

# The Tang Dynasty and Abbasid Empire: Contact and Comparison, 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> Century

Morris Rossabi

Adjunct Professor of East Asian Language and  
Cultures, Department of East Asian Languages & Cultures,  
Columbia University

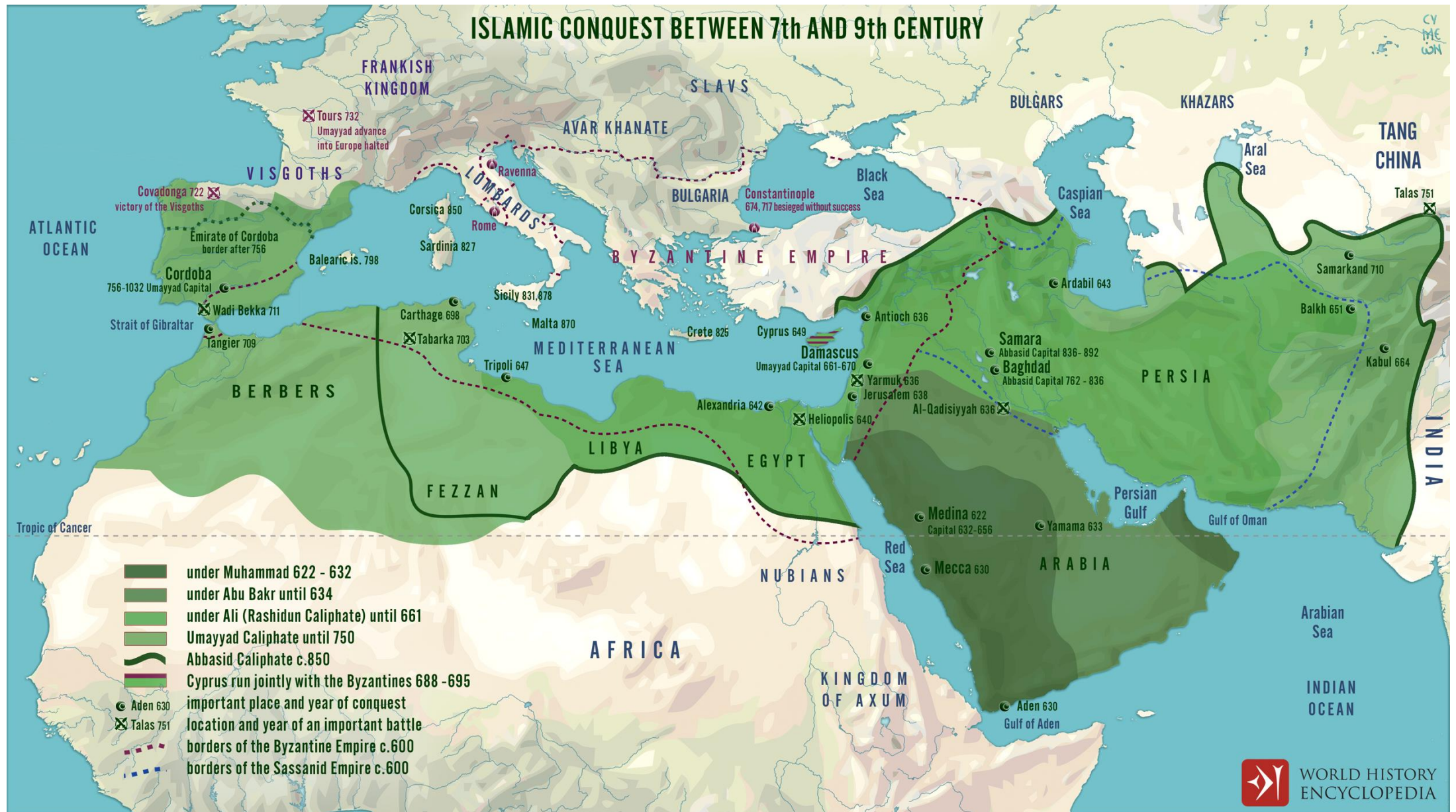
[mr63@columbia.edu](mailto:mr63@columbia.edu)















Horses were vital  
to the Silk Roads  
and were often  
depicted in art

# Tang (618-907); Umayyad Caliphate (661-750); Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258)

Peaceful relationship except battle of Talas River (751)

Abbasids receive techniques of making paper and gunpowder, ceramics; did not implement printing;

Tang receives horses, camels, grapes, medicines, and silversmiths; Exposure to Zoroastrianism, Manicheism, Nestorian Christianity, Judaism (?), and Islam

Great Teacher Resources: **Golden Peaches of Samarkand** by Edward Schafer; **A History of Islamic Societies** by Ira Lapidus

- Empress Wu (Wu Zetian, 624-705)—Only Empress to rule in her own right; supported civil service exams, Buddhism, and trade with foreigners; Useful sources: **The Woman Who Discovered Printing** by T. H. Barrett; **Buddhism in Chinese History** by Arthur Wright
- Yang Guifei 719-756—Greatest beauty in Chinese history





