emphasis on the role of the *Sunnah* in their tradition, they have been called *Ahl al Sunnah* or *Sunnis*. Conformity to past tradition and practice is thus the cornerstone of the Sunni interpretation of Islam.

The position of Sunnism became defined as a response to questions concerning authority and practice that had also given rise to the Khwarij and the Shia. Much of the eventual content of Sunni thought developed as a result of its reactions to these other groups. In regard to practice, the Sunnis evolved a means of elaborating the *Shariah* by which their scholars developed, in addition to the Quran and the *Sunnah*, the concepts of *ijma*, consensus, and *qiyas*, analogy. According to *ijma*, a consensus of most scholars on the validity of a practice, followed by common agreement on it, was sufficient to establish the validity of the practice in *Shariah*. According to *qiyas*, the validity of a practice could be tested by scholars employing reasoning and the drawing of analogies with other laws of the *Shariah*.

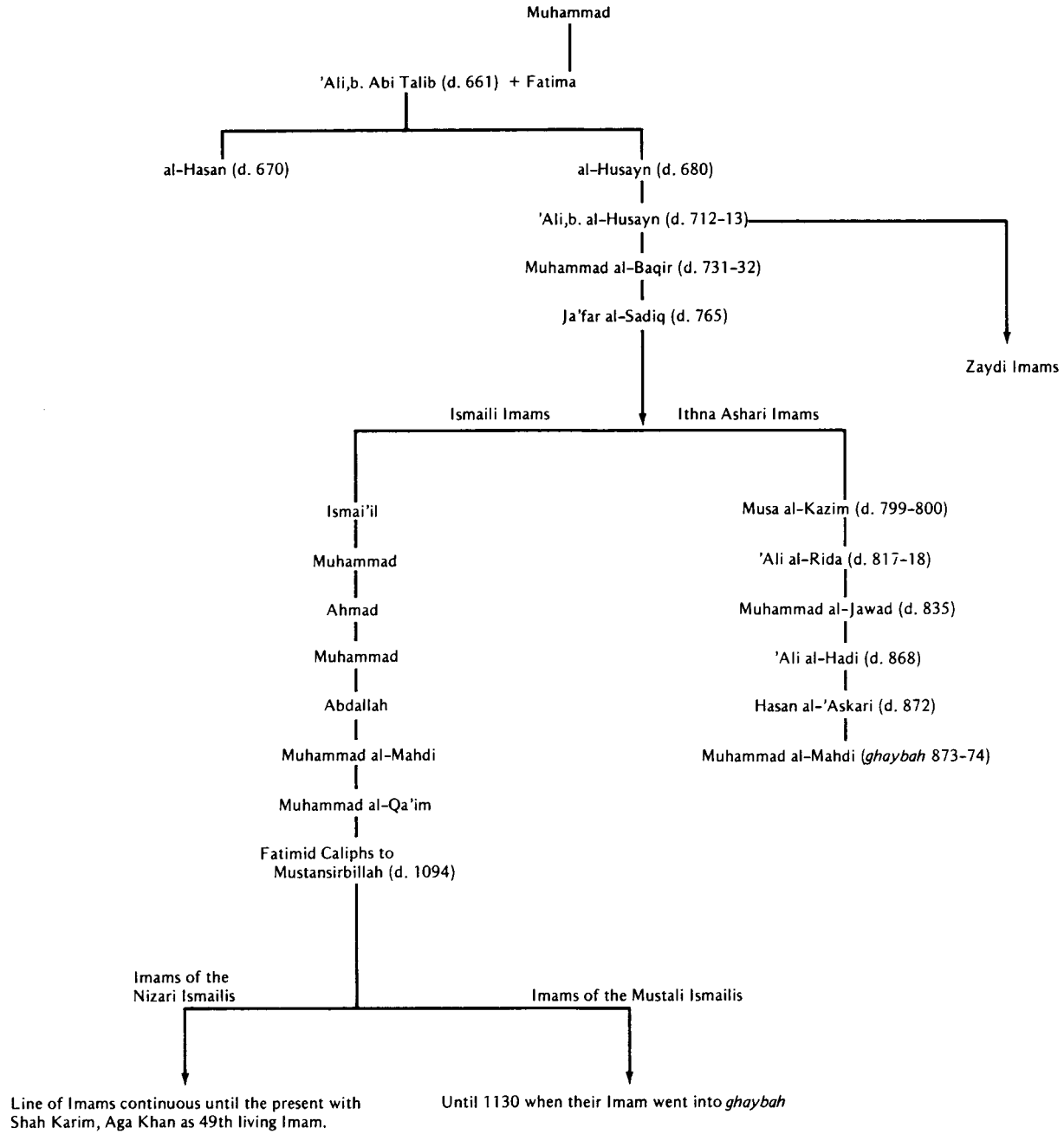
For instance, a parallel could be established between a case treated in the Quran or by the Prophet and newly arising issues. By considering the parallels the jurists could then proceed to a logical deduction. A specific example of this is their treatment of the Quranic command to put commercial transactions in writing so as to prevent fraud. By analogy, the Muslim jurists made it compulsory to register marriages officially, although the Quran makes no reference to such a requirement. The jurists, however, considered it to be a serious transaction of trust between two individuals to which the Quranic ruling ought also to apply. By thus checking agreement in the present and consistency with the past through *ijma* and *qiyas*, a flexibility was provided by which the scholars could accommodate practices not specifically referred to in the Quran and in the *Sunnah* but not contradictory to their spirit. The scholars and jurists thus acted as interpreters of Islam, assuming both universal application and a sense of continuity.

