

raises a scholar to renew and strengthen the faith of the Muslim community. Such a man is known as a *mujaddid* ('renovator') of the faith. Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali (1058-1111) of Tus, in Iran, has been regarded as the *mujaddid* of the sixth Islamic century. His work went far beyond theology and philosophy, encompassing mysticism and all the religious sciences.

In 1091 al-Ghazali was appointed a professor of theology and law at the prestigious Nizamiyah college in Baghdad, where he tirelessly defended mainstream Sunni Islam against the innovations of the theologians and the heresies of the philosophers. Four years later, however, he suffered a deep psychological crisis and gave up teaching. After a long quest, he determined that true knowledge could not be attained through either the senses or the rational sciences, but only through a divine light that God casts into the heart of the person of faith. His reason thus enlightened, al-Ghazali produced one of the most ambitious works in the history of Islamic thought. Appropriately entitled *ihya' 'ulum al-din* (The Revivification of the Religious Sciences), this magnum opus examines all religious learning from a deeply mystical point of view.

In his book *The Incoherence* [or 'Collapse'] of the Philosophers, al-Ghazali rejected the philosophical principle of causality (which said, for example, that created things could be the efficient causes of events) and in its place proposed a theory of occasionalism, according to which the only cause of anything in the universe is God. Al-Ghazali's critique itself would be the subject of a critique by the Andalusian Aristotelian philosopher Ibn Rushd.

Ibn Rushd (known in Latin as Averroës, 1126-98), who was born in Córdoba, Spain, was the greatest Muslim commentator on Aristotle. He came from a long line of jurists, and was himself a noted scholar of Islamic law. His legal training decisively influenced his philosophy. In his critique of al-Ghazali, entitled *The Incoherence of the Incoherence*, Ibn Rushd methodically criticizes

al-Ghazali for misunderstanding philosophy and Ibn Sina for misunderstanding Aristotle. The first to construct a true Aristotelian philosophical system, Ibn Rushd essentially shared his Eastern predecessors' belief in the primacy of philosophy over religion. In his famous double-truth theory, however, he argued that both were valid ways of arriving at truth: the difference was that philosophy was the way of the intellectual elite, while religion was the way of the masses.

The great thirteenth-century philosopher-mystic Ibn 'Arabi will be discussed later, in the context of Sufism. A more empirical philosopher than any of those mentioned so far was the Tunisian-born 'Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406). Through his extensive travels and the positions he held as a jurist and political theorist, Ibn Khaldun gained insight into the workings both of nations and of political and religious institutions. This led him to write a universal history. The most important part of this work is its introduction (*Muqaddimah*), in which Ibn Khaldun presents the first social philosophy of history in the Western world.

Islamic philosophy had a lasting influence on medieval and Renaissance thought in Europe, particularly through its interpretation of Aristotelianism. Europeans came to know many Muslim philosophers by Latinized forms of their names: Rhazes for al-Razi, Alfarabi for Avernasar for al-Farabi, Avicenna for Ibn Sina, Algazel for al-Ghazali, Averroës for Ibn Rushd.

DIFFERENTIATION

Shi'ism

As we have seen, the Muslim community was permanently divided soon after the death of the Prophet when a political party (*shi'ah*) formed around his cousin and son-in-law 'Ali in support of his right to succeed Muhammad as leader, or Imam.

learning not only in the Islamic world but anywhere in the West. Christian scholars had already translated many Greek medical, philosophical, and theological treatises into Syriac and commented on them, but the House of Wisdom, which housed an impressive library of Greek manuscripts, provided additional support for their work. Families of translators worked in teams, rendering into Arabic the ancient treasures of Hellenistic science and philosophy. Smaller centres of philosophical and medical studies in Syria and Iran also made notable contributions.

The Early Period

Early Islamic philosophy had a distinctive character: Aristotelian in its logic, physics, and metaphysics; Platonic in its political and social aspects; and Neoplatonic in its mysticism and theology. Two figures stand out in this early period. The first was the Iraqi theologian-philosopher Abu Yusuf Ya'qub al-Kindi (d. 870), who used philosophical principles and methods of reasoning to defend fundamental Islamic teachings such as the existence and oneness of God, the temporal creation of the universe by God's command out of nothing, the inimitability of the Qur'an, and the necessity of prophets. In his argument for the latter, Al-Kindi underlined the distinction between the philosopher who acquires his knowledge through rational investigation and contemplation and the prophet who receives his knowledge instantaneously, through divine revelation.

In sharp contrast to al-Kindi, Abu Bakr Zakariyah al-Razi ('the one from Rayy, Iran'; c. 865–926) was a thoroughgoing Platonist who rejected the doctrine of creation out of nothing. Rather, drawing on the theory that Plato elaborated in his *Timaeus*, al-Razi argued that the universe evolved from primal matter, floating gas atoms in an absolute void. The universe or cosmos came into being when God imposed order on the primeval chaos, but it will return to chaos at some distant point in the future, because matter will revert to its primeval state.

The Flowering of Islamic Philosophy

Abu Nasr al-Farabi (c. 878–950), who moved to Baghdad from Turkestan, in Central Asia, was not only a great philosopher but an important musical theorist and an accomplished instrumentalist. His Platonic philosophical system was comprehensive and universal. According to al-Farabi, God is pure intellect and the highest good. From God's self-knowledge or contemplation emanates the first intellect, which generates the heavenly spheres and a second intellect, who then repeats the process. Each subsequent intellect generates another sphere and another intellect.

Al-Farabi agreed with al-Kindi that a prophet is gifted with a sharp intellect capable of receiving philosophical verities naturally and without any mental exertion. He then communicates these truths to the masses, who are incapable of comprehending them on the philosophical level.

