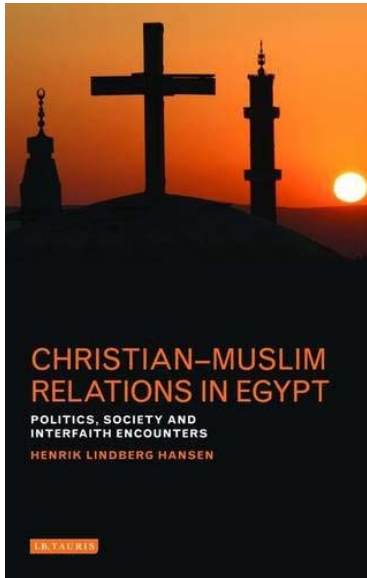


## Brief Reviews, Spring 2016



**Christian-Muslim Relations in Egypt: Politics, Society and Interfaith Encounters.** By Henrik Lindberg Hansen. I.B. Tauris: London, 2015. 304 pp. \$99.

Hansen has made a substantive contribution to our understanding of Egyptian society by focusing on relations between Christians and Muslims. His discussions on a number of topics are insightful: the patron-client relationship between the two groups, the complex identities existing within the continuum between Muslim and Christian—from those on the extremes who see themselves exclusively as Muslim or Christian to those in the middle who see themselves as Egyptians—and Egyptian society’s worsening post-revolutionary polarization along Islamist, secular, and Christian lines.

The book is not for the lay reader; its first fifty pages closely examine a number of sociopolitical and psychological theories and

then regularly invoke them as paradigms for understanding Christian-Muslim relations. Moreover, while Hansen gives fair warning that “this book is addressed to Western academia,” the result is a work that incorporates one of the key deficiencies of such scholars: the failure to factor in religion, particularly Islamic doctrine, when analyzing societal issues.

Thus, while noting Egyptian Christians’ marginalized position, he also portrays them as “clannish and mistrusting” in what seems a strained effort to appear objective. When declaring that “discrimination [against Christians] is not a product of Islam as an essentially evil religion, which propagates the suppression of people not belonging to the faith,” he trivializes and thus dismisses the topic of Islam’s doctrines. One does not need to characterize a faith as evil to examine its actual tenets and their practical repercussions.

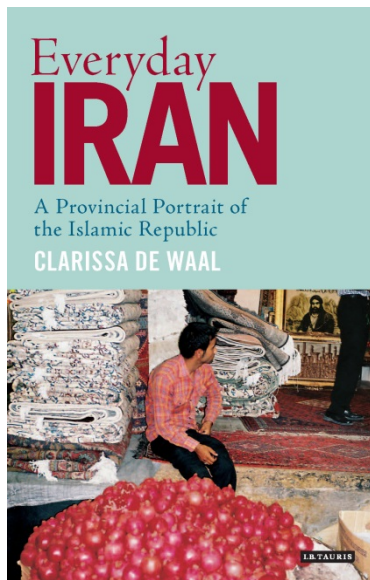
For example, while discussing the social, political, and psychological aspects that make it difficult to build or repair churches, Hansen never informs the reader that Shari‘a bans the building and reparation of such houses of worship and that this is precisely what Muslims cite when they protest and attack churches. Nor does he mention how Muslim authorities use the conceit of “defamation of religions” to harass and imprison Christians (most recently of youths who mocked ISIS).

By not scrutinizing Islamic teaching, Hansen offers strange or naïve assertions: “Salafi with an inclusive attitude towards religious minorities” supposedly exist, and it is still “debatable” whether the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, which Hansen acknowledges incited violence against Christians, was “democratically-minded or

just politically opportunistic.” There are even hints that the Christian Copts brought violence on themselves by supporting the anti-Muslim Brotherhood revolution.

The book offers a comprehensive and sometimes insightful look into its topic, albeit through the secular lenses of sociopolitical and psychological theory. However, because it strictly avoids religion—specifically Islamic doctrines concerning non-Muslims—it offers a seriously incomplete analysis.

Raymond Ibrahim  
Middle East Forum



**Everyday Iran: A Provincial Portrait of the Islamic Republic.** By Clarissa de Waal. New York: I.B. Tauris, 2015. 198 pp. \$94.

