

## **Chapter III**

### **Survey of Islamic History**

The purpose of this chapter is to give a brief survey of Islamic history. Islam, however, is not just a social and historical product, but rather a source of ideas and practices which transcends the immanent world, and is therefore capable of acting upon the material world in independent and unpredictable ways. Islam can be both a source of social change and challenge and a source of social order and legitimating the status quo. Islam is a faith and a source of inspiration encompassing both aspects of life: the material and the spiritual. History tends to focus on the material aspect of life and must not hide the fact that Islam also transcends worldly concerns.

In 632, Prophet Muhammad died in Madīna, as leader of a community that will become the nucleus of an empire. Muhammad was considered by Muslims as a transmitter and a privileged Interpreter of the Qur’ān. As founder of the Muslim community, Muhammad had a decisive role in shaping social practices. He drew on earlier customs of Arab society and the first interpretations of the Holy Book, to start to codify social practices inside the framework of Islamic ethics. However, at the death of Muhammad, not only was there no official codification but the Qur’ān had not yet received its final form. It will be compiled during the reign of the third Caliph ‘Uthmān.

In addition, there were other tribulations: the first was the crisis in the Makkan and Madīnan communities due to the emergence of Islamism. The flight of Muhammad to Madīna and the war that ensued led to a break in the existing tribal hierarchy. At first, Muhammad joined the people of Madīna who provided the nucleus of “companions” against his own Makkan clan, the Quraysh; the latter submitted willy-nilly to the Prophet, while seeking to recover their power after his death. Moreover, other Arab tribes, especially those of South Arabia, did not like the domination of the Makkan and Madīnan clans. A century after the death of Muhammad, the Muslim empire stretched from Spain to Central Asia and was thus obliged to integrate a multitude of peoples, cultures, and religions that has influenced its own evolution.

### *Chapter 3 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History*

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The question of a Successor to Muhammad arose as both a political and an ideological problem. Some companions decided to elect a Caliph, guardian of *sharī'a*, to implement the expansion of Islam through conquest. But this appointment of the first Caliph did not prevent the struggle between Makkan clans and the family of the Prophet represented by his cousin and son-in-law 'Alī. This conflict brought in and fueled another that revolved around defining the role of head of the community. Abū Bakr was elected as the first Caliph. One of his major accomplishments was to keep the community together, not only by defeating the “apostates” but also by contributing to the expansion of Islam by sending military expeditions to Syria and Palestine. After a reign of only two years, Abū Bakr died in 634 and left a personal will appointing 'Umar Caliph; he then governed for ten years. 'Umar conquered the Persian Empire, Syria and Egypt and his army went as far as Jerusalem. 'Umar's reign was prosperous and he developed sophisticated administrative tools that assisted him in managing the Islamic State. 'Umar was succeeded by 'Uthmān, who ruled for some twelve years. During his reign, the Islamic expansion was carried on. The caliph 'Uthmān ordered his subjects to compile the official Qur'ān; once the version was approved, he sent copies all over the Muslim world and then ordered that any other compilations or verses of the Qur'ān found anywhere else be burned. However, during his reign, his 'Uthmān was eventually killed; this provoked a rift in the Muslim community.

For the Sunnī majority, the religious revolution of humanity had ended: Muhammad was the Seal of the Prophets, bringing to its end the religious adventure of mankind; the word of God had finally been revealed in all its purity and in its entirety. In this case, the Caliph was just there as a leader whose function was to implement the religious law in society. For the Shī'ī minority, the word of God cannot be immediately accessible to man; the Qur'ān has a hidden meaning that can only be revealed by a Guide, an Imām chosen by God. This Imām is more than just a “Caliph” of the Prophet; he perpetuates and constantly regenerates the religious life. Here the religion is dynamic under an Imām, continuing the mission of the Prophet as a privileged Interpreter of the Qur'ān. This way of understanding Islam is supported in the struggle for power by the family of the Prophet, the party (*Shī'a*) of 'Alī, which sought to perpetuate a religious function with a dynastic system. But when 'Alī was finally elected Caliph in 656, the first

### *Chapter 3 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History*

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civil war broke out. The rift caused by the death of the Caliph ‘Uthmān, widened. The cousin of ‘Uthmān, Mu‘āwiya, who was governor of Syria, believed that the election of ‘Alī was invalid because some of his supporters were responsible for ‘Uthmān’s unavenged death. This led to a confrontation in 657 at Siffin, near the Euphrates, provoking a major division between Shī‘ites and Sunnīs.

A group of seceders (Khārijī(s)) rejected with violence both sides and decided to withdraw from the conflict. This group, called Khārijī(s) (the root derived from *kharaju* meaning “to withdraw”), is the first schism in Islam. The Khārijī(s) considered both Shī‘ites and Sunnīs as infidels. Their position on the Caliphate was that any Muslim, irrespective of race, color, or sex, could become ruler—provided he or she satisfied the conditions of piety. This was in contrast to the claims of the Sunnīs that the ruler must descend from the Prophet’s tribe (the Quraysh) and to the Shī‘ī view that the Caliph must belong not only to the Quraysh, but specifically to the direct family of the Prophet. According to the Khārijī(s), the Caliph should be put to death if he deviates from the right path. Their extreme view led to the assassination of the fourth Caliph ‘Alī, by a Khārijī, Ibn Muljam, in 40/661.

