

respectively; the inside is marred by the absence of front and back fly-leaves, very narrow top, bottom and outer page margins, absence of indentation, and lack of differentiation between the line spacing of the main text and that of the excerpts.

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Farhad Daftary and Wilferd Madelung (eds.) • *Encyclopaedia Islamica* •
Leiden: Brill, in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies

Volume 3 (Adab–al-Bāb al-Ḥādī ‘ashar)

• HB • ISBN: 9789004191655 • 2011

Volume 4 (Bābā Afdāl–Bīrjandī)

• HB • ISBN: 9789004246911 • 2013

Volume 5 (al-Bīrūnī–Daḥw al-Ard)

• HB • ISBN: 9789004307896 • 2015

With the publication of three more volumes of *Encyclopaedia Islamica*—the English version of *Dā‘irat al-ma‘ārif-i Islāmīya al-kubrā* (The Great Islamic Encyclopedia)—the project has attained a steady production schedule; publication of one volume every two years is, indeed, impressive.¹ The translation is being produced collaboratively by the Center for the Great Islamic Encyclopaedia, established in 1983 (Tehran), the Institute of Ismaili Studies (London), and Brill (Leiden).

The English version differs from the original Persian in its organization; some entries are omitted, others are abridged, but the integrity of the text has been preserved. *Dā‘irat al-Ma‘ārif-i Buzurg-i Islāmī* is also being translated into Arabic; several volumes have been published. The most prominent feature of all three versions of this encyclopedia is the prominent coverage of specifically Shi‘i themes, personalities, culture and history. These aspects are said to be “precisely [those], which were either given scant attention in earlier encyclopaedias or ignored altogether, as a result of the Arabo-centric and Sunni-centric tendencies which have, until recently, prevailed in Orientalist academic circles in the West.” The project description, however, also states that “it is far from being simply an encyclopaedia of ‘Shi‘i Islam’” (1:x).

Unlike the recently completed forty-four volume *Islam Ansiklopedisi*,² which

1. For a review of volume 1 and 2, see *Islam & Science* vol. 9 (Summer 2011) no. 1, pp. 33-49.

2. In Turkish only, with specific focus on entries related to Turkish history

caters to non-specialists à la Britannica, the present project is an in-depth work suitable for serious subject specialists and its coverage is comparable to Brill's second *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (*EI2*). The work, however, leans heavily toward Persian people and places, rather than general Islamic topics and abstract ideas. For instance, volume four, which begins with an entry on Bābā Afḡal (the fourth entry under the letter "B"), has ten additional entries before the entry on Bābā Ṭāhir compared to *EI2*, and all of them related to Persia. Meanwhile, it omits entries on the Bābān family and the Arab poet al-Babbaghāʾ, both of which appear in *EI2*, and (surprisingly) the entry on Bābur, founder of the Mughal empire, is not included in the English version, although it appears in the Persian. Al-Badīʿ, Arabic for the Originator, an attribute of God, is only dealt with in reference to Persian language and literature (not theology), and al-Badīʿ al-Aṣṭurlābī, the celebrated Arab scholar, physician, philosopher, and astrolabe specialist is not deemed worthy of attention. Badīhiyyāt is admirably included, whereas *EI2* misses out on this important term so central to any discourse on logic.

Translations are generally well done and the text almost reads as if originally written in English. Like the original text in Persian, more is deemed better than less; this leads to a lack of concision, considerable repetition, and a slow narrative style. "Badr", for instance, begins with a summary description ("Badr, is a region in the Ḥijāz and the site of the first important battle between the Muslims and the Meccans in Ramaḡlān 2/March 624") that is repeated in the third paragraph ("The primary significance of Badr is that it was the site of the first and most important battle between the early Muslims, led by the Prophet, and the Quraysh of Mecca"). This is followed by two pages of text which goes into numerous details of why and how the battle was fought, the number of casualties on both sides, a cursory mention of consequences of the battle, and other secondary details. When the author finally mentions the Qurʾān, the reference is very general ("The victory of the Muslims at Badr was described in various places in the Qurʾān, for example, Q 3:123 [see al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān*, 2/578; al-Qurṭubī, 4/190 ff.]") (4:90b).

Encyclopedic texts are as good as their sources. The approach of the *Encyclopaedia Islamica* is more historical than religious. The extensive bibliography in many entries is impressive (for example, twelve full columns for "Caliphate"). Yet most entries indiscriminately use primary Persian and Arabic sources along with Orientalist and missionary works of dubious quality and authenticity; many even throw in tertiary-level popular paperbacks in the references. This produces a text that does not consistently reflect its own sources. For example, it is impossible to parse who is saying what in a sentence

