

Teaching Islam as an Asian Religion

By Vernon James Schubel

In the introduction to his book Islam: The View from the Edge, Richard Bulliet states, “The story of Islam has always privileged the view from the center.”¹ He then recounts a standard version of that story found in many introductory textbooks. In summary, in 611 CE Muhammad hears the revelation of God and becomes the Prophet of Islam. In 622 he immigrates to Medina and establishes the first Islamic polity. After conquering Mecca, he dies in 632 and the Muslim community (ummah) institutes the Caliphate. After a period of civil war (fitna) following the death of the third Caliph Uthman, the Arab Umayyad Dynasty is established, followed by the more diverse Abbasid Caliphate, and, after a brief period of cultural florescence, the Islamic empire sinks into an irreparable political degeneration, which culminates in the sack of Baghdad by the Mongols in 1258. Thus begins the lengthy decline of Islam.²

As Bulliet points out, many accounts of Islamic history actually end here. Those that continue often describe the following period of Islamic history as one of atrophy and decay that is of little historical consequence until the recent “fundamentalist” resurgence. But as Bulliet notes, this narrative is deeply inaccurate.³ Most significantly, it privileges the Arab lands of Islam’s origin, erroneously equating the political decline of the Arabs with the decline of Islamic civilization.

But as others have pointed out, the next five centuries were periods of great cultural florescence in other parts of the Muslim world.⁴ This period saw the emergence of the great transnational Sufi orders, which in many ways defined the religious culture of medieval Islam.

This period also witnessed the rise of the vernacular literary traditions in Islam—including magnificent poetry in Persian, Turkish, and Urdu. It also saw remarkable achievements of Islamic architecture, including the Taj Mahal and the Registan of Samarqand. Nowhere was this florescence more apparent than in Asia. In the wake of the Mongol conquests, many of the Turko-Mongol tribes converted to Islam, bringing new vitality and insights into Islamic religion and civilization. They went on to establish the great medieval empires of the Asian Muslim world—the Safavids in Iran, and the Ottomans and the Mughals in South Asia. During this period Islam became firmly established in Southeast Asia. As a result, it became one of the



Bektashi calligraphy creating an image of the human face from the Arabic letters spelling the name of Ali, the first Shi’i Imam and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad. Photograph by Vernon James Schubel.

major religious traditions of Asia, linking populations from Anatolia to Urumchi, from Bukhara to Bengal, from Sindh to Jakarta.

ISLAM AS AN ASIAN RELIGION

Islam is sometimes treated as a problematic part of the curriculum. How does it fit it into the larger curriculum? Where should it be taught? Is it part of some nebulous field known as “Middle East Studies?” Should it be included in Asian and African studies programs? This is particularly evident in the context of structuring introductory religion courses. A few years ago our religious studies department at Kenyon College restructured our curriculum, moving from a year-long introductory course, which covered both methods and world religions, to a single-semester introduction. This, of course, raised the issue of how to structure the new shorter course. We

briefly considered, and rejected, a formula used in many religion departments: offer two options—a one-semester course on the “Religions of the West” and another on the “Religions of the East.” One reason we rejected this option was the difficulty of deciding where to teach Islam.

In departments that structure their courses this way, Islam is usually grouped with Judaism and Christianity as one of the “Religions of the West.” At first this seems quite logical. There are obvious similarities between these three Abrahamic religions. They share a common symbolic universe consisting of a monotheistic God, prophets, angels, and similar understandings of the afterlife and salvation.

But there are difficulties with this approach. In most departments this course is taught by a specialist in Christianity or Judaism. This person, who usually has little graduate training in Islam, must then teach one third of the course on the basis of inaccurate secondary sources or the scant material in introductory World Religion texts. Furthermore, there is an unfortunate tendency to see Islam as a simple religion that requires less time to teach. Perhaps for this reason Islam often winds up getting a week or two at the end of the semester. Often these courses focus on a comparison of the theological elements that link these traditions, an approach that tends to remove Islam from its historical contexts. Furthermore, the comparison of Islam with Judaism and Christianity as they developed in “the West” can create an impression that the Muslim world was primarily focused on the European territories to its west, while in fact Muslims were much more actively involved in the eastern lands of Eurasia, especially in the medieval period.

