



ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF ISLAM

ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF ISLAM, a reference work of fundamental importance on topics dealing, according to its self-description, with “the geography, ethnography and biography of the Muhammadan peoples.” Published under the auspices of E. J. Brill, it exists in two editions. The first edition was published during the period 1913-1938 and supervised by a distinguished editorial board which eventually included M. Th. Houtsma, T. W. Arnold, Basset, Hartmann, A. J. Wensinck, W. Heffening, E. Lévi-Provençal, and H. A. R. Gibb. It appeared in three simultaneous but not completely identical versions—one in French, one in German, and one in English, the latter comprising four volumes and a supplement totalling almost five thousand densely printed pages and approximately nine thousand articles arranged alphabetically. The first edition quickly attained a place in the field of Islamic studies as an essential reference work with a stature not unlike that of the Pauly-Wissowa *Realencyclopädie* in classical studies. However, it was not as comprehensive in coverage as might be desired and was quickly outdated by the explosion of scholarship on the Muslim world which took place after World War II. As a result, publication of a new edition, in French and English versions, began in 1954. At this date (1994), it is still not complete, having just reached the letter “R.” Both editions contain a great variety of articles by prominent scholars dealing with the history and culture of the Islamic world; virtually all are documented and provide extensive bibliographical references. The *Encyclopaedia of Islam* also includes numerous maps, illustrations, and tables.



The relationship between the two editions of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* is complex. The new edition is similar in format to the first edition, retains some of its articles, and was originally intended as essentially an updating of the original. However, the scope of the new edition has expanded substantially during the course of its publication, notably after completion of the second volume in 1965, so that the differences between the editions are particularly pronounced in more recent volumes. The new edition already occupies eight volumes plus supplementary fascicles amounting to more than nine thousand pages—when complete this would make it roughly triple the size of the first edition, an increase attributable both to expanded or revised and updated treatment of some topics and the inclusion of new, additional articles. Generally speaking, the new edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* is superior to the first edition and has superseded it, yet the first edition is by no means obsolete. It has the advantage of being complete and obviously retains its value for those articles toward the end of the alphabet which have not yet been reached in the new edition. Owing to a rearrangement of article topics in the new edition, some articles from earlier volumes of the first edition have not yet been duplicated and thus remain useful. In the first edition, for example, may be found articles on “Alī b. al-Ḥusain” or “Karam, Banu’l” which do not yet appear in the new edition as they will be listed under “Zayn al-‘Ābidīn” and “Zuray’ids.” Some individual biographies in the first edition have been subsumed under dynastic entries in the new edition; while waiting for the new articles on the Rostamids, Ṣafavids, Sāmānids, or Zīrids, recourse may be made to such articles in the first edition as “Abd al-Raḥmān b. Rostem,” “Abbās I,” “Abd al-Malik b. Nūḥ,” and “Bādīs b. Ḥabbūs.” Similarly, articles such as “Āferīn” or “Ardibehisḥt” will appear under “Ta’rīkh” in the new edition. There are also many minor articles which have been dropped from the new edition and thus are found only in the first edition. These include such a variety of topics as “Āb” (water), “Ābish” (the Salghurid princess), “Khāna” (house), “Alkekengi” (*kākonaj*, winter cherry), “Ḳaplan Muṣṭafā Pasha” (Ottoman general), “Alhagi” (the medicinal shrub), and “Abd al-Raḥmān Ḥusam Zāde” (Ottoman Ṣayḳ al-Islām). Finally, it should be noted that some articles from the first edition are actually better than their replacements in the new edition, and many retain considerable historiographical and bibliographical interest as they represent the perspectives of an earlier generation of scholars and give references to older books and articles not mentioned in the newer articles. With all this in mind, the two editions of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* should perhaps be regarded as separate works, and the careful researcher will wish to consult both.



Although the topical coverage of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* is remarkably broad and the scholarship it contains is of very high quality, the project is not without its flaws. One general criticism that has been directed at it is that it is very difficult for ordinary readers to use and can be confusing even for professional Islamicists. A typical difficulty is that the articles, which are long on facts and short on explanation, can become opaque and bogged down by inordinate attention to complex and trivial details of little more than antiquarian interest. Another hurdle that must be overcome is the system of transliteration. This was quite inconsistent and arbitrary in the first edition; in the new edition it is applied more systematically but can still be confusing since slightly different methods are used for transliterating Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Urdu (there is apparently no set system for transliterating from other Islamicate languages). It is not always easy to guess which method will be used or how; for example, the entry “Muḥammad” for Arabic and Persian usage usually appears as “Meḥammed” for Turkish usage, yet one may also encounter exceptions as in the name of the Ottoman vizier “Alī Pasha Muḥammad Amīn.” It is also not always apparent whether an entry will appear in an archaic or modern form. To find information in the new *Encyclopaedia of Islam* on Georgia, for example, one might look under the medieval name “Djurzān,” only to be referred to the more recent term “Gurdjistān” and thence to “Kurđj,” where the article actually appears; even specialists might not think to look first for the capital of the Sudan under “Khurṭum.” An even more daunting problem for many readers is that articles on topics of general culture, which are frequently examples of the most original, informative, and significant articles in the *Encyclopaedia*, appear under a term taken from Arabic terminology—very interesting material, for example, on gunpowder appearing under “Bārūd,” eunuchs under “Khaṣī,” sports under “La‘b,” murder under “Ḳatl,” or archery under “Qaws.” Fortunately, the recent publication of a general index and index of subjects for the new *Encyclopaedia of Islam* offsets these difficulties and should enable the diligent researcher to find the desired information more efficiently.

