Understanding Islamic Law

(Sharī’a)
Understanding Islamic Law (Sharī’ā)
SECOND EDITION

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Bismillah ir Raḥmān ir Raḥīm
(In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful)

Christians and Muslims are brothers and sisters. We must therefore consider ourselves and conduct ourselves as such. Together, we must say no to hatred, to revenge and to violence, particularly that violence which is perpetrated in the name of a religion or of God himself. God is peace, salām.

His Holiness, Pope Francis (1936–), Bishop of Rome
Address and Meeting with the Muslim Community
Central Mosque
Bangui, Central African Republic
30 November 2015

May the pure, brilliant sun of bodhicitta [enlightened mind]
Dawn in each and every heart and mind
Dispelling the darkness of suffering and confusion
Unstoppably — until all are illumined and awakened.

Lama Surya Das, Awakening the Buddha Within: Tibetan Wisdom for the Western World
Dedication

To the trinity of great women in my life:

My patient mother, Barbara Mae Mallory (1937-2003), who in the 1960s introduced me to the beauty of Islam through Islamic arts and calligraphy exhibited at the New York Metropolitan Museum, and to the spiritualism of Islam from the poetry of Maulana Jalâluddin Rumi (1207-1273), whom she read even on her last day.

My dear wife, Kara Tan Bhala, who grew up in a Muslim country, Malaysia, in a Buddhist Chinese family and attended Catholic Convent School, witnessed in many countries the evils of ignorance and extremism, and rightly pushed me to author this textbook out of her compassion for people, regardless of their faith, so that they may be better educated.

Our little gift from God (Allâh), our daughter, Shera Tan Bhala, who has travelled with us to no fewer than 29 countries, many of them Islamic, and helped us see them better through her loving eyes, generous heart, and empathetic spirit, and for whom I pray this textbook makes her world more peaceful than mine.
Summary of Contents

Preface to the Second Edition xxxv
Acknowledgments xxxix
Introduction · Ten Threshold Issues xlv

Part One: Origins
Chapter 1 · Muhammad (PBUH) Before Prophethood (570/571–610 A.D.) 1
Chapter 2 · Muhammad (PBUH) as Prophet (610–632 A.D.) 27
Chapter 3 · Holy Qur’an (610–650 A.D.): Revelation, Compilation, and Tenets 73

Part Two: Golden Age
Chapter 4 · Caliphs of Mecca and Medina (Rashidun) (632–661 A.D.) 115
Chapter 5 · Umayyad Caliphate (661–750 A.D.) 123
Chapter 6 · Abbasid Caliphate (750–1258 A.D.) 137
Chapter 7 · The Crusades (1095–1272 A.D.) 153

Part Three: Schism
Chapter 8 · Sunni — Shī‘ite Split (632–680 A.D.) 169
Chapter 9 · Shi‘ism and Its Imāms (680–940 A.D.) 191

Part Four: Last Great Era?
Chapter 10 · Ottoman Turkish Empire (11th Century – 1923 A.D.) 215
Chapter 11 · Moghul Indian Empire (1504–1857 A.D.) 239

Part Five: Theory — Classical Sources of Jurisprudence (Uṣūl Al-Fiqh)
Chapter 12 · Fundamental Sources: Holy Qur’an and Sunnah 257
Chapter 13 · Secondary Sources: Ijma’ and Qiyās 283
Chapter 14 · Controversial Additional Sources 299

Part Six: Practice
Chapter 15 · Five Pillars of Islam 317
Chapter 16 · Four Sunnite Schools of Islamic Law 349

Part Seven: Commercial Law, Capitalism, and Global Trade
Chapter 17 · Islam and Capitalist Economic Growth 369
Chapter 18 · Property Law: Ownership and Property 389
Chapter 19 · Property Law: Public Property, Private Property, and Possession 411
Chapter 20 · Property Law: Protecting and Restricting Private Ownership 439
Chapter 21 · Contract Law: General Principles and Contract Formation 471
Chapter 22 · Contract Law: Types of Contracts 493
Chapter 23 · Contract Law: Performance, Terms, and Remedies 519
Chapter 24 · Business Associations Law: Traditional Types of Partnership 535
Chapter 25 · Business Associations Law: Modern Partnerships and Agricultural Ventures 573

Part Eight: Banking Law, Capitalism, and Global Finance
Chapter 26 · Banking Law: Risk (Gharar) 587
Chapter 27 · Banking Law: Interest (Ribā) 601
Chapter 28 · Banking Law: Legal Devices (Hiyal) and the Prohibition on Interest (Ribā) 633
Chapter 29 · Finance (Tamweel): Islamic Bonds (Ṣukūk) and Securitization 673
Chapter 30 · Finance (Tamweel): Types and Risks of Islamic Bonds (Ṣukūk) 715
Chapter 31 · Finance (Tamweel): Insurance (Takaful) and Money Transfers (Ḥawālah) 733
Chapter 32 · Finance (Tamweel): Innovative Instruments and Markets 757

Part Nine: Family Law and Women
Chapter 33 · Marriage and Divorce 785
Chapter 34 · Polygamy and Mixed Marriages 817
Chapter 35 · Rights of Wife 841
Chapter 36 · Women and Clothes 867
Chapter 37 · Women and Work 891

Part Ten: Family Law and Children
Chapter 38 · Rearing Children 915
Chapter 39 · Contraception 925
Chapter 40 · Abortion 969

Part Eleven: Inheritance Law
Chapter 41 · Wills (Waṣâyā), Charitable Trusts (Waqfs), and Euthanasia 1007
Chapter 42 · Law of Succession 1041

Part Twelve: Criminal Law (ʿUqūbat)
Chapter 43 · Key Concepts 1075
Chapter 44 · Claims of God (Ḥaqq Allāh): Sex Crimes 1103
Chapter 45 · Claims of God (Ḥaqq Allāh): Drinking and Stealing 1133
Chapter 46 · Claims of God (Ḥaqq Allāh): Converting and Religious Freedom 1155
Chapter 47 · Private Claims (Ḥaqq Ādami) 1191

Part Thirteen: International Law
Chapter 48 · Law of War 1211
Chapter 49 · Jihād (Struggle) 1243
Chapter 50 · Terrorism 1261

Part Fourteen: Glossary of Arabic Terms 1295

Index 1361
# Contents

Preface to the Second Edition  xxxv
Acknowledgments  xxxix

Introduction · Ten Threshold Issues  xlv
1. What Does “Sharî’a” Mean?  xlv
2. What Does “Islam” Mean?  xlviii
3. Use of Name “Allâh” and Promise of Muhammad to Saint Catherine (628 A.D.)?  xlix
4. Does Arabic Matter?  liv
5. Sphere of Application of Sharî’a?  lvii
6. Apology for Sharî’a?  lviii
7. Attack on Sharî’a?  lxii
8. Importance of Understanding Sharî’a?  lxiii
9. Compared to What?  lxv
10. Other Reasonable Comparisons?  lxxii

Part One: Origins

Chapter 1 · Muhammad (PBUH) Before Prophethood (570/571–610 A.D.)  1
§ 1.01 Pre-Islamic Times on Arabian Peninsula  2
A. Two Great Empires  2
B. Arabian Bedouin Society  2
C. Muhammad, Hashim Clan, and Quraysh Tribe  3
D. Profane Law of Arabian Bedouins  4
E. Arbitration among Bedouins and Ḥakam (Arbitrator)  4
F. Cities of Medina and Mecca  5
§ 1.02 Muhammad and Jesus  6
A. Muhammad and Prophetic Tradition  6
B. Comparisons between Islam and Catholic Christianity  7
C. Free Will versus Pre-Destination  13
D. Need for Final Revelation  14
§ 1.03 Non-Muslim Characterizations of Muhammad  15
A. Portraying Muhammad  15
B. Through Early 19th Century  17
C. Recent Writings  18
D. Orientalist Fallacy  18
§ 1.04 Childhood of Muhammad (570/571–595 A.D.)  19
A. A-Historical Moment: Vitality of Life of Muhammad  19
B. Life Span: 570/571 A.D. to 632 A.D.  19
CONTENTS

C. Special Sign: Ḥalimah Story
D. Orphan, Early Childhood, and Uncle Abū Ṭalib
E. Another Special Sign: Story of Christian Monk Bahira

§ 1.05 Khadyja, Muhammad, and Family Business (595–619 A.D.)
   A. Employer, Wife, and Companion
   B. Children

Chapter 2 · Muhammad (PBUH) as Prophet (610–632 A.D.)

