

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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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
4843/24, 2nd Floor, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, Delhi – 110002, India
79 Anson Road, #06-04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107182011

DOI: 10.1017/9781316855669

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First published 2017

Printed in the United Kingdom by Clays, St Ives plc

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Akhtar, Ali Humayun, author.

Title: Philosophers, sufis, and caliphs: politics and authority from Cordoba to Cairo and Baghdad / Ali Humayun Akhtar.

Description: Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2017. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017007508 | ISBN 9781107182011 (hardback)

Subjects: LCSH: Islam and politics. | Islamic Empire – Politics and government. | Caliphs. | Sultans. | Judges. | Umayyad dynasty. | Fatimites. | Abbasids. | Sufis. | Islamic philosophy. | Philosophy, Ancient – Influence.

Classification: LCC BP173.7.A4924 2017 | DDC 297.2/7209–dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017007508>

ISBN 978-1-107-18201-1 Hardback

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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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Acknowledgments

This book is based on research that I conducted while teaching at three institutions: New York University, Bard College, and Bates College. It was at NYU, as a doctoral candidate and instructor under the supervision of Dr. Everett K. Rowson, where I learned how to grapple with the labyrinth of primary sources that have survived from the medieval world. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Rowson for guiding my research through each new challenging step during my years at NYU, instilling new ideas in my research trajectory, encouraging me to pursue research from a diverse set of investigative tracks, and reminding me to “keep digging” through the rich array of textual materials available. I am also very grateful to Dr. Marion H. Katz at NYU, who encouraged me to examine and reconsider multiple theoretical frameworks in my research, and who always offered a sense of intellectual security in moments when my scholarly aspirations seemed daunting during my doctoral years. I also thank Dr. Maribel Fierro at the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC) in Madrid, whose work has opened my eyes to the richness of the interdisciplinary research undertaken in European and North African universities, and who has helped me see one of the most beautiful and rich eras of world history, al-Andalus and its legacy, through multiple investigative perspectives. I thank Dr. Tamer el-Leithy at NYU for having been an inspiration to every scholar who aspires to master the diverse genres of edited and unedited materials available in the world’s archival and manuscript libraries. I also thank Dr. Arang Keshavarzian at NYU for encouraging me to analyze the interplay between politics and social movements when conducting research on the Middle East.

The trajectory of my research for this project also reflects the continued guidance of my undergraduate advisor at Cornell University, Dr. Shawkat M. Toorawa, whom I thank for believing in my abilities as an aspiring historian and educator at a time when there was a variety of intellectual, research, and career choices to pursue. I thank Dr. Ross Brann at Cornell, who encouraged my fascination with the confluence

xii Acknowledgments

of cultures and languages in history, and who directed through patient guidance my interest in thinking about research at a doctoral level. I also thank Dr. Cynthia Robinson at Cornell, who has inspired me to think of art as a window into history and humanity to the point of helping me realize that the scholar of the humanities must aspire to turn a work of scholarship into a carefully crafted work of literature.

I am also grateful to Dr. Ahmed Ferhadi, Dr. Sibel Erol, and Dr. Mohammad Mehdi Khorrami at NYU for many years of guiding my fascination with world languages through coursework on Arabic, Turkish, and Persian literature. This language training has allowed me to expand my research on comparative politics and intellectual history, which was the basis of this book, into the realm of early modern global trade routes in my forthcoming second book.

At Bard College and Bates College, I thank all of my colleagues and students for many years of truly enriching dialogue that has helped me think in new ways about questions of methodology when conducting research on medieval and early modern history. At Bard College, I am particularly grateful to Dr. Mairaj Syed, Dr. Dina Ramadan, Dr. Jennifer Derr, and the entire faculty in the Departments of History, Middle Eastern Studies, and Latin American and Iberian Studies. At Bates College, I thank all of my colleagues in the Departments of Religious Studies, Classical and Medieval Studies, Asian Studies, and History. I am particularly grateful to Dr. Marcus Bruce, Dr. Cynthia Baker, Dr. John Strong, Dr. Thomas Tracy, and Dr. Alison Melnick. While in New England, I had the opportunity to have conversations with a number of faculty whose research methodologies inspired some of my own, and who offered feedback of inestimable value. I thank especially Dr. Kenneth Garden of Tufts University as well as Dr. Russell Hopley and Dr. Robert Morrison of Bowdoin College for sharing their investigative insights on the premodern world.

I thank the students in my survey courses and seminars at both Bard College and Bates College, where the chance to be involved in liberal arts education has been a deeply enriching and formative experience as an educator. Class discussions offered an enlightening opportunity to exchange perspectives on historical research methods in a way that has reshaped my understanding of questions of historical agency and intellectual boundaries in the study of Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia.

I also thank Dr. Susan Friedman, Director of the Institute for Research in the Humanities (IRH) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, for cultivating an interdisciplinary intellectual environment that allowed me to continue research for my second book on global trade networks while revising and expanding this book. The time I have spent at UW-Madison

as Robert M. Kingdon Fellow of Judeo-Christian Studies has been central to the progress of both books, and I thank Dr. Andre Wink, Dr. Elaine Fisher, Dr. Andreas Schwab, and Dr. Nathanael Andrade for their conversations and profound insights.

I am also grateful to the staff members of the various manuscript and archival libraries that have been central to my research, especially those of the Süleymaniye Manuscript Library of Istanbul, the Yusuf Ağa Manuscript Library of Konya, the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC) in Madrid, the Freie Universität of Berlin, the National Library and Archives of Egypt in Cairo, and the National Library and Archives of Morocco in Rabat.

At Cambridge University Press, I would like to thank Maria Marsh, William Hammell, Cassi Roberts, and Kate Gavino for taking on this book project and moving it through production with patience and multifaceted editorial expertise. Maria Marsh's editorial insights and close attention to this project has made the process of completing it a truly rewarding one. Cassi Roberts moved this book through the production process with extraordinary care. I also thank the scholars who reviewed this book for Cambridge University Press. Their careful and thorough feedback has been of utmost importance to the completion of this book.

Finally, I would like to thank each individual I have encountered in the world's spectrum of cultures, philosophies, and spiritual traditions who has inspired in me a deeper understanding of diversity, optimism, and love in the spirit of shared humanities.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-18201-1 — Philosophers, Sufis, and Caliphs
Ali Humayun Akhtar
Frontmatter
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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