Although al-Farabi was called 'the second teacher', after Aristotle, even he was excelled by 'the great master' Ibn Sina (known in Latin as Avicenna, 980–1037). Ibn Sina, who was born in Bukhara, Iran, was a self-taught genius who mastered the religious sciences at the age of ten and by the age of eighteen had become a leading physician, philosopher, and astronomer. His encyclopedic manual of medicine, *al-Qanun fi al-Tibb* ('The canon of medicine'), and his philosophical encyclopedia, *al-Shifa'* ('The book of healing'), were studied in European universities throughout the Middle Ages.

Ibn Sina built on al-Farabi's Neoplatonic ideas to produce a comprehensive system of mystical philosophy and theology. He accepted and developed al-Farabi's emanationism, placing it in a more precise logical and philosophical framework. Although he affirmed the prophethood of Muhammad, the revelation of the Qur'an, and the immortality of the soul, he rejected the Qur'anic traditions of the resurrection of the body, the reward of paradise, and the punishment of hell.

According to a widely accepted Prophetic tradition, at the beginning of every century God

'ism' is a broad term covering a variety of political movements, sects, and ideologies. They share a general allegiance to 'Ali and his descendants, and their right to spiritual and political authority in the Muslim community after the Prophet Muhammad.

Summi Muslims, the term 'imam' refers to one who serves as the leader of prayer at mosque, a role that the caliph sometimes filled. For **Shi'is**, by contrast, 'Imam' is the title given to the one individual held to be the divinely mandated leader of the Muslim community.

In general, Shi'ism has always been characterized by absolute devotion to the Prophet's household. To Shi'is, the Qur'an underlines the status of Muhammad's family ('the people of the house'): 'Surely, God wishes to take away all sin from you, O people of the House, and purify you with a great purification' (Q. 33: 33). Furthermore, Muhammad is prompted to say that he wishes no reward for his work in following God's revelation 'except love for [my] kin' (Q. 42: 23). The expressions 'people of the house' (*ahl al-bayt*) and 'next of kin' (*al-qurba*) are usually interpreted as referring to the Prophet's wife Fatimah, her husband 'Ali, and their two sons, Hasan and Husayn.

The foundation of the Shi'i claim is a *hadith* in which the Prophet, on his way back from Mecca to Medina, stopped at a place called Khumm, took 'Ali by the hand, and made the following declaration:

People, hear my words, and let him who is present inform him who is absent: Anyone of whom I am the master, 'Ali, too, is his master. O God, be a friend to those who befriend me and an enemy to those who show hostility

to me. Designated 'Ali as his successor, Shi'i specialists on the Prophetic oral tradition constructed an elaborate legal and theological system based on the doctrine of *imamah*, according to which the source of all legitimate authority is the office of the Imam.

Ashura

In the year 680 the Prophet's grandson Husayn (the son of 'Ali) was leading an uprising against the Umayyad Caliph Yazid when he was killed in battle at Karbala' in Iraq. The anniversary of his death, on the tenth day of the month of Muharram, has become a focal point for the Shi'i community's hopes and frustrations, messianic expectations, and highly eschatological view of history.

'Ashura' ('ten'), as the anniversary came to be known, is still commemorated by the Shi'i community throughout the Muslim world. Blending sorrow, blessing, and mystery, it has inspired a rich devotional literature, as well as numerous popular passion plays re-enacting the events leading up to the death of Husayn. Above all, it is observed by the Shi'i community as a day of suffering and martyrdom. Its symbolism is expressed in a variety of devotional acts, including solemn processions, public readings, and a pilgrimage to the sacred ground of Karbala'. Sunni Muslims commemorate 'Ashura' with a day of fasting.

Imami ('Twelver') Shi'ism

According to the doctrine of *imamah* as elaborated by the Shi'i tradition, the Prophet appointed 'Ali as his viceregent. 'Ali in turn appointed his son Hasan to succeed him as Imam, and Hasan appointed his brother Husayn. Thereafter, each Imam designated his successor, usually his eldest son.

Mainstream Shi'is believe that the line of imams descended from Husayn continued until 874,

point the Imam entered a new phase known as the 'greater occultation', which will continue until the end of the world. Then, before the Day of Resurrection, he will return as the **Mahdi**, 'the rightly guided one', who with Jesus will establish universal justice and true Islam on earth.

Shi'is agree with Summi Muslims on the centrality of the Qur'an and *sunnah* as the primary sources of Islamic law. However, they understand the *sunnah* to include not only the life-example of the Prophet Muhammad and his generation, but the life-examples of the Imams—the men they believe to be his rightful successors. Hence the period of the *sunnah* for Twelver Shi'i Muslims extends over three centuries, until the end of the lesser occultation of the twelfth Imam in 941.

'Sevener' or Isma'ili Shi'ism

The majority of Shi'is accepted the line of Husaynid Imams down to Ja'far al-Sadiq (d. 765), the sixth in the succession. But a major schism occurred when Ja'far's oldest son and successor, Isma'il, died about ten years before him. Ja'far then appointed a younger son, Musa al-Kazim, as his successor.

Many of Ja'far's supporters considered this appointment irregular and insisted that the seventh Imam should be Isma'il's son Ahmad. For this reason they came to be known as Isma'ilis or 'Seveners'. The largest faction, called Nizaris, carried on the line of imams through Ahmad and his descendants down to the present.

Basic to Isma'ili faith and worldview is the doctrine of the divine mandate of the Imam and his absolute temporal and religious authority. Over the centuries Isma'ili philosophers and theologians developed this fundamental teaching into an impressive esoteric system of propheticology. The Isma'ilis have played a very conspicuous intellectual

Indo-Iranian title signifying nobility. The third Agha Khan (1877–1957) initiated a movement for reconciliation with the larger Muslim community, and efforts to resolve differences have continued under his Harvard-educated successor, Karim Agha Khan (b. 1936). In modern times Isma'ilis have migrated in large numbers to the West. Prosperous and well-organized, the Isma'ilis now number roughly 15 million and are the best-integrated Muslim community in the West.

