

WHO SPEAKS FOR WHOM: AUTHORITY, TRADITION AND
ENCYCLOPEDIAS OF ISLAM

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This review article provides a broad overview of the academic, political, and methodological framework of five encyclopedias of Islam. Starting with the 4-volume *The Encyclopædia of Islam: A Dictionary of the Geography, Ethnography and Biography of the Muhammadan Peoples*, published between 1913-38, the review traces history and *raison d'être* for the emergence of encyclopedic works on Islam and examines their mutual influence on each other. Specific attention is given to the social and political environment in which academic activity takes place. Three current Muslim projects are compared with Brill's ground-breaking *Encyclopædia of Islam* and with each other. Using two case studies (entries on Ādam and Abū Bakr) the article examines source material, methodology, and perspective in the new encyclopedias.

Keywords: Encyclopedias of Islam; historical and social influences on academic scholarship; colonialism and academic activity; influence of state and political power on academia; knowledge, authority, and tradition.

Introduction

In retrospect, 1913 seems relatively unremarkable, especially compared to the following year, which ushered the world into the first of the two great wars of the twentieth century. Although not many would consider the publication of a reference work in a Dutch town by a small publishing house a world-historical

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event, Brill's First *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, with its revealing subtitle ("A Dictionary of the Geography, Ethnography and Biography of the Muhammadan Peoples"),¹ became a milestone in Western academia. It marked a turn in the attempt to establish definitive knowledge about the Orient, becoming dated so quickly that by the time it was completed in 1936 there was already need for a revised edition. Five supplements (issued in 1934, 1936, two in 1937, and 1938) added missing entries and supplied corrigenda and addenda to the published volumes. The work thus completed in 1938, and published in English, German, and French, became "the only *complete* encyclopedia on Islam."²

Raison d'être for *EI1*

The *raison d'être* for *EI1* was "the increasing interest in Islam and Islamic culture during the last [i.e. nineteenth] century and the early part of this [i.e. the twentieth] century." For the "first time in history a truly international [although entirely European] team of scholars began work on a single project."³ The four-volume work quickly established itself in the academic world as the most important and indeed the only reference source of its kind. Its articles carried authority, it was the grand summation of the scholarship of the previous three centuries, and it created a niche for the publisher which has not been seriously challenged to this day.

Precedent for *EI1* can be found in the posthumous 1697 publication of Barthélemy d'Herbelot's (1625-1695) encyclopedic work, *Bibliothèque Orientale*, which remained the prime reference work for Western Orientalists until the nineteenth century. Modeled on the Pauly-Wissowa *Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World* and produced under the aegis of the International Union of Academies in coordination with Leiden University, Brill's *EI1* was a work by European scholars who surveyed "the Muhammadan peoples", their faith, and their history from imperial heights. This vantage point was precipitated by the lamentable situation of the Muslim world at the beginning of the twentieth century and the overall global vectors of power, economic strength, and deployment of scientific knowledge, the state of academic institutions, and other factors. There was hardly a Muslim land which was not under direct or indirect European imperial influence; intellectually, the Muslim world was a

1. M. Th. Houtsma et al. (eds.), *The Encyclopædia of Islam: A Dictionary of the Geography, Ethnography and Biography of the Muhammadan Peoples*, 4 vols. and Suppl. (Leiden: Late E. J. Brill and London: Luzac, 1913-1938); hereinafter *EI1*.

2. Publisher's Preface to the 1987 reprint, unnumbered first page; emphasis in the original.

3. *EI1*, unnumbered first page.

wasteland; politically, millions of Muslims were living in a state of subjugation and being treated like cattle by the European powers.

For instance, some 1.3 million Indian soldiers and laborers were recruited by force from Indian villages, given insufficient training, and quickly thrown into the war machine under horrible conditions; they became fodder for World War I and thousands died in the mosquito-ridden battlefields of Africa. They were treated differently from the white soldier in all respects, from salaries to living conditions. Most of them had no clue about why were they fighting, having been forcefully taken from their families on a certain day, kept in ill-equipped training camps for a few weeks, and then sent to unknown battle fronts. They outnumbered the white men in the British Army at the beginning of the war. The Indian British Army consisted of men belonging to all religions; thousands of Muslims found themselves fighting against their own brethren in faith who were, like them, conscripted by the other side—the Central Powers (also called the Triple Alliance: the German, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires, and the Kingdom of Bulgaria).⁴

It was a foregone conclusion that those who were thus being studied could not properly represent themselves. The team of European scholars which produced *EI1* could comfortably gaze at the barren landscape that stretched from the steppes of Central Asia to the Malayan Archipelago from a position of power and superiority and pronounce reasoned judgments on the entire range of things Islamic. The Qurʾān could thus be characterized as “the sacred book of the Muḥammadans,”⁵ the Prophet of Islam was someone suffering from “half diseased ecstatic conditions with which he was overcome,”⁶ and his wife ʿĀ'isha could be characterized as a “frivolous young woman.”⁷ There was no scholarly institution or apparatus in the Muslim world that could seriously respond to this project, and the field thus lay open to the German, French, and English speaking contributors of *EI1*.

