

ISLAM

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Islam — in Arabic, literally, “submission” or “surrender” (to the will of God) — is a monotheistic religion professed by over 1.5 billion people worldwide. Adherents of Islam are called Muslims. South Asia (Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan) is home to some 480 million Muslims, and a similar number are to be found in North Africa, the Middle East, Iran, Turkey, and central Asia. Sub-Saharan Africa has some 240 million Muslims (with large populations in Nigeria and Ethiopia), and Southeast Asia has 220 million Muslims (principally in Indonesia, and also Malaysia). The remaining 600 million or so are scattered across the globe, including 16 million in Russia and 20 million in China. Though not significant in number, the Muslims of western Europe (10 million) and North America (3.5 million) wield considerable symbolic and intellectual power in contemporary discourses in and about Islam. The desire of Muslim women to wear the head covering (the *hijâb*) in France and Germany, for instance, has seriously tested those countries’ purportedly unswerving commitment to freedom of expression and of religion. And scholars of Islam, both Muslim and non-Muslim, in the United States and England in particular, have contributed to a rethinking (some would say reformation) in their discussions about Islamic law and practice. Muslims in North America, many of whom are professionals, exert considerable influence on Muslims in other parts of the world through their wealth and resources (see “Islam in America,” chapter 15). But it remains true that many of the areas where Islam has spread have inherited legacies of colonialism (e.g., most of the Middle East), state oppression (e.g., China, with anywhere from 20 million to 150

million Muslims), and economic hardship (e.g., in Africa); it is also true that the majority of Muslims are poor and have limited access to food, water, resources, health care, education, and self-determination. These severe constraints have inevitably shaped the desires and actions of many predominantly Muslim countries and some of their inhabitants.

Muslim Population by Region, 2009

	Estimated 2009 Muslim Population	Percentage of Population That Is Muslim	Percentage of World Muslim Population
Asia-Pacific	972,537,000	24.1	61.9
Middle East-North Africa	315,322,000	91.2	20.1
Sub-Saharan Africa	240,632,000	30.1	15.3
Europe	38,112,000	5.2	2.4
Americas	4,596,000	0.5	0.3
World Total	1,571,198,000	22.9	100.0

Source: "Mapping the Global Muslim Population: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Muslim Population," October 2009; available online at www.pewforum.org/publications.

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Beginnings

As in other religions, Muslims run the gamut, from extremely devout to lapsed, from extremist to ultraliberal, from converted to merely cultural, and of course everything in between. Virtually all self-identifying Muslims are bound together, however, by an acknowledgment of the existence of one God (a notion called *tawhîd* in Arabic) and by belief in the divine origin of the Qur'an as God's speech (see "Qur'an," chapter 2) and in the ministry of the Prophet Muhammad (see "Muhammad," chapter 3). Muhammad, son of 'Abdallah, was born in the pilgrimage and trading town of Mecca in about 570 into the influential Quraysh tribe, who were custodians of the Ka'ba, an ancient cube-shaped shrine. Muhammad's father died before he was born and his mother died when he was six years old; thereafter, the child was raised by his grandfather, and later his uncle, Abû-Tâlib.

A trader known for his honesty and integrity, Muhammad accepted the proposal of marriage from his wealthy widowed employer, Khadija, when he was twenty-five years old and she perhaps as old as forty. Their close, loving relationship during their twenty-five-year marriage and Muhammad's affection for his four daughters — no sons survived infancy — are described by many, including Western feminists, as the basis for Muhammad's egalitarian stances on gender. It is certainly the case that Islam enfranchised women by granting them rights and autonomy hitherto denied to them in any political or religious system (see "Women and Islam," chapter 12). It is also true that Muhammad's numerous marriages, after Khadija's death, form the basis for many detractors' criticisms of Islam's patrilineal regulations and acceptance of polygamy (if under stringent conditions). It should be pointed out, however, that the patriarchal practices in many societies that embraced Islam are blamed on Islam itself: Muhammad's decision to marry an older, twice-widowed woman, for example, is nowhere emulated today, because of cultural and social values unconnected to Islam, in spite of the religious imperative to emulate Muhammad in all ways possible (see below).

