

**Further Reading**

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**ISLAM—WEST ASIA** Although people have practiced Islam in parts of West Asia (present-day Iraq, Iran, and Turkey) since its inception, different versions of the religion have been created by the region's differing cultures, language groups, and histories.

Islam was brought to modern Iraq during the reign of Abu Bakr (c. 573–634), the first successor to the

Prophet Muhammad. Abu Bakr attacked and defeated the Persians near An Najaf in southern central Iraq in 634. In 642, under the caliph ʿUmar (c. 585–644), the Muslim invaders again defeated the Persians, this time at the so-called victory of victories near modern Hamadan in northwestern Iran. This defeat resulted in the destruction of the old Sasanid empire (224/228–651 CE), whose religion had been Zoroastrian.

By contrast, Islam did not become a major force in the area of present-day Turkey until 1071, when the Muslim Seljuk Turks defeated the Christian Byzantines at the battle of Manzikert. Subsequently, as the Byzantine empire shrank, Turkish Muslim power grew.

Iraq was a battleground in the disputes surrounding who would govern the community of Muslim faithful, which split Muslims into Sunni and Shiʿite sects. (Today, Sunnis account for 90 percent of the



### SUPPORT FOR THE POOR

In many Islamic societies, the poor or otherwise disadvantaged are helped by taxes collected by the government and also charity given by individuals. This means that begging has a special meaning in Muslim societies.

In 1949 I was traveling by bus from Tehran to Hamadan. At a certain ford the driver stopped. A blind woman, nursing a baby, arose from a brush shelter beside the road and approached the bus. The driver passed the hat, everyone put in a coin or a bill, and he handed the collection to the poor woman, who replied with an invocation to God to bless her benefactors. The blessing was returned by the occupants of the bus, and the driver drove on. (If, in visiting an oriental city, you find yourself pestered with beggars and remark, "There ought to be an institution to take care of these people," remember that there is an institution, and an old one, the zaka. Give, in moderation as the Muslims do, and take it off your income tax.)

The zaka is not the only tax imposed in Muslim states. There is a special tax on Christians and Jews, which was abusively levied on Berber converts to Islam in the early days of the conquest of North Africa. There are also customs, gate taxes, market taxes, and other sources of revenue most of which appeared after Muhammad's death. But the zaka differs from those in that it was not originally designed to support the state, being rather a means of leveling out the income of the various elements in the community so that no one would go hungry, of financing the conversion of the heathen and of facilitating travel between the various parts of the Islamic world.

*Source:* Carleton S. Coon (1951) *Caravan: The Story of the Middle East*. New York: Holt, 112.

world's Muslims.) Many of the most important sites in Shi'ite history are to be found on Iraqi soil, including the site of the battle of Karbala (10 October 680), when the Prophet's grandson Hussein was killed. Shi'ites annually mark this event at the Ashura festival (10 Muharram in the Islamic calendar).

Shi'ism has also always been strong in Iran, partly because its messianic tendencies grafted relatively easily onto the base of Zoroastrian culture and partly because this border region of the early empire attracted dissidents at a time when Shi'ism was a movement of social protest almost as much as a religious. A decisive moment in Iranian religious and cultural history occurred in the early sixteenth century, when the forces of Esmā'il I (1487–1524) conquered the country. The new Safavid dynasty (1501–1722/1736) proclaimed Shi'ism the state religion. Shi'ism ceased to be a movement of social protest and was closely associated with the Safavid and later Qajar state (1784–1925).

A defining moment in Turkish Islam came with the capture of Constantinople by the Ottomans in 1453. The Ottoman empire (1453–1922), which at its height covered Southeast Europe, North Africa, and most of the Middle East, including modern Iraq, created a cultural synthesis of Turkish, Greek, Persian, and Arabic elements but was above all a Sunni state based on an ideology of universal empire. In the eighteenth century, Sultan Selim I (1467–1520) transferred the relics of the Prophet to Constantinople (modern Istanbul), and the title "caliph," implying leadership of the world Muslim community, came into use to describe the Ottoman rulers. Within the Ottoman and Persian states, the Muslim religion was the basis of all laws and of the education system. It was necessary to be Muslim to participate in government. However, during the nineteenth century, pressure from the West led to a decline in religious institutions. In 1826, the Tanzimat reforms, undertaken in the Ottoman empire to modernize society and limit the power of Muslim clerics, allowed Christians to participate in the administrative and legal systems and created state schools.

