

The Sufyanid Caliphs: Mu'āwiya and his Family
41-64/661-684

The assassination of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib in 40/661 left his rival Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān as the undoubted strongman of the Muslim community. Mu'āwiya was by this time in his fifties, having been born in the first decade of the seventh century. His father, Abū Sufyān, had emerged as leader of the Meccans in the years that followed the battle of Badr and had conducted the negotiations which brought the city to acknowledge the authority of the Prophet. His young son received a political education in the best traditions of the Quraysh. Like his father, he became a Muslim at the time of the conquest of Mecca, later that is, than many over whom he was subsequently to rule, but his education meant that he became one of Muhammad's secretaries and part of the new Muslim élite. After Muḥammad's death, he and his elder brother Yazīd went on the expeditions to Syria, where the family had owned property before the coming of Islam. Yazīd's premature death from plague meant that Mu'āwiya came to be the leader of the family and governor of Syria after the death of Abū 'Ubayda. He remained governor without interruption or challenge for the next twenty years, thus obtaining an unrivalled opportunity to build up and strengthen his power base in the province.

While his place in the affections of the Syrians was secure, even his enemies attested that the problems he faced in the rest of the Islamic world were formidable. He had to assert not only his personal power but also the credibility of the caliphate and the unity of the Muslim community which had been so badly damaged in the preceding years, and he faced opposition not just from people who resented his assumption of power, but people who resented the whole idea of a strong and effective government. Perhaps his greatest achievement was to ensure that, despite the stresses his policy inevitably caused, the Muslim world

remained united enough to resist the attacks of its enemies and to expand its own borders.

Mu'āwīya's character and policies emerge with some clarity from the sources and even hostile commentators paid tribute to his abilities.

His virtues were those of the successful politician, not of the brilliant general or the religious leader; of these the most important was the quality the Arab sources describe as *ḥilm*, the shrewdness, moderation and self-control that the situation demanded. Money was as important a weapon as the support of the Syrian army; he knew that most people have a price and he was prepared to pay it to avoid conflict. The loyalty of the Syrians was assured and their army was the most effective in the Muslim world but he did not use this military power as an instrument to keep control over other provinces; he used it to attack the Byzantines on land and sea. It was there as a reserve, but a reserve that was never needed after the death of his rival 'Alī. He ruled rather by making agreements with those who held power in the provinces, by building up the power of those who were prepared to co-operate with him and by attaching as many important and influential figures to his cause as possible. It was not an absolute government in which governors were appointed and dismissed by a central authority but almost a confederation of different leaderships acknowledging one overall authority. From his provincial governors the caliph demanded that they accept his authority, that they keep order and that, in some cases, they forward revenues to the central government: it is recorded, for example, that of 60 million dirhams collected in the province of Baṣra, only 4 million were sent to Damascus, all the rest being spent in the province, mostly on paying the local military. Beyond that governors were allowed to establish their own power bases and assure the fortunes of their families and friends. Unlike his own relative and predecessor, 'Uthmān, however, he did not attempt to assert his authority through his own family. The Umayyads were an extensive family and contained a number of figures, notably Marwān b. al-Ḥakam, of great ability and political experience, but few of them were given important roles in the government, either as advisers at the court in Damascus or as provincial governors. They were mostly settled, in luxury, in Medina and the Ḥijāz, far from the real centres of power. Mu'āwīya's father had been a leading figure in the Meccan commonwealth, that system of trading agreements and alliances which had brought such prosperity to the city, and his son seems to have used this, rather than the absolutist models of the Byzantine empire or the religious claims of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, as the inspiration for his statecraft.

The most serious difficulties he faced were in Iraq. The death of 'Alī had not solved any of the deep-rooted problems which the conquest

and the vast flood of immigrants had caused. The Iraqis were resentful of Syrian dominance but this feeling did not lead to any sense of unity. There remained the social divisions between the *ashrāf* and the early Muslim élite, now itself divided between the *qurrā'* and their descendants who clung to the memory of 'Alī, and the Khawārij who rejected any but their own rigorist interpretation of Islam. There were regional differences as well; the problems of Kūfa were not those of Baṣra and the two cities were more rivals than allies. These tensions and divisions made violence almost inevitable and that it did not break out until after the death of the caliph was a tribute to his own talents and those of the men he chose.

