

ISLAM

THE STRAIGHT PATH



Expanded Edition

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The Muslim Community in History

The history of Islam has often been linked to the existence of an Islamic state or empire. From its beginnings, Islam existed and spread as a community-state; it was both a faith and a political order. Within centuries after his death, Muhammad's local Arabian polity became a vast empire, extending from North Africa to Southeast Asia. The development of Islam and state institutions (the caliphate, law, education, the military, social services) were intertwined. Again, the Prophetic period provided the paradigm for later generations. For it was in Medina that the Quranic mandate took on form and substance under the guidance and direction of the Prophet.

The Medinan community formed a total framework for state, society, and culture. It epitomized the Quranic mandate for Muslims as individuals and as a community "to transform the world itself through action in the world."⁸ This aspiration and ideal has constituted the challenge for the Islamic community throughout much of its history. It inspired Muhammad to transform a local shiekhdom into a transtribal state.

Muhammad and the Medinan State

Seventh-century Arabia was dominated by two great empires: the Byzantine (Christian), or Eastern Roman, empire and the Sasanian Persian (Zoroastrian) empire. In the middle was the Arabian Peninsula, composed of apparently weak and divided tribal societies. Within one hundred years, both empires would fall before the armies of Allah as Muhammad and his successors united Arabia under the umbrella of Islam,

which provided a principle of organization and motivation. In time, a vast empire and a commonwealth of Islamic states would come to dominate much of the world. Its missionaries would be soldiers, merchants, and mystics. Islam would provide the basis of community identity and the rationale or legitimacy for rulers and their policies of expansion and conquest. Thus, for example, the wars of conquest were termed *fath*, "opening or victory" of the way for Islam. As Muhammad governed a transtribal state in the name of Islam, so too the Islamic community became associated with an expansive empire. Why and how did this come to pass?

Shortly after the surrender of Mecca, Muhammad turned his attention to the extension and consolidation of his authority over Arabia. Envoys were sent and alliances forged with surrounding tribes and rulers. The fiercely independent Bedouin tribes of Arabia were united behind the Prophet of Islam through a combination of force and diplomacy. As Muhammad was both head of state and messenger of God, so too were the envoys and soldiers of the state the envoys and soldiers of Islam, its first missionaries. Along with their treaties and armies, they brought the Quran and the teachings of their faith. They spread a way of life that affected the political and social order as well as individual life and worship. Islam encompassed both a faith and a sociopolitical system. Ideally, this new order was to be a community of believers, acknowledging the ultimate sovereignty of God, living according to His law, obeying His Prophet, and dedicating their lives to spreading God's rule and law. This was the message and vision that accompanied Arab armies as they burst out of Arabia and established their supremacy throughout the Middle East.

What is most striking about the early expansion of Islam is its rapidity and success. Western scholars have marveled at it. Muslim tradition has viewed the conquests as a miraculous proof or historic validation of the truth of Islam's claims and a sign of God's guidance. Within a decade, Arab forces overran the Byzantine and Persian armies, exhausted by years of warfare, and conquered Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Persia, and Egypt. The momentum of these early victories was extended to a series of brilliant battles under great generals like Khalid ibn al-Walid and Amr ibn al-As, which extended the boundaries of the Muslim empire to Morocco and Spain in the west and across Central Asia to India in the east. Driven by the economic rewards from conquest of richer, more developed areas, united and inspired by their new faith, Muslim armies proved to be formidable conquerors and effective rulers, builders rather than destroyers. They replaced the indigenous rulers and armies of the conquered countries, but preserved much of their government, bureaucracy, and

culture. For many in the conquered territories, it was no more than an exchange of masters, one that brought peace to peoples demoralized and disaffected by the casualties and heavy taxation that resulted from the years of Byzantine-Persian warfare. Local communities were free to continue to follow their own way of life in internal, domestic affairs. In many ways, local populations found Muslim rule more flexible and tolerant than that of Byzantium and Persia. Religious communities were free to practice their faith—to worship and be governed by their religious leaders and laws in such areas as marriage, divorce, and inheritance. In exchange, they were required to pay tribute, a poll tax (*jizya*) that entitled them to Muslim protection from outside aggression and exempted them from military service. They were therefore called the “protected ones” (*dhimmi*). In effect, this often meant lower taxes, greater local autonomy, rule by fellow Semites with closer linguistic and cultural ties than the hellenized, Greco-Roman elites of Byzantium, and greater religious freedom for Jews and indigenous Christians. Most of the Christian churches, such as the Nestorians, Monophysites, Jacobites, and Copts had been persecuted as heretics and schismatics by Christian orthodoxy. For these reasons, some Jewish and Christian communities aided the invading armies, regarding them as less oppressive than their imperial masters. In many ways, the conquests brought a Pax Islamica to an embattled area:

The conquests destroyed little: what they did suppress were imperial rivalries and sectarian bloodletting among the newly subjected population. The Muslims tolerated Christianity, but they disestablished it; henceforward Christian life and liturgy, its endowments, politics and theology, would be a private and not a public affair. By an exquisite irony, Islam reduced the status of Christians to that which the Christians had earlier thrust upon the Jews, with one difference. The reduction in Christian status was merely judicial; it was unaccompanied by either systematic persecution or a blood lust, and generally, though not everywhere and at all times, unmarred by vexatious behavior.⁹

A common issue associated with the spread of Islam is the role of jihad, so-called holy war. While Westerners are quick to characterize Islam as a religion spread by the sword, modern Muslim apologists sometimes explain jihad as simply defensive in nature. In its most general sense, jihad in the Quran and in Muslim practice refers to the obligation of all Muslims to strive (*jihad*, self-exertion) or struggle to follow God's will. This includes both the struggle to lead a virtuous life and the universal mission of the Muslim community to spread God's rule and law through teaching, preaching, and, where necessary, armed

struggle. Contrary to popular belief, the early conquests did not seek to spread the faith through forced conversion but to spread Muslim rule. Many early Muslims regarded Islam solely as an Arab religion. Moreover, from an economic perspective, increase in the size of the community through conversion diminished Arab Muslims' share in the spoils of conquest. As Islam penetrated new areas, people were offered three options: (1) conversion, that is, full membership in the Muslim community, with its rights and duties; (2) acceptance of Muslim rule as “protected” people and payment of a poll tax; (3) battle or the sword if neither the first nor the second option was accepted. The astonishing expansion of Islam resulted not only from armed conquest but also from these two peaceful options. In later centuries, in many areas of Africa, the Indian subcontinent, and Southeast Asia, the effective spread of Islam would be due primarily to Muslim traders and Sufi (mystic) missionaries who won converts by their example and their preaching.

The Caliphate (632–1258)

Given Muhammad's formative and pivotal role, his death (632) threatened to radically destabilize the community. Who was to lead? What was to happen to the community? The companions of the Prophet moved quickly to steady and reassure the community. Abu Bakr, an early follower of Muhammad, announced the death of the Prophet to the assembled faithful: “Muslims! If any of you has worshipped Muhammad, let me tell you that Muhammad is dead. But if you worship God, then know that God is living and will never die!” Nevertheless, the Prophet's death did plunge the Islamic community into a series of political crises revolving around leadership and authority. Issues of succession and secession were to plague the early community.

The caliphate (632–1258) has traditionally been divided into three periods: the “Rightly Guided Caliphs” (632–661), the Umayyad empire (661–750), and the Abbasid empire (750–1258). During these eras, a vast empire was created with successive capitals in Medina, Kufa, Damascus, and Baghdad. Stunning political success was complemented by a cultural florescence in law, theology, philosophy, literature, medicine, mathematics, science, and art.

The Rightly Guided Caliphs

The caliphate began in 632 with the selection of Muhammad's successor. The first four caliphs were all companions of the Prophet: Abu Bakr

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 (reigned 632–634), Umar ibn al-Khattab (634–644), Uthman ibn Affan (644–656), and Ali ibn Abi Talib (656–661). Their rule is especially significant not only for what they actually did, but also because the period of Muhammad and the Rightly Guided Caliphs came to be regarded in Sunni Islam as the normative period. It provides the idealized past to which Muslims have looked back for inspiration and guidance, a time to be remembered and emulated.

The vast majority of Muslims (Sunni) believe that Muhammad died without designating his replacement or establishing a system for the selection of his successor. After an initial period of uncertainty, the Prophet's companions, the elders or leaders of Medina, selected or acknowledged Abu Bakr, an early convert and the Prophet's father-in-law, as caliph (*khalifa*, successor or deputy). Abu Bakr's designation as leader was symbolized by the offering of *baya* (oath), a handclasp used by the Arabs to seal a contract, in this case an oath of obedience and allegiance. Abu Bakr had been a close companion and a trusted adviser of Muhammad; he was a man respected for his sagacity and piety. Muhammad had appointed him to lead the Friday community prayer in his absence. As caliph, Abu Bakr was the political and military leader of the community. Although not a prophet, the caliph enjoyed religious prestige as head of the community of believers. This was symbolized in later history by the caliph's right to lead the Friday prayer and the inclusion of his name in its prayers.

Having resolved the question of political leadership and succession, Abu Bakr turned to the consolidation of Muslim rule in Arabia. Muhammad's death had precipitated a series of tribal rebellions. Many tribal chiefs claimed that their allegiance had been based on a political pact with Medina that ceased with the Prophet's death. Tribal independence and factionalism, long a part of Arab history, once more threatened the unity and identity of the new Islamic state. Abu Bakr countered that the unity of the community was based on the interconnectedness of faith and politics and undertook a series of battles that later Muslim historians would call the wars of apostasy. Relying on Khalid ibn al-Walid, whom Muhammad had dubbed "the sword of Allah," he crushed the tribal revolt, consolidating Muslim rule over the entire Arabian Peninsula, and thus preserved the unity and solidarity of the Islamic community-state.

Abu Bakr's successor, Umar, initiated the great period of expansion and conquest. One of the great military leaders of his time, he added the title "Commander of the Faithful" to that of "Successor" or "Deputy of the Prophet of God." He also introduced a new method for the selection of his successor. On his deathbed, Umar appointed an "election com-

mittee" to select the next caliph. After due consultation, the council of electors chose Uthman ibn Affan from the Umayyad clan, a leading Meccan family. This was accompanied by the traditional sign of allegiance, the clasp of hands. Thus, based on the practice of the first three caliphs, a pattern was established for selecting the caliph from the Quraysh tribe through a process characterized by consultation and an oath of allegiance.

Before long, tribal factionalism and the threat of rebellion resurfaced in the community. Uthman's family had been among the strongest foes of the Prophet. Many of the Medinan elite, who had been among the early supporters of Muhammad, resented Uthman's accession to power and the increased prominence and wealth of his family. Although personally pious, Uthman lacked the presence and leadership skills of his predecessors. Accusations that the caliph was weak and guilty of nepotism fueled political intrigue. In 656, Uthman was assassinated by a group of mutineers from Egypt. The caliph's murder was the first in a series of Muslim rebellions and tribal fratricides that would plague the Islamic community's political development.

THE CALIPH ALI AND THE FIRST CIVIL WARS

Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, succeeded Uthman as the fourth caliph. Ali was devoted to Muhammad and among the first to embrace Islam. He had married Fatima, the only surviving child of Muhammad and Khadijah, with whom he had two sons, Hasan and Husayn. Ali was a charismatic figure who inspired fierce loyalty and commitment. Many of Ali's supporters (Alids) believed that leadership of the Islamic community should remain within the family of the Prophet and that, indeed, Muhammad had designated Ali as his rightful successor and heir. For these partisans of Ali, later to be called Shii (*shiat-u-Ali*, party of Ali), the first three caliphs were interlopers who had denied Ali his rightful inheritance. However, their satisfaction and expectations were to be short-lived. Within the few short years that Ali ruled, the caliphate was racked by two civil wars. Ali's authority was challenged by two opposition movements: first, by a coalition headed by Muhammad's widow, Aisha (the daughter of Abu Bakr), and second, by the forces of Muawiyah, the governor of Syria and a relative of Uthman. Ali's failure to find and prosecute Uthman's murderers became the pretext for both revolts. In the first, Ali crushed a triumvirate led by Aisha, the youngest wife of Muhammad. The "Battle of the Camel," so named because it took place around the camel on which Aisha was mounted, marked the first time a caliph had led his army against another Muslim army.

Of greater long-range significance was Muawiyah's challenge to Ali's authority. Securely established in Damascus with a strong army, Muawiyah, the nephew of Uthman, had refused to step down and accept Ali's appointment of a replacement. In 657, at Siffin (in modern-day Syria), Ali led his army against his rebellious governor. Faced with defeat, Muawiyah's men raised Qurans on the tips of their spears and called for arbitration according to the Quran, crying out, "Let God decide." Although the arbitration proved inconclusive, it yielded two results that would have lasting effects. A splinter group of Alids, the Kharijites or "seceders," broke with Ali for having failed to subdue Muawiyah; Muawiyah walked away from Siffin and continued to govern Syria, extending his rule to Egypt as well. When Ali was murdered by Kharijites in 661, Muawiyah laid successful claim to the caliphate, moving its capital to Damascus and frustrating Alid belief that leadership of the community should be restricted to Ali's descendants. With the establishment of the Umayyad dynasty, the "golden age" of Muhammad and the Rightly Guided Caliphs came to an end and the caliphate became an absolute monarchy.

Despite the turmoil during the early caliphal years, Muslims regard the period of Muhammad and the first generation of companions or elders as normative for a variety of reasons. First, God sent down His final and complete revelation in the Quran and the last of His prophets, Muhammad. Second, the Islamic community-state was created, bonded by a common religious identity and purpose. Third, the sources of Islamic law, the Quran and the example of the Prophet, originated at this time. Fourth, this period of the early companions serves as the reference point for all Islamic revival and reform, both traditionalist and modernist. Fifth, the success and power that resulted from the near-miraculous victories and geographic expansion of Islam constitute, in the eyes of believers, historical validation of the message of Islam.

ORGANIZATION AND INSTITUTIONS

The early caliphate established the pattern for the organization and administration of the Islamic state. Islam provided the basic identity and ideology of the state, a source of unity and solidarity. The caliph's authority and leadership were rooted in his claim to be the successor of the Prophet as head of the community. Muhammad's practice provided the model for governance. The caliph exercised direct political, military, judicial, and fiscal control of the Muslim community. He was chosen through a process of consultation, nomination, and selection by a small group of electors who, after pledging their allegiance, presented the caliph to the people for acceptance by public acclamation. The caliph was the protector and defender of the faith, he was to assure the following of

God's law and spread the rule of God through expansion and conquest. The community was a brotherhood of believers, a society based on religious rather than tribal solidarity.

In general, the Arabs did not occupy conquered cities but established garrison towns nearby, such as Basra and Kufa in Iraq, Fustat (Cairo) in Egypt, and Qariwiyyin in North Africa. From these towns, conquered territories were governed and expeditions launched. They were centered around a mosque, which served as the religious and public focal point of the towns. Conquered territories were divided into provinces, each of which was administered by a governor who was usually a military commander. The internal civil and religious administration remained in the hands of local officials. An agent of the caliph oversaw the collection of taxes and other administrative activities. Revenue for the state came from the captured lands and taxes.

The Islamic system of taxes took several forms: the tithe or wealth tax to benefit the poor and a land tax paid by Muslims; the poll tax and tribute, later a land tax, paid by non-Muslims. All revenue was owned, collected, and administered by the state. The distribution of revenue was managed by the registry at Medina through a system of payments and pensions based on priority in accepting Islam. The Muslims at Medina and the family of the Prophet enjoyed a special place of honor because of their closeness to Muhammad and their fidelity to God's call.

Muslim society was divided into four major social classes. The elites of society were the Arab Muslims, with special status given to the companions of the Prophet because of their early support and role in establishing the community. Next came the non-Arab converts to Islam. Although in theory all Muslims were equal before God, in fact, practice varied. Under the Umayyads, non-Arab Muslims were clearly second-class citizens. They continued to pay those taxes levied on non-Muslims even after their conversion. The *dhimmi*, or non-Muslim (People of the Book) (those who possessed a revealed Scripture, Jews and Christians), constituted communities within and subject to the wider Islamic community-state. In time, this protected status was extended to Hindus and Buddhists. Finally, there were the slaves. As in much of the Near East, slavery had long existed among the Arabs. Although the Quran commanded the just and humane treatment of slaves (16:71) and regarded their emancipation as a meritorious act (90:13; 58:3), the system of slavery was adopted in a modified form. Only captives in battle could be taken as slaves. Neither Muslims nor Jews and Christians could be enslaved in early Islam.

Thus, religion played an important role in the government, law, taxation, and social organization of society.

The Umayyad Empire: Creation of an Arab Kingdom

The advent of Umayyad rule set in motion a process of continued expansion and centralization of authority that would transform the Islamic community from an Arab shaykhdom into an Islamic empire whose rulers were dependent on religion for legitimacy and the military for power and stability.

In 661, Muawiyah (reigned 661–80) laid claim to the caliphate and ushered in the Umayyad era (661–750): imperial, dynastic, and dominated by an Arab military aristocracy. The capital was moved to Damascus. This permanent shift from the less sophisticated Arabian heartland to the established, cosmopolitan Greco-Roman Byzantine city symbolized the new imperial age. From this new center, the Umayyads completed the conquest of the entire Persian and half the Roman (Byzantine) empire. When Muawiyah seized power, Islam had already spread to Egypt, Libya, the Fertile Crescent, Syria, Iraq, and Persia across Armenia to the borders of Afghanistan. Under the Umayyads, Muslims captured the Maghreb (North Africa), Spain, and Portugal, marched across Europe until they were halted in the heart of France by Charles Martel at the Battle of Tours in 732, and extended the empire's borders to the Indian subcontinent. The accomplishments of the Umayyads were indeed remarkable. Damascus became an even greater imperial capital than it had been under Byzantine rule. Umayyad rulers developed a strong centralized dynastic kingdom, an Arab empire. The more advanced government, institutions, and bureaucracy of Byzantium were adopted and adapted to Arab Muslim needs. Native civil servants and ministers were retained to guide and train their Muslim masters. In time, through a process of conversion and assimilation, language and culture, state and society were Arabized and Islamized. Arabic became the language of government as well as the lingua franca of what today constitutes North Africa and much of the Middle East. Islamic belief and values constituted the official norm and reference point for personal and public life.

Umayyad rulers relied on Islam for legitimacy and as a rationale for their conquests. Caliphs were the protectors and defenders of the faith charged with extending the rule of Islam. The basis of Umayyad unity and stability was the establishment of an Arab monarchy and reliance on Arab, in particular Syrian, warriors. Contrary to previous practice, hereditary succession, not selection or election, restricted the caliphate to the Umayyad house. This innovation, or departure from early Islamic practice, became the pretext for later Muslim historians, writing with

Abbasid patronage, to denounce Umayyad rule as kingship and thus un-Islamic. In fact, a form of hereditary succession and dynastic rule became standard practice for the remainder of the caliphal period. Centralization and militarization of the state resulted in an increasingly autocratic and absolutist government supported and protected by its military.

Umayyad society was based on the creation and perpetuation of an Arab military aristocracy that constituted a hereditary social caste. Syrian troops were the heart of the caliphs' powerful military. As the source of caliphal power and security, they were amply rewarded from the booty and tribute that poured into Damascus as a result of the conquests. Arab Muslims enjoyed special tax privileges, exempted from the more substantial taxes levied on non-Arab Muslims and non-Muslims. This preferential treatment became a source of contention, especially among non-Arab Muslims, who regarded their lesser status as a violation of Islamic egalitarianism. Their alienation contributed to the eventual downfall of the Umayyad dynasty.

DIVISIONS WITHIN THE ISLAMIC COMMUNITY

As had been done from the time of the Prophet, critics and opponents used an "Islamic yardstick" to judge or condemn the Umayyads and legitimate their own actions and aspirations. Political, social, economic, and religious grievances were viewed through the prism of an Islamic ideal relevant to all areas of life. Thus, Umayyad practice incurred an opposition that ranged from Kharijites, Alids (Shii), and disgruntled non-Arab Muslims to the early legal scholars and mystics of Islam.

The Kharijites. The Kharijites originated in the time of the caliphs Uthman and Ali. They represent the earliest example of radical dissent in Islam and were the first, in a series of movements, to offer a different concept of the nature of the community and its leadership. Combining a rigorous puritanism and religious fundamentalism with an "exclusivist egalitarianism," the Kharijites emerged as revolutionaries who, despite their seeming lack of success in their own times, continue to inspire contemporary radical groups like Egypt's Takfir wal Hijra and Jamaat al-Jihad.

As previously noted, the occasion for the Kharijite secession from the main body of the community was Ali's submission to arbitration in his struggle with Muawiyah. For the Kharijites the situation was simple. Muawiyah had challenged the legitimate authority of the caliph; this grave sin rendered him an apostate or infidel, and thus Ali, and all true Muslims, had an obligation to wage jihad until Muawiyah desisted or

was subdued. When the arbitration was announced, the Kharijites shouted, "Only God can decide." It was not the job of human beings to counter God's command and sit as judge. As a result, the Kharijites believed that Ali too was now guilty of a grave sin and no longer the legitimate head of the community. This early incident illustrates the basic Khariji beliefs. The Kharijites were extremist. They were very pious believers who interpreted the Quran and Sunna (example) of the Prophet literally and absolutely. Therefore, they believed that the Quranic mandate to "command the good and prohibit evil" must be applied rigorously and without compromise. Acts were either good or bad, permitted or forbidden. Similarly, their world was divided neatly into the realms of belief and un-belief, Muslim (followers of God) and non-Muslim (enemies of God), peace and warfare. Faith must be informed by action; public behavior must rigorously conform to Islamic principles if one was to be a Muslim. Therefore, any action contrary to the letter of the law constituted a grave sin that rendered a person a non-Muslim, subject to excommunication (exclusion), warfare, and death unless the person repented. Sinners were not simply backsliders but apostates who were guilty of treason against the community-state. All true believers were obliged to fight and subdue these nominal or self-styled Muslims.

Within their exclusivist view of the world and the nature of the Muslim community, the Kharijites incorporated an egalitarian spirit that maintained that any good Muslim, even a slave, could be the leader, or imam, of the community, provided he had community support. Their puritan absolutism demanded that a leader guilty of sin be deposed.

When the Kharijites broke with Ali, they went about establishing their vision of the true charismatic community based strictly and literally on the Quran and Sunna. Modeling themselves on the example of the Prophet, they first withdrew (*hijra*) to live together in a bonded community. From their encampments, they waged battle (*jihad*) against their enemies, seeing themselves as the instruments of God's justice. They were the people of God (paradise) fighting against the people of evil (hell). Since they were God's army struggling in a heavenly crusade against the forces of evil, violence, guerrilla warfare, and revolution were not only legitimate but obligatory in their battle against the sinful usurpers of God's rule. Defeated by Ali at Nahrawan in 658, they continued to lead uprisings and join in revolts against Muawiyah's Umayyad descendants and engaged in guerrilla warfare against subsequent Abbasid caliphs. A moderate branch of the Kharijites, known as the Ibadiyya, followers of Abd Allah ibn Ibad, founded Ibadi imamates in North (Tripolitania and Tahert) and East (Zanzibar) Africa, Yemen, and

Oman. Their descendants still exist in small numbers in North Africa and in Oman, where the Ibadi faith is the official state religion.

Shii Islam. The first civil war between Ali and Muawiyah, which had resulted in the secession of the Kharijites and the alienation of Ali's supporters, came back to haunt the Umayyads. During the reign of Muawiyah's son, Yazid, a second round of civil wars broke out. One of these, the revolt of Ali's son Husayn, would lead to the division of the Islamic community into its two major branches, Sunni and Shii, and shape the worldview of Shii Islam.

When Yazid came to power in 680, Husayn, the son of Ali, was persuaded by a group of Alids in Kufa (Iraq) to lead a rebellion. However, when popular support failed to materialize, Husayn and his small band of followers were slaughtered by an Umayyad army at Karbala. The memory of this tragedy, the "martyrdom" of Alid forces, provided the paradigm of suffering and protest that has guided and inspired Shii Islam. For these partisans (*shia*) of Ali, the original injustice that had denied Ali his succession to Muhammad had been repeated, thwarting the rightful rule of the Prophet's family. Thus, the Shii developed their own distinctive vision of leadership and of history, centered on the martyred family of the Prophet and based on a belief that leadership of the Muslim community belonged to the descendants of Ali and Husayn.

The fundamental difference between Sunni and Shii Muslims is the Shii doctrine of the imamate as distinct from the Sunni caliphate. As we have seen, the caliph was the selected or elected successor of the Prophet. He succeeded to political and military leadership but not to Muhammad's religious authority. By contrast, for the Shii, leadership of the Muslim community is vested in the Imam (leader), who, though not a prophet, is the divinely inspired, sinless, infallible, religiopolitical leader of the community. He must be a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad and Ali, the first Imam. He is both political leader and religious guide, the final authoritative interpreter of God's will as formulated in Islamic law. Whereas after the death of Muhammad, Sunni Islam came to place final religious authority for interpreting Islam in the consensus (*ijma*) or collective judgment of the community (the consensus of the *ulama*, the traditional religious scholars), the Shii believe in continued divine guidance through their divinely inspired guide, the Imam.