§ 2.01 Prophet in Mecca
   A. First Revelation
   B. Reaction of Meccans
   C. Boycott of Clan of Prophet
   D. Death of Abū Ṭalib, Khadyja and Trip to Ṭa’if
   E. Isra’ and Mi’raj
   F. Assassination Attempt

§ 2.02 Establishment of Islamic State
   A. Hijra (622 A.D.)
   B. Constitution of Medina and Battle of Badr (624 A.D.)
   C. Battle of ‘Uhud (625 A.D.)
   D. Battle of Trench (Ghazwat AlKhandaq) or Confederates (Alahzab) (627 A.D.)
   E. Truce of Hudaybiyah between Prophet and Mecca (628 A.D.)
   F. Breaking the Truce and Glorious Victory (Fatah Al Mubeen) (630 A.D.)

§ 2.03 Prophet Returns to Mecca as Leader (632 A.D.)
   A. Farewell Pilgrimage (Ḥajjat Alwada’) and Farewell Sermon (Khutbat Alwada’)
   B. Themes in Khutbat Alwada’ (Farewell Sermon)

§ 2.04 Wives of Prophet

§ 2.05 Death of Prophet (632 A.D.)

§ 2.06 Deaths and Prophet
   A. Difficulty of Verification
   B. Hadiths Compiled by Bukhari
   C. Biographical Accounts
   D. Overall Assessment

§ 2.07 Islamic Lunar Calendar
   A. “A.D.” versus “A.H.”
   B. Lunar versus Solar Calendars
   C. Formulas to Convert between “A.D.” and “A.H.”
   D. Mathematical versus Physical Determinations

Chapter 3 · Holy Qur’ān (610–650 A.D.): Revelation, Compilation, and Tenets

§ 3.01 Progressive Revelation and Origins
   A. Theory of Umm Al Kitab
   B. Staged Revelation

§ 3.02 Five Basic Features
**CONTENTS**

A. Pattern 78
B. Timing 78
C. Timelessness 79
D. Oral Revelation 79
E. Living Reality 79

§ 3.03 Compilation and Organization 79
A. Literalism, Faith, and Orientalist Scholarship 79
B. Revelation Writers 81
C. Four Types of Compilation 82
D. Abū Bakr, Zaid bin Thabit, and Muṣḥaf 83
E. ‘Uthmān and Canonical Text 84
F. Meccan *Surat* (610–622 A.D.) and Medinan *Surat* (622–632 A.D.) 86

§ 3.04 Comparisons to Bible 91
A. Overview 91
B. Tabular Summary 94

§ 3.05 Controversies About Readings and Language 99
A. Debate about Variant Readings (*Qirā’āt*) 99
B. Debate about Classical Arabic 100

§ 3.06 Three Grand Tenets 103
A. Tenet #1: Monotheism 103
B. Tenet #2: First and Final Judgment 105
C. An Islamic Purgatory? 109
D. Conceptions of Heaven and Hell 111
E. Tenet #3: Intervention 113

§ 3.07 No Appeal 113
§ 3.08 No Intercession 113

**Part Two: Golden Age**

**Chapter 4 · Caliphs of Mecca and Medina (*Rashidun*) (632–661 A.D.)** 115

§ 4.01 Death of Muhammad and Succession Crisis (632 A.D.) 116
§ 4.02 Four Rightly Guided Caliphs (*Rahidun*) 116
A. Abū Bakr As Siddiq 117
B. ‘Umar Ibn Al Khattāb 118
C. ‘Uthmān Ibn Affan 119
D. ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭalib 119

§ 4.03 Legal Developments 121

**Chapter 5 · *Umayyad* Caliphate (661–750 A.D.)** 123

§ 5.01 Origins 123
§ 5.02 Development and Expansion 124
§ 5.03 Legal, Political, and Social Structure 126
§ 5.04 Discontent 127
§ 5.05 Collapse 129
CONTENTS

§ 5.06 Salient Developments in Shari'a
A. Appointment of Qādis 130
B. Decisions of Qādis 132
C. Ancient Schools of Law 132
D. Traditionists and Increasing Reliance on Sunnah of Prophet 133
E. Increasing “Islamicization” of Legal Rules 135
F. Inspector of Market (Amil al-Souq) 135

§ 5.07 Shari'a Not Yet a Complete System 135

Chapter 6 · Abbasid Caliphate (750–1258 A.D.) 137
§ 6.01 Origins 137
§ 6.02 Consolidation and Development 139
§ 6.03 Flowering of Islamic Civilization 142
§ 6.04 Admixture of Law and Politics 144
§ 6.05 Decay and Downfall 146
§ 6.06 Caliphate in Retrospect 147
§ 6.07 Salient Developments in Shari’a 148
A. Appointment of Qādis Bound by Shari’a 148
B. Development of Inspector of Market (Muḥtasib) 148
C. No Fusion of Sacred and Profane 149
D. Split between Shari’a and Siyāsa 150
E. Failed Attempt at Codification 150

Chapter 7 · The Crusades (1095–1272 A.D.) 153
§ 7.01 Defining “Crusades” 153
§ 7.02 Origins of Crusades 155
§ 7.03 First Crusade 159
§ 7.04 Rise of Zengi and Second Crusade 161
§ 7.05 Rise of Saladin, Fall of Jerusalem, and Third Crusade 162
§ 7.06 Final Five Crusades 165
§ 7.07 Impacts and Perceptions 167

Part Three: Schism

Chapter 8 · Sunni — Shī’ite Split (632–680 A.D.) 169
§ 8.01 Diversity Within Unity and Demographic Realities 170
§ 8.02 Succession Problem Catalyzing Schism 174
A. Nature of Authority 174
B. Tribal Consensus or Blood Lineage? 175
C. Fātimah and Children of ‘Alī 176
§ 8.03 ‘Ali and Succession Crisis 178
A. Public Anointing? 178
B. ‘Ali Passed Over Thrice 179
C. Battles of Camel (656 A.D.) and Siffin (657 A.D.) 180
CONTENTS

D. Assassination and Martyrdom of 'Alī 182

§ 8.04 Battle of Karbala (680 A.D.) 182
   A. Abdication by Hasan, Usurpation by Yazid 182
   B. Martyrdom of Imām Hussein 183

§ 8.05 'Āshūrā 187

Chapter 9 · Shi‘ism and Its Imāms (680–940 A.D.) 191
§ 9.01 Shi‘ite concept of Imām 191
§ 9.02 Twelver Shi‘ism 193
   A. Safavid Dynasty (1501–1702 A.D.) and Iran 193
   B. Marja‘iyya (Reference) 195
   C. Najaf, Qom, and Controversies about Velayat-e Faqih 195
§ 9.03 12 Imāms 198
   A. Summary Table 198
   B. Brief Biographies of Imāms 200
§ 9.04 Sevenner Shi‘ism 206
   A. Split Over 7th Imām 206
   B. Fatimid Caliphate (909–1171 A.D.) 206
   C. Nizārites and Druze 207
§ 9.05 Fiver Shi‘ism 208
   A. Split Over 5th Imām 208
   B. Distinctive Beliefs 209
§ 9.06 Comparisons with Catholic Christianity 210

Part Four: Last Great Era?

