

Islam and Asia

Chiara Formichi explores the ways in which Islam and Asia have shaped each other's histories, societies, and cultures from the seventh century to today. Challenging the assumed dominance of the Middle East in the development of Islam, Formichi argues for Asia's centrality in the development of global Islam as a religious, social, and political reality. Readers learn how and why Asia is central to the history of Islam, and vice versa, considering the impact of Asia's Muslims on Islam, how Islam became an integral part of Asia, and its influence on local conceptions of power, the sciences, arts, and bureaucracy. Grounding her argument in specific case studies, Formichi ultimately concludes that the existence of Islamized interactions across Asia have allowed for multidirectional influences on Islamic practices and interpretations throughout the Muslim world.

CHIARA FORMICHI is Associate Professor at Cornell University. Her publications include *Islam and the Making of the Nation: Kartosuwiryo and Political Islam in Twentieth-Century Indonesia* (2012).

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Islam and Asia

A History

Chiara Formichi

Cornell University



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To my students

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Preface

This book offers a transregional approach to the intersection of Islam and developments in other spheres of the human experience across Asia. Here Asia is broadly conceptualized as the territorial expanse from the Mediterranean to the Pacific; and although I include recurrent references to the “greater Middle East region” as “West Asia,” the main focus of this book lies with the lands beyond the Oxus/Amu Darya river – in cruder terms, all that lies east of contemporary Iran.

My primary interest is in offering the big picture of how and why Asia beyond the Oxus/Amu Darya river is central to the history of Islam, and vice versa. The materials presented cover a vast territory and a wide chronological span, during which these lands saw many social, religious, economic, and political transformations; any one reader is likely to think that something is missing, but I had no intention of achieving encyclopedic coverage. As I endeavored to capture the interplay of these changes across time and space, offering selected but rich and detailed examples, the main narrative threads are thematic, secondarily bounded by temporal considerations, with an evident bias toward the late modern and contemporary eras. In terms of geography, the “units” of reference necessarily fluctuate, depending on the historical period of analysis, ranging from transregional bird’s-eye views of “Asia” to patchwork colonial possessions and clearly defined nation-states. Because the primary lens of each chapter is thematic, most chapters address a selection of locales, depending on what I saw as most illustrative of the matter at hand, and sometimes also to provide some degree of continuity across chapters. Hence, whereas I have attempted a balanced coverage of Asia’s subregions – defined as Central, South, East, and Southeast – with relevant references to the Muslim Mediterranean, this book is by no means a complete survey of “Islam” in each and every polity/nation in “Asia.” Similarly, not all themes could be addressed to the same depth. I have tended to favor political history, with a nod to intellectual and social phenomena, but – for example – issues of race and racialization of Islam are not addressed in a systematic fashion, and imperialism only

takes a background role; much to my regret I was not able to include a fair elaboration of the impact of Islam (and Europe, in fact) on renegotiation of traditionally fluid sexual identities, but the role of women is integrated into the narrative through most chapters.

The theoretical contribution of this book is in its approach, in its endeavor to bring together two fields that have rarely (and only recently) spoken to each other – namely Islamic Studies and Asian Studies, as addressed in Chapter 9 – and to present an interwoven history that gives each of these two subjects due consideration. Hence, while this takes the form of a “history book,” written by a historian for readers interested in understanding the historical trajectories of Islam across the Asian expanse from the seventh century onwards, the methodology deployed has more affinity with the field of “Area Studies,” which I see as deeply rooted in and committed to multi-disciplinarity. The scholarship this book is grounded in, and the materials used throughout, hail from the “traditional” field of history as well as the fields of anthropology, archaeology, history of art and architecture, religious studies, political sciences, cultural studies, and more.

Beyond this theoretical intervention in the study of Islam and Asia, I intend for this volume to be accessible, useful to teachers and students at all levels, scholars of global history, and lay readers. Related to this intention was my choice not to delve too deeply into scholarly debates and theoretical approaches specific to any given subtopic addressed in the book. The “Further Reading” sections that conclude each chapter are curated lists of classic or recent scholarly works that can help readers further explore both the debates I tangentially touch upon and the details of the subject matter.

