INTRODUCTION

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This *Companion* begins a fresh initiative — the Muslim Heritage Series — which aims to bring insightful essays on key themes in the civilisations and cultures of Islam to a general readership. There are exciting challenges in doing so, of the kind that confront any such venture today. Scholars in every discipline have a language that has become specialised over time, and is perhaps suitable for dialogue within the discipline. Alas, this can make it impenetrable even to highly intelligent readers from outside the field. One recalls George Bernard Shaw's quip that 'all professions are a conspiracy against the laity'.

Beyond a specialised vocabulary or jargon, other practices deepen the feeling of a professional code that seems to be aimed at excluding the lay reader. There are multiple dating systems that relate to various calendars, such as the Muslim lunar in addition to western solar dating. Moreover, these tend to give the reader only the death-year of an important individual, leaving out the lifespan or years of flourishing. Then there are the diacritic marks, or signs attached to letters in transliteration, which give the text a look unlike anything that one usually encounters in books, newspapers or on the internet.

These conventions certainly have their place in texts that are situated within a particular scholarly discourse. But they can also get in the way of a non-specialised reader who is already grappling with theories about how to understand a particular line of scripture or legal rule or artistic expression. Nor is this a plea for what is commonly referred to as 'dumbing down'. Rather, it is an argument for readability — indeed, reasonable access — to ideas and discussions that have a profound impact on society, by way of influencing the individual reader and the people with whom he or she is in conversation. The issue is perhaps better recognised in the sciences. Skilled journalists as well as scientists are called upon, in the public interest, to explain new developments in genetics or nuclear physics or astronomy, and receive prizes for doing so effectively. This plain speaking coexists happily with science journals and books that remain as technical as ever. Why should we expect less when it comes to

discussing ethics or gender in Muslim societies, where the public interest is hardly less pressing?

Our response in the Muslim Heritage Series is to offer texts that are readable in several practical ways. Jargon and footnotes will be kept to a minimum, and diacritic marks avoided altogether. Where technical language cannot reasonably be avoided, it will be explained to the reader as plainly as possible. Dates will tell of the birth and death years of key figures to give a fuller picture of their flourishing, and follow the western calendar. Our scholars will seek to refrain from straying into the kind of abstract theoretical talk that can drive the lay reader, and sometimes even fellow specialists, to distraction. Footnotes will appear only where they give essential information in support of a claim in the text. A list of 'further readings' directs the reader to books and articles that are readily available to extend the appreciation of each theme.

If readability is a priority, so is the quality of scholarship, which we have no wish to compromise in this venture. The integrity of what is on offer with regard to each theme — the accuracy, balance and clarity of the writing — remains vital. It must, if this series is to achieve its avowed purpose of making accessible the best knowledge and thinking on the heritages of Islam as experienced and understood today. This *Companion* features writers who are Muslim and non-Muslim, women and men, selected for their academic expertise. Many are well-known names internationally, while other younger scholars have made valuable contributions. The series is firmly committed to this approach.

Understanding the Muslim World

Our task would surely be easier were it not for the events and aftermath of September 11, 2001, which cast long shadows on the perception of Islam and Muslims. In our globalised world, it matters little whether one inhabits the Muslim-majority societies of Asia, Africa and the Middle East, or those of the rest of the world. From daily reports in the news media, including the internet, to the hundreds of books and articles (from sources of varying reliability), 'Islam' is news. A significant portion is simply off the mark, whether in getting the facts right about Muslims and their faith

traditions, or drawing rational conclusions about them. The tone is more often than not alarmist, and the consequences can be serious. At the everyday level, the impact of the 'war on terror' is felt by individuals and communities the world over, but especially by Muslims.

Easy generalisations and stereotypes that link Islam to violence, gender abuse, uncivil politics and an aversion to science and modernity have been common since at least the colonial period. But recent events have heightened prejudice, as well as fear. Both are often tied to ignorance. Those who violate the most basic ethical principles while claiming to act in the name of religion are taken at their word — and the resulting view of that religion is then foisted on all its adherents. When such claims and behaviour take centre stage in the news media, so do the prejudice and fear. The situation is not improved when politicians and instant experts with axes to grind get into the game. Yet there is no lack of evidence in the public domain to counter this: a rich array of acts of charity, solidarity, artistic and cultural expression, passion for learning and political innovation, inspired by a view of Islam that is boldly humanistic. Much is obscured by the smoke and noise of our post-September 11 world.

History reminds us that all major civilisations and cultures have gone through their 'dark ages', when the tide seems to have turned forever. It was a Muslim scholar, Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), who first wrote of the cycles of rise and fall that afflict societies and empires. This was not long after the Mongol invasions that destroyed much of the glory of Muslim civilisations in the east, including those of Central Asia, Iraq, Iran and Syria. A symbol of the new darkness was the razing of Baghdad in 1258 by Hulegu, grandson of Genghis Khan, with the slaughter of tens of thousands and the burning of the city's magnificent library. But the Muslim east was to recover, with a creative energy that proved nothing short of astonishing. With the rise of the Mughals, Safavids and Ottomans, the tide had turned again. 'In the sixteenth century of our era,' notes Marshall Hodgson in *Rethinking World History* (1993), 'a visitor from Mars might well have supposed that the human world was on the verge of becoming Muslim'. This was not merely about the frontiers of empire. From the art of governance and law-making to commerce, urban planning and architecture, to painting, poetry and the sciences, the post-Mongol Muslim world was a thriving

space. It certainly had plenty to teach Europe in its Renaissance, which was built on the shoulders of knowledge societies across the Muslim Mediterranean and beyond.