In social terms, Mu'āwiya's triumph was the triumph of the *ashrāf* in Kūfa and the surrounding area. The fortunes of tribal leaders like al-Ash'ath al-Kindī and his son Muḥammad and Jarīr al-Bajalī prospered while those who had challenged their status, like Mālīk al-Ashtar and his son Ibrāhīm and Ḥujr b. 'Adī al-Kindī felt betrayed and resentful. As governor of this most difficult city, the caliph chose a man of ability and experience if of somewhat disreputable morals. Al-Mughīra b. Shu'ba al-Thaqafī came from the holy family of Ṭā'if, just as Mu'āwiya did from that of Mecca. Before the conquest of his city by the Muslims, he had fled to Medina and embraced the new religion in the year 8/629-30 to escape the consequences of a particularly outrageous murder. Islam, as Muḥammad said, cancelled all that had gone before and al-Mughīra, like Mu'āwiya, became one of the Prophet's secretaries. When Ṭā'if fell to the Muslims, al-Mughīra, helped by Abū Sufyān, was the man who destroyed the idol of the town and pillaged the temple treasury. Like many Thaqafīs he joined in the conquest of Iraq and his knowledge of Persian marked him out for administrative office. He became governor of Baṣra under 'Umar and was removed after allegations of adultery but reappointed as governor of Kūfa at the end of 'Umar's reign. In the conflict between 'Alī and Mu'āwiya he had played a moderating role, advising 'Alī to recognize Mu'āwiya in Syria. Nobody had more experience of the Iraqis and their problems and Mu'āwiya appointed him as governor, a post he held for nearly ten years from 41 to his death in 50 (661-70). He adopted a policy of keeping the peace and turning a blind eye to misdemeanours which did not threaten his authority. The Kūfans were allowed to keep for their own needs the revenues of the district known as Māh al-Kūfa in the Zagros mountains, and the regular payment of salaries, something 'Alī had never been able to achieve, must have done much to induce co-operation.

In Baṣra Mu'āwiya turned at first to the obvious candidate, the Umayyad 'Abd Allāh b. 'Āmir. b. Kurayz who had already held the

under 'Uthmān and had begun the conquests of Khurāsān and Sindh. Now reappointed he again opened campaigns in the east, notably in Sindh, and Arab armies even entered distant Kābul. While his fighting qualities were not in doubt, however, 'Abd Allāh seems to have been either unable or unwilling to undertake the maintenance of law and order in Baṣra and there may have been some resentment against these distant campaigns. He was dismissed in 44/664 and replaced by the most remarkable of Mu'āwiya's subordinates, Ziyād b. Abīhi otherwise known as Ziyād b. Abī Sufyān. Like al-Mughīra, he came from Ṭā'if, from a Thaqaṭī background although his exact parentage was obscure as his name implies (Ziyād son of his father). He joined the Thaqaṭī in southern Iraq in the earliest stages and because of his education he was put in charge of the division of the booty and then became secretary to successive governors, including al-Mughīra who became the patron of this bright young man. He was one of 'Alī's most consistent supporters, refusing to be reconciled to Mu'āwiya even after 'Alī's death, and remaining in Fārs until 42/662-3 when, with al-Mughīra acting as intermediary, he was reconciled to the new caliph. Mu'āwiya recognized that he had both the abilities and the all-important local connections to be his right-hand man in Baṣra and he was duly appointed. Ziyād had a very positive view of the governor's responsibilities and his conception of the office was deeply influential in the later development of ideas of government. In a widely reported speech he made to the people of Baṣra on his appointment, he is said to have offered both a carrot and a stick. The good news was that the *'aṭā'* was to be paid regularly and that they would not be forced on long campaigns in distant regions, and he also promised to be accessible at all times to his subjects (he himself never led armies to the east). On the other hand he promised draconian measures to enforce law and order within the city; there was to be a curfew, tribal and clan solidarities were no longer to be used to protect the guilty and the *shurṭa* or police force was to ensure the maintenance of peace. He ended with the celebrated warning, as he surveyed the people gathered before him, that he saw heads tottering on shoulders and they were to make sure that their own stayed in place. The policies seem to have worked and Ziyād enjoyed the favour and confidence of the caliph to the extent that he was acknowledged as Mu'āwiya's half brother and was officially known as Ziyād b. Abī Sufyān as a result.