Sunni and Shii Muslims also developed differing doctrines concerning the meaning of history. For Sunni historians, early Islamic success and power were signs of God's guidance and rewards to a faithful com-

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munity as well as validation of Muslim belief and claims. For the Shii, history was the theater for the struggle of an oppressed and disinherited minority community to restore God's rule on earth over the entire community under the Imam. A righteous remnant was to persist in God's way against the forces of evil (Satan), as had Ali against Muawiyah and Husayn against the army of Yazid, to reestablish the righteous rule of the Imam. The lives of the suffering Imams, like that of Husayn, were seen as embodying the oppression and injustice experienced by a persecuted minority community. Realization of a just social order under the Imam was to remain a frustrated hope and expectation for centuries as the Islamic community remained under Sunni caliphal governments.

Rule of the Imam over the entire Muslim community was frustrated not only by "usurper" Sunni caliphs, but also by disagreements within the Shii community over succession. This led to three major divisions: Zaydi, Ismaili, and Ithna Ashari or Imami. The Zaydis claimed that Zayd ibn Ali, a grandson of Husayn, was the fifth Imam. The majority of the Shii recognized Muhammad al-Baqir and his son Jafar al-Sadiq as rightful heirs to the imamate. Unlike other Shii, who restricted the imamate to the descendants of Ali by his wife Fatima, the Prophet's daughter, Zaydis believed that any descendant of Ali could become Imam. They were political activists who, like the Kharijites, believed that the duty to enjoin the good and prohibit evil was incumbent on all Muslims at all times. They, too, rebelled against both Umayyad and Abbasid rule. The Zaydis were the first Shii to gain independence when Hasan ibn Zayd founded a Zaydi dynasty in Tabaristan, on the Caspian, in 864. Another Zaydi state was established in Yemen in 893, where it continued to exist until 1963.

In the eighth century, the majority of the Shii community split again into its two major branches in a dispute over whom the sixth Imam, Jafar al-Sadiq (d. 765), actually designated as his heir. While most accepted his younger son, Musa al-Kazim, some followed Ismail, the elder son. This resulted in the two major Shii communities, the Ithna Asharis, or Twelvers, and the Ismailis (sometimes called the Seveners). The numerical designation of each group stems from a crisis caused by the death or disappearance of their Imam and thus the disruption of hereditary succession. For the Twelvers, or Ithna Asharis, the end of imamate succession occurred in 874 with the disappearance of the twelfth Imam, the child Muhammad al-Muntazar (Muhammad, the awaited one). Shii theology resolved this dilemma with its doctrines of the absence or occultation of the Imam and his return in the future as the Mahdi (the expected one). For Shii, the Imam had not died but had disappeared and gone into hiding or seclusion. He would return as a messianic figure, the

Mahdi, at the end of the world to vindicate his loyal followers, restore the community to its rightful place, and usher in a perfect Islamic society in which truth and justice will prevail. During the absence of the hidden Imam, the community was to await his return and be guided by its religious experts, *mujtahids*, those *ulama* (religious scholars) who interpret God's will, Islamic law, for the community. The Ismaili split into a number of subdivisions. For a major group of Ismailis, the line of Imams ended in 760 when Ismail, the designated seventh Imam, died before his father. Another group believed that Ismail had not died but was in seclusion and would return as the Mahdi. Others accepted Ismail's son, Muhammad, as Imam.

The Ismailis. The image of the Ismaili today as a prosperous merchant community, led by the Aga Khan, belies their early revolutionary origins.¹⁰ The early Ismaili were a revolutionary missionary movement. They attacked and assassinated Sunni political and religious leaders, seized power, and at their peak, ruled an area that extended from Egypt to the Sind province of India. For the Ismaili, as for Shii in general, the Quran had two meanings, an exoteric, literal meaning and an esoteric, inner teaching. This secret knowledge was given to the Imam and through a process of initiation to his representatives and missionaries. The followers of the Imam, as distinguished from the majority of Muslims, constituted a religious elite who possessed the true guidance necessary for salvation and a mission to spread or propagate, by force if necessary, the message and rule of the Imam. Often functioning as secret organizations to avoid the Abbasid police, Ismaili also used *taqiyya* (to shield or guard), a common Shii practice that permits concealment of one's belief for self-protection or survival as a persecuted minority. The Ismaili consisted of a variety of such missionary communities or movements. During the early tenth century, one branch, the Qarmatians, attacked Syria, Palestine, and southern Mesopotamia, and set up their own state in Bahrain. Other groups spread to North Africa and India. It was in North Africa and Egypt that the Ismaili Fatimid dynasty (named for Fatima, the Prophet's daughter, from whom the ruler claimed descent) was created. After an abortive attempt to conquer Syria, Ubayd Allah had fled to Qairawan (Tunisia), where he successfully seized power in 909, declaring himself the Mahdi and establishing a line of Fatimid Imams. In 969, Egypt was conquered and a new capital, Cairo (al-Qahiro, the victorious), was built outside the older city of Fustat to celebrate the conquest of Egypt. The Fatimids established an absolute hereditary monarchy. The infallible Imam ruled over a strong, centralized monarchy that relied on its military and religious missionaries.

From the tenth to the twelfth centuries, the Fatimids successfully competed with a weakened, fragmented Abbasid empire, spreading their influence and rule across North Africa, Egypt, Sicily, Syria, Persia, and Western Arabia to the Sind province of India. Although the state was Fatimid, the majority of the population remained Sunni. During this period, the Fatimid caliphate flourished culturally and commercially as well as militarily. Among its most enduring monuments was its religious center, the al-Azhar mosque in Cairo, which served as a training center for its missionary propagandists. Reputed to be one of the world's oldest universities, al-Azhar has remained an internationally recognized center of (Sunni) Islamic learning, training students from all over the Islamic world and issuing authoritative religious judgments on major issues and questions.

Although the Fatimids even managed to briefly capture Baghdad, their attempt to rule all of the *dar al-Islam* (abode of Islam) came to an abrupt end in 1171 when Salah al-Din (Saladin) conquered Egypt and restored the Sunni rule of the (Seljuq) Abbasid caliphate. However, the Ismaili persist through several offshoots. The Nizari Ismaili began as a Persian-based sect under Hasan al-Sabah that broke away from the Fatimids in 1094. Called the assassins and guided by a series of Grand Masters who ruled from a stronghold on Mt. Alamut in northern Persia (thus each becoming known as the Old Man of the Mountain), they were particularly effective in murdering Abbasid princes, generals, and leading *ulama* in the name of their hidden Imam.¹¹ They struck such terror in the hearts of their Muslim and Crusader enemies that their exploits in Persia and Syria earned them a name and memory in history long after they were overrun and driven underground by the Mongols in 1258. A descendant of Hasan al-Sabah, Hasan Ali Shah, received the honorary title Aga Khan through marriage to the daughter of the shah. He fled to India in 1840 after a failed revolt in Persia. Centered in Bombay, these Nizari (Khoja) Ismailis were led by a series of Imams, known as the Aga Khan, whose personal fortunes have been matched by the wealth of remarkably successful and thriving Ismaili communities in East Africa, South Asia, Britain, and Canada. Currently, the Aga Khan oversees the spiritual and cultural life of the community. As its living Imam, he has been able to reinterpret Islam to respond to modern life. At the same time, he oversees extensive commercial and industrial Ismaili investments and supervises the many educational, medical, and social welfare projects of its philanthropic foundation.

The Druze. Among the sectarian offshoots of Ismailism were the Druze of Lebanon. The Druze date back to two Fatimid missionaries named

Darazi (d. 1019) and Hamza ibn Ali, who had been encouraged by the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim (reigned 996–1021) to spread the Ismaili faith in southern Lebanon. Al-Hakim was an eccentric ruler who took the title Imam and progressively came to believe that he was not only the divinely appointed religiopolitical leader but also the cosmic intellect, linking God with creation. Darazi and Hamza became leaders of a movement centered on recognition of al-Hakim as a divine incarnation, the highest or first cosmic intellect. This supernatural status became the excuse for his erratic, authoritarian behavior, which at times included the persecution of Ismaili, Sunni, and Christian leaders alike. When al-Hakim disappeared or was killed, they maintained that he had gone into seclusion to test the faith of his followers and would return to restore justice in the world. After Darazi's death, Hamza, now claiming to be the leader (imam) in Hakim's absence, organized and developed Hakim's cult into what became a separate religion. Hamza then disappeared, and was expected to return as the Mahdi at a later date with al-Hakim. In the interim, Baha al-Din al-Muktana served as the earthly link between Hamza and the community.

The Druze call themselves the unitarians, followers of al-Hakim who embodied and revealed the one true God. Forming a distinct religion, the Druze possess their own Scripture, the *Risail al-Hikma* (the Book of Wisdom), and law. The Book of Wisdom is a collection of letters from al-Muktana, al-Hamza, and al-Hakim. The Sharia, mosque, and *ulama* were replaced by Druze law, places of prayer, and religious leadership. The community is hierarchically organized. The two major divisions are the majority of ordinary members, the so-called ignorant, and the wise, those men and women who are initiated and as such can read the Scriptures and are expected to lead an exemplary life of regular prayer and abstention from wine, tobacco, and other stimulants. They can be recognized by the quality of their lives and their special dress or white turbans. Among the wise are a group of religious leaders called shaykhs, noted for their learning and piety, who preside over meetings, weddings, and funerals. The head of the community is the *rais* (chief), who is selected from one of the leading families.

Historically, the Druze have been a secretive and closed community. They have steadfastly kept their texts, beliefs, and practices secret, carefully guarding them from outsiders. Regarded by both Sunni and Shii as heretics and living in a Sunni-dominated world, they too have followed the Shii doctrine of *taqiyya*, with its double meaning of caution and dissimulation for survival in a hostile world. Thus, although they do not observe the fast of Ramadan or pilgrimage to Mecca, when necessary they have outwardly followed the prevailing Sunni faith and a modified

form of Hanafi (Islamic) law. Druze beliefs and practices emphasize solidarity; they neither accept converts nor marry outside the faith. They practice monogamy and endogamy and discourage divorce. The seven pillars or basic religious obligations reinforce a strong sense of community. They include speaking the truth to other members (though not necessarily to nonbelievers), mutual defense, and living separately from unbelievers. Unlike other monotheistic faiths, the Druze believe in the transmigration of souls until perfected souls cease to be reborn and ascend to the stars. At the end of time, when Hakim and Hamza return to establish a reign of justice, the faithful will be rewarded by being placed close to God. The Druze have survived in Syria, Israel, and especially Lebanon, where they number several hundred thousand.

LAW AND MYSTICISM

Dissatisfaction with Umayyad rule also resulted in the development of nonrevolutionary reform movements within society. The rapid geographic expansion and conquests brought the rise of new centers of power and wealth, an influx of "foreign" ways, and greater social stratification. The very success of the Umayyad empire contained the seeds of its downfall. With wealth and power came corruption and abuse of power, symbolized by the new lifestyle of its flourishing, cosmopolitan capital and the growth of new cities. This was accompanied by the infiltration of new ideas and practices. The strengths that came with acculturation were offset, in the eyes of some, by innovations that were seen as undermining the older Arab way of life. In addition to the disaffected Kharijites and Alids, a host of other critics sprang up who contrasted an idealized Medinan Islamic community with the realities of Umayyad life. This gave rise, in particular, to the growth of two Islamic movements or institutions, the *ulama* (religious scholars) and the Sufis (mystics).

For a growing number of pious Muslims, who would become a religious and social class in the Muslim community known as the *ulama* (plural of *alim*, "learned" or scholar), Umayyad practice seemed more indebted to foreign innovations than to the practice of the Prophet and the early community. Arab power and wealth, not Islamic commitment and ideals, inspired and unified the empire. The behavior of many caliphs, the intrigues of court life, and the privileged status of new elites were regarded as having little to do with Islam. What the Umayyads had done was pragmatically necessary, because the Arabs had not had the institutions and trained personnel required for empire building, but their critics believed that the Umayyad system of incorporating the

indigenous bureaucracy of the conquered lands inevitably produced an un-Islamic society based more on the command of the caliph than the command of God. The problem was epitomized by the application of Islamic law. God's law, they argued, should provide the blueprint for Muslim society. Yet, conquest and empire had introduced a diversity of cultures, lifestyles, and customs. The differing customary laws of Medina, Damascus, Kufa, and Basra, coupled with the caliph's decision and his judges' ability to settle disputes on the basis of their own discretion, resulted in a confused and often contradictory body of laws. Many asked, "Can God's will be discerned through so subjective a process; can His law for Muslims in Medina be so different from that in Kufa?" They responded that if all Muslims were bound to submit to and carry out God's law, then Islamic law ought to be defined clearly and with more uniformity. Maintaining that Islam offered a self-sufficient, comprehensive way of life based on the Quran and *sunna*, or custom, they argued that Islam must permeate every area of life. Umayyad practice and law should be brought into line with Islamic principles, and the institutions of the state should have as their source Islam and not the precedents of Byzantium.

The outcome of this movement was a burst of activity that would result in the development of Islamic religious sciences. Pious Muslims from all walks of life devoted themselves to the study of the Quran, Arabic language and linguistics, and the collection and examination of Prophetic traditions. In particular, in order to safeguard their beliefs and limit the power of the caliph, many devoted themselves to the formulation and explication of Islamic law. By the late Umayyad period, centers of law could be found in many cities of the empire.

Reaction to the excesses of empire contributed to the development of mysticism as well as law. Luxury, the pursuit of conquest and wealth, the transformation of the caliphate into a dynastic monarchy with the trappings of imperial court life, and the doubtful moral character of some of the Umayyad caliphs struck some pious Muslims as standing in sharp contrast to the early example of Muhammad and the Rightly Guided Caliphs and the relative simplicity of life in Medina. They believed that Umayyad goals of power and wealth conflicted with and distracted from the true center and goal of Muslim life, Allah. Therefore, the early mystics preached a message stressing renunciation and detachment from worldly concerns and attachments for the pursuit of the "real" God. As we shall see, mysticism or Sufism became a major popular force within Islam that swept across the Muslim world, spreading its spirit of love and devotion.

GROWTH OF "ISLAMIC" REVOLT

Despite the accomplishments of Umayyad rule, by the eighth century (720) anti-Umayyad sentiment had spread and intensified. It encompassed a variety of disaffected factions: non-Arab Muslims who denounced their second-class status vis-à-vis Arab Muslims as contrary to Islamic egalitarianism; Kharijites and Shii who continued to regard the Umayyads as usurpers; Arab Muslims in Mecca, Medina, and Iraq who resented the privileged status of Syrian families; and, finally, pious Muslims, Arab and non-Arab alike, who viewed the new cosmopolitan lifestyle of luxury and social privilege as foreign and an unwarranted innovation or departure from their established, Islamic way of life.

Opposition forces shared a discontent with Umayyad rule as well as a tendency to legitimate their own claims and agenda Islamically; they condemned Umayyad practice and policies as un-Islamic innovations and called for a return to the Quran and the practices of the Prophet and the early Medinan community:

The ideology of a restoration of primitive Islam, with variants reflecting different trends, had conquered the masses, and, with the support of the majority of the learned men, became part of the programme of all, or nearly all, the leaders of parties. It triumphed when the Abbasids adopted it as their slogan.¹²

By 747, an opposition movement, with substantial Shii support, rallied behind Abu Muslim, a freed Abbasid slave. In 750, the Umayyads fell, and Abu al-Abbas, a descendant of the Prophet's uncle al-Abbas, was proclaimed caliph. Islam's capital was moved from Damascus to the newly created Baghdad, known in Arabic as the City of Peace. Under Abbasid rule, the Islamic community would become an empire remembered not only for its wealth and political power, but also for its extraordinary cultural activity and accomplishments.

The Abbasid Caliphate: The Flowering of Islamic Civilization

Abbasid rule of the Islamic community ushered in an era of strong centralized government, great economic prosperity, and a remarkable civilization. Abbasid caliphs could be as autocratic and ruthless as many of their Umayyad predecessors. Indeed, Abu al-Abbas did not hesitate to take the title "the blood shedder" (*al-saffah*); he came to be remembered as Abu Abbas al-Saffah. The Abbasid caliphs consolidated their power by crushing their Shii supporters as well as their opponents. This be-

trayal further alienated the Shii from the Sunni majority. The name Sunni comes from their self-designation as *ahl al-sunna wal jamaa*, those who follow the Prophet's example and thus belong to his society or community.

The Abbasids came to power under the banner of Islam. Their seizure of power and continued dynastic reign were Islamically legitimated. However, the Abbasids took great care publicly to align their government with Islam. They became the great patrons of an emerging religious class, the *ulama* (religious scholars). They supported the development of Islamic scholarship and disciplines, built mosques, and established schools.

The Abbasids refined Umayyad practice, borrowing heavily from Persian culture, with its divinely ordained system of government. The caliph's claim to rule by divine mandate was symbolized by the transformation of his title from Successor or Deputy of the Prophet to Deputy of God and by the appropriation of the Persian-inspired title, Shadow of God on Earth. The ruler's exalted status was further reinforced by his magnificent palace, his retinue of attendants, and the introduction of a court etiquette appropriate for an emperor. Thus, subjects were required to bow before the caliph, kissing the ground, a symbol of the caliph's absolute power. Persian influence was especially evident in the government and military. Preempting critics of the previous regime, the Arab Syrian-dominated military aristocracy was replaced by a salaried army and bureaucracy in which non-Arab Muslims, especially Persians, played a major role. The Abbasids explained this change in terms of Islamic egalitarianism. More often than not, however, it was royal favor and fear, symbolized by the royal executioner who stood by the side of the caliph, that brought him prestige and motivated obedience.

The early centuries of Abbasid rule were marked by an unparalleled splendor and economic prosperity whose magnificence came to be immortalized in the *Arabian Nights* (*The Thousand and One Nights*), with its legendary exploits of the exemplary caliph, Harun al-Rashid (reigned 786–809). In a departure from the past, Abbasid success was based not on conquest, but on trade, commerce, industry, and agriculture. The enormous wealth and resources of the caliphs enabled them to become great patrons of art and culture, and thus create the more significant and lasting legacy of the Abbasid period, Islamic civilization. The development of Islamic law, the Sharia, constitutes their greatest contribution to Islam. Since part of the indictment of the Umayyads had been their failure to implement an effective Islamic legal system, the Abbasids gave substantial support to legal development. The early law schools,

which had begun only during the late Umayyad period (ca. 720), flourished under caliphal patronage of the *ulama*. Although Islam has no clergy or priesthood, by the eighth century the *ulama* had become a professional elite of religious leaders, a distinct social class within Muslim society. Their prestige and authority rested on a reputation for learning in Islamic studies: the Quran, traditions of the Prophet, law. Because of their expertise, they became the jurists, theologians, and educators in Muslim society, the interpreters and guardians of Islamic law and tradition. The judge (*qadi*) administered the law as it was developed by the early jurists, firmly establishing the Islamic court system.

In addition to law, the Abbasids were also committed patrons of culture and the arts. The process of Arabization, begun during the late Umayyad period, was completed by the end of the ninth century. Arabic language and tradition penetrated and modified the cultures of conquered territories. Arabic displaced local languages—Syriac, Aramaic, Coptic, and Greek—becoming the language of common discourse, government, and culture throughout much of the empire. Arabic was no longer solely the language of Muslims from Arabia but the language of literature and public discourse for the multiethnic group of new Arabic-speaking peoples, especially the large number of non-Arab converts, many of whom were Persian. Translation centers were created. From the seventh to the ninth centuries, manuscripts were obtained from the far reaches of the empire and beyond and translated from their original languages (Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, Syriac, Coptic, and Persian) into Arabic. Thus, the best works of literature, philosophy, and the sciences from other cultures were made accessible: Aristotle, Plato, Galen, Hippocrates, Euclid, and Ptolemy. The genesis of Islamic civilization was indeed a collaborative effort, incorporating the learning and wisdom of many cultures and languages. As in government administration, Christians and Jews, who had been the intellectual and bureaucratic backbone of the Persian and Byzantine empires, participated in the process as well as Muslims. This "ecumenical" effort was evident at the Caliph al-Mamun's (reigned 813–833) House of Wisdom and at the translation center headed by the renowned scholar Hunayn ibn Ishaq, a Nestorian Christian. This period of translation and assimilation was followed by one of Muslim intellectual and artistic creativity. Muslims ceased to be merely disciples and became masters, in the process producing Islamic civilization, dominated by the Arabic language and Islam's view of life: "It was these two things, their language and their faith, which were the great contribution of the Arab invaders to the new and original civilization which developed under their aegis."¹³ Major contributions

were made in many fields: literature and philosophy, algebra and geometry, science and medicine, art and architecture. Towering intellectual giants dominated this period: al-Razi (865–925), al-Farabi (d. 950), ibn Sina (known as Avicenna, 980–1037), ibn Rushd (known as Averroes, d. 1198), al-Biruni (973–1048), and al-Ghazali (d. 1111). Islam had challenged the world politically; it now did so culturally. Great urban cultural centers in Cordova, Baghdad, Cairo, Nishapur, and Palermo emerged and eclipsed Christian Europe, mired in the Dark Ages. The activities of these centers are reflected in the development of philosophy and science.

Islamic philosophy was the product of a successful transplant from Greek to Islamic soil, where it flourished from the ninth to the twelfth centuries. Muslim philosophers appropriated Hellenistic thought (Aristotle, Plato, Plotinus), wrote commentaries on and extended the teachings and insights of Greek philosophy within an Islamic context and worldview. The result was Islamic philosophy, indebted to Hellenism but with its own Islamic character. Its contribution was of equal importance to the West. Islamic philosophy became the primary vehicle for the transmission of Greek philosophy to medieval Europe. The West reappropriated its lost heritage as European scholars traveled to major centers of Islamic learning, retranslating the Greek philosophers and learning from the writings of their great Muslim disciples: men like al-Farabi, who had come to be known as "the second teacher or master" (the first being Aristotle), and ibn Sina (Avicenna), remembered as "the great commentator" on Aristotle. Thus we find many of the great medieval Christian philosophers and theologians (Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Abelard, Roger Bacon, Duns Scotus) acknowledging their intellectual debt to their Muslim predecessors.

The enormous accomplishments of Islamic philosophy and science were the product of men of genius, multitalented intellectuals (who often mastered the major disciplines of medicine, mathematics, astronomy, and philosophy). They were the "renaissance" men of classical Islam. Avicenna's reflections on his own training typifies the backgrounds of many of the great intellectuals of this period:

I busied myself with the study of the *Fusus al-Hikam* [a treatise by al-Farabi] and other commentaries on physics and mathematics, and the doors of knowledge opened before me. Then I took up medicine . . . Medicine is not one of the difficult sciences, and in a very short time I undoubtedly excelled in it, so that physicians of merit studied under me. I also attended the sick, and the doors of medical treatments based on experience opened before me to an extent that can not be described. At the same time I carried on debates and controversies in jurisprudence. At this point I was sixteen years old.

Then, for a year and a half, I devoted myself to study. I resumed the study of logic and all parts of philosophy. During this time I never slept the whole night through and did nothing but study all day long. Whenever I was puzzled by a problem . . . I would go to the mosque, pray, and beg the Creator of All to reveal to me that which was hidden from me and to make easy for me that which was difficult. Then at night I would return home, put a lamp in front of me, and set to work reading and writing. . . . I went on like this until I was firmly grounded in all sciences and mastered them as far as was humanly possible. . . . Thus I mastered logic, physics, and mathematics.

The Sultan of Bukhara . . . was stricken by an illness which baffled the physicians. . . . I appeared before him and joined them in treating him and distinguished myself in his service.

One day I asked his permission to go into their library, look at their books, and read the medical ones. . . . I went into a palace of many rooms, each with trunks full of books, back-to-back. In one room there were books on Arabic and poetry, in another books on jurisprudence, and similarly in each room books on a single subject. I . . . asked for those I needed . . . read these books, made use of them, and thus knew the rank of every author in his own subject. . . . When I reached the age of eighteen, I had completed the study of all these sciences. At that point my memory was better, whereas today my learning is riper.¹⁴

Islamic science was an integrated and synthetic area of knowledge. It was integrated in that Muslim scientists, who were often philosophers or mystics as well, viewed the physical universe from within their Islamic worldview and context as a manifestation of the presence of God, the Creator and source of unity and harmony in nature.¹⁵ Islamic science was also a grand synthesis informed by indigenous and foreign sources (Arab, Persian, Hellenistic, Indian) and transformed by scholars and scientists in urban centers throughout the world of Islam. Thus, it constituted a major component of Islamic civilization, and in the eyes of many Muslims, a worthy complement to Islam's international political order. As one Muslim intellectual observed:

Islamic science came into being from a wedding between the spirit that issued from the Quranic revelation and the existing sciences of various civilizations which Islam inherited and which it transmuted through its spiritual power into a new substance, at once different from and continuous with what had existed before it. The international and cosmopolitan nature of Islamic civilization, derived from the universal character of the Islamic revelation and reflected in the geographical spread of the Islamic world, enabled it to create the first science of a truly international nature in human history.¹⁶

The legacy of Islamic civilization was that of a brilliant, rich culture. Its contributions proved to be as significant for the West, which in

subsequent centuries appropriated and incorporated its knowledge and wisdom.

