

The Illustrated Guide to Islam

Raana Bokhari and Mohammad Seddon. *The Illustrated Guide to Islam*. London: Lorenz Books, 2012. 512 pp. \$29.99. Hardcover. ISBN: 0754823911

The *Illustrated Guide to Islam* is an instructive study aid for students who are intrigued by religious art and architecture in the Muslim world and have a general interest in Islamic history. The guide begins with an informative introduction that briefly highlights important statistical facts based on socio-historical and religious details about Islam. It is here that the authors note the layout of the text and convey the use of the Arabic terminology and their transliterations.

The text is divided into two major sections. Part One articulates the themes related to the “History, Philosophy, Traditions, and Teachings of Islam.” A useful historical timeline that presents major points in the development of the Islamic tradition, beginning with the birth of the Prophet Muhammad in 570 CE, is provided, and helpful maps are included throughout the text. Part One effectively traverses through the nascent development of the religious institution of Islam in order to create a foundation for the unfamiliar reader. The first seven chapters in this initial section help the reader gain insight into major elements of the Islamic tradition.

Art and architecture reveal a history that encompasses technology, environment, politics, culture, economics, and religion. Religious art and architecture reflect spirituality and functionality, estheticism and practicality, and, finally, symbolic religious motifs and socio-historical narratives. In order for the curious learner to better understand a piece of historic art or a significant building, the learner must enter the realm of the artist or architect. Part One provides an efficacious transition into Part Two, as it helps readers enter that context.

Part Two of this expert guide contains twelve chapters and a helpful timeline that lists major Islamic artistic contributions. The first chapter explores the major source for artistic inspiration: the Holy Qur’an. This part underscores the relevance, functionality, symbolism, and artistic value in Arabic calligraphy and in the art of recitation: the memorization and vocalization of Islamic scripture.

In keeping with its title, the *Illustrated Guide to Islam* includes an impressive array of illustrations, making it an ideal resource for any student, academic, or interested learner. Depictions reflective of Islamic iconography, photographs of medieval structures and ceramics, pictures of tapestry and textiles, artistic drawings and paintings, and photos of global architectural designs are aptly portrayed throughout the book. This demonstrates the breadth of Islamic artistic contributions to the world and exhibits the notable interplay between the ruling caliphates and the lands over which they ruled, for example, as seen in Istanbul mosques with borrowed Byzantine domes. Islamic art and architecture reveal the multi-faith and multi-cultural societies that created their context, further animating the dynamic relations that existed.

The text provides an exceptional overview of the richness and depth surrounding this enormous topic. Although the book includes a wide range of incredible photographs, the inclusion of more photos of mosques from remote areas of the world would have been welcome to illustrate how the surrounding environment influenced architecture. The authors brilliantly accomplish the weighty task of concisely and yet comprehensively demonstrating the diversity

within Islamic belief systems. Though this is represented through the authors' inclusion of the varying schools of law, political thought, and the major sects within Islam, it would have been helpful to elaborate in a separate, brief section in Part One the contemporary trends in Islamic thought. This would illuminate the fact that revival and reform periods have unofficially taken shape over the course of Islamic history (not solely referring to the "promised reformer," or Mahdi, that is referenced in the text), highlighting that a "progressive" branch has been catalogued, as well as its counterparts, thus expressing further that Islam is diverse in character and controversial issues remain controversial. The authors do provide some examples of this in the sections on law and women, for example. However, including a separate chapter devoted to this topic would have enhanced Part One.

The inclusion of a picture index noting titles and information such as location, time period, and citation would have been beneficial. Picture credits are included, as is a glossary of terms. The authors also provide a list of the world's greatest museum collections of Islamic art.

The Illustrated Guide to Islam is recommended highly. It is well researched and engaging, and both scholarly and accessible. It provides a wealth of information to the reader and whets one's appetite for more. The authors have presented a thorough, model academic reference for any college or university library. Dr. Mohammed Seddon is an expert scholar on Religious Studies and Islam and is currently teaching at the University of Chester in the United Kingdom. Raana Bokhari's academic expertise encompasses the study of religions with a focus on women and Islam. She is a Visiting Lecturer at the University of Chester.

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