Although the form of the initial revelations Muhammad received from God through the archangel Gabriel — a strongly rhythmic, rhyming prose — resembled the pronouncements of local Arabian oracles, this message was not mundane, but centered rather on belief in the One God (in Arabic, *Allâh*), on charitable acts, on right action, and on preparation for the Day of Judgment. One early revelation states:

In the Name of God, Full of Compassion, Ever Compassionate

¹By Time, endless, ²Humanity is assuredly in a state of loss, ³Except for those who believe, perform righteous acts, mutually enjoin Truth and mutually enjoin Steadfastness.

These revelations — the *Qur'ân*, literally "Recitation" — made it clear that God wanted to impart through Muhammad to the Arabs and to the world the same revelation God had imparted through Noah (Nûh) to his people, through Abraham (Ibrâhîm) to the inhabitants of Ur, and through Moses (Mûsâ) and Jesus ('Îsâ) to the Jews. The Qur'an refers to the recipients of these earlier revelations as "people of the scripture" or "people of the book" (*ahl al-kitâb*).

Muhammad initially preached his message — which he received piecemeal from God through Gabriel over the next twenty-three years —

to his intimates, and soon after to those who would become his closest confidants, including 'Alī (his first cousin and future son-in-law) and Abū-Bakr (his future father-in-law). Like disciples, the men and women around Muhammad (called *Sāhāba*, Companions) scrupulously memorized the revelations he repeated to them (i.e., the Qur'an) and also prophetic traditions (hadiths) containing his words of advice, instruction, and admonishment. By following the prescriptions of the Qur'an and by emulating the actions and deeds of Muhammad expressed in the hadiths (which collectively came to be called the Sunna), Muslims honor the Qur'anic injunction to "obey God and His Prophet" (see "Hadith and Sunna," chapter 4). But that obedience came at a price, especially for the poor and marginalized among his followers in Mecca, who were ostracized, banished, and persecuted by the ruling non-Muslim elite. As in Christianity, Islam first appealed to the indigent and disenfranchised, and it has continued to do so throughout its history: a large number of American converts, for instance, are low on the socioeconomic ladder, and members of ethnic minorities, including prisoners — it was in prison that the Black Muslim leader Malcolm X discovered Islam.

Growth

In 615, Muhammad temporarily sent a small band of his persecuted followers to Abyssinia, where he knew they would receive fair treatment as the kingdom was ruled by the Negus, a benevolent ruler, and, as a Christian, a believer (see "Islam and Christianity," chapter 14). The Qur'an, and consequently Islam, distinguishes more between believers in God and unbelievers than it does between Muslims and non-Muslims; it also makes an important distinction between the righteous and just (e.g., the Negus) on the one hand, and the tyrant and oppressor (e.g., Pharaoh) on the other. In 622, Muhammad accepted an invitation to move to the northern oasis town of Yathrib and become its chief. The Meccan Muslims traveled there in small bands and came to be known as the "Emigrants" (*Muhājirūn*); those welcoming them came to be known as the "helpers" (*Ansār*), and the city came to be known as Madīnat al-Nabī (City of the Prophet), or Medina for short. In Medina, Muhammad set about establishing a community proper. The Qur'anic revelations from 622 until Muhammad's death in 632 reflect his new role as leader of a body politic, the *umma* (community). Since Medina's population was religiously diverse, Muhammad drew up a

charter to protect all parties. The Constitution of Medina guaranteed, among other things, religious freedom, the security of women, and stability between warring tribes. But internal tensions in Medina led the Jewish tribes to collaborate with the Meccans, whose conflict with Muhammad escalated from skirmishes to full-scale war. In 628, Muhammad quashed the Jewish tribes and their confederates, and signed a treaty with the Meccans (see "Islam and Judaism," chapter 13). In 630, Muhammad entered Mecca without bloodshed and proceeded immediately to the Ka'ba, whereupon he destroyed all the idols within and around it (in an echo of Abraham's similar act before leaving Ur).

