

1

ISLAM IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

The Problem of Defining Islam

The student who sets out to learn about Islam will soon face a problem something like this. If we were to draw a circle and designate the contents of that circle as the complete set of phenomena that fall under the rubric of Islam, how would we decide what would be included within the circle and what must be excluded? Provocative examples are easy to find. Do the actions and motivations of those who destroyed New York's World Trade Center or the London Underground bombers fall within the circle of Islam? Or should "true" Muslims abhor and repudiate such actions? To phrase the question in the terms of popular debate, is Islam a "religion of peace," or does it somehow promote violent action? The issue need not be limited to the question of violence, of course. Did the rigorous constraint of women's rights by the Ṭalibān of Afghanistan (or the present regime of Sa'ūdī Arabia) belong in the circle? And if so, how can the ideas of Muslim feminists like Amina Wadud or Fatima Mernissi also fit there alongside them? Was Elijah Muhammad, twentieth-century Prophet of the Nation of Islam, a Muslim? Did his assertion that the white man is the devil and the black man God represent a manifestation of Islam? Reaching back into Islamic history we can multiply the examples. Do the doctrines of Shī'ite Muslims who taught that 'Alī was an incarnation of God fall within the circle of Islam? What of the speculations of the Islamic philosophers who held that the universe is eternal and treated revelation as no more than philosophy for the masses? Were the targeted assassinations of

the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs “Islamic”? What of the modern Aḥmadiyya movement, rejected as heretical by many Muslims, but whose members insist they are a part of the Islamic community?

This exercise is useful because it quickly exposes a common confusion. For the believing Muslim the question is meaningful. It is essential and proper for the believer to determine where the boundaries of his faith community lie and to decide what represents Islam and what does not. But for those, whether believers or not, who seek to understand Islam as a movement of people and ideas in history, this way of thinking will not do. Whether we take an anthropological, historical, or religious studies perspective, all of the phenomena I have listed belong within the realm of the study of Islam.

But this raises a further problem that is rather central to the object of this book. If such conflicting movements of people and ideas all belong in the circle of Islam, how is one to go about introducing the whole lot of them? How is it possible to “introduce” such a diverse, indeed contradictory, set of phenomena? One common answer is that the attempt is in itself misleading and fruitless; the idea of “Islam” with an upper-case “I” is a false construct; we should rather speak of many different “islams” which must be examined as separate phenomena. To paraphrase a political maxim, all religion is local, and to imagine that all these different “islams” have something in common which can be labeled “Islam” is to imagine something that has no reality. Since I have already written several hundreds of pages in which I have tried to introduce Islam with an upper-case “I,” it is too late for me to take this perspective. Nor am I inclined to do so.

My own perspective is best introduced by analogy. When a student sets out to study a language, Arabic for instance, she will soon learn that there are many quite different varieties of Arabic. Yet she will not normally trouble herself with the question of whether such different linguistic phenomena deserve to be called “Arabic.” And she is quite right not to be troubled. Arab grammatical police might worry about demarcating the precise boundaries of true “Arabic,” but from a common-sense perspective it is clear that all of the different dialects and varieties of the Arabic language rightly share the family name. Even if speakers of Maghribī and Palestinian Arabic may have some difficulty communicating, they all belong within the circle of Arabic speakers. In particular, the dialects they speak share sufficient common roots, sufficient common vocabulary, or a close enough grammatical structure to make it clear that they belong to the same family. It would be perfectly reasonable for a linguist to set out to survey the common structures, lexicon, and heritage of the whole family of dialects that are called Arabic, and so to introduce Arabic.

It is in that spirit that I have set out to introduce Islam here, and this book might be seen as an attempt to explain the evolution of the common grammar and vocabulary of Islam. Thus the Islamic feminist and the Ṭalibān both belong here, for although they are diametrically opposed in their conclusions,