Iran also witnessed a gradual decoupling of religion and the state from the 1850s on. A gradual transfer of power from religious to secular authorities has been a recent feature of all three countries, although the 1979 Iranian revolution has challenged this trend.

### Turkey

Turkey emerged as a result of a nationalist struggle that began in 1919. Ironically, modern Turkey is much more Muslim than the Ottoman provinces it replaced. Roughly 2.5 million Christians left Turkey, to

be replaced by Muslims from Europe. Turkey is now 98 percent Muslim. Estimates of the number of Shi'ites among these vary from 5 to 40 percent, a spread caused in part by widespread ignorance of the finer points of Muslim theology.

Theoretically, Turkey was to be ruled by the sultan-caliph, who based his legitimacy on his leadership of the Islamic community. However, real power lay in the hands of Turkish army officers, chief among them Mustafa Kemal (Kemal Atatürk; 1881–1938), who had seen that Islamic ideology had failed to bind the Arabs to the empire and who attributed the country's weakness to the Islamic institutions the sultan represented. A republic was proclaimed in 1923, and the following year the caliphate was abolished. Since then, Turkey has been constitutionally secular, with the army regarding itself as the guarantor of this secularity.

During the 1920s and 1930s, Atatürk drove through a program of modernization that involved assaults on Islamic institutions and traditions. Education and the courts were taken out of religious hands; pious endowments (*waqf*) were confiscated, Sufism outlawed, religious dress permitted only within the mosque, and Western dress enforced elsewhere. The government abolished the Muslim calendar, made Sunday the day of rest, and replaced Arabic with the Latin alphabet. Women were given legal equality with men. The number of mosques was reduced and the content of sermons supervised. In all, this amounted to the greatest attack on Islam anywhere outside the Soviet Union.



The Ortakoy Mosque with its towering minarets in Istanbul, Turkey. (MICHAEL NICHOLSON/CORBIS)



## PILGRIMAGE AND LOCAL TRADITIONS

All Muslims adhere to the basic beliefs and practices of Islam but in many places Muslims also worship personages of regional or local significance. The Kurds of West Asia are one people who follow this practice as described in the following extract.

The typical indication of a shrine is either a low, quadrilateral, rubble wall about the grave or a cairn of stones. Those who visit the shrine with some purpose characteristically tie a piece of white rag on the end of a pole and lean the pole against the inner surface of the wall. Some shrines have bundles of these crude banners standing in them. The meaning of the rag is variable. In some cases the visitor will return and reclaim it, incorporating it in a charm, while in others it is simply the sign of a vow that the suppliant, if the shaykh buried there will bring about the desired favor, will sacrifice so many animals or give so much money to the poor. The most auspicious days, it might be noted, to visit a shrine are Wednesdays and Thursdays. The six most noted shrines near the town of Rowanduz are as follows:

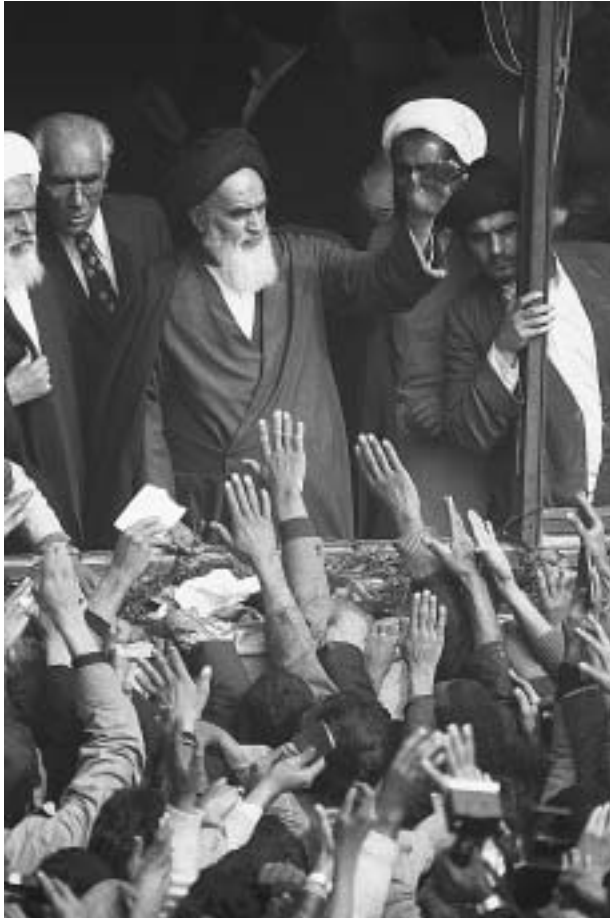
1. Shaykh Piri Mawili near the village of Kani Kah. Shaykh Piri Mawili is said to have lived about two hundred years ago, "in the time of Kor Pasha."
2. Shaykh Sa'idi Galikarak near the village of Karak. The shrine is said to be very old, dating perhaps from the time of the Islamic conquest.
3. Shaykh Saran in the village of Saran itself. Shaykh Saran is said to have died about fifty years ago.
4. Shaykh Usu Shaykhan on the road to Kawlok. No one knows how old it is, but it is very ancient.
5. Shaykh Muhammad or Shaykh Balik, the second most famous shrine in the district, at Haiji Umran.
6. Shuwani Shaykh Muhammad or Shuwani Mala, The Shepherd of Shaykh Muhammad.