A Void of Knowledge

That heritage was hastily forgotten once colonial rule prevailed over the Muslim east, west and south. Now, images of a cultural, social and political backwardness tied to race and religion (of the non-Christian kind) became commonplace. In the postcolonial era, this tendency was exposed and challenged, especially with the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978, and then his *Covering Islam* (1981). But the old prejudice seems to have found new impetus. One prominent avenue is the idea of a 'clash of civilisations' between the West and the Rest, though mainly between the West and the Muslim world. In this influential view,[1] values such as equality and freedom of thought are exclusively Euro-American, at fateful odds with Islamic (as well as Chinese) civilisation. Many in the West and beyond have pointed out the historical and logical flaws in such claims, including the idea that diverse peoples can be reduced to 'a civilisation' whose behaviour is determined by their religious beliefs. Surely what is most worrying in the present political and social climate is a 'clash of ignorance' in a shrinking world.[2]

By their own account, nearly 60 per cent of Americans know little or nothing about Islam, the religion of one-fifth of mankind today and of millions in the United States itself.[3] Heavy media coverage and the sudden proliferation of books on all matters Islamic since 2001 have failed to better inform Americans about a faith that also explicitly affirms the sanctity of the Judeo-Christian revelation. More than two-thirds of Americans believe that Christianity has very little in common with Islam. Half of all Americans hold prejudicial views about Islam and Muslims — a situation not helped by the fact that leading Christian ministers have repeatedly made derogatory remarks about Islam as a faith. This against a background in which 46 per cent say

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[1] Put forward most famously by Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York, 1996). In the same vein, Bernard Lewis reduces modern civic values to the generalised cultures of 'East' and 'West' in *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle East Response* (New York, 2002). Again, Francis Fukuyama insists that 'something about Islam' makes 'societies particularly resistant to modernity': 'The West has won', *The Guardian*, 11 October 2001.

[2] See Edward Said, 'The Clash of Ignorance', *The Nation*, 22 October 2001.

[3] As reported in two separate opinion surveys in 2007, respectively by the Pew Research Centre, available at http://pewforum.org/surveys/religionviews07/, and the Gallup World Poll, reported in John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, *Who Speaks for Islam?* (New York, 2007).

that the Bible should be a source of legislation in the United States, and 42 per cent want religious leaders to have a role in drafting a constitution. In Europe, a 2008 survey showed growing prejudice against both Jews and Muslims.[4] The worst figures were in Germany, Poland, Russia and Spain, with France and Britain faring only slightly better. As in the United States, Europeans with a lower level of education were more likely to hold such prejudices, whether against Jews or Muslims.

Yet according to the *New York Times*, the level of basic knowledge of Islam and Muslims is strikingly poor even among elite officials of United States security agencies and politicians in Congress. Most had no idea about the difference between Shia and Sunni.[5] 'Wouldn't British counterterrorism officials responsible for Northern Ireland know the difference between Catholics and Protestants?', asks the report. The then head of the FBI's national security branch thought Iran was a Sunni nation. In another recent episode, an army official delivering a press briefing about cultural deficits in the education of the United States military claimed that the official language in Baghdad was 'Iraqi'. At present, then, having a higher education seems to offer no assurance of even a minimal grasp of the world of Islam. Alas, to those of us who are educators in the humanities and social sciences on both sides of the Atlantic, it comes as no surprise.

This 'current void of knowledge' was broached by His Highness the Aga Khan — a leading international figure and imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims — speaking to a gathering of German ambassadors in Berlin. The way forward lay not in a focus on theology, he urged, but an appreciation of the culture and civilisation of the Other:

> Today, theological interpretation and proselytisation continue to divide among Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant interpretations in the Christian world, as in the Islamic world between Sunni and Shia and their various sub-divisions. I would hope to see the day when the definition of an educated person in Judaeo-Christian culture would include an intelligent understanding of the Muslim world. That would include an understanding of their tradition of

[4] Pew Research Centre poll, available at http://pewresearch.org/pubs/955/unfavorable-views-of-both-jews-and-muslims-increase-in-europe.
[5] Jeff Stein,'Can You Tell a Sunni From a Shiite?' *New York Times*, 17 October 2006.

