

3.1 The Heritage of The Umayyads

**1. The rise of Islamic empires and states**

**a. Military Conquests:**

Islam initially spread through the military conquests of Arab Muslims, which happened over a very short period of time soon after the beginning of Islam. However, only a small fraction of the people who came under Arab Muslim control immediately adopted Islam.

**b. Trade and Business:**

The spread of Islam through merchants, missionaries, and pilgrims was very different in nature. These kinds of exchanges affected native populations slowly and led to more conversion to Islam.

**c. Arabs and non-Arabs:**

Early on in Islamic history, under the Rashidun caliphate—the reign of the first four caliphs, or successors, from 632 to 661 CE—and the Umayyad caliphate, Arab Muslim forces expanded quickly. With the Abbasids, more non-Arabs and non-Muslims were involved in the government administration.

**2. A new political structure**

Under the Umayyads, a dynastic and centralized Islamic political state emerged.

**a. Change of Capital, Language and Money:**

The Umayyads shifted the capital from Mecca to Syria. They replaced Greek, Persian, and Coptic with Arabic as the main administrative language. The Umayyads also minted Islamic coins.

**b. Jizya:**

The Umayyads did not actively encourage conversion, and most subjects remained non-Muslim who were required to pay a special tax, the Umayyads were able to subsidize their political expansion.

**c. Different Groups:**

Debates raged about the nature of Islamic leadership and religious authority. These conflicts evolved into major schisms between Sunni, Shia, and Ibadi Islam. Ultimately, there were many factions that regarded the Umayyads as corrupt and illegitimate, some of whom rallied around new leaders.

**d. Persian Culture:**

The Abbasids were intent on differentiating themselves from their Umayyad predecessors, though they still had a lot in common. The distinction between Arab Muslims and non-Arab Muslims diminished, with Persian culture exerting a greater influence on the Abbasid court.

**e. Islamic Art:**

Under the Abbasids, Islamic art and culture flourished. They are famous for inaugurating the Islamic golden age. Religious scholars, called ulema, developed more defined religious institutions and took on judicial duties and developed systems of law. It was also during Abbasid rule that many people converted to Islam, for a multitude of reasons including sincere belief and avoiding paying taxes levied on non-Muslims. As a result, Islamic culture spread over the Abbasids' vast territory.

### 3. The Umayyad Dynasty

The Umayyad Dynasties lasted from the year 661 – 750 CE. They were characterized by 4 main caliphs: Mu'awiyah, Abdul Malik, 'Umar II and Marwan II. In a way or the other the mentioned caliphs brought their own contributions. In the paragraphs below we will try to elaborate on them.

i. Mu'awiyah ibn Abu Sufyan (661 – 680):

He was the governor over Syria for 20 years. He changed Syria into a powerful military and naval base. His career began in 655 with the murder of the caliph Uthman (رضي الله عنه) who was his cousin. He was determined to bring the murderer to court. After death of Ali (رضي الله عنه), he persuaded Imam Hasan (رضي الله عنه), to renounce his claim to the caliphate.

He set about restoring the unity and renewing the expansion of the Muslim state. He obtained strength from two quarters - the Syrian tribesmen and his Umayyad kinsmen. To consolidate the support of the Syrian, he transferred the centre of Muslim government from Iraq to Damascus.

However, there was a lack of the support from the influential religious circles. He transformed the Islamic government to an Arab tribal aristocracy served by a bureaucracy.

He created a postal service and a bureau of registry. He framed a tolerant policy toward Christians. There was the distribution of bribes to dissident (rebellious) tribes.

He organized military expansion - on land and sea, to the north, east, and west. That was a new era of Muslim Arab conquest which was established. He established his kingdom to the east, the north-eastern province of Persia—Khurasan, to the west, North Africa as far west as Algeria and to the north, with the Byzantine.

ii. Abdul Malik (685 – 705).

He was recognized by his partisans and he strengthened the governmental administration. He adopted Arabic as the language of administration.

He crushed his Enemies: the Kharijites, the Shi'ah, and the forces of the anticaliph 'Abdallah ibn az-Zubayr. The Khawarij was still being a problem. 'Abd al-Malik had appointed al-Hajjaj to govern Basra that campaigns against them began to prove successful. In the north of Kufah, another Kharijite trouble centre developed.