Nevertheless, certain minor areas of disagreement have led to variations in the interpretation of the *Shariah*. Four schools of law in Sunni Islam have developed, each named after the scholar responsible for defining its main features: They are Shafi'i, Maliki, Hanbali, and Hanafi. Each school has recognized the right of the others to disagree on minor points of interpretation, and therefore all four are considered as normative in Sunni Islam. Some of these schools have not always been as tolerant toward other groups in Islam.

The scholars in the Sunni tradition, generally referred to as *ulama* in Arabic or *mullah* in other languages, have acted as learned experts and teachers of Islam. They have received their training in a variety of schools, specializing in Quranic and legal sciences. In Sunni Islam they have played an important role as custodians of knowledge and protectors of the tradition.

Since the divine law was the basis on which a Muslim state was to be organized, the law in Sunni Islam also involved a definition of the nature of the state and politics. Like the Shia, the Sunni tradition accepted the necessity of having a head of state generally referred to as *Khalifah* (caliph). His role, as defined by jurists, was to act as the custodian of the state and the *Shariah*. Jurists developed elaborate theories that defined and circumscribed the conditions under which one could become a ruler and the duties and responsibilities that the ruler was to carry out.

Besides having its own specific systematization of matters related to the law and the state, Sunnism also defined itself in relation to the interpretation of doctrine. An interesting example of how this happened in early Islam is the controversy regarding Muslim attitudes to the "createdness" of the Quran. One group of Muslims, called Mutazilah, believed that the Quran, as it could be considered as the speech or word of God, should be regarded as created. This position was based on their view that the concept of the unity of God, *tawhid*, implied that God was pure Essence, and this belief would be violated if the Quran, the speech of God, were to be considered as uncreated and, therefore, part of this pure Essence. On this issue, the Mutazilah were supported by the Caliph in Baghdad, al Mamun (ruled 813–833), who set about imposing their view and persecuting those who rejected it.



The Shia Imams.

However, it was from their opponents, who could not accept the idea of the createdness of the Quran and who believed instead in its eternal nature, that the majority Sunni view came to be established and eventually accepted after al Mamun's death. Subsequent Sunni scholars, the main ones being al-Ashari (d. 935) and al-Maturidi (d. 944), used rational, theological tools to refute Mutazili arguments and defined Sunni theology regarding the nature of God and the Quran.

Sunnism continued to produce great scholars who sought to establish main doctrines and the practice of the majority against diverging points of view. One of the best known was al-Ghazali (d. 1111), who played a major role in establishing the validity of the Sunni position against the views of the philosopher and Shia groups like the Ismailis. Al-Ghazali's condemnation of certain views of the philosophers and Ismailis was aimed at discouraging departures from what he regarded as the established norms of Muslim belief and practice. In helping to consolidate the Sunni position, he also stimulated a greater concern for the dimension of religious experience as an integral part of acts of devotion and piety. His major work, entitled *Ihya Ulum al-din* (*The Revitalization of Religious Sciences*), has had a major influence on all subsequent Sunni thought.

