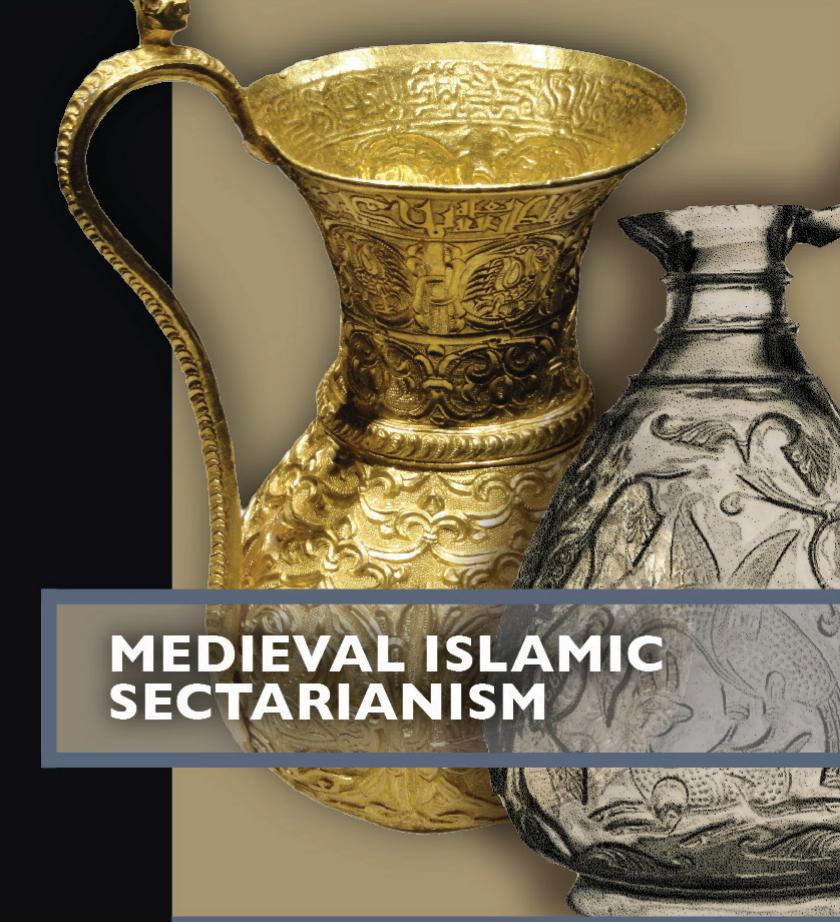

MEDIEVAL ISLAMIC SECTARIANISM

Christine D. Baker

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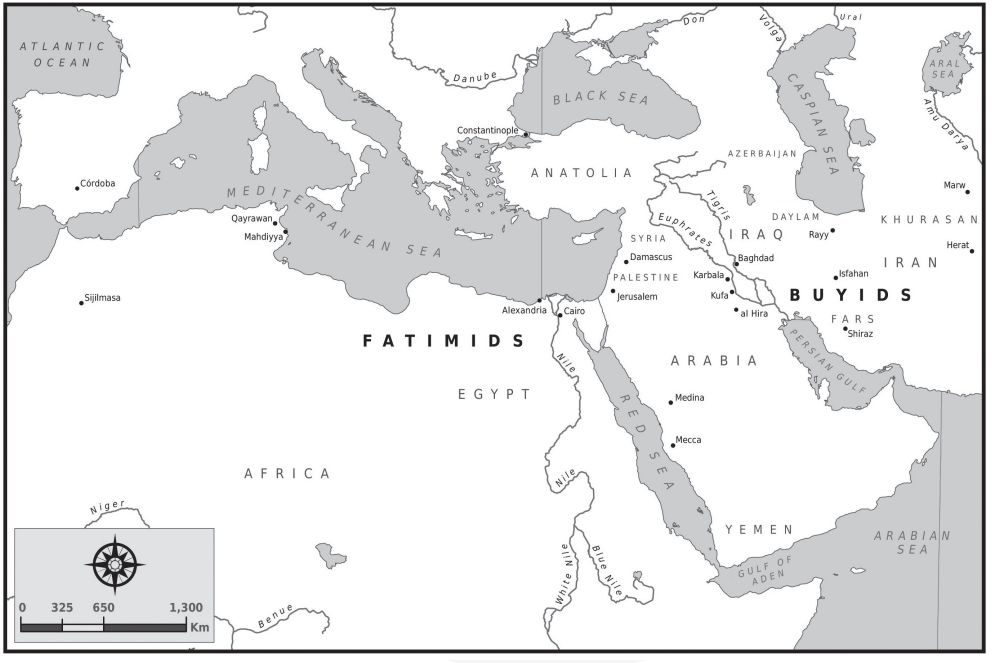
In the interest of simplicity, I have not indicated all of the diacritical markings from transliterating Arabic into Latin script. Instead, following *The Chicago Manual of Style*, I have only marked the Arabic letter *hamza* (’) and *‘ayn* (‘).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Timeline