#### *The Umayyads*

This period of the first four Caliphs (Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān, ‘Alī), fertile in dissensions, ended with the assassination of ‘Alī and the advent of the Umayyad dynasty, inaugurated by the Caliph Mu‘āwiya. The Umayyad dynasty originated from Makkan clans and retained the Caliphate for almost a century; it chose Damascus for its capital. During this period of conquests, internal struggles persisted and deepened. The party of ‘Alī was pursuing its claims and the Shī‘ites were massacred by the troops of the Umayyad Caliph Yazīd in Karbalā’ in 680; this added to the Shī‘ī faith a new element: the passion of Imām Husayn. The Umayyads achieved more stability during the reign of the Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (d. 86/705) who reopened the canals that irrigated the Tigris-Euphrates Valley and minted a coinage serving as currency for the empire. He also put in place a governmental bureaucracy with different functions: collecting taxes, keeping paid records, delivering mail all over the empire. Arabic became the language of administration. During his reign, Islam continued to expand in Transoxiana and into

### *Chapter 3 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History*

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China. He conquered the area from Kairouan, now in Tunisia, all the way to the Atlantic Ocean. Afterwards the Arabs went into Spain and by 713; they arrived in Narbonne (France). They were stopped in 732 at the Battle of Poitiers by Charles Martel. During the reign of the Umayyads, beautiful buildings of Islamic architecture were built: the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, and many lovely palaces in Syria, Jordan, and 'Iraq.

In the meantime, the Shī'ites organized several revolts against the Umayyads. But the overthrow of the latter was obtained by another group that was by its origins a compromise between the clans and the family of Muhammad: the 'Abbāsids, descendants of 'Abbās, the uncle of the Prophet. They managed to crystallize the opposition by cooperating with the Shī'ites as well as with non-Arab peoples dissatisfied with the Arab domination. The great revolt of 749-750 overthrew the Umayyad regime and replaced it with the 'Abbāsids. The last Umayyad Caliph, Marwān II al-Himār, was defeated, but a young prince, 'Abd al-Rahmān, managed in 756 to flee to Spain where he founded another Umayyad dynasty.

#### *Islam in Spain and Maghreb*

The Umayyads settled in Andalusia. Christians and Jews were allowed to practice their faith freely. They encouraged the development of science, arts, agriculture, and trade. The Caliphal residence, called *Madīnat al-Zahra*, was established five miles away from Cordoba which had seventy libraries with countless manuscripts. The Umayyads employed a staff of researchers, librarians, and bookbinders.

At the end of the XI<sup>th</sup> century, King Alfonso VI reconquered Toledo. The *Reconquista*, the Christian recapture of Spain, reached central Spain. In 1082, the Muslim rulers asked the Almoravids (a North African Berber dynasty) for help. The Almoravids came to Spain and eventually took power until 1147, when they were defeated by another Berber dynasty, the Almohads. The architectural legacies left by the Muslims in this period of rule are impressive and include the Cathedral of Seville, originally the Grand Mosque called the Giralda, and the Kutubiyya mosque of Marrakesh. The citadel above Granada called the Alhambra, a masterpiece of Moorish architecture, was begun in 1238 by Muhammad ibn al-Ahmar, who took refuge there during the siege by King Ferdinand

### *Chapter 3 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History*

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of Aragon. In exchange for peace, Ibn al-Ahmar accepted to become the vassal of the Christian King and afterwards had to help the King against Muslims in the siege of Seville in 1248. Granada survived for a while but in 1482, the Muslim kingdom weakened and split into two hostile factions. Ten years later, in 1492, (the year they sent Columbus), King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella took Granada and ended the Muslim reign in Spain.

The lands of the Maghreb had successively housed many minorities. The first Khārijī State was implanted there and was succeeded by the first Ismā'īlī State. Idrīs was the first 'Alid to found the kingdom of Idrīsids in Morocco, in 788. But the bulk of the population was Sunnī Mālikī. The Almohad movement took Morocco in 1121, in the cause of orthodoxy. The decline of the Almohads, who had managed to unify North Africa all the way to Egypt, put into motion the centrifugal movement of tribes. The Banū Marīn and the Banū 'Abd al-Wad, both from the group Zanata, crystallized the opposition while following different paths. The Marīnids focused on the Moroccan highlands before gradually taking the Almohad territory. The 'Abd al-Wadites became vassals of Almohads in the Oran region and around the town of Tlemcen. Thus, when Marrakesh was conquered in 1269, the Marīnids took power over all of Morocco; the 'Abd al-Wadites, who occupied the west of Algeria, became the enemies of the Moroccan kingdom. At the other end of the Maghreb in Tunis, the Hafsides (other vassals of the Almohads) had also achieved independence.

#### *The 'Abbāsids*

The 'Abbāsids moved the capital of the empire from Damascus to Baghdad. Upon their arrival in power, they pushed aside the Shī'ites who once again saw their dreams of the reunification of Islam under a descendant of 'Alī collapse. The 'Abbāsids implemented two orientations: the separation from Shī'ism and the progressive establishment of "orthodox" Islam, Sunnism. Disillusioned with the 'Abbāsids, some Shī'ites conducted revolts. The 'Alids became, as of the XIII<sup>th</sup> century, Amīr(s) of Makka and Madīna. The Zaydī(s) (from Zayd, son of the Shī'ī Imām 'Alī Zayn al-'Ābidīn) established a Zaydī power in Yaman which has lasted until our present century. Unlike the Zaydī(s), who recognized only five Imāms, the Ismā'īlī(s) believed that the *Imāma*

### *Chapter 3 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History*

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continued in the lineage of Ismā‘īl, the son of the Imām Ja‘far al-Sādiq. Since in their history, the Imāms were often targets of persecution, the Imām sometimes had to hide and could only reappear when the times were safer. The first “hidden” Imām was Ismā‘īl from whom the Ismā‘īlīs derived their name.

At the beginning of the ‘Abbāsīd rule, al-Mansūr (d. 158/775) reorganized the administration. The institution of *wazīr* became central and when the Caliph was sick, the *wazīr* often became the most powerful figure in the empire. The ‘Abbāsīds put in place a well-organized intelligence service. Government officers posted in different provinces were charged with reporting regularly on everything that was happening in their region. They developed trade by establishing trading posts all over the empire. A sophisticated banking system was established; for instance a letter of credit issued in Baghdad could be honored in Samarkand in Central Asia. Under the Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (d. 193/809), a Golden Age began, characterized by great intellectual activity in science and literature — particularly biography, history, and linguistics. Arabic became the language of international scholarship. In mathematics, the Arabic numerals contributed to simplifying calculation and helped the development of algebra. In astronomy, there were many breakthroughs; for instance, the world’s first observatory was built, many new data were collected and the astrolabe was invented. In medicine, they made many discoveries regarding anatomy, surgery, diet, and drugs. In agriculture, they improved the system of waterwheels and underground canals. A paper mill in Baghdad introduced paper and made books more accessible.

