

## Wordtrade Reviews:

### Table of Contents

[FINDING GOD THROUGH YOGA: PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA AND MODERN AMERICAN RELIGION IN A GLOBAL AGE by David J. Neumann \[University of North Carolina Press, 9781469648620\]](#)

[IN DIALOGUE WITH CLASSICAL INDIAN TRADITIONS: ENCOUNTER, TRANSFORMATION AND INTERPRETATION edited by Brian Black and Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad \[Dialogues in South Asian Traditions: Religion, Philosophy, Literature and History, Routledge, 9781138541399\]](#)

[JESUS IN AN AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT: RADICAL GOSPELS FROM THOMAS HOBBS TO THOMAS JEFFERSON by Jonathan C. P. Birch \[Christianities in the Trans-Atlantic World, Palgrave Macmillan, 9781137512758\]](#)

[RELIGION, LAW, USA edited by Joshua Dubler and Isaac Weiner \[North American Religions ,New York University Press, NYU Press, 9781479893362\]](#)

[FREE WILL, CAUSALITY, AND NEUROSCIENCE edited by Bernard Feltz, Marcus Missal and Andrew Cameron Sims \[Value Inquiry Book Series, Cognitive Science, Brill, Rodopi, Hardback: 9789004372917, E-Book: 9789004409965\] Open Source](#)

[ESOTERIC IMAGES: DECODING THE LATE HERAT SCHOOL OF PAINTING by Tawfiq Da'adli \[Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture, Brill, Hardback: 9789004398009; E-Book: 9789004398412\]](#)

[SAINTHOOD AND AUTHORITY IN EARLY ISLAM: AL-HAKĪM AL-TIRMIDHĪ' S THEORY OF WILĀYA AND THE REENVISIONING OF THE SUNNĪ CALIPHATE BY AIYUB PALMER \[Studies on Sufism, Brill, Hardback: 9789004408302; E-Book: 9789004416550\]](#)

[THE QUR'ĀN AND THE BIBLE: TEXT AND COMMENTARY by Gabriel Said Reynolds, Qur'ān translation by Ali Quli Qarai \[Yale University Press, 9780300181326\]](#)

[THE QURANIC JESUS: A NEW INTERPRETATION BY CARLOS A. SEGOVIA \[JUDAISM, Christianity, and Islam: Tension, Transmission, Transformation, de Gruyter, 9783110597646\]](#)

[APPROACHES TO THE QUR'ĀN IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA edited by Zulfikar Hirji \[Qur'anic Studies Series, Oxford University Press, 9780198840770\]](#)

[APPROACHES TO THE QUR'ĀN IN CONTEMPORARY IRAN edited by Alessandro Cancian \[Qur'anic Studies Series, Oxford University Press, 9780198840763\]](#)

[CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES TO THE QUR'ĀN AND ITS INTERPRETATION IN IRAN by Ali Akbar, Abdullah Saeed \[Contemporary Thought in the Islamic World, Routledge, 9780367272036\]](#)

[A SUFI APOLOGIST OF NĪSHĀPŪR; THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF ABŪ `ABD AL-RAHMĀN AL-SULAMI by S.Z. Chowdhury \[Monographs in Arabic and Islamic Studies, Equinox Publishing, 9781781795224\]](#)

[A LIGHT IN THE HEAVENS: SAYINGS OF THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD by al-Qādi al-Qudā'i, translated by Tahera Qutbuddin, foreword by Paul Hinder. \[Library of Arabic Literature, New York University, 9781479864485\]](#)

[STORIES OF PIETY AND PRAYER: DELIVERANCE FOLLOWS ADVERSITY by al-Muhassin ibn 'Ali al-Tanukhi \(Author\), edited and translated by Julia Bray, Volume editor: Shawkat M. Toorawa \[Library of Arabic Literature, NYU Press, 9781479855964\]](#)

[ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF ISLAMIC LAW edited by Khaled Abou El Fadl, Ahmad Atif Ahmad, and Said Fares Hassan \[Routledge Handbooks, Routledge, 9781138803176\]](#)

[VIRTUES OF GREATNESS IN THE ARABIC TRADITION by Sophia Vasalou \[Oxford University Press, 9780198842828\]](#)

[ARGUMENTS FOR GOD'S EXISTENCE IN CLASSICAL ISLAMIC THOUGHT: A REAPPRAISAL OF THE DISCOURSE by Hannah C. Erlwein \[De Gruyter, 9783110617641\]](#)

[THE PHILOSOPHER RESPONDS: AN INTELLECTUAL CORRESPONDENCE FROM THE TENTH CENTURY, VOLUME ONE by Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi, Abu 'Ali Miskawayh edited by, Bilal Orfali and Maurice A. Pomerantz \(Editor\), translated by Sophia Vasalou and James E. Montgomery, Volume editor: Devin J. Stewart \[Library of Arabic Literature, New York University Press, 9781479871483\]](#)

[THE PHILOSOPHER RESPONDS: AN INTELLECTUAL CORRESPONDENCE FROM THE TENTH CENTURY, VOLUME TWO by Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi, Abu 'Ali Miskawayh edited by, Bilal Orfali and Maurice A. Pomerantz \(Editor\), translated by Sophia Vasalou and James E. Montgomery, Volume editor: Devin J. Stewart \[Library of Arabic Literature, New York University Press, 9781479834600\]](#)

#### [Bibliography](#)

#### Editorial Appraisals:

Some qualified reviewers offer their own brief evaluation of the book. Otherwise most of our content represents the authors'-editors' own words as a preview to their approach to the subject, their style and point-of-view. <>

## **FINDING GOD THROUGH YOGA: PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA AND MODERN AMERICAN RELIGION IN A GLOBAL AGE** by David J. Neumann [University of North Carolina Press, 9781469648620]

Paramahansa Yogananda (1893–1952), a Hindu missionary to the United States, wrote one of the world's most highly acclaimed spiritual classics, **AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A YOGI**, which was first published in 1946 and continues to be one of the best-selling spiritual philosophy titles of all time. In this critical biography, David Neumann tells the story of Yogananda's fascinating life while interpreting his position in religious history, transnational modernity, and American culture. Beginning with Yogananda's spiritual investigations in his native India, Neumann tells how this early "global guru" emigrated to the United States in 1920 and established his headquarters, the Self-Realization Fellowship, in Los Angeles, where it continues today.

Preaching his message of Hindu yogic philosophy in a land that routinely sent its own evangelists to India, Yogananda was fueled by a religious nationalism that led him to conclude that Hinduism could uniquely fill a spiritual void in America and Europe. At the same time, he embraced a growing belief that Hinduism's success outside South Asia hinged on a sincere understanding of Christian belief and practice. By "universalizing" Hinduism, Neumann argues, Yogananda helped create the novel vocation of Hindu yogi evangelist, generating fresh connections between religion and commercial culture in a deepening American religious pluralism.

Contents

Acknowledgments

Note on Transliteration

Introduction: Paramahansa Yogananda, the Father of Yoga in the West

1 The Making of a Modern Religious Seeker: From Mukunda Lal Ghosh to Swami Yogananda, 1893-1920

2 The Founding of a Home for Scientific Religion: Swami Yogananda and Southern California's Spiritual Frontier, 1920-1925

3 The Creation of a Yogi Guru Persona: Marketing Swami Yogananda and His Yoga Instruction, 1925-1935

4 The Apotheosis of a Global Guru: Paramahansa Yogananda and His Autobiography, 1933-1946

5 The Death of an Immortal Guru: Charisma, Succession, and Paramahansa Yogananda's Legacy, 1946-1952

Epilogue

Notes

Bibliography

Index

## Paramahansa Yogananda, the Father of Yoga in the West

It is your greatest privilege to meditate. In one life you can find God if you put forth strength, energy, and determination. Without determination, He cannot be found. So remember, taking the Lessons only will not do, but if you practice them you will get results." —PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA,

Devotees of the great Indian swami Paramahansa Yogananda placed two milestones in his honor in 2017. The first was the sixty-fifth anniversary of his departure from this world on March 5, 1952. And the second was the centennial of Yogoda Satsanga Society, the organization he founded before coming to the United States, where he lived most of his life. Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi used these twin anniversaries to celebrate Yogananda's life and work. Speaking at the parliament's conference center in New Delhi during an elaborate hour-long ceremony at which he unveiled a postage stamp in Yogananda's honor, Modi took the opportunity to remind audiences of Yogananda's Indian identity. Conceding that "the major part" of Yogananda's life was "spent outside India" — and ignoring altogether the inconvenient fact of Yogananda's American citizenship — he insisted that "Yogananda takes his place among our great saints." Yogananda was a guru, not just for India, but for the world, and "his work continues to grow and shine ever more brightly, drawing people everywhere on the path of the pilgrimage of Spirit."

Growing Indian interest in Yogananda illustrates the so-called pizza effect, in which Indian teachers develop significant followings in their homeland only after they establish successful ministries overseas? In recent years, a number of prominent Indians have claimed Yogananda as their guru. Indian cricket champion Virat Kohli, for example, revealed that Yogananda's Autobiography of a Yogi was the secret of his success and could be for many others as well. "The understanding and implementation of the knowledge in this book," Kohli promised, "will change your whole perspective and life. Believe in the divine and keep

marching on doing good deeds." Once known largely as a spiritual guide to Americans, Yogananda has increasingly been claimed by Indians as one of their own.

Paradoxically, a part of Indians' attraction to Yogananda stems from his influence overseas, especially in the United States, as the herald of yoga. The United Nations' establishment of International Yoga Day in 2015, largely at Modi's urging, inspired a number of Indians to declare Yogananda's unrivaled importance in spreading yoga worldwide. One Times of India writer boldly claimed that if the United Nations had so easily welcomed International Yoga Day, "much of the credit must go to Paramhansa Yogananda, India's first guru in the U.S." Though he was not as well known among Indians as the ubiquitous Swami Vivekananda, Yogananda nevertheless "played a huge role in laying the foundation for yoga in the United States a century ago." Another writer asserted that the advent of International Yoga Day was an opportune time to "tip our hats to the teacher who first introduced the modern world to the transformative power of yoga as a timeless inner discipline." And a third declared, "We should pay homage to the enlightened mystic Paramhansa Yogananda who started it all," introducing yoga to Americans a century earlier. Calling Yogananda America's first yogi may be an overstatement, but not by much. Given his imprint on the American spiritual landscape, it is appropriate to call him the Father of Yoga in the West, as followers of both Self-Realization Fellowship, his American organization, and Yogoda Satsanga Society routinely do.

Yogananda's followers have been making this claim in some fashion for decades, honoring him as the Indian founder of an international yoga organization headquartered in the United States. On March 7, 1977, forty years before Modi's commemoration, a similar—though much more subdued—ceremony took place in recognition of Yogananda's importance. On that occasion, a small group of Self-Realization Fellowship leaders, Yogoda Satsanga Society members, and Indian dignitaries gathered at Yogoda Satsanga Society's Dakshineswar ashram in Calcutta to honor Yogananda on the twenty-fifth anniversary of his death, likewise with the issuing of a postage stamp. Appropriately enough, former Indian ambassador to the United States Binay R Sen led the commemoration: it was at a dinner in Sen's honor that Yogananda had departed this world in 1952.

The location of the 1977 event was another reminder of Yogananda's Indian identity. The Dakshineswar property had been acquired as a result of Yogananda's return visit to India in 1935-36 after fifteen years of ministry in the United States. The site recalled the vital importance of that trip, when Yogananda's guru Sri Yukteswar bestowed the title Paramahansa on him. The Dakshineswar ashram abuts the Hooghly River half a mile upstream from the imposing Kali temple that Yogananda often visited as a young man in search of spiritual truth.

But the Dakshineswar ashram also hints at Yogananda's American identity. On the opposite bank of the Hooghly River sits the Ramakrishna Math and Mission headquarters, established by Swami Vivekananda. Yogananda chose the Dakshineswar location precisely because of this proximity. He wished to found an ashram within view of Ramakrishna Math as a reminder of Vivekananda, the first Hindu missionary to America and the inspiration of his own missionary endeavor. Following in Vivekananda's footsteps, the young Bengali swami from an unremarkable middle-class Indian family had departed from this very city in 1920, arriving in a United States suspicious of Indians and Hindu beliefs. For more than thirty years, America was his home. He formed Self-Realization Fellowship shortly after his arrival, moved his headquarters to Los Angeles in 1925, acquired property throughout Southern California and elsewhere, and made disciples all over the country before expanding his mission overseas. He died an American citizen in Los Angeles and — after an abortive attempt was made to ship his body to India—was interred in a local cemetery.

If Yogananda's national identity is complex, his identity as a religious leader is even more so. The popular recent trend toward being "spiritual but not religious" has led several admirers to associate Yogananda with contemporary yoga as a popular postural health practice focused on mindfulness, which they explicitly distinguish from normative religious practice. One describes Yogananda as a "forerunner to a breed of twenty-first century psychologists, psychotherapists and neuroscientists who are generating powerful new insights on human nature—all aligned with Yogananda's how-to-live teaching." Although this author accurately identifies the "empirical, scientific nature" Yogananda claimed for his meditation technique, he completely ignores Yogananda's explicit central goal, the experience of God. Popular speaker and author Deepak Chopra has expressed similar admiration for Yogananda as a forebear of New Age spirituality, the "most viable spiritual movement in place," rather than the "dogma" and "aggressive fundamentalism" of religion." In his speech announcing the 2017 commemorative stamp, Prime Minister Modi, who practices yoga daily, engaged in similar feats of wishful thinking. Lamenting that it is "unfortunate that some people link spirituality with religion, whereas the two are very different," Modi asserted that Yogananda had been interested in the former (antaryatra, "the inner journey," or self-realization), not the latter (mukti, liberation)

These false dichotomies distort Yogananda's identity. He was a teacher both of the inner journey of self-realization and of religion. His first book was *The Science of Religion*; he first came to the United States to attend a gathering of religious leaders; he incorporated Self-Realization Fellowship as a "church" in 1935; and local branches have long hosted weekly Sunday services with devotional singing, prayer, and a sermon. Self-Realization Fellowship, in other words, bears all the marks that advocates of spirituality attribute to religion. It is a hierarchical institution with formal membership that firmly regulates normative beliefs and practices focused on the transcendent reality of intimate communion with the divine. Self-Realization Fellowship conforms to the features of Modern Denominational Yoga, as stated in yoga scholar Elizabeth De Michelin's influential typology, in that it is collectivist, tightly structured, makes demands on members, has stable belief and organizational systems, and promotes adherence to its own beliefs, rules, and sources of authority.

The leaders of the religious organizations Yogananda established remain the primary custodians of their master's legacy. When Yogoda Satsanga Society-Self-Realization Fellowship representatives met with Prime Minister Modi at Parliament House in New Delhi in March 2016 to thank him for his efforts to establish International Yoga Day, they presented him with a letter from then- Self-Realization Fellowship president Sri Daya Mata expressing her "warm good wishes and prayers that God may guide and bless you in the work you are doing for the well-being and upliftment of India." Mata reminded the prime minister that Yogananda sought to disseminate yoga globally to promote unity through communion with the one God:

Although he spent much of his time in the West disseminating India's ancient science of yoga meditation for attaining direct personal experience of God, Paramahansaji always cherished a deep love of India in his heart and left his physical form while speaking the words of his poem, "My India." One of his goals was to promote unity between East and West, and over the years seekers of many faiths and nationalities have been drawn to his universal message. He predicted that one day the message of yoga would encircle the globe aiding in the establishment of world peace on the basis of humanity's direct perception of the one God.

Yogananda's global vision has been realized. Today, Self-Realization Fellowship has a truly worldwide presence with centers on six continents, in nearly sixty countries, including 170 in the United States and more than 300 in other countries.

## Yogananda as a Pioneering Global Guru

In this book, I explore Paramahansa Yogananda's ministry as an Indian, an American, and the founder of a global religious organization. Yogananda thus illuminates the role of religion in transnational history, a topic that has received scant attention from historians pursuing transnational themes in the modern era. Investigating Yogananda opens a crucial window on the role of Hinduism in the development of early twentieth-century American religion. But Yogananda's hybridity extends beyond an Indian-American binary. Through overseas travel, participation in international religious gatherings, the creation of Self-Realization Fellowship branches around the world, and talks and articles addressing global issues, he became one of the earliest "global gurus," figures who "function as spokespersons, apologists, and unifiers of the Hindu religion" and "creators of newer and more universalized religious forms that break the bounds of territory, race, and ethnicity." Yogananda exemplified "transnational transcendence," an attempt to reenchant the modern world with a universal message that intentionally rises above national borders. More recent gurus have fueled the expansion of their global ministries by reaching out to growing diaspora Indian communities, taking advantage of inexpensive air travel to connect with followers, and, in the past few decades, using the Internet to establish a virtual presence. Without the advantage of any of these later developments, Yogananda nurtured a fruitful transnational ministry. Yogananda illustrates, as religion scholar Amanda Lucia says regarding more recent global gurus, "an alternative narrative to globalization, which has often been imagined as a movement from center to periphery." Like later global gurus, Yogananda spread his message from peripheral India to the center of the modern world, the United States.

The first Indian to establish a thriving American ministry, Yogananda played a significant role in popularizing yoga meditation and the Hindu cosmological tenets that have become increasingly prevalent in the United States. His American ministry, which spanned more than three decades, from 1920 to 1952, was established in the United States much earlier than organizations the counterculture or hippie era, such as the International Society for Krishna Consciousness and Transcendental Meditation...

The 1965 Hart-Celler Act's immigration liberalization did not yield a critical demographic mass of religious diversity, as some scholars assume. The law did contribute modestly to the growth of non-Christian religions, but its primary effect was to diversify the Christian population, as the percentage of Asian and Latino Christians increased relative to Christians of European descent. The Hart-Celler Act really functions as a symbolic watershed of Americans' growing awareness of other faiths, rather than as a marker of religious diversity per se.

Of course, many scholars recognize that Hindu traditions — and the interest of some white Americans in those traditions — have a much longer trajectory. In the wake of the counterculture era, scholars like Harold French and Carl Jackson explored the influence of Hindu religion and philosophy on early twentieth-century America. More recently, Catherine Albanese's masterly *Republic of Mind and Spirit* has provided a comprehensive survey of American metaphysical traditions, including influences from India and elsewhere in Asia.

These authors, however, tend to consider Hindu organizations either as independent stand-alone movements, like French and Jackson, or in the context of New Thought, like Albanese. Like the yoga scholars discussed above, Albanese frames her brief treatment of Yogananda by largely ignoring the role of Christianity, in effect walling off Hinduism and yoga from the nation's dominant religion. Yogananda, whose deep knowledge of Jesus and the New Testament is typical of many educated Indians of his generation, illustrates why the growth of modern Hinduism can be properly understood only in the context of Christianity.

## The Plan of This Book

Finding God through Yoga explores the life and ministry of Paramahansa Yogananda in five chapters that follow the chronology of his life, addressing key themes as they emerge.

### Chapter 1, "The Making of a Modern Religious Seeker: From Mukunda Lal Ghosh to Swami Yogananda, 1893-1920,"

places Yogananda's spiritual development in the context of Indian modernity, with rapid travel, exposure to diverse traditions, and awareness of the outside world — particularly the United States and the larger West. The chapter examines his childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood, focusing on the spiritual journey that culminated in his decision to become a swami under the leadership of a guru. His connection to modernity deepened with his college education and adoption of modern Hinduism, a framework that severed religious belief from its historic embeddedness in land, caste, life stage, and gender. This universalizing of Hinduism paved the way for Yogananda's American ministry as a Hindu missionary.

### Chapter 2, "The Founding of a Home for Scientific Religion: Swami Yogananda and Southern California's Spiritual Frontier, 1920-1925,"

traces Yogananda's early years in the United States. The chapter begins by examining the conference that brought him to the United States and the presentation he gave there on "the Science of Religion." It places both in the context of an intramural Protestant debate that offered competing answers to the epistemological challenges modernity raised for the universalistic claims of Christianity. For the first few years after the conference, Yogananda struggled to establish a successful ministry. A cross-country road trip in 1924 took him to Los Angeles, which quickly became his national headquarters. This chapter explores the role Southern California played in fostering Yogananda's ministry at a time when many Americans were suspicious of so-called Orientals, their cultures, and their religions. The nation's new spiritual frontier, the Los Angeles region was an ideal space for a new religious movement, a relatively tolerant center that had already fostered Hindu movements by the time Yogananda arrived.

### The third chapter, "The Creation of a Yogi Guru Persona: Marketing Swami Yogananda and His Yoga Instruction, 1925-1935,"

evaluates Yogananda's ministry through the lens of modern consumer religion, mass marketing, and religious branding. The early portion investigates the religious products he touted, most centrally his systematic, practical method for God-realization through yoga—in the innovative form of a correspondence course. Yogananda's instruction inculcated a larger Hindu worldview, not just a set of meditative techniques. His East-West magazine was a promotional tool designed to highlight his brand's distinctiveness. The chapter also explores the way the yogi, like evangelical preachers of the time, promoted his message to a modern American audience saturated with savvy advertising and modern products. The final section considers the hazards of the religious market, including negative press attention and several lawsuits that threatened his brand image as well as his solvency just as the Depression arrived.

### "The Apotheosis of a Global Guru: Paramahansa Yogananda and His Autobiography, 1933-1946,"

the fourth chapter, explores Yogananda's growing status as a global spiritual authority and a divine figure. The chapter begins by placing Yogananda in the context of religious internationalism, a subset of interwar cultural internationalism driven by concerns for world peace.

It details his use of East-West as a vehicle for a cosmopolitan spiritual vision. An extravagant worldwide journey in 1935-36 from California to England, the Continent, the Middle East, and ultimately to his home city of Calcutta solidified his reputation as a "global guru." The chapter also explores his lengthy exegesis

of two sacred texts. He provided extensive exegesis of the Bhagavad Gita in the pages of East-West, presenting it as an allegory for personal struggle against evil temptations. In another long-running series in his magazine, he interpreted the New Testament gospel narratives, transforming the story of Jesus and his teachings into a revelation of yogic truth that hinted at Yogananda's own divine identity. But it was the 1946 Autobiography of a Yogi that firmly established Yogananda's reputation as a guru to the world. An analysis of this text's structural features reveals it to be a new scripture, designed to inculcate belief in the spiritual world Yogananda evoked and in the divine status of the yogi who wrote it.

#### Chapter 5, "The Death of an Immortal Guru: Charisma, Succession, and Paramahansa Yogananda's Legacy, 1946-1952,"

explores discipleship and conversion in Self-Realization Fellowship, Yogananda's dramatic death, and the transfer of authority that transpired afterward. The chapter profiles twenty Yogananda disciples, employing a model of conversion to offer insight into common patterns among those who chose to follow Yogananda and the challenges of spiritual apprenticeship they faced as Americans raised in an individualistic cultural ethos. The circumstances surrounding Yogananda's death and his followers' efforts to cope with the tragedy are considered next. Yogananda's death produced a crisis in leadership. Max Weber's model of the routinization of charisma, modified by subsequent scholars, offers insight into the common challenge faced by organizations led by charismatic individuals, particularly after their death. Yogananda spiritualized his own leadership by indicating that his writings were to become the "guru" after his departure, but this did not fully solve the problem of human leadership. After the short tenure of one leader, long-term female disciple Faye Wright was appointed president. Her half-century tenure at Self-Realization Fellowship stabilized the organization and routinized its publications by and about Yogananda.

A century after Yogananda came to the United States with the message of Kriya Yoga and three quarters of a century after **AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A YOGI** was released, yoga has become ubiquitous and Hindu beliefs have become an integral part of the spiritual landscape. Yogananda played a key role in this transformation. During his lifetime, he converted thousands of Americans. Since his death in 1952, he has influenced countless others around the world through Self-Realization Fellowship and independent organizations that trace their lineage to him, as well through **AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A YOGI** and his other teachings. The Father of Yoga in the West nurtured numerous religious offspring. Not simply a wise teacher, he came to be revered and worshipped—overwhelmingly by non-Indian Americans—as the very incarnation of deity. Yogananda's story is thus indispensable to understanding the emergence of contemporary yoga, modern American Hinduism, and modern global religion. <>

## **IN DIALOGUE WITH CLASSICAL INDIAN TRADITIONS: ENCOUNTER, TRANSFORMATION AND INTERPRETATION** edited by Brian Black and Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad [Dialogues in South Asian Traditions: Religion, Philosophy, Literature and History, Routledge, 9781138541399]

Dialogue is a recurring and significant component of Indian religious and philosophical literature. Whether it be as a narrative account of a conversation between characters within a text, as an implied response or provocation towards an interlocutor outside the text, or as a hermeneutical lens through which commentators and modern audiences can engage with an ancient text, dialogue features prominently in

many of the most foundational sources from classical India. Despite its ubiquity, there are very few studies that explore this important facet of Indian texts. This book redresses this imbalance by undertaking a close textual analysis of a range of religious and philosophical literature to highlight the many uses and functions of dialogue in the sources themselves and in subsequent interpretations.

Using the themes of encounter, transformation and interpretation – all of which emerged from face-to-face discussions between the contributors of this volume – each chapter explores dialogue in its own context, thereby demonstrating the variety and pervasiveness of dialogue in different genres of the textual tradition.

This is a rich and detailed study that offers a fresh and timely perspective on many of the most well-known and influential sources from classical India. As such, it will be of great use to scholars of religious studies, Asian studies, comparative literature and literary theory.

## Contents

List of contributors

Acknowledgements

Introduction BRIAN BLACK AND CHAKRAVARTHI RAM-PRASAD

### PART 1

#### Encounter

1 Sources of Indian secularism? Dialogues on politics and religion in Hindu and Buddhist traditions BRIAN BLACK

2 Dialogues with solitary Buddhas NAOMI APPLETON

3 Refutation or dialogue? Samkara's treatment of the Bhāgavatas J G SUTHREN HIRST

4 We resort to reason: The argumentative structure in Venkatanātha's Sesvaramimāṃsā ELISA FRESCHI

5 'Speakers of highest truth': Philosophical plurilogues about brahman in the early Upanisads JESSICA FRAZIER

### PART 2 Transformation

6 Transformative dialogue in the Yogavāsistha JAMES MADAIO

7 Being human, dialogically LYNN THOMAS

8 Dialoguing the Vārkarī tradition MONIKA KIRLOSKAR-STEINBACH

9 Convincing the king: Jain ministers and religious persuasion through dialogue

JONATHAN GEEN

### PART 3 Interpretation

10 Careful attention and the voice of another MARIA HEIM

11 Mahābhārata dialogues on dharma and devotion with Kṛṣṇa and Hanumān BRUCE

M SULLIVAN

12 Models of royal piety in the Mahābhārata: The case of Vidura, Sanatsujāta and

Vidurā JAMES M HEGARTY

13 Dialogue in extremis: Vālin in the Vālmiki Rāmāyana CHAKRAVARTHI RAM-

PRASAD

Afterword LAURIE L PATTON

Bibliography

Index

Dialogue is a recurring and significant component of Indian religious and philosophical literature. It is an important compositional feature as far back as the Rgveda and the Upanisads, and becomes a central

device in terms of framing and structuring texts in the Mahābhārata, Rāmāyana, Yoga-Vasistha, the Purānas and other Hindu sources. In the Buddhist tradition, dialogue features prominently in early literature such as the Nikāyas and the Jātakas, while continuing to be important in the Gandavyūha, Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras and other Mahāyāna texts. In the Jaina tradition, dialogue is used extensively in canonical texts such as the Rāyapaseṇiya and the ivāgasuyam, and continues to be a dominant feature in the Vasudevahindī, Ādipurāna and Trisastisālākāpurusacarita. In addition to narrative, normative texts such as the Mānava-dharma-sāstra are sometimes framed by dialogue, while philosophical texts, such as sūtras, sāstras and samgrahas are often rhetorically in dialogue with their opponents.

Our interest in dialogue begins from this initial observation: that it appears repeatedly in classical Indian sources. In its widest sense, we take dialogue to mean a language-loaded encounter between two or more interlocutors, whether these interlocutors are people — real or imagined — or texts — either contemporaneous or of different historical periods. This book does not attempt to define dialogue in any specific way, but rather to examine its various forms and uses in particular classical Indian contexts. Dialogue is a particularly rich and complex literary expression, because there is always a range of issues being addressed simultaneously and in relation to each other: the interlocutors, their relationship, what they are talking about, the social context of their encounter, what is at stake, the consequences and the structures and motifs one dialogical episode has in relation to others. In paying attention to the ubiquity of dialogue in Indian sources, our primary assumption is that the recurring use of this particularly rich and complex mode of expression was not accidental. It was used repeatedly because it effectively addressed a variety of concerns. Within the context of texts about religion and philosophy, dialogue is a mode for exploring epistemology, ethics, metaphysics, theology and hermeneutics. As we

Lancaster. In addition to addressing a range of types of dialogue, the Chapters in this book include dialogues from textual sources across Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism — thus reflecting real communication across religious and philosophical traditions. They also include a wide historical scope, from the Upanisads and Nikāyas to bhakti literature from the thirteenth century. In covering a wide range of sources and time periods, this book does not claim to be exhaustive, but rather representative of both the ubiquity and diversity of dialogue in classical India. If there is a unifying argument of the book as a whole, it is that examining the details, uses and implications of dialogue brings out otherwise unnoticed or unexplored features of classical Indian thought. The book is structured around three themes that emerged from our discussions during the workshop in Lancaster: encounter, transformation and interpretation. These three themes all address some of the most general and generic aspects of dialogue, focusing on questions such as: what constitutes a dialogue, who participates in dialogue, what is talked about, what results from dialogue and how they have been interpreted. In addressing these questions about the form itself, we hope to maximise the relevance of this book and its individual Chapters for ongoing research on Indian classical sources, comparative philosophy and religion and studies on dialogue itself.

## Encounter

By 'encounter' we refer to the meeting of interlocutors, including their identities and the power dynamics between them. The interlocutors in the dialogues discussed throughout this book include teachers, students, rivals, renouncers, kings, advisors, gods, women and animals. The types of dialogue examined range from friendly discussions to hostile debates; from face-to-face meetings to implied communications across time and space; from narrative depictions of conversation to rhetorical gestures towards unspecified philosophical opponents. Taken together, the Chapters in this section demonstrate that, whether actual or

implied, the character of the engagement between interlocutors shapes how teachings and arguments are articulated, as well as its transformative potential.

## Chapter 1: Sources of Indian secularism? Dialogues on politics and religion in Hindu and Buddhist traditions

In the first Chapter, Brian Black analyses two dialogues between a sage and a king: the first between the brahmin Yājñavalkya and King Janaka from the Brhadāranyaka Upanisad, and the second between the Buddha and King Ajātasattu from the Digha Nikāya. In comparing these two dialogues, Black argues that Hindu and Buddhist sources use the same literary paradigm to explore the relationship between religion and politics in distinct, yet overlapping ways. His analysis focuses on two interrelated issues, each of which is addressed by both dialogues: (1) the relationship between political and religious authority, and (2) the plurality of religious groups.

In examining these two issues of both dialogical encounters, Black shows that the identities of the interlocutors and how they relate to each other frame the encounter, with the relationship between political and religious authority explored through the dynamics between them. In other words, these dialogues demonstrate the integral relationship between what the interlocutors say to each other and how they interact with each other. As Black argues, differences between how the encounter between sage and king is portrayed in the Upanisads and Nikāyas point to differences in how Hindu and Buddhist sources characterise the relationship between religion and politics.

## Chapter 2: Dialogues with solitary Buddhas

In Chapter 2, Naomi Appleton discusses dialogues with paccekabuddhas in the Pāli Canon. Despite their solitary reputation, in Pali sources paccekabuddhas are repeatedly depicted as interacting with others, especially with kings and princes. A distinctive feature of paccekabuddhas is that they speak very little, often using signs or images to convey their teachings. Indeed, in some cases paccekabuddhas do not speak at all and are not even physically present for their encounter. To illustrate this point, Appleton describes a scene from the Sutta Nipāta, in which a paccekabuddha invites a prince to visit him, but does not remain in his hut to deliver his teaching face-to-face. Instead, he leaves his footprints behind to suggest he is there, even though he had already departed. When the prince visits and does not find the paccekabuddha present, he sits on the empty bench in the empty hut and achieves paccekabodhi himself. In this example, no words are exchanged and the paccekabuddha is physically absent. Nonetheless there is an interactive encounter that leads to the same type of transformation as one of the Buddha's sermons. This discussion takes us to the limit of dialogue, implicitly questioning the exact role of language in it: while no words are spoken, nonetheless, the symbolism, expressive as it is of complex doctrine, is explicable only through language.

As opposed to encounters that emphasise a particular teaching or doctrine, dialogues with paccekabuddhas focus on the importance of an interpersonal interaction, thus bringing attention to the encounter itself as part of the teaching. Perhaps because paccekabuddhas are generally known to be independent of the Buddhist community, the dialogues that portray them teaching indicate that even the most solitary figures are still embedded within a web of social relations.

## Chapter 3: Refutation or dialogue? Samkara's treatment of the Bhāgavatas

In the third Chapter, J G Suthren Hirst explores the notion of implied or potential dialogue by looking at Samkara's Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya. Samkara is explicit that his primary concern is to refute the views of

opponents, unequivocally rejecting what is incompatible with Advaita. Suthren Hirst asks whether in these circumstances it is even possible to consider these arguments as 'dialogues'. Beginning with Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya 2.2.42-45, but also considering this material in the light of his broader corpus, Suthren Hirst argues that Samkara is not simply refuting his opponents, but indeed conducting a dialogue with some of them, particularly the Bhāgavatas, who had a solid grounding in the Vedas. In relation to the theme of encounter, Suthren Hirst shows that Samkara's precise wording indicates that certain Bhāgavata practices and beliefs could be aligned with his own Advaitin understanding. Samkara's starting point for this implied dialogue is recognising a common ground in how Advaita and his Bhāgavatas interlocutors view the supreme. Despite disputing some of their assumptions, Samkara builds on the transcendental claims they have in common.

Another way Samkara finds common ground is through his engagement with the Bhagavad Gītā. Despite not being an obvious fit for explicating Advaita teachings, Samkara's commentary on the Bhagavad Gītā could be seen as part of his implied dialogical encounter with his philosophical interlocutors. As Suthren Hirst argues, Samkara uses the Bhagavad Gītā to show how, rightly interpreted, aspects of Vaisnava theology and practice can provide a stepping stone along the way to non-dual realisation. Suthren Hirst notes that because it was Samkara who apparently set the precedent for including the Bhagavad Gītā among the scriptural sources of Vedānta, then it may have been his implied encounter with the Bhagavatas that began this commentarial tradition among Vedānta schools. Once more, we are at the boundaries of the dialogical, one shaded subtly by the very notion of implication.

## Chapter 4: We resort to reason: The argumentative structure in Venkatanātha's Sesvaramīmāṃsā

In Chapter 4, Elisa Freschi also discusses dialogue within the context of philosophical texts, in this case focusing on the work of Venkatanātha, a central figure in the systematisation of the Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta school. Freschi's Chapter investigates how Venkatanātha uses several dialogical structures to deal with different types of discussants and analyses his motivations for the various approaches that he takes. Venkatanātha's general approach to dialogue is illustrated in his understanding of the term *vāda*, which he defines as an encounter aiming at the establishment of the truth. As we have seen, this understanding was widely accepted among the different philosophical schools of classical India. As Freschi observes, Venkatanātha appears to follow this definition himself, since he engages in discussions without ending them abruptly with *ad hominem* attacks, paralogisms or appeals to authority.

An interesting aspect of Venkatanātha's approach to dialogue in relation to the theme of encounter is that he makes no distinction between past and present interlocutors. Venkatanātha may dedicate more space to Mīmāṃsākas than to Buddhists, but there is nothing in his style to indicate whether or not he is engaging with a living discussant. According to Freschi, this indicates that Venkatanātha's engagement with the arguments of his interlocutors emerges out of his own interest and curiosity, rather than on the social and political relevance of their views. This approach is another example of how Venkatanātha seems to comply with his own definition of *vāda* as aiming at the establishment of truth. Freschi concludes that the works of Venkatanātha represent the use of dialogue as a mode of presenting philosophical discussions that are based on reason and argumentation. An interlocutor can potentially change the views of a living

discussant; or change the understanding contemporaries have of opponents situated in the past. Here, dialogue is an optimistic epistemological undertaking.

## Chapter 5: 'Speakers of highest truth': Philosophical plurilogues about Brahman in the early Upanisads

In Chapter 5, Jessica Frazier argues that some dialogues in the Upanisads can be characterised as a collaborative search for broad, over-spanning truths. Seen in this way, these dialogues offer a distinctive Indian model, which focuses on creatively canvassing broad speculative explanations. As with Freschi, Frazier's Chapter addresses the term *vada*, noting that in the Upanisads its meaning includes not only 'speech', but also 'discussion, debate, the search for greater knowledge and a display of skill'.

In relation to the theme of encounter, Frazier characterises this model of dialogue as collaborative, with interlocutors working together, listening to each other and building on each other's insights to achieve the goal of higher knowledge. Embedded within this model is a critique of the standard modern descriptions of the 'public sphere', in which dialogue is often celebrated as a performance of citizenship or a community-building exercise. In the Upanisads, in contrast, the goal is to elevate one's understanding by assimilating diverse views into an encompassing position that is abductively derived from all of them together. In this model of dialogue as idea-building, rather than mere talk, as Frazier describes it, competition is resolved by debate rather than violence because it is the increased explanatory power of an idea that unites theories.

### Encounter: Discussion

As we can see, the Chapters in this section cover a wide range of encounters depicted in ancient Indian sources. Whereas Appleton's Chapter examines dialogues in which *paccekabuddhas* assume the traditional role of a teacher, sometime guiding their interlocutor to a higher awareness, the encounters discussed by Black are often part of an ongoing negotiation between kings and sages for establishing a relative hierarchy between them. The dialogues discussed by Frazier are characterised as a collaborative process by which interlocutors work together towards a common goal, while both Suthren Hirst and Freschi examine ways that philosophers rhetorically engage with opponents present and past, sometimes refuting their views, but also participating in shared practices and attempting to find a common ground, even while searching for the best ways of articulating their truth-commitments.

Throughout these various types of encounters, dialogue with another is often presented as the starting point for religious or philosophical inquiry, with the identities of the interlocutors and their relationship with each other playing an important role in shaping the character and transformative potential of their interaction. By paying attention to all available details of an encounter, we not only get a better understanding of why some arguments are made and not others, but we also see that teachings are characterised as situational and contextual. By articulating religious and philosophical doctrines dialogically, whether literally in that format or implicitly in engagement with other viewpoints, our sources convey the notion that ideas are not formulated in isolation, but as part of an ecology of encounter, argument, refraction and transformation.

### Transformation

By 'transformation' we refer to the consequences of the encounter, including persuasion, conversion, mutual recognition, disagreement, impasse or enlightenment. If encounter refers to the meeting of interlocutors, then transformation refers to what happens subsequently to those involved, where relationships and meanings shift. The Chapters in this section explore the potential for an encounter with another to have the power to change one's understanding or experience of the world.

## Chapter 6: Transformative dialogue in the Yogavāsistha

In Chapter 6, James Madaio examines the transformative potential of dialogues from the *Yogavāsistha*. The main frame story of the *Yogavāsistha* depicts a dialogue between the enlightened sage Vasistha and the dejected prince Rāma. Throughout, Vasistha instructs Rāma about the nature of non-dual reality through a series of narratives, many of which feature dialogical encounters. Noting that the stories serve a variety of pedagogical functions, Madaio focuses attention on a number of key dialogues that exemplify and draw the reader into the practice of *vicāra*, a probing inquiry into the nature of world and identity.

Focusing particularly on the dialogue between the enlightened queen Cūdālā and her materialistic husband, king Sikhidvaja, Madaio situates the method of *vicāra* within the radically non-dual interpretative framework of the *Yogavāsistha* and in relation to the work's analysis of the apparent egoic agent who carries out the practice. Madaio characterises this dialogue, as well as others in the *Yogavāsistha*, as gnoseological, wherein one interlocutor, of an omniscient nature, leads another to a higher understanding through dialogue. The method of this self-inquiry is modelled through dialogues that serve to prompt an internal dialogue in the reader. Madaio explores the interaction between the reader and the text by arguing that certain characters in the text can be productively understood as a mirror of the reader. In discussing the transformative potential of dialogue, not just within the text, but for readers and listeners, Madaio anticipates the theme of interpretation in the third section of this book.

## Chapter 7: Being human, dialogically

In the seventh Chapter, Lynn Thomas offers a close reading of a dialogue from the *Āranyakaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*, between the Pāndava king, Yudhisthira, and the snake Nahusa, who had previously been a king of the gods, but is reduced to his present reptilian form because of a curse. As she argues, the dialogue between Yudhisthira and Nahusa highlights the contrast between the human and the snake as primarily defined in terms of their interactions with others. Whereas Yudhisthira operates within a network of social relationships, the snake lives alone, concealed in a cave. It is through dialogue that the snake can finally overcome his curse and change back into a human. Thomas also notes that all the virtues advocated by Yudhisthira — generosity, speaking kindly, telling the truth and practising non-injury — can only be practised in relation to others.

In relation to the theme of transformation, Thomas shows that this dialogue effects change in a very dramatic way, with Nahusa beginning the encounter bound by a curse in the form of a snake, but ending with his regaining his former, human, state. Nahusa is able to re-transform into a human because he meaningfully engages with Yudhisthira, and learns that others are as much subjects of their own experience as he is. Thomas calls this two-way engagement in which an interlocutor learns how to see through the eyes of the other 'the gaze returned'.

## Chapter 8: Dialoguing the Vārkarī tradition

In the next Chapter, Monika Kirloskar-Steinbach examines how three *santakaviyātris* of the Maharashtrian Vārkarī tradition exercise their agency as women. Focusing on Muktābāī, Janābāī and Bahinābāī, Kirloskar-Steinbach demonstrates how they each engage in dialogues with men and/or male deities, through which they establish themselves on equal footing, while offering criticism and dissent of their prescribed gender roles, particularly the ideal of the *pativrata*, the virtuous and devoted wife. Although their social roles as females demand subservience to male needs and interests in their daily lives, through dialogue they forge

mutual relationships of deep trust and companionship, particularly with the god Vittal. They establish a playful, and yet deeply caring relationship, but one in which they can persuade, cajole, curse and even insult their divine interlocutor, as they seek help from him to navigate the existential problems they face. Here, the other in the dialogue is so fundamental to one's own being and identity, that his presence is concrete rather than merely literal; his interaction is through grace and love rather than ordinary language. Self-constitution through the divine is also a dialogical exercise, once more making us rethink the functions of dialogue beyond physical conversation.

We might see some similarities between these dialogues and those discussed by Thomas in which she talks about 'the gaze returned'. Like the dialogue between Yudhisthira and the snake, which has at the outset an unequal power dynamic between the interlocutors, the *santakaviyatrīs* are mortal women and

Vittal is a male god. Despite the asymmetry, their agentive (rather than submissive) devotion and an almost provocative friendship enable them to establish reciprocity with their ever-present interlocutor. Kirloskar-Steinbach suggests that these egalitarian dialogues with a male deity could model other non-oppressive ways of pursuing intimate relationships.

## Chapter 9: Convincing the King: Jain ministers and religious persuasion through dialogue

In the ninth Chapter, Jonathan Geen offers a comparative analysis of three versions of a dialogue between the Jain teacher Svayambuddha and the king Mahābala. Variations of this encounter appear in three important Jain texts: Sanghadāsa's *Vasudevahindi*, Jinasena's *Ādipurāna* and Hemacandra's *Trisastisalākāpurusacarita*. All three versions portray the Jain sage Svayambuddha instructing the king Mahābala to renounce the pleasures of the senses and to live the life of a Jain mendicant. As Geen shows, despite the shared scenario, the circumstances of their encounter and the process by which their discussion unfolds can vary considerably.

Whereas in the *Vasudevahindi* and *Triyastisalākāpurusacarita* the dialogue between Mahābala and Svayambuddha is portrayed with the minister learning of the king's impending death, in the *Ādipurāna* their dialogue takes place during the king's birthday celebrations, when he is surrounded by Svayambuddha and three other royal ministers. And whereas in the *Vasudevahindi* their dialogue takes place between the two of them, in the *Ādipurāna* and the *Trisastisalākāpurusacarita* their encounter includes a debate in which Svayambuddha dismisses the views of three rival sages.

In examining three versions of the same dialogue together, Geen points out their remarkable malleability in Jain tradition, with each version including some details in common with another version, yet each one omitting a detail included in the two others. In relation to the theme of transformation, it is interesting that even as the context of the encounter can change from one version to the next, the outcome of their dialogue remains largely the same, as in all three versions the king renounces the throne and becomes a renunciate. This paper therefore highlights the importance of looking at the function of dialogue: it can lead to the same end but there are several versions of it. In characteristic Jain fashion, the running of the encounter through different versions holds together both a unifying truth and multiple realisations.

### Transformation: discussion

As we can see, there are many types of transformations that can take place through dialogue, including interlocutors changing their mind, changing their way of being in the world, changing their religious or

social identity, changing their social future, or changing their relationship with another. Madaio's Chapter examined the gnoseological potential for dialogue, where an interlocutor of an omniscient nature leads another to a higher understanding. (Since, in fact, Prince Rāma is divine but born as a human, dialogue with an omniscient teacher transforms him back into his own omniscience from which his teacher's knowledge derives. This complexifies the transformative nature of dialogue further.) Similarly Geen explored dialogue's emancipatory potential, examining three dialogues in which a Jain sage advises a king to adopt the life of a renunciate. Whereas the dialogues analysed by both Madaio and Geen feature an enlightened teacher guiding a student towards a liberating knowledge, the dialogues explored by Thomas and Kirloskar-Steinbach are more focused on the social relations between interlocutors. Thomas shows how the inherently social nature of dialogue can be used to enact more far-reaching transformations of the sociality of those involved in that dialogue: the snake-life of Nahusa precisely is a nondialogical life, and his re-transformation begins as he goes beyond mere threat and challenge to interacting with Yudhisthira, ultimately reaching full integration back into the social life he once possessed. Kirloskar-Steinbach demonstrates how dialogue can be a radical theological expression of the call to more egalitarian relationships amongst humans.

Throughout these various types of transformations, dialogue with another requires shared practices of engagement to be followed for a change to take place. Madaio's Chapter shows that dialogue has the potential to transform because it follows a particular method of inquiry, but it also requires a teacher to be enlightened and a student to be receptive of the teaching. Thomas examines a dialogue in which the ability to lead to a change requires interlocutors to return each other's gaze. Similarly, Kirloskar-Steinbach shows that free-spirited yet caring dialogue can make the most dramatically unequal friendship possible (between god and human) into a model for what should definitely be an equal relationship (between women and men). In two of the three versions of the dialogue between Svayambuddha and Mahābala, the king is able to be transformed by the sage's teachings because the sage tells him he is about to die. There are interesting parallels between the emotional states of Mahābala and Rāma when they receive their teachings. Dialogue does not lead to transformation automatically, but only when there is a readiness to be transformed; but that requires practices of understanding and interpretation.