While one can understand the ambitions of the European project (objective, authoritative knowledge), and indeed also why the Muslims of that

4. At the beginning of World War II, the British Indian Army consisted of approximately 200,000 men. By the end of the war (August 1945), it was the largest “volunteer army” in history, consisting of over 2.5 million men. They were sent to frontiers on three continents in Africa, Europe and Asia. “The Indian Army in the Second World War”, Commonwealth War Graves Commission, <http://www.cwgc.org/foreverindia/context/indian-army-in-2nd-world-war.php>; Kaushik Roy, “Expansion And Deployment of the Indian Army during World War II: 1939-45,” *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, Autumn 2010, Vol. 88 Issue 355, pp 248-268.

5. *EI1*, vol. 4, “Koran,” 1063.

6. *Ibid.*, 1064b.

7. *EI1*, vol. 1, “Abū Bekr,” 81a.

era did not produce a response, what remains astounding is the way they sought to duplicate it in their own languages.

Reception of *EI1* in the Muslim world

The reception of *EI1* in the Muslim world had nothing to do with its scholarly merits and far more to do with the colonial occupation and administration of the time. *EI1* was thus rendered into Arabic,⁸ Turkish, Persian, Urdu⁹ and even Dari by special mandate of the ruling elites of that era (for whom anything written in Latin script was often more important than heavenly writ). The special commission set up within al-Azhar University to translate *EI1* into Arabic, for instance, was brought about by the decree of King Farouk; the first volume of the Arabic edition (appearing in 1933) opened with a glossy picture of his corpulent eminence overshadowing the text.

The Turkish version, similarly, was produced by order of the military officers of the secular republic established by Mustafa Kemal, a man who brutally removed all public expression of Islam from Turkish society. *EI1* was translated into Turkish at the Istanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi (the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences at Istanbul University) and published by the Turkish Ministry of Education in fifteen volumes (1940 to 1987). Both of these editions involved several attempts by the Muslim translators to domesticate or sanitize the more egregious elements of the source text. In the case of the Turkish version, this was done for entries dealing with Turkish history and culture (understandable given the nationalistic orientation of the undertaking), leaving even the grossest misrepresentations of Islam uncorrected.¹⁰

In the case of Arabic, Persian, and Urdu translations, certain articles were rewritten, disparaging remarks were either taken out or diluted, and, in certain cases, additional material was appended to the end of the entries. None of these translations, however, attempted to change the broader framework of knowledge about the other which structured the text. In this respect, *EI1* was the crowning achievement of nineteenth-century Europe, the parting gift of that tradition of scholarship which had supported (and sometimes directly participated in) the colonization and imperial domination of the 'Orient'. *EI1* had a strong missionary sensibility; many of its contributors

8. The Arabic version only contains translation of material up to the letter 'ayn; the first volume appeared as *Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-Islāmiyya* (Cairo: Lajna Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-Islāmiyya, 1352/1933).

9. *Dā'ira Ma'ārif-e Islāmiyya*, 24 vols. (Lahore: Dānish Gāh-e Panjāb, 1964-1993, repr. 1980), Urdu.

10. See unnumbered third page of Önsöz (Preface) to *İslam Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 1988), vol. 1.

were renegade seminarians who had been on proselytizing missions in the Muslim world, colonial administrators, and Orientalists of a generation that produced scathing criticism of Islam and its primary sources.¹¹ Often, these contributors had seen firsthand the abject living conditions, poverty, hunger, disease, and corruption in Muslim societies. They had an experiential basis for what they said about Muslims, even as they drew their academic material from the polemical discourses of the Middle Ages and the so-called 'scientific' Orientalism of the nineteenth century. *EI2*, however, was a different story.

Brill's *Encyclopædia of Islam 2nd Edition (EI2)*

The first volume of *EI2* appeared in 1960 to a world that had drastically changed since the year the first volume of *EI1* appeared. The two world wars, the dissolution of the British Empire, the retreat of the French and Dutch forces from their Muslim colonies, and the emergence of the United States of America as the new contender for global hegemony had not only reconfigured the world politically and economically; it had simultaneously shifted the balance of academic research and publications. European scholars were flocking to American universities to claim positions of power and prestige. The Muslim world had also changed: instead of being an intellectually barren land under colonial occupation, it had now been carved up into some fifty nation states which emerged through a redrawing of the world map by the European powers (with American assistance)—lines drawn on sand, divisions that were often artificial, impractical, and historically anomalous, but which quickly forced alliances with one of the two great contenders of Cold War global power. Many of these new Muslim states came into existence through wars of independence which forced the occupiers to leave; the first steps were thus taken towards awakening the Muslim world from its three centuries of siesta—a time during which its intellectual tradition had been ransacked by European invaders as its prestigious manuscripts were stolen or bought from unscrupulous market men and its gems of art and crafts found themselves housed in the museums and private collections of the erstwhile colonizers, for the departing hordes took with them what they could find by way of manuscripts, instruments, artifacts and historical material.

