

RECENT BOOKS

OXFORD ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE MODERN ISLAMIC WORLD

The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World, New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 4 vols. Price \$395.

This encyclopedia has been put together by a formidable team of scholars, headed by John Esposito as Editor in Chief, with the late Albert Hourani as Senior Consultant. The team of seven editors, the four consultants and the fourteen advisors contain some of the best known names in the field. There are likewise many distinguished contributors. It is designed 'to become the primary reference not only for scholars and students of religion, history, and the social sciences but also general readers seeking to understand the background of current events' (p. ix). Yet this reviewer, as he worked his way into its four volumes, found himself increasingly dissatisfied with the work, and especially as it refers to sub-Saharan Islam. There are two main problems: first, that the technical and intellectual level of the writing is very much that of the general reader; secondly, sub-Saharan Africa—despite the presence of John Voll as an editor and Sulayman Nyang as a member of the advisory panel—gets short, and sometimes eccentric, shrift. The level of writing no doubt results from an executive decision by Oxford University Press, since it must be presumed that they see the encyclopaedia as a large sale item. That is their right; but it is therefore disingenuous to describe the work as designed to be 'the primary reference for scholars and students of religion'. That will remain, for specialist scholars, the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (except for truly contemporary matters), and for students of religion the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, or the more recent *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, edited by Mircea Eliade. The scanty coverage of sub-Saharan Africa is more clearly attributable to the proclivities of

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the editor and his team, and it is to this aspect that we shall now turn.

At the end of volume 4 is a 'Synoptic Outline of Contents' which conveniently allows the reader to obtain an overview of the contents of the encyclopaedia. From this it is quite easy to find out which articles specifically deal with sub-Saharan Africa. There are articles on specific Muslim countries, a heading 'Institutions, Organizations, Movements' which has a country by country breakdown (as well as 'International'), as does the heading 'Biographies'. Other than under such headings as these, sub-Saharan Islam can claim only three other articles: 'Popular Religion in Sub-Saharan Africa' (by C.C. Stewart), 'African Languages and Literatures' (East Africa by Jan Knappert and West Africa by Mervyn Hiskett) and an overview by Ali Mazrui (see below). One might, of course, suppose that aspects of sub-Saharan Islam would be dealt with in the course of other, thematic articles, but this is not necessarily the case—a reflection of the continuing marginal interest of the region in the minds of students of Islam.

This view was arrived at by looking at a number of articles in which one might have thought that reference to sub-Saharan Africa was a *sine qua non*: 'Jihād', 'Mālikī Law School' (a subsection of 'Law: Sunni Schools of Law'), 'Takfīr', 'Tijānīyah,' 'Aḥmadiyah'. The article 'Jihād' by Rudolph Peters is mainly concerned with classical theory and changing modern interpretations. There is no indication in it that *jihād* was thought about or written about, or practised in sub-Saharan Africa. One might have hoped for at least a *passing* reference to *jihād* movements such as those of Aḥmad Grañ in Ethiopia, Nāṣir al-Dīn in Mauritania, °Uthmān b. Fodiye in Nigeria, *al-ḥājj* °Umar in Mali, or Muḥammad °Abd Allāh Ḥasan in Somalia, and to the elaborate theoretical literature which emerged from the Sokoto *jihād*. The section 'Mālikī Law' might also be presumed to include sub-Saharan material, but Farhat Ziadeh's article gives no indication that the Mālikī *madhhab* ever crossed the Sahara, or perhaps that regions such as West Africa even belong to the Islamic world. North African countries are cited as areas to which the Mālikī *madhhab* spread, and upper Egypt and the Sudan are recognized.