224–651	Sassanid Empire
ca. 570	Birth of the Prophet Muhammad
632	Death of the Prophet Muhammad
632–634	Reign of Abu Bakr, first of the *Rashidun* caliphs
634–644	Reign of ʿUmar al-Khattab, second of the *Rashidun* caliphs
644–656	Reign of ʿUthman, third of the *Rashidun* caliphs
656–661	Reign of ʿAli b. Abi Bakr, third of the *Rashidun* caliphs
657	Battle of Siffin between forces of ʿAli and Muʿawiya, leads to the emergence of the *Kharijis*
661–750	ʾUmayyad rule in Syria
680	Husayn b. ʿAli, the third Imam, dies at the Battle of Karbala
740	Zayd b. ʿAli, the fifth Imam, dies during an unsuccessful uprising against the ʾUmayyads in Kufa, leading to the emergence of the Zaydi Shiʿis
749–750	ʿAbbasid Revolution
750–1258	ʿAbbasid rule
762	Death of Ismaʿil ibn Jaʿfar al-Sadiq, beginning the division between Ismaʿili and Twelver Shiʿis
800–909	Aghlabid rule in North Africa

833–847	*Mihna* of the ʿAbbasid caliph al-Maʾmun
909–1171	Fatimid rule in North Africa (later, also Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Mecca, Medina, and Yemen)
909–934	Reign of first Fatimid caliph, al-Mahdi
929	ʾUmayyads in Spain declare a caliphate
934	First Buyid amir, ʿImad al-Dawla, conquers Fars, Iran and establishes dynasty
934–949	Reign of first Buyid amir, ʿImad al-Dawla
934–946	Reign of second Fatimid caliph, al-Qaʾim
943	Buyids conquer the Jibal (western Iran)
943–947	*Khariji* rebellion against the Fatimids in North Africa
946–953	Reign of third Fatimid caliph, al-Mansur
949	Buyid ruler ʿAdud al-Dawla becomes amir in Fars, Iran
953–975	Reign of fourth Fatimid caliph, al-Muʿizz
955–1055	Buyid rule in Baghdad
969	Fatimids conquer Egypt
971	Fatimids found the city of Cairo
975	Buyid ruler ʿAdud al-Dawla seizes power from his cousin in Baghdad (but is soon forced to abdicate)
975–996	Reign of fifth Fatimid caliph, al-ʿAziz
979–983	Buyid ruler ʿAdud al-Dawla serves as amir in Baghdad
1062	End of the Buyids

Introduction

In part, our understanding of contemporary sectarianism in the Middle East is based on a misunderstanding of the origins and development of Muslim sectarian identities. We tend to view Sunni Islam as the original or orthodox Islam while we portray all other Islams, such as Shiʿism, as heterodox deviations from the original. This book aims to dispel this misconception. While Sunni Islam eventually became politically and numerically dominant, Sunni and Shiʿi identities took centuries to develop as independent communities with fully articulated theologies and practices. Rather than seeing Sunnis and Shiʿis as having split and never come back together, it is more accurate to view the early Muslim community as espousing a diversity of formulations of Islam that eventually, over centuries, narrowed into the sectarian identities that we can recognize today.

Further, due to modern sectarian conflicts, we tend to assume that enmity and violence have been a constant feature of the Sunni–Shiʿi relationship. On the contrary, this book will reveal how the idea of Muslim sectarian hostility developed relatively late in Islamic history by analysing two tenth-century Shiʿi dynasties, the Fatimids (909–1171) of North Africa and the Buyids (945–1055) of Iraq and Iran, investigating how they articulated their power, and how local Sunnis reacted to them.