> research and achievements, from philosophy and the arts, to the sciences, architecture and engineering. You cannot build a dialogue based upon ignorance. Without meaningful dialogue, you cannot construct coherent and sustainable foreign policy. How would the handling of the situations in Kashmir, Afghanistan, Iraq and the wider Middle East, or the Philippines, have been different if the main players had benefited from a thorough understanding of the history and culture of those regions?[6]

Indeed, this wider approach would be enormously valuable to Muslim societies as well, the Aga Khan pointed out, in bringing home the rich pluralism of their own civilisational heritage, including 'interpretations of Islam'. A major initiative in that regard was taken in 2005 with the Amman Declaration by scholars and emissaries from across the Muslim world, affirming the diversity of Muslim traditions of law and worship, as well as committing Muslims to interfaith dialogue.[7]

Mutual ignorance gives plenty of fuel to the idea that the West and Islam are entirely separate worlds that are destined to clash. One powerful myth is that the attacks of September 11 were about hatred of the West for its freedoms and democracy. This is thought to show in a popular anti-Americanism, which can turn to outright militancy of the kind engineered by al-Qaeda. Hence, 80 per cent of Americans told a Gallup poll in 2002 that Muslim dislike of the United States was simply about 'misinformation'; the figure was down to 57 per cent in 2007, but only 26 per cent felt that this might have to do with their country's actions.[8] Yet the polls found that most Muslims in Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere strongly admired and desired the values of political freedom and democracy, which were associated with the modern West. Large majorities back equal rights for women and freedom of speech. But 75 per cent expressed strong dislike of the *actions* of the United States — an attitude that was widely shared among those polled in Western Europe.

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[6] Abbreviated quote. Full text available at http://www.akdn.org/speech/583/Annual-Conference-of-German-Ambassadors; and 'Underwriting human progress', 6 September 2004, HH the Aga Khan, *Where Hope Takes Root*: *Democracy and Pluralism in an Interdependent World* (Vancouver, 2008), pp. 65-66.

[7] The Declaration was adopted by some 180 scholars and emissaries from 45 Muslim states, and representing key Shia and Sunni institutions. Texts available at http://ammanmessage.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=20&Itemid=34

[8] Esposito and Mogahed, *Who Speaks for Islam?*, p. 159.

Again, while each side believes that the other side just does not care, the polling evidence says otherwise. Most Muslims and Americans are highly concerned about relations with each other. Muslims who were asked what should be done about the future wished for mutual respect; unlike most Americans, they were critical of their own side, and urged greater understanding for western concerns about extremist violence and liberty. However, a key apprehension for Muslim societies was the perceived insensitivity of the West to Islam as a faith. An obvious example would be the controversy about political cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, first published by the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* in September 2005. The matter was cast as one of freedom of expression, directed at militancy among Muslims. If so, why did they not choose to depict a figure such as Osama bin Laden? Why were earlier cartoons directed at the figure of Jesus Christ turned down by *Jyllands-Posten*? Would anti-Jewish cartoons be regarded as legitimate? In the face of obvious distress among Muslims, other western newspapers chose to reproduce the cartoons in 2008. Was this about principles or profits? Diplomacy, peaceful protest and legal action on the part of Muslims yielded no results. Sharing their distress, France's Grand Rabbi, Joseph Sitruk, noted that freedom of expression 'is not a right without limits', and saw no gain in 'lowering religions, humiliating them and making caricatures of them'.[9] A majority of those polled by Gallup in Britain and France agreed that printing the cartoons was not legitimate free speech.

Overlapping Worlds

It turns out, then, that disagreement about the *scope* of civil liberties, even something as basic as free speech, is not evidence of a clash of religious traditions or civilisations. Opinion on vital issues varies not only among and within western societies but also the world's 1.3 billion Muslims who live in 57 countries as majorities or sizable minorities. Most do not live in the Middle East, or speak Arabic. Aside from the majority living in South and Southeast Asia, there are large indigenous communities in China and Central Europe, and old migrant communities in France, Spain and the United Kingdom. It remains the principal faith tradition of West Africa, and is a major religion not only in the rest of Africa but also, increasingly, in Western

[9] Quoted in Ibrahim Barzak 'Protests over Prophet Muhammad cartoons escalate in Islamic world', *Associated Press*, 2 February 2006.

Europe, Canada and the United States. This vast spread of the 'Muslim world' can only mean that there are diverse social, economic and political factors that shape identities. Equally, there have always been plural ways of being Muslim: communities of interpretation abound among both Shia and Sunni, each bringing to Islam its own set of experiences in time and locale. True, religion has a place in the lives of Muslim individuals and communities that is more central than in the secular societies of modern Europe. Yet this aspect of Muslim modernity is shared with the United States, where public religion is also vital.

Globalisation has indeed put peoples and cultures — and therefore faith traditions — in closer proximity than ever before. Streets and neighbourhoods in Dubai, Singapore, Manchester, Perth, San Francisco and Vancouver offer the global in the local, from architecture, dress, food and music to spaces of worship. This proximity is made tighter still by technology, and especially the internet. But the intensity of it all does not change the fact that overlapping worlds have long been a reality. The societies of the Mediterranean and South Asia are obvious examples, while the Silk Road from Xian to Istanbul was a medieval internet, a channel for ideas as well as goods and peoples across civilisations. Cosmopolitan cities like Bokhara, Khotan, Peshawar and Samarkand dotted the Silk Road, vying with Baghdad, Istanbul and Xian.