Thereafter we are simply told: 'A number of other countries also have some Mālikī adherents'. The fact that the Mālikī school is the sole *madhhab* of West African Muslims, and has been for the past seven or eight hundred year, producing an extensive jurisprudential literature, might never be guessed. Reference to West Africa is similarly missing from the article on 'Takfīr', despite the literature generated on this topic from al-Maghīlī down to the present day, and the huge political ramifications of the translation of these doctrines into practice.¹

The article 'Tijānīyah' is a peculiar case. Written by John Ralph Willis, and using the imagery of electricity and cybernetics, it concentrates exclusively on North Africa, with a very small nod to *al-hājj* ʿUmar at the end. Admittedly the same writer also contributes an article on *al-hājj* ʿUmar, but this still gives the reader a very lopsided picture of the Tijāniyya *ṭarīqa*, missing any reference to twentieth-century developments, such as the spread of the *ṭarīqa* to Mali, Ghana, Nigeria and the Sudan, or the role of such Tijānī leaders as *al-hājj* Mālik Sy of Tivaouane, Ibrāhīm Niassé of Kaolack, Hamāhu 'llāh (and the Ḥamāliyya *ṭāʿifa*) or Abū Bakr ʿAtīq and the Tijānīs of Kano. By contrast the article 'Qādirīyah' by Bradford Martin pays a good deal more attention to West Africa, and there are biographical articles on 'Aḥmad al-Bakkāʿī al-Kuntī' (by C.C. Stewart) and 'Dan Fodio, Usuman' (by John Paden), as well as an article on 'Murīdīyah' (by David Robinson) to supplement it. As for the Aḥmadiyya in West Africa, there is an apparent conspiracy of silence—*ka-an lam yakun!*

Another level of coverage is that of organizations and movements, on the one hand, and biographies of individuals on the other. Here the selection is truly eccentric. The only countries where organizations or movements exists, apparently, are Nigeria, Senegal and the Sudan. Nigeria and Senegal each boast one: the 'Sokoto Caliphate' for Nigeria (written by John Paden), and the 'Murīdīyah' for Senegal. By contrast the Sudan has seven: 'Anṣār' and 'Muslim Brotherhood' (outstanding contributions by

1 The reviewer has contributed a short article on 'Takfīr (West Africa)' to vol. ix of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*.

Gabriel Warburg), 'Funj Sultanate' (by Jay Spaulding), 'Khatmīyah' by Ahmad al-Shahi, 'Mahdīyah' (by Robert Kramer, who also wrote the general article 'Mahdī'), 'Republican Brothers' (by Paul Magnarella), and 'Ummah-Anṣār' (by Alexander Cudsi). Quite why it was thought necessary to have two articles about the Anṣār is not clear, nor is it clear why the Funj Sultanate qualifies for entry in an encyclopaedia of modern Islam; nor yet, indeed, why the Sudan should have seven articles devoted to its institutions and organizations, whilst the rest of Africa shares but two! Where are the Izāla movement, the Jamā'at Naṣr al-Islām, the Anṣār al-Dīn, and the Aḥmadiyya for Nigeria? Where are the Union Culturelle Musulmane, the 'Wahhābiyya', the Layenne movement, the Ḥamāwiyya for francophone West Africa, the movement of Muḥammad °Abd Allāh Ḥasan for Somalia? Where, even, is the 'caliphate of Ḥamdallāhi', the Islamic state founded by Shaykh Aḥmadu Lobbo?

Biographical entries exist for only four countries: Mali—'Aḥmad al-Bakkā'ī' (though the synoptic outline lists him under Mauritania), Nigeria—'Dan Fodio, Usuman' and 'Mai Tatsine' (by Allan Christelow—a fine article), Senegal: '°Umar Tal', and Sudan: 'al-Ṣādiq al-Mahdī' (by Gabriel Warburg) and 'Ḥasan al-Turābī' (by Peter Woodward). What a strange view the uninitiated would get of Islamic leadership in sub-Saharan Africa. Would anyone believe that there were no Muslim personalities worthy of a biography between Usuman dan Fodio/°Uthmān b. Fodiye and Mai Tatsine? What an incongruous representation for Nigeria! Where are °Abd Allāh b. Fodiye and Muḥammad Bello, Ḥayātū b. Sa'īd, Abū Bakr Gumi, Ādam °Abd Allāh al-Ilūrī? Where are Aḥmad Bamba, Ibrāhīm Niasse (Senegal), al-Mukhtār al-Kuntī and his son Muḥammad, Aḥmadu Lobbo, Shaykh Ḥamāhu 'Ilāh, °Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ifrīqī (Mali), Alfa Ḥāshim (Mali/Saudi Arabia), Mā' al-°Aynayn (Mauritania), Samori (Ivory Coast), Shaykh al-Amīn al-Mazrū'ī (Kenya), Qarīb Allāh and his descendants, the Sammānī shaykhs of the Sudan (no entry at all for the Sammāniyya),² Muḥammad °Uthmān al-

