Muslim Contributions to the History of Religions

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History of Religions in the West

A universal, comparative history of the study of religions is still far from being written. Indeed, such a history is even far from being conceived, because its components among the legacies of non-Western scholars have hardly been discovered. One such component, perhaps the most significant one, is the contributions made by Muslim scholars during the Middle Ages to this discipline. What is generally known and what has been documented in this field consists entirely of the contribution of Western scholars of religion. Even these Western scholars belong to the post-Enlightenment era of Western history.

There is little work dealing with the history of religions which does not claim the middle of the nineteenth century CE as the beginning of this discipline. This may not be due only to the *zeitgeist* of the modern West that entails aversion, downgrading, and undermining of everything stemming from the Middle Ages; its justification may also be found in the intellectual poverty of the Christian West (Muslim Spain excluded) that spans that historical period.

Although most works dealing with this field include some incidental references, paragraphs, pages, or short chapters on the contribution of the past, according to each author's estimation, all of these studies are categorized under one of the two approaches to religion: philosophical or cultic. All of the reflective, speculative, philosophical, psychological, historical, and ethnological theories of the Greeks about the nature of the gods and goddesses and their origins, about the nature of humanity's religion, its *raison d'être*, and its function in society are described as philosophical quests for truth. It is maintained that the Greeks' contribution to the study of religion showed their openness of mind and their curiosity about other religions and cultures.

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Their approach to religion was, however, a philosophical one. Thus all Greek endeavors to comprehend religious phenomena are reduced to the categories of allegory, psychology, history, or euphemism.[1]

The contribution of the Christian West to the study of religion during its early and middle ages is explained in terms of an apologetical or polemical nature. Its approach to religious phenomena was based on a cultic approach, because it had an intolerant and exclusive attitude towards other religions. In comparing the Greek and the Christian attitudes towards other religions, Eric Sharpe writes:

> The Greek philosophers were committed to a quest for information, and a quest for truth; the Christian theologians were committed to a soteriology, and within a cultic framework to a quest for perfection. Both found themselves in contact with other forms of belief, and reacted in radically opposite ways, one positively, the other negatively.[2]

When we consider the period of the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the post-Reformation, we again find that Western scholars did not add anything directly to the history of religions. Their immersion in Classical studies, natural religion, pietism, and deism paved the way for the rationalist approach of the Enlightenment. The romanticism of the post-Enlightenment period, with its emphasis on the irrational aspects of religion, was a reaction to this extreme rationalism.

The main factors which brought about a vigorous interest in the history of religions were Western colonial expansion and the availability of massive data about non-Western cultures, religious beliefs, and lifestyles. We also must not overlook Christian missionaries' direct encounters with a variety of religious traditions. Western penetration into the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Australia not only provided an area for economic and political exploitation, but also caused Western scholars to reflect upon humanity's various beliefs, rituals, and lifestyles throughout the world. Christian missionaries encountered the dilemma of the nonavailability of God's acts of salvation through Jesus Christ to a large part of the world. The secularists looked at non-Western religious phenomena and saw in it the historical evolution of humanity from primitive mutality to scientific ingenuity.

For the first time, Western individuals found an opportunity to reflect seriously and critically upon the diversity of religions. Their interest in comparative mythology and comparative linguistics led them to comparative

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[1]Jan DeVries, *Perspectives in the History of Religions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 11.

[2]Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1975), 10.

religion. The decade of 1860-1870 is generally considered the beginning of the discipline known as the science of religion, for it was in this decade that the first chairs of comparative religion were established in Western universities. It was also during this decade that the first works arguing for the science of religion and proposing it as a separate methodology were published. Friedrich Max Mueller (1823-1900) is considered to be the leading and most courageous spirit calling for the establishment of comparative religion as an independent academic discipline.

He wrote extensively in order to develop its methodology. Although he saw comparative religion along the lines of comparative mythology and comparative linguistics, he was radical enough to claim that "he who knows one, knows none." By "one," he meant Christianity.[3] To a large extent, attitudes such as this freed Western scholars by making it possible for them to delve into the study of other religious traditions; while they were not entirely dispassionate, they had some degree of curiosity, openness, and understanding. Then, too, the discipline of comparative religion no longer remained the exclusive domain of theologians and philosophers, for all other disciplines in the social sciences and the humanities made religion a field for research and investigation. There emerged different theories of religion, and different methods evolved to analyze and explain religious phenomena. These anthropological, psychoanalytical, sociological, historical/migration/diffusion, and phenomenological theories of the last century are now accepted as "classical approaches to the study of religion."[4]