Another important theologian and legal scholar was Ibn Taimiyah (d. 1328). His strong reaction to the growth of popular Sufism became the basis for much of the reform that developed in the Islamic world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Like al-Ghazali, he became a strong defender of the Sunni position. In particular, he directed his writings and arguments against persons whom he felt to be exercising undue restraint in applying reason to the interpretation of basic Islamic concepts. He argued for a more literal and strict adherence to the Quran and *Sunnah* in thought and practice, occasionally rejecting some of al-Ghazali's views as well. His works have had a great influence on subsequent Muslim thinkers, who have argued for a return to the basic ideas and practices of early Islam.

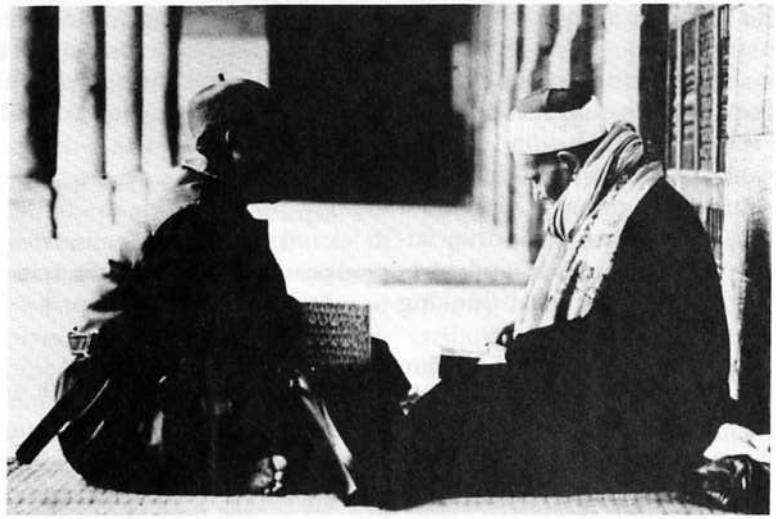
A Sunni thinker whose work went beyond theological concerns was Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406). He wrote a monumental work on history with a lengthy introduction on the nature and meaning of human history and social process, which has been considered as one of the most original works of the time—so much so that he has earned, among some modern European scholars, the title of "father of sociology."

In addition to these major groups, other Muslims in the course of Islamic history developed specific approaches to the understanding and practice of Islam. Groups such as the philosophers and the Sufis (discussed shortly) did not consciously establish "schools" of their own; but some of their interpretations of Islam are sufficiently divergent from Sunnism, in particular, to warrant identification as major groups.

The Muslim Philosophers

As the Muslim empire expanded, it came into close contact with cultures that had long-established intellectual roots. The most important of these were in the Mediterranean world, Persia (Iran), and India. Under the patronage of various rulers, academies were set up in which translations were made of scientific and philosophic works from Greek, Pahlavi (the language of Persia), and Sanskrit. Thus, there developed within Islam an intellectual tradition that undertook a study of these sources and created a new synthesis that would incorporate, modify, and further develop this heritage. One direct result was the rise of Muslim philosophers who, like other groups in Islam, began to address themselves to the intellectual problems raised by the Muslim encounter with other religious and intellectual traditions. The Mutazilah, mentioned earlier, were the first along with the Shia to emphasize rational and intellectual tools as means of explaining Quranic principles. Both of these groups in turn influenced later thinkers.

Among early Muslim philosophers, the most important was al-Farabi (d. 950). He defined the goals of Muslim philosophy on questions of metaphysics, ethics, and politics, and the relationship of these goals to Islamic society. His main aim was to pro-



Master and Pupil. *A teacher and student engaged in the study of the Quran.* (Courtesy of Fred Denny)

mote philosophical inquiry as a tool for interpreting and clarifying the basis of Islam in terms of doctrine and practice. His philosophical investigation led to a definition of the nature of a truly Islamic community. He also attempted to harmonize philosophy and religion by arguing that they were analogous, comparing the true prophet (Muhammad, in the case of Islam) to Plato's philosopher-king. He was also recognized for his commentaries and interpretations of the works of Plato and Aristotle, whose philosophies he attempted to reconcile with each other.