Thus during the Abbasid period, the comprehensiveness of Islam was clearly manifested and delineated:

Islam—the offspring of Arabia and the Arabian Prophet—was not only a system of belief and cult. It was also a system of state, society, law, thought and art—a civilization with religion as its unifying, eventually dominating factor.¹⁷

For Muslim and non-Muslim alike, the political and cultural life of a vast empire, consisting of many tribal, ethnic, and religious groups, was brought within the framework of the Arabic language and Islamic faith.¹⁸ Islamic civilization was the result of a dynamic, creative process as Muslims borrowed freely from other cultures. It proceeded from a sense of mission, power, and superiority. Muslims were the dominant force—masters not victims, colonizers not the colonized. The new ideas and practices were Arabized and Islamized. It was a process of change characterized by continuity with the faith and practice of Muhammad. Unlike the modern period, Muslims controlled the process of assimilation and acculturation. Their autonomy and identity were not seriously threatened by the specter of political and cultural domination. As with the early conquests and expansion of Islam, Muslims then (and now) regarded this brilliant period as a sign of God's favor and a validation of Islam's message and the Muslim community's universal mission.

The extraordinary spread and development of Islam was not without its religious conflicts. The same concern that had motivated the attempt by the *ulama* to preserve Islam in the face of caliphal whim and uncritical adoption of foreign, un-Islamic practices, led to conflicts between the *ulama* and those whom they sometimes regarded as their competitors, the Sufis and the philosophers. The *ulama* delineation of law as the embodiment of the straight path of Islam set the criteria for belief and behavior in intellectual, social, and moral life and the pattern for orthodoxy (correct belief) or, perhaps more accurately, orthopraxy (correct practice). This vision of Muslim life as the observance of God's law did not always coincide comfortably with the Sufi emphasis on the interior path of contemplation and personal religious experience or the tendency of philosophy to give primacy to reason over the unquestioned acceptance of revelation. The tension between religious scholars on the one hand and philosophers and Sufis on the other was reflected in the life and work of a towering giant in the history of Islam, indeed in the history of religions, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali.

Ironically, the golden age of Islamic civilization paralleled the progressive political fragmentation of the universal caliphate. The relative peace, prosperity, and unity of the Islamic community, epitomized during the rule of Harun al-Rashid, was challenged internally by competing groups and externally by the Fatimids and the Crusades.

Governing a vast empire extending from the Atlantic to central Asia proved impossible. Abbasid political unity deteriorated rapidly from 861 to 945 as religious (Khariji and Shii) and regional differences, and particularly competing political aspirations, precipitated a series of revolts and secessionist movements. In Morocco, Tunisia, Iran, Syria, and Iraq itself, local governors, who were often army commanders, asserted their independence as heads of semiautonomous states. These regional rulers (amirs, or commanders), while continuing to give formal, nominal allegiance to the caliph, exercised actual rule over their territories, establishing their own hereditary dynasties. By 945, the disintegration of the universal caliphate was evident when the Buyids (Buwayhids), a Shii dynasty from Western Persia, invaded Baghdad and seized power, and their leader assumed the title commander-in-chief or commander of the commanders. Although Shii, they did not change the Sunni orientation of the empire and left the caliph on his throne as a titular leader of a fictionally unified empire. The Abbasids continued to reign but not rule. With an Abbasid on the throne as a symbol of legitimate government and Muslim unity, real power passed to a series of Persian (Buyid) and Turkic (Seljuq) military dynasties or sultanates. The sultan ("power," ruler), as chief of the commanders, governed a politically fragmented empire as the caliph helplessly stood by.

Sunni Islam was also threatened by two other developments during the Abbasid caliphate—the rise of the Fatimid dynasty and the Crusades. The Ismaili rebellion in Tunisia and subsequent establishment of a Shii imamate in Egypt constituted a serious religiopolitical challenge. The Fatimids claimed to be Imams and were not content to simply govern Egypt, but, as we have seen, followed other Ismaili groups in sending their missionaries to spread their Shii doctrine. This Shii challenge elicited a religious as well as a military response as Sunni *ulama* moved to protect their version of orthodoxy in the face of Shii innovations. They were supported in their endeavors by the royal court, which wished to counter Shii anticaliphal sentiments. This contributed to a growing tendency among the Sunni *ulama* to preserve the unity of Islam through greater self-definition and standardization. In the face of the internal breakup of the central empire, this meant achieving a consen-

sus on the corpus of Islamic law in order to protect and maintain the sociopolitical order.

Islam and the West: The Crusades and Muslim Response to Militant Christianity

Despite their common monotheistic roots, the history of Christianity and Islam has more often than not been marked by confrontation rather than peaceful coexistence and dialogue. For the Christian West, Islam is the religion of the sword; for Muslims, the Christian West is epitomized by the armies of the Crusades. From the earliest decades of Islamic history, Christianity and Islam have been locked in a political and theological struggle, because Islam, unlike other world religions, has threatened the political and religious ascendancy of Christianity. Muslim armies overran the Eastern Roman empire, Spain, and the Mediterranean from Sicily to Anatolia. At the same time, Islam challenged Christian religious claims and authority. Coming after Christianity, Islam claimed to supersede Christian revelation. While acknowledging God's revelation and revering God's messengers, from Adam through Jesus, as prophets, Islam rejected the doctrine of Christ's divinity, the finality of Christian revelation, and the authority of the church. Instead, it called on all, Jews and Christians as well, to accept finality of revelation and prophecy in Islam, to join the Islamic community, and to live under Islamic rule. Islam's universal mission had resulted in the spread of Muslim rule over Christian territories and Christian hearts. While conversions were initially slow, by the eleventh century large numbers of Christians living under Muslim rule were converting to Islam. Even those who had remained Christian were becoming Arabized, adopting Arabic language and manners. The European Christian response was, with few exceptions, hostile, intolerant, and belligerent. Muhammad was vilified as an imposter and identified as the anti-Christ. Islam was dismissed as a religion of the sword led by an infidel driven by a lust for power and women. This attitude was preserved and perpetuated in literature such as the *Divine Comedy*, where Dante consigned Muhammad to the lowest level of hell. Christian fears were fully realized as Islam became a world power and civilization while Christianity stagnated and stagnated in its Dark Ages.

By the eleventh century, Christendom's response to Islam took two forms: the struggle to reconquer (the *Reconquista*) Spain (1000–1492) and Italy and Sicily (1061), and the undertaking of another series of Christian holy wars—the Crusades (1095–1453).

Two myths pervade Western perceptions of the Crusades: first, that the Crusades were simply motivated by a religious desire to liberate Jerusalem, and second, that Christendom ultimately triumphed.

Jerusalem was a sacred city for all three Abrahamic faiths. When the Arab armies took Jerusalem in 638, they occupied a center whose shrines had made it a major pilgrimage site in Christendom. Churches and the Christian population were left unmolested. Jews, long banned from living there by Christian rulers, were permitted to return, live, and worship in the city of Solomon and David. Muslims proceeded to build a shrine, the Dome of the Rock, and a mosque, the al-Aqsa, near the area formerly occupied by Herod's Temple and close by the Wailing Wall, the last remnant of Solomon's temple.

Five centuries of peaceful coexistence elapsed before political events and an imperial-papal power play led to centuries-long series of so-called holy wars that pitted Christendom against Islam and left an enduring legacy of misunderstanding and distrust.

In 1071, the Byzantine army was decisively defeated by a Seljuq (Abbasid) army. The Byzantine emperor, Alexius I, fearing that all Asia Minor would be overrun, called on fellow Christian rulers and the pope to come to the aid of Constantinople by undertaking a "pilgrimage" or crusade to free Jerusalem and its environs from Muslim rule. For Pope Urban II, the "defense" of Jerusalem provided an opportunity to gain recognition for papal authority and its role in legitimating the actions of temporal rulers. A divided Christendom rallied as warriors from France and other parts of Western Europe (called "Franks" by Muslims) united against the "infidel" in a holy war whose ostensible goal was the holy city. This was ironic because, as one scholar has observed, "God may indeed have wished it, but there is certainly no evidence that the Christians of Jerusalem did, or that anything extraordinary was occurring to pilgrims there to prompt such a response at that moment in history."¹⁹ In fact, Christian rulers, knights, and merchants were driven primarily by political and military ambitions and the promise of the economic and commercial (trade and banking) rewards that would accompany the establishment of a Latin kingdom in the Middle East. However, the appeal to religion captured the popular mind and gained its support.

The contrast between the behavior of the Christian and Muslim armies in the First Crusade has been etched deeply in the collective memory of Muslims. In 1099, the Crusaders stormed Jerusalem and established Christian sovereignty over the Holy Land. They left no Muslim survivors; women and children were massacred. The Noble Sanctuary, the Haram al-Sharif, was desecrated as the Dome of the Rock was converted into a church and the al-Aqsa mosque, renamed the Temple

of Solomon, became a residence for the king. Latin principalities were established in Antioch, Edessa, Tripoli, and Tyre. The Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem lasted less than a century. In 1187, Salah al-Din (Saladin), having reestablished Abbasid rule over Fatimid Egypt, led his army in a fierce battle and recaptured Jerusalem. The Muslim army was as magnanimous in victory as it had been tenacious in battle. Civilians were spared; churches and shrines were generally left untouched. The striking differences in military conduct were epitomized by the two dominant figures of the Crusades: Saladin and Richard the Lion-Hearted. The chivalrous Saladin was faithful to his word and compassionate toward noncombatants. Richard accepted the surrender of Acre and then proceeded to massacre all its inhabitants, including women and children, despite promises to the contrary.

By the thirteenth century the Crusades degenerated into intra-Christian wars, papal wars against its Christian enemies who were denounced as heretics and schismatics. The result was a weakening, rather than a strengthening, of Christendom. As Roger Savory has observed:

An ironical but undeniable result of the Crusades was the deterioration of the position of Christian minorities in the Holy Land. Formerly these minorities had been accorded rights and privileges under Muslim rule, but, after the establishment of the Latin Kingdom, they found themselves treated as "loathsome schismatics." In an effort to obtain relief from persecution by their fellow Christians, many abandoned their Nestorian or Monophysite beliefs, and adopted either Roman Catholicism, or—the supreme irony—Islam.²⁰

By the fifteenth century, the Crusades had spent their force. Although they were initially launched to unite Christendom and turn back the Muslim armies, the opposite had occurred. Amid a bitterly divided Christendom, Constantinople fell in 1453 before Turkish Muslim conquerors. This Byzantine capital was renamed Istanbul and became the seat of the Ottoman empire.

The Sultanate Period: Medieval Muslim Empires

By the thirteenth century, the Abbasid empire was a sprawling, fragmented, deteriorating commonwealth of semiautonomous states, sultanates, governed by military commanders. It was an empire in name only. The fictional unity of a united Islamic community symbolized by the caliph in Baghdad, stood in sharp contrast to the underlying reality of its political and religious divisions. Invaded and ruled successively by the Buyids and then the Seljuks, Baghdad was completely overrun in the

thirteenth century by the Mongols. Pouring out of Central Asia, the armies of Genghis Khan had subjugated much of Central Asia, China, Russia, and the Near East. In 1258, the Mongol army under Hulagu Khan, the grandson of Genghis Khan, captured Baghdad, burned and pillaged the city, slaughtered its Muslim inhabitants, and executed the caliph and his family. Only Egypt and Syria escaped the Mongol conquest of the Muslim empire. In Egypt, the Mamluks ("the owned ones"), Turkish slave soldiers who served as a sort of praetorian guard, seized power from their Ayyubid masters. The Mamluk sultanate successfully resisted the Mongols and ruled until 1517.

Although the destruction of Baghdad and the abolition of the Abbasid caliphate brought an end to the caliphal period and seemed to many an irreversible blow to Muslim power, by the fifteenth century Muslim fortunes had been reversed. The central caliphate was replaced by a chain of dynamic Muslim sultanates, each ruled by a sultan, which eventually extended from Africa to Southeast Asia, from Timbuktu to Mindanao, as Islam penetrated Africa, Central and Southeast Asia, and Eastern Europe. Among the principal missionaries of Islam were traders and Sufi brotherhoods.

Muslim power peaked in the sixteenth century. Three major Muslim empires emerged in the midst of the many sultanates: the Ottoman Turkish empire, centered in Istanbul but encompassing major portions of North Africa, the Arab world, and Eastern Europe; the Persian Safavid empire, with its capital in Isfahan, which effectively established Shii Islam as the state's religion; and the Mughal empire, centered in Delhi and embracing most of the Indian subcontinent (modern-day Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh). Baghdad's successors were the imperial capitals of Istanbul, Isfahan, and Delhi. Political ascendancy was accompanied by a cultural florescence. As in Abbasid times, great sultans, such as the Ottoman Sulayman the Magnificent (reigned 1520–1566), Shah Abbas in Persia (reigned 1587–1629), and the Mughal emperor Akbar (reigned 1556–1605) in India, were patrons of learning and the arts.

The Ottoman empire was the heir to the Mongol-Turkish legacy of Ghengis Khan and his successors. The fall of Constantinople (Istanbul) in 1453 to the Ottoman sultan Mehmet II and the conquest of Byzantium realized the cherished dream of Muslim rulers and armies since the seventh century. The acknowledgment of Mehmet as "The Conqueror" throughout the Islamic world and his cosmopolitan capital at Istanbul, which sat astride both Europe and Asia, symbolized the power and mission of an emerging imperial giant.

The Ottomans drew on their Mongol-Turkish and Islamic roots and traditions, combining a warrior heritage with an Islamic tradition that

believed in Islam's universal mission and sacred struggle (jihad), to establish themselves as worldwide propagators and defenders of Islam. They became the great warriors of Islamic expansion through military conquest. The titles taken by Ottoman sultans, such as "Warrior of the Faith" and "Defender of the Sharia," reflected this religiopolitical justification and rationale. Ottoman suzerainty was extended to the Arab Middle East and North Africa, incorporating such major Islamic cities as Mecca, Medina, Cairo, Damascus, and Tunis along with great centers of Islamic learning like Egypt's Al-Azhar and Tunisia's Zaytouna Mosque-University. Greece, Malta, Cyprus, Tripoli, the Balkans, and much of Eastern Europe were also absorbed. A besieged Europe struggled for its existence. After two centuries of confrontation, Ottoman forces were decisively turned back by the navies of Christian Europe at the Battle of Lepanto in 1571. The Ottoman defeat and the truce of 1580 in the Mediterranean "confirmed the frontier between Christian and Muslim civilizations that has lasted to the present day." In 1629 Ottoman expansion in Eastern Europe was checked by the failure of the siege of Vienna.

During the 1600s the Ottoman empire fully evolved. Istanbul, whose population of 500,000 was more than twice the size of any European capital, became once again an international but now Islamized center of power and culture. Scholars, artists, and architects from all over the Islamic world and Europe were commissioned, as Muslim conquerors also proved to be great builders of civilization as well. The skyline of Istanbul was transformed by the distinctive cupolas of palaces and mosques. The royal family lived in splendor in the Topkapi palace, preserved today as a great museum. An imperial monarchy governed subjects of many tribal, ethnic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds from the Mediterranean to Iran.

Both Byzantine and Turkish-Muslim influences informed the development of the political, legal, economic, and social institutions of the state. The ruling class was comprised of the Ottoman family and a special cadre of Balkan slaves who had been Turkified and Islamized through a sophisticated educational system so that they might serve as government administrators and members of the elite military, the Janissaries. Ottoman sultans relied on a strong military of slave-soldiers supported by gunpowder technology; the empire was governed by means of a centralized administration and a well-organized bureaucracy. Alongside the political establishment was a structured religious establishment. The *ulama*, schools, and the courts were brought within the state's bureaucracy. Through royal patronage, the empire developed a hierarchy of Islamic institutions: local Quran schools, mosque-univer-

sities (*madrasas*), and courts. At the apex of the state's religious bureaucracy was the *shaykh al-Islam*, who like the chief *qadi* (judge), was appointed by the sultan. Thus, Ottoman *ulama* families became a religious aristocracy.

A distinctive feature of the Ottoman sultanate was the millet system, a variation on the earlier Islamic institution of the *dhimmi*, or protected non-Muslim peoples, which recognized and regulated the rights and duties of religious communities. (Whatever the Ottoman desire was to forge a broader identity, the basic units of society were the empire's religious communities, which provided the primary source of identity and loyalty.) Leaders of religious communities (Christian patriarchs and chief rabbis) were appointed by the sultan to collect the taxes due the royal household and to rule over their communities. Religious communities enjoyed limited autonomy. They could operate their own churches and synagogues, schools, and domestic religious courts, train and govern their clergy, and oversee their charitable institutions.

As the Ottoman empire prospered in its imperial fortunes, new rival Muslim empires were emerging in the sixteenth century: the Safavid dynasty (1501–1722) in Iran and the Moghul empire (1520–1857) in the Indian subcontinent. The Safavids had begun as a revivalist Sufi brotherhood in the thirteenth century, calling for a restoration of a purified Islam. By the fifteenth century, the brotherhood was transformed into a religiopolitical movement, combining Shii messianism and a call for armed struggle (*jihad*) against other Muslim regimes, which it denounced as un-Islamic. In 1501, Ismail (1487–1524), head of the Safavid family, invaded and occupied Tabriz, proclaiming himself shah of Iran. Within a decade, he had conquered the rest of Iran, rapidly building an empire east of the Ottoman frontier. The creation of the Safavid dynasty made Shii Islam the official religion of an Islamic empire.

Shii Islam was effectively imposed in Iran through a process of persecution and doctrinal interpretation. Shah Ismail imposed Twelver Shii Islam upon Iran's Sunni majority to unify his rule. He sought religious legitimacy and leadership by asserting that he was a descendant of the twelfth (hidden) imam and a *mahdi*, or divinely guided reformer. Thus, the shah was both temporal and spiritual ruler, emperor and messianic messenger. The religious pretensions of Safavid rulers were symbolized by their title, "Shadow of God on Earth." Rival Islamic groups or interpretations of Islam (Sunni and Sufi) as well as non-Muslim communities were suppressed. The Safavids enforced their own brand of Shii religiopolitical ideology and identity in an attempt to legitimate their political authority and to forge a new Safavid Shii Iranian bond of solidarity. A full-blown Shii alternative to Sunni Islam was skillfully developed. Sufi

ideas, philosophical doctrines, and popular religious practices such as saint veneration were selectively appropriated. Emphasis was placed on the veneration of sacred "Shii" persons: Husayn, the imams, and their families. Visits to their shrines replaced popular Sufi village shrines. Sunni persecution of Ali and his family were commemorated, while the first three caliphs were ritually cursed as usurpers. The martyrdom of Husayn at Karbala, the scene of the original massacre of Husayn and his followers by Sunni forces, became a central religious symbol, ritually reenacted during the sacred month of Muharram in passion plays which emphasized mourning, self-sacrifice and atonement. Karbala served as an alternative pilgrimage site to Mecca, which was under Ottoman control. Shii *ulama* from Iraq, southern Lebanon, and Bahrain were brought to Iran as missionaries and became part of the state-created and controlled Shii religious establishment, responsible for preaching Shii doctrine and manning the schools, universities, seminaries, and courts.

The Safavid empire reached its zenith guided by the genius of its most celebrated sultan, Shah Abbas (1588–1629). From his capital in Isfahan, he oversaw an ambitious program of state building, implementing administrative, military, economic and religious reforms. Generous religious endowments supported the building of major religious monuments, schools, mosques, and hospitals. As with the Ottomans, the *ulama* and their educational and judicial institutions were brought within the Safavid state bureaucracy.

The splendor and accomplishments of the Ottomans in the Arab Middle East and Eastern Europe and the Safavids in Iran were matched by those of India's Mughal dynasty, which was founded in the sixteenth century. North India had long been the scene of Muslim penetration and conquest, with the invasions of Arab soldiers in the seventh century and the establishment of the Turkish and Afghan dynasties of the Delhi sultanate (1211–1556). Muslims in the Indian subcontinent were a minority ruling a vast Hindu majority. In fact, Muslims never actually ruled all of India.

The Emperor Akbar (1565–1605) made the Mughal empire a reality. During his long reign, through conquest and diplomacy he significantly extended Muslim rule into major areas of the subcontinent. The emperor initiated policies to foster greater political centralization and the social integration of his Muslim and Hindu subjects. Religious learning, tolerance, harmony, and syncretism were hallmarks of Akbar's reign. Royal patronage sponsored the building of schools and libraries. A policy of universal tolerance and abolition of the poll tax as well as a tax on Hindu pilgrims fostered loyalty among Hindus, who constituted the majority of his subjects. Akbar encouraged the study of comparative

religions and built a House of Worship, where religious scholars from various faiths engaged in theological discussion and debate. Sufi brotherhoods who followed a more flexible, eclectic approach in their encounter with other faiths enjoyed court favor. Their emphasis on religious synthesis, which stressed similarities rather than religious differences, was preferred to the rigid legalism of the more conservative *ulama*. The power of the *ulama* was circumscribed, and their ire incurred by a state-sponsored religious cult, the religion of God or divine religion (*din illahi*), which emphasized the truth to be found in all religions. They took special offense at the Infallibility Decree of 1579, which recognized the emperor, rather than the *ulama*, as the final authority in religious matters.

Ulama opposition to Akbar's eclectic religious approach and legacy was joined to that of religious reformers such as Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi (1564–1624), a member of the Naqshbandi Sufi brotherhood, who rejected religious assimilation and advocated a more pronounced emphasis on the Islamic basis and character of state and society. However, it was the emperor Aurangzeb (1658–1707) who dismantled Akbar's pluralistic system of governance. Aurangzeb implemented the *ulama's* more exclusive (rather than Akbar's inclusive) religiopolitical order, which emphasized implementation of Islamic law (including the prohibition of alcohol and gambling), a subordinate political and social status for non-Muslims, reimposition of the poll tax, and the destruction of Hindu temples.

The political and religious accomplishments of Akbar and his successors were accompanied by the fluorescence of Mughal art. Mughal painting and architecture reflected both Persian and Ottoman influences. As with its Safavid and Ottoman counterparts, Mughal art reached great heights in manuscript illustration and miniature paintings as well as the design and building of religious and public monuments—grand mosques, forts, and palaces. Perhaps the most famous product of this period is the Taj Mahal, built in Agra by Shah Jahan, a grandson of Akbar, as a memorial to his beloved wife.

Despite the division of the Muslim world into separate sultanates, a Muslim traveler across this vast area could experience an international Islamic order that transcended state boundaries, particularly in the urban/intellectual culture of cities and towns. All Muslim citizens were members of a transnational community of believers, citizens of the *dar al-Islam* (abode of Islam) who, despite differences of interpretation, professed faith in one God, His Prophet, and revelation. All were bound by the Sharia, Islamic law, and obligated to observe the Five Pillars of Islam. The Islamic city reflected this common framework and culture in

its organization and institutions (mosques, legal codes and courts, schools and universities, Sufi convents, religious endowments, a political establishment of sultans, military commanders, and soldiers as well as a religious establishment of *ulama* and Sufi shaykhs or *pirs*—scholars and mystics).

Despite variations and the individual policies of some rulers, the imperial Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal sultanates demonstrated a somewhat common Islamic ideological outlook and approach to state organization, support, and use of Islam. Rulers bore the title sultan (the one who possesses power or authority). Their rule was based on a blend of military strength and religious legitimacy. The sultan appropriated the caliph's charge as defender and protector of the faith. Islamic law continued to enjoy pride of place as the official law of the state. Religion not only supported the state but was itself supported by state patronage. In particular, many of the *ulama* became part of a prosperous religious establishment that assisted the sultan's attempt to centralize and control the educational, legal, and social systems. They educated the military, bureaucratic, and religious elites in their schools, supervised and guided the interpretation and application of Islamic law in the Sharia courts, and oversaw the disbursement of funds from religious endowments (*waqf*) for educational and social services from the building of mosques and schools to hospitals and lodges for travelers. During this time, a number of the nonofficial *ulama* in particular developed strong international linkages. Many people came from far and wide to study at Mecca and Medina or at the renowned al-Azhar University in Cairo. After years of study and interchange, they returned to their home territories or took up residence in other parts of the Islamic world. Scholars, in particular, often traveled throughout the Muslim world to study with great masters and collect Prophetic traditions and reports about the Prophet's words and deeds. Islamic learning and interpretation possessed truly international character due to the sacrifice and commitment of these learned men. As the *ulama* developed and prospered, so too did the Sufis. Their eclectic, syncretistic tendencies enabled Islam to adapt to new environments and absorb local religious beliefs and customs. This complemented and enhanced the general process of adaptation pursued by the sultans and attracted droves of converts as Islam spread at an astonishing rate in Africa, India, and Southeast Asia. Established Sufi orders, like the Naqshbandi, spread from the Indian subcontinent to the Mediterranean, becoming vast international networks, and new orders sprang up and prospered.

Within the diversity of states and cultures, Islamic faith and civilization provided an underlying unity, epitomized by a common profes-

sion of faith and acceptance of the Sharia, Islamic law. Islam provided the basic ideological framework for political and social life, a source of identity, legitimacy, and guidance. A sense of continuity with past history and institutions was maintained. The world was divided into Islamic (*dar al-Islam*, the abode of Islam) and non-Islamic (*dar al-harb*, the abode of warfare). All Muslims were to strive to extend Islam wherever possible. Thus, merchants and traders as well as soldiers and mystics were the early missionaries of Islam. The sultan was the protector and defender of the faith charged with extending the Islamic domain. Citizenship, taxation, law, education, social welfare, defense, and warfare were based on Islam. The *ulama* for their part successfully asserted their role as protectors and interpreters of the tradition. Thus, both the political and the religious authorities, the "men of the sword" and the "men of the pen," appealed to Islam to legitimate their authority. For the majority of believers, there was a continuum of guidance, power, and success that transcended the contradictions and vicissitudes of Muslim life, and validated and reinforced the sense of a divinely mandated and guided community with a purpose and mission.

