Mecca and Medina where, the Shia believe, Muhammad designated Alī as his heir. Their opponents, whom we can describe as proto-Sunnis, developed a

rival festival of the Cave, the cave where Muhammad and Abū Bakr had hidden together to escape the persecutions of the Meccans.

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The Qādiri Epistle (Risālat al-Qādiriya) is a comparatively short document and has none of the bombastic and convoluted language of, say, Walīd II's letter about the appointment of his heir discussed earlier. In fact, it was obviously written for public circulation and information.

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'We should declare no one an unbeliever for omitting to fulfil any of the legal ordinances except the prescribed prayer,' and a quote from the Prophet: 'Neglect of prayer is unbelief, whoever neglects it is an unbeliever and remains so until he repents and prays', to which he adds that the neglect of other injunctions does not make one an unbeliever.

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What accounts for this longevity is quite unclear. It is possible that a moderate lifestyle and abstinence from alcohol may have played their part, but we have no evidence for this. Certainly their largely static lifestyle—neither of them seems to have travelled far from Baghdad—does not suggest that fresh air and exercise were important factors.

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It was important to send some men who spoke Arabic because there is no indication that the envoy spoke Persian, while many at the Ghaznevid court, including the sultan himself, had little or no Arabic. On 10 December, escorted by the notables of the town and a guard of honour of 1,000 troops, the envoy entered the city and was taken to his lodgings in a palace in the Alley of the Basket Weavers where 'much delicately prepared food was immediately brought in'. The envoy was allowed three days to recover from the rigours of the journey and was lavishly entertained.

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The next day was to be the start of mourning for the dead caliph. The sultan wore a white headcloth and a white robe, white being the colour of mourning, and all his courtiers did the same.

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The sultan's officials were frank about their motivations: 'a vast army has been assembled and we need more territory. The army must be put to work.' An

army which did not bring in more resources was an intolerable burden on the state.

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He swears genuine and unshakeable allegiance to the caliph, his lord (sayyid), though exactly what this might entail is not specified. Certainly, there is no concrete mention of military or financial support. He takes the oath by the Qur'ān, as one might expect, but also by the Jewish Torah, the Christian Gospels and the Psalms of David, and he finishes by a very extended indemnity clause in which he states that if he breaks this oath all his possessions, including slaves, should be given to the poor and any wives he has or will marry should be irrevocably divorced. Finally he will make the hajj to Mecca thirty times, on foot, not riding.

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The caliphs again had viziers to run an expanded administration and in 1125 Caliph Mustarshid (1118–35) led an army in the field against an aggressive prince of Hilla, who had attached himself to the Shiite cause. Caliph Muqtafī (1136–60) used his increased revenues to build up a new army recruited not from Turks but from Greeks and Armenians who had converted to Islam.

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In 1086 the new Almoravid ruler of Muslim Spain and Morocco, Yūsuf b. Tashfīn, who had just inflicted a major defeat on King Alfonso VI of Castile, was advised by the religious lawyers that 'It is proper that your authority should come from the caliph to make obedience to you incumbent on all and sundry.' So he sent an envoy to Caliph Mustazhir, Commander of the Faithful, with a large gift and a letter in which he mentioned the Frankish territories which God had conquered (at his hands) and his efforts to bring victory to Islam, and he also requested investiture with rule over his lands. A diploma granting him what he wished for was issued from the caliphal chancery and he was given the (newly invented) title of Commander of the Muslims. Robes of honour were also sent to him and he was greatly delighted with this.4 In 1229 the ruler of Delhi, Iltutmish, requested investiture from Caliph Mustansir (1226–42). He was granted the title of Great Sultan and confirmed in all his possessions. The document was solemnly read out in a vast assembly and from then on Iltutmish put the caliph's names on his coins. His successors followed his example.5 It is worth noting that neither Spain and Morocco nor northern India had ever been ruled by the Abbasids at the height of their political power. In 1097 the first Crusaders, known to the Muslims

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According to later Arabic sources, the execution was carried out by having the caliph and his sons put in two great sacks and trampled to death. In the Mongol scale of values, killing a man without shedding his blood was an expression of respect. But the thirty-seventh and last Abbasid caliph of Baghdad may have missed the point of this compliment as Hulegu's horses pounded him to extinction.