Medina remained the capital of the nascent Islamic state, but the Prophet did return to his hometown to perform the Hajj pilgrimage in 631. Before or after pilgrimage, Muslims pay their respects at Muhammad's tomb in Medina by wishing upon him God's salutations and blessings; indeed, many Muslims do this every time they hear or utter his name. Although God is the sole focus of prayer, prostration, petition, and worship, Muhammad nevertheless constitutes a major locus of reverence. This is why perceived or real attacks on him, such as the cartoons commissioned by a Danish newspaper in 2005 (or Salman Rushdie's 1989 novel *The Satanic Verses*, which parodies Muhammad), provoke such visceral reactions among so many Muslims. At issue and at stake is not the permissibility of depicting Muhammad — a frieze of Muhammad continues, for example, to grace the Supreme Court building in Washington, D.C., and numerous illustrations of Muhammad accompany manuscripts, both religious and secular — but rather the perceived insult to an emissary of God.

In one hadith, Muhammad is described as responding to a request that he define "Submission" (i.e., Islam) as follows: "Submission is that you bear witness that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is His messenger (*shahāda*), that you perform the (prescribed) ritual-prayers (*salāt*), that you fast the month of Ramadan (*sawm*), that you pay the (prescribed) alms-tax on wealth (*zakāt*), and that you perform the pilgrimage to the Ka'ba if you are able (*hajj*)." These obligations have come to be known as the five pillars of Islam, though some denominations enumerate other obligations: loving the Prophet and his family (*ahl al-bayt*), namely, his daughter Fātima, her husband 'Alī, and their children Hasan and Husayn (*tawallī*), and having antipathy for the enemies of the Prophet and his family (*tabarru*). Some also include struggling in the cause of the religion (*jihād*). *Jihād* has been widely used and abused, both as a term and as a course of action, by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Like the term "na-

tional security," it can be used by hawkish, militaristic, embattled interpreters to perpetrate violence, prosecute wars, and divest citizens of "God-given" rights; it can also be used by peace-loving, nonviolent, and sympathetic interpreters to defend borders, defuse conflicts, reassure citizens, and enhance personal piety and spirituality.

The testimony that there is no deity except for (the one, true) God and that Muhammad is his (final) messenger constitutes Islam's fundamental doctrinal belief, a formulation known as the *shahâda*. The *shahâda* must be uttered at least once in a Muslim's lifetime: those born Muslim do so from early childhood; converts utter it to mark their acceptance of Islam. This phrase, as well as phrases from the Qur'an, can be found adorning people's homes and also major Muslim monuments, such as the Dome of the Rock (built 691) in Jerusalem, Islam's oldest standing religious structure, and the Alhambra (built between 1338 and 1390) in Granada, though this Spanish palace's inscriptions include secular aphorisms and poetry.

There are more elaborate creeds, such as the important "Detailed Articles of Belief," which states: "I believe in God, in His angels, in His scriptures, in His messengers, in the Last Day, in destiny, both good and bad, and in resurrection after death." This creed reveals that Islam sees itself as part of a continuous process of revelation on God's part of His will to humanity, through angels and prophets and scriptures. Thus, for Islam, Moses received the *Tawrât* (Torah, the Hebrew Bible), David (Dâwûd) the *Zabûr* (Psalms), and Jesus the *Injil* (the Evangel, or Gospel) from God. They were prophets, as were Adam (with Eve, half of the first human couple), Noah, Abraham, Solomon (Sulaymân), and John the Baptist (Yahyâ), to name only a handful of the 126,000 messengers Islamic tradition says God sent to humankind. Other prominent characters include Satan — not a fallen angel but a disobedient jinn (origin of the English "genie"), another kind of creation that inhabits the earth and to whom the Qur'an is also addressed; Mary (Maryam), the mother of Jesus; the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus; and some nonbiblical individuals, such as Khidr, the long-living tutor to the prophets, and Dhul-Qarnayn, an Alexander figure. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Qur'an accepts, co-opts, and, in its own view, corrects the narratives to be found in earlier monotheistic scriptures. From the very beginning, then, Muhammad preached Islam as part of a larger grace from God to humankind. This helps to explain why Muhammad was regarded as a renegade by some Christians in the Middle Ages, or as the founder of a Jewish, Christian, or Judeo-Christian heresy in some modern Western scholarship. It is clear that the message Muham-

mad preached had a profound effect on his listeners, both in form and content.