Chapter 10 · Ottoman Turkish Empire (11th Century – 1923 A.D.) 215
§ 10.01 Birth (11th Century to 1362 A.D.) 215
§ 10.02 Conquest and Consolidation (1362 to 1590 A.D.) 220
§ 10.03 Beginning of End (1595 to 1789 A.D.) 223
§ 10.04 Western Influence, Nationhood, and Decline (1789 to 1920 A.D.) 224
§ 10.05 Atatürk and Birth of Modern Turkish Republic (1923 A.D.) 229
§ 10.06 Salient Developments in Shari‘a 229
   A. Organization of Political Units on Religious Lines and Jurisdiction of Islamic Judges (Qādis) 229
   B. 1499 Ottoman Law Book (Kanun) 230
   C. 1877 Ottoman Civil Code (Mejelle) 231
   D. 19th Century Legal Reforms Contrary to Shari‘a 233
§ 10.07 Law of Personal Status, Ottoman Millet (Denomination) System, and Israel and Palestine 234

Chapter 11 · Moghul Indian Empire (1504–1857 A.D.) 239
§ 11.01 Arrival of Muslims on Indian Subcontinent and Origins of Moghul Rule 239
§ 11.02 Achievements of Great Moghul Emperors 240
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>§ 11.03</td>
<td>British Raj</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 11.04</td>
<td>Development of Anglo-Muhammadan Law</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 11.05</td>
<td>Evolution of Anglo-Muhammadan Law</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 11.06</td>
<td>Enduring Impact of Anglo-Muhammadan Law</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Part Five: Theory — Classical Sources of Jurisprudence (*Uṣūl al-Fiqh*)

#### Chapter 12 · Fundamental Sources: Holy Qur’ān and *Sunnah*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>§ 12.01</td>
<td>Overview of Four Sources</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Sources and Their Philosophical and Practical Dimensions</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.</td>
<td>Defining “<em>Uṣūl al-Fiqh</em>”</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.</td>
<td>Two Primary and Two Secondary Sources, and Term “Fundamentalist”</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 12.02</td>
<td>Ambiguity, Vagueness, Interpretation, and Construction</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 12.03</td>
<td>Qur’ān and Approaches to Reading It</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Meaning of “Qur’ān”</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.</td>
<td>Biblical Parallel</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.</td>
<td>Easy, Simplistic Dichotomies</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.</td>
<td>Ramadan’s Categorization of Six Approaches</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 12.04</td>
<td>Issues in Qur’ānic interpretation</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Translations of Qur’ān and Formal versus Dynamic Equivalence</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.</td>
<td>Theory of Repeal (<em>Naskh</em>)</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 12.05</td>
<td><em>Sunnah</em> of Prophet</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Definition and Relation to “<em>Ḥadīth</em>”</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.</td>
<td>Codification of Shari‘a</td>
<td>274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.</td>
<td>Authority of <em>Ulema</em></td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.</td>
<td>Achievement and Tension</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 12.06</td>
<td>Compilations of Hadith</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Question of Authenticity</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.</td>
<td><em>Isnād</em> (Chain of Transmission)</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.</td>
<td>Summary and Evaluation of Hadith Compilations</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Chapter 13 · Secondary Sources: *Ijmā’* and *Qiyās*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>§ 13.01</td>
<td><em>Ijmā’</em> (Consensus of Islamic Scholars)</td>
<td>283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.</td>
<td>Historical Background</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.</td>
<td>Modern Perspectives</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 13.02</td>
<td><em>Qiyās</em> (Analogical Reasoning)</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.</td>
<td>Historical Background</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.</td>
<td>Modern Perspectives</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 13.03</td>
<td>Desirability: Scale of Religious and Legal Qualifications (<em>Al Aḥkām Al Khamsa</em>)</td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 13.04</td>
<td>Validity: Scale of Validity</td>
<td>294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 13.05</td>
<td>Relationship Between Scales</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 14 · Controversial Additional Sources 299

§ 14.01 Individual Reasoning (Ijtihād) 300
   A. Doctrinal Development and Methodology 300
   B. Definition 302
   C. Closing of Gate to Ijtihād Around 900 A.D. 303
   D. Was Gate Really Closed? 304
   E. Does Gate Need Re-Opening? 305

§ 14.02 Imitation (Taḳlīd) 306
   A. Importance and Evolution of Taḳlīd 306
   B. Rejection of Custom (‘Urf) 307

§ 14.03 Juristic Preference (Istiḥsān) 308

§ 14.04 Public Interest Reasoning (Istiṣlāḥ) 308

§ 14.05 Creativity, Muftis, and Fatwās 309
   A. Mujtahid in Every Generation? 309
   B. Nature of Muftis and Fatwās 310

§ 14.06 Shi‘ite Distinctions 311
   A. Five Roots 311
   B. Ījma’ and Consistency with Imām 311
   C. Ḥadīth of Imām Qualify 312
   D. Lesser Role for Qiyās 312
   E. Greater Role for Ijtihād 313

Part Six: Practice

Chapter 15 · Five Pillars of Islam 317

§ 15.01 First Pillar: Bearing Witness (Shahāda) 318

§ 15.02 Second Pillar: Prayer (Salah) 320
   A. Five-Fold Daily Prayer 320
   B. Comparison with Catholic Liturgy of the Hours 322
   C. First Call (Adhān) and Second Call (Iqama) to Prayer 322
   D. Commerce and Prayer 324
   E. Direction of Prayer (Qibla) 325
   F. Women and Prayer 326

§ 15.03 Third Pillar: Almsgiving (Zakāt) 329
   A. Virtues of Charity and Community 329
   B. Distinction with Zakāt al Fiṭr 331
   C. Effects and Beneficiaries 332
   D. Formula and Administration 332
   E. Does Intent (Niyyah) Matter? 335
   F. Shi‘ite Distinction: Khums (Wealth Tax) 335

§ 15.04 Fourth Pillar: Fasting (Sawm) and Ramaḍān 337
   A. Practice of Fasting Across Faiths 337
   B. Islamic Legal Bases 337
   C. Obligation and Three Issues 338
   D. Elevation and 2011 Dubai Fatwā 340
   E. Closing of Gates of Hell 340
CONTENTS

§ 15.05 Fifth Pillar: Pilgrimage (Hajj) 341
  A. Meqaat (Six Starting Points) 341
  B. Muslims Only 342
  C. Female Pilgrims 344
  D. Preparation at Meqaat 344
  E. Steps in 'Umrah 344
  F. Three Types of Hajj and Steps 345

Chapter 16 · Four Sunnite Schools of Islamic Law 349
§ 16.01 Historical Basis for Four Schools 350
§ 16.02 Five Comparative Points 352
§ 16.03 Ḥanafi School 353
  A. Life of Abū Ḥanīfa and Other Key Figures 354
  B. Jurisprudential Foundations and Evolution 355
  C. Hierarchy within Ḥanafi School 356
§ 16.04 Mālikī School 357
  A. Life of Mālik ibn Anas Al Asbahi 357
  B. Transplantation of Mālikī School 358
  C. Mālikī School Sources of Law 358
§ 16.05 Shāfi‘ī School 361
  A. Life of Muhammad Al Shāfi‘ī and Development of Shāfi‘ī School 361
  B. Shāfi‘ī School Sources of Law 362
§ 16.06 Ḥanbalī School 363
  A. Founders (Ibn Ḥanbal, Ibn Taymiyya, and Ibn Abd Al Wahhāb) and Development of Ḥanbalī School 364
  B. Ḥanbalī Sources of Law 366

Part Seven: Commercial Law, Capitalism, and Global Trade
Chapter 17 · Islam and Capitalist Economic Growth 369
§ 17.01 Stereotypes 369
§ 17.02 Conventional Economic Indicators 372
§ 17.03 Human Development and Freedom 372
§ 17.04 Why the Poor Performance? 384

Chapter 18 · Property Law: Ownership and Property 389
§ 18.01 God and Wealth 390
  A. Regency and Vice-Regency 390
  B. Freedom and Right to Private Ownership 392
  C. Proper Attitude to Private Wealth 395
§ 18.02 Property 399
  A. What is “Property”? 399
  B. Certain Rights as Property 401
  C. Validity: Void (Bātil) versus Voidable (Fāsid) 403
  D. Objects of Commerce (Māl) 403
## CONTENTS

### § 18.03 Ownership 405
   A. What is “Ownership”? 405
   B. Is Ownership Possible? 406
   C. Complete versus Deficient Ownership 407
   D. Ownership by Women 410

### Chapter 19 · Property Law: Public Property, Private Property, and Possession 411
   § 19.01 Public (Community) Property 412
      A. Principle of Original Permissibility (Ibāḥa) 412
      B. Public Ownership and Nature 413
      C. Four Categories of Publicly Owned Property 416
      D. Governmental Assignment (Iqṭā’) of Public Property and Oil Concession Contracts 419
   § 19.02 Private Property 423
      A. Lawful versus Unlawful Acquisition 423
      B. Lawful Acquisition of Un-Owned Land 424
      C. Lawful Acquisition of Owned Land 427
      D. Finding Treasure (Luqṭa) 429
      E. Individual versus Joint Ownership 431
      F. Termination of Ownership 432
   § 19.03 Possession 433
      A. Right to Possess 433
      B. Legitimate versus Illegitimate Possession 434
      C. Adverse Possession 435
      D. Deposits (Amāna), Pledges (Rahn), and Liens (Ḥabs) 436