This rich cache gave birth to a mini-translation movement in the Academy, an institution which had by then become the unrivaled powerhouse of the Euro-American world and a hub of ideas, technological innovations, and even the locus of development of deadly weapons. The publication of reference

11. For instance, Mansel Longworth-Dames, who was Deputy Commissioner/ Indian Civil Service and who produced some works on Balochi poetry; Orientalists such as J. H. Mordtmann, B. Carra de Vaux, and Cl. Huart; and missionaries such as Duncan Black MacDonald.

works was by now a profitable enterprise and there was an unending supply of academic scholars ready to contribute.

The authors who produced *EI2* were also an entirely different breed from the missionary-cum-Orientalist writers of *EI1*. Equipped with an often superficial knowledge of the languages spoken in the Muslim world, this new generation of academic scholars not only removed the missionizing aspects of *EI1*, they also attempted to reconstruct source material by passing it through a new lens that was partly constructed from methods developed for Biblical criticism. They again asked fundamental questions such as when and where did the text of the Qurʾān originate? How, why, by whom, for whom, and in what circumstances? What influenced the text and its interpretation? *EI2* examined the Qurʾānic text in much more detail than had been done hitherto and specific attention was paid to the meaning of the words and the way they were used in the Qurʾān and in the pre-Islamic era.

If *EI1* was sparse in its use of Muslim sources, *EI2* was richly sprinkled with such material. However, all of it was filtered through a skeptical lens that ultimately discarded what it drew from Islamic tradition in favor of a more 'objective' theory originating in the imagination of the author. This, much as with *EI1*, was often compounded by insufficient training in reading classical Islamic sources—training that often simply was not available to these scholars, who could not study such texts with the traditional modes of attention to the style and qualities of particular authors (for instance, the specific way al-Ṭabarī organizes his account of prior Qurʾān scholarship, implicitly embedding his own opinions within his lists and indicating weaker exegetical opinions). The untrained reader encountering such texts responded with confusion, which was then often attributed to the Islamic scholarly tradition itself. Furthermore, this generation of scholars was so narrowly trained in its chosen field that it often could not appreciate the dynamic interdisciplinary connections that traditional source material establishes between different genres. Thus, when al-Ṭabarī provides five different linguistic explanations of a key word in a verse along with sayings of three Companions about the occasion of its revelation, and supplements it with three Prophetic sayings before explaining its juridic dimension, readers not trained in all these branches of knowledge are confounded by the text. Such scholars thus often took for granted the judgments passed on Islamic sources by the previous generation of Orientalists, which included such figures as Abraham Geiger (1810-1874), Theodor Nöldeke (1836-1930), Ignaz Goldziher (1850-1921), and Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857-1936).

As noted above, the new focus on Islam and its sources drew upon a wider range of disciplines which the academic scholars had used for Biblical criticism, including archeology, anthropology, folklore, and linguistics. Certain old

biases were revised and revisited—thus the Qurʾān was no longer described as the “the sacred book of the Muḥammadans” but rather “the Muslim scripture, containing the revelations recited by Muḥammad and preserved in a fixed, written form.”¹² The *EI2* article on the Qurʾān pays far greater attention to the Qurʾān itself, its structure, content, chronology, language and style, and its literary forms and major themes. Its conclusions, however, still grant itself decisive authority: “The Muslim scripture and Muḥammad’s prophetic experiences are so closely linked that one cannot be fully understood without the other. The orthodox view of the dramatic form of the Qurʾān is that God is the speaker throughout, Muḥammad is the recipient, and Gabriel is the intermediary agent of revelation—regardless of who may appear to be the speaker and addressee. An analysis of the text shows that the situation is considerably more complex than this.”¹³ The authority of a figure like al-Ṭabarī is dismissed in the face of the critical regard leveled by a figure like Richard Bell, whose opinions are taken axiomatically.

Bell suggested that when some passages were being revised Muḥammad instructed the scribes to write the new versions on the backs of the sheets on which the verses being replaced were written, and that the later editors, not wanting to discard any of the revelation, inserted the old verses just before or after the new ones. E.g. II, 185, was written on the back of 184, 186 (on fasting), II, 196, on the back of 197-9 (on the Pilgrimage), XXIV, 2-9, on the back of 10-18 (on fornication), and XVIII, 6-9 (a new introduction to the story of the Seven Sleepers), on the back of 10-12, which was replaced by a longer version of the story in 13-21. In other cases the scribes simply used the backs of sheets on which older, discarded material was written, e.g. IV, 11-14, on the back of 2-10, VI, 19-21, on the back of 15-18, and VII, 3-5, on the back of 6-9. This hypothesis provides a feasible explanation and solution to textual problems in some cases, but not in others.¹⁴

EI2 was a product of a different environment from *EI1*. It even had some Muslim scholars on its Executive Committee, albeit under the undefined role of “Associate Members”. The response of its co-editor C. E. Bosworth to a pointed question about Muslim participation in the project, however, is demonstrative of the project more generally: When asked, “why [are] Muslim scholars, even those trained in the Western institutions...not invited to contribute to the encyclopedia’s essential articles, such as Qurʾān, hadith, *jihād*, etc.”? He said,

12. J.D. Pearson, “Al-Ḳurʾān,” *EI2*, vol. 5, 400.

13. *Ibid.*, 403.