Muslims believe that Muhammad was, while still alive, transported into the presence of God; during this Night Journey and Ascension, God prescribed the five daily ritual-prayers (*salât*, *namâz*), known by the times they are to be performed: predawn (*fajr*), early afternoon (*zuhr*), midafternoon (*asr*), sunset (*maghrib*), and nighttime (*ishâ'*). All observant Muslims perform these ritual-prayers, either alone or, if possible, in congregation (which is preferable). The Friday congregational prayer (*Jum'a*) — which always includes a sermon, one often used for propaganda, not just exhortation — is also an obligation. It must be performed in a designated place of congregation. Typically that place is a congregational mosque (*jâmi'*), but a campus hall or any clean open space may also be used — Muhammad emphasized that a distinguishing feature of Islam is the possibility of performing one's ritual-prayers anywhere, that is, without needing a sacred or sanctified place, though simple ritual washing (*wudû'*, ablutions, or *tayammum*, if earth is used instead of water) is a prerequisite to ritual practices (see "Mosque," chapter 10). Because the Qur'an asks believers to abandon work and hasten to the Friday services, *Jum'a* is therefore not unlike the Jewish Sabbath service or the Sunday Mass, and consequently countries with large Muslim populations declare Friday a holiday and make Friday-Saturday the weekend.

The prescribed alms, or *zakât*, are repeatedly enjoined in the Qur'an, as is the need for performing regular charity in general. What distinguishes *zakât* is that it is not voluntary, but a required 2½ percent tax specifically on accumulated wealth and goods (not income), which must be paid out by those who have such wealth to those who do not. In some countries, ministries or departments collect *zakât* from Muslim citizens and distribute it to the needy, and in others, benevolent organizations do so. *Zakât's* literal meaning is "purification," which suggests that the redistribution of wealth it entails, besides being an important communal and fiscal act, cleanses the believer.

"Fasting is prescribed for you just as it was prescribed to those who came before you," says the Qur'an, implying Jews on Yom Kippur or Christians in Lent. Besides voluntary fasting on almost any day of the year, the obligatory fast (*sawm*, *siyâm*, *roza*) lasts the whole of Ramadan, the ninth lunar month, and entails abstaining from all food, drink, and sex from before first light until sunset. Although it is one of the five pillars, the obligation is relaxed for anyone who is unable to fast, such as the very young, the

very old, the infirm, those who fall sick doing so, and the like. Ultimately, like all the obligations (except the pilgrimage), it is up to the Muslim herself to regulate observance. According to the Prophet Muhammad, virtue (*ihsân*) "is that you worship God as if you see Him, for even though you do not, He sees you," underscoring the importance placed in Islam on personal responsibility and on the personal and unmediated relationship between the believer and God. All Muslims may cultivate this relationship through pious devotion and righteous acts, but it is especially the focus of many *sûfi* practices (see "Sufism," chapter 7). For Sufis (loosely, mystics), the ultimate aim is proximity (even "union") with the divine. To achieve this, they engage in active remembrance of God, by intoning pious phrases, by reciting Qur'anic verses, and by engaging in other practices that induce a heightened state of awareness, such as chanting or, in one celebrated case, whirling. These practices have been frowned upon by more austere Muslims, who believe that one is saved from hellfire and guaranteed paradise by doing what is prescribed and permitted, and avoiding — and punishing those who engage in — what is forbidden, a category interpreted narrowly. Given that most areas of Muslim concentration outside the Arabian Peninsula adopted Islam because of the appeal of the more populist practices of the Sufis, this hard-line position is difficult to maintain (and may even be disingenuous).

