

The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought

Gerhard Bowering, ed. *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013. 656 pp. \$75.00. Hardcover. ISBN: 9780691134840. E-book: 9781400838554.

The impact of Muslim faith and practice upon global issues today can scarcely be denied. Islam exerts an influence as a primary motivator and source of organizing principles in the daily personal behavior and communal or national life of about 1.5 billion of the earth's population. Of particular importance in international affairs is the role of political philosophies, movements, structures, personalities, and systems derived from or expressing various interpretations of Islamic belief.

This beautifully constructed new reference work offers the serious reader solid and detailed information about the historical origins and development of Islamic political and legal ideas and institutions and their roles in today's world. The writing is intended for the "educated nonspecialist" (xix), though I have no doubt that academics in the many disciplines of Islamic studies will benefit from it, and those in related fields will find it as useful as *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, and other indispensable references.

The work has an unusual and appealing conceptual basis in five ranges of responsibility undertaken by the five editors. The central or foundational themes — such as Muhammad, the Qur'an, *shari'a*, authority, government — are examined in articles overseen by the editor-in-chief, Gerhard Bowering (Yale). Patricia Crone (Princeton) led the work on the historical evolution of political thought, sects and schools, regions, and dynasties throughout the Muslim world; Muhammad Qasim Zaman (Princeton) directed the contributions on modern concepts, institutions, movements, and political parties; Devin Stewart (Emory) developed the key area of Islamic law, legal theory, and practice; and Wadad Kadi (Chicago) selected the specific thinkers, leaders, and individuals discussed.

Each one of these editors is an instantly recognizable and widely respected authority in his or her subject area. The editors have marshaled contributions from an interesting array of international scholars, men and women, and Muslims and non-Muslims, many of them established professors who have written important books on their particular subjects within the past ten years, and some emerging younger scholars and graduate students. For example, there is an article by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, editor of the massive *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, on exegesis; one by Jonathan A.C. Brown on hadith; and several by doctoral student Nassima Neggaz. The contributors were asked to make their articles "accessible, informative and comprehensive" and to "maintain an objective tone" (xviii), and this they have accomplished to an impressive degree, in a field that has traditionally been somewhat fractured and strained over tendencies toward orientalism and/or essentialism.

Bowering's own introductory essay is an excellent example of detail in context: it provides ample names and dates and specific information, within a lucid and well-organized overview of the historical development of political ideas and activity through centuries of time and the widest possible geographical expanse. One can gain a sense of the entire field and identify the vital issues and individuals involved just by attending with care to this introduction. The tone is both critical and scrupulously respectful. Some will take exception to Bowering's characterization of

the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, but it would be difficult to refute his specific comments about it. Likewise, the one-page article on Palestine by Loren Lybarger, his articles on Hamas and the PLO, and those by others on Islamic Jihad, the Muslim Brotherhood, and so on will attract attention.

In fact, Malika Zeghal's article on the Muslim Brotherhood is one of the few in this volume in which the balance of historical background and current relevance fails. It relies entirely on a retrospective approach and remains agnostic on the role of this organization in the present. One must read Bowering's article on Egypt to find out what has transpired since the emergence of the "Arab Spring" movements in 2010 up to early 2012, and the Brotherhood's role in those developments. The currency of the entire volume is impressive; the death of Osama bin Laden in 2011 is discussed, as is the outbreak of civil war in Syria, up to April 2012 (again by Bowering). Evidently, editorial updates on these articles continued right up to the last possible point, when the book went to press. The demographic maps and table in the front of the book also provide information as recent as 2010.

The article on Osama bin Laden brings up one of the most vexing problems in a reference work on Islam — the alphabetical ordering of traditional Muslim names. The article is found under "B" for "Bin Laden," without a cross-reference in the index from Osama, or even Laden, where the inexperienced reader might look. On the other hand, the article on Sayyid Qutb is found under "S," but there is a cross-reference in the index: "Qutb, Sayyid. See Sayyid Qutb." Hasan al-Turabi, however, is found under "T," with no cross-reference. This is a problem without a solution, though I am sure they tried to organize a consistent practice, with imperfect results.

The index does serve to help the reader find mention of particular topics or names within articles under other headings; for example, Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti is discussed in the article "Ijtihad and Taqlid" by Devin Stewart, although al-Suyuti's name is not used as the heading of an article. The index also coordinates terms with subheadings effectively, such as:

Shi'ism, 510-512
 Abbasids and, 2
 Abu Bakr and, 13-14, 110
 in Afghanistan, 20

and so on. Yes, this is entirely normal, but the art of indexing is becoming depleted in this age of keyword searching to the point where competent standard indexing is noteworthy.

The entire work rests upon a foundation of fifteen core articles: authority, caliph/caliphate, fundamentalism, government, jihad, knowledge, minorities, modernity, Muhammad, pluralism/tolerance, Qur'an, revival/reform, *shari'a*, traditional political thought, and *ulama*. These lengthy essays are meant to provide a basis for the contextual understanding of the fine-grained detail found in the very specialized articles. For example, Patricia Crone's essay "Traditional Political Thought" begins with this explanation:

In terms of political thought, as in so many other respects, Muslims today could be said to be bilingual. On the one hand, they speak the global political language of Western derivation marked by key concepts such as democracy, freedom, human rights, and gender equality; on the other hand, they still have their traditional political idiom, formed over 1400 years of Islamic history and marked by concepts such as prophecy, imamate, and commanding right and forbidding wrong. The Islamic tradition is alien to most Western readers. What follows is an attempt to familiarize them with it to make it easier for them to follow the other entries in this volume (554).

And what follows is, indeed, a marvel of clarity and persuasion, filled with provocative statements that are surprisingly vivid in a reference work. This article could become the stimulus for very profitable and lively classroom discussion among advanced students. Fostering greater “bilingual” awareness among Western scholars and students is the intention underlying the entire volume. Each of the lengthy core articles is more than a recitation of data. They are interpretations of data, often with a distinct point of view and an implicit invitation to debate.

The professors with whom I have shared this book immediately expressed an interest in assigning some of the topical articles for classroom use, such as those on modernity, *shari‘a*, *ijtihad* and *taqlid*, pluralism and tolerance, and jihad. Smaller articles on gender issues and Salafism seemed appropriate to them for able undergraduates. They also appreciated the selective bibliography provided with each article, both large and small (with the exception of Crone’s). These book lists, headed “Further Reading,” are compact but well chosen, up to date, and convenient. Each article also directs the reader to other pertinent articles within this volume. These professors also wished to have desk copies for ready reference and fact-checking on a whole range of topics, both current and historical. The value of the work is certainly not confined to instructors in the field of religion, however — those teaching in the areas of history, politics, law, culture, international relations, security studies, and social science would also find it applicable.

The good news on desk copies is that this volume is almost unbelievably affordable: the list price of \$75 from Princeton University Press is terrific, and discounts can be found. I hesitate to mention this for fear that they will be inspired to raise the price. Professors can afford to have a copy of their own, and every academic library should purchase one without delay. An e-book and Kindle version is available, though this reviewer had no opportunity to examine these. But the print edition of this reference comes highly recommended.

Paula Skreslet
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