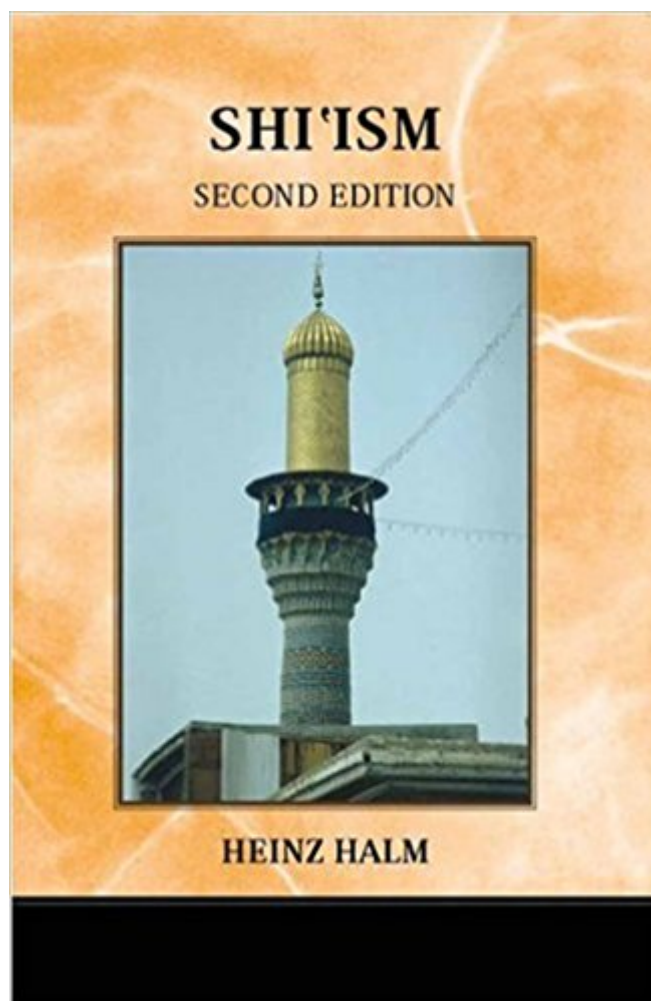


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Shi'ism (New Edinburgh Islamic Surveys)



Synopsis

Heinz Halm's work presents a thorough and accessible discussion of the history, theology, and current state of this branch of Islam. Newly revised, Shi'ism includes updated information on the fate of the Shi'ite revolution in Iran as well as a new chapter on Iraq. Observing a tradition more than 1000 years old, Shi'ites represent 10 percent of the Muslim population, or 100 million people. Halm explores how Shi'ism differs from the rest of Islam, discussing the prominence of its authorities, the Imams, as well as its legal system, practices of worship, places of pilgrimages, and a religious ethos characterized by a fervor to suffer for the cause. Additionally, Halm provides a lucid survey of the various branches of Shi'ism, paying attention to their historical, organizational, and theological developments. The book also considers the appeal and impact of Imams in contemporary Shi'ism and their interpretation of the social and economic problems gripping the Islamic world.

Book Information

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"A good primer to the complex subject of Shi'ism. It should be on the bookshelves of all good libraries and personal collections." -- "The Muslim News"

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Provides a concise yet comprehensive overview of Shiism in its myriad forms. The bulk of the book is dedicated to Imami/Twelver Shiism (130+ pages) with a particular emphasis on its development during and after Safavid Iran. The section on Ismaili Shiism is roughly 40 pages, and then there are about 5 pages each dedicated to Zaydi and Ghulat (heterodox) strands. Overall I found the book to be well worth the read, even though at times the tone of the author is critical if not offensive to the subject matter he is discussing, I learned a lot. Also wished he wrote more on the historical development of Twelver Shiism outside of Iran - ie, Iraq, Lebanon, India etc, instead of mentioning it briefly.

This book is a clear and well documented explanation of Shi'ism, the largest minority faction within Islam. When the Prophet Mohammad died a dispute arose almost immediately over who should succeed him as leader of the Islamic community (umma). In the tumult that followed the assassination of the third Caliph "Uthman in 656, one party supported the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law over other contenders in the belief that only a kinsman of the Prophet should succeed him. This party became the "Sh'ia", which name, the reader is informed means party in Arabic. The majority favored a succession that extended well beyond the Prophet's family and eventually become to be known as "Sunni." According to the author, the Sh'ia thus began more as a political party than a religious movement and it was not until the 10th and 11th Centuries that real religious differences appeared between the Sunnis and the Sh'ia. During these centuries regular if complex religious doctrines were developed in support of the Sh'ia by religious scholars in what became Iraq and Iran. But again the author makes clear that the divisions between the Sunni and Sh'ia have always been as much political as religious. Indeed it would seem the more one finds out about the Realm of Islam the more complicated and sometimes confusing it becomes. This book provides an important guide to anyone trying to understand the practices and memorials of those Moslems belonging to one or another of the Shi'ia factions. Now be forewarned. This book is an excellent primer on Shi'ism, but it is a hard slog to read. Perhaps the fact that it was originally written in

German has something to do with its difficulty or perhaps it is merely the complex subject matter. Still if one reads this book with care and attention to detail, one can gain a good deal of knowledge on an important facet of Islam.

Who is Al Shareef Al Radi and Al Shareef Al Mourtada and when was the main core of the ideology of Twelver Shiism formed? How did the Shiite thought shift from the need to wait for the hidden imam who is divinely mandated to rule into their later thinking of the necessity of taking governance into their hands as they wait for the return of the imam? Who were the 12 imams and how was the Shiite branch of Islam formed? Heinz offers accurate, yet brief, answers to all the questions that students - and interested individuals - of Shiism might ask. He skillfully employs needed methodology for treating the Shiite history and writing it. As such, Heinz presents all of the literature available on the subject at hand, examines the credibility of the sources and cross-examines these sources with other similar ones in order to come up with his account. The book is condensed, full of names, dates and events and might be an overdose for readers unfamiliar with the subject. Yet, it covers most of the issues on Shiism. Another draw back (or maybe not) is that the book is written in the style of a teaching text book with sections dividing each subject. Subjects are covered in a chronological order. While this kind of writing and classification of sections might be beneficial for new comers to the learning on Shiism, it might be distracting for those who seek a book with a coherent narration.

It is refreshing to see interest in Shiism and particularly in Ismailism. I wonder why Fatimids do not get the same play as other Islamic Ruling dynasty and why not reflect on their "Rule" rather than "Religion" only.

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