The Hajj is the largest annual pilgrimage in the world: today it draws between two and three million Muslims during the Hajj season (in the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar), and an equal number during the rest of the year (a voluntary pious act called *umra*). It takes place specifically in the sacred precincts around the Ka'ba (or *bayt Allâh*, "house of God") and around Mecca. But the Hajj is an obligation most Muslims will never fulfill given the resources and time required, though many set aside money their entire lives and then spend those savings to perform the Hajj. Pilgrims reenact rituals performed by Muhammad, all the while dressed in two pieces of unsewn cloth (men) or simple cotton garments (women). The garb is called *ihrâm*, which is the term also for the sacralized state it represents, during which sexual intercourse, the cutting or shaving of hair, and the use of scented products are forbidden. The rituals are based in large part on the movements and actions of Abraham, who is believed by Muslims to have rebuilt the Ka'ba, a "house" originally erected for the worship of the one true God but that had been turned by lapsed monotheists into an animist shrine. They include circumambulating the Ka'ba, hurrying between two hills in a reenactment of Hagar's search for water for her

infant, the symbolic stoning of Satan, and conclude with the sacrifice of animals in emulation of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son.

Flowering

When Muhammad died in 632, Abû-Bakr, the father of Muhammad's wife 'Ā'ishah and one of his closest Companions, announced to the Muslims of Medina, "Those of you who believe in God, know that He is Alive and Everlasting; those of you who believed in Muhammad, know that he is dead." That declaration set the tone for Abû-Bakr's two years as caliph (from the Arabic *khalifa*, successor), an office he reluctantly accepted. Some Muslims believed Muhammad had designated 'Alî as his successor and objected to the naming of Abû-Bakr; others openly stated that their allegiance to Muhammad had died with Muhammad. Abû-Bakr courted the former and fought the latter, and by the time of his natural death in 634, the entire Arabian Peninsula was nominally Muslim. His successor, 'Umar, was chosen by a *shûrâ* (council), and over the next ten years oversaw, from the capital in Medina, the expansion of the *umma* into a veritable empire. In 636, the Persian Empire fell to the Muslims; in 637 so did Byzantine Syria, including Jerusalem, which remained under Muslim control from then until the British defeat of the Ottomans in 1917, except for an eighty-seven-year period during the Crusades.

Under Muslim rule (see "Islamic Government," chapter 11), all monotheists were protected: they enjoyed freedom of worship and congregation, and were allowed to engage in economic, artistic, and intellectual activity. Monasteries, for instance, thrived in Islamic lands; the most famous was St. Catherine's Monastery at the foot of Mount Sinai, which claims to have a letter from Muhammad himself guaranteeing its safety. Relations with Christians from outside the Middle East were forever strained by the arrival of the successive waves of Crusaders (from 1095 to 1291), however. The Christians living in Syria, Palestine, and Egypt were known as Christians, but the invaders were invariably referred to as Franks (*Faranj*). This distinction between local minorities who were trusted and outsiders who were not is echoed in a number of contemporary situations. The U.S. administration in the wake of the September 11, 2001, attacks, for example, distinguished between American Muslims, whom it regarded as trustworthy, and "foreign" Muslims, some of whom it regarded as representing a serious, terrorist threat. The resentment that Muslims and Christians in Eu-

rope feel toward each other, by contrast, has a different context and background. In part, it is related to a shared history of conflict (Crusades, world wars), and subsequently to subjugation and domination through colonialism by the European powers (principally France and England). In western Europe, even native-born Muslims are often denied full citizenship. In France and Germany, this is no doubt because they are predominantly members of an immigrant labor underclass; these two countries are alone in banning women from wearing the head covering in government service — something that is not an issue elsewhere in Europe, or in North America.

