The Muslim World Book Review

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Blessed Names and Attributes of Allah Abdur Raheem Kidwai

Remembering the Names of Allah is a sacred tradition in Islam. Both the Qur'an and sayings of the Prophet (Hadith) state the importance of learning them and promise reward for reciting them in supplications and prayers.

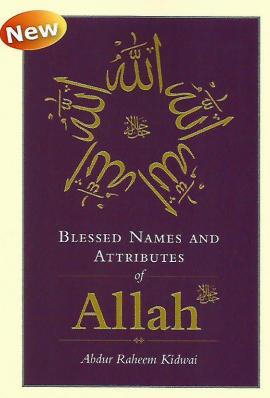
This beautiful presentation of the 99 Blessed Names of Allah draws the reader nearer to the Divine through contemplation and reflection of Allah's names, their meaning and how each impacts our daily lives. They help to conceptualize Allah Whose limitless greatness and glory is impossible to grasp.

Each name is presented in the original Arabic and its translation into English. Accompanying each name is a commentary that is concise and easy to understand but rich in meaning.

"Allah's are the names most beautiful. Whatever is in the heavens and earth extols His glory."

- Qur'an (Al-Hashr 59:24)

"Allah has 99 names. He who remembers these will certainly enter Paradise." - Prophet Muhammad (Bukharhi Hadith Kitab Ad-Dawat, 2, 949)



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Contents

Re	view Article
Ru	qaiyah Hibell
	In the Eye of the Beholder: Revisiting the
	Perception of Terrorism
	Disciplining Terror: How Experts Invented Terrorism,
	by Lisa Stampnitzky.
	The Psychology of Terrorism, by John Horgan.
	On Western Terrorism: From Hiroshima to Drone Warfare,
	by Noam Chomsky and Andrew Vltchek.
	Reclaiming Jihad: A Qur'anic Critique of Terrorism,
	by ElSayed M.A. Amin.
	The Rise of Islamic State: ISIS and the New Sunni Revolution,
	by Patrick Cockburn.
	New Approaches to Countering Terrorism, by Hamed El-Said
	Date of James and Control of the Con
Isla	amic Thought and Sources
Ab	dur Raheem Kidwai
	The Qur'ān: A New Annotated Translation, by A. J. Droge
	Misquoting Muhammad: The Challenge and Choices of Interpreting
	the Prophet's Legacy, by Jonathan A. C. Brown 25
Mu	ıhammad al-Ghazali
	Rāzī: Master of Qur'ānic Interpretation and Theological
	Reasoning, by Tariq Jaffer
Μι	ihammad Yaseen Gada
	Islam: An Introduction, by Catharina Raudvere 31
Co	ntemporary Muslim World
Elf	atih A. Abdelsalam
	Routledge Handbook of the Arab Spring: Rethinking
	Democratization, edited by Larbi Sadiki
SP	arvez Manzoor
	Confronting Political Islam: Six Lessons from the West's Past,
	by John. M. Owen IV

Anis Ahmad
Temptations of Power: Islamists and Illiberal Democracy
in a New Middle East, by Shadi Hamid
Murad Wilfried Hofmann
Non-State Actors in the Middle East: Factors for Peace and
Democracy, edited by Galia Golan and Walid Salem
T.T. and T.T. down
Islamic History
Abdullah Drury
History of the Umayyad Caliphs: Tarikh al-Khulafa,
by Jalal ad-Din as-Suyuti.
Shahrul Hussain
Henry Stubbe and the Beginning of Islam: The Originall &
Progress of Mohometanism, edited and Introduced
by Nabil Matar.
Elfatih A. Abdelsalam
The Yezidis: The History of a Community, Culture and
Religion, by Birgul Acikyildiz
Islam and the West
Philip Lewis
Muslims In British Local Governent, Representing Minority
Interests in Hackney, Newham, and Tower Hamlets,
by Eren Tatari 4
Murad Wilfried Hofmann
Organizing Muslims and Integrating Islam in Ger-many: New
Developments in the 21st Century, by Kerstin Rosenow-Williams.
Mysticism and Spirituality. Part Two: Spirituality –
The Way of Life, by Raimon Panikkar.
Shahrul Hussain
Muslim Family Law in Western Courts, edited by Elisa Giunchi
Abdur Raheem Kidwai
Muslims in the Western Imagination, by Sophia Rose Arjana
L.L I F.
Islamic Banking and Finance
Abdelkader Chachi
Islamic Finance: Political Economy (Vol I: Values and Innovation; Vol II:
Risk, Stability and Growth; Vol III: Performance and Efficiency),
edited by Mehmet Asutay and Abdullah Q. Turkistani