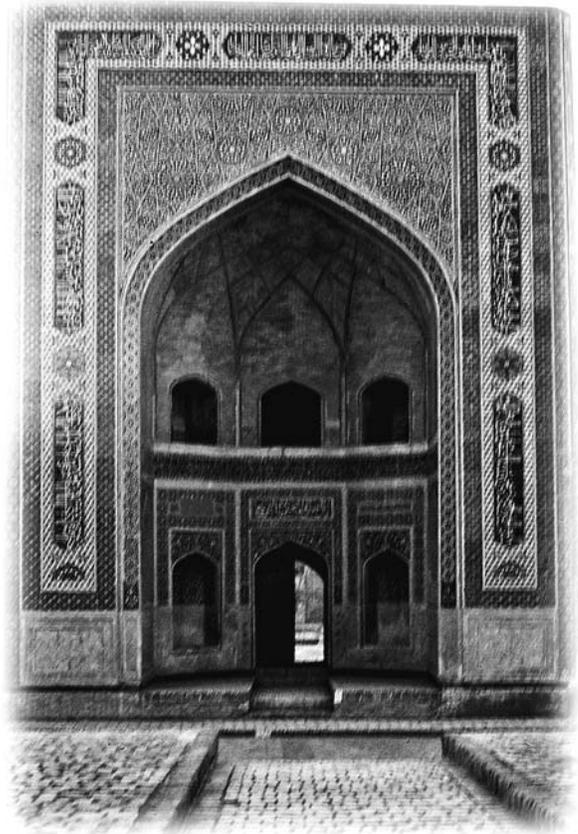
In my department these problems were compounded by the fact that although I am its Islam specialist, I am by training a scholar of South Asian Islam. My secondary specialization in graduate school was Hinduism. Given my expertise it did not make much sense for me to regularly teach Religions of the West, where I would devote large blocks of time to Judaism and Christianity. More importantly, from my perspective as an Asianist and a scholar of Islam, it seemed obvious that any course on “Asian Religions” or “Religions of the East” must necessarily include Islam. After all, Islam has played a crucial role in Asia. Any comprehensive understanding of Asian civilizations and cultures requires an understanding of Islam.

In fact, in many ways Asia became the heartland of Islam. Indonesia is the largest Muslim country. India, a country with a Muslim *minority*, has the second largest population of Muslims—well over 100 million. Together the three modern countries of the Asian subcontinent—India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh—contain the largest concentration of Muslims in the world. Muslim Central Asia—largely ignored by the North American scholarly community because of its political incorporation into the former Soviet Union—was the crucial conduit connecting a vast Asian system of trade and cultural exchange. The founders of many of the major Sufi orders—including Bahauddin Naqshband, Ahmet Yesevi, Najmuddin Kubra, and Muinuddin Chishti—lived and worked in Asia.

Yet, despite the longstanding presence of Muslims in Asia, Islam is regularly omitted from the list of Asian religions. The textbook *Religions of Asia* published by St. Martin’s Press claims in its introduction to offer “a comprehensive introduction to the major religious traditions of Asia”—which it defines as “Hinduism, Buddhism, the religions of China and Japan, and Jainism and Sikhism.”⁵ There is virtually no discussion of Islam, except for passing mention of how Muslims “destroyed Buddhism and converted Hindus.”⁶

Why is one of the most significant religious traditions of Asia commonly omitted from the list of Asian religions? Some argue that Islam is somehow alien to Asia, a point that is difficult to defend. Not only is it arbitrary to define the Arab East, located geographically in Southwest Asia, as lying outside of the Asian continent,⁷ but Islam is no more alien to the Indian subcontinent, Central Asia, China, or Southeast Asia than Christianity or Judaism—which originated in Southwest Asia—are to Europe and North America. And

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Gateway to medieval madrasah complex in the old city of Bukhara, Uzbekistan. Photograph by Vernon James Schubel.

yet no one seriously wants to remove these traditions from the list of “Religions of the West” courses simply because they originated in “the East.”