By all accounts the caliph 'Umar disliked being regarded as an absolute ruler and refused both title and luxury, but — or perhaps, therefore — he ruled with the greatest efficiency and success. In order effectively to administer the ever-growing empire, and to regulate salaries and taxation, 'Umar instituted the lunar Islamic calendar (year 1 of which is the Prophet's migration [Hijra] to Medina). 'Umar also leased a Byzantine church in Damascus to allow the Muslim population there to congregate for prayer, especially on Friday and on the two high holidays, the Feast of Fast-breaking (in Ramadan) and the Feast of Sacrifice (to coincide with the pilgrimage). Eventually, the Muslims took the half of the land where the church stood and built the Umayyad Mosque on the entire enclosure, with decoration by Syrian Christian artisans trained in the Byzantine tradition. Besides being an important center of religious education, the Umayyad Mosque has great symbolic significance. It houses the head of John the Baptist — the 2001 visit of John Paul II to the relic was the first time a pope had visited a mosque. It also houses the head of Muhammad's grandson Husayn (see below), and is therefore an important Shi'ite shrine (see "Shi'ites, Shi'ism," chapter 8). The Umayyad Mosque is also believed to be the site where the prophet Jesus — Muslims regard him as fully human, and do not believe he was crucified but, rather, protected by being raised up to heaven while still alive — will return to assist in defeating the Antichrist (called Dajjâl) and the forces of unbelief and darkness, before helping to usher in a time of peace and submission to God.

'Umar, in spite of his austerity, justice, and scrupulous adherence to Muhammad's example of modest and self-effacing leadership, was assassinated by one or more non-Muslim conspirators, even though he had established clear rules protecting believers in the revealed religions as *dhimmi*s (from *dhimma*, "[pact of] protection"). *Dhimmi*s were, to be sure, second-class citizens, as are resident aliens in some twenty-first-century

countries (e.g., in the United States, where they are taxed but have no right to vote or to hold public office). 'Umar was succeeded by 'Uthmân, a caliph who reportedly promoted the interests of his kinsmen but is primarily remembered for collecting the Qur'an into a single, written, canonical codex. Curiously, for this he was both praised (since it would prevent the possibility of erring in the recitation of God's words) and vilified (he burned copies of noncanonical Qur'anic texts).

'Uthmân was assassinated by disgruntled Muslim subjects, and his successor, 'Alî, inherited a fractured polity — though the empire was financially robust, in particular thanks to the very able governor of Syria, Mu'âwiya, a kinsman of 'Uthmân. 'Alî was supported by some Muslims, especially those who claimed his primacy from the very beginning (a group that came to be known as the Shi'a, Anglicized as Shi'ites), but he was opposed by several factions, including Mu'âwiya. Their armies met in battle, but the pious 'Alî accepted Mu'âwiya's offer of arbitration over bloodshed, and Mu'âwiya thereby gained the upper hand. This opposition has a certain symmetry to it: Mu'âwiya's father, Abû-Sufyân, had been Muhammad's staunchest opponent; now his son Mu'âwiya was opposing Muhammad's son-in-law; later, Mu'âwiya's son would murder 'Alî's son (Muhammad's grandson), Husayn.

In 661, 'Alî was assassinated by a malcontent former follower (the member of a small group known as the Khârijites, or "leave-takers"). With his death, a thirty-year period described by Muslim historians as the time of the "rightly guided" (*râshidûn*) caliphs came to an end, during which all the rulers had been very close companions of Muhammad, members of his inner circle, so to speak. With 'Alî dead, Mu'âwiya claimed the caliphate and ruled for twenty years from the new capital of the Islamic empire, Damascus. In 680, he was succeeded by his son Yazîd, and thus began the first caliphal dynasty, the Umayyads (so named for an ancestor, Umayya). Mu'âwiya preserved the Byzantine civil administration; not until 697, under the later caliph 'Abd-al-Malik, did Arabic become the language of state and administration. Under the Umayyads, who ruled from 661 to 750, the Islamic empire expanded across northern Africa, and as far as Spain in the west and western China in the east. It is difficult to estimate the total Muslim population in the mid-eighth century, as most of the inhabitants in areas taken over by the Muslim rulers remained unaffected by Islam; it was, paradoxically, in the empire's interest to have subject populations remain non-Muslim, as it could collect a poll tax from non-Muslims (the *jizya*). Modern historians have remarked that certain areas welcomed the Mus-

lims as preferable to their previous overlords, as in Roman Egypt, Persia, and Iberia. And yet, it appears that in some areas the new religion did appeal to the masses and resulted in conversions, sometimes on a large scale. This was especially true in West Africa, South Asia, and central Asia, where itinerant missionary mystics (Sufis) made Islam attractive.