In 50/670 on al-Mughīra's death, he replaced his former patron as governor of Kūfa as well as Baṣra and hence became a virtual viceroy in the east.

In Kūfa, his firmness contrasted with al-Mughīra's more easy-going ways but the reliability of his financial administration went far to

compensate for this. He reorganized the city into four quarters, each with chiefs appointed by and responsible to him in order to control the population. As governor of Iraq he also controlled appointments in Iran. Here it is clear that he encouraged further conquests as a way of relieving the pressure on resources in Iraq. From 47/667 on he sent a series of armies to Khurāsān. Hitherto the Arabs had maintained a small garrison in Marv but otherwise left the administration in the hands of the local princes. Ziyād decided to change this position in a way which was to have extremely important consequences for Islamic history. In 51/671 he sent to the provinces a large contingent of 50,000 troops from both Baṣra and Kūfa, not as a garrison but as settlers, and they established themselves in the Marv oasis. This meant that Khurāsān had a larger number of Muslim settlers than any other area outside the Fertile Crescent, more than Egypt and certainly more than any area in western Iran. For the moment this emigration solved some of the problems of Iraq but it was the descendants of these settlers who were, in the end, to destroy the Umayyad caliphate itself.

Iraq and the east then were managed by Mu'āwiya through what some must have seen as a Thaqaḥfī mafia. Thaqaḥfīs were experienced in the affairs of Iraq before the coming of Islam, well educated (it is worth noting how important the education of both al-Mughīra and Ziyād was in ensuring their success) and they had close connections with the Quraysh and the Umayyads from before Muḥammad's time. In addition, the Thaqaḥfī had played a major role in the conquest of Iraq; nobody could say they were outsiders, creatures of a distant and unresponsive government. All these factors made for a system which worked for Mu'āwiya's reign; when the great Ziyād died in 53/673 he was succeeded a few years later in all his offices by his son 'Ubayd Allāh, more hasty and given to the use of force than his father, but a man whose devotion to the Umayyad cause could not have been doubted.

Mu'āwiya's power base was in Syria but, compared with Iraq, we are fairly badly informed about the position in the province. The Islamic historical tradition was developed in Iraq under 'Abbasid rule, and the sources tend to be hostile to the Umayyads and concerned with Iraqi and Khurāsānī affairs. It is clear, however, that Mu'āwiya drew support from a wide cross-section of Syrian tribes, both from those who had arrived at the time of the conquest and those who had been settled in Byzantine times. As yet the feud between the Qays and Yaman which was to plague Syria for so many centuries was not a major problem. He gathered around himself what might be described as a cabinet of Syrian leaders who were his right-hand men; some of these were Qurashīs, including 'Abd al-Raḥmān the son of the great general Khālīd b.