By the turn of the eighteenth century, the power and prosperity of the imperial sultanates were in serious decline. The decline of the great Muslim gunpowder empires coincided with the Industrial Revolution and modernization in the West. The emergence of modern Europe as a major military, economic, and political power ushered in the dawn of European colonialism. Internal political disintegration (the rise of semi-autonomous regional and provincial governments), military losses, a deteriorating economy affected by European competition in trade and manufacturing, and social disruption signaled the dénouement of Muslim imperial ascendancy. The Safavid empire fell in 1736; dynastic rule would not be reestablished until the end of the century under the relatively weak Qajar dynasty. The Mughal empire lingered on in name only, subservient to Britain, until 1857, when India was formally declared a British colony. Only the Ottoman empire survived into the twentieth century, when it collapsed and was dismembered by the British and the French during the post-World War I Mandate period. As we shall see, the social and moral decline of these great Muslim empires would contribute to a wave of Islamic revivalist movements throughout much of the Muslim world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

3

Religious Life: Belief and Practice

For Christianity, the appropriate question is "What do Christians believe?" In contrast, for Islam (as for Judaism), the correct question is "What do Muslims *do*?" Whereas in Christianity, theology was the "queen of the sciences," in Islam, as in Judaism, law enjoyed pride of place, for "to accept or conform to the laws of God is *islam*, which means to surrender to God's law."²²

Because Islam means surrender or submission to the will of God, Muslims have tended to place primary emphasis on obeying or following God's will as set forth in Islamic law. For this reason, many commentators have distinguished between Christianity's emphasis on orthodoxy, or correct doctrine or belief, and Islam's insistence on orthopraxy, or correct action. However, the emphasis on practice has not precluded the importance of faith or belief. Faith (*iman*) and right action or practice are intertwined.

Theology

As the confession of faith or basic creed ("There is no god but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God") illustrates, faith in God and the Prophet is the basis of Muslim belief and practice. As discussed in Chapter 1, the Quran established a set of basic beliefs that are the foundation of its worldview and the criterion for belief versus unbelief: belief in God and His Prophet, previous prophets and revealed Scripture, angels, and the Day of Judgment (4:136). Acceptance of these beliefs renders one a believer (*mumin*); to reject them is to be an unbeliever (*kafir*). Faith places the Muslim on the straight path, acts demonstrate commitment

and faithfulness. In Islam, the purpose of life is not simply to affirm but to actualize; not simply to profess belief in God but to realize God's will—to spread the message and law of Islam. Faith without works is empty, without merit; indeed, it is the Book of Deeds that will be the basis for divine judgment. Thus the primacy of law over theology in the Islamic tradition.

Kalam: Dialectical Theology

Islamic theology, unlike Christian theology, was not developed systematically, nor was it the product of theoretical reflection or speculation. Theology (*kalam*, "speech" or discourse) emerged as a reaction to specific debates or issues that grew out of early Islam's sociopolitical context, for example, the Kharijite split with Ali, early Christian-Muslim polemics, and the penetration of Greek thought during the Abbasid period. Although theological issues and discourse began during the early caliphal years, the science of theology, sometimes referred to as the science of (divine) unity, developed as an Islamic discipline during Abbasid times under royal patronage. Its scope reflected the mixing of faith and politics: questions of belief, sin, eschatology, legitimate governance. Among the key theological issues were the relationship of faith to works, the nature of God and the Quran, predestination, and free will.

The relationship of faith to works was the first major theological issue confronting the early community. It involved both the question of grave sin and its effect on membership in the community (does a Muslim guilty of a grave sin remain a Muslim?) and the legitimacy of its ruler or caliph. The occasion was the Kharijite rejection of the third caliph, Uthman, and of Ali's agreement to arbitration with Muawiyah. The Kharijites insisted on total commitment and observance of God's will. They equated faith with works. There could be no compromise, no middle ground. A Muslim was either rigorously observant, a true believer, or not a Muslim at all. Their worldview admitted of only two categories: believer and unbeliever, or infidel. For the Kharijites, Uthman had sinned seriously in his favoritism toward members of his family. Muawiyah, an Umayyad relative of Uthman, was an infidel due to his rebellion against the authority of Uthman's successor, the Caliph Ali. However, Ali's acceptance of arbitration, and thus failure to move decisively against the enemy of God, was also a grave sin. He, too, ceased to be a true Muslim and forfeited his right to rule. The Kharijites regarded these leaders as renegade Muslims (apostates), whose grave sin

rendered them infidels and illegitimate rulers, against whom jihad was mandatory.

The majority of the community steered away from the extremism of the Kharijites and followed the more moderate position of the Murjiites, who refused to judge, maintaining that only God on the Last Day could judge sinners and determine whether they were excluded from the community and from paradise. This attitude came to prevail in mainstream Islam. Faith, not specific acts, determined membership in the Islamic community. Except for obvious acts of apostasy, sinners remained Muslims. Non-Muslims were the object of Islam's universal mission to call (*dawa*, "the call," propagation of the faith) all humanity to the worship and service of the one true God.

The Murjia position also provided a justification for Umayyad legitimacy and rule. The caliphs had asserted that, whatever sins and injustices they may have committed, they remained Muslims; they ruled by divine decree and their rule was predetermined by God. This belief gave rise to a second theological issue, determinism versus free will. The opposition to the Umayyads maintained that it was not God but human beings who committed injustices and thus were responsible for their acts. The theological question was, "Does an omnipotent and omniscient God predetermine all acts and events and thus constitute the source of evil and injustice; or are human beings free to act and therefore responsible for sin?" The determinists argued that to attribute free will to human beings limited an omnipotent God. The advocates of free will countered that to deny free will ran counter to the sense of human accountability implicit in the notion of the Last Day and Judgment. Both sides were able to utilize Quranic texts to justify their positions. On the one hand, human freedom is affirmed in such passages as, "Truth comes from your Lord. Let anyone who will, believe, and let anyone who wishes, disbelieve" (18:29). On the other hand, there are many verses that portray an all-powerful God who is responsible for all events: "God lets anyone He wishes go astray while He guides whom-ever He wishes" (35:8). The issue of free will versus predestination became a major theological issue, with the majority accepting a divinely determined universe. Among the chief advocates of free will were the Mutazila, who developed into a major theological movement.

The Mutazila

The origins of the Mutazila have often been traced back to the early discussion and debate over the status of a grave sinner during the Umayyad dynasty. The word *mutazila*, "those who stand aloof," may

well refer to those who espoused a middle or intermediate position, regarding the grave sinner as neither a Muslim nor a non-Muslim. In any case, the Mutazila emerged as a formal school of theology during the Abbasid period. The Mutazila were especially strong during the reign of the Caliph Mamun (reigned 813–833), who attempted in vain to force their theological position on the majority, initiating an inquisition that persecuted and imprisoned its opposition. One of its most famous victims was Ahmad ibn Hanbal, the traditionist leader and legal scholar.

The Mutazila called themselves "the people of (divine) justice and unity," the defenders of divine unity (monotheism) and justice. Influenced by the influx of Greek philosophical and scientific thought during the Abbasid period, with its emphasis on reason, logical argumentation, and study of the laws of nature, they relied on reason and rational deduction as tools in Quranic interpretation and theological reflection. Reason and revelation were regarded as complementary sources of guidance from a just and reasonable God.

The Mutazila took issue with the majority of *ulama* over the doctrines of the divine attributes or names of God and the eternal, uncreated nature of the Quran. Both beliefs were seen as contradictory and as compromising God's unity (Islam's absolute monotheism). How could the one, transcendent God have many divine attributes (sight, hearing, power, knowledge, will)? The Mutazila maintained that the Quranic passages that affirmed God's attributes were meant to be understood metaphorically or allegorically, not literally. Not to do so was to fall into anthropomorphism, or worse, *shirk*, associationism or polytheism. Similarly, the Islamic doctrine that the Quran is the speech or word of God should not be taken literally, for how could both God and His word be eternal and uncreated? The result would be two divinities. The Mutazila interpreted metaphorically those Quranic texts that spoke of the Quran as preexisting in heaven. Contrary to majority opinion, they taught that the Quran is the *created* word of God, who is its uncreated source. The Mutazila critique of those like Ahmad ibn Hanbal, who believed in the eternity of the Quran, was ably summarized by Caliph Mamun in a letter to his governor in Baghdad:

Everything apart from Him is a creature from His creation—a new thing which He has brought into existence. [This perverted opinion they hold] though the Koran speaks clearly of God's creating all things, and proves to the exclusion of all differences of opinion. They are, thus, like the Christians when they claim that Isa bin Maryam [Jesus, the son of Mary] was not created because he was the word of God. But God says, "Verily We have made it a Koran in the Arabic language," and the explanation of that is, "Verily, We have created it," just as the Koran says, "And He made from it His mate that he might dwell with her."²³

For the Mutazila, belief in God's justice required human free will and responsibility. How could God be a just judge if people were not free, if human action was predetermined? How could there be divine justice if God was solely responsible for all acts, including evil and injustice? They rejected the image of an all-powerful divinity who arbitrarily and unpredictably determined good and evil, and instead declared that a just God could command only that which is just and good. His creatures bore the responsibility for acts of injustice. Thus, the Mutazila provided a counterweight to the Murjia; Mutazila teachings provided a rationale for critics of Umayyad policies and rule.

The Asharite Response

Muslim theology was pulled in two seemingly irreconcilable directions by those who asserted the unqualified, absolute power of God and by their adversaries, the Mutazila, who maintained that God's actions followed from His just and reasonable nature and that all people were free and morally responsible. Once again, someone arose to bring about a new synthesis. Ironically, it was Abu al-Hasan Ali al-Ashari (d. 935), one of the great Mutazila thinkers of his time, who was the father of the Asharite school of theology, which came to dominate Sunni Islam.

Al-Ashari used the rational dialectic of the Mutazila to expose the deficiencies of their system and to defend the nonrational aspects of belief, which, he maintained, transcended human categories and experience. A critique of the Mutazila tendency to rationalize God and theology is contained in the story of al-Ashari's break with his Mutazila teacher, al-Jubbai, which underscores the limits of human reason and human concepts of justice in explaining divine justice. Al-Ashari is reported to have said:

Let us imagine a child and a grown-up person in Heaven who both died in the True Faith. The grown-up one, however, has a higher place in Heaven than the child. The child shall ask God: "Why did you give that man a higher place?" "He has done many good works," God shall reply. Then the child shall say, "Why did you let me die so soon that I was prevented from doing good?" God will answer, "I knew that you would grow up into a sinner; therefore, it was better that you should die a child." Thereupon a cry shall rise from those condemned to the depths of Hell, "Why, O Lord! did You not let us die before we became sinners?"²⁴

Al-Ashari, like al-Shafii in law and al-Ghazali in theology, undertook a synthesis of contending positions. He staked a middle ground between the extremes of ibn Hanbal's literalism and the Mutazila's logical ratio-

nalism. He reasserted the doctrines of the omnipotence of God, His attributes, the uncreatedness of the Quran, and predestination. However, he did this with some reinterpretation, drawing on the language and categories of Greek thought that had now become an integral part of Muslim theological discourse. Al-Ashari used reason to provide a rational defense for that which transcended, and at times seemed contrary to, reason. Thus, while reason and logic might be used to explain and defend belief, revelation was not subordinate to the requirements of reason. The stark divinity of the Mutazila's attributeless God was countered by a reaffirmation of God's eternal attributes, which, al-Ashari maintained, were neither His essence nor accidents. Al-Ashari's universe was controlled by a transcendent, omnipotent God who could intervene in every place and at every moment. Yet he maintained a qualified law of causality by stating that God customarily allowed many events to follow from certain causes. Although al-Ashari's God decreed (willed and created) all actions and events, this determinism was accompanied by a theory of "acquisition," which maintained that people acquire responsibility and thus accountability by their actions.

Al-Ashari and his successors produced a school of theology that by the eleventh century had attracted many adherents, including followers of the Shafii law school, and had become a major stream of Muslim learning. Despite its success, for many of the traditionalists, in particular Ahmad ibn Hanbal, al-Ashari and scholastic theology in general remained suspect. Whatever the accomplishments of theology, its use of reason, even if subordinated to revelation, was unacceptable. However, in time the followers of al-Ashari came to be regarded as the dominant school of Sunni theology, including among its members perhaps the most influential Muslim intellectual, al-Ghazali. Mutazila fortunes were more limited. Always a small minority, they failed to attract a substantial following. Their association with the excesses of Caliph Mamun's attempt to impose Mutazila theology as orthodoxy and their use of a rational dialectic struck the majority of *ulama* as a blasphemous attempt to limit God's power. However, much of their thought continued to influence Shii Islam, and many of the issues they raised remain influential today.

At the same time that Greek philosophy and science influenced the development of scholastic theology, philosophy developed as a separate Muslim discipline. Because of the movement to translate classical texts into Arabic, Muslim thinkers were able to appropriate Aristotle, Plato, Plotinus, and the Stoics, and rework these materials within their own context, producing an extraordinarily rich contribution to Islamic civilization. Men like the Arabs Abu Yusuf al-Kindi (d. 873) and al-Farabi

(d. 950), the Persian Ibn Sina (Avicenna, d. 1037), and the Spaniard Ibn Rushd (Averroes, d. 1198) were among the intellectual giants of their times. Their ideas challenged their Muslim contemporaries.

Ironically, despite the genius of Muslim philosophers, their impact on Islamic thought was marginal. If the use of reason in scholastic theology had been suspect, how much more was philosophy, which, in contrast to theology, took reason and not revelation as its starting point and method. The *ulama* (scholars of tradition, law, and theology alike) viewed philosophy as embodying the conflict between reason and revelation, a direct threat to faith. Talk of creation through a process of emanation, reason as the surest means to the truth, and philosophy as the superior path to the real drove a wedge between the philosophers and the bulk of orthodoxy. Al-Ghazali, the great theologian, legal scholar, and mystic, mastered philosophy simply to refute it in his *Incoherence of the Philosophers*, which became a standard work. Ibn Rushd countered with his ringing defense *The Incoherence of the Incoherence*, in which he argued that the differences between philosophy and religion were only apparent, since both pursued the real, the former relying on the language of reason and science and the latter on the metaphorical language of revelation. The measure of the gulf between the philosophers and the community could be seen in the response to Ibn Rushd and the philosophical tradition. Despite the accomplishments of many great philosophers, not only in philosophy but also in medicine and the sciences (for they were truly renaissance men), more often than not they were viewed as rationalists and nonbelievers. Philosophy never established itself as a major discipline. In contrast, Muslim philosophy had a major impact on the West. By transmitting Greek philosophy to medieval Europe, it influenced the curriculum of its universities and the work of such scholars as Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, and Roger Bacon.

Islamic Law

Law is the primary religious science in Islam. Once committed to Islam, the believer's overriding concern and question is "What do I do; what is God's will/law?" Law is essentially religious; the concrete expression of God's guidance (*sharia*, path or way) for humanity. Throughout history, Islamic law has remained central to Muslim identity and practice, for it constitutes the ideal social blueprint for the "good society." The Sharia has been a source of law and moral guidance, the basis for both law and ethics. Despite vast cultural differences, Islamic law has provided an

underlying sense of identity, a common code of behavior, for Muslim societies. As a result, the role of Islamic law in Muslim society has been and continues to be a central issue for the community of believers.

Historical Development

For the early Muslim community, following the Sharia of God meant obedience to God's continuing revelation and to His Prophet. Issues of worship, family relations, criminal justice, and warfare could be referred to Muhammad for guidance and adjudication. Both Quranic teaching and Prophetic example guided and governed the early Islamic state. With the death of Muhammad, divine revelation ceased; however, the Muslim vocation to follow God's will did not. Knowledge and enforcement of God's law were continuing concerns. The first four caliphs, assisted by their advisers, carried on, rendering decisions as new problems and questions arose. With the advent of the Umayyad dynasty, an Islamic legal system began gradually to take shape, replacing this ad hoc approach. Part of the new administrative structure established by the Umayyads was the office of the *qadi*, or judge. The *qadi* was originally an official appointed by the caliph as his delegate to provincial governors. He was to see that government decrees were carried out and to settle disputes. In rendering a decision, judges relied on the prevailing Arab customary laws of the particular province and the Quran as well as their own personal judgment. A rudimentary legal code developed, consisting of administrative decrees and judicial decisions. The result was a body of laws that differed from one locale to another, given the cultural diversity of the empire's provinces and the independent judgment exercised by judges.

Growing dissatisfaction with Umayyad practice led to a new page in the history of Islamic law. Critics of the Umayyads charged that the differing customary laws, coupled with caliphal decrees and the personal opinions of judges, had resulted in a confused and often contradictory body of laws. Many asked, "Can God's will be discerned through so subjective a process; can His law for Muslims in Medina be so different from that in Kufa?" They argued that if all Muslims were bound to submit to and carry out God's law, then Islamic law ought to be defined clearly and more uniformly. By the eighth century, such critics, eager to limit the autonomy of Muslim rulers and to standardize the law, could be found in major cities: Medina, Damascus, Basra, Kufa, Baghdad. In time, these great early legal scholars, such as Abu Hanifa (d. 767), Malik ibn Anas (d. 796), Muhammad al-Shafii (d. 819), and Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 855), who came to be viewed respectively as the founders

or leaders of the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafii, and Hanbali law schools, attracted followers. They began to systematically review Umayyad law and customs in light of Quranic teachings. Maintaining that Islam offered a comprehensive way of life, they sought to apply Islam to all aspects of life. These loosely organized endeavors were the beginnings of early law centers or schools.

The major development of Islamic law and jurisprudence took place during the Abbasid caliphate. Having justified their revolution in the name of Islam, the Abbasid caliphs became the great patrons of Islamic learning. Study of the Quran, traditions of the Prophet, and law excelled in the hands of a new class of scholars (*ulama*), who sought to discover, interpret, and apply God's will to life's situations. Islamic law was not the product of government decrees or judges' decisions but the work of jurists or scholars who struggled from 750 to 900 C.E. to set out a religious ideal, to develop a comprehensive law based on the Quran. Jurists interpreted and formulated Islamic law, while judges were restricted to the application of the law. The consensus of jurists during this period produced the binding legal formulations that were to govern Muslim life down through the centuries.

Despite their common purpose and goals, differences soon arose during Abbasid times, pitting one law school against another and causing divisions within the law schools themselves. This divergence resulted from a combination of factors. The Quran is not a law book. About six hundred of the six thousand verses in the Quran are concerned with law, many of them covering matters of prayer and ritual. Approximately eighty verses treat legal topics in the strict sense of the term: crime and punishment, contracts, family laws.²⁵ Therefore, in many instances the doctrines of the law schools remained dependent on the interpretation or opinion of jurists who were, in turn, influenced by the differing customs of their respective social milieux. Medina and Kufa provide instructive examples of this stage in the process of legal development. The legal interpretations in both cities shared a common starting point—the Quran was interpreted in light of the precedents of the Prophet and the early caliphs. However, where the Quran was silent, jurists in each city relied on local practice in elaborating the law. The older Arab patrilineal system of Medina contrasted with the more recently established, cosmopolitan Arab and non-Arab urban society of Kufa. Legal scholars who lived in Medina tended to identify their way of life with that of the Prophet and his early companions. Thus, customary tribal law (*sunna*, trodden path or practice) became associated or equated with the practice of the Prophet (what the Prophet said, did, or permitted) and his companions. For the Medinans, law in Islam was based on the Quran and the Prophetically

informed practice or local consensus of the Medinan community. This perspective was epitomized by Malik ibn Anas, who wrote the first compendium of Islamic law. Malik was a scholar of both tradition (*hadith*, written reports about the practice or Sunna of Muhammad and his companions) and law. His treatise, the *Muwatta*, is a collection of traditions and laws. Legal argument and conclusions are justified or supported by citations from the Quran and traditions. Where differences existed, the local consensus of Medina remained authoritative. In contrast, legal scholars in the much younger community of Kufa, followers of Abu Hanifa and al-Shaybani (d. 804), relied on jurist opinion and local law. The law of equality in marriage is a clear example of the differences that followed from this approach. Because Kufa was a far more diverse and class-conscious society, influenced by Persian practice, a husband was required to be the equal of his wife's family in terms of lineage, financial status, and so forth. However, no such law developed in the more homogeneous society at Medina.

By the end of the eighth century, Muslims again found that despite their best efforts to bring uniformity to the law, significant differences in their legal doctrines continued to exist, given the number of law schools, differences of cultural milieu, and the diversity of legal techniques or criteria employed by jurists (personal opinion, tradition, equity, public welfare). Two contending camps emerged: those who wished to bring uniformity to the law by restricting the use of reason and relying primarily on the traditions of the Prophet versus those who vigorously asserted their right to reason for themselves in the light of such criteria as equity or public interest. Into the fray stepped Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafii (d. 819), the father of Islamic jurisprudence.

Born in Mecca, al-Shafii studied with Malik ibn Anas at Medina. He spent the early part of his career traveling through Syria and Iraq, thoroughly familiarizing himself with the legal schools and the thinking of his time before settling in Egypt. It was here that his own thought crystallized, and he emerged as the champion of those who sought to curb the diversity of legal practice. Al-Shafii was primarily responsible for the formulation that, after great resistance and debate, became the classical doctrine of Islamic jurisprudence, establishing a fixed, common methodology for all law schools. According to al-Shafii, there are four sources of law (*usul al-fiqh*, roots or sources of law): the Quran, the example (Sunna) of the Prophet, consensus (*ijma*) of the community, and analogical reasoning or deduction (*qiyas*).

Al-Shafii taught that there were only two material sources of law: the Quran and the Sunna of the Prophet, as preserved in the *hadith*. He maintained that Muhammad was divinely inspired, and thus his exam-

ple was normative for the community. He restricted the use of the term *sunna* to the Prophet. Henceforth, it came to be identified solely with the divinely inspired practice of Muhammad and no longer with tribal custom or the consensus of law schools. Al-Shafii also transferred the authority for legal interpretation from individual law schools to the consensus of the community. Basing his opinion on a tradition of the Prophet—"My community will not agree upon an error"—the agreed-on practice of the community (*ijma*) became the third infallible source of law. Finally, the role of personal reasoning in the formulation of law was restricted. Where no explicit revealed text or community consensus existed, jurists were no longer free to rely on their own judgment to solve new problems. Instead, they were to use deductive reasoning (*qiyas*) to seek a similar or analogous situation in the revealed sources (Quran and Sunna), from which they were to derive a new regulation. Reasoning by analogy would eliminate what al-Shafii regarded as the arbitrary nature of legal reasoning prevalent in the more inductive approach of those who relied on their own judgment.

The Sources of Law

The literal meaning of Sharia is "the road to the watering hole," the clear, right, or straight path to be followed. In Islam, it came to mean the divinely mandated path, the straight path of Islam, that Muslims were to follow, God's will or law. However, because the Quran does not provide an exhaustive body of laws, the desire to discover and delineate Islamic law in a comprehensive and consistent fashion led to the development of the science of law, or jurisprudence (*fiqh*). *Fiqh*, "understanding," is that science or discipline that sought to ascertain, interpret, and apply God's will or guidance (Sharia) as found in the Quran to all aspects of life. As a result of al-Shafii's efforts, classical Islamic jurisprudence recognized four official sources, as well as other subsidiary sources.

QURAN

As the primary source of God's revelation and law, the Quran is the sourcebook of Islamic principles and values. Although the Quran declares, "Here is a plain statement to men, a guidance and instruction to those who fear God," it does not constitute a comprehensive code of laws. While it does contain legal prescriptions, the bulk of the Quran consists of broad, general moral directives—what Muslims ought to do. It replaced, modified, or supplemented earlier tribal laws. Practices such as female infanticide, exploitation of the poor, usury, murder, false con-

tracts, fornication, adultery, and theft were condemned. In other cases, Arab customs were gradually replaced by Islamic standards. Quranic prescriptions governing alcohol and gambling illustrate this process. At first, the use of alcohol and gambling had not been expressly prohibited. However, over a period of years, a series of revelations progressively discouraged their use. The first prescription against the old custom is given in the form of advice: "They ask thee concerning wine and gambling. Say: in them is great sin and some use for man, but the sin is greater than the usefulness" (2:219). Then, Muslims were prohibited from praying under the influence of alcohol: "Approach not prayer with a mind befogged until you can understand all that you say" (4:43). Finally, liquor and gambling were prohibited: "Satan's plan is to incite enmity and hatred between you with intoxicants and gambling, and hinder you from the remembrance of God and from prayer: Will you not then abstain?" (5:93).