14. Pearson, “Al-Ḳurʾān”, 418b.

it is “a work by the Western pen for Western people.”¹⁵

From a Muslim perspective, the single most important feature of *EI1*, and which *EI2* only amplified, was its apparent success in wresting authority and credibility from the Islamic tradition (and hence from Muslim scholars). Authority was now vested in the author of the entry, not the internal dynamics of the tradition. The authors of *EI* became the de facto voice of Islam for a growing number of consumers of knowledge within academia as well as for the reading public, both audiences largely ignorant of Islam, both receptive to the voice of the expert who was no longer attached to any tree of knowledge, whether sacred or profane, but existed in his or her isolated shell of specialized knowledge. To be sure, this was a monumental reordering of the structures of knowledge about Islam. Instead of some independent or semi-independent Orientalist, eking out his living by working outside the university, or some erstwhile missionary employed by a church, as was the case during the nineteenth and the early decades of the twentieth century, authority to speak about Islam was now invested in the professor, who was trained in the department of Oriental Studies and taught at the department of religion, and who received cursory training in reading Islamic texts (many authors of *EI2* specialized in Biblical studies or the history of Christianity and Judaism and dabbled in things Islamic).

A New World Order

Within two decades of the publication of the first volume of *EI2* in 1960, however, the entire situation would change with the momentous events which shook the Western world and instilled a new sense of hope and awakening in the Muslim world—events which quickly turned violent and whose consequences we are still encountering. For a student of sacred knowledge it is not coincidental that it was precisely at the dawn of the fifteenth century of Islam that Iran went through its Islamic revolution and the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, thereby initiating a process of rapid change in that center of gravity of the Muslim world. It is also not coincidental that the post-1979 era saw a rapid flowering of interest in Islamic Studies in the Western university. In part, this was the result of increased funding that allowed an aspiring graduate student or an assistant professor to benefit from the largesse of a Fulbright or other private grant or even governmental agency and embark upon a new career as an expert on Islam. The rapidity of this change can be seen gauged from the fact that “at the mid-twentieth century religious studies was taught mainly in private colleges, and faculties were usually drawn from theological

15. M. M. Al-Azami, *The History of the Qur'ānic Text: From Revelation to Compilation*, 2nd ed. (Sherwood Park, AB: Al-Qalam Publishing, 2011), xx-xxi.

seminaries and were narrowly focused on the study of Christianity and, to a lesser extent, Judaism. The cohort that influenced, and was influenced by, the rise of Islam in academe in the 1970s was increasingly schooled in non-theological academic environments...The subfield that grew out of this effort was called “Islamic Studies” or “the Study of Islam.”¹⁶ The emergent field of Islamic Studies fell heir to Orientalist discourse, a reincarnation which enjoyed “the very close ties to the enabling socio-economic and political institutions,”¹⁷ as subsequent developments proved.

The changed situation of the study of Islam in the West included some Muslims, but those who contributed to *EI2* were assigned only minor entries. Many of them, moreover, had immigrated to the lands of their colonizers before or shortly after the departure of the colonizers from their homelands, had studied at Western universities, and had been incorporated into the Euro-American Academy after a quick metamorphic dry-cleaning. The work of scholars like M. M. al-Azami, for instance, remained unacceptable to the objectivist pretensions of the reigning framework of Islamic studies, despite his groundbreaking work in early Hadith studies and later on the history of the text of the Qurʾān.¹⁸ In any case, Muslim contributions to *EI2* remained marginal as the work was framed by non-Muslim European and American scholars.

Brill’s *Encyclopaedia of Islam*—Three (*EI3*)

Three years after the completion of *EI2* in 2004, when a supplemental volume (XII supplement) appeared, Brill launched its *Encyclopaedia of Islam—Three* (*EI3*) project.¹⁹ According to the publisher’s website, *EI3* recognizes certain shortcomings of the previous two versions. It recognizes, moreover, that Islamicists in the contemporary academy must reckon with the ‘crisis of representation’ that swept the humanities in the late twentieth century, and that the politics of knowledge production require a greater sense of responsibility than empiricist conceits had admitted. It remains to be seen, however, what

16. Richard C. Martin, “Islamic Studies in the American Academy: A Personal Reflection,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78 (2010) 4, 897-898. For a more detailed history of the academic teaching of Islam, see his *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press), 1985.

17. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 6.

18. Cf. his *On Schacht’s Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.), 1985.

19. Marc Gaborieau, Roger M. A. Allen, Gudrun Krämer, et al (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam—Three* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); four volumes have appeared thus far.

fruits this increased attentiveness to the subjects of one's knowledge will bear.²⁰ (It should also be noted that in addition to Brill's encyclopedias, there are other far less comprehensive encyclopedias of Islam and Muslims which are not addressed in this review article.²¹)



Two Encyclopedias of Islam by Muslims

The Muslim world today is not what it was in 1913, when the first volume of *EI1* was released, or even in 1960, when *EI2* made its appearance; there is now an awakened scholarly Muslim community which has begun attempting to represent itself and its own tradition in contemporary academic idiom. Production of encyclopedic knowledge is not a new venture for Muslims, for instance by way of encyclopedic tafsirs (such as that of al-Ṭabarī and al-Mizzī's magisterial *Tahdhīb al-kamāl fī asmā' al-rijāl*). Such texts were, however, by and large single-author works. In contemporary times, there is hardly anyone producing such works and hence international efforts are needed to produce such works. Two large projects are currently attempting to do this, with mixed success:

- (i) The nearly completed Turkish Encyclopedia of Islam, *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, published by Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, Istanbul, Turkey;
- (ii) *Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif-i Buzurg-i Islāmī* (*DMBI*), a Persian encyclopedia being published by Markaz Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif-i Buzurg-i Islāmī, Tehran, with simultaneous Arabic and English editions, respectively entitled *Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-Islāmiyya al-kubrā* and *Encyclopaedia Islamica (ISLA)*;

İslam Ansiklopedisi—Turkish

The nearly-complete *İslam Ansiklopedisi (İA)* is being published by Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı (TDV) İslam Arastirmalari Merkezi (İSAM).²² The first volume

20. For more details, see <<http://www.brill.nl/publications/encyclopaedia-islam-three>>.

21. For instance, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*, first published in 1995 in four volumes and later expanded to a 6-volume edition that appeared in 2009. Various single-volume shorter works provide summary information.

22. The Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı (TDV), or Turkish Religious Foundation, was established in 1975 with the objective of supporting the activities of Diyanet İsleri Başkanlığı, or the Presidency of Religious Affairs. In 1983, TDV set up the TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi Genel Müdürlüğü, or the General Directorate of TDV Encyclopedia of Islam in Istanbul. After five

appeared in 1988, the latest (vol. 39) in 2010. It is a monumental undertaking, with some 17,000 entries in 44 projected volumes, each volume comprising approximately 600 pages. To date about 2,300 authors from around the world have contributed. There is a special emphasis on things Turkish, but not at the expense of things Islamic. At the most fundamental level, what distinguishes *ĪA* from all three editions of *EI* are the framework of inquiry and the sources from which material is drawn; for most (though not all) entries, it draws exclusively on Muslim sources. In entries where Orientalist sources are mentioned, the additional material does not alter the basic framework of enquiry. A more detailed discussion on its salient features is given in the last section below.

***Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif-i Buzurg-i Islāmī*—Persian, Arabic and English versions**

The Center for the Great Islamic Encyclopaedia, established in 1983 in Tehran, was conceived as a continuation of several previous Iranian initiatives to produce encyclopedias, but with a comprehensiveness which had so far remained allusive.²³ The project now includes an Arabic version, entitled *Dāʾirat al-maʿārif-i Islāmiyya al-kubrā*, and an English version, entitled *Encyclopedia Islamica*. The Arabic version is being prepared in Tehran, closely following the original Persian and envisioned as containing the same number of volumes; the first volume appeared in 1991 and the seventh in 2009. The English version is being produced in collaboration with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London. The English version differs from the original Persian in the

years of preparation, publication of the encyclopedia began in November 1988. At the same time, the TDV also created Islam Arastirmalari Merkezi, or the Center for Islamic Studies, so that the research carried out by scholars, whose training was made possible through graduate scholarships granted by the TDV, could be coordinated in a systematic and efficient manner. The Center for Islamic Studies started its activities in 1988 in the same building as the General Directorate. In 1993 the two organizations merged, forming Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Islam Arastirmalari Merkezi (İSAM), or the TDV Center for Islamic Studies, and the responsibility for preparing the encyclopedia was given to İSAM; see <http://english.isam.org.tr/>.

23. Several new entries were written during the process of translation of *EI1* and *EI2* into Persian. The translation project, headed by Ehsan Yarshater, was followed by *Encyclopedia Iranica*, but it is essentially a Western effort housed at Columbia University since 1982, when the first fascicle appeared. As of Spring 2011, fifteen complete volumes of the print edition have been published, containing entries up to “Kāšgari.” For the history of this project, see <http://www.iranica.com>. Another encyclopedic effort was made by Ghulām Ḥusayn Muṣāḥib in the form of *Dāʾirat al-maʿārif Fārsī*, originally published in two parts and three volumes; an expanded edition was published in 1995.

organization of entries; some entries are also omitted, others are abridged, but the integrity of the longer entries has been preserved.²⁴

The most prominent feature of all three versions of *Dāʿirat al-Maʿārif-i Buzurg-i Islāmī* is the coverage of “specifically Shīʿī themes, personalities, culture and history—those aspects, precisely, which were either given scant attention in earlier encyclopaedias or ignored altogether, as a result of the Arabo-centric and Sunni-centric tendencies which have, until recently, prevailed in Orientalist academic circles in the West.”²⁵ However, the project claims that it is not merely a Shīʿī encyclopedia of Islam; rather, it is an encyclopedia of Islam with an emphasis on Shīʿī Islam. This aspect of the work is particularly important for the contemporary study of Islam in the world. It is also this aspect of the project that deserves attention in understanding the methodologies used by its editors and contributors to present views, opinions, and even datum which might sometime be conflicting depending on the lens used to view them.

