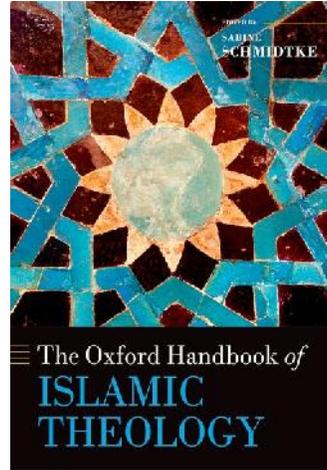


Sabine Schmidtke, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016. Pp. xi+815. Hardcover. ISBN: 9780199696703. Price: Not listed.

Since the publication of her *The Theology of al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī* in 1991 (later translated into Persian and published in Iran), Sabine Schmidtke earned remarkable fame in the field of Islamic theology, philosophy, and history. As the editor of the book under review which is a collection of forty-one different articles by thirty-seven eminent scholars, she once again demonstrated how it was possible to remain consistent, both in approach and style, in such a comprehensive and detailed work. Divided into five parts in a diachronic order, this book is an excellent example of Western perspectives on the



intellectual history of Islamic theology, albeit only for experts. Additionally, it also sheds light on the academic interchange between Jews, Christians, and Muslims (chapters five and thirty one). Not to mention the article (chapter six) written by late Patricia Crone (d. 2015) on Dahrīs and Zindīqs.

Theology, if explained in its traditional Christian context, is a branch of knowledge that attempts to present a critical study of the nature of divine both from the viewpoint of reason and revelation.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the most appropriate equivalent for this term, in Arabic, is *ilāhiyyāt*, an Islamic science that deals with everything related to God whether these are His attributes, names, or actions. The word “theology” is often used as an equivalent of *‘ilm al-kalām* (the science of dialect) too. However, as this handbook also explains, the task of *kalām* is not limited to theology. It deals with the non-theological areas such as epistemology and physics (p. 29) as well. Thus, rather than defining theology in a narrow sense, this book uses it the other way around and attempts “to cover the doctrinal thought of all the various intellectual strands of Islam that were engaged with theological concerns” (p. 1).

This book is a collection of different articles written by different authors. Therefore, its research quality also varies from chapter to chapter. Focusing on individuals, it usually talks about teacher-student relationship, a traditional

<sup>1</sup> G. F. van Ackeren, “Theology,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Thomas Carson and Joann Cerrito (New York: Thomson Gale, 2003), 13:891.

way of explaining *kalām* discourses.<sup>2</sup> It begins with an introduction from the editor providing an overview of Islamic theology. The most significant feature of this introduction is her discussion on the sources (pp. 5–17). It is where she tells her readers about both published and unpublished materials, developments took place in the fields of Twelver Shi‘i, Ash‘arī, and Māturīdī studies, and discoveries of the new texts that were believed to be lost.

The first part, which comprises almost half of the book, consists of twenty chapters. It deals with the formative and early middle periods (roughly from the second century AH to fourth century AH). The first chapter examines the origin of *kalām*. It draws the focus of readers to the necessity of fresh analysis of all types of polemics to understand the emergence of *qadar* controversy in Muslim community (p. 38). However, like some other chapters (e.g., chapters eight and nine) of this work, this chapter mostly concerns with the developments took place in West in the field of Islamic theology.<sup>3</sup> Mostly relying on anti-Qadarī sources, the next chapter focuses on Qadariyyah, a short-lived political and theological movement (p. 53). Surprisingly, it does not consult Yaḥyā b. Abī ‘l-Khayr al-‘Umrānī’s (d. 1163 CE) *al-Intiṣār fi ‘l-Radd ‘alā ‘l-Mu‘tazilah al-Qadariyyah al-Ashrār* that offers valuable information about *qadarī* stance on divine attributes,<sup>4</sup> one of the issues about which this chapter says, “Practically nothing is preserved about Qadarī views on issues such as the divine attributes. . .” (p. 45). Discussing the contributions of Jahm b. Ṣafwān (d. 745 CE) and Dirār b. ‘Amr (d. 815 CE), the third chapter clarifies why Ibrāhīm al-Nazzām (d. 835 CE)—who is considered a Mu‘tazilī—criticised Ṣafwān’s and ‘Amr’s theory of nature inherent in material things (p. 77). The focus of the fourth chapter is early Shi‘i theology. It examines both “dual vision” and the “dualistic view” to tell the reader why Shiism is an imamology (p. 84). Chapter seven to eleven can be placed into two groups. The first group studies the origin, features, and phases of Mu‘tazilī theology whereas the second group discusses Shi‘i reception of Mu‘tazilism. Information enclosed in these chapters is of diverse quality and nature (for example, compare the sources of chapter seven and eight with nine, ten, and eleven). Moreover,