Many discoveries in science, literature and trade blossomed during the reign of the ‘Abbāsīd Caliph al-Ma’mūn (d. 218/833) who made Mu‘tazilism the official doctrine. The Mu‘tazilites (“those who stand apart”) were members of a rationalistic school of thought supporting human free will and the created nature of the Qur’ān. Al-Ma’mūn even considered appointing as his Successor ‘Alī al-Ridā (the eighth Imām of the Twelver Shī‘ites), but the Imām died before him. Al-Ma’mūn encouraged the translations of many Greek scientific and philosophical works into Arabic at the House of Wisdom (*Bayt al-Hikma*). But as the ‘Abbāsīd authority continued, the bureaucratic structures became paralyzed and returned to a more rigid Sunnī orthodoxy in dealing with dissidents. The last Shī‘ī Imāms were put under house arrest in Sāmarrā. This is when the

### *Chapter 3 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History*

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Shī'ites started to hope for the return of the Twelfth Imām who had suddenly disappeared.

The 'Abbāsīd Caliphate led the return to orthodoxy or rather codified this "orthodoxy". The corpus was gradually erected on the Qur'ān and on the practice established by Muhammad, by his companions, by the second generation, and even the third generation. This practice inspired from the Madīnan Islamic community and some pre-Islamic customs came from an oral tradition that had to be collected. It was the *hadīth*, "acts of the Prophet" in a sense that were gradually gathered into collections, each accompanied by a chain of transmission used to authenticate it. These chains of transmission did not prevent distortions and falsifications, as is normally the case for an oral tradition collected two hundred years after the Prophet's death.

When these traditions were collected at the beginning of the 'Abbāsīd era, the practice of Islam already tended to differentiate itself by region, distinguishing the "people of Hijāz" (those of Makka and Madīna) from the "people of 'Iraq" (mainly of Basra and Kūfa and subsequently Baghdad). Mālik b. Anas of Madīna, who lived and died in 179/796 in this city, gave us the first legal book of Islam, whose title, *Al-Muwatta* (The Way made smooth) showed the intentions of the author. This work codified the customary law of Madīna and gave birth to the Mālikī school. This school, more pragmatic and traditionalist, emphasizes the custom of the community and is widespread, especially in Africa. Abū Hanīfa, the Great Imām of Baghdad, who died there in 767, represented the "people of 'Iraq". The Hanīfī doctrine was influenced by the imperial city of Baghdad in which it flourished. This school was more flexible in submitting to the needs of power; it became rigid when it was time to defend the regime. It earned the favor of the Saljūqs and later of the Ottomans and with their help, it became widespread in most of the Islamic world. These first two scholars of "orthodox" Islam did not think about forming a school in their lifetimes. The third scholar, Imām Shāfi'ī, who died in Egypt in 820, established the first foundation of Islamic legal science. His school, more scientific and eclectic, focused on written sources at the expense of custom and interpretation. More appreciated by academics than statesmen, it constituted the official doctrine of Egypt until the Ottoman conquest.



### *Chapter 3 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History*

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Finally, the last of the four schools was founded by Ahmad b. Hanbal, who died in Baghdad in 855. Its rigorous practice and requirements for a return to the sources made the Hanbalī doctrine less popular, because it was difficult to follow. The Sunnī doctrine was established in the intervening sixty years between the death of Mālik b. Anas and that of Ahmad b. Hanbal. That time corresponded partly to the reign of the Caliph al-Mutawakkil (847-861), who revoked the decrees in favor of Mu‘tazilites and began to persecute Shī‘ites. The ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate began to become paralyzed when a deep political crisis happened due to the gradual disintegration of the empire. Many provinces asserted their independence from the central government and fell away from the ‘Abbāsīd’s control. The Caliph al-Mu‘tasim (d. 227/842) had recruited an army of Turks but after 861, the army made and unmade rulers at will and accelerated the decay of the empire.

#### *The Fātimids*

During this period, the Shī‘ī Muslims called Ismā‘īlī(s) emerged on the political scene. The Ismā‘īlī(s) uphold an esoteric interpretation of the Qur’ān founded on the Imām’s knowledge of the mystical significance of letters and numbers. They developed a gnostic philosophy and a cyclical cosmology. After the cycle of Prophecy represented by Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and ending with the Seal of Prophets, Muhammad, there must be a cycle of *Imāma*. These Imāms, direct descendants of ‘Alī (cousin of Muhammad) and Fātima (the daughter of Muhammad), must update and unveil the true meanings of the Qur’ān for every generation.

A branch located in Arabia, in the region of Bahrayn (this name was given at the time to the coast in front of the present island called Bahrayn), separated from the Ismā‘īlīs by rejecting their allegiance to the Fātimid Imām. This movement of Qarmatians, named after its founder Hamdān Qarmat, created a “communist” society which drew the admiration of visitors and lasted nearly two centuries. The Qarmatians organized an uprising of peasants and the dispossessed against the orthodox establishment. In 930, they attacked Makka, stole the Black Stone of the Ka’ba in three pieces and returned it in 951 in seven pieces. The Qarmatians seemed to have stolen the



### *Chapter 3 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History*

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Black Stone as a means of propaganda. They probably deliberately broke it into seven pieces to draw the attention to their belief in the new age marked by seven Imāms.

