

Gabriel Said Reynolds. *The Emergence of Islam: Classical Traditions in Contemporary Perspective*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012. Pp. 224. ISBN: 9780800698591. Price: \$25.

Gabriel Said Reynold's effort "*The Emergence of Islam: Classical Traditions in Contemporary Perspective*" is a welcome contribution for the students and all those who have interest in the emergence and evolution of Islam. It does not only deal with the single offshoot of Islam; instead, it deals with a range of areas in Islamic thought from the birth of Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) till the contemporary times. The author has divided the book into three parts and each part comprises of certain chapters with an introduction and conclusion. The work also includes a number of other supplementary features that offer unique insights on their relevant issues. The opening of the work includes a reference map of the Middle East in the early seventh century, a timeline that provides an overview of the traditional chronology of Islam's development and a chart that presents Muḥammad's (peace be on him) family background and his descendants according to the traditional Islamic account of his life. More resources are found in the body of the work itself. Interspersed in the text are the photographs of Islamic manuscripts and monuments, reproduction of the classical objects of Islamic art and charts/maps meant to illustrate Islamic ideas and traditions. Readers will also discover three types of text boxes that contain excerpts of original Islamic sources, simple introduction to basic topics of Islamic religion and brief biographies of key Muslim figures. Further at the end of each chapter, study questions are included for individual reflection or group discussion.

The first part of the book "The Prophet Muhammad and the Rightly Guided Caliphs" contains three chapters: Muhammad in Mecca, Muhammad in Medina and The Birth of an Empire. In the first chapter the author presents an overall situation of Makkah at the time of the birth of Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him). The author tells that the Islamic sources refer to the period of early Arab society as "*Jāhiliyyah*" (the realm of ignorance) because for them Muḥammad (peace be on him) was born to be a bearer of light in a city of darkness. The account of Muḥammad's (peace be on him) meeting with the mysterious Bahīrah monk illustrates three themes in the traditional narrative of Islam's emergence. First, it presents Islam as a religion that completes and corrects Christianity. The figure of the monk is meant to show that a true Christian recognizes Muḥammad (peace be on him) as a prophet. The Qur'ān itself describes the reaction of Christians who hear Muḥammad (peace be on him) proclaim his revelations.

When they hear what has been sent down to the Messenger, thou seest their eyes overflow with tears because of the truth they recognize. They say, "Our Lord, we believe; so do Thou write us down among the witnesses" (Q 5:83). (p. 12)

In the second chapter "Muhammad in Medina" the author discusses different topics like the flight for Islam i.e., *hijrah*, the battle of Badr, Muhammad's (peace be on him) relationships in Madinah, the mothers of the believers, Muslims' relations with the Jews and the Christians, the triumph of Islam, the return to Makkah and the final years of the Prophet. The author comments, "If the prophet sensed that his death was near, he had lost none of his military ambitions. In the final months of his life, Ibn Ishaq reports, Muhammad sent out an increasing number of raids, including attacks against Byzantine territory in the north and Persian-controlled Yemen to the south. This, the Islamic sources told us, signaled to his successors that the Islamic conquests were meant to continue" (p. 56). The third chapter "The Birth of an Empire" includes the themes like the first caliph and the first imām, the election of Abū Bakr, and Abū Bakr and the wars of Apostasy. The chapter also describes the early Islamic conquests like the conquest of Syria and Iraq during the reigns of 'Umar, 'Uthmān, and 'Alī.

In the concluding remarks the author observes that the biographers of the prophet show no particular interest in the moral questions that concern modern observers, such as women's rights or just warfare. Instead, they are concerned above all with the presentation of Muhammad in a way that proves he was a Prophet like the Prophets of the Bible.

Second part of the book "The Qur'an" is divided into four chapters, "The Qur'an and Its Message," "The Qur'an and the Bible," "Rethinking the Biography of the Prophet," and "The Historical Context of the Qur'an." These chapters provide an overview of issues surrounding the Qur'ān. In this part of the book, the author articulates that he will base his narrative only on what is found in the Qur'ān and thereby asks what the holy book of Islam might teach us. Reynolds discusses the fourth chapter, "The Qur'an and Its Message," under different headings like "The Nature of the Qur'anic Text," "The Traditional Account of the Qur'an's Development," "The Revelation of the Text," "The Collection of the Text," "The Readings of the Qur'an," "The Qur'an on Repentance and Belief," "The Qur'an on Divine Majesty" and "The Importance of Theology and the Qur'an's Concern with Jesus." In this chapter the author comments that those who fail to recognize God's majesty for example, by believing in more than one god—have failed the test that the Qur'ān lays out for humanity. In this regard, the Qur'ān is a book with theology (literally, "a word about God;" from the Greek words *theos* and *logos*) at its center. The God of the Qur'ān, in other words, speaks a lot about

Himself (p. 112). The Qur'ān, however, is not an account at all. It is a book of God's direct speech, and in particular of His warnings and admonitions (p. 102).