Sufism: The Mystical Tradition

The early Muslim mystics were said to wear a garment of coarse wool over their bare skin in emulation of Jesus, who is represented in Islamic hagiography as a model of ascetic piety. For this reason they became known as Sufis (from the Arabic word meaning 'wool'). Asceticism was only one element in the development of Sufism, however.

At least as important was the Islamic tradition of devotional piety. Since the ultimate purpose of all creation is to worship God and sing God's praises (see Q. 17: 44 and 51: 56), the pious are urged to 'remember God much' (33: 41), 'in the morning and evening' (76: 25), for 'in the remembrance of God hearts find peace and contentment' (13: 28). The Prophet's night vigils and other devotions, alluded to in the Qur'an (73: 1–8) and greatly embellished by hagiographical tradition, have served as a living example for pious Muslims across the centuries. *Hadith* traditions, particularly the 'divine sayings' (*hadith qudsi*) in which the speaker is God, have also provided a rich source of mystical piety. Above all, the *mi'raj*—the Prophet's miraculous journey to heaven—has been a guide for numerous mystics on their own spiritual ascent to God.

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On the basis of this and other sayings in which they believe the Prophet directly or indirectly

designated 'Ali as his successor, Shi'i specialists on the Prophetic oral tradition constructed an elaborate legal and theological system based on the doctrine of *imamah*, according to which the source of all legitimate authority is the office of the Imam.

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point the Imam entered a new phase known as the 'greater occultation', which will continue until the end of the world. Then, before the Day of Resurrection, he will return as the **Mahdi**, 'the rightly guided one', who with Jesus will establish universal justice and true Islam on earth.

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For centuries they lived as an obscure sect in Iran, Syria, East Africa, and the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent. Since 1818 their leader, or Imam, has been known as the Agha Khan, an

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The early Muslim ascetics were known as *zuhhad*, meaning 'those who shun [the world and its pleasures]'. One of the earliest champions of this movement was a well-known theologian and traditionist named al-Hasan al-Basri, who was born in Medina in 642 and lived through both the crises

and the rise to glory of the Muslim *ummah*. In a letter addressed to the pious caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz, Hasan likened the world to a snake: soft to the touch, but full of venom.

The early ascetics were also called weepers, for the tears they shed in fear of God's punishment and in yearning for God's reward. Significantly, this early ascetic movement emerged in areas of mixed populations, where other forms of asceticism had existed for centuries: places such as Kufa and Basra in Iraq (long the home of Eastern Christian asceticism); northeastern Iran, particularly the region of Balkh (an ancient centre of Buddhist ascetic piety, now part of Afghanistan); and Egypt (the home of Christian monasticism as well as Gnostic asceticism).

Asceticism for its own sake, however, was frowned on by many advocates of mystical piety.

Among the critics was the sixth Imam, Ja'far al-Sadiq, who argued that when God bestows a favour on a servant, God wishes to see that favour manifested in the servant's clothing and way of life. Ja'far's grandfather 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin is said to have argued that God should be worshipped not out of fear of hell or desire for paradise, but in humble gratitude for the gift of the capacity to worship God.

What transformed ascetic piety into mysticism was the all-consuming love of the divine exemplified by an early woman mystic named Rabi'a al-'Adawiyyah of Basra (c. 713–801). Born into a poor family, Rabi'a was orphaned and sold into slavery as a child, but her master was so impressed with her piety that he set her free. She lived the rest of her life in mystical contemplation, loving God with no motive other than love itself.

Rabi'a al-'Adawiyyah

When Rabi'a's fellow Sufis urged her to marry, she agreed in principle, but only on the condition that the prospective husband—a devout man named Hasan—answer four questions. In the end she remained unmarried, free to devote all her thoughts to God.

'What will the Judge of the world say when I die? That I have come forth from the world a Muslim, or an unbeliever?'

Hasan answered, 'This is among the hidden things known only to God. . . .'

Then she said, 'When I am put in the grave and Munkar and Nakir [the angels who question the dead] question me, shall I be able to answer them [satisfactorily] or not?' He replied, 'This is also hidden.'

'When people are assembled at the Resurrection and the books are distributed, shall I be given mine in my right hand or my left?' . . . 'This also is among the hidden things.'

Finally she asked, 'When mankind is summoned (at the Judgment), some to Paradise and some to Hell, in which group shall I be?' He answered, 'This too is hidden, and none knows what is hidden save God—His is the glory and the majesty.'

Then she said to him, 'Since this is so, and I have these four questions with which to concern myself, how should I need a husband, with whom to be occupied?' (Smith 1928: 11).

Farid al-Din 'Attar

Farid al-Din 'Attar' lived in Iran at the turn of the thirteenth century. In this extract, the words 'Ask not' echo a phrase used by theologians to express paradox—bila kayf, 'without asking how'—but here they evoke the mystic's sense of ineffability.

His beauty if it thrill my heart
If thou a man of passion art
Of time and of eternity,
Of being and non-entity,
Ask not.

When thou hast passed the bases four,
Behold the sanctuary door;
And having satisfied thine eyes,
What in the sanctuary lies
Ask not....

When unto the sublime degree
Thou hast attained, desist to be;
But lost to self in nothingness
And, being not, of more and less
Ask not.

(Arberry 1948: 32–3)

My Lord, if I worship you in fear of the fire, burn me in hell. If I worship you in desire for paradise, deprive me of it. But if I worship you in love of you, then deprive me not of your eternal beauty. (Smith 1928)

Mystics of all religious traditions have used the language of erotic love to express their love for God. Rabi'a was perhaps the first to introduce this language into Islamic mysticism. She loved God with two loves, the love of passion and a spiritual love worthy of God alone.

The love that Rabi'a spoke of was the devotional love of the worshipful servant for his or her Lord. A more controversial tradition within Sufism pursued absolute union with God. Among the proponents of this ecstatic or 'intoxicated' Sufism was Husayn bin Mansur al-Hallaj (c. 858–922), whose identification with the divine was so intense as to suggest that he made no distinction between God and himself. For this apparent blasphemy he was brutally executed by the 'Abbasid authorities.