Iran—a country of more than 80 million—is incredibly diverse, a patchwork of languages and cultures. In *Everyday Iran*, Cambridge University anthropologist de Waal focuses on life in the capital city of Fars province, Shiraz, and the Fars tribal hinterlands. Traveling to the province periodically between 2007 and 2012, she looks at villages and towns and describes individuals and families from different socioeconomic backgrounds, providing

interesting color on how the controversial 2009 elections transpired in a province unseen by most journalists. Her narrative is refreshingly free-flowing and unencumbered by academic jargon.

Alas, aside from providing colorful anecdotes, *Everyday Iran* adds little to understanding the country or the considerable scholarship surrounding it. De Waal seems not to know Persian and consults none of the considerable Persian literature surrounding Fars province, such as Mirza Hasan Fasa'i's nineteenth century masterwork, the *Farsnameh-ye Naseri*. And while she lists anthropologist Lois Beck's extensive work in the area in her bibliography, her effort fails to match Beck's rigor or revise her understandings.

When it comes to U.S. policy toward Iran, de Waal is sloppy and too ready to embrace conspiracy. She posits that Washington's "disproportionate focus" on Iran and U.S.-imposed sanctions, for example, are motivated by the "humiliation" of the 1979 hostage crisis—never mind Tehran's unrepentant terrorism, its cheating on nuclear accords, and its threats to eradicate Israel. She blames the "Jewish lobby" for tightening the screws on Iran, seemingly unaware that the U.S. Senate, including members whose constituencies contain few Jews, voted on occasion 100-0 to increase sanctions. Nor does she remark on the multilateral nature of many of the restrictive measures. Too willing to take her interlocutors at their word, she attributes shortages of medicines to sanctions (they are exempted) even as she quotes Iranians who speak of seeing Lamborghinis on the streets.

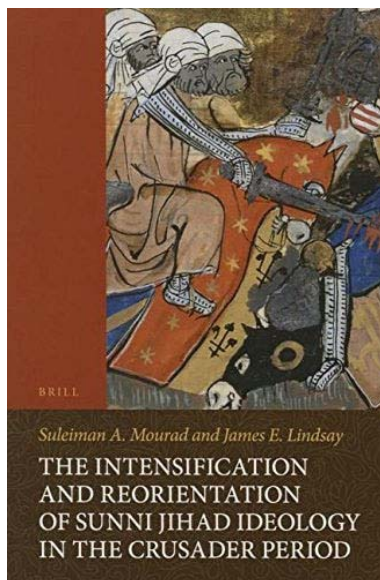
Nor does de Waal have a good grasp of Iranian history. She equates the 1979 seizure of American hostages and the 1953 ouster of Iranian prime minister Mohammed Mosaddeq as moral equivalents and equal impediments to rapprochement but seems unaware that many in Iran, including the conservative clergy whose spiritual

descendants lead Iran today, supported the leftist premier's ouster.

The constraints of her experience also lead to questionable conclusions. She somehow blames sanctions and the threat of an Israeli air-strike for a rise in street crime. Yet even in the 1990s, Iranians themselves told cautionary tales of high street crime. And asserting that "body-building is big at the moment" in Iran is the equivalent of saying "ice-hockey is big at the moment" in Canada.

In essence, *Everyday Iran* is a glorified travelogue. Read as such, it can be entertaining. De Waal is certainly right that to understand Iran requires understanding the provinces as well as the capital. But if the goal is to really illuminate Iran, her work falls far short.

Michael Rubin



**The Intensification and Reorientation of Sunni Jihad Ideology in the Crusader Period.** By Suleiman A. Mourad and James E. Lindsay. Brill Academic Publisher: Leiden, 2015. 221 pp. €8, \$133.

One of the more pernicious and prevalent post-9/11 myths is that one of

Islam's most fundamental concepts, jihad, has been distorted by "violent extremists" who have "hijacked the religion." In this fairy-tale view, jihad is above all a struggle for self-betterment that al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, Boku Haram, and others have twisted and deformed. Mourad of Smith College and Lindsay of Colorado State University provide an excellent antidote to this ahistorical nonsense by offering a serious primer on the historical codification of jihad and its subsequent application in response to the Crusaders.