- Li Bo (701-762)—friendship, drinking, Nature
- Du Fu (712-770)—morality, Confucian, failure in exams





- Harun al-Rashid (766-809)—Golden Age of Islam, Mathematics, Astronomy, Medicine: Baghdad as capital, Poetry, Architecture—mosques, palaces.
- Ibn Sina (Avicenna; d. 1037)—Renaissance Man, Medicine, Scientific Method.
- Trade with Russia, East and South Asia, Venice, Genoa, Africa

- Beilitung shipwreck—off coast of Indonesia
- 60,000 items—ceramics, gold objects





# Salvaged objects from the Beilitung shipwreck



Changsha ceramic bowls (above left)



Bronze mirror (above right)



Gold dish (bottom left)



- 1. Abbasids—Caliph secular-religious leader; Tang Emperor—mostly secular; both use religion for political purposes
- 2. Abbasids—government supports trade and merchants; Tang—merchants accorded low social status
- 3. Abbasids—expansionism successful; much larger domain—Spain to Central Asia; Tang—expansion merely in few oases and towns
- 4. China—sophisticated bureaucratic system; Abbasids—less based on officials, no civil service exams
- 5. Both multi-ethnic and multi-religious
- 6. Both adopted legal systems and concerned about law, but different attitudes toward law
- 7. Status of women—bound feet in China; 3 Obedienced; No public presence in Abbasid domain
- 8. Technology—China—paper, printing, gunpowder, paper money, ceramics; Abbasids—medical and astronomy

- Decline:
- 1. Tang: failure of equal field system, evasion of taxes, corruption, An Lushan rebellion, anti-Buddhist and anti-foreign policies
- 2. Abbasids—succession disputes, corruption, trade paramount, agriculture ignored, local governors powerful and civil wars, loss of areas, 1055—Persian conquest of Baghdad

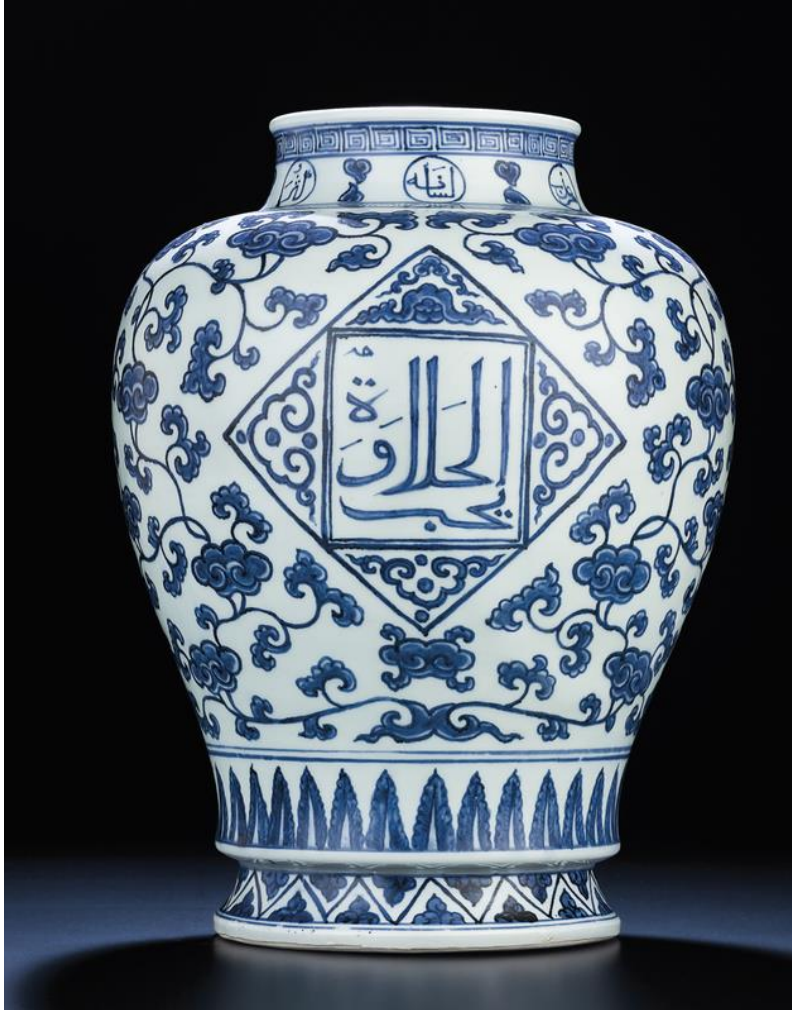
# Tombs from the Lingshan Islamic Cemetery located in Quanzhou, Fujian province



Tomb of the “Two Worthies,” 7<sup>th</sup> century Islamic missionaries to China- wide view (right upper) and close up (right lower)  
Tomb of Zheng He, Islamic-Chinese diplomat and mariner (above left)



# Porcelain with Arabic inscription



Ming Emperor Zhengde era, 1505-1521