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While the papacy has, precariously at some times, maintained its political independence to this day, the caliphate lost it in 1258 and it was never revived. With this political independence, gone too were any real aspirations to a leadership which went beyond self-interested dynastic concerns.

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They were needed to hold up the whole edifice of the sharīa. All qādīs and preachers, it was argued, owed their authority ultimately to the caliph. Without him no marriages would be valid, no contracts enforceable and man would be bereft of spiritual guidance.

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But suppose there are two equally good candidates, Māwardī considers. The choice then depends on the situation. If Muslims are being attacked, then bravery in battle should be given priority; if popular lethargy and heresy are the main problems, then intelligence should be deemed more important. Age could be used to differentiate two equal candidates, but seniority, by itself, was not a decisive qualification. Casting lots should not be used in deciding these issues. Once the electors have decided and the candidate has agreed, then the decision cannot be undone unless the chosen candidate resigns. If two candidates are elected in different cities, then the one who was elected first has priority.

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To that end the Abbasid caliph Muqtadī married the daughter of Malik Shāh and produced a son called Jafar, who Malik Shāh was determined would be Commander of the Faithful. In 1092 Malik Shāh ordered the reigning caliph to resign and leave the city, paving the way for Jafar to succeed him. In the event Malik Shāh died young and Nizām al-Mulk was assassinated and the whole scheme collapsed as the Seljuq princes and their supporters fought each other for the succession.

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The electors should be free men with experience in law, government and administration. Like Māwardī, he accepts the possibility of choice by just one

elector, but for him the key qualification for this elector is that he has power and authority, what he calls shawkat. Although he does not say so, this allows the possibility that a powerful Seljuq ruler may quite legally appoint a caliph.

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There seems to be a veiled encouragement to the Seljuq vizier Nizām al-Mulk to take over the caliphate. This would have been a very radical departure from the tradition and practice of the community but would be justified by Juwaynī's arguments. He praises the role of the Seljuqs, their organization of government and their leadership of the jihād, and argues that a usurper who has the power and the qualifications to lead the umma should be accepted.

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The essential quality of this one elector is that he has power and authority to make the rule of the caliph effective. Ghazālī adopts the concept of shawkat already used by Juwaynī to express that combination of force and awe which is essential to enforce obedience, for a caliph who cannot command obedience is no use to anyone. It is God who provides and sustains this shawkat, thus expressing His support for the choice.

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The question which separates Sunnis and Shias was whether the Qur'ān had existed through all eternity with God, or whether it had been authored by God at a particular moment in human history and revealed to Muhammad.

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Virtually all Shiites believe that it means that the imam should be able to interpret uncertain and controversial passages in the Qur'ān and that it is him, not the scholars of Tradition, who had the knowledge to do this. The sharīa of the Shiites is to be decided by the imam, not by the ulama or by the consensus of the community. Some took the argument further than that, saying that the imam should be able to change and even abrogate the sharīa because of his superior judgement.

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Although the biographies of these early imams were elaborated later to give an impression of continuous activity, there is no evidence that this second Alī played any part in the politics of his day or that he was respected as an authority on religious questions. The same was broadly true of his son Muhammad al-Bāqir (d. c.735). There were Shiite revolts in Iraq, notably that of Zayd b. Alī in Kufa in 740, but the line of the Twelver imams played no part in them. There are reports that at the time of the Abbasid revolution the organizer of the Abbasid

movement in Kufa, Abū Salama, tried to interest the then imam, Jafar al-Sādiq (d. 765), in putting himself forward for the caliphate, but Jafar, perhaps wisely, declined to get involved and Abū Salama paid for his initiative with his life.

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To Twelver Shiites this occultation of the imam meant, and still means, that there is an imam in the world, indeed there has to be an imam or Islam would not be possible, but he is hidden. It is impossible to have any direct communication with him or for him to issue any decrees. Instead, decisions have to be made by learned men on the basis of decrees passed down from Alī and the known imams.

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The Zaydi imamates remained a distinctly Yemeni phenomenon. The imams were, in a way, outside the tribal structure. They served as mediators, advisers, scholars and leaders of the Yemenis against invaders but not as rulers with absolute control over law and order and other aspects of everyday life: this was left in the hands of the tribes and tribal chiefs. It was a model of authority which worked well enough in Yemen for many centuries but could not be exported to other parts of the world.