Al-Hallaj had been initiated into Sufism early in life and travelled widely, studying with the best-known Sufi masters of his time. But in time he broke away from his teachers and embarked on a long and ultimately dangerous quest of self-realization. It began when he went one day to see his teacher Abu Qasim al-Junayd. When the latter asked who was at the door, Al-Hallaj answered, 'I, the absolute divine truth' (*ana al-Haqq*)—calling himself by one of the 99 'wonderful names' of God mentioned in the Qur'an. Al-Junayd reprimanded his wayward disciple and predicted an evil end for him.

At its core, al-Hallaj's message was moral and intensely spiritual, but it was interpreted as suggesting that God takes the form of a human person (as Christians believe of Jesus)—an idea that most Muslims of his time found deeply shocking. Whereas a less extreme predecessor, Bayazid Bis-tami, had preached annihilation of the mystic in God, al-Hallaj preached total identification of the lover with the beloved:

I am He whom I love, and He whom I love
is I.

We are two spirits dwelling in one body:
If thou seest me, you see Him; and if thou
seest Him, you see us both
(Nicholson 1931: 210–38).

After eight years in prison, al-Hallaj danced to the gallows, where he begged his executioners to 'Kill me, O my trusted friends, for in my death is my life, and in my life is my death.' For many Muslims, al-Hallaj lives on as the martyr of love who was killed for the sin of intoxication with God by the sword of God's own *shari'ah*.

The Crystallization of Sufism

The mystical life is a spiritual journey to God. The novice who wishes to embark on such an arduous journey must be guided by a master who becomes in effect his or her spiritual parent. As Sufism grew, however, many well-recognized masters attracted too many disciples to allow for a one-to-one relationship. By the eleventh century, therefore, teaching manuals were being produced to impart the ideas of great masters to eager disciples. A high point in this process of crystallization was al-Ghazali's *Revivification of the Religious Sciences*.

Roughly half a century after al-Ghazali, Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi (c. 1155–91) became known as the great master of illumination (*shaykh al-ishraq*). He grew up in Iran and eventually settled in northern Syria. Drawing on a verse in the Qur'an (24: 35) that speaks of God as the light of the heavens and the earth, Suhrawardi described a cosmos of light and darkness populated by countless luminous angelic spirits.

The most important Sufi master of the thirteenth century was Muhyi al-Din Ibn 'Arabi

According to this doctrine, God in God's essence remains in 'blind obscurity', but is manifested in the creation through an eternal process of self-disclosure. Thus even as human beings need God for their very existence, God also needs them in order to be known.

Ibn 'Arabi's doctrine of the unity of being had many implications, among them the idea that, if God alone really is, then all ways ultimately lead to God. This means that all the world's religions are in reality one. Ibn 'Arabi says:

My heart has become capable of every form: it is a pasture for gazelles and a convent for Christian monks,

And a temple for idols, and the pilgrim's Ka'ba, and the tables of the Tora and the book of the Koran.

I follow the religion of Love, whichever way his camels take. My religion and my faith is the true religion
(Nicholson 2002 [1914]: 75).

Ibn 'Arabi remains one of the greatest mystic geniuses of all time.

Rumi

The most creative poet of the Persian language was Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207–73). Like Ibn 'Arabi, he was the product of a multicultural, multi-religious environment. Rumi was born in Balkh, Afghanistan, but as a child fled with his parents from the advancing Mongols. At last they settled in the city of Konya in central Anatolia (Turkey), a region that had been part of the Roman Empire.

In 1244 Rumi met a wandering Sufi named Shams of Tabriz. The two men developed a relationship so intimate that Rumi neglected his teach-

Jalal al-Din Rumi

Here Rumi expresses the mystic's experience of union with God in terms of the dissolution of individual identity.

I died as mineral and became a plant
I died as plant and rose to animal,
I died as animal and I was Man.

Why should I fear? When was I less by dying?

Yet once more I shall die as Man, to soar

With angels blest; but even from angelhood

I must pass on: all except God doth perish (Q. 28: 88).

When I have sacrificed my angel-soul,

I shall become what no mind e'er conceived.

Oh, let me not exist! for Non-existence

Proclaims in organ tones, 'To him we shall return' (Q. 2: 151)

(Nicholson 1950: 103).

Rumi's greatest masterpiece is his *Mathnawi* ('Couplets'), a collection of nearly 30,000 verses. The spirit of this vast panorama of poetry is clearly expressed in its opening verses, which evoke the haunting melodies of the reed flute telling its sad tale of separation from its reed bed. In stories, couplets of lyrical beauty, and at times even coarse tales of sexual impropriety, the *Mathnawi* depicts the longing of the human soul for God.

Sufi Orders and Saints

The religious fraternity is an ancient and widespread phenomenon. The earliest Sufi fraternities were established in the late eighth century, and by the thirteenth century a number of these groups were becoming institutionalized. Usually founded either by a famous *shaykh* (master) or by a disciple in the *shaykh's* name, Sufi orders began as teaching and devotional institutions located in urban centres, where they would often attach themselves to craft or trade guilds in the main bazaar.

It became a common custom for lay Muslims to join a Sufi order. Lay associates provided a good

source of income for the order, participated in devotional observances, and in return for their contributions received the blessing (*barakah*) of the *shaykh*.

The truth and authenticity of a *shaykh's* claim to spiritual leadership depended on his or her spiritual genealogy. By the thirteenth century, Sufi chains of initiation (similar to chains of *isnad* in *hadith* transmission) were established. Such chains began with the *shaykh's* immediate master and went back in an unbroken chain to 'Ali or one of his descendants, or in some cases to other Companions of the Prophet or their successors.