Muslims drew some of the most authoritative early maps of the world, such as those of al-Khwarazmi (c. 780-850), al-Idrisi (1100-1166), Zheng He (1371-1433) and Piri Reis (1465-1554), whose mapping of the Americas and the Antarctic had a precision all new in the old world. Others ventured to the far ends of the Islamic world and beyond, like Ibn Battuta (1304-1368) in Beijing and Hangzhou, leaving us an account of the familiar struggle to come to terms with human and social difference. This is equally evident in the writings of Leo Africanus, alias Hassan al-Wazzan (1485-1554), even if they were the outcome of capture by Spanish pirates and becoming a prisoner of Pope Leo X in Rome. Or consider the shock and awe of the young Egyptian imam Rifaa al-Tahtawi (1801-1873) on his visit to Paris. 'If Islam had not been protected by the might of God, it would be nothing compared to their prowess, population, wealth, skills … their knowledge of astronomy and geography, their

appetite for business and trade, and their love of travel', he noted.[10] His writings and public career were to have an enormous impact on political and social reform in Egypt. By contrast, the sojourn of Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) in the United States was less happy. He found American ways to be overly loose and trivial, apparently without the redeeming qualities that Tahtawi found in France. The experience helped turn Qutb into a political and religious militant.

As the reality of overlapping worlds becomes clearer, so may the need to hold on to that which is found to be distinctive. This is especially so when the Other is seen as dominant. In the aftermath of World War II, America was for Qutb a threatening presence, as was France in the 1820s for Tahtawi. Yet Tahtawi was keen — as were reformers like Muhammad Abduh (1814-1905), Sayyid Ahmed Khan (1817-1898) and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897) — to absorb what they saw as the best of the West. There was confidence not only that this could be done but also that it *must* be done. After all, had Muslims not once carried the torch in the sciences and humanities, from which was lit the fire of the Renaissance that led to Modernity? Tahtawi evokes the image of the Prophet as a model seeker of wisdom earthly and divine, coupled with his own love of homeland (*watan*), as a moral base from which to engage with the Other. For Qutb, fear leads to a rejection of all voices outside his own 'authentic' vision as corrupt, including other Muslim voices. This is an old tension, felt across history: what one welcomes as cosmopolitan and enriching, another sees as a loss of heritage and identity. Steering through the waters is no easy task, yet the stakes are high enough, as Marshall Hodgson notes in *The Venture of Islam*:

> If the realities of the Islamic heritage can be frankly faced — its historical actuality good and bad, the problems which it presents as well as the spiritual opportunities it offers — then Islam as a heritage might conceivably prove able to serve flexibly in the Modern crisis. Facing up to their history in this way might help Muslims — and possibly others as well — to overcome the cultural dislocations of our time and provide a basis for creativity in the midst of lettered mass culture, a basis consistent with, but able to transcend, the

[10] From his account of 1834, quoted in Roxanne L. Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore: Muslim and Western Travellers in Search of Knowledge* (Princeton, 2006), p. 101.

> ‘democratic virtues’. More generally, it might show that Islam was able to fill the modern need for moral vision, for a creative illumination of the human conscience in a technicalistic world … [I]f Islam can be shown to be capable of providing a fruitful vision to illuminate the Modern conscience — then all mankind, and not only Muslims, have a stake in the outcome; even those who explicitly or even militantly reject any religious tradition.[11]

This *Companion*

What is distinctive about Islam, amid all the emphasis on values and experiences that are said to overlap with those of other civilisations and societies? Many will point to the ‘five pillars’ that Muslims regard as central, since they were articulated in a well-attested account or hadith which involved a public encounter in Medina between Muhammad and the archangel Gabriel. The pillars are the *shahada* or affirmation that there is only one God and Muhammad is His messenger; *salat* or daily recital of ritual prayers; *zakat* or the giving of alms; *sawm* or keeping the fast during the month of Ramadan; and *hajj* or the pilgrimage to Mecca. Along with these outward acts of submission — *islam* — the Gabriel hadith has the Prophet stating the importance of faith or *iman*, and virtuous conduct or *ihsan* done with the consciousness of God’s presence.

From the outset, Muslims have understood and practised the pillars in a variety of ways. There have been multiple schools of law as well as of theology among Sunni and Shia alike, in interpreting what the central doctrines actually entail. The foremost of the five pillars, the *shahada*, involves for Shia Muslims an affirmation also of the privileged status of Imam Ali (599-661), as rightful successor to Muhammad. For those who uphold the Sufi or mystical traditions of Islam, going back to the time of the Prophet, it is the Quran’s spiritual aspect that matters most — beyond mere adherence to religious laws and customs. Women have figured prominently from the earliest days of the Sufi traditions. At the same time, as many scholars have pointed out, Islam has always been more about how people act and the faith with which they do so, than what their creedal beliefs say. The letter of the law can be overridden by

[11] Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam* (Chicago, 1974), vol. 3, pp. 440-441.

maslaha, the public good. The Quran holds ‘the best’ to be about conduct before all else (sura 3:110). For Muhammad, the ‘best Islam’ was about spreading peace alike among those one knew and those that one did not.

