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978-0-521-82282-4 - A New Anthropology of Islam  
John R. Bowen  
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#### A NEW ANTHROPOLOGY OF ISLAM

In this powerful, but accessible, new study, John R. Bowen draws on a full range of work in social anthropology to present Islam in ways that emphasize its constitutive practices, from praying and learning to judging and political organizing. Starting at the heart of Islam – revelation and learning in Arabic lands – Bowen shows how Muslims have adapted Islamic texts and traditions to ideas and conditions in the societies in which they live. Returning to key case studies in Asia, Africa, and Western Europe to explore each major domain of Islamic religious and social life, Bowen also considers the theoretical advances in social anthropology that have come out of the study of Islam. *A New Anthropology of Islam* is essential reading for all those interested in the study of Islam and for those following new developments in the discipline of anthropology.

JOHN R. BOWEN is the Dunbar-Van Cleve Professor in Arts and Sciences at Washington University in St. Louis. His fieldwork in Indonesia, France, and England, on topics ranging from poetics and political history to civil law reasoning and everyday forms of Islam, has spanned over thirty years. He has published widely on his research interests, and his *Islam, Law and Equality in Indonesia* (Cambridge, 2003) won the prize for Best Work from the Law and Society Association.

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*To my parents*

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## Acknowledgments

A work such as this one, intending to analyze a dimension of social life by synthesizing others' works on the topic, is necessarily part of a collective endeavor. For that reason, I will not single out the individual scholars whose works have contributed to my thinking, but rather thank the collective body of all those who have been trying to advance understanding of Islam as it is lived and understood by Muslims. Most of you are cited herein. It has been an honor and a pleasure to be part of this group.

The pleasure is all the greater for the ways in which Islamic studies and social anthropology have grown closer over the past generation. If in the past the former guarded the temple of high scripture, and the latter the thicket of contextualized knowledge, today we work together to trace practices of referring to the Islamic tradition in diverse and often competing ways. We bring together the tools of philology and fieldwork, pay attention to the magisterial reading and the marginal citation, study in the palace court and the law court. I once was called "a real anthropologist" by an old-school theologian, as a way of saying that I listened to the wrong people, ignorant villagers and poorly trained jurists, and could not be bothered to distinguish between "good" and "bad" readings of texts. Other scholars were denounced as "Orientalists" for focusing on writings of the intellectuals of the distant past, those who had produced the canonical "good" readings. Today, more often we combine forces to see how villagers and intellectuals use the writings



## Acknowledgments

of those distant intellectuals, and how intellectual production draws on everyday habits of life.

Or at least so I presume in writing this text: that “anthropology” now includes close textual readings and archival work, and that “Islamic studies” extends to ordinary understandings of the Islamic tradition. If this text has readers, then, on good pragmatist grounds, the presumption can be said to hold.

In working from one realm of social life to another, I draw abundantly on my own work, partly because I know it best and partly because doing so provides a degree of case-continuity across multiple domains. Some of the examples appeared in works already published; let me acknowledge in particular the publishers of *Muslims Through Discourse* (Princeton University Press, 1993), and of two articles: “On Scriptural Essentialism and Ritual Variation: Muslim Sacrifice in Sumatra and Morocco” (*American Ethnologist* 19: 656–71, 1992), and “Islamic Adaptations to Western Europe and North America: The Importance of Contrastive Analyses” (*American Behavioral Scientist* 55: 1601–15, 2011).

Notwithstanding what is said above about individuals, let me thank Michael Lambek and Jonathan Spencer for their patient and enthusiastic encouragement of this work, and, somewhat later but with equal enthusiasm, Richard Fisher and Lucy Rhymer of Cambridge University Press. And above all, for literally making this possible: my parents.

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## **Note on transliteration**

I give a close transcription of major Arabic terms at first usage, and thereafter use a simplified form. Please see the Glossary for these terms.