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BOOK REVIEW: *WHAT IS THE SHARIA?*

Author: Baudouin Dupret

Translator: David Bond

India: C. Hurst & Co. Ltd., 2018, 246 pp

At first blush, *What is the Sharia?* appears to be a simple guide to Islamic law. We opened the book expecting it to be written in the same style as, say, *Shari'a for Dummies*.

While we cannot vouch for his faithfulness to the original French script, translator David Bond can be applauded nonetheless for a superb translation. He has masterfully reproduced a rich, eloquent, beautifully flowing style of writing that is a rare find among academic scholarship. Indeed, our issues with the book stem not from its content but with its title and marketing.

The writing often veers in the direction of becoming a little too scholastic—describing the Sunna as “an entire system of morality founded on right practice, a deontology based on orthopraxis.” This short volume is an easy read for those approaching it with appropriate expectations or who are already well versed in Islamic Law. This work may not be suitable for beginners. (For those seeking to learn the central concepts and terminology of Islamic Law, we’d recommend picking up this work only after reading a true primer on Shari’a.) What is this book, then? Something even more valuable than what its title purports: it is an antidote to dogma.

By refusing to cast Islamic principles in simplistic terms, Dupret refuses to allow one viewpoint prevail over another. To his credit, the author eloquently describes schisms and controversies rather than trying to simplify them for the reader. This book is an exploration of the complexities of a religion that has evolved over millennia across continents, syncretizing with local cultures and often being confused with those cultures themselves. Dupret challenges willing readers to open their minds and engage in the debates that enliven, characterize, and sow discord within Muslim communities.