The first part of the book deals with Islamic literature on jihad and the role of Muslim scholars in elucidating and disseminating the concept. The authors then focus on the *Forty Hadiths for Inciting Jihad* compiled not long after the Second Crusade by Ibn Asakir, "one of the most celebrated scholars of medieval Islam, both in his own time and in subsequent centuries." The actual text of the *Forty Hadiths* is presented in both Arabic and English, offering the reader the chance to read firsthand what kind of statements concerning jihad are attributed directly to Muhammad, all of which are deemed by Sunnis as *sahih* or "authentic."

The hadiths, and the worldview they have engendered, speak for themselves: "Lining up for battle in the path of God [jihad] is worthier than 60 years of worship." "If he dies or is killed, all his sins are forgiven ... He will be wedded to the virgins of paradise, and the crown of dignity will be placed on his head."

Themes emerge, some familiar to those following modern day jihadist discourse (e.g., the supremacy of jihad versus all other duties, and the great rewards associated with it)—but also lesser known ones, such as the terrible punishments awaiting those Muslims, according to Muhammad, "who do not believe in jihad ... They will be tortured like no other sinful human."

Mourad and Lindsay make clear that the Crusades did not create the doctrine of jihad, which had already been codified in books such as Ibn Mubarak's *Kitab al-Jihad* some three hundred years earlier. The primary innovation, or "reorientation," in this period is that Asakir and other Islamic scholars intensified the importance of jihad in the new context of repulsing infidel invaders. They also expanded "the ideology of jihad to include direct and indirect attacks against other Muslim groups, especially Shi'is." Although jihad had been proclaimed against other Muslims more than two hundred years before the Crusades, afterward, it became a major theme as Sunnis saw Shiites as subversive moles, weakening Islam against outside aggression.

Considering that the Muslim world is even more vulnerable to non-Muslim influence today than during the Crusades, it is unsurprising that in its most recent Islamic State manifestation, jihad continues to intensify, its fury directed against whatever is in its path—Jews, Christians, Yazidis, and, of course, Shiites.

Raymond Ibrahim

**The Iranian Constitutional Revolution and the Clerical Leadership of Khurasani.** By Mateo Mohammad Farzaneh. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2015. 329 pp. \$49.95.

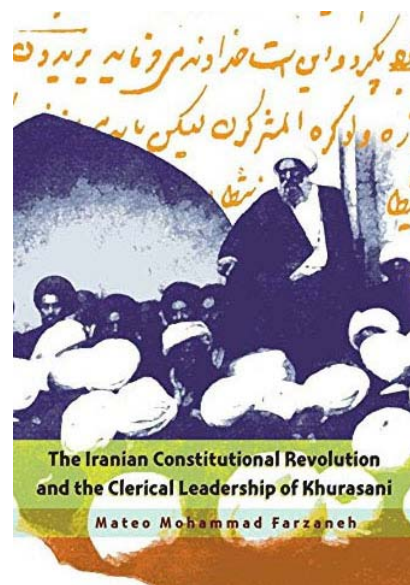
For Iranians, the 1905-11 constitutional revolution was transformational. Liberals, constitutionalists, nationalists, reformers, tribesmen, and even some clergy worked together to force the shah to accept a constitution. They then defended it against the forces of counter-constitutional revolution led by the next shah with Russian backing.

While much has been previously written about the constitutional revolution

since the account of Edward Granville Browne,<sup>1</sup> Farzaneh, a professor at Northeastern Illinois University, sheds new light on the role of Mohammed Kazem Khurasani, perhaps the most prominent ayatollah of the early twentieth century. At a time when many Persian constitutionalists looked to Europe for a model, Ayatollah Khurasani used Shiite doctrine to provide the religious rationale for a constitution and parliament. Farzaneh provides the first major study of these arguments.

The first part of the book is largely an abridged history. However, for scholars of Iran and religion, the second part is essential. The author provides a deep examination of Khurasani's life, works, and philosophy. Farzaneh makes clear that whereas Sunnism prioritizes consensus to such a degree that many clerics and scholars argue that key theological arguments were settled once and for all a millennium ago, Shiism has been more vibrant with a constant evolution of exegesis.