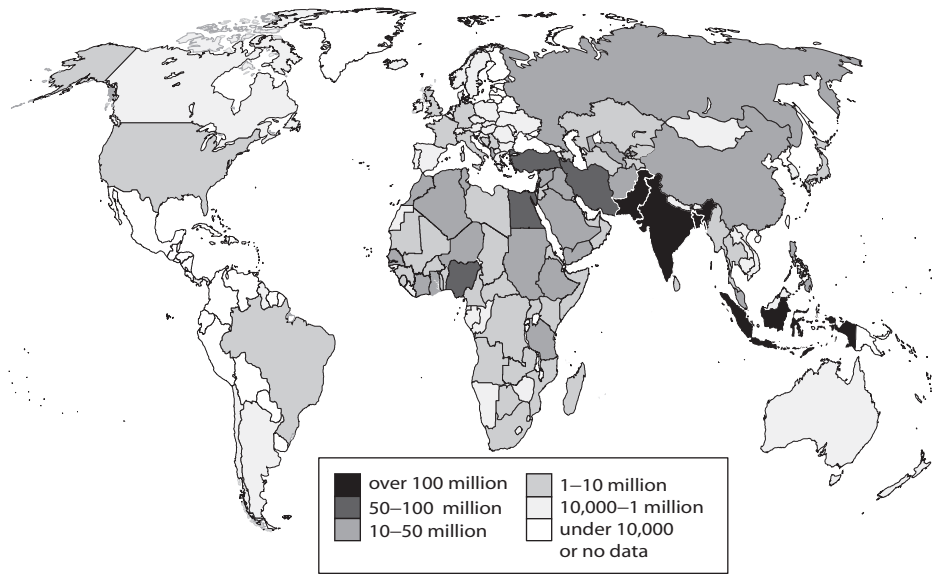
they make use of a common vocabulary. Similarly the Muslim pacifist and the suicide bomber, the Nizārī “assassin” and the Sunnī religious scholar who condemns him, are responding (albeit in very different ways) to a shared heritage – indeed, they are contending for control of that heritage.

Mapping the Islamic World

To restate the argument to this point, the set of phenomena that we label “Islam” is exceedingly varied, and there is enough complexity in the literatures, history, philosophy, theology, ritual, and politics of Islamic civilization to engage many lifetimes of study. Oversimplifying will not do. But keeping that danger in mind, we can still attempt to gain some sense of the big picture before our attention is consumed by details. There is a place, in other words, for the global view that excludes most detail as well as for the street-level view that includes it all.

A map turns out to be a useful starting point. If we peruse a map of the contemporary Islamic world, what will we notice? We can begin with a simple demographic survey. Map 1 is a simple map of the world’s Muslim population by country. The first thing to notice about this map is that it includes the entire world. The time when we could depict the Muslim world on a single hemisphere is long past, although many cartographers have yet to catch on. The contemporary Muslim community, the *umma*, is worldwide. Muslims live, work, raise families, and pray everywhere, from China to California, from Chile to Canada; there is almost no place on earth where Muslims have not settled. This simple fact turns out to be both easily forgotten and immensely important to understanding contemporary Islam. The modern Muslim diaspora is shaping the course of Islam, and of the world. Many critical issues facing contemporary Muslims arise precisely because so many influential Muslims are German, French, British, Canadian, Dutch, or Australian. Muslims work throughout the world as scientists and scholars, teachers and doctors, lawyers and entrepreneurs, farmers and factory workers. Their responses to this geographical mobility and the pluralism of the varied societies in which they live fuel rapid change in Muslim communities, and significant conflict among Muslims as well as between some Muslims and their non-Muslim neighbors. The experience of Muslims as a truly worldwide community has stimulated new and pressing discussions of the relation of Islam to women’s rights, human rights, bioethics, religious diversity, tolerance, and freedom of expression.

The worldwide controversy stirred by the publication in 2006 of inflammatory cartoon images of Muhammad in the Danish newspaper *al-Jostens* is a case in point. The publication of the cartoons, and the varied Muslim responses, were a product of a Muslim community that spans the globe. The cartoons were

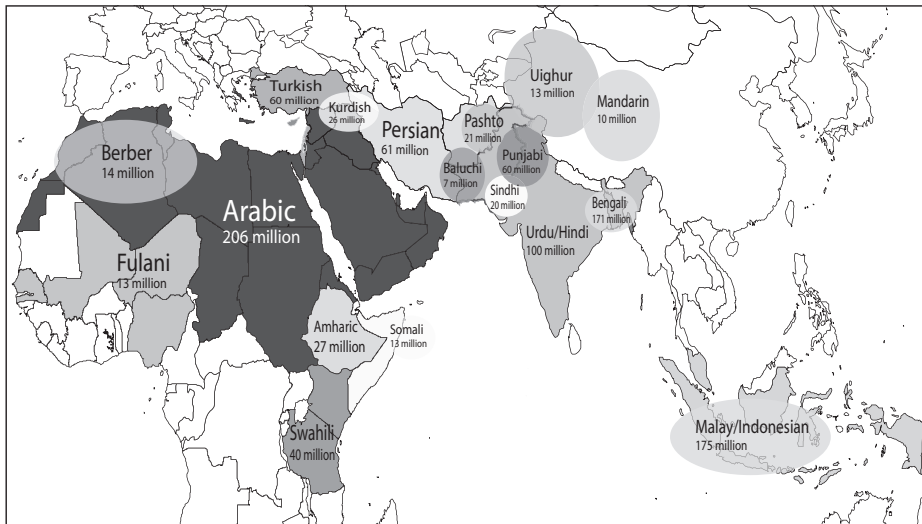


Map 1 Distribution of Muslim population by country

Muslims are concentrated in Asia, but significant numbers of Muslims now live on every continent. This map should be read with caution, however. Russia, for example, has a population of more than 14 million Muslims, but this population is not evenly distributed throughout its vast territory as the map seems to suggest, nor does Alaska have significant numbers of Muslims. China has a large Muslim population, but there is a great deal of uncertainty about its actual size. Population figures used for this map were drawn from the database at adherents.com.