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The missionary Abū Abd Allah, whose preaching had done so much to mobilize the Kutāma in the Fatimid cause, was executed, much as the Abbasid caliph Mansūr had executed Abū Muslim.

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Even the strongest and greatest of the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs, Abd al-Malik or Mansūr, had not presumed to produce an official law-book. The caliph sanctioned the law and it was to the caliph that difficult decisions should be referred. If the Abbasids had lost the struggle with the ulama for control of sharīa, the Fatimids had clearly won it.

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The Fatimids and the Umayyads soon became rivals for the allegiance of the tribes of the largely Berber populations of the western Maghreb (roughly speaking modern Morocco). Clearly if there was going to be this sort of competition, the Umayyads of Córdoba needed to improve their ideological armoury to compete on equal terms. The Berber tribal leaders could now choose between two caliphs, not just a caliph and a simple emir, when they debated to whom they should offer their allegiance.

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Rather than taking the caliphate on tour, so to speak, he created a court to which notables were drawn and wanted to belong, and where they wanted their sons to be educated. It was a pattern which, many centuries later, Louis XIV was to adopt in the palace and court at Versailles: autocracy by attraction rather than by the naked use of force.

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Not everyone saw it this way: for Usāma b. Lādin and the ideologues of Al-Qaeda, the story of Andalus was a terrible warning. Muslims had tolerated Christian and Jewish elements in the population and allowed them rights and positions. The result was plain to see: Muslims ended up driven out of their own country and the Iberian Peninsula was permanently lost to the Dār al-Islam.

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Although convivencia meant peaceful co-existence, it did not mean equality. Christians and Jews were second-class citizens and a peaceful coexistence was only possible as long as they accepted an inferior status. When this was no longer the case and the Muslims felt threatened, then convivencia was doomed.

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John was meant to make himself 'presentable to royalty by cutting his hair, washing his body and putting on clean clothes'. He refused, even when the caliph sent him ten pounds in coin to smarten himself up, thanking him for the gift but suggesting that it would be better spent on alms for the poor: 'I do not despise royal gifts,' he wrote in response, 'but it is not permitted to a monk to wear anything other than his usual habit', and eventually the caliph gave in, saying, 'Even if he comes dressed in a sack, I will most gladly receive him.'

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Under the reign of the caliph's son Hakam, Byzantine mosaicists came to work in Córdoba and the brilliant results of their labours can still be seen around the mihrab of the Great Mosque and in the domes in front of it. Of course, the mosaics in Córdoba were very different in their iconography and images from the mosaics being created in Constantinople to decorate the churches of the city.

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Many in Córdoba were very reluctant to accept this inexperienced youth as ruler and a group among the Siqlabi (Slav) officials who formed the elite of the Córdoban army3 attempted to secure the appointment of the dead caliph's brother Mughīra, son of the first caliph, Nāsir. However, they were soon outmanoeuvred by an ambitious courtier called Mu hammad b. Abī Āmir and the unfortunate

Mughīra, though he seems to have been innocent of any political ambition, was strangled in his own house in front of his family.

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In 1031 a group of Córdoban notables came together and abolished the caliphate, preferring one of their own, unrelated to the ruling family, as local governor. The abolition of the caliphate was an unusual move in a society which valued traditions and titles, particularly a title with such a history and resonance. What is even more surprising is that no one seriously attempted to revive it. The Umayyad family just disappeared from the political scene. One important reason was the destruction of Córdoba and its Campiña, the rural area which surrounded it. The fate of the city and that of the Umayyad caliphs were closely bound up. After the siege of 1010–3, many of Córdoba's people were dead and many others had emigrated, while the luxurious villas and estates which had provided the settings for so much of the social and cultural life of the caliphate were ruined and abandoned. The surviving inhabitants seem simply to have concluded that the caliphate was more trouble than it was worth. And they were probably right.