Another great figure in Islamic philosophy was Ibn Sina, known to the Latin West as Avicenna (d. 1061). His contributions to thought, medicine, and natural science have led to his recognition as one of the intellectual giants of the medieval period. Among the Muslim philosophers who followed, the best known are Ibn Rushd (d. 1198), known as Averroes, and Ibn Tufayl (d. 1186), both of whom lived and worked in Spain and North Africa during the twelfth century.

An excellent illustration of the attempts by Muslim philosophers to relate reason and revelation is the philosophical tale *Hayy bin Yaqzan,* written by Ibn Tufayl.[2] The story begins with the birth of a male child born through spontaneous generation out of natural elements. He is called Hayy bin Yaqzan, "Living, the son of Awake." The child, cared for by a deer, grows up on an island and, after learning to provide for himself, learns to explore, experiment, and eventually to speculate and philosophize. He becomes aware of his status as a rational being in the world and establishes a pattern of ethical behavior based on his perception of the living things around him and the movement of the planets. Ultimately, his consciousness develops to the point where philosophical abstraction leads him to meditation and ecstatic contemplation. The search for truth is expressed in terms of a rational process as well as profound religious experience. This stage of perfection is reached entirely through the use of his natural rational capacities.

In the story, Hayy is led to a nearby island where he encounters a human society bound by the norms that govern human life and regulated by rules derived from prophetic revelation. Although he recognizes the same truths expressed in the images of revelation that he has already arrived at through philosophy, he is unable to convince the people of the island of this link and thus to awaken in them an awareness of their full potentialities as rational

beings. He leaves the island to return to his own secluded and blissful life.

The tale highlights some of the problems faced by philosophers as they attempted to reconcile the roles of reason and revelation in Muslim thought, both for themselves and for the larger community. It is in this wider context that the role of Muslim philosophers needs to be evaluated, as they attempted to bridge the claims of reason and revelation and inspire ways of philosophical thinking among Muslims.

The refutation of some of the views of Muslim philosophers by the Sunni theologian al-Ghazali—and his charge that some of their views were unacceptable—created an unfavorable climate for the development of philosophy in some parts of the Muslim world. The study and development of philosophy flourished, however, in other areas, such as Persia. During the seventeenth century, Islamic philosophy gave rise to major thinkers like Mir Damad and Mulla Sadra. In their thought, philosophy came to be closely linked with some of the basic ideas underlying Islamic mysticism, or more properly Sufism.

The Sufis

The Sufis are Muslims who seek to understand and experience the dimension of Islam that relates to the cultivation of an inner life in search of divine love and knowledge. The same *sufi* is derived from *tasawwuf:* the act of devoting oneself to a search for an inner life. Sufis are also referred to as *faqir* or *dervish,* both meaning "poor" (in spirit), words that have become part of the English language. The word "sufi" may in part also be attributed to the use of *suf,* woolen garments, such as some early Muslim mystics wore.

The roots of Sufism lay in some of the early Muslims' experience of the Quran and their desire to understand the nature of the Prophet's religious experience: "From God we are and to Him is our return" (2:156). Verses of the Quran like this constituted the basis of what became the Sufi understanding of spiritual life. Sufis themselves often employed vivid imagery to describe their quest for religious meaning. The poet Rumi (d. 1273), whose *Mathnawi* is considered one of the great classics of Sufi literature, began his work by citing the analogy of a flute, made out of reeds, playing soulfully:

> Listen to the reed as it tells a tale, complaining of separation—, crying:
>
> "Ever since I was torn from the reed-bed, my complaint has brought tears to man and woman. I seek a heart torn by separation, that I may reveal the yearning of love."
>
> All those torn asunder from their source, long for the day they were one with it.[3]

The central image of the flute or pipe, as it is used in this passage and elsewhere in Sufi literature, mirrors the yearning of the soul, which, like the reed out of which the flute is made, has been separated from its source, namely God.