Islamic sectarianism has received a great deal of attention recently due to contemporary events in the Middle East: the

collapse of Iraq following the U.S. invasion in 2003, the ongoing Syrian civil war, protests led by Shiʿi groups in Yemen and the Gulf States, the tension between Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shiʿi Iran, and the rise of extremist Sunni organizations like Daesh/ISIS and al-Qaeda that violently target Shiʿi Muslims. These current conflicts in the Middle East, with their emphasis on sectarian identities, have led historians and political scientists to coin the term "sectarianization" as the process by which political actors use aspects of sectarian identity to exacerbate existing conflicts for their own benefit.[1]

It can be easy to blame sectarianism for contemporary and historical conflicts in the Middle East, especially when the causes seem hard to explain. Sectarianism is further complicated because we often use the term to suggest an ancient, deep-seated conflict based in the essentials of culture, which implies that the concept overall is irrational, unchanging, and beyond analysis.[2] Contemporary journalists and politicians often describe conflicts in the Middle East as a simplistic binary that has existed as long as there have been Muslims. To take a handful of examples: in 2007, *Time Magazine* published a cover story entitled, "Sunnis vs. Shiʿites: Why they Hate Each Other." Nearly a decade later, similar articles remain popular, such as *Vice News*' "The Only Thing Iraq's Sunnis and Shias Hate More Than Each Other is the Islamic State" (2015) and *The Independent*'s "Sunni and Shia muslims: Islam's 1400-year-old divide explained" (2016). In a 2013 statement, former U.S. President Barack Obama described the problems in Syria as rooted in "ancient sectarian differences" that would not be easily resolved.[3]

Presenting contemporary conflicts in the Middle East as timeless and unchanging leads to simplistic connections between the present and early Islamic history, which makes analysts miss the very real political, social, and economic roots of current conflicts in the region. Further, the idea of ancient sectarian differences or a fourteen-hundred-year war between Sunnis and Shiʿis is inaccurate and misleading. Even when contemporary conflicts involve sectarian movements, these conflicts remain complex and cannot be reduced to ancient

hatreds. Viewing these conflicts only through the lens of sectarianism creates misunderstandings and misinterpretations.

Goals

This book asks readers to re-examine their view of the Islamic world and the development of sectarianism in the Middle East. While the book will cover events from the early seventh century through the twelfth century, it is not a survey of Islamic history (although I will provide a very quick overview of historical events below). It is also not a book on Islamic theology or jurisprudence. We will only discuss theology and law to the extent it is necessary to understand the development of sectarian identities and communities.

This book is designed for students and non-experts, so there will be times when, from a specialist perspective, I simplify some complex matters. This choice was deliberate. Scholars have written many excellent books on conversion to Islam, early Shiʿism, the formation of Sunni identity, and how medieval Muslim states used religion to articulate their authority and legitimacy (and I will cite many of them). Surveys of medieval Middle Eastern history designed for students and non-experts, while doing excellent and important work, still often present what renowned historian Richard Bulliet called the "view from the centre":

> The view from the centre portrays Islamic history as an outgrowth from a single nucleus, a spreading inkblot labelled "the caliphate" [...which], in seeking to explain the apparent homogeneity of Islamic society in later centuries, itself something of an illusion, projects back into the days of the caliphate a false aura of uniformity, leaving untold the complex and strife-ridden tale of how Islamic society actually developed.[4]

I hope to provide a view of the development of different forms of sectarian identity that shines a light on the complexity and diversity of early Islamic society.

In this book, I will focus on the tenth century, a period in Middle Eastern history that has often been referred to as

the "Shiʿi Century," when two Shiʿi dynasties rose to power: the Fatimids of North Africa and the Buyids of Iraq and Iran. This era often seems like an anomaly: a period when, for a short time, Shiʿis grabbed the wheel of Islamic history but were quickly ousted. Following from this assumption, historians often call the period after the Shiʿi Century the "Sunni Revival" because that was when Sunni control was restored. I will argue, however, that these terms present a misleading image of a unified medieval Islam that was predominately Sunni. By looking at the development of terms like Sunni and Shiʿi, as well as how they were used by Muslim states, we will learn about the lived experience of countless medieval Muslims.