In other words, it won’t do to reduce Islam to creed or doctrine. We must inquire about the way that it is lived, both in terms of what Muslims do and their disposition or ethos. An inquiry that attends to civilisations and cultures tells us what Islam has actually meant in history, in its plural interpretations and realities, and what that heritage means today. This *Companion* sets out to capture some of the vital elements in that picture, always putting them in their social as well as moral context. The broad picture of the Muslim world is not, of course, something that can be conveyed and discussed in every detail, even by a volume several times the size of this one. The challenge for us is to leave the reader with a sense of the fullness, diversity and energy of the experience of Islam in the world, in a language and style that is accessible. What follows in this introduction is a map of the volume, which sets out the four main pathways that our contributors here have explored. These are ‘foundations’, ‘expressions’, ‘inclusions’ and ‘networks’, which take us through past and present as well as some possible pathways to the future.

Foundations

Muhammad and the Quran stand at the beginning of our journey, marking the birth of Islam in the Arabian peninsula of the early seventh century. They stay with us throughout the journey, in word and deed, for reasons that are explored in the opening chapters by Reza Aslan and Abdullah Saeed. The Prophet’s earliest biographies were written long after his death in 632, and often reflect the later realities of a successful empire, as viewed from Baghdad or Damascus. So in taking us through the ‘remote desert oasis’ of Muhammad’s time, Aslan sets out to sift history from ideology. There are encounters not only around the revelation that became the Quran, but more ordinary though often challenging ones with wives, Jewish traders and quarrelsome tribesmen. By situating the verses of the Quran which Muhammad received over a period of 22 years (a far shorter span, of course, than the extended revelations of the Bible) in the soil of the everyday, Aslan is able to give us more than a detailed narrative of the birth of a religion. In grasping the social *context* of that birth, where fundamental ideas come forth about how to live ethically and the proper treatment of

women and minorities, one can see more clearly what principles are at stake rather than just what the rules are. Practices of veiling and worship are related intimately to custom and circumstance — which have a continuity with earlier religious and cultural traditions.

What is distinctive here is that far from proclaiming their uniqueness, Islam and its Prophet are adamant about not inventing new truths but affirming timeless ones in a fresh setting. The Quran itself asserts that all revealed scriptures come from a single source, the *Umm al-Kitab* or 'Mother of Books' (sura 13:39). 'As far as Muhammad was concerned', notes Aslan, 'the Jews and the Christians were "People of the Book" (*Ahl al-Kitab*), spiritual cousins who, as opposed to the pagans and polytheists of Arabia, worshipped the same God, read the same scriptures, and shared the same moral values as his Muslim community.' What differences there were in theology and practice were a matter of divine plan, for did He not prefer in the Quran that 'every umma have its own Messenger'? Yes, there were wars to fight, since Muhammad's community was for most of his life a small minority at odds with the more powerful clans and interests around it; yet time and again he sought a compromise even with those whose beliefs he found deeply wanting.

What, though, is the Quran in the first place? How did its individual verses, existing only in oral form as they were spoken to a prophet said to be unlettered, come to form a single book? When did it become a vital feature of Muslim intellectual and legal life? These are among the questions that Saeed tackles en route to showing how 'reading the Quran' is a practice and an exercise that speaks to the essence of how one imagines being a Muslim. If the earliest interpretation came in the form of Muhammad's practical choices in giving life to the word of God, then a century after his death a tradition of sophisticated writing was already taking off. Surrounded by the complex legal and political heritages of the Byzantine and Sassanian empires that had come under Muslim rule, where else could one turn for guidance that had moral as well as pragmatic value? This also meant, of course, that varying situations called for a diversity of readings of the Quran. To be sure, there were leanings toward a more literal approach among Sunni groups, compared with a Shia preference for seeking out the spiritual essence of texts. But as the multiplicity of schools of law proves, there were mutually recognised differences in what the Quran was felt to

imply on a whole range of secular and religious issues — for which the sharia or body of ethical principles was derived from the Quran.

Saeed draws out the exciting trends that appeared with the rise of learning in Islam. Greek rationalism shaped how thinkers like al-Farabi (870-950), Ibn Rushd (1126-1198) and the adepts of the *Ikhwan al-Safa* (Brethren of Purity, in 10th-century Basra) read the Quran; others like al-Tustari (818-896) and Ibn Arabi (1165-1240) coupled reason with a keen mysticism in their quest for meaning. There were also those like the Asharis who questioned the role of reason and favoured a conservative stance. All of which laid the groundwork for a richly varied tradition of exegesis or scriptural interpretation, that has lived on across the Muslim world. As in the past, social context has plenty to do with how Muslims relate to the Quran as text and guide. Modern science, colonialism, debates about women's equality and human rights, and new ways of approaching literary texts have all left their mark. 'In the contemporary struggles for "authenticity", Quranic exegesis is at the forefront of debate', Saeed notes, not only among traditionalists but also Sufis and postmodernists.