published in the first place because the Muslim community in Europe is sizeable enough to motivate fierce debate about the compatibility of Islam with European cultural and political tradition. Authors like the pseudonymous Ba't Yeor raise the specter of "Eurabia," a Europe held hostage to Islamic radicalism because Europeans have failed to recognize the threat to freedom and to European tradition posed by Islam. The Muslim response to the cartoons was worldwide, however, and the fiercest reactions came from outside of Europe.

But while Islam is worldwide, our map also gives rise to a second, paradoxical observation: Muslims are heavily concentrated in Asia and Africa. More than 50 percent of the world's Muslims live in just eight countries: Indonesia, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nigeria, Iran, Turkey, and Egypt. This list is surprising for two reasons. First, the majority population of only one of these, Egypt, is Arabic speaking. The range of cultures and languages for which the most populous Muslim countries are home is staggering. More than twice as



Map 2 Major languages spoken by Muslims

The map shows something of the linguistic diversity of the Muslim world. For a catalogue of all of the hundreds of languages spoken by Muslims, see the source from which the data for this map was drawn, Raymond G. Gordon, Jr., ed., 2005. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 15th edn. Dallas, TX.: SIL International. Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com/>.

many Muslims speak Indonesian, Bengali, or Urdu as speak Arabic. Map 2, portraying the major languages spoken by Muslims, hints at this cultural and linguistic diversity but also grossly understates it by leaving out hundreds of smaller languages.

The second surprise is that a great many contemporary Muslims live in religiously plural societies. In India, Muslims are, despite their numbers, dwarfed by the size of the majority population. China, with 40 million or more Muslims, presents a similar case. In both countries the Muslim minority faces real or perceived threats from the majority. Nigeria, too, is religiously divided. About 50 percent of its population is Muslim, 40 percent Christian, and 10 percent animist. Communal tensions there are high. Many other nations with significant Muslim populations – Sudan, Lebanon, the Balkan nations, Malaysia – are also multi-ethnic and religiously plural. Consequently a large number of contemporary Muslims do not live in Muslim majority societies. Rather, they live in societies in which they must live, work, and worship amongst non-Muslim neighbors.

We can add a final observation: among these most populous Muslim countries, most are former European colonies, and all faced significant economic

and social upheavals in the twentieth century. During the last fifty years all have contended with high rates of poverty, uneven distribution of wealth, and the accompanying political turmoil. In other words, the vast majority of Muslims in the contemporary world live in societies which bore the brunt of colonialism, and which have experienced rapid and disorienting social and economic change in the course of decolonization.

To summarize: the Muslim community – the umma – truly spans the globe, and thus faces all of the challenges of globalization and pluralism; in a great many countries Muslims are a minority community; and, finally, Muslims are demographically concentrated in politically and economically tumultuous regions of the world. Gathered together, these varied facts make for a turbulent picture. We should hardly be surprised if many contemporary Muslims view their community as embattled and besieged. Large numbers of Muslims have suffered a great deal at the hands of European colonizers, Chinese communists, Hindu zealots, and homegrown tyrants. Many are not free to order their lives as conscience or community norms might dictate, either because they live as minorities in societies dominated by non-Muslims or because, even in Muslim-majority societies, they suffer under repressive regimes.

Arabs and Non-Arabs

But dwelling, as we have, on the diversity of the Islamic world, begs an important question. If the majority of Muslims are Indonesian, Indian, Bengali, Pakistani, Nigerian, or Chinese, then why *do* we tend to think first of Arabs and Arab culture when we think about Islam? And why do textbooks like this one spend so much space making the obvious point that non-Arab Muslims vastly outnumber Arabs, when we know quite well that much of the book will inevitably focus on the Arabic-speaking Middle East? Stereotypes become stereotypes for a reason, and in this case the reason is fairly simple. Because Islam originated in Arabia, because the Qur'ān is in Arabic, because the classical intellectual tradition of Islamic civilization was recorded in Arabic, and because Islamic religious ideas and cultural norms were rooted first of all in Arab culture – for all of these reasons Arabs exert and will continue to exert an influence on Islam disproportionate to their demographic strength. Important as it is, and although it is spoken by nearly 200 million Muslims, Indonesian will never be the classical language of Islam or the lingua franca of Islamic scholarship. Jakarta will never be the worldwide center of pilgrimage. It is too late for that. So long as Muslims continue to read the Qur'ān, study Islamic law, and value their heritage, Arabic and the Arabic-speaking world will remain of critical importance. This should be no more surprising than the observation that the Vatican, a tiny city-state in

Italy that still publishes documents in Latin, has an outsize influence on the worldwide community of Christians.