The book can be read from cover to cover, or one could pick sections through the book to follow the history of Islam in a specific subregion of Asia; individual chapters could be extracted from the book as inserts in a variety of syllabi, or a lecturer could offer any chapter’s opening image and related text as a starting point for their own class. In whichever way you peruse this volume, I hope it will enhance your understanding of how and why Islam and Asia have been two intersecting subjects for the past 1,400 years.

Acknowledgments

As an undergraduate student majoring in Islamic Studies and with a keen interest in Southeast Asia, I often felt bounded by the structural limits of my department and by the discipline more broadly. Even in the most adventurous instances, a line seemed to exist coterminous with the usage of the Urdu language. But my professors encouraged me to follow that interest, to “cross” that line, and to explore what they saw as “the peripheries” of Islam.

Over the years I have incurred more debts than I could ever repay; this is only an attempt to acknowledge a few of them.

I am thankful to my earliest teachers at the Facoltà di Studi Orientali, Università di Roma La Sapienza, *Professore* Francesco Noci and *Professoressa* Biancamaria Scarcia Amoretti, who constantly reminded me with their own work that Islam stretched much further than the Arab lands. To *Professore* Gianmaria Piccinelli for supporting me in my desire to explore Indonesia for my *tesi di laurea*. To William-Gervase Clarence Smith, who at SOAS first gave me guidance in thinking about Indonesia as an integral and legitimate part of the “Muslim world” and who exposed me to global history as a field. And to Michael Feener, who since my postdoctoral fellowship in Singapore has pushed me to broaden my perspective, thinking regionally and comparatively.

A more specific intellectual debt rests with Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst and Zahra Ayubi, who in April 2015 invited me to participate in the conference “Shifting Boundaries: The Study of Islam in the Humanities” at the University of Vermont, Burlington. This was the first opportunity I had to express my discomfort with the Arab-centric approach of Islamic Studies beyond the confines of my classroom. The conversations and collaborations that have since ensued have made this book and its larger framework much stronger than they would otherwise have been.

This book would not even have been conceived without Lucy Rhymer. Her work as Commissioning Editor at Cambridge University Press has been extraordinary. She first approached me when I was an Assistant Professor in Hong Kong, asking if I would be interested in writing a book

xvi Acknowledgments

based on my teaching of courses on “Islam in Asia.” Since that day much has happened – a transcontinental move, a marriage, a child, and working toward tenure – but Lucy did not relent. Some of the final edits were dealt with at my grandmother’s bedside. She never really understood what I was doing, and I had hoped that this book would help; alas, it came too late.

I am most grateful to those colleagues and friends who read the manuscript when it was still in draft form. From Eric Tagliacozzo (who got “first dibs,” reading the very first semi-complete draft), to David Kloos (whose thoughts on Chapter 8 have been absolutely crucial), to the anonymous readers whose feedback was constructive and truly helped make this a better piece of scholarship, and to Michael Feener, Rian Thum, and David Atwill, who participated in a Manuscript Development Workshop I was able to host thanks to the financial support of Cornell University’s College of Arts and Sciences. Their input and detailed feedback have been invaluable. Broader thanks go to all the colleagues whose amazing scholarly work has allowed me to rethink how we approach the study of Islam in Asia. Without the painstaking work of detail done in the field, broader “approach” endeavors would not be possible. All mistakes remain nonetheless mine.

The “big push” to fine-tune the conceptualization of the book and get a few core chapters written took place at the Asia Research Institute (National University of Singapore). I am most grateful to Kenneth Dean and Jonathan Rigg for facilitating my return to Singapore, hosting me as a visiting senior fellow during a semester of study leave from Cornell University.

The Production team at Cambridge was extremely patient and helpful, as we navigated the usual difficulties of getting a manuscript together, exacerbated by my desire to have many maps and to integrate illustrations in the narrative. Thanks go also to Getty Images, the Stiftung Bibliotheca Afghanistanica, the Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University, the Asian Civilization Museum of Singapore, and Kees Metselaar for providing the beautiful images that accompany this book.