Historians have long debated about the formation of medieval sectarian identity and I am not the first one to argue that, even in the tenth century, the term Sunni tends to be misleading because religious scholars often used it to indicate whatever they viewed, personally, as Muslim orthodoxy.[5] There have also been excellent critiques of the idea of the Shiʿi Century and the Sunni Revival. Richard Bulliet argued that what has been called the Sunni revival was actually only the first stage in the creation of institutions to standardize and disseminate the ideas that would later become the markers of Sunnism[6] and, historian Jonathan P. Berkey noted that, "like many grand historical themes, this one is perhaps a bit too neat and simple."[7] Most recently, art historian Stephennie Mulder observed that, even at the height of the so-called Sunni Revival, Sunnis and Shiʿis alike sponsored and venerated shrines dedicated to members of the family of the Prophet later held up as uniquely Shiʿi.[8] Despite these sound critiques of the Sunni Revival, the story of the tenth century is still predominantly told as a sectarian narrative, divorced from the overall history of the medieval Islamic world, which helps feed into the overall view of sectarian hostility in Islam.

This book will reintegrate the Shiʿi Century into the broader narrative of medieval Islamic history and trace the complexities of sectarian identities in order to dispute Sun-

nism's early dominance over the concept of orthodoxy and challenge the idea of sectarian conflict dating back to the origins of Islam. Sectarian identities do not conform to a simple binary of Shiʿis versus Sunnis. In this book, I will make several interconnecting arguments to prove that this was the case for the tenth-century Islamic world, during the period called the Shiʿi Century. First, I will show how even the Shiʿi Fatimids made nuanced claims to authority that often followed models from the Sunni ʿAbbasid dynasty that had come before them. Fatimid claims to legitimacy did not tend to be based in their Shiʿi identity but in broader concepts that would appeal to a wider variety of Muslims. Even the later Fatimids in Cairo, who made more recognizably Shiʿi claims to authority, always sought to appeal to a broad constituency of the people they ruled. Second, the Shiʿi Buyids also did not base their claims to authority in their Shiʿi identity, but rather blended concepts from Sunni, Shiʿi, Persian, and Arab modes of authority. Finally, contemporary Sunni reactions to the Fatimids and the Buyids were not necessarily critical of their Shiʿi identities. Contemporary commentators often did not highlight the Shiʿi identity of either dynasty. Rather it was non-contemporary writers, from the eleventh century and later, who began to focus on sectarian critiques of the Fatimids and Buyids. This shift in portrayals of the Fatimids and the Buyids reveals how Muslim attitudes towards Shiʿism and sectarianism changed from the tenth to the eleventh century.

Islamic History: A Short Overview

This book is not a survey, but it does cover the development of Muslim sectarian identities over a wide geographic and chronological range. Thus, for non-specialists, I will begin with a brief overview of the significant milestones in Islamic history from the seventh through twelfth centuries to serve as a framework to contextualize the book's argument.

The Prophet Muhammad (d. 632) established the first Muslim community in the early seventh century. The Prophet lived in Mecca, in modern Saudi Arabia. Muslims believe that the

Prophet received revelations from God via the Angel Gabriel. But not all Meccans believed in his prophethood: powerful Meccan families persecuted the early Muslims. Thus, in 622, in an event known as the *Hijra,* the Prophet Muhammad and the new Muslim community moved to the nearby settlement of Medina. Invited there by the people of Medina, the Prophet served as both political and religious leader of Medina. The Meccan Arabs considered the Muslims a threat and tried to eliminate the new Muslim community. Eventually, however, due to Muslim military victories and the popularity of the Prophet's message, the Meccans ended their war, converted to Islam, and allowed Muslims access to the *Kaʿba* in Mecca, considered the holiest site in Islam.

After the death of the Prophet, Muslims had to choose a new leader for their community. They did not believe that God would send another Prophet, but they needed to choose someone to fulfil the Prophet's political, religious, and military roles. The community did not agree on a successor. The group we now know as Sunnis (and who, for a lot of the book, I'll call proto-Sunnis), supported the candidacy of the Prophet's closest friend and advisor, Abu Bakr (d. 634). The group we now call Shiʿis (who I'll call proto-Shiʿis for much of the book), supported the candidacy of the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, ʿAli b. Abi Talib (d. 661). Abu Bakr's supporters won the debate, making him the leader of the Muslim community. He took the title "caliph," which meant successor to the Prophet. Although the caliphate changed significantly over time, for more than five hundred years, only Arabs descended from the tribe of the Prophet claimed the title. The fact that only an Arab could claim the caliphate became increasingly significant as more non-Arabs converted to Islam in the eighth through tenth centuries.