Through this spiritual lineage, a *shaykh* inherited the *barakah* of his masters, who inherited it from the Prophet. In turn, the *shaykh* bestowed his *barakah*, or healing power, on his devotees, both during his life and, with even greater efficacy, after his death.

The *shaykhs* of Sufi orders are similar to the saints of the Catholic Church in that the faithful ascribe miracles or divine favours (*karamat*) to them. Unlike Christian saints, however, they are

recognized through popular acclaim rather than official canonization.

Devotional Practices

The most characteristic Sufi practice is a ritual called the *dhikr* ('remembrance') of God, which may be public or private. The congregational *dhikr* ritual is usually held before the dawn or evening prayers. It consists of the repetition of the name of God, Allah, or the *shahadah*, 'There is no god except God' (*la ilaha illa Allah*). The *dhikr* is often accompanied by special bodily movements and, in some Sufi orders, by elaborate breathing techniques.

Often the performance of the *dhikr* is what distinguishes the various Sufi orders from one another. In some popular orders it is a highly emotional ritual (similar to charismatic practices in some Pentecostal churches) intended to stir devotees into a state of frenzy. By contrast, in the sober Naqshbandi

order (founded by Baha' al-Din al-Naqshbandi in the fourteenth century), the *dhikr* is silent, an inward prayer of the heart.

Another distinctly Sufi practice is the *sama'* ('hearing' or 'audition'), in which devotees simply listen to the often hypnotic chanting of mystical poetry, accompanied by various musical instruments. As instrumental music is not allowed in the mosque, *sama'* sessions are usually held in a hall adjacent to the mosque, or at the shrine of a famous *shaykh*.

Music and dance are vital elements of devotional life for members of the Mevlevi (Mawlawi) order, named after Mawlana ('our master') Rumi and founded by his son shortly after his death. As practised by the Mevlevi—also known as the 'Whirling Dervishes'—dance is a highly sophisticated art symbolizing the perfect motion of the stars; the haunting melodies of the reed flute and the large orchestra that accompanies the chanting



Dervishes at the Galata Mevlevihanesi (Mevlevi Whirling Dervish hall) in Istanbul (Images & Stories/Alamy).

poetry echo the primordial melodies of the heavenly spheres.

Sufism has always shown an amazing capacity for self-reform and regeneration. It was the Sufis who preserved Islamic learning and spirituality after 1258, when Baghdad fell to Mongol invaders, and Sufis who carried Islam to Africa and Asia. Today in the West it is primarily Sufi piety that is attracting non-Muslims to Islam.

Women and Sufism

Women have played an important role in the Sufi tradition, often serving as positive role models for both men and women. This may help to explain part of the historical tension between orthodox Islam and Sufism. One of the most beloved stories about Rabi'a, the early female Sufi, has her roaming the streets of Basra carrying a bucket of water and a flaming torch, ready to put out the fires of Hell and set fire to the gardens of Paradise so that people will worship God for the sake of Love alone.

The Sufi tradition provided one of the few outlets for women to be recognized as leaders. Since the Sufis believed the Divine to be without gender, the gender of the worshipper did not matter. After Rabi'a, women could be Sufi leaders even though they were prohibited from training as imams. In addition, the shrines of Sufi saints, whether male or female, are often cared for by women. As places where women have some measure of control, they tend to attract more women than men, inverting the usual gender breakdown of attendance at mosques. It isn't hard to imagine how some men, accustomed to thinking of public space as male space, might feel threatened by a public space where women are the dominant presence.

community transcending geographical, cultural, and linguistic borders.

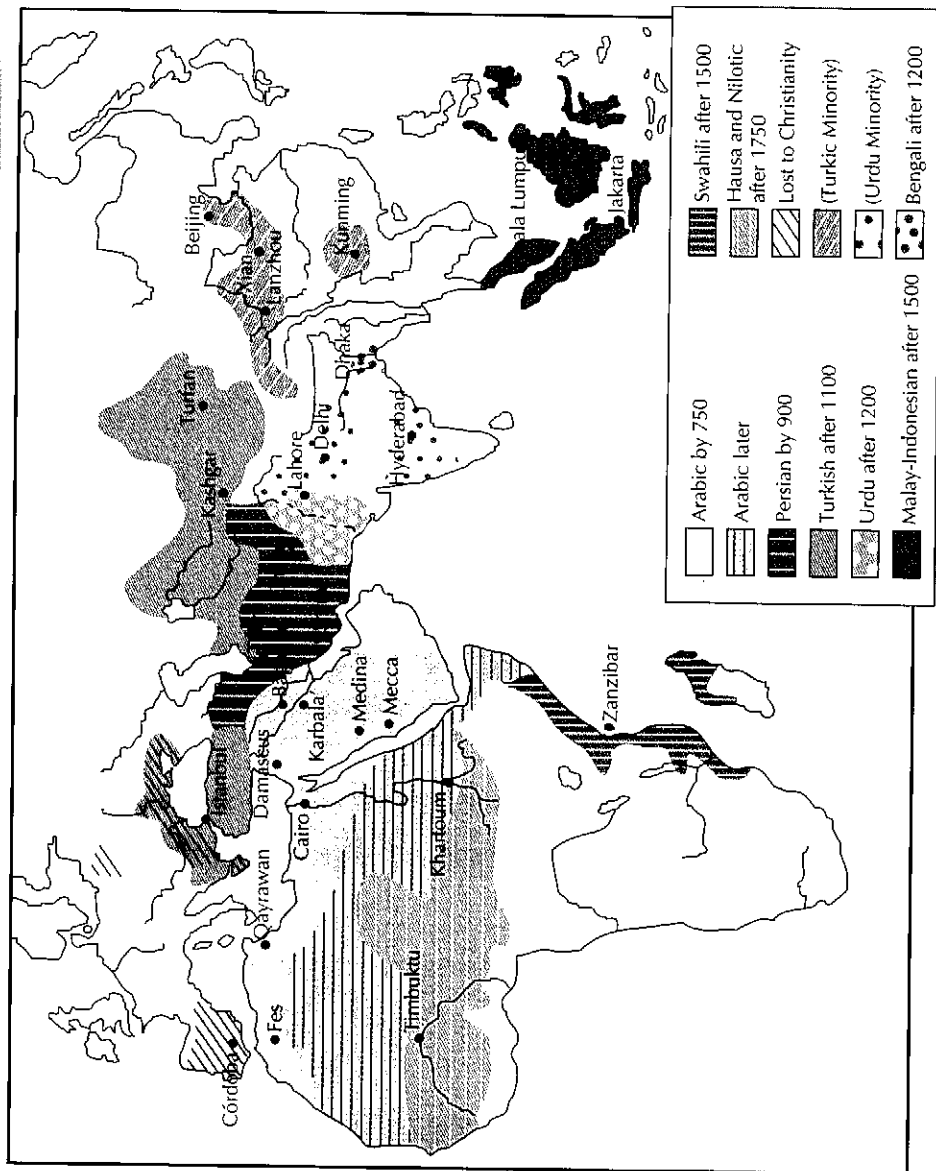
Islam is ideologically and historically a post-Jewish, post-Christian religion. Ideologically, it sees itself as one of the religions of the Book, one that confirms the scriptures that preceded it, notably the Torah and the Gospel. Historically, Muslims from the beginning responded to and interacted with the communities of other faiths, particularly Christians and Jews. It was therefore necessary for Islam as a religio-political power to regulate its relations with non-Muslim citizens.