### Chapter 20 · Property Law: Protecting and Restricting Private Ownership 439
   § 20.01 Protecting Private Property 440
      A. Self-Defense 440
      B. Protecting Private Property: Penal Law 442
   § 20.02 Restrictions on Ownership: General Doctrines 442
      A. Good Neighborly Relations 442
      B. Social Responsibilities of Private Owners 444
      C. Four Categories of Restrictions 445
   § 20.03 Category #1 Restrictions: Preventing Harm (Ḍarar) 445
      A. Harm Principle, Intent, and Preemption 445
      B. 1877 Ottoman Mejelle and Examples of Harm Principle 449
      C. Women, Privacy, and Physical Barriers 454
   § 20.04 Category #2 Restrictions: Public Interest (Maṣlaḥah) 456
      A. Encumbrances (Servitudes) 456
      B. Takings: Expropriation (Muṣādarah), Nationalization (Tā’mim), and Their Contexts 457
      C. Public Interest (Maṣlaḥah) and Other Restrictions on Takings 460
      D. Taxation 463
   § 20.05 Category #3 Restrictions: Promoting Cooperation and Right of Pre-Emption (Shuf’ah) 464
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Termination</td>
<td>524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Rescission (Khiyār) and Cancellation (Faskh)</td>
<td>525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Damages</td>
<td>530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Performance</td>
<td>531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Imprisonment (Ḥabs)</td>
<td>532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 23.07 Ratification (Imdā’)</td>
<td>533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 23.08 Amicable Settlement (Ṣulh)</td>
<td>534</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chapter 24 · Business Associations Law: Traditional Types of Partnership 535

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>§ 24.01 Introduction</td>
<td>536</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Importance of Partnership</td>
<td>536</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Historical Origins of Partnership</td>
<td>536</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 24.02 General Term for Partnership</td>
<td>537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Contract-based Partnerships (Sharikah al-‘Aqd)</td>
<td>537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Common Rights of Acquisition (Sharikah al-Ibāḥah)</td>
<td>539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Co-ownership (Sharikah al-Milk)</td>
<td>540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 24.03 Five Traditional Types of Sharikah Al-‘AQD</td>
<td>542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Sharikah al-‘Inān (Limited Liability Company)</td>
<td>543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Sharikah al-Mufāwadah (Unlimited Mercantile Partnership)</td>
<td>555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Sharikah al-Abdān (Skill-based Partnership)</td>
<td>564</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Sharikah al-Wujūh (Credit Cooperative)</td>
<td>570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Sharikah al-Mudārabah (Sleeping Partnership)</td>
<td>571</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chapter 25 · Business Associations Law: Modern Partnerships and Agricultural Ventures 573

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>§ 25.01 Four Modern Types of Sharikah al-‘Aqd</td>
<td>574</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Sharikah al-Musāhamah (Stock Market Partnership)</td>
<td>574</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Sharikah al-Taḍamon (Trading Partnership)</td>
<td>576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Two Other Modern Partnerships</td>
<td>577</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 25.02 Agricultural Ventures</td>
<td>578</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Muzāra’ah (Sharecropping)</td>
<td>578</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Musāqāh (Irrigation)</td>
<td>583</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Part Eight: Banking Law, Capitalism, and Global Finance

### Chapter 26 · Banking Law: Risk (Gharar) 587

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>§ 26.01 Defining “Gharar”</td>
<td>587</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 26.02 Rationale for Prohibition on Gharar</td>
<td>588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 26.03 Traditional Illustration of “Gharar”</td>
<td>590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 26.04 Major versus Minor Gharar</td>
<td>591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 26.05 Gharar and Types of Forbidden (Ḥarām) Transactions</td>
<td>592</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Short-Selling and Gharar</td>
<td>592</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Ja‘ālah (Services Fee) Contracts</td>
<td>595</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Bay’ Al-Urbūn (Down Payment) Contracts</td>
<td>597</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Sales of Unripe Fruit</td>
<td>598</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 27 · Banking Law: Interest (Ribā) 601
§ 27.01 Defining “Ribā” 601
§ 27.02 Long History behind Ribā 606
A. Religious Perspectives before Islam 606
B. Usury and American Law 610
§ 27.03 Sources for Rule against Ribā 612
§ 27.04 Ribā, Qard al Hassan, and Forbidden (Harām) Transactions 616
A. Ribā al-Nasi’a (Excess in Credit Transactions) 616
B. Ribā al-Faḍl (Unequal Spot Commodity Trades) 622
C. Ribā Al-Jahiliyya (Defer and Increase) 625
D. Da’ Wa Ta’Ajjal (Prepay and Reduce) 626
§ 27.05 Rationales for Prohibition on Ribā 627
A. Unjust Enrichment (Al- Ithra’ Bila Sabab) 627
B. Complimentary Rationales 630
§ 27.06 Shi’ite Distinctions 631

Chapter 28 · Banking Law: Legal Devices (Ḥiyal) and the Prohibition on Interest (Ribā) 633
§ 28.01 Legal Devices or Fictions (Ḥiyal) 634
A. Need for Legal Devices in All Legal Systems 634
B. Development of Ḥiyal 635
C. Documenting Ḥiyal 635
D. Illustrations of Ḥiyal 636
E. Why Accept Ḥiyal? 636
§ 28.02 Nature of Sharikah al-Muḍārabah (Sleeping Partnership) 637
A. Definition 637
B. Three Basic Steps, and Interest or Not? 640
§ 28.03 Rules Governing Sharikah al-Muḍārabah 641
A. Limits on Participation by Rabb al-Māl and Vitiation of Muḍārabah 641
B. Legality of Sharikah al-Muḍārabah 643
C. Five Conditions for Sharikah al-Muḍārabah 645
D. Termination of Sharikah al-Muḍārabah 655
§ 28.04 Murābaḥa (Cost Plus Pricing) Contracts 655
A. Relationship between Murābaḥa and Muḍārabah 655
B. Common Consumer Finance Transactions 657
§ 28.05 Mushārakah (Joint Venture) 660
A. Definition, Four Principles, and Avoidance of Ribā 660
B. Eight Rules Governing Mushārakah 662
C. Six Features Distinguishing Mushārakah from Muḍārabah 664
D. Contemporary Applications of Mushārakah 665
§ 28.06 Diminishing Mushārakah 667
A. Four Steps 667
B. Four Additional Rules for Diminishing Mushārakah 668
C. Contemporary Applications of Diminishing Mushārakah 669
§ 28.07 Bank Funding, Transactions, and Legal Fees 670
Chapter 29 · Finance (Tamweel): Islamic Bonds (Ṣukūk) and Securitization 673

§ 29.01 Importance of Islamic Finance (Tamweel) 674

§ 29.02 Conventional Non-Islamic Bonds 676
   A. Definition 676
   B. Investment Appeal 677
   C. Differences with Equity 678
   D. Bond Issuers and Types 679
   E. Indenture and Covenants 681
   F. Callability and Putability 681
   G. Secondary Market Trading 682
   H. International Bonds 684

§ 29.03 Present Value, Price, and Yield of Non-Muslim Bonds 685

§ 29.04 Defining “Islamic” Bonds (Ṣukūk) 693
   A. Overview 693
   B. Derivatives, the Financial Crisis, and Shari’a 695
   C. Technical Meaning 698
   D. Clearing and Settlement in Secondary Markets 699

§ 29.05 Comparing Islamic Bonds and Non-Muslim Securitization 699
   A. Typical Transactions 699
   B. Similarities Between Ṣukūk and Conventional Non-Muslim Bonds 711
   C. Differences Between Ṣukūk and Conventional Non-Muslim Bonds 712
   D. Ṣukūk and Conventional Non-Muslim Stocks 713

Chapter 30 · Finance (Tamweel): Types and Risks of Islamic Bonds (Ṣukūk) 715

§ 30.01 Privately-Issued Ṣukūk 715
   A. Secondary Market Restrictions 716
   B. Nine Types 717

§ 30.02 Innovations and Challenges for Privately-Issued Ṣukūk 723

§ 30.03 Risks Associated with Ṣukūk 726
   A. Distinction Between “Asset-Backed” and “Asset-Based” 726
   B. Credit Risk 727
   C. Legal Risk 727
   D. Shari’a Risk 727