Expressions

Fired by the images of scripture and the story of the rise of Medina from pagan oasis to the Prophet's 'Illuminated City', Muslims could hardly be content with living in old ways. Gardens are brought up no fewer than 120 times, whether as places of blissful retreat or secure refuge, in the Quran. Water, trees and animals abound. Ideas about cleansing, family life, collective and solitary prayer, pilgrimage and trade are part of a universe that emerges from the founding narratives of Islam. Although it draws on aspects from pre-Islamic times, there is fresh meaning attached to these ideas and practices, which are tied to moral purpose and accountability. It leaves behind the time of darkness, *jahiliyya*, when mere material ends were pursued by rulers and ruled, in ignorance of the proper ideals of community and civilisation. This shift is seen not only in codes of law and ways of worship but also in art, architecture, poetry, music and learning. The place where this can best be witnessed and experienced is the city. Here the gardens of paradise come to life, minarets and libraries jostle with markets, news is exchanged in public baths, courts and bureaucrats keep order, while travellers, traders and mystics find rest in caravanserais or *khanqah*s.

Amira Bennison's chapter, 'The Umma in the City', reminds us that the earliest shifts of the moral universe happened in Jerusalem, Mecca and Medina. 'Islam has often been characterised as an urban faith in the sense that its ritual, political and legal requirements are most easily met in cities', she notes — but also that cities are about 'culture, society and the environment, and how these different things intertwine to create a particular city and way of urban living at a specific time'. Over time, western scholars keen to write about the 'Islamic city' have developed a stereotype in which economic and social factors that shape urban spaces are ignored, making it all about religion. For example, the practice of ranging the city centre around a principal place of worship — a church or temple — with a marketplace nearby was common in medieval Europe; yet the expression of this with a mosque and bazaar at the heart of the *kasbah* is seen as peculiarly 'Islamic'. True, there were religious influences such as the need for spaces for cleansing before prayers, and the division of public and private spaces between men and women. But in taking us through five great centres — Cairo, Cordoba, Delhi, Isfahan and Marrakesh — Bennison shows that the character of urban life in Muslim societies has always been a lively mix of culture, geography, wealth and lived faith.

Surely, though, the mosque is an entirely distinctive expression of Islam? Only to a point, as Hasan-Uddin Khan notes in his account of its art and architecture. The minaret and the dome are optional; neither was present in the Prophet's own mosque; the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem has no minaret. There are Chinese mosques built with pagodas rather than domes, West African mosques with high mud walls that look like exotic fortresses, North American mosques that recall Navajo and other indigenous styles, and robust Indian ones that draw on Hindu and Victorian features. Khan shows that what is most universal are themes such as the threshold or entrance 'that marks a symbolic change of mind from one state to another', the space for ablutions 'both practical and inspirational, for it marks another threshold', and the niche (*mihrab*) that marks the direction of prayer. He sees two issues dominating how Muslims today think about mosques: expressions of local and global identity, and the status of women. These often interface, as when North American Muslims choose to have a woman lead the ritual prayer — a reflection of how the congregation wishes to see itself, and be seen by others. In the dialogue of tradition and modernity, with sensitivity toward the

environment, initiatives like the Aga Khan Award for Architecture have encouraged bold innovation in how Muslims express their aspirations.

Such innovation was once commonplace, when Muslim approaches to the body of knowledge as well as to cities, mosques and the Quran itself were dynamic. It is in these 'cultures of learning' that Anil Khamis locates his chapter on institutions of education. The rise of the world's oldest universities, al-Azhar in Cairo (969) and the Nizamiyya in Baghdad (1091), was accompanied by the vigorous building of libraries and centres for translation and research across the Islamic Mediterranean. What's now thought of as the lowly *madrassa* was then not merely a 'Quran school' but a thriving place of secular and religious learning. These once-innovative institutions became 'traditional' when the lead in fostering 'knowledge societies' passed to the West. Muslim education today lags on every score, from basic literacy to the quality of higher learning in the natural and social sciences, to a degree that is only partly explained by poverty. Khamis finds that some of the most creative solutions in bridging the gap, for females and males, aim to rehabilitate older institutions like the *madrassa* and make them into 'hybrid' schools that tackle *all* learning seriously. At the same time, formal as well as alternative types of schools and universities need to foster more effectively an ethic of civil belonging, one that is rooted but pluralist in outlook.

No encouragement on that score is needed when it comes to poets, at least the good ones, of whom the Muslim world has surely had a fair share. But does poetry really matter in our impatient age — and what are the wider prospects for verse written in Persian, Urdu or Arabic? There is a clue in the fact that Jalal al-din Rumi (1207-1273) is today among the most widely read poets in the world, in all his rooted yet cosmopolitan spirituality that poured forth in classical Persian. Among the most effective modern renditions in English is that of Raficq Abdulla, whose chapter here offers spirited reasons for taking poets seriously. They speak to our displacement both internal and external, to longings that the rest of us have difficulty putting into coherent language, or which we may not even consciously recognise. 'Poetry matters because, like music, it removes us from the mundane, it teaches us to sense the unseen influences that mould us and mature us', says Abdulla. 'Like prayer, it opens us to deeper layers of the self.' Secular and sacred themes alike figure in his exploration here, and so they must since poets have a way of dwelling between worlds — cultural,

religious, and political — rather than being shut in. A leading contemporary poet who captures these many worlds while also explaining them in prose (scholarly and fiction) is Salma Jayussi. Like her fellow Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008), Jayussi writes from exile that becomes more than just political; it is also about the dislocation and journeying of the human soul, in a modern echo of Rumi.

