

BOOK REVIEWS

Islamic Thought through Protestant Eyes by Mehmet Karabela (New York, London: Routledge, 2020). Pp. xvi + 356. \$160.00 (cloth). ISBN: 978-0-367-54954-1 (hbk) ISBN: 978-1-003-09134-9 (ebk).

Islam Through Protestant Eyes (2021, Routledge) by Mehmet Karabela of Queen's University, provides a unique resource for researchers in the history of European ideas, religious studies, and comparative philosophy. The author has translated and edited seventeen selections from dissertations about various aspects of Islam written by Protestant theologians of the early modern period. The selections aim at gaining insight into early Protestant views on Islam and the role they played in the trajectory of the reformation, with respect to both their intellectual and polemic debate against the Catholic Church, and to the internal discussions shaping the self-conception of the new religious movement. They also provide insight on how the Protestants' self-conception in contrast to their Catholic enemies shaped their interpretation of Islam.

Karabela provides a thorough yet concise analysis of all of this in Part 1: "Post-Reformation Protestant Uses of Islam," dividing the subject into three sections corresponding to issues of particular interest to the Protestant scholars of the time. These are Religion and Theology, Philosophy and the Liberal Arts, and the Sunni – Shia schism. The next three parts of the book provide the generous offering of translated and edited selections from the primary sources. Preceding each selection, Karabela provides a brief biography of the author and a summary of its contents. An extensive though not comprehensive bibliography that follows, Protestant academic work on Islam between 1650 and 1840, illustrates the amount of research yet to do on the important subject. This book, in short, initiates a new field of study of interest for multiple reasons.

One reason is that it fills a gap left by the already advanced study of orientalism, as that developed in the colonial context, as well as the ongoing historical critique of secular liberalism that eventually informed both the rationale of colonialism and the self-conception of colonial societies. These ideas along with their dialectic relation to conceptions of Islam, obviously had a genealogy in earlier Protestant thought, the roots of which are located in the Protestant writings of Islam revealed here. As Karabela points out, by contrast to the ascendant colonial

position of later orientalist over subjugated Muslim lands, earlier Protestant thought on Islam took place in a context in which Europe felt the threat of Ottoman power and the weakness of religious division at the height of the western Christian schism. Further study of this thought will thus facilitate a deeper historical critique of the development of the cultural contingency that eventually became 'the West.'

Another reason this field will be of interest is to contribute to a greater awareness of the general manner in which our cultural/religious/ideological self-conceptions, along with their requirements and vulnerabilities, affect our perceptions of others. Here, we have a case study, or range of case studies, of how the ongoing theological and political conflict with the Catholic Church created the needs for the satisfaction of which Protestant presentations of Islam were instrumentally shaped (and often oversimplified or even distorted). This is certainly not a phenomenon limited to Protestant views of Islam. One could do a similar study of early Muslim writings on Christianity in the context of inter-Muslim sectarian polemics. Taken together, these could facilitate a greater self-awareness in the West and the Muslim world regarding the contingencies affecting mutual perceptions between the two cultures.

Lastly, this study should be of interest to anyone engaged in comparative religion and philosophy most broadly. An historical example that comes to mind is the way in which Confucians and Taoists responded to the introduction of Buddhism in China. As well known, the threat it posed to Confucian social authority affected both Confucian perceptions of Buddhism as well as its own self-conceptions in the form of neo-Confucianism. Likewise, perceived affinities to Buddhism among Taoist thinkers led to new forms of both Taoism and Buddhism. A comparative study between these interactions and those discoverable in the Protestant writings on Islam may uncover both similarities and differences that greatly enrich our historical understanding of how cultural self-conceptions and conceptions of the other dynamically influence each other. These are just a few among many other possibilities for interesting comparative study raised by this admirable new book by Karabela. For that alone, it would be a valuable addition to the libraries of historically-minded scholars in Philosophy, Religion, and Humanities throughout Asia.

Dr. Edward Moad
Professor of Philosophy
Qatar University, Qatar