

BOOK REVIEW

Book review editor: David Robertson
d.robertson@open.ac.uk

***The Norton Anthology of World Religions: Islam.* Jane Dammen McAuliffe (ed.). Series edited by Jack Miles. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2015. Pp. xxx + 659. ISBN: 9780393918984.**

Reviewed by: Riyaz Timol, Centre for the Study of Islam in the UK, Cardiff University

The W.W. Norton Company has developed something of a reputation for producing definitive anthologies; as a young undergraduate I vividly recall lugging around two hefty volumes of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* over three tiring years. It was with some excitement then that I opened the Islam volume of the recently published *Norton Anthology of World Religions*. Could we expect the same canon-shaping selection of primary texts that capture, in this case, the lifeblood of Islamic literary production over 14 centuries condensed into a single, accessible, English-language volume? The answer, after some lengthy and very pleasant perusal, has transpired to be a resounding yes.

Jane Dammen McAuliffe, editor of the multivolume *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, deserves to be congratulated for the evident care and precision with which this superlative offering has been brought to fruition. The formidable task of compressing the literary fruits of such a heterogeneous history, spanning several continents and civilizational moments, into a single cohesive whole is approached, rather sensibly, chronologically. A tripartite demarcation thus divides the book into three distinct though unequal phases. The first of these, *The Foundational Epoch (610-750)*, covers the period from Muhammad's first revelatory experience to the end of the Umayyad dynasty and presents excerpts from only two sources: the Qur'an itself (chapters 1, 4, 12, 55 and 78-114 in Pickthall's translation) and the earliest extant biography of the Prophet - ibn Hisham's recension of ibn Ishaq's earlier, though now lost, work.

The next phase constitutes the lion's share of the book spanning over 1,000 years and 350 pages. *The Classical Synthesis (750-1756)* covers the period from the ascension of the Abbasids right through to Islam's first encounter with European colonialism in the Bay of Bengal, and so encompasses the principal flowerings of Islamic civilisation. There are four key sections here: (i) *Hadith and Sunna*, including excerpts from the classical collections of al-Bukhari and Muslim (ii) *Shari'a and Fiqh*, including excerpts from the works of jurists al-Shafi'i and ibn Hanbal (iii) *The Intellectual Elaboration of the Classical Synthesis* and (iv) *Belles Lettres: The Fine Arts of Poetry and Prose* subdivided into the genres of *Qasida* (The Arabic Ode), Persian Lyricism, and *Adab* (Fable, Aphorism and Essay). Section (iii) constitutes the backbone of the entire volume and is subdivided into the following categories: *Kalam* (Theology), *Falsafa* (Philosophy), *'Ulum-al Qur'an* (Qur'anic Sciences), *'Ilm al-Akhlaq* (Private Ethics and Governance), *Ta'rikh* (History, Geography and Travel Writing) and *Tasawwuf* (The Mystical Interiority of Sufism). McAuliffe judiciously presents extracts from the works of most of the usual suspects here including Abu Hanifa, al-Ashari (though not at-Tahawi or al-Maturidi), al-Ghazali, al-Farabi (though not al-Kindi), ibn Sina, ibn Rushd, al-Razi (though not ibn Kathir), ibn Taymiyya (though not ibn al-Qayyim), Miskawayh, al-Tabari, ibn Battuta, ibn Khaldun, al-Bistami (though not al-Junayd), ibn al-'Arabi, Hafiz and Rumi as well as many other less-known names. Shi'i contributions are also represented with, for example, Majlisi's *Ocean of Lights*, ibn Babawayh's *The Beliefs of the Shi'is* or a selection of Isma'ili Devotional Songs. Later developments in Sunni theology feature too through the inclusion, for instance, of eighteenth-century reformers Shah Wali-Allah al-Dihlavi and Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab.

The final section is titled *The Classical Synthesis Encounters Modernity, 1765 to the Present* and deals, in turn, with (i) Muslim responses to *Colonialism and Post-Colonialism* (including extracts from Muhammad 'Abduh, Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, Muhammad Iqbal and Sayyid Qutb) (ii) *The Religious Reassertion* (Ebrahim Moosa finds himself in the hallowed company of Ruhollah Khomeini and Usama bin Ladin here!) (iii) *The Emergence of Women's Voices* (including Fatima Mernissi and Amina Wadud – though the implicit assumption is that women's voices were hitherto absent) and (iv) *Negotiating Religious Pluralism* (including Fethullah Gülen and Tariq Ramadan). A valuable annotated bibliography at the end signposts the interested reader to reputable, English-language scholarly works spanning all the above sections.

Two 'framing' features enhance the volume's merit no end. First is McAuliffe's outstanding introductory essay that fleshes out the book's structural architecture with substantive historical detail; this is supplemented by further detailed overviews that precede each of the three historical sections. Second are the piquant biographical sketches of every author selected for this anthology which segue into a description of the selected extract and its place within the author's broader oeuvre. Reflecting Norton's editorial prowess, all of this 'framing' text appears in elegant, lucid prose that is a joy to read. Carefully produced maps, illustrations, timelines and colour photographs pepper the pages, though the pronouncing glossaries that accompany each selection do become unnecessarily long and tedious. Extracts themselves are usually

reproduced verbatim from extant publications, with the translator's name noted in each case. Though – as Jack Miles points out in his lengthy General Introduction – the rationale of *The Norton Anthology of World Religions* is overwhelmingly phenomenological (let the traditions' speak for themselves), I would nevertheless have liked a section that included non-Muslim engagements with Islam - ranging perhaps from St John of Damascus through Henry Stubbe to the more recent European scholarship of, say, Louis Massignon, Montgomery Watt or Annemarie Schimmel. Even without this, there is no doubt that this is a work of enduring value, unique in both its scope and accessibility, that will make a welcome addition to the library of any Anglophone student, scholar or teacher of Islam.