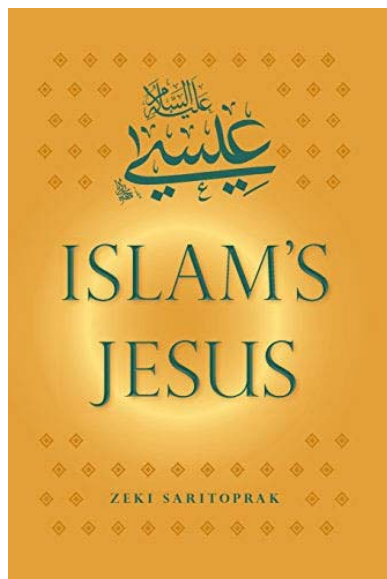
Farzaneh's exploration of the theological debates in which Khurasani



<sup>1</sup> *The Persian Revolution of 1905-1906* (Washington, D.C.: Mage Publishers, 1995).

engaged with competitors and detractors may also be critical to understanding the future possibilities of Islam. Parallel discussions of the interplay between Islam and democracy today can help illuminate a path to modernity, simultaneously showing one and all just how complicated Shiite religious figures can be.

Michael Rubin



**Islam's Jesus. By Zeki Saritoprak. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014. 222 pp. \$74.95.**

Islam's views about Jesus are the focus of a new work by Saritoprak of John Carroll University in Cleveland. Next to Muhammad, Jesus is perhaps the most prominent messenger of God in a chain of prophets that Muslims believe reaches from Noah through the biblical patriarchs down through Moses, David, and Solomon. Jesus is mentioned in more than ninety verses of the Qur'an and appears not only as a receiver of divine revelation but can be seen, the author claims, as a precursor of Muhammad in terms of his ethical and pastoral

teachings. According to Saritoprak, any differences are due to the different contexts in which the two men lived.

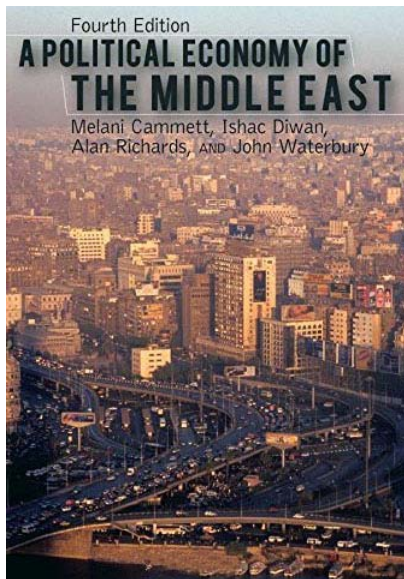
Further, in the Muslim tradition, veneration of Jesus—while markedly different from Christianity—“prefigures” the role of Muhammad. Saritoprak asserts that the Qur'an instructs Christians to avoid exaggerating the personality of Jesus in a way that is not consistent with his message, rejecting both the divinity of Christ and the Trinity. Likewise, Muhammad asks his companions not to deify him and to view him only as a human being, albeit one receiving the final and preeminent revelation from God.

Saritoprak examines further commonalities between the two faith systems, using the figure of Jesus to find ways in which Christians and Muslims can engage in fruitful dialogue. In the Muslim tradition, for example, martyrs are not truly dead since they receive sustenance from their Lord (3:169-170). For the author, this echoes the Christian concept of an ascendant Jesus who has defeated death and is alive at the right hand of the Father.

However, Saritoprak veers off course when he maintains that Jews, Muslims, and Christians have, more often than not, lived peacefully side by side and points to the Ottomans' millet system as one of harmonious interreligious ties. This is, unfortunately, a romantic myth. Real life rarely meant harmony but rather daily struggle for the barely-tolerated minorities, culminating in the genocide perpetrated by Muslim Ottomans against Christians, and the attempted genocide against Jews, also in World War I.

Despite this flaw, *Islam's Jesus* is an easy read and does much to enlighten the reader on Qur'anic theologians' perceptions and knowledge of Jesus's teachings while offering insights into concepts shared by Christians and Muslims.

Wolfgang G. Schwanitz  
Middle East Forum



**A Political Economy of the Middle East.**  
**By Melani Cammett, Ishac Diwan, Alan Richards, and John Waterbury. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2015. 590 pp. \$57, paper.**

This classic study of Middle East economics, which first appeared in 1990, remains by far the best single work on the topic, equally appropriate for a university student or the general reader. Originally produced by economist Richards and political scientist Waterbury, it has been updated this time with the help of Harvard academic Cammett and Diwan of the Paris School of Economics. They have preserved much of the original analytical structure—which has aged well—though the analysis has become noticeably less influenced by left-wing shibboleths.