## Interpretation

By 'interpretation' we refer to the hermeneutics of dialogue, including how dialogue yields meaning. In some Chapters, we see how dialogue becomes the methodology for manifesting a problem in life and offering some sort of a solution to it. As the text encodes its purposes in dialogue, it invites us to develop an exegesis that is sensitive to how dialogue functions, thereby getting to an understanding of what the text means to convey. Some Chapters in this section will look at how dialogue sets up intertextual and intratextual relationships, while others will look at how dialogue has been understood by commentators and modern-day audiences. As we will see, there are certain features of the

dialogue form that make it accessible to later interpreters, including its multi-vocal nature that permits horizons of meaning to widen and fuse.

## Chapter 10: Careful attention and the voice of another

We begin this section with a Chapter by Maria Heim, who reads the Pāli suttas alongside the fifth century CE commentator Buddhaghosa, who considered the opening framework (nidāna) of each sutta to be vital for interpreting its embedded teachings. Heim's Chapter explores the theme of interpretation by analysing the methods through which Buddhaghosa derived meaning through the suttas. As she observes, Buddhaghosa offers a theoretical apparatus to help us understand the contextual nature of the Buddha's

teachings. As opposed to modern reading practices that often abstract the doctrinal content from the narratives, Buddhaghosa's commentaries illustrate that in some important sense, the dialogues are integral to understanding the meaning of the sutta as a whole.

It is Buddhaghosa's attention to the details of the nidāna, Heim argues, that reading alongside him heightens the power of the suttas: we come to see how a sutta can be an intervention not only for the people involved in the narrative, but also for the ideal reader as trained by Buddhaghosa. As such, Buddhaghosa reads a nidāna as demonstrating how the Buddha is speaking to the inclinations and dispositions of his audience, giving an impromptu sermon that addresses their particular needs — in the process making the Buddha narratively present for the reader, who also has particular needs. By reading the suttas alongside Buddhaghosa, Heim demonstrates how the suttas — and perhaps other ancient and classical Indian texts — not only spoke to their own context, but also how they continue to speak to readers in the future. The dialogues within the text become the focus of the commentator's dialogue with it, by means of which he sets up our own dialogues with him and the dialogues within the text. Dialogue therefore becomes the mode of an ever-relevant hermeneutic.

## Chapter 11: Mahābhārata dialogues on dharma and devotion with Kṛṣṇa and Hanumān

In Chapter 11, Bruce M Sullivan discusses the dialogue between Bhīma and the monkey king Hanūmat (Hanūmān) from the Āranyakaparvan of the Mahābhārata. As Sullivan demonstrates, this dialogue has many parallels and thematic resonances with the Bhagavad Gītā, as both are private discussions between a Pāṇḍava warrior and a deity who is also a family elder. And in both, the deity uses the encounter as an occasion to reveal their divine form, in each case overwhelming their Pāṇḍava disciple. Moreover, both dialogues address some of the same themes, including the temporal logic of kāla and the yugas, the ethical tension between ksatriya-dharma and sva-dharma, and the redemptive emotion of bhakti.

Sullivan argues that the similarities between the Hanūmat/Bhīma dialogue and the Bhagavad Gītā indicate that the former was patterned on the latter, with the two sharing an intratextual relationship within the Mahābhārata. Although not a commentary as such, as it does not present a line-by-line explication, the Bhīma/Hanūmat dialogue utilises its location in the narrative before the much more famous dialogue by appearing to prebend its doctrines (particularly the four-fold functioning of time across the yugas, Kṛṣṇa's explicit statements of his divinity, and his visvarūpa revelation), thereby conceptually providing support and context for the Gītā. Reciprocally, the Bhīma/Hanūmat dialogue invokes the authority of the Bhagavad Gītā to enhance its own message. As Sullivan observes, by having Hanūmat fulfil the same function within the encounter — as the revealer of cosmic truths to a Pāṇḍava warrior who is his relative — the text invites us to see Hanūmat as divine. Interpreting the two as themselves being in dialogue with each other allows us to know more about each of them.

## Chapter 12: Models of royal piety in the Mahābhārata: The case of Vidura, Sanatsuḷāta and Vidurā

In Chapter 12, James Hegarty analyses three dialogues in the Udyogaparvan of the Mahābhārata: (1) between Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his brother and advisor Vidura, (2) between Dhṛtarāṣṭra and the sage Sanatsuḷā

ta and (3) between queen Vidurā and her son Samjaya. Besides all appearing in the Udyogaparvan, these three dialogues are inter-related: the first two comprise one continuous scene, as Sanatsujāta replaces Vidura in instructing Dhrtarāstra during the latter's long dark night of the soul; the third dialogue appears much later in the parvan, but Vidurā is both Vidura's namesake and his foil.

In his analysis of the first dialogue, Hegarty shows that Vidura's emphasis on controlling the senses, equanimity and truthfulness offers a distinctive perspective on the harmonisation of competing religious and political imperatives. In the second dialogue, Sanatsujāta's teachings overlap with those of Vidura, but rather than promoting impartial kingship, his instructions are more directed towards emancipation. In the third dialogue, which is described as a *sarnvāda* (5.131.1), Vidurā berates her son for retreating from battle. Rather than advise controlling his senses or cultivating virtues, Vidurā instead exhorts her son to act like a man by seeking fame in battle against his enemies. In contrast to the blind king who seems to misunderstand his advisor's teaching, Samjaya listens to his mother, faces his foes, and attains victory on the battlefield.

By reading these three dialogues together, and by paying attention to variations among manuscript traditions along the way, Hegarty offers two different layers of interpretation. The first of these looks largely to the past, examining mutual textual influences from the Vedas and Upanisads, as well as the intratextual relationship between these three dialogical episodes and other sections of the Mahābhārata.

As Hegarty notes, there are different types of relationships of intratextuality, with Sanatsujāta and Vidura talking to, and with, one another, but with Vidura and Vidurā locked in an intratextual altercation. The second layer of interpretation looks to the future, moving forward into the manuscript traditions of the Mahābhārata to explore how later variations in the text amplify and play with its content. This, as Hegarty describes it, is a dialogue between the scribe, diverse reading communities and the story itself, and once more, interpreting the content and context of the dialogues makes us understand better how dialogues themselves have multiple functions across different interlocutors (i.e., both characters within the text and exegetes across time).

### Chapter 13: Dialogue in extremis: Vālin in the Vālmiki Rāmāyana

In the final Chapter, Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad provides a close reading and analysis of the dialogue between Rama and Vālin, which appears in the Kisikindhākānda of the Rāmāyana. This episode, in which Rama breaches dharmic norms by stealthily slaying the monkey-king Vālin while he is engaged in one-to-one combat with his brother, has been problematic for both commentators and modern audiences. Ram-Prasad examines the philosophical implications of this dialogue by engaging closely with both Vālin's and Rāma's perspectives, asking how we can understand Vālin's persuasive summary of Rāma's actions, as well as Rāma's own multiple, inconsistent arguments in defence, and Vālin's astonishing acceptance of that defence. By engaging with the perspective of both interlocutors, Ram-Prasad simultaneously examines two possible interpretations: one as the narrative enactment of the unresolved (perhaps irresolvable) dialogue between the subaltern expression of alterity and the elite pursuit of closure; the other as a theological metaphor for the necessarily arbitrary choice of faith in the face of existential bafflement. As Ram-Prasad reflects, it remains an open question whether these two readings relate to one another and, if so, how.

Building on this aspect of their encounter, Ram-Prasad brings attention to the hermeneutical implications of the dialogue form itself. Dialogues can leave an extra space for creative interpretation because they are

often suggestive and unresolved. This not only relates to how we might interpret dialogue as readers of the text, but also how we understand the transformative potential of dialogue. As Ram-Prasad argues: the way we think about the relationship between the two readings of the text 'has implications for how we ought to understand the transformative potential that the incident contains'. It is this openness of dialogue that makes it 'a model for the re-conceptualisation of the purposes of traditional narratives' and help make classical dialogues continue to live for us today.

### Interpretation: Discussion

The Chapters in this section have discussed a number of ways in which dialogue has been interpreted, either within the text, by later commentators, or by audiences today. In reading the Pāli suttas alongside Buddhaghosa, Heim has shown how a Buddhist commentator has paid close attention to the details of dialogical narrative as a way of understanding the truths of the Buddha's teaching. For Buddhaghosa, the literary form of the texts is integral to interpreting Buddhist sources; his reading gives his own as well as later audiences the opportunity to have their particular encounter with the Buddha. Sullivan explores the theme of interpretation by discussing the intertextual relationship between several dialogues in the Mahābhārata, arguing that the Hanumad-Bhīma-Samāgama is in dialogue with and modelled on the Bhagavad Gītā. Hegarty's Chapter also looks at intratextuality, exploring the relationship between three interrelated dialogues in the Mahābhārata. In addition to their intratextual relationship, Hegarty discusses their intertextual relationship with previous texts, such as the Upanisads, and how later manuscript traditions shift their interpretive trajectories by expanding and embellishing each dialogue. Finally, Ram-Prasad explores the multi-perspectival dimension of dialogue, by offering opposing but not mutually exclusive readings of the dialogue between Rama and Vālin. One of the implications of Ram-Prasad's Chapter is that the dialogue form leaves itself particularly open to creative interpretations because of the 'in betweenness of the encounter', as most dialogues are irreducible to one perspective or one interpretation. <>

## **JESUS IN AN AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT: RADICAL GOSPELS FROM THOMAS HOBBS TO THOMAS JEFFERSON** by Jonathan C. P. Birch [Christianities in the Trans-Atlantic World, Palgrave Macmillan, 9781137512758]

This book explores the religious concerns of Enlightenment thinkers from Thomas Hobbes to Thomas Jefferson. Using an innovative method, the study illuminates the intellectual history of the age through interpretations of Jesus between c.1650 and c.1826. The book demonstrates the persistence of theology in modern philosophy and the projects of social reform and amelioration associated with the Enlightenment. At the core of many of these projects was a robust moral-theological realism, sometimes manifest in a natural law ethic, but always associated with Jesus and a commitment to the sovereign goodness of God. This ethical orientation in Enlightenment discourse is found in a range of different metaphysical and political identities (dualist and monist; progressive and radical) which intersect with earlier 'heretical' tendencies in Christian thought (Arianism, Pelagianism, and Marcionism). This intellectual matrix helped to produce the discourses of irenic toleration which are a legacy of the Enlightenment at its best.

CONTENTS  
1 Introduction

- 2 Imagining Enlightenment: The Historical and Historiographical Context
- 3 Overture to a Moral Messiah: God, Goodness, and the Heretical Tendency
- 4 Material Messiah: Hobbes, Heresy, and a Kingdom Not of This World
- 5 'No Spirit, No God': From the Light of Christ to the Age of Enlightenment
- 6 What Would Jesus Tolerate? Reason and Revelation in Spinoza, Locke, and Bayle
- 7 The Unity of God and the Wisdom of Christ: The Religious Enlightenments of Joseph Priestley and Thomas Jefferson
- 8 Postscript and Conclusion
- Bibliography
- Author Index
- Subject Index

It may appear that my Jesus in an Age of Enlightenment is the series of (mostly Protestant) alternative answers to the question, 'Why should I continue to concern myself with Jesus and the Gospels?' But the question of salvation did not disappear, nor Jesus' role within it. What disappeared, gradually, was coercive uniformity as to what this meant. The prominence given to Jesus, as a teacher of universal virtue, in the work of some of the most radical writers in the Enlightenment is widely acknowledged. It is less commonly acknowledged that the moral virtue he represented, over against belief in Christological doctrine, was the way of salvation (for the Jewish Spinoza no less than Anglophone 'deists'). To be sure, such sentiments were unorthodox at the time, and would still be seen by many as theologically reductive, but holders of such sentiments are in good Christian company (or at least ancient company). In his 1948 study of the idea of grace among the Fathers of the Church, Thomas Torrance found it 'astonishing' that there was so little appreciation of the significance of Christ's death. On examining the text of 1 Clement, he thought it 'difficult to see any place for Christ in the Christian salvation beyond that of a preacher of the "grace of repentance"'. Reflecting on the early centuries of Christianity, in his classic history of doctrine, Jaroslav Pelikan argued that it is clear that meditation on the life and teachings of Jesus was a major preoccupation of the piety and doctrine of the church...Christ as example and Christ as teacher were constant and closely related doctrinal themes, but precisely because salvation, however it may have been defined, was the fundamental truth of the gospel, the imitation of Christ as example and the obedience to Christ as teacher must be seen in their close connection with it.

There may be no exact replicas of this among radical writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, but it is a mistake to see them all as promoters of 'moralism bereft of the idea of salvation', and wrong just to see them as modern religious sceptics, without precedence within the Christian tradition that so many of them always insisted they were in dialogue with. I concur with the late Peter Gay that it is through an 'appeal to antiquity' that important strands of Enlightenment thought ought to be understood, but this includes Christian as well as pagan antiquity.

My understanding of 'heresy' in this study will be as follows:

1. Any theological or philosophical notion purporting to be Christian that contradicts the Trinitarian and Incarnational doctrines formulated at the councils of Nicaea-Constantinople and Chalcedon (e.g. Arianism, Socinianism, Unitarianism, and Marcionism);
2. Any theological or philosophical notion purporting to be Christian that has been formally condemned as heretical by a Bishop of Rome, and where this judgement has been upheld as Catholic (as in universal) by Churches regardless of whether they are still in communion with Rome (e.g. the Lutheran stance on Pelagianism);
3. Any theological or philosophical notions purporting to be Christian which contradict context dependent norms laid down by a state Church (e.g. the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of

England and their stance in favour of the doctrinal authority of the Church and against the corporeality of God).

These working definitions acknowledge that orthodoxy and heresy are not fixed. They are dependent at all times on the reigning religious and political authorities who have the power to impose normative standards and punish deviations. In terms of the individual heresies, I will give just the bare outlines of the historic origins of the relevant notions, and I will not be offering tight definitions of each: to do so would be an ironic imposition of a system of 'correctness' on something which, from the perspective I am adopting here, is best understood in terms of shifting patterns, tendencies, and inclinations in increasingly autonomous forms of religious and philosophical commitment.

## The Arguments, Organisation, and Contents of this Book

This book will argue for the following theses:

1. The seventeenth and eighteenth century provide compelling prototypes for theological discourse centring on Jesus which persist in modern thought and culture, with the Gospels capable of furnishing both authoritarian and more liberal visions of Enlightenment.
2. The 'religious Enlightenment' (or Enlightenments) is not simply faith's uneasy accommodation to modernity: in a Christian context it grows out of the resources of scholastic and post-Reformation theology, where forms of theological-moral realism are often central to the relevant discourses.
3. Different metaphysical commitments (e.g. monist or dualist) can and have been supported by and integrated with both authoritarian and more liberal visions of Enlightenment.
4. Religious heresy is a characteristic tendency of the Enlightenment and has contributed to the formation of modern thought and culture.

These theses will be developed in an integrated way through six main chapters (Chapters 2-7) which are thematically orientated. Although a strict chronology is not adopted, the overall narrative flow is from pre-modernity to the early nineteenth century.

In Chapter 2, I offer a brief survey of conceptions of the Enlightenment in order to situate the present study within that historiographical tradition, clarify my historical method, and outline the relevant philosophical and theological contexts for engagement with Jesus and the Gospels in this study.

So important has Jesus' moral authority been in the reception and use of the Gospels in Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment discourse that I devote Chapter 3 to an account of that ethical turn. Rather than arguing for its origins in the work of Rousseau or Kant—the relationship between these figures and a liberal, morally orientated theology is well documented—I argue that it has roots in pre-modern philosophical and religious controversies, from Plato to Erasmus via Aquinas and medieval nominalism, before it was taken up by theological rationalists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

All the chapters in this book deal, in one way or another, with what one might call the 'metaphysics of Enlightenment', and this will be especially prominent in Chapters 4 and 5, which contrast different philosophies and their relationship to Jesus, the Bible, ethics, and politics. These chapters concern metaphysical struggles between monist and dualist philosophies: materialist and spiritual theologies of power and goodness. In modern political thought, these values have worked in creative tension: without sovereign power, effective governance of a commonwealth in the interests of its people is impossible; without justice, rooted in some source of authority which is independent of any one political administration, such governance is indistinguishable from arbitrary and despotic power. In Chapter 4, we will examine the Christology of Hobbes within the context of his authoritarian political theology and materialist metaphysics.

Following Lilla's example, Aquinas will be a point of comparison, but on my reading the gulf between the two thinkers will be (partly) bridged.

In Chapter 5, we will meet the radical Quaker James Nayler, and some of his co-religionists, who were embroiled in the 'dangerous' theological movements that Hobbes sought to check with his political theology: his perceived antinomianism and anti-authoritarianism, guided by the revelatory 'light' of Christ, prefigures the personal freedom and levelling of social hierarchies that would eventually be taken up in the radical thought of the eighteenth century. Nayler did not hold many of what we would recognise as typically 'enlightened' views (about, say, the progressive fruits of science and technology), but he tested the limits of the free expression of religious devotion which is something associated with the Enlightenment, and something we are still grappling with in our own time. We will also encounter some of Hobbes's most persistent critics. One of the most relentless was the philosopher and theologian Henry More who, from one perspective, could reasonably be charged with holding fast to some of the most pernicious superstitions of his time. And yet More's sympathetic writings on freedom of conscience, his vision of goodness as independent of power, and his view that Christ embodied that sovereignty of the good, would find favour with many who are routinely associated with the Enlightenment. If Hobbes, an English philosopher, was among the most feared materialists in the seventeenth century, by the eighteenth century the most daring were to be found elsewhere in Europe and especially in France. One important eighteenth-century source of resistance to materialism, from outside the English-speaking world, was H. S. Reimarus, the author of the single most celebrated historical study of Jesus in the Enlightenment. Reimarus shared the dualist metaphysics of many of Hobbes's Anglophone critics, their moral and intellectual repudiation of materialism, their belief in a benevolent God, and in the immortality of the soul. And yet Reimarus engaged in a form of biblical criticism more radical and impious than anything Hobbes would have entertained. Reimarus combined a dualist metaphysic with anticlericalism, a commitment to religious freedom, and a vision of Jesus so profane that he declined to publish it in his lifetime. Even here though, Jesus emerges as a moral light in the darkness cast by religious dogma, ancient and modern.

In Chapter 6, the political theology and ethical imperatives which have already been to the fore in this study will narrow in on one of the concrete controversies of the age, touched on repeatedly in the previous chapters: religious toleration. Like Jonathan Israel, I shall compare and contrast the approaches of Spinoza, Locke, and Pierre Bayle. The plausibility of placing these figures in categories of 'radical' or 'moderate' Enlightenment based on metaphysical commitments will be challenged, and the theological dimension of their writings will be emphasised. All these figures drew on the philosophical and biblical traditions of Jewish and Christian thought; they gave Jesus an important role in their cases for toleration, and in their general articulation of the relationship between the sacred and the civil dimensions of society.

In Chapter 7, we see Jesus once again through the prism of materialist metaphysics, as we discuss the work of two important public figures of the late Enlightenment, Joseph Priestley and Thomas Jefferson. They both show, in the same spirit of Hobbes, that a heretical Christian theology was capable of nurturing or authorising progressive visions of social and political order, and that materialism as a view of the natural world does not preclude a view of that world as created. Jefferson's famous (or infamous) editorial work on the New Testament is indicative of a familiar modern trend, especially in Anglo-American thought: promoting a minimalist historical Jesus as a progressive prophet of modernity. This project was close to Jefferson's heart, having come to the belief, late in life, that some form of religion was crucial to the flourishing of the American republic. It is a belief that has endured in Jefferson's beloved republic.

In my conclusion and postscript, I shall summarise my findings, reaffirm my theses, and sketch paths from the Enlightenment to more recent discourse about Jesus in political and cultural commentary. But before I can

situate Jesus within these discourses I can no longer avoid the question asked by philosophers, historians, and sundry thinking persons for centuries: What is the Enlightenment? <>

## **RELIGION, LAW, USA** edited by Joshua Dubler and Isaac Weiner [North American Religions ,New York University Press, NYU Press, 9781479893362]

Offers insight into the complex relationship between religion and law in contemporary America Why religion? Why law? Why now? In recent years, the United States has witnessed a number of high-profile court cases involving religion, forcing Americans to grapple with questions regarding the relationship between religion and law. This volume maps the contemporary interplay of religion and law within the study of American religions.

What rights are protected by the Constitution's free exercise clause? What are the boundaries of religion, and what is the constitutional basis for protecting some religious beliefs but not others? What characterizes a religious-studies approach to religion and law today? What is gained by approaching law from the vantage point of religious studies, and what does attention to the law offer back to scholars of religion? Religion, Law, USA considers all these questions and more.

Each chapter considers a specific keyword in the study of religion and law, such as "conscience," "establishment," "secularity," and "personhood." Contributors consider specific case studies related to each term, and then expand their analyses to discuss broader implications for the practice and study of American religion. Incorporating pieces from leading voices in the field, this book is an indispensable addition to the scholarship on religion and law in America.

### CONTENTS

Introduction: Religion, Law, USA Joshua Dubler and Isaac Weiner

#### PART I. DEFINITION

1. Belief by Sarah Imhoff
2. Conscience by Ronit Y. Stahl
3. Exercise by Finbarr Curtis
4. Establishment by Anna Su

#### PART II. CONTESTATION

5. Separation by Kathleen Holscher
6. Sovereignty by Tisa Wenger
7. Protection by Rosemary R. Corbett

#### PART III. MANAGEMENT

8. Noise by Ashon Crawley
9. Sexuality by Heather R. White
10. Indigeneity by Spencer Dew
11. The Secular by Jason C. Bivins

#### PART IV. LIMITS

12. Friend by Kathryn Lofton
13. Personhood by Sylvester A. Johnson
14. Hope by Vincent Lloyd

Afterword by Winnifred Fallers Sullivan

Acknowledgments

About the Editors

About the Contributors  
Index

## Religion, Law, USA

It might well seem imprudent for drug-rehabilitation counselors, especially ones with histories of dependency, to use prohibited substances. But what if they take themselves to be religiously obligated to do so? In 1983, Alfred Smith and Galen Black, Oregonian members of the Native American Church, were fired from their counseling jobs at the Douglas County Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention and Treatment for violating its substance abuse policy. As part of their church's religious ceremonies, the two men had ingested peyote, a powerful hallucinogen. Denied their subsequent claim for unemployment compensation, Smith and Black sued, alleging that the state was infringing on their religious freedom. Taking peyote was not evidence of "workplace misconduct," they argued, but rather was a sacramental expression of their sincerely held religious beliefs—and thus categorically protected by the US Constitution.

Smith and Black's case would twice reach the US Supreme Court. In what was eventually decided in 1990 as *Employment Division v. Smith*, a sharply divided court ruled against the Native American Church members. Religious motivation, it said, did not exempt people from an otherwise generally applicable law. Writing for the majority, Justice Antonin Scalia dismissed the applicability of the "Sherbert test" and its generation-old directive that only a "compelling state interest" justifies placing a "substantial burden" on a religious practice. To date, Scalia reasoned, this test had been applied only to cases involving "hybrid rights," where the right to religious free exercise was asserted in support of another fundamental right, such as the right to free speech or a parent's right to shape their children's education. Absent such hybridity, religious practitioners should expect little relief through litigation. For special exemptions from otherwise neutral laws, religious citizens would have to seek redress through legislative channels and not via the courts.

The Smith decision was an outrage and, in cultural terms, a landmark. In the years to follow, liberals and conservatives banded together to pass a plethora of specialized legislative acts, including the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA), and the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA), each of which meant to re-secure the federal government's commitment to protecting religious liberty. Many states adopted their own "mini-RFRAs," which afforded religious claims further accommodation. A specialized legal bar arose alongside an array of well-funded political advocacy groups, each committed to preserving and defending the legal rights of religion.

In the academy, meanwhile, Smith unleashed a flood of consideration. Legal scholars dissected Scalia's reasoning, questioning whether his decision was consistent with or a departure from thirty years of free exercise clause jurisprudence. They debated the proper standards by which courts should adjudicate petitions for religious exemptions and outlined competing visions for how courts might best safeguard religious rights in the future! These are questions of momentous consequence. However, as we ourselves discovered early in our trainings as scholars of American religion, to wade into these waters is to follow the court's opinion into a rarefied and somewhat exclusionary realm. It is a world of legal experts, disciplined to approach religion and law with particular tools in hand and particular questions in mind. To the uninitiated, this discursive terrain can feel alienating, and to humanists, its argumentation can feel remote from the lives and concerns of people like Alfred Smith and Galen Black.

Scholars of American religion, though indebted to and engaged with these conversations, have charted a somewhat different course in recent years. More and more, we have turned to law as a productive site of

inquiry, but we have approached it with our own theoretical preoccupations and disciplinary vocabularies, and from our own methodological vantage points. Now an established and vibrant subfield, academics working at the intersection of American religion and American law have produced influential and innovative works of scholarship. It seems the right time to take stock and consider the value of this collective enterprise. Why, we might ask, has religion and law emerged as a burgeoning area of study now? What has this recent work enabled us to perceive more clearly about religion, about law, and about American society? What, precisely, are we doing and why? It is to think through these questions that we decided to write this book.

## Surveying the Terrain

Before we can zero in on a single copse of trees, a special group to be tagged, measured, and evaluated for diseases, we must first consider the forest.

Religion, law, the United States of America: these are concepts of mammoth consequence, categories with complex histories and rich material lives. These ideas populate a range of individual, communal, and civic practices, where, as often as not, they appear in a moralizing register and act as carriers of accentuated feeling and identification. To think through these concepts requires that we consider not solely what they mean but also the trajectories and circumstances that call these meanings to life. Necessarily, then, to do theory is also to do history and ethnography.

## RELIGION

As we tend to observe in our classrooms, in our nonprofessional social circles, and in the public square, for most Americans, the category of religion connotes first something associated with a presumed state of interiority. As indicated by its companion terms "belief" and "faith," "religion" is most commonly associated with certain cognitive content. This means that religion is located within an individual, who is presumed to believe in a certain thing in a certain way. When multiple individuals are thought to avow a shared set of doctrines, they are said to belong to a religious community. These religious credos are thought to be distinct from ordinary principles in that they are nonfalsifiable. They are, one might say, "taken on faith." That God sent his only Son, who died on the cross to deliver us from our sins; that God revealed himself on Mount Sinai to an appointed tribal leader; that God revealed himself in the seventh century to an illiterate messenger: the essence of religion is generally presumed to be the avowal of doctrines of this kind. As a general rule, Americans who profess a belief in God and Americans who profess an absence of belief in God tend to agree that this sort of creed is what religion is fundamentally about.

The roots of this American way of conceptualizing religion begin elsewhere and prior. This notion of religion as something doctrinally based, interiorized, and individualistic is indebted to the history and theology of Protestant Christianity, a religious, social, and political movement launched in sixteenth-century Europe. It is fair to say that nothing has been more determinative of the ways that Americans talk about religion than Protestantism, and that this is true even for those many Americans, including the authors of these words, who are not themselves Protestant. In theological terms, the Protestant emphasis on inward faith stood as corrective to what reformers regarded as the excessive ritualism and institutionalized corruption of the Roman Catholic Church. In historical or political terms, channeling religion into a narrowly circumscribed private realm promised a philosophical and pragmatic solution to the "problem" of religious violence, especially in response to the bloody conflicts that followed in the Reformation's wake. Half a millennium later, what and how individual "religious" people believe remains the purported essence of religion.

What then of religious practices—what in a Catholic context one might call "works;" in a Jewish context one might call "mitzvot;" or in a Hindu context one might call "yogas"? These genres of practices are conventionally regarded as the material actualization of religious belief, perhaps secondary or ancillary to inward commitment but nonetheless consequential. In combination with a lay theology, then, it is possible to pinpoint in the United States a lay sociology of religion: religious bodily behaviors matter. Sermons, liturgies, catechisms, life-cycle celebrations and festivals: these things are thought to have substantial effects. In religious ritual feelings flow and convictions are confirmed. In ways both quiet and loud, abiding and ephemeral, in religious activity, selves congeal and collectivities cluster. Marching orders are given, and marching orders are received. Whether or not accompanied by something like bona fide faith, religion, it is generally thought, is like a spirit come to earth. It makes bodies move in righteous or curious ways, toward this or that end. That is, religion is frequently credited as being a shaping force in the world.

With the rarest of exceptions, this force is thought to arrive with a charge. Religion is something good or bad; almost never is it seen as neutral. This is weird and interesting. Compare this, for a second, to some of the study of religion's neighboring humanistic disciplines. While a particular introductory history lecture course may be spoken of as exceptionally good, would anyone think to call history as such "a good thing"? And while as a tradition of inquiry there is much in anthropology's fraught relationship to colonialism that invites critique, it would raise an eyebrow were a colleague or student to call culture—anthropology's organizing concept—"bad." Yet, with religion, such judgments do not seem remotely so odd. According to one common view, religion is a good thing, even an essential thing, for self, community, and nation. In this read, religion is said to engender virtue, to bind families together, and to foster avid citizenship, up to and including the enabling of righteous sacrifice. Without religion, many have long worried, individuals will succumb to vice, families will fracture, and the republic will teeter. If only they could get right with God, many reason, degenerates and communists might also be saved.

For others, meanwhile, religion is a bad thing, and not infrequently a very bad thing. In this read, religion is a holdover from primitive times, the delusional refusal to see the world for what it is, a barrier to individual and collective flourishing. Sometimes, people we might describe as "religious" counterpose this kind of bad religion to bona fide faith. The pejorative sense of the English word "ritualistic" captures this negative judgment of ritual behaviors. Mostly, however, the critique of religion (which is to say, of all religion) is a secularist position. In certain alien or insurgent forms most especially, religion is cast as a machine for superstition and compulsion, a weapon of patriarchal domination, and a fount of extremist violence. As John Lennon longingly implied in his anthem "Imagine," the abolition of religion would be nothing less than a symptom of peace on earth. Between defenders and detractors, a common ground may be marked out. That is, whether as something to be nurtured or something to be defended against, religion is a powerful force that requires considered management. In this project, it is assumed, law has an important part to play.

## LAW

If religion is a force, law is a firmament. Whether as existential threat or possible utopia, a world without religion is possible to imagine. But what would a world without law look like? To edify or entertain, various genres of fiction explore such a possibility, and the result tends to be awfully bloody. This side of *The Road*, however, law is more or less elemental, like water or air. Along with norms—law's less discrete cousin—law is thought to enable governance and to enforce social coherence. Law is a centripetal force. It is gravity, and without it, things would fall apart. This pervasive, deeply reactionary attitude toward law doesn't come up all that much in casual conversation. As an ethnographic matter, law—by which we mean law as such—borders on the untheorizable. Canvass a hundred Americans on a random street corner, we

figure, and most would have some sort of take on "religion"; solicit their position on "law" and—other than the odd loquacious anarchist or dispensationalist—few would know quite how to respond.

One notable exception to the general attitude of deference shown to the law as such is a widespread bias against law when it is enforced in a manner so literal as to be stupid—that is, when the spirit of the law is sacrificed to the letter of the law. Consider the following sort of sentiment: "I mean, I don't care what it says in the freaking rule book, nothing you say can convince me that Dez Bryant's catch against the Packers in the 2014 playoffs wasn't a catch." This position (which we share) is commonsense populist, and in a way that rhymes with the English language's polemic against ritualism, a fundamentally Protestant proposition. An astute reader might already note this as a recurring theme.

In contrast to religion, law when it is objectified is generally objectified in the particular. Unless otherwise specified, "religion" is all religions, but "law" is one given body of law. It is here where critical attitudes toward the law generally begin. John Lennon imagined no religion, but the Clash fought the law (and the law won). For a notable minority—those who live in certain sectarian religious communities—the "law" could mean divine law. As halakhah, as sharia, or as God's law, the law is something revealed in scripture, interpreted by scholars, and (unless superseded by Christ's salvific death on the cross) implemented by community elders. In such subcultures, the law can unspool an entire way of life. But in the United States, those who seek to live the law in this way are the minority.

Whether religious or secular, most Americans belong to multiple, overlapping communities, each of which imposes, in formal and informal ways, its own normative demands. In aggregate, however, when Americans speak of the law, they refer to the law of the state. Across the many ways we live, this law is attended by a special force. Federal, state, and local laws govern who is permitted to vote, who can drive and how fast, and what sorts of things one is free to do on one's property without specially secured dispensation. Some laws are seen as bad, and opposing such laws can be a glue that holds communities together. Other laws tend to be disregarded entirely.<sup>1</sup> As a formal matter, the law is recognized as the machine that produces public justice. According to this dominant view, we may fail the law; the law does not fail us. Law enforcement officers who break the law or who act wantonly within the law are painted as bad apples. With proper training, law enforcement is necessarily just. In the United States, this apologetic attitude toward state law is buttressed with an arsenal of national myths and rituals. Via courthouse monuments and grade-school civics lessons, we are instructed that justice is blind. In courtrooms, we rise. At parades and sporting events, we honor those who enforce the law at home and extend the sovereignty of American law abroad.

How precisely these rituals make one feel depends on a slew of factors not limited to race, class, folkways, and family ties. These rituals of deference to the law engender for some feelings of collectivity, of being at home, of being safe, of gratitude. For others, these rituals spark feelings of alienation or even terror. If, for the former group, the law is that which guarantees fairness, for others, whose social positioning may be different, the law is that which enforces unfairness. From this latter critical vantage point, the law protects some and preys upon others. One of the things that makes the present moment in the United States such an interesting one, a moment ripe with new dangers but also new possibilities, is that this dissident perception of the law has rapidly become, for an increasing number of Americans, a species of common sense.

As apologists and dissidents understand equally, the flesh of the law may be reason but its soul is violence. A police officer pulls over a speeding motorist; a suspect is taken into custody; a prisoner has his appeal denied. The object of the law's violence is the body. Even in its coolest forms—jurisdiction and civil procedure—the law can kill, and, routinely, it does. Depending on one's social positioning, the moments in which law articulates itself in lethal violence are grounds for mourning or for celebration.

Not just a set of value-neutral rules meant to facilitate social coexistence, state law constitutes its own distinct culture, structuring social experience and creating meaning through its distinct norms and practices." As is true of religious doctrines, the law propagates a series of consequential fictions that describe and prescribe what it is to live as a human being. The law's human beings are capable of keeping their promises, of being held responsible, of being deterred by punishment. To undo the harm they've done and to ensure that they won't do it again, those who break the law are subjected to penalties. To say that such propositions are considered "uncontroversial" overstates the degree to which they are considered at all.

Not by accident have we repeatedly appealed to religion to make sense of law. In the conceptual field of American popular discourse, the two entities are closely and variously related. As concepts, religion and law share a jealous tendency. Placed in combination, the results are often fractious: a sovereign regime with a legal system backed by scripture suppresses dissent; a charismatic leader, perhaps one in direct communication with God, comes into conflict with secular authorities; a group of religious enthusiasts campaigns to make certain proscriptions the law of the land. The oppressive theocracy, the persecuted prophet, the reformist crusade: in American literature and lore, tropes such as these frequently signal high-stakes conflict. In a different guise, meanwhile, religion—and, in particular, the religious law of Christian scripture—is seen as the precursor to secular law. For some, this story is one of decline. But for others, this putative succession is cited to valorize the law of the state and to imply a covenantal relationship between our special nation and the creator of the world.

## THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

In the United States, the most heralded site of encounter between religion and law is the regulation of religion within the scope of the Constitution. Any institutionalized tradition is a powerful thing, and American constitutionalism is no mere tradition. Two hundred and thirty years after they were first drafted, the first two clauses in the First Amendment to the Constitution provide the rules by which most public contestation over religion and law takes place and the playing field for the coming conversations. Chances are that many readers know them by heart, and even those of you that don't know them by heart know them nonetheless: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

It largely took until the twentieth century for justices on the Supreme Court to spell out what precisely these two clauses mean in practice, but it is not false to say that in the US, religion has been, from the very beginning, an object of legal discourse. "Religion" demarcates a discrete sphere, a sphere of special privilege, of inalienable rights for citizens and inviolable restrictions placed on government. An obvious tension is plain from the start. Religion is to be made sacred, but by what authority? By secular law, of course. For this thing "religion" to be protected, it must first be subordinated. Religion may well be privileged by the Constitution, but not before it is also brought to heel. Sovereignty hates to share, and so, while state law can certainly act as religious law's protector, it can also be its killer.

This normative configuration of religion and law has its roots in the entwined historical legacies of the Protestant Reformation and the early modern European wars of religion. The construction of religion as a peculiar object of legal concern arose as a philosophical solution to the "problem" of religious violence and as a pragmatic strategy for managing religious differences. The drafters of the US Constitution were well versed in the writings of Enlightenment thinkers like John Locke, whose political theory of toleration ascribed to religion an inviolable sphere of personal autonomy, free from the coercive power of civic authority, yet only to the degree that it refrains from infringing on the public good.

How well or poorly this somewhat paradoxical directive has been realized has long been a keystone in public discourses about the success or failure of the United States as a political project. Some of the United States' most prominent civic myths—a city on a hill, a light unto the nations, a new Jerusalem—are both religious in origin and point to the special protections of religion under American law as positive proof of the United States' exceptionalism. Draped in a patriotic spirit, religion, and in particular religious freedom, frequently becomes a hallmark of this land of opportunity, liberty, equality, and immigrants who get the job done. For others and at other times, the purported failure to deliver on this sacred promise burnishes an American exception built of other stuff: nativism, white supremacy, plutocracy, imperialist excess, settler colonialism. Our time especially is a heyday of both impulses: the patriotic celebration of American religious freedom and the emphatic negation of the same. Our guess is that it would be hard to find an American community today that does not in one way or another engage in regular conversations—celebratory or polemical, impassioned or by rote—about the fact and relative beneficence of American sovereignty and of the special place of religion as agent or object of this political enterprise. Albeit often at a level of some abstraction, in this regard, scholars of American religion are no exception.

### Points of Departure

For today's students of American religions, law is a privileged object, and it is also an archive. Court cases and other legal documents provide extraordinary access to subterranean religious discourses, practices, and histories. These sources occasion powerful insights into how religion has been produced, imagined, and managed and how, under the banner of religion, individuals and communities have accommodated themselves to, endured, and resisted the forces and interests that shape life in America. When approached with our own distinct set of interests and questions and through our own discrete but disciplined practices of reading and reflection, law offers an enormously productive point of entry into a variety of broader conversations in the academic study of religion.

To gesture toward some of these openings, we return to Smith. At the top, we described some of the questions law professors posed about the case, but what is Smith to a scholar of American religion? A religionist, as one example, might approach the Smith decision with a focus "not on the Court as the ultimate authority on the United States Constitution;" as scholar of religion Jonathan Z. Smith has put it, "but rather on the Court as the legally authorized interpreter of religion." This means, in part, attending to how the court has come to conceptualize religion in the way that it has and what the implications of its imaginings are for religious practitioners. How has "sincere belief" come to be the standard by which religious legitimacy is to be assessed, and what does this mean for practices like the consumption of peyote? What can we learn from the court's turn to comparison as a strategy for making sense of unfamiliar practices? Is the Native American Church's use of peyote analogous to the Catholic Church's administration of the Eucharist, or is it more like polygamy or female circumcision, each of which the state has placed beyond the boundaries of legal acceptability? Is it an innovative practice, the product of a new religious movement with syncretic origins in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, or an ancient one, tracing a continuous lineage to Indigenous Mexican tradition? How are we to interpret the significance of this ritual and its place in Native American life? In each of these questions, we find hints of broader classificatory dilemmas facing any student of religion, yet they are invested here with the imprimatur and heightened stakes that attend the administration of state authority.

Alternatively, one might analyze the Smith case with reference to the contested legacies of religious freedom as an American ideal. Celebrated by many as the defining feature of American exceptionalism, religious freedom has an uneven history, functioning just as often to marginalize minority religious communities as to embrace them. In this telling, Alfred Smith and Galen Black might be said to have joined a long list of litigants—including other Native Americans, Catholics, Mormons, Muslims, and others—who

have found US law surprisingly inhospitable if not outright hostile to their distinct ways of life. Whether due to its privileging of belief over practice, individual rights over communal autonomy, or universal claims over ones tied to particular geographic spaces, US law has rendered legible only certain kinds of religious appeals. By attending to this history, we might interrogate how the rhetoric of religious freedom has functioned as much to legitimate particular ways of being religious as to make space for robust forms of difference. We might approach law as a tool by which empowered American agents have distinguished "good" religion from "bad" so as to dispense the former with support and the latter with violence.

Finally, we might locate Smith within the history of Indigenous efforts to secure sovereignty or self-governance. How did peyote religion and the Native American Church emerge, in part, as responses to direct acts of governmental suppression? In what ways have Native Americans worked to carve out space free from state regulation and interference? Has the category of "religion" advanced this project or hindered it? Telling this story would require ethnographic attention to the lived experience of Indigenous peoples under the law. How has the legal system served—and how does it continue to serve—as an arena for struggle, resistance, and even revitalization? How have Native American engagements with the law shaped and reshaped the tenets and practices of its community's religious life?

In each of these ways, and others, the Supreme Court's decision in *Employment Division v. Smith* opens itself up not only to jurisprudential analysis but also to other modes of investigation, including historical, ethnographical, and genealogical. Circulating through these disparate readings is a common vocabulary of critical terms, including "belief," "practice, sincerity, freedom," "sovereignty, indigeneity," and "race." To wrestle with the competing meanings and contested legacies of these categories is to enter a complex world of mutual entanglement of law and religion in the United States. It is to consider how religion and law have shaped and informed each other in ways that complicate civic slogans like "separation of church and state." It is to approach religion and law as critical sites for understanding the manifold moods and modes of American life. Such are the concerns of this volume.

This book emerges from an invitation we sent to fourteen prominent and up-and-coming scholars of American religions. Select a term, we wrote, and show us what it reveals about the mutual entanglement of religion and law in America. Hoping for some regularity of rhythm, we encouraged our contributors to ground their explorations in a particular case or event. We then asked them to spin out from this discrete site and consider how their selected category might open itself up to any number of productive paths of inquiry. Finally, we asked them to proceed along one of those paths, guided only by their own scholarly interests. In doing so, we hoped, this volume would be diverse but coherent as it grappled with the broader theoretical concerns of the academic study of religion, writ large.

As befitting a field which, at its best, strives to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange, the resulting chapters include new takes on topics you would expect, such as belief, conscience, and establishment, alongside others that might seem less conventional, like noise, hope, and friend. We readily concede that the selected terms and sites of inquiry are by no means exhaustive. Nevertheless, we believe that the chapters that follow showcase the rich variety of approaches to religion and law currently available within American religious studies. They include attention to the relative (in)commensurability of the practices and categories of legal and religious studies scholarship, to the lived experience of American religionists under the law, and to the secularization through law of theological concepts and principles. We have divided the chapters into four sections, which reflect the volume's overarching concerns: definition, contestation, management, and limits. Winnifred Fallers Sullivan has graciously supplied a concluding reflection.

Perhaps it was the specificity in our prompt, perhaps it was the set of scholars we invited, perhaps it is the historical moment in which we assembled, but the following chapters generally share a statist and Americanist perspective. There is much that is distinctive about the American approach to managing religion, and any abstract or comparative conversation must proceed from a recognition of and engagement with those particularities. Yet we do hope this volume will also be useful for those working on religion and law in other theoretical and historical contexts. We ourselves have learned much from those working in other contexts and at other scales of analysis, and we expect that the questions, concepts, and approaches introduced here can be fruitfully taken up and applied elsewhere.

What the volume's chapters may lack in sweep they compensate for in heat. There is a sense of urgency at work in these pages. We finalize these words in the days following the Supreme Court's decisions gutting public-sector unions and affirming President Trump's Muslim ban and Justice Anthony Kennedy's retirement announcement, which portends new vulnerabilities. The landscape is shifting quickly, and we cannot anticipate where things will stand when this book goes out into the world. Where and how should residents of the United States best pursue justice? What can we reasonably expect of courts of law? What role might religion have to play? To our readers who are grappling with these issues in and beyond the classroom, we hope this book has something to offer. <>

**FREE WILL, CAUSALITY, AND NEUROSCIENCE** edited by Bernard Feltz, Marcus Missal and Andrew Cameron Sims [Value Inquiry Book Series, Cognitive Science, Brill, Rodopi, Hardback: 9789004372917, E-Book: 9789004409965] [Open Source](#)

Neuroscientists often consider free will to be an illusion. Contrary to this hypothesis, the contributions to this volume show that recent developments in neuroscience can also support the existence of free will. Firstly, the possibility of intentional consciousness is studied. Secondly, Libet's experiments are discussed from this new perspective. Thirdly, the relationship between free will, causality and language is analyzed. This approach suggests that language grants the human brain a possibility to articulate a meaningful personal life. Therefore, human beings can escape strict biological determinism.

- Contents
- Acknowledgements
- The Authors
- Introduction by Bernard Feltz, Marcus Missal and Andrew Sims
- Intention and Consciousness
- Perceptual Decision-Making and Beyond: Intention as Mental Imagery by Andrew Sims and Marcus Missal
- Dual-System Theory and the Role of Consciousness in Intentional Action by Markus Schlosser
- When Do Robots have Free Will? Exploring the Relationships between (Attributions of) Consciousness and Free Will by Eddy Nahmias, Corey Hill Allen and Bradley Loveall
- Libet-Style Experiments
- Free Will and Neuroscience: Decision Times and the Point of No Return by Alfred Mele
- Why Libet-Style Experiments Cannot Refute All Forms of Libertarianism by László Bernáth
- Actions and Intentions by Sofia Bonicalzi
- Causality and Free Will
- The Mental, the Physical and the Informational by Anna Drozdowska

Free Will, Language, and the Causal Exclusion Problem by Bernard Feltz and Olivier Sartenaer  
Index of Authors

Excerpt: What is the relationship between mind and body? Even in antiquity, the contrast between Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions of the relationship between soul and body anticipate this anthropological debate, which has recently been taken up under the banner of a “naturalisation of consciousness.” In the modern period, the dialogue between Descartes’s neo-Platonism and Spinoza’s monism—and later, the Kantian critique—can be interpreted as a continuation of these themes. The passionate discussions in the 20th century between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty about phenomenological “Being-in-the-World” offer a new approach to that which is specifically human. At the heart of all these traditions, language and the capacity for meaning-making play a decisive role. Paradoxically, it is at the very moment when philosophy discovers the corporeal dimension of humanity—in dialogue with the natural sciences, furthermore—that the ubiquity of language in all behaviour is freshly brought into view. Paul Ricoeur and Jürgen Habermas are exemplary of such a position. A human being is a corporeal entity but human behaviour is unintelligible in abstraction from the role of language.