al-Walīd, who was powerful in the Homs area, but none of them were Umayyads and they tended to come from the less important clans of the Quraysh, notably from the Fihri's like al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Qays who had played an important role in the conquest of the Jazīra. The others were mostly from Yamāmi tribes, including Shuraḥbīl b. al-Simṭ al-Kindī whose power base was in Homs, and Ḥassān b. Mālīk b. Baḥdal, chief of the powerful Kalb tribe. This inner circle assured the loyalty of different groups in Syria and the Jazīra and was occasionally used on difficult missions outside that area. While they were sometimes made governors of the districts within Syria, they were never appointed to Iraq or the east and the Syrian army was kept busy attacking the Byzantines. Rhodes was taken in 52/672 and Crete in 54/674 while during the last seven years of Mu'āwiya's reign, the caliph's son Yazīd led continuous attacks on Constantinople itself (54-60/674-80). These expeditions were mostly raids and even such areas as the Mediterranean islands that were captured and held were used as sources of tribute but not for colonization. The Arabs of the Jazīra led similar expeditions into Armenia but again there was no extensive settlement of new areas such as the Iraqis were accomplishing in Khurāsān. This suggests that the motives for the warfare were to provide the Syrians with military experience and financial rewards rather than to cope with the problem of over-population. Mu'āwiya managed the Syrians with consummate skill and their loyalty to him was famous; it was only after his death that serious divisions began to appear.

Egypt was controlled almost as an appendage of Syria. Arab settlement here was very limited, being confined almost entirely to the cities of Fuṣṭāṭ and Alexandria. In the struggle with 'Alī, Mu'āwiya had received the loyal backing of 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ, anxious to regain control of the province he had conquered for Islam, and 'Amr ruled Egypt almost as a partner until his death in 43/663. For most of the rest of the reign, 47-62/667-82, Egypt was governed loyally by Maslama b. Mukhallad, the only member of the *Anṣār* to achieve a high rank in Mu'āwiya's government.

If Mu'āwiya's caliphate was decentralized politically, it was decentralized administratively as well. No attempt was made to introduce a general, Arabic-speaking administrative system for the whole Muslim world. On the contrary, each province continued the local traditions of the previous rulers. In Syria financial administration was almost entirely in the hands of local Christians, including Sarjūn son of Manṣūr who had held the same office for Heraclius at the time of the Muslim conquest. In Egypt, as we know from the slightly later papyri of Qurra b. Sharīk, the Byzantine system continued almost unchanged with the local headmen

responsible for tax collecting and local administration. In Khurāsān we have already seen that the local magnates continued to manage their own affairs, only paying tribute to the Arabs. Even in Iraq, the area most affected by the Arab expansion, the native landowners continued to play a role in local administration. This local autonomy was typified by the coinage; there was no Islamic coinage as such, rather each province used and supplemented where necessary the existing money supply, the gold *ḍīnār* of the Byzantine areas and the silver *dirham* of the Sasanian countries. Taxation systems differed as a consequence and there was no uniformity in the dues paid by the native inhabitants of different areas, these being determined by local tradition and the circumstances of the conquest rather than by government policy. Mu'āwiya supplemented the limited income derived from provincial taxation in two ways; the first was by the frontier warfare and there can be no doubt that at this stage, booty and tribute helped to secure the loyalty of the Syrians. The second way was by large-scale agricultural developments. We know most about this in the Ḥijāz around Medina since his activities provoked considerable opposition, but no doubt other likely areas were developed as well. This large-scale farming, using the labour of *mawālī* (freedmen, sing. *mawlā*) or slaves meant a substantial income for the treasury. In Iraq, the extensive *ṣawāfī* lands which had caused so much anger during the reign of 'Uthmān, were taken over as government property, or rather they ceased to be the *māl al-muslimīn* (wealth of the Muslims), controlled by the Muslims, but became rather the *māl Allāh*, controlled by the caliph. The Kūfans were paid their '*aṭā*', regularly and honestly, but they no longer had direct control over the lands which produced it.

The one serious problem which disturbed the later years of Mu'āwiya's reign was the ordering of the succession. Mu'āwiya was determined that his son Yazīd should succeed him and that he should be formally acknowledged by the Muslim community in his father's lifetime. Many were scandalized by the idea. No caliph had been so succeeded by his son and those who opposed the plan were quick to call for a *shūra* or some more open form of decision and accused Mu'āwiya of attempting to set up a hereditary monarchy. Everyone understood that the acceptance of Yazīd would mean the maintenance of the sort of Syria-based regime which his father had set up and the idea was bitterly opposed therefore, not just by the Iraqis but also by those Umayyads and other Qurashīs in the Ḥijāz who had been effectively excluded from power by Mu'āwiya. In the end the opposition was silenced by threats or payments but when Mu'āwiya died in Rajab 60/April 680, his son, although able, well liked and of proven military ability, faced a whole series of challenges.