Much of the Quran's reforms consist of regulations or moral guidance that limit or redefine rather than prohibit or replace existing practices. Slavery and women's status are two striking examples. Although slavery was not abolished, slave owners were encouraged to emancipate their slaves, to permit them to earn their freedom, and to "give them some of God's wealth which He has given you" (24:33). Forcing female slaves into prostitution was condemned. Women and the family were the subjects of more wide-ranging reforms affecting marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Marriage was a contract, with women entitled to their dower (4:4). Polygamy was restricted (4:3), and men were commanded to treat their wives fairly and equally (4:129). Women were given inheritance rights in a patriarchal society that had previously restricted inheritance to male relatives.

SUNNA OF THE PROPHET

Quranic principles and values were concretized and interpreted by the second and complementary source of law, the Sunna of the Prophet, the normative model behavior of Muhammad. The importance of the Sunna is rooted in such Quranic injunctions as "obey God and obey the Messenger. . . . If you should quarrel over anything refer it to God and the Messenger" (4:59) and "In God's messenger you have a fine model for anyone whose hope is in God and the Last Day" (33:21). Belief that Muhammad was inspired by God to act wisely, in accordance with God's will, led to the acceptance of his example, or Sunna, as a supplement to the Quran, and thus, a material or textual source of the law. Sunna includes what the Prophet said, what he did, and those actions that he permitted or allowed.

The record of Prophetic deeds transmitted and preserved in tradition reports (*hadith*, pl. *ahadith*) proliferated. By the ninth century, the number of traditions had mushroomed into the hundreds of thousands. They included pious fabrications by those who believed that their practices were in conformity with Islam and forgeries by factions involved in political and theological disputes. Recognition that many of these traditions were fabricated led to the development of the science of tradition criticism and the compilation of authoritative compendia. The evaluation of traditions focused on the chain of narrators and the subject matter. Criteria were established for judging the trustworthiness of narrators—moral character, reputation for piety, intelligence, and good memory. Then a link by link examination of each of the narrators was conducted to trace the continuity of a tradition back to the Prophet. The process required detailed biographical information about narrators: where and when they were born, where they lived and traveled, and so forth. Such information might support or refute the authenticity of a narrator. For example, it might be shown that a reputed narrator could not have received a *hadith* from his predecessor because they did not live at the same time or because they neither lived nor traveled near each other.

The second criteria, evaluation of a tradition's subject matter, entailed an examination to determine whether, for example, a tradition contradicted the Quran, an already verified tradition, or reason. After traditions had been subjected to both external (narrators) and internal (subject matter) examination, they were categorized according to the degree of their authenticity (authority) or strength as sound, good or acceptable, and weak.

Throughout the ninth and tenth centuries, scholars traveled throughout the Muslim world collecting traditions and gathering information on their narrators or transmitters. Faced with the enormous corpus of traditions that had grown up, they sought to study and sift through them in order to authenticate and compile those traditions worthy of being conserved and followed by the Muslim community. Six collections came to be accepted as authoritative: those of Ismail al-Bukhari (d. 870), Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj (d. 875), Abu Dawud (d. 888), al-Nisai (d. 915), al-Tirmidhi (d. 892), and Ibn Maja (d. 896). Among these, the collections of al-Bukhari and Muslim have enjoyed an especially high status as authoritative sources.

Authenticity of Tradition Literature. Modern Western scholarship has seriously questioned the historicity and authenticity of the *hadith*, maintaining that the bulk of traditions attributed to the Prophet

Muhammad were actually written much later.²⁶ Joseph Schacht, the most influential modern Western authority on Islamic law, building on the work of his European predecessors, concluded that the term "Sunna of the Prophet" developed for the first time in the eighth century due to the influence of the Traditionist Movement and under the aegis of al-Shafii, and that this usage gave legal authority to later customary practices and traditions. On the basis of his research, Schacht found no evidence of legal traditions before 722, one hundred years after the death of Muhammad. Thus, he concluded that the Sunna of the Prophet is not the words and deeds of the Prophet, but apocryphal material originating from customary practice that was projected back to the eighth century to more authoritative sources—first the Successors, then the Companions, and finally the Prophet himself.

Most Muslim scholars, while critical of some Prophetic traditions, take exception to Schacht's conclusions.²⁷ To state that no tradition goes back prior to 722 creates an unwarranted vacuum in Islamic history. Schacht's "first century vacuum" with regard to the existence of Prophetic traditions is a theory or conclusion that completely overlooks or dismisses the Muslim science of tradition criticism and verification and does violence to the deeply ingrained sense of tradition in Arab culture, which all scholars, Muslim and non-Muslim, have acknowledged. As Fazlur Rahman notes:

The Arabs, who memorized and handed down the poetry of their poets, sayings of their soothsayers and statements of their judges and tribal leaders, cannot be expected to fail to notice and narrate deeds and sayings of one whom they acknowledged as the Prophet of God.²⁸

Accepting Schacht's conclusion regarding the many traditions he did examine does not warrant its automatic extension to all the traditions. To consider all Prophetic traditions apocryphal until proven otherwise is to reverse the burden of proof. Moreover, even where differences of opinion exist regarding the authenticity of the chain of narrators, they need not detract from the authenticity of a tradition's content and common acceptance of the importance of tradition literature as a record of the early history and development of Islamic belief and practice. As H.A.R. Gibb observed regarding the significance of tradition literature:

It serves as a mirror in which the growth and development of Islam as a way of life and the larger Islamic community are truly reflected. . . . [I]t is possible to trace in *hadiths* the struggle between the supporters of the Umayyads and the Medinan opposition, the growth of Shiism and the divisions between its sects . . . the rise of theological controversies, and the beginnings of the mystical doctrines of the Sufis.²⁹

ANALOGICAL REASONING

Throughout the development of Islamic law, reason had played an important role as caliphs, judges, and, finally, jurists or legal scholars interpreted law where no clear, explicit revealed text or general consensus existed. The general term for legal reasoning or interpretation was *ijtihad* (to strive or struggle intellectually). It comes from the same root as *jihad* (to strive or struggle in God's path), which included the notion of holy war. The use of reason (legal reasoning or interpretation) had taken a number of forms and been described by various terms: personal opinion, jurist preference, and analogical reasoning (*qiyas*). Reasoning by analogy was a more restricted, systematic form of *ijtihad*. When faced with new situations or problems, scholars sought a similar situation in the Quran and Sunna. The key is the discovery of the effective cause or reason behind a Sharia rule. If a similar reason could be identified in a new situation or case, then the Sharia judgment was extended to resolve the case. The determination of the minimum rate of dower offers a good example of analogical deduction. Jurists saw a similarity between the bride's loss of virginity in marriage and the Quranic penalty for theft, which was amputation. Thus, the minimum dower was set at the same rate that stolen goods had to be worth before amputation was applicable.

CONSENSUS OF THE COMMUNITY

The authority for consensus (*ijma*) as a fourth source of law is usually derived from a saying of the Prophet, "My community will never agree on an error." Consensus did not develop as a source of law until after the death of Muhammad, with the consequent loss of his direct guidance in legislative matters. It began as a natural process for solving problems and making decisions; one followed the majority opinion or consensus of the early community as a check on individual opinions. However, two kinds of consensus came to be recognized. The consensus of the entire community was applied to those religious duties, such as the pilgrimage to Mecca, practiced by all Muslims. But despite al-Shafii's attempt to define the fourth source of law as this general consensus, classical Islamic jurisprudence defined the community in a more restricted sense as the community of legal scholars or religious authorities who act in behalf of and guide the entire Muslim community.

Consensus played a pivotal role in the development of Islamic law and contributed significantly to the corpus of law or legal interpretation. If questions arose about the meaning of a Quranic text or tradition or if revelation and early Muslim practice were silent, jurists applied their own reasoning (*ijtihad*) to interpret the law. Often this process resulted

in a number of differing legal opinions. Over time, perhaps several generations, certain interpretations were accepted by more and more scholars, endured the test of time, while others disappeared. Looking back upon the evolving consensus of scholars, it was concluded that an authoritative consensus had been reached on the issue. Thus, consensus served as a brake on the vast array of individual interpretations of legal scholars and contributed to the creation of a relatively fixed body of laws.

While all came to accept the four sources of law, Islamic jurisprudence recognized other influences, designating them subsidiary principles of law. Among these were custom, public interest, and jurist preference or equity. In this way, some remnant of the inductive, human input that had characterized the actual methods of the law schools in their attempt to realize the Sharia's primary concern with human welfare, justice, and equity was acknowledged. However, the ultimate effect of the acceptance of al-Shafii's formulation of the four sources of law, with its tendency to deny independent interpretation and derive all laws directly from revelation, the inspired practice of Muhammad, or the infallible consensus of the community, was the gradual replacement of the real by the ideal. The actual, historical development of the law was forgotten.

By the tenth century, the basic development of Islamic law was completed. The general consensus (*ijma*) of Muslim jurists was that Islamic law (Islam's way of life) had been satisfactorily and comprehensively delineated in its essential principles, and preserved in the regulations of the law books or legal manuals produced by the law schools. This attitude led many to conclude that individual, independent interpretation (*ijtihad*) of the law was no longer necessary or desirable. Instead, Muslims were simply to follow or imitate (*taqlid*) the past, God's law as elaborated by the early jurists. Jurists were no longer to seek new solutions or produce new regulations and law books but instead study the established legal manuals and write their commentaries. Islamic law, the product of an essentially dynamic and creative process, now tended to become fixed and institutionalized. While individual scholars like Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) and al-Suyuti (d. 1505) demurred, the majority position resulted in traditional belief prohibiting substantive legal development. This is commonly referred to as the closing of the gate or door of *ijtihad*. Belief that the work of the law schools had definitively resulted in the transformation of the Sharia into a legal blueprint for society reinforced the sacrosanct nature of tradition; change or innovation came to be viewed as an unwarranted deviation (*bida*) from established sacred norms. To be accused of innovation—

deviation from the law and practice of the community—was equivalent to the charge of heresy in Christianity.

There is a danger in overemphasizing the unity and fixed nature of Islamic law. First, while an overall unity or common consensus existed among the law schools with regard to essential practices such as the confession of faith, fasting, and pilgrimage to Mecca, the divergent character of the law schools was preserved by differences in such areas as the grounds for divorce, the levying of taxes, and inheritance rights. Acknowledgment of this diversity within the unity of law was sanctioned by the reported saying of the Prophet, "Difference of opinion within my community is a sign of the bounty of Allah." This diversity continued in practice as judges applied the laws of the various law schools in their courts. Second, some limited legal development and change did occur where scholars interpreted and clarified details of legal doctrine. This was especially true as regards the activity of the *mufti*, a legal expert or consultant. These experts advised both judges and litigants on matters of law. Their formal, written legal opinions (*fatwa*), based on their interpretation of the law, were often relied on in judicial matters. Many of the more important opinions became part of collections of *fatwas*, which became authoritative in their own right.

Schools of Law

Although there had been many law schools, by the thirteenth century the number became stabilized. For Sunni Islam, four major schools predominated: the Hanafi, Hanbali, Maliki, and Shafii. Today, they are dominant in different parts of the Islamic world—the Hanafi in the Arab Middle East and South Asia; the Maliki in North, central, and West Africa; the Shafii in East Africa, southern Arabia, and Southeast Asia; and the Hanbali in Saudi Arabia.

Shii Islam also generated its own schools, the most important of which is the Jafari, named for Jafar al-Sadiq. The doctrine of the imamate resulted in fundamental differences in Islamic jurisprudence. While both Sunni and Shii accept the Quran and Sunna of the Prophet as inspired authoritative textual sources, the Shii have maintained their own collections of traditions that include not only the Sunna of the Prophet but also that of Ali and the Imams. In addition, the Shii reject analogy and consensus as legal sources, since they regard the Imam as the supreme legal interpreter and authority. In his absence, qualified religious scholars serve as his agents or representatives, interpreters (*mujtahids*) of the law. Their consensus guides the community and is binding during the interim between the seclusion of the Imam and his

return as the Mahdi. In contrast to Sunni Islam, Shii Islam did not curb the use of *ijtihad*. In practice, Shii religious leaders, although not formally accepting the Sunni doctrine of imitation, tended to follow their medieval legal manuals as well. In the eighteenth century, the right to *ijtihad* was challenged in the conflict between the Akbari and Usuli schools over the question of religious authority. Were the sacred texts sufficient or was there still need for jurist interpretation of the law? The Akbari (a synonym for tradition, or *hadith*) took a more rigid approach and maintained that the sacred texts were sufficient. Therefore, they sought to curb the authority of jurists by maintaining that independent interpretation was not necessary. The Usuli, defending the right and authority of jurists to interpret the law, asserted the need for *mujtahids*. In the end, the Usuli school won out. Moreover, Shii Islam also developed its own distinctive doctrine of emulation or imitation. This was the belief that in the absence of the Imam, leading *mujtahids*, those publicly acknowledged for their learning, piety, and justice, should serve as a religious guide whose example and teachings believers should follow.

Courts of Law

The application of Islamic law was the task of the Sharia courts and their judges (*qadis*). The judiciary was not independent, for judges were appointed by the government, and were paid and served at the pleasure of the caliph. Although originally judges had been interpreters and makers of law, their role came to be restricted to the application of law—that body of laws developed by the jurists and enshrined in the law books. Sharia judges were not to interpret or add to the law. Thus, Islamic law does not recognize a case law system of legally binding precedents. This reflected the belief that jurists, not judges, were to interpret the law. Judges served under a chief judge appointed by the caliph. They were assisted in their work by experts or legal consultants, *muftis*. Among the notable judicial procedures were rules of evidence that required an oath sworn before God in the absence of two adult male Muslim witnesses to a crime, the exclusion of circumstantial evidence, and the absence of cross examination of witnesses. Legal decisions were final. There was no system of judicial appeal. In reality, however, all decisions could be reviewed by the political authority, the caliph or his provincial governor. The *ulama* were the backbone of the legal system. While these scholars were experts in a number of fields, many specialized in law. A specialist in law, or jurist, was called a *faqih* (pl. *fuqaha*). They

dominated the Sharia system, serving as lawyers, teachers, judges, and *muftis*.

In addition to the Sharia courts, a class of officials or religious police were charged with the supervision and enforcement of public morals. The office of *muhtasib* originally referred to a market inspector who was to regulate business transactions and practices in the marketplaces or bazaars. However, the office was extended to ensuring public morality in general: the observance of prayer times, fasting, modesty between the sexes. Islamic justification for his activities was rooted in the Quranic command to the Muslim community to encourage good and prohibit evil (3:104, 9:71). The *muhtasib* was empowered to impose penalties for violation of Islamic laws, flogging for public drunkenness, and amputation for theft. The institution continues to exist in a number of Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. It has been reintroduced more recently in other countries, such as Pakistan and Iran.

While the Sharia system remained integral to state and society, it was not the sole system of law. Though in theory the Sharia was the only officially recognized system of law, in practice a parallel system of caliphal laws and courts existed from earliest times. Both legal idealism and imperial absolutism contributed to the development of an alternative, or rather, supplementary system. An idealism that accepted in good faith an oath sworn before God and excluded circumstantial evidence and cross examination of witnesses proved cumbersome. More importantly, the Sharia system limited the powers of strong and often autocratic rulers. The caliph's desire to exercise absolute power clashed with the belief that God was the only lawmaker. An Islamic rationale was created to circumvent the problem. Citing the caliph's obligation to uphold and ensure governance according to the Sharia, the Umayyads asserted broad discretionary legislative and judicial powers. They issued administrative ordinances and created Grievance courts, ostensibly to enhance the proper administration and implementation of the Sharia in society. Carefully avoiding the term "law," government regulations were called ordinances; the only requirement was that they not be contrary to the Sharia. The Grievance courts were initially established to permit the caliph or his representative to hear complaints against senior officials whose status or power might have inhibited the judges. They soon became a system of courts whose scope and function were determined by the ruler. As a result, Islamic society possessed a dual system of laws and courts (Sharia and Grievance), religious and secular, with complementary jurisdictions. Sharia courts were increasingly restricted to the enforcement of family laws (marriage, divorce, inheritance) and the handling of religious endowments. The Grievance courts dealt

with public law, especially criminal law, taxation, and commercial regulations. This approach continued throughout Islamic history. In modern times, it has been employed in countries like Saudi Arabia to provide the rationale for the introduction of a series of modern ordinances, such as the Civil Service Law (1971) and the Mining Code (1963), that supplement the Sharia. Similarly, the creation of Grievance courts made possible the broadening of the judicial system and the introduction of a hierarchy of courts.

Despite the differences between the ideal and the reality, Islamic law endured as the officially recognized cornerstone of the state. When Sunni Muslim jurists and theologians faced the issue of what to do about tyrants and despots, they concluded that it was not the moral character of the caliph but the ruler's acknowledgment of the Sharia as official state law that preserved the unity of the community and determined the Islamic nature and acceptability of a state.

The Content of Law

Law in Islam is both universal and egalitarian. The Sharia is believed to be God's law for the entire Islamic community, indeed for all humankind. In the final analysis, God is the sovereign ruler of the world, head of the human community, and its sole legislator. As a result, Islamic law is as much a system of ethics as it is law, for it is concerned with what a Muslim ought to do or ought not to do. All acts are ethically categorized as: (1) obligatory; (2) recommended; (3) indifferent or permissible; (4) reprehensible but not forbidden; or (5) forbidden. To break the law is a transgression against both society and God, a crime and a sin; the guilty are subject to punishment in this life and the next. The idealism of the law can be seen in the fact that ethical categories such as recommended and reprehensible were not subject to civil penalties. Islamic law is also egalitarian; it transcends regional, family, tribal, and ethnic boundaries. It does not recognize social class or caste differences. All Muslims, Arab and non-Arab, rich and poor, black and white, caliph and craftsman, male and female, are bound by Islamic law as members of a single, transnational community or brotherhood of believers.

The belief that Islamic law was a comprehensive social blueprint was reflected in the organization and content of law. Legal rights and duties are divided into two major categories: (1) duties to God (ritual observances), such as prayer, almsgiving, and fasting, and (2) duties to others (social transactions), which include penal, commercial, and family laws. The heart of the former is the so-called Five Pillars of Islam; that of the latter is family law.

THE FIVE PILLARS

Despite the rich diversity in Islamic practice, the Five Pillars of Islam remain the core and common denominator, the five essential and obligatory practices all Muslims accept and follow.

1. *The Profession of Faith.* A Muslim is one who proclaims (*shahada*, witness or testimony): "There is no god but the God [Allah] and Muhammad is the messenger of God." This acknowledgment of and commitment to Allah and His Prophet is the rather simple means by which a person professes his or her faith and becomes a Muslim, and a testimony that is given throughout the day when the muezzin calls the faithful to prayer. It affirms Islam's absolute monotheism, an unshakable and uncompromising faith in the oneness or unity (*tawhid*) of God. As such, it also serves as a reminder to the faithful that polytheism, the association of anything else with God, is forbidden and is the one unforgivable sin:

God does not forgive anyone for associating something with Him, while He does forgive whomever He wishes to for anything else. Anyone who gives God associates [partners] has invented an awful sin. (4:48)

The second part of the confession of faith is the affirmation of Muhammad as the messenger of God, the last and final prophet, who serves as a model for the Muslim community. Molding individuals into an Islamic society requires activities that recall, reinforce, and realize the word of God and the example of the Prophet. The praxis orientation of Islam is witnessed by the remaining four pillars or duties.

2. *Prayer.* Five times each day, Muslims are called to worship God by the muezzin (caller to prayer) from atop a mosque's minaret:

God is most great (Allahu Akbar), God is most great, God is most great, I witness that there is no god but Allah (the God); I witness that there is no god but Allah. I witness that Muhammad is His messenger. I witness that Muhammad is His messenger. Come to prayer, come to prayer. Come to prosperity, come to prosperity. God is most great. God is most great. There is no god but Allah.

Facing Mecca, the holy city and center of Islam, Muslims, individually or in a group, can perform their prayers (*salat*, or in Persian, *namaz*) wherever they may be—in a mosque (*masjid*, place of prostration), at home, at work, or on the road. Recited when standing in the direction of Mecca, they both recall the revelation of the Quran and reinforce a

sense of belonging to a single worldwide community of believers. Although the times for prayer and the ritual actions were not specified in the Quran, they were established by Muhammad. The times are day-break, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and evening. Ritually, prayer is preceded by ablutions that cleanse the body (hands, mouth, face, and feet) and spirit and bestow the ritual purity necessary for divine worship. The prayers themselves consist of two to four prostrations, depending on the time of day. Each act of worship begins with the declaration, "God is most great," and consists of bows, prostrations, and the recitation of fixed prayers that include the opening verse of the Quran (the *Fatihah*) and other passages from the Quran:

In the name of God, the Merciful and Compassionate. Praise be to God, Lord of the Universe, the Merciful and Compassionate. Ruler on the Day of Judgment. You do we worship and call upon for help. Guide us along the Straight Path, the road of those whom You have favored, those with whom You are not angry, who are not lost. (1:1-7)

At the end of the prayer, the *shahada* is again recited, and the "peace greeting"—"Peace be upon all of you and the mercy and blessings of God"—is repeated twice.

On Friday, the noon prayer is a congregational prayer and should be recited preferably at the official central mosque, designated for the Friday prayer. The congregation lines up in straight rows, side by side, and is led in prayer by its leader (*imam*), who stands in front, facing the niche (*mihrab*) that indicates the direction (*qibla*) of Mecca. A special feature of the Friday prayer is a sermon (*khutba*) preached from a pulpit (*minbar*). The preacher begins with a verse from the Quran and then gives a brief exhortation based on its message. Only men are required to attend the Friday congregational prayer. If women attend, for reasons of modesty due to the prostrations, they stand at the back, often separated by a curtain, or in a side room. Unlike the Sabbath in Judaism and Christianity, Friday was not traditionally a day of rest. However, in many Muslim countries today, it has replaced the Sunday holiday, usually instituted by colonial powers and therefore often regarded as a Western, Christian legacy.

3. *Almsgiving (zakat)*. Just as the performance of the *salat* (prayer) is both an individual and a communal obligation, so payment of the *zakat* instills a sense of communal identity and responsibility. As all Muslims share equally in their obligation to worship God, so they all are duty-bound to attend to the social welfare of their community by redressing economic inequalities through payment of an alms tax or poor tithe. It

is an act both of worship or thanksgiving to God and of service to the community. All adult Muslims who are able to do so are obliged to pay a wealth tax annually. It is a tithe or percentage (usually 2½ percent) of their accumulated wealth and assets, not just their income. This is not regarded as charity since it is not really voluntary but instead is owed, by those who have received their wealth as a trust from God's bounty, to the poor. The Quran (9:60) and Islamic law stipulate that alms are to be used to support the poor, orphans, and widows, to free slaves and debtors, and to assist in the spread of Islam. Although initially collected and then redistributed by the government, payment of the *zakat* later was left to the individual. In recent years, a number of governments (Pakistan, the Sudan, Libya) have asserted the government's right to a *zakat* tax.

4. *The Fast of Ramadan*. Once each year, Islam prescribes a rigorous, month-long fast during the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. From dawn to sunset, all adult Muslims whose health permits are to abstain completely from food, drink, and sexual activity from sunrise to sunset. Ramadan is a time for reflection and spiritual discipline, for expressing gratitude for God's guidance and atoning for past sins, for awareness of human frailty and dependence on God, as well as for remembering and responding to the needs of the poor and hungry. The rigors of the fast of Ramadan are experienced during the long daylight hours of summer when the severe heat in many parts of the Muslim world proves even more taxing for those who must fast while they work. Some relief comes at dusk, when the fast is broken for the day by a light meal (popularly referred to as breakfast). Evening activities contrast with those of the daylight hours as families exchange visits and share a special late evening meal together. In some parts of the Muslim world, there are special foods and sweets that are served only at this time of the year. Many will go to the mosque for the evening prayer, followed by a special prayer recited only during Ramadan. Other special acts of piety, such as the recitation of the entire Quran (one-thirtieth each night of the month) and public recitation of the Quran or Sufi chantings, may be heard throughout the evening. After a short evening's sleep, families rise before sunrise to take their first meal of the day, which must sustain them until sunset. As the end of Ramadan nears (on the twenty-seventh day), Muslims commemorate the "Night of Power" when Muhammad first received God's revelation. The month of Ramadan comes to an end with a great celebration, the Feast of the Breaking of the Fast, *Id al-Fitr*. The spirit and joyousness remind one of the celebration of Christmas. Family members come from near and far to

feast and exchange gifts in a celebration that lasts for three days. In many Muslim countries, it is a national holiday. The meaning of Ramadan is not lost for those who attend mosque and pay the special alms for the poor (alms for the breaking of the fast) required by Islamic law.

5. *Pilgrimage: the Hajj.* Ramadan is followed by the beginning of the pilgrimage season. Every adult Muslim physically and financially able is expected to perform the annual pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Mecca at least once in his or her lifetime. The focus of the pilgrimage is the Kaba, the cube-shaped House of God, in which the sacred black stone is embedded. Muslim tradition teaches that the Kaba was originally built by the prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and his son Ismail. The black stone was given to Abraham by the angel Gabriel and thus is a symbol of God's covenant with Ismail and, by extension, the Muslim community. The Kaba was the object of pilgrimage during pre-Islamic times. Tradition tells us that one of the first things Muhammad did when he marched triumphantly into Mecca was to cleanse the Kaba of the tribal idols that it housed, thus restoring it to the worship of the one true God.

