

Encyclopaedia Islamica

Wilferd Madelung and Farhad Daftary, eds. *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, Vol. 1: *‘Abā’- Abu Hanifa*. Leiden: Brill, in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, 2008- . 841 pp. \$699.00. Hardcover. ISBN: 9789004168602.

The founding of an Islamic republic in Iran and the American invasion of Iraq have raised awareness of sectarian divisions in Islam, most notably the doctrinal and cultural differences among Sunni and Shi’ite Muslims. Most previous encyclopedias of Islam, including the monumental *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, have reflected the interest of Western scholars on Arabo-centric and Sunni-centric topics. Alternatively, *Encyclopaedia Islamica* is a rare English attempt to “provide coverage of specifically Shi’i themes, personalities, culture and history” (x). It is an abridged translation of the *Da’irat al-Ma’arif-i Buzurg-i Islami* (*The Great Islamic Encyclopedia*), published in Persian by the Centre for Iranian and Islamic Studies in Tehran, itself an on-going project “sustained by a number of primary and secondary research departments, focusing upon specific subjects, such as the literature of Persian and other Islamic cultures, Arabic, Qur’anic sciences, *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *usul* (principles) and *hadith* (tradition), history, geography, mysticism, comparative religion, philosophy, anthropology, and the arts” (ix). The result has sparked considerable scholarly interest in the Islamic world, with the result that the *Encyclopaedia* has been translated into Arabic, and now into English. The editors of this English edition, Farhad Daftary and Wilferd Madelung, are recognized scholars of medieval Islam and Ismaili studies.

The first volume of *Encyclopaedia Islamica* contains 210 signed entries written by a group of Iranian scholars and researchers. Many extend over several pages and are subdivided into various facets. For example, the entry on “*Abu Hanifa*,” a renowned jurist and theologian, covers twenty pages with fifteen subdivisions. Each entry includes an extensive bibliography listing the major works in Persian, Arabic, and Western European languages. There is no index, but one hopes that one will be available when the work is complete.

The range of topics is broad, including “scientific, artistic, literary and philosophical themes; the disciplines of jurisprudence, Qur’anic studies, history, geography, logic and linguistics, faith and philosophy, and such sciences as medicine and mathematics” (x). It is unfortunate that the editors are not more specific about the precise historical and geographical scope of the work, but, from the evidence of one volume, it appears to cover the history of Islam from Muhammad through the Ottoman period. Most entries in this first volume are biographical and include religious leaders, political and military figures, artists, and poets.

The entry on “*Abkhazia*,” a region on the east coast of the Black Sea, is the only one with a map. The volume would have benefited from the inclusion of more maps, since many locations will be obscure to readers.

In trying to discern distinctly Iranian or Shi’ite content, the reviewer found considerable overlap with the second edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, the major difference being that the articles in the *Encyclopaedia Islamica* are longer and more detailed. The special character of Persian culture comes through, however, in entries on artistic techniques, specifically “*Abri*,” marbled paper used for various decorative purposes, and “*Abrang*,” watercolors or watercolor painting, and in several articles that treat monumental architecture, including the famous “*Abu Dulaf*”

mosque in Samarra. An example of the specialized Shi'ite subject matter is the entry for "*Al-'Abbas b. 'Ali*," who was the son of *'Ali b. Abi Talib* and the half-brother of *al-Husayn b. 'Ali*, the two great Shi'ite martyrs. *Al-'Abbas* was killed with *al-Husayn* in the massacre at Karbalā' and is also revered as a saint. The second part of the article on *al-'Abbas* covers the multiple aspects of his religious and cultural influence, including signs and symbols, places of pilgrimage, religio-artistic iconography, passion play performances, prayer and supplication, and folklore and popular literature.

This is undeniably an encyclopedia for the specialist and not for students approaching Islamic civilization for the first time. In order to locate the entry on a specific topic, it is necessary to know the correct term in Arabic or Persian since the work lacks a system of topical cross-references. Even someone with a basic knowledge of Islam and the relevant languages could easily be intimidated by the level of detail and the numerous references to source materials. The style of historical writing might also be foreign to those not accustomed to the strict sequential narration of events characteristic of Arabic and Persian historical discourse. This, however, is also one of its strengths, as it is possible to check the veracity of the information against the numerous citations. The *Encyclopaedia Islamica* is refreshingly free of extreme and biased opinions and, where appropriate, Jewish and Christian sources are referenced in addition to Islamic ones.

The intended audience is advanced graduate students and scholars who require meticulous documentation. Most seminary, divinity school, and college libraries will not have need for such a specialized research tool, and would be better served with the new third edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, which also promotes a global scope. However, schools and universities with graduate programs in Islamic or Iranian studies will want to consider purchasing this new work.

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