The Kūfans had not lost their enthusiasm for the house of 'Alī during the long years of Mu'āwiya's reign since they believed that only the coming to power of the Family of the Prophet would restore Kūfa and the Kūfans to their rightful position. 'Alī's elder son al-Ḥasan had abandoned his claims to leadership but his younger brother al-Ḥusayn was prepared to take up the cause. On the death of Mu'āwiya al-Ḥusayn left his place of retirement in Medina and travelled across the desert towards Kūfa to seek his supporters, accompanied only by a small band of family and friends. The governor of Iraq, Ziyād's son 'Ubayd Allāh, was waiting for him; he prevented the small party from reaching the settled lands and, after some days of confrontation when al-Ḥusayn and his followers suffered increasingly from thirst, there was a short battle at a place called Karbalā', and al-Ḥusayn and most of his party were killed. The Kūfans had made no effort to support him. It was 10 Muḥarram 61/10 October 680. At the time, the attempt to raise the 'Alid banner in Iraq was a pathetic failure but the events of the massacre at Karbalā' made a deep impression on the Muslim community. Many felt that the grandson of the Prophet, a man whom Muḥammad loved and had played with on his knee, had been brutally done to death by the forces of godless oppression. Al-Ḥusayn might be dead but his memory lived on; the accounts of his sufferings at the hands of Umayyad troops were elaborated in Kūfa to discredit the regime, and al-Ḥusayn became the symbol for the sufferings of all the weak and defenceless. To talk of Shi'ites in Iraq at this stage is misleading; the development of a Shi'ite "sect" was a much later development, but the death of al-Ḥusayn played an important part in the attachment of people's hopes and political aspirations to the family of 'Alī.

The death of al-Ḥusayn meant the effective end of trouble in Iraq; much more intractable were the problems of the Ḥijāz. Yazīd was well aware of the strength of feeling against him in the Holy Cities and he made great efforts to be conciliatory, but some refused to take the oath of allegiance, notably 'Abd Allāh, the son of that al-Zubayr who had died at the Battle of the Camel. An austere and determined figure, he held that the caliphate should not be the plaything of the Sufyanids but that the ruler should be chosen from all the Quraysh. Ibn al-Zubayr established himself in Mecca where he became a rallying point for all those who opposed Yazīd's claims, asserting that there should be a new *shūra*. The Medinese, for their part, were motivated by other considerations as well; it is clear that Mu'āwiya's agricultural activities in Medina had aroused widespread opposition, especially from the *Anṣār*, who felt that their city was being taken over by an absentee landlord and they rallied to the anti-Umayyad party. There were some two years

THE PROPHET AND THE AGE OF THE CALIPHATES

of negotiation and manoeuvre while Yazīd and a series of governors attempted to defuse the situation. Finally it came to open hostilities; the Umayyads in the city, led by Marwān b. al-Ḥakam, were driven out to Syria while a Syrian expeditionary force marched on the Prophet's city. The Medinese attempted to defend themselves, just as the Prophet had done, by digging a trench around the town but the Syrians were an easy match for them and at the battle of the Ḥarra (Dhu'l-Ḥijja 63/August 683) they were defeated and the city sacked. It only remained now for the Syrians to march on Mecca and eject Ibn al-Zubayr and it was while they were engaged on the unsavoury task of attacking the Ka'ba itself that news came of Yazīd's death and once more the whole situation was changed.

The disasters of Karbalā' and the Ḥarra cast a cloud over Yazīd's brief reign. Yet it was not devoid of achievement. Compared with Mu'āwiya's ambitious raids, he tried to stabilize the frontiers between Syria and Byzantium; outposts on the Sea of Marmara were abandoned while in the north of Syria itself, he carved up the over-large *jund* of Homs to make a new frontier province based on Qinnasrīn which was to include both Antioch and Manbij. Had he lived longer, his reputation might have recovered from the shocks of the early part of his reign; as it was he died in his desert encampment at Ḥawwārīn in Rabī' I 64/November 683, when he was only about forty years of age.