<sup>2</sup> Many important *kalām* schools such as *Jahmiyyah*, *Karrāmiyyah*, *Ash‘ariyyah*, and *Māturīdiyyah* were named after their founders. Therefore, many of the books on *kalām* prefer to use this approach.

<sup>3</sup> For example, while talking about the origin of *kalām*, the first chapter finds it necessary to quote Josef van Ess who argued that it was politics rather than polemics that caused the birth of *kalām* (p. 28). However, it ignores the fact that the same point was also raised much earlier by Shibli Nu‘mānī (d. 1914) as well. See Shibli Nu‘mānī, *‘Ilm al-Kalām aur al-Kalām* (Karachi: Nafīs Academy), 24.

<sup>4</sup> Yaḥyā b. Abī ‘l-Khayr al-‘Umrānī, *al-Intiṣār fi ‘l-Radd ‘alā al-Mu‘tazilah al-Qadariyyah al-Ashrār* (Madinah: Islamic University of Madinah, 1998), 134.

discussion on Ash‘arī, Ibādī, Karrāmī, Ḥanafī, and Ismā‘īlī theologies is also among the important features of this part. The article on philosophical theology draws the reader’s attention to the question “whether a Muslim theologian should follow Avicenna in understanding God as a necessary, and therefore transcendent, cause” (p. 309). The first part ends with a study of Sufi theological thought. However, it seems blind to the Sufi theologies of the Indian subcontinent.

Taking a thematic approach, the second part of the book presents four case studies regarding the intellectual interactions between Islamic theologies. To examine the origin, development, and culmination of the theory, the chapter on Occasionalism provides case studies of Abū ‘l-Hudhayl (d. 840 CE), Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī (d. 936 CE), and Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111 CE). Mostly relying on the secondary sources, the next chapter presents an analysis of modern understanding of Abū Ḥāshim al-Jubbā‘ī’s (d. 933 CE) theory of states and its adaptation by Ash‘arah. It argues that the example of the concept of *aḥwāl* shows the flexibility of Ash‘arah in borrowing different notions from other *kalāmī* schools for their own theological purposes (p. 382). After covering the theories of ethical values, the second part ends with a chapter studying disputes between logicians and theologians. Examining the beginning, growth, and blending of Greek logic with Islamic theology, it argues that despite the criticism of the towering figures such as Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (Taqī ‘l-Dīn Abū ‘Amr ‘Uthmān b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Kurdī) (d. 1245 CE) and Ibn Taymiyyah (Taqī ‘l-Dīn Aḥmad b. Taymiyyah) (d. 1328 CE), the assimilation of logic and theology remained a feature of Islamic intellectual history in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (p. 422).

The third part, which is also the second largest part, consists of eleven chapters and presents an analysis of later middle and early modern period. The first chapter of this part discusses al-Ghazālī’s and Maḥmūd b. Muḥammad al-Malāḥimī’s (d. 1141 CE) criticism of Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037 CE). Although, the section on al-Ghazālī adds little to what is already said on the subject, the section that compares *Tabāfut al-Falāsifah* with *Tuḥfat al-Mutakallimīn*, a recently discovered work of al-Malāḥimī (p. 447), does not only explain the similarities and differences between both works but also points out why new researches on al-Malāḥimī are vividly needed. The next two chapters provide a well-researched chronological study of various theologians whose writings established, developed, and strengthened Twelver Shi‘i and Zaydī theologies in Iran and Yamen respectively. Moreover, these chapters also elaborate the love/hate (for example compare, pp. 457, 474 with pp. 463, 484) relationship of both theologies with Mu‘tazilism. Examining the scholarships of the Islamic East and West and Egypt, the next four chapters are concerned with Ash‘arism

