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Gudrun Krämer and Sabine Schmidtke, eds., *Speaking for Islam: Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies*, Brill, 2014, x + 310 pp., \$63.00 US (pbk), ISBN 9789004272101.

In Islam, as in other monotheistic religions, God is the ultimate authority. This, however, should not obscure the different understandings of how His authority is mediated through, perhaps even delegated to, some select individuals or groups. For even when God addresses humans directly in a scripture, it, more often than not, requires interpretation to fathom His real intentions from the words that He uses. Here, as the editors of the volume under review point out, all sorts of factors are relevant, including age, gender, status group, and language skills (7). But textual interpretation is not the only means by which authority could be exercised in the name of God. There is also the direct personal and spiritual experience of His will, as well as the direct divine intervention in human life by selecting certain individuals as community leaders, either on the basis of their descent, knowledge, charisma, piety, or various combinations of some or all of these factors. And today, in our ‘modern’ world, we can add access to various forms of mass media and new communication technologies, which access has had tremendous influence, not only on the agents of authority and their credentials, but also on the very sources upon which they construct their authority and the way they exercise it.

This book is about these various manifestations of authority as has existed in the history of Islam, which authority usually blurs the boundaries between the ‘religious’ and the ‘temporal,’ and bears witness to the weight of the tradition (rather, traditions) that sanctions it. In fact, a professed aim of this volume is to reveal the complexities of the notion of authority in Islamic history by questioning, or at least problematizing, its relationship with Islam’s scriptural texts; the position of religious scholars in it vis-à-vis both caliphs and sultans, as well as Sufis or even *darnishes*; the weight of individuals vs. institutions as agents of authority in Muslim societies; the oral transmission of knowledge and personal investiture of scholarly or spiritual authority vs. autodidacticism or direct, personal experience. We can add to these the onslaught of modernity and its exigencies. Naturally, all these factors lead to diversity, so it is perhaps more apt to speak, not of ‘authority,’ but of “authorities” of “men and women claiming, projecting and exerting religious authority within a given context” (3).

Following an “Introduction” that sets the theoretical foundation of this volume, the first chapter presents a theory against what is generally assumed to be the most salient form of authority in Muslim society—the authority of the legal schools. In the *Zāhirī* school of law, Camila Adang points out, “the interpretative role of the legal scholars [is] reduced to a

minimum” (16). Accordingly, Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī, the most famous of all Zāhirī scholars, militated against all forms of *taqlīd*, viz., the (blind) following of and adherence to the legal views of a particular scholar or school of law. In other words, seeking to establish the absolute authority of the religious texts, Zāhirīs sought to undermine the authority of legal schools, which, they held, had compromised that authority by introducing a whole range of extra-textual and non-textual legal sources. The chapter provides an overview of the rational and textual arguments advanced for and against *taqlīd* in medieval Islamic legal literature. If *taqlīd* is not permissible, *ijtihād* becomes incumbent upon every Muslim who can undertake it. Those who do not possess the knowledge required for the direct engagement with the textual sources of the law (the only valid sources, that is) are required to ascertain that the views they follow are based on those textual sources and are *not* the personal opinions of one scholar or another.

The second chapter presents early Sunnī–Shī‘ī debates about the sources of legitimacy of religious and political leadership. Here, Asma Afsaruddin grants possession of knowledge pride of place, so much so that Sunnīs are presented as having held that Abū Bakr was the Prophet’s legitimate successor because of his knowledge, as did Shī‘īs regarding ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. Interestingly, the debates also tackled the issue of age, with Abū Bakr accepting the Prophet’s call when he was relatively old, and ‘Alī when he was a child. As expected, arguments for and against embracing a religion in young or old age can easily be made by competing parties. Overall, the argument made in this chapter is not always compelling, and the relevance of some of the accounts mentioned to the argument made is not always clear, particularly in the case of Sunnī views on Abū Bakr. One is also puzzled by the reference to Q. 2:31 as an example that allegedly shows how “the Qur’ān points to Adam’s *superiority over the angels and all other creatures* on the basis of his ability to recite the names of all created beings and things” (49, emphasis added).

Although the editors acknowledge upfront that, “In their majority, the authors do not approach their subject with an explicit theoretical agenda” (14), judging by their approach in the introduction, it seems that they may have wished that some chapters were more theoretically vigorous than they actually are. The third chapter is a case in point. It is basically a history—an inconclusive history, in fact, as witnessed by the many unanswered questions that Paul E. Walker raises but cannot answer due to the lack of sufficient sources—of two positions that existed within the Fatimid administration: the *qādī al-quḍāt* and the *dā‘ī al-du‘āt* (and later the *bāb al-abwāb*, a kind of spiritual leadership without official state position). The former, as all readers know, adjudicated cases presented to him, whereas the latter was in charge of propagating the Fatimid cause and ‘indoctrinating’ its followers (the believers, in contrast to Muslims, or non-Ismā‘īlīs). Remarkably, despite the fact that the chief *qādī* was higher in rank than the chief *dā‘ī*, whereas the latter naturally had to be Ismā‘īlī, the former did not—in which case he at times asked for a guarantee of independence, including the right to reject royal gifts and official ceremonies associated with his position (75). Overall, the chapter shows the intricacy of choosing occupants of the two positions in a caliphate where the majority of the population did not follow the religious doctrines of their rulers.

