

Book Notice

## The Cultural Atlas of Islam

*Ismail and Lamyā' al Faruqī*

This magnificent book, published by Macmillan a month after the Faruqis' deaths, presents the entire world view of Islam—its beliefs, traditions, institutions, and its place in the cultures in which it has taken root. THE CULTURAL ATLAS OF ISLAM is not only a comprehensive introduction to the Islamic experience in history and the modern world. It is an authoritative and deeply felt statement of the faith of Islam, written for those of all faiths. Isma'il and Lois Lamyā' al Faruqī's book is, in fact, Islam explaining itself.

Rich with more than 300 photographs, drawings, and other illustrations, and with some 75 original maps, this is a unique guide to the meaning of Islam and its shaping force on cultures from the Mediterranean to the Pacific. This is, however, much more than a history of events; it is a clear presentation of the essence of Islamic civilization in all its spheres, from everyday practices of Muslims around the world to the Islamic legacy in art, science, law, politics, and philosophy.

The authors begin with the ancient setting of Islam, examining the different strands of influence—Arab, Mesopotamian, Canaanite, and Hebrew—that were its frontrunners. Islam, the authors demonstrate, brought together diverse traditions and from them forged the unique body of belief, thought, and practice that continues to animate Muslim life today throughout the world.

Part Two explains the concept of *Tawhid*—the essence of Islam that binds together the lives of its believers. *Tawhid* is the affirmation of God as One, Absolute, and Ultimate; it deeply affects all aspects of Islamic thought, expression, and behavior.

Part Three shows how this core of belief takes shape in scripture, social institutions, and the arts—the forms which God's revelations to Muhammad assumed in the historical fabric of Islam. There is a concise introduction to the fundamental nature of the *Qur'an*, and to the collection of Muhammad's sayings and deeds that clarify its statements—the *Sunnah*. The ways in which Islam affects social life and its institutions—from education and family life to the making of the *Hajj*, or pilgrimage, to Mecca—is also examined. So, too, is the central role of the *Qur'an* in defining artistic expression.

Part Four is a remarkable exploration of the manifestations of Islam in all

areas of intellectual, social, artistic, political, and scientific life. Here, the authors trace the flowering of Islam, its enormous impact on other traditions, and its distinctive legacy in language, law, theology, philosophy, the social sciences, history, literature, art, architecture, music, and crafts. From the effect of the *Qur'an* on the development of literary Arabic to the function of ornamentation in Islamic art, from the meaning of *Shari'ah*, or Islamic law, to the achievements of such influential scholars as the historian Ibn Khaldun, these chapters form a superb introduction to the entire range of Islamic civilization.

Throughout the book, the authors pay special attention to the influence of other traditions—Judaism, Christianity, and classical Greek philosophy, for example—on Islam. Yet they return time and again to that which is unique to Islam: the distinctive set of assumptions and questions Muslims use to define the path to a just and holy life.

Rich in detail, clearly written, and integrating the best of classic and contemporary scholarship, this is an exceptionally valuable book. It presents Islam from the inside out, makes much that has been overlooked or distorted by Western scholars clear, vital, and comprehensible, and documents for all the reality of a religion that counts nearly a quarter of humanity as its followers. This is indeed an essential addition to all libraries, and a valuable new resource for all interested both in Islam and in the religious experience writ large.

Available from the Islamic Book Service, 10900 West Washington St.,  
Indianapolis, IN 46231