ries, universal histories, and biographies of the Prophet. Historians most often belonged to wealthy, conservative scholarly families and usually wrote their histories on the side, while being paid to do something else. Their approach was also conservative, although not without innovation. Many histories were based on earlier works, including epitome (ikhti*sar, mukhtasar*), continuation (*dhayl, silah*), and recasting (*tahdhib*).

The medieval Muslim historians' methods are in some ways familiar even in the present day (or were until the advent of computers). They worked from notebooks, slips or cards, and in some cases diaries, and completed rough drafts that then would be polished into a fair copy. They used sigla and abbreviations in citing sources. The accuracy and regularity of source citation varied. Some historians copied freely from earlier works without acknowledging their sources, others cited early works through unacknowledged intermediary sources, others cited works more carefully, and a number of authors (e.g., al-Ya`qubi and Ibn Hajar al-`Asqalani) provided relatively complete bibliographies at the beginning of their works. Some medieval works even sported the equivalent of the modern jacket-blurb, a laudatory appraisal (*taqriz*) requested from a well-disposed colleague and written on the work's cover or opening pages.

At once an entertaining introduction, a handy reference, and a thoughtful essay, *Islamic Historiography* is well worth acquiring.

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Excellence and Precedence: Medieval Islamic Discourse on Legitimate Leadership

Asma Afsaruddin
Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 2002. 322 pages.

The question of the imamate or the caliphate, the designation of the Muslim community's legitimate leader, is undoubtedly one of the most important in Islamic history. The first civil war (656-61), which broke out with the murder of Caliph `Uthman, had a profound effect not only on subsequent Islamic political and religious institutions, but also on later Muslims' views, accounts, and discussions of the community's early history. This bitter conflict, which necessarily involved extensive controversy concerning the identity and required qualifications of the community's legitimate leader,

laid the foundations for an enduring theological split among Islam's three major "sects": the Shi`ites, the Sunnis, and the Kharijis – one that would persist long after the war ended with the assassination of `Ali.

Polemics among these groups, and among subcategories of the three main groups, each of which endeavored to justify its contemporary views on legitimate leadership and sectarian identity, were a creative force in many fields. Bodies of theoretical discussion, primarily in theology but also in law and other fields, grew around these polemics, using proof-texts from the Qur'an and Hadith, as well as historical accounts, as evidence in arguments about the Companions, their relationships with the Prophet, their relative merits and other moral qualities, and their dealings with each other. Though focused on a much earlier period and concerning conflicts long over, these polemics were all the more sensitive and emotionally charged because of their contemporary implications concerning the legitimacy of the sectarian groups' beliefs.

Her work reveals, by examining one important intellectual exchange, some of the processes by which this body of theoretical discussion grew. It analyzes Bin*a' al-*Maq*a*lah al-F*a*tim*i*yah f*i* Naqd al-Ris*a*lah *al-*`Uthm*a*n*i*yah, a seventh-/thirteenth-century polemical Shi`ite work on the imamate, itself a refutation of a third-/ninth-century polemical work. The author, Jamal al-Din Ahmad ibn Musa ibn Tawus (d. 673/1274-75), belonged to an established Twelver Shi`ite scholarly family from Hillah, southern Iraq. Both he and his brother, Radiy al-Din `Ali ibn Tawus (d. 664/1266), were important thirteenth-century scholars, although Radiy al-Din has been better served than Jamal al-Din in modern scholarship since the publication of Kohlberg's *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work: Ibn Tawus and His Library* (Leiden: 1992).

The *Bina' al-Maqalah* refutes an anti-Shi`ite work by the famous ninth-century litterateur, Mu`tazili theologian, and polymath `Amr ibn Bahr al-Jahiz (d. 255/868). The book against which Ibn Tawus wrote *Bina' al-Maqalah, al-Risalah al-`Uthmaniyah*, is itself an anti-Shi`ite polemic upholding the views of the `Uthmaniyah, who revered the first three caliphs (Abu Bakr, `Umar, and `Uthman) and rejected `Ali as a legitimate caliph. However, his arguments stressing Abu Bakr's superior qualifications for the caliphate are closely related to anti-Shi`ite polemics written by mainstream Sunni theologians, who generally accepted `Ali as a legitimate caliph, but one inferior in excellence to his three predecessors. Afsaruddin draws on al-Jahiz's work extensively in her discussion of its refutation, so that one might characterize this study as a comparative analysis of the two works.