The Qur'an regards Jews and Christians as People of the Book. They were promised full freedom to practise their faith in return for paying a poll tax that also guaranteed them physical and economic protection and exemption from military service. Legally such communities came to be known as *dhimmis* ('protected people'). In the course of time, this designation was expanded to encompass other communities with sacred scriptures, including Zoroastrians in Iran and Hindus in India.

In its first century Islam spread through conquest and military occupation. Much of the Byzantine and Roman world and all of the Sasanian Persian domains yielded to the Arab armies and came under Umayyad rule. In subsequent centuries, politico-military regimes continued to contribute to Islam's dominance, especially in regions under Arab, Persian, or Turkish rule.

Over time, however, the influence of mystics, teachers, and traders has reached farther and endured longer than the power of caliphs and conquerors. It was principally through the preaching and the living examples of individual Muslims that Islam spread to China, Southeast Asia, and East and West Africa. In modern times, migration and missionary activity have carried Islam to the Western hemisphere as well.

Map 5.1 Language and Culture in the Spread of Islam



Muslims moved into North Africa in the second half of the seventh century. Before that time North Africa had been first an important Roman province and then an equally important home of Latin Christianity. With its indigenous Berber, Phoenician, Roman, and Byzantine populations, North Africa was rich in cultural and religious diversity, and it has always maintained a distinct religious and cultural identity that reflects its ancient heritage.

The Umayyads had established their capital in Damascus in 661. With the shift of the capital

Islamic domains became more Persian than Arab, more Asian than Mediterranean. Meanwhile, the centre of Arab Islamic culture shifted from Syria to the western Mediterranean: to Qayrawan, the capital of North Africa, in what is today Tunisia; and to Córdoba, Islam's western capital, in Spain, which rivalled Baghdad and Cairo in its cultural splendour. North African mystics, scholars, and philosophers were all instrumental in this remarkable achievement. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, North African religious scholars and particularly Sufi masters played a central role in

the religious and cultural identity of their people and mobilized them to resist Italian and French colonization in Libya and Algeria. In spite of the deep influence of the French language and secular culture, North African popular piety still reflects the classical Islamic heritage.

Spain

When Arab forces arrived on the Iberian Peninsula in 711, Jews who had lived in Spain for centuries were facing harsh restrictions imposed by rulers recently converted to Catholic Christianity. They welcomed the Arabs as liberators.

With astonishing rapidity, Umayyad forces conquered the land of Andalusia, or al-Andalus, as the Arabs called southern Spain, and laid the foundations for an extraordinary culture. Arab men married local women, and a mixed but harmonious society developed that was Arab in language and expression and Arabo-Hispanic in spirit. Muslims, Christians, and Jews lived together in mutual tolerance for centuries before fanatical forces on all sides stifled one of the most creative experiments in interfaith living in human history.

Arab Spain produced some of the world's greatest minds, including not only Ibn 'Arabi, Ibn Tufayl, and Ibn Rushd but the jurist and writer Ibn Hazim (994–1064), and the mystic-philosopher Ibn Masarra (d. 931). Islamic Spain was the cultural centre of Europe. Students came from as far away as Scotland to study Islamic theology, philosophy, and science in centres of higher learning such as Córdoba and Toledo. It was in these centres that the European Renaissance was conceived, and the great universities in which it was nurtured were inspired by their Arabo-Hispanic counterparts.

In Muslim Spain the Jews enjoyed a golden age of philosophy and science, mysticism, and gen-

and contributed directly to the rise of the West to world prominence.

In addition to symbiotic creativity, however, the 900-year history of Arab Spain (711–1609) included the tensions and conflicts typical of any multi-religious, multicultural society ruled by a minority regime. In the end, Islamic faith and civilization were driven out of Spain and failed to establish themselves anywhere else in Europe.

Sub-Saharan Africa

Islam may have arrived in sub-Saharan Africa as early as the eighth century. As in other places where it became the dominant religion, it was spread first by traders, and then on a much larger scale by preachers. Finally jurists came to consolidate and establish the new faith as a religious and legal system. Sufi orders played an important part both in the spread of Islam and in its use as a motivation and framework for social and political reform.

Islam always had to compete with traditional African religion. Muslim prayers, for example, had to show themselves to be no less potent than the rain-making prayers or rituals of the indigenous traditions. In the fourteenth century, the Moroccan Muslim traveller Ibn Battutah wrote a vivid account of the efforts of Muslims in the Mali Empire of West Africa to adapt the new faith to local traditions.