The pilgrimage proper takes place during the twelfth month, Dhu al-Hijja, of the Muslim lunar calendar. As with prayer, the pilgrimage requires ritual purification, symbolized by the wearing of white garments. Men shave their heads, or have a symbolic tuft of hair cut, and don two seamless white sheets. Women may wear simple, national dress; however, many don a long white dress and head covering. Neither jewelry nor perfume is permitted; sexual activity and hunting are prohibited as well. These and other measures underscore the unity and equality of all believers as well as the total attention and devotion required. As the pilgrims near Mecca they shout, "I am here, O Lord, I am here!" As they enter Mecca, they proceed to the Grand Mosque, where the Kaba is located. Moving in a counterclockwise direction, they circle the Kaba seven times. During the following days, a variety of ritual actions or ceremonies take place—praying at the spot where Abraham, the patriarch and father of monotheism, stood; running between Safa and Marwa in commemoration of Hagar's frantic search for water for her son, Ismail; stoning the devil, three stone pillars that symbolize evil. An essential part of the pilgrimage is a visit to the Plain of Arafat, where, from noon to sunset, the pilgrims stand before God in repentance, seeking His forgiveness for themselves and all Muslims throughout the world. It was here, from a hill called the Mount of Mercy, that the Prophet during his Farewell Pilgrimage preached his last sermon or message. Once again, the preacher repeats Muhammad's call for peace and harmony among the believers. Standing together on the Plain of Arafat,

Muslims experience the underlying unity and equality of a worldwide Muslim community that transcends national, racial, economic, and sexual differences.

The pilgrimage ends with the Feast of Sacrifice (*Id al-Adha*), known in Muslim piety as the Great Feast. It commemorates God's command to Abraham to sacrifice his son Ismail (Isaac in Jewish and Christian traditions). The pilgrims ritually reenact Abraham's rejection of Satan's temptations to ignore God's command by again casting stones at the devil, here represented by a pillar. Afterward, they sacrifice animals (sheep, goats, cattle, or camels), as Abraham was finally permitted to substitute a ram for his son. The animal sacrifice also symbolizes that, like Abraham, the pilgrims are willing to sacrifice that which is most important to them. (One needs to recall the importance of these animals as a sign of a family's wealth and as essential for survival.) While some of the meat is consumed, most is supposed to be distributed to the poor and needy. In modern times, with almost 2 million participants in the pilgrimage, Saudi Arabia has had to explore new methods for freezing, preserving, and distributing the vast amount of meat. The Feast of Sacrifice is a worldwide Muslim celebration that lasts for three days, a time for rejoicing, prayer, and visiting with family and friends. At the end of the pilgrimage, many of the faithful visit the mosque and tomb of Muhammad at Medina before returning home. The enormous pride of those who have made the pilgrimage is reflected in a number of popular practices. Many will take the name Hajji, placing it at the beginning of their name. Those who can will return to make the pilgrimage.

In addition to the *hajj*, there is a devotional ritual, the *umra* (the "visitation") or lesser pilgrimage, which Muslims may perform when visiting the holy sites at other times of the year. Those who are on the pilgrimage often perform the *umra* rituals before, during, or after the *hajj*. However, performance of the *umra* does not replace the *hajj* obligation.

The Struggle (Jihad). Jihad, "to strive or struggle" in the way of God, is sometimes referred to as the sixth pillar of Islam, although it has no such official status. In its most general meaning, it refers to the obligation incumbent on all Muslims, as individuals and as a community, to exert themselves to realize God's will, to lead virtuous lives, and to extend the Islamic community through preaching, education, and so on. As discussed earlier, a related meaning is the struggle for or defense of Islam, holy war. Despite the fact that jihad is not supposed to include aggressive warfare, this has occurred, as exemplified by early extremists like the Kharijites and contemporary groups like Egypt's Jihad Organi-

zation (which assassinated Anwar Sadat) as well as Jihad organizations in Lebanon, the Gulf states, and Indonesia.

MUSLIM FAMILY LAW

As the Five Pillars are the core of a Muslim's duty to worship God, family law is central to Islam's social laws. Because of the centrality of the community in Islam and the role of the family as the basic unit of Muslim society, family law enjoyed pride of place in the development of Islamic law as well as in its implementation throughout history. While caliphs and modern Muslim rulers might limit, circumvent, and replace penal or commercial laws, Muslim family law has generally remained in force. Today, as in the past, the subject of women and the family remains an important and extremely sensitive topic in Muslim societies.³⁰

The special status of family law reflects the Quranic concern for the rights of women and the family (the greater part of its legislation concerns these issues) as well as that of the patriarchal society in which the law was elaborated. The traditional family social structure, the roles and responsibilities of its members, and family values may be identified in the law. The Quran introduced substantial reforms affecting the position of women by creating new regulations and modifying customary practice. These reforms and customary practice constitute the substance of classical family law. To understand the significance of Quranic reforms as well as the forces that influenced the development of family law, some appreciation of the social context in pre-Islamic Arabia is necessary.

The extended family had one head or leader, the father or senior male, who controlled and guided the family unit. The family consisted of the father, his wife or wives, unmarried sons and daughters, and married sons with their wives and children, all of whom had specific roles within the family structure. It served as the basic social and economic unit of the tribe within a male-dominated (patriarchal) society. The paramount position of males was reflected in family matters: their unlimited right to marry or divorce at will and an inheritance system that excluded women. A woman was regarded as little more than a possession, first of her father and her family, and subsequently, of her husband and his family.

The status of women and the family in Muslim family law was the product of Arab culture, Quranic reforms, and foreign ideas and values assimilated from conquered peoples. These regulations and practices—organized in Islamic law under the categories of marriage, divorce, and inheritance—have guided Muslim societies and determined attitudes and values throughout the history of Islam.

The centrality of marriage in Islam is captured by the tradition of the Prophet, which says, "There shall be no monkery in Islam." Marriage is incumbent on every Muslim man and woman unless they are financially or physically unable. It is regarded as the norm for all, a safeguard on chastity, and essential to the growth and stability of the family, the basic unit of society. Marriage is regarded as a sacred contract or covenant, but not a sacrament, legalizing intercourse and the procreation of children. It is not simply a legal contract between two individuals, but between two families. Thus, in the traditional practice of arranged marriages, the families or guardians, not the prospective bride and groom, are the primary actors. They identify suitable partners and finalize the marriage contract. The official marriage ceremony is quite simple. It consists of an offer and acceptance by the parties (the representatives of the bride and groom) at a meeting before two witnesses. This is followed later by a family celebration. The preferred marriage is between two Muslims and within the extended family. While a Muslim man can marry a non-Muslim woman (i.e., a Christian or a Jew, "People of the Book") (5:6), Muslim women are prohibited from marrying non-Muslims (5:6).

Islamic law embodies a number of Quranic reforms that significantly enhanced the status of women. Contrary to pre-Islamic Arab customs, the Quran recognized a woman's right to contract her own marriage. In addition, she, not her father or other male relatives as had been the custom, was to receive the dower from her husband (4:4). She became a party to the contract rather than simply an object for sale. The right to keep and maintain her own dowry was a source of self-esteem and wealth in an otherwise male-dominated society. Women's right to own and manage their own property was further enhanced and acknowledged by the Quranic verses of inheritance (4:7, 11–12, 176), which granted inheritance rights to wives, daughters, sisters, and grandmothers of the deceased in a patriarchal society where all rights were traditionally vested solely in male heirs. Similar legal rights would not occur in the West until the nineteenth century.

Although it is found in many religious and cultural traditions, polygamy (or more precisely, polygyny) is most often identified with Islam in the minds of Westerners. In fact, the Quran and Islamic law sought to control and regulate the number of wives rather than give free license. In a society where no limitations existed, Muslims were not told to marry four wives but instead to marry no more than four. The Quran permits a man to marry up to four wives, provided he can support and treat them all equally. Muslims regard this Quranic command (4:3) as strengthening the status of women and the family, for it sought to

ensure the welfare of single women and widows in a society whose male population was diminished by warfare, and to curb unrestricted polygamy: "If you are afraid you shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two or three or four; but if you shall not be able to deal justly [with them] only one."

Islamic law prescribes that co-wives are to be treated equally in terms of support and affection. This includes separate housing (depending on finances, a room, an apartment, or a house) and maintenance. As we shall see, a subsequent verse of the Quran ("You are never able to be fair and just between women even if that is your ardent desire" [4:129]) has been used in modern times by some Muslims to reject the possibility of equal justice among wives and to therefore argue that the Quran preached a monogamous ideal.

The relationship of a husband and wife is viewed as complementary, reflecting their differing characteristics, capacities, and dispositions, and the roles of men and women in the traditional patriarchal family. The primary arena for men is the public sphere; they are to support and protect the family and to deal with the "outside" world, the world beyond the family. Women's primary role is that of wife and mother, managing the household, raising children, supervising their religious and moral training. While both are equally responsible before God to lead virtuous lives, in family matters and in society women are subordinate to men by virtue of their more sheltered lives, protected status, and the broader responsibilities of men in family affairs. Because men were responsible for the economic well-being of all of the women in the extended family, their portion of inheritance was twice that of women. Similarly, because men had more extensive experience in society, in legal affairs the testimony of two women was regarded as equal to that of one man.

Divorce. Alongside the popular images of polygamy, veiling, and seclusion, is that of a man's unilateral right to dismiss his wife simply by declaring, "I divorce you." However, ideally divorce is a last resort, discouraged rather than encouraged in Islam. This attitude is preserved in an often-cited tradition of the Prophet that states that "of all the permitted things, divorce is the most abominable with God."³¹ The Quran counsels arbitration between spouses: "If you fear a split between a man and his wife, send for an arbiter from his family and an arbiter from her family. If both want to be reconciled, God will arrange things between them" (4:35). One of the clearest indications of the negative attitude toward divorce, yet reluctant acceptance of it by jurists as a last resort, occurs in the *Hedaya*, a legal manual, which describes divorce as

a dangerous and disapproved procedure as it dissolves marriage, an institution which involves many circumstances as well of a temporal as a spiritual nature; nor is its propriety at all admitted, but on the ground of urgency of relief from an unsuitable wife.³²

However, the Islamic ideal was often compromised by social realities.

Faced with a situation in which Arab custom enabled a man to divorce at will and on whim while women had no grounds for divorce, the Quran and Islamic law established guidelines for men and rights for women based on considerations of equity and responsibility, values that exemplified the Quranic admonition to husbands who were separated and contemplating divorce to "either retain them [their wives] honorably or release them honorably" (65:2).

Several methods of divorce were introduced to constrain a man's unbridled right to repudiate his wife and to establish a woman's right to a judicial (court) divorce. The most common form of divorce is a man's repudiation (*talaq*) of his wife. The approved forms were: (1) a husband's single pronouncement of divorce ("I divorce you"), to take effect after a three-month mandatory waiting period had elapsed in order to make sure the wife was not pregnant (to determine paternity and maintenance) and to allow time for reconsideration and reconciliation; (2) the pronouncement of the words of divorce three times, once each in three successive months. At any time during the three months, the couple can nullify the divorce by word or action, such as resuming to live together. However, at the end of the three months, the second form of divorce becomes final and irrevocable. The couple may not remarry unless there is an intervening marriage—that is, the wife must have remarried, consummated the marriage, and then divorced. The third form of divorce, more common and problematic, is the husband's pronouncement of the words of divorce three times at once. In this case, the divorce takes effect immediately rather than at the end of a three-month waiting period, bypassing the Quranically mandated waiting period for determining paternity and maintenance obligations and the opportunity for reconciliation. Although this form of divorce is regarded as an unapproved innovation or deviation (*talaq al-bida*, a deviant repudiation) and therefore sinful, it is legally valid. The allowance of this disapproved, though legal, form of divorce is a good example of the extent to which custom was able at times to contradict and circumvent revelation in the development of law:

When you divorce women, divorce them when they have reached their period. Count their periods . . . and fear God your Lord. Do not expel them from their houses. . . . Those are limits set by God. (65:1)

The strong influence of custom is also evident in the more limited divorce rights of women. In pre-Islamic times, Arab women had no divorce rights. In contrast the Quran states, "Women have rights similar to those [men] over them; while men stand a step above them" (2:228). In the elaboration of Islamic law, the *ulama* extended rights to women while retaining the dominant status of men. In contrast to men, women who wished a divorce had to go before a court and had to have grounds for their action. A wife can sue for divorce if her husband has previously delegated a right to divorce in their marriage contract. She may also request a judicial divorce on such grounds as impotence, insanity, desertion, or nonmaintenance. These grounds varied within the law schools; some were more liberal than others in their interpretation.

Historically, divorce rather than polygamy has been the more serious social problem. This situation has been compounded by the fact that many women have been unable to exercise their legal rights because they were unaware of them or because of pressures in a male-dominated society.

Inheritance. Prior to Islam, the rules of inheritance were concerned solely with the strength and solidarity of the male-dominated tribe. Therefore, inheritance was kept within the male line (patrilineal). Women in Arabia, as in many cultures, were excluded from inheritance, which passed in its entirety to the nearest male relative of the deceased, on whom they were totally dependent. However, Quranic reforms in inheritance strengthened the rights of individual family members, especially women. New rules of inheritance were superimposed on existing practices. The Quran gave rights of inheritance to wives, daughters, sisters, and grandmothers of the deceased, all of whom had previously had no rights. These new "Quranic heirs" received a fixed share from the estate before the inheritance passed to the nearest male relative of the deceased. Only after these Quranic claims were satisfied was the residue of the estate awarded to the senior male.

Custom and Law

VEILING AND SECLUSION

Nothing illustrates more the interaction of Quranic prescription and customary practice than the development of the veiling (*hijab*, *burqa*, or *chador*) and seclusion (*pardah*, harem) of women in early Islam. Both are customs assimilated from the conquered Persian and Byzantine societies and viewed as appropriate expressions of Quranic norms and



Completed in 691, the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem is the earliest remaining Islamic monument.

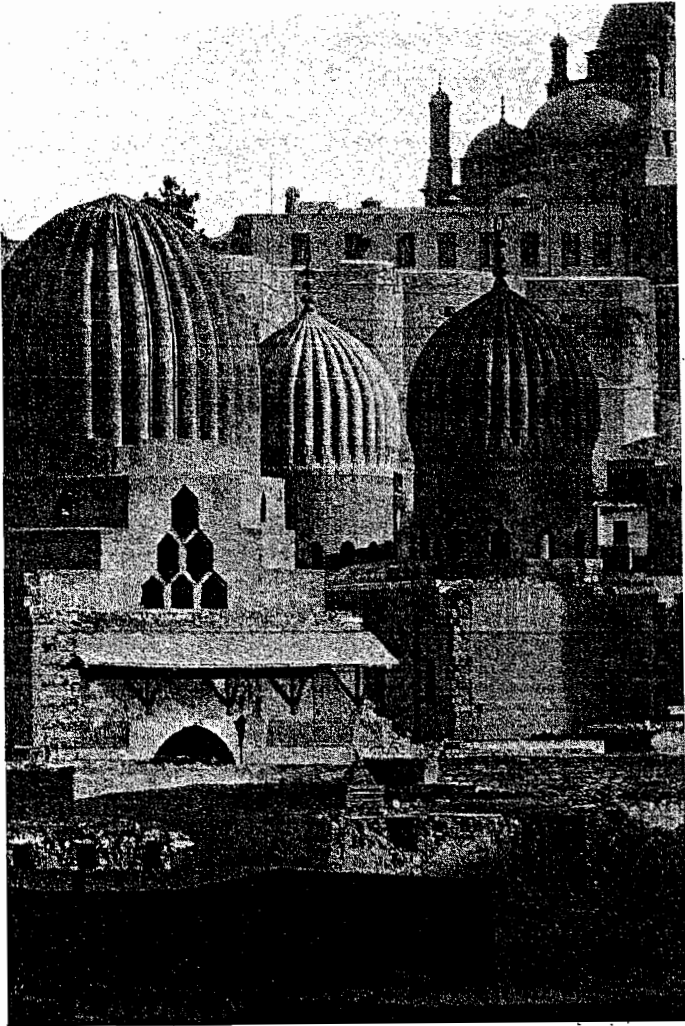
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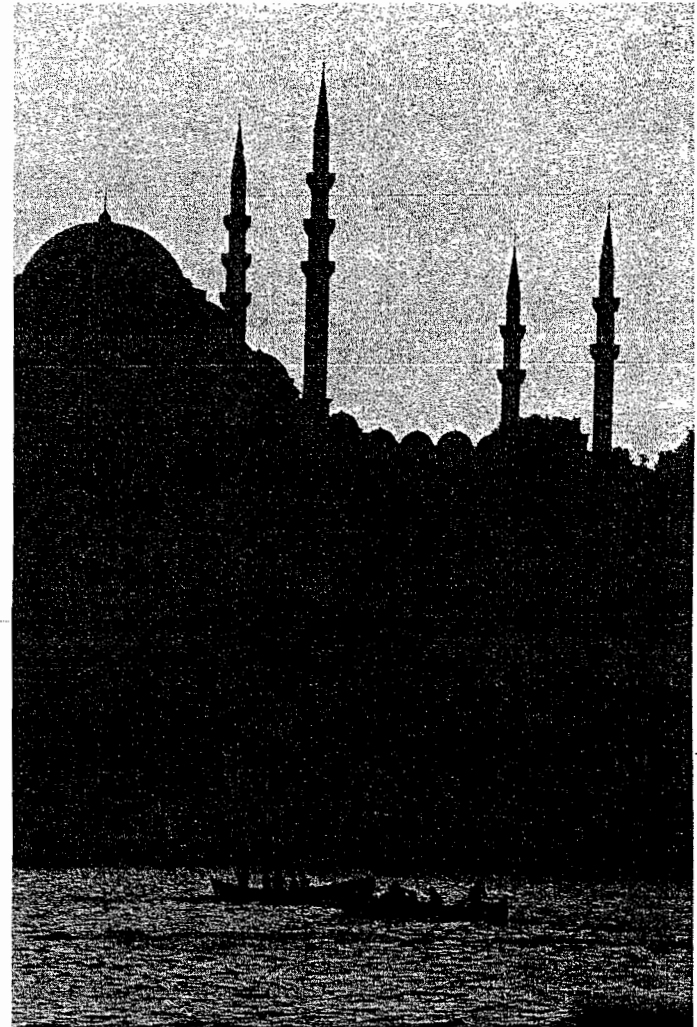
Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, was the fourth caliph (successor) of Sunni Islam and the first Imam (leader) of Shii Islam. The Shrine of Imam Ali, Kufa, Iraq, remains one of the most important religious centers in the Islamic world. (Courtesy of Mehmet Biber)



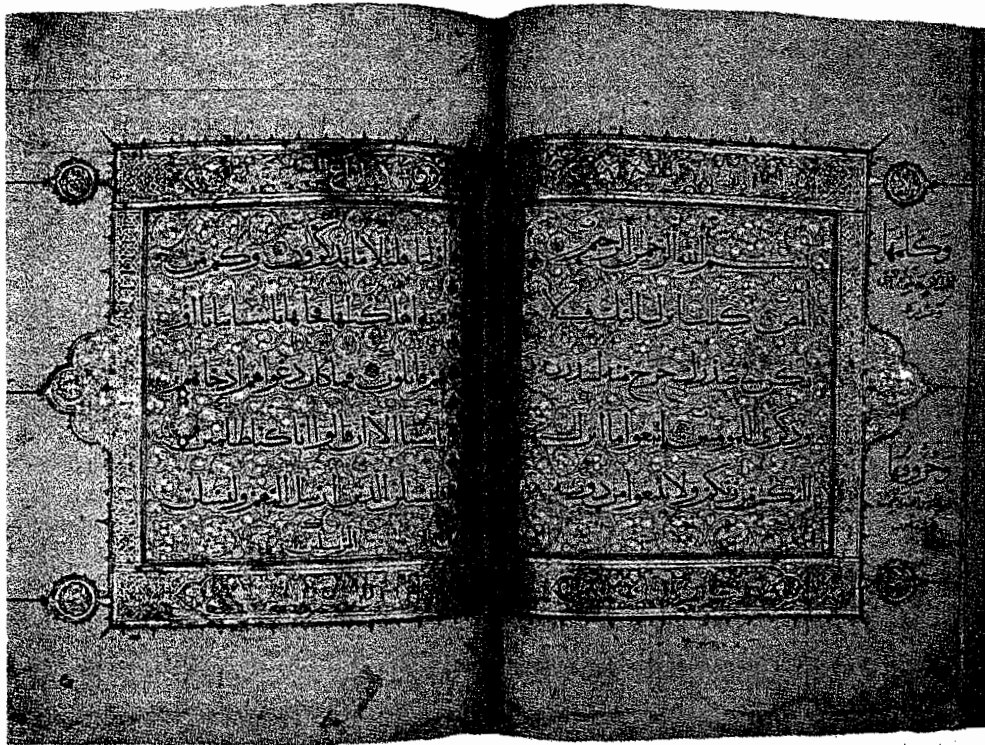
The "Golden Mosque," in Baghdad, Iraq, reflects the grandeur of mosque architecture as found throughout the Islamic world. (Courtesy of ARAMCO World)



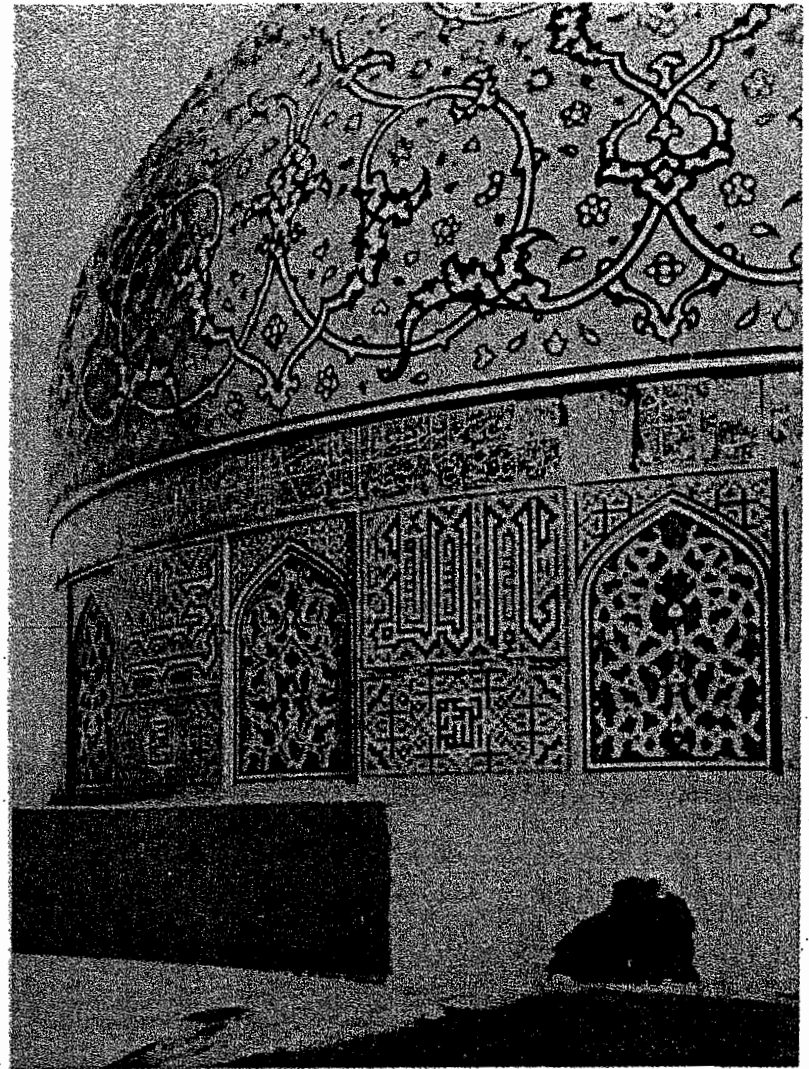
Although according to Islamic belief the grave for Muslims is to be simple, the burial sites for the wealthy and powerful often were marked by elaborate architectural masterpieces, such as Sultan Barquq's Mausoleum and Mosque in Cairo, Egypt. (Courtesy of ARAMCO World)