and its impact on the Coptic and Syriac Christians. These chapters point out research gaps (p. 495) and talk about chronology and geography of Ash‘arism, its spread in Egypt, and the role played by the scholars such as al-Ghazālī, Muḥammad b. Zakariyyā al-Rāzī (d. 925 CE), Sa‘d al-Dīn Mas‘ūd b. ‘Umar b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Taftāzānī (d. 1390 CE), and ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar al-Bayḍāwī (d. 1286 CE) in its development in Egypt, Persia and elsewhere (p. 536). Continuing the geographical study of *kalām*, next three chapters examine the theologies of Ottoman lands, Central Asia, and the Indian subcontinent. Finally, this part ends with a study of Hanbalite theology.

The fourth part offers four case studies discussing the role played by the social and political atmosphere of Abbasid, Mamluk, and Ottoman empires in the development of *kalām*. This part starts with an analysis of the policy of Abū ‘l-‘Abbās ‘Abd Allāh al-Ma‘mūn (r. 813–833 CE) regarding *miḥnah*. Afterward, it elaborates why *mutakallimūn* “lost their standing in intellectual circles and could no longer transmit Prophetic traditions” (p. 656). It ends with a conclusion that Islam alone did not face the issues like the *miḥnah* but other religions also met with the same fate when they interacted with the Greek philosophy and logic (p. 658). The next chapter presents a summary of Abū ‘l-Wafā ‘Alī b. ‘Aqīl’s (d. 513/1119) *miḥnah*. It argues that *fiṭnah* of Ibn al-Qushayrī (d. 514/1120) was a consequence of political, social, and doctrinal factors (p. 676). The third chapter examines the religious policy of Almohads who ruled in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It talks about the inaccuracy of earlier scholars on the subject (p. 662), abolishment of *dhimmah* status, superficial forced conversions of non-Muslims (p. 684) on the one hand, and the developments took place in the field of law, theology, philosophy, and Sufism during Almohads’ rule on the other. This part ends with a case study of the positions of Ash‘arism and Maturidism in Mamluk and Ottoman times.

The fifth part which consists of only two chapters focuses on early modern and modern period. It discusses the hermeneutical advancements took place in the last two centuries. The first chapter of this part provides a lengthy survey of Islamic theological thought from the late nineteenth century to present times. Starting with Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d. 1898), it talks about the methodologies of modern Muslim scholars such as Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (d. 1897), Muḥammad ‘Abduh (d. 1905), and Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938) who tried to organise Muslim communities to face the challenges posed by the West. In the reviewer’s opinion, what is ignored in this chapter is the impact of Shāh Walī Allāh (d. 1762) that he left on the later Muslim theologians. It is worth mentioning here that according to some scholars, Walī Allāh was the first person who turned the attention of *mutakallimūn* towards the rational

explanations of legal injunctions (*abkām al-sharī'ah*).<sup>5</sup> Finally, this book ends with a chapter devoted to analyse the hermeneutical models constructed by Muslim scholars in modern times to understand the Qur'ān.

In sum, the authors of this volume managed to bring forth a number of important findings. However, the negligence of *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr* literature among the sources of this work raises questions about its methodology. Almost nothing is written in it about Khawārij, a politico-religious movement, which should have been focused as well. Moreover, work could have been more useful if separate articles on the towering figures such as al-Ghazālī and Walī Allāh were provided. Nevertheless, this book is still rich in its contents and findings. Through using transliteration system, it maintained original names of the discussed personalities and writings. Moreover, it used both the Gregorian and Islamic calendars consistently. A number of articles talk about the scarcity of the sources (pp. 44, 55, 83, 131, 203, 208, to mention a few). This not only reveals the tremendous efforts of the writers who contributed to this huge volume but also discloses that the information provided in this handbook is just an analysis of the currently available sources and not the final word on the subject. Thus, this work is an open invitation for advanced-level students, post-doctoral fellows, and critics to dwell deep into this ocean of knowledge in order to come up with new gems of wisdom.

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<sup>5</sup> For details, see Nu'mānī, *Ilm al-Kalām aur al-Kalām*, 88.

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