A few general observations are here in order:

- (i) Given the stated *raison d’être* of both the Persian and Turkish projects, one would expect the architecture of these encyclopedias to somehow be fundamentally different from that of Brill’s encyclopedias, in that they would recognize the source material of Islamic tradition as authoritative; this, sadly, is not the case. The general framework of inquiry remains such that the voice of the author reigns supreme, although material is generally taken from Islamic sources. This is precisely what was established by a certain Western tradition of encyclopedic knowledge (from Diderot to *Britannica*) and that opposes the tendency within Islamic tradition to let the sources themselves speak. For instance, luminaries like al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Ḥajar, despite their encyclopedic knowledge, filled their works with *qāla*, *qāla* (he said, he said), giving voice to a whole range of disparate opinions. This mode of enquiry was adopted out of deep fidelity and respect for the sources; it is unfortunate that is not taken up by the Turkish and Persian encyclopedias.
- (ii) *EI* itself appears as one of the primary sources in both encyclopedias! Like Brill’s *EI*, moreover, in both encyclopedias it is difficult to

24. *Dāʿirat al-Maʿārif-e Buzurg-e Islāmī*. Vols. 1-17 to date, Tehran: Markaz Dāʿirat al-Maʿārif-i Buzurg-i Islāmī, 1989—. Persian. *Dāʿirat al-Maʿārif al-Islāmiya al-kubrā*. Vols. 1-7 to date, Tehran: Dāʿirat al-Maʿārif al-Islāmiya al-kubrā, 1991—. Arabic. *Encyclopaedia Islamica*. Vols 1-2 to date. Leiden: Brill, in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2008—. English.

25. *Encyclopedia Islamica*, I:x.

ascertain the boundaries between the author's personal opinion and that of the sources being drawn from.

- (iii) Like all large encyclopedias, there is considerable diversity in the quality of text; in general, however, the Persian Encyclopedia is richer in bibliographical references than the Turkish project.
- (iv) Generally speaking, the entries in *İslam Ansiklopedisi* provide adequate coverage for an average educated reader, but are inadequate for specialists. *Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif-i Buzurg-i Islāmī*, on the other hand, attempts more in-depth coverage.

Two Case Studies

A closer examination of two entries from both encyclopedias may help to elucidate these points: “Ādam” in the Persian/Arabic *DMBI*²⁶ (there is no English entry so far), “Ādem” in *IA*²⁷; and “Abū Bakr” in the Persian/Arabic/English *DMBI*,²⁸ “Ebū Bekīr” in *AI*.²⁹

“Ādam” in *DMBI*

The 17-page entry in the Persian/Arabic *DMBI* comprises the following sections: (i) A brief untitled section (172a) dealing with definition and linguistic discussion on the name; (ii) Ādam in Judaism; (iii) Ādam in Christianity; (iv) Ādam in Zoroastrianism; (v) Ādam in Islam (beginning at 180b); (vi) Ādam in mystical tradition (*Ādam dar taṣawwuf wa 'irfān/Ādam fil-taṣawwuf wa 'irfān*); (vii) Bibliography.

Editorial Choices

As indicated in the section titles, almost half the entry is devoted to Jewish, Christian, and Zoroastrian material (which is readily available in other excellent reference works on Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism), and special emphasis is given the Islamic mystical tradition by creating a separate section for it within the entry. The first choice is understandable if one considers the intended Iranian readership, which may not have access to Jewish and Christian source material (although Zoroastrian material is readily available to the Persian-speaking scholarly community).

Material Used

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- 26. Original entry in *DMBI*, Persian, 1:172-192; Arabic version, 1:91-109; no English version published yet.
 - 27. *AI*, 1:358-363. I am thankful to my friend Osman Kademoglu for providing a working translation of the original entry.
 - 28. Original entry in *DMBI*, Persian, 5:240; Arabic version, 4:370-387; *Encyclopedia Islamica*, 2:563-599.
 - 29. “Ebū Bekīr” in *AI*, 10:101-108. Once again, thanks to my friend Osman Kademoglu for providing a working translation of the original entry.

The beginning of the section “Ādam in Islam” (*Ādam dar Islām/Ādam fil-Islām*) is devoted to a wholesale reproduction of verses in which the name Ādam is mentioned in the Qurʾān (as if the Qurʾān were not readily available to the scholarly community, that is, the intended readership of this “specialist encyclopedia”). Then, contrary to the claims made in the introduction, and in utter disregard of all prior Muslim reflection on the Qurʾānic description of the father of humanity, the author jumps to the opinions of Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (1282-1354/1865-1935) and his teacher, Muḥammad ‘Abduḥ (1266-1323/1849-1905), the two modernists who remain a continuous presence throughout the entry.

Statements such as “the great exegetes of the Noble Qurʾān, such as Imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and ‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā’i and Rashīd Raḍā” show a disregard for the hierarchy of *tafsīr* literature in both Shī‘i and Sunni Islamic traditions. The first subsection (on the creation of Ādam, upon him peace), is followed by a subsection on the meaning of *khalīfa* (cf. Q 2:30), where a choppy narrative reproduces a few isolated, disconnected statements from al-Ṭabarī, one statement from al-Rāzī, and then skips several centuries to go to Rashīd Riḍā who is followed by Ṭabāṭabā’i.