Recent developments in neuroscience have led to a fresh perspective on this set of issues. The relationship between mind and body is not only a philosophical matter. A close dialogue with the experimental sciences is not only possible but indeed also necessary. In recent decades, new methods for studying the brain have produced important theoretical advances and led to the rapid development of various disciplines, among which are neuroscience and the cognitive sciences. The philosophy of neuroscience has itself grown considerably. In this context, one influential line of thinking tends toward the thesis that free will is pure illusion and that the principle of causation in all its rigor leads inexorably to the rejection of a concept of free will likely to contribute to an understanding of human behaviour.

This conducts us to propose two introductory developments: free will and causality.

## Free Will

There are several epistemological positions that yield different conceptions of free will. Beginning from his work in cognitive psychology, Daniel Wegner constructs what he calls a “theory of apparent mental causation” which explains the conscious experience of our own causal efficacy during action as a post-hoc reconstruction. On the basis of Libet’s (Unconscious cerebral initiative and the role of conscious will in voluntary action. *Behavioural and Brain Sciences*, 8, 529–566) experiments, he argues that the conscious experience of acting is pure illusion. It is language—in an a posteriori reorganisation—that inscribes a particular action in the autobiographical memory. The subject then acquires an illusory sense of herself as the author of that action.

In the same line, in the course of a discussion of theories of self-organisation, decision theory, and cognitive models, Henri Atlan (2011) proposes a neo-Spinozist interpretation of human behaviour which is characterised by its total determinism. For him there is a kind of freedom that is linked to the impossibility of predicting behaviour, but this impossibility is purely epistemological. Human behaviour is deeply determined and freedom consists in making this determination our own. In this context, free will proper has no place and is qualified as a “necessary illusion” in that, while we must act as if our decisions were efficacious, this efficacy is fictive on account of the principle of total determinism. Both of these perspectives just discussed are characterised by the conception of a deterministic world and the conception of scientific explanation in terms of causation. Free will is understood as calling into question a principle of causal continuity that these conceptions imply.

This introduction is not the place for a detailed discussion of each of these sorts of models. Simply put, our working hypothesis is that the concept of free will remains pertinent without coming into conflict with any

scientific practice that requires the concept of causation in its explanations. Language, as an emergent process of brain activity, contributes to the development of behaviour which count as unified actions taking place over long intervals of time and which makes it possible to conceive of an acting body which is both corporeal and yet aptly described as “free.”

More precisely, intentional action in human beings is a function of both the initial conditions of the distributed neural networks that are involved (that is, the “brain state”: emotions, physiological state, autobiographical and implicit memory) and the circumstances and events at some moment (rest, activity, social interactions, etc...). The expression “free will” is used in order to describe this situation of interaction between an agent whose nervous system reacts to a prior set of events according to both its state at that point and according to an intentional logic. Intentional action refers explicitly to an operation that involves the capacity to represent a future state of the world. The concept of free will refers both to behaviour that has this intentionality and for which it is not entirely determined. Our hypothesis is that the use of language is an activity that allows such an operation.

To defend this conception, we have to analyze more precisely the relation with causality.

## Causality

From the philosophical point of view, the study of the concept of causality started with Aristotle (384 bc–322 bc) who proposed four different types of causes (material, formal, efficient, final; *Physics* and *Metaphysics* v 2). During the following centuries, the concept of causality has continued to be interpreted in Aristotelian terms. David Hume initiated the modern approach of causality. He recognized the importance of causal beliefs for human understanding. However, he convincingly demonstrated that causality itself is not observable. Describing colliding objects, David Hume wrote: “When we consider these objects with the utmost attention, we find only that the one body approaches the other; and the motion of it precedes that of the other without any sensible interval” (Hume 1739). The argument of David Hume seems logically impossible to contradict: a necessary connection between events cannot be observed or measured. Only contiguity and succession can be observed. Causality seems indispensable to human understanding but could not be founded rationally and causal inferences are made on the basis of non-causal co-variations. If we follow David Hume’s philosophy, the mind is a white sheet of paper and only learned associations can form the base of human knowledge. Immanuel Kant considered Hume’s conception of causality as deeply unsatisfactory. In Kant’s approach, causality is an a priori category of understanding, a logical necessity for the possibility of experience. Categories of understanding are a priori features of the mind. Therefore, for Immanuel Kant, the mind is not a white sheet of paper. The British philosopher Bertrand Russell tried to close the debate by declaring the concept of causality obsolete: “The law of causality, I believe, like much that passes muster among philosophers, is a relic of a bygone age, surviving, like the monarchy, only because it is erroneously supposed to do no harm” (Russell 1912). However, we suggest that simply giving up the concept of causation at the macroscopic level is unsatisfactory. More specifically, the concept of causation is central to the notion of free will. Indeed, free decisions could cause behavior if humans enjoy free will and this question is central in modern philosophy.

The modern concept of causality has been deeply influenced by physics and psychology during the xxth century and has a deep impact on causality in neurosciences.

According to the physicist Max Born (1949): “Causality postulates that there are laws by which the occurrence of an entity B of a certain class depends on the occurrence of an entity A of another class, where the word ‘entity’ means any physical object, phenomenon, situation, or event. A is called the cause, B the effect.” The concept of “lawlike” necessity is important in the contemporary approach to causation.

Moreover, Max Born added that the cause should precede (or at least be simultaneous with) the effect and that there must be some sort of spatial contact between the cause and effect (even if it is by way of a chain of intermediaries). Albert Michotte (1949/1963), profoundly influenced by Immanuel Kant, considered the possibility that humans actually “perceive” causality directly through the activation of an encapsulated specific brain detector receiving a particular pattern of spatio-temporal inputs (Wagemans et al. 2006). Michotte used abstract visual stimuli, such as shapes that moved and collided in various ways, and made detailed manipulations of their spatial and temporal properties. His subjects responded with verbal descriptions of the resulting “scenes,” and Michotte determined whether they thought there was a causal percept (“object A caused object B to move”) or not. Michotte concluded that humans perceive causality as a Gestalt, similar to the way they perceive shape, motion, or other fundamental qualities in the world.

Michotte’s results have been replicated in contemporary experiments. Whatever their interpretation, Michotte’s experiments and those of his followers clearly show the prevalence of causal judgment in psychology and behavior. Suggesting that causality is an illusion is epistemologically counterproductive. Similarly, idea that causal beliefs are elaborated on the basis of passive observations of covariations suffers from obvious limitations. Indeed, readings of a drop of atmospheric pressure on a barometer covaries with storms occurrence. However, nobody will claim that manually changing the reading of a barometer could cause a storm. Genuine causation must be distinguished from spurious. The modern approach to causality inference that is emerging can be thought of in terms of graphs and probabilities. The fundamental idea is that a cause raises the *probability* of occurrence of an effect. Making causal hypotheses is very similar to elaborating a scientific theory from experimental data.

More recently, any works are specifically oriented to causality in neuroscience. Craver distances himself from “law-like” necessity causality and defends a mechanistic conception of causality. To explain is to show multilevel mechanisms conducting the transition from state 1 to state 2. In the same line, Woodward proposes an interventionist concept of causality where the articulation between levels of organization in the brain is essential.

These diverse conceptions of causality are present in this book. Each author dialogues with one or other conception in order to think the possibility of free will.

## Content

The relation between free will and causality is an important focus of this book. That is why we organize it into three parts. In the first part, “Intention and Consciousness,” the objective is to consider a priori theories of the meaning of intentional action in light of our increasing knowledge about the architecture of cognition, and to probe intuitive ideas about the relationship between control, intention, and consciousness. The compatibility of intention with efficient causality is also analysed. In the second part, “Libet-Style Experiments,” while Libet’s famous experiments are generally considered as defending a causality which reject free will, we would like to reconsider these experiments in light of the variety of ways in which they have been instantiated as well as the sorts of theories which they are intended to refute. The third part, “Causality and Free Will,” aims to clarify the ways in which language has an impact on human behaviour, and in the way that it allows a rich scope of flexibility and planning that would otherwise be out of reach. The relation with causality is the main topics, first in articulation with mental causation, finally in the context of emergence.

Specifically, in “Perceptual Decision-Making and Beyond,” Andrew Sims and Marcus Missal extend models of perceptual decision-making in psychophysics in order to elaborate a theory of intentional action that does not rely on the propagation of content from abstract propositional attitudes to sensorimotor

---

representations in the concrete moment of action. Instead, this model conceptualises intentional action as a process in which quasi-perceptual representations bias the evolution of a “decision variable” into a state space which represents the sensorimotor consequences of a particular outcome. This is intended to be an alternative to the sort of causal theory of action that links action to causation by propositional attitudes.

Markus Schlosser is more optimistic that the traditional picture of action and control can be retained, and illustrates this by walking us through a challenge posed to that picture by dual-process theories of cognitive architecture. In his piece “Dual-System Theory and the Role of Consciousness in Intentional Action” he carefully distinguishes between various kinds of control and guidance, and concludes that the traditional picture can be preserved given qualifications about the role of consciousness.

Nahmias, Allen, and Loveall ask their participants the question: “When do Robots have Free Will?” They do so in order to further probe the importance that attributions of phenomenal consciousness have to ascriptions of free will. Their guiding hypothesis is that phenomenal consciousness matters because for an agent to be free and responsible requires that agent to care about one’s choices and their consequences, and that care requires the capacity to feel emotion. Their results provide tentative support for this hypothesis.

The second part of the book contains two chapters that revisit themes in the empirical literature. In his “Free Will and Neuroscience,” Alfred Mele considers Libet-style arguments against free will in light of recent updated instances of these studies. He considers two specific arguments for the nonexistence of free will that he takes to be refuted and concludes that recent studies do not do anything to salvage them.

Then, in “Why Libet-Style Experiments Cannot Refute All Forms of Libertarianism,” László Bernáth argues that such experiments are able to serve as evidence against forms of libertarianism that do not make metaphysical distinctions between types of decisions. However, he claims that there are a class of libertarian positions for which they are powerless: those that restrict the set of free decisions in a way that rules out their testing in existing paradigms (though he suggests ways in which those paradigms might be modified).

In “Actions and Intentions,” Sofia Bonicalzi argues that recent findings in cognitive neuroscience militate against a proposition-style causal theory of action. Instead, she claims, we are better off thinking of action as the product of complex interactions between a number of different systems. Under such a scheme, intentions are not plausibly context-independent, inherently causal, discrete entities. On the basis of specific Libet’s experiment interpretations, she suggests that neuroscience can play a constructive role with respect to basic concepts in the philosophy of action.

Finally, the third part of the book returns to the articulation of language and causality in agency and free will in human beings. Anna Drozdowska argues that the problem of mental causation is of central importance in the free will debate, despite the fact that it is often missing from discussions in the extant literature. In “The Mental, the Physical, and the Informational” she suggests that the right approach in this context will be to consider the causal role that information can play in the brain. She motivates the view that this may provide a new approach to the problem of causal exclusion.

Last, in “Free Will, Language, and the Causal Exclusion Problem,” Bernard Feltz and Olivier Sartenaer address a similar theme, by considering the ways in which the use of language might instantiate emergent causal powers that produce downward-causal effects. In doing so they bring recent ideas about diachronic causation into contact with the neuroscience of learning and philosophy of language.

## Opening Perspectives

The question of free will admits of a diverse number of positions. Even in this book, which brings together contributions by authors largely open to the possibility of free will, it would be hazardous to propose general conclusions to which all could agree. However, in our role as editors of this book, we would like nonetheless to propose some final thoughts on the relation between language and causality with respect to the question of free will.

From a social point of view, it seems difficult to defend the idea that language lacks causal power. We need just be reminded that science is language, and that the products of science—technology—are unthinkable without the causal efficacy of language. Law, economics, political science, rhetoric, all of these are equally languages for which it seems superfluous to argue for their efficacy. Now, if language has causal power from this social point of view, the monist presupposition requires that we posit its efficacy at the individual level as well. If one wonders about the causal efficacy of language at the level of the individual, then in a certain sense the question is *how* to understand this efficacy and not *if* there is any such efficacy. Language operates just as much on the individual level as it does on the social.

On this point, the contributions on language in this collection demonstrate that it is possible to think about the effect of language on the brain while respecting the principle of causal closure. Such a result is important since it allows us to give language a decisive place in our thinking about free will and to bring about a rapprochement between certain philosophers of language and the experimental work of contemporary neuroscientists. In decision-making processes, language is not epiphenomenal. It is perfectly coherent to defend that language has a causal influence in decision-making processes.

However, this causal efficacy of language does not correspond to free will. For example, some thinkers inspired by structuralism defended the idea that language itself determines behaviour through the unconscious (in Lacan's "Return to Freud") or determines collective behaviour through ideology and without the knowledge of the persons concerned. So in order to intervene in the debate over freedom on the basis of language, one needs to go beyond its efficacy.

In contrast with structuralism, develops the idea of a productive language in culture that gives rise to meaning: this is what he calls "objective mind." The human subject, by learning language, becomes part of this cultural dynamics and becomes able to participate in social conversation, becomes capable of inventiveness, creation, and novelty. The latter is what Habermas calls "subjective mind." For Habermas, then, language is not an oppressive structure but an open and dynamic structure that allows each individual within it to choose the meaning of her existence. To be free is to behave according to the system of meanings that we have chosen and helped to construct. Not only is language causally efficacious then, but it brings with it the potential for novelty.

Habermas's philosophy of language leads us to defend the idea that the causal power of language allows for a wider efficacy of the processes that involve the self-determination of human behaviour. Language, through which the individual participates in objective mind, allows each person to construct a system of meaning by which he gives sense to the world and orients himself behaviourally. Neural plasticity and learning as implemented in neural networks are the mechanisms which allow to understand the effect of language on the brain. These mechanisms bring us back to these processes themselves as the conditions of possibility for the production of language. Such a perspective makes it possible to meet the difficulties related to the problem of causal exclusion. It produces reconciliation between neuroscience and a conception of the human being as free. <>

## **ESOTERIC IMAGES: DECODING THE LATE HERAT SCHOOL OF PAINTING** by Tawfiq Da‘adli [Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture, Brill, Hardback: 9789004398009; E-Book: 9789004398412]

In **ESOTERIC IMAGES: DECODING THE LATE HERAT SCHOOL OF PAINTING** Tawfiq Da‘adli decodes the pictorial language which flourished in the city of Herat, modern Afghanistan, under the rule of the last Timurid ruler, Sultan Husayn Bayqara (r.1469-1506). This study focuses on one illustrated manuscript of a poem entitled *Khamsa* by the Persian poet Nizami Ganjavi, kept in the British Library under code Or.6810. Tawfiq Da‘adli decodes the paintings, reveals the syntax behind them and thus deciphers the message of the whole manuscript. The book combines scholarly efforts to interpret theological-political lessons embedded in one of the foremost Persian schools of art against the background of the court dynamic of an influential medieval power in its final years.

### Contents

- Dedication
- Acknowledgments
- Figures
- Introduction
- Historical and Cultural Contexts
- Focusing the Gaze in Late Timurid Painting
- The Iskandar Cycle
- Making Justice
- Death and Annihilation
- Concluding the Poetics of Painting
- Epilogue
- Bibliography
- Index

Excerpt: During the rule of the sultan Husayn Bāyqarā (r. 1469–1506), the elite of the court at Herat (modern Afghanistan) were patrons of the arts of the book, from paper manufacturing and calligraphy to illumination, illustration, and bookbinding.<sup>1</sup> This Late Herat school of painting marks one of the highest moments in Persian painting. Based on previous schools of art, especially the Early Herat school of painting, the artists of the Late School created new compositions and encoded several levels of meaning into their paintings. However, the illustrations contain a paradoxical relation between form and content. Those paintings bear relationship to mystical Persian poetry which is composed of sophisticated verse and includes ambiguous metaphor. The fundamental objective of this book is to analyze the visual language of these illustrated manuscripts in relation to the circumstances in which they were produced.

One of the most celebrated illustrated manuscripts of the *Khamsa* (Quintet) of the Persian poet Niẓāmī Ganjāvī (1135 or 41–1202 or 9) serves as a case study for the whole school. Currently kept in the British Library under code Or.6810, the manuscript reveals the extraordinary quality and revolutionary approach of this school. It was originally created for Amīr ‘Alī Fārsi Barlās, ruler of Samarkand. The history of the manuscript is documented with more than 70 inscriptions and seal impressions dating from 1564/65 to 1782 testifying to its transition from the Timurid to the Mughal. Among its owners in the Mughal court were Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan and Awrangzeb. The manuscript was restored in the Mughal court and

some paintings were retouched. The manuscript was acquired by Richard Johnson on 17 December 1782 and purchased by the British Museum on 27 February 1908.<sup>2</sup> The page size of this manuscript is 17 × 24 cm and the poem is written in four columns of 25 lines per page. Interlaced within the text of the poem are one double and 20 single miniatures in the Herat style. The attributions to various artists beneath the lower margins of the miniatures were added later, but the miniatures folios 37v, 135v, 190r, 214r, 225v, and 273r are considered to be the work of Bihzād. One of the paintings (f 284a) is clearly dated 900 AH (1494/95).

The paintings illustrate scenes from the five poems of the *Khamsa*; the *Makhzan al-asrār*, that consists of twenty discourses, each exemplified by a representative story; *Khusrau and Shīrīn*, based on the love story of the Sasanian King Khusrau II Parviz (590–628) and Princess Shīrīn, who seek to be together in the face of significant obstacles; *Laylī and Majnūn*, a rendering of an Arabic legend about two star-crossed lovers—the poet, known as Majnūn, and his uncle’s daughter, Laylī; *Haft Paykar*, where the Sasanian King Bahrām Gūr (420–438) becomes a prototype of the ideal king; and the *Iskandar-nāma* in two parts. In this poem, Alexander/Iskandar is the ideal king and reaches prophet status, his physical integrity reflected in royalty, his spiritual integrity in prophecy.

In some cases, the poem presents the story of one protagonist, as in the *Iskandar-nāma*, where the artist chose to illustrate Iskandar’s different natures. In other cases, poems depict different episodes, sometimes unrelated to each other, as in the case of the *Makhzan al-asrār*, where the painter illustrates episodes that tackle moral issues along didactic lines.

While a few of the paintings were based on earlier versions of compositions, the majority were newly created by the Late Herat painters. Those painters, it seems, did not only illustrate the text, but created their own pictorial texts and embedded in them clues to deeper layers of meaning. Some of the clues are only visible in the original paintings. In later retouches, they were brushed over, leaving the illustrations without important symbols and metaphors.

Some research, including a short monograph by Martin and Arnold, and an article by Stchoukine, has been conducted into the illustrations of Or.6810. Paintings from this manuscript are reproduced in books on Islamic art in general, and in those on Persian painting in particular. However, the discussions tend to be about the identity of the painters, rather than about the paintings’ meanings. For example, while some of the miniatures have been attributed to the famous painter of the Late Herat school, Kamāl al-dīn Bihzād,<sup>5</sup> only few studies engage with the question of the meaning of illustrations affiliated with this school.<sup>6</sup> For me, the question of attribution or the identity of the painters is secondary to the discussion of the art itself and its significance.

In the early stage of research, the illustrations from the manuscript were examined separately in order to get an understanding of the iconography behind each. During this stage it became obvious that illustrations in *Khamsa* Or.6810 contain details redundant to a straightforward illustration of episodes described in the text of Niẓāmī. My premise is that these additional details point to a parallel narrative with didactic intent.

After dividing the manuscript into individual illustrations, I found that the paintings covered common ground and consequently regrouped them according to theme. The reconstruction of the manuscript unmasked what I see as a general theme and dictated the further choice of scenes. That is to say, most of the scenes illustrated in this manuscript were selected to demonstrate one particular idea—the revelation of Sufi mystical beliefs and concepts. Moreover, the idea of just rule, where the ruler seeks the truth and is humble

before the Sufi dervish who encapsulates this truth, is discussed in various chapters and is intrinsic to the idea behind the illustrated manuscript.

As the book focuses on the Herat school of painting under Ḥusayn Bāyqarā, and especially on one illustrated *Khamsa* from this school, an introductory chapter is provided with background material. The introduction first presents a (brief) history of the Timurid dynasty, especially the days of Sultan Ḥusayn Bāyqarā and the cultural conditions that prevailed in Herat under his rule. The second part discusses the poet Niẓāmī Ganjāvī, author of the *Khamsa*.

The meaning of the paintings cannot be understood without decoding the pictorial language of the Late Herat school. The second chapter attempts to decode and reinterpret some paintings from Late Timurid Herat by pointing to a character, here called a focalizer, whose function it is to point out a specific event. By situating focalizers in a central place in the composition, whence eye contact is established between them and the observer or another feature in the painting, the painter attracts the observer to the focalizer himself or to the object of his gaze. The focalizer in the painting becomes the lens through which the observer can “read” the illustration. This reading can, I suggest, be mystical in nature which would be in keeping with the cultural context of Herat under Sultan Ḥusayn Bāyqarā.

Chapters 3 and 4 look at the didactic aspect of several scenes. In several illustrations the Sultan is depicted as the main protagonist who practices justice and helps his subjects, while in other paintings he is depicted as a mystic seeking to reveal the truth. In some of these illustrations, one of the Sultan’s sons, perhaps the crown prince, is illustrated as well as the Sultan. Where acts of justice are depicted, the son is seen beside his father; in the mystical illustrations, the son is separated from his father and relegated a lower spiritual status.

Beside the didactic scenes in the Or.6810 *Khamsa*, the painter also illustrates scenes in chapter 5 that emphasize the fleeting nature of the material world. Man should avoid false representation and seek the path to his true destiny, attainable only through divine love. Illustrations of the deaths of mystical lovers combine two aspects—earthly death and the path to salvation. This is not far removed from the moral aspect of the other scenes, as the Sultan who seeks the truth is aware of the transient nature of the material world and the need to escape its temptations.

The sixth chapter offers conclusions regarding the formal building of compositions and the creation of a pictorial language. The discussion in this chapter is largely based on conclusions that emerged after deciphering the narratives of the paintings studied. By this I mean the elements or tools used by painters of the Late Herat school to build the meaning of their compositions. This chapter is followed by a concluding section in which I attempt to bring together the connecting themes in this illustrated manuscript.

While I have arranged the scenes to support my argument, the scenes can of course be regrouped to reflect other lines of enquiry. For example, the two chapters discussing the ancestral line of Sultan Ḥusayn can be merged into one group: scenes depicting the Sultan alone and those where the Sultan and his son are together; or illustrations that depict the Sultan seeking the truth as distinct from those that also depict his acts of justice.

And finally a word about the texts used to support the arguments. Nizami’s text was the first source examined to unravel the illustrations’ meanings; later came the poems of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī, the influential poet of late fifteenth-century Herat. Other sources derived from various poems that were popular in Herat in that period.

Since the cultural life of late fifteenth-century Herat was so rich, the proposed reading of its pictorial language—admittedly only a section of it—is but a step in widening the crack in the shutters that might afford us a glimpse into what was once a vibrant civilization.

## **SAINTHOOD AND AUTHORITY IN EARLY ISLAM: AL-ḤAKĪM AL-TIRMIDHĪ'S THEORY OF WILĀYA AND THE REENVISIONING OF THE SUNNĪ CALIPHATE BY AIYUB PALMER [Studies on Sufism, Brill, Hardback: 9789004408302; E-Book: 9789004416550]**

In **SAINTHOOD AND AUTHORITY IN EARLY ISLAM** Aiyub Palmer recasts *wilāya* in terms of Islamic authority and traces its development in both political and religious spheres up through the 3rd and 4th Islamic centuries. This book pivots around the ideas of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, the first Muslim theologian and mystic to write on the topic of *wilāya*.

By looking at its structural roots in Arab and Islamic social organization, Aiyub Palmer has reframed the discussion about sainthood in early Islam to show how it relates more broadly to other forms of authority in Islam. This book not only looks anew at the influential ideas of al-Tirmidhī but also challenges current modes of thought around the nature of authority in Islamicate societies.

### Contents

Dedication

Acknowledgments

Abbreviations

System of Transliteration for Arabic Letters

Introduction

*Wilāya*/*Walā ya* and the Basis of Authority in Early Islam

The Historical and Social Context of Al-Tirmidhī's Life and Times

Wisdom Mediates the Terrestrial and Celestial

The Theological Significance of *Wilāya*

Al-Tirmidhī's Gnoseology of Sainthood

A *Ṣūfī* by Any Other Name: Al-Tirmidhī's Relationship to Islamic Mysticism

Conclusion

Bibliography

Index of Terms and Proper Names

Excerpt: Through this work I have sought to reimagine the way we think about *wilāya* in the early Islamic period, by bringing a new methodological approach, new textual sources to bear, as well as a close reading of al-Tirmidhī's major works. The results have provided significant explanatory potential for numerous social, political and religious movements in early Islam. I did not want to simply write a book about al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī and his ideas. That has already been done by previous authors. My purpose was to reframe the discourse around al-Tirmidhī and his ideas and provide a new and hopefully beneficial approach to the study of Islamic Mysticism that other scholars may be able to reproduce and explore in further detail. After several attempts to apply Weber's paradigm to early Islamic *wilāya*, it became clear that there was a lack of congruence between the theory and the subject matter. Early on, I had tried to apply Foucault's concept of the episteme, and that too produced mediocre results. It was not until I looked

for a structure within early Arab/Islamic social and political history that I began to notice the transactional and socially dynamic manner that authority conveyed within Islamicate society. This approach has the possibility of allowing us to rethink not only certain aspects of Islamic Mysticism but also the way Islamic history is understood generally. I have pointed out some of these insights throughout the book.

Instead of looking at al-Tirmidhī's gnoseology through the prism of sainthood, I looked at *wilāya* as it was playing out socially and politically in the two centuries prior to al-Tirmidhī. This required tracing the historical roots of *wilāya* as it grew out of the early Arab/Islamic conquests and the rule of the Rāshidūn caliphs up to and including the first couple of centuries of the 'Abbāsids. When looking across numerous Islamic movements during the first three centuries of Islam, it is clear that *wilāya* occupied a very different social-semantic universe than sainthood, while overlapping in only a few distinct areas. If *wilāya* was not the same as sainthood then, based on its various meanings and usages, it must be related to authority or some discourse around the negotiation of power. In fact, we find that *wilāya* speaks to a range of power relations in pre-Islamic and early Arab/Islamic society that coalesce around the solidarity group. It is the solidarity group that is primary in this model rather than the individual. We find social structures connected to the way solidarity groups form and interact at both the political and social levels. The city-based mercantile classes had developed strong ties of dependence with the nomadic Bedouin ethos that surrounded the urban oases. This *Weltanschauung* proved to imbue early Arab/Islamic social structures with durable patterns that gave precedence to transactional and diffuse types of authority that varied significantly from the more hierarchical agrarianate models often used in Islamic Studies.

This approach to early Islamic history helps us look at the development of Sufism in a different way. It brings into question Melchert's thesis that Sufism developed out of a transition from asceticism to mysticism in the 3rd/9th century. His thesis does not resolve a number of outstanding anomalies that have plagued the study of Islamic Mysticism for decades. For example, why are 'wearers of wool' always characterized differently in the literature than Ṣūfīs? The problem partly lies in the persistence of certain assumptions about Ṣūfīs, such as their being primarily mystics, and their vaulted mystical doctrines being the centerpiece of their efforts. Rather, Chapter 1 shows us that the Ṣūfīs were more concerned with correcting what they saw as negligence and abuse by the caliphal establishment. When the state persecuted them, the Ṣūfīs transformed from being a diffuse subversive movement to following a more stable contractual model founded on the doctrine of al-Junayd. One of the significant points about the Ṣūfīs is that, in doing so, they developed a solidarity group that could absorb other solidarity groups and thus become a type of meta-solidarity group. Al-Tirmidhī developed out of the same Baṣran-based milieu that gave rise to the Ṣūfiyya. Al-Tirmidhī focused on the *wilāya* model of the early *zuhhād* such as Ibrāhīm b. Adham and Fuḍayl b. 'Iyād, who were Traditionists representing a contractual authority structure outside of the nascent *madhāhib*. It is these two types of authority that eventually merge to then be reconstituted in Nīshāpūr in the 11th-century ce.

Chapter 2 explains how al-Tirmidhī thought about *wilāya* through the prism of clientage (*walā'*). Through a close reading of al-Tirmidhī's works, it is clear how he is not as interested in promoting *virtuosi* as he is concerned with working out the relationship of the '*ulamā'* to the common Muslims and the political rulers. He is focused on reforming the scholarly class and preserving its position of authority in a time of political instability and rapid social change. Clientage (*walā'*) could schematize both the path towards freedom (in a spiritual sense) and a new basis for social dependence and authority that prioritized Islamic norms rather than Arab descent. The beneficiaries of al-Tirmidhī's model are the '*ulamā'*, who become the class from

which the *awliyā'* arise. These are the *awliyā'* who are worthy to be followed; however, their precise characterization always remains amorphous.

In Chapter 3, we looked at al-Tirmidhī's notion of *ḥikma*. The debate has swung back and forth about whether or not al-Tirmidhī was influenced directly by Hellenistic thought. I position myself somewhere in between Radtke and those who say that al-Tirmidhī incorporated Greek learning directly in its Aristotelian and Neoplatonic forms. What is significant, however, about my presentation is that it shows how al-Tirmidhī attempts to encompass and synthesize a foreign knowledge-paradigm within his traditional Islamic scholarly framework. What is more important than the content of this imported knowledge is the way in which al-Tirmidhī interacts with that knowledge. *Ḥikma* and the purveyors of *ḥikma*, i.e. the *ḥukamā'*, are not adopted by the later Ṣūfī tradition as authority figures. This is not necessarily because they saw *ḥikma* as a foreign implant, but more probably because the authority of the *ḥukamā'* was ultimately subversive to the authority of the '*ulamā'*'.

Chapter 4 serves to demonstrate al-Tirmidhī's connection to the normative scholarly tradition as exemplified in the works of early Murjī'ī/Ḥanafī creedal texts. Al-Tirmidhī's discourse on the *awliyā'* was part of a much wider discourse among the '*ulamā'*' that sought to place the *awliyā'* as the true inheritors of the *anbiyā'*. By the end of the 3rd/9th century, the *awliyā'* figure prominently in these creedal texts, and it is assumed among large numbers of Muslims in the Eastern lands of Islamdom that the *awliyā'* not only exist, but that their miracles (*karamāt*) are recognized by the normative tradition. Again, this provides a correction to the view that al-Tirmidhī was an outlier or that his views were incompatible with the normative tradition. While al-Tirmidhī's notion of *ḥikma* was not adopted by the later Ṣūfī tradition, it does seem to have influenced the Māturīdī theologians of Transoxania as a theoretical basis for their theological discourse. In this sense, the theoretical approach we can call *ḥikma*-based was disassociated from its connection to the *ḥukamā'* and so also its potential to generate authority. However, *ḥikma* for the Māturīdīs seems to function in a similar way to Aristotelian philosophy for the Ash'arīs after al-Ghazālī.

In Chapter 5, we looked at how al-Tirmidhī develops a schematization of *wilāya* that reflects the primary binary structure of diffuse versus contractual modes of authority. He does this through a tripartite approach to authority types focusing on the '*ulamā'*', *ḥukamā'* and *awliyā'* (*khulafā'*). The '*ulamā'*' and the *awliyā'*' represent the two primary modes of both contractual and diffuse structures, while the *ḥukamā'*' represent a subversive authority that frames *wilāya*. Chapter 5 also addresses a number of aspects of al-Tirmidhī's concepts of *wilāya* and *ḥikma* that are important for his overall gnoseology. Examples of these are the light-based nature of al-Tirmidhī's notion of *wilāya* as well as the potential ramifications of *wilāya* and *ḥikma* for Islamicate social and political history. While *ḥikma* does not become important for Islamicate authority, it does become important as a conduit for foreign knowledge elements to enter into the Islamic scholarly discourse.

In Chapter 6, I complete the book by showing how the discourse on authority and al-Tirmidhī's notions of *wilāya* were important building blocks for the Great Mystical Synthesis of the 11th-century ce in Nīshāpūr. Again, I show how al-Tirmidhī was not necessarily the outlier that many characterize him to be, even for the discourse stream of Islamic Mysticism. One of the important lessons of this work is that the solidarity group should be understood as the primary basis of negotiating authority in Islamicate societies. Al-Tirmidhī's ideas and his contributions to Ṣūfī discourse are more important than the figure of al-Tirmidhī himself for Islamicate society. What is clear is that al-Tirmidhī was actively working through central issues at the center of Islamic social, political and religious thought. For that reason, we should not view al-

Tirmidhī as only an Islamic mystic but as one of the important early ideologues of Islamic social, religious and political thought. His approach to new knowledge paradigms is still very relevant today as we see Islamicate societies grappling with the challenges of modernity while attempting to ground their claims to authority through Islam. Al-Tirmidhī exemplifies the process of Islamic renewal and a path that leads forward in a time of political and social change. <>

## **THE QUR'ĀN AND THE BIBLE: TEXT AND COMMENTARY** by Gabriel Said Reynolds, Qur'ān translation by Ali Quli Qarai [Yale University Press, 9780300181326]

A groundbreaking comparative study that illuminates the connections between the Qur'ān and the Bible

While the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament are understood to be related texts, the sacred scripture of Islam, the third Abrahamic faith, has generally been considered separately. Noted religious scholar Gabriel Said Reynolds draws on centuries of Qur'ānic and Biblical studies to offer rigorous and revelatory commentary on how these holy books are intrinsically connected.

Reynolds demonstrates how Jewish and Christian characters, imagery, and literary devices feature prominently in the Qur'ān, including stories of angels bowing before Adam and of Jesus speaking as an infant. This important contribution to religious studies features a full translation of the Qur'ān along with excerpts from the Jewish and Christian texts. It offers a clear analysis of the debates within the communities of religious scholars concerning the relationship of these scriptures, providing a new lens through which to view the powerful links that bond these three major religions.

### CONTENTS

Acknowledgments

List of Abbreviations and Conventions xiii List of Principal Biblical and Post-Biblical Characters in the Qur'ān

Introduction

Qur'ān Texts and Commentary

al-Fātiḥa, The Opening

al-Baqara, The Heifer

Al `Imrān, The Family of `Imrān

al-Nisā', The Women

al-Mā'ida, The Table

al-An 'am, The Cattle

al-A `rāf, The Elevations

al-Anfāl, The Spoils

al-Tawba, Repentance

Yunus, Jonah

Hūd, Had

Yūsuf Joseph

al-Ra 'd, Thunder

Ibrāhīm, Abraham

al-Hijr, The Rock

al-Nahl, The Bees  
al-Isrā', The Night Journey  
al-Kahf The Cave  
Maryam, Mary  
Ta Hā, Ta Ha  
al-Anbiyā', The Prophets  
al-Hajj, The Pilgrimage  
al-Mu 'minūn, The Faithful  
al-Nūr, Light  
al-Furqān, The Criterion  
al-Shu `ara', Poets  
al-Naml, Ants  
al-Qasas, The Stories  
al- Ankabūt, The Spider  
al-Rūm, The Byzantines  
Luqmān, Luqman  
al-Sajda, The Prostration  
al-Ahzāb, The Confederates  
Saba', Sheba  
Fātir, The Originator  
Yā Sin, Ya. Sin  
al-Sāffāt, The Ranged Ones  
Sad, Sad  
al-Zumar, Throngs  
Ghāfir, The Forgiver  
Fussilat, Elaborated  
al-Shūrā, The Counsel  
al-Zukhruf Ornaments  
al-Dukhān, Smoke  
al-Jāthiya, Kneeling  
al-Ahqāf The Sand Hills  
Muhammad, Muhammad  
al-Fath, The Conquest  
al- Hujurāt, The Chambers  
Qāf Qāf  
al-Dhāriyāt, The Scatterers  
al-Tūr, The Mount  
al-Najm, The Star  
al-Qamar, The Moon  
al-Rahmān, The All-beneficent  
al-Wāqi `a, The Imminent  
al-Hadīd, Iron  
al-Mujādila, The Pleader  
al-Hashr, The Banishment  
al-Mumtahana, The Woman Tested  
al-Saff, Ranks  
al-Jumu `a, The Day of Congregation  
al-Munāfiqūn, The Hypocrites

al-Taghābun, Dispossession  
al-Talāq, Divorce  
al-Tahrim, The Forbidding  
al-Mulk, Sovereignty  
al-Qalam, The Pen  
al-Hāqqa, The Besieger  
al-Ma 'aril Lofty Stations  
Nūh, Noah  
al-Jinn, The Jinn  
al-Muzammil, Enwrapped  
al-Muddaththir, Shrouded  
al-Qiyāma, Resurrection  
al-Insān, The Person  
al-Mursalāt, The Emissaries  
al-Naba', The Tiding  
al-Nāzi `āt, The Wresters  
Abasa, He Frowned  
al-Takwīr, The Winding Up  
al-Infitār, The Rending  
al-Mutaffifin, The Defrauders  
al-Inshiqāq, The Splitting  
al-Burūj, The Constellations  
al-Tariq, The Nightly Visitor  
al-A la, The Most Exalted  
al-Ghāshiya, The Enveloper  
al-Fajr, The Dawn  
al-Balad, The Town  
al-Shams, The Sun  
al-Layl, The Night  
al-Duhā, Morning Brightness  
al-Sharh, Opening  
al-Tin, The Fig  
al- Alaq, The Clinging Mass  
al-Qadr, The Ordainment  
al-Bayyina, The Proof  
al-Zalzala, The Quake  
al- `Ādiyāt, The Chargers  
al-Qāri 'a, The Catastrophe  
al-Takāthur, Rivalry  
al- `As , Time  
al-Humaza, The Scandal-monger  
al-Fil, The Elephant  
al-Quraysh, Quraysh  
al-Ma'un, Aid  
al-Kawthar, Abundance  
al-Kāfirūn, The Faithless  
al-Nasr, Help  
al-Mas ad, Palm Fiber

al-Ikhlās, Purity  
 al-Falaq, Daybreak  
 al-Nās, Humans  
 A Note on Sources  
 Selected Bibliography  
 Index to the Qur'ān  
 Index to Citations of Biblical Verses

Excerpt: Today Christians know the Bible as a work in two parts, the Old and New Testaments, and they may find it obvious that both belong in their scripture. For some in the early church, however, the inclusion of the Old Testament was not obvious. Marcion (d. ca. AD 160) made the case that the God of the Old Testament was a demiurge, a tribal deity not to be identified with the heavenly father of the New Testament. Accordingly, he argued that only the New Testament (and in fact, not all of the New Testament) should be considered scripture. The majority opinion of the early church, however, was different, namely that the Hebrew Scriptures are indeed the word of God. They were ultimately included in the Christian Bible.

Early Islam was faced with a similar choice in regard to the Jewish and Christian Bible. Muslims, in theory, could have considered the Bible authoritative scripture. There are some signs that the author of the Qur'ān attributed such authority to the Bible. In one place the divine voice of the Qur'ān commands its Prophet to confer with those "who read the Book" in times of doubt (Q 10:94).<sup>1</sup> In another place this voice commands that the "People of the Gospel" judge according to what God has revealed in it (Q 5:47). However, in other passages (e.g., Q 2:42, 59, 79; 3:71, 187; 4:46; 5:13; 7:162), the Qur'ān suggests that the Jews (especially) and the Christians (also) have misread scripture, have hidden passages, or have pretended that things which they themselves have fabricated are scripture.<sup>2</sup> In part inspired by such passages, the early Islamic community decided that the Bible was not authentic but rather falsified (muharraf) scripture. That community could have, conceivably, made a different decision, recognizing the authority of one kind or another of the Bible as scripture, as the early Christians did with the Hebrew Bible (and as Mormons, or Latter-Day Saints, would later do with the Bible, or as Baha'is would do with the Bible and the Qur'ān).

The decision to relegate the Bible to a status of inauthenticity had significant implications for the ways in which traditional Muslims and academic scholars alike would approach the Qur'ān. It is true that Muslim commentators not infrequently turn to Biblical traditions, and occasionally the Bible itself,<sup>3</sup> in their efforts to understand the Qur'ān. Most Muslim commentators, however, did not have a copy of the Bible open on the desk next to them as they studied the Qur'ān. The same could be said for most Western academic scholars. Although things have begun to change, for much of the second half of the twentieth century, students pursuing Qur'ānic studies were trained in Islamic languages and literature but not in the Bible and Biblical literature. Their formation was comparable to that of a student of the New Testament who is never introduced to the languages, literature, and culture of second temple Judaism and the Mediterranean Roman world.

In the present work Bible and Qur'ān are brought together. This work is meant to make a contribution to our understanding of the Qur'ān by bringing to light its conversation with Biblical literature. The terms "conversation" and "Biblical literature" are key to understanding the methodology behind this work. By "conversation" I mean the way that the Qur'ān alludes to, and develops, earlier traditions. By "Biblical literature" I mean not simply the canonical Bible but also those post-Biblical (but pre-Qur'ānic) Jewish and Christian writings which became part of the repertoire of sacred history among Jews and Christians and, eventually, for the author of the Qur'ān.

My conviction, a conviction which has only increased during my work on this book, is that the Qur'ān is an original work in literary and religious terms, but also a work which depends heavily on its audience's knowledge of the Bible and the traditions which developed out of the Bible. The present work accordingly seeks to promote an appreciation for the meaning of the Qur'ān by providing both relevant Biblical traditions and some commentary on the nature of the Qur'ān's references to them.

According to Faruq Sherif, approximately one-fourth of the Qur'ān's verses are concerned with narratives of prophets or other figures from Jewish and Christian tradition.<sup>1</sup> Yet the Qur'ān's relationship to Biblical material goes well beyond narrative.<sup>2</sup> Its vision of creation and eschatology (the beginning and end of things), its cosmology, its use of parables, and its discussion of legal matters are all intimately connected to Biblical tradition. Even the Qur'ān's concept of Muhammad's prophethood (i.e., the idea that God would send an angel to one man and task him with communicating the angel's messages to his people) is Biblical.

Readers of the work will also notice that the Qur'ān tends not to quote the Bible verbatim. Indeed, it may be argued that the Qur'ān contains no direct citations of the Bible whatsoever. The closest thing to a citation in the Qur'ān is perhaps 21:105 ("We wrote in the Psalms, after the Remembrance: 'My righteous servants shall inherit the earth'"), but in fact this verse merely resembles certain elements of Psalm 37.9 The Qur'ān (7:40) refers to the Biblical maxim of the "eye of the needle," but it does so in a unique manner. Similar observations might be made about the way the Qur'ān refers to a "mustard seed" (Q 21:47; 31:16), "uncircumcised hearts" (Q 2:88; 4:155), or the "twinkling of an eye" (16:77). In each case a Biblical turn of phrase is cited, but to a different effect. Perhaps the closest thing to a quotation in the Qur'ān is 5:32 ("That is why We decreed for the Children of Israel that whoever kills a soul ..."), but then this is a quotation of the Jewish text known as the Mishnah, and not of the Bible." All of this suggests that the Qur'ān emerged in a context where Biblical expressions permeated the oral culture; they were "in the air."

In other words, the absence of direct quotations of Jewish and Christian texts in the Qur'ān reflects the path these texts took to reach the Qur'ān's author. As Sidney Griffith has argued, neither the Bible nor other Jewish and Christian texts were available in Arabic at the time of the Qur'ān's origins. The author of the Qur'ān would have heard only descriptions or paraphrases of such texts rendered into Arabic orally, most likely from some form of the Semitic language known as Aramaic. Yet the Qur'ān's author also played an active role in developing Biblical material. The Qur'ān has not simply borrowed material from Jews or Christians. Instead, it has consciously reshaped Biblical material to advance its own religious claims.

My argument that the Qur'ān is so closely, or organically, related to the Bible represents a departure from traditional ideas that the background of the Qur'ān is largely pagan (and partially Jewish). In terms of method, however, the present work is rather unoriginal. As mentioned earlier, classical Muslim exegetes, beginning already with the earliest commentators, such as Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767), often provide Biblical traditions in their attempts to render the Qur'ānic text more intelligible. Eventually such traditions would come to be known as *Isrā'īliyyāt* and would be maligned by some tradition-minded scholars as unreliable (because they did not come through trusted chains of traditions leading to the Prophet or his companions).<sup>16</sup> By then, however, many of the hadith which such tradition-minded scholars would cite instead to explain Qur'ānic material were themselves infused with material from the Bible or post-Biblical Jewish and Christian literature.

Much recent scholarship on the Qur'ān, such as the recently published HarperCollins Study Qur'ān (edited by S. H. Nasr and others), sets the Qur'ān's relationship with the Bible aside. The Study Qur'ān, which is the fruit of extensive research and collaboration, provides readers with summaries of Islamic commentaries and various essays. It does not provide an analysis of the Qur'ān's relationship to Biblical literature."

The present work, by contrast, focuses less on medieval commentaries and more on the religious traditions of the Qur'ān's own context, the period known as Late Antiquity. Thus, one might say that this volume is meant to be at once a reference work and an argument about the importance of a "contextual" reading of the Qur'ān.

## Closing Reflection

I consider the authorship of the Qur'ān to be an open question. From a traditional Islamic religious perspective the author of the Qur'ān is simply God (although we should not underestimate the diversity of Muslim approaches, both classical and contemporary, to the process of the revelation of the Qur'ān). From a traditional Orientalist perspective the author of the Qur'ān is simply Muhammad, and indeed most early Orientalists explain particular turns of phrase in the Qur'ān in light of the ups and downs of his prophetic career that they read about in medieval biographies. This position is an adapted form of the traditional doctrine of "serial" revelation, to use an expression of John Wansbrough. Beginning with Wansbrough, however, some scholars began to see that the idea of serial revelation is a way of explaining how the Qur'ān could have one author despite the diversity of material therein.

Indeed, it seems to me that there is simply no compelling academic reason (theological reasons are of course another story) to refuse categorically the possibility that the Qur'ān has multiple authors and/or editors. Indeed, this possibility is one way of explaining why the Qur'ān includes material as diverse as Qur'ān 5 (al-Mā'ida), Qur'ān 53 (al-Najm), Qur'ān 55 (al-Rahmān). In light of this possibility readers will find me referring in the present work neither to what God says nor to what Muhammad says but simply to what the "Qur'ān" says. I grant that this is a way of avoiding the question of authorship, but given the present uncertain state of research I feel that there is no better solution.

Finally I would add that, despite all of the nontraditional ideas presented in this brief introduction, my hope is that the present work will be useful (and, perhaps, interesting) to a wide range of readers, including pious Muslims. As Fred Donner has explained in a lucid reflection, what is at stake in academic research on the Qur'ān is not whether or not the Qur'ān is revealed—a question which surpasses the domain of the historian—but instead how it can be best understood.

Ultimately, if the present book makes any argument, it is that the Qur'ān itself, by referring regularly to Jewish and Christian traditions, demands that its audience know those traditions. The Qur'ān, in other words, has an intimate relationship with the Bible. We should thus learn to appreciate the Qur'ān not only as the scripture of Islam but also as a central work in the history of Biblical literature.

## Principal Biblical and Post-Biblical Characters in the Qur'ān

- Aaron—Brother of Moses, called on by God to help Moses in his prophetic mission and his confrontation with Pharaoh.
- Abraham—Father of Isaac and Ishmael, monotheist by natural observation. Confronts his idolatrous people and is persecuted, builds a house of God with Ishmael.