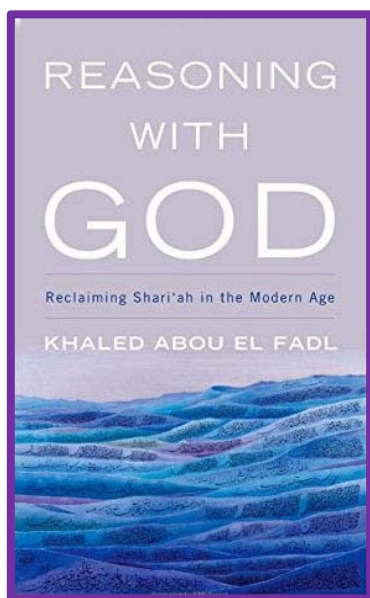
Eight of the thirteen chapters cover the same topics as in the first edition, updated with new anecdotes and items as well as critical data. The authors first review

the basic background: demography (including the passing of the “youth bulge,” soon to be replaced by aging populations); water and food; and health and education. Turning to the political economy, the reader learns of the rise and fall of state-led development; the hopes for International Monetary Fund-World Bank-style structural adjustments that were betrayed by crony capitalism; and the impact of wars. The new chapters cover the role of Islam in economics; the rise of the Persian Gulf oil producers; social outcomes (i.e.: Why has growth in the national economy not translated into better standards of living for so many people?); a review of the various types of political regimes in the Middle East; and regional and global economic integration.

While the volume is organized by topic rather than by country, the authors weave into their study the profound differences among the region’s societies, arguing that they fall into three economic types: resource poor/labor abundant; resource rich/labor poor; and a few that are resource rich/labor abundant. The major conclusion is that most of the region’s governments “have long been either incapable of responding to the demands of their populations or unwilling to do so.”

In an age when academics often seem out of touch with reality—examining esoteric irrelevancies, more interested in political polemic than balanced scholarship, and afraid to appear outside the leftist political orthodoxy—this volume is refreshing, timely, and essential.

Patrick Clawson  
Washington Institute



**Reasoning with God: Reclaiming Shari'ah in the Modern Age. By Khaled Abou El Fadl. Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014. 556 pp. \$50.**

Abou El Fadl, a professor of Islamic law at the University of California, Los Angeles, has produced a dense and wordy work that amounts to an encyclopedia of evasion. Endorsed by international Islamist “rock star” and Muslim Brotherhood apologist Tariq Ramadan, *Reasoning with God* is clearly intended as a major academic text but is really a defense of the outlook of the Muslim Brotherhood, a movement the author seldom describes or addresses straightforwardly. Nor is he transparent about his own relations with the Brotherhood even as the text includes numerous personal reminiscences pointing indirectly at such a relationship.

Worse, *Reasoning* includes flights of fancy and conspiracy theories that make the book, at times, almost comical: The failed “Arab spring” was caused in significant part by Arab resentment over Muslim humiliation

at the hands of U.S. soldiers at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, he says, and the incarceration of accused terrorists at Guantánamo Bay. The 2002 death by fire of fifteen schoolgirls in Mecca, who were prevented from escaping the blaze by members of the Saudi morals patrol, was really caused by resentment over indignities inflicted by the West in Afghanistan and “Palestine.” A Saudi fatwa justifying slavery to legitimize the exploitation of foreign domestic workers “was a direct response to the [2003] American invasion of Iraq.”

The author does qualify these outlandish assertions by specifying that they cannot be proven empirically, but that does not inhibit him from piling them on, even relying on the bogus memoirs of British spy Oliver Hempher who supposedly encouraged the rise of Wahhabism to weaken Ottoman and Islamic power. But there is no more evidence that Hempher ever existed than there is connecting the 2002 Mecca girls’ school fire to events in the larger Middle East.

Nor will the volume be of much use to an individual seeking to learn about Shari’a, the topic of the book’s subtitle. Abou El Fadl is committed to the reestablishment of Shari’a as a component of common law in Muslim lands and blames its abandonment for much of the decline in Islamic intellectual rigor.

In the end, Abou El Fadl’s book offers little more than the dyspeptic ranting of a Muslim Brotherhood acolyte with a deep enmity toward both Wahhabism and Western “colonialists.” Hailed as an Islamic moderate exposition by the gullible, his *Reasoning* instead takes leave of both reason and reality.

Stephen Schwartz  
Center for Islamic Pluralism