*Source:* William M. Masters. (1953) "Rowanduz: A Kurdish Administrative and Mercantile Center." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 313.

In 1925, the Naqshbandi Sufis (an order of Sufis, or Islamic mystics) led a revolt among the Kurds, a non-Turkish ethnic group present in large numbers in eastern Turkey, but the revolt was ruthlessly suppressed.

Turkey's constitution banned religious parties, but from the 1960s there began to be calls for greater recognition of religion in public life. Religious parties

have appeared by disguising their religious nature. Such parties, with messages of social justice and respect for traditional culture, have particularly appealed to recent migrants to urban areas, but they are led and often supported by the urban middle class. In part, the rise of these parties has been fed by resentment at the European Union's seeming preference for the membership claims of Christian countries over Turkey's



The leader of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini, greets followers in Tehran in February 1979. (BETTMANN/CORBIS)

long-standing application. Recently the issue of whether female university students may wear Islamic head scarves has aroused political controversy. In addition, Sufi groups have reorganized in several cities.

### Iraq

As part of the Ottoman empire, Iraq experienced the modernizing trends of the Tanzimat reform. Arab nationalism, although not strong, was felt here, and neither the British nor the Turks who fought over the area in World War I could count on the support of the local population. At the time of Iraq's establishment by the British in 1921, the population was approximately 90 percent Muslim, with small Christian and Jewish communities. Roughly one-third of Iraqi Christians fled to Syria in 1933 following persecution.

Although the ratio of Shi'ites to Sunnis has been approximately 7 to 5 in Iraq, Sunnis have been politically dominant both under the British protectorate (until 1927) and subsequently. This has been particu-

larly the case since a 1968 coup brought the Ba'ath Party to power.

For much of modern Iraqi history, the state has gradually taken over services traditionally provided by religious organizations (education, welfare, justice), although Islam has never faced the outright assault it did in Turkey.

The dominance of Sunni Arabs has left Shi'ites and Kurds relatively disadvantaged. Whereas among the Kurds political discontent is expressed through nationalism, in the Arab south this is expressed via the medium of Shi'ism. This situation is heightened by the presence of the Shi'i holy cities of An Najaf and Karbala on Iraqi territory. Ironically, Iraq has given shelter to Shi'ite leaders such as the Ayatollah Khomeini (1900–1989), who opposed the government of Iran, while suppressing outspoken leaders of its own Shi'ite community.

Antistate revolts articulated via Shi'ism have periodically broken out, notably in 1979 and after the expulsion of Iraqi troops from Kuwait in 1991. The regime's response has been both the suppression of Shi'ism and an increased Sunni religiosity on the part of political leaders.

### Iran

In 1920, Iran was 95 percent Shi'i, with small Baha'i, Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian communities. Traditionally, Shi'ism had kept politics at arm's length, but Iranian religious leaders began to become politically involved toward the end of the nineteenth century, their anger directed particularly against concessions granted by the Qajar shahs to Western economic interests (especially tobacco). Whereas in Turkey the constitutional movement was secular and nationalist, in Iran opposition to the power of the ruler came from the clergy, which was closely allied with the class of small shopkeepers most economically threatened.