The Kharijite movement remained strong, especially among the Bakr tribes between Mosul and Kufah. He captured Carthage and other coastal cities fell, and thus there was the work of pacification and Islamization.

He set up a money system. He built mosques from local materials. There was the system of coinage and development in religious architecture. He made the Dome of the Rock, the Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem and the Great Mosque of Damascus.

iii. 'Umar II (717 – 720).

He was not a hereditary successor to the former caliph, but was appointed. His mother was a granddaughter of Hazrat Umar (r.a). He formed a council with which he administered the province. He preferred to keep things simple. All depositing equipment in the public treasury was meant for the caliph.

He decided in abandoning the palace to the family of Sulaiman and lived in a tent. He was publicly encouraging the people to elect someone else if they were not satisfied with him. He confiscated all estates seized by Umayyad "royalty" and redistributed it to the people. He was unpopular with the Umayyad court but was beloved by the masses.

Umar ended a tradition among some Umayyad rulers where Ali (رضي الله عنه) would be cursed during Friday sermons, replacing the tradition with the recitation of the following verse, “*Surely God enjoins justice, doing of good and giving to kinsfolk*”.

He enforced the Shari’ah and ended drinking and bathhouses. He continued the welfare programs and special programs for orphans and the destitute.

He reinforced the Islamic frontier but he had to contend with Kharijite uprisings. He was one of the finest caliphs in Islamic History.

He gave much importance to Education, Schools of Shari’ah and advocated the return to Shari’ah.

iv. Marwan II (744 – 750).

He was the last Umayyad ruler to rule from Damascus. He took the caliphate after his cousin Ibrahim abdicated and went into hiding. He inherited an empire that was falling apart and he dedicated his life in trying to keep the Umayyad Empire together.

There were Anti-Umayyad in Iran and Iraq and thus the Abbasids had gained a lot of followers. He was killed by Abu Al Abbas As Saffa (at bank of river Nile). There were too many problems and could not solve all of them.

He lost many territories to the Abbasid and the Islamic dominion was surrounded by enemies from all sides. There was a lack of administrative measures due to inefficiency of his governors. He was thus not able to consolidate the Islamic frontiers and wasn’t able to cope with the existing and uprising Khawarij. For 6 years he tried to regain the lost cause.

His society was characterized by Shari’ah being established in the dominion, loyalty of some of his governors, support of the masses, inefficiency of his men, materialistic influence of the society, degradation of the society (sins), emergence of Shi’a movement helping the Abbasid, uprising movement and slogan against the state and threat against the Umayyad families.

#### **4. Main traits of the Umayyad Dynasty**

a. There was development in Architectural buildings and palaces. The Umayyad architecture is a major witness of the dynasty, with numerous buildings still extant. Extensive municipal architectural programmes were undertaken, in addition to those constructions that were built by order of the Umayyad royal family.

b. There was the construction of different mosques and the Dome of the Rock. Both the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus appear to have been built as symbols of Umayyad power and victory, and these buildings still give an impression of the grandeur of the dynasty’s architecture.

c. There were many palaces used for festivities and the presence of forts and ruins are still important. In addition, the remarkable palatial buildings formerly known as ‘desert castles’ continue to fascinate people for the window they provide into Umayyad court life and ceremonials.

d. There was the construction of full-fledged cities. There were extensive building programmes which were undertaken for the benefit of the community as well as for the ruling elite. Cities such as Amman had a palatial complex, a mosque, a marketplace and a water reservoir, and thus served the government and the administration of the country in addition to the needs of the community. Vitaly important infrastructure such as dams, cisterns and water reservoirs were constructed and bridges were erected.

e. There were different styles and cultures of different countries used by the Umayyad caliphs and governors. In this formative phase one cannot speak strictly of a full-blown Islamic art as it is the juxtaposition (association and comparison) and innovative combination of various decorative styles and motifs (styles and designs) drawn from different artistic and imaginative traditions that produced such striking results and made them appear different.

f. There was the establishment of independent policy. During the caliphate of ‘Abd al-Malik bin Marwan (r. 65–86 / 685–705), a policy of administrative and political centralisation was initiated. Each province had its own way of administration and policy. However the rulers and governors will be accountable for the financial development and problems.