The discipline on which Max Mueller expounded had three basic aims: to analyze the common elements of different religions and myths, to study the development and evolution of religion, and to discover the origin of religion. Although scholars involved in the study of religion had different theories and used different methods, they all believed in the doctrine of evolution. Their main concern throughout remained that of discovering religion's origin. Whether this obsession was due to empirical historicism or to the superiority complex of the West, the common assumption of all these scholars was that religion, humanity, and hence history had evolved from the simple to the complex. Western scholars of religion started to question these underlying assumptions of the classical theories of religion only two decades ago. The discipline is still very young and battling out its own bounds and goals.

As for our knowledge of the contribution of past non-Western scholars to the history of religion, we are still left in the dark. Muslim scholars of the Middle Ages have made a significant contribution in this domain. By

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[3]Ibid.

[4]Jacques Waardenburg, *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religions: Aims, Methods, and Theories of Research*, 2 vols. (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1973).

studying and analyzing their works, we can enrich the history of the study of religions and can thereby learn from the experiences of the past.

Muslim Contribution to the History of Religions during the Middle Ages

Among the more common works on the history of the study of religion, there are, to this writer's knowledge, only two authors who provide us with some details on past contributions. Both mention, very briefly, the Muslim contribution to the study of religion during the Middle Ages. Eric J. Sharpe includes only one paragraph in his study, though he admits that the honor of writing the first history of religion belongs to a Muslim schoar, al Shahrastānī. Writing about the Christian Church's antipathy towards other religions during the Middle Ages, Sharpe says:

> Although Christians were not seriously interested in other religions, except as opponents to be overcome, there were a number of Muslim writers of the period whose works deserve to be mentioned. They attempted to describe or otherwise confront those religions to which Islam was opposed.[5]

Referring to the names of al Ṭabarī, al Masʿūdī, and al Birūnī in the next sentence, he writes:

> The honor of writing the first history of religion, in world literature, seems in fact to belong to the Muslim Shahrastani (d. 1153) whose *Religious Parties and Schools of Philosophy* describes and systematizes all the religions of the then-known world, as far as the boundaries of China. This outstanding work far outstrips anything which Christian writers were capable of producing at the same period.[6]

Similarly, Annemarie Malefijt includes two small paragraphs on the Muslim contribution to the study of religion during the Middle Ages. She

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[5]Annemarie de Waal Malefijt, *Religion and Culture: An Introduction to the Anthropology of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1968), 24 and passim. See also Walter H. Capps, *Ways of Understanding Religion* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1972); Mircea Eliade, *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), chapters 1-4; E. E. Evans Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965).

[6]Sharpe, op. cit., 11.

also refers to the names of al Ṭabarī, al Mas'ūdī, and al Birūnī and writes:

> Perhaps the first systematic comparative history of religion was produced by the Muslim scholar Shahrastani (d. 1153.) After comparing 'all known religions' (but not including tribal religions), he set up a fourfold typology: Islam; literary religions (Judaism); quasi-literary religions (Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism); and philosophical and 'self-willed' religions (Buddhism and Hinduism).[7]

The Muslim contribution to the history of religion and the Muslim's understanding of other religions has turned out to be a field of study producing one of the richest, most documented, and most well-written areas from the heyday of Muslim rule in the East as well as in the Muslim West. This is still generally unknown to Western historians of religion. Historians of religion in the West have made little significant contribution to Islam and Islamics. This apathetic attitude of Western religious historians toward Islam was decried strongly by Ismā'īl R. al Fārūqī about twenty-three years ago. His outcry, somewhat hesitantly approved, found its echo in a reminder by Charles J. Adams to the historians of religions, but nothing else has improved the situation.[8]

The West's aversion to Islam and its persistent distortion of facts does not need more documentation.[9] Orientalists' disparagement of Muslim contributions to the history of religion did appear, at times, through their

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[7]De Waal Malefijt, op. cit., 24.

