

# The message of Islam



## THE CRESCENT

The crescent, seen on top of many mosques, originally signified the waxing moon. It is associated with special acts of devotion to God. The star and crescent appear on the flags of countries that are mainly Muslim.

ISLAM IS A RELIGION of submission. Its followers, Muslims, are "those who commit themselves in surrender to the will of Allah" ("Allah" is the Arabic word for God). The word "Islam" itself means "submission" or "surrender." Muslims see their faith as God's final revelation, which meets all the spiritual and religious needs of humanity. The religion began with the Prophet Muhammad, who was born about 571 in the city of Mecca in Arabia. At about the age of 40 he found that he was being called to become a prophet and preach the message of the one true God. At first he met much opposition, and in 622 he left Mecca with his followers for the nearby city of Medina. By 630 he had made them into a powerful religious and political community and was able to re-enter Mecca in triumph.



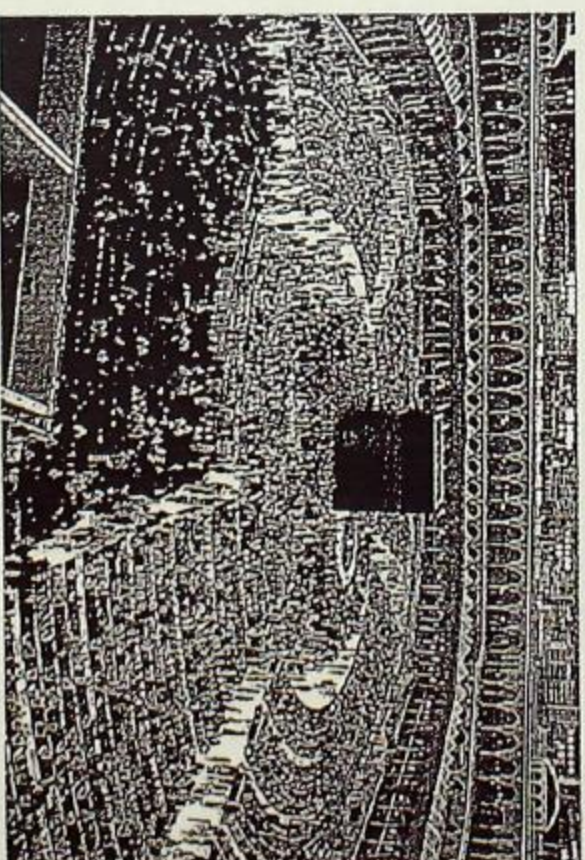
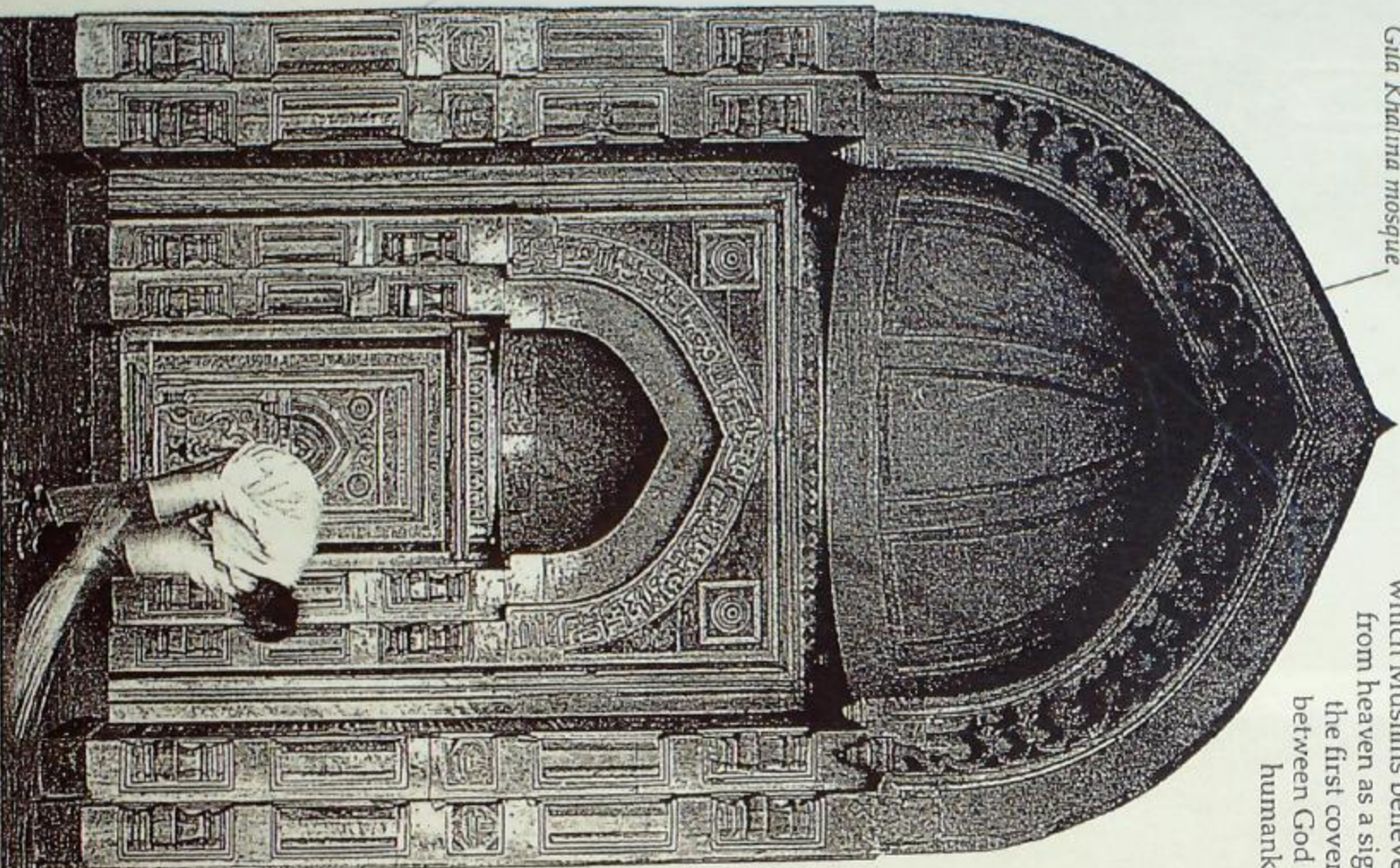
## SACRED TEXTS

