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Questions about the authenticity and authority of sunna have long been of central importance to the study of Islam, especially to those concerned with Islamic law. In this fascinating study, Daniel Brown traces the emergence of modern debates over sunna, focusing in particular on Egypt and Pakistan where these controversies have raged most fiercely, and assesses the implications of new approaches to the law on contemporary movements of Islamic revival. Using the case of modern Islam as a starting-point, the author considers how adherents of any great tradition deal with change and explores the impact of modernity on attitudes towards religious authority generally. This important book makes a major contribution to the understanding of contemporary Islam, and will be of interest to scholars of the Middle East and South Asia, as well as to those specifically concerned with the teaching and implementation of Islamic law.

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To Carol

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i> x
<i>Introduction: the prism of modernity</i>	1
1 The relevance of the past: classical conceptions of Prophetic authority	6
2 The emergence of modern challenges to tradition	21
3 Boundaries of revelation	43
4 The nature of Prophetic authority	60
5 The authenticity of ḥadīth	81
6 Sunna and Islamic revivalism	108
7 Conclusion: the spectrum of change	133
<i>Notes</i>	142
<i>Bibliography</i>	169
<i>Index</i>	179

Preface

This study owes its inspiration to Fazlur Rahman who was both a keen scholar of modern Islamic thought and himself a major contributor to the rethinking of the Islamic tradition that is the focus of this book. His personal concern for questions related to sunna first alerted me to the importance of the topic for modern Muslims, and readers familiar with Fazlur Rahman's work will recognize the imprint of his scholarship here. His death in 1988 was a loss to all those concerned with the study of Islam and a special loss to his students.

I am likewise indebted to friends, colleagues, and family who encouraged me to carry the project forward. Thanks especially to Wadad Kadi, Charles Adams, and William Graham who all gave generously of their advice and time at various stages of my work. I am grateful to the many people who helped me in the course of research visits to Pakistan and Egypt: Peter and Erica Dodd and the staff of United States Educational Foundation in Pakistan, Dr. Zafar Ishaq Ansari and the faculty and staff of the Islamic Research Institute in Islamabad, Aḥmad Ramaḍān of the Library of Congress office in Cairo, and Dr. Muḥammad Sirāj and other faculty and staff of the Dār al-'Ulūm at Cairo University. Thanks also to my colleagues in the Department of Religion at Mount Holyoke College for their encouragement.

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