like “The battle of Badr played a decisive role in the early history of Islam: Sūrat al-Anfāl (Q 8) was revealed immediately after the battle, which is there referred to as ‘yawm al-furqān’ (the day of criterion; see Q 8:41) (‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr, 144-145; al-Wāqidi, 1/131 ff; al-Šālihī, 4/30; see also Watt, 16)” (4:90a). Although the “direct cause of the battle of Badr” is said to be the “Muslims’ plan to raid one of the largest Meccan trade caravans,” the entry goes on to provide justifications that range from a mention of “the first of the Qur’ānic revelations concerning warfare (Q 22:39-40), allowing the Muslims to have recourse to warfare in self-defence” to various modern apologetics. There is no mention of Q 8:47 with reference to the Makkans, who had *come forth from their dwellings boastfully and to be seen by men*, or of the Prophet’s address to the dead disbelievers, or of the presence of the angels. Absent also is the Qur’ān’s description of the importance of this battle as mentioned in Sūrat al-Anfāl, dubbed “the Sura of Badr” by Ibn ‘Abbās (3BH-68/619-688). Instead, the entry uncritically relies on a heterogeneous mixture of sources, ranging from ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr’s *Maghāzī* to Karen Armstrong’s popular Prophetic biography, with many Orientalists thrown in; it even refers to Brill’s *El3*. Thus, in addition to unreliable tertiary works, modernist apologia (Haykal), a missionary version by a bishop (Andrae Tor), the encyclopedia entry relies on another encyclopedia! Finally, even though the editors claim that it is not a Shi’i encyclopedia, the Badr entry clearly indicates its orientation as it ends with claims as the following, mostly based on Shi’i sources: “For their part, those Meccans who later embraced Islam never forgot their defeat at Badr, especially when tribal rivalries and civil strife emerged after the Prophet’s death. During the events of Šiffin, al-Walid b. ‘Uqba b. Abī Mu‘ayt, whose father had been killed during the battle of Badr (see Ibn Hishām, 2/298), openly called for Badr to be avenged, and Mu‘āwiya encouraged him in this (al-Balādhuri, Ansāb 4(1)/99; for Imam ‘Alī’s presence at the battle of Badr, see al-Mufid, al-Irshād, 1/67 ff; al-Majlisī, 41/79.) Later, following the events of Karbalā’, Yazīd b. Mu‘āwiya cited a line of poetry by Ibn al-Zibā‘rā, the Qurashī poet who had celebrated the Muslim defeat at Uḥud, to express the enmity of the Umayyads towards the aṣḥāb Badr, especially the ‘Alids (see Ibn al-Jawzī, 4/158)” (4:90b).

The relative length of entries suggests the leanings of the editors: the Divine Name “Allāh” is allotted 32 pages (3:614-46), most of which are devoted to themes that might properly fall under other entries,³ in comparison, “‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib” is 106 pages (3:477-583) and “Caliphate” spans 56 pages (5:407-62). The Mughal emperor Akbar, who ruled India for half a century, is given 10 pages (3:386-96); which is almost the same as given to the little-known

3. As with the following subsections: God in the Qur’ān; God in Ḥadīth Studies; God in Islamic Theology and Philosophy; The Names of God in the Qur’ān; The Names of God in Kalām; The Names of God in Mysticism; The Use of Attributes as a Technical Term; Shi’i Theories; Sunni Theories.

Persian poet Abū Maṣṣūr (or Abū Naṣr) ‘Alī b. Aḥmad Asadī Ṭūsī (3:820-29). The 65-page entry on Baghdad (4:91-155) and 58-page entry on Baṣra (4:507-64), both conceived on a grand scale à la *Tārīkh Baghdād* and *Tārīkh Dimashq*, provide a breathtaking panoramic view of these two historic cities. They are both rich in history and intellectual thought and extensive bibliographies cover almost all facets of public life. Yet while subthemes like “Literature, Religious Sciences, and History of Science” of these cities do provide glimpses of their intellectual life, they are neither complete developments nor comprehensive enough to grant the reader insight into the cities’ intellectual milieu and historical contributions. The mere mention of al-Ṭabarī’s monumental *Jāmi‘ al-bayān* in half a sentence does not yield much regarding what went on in the city with reference to Qur’ān commentary. Perhaps the editors wanted to replicate what happened in Kūfa with reference to law (the section begins, “Although Baghdad never produced its own school of Qur’ān commentary...”) (4:115a).

Printed on coated paper, the five volumes so far published are an impressive achievement both in production as well as in scholarship related to Persian themes. Each of the volumes published so far comprises approximately 900 pages. The publications’ font size and style as well as line spacing are superior to *EI2*, while its bibliographies follow the same user-unfriendly format, and do not adhere to alphabetical order. Typography could have been improved by making the entry-headers more distinct; currently, the new entry titles (in bold) are barely distinguishable from running text. The entries could have been more carefully divided between volumes. Volume three, for instance, has only three short entries under letter “B”, which could have been moved to the next volume. Another overall feature is the placement of illustrations at the end of the volume. The rationale seems to be cost of color printing when it is spread throughout the text, but the alternate with no additional cost (black and white illustrations within the entries) could better illustrate the text, as is finally done in an entry of volume 5.

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‘Uthmān ibn Ibrāhīm al-Nābulusī • *Sword of Ambition: Bureaucratic Rivalry in Medieval Egypt* • Edited and translated by Luke Yarbrough • New York: NYU Press, 2016 • ISBN: 9781479889457 • HB • pp. xliv + 266

This admirable translation of *Tajrīd sayf al-himmah li-stikhrāj mā fī dhimmat al-dhimmah* (*Unsheathing Ambition’s Sword to Extract What the Dhimmis Hoard*) by “an unemployed Egyptian scholar and former bureaucrat”, ‘Uthmān ibn Ibrāhīm