We identify the conflict over the successor to the Prophet Muhammad as the origin of the Sunni–Shiʿi split. The proto-Shiʿis get their name because they called themselves the *Shiʿat ʿAli*, or the "Partisans of ʿAli." They believed that the Prophet Muhammad had designated ʿAli as his successor. Eventually, they came to believe that ʿAli's power had been

deliberately usurped by other members of the first Muslim community. I call this group "proto-Shiʿi" (and the group who supported Abu Bakr "proto-Sunni") because it took at least a century, if not more, for Sunnis and Shiʿis to begin to develop communities. Modern scholars do not agree on the precise moment when we can consider these groups to be officially the Sunnis and the Shiʿis. In chapters one and two, I'll talk a bit about this process, arguing that it actually took far longer than we usually acknowledge.

ʿAli eventually became caliph, but it took time. The community selected him as the fourth successor to the Prophet, but his immediate predecessor had been assassinated by an angry mob. After the assassination, ʿAli faced a civil war led by a powerful Meccan family, the ʾUmayyads, who blamed him for his predecessor's death. ʿAli's caliphate did not represent a victory for proto-Shiʿism. His conflict with the ʾUmayyad family lasted the duration of his short reign and, after ʿAli's death, the ʾUmayyads took control over the caliphate.

This earliest period of Islamic history, under the first four successors to the Prophet, holds a special place in Islamic historical memory. Sunnis consider this period to be a kind of golden age; they call it the era of the *Rashidun* or "Rightly-guided" caliphs. From a Sunni perspective, the generation who lived with the Prophet knew how to practise Islam best; after all, they had experienced the Prophet's preaching and guidance first hand. Thus, Sunnis often use the example of the first community, of the Prophet and his Companions, as their example of best practices in Islam. Shiʿis also revere the earliest generation of Muslims, but they focus on the Prophet's family, his descendants, and the supporters of ʿAli. Most Shiʿis believe that the first three caliphs deliberately stole power from ʿAli despite the Prophet's endorsement of ʿAli as his successor. From a historical perspective, the era of the first four caliphs featured a fair amount of strife over how Muslims should best live, practise their faith, and rule an empire. While Muslims had the Qurʾan, the text of God's revelation via the Prophet Muhammad, many questions about how to practise remained unanswered.

Not even the earliest Muslims agreed on the best ways to practise their faith. In addition to their attempts to interpret the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet without having a living Prophet, the Muslim community also changed tremendously during the period of the first four caliphs. Muslim armies expanded out of Arabia, ruling over an empire with extensive non-Muslim populations. Their empire grew quickly, conquering territory in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. Many of the peoples they conquered were Christians and Jews who did not convert to Islam. The Qur'an forbids forced conversion to Islam and Muslims consider Christians and Jews "People of the Book" because they follow the same God as Muslims. So this new Muslim empire also had to determine how to rule over a diverse population of both Muslims and non-Muslims. In addition, as new peoples converted to Islam and brought their own ideas and interpretations to the faith, it led to further disagreements about the best way to practise Islam and rule the Muslim empire.

The caliphate changed over time as well. The ʾUmayyads, the Meccan family who had led the civil war against ʿAli, controlled the caliphate from 661 to 750. They moved the capital of the caliphate from Medina to Damascus, in Syria, and established dynastic rule within their family, which many early Muslims considered a defiance of the tradition of the Prophet. Furthermore, while the first four caliphs had been known for their piety, the ʾUmayyads were late converts to Islam and not remembered as particularly pious leaders. In addition, while the first four caliphs had not held themselves apart from the Muslim community, the ʾUmayyads started to rule more like medieval kings: building palaces and grand mosques, wearing ceremonial robes, and establishing elaborate court rituals.

