

Böwering, Gerhard, et al. (ed.), *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012.

Islamic political thought represents a vast area of research that has preoccupied the minds of both specialist and non-specialist alike for over a millennium. As with any body of people that total more than one billion in number, the political history of the thought, nations, and thinkers of the Islamic world, past and present, is incredibly complex and colorful. With this complexity in mind, *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Thought*—the first comprehensive encyclopedia of its type to be published in the English language—is a welcome compass by which students, policymakers, and journalists can navigate this vast area of study. The need for such a publication becomes even more apparent when considered in light of the recent proliferation of books precipitated by the so-called Arab Spring and an ever evolving political dynamic in southwest Asia.

The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Thought was edited by Gerhard Böwering (Yale), who was assisted by four Associate Editors, namely, Patricia Crone (Princeton), Wadad Kadi (Chicago), Devin Stuart (Emory), and Muhammad Qasim Zaman (Princeton). All five editors are counted amongst the leading authorities in their respective fields and, as such, bring with them both a wealth of knowledge and the ability to attract an array of highly esteemed contributors.

The 650-page volume is vast in its scope and appeal. As well as undertaking a thematic study of Islamic political thought, the volume helpfully divides its content into a set of broad historical periods. In his introduction to the encyclopedia, as well as his later entry on the Prophet Muhammad, Böwering acknowledges the importance of Islam's nascent period, but admits that with the passing of the Prophet Muhammad and later fall in 750 CE of Islam's first dynasty, the Umayyad empire: the "stage had been set for Islamic political thought to evolve through five successive periods." These five periods were: (1) the Abbasid ascendancy from 750-1055; (2) the influence of the Turkic Seljuks from 1055-1258; (3) the fall of Baghdad and division of the Islamic world into sultanates from 1258-1500; (4) the rise of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals from 1500-1800; and (5) the decline of the Islamic empire and rise of revival and nationalistic movements from 1800 onward.

From a thematic perspective, the volume is similarly split into five wide spectrums of interest, with each area carefully edited by Böwering and the volume's Associate Editors. Broadly speaking, the division of labor is as follows:

- Gerhard Böwering: Central themes, including authority, government, knowledge, Muhammad, the Qur'an, Shari'a, and traditional political thought.
- Patricia Crone: Historical developments, sects and schools, regions, and dynasties.
- Muhammad Qasim Zaman: Modern concepts, institutions, movements, and parties.
- Devin Stewart: Islamic law and traditional Islamic societies.
- Wadad Kadi: Thinkers, personalities, and statesmen.

In addition to its prominent editors, the volume attracted the contributions of more than 200 academics, representing a healthy balance of leading specialists and early career researchers. The balance of the volume is further enhanced by the fact that the majority of contributors wrote only a couple of entries each, ensuring a refreshing blend of research and opinion.

Readers of the volume will be particularly interested in what Böwering terms the "core articles," written by each of the five editors and some guest contributors, comprising fifteen essay-length entries that offer the reader an overview of the key topics (Qur'an, Shari'a, Muhammad, etc.) and the interaction between many of the subjects discussed in the shorter entries. The introduction should be added to the list of core articles; in it Böwering skillfully summarizes much of the evolution of Islamic political thought throughout the ages, from the Prophet Muhammad to the Muslim Brotherhood and the so-called Arab Spring. Of the shorter entries, there are a number of insightful discussions that take place on modern and classical subjects (e.g., Osama Bin Laden, Police, etc.).

Despite the depth of the encyclopedia, there are a number of topics and personalities missing from the volume. For example, we find no dedicated entry for the modern influential Turkish thinker Fethullah Gülen who is only briefly mentioned in the entry on Knowledge (p. 304). Similarly, we encounter only a cursory treatment of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (p. 8) and the Pahlavi dynasty (p. 296). The prominent Egyptian writer and thinker Taha Husayn (p. 469) is mentioned only once, passively, and without context. The absence of these entries, amongst others, however, is perhaps not too surprising. As is inevitable with any encyclopedic work, the range of subjects that can be included is often at the mercy of several external factors. Add to this inevitable editorial complexity, and editors often find themselves forced to make difficult decisions. (Such omissions are perhaps something that could be addressed in a second edition?)

Though not surprising for an encyclopedic work, there are at times disparities in the depth of entries on subjects of a comparative nature. For example, the entry on Aligarh since 1801 (pp. 32-33) is disproportionately longer than the entry on Baghdad from the eighth century to the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq (pp. 60-61). Other entries appear to tilt their focus toward the twentieth century, offering little to no insight into the important roles they

played as Islamic political centers before the modern period. For example, the two brief entries on Iran (pp. 260-61) and Iraq (pp. 261-62) deal only with events and political thought since the turn of the twentieth century. Similarly, the entry on Egypt rather hastily glosses over the medieval period to deal in part with the modern period, but mainly with the so-called Arab Spring. The areas discussed were certainly worthy of inclusion, but so were the parts omitted or glossed over. These absences further enhance the significance of the fifteen core articles which often serve to fill in the gaps.

The transliteration and general editorial system applied is consistent and easy to use. However, given that the target readership will most likely be undergraduate students, policymakers, and journalists, a “how to use” page would have been helpful. Such a section could also benefit the reader with regard to cross-referencing. For example, it might not be apparent to the non-specialist reader that Osama Bin Laden would be listed under “B” or Abu Nasr al-Farabi under “F.” The encyclopedia’s index is excellent and the “Further Reading” section at the end of each entry a welcome door to more detailed research. The volume also contains useful maps and tables of statistics up to 2011.

The encyclopedia under review is a welcome and useful resource for the non-specialist reader. It certainly does serve its purpose of making the established or latest academic research on many subjects accessible to a wider audience. With the plethora of contemporary works on specific aspects of Islamic political thought, this volume will help to focus the minds of its readers. And rather than being viewed as a finished project, one hopes that the encyclopedia is a starting point that will lead to future editions.

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