



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

By Najam Haider

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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.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Haider provides a thoroughly researched and methodologically nuanced survey of Shi'ism that fills the gap between works that focus on the historical origins of Shi'ism and primers that attempt to summarize the central elements of Shi'i theological beliefs and practices. This work is certain to supersede existing introductions as the standard reference on the subject for academic courses and as a general guide for specialists and non-specialists alike."

Tariq al-Jamil, Swarthmore College

"Students and specialists alike will welcome this authoritative introduction and survey of Shi'i history from its seventh-century beginnings to the present. All aspects of Shi'i history are succinctly encompassed through Haider's carefully organized and clearly written narrative and cogent analysis. Especially important is Haider's demonstration of how Shi'i origin narratives were constructed through the lens of later ninth- to twelfth-century theology and then remembered by subsequent generations."

G. R. Garthwaite, Dartmouth College

"A detailed but accessible study of the key aspects of the beliefs of the three main Shi'i groups of the modern world - the Zaydis, Isma'ilis and the Twelvers - that as much highlights what unites the three branches as it explores the theological and narrative differences between them. The author also examines the historical development of each from the earliest days of Islam and concludes by charting developments across all three communities into the present day. With useful tables and maps this is an excellent and most welcome addition to the growing body of recent scholarship on the Shi'a."

Andrew J. Newman, University of Edinburgh

"Najam Haider's perceptive overview covers Islamic history from time of the Prophet until the present day, explaining the complex histories and distinctive theologies of the three Shi'i traditions, but also showing how they have shaped each other. Particularly valuable is the attention Haider pays to historical memory and to Sunni-Shi'i relations, showing how Shi'i and Sunni Islam have shaped and reacted to each other and continue to do so in the present day. Shi'i Islam is an excellent resource for students, scholars, and members of the reading public who want to get a thorough, intelligent survey of this fascinating topic."

Devin Stewart, Emory University, Atlanta

"Deftly connect[s] Shi'a to a wide array of influences, most notably Mu`tazili thought ... Recommended."

S. P. Blackburn, Choice

About the Author

Najam Haider is Assistant Professor of Religion at Barnard College of Columbia University. His articles have been published in many journals, including *Der Islam*, the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, and *Islamic Law and Society*. His research interests include early Islamic history, Islamic law, and the impact of modernity on the contemporary Muslim world. His first book, *The Origins of the Shi'a* was published by Cambridge University Press in 2011. He is currently working on a new project that focuses on early Islamic historical writing.

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