- Adam—First human, described as a "vicegerent" (khalīfa). Disobeys God by eating from, or approaching, the forbidden tree in paradise.
- Alexander the Great—Named "the possessor of two horns" (Dhū l-Qarnayn) in the Qur'ān. Travels to the ends of the earth.
- David—Described like Adam as a "vicegerent" (khalīfa), noted in the Qur'ān for his praise of God and knowledge. Kills Goliath.
- Elijah—Briefly mentioned in the Qur'ān for his rejection of the worship of Baal.
- Haman—Appears as an assistant to Pharaoh in Egypt, commanded to build a tower to heaven.
- Iblis—The devil as cosmic adversary of God. The Qur'ān names the devil instead Satan when he appears as the tempter of humans.
- Isaac—Son of Abraham whose miraculous birth is announced on several occasions. Perhaps the son of Abraham who was to be sacrificed before he is redeemed.
- Ishmael—Builds a house of God with his father Abraham. Described as "true to his promise."
- Jacob—Father of Joseph (and other sons) who has prophetic knowledge of Joseph's fate.
- Jesus—Son of Mary and named al-masīh ("Christ"). Distinguished by his miraculous birth, the miracles which he accomplishes (even in childhood), and his ascension to heaven after his life.
- Job—Mentioned briefly in the Qur'ān for his prayer. Commanded to reprimand his wife.
- John—Son of Zechariah, born in his parents' old age. Given judgment while still a child, said to confirm the word of God.
- Jonah—A prophet who is said to have "gone off angry" and ends up in the belly of a fish, for which reason he is named "man of the fish" (dhū l-nūn)
- Joseph—Son of Jacob who is enslaved and taken to Egypt where he is first imprisoned. Later becomes a powerful figure and receives his family. Lot—Revered as a prophet in the Qur'ān and closely connected to Abraham.
- Condemns his people for their deviant ways.
- Mary—Mother of Jesus, praised in the Qur'ān for her purity and faithfulness.
- Moses—Prophet who confronts Pharaoh, speaks directly with God, and receives a divine revelation (al-tawrāt).
- Pharaoh/Firawn—Name (not title) of the Egyptian ruler in the time of Moses who considers himself a god but meets his demise.
- Queen of Sheba—A pagan queen who visits Solomon and comes to believe in God.
- Sarah—Named "wife of Abraham" in the Qur'ān, remembered for her incredulous reaction to the annunciation of a son (Isaac) in her old age.
- Saul—Referred to as Tālūt, a king before David who leads Israel to war.
- Solomon—Remembered for his knowledge and his miraculous authority over natural and supernatural beings, converts the Queen of Sheba to belief in God.
- Sons of Adam—While their names are not given the Qur'ān alludes to Cain's killing of Abel.
- Zechariah—Father of John, receives an angelic annunciation of his son's birth after imploring God.

&lt;&gt;

## **THE QURANIC JESUS: A NEW INTERPRETATION BY CARLOS A. SEGOVIA [JUDAISM, Christianity, and Islam: Tension, Transmission, Transformation, de Gruyter, 9783110597646]**

Is it possible to rethink the multilayered and polyvalent Christology of the Qur'ān against the intersecting of competing peripheral Christianities, anti-Jewish Christian polemics, and the making of a new Arab state in the 7th-century Near East? To what extent may this help us to decipher, moreover, the intricate redactional process of the quranic corpus? And can we unearth from any conclusions as to the tension between a messianic-oriented and a prophetic-guided religious thought buried in the document? By analysing, first, the typology and plausible date of the Jesus texts contained in the Qur'ān (which implies moving far beyond both the habitual chronology of the Qur'ān and the common thematic division of the passages in question) and by examining, in the second place, the Qur'ān's earliest Christology *vis-à-vis* its later (and indeed much better known) Muhamadan kerygma, the present study answers these crucial questions and, thereby, sheds new light on the Qur'ān's original sectarian milieu and pre-canonical development.

Contents

Preface

Abbreviations

1 Introduction: Traditional Views and New Insights on the Quranic Jesus

Descriptive vs. Anti-Christian Theological Texts?

The Study of the Quranic Jesus between the 1830s and Now

From Carl Friedrich Gerockto Denise Masson's Ecumenical Reading of the Qur'ān

Robert Charles Zaehner and the "Nestorian" Matrix of the Qur'ān's Christology

Henri Michaud and the Hypothesis of a Jewish-Christian Influence on the Qur'ān

Geoffrey Parrinder's Theological Approach to the Quranic Jesus

From Ali Merad to Heikki Räisänen's Historical Interpretation

Giuseppe Rizzardi, Claus Schedl, and Günther Risse

Neat Robinson's Comparative Study on Christ in Islam and Christianity

Addendum. Investigations on the Emergence of Islam and 7th-Century Near-East Christianity

Purpose and Argument of this Book, with a Note on the Notion of "Symptomatic Reading"

Three Preliminary Notions: Polyphony, Periphery, Hypertextuality

Introducing the Argument of the Book and Its Parts

2 Jesus in the Quranic Corpus: Texts and Contexts

Distribution of the Relevant Passages

The Texts, with a Brief Commentary

Sūrat al-Saqara (Q 2, "The Cow")

No. 1: Q 2:87

No. 2: Q 2:136

No. 3: Q 2:253

Sūrat Al 'Imrān (Q 3, "The House of 'Imrān")

No. 4: Q 3:33-63

No. 5: Q 3:84

Sūrat al-Nisā' (Q 4, "Women")

No. 6: Q 4:155-9

No. 7: Q 4:163

No. 8: Q 4:171-2

Sūrat al-Mā'ida (Q 5, "The Table")

Q5:17

Q 5:46

Q 5:72-5

Q5:78

Q 5:110-18

Sūrat al-An`ām (Q 6, "Livestock")

No. 14: Q 6:84-7

Sūrat al-Tawba (Q 9, "Repentance")

Q 9:30-1

Sūrat Maryam (Q 19, "Mary")

Q 19:2-36

Sūrat al-Anbiyya' (Q 21, "The Prophets")

No. 17: Q 21:91

Sūrat al-Mu'minūn (Q 23, "The Believers")

No. 18: Q 23:50

Sūratal-Ahzāb (Q 33, "The Factions")

No. 19: Q 33:7-8

Surat al-Sūrā (Q 42, "Consultation")

No. 20: Q 42:13

Sūratal-Zuhruf (Q 43, "Ornaments")

No. 21: Q 43:57-64

Súrat al-Hadīd (Q 57, "Iron")

No. 22: Q 57:25-7

Sūrat al-Şaff (Q 61, "The Lines")

No. 23: Q 61:6

No. 24: Q 61:14

Sara al-Tahrim (Q 66, "The Forbidding")

No. 25: Q 66:12

3 Reassessing the Typology, Date, and Ideology of the Jesus Passages — and Their Setting  
Towards a New Classification, Formal and Thematic

Formal Division

Thematic Division

Deciphering the Date of the Jesus Passages

Overlooked Texts in Defence of Jesus (and Mary) against the Jews

The Vindication of the Quranic Prophet in Q 3:84

The Parallel Vindication of the Jesus in Q 2:136

Anti-Jewish Rhetoric, Anti-Christian Texts, and the Date of the Jesus Passages

Their Setting and the Chronology of the Corpus

Ideological Stages, Redactional Layers, and Historical Periods

4 The P1 Jesus Passages as a Response to mid-7th-century Jewish Writings like

SēferZarubbābel and Sēfer Tōladōt

The P2 Jesus Passages and the Making of a New Religious Identity

Transition

Moving Backwards: A Peripheral South-Arabian Christology?

The Withdrawal from Byzantium's Political and Religious Control in 6th-Century Yemen — and the Arabian Peninsula

The Making of a Christian Yemen in the 6th Century

Reflections on Abraha's Enigmatic Christology

Peripheral Christianity and Formative Islam

East Syria and Iraq, or Christianity beyond the Limes of the Byzantine Empire

Monks, Bishops, and the Plausible Anti-Chalcedonian Setting of Q 9:31, 34

Misunderstood Terms and Redactional Layers in Q 9:30

Pro-Chalcedonian Bishops and Anti-Chalcedonian Monks?

The Philological Crux in v. 9:31a — and v. 9:30

Five Hypotheses in Search of Q9:31's Vorlage

5 From the Qur'ān's Early Christology to the Elaboration of the Muhamadan Kerygma

A Sketch of the Early Qur'ān Christology (Q 75-107)

Introducing a Systematically Overlooked but Crucial Topic

A Heavenly Messenger that Speaks Directly to Mankind and Refers to God as "He" — but Who Is One with God

Excursus 1: Traces of an Angelomorphic Christology?

Introducing the Human alongside the Divine (Q 17, 68, 73-4, 81, 87, 88)

The Need of a Human Messenger — Almost Absent from the Earliest Quranic Layers

The Exaltation of the Human Messenger

Substituting the Heavenly Messenger by a Human Messenger: The Beginnings of the Muhamadan Kerygma (Q 53, 55, 69)

A Dual Farewell to the Heavenly Messenger

Re-imagining Jesus as a New John the Baptist

Excursus 2: Contesting the Exclusiveness of the Muhamadan Kerygma, or Reimagining Proto-Shite Christology vis-à-vis the Making of a Tribal- and Supra-Tribal Religion

Afterword

Bibliography

Index of Ancient Sources

Index of Ancient and Modern Authors

Excerpt: While clearly affirming that God has no partner, and moreover that he is childless,<sup>1</sup> the quranic authors repeatedly encourage their audience to behave like Jesus's disciples, defend Jesus against the Jews, declare him to be the Messiah and the Word of God as well as a spirit from him (a series of titles they never apply to other prophets), make systematic use of a number of crucial Christian rhetorical moves, and quote more or less verbatim the New Testament Apocrypha and the writings of several late-antique Christian authors. Furthermore, they seem to be engaged in intra-Christian controversies just as much as they seem to partake in anti-Christian polemics. Conversely, the apparently pro-Jewish passages that one finds in the Qur'ān often prove tricky, as they are usually placed within, or next to, more or less violent anti-Jewish pericopes that bear the marks of Christian rhetoric despite a few occasional anti-Christian interpolations. And to further complicate the matter, the earliest quranic layers seem to develop a high-yet non-incarnationist Christology of which, interestingly enough, Jesus's name is totally missing.

What, then, can we make out of this puzzle? To what extent may the Qur'ān's highly complex Christology help to decipher not only the intent of various quranic authors — which may well be very different from what has been hitherto taken for granted — but also the likewise complex redactional process characteristic of the document itself? Is it, moreover, possible to inscribe the often — indeed too-often — oversimplified Christology of the Qur'ān within the peripheral religious culture of the 6th-to-7th-century Near East? Is it possible, also, to unearth from it something about the tension carefully — or perhaps not so carefully — buried in the document between a messianic-oriented- and a prophetic-guided religious thought, and to root therein the earliest "Islamic" schism — if speaking of Islam before 'Abd al-Malik's reign in the late 7th century makes any sense, that is? By analysing, first, the typology and the plausible date of the Jesus-texts contained in the Qur'ān (which implies moving far beyond any purely thematic

division of the passages in question), and by examining, in the second place, the Qur'ān's earliest Christology vis-à-vis its later (and indeed much better known) Muhamadan kerygma, the present study tries to give response to these crucial questions. <>

## **APPROACHES TO THE QUR'ĀN IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA** edited by Zulfikar Hirji [Qur'anic Studies Series, Oxford University Press, 9780198840770]

Covering a period from the eighteenth century to the early twenty-first century, this multidisciplinary volume examines Muslim engagements with the Qur'an in a variety of geographical locations in sub-Saharan Africa including Burkina Faso, Kenya, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Tanzania. The volume's twelve case studies use different frameworks and methodological approaches from the academic disciplines of philology, historiography, anthropology, and art history. These studies explore a variety of media and modalities that Muslims in sub-Saharan Africa, as elsewhere, use in their engagements with the Qur'an. These include: manuscripts; commentaries; translations; recitations and invocations; music and poetry; magical squares and symbolic repertoire; medicinal and curative acts; textiles, ink, paper, and wooden boards; spaces of education, healing and prayer, as well as spaces of dreams and spirit worlds. As such, the case studies move well beyond the materiality of the Qur'an as a physical book to explore the ways in which the Qur'an is understood, felt and imagined, as well as the contestations and debates that arise from these diverse engagements.

**APPROACHES TO THE QUR'ĀN IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA** opens up new discourses about Islam and Muslims in sub-Saharan Africa through the examination of how Muslims in this geographical and socio-cultural context engage with the Qur'an, and about the Qur'an through an examination of how Muslims in sub-Saharan Africa engage with it. Thus, in seeking to understand the plurality of engagements that Muslims from diverse communities of interpretation and from different parts of sub-Saharan Africa have had with Qur'an, this innovative collection adds to the scholarship on the Qur'an as well as the scholarship on Islam and Muslims in Africa.

### Contents

List of Illustrations

Notes on Contributors

Note on Transliteration, Conventions and Abbreviations

Acknowledgements

1 Introduction: Approaching the Qur'ān in Sub-Saharan Africa by Zulfikar Hirji

2 Tafsir Sources in Four Annotated Qur'ānic Manuscripts from Early Borno by Dmitry Bondarev

3 Qur'ānic Exegesis in Manding: The Example of a Bamana Oral Commentary on Sūrat al-Rahman by Tal Tamari

4 Polemics and Language in Swahili Translations of the Qur'ān: Mubarak Ahmad (d. 2001), Abdullah Saleh al-Farsy (d. 1982) and Ali Muhsin al-Barwani (d. 2006) by Farouk Topan

5 'A Confirmation of What Went Before It': Historicising the Shi'i Swahili Qur'ān Translation by Ali Jumaa Mayunga by Gerard C. van de Bruinhorst

6 A Pious Poetics of Place: Islam and the Interpellation of (Im)moral Subjects in Malian Popular Music by Ryan Thomas Skinner

- 7 And God Will Protect Thee From Mankind (Q. 5:67): A Talismanic Shirt from West Africa by Ruba Kana an
- 8 Prayer, Piety and Pleasure: Contested Models of Islamic Worship in Niger by Adeline Masquelier
- 9 By Way of the Qur'ān: Appeasing Spirits, Easing Emotions and Everyday Matters in Zanzibar by Kjersti Larsen
- 10 The Woman Who Did Not Become Possessed: The Soul, Spirits and Ancestors in Tuareg Cultural Interpretations and Uses of Islam and the Qur'ān by Susan J. Rasmussen
- 11 Women Who Are Men: Shaykha Maryam Niasse and the Qur'ān in Dakar by Joseph Hill
- 12 Fi Lawhin Mahfūz: Towards a Phenomenological Analysis of the Qur'ānic Tablet by Andrea Brigaglia
- 13 The Siyu Qur'āns: Three Illuminated Qur'ān Manuscripts from Coastal East Africa by Zulfikar Hirji
- Bibliography
- Index of Qur'ānic Citations
- General Index

## Approaches to the Qur'ān In Sub-Saharan Africa

This work aims to open up new discourses about Islam in sub-Saharan Africa through the examination of how Muslims in this geographical and socio-cultural context have engaged with the Qur'ān. Covering a period from the twelfth/eighteenth century to the early twenty-first century, this multidisciplinary volume examines a variety of geographical locations in sub-Saharan Africa including Burkina Faso, Kenya, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Tanzania.

The book's twelve case studies use different frameworks and methodological approaches from the academic disciplines of anthropology, art history, historiography and philology. They explore a variety of media and modalities that Muslims in sub-Saharan Africa, as elsewhere, use in their engagements with the Qur'ān. This volume moves well beyond the materiality of the Qur'ān as a physical book to explore the ways in which it is understood, felt and imagined, and to examine the contestations and debates that arise from these diverse engagements. The volume covers textual culture (manuscripts, commentaries and translations); aural and oral culture (recitations and invocations, music and poetry); the lived experience (magic squares and symbolic repertoire, medicinal and curative acts, healing and prayer, dreams and spirit worlds); material culture (textiles, ink, paper, and wooden boards); and education.

In seeking to understand the plurality of engagements that Muslims from diverse communities of interpretation and from different parts of sub-Saharan Africa have had with Qur'ān, this volume adds to the scholarship on the Qur'ān as well as the scholarship on Islam and Muslims in Africa.

## Gathering the Texts: A Summary of the Case Studies

Four broadly defined and overlapping themes emerge from the volume's case studies: 1) interpretation; 2) embodiment; 3) gendered knowledge; and 4) transmission. The first of these, 'interpretation', concerns the formal and informal processes that Muslims use to make God's Word understood. The contributions of Dmitry Bondarev (chapter 2) and Tal Tamari (chapter 3) provide examples of the exegetical production of tafsir (synchronous, often interlinear commentary on the Qur'ānic Arabic text) in historical and contemporary contexts. Bondarev's study compares the variety of Arabic tafsirs inscribed on four Qur'ān manuscripts dating from the eleventh/seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, from the Borno Empire in

northeast Nigeria. Bondarev shows that Borno's scholars turned to multiple classical Arabic tafsirs to help them elucidate the meaning of the Qur'ān. Among these commentaries were the Sunni Tafsir al-Jalālayn, composed by the Cairo-based scholar Jalāl al-Din al Mahallī (d. 864/1459) and his student Jalāl al-Din al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), as well as some lesser-known tafsirs from the scholarly Sufi tradition, including *Ilaqa'īq al-tafsir*, the commentary of the Nishapuri exegete Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami (d. 412/1021). This rich and diverse Arabic-language material was not only copied into each of the Borno Qur'ān manuscripts but it coexisted with interlinear annotations and commentaries in Old Kanembu, a Nilo-Saharan language that developed in the area of Lake Chad. Hence, such manuscripts may indicate the dexterous polyglot capacities of the scribes that lived and worked in this region in the premodern period or suggest different historical phases of their local exegetical tradition. Whichever the case may be, it definitely reflects a keen awareness of, and access to, the exegetical traditions in the broader Muslim world. It also indicates that Borno scholars produced their own original commentaries in the vernacular of their region. As such, through Bondarev's forensic lexicography, we see the fingerprints of an interpretative community of scribes and scholars who, through their multilingual interplay of commentary, translation, annotation and citation, gathered around the Qur'ān to make meaning out of God's Word.

The metaphor of gathering around the Qur'ānic text takes on a real-time spoken dimension in Tamari's study of a 1992 audio recording of an orally delivered tafsir of Sūrat al-Rahman (Q. 55) by a Manding-speaking scholar from the Segou region of central Mali. In this case, the scholar, who is of prominent lineage and well-versed in classical Arabic tafsir traditions, attempts to comment on the sura's meaning for an audience of his students through what Tamari calls 'translational reading'. This process involves paraphrasing and translating the Qur'ānic Arabic text into Manding, a Niger-Congo language spoken throughout southern Mali and adjacent countries, as well as using other lexical and inter-linguistic strategies including words from a specialised Arabic-Manding lexicon called *Bamana*, and loanwords from Arabic and French. The scholar also uses affective modes of performance-style interlocution, such as repetition and onomatopoeia, which indicate the embodied nature of the translational process in which the meaning of the words is given physical form through gesticulation and vocal stresses. The scholar is thus an earnest religious bricoleur who draws from and mingles a range of languages and lexical resources to make abstract Qur'ānic ideas, such as the unity of God (*tawhid*), concrete and intelligible to non-Arabic speakers. In so doing, the scholar casts his own tafsir into the discursive arena and adds to Borno's discursive tradition. Tamari notes that while oral tafsir sessions are recalled to have taken place in the region since before the colonial period, in modern times this tradition competes with printed copies of tafsirs circulating in the market, including ones in *Bamana* and other vernaculars. However, whereas the printed tafsirs preserve the ubiquitous physical separation between the Qur'ānic text and vernacular commentary, the oral tafsir has the advantage of retaining a more fluid intertextuality which may account for its continued appeal in teaching-learning contexts.

The contributions by Farouk Topan (chapter 4), Gerard van de Bruinhorst (chapter 5) and Adeline Masquelier (chapter 8) concern acts of Qur'ānic translation and interpretation in the context of intra-Muslim contestations. Topan's study focuses on Swahili language translations of the Qur'ān produced in East Africa by Mubarak Ahmad (d. 2001), Abdullah Saleh al-Farsy (d. 1982) and Ali Muhsin al-Barwani (d. 2006) during the twentieth century and shows the extent to which each of the three translations reflects the 'history, culture, ethnicity, the aspirations of the translator and of his community', among other aspects of the translators' context. A shared characteristic of these three translations is that each of their authors seeks to present their translation as authoritative and appeal to local Swahili-speaking audiences by contesting translation(s) that preceded it, as a whole or in part. As such, Topan's cases make plain that translating the

Qur'ān is not a prosaic exercise, but a creative endeavour which can be historicised and through which we can witness long-standing and emerging intra-communal contestations, among other debates.

Bruinhorst's study examines a recent (2003) electronically published interlinear Swahili Qur'ān translation and tafsir by Ali Jumaa Mayunga (b. 1947), a Tanzanian Muslim convert to Twelver Shi'ism, and its reception. Here, the local scholar uses Qur'ānic commentary to present his own conversion journey. He also draws comparisons between Islamic history and contemporary Tanzanian politics. Bruinhorst notes a particularly charged example of the scholar's comparison between the oppression of the Shi'a under Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān (d. 60/680), the Umayyad governor of Syria, and the anti-Muslim policies of Julius Nyerere (d. 1999), the former president of Tanzania. This exegetical strategy of blending politics with religion, according to Bruinhorst, was highly contested by the scholar's local audience. In their view, owing to the region's history of contested Swahili Qur'ān translations, it was preferable for translations to be free of 'explanatory footnotes and introductions' so as to mirror the ahistorical canonical feel of the Qur'ān in its original Qur'ānic Arabic. In response, the Shi'i scholar defends his decision by drawing on a sermon of Ayatollah Khomeini (d. 1989), the former supreme leader of Iran. While both Qur'ān and history form part of a single seamless discourse, the opposition to this work and contemporary trends in East Africa favours an ahistorical approach to Qur'ān translations that strips the fingerprint of the scholar from the translation.

Interpretations of the Qur'ān are also the subject of Masquelier's study of Islamic prayer practices amongst Hausa-speaking communities in Niger's southern town of Dogondoutchi in the late 1990s. In this case, anti-Sufi Izala reformists sought to correct the obligatory prayer (Hausa, *salla*) practices of Sufi-oriented traditionalist Muslims in Dogondoutchi and eradicate their forms of Islamic expression, including meditative prayer (Hausa, *zikri*), devotional singing (Hausa, *ishiriniyya*) and recitations of the opening chapter of the Qur'ān (Hausa, *salat al-fatih*). In charting the discourse between the two sides and their leaders, Masquelier provides insight into the multiple ways that authoritative knowledge of the Qur'ān and the ability to accurately read the text was used by both sides to prove their claims and the superiority of their understanding of the revelation. Unlike the Izala, who focus primarily on exposition of the Qur'ānic text and following a very strict bodily regime of prayer postures, the traditionalist Muslims added other more embodied and sensory forms to their repertoire of religious knowing, including visualising the text and repetitious or melodious chanting of Islamic prayer such as *salat al-fatih*. From their perspective, such practices provided 'bliss' and 'pleasure' that encouraged the growth of an 'inner spirituality'. It is important to recall that Masquelier notes that such forms of Islam do not negate the Qur'ānic text, which all parties in the debates agreed was the foundation of Islam; rather, the aim of Dogondoutchi's traditionalists is to get at the Qur'ān's essence.

Ryan Skinner's study (chapter 6) of the contemporary music scene in Mali's capital Bamako evidences similar tensions between Qur'ānic embodiment as a way of Islamic knowing and a more textual approach to God's Word. Skinner examines the manner in which Malian popular musicians interpolate Qur'ānic content, phrases, formulae and selected words into the lyrics of their songs to 'interpellate' (i.e. bring into being) an 'Islamic voice' and produce moral subjects. Such processes are what Skinner calls 'a poetics of recognition' through which local participants in the music, both performers and audiences, co-construct a moral space of interaction. While not the kind of oral tafsir space discussed by Tamari, the musical performances that Skinner describes also exhibit codeswitching between Arabic and Bamana, and repeatedly interpolated Qur'ānic content. As Skinner notes, in Malian contexts the Qur'ānic content in the music serves to reaffirm identity and belonging and mark particular ways of being Muslim, but when the

music with its Qur'ānic content moves into the global arena, it can suffer from 'misrecognition' and be contested and regarded as 'unorthodox' or against Islam. Skinner's study provides several illustrations of the responses of Mali's musicians to these claims, including Toumani Diabaté (b. 1965), who defend their use of the 'poetic voice of Islam' and 'Qur'ānic interpolation'.

Ruba Kana'an (chapter 7) examines a late-twentieth century talismanic shirt from Burkina Faso which is heavily inscribed with Qur'ānic content, including selected Qur'ānic verses (āyas), the ninety-nine names of God (al-asma' al-husnā), the names of prophets and other Islamic formulae. Kana'an argues that the shirt, like its many other counterparts in West Africa and other parts of the Islamic world, including Sultanate and Mughal India, Ottoman Turkey and Safavid Iran, embodies the Qur'ān as one iteration of the Islamic tradition of 'talismanic' shirt-making. Muslims in many places used such inscribed shirts to protect the wearer from harm. Such garments were part of a long-standing and widely spread Islamic apotropaic tradition of bodily care and healing through the invocation, ingestion and application of Qur'ānic material. Kana'an also discusses the way in which Western scholars of Islam, particularly art historians, have often over-determined the 'Africanness' and 'locality' of such talismanic objects, primarily attributing the cultural production of such garments to the 'magic' and 'animistic' beliefs of the diverse African religious landscape rather than seeing them as part and parcel of the Muslim world view. As such, Kana'an adds Western art historians to Skinner's global arena of 'religious orthodoxies', who through a 'politics of misrecognition' have wrongly presented the cultural expressions of Muslims in sub-Saharan Africa as entirely anomalous to that of Muslims elsewhere.

As with Kana'an's talismanic shirt, the healing and protective words of the Qur'ān are central to Kjersti Larsen's ethnographic study (chapter 9) of the different ways in which the words of the Qur'ān are regarded as 'medicine' (Swahili, *dawa*) amongst some Muslim female and male residents of Zanzibar Town, the capital city of Zanzibar, Tanzania. Here, speaking the Qur'ān or enacting its truths are believed to materialise a force that can protect and heal. This is true in all aspects of life, not just in the space of ritual practice. This idea of 'utterance' is comparable to Skinner's study, in which the Islamic moral subject is interpellated through acts of Qur'ānic interpolation. It is for this reason that Larsen's informants move through their daily lives invoking Qur'ānic words, phrases and ideas at every turn. Such actions not only dissolve distinctions between the social and the ritual, they also allow some informants access to the world of spirits, which is considered an important part of the Qur'ānic world view in Zanzibar, as it is elsewhere in the Muslim world. One of Larsen's female interlocutors attributed her unique knowledge of the hidden meanings of the Qur'ān to Muslim spirits from Arabia, with whom she became acquainted through the regular practice of *dhikr* (remembrance of God) and undertaking pious deeds. Over time, she believes, the spirits transmitted this special Qur'ānic knowledge to her, which eventually allowed her to become recognised as a religious authority in Zanzibar in arenas that are usually dominated by men. As such, Larsen's study hints at the final two themes of gender and knowledge transmission that are explored fully in the remaining studies of the volume.

In Susan Rasmussen's study (chapter 10) of gender, altered states, and local cultural representations of Islam among the Tuareg (Kel Tamajaq) living in the rural Air mountains of Niger, marabouts (Tamajaq, *ineslemen*) - local diviners who are also Islamic religious scholars - interpret the dreams of their female clients. Rasmussen's ethnographic study shows how the Qur'ānic world view that speaks of the world of spirits (*djinn*s) is uniquely articulated and expressed amongst the Tuareg. Additionally, Rasmussen provides examples of how verses from the Qur'ān are used to divine cases of possession or spirit visitation and as a 'force of mediation and reconciliation' in a richly elaborated case about a woman who was potentially

possessed. She argues that amongst the Tuareg, indigenous systems of knowing and those derived from Islam work in 'a productive tension' rather than a neat binary opposition between 'folk' and 'scriptural' religion. By extension, women are not, in Rasmussen's view, more likely to opt out of normative Islamic religious practices or feel deprived of access to the Qur'ān. As in Larsen's case study, the woman who was almost possessed achieved equilibrium through embracing these Islamic practices and using them to her advantage.

Joseph Hill's study (chapter 11) provides another example of how women in Islamic contexts move past assigned gender roles. Hill's study examines the life of Shaykha Maryam Niasse (b. 1932), the daughter of the Tijānī Sufi Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niasse (d. 1975). She resides in Senegal and acts as an Islamic leader and teacher. While such women are widely recognised as Qur'ān teachers, internationally influential Islamic authorities, channels of their father's divine blessing (*baraka*), their formal appointment as Sufi spiritual guides who regularly induct male and female disciples into the Sufi order is far less widely known. Hill casts his attention to Shaykha Maryam's daily life and the way she expertly mediates her ascribed gender role by asserting her knowledge and mastery of the Qur'ān. What is also notable in Hill's study is Shaykha Maryam's use of an esoteric interpretation of the Qur'ān to argue that gender distinctions are this-worldly (*zāhir*), and thus present her authority as transmitter of religious knowledge and spiritual truths as equivalent to or even surpassing that of a man. As Hill suggests, paradoxically, the 'largely hidden and informal' feminine forms of piety in this Sufi context are often viewed as being of the highest and most legitimate order, thereby heightening the Shaykha's religious authority.

Andrea Brigaglia's study (chapter 12) of the wooden tablet (Hausa, *allo*; al-lawh being the Arabic equivalent) historically used throughout the Muslim world for the teaching of the Qur'ān, and still adopted in most traditional West African Qur'ānic schools, brings together themes of transmission of knowledge with the concept of embodiment. Brigaglia's study focuses on the role of the *allo* in the first stages of traditional Islamic education in Hausaland (northern Nigeria) and on the symbolism associated with it. Far from being a mere substitute for paper as a support of learning before the latter became easily (and cheaply) available in the region, Brigaglia shows how the *allo* is seen as an indispensable support for writing down the Qur'ān as the students move through the various stages of their religious education. The study also discusses the anthropomorphism of the different physical shapes taken by the *allo* through the different stages of traditional Qur'ānic studies. As with Kana'an's study of a West African 'talismanic' shirt, Brigaglia also argues that the *allo*'s material form and aesthetic are deeply grounded in Islamic theological concepts rather than being examples of syncretism with local 'pagan' ideas. Further pursuing this line of reasoning, Brigaglia discusses how the *allo* is also an object that embodies a complex network of Islamic knowledge and symbolic meanings — what Brigaglia calls 'embodied epistemology'. Ultimately, the *allo* allows the student to conceive of their learning as the re-enactment (and not only the transmission) of the original process through which the Word of God was revealed: the 'descent' (*nuzūl*) of the archetypal, eternal Qur'ān from the heavenly 'preserved tablet' to the Prophet Muhammad.

My own study (chapter 13), which concludes the volume, examines the historical or stylistic relationships between three illuminated Qur'ān manuscripts produced at the town of Siyu on Pate Island in the Lamu archipelago between the twelfth/eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I argue that the manuscripts, which are currently located in Los Angeles, London and Muscat, provide evidence that there was a distinctive and sophisticated scribal tradition on the East African coast located at Siyu before the nineteenth century. Thus, in connection to the theme of transmission, the study of the Siyu Qur'ān manuscripts raises questions about the historical formation and development of this scribal tradition, its connections to other manuscript

production centres in the region and beyond, and its relationship with locally produced Swahili-language manuscripts in Arabic script. Finally, like the Hausa *allo* discussed by Brigaglia, the talismanic shirt from Burkina Faso in Kana'an's study and the Borno manuscripts examined by Bondarev, the Siyu Qur'āns are treated here not just as physical objects that house the text of the Qur'ān, but as examples of 'material religion' out of which the histories of the people who engaged with the Qur'ān can be read, felt and imagined.

In sum, the twelve studies in this volume provide a range of methodological approaches and theoretical frameworks that allow us to begin to understand the plurality of engagements that Muslims from diverse communities of interpretation and from different parts of sub-Saharan Africa have had with the Qur'ān. These studies also add to the growing scholarship on Muslim approaches to this scripture. But they are also indicative of the many landscapes, in Africa and elsewhere, where the Qur'ān and Islam feature yet remain to be studied. Undoubtedly, the fruits of all such endeavours will make for a richer harvest.

## **APPROACHES TO THE QUR'ĀN IN CONTEMPORARY IRAN** edited by Alessandro Cancian [Qur'anic Studies Series, Oxford University Press, 9780198840763]

**APPROACHES TO THE QUR'AN IN CONTEMPORARY IRAN** explores the importance of the Qur'an in the religious, artistic, political, and intellectual discourses in modern and contemporary Iran from the nineteenth century to the present. The chapters included in the volume have been written by some of the most authoritative specialists in the modern history of Iran. Their contributions span a wide range of subjects and themes, covering such varied ground as the examination of the trends in Qur'anic exegesis that are currently prominent in Iran, the use of Qur'anic themes in contemporary Iranian cinema, the concept of revelation as the basis of diverse political trends in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Sufi mystical interpretations of the Qur'an the use of the Qur'an in the arts, the Qur'an as a living scripture in specific intellectual and social circles, and case studies of individual intellectuals.

Through this wide-ranging survey, the book aims to become a reference for anyone interested in the Qur'an's imprint on the religious, political, cultural, and anthropological history of modern and contemporary Iranian society. The maps serve to situate the reader geographically and a careful selection of photographs bring a flavour of Iranian religious culture during this period.

Contents

Notes on Contributors

Note on Transliteration, Conventions and Abbreviations

Preface and Acknowledgments

Map

Introduction

Alessandro Cancian

Section I: Power, Authority and Exegesis

1 Rational-analytical Tafsir in Modern Iran: The Influence of the Usūṭī School of Jurisprudence on the Interpretation of the Qur'ān by Seyfeddin Kara

2 Striving Beyond the Balance (al-Mizn): Spiritual Practice and the Qur'ān in the Tabātabā'ī Tariqa by Sajjad Rizvi

3 Privileging the Qur'ān: Divorce and the Hermeneutics of Yūsuf Sāni i by Liyakat Takim

- 4 Al-Amr bi'l-ma'rūf and the Semiotics of Sovereignty in Contemporary Iran by Neguin Yavari
- 5 The Limits of a 'Fixed' Qur'ān: The Iranian Religious Intellectual Movement and Islamic New Theology by Banafsheh Madaninejad
- 6 Soroush's Theory of Qur'ānic Revelation: A Historical-Philosophical Appraisal by Yaser Mirdamadi
- Section II: Alternative Approaches: Between Marginality and Legitimacy
- 7 A Sufi Defence of the Qur'ān: Husayn 'Ali Shāh's Rebuttal of Henry Martyn by Reza Tabandeh
- 8 Abrogation and Falsification of Scripture according to Twelver Shi'i Authors in Iraq and Iran (19th-20th Centuries) by Rainer Brunner
- 9 Speaking the Secrets of Sanctity in the Tafsir of Safi 'Ali Shah by Nicholas Boylston
- 10 Exegesis and the Place of Sufism in Nineteenth-Century Twelver Shi'ism: Sultān Ali Shah Gunābādī and his Bayān al-sa'āda by Alessandro Cancian
- 11 In the Company of the Qur'ān by Muhyī al-Din Ilāhī Ghomshei by Leonard Lewisohn
- Section III: The Arts, Material Culture and Everyday Life
- 12 A Contemporary Illustrated Qur'ān: Zenderoudi's Illustrations of Grosjean's Translation (1972) by Alice Bombardier
- 13 Women, the Qur'ān and the Power of Calligraphy in Contemporary Iran by Anna Vanzan
- 14 The Divine Word on the Screen: Imaging the Qur'ān in Iranian Cinema by Nacim Pak-Shiraz
- 15 Notes on Ritual Prayer in Iran: Qunūt Choices among a Group of Shi'i Women by Niloofar Haeri

## **CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES TO THE QUR'ĀN AND ITS INTERPRETATION IN IRAN** by Ali Akbar, Abdullah Saeed [Contemporary Thought in the Islamic World, Routledge, 9780367272036]

This book sets out how contemporary Iranian scholars have approached the Qur'ān during recent decades. It particularly aims to explore the contributions of scholars that have emerged in the post 1979-revolution era, outlining their primary interpretive methods and foundational theories regarding the reading of the Qur'ān.

Examining issues such as the status of women, democracy, freedom of religion and human rights, this book analyses the theoretical contributions of several Iranian scholars, some of which are new to the English-speaking academy. The hermeneutical approaches of figures such Abdolkarim Soroush, Muhammad Mojtahed Shabestari, Mohsen Kadivar, Hasan Yousefi-Eshkevari, Abolqasem Fanaie and Mostafa Malekian are presented and then analysed to demonstrate how a contextualist approach to the Qur'an has been formed in response to the influence of Western Orientalism. The effect of this approach to the Qur'an is then shown to have wide-ranging effects on Iranian society.

This study reveals Qur'anic thought that has been largely overlooked by the West. It will, therefore, be of great use to academics in Religious, Islamic and Qur'ānic studies as well as those studying the culture of Iran and the Middle East more generally.

## Contents

## PART I

Introduction and reception of Western scholars' approaches to the Qur'ān in Iran

## Introduction

1 Reception of Western scholars' approaches to the Qur'an in Iran: orientalism refuted

## PART II

Approaches of contextualist Iranian scholars towards interpretation of the Qur'ān

2 Abdolkarim Soroush

3 Muhammad Mojtahed Shabestari 4 Easan Yousefi-Eshkesari

5 Mohsen Kadivar

6 Abolqasem Fanaei

7 Mostafa Malekian

## PART III

Contextualist approaches in practice

8 Gender issues

9 Pluralism and freedom of religion

10 Human rights, democracy and methods of governance

## PART IV

Concluding remarks

Bibliography

Index

## Approaches to the Qur'ān in Contemporary Iran

**APPROACHES TO THE QUR'ĀN IN CONTEMPORARY IRAN** explores the importance of the reception of the Qur'ān in the religious, intellectual, political and artistic discourses in modern and contemporary Iran, from the nineteenth century to the present.

The chapters included in the volume have been written by some of the most authoritative specialists in the modern history of Iran. Their contributions span a wide range of subjects and themes, covering such varied ground as the examination of the trends in Qur'ānic exegesis that are currently prominent in Iran, the use of Qur'ānic themes in contemporary Iranian cinema, the concept of revelation as the basis of diverse political trends in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Sufi mystical interpretations of the Qur'ān, the use of the Qur'ān in the arts, the Qur'ān as a living scripture in specific intellectual and social circles, and case studies of individual intellectuals.

Through this wide-ranging survey, the book aims to become a reference for anyone interested in the Qur'ān's imprint on the religious, political, cultural and anthropological history of modern and contemporary Iranian society.

The discourse on the interpretation of the Qur'ān and on who has the authority to interpret its true meaning has a clear political bearing on today's Iran. This is probably more so now than it was in the past due to the embedding of the doctrine of the wilāyat-i faqīh in the Constitution of Iran. This doctrine posits that religious scholars are the sole class who have the authority to interpret the Qur'ān, and that the governance of the country should be based on their interpretation. It is for this reason that the first section of this book refers to power and authority. Connected with issues of religious authority are the developments in the areas of classical hermeneutics and jurisprudence, both of which have informed, and continue to inform, the practice of Qur'ānic exegesis. Seyfeddin Kara's chapter (chapter 1) illustrates this. He points out that the success of Wilism in the late eighteenth century, with its rational-analytical method of jurisprudence,

resulted in the adoption of a parallel method of exegesis. This method of exegesis utilised elements borrowed from jurisprudence. Though this was not an exclusively modern phenomenon, it gained momentum in the twentieth century, as exemplified by the tafsir works of two of the most prominent Iranian exegetes of the period, namely *al-Mizān* by Muhammad Husayn Tabātabā'ī (d. 1981) and *Tasnim* by Abd Allah Jawādī Āmuli (b. 1933). These highly influential and popular works are partly the product of the success of neo-Usūlism and its enshrinement as the unchallenged leading juridical/ideological school of revolutionary Iran.'

The theme of the permeability of the tafsir genre and of its function in imbuing the exegete with authority is present in Sajjad Rizvi's chapter (chapter 2). Rizvi reviews the exegetical works of Tabātabā'ī, though not his celebrated tafsir, *al-Mizān*. His close scrutiny of the extant literature by the great scholar and some of those associated with his informal, non-Sufi mystical tariqa (order), allows one to better understand how the ideas circulating among those who subscribed to Tabātabā'ī's apparatus shaped a diffuse interpretation of the Qur'ān. It also allows one to better appreciate the strategies adopted by these intellectuals, and Tabātabā'ī in primis, which enabled them to propose an approach to the Qur'ān that stayed true to the school's *weltanschauung* while obviating accusations that such a method involved 'interpreting the Qur'ān according to one's own ideas'. The mystical and philosophical reading of the Qur'ān, against which Tabātabā'ī himself warns the reader in his introduction to the *Mizān*, comes back to the interpretation of the Book in other works of exegesis without technically being tafsir. In addressing these strategies, Rizvi argues that the tariqa in question works as a *dispositif*, or apparatus, in the Foucaultian sense; that is, it encapsulates a given set of structures, modes of comportment, discourses and relationships that govern the projection of self by a specific group, community or sodality. The main point made by Rizvi is that the exegetical use of the Qur'ān in some of the staple works of the apparatus, such as the *Risāla-yi sayr wa sulūk* attributed to Sayyid Bahr al-'Ulūm (d. 1212/1797), the *Tadhkirat al-muttaqin* by Shaykh Muhammad Bahārī Hamadānī (d. 1907) and the *Risālat al-walāya* by Tabātabā'ī, was part of a strategy by the apparatus to present elements of Sufi theory and practice to a Twelver Shi'i audience that was opposed to Sufism. They accomplished this by deploying authoritative readings of the Qur'ān carried out by charismatic figures.

A number of hermeneutical strategies have been triggered by the establishment of the Islamic Republic. How jurisprudence negotiated its way through the practical needs of a modern state and developed hermeneutical strategies to that end is at the heart of Liyakat Takim's essay on Yūsuf Sāni'ī (b. 1937) and his juridical thought and practice (chapter 3). Takim's essay explores the theme of the new jurisprudence. He places the idea of revelation at the centre by looking at a specific case of the ruling on the *khul'* form of divorce apud the outspoken reformist cleric Sāni'ī. Takim argues that through an egalitarian and progressive reading of the Qur'ān, Sāni'ī challenges the preexisting rulings on the matter and shows how privileging the revelation and its interpretation is key to the development of a flexible jurisprudence.

The negotiability of the meaning, social significance and political clout of the Qur'ānic text is made clear in the next chapter. Interpretative efforts to wrest back from the opposing camp religious ideas, concepts or even characters is nothing new in contemporary Iran — for example, one can think of the politically oriented struggle over the meaning of the tragedy of Karbala in the decade preceding the revolution,<sup>10</sup> or the reformist claim to Khomeini's legacy. Nequín Yavari (chapter 4) explores further the theme of the negotiability of the meaning of scripture. She analyses the rereading of the Qur'ānic precept of *amr bi'l-ma'rūf wa nahy an al-munkar* (commanding right and forbidding wrong) by one of Iran's most prominent

theoreticians of political reform, Mustafa Tājzāda (b. 1956). Yavari argues that Tājzāda's treatment of the subject represented an attempt 'to appropriate the mantle of doctrinal orthodoxy and legitimacy for Reformist politics' and to wrest from the conservatives a concept crucial to the understanding of Muslims' ethical engagement with society. Pointing out the programmatic centrality of the Qur'ān, as opposed to the Sunna, as the arbiter of the practice of political Islam in the Muslim world in the twentieth century, Yavari compares Tājzāda's views with those of Khomeini and other religious intellectuals. Her aim in doing so is to study the role of Qur'ānic sanction in the political discourse of the Islamic Republic.

It is interesting to note how momentous the notion of the flexibility of the meaning of the revelation is in this context: the meaning here generates authority and is susceptible to being accommodated to a specific political agenda. It is within this same framework that religious intellectuals in contemporary Iran have sought to provide a Qur'ānic basis for their political position and criticism of the state of affairs in the Islamic Republic. This theme is tackled in the two following chapters, through the analysis of two case studies whose common denominator is that they both gravitate around the milieu of the Iranian Religious Intellectual Movement, albeit with different characteristics. In the first (chapter 5), Banafsheh Madaninejad examines the intellectual trajectory of Abū'l-Qāsim Fanā'ī (b. 1959), one of the 'rising stars' of the current Iranian religious intelligentsia, in the context of the wider debates on secularism, religiosity, rationality and commitment that were occurring in Iran in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Well versed in both the Twelver Shi'i religious tradition and Western philosophy,<sup>12</sup> Fanā'ī works within the non-radical (he is still considered as operating from 'within the orthodoxy') end of the ideological spectrum of the religious intellectual movement. He develops an innovative approach to jurisprudence (fiqh) in order to argue for a 'more adaptable Qur'ān', one whose hermeneutics would allow the basis of the exegetical undertaking to be updated. Along with Fanā'ī, Madaninejad highlights the case of other Iranian religious intellectuals well known to the Western public interested in the debate, namely Mohsen Kadivar (b. 1959) and Abdolkarim Soroush (b. 1945), showing how they share some of their hermeneutical strategies with Western Muslim feminist intellectuals. The case is different for Soroush, the established star of the pleiad of Iranian religious intellectuals, whose approach to the Islamic revelation is addressed in detail and from another perspective in the chapter authored by Yaser Mirdamadi (chapter 6). In inverting the terms traditionally ascribed to the 'orthodox dogma', by affirming that the revelation is human and accidental ('aradī) in nature rather than divine and essential (dhātī), Soroush challenges the very core of the idea of 'holiness' in Islam. Mirdamadi assesses Soroush's thought on the Qur'ānic revelation against the history of theology, namely by comparing it to similar ideas found among Mu'tazilī theologians and looking at its implications for pressing contemporary issues, such as the relationship between religion and science and the broadening of the juridical horizon of today's Shi'i jurists. Mirdamadi's analysis of the Soroushian theory of revelation shows that attempts have been made throughout history to desacralise the letter of the Qur'ān while preserving the sacrality of its inspirational source. This desacralisation perhaps helps to explain why Soroush's ideas have been met with criticism by the religious authorities in the Islamic Republic and have been scarcely influential in precipitating a substantial change within juridical practice in a religious, Twelver Shi'i environment where the sacrality of the very form of the imam is so dear both in theology and in popular devotion. If one thinks of the imam as the Perfect Man and as the iconic 'proof of God', statuses traditionally attributed to him by theologians and mystics, it is easy to understand why the sacrality of the form is often jealously preserved.