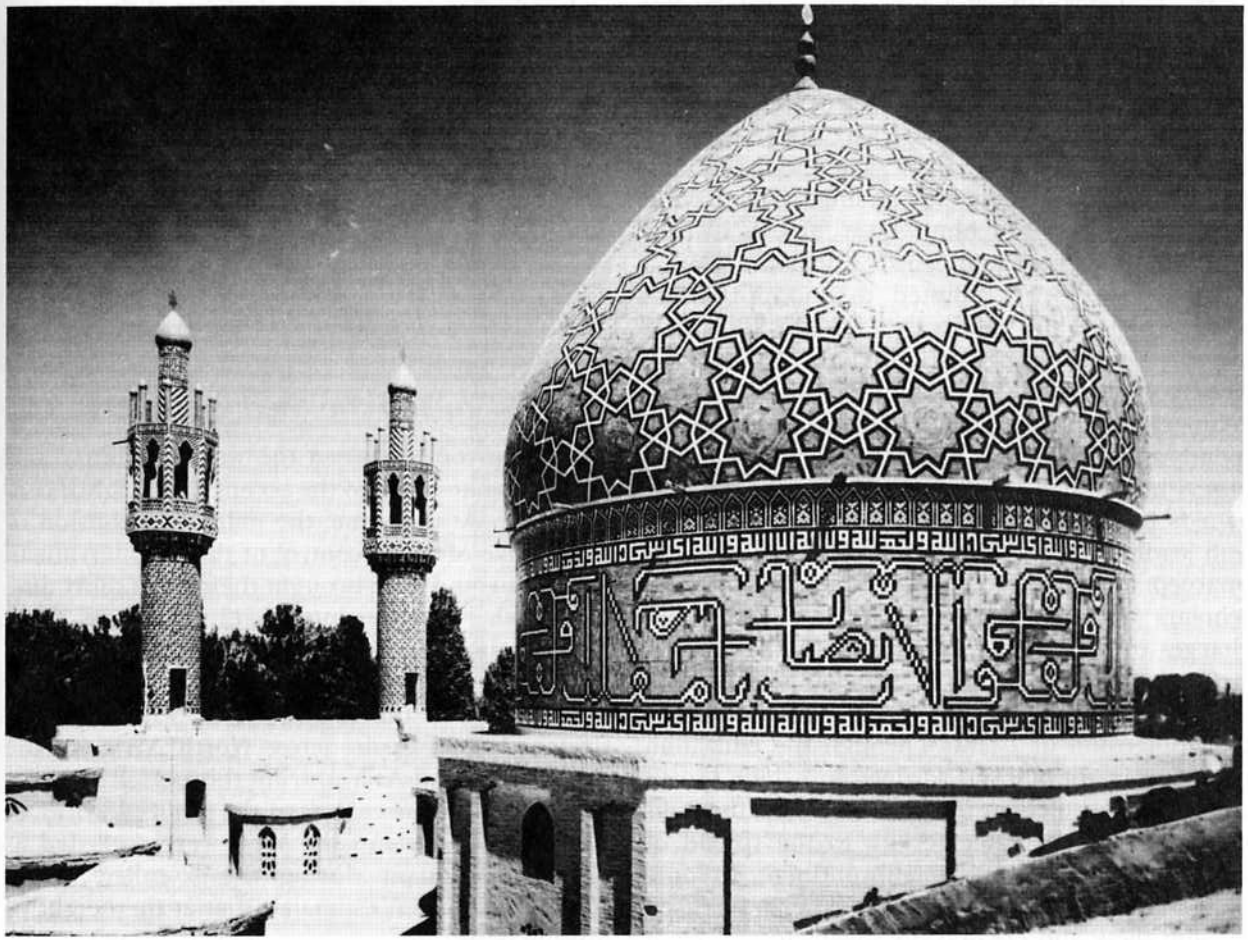
Since the major concern of Sufism was to enable an individual Muslim to seek intimacy with God, it was felt that such seekers must embrace an inner life, a path of devotion and prayer that would lead to spiritual awakening. In Sufism, therefore, the *Shariah* (law) has had a counterpart called the *Tariqah* (way) that complements the observance of Islam. The *Tariqah* is the journey and the discipline undertaken by a Muslim in the quest for knowledge of God, which leads ultimately to an experiential understanding of the true meaning of *tawhid,* or divine unity.

From this early stage, when Sufism was no more than a very intense and personal seeking of God on the part of certain Muslims, it developed into a system of mystical orders centering around the teachings of a leader. This gave rise to the establishment of several Sufi Orders in Islam, named after their founding teachers but also tracing their spiritual genealogy back to the teachings of the Prophet and Ali, whom they considered to have been endowed with the special mission of explaining the mystical dimension of Quranic teachings. By the thirteenth century these Orders had grown and spread all over the Muslim world. Muslims were attracted from all walks of life and from all groups in Islam, among them al-Ghazali and Ibn Sina. Later Jalal al-din Rumi, Ibn al Arabi (d.

