
This timely volume fills a tangible gap in the studies of Afghan religiosity rich in misunderstandings and stereotypes. The choice of its title, as the editor explains in the Introduction (xiv), draws the boundaries of the idea of Islam in Afghanistan more clearly than if it was just named “Afghan Islam”, for it covers also many other Muslim peoples who do not identify themselves as Afghans. The book is comprised of Introduction, four parts, Afterword, a Glossary of Islamic Terms, and an Index.

The Introduction summarises the religious history of Afghanistan, as well as the extant scholarship on the emergence, shaping and development of various dimensions of Islam during the period from the 8th to 21st century. Such a comprehensive approach breaks the petrified view of dealing with Islam in Afghanistan as something static and monolithic based just on dogmatic values, neglecting by that, say, the local cultural phenomena and folk beliefs.

Part One, From Conversions to Institutions (ca. 700-1500), includes three contributions of both general and specific natures. Arezou Azad (“The Beginnings of Islam in Afghanistan: Conquest, Acculturation, and Islamization”) gives a view on the context of the emergence of Islam in Afghanistan, as well as its transition from the conquest to caliphal administration.

Nushin Arbabzadah (“Women and Religious Patronage in the Timurid Empire”) examines the role of Timurid female power and women’s patronage of mosques, madrasas, khanaqahs and mausoleums.

Jürgen Paul (“The Rise of the Khwajagan-Naqshbandiyya Sufi Order in Timurid Herat”) illustrates the rise of the Sufi silsīlas during the Timurid era, particularly focusing on the Khwajagan Sufi order in Herat and investigating its activities under the light of political outlook, patronage, and support of the ruling elite.

Part Two, The Infrastructure of Religious Ideas (ca. 1500-1850), is presented by two papers: “Earning a Living: Promoting Islamic Culture in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries” (R. D. McChesney) and “Transporting Knowledge in the Durrani Empire: Two Manuals of Naqshbandi-Mujjadidi Sufi Practice” (Waleed Ziad). The first presents an overview of the process of transmitting and transforming the religious culture based on
contemporary works that focus on the lives of noteworthy personalities known for their efforts in preservation, promotion, studying, teaching of Islamic tradition and, last but not least, earning a living from religious practices.

The second paper is dedicated to two Sufi writings: Khwaja Safiullah’s *Makhtzan al-Anwar* and Fazl Ahmad Ma’sumi’s *Risala*, which, though being esoteric texts, are presented as historical aides to shed light on the value systems and ethical premises of 18th century Kabul and Peshawar.


The first is an attempt to briefly outline how Afghanistan’s Emir ‘Abd al-Rahman alongside with terror, intimidations, and exile used Islam (through reorganisation and expansion of the judicial system) for imposing the rule of government upon the yāğhistāns (the lands of unruly).

The second article investigates the Pashtun socio-political organisation in the Indo-Afghan borderlands, emphasising the nature of the Pashtun tribalism in the context of religiousity that eventually brought to the Afghan jihad and the rehabilitation of the idea of the Islamic tribe during the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan.

The third article discusses the activities of the “Awaken Youth Party” (AYP) in Afghan politics after World War II. The emergence of this party launched a new political discourse in Afghanistan with a new approach toward Pashtun nationalism in terms of its ideology and leadership vis-à-vis religion and the clergy. The author concludes that the emergence of political Islam in Afghanistan was due to the rivalry and competition of the AYP and the clergy.