In forms and ways different to those deployed by theologians and jurists, the centrality of the imam as the holy guide of the faithful is a theme frequented by the mystics. The latter's diverse approaches to the Book, which can be considered non-mainstream for reasons ranging from their beliefs to their intellectual

outlook, are reflected in the second section of this volume (Alternative Approaches: Between Marginality and Legitimacy). The personalities on which the contributions in this section focus are only tangential, in different ways, to the universe of formal Shi'i religious education. A number of these personalities are responsible for some of the most original and influential pieces of work that deal with the Qur'ān, interpreting, revisiting and even defending it. One such defence comes from a master of the Ni`matullāhī order, Muliammad Husayn Isfahānī (d. 1818), known by the tariqa sobriquet Husayn 'Ali Shah. He was requested by the Qajar ruler of Persia, Fath 'Ali Shah (r. 1797-1834), to compose a response to a refutation of Islam and the Qur'ān written in Persian by the Anglican missionary Henry Martyn (d. 1812), as discussed by Reza Tabandeh (chapter 7). Martyn's contentious work, the *Mīzān al-haqq*, was influential in the early eighteenth century, to the extent that the court, unable to take direct action against the missionary for diplomatic reasons, found it necessary to appoint Shi'i scholars to respond in kind by writing rebuttals of the treatise. The sovereign's initiative gave rise to the *radd-i padri* (refutations of the priest), which can be considered a sort of literary genre in its own right, of which the Sufi master Husayn 'Ali Shah's work is the first written example. Tabandeh contends that Husayn 'Ali Shah's rebuttal of Martyn is important not only because it served as a model for the subsequent responses to Martyn's attack on the Qur'ān and Islam, but also because it gives us a sample of the dialectical strategies of a resurgent Sufism jostling for position within the wider context of Shi'i orthodoxy. Tabandeh shows how Husayn 'Ali Shah's *Radd-i padri* is more theological than mystical, though Sufi elements are interspersed throughout the pages in a veiled fashion. Husayn 'Ali Shah, it is worth noting, was the first *qutb* (grand master) of the Ni`matullāhī renaissance to be an Iranian and, for good measure, a trained jurist. His defence of the Qur'ān - his only written work - is an appropriate specimen of the cautious way the Sufi masters negotiated the transition from charismatic and somehow antinomian characters to a more mature Twelver Shi'i religious identity.

Religious identity from both within and without one's own denomination is a major theme in this second section of the book, and the next chapter addresses it from the dogmatically crucial standpoint of the authenticity, integrity and inalterability of the Qur'ānic text. With regard to this, the contribution of Rainer Brunner (chapter 8) is essential in our overview because it offers a glimpse of the most important contemporary Shi'i contributions on the issue of whether the Qur'ān that came down to us is the authentic one that God entrusted to Muslims or whether it is inauthentic because it had been subject to degrees of falsification (*tahrīf*). By looking at the works of some of the most influential Shi'i 'ulama' of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Brunner unveils a picture of problematicity, where the diplomatic necessity to discard *tahrīf* as a fancy theory of some maverick scholar of the past clashes with the abundance of hints from the past and the sometimes ambiguous references by contemporary theologians which suggest otherwise. *Tahrīf* may have well been a marginal topic in the history of Shi'i theology, but contemporary Shi'i scholars, from Husayn Taqī al-Nūrī al-Tabrisī (d. 1902) to Khomeini, cannot ignore that the corpus of the sayings of the imams is evidence that the problem cannot be entirely discarded. The sensitivity of the matter, however, as Brunner points out, is attested by the fact that apart from Mari in his *Fasl al-khitāb fī tahrīf Kitāb Rabb al-arbāb*, no Twelver Shi'i scholar after him has publicly endorsed the thesis that the Qur'ān was falsified or altered. Naffs stance, therefore, can to some extent be considered 'marginal', at least concerning the last century.

In the chapter authored by Nicholas Boylston (chapter 9), a different kind of marginality is analysed, one which stems from a mystical and poetical approach to the understanding of the Qur'ān. In his exploration of the *tafsir* by the Ni`matullāhī master Safi 'Ali Shah (d. 1898), the singularity of the work under scrutiny is highlighted. The *Tafsir-i Safī* is the first known translation-cum-commentary of the entire Qur'ān in the

Persian language. While the use of the vernacular in Qur'ānic exegesis has a long and, at times, noble history, this is the first significant commentary written entirely in Persian rhyming couplets by a charismatic Sufi master after the resurgence of the Ni`matullāhī order and its return from India to Iran in the late eighteenth century. Safi 'Ali Shah's tafsir was completed in 1890, but its literary value and exegetical significance had been long overlooked in both Western and Iranian scholarship. Boylston's examination of it, therefore, is a valuable attempt to do justice to a work too long absent from the histories of literature and of exegesis. The author of the tafsir, as shown by Boylston, does not aim to situate his work within the scholarly madrasa-centred tradition. For Safi 'Ali Shah, writing a poetic commentary on the Qur'ān was an act of worship fully within the framework of his role as a Sufi master, and he drew more upon the tradition of mystical Persian poetry than that of highly technical Qur'ānic exegesis (although he sought, through the intercession of the Qajar ruler Nāsir al-Din Shah [r. 1848-96], a fatwa on the legitimacy of translating the Qur'ān into poetry, which was granted by the celebrated Mirza Muhammad Hasan Shiraz' [d. 1896]).

The variety of approaches to the Qur'ān in Iran in the late nineteenth century, as well as the creativity of the protagonists, is attested by Safi 'Ali Shah's coeval Sufi master Sultan Ali Shah Gunābādī (d. 1909). Head of another branch of the Ni`matullāhī Sufi order, Sultan 'Ali Shah composed, among many other mystical works, a hitherto understudied Qur'ānic commentary, the Tafsir Bayān al-sa`āda fī maqāmāt al-`ibāda, which stands at the opposite end of the spectrum to the Tafsir-i Safi in terms of its formal aspects and intended audience. The commentary, presented in my contribution (chapter 10), was penned according to the entirety of the formal codes of the tafsir genre: it is written in Arabic, it covers different aspects of each verse (semantic, lexicological, historical, etc.), it comments on the whole of the Qur'ān, and it is in conversation with the exegetical tradition. Its specificity lies, however, in the fact that the focus of the discussion is evidently the esoteric meaning of the Book, which is expounded by referring to and conflating three sources of inspiration: the mystical, stemming from classical Sufism; the philosophical/theosophical, stemming from the legacy of Sultan 'Ali Shah's long-standing and fruitful studentship with the most important philosophers of the school of Ibn 'Arabi in Iran and the `School of Isfahan'; and the Twelver Shi`i Hadith-based juridical and theological tradition. The result has been monumental and hugely influential in Iran throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century, despite a long period of ostracism due to the Shi`i ulamā's disparagement of Sufism. The chapter offers an overview of the main themes of the commentary and contextualises it within the intellectual history of contemporary Iran. It illustrates how Sultan Ali Shah's reading of the Qur'ān had been crucial to his positioning of himself and his order within the mainstream landscape of Twelver Shi`ism.

The next chapter brings the second section to a close with a temporal leap of about one century. It offers an analysis of a unique work by one of the most renowned public intellectuals in Iran today, Muhyi al-Din Ilāhī Ghomshei (b. 1940). In his contribution (chapter 11), Leonard Lewisohn discusses Ghomshei's work *365 Days in the Company of the Qur'ān*. Although not a tafsir in the technical sense, the book is a commentary on 365 passages of the Book - one for each day of the year; the result is a voluminous work of exegesis sui generis. Lewisohn, with a fine sensibility for things poetical, allows us to appreciate in the English language Ghomshei's novel yet traditional approach to the scripture, and situates the work within the spiritual, social and political context of twentieth-century Iran. Lewisohn points out that Ghomshei's lyrical reading of the Qur'ān draws on the wealth of Persian mystical literature to shed light on the meaning of the Book. This allows him to bring it alive and simultaneously make it comprehensible to a general public not versed in the subtleties of the language of the hawza while leaving its interpretation open to the creative imagination of classical Persian mysticism.

The Qur'ān, as we have seen, continues to be a source of inspiration for Iranians at the spiritual, religious, political and intellectual levels, but it has also been inspirational at the level of material culture. This is the theme of the contributions in the third section of this volume (The Arts, Material Culture and Everyday Life). There is little surprise, therefore, in the fact that the artistic vanguards have continued to engage with the Qur'ān in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The Saqqākhāna movement stands out as one of the most significant and successful popular artistic movements in Iran that encapsulated the Qur'ānic fabric of that country. Alice Bombardier (chapter 12) offers an overview of a very important yet little-known work by one of the most successful artists associated with this particular form of 'spiritual pop art', Charles-Hossein Zenderoudi (b. 1937), who illustrated the French translation of the Qur'ān by Jean Grosjean (d. 2006). This work was published, under Bombardier's direction, in 1972, and her article contributes to the rediscovery of an important chapter in the reception of the Qur'ān in a milieu close to an Iranian artistic vanguard. Bombardier's outline shows us how the conflation of modern artistic inspiration and traditional forms of Qur'ānic art (from Sufi symbolism to miniature painting and Qur'ānic illumination) can generate an outstanding 'visual companion' to the Qur'ān. Bombardier's analysis of Zenderoudi's illustrations shows how, in a contemporary Iranian context, the Qur'ān can function as the fulcrum where a number of streams of inspiration come together in a coherent unicum, visually representing the Book and reinventing traditions.

Continuing this focus on the visual aspect of the reception of the Qur'ān, the contribution by Anna Vanzan (chapter 13) looks at calligraphy in contemporary Iran from a new perspective. It specifically discusses calligraphy as a space for the expression of the female self within religion. Vanzan argues the translating the Qur'ān into visuals through the traditional medium of calligraphic script is a means through which women can transcend the limitations imposed on them by the patriarchal Iranian society. Placing interviews with a number of women calligraphers within a historical perspective, the author of the chapter shows that calligraphy is envisaged by women as an interpretive practice and a devotional act; it is also a powerful means for them to rediscover the emancipatory force of Islam and challenge the top-down version of religion sub-ministered by the state — a state which, it is worth noting, has acted as a generous supporter of the Qur'ānic arts since its inception, triggering a movement that reached as far as the entertainment industry.

In the chapter that follows (chapter 14), Nacim Pak-Shiraz persuasively argues that the cinematic genre of the Iranian 'religious epic' offers a Qur'ānic version of Biblical stories already explored in Western cinema and provides at the same time a new development in the genre of Biblical films. The phenomenon of the Muslim religious epic in the film industry in Iran is a telling example of how the Qur'ān is considered central to the promotion of a national religious culture and how it is credited with the potential to offer a counternarrative of the highest quality to the dominant cultural artefacts of the Western film industry. Pak-Shiraz looks at Shahriar Bahrani's 2010 film *The Kingdom of Solomon* to illustrate the way a collaborative work between the film industry and the clergy could bring about highly polished results in the genre in Iran. Cinema, which earlier in the twentieth century had been looked at with suspicion as a 'Western medium', has now taken on a religious and political function in Iran.

The next two chapters of this volume are ethnographical accounts of the everyday Qur'ān-related religious practices and rituals of Iranian women. Niloofer Haeri's contribution (chapter 15) is based on fieldwork that the author undertook in Tehran between 2008 and 2013. During that time, Haeri interacted with a group of middle-class women in their sixties, sitting in on their Qur'ān classes as well as their classes on Rūmī's mystical poetry. Based on her observations and interviews with these students, Haeri draws a lively portrait of the way they negotiate their place within the Twelver Shi'i community at large and within the

hermeneutical tradition. The rituals and performances of the women in these groups, Haeri argues, have an impact on the way they read the Qur'ān, recite it in prayers and understand it; not only is their understanding of the Qur'ān — aided by the commentary provided by Rūmī's mystical poetry — informed by the way they perform the prayer, but their performance of the prayer is in turn modified by the elements introduced within the classes.

Ingvild Flakerud's chapter (chapter 16), on the other hand, discusses the engagement of a network of pious women in Shiraz with the Qur'ān. This chapter, too, is the result of field research. Flakerud, between 1999 and 2003, had the opportunity to attend a number of Qur'ānic classes and other Twelver Shi'i rituals frequented by pious women. Using the ethnographic data she gathered, she reflects on how the 'everyday' Qur'ān experiences of the subjects of her study represent a form of living exegesis, where typically Shi'i elements such as the imam's proximity to the Book, the concept of the imam as the 'speaking Qur'ān' and others, are incorporated in the devotional performance. Flakerud argues that the Qur'ān becomes, in practice, a living text whose spiritual, protective and miraculous efficacy is granted through the faithful's devotion to the ahl al-bayt (the People of the House). In the settings observed, everyday needs are addressed in the context of ritual, which in turn affects the behavioural patterns in everyday life. The centrality of the Book in the lives of a section (albeit circumscribed) of today's Iranian society is thus reinstated.

It goes without saying that the Qur'ān, as much as it is positively placed centre stage in the lives of the most religious segments of society, is also marginalised, ignored by or even removed from the lives of other segments of the same society. The offering of different approaches to the Book in this volume is an attempt to reflect this diversity, which resonates in the last contribution of this volume. Giovanni De Zorzi (chapter 17) offers a fascinating examination of the oral/aural universe represented by the strong connection between the Qur'ān and music in twentieth- and twenty-first-century Iran, as he illustrates how most classical musicians in contemporary Iran have a background in one of the sciences of Qur'ānic recitation. Without going as far as equating it with the fate that befell Mushtāq Ali Shah (d. 1791), De Zorzi's essay is an apt testimony of the consequence of the Qur'ān in religious, political, social and cultural life in contemporary Iran.

## **A SUFI APOLOGIST OF NĪSHĀPŪR; THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF ABŪ 'ABD AL-RAHMĀN AL-SULAMI** by S.Z. Chowdhury [Monographs in Arabic and Islamic Studies, Equinox Publishing, 9781781795224]

Abu 'Abd al-Rahman Muhammad b. al-Husayn al-Sulami (d.412/1021) lived in the 3rd and 4th century AH / 9th and 10th century CE. He was born in the city of Nishapur, one of the most renowned cities in the Islamic world. He was part of a line of earlier Sufi figures who attempted to defend the cardinal tenets of Sufism from accusations of heresy. However al-Sulami's surpassed his predecessors by amassing a corpus of antecedent mystical dicta from the architects of Islamic mysticism and substantiating them with transmission channels (isnad) or grounding them in a core teaching of the Prophet Muhammad. This study demonstrates that al-Sulami was an accomplished mystic. It outlines his life and times and surveys in full all his works as far as they can be identified. Moreover, the important sources that shaped the development

and impression of his thinking and modality of transforming the ego-self (nafs) are presented in detail bringing together earlier and current academic scholarship on him.

- Contents
- List of Figures
- Acknowledgements
- Introduction
- Reviewing the Literature on al-Sulami
- Geography and Environment
- Khurāsānian Protégés: Examining al-Sulami's Main Influences
- Vita Sulamīi
- Textual Terrain and Taxonomy: The Oeuvre of Abū 'Abd al-Rabmān al-Sulamī
- "Words along the Way": Surveying al-Sulami's Mystical Lexicon
- Mystical Interiority: Al-Sulami's Method of Self-Transformation
- Conclusions: An Apologetics for a Sufi Orthodoxy
- References
- Index

Excerpt: On his travels to a Moroccan village,<sup>1</sup> having departed from Andalusia, the great mystical visionary Ibn 'Arabi (d. 638/1240 AH/CE) attained—according to his own account—the highest "spiritual station" (maqām). Suffering a heightened feeling of loneliness and alienation within this spiritual station, Ibn 'Arabi was met by a "shadowy figure", and he narrates his encounter with it as follows:

I rose from my bed and went towards it hoping to receive some solace from it. It embraced me; I looked at it closely and saw that it was Abū `Abd [al-]Rahman al-Sulamī,<sup>1</sup> whose spirit had assumed corporeal form for my sake. God had sent him out of compassion for me. I said to him: "I see that you [too] are in this station!" His reply was: "It was while I was in this station that I was overtaken by death and I will never cease to be here." I told him of my isolation and complained about the absence of any companion. He said to me: "He who is in exile always feels alone! Now that divine providence has granted you access to this station praise God, for to how many is this given, brother of mine? Are you satisfied with the fact that Khaḍlir is your companion in this station?" [...] I replied: "Abu `Abd al-Rahman, I know of no name to designate this station?" He answered: "It is called the Station of Proximity (maqām al-qurba). Realise it in its fullness!

This reference yields two very important observations. The first is that the maqām al-qurba is deemed by Ibn 'Arabi to be the highest station a saint (walī) can attain—immediately below that of the station of "the legislative prophethood" (nabuwwat al-tashrī). The second is that al-Sulami was brought to Ibn 'Arabi, out of divine compassion, in order "to teach him the name and nature of the maqām". Thus, the direct inference is that al-Sulami was a Sūfi who was himself situated at the apex of the spiritual hierarchy.

This acknowledgement accorded to al-Sulami in recognition of his privileged status—a homage of spiritual affinity—also alerts one to a consciousness of his authority. Yet, contrary to this, some have found little that is inspirational or original in this fourth-century AH author.<sup>1</sup> The current work demonstrates that this negative evaluation is inaccurate, and argues that al-Sulami was indeed an instrumental figure in the development of Safi apologetics and subsequently Sufism itself.

Studies in Sufism focusing on the early period until Ghazālī's (d. 505/1111 AH/CE) time have revealed the myriad thoughts and methodologies of individual Sūfis, as well as the significant events that have shaped Sufism's development and formation. Authorities in the discipline and their initiatives on the mystical

path continue to receive interest, with new areas and avenues being explored. Thus, early "sober" (sahwf ascetics, like al-Hārith al-Muhāsibī (d. 243/857 AH/ CE)' and Junayd al-Baghdādī (d. 298/910 AH/CE),<sup>9</sup> and "intoxicated" (sukrt) mystics such as Mansūr al-Hallāj (d. 309/922 AH/CE)<sup>10</sup> and Abū Yazid al-Bistāmī (d. 261/874 AH/CE), as well as key apologetic figures such as Abū Nasr al-Sarrā'ī" (d.378/988 AH/CE), Abū Tālib al-Makki (d.386/996 AH/CE)<sup>12</sup> and Abū Bakr al-Kalābādhi (ca.385/995 AH/CE), have all been given considerable attention. However, no thorough investigation has been made regarding al-Sulami's role and contribution in expanding, enlarging and refining Sufism. Moreover, no dedicated study in English known to this author has explored or collated the metaphysical, mystical, theological and conceptual categories found in his works (as well as their relation to general Sūfi practice) with the aim of identifying the specific methodology underpinning his presentation and application of transforming the self.

Chapter 1 is a short literature review of key studies on al-Sulami, as well as of broader works that may reveal existing lacunae in one or more facets of his thought and practice.

Chapter 2 identifies, from a survey of the social, political and intellectual trends within the city of Nishāpūr, the factors and events that have a direct or indirect bearing on al-Sulami's formative years, as well as on the broad contours of his exposition of Sufism. It also includes general analyses of the historical developments and evolution of Sufism from its ascetic origins through to a mystical elaboration by al-Sulami's time and his role in the apologetic phase of that evolution.

Chapter 3 focuses on the circle of individuals and movements that were significant influences on al-Sulami's intellectual and mystical outlook, examining key primary biographical source texts in Arabic as well as historical studies from contemporary scholars.

Chapter 4 outlines the biographical data on al-Sulamī, highlighting amongst other aspects his teachers, students and lineage. It also includes evaluative material assessing al-Sulami's influences on later Sufi practitioners and masters of the discipline as well as positive and negative assessments by subsequent Muslim scholars regarding his integrity as a theoretician and Hadīth expert.

Chapter 5 presents a taxonomy of al-Sulami's extant works, with brief. <>

## **A LIGHT IN THE HEAVENS: SAYINGS OF THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD**

by al-Qādī al-Qudā'ī, translated by Tahera Qutbuddin,  
foreword by Paul Hinder. [Library of Arabic Literature, New  
York University, 9781479864485]

Humanitarian lessons and practical insights from the prophet of Islam

The words of Muhammad, messenger of God and prophet of Islam, have a special place in the hearts of his followers. Wielding an authority second only to the Qur'an, they are cited by scholars in a vast array of disciplines—including law, theology, metaphysics, poetry, grammar, history, and medicine—and are quoted by Muslims to one another in their daily lives.

**LIGHT IN THE HEAVENS** by al-Qadi al-Quda'i, a Sunni judge in the Fatimid court in Egypt, is an outstanding example of a compilation of these sayings, known as hadiths, that circulated orally and were later assembled and written down. From North Africa to India, generations have used Light in the Heavens as a

teaching text for children as well as adults, and many of its 1,200 sayings are familiar to individuals of diverse denominations and ethnicities. For Muslims—who consider Muhammad’s teachings the fount of wisdom and the beacon of guidance in all things, mundane and sublime—these sayings provide a direct window into the inspired vision of one of the most influential humans to have walked the Earth.

## CONTENTS

Letter from the General Editor

Abbreviations

Foreword

Acknowledgments

Introduction

Note on the Text

Notes to the Introduction

LIGHT IN THE HEAVENS

Author's Introduction

Chapter One through Chapter Fifteen untitled

Chapter Sixteen: Sayings of the Lord Reported by the Messenger of God

Chapter Seventeen: The Final Chapter Containing the Prophet's Supplications

Notes

Glossary of Names and Terms

Bibliography

Index

About the NYU Abu Dhabi Institute

About the Translator

The Library of Arabic Literature

Excerpt: The compiler of *Light in the Heavens*, al-Qādī al-Qudā`ī, was a jurist of the Sunni-Shāfi`ī school of legal thought, and an eminent scholar of Hadith and history who flourished in Fatimid Cairo. His full name was Abū 'Abd Allāh Muhammad ibn Salāmah ibn Ja`far ibn 'Ali ibn Hakmūn al-Qudā`ī (thus an affiliate of the clan of Qudā`ah from the tribe of Himyar). The biographical sources refer to him most frequently as "judge of Egypt" and "compiler of *Light in the Heavens*."

A senior government official for the Shi`i Fatimids, al-Qudā`ī performed several singular functions for them. He was judge over their Sunni subjects; he traveled in 447/1055 to Constantinople as Fatimid emissary to the Byzantine court;" and he served (indirectly) in their chancery, being scribe for a time for the vizier 'Ali ibn Abmad al Jarjarā`ī (d. 436/1045). Although the sources do not mention specific interactions, al-Qudā`ī would presumably have had contact with the eminent Fatimid scholar al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirāzi (d. 470/1078), who was head of the chancery from 443/1051 to 448/1056.

Al-Qudā`ī's scholarship was highly respected, especially in the collection and transmission of hadith. Sunni scholars deemed al-Qudā`ī to be a "trustworthy" (thiqah) transmitter of hadith. His student Ibn Mākūlā (d. 475/1082) praised him, saying: "He has mastered many different sciences ... I know none in Egypt who approach his stature." Writing a century later, the jurist al-Silafi (d.576/1180) said of him: "His fame absolves me from lengthy expositions ... he is counted among the trustworthy and reliable transmitters. An indication of al-Qudā`ī's eminence in the field of Hadith scholarship is the fact that he is cited in the chains of transmission of numerous well-regarded compilations."

Following Ibn Mākhūlā and al-Silafi, several prominent medieval biographers chronicled al-Qudā`ī's career and writings. They tell us that al-Qudā`ī heard and transmitted hadith in his homeland of Egypt, as well as during his travels in Syria en route to Constantinople, in Constantinople, and in Mecca and Medina, where he performed the hajj in 445/1053. They record the names of his teachers, including several distinguished scholars. And they tell us about his students, saying he transmitted hadith to men who would become well-known jurists in their own right. One student, Muhammad ibn Abi Nasr al-Humaydī (d. ca. 450/1058), declared that the "Shihāb turned me into a shihāb," that is, a star."

## Light in the Heavens

The full title of *Light in the Heavens* is—in rhyming Arabic—*Kitāb al-Shihāb fi l-amthāl wa l-mawā`iz wa-l-ādāb: alf kalimah wa-mi'atā kalimah min hadith al-nabi sallā llāhu `alayhi wa-ālihi wa-sallam*. It translates literally as "Book of the blazing star containing aphorisms, counsels, and directions for refined behavior: 1,200 maxims from the hadith of the prophet." In some manuscripts, the work is titled *Shihāb al-akhbār*, "The blazing reports-star," or *Al-Shihāb fi l-hikam al-nabawiyyah*, "The blazing star containing the wise sayings of the prophet," or *Al-Shihāb al-nabawi*, "The prophet's blazing star." It is usually mentioned by its shortened title, *Al-Shihāb*—"blazing comet," "shining star," or "luminous planet"; the rendering as *Light in the Heavens* is an attempt to capture these various meanings in English.

The book overlaps to some degree with other well-known hadith collections. For each hadith cited in *Light in the Heavens*, the commentator al-Marāghī and the editors of *The Transmissions* list additional sources, which include the major Sunni collections of Ibn Hanbal, al-Bukhārī, Muslim, al-Tirmidhi, Abū Dā`ūd, Ibn al Jawzī, and Ibn Hajar al-Asqalānī; many of the *Shihāb*'s hadith are also found in Shi`i works, such as the collections of al-Qādi al-Nu`mān and al-Tūsī.

## System and Substance

As a popular collection of the prophet Mubammad's sayings for the general reader, the system and substance of *Light in the Heavens*' material are straightforward and accessible. In the introduction, al-Qudā`ī tells us that he has arranged the sayings "uninterruptedly, one following the other, omitting the chains of transmission," which he provides separately in the companion specialist book *The Transmissions*. "For simplified access and ease of memorization," he continues, he has divided the sayings into seventeen "chapters based on similarity of lexical pattern," for example, "Whosoever does X gets Y" and "Do X and you will get Y." This is a relatively unusual method of organization for hadith compilations, but one routinely used in collections of classical Arabic proverbs and sayings—and *Light in the Heavens* contains largely aphoristic material.

The contents of the work are listed by al-Qudā`ī in his introduction as "testaments, directions for refined behavior, counsels, and maxims" as well as "supplications attributed to the prophet in prayer." Most are succinct one-liners extracted from longer texts of the prophet's sermons and speeches, from answers to questions, from responses to real-life situations, and from anecdotes about his deeds and gestures. Contextual material is provided in *The Transmissions*, in commentaries of *Light in the Heavens*, in other hadith compilations and their commentaries, in biographical works on Muhammad, and in historical works on early Islam.

Mubammad's words collected in *Light in the Heavens* preach humane behavior and consciousness of God, and urge the reader to prepare for the imminent hereafter. They counsel repentance of sins and renunciation of worldly matters, and advocate virtuous action.

They offer practical advice on daily life issues, keen observations on human nature, and legal rulings on social and economic issues. In one chapter, they quote God directly speaking to humans. The themes, whether worldly or sublime, are couched within an Islamic pietistic framework, consonant with the teachings of the Qur'ān.

Imagery is based on flora and fauna from the Arabian Peninsula, as well as cosmic and mundane objects and acts that reflect the life-style of the residents of early Islamic Mecca and Medina; numerous sayings also reference them literally. Camels, horses, sheep, dates, turbans, musk, vinegar, salt are all to be found, as are the blacksmith and the perfume vendor. Advice on detailed aspects of everyday life abound: "never skip dinner," "pay a worker his wages," and "wear white garments."

Doctrines and practices of Islam are also abundantly described: the mandatory rites of the daily prayer, the annual alms-levy, fasting, the hajj pilgrimage, and regular and melodious recitation of the Qur'ān. Prophets are held up as exemplars. Exhortations to revere and be guided by Mubammad's progeny, his pious companions, and the learned among the community pepper the collection.

The vast majority of the collection's sayings are devoted to promoting upright character: honesty, integrity, affection, compassion, contentment, scrupulosity, gentleness, harmony, modesty, courage, generosity, fortitude, gratitude, justice, simplicity, trustworthiness, moderation, and forgiveness, as well as giving in charity and seeking counsel. The traits and acts warned against include deception, untruthfulness, harshness, obscenity, drink, fornication, arrogance, aggression, hypocrisy, conceit, begging, and flattery. A large number of sayings advocate the seeking of knowledge and the cherishing of wisdom, and encourage the related traits and acts of careful planning, intellectual curiosity, and asking good questions.

## Reception and Renown

**LIGHT IN THE HEAVENS** is al-Qudā'ī's most celebrated work. Its approachable format and humane content made it popular almost immediately after it was compiled, and the numerous extant manuscripts and their varied places of origin suggest the book's dissemination across the expanse of the Islamic world—from Spain in the West, through North Africa, Egypt, Turkey, Palestine, Syria, and Yemen, to India in the East. Al-Silafi and Ibn Asākir note its prominence in their biographies of al-Qudā'ī, saying the collection "has spread to the corners of the earth, becoming as clearly visible in the firmament as the blazing star after which it is named."

**LIGHT IN THE HEAVENS** played an important role in traditional Muslim education, particularly for young children and nonspecialists, but also for scholars, and it appears to have been a regularly featured text in madrasa curricula. For more advanced students of jurisprudence, a commentary seems to have been studied, particularly those of the Sunni Māliki al-Sijilmāsi and the Twelver Shi'i al-Rāwandi. The hadith specialists paid special attention to The Transmissions. The large number of manuscripts of Light in the Heavens and The Transmissions, and the numerous study certificates, colophons, commentaries, and isnād-assessments, also indicate that these were teaching texts read in numerous study circles in Egypt and elsewhere in the Islamic world.

**LIGHT IN THE HEAVENS** was popular across the far reaches of the Islamic world, being studied by Hadith scholars in North Africa and Spain in the West, as well as Mecca in the center, and Iraq and Iran in the East. In Morocco under the Almohad dynasty (r. 514-667/1121-1269), the Shihāb was among the hadith works prescribed for study. Under the Marinids (r. 642-869/1244-1465), the text's fame continued to grow: Ibn Abbād al-Rundi (d. 792/1390), the famous Māliki Hadith scholar and Sufi shaykh who flourished in their realms, had memorized Light in the Heavens in its entirety. Among the several hundred

scholars who are named in the sources as having studied *Light in the Heavens and The Transmissions*—often with students of al-Qudā`ī, or students' students—several are from Spain, from cities such as Toledo, Seville, Granada, Almeria, Mallorca, and Valencia. Additionally, twenty-four scholars with connections to Iran (notably Qazvin) are identified by al-Rāfi`i (d. 623/1226) as having studied and taught the *Shihāb*. In Baghdad, the famous Hanbali jurist, Hadith scholar, historian, and preacher Ibn al jawzī (d. 597/1200) is reported to have transmitted *Light in the Heavens*. In Cairo, it was taught to public audiences by al-Qudā`ī and his students in the sixth/thirteenth century; three centuries later, the renowned Shāfi`ī Hadith scholar, judge, and historian Ibn Hajar al-Asqalānī (d. 852/1449) also taught *The Transmissions* in Cairo to a scholar from the al-Azhar teaching establishment.

Ironically, an indication of the *Shihāb*'s fame comes from the mouth of a detractor, al-Hasan ibn Muhammad al-Sāghānī (d. 650/1252), a native of Lahore (in present-day Pakistan), who traveled across the Islamic world, and studied and taught in Ghazna, Mecca, Baghdad, and Delhi. In the introduction to his hadith compilation *Mashāriq al-anwār* (*Rising-places of Celestial Lights*), in which he combined the "sound" hadith collections of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, he lamented that people of his age studied hadith only from al-Uqūlīshī's *Al-Najm* (*The Star*), al-Nawawī's *Forty Hadiths*, and from the "books of al-Qudā`ī," all collections that, according to him, mixed sound hadiths with weak ones. This, he said, is what led him to compile his own, more rigorous work. But he does not reject the *Shihāb* outright; in fact, he writes that he has included its sound sayings in his compilation.

It is fitting to conclude with the views of one medieval scholar and one modern savant, one a Sunni and one Shi`i. The celebrated literary theorist Diyā` al-Din Ibn al-Athir (d. 636/1239), in his work titled *The Popular Aphorism* (*Al-Mathal al-sā`ir*), advised aspiring chancery scribes to begin their study of hadith with al-Qudā`ī's *Light in the Heavens*. Ibn al-Athir was born in Turkey, and he lived in Damascus, where he served as vizier for Saladin and al-Malik al-Afdal, and then in Mosul, where he was head of the chancery for the last Zangid ruler. He says:

The first [book] you should memorize of [prophetic] reports is *Light in the Heavens*. It is a short book, and all that is in it may be used, for it contains words of wisdom and manners. Once you have memorized it and are familiar with using it, as I have shown you here, you will have the capacity to deal with, and know, what [kinds of hadith] may be used and what may not. At that time, you can go on to study the *Sahīh* works of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, [Mālik's] *Muwatta`*, [the work of] al-Tirmidhī, the *Sunan* of al-Nasā`ī, and other works of hadith

More recently, Sayyidnā Tāhir Sayf al-Din (d. 1385/1965)—fifty-first dā`ī of the Tayyibi Fatimid-Islmā`īlīs, and a learned scholar and prolific author and poet from Surat in India—cites a large number of *Shihāb* hadith in his *Treasures of the Imam of the Pious* (*Khazā`in imām al-muttaqīn*). In his preface to the selection, he echoes the language of al-Qudā`ī's introduction describing Muhammad's sayings, and entreats his readers to study them as follows:

Let us profit from this selection [of sayings] come to us from a prophet fortified with profound words and marvelous sayings. They shine in the sky of that [divine] knowledge which gives benefit in this world and the hereafter—as shining stars lighting up black darkness. For they derive from God's command, written in the Tablet by the Pen.'

## **STORIES OF PIETY AND PRAYER: DELIVERANCE FOLLOWS**

**ADVERSITY** by al-Muhassin ibn 'Ali al-Tanukhi (Author), edited and translated by Julia Bray, Volume editor: Shawkat M. Toorawa [Library of Arabic Literature, NYU Press, 9781479855964]

Uplifting tales from one of the most influential Arabic books of the Middle Ages

One of the most popular and influential Arabic books of the Middle Ages, **DELIVERANCE FOLLOWS ADVERSITY** is an anthology of stories and anecdotes designed to console and encourage the afflicted. Regarded as a pattern-book of Arabic storytelling, this collection shows how God's providence works through His creatures to rescue them from tribulations ranging from religious persecution and medical emergencies to political skullduggery and romantic woes.

A resident of Basra and Baghdad, al-Tanukhi (327–84/939–94) draws from earlier Arabic classics as well as from oral stories relayed by the author's tenth-century Iraqi contemporaries, who comprised a wide circle of writers, intellectuals, judges, government officials, and family members. This edition and translation includes the first three chapters of the work, which deal with Qur'anic stories and prayers that bring about deliverance, as well as general instances of the workings of providence. The volume incorporates material from manuscripts not used in the standard Arabic edition, and is the first translation into English. The complete translation, spanning four volumes, will be the first integral translation into any European language.

- Table of Contents
- Letter from the General Editor
- Acknowledgments
- Introduction
- Map: The Geography of Stories of Piety and Prayer
- Note on the Text
- Notes to the Introduction
- DELIVERANCE FOLLOWS ADVERSITY
- Author's Introduction
- Chapter One: In the Qur'ān, God Exalted reveals how deliverance follows suffering and ordeals
- Chapter Two: What Tradition relates of deliverance following desolation and how one may be rescued from sore adversity and tribulation
- Chapter Three: Presages bringing tidings of delivery to those saved from trials by speech, prayer, or entreaty
- Notes
- Glossary
- Bibliography
- Further Reading
- Index of Qur'ānic Quotations
- Index of Prophetic Hadith
- Index of Poems
- General Index
- About the NYU Abu Dhabi Institute

About the Typefaces  
 Titles Published by the Library of Arabic Literature  
 About the Editor-Translator

## Al-Tanūkhī

Al-Faraj bad al-shiddah (Deliverance Follows Adversity) was written in Iraq in the second half of the tenth century AD by al-Muhassin ibn 'Ali al-Tanūkhī, born in 327/939, the son of 'Ali ibn Muhammad al-Tanūkhī, a judge and leading literary figure in the city of Basra. Basra, long a center of learning, agricultural wealth, and Indian Ocean trade, had become politically important during al-Tanūkhī's childhood. It was one of the theaters where the unraveling of the Abbasid caliphs' authority played out against the rise of the Shi'i Buyid warlord dynasty. Al-Tanūkhī's father had a modest part in these events.' From his father, al-Tanūkhī inherited land and family connections in neighbouring Ahwaz in what is now Iran, as well as strong family ties in Baghdad thanks to his father's marriage into a famous legal family there. His writings are full of references to his father's local friends and colleagues, and to his Baghdad relatives, some of whom had held posts in the old caliphal bureaucracy. He does not mention his mother or any brothers or sisters. His father gave him an excellent education and was clearly a great influence on him.

The key figures in al-Tanūkhī's life were all exceptionally gifted, and they left their mark on his writings. Al-Tanūkhī was fifteen when his father died in 342/953. At eighteen, in 346/957, he already held the position of inspector of the mint in Sūq al-Ahwāz). Not long afterward, he was taken under the wing of his father's friend and patron, the vizier al-Muhallabī. Thanks to him, al-Tanūkhī studied in Baghdad with Abū l-Faraj al-Isfahānī, one of the greatest literary historians who ever lived,' and was given a number of administrative posts and judgeships in southern Iraq. (We do not know how he trained to become a judge.) Al-Muhallabi died in 352/963, when al-Tanūkhī was in his early twenties, and he was less lucky under his successors, losing his positions and having his estates confiscated, as he mentions several times. Reinstated in 366/977, al-Tanūkhī joined the court of the greatest of the Buyid emirs, 'Adud al-Dawlah, where we find him in 367/977, aged thirty-eight, taking part in a Hadith session convened by the ruler in private audience while he was on a military campaign. Two years later, when 'Mud al-Dawlah married his daughter to the caliph al-Tā'i' in Baghdad in 369/979, al-Tanūkhī gave the wedding address. This was the zenith of his career. But the caliph refused to consummate the marriage, and al-Tanūkhī, who had been ordered to recall him to his duty, wriggled out of the task and was disgraced. After 'Adud al-Dawlah's death, he seems to have spent the last ten years of his life quietly in Baghdad,4 dying there in 384/994. Deliverance and his other work, Nishwār al-muhādarah (The Table Talk of a Mesopotamian Judge), were probably written during this period, or at any rate put into their final form then.

The message of Deliverance, spelled out in al-Tanūkhī's introduction, is that our lives are full of tribulations and reversals, but if we trust in God's kindness and love Him steadfastly, He will make everything come right. Al-Tanūkhī wrote Deliverance for people like himself: members of the Iraqi upper bourgeoisie and service aristocracy who for centuries had been adept at surviving regime change. A lot of the stories in Deliverance are indiscreet first-person gossip about ups and downs in the careers of just such grandees, keyhole history that reflects their worldly and self-interested attitudes to patronage, politics, money, and success. In Stories of Piety and Prayer, which consists of the first three chapters of Deliverance, stories of this sort rub shoulders with legendary examples of sanctity or moral heroism, and are interwoven with prayers of great spirituality—and others of guaranteed talismanic efficacy—together with reflections on key passages from the Qur'ān. This mix of ingredients, some of them common property, some composed by al-Tanūkhī, and the whole organized by him into a vision of his own, reflects al-Tanūkhī's idea of

authorship, which is in some ways what we would call academic and in others autobiographical. Equally, it reflects his background, his theoretical adherence to the rationalist Mu`tazilī religious thought that ran in his family, and his immersion in Tradition (also a family speciality), which acts as hinge between his intellectual allegiances and his longing for comfort and hope. What *Stories of Piety and Prayer* offers is not the idealized belief and practice of prescriptive writings. Rather, it gives a rare insight into the complexities of lived religion. When al-Tanūkhī's sophistication is confounded by another man's blind faith, he notes the fact with irony. His own acts of blind faith are recorded with no irony at all.

### Compilation as autobiography

Al-Tanūkhī wrote *Deliverance* not only for a readership of people like himself; he also wrote it for himself and about himself, as a spiritual exercise and a setting in which to relate and give meaning to his own experiences. Such items form a minority, but much if not most of the material in *Deliverance* came to him through people with whom he was on intimate terms, especially his father. Al-Tanūkhī cites his father fourteen times in Chapters One to Three, he is also cited indirectly). The connections between al-Tanūkhī and many of his informants would probably have been evident to his intended readers. Nevertheless, because he is a literary scholar and a man of law, he names them formally—publicly, as it were—before identifying any personal relationship, and often stops short of explaining the connection. Most notably in the case of his mother's family, the Buhlūlids, he never clarifies the family link, although he repeatedly cites the members of the family. This family link, which was first noticed by Margoliouth but ignored by subsequent scholars, explains al-Tanūkhī's access to inside information about the caliphal court and government offices in Baghdad, and helps us understand certain aspects of his piety.<sup>1</sup> Buhlūlid family sources not identified as such in *Stories of Piety and Prayer* are Abū l-Hasan Ahmad ibn Yūsuf the Blue-Eyed, son of Ya`qūb ibn Ishāq ibn al-Buhlūl al-Tanūkhī, al-Tanūkhī's cousin on his mother's side, much cited by him in later parts of *Deliverance* and in *Table Talk*, who died when al-Tanūkhī was about twelve; the famous judge Abū Ja`far Ahmad ibn Ishāq ibn al-Buhlūl al-Tanūkhī, al-Tanūkhī's greatgrandfather; his son Abū Tālib Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Ishāq ibn al-Buhlūl, al-Tanūkhī's grandfather, who took a hand in his education and was closely involved with his father; his son, al-Tanūkhī's uncle, Judge Ja`far ibn Abi Talib Muhammad ibn Abi Ja`far Ahmad; and his great-great-grandfather, the famous traditionist Ishāq ibn al-Buhlūl al-Tanūkhī. A different branch of maternal relatives is mentioned.

For modern readers, al-Tanūkhī's reticence has obscured the more general significance of the personal element in his writings. Teachers, friends, and associates, some not overtly identified as such in *Stories of Piety and Prayer*, are his father's friend Abū l-Faraj 'Abd al-Wāhid ibn Nasr ibn Muhammad al-Makhzūmi of Nasībīn, the state scribe and poet known as the Parrot; Abū Aqil al-Khawlāni, who taught al-Tanūkhī's father in his youth in Antioch); his father's deputy Ibn Khallād of Rāmhurmuz; Ayyūb, son of the vizier al-Jarjarā'i (al-Abbas ibn al-Hasan ibn Ayyūb of Jarjarāyā); the literary historian Abū Bakr al-Sūlī; the critic al-Hātimi (Muhammad ibn al-Hasan ibn al-Muzaffar; and the vizier al-Muhallabi.

In more ways than scholars have yet examined, al-Tanūkhī writes himself into *Deliverance*, expressing his identity and allegiances by the channels through which he cites his materials. This is particularly true of one of the previous books on the subject of deliverance that he acknowledges as an inspiration and source. He could have quoted it directly, but instead he cites it via a personal informant. Thus in Chapters One to Three, he transmits forty-eight items from Ibn Abi l-Dunyā without naming his *Book of Deliverance*, instead quoting a personal informant, 'Ali ibn al-Hasan ibn 'Ali ibn Mutrif of Rāmhurmuz (of whom, unfortunately, we know little) as citing Ibn al Jarrāh citing Ibn Abi l-Dunyā. There is also one mention of Ibn Abi l-Dunyā

with no onward chain of transmitters to al-Tanūkhī), 'Ali ibn al-Hasan's informant, Ibn al-Jarrāh (Ahmad ibn Muhammad Ibn al Jarrāh), was also a personal connection of the Tanūkhī family. He lived in Baghdad and knew al-Tanūkhī's son, to whom he described himself in these terms: "My books are worth ten thousand dirhams; so is my mistress and so are my arms and my horses." Fully accoutered, he engaged in tourneys with other cavaliers in the maydān or "Great Square" in Baghdad.' Other noteworthy personal informants are the aforementioned al-Hātimī, state scribe and poet as well as literary critic; Abū 'Umar Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wāhid, known as "Thalab's Pupil," with whom al-Tanūkhī had studied; and the state scribe Abū l-Fadl Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn al-Marzubān, whom al-Tanūkhī had known at the court of al-Muhallabi. The chains of transmitters (isnāds) that identify al-Tanūkhī's informants and their sources are discussed in more detail below in the Note on the Text.

### A century of reading al-Tanūkhī

With its promise that all life's woes and perils can lead to happy outcomes, not to mention thrilling stories of romance and adventure involving brigands, caliphs, amateur detectives, and even animals, *Deliverance* appealed for many centuries to a wide readership, and when it first appeared in print in the twentieth century, the editions were based on manuscripts in which scribes no longer recognized the names of most of the protagonists, and the anecdotes, now blurred and generic, had become much like *Thousand and One Nights* tales—in the course of time, a number of them were in fact absorbed into the *Thousand and One Nights*. These versions of *Deliverance* gave the impression of a naive feast of optimism difficult to reconcile with the rationalist, disillusioned *Table Talk*, which mirrors tenth-century Iraqi life in all its aspects, from tax collecting to teenage neurosis, with a strong emphasis on absurdities, and is quoted by countless medieval authors. How did al-Tanūkhī manage to write two such different bestsellers? And how could *Deliverance* be a devotional work, as he claims, when so often it is about morally flawed characters?

Our image of al-Tanūkhī, and especially of *Deliverance*, has developed over the past century. Alfred Wiener published the first study of the *Deliverance*-story genre and al-Tanūkhī's precursors and sources in 1913 and in 1955 Rouchdi Fakkar produced the first monograph on *Deliverance* itself.' Meanwhile, in the 1920s and 1930s, D. S. Margoliouth brought out an edition and English translation of what survives of *Table Talk*, which had hitherto been unknown to modern readers. In 1920, Margoliouth had translated Miskawayh's history of the times in which al-Tanūkhī and his father lived, and in 1928, Harold Bowen's *The Life and Times of All ibn Vs* drew a lively picture of the high politics that some of al-Tanūkhī's maternal relatives had witnessed or been involved in. In 1937, Adam Mez's *The Renaissance of Islam*, co-translated by Margoliouth, provided a wealth of information on the social, literary, and material culture of the period. Together, these books gave (and still give) readers of *Deliverance* and *Table Talk* an unusual amount of detailed historical background in accessible form." In the 1950s, Dominique Sourdel, working from two unpublished manuscripts in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, showed that *Deliverance* is itself a major source for Abbasid political history. Finally, in 1978, the Iraqi scholar Abbūd al-Shālī published a richly annotated critical edition of *Deliverance* from previously unused manuscripts and drew attention to the mass of information it contains on people, places, institutions, food, music, medicine, local customs, and language. Above all, his edition makes visible its high literary quality and shows the importance of its form and compositional techniques.

### Al-Tanūkhī's compositional techniques

The way al-Tanūkhī cites books reflects his literary training. He sometimes dates and localizes the encounters that provided his literary material, such as the teaching sessions with Abū Bakr al-Sūli which he attended as a boy. The same applies when he cites *Tradition*. These are compositional techniques insofar

as they frame and connect items. Al-Tanūkhī's attributions of variant tellings of a story and his identification of poetic variants—which he records scrupulously even when they are minor—are likewise techniques of connection and closure as well as marks of literary scholarship. Among his contemporaries, al-Tanūkhī is unusually rigorous and consistent in his use of such devices and, as he says in his introduction, he makes it a point of honor to acknowledge material quoted from his predecessors in the faraj genre. In Chapters One to Three, besides his single major source, Ibn Abi l-Dunyā, whom (as we have already seen) he quotes through a personal informant, he quotes six items from al-Madā'ini, and ten from Judge Abū l-Husayn, whose father.