Some scholars of Asia write about Islam as not only alien to Asia, but as morally or intellectually inferior. K. N. Chaudhuri in his major work on the Asian world system, *Asia Before Europe*, after recognizing the Islamic world as one of the four great Asian civilizations, goes on to assert that “Hindu civilization remained the most formidable adversary of Islam in the Western Indian Ocean and a far greater rival in the mental domain. No Arab or Persian thinker ever approached the intellectual depth or brilliance of Shankara or Ramanuja”⁸—a statement for which he offers no proof except to footnote Das Gupta’s *A History of India Philosophy*. This attitude is not uncommon among certain Asianists, some of whom see Islam as unsophisticated and anti-intellectual compared to the indigenous religions of the region. For these Asianists, Islam will always be the simple religion of desert Arabs, as opposed to the intricate world-views of Hindus, Buddhists, and neo-Confucianists. Of course this position ignores not only the brilliant poetry of Rumi and Attar, but

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also the philosophical texts of Al-Farabi, Ibn Rushd, and Ibn Sina, the mystical theology of Ibn Arabi, and the legal writings of al-Shafi'i.

Over the course of my career, I have had colleagues who argue that Islam is non-Asian because it is monotheistic—unlike *truly* Asian religious systems, which are polytheistic, monistic, or non-theistic. Following this essentialist model, Islam came to Asia an alien conqueror, and maintains that status to this day—a rare concurrence of the most negative viewpoints of chauvinist Orientalists and extremist Hindu nationalists. I argue that such arguments are both inaccurate and rooted in a lack of knowledge about the way that Islam has for centuries been integrated into the larger Asian context.

ISLAM IN ASIAN STUDIES

At Kenyon College we have developed an interdisciplinary concentration in Asian Studies. Our program is in many ways unique in that it is inherently comparative. Rather than study just one region of Asia, students are required to take courses dealing with both East Asia and South Asia. The program culminates in a senior capstone course that emphasizes this comparative aspect. A central theme of this course has been the notion that there is an interconnected “Asian World system.” It has become increasingly clear that once we stop teaching China and India as self-contained, isolated regions, it

becomes necessary to include the neglected areas of Muslim Central Asia that border and connect East and South Asia, the region Janet Abu Lughod refers to in her book *Before European Hegemony* as the “Mideast Heartland.”⁹ While it is possible to teach the history and cultures of East and South Asia without reference to the Muslim territories that border them, to do so produces a distorted image of the region and ignores the complex historical processes that shaped it.

In particular, the role of Central Asia in the larger history of Asia is crucial for understanding the specific histories of China and India. The impact of both Muslim and non-Muslim Mongols on China has been a significant aspect of Chinese history. Yuan Dynasty China was the result of the interaction of Han, Mongol, Buddhist, and Muslim cultures.¹⁰ An understanding of the role of Central Asian Turks in the development of the institutions of the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire is crucial for understanding Indian history, which is also inexplicably bound up with the history of Central Asian Turko-Mongol rulers like Babur and Shah Ismail. The legacy of Timur and the Timurids casts a powerful shadow over all of Asia; understanding that impact is essential to any deep understanding of Asia. By understanding Central Asia we learn, in the end, a tremendous amount about East and South Asia as well. And that requires an understanding of Islam.

An understanding of Islam is also crucial to an effective reading of important Muslim primary sources dealing with Asia—such as the travelogue of Ibn Batuta and the *Ain-i Akbari*. Reading the account of the fourteenth-century North African traveler Ibn Batuta, and his ability to travel all the way across North Africa and Asia into China and Southeast Asia by relying on the hospitality of Muslim co-religionists, in a meaningful way requires an understanding of his social role as a Muslim scholar (*alim*), his belief in Sufi saints (*auliyah*), and the role of Sufi orders (*tariqats*) in medieval Islam.