In the next, heavily documented chapter, Sabine Schmidtke revisits the institution of *ijāza*, the license granted by a teacher (a *shaykh*) to a student to transmit some or all of his books. Unlike the general presumption, these *ijāzas* were as important to the teacher as they were to the student who received them; in fact, it may have been even more important to the teacher’s image and authority. The *ijāza* was a kind of an autobiography where a scholar

listed his teachers (and obviously, the more prominent and ‘connected’ they were, the better) and works (99). This notwithstanding, we do not lack scholars who boasted being self-educated with no *ijāzas* from anybody. Generally, the *ijāzas* that a scholar granted were remarkably more important to his scholarly status than the ones he actually received (100), especially if his students turned out to be prominent scholars themselves.

Moving from scholarly authority to another kind of what may be regarded as ‘popular’ authority, Bettina Dennerlein discusses in the next chapter the notion of Maraboutism, a mélange of popular Islam and Berber religious beliefs dealing with the super-natural, magic, and natural forces of good and evil. It probably originated in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries when a power vacuum and external threat gave local religious experts socio-political powers (130). To boost their legitimacy and authority even more, the Marabouts—those local religious-cum-political leaders—frequently claimed noble descent from the Prophet Muḥammad’s family. But contrary to the view that this kind of popular authority usually implies a tension with the ‘scholarly,’ scriptural tradition, Dennerlein insists that it was “shaped by scripturalist interpretations of Islam and influenced by religious developments in other parts of the Muslim world” (133). This we see in a case study of a Marabout from nineteenth century Morocco. The bases of his authority included, not only knowledge of, but also closeness to God, as manifested by his performance of various forms of miracles (*karamāt*) without shunning the scholarly tradition or opposing it. Four chapters later, Annabelle Böttcher presents the case of a twentieth century Sufi *walī*, focusing not only on his charismatic appeal and miracle performing credentials, but also on the network and “corporate identity” that he is able to create and maintain. In contrast to the local Marabout, the case of the *walī* presented here shows the trans-national reach of a Sufi network that relies a great deal on the presence of a charismatic spiritual leader and generally lacks a fixed or rigid structure with membership duties and responsibilities (264).

In the next chapter after Dennerlein’s, Muhammad Qasim Zaman discusses how some twentieth century Muslim scholars have sought to rethink the relevance of consensus (*ijmāʿ*) as a source of law to modern Islam. Starting with advancing new interpretations of Q. 4:59—which enjoins Muslims to obey “God, the Messenger, and those in *authority among you*”—they have emphasized that consensus need not be an impediment to the process of tuning Islam to modern times. Zaman speaks briefly of Muḥammad ‘Abduh, Rashīd Riḍā, and Muḥammad Iqbāl, but gives more space to the views of ‘Ubayd Allāh Sindhī (d. 1944) and Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, all of whom are scholars who sought in various ways to reconceive and transform consensus as an “instrument of legitimizing change” (166). Remarkably, whereas Muslim scholars tend to be tolerant towards attempts at redefining and reconstituting consensus as a legal source, they tend to react aggressively when an issue believed to be held on the basis of consensus is at stake—an example would be the necessity of having a caliphate (174-175). In other words, for any new reconfiguration of consensus to be tolerated, it cannot but reinforce “the authority of the Islamic tradition” (175).

Zaman also touches on the issue of the rise of a new generation of Muslim scholars who are not graduates of traditional religious seminaries, and who are skilled in the use of modern information technologies and media of mass communication. This, however, did not necessarily undermine the position of traditionally educated scholars, many of whom are able to adapt to the requirements and realities of the new circumstances—some of which have led to a kind of fragmentation of their authority (176). Zaman also mentions the “uncertainty” (one could read here either ‘vagueness,’ ‘contradictions,’ or both) that characterize much of this modernist Islamic discourse. An outstanding example of these two

points is perhaps Shaykh Yūsuf al-Qarāḍāwī, whose life and scholarship are tackled in the next chapter by Gudrun Krämer. Krämer argues that Qarāḍāwī is consciously engaged in a process of “drawing boundaries” and defining “correct belief and practice” in both public and private matters. To this end, he has spared no means to disseminate his views, including the extensive use of the Internet and satellite channels, and the leadership of trans-national Islamic organizations. His appeal, and also authority, can further be attributed to his emphasizing that Islam does not intend to cause Muslims hardship and inconvenience, which means that Muslims can be fully compliant with its ordinances while contributing to and enjoying what modern life has to offer them as long as it does not contradict their religious beliefs. This is his understanding of centerism (*wasatīyya*), the “*juste milieu*” the characteristics of which are “balance, moderation, [and] unison” (198).

This notwithstanding, we do not lack cases of “uncertainty,” where a self-professed ‘moderate’ scholar