[8]Ismā'īl R. al Fārūqī, "History of Religions: Its Nature and Significance for Christian Education and the Muslim-Christian Dialogue," *Numen* 12 (1965): 31-65, 891-95. See also Charles J. Adams's article in Joseph M. Kitagawa and Mircea Eliade, eds., *The History of Religions: Essays on the Problem of Understanding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 179. The "Middle Ages" were neither dark nor medieval as Western medievalists would like us to believe. Rather, it was a period of High Ages for Muslim civilization. Asserting this fact, Philip K. Hitti writes: "It is clear that the Middle Ages were not really dark in the sense that certain narrow medievalists report. Those historians have often erred in their pronouncements on the course of scientific thought in the Middle Ages, showing us only the darkest side of the period. An exaggerated emphasis upon the least progressive elements and exclusive preoccupation with the limited domain of Western thought are responsible for this grave injustice. The truth of the matter is that that stretch of history was not as dark as our ignorance of it. Simply because its greatest achievements were made by Easterners is no valid excuse for its deprecation. The unbiased verdict of history decrees that from the second half of the eighth to the end of the eleventh century, Arabic was the scientific language of mankind," in his article entitled "The Course of Arab Scientific Thought," in *The Arab Heritage*, eds. P. R. Hitti and Nabih Amin Faris (New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), 232.

[9]Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1960) and recent studies of Edward W. Said, such as his *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1978) and *Covering Islam: How the Media and Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York: Pantheon, 1981).

faint praise of one Muslim scholar or another. They were fully aware of the Muslim contribution in this field of study, but denigrated all works that dealt with this field and relegated them to universal histories, polemics, heresiographies, dogmatics, and theology. It comes as no surprise that even al Shaharastānī's *Kitāb al Milal wa al Niḥal*, recently accepted by Western historians of religion as the first written history of the world's religions, had been relegated to the genre of heresiography. The fate of his predecessors and their works, upon which he drew and improved, still has not changed much. On occasion, references are made to scholars of the history of religion (like al Birūnī and Ibn Hazm), but no systematic study of their contribution to this field has been made in either the Muslim world or in the West.

The interest of Muslim scholars in studying the phenomenon of religion and its diversity is as old as the Qur'an itself. Muhammad's religious experience took place in an environment where encounters among the practitioners of Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism/Manichaeism, and pre-Islamic Arab religions of Associationism, Hanifism, Tribalism, and Naturism were possible through trade caravans. The caravans offered the exchange of ideas as well as the exchange of goods.

The Qur'an was sent to humanity with its definite position of tolerance for earlier religions and with its definite understanding of the nature and reality of religious diversity. Muhammad anxiously wanted and expected everyone to embrace Islam as a religion of common sense and reason, since it was a model of the Truth dictated by God. Nonetheless, he was time and again reminded in the Qur'an that his duty and role was only that of a messenger-prophet, a reminder—someone who was to warn, bring the good tidings, and act as the teacher of the divine writ and wisdom.[10] The Qur'an emphasized the formal, perfect, and final form of Islam (submission to the will of God). It represented the final Shari'ah (divine law and model way of life). The Qur'an declares itself to be the final revelation of the will of God. Accordingly, Muhammad is the last messenger-prophet to humanity. It was he who showed his finality as "the prophet," and Islam as "the religion."

Nowhere, however, was the coexistence of other religious traditions with Islam prohibited. Though distorted, deviant, imperfect, and incomplete forms of Islam, these religious traditions still merited Islam's protection.[11] Muhammad therefore practiced religious tolerance, as formulated in the Qur'an, in his encounters with adherents of other religions. He served as a model, through his practice and teaching, to his companions and, through them, to the early generations of Muslims.

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[10]Qur'an 7:188; 11:12; 22:9; 26:115; 35:23; 46:9; 17:105; and many other verse describing Muhammad as *nadhīr*.

[11]Qur'an, 2:62, 148; 5:44-69; 22:17.

With the expansion of Islamic rule to the conquered strongholds of Byzantium's and Persia's religions and cultures, the Muslims came into contact with well-organized and entirely institutionalized religious traditions and leaderships. Although the Muslims were rulers, they were neither in the majority nor as advanced in material culture as were the Persians and the Byzantines. They discussed all conflicting claims of truth through direct diaglogue and argumentation. From these discussions there emerged written treatises of polemical, apologetical, and even of conversional intent and content.

This unprecedented religious tolerance shown by the conquering minority caused the inquiring Muslim scholar of the time to reflect upon the nature of religious diversity under its own terms. Muslim scholars were even more obliged to explain and comprehend the fact of religious diversity in light of their own conviction of the unity of truth, the unity of humanity, and the unity of life. Their intellectual integrity and honesty ordered them to reflect upon the nature, scope, and function of religion on the one hand, and to understand the various creeds, cults, customs, and practices of these different religious traditions on the other hand. They could ignore these activities only at their own intellectual existential peril. They therefore rose to the occasion and made an unparalleled contribution to the common fund of human knowledge.