Calligraphy (the art of writing) in Arabic is a great Islamic art. Wherever possible Muslims try to learn Arabic because God revealed his Word to Muhammad in Arabic, and they wish to read it in the original language. The writing on this tile is a fragment from the Koran.

## THE KA'BAH AT MECCA

The great mosque in Mecca is built around the Ka'bah (or Kaaba). Set into the wall of the Ka'bah is the Black Stone, which Muslims believe fell from heaven as a sign of the first covenant between God and humankind.

The mihrab in the Gila Khalina mosque



## PILGRIMAGE TO MECCA

The Ka'bah is Islam's most sacred site. Every Muslim who is healthy, free from debt, and can afford the journey must make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in his lifetime, to visit the Ka'bah and other sacred sites. Pilgrimage is the fifth of the five pillars (or duties) of Islam. The others are: first, confession of faith; second, prayer; third, fasting during the month of Ramadan; and, fourth, charitable giving. The duties are based on the Koran, and the practices of the Prophet Muhammad.

## PRAYING TOWARD MECCA

Prayer is the second of the five pillars of Islam. Muslims are required to pray five times a day, facing Mecca: in the morning, at noon, at mid-afternoon, after sunset, and at bedtime. In every mosque there is a niche in the wall, called a mihrab, which faces in the direction of Mecca to show people which way they should turn as they pray.