Many Muslims felt dissatisfied with ʾUmayyad rule and this era saw a proliferation of proto-Shiʿi political opposition movements. These movements became more powerful when one of ʿAli's sons, Husayn (d. 680), led a rebellion against the ʾUmayyads which ended in his death. Husayn's death changed the character of proto-Shiʿi movements: many scholars argue

that Husayn's martyrdom shifted anti-ʾUmayyad political opposition movements into religious movements that eventually developed into Shiʿism.

Husayn's death increased opposition to the ʾUmayyads and, eventually, contributed to their overthrow. The ʿAbbasids, named for a descendant of the Prophet's uncle ʿAbbas (d. 653), organized an anti-ʾUmayyad revolutionary movement with broad support from proto-Shiʿis and Persian converts to Islam. Proto-Shiʿis supported them because the ʿAbbasids kept the identity of their leader a secret, claiming that they wanted "the best of the people of the Prophet Muhammad" (*al-Rida min Al Muhammad*) to become caliph. Proto-Shiʿis assumed this slogan indicated a descendant of ʿAli. Persian Muslims supported the revolution because the ʾUmayyads sometimes acted as if Islam was a uniquely Arab religion and often treated Persians like second-class Muslims.

After their revolution, the ʿAbbasids disappointed proto-Shiʿis with their selection of a descendant of the Prophet's uncle as caliph because most proto-Shiʿis only supported descendants of ʿAli and Fatima. Thus, most proto-Shiʿis abandoned the ʿAbbasids. Persian Muslims tended to remain loyal because the ʿAbbasids adopted many aspects of Persian culture. Baghdad, which the ʿAbbasids established as their capital, lay within the former Sassanid Empire (224–651), the Persian empire that predated the Muslim conquests. In addition, the ʿAbbasid administration hired many Persian Muslims, further Persianising ʿAbbasid caliphal ceremonies and the culture of Baghdad. The ʿAbbasids remained in power until the thirteenth century, although their power began to decline significantly in the late ninth century and they often held power in name only, especially in provinces distant from Baghdad.

Much of this book will focus on the tenth century, which historians sometimes call the Shiʿi century. During this era, two Shiʿi dynasties took over the Middle East. First, the Fatimids (909–1171), which began as an underground Shiʿi movement in Syria, Yemen, Iran, and southern Iraq, declared a rival caliphate in North Africa in 909. Never before had there been more than one caliph. In addition, at nearly the same time,

the Buyids (945–1055), a military family from northern Iran who often worked as mercenaries for local Muslim powers, conquered Baghdad. The Buyids were Shiʿi, but they maintained the power and position of the ʿAbbasid caliph in Baghdad because they were not Arab and, therefore, could not claim the caliphate.

The Fatimids held power for more than two hundred years, eventually ruling over North Africa, Egypt, portions of Syria and Palestine, as well as the Muslim holy cities of Mecca and Medina. They founded the city of Cairo as their imperial capital and were known for the tolerance of their rule, employing Sunnis, Shiʿis, Christians, and Jews in their administration. The Fatimids have also been recognized for their sponsorship of art and education. They founded al-Azhar University, which is considered one of the oldest universities in the world and still in operation today.

The Buyids held power for just over a century. They unified portions of Iraq and Iran which had begun to break away from direct ʿAbbasid rule. Taking over Baghdad during a period when the city had been ravaged by civil war and famine, they sought to rebuild the city and restore it to its former glory. At their height, the Buyids held territory in Iran, Iraq, parts of Syria, and the Arabian Gulf, as well as portions of Turkey, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. The Buyids are best remembered by historians for reviving symbols of Persian kingship, harkening back to the era before Islamic rule.

The Buyids were conquered in 1055 while the Fatimids maintained their power until 1171. But this century or so—the time from the fall of the Buyids in 1055 to the end of the Fatimids in 1171—was a period of remarkable disunity and political disintegration in Middle Eastern history. Competing political dynasties divided the region, but the eleventh and twelfth centuries also featured an influx and eventual takeover of Turkic armies from Central Asia, in addition to the invasion of European Crusader forces trying to reconquer Jerusalem.