1240), and many other important figures all over the Muslim world sought an experiential understanding of Islam by way of the Sufi path.

Within the Orders, the path or way began with the acceptance of a teacher as a guide. His teaching was aimed at enabling the disciple to develop discipline through strict, ascetic practices and by meditation on certain formulas, mostly attributes of God, from the Quran. By means of meditation, remembrance, and contemplation, the Sufi passed through several spiritual "stations," each representing the development of inner life, until finally through the experience of "annihilation" (*fana*) the true meaning of spiritual union with God was realized. Sufism taught that at this point the Muslim devotee had reached a true understanding of Islam, having finished the *Tariqah,* or path of discipline built on the *Shariah.*

The Sufi quest is described by the poet Attar (d. 1229) in a famous mystical poem called *Mantiq al-Tayr* ("The Conference of the Birds").[4] The poem depicts the quest of a large number of birds for the *Simurgh,* the mythic king of the birds. After many tribulations, and having crossed over seven valleys, thirty of the birds reach the end of their journey and come to the gate where the Supreme Majesty



A Sufi Mausoleum. *The dome and* minarets *within the courtyard that contains the shrine of a famous Sufi leader, Shah Niamatullah. The shrine is in Mahan, Iran.* (Courtesy of Mohammed Torabi-Parizi)

lived. The gatekeeper tests them and then opens the door. As they sit on the dais awaiting the king, an inner glow awakens in all of them at the same moment and they realize that the *Simurgh* has been with them all along, guiding them from within. They realize further that the goal of their quest was ultimately the recognition that their inner selves, together, represent the *Simurgh* (the Persian words *si* and *murgh* mean "thirty" and "birds," respectively). The parable thus illustrates the Sufi concept of the return of the soul to its original source—God Almighty—and the universal spiritual aspiration that provides a common bond and purpose among all human beings.

Much of the understanding and practice of Sufism has been based on Quranic formulations and on the model of Muhammad. For example, the Quranic admonition "and seek to remember Allah often" (62:10) contributed to the practice of meditation, and the Quranic statement that "In the messenger of God [Muhammad] you have a beautiful example of him whose hope is in God and the Last Day and who remembers God a great deal" (33:21) pointed to an appropriate model for the Sufi quest. In addition, Sufis have appealed to a saying attributed to Muhammad, "There is a means for polishing everything that removes rust; what polishes the heart is the remembrance of God." Nevertheless, certain Sufi observances, such as the use of music or dancing as aids to spiritual ecstasy and the veneration of Sufi leaders, were seen by some other Muslims as unacceptable. Conflicts with other groups and scholars in Islam have resulted, along with charges of heresy and unbelief.