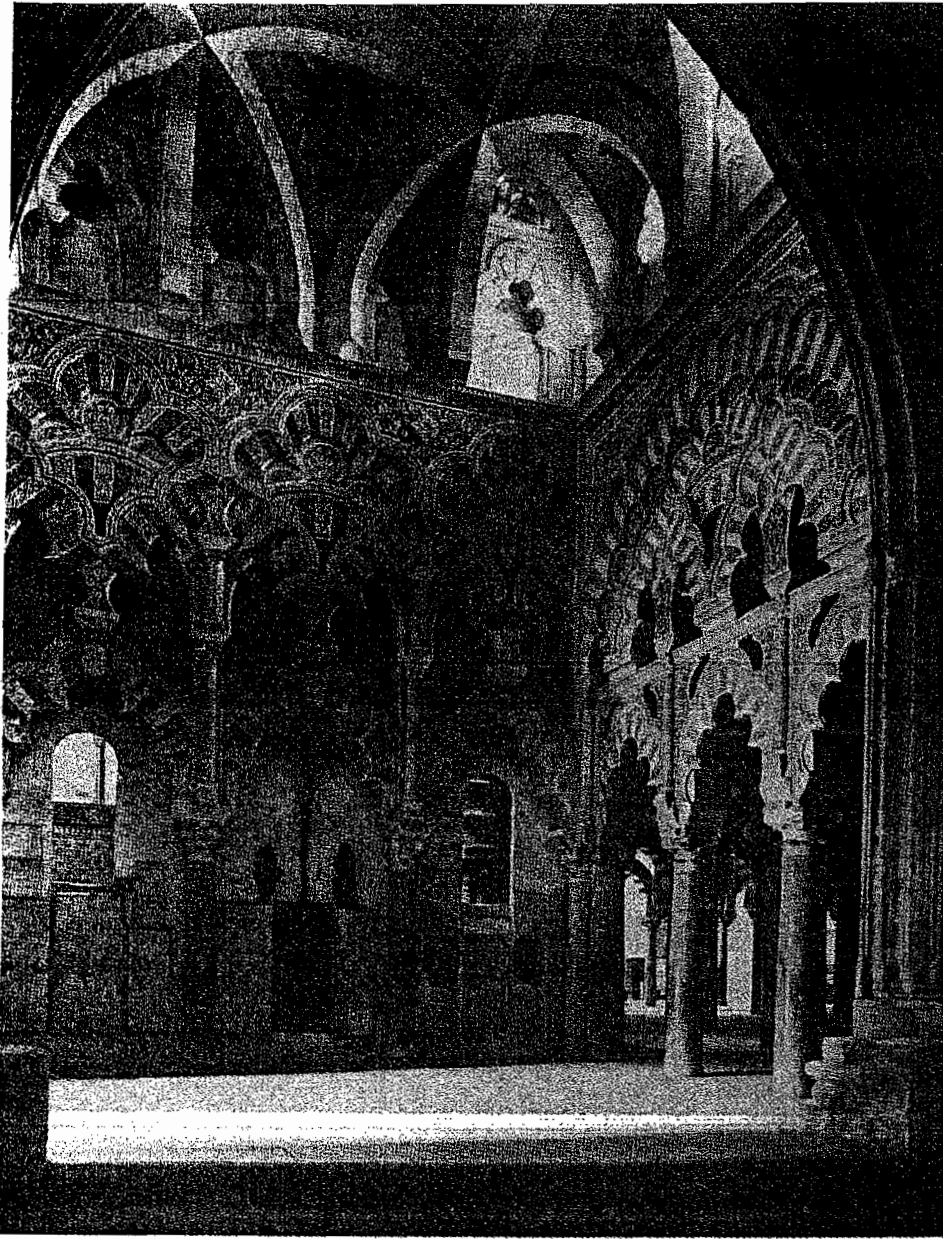
The mosque of Süleyman the Magnificent dominates the Istanbul skyline. Completed in 1557, the vast mosque and its surrounding complex of buildings epitomize the artistic creativity of the Ottoman period. (Courtesy of Walter B. Denny)



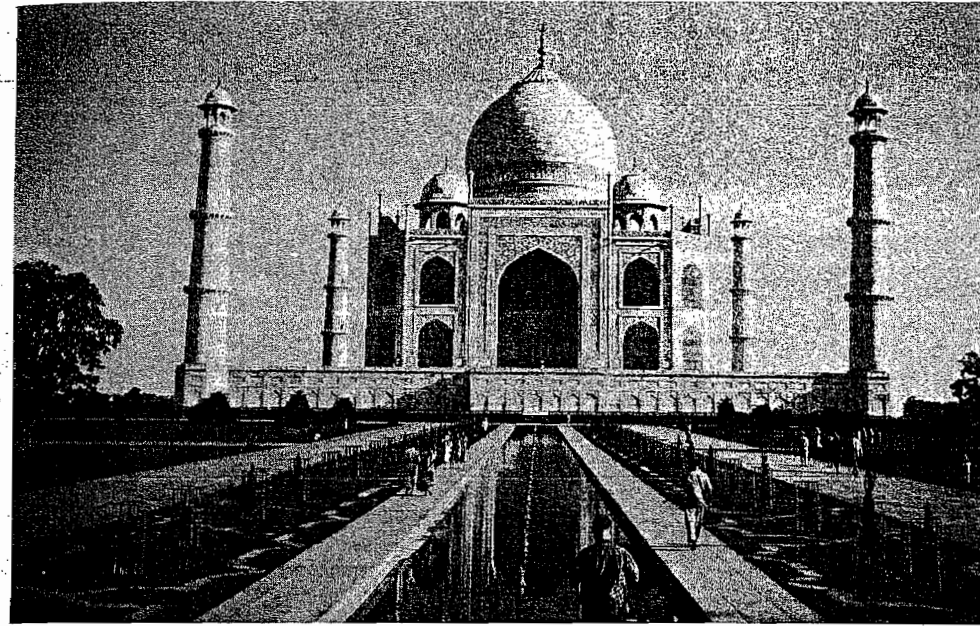
Calligraphy and text illumination are major Islamic art forms. Opening of Sura VII of the Quran. Arabic Ms. OR., 1401, ff.116v-117r, Egyptian, fourteenth century. (Courtesy of The British Library)



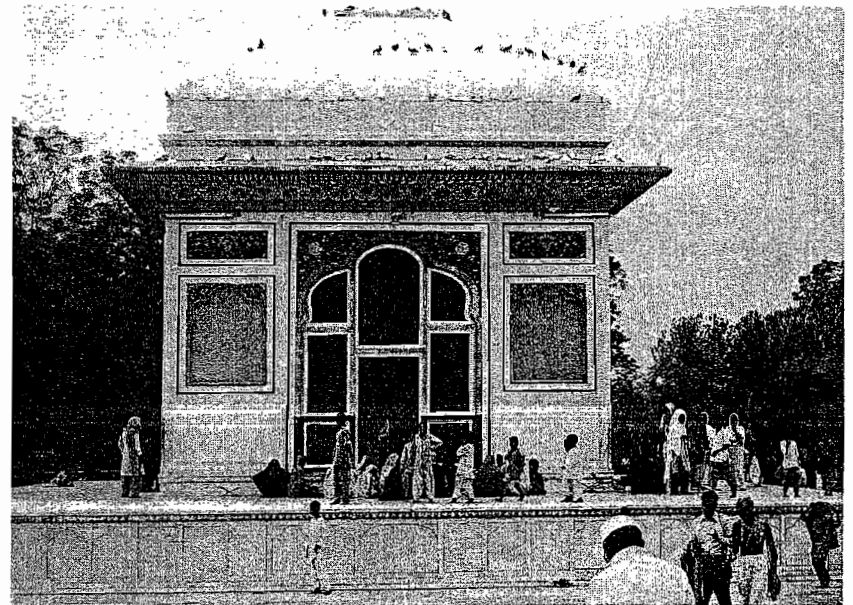
Dome of the Mosque of Shaykh Lutfallah, Isfahan, Iran, built during the Safavid period when Shii Islam was established as the state religion and a major source of Iranian identity and culture. (Courtesy of Islamic Art Archive, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor)



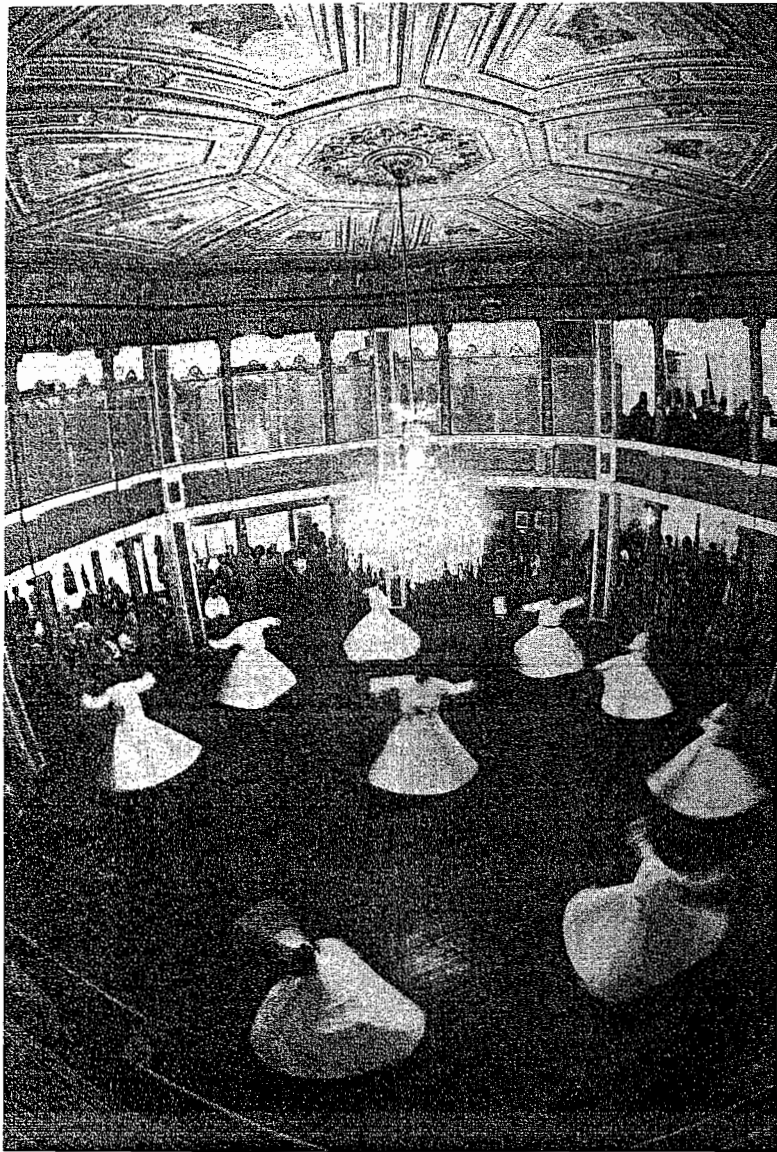
The Great Mosque at Cordoba. One of the few remaining religious monuments commemorating Muslim rule in Spain and the presence of Islam in the Iberian Peninsula from the eighth to the fifteenth centuries. A major center of culture and civilization, Spain served as an intermediary in the transmission of Arabic science and philosophy to the West.



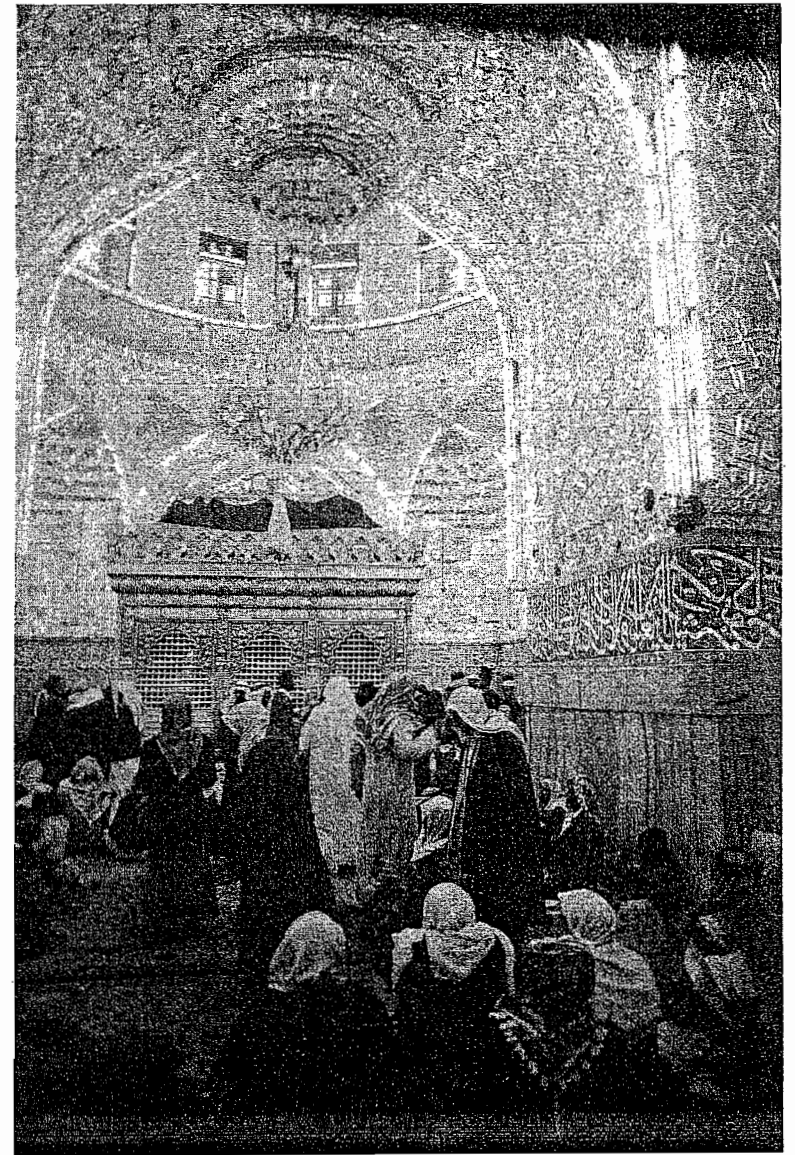
Built during the Mughal period by Shah Jahan in memory of his wife Mumtaz Mahal, the Taj Mahal in Agra, India, is one of the masterpieces of Islamic art as well as one of the seven wonders of the world. (Courtesy of Walter B. Denny)



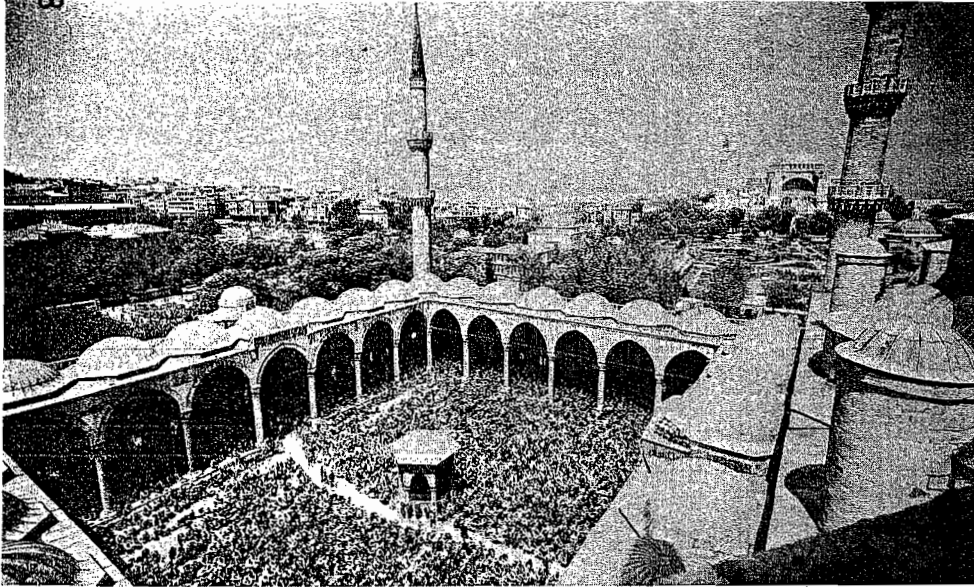
Islam spread throughout much of the Muslim world due to the efforts of Muslim mystics. Shrines, such as the Mian Mir Sufi Shrine in Lahore, Pakistan, serve as centers of pilgrimage for the disciples of great Sufi masters.



The mystics of Islam used music and dance to “remember” (*dhikr*) or experience the presence of God. Perhaps the most famous example is that of the whirling dervishes, disciples of the great Sufi master Jalal al-Din Rumi, whose dance imitated the order of the universe. (Courtesy of Mehmet Biber)



The martyrdom of Husayn (grandson of the Prophet Muhammad) at Karbala is a central religious paradigm, ritually reenacted annually in Shii Islam. His shrine at Karbala, Iraq, is a major center for pilgrimage. (Courtesy of Mehmet Biber)



Once each week Muslims come together for the Friday congregational prayer as seen here at the Blue Mosque, Istanbul, Turkey. (Courtesy of Mehmet Biber)



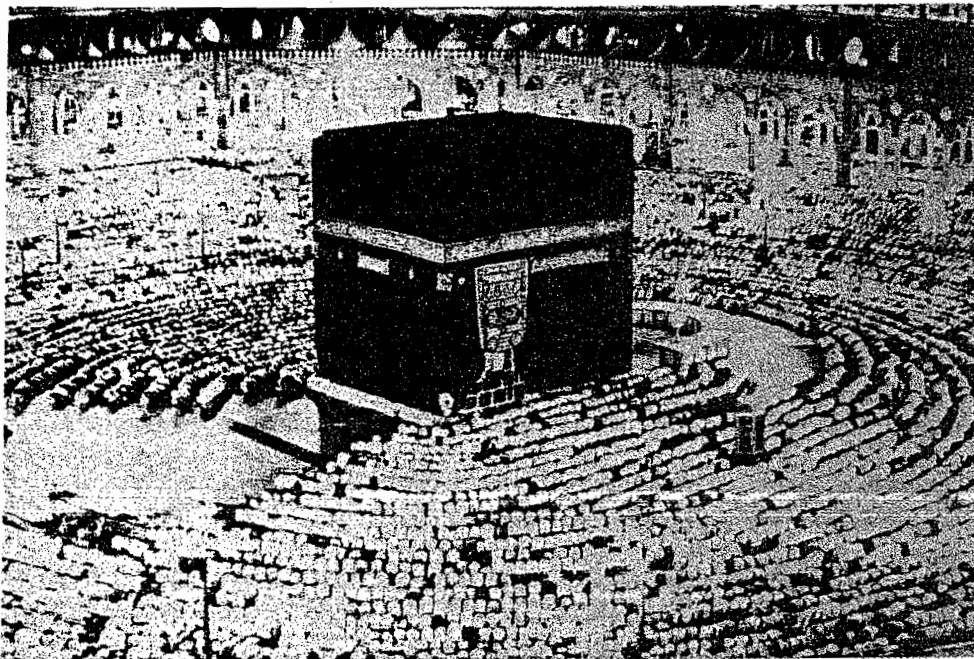
Women praying in mosque. Men and women are equally responsible to worship and obey God. However, women have tended to pray at home. Today, in many parts of the Muslim world, women are seen in greater numbers worshipping at the mosque. (Courtesy of Mehmet Biber)



Wherever Muslims are, as individuals or in a group, they face Mecca and prostrate before God to perform their daily prayer or worship (*salat*).



Five times each day the muezzin calls Muslims throughout the world to worship God. (Courtesy of ARAMCO World)



The Kaba, believed by Muslims to have been built originally by the Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and his son Ismail, has been a focal point of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca since the days of the Prophet Muhammad. (Courtesy of the Middle East Institute)

values. The Quran does not stipulate veiling or seclusion. On the contrary, it tends to emphasize the participation and religious responsibility of both men and women in society. However, the Quran does say that the wives of the Prophet should speak to men from behind a partition and admonishes women to dress modestly:

And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and charms except what [normally] appears of them; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and display their beauty only to their husbands, their fathers. (24:31)

It should be noted that in the previous verse, modesty is enjoined for men as well: "Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and be modest (24:30).

The extent to which foreign practices were adopted and legitimated by Quranic interpretation may be seen in the exegesis of al-Baydawi, a thirteenth-century Persian Muslim and one of the most renowned Quranic scholars, who wrote regarding this verse of the Quran:

Indeed the whole of the body is to be regarded as pudental and no part of her may lawfully be seen by anyone but her husband or close kin, except in case of need, as when she is undergoing medical treatment or giving evidence.³³

Veiling and seclusion had as their original intent the protection, honor, and distinction of women. They were adopted by upper-class urban women who lived in great palaces and courts and enjoyed considerable mobility and opportunity to participate in the activities within their environment. Village and rural women were slower to adopt these practices, as they interfered with their ability to work in the fields. Over the centuries, as the segregation of women in the home spread to every stratum of society, it had unforeseen and deleterious effects. Poorer women were confined to small houses with limited social contacts. They were effectively barred from community life. Since the mosque served as the center of community life, to the extent that women ceased to worship publicly in the mosque, they were cut off from social and educational activities. The negative effects of this process are attested to in modern times by the Egyptian religious scholar Muhammad al-Ghazali: "Ninety percent of our women do not pray at all, nor do they know of the other duties of Islam any more than their names."³⁴

To the extent that tribal customs prevailed in the development of Islamic law and in Muslim practice, both the letter and the spirit of

Quranic reforms were weakened or subverted by practices such as the *talaq al-bida*. Similarly, despite Quranic passages that talk about the rights of women and counsel that they be treated justly and equitably, regulations were enacted such as the "house of obedience," which requires that a woman obtain her husband's permission to leave the house. If she fails to do so, he may ask the police to forcibly return her and may confine her until she becomes more obedient.

The force of custom can also be seen in the ways in which social customs often contradicted the precepts of Islamic law. Despite a woman's Quranic and legal right to contract her marriage and receive the dower, marriage was often simply arranged by the bride's father and the dower functioned as a bride price given to her family. Thus, she remained the object of sale rather than the subject of a contractual agreement. Women's inheritance rights were also often ignored. Given the social structure of the family, awarding married daughters their rightful share in their father's estate was often regarded as giving wealth to another, her husband's family. Finally, the pressures of a strong patriarchal society often militated against women exercising their legal right to divorce. As a result, in practice, men could still legally divorce at will and for any reason (a wife's sickness, failure to produce a son), free from legal, though not moral, sanction.

Historically, although the Sharia technically was the sole law and a ruler's source of legitimacy, in fact Islamic empires and states had two complementary legal systems—Sharia courts, which were increasingly restricted to family law and the handling of religious endowments, and Grievance courts, which dealt with public law (criminal, land, and commercial regulations). While the Sharia remained an essential and integral part of Islamic government, it was only part of a legal system in which the ruler was able to exercise his authority and influence through his power to restrict the scope and jurisdiction of Sharia courts, appoint and fire its judges, issue his own ordinances, and guide his courts. The Sharia set out the law to be followed, but it did not provide constitutional or (independent) judicial restraints. Its ideal nature was reflected in a law that presumed a good Muslim ruler. When faced with the question of what to do about a tyrant, the majority (Sunni) position accepted obedience to the ruler rather than the disorder of civil strife, provided the ruler recognized the supremacy of the Sharia. Acknowledgment by the ruler that the Sharia was the state's official law preserved both the unity and the Islamic character or framework of the community. The supremacy of Islamic law as the eternally valid expression of the straight path of Islam for state and society prevailed

both as an ideal and in the practice of official government recognition.

Popular Religion

Sufism: The Mystic Path of Love

Alongside the exterior path of law (*sharia*) is the interior path or way (*tariqa*) of Sufi mysticism, a major popular religious movement within Sunni and Shii Islam. While the Sharia provided the exoteric way of duties and rights to order the life of the individual and community, Sufism offered an esoteric path or spiritual discipline, a method by which the Sufi sought not only to follow but to know God. Like other mystical movements in Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, the Sufi path is a way of purification (*tasawwuf*), a discipline of mind and body whose goal is to directly experience the ultimate reality. In later generations, Sufism swept across the Islamic world as Sufis became the great missionaries and popular preachers of Islam in Asia and Africa.

While the traditional Islamic way of life was expressed officially and formally in Islamic law, there developed within the Islamic community individuals for whom mere following or obedience to the will of God was not totally satisfying. Reacting with disdain and dismay to the worldly seductions of imperial Islam, they were motivated by a desire to return to what they regarded as the purity and simplicity of the Prophet's time and driven by a deep devotional love of God that culminated in a quest for a direct, personal experience of the presence of God in this life. These men and women pursued an ascetic lifestyle that emphasized detachment from the material world, which, they believed, distracted Muslims from God, repentance for sins, fear of God, and the Last Judgment. Many took to wearing simple, coarse woolen garments; their detachment from material concerns earned them the name *faqir* or, in Persian, *darwish* (poor or mendicant). Dedicated to a life of prayer and fasting, they meditated on the words of the Quran, seeking deeper or hidden guidance, and scrupulously gathered and imitated the example of the Prophet, strongly motivated by fear of God and His judgment on the Last Day.