2 John Voll, however, includes a paragraph on them in his valuable

Mīrghani (Sudan—but of course mentioned in the article ‘Khatmīyah’).³ There are, of course, many others who could be mentioned, but these are just some of the more important. It could be argued that most of those omitted had only local or regional importance, but this does not seem to me a good argument. Indeed, the same might be said of many of the thirty biographies of Egyptians or the eighteen for Iran. In fact, it is neither more nor less than a reflection of the dominance of the ‘centre’ at the expense of the ‘periphery’, and this is the more regrettable in the light of the considerable work that has been done on Islam in sub-Saharan Africa over the past thirty or more years.

At yet another level, are the country surveys. Included are Senegal (David Robinson), Nigeria (John Paden, who gives no hint that Islam took root south of the river Niger), Sudan (Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban), Somalia (Hussein Adam, who has a large chip on his shoulder about Muḥammad °Abd Allāh Ḥasan), Mali (Ronald Niezen), Mauritania (C.C. Stewart), Niger (Wendy Wilson Fall, written at an astonishing level of naïveté), Chad (René Lemarchand, who has evidently never heard of Wadai or Bagirmi), Djibouti (Charlotte Quinn), Ethiopia (John Harbeson), Guinea (Charlotte Quinn), Ghana (David Owusu-Ansah, who *does* devote a paragraph to the Aḥmadiyya), Gambia (a useful article by Sulayman Nyang), South Africa (a fine article by Muhammad Haron), Tanzania (August Nimtz), and Uganda (a useful article by Omari Kokole). Omitted are Guinea Bissau, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Bénin, Kenya and Mozambique, all of which have significant Muslim populations. To cap the enterprise there is an overview of ‘Islam in sub-Saharan Africa’ by Ali Mazrui—a blend of his ‘triple heritage’ doctrine and what might most charitably be called some personal interpretations of history and chatty digressions.

Islam in sub-Saharan Africa has been poorly served by this encyclopaedia, both in the extent of coverage and in some cases

overview ‘Sufism: Ṣūfī Orders’.

3 Where he is described as ‘a pupil of the *reformist teacher* Aḥmad b. Idrīs al-Fāst’. Evidently R.S. O’Fahey’s *Enigmatic Saint* is not yet enjoying the circulation it deserves.

by the quality of the coverage. The level of technical sophistication of the contributions naturally takes its cue from the encyclopaedia's policy, though some authors have managed to rise above the constraints. The problem with much of the writing is that it focuses more on political than on spiritual or intellectual matters—and this is true (with notable exceptions) of the work as a whole, not just the sub-Saharan entries. In some cases this may be due to the predilections of certain authors who are political scientists, rather than historians of religion, for example. It might also be argued that the major debates of twentieth-century Islam have been over its societal mission, and especially its political role; certainly, this is the optic through which the editor of the *Encyclopaedia*, John Esposito, has viewed the modern period in his own writings. As true as this may be, however, it remains only half of the story, whether in sub-Saharan Africa or elsewhere.

A final gripe: the *Encyclopaedia* is unnecessarily costly. It is printed in a large-size font with wide line spacing. A smaller font size, more economically set could have reduced the bulk by perhaps as much as a quarter. Alternatively, the space saved could have been used for broader coverage, not only of sub-Saharan Africa, but also of other 'peripheral' regions.

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