Inclusions

Women have figured prominently among Muslim poets and mystics, but less so among those who have determined the course of political and religious life. The Prophet himself leaned heavily on Khadija as his wife, counsellor and even employer, while women played vital roles in attesting to the hadith and other essential narratives of the community. Indeed, the Quran addressed them directly as moral equals of men, and set the foundation for laws that could treat them as such. Yet the patriarchal societies of the Middle and Near East were hard on the status of Muslim women, as they were on their Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian sisters. The legacy of those cultural realities is the focus of Azizah al-Hibri's chapter, in which she notes (as activist and scholar) that gender equity has a powerful basis within Islam. In matters of inheritance, economic independence, choice of spouse and security from abuse, she finds that the practice of Islamic law has veered far from what the underlying norms actually say. What influential male jurists have done, she argues, is to distort the Quranic sensitivity to step-by-step change in matters of deep social reform, and to freeze the laws at stages that suit their own conservatism. Thus the Quran limited to four the number of wives that a man could marry, and placed a heavy burden on having more than one; yet polygamy became the favoured practice, legitimated in law.

For al-Hibri, each generation must exercise *ijtihad* or interpretation in the light of its social context, which today is 'a world that takes as non-negotiable the rights of women as full and active citizens'. That is certainly the spirit in which reformist women have sought to deal with those for whom 'tradition' is tied to a fixed reading of religion and identity. Anxieties about the loss of patriarchal power attached to fixed versions of tradition/religion can unleash strong reactions to preserve old forms of dominance. In Afghanistan, the Taliban's version of tradition means that female legislators and activists risk life and limb to advocate for a reading of the sharia that is

true to its liberating spirit. Elsewhere, from Iran and Pakistan to Nigeria and Saudi Arabia, women's groups are using the language both of tradition and modern human rights in pushing for legal reform and effective participation.

Inclusion within the wider governance of society extends not only to women, of course, but also to those from various ethnic and religious backgrounds. The template was cast at the very birth of Islam, when the Constitution of Medina brought a *civic* umma together, with Muhammad as guardian of all faiths. Even his religious umma sought to break with prior affinities to clan and tribe, defining itself in terms only of its ethical ideals. Shainool Jiwa's chapter offers another example of inclusive governance, that of the Fatimids in Egypt (969-1171), who traced their lineage as well as their inspiration in this regard to Muhammad. In particular, the Fatimids proclaimed a warrant of general safety and civic wellbeing or *Aman*, which Jiwa sees as 'the blueprint' for their two centuries' rule as a Shia regime in the midst of a Sunni majority as well as Christian and Jewish minorities. Under the *Aman*, citizens could freely practice their faith and follow any of the religious schools of law; the state would ensure the upkeep of places of worship and of their administrators. One is reminded of Cyrus II of Persia's celebrated assurance of relief and security for all subjects upon his conquest of Babylon in 539 BC. But Fatimid Egypt went much further: skilled individuals of all backgrounds could gain a place in the highest levels of government, as well as in the military. Women played important public roles in politics and culture, with many receiving an advanced education. The broad setting for all this was one of extraordinary success in the arts, commerce, learning and development, including the founding of the city of Cairo and al-Azhar university.

This was but one of several such epochs of liberal governance in settings as diverse as Moorish Andalusia, Mughal India and Ottoman Turkey. It would, of course, be ahistorical to expect these settings to have all the elements of contemporary pluralist democracy, such as constitutional neutrality on religion and a separation of powers among the legislature, judiciary and executive. What they do offer, though, is evidence that Muslims have taken very seriously the values of tolerance and inclusion — which Amir Hussain extends to a larger interweaving of religious traditions. For just as the 'Muslim world' has long included and drawn upon Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish and other faith traditions in its cultural and intellectual life, so too has Islam penetrated

the lifeworlds of those Others. In the Americas, Hussain notes that Arab travellers, African slaves, and Christian converts brought their assorted Islams long before today's waves of migrants. When we seek a sensible pluralism, then, we ought to look not only at inclusive theologies but also at dense histories of cultural and civilisational sharing. This can give us a cosmopolitanism that has both cultural and religious roots. There are lessons here, Hussain says, for the troubles in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere. Minorities and majorities that feel excluded will take what is presented to them as a sole marker of their identity, like ethnicity, region or religion. What sits under these labels is real or feared exclusion in economic, social or political life. If an 'ethic of inclusion' is to be more than a slogan, it should 'find its way into constitutions, codes of law and institutions of governance'.