Yazīd was succeeded immediately by his young son Mu'āwiya. His accession was due to the influence of his cousin, Ḥassān b. Mālīk b. Baḥdal of Kalb, and the prince himself proved sickly. Mu'āwiya II, the last of the Sufyanids, died after only a few weeks.

The Foundation of the Marwanid Caliphate and the Achievement of 'Abd al-Malik 64-86/684-705

The death of Mu'āwiya II led to a deep crisis in the Umayyad regime; Yazīd's other sons were too young to be generally acceptable and the major provinces of the empire were slipping rapidly from the control of the Syrians. 'Ubayd Allāh b. Ziyād was forced to flee Baṣra, despite a speech in which he not only recalled his own Baṣran connections but promised to retain the wealth of the province for its people. These concessions were not enough, and almost alone he fled along the direct desert road to the Ḥawrān in Syria. On his arrival in Syria he found the Syrians in total disarray. Al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Qays al-Fihri, one of the last surviving members of Mu'āwiya's inner circle, held power in Damascus but wavered between acknowledging Ibn al-Zubayr or finding a suitable Syrian candidate. Many other Syrians were willing to acknowledge Ibn

al-Zubayr as well, notably the Qaysī tribesmen of the northern part of the country, and even leading members of the Umayyad family were preparing to go to the Hijāz to offer their allegiance to him. Not all Syrians, however, were prepared to surrender their privileged position. The Kalbī chief Ibn Baḥdal was related by marriage to the ruling house and now put his power and that of his tribe firmly behind the continuation of the Umayyad house. 'Ubayd Allāh b. Ziyād had been taught by his experience in Baṣra how closely his own fortunes were linked to those of the dynasty and on his arrival in Syria he too set about organizing the resistance.

The most serious problem facing Ibn Ziyād and the Kalbī chief was that of finding a suitable Umayyad candidate. Ibn Baḥdal favoured Mu'āwiya II's young half-brothers but 'Ubayd Allāh turned to Marwān b. al-Ḥakam. Marwān was by this time an old man. He had served his uncle 'Uthmān as his right-hand man in Medina and after the caliph's assassination had remained to become leader of the Umayyads in the Hijāz. He had never moved to Syria and had remained very much in the background during Mu'āwiya's reign, but the troubles which led to the battle of the Ḥarra had forced him to leave along with the rest of the Umayyads in Medina and make their way north as refugees. Marwān seems to have been resigned to accepting Ibn al-Zubayr when he was met by 'Ubayd Allāh, newly arrived from Iraq who persuaded him to change his mind. Ibn Baḥdal then summoned a meeting of Syrian *ashrāf*, not in Damascus where al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Qays remained in control, but in his own territory at the old Ghassanid centre of Jābiya. Here he presided over a sort of extended *shūra* at which Marwān was finally acknowledged as the candidate of the Umayyad party, in exchange for financial promises. Marwān had no experience or contacts in Syria, he would be entirely dependent on the *ashrāf* from the Yamāmī tribes who had elected him.

Not everyone in Syria could accept this, especially the leaders of the Qaysī party who more and more turned to al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Qays. They persuaded him not to go to the Jābiya meeting but rather to prepare for battle. The Yamāmīs marched to meet them, Damascus was brought over to their side by the prompt action of a scion of the old Ghassanid ruling family and, in Muḥarram 65/July 684, just nine months after Yazīd's death, the two sides met in a terrible battle at Marj Rāhiṭ, on the road from Damascus to the north. The Yamāmī tribesmen were victorious and the Qaysīs although much more numerous than their opponents were driven from the field with a dreadful slaughter, al-Ḍaḥḥāk himself being killed. While the remnants of the Qaysīs, led by Zufar b. Ḥārith al-Kilābī, fled to Qarqīsiyyā' on the Euphrates, Marwān was acknowledged as caliph in Damascus.