Sufis were not accepted in some places, especially in certain parts of the world that were (already) predominantly Muslim, where gnostic or musical or populist or syncretic presentations of Islam were regarded as a threat to the pristine Islam of the law books. The most well-known opponent to Sufis is probably Ibn-ʿAbd-al-Wahhâb, eponym of the so-called Wahhâbi movement, influential today in Saudi Arabia. This is a puritanical, literalist brand of Islam that the Saudis can easily propagate by using their economic power (deriving principally from oil) to distribute “authorized” translations of the Qurʾan and to train scholars in seminaries and universities funded by them all over the world, and through the pilgrims who piously visit the holy cities of Mecca and Medina year-round. Though Wahhâbism is not necessarily a violent ideology, it is famously intolerant of what it regards as heterodox Muslim beliefs.

The Umayyad empire stretched from Spain to India, with a predominantly non-Arab and non-Muslim population. In 750, frustrated non-Arab Muslims rallied to the Abbasid cause and helped topple the Umayyads, who cultivated Arab and Arabian virtues and regarded non-Arab members of the Muslim polity as inferior — a form of discrimination Muhammad had specifically forbidden in his last sermon. The Abbasids (so named for Abbas, Muhammad’s uncle) soon thereafter built a new capital, Baghdad, in 762, and before the end of the eighth century the “Round City” or the “City of Peace” was the envy of the world. It attracted artists and artisans, scholars and scientists, physicians and philosophers. Many of modern society’s institutions have their origins in medieval Baghdad, such as the college, the hospital, the postal system, and the police force. Baghdad also had running water, observatories, philosophical societies, and law schools. It was in the latter that the principles of Islamic jurisprudence were studied. A law student, like a law student in a modern American law school, had a preparatory education first; for the medieval Muslim this typically involved memorizing the Qurʾan, learning hadiths, studying the principles of Arabic grammar, and memorizing classics from the literary tradition. In the ninth century particularly, scholarship, learning, and literary output flourished in Arabic, building on the scholarly advances of the eighth century. These included the anthologizing of the vast Arabic poetic corpus; the study of

Arabic grammar and lexicography; exegesis of the Qurʾan; the sifting, collecting, and publishing of hadiths; the patronage — notably by the caliphs Hârûn al-Rashîd and al-Maʾmûn — of the translation of scientific and philosophical works from Greek and historical and political works from Middle Persian; and the development of methodological and theoretical principles in jurisprudence, literary criticism, and philosophical theology (see “Islamic Philosophy,” chapter 6).

The Abbasids ruled from 750 to 1258, but from the tenth to the thirteenth century their economic success was consolidated and their resources were fragmented and spread out. As early as the ninth century, even nearby Egypt was virtually self-governing. In the tenth century, both Spain, under the Spanish Umayyad caliphate (756-1031), and Egypt, under the Shiʿite Fâtimid caliphate (909-1171), were being run by rival polities actively opposed to the Abbasids. The notion that the Abbasid caliph was the head of the entire Muslim *umma* was now a fiction, and even the titular caliph’s political power devolved increasingly to outlying governorates that were often autonomous and only paid lip service and tribute to the central authority in Baghdad. During the period of the Crusades, for instance, resistance was not organized by the Abbasid caliph in Baghdad, but by the Turkic rulers of Syria, and later by their Kurdish lieutenant, Saladin (Salâh-al-dîn). Saladin later defeated the Fâtimids and established himself as sultan in Cairo. The title sultan (literally, “potentate”) had been in use since the advent of Turkic Muslim rule in central Asia, and would remain an important title. In the fourteenth century, Dante spared Saladin in the *Commedia*, saving him from hellfire by placing him in Limbo, and by referring to him as “the Sultan,” an acknowledgment of him as an honorable ruler. In Limbo too are two important Muslim philosophers and polymaths, the Central Asian Avicenna (Ibn-Sina, d. 1037) and the Spanish Averroës (Ibn-Rushd, d. 1198), spared because of the incalculable importance of these thinkers’ works in European philosophy, medicine, and theology. Avicenna also wrote a medical textbook, the *Canon*, which was in continuous use in medical schools all over Europe until the seventeenth century. Both were also jurists, mathematicians, and scientists, and wrote on numerous other topics, as did many Muslim scholars in the Middle Ages — “renaissance” scholars before the Renaissance itself.