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When I was fighting with the Christians in the tower, which was the heart of their resistance in the city of Huete, and victory and triumph over them were within our grasp, I saw none of the valiant Almohad soldiers or commanders who were supporting me. I ran in person to the caliph who was in session with his brother and the talba of the court discussing questions of religious dogma. I said to him, 'My lord caliph! Send me reinforcements for I am on the point of victory!' I only wanted him to show himself on horseback so that the people and all the people would see him and they would enter the city there and then. But he did not answer me and carried on with what he was doing. I realized that the intention of the jihād had been corrupted and that the expedition had failed. I returned, despairing of victory and very preoccupied and thoughtful.2

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After the disappearance of the Almohad caliphate, the Hafsid rulers of Tunisia used the title, as did the Turkman rulers of eastern Anatolia in the fifteenth century and the Shaybani Uzbeg rulers of Bukhara in the sixteenth.

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Murad I (1360–89) seems to have been the first of his dynasty to assume the title after he took Edirne and Plovdiv from the Byzantines in around 1362, when he wrote to lesser emirs in more eastern parts of Turkey that God had chosen him to assume the dignity of the caliphate. He called God to witness that 'from the date of his coming to the throne, he had not taken a moment's rest but had

devoted himself day and night to the waging of war and jihād and always had his armour on to serve the well-being of the Muslims'.2

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A legend, which seems to have been elaborated at the end of the eighteenth century, recounts that the last Abbasid transferred the caliphate to the Ottoman sultan, but this is no more than a piece of fiction concocted to justify the Ottomans' renewed interest in the caliphal title at that time. A contemporary notes that 'the caliph, Commander of the Faithful Mutawakkil, has been sent by sea to Istanbul' and three years later he is said to still be living in the capital. After the accession of Sulayman the Magnificent in 1520, Mutawakkil was allowed to return to Egypt where he died in 1543, the last and final claimant of a line which stretched back to Saffāh in 750.

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Despite this, Selīm never seems to have called himself caliph or to have been mentioned as such on coins or in documents; he was always known as sultan. By the reign of Sulayman the Magnificent (1520–56), it was generally accepted that the Ottomans were caliphs as well as sultans. The title of caliph was only really used in relations with other Muslim powers, like the rulers of Morocco, who were not under the direct authority of the Ottomans. The Sadi rulers of Morocco (1510– 1668) accepted the status of the Ottomans as the protectors of Islam but only as representatives of the true caliphs, who had to be members of the tribe of Quraysh, and they themselves claimed to be descendants of Alī and Fātima. Other Muslim potentates also appropriated the title, as for instance the Mogul emperor Akbar (1556–1605) in distant Delhi, but it was never more than a vague honorific.

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In Ottoman times it seems to have been generally accepted that the power and authority of the Ottoman sultan justified his taking of the title of caliph, but in doing so the force of the title was largely lost, subsumed in the wider rhetoric of Ottoman power. There was no authority that the sultan gained as caliph which he did not already have as sultan and the office therefore added little to his standing.

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The first example of this seems to have been in the Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca of 1774, in which the Ottoman sultan Abd al-Hamīd I (1774–89) was obliged, to all intents and purposes, to cede the sovereignty of the largely Muslim Crimea to Catherine the Great of Russia, and where the sultan was described as 'the imam of the believers and the caliph of all those who profess the unity of God [that is, Muslims]'. This seems to be a face-saving formula to allow him to claim

to be the spiritual leader of the Muslims of Crimea and to avoid the shame of allowing Muslims to be ruled by infidels.

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One of the most celebrated examples of his adoption of modern technologies to fulfil the ancient responsibilities of the caliphate was the construction of the Hijaz railway from Damascus to Medina, completed in 1900. This enabled the pilgrims from Ottoman lands to make the hajj in the (comparative) comfort of the train as opposed to going on foot or on camels. It also alienated many of the Bedouin who had been used to the protection money that the pilgrims paid them, and they were more than happy to cooperate with the British mission led by T. E. Lawrence in his attempts to destroy the track during the First World War. In doing this Abd al-Hamīd was facilitating the hajj, just as Hārūn al-Rashīd and the Abbasids had done 1,100 years before with the construction of the Darb Zubayda.