§ 30.04 Sovereign Ṣukūk 728
   A. Need for Sovereign Ṣukūk 728
   B. How Sovereign Ṣukūk Work 730

Chapter 31 · Finance (Tamweel): Insurance (Takaful) and Money Transfers (Ḥawālah) 733

§ 31.01 Conventional Non-Islamic Insurance Products 734
   A. Definition 734
   B. Government Insurance Products 735
   C. Private Insurance Products 736
D. Investment Products 737
E. Reinsurance 738
§ 31.02 Defining “Takaful” 739
§ 31.03 Historic Types of Takaful 739
§ 31.04 Modern Takaful and Debate about Gharar (Uncertainty) and Ribā (Interest) 742
§ 31.05 How Modern Takaful Works 743
§ 31.06 Ḥawālah Banking Transactions 749
A. Definition of “Ḥawālah” and Sources for Permissibility (Mubah) 749
B. Three Conditions 750
C. Hypothetical Ḥawālah Transactions 752
D. Law Enforcement Issues 753

Chapter 32 · Finance (Tamweel): Innovative Instruments and Markets 757
§ 32.01 Microfinance 758
A. Definition of “Microfinance” 758
B. Features 758
C. Empowerment of Women 761
D. Islamic Microfinance 761
E. Not Ribā 763
F. Legal Challenges 763
§ 32.02 Islamic Real Estate Investment Trusts (I-Reits) 764
A. Advantages of Malaysia over Arab Muslim World 764
B. Attractions of I-REITs 767
C. Compliance with Islamic Law 768
§ 32.03 Conventional Non-Islamic Investment Funds 772
A. Mutual Funds 772
B. Hedge Funds 776
C. Socially Responsible Funds: A Case Study of Ave Maria 777
§ 32.04 Shari’a Compliant Investing 780
A. Defining “Shari’a Compliant” 780
B. Certification from Shari’a Board 781
C. A Sole Certification Authority? 782

Part Nine: Family Law and Women

Chapter 33 · Marriage and Divorce 785
§ 33.01 Underlying Theory 786
A. Three Persons in Marriage? 786
B. Sacrament or Contract? 786
C. Between Man and Woman? 789
D. Importance 790
E. Addressees and Effects 791
F. Incongruity and Orientalist Fallacy 792
§ 33.02 Marriage (Nikāh) 794
A. Overview of Marriage Contract 794
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B. Witnesses and Conclusion</td>
<td>794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Impediments to Marriage</td>
<td>795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. <em>Fāsid</em> (Voidable) versus <em>Bātil</em> (Invalid) Marriage Contracts</td>
<td>797</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 33.03 Authority of Legal Guardian (<em>Walī</em>)</td>
<td>798</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Presence of <em>Walī</em></td>
<td>798</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Minor Female and Controversial Right of Rescission</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Mature Female and Controversial Objection Based on Equality of Birth</td>
<td>802</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 33.04 Divorce</td>
<td>805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Overview of Methods</td>
<td>805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Repudiation (<em>Ṭalāk</em>)</td>
<td>806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Oath of Abstention (<em>Īlā‘</em>)</td>
<td>809</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Separation (<em>Tafrīk</em>)</td>
<td>810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Unchastity (<em>Li‘ān</em>)</td>
<td>811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Apostasy (<em>Riddah</em>)</td>
<td>812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Waiting Period (<em>İdda</em>)</td>
<td>812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 33.05 Modernist Legislation on Divorce</td>
<td>813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 33.06 Shi‘īte Distinction: Temporary Marriage (<em>Mut‘a</em>)</td>
<td>813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 34 · Polygamy and Mixed Marriages</td>
<td>817</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 34.01 Polygamy</td>
<td>818</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Up to Four Wives and Prophet’s Special Rules</td>
<td>818</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Prophet’s Special Rules</td>
<td>819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Does Qur‘ān “Encourage” Polygamy?</td>
<td>819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 34.02 Arguments About Polygamy</td>
<td>821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Justifying Polygamy and Orientalist Fallacy</td>
<td>821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Questioning Polygamy</td>
<td>822</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 34.03 Modernist Legislation on Polygamy</td>
<td>822</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 34.04 Mixed Marriages</td>
<td>823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Basic Rules and Challenge of Globalization</td>
<td>823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Prohibition on Marriage with <em>Mushrik</em>: Interpreting <em>Surah</em> 2, <em>Ayah</em> 221</td>
<td>825</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 34.05 Exception for Muslim Men: <em>Surah</em> 5, <em>Ayah</em> 5</td>
<td>827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. <em>Hanafi</em> School Interpretation of <em>Surah</em> 5, <em>Ayah</em> 5</td>
<td>828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. <em>Mālikī</em>, <em>Shāfi‘i</em>, and <em>Hanbalī</em> School Interpretations of <em>Surah</em> 5, <em>Ayah</em> 5</td>
<td>829</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 34.06 Probing <em>Surah</em> 5, <em>Ayah</em> 5 Exception</td>
<td>831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Gender Asymmetry</td>
<td>831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Reasons and Counter-Arguments for Prohibiting Muslim Women from Marrying Non-Muslim Men</td>
<td>834</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 34.07 Contrasts with Catholic Christianity</td>
<td>837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 35 · Rights of Wife</td>
<td>841</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 35.01 Community Versus Individual Property</td>
<td>841</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 35.02 Nuptial Gift (<em>Mahr</em>)</td>
<td>842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Basic Terms</td>
<td>842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Conditions and Stipulations</td>
<td>844</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
xxvi  CONTENTS

§ 35.03 Maintenance (Nafaكا) 845
§ 35.04 Husband’s Right of Correction and Wife Beating 848
   A. Three Key Sentences of Surah 4, Ayah 34 848
   B. Conventional Translations 850
   C. Bakhtiar Translation 857
   D. Five Arguments in Defense of Bakhtiar Translation 858
   E. Is Translation Irrelevant? 864
§ 35.05 Biblical Contrast 865

Chapter 36 · Women and Clothes 867
§ 36.01 Classifying Hijābs (Veils) 867
§ 36.02 Obama Versus Sarkozy on What Muslim Women Should Wear 869
   A. Distinct Positions 869
   B. France’s Burkha Ban 871
   C. Burkha Bans in Other Non-Muslim Countries 873
   D. Burkha Bans in Muslim Countries 874
   E. Religious Symbols and Secularism 876
§ 36.03 Five Requirements for Both Genders 877
§ 36.04 Special Requirements for Women 880
   A. Applicability 880
   B. Meaning of “‘Awrah” 881
   C. “Descent of the Hijāb” in Surah 33, Ayah 53 882
§ 36.05 Five Practical Dress Requirements Specific to Women 884
§ 36.06 Differences Among Four Schools on ‘Awrah (Private Parts), Hijāb, and Niqāb (Full-Face Veil with Eye Slit) 888
   A. Hanafi and Mālikī Schools 888
   B. Hanbali School 890
   C. Shāfi’i School 890

Chapter 37 · Women and Work 891
§ 37.01 Basic Equality 892
§ 37.02 Traditional Roles 894
§ 37.03 Employment Outside Home 895
   A. Issue At Stake 895
   B. No Prohibition 896
   C. Three Criteria 897
   D. Trend toward Reform 898
§ 37.04 Women as Heads of State 899
   A. Arguments Based on Qur’ān and Hadith 899
   B. Other Arguments 909
   C. Apprehension 910
§ 37.05 Muslim Feminism 910
   A. Not Monolithic 910
   B. Controversial Thesis of Irshad Manji 911
CONTENTS

Part Ten: Family Law and Children

Chapter 38 · Rearing Children
§ 38.01 Acknowledgement of Parenthood
§ 38.02 Father’s Duty to Provide Maintenance
§ 38.03 Mother’s Right to Care (Haddāna)
§ 38.04 Foundling (Lākīt) and Adoption

Chapter 39 · Contraception
§ 39.01 Basic Rules
   A. Irreversible Methods Forbidden (Harām)
   B. Historical Practice of ‘Azl (Withdrawal)
   C. Most Reversible Methods Generally Permitted (Ḥalal)
§ 39.02 Diversity of Islamic Opinions
   A. Overview and Three Themes
   B. Ḥanafī School
   C. Mālikī School
   D. Shāfi‘i School
   E. Ḥanbali School
   F. Three Instances in which Contraception (Including ‘Azl)
      Is Impermissible
   G. Unacceptability of One and Two Child Policies of Chinese
      Communist Party
§ 39.03 Balancing Religious Factors
§ 39.04 Contrasting Opinions: American Law and 1965 Supreme Court Decision
   in Griswold v. Connecticut
§ 39.05 Contrasting Opinions: Catholic Christian Teaching and
   1968 Encyclical Humanae Vitae
   A. Choice of Family Size
   B. Distinctions among Methods
   C. Rationale
   D. Gravity
   E. Compassion