This book is divided into an introduction, six chapters, and a conclusion. The first four chapters have to do with the arguments put forward to prove the right of Abu Bakr or `Ali to have succeeded the Prophet as caliph. Chapter 1, "The Excellence of Precedence," discusses the conversions of Abu Bakr and `Ali, and the relative merit assigned to them for their early conversion. Chapter 2, "The Precedence of Excellence," looks at the virtues of Abu Bakr and `Ali with attention to generosity, abstemiousness, veracity, and valor. Chapter 3, "The Epistemology of Excellence," covers the importance of knowledge as a requirement for the imamate. Chapter 4, "The Excellence of Propinquity to the Prophet: Kinship vs. Companionship," reviews the claims made about the relative strength and virtue associated with the close relationships that Abu Bakr and `Ali enjoyed with the Prophet. In the last two chapters, Afsaruddin deals with some of the evidence used in making these arguments and focuses on hadith reports and Qur'anic verses: Chapter 5, "Canon of Excellence I: Hadith as Proof-Texts and the Principle of Nass," and chapter 6, "Canon of Excellence II: Qur'anic Verses as Proof-Texts."

This work is less about what the correct theological answer to the controversy is than about the historical development and effects of the argument itself. This controversy had wide-ranging effects on Islamic religious literature in various genres. This might be expected in theological treatises, for the imamate early on became one of the main divisions of Islamic dogma (usul al-din) or theology (kalam). It also had a profound effect on hadith criticism, Qur'anic exegesis, histories, biographies (sirah), and other genres. One of Afsaruddin's main accomplishments is showing in detail to what extent the interpretation of the Qur'an, Hadith, and early Islamic history was colored by this controversy. Another is her showing the importance of such little-studied genres as *manaqib* or *fada'il* (virtuous or excellent qualities) and *awa'il* (firsts), and their connection with such concepts as precedence (sabq, *sabiqah*), which played a major role in Sunni-Shi`ite polemics.

The work includes a few errors in translation. Ahmad ibn Hanbal is described as "the great learned shaykh, a quarter of those who are affiliated with the sunna" (p. 215). It is not "quarter" (*rub`*) that is intended here, but rather "stalwart" (*rab`*). The theologian al-Baghdadi defined the Ahl al-Sunnah as "those who showed preference (*tafdil*) for Abu Bakr, `Umar, and those who were after him, even though they differed with regard to the respective merits of `Ali and `Uthman" (p. 20). This should be "... considered Abu Bakr the best, then `Umar, then those after (`Umar) ..." An unfortunate error is the translation of "al-Khidr," the character associated with

the unnamed mystical teacher of Moses in *Surat al-Kahf*, as "vegetables" (*al-khudar*) (p. 174). While such errors certainly affect the reader's understanding of particular points, they are relatively minor in terms of the overall presentation.

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Cultural Diversity and Islam

Abdul Aziz Said and Meena Sharify-Funk, eds.
Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2003. 240 pages.

As a compilation of papers presented at an international conference (1998) on "Cultural Diversity and Islam" at American University in Washington, DC, this volume brings together the contributions of a wide array of scholars. It has four sections and twelve chapters dealing with diversity and/or pluralism in relation to Islam.

The first section, "Cultural Diversity in Civilizational Perspective," provides a macro (and at times comparative) perspective on Islam and diversity. In chapter 1, the editors prepare the ground for discussion by providing some definitions, potential questions, and chapter summaries. They also explain why they prefer the concept of diversity over pluralism.

In chapter 2, Seyyed Hossein Nasr discusses what he calls "a theoretical and practical dilemma" in Islam: unity vs. diversity. Entitled "Unity and Diversity in Islam and Islamic Civilization," this chapter makes general statements about the nature of diversity in Islam and how unity and uniformity differ. Nasr argues that "Islam's refusal to reduce this unity-in-diversity to mere uniformity, far from weakening the faith, has been a major cause of its strength through the ages" (p. 33). To understand more fully how Islam created a unitary civilization that has thrived on diversity, he looks at different cultural zones within Islam.

The issue of Islam and diversity is often discussed in reference to the assertion of Islam's compatibility with democracy as well as the challenges produced by globalization, which brought Islam into closer contact with western and other cultures. It is uncommon for scholars addressing such issues to raise the question of power.

Sulayman S. Nyang's excellent article in chapter 3 brings the issue of power into the equation. Looking at what he calls the factors and