Toseef Azid	
Risk and Regulation of Islamic Banking, edited by Mervyn K.	
Lewis, Muhamed Ariff and Shamsher Mohamad.	66
Faizal Ahmad Manjoo	
Derivatives in Islamic Finance, Examining the Market	
Risk Management Framework, by Sherif Ayoub.	71
Children's Literature	
Sabeeha Coates	
She Wore Red Trainers: A Muslim Love Story,	
by Na'ima B. Robert.	75
The Victory Boy: Team Spirit, by Jamal Orme.	76
Imran Mogra	
I Wonder about Allah (Book 2), by Özkan Öze.	78
Short Reviews	
Murad Wilfried Hofmann	
Teilhard's Mysticism: Seeing the Inner Face of Evolution,	
by Kathleen Duffy.	81
Abdur Raheem Kidwai	01
English Poems on Prophet Mohammed,	
edited by Massood Ul Hasan.	82
PANTIE WAS DECIDED TO A STATE OF THE STATE O	02
BOOKS RECEIVED.	84
INDEX TO VOLUME 35.	87

world to the desolation, in a manner, of paganism, Judaism and Christianity, which hath now maintained itself above a thousand years and has increased its extent and proselytes over more than a fifth part of the known earth.' His book was in response to the climate of his time and his tone was set to match his opponents' tone. What follows after the above excerpt is a sharp criticism of Christianity and Judaism while offering a gracious depiction of the Prophet Muhammad's character. This depiction is rapidly lost in the midst of quotations from the Bible and accounts of history containing an overabundance of Latin names. When he talks about the 'Trinitarians' he describes them as 'enemies to all human learning' 'ignorant' 'vulgar' and much more. The language changes from Chapter 3 onwards. The Latin and historical jargon is reduced to a great extent. Of particular interest is Stubbe's response to the claim that Islam was spread 'by the sword', calling it a 'vulgar opinion'. He points out that while Christian theologians held views that Christianity may be enforced and territories be seized in order to propagate the 'true religion', Muslims offered pacts of treaties and alliances to non-Muslims. Stubbe points out that this was done to provide safety and security and an assurance for non-Muslim states. One of the unique features of this book is that no European writer before Stubbe had produced anything similar to what he wrote about the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the Qur'an. Stubbe's book therefore makes a unique and positive contribution to the study of the representation of Islam in Western thought. The editor's aim was to make Stubbe's text as accessible as possible to today's reader while preserving its seventeenth-century syntax and style. To a great extent he has succeeded in doing so.

The book is a timely publication, especially in an age where unjustified insults have become fashionable, rather a badge of honour worn by those who regard themselves as the self-appointed vanguard of 'freedom of speech'.

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Shahrul Hussain

THE YEZIDIS: THE HISTORY OF A COMMUNITY, CULTURE AND RELIGION. By Birgul Acikyildiz. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014. Pp 283. ISBN: 9781784532161.

The Yezidis are a group of people who form part of the rich cultural mosaic of the Middle East. This book aims to give a comprehensive and comprehensible introduction to Yezidi culture, religion and society. It examines Yezidism not only as a religion but also as a historical and social phenomenon. This is a fresh approach to the subject. Previous scholars focused mainly on the origins, early

history and religious practices of the modern Yezidis of northern Iraq. In this book, the full historical and geographic range of Yezidism is examined for the first time, not just in northern Iraq but also in Turkey, Syria and Transcaucasia. Thus, the book throws light on the origins of Yezidism and documents its historical development as part of the general history of the Kurds. It traces the changing fortunes of Yezidism and examines the role of the Yezidis in Kurdish history over time and in the different Kurdish regions. The Yezidi community emerged in a small area, known as Sheikhan, and spread rapidly amongst the Kurdish tribes. However, this rapid expansion disturbed their Muslim and Christian neighbours, and from the thirteenth century onwards, Yezidis suffered repression and massacre. As a result, the Yezidis remain a small, oppressed community, but one that has stubbornly survived to this day. Today, the Yezidis of northern Iraq are under increasingly severe threat from the Islamic State (ISIS) jihadists. It is not just their religious and material culture that are in peril but their entire existence is under threat.