In the fifth chapter "The Qur'an and the Bible," the author makes hard work to demonstrate the relationship between the Qur'ān and the Bible under different headings like "Biblical Literature and Qur'anic Rhetoric," "The Qur'an and Paganism," "The Qur'an's Awareness of the Bible," "The Qur'an's Conversation with Biblical Literature" and "The Seven Sleepers and Their Dog." The author maintains that the second step to understand the religious context in which the Qur'ān emerged is found in its close relationship with the Biblical literature. He points out that the Qur'ān is much more concerned with biblical characters and stories than it is with pagan gods and goddesses. Yet the presence of Biblical material in the Qur'ān also raises the question of what authority the Qur'ān gives to the Bible. Instead the standard view of Islamic tradition is that the Bible contains a corrupted or falsified record of an originally pure divine revelation.

The sixth chapter "Rethinking the Biography of the Prophet" contains description of the biography of Muḥammad and exegesis of the Qur'ān, Western scholarship and the traditional biography of the Prophet. In this chapter, the author discusses issues which need to be answered by the Muslim scholars. For example, the author quotes the Western scholar Alfred Welch who assumes that the traditional biography of the Prophet Muḥammad is basically correct, that Muḥammad was the sole author of the Qur'ān, and that the key to understanding the Qur'ān is to understand his life.

In the seventh chapter "The Historical Context of the Qur'an," Reynolds turns to a quality of the Qur'an—its Arabic language—that offers us a third lesson on Islam's origins. The author concludes the second part of the book remarking that the Islamic sources on the life of the Prophet are late. Moreover, they consist of stories written to explain the Qur'ān and they are shaped by the apologetic goals of authors working in a sectarian environment. The non-Islamic sources (for example, Sebeos) are much earlier, yet they too are affected by religious apology.

The third and the last part of the book "Contemporary Perspectives" consists of only one chapter "Contemporary Muslim Narratives of Islam's Emergence." In this chapter the author moves towards some medieval Muslim scholars like Ibn Taymiyyah who have influenced the contemporary scholars like Sayyid Quṭb. The author states that later Muslims remember Ibn Taymiyyah for his fidelity to the Prophet (peace be on him). One of his disciples, named Abū Ḥafṣ al-Bazzār (d. 1349 CE) describes Ibn Taymiyyah as the "defender of the pure sharia and the conduct of the Prophet" (p. 179). In this chapter the author also talks about the hidden imām, teachings of

Ayatollah Khomeini, the guardianship of the jurisprudent (*wilāyat al-faqīh*) and the Qur'ān and the scientific miracles.

In the concluding remarks of this chapter, the author comments that the shari'ah is at the epicenter of Islamic ideology of Sunni Islamist movements such as Muslim Brotherhood and the Jamā'at-i Islāmī. These movements, inspired in part by the teaching of medieval Muslim scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah, insist that Muḥammad (peace be on him) and the early caliphs successfully established an Islamic state faithful to the Shari'ah and argue that this state should be the model for Islamic states today. Through the influence of Ayatollah Khomeini, and his idea of *wilāyat al-faqīh*, shi'ite Muslims in Iran and elsewhere have come to accept the idea (even if they do not accept the legitimacy of the first three caliphs). In general, the legitimacy of Shari'ah is well-knit in the conscious of Muslims across the Islamic world. The remarkable multiplication of online *fatwās* seems to testify to this concern.

A very real strength of Reynolds work is his competence in the fields of Islamic studies, Middle Eastern antiquity, and the relevant languages, alongside his evident skill in communicating to the "average" educated reader. This work would serve quite well as an introductory text to Islam; even without the critical reevaluation of Islamic origins, the book is a readable presentation of the basic story of Muḥammad and the Qur'ān. And the benefits do not stop there. The book is nicely arranged so that in tandem with the author's argument the reader enjoys the added value of sidebars, photos, selected excerpts in translation, key personality profiles, etc. Textual artifacts include samples of Islamic constitutions and speeches, translations of various modern *fatwās* or ancient *ḥadīths* and so on. Reynolds presents, in an excellent way, both the traditional view of Islam adopted by Muslims and the "new" or "revisionist" views. He shows due respect to the tradition without diluting/ignoring the critical assessment offered by recent scholarly research.

Asma Kounsar

