



The Lives of Muhammad

By Kecia Ali

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The Lives of Muhammad By Kecia Ali

Recent outbursts sparked by a viral video and controversial cartoons powerfully illustrate the passions and sensitivities that continue to surround the depiction of the seventh-century founder of Islam. *The Lives of Muhammad* delves into the many ways the Prophet's life story has been told from the earliest days of Islam to the present, by both Muslims and non-Muslims. Emphasizing the major transformations since the nineteenth century, Kecia Ali shows that far from being mutually opposed, these various perspectives have become increasingly interdependent.

Since the nineteenth century, two separate streams of writing, one hagiographic and the other polemical, have merged into a single, contentious story about the life of Muhammad. Protestant missionaries, European Orientalists, Indian and Egyptian modernists, and American voices across the spectrum, including preachers, scholars, Islamophobes, journalists, academics, and new-age gurus, debated Muhammad's character and the facts of his life. In the process, texts written symbolically came to be read literally. Muhammad's accomplishments as a religious and political leader, his military encounters with Meccans and Medinan Jews, and a subject of perennial interest?his relationships with women, including his young wife Aisha, are among the key subjects writers engaged, repurposing early materials for new circumstances.

Many of the ideas about Muhammad that Muslims embrace today?Muhammad the social reformer, Muhammad the consummate leader, Muhammad the ideal husband?arose in tandem and in tension with Western depictions. These were in turn shaped by new ideas about religion, sexuality, and human accomplishments.

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Editorial Review

Review

[Ali] examines Muhammad biographies as a genre to which both Muslim and non-Muslim authors have contributed... The modern telling of Muhammad's biography appears in Ali's work as a collaboration between Muslims and non-Muslims, revivalists and reformists, sympathetic outsiders and antagonistic critics who drew not only from a more or less stable outline of Muhammad's life, but also from worldwide notions of great men and from certain controversies... For Ali, the development of Muhammad's biography serves to undermine the famed clash-of-civilizations thesis, in which the West and the Muslim world exist as separate and self-contained wholes. In her view, the mutual influence between Muslim and non-Muslim writers presents a world of shared values and assumptions about what constitutes authoritative evidence, in which writers who aim to defend Muhammad and those who seek to discredit him together produce a body of literature that is neither East nor West... Ali's coverage of historical shifts among Muhammad's followers and opponents alike challenges our ideas about universal norms... *The Lives of Muhammad* leads its reader to rethink assumptions about history, biography and the imagined East-West divide... [It] serves to skillfully complicate modern debates over Muhammad's life and character, and his relevance for modern Muslims.

(Michael Muhammad Knight *Washington Post* 2014-12-15)

Ali offers a controversial thesis: Biographies of Muhammad have taken a Protestant turn. She focuses on Muhammad not as a source of metaphysical truth or personal piety but as a historical person with his own life story. Just as depictions of the historical Jesus are ever-changing, refashioned to fit new circumstances, so is the quest for the historical Muhammad... No one can finish Ali's book without a renewed curiosity about reading, interpretation, and authority. (Bruce R. Lawrence *Chronicle of Higher Education* 2014-10-06)

The Lives of Muhammad is not merely a biography, but a biography of biographies. It's a book devoted to unraveling the story of the Muslim prophet over the last 1,500 years and a serious contribution to the debate over what is real, what is apocryphal and what is myth... *The Lives of Muhammad* has set the bar high and it is [Ali's] best work to date. It is exhaustive, well-researched and an amazing contribution to the humanities. (Shyam K. Sriram *PopMatters* 2014-11-11)

Ali takes an innovative approach to a biography of Muhammad, comparing the various accounts of his life in what is probably the only book to do so comprehensively. She concludes that, as sensibilities evolved in the time since Muhammad's life, the biographies of the prophet expanded or even altered in keeping with prevailing mores. (*Publishers Weekly* 2014-10-06)

An extraordinarily insightful and illuminating book?well-written and highly readable. Henceforth it will be essential reading alongside any biography of Muhammad. (Leila Ahmed, Harvard University)

Kecia Ali has written an engaging and accessible book for anyone wishing to understand a wide variety of historical and current perspectives on Muhammad's life. (Mona Siddiqui, University of Edinburgh)

This book explores the stories around not just Prophet Muhammad, but also those close to him. The primary focus is to uncover the motivations behind these stories, and trace the shifting emphasis that evolved as these narratives were told and retold. These stories were tailored and pressed into service by both opponents and proponents of Muslims from the advent of Islam to contemporary times. (Muhammed Hassanali *Booklist* 2014-10-15)

Ali attempts to uncover not only the stories of the Prophet Muhammad and those close to him but also the motivations behind recording or retelling these stories... Ali traces the shifting emphasis on the narratives through time and across several authors who crafted these stories and deployed them either to legitimize or discredit Muhammad's prophethood. (Muhammed Hassanali *Library Journal* 2014-09-05)

Muhammad presents two violently incompatible faces to the historian. For devout Muslims, relying both on the Quran and the vast corpus of sacred traditions, the hadith, he serves as the unimpeachable model for human behavior, not only in matters of faith and ritual but in the most humdrum aspects of daily life, from marital and business relations to personal hygiene, including even the proper use of the toothpick. For non-Muslims, drawing on the same sources, he has been viewed from the earliest times as lustful and barbarous, as a raving impostor aping the ancient prophets; nowadays he is further charged with misogyny and pedophilia. The contrast is so stark as to appear irreconcilable. Instead of attempting to skirt this divergence, **Ali** uses it to structure her inquiry. (Eric Ormsby *Wall Street Journal* 2015-01-09)

About the Author

Kecia Ali is Associate Professor of Religion at Boston University.

Users Review

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newspapers, book, and soon. You will see that now, a lot of publisher in which print many kinds of book. The book that recommended for you is The Lives of Muhammad this publication consist a lot of the information of the condition of this world now. This book was represented how can the world has grown up. The language styles that writer use to explain it is easy to understand. The actual writer made some investigation when he makes this book. This is why this book suited all of you.

Matthew Sewell:

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