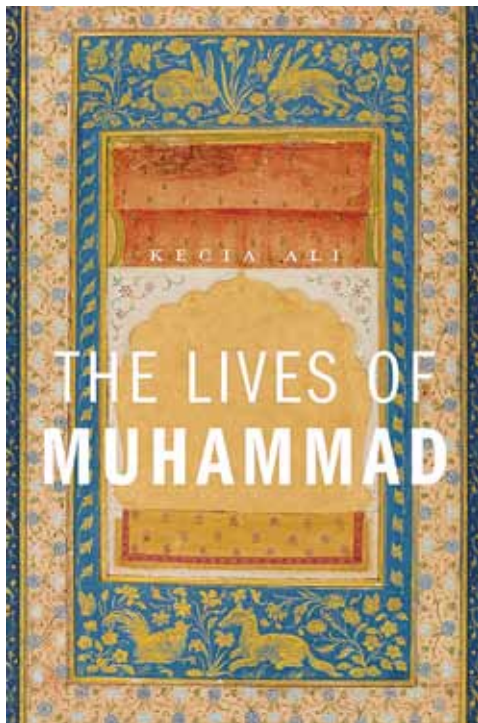


path setting work of Maria Dakake in this volume is worthy of special recognition. Her essay, “Qur’anic Ethics, Human Rights, and Society,” is essential reading for those working in theoretical fields such as ethics and philosophy as well as for those invested in understanding Qur’anic views on social justice. Ingrid Mattson also makes a notable contribution in the first essay appearing in the volume entitled, “How to read the Qur’an.”

The work is poised to create a considerable wake in the field of Qur’anic studies. Not only is it an important work in its own right, but its presentation of the commentary tradition will no doubt serve as a catalyst for further studies in the field. In particular, the cross-references in the commentary are invaluable for exploring textual coherence, a methodology for interpretation known as *qur’an bi-l-qur’an*, that is, interpreting Qur’anic passages vis-à-vis other places in the Qur’an where a related idea, wording, or Arabic root appears.

One of the stated goals of *The Study Qur’an* is to help transform English into “an Islamic language.” This goal is particularly exciting to *Azizah* staff, as English is the first language of the majority of American Muslims and is becoming an important language of cutting edge Muslim scholarship. Perhaps this goal will most clearly manifest when, no doubt, the volume authors receive requests to translate their commentary into Arabic and Persian, among other historic languages of Islamic scholarship. An electronic resource based upon the volume would be another wonderful resource to eventually flow from this project. The editors might also have demand to develop their hadith index into a standalone English-Arabic volume. *Azizah* Magazine is excited to recommend this work for both the well versed in Qur’anic studies and those encountering the Qur’an for the first time.

The Lives of Muhammad by Kecia Ali Reviewed by Zahra Ayubi



Kecia Ali’s important book, *The Lives of Muhammad*, is about the ways in which the biography of the Prophet, peace be on him, has been constructed and re-constructed throughout the centuries by multiple actors depending on their affiliations, pre-commitments, and their own stakes in his biography. Throughout the book, Ali juxtaposes pre-modern and colonial-era European polemics against the Prophet’s character, his status and goals as a leader, and his marriages, with apologetic biographies that were specifically designed to defend the Prophet’s memory. Her close reading of these sources allows the reader to understand how geo-politics deeply affects the narrative choices scholars have made in recounting the Prophet’s life.

For example, Ali argues that the emphasis some biographers have placed on the Prophet’s role as a compassionate statesman in Medina was designed in response to orientalist

depictions of the Prophet as violent. Another example, is how Muslims today have come to think of the Prophet’s monogamous marriage to Khadijah bint Khuwailid and subsequent polygynous marriages, including his marriage to Aisha bint Abu Bakr, who was extremely young by today’s standards, as a response to polemical allegations leveled against the Prophet regarding the purpose of these marriages. While the orientalist polemicists saw cunning in the financial and bodily security that the Prophet found in his marriage to Khadija, Muslims have chosen to view this security in the context of a marriage based on trust, love, and mutual faith in God. Muslims also contextualize the Prophet’s polygynous marriages as either political or acts of charity, and Aisha’s young age at marriage as customary ancient practice, in order to negate charges of lust against the Prophet.

Further, Ali builds on other scholarly critiques that, between the orientalist polemics and Muslim apologetic defense, both Muslims and non-Muslim biographies frequently omit his proximity to the Creator and the spiritual and prophetic elements of his character. She also problematizes comparative religion approaches used to evaluate the Prophet’s spiritual biography. Ali’s book will prompt *Azizah* readers to think critically about how the Prophet’s biography is used, abused, and ultimately constructed by multiple actors to serve their own purposes, both within and outside the Muslim community.