Chapter 40 · Abortion
§ 40.01 Range of Opinions in Sacred and Secular Legal Systems
§ 40.02 Respect for Life
   A. Embryonic Development
   B. When Does Life Begin and Ensolement Occur?
§ 40.03 Basic Rules
   A. Forbidden (Harām) After 120 Days, Except to
      Save Mother
   B. Cases of Necessity
   C. Role of Medical Practitioner
   D. Blood Money (Ghurra and Diyya)
§ 40.04 Diversity of Islamic Opinions 981
A. Hanafi School 981
B. Mālikī School 981
C. Shāfi‘ī School 982
D. Hanbali School 982
E. Shi‘īte Schools 982
F. 1984 Synthesis Opinion of Sheikh Al Qaradawi 983

§ 40.05 Contrasting Opinions: American Law and 1973 Supreme Court Decision in Roe v. Wade 984
A. What Roe Says 984
B. Aftermath 988
C. Critique 989
D. Islamic Law and Roe 990

§ 40.06 Contrasting Opinions: Catholic Christian Teaching 992
A. Two Misconceptions 992
B. “Yes” to Life 997
C. “Direct” Abortion, Conception, and Intention 997
D. Further Rationales Against Direct Abortion 1000
E. “Indirect” Abortion and Principle of the Double Effect 1002
F. Compassion 1004
G. Synopsis of Contrasts 1006

Part Eleven: Inheritance Law
Chapter 41 - Wills (Waṣāyā), Charitable Trusts (Waqfs), and Euthanasia 1007

§ 41.01 Overview 1008
A. Synopsis of Islamic Inheritance Law 1008
B. Four Key Features and Evaluation Using Scale of Five Qualifications (Al Aḥkām Al Khamsa) 1009

§ 41.02 Form of Will (Waṣīyya) 1011
A. Oral or Written 1011
B. Holographic or Bequest-Under-Seal 1011
C. Sample 1012

§ 41.03 Four Elements of Will (Waṣīyya) 1016
A. Al Sighah (The Offer and Acceptance, or Declaration) 1016
B. Al Musi (The Testator) 1018
C. Al Musa Lahu (The Legatee) 1019
D. Al Waṣi (The Executor) 1020

§ 41.04 Payment of Costs and Debts 1021
§ 41.05 Legacies and One-Third Limit 1022
§ 41.06 Charitable Trusts (Waqfs) 1027
A. Origins and Definition of “Waqf” 1027
B. Three Conditions about Purpose 1030
C. Types of Waqf 1031
D. Shi‘īte Distinctions 1032
CONTENTS

§41.07 Euthanasia
   A. Definitions and Categories
   B. View of Shari’a
   C. Synopsis of American Law and Catholic Christian Teaching

Chapter 42 · Law of Succession

§42.01 Basics
   A. Three Principle Classes of Heirs
   B. Four Key Rules

§42.02 Principles of ‘Awl (Increase) and Radd (Return)

§42.03 Distribution of Net Estate
   A. Agnatic Heirs (‘Aṣabāt)
   B. Shares (Farāḍ) to Qur’ānic Heirs (Aṣḥāb Al-Farā’id)
   C. Examples

§42.04 Disinheritance

§42.05 Shi’ite Variations

§42.06 Women and Inheritance
   A. Differential Treatment in Two of Four Basic Classes
   B. Three-Pronged Conventional Defense

Part Twelve: Criminal Law (‘Uqābāt)

Chapter 43 · Key Concepts

§43.01 Underlying Theory
   A. Prohibitions Matter More Than Sanctions
   B. “Missing” Features
   C. Proportionality and Orientalist Fallacy

§43.02 Foundational Distinction
   A. Claims of God (Haqq Allāh) and Mālikī School Treatment of Rebellion (Baghi)
   B. Meaning of “Hadd”
   C. Claims of Man (Haqq Ādamī)
   D. Orientalist Fallacy Again

§43.03 Restrictions on Imposing Hadd Punishments
   A. Narrow Definitions
   B. Strict Evidentiary Requirements
   C. Resemblance (Shubha)
   D. No Cumulation
   E. Limitations Period
   F. Incapacity: Age and Mental Deficiency
   G. Necessity (Ḍarūrāh)
   H. Duress (Ikrāh)

§43.04 Confession and Repentance
   A. Schacht’s Illustrations
   B. Opinions of the Four Sunnite Schools
C. Retraction of Confession 1095

§ 43.05 Additional Considerations
  About Imposing Hadd Punishments 1096
  A. Good Faith? 1096
  B. Self-Defense? 1096
  C. Mixed Legal Systems 1097

§ 43.06 Practical Points 1097
  A. Prosecution and Muḥtasib 1097
  B. Applying Hadd Punishments and Imām 1098

Chapter 44 · Claims of God (Ḥaqq Allāh): Sex Crimes 1103

§ 44.01 Unlawful Sexual Intercourse (Zinā) 1104
  A. Biblical Comparisons: 6th and 9th Commandments 1104
  B. Key Qur’ānic Passages 1106
  C. Scope and Elements 1107
  D. Evidentiary Requirements 1109
  E. Hadd Punishment 1114

§ 44.02 Zinā and Rape 1117
  A. Consent 1117
  B. Difficulty of Prosecuting Rape 1119
  C. Hadd Punishment 1120
  D. Struggle in Pakistan 1120
  E. Date Rape and Marital Rape 1121

§ 44.03 Zinā and Homosexuality 1121
  A. Islamic View 1121
  B. Contrast with Catholic Christianity 1123

§ 44.04 False Accusation of Unlawful Sexual Intercourse (Kadhf) 1125
  A. Biblical Comparisons: 8th Commandment 1125
  B. Key Qur’ānic Passages 1126
  C. Elements and Evidentiary Requirements 1127
  D. Hadd Punishment 1129

§ 44.05 Relationship of Kadhf to Zinā 1130

§ 44.06 Mutual Exclusiveness of Sex Crimes (Kadhf and Zinā) and Divorce through Liʿān 1130

§ 44.07 Are Arab Muslims Prudish? 1131

Chapter 45 · Claims of God (Ḥaqq Allāh): Drinking and Stealing 1133

§ 45.01 Consuming Alcohol (Shurb Al-Khamr) 1134
  A. Biblical Contrasts: Wedding Feast at Cana and Last Supper 1134
  B. Analyzing Qur’ānic Passages on Drinking 1136
  C. Practical Realities in Muslim World 1140
  D. Elements 1141
  E. Evidentiary Requirements and Hadd Punishment 1142

§ 45.02 Theft (Sarīka) 1143
  A. Biblical Comparisons: 7th, 9th, and 10th Commandments 1143
Contents

B. Key Qur’anic Passages 1144
C. Ḥadd Punishment 1145
D. Evidentiary Requirements 1146
E. Elements 1147

§ 45.03 Highway Robbery
(Kat’ al-tarik or Hirabah) 1150
A. Biblical Comparisons: 5th and 9th Commandments 1150
B. Good Order of Society and Concept of “Hirabah” 1150
C. Elements 1151
D. Ḥadd Punishment 1152

Chapter 46 · Claims of God (Ḥaqq Allāh): Converting and Religious Freedom 1155

§ 46.01 Socrates, the Examined Life, and Freedom of Conscience 1156

§ 46.02 Distinguishing Authentic from Unauthentic Islam 1157
A. Oppressive Intellectual Climate 1157
B. 2006 Pakistan Apostasy Bill and Aftermath 1159
C. Qur’anic Precept of Surah 2, Ayah 256, Against Compulsion in Religion 1160

§ 46.03 Apostasy (Riddah and Irtidād) 1162
A. Definitions and Categories 1162
B. Grounds for Apostasy 1163
C. Traditional Punishments 1164
D. Scrutinizing Hadiths as to Punishments 1165
E. Distinction between Riddah and Baghi 1168