The Ismā'īlī(s) took Tunisia in 909, where they replaced a Khārījī State. They then settled in Egypt (969), one of the major provinces of the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate, to establish a Fātimīd Caliphate. They claimed that the first Caliph, 'Ubayd Allāh al-Mahdī (d. 322/934), was a direct descendant of Fātima (the daughter of Muhammad) and of 'Alī; therefore they named the dynasty: Fātimīd. The Fātimīd Caliphate was very successful for more than a century. Faced with the weakened 'Abbāsīds who were surrounded by secessionist provinces that kept only formal ties with Baghdad because they were subjected to the power of the Būyids (a Shī'ī family), the Fātimīds had good reason to believe in victory. Palestine and Syria were conquered. In Cairo, the Fātimīd Caliph al-Mu'izz (d. 365/975) had founded Al-Azhar University, one of the oldest universities, providing both religious and secular studies. The Fātimīd Empire extended over North Africa, the Red Sea coast, Yaman, Palestine, and parts of Syria.

In this empire, the majority of Muslims were Sunnī and the Coptic Christians constituted the majority of the population in Egypt at the time. There were also significant numbers of Christians called Melkites, who belonged to an Orthodox Greek denomination, as well as Jews, especially in Syria. Nāsir-i Khusraw (d. *circa* 470/1077), the famous Ismā'īlī thinker who visited Egypt, noticed that nowhere in the Muslim world had he seen Christians enjoy as much peace and material wealth as did the Copts. The Caliph al-Mu'izz hired a large number of *ahl al-Kitāb* (people of the Book) as administrators of the State. The Caliph al-'Azīz continued his father's policy of religious tolerance and married a Melkite Christian. Al-'Azīz's two brothers-in-law, Orestes and Arsenius, were nominated respectively Patriarch of Jerusalem and Metropolitan of Cairo.

During the Fātimīd period, Christians and Jews had full liberty to celebrate their festivals. Muslims took part in these celebrations and the State participated as well. The government also used some Christian festivals as an occasion for the distribution of garments and money among the people. Christians and Jews were employed in the Fātimīd administration. They were able to reach very important ranks, even to go as high as the position of *Wazīr*. It is worth mentioning that no similar examples of employment of non-Muslim *Wazīr*(s) are known among other Muslim contemporary dynasties.

### *Chapter 3 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History*

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Hākim bi Amr Allāh, the sixth Fātimid Caliph, had a very difficult reign. The empire was endangered by the empowerment of the Byzantines allied with the Hamdān(s) and the leaders of Baghdad. There was a period of social and economic degradation followed by a prolonged famine. The Fātimid State faced internal political intrigues fomented by: Ibn ‘Ammar, the Chief of the Kutama tribe, the mother and the sister of al-Hākim, and the Christian family of the previous Caliph al-Azīz. Some adepts of al-Hākim (996-1021) proclaimed his divinity and gave birth to the Druze religion. The Druzes will take refuge in the mountains of Lebanon, where they have been ever since.

At the death of al-Hākim, or rather his disappearance, the Turks emerged as the major enemy. The Saljūq Empire took under its protection the ‘Abbāsid Caliphate in 1058 and intended to fight all heretics. Jerusalem and Damascus were conquered while the Fātimids remained in Egypt. When the Ismā‘īlī(s) of Persia revolted in 1090 against the Saljūqs and occupied the castle of Alamūt in the chain of Alborz in the north, the Saljūq were waiting for a pretext to rebel against the Fātimid trust. It was provided by a family disagreement. At the death of the Caliph Mustansir bi-Allāh (d. 487/1094), a division occurred among the Ismā‘īlī community. The Imām al-Mustansir designated Nizār as his Successor but his youngest son Ahmad took power with the help of the *Wazīr* al-Afdal, who gave him the title of al-Musta‘lī. Imām Nizār managed to escape with his disciples. The Ismā‘īlīs of Persia gave their allegiance to Nizār. The Fātimids of Egypt survived for one century before their final defeat. They were decimated in 1171 by Salāh al-dīn founder of the Ayyūbid dynasty, bringing Egypt back into the fold of Sunnī Islam.

#### ***The Būyids***

The Būyid dynasty (945-1055) of Daylamite (northern Iranian) origin was founded by three sons of Buwayh: ‘Alī, Hasan, and Ahmad. ‘Alī, who was appointed governor of Karaj by the Daylamite leader Mardāvīz b. Ziyād, took Isfahān and Fārs while his brothers seized Jibāl, Khūzistān, and Kirmān. In December 945, Ahmad entered Baghdad without any resistance. The ‘Abbāsid Caliph conferred upon him the office of *Amīr al-umarā’* (Commander in chief) and the honorific title of Mu‘izz al-Dawla, while his brothers received these titles: ‘Imād al-Dawla (‘Alī), Rukn al-Dawla (Hasan). ‘Alī,

### *Chapter 3 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History*

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who was childless, appointed his brother Hasan' son as Successor ('Adad al-Dawla), before he died in 338/949. Afterwards, 'Adad al-Dawla took advantage of the situation and was able to establish himself as unique ruler by 977. At that time, the dynasty reached its peak; it favored the practice of Shī'ism while patronizing poets such as al-Mutanabbī and Firdowsī. The Būyids had several cultural centers: the cities of Rayy and Nayin in Iran and Baghdad in 'Iraq. After the death of 'Adad al-Dawla, the dynasty, characterized by disunity and dissension in the army, began to decline. In 1055, the Saljūq Tughrīl Beg deposed the last Būyid ruler, Abū Nasr al-Mālik al-Rahīm.

#### *The Saljūqs*

The Saljūqs descended from a tribal chief, named Saljūq, who came from a region close to the Aral Sea beyond the Oxus River. The Saljūq dynasty began in 429/1038 and lasted until 582/1194. It extended from Central Asia to Asia Minor. The Saljūqs had a powerful army as well as a body of good administrators. The first of the three Sultans (Tughrīl Beg, Alp Arslan, and Mālik Shāh) established a well-administered State that gave nominal allegiance the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate.