This situation was not dissimilar to the Western scholar's encounter with other cultures and religions during the period of Western colonization. Western scholars of religion had been dependent upon second-hand information and imported data provided by nonspecialists; often, the data were inaccurate if not entirely distorted. However, the Muslim scholar of that time did not approach other cultures in the same way as the Western colonizer. The Muslim could not behave as the curious observer or as a more developed and a more civilized conquerer; living in the midst of religious dialogue, he/she did not isolate himself/herself nor shy away from the real challenge.

Some scholars took this situation very seriously and gave their full support to the use of objectivity. Their criteria for the study of differing religious traditions were based on reason, common sense observation, and the analysis of those socioeconomic, political, and historical factors which made these religions different. They studied the sacred scriptures and the original sources of other religions, researched their meanings and interpretations, and observed their implementations by their followers. They learned the languages of the conquered cultures, listened to the teachers, and participated in the rituals when and where possible. They even confirmed and cross-checked the different interpretations and the differing levels of the followers' understanding. They persisted in gaining a proper understanding of these religions in order to comprehend the nature and purpose of religious diversity and to describe the unity of truth.

The venture of Muslim scholars of the first millenium of Muslim history, especially from the third to the sixth *hijrī* century, resulted in a unique and voluminous literature that still awaits its readers, analysts, critics, and translators. How much gratitude is due to these scholars is sometimes acknowledged even by the orientalists. Franz Rosenthal, for example, writes:

> The comparative study of religion has been rightly acclaimed as one of the great contributions of Muslim civilization to mankind's intellectual progress. Bestriding the middle zone of the oikeumene, medieval Islam had contact with many religions and probably all conceivable types of religious experience. . . . There were only two possible ways to confront the challenge arising out of the multiplicity of competing religions. It could either be blandly ignored or it could be met head on. To our great benefit, Muslim intellectuals chose the second alterative.[12]

It would be an exaggeration to claim that all of these earlier studies were free of apologetics, polemics, and value judgments. It would equally be a distortion to deny that the roots of every comparative study are found in the soil of polemics and apologetics, emerging out of encounters between traditionalism and change, or between different religions and ideologies. Most of the Muslim scholars' studies of religion were the direct result of a scholar's personal encounter with and interest in other religions, and through the original and living sources of these religions. If there was any postulate for the treatment of these differing religious traditions, it was the scholar's conviction of the unity of truth and the unity and universality of humanity as logical concomitants of his faith in the unity of God. The sole criterion for comparative analysis of the religious data was reason and commonsense observation.

After taking a critical look at the body of literature on world religions and cultures contributed by the Muslim scholars, broadly speaking, four principal types emerge: a) accounts of personal dialogues between a Muslim and a non-Muslim, a sort of participatory dialogue; b) letters of persuasion and conversational discussion, with argumentation of differences; c) general refutation of other religions by a new convert to justify his/her own conversion, or a response to general polemical literature advanced against Islam or to inform the general public about these polemics; and d) general studies of religions not based on polemical or apologetical interests, but on undertaking a serious search to comprehend the unity of truth and the diversity of religious traditions, i.e., a systematic study of the nature and function of religious

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[12]Bruce B. Lawrence, *Shahrastani on Indian Religions*, vol. 4, Religion and Society Series (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1976), 5-preface. Adam Mez admits this fact even with a better record. See Adam Mez, *The Renaissance of Islam* (New York: AMS Press, 1975), 210 ff.

phenomena, the nature of the truth-claims made by these diverse religious traditions, their division into various sects, and their processes of development and change. The studies which represent this fourth type stand up to any rational/objective criteria claimed by the so-called modern and Western discipline of the history of religions.

The most important point to note about these Muslim studies of religions is, however, that the scholars of religion did not see religions as epiphenomena, nor did they divide the knowledge into different watertight disciplines as modern Western scholars have done. In accordance with the Islamic concept of the unity of knowledge and the unity of truth, they saw religion as the queen of all sciences and also as the locus and substance of all branches of knowledge. The present pseudodivision of knowledge into the disciplines of "humanities," "social sciences," and "natural sciences" is an exclusively Western invention and is primarily based upon the postulates of evolution and materialism. This explains why the Western classical studies of religion from the second half of the nineteenth century onward were obsessed with the search for the origin and primordial forms of religion. They reduced religion to an element of culture rather than taking people *qua homo religiosus* and treating the phenomena of religion as the core of human culture and civilization.

