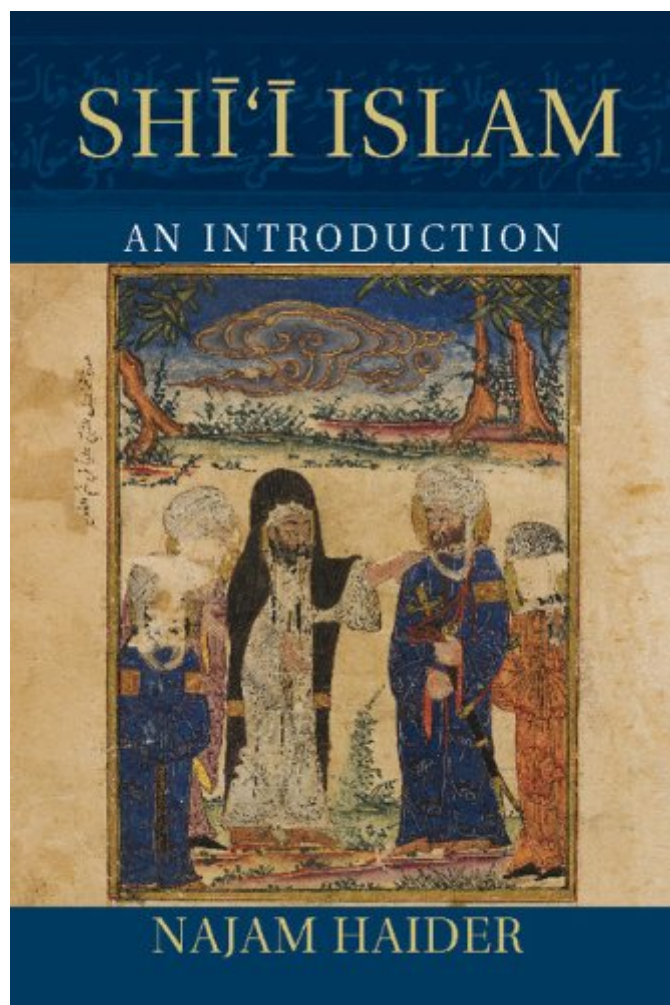


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Shi'i Islam: An Introduction (Introduction To Religion)



Synopsis

During the formative period of Islam, in the first centuries after Muhammad's death, different ideas and beliefs abounded. During this period two particular intellectual traditions emerged, Sunnism and Shi'ism. Sunni Muslims endorsed the historical caliphate, while Shi'i Muslims, supporters of 'Ali, cousin of the Prophet and the fourth caliph, articulated their own distinctive doctrines. The Sunni-Shi'i schism is often framed as a dispute over the identity of the successor to Muhammad, whereas in reality, Sunni and Shi'i Muslims also differ on a number of seminal theological doctrines concerning the nature of God and legitimate political and religious authority. This book examines the development of Shi'i Islam through the lenses of belief, narrative, and memory. This book also covers, for the first time in English, a wide range of Shi'i communities from the demographically predominant Twelvers to the transnational Isma'ilis to the scholar-activist Zaydis. The portrait of Shi'ism that emerges is that of a distinctive and vibrant community of Muslims with a remarkable capacity for reinvention and adaptation, grounded in a unique theological interpretation of Islam.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I came to this book with only a rudimentary knowledge of Islamic history and a glaring ignorance of Shi'i Islam. This book proved an excellent means of beginning to fill that void. It is academic in its approach and organized into two main sections: 1) an overview of Shi'i theology; and 2) an overview of Shi'i history. Though there is some mention of Sunni doctrines, a comparison of the two traditions is not a focus of this book. Instead, it focuses on the development of the institution of the Imamate from both a theological and historical perspective within three Shi'i sects: the Zaydis, the Isma'ilis, and the Twelvers. Each section of the book is divided into three subsections so that each sect is discussed separately. This makes the book convenient to digest and thankfully I wasn't overwhelmed with information. Overall, I found the book very easy to read, and it even bolstered my interest in further learning about Islam. To this end, the suggested reading the author provides at the end of each chapter is extremely helpful. I would recommend this book to anyone interested in Shi'i history regardless of your level of knowledge.

Partial comments from a review by Stephen Schwartz in the Fall 2015 "The Middle East Quarterly": "Haider's volume is by no means an introduction to the Shiite tradition in Islam. Rather, it is the author's analysis of features of Shiism that have drawn his attention, emphasizing details that for a reader little acquainted with the sect will likely be difficult to follow and of little interest.... Thus, while discussing the transformation over time of the Khoja Shiites and their absorption into Nizari Isma'ilism, the reader is forced to suffer through rather predictable but, nonetheless, lamentable quotations from leftist sociologist Frantz Fanon and Palestinian apologist Edward Said, culminating in a sharp critique of the movement's current leader, Aga Khan, IV, for what Haider calls his "modernist" ideas and attachment to capitalism. For the author, the "collective memory" of Shiites, focused on the legitimacy of Muhammad's son-in-law Ali as successor to the Muslim prophet, his assassination in 661 C.E., and the subsequent battle of Karbala, in which Ali's son Hussein was slain, recede into the background. They serve merely as markers to distinguish between the main Shiite traditions: the Twelvers, the Isma'ilis, and the Zaydis. Comparison of the differences in narratives of Karbala among these groupsâ "which focus on a cosmic significance in the martyrdom of Hussein among the Twelvers and Isma'ilis, and a less spiritual protest over the break in Muhammad's lineage for the Zaydisâ "provides a simple reference for scholars. For those who have some acquaintance with Shiism, this volume may prove a useful handbook in sorting out differences within the sect. For most newcomers to the subject, it will likely prove confusing and a waste of time."

It can be quite philosophical, but easy to read especially if you have a good grasp of advanced English vocabulary. I highly recommend this for anyone wanting to get their feet wet in Islamic history.

I learned a lot. Very poor editor on this. For an introduction it skips needed introductions and assumes familiarity with subject matter and characters involved. It needs to explain pre Ottoman fall versus post Ottoman. So many issues not covered.

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