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But no monarch could maintain absolute control of an empire that stretched from Morocco to India. In the late eighth century, North Africa slipped away from Baghdad's authority and became a region of autonomous Islamic states. During the ninth century, independent and often short-lived dynasties rose and fell in various parts of Iran. Yet despite the emergence of new centers of power, the Abbasid caliphs remained the dominant rulers of the Middle East until the tenth century, and the imperial court at Baghdad set a style of royal behavior that was imitated in provincial capitals and breakaway dynasties throughout the vast territories in which Islam had become established.

## CONCLUSION

In the historically short span of time from the Prophet Muhammad's death in 632 to the transfer of the imperial capital from Damascus to Baghdad in the 750s, the Islamic *ummah* had expanded from its Arab origins to embrace a universal world empire. The epoch of the Arab conquests constitutes a decisive period in world history, one that transformed a nomadic desert population organized along tribal lines into the ruling elite of an imperial structure concentrated in the heartlands of classical antiquity. Arabic replaced Greek, Persian, Aramaic, and other established literary traditions as the language of administration and high culture; Islam replaced, though it did not eliminate, Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and paganism as the dominant religion in the Middle East. This process of replacement raises important questions. In its interaction with the existing literary, religious, and administrative traditions of Byzantium and Iran, how could the Islam of the revelations, the Islam of the Prophet's caravan city of Mecca, survive as a guide to administrative, economic, and social practices? How could the peoples living within the territories of the extensive Arab conquests, with their long-established traditions, be organized to obey the commands on proper human behavior that God revealed to a Meccan merchant in seventh-century Arabia? In developing answers to these questions, or simply in developing certain patterns of living and worship, Muslims affirmed their belief in the validity of Muhammad's mission by creating a civilization centered on the revelations contained in the Quran.

