historians should not interpret literally the stereotypical Muslim views of Franks that Usâmah exhibited in his memoirs; that is, Usâmah made use of these stereotypes because he knew that this was what his audience expected to hear (p. 274). This section, however, offers little additional new information about Muslim perceptions of the crusaders. As Hillenbrand points out, this is due in part to the fact that it is very difficult to find information on the subject because most Muslim writers lived outside of the crusaders states and did not have direct exposure to the crusaders (p. 358).

Chapters 7 and 8 discuss the military aspects of the crusades. Once again, Hillenbrand calls attention to the fact that western scholarship on the military component of the crusades has been very narrow in focus and mainly limited to the study of crusader castles in Syria-Palestine. She urges historians to broaden their study of military techniques and strategies beyond the construction and use of crusader castles (p. 432).

In conclusion, Hillenbrand’s book represents a major step forward for the field of crusades history. It points in the right direction. In fact, its rich content can be dissected into countless other books on such topics as jihad, etc. One can only hope that Arabists and Medievalists are paying attention and that a new more balanced view of the crusades will develop by combining the Christian and the Islamic views of the crusades, events that continue to capture our imagination.

Isabel A. O’Connor


Television screens have recently shown Iraqi civilians, in the chaos brought on by the fall of Šâddâm Husayn’s regime, trying to maintain order on street corners or in front of public buildings. Reporters tell us that these individuals have been “sent by the local mosque”. Whatever form a future Iraq will take, it seems that the traditional religious class, or ‘ulama’, will have a role to play in the reconstruction of Iraq. It is this class and their history from the 19th century to the present, that is the subject of Muhammad Qasim Zaman’s
study. More precisely, his focus is on the ‘ulamā’ of South Asia and in particular the Deobandis. His book is an exploration of the ‘ulamā’, their understanding of Islamic tradition, their role as interpreters of Islamic law, their impact on and involvement in “political Islam”, and their role in sectarian conflicts in the Subcontinent. The study also takes stock of the impact this participation has had on the ‘ulamā’ themselves. No effort is made to describe the normative function of an ‘ālim, or to inventory his various roles in Islamic society.

The ‘introduction’ includes a discussion of the wider sense of “tradition”, that religious entity which the ‘ulamā’ preserve, interpret and speak for. Here we meet Alasdair MacIntyre’s theory that a tradition can only be understood from within; that is, each tradition has an internal logic and language, which must be mastered before it can be properly understood (pp. 4–5). Zaman raises this concern in light of both our (the non-‘ulamā’s) approach to tradition, and that of modernist Muslims who relate to their tradition without a “traditional” education (p. 7). Here Zaman has raised a significant point, although he is not about to fully resolve it. This discussion falls within the field of Hermeneutics, a vast area of inquiry which is outside the purview of this book. Zaman also introduces us to Talal Asad’s view of a “discursive” Islamic tradition, one that relates not only to the past, but to the present and the future as well (p. 6). In light of these discussions Zaman presents his own concern with the ‘ulamā’, stating “... their larger claim on our attention lies in the ways in which they have mobilized this tradition to define issues of religious identity and authority in the public sphere and to articulate changing roles for themselves in contemporary Muslim politics” (p. 10).

The first chapter deals with the ‘ulama’’s discourse on Islamic law under British rule. Here a struggle is documented between the ‘ulamā’ and the colonial authorities over the right to interpret the šbā‘īḥ. The ‘ulamā’ were mobilized to assert their authority in this realm. They worked to keep the British from codifying Islamic law and thus appropriating its interpretation. This authority to interpret not only guaranteed the ‘ulamā’ authority, but it also allowed them the flexibility to respond in the future to new social and political situations (p. 37). The second chapter takes up the vast body of commentary literature, in which the ‘ulamā’ specialize. Zaman rightly notes that this literature, when produced in the modern period, has largely been viewed as sterile by researchers. He explores these writings, most of which are legal commentaries, and underlines their function in reinforcing the ties between ‘ulamā’, and their modern service as vehicles for adapting to new political and legal realities.
The third chapter looks at the authority of the ‘ulamā’ through the institutional lens of the madrasahs. The focus here is the various efforts at reform — particularly important for modern Islam — which the governing authorities have attempted to implement. Significantly, in this context a new conception of religion emerges, one which sees religion as representing a distinct social sphere (p. 62). The struggle with colonialism and sectarian realities forced this realization upon the ‘ulamā’ of Pakistan and India earlier than it has on the ‘ulamā’ in other Muslim communities. The idea is that the religious sphere has been demarcated by the ‘ulamā’ themselves as part of their strategy to preserve their authority. Flowing nicely from this discussion is chapter four’s Conceptions of the Islamic State, which explores the ‘ulamā’ understanding of their own role from the perspective of political Islam. Here Islamic law is central, but debates over its implementation have dramatically divided the ‘ulamā’. Of particular significance is the issue of codification, as against ijtihād. The codification approach to the implementation of Islamic law would be easier to sell to the ruling powers (and the Modernists), but with the loss of ijtihād the authority of the ‘ulamā’ and flexibility in the face of changing political and social circumstances would be undermined (p. 96).