g. There was the introduction of an income to be allocated for members of the state and the role of the Bait ul Maal. In the fiscal / financial administration, however, the Arabs introduced an innovative system according to which all fully fledged members of the new polity were entitled to regular stipends (salaries) (*‘ata’*); a system that was financed by the taxes of the local populous (people). The main taxes were land tax (*kharaj*), a fixed rate in kind or money and the poll tax (*jizya*), which was imposed on every mature non-Muslim and means tested according to income. Priests, monks, and the disabled were exempt from paying *jizya*.

h. There was the introduction of the official Arabic coinage. A standard Arabic coinage was developed to replace the Arab-Byzantine (Roman empire) and Arab-Sassanian (Persian of modern times(new persian people)) types which had been used up to this time. From the coin reform on, all Umayyad coinage was of a standardised weight and design: purely epigraphic, with an inscription giving the date and a religious formula. These measures served to introduce a unity which hitherto had been lacking.

i.

## **5. Downfall of the Umayyad Dynasty**

a. There was the battle of Karbala against the Ahlu Bait by Yazid the son of Mu’awiyah where many of the members of the family of the prophet (ﷺ) were killed and among them there was Imam Hussein.

b. There were too many illicit thoughts and activities (policies) like adultery, prostitution, the bait-ul-Maal became the kingdom’s property as such. The people were disgusted with that regime.

c. There were bribes which were distributed to gain popularity and election by the governors of the future caliph. They were buying their seats for the caliphate.

d. Interest was ramping and too much liberty was given to non-Muslims in many fields. The rate of interest imposed by the lenders over both Muslims and non-Muslims were too high. The rich becoming richer and the poor becoming poorer was the condition at that time.

e. There was a return to islamisation from the good caliphs which also meant a reduction of illicit gain. In this way the corrupted people tried their best to eliminate them (the good caliphs).

f. Both the Christians and the Jews were not loyal to the caliphs and they plotted against them (the caliphs) for personnel interest. They were never for the caliphate or the Islamic state as during the time of the prophet (ﷺ).

g. The Khawarij were always uprising from all sides to create instability in the society. That was since the time of the prophet (ﷺ) in his army and city. They were the mischief mongers.

- h. There were revolts from those tribes who accepted Islam based on personal interest and once a caliph passed away they rose against the Muslims. They wanted only to be under the protection and wings of the caliphs.
- i. There were constant revolts from the Abbasid leaders against any Umayyad caliphs. The Abbasid wanted to come to power and every mean was good to attain their objectives.
- j. There were revolts from the Shi'a movement in search for a leader from the Ahl-ul-Bait. The shi'a were never satisfied and wanted only a member and descendant of the prophet (ﷺ) as leader and guide. They would not accept any other leader.
- k. There was a decrease in the amount of jizya obtained from non-Muslims resulting in a decrease in the Bait-ul-Maal. That was done to please the non-Muslims and to obtain their votes but the bait ul Maal was not well funded.
- l. The unpopular caliphs due to their personal interest disgusted the common people. The latter knew that these caliphs were nominated due to their political power and thirst for money and power. There were so many unreligious and egocentric deputies, governors and caliphs of the Umayyad period.
- m. There were so many other small Karbala (murders) against the caliphs of the Umayyad. The opposing regime (Abbasid) would use illegal means in order to wipe out the Umayyad from the surface of the earth.
- n. There was a general political instability among the caliph due to their inexperienced governance. At the outset they were nominated due to their influences and many of them were inexperienced in fields of administration, business (trade) and humanitarian grounds.
- o. There was a lack of expertise and counselling from Umayyad caliphs. Each caliph would do as he wanted to run his reign and country. There was no sincere and concrete Majlis Shurah.
- p. There were well established conspiracies led by the Abbasid to bribe and buy the Umayyad governors. Many governors were on the side of the Abbasid secretly and they plotted against the Umayyad till its downfall.
- q. There was a series of attack on the main points/strength of the caliphate or related to their family members. There were menaces, threats, kidnappings, many attempts to kill and murders upon the Umayyad.
- r. There was no regular check on the work and expenses of the governors. Some of the caliphs were themselves self-centred and the governors would do the same.
- s. There were so many critics concerning the morality of both the Umayyad caliphs and the state of the Islamic society. They were not applying the Shari'ah and people were disgusted with the situation.