The decline of the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate did not prevent the progress and consolidation of Sunnī Islam. The Persian *Wazīr* Nizām al-Mulk entered into their service and was a very successful political administrator. He was a devout Sunnī who established a system of schools (*madrassa(s)*) called Nizāmiyya, providing students with the scientific and theological knowledge of the time. The famous Ash'arite theologian al-Ghazzālī and the renowned historian of religion al-Shahrastānī worked at the Nizāmiyya in Baghdad. The memorable astronomer and poet 'Umar Khayyām lived during that time. After the death of Mālik Shāh in 1092, the Saljūq dynasty became fragmented between young heirs and many regional chieftains.

During the time of Hasan 'Alā dhirkri-hi al-Salām, the Nizārī Ismā'īlī Imām of Alamūt, solemnly proclaimed in 1164 the Resurrection by unveiling the inner truth of the religious law (*sharī'a*) to his disciples. He said:

Mawlānā (our Lord) is the Lord of Resurrection (*Qā'im al-Qiyāma*); he is the Lord who is the absolute act of being (*al-wujūd al-mutlaq*); he excludes all existential determination, for he transcends them all; he opens up the threshold of

### *Chapter 3 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History*

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his Mercy, and through the light of his knowledge he causes all being to see, hear and speak for all eternity. (Corbin, 99)

This event is related by Marco Polo, who helped to disseminate the famous “Legend of Assassins” considered by the historian Marshall Hodgson too exaggerated to be true. The Ismā‘īlī community in Alamūt will survive until the arrival of the Mongolian Hülegü, who ended their political hegemony. However, the Imām and many disciples managed to escape. The Imāms were resurfacing in the eighteenth century, and, in 1818, they received the title of Āgā Khān from the Shāh of Persia Fath ‘Alī; afterwards, they settled in India for a long period of time. The present living Imām, Āgā Khān IV, lives in Aiglemont (France) and is involved in many humanitarian projects.

But after the bloody and exhausting political failure to realize a heavenly kingdom on earth, many Shī‘ites and Mu‘tazilites left the realm of politics and turned to a personal quest of God. Mysticism begins spreading, as of the eleventh century, under the generic name of “Sufism” (of suffering, wool coat worn by his followers) into many brotherhoods, *tarīqa(s)*.

#### ***The Safavids***

A Sufī order, called the Safavids, originated from Shaykh Ishāq Safī al-Dīn (d. 735/1334) who lived among Turkish-speaking people west of the Caspian Sea, at Ardabil. In the year 1500, Ismā‘īl, the son of the Safavid Shaykh Haydar, wanted to avenge the death of his father who had been assassinated. Thus, in 1502, he defeated the Aq Qoyunlu ruler of Azerbaijan and made Tabriz his capital. He conquered Azerbaijan, Armenia, Khurāsān, and became the first Shāh of the Safavid dynasty that lasted until 1736. Shāh Ismā‘īl claimed to be a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad on his father’s side. Shī‘ism became the State religion and Persian was adopted as the official language.

At first, the Ottomans were the greatest enemies of the dynasty, but Shāh ‘Abbās I managed to make peace with them and focused his attention on repressing the Uzbek tribes who were fomenting troubles. Shāh ‘Abbās I reformed the army and the administration and he moved the capital to Isfahān. During his reign, the dynasty flourished in art, diplomacy, and commerce. The Shī‘ites were pursuing the tradition of Islamic philosophy (*falsafa*) by trying to reconcile Shī‘ī theology with Aristotelian and

### *Chapter 3 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History*

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Neo-Platonic philosophy. From the late XVII<sup>th</sup> century, the State declined due to weak rulers, maladministration, the decline in trade, and rivalries between influential members of the State.

#### ***The Crusaders***

Compared to the Mongols, the crusaders were less a threat to the Muslim world. The First Crusade began in 1095 when the Byzantines, threatened by the Saljūqs, asked Pope Urban II for help. In 1099, the crusaders took Jerusalem, establishing their power along the way in Antioch, Edessa, and Tripoli. The Muslims were able to counterattack; thereafter a Second Crusade was launched. The crusaders went as far as the borders of Egypt but Salāh al-dīn, founder of the Ayyūbid dynasty, who recaptured Jerusalem in 1187, stopped them. However, the crusaders were able to occupy Constantinople until 1453, when it fell into the hands of the Ottoman Turks.

#### ***The Mongols and the Mamlūks***

The arrival of the Mongols, a confederation of nomadic tribes led by Genghis Khān, was another calamity that befell the Muslim world. In 1220, they took Samarqand and Bukhārā. Afterwards, they conquered Russia, Central Europe, Northern Iran, and the Caucasus. In 1258, under Hülegü, the Mongols conquered and destroyed Baghdad, the religious and political center of the Islamic world. The ‘Abbāsīd Caliph and his family were killed, but a distant relative managed to escape to Cairo.

Islam was undergoing a major crisis, with the crusaders in Syria and Palestine and the Mongols in Damascus and at the gates of Jerusalem. The Mamlūks of Egypt, who stopped the Mongols in 1260 and retained their control over Egypt until the Ottoman conquest in 1517, saved Islam. However, a century later, the wounds made by the Mongols were still deep and far from healed. The Mamlūks were soldier-slaves of Turkish origin who had been recruited by the Ayyūbids and eventually took power. The Mamlūk State of Egypt appeared to be the best pillar of orthodox Islam, while the Mongolian Ilkhānīd Empire, newly converted to Islam, was divided. Insecurity and uncertainty had a tremendous impact on Sufism, which did not hesitate to integrate Buddhist and Hindu concepts to attract adepts of different cultures into the Islamic faith.