Qawwali performers in the courtyard of the shrine of the saint Muinuddin Chishti in Ajmeer, India. Photograph by Vernon James Schubel.



Alevi performance at festival in Central Anatolia. Photograph by Vernon James Schubel.

Within our Asian Studies program we recently discussed whether or not to count Arabic as an Asian language for the purposes of our interdisciplinary concentration. Given the importance of Arabic as a scholarly and ritual language for the nearly three-quarter of a billion Muslims living in Asia, the tremendous number of primary sources written by Muslims about Asia, as well as primary Islamic sources such as Tirmidhi's collection of *hadith* (accounts of the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad), and numerous Sufi treatises written in Arabic, most of us agreed that it would be intellectually incoherent to not accept Arabic as an appropriate language for Asian studies.

TEACHING ISLAM AS AN ASIAN RELIGION

Balancing the Contextual and the Universal

Islam, like any religion, needs to be understood not only as a body of ideas, but as a lived faith. And that requires the teaching of context. Teaching Islam as an Asian tradition allows for the kind of contextual approach that brings Islam alive for students. My first academic exposure to Islam came in a course on the Religions of India taught by the late Professor Hyla Converse at Oklahoma State University in 1976. When we came to the section on Islam, I was not looking forward to it. We had already covered what I initially imagined would be the interesting elements of the course—the wonderful narratives of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the philosophical intricacies of Buddhist thought, and the profound asceticism of Jain monks and *sannyasins* (Hindu ascetics). At the time, I thought of Islam as simply a sterner version of Christianity and Judaism—a textual religion of laws established by a patriarchal deity presenting humanity with a list of rules. To my surprise, Professor Converse began her discussion with spectacular slides of the Taj Mahal—walking us through the architecture, connecting it to Qur'anic motifs and theological

doctrines. This was followed by compelling images of the rituals and festivities at the tombs of Sufi saints. Then and there I made the decision to focus my scholarly life on Islam, to explore the religion and cultures that produced these remarkable artifacts.

UNIVERSAL ELEMENTS OF ISLAM

Of course a contextual approach to teaching about Islam cannot lose sight of the fact that a worldwide ummah (Muslim community) shares certain basic principles and institutions. Thus it is important to begin with a definition and description of Islam as a universal phenomenon. In my courses, I define Islam as a historical process that consists of all the beliefs and practices that have emerged from the event of the revelation of the *Qur'an* to Muhammad. Accordingly, Muslims can be defined as all those who look back to that event, and the events following from it, as the most important and meaningful events in history, the most significant source of normative guidance for themselves, their community, and ultimately all of humanity. This definition allows for the inclusion of the vast diversity of Muslims—Sunni, Shi'i, and Sufi—in all their permutations.

With this definition in place, I argue that despite the tremendous diversity within Islam, all Muslims share core theological categories. These are the three *usul al-din* or “roots of religion” common to both Sunni and Shi'i Muslims. The *usul al-din* are: *tauhid*, the unity of God, *nubuwwat*, belief in prophets, and *qiyamat*, belief in the Day of Judgement. I use the *usul al-din* as an organizing framework in all of my courses dealing with Islam. Among Muslims the categories themselves are not in debate, although the interpretation of each has been debated within the ummah. For example, *tauhid* means something very different for ecstatic mystics like al-Hallaj who stress the primacy of divine union, than it does for “fundamentalist” Wahabis, who hold to a pristine and absolute separation of the Creator from His Creation.



The tomb of the Prophet Ayub (Job) in Bukhara, Uzbekistan. Photograph by Vernon James Schubel.

