

## Philosophers, Sufis, and Caliphs

What was the relationship between government and religion in Middle Eastern and North African history? In a world of caliphs, sultans, and judges, who exercised political and religious authority? In this book, Ali Humayun Akhtar investigates debates about leadership that involved ruling circles and scholars of jurisprudence and theology. At the heart of this story is a medieval rivalry between three caliphates: the Umayyads of Cordoba, the Fatimids of Cairo, and the Abbasids of Baghdad. In a fascinating revival of Late Antique Hellenism, Aristotelian and Platonic notions of wisdom became a key component of how these caliphs debated their authority as political leaders. By tracing how these political debates impacted the theological and jurisprudential scholars (*‘ulamā’*) and their own conception of communal guidance, Akhtar offers a new picture of premodern political authority and the connections between Western and Islamic civilizations. It will be of use to students and specialists of the premodern and modern Middle East and North Africa.

Ali Humayun Akhtar is an Assistant Professor at Bates College. He is also the Robert M. Kingdon Fellow at the Institute for Research in the Humanities at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He holds a PhD in History and Middle Eastern Studies from New York University.

# Philosophers, Sufis, and Caliphs

*Politics and Authority from Cordoba  
to Cairo and Baghdad*

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For my parents,  
Dr. Humayun Aftab Akhtar and  
Ms. Yosria M. Zaki El Sabban, and  
for my siblings

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The Abbasid caliphate after the 750s following the transition of the late antique Africa from Eastern Roman (Byzantine) and Sassanian dominion to Umayyad

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Three caliphates in competition in the 900s: the Andalusī Umayyads of Cordoba (after 969), and the Abbasids of Baghdad.