### *Chapter 3 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History*

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Egypt was the only major Muslim power of the time. The holy places of the Hijāz, Syria, and Palestine were under its empire. The ‘Abbāsīd Caliphs, who fled Baghdad, were installed with great ceremony in Cairo, where they played a ceremonial role that was effective for the Sunnī Shāfi‘ī religious policy of Egypt. Finally the regime, through the election of its sovereign by the community, represented in principle a formal return to the sources. In fact, the regime of Mamlūk Egypt was the culmination of a process begun by the ‘Abbāsīds who were distrustful of their Arab clients and tended to replace them by an army of non-Arab slaves (many of them were Turks). These liberated slaves were able to ascend the State hierarchy and get access to very high positions. This had the effect that the sovereign, over time, became a prisoner of his slaves. If the sovereign was not a charismatic figure, nothing prevented his death and his replacement by the more powerful of his bureaucrats. The system reached this extreme in Egypt and to a lesser extent in the kingdom of Delhi India. Each Mamlūk slave, once freed by his master, climbed the ladder of the hierarchy according to his capabilities; in this system, plots had a prominent place. The tendency to transmit power to the heirs and the creation of dynasties was introduced. Thus Qalā’ūn, the sixth Mamlūk ruler (1279-1290), managed to establish his own dynasty while the struggle for power between *Amīr(s)* continued. Egypt, centered between East and West, was a main route of passage for the flowing trade between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean.

Sufism was strongly encouraged to enter Egypt during the time of Salāh al-dīn b. Ayyūb, and afterwards. Sufism was indeed, since its spread in the eleventh century, a conversion tool appreciated for its syncretism, easing the transition from other religions into Islam, and popular both in India and Asia Minor. The new function assigned to it in turn influenced its evolution, resulting in greater systematization through the formation of Sufi orders and the subsequent construction of new buildings.

In 1380, a new Turko-Mongol confederation leaded by Tamerlane swept down on Central Asia, India, Iran, ‘Iraq, and Syria, but they were unable to defeat the Mamlūks of Egypt. The Mongol invasions were disastrous and certainly greatly responsible for the decline of Islam. The Mongols demolished all the system of irrigation. They killed or deported many scholars and scientists. They set on fire many libraries with their precious manuscripts, cutting Muslims from their scientific and cultural legacy.

## *Chapter 3 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History*

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### ***The Moghuls in India***

Islam was first brought to Sind, West India, in the VIII<sup>th</sup> century by seafaring Arab traders; by the X<sup>th</sup> century, Muslim armies from the north were raiding India. Around this same time, Mamlūks (soldiers from Central Asia) moved into the Arab world. The Caliphate became weak and the Central-Asian nomads were stepping into the Caliphs' previous place of power. It would be these cavalry soldiers who would eventually spread Islam into South Asia.

With more victories, Muslims continued their rule over the territory. However, Islam as a religion did not spread throughout the conquered lands and did not move beyond the Indus River, stopped by the strength of the Rajputs (Hindu rulers of northern India). Turkish soldiers held the power militarily, while the '*ulamā*' held control over the empire— through culture and ideology. Around this same time, the Mongols and the Turks began to collide along the Afghan/Persian border, which pushed the Turks back into Afghanistan. The Mongolian attacks on the Islamic community lead to the establishment of the first Islamic Kingdom in Afghanistan. It was from there that raids were directed toward India and would culminate with formation of the Delhi Sultanate in 1250.

The Muslim kingdoms that succeeded it were defeated by a Turkic invader from Afghanistan, Bābur, a remote descendant of Timur (Tamerlane; Tēmūr), who, after the battle of Panipat in 1526, founded the Moghul Empire. Bābur came to India with his band of followers. He managed to defeat Ibrāhīm, the last weakling Lōdī ruler, in 1526, at the first battle of Panipat and to take control of the entire region. There was a brief interruption to Moghul rule when Bābur's son Humāyūn (1508-1556) was ousted from Delhi, by Sher Shāh Suri (1472-1545).

When in January 1556 Humāyūn died, his son Akbar was about thirteen years old. At that time, the Moghul Empire was confined to Kabul and Kandahar besides Punjab. After Humāyūn's death, Bairam Khān, a trusted lieutenant of Humāyūn, had been appointed as Akbar's guardian. Hemu (Hemchandra), the military chief of the Afghan King Muhammad Adil Shāh (based in Chunar, Uttar Pradesh), was seeking to expel the Moghuls from India. Taking advantage of Humāyūn's death, Hemu marched toward



### *Chapter 3 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History*

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Agra and Delhi in order to capture these cities. To foil this move, Bairam Khān (escorting Akbar) marched towards Delhi from Punjab where they had been stationed. On November 5, 1556, the two armies met at Panipat. In spite of having a smaller army, Akbar won the battle.

Akbar (1542-1605) was the greatest and the most famous of all the Moghul rulers. He consolidated his political power and extended his empire over practically the whole of north India and parts of southern India. His rule was characterized by broadmindedness, secularism, and liberalism. His son Jahāngīr (1569-1627), who succeeded Akbar, possessed a great sense of aesthetics. Beautiful gardens were designed during his reign in Kashmīr. His son Shāh Jahān (1592-1666), who succeeded him, followed in his footsteps. In memory to his beloved wife, he ordered the construction of the architectural masterpiece known as the Tāj Mahall. Aurangzēb (1618-1707), was the last of the prominent Moghul rulers. A staunch, dogmatic and bigoted Muslim, he was ruthless in his political ambitions and attitudes. When Nādir Shāh (1688-1747) of Persia attacked and plundered Delhi in 1739, the declining Moghuls were even further weakened; simultaneously the growth and expansion of the Hindu Marāthā power too came to an abrupt end.