Along with these categories I identify two basic modes of piety within Islam. I define these as (1) “the piety of allegiance to text and community” and (2) “the piety of personal allegiance.” The “piety of allegiance to text and community” encompasses the *Qur’ān* as a focus of piety, as well as the general sacrality of the ummah that is an essential part of non-mystical Sunni piety. Closely connected to these is the attempt to create (or uncover) a body of Islamic law (*shariah*) rooted in the *Qur’ān* and the Sunnah of the Prophet as a basis for both ritual and social behavior. The piety of personal allegiance—most recognizable in Shi’ism and Sufism—manifests itself in terms of devotion to holy persons as a necessity for proper religious orientation. This piety is expressed in devotion to the Prophet Muhammad, both as an exemplar and, for many Muslims, as a continuing spiritual presence; in the Shi’i devotion to their Imams; and in the Sufi’s belief in and devotion to Muslim saints (*auliyah*).

These modes of piety are not exclusive of each other—most Muslims have articulated both to differing degrees—although the meanings and consequences of these allegiances have been points of disagreement within the ummah since the earliest period of Islam. While these elements exist as universal themes throughout the Muslim world, they are articulated differently by different groups and individuals in different contexts.

TEACHING ISLAM IN ASIA

Having established these basic categories of Islam, one can proceed to discuss the ways they have been articulated in various Asian contexts. It should always be remembered that Islam never entered anywhere in Asia as an abstraction: it was always carried in by people who brought their culture and language with them. Islam was carried throughout Asia in large part by Central Asian Turks who brought a particular Central Asian Islamic worldview steeped in a belief in Sufi saints. Asian Islam was also influenced by the influx of Arab traders, Persian religious scholars, and various political elites from throughout Eurasia. Most importantly, this Islam was transformed by

indigenous converts who found their own ways of expressing the universal aspects of greater Islam.

Remember too that there were important elements of continuity between Islamic Asia and previous “Asian world systems.” For example, there was once a “Buddhist world system” that covered much of the same area and involved trade, systems of pilgrimage, and traveling to discover knowledge. Islam did not destroy this previous Asian system but rather adapted, continued, and built upon it—often incorporating Buddhist pilgrimage sites as Islamic ones.

Thus, the Islamic ummah in Asia was multi-cultural and multi-ethnic in nature, incorporating a wide variety of individuals and communities. There were cities, peasants and nomads, immigrants and converts, and a variety of ethnic, linguistic, and tribal groups whose relations were in constant flux. In this context, I feel it is important for students to understand the significance of the contributions of vernacular languages like Uighur, Urdu, Panjabi, Indonesian, and Chinese to Islamic literatures, as well as the role of Persian and Chagatay Turkic (along with Arabic) as *lingua francas* connecting the Asian Islamic world.

Alongside this linguistic, ethnic, and social diversity was tremendous religious diversity. Every form of Islam was present: Twelver and Ismaili Shi’i Muslims, shariah-minded Sunnis, both sober and ecstatic Sufis. The interaction between Muslims of different viewpoints in South Asia provides a tremendous opportunity for the study of Islamic diversity. As for Muslim relations with non-Muslims, these were also complex. For example, some Muslims saw Hindus as unbelievers to be subjugated. Others sought to find a rapprochement with Hindus by proving on the basis of the *Upanishads* that they could be counted as fellow People of the Book (*ahl-i kitab*) who shared a belief in one single God. There were also important resonances between Islam and the other religions of Asia, which allowed dialogue and even facilitated conversion. Just as the Muslim pilgrimage (*hajj*) was originally Islamicized from a previously pagan

religious performance, elements of pre-Islamic Asian religion were transformed. Throughout Asia, ancient Buddhist and Hindu festivals and sites of pilgrimage were incorporated into Sufi devotion. In India, Muslim converts not only Islamicized previous cultural practices, but Islam also affected the development of Hinduism. For example, the similarities between Sufi pilgrimage (*ziyarat*) and rituals associated with Maharashtran saints such as Nam Dev likely show the result of Muslim influence, as does the poetry of Kabir and Guru Nanak. Similarly it is clear that some Hindus saw dervishes, *malangs*, *qalnadars*, and other Muslim holy persons as variations on the indigenous South Asian theme of renouncers.