As a literary practitioner, al-Tanūkhī uses rhymed prose (saj') for his chapter headings, perhaps for its mnemonic qualities. He does not use it elsewhere as a stylistic resource, but his introduction illustrates his command of expository and argumentative structures, and of complex analytical phrasing. These are found again in his densely written passages of Qur'ānic exegesis. A compositional feature of *Stories of Piety and Prayer* (but not of *Deliverance* as a whole) is al-Tanūkhī's use of recurrent vocabulary to establish an intertextual connection between the three chapters. This is discussed further in the Note on the Text.

### The form and structure of *Deliverance*

The form of *Deliverance* is all-important—its division into themed chapters, and the way the chapters explore subthemes. Besides the overarching theme of deliverance (faraj), thirteen out of the fourteen chapters deal with a specific type of adversity and deliverance, as announced by al-Tanūkhī in his table of contents. Sometimes the chapter contents are also specific to a genre: for example, Qur'ānic stories in Chapter One, or medical stories in Chapter Ten. Within each chapter's theme, particular motifs and narrative schemas are highlighted and explored. For example, "toying with grapes, tyrant taunts captive but is struck down before he can eat them," in Chapter Three, is an elaboration of "tyrant taunts captive with the Angel of Death and is killed in his place". This technique, applied to a range of sources—the Qur'ān, histories, life writing, letter writing, and Abū l-Faraj al-Isfahānī's *Book of Songs* are just a few—makes *Deliverance* a pattern book of Arabic storytelling and a virtual motif index of one of the richest periods of Arabic writing. It has been used as such by folklorists, but it ought to be used much more widely as a guide to plots, themes, and materials that occur across Arabic genres.

I have used numbered paragraphs to emphasize the book's motif index aspect, breaking down each piece into units that correspond to a theme, situation, or narrative function. Its analytical structure makes *Deliverance* a revolution in Arabic narratology and literary theory, but the theory is embedded in al-Tanūkhī's method, not expressed separately. He was conscious of his own originality, but too close to it to do it full justice. As he says in his introduction, his book is, in every way, bigger and better organized than anything written on the subject before. But though he expresses exasperation at having spent so long writing and rewriting it, he makes nothing of the fact that *Deliverance* is more than a themed anthology: It is in fact an epitome of a culture, in this sense a rival to his teacher Abū l-Faraj al-Isfahānī's *Book of Songs*, from which it differs in that it does not content itself with setting down the complexities of human experience but tries to reconcile them.

### Al-Tanūkhī's notion of faraj

The comprehensiveness of *Deliverance* is due to al-Tanūkhī's conception of affliction and divine rescue. His predecessors had thought of deliverance in conventionally devotional terms. Al-Tanūkhī's notion of deliverance embraced most kinds of human situation and many ways of writing about them. There are few

limits to what qualifies as a rescue story in *Deliverance*. Under the storytelling rules that emerge as one reads, deliverance must be earned, sometimes heroically, or deserved, sometimes by the truly deserving; but often it takes only a very little faith or hope for someone to be plucked from misery, and luck in all its forms, including that of unexpected human kindness, plays a major part. In this moral economy, one person's merit may rub off on another. The ultimate example of this is asking someone whose prayers are known to be answered to pray in your stead.

This is where the structure of the book and the plot structures it foregrounds work together to express al-Tanūkhī's ideas about God and society. Many of al-Tanūkhī's family members—his father and relatives on his mother's side—prided themselves on their inquiring, scientific minds. Theologically they were *Mu`tazilīs*, believing in a just and rational deity whose workings and providence can be rationally apprehended.<sup>1^</sup> With al-Tanūkhī, inquiry blossomed into inquisitiveness and a delight in the variety and surprises of God's world, and he thought (or hoped) that God's providence was not only just, but merciful to the point of indulgence, and likely to operate in the unlikeliest situations. In an ideal society as al-Tanūkhī's tales depict it, God's mercy to the afflicted is channeled through the established customs of generosity and mutual obligation that permeate social hierarchy and social exchange. Money, which is so prominent in many of his stories, even in *Stories of Piety and Prayer*, is a tangible sign of God's goodness. It should be freely given and gratefully received, for networks of giving and receiving money and favors are the fabric of a good society. Coincidence belongs to this order of things. The wise recognize it as an opportunity to be generous; the wicked misread it as a sanction for their evil acts. Invoking God, which everyone does, including the wicked, as an everyday habit of speech, never fails in these stories to bring about some operation of divine justice: God is truly present.

It could be argued that the early chapters of *Deliverance*—those translated in this volume—are the most genuinely religious since they focus on the Qur'ān and prayer, and that as the book proceeded, worldliness got the better of al-Tanūkhī, or that he observed a certain decorum by placing an increasing distance between sacred and worldly material. The contrast between the earlier and later materials has been seen as hierarchical (downward from the divine to the human). or stylistic (upward from the archaic and schematic material that forms the bulk of the first three chapters to the contemporary realism of the following ones). If hierarchy there is, it is complicated by what seems to be al-Tanūkhī's conviction that the present and everyone in it is as immediate to God as is the sacred past of prophets and saints. The evidence of God's providential mercy is manifest in all lives, and all afflictions are important and morally productive if God responds to them with mercy. The happy accidents that prove this increase in frequency as the book proceeds.

Does this confirm the traditional view of *Deliverance* as optimistic? In his introduction, al-Tanūkhī insists we must believe that, with faith, all will be well. But the examples he gives from his own experience are mixed, and the letter of consolation sent to him by Abū l-Faraj "the Parrot," which argues that good and bad fortune alternate cyclically, offers no lasting comfort if the argument is followed to its conclusion. Scripture, parables, and fiction affirm the optimistic, deliverance-follows-adversity paradigm. Life writing, on the other hand, conforms more to the paradigm of circularity or alternation. Thus X, whose friendship saves his colleague Y from ruin, is a threat to Z, who is saved when X drops dead of a stroke; and in real life, as al-Tanūkhī knew from his own checkered career, benevolence has limits and deliverance is a respite. The information on protagonists in the Glossary shows that many of the people held up as examples of deliverance in *Stories of Piety and Prayer* met a sticky end in real life.

The contradiction between the two paradigms is unresolved, and their juxtaposition points to Deliverance's dark side. Al-Tanūkhī lived in dangerous times, and the experience of fear and loss is as much part of the book as the theme of hope. The emotional immediacy of autobiographical narrators' reactions to fear, grief, and pain is heightened by the deliberate eschewing of distinctions of proportion and time that places an anecdote about the worries of a civil servant in the same chapter as the ordeals of prophets, or al-Tanūkhī's unabashedly self-pitying reminiscences of his own misfortunes next to the Prophet's and the Alids' teachings on fortitude.

### Stories of Piety and Prayer

The first three chapters of Deliverance, which we have called Stories of Piety and Prayer for convenience, combine literary genres, which makes it both self-consistent and a foretaste of Deliverance as a whole. Its dominant genres, not found in other parts of Deliverance, are Tradition; prayers; paraphrases of and glosses on the Qur'ān; Qur'ānic exegesis and theological discussions that, typically, expand condensed expressions, explain imagery, and clarify grammatical rules, citing authorities where appropriate, and adducing key passages of the Qur'ān to prove the necessity of faith and the efficacy of prayer. Some glosses are specifically Mu`tazilī in their concern to demonstrate that God is just and that believers, including prophets, earn their own destinies by making rational moral choices. The prayers quoted range from short, talismanic supplications to complex meditations. A large component of Stories of Piety and Prayer is Tradition, both Prophetic and Mid (an index of the former has been provided). Aphorisms, popular proverbs, admonitions, and edifying epistles are seemingly accorded the same moral authority as Tradition. Uniquely for al-Tanūkhī, there is also a story involving a demon.

The scattered examples of the genres typical of the rest of Deliverance include occasional poetry; anecdotes about sicknesses and cures; supposedly real-life autobiographical narratives (the default mode of Abbasid storytelling and historiography) involving Abbasid bureaucracy and politics; and stories that afford glimpses of Abbasid urban and rural domestic and economic life. These last are of special interest, for medieval Islamic social and economic history remains the least developed area of modern scholarship. Hints at the connections between Abbasid political structures, officeholding, landholding, agricultural and manufacturing production, distribution, trade, and taxation can be gleaned from stories. <>

## **ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF ISLAMIC LAW** edited by Khaled Abou El Fadl, Ahmad Atif Ahmad, and Said Fares Hassan [Routledge Handbooks, Routledge, 9781138803176]

This handbook is a detailed reference source comprising original articles covering the origins, history, theory and practice of Islamic law. The handbook starts out by dealing with the question of what type of law is Islamic law and includes a critical analysis of the pedagogical approaches to studying and analysing Islamic law as a discipline. The handbook covers a broad range of issues, including the role of ethics in Islamic jurisprudence, the mechanics and processes of interpretation, the purposes and objectives of Islamic law, constitutional law and secularism, gender, bioethics, Muslim minorities in the West, jihad and terrorism.

Previous publications on this topic have approached Islamic law from a variety of disciplinary and pedagogical perspectives. One of the original features of this handbook is that it treats Islamic law as a legal discipline by taking into account the historical functions and processes of legal cultures and the patterns of legal thought.

With contributions from a selection of highly regarded and leading scholars in this field, the **ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF ISLAMIC LAW** is an essential resource for students and scholars who are interested in the field of Islamic Law.

#### Contents

List of contributors

Notes on transliteration

Approaches and the state of the field, Ahmad Atif Ahmad, Editor

What type of law is Islamic law? Khaled Abou El Fadl, Editor

Part I; Jurisprudence and ethics

1 Shari'ah, natural law and the original state by Ahmed Izzidien

2 'God cannot be harmed': On *Ilūqūq Allah/Huqūq al-`ibād* continuum by Wael Hallaq

3 Balancing this world and the next: Obligation in Islamic law and jurisprudence by Ornar Farahat

4 Divine command ethics in the Islamic legal tradition by Mariam al-Attar

5 Islamic law and bioethics by Ayman Shabana

Part II: History and interpretation: Scholars

6 The Qur'ān and the Hadith as sources of Islamic law by Amr Osman

7 The emergence of the major schools of Islamic law/madhabs by Labeeb Ahmed Bsoul

8 Qadis and muftis: Judicial authority and the social practice of Islamic law by Delfina Serrano Ruano

9 *Ijmā`*, consensus by Ahmad Atif Ahmad

10 Superior argument by Ahmad Atif Ahmad

11 *Maqāsid al-Shari`ah* by Felicitas Opwis

12 Legal pluralism in Sunni Islamic law: The causes and functions of juristic disagreement by Ahmed Fekry Ibrahim

13 Interpreting Islamic law through legal canons by Intisar A. Rabb

14 *Ijtihād* and *taqlīd*: Between the Islamic legal tradition and autonomous western reason by Sherman A. Jackson

Part III: History and interpretation: Society and politics

15 Legal traditions of the 'Near East': The pre-Islamic context by Lena Salaymeh

16 The place of custom in Islamic law: Past and present by Ayman Shabana

17 Jihad, sovereignty and jurisdiction: The issue of the abode of Islam by Ahmed Al-Dawoody

18 *Fiqh al-aqalliyyāt* and Muslim minorities in the West by Saïd Fares Hassan

19 Family law and succession by Irene Schneider

20 Islamic law and the question of gender equality by Ziba Mir-Hosseini

Part IV: State and power

21 Islamic law and the state in pre-modern Sunni thought by Ovamir Anjum

22 Concept of state in Shi`i jurisprudence by Amirhassan Boozari

23 Codification, legal borrowing and the localization of 'Islamic law' by Guy Burak

24 Modern Islamic constitutional theory by Andrew F. March

25 Islam, constitutionalism and democratic self-government by Mohammad H. Fadei

26 Terrorism, religious violence and the Shari`ah by Ahmed Al-Dawoody

Index

Excerpt: In choosing representative contributions to this Handbook, the editors considered the nature of the field of Islamic law as the editors understand it, as juxtaposed to existing practices of scholarship in that field. Islamic jurisprudence, the art of legal reasoning and explanation, is the able, invisible hand behind any legal doctrines in Islam, and 'personal responsibility' and the 'nexus of worshipper and worshipped' are at the heart of what distinguishes this 'Islamic law' from all laws today. Abou El Fadl starts this volume with an introduction to the key concepts and institutions of Islamic law, and in this context, he wrestles with the foundational question of what type of law is Islamic law. Abou El Fadl contends that Islamic law is not

simply a set of normative commandments but a deliberative method of applied practical reasoning. Fundamentally, Islamic law is an interpretive method of investigating the ways that the Divine Will applies to the living interests of human beings. After this introductory chapter to Islamic law as a field and discipline, the Handbook is divided into four sections. The first section of this Handbook covers some of main themes of jurisprudence and ethics, impressing upon the reader this law's basic connections with concepts of 'nature', God as both a source of his creation and simultaneously high and above it, and the main entanglements of reason, natural law and obligation in this world and the next. After this section, the Handbook attends to a simple tripartite formula: The law in Islam is a product of scholars (jurists), applied in societies, affected by politics within and without society, and, finally, responsive to state power. Despite overlaps among these areas, the volume's chapters are organized, according to this understanding, under four categories:

- Jurisprudence and ethics
- History and interpretation: scholars
- History and interpretation: society and politics
- State and power

## The Handbook's chapters

### Part I

The first of the volume's four divisions addresses an aspect that distinguishes Islamic law from many comparable systems of law and moral instructions. This aspect encompasses debates in jurisprudence on the nature of religious, legal and moral commitment in the Islamic tradition. Standing on a nexus between human nature, on the one hand, and moral and religious obligation, on the other, obligation for believing Muslims has implications in this world and the next. It appeals to an understanding of God as a lawgiver and a holder of rights, while remaining distinct from His creation. Whether 'divine command' theory and 'natural obligation' theory is adequate to explain the nature of Islamic reasoning is an open question for one of the volume's contributors.

Ahmed Izzidien opens this section with an inquiry that makes two steps, rather than one step, backwards from legal reasoning (hence not standing at the door of theological inquiry, but) moving toward an earlier inquiry, that of first philosophy, where a human may wonder what, where and why: What is this world; where is it; and why am I in it? This first substantive chapter directs the reader to an often forgotten side of Islamic law as a law that ties itself to the experience of a believer, rather than an individual subject, an emancipated citizen, or a globetrotter. The author moves from epistemology to natural philosophy, forward to ethics and the tenets of conscience, and backwards to doubt and reaffirmation.

At the level of this inquiry, some readers may think that we are at the gates of sufism or natural philosophy. We can also think with Kalle Taneli Kukkonen, that these gates are the saine or proximate gates, as we note that Ibn Tufayl, the author of *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* (Living, Son of Awake), cited Ibn Sina's Eastern Wisdom as a model for the argument for the unity of knowledge of God, nature and the self (Kukkonen, Ibn Tufayl, Oxford: One World, 2014). The opening essay is, indeed, a caution against academic separations of these areas of inquiry. Four more chapters in this opening section will confirm the thought of interrelatedness.

Following this is a chapter by Wael Hallaq, who meditates on the concept of God's rights — a complex concept rarely dissected with erudition. Hallaq tackles what it means to contemplate 'harm' to God — the

one Being unaffected by the conditions to which the law applies. If God is out of an equation of the law, it is no longer Islamic law, however. This puzzle occupies the chapter's author, reaching what is close to a satisfactory resolution only when we realize that the modernity-imprisoned mind that keeps looking for equivalents for God's rights (in state rights, group rights, collective rights) and fails to see the rich threefold nature of of haqq (Arabic for truth, right and God) will most likely need to be trained to suspend many of its judgements for a fruitful engagement with the world of Islamic law.

Ornar Farhat aims to provide what he takes to be an accurate, though in our eyes creative, interpretation of how 'obligations' ought to be understood in Islamic legal reasoning. His contribution, 'Balancing this world and the next: obligation in Islamic law and jurisprudence', strongly emphasizes the role of legal reasoning and directly addresses 'obligation' without confining it to considerations of politics, social standards, or national and transnational institutions. For Farhat, the interest of humans is considered simultaneously against the need both for order in an ethical and spiritual world and a universal teleology of humanity and life. This complex consideration explains the central notions of 'maslaha' (benefit, utility, the common good) — about which we hear later when the purposes of the law are discussed in the second division of the volume — as well as ties us back to Izzidien and Hallaq's view of the role of the divine in ascertaining the humanity of the human being.

The fourth of this section's chapters is an ambitious treatment by Mariam al-Attar of whether divine command theory (DCT) and natural law explanations are adequate tools to understand obligation in Islamic jurisprudence. Attar's answer is in the negative. This chapter alerts the reader to how similarities between Islamic law and jurisprudence, on the one hand, and other legal and moral systems, on the other, are not limited to modern views. Islamic law is easily the oldest current, functioning legal tradition in today's world (and if one bows to the notion that Roman law is still alive today, it would be the second oldest). In its long journey, Islamic law compared and contrasted to other (ancient, medieval and early modern) systems of law and ethics. The notion of 'submission', often seen as an equivalent to 'Islam' itself, is explained here to show many rough edges. A Muslim submits to God, the world's nature, and his or her own nature in one act. This rich position leaves external attempts at explaining 'obligation' in an Islamic world order bound to be inadequate. Leaning toward a modernization of the existing Islamic jurisprudence, Attar suggests that it be moved closer to social explanations and liberated from human-divine postures. On principle, the editors leave this stand as it is, referring the reader to their own writings to allow her or him to identify points of overlap and comparisons between the editors' own views and those of the authors of this collection.

A practicum concludes this first section, one that considers both pre-modern and modern contributions by Muslim jurists to the dilemmas of 'bioethics'. Ayman Shabana starts this chapter by emphasizing the modernity of the term (bioethics) and its open-ended character. At the bottom of the analysis is a recognition that medicine offers: 1) the potential of overcoming some of nature's vagaries and defects as it applies to the human body; and 2) a paradox for the human intellect, which recognizes that humans are not well-positioned to heal other humans on their own. In practice, all know that medicine fails even as it succeeds, but the human weakness and hope for an amelioration of their condition and a removal of their physical suffering conspire to make them ready to bow to medicine's authority at all moral and spiritual cost. Islam does recommend medicine and applauds its practitioners, but it is also mindful of its limits. Shabana views the proliferation of fatwas on bioethics as a welcome addition to the texture of an already rich field. His chapter wraps up one of the field's pillars (the personal side in Islamic law) and segues to the next division, which covers the authorities of Islamic law, shifting the volume toward a historically and theoretically bent presentation of Islamic law's scholars.

## Part II

Recognizing the simple fact that the Qur'ānic revelation and the Prophet's example were the umbrella under which Islamic law operated, the rubric 'History and interpretation: scholars', opens with a chapter on how the two textual sources (Qur'ān and Sunnah) were addressed by the authorities of the law in its early days. In this chapter, Amr Osman provides a complex treatment of how these texts could be both a good starting point and often a misleading indicator of what the law is from certain jurists' viewpoint. This chapter is followed by Labeeb Bsoul's treatment of the schools of law, the madhhabs, also focusing on their early beginnings and characteristic qualities. Delfina Serrano Ruano's chapter on 'Qadis and muftis' follows these two contributions, providing a description of institutionalized authority in society that both relied on the authority of the schools of law, discussed by Bsoul, and asserted its commitments to the values instilled in the textual sources discussed by Osman. Ruano, however, makes an extra trip away from the judges and muftis (producers of the law) themselves in the direction of describing the evolution of the institutions of adjudication and *iftā'*. It becomes clear that judges and muftis played the double role of being community leaders and conflict resolution experts as well as functionaries of the pre-modern states in which they lived. Ruano also allows a few descriptive comparisons between these institutions in pre-modern times and their equivalents in the modern centuries.

In two chapters, titled 'Consensus' and 'Superior argument', Ahmad Atif Ahmad attempts to cover juristic agreement and disagreement from multiple angles. Ahmad understands consensus to be a tool to establish a core for juristic knowledge and conversation. Scholarly consensus, by itself, must be taken only as an indication of a presumptively correct response to a human condition, which, when subjected to change, affects the consensus itself. Ahmad also understands disagreement to be natural and a result of human reflection, but he thinks that many modern discourses have exaggerated the value of every individual's standpoint to satisfy a (mostly theoretical) fear of 'hegemony' over the individual. In the real world, there are good and bad arguments. Bad arguments do not stand the test of time. They work for a while, and then they fail. Only arguments that take into account the human long-term need to be reconciled with one another. The discussion in Islamic theoretical jurisprudence of *tarjīh* (determining the superior argument) shows medieval jurists' interest in discussing arguments in a cosmic and universal format, to be distinguished from modern discussions of tolerance and consensus-building in a purely pragmatic worldview.

Employing a strict historicist approach to the subject, a classic presentation by Felicitas Opwis of the question of 'the purposes of the law' — the *maqasid* — in the Islamic tradition follows. Professor Opwis is an erudite scholar, combining early training in Germany and a subsequent training and long career in the United States, who is engaged with both the European and American scholarship in Islamic law. She is also a close and attentive reader of medieval and modern Arabic juristic texts. In her presentation, she aims at a faithful interpretation of both the pre-modern and modern conceptions of the purposes of the law in Islam, uncovering how the social, the political and the organizational elements of the law are always in the background of legal reasoning.

Ahmed Fekry Ibrahim then attends to the question of jurists' disagreement and legal pluralism. While his chapter touches on the role of state and power and their influence on legal reasoning, his focus remains 'the scholars' who are simultaneously the producers of the law and their internal critics. This chapter's themes overlap with the earlier chapter on 'superior argument', but Ibrahim's treatment considers theological and epistemological commitments of jurists from the angles of public knowledge and addresses a reader who inhabits the modern view of pluralism and takes it more seriously.

In the next chapter, Intisar Rabb discusses a central aspect of the legal reasoning of scholars, the formulation of legal canons. Like canons of statutory constructions (discussed, for example, in Theodore

Crawford's *The Construction of Statutes*), these canons are abstract, generalized principles that are supposed to aid the scholar in devising laws. Unlike these canons, however, legal canons in Islamic legal reasoning are 'reductive' statements of aggregated legal doctrines and hence subsequent to legal doctrines (even though they are employed by new jurists as points of entry to legal reasoning). Islamic legal canons are also considered only 'generally true' — allowing room for exceptions to attend to what distinguishes aberrant and grey-area cases.

This rich section is concluded with a contribution by a veteran scholar of Islamic law, whose early work on the 13th-century Maliki Cairene, Qarafi, examined the connections between scholars, public and social knowledge, and the state. His contribution to this volume is a dialogue with the presumptuous posture of enlightenment, 'reason', and an assessment of the negative cost it inflicted on the Islamic legal tradition in its modern incarnation. Jackson makes a forceful argument for the right of the Islamic legal tradition, seemingly taken for granted by other philosophical and religious traditions, to understand its basic tools, such as reason, meaning and view of the world and its priorities, without having to make constant efforts to meet others halfway.

### Part III

Just as there would be no Islamic law without its scholars, there would be no law without a society that accepts, and at times, resists and complements the work of the law's scholars. Islamic law appeared in diverse societies across a vast array of historical moments. This third section of the Handbook starts with the societies that hosted Islamic law's beginnings. In what environment did Islamic law take its early forms? asks Lena Salaymeh, providing a panoramic overview of controversial possibilities of what traditions or sets of ideas and practices 'influenced' Islamic law or, in the writing of some scholars, shaped its parameters from the start. Salaymeh's early work has argued that identifying a Near Eastern (social, moral and political) context modifies the question of influences into a more sophisticated and meaningful inquiry about the law's early environment. The historical depth of this environment covers ancient Egyptian, Persian and Mesopotamian (Hamurabi's code, most famously), Greek, Syriac and Roman traditions as well as the more communal and less geographically dominant Jewish law. The Islamic tradition of theoretical jurisprudence (*usūl al-fiqh*) has preserved early discussions about the sense in which Islamic law is meant to incorporate earlier practices of religious traditions that Islam as the final revelation is meant to scrutinize and complement (according to a religious doctrine Muslims have). This question, addressing the authoritativeness of the laws of those who came before (*sharʿu man qablanā*), leaves to us non-controversial practices such as animal sacrifice in the time of pilgrimage as well as practices about which jurists disagreed, such as whether the length of a hiring contract may be left undetermined until a later stage in the hiring.

Ayman Shabana then provides a history-conscious, yet broadly theoretical, treatment of how social laws are considered as part of the Islamic legal tradition. It may be surprising to many to learn that Muslim legal theorists and theologians thought about parallels between natural and social laws, or laws of nature and laws of social interaction, and measured both against what they took to be stable norms of Islamic law. Shabana offers cases and legal scenarios from the formative period of Islamic law, modern time, and times in between. His chapter, overall, prepares the way for the subsequent four chapters, which cover the questions of war, Muslims living as a minority, family law, and modern reflections on males and females in legal and moral life in Islam.

If Shabana's chapter covers a Muslim's interpretation of social and natural laws as the laws of Islam are augmented and developed, Ahmed Al-Dawoody attends to 'jihad', a term of unusual misfortune, truth be told. It is in the eye of the beholder, Dawoody exclaims, but it is also a term with a history and a term with connections to other terms, such as jurisdiction and sovereignty. Its simplification, whether deliberate or just

an honest mistake of necessity, is a target for the chapter. When seen in the usage of those who bothered to think about it, it is an element of social and political life in Islam. Exercising 'jihad' is both a source of constructive and destructive energy. It is, in any case, much more than its common understanding permits and much less of an unusual practice among nations that live with a moral code.

The commonality of 'emigration' — reckoned to be an exception rather than a rule — prompts Said Hassan to attend to what came to be called 'jurisprudence for minorities'. A strong strand in the pre-modern Islamic legal tradition (not limited to Hanafi jurists) acknowledged that a Muslim's life as a minority could not be burdened by the same expectations given to a Muslim living among a normal, Muslim community. In an age of global shifts, tosses and turns, drawing on the old tradition became a necessity, rather than a luxury, in order to provide new norms for a large number of Muslims now living without the standard support of social networks and Islamic mores. New limits are now imposed on geographical borders (important for the abodes theory, where the world is divided based on moral Muslim norms and government support for them) and even modern (17th-20th-century) notions of territoriality. This chapter allows the reader to understand Islamic law's treatment of a subject, which is bound to appear mysterious to a (Weberian-type) spectator with no comprehension of how Islamic legal reasoning built its own limits to allow itself to function without breach to reason and practical considerations.

Irene Schneider and Ziba Mir-Hosseini, to conclude this section, investigate family law and male—female interaction under the umbrella of Islamic law past and present. These two chapters allow the reader to juxtapose different versions of justice, equality, what is practical and what it not in human affairs, and the frictions of ideals and realities. The chapters also point to an inevitable limitation that accompanies 'Islamic law' as a discourse and as a human exercise. The producers of the law are, from an important and neglected angle, not that different from the practitioners of medicine whose limitations are brought to relief by the theologians and the scholars of the law. That is, jurists will simply fail to diagnose and prescribe to human nature to fulfil its social potential the way medical doctors fail to address the human body's need for a full life. These two chapters conclude the third section, leaving the final section to a discussion of 'state and power'.

## Part IV

This last section begins with an experimental chapter by Ovamir Anjum, cutting to the bare chase of the questions of authority in Islamic political life. Anjum's chapter reflects a double investment, one in modern sociological approaches to questions of power and one in a textualist view of Islamic law that harkens back to its revelatory and prophetic elements as recovered by moderns. This chapter does remind readers who follow the volume's progression of links between the sources of the law and political theory and practice and between the pre-modern traditions' richness and attempts to capture it and absorb it in a limited number of principles and maxims.

Amirhassan Boozari then provides a view of the state in the modern shi'i experience, which not only built theoretical temples of possible Muslim nation-states, but provided one of the modern world's most important political developments, the Iranian revolution of 1979. Boozari argues for a cooperativist view of modern Shi'i law and politics that blends law and political authority in a clearly modern sense. This is a sense that is thus far unknown in the Sunni world, which mostly knew of competitions between traditionally trained scholars, political Islamists, and those on a broadly modernist spectrum. The relationship of the jurist (qadi, mufti or a holder of any other public wilayā or jurisdiction) and government is a central theme in this section, starting from Amirhassan Boozari's chapter onwards.

Guy Burak's scholarship endeavours to resolve a historical puzzle: Why do the boundaries between the two institutions of 'judges' (or qadis) and 'muftis' — as inherited in the modern centuries — seem uneven and at times unclear in certain geographic regions. His research took him to the early modern centuries and especially to the Ottoman world. His chapter, 'Codification, legal borrowing and the localization of "Islamic law"', considers codes of law (articulations of what the law is in abstract and concise language to be used by judges and law-enforcement bodies), reckoned to be a modern phenomenon unknown in medieval Islamic law, also tracing these codes to premodern origins. His work bears the quality of restraint and economic description on which historians pride themselves.

In the next chapter, Andrew March provides an account of Islamic constitutional reasoning at the heart of reflections about the modern state in the Muslim world. He argues that this area was clearly ripe for creative treatments by reformers and state functionaries all the same. Reconciling 'nation' with a worldwide Muslim community is the central question. It is not that either state power or even aggression (internal or external) was unknown in premodern Islamic history. What is new, rather, is Muslims' appropriation of a European satisfaction with identities below that of a multi-ethnic or regional Christendom (Christendom has never been global). This pushed Muslim political theorists, from Mawdudi (d. 1979) to the contemporary Ghannushi (b. 1941), to ask whether a Muslim nation state can function within the parameters of a worldwide Muslim unit, or whether this unit itself needs to be questioned or discarded.

Mohammad Fadel moves us closer to our recent moment as he takes up the Arab Spring and attempts a theoretical and historical interpretation of the notions of 'political state' and 'legitimacy' in political order in our ambiguous global condition encompassing many (either) failed or failing national entities. This chapter asks: What kind of new beginning should be expected for political and constitutional reasoning in the Muslim world today? Will reconciling the tenets of liberalism with those of paternalist, value-laden views of community be possible?

In the context of a contained community with identifiable borders, Ahmed Al-Dawoody attends to how 'destruction' (of human selves, property and freedom) is punished by the law in the particular case where threats to human safety itself accompanies the destruction. The much-abused term 'terrorism' is employed in this chapter to cover what Muslim jurists term 'hirāba', or (if attended by cessation) 'baghy' or (if attended by a declaration of the rejection of the tenets of Islam 'ridda'. Both premodern views of the subject and recent resolution by fiqh academies' are covered.

While these four categories evolved out of a prior plan the editors devised, they reflect choices the contributors made, which the editors found to be reflective of broader trends in academic scholarship in the field. Classifying the chapters also took the author's orientation and specific contribution as a starting point for classifying it, rather than work to force each contribution into a ready straight jacket. Each contributor's specific goals are preserved in her or his chapter, while the chapters, collectively, make up an overall architecture the editors approve for a volume intended to function as a reference book.

Many contributors avail themselves of opportunities of 'method choice' and 'interdisciplinary outlook'. These are important factors in situating each contribution and understanding its function. Reading any tradition with a focus of any type does always jettison other foci. This is another recommendation to consider this volume as something much more than the sum of its parts. Each contributor was asked to observe the standards of due diligence and offer his or her own view of their subject. The resulting collection is presented with the promise that it will not be uni-dimensional, ideological or lacking in breadth of scope.

## Audience

This Handbook should be useful to advanced undergraduate students in the humanities and social sciences whose academic focus overlaps with the subject(s) of Islamic law as well as students of law schools who are similarly interested in Islamic law, Islamic jurisprudence and modern law in Middle Eastern and Muslim countries. It also clearly fills a gap experienced by graduate students in many academic fields who are unable to consult Islamic law's primary sources and those graduate students who are considering specializing in the field or fields of Islamic law. For more advanced students or scholars, the Handbook provides a review and an overview of the field from actual examples of contributions by its practitioners. The material in the Handbook may be serviceable as reading material for different college and university courses. <>

## **VIRTUES OF GREATNESS IN THE ARABIC TRADITION** by Sophia Vasalou [Oxford University Press, 9780198842828]

There are few ideals of character as distinctive and divisive as the ancient virtue of 'greatness of soul'. A larger-than-life virtue embodying nothing less than a vision of human greatness, it has often been seen as a relic of the Homeric world and its honour-loving heroes. In philosophy, it found its most celebrated expression in Aristotle's ethics, and it has lived on in the minds of philosophers and theologians in different forms ever since. Yet among the many lives this virtue has led in intellectual history, one remains conspicuously unwritten. This is the life it led in the Arabic tradition. A virtue of Greek warriors and their democratic epigones -- what happened when this splendid virtue made landfall in the Islamic world? This world, too, had its native heroes, who bequeathed their conception of extraordinary virtue to posterity. Heroic virtue is above all expressed in a boundless aspiration to what is greatest. Could we admire such virtue enough to want it as our own? What can we learn from the Arabic tradition of the virtues? In answering these questions, Sophia Vasalou elucidates a larger family of virtues that are united by their preoccupation with all things great: the 'virtues of greatness'. An important constituent of the character ideals expounded within the Islamic world, this type of virtue tells us as much about the content of these ideals as about their kaleidoscopic genealogies.

- Contents
- Acknowledgements
- Introduction
- Greatness of Soul: The Reception of an Ancient Virtue
- Ancient Approaches: One Virtue, Many Configurations
- Arabic Approaches: Defining a Virtue
- The Ethics of Honour and Self-Esteem: Miskawayh
- The Ethics of Honour and Self-Esteem: Al-Ghazali
- An Ethical Conflict and its Eclipse
- Concluding Remarks
- Greatness of Spirit: The Transfiguration of Heroic Virtue
- Philosophical Handbooks: Aspiring to the Greatest Things
- Mirrors for Princes: A Virtue Fit for the Great
- The Genealogy of a Virtue Between Greek and Persian Ethics
- Pre-Islamic Arab Culture and the Virtues of Heroes
- Broader Perspectives
- Postlude: A Living Virtue?
- Situating Greatness of Spirit: A Second-Order Virtue?
- Emulation, Aspiration, Self-Reference
- Schematizing a Defence
- Bibliography

## Index

Excerpt: When we survey the rich terrain of ancient ethics and the different visions of the best human character that flourished within it, there is one element—one virtue within these visions—that stands out as particularly distinctive. This is a virtue usually translated as 'magnanimity' or 'greatness of soul'. For philosophical readers, its most familiar expression is the one it received at the hands of Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In an evocative portrait, Aristotle had enshrined the great-souled person or *megalopsychos* as an image of the highest ethical accomplishment. One might call it an image of greatness, as its very name suggests. Greatness of soul was the virtue of a person who possessed all the virtues to a great degree, and whose self-knowledge was reflected in an awareness of the 'great things' he was worthy of, above all honour. Looking back, one can already see this virtue occupying an important place among earlier writers, including Plato, who identified it as the philosophical virtue par excellence in the *Republic*. Under shifting names, under different configurations, the virtue would also feature prominently in the ethical outlooks of a number of other ancient thinkers and schools, notably the Stoics. In later times, it would continue life under a variety of guises among philosophical and theological thinkers, from Aquinas to Descartes, and from Hume to Emerson. Refracted in the virtue—its content shifting with them—were larger conceptions of the good life and the nature of human greatness.

Some of the stages of this long history are more familiar to us than others. The sharpest spotlight has often fallen on Aristotle's account, which has fascinated readers almost as much as it has divided them, and still attracts fresh readings and renegotiations. In recent times, there has been increasing attention to other episodes of its development, both within the ancient world and in later periods, enriching our perspective on the identity of the virtue and furnishing us with new material for chronicling the life it led over the course of intellectual history.<sup>1</sup> Yet to someone considering this broader scene, what will be striking is that most of what we know about the virtue tends to be focused on the European context. Among the many lives this virtue has led in philosophical and theological history, one in particular remains conspicuously unwritten. This is the life it led in the Islamic world and the Arabic tradition.

This may not be entirely surprising, given how many swathes of the vibrant intellectual history of the Islamic world still remain plunged in darkness. Yet there is much to suggest that such an investigation would be worthwhile. This was a world, as we know, that opened its doors wide to the ancient philosophical legacy early in its history, through a large-scale translation movement that saw an extraordinary array of Greek philosophical and scientific texts translated into Arabic between the eighth and tenth centuries. The response this legacy provoked among Muslim intellectuals was composite. Often amicable and appreciative—as Ibn Qutayba (d.889), one of the founders of Arabic letters, put it, 'knowledge is the object of the believer, and it profits him whatever the source from which it may be drawn'—their engagement with this legacy was also marked by moments of tension and high conflict.<sup>1</sup> It is the conflict that has frequently shaped prevailing views of the place of philosophy in the Islamic world. In the past, such views have rallied around the spectacular career of the eleventh-century theologian Abu Hamid al-Ghazālī (d.1111), and the truculent campaign he appears to have waged against the philosophers, notably in his celebrated work *The Precipitance of the Philosophers*.<sup>1</sup> This picture has begun to loosen its scholarly grip, and a changing view of al-Ghazālī's own relationship to philosophy has been among the many tributaries to its reversal. In recent times, several readers have redirected attention to al-Ghazālī's indebtedness to and continued appreciation of the philosophical tradition.

Many of the writings and rewritings of the status of philosophy in the Islamic world have focused, unsurprisingly, on issues of metaphysics. These were the issues that apparently channelled al-Ghazālī's own discomfort in *The Precipitance*. What about ethics? If we were interested in building a more inclusive picture about the status of philosophy and calibrating more finely the balance of amity and conflict that

characterized Muslim thinkers' transactions with it, it is clear that this could not be achieved without taking into account these thinkers' engagement with the ethical elements of the ancient tradition. Ethics has sometimes seemed an unpromising subject to commentators addressing the history of philosophy in the Islamic world. Falsafa', as Peter Adamson matter-of-factly notes in a conspectus of the Arabic tradition, 'is not particularly known for its contributions to ethics.' The intellectual giants of Arabic philosophy, such as Avicenna (d.1037) and Averroes (d.1198), devoted their immense energies to other areas of philosophical inquiry and mostly turned a cold shoulder to ethical topics. Those works of philosophical ethics that were written sometimes seem to lack the intellectual élan that gives sparkle to works in other areas. Even among writers with overt religious commitments, conflict does not seem to be in the air to make it crackle. In his famous autobiography where he discusses his relationship to philosophy, notably, al-Ghazāli treats ethics with comparatively velvet gloves. Yet is it possible that by looking closer—and by posing more specific kinds of questions—we might get a different view?

These larger perspectives and questions about the place of ancient philosophy in the Islamic world lie in the backdrop of the present book, which began life as an attempt to answer a simple question. Among the many ethical ideas that thinkers in the Islamic world confronted in the Greek texts that reached them in translation, how did they respond to this one—to the virtue of magnanimity or greatness of soul? This is a virtue that occupied a special place in the ancient tradition, embodying a conception not only of goodness, but indeed greatness. No less important, this was a conception that has often been viewed as unusually expressive of the distinctive sociocultural milieu in which it was articulated. How did Muslim thinkers make sense of this distinctive virtue? What story could one tell about the reception of this part of the ancient ethical tradition in the Islamic world?

To the extent that the backdrop sketched out above—regarding the place of philosophy in the Islamic world—was shaped by questions about conflict, such a story would seem calculated to engage it especially strongly. For conflict has in fact been a salient theme in the trajectory this virtue has traced across philosophical and theological history. This conflict has been palpable among recent philosophers, even among votaries of Aristotle's ethics, who have taken turns decrying his depiction of greatness of soul for a litany of moral evils. The focus of such criticisms has often been the flawed mode of self-evaluation and deficient humility exhibited by Aristotle's exemplar. Yet this conflict has also been palpable in the reactions of earlier eras, not least within theological circles, as suggested by the history of the Christian engagement with the ancient tradition. The tension between greatness of soul or magnanimity and humility, as Jennifer Herdt remarks, 'is often seen as capturing the basic tension between pagan and Christian conceptions of virtue'. This history of strained responses presents itself as an important foil for considering the Arabic reception.

Yet if the present book began as an attempt to answer this simple question, its plot—and the questions that oriented it—was gradually forced to widen during its progress. On the one hand, it was soon clear that the story about the reception of this ancient virtue in the Islamic world was not quite what one would expect coming from the contexts just outlined. This, in fact, turned out to be a story in which the theme of conflict had a more complex place. It was a story that was as much about acts as it was about omissions, and as much about what was said as about what wasn't (and why). Yet even more importantly for the overall plot, this was a story in which the identity of the subject, as in many good stories, underwent transformation in the telling. Because one of its surprises was that there are no less than two distinct Arabic concepts that can be identified as counterparts or interlocutors—to put it as broadly as possible—of the ancient virtue of greatness that was megalopsychia. These were concepts whose genealogies and trajectories converged but also diverged in crucial respects, and whose content involved an equally delicate pattern of convergences and divergences that marked them off as separate yet consanguineous.

The focus of one of these concepts—*kibar al-nafs*, or 'greatness of soul'—was on the right attitude to the self and its merits, and bore a strong affinity to Aristotle's configuration of the virtue. The focus of the second—*'izam al-himma*, which I translate as 'greatness of spirit'—was on right desire or aspiration. Unlike the first concept, which ultimately appears to have failed to strike deep roots in Arabic-Islamic ethical culture, the second spread like wildfire through a number of genres of ethical writing and formed an important element of the visions of character excellence articulated in different kinds of ethical works. Recounting the fuller story about both concepts meant moving away from a simple account of the reception of Greek thought, and toward a more complex narrative about a broader family of moral concepts and larger region of moral thought. One might call this family 'virtues of greatness.' While the biography of this family provides new insight into the Arabic reception of ancient ethics, it also has much to tell us about the sources and pattern of Islamic ethical thought more globally.

The complexity of this biographical account is reflected in the structure of the present book, which unfolds in two parts. Let me briefly sketch them out. Part 1 focuses on the first virtue of greatness, which is also the virtue that can be most straightforwardly identified as the 'heir' of the ancient one. Surveying the ethical works of some of the most prominent Muslim thinkers influenced by ancient thought, notably al-Fārābī (d.950/1), Miskawayh (d.1030), and al-Ghazālī, we find that greatness of soul indeed makes an appearance in these works. It does so under the Arabic term *kibar al-nafs*, a calque of the Greek *megalopsychia*. In Miskawayh's and al-Ghazālī's classifications of the virtues and vices, this virtue is predominantly defined in terms that approximate to Aristotle's account. The overall treatment the virtue receives among these writers appears all too cursory. This may seem surprising in view of its relative significance within the ancient tradition. It may also seem surprising in view of what we know about the chequered career of the virtue in other philosophical and theological (Christian) circles, particularly in its Aristotelian version, whose conflict with an ideal of humility has often come up for remark. Did thinkers in the Arabic tradition take a different view of this ideal—a different view of the 'ethics of self-esteem' and the right attitude to the self and its merits?

I investigate this question by offering a substantive reading of Miskawayh's, and, rather more concertedly, al-Ghazālī's account of the ethics of esteem (honour) and self-esteem, drawing on a more extensive range of works. There are delicate interpretive issues to be navigated in piecing together a confident account of al-Ghazālī's ethical commitments in this context. Yet my conclusion is that, just like philosophical and theological critics of Aristotelian magnanimity, al-Ghazālī privileges the virtue of humility and denigrates the status of honour as a good. The virtue of magnanimity that al-Ghazālī incorporates in his tables of the virtues thus appears to be in profound conflict with his considered ethical viewpoint—indeed, with what has a serious claim to being viewed as an ideal central to Islamic religious morality. Why, then, does al-Ghazālī (like Miskawayh) pass this conflict over in silence, leaving it to his readers to read between its lines? I end with some suggestions about where the answer to this puzzle might lie, and what it may have to tell us about these thinkers' engagement with ancient philosophy more broadly.

The first part of the book may seem to lead to a disappointing denouement. That larger-than-life virtue which had formed one of the brightest jewels in the crown for Aristotle and other ancient thinkers enters the Islamic world only to fade away; the foreign graft never takes. Yet this, as Part 2 of the book aims to show, is not the end of the story of the 'virtues of greatness' in the Arabic tradition. There was another concept belonging to the same region of moral thought that led a more flourishing and full-blooded life within this tradition, namely greatness of spirit (*'izam al-himma*). Crucially, this virtue appears not only in philosophical treatises, but also in a number of other genres of ethical writing, including mirrors for princes and works of etiquette or literature (*adab*). Unlike the first concept, which thematized the right attitude to

the self and its merits, this second concept thematizes right desire or aspiration, and some of its chief architects parse it more specifically as a foundational virtue of aspiration to moral virtue, or indeed moral greatness.

I begin by documenting its development in works of a philosophical character, focusing on the works of the tenth-century Christian philosopher and theologian Yahyā ibn 'Adī (d.974) and the eleventh-century religious and literary scholar al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī. I then turn to plot its development in mirrors for princes, drawing on a number of prominent representatives of this genre. There are important continuities between the ways the virtue is articulated across these genres, though also some noteworthy discontinuities. There are likewise suggestive comparisons to be drawn with approaches to the virtue of greatness of soul familiar to us from broader philosophical history. Taken together, these observations invite a question about the intellectual origins of the virtue. This genealogical story turns out to be a marvellously complex one. While the influence of the Greek tradition cannot be wholly excluded, a stronger argument can be made for the influence of the Persian cultural tradition and, more intriguingly and more convincingly, the influence of pre-Islamic Arab culture. 'Greatness of spirit' was in fact one of the epithets applied to the Arab hero of pre-Islamic times. This heroic ideal is reconfigured in telling ways after it is transplanted into the soil of the Islamic faith and exposed to the effects of other intellectual traditions. Against this landscape, one can place on new footing the question about the relationship of the virtues of greatness to Islamic religious morality.

Questions about how the approaches taken in the Arabic tradition relate to developments in broader philosophical history form a running theme in Parts 1 and 2 of the book. In the book's concluding Postlude, this philosophical concern takes a different, and less historical, form. The virtue of greatness I identified as a more prominent and distinctive element of the ideals of character articulated in the Arabic tradition, greatness of spirit, may have much to tell us about the content of these ideals, and about the intellectual processes that shaped them. Yet does this historical lesson exhaust the interest that contemporary readers might take in this particular ideal? Is there anything in this ideal to engage the attention of contemporary philosophers of the virtues? In seeking to answer these questions, I consider two different ways of construing the identity of this virtue: one as a meta-virtue, another as a substantive virtue that has an affinity with the virtue of 'emulousness' as theorized in recent philosophical work on the virtues. It is the latter construal that enables us to pick out the distinctive commitments that constitute the virtue, above all its emphasis on open-ended moral aspiration. Many philosophers of the virtues will find these commitments contentious. I outline a number of ways in which this virtue can be defended. Yet the greatest value of engaging with this ideal of character may lie in the very space for debate it opens and in persuading us that this debate is worthwhile.