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Later Caliph Muāwiya bought it from Kab's heirs and, it is said, it was preserved by all later caliphs. According to one story the burda was burned by Hulegu following the sack of Baghdad in 1258 and the death of the last Abbasid caliph of the city, but others said that survivors of the massacre took it to Cairo whence it was removed to Istanbul at the time of the Ottoman conquest in 1517. It was certainly in the Ottoman relic collection by the reign of Sultan Murad II (1574–95) who had a golden case made for it. It was thought to have a talismanic importance and sultans took it on campaign. When Mehmet III (1595–1603) led his armies on campaign to Eger in Hungary, he took the mantle with him. At one point in the battle it looked as if his army was about to be defeated, but one of his courtiers told the monarch, 'My sultan! As an Ottoman sultan who is caliph on our Prophet's path, it would be appropriate for you to put on the Holy Mantle and pray to God.' The sultan took his advice, donned the mantle and led his soldiers to victory, and an elegant miniature illustrates the sacred garment being carried on the head of a courtier as the sultan looks on and the cannon thunder against the enemy. It is interesting in this account to see the identification of the possession of the mantle with the caliphal office, just as it was in the Abbasid period.

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In 1877 two retired Indian political officers, Sir George Campbell, ex-governor of Bengal, and George Birdwood, argued that the Ottoman claim was fraudulent, and Birdwood went on to say that it would be to the British advantage to encourage looking to the Sharif of Mecca (the local ruler of the Holy City who was also a descendant of Alī and Fātima) as caliph for 'he would be as completely in our power as the Suez Canal'. This provoked a vigorous response from the pro-Ottoman writer James Redhouse (1811–92). Redhouse had enjoyed a career

which was, to say the least, unusual. As a young orphan from London, he had taken service as a cabin boy on a British ship. When the ship berthed in Istanbul in 1826, he absconded and used his education in mathematics and science to make a career in the service of the Ottomans, then battling with the insurgent Greeks and the Egyptian Muhammad Alī. Redhouse became a passionate Turko-phile and wrote, among other things, the most scholarly and complete dictionary of Ottoman Turkish ever compiled. He now entered the fray and produced a pamphlet entitled 'A Vindication of the Ottoman Sultan's "Title of Caliph" ', in which he dismissed challenges to the Ottoman title as 'erroneous, futile and impolitic', firstly because the sultan's claim to the title was ancient and accepted by 'the whole orthodox world of Islam' and then because the claim that the caliph should be of Qurashi descent, always a difficulty for the Ottomans, had no Prophetic support. In

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A swift response came from the sheikhs of the Azhar in Cairo, long the established intellectual leaders of the Sunni world. After a meeting on 25 March 1924, they issued a notice reaffirming the traditional view that the caliphs were the representative of the Prophet in the protection of the faith and the implementation of its laws. They rejected the separation of the political and religion powers of the office implied by the 1922 abolition of the sultanate and asserted that Abd al-Majīd was not a true caliph since he had accepted this. Now the umma should set about finding a new holder for the office.

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Al-Qaeda's Afghan allies, the Taliban, were and still are primarily focused on creating a Muslim state, ruled according to sharīa within Afghanistan rather than a caliphate which could attract the loyalty of all Muslims. Ironically, the idea that Al-Qaeda is working to establish a universal caliphate finds its clearest expression in the polemics of American politicians like George W. Bush and Donald Rumsfeld, who tried to develop the image of the caliphate as a Muslim totalitarian enterprise which threatens the whole world.

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The claim of Abū Bakr al-Baghdādi to the caliphate seems to be based on two criteria. The first is descent from Quraysh. While we cannot be certain, there is no reason to doubt his lineage and there must be many tens of thousands of people who could claim Qurashi descent, after all but, as we have seen, there are, and have been since the eleventh century, many Muslims who have rejected the idea that the caliph has to be from the holy tribe.

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In the abundant, and historically very unreliable, accounts of the wars of the early caliphs, they can discover almost anything. To take one especially terrible example, the burning alive in an iron cage of the unfortunate Jordanian pilot, in the whole of early Islamic history (in contrast, incidentally, to early modern European history) there is virtually no tradition of burning prisoners alive. However, Islamic State 'researchers' have managed to find one example in which Abū Bakr is alleged to have ordered such a dreadful punishment, and that is enough to justify this barbaric behaviour and, more than that, to publicize and glorify it.