The war had been won but the bloody victory at Marj Rāhiṭ had long-term consequences which were to be fatal for Syria and the Umayyads alike because it divided the Arabs of the province into two separate parties, Qays/Muḍar on one side and Yaman on the other. The basic distinction between northern (Qays) and southern (Yaman) Arabs was an ancient but hitherto fairly harmless one. In theory the allegiance of each tribe was decided according to complicated genealogies but in practice there was considerable confusion and some tribes were claimed by both sides. In Umayyad times the division was in part geographical, the Qaysī tribes being mostly settled in the northern parts of the province, in the newly created *jund* of Qinnasrīn, and the Jazīra, including the Byzantine frontier areas as far east as Armenia. Yamanī tribes occupied the steppes around Homs, the Palmyrena, Palestine and the areas to the east of the Jordan valley. It was also a division arising from the Islamic conquests. Some Yamanī tribes like the Kalb, Tanūkh, Judhām and Taghlib had been in Syria before the coming of Islam, while the majority of Qaysīs like the Sulaym, Kilāb and 'Uqayl were newly arrived from the Arabian peninsula, many of them brought to the Jazīra by Mu'āwiya in 'Uthmān's reign. Some newly arrived tribes from south Arabia, like the Kindīs and Ḥaḍramīs settled in Homs, joined the Yaman group. Much of the hostility must have been the result of disputes over grazing rights. Many of the Yamanīs came from tribes that were still in part Christian, like the ruling house of Kalb where Ibn Baḥdal's grandfather had remained Christian until his death during 'Alī's caliphate. They had also in many cases been allies of the Byzantines and in some ways the battle of Marj Rāhiṭ was the battle of the Yarmūk refought, with the victory this time going to the old-established Syrian tribes. The confused succession to Mu'āwiya II had led to the emergence of two coalitions, Qaysīs supporting al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Qays and Yamanīs supporting Ibn Baḥdal and Marwān but the battle meant that the split continued beyond the immediate crisis. Qays had so many dead to avenge and the feud was to continue for generations. As late as the nineteenth century, battles were still being fought in Palestine between groups calling themselves Qays and Yaman.

The newly established caliph had a mass of problems to contend with but he and his supporters, 'Ubyad Allāh and Ibn Baḥdal, set about tackling them with energy and determination. Marwān's son Muḥammad was sent to contain the Qaysīs on the middle Euphrates while 'Ubayd Allāh prepared for the reconquest of Iraq. An expedition to the Ḥijāz ended in failure but the caliph, accompanied by Ibn Baḥdal and another of his sons, 'Abd al-'Azīz, had a signal triumph when, with the help of the *ashrāf* of Fustāṭ, they seized Egypt from the representative of Ibn

al-Zubayr. Already the characteristics of the new regime were becoming apparent. Marwān looked back for his political guidance not to Mu'āwīya but to the uncle he had served so long and well, the Caliph 'Uthmān. Like 'Uthmān he made the family the basis of his power, just as Mu'āwīya had neglected it; his sons Muḥammad and 'Abd al-'Azīz had been given military commands almost from the beginning while his eldest son, 'Abd al-Malik, was soon acknowledged as heir to the caliphate. It was a shaky beginning, but a new regime had been born.

Marwān died, an old man by the standard of the day, in Ramaḍān 65/April 685 and he was succeeded immediately by 'Abd al-Malik, his son and designated heir, the accession being smoothly managed by the Yamanīs. The new caliph had been born in his father's house in Medina about 26/646-7, near the beginning of 'Uthmān's reign, and he was a boy when the old caliph was killed. Like most members of his family, his relations with Mu'āwīya were not close and he grew up, a pious and serious young man, in Medina where he worked as his father's assistant in the administration. He came to Syria with his father after the expulsion of the Umayyads from the Ḥijāz and was one of his closest advisers during the few months of his caliphate. His political experience may not have been very extensive when, now, in his early forties, he found himself caliph, but he was methodical, careful and determined to make his power effective.