#### *The Ottomans*

The Ottomans were a confederation of Turkish-speaking peoples of Anatolia under a chieftain called Othman. They were called *ghāzī(s)* (warriors of faith) and by the second half of the XIV<sup>th</sup> century, they occupied Greece and Turkey. In 857/1453 the Ottomans under Mehmet II took Constantinople and renamed it Istanbul. In 923/1517, Selim I conquered Egypt, putting an end to the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate. Later the Ottomans claimed that the last ‘Abbāsīd Caliph al-Mutawakkil III gave them the Caliphate. This was going against the Sunnī theory of Caliphate based on a *hadīth* that the ruler must be from Arab Quraysh descent. At the peak of its glory, the Ottoman Empire had many good Sultān(s), culminating with Süleyman the Magnificent (1520-1566). The Ottomans had a great army composed of janissaries (an elite corps of slave soldiers carefully selected on the basis of physique and intelligence who were educated and trained) and a State characterized by administrative efficiency. The empire covered Asia Minor, Syria, ‘Iraq,

### *Chapter 3 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History*

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Egypt, North Africa, the coastal regions of Arabia, Azerbaijan, the Balkans, Hungary, and the southern part of Russia. By the middle of the XVI<sup>th</sup> century the empire began to decline, as the office of Grand *Wazīr* became more important and the Sultān(s) tended to neglect the administration. Also the janissaries became so influential that they made and unmade Sultān(s). When Europe found a new way to India without passing through the Ottoman Empire, the Ottomans lost many sources of revenue.

During the First World War, the Ottomans sided with Germany and the empire was completely lost. Afterwards, Mustafā Kemal, called Atatürk (Father of the Turks), became the first President of Turkey, from 1923 to 1938. He modernized and westernized Turkey. He abolished the Sultanate and the Caliphate and made Turkey a republic. He made the Turkish language adopt the Latin alphabet and discarded the previous Arabic alphabet. Atatürk's reforms were well accepted by the majority of Turks who believed they were in harmony with the principles of Islam and their past history.

#### ***Western Domination over the Muslim World***

European penetration into the Ottoman Empire was gradual. The Ottoman Empire gave a series of concessions called "Capitulations" to the European powers, favoring them in foreign trade. Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Egypt in 1798; he crushed the Mamlūks (who governed Egypt under Ottoman suzerainty), showing the inner vulnerability of Ottoman power. This was the beginning of more Western interventions on Muslim territory. In 1820, Great Britain compelled the Arab tribes of the Arabian Gulf to sign a pact. In the 1830s, France invaded Algeria. Britain occupied Aden, a strategic place located at the entrance of the Red Sea. In 1869, Ferdinand de Lesseps, with the help of the French Emperor, completed the Suez Canal (a major shipping passage). The profits derived from the Suez Canal went for nearly a century to European shareholders of the canal instead of benefiting Egyptians. Muslim rulers, who wanted to modernize their countries, often contracted debts that led to European political domination. This is how France took control of Tunisia in 1881, Britain of Egypt in 1882, and Italy of Libya in 1911. Since, during the First World War, the Ottomans sided with the Germans, Great Britain encouraged Arab revolts against the Turks all over the empire. These revolts helped the European powers to gain control over the region. France and Great Britain agreed to

### *Chapter 3 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History*

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partition most Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire between them and obtained mandates from the League of Nations: France took Syria and Lebanon while Britain took 'Iraq, Palestine, and Transjordan.

The unending conflict over Palestine since 1948 ignited many bloody wars and sent millions of Palestinians into exile; this conflict has fueled other international dilemmas such as the energy crisis of 1973, the civil war in Lebanon from 1975 and the emergence of terrorist activities. In 1896 Theodor Herzl, in a pamphlet called *Der Judenstaat* ("The Jewish State"), advocated for the British to create a sovereign Jewish State. His petition was heard and in 1917, the Balfour Declaration promised British support for the establishment of a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine. At that time the Arabs were 92% of the population. Afterwards and even more so after World War II, Jewish immigration increased. Tensions rose between Palestinians and Jews; Britain transferred the problem to the United Nations which proposed the partition of Palestine into Jewish and Arab States. Six month later Britain withdrew and the State of Israel was proclaimed in 1948. The Arabs immediately went to war against Israel and were defeated. Israel is seen by Muslims as a State created on Arab territory by the Western powers because of their guilt for Europe's treatment of the Jews during the World Wars and as a way to continue their colonial policies of interference in the region.

After World War II, most Muslim regions acceded to independence. In 1952, Jamāl 'Abd al-Nāsir (Nasser) regained control over the Suez Canal and forced the British to withdraw from Egypt. Afterwards, 'Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Algeria gained their independence. The 1979 Iranian revolution was able to overthrow the unpopular Muslim regime of the Shāh, closely allied to the West and promoting secularization in the name of modernization. At the beginning, many Muslims were impressed by the revolutionary way Āyat Allāh Khumainī was reorganizing the State according to Islamic principles. (For more details on the history of Iran, read chapter 8.)

Muhammad Zāhir Shāh became King of Afghanistan in 1933; in the early 1960's he introduced a liberal constitution which provided a two-chamber legislature. This led to the formation of the communist *Hizb-i-Democratic-i-Khalq* (People's Democratic Party, HDK), which had close ideological ties to the Soviet Union. In 1967, the HDK split into two major rival factions: the *Khalq* (Masses) faction headed by Nūr Muhammad Tarakī

### *Chapter 3 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History*

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and Hāfiz Allāh Amīn (supported by some members within the military), and the *Parcham* (Banner) faction led by Babrak Karmal. Unfortunately shortly after 1973, Afghanistan became a dictatorial republic.

Nevertheless, in 1978, the HDK led by Nūr Muhammad Tarakī seized power. In 1979, Tarakī was assassinated and succeeded by Hāfiz Allāh Amīn. But the USSR invaded the country and Babrak Karmal was placed as new President. Islamic factions started a guerrilla war against the regime and the soviet-occupation. After the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, the Americans decided to intervene by subsidizing Muslim extremists to struggle against the communists. Usama Bin Laden immediately joined the movement of anti-Soviet *jihād*. His activities at that time were appreciated by both the United States and Saudi Arabia. Even the Tālibān (students), who were attending conservative Islamic schools in the Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan, received financial supports from Americans.