The fifth chapter examines the radicalisation of Sunnī and Shi‘ah identities in Pakistan, and the various roles the ‘ulamā’ have played on both sides. Zaman observes a structural similarity between the two communities, particularly in the creation of distinct militant bodies (the Sip̣h-i Muḥammad and the Sip̣h-i Ṣahābah) which allegedly carry out the work of sectarian violence, at arm’s length from the establishment ‘ulamā’, who implicitly support their efforts. Zaman points out that the ‘ulamā’, in particular the Sunnī Deobandīs, have seen their influence extended into new areas through the mobilization of sectarianism. Note is also made of the retreat of mysticism, on both sides (Barēlawis and Shaykhīs), in the face of these sectarian mobilizations. The modern devotionalism of the Sunnī radicals, an attempt to counteract “cultural Shī‘ism”, is also acknowledged.

Chapter six is a comparative look at the modern religiopolitical activism of the ‘ulamā’, and how it relates to Islamism. Zaman notes the differences between al-Azhar’s experience of government reform and control, and that of the relatively decentralized madrasah system of Pakistan and Northern India which has largely escaped government impositions. In contrast, the Saudi Arabian ‘ulamā’ have an assured authority based on state ideology, and their control over the interpretation and implementation of the šari‘ah goes unchallenged by the ruling powers. The Egyptian ‘ulamā’ are most active politically through their non-institutional “peripheral” positions. Saudi “peripheral” ‘ulamā’ also overlap with Islamism, although the authority of the
‘ulamā’ seems to be increasing at the expense of the Saudi rulers. In Pakistan the ‘ulamā’ have found common cause with Islamists over such issues as Indian Kashmir and the Soviet and U.S. presence in Afghanistan. Zaman notes within these three examples a common development. An advantageous ground is staked out by the ‘ulamā’, since “…the ruling elite have sometimes enhanced the scope of the ‘ulamā’s authority as a counterweight to the Islamist challenge to their regimes. But this has enabled the ‘ulamā’ not only to challenge the Islamists on behalf of the state, but also to challenge the state itself on behalf of Islam” (p. 172). As a result, the ‘ulamā’ benefit greatly from being able to play both sides — switching association as they need to in their struggle with the state or with the Islamists for authority.

With this book Muhammad Qasim Zaman has placed the modern ‘ulamā’ squarely into the debates over the rise and appeal of Islamist movements. His analysis, stressing the flexibility and dynamism of the ‘ulamā’, has made them now part of the power equation which often has simply opposed Islamism to secular governing bodies. The book presents a well-documented exploration of the ‘ulamā’ in the Subcontinent, and an important comparison of the modern ‘ulamā’ of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and India.

Richard McGregor

☆ ☆ ☆


Of the various accounts of the Islamic movement in contemporary Egypt, this is the most riveting, insightful, up-to-date, and self-critical. There are numerous writings on the Islamist movement; however, few offer an insider’s perspective on contemporary Islamism, its trials and tribulations and the challenges it has faced since the attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001. In this important work, Egyptian Islamist lawyer Muntasir al-Zayyat critically discusses the life, thought, and activities of the founder of the Egyptian Jihād movement, Dr Ayman al-Zawahiri, second-in-command of the Qā’idah, who has been accused by the United States of being the brains behind the attacks on the United States. The book offers a detailed analysis of