Networks

Hussain's theme of 'Islams in the Plural' is for Bruce Lawrence best understood, in history and today, as a matter of how *social* networks express the bonds of faith, trade, travel and more. 'Precisely because Islam is not homogeneous, it is only through the lens of Muslim networks, whether they be historical or commercial, academic or aesthetic, that one can see how diverse groups contest and articulate what it means to be Muslim.' There are the more obvious webs that have marked the flourishing of secular and religious bonds, like those of the Silk Road, guilds and brotherhoods of artists, craftsmen, clerics and Sufis, the sojourns of Ibn Battuta, pilgrimages to Mecca, and scholarly associations. They are rooted, for Lawrence, in the founding idea of the umma itself, which sets 'the broadest boundaries defining Muslim collective identity'. Muhammad's own life and message thrived on existing webs of clan, commerce and pilgrimage that criss-crossed Arabia, and which defined pre-Islamic solidarities and identities on the basis of trust. The umma cast these anew as global and also local. Today's umma has multiple threads that include sisterhoods of solidarity for equity, as well as networks for migrants, musicians and political causes. In negotiating trust, such networks must grapple with inclusions (and exclusions) of class, gender, nationality and ways of understanding and practising the faith — which reminds us of the tension of 'universality and uniformity' that mark globalisation.

Nowhere is that tension, and indeed contemporary networking, played out more visibly than in the 'cyberworld', the universe of the internet in all its energetic sprawl. Here we have opportunities and spaces not only for direct communication and networking among individuals and groups, but also for images and sounds, for points of view and debate, and for archives that can range back to the founding sources of Islam. The 'digital umma', as Gary Bunt calls it, is now a transforming reality for those with and also those without access to the internet. Cyberspace allows for authoritative judgments on issues of faith in the form of *fatwa*s to be asked for and delivered, for details about ritual prayers and fasts to be posted, for pious images and sounds to be carried, and for 'Islamically approved' arrangements for dating and marriage. The digital umma engages in daily shopping, chat and social networking — outside the radar of media and intelligence agencies on the watch for online jihad. As the internet becomes ever more vital both as a tool and a space, so do questions of access and participation. Bunt points out that while countries like Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates rank relatively high in terms of internet access, the overall picture in 2005 was that 50 per cent of those in developed countries as against 9 per cent in less developed ones, and just 1 per cent in the least developed nations, had access. The cost of individual access tends to be much higher in poorer countries, and there are disparities also of gender and region within societies. Still, Africa and the Middle East rank highest in growth of usage as of 2008, and many Muslim countries are fast becoming emerging markets for information technology. When it comes to social networking, young Iranian females and males rank among the most active in the world; they are quickly being joined by Muslim youth elsewhere.

Today's 'networked Islam' may not be entirely new. Webs of information and solidarity on the basis of trust have long been part of human society. But cyber networks challenge the way we experience the world, including 'old, exclusive divisions between East and West', notes Lawrence. Geography itself is collapsed by overlapping cyber cultures and civilisation. This also means, says Bunt, that the Muslim diaspora in Europe and North America is highly visible in every form of cyber expression, from websites to databases on history and religious practice, to the point of reversing the old divide of 'centre' and 'periphery'. This is hardly surprising, of course, given the access to advanced information technology in these regions. At the same time, the wide terrain of cyber space is not without its dangers, byways that

stray from the civil or the ethical. ‘The open-ended nature of the internet makes the boundaries of digital Islam at once more porous and more subject to change’, Lawrence observes. So the ‘familiar guideposts’ of faith and ethics are still needed as the umma strives, in the cyber as in the social world, to keep along the *sirat al-mustaqim*, the Straight Path.

The finest of journeys — by adventurers and pilgrims, scholars and mystics — are as much passages within the self as they are outward travels. This is captured with much flair in epic poetry, such as Attar’s *The Conference of the Birds* where dialogue on the perils and prizes of a long journey is really all about the character of the questing self. Since maps of internal travel are harder to draw, the outward ones must serve as a symbolic guide. So it is with mapping the ‘Muslim world’ over time. The pathways discussed in this introduction tell us broadly of the landscape, and suggest what aspects are not fully covered. But they can barely hint at the internal journeys that Muslims have made in their evolving appreciation of the founding sources and of the manifold ways that faith is lived in the secular world. In this, we rely much on the reader’s imaginative generosity, with a little help from the suggestive gifts of our contributors. Future publications in the Muslim Heritage Series will focus more specifically on ethics, the sciences, philosophy, mysticism, the arts and public culture. In this exploration of heritage we must give history its due — but also inquire into how and why that heritage matters. Traditions should be ‘sought as shelters and avoided as prisons’, observes the Iranian intellectual Abdolkarim Soroush.[12] As the Muslim world grapples with globalisation, the knowledge society and the fostering of pluralist civil society, both change and continuity will characterise the choices that are to be made.

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[12] Abdolkarim Soroush, *Reason, Freedom and Democracy in Islam*, tr. and ed. M. Sadri and A. Sadri (Oxford, 2000), p. 53.