The reality, then, is that a relatively small population of Arabs exerts an outsize influence on the religious and intellectual culture of a far larger population of non-Arab Muslims. The result is a dynamic interaction between a centripetal pull toward uniformity and the centrifugal forces of cultural and linguistic diversity. We see this tension in medieval Muslim travel writers like Ibn Battuta. There was no end to the strangeness that Ibn Battuta encountered as he traveled through India, China, and Indonesia. Yet wherever he went he also found himself on familiar ground. Throughout Islamic history, and continuing into the contemporary period, Muslim practice has been constantly shaped by local environments, while local variations of Islam are constantly under pressure to conform to a uniform standard. We will see this pattern especially in the growth of *ṣūfism*, which is often adaptive to local practice, in contrast with the spread of various forms of fundamentalism, which favor uniformity with some ideal norm.

Sunnīs and Shīʿites

There is more to the diversity of Islam than language, culture, and geography. In fact, the Muslim world is split by a major sectarian fault line. Roughly 80 percent of Muslims identify themselves as Sunnīs. About 18 percent call themselves Shīʿites. Shīʿites are themselves divided into several communities, and small sects make up the remaining 2 percent. Such a major schism seems to demand explanation, and among the first questions students of Islam ask is “What’s the difference?” The short answer is that Shīʿites and Sunnīs are divided over the questions of leadership and authority within the *umma*. The division is rooted in the early years of Islamic history when Muslims faced the urgent question of who should succeed Muhammad as leader of the Muslim community. Shīʿites supported the leadership of Muhammad’s cousin, ‘Alī, and his descendants. They came to see authority, both religious and political, as vested in divinely appointed leaders, beginning with ‘Alī. By contrast, Sunnīs adopted a pragmatic political stance. The Sunnī theory of the caliphate required that the leader of the Muslims be male, a member of the Prophet’s tribe of the Quraysh, and meet certain basic qualifications for fitness. Beyond these broad expectations, it was up to the community to decide. Moreover, although the Sunnī caliphs had religious obligations and were expected to guard and defend Islamic values, they did not come to be viewed as sources of religious authority in their own right. Authority, for Sunnīs, came to be vested in texts – the Qur’ān and the Sunna – whereas for Shīʿites it was focused on the family of the Prophet and its descendants, humans especially chosen

by God to represent him on earth. Many other differences – in law, ritual, attitudes toward suffering, and eschatology – grew out of this basic difference over leadership. In particular Shī'ites make martyrdom and redemptive suffering central values, and these values are given dramatic shape in annual celebrations during the month of Muḥarram.

These differences between Sunnīs and Shī'ites are significant, but they would be easy to overplay. The two groups share more than divides them, and throughout most of Islamic history Shī'ite communities were demographically dispersed amongst the majority Sunnī population. It was only after the emergence of the Safāvid empire in the sixteenth century that Iran and southern Iraq came to be almost exclusively Shī'ite. Even in the contemporary Islamic world, where conflicts between resurgent Shī'ites and Sunnīs are once again becoming important, it is striking how much the two communities have in common, and this raises a broader question: in the face of the stunning diversity among Muslims, what holds Islam together? Is there anything that *all* Muslims agree on, whether Sunnīs and Shī'ites, Arabs and Indonesians, twelfth-century theologians and twentieth-century scientists? A simple reversal of our map exercise will focus the question. When we survey a map, we place ourselves at some imaginary point in space from which we pretend we can see all. And from that vantage point, we cannot help but be struck by the scope and variety of the world of Islam. But suppose we descend from our imaginary lookout and zoom in on one particular place at one particular time – a local mosque at the time of Friday prayers. This is a field trip that most readers will have little difficulty arranging. On such a visit, what will we notice? And in particular, what will we notice that will be more or less the same regardless of geography, ethnicity, or historical era?