In 1986 Karmal was replaced by Muhammad Najīb Allāh. After a long war that lasted nine years, a peace treaty with the Russians was signed in 1988. In 1990 the Islamic *mujāhidīn* (fighters) expelled the communist dictatorship. A central government was installed, but de facto the country was ruled by warlords. In 1992 Burhān al-dīn Rabbanī became President. The civil war was continuing and in 1996, the head of the Tālibān movement Mullā Muhammad ‘Umar, who fought against the warlords with the help of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, gained control over the Afghan territory. Most of the Tālibān were from rural Pashtun origin. By the end of 1998, the Tālibān occupied about 90% of the country. Afghanistan became a theocratic dictatorship and Mullā Muhammad ‘Umar was appointed President.

The Tālibāns established an oppressive regime that was clearly going against the principles of Islamic faith. They forced women to be completely veiled, not allowing them to go to school nor to work outside the home. They banned televisions, movies, and music. From the mid-1990s the Tālibān provided sanctuary to Usama Bin Laden, a Saudi national who had fought with them against the Soviets. Bin Laden provided both financial and political support to the Tālibān. It was in this context that Usama Bin Laden could expand his activities culminating with the tragic 9/11 event. The Tālibān were also sponsoring diverse terrorist attacks against American targets all over the world. In mid-

### *Chapter 3 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History*

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November, 2001, after intensive US bombing and attacks from anti-Tālibān ground forces, the regime of Tālibān collapsed. Usama Bin Laden and many Tālibān escaped and are presently hiding in the mountains of Afghanistan and Pakistan. They are still conducting terrorist activities in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and all over the world.

Sponsored by the UN, Afghan factions opposed to the Tālibān met in Bonn, Germany in early December 2001 and agreed on a political process to restore stability and governance to Afghanistan. A transitional government was formed and renamed Afghanistan as the Islamic State of Afghanistan. Burhān al-dīn Rabbānī resumed office and was succeeded by Hamīd Karzai. In 2004 a new constitution was accepted, identifying Afghanistan as an “Islamic Republic.” The constitution paved the way for nationwide presidential and parliamentary elections to be held in June 2004. The government’s authority beyond the capital, Kabul, is slowly growing, although its ability to deliver necessary social services remains largely dependent on funds from the international community.

Many Muslims were hoping that Pakistan, created in 1949, would become a modern Islamic democracy. But Pakistan’s history was marked by many military takeovers and by corruption. Some Muslims started to believe that Pakistan was not a model to follow and that the implantation of a truly Islamic State would have to follow a more revolutionary path. After a long period of exile, Benazir Bhutto returned to Pakistan. Her assassination in December 2007 during an election campaign led to a nationwide uprising. In February 2008 elections were held and Bhutto’s *Pakistan Peoples Party* (PPP) won and Yousaf Raza Gillani became Prime Minister. On 18 August, 2008 Pervez Musharaff resigned from the presidency. The access of Pakistan to democracy is too recent to draw any conclusion from it at the moment.

Later events encouraged revivalist movements. The 1991 Gulf War and the continuing blockade against ‘Iraq, with the economic sanctions against some outspoken Muslim nations confirmed that the West, particularly the United States, wanted to isolate some Muslims countries whose dictators were not ruling in their favor. The 9/11 event was the culmination of many frustrations accumulated over many years by Muslim extremists. The provocative statements of President George W. Bush with the unending

### *Chapter 3 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History*

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war in 'Iraq did not help to improve the bad American reputation in the Muslim world. All hopes are turned towards the new President Barack H. Obama!

Obama is certainly moving away from the foreign policy of the previous President. In his speech delivered in Cairo, on June 4<sup>th</sup> 2009, he explained that United States pursued out of necessity al-Qaeda and the Tālibān because these extremists kill innocent civilians. United States do not seek to establish permanent military bases in Afghanistan nor in Pakistan. The Americans intent to repatriate their troops when all violent extremists will be under control. These extremists, said the President, “have killed people of different faiths —more than any other, they have killed Muslims. Their actions are irreconcilable with the rights of human beings, the progress of nations, and with Islam. The Holy Qur’ān teaches that whoever kills an innocent, it is as if he has killed all mankind; and whoever saves a person, it is as if he has saved all mankind.” The Americans will provide financial help to stimulate the economy of Pakistan and Afghanistan by promoting various construction projects (school, hospital, roads, etc.) Regarding 'Iraq, the President asserted two objectives “to help 'Iraq forge a better future — and to leave 'Iraq to 'Iraqis.” The Americans will help 'Iraq to develop their economy and their own Security Forces. They are planning to remove all their troops from 'Iraq by 2012. About the prison at Guantanamo Bay, the President prohibited the further use of torture and promised to close it by early next year.

Concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the President talked about the strong and unbreakable bond that has tied United States and Israel since a long time. “It is based upon cultural and historical ties, and the recognition that the aspiration for a Jewish homeland is rooted in a tragic history that cannot be denied.” The President recognized also the legitimacy of the Palestinian cause. “On the other hand, it is also undeniable that the Palestinian people —Muslims and Christians— have suffered in pursuit of a homeland. For more than sixty years they have endured the pain of dislocation. Many wait in refugee camps in the West Bank, Gaza, and neighboring lands for a life of peace and security that they have never been able to lead. They endure the daily humiliations —large and small— that come with occupation. So let there be no doubt: the situation for the Palestinian people is intolerable. America will not turn our backs on the legitimate Palestinian aspiration for dignity, opportunity, and a State of their own.” The President

### *Chapter 3 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History*

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concluded with a very prudent statement. “But if we see this conflict only from one side or the other, then we will be blind to the truth: the only resolution is for the aspirations of both sides to be met through two States, where Israelis and Palestinians each live in peace and security.” Compromises must be done on both sides. Hamas should end their use of violence and recognize the State of Israel while the Israeli government must stop Israeli settlements and ensure that Palestinians can develop their own State.

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### *Chapter 3 Diana Steigerwald Diversity in Islamic History*

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