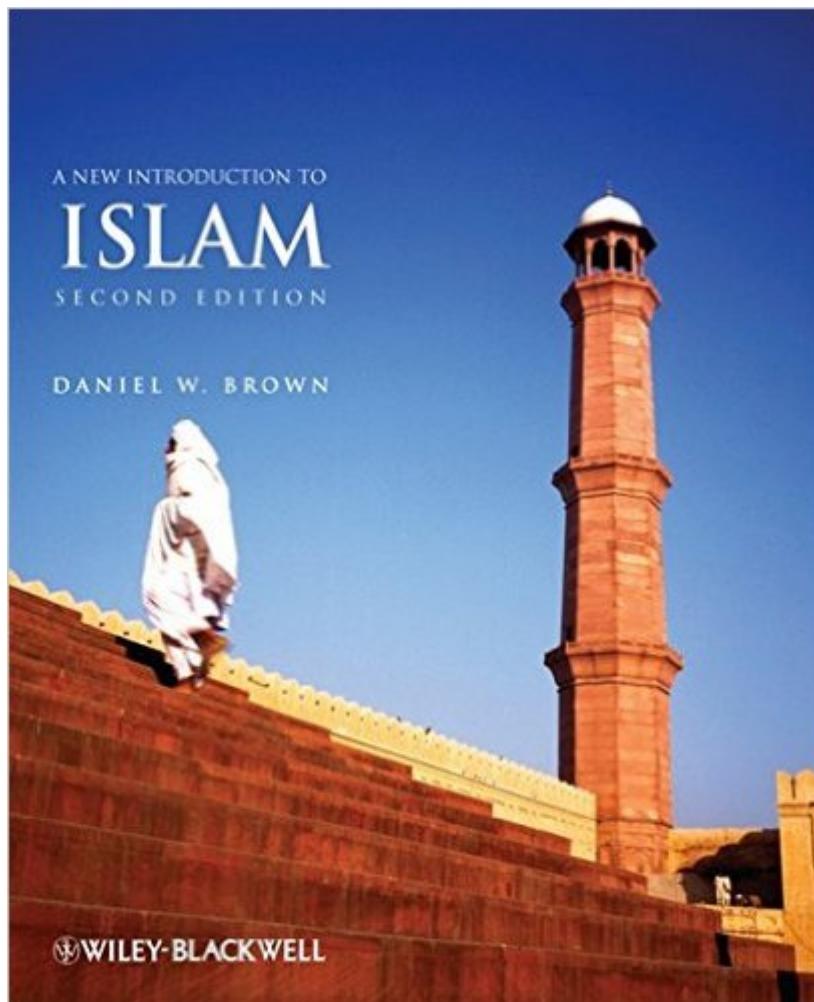


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# A New Introduction To Islam, 2nd Edition



## **Synopsis**

The second edition of this student-friendly textbook explores the origins, major features and lasting influence of the Islamic tradition. Traces the development of Muslim beliefs and practices against the background of social and cultural contexts extending from North Africa to South and Southeast Asia. Fully revised for the second edition, with completely new opening and closing chapters considering key issues facing Islam in the 21st century. Focuses greater attention on everyday practices, the role of women in Muslim societies, and offers additional material on Islam in America. Includes detailed chronologies, tables summarizing key information, useful maps and diagrams, and many more illustrations.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

I bought the new second edition of this text for an introductory course on Islam and ended up reading the entire book before the class even started. It's well written and organized, a vital necessity with 1400 years of ground to cover. Of course there are the narratives and basic info that any introductory work would include, but Brown also uses good examples to bring things into perspective: for instance the "Coffee Debate" illustrates how Islamic law actually operates. The book is up-to-date not only in its discussion of issues like "Islam and Modernity" but also in bringing up recent scholarly debates about the Koran and Islamic traditions. I found myself constantly saying, "So that's why," in regard to controversial issues like gender or the sharia. Brown is sympathetic to his topic, but avoids an apologetic stance and tends to let facts speak for themselves. It's very much to his credit that someone like myself, a devout believer in a "heretical" religion, comes away from

the book with far greater respect for Islam as a whole, and a thirst to know more. For that purpose the numerous references and bibliography are solid and useful. There's also a concise 10-page glossary for us non-Arabists.

My review is really in response to John Esposito's book which was previously used for the Intro to Islam class at my university. This book is breath of fresh air. I have only read a couple chapters so far, but Brown tells you more explicitly WHERE Muslims get their information about things such as Muhammad's life. This was missing in the equivalent Esposito book for the most part. Also I see Brown as very fair in his analysis, just the right amount of critical. This is a very basic textbook but a good one for an Intro class. Esposito has the tendency to make Islam appear perfect, and is not critical of any areas of it. Brown does a much fairer job.