The obstacles the new caliph faced were formidable. The Syrians were far from united and he was heavily dependent on the Yamanī leaders, Ibn Baḥdal and Rawḥ b. Zinbā' al-Judhāmī, and the support of members of his own family. Egypt was now firmly under Umayyad control again but while it was an important source of income, the smallness of the Arab population meant that it provided little in the way of military support. Ibn al-Zubayr had consolidated his power in the Ḥijāz while his brother Muṣ'ab had moved to Baṣra and was working to win over the whole of Iraq to his side. In Kūfa, on the other hand, Mukhtār b. Abī 'Ubayd was trying to turn local discontents to his own advantage and seeking an 'Alid candidate for the throne. Finally the Qaysīs of northern Syria and the Jazīra, defeated, bitter but by no means powerless, had established themselves under the leadership of Zufar b. al-Ḥārith al-Kilābī at Qarqāsiyyā' on the Euphrates and they continued to acknowledge Ibn al-Zubayr as their caliph.

'Abd al-Malik's forces began to take the initiative immediately after his succession. 'Ubayd Allāh b. Ziyād, whose arrival in Syria had done so much to assure the throne for the Marwanids, was now determined to return to Iraq and re-establish control. His progress was delayed by the activities of the Qaysīs in the Jazīra and by the time he approached Iraq

from the north, via Mosul, Mukhtār had consolidated his position in Kūfa. Against 'Ubayd Allāh he sent the son of 'Alī's old champion, Ibrāhīm b. Mālīk al-Ashtar who was to prove his most effective military commander. After some setbacks, the Kūfans defeated the army and killed 'Ubayd Allāh himself at a battle on the river Khāzīr, near Mosul (Muharram 67/August 686). With 'Ubayd Allāh gone, 'Abd al-Malik took no further initiatives to retake Iraq for the next five years. He contented himself with consolidating his power in Syria and waited while his opponents destroyed each other.

In Iraq, the social tensions which had led to the murder of 'Uthmān and the problems which confronted 'Alī, broke out again with renewed virulence. Umayyad rule had tended to favour the interests of the *ashrāf* and there had emerged a new landowning aristocracy in the neighbourhood of Kūfa where families like those of al-Ash'ath b. Qays al-Kindī had become important property-owners. Further to the south, much land had been reclaimed in the marshes of southern Iraq, by Ziyād and Mu'āwiya's *mawlā*, 'Abd Allāh b. Darrāj, but the beneficiaries of this reclamation had not been the people of Iraq as a whole but the supporters of Ziyād and the Umayyad government. As in Medina, Mu'āwiya's large-scale agricultural developments had proved a major source of discontent. Along with these old disputes about landownership and social status among the Arabs, a new problem had emerged in the generation since 'Alī had died. Many of the local people, especially in the Kūfa area, had been converted to Islam. While this was no doubt welcome in many ways, it did pose serious problems to the rulers. The real question was how far these new converts, usually referred to as *mawālī* (clients of freedmen) of the Arab tribes, should be treated as first-class Muslims. While in theory all should be equal, objections were raised on two fronts. The non-Muslims paid a higher rate of tax on their landed property, the *kharāj* and a poll-tax on top of that, while the Arab Muslims simply paid the *ṣadaqa*. This meant that conversion would result in a substantial loss of income for the government. Naturally converts tended to be denied the fiscal benefits of their conversion and, equally naturally, they resented it. But the idea of raising the status of the *mawālī* was also opposed by the *ashrāf* who feared that this flood of new converts would escape their power and undermine their privileges. In this way a whole new set of destructive social antagonisms came into being.

As usual it was in the turbulent city of Kūfa that these tensions became most apparent. The weakening of the Umayyad grip had led immediately to unrest. After Mu'āwiya's death the Kūfans had looked to 'Alī's son al-Ḥusayn to provide leadership and al-Ḥusayn's death had