A much more serious criticism pertains to its epistemological assumptions. No real explanation of the *Encyclopaedia*’s scholarly philosophy or editorial principles has ever been published, but its perspective seems well exemplified by the slogan on its title page, which proclaims that it is “prepared by a number of leading orientalist.” In many ways, the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* is indeed a quintessential expression of traditional European orientalism, with all that it implies for both good and bad. The potentially problematic aspect of



this is reflected first of all in its authorship, which inevitably raises the question of who is empowered to represent Islam in a major work of scholarship and how authentically they do so. All of the editors and the vast majority of the contributors have, indeed, been European orientalists. It is true that the new edition, responding to criticism of the lack of Muslim contributors, now includes articles from many scholars of Muslim background, but they remain scholars trained in orientalist methods, whose outlook and approach differ little from those of the European contributors. One senses that a great opportunity has been missed by not including, as articles or parts of articles, contributions by traditional Muslim scholars at least on matters of jurisprudence (*feqh*). A good case in point is the quite inadequate article on “al-Mash‘ala’l-khuffayn.” It virtually ignores the Shi‘ite point of view, loses its focus in a mishmash of petty semantics, and utterly fails to convey the meaning and importance of this issue in Muslim thought. Perhaps equally significant is the under-representation of American contributors to the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. This is understandable in the case of the first edition but harder to justify in the new edition, given the tremendous increase in Middle Eastern and Islamic scholarship in the United States over the past several decades. American scholarship, however, tends to emphasize topics of modern interest, to utilize newer methodologies often adapted from the social sciences rather than conventional philology, and to value interpretation and analysis over raw factual data; these tendencies are apparently as uncongenial to the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* as would be the approach of traditional Muslim ulama.

What is ultimately of greater concern than the authorship of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* is the impact of its orientalist perspective on its substantive content. One of the first scholars to make a trenchant attack on this aspect of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* was Marshall Hodgson, who lamented what he saw as its “Arabistic and philological bias” (I, p. 40). Certainly, anyone who uses it at length will notice various odd choices about what articles are included or omitted, the amount of space devoted to particular topics, and the overwhelming fixation on textual and antiquarian concerns. To give a few illustrations, the article on the minor Syrian city “Ḥimṣ” in the new edition occupies six pages plus a fold-out map; by contrast the articles “Ḳum” and “Mashhad,” both dealing with major religious centers, are given about three pages each; “Anḳara,” a modern political center with its own long history, two pages; and “Djakarta,” one of the largest Muslim cities in the world, a mere half page, with population statistics for 1940 that give no indication of its



actual size at the time the article was published! While there may be a defensible rationale for such a “bias” (and much of it may simply be attributable to a laissez-faire editorial policy in dealing with individual contributions), it is regrettable to the extent that it gives the impression that “Islam” is a fossilized museum relic rather than a vital, living, developing, multifaceted entity, and that what is significant and normative about it is determined by its proximity to Arabism, Sunnism, the Mediterranean lands, philological methodology, and pre-modern periods. It also has the effect of making the work less satisfactory as a reference tool for those interested in areas of Islam studies that do not coincide with the priorities of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*.

Iranologists are among those who may be disappointed by the relative imbalances caused by the perspective of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Although the pre-Islamic culture of Arabia and the Semitic world is treated in considerable detail, pre-Islamic Persia is not. The first edition had no article on Zoroaster (only a general article on the “Madjūs”). Even a figure such as Anōšīravān, so prominent in the development of Islamic *andarz* literature and the theory of statecraft, receives only cursory mention in the new edition. Virtually all of the various Arab tribal groupings receive lengthy coverage; fewer Turko-Persian tribes are included and usually at shorter length (cf., for example, the size and approach of the article in the new edition on the “Bakhtiyārī” with that on the ancient Arab tribe “Khuzā‘a”). Treatment of things connected with Shi‘ism has also tended to be relatively neglected, although the impact of recent events has apparently forced some changes in this regard. The term “Āyatullāh” was never included in the first edition and made its appearance in the new edition only with the publication of a supplementary fascicle in 1980 after the Persian Revolution of 1357 Š./1978-79 had brought its usage into common parlance. Although some of the most obscure medieval sects of Islam received articles in both editions, the vitally important Akhbārī-Uṣūlī movements likewise received attention only in recent volumes (s.v. articles on “Īrān” and “Mardja‘-i taqlīd”) and a supplementary fascicle (“Akhbāriyya”). Although the eventual inclusion of such articles indicates an improvement in the coverage of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, it is also indicative of problems that have existed in the past and which one may still sometimes encounter.

Finally, it may be noted that such deficiencies in the conception or execution of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* have had one fortuitous result: they have



inspired the production of several comparable reference works aimed at correcting them. A desire to compensate for the Sunni orientation of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, for example, produced the start of an *Islamic Shi'ite Encyclopaedia* (edited by Ḥasan al-Amīn; Beirut, 1970). The Turkish *İslâm Ansiklopedisi* not only translated much of the original *Encyclopaedia of Islam* into Turkish, but it also amended various articles and added a great number of others on topics dealing with pre-Ottoman Turkish antiquities, Ottoman history and civilization, modern Turkey, and the Turkish peoples. Of greater interest to Iranologists, a similar revised and expanded translation in Persian was begun as the *Dāneš-nāma-ye Īrān o Eslām* (q.v.) This has now been superseded by a major new reference work which vastly expands the treatment of all topics relating to Persian culture in Islamic and pre-Islamic periods, the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (q.v.).

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