This is an undergraduate college textbook, and it reads like one. I found it interesting, though the style is rather dry. I appreciated the history of Islam being provided in the context of the religious ferment that was going at the time -- particularly the unorthodox Christian sects that had been driven out of the Byzantine empire into the desert regions. Mohammed apparently had contact with several of these groups during his travels, and his views and perspectives on Christianity were influenced by their theology. It was also interesting to read how in the early years, Muslims and Jews found common cause in their opposition to Christianity. All in all, an excellent overview of the history of Islam, the major (and minor) Islamic sects, Islamic theology, interpretations of Islamic law, etc. If you want an objective, non-polemic introduction to this important religion, this is a good one.

A clear description of the basics of Islam. I haven't finished it yet, and it is intended to be a textbook for college courses. It has been helpful to me as I have more contact with Muslims in other countries so that I can understand some of their orientation.

Islam has been much in the news in recent years and not in a good way. Like many other people, I have wondered why we are seeing so many violent acts of terrorism against innocent people. The rise of ISIS with their "caliphate" along with terrorist acts around the world made me want to know more about the reasons for these acts, which involve random killing of innocent people and often suicide for the perpetrators who desire to become "martyrs." These acts are done in the name of one of the world's great monotheistic religions called Islam. What kind of a religion encourages such acts? . . . . I got this book at a yard sale and it sat on my shelf for a long time until the attacks in

Paris led me to pick it up and begin reading. I wanted to know what Islam is all about and this book drew me into what is actually a fascinating topic. Most of us have heard of the Koran (spelled various ways -- Qur'an, etc.) and the Prophet Muhammad, but know little of the religion he founded.~ . . . WHERE DID ISLAM BEGIN?This book begins with the era in which Islam was born (the 7th century) in a geographic place that is home to Arabs, who were basically pastoral people tending animal herds in the Arabian peninsula. The major religions of the time were Eastern Christianity centered in the Byzantine Empire and Zoroastrianism in the Persian (Sasanian) empire, which also had a large Jewish population. The Arabs, with their new religion given to them by the Prophet Muhammad, managed to conquer these empires. It was an unlikely event and they did not become absorbed into what were actually more sophisticated societies. They kept to themselves and their own belief system as given by the Prophet. So much so that early conflicts were mainly among themselves concerning who should be seen as the successor to Muhammad. Although the Prophet had designated his son-in-law Ali as his successor, Ali was not accepted by all. The split between Shiites (who accepted Ali) and Sunnis goes back to these early disputes over succession... . . . I expected to be reading a lot about jihad and forced conversions of non-Muslims, but that seems to be a misconception of those of us not raised in a place with Muslims. In the beginning, many Muslims did not even think non-Arabs could become Muslims. Islam was for Arabs, they felt. It was centered on the holy cities of Mecca and Medina in Arabia and was part of a uniquely Arab story. They did not seek converts from non-Arabs. Even today, Muslims pray turning toward Mecca.~ . . . WHAT ABOUT JIHAD AND THE CALIPHATE?Jihad is barely mentioned in the book until near the end. It turns out, violent jihad is mostly a recent concept. The actual history of Islam related in these pages takes you on a long tour of many interpretations of Islam and the many separate groups of practicing Muslims, from those centered on the Koran and others who furthered development of Islamic law to the fascinating world of the Sufis, with their whirling dances, their saints and relics, and their rich spiritual tradition. . . . The author deals with the concept of the Caliphate, which is an old idea going back to the days of the Prophet. The Caliphate is not the same as the modern nation-state. It is an institution headed by a Caliph who becomes the leader of Islam. He would be someone related to the Prophet's tribe, making a kind of lineage backward. Caliphates existed when Islam was not so spread out around the world. The last officially recognized Caliphate was abolished in 1924 by the Ottoman ruler Ataturk whose empire had shrunk and was on the decline. What was left of it was to become the modern nation of Turkey. . . . The Caliphate is a kind of melding of civil and religious authority. Laws based on the Koran are applied to everyone through religious courts. As the Ottoman empire was reduced to becoming a nation called Turkey,

its courts were reformed to imitate the Western practice of establishing civil laws for governing a nation. Muslim religious laws (sharia) remain in some Muslim nations. The author says family law (marriage, divorce, inheritance, etc.) is usually the last type of law to be reformed.~ . . . ISN'T ISLAM ROOTED IN THE PAST?Islam did ultimately spread to many parts of the world far beyond the Arabian peninsula. Muslims of many different traditions and worship styles inhabit the world today, and most have adopted modern interpretations of the Koran as it applies to a different situation than existed in the 7th century when the Prophet Muhammad gave his message to the world. This book summarizes the most important scholarly thought and theology of Muslims leading up to today. It is an interesting discussion, with many comparisons and similarities to Christian theology.~ . . . The main division in the concept of God between Muslims and Christians appears to be the concept of "One God" central to Islam. The Christian idea of the Trinity is rejected and, while Muslims honor Jesus as a messenger, they do not accept him as God. Muslims believe to honor any person other than God as God is idolatry. Thus the idea of honoring saints and prophets is discouraged, though this DID become part of the Sufi traditions. Islam encompasses a broad array of ideas and practices, as do Christianity and Judaism.~ . . . SO, HOW DID ISLAM TURN TO