Asian Islam tended to emphasize belief in Sufi saints (*auliyah*). Sufi *pirs* (spiritual masters) have long been venerated both as living individuals and as the hierarchy of invisible *auliyah* whose tombs function simultaneously as pilgrimage sites and as palaces for the true spiritual government of the world. The network of these Sufi tombs constitutes a Pan-Asian sacred geography. Despite opposition in some circles, Asian Islam in general supported the “piety of personal allegiance” both in terms of Shi’ism and Sufism.

Along with this belief in Sufism, the body of Islamic law, the shariah, has also remained a crucial aspect of piety for many Muslims in Asia, uniting Asian Muslims to each other and the larger Muslim world. In many ways, aspects of shariah, especially those related to ritual—prayer, fasting, almsgiving, etc.—create a common body of practice and a religious aesthetic that have linked Muslims to each other across cultural and national boundaries. However, shariah is in many ways the most difficult aspect of Islam in Asia to teach to modern students. For many students the very notion of religious law seems like a harsh anachronism. In particular, specific and controversial laws referring to women and criminal punishments are

difficult to accept—both by modern American students and progressive Muslims. In this context, I think it important to remind students that Muslims are often as lax and ambivalent about legal religious observance as their Christian and Jewish counterparts. More importantly, they should understand that particularly in the medieval context the shariah has been, in fact, a popular institution addressing the needs of ordinary people, allowing participation in spiritual and devotional life to all classes, and most importantly, providing a theoretical limit to the capricious power of rulers. I do my best to get students to understand that Islam is not identical with Islamic law. Shariah is only one way of manifesting piety and belief, and many Muslims reject elements of Islamic law, either because they belong to communities that do not define their piety in terms of shariah or find aspects of it unacceptable in the modern world.

Finally, teaching about Islam in Asia requires an emphasis not only on the textual tradition, but also on the activities of ordinary people. To that end I find it crucial to present a variety of cultural artifacts that demonstrate the ways in which Islam creates an Islamic environment. I cannot emphasize enough the value of video, film, and music as teaching aids. Exposure to music, architecture, and ritual performance helps students appreciate and understand Islam. My students have shown an immediate appreciation for the recordings of the great Pakistani *qawwali* singer Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and the Turkish Alevi musician Arif Sag.

These sorts of materials help to counter any preconception that Islam is only about books and the ideas in them. Islam is as much about sight and sound as it is about the mind. Hearing *Qur’ān* recitation helps students to understand that there is more to know about a text than its content. Reading Rumi’s devotional poetry to his *pir* Shah Shams is one thing, but seeing his poetry used in a *zikr* (Sufi



Shah-i Zinda shrine complex in Samarqand, Uzbekistan. Photograph by Vernon James Schubel.



Shrine of Haji Bektash, the Central Asia saint who brought the Bektashi tradition to Anatolia. Photograph by Vernon James Schubel.

ritual) or watching a pilgrim lovingly lay a *chador* (cloth covering) on the tomb of her *pir* puts such textual materials into a much more meaningful context.

As most of my research has been in Asia, most of my slides and videos come from that region. It is a testimony to the way that Islam has truly become an Asian religion that I can use those materials not only in my courses on Asia but in my general Islam courses as well. The religious practices of Asian Muslims—while clearly rooted in their particular cultures—are also obviously part of the larger world of Islam.