A declining Islamic empire was taken over by a military strong man, Reza Pahlavi (1878–1944), in 1921. Fearful of a repetition of events in Turkey, the clergy opposed the creation of a republic, and Reza was proclaimed shah. However, he rapidly introduced secularizing policies similar to those of Atatürk. His son Mohammed Reza (1919–1980), who was placed on the throne by British and American interests after a short-lived socialist experiment, continued these policies in his so-called White Revolution of 1963.

One upshot of the fall of the leftist government in 1953 was that left-wing political parties were ruthlessly suppressed. Religion was now the only means of articulating political dissent, and during the 1960s two

developments radically altered Shi'i political thought. 'Ali Shari'ati (1933–1997), the philosopher whose thought most influenced Iran's Islamic revolution, created a synthesis of Marxist sociology and Shi'i theology that for the first time provided religious justification for revolution, while the minor cleric Ruholla Khomeini, from his exile in An Najaf, Iraq, elaborated a theory of the ideal Shi'ite state.

As the shah's rule became increasingly oppressive, the urban middle class became attracted to Shari'ati's ideas. Migrants to the cities identified with Khomeini's formulation of a genuinely Shi'ite, just state untainted by foreign influences, although many senior clerics strongly disagreed with his formulation. The 1979 revolutionary slogan—Neither East nor West but Islam—expressed the anticolonial sentiment of the people, the desire for a genuinely Iranian political order, and frustration with the iniquities of the shah's regime. Popular dissatisfaction was expressed particularly toward the United States.

Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, Iran has formally been a participatory constitutional democracy. However, Khomeini's insistence that legislation be vetted by a religious council has created tensions within the state, as power is split between the presidency and the Council of (Religious) Experts. The limits of Khomeini's conception have become increasingly clear.

### Present-Day Problems

In recent years, West Asian Muslims have faced similar pressures but have responded to them in a variety of ways. In Iran, Islam has become a substitute for nationalism and socialism. In Turkey, the government has, with limited success, presented nationalism as a substitute for Islam. In Iraq, where both Kurdish nationalism and Shi'i Islam could threaten the governing class, a variant of Islamic socialism has held sway since 1968. All these countries feel the twin pressures of modernization and urbanization. Whereas a small group in each country is happy with the social changes, for most the experience has been deeply unsettling. They have therefore sought support from a form of their traditional culture and have sought to expand that culture into the alien secular environment, which in all cases was imposed from above by the state.

*Will Myer*

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**ISLAM, KAZI NAZRUL** (1899–1976), Bengali poet and playwright. Kazi Nazrul Islam, known as the *bidrohi kobi* (rebel poet), was both a poet and a playwright who was deeply influenced by leftist ideology and who championed the working class. Many Bengalis consider Nazrul Islam a "nonconformist" who despite not having a formal education and not having traveled outside India acquired a worldly outlook. He took the Bengali literary world by storm with his poem *Bidrohi* (The Rebel). That poem, along with his many other patriotic poems and songs, inspired Bengalis during their struggle against the British and during the Bangladeshi war of liberation in 1971.

Nazrul Islam was born to an impoverished family in West Bengal, India. He lost his father at an early age and to support his family started working as a domestic servant and later as a baker's assistant. In 1917, at the age of eighteen, Nazrul quit high school and joined the Forty-Ninth Bengali Regiment. After the regiment was disbanded in 1919, Nazrul went to Calcutta to pursue his writing career.

Nazrul Islam is regarded as the greatest Bengali poetic force after the Nobel laureate poet Rabindranath Tagore. His chief works include *Agnibeena*, *Shonchita*, *Dolon Champa*, and *Chayanot*. Although Nazrul's life as a poet lasted a little over twenty years, he wrote three thousand songs, twenty-one books of verses, fourteen books of songs, six novels and collections of stories, four books of essays, three plays, four books of poems and plays for children, and three books of translations of Persian poetry and Qur'anic verses. Many of his works remain uncollected in out-of-print journals and periodicals.

Tragically, Nazrul's literary career was cut short in July 1942 when he suffered a stroke and lost his speech. Within weeks his condition deteriorated further, and he lost contact with reality. He lived for another thirty-five years and died in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

*Mebrin Masud-Elias*

**ISLAMABAD** (1998 pop. 529,000). Soon after Pakistan achieved independence in 1947, the idea of the national capital of Islamabad was conceived by President Ayub Khan (1907–1974). Karachi had been contemplated as the capital because it was Pakistan's