The next fourteen numbered subsections (3 to 16) are more grounded in *tafsīr* literature. They discuss all the standard questions associated with the Qurʾān narrative, but the order is sometimes counterintuitive: the third subsection is devoted to discussion on the question of the angels (*Will You place therein one who will spread corruption and shed blood, while we extol Thy limitless glory and praise Thee, and sanctify Thee?*), the fourth to the teaching of the names, the fifth to the presentation of Ādam, upon him peace, to the angels—but the sixth subsection takes the discussion back to the creation narrative by discussing material on Q 15:29, *and breathed into him My spirit*. Likewise, there is a logical disconnect between the twelfth and the thirteenth subsections, the former on repentance and forgiveness and the latter on the whispering of the Shayṭān. The last subsection (number 16) hands the discussion back to Rashīd Riḍā, who utters the final words of the entry (105b-106a); the opening quotation mark on page 105b, indicating a direct quote from *Tafsīr al-Manār*, never closes, and hence one does not know whose words one is actually reading at what point (those of Rashīd Riḍā or the author) but the reference on page 106a, marking the end of the quoted text, refers to three pages of *al-Manār* (1:280-283).

The text under discussion here is either a hybrid of direct quotations plus the author’s summary or simply a summary. These aspects notwithstanding, the entry does provide sufficient material and discusses almost all aspects of the Qurʾānic narrative on Ādam, upon him peace. The fifth main section, devoted to the mystical tradition, begins with the views of al-Ḥallāj (309/921),

closely followed by those of Rūz Bihān al-Baqālī al-Shūrāzī (d. 606/109), one of his best interpreters, and Ibn al-‘Arabī (638/1240), who is followed by Maḥmūd al-Shabstarī (720/1320) and ‘Azīz al-Dīn al-Nasafī (d. 711/1311), the celebrated author of *al-Insān al-kāmil*. All in all, and despite the above-mentioned shortcomings, the entry is a marked advance over both the *EI1* and *EI2* entries in representing Islamic tradition.

“Ādam” in *ĪA*

The six page *ĪA* entry begins with a brief definition, explains the etymology of the word Ādam using both Islamic and pre-Islamic sources (primarily the Bible), and then proceeds in logical order, providing source-rich material on his creation; the teaching of the names; the command to the angels to prostrate to Ādam; their statement about the human propensity for bloodshed; on the meaning of *khalīfa* (vicegerent); the creation of his partner; their life in Paradise; their eating of the forbidden tree; their descent from Paradise; the story of Hābīl and Qābīl (Abel and Cain); and his death and burial. The author zigzags between Islamic and non-Islamic material throughout the text, making the entry a comparative study, although the focus remains on Islamic sources. Unlike *DMBI*, the text remains solidly grounded in mainstream Islamic sources: although it mentions modernist interpretations, it does so with critical control and balance. It also uses more hadith material than the *DMBI* entry. The main problem here, however, is the constant shifting between Islamic and Jewish or Christian sources. This breaks the continuity of text; rather than an integrated enrichment, the non-Islamic material remains an appendage sprinkled over the narration. The depth of coverage is adequate for a general reader, but not for specialists in the field.

This is, in fact, a general feature of *ĪA*; it is an encyclopedia for the general reader, providing well-referenced and adequate summaries but never going into great depth. Moreover, its articles are sometimes selective. For instance, there is hardly any discussion on the succinct Qur’ānic account regarding the ‘teaching of the names’ (as in Q 2:31: *And He taught Ādam the names, all of them; then He presented them to the angels, and said: “Tell Me the names of these, if you are truthful”*), about which al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) collected several reports from Companions, Successors, and eminent scholars of the first two centuries of Islam, classified them into three opinions, and then gave his own preferred view based on linguistic grounds. Likewise, the entry does not mention the important hadith, “Allah created Ādam on His/his own image (*sūratihī*) and he was sixty cubits (*dhir‘ā*) tall” (Bukhārī, *Aḥādīth al-anbiyā’*, qawl Allāh Ta‘ālā wa-idh qāla Rabbuka lil-malā’ika innī jā‘ilu fil-arḍ khalīfa), and the prolific commentaries and glosses of which it was productive.

“Abū Bakr” in *ĪA*

The seven-page, richly illustrated “Abū Bakr” entry in *IA* has only three sections (“his knowledge and character”, “literature” and “bibliography”), but the text has logical order: it begins with biographical details and covers, in sequence, his life before Islam; the Makkan period after Islam; his hijra; his life in Madina, with due attention paid to his role in various battles; his special closeness to the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace; his Caliphate; his knowledge and character; his role in the collection of the Qurʾān; and his station in *tasawwuf*. Each part of the entry remains focused and quotes several primary sources, but the overall structure of the entry seems to have been taken from a secondary Turkish source that is cited multiple times (“Abdūllhay el-Kettānī”). In addition, even Montgomery Watt’s biased and unsound entry from *EI2* is present in the sources! At times, the text becomes totally disconnected from both primary and secondary sources and degenerates into personal commentary with disastrous results; the account of Tābūk and Muʿta, the episode of his walking alongside Usāma while sending him off, and, on page 105b, following el-Kettānī, he is called the “vizier of the Prophet” (Peyghamberʾin veziri)! The Saqifa episode, which looms large in *DMBI* (see below), receives less than a paragraph and the author quickly jumps to the general pledge in the Prophet’s Masjid, without mentioning the pledge at Saqifa. Then, instead of letting him speak himself, his first sermon as Khalifa is paraphrased, as is the subsequent sermon given at the time of the departure of the army under Usāma’s command; both could have been better presented in his actual words.