In framing the project of this book, I have spoken of a 'family' of concepts, and of different virtues that can be viewed as 'counterparts' or 'interlocutors' of the ancient virtue of greatness of soul. The question may be raised: how exactly is such talk to be understood, and how much weight is it intended to carry? Put differently: what kind of claim of kinship is being made here, and is it sufficiently robust to ensure that this is a book with a coherent subject—a book about a single subject? Unless the two 'separate yet consanguineous' virtues that form the focus of this book can be seen to be united by a robust relation, what sense does it make to treat them as part of a single story?

These are interesting questions, and they point on to larger questions about what it means to say that one concept is 'like' another, or an 'instance' of another, or of a larger 'family' or 'kind'. What is particularly worth bearing in mind is that notions like 'being the same concept' or 'being the same kind of concept' are not fenced off by crystal-clear boundaries which would lend themselves to crystal-clear replies to such

questions. Yet as in the literal foundation of the metaphor of 'families' and 'family relations', this does not prevent us from being able to intuitively recognize resemblances and pick out patterns when faced with actual cases.

Thinking about many of the standard virtues, we naturally assume that we have a sufficient grasp of their conceptual contours that there would be no insuperable difficulty in recognizing them even in new contexts—at the limit, in other cultures whose moral language is unfamiliar to us and whose fabric of ethical thought we are newly confronted with. To be sure, this kind of cross-cultural identification is not entirely unproblematic, even when we think of standard virtues such as courage or compassion. 'It is a difficult question,' as Daniel Russell points out, whether 'the courage of a Quaker is the same as the courage of a Samurai'.<sup>8</sup> Yet from a methodological viewpoint, the confidence that such cross-cultural identification of the virtues is possible would seem to be underpinned by a universalism that has been tightly bound up with an ethics of character, and that in turn is wedded to the naturalistic terms in which this ethics has been commonly developed. This kind of universalism, as Martha Nussbaum suggested in an influential essay, shapes Aristotle's approach to the virtues. Taken most simply, the virtues and vices represent better and worse ways of handling universal spheres of experience which all human beings share and which necessarily confront them with the choice of acting in one way or another.'

Yet this point would now appear to add fresh impetus to the question raised above about 'families' and 'kinds'. Because the virtue of magnanimity or greatness of soul has often been felt to constitute a very special case set against the other virtues that feature in Aristotle's work and that of his philosophical successors—virtues like courage, temperance, generosity, or justice. It has frequently been described, and decried, as a virtue steeped in the specificities of its time, encoding (in one phrasing) 'an attitude to one's own worth that is more Greek than universal!' It is the flagrant exception to the apparent universalism of Aristotle's ethics—the Trojan Horse, for some, that betrays its contingent cultural roots, serving up the image of the Athenian gentleman in one view (Alasdair MacIntyre) and the repugnant relics of the Homeric hero in another." Faced with a virtue of such thick cultural identity, what chance does the notion of a broader 'kind' or 'family'—a family of which this virtue would be only one member among others, and to which virtues articulated in other ethical cultures might be discovered to belong—have of getting off the ground?

From this perspective, it would seem that one could only intelligibly speak of this virtue as it lived and breathed in this particular cultural and textual tradition. This would have crucial implications for the way we understand our ability to identify the concept, yielding an emphasis on genetic descent in which the metaphor of 'family relations' would come to its narrowest fruition. Our ability to recognize that a given concept found among particular thinkers represents the same concept as the one at work in the ancient tradition would depend on our ability to recognize these thinkers as heirs and participants of this tradition. Isn't this genetic continuity, it might be said, foundational to our ability to identify Aquinas' notion of magnanimitas, Descartes's *générosité*, or Hume's 'greatness of mind' as instances of the very same concept? On these terms, a story about the life that the virtue of greatness of soul led in the Islamic world could only make sense as a story about the reception of the Greek textual tradition.

Yet, on the one hand, it is important to observe that, even within that philosophical tradition which is connected by a visible backbone of genetic descent, this virtue had a far from unified identity. It was a virtue, for one, whose conceptual traits changed over time. Aquinas' magnanimity, to take the most obvious example, is in some ways a dramatic revision of Aristotle's, making way, among other things, for the element of humility that the latter has been accused of disregarding. Even within the ancient context, different thinkers approached it in a variety of ways. If Aristotle, for example, articulated it as a virtue of self-evaluation concerned with honour, prominent Stoic thinkers articulated it as a virtue codifying the

attitude of indifference to external goods that epitomized their moral approach. We should not thus overlook the plurality of ways in which this concept was articulated in the ancient context, or indeed the plurality of terms through which it was expressed (Plato's *megaloprepeia*, Aristotle's *megalopsychia*, Longinus' *megalophrosyne*, Cicero's *magnitudo animi*). If in fact we look far back enough to take in the Homeric roots of the concept—as Aristotle himself invites us to do in the *Posterior Analytics*—our sense of the conceptual and linguistic boundaries of the concept will be loosened still further.

This is not to deny that many of these articulations had important conceptual ingredients in common. As Arthur Lovejoy noted in a different context, intellectual innovation is often less a matter of the emergence of entirely novel elements than of a new patterning or rearrangement of existing ones. Many of the ancient configurations of greatness of soul can be seen as different ways of patterning or balancing a limited number of existing elements. These notably include an attitude to self-worth, and an attitude to external goods, including honour. The way such elements were patterned by particular philosophers—a high sense of self-worth as an individual or a human being? attachment to honour or indifference?—reflects larger variances in ethical outlook. Yet the differences are sufficiently real to suggest that the notion of a 'family' of concepts—a family constituted by an intersecting pattern of likenesses and unlikenesses exhibited over time—may be required even in approaching an intellectual tradition sharing the same broad pathway of genealogical descent." Once this is granted, the possibility of opening up this family to virtues articulated outside this cultural tradition begins to look less unimaginable.

For an example of what such cross-cultural identification might look like, one might consider the case of the Icelandic sagas. In an essay written some time ago, Kristján Kristjánsson proposed that it is possible to recognize a substantial affinity between the concept of greatness of soul articulated by Aristotle and a concept that is central to the moral code presented in the sagas, the *mikilmenni*—variously translated as 'great men', the 'great-hearted', or 'great-minded'. Like Aristotle's great-souled men, the *mikilmenni* combine great virtue with a strong sense of self-esteem and awareness of their merits.

They are likewise flanked by two vicious extremes, the 'small-minded' and the 'overly ambitious'. Given the heroic roots and overtones of the ancient virtue, there are also suggestive comparisons to be made with saga morality, with its heroic aspect.

If this account is correct, here we have two virtue terms which are connected by sufficient similarities in conceptual content for us to be able to identify them as cross-cultural 'counterparts'. This is one possible model for how such identification could happen, though just how heavily we can lean on this particular instance will ultimately depend on our approach to complex questions about the relative importance of indigenous and foreign elements (notably the influence of Latin literature) in the sagas.<sup>16</sup> It is an interesting question how much cultural luck (to coin a term) is required for felicitous isomorphisms of this sort to emerge. Might this kind of virtue concept have a strong probability of emerging naturally within certain types of social structures or stages of social development? If it did, this would have significant implications for the way we think about the relationship between what is culturally contingent and universal in the concept.

In the absence of obvious isomorphic terms, there would still be another possibility if our interest lay in carrying out a cross-cultural ethical conversation. We might instead undertake a comparison not at the level of the virtue term, but of what I earlier described as its core elements or stakes. In the case of our specific virtue, this might mean investigating, for example, whether in a particular ethical culture similar stances were adopted on stakes such as the appropriate attitude to self-worth or to external goods, and whether concordances in ethical stances can be discerned regardless of whether these concordances were codified in a single corresponding term.

This is not the type of project I have pursued here. My investigation in this book has been structured around virtue terms, rather than stakes, though a focus on stakes also forms a building block of my discussion, notably in Part 1, which considers al-Ghazālī's substantive attitude to the stakes of esteem and self-esteem as a context for his engagement with the specific virtue of greatness of soul. There are certainly many interesting comparative stories waiting to be told about the approaches taken by Muslim thinkers to some of the other elements thematized by this virtue, and to the broader ethical threads that entered into its skein—to questions about the importance of external goods, about the role of luck in the good life, or about the relation between dependence and the aspiration to self-sufficiency. The results of certain comparisons seem more predictable than others. The notion of fortune or luck, for example—such a potent element in ancient philosophers' confrontations with the fragility of the human good—could hardly be approached in the same way by thinkers steeped in a theistic world-view in which God's determining influence on all events occupied a pivotal place. The attitude to such events, by the same token, could not be a proud avowal of independence but a sense of dependence embraced as a key moral value.

For my purposes, it will be enough if the above has opened up the concept of our focal virtue sufficiently to enable us to entertain the possibility of a larger family of concepts—a family of which greatness of soul, as developed in the ancient tradition, might not form the only member. That the Arabic virtue of greatness of spirit has a good claim to be included within that larger family is a more specific suggestion which can only be borne out through the detailed story that follows, which will allow the pattern of affinities and resemblances to stand out. <>

## **ARGUMENTS FOR GOD'S EXISTENCE IN CLASSICAL ISLAMIC THOUGHT: A REAPPRAISAL OF THE DISCOURSE** by Hannah C. Erlwein [De Gruyter, 9783110617641]

The endeavour to prove God's existence through rational argumentation was an integral part of classical Islamic theology (*kalām*) and philosophy (*falsafa*), thus the frequently articulated assumption in the academic literature. The Islamic discourse in question is then often compared to the discourse on arguments for God's existence in the western tradition, not only in terms of its objectives but also in terms of the arguments used: Islamic thinkers, too, put forward arguments that have been labelled as cosmological, teleological, and ontological. This book, however, argues that arguments for God's existence are absent from the theological and philosophical works of the classical Islamic era. This is not to say that the arguments encountered there are flawed arguments for God's existence. Rather, it means that the arguments under consideration serve a different purpose than to prove that God exists. Through a close reading of the works of several *mutakallimūn* and *falāsifa* from the 3rd–7th/9th–13th century, such as al-Bāqillānī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī as well as Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Rushd, this book proffers a re-evaluation of the discourse in question, and it suggests what its participants sought to prove if it is not that God exists.

### Contents

#### Acknowledgements

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm (d. 225/860)
  - 2.1 The Proof of God's Existence and al-Qāsim's Kitāb al-Dalīl al-Kabīr
  - 2.2 Al-Qāsim's Objective
  - 2.3 Design as Proof of God's *rubūbiyya*
  - 2.4 Other Early Muʿtazilis and the Proof of God's Existence: al-Fuwati and al-Nazzām

- 3 Ya`qūb b. Ishāq al-Kindī (d. 256/873)
- 3.1 Al-Kindī's Objectives in FT al-falsafa al-ūlā
- 3.2 Al-rubūbiyya as First Philosophy's Concern
- 3.3 First Philosophy and the Proof of God's Existence
- 3.4 Tawhīd as First Philosophy's Concern
- 4 Abū Mansūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944)
- 4.1 Al-Māturīdī's Kitāb al-Tawhīd and the Proof of God's Existence
- 4.2 The Proof of the Originatedness of the World
- 4.3 The Proof of the Originator for the World
- 4.4 The Argument from Evil for the Originator
- 5 Abū 'I-Hasan al-Ash`arī (d. 324/936)
- 5.1 The Proof of God's Existence and al-Ash`arī's Kitāb al-Luma`
- 5.2 The Proof That There Is for Creation a Creator
- 5.3 God's Oneness and Uniqueness
- 5.4 The Proof of the World's Beginning
- 6 Abū Bakr Muhammad b. al-Tayyib al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013)
- 6.1 Al-Bāqillānī's Kitāb al-Tamhid and al-Insāf and the Proof of God's Existence
- 6.2 Al-Bāqillānī's Three Proofs to "Affirm the Creator"
- 6.2.1 The First Argument Based on the Analogy Between the shāhid and the ghā'ib
- 6.2.2 The Second Argument Based on the Earlier and Later Occurrences of Things
- 6.2.3 The Third Argument Based on the Different Forms and Shapes of Things
- 6.3 The Objective of "the Affirmation of the Creator"
- 6.4 Creation as Proof of God's Existence?
- 6.5 The Conception of God as an Agent Endowed with Will
- 7 Abū 'Alī Ibn Sīnā (d. 427/1037)
- 7.1 The Proof of God's Existence and the Science of Metaphysics
- 7.2 Metaphysics' Investigation of wujūd al-ilāh
- 7.3 Metaphysics' Investigation of inniyyat Allāh
- 7.4 The Twofold Division of Existence—Proving God's Existence?
- 7.5 Investigating God's True Nature and His Attributes
- 8 Abū Hamid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111)
- 8.1 The Proof of God's Existence and al-Ghazālī's Tahāfut al-falāsifa
- 8.2 "He Who Does Not Assume the Originatedness of the Bodies Has No Ground at All for His Assumption of the Creator"
- 8.3 The Proof of God's Existence and al-Ghazālī's al-Iqtisād fi al-i`tiqād and al-Risāla al-qudsiyya
- 8.4 Al-Ansārī's al-Ghunya fi al-kalām—Continuation or Change of Discourse?
- 8.5 Al-Nasafi's Tab'rat al-adilla—Continuation or Change of Discourse?
- 8.6 The Meaning of al-Ghazālī's Mention of "God's Existence"
- 9 Muhammad b. Ahmad Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198)
- 9.1 Ibn Rushd's Kashf an manāhij al-adilla and the Proof of God's Existence
- 9.2 The Meaning of "the Existence of the Creator"
- 9.3 The Meaning of "the Existence of God"
- 9.4 The Tahāfut al-Tahāfut and the Terminology of Creation
- 9.5 The Tahāfut al-Tahāfut and the Proof of the Creator
- 9.6 A Note on Ibn Rushd's Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics and the Proof of God's Existence
- 10 Muhammad b. 'Umar Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210)

10.1	AL-Rāzi's "Proof of the Existence of the Creator" and the Proof of God's Existence
10.2	The Objective of "the Proof of the Existence of the Creator" in the <i>Ta fsīr</i>
10.3	Establishing God's (Kind of) Existence
10.4	The Importance of the Proof of the Existence of the Creator
10.5	God—Agent or Necessary Cause?
11	Conclusion
	Bibliography
	Index of Persons
	Index of Subjects

Excerpt: The endeavour to prove the existence of God through reason and rational argumentation was an integral part of medieval Islamic theology (*kalām*) and philosophy (*falsafa*), it has often been argued in the secondary academic literature. "Both *kāfi* exponents and philosophers showed a keen interest in advancing arguments for the existence of God [...] to respond to physicalist atheism [among other motives],<sup>1</sup> Ayman Shihadeh notes in his chapter "The existence of God" in the *Cambridge Companion to Islamic Theology*. In her monograph *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam*, Sarah Stroumsa notes, in similar fashion, that "[a] significant part of *kalām* works, written by Muslim [...] theologians, is dedicated to the attempt to prove that God does exist," adding that "[i]n theological *summae* this discussion [is] presented as the cornerstone of religious thought.<sup>s</sup>" In past decades, numerous academic articles have been published which identify and analyse arguments for God's existence in the works of medieval Islamic thinkers. After Majid Fakhry's 1957 introductory article "The Classical Islamic Arguments for the Existence of God,"<sup>3</sup> Lenn E. Goodman discussed "Al-Ghazālī's Argument from Creation. (I) & (II)" (1971),<sup>4</sup> while Michael E. Marmura examined "Avicenna's Proof from Contingency for God's Existence" (1980).<sup>5</sup> In 1986, Binyamin Abrahamov proffered an analysis of "al-Kāsim ibn Ibrāhīm's Argument from Design,"<sup>6</sup> and Taneli Kukkonen discussed "Averroes and the Teleological Argument" in 2002.<sup>7</sup> A plenitude of other similar article titles could be mentioned. Mention should finally be made of Herbert A. Davidson's 1987 monograph, *Proofs for Eternity, Creation, and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy*, the only monograph dedicated to this subject. His detailed discussion opens with the remark that "[v]arious procedures for proving the existence of God are [...] discernible in medieval Islamic [...] philosophy, thus underscoring the role these proofs played in Muslim intellectual history.

In the secondary academic literature, the medieval Islamic discourse on arguments for God's existence is then frequently linked to the discourse on arguments for God's existence found in the Western tradition. These two discourses with their evident similarities did not merely happen to exist side by side, rather, it has been emphasised, they had a mutual influence on each other: the Islamic discourse first took its inspiration from Greek philosophical thinking and later came to shape the European philosophical tradition in turn. Davidson observes in this regard that "[t]he starting point both for the history of the [Islamic] proofs and the history of their components is, with rare exceptions, Aristotle. [...] The direction in which the Aristotelian conceptions developed in the Middle Ages was, however, often determined by the late Greek philosophers [...] [such as] Proclus (5th century) and, in greater measure, John Philoponus (6th century)."<sup>8</sup> With a view to the *mutakallimūn* in particular, Davidson observes that they "followed what has been called the Platonic procedure [for proving God's existence], that is, the procedure of first proving the creation of the world and then inferring therefrom the existence of a creator," thus taking their inspiration from Plato's (427— 347) *Timaeus*. Davidson has also drawn attention to the influence Islamic arguments for God's existence had on the same class of arguments in the Western philosophical tradition. He remarks:

[f]rom the time of Descartes, there appears a series of both cosmological and ontological proofs of the existence of God as a necessarily existent being. Although precise filiation cannot be traced, inspiration undoubtedly came from the medieval cosmological proofs, initiated by

Avicenna, of the existence of a being necessarily existent by virtue of itself. Descartes and, to a greater extent, Spinoza and Leibniz were after all familiar with the medieval discussions. William Lane Craig has likewise stated that the so-called "kalām argument as a proof for God's existence [this being a particular version of the cosmological argument] originated in the minds of medieval Arabic theologians, who bequeathed it to the West, where it became the centre of a hotly debated controversy.

Not only is the medieval Islamic discourse on arguments for God's existence frequently linked to the discourse on arguments for God's existence in the Western tradition in terms of their shared objective and mutual influences. The secondary academic literature also establishes a link between the two discourses when applying the classification of arguments primarily associated with the Western tradition to the Islamic arguments. Following Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) classification of arguments for God's existence as cosmological, teleological, or ontological, Islamic arguments are likewise placed in these categories. This has been seen in the article titles mentioned above, and becomes further evident in Davidson's evaluation that "medieval Islamic [...] arguments for the existence of God are, in the main, cosmological; teleological arguments are also found; and no argument is ontological. While there is some disagreement among scholars whether ontological argument for God's existence do or do not

exist in the Islamic tradition, the Kantian terminology to classify such arguments is unanimously accepted.

\*\*\*

Contrary to the widely held view, described above, that medieval Islamic theologians and philosophers sought to prove that God exists, this book argues that proofs for God's existence are absent from their works. By this, I do not mean that there existed the endeavour to prove God's existence, yet the arguments employed are either flawed or unconvincing so that they fail in their endeavour; this book is not concerned with evaluating strengths or weaknesses of arguments, which has been the concern of many existing publications. Rather, when arguing that arguments for God's existence are absent from the works of medieval Islamic thinkers, I am referring to the objective of these arguments—"objective" in the sense of the conclusion they seek: what are they meant to prove? What do they seek to establish? (There is, of course, another sense of the "objective" of arguments, such as that they may be meant to convince an opponent, to baffle, or to invite to reflection; this is not the sense this book is primarily concerned with.) The central thesis of this book is that medieval Islamic theologians and philosophers did not intend or seek to prove that God exists. This implies that to identify certain arguments in their works as arguments for God's existence, as frequently done in the secondary academic literature, seems to pose a misunderstanding of what their arguments are meant to establish. This book, therefore, proffers a reappraisal of the discourse which, in the scholarly meta-discourse, has been regarded as the medieval Islamic discourse on the proof of God's existence. The chapters to follow will examine and explain what participants in this discourse sought to prove, if it is not the existence of God. In doing so, this book does not attempt a thorough comparison between the Islamic discourse in question and the Western philosophical discourse on arguments for God's existence; while such a comparative approach would certainly be interesting as well as insightful, it is not the concern proper of this book, which is concerned with the intellectual tradition of Islam exclusively. Yet, it seems appropriate, in order to put forward the thesis that arguments for God's existence are absent from the works of medieval Islamic thinkers, to clarify first what arguments for God's existence in general try to do and how the different kinds of arguments go about it. In clarifying this terminological and conceptual issue, reference needs to be made to arguments for God's existence put forward by thinkers in the Western philosophical tradition, who were undoubtedly concerned with this problem. This clarification shall serve to highlight the way in which the objective of their arguments differs

from that of the Islamic arguments, which explains why the latter arguments are not to be identified as arguments for God's existence.

\*\*\*

While especially in recent decades a number of different classes of arguments for God's existence have been proposed, I shall limit myself to discussing the three main classes identified by Kant—the cosmological, teleological, and ontological arguments—since the Islamic arguments this book is concerned with have been, in the secondary academic literature, classified making recourse to these labels.

Notwithstanding differences in detail, the way a cosmological argument for God's existence works can be summarised as follows:

cosmological arguments are, as the name implies, attempts to infer the existence of God from the existence of the cosmos or universe. Such arguments may take as their starting point the existence of the universe as a whole, the existence of particular objects or the existence of even the individual object. These arguments are sometimes called first-cause arguments [sic] because they attempt to infer that God must exist as the first cause or ultimate cause of the universe.

Many thinkers in the Western philosophical tradition have been credited with attempting to prove God's existence through a cosmological argument, among them Plato and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646 — 1716). One much discussed terms such as " sāni " and "muhdith," which are Allāh's attributes? If the former is the case, and an Islamic argument for God's existence is understood as an argument seeking to prove that Allāh exists, it needs to be emphasised, as alluded to above, that Allah Himself is taken for granted by these thinkers when they discuss "the proof of the creator." If the latter is the case, and an Islamic argument for God's existence is understood as an argument seeking to prove that there is an entity who is the creator of the world, one might also want to point out that Islamic thinkers were eager to prove that Allah indeed is the creator of the world —and after all, is this not what "God" is a shorthand for? Yet, it still remains to be said that, while it is true that Islamic thinkers seek to establish Allāh as creator (that is, to affirm an attribute for Him), the essential formal aspect of arguments for God's existence, repeatedly addresses above, of introducing into reality the existence of yet another entity in addition to the world is missing in the Islamic arguments. Furthermore, as clarified above, a mere discussion of this or that attribute of God, while He Himself is taken for granted, does not warrant to be called an argument for God's existence. This latter position also results in the rather paradoxical situation that "Allāh" cannot be translated as "God," or that one could not say that "Allāh" is God's name in Arabic, as long as it has not been shown that Allāh has the attribute of being creator of the world, for "God" is a shorthand for "creator of the world." All this illustrates that, no matter what one takes "God" to stand for in "arguments for God's existence," their reasoning and objective is not applicable to the Islamic arguments in question, which are concerned with other issues and start from different assumptions. Phil Zuckerman got to the heart of the difficulties associated with applying terms and concepts originating in one tradition to another tradition when noting that "[d]efinitions of specific words seldom translate well cross-culturally. Signifiers such as 'religious' or 'God' have different meanings in different cultures."

\*\*\*

The thesis of this book that arguments for God's existence are absent from the works of medieval Islamic thinkers, gives rise to the following question: why is it that Islamic thinkers were not concerned with proving God's existence? This observation might appear all the more perplexing considering that in the Western philosophical tradition the discourse on arguments for God's existence did occupy an important place in philosophical thought throughout the centuries, so it might seem natural to expect the same in the Islamic

tradition. Some have indeed gone so far as to suggest that the proof of God's existence has to be the logical, and is the natural, starting point of theological enquiries: "God is the principal concern of sacred theology. And God is considered in various ways by this divinely human wisdom [...]. Among all these various considerations, the question of God's existence is first, both in the order of thinking and in the order of divine things. There would be little point in making an inquiry into some being who might not even exist." Admittedly, this statement has in mind the Christian tradition, yet it could well be extended to the theological and metaphysical enquiries undertaken by Islamic thinkers and it could be posed that in their case, too, any enquiry into God logically requires first the proof that He actually exists. Yet, this statement about the logical order of enquiries into God, while one might personally consider it convincing, does nevertheless not seem to apply to the medieval Islamic tradition. There, the starting point of such enquiries was precisely not the proof of God's existence, who was taken for granted. Instead, their starting point was the proof that God indeed is to be described as the creator of the world. This means that their starting point pertained to one of God's attributes. This observation is exemplified by al-Rāzī's remark that "the starting point of knowledge about God is the knowledge of His being [i. e. that He is!] originator and maker of the world."

Thus, attempting an answer to the question of why arguments for God's existence are absent from the works of medieval Islamic thinkers appears as somewhat of a difficult task. For one, as is frequently the case when a certain question is not discussed, Islamic thinkers do not tell us why they are not concerned with the proof, as well as the related question about the provability, of God's existence. Had they not remained silent on this issue, we would at least be able to establish that they were aware of these questions, but chose, for whatever reasons, not to expound upon them. Seeing the lack of such information, one has to be careful not to enter too far into the realm of speculation.

Pointing to audiences, who evidently shape the content of works, is similarly problematic. Stroumsa, for instance, infers from what is her interpretation that "[a] significant part of kalām works [...] is dedicated to the attempt to prove that God exists" that "the notion of atheism seems to have been recognized" by Islamic thinkers and that atheists were "actual opponents" of theirs.<sup>1</sup> Her reading of these texts is the basis on which she makes assumptions about audiences as well as the mutakallimūn's opponents and their beliefs. Conversely, it could be argued that, if arguments for God's existence are not to be found in the works of Islamic thinkers, one must conclude that atheism was not part of their lived reality, which explains the absence of such proofs. This illustrates the difficulty of pointing to audiences as an explanatory principle for the absence of Islamic arguments for God's existence, if our assumptions about audiences and their beliefs derive from our readings of the relevant texts.

A possible answer—which this book in fact proposes—to the question of why medieval Islamic thinkers had no concern for the proof of God's existence takes into account the all-important role of the Qur'ān for theological and philosophical enquiries. It is well-known and evident that a great number of these enquiries have their starting point in, and were shaped by, Qur'ānic pronouncements, whose meaning was hotly debated. It might beg the question to claim that the Qur'ān itself is not concerned with presenting proofs of God's existence, which could serve as an explanation, even if only a partial one, why these proofs are not encountered in works of kalām and falsafa. Yet, what can certainly be said is that one of the greatest concerns, if not the greatest one, of the Qur'ān is to emphasise God's absolute uniqueness and His sole worthiness of worship, which results from it (commonly expressed as the affirmation of tawhīd and the rejection of shirk). One might, therefore, want to pose that Islamic thinkers remained faithful to the Qur'ān's primary concern when they took God's very existence for granted and proceeded to prove God's uniqueness by showing that He, in being the creator of the world, is different from creation. This book in

fact argues that it can positively be shown that this is exactly how Islamic thinkers viewed the Qur'ān's concerns and that they saw their own enquiries to follow these concerns.

It is interesting to observe that the Bible, too, has been read as not being concerned with the proof of God's existence. In his 1939 monograph *Our Knowledge of God*, John Baillie notes, in "The Irrelevance of Proofs from the Biblical Point of View," that "[n]one of the Old Testament writers treats of the existence of deity as if it were an open question or in any sense problematic." He then explains:

[t]here are, indeed, three or four passages in the literature which look at first sight like exceptions to this statement, but a close examination of them shows that they are not so in reality. In the tenth psalm we read of murderous criminals who despise Jehovah and whose thoughts amount to the declaration that "There is no God." [...] most of the commentators are concerned to make the point that this is "not a denial of the divine existence, but of His presence and interposition." This is made clear enough by the rest of the psalm, where the thoughts in the criminals' minds are said rather to be "God does not punish," "God has forgotten, He has hidden His face, He never sees." Again in the fourteenth psalm [...] we read of fools or impious men who say in their heart "There is no God," but again the commentators make the point that it is God's effective presence rather than His existence that is being denied, so that we should perhaps translate "No God is here." [...] This being the case, the Old Testament naturally has no occasion to speculate in how this knowledge that God is arises in the mind. [...] It teaches how God who is, is known, and is known to be what He is. But it seems nowhere to contemplate men as ignorant of the existence of God, and therefore it nowhere depicts the rise or dawn of the idea of God's existence on men's minds [...]

The same was observed by Andrew Bruce Davidson in his 1904 monograph *The Theology of the Old Testament*:

In the subject of God [sic] the ideas of the ancient world are in many respects different from our own. [...] One such point of difference is this, that it never occurred to any prophet or writer of the Old Testament to prove the existence of God. To do so might well have seemed an absurdity. For all Old Testament prophets and writers move among ideas that presuppose God's existence. [...] Even the phrase "there is no God" hardly means that God is not, but rather that He is not present, does not interfere in life [...].

It is interesting to observe that, while the Bible and the Qur'ān can be seen to be on a par in that God's existence is taken for granted throughout and no argument for His existence is advanced, the later Christian and Islamic philosophico-theological traditions evolved in different directions: Christian thinkers did indeed discuss, and attempt, the proof of God's existence; medieval Islamic thinkers did not. What is more, there is a difference in how Christian and medieval Islamic thinkers thought of their respective holy scriptures when it comes to the question of whether these scriptures are concerned with the proof of God's existence. For instance, Aquinas precedes his five proofs of God's existence with a discussion of whether God's existence is or is not self-evident. In arguing that it is not self-evident, but requires proof, Aquinas makes explicit mention of Ps 52.1, "The fool said in his heart, There is no God. He, thus, expresses his view that scripture addresses the phenomenon of atheism as well as the proof and provability of God's existence. In modern times, the Bible has also been presented as being concerned with these issues: "The possibility of demonstrating the existence of God is clearly taught in Sacred Scripture: 'For all men were by nature foolish who were in ignorance of God, and who from the good things seen did not succeed in knowing him who is, and from studying the works did not discern the artisan' (Wisdom 13:1, cf. Romans 1:18 — 21)."

When it comes to the medieval Islamic tradition, however, this book argues, as noted above, that theologians and philosophers saw their own discussions as following Qur'ānic pronouncements, which includes that they did not consider the Qur'ān as concerned with proving God's existence. This observation gives rise to an obviously interesting question, which to pursue, however, goes beyond the scope of this book which focuses on the classical period of Islam: it is the question of whether, or how, this understanding of the Qur'ān and its concerns changed. For Sayyid Qutb (1906 —1966), to name but one modern Muslim thinker, argued in his 1964 publication *Ma`ālim fi al-tariq* (Milestones): "there were no people—except for some scattered in history—who denied the principle of divinity and rejected God's existence (*wujūd Allāh*) altogether. It was only the case that they were mistaken when it comes to true knowledge of their true lord (*rabb*), or that they associated other deities with God (*yashrikūna ma`a Allah āliha ukhrā*). [...] people, thereby, leave the religion of God, which they learned of from each prophet."<sup>79</sup> One might be justified to infer from Qutb's words that he did not consider the Qur'ān to be concerned with proving God's existence, as its audience took God Himself for granted, but rather with establishing God's uniqueness. Yet, it is clear that Qutb was aware of the problem of the proof of God's existence.

\*\*\*

A few words should finally be said about the selection of thinkers considered in this book. As indicated, the discourse this book is concerned with properly belongs to the two Islamic disciplines of theology (*Wm al-kalām*) and philosophy (*falsafa*). The investigation into this discourse shall, therefore, rest on works of *kalām* and *falsafa*, to the exclusion of works belonging to other Islamic disciplines, such as law (*fiqh*) or mysticism (*taawwuf*), which might, however, in places turn out to contain references pertaining to the discourse in question. Only in one instance, in Chapter Ten, a work belonging to the discipline of Qur'ānic exegesis (*tafsir*) shall be considered, that is, al-Rāzī's aforementioned *al-Tafsir al-kabir*, for reasons that will be explained.

This book covers a time period of five centuries, from the beginnings of our discourse in the third/ninth century to what can be described as its culminating point in terms of intellectual and argumentative rigour in the seventh/thirteenth century. The authors and their works considered by this book shall be approached in chronological order, rather than organised along thematic lines (as, for instance, done by Davidson in his *Proofs for Eternity, Creation, and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy*). The reason for this approach is that this book not only discusses the question of what Islamic thinkers sought to prove if it is not God's existence, but also aims to trace the development of the discourse with regards to the use of arguments, concepts, and terminology.

This book is divided into eleven chapters. After the Introduction, our enquiry begins with one of the earliest *mutakallimūn*, al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm (d. 225/860). It then turns to the—arguably—first Arabic philosopher, al-Kindī (d. 256/873). Thereafter, it turns to the eponym of the Māturidī school of thought, the theologian al-Māturidī (d. 333/944). The subsequent chapter is dedicated to al-Ash`arī (d. 324/936), whose name would come to designate yet another school of thought. This is followed by a chapter dedicated to al-Bāqillāni (d. 402/1013), who belonged to the Ash`arī school. Next up is Ibn Sinā (d. 427/1037), conceivably the greatest philosopher in the Islamic tradition. We then turn to one of the greatest defenders of the theological tradition and harshest critic of philosophy, al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111). This is followed by a chapter on Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198), who for his part took up the defence of philosophy after al-Ghazālī's attack. Finally, we shall turn to one of the most influential theologians of the later Ash`ari tradition, Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), before presenting some concluding remarks. In addition to

these thinkers and their works, a number of other theologians will find mention as well, such as al-Fuwati (d. 209/825), al-Nazzām (d. 230/845), Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā'i (d. 321/933), 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025), al-Malāhimī (d. 536/1141), Abd 'l-Mu'in al-Nasafi (d. 507/1114), and of Abu 'l Qāsim (d. 511/1118).

The thinkers and their works dealt with in this book have been selected primarily on the basis that they were previously discussed in the secondary academic literature as participants of an Islamic discourse on arguments for God's existence. Since this book argues that the discourse these scholars were engaged in is not concerned with the proof of God's existence, the focus lies on the aforementioned thinkers so as to show how a different reading of their arguments allows different conclusions about their objectives. It goes without much explanation that this selection of thinkers is not meant to convey the idea that other Islamic theologians or philosophers, whether contemporaneous with the ones selected or coming after them, did not contribute to, and shape, the discourse in question. More comprehensive research into the question of arguments for God's existence would certainly benefit from taking into consideration also less studied Islamic thinkers as well as those coming after al-Rāzī, with whom this book comes to an end. I also want to emphasise that when basing the thesis of this book, which is that arguments for God's existence are absent from the works of classical Islamic thinkers, on this selection of thinkers, it must be regarded as a cumulative case: a cumulative case insofar as, strictly speaking, what might be true of the thinkers considered in this book might not be true of all classical Islamic theologians and philosophers; yet, one might be justified in tending to think that if these thinkers can be shown not to have been concerned with the proof of God's existence, this applies to their peers as well who were engaged in the very same discourse, presenting very similar arguments.

\*\*\*

It should finally be pointed out that, even if this book argues that, in the secondary academic literature, the discourse in question has falsely been identified as being concerned with the proof that God exists, it is undisputed that the discourse itself has rightly been described as a significant aspect of medieval Islamic intellectual history. This is evident from the important position it assumes in the works of Islamic theologians and philosophers and the intellectual depth their arguments exhibit. Yet, it is also evident from the following explanation given by al-Rāzī in the context of a defence of the discipline of kalām against its detractors:

knowledge either pertains to religion or not. There is no doubt that knowledge pertaining to religion is nobler than knowledge not pertaining to religion. As for knowledge pertaining to religion, it is either knowledge of the principles [of religion] (Cam al-usūl) or everything else. As for everything else, its correctness (sihha) rests on knowledge of the principles [of religion], for what the exegete (mufassir) does is investigating the meanings of God's speech, and this branches out (fara`a) from [establishing] the existence of the creator who has choice and who speaks. As for the student of hadīth (muhaddith), what he does is investigating the speech of God's Messenger, and this branches out from the affirmation of his prophethood. What the jurist (al-faqih) does is investigating God's laws (ahkām), and this branches out from [the affirmation of His] uniqueness (tawhīd) and prophethood. This proves that [all] these sciences depend on knowledge of the principles [of religion].

Al-Rāzī's statement draws attention to the significance of the "proof of the creator" in that it forms the logical basis for all other Islamic disciplines. This book, therefore, hopes to facilitate a better understanding of Islamic intellectual history by proffering a reappraisal of this significant discourse. <>

**THE PHILOSOPHER RESPONDS: AN INTELLECTUAL CORRESPONDENCE FROM THE TENTH CENTURY, VOLUME ONE** by Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi, Abu 'Ali Miskawayh edited by, Bilal Orfali and Maurice A. Pomerantz (Editor), translated by Sophia Vasalou and James E. Montgomery, Volume editor: Devin J. Stewart [Library of Arabic Literature, New York University Press, 9781479871483]

**THE PHILOSOPHER RESPONDS: AN INTELLECTUAL CORRESPONDENCE FROM THE TENTH CENTURY, VOLUME TWO** by Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi, Abu 'Ali Miskawayh edited by, Bilal Orfali and Maurice A. Pomerantz (Editor), translated by Sophia Vasalou and James E. Montgomery, Volume editor: Devin J. Stewart [Library of Arabic Literature, New York University Press, 9781479834600]

### Questions and answers from two great philosophers

Why is laughter contagious? Why do mountains exist? Why do we long for the past, even if it is scarred by suffering? Spanning a vast array of subjects that range from the philosophical to the theological, from the philological to the scientific, *The Philosopher Responds* is the record of a set of questions put by the litterateur Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi to the philosopher and historian Abu 'Ali Miskawayh. Both figures were foremost contributors to the remarkable flowering of cultural and intellectual life that took place in the Islamic world during the reign of the Buyid dynasty in the fourth/tenth century.

The correspondence between al-Tawhidi and Miskawayh holds a mirror to many of the debates and preoccupations of the time and reflects the spirit of rationalistic inquiry that animated their era. It also provides insight into the intellectual outlooks of two thinkers who were divided as much by their distinctive temperaments as by the very different trajectories of their professional careers.

Alternately whimsical and tragic, wondering and brooding, trivial and profound, al-Tawhidi's questions provoke an interaction as interesting in its spiritedness as in its content. This new edition of *The Philosopher Responds* is accompanied by the first full-length English translation of this important text, bringing this interaction to life for the English reader.

Table of Contents Volume One  
Letter from the General Editor  
Acknowledgments  
Introduction  
Map: Buyid and Neighboring Lands  
Note on the Text  
Notes to the Introduction

THE PHILOSOPHER RESPONDS, VOLUME ONE

- On the differences between a number of similar words
- On why people commend the keeping of secrets yet still disclose them
- On why certain names are more pleasing than others
- On why people preach renunciation but do not practice it; on reasons, causes, time, and place
- On why people seek worldly goods through knowledge but do not seek knowledge through worldly goods
- On why people long for the past
- On why men of knowledge tend to be conceited
- On why people are sometimes ashamed and sometimes proud of wrongdoing; on the meaning of shame
- On why people claim to have knowledge they lack
- On why it pleases people when others ascribe good qualities to them
- On why it is bad to praise people in their presence and good to praise them in their absence
- On why people want to know what others say about them in their absence
- On why people disapprove of young people who act as if they were older
- On why mean people tend to be mild-tempered and generous people volatile
- On why people need to acquire knowledge but not ignorance
- On why people who provoke admiration also feel wonder at themselves; on the nature of wonder; on describing and knowing God
- On why it is unseemly to eulogize long-time friends and acquaintances
- On why blind people are often endowed with unusual powers
- On why people say that nothing good comes from partnership
- On why people use intermediaries despite the problems with partnership
- On why people speak gladly about the needs of those they concern themselves with yet keep quiet about their own needs
- On why some people become famous after they die
- On why men of virtue and reason feel envious toward their equals even though they know envy is blameworthy
- On why we fear death but sometimes welcome it
- On why thin people tend to be noble and fat people ignoble
- On why short people tend to be crafty and tall people foolish
- On why some people overstate and others understate their age
- On why people end up loving particular months or days and why they form different conceptions of different days
- On the meaning and origin of injustice
- On the significance of a popular saying, and the meaning of certain words
- On why relatives and kinfolk are prone to outbreaks of extreme hostility
- On why people become angry when others impute evil to them
- On why a person who is being talked about suddenly appears out of nowhere; on the nature of coincidences
- On the meaning of certain ordinary and technical terms
- On the meaning of certain prepositional expressions concerning God
- On the nature of the sense of familiarity we feel toward particular places and people
- On why epilepsy is so hard to treat
- On why people are so enamored of ascetic individuals
- On why some people squander their money despite the harmful consequences this entails while others are miserly even though this gives them a bad name
- On why some people keep their affairs private while others broadcast them for all to hear

On why self-praise is unseemly  
On why people disparage avarice even though they're avaricious; on the origin of avarice and generosity  
On why people blame treachery and praise fidelity even though treachery predominates among them  
On the origin of the customs of different nations  
On why people don't grow young again after they've grown old  
On the benefit people derive from likening some things to others  
On why some dreams are true and others false  
On the nature of dreams  
On why friendship arises between apparently dissimilar individuals  
On the definition and nature of knowledge  
On why people make apparently false statements when expressing admiration  
On why people take pleasure in contemplating beautiful forms  
On why people are more adept at counseling others than at managing their own affairs  
On why the sight of open wounds provokes horror and fascination  
On why people love the present world; on whether the religious Law can conflict with nature  
On why people take their own lives  
On a philosophical puzzle relating to the act of suicide  
On moral change and acting out of character  
On the meaning of a certain saying concerning God's beneficence  
On why noble-minded people love cleanliness  
On the merits of singing versus playing musical instruments  
On why some people master different subjects more easily than others  
On the nature of physiognomy  
On why people covet things denied to them  
On why people inquire into what will happen in the future  
Notes  
Glossary  
Bibliography  
Further Reading  
Index  
About the NYU Abu Dhabi Institute  
About the Typefaces  
Titles Published by the Library of Arabic Literature  
About the Editor-Translators

Table of Contents Volume Two  
Letter from the General Editor  
Map: Buyid and Neighbouring Lands  
THE PHILOSOPHER RESPONDS, VOLUME Two  
On the influence of companions on a person's character and on the benefits of companionship  
On why people scorn certain forms of ostentatious demeanor and why individuals aren't simply allowed to do as they please  
On what the soul seeks in this world and on the nature of human beings  
On the nature and attributes of God  
On why people experience fear in the absence of an apparent cause  
On why people fly into a rage when they can't open a lock  
On why people with small heads have light brains  
On certain beliefs concerning the relation between a person's facial hair and his character

- On why people racked by suffering find it easy to face death
- On why people denigrate things they fail to attain and are hostile to things of which they are ignorant
- On why it is easier to make enemies than friends
- On why atheists act morally
- On why some people willingly become the butt of other people's jokes
- On why people love to occupy positions of eminence
- On why we honor people for the achievements of their ancestors but not those of their progeny
- On why the progeny of illustrious people evince an elevated sense of entitlement and self-importance
- On whether it would be more consistent with the true order of things if all people were honored equally
- On different forms of divination
- On why some people dislike being addressed as "old man" while others relish it
- On why people take comfort from knowing they are not alone in their misfortune
- On the virtues of different nations, such as the Arabs, Byzantines, Persians, and Indians
- On why intelligent people are more susceptible to grief
- On why intrinsic merit and worldly fortune do not coincide
- On the meaning of coincidence
- On the nature of compulsion and choice
- On the reason for the wanderlust experienced by certain people
- On why people desire knowledge, and on the benefits of knowledge
- On why people and other animals respond so powerfully to certain kinds of sounds and musical effects
- On why older people are more liable to hope; on the meaning of "hope" and related terms
- On why women are more jealous than men; on the nature and moral status of jealousy
- On why more people die young than die old
- On why people seek likenesses
- On why we find it easier to represent extreme ugliness in our imagination than exquisite beauty
- On why sudden joy affects people so violently
- On why we experience states of suffering more intensely than states of well-being
- On why seeing someone laughing causes others to laugh
- On why human beings are so attached to the world despite the misfortunes and suffering they experience in it
- On why people say the world would fall to ruin if it weren't for fools
- On the anxiety experienced by people who have something to hide
- On why we are more likely to heed a preacher who practices what he preaches
- On why people regret their failure to honor and benefit from great men during their lifetime
- On why Arabs and non-Arabs declare their pedigrees in times of war
- On why people distinguish between different kinds of air, water, and earth, but not different kinds of fire
- On why people feel happier when they unexpectedly obtain something they weren't seeking than when they obtain what they were seeking
- On why fine edifices fall to ruin when left uninhabited
- On why men of sublime character beget knaves
- On why our longing for home grows more intense the nearer we come to it
- On the meaning of the dictum that judgement sleeps while passion keeps watch
- On a remark concerning logic made by the dialectical theologian Abu Hāshim to the philosopher Abu Bishr Mattā
- On why some Arabic words are feminine and others masculine

- On whether a human being could know everything
- On why new incumbents are harsh toward the officials they replace
- On why human beings are considered to be orphans after losing their father rather than their mother
- On why chess is so hard to master
- On why people dislike changing their name or patronymic, and why they have a sense of aversion toward certain names and titles
- On the mannerisms of people whose mind is preoccupied, and on why people have so many different ways of behaving when they feel anxious or unhappy
- On different ways of approaching God's attributes
- On why we find it easier to remember what is correct than what is defective
- On why prosodists tend to produce flat poetry
- On the meaning of the dictum that the learned live longer than the ignorant
- On why it is harder to speak eloquently than to write eloquently
- On the significance of the fact that human beings are the only animals to stand upright
- On why certainty is less enduring than doubt
- On why we laugh harder when a person keeps a straight face
- On the meaning of the scholars' proposition that a rare instance attracts no ruling
- On the possibility of certain kinds of coincidences obtaining
- On the role of analogical reasoning in the linguistic sciences
- On whether God created the world for a cause
- On why a life of comfort makes people feel oppressed and leads them to behave wantonly
- On why some things are best when they're new and others are best when old
- On why people who display great piety are prone to arrogance
- On why a warm manner is more pleasing than a cold benefaction
- On why those closest to a king are less inclined to prattle about his person than those at the farthest remove from him
- On Ibn Sālim al-Basrī's claim that God perceived the world while it was nonexistent
- On why the poets love to dwell on the apparitions that come to them in their sleep
- On why people are reluctant to advertise their merits
- On the relative merits of verse as against prose
- On why people feel oppressed when things are prohibited to them
- On why preachers are affected by stage fright when addressing large audiences
- On the anxiety that affects onlookers when they see preachers affected by stage fright
- On why we hate hearing the same thing twice
- On whether the religious Law can conflict with human reason
- On a remark made by Ahmad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb concerning the possibility of uttering something that is completely false versus something completely true
- On why excellent souls find repose in the truth and find falsehood repugnant
- On a question put by Ahmad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb concerning why animals are generated inside plants but plants are not generated inside animals
- On the nature of alchemy and why people are so enamoured of it
- On a question put by Ahmad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb concerning the difference between the words "indeterminable" and "impenetrable"
- On the disagreements between jurists
- On why people despise kings who are governed by pleasure and fear kings governed by reason
- On the physical reactions people exhibit when listening to music
- On why liars often tell the truth but not the reverse, and on whether habits can change
- On certain popular sayings
- On the distinction between different forms of divination

On why there are four categories for inquiry: whether, what, which, and why  
 On the nonexistent  
 On why a physician rejoices at the recovery of his patient  
 On why money is made of silver and gold and not other substances  
 On the specific time when the soul attaches itself to the body  
 On whether souls can recollect what they used to know after leaving the body  
 On why mountains exist  
 On why there are three souls  
 On why the sea is located on a particular side of the earth  
 On why seawater is salty  
 On how we can see things in our sleep without an organ of sense perception  
 On a puzzle concerning the possibility of seeking something we do not know  
 On why it does not snow in the summer  
 On the proof for the existence of angels  
 On what justifies the suffering of children and non-rational animals  
 On why it takes us longer to hear thunder than to see lightning  
 On the possibility that a person may abandon every belief he adopts ad infinitum  
 Notes  
 Glossary  
 Bibliography  
 Further Reading  
 Index  
 About the NYU Abu Dhabi Institute  
 About the Typefaces  
 Titles Published by the Library of Arabic Literature  
 About the Editor-Translators

Excerpt from Introduction: The present book is unusual in having not one, but two authors. It is the result of a collaboration between two figures, both of whom were outstanding contributors to that remarkable flowering of cultural and intellectual life that took place in the Islamic world during the fourth/tenth century under the Buyid dynasty.