Islamic Ritual

The first thing we are likely to notice, often before even arriving at the mosque, will be heard not seen. The voicing of the call to prayer, the *adhān*, whether by the unaided human voice or broadcast over loudspeakers, is part of the universal experience of Muslims. For many Muslims, these were the first words whispered into their ears. The words of the call (although not its intonation) are always the same, and always in Arabic. The founder of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, tried to change this, imposing a call to prayer in Turkish in the early part of the twentieth century. Only an iron hand could enforce such a policy, however. After 1950 democracy undid the change. Now, five times each day, should they choose to listen, Turks, along with Bengalis, Malays, and Canadians, are summoned to worship with the same Arabic words that Muslims throughout history have heard:

Allāhu akbar	God is great (repeated four times)
ashhadu anna lā ilāhā illa Allāh	I testify that there is no god but God (repeated twice)
ashhadu anna Muḥammadan rasūl Allāh	I testify that Muhammad is the Prophet of God
ḥayya ‘ala al-ṣalāt	Hasten to prayer (repeated twice)
ḥayya ‘ala al-falāḥ	Hasten to success (repeated twice)
[aṣ-ṣalāt khayrun min an-nawm]	[Prayer is better than sleep] (Sunnīs; morning only)
[ḥayya ‘ala khayr al-‘amal]	[Hasten to the best of works] (Shī‘ites only)
Allāhu akbar	God is great (repeated twice)
lā ilāha illa Allāh	There is no God but God (Sunnīs once, Shī‘ites twice)

It is worth noting the subtle differences between Sunnī and Shī‘ite practice. These differences are sufficient to mark out a separate communal identity without, however, negating the essential unity of Muslim experience. It is also worth noting that the call to prayer incorporates the most elemental of Muslim credal statements, the Shahāda, or confession of faith. With the call to prayer we would seem to encounter the Islamic belief system at its most elemental, stripped of commentary or controversy: God is One and without rival, the messenger of the One God is Muhammad, and worship is God’s most basic requirement of his creatures. We will have plenty of opportunity to complicate this picture as we proceed, but at this point it may be worth pausing to admire the simplicity and directness of this message. A person who takes this message to heart is bound to live with a certain seriousness and focus.

If the visitor heeds the summons of the adhān to come to prayer, he will arrive at the mosque to be greeted at the entrance by a collection of shoes. Here is an image with universality that extends well beyond even the Muslim community. The removal of shoes marks the borderline between sacred and profane space. As we enter the mosque the shoes remind us that we are leaving the marketplace and the mundane world behind, entering what Mircea Eliade calls sacred space and sacred time.

The mosque itself has few universal features. It may or may not have a dome, minarets, a pulpit, a source of flowing water for ritual ablutions, or a niche, the miḥrāb, indicating the direction of prayer. The mosque, at its most basic, is simply a place of worship as its Arabic designation, masjid, communicates. Any space can be transformed into a masjid, whether a rectangle marked out in the sand, an empty office, or a rented church basement. Mosque architecture has been remarkably varied through Islamic history, although modern times and Sa‘ūdī Arabian money have brought increasing pressure toward uniformity.

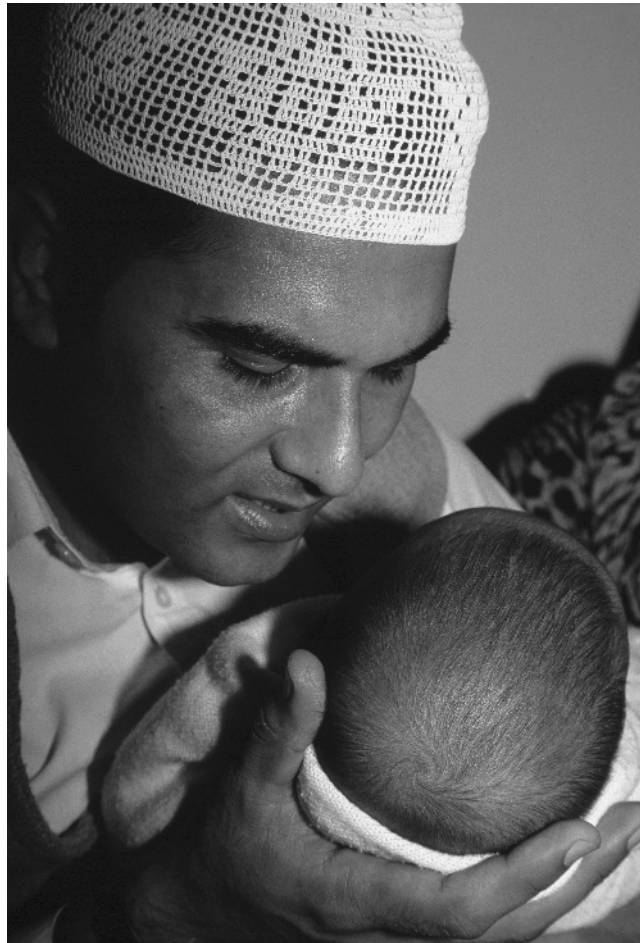


Figure 1.1 A Muslim father whispers the call to prayer to his newborn child. Ideally, the words of the adhān are the first words heard by a Muslim infant, and will be heard at the start of every act of worship throughout his life. Photo: World Religions Photo Library/Alamy