TERRORISM?Reading the last few chapters finally got me to my reasons for reading the book. What is going on with this violent movement called ISIS (or ISIL or "daish" or whatever)? The author's words were a chilling prediction of things to come since the book was published in 2004. He traces the idea of using violence against non-believers to the Muslim Brotherhood, a Sunni organization based in Egypt, but focused on Palestine. This movement started peacefully with educational goals but became violent in response to the British occupation of Palestine.~ . . . Of their leader, al-Banna, the author states "Along with this return to jihad he revived and restated the Islamic doctrine of martyrdom. Muslims, he said, should learn 'the art of death'. By this he meant, they should deliberately and purposefully plan how to make their deaths count for the cause of Islam."~ . . . The author goes on to state that al-Banna believed that, because there was no Islamic state, the task of jihad had become an individual rather than a collective duty. The primary allegiance of a Muslim, he said, was to Islam, not to the country where they live. He quotes al-Banna: "there can be no solidarity with godless countrymen just because they share a homeland. One's countrymen are as bad as the infidels; in fact, many of them ARE infidels." Does this remind you of events in San Bernardino California in December 2015?~ . . . The author also points to Wahabism as practiced in Saudi Arabia, the very site of the holy city of Mecca. The Wahabbis are "most easily identified by what they oppose" which includes other forms of Islam (including Shiites, Sufis and many other groups), all theological or philosophical discussion, most forms of music and

many scientific ideas if not corroborated in the Koran. He says some Wahhabbis joined up with radical elements of the Muslim Brotherhood to carry out violence against groups perceived as enemies. All this, before ISIS came on the scene and became the face of this kind of radical Islam.~

... HOW SHOULD AMERICANS FEEL ABOUT ISLAM? Should we in America fear the rise of radical Islam? What does it mean for us? After reading this book, I feel I have a better understanding of Islam and where the terrorists who kill in the name of Islam fit in. They are clearly just one stream of thought within a much larger community of believers. Violent beheadings, suicide bombers, destruction of sacred sites from antiquity, desire for martyrdom, the Caliphate and all the ideas we're hearing about on the nightly news that seem so disgusting are not synonymous with Islam. . . . But, in my opinion, these ideas from the past ARE dangerous. Modern media via the internet make self-radicalization possible and it is unrealistic to think police organizations or the FBI will discover everyone who might be thinking about carrying out violence against innocent people. Even retaking the land held by ISIS (their so-called "Caliphate") is going to be a challenge. Americans are tired of war and do not want to see more troops ("boots on the ground") in the Middle East. It seems likely we will see more attacks like those in Paris and San Bernardino. New recruits quickly replace those who die in these attacks.~ . . . CONCLUSIONS What will it take to defeat this movement? It MUST be defeated, but we cannot allow our fears to lead to measures that take away our heritage of freedom as Americans. All Muslims are NOT terrorists and immigrants benefit our country in so many ways. We must continue to welcome immigrants and refugees to America, the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave. My own ancestors came here from foreign lands. In America, we are united -- not by race, ethnicity or religion -- but by being Americans and sharing American values. . . . This book, which is well-written and includes illustrations, provides historical background and context to Islam, its beginnings and its evolving forms. It is not so much about the religious beliefs themselves as it is about the history of the impact of Islam on the world. This book, and I'm sure other books too, can help those of us who know little about Islam to improve our knowledge and understanding of world events. I give "A New Introduction to Islam" five stars for readability and for its wealth of information.

The text itself is very good. It is simultaneously accessible and scholarly. The thing that kept me from giving it five stars is that the Kindle edition doesn't have actual page numbers. This makes it harder to use academically. My professor assigns page numbers--not chapter numbers or names. I have no idea what I'm supposed to be reading each week.

It's a good introduction. I bought the Kindle version and for study purpose this is not handy:It's very annoying that the index in the back of the Kindle version doesn't link to passages in the book.

This primer on Islam is very well-written and an excellent tool, if paired with primary source readings. Brown's ability to present complex material in a very readable manner is appreciated. As a very good introduction ought to do, it connects with undergraduates to inspire further in-depth research.

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