

Brockopp, Jonathan E., Ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad*.

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Muhammad continues to be a subject of controversy in Western scholarship, and Brockopp's fifteen chapter collection is a pleasing patchwork covering many angles on the Prophet of Islam. It spans the earliest years of Islam right up to the present day by presenting material on topics as varied as the social context of Islam, medieval Latin representations of Muhammad, and the portrayal of Muhammed as 'cool' in modern Indonesian comics.

The fourteen main chapters follow an introduction, and are grouped in three sections covering the world of Muhammad, his place in history, and the memory of the Prophet, which is a somewhat arbitrary approach and is best ignored. All the authors are experts on Islam, although not many are leading scholars and few would really be considered experts on Muhammad *per se*. However, the weakest section is actually the introduction, in which Brockopp does a generally good job of surveying current thinking on Muhammed and of introducing the following chapters, but makes some glaring errors. He says that Arabia was "quite distant" (p. 3) from Christianity *etc.*, a position at odds even with the excellent first chapter by Saleh (especially p. 22). Brockopp also states that veneration of Muhammad was like that of Jesus (p. 1), a position that the Quran and Muslims plainly contradict, and he says that the bureaucratic language of Syria in early Islam was Greek (p. 11), when, in fact, it was Syriac. This aside, the remainder of the book is, indeed, a worthwhile companion and provides many insights from recent scholarship.

Saleh's opening chapter on the Arabian context of Muhammad dispels many myths about illiterate Arabs, showing, as he does, that the Arabs were in close contact with their neighbours and quite aware of developments in Rome. Saleh draws interesting parallels between Muhammad's visions in the cave and Plato's story of the cave, a possible link of significance in light of early Islam's partial embrace of NeoPlatonic thought.

Much of the Quran emphasises the coming apocalypse and Muhammad's role as a warner of the coming judgement. Rubin's chapter is, thus, a needed exploration of the shift that occurs in Islam from seeing Muhammad as warner to Muhammad as ideal hero. This is a very under-researched topic and Rubin's contribution is a good introduction to the trend in early Islam to downplay eschatology.

Lecker's chapter on Medina provides a valuable glimpse into life there and useful detail on the impact of Muhammad on Medinan trade and living. He also discusses early attempts to "cleanse" the biography of Muhammad, which raises many questions about sources and representation. This chapter also is a deft link into the following piece by Lowy about Muhammad's place as lawgiver in Islam. The author makes some good points about the use of *hadith* in legal dispute, especially in the context of other sources of authority such as reason and extra-Quranic knowledge.

Whether, when, and how to cut one's fingernails is a very practical aspect of Islamic teaching and is ably covered along with many other topics in Gleave's contribution. He raises interesting questions about the Prophet's intentions and whether he made mistakes, and neatly summarises the debates. Ernst's chapter makes a tidy pair to Gleave by surveying Muhammad's role as the perfect example in Islam. He discusses the ways in which Muhammad is seen and not seen as salvific in various Muslim communities, including NeoPlatonic understandings of Muhammad as an

emanation of divine light. This chapter also flows seamlessly into the following chapter by Katz on Muhammad's place in Islamic ritual, especially the controversial celebration of the Prophet's birthday. The *mawlid* and other Sufi practices are a key point of attack for modern Salafist Muslims and this chapter places these intra-Islamic debates in perspective.

The following three chapters also form something of a coherent unit as they survey the topics of Muslim rationalist's explanations of Muhammad's prophecy, his role as head of state and the subsequent Sunni-Shia division, and various Sufi understandings of Muhammad. Together these chapters dispel any notions of a monolithic Islam and show many aspects of the ongoing debates about Muhammad within their historic contexts.

Medieval Latin representations of Muhammad were highly politicised and Tolan's essay captures the contextual issues of Mohammad's historiography very well. This, again, shows just how much history can be distorted by context, and is a warning against the over-simplified misrepresentation and Orientalist romanticism of much Western media.

The final three chapters by Gade, Hussain and Tayob situate Muhammad's historiography in the twenty-first century with relevant pictures and examples of how Muhammad is represented. Gade's piece on Indonesia again dispels notions of a Wahhabi-dominated Islam, and Tayob's reflections on the future of Muhammad in Islam is also provocative. Certainly no-one could accuse this collection of being 'dry and academic' given its kaleidoscopic coverage of issues.

As with other Cambridge companions this book has useful suggestions for further reading and a quality general index and an index of Quranic verses. Overall, the

selection and ordering of chapters is good and cover many aspects of Muhammad's life, teaching and impact. Because each author is summarising, they sometimes leave out less mainstream points of view, and readers need to be aware that this volume reflects the general consensus, glossing over many differing perspectives. There are also topics missing from the collection, although they are mentioned in various footnotes. That said, for anyone wanting a solid well-written introduction to Islamic studies, this is a concise and valuable work on Muhammad.

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