Muslim historians of religions, convinced of the unity of knowledge and the unity of truth, conceived of religion as the core and basis of all human culture and civilization and saw all other branches of knowledge as directly related to, and dependent upon, the science of religion. There is hardly any Muslim work on history, whether biographical, local, or universal, on geography, belles lettres, law, theology, philosophy, or some other Qur'anic science which does not include some information on Islam and other religions.

It is only during the last two decades that those Muslim scholars, so long relegated to the status of being mere historians, heresiographers, or theologians by the orientalist patriarchs, are being studied as early contributors to the study of religion. Although al Shahrastānī's *Kitāb al Milal wa al Niḥal* is becoming known as the first Muslim study of the history of religions in the West, and although there is some recognition of and appreciation for al Birūnī's contribution to this field, no systematic research on Muslims' studies of religious traditions has been done. This genre of literature, known to the Muslims as *milal wa niḥal*, and to which al Shaharastānī's work stands as the high-water mark, is as yet undocumented and awaits serious study. For the purpose of illustrating this point, we refer to two scholars, each belonging to the Muslim East and West respectively. They are al Birūnī and Ibn Hazm.

Both scholars stand as founding pillars due to their studies of religion. They inform us about the existence of previous works on the history of religions, and both of them justify the need and distinction of their studies over and against the previous ones. They claim that their treatment of other religions

is objective, scientific, more coherent and consistent, and that they are based upon original sources and direct observation, thus making their works a presentation of these religions on their own terms. These are the criteria that previous studies lacked. In the preface of *Kitāb al Fiṣl fī al Milal wa al Aḥwā' wa al Niḥal*, Ibn Hazm writes:

> Indeed, many people have written a great number of books on the differences of humanity's religions and worldviews. Some of them prolonged their treaties with unnecessary details and longwindedness to an extent of prolixity, nonsense, and exaggeration and thus including incoherent and mistaken data which made them devoid of understanding and deprived of knowledge. Others summarized, shortened, and curtailed them to the extent of leaving out strong points of their strength, and thus their purpose was lost. So these religions or views were not presented on their own terms. Thus these studies do an injustice to the proper study of the differing views and are no longer useful to their readers.[13]

Similarly, after explaining his purpose and method for the study of Indian religions and condemning the lack of objectivity among his predecessors in the description of other ideas, systems of thought, and religious outlooks, al Birūnī writes:

> The same tendency [i.e., toward distortion, misrepresentation, and prejudiced treatment] prevails throughout our whole literature on philosophical and religious sects. If such an author is not alive to the requirements of a strictly scientific method, he will procure some superficial information which will satisfy neither the adherents of the doctrines in question nor those who really know it . . . My book is nothing but a simple historical record of facts. I shall place before the reader the theories of the Hindus exactly as they are, and I shall mention in connection with them similar theories of the Greeks in order to show the relationship existing between them.[14]

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[13]Ibn Hazm, *Kitāb al Fiṣl fī al Milal wa Ahwā' wa al Niḥal* (Cairo: al Matba'at al Adabīyah, 1317-1321/1899-1903), 1:2. The publication consists of five parts bound into two: parts 1 and 2 are in one volume, and parts 3, 4, and 5 are in another volume. Each part is separately paginated.

[14]Al Birūnī, *Al Beruni's India*, ed. and trans. Edward C. Sachau, vol. 1 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, and Co., 1910), 6-7. This is a two-volume work.

Neither al Birūnī nor Ibn Hazm inform us about the authors or the titles of those works they believe to be unscientific and unsatisfactory. As there is no other extant systematic study of other religions which can equal their studies, we are left with hypotheses designating these works mentioned by these two authors as the first scientific and objective works on the history of religions.

Students of Islam are aware of the fact that an abundance of data on world religions is available in different Muslim scholarly works—works dealing with universal history, geography, philosophy, theology, literary criticism and belles lettres, Qur'anic commetaries, hadith commentaries, and fiqh literature. These data were distributed according to the context of the main subject matter. This is telling evidence that the history of religions was not known just to theologically-oriented Muslim scholars but was also common knowledge among scholars of various persuasions. The originality and importance of al Birūnī's and Ibn Hazm's studies lies in their ingenious development of methodology and systematic analysis, later taken to a high-water mark in al Shaharastānī's study.

One may ask why both of the above-mentioned authors and their works have been ignored and why they did not attain even the same status as that accorded to al Shaharastānī? The primary reason may be the fact that both scholars are encyclopedic in their knowledge. Both have more than one *magnum opus* in other sciences, while al Shaharastānī's *magnum opus* is only on the history of religions.