For actually having the time and brain space for the necessary everyday thinking, reading, and writing, I owe more than I can say to my family. My husband, Eli, and daughter, Licia, got “shipped off” to Singapore for a semester, and then “sequestered” in Ithaca for a long summer and (even longer) winter, so that I could put the manuscript together. My mother and my in-laws were similarly displaced and “enlisted to help” when we needed it. I acknowledge that this is a privilege in an age when being an academic almost always entails moving and settling far away

from our support networks. Thank you for allowing me to pursue my intellectual work while choosing to have a family.

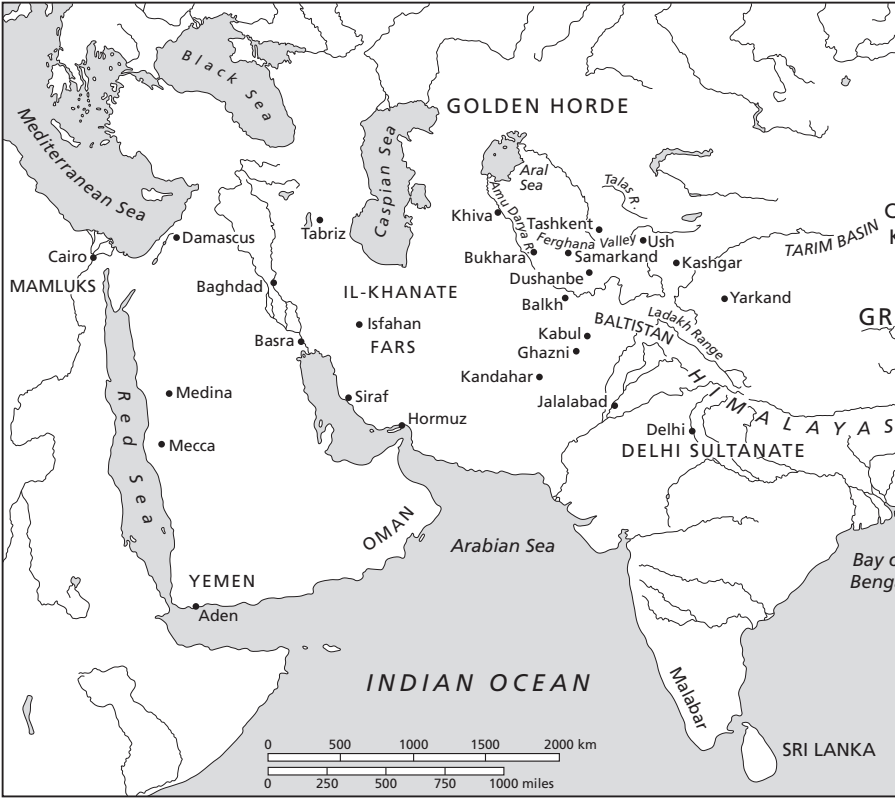
I wrote these pages thinking about my students. The ideas and approaches presented in the following pages were shaped during the years I spent teaching courses on “Islam in Asia” in classrooms in Hong Kong and Ithaca. It was in that effort to make deep scholarly complexities digestible and understandable to my students that these thoughts developed and came together; it was in the everyday conversations that questions were formulated, and that answers were attempted; and it was in seminar discussions that scholarship was explored, dissected, challenged, and embraced. It is thus to my students that I dedicate this book.

Note on Transliteration and Foreign Terms

This book covers a wide geographical, linguistic, and historical span. In an attempt to bridge accuracy and accessibility, I have opted for a single (simplified) approach to the transliteration of “Islamic” terms. There are no diacritic marks. I have avoided placing an “h” at the end of words that in Arabic terminate with a *ta marbuta* (hence, *da’wa*, not *da’wah*), and I have not differentiated between *‘ayn* and *hamza*, both being rendered with an apostrophe. I have compressed all regional variations into one consistent rendering (hence, the Indo-Malay term *dakwa* has become *da’wa*), making exceptions for quoted materials. Words that have entered the English language have been rendered in their English form, without italicization. All dates are indicated in the Common Era calendar.

Maps





Map 2 Continental Asia, ca. fourteenth century

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Map 3 Southeast Asia and coastal China



Map 4 Contemporary China



Map 5 Greater South Asia



Map 6 Asia in the age of Empires (1914)



Map 7 Contemporary Asia