What goes on once the worshiper enters the sacred space and joins other worshipers for prayer is also remarkably uniform, and like the call to prayer, is part of the universal experience of Muslims. We will have occasion to describe the detailed requirements of Muslim prayer in chapter 10. For now it is sufficient to note that believers face the same direction, toward Mecca, they recite the same passages of the Qur'ān that generations of Muslims have recited, and they follow a prescribed pattern of movements and prostrations that has

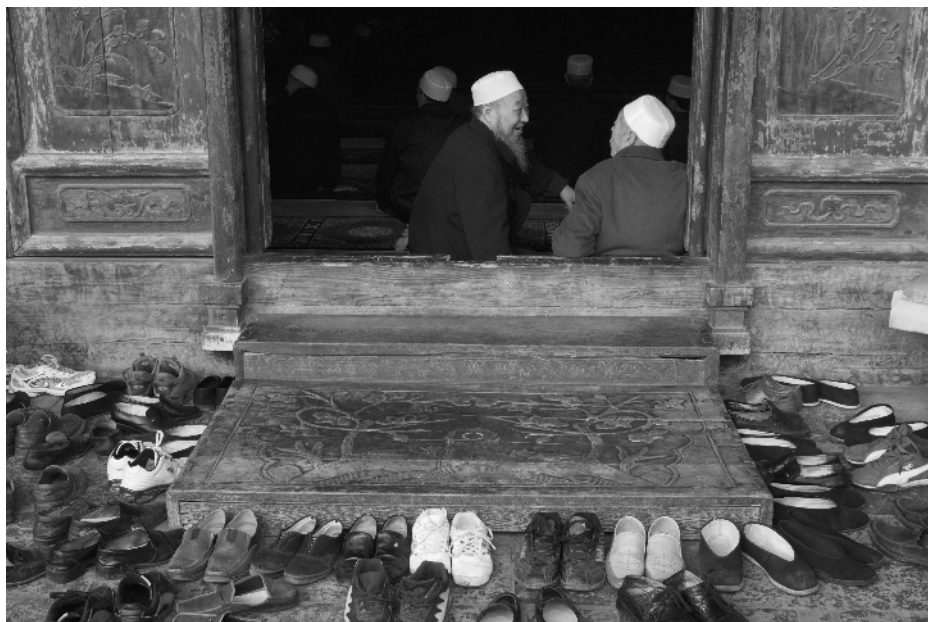


Figure 1.2 Shoes outside a mosque in Xian, capital of Shaanxi province, China. The removal of shoes is a visible indicator for Muslims of entry into sacred space and time. Photo: Eitan Simanor/Alamy

remained uniform for centuries. The ritual prayer, in other words, is a universal aspect of Muslim experience, even for those Muslims who may have abandoned it. It is a ritual that any Muslim, whether Sunnī or Shīʿite, whether from the tenth century or the twenty-first, will immediately find familiar not just in broad outlines, but in specific detail.

The uniformity of practice demonstrated in the ritual prayer is mirrored in other aspects of Muslim religious practice. The rites followed by pilgrims to Mecca when they perform the Ḥajj and the rules followed by Muslims when they fast during the month of Ramaḍān, are all remarkably uniform. So too is the value placed on charitable giving, zakāt. Indeed, it is with good reason that every introduction to Islam begins by outlining these so-called pillars of Islam. Like pillars in a mosque, the words of the Shahāda, the practice of ṣalāt, the rules for fasting, the rites of pilgrimage, and the value of generosity enshrined in the notion of zakāt seem to remain fixed, solid, and unchanging. In contrast with many other aspects of Muslim experience, essential Muslim religious duties have remained remarkably stable over time and across cultures.