“Abū Bakr” in *DMBI*

Compared to the scant attention paid to the Saqifa episode in the seven-page entry of the Turkish encyclopedia, the nineteen-page entry in the Persian version of *Dāʾirat al-Maʾārif-i Buzurg-i Islāmī* (and corresponding entries in its Arabic and English versions³⁰) dwells far too long on this episode in the life of Abū Bakr, may Allah be well-pleased with him. This is not surprising, given the Shīʿi perspective of *DMBI*, but the problem here is lack of critical control in presenting historical data. Instead of using (Shīʿi) Muslim sources, the entry relies on non-Muslim sources for presenting major points of differences which have separated Sunni and Shīʿi polities for centuries; a Lammens and a Buhl are deemed more reliable than an Ibn Saʿd and al-Ṭabarī!

The English version is harsher than the original; it contains an additional layer, highlighting the historical wedge between Sunni and Shīʿas. For instance, it states: “The central controversy, in the light of which he is viewed by all later generations, concerns his assumption of the caliphate, an event regarded within the majoritarian Sunni branch of Islam as entirely legitimate

30. In this case, the English version, *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, 1:563-593, differs significantly from the original.

and as entering into the articulation of the very paradigm of Islamic-religio-political orthodoxy; whilst within Shī‘i Islam, his assumption of supreme power is largely viewed as a usurpation of the rights of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, a right deriving from the Prophet’s ostensibly ‘clear designation’ (*naṣṣ*) of ‘Alī as his successor” (563). This text is not present in the original or its Arabic version, both of which are far more balanced than the English version in many other respects as well.

The translator of the entry has a secular, modernistic understanding, a mindset so steeped in materialism that he cannot even think in Islamic terms. Thus all Islamic biographical works use a person’s piety, his or her dealings with others, personal virtues, moral excellence, spiritual station and the like as barometers for summing up a person’s overall station, but the writer of this entry has a Wall Street barometer; he wrote about Abū Bakr, may Allah be well-pleased with him: “He was said to be worth 40,000 dirhams” (565b, and he fraudulently ascribed this to Ibn Sa‘d, who actually has two different sayings: (i) “when he accepted Islam, Abū Bakr had 40,000 dirhams”; (ii) “at the time of the Prophet’s *ba‘th*, Abū Bakr had 40,000 dirhams; he used it to free [slaves] and strengthen Muslims, until he was left with 5,000 dirhams at the time of his arrival in Madina, where he continued to do what he used to do in Makka” (Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt*, 3/172). This kind of misrepresentation is not limited to this one example.

The attention paid to the question of who was first to enter Islam is disproportionate and the conclusion there, presented as the author’s own insight, already exists in other sources: “It is not difficult to reconcile these reports: one can simply refer to Abū Bakr as the first adult male to have entered Islam, and to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, who was only ten years old when he entered Islam, as the first individual after Khadija to have entered Islam” (Persian 222b-223b/Arabic 371b-72a/English 566b). After this, all three versions state that Abū Bakr, may Allah be well-pleased with him, migrated to Ḥabsha, whereas all traditional Islamic sources clearly indicate that he left Makka with that intention but only went as far as a day or two days’ distance from Makka, when he met Ibn al-Dughunna, who offered him protection whereupon he returned.³¹ The English version then adds to the original a few sentences about the “purchase of Bilāl by Abū Bakr”, but it does so on the authority of a popular Sīra work (that of Martin Lings) rather than a primary source. There is no distinction made in the use of primary, secondary and tertiary sources in the bibliography.

31. Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, 1:229. The English version of the entry states: “After the exile of the Banū Hāshim from Mecca, the persecutions became more intense; as a result, he was compelled to leave Mecca and he migrated to Ethiopia with the Prophet’s permission” (567a).



İslam Ansiklopedisi and *Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif-i Buzurg-i Islāmī* are good initiatives, but if Muslims wish to reclaim Islamic tradition, they need to produce reference works that are based on Islamic sources and that reflect the hierarchy and traditional taxonomy of knowledge in these sources. The works under review fall short because little attention has been paid to the broader structure of Orientalist knowledge about Islam; they often replicate this basic structure. Entries in *İslam Ansiklopedisi* give undue authority to the author to editorialize, rather than faithfully represent the sources; *Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif-i Buzurg-i Islāmī* heavily relies on Orientalist and modernist sources, at the expense of traditional and classical literature. Neither encyclopedia alters the conceptual framework of the Western norm to which they respond. What is needed in encyclopedically representing the breadth and depth of Islamic intellectual tradition is a radical departure from that framework of enquiry, so that the rich and diverse source material is able to speak to the contemporary reader in accessible idiom without compromising its content. Likewise, Muslim efforts need to pay more attention to critical differences between regimes of knowledge and the authority of figures like al-Ṭabarī and Gibb; to accord equal weight to their exegeses, for instance, elides the massive differences not only between the encyclopedic scholarship of the former and the exceptional learning of the latter but more significantly also between the modes of knowledge and rationality within which each worked.