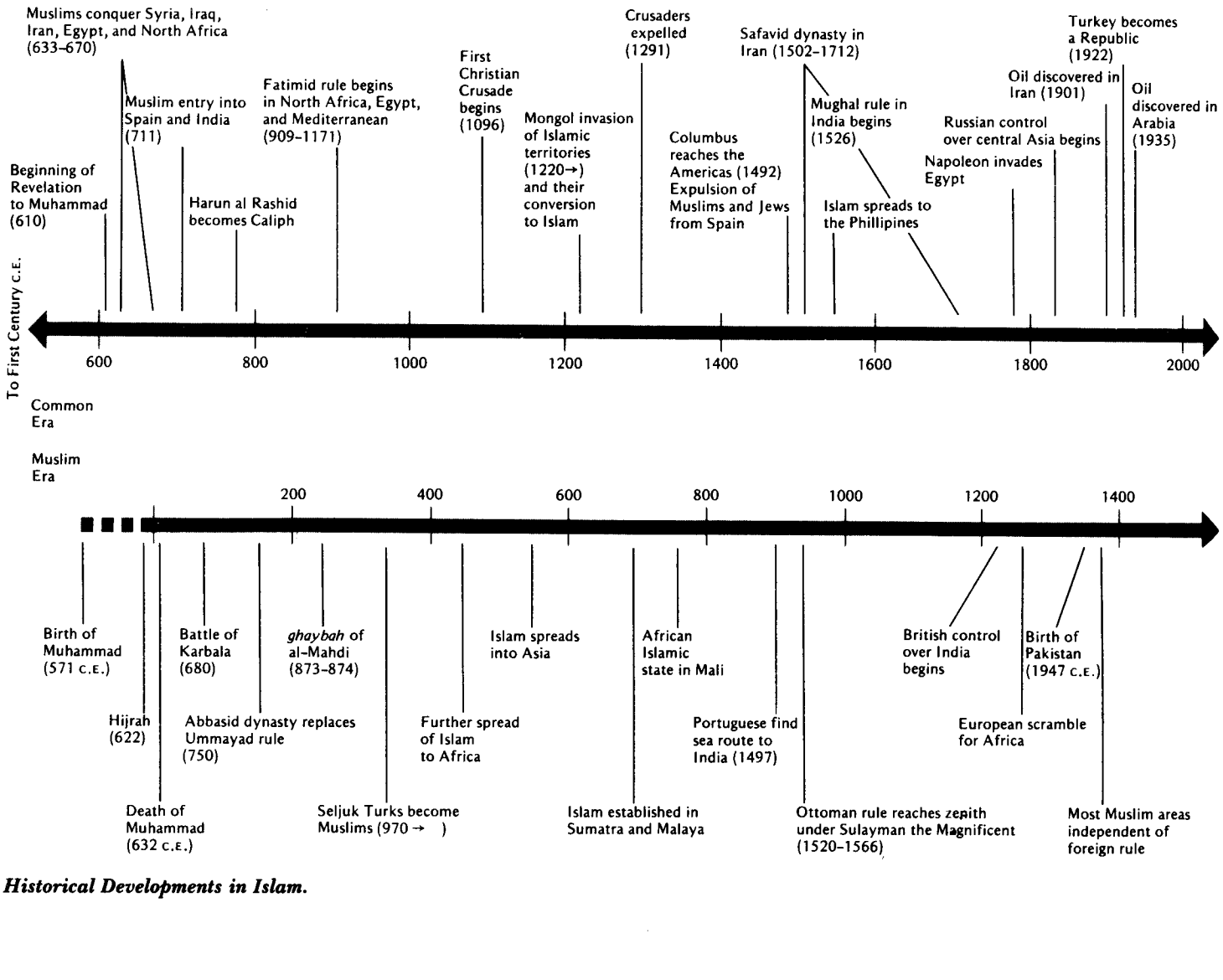
On the whole, however, Sufism has been responsible for creating a deeper awareness of the spiritual dimension of Islam. Through the education provided in the various Orders and their travels and preaching all over the Muslim world, the Sufis rendered an invaluable service to the spread of Islam in Africa, the Indian subcontinent, Indonesia, Malaysia, and southeast Asia. They influenced Muslim piety and created the means to express it through their writings and works of art. Sufi poetry and literature in Arabic, Bengali, Persian, Turkish, Urdu, Sindhi, Swahili, Hausa, and the languages of Indonesia and Malaysia represent the creative dimension of the synthesis of Islamic and local traditions and forms of cultural expression. Further, this literature provided them with a medium in their own language to express their particular sense of devotion and love for Islam and for the Prophet and to create a bridge for greater understanding of Islam among most non-Muslims in that area. On the other hand, a number of Muslims in the past, and even in the modern era, who have sought to restore Muslim practice to the norms of the Quran have accused Sufism of causing degeneration in Islam.

In addition to their contributions at the literary and cultural levels, some Sufi Orders have also acted as vehicles for political and social movements. To a significant extent, the national struggles in parts of the Muslim world in the nineteenth century derived their fervor from a common bond forged by allegiance to the Sufi Orders.

ISLAM IN CONTACT AND IN TRANSITION

Islam and the Medieval West

The interaction between the world of Islam and the West dates back to the seventh and eighth centuries C.E. At that time, the military expansion of Islam gave Muslims control of the Mediterranean and Spain, and even brought them for a short time beyond the Pyrenees into Southern France. Over the next six centuries this control was consolidated, and Spain became culturally as well as politically an integral part of the Islamic world, which by then stretched from Spain across North Africa to the Middle East and Asia. During this period the area became one of the centers of the civilized world, at a time when parts of the West were regarded as relatively stagnant during the so-called "Dark Ages." It has been estimated that at the height of Muslim power in Spain, one of every six persons in the peninsula probably was Muslim. The crystallization of a Hispanic–Muslim culture was accompa-



Historical Developments in Islam.

nied by the dominance of Muslim educational and legal institutions and the use of Spanish–Arabic as a kind of *lingua franca* for Muslims, Christians, and Jews who lived there. In 1492, Granada, the last stronghold of Muslim rule in Spain, fell; Jews and Muslims who refused to convert to Christianity were expelled, bringing to an end a long period of religious and cultural pluralism and co-existence between the three faiths.