The Buyids lost their territories to two Turkic dynasties from Central Asia: the Ghaznavids (977–1186) and the Seljuks

(1037–1194). Mahmud of Ghazna (d. 1030), the founder of the Ghaznavids, ruled Afghanistan and expanded into Buyid territory in northern Iran. The Buyids lost Baghdad due to in-fighting within the family. The last Buyid leader asked the Seljuks, a Turkic military confederation that had moved into Iraq, for assistance against a rival. The Seljuk commander, Tughrul Beg (d. 1063), came to Baghdad, but instead of helping the Buyids, he took control over the city and founded the Seljuk dynasty in 1055. The Seljuks eventually ruled much of Iraq, Anatolia, and Syria while the Ghaznavids maintained control over most of Iran and Afghanistan until the late twelfth century.

The end of the Fatimids took another century, but their fall was also partially caused by the Seljuks. Seljuk rule was decentralized: various factions fought for control as they expanded westward. The speed of Seljuk victories in Anatolia, however, led the Byzantine Emperor (who ruled from Constantinople) to ask the pope for military assistance. This request led to the series of wars that we remember as the Crusades. While the Crusaders' goal was the conquest of Jerusalem, they also threatened Fatimid rule, ultimately reconquering Jerusalem from the Fatimids in 1099. Further, Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi (d. 1193), better known as Saladin, served a family of vassals of the Seljuks in Syria. The Fatimids, dealing with their own problems and infighting, sought assistance from those Seljuk vassals in 1164. Saladin, while not the leader of the expedition, assisted and took a leadership role after their victory. In 1169, the Fatimid caliph appointed Saladin to be his *vizier*. Scholars debate why the Shi'i Fatimid caliph appointed Saladin, who was not Shi'i: some claim that the Fatimid caliph underestimated Saladin while others argue that the caliph respected Saladin's "generosity and military prowess." The Fatimids may have thought that promoting Saladin would divide their enemies in Syria. Regardless, Saladin became *vizier* and, when the reigning Fatimid caliph died in 1171, Saladin proclaimed his own rule over Fatimid territory.

Neither Saladin nor the Seljuk rulers were Arab, thus none of them claimed the caliphate. Instead, both Saladin and the Seljuks presented themselves as the defenders of the 'Ab-

basid caliph and made shrewd alliances with urban Sunni religious leaders. These strategies allowed the new Turkic dynasties to claim their legitimacy as protectors of the caliph and of orthodox Sunni Islam. Their takeover and use of Sunni orthodoxy as a legitimization tool also led them to demonize the Shiʿi dynasties that had preceded them. This process, in large part, created the idea of Sunni–Shiʿi hostility that we think of as timeless today.

Power, Authority, Legitimacy, and a Problem of Sources

This book analyses the crystallization of Sunni and Shiʿi identity and how these Muslim sects developed over time. But, in order to do that, we will focus on analysing how medieval dynasties articulated their authority and legitimacy. Deconstructing how medieval rulers claimed power (which is what we mean by "authority and legitimacy") allows us to see what was important to the people over whom these medieval dynasties ruled. This methodology might seem like an indirect way of approaching how medieval Muslim communities defined their sectarian identities. But religious identity played a significant role in medieval political legitimacy—medieval rulers often claimed to be chosen by God in some way—so examining how these rulers used their faith to talk about their right to rule gives us insight into what the people they ruled would have thought about their faith. In addition, many of the peoples of the medieval Islamic world did not leave behind sources attesting to their feelings about sectarianism, so this approach allows us to glimpse their views on the matter and not only focus on the opinions of elite religious scholars.

But what, exactly, do we mean when we talk about power, authority, and legitimacy? Whole books have been devoted to this very topic but, stated simply, authority is a kind of power. Power, most broadly, can be considered the "force by means of which you can oblige others to obey you" while authority "is the *right* to direct and command, to be listened

to or obeyed by others. Authority requests power. Power without authority is tyranny."[9] So, a state (especially one with an army) has the *power* to create law, collect taxes, go to war, and enforce obedience. But they seek the *authority* to do so by making arguments that they have the *right* to hold power. There are different kinds of authority, of course. We will focus on the authority of the caliph, but other people held different types of authority in the medieval Islamic world: people like military leaders and religious scholars. The caliph needed these people to support his authority.

Legitimacy is linked with authority: it encompasses the system of government used to claim the right to exercise authority. Governments claim legitimacy in different ways. For example, modern democracies base their legitimacy on elections. The government has the right to tax, make laws, and go to war because it was elected by a majority of the people. In the medieval world, rulers often based their legitimacy on the spiritual authority of God. The king/caliph/emperor had the right to rule because he was chosen and supported by God.