How can we account for this picture, at once so diverse and so valuing of uniformity? On the one hand, the Islamic world is dizzyingly varied, and one

(a)



(b)



Figure 1.3 Variations in mosque architecture in Indonesia. Above, the Jepara masjid in Indonesia, showing the influence of Javanese Hindu architecture; below, the Grand Mosque in Banda Aceh (the photograph was taken before the mosque was inundated by the 2004 tsunami). Photos: Jepara masjid © Bettmann/CORBIS; Grand Mosque: © Kees Metselaar/Alamy

cannot presume to know what any given Muslim values or believes without first asking. Indeed, the most practical nugget of advice I usually offer newcomers to the study of Islam is not to assume that one's textbook will be reflected in reality. A new Muslim acquaintance may, in the modern world, be influenced quite as much by Marx as by Muhammad. Yet in the face of all of the diversity of the Muslim community Islam still offers Muslims a remarkably stable set of core practices – what I called earlier in this chapter a common vocabulary and grammar of Islam – that would be recognizable as in some sense “Islamic” by any Muslim of any cultural origin or any historical period.

What to Expect from This Book

How this came about – how Islam came to be what it is today in all of its variety and its paradoxical unity – is the story I have set out to tell in this book. It is a story that is first of all rooted in history, and to begin to explore that history we begin well before the rise of Islam. Part I explores the historical and religious context of the rise of Islam, and surveys the central elements of the Islamic tradition. We begin with pre-Islamic Arabia, and are immediately faced with a critical question: how significant is the Arab background for understanding the rise of Islam? Is sixth-century Arabia a credible context for the rise of a new, vigorous monotheistic faith and a vibrant civilization? And, if not, where should we look for the “cradle” of Islam? These questions will lead us, in chapter 3, on an exploration of Near Eastern civilization and religion before the rise of Islam.

With chapter 4 we begin to examine the sacred history of Islam, beginning with the key narrative in that history, the life of Muhammad. The story of Muhammad, we will find, is far more colorful and fantastic than many modern treatments of his life allow and it is rooted squarely in the religious context of the Near East. Chapters 5 and 6 take on the two thorniest questions in the field of Islamic studies – how the Qurʾān came into its present form, and the authenticity of the ḥadīth literature on which the traditional story of Islamic origins, including the life of Muhammad, is based. It is in these chapters that we will have to contend with two centuries of critical scholarship that has increasingly brought into question the traditional account of how Islam came into being.

In part II we turn from sacred history and the formative elements of Islam to the complex historical context in which Islamic civilization grew to maturity. We begin with the Arab conquests. The conquests stand as one of the great turning points of world history, but how much really changed in the Near East? Less, it turns out, than we sometimes imagine. Chapter 8 examines the worldview of the early Arab conquerors. In this formative phase in the shaping

of Islamic identity, what did these new rulers of the world believe, what motivated them, and how do we know? Finally, in chapter 9, we follow the story forward to the rise of the ‘Abbāsid caliphate, the maturing of Islamic political thought, and the emergence of the major schisms in Islam.

Part III surveys the great institutions of Islamic civilization in its maturity, beginning with Islamic law in chapter 10. The elucidation of God’s law pre-occupied the greatest minds of the Islamic world, and the resulting system was a signature achievement of Islamic civilization. The ideals of Islamic law continued to give the world of Islam unity and coherence long after it had fragmented politically. By comparison with the law, and in contrast with its status as the queen of sciences for Christians, Islamic theology was a lowly stepchild. But it is in the field of theology that we most clearly see the articulation of a distinct Sunnī worldview. Finally, in chapter 12 we turn to the spiritual center of Islam, ṣūfism. These three great institutions – the law, theology, and ṣūfism – are the defining features of Islam in its maturity. In combination they gave it the coherence, the brilliance, and the resiliency that marked Islamic civilization at its height.

This resiliency would be severely tested in history, however, especially in the modern period. Part IV examines Muslim responses to the challenge of history and patterns of renewal and reform in Islam. The ways in which Muslims met the challenges of the Crusades and the Mongol invasions are both of intrinsic interest and illuminating for our understanding of what would follow. What did follow was first of all a florescence of great Islamic empires on the eve of modernity. The great “gunpowder empires” – Ottoman, Safāvid, and Mughal – arose simultaneous with the first foreshadowings of Western power, and the religious environment in these empires had a profound effect on Islamic responses to Western imperialism. From the eighteenth century on, the power and pervasiveness of Western civilization has proved to be a challenge unlike any in Islamic history. The heart of the final section is an examination of the varied responses of Muslims to the West, and the effects that the encounter with the West has had on developments in Islamic law, theology, and worldview. The concluding chapter 5 surveys the major challenges facing Muslims in the twenty-first century, particularly the challenges of pluralism, of violence, and of feminism.

Essential Resources for the Study of Islam

The *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (*EI*) will be the student’s best friend in any serious study of topics related to Islam. This massive work is difficult to get to know, but will abundantly repay the effort. *EI* comes in two editions, and the second, only recently completed and recognizable by its oversized green volumes, is naturally more up to date and thus preferred. Most college libraries will have

a copy, and an electronic version is now available from the publisher, E. J. Brill. For those who cannot access the full *Encyclopaedia*, an abbreviated volume of excerpts from the first edition is available in *The Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*.