Many of the early Sufis were critics and opponents of the Umayyads, among those early *ulama* (*hadith* scholars, jurists, and theologians) who sought to check Umayyad extravagances and refocus the vision and goals of the community. Hasan al-Basri (643–728), an eminent scholar, typifies the ascetic reaction to what they regarded as the decadence of imperial Islam:

The lower (material) world is a house whose inmates labor for loss, and only abstention from it makes one happy in it. He who befriends it in desire and love for it will be rendered wretched by it, and his portion with God will be laid waste. . . . For this world has neither worth nor weight with God, so slight it is.³⁵

The early emphasis on ascetic detachment (worldly renunciation) and meditation was complemented by the contribution of Rabia al-Adawiyya (d. 801), who fused asceticism with an undying devotional love of God. Her joining of the ascetic with the ecstatic permanently influenced the nature and future development of Sufism. An attractive and desirable woman, Rabia declined offers of marriage, not willing to permit anyone or anything to distract her from dedication and total commitment to God. She attracted a circle of followers for whom she served as an example and a guide. Perhaps nothing captures better the selfless devotion she espoused than the following words attributed to her:

O my Lord, if I worship Thee from fear of Hell, burn me in hell, and if I worship Thee in hope of Paradise, exclude me thence, but if I worship Thee for Thine own sake, then withhold not from me Thine Eternal Beauty.³⁶

The joining of devotionalism with asceticism transformed Sufism from its relatively limited elite base into a movement that attracted and embraced all strata of society. Throughout the ninth and tenth centuries, Sufism grew in Arabia, Egypt, Syria, and Iraq. Though its origins and sources (Sufi interpretation of the Quran and life of the Prophet) were clearly Islamic, outside influences were absorbed from the Christian hermits of Egypt and Lebanon, Buddhist monasticism in Afghanistan, Hindu devotionalism, and Neoplatonism. Mystics like al-Muhasibi of Baghdad (d. 857) Dhu al-Nun of Egypt (d. 859), Junayd of Baghdad (d. 910), and the Persians Abu Yazid al-Bistami (d. 874) and Mansur al-Hallaj (d. 922) made major contributions to the formation of the Sufi way. Their lives and teachings provided the core of beliefs and practices on which later generations would build. They represented a range of mystical doctrines from the "sober" to the "intoxicated," from the doctrinally safe followers of the law and a path of selfless love and service of God to ecstatic rebels like Abu Yazid and al-Hallaj, whose experience of God as indwelling in their souls moved them to actions and statements that scandalized many and drew the ire of the *ulama*. Abu Yazid's consciousness of the transience of the material world and the inner presence of God led him to declare, "Glory to me. How great is my majesty!" Equally blasphemous to orthodox ears was al-Hallaj's claim, "I am the Truth," for which he was crucified.

As Sufism spread in Muslim societies, becoming a mass movement, the gap widened between the Sufi movement and many of the *ulama*, who were often seen by Sufis as co-opted by power, tolerating and supporting the sociopolitical abuses and excesses of the government. As a religious establishment, the *ulama* felt Sufism challenged their authority and prerogatives. Sufis claimed their own authority and guides. They often rejected as religious formalism the official, legal-moral Islam of the *ulama*, seeking to go beyond the letter of the law to its spirit. Sufism claimed to go back beyond religious forms, institutions, and laws to the divine source itself. While some members of the *ulama* were Sufis, the majority dismissed Sufi doctrine and practice as heretical, as an unwarranted deviation or innovation from the orthodox consensus of the community. Deep-seated suspicions and hostility led to persecution and even executions, as in the martyrdom of al-Hallaj.

ABU HAMID AL-GHAZALI: RECONCILER AND REVIVALIST

The eleventh and twelfth centuries were a particularly turbulent time in Muslim history. The universal caliphate had disintegrated into a system of decentralized and competing states whose only unity was the symbolic, though powerless, Abbasid caliph in Baghdad. The Ismaili missionary propagandists were actively undermining the Sunni consensus. Muslim philosophers, deeply indebted to Hellenism and Neoplatonism, were offering alternative, and sometimes competing, answers to philosophical and theological questions that often strained or tested the relationship between reason and faith. Sufism had become a mass movement with a strong emotional component and an eclectic propensity to accept superstitious practices. Much of what was taking place seemed out of the reach and control of the *ulama*, many of whom felt that these movements threatened their status and authority in the community. It was the genius and accomplishment of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058–1111) to address all these issues. Amid the turmoil, al-Ghazali emerged, as had al-Shafii centuries earlier, to save the day by providing the needed religious synthesis. His reputed success may be measured by his popular designation as a great reviver (*mujaddid*) of Islam.

Born and raised in Iran, al-Ghazali received the best Islamic education available in his time. After studying at the mosque school in his village Tus, near modern-day Mashhad, he was trained at Nishapur by the most prominent theologian of the time, al-Juwayni. He mastered law, theology, and philosophy. At a relatively young age, he was appointed in 1091 to the faculty of the Nizamiyya, a theological institute in Baghdad. There, in a series of books, he responded to the challenges posed by the Ismailis and the philosophers. He wrote *The Incoherence of*

the *Philosophers*, in which he refuted those aspects of the philosophy of Avicenna (d. 1037) that he found unacceptable. In particular, he maintained that while reason was most effective in mathematics and logic, its application to theological and metaphysical truths merely led to confusion and threatened the fabric of faith. Al-Ghazali's teaching and writings brought him fame and recognition. Yet, at the peak of his success, he had a spiritual crisis that was to change his life. The brilliant lecturer suddenly found himself unable to speak. Inexplicably, he deteriorated physically and psychologically. Despite his theological knowledge and extraordinary achievements, he felt lost:

When I considered the circumstances, I saw I was deeply involved in affairs, and that the best of my activities, my teaching, was concerned with branches of knowledge which were unimportant and worthless. I also examined my motive in teaching and saw that it was not sincere desire to serve God but that I wanted an influential position and widespread recognition. I was in no doubt that I stood on an eroding sandbank, and in imminent danger of hell-fire if I did not busy myself with mending my ways. . . . Worldly desires were trying to keep me chained where I was, while the herald of faith was summoning, "To the road! To the road! Little of life is left, and before you is a long journey. Your intellectual and practical involvements are hypocrisy and delusion. If you do not prepare for the future life now, when will you prepare; if you do not sever your attachments now, when will you sever them?"³⁷

Desperate, al-Ghazali resigned his position, left his home and family, and withdrew to Syria, where he studied and practiced Sufism:

I turned to the way of the mystics. . . . [I] obtained a thorough intellectual understanding of their principles. Then I realized that what is most distinctive of them can be obtained only by personal experience ["taste"-*dhawq*], ecstasy and a change of character. . . . I saw clearly that the mystics were men of personal experience not of words, and that I had gone as far as possible by way of study and intellectual application, so that only personal experience and walking in the mystic way were left.³⁸

For many years, al-Ghazali studied and practiced Sufism, traveling, after his initial stay in Syria, to Sufi centers in Palestine and Arabia. During this period, he wrote what many regard as his greatest work, *The Revivification of the Religious Sciences*, his great synthesis of law, theology, and mysticism. Law and theology were presented in terms which the *ulama* could accept, but these disciplines were grounded in direct religious experience and interior devotion. Rationalism was tempered by Sufism's emphasis on religious experience and love of God. It proved to be a brilliant tour de force, reassuring the *ulama* about the orthodoxy of Sufism and countering the rationalism of the philosophers.

In both his life and his work, al-Ghazali represented the intellectual and spiritual currents of his times. At the end, he had achieved an integration and religious synthesis that earned him a place as one of Islam's great scholars and the title, "Renewer of Islam," a designation based on the popular belief that in each century an individual (*mujaddid*) will come to restore and revitalize the Muslim community, to renew (*tajdid*) Islam by returning Muslims to the straight path.³⁹ Despite continued differences of opinion between the Sufis and many of the *ulama*, al-Ghazali had secured a place for Sufism within the life of the community.

SUFI ORDERS

The twelfth century proved to be an important turning point both for al-Ghazali's legitimation of Sufism and because of the formation of the first great Sufi orders. In the last years of his life, al-Ghazali had established one of the first Sufi centers or compounds (*zawiyya*), where followers gathered to live and be trained by their spiritual guide. As Sufism became a mass movement, attracting people of all social classes and educational backgrounds, similar centers sprang up and multiplied. Sufism began to be transformed from loose, voluntary associations into organized brotherhoods or religious orders (*tariqa*) of mendicants with their own distinctive institutions. Prior to this time, Sufism had tended to be concentrated in urban areas among religious elites who met at mosques or in private homes. Now the spiritual family was organized more formally as a community. By the thirteenth century, Sufi orders had created international networks of centers that transformed Sufism into a popular mass movement whose preachers were the great missionaries of Islam.

Organizationally, Sufi orders built on the already established relationship of master (*shaykh*, or Persian, *pir*) and student or disciple. Sufi masters drew their authority from their illustrious predecessors. As the authority of traditions was based on a system of links dating back to the Prophet, so too a similar system of linkages of pious predecessors was established going all the way back to Muhammad. Spiritual pedigree or lineage was the source of a master's religious authority, teachings, and practices. Because of his piety, reputation for sanctity, and often miraculous powers, the master was viewed as especially near to God, a friend of God. He served as a spiritual guide and a model to be emulated. His followers wished to be near him both to benefit from his teaching, advice, and example as well as to receive his blessing, the product of his spiritual power. Over time the teachings of masters were passed on through their disciples to future generations.

Sufi centers served as the spiritual, social, and cultural center of the community. They consisted of a collection or compound of buildings, which might include the residence of the shaykh and his family, a separate room for recollection, living quarters for his disciples, a mosque, kitchen, hospice for visitors, and school. The focal point was the master's residence. The shaykh would lead prayers, instruct and train, guide and advise individuals, and oversee communal life. Membership was of two kinds: full-time professed members and associate or affiliated members. Professed disciples were those who, after a period of training, were initiated into the order. This ceremony included investiture with the distinctive garb and cap of the order, which symbolized obedience to the rule of the order. The initiate swore an oath of allegiance to his shaykh and clasped his hand, receiving his blessing. Disciples lived nearby in the center, devoting themselves to study, spiritual exercises, and the upkeep and activities of the center. These included a soup kitchen to feed the poor and hungry, care for the sick, a hospice for visitors (travelers, pilgrims, other Sufis), and religious education. Centers were often established and subsidized by pious endowments that permitted the master and his disciples to pursue their spiritual path, free from secular employment and concerns. A large number, often the majority, of members had an associate status, somewhat like "third-order" members of Christian religious orders. These lay associates "lived in the world," engaged in the everyday activities of working and raising families. However, they were also subject to the authority of the shaykh, sought his guidance and advice, participated in community services, and performed the important task of financially supporting the center and its activities. Often associate members formed neighborhoods or even villages around Sufi centers.

Sufi orders developed their own forms of monastic rule that detailed the regulations by which the dervishes or *faqirs* were to live. These varied from order to order and from one geographic area to another. In one of the earliest set of rules, we find regulations common to many orders, such as:

- 1) The disciple should keep his garments clean and be always in a state of ritual purity. . . . 2) One should not sit in a holy place gossiping. . . .
- 5) At dawn a disciple should pray for forgiveness. . . . 6) Then, in the early morning, he should read the Koran, abstaining from talk until sunrise. . . . 7) Between the two evening prayers, he should be occupied with his recollection [*dhikr*] and the special litany [*wird*] which is given to him by his master. . . . 8) The Sufi should welcome the poor and needy, and look after them.⁴⁰

53 Under the tutelage of a shaykh, disciples progressed along the Sufi path of virtue and spiritual knowledge. The master assigned them

prayers to recite and meditate on, monitored and evaluated their progress, and, finally, authenticated their spiritual experiences and insights. He designated the more advanced as *khalifa*, successors. A *khalifa* might be designated to succeed the shaykh after his death or he might be sent to head one of the centers of the order. The spiritual power of the shaykh was passed on or inherited by his successor. While some orders retained the practice of selection or election of the shaykh's successor, many opted for hereditary succession. Leadership of the order often passed to a son or relative of the shaykh, keeping control of the order in family hands.

The focal point of a Sufi order was the domed tomb of its founder, who was venerated as a saint (*wali*, friend) of God. The tomb became a center for pilgrimage as visitors came to appeal to the saint for assistance. His spiritual power and intercession before God could be invoked for a safe pregnancy, success in exams, or a prosperous business, and offerings were made in thanksgiving for answered prayers. Once each year, a great celebration was held to commemorate the anniversary of his birth or death. Pilgrims would come from near and far for several days of rituals, songs or spiritual concerts, and celebration.

THE WAY: DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE

At the heart of Sufism is the belief that one's self must die, that is, one must undergo annihilation (*fana*) of the lower, ego-centered self in order to abide or rest (*baqa*) in God. Renunciation of that which is impermanent and transient, the phenomenal world, is a prerequisite to realization of the divine that indwells in all human beings. The goal of the Sufi is direct knowledge or personal religious experience of God's presence. This mystical knowledge or understanding is reached by means of a series of stages and states. The shaykh leads the disciple through successive stages—renunciation, purification, and insight. Along the way, God rewards and encourages the disciple by granting certain religious experiences or psychological states.

In order to obtain their goal, the Sufis adapted many practices, some of which were foreign, in the eyes of the *ulama*, to early Islamic values. One of the fundamental tensions between the *ulama* and the Sufis was the extent to which the religious brotherhood offered an alternative sense of community, and the shaykh constituted a threat to the religious authority of the *ulama*. Among the predominant Sufi practices employed to break attachment to the material world and rediscover or become aware of God's presence were: (1) Poverty, fasting, silence, celibacy, and other disciplines of mind and body whose object was the letting go of all attachment to and awareness of the self and the phenomenal world. Only then could the Sufi become aware of the divine,

which was always present but ordinarily hidden from view by a preoccupation with the material world. While some orders practiced celibacy, many did not. The interpretation and practice of poverty varied as well. Each order and master had a distinctive approach. (2) Remembrance or recollection of God through a rhythmic, repetitive invocation of God's name(s), accompanied by breathing exercises, to focus consciousness on God and place the devotee in His presence. By themselves or sitting with their shaykh in community worship, Sufis repeated or recalled God's name hundreds and thousands of times for hours during the day or throughout the night. Another form of recollection is the recitation of a litany of God's names or attributes, often counted on a string of prayer beads, similar to a rosary. To become absorbed in recitation is to forget about worldly attachments and rest in God. (3) The use of music and song, spiritual concerts of devotional poems, as well as dance or bodily movements to induce or trigger ecstatic states in which the devotee could experience the presence of God or union with God. Though orthodoxy remained critical and Sufis like al-Ghazali warned of their dangers, music and dance proved especially popular among the people as a quick way to become intoxicated on God, to experience deep feelings of love for God and to feel His nearness. Groups of Sufis would gather to sing God's praises and loving hymns to Muhammad, or other great leaders like Ali, begging their intercession and assistance. The most famous example of the use of dance is that of the whirling dervishes, followers of the order founded by Jalal al-Din Rumi. Their whirling dance imitated the order of the universe. As dervishes spun in a circle around their shaykh, so did the planets revolve around the sun, the axis or center of the universe. (4) Veneration of Muhammad and Sufi saints as intermediaries between God and people. Muhammad had emphasized that he was only a human being and not a miracle worker. Despite this emphasis in official Islamic belief, the role of the Prophet as a model for Muslim life had early led to extravagant stories about Muhammad's life and extraordinary powers. This tendency became pronounced in Sufi piety. Muhammad was viewed as the link between God and man. The most extraordinary powers were attributed to him, given his closeness to God. These wonders were extended to Sufi saints, the friends or protégés of God. Miraculous powers (curing the sick, bilocation, reading minds, multiplication of food) and stories of saintly perfection abounded. Sufi theory organized the saints into a hierarchy, at the apex of which stood Muhammad, the pole of the universe, supervising the world. Shaykhs were venerated during their lifetime; they were honored, loved, and feared because of their miraculous powers. After their death, their burial sites or mausoleums became religious sanctuaries, objects of pilgrimage

and of petitions for success in this life as well as the next, for worldly gains as well as eternal life.

The very characteristics that accounted for the strength of Sufism and its effectiveness and success as a popular religious force, contributed to its degeneration. That same flexibility, tolerance, and eclecticism that had enabled Islam to spread and incorporate local customs and practices from Africa to Southeast Asia and attract many converts permitted the most bizarre and antinomian practices to enter and run wild. Sufism's healthy concern about legalism and ritual formalism gave way to the rejection by many of official religious observances and laws. Sacred song and dance resulted not in spiritual intoxication but in drunkenness and sensuality. Awareness of the divine presence in all of creation became a justification for the assimilation of saint worship, fetishism, and all manner of magical and superstitious practices. A movement that had emphasized poverty and asceticism became weighed down by shaykhs, whose playing on the credulity of poor and ignorant followers rather than their sanctity won them followers and financial fortune. The *faqir* (mystic/mendicant) became the faker, the spiritual heads of mendicant orders were transformed into dispensers of amulets, becoming wealthy feudal landlords. Emphasis on the limitations of reason and the need for direct knowledge to experience the divine became an excuse for the rejection of all Islamic learning and religious authority and the growth of superstition and fatalism. The high ground of sound and sober mysticism sank under the weight of ignorance and superstition, contributing significantly to the decline and decay of the Islamic community. The corrosive role of Sufi excesses came to be so much regarded as a primary cause of Muslim decline that from the seventeenth century onward, Sufism was subject to suppression and reform by premodern and modern Islamic revivalist and reformist movements.

Shii Religious Practices

In contrast to official Sunni Islamic ambivalence and/or rejection of popular religious practices, such as visiting the shrines or tombs of saints and belief in their intercession, Shii Islam's worldview incorporated a number of such beliefs and ritual practices. This difference was rooted in their different orientations. For Sunnis, God and human beings have a direct relationship; the *ulama* are not intermediaries but scholar-interpreters of religion. Thus, belief in saintly intermediaries was often viewed as heretical or, more precisely, dangerous deviation (*bida*). For Shii, intercession is an integral part of the divine plan for salvation. Ali

and the other Imams were divinely inspired models, guides, and intermediaries between God and the believers. In their absence, the *ulama* or *mujtahids* and local religious leaders (*mullas*) served as community guides, though they had no intermediary or intercessory powers. This belief developed later into the notion that, in the absence of the Imam, a distinguished cleric (or clerics) might serve as the supreme guide and authority on law, the source of emulation.

The special place and veneration of the Imams generated a rich set of religious symbols and rituals that were accepted as integral to Shiism, rather than, as would have been the case in Sunni Islam, peripheral. The central figures are the Fourteen Pure or Perfect Ones. They consist of: (1) the Prophet, Ali and Fatima, and their sons Hasan and Husayn and; (2) the remaining nine Imams. Ali and the Imams are the means to an intellectual, esoteric, and legal understanding and interpretation of revelation. They serve as charismatic, infallible, divinely inspired leaders of the community as well as models of suffering and sacrifice in the face of tyranny and oppression. Veneration for the Holy Family is reflected in the special place and honorific title that their descendants have claimed throughout Islamic history, an attitude found in Sunni Islam as well.

Like Sufism, Shiism places great value on the intercession of saints, the "friends" of God who mediate God's grace and blessings to the believers. As in Christianity, suffering and compassion, martyrdom and sacrifice, atonement and redemption are central motifs in salvation history. In contrast to the Sunni, Shii believe that the intercession of the Imams is a necessary part of history, from the redemptive death of Husayn to the return of the Hidden Imam at the end of time:

The Imams are also the intermediaries between man and God. To ask for their succour is to appeal to the channel God placed before man so as to enable man to return to him.⁴¹

Along with those holy days that they share with their Sunni coreligionists, Shii also mourn and celebrate the birthdays and death anniversaries of the Imams. Moreover, a major form of devotion is the visitation of the tomb-shrines of the Holy Family and Imams at Karbala, Kazimiyya, Najaf, Kufa, Qum, and Mashhad. These holy sites draw hundreds of thousands of pilgrims throughout the year. Historically, for financial reasons and ease of access, these pilgrimages have been more popular and common than the *hajj*.

Husayn and Fatima serve as major male and female religious symbols, on whom believers are to meditate and pattern their lives. Husayn's martyrdom at Karbala on the tenth day (*ashura*) of the Islamic month of Muharram in 680 is the paradigmatic event of Shii history. Remembrance

and ritual reenactment of the tragedy of Karbala is a cornerstone of faith, personal and communal identity, and piety. It accounts for the special vision and character of Shii Islam as a disinherited, oppressed community, loyal to God and His Prophet, struggling throughout history to restore God's rule and a just society. The martyrdom motif was extended to all the Imams, who, with the exception of the twelfth, were believed to have been martyred. As a result, the "passion" of Husayn symbolized the historic struggle between the forces of good and evil, God and Satan, and the eschatological hope and belief in the ultimate triumph of justice over tyranny when the Imam will return at the end of time.

The pathos and meaning of Husayn's martyrdom—with its themes of oppression, tyranny, martyrdom, social justice, and atonement—are revealed in liturgical manuals which recount the fateful battle. Husayn was drawn into battle by a request from the citizens of Kufa to liberate them from a land

where an oppressor now rules, who takes wedded wives and virgin daughters for his own pleasure, and extracts money with threats and violence. It is better to execute a tyrant than to allow the government of sinners. If you, Prince Husayn, do not rescue us from corruption and injustice, we shall accuse you on the Day of Judgment of neglecting your duty, we swear this by the Almighty.

Husayn then set out from Mecca to Kufa with but seventy-seven followers. Along the way he was tested by God but overcame all temptation. Husayn and his army encountered the Syrian forces of the Sunni Umayyad caliph Yazid:

The Syrians avoided man-to-man battle because Husayn and his men had a reputation as warriors and the Syrians were cowards who limited themselves to shooting arrows at the Alids from behind safe positions. For the sake of the women and children who were with them, Husayn's men tried to fight their way through to the river in the hope of fetching water for those parched creatures . . .

However, after hours of battle, the small band of followers were overcome by the vast Syrian army. The casualties included Husayn's eldest and youngest sons as well as the son of Husayn's brother Hasan who, Shii tradition reports, had gallantly killed more than three thousand of the enemy before he too fell in battle. Finally, Husayn set out for his final confrontation. The meaning of this event and the intensity of religious belief and feeling it inspires is captured in a scene movingly recalled in Shii religious literature:

In spite of his admonition, all the women wept bitter tears, and so did the children. Even the angels in heaven cried sadly, and the animals in

the wilderness and the birds in the sky lamented in mournful songs, even the fish in the ocean wept. . . . He mowed down his enemies like a fire raging through the tall grass of the savannah. The earth grew bloodied and the sky grew dark as if the Day of Judgment had begun. Dark clouds veiled the sun even in Mecca so that its people wondered what caused this gloom which covered Arabia, Syria, and Egypt, reaching as far as Iran and Khurasan. . . . A voice was heard: Husayn! The enemy has overrun your tent! / The women have been taken and the children killed! / . . . He turned his horse and hurried back to the camp. There in the shrubs the enemy were waiting. They shot at him without their faces showing / Hundreds of arrows flew into his face / Seventy arrows hit his tender body / and pierced the skin and spilled his precious blood. / He knew that he did not have long to live / Just enough time to say: There is no god / but God and Muhammed is His prophet. / His soul flew up into the cloudless sky where it was met by those who loved him most: / His parents and his brother and his sons. . . . Here ends the sad account of Prince Husayn / Who lived and died a witness for the faith / A ransom for his people, for Mankind.

Fatima, "the Mother of the Imams," has a special claim and role in Shii piety due to her special place in the family of the Prophet. She was the Prophet's only surviving child, the wife of Imam Ali, and the mother of the Imams Husayn and Hasan. Her unique status is captured by a widely cited tradition of the Prophet: "Fatima is a part of my body. Whoever hurts her, has hurt me, and whoever hurts me has hurt God."⁴⁵ Fatima is the primal mother figure, immaculate and sinless, the pattern for virtuous women, the object of prayer and petition. Like her son Husayn, she embodies a life of dedication, suffering, and compassion. Tradition portrays her as, despite often leading a life of poverty and destitution, sharing whatever she had with others. Like the Virgin Mary in Christian tradition, Fatima is portrayed as a woman of sorrow, symbolizing the rejection, disinheritance, and martyrdom of her husband and sons.

In addition to the *salat* (daily prayer), Shiism developed a number of ritual practices that became major forms of piety and were regarded as earning spiritual merit. All are centered on the tragedy of Karbala, commemorated each year during the month of Muharram through dramatic recitations, passion plays, (*taziya*), and street processions. The purpose of these ceremonies is remembrance and mourning. Participants experience profound grief, pain, and sorrow in emotional ceremonies marked by lamentation, breast beating, weeping, and flagellation as the tragedy and heroism of Husayn are relived. Some of its aspects are reminiscent of practices found at times in a number of Christian contexts—"The Muharram processions are, perhaps, more similar to the Passion Week

celebrations which can still be seen in such Christian countries as Guatemala."⁴⁶

Through ritual reenactment and identification with the suffering and patient endurance of Husayn and his family, Shii seek to atone for their sins, merit salvation, and hasten the final triumph:

Thus lamentations for Husayn enable the mourners not only to gain assurance of divine forgiveness, but also to contribute to the triumph of the Shii cause. Accordingly, Husayn's martyrdom makes sense on two levels: first, in terms of a soteriology not dissimilar from the one invoked in the case of Christ's crucifixion: just as Christ sacrificed himself on the altar of the cross to redeem humanity, so did Husayn allow himself to be killed on the plains of Karbala to purify the Muslim community of sins; and second, as an active factor, vindicating the Shii cause, contributing to its ultimate triumph.⁴⁷

Remembrance of the passion and death of Husayn, like that of Christ in Christianity, occurs not only annually, during the month of Muharram, but also daily. The recitation of sacred stories in homes and specially constructed halls and the performance of passion plays in special theaters, which focus on Husayn and other great Shii martyrs, take place throughout the year in villages, towns, and cities. They constitute popular forms of piety and entertainment and a distinctive way of preserving and reappropriating a sacred history and heritage.

While the Five Pillars and the Sharia remain the common basis of faith and practice for all Muslims, at the same time Islam incorporated a variety of beliefs and activities that grew out of religious and historical experience and the needs of specific Muslim communities. The inherent unity of faith, implicit in statements like "one God, one Book, one [final] Prophet," should not deter one from appreciating the rich diversity that has characterized the religious (legal, theological, and devotional) life of the Islamic community.