In medieval societies, rulers made clear statements claiming their right to rule and used symbolic ways of communicating their authority through art, architecture, and ceremony. As the Muslim empire expanded, the ways that the caliphs claimed legitimacy changed. At first, when the Muslim community was small and homogenous, it was easier: even if not everyone always agreed, the community knew the first four caliphs for their loyalty to the Prophet and the piety of their faith. These two attributes, plus the fact that they were selected by leaders within the community, gave them legitimacy in the eyes of most Muslims.

Furthermore, when discussing authority and legitimacy, it is significant to consider the *audience* for these claims. Even medieval rulers needed to make claims that would appeal to a wide variety of constituencies. As the Muslim empire expanded to rule over a more heterogeneous population, most of which was *not* Muslim, they had a harder task. Non-Muslims would not grant the caliph legitimacy because of his piety or relationship with Islam. The caliph had to act

how people would expect a medieval ruler to act. In general, the ʾUmayyads and the ʿAbbasids (as well as the Fatimids and Buyids) borrowed ways that pre-Islamic empires, like the Byzantines, the successors of the eastern Roman Empire, and the Persian Sassanid dynasty, had claimed their legitimacy.[10] Since the Byzantines and the Sassanids had ruled over the region for centuries, they had established protocols for claiming authority that would be recognizable by the diverse peoples of the region. Muslim dynasties based a lot of their authority on Islam, but also used architecture, regalia, rituals, and ceremony that would be recognized as markers of legitimacy to a non-Muslim audience.

Despite the ways that the caliph would need to appeal to a wide variety of peoples, both Muslim and non-Muslim, to maintain his power, historians tend to focus on how religious scholars responded to the caliph. We do this because religious scholars tend to be the group we know the most about in medieval Muslim society: they wrote most of the sources that survive. So we know a lot about what they thought about sectarian identities, but we do not always have clear ways to find out what other people might have thought. Most people, especially non-elites, did not leave behind written sources, so it can be difficult to determine their views. In this book, we will examine how the Fatimids and Buyids used or did not use their sectarian identities to claim legitimacy in order to read between the lines to see what kinds of messages were acceptable to broad medieval audiences.

The era of the Fatimids and the Buyids offers a unique opportunity to examine ideas of identity in medieval Islamic society because the tenth century witnessed tectonic shifts within the very idea of Muslim society. First, it was the period when the Middle East became predominately Muslim for the first time, bringing more non-Arabs (and their ideas) into the Muslim faith. Second, Fatimid and Buyid domination of the region represented a massive break with the earlier unity of the Islamic world under one caliph. And third, because the Fatimids and Buyids identified as Shiʿi, their competition and the reaction of Sunni political elites and religious scholars helped crystallize different forms of sectarian identity.

Analysing how the Fatimids and Buyids, two Shiʿi dynasties, claimed their legitimacy over a diverse population of Muslims and non-Muslims allows us to glimpse the myriad of ways that the people of the tenth century viewed themselves and their identities. The caliph had to express his right to rule in a way that resonated with the people he ruled. In the Shiʿi century, we might expect medieval Muslim rulers to foreground their sectarian identities, but they did not. We also might expect that critiques of these Shiʿi states would focus on their Shiʿi identity, but they did not. This book looks at what that can tell us about sectarianism and medieval Islamic society.

Notes

[1] Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel, eds., *Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 4–5.

[2] Toby Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Spring that Wasn't* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

[3] "Statement by the President on Syria," August 31, 2013, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/08/31/statement-president-syria

[4] Richard Bulliet, *Islam: The View from the Edge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 7.

[5] Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, vol. 1: *The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 278.

[6] Bulliet, *View from the Edge*, 127.

[7] Jonathan P. Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 189–193.

[8] Stephennie Mulder, *The Shrines of the ʿAlids in Medieval Syria: Sunnis, Shiʿis, and the Architecture of Coexistence* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 14.

[9] Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1951), 126, as quoted in George Makdisi, "Authority in the Islamic Community," *La Notion d'autorité au Moyen Age: Islam, Byzance, Occident* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1982), 117.

[10] Aziz al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship: Power and the Sacred in Muslim, Christian, and Pagan Polities* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2001), ix–x.