Many Muslim students of Ibn Hazm, especially in the modern period, have been occupied either with his works on fiqh or on the history of belles lettres; seldom have they felt the need to emphasize his contribution to the history of religions.[15] Partly because this discipline (once the queen of all sciences in the heyday of Muslim scholarship) had been ignored after the onslaught of colonialism, and partly because of the downfall of the Muslim empire, Muslim scholars became more concerned with the preservation of

[15]Moshe Perlmann, "The Medieval Polemics between Islam and Judaism," in *Religion in a Religious Age*, ed. S. D. Goiten (Cambridge, MA: Association for Jewish Studies, 1974), 103-138. See also his "Eleventh Century Andalusian Authors on the Jews of Granada," in *American Academy for Jewish Research Proceedings* 28 (1948-1949), 269-290. It is noteworthy that Perlmann, who reduced Ibn Hazm's studies on religion to sheer polemics, the studies later produced on the same pattern as Sa'd bin Manṣūr bin Kammūnah's *Tanqīḥ al Abḥāth fī al Milal al Thalāth* are claimed by him to be a study of comparative religion. See *Ibn Kammunah's Examination of Three Faiths: A Thirteenth Century Essay in the Study of Comparative Religion*, ed. and trans. by Moshe Perlmann (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971; Arabic Text, 1967). See its review in *The Muslim World* 65 (Oct. 1975), 295-6. See also Israel Friedlaender, *Heterodoxies of the Shi'ites according to Ibn Hazm* (New Haven, CT: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1909). George Makdisi's criticism and analysis of Goldziher's disparagement of the Ḥanbalī and Ẓāhirī schools of Islamic law and their theological thought came to our notice after we had already realized Goldziher's and his followers views, in concurrence with Dozy and others, against Ibn Hazm. See George Makdisi's "Hanbalite Islam," in *Studies on Islam*, ed. and trans. by Merlin L. Swartz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 216-74.

their tradition and more rigid and defensive, rather than open and analytic, in their points of view.

The orientalist scholars of Ibn Hazm, with the exception of Miguel Asin Palacios, studied his works on belles-lettres, the psychology of love, ethics, and fiqh. Among his orientalist readers, one finds two different approaches and attitudes towards Ibn Hazm's scholarly contribution. One group of scholars, led by Ignaz Goldziher, studied Ibn Hazm's literalist approach to fiqh and his revivification of the Ẓāhirī school of Islamic law. Goldziher reduced all of Ibn Hazm's scholarly contribution to dogmatics, polemics, and heresiography and labelled him the representative of the most conservative, fundamentalist, and exclusivist stream of Muslim scholars. The second group of orientalists, led by Miguel Asin Palacios (who, alone, thoroughly studied Ibn Hazm's *Kitāb al Faṣl*), declared Ibn Hazm the founder and unprecedeted scholar of the history of religions. But their findings did not gain any following after the 1930s. Though Palacios' study of Ibn Hazm was a classic, it remained an unconsulted and unused reference. His evaluation of Ibn Hazm was passed by, although his analysis was never disproved. Consequently, Ibn Hazm continued to be described as the great Muslim polemicist and heresiograph of medieval Muslim Spain rather than the founder of the history of religions and biblical criticism.

As for al Birūnī, he had been recognized and acknowledged as an objective and scientific scholar of his time by both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars. Nonetheless, his *Kitāb fī Taḥqīq mā li al Hind* has never been studied or analyzed as a study of the Hindu religious tradition. There has been some recent awareness of his contribution to the history of religions, but this appreciation has not yet produced a thorough analysis of his study of the Hindu religious tradition from the viewpoint of the history of religions. Students of al Birūnī have also been primarily occupied with his works on astronomy, astrology, mathematics, geography, and history; little attention has been paid to his contribution to the history of religions.

Conclusion

Both Ibn Hazm and al Birūnī were great original thinkers and encyclopedists and therefore cannot remain unknown or simply ignored by serious students of Muslim intellectual history. The major point of complaint and concern here is the lack of appreciation due to them by students of the history of religions and religious ideas.

This brief and sketchy survey on Muslims scholars' founding of and contribution to the history of religions is an attempt to remind Muslim historians and social scientists that their predecessors conceived the reality of

sociohistorical phenomena based upon religious ideas and their practices. The history of humanity was for them the history of ideas and values which was, in turn, based on religious ideas and their application in human life.