So much for the good news. The bad news for the newcomer to the field is that headwords in *EI* are given in transliterated Arabic. Thus if one is interested in Islamic mysticism, one must know to look under *Taṣawwuf* rather than *Ṣūfism*. Consequently, non-specialists will need to make frequent use of the subject index. The *Encyclopaedia* also has other peculiarities. The system for transliterating the languages of the Islamic world, for instance, uses “dj” rather than the now more common “j,” and “Ḳ” rather than “q.” Once these hurdles are overcome and the desired entry found, the articles themselves will prove dense and daunting. They are written by specialists for specialists. Still, many of the entries represent the definitive word, sometimes the only word, on their particular topic and all of the articles supply extensive bibliographies.

Serious research on Islam is unimaginable without *EI*. But in addition to the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, there has recently been a frenzied rush to publish other encyclopedias with relevance to Islam; some of them are quite good and draw more heavily on the work of younger scholars than the staid and ponderous *EI*. Among these John Esposito (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Modern Islamic World* (1995) and the *Encyclopaedia of Islam and the Muslim World* (2004) are worthy of mention. A number of reference works, while not specifically focused on Islam, provide excellent coverage of topics related to Islam, sometimes in a much more accessible manner than *EI*. Among these Mircea Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, and André Vauchez (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of the Middle Ages*, stand out, often providing a convenient starting point for many topics.

For the beginning student searching for a guide to the most important books on Islam, Charles Adams's *Reader's Guide to the Great Religions* (1977) provides an excellent starting point, although it is now dated. Stephen Humphries provides a more recent and somewhat more technical bibliographical introduction to the field, geared toward graduate students, in his *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry* (1991). Other bibliographical guides include Derek Hopwood and Diana Grimwood-Jones's *The Middle East and Islam* (1972), Jean Sauvaget's *Introduction to the History of the Muslim East* (1965), and George Atiyeh's *The Contemporary Middle East 1943–1973* (1975). It will not be long, however, before most serious students of Islam will have to face J. D. Pearson's *Index Islamicus, 1906–1955* (1958) and its many supplements. *Index Islamicus* lists just about every article written about Islam in a European language. The trick is to decipher its idiosyncratic organization. The index is arranged topically, with the list of topics given at the front of each volume, and because there are many separate volumes without a comprehensive index the print edition is laborious to use. An electronic version is now available, making bibliographic research in Islamic Studies a great deal easier.

Two of the best short introductions to Islam are H. A. R. Gibb's *Mohammedanism* (1969) and a rejoinder to Gibb's book by one of his most gifted Muslim students, Fazlur Rahman's *Islam* (1972). Among more ambitious surveys of Islamic history, Marshall Hodgson's three-volume *Venture of Islam* is unrivaled. Other such surveys include Ira Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (1988) and Gustave E. von Grunebaum's three volumes, *Classical Islam* (1970), *Medieval Islam* (1953), and *Modern Islam* (1962). Classics in the field include Bertold Spuler's *The Muslim World: A Historical Survey* (1960) and Carl Brockelmann's *History of the Islamic Peoples* (1947). *The Cambridge History of Islam*, edited by P. M. Holt, and Ann K. S. Lambton (1970) is also worth a look. A handy chronology, although confined to the Middle East, is available in Jere L. Bacharach, *A Middle East Studies Handbook* (1984). Much more detailed chronological tables are found in Clifford Bosworth's *The Islamic Dynasties: A Chronological and Genealogical Handbook* (1967).

Many anthologies of Islamic texts in translation are now available, among them F. E. Peters, *A Reader on Classical Islam* (1994c), A. J. Arberry, *Aspects of Islamic Civilization as Depicted in the Original Texts* (1964), Bernard Lewis, *Islam: From the Prophet Muhammad to the Capture of Constantinople* (1987), and James Kritzeck, *Anthology of Islamic Literature* (1964). Finally, for lovers of maps, several good atlases are available, including Harry W. Hazard's *Atlas of Islamic History* (1954) and R. Roolvink's *Historical Atlas of the Muslim Peoples* (1957).

If this list seems rather daunting for the beginner, it is perhaps worth reminding ourselves that the development of Islam spans fourteen centuries, that the Islamic world encompasses a vast range of languages and cultures which now span the globe from China to North America, that about one-fifth of the world's people call themselves Muslims, and that many of those billion-plus people disagree vehemently with one another on the most basic matters of faith and practice. One cannot begin to study such a subject without some effort. Those who shy away from complexity had better stop here.