In East Africa Islam spread along the coast, carried mainly by mariners from Arabia and the Gulf trading in commodities and also in slaves. From the sixteenth century onward, after Portuguese navigators rounded the southern cape of Africa, the cultural and political development of East African Islam was directly affected by European colonialism as well.

is Arabic, and until recently, most of the major African languages were written in the Arabic script.

An important element of East African society has been the Khoja community. Including both Sevens (Isma'ili) and Twelver Shi'is, the Khojas immigrated from India to Africa in the mid-1800s. They have on the whole been successful business people with Western education and close relationships with Europe and North America. These relationships have been strengthened by the migration of many Khojas to Britain, the United States, and Canada.

Iran and Central Asia

Central Asia had a cosmopolitan culture before Islam. Buddhism, Gnosticism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity existed side by side in mutual tolerance. The Arab conquest of the region took more than a century: beginning in 649, less than two decades after the Prophet's death, it was not completed until 752.

Under the Samanid dynasty, which ruled large areas of Persia and Central Asia in the ninth and tenth centuries, Persian culture flourished, as did classical *hadith* traditionists, historians, philosophers, and religious scholars working in the Arabic language. Particularly important centres of learning developed in the cities of Bukhara and Samarkand, located in what is now Uzbekistan, which owed much of their prosperity to trade with India, China, and the rest of the Muslim domains. With the first notable Persian poet, Rudaki (c. 859–940), Bukhara became the birthplace of Persian literature.

While their contemporaries the Buyids promoted Shi'i learning and public devotions in the region that is now Iraq, the Samanids firmly established Sunni orthodoxy in Central Asia. Many

al-Maturidi, the philosopher Ibn Sina, the great scholar and historian of religion Abu Rayhan al-Biruni, and the famous Persian poet Ferdowsi. In this intellectual environment, Islam was spread by persuasion and enticement rather than propaganda and war.

Early in the eleventh century, the Samanids were succeeded by the Seljuq Turks in the Middle East and the Karakhanid Mongols in Persia and Central Asia. The Mongols profoundly altered the situation in that region as they did in the Middle East a century later. The devastating consequences of the Mongol conquest of Persia and Central Asia were compounded by the loss of trade revenues when the traditional caravan routes were abandoned in favour of sea travel to India and China. Central Asia never recovered from the resulting decline in culture and prosperity.

The Turks

As Turkic tribal populations from Central Asia moved into parts of the Middle Eastern Muslim heartland, they were converted to Islam mainly by Sufi missionaries. They became influential from the tenth century onward in Central Asia, Armenia, Anatolia, and Syria. Mahmud of Ghazna in Afghanistan (r. 998–1030), of Turkish descent, broke away from the Persian Samanid dynasty; his successors, the Ghaznavids, extended Muslim power in northern India. Mahmud was the first person to be called 'sultan', a term that until his time had referred to the authority of the state.

The Seljuqs, another Turkic family, prevailed in Iran and farther west a generation after Mahmud. The second Seljuq sultan, Alp Arslan, inflicted a crushing defeat on the Byzantines at Manzikert, in eastern Anatolia, in 1071. Bit by bit, eastern Anatolia (today's Turkey) fell to the Seljuqs, who ruled until they were conquered by the Mongols.

'Ottomans'—that was to endure until 1924. In the fourteenth century they absorbed former Seljuq territory in eastern Anatolia and took western Anatolia from the Byzantines, and they reached the height of their power in the sixteenth century, occupying the Balkans as far north as Vienna, the Levant (i.e., the Syro-Palestinian region), and all of northern Africa except Morocco. So widespread was their empire that Christian Europe until the nineteenth century thought of Islamic culture as primarily Turkish.

As their imperial symbol the Ottomans adopted the crescent, an ancient symbol that the Byzantines had also used. Conspicuous on the Turkish flag, the crescent was considered by Europeans and eventually by Muslims themselves to be the symbol of Islam. Turkic languages continue to prevail in much of the region of Central Asia ruled by the Soviet Union for much of the twentieth century. From Azerbaijan to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, a dominant element in the population is Turkic. The same is true of Chinese Central Asia, in the vast region of Xinjiang.

China

Islam may have made contact with China as early as the eighth century, although the first written sources referring to Islam in China do not appear till the seventeenth century. For earlier information we have to rely on Chinese sources, which unfortunately focus on commercial activities and have little to say about the social and intellectual life of Chinese Muslims.

The extent of the Muslim presence in any area may often be gauged by the number of mosques. There seem to have been no mosques in the main inland cities of China before the thirteenth century. Along the coast, however, the minaret of the mosque in Guangzhou (Canton) and various in-

From the beginning, Persian and Arab merchants were allowed to trade freely so long as they complied with Chinese rules. But it was not until the thirteenth century that Muslim traders began settling in China in numbers large enough to support the establishment of mosques. The presence of Islam in China before that time was probably limited.

Muslim communities in China prospered under the Mongol (1206–1368) and Ming (1368–1644) emperors. After the Mongol period Chinese Muslims were assimilated culturally but kept their distinct religious identity. Since it was through trade that they kept in touch with the rest of the Muslim *ummah*, however, the decline of the overland trade with Central Asia in the 1600s had the effect of isolating the Chinese Muslim community. It became virtually cut off from the rest of the world, so that our information about Muslims in China after the seventeenth century is largely a matter of conjecture.

Unlike Buddhism, centuries earlier, Islam never came to be seen as culturally Chinese. The Uighurs—the Muslim population of Xinjiang (Chinese Turkestan), in the far northwest of the country—are an identifiable minority in Chinese society, distinguished by their language as well as their religion. Yet even the Chinese-speaking Muslims in the principal eastern cities of 'Han' China are set apart by their avoidance of pork—a staple of the Chinese diet. The presence of *halal* (ritually acceptable) restaurants and butcher shops is a sure sign of a Muslim neighbourhood.