§ 46.05 Islamic Countries and International Law on Religious Freedom 1170
A. United Nations Instruments 1170
B. 1990 Cairo Declaration 1175

§ 46.06 Blasphemy 1181
A. Is There Really an Injunction? 1181
B. 1989 Rushdie Affair 1182
C. 2005 Danish Cartoon Affair 1185
D. 2015 Charlie Hebdo Attacks 1186

Chapter 47 · Private Claims (Haqq Ādamī) 1191

§ 47.01 Concept of Jināyāt (Torts) 1192
A. Private Nature of Claim 1192
B. Examples of Jināyāt 1192

§ 47.02 Ta’zīr Punishments 1193
A. Types of Liability 1193
B. Settlement and Pardon (‘Afw) 1194
C. Umayyad Caliphate Origins of Ta’zīr Punishments 1195
D. Eye-for-An-Eye Justice 1195

§ 47.03 Homicide (Katl) 1197
A. Continuum of Culpability 1197
B. Claimant: Next-of-Kin of Victim (Wali al-Dam) 1198
C. Highest Degree: Deliberate Intent (ʿAmd) 1198
D. Second Highest Degree: Quasi-Deliberate Intent (Shibh al-ʿAmd) 1201
E. Second Lowest Degree: Mistake (Khataʾ) 1202
F. Lowest Degree: Indirect Homicide (Katḥ bi-Sabab) 1202

§ 47.04 Suicide 1205
§ 47.05 Bodily Harm not Involving Death 1205
§ 47.06 Property Damage 1207
§ 47.07 Perjury 1207
§ 47.08 Protected (Maʾṣūm) or Not Protected (Hadr)? 1208

Part Thirteen: International Law

Chapter 48 · Law of War 1211
§ 48.01 Conflicting Qur’ānic Passages about Conflict? 1212
A. Three Sword Verses and Orientalist Fallacy 1212
B. Other Aggressive Passages 1217
C. Passages Championing Non-Violence and Reason 1221
D. Bottom Line and Just War Theory 1223

§ 48.02 Overview 1224
A. Shaybānī’s 8th Century Siyar, But an Inchoate Scheme 1224
B. Bifurcation and Framework Questions 1225

§ 48.03 Bifurcation of World 1226
A. Dār al-ʾIslām (Abode of Peace — Muslims) 1226
B. Dār al-Ḥarb (Abode of War — Non-Muslims) 1227

§ 48.04 Answers to Framework Questions 1227
A. Who Must Fight? 1227
B. When Must Muslims Fight? Against Whom Must They Fight? 1228
C. How May The Enemy Be Dealt With? 1229
D. Where Do Muslims Find The Enemy? 1231
E. By What Means May Military Success Be Pursued? 1231
F. How Is Success Defined? 1232

§ 48.05 Treatment of Conquered Peoples (Dhimmīs) Under Treaty of Surrender (Dhimma) 1233
A. Basic Obligations 1233
B. Problem of Religious Freedom 1234
C. Equality and Inequality 1235

§ 48.06 Rebellion (Baghi) 1236

§ 48.07 Use of Human Shields and Hukm Al Tatarrus 1237
A. Two Questions 1237
B. Scholarly Answers to Second Question 1238
C. Self-Serving Answers of Terrorists to First Question 1239
D. Not All Agree 1241
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 49  ·  Jihād (Struggle)</th>
<th>1243</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>§ 49.01 Definition of “Jihād”</td>
<td>1244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Basic Meaning</td>
<td>1244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Critical Distinction Between Greater and Lesser Jihād</td>
<td>1244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 49.02 Contexts for Use of “Jihād”</td>
<td>1245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Putting God First</td>
<td>1245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Remaining Steadfast on Straight Path</td>
<td>1246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Striving to Do Righteous Deeds</td>
<td>1247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Freeing People from Tyranny</td>
<td>1249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 49.03 Emphasis on Peace</td>
<td>1251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Relations with Non-Muslims</td>
<td>1251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Love Your Enemies?</td>
<td>1253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 49.04 Jihād as War?</td>
<td>1254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Distinction between “Jihād” (Struggle) and “Katl” (Killing)</td>
<td>1254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Jus Ad Bellum, Jus In Bello, and Power to Declare War</td>
<td>1255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Fighting in Self-Defense</td>
<td>1255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Fighting for Cause of Allāh and Four Caveats</td>
<td>1256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 49.05 Kharijītes and Assassins</td>
<td>1259</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 50  ·  Terrorism</th>
<th>1261</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>§ 50.01 Jihād as Terrorism?</td>
<td>1261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. What Is “Terrorism”?</td>
<td>1261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Condemnation in Islamic Criminal Law</td>
<td>1264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 50.02 Muslim Brotherhood</td>
<td>1266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Origin, Evolution, and Growth</td>
<td>1266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Philosophy, Principles, and Objectives</td>
<td>1267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Terrorism</td>
<td>1269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 50.03 Al Qaeda</td>
<td>1271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Origins</td>
<td>1271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Development and Organizational Structure</td>
<td>1273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Principles and Objectives</td>
<td>1274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Legality of Al Qaeda Actions under Islamic Law of War</td>
<td>1277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Future Prospects</td>
<td>1280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§ 50.04 Islamic State</td>
<td>1281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Origins</td>
<td>1281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Principles and Objectives</td>
<td>1284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Atrocities</td>
<td>1286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Funding</td>
<td>1288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. How “Islamic” Is Islamic State?</td>
<td>1290</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Part Fourteen: Glossary of Arabic Terms**  
1295

Index  
1361

About the Author  
1379
Preface to the 2nd Edition

... One race did not settle everything, as I had thought it would.
One race is only the prelude to another.

Sir Roger Bannister (1929–)
The Four-Minute Mile 225 (Guilford, Connecticut: The Lyons Press, 1981),
First person to run a sub-4 minute mile
(3:59:4 on 6 May 1954 at the Iffley Road Track, Oxford University)

No background in law, religion, history, or foreign languages is required to read Understanding Islamic Law (Sharīʿa). Only a dedicated mind and open heart are needed. This textbook is for two audiences: law students and legal practitioners. It is a learning tool for future lawyers and reference for current ones. But, it cannot possibly resolve all issues about Islamic Law. It is a prelude for further study and contemplation, a point intimated in the above quotation from one of my heroes about one of my favorite activities. Completing the 1st edition in 2011 after nearly 3 years, and 2nd edition in 2016 after another 4 years, is like finishing a long run. It leaves me with the certitude I have more to learn, just as I seek to improve as a runner.

This textbook also is eminently suitable for students of other disciplines, and non-lawyers, who are interested in or need to know about the subject. Along with my law students, many non-law graduate students and professionals in other fields have completed successfully the Islamic Law (Sharīʿa) course at the University of Kansas School of Law (KU Law School) since I first offered it in the fall 2003 semester. That also is true of the honorable men and women, for whom I have enormous respect, and who I am humbled to serve, in the United States Special Operations Forces (SOF). They began taking the course in the fall 2010 semester at the Command and General Staff College (CGSC) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Thanks to them, this textbook is better. Indeed, to all who have taken the class, I owe much. Hailing from Bangladesh, Canada, China, Egypt, India, Iran, Korea, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, United Arab Emirates (UAE), and from cities, suburbs, or farms around Kansas and across the United States, the “students” taught the teacher about the subject, and constructively criticized earlier iterations of this book.

It sounds not only striking, but also supercilious, to state that Understanding Islamic Law (Sharīʿa) is the first comprehensive textbook and treatise on the topic ever written for the English-speaking market by an American law professor. The book is the first work to incorporate systematically comparisons and contrasts with American law and Catholic Christian teaching.1 And, it is the first such work to address frankly controversial

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1. For an overview of the American legal system, see Gerald Paul McAlinn, Dan Rosen & John P. Stern, An Introduction to American Law (Durham, North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press, 2nd ed., 2010). For brief discussions of Catholicism, by the Chaplain to Cambridge University and a Professor of Philosophy at Boston College, respectively, see Alban McCoy, An Intelligent Person's
matters from abortion to Wall Street, paying particular attention to women’s issues. There is no genius on the part of the author, who is nothing more than a struggling student of the Shari’a. Rather, these facts reflect the under-developed state of Islamic Law in American legal education and practice.