The second major example of the interaction began as a military confrontation and, ironically, resulted in a fruitful influence on learning and culture. The military confrontation was initiated in the First Crusade, launched in 1095 by European Christians to recapture Jerusalem. By this time, the city and the "Holy Land" had been part of the Muslim world for over four hundred years, although pilgrimages by devout Christians to Jerusalem had continued since the Muslim conquest. Leaders of Christianity, the rulers of Europe, and the Byzantine Emperor joined in support of this Crusade. The result was the capture of Jerusalem, as well as the major cities of Antioch, Edessa, and Tripoli, where the Crusaders established themselves. The Muslims were slow to respond, but in due course a concerted effort was made to recapture these cities. In 1187 the Muslim general Saladin recaptured Jerusalem. The Crusades continued intermittently through the thirteenth century. By 1291 the remaining areas in the hands of the Crusaders had been recaptured and the Crusader Kingdom finally put to an end.

Although the Crusades failed in their military purpose of recapturing the "Holy Land" from the Muslims, they did have other enduring results. The most significant of these were the stimulation of economic contact between Europe and the Middle East and the transmission of learning from the universities of the Muslim world to the scholars and academies that were developing in Europe. One example was the effort of Frederick II, ruler of Sicily from 1215 to 1250, to house and translate into Latin manuscripts on philosophy, mathematics, and science preserved in Muslim centers of learning. In addition to the cultural interaction that took place in Spain, the legacy of Islamic civilization exercised a profound influence on medieval Western Europe.

The major Islamic influences on Spain were cultural and linguistic. This was reflected in varied ways, ranging from agriculture to arts and crafts, from war to philosophy, science, architecture, literature, and music. Another aspect of this cultural diffusion was the transmission of Muslim philosophy and science. As mentioned earlier, Muslim philosophers and scientists had sought to preserve and develop Greek learning. Indeed, many works of Aristotle and other classical Greek writers survived primarily through the efforts of these Muslim scholars. This heritage, in its classical form and in the developed form of Islamic philosophy and science (including mathematics, medicine, and astronomy), came to be transmitted through centers of Spanish Muslim learning in Cordova, Granada, and later in Seville and Barcelona. These centers attracted Jewish and Christian scholars from the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe, and provided the intellectual climate in which Jewish scholars such as Moses Maimonides produced their works. The philosophical commentaries and works of Averroes and the scientific and medical texts of Avicenna, among others, also played a role in stimulating the renewal of scientific and intellectual thought in Europe prior to the onset of the Renaissance. For instance, the works of Averroes exerted an influence on the famous medieval Christian theologian Thomas Aquinas.

Although "borrowing" is perhaps too simple a word to describe a process of cultural exchange, a large portion of this transmission continues to be reflected both in material culture and in the intellectual and cultural life of the West. Some examples of transmitted material culture are the Arabian horse, gum Arabic, tobacco, and muslin fabric; in mathematics, the most obvious are the Arabic numerals and the terms *algebra* and *algorithm;* in chemistry, terms such as *alcohol* and *alkali;* in astronomy, *zenith* and *nadir;* in military terminology, *admiral* and *arsenal;* and in agriculture and horticulture, a vast number of new plants, fruits, and vegetables that made their way into Europe and eventually to the Americas. All of this trans-

A Muslim Monument in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. (Courtesy of Yugoslavia National Tourist Office)

mission suggests that a cosmopolitan culture was forged in medieval times by the interaction of Islam with the Mediterranean world and with Europe, and that much of this heritage spread to and was further elaborated in the West. In recent times migration from many parts of the Muslim world has led to the emergence of small Muslim communities in most of the larger cities of Western Europe and Britain, in addition to the already established Muslim communities of Eastern Europe, such as in Albania and parts of the former Yugoslavia.

Islam, Africa, and Asia

Although the focus here has been primarily on the interaction that took place between Islam and the Mediterranean world and Europe, it must be re-