Military men of Persian extraction and Shi'i sympathies, the Buyids rose to power with the collapse of the Abbasid Caliphate and ruled over large parts of the eastern Islamic lands for over a century (320-454/932-1062). A time of economic distress and social insecurity, of religious and ideological rivalries, this period nevertheless saw an outpouring of creative energy that would shape Islamic intellectual history for centuries to come. Intellectual possibilities that had already dawned crystallized and solidified. The engagement with the legacy of classical antiquity, already begun in Abbasid times, intensified, and the concerted efforts to translate and study the works of major philosophical and scientific thinkers of the ancient world—Aristotle and Plato, Euclid and Ptolemy, Hippocrates and Galen—ministered to a climate of rationalistic inquiry that is one of the hallmarks of that period. The distinctive form of literary refinement known as *adab*, whose standard-bearers were the secretaries, scribes, and other members of the administrative apparatus of the state, blossomed alongside this philosophical culture.

The ruling class had a large hand in galvanizing this activity, not only through active patronage but also through the spirit of tolerance they nurtured in the face of new ideas and existing antagonisms. During the heyday of Buyid rule, the courts of princes and viziers in key cities across Iraq and western Iran—notably Baghdad, Rayy, Isfahan, and Shiraz—became nerve centers of intellectual activity, lodestones for philosophers, scientists, and literati competing for recognition and support. Many of the luminaries from this

period who have become household names for students of Islamic intellectual history, including our own two authors, were shaped and fostered by this social milieu.

This book forms part of the rich legacy left behind by that historical moment—a moment in which many have read the contours of an Islamic "Renaissance" or humanistic Enlightenment. Taken simply, the book consists of a series of wide-ranging questions posed by the litterateur Abū Hayyān al-Tawhidī to the philosopher and historian Abū 'Alī Miskawayh. The Arabic title of the book, *al-Hawāmil wa-l-shawāmil*, makes this dual character somewhat clearer than its English rendering. *Hawāmil* are camels that have been left free to wander without bridle or burden—such are al-Tawbidī's questions. In answering them, Miskawayh seeks to contain (*shamila*) these wandering questions and bring them home as a good "herder" and "steward" would.

### Al-Tawbidī and Miskawayh: Life and Works

How did this collaborative work come about, and what is its precise character? A brief overview of the careers of both men will provide some context for answering these questions. Abū 'Alī Abmad ibn Muhammad ibn Ya`qub Miskawayh was born in Rayy around 320-35/932-47, with one biographical report placing his death in 421/1030. He served as a secretary (which was his training) and a librarian under a series of ruling figures in the Buyid courts. His first appointment to the service of the vizier al-Muhallabi (d. 352/963) in Baghdad was followed by appointments at the court in Rayy under the vizier Abu l-Fadl Ibn al-Amid (d. 360/970), his son Abū l-Fath (d. 366/976), and the emir Mud al-Dawlah (d. 372/983). Many of his patrons were men of great cultural accomplishment whose courts served as lodestones of intellectual activity. The galvanizing effect of this environment would register clearly in Miskawayh's own output. As a historian, Miskawayh is best known for his multivolume work *The Experiences of the Nations* (*Tajārib al-umam*), which includes important first-person accounts of events that took place within his own lifetime. Yet it is to his philosophical work that he no doubt owes the greatest part of his reputation. His philosophical output includes *The Degrees of Happiness and the Classification of the Sciences* (*Tartib al-sa`ādāt wa-manāzil al-`ulūm*) and *The Minor Triumph* (*al-Fawz al-asghar*), and tackles key philosophical questions about the nature of God, the nature of the soul, and prophecy. His most celebrated work, however, is *The Refinement of Character* (*Tandhib al-akhlāq*), in which the ethical focus that forms the hallmark of his intellectual orientation comes into full fruition. Synthesizing Aristotelian, Platonic, Neoplatonic, and Galenic ideas that had become available to Arabic readers through translation from Greek and Syriac sources over the preceding two centuries, this work offers an account of virtuous character, its relation to happiness, and the means of educating it, an account that would prove widely influential to later writers in ethics. In developing his philosophical ideas, Miskawayh builds on the work of his predecessors, notably Abū Yūsuf al-Kindī (d. between 247-52 and 861-66), and refines it in new ways.

Miskawayh's elder by a few years, Abū Hayyān Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Abbas al-Tawhidī is thought to have been born between 310/922 and 322/934, either in Iraq or in Fars; the date of his death is given as 414/1023. After a traditional education, which included instruction in the philological and religious sciences in Baghdad, he worked as a copyist before launching a series of concerted attempts to find patronage in courtly circles. He would spend several years between Baghdad and Rayy pursuing this quest without success, first approaching the elder Ibn al-Amid, then his son, and finally the vizier al-Sābib Ibn Abbād (d. 385/995), in whose service he spent three discontented years before finding temporary patronage in Baghdad with the vizier Ibn Sa`dān (d. 374/984-85). His inability to attain the worldly success he felt he merited—which many have attributed to his difficult character—left him impoverished

and produced a lasting embitterment that is reflected in much of his work, tinging it with a pessimism and "tragic sense of life" that makes for its distinctive voice and personal immediacy.

His literary output is shaped by the philosophical interests he acquired through interaction with leading philosophers of his time, including Yahyā ibn 'Adi (d. 363/974) and, more notably, Abu Sulaymān al-Sijistāni (d. ca. 375/985), whose study sessions he assiduously attended. It is also shaped by, and shines a brilliant light on, the social context in which learned exchange took place in his time. One of his best-known works, *The Book of Enjoyment and Conviviality* (*Kitāb al-lmtā` wa-l-mu'ānasah*), is a lively, stylized account of the evening conversations between al-Tawhīdī and Ibn Sa`dān, covering philosophical, literary, scientific, and other topics. Another work, *Conversations* (*al-Muqābasāt*), documents a number of exchanges featuring the philosophers Yahyā ibn 'Adi and al-Sijistānī, among other figures. Other well-known works include the literary compilation *Insights and Treasures* (*al-Basā'ir wa-l-dhakhā'ir*), the treatise *On Friendship and Friends* (*al-Sadāqah wa-l-sadīq*), a work lampooning the two viziers Ibn al-Amīd and Ibn Abbād (*Dhamm akhlāq al-wazīrayn*), and the mystical work *Divine Intimations* (*al-lshārāt al-ilāhiyyah*).

### The Philosopher Responds in Context

How can we locate the present book in the work and life of these two thinkers? Even this brief outline of their respective biographies has suggested convergences of social context and intellectual interests that would not make such a collaboration improbable. Although we do not know for certain where the two men first met, whether in Rayy or Baghdad, the learned and courtly circles in which they both moved provided ample opportunity. It has been speculated that they may have met as early as the 340s/950s during the period of Miskawayh's first appointment in Baghdad.<sup>1</sup> A learned exchange within the pages of a book, similarly, seems fully at home in the dialogic spirit of the intellectual culture they shared in, so vividly portrayed in al-Tawhīdī's work.

Taken as a philosophical exchange in particular—and, as we will see in a moment, the book has a distinct philosophical focus—there was even more specific precedent available. The Aristotelian *Problemata* literature, at least partly translated into Arabic by that time, had offered a clear model for the way philosophical topics might be explored in a question-and-answer format.<sup>1</sup> Even more directly, other eminent philosophers had appropriated this format in initiating learned correspondence of different kinds. A good example is the correspondence that took place between Yahyā ibn 'Adī and the Jewish scholar Ibn Abi Sa`īd al-Mawsili, in which the former offered his response to fourteen questions on logic, physics, and metaphysics put to him by the latter. The philosopher-historian Miskawayh and al-Tawhīdī, that wide-ranging intellectual whom one biographer, Yaqūt al-Hawamī (d. 626/1229), memorably called the "philosopher of the litterateurs and the litterateur of the philosophers," had a number of wellmarked tracks in which to tread in opening their conversation.

There will be something more to say about the nature of this exchange and its peculiar type of conversation in a moment. Yet, certainly, when it comes to anchoring the work chronologically within the careers of the two writers, forming a clear view of its genesis is not an entirely straightforward task. It seems reasonable to suppose, as many of those approaching the question have done, that the work belongs to a relatively early stage in the writing career of both thinkers, predating their major writings. As has been aptly pointed out, for example, Miskawayh—ever the academic in his hearty appetite for citing his own past work—only makes reference to a single existing work, the *Minor Triumph*, which was likely written at the behest of 'Mud al-Dawlah (r. 338-72/949-83). One of the strongest hypotheses, advanced by Mohammed Arkoun, would locate the composition of the book during the time of Miskawayh's service to

the latter, in the period between 367/977 and 372/983, when al-Tawhīdī would have also been in Rayy at the court of Ibn Abbād. Arkoun speculates that al-Tawhīdī may have composed his questions during his sojourn in Rayy between 367/977 and 370/980 and that Miskawayh may have responded to them between 370/980 and 372/982. It is during his service to an emir who was himself a philosopher and patron of the intellectual elite, he suggests, that Miskawayh was most likely confirmed in his philosophical vocation and would have felt especially motivated to compose a work that would help cement his philosophical credentials. Al-Tawhīdī, on his end, would have hoped to extract some benefit through the support of his well-positioned interlocutor.<sup>1</sup> This chronological hypothesis has not gone untested. Arkoun himself would later revise his view, framing the more open-ended hypothesis that the whole work was composed after 375/985, when al-Tawhīdī would have left Rayy for Baghdad.<sup>1</sup> Erez Naaman dismisses this proposal, pointing out that nowhere in the book does al-Tawhīdī refer to his revered teacher al-Sijistānī, whom he would already have met by that time. His own view is that the work was composed earlier, in the late 350s/960s or 360s/970s.

Taken on its own, the debate about the chronology of the work might seem of relatively narrow interest. What makes it both especially intriguing and elusive is its enmeshment with the way we understand the relations between the two thinkers, the motivations that drove them, and thus the spirit and nature of the exchange. These questions contribute to the somewhat enigmatic character of the book as a whole.

One of the principal interpretive levers used for approaching the relations between the two men is the remarks made by al-Tawhīdī about Miskawayh in a number of works, notably *Enjoyment and Conviviality*. Many of these remarks bear the unmistakable mark of al-Tawhīdī's barbed tongue. In a well-known passage, he characterizes Miskawayh as "a pauper among the affluent and a stutterer among the eloquent" who only has a smattering of knowledge, having wasted many opportunities to learn and having been overly obsessed with the study of alchemy. He's covetous, a miser, and a hypocrite, naturally vicious in character.<sup>1</sup> In introducing the 1951 edition of the present book, Salāh Rāslān must have had these disparaging comments in mind when he suggested that al-Tawhīdī's aim in initiating this exchange was to taunt Miskawayh and to reveal his intellectual inadequacy by confronting him with a barrage of challenging questions—not unlike what al-Jāhīz, one of al-Tawhīdī's idols, had done in a work entitled *The Square and the Round* (al-Tarbī' wa-l-tadwīr) that was addressed to one Ahmad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb.

In arguing for his later chronological hypothesis, Arkoun takes an explicit stance against this view of the book's spirit. This view, he suggests, conflicts with the "serenity and even affectionate tone" of Miskawayh's responses. In the preface to the book, he points out, we hear Miskawayh seeking to console his ever-lamenting interlocutor, who must have opened his correspondence with an all-too-familiar complaint. "You began your letter with a lament about the sorry times we live in." You are not alone in your suffering, Miskawayh rejoins: "Your lament falls on the ears of one who himself laments, and your tears are shed before one who is equally tearful. There is a lump in every man's throat, and a mote in every man's eye." And in Arkoun's revised view, we can make the greatest biographical sense of this spirit of fellowship through shared suffering after 375/985. Naaman, likewise, draws on a specific reading of the book's spirit and what it reveals about the relations between the two men in framing his own chronological hypothesis. He comments on the "admiring" tone of the book—"you are a storehouse of arcane learning and recondite wisdom," al-Tawhīdī tells his respondent at one place as he lays a challenging question at his feet, and I have "fixed my hopes on seeing it answered by you" (5147.1)—and on the "unequal scholarly authority" and "student-teacher relationship" the work evokes. This deferential attitude, he suggests, conflicts with the negative view of Miskawayh voiced in *Enjoyment and Conviviality*, and argues for an earlier composition date when al-Tawhīdī's view of the philosopher was still rose tinted.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, to the extent that these chronological conjectures pivot implicitly or explicitly around specific readings of the tone of the book and what it reveals about the state of the relations between the two men, no conjecture seems immune to questioning. For one, even al-Tawhidi's characterization of Miskawayh elsewhere does not provide unequivocal witness, which might be bookmarked to track his changing view and used as a cast-iron basis for definitive chronologies. As some have pointed out, this characterization, in *Enjoyment* and elsewhere, is riddled with ambiguities, and even within the boundaries of a single work offers contradictory testimony. In one place al-Tawhidi derides Miskawayh's eloquence and knowledge, and in another he praises him for his intelligence and poetic compositions. A desire to shine before his audience, and jealousy of Miskawayh's worldly successes, certainly did not make al-Tawhidi a stable or impartial witness here. Turning to the evidence of the present book, what one reader will hear as al-Tawhidi's admiring tone, a reader more impressed by his acerbic remarks in *Enjoyment* may hear as ironic. What one reader will hear as the affectionate tone of Miskawayh's consolation, another will hear as so much rebuking or haranguing.

This last reading, or hearing, in fact dovetails with impressions generated by other parts of the book, where we find Miskawayh reacting to the content and form of al-Tawhidi's questions with an asperity that borders on condescension, sometimes going so far as to land a few sharp *ad hominem* blows on the ethical character of his questioner as expressed in his flawed questions. A good example appears in 554.1-14. In his question, al-Tawhidi opens with a query about renunciation (*zuhd*), which might be paraphrased most simply as follows. Why do people praise renunciation of the world, yet still we see them running headlong after worldly things? It is an interrogative pattern—"Why x, yet/when y?"—that can be seen at work in many of al-Tawhidi's questions, which are often structured by a quest for reasons twinned to an observation of paradox.

Yet, rather than confining himself to this particular question, al-Tawhidi begins to pull a new question out of the end of the first. The request for causes and reasons suddenly makes him think of causes and reasons generally, and makes him want to ask what these are. Another turn of phrase sparks a question about the nature of time and place, and about the difference between different concepts of time. Having hurtled breathlessly from one grand question to another, he finally throws up his hands in ecstatic wonderment at the grandeur of these matters, at the chastening limits of human power and understanding, and at the majesty of God. "Good God! This is a topic to make your mouth dry, to press your cheek to the ground, to plunge the soul into a state of ferment, to make the glutton choke on his next bite, to reveal the emptiness of claims to knowledge, and to make one confess the limits of one's adequacy and power. It is a topic that proves the unity of Him who encompasses these mysteries and truths" (54.z). Taking the podium, Miskawayh begins by dryly objecting to this irresponsible heaping of questions, and proceeds to diagnose it as a manifestation of ethical malaise, no less—of al-Tawhidi's "vanity" and "conceit"—completing the point with an image calculated to deliver a poisonous sting. In putting this question, he tells al-Tawhidi, you went about "like a proud stallion ... lustily swishing your tail back and forth, running sidelong across fields, swaggering in your pride and pressing ahead with your extravagance until I feared you would trip yourself up in the swell of your volubility" (54.4).

Even without this pathologizing tenor, we often find Miskawayh taking issue with the form and content of al-Tawhidi's questions and sparing al-Tawhidi little of his own barbed tongue in conveying his dissatisfaction. In numerous places, he rejects or corrects the premises of al-Tawhidi's questions. In others, he declares them vulgar and unworthy of consideration, as when al-Tawhidi asks him about the meaning of certain popular sayings (0157.1) or about the origins of different human customs (444.1). This is a question to which "I cannot offer a response," Miskawayh replies, and then grandly continues: "I would not want it should someone offer to provide it for me, nor would I consider it real knowledge" for there "would be no

advantage to be gained from it" (444.2). In other questions, he objects to al-Tawhīdī's manner of expressing himself. The author of these questions, he remarks in one place, "follows a rhetorical style, and does not proceed the way the logicians do in investigating a question" (486.2). In making these criticisms, he often switches from addressing al-Tawhīdī in the second person to addressing him in the third, as if he were no longer in the room.

The last point raises a question about Miskawayh's understanding of his audience to which we will be returning. Might it have been this superior tone and bare-knuckle treatment that later seeded al-Tawhīdī's own truculent comments about the philosopher? One may only speculate. Yet this kind of exchange illustrates the reasons why, even though the overall tone or spirit of the work is difficult to determine and offers a shaky foundation for factual conjectures about its genesis, it is difficult to keep it from occupying a central place in one's engagement with the book. As Arkoun remarked, the interest of the book does not lie simply or exclusively in the intellectual content of the questions, but also, at least in part, in the spirit or perspective in which these questions are posed and answered—and thus in the often striking contrast between the two spirits or perspectives we find juxtaposed as question and answer.

### Al-Tawhīdī's Questions

This is by no means to deny the interest of the intellectual content as such. The best way of getting at the spirit of the exchange, in fact, is to start by considering its content, and by taking a closer look at the nature of al-Tawhīdī's questions. His questions, true to their name (*hawāmil*, "the wandering herd"), do not appear to follow any particular order, and wander freely across a wide array of topics. Several questions relate to topics that fall solidly within the philosophical curriculum broadly conceived. There are questions of natural science, about why mountains exist (4165.1) and why the sea is located on one side of the earth and not another (4167.1). There are questions of medicine or physiology, such as why epilepsy is so hard to treat (437.1). There are questions of philosophical psychology, such as why the souls are three in number (4166.1). There are questions about the methods of philosophical inquiry, about why we inquire into objects by asking four types of questions—whether, what, which, and why (5S159.1). There are questions about practices or crafts allied to the philosophical domain, about what physiognomy is (5S63.1), what alchemy is, and why people pursue it (4151.1). There are also broad questions about the nature of key concepts or entities whose interest transcends philosophical boundaries, about what knowledge is (450.1), what injustice is (429.1), and what dreams are (448.1). Many of these questions were hot topics among intellectuals of al-Tawhīdī's day, and were discussed not only by philosophers but also by dialectical theologians (*mutakallimūn*) and by members of other disciplines. Several of the questions al-Tawhīdī brings up were staples of debate in different intellectual circles, such as his question about the possibility of conflict between reason and the religious Law (4147.1) or about the relative merits of prose and poetry (4142.1). The latter is one of many that attest to al-Tawhīdī's literary and philological interests. A further set of questions that focus on the meanings of words, and on the distinctions between closely related words, flag these philological interests even more systematically. It is all the questions just enumerated that make this book a kind of Wunderkammer showcasing not only the remarkable diversity of al-Tawhīdī's interests, but the intellectual interests of his age more broadly.

Yet these kinds of erudite questions are joined to another, larger, family of questions that is rather harder to categorize, and harder to read in a spirit of mere detached "erudition." If we insisted on categorizing them, we might label many of them as questions of an ethical kind, particularly if we connect this term to its root—*ethos*: custom, character—and take it in a sense sufficiently broad to include psychological or social phenomena.<sup>14</sup> Several of them share in the "Why ... yet/despite" paradoxical structure picked out above. Why do people extol discretion and the keeping of secrets—and yet broadcast secrets for all to hear?

(42.1) Why are men of knowledge prone to conceit, even though knowledge naturally begets humility? (47.1) Why are men of quality prone to envy, even though they know envy to be vile? (423.1) Why do people disparage avarice, even though they're avaricious? (442.1) Many of these questions derive their edge from an observation of the chasm between moral ideals and actual practice in human life.

Things are different with another group of questions, which target aspects of human behavior that do not carry obvious moral significance, and in which the question "Why?" is more open. Why do people long for the past, even when the past was filled with suffering? (46.1) Why is it that when a person sees a beautiful picture or hears a pleasing tune, he says, "By God, I've never seen or heard anything like that before," even though he knows he has heard and seen better things? (4s1.1) Why do people experience fear in the absence of anything fearful? (47o.1) Why do we find it easier to spontaneously conjure extreme hideousness in the eye of our imagination than to conjure exquisite beauty? (498.1) Why is laughter contagious? (41o1.1) Why do some people prefer company when they are anxious and aggrieved, and others prefer solitude and remote places? (4121.1) Why do we feel embarrassed when we see someone embarrass himself? (4145.1) Why do we hate hearing the same thing twice? (4146.1) Here we see al-Tawhīdī as a sharp-eyed observer of human life with an instinct not only for outright curiosities but also for those everyday phenomena that seem so ordinary we would normally be little inclined to question or remark them. Al-Tawhīdī remarks them, and is plunged into wonder: "There are things about human beings ... that carry us to the ends of wonder and plunge our hearts into perplexity" (498.1).

The same flair for surprise at the ordinary is exhibited in many of al-Tawhīdī's questions. It is this surprise—this constant ability to step back from what is familiar and no longer take it for granted—that gives many of his questions their special savor, and makes the questions an experience in their own right for the reader. The surprise itself, the remarking of the hitherto-unnoticed fact, is already an offering, regardless of the way it may or may not then be resolved. A masterpiece of this kind of programmatic surprise—of what we may call al-Tawhīdī's practice of defamiliarization—is the question he poses about the human response to music. Why is it, he asks (4155.1), that "people in a transport at singing and delighted by a musical performance stretch out their hands, move their heads, and sometimes get up and drift about—dancing, making impassioned sounds, crying out, and sometimes even running and wandering here and there distractedly?" Al-Tawhīdī observes the human response to music with the eyes of someone who might have just landed from the moon and was seeing it for the first time. His questions go to the heart of even more central social practices elsewhere, as when he picks out the practice of honoring the sons of illustrious fathers or grandfathers and not the reverse—why must it work that way? (480.1).

The questions that issue from this defamiliarizing perspective are often profound, as when al-Tawhīdī asks about the reasons why we take pleasure in beauty (452.1), why we feel the state of ill-being and not the state of well-being (41oo.1), or why it is easier for doubt rather than certainty to take root in our minds (4128.1). At other times they seem so maddeningly strange as to verge on the trivial or nonsensical, as when he asks why people need to acquire knowledge but not ignorance (5S15.1), or why people don't grow young again after they've grown old (445.1).

The curiosity or surprise at work in al-Tawhīdī's questions is of different kinds, as the above suggests. The surprise that is built on an observation of the gap between real and ideal—is and ought—is not of the same kind as the surprise provoked by many of the other phenomena listed above. In the latter set, as Elias Muhanna notes, the surprise seems more genuine and less rhetorical. It also seems freer, in the sense of not carrying the obvious marks of a personal investment.

This investment is easier to pick out in the first type of questions, aligning itself far more closely with what we know of al-Tawhīdī's character and standing concerns—above all, the attitude of "moral protestation" that suffuses his work, his condemnation of hypocrisy in all its forms, and his penchant for delving into the darkest nooks and crannies of human behavior to sleuth out ethical foibles. This biographical link is emblazoned even more strongly elsewhere, where it is impossible to hear the questions in impersonal accents and not to hear, only flimsily veiled under the sophisticated literary style, the visceral concerns of al-Tawhīdī the living and breathing man. On no less than four occasions, he poses the question of suicide in different formulations. "What causes a person to take his own life when failures crowd him, when poverty besieges him, when circumstances defy his power and capacity, when his demands and desires meet with closed doors, when passionate love oppresses him and shows itself recalcitrant to cure?" (456.1; see 4424.1, 57.1, 74.1). It is hard to miss the passionate undertone of this lyrical phrasing, with its rising crescendo of successive restatements, and inevitably a rhetorical air clings to it. It is also hard to miss in another question, particularly as al-Tawhīdī explicitly points us to its importance by announcing it as the "queen of all questions" (488.1). Put pithily: Why do the worthy fail, and the unworthy succeed? Taken bookishly, it is the theological question of theodicy, or one of its strands—the age-old question of why virtue and happiness do not coincide. Taken viscerally, it is the question of al-Tawhīdī's life. Al-Tawhīdī's saturnine temper and personal anxieties seep through his lyrical, complex prose.

In responding to al-Tawhīdī's questions, Miskawayh thus unveils for his readers, in bite-sized segments, large parts of the edifice of philosophical knowledge as he understood it to stand in his day. The brevity of the replies seems to have been a condition stipulated by al-Tawhīdī, and Miskawayh often refers to this condition when justifying his reluctance to probe topics at greater length.<sup>1</sup> Many of the philosophical ideas he presents synoptically in the book can be found developed more fully in other works, such as the *Minor Triumph and the Refinement of Character*. This includes, above all, his understanding of philosophical psychology, which pivots around a Platonic conception of the soul as consisting of three parts or powers—the irascible, the appetitive, and the rational—and of the ethical task as a matter of ordering these powers or faculties correctly, that is, with reason in the ruling seat. The virtues or excellences that arise from the proper ordering of these powers are understood, in an Aristotelian fashion, as means between extremes. The realization of the specifically human perfection is tied to the perfection of reason in both its practical and, above all, its intellectual aspects. This understanding is anchored in a Galenic physiology that views the human body as depending on a mixture of four humors that need to be constantly maintained in balance, and whose precise configuration is reflected in the ethical and psychological characteristics of different individuals.

These are some of the chief aspects of the philosophical understanding that Miskawayh unfolds in response to al-Tawhīdī's questions. Yet, given the very particular spirit in which many of the latter are posed, one of the most interesting questions for the reader is how fully or directly these responses meet them not only in their content, but also in their spirit. To the extent that this spirit is one of wonder, it is clear that Miskawayh, as a true Aristotelian, sees his task not as that of meeting it, but indeed of dislodging it. Wonder, as Aristotle indicated at the opening of the *Metaphysics*, is the result of ignorance, and more specifically ignorance of the cause of something (982b-983a)—a definition that Miskawayh echoes in one of his responses (ḡ16.5). Once knowledge has been acquired, wonder loses its purpose and place. In responding to al-Tawhīdī's questions, Miskawayh thus aims to supply the knowledge that will function as the natural solvent of al-Tawhīdī's wonder, as he signals directly in many places. The contagious effect of laughter will no longer seem wondrous or surprising (*laysa bi-`ajab*) once a person realizes that the soul is in reality one (5101.2). Once al-Tawhīdī has grasped the right account of "interpretive effort" (*ijtihād*) in

the religious law, he "will no longer be amazed" by the differences between juridical opinions (lam ya`rid laka al-`ajab, §153.6).

Yet, even if the philosopher may legitimately regard wonder as something to be eliminated by explanation, one is sometimes inclined to question whether Miskawayh has put his finger on the precise quality of al-Tawhidi's motivating passion. "What does the soul seek in this world?" al-Tawhidi asks in one place. He continues with pathos: "Man is a mystery to man" (§68.1). It is this sighing remark that Joel Kraemer had in mind when he described al-Tawhidi's humanism as "a sober acceptance of man's ambiguity" rather than a "joyful celebration of man's grandeur." The term "man," Miskawayh expounds in replying, "has been appointed to designate the entity composed of a rational soul and a natural body." The philosopher who has properly assimilated the fruit of his predecessors' labors and confidently grasped the nature of human beings can dispel any appearance of mystery in the topic. Yet those who have felt the personal angst and existential concerns seeping through al-Tawhidi's questions will wonder whether this was a response quite calibrated to meet the spirit in which they were posed.<sup>22</sup>

A sense of tension between the spirit of the questions and the spirit of the replies is more sharply felt on other occasions. In places, for example, Miskawayh seems unable to take al-Tawhidi's questions seriously, and appears more disposed to criticize their actuating wonder than to take active steps to dispel it. This is particularly the case faced with those of al-Tawhidi's questions that focus on self-evident or familiar aspects of human life, which are harder to treat as straightforward cases of "ignorance" that can be removed through an informative account. (Here we may also see the root of the temptation some readers may feel to hear al-Tawhidi's questions as ironic, and his intention as one to taunt—though not by inquiring after abstruse matters, but after insultingly simplistic ones.) Why do people who have something to hide become anxious, so much that they virtually give themselves away? Your question, Miskawayh tersely replies, "only provokes perplexity (hayrah) in people who do not acknowledge the reality of the soul" (5104.2); nobody who knows the first thing about the topic could be surprised by this fact. Why do people grow more hopeful the older they grow? (594.1). Rather than respond directly, Miskawayh gives a deconstructive genealogy of the wonder that drove it (apparently ignorant of the fact that Aristotle himself had dignified the topic with a discussion in the *Rhetoric*). "This question took an act of the soul and connected it with an act of nature, of the sort that depends on the body and the bodily mixture, and then a comparison was struck between the two, though they are distinct and do not resemble each other. This is why it provoked a sense of astonishment" (594.2). Why do those who die young outnumber those who die old? "There is little to wonder at" in this, as "it would indeed be worthy of wonder if the opposite obtained" (596.2). Elsewhere, his impatience becomes clearer. "The merest reflection suffices to answer this question," he says in one place (80.2), after the briefest of replies. "Your question answers itself," he curtly says elsewhere (§76.2). Several times he describes al-Tawhidi's questions as "too obvious" to be worth the toil of serious response (e.g., 551.11, 4.11, 38.2). Sometimes his only way of dealing with an almost absurd or trivial-sounding question about self-evident things is by converting it into a different question. A good example is Question 1s, where al-Tawhidi asks—and here we translate as literally as possible—why people need to "learn knowledge" (yata`allama l-ilm) rather than "learn ignorance" (yata`allama l-jahl). Miskawayh deals with this extraordinary question by hearing it as an invitation to provide a philosophical overview of the nature of knowledge.

Yet the sharpest contrast probably emerges in those questions broadly called "ethical," particularly those paradoxical "Why ... yet ... ?" questions, which reveal al-Tawhidi's preoccupation with the gap between the real and the ideal in human life. Arkoun has aptly spoken of the "passion for teaching in which all of Miskawayh's works abound."<sup>24</sup> In Miskawayh's responses to these questions, we see this passion take a powerful moral form that gives us a clear glimpse of the future author of the *Refinement*. Asked why

people behave one way or another, Miskawayh's response is often to simply state that they shouldn't. Asked why the real and the ideal diverge, Miskawayh often responds by correcting al-Tawhīdī's notion of the real to tip it more firmly into the domain of the ideal. The really learned man will never be conceited. Real men of quality are not prone to envy. If one tells secrets or breaks promises or displays avarice even though one shouldn't—well, all that can be done is to simply reassert that one shouldn't, and to explain why one nevertheless does through a closer analysis of the soul, which reveals the existence of different powers that compete for supremacy, the highest often losing out to the lowest. Miskawayh's response is thus to reassert the idealistic viewpoint that al-Tawhīdī interrogates by referring to the observed facts. It is this dimension of the exchange that has prompted Arkoun to state that a "misunderstanding" runs through the entire book.<sup>1</sup>

The difference between the spirit or perspective of the questions and responses can be overstated. As Arkoun himself emphasizes, for example, it would be wrong to write this up as a contrast between a passionate, experiential, personal perspective and a dispassionate, abstract, impersonal one. The ethical views Miskawayh outlines here and elsewhere also carried lived or experiential significance for him: They were ideals meant to guide his own conduct. This is a personal dimension he makes crystal clear in the *Refinement*, and is also evident in the so-called "oath" or "covenant" ('and) with which he announced his philosophical conversion.<sup>26</sup> Even more basically, both questioner and respondent are united in at least one set of fundamental values—an aspiration to uncover rational answers, and a belief in the possibility of obtaining them. Yet the differences in intellectual temper that divide the two thinkers remain real, and they form an integral part of the reader's experience of the book and of the interest with which one approaches it. If we want to read on even after we discover our authors in a state of "misunderstanding," it is not only because the questions and the answers as such engage us, but also because this misunderstanding is interesting.

### Audience and Method of Composition

So much for the content of the work. What can we say about its method of composition? This question is in fact closely connected to a question (and indeed puzzle) about its intended audience. The book opens with a preface in which Miskawayh, addressing al-Tawhīdī in the second person, acknowledges the questions he has sent to him and outlines the method he will follow in responding to them. His replies will be brief, and for further detail, he will refer his reader to books where they can be found more fully elaborated. Taking this preface at face value, it seems plausible that al-Tawhīdī sent all of his questions to Miskawayh at a single stroke, though in places Miskawayh expresses his readiness to receive new ones (e.g., §16.6). The body of Miskawayh's responses suggests that he likewise delivered them all together. He occasionally refers back to his earlier responses, particularly when he wishes to avoid repetition. Unlike other forms of learned correspondence we are familiar with—such as the famous exchange between Avicenna (d. 428/1037) and al-Bīrūnī (d. ca. 440/1048)—there is no evidence that any follow-up took place between the two men after the initial answers were given. There is only one instance in the entire work that provides the tantalizing suggestion of a counter-response having been offered by al-Tawhīdī.

One aspect of Miskawayh's preface that is so obvious it may not strike us immediately is that we have no independent access to al-Tawhīdī's initial letter, which Miskawayh responds to in the preface, except through the summary Miskawayh provides. The point applies, in fact, to al-Tawhīdī's questions as a whole, and reflects an important aspect of the book's composition that enters the reader's experience repeatedly throughout the book. While in many places it seems clear that al-Tawhīdī's questions have been quoted verbatim, in many other places it is equally evident that Miskawayh has intervened in that section of the text that is marked out in the translation as al-Tawhīdī's speaking part. Sometimes, instead of quoting a

question in full, he reports it in truncated form, paraphrases it, or summarizes parts of it (see, e.g., §§4.3, 68.1, 165.1, 173.1). Often, this reflects an overt dismissal of the value of the remarks summarized or left unreported. On occasion, the interventions are so drastic that the reader is only allowed the barest access to al-Tawhīdī's question. An example is §157.1, which Miskawayh expresses so much disdain for that not only does he refuse to answer it; he doesn't even fully quote it.

One challenging consequence of this practice is that it is sometimes difficult to disentangle al-Tawhīdī's remarks from Miskawayh's interventions and determine whose voice we are hearing. A particularly acute example of this is §149.1, though there are many others. In several cases, the editorial work makes the logical flow of the question harder to follow, though Miskawayh's responses are usually a good guide for identifying the core thread of questioning. Such heavy-handed editorializing has a bearing on how we understand Miskawayh's view of the audience of this written exchange. On the one hand, as already mentioned, there was a sufficiently established precedent of question-and-answer works of different types—and even more broadly, of composing works at the behest of particular individuals while offering them to the wider public—that it is reasonable to suppose Miskawayh likewise intended this work for wider consumption. On at least one occasion, he refers to it as a "book" (§151.4). In a passage that is of special importance for reconstructing his understanding of his audience, he apologizes for his brevity in answering a particular question and remarks: "I pray that the statements to which I have confined myself will suffice for those perusing [al-nāzir] the present questions; for I have been addressing my answers to a reader who [man] already has a purchase on these subjects and so commands respect. Whoever is not at this level must school himself well in these subjects first, and only then, God willing, peruse these answers" (0146.2).

While it could be debated whether the terms that feature in the first part of this passage ("those perusing," "a reader") should be translated in the singular or the plural, the last statement makes it clear that Miskawayh expected the work to find readers beyond the single questioner he is most immediately addressing. This remark also illuminates Miskawayh's conception of his audience on another level, suggesting that despite the book's synoptic character, he thinks of his reader not as the beginner, the young disciple, or the amateur (as Arkoun, for one, proposes), but as a person with a certain degree of intellectual accomplishment. The fact that he is not addressing himself exclusively to al-Tawhīdī but speaking beyond him to a wider audience appears to find confirmation at several junctures of the text where one sees Miskawayh abandoning the second-person pronoun ("you") and referring to al-Tawhīdī in the third person (e.g., 4457. 86.z, 128.2). The fact that in many of these cases Miskawayh is implicitly conveying a negative view of al-Tawhīdī's questioning (giving this grammatical shift an expressive significance) leaves the point untouched.

At the same time, this widened conception of Miskawayh's intended audience is hard to square with some of his editorial interventions. In several places, these interventions leave the question opaque in ways that seem to presuppose that the reader would have independent means of access to al-Tawhīdī's questions beyond the access Miskawayh provides.<sup>30</sup> On those occasions, it is as if Miskawayh had lost sight of his wider audience and was addressing himself more narrowly to al-Tawhīdī. One possible conjecture, more compatible with the broader view of his audience, is that Miskawayh indeed expected that al-Tawhīdī's questions would circulate separately.

### Labeling the Questions

These puzzles about the book's audience and method of composition bring us to a related issue. Readers will notice that several of the questions—particularly early on in the book—carry labels of different kinds.

Some are very specific, e.g., on the meaning and origin of injustice (429.1) or on why some dreams are true and other false (47.1). Most of them, however, speak to broad categories. The main categories are: "ethical" (khuluqiyyah), "relating to (voluntary) choice" (ikhtiyāriyyah), "natural" (tabi'iyyah), "voluntary" (irādiyyah), and "linguistic" or "lexical" (lughawiyyah). Occasionally we see these labels being combined, e.g., "natural-ethical" or "natural-linguistic." What is the function and significance of these labels? And to which of our two authors may we ascribe the initiative of affixing them to the questions? The function of these labels, in fact, is not entirely transparent. With the exception of the questions tagged as "linguistic"—which predictably focus on issues of a philological kind—a closer examination of the labels of the questions against their content does not enable one to confidently assign a clear meaning to each label and demarcate it sharply from the others.

Certainly, there are broad patterns to be observed. The questions labeled "ethical" tend to focus on aspects of human behavior that carry ethical significance, and sometimes straightforwardly relate to excellences or defects (virtues or vices) of character. (Examples: on why men of knowledge tend to be conceited [47.1] and on why men of virtue and reason feel envious toward their equals even though they know envy is blameworthy [423.1].) The questions labeled "natural"—contrary to what we might anticipate—also tend to focus on human behavior, with the perhaps discernible distinction that this behavior usually does not carry apparent ethical significance. (Examples: on why people long for the past [46.i]; on why people want to know what other say about them in their absence [412.1]; and on why people end up loving particular months or days and why they form different conceptions of different days [428.1].) Those labeled as "questions of voluntary choice" often seem to revolve around value judgments or responses of approval/disapproval to different kinds of things. (Examples: on why it is bad to praise people in their presence [411.1]; on why people disapprove of young people who act as if they were older [413.1]; and on why it is unseemly to eulogize long-term friends and acquaintances [417.1].) The paucity of questions labeled "volitional" makes it harder to speak of distinct patterns.

Yet all of the patterns one discerns are shot through with exceptions. The category of "natural questions" is probably the best example, incorporating a number of questions that fit a little more predictably under that heading, such as ones relating to medicine or physiology. (Examples: on why blind people are often endowed with unusual powers [418.1] and on why epilepsy is so hard to treat [437.1].) It will also be clear that the content of many of these variously labeled questions is remarkably similar, with most focusing on human behavior. The seams between topics seem thin, and sometimes the label settled on one question may not strike the reader as the most suitable one based on its apparent semantic pattern. Moreover, the pattern is made harder to discern by the ricocheting style of al-Tawhīdī's questioning, which sometimes leaves in doubt which of the multiple strands of his questions the label is intended to reflect. No less puzzlingly, nearly a third of the way into the list of questions (after §§49.1-6), the labels come to an abrupt end.

What to make of all this? It might help if we could say with greater definiteness who was responsible for assigning these labels in the first place, even if it would not entirely resolve the conundrum. Most of those who have reflected on the issue have credited the labels to al-Tawhīdī. One of the strongest arguments in favor of this hypothesis is the one offered by Elias Muhanna, who suggests that had the labels been added by the hand of a copyist, he might have taken greater care to ensure the adequacy of a given label to its multilayered question.<sup>32</sup> Yet one must wonder whether there is any single label that would be capacious enough to reflect and encompass all the threads of al-Tawhīdī's thinking.

My own sense is that the labels should be ascribed either to a copyist or to Miskawayh himself. The desire to order, systematize, and categorize certainly seems far more of a piece with what we see of

Miskawayh's intellectual temper, and his evident interest to situate his enterprise against recognizable rubrics and intellectual formats. Besides this psychological evidence, there is also the evidence of the questions and answers themselves. It is striking that in a number of cases, the labels do not reflect the content of the questions nearly as well as they reflect the answers. In the label for §3.1, for example, literally rendered as "A composite question about the secrets of nature and the letters of the language," the term "letters" (*hurúf*) does not appear in the question itself, and appears for the first time in the reply. §33.1 carries the label A psychological (*nafsāniyyah*) question," a label that seems mystifying if one looks only at the question, which asks for an explanation of certain kinds of coincidence. ("Why does a person who is the subject of conversation unexpectedly appear at the very moment he is being mentioned?") Miskawayh, however, builds his reply precisely on considerations about the nature of the soul (*nafs*). Likewise, it is noteworthy that some of the questions labeled "ethical" are given a distinct ethical inflection, and connected more directly to the excellences or defects of character, in Miskawayh's reply rather than in al-Tawhīdī's question.

This hypothesis doesn't rule out the possibility that it was a copyist, rather than Miskawayh himself, who assigned the labels; it only argues against their being the work of al-Tawhīdī. Why the abrupt stop? Did the meticulous categorizer, toiling over the wild garden of al-Tawhīdī's questions, reach a point where he threw up his hands at their untamable profusion and simply gave up? Short of clinching evidence, one may only speculate. But for the reader of the present questions, there could be no greater commendation than such a defeat. <>

<>

## Bibliography

[Finding God through Yoga: Paramahansa Yogananda and Modern American Religion in a Global Age](#) by David J. Neumann [University of North Carolina Press, 9781469648620]

[In Dialogue with Classical Indian Traditions: Encounter, Transformation and Interpretation](#) edited by Brian Black and Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad [Dialogues in South Asian Traditions: Religion, Philosophy, Literature and History, Routledge, 9781138541399]

[Jesus in an Age of Enlightenment: Radical Gospels from Thomas Hobbes to Thomas Jefferson](#) by Jonathan C. P. Birch [Christianities in the Trans-Atlantic World, Palgrave Macmillan, 9781137512758]

[Religion, Law, USA](#) edited by Joshua Dubler and Isaac Weiner [North American Religions, New York University Press, NYU Press, 9781479893362]

[Free Will, Causality, and Neuroscience](#) edited by Bernard Feltz, Marcus Missal and Andrew Cameron Sims [Value Inquiry Book Series, Cognitive Science, Brill, Rodopi, Hardback: 9789004372917, E-Book: 9789004409965] [Open Source](#)

[Esoteric Images: Decoding the Late Herat School of Painting](#) by Tawfiq Da'adli [Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture, Brill, Hardback: 9789004398009; E-Book: 9789004398412]

[Sainthood and Authority in Early Islam: Al-Hakīm al-Tirmidhī's Theory of wilāya and the Reenvisioning of the Sunnī Caliphate](#) by Aiyub Palmer [Studies on Sufism, Brill, Hardback: 9789004408302; E-Book: 9789004416550]

[The Qur'ān and the Bible: Text and Commentary](#) by Gabriel Said Reynolds, Qur'ān translation by Ali Quli Qarai [Yale University Press, 9780300181326]

[The Quranic Jesus: A New Interpretation](#) by Carlos A. Segovia [Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: Tension, Transmission, Transformation, de Gruyter, 9783110597646]

[Approaches to the Qur'ān in Sub-Saharan Africa](#) edited by Zulfikar Hirji [Qur'anic Studies Series, Oxford University Press, 9780198840770]

[Approaches to the Qur'ān in Contemporary Iran](#) edited by Alessandro Cancian [Qur'anic Studies Series, Oxford University Press, 9780198840763]

[Contemporary Approaches to the Qur'an and its Interpretation in Iran](#) by Ali Akbar, Abdullah Saeed [Contemporary Thought in the Islamic World, Routledge, 9780367272036]

[A Sufi Apologist of Nīshāpūr: The Life and Thought of Abū `Abd al-Rahmān al-Sulamī](#) by S.Z. Chowdhury [Monographs in Arabic and Islamic Studies, Equinox Publishing, 9781781795224]

[A Light in the Heavens: Sayings of the Prophet Muhammad](#) by al-Qādī al-Qudā`ī, translated by Tahera Qutbuddin, foreword by Paul Hinder. [Library of Arabic Literature, New York University, 9781479864485]

[Stories of Piety and Prayer: Deliverance Follows Adversity](#) by al-Muhassin ibn 'Ali al-Tanukhi (Author), edited and translated by Julia Bray, Volume editor: Shawkat M. Toorawa [Library of Arabic Literature, NYU Press, 9781479855964]

[Routledge Handbook of Islamic Law](#) edited by Khaled Abou El Fadl, Ahmad Atif Ahmad, and Said Fares Hassan [Routledge Handbooks, Routledge, 9781138803176]

[Virtues of Greatness in the Arabic Tradition](#) by Sophia Vasalou [Oxford University Press, 9780198842828]

[Arguments for God's Existence in Classical Islamic Thought: A Reappraisal of the Discourse](#) by Hannah C. Erlwein [De Gruyter, 9783110617641]

[The Philosopher Responds: An Intellectual Correspondence from the Tenth Century, Volume One](#) by Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi, Abu 'Ali Miskawayh edited by, Bilal Orfali and Maurice A. Pomerantz (Editor), translated by Sophia Vasalou and James E. Montgomery, Volume editor: Devin J. Stewart [Library of Arabic Literature, New York University Press, 9781479871483]

[The Philosopher Responds: An Intellectual Correspondence from the Tenth Century, Volume Two](#) by Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi, Abu 'Ali Miskawayh edited by, Bilal Orfali and Maurice A. Pomerantz (Editor), translated by Sophia Vasalou and James E. Montgomery, Volume editor: Devin J. Stewart [Library of Arabic Literature, New York University Press, 9781479834600]