True, Dr. Majid Khadduri (1909–2007) and Dr. Herbert J. Liebesny (1911–1985), edited a collection of 15 essays, Law in the Middle East, published by the Middle East Institute in Washington, D.C. in 1955. In 1975, Dr. Liebesny produced The Law of the Near & Middle East — Readings, Cases, & Materials, published by the State University of New York Press, which compiled materials from a graduate seminar he taught at The George Washington University. Nevertheless, and despite more books appearing on a variety of Islamic topics in the intervening decades, no full-length, English-language treatment of Muslim law, religion, and history, covering not just the Arab world (in which roughly 300 million Muslims live), but also East Asia, Africa, and other regions (where the other 1 billion Muslims live), has appeared.

That a major text and reference work did not emerge after the Iran Hostage Crisis, which ran for 444 days starting on 4 November 1979, is shocking. After all, that debacle was a rude awakening involving legal issues and Shi’ite Islam. Before the terrorist atrocities of 11 September 2001, discourse on Islamic Law was the province a small group of law professors, many of whom were Muslim, and a niche area of practice for precious few specialist practitioners. Since then, the circle has expanded only modestly, even though the group never was a cabal. To the contrary, Shari’a experts are delighted andpleasantly welcome newcomers to the field.

The problem has been a lack of attention to modernizing the international and comparative law curriculum and practice in the United States in the wake of paradigmatic shifts around the globe. More accurately, the problem has been a lack of including Islam and the Shari’a in the modernization plans. Perhaps we in the American legal academy have been too complacent in our familiar Euro-centrism. Perhaps now we are too dazzled by China, and forget that even the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has an uneasy time in its rule over a vast Muslim population, the Uyghurs, in the Far West of the People’s Republic. Perhaps we exalt too much the precious-ly-placed law review article as a mode of scholarship over the old-fashioned book that is useful to students and practitioners. We use student law review editors as means to an end, especially when we leverage one journal over another. In so doing, we miss the opportunity to orient ourselves to be instruments of service through the patient preparation of teaching materials.

To be sure, Islamic legal scholarship is as old as Islam. Hence, there are innumerable volumes on the Shari’a — in Arabic, written by Muslims, with a Muslim audience in mind. There also are countless books in English, many written by Muslims, on the religion and history of Islam, and on specialty Islamic fields, such as Family Law, Inheritance Law, and International Law. Some such books are written originally in English. Others are in translation from Arabic, French, or German. With a few notable exceptions, many of which are cited herein, the authors tend not to be foreign lawyers or law professors. None of these books is oriented to the needs of the contemporary English-speaking legal classroom or demands of modern legal practice. Likewise, within the American

legal academy and among practitioners, fine law review articles and books have been written on focused Islamic legal topics. But, the bottom-line is where can a newcomer, an average English-speaking law student or legal practitioner, learn about the breadth and depth of Islamic Law?

There certainly is nothing wrong with a book on Islamic Law written by a Muslim. But, it is not the same as one written by a non-Muslim. In first case, the author is writing from inside the system to which she adheres. It is difficult to see outside the paradigm, even if the author creatively and courageously advocates certain reforms against centuries of tradition and understanding. In the second case, the author is doing her best to empathize, but still is explaining and assessing the paradigm from the outside looking in. Her instincts may be less honed, her appreciation of nuances less sophisticated, than her Muslim counterpart. But, in contrast to her Muslim counterpart, perhaps she can view the paradigm more systemically and systematically, and ask different questions.

One type of work is not better than the other. Both kinds of contributions are necessary for a full understanding and appraisal. Writing this book puts me in both positions. I am a non-Muslim writing about the Sharī‘a. I am an American lawyer and a Catholic comparing the subject to American law and Catholicism.

In the present age of globalization, such is the status of many law students and young lawyers in America. They — or shall I say, we? — are blended and mixed in ways scarcely imaginable when the last Kansan to become President, Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890–1969), occupied the White House. We are on the inside of some paradigms angling for a more holistic view, and on the outside of other systems yearning to get in. This problem is a good one to have. It suggests we are unwilling and even unable to be limited and defined by traditional boundaries. That spirit of adventure, along with a dedicated mind and open heart, surely ought to lead to greater peace, tolerance, and understanding.

In keeping with the present age and contemporary Kansas, Understanding Islamic Law (Sharī‘a) is the product of a decidedly mixed author: an imperfect Roman Catholic in love with his faith, who is proud of his half-Indian (Punjabi), half-Canadian (Scottish) heritage. These influences, plus the impressions of my Malaysian-Chinese wife, our blessedly mixed daughter, and our travels around the world, resonate throughout this book. I try to ensure they do so transparently, as teaching is not supposed to be an exercise in veiled indoctrination.

I confess a special exertion in respect of the influence of my faith. When drawing comparisons and contrasts to Catholic Christianity, I rely on the three recognized sources of Catholicism: Sacred Scripture (i.e., the Bible), the Magisterium (i.e., the teachings of the Church through the Popes, Cardinals, Bishops, Priests, and Nuns), and Sacred Tradition (i.e., the practices of the Church, many of which are from its earliest days). The Catechism of the Catholic Church provides a single-volume summary of the substance of all three sources.2

Notably, in writing Understanding Islamic Law (Sharī‘a), I am mindful of two quotes from such sources. First, there is the 2000 document, Dominus Iesus. In this Declaration, Pope John Paul II (1920–2005) states that “to consider the Church as one way of salvation alongside those constituted by the other religions” is “contrary to the faith.”

Likewise, his successor, Pope Benedict XVI (1927-) warns repeatedly that one danger of relativism is the trivialization of different religions by equating them all. In turn, one consequence is false ecumenism and inauthentic inter-faith dialogue.

Second, in respect of Muslims, the Church teaches in the document from the Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, that:

> The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, *in the first place amongst whom are the Muslims*; these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one merciful God, mankind’s judge on the last day.3

*Dominus Iesus* is *(inter alia)* an admonition against relativism, against trivializing Catholicism by equating it with, or subordinating it to, other paths to salvation. *Lumen Gentium* is *(inter alia)* an admonition against pride, against arrogance. It is the province of God, not man, to judge fitness for salvation.

Until then, there are many joys from writing this book to cherish: a greater admiration for Islam and the *Sharīʿa*, a better appreciation of the gift of the Catholic faith, and a clearer understanding of the common points, amidst undeniable differences, shared by Muslims and Christians, and Muslim and Christian lawyers, in our common human dignity derived from God.

For now, *Understanding Islamic Law (Sharīʿa)* spells the beginning of the end of one conventional excuse for not teaching a course in Islamic Law, namely, there are no readily available, user-friendly teaching materials. In time, there may well be more choices than this volume, and so there should be. Let 100 flowers bloom, particularly in a field as rich and elegant as the *Sharīʿa*.

Raj Bhala
Kansas City, Missouri
June 2016

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Acknowledgments

We cannot do great things on this Earth, only small things with great love.
Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta (1910–1997),
Missionaries of Charity

I did nothing great in writing this book. Rather, I had great help from my Research Assistants (RAs). We all collaborated with great love for our endeavor, hoping our respective small contributions would help make the world a better place. So, “blessed” hardly is too strong a word to describe how I feel about my RAs and their substantive contributions to this textbook. Without the help of this elite but understated team, the result would have been much diminished.

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Ellen carefully edited virtually every Chapter, re-drafted sections of several Chapters, and her insights on many points added great value. Her research memoranda on analogical reasoning (*ijma’*), consensus (*qiyās*), and *ijtihād* (independent reasoning) formed part of the basis of the Chapter on the Four Sources of Islamic Law (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), and on additional sources. A Latin scholar, Ellen also provided all Latin translations.

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Jomana’s research memos on abortion, contraception, women’s dress, and women’s employment are the bases for portions of the Chapters on Family Law. Her memo on *ḥawāla* banking is the basis for a portion of a Chapter on Finance. Her memo on the meaning of “*jihād*” is the basis for a portion of a Chapter on International Law.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Eric researched and wrote for the Second Edition about the use of human shields, battle casualties and the Prophet Muhammad, and impact of blasphemy laws on events such as the Charlie Hebdo attacks.

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As the RAs and I worked collaboratively on this book, they became part of my family. My wife, Kara, our daughter, Shera, and I miss them. We shall always remember them well.

I am grateful to KU Law School for generous financial support through RA and summer research grant funding. Set amidst gorgeous landscape, Kansas can be a marvelous mix of the cosmopolitan and contemplative.