

AAR
TAZIM KASSAM

The Study of Islam American Academy of Religion

The American Academy of Religion is the world's largest learned society and professional association of scholars and teachers in the field of religion. Through academic conferences, publications and a variety of programme and membership services, the American Academy of Religion (AAR) fosters excellence in scholarship and teaching. It also aims to advance publication and scholarly communication on religion; to welcome multiple perspectives on the study of religion; to support racial, ethnic and gender diversity within the Academy; and to seek ways to contribute to the public understanding of religion.

The AAR's annual meeting is held every year in late November and provides a lively and enabling context for free inquiry, disciplined reflection and scholarly exchange on the world's religions. The Study of Islam section is one of fourteen programme units of the AAR and was officially recognized in 1986. It is one of the major sections of the AAR with a long-standing and committed participation of more than a hundred active members. One of the most diverse groups in the AAR, the section's presenters, panellists, and audience represent scholars at all stages of their academic careers. The section also features regular attendance and participation of international scholars from countries including Egypt, Malaysia, Indonesia, South Africa, and China.

The Study of Islam section serves as a forum for current research on Islam. The annual meeting of the AAR sponsors at least five sessions related to the study of Muslim faith and practice as well as additional individual presentations on Islamic topics in other programme units and sessions. The cultural and linguistic diversity, the regional and historical range, and the varieties of methodologies currently used in Islamic Studies make the section's offerings rich and diverse from year to year. The themes of the sessions fall under the following categories:

1. The study of Islamic texts and scriptures;
2. The study of lived Islam in various regions and cultures;
3. Methodology and approaches to the study of Islam;
4. Issues such as gender, liberation theology, human rights;
5. Subfields of Islamic studies including Mysticism, Law, Theology, Philosophy, Shi'ism.

Our policy is to encourage methodological sophistication, ideological diversity and interdisciplinary discussion in our programme. Shared sessions with other programme units of the academy have encompassed fields such as Islamic Ethics, Gender, Islamic and Judaic Studies, and Islam and Academic Teaching, and the Study of Religion. Given the importance of scripture in Islam, the Study of Islam section regularly sets aside one session for Qur'anic Studies. The section encourages the use of inter-disciplinary discourses that bridge textual, philological, sociological and anthropological approaches to the Qur'an as well as other Islamic texts.

An additional aspect of the Study of Islam section is its outreach to the broader membership of the AAR by offering sessions concerning the teaching of Islam in the undergraduate liberal arts curriculum. Many American university programmes in Religious Studies draw upon non-specialists to offer introductory courses on the Islamic world. The sessions on teaching Islam provide a forum for addressing important pedagogical issues. They also offer scholars an opportunity to deliberate on the broader conceptual categories and frameworks used in the study of religions. The Study of Islam section is thus a critical resource within the AAR for other scholars of religion who may not have Islamic experts in their departments.

The Study of Islam section also has an e-mail list for its members called 'Islam-AAR'. The list facilitates communication about scholarly topics and disseminates information about grants, employment, workshops and AAR business. Recent topics of discussion on the list have ranged from the best software for studying the Qur'an to the pros and cons of using novels in undergraduate teaching. In addition to the e-mail list, a special leaflet informing members of all papers and panels with content of special interest to Islamicists is mailed to the member-

ship before the annual meeting. As the premiere international forum for the study of religions, the AAR plays a key role in influencing the way that scholars and teachers of religion in North America and abroad construct their curricula and discipline. Within this context, the Study of Islam section has a unique and important role to play in shaping the academic study of Islam. Considering its growing importance as the world's second largest faith and its social, economic and political relevance in contemporary life, the Islamic world has not received the attention it deserves in higher education. Thus, the Study of Islam section's goals are: to anchor the study of Islam centrally within the wider academic study of religions; to provide a disciplined forum for critical inquiry and high quality, original scholarship in Islamic Studies; and to encourage comparative and inter-disciplinary study of Islamic history and societies. ♦

Dr T. Kassam, Department of Islamic Studies and Religion, Colorado College, Colorado, USA.

- The Annual Meeting for 1999 is to be held in Boston, November 20-23, 1999.
- For more information, please consult the following Internet address: <http://www.aar-site.org/>

ADVERTISEMENT

Islamic Studies from *Hurst* Islamic Studies from *Hurst*

A Dictionary of Muslim Names

Khalid al-Akbari
Comprehensive and readily accessible, and suitable with a broad audience in mind, including students of Islam and Arabic.
c. 200pp. April 1999 £20.00 / \$35.00 hb

Fundamentalism Reborn?

Al-Qaeda and the Taliban
William Malley (ed.)
"A superb achievement... [very well written]... [accessible]... [useful]... [could not be done up for dummies]... [Islamic Society for Middle East Studies]"
c. 200pp. 2000 £12.95 / \$20.00 hb

Islam in the Soviet Union

From the Second World War to Post-Soviet
Yusef M. Sidani
The most detailed historical study of Islam under post-war Soviet Communism yet published, and the first to be based largely on official Soviet archive material.
c. 200pp. July 1999 £20.00 / \$35.00 hb

In Quest for God and Freedom

The Gulf Neighbourhood Brotherhood of the North Caucasus
Anna Zakaria
Reconstructs the history of the Neighbourhood Brotherhood and its impact on Chechnya and Dagestan.
c. 200pp. Jan 1999 £20.00 / \$35.00 hb

Pakistan: A Modern History

Imtiaz Ahmad
Analyses the evolving problems that have beset Pakistan since its creation in 1947 and explains why authoritarian and often brutal regimes have followed the path to truly representative politics.
c. 200pp. Feb 1999 £14.95 / \$24.95 hb

Muslim Identity and the Balkan State

M. Prizren and S. Topal Prizreni (eds.)
"A systematic, comprehensive and up to date analysis of identities in the Balkans."
c. 200pp. 1997 £14.95 / \$24.95 hb

Legacy of a Divided Nation

India's Muslims since Independence
Mehrez Elmaghrabi
"Should become the standard work in the field." *Asian Survey* (1997)
c. 200pp. 1997 £14.95 / \$24.95 hb

The Agency of Algeria

Muhammad Ghannouchi
"The book will give some political and social background for people with Algeria." *Financial Times*
c. 200pp. 1997 £14.95 / \$24.95 hb

African Islam and Islam in Africa

Encounters between Sufis and Islamists
D. M. F. M. and E. E. F. (eds.)
"A valuable addition to studies of Muslims of Africa and a welcome addition to studies of Islamic revival in the academic world." *Islam & Christian-Muslim Relations*
c. 200pp. 1997 £14.95 / \$24.95 hb

Between Serb and Albanian

A History of Kosovo
M. M. V. (ed.)
"An excellent and detailed handbook for the student, the diplomat and the politician." *Daily Telegraph*
c. 200pp. 1998 £14.95 / \$24.95 hb

The Ideal Nature of Islamic Fundamentalism

Johns G. (ed.)
"An individual and innovative approach to current considerations of Islamic fundamentalism as a socio-political movement... [the breadth of Johns' knowledge is remarkable]" *International Affairs*
c. 200pp. 1997 £12.95 / \$20.00 hb

Countdown to Armageddon

Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam
Martin Gardell
"A readable but critical view of Louis Farrakhan's activities, beliefs and organisations." *Asian Survey* (1997)
c. 200pp. 1997 £14.95 / \$24.95 hb