Chinese Muslims experienced their share of repression under the Communist regime, particularly during the Cultural Revolution of 1966–76. While the overall situation for Muslims has improved since then, Uighur demands for independence have been met with a severe crackdown, and Chinese authorities often describe Uighur

they face an uncertain future, but the ethnic base of the minorities in China's Central Asian interior is not likely to disappear soon.

South Asia

Islam arrived early in India, carried by traders and Arab settlers. Umayyad armies began moving east into India in the early eighth century, and since that time Islam has become an integral part of Indian life and culture.

The Muslim conquest of India was a long process. In the second half of the tenth century the city of Ghazni, in what is today Afghanistan, became the base from which the armies of the sultan Mahmud the Ghaznavid and his successors advanced over the famous Khyber Pass onto the North Indian Plain. By the fourteenth century most of India had come under Muslim rule, with the exceptions of Tamil Nadu and Kerala in the far south.

The Muslim rulers of India came from Iran and Central Asia. Thus maintaining and expanding Muslim power over a large Hindu population meant continuous warfare. For Hindus, the Muslim regime was undoubtedly repressive; yet Indian Islam developed a unique and rich religious and intellectual culture.

India was something new in the history of Islam's territorial expansion. For the first time, the majority of the conquered population did not convert to the new faith. In ancient Arabia Islam had been able to suppress and supplant polytheism; but in India it had to learn to coexist with a culture that remained largely polytheistic.

At the same time Islam was something new to India. In a land where people often had multiple religious allegiances, and community boundaries were fluid, Islam's exclusive devotion to the one

—have the largest Muslim population in the world. The Muslims of India alone make up the world's third-largest Muslim population (after Indonesia and Pakistan), numbering between 100 and 120 million. Even so, they are a minority whose future appears bleak in the face of rising Hindu nationalism.

Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia, when Islam arrived there, consisted of small kingdoms and settlements that were home to a wide variety of languages and cultures, and its religious life had been strongly influenced by the Hindu and Buddhist traditions. These influences can still be seen in the ancient Hindu culture on the island of Bali and the great Buddhist stupa complex of Borobudur in Indonesia.

There is no evidence for the presence of Islam in Southeast Asia before the tenth century. But Yemeni traders are reported to have sailed into the islands of the Malay archipelago before the time of the Prophet, and this suggests that the Malay people may have been exposed to Islam at an early date. Scattered evidence from Chinese and Portuguese travellers, as well as passing references by Ibn Battutah, indicate that by the fifteenth century Islam had spread widely in Southeast Asia. Two centuries later, when British and Dutch trading companies arrived in the region, Islam was the dominant religion and culture of the Malay archipelago.

Muslim communities in small states ruled by sultans are widely reported by the thirteenth century. The earliest of these was Pasai, a small kingdom on the east coast of northern Sumatra. Some of the states that emerged in the fifteenth century gained considerable prominence both culturally and economically. In every case, prosperity attracted Muslim religious scholars from India to

powers. Aceh also produced noteworthy Islamic scholarship, which is still used in the Malay world today.

In Southeast Asia even more than elsewhere, Sufi orders played a crucial part in the process of Islamization. They were also prominent in later political and social struggles for reform and liberation. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Modernist reform movements in the Middle East inspired similar movements in Indonesia and other countries of the region. At present Islam is the majority religion in Malaysia, Brunei, and Indonesia (the largest Muslim country in the world today, with at least 180 million Muslims), and there are Muslim minorities in all the other countries of Southeast Asia. Today Southeast Asia can claim at least one-third of the world's Muslims.

PRACTICE

The Five Pillars of Islam

Individual faith and institutional Islam converge in the worship of God and service to others. According to well-attested tradition, the Prophet himself said that Islam was built on five 'pillars'. With the exception of the first (the *shahadah*, the profession of faith through which one becomes a Muslim), the pillars are all rites of worship, both personal and communal. The Five Pillars are:

- to declare, or bear witness, that there is no god except God, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God;
- to establish regular worship;
- to pay the *zakat* alms;
- to observe the fast of Ramadan; and
- to perform the *hajj* pilgrimage.

The Five Pillars are the foundations on which Islam rests as a religious system of faith and social responsibility, worship, and piety. Acts of worship are obligatory for all Muslims. Each of the

Five Pillars has both an outer or public obligatory dimension and an inner or private voluntary dimension.

Bearing Witness

The first pillar is the *shahadah*: 'I bear witness that there is no god except God, and I bear witness that Muhammad is the messenger of God.' It consists of two declarations. The first, affirming the oneness of God, expresses the universal and primordial state of faith in which every child is born. The Prophet is said to have declared, 'Every child is born in this original state of faith; then his parents turn him into a Jew, Christian, or Zoroastrian, and if they are Muslims, into a Muslim.'

The second declaration, affirming Muhammad's role as messenger, signifies acceptance of the truth of Muhammad's claim to prophethood, and hence the truth of his message.

Prayer

The second pillar consists of the obligatory prayers (*salat*). These are distinguished from voluntary devotional acts, such as meditations and personal supplicatory prayers (which may be offered at any time), in that they must be performed five times in a day and night: at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and after dark. The *salat* prayers were the first Islamic rituals to be instituted.

The *salat* prayers must always be preceded by ritual washing. *Wudu* ('making pure or radiant') or partial washing involves washing the face, rinsing the mouth and nostrils, washing the hands and forearms to the elbows, passing one's wet hands over the head and feet, or washing the feet to the two heels.

Five times a day—on radio and television, through loudspeakers, and from high minarets—a *mu'adhdhin* chants in a melodious voice the call to prayer inviting the faithful to pray together either in a mosque or at home. Whether a Muslim prays alone or behind an imam in congregation, he or she is always conscious of countless other men and women engaged in the same act of worship.