CONCLUSION

It is indeed unfortunate that Islam is often neglected as an Asian Religion. It is, in fact, in many ways the quintessential Pan-Asian religion, spanning linguistic and cultural boundaries. Long after the decline of Arab power, Islam flourished in its new Asian heartland, where it spawned new achievements that transformed not only Islam but the entirety of Asia. Asian Muslims took the universal themes of global Islam and created their own local and regional manifestations of Islamic piety. Asian expressions of Muslim piety, such as the tomb of Ahmet Yesevi in Kazakhstan, the celebrations of *'urs* (death anniversaries) at the tombs of Indian Sufis, the Urdu poetry of Ghalib and Mir Anis, and the Sufi rituals of Naqshbandis in Xinjiang, are simultaneously manifestations of a universal Islamic piety and expressions of the particular cultures that created them. They are clear evidence that despite its Arab origins Islam has truly become an Asian religious tradition. ■

RESOURCES FOR TEACHING

BOOKS

John R. Bowen, *Muslims through Discourse: Religion and Ritual in Gayo Society*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993. Excellent book on Southeast Asian Islam.

Carl Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism*. Boston: Shambhala, 1997. Fine easy-to-read introduction to Islamic mysticism.

Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization, Vols. 1–3*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974. Despite its difficulty and density, still the most coherent and balanced account of Islamic history. Volume II is the most useful for understanding Islamic Asia.

Azim Nanji, ed., *The Muslim Almanac: A Reference Work on the History, Faith, Culture, and Peoples of Islam*. Detroit: Gale Research, 1996. For teachers, an excellent resource with useful materials on Asian Islam.

Vernon James Schubel, *Religious Performance in Contemporary Islam: Shi'i Devotional Rituals in South Asia*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993. My book is an attempt to address the nature of South Asian Shi'i Islam and its relationship to the larger Islamic context.

MUSIC

I suggest the CD *Shahbazz* by Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan on Real World Records as an excellent introduction to the power of the South Asian Sufi music of *qawwali*. Similarly the CD *Asya Iclerinden Balkanlara Saz* (the *Saz* from Inner Asia to the Balkans) on Kalan Records is a masterful overview of stringed instrument traditions from throughout Eurasia, including wonderful pieces of Alevi and other Islamic music.

VIDEOS

I am a Sufi, I am a Muslim. Production, Herman Meyssen; written and directed by Dirk Dumon. Princeton, N.J.: Films for the Humanities and Sciences, 1996. I suggest this film for its striking images of shrine culture in South Asia.

WEB SITES

The best all-around Web site for understanding Islam is the one maintained by Professor Alan Godlas of the University of Georgia at <http://www.arches.uga.edu/~godlas/>. A remarkable site with links to most of the useful and reliable information on the Web, it includes numerous links to material on Islam in Asia.

NOTES

1. Richard Bulliet, *Islam: The View from the Edge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 5.
2. Bulliet, 5–6.
3. Bulliet, 6–8.
4. See in particular Marshall G. S. Hodgson's groundbreaking description of Islamic history in his three-volume masterwork, *The Venture of Islam*. I have also heard the late Marilyn Waldman of Ohio State University speak eloquently on this subject.
5. John Y. Fenton, et al., eds., *Religions of Asia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), v–vi.
6. *Religions of Asia*, 186.
7. Defining the continent of Asia is always a difficult and controversial endeavor. Technically it could be argued that there is in fact no such geographical entity. Rather there is a huge expanse called Eurasia. But for cultural reasons it makes sense to divide the Eurasian landmass into Asia and Europe. While I am perfectly comfortable including the "Arab East" in Asia, I know many scholars who are not. Therefore, for the purposes of this paper, I am defining Asia to include the traditional territories of East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, along with Central Asia—including Afghanistan, Anatolia, the Caucasus, and the Iranian plateau. The logic behind this is that I believe it necessary culturally to include within Asia all territories that came under the political and cultural dominance of the Turks and Mongols in the medieval period. This links such diverse regions as Anatolia, Iran, and Indo-Pakistan—in fact, most of the Silk Road region. Another option would be to leave out the Silk Road region entirely, but that, I believe, is intellectually indefensible.
8. K. N. Chaudhuri, *Asia Before Europe: Economy and Civilization in the Indian Ocean from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 53.
9. Janet Abu Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 135–247.
10. I am grateful to my colleague Prof. Ruth Dunnell for this insight.

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