The book is organized into an introduction, four chapters and a conclusion. Chapter one sheds light on the origins, history and development of the community; Chapter two analyses their religious belief system; Chapter three is about their religious practices, observances and rituals; Chapter four deals with the community's material culture. In their entirety, the four chapters explore what makes Yezidism a separate and unique religion. The chapters principally focus on the Peacock Angel, the main character in Yezidism, and explore his relation with the Creator and the Yezidi people. Yezidis believe in one eternal God who is the creator of the universe. According to the Yezidi belief system (Chapter two), God manifests himself as a Holy Trinity in three different forms: the Peacock Angel, Sultan Ezi and Sheikh 'Adi (died 1162). Furthermore, God has delegated his earthly powers to seven angels led by the Peacock Angel. In Yezidi belief, this angel is the mediator between God and the Yezidi people. Muslim and Christian neighbours of the Yezidis in the Middle East consider the Peacock Angel as the embodiment of Satan and an evil, rebellious spirit. The devil was identified with the fallen angel who was expelled from Paradise because of his disobedience to God. And as the Yezidis pray to God through his banners in the form of the Peacock, they were considered to be worshippers of Satan ('abadat al-Shaytān).

Chapter three describes the Yezidi belief system and its religious practices. It analyses the personality of Sheikh 'Adi who is considered the reformer of Yezidi religion by modern Yezidis – focusing on his written work and other Arabic sources to examine his influence on the Yezidi doctrine. It also considers a set of Yezidi myths, including those of the Creation and the Flood, and explores the originality of the Yezidi holy books. In addition, the book describes the

caste system, one of the predominant characteristics of Yezidi society. The life of every Yezidi is full of ceremonies and rituals, and it is upon participation in these rituals that their acceptance in the Yezidi community hinges.

One of the main aims of the book is to give the first full and extensive account of the most important facets of Yezidi religious and funerary architecture, in order to relate religious observances and practices to material and visual culture and their relationship to the corresponding culture of their neighbours throughout the Middle East. This is the subject of chapter four, where the funerary monuments and zoomorphic tombstones are described and illustrated with line drawings and photographs. This is the first attempt to study the material culture of the Yezidis. This material is not found in any earlier publication that aimed to throw light on Yezidi religion, and culture. The coverage of this aspect of the Yezidi material culture is one of the major strengths of this book. Its aim is to discuss how form, content and function sanctify a place in the Yezidi world. This part of the book considers a number of key questions: what impact did the coming of Yezidism have upon the preexisting sacred topography of the region? What makes a building 'Yezidi' in form, function or meaning? How is the 'spirit' of Yezidism manifested visually? Is there a correlation between Yezidi art and architecture and that of Islam and Christianity? What is new and original in Yezidi material and visual culture?

The author admits that she has faced a number of methodological challenges in her study. The first challenge lies in the dating of Yezidi buildings with precision. Few Yezidi monuments offer inscriptions or other written evidence for their dating. This limitation has often led the author to make educated guesses as to the dating of certain buildings. The second difficulty is in the transcription of names. Although the Yezidis speak Kurdish, most Yezidi names are originally Arabic, and the orthography of the Arabic names does not always correspond to the way they are articulated by the Yezidis.

These shortcomings notwithstanding, this book is an essential guide to a threatened tradition. It reveals an intricate system of belief influenced by Zoroastrianism and Sufism and regional paganism. It explores the origins of the Yezidis, their art and architecture and the connections between Yezidism and Satan/Shayṭān of Christian and Muslim tradition. Extensively illustrated, with maps, photographs and visual images, this pioneering book is a testimonial to one of the region's most extraordinary and ancient peoples.

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