Becoming an intellectual of the caliber of Averroës and Avicenna was made possible by the relative ease of access to teachers, libraries, bookshops, colleges, and universities, and the sheer curiosity implicit in the intellectual milieu, which often included travel across great distances in

search of knowledge (*rihla fi talab al-'ilm*). This is in keeping with the Qur'an's emphasis that God is worthy of worship because, among other things, "He taught humanity the use of the pen." The prominent religious scholar Ja'far al-Sâdiq (d. 765, great-great-grandson of 'Alî) reportedly said that a scholar is worth a thousand worshippers.

Authority to discern and interpret the divine law for both Shi'ite and Sunni Muslims is vested in clerics. Shi'ite clerics form a hierarchy that culminates in ayatollahs, master jurists whose knowledge of the law commands allegiance from lower-level clerics (mullahs, *mujtahids*) and laypersons. Sunni clerics, by contrast, are not hierarchically organized and, in principle, are each equally entitled to develop authoritative interpretations of the law (though in practice some enjoy more prestige than others, whether through an official position or reputation in a given community) (see "Sunnis, Sunnism," chapter 9). Paradoxically, this allows anyone with authority and power to advance their brand of Islam. The threat of this possibility in the ninth century is what led jurists to close ranks and effectively ensure that only qualified jurists could interpret the law (see "Shari'a," chapter 5). This is akin to allowing only those who hold degrees from an accredited law school and who have passed the bar exam to call themselves lawyers and practice law; it is a mechanism established to ensure that the experts control the knowledge production and the expertise. The institution where one studied law was called a *madrasa* (law college), and was residential. The first *madrasa*, the Nizâmiyya, was founded in Baghdad in 1091 by the patron Nizâm-al-Mulk, chief minister in the Seljuk Turkish empire. The word *madrasa* today is used principally to mean "Sunday school" or seminary, but its origins are medieval; during medieval times a *madrasa* dispensed higher education, not elementary or secondary education.

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One could describe the rise and fall of several important Muslim empires in the centuries following the arrival of the Mongols on the scene in the thirteenth century, such as the Songhay empire in Niger and Burkina Faso (1468-1591), the (Shi'ite) Safavids in Persia (1501-1736), the Sultanate of Aceh in Indonesia (1496-1903), and the Ottomans in the Middle East and southeastern Europe (1293-1923) — the latter important for having ruled in Constantinople/Istanbul through to the early twentieth century and whose sultans were the last rulers to claim the title caliph. But their story is the

stuff of regional, political, and economic history and international relations, not the story of Islam, the belief system. By the same token, it is a mistake to think of "the Muslim world," a term glibly deployed by many, including the Western media and academy, as a synonym for Islam. Neither journalists nor academics would refer to Europe and the Americas, say, as "the Christian world," or Israel as "the Jewish country." Similarly no one would attribute the actions or beliefs of *some* Christians to all of "Christianity," or of the Ku Klux Klan to all Americans. The assumption that an elementary school teacher in Nigeria, an actress in Canada, a shopkeeper in Pakistan, a nurse in Baghdad, an architect in Indonesia, a combatant in Guantanamo, and a criminal anywhere have a single *Muslim* view of the world is a *seriously* flawed one. Observant Muslims do, to be sure, give their religion importance; but so do observant Jews. Politically disenfranchised Muslims in Russia and Palestine do, to be sure, rail against neocolonialism, state repression, and foreign interference, but so do politically disenfranchised Christians in Russia and Palestine. The assumption that for Muslims, religious identity is more important than any other part of their identity, such as citizenship, race, gender, or class, is as flawed as assuming that this is not true of Christians or Jews.

Like everyone else, Muslims are parents, children, spouses, farmers, soldiers, writers, thinkers, activists, teachers, politicians. Like atheists and animists, Buddhists and Baptists, Jains and Jews, Muslims come in all stripes. And like the members of so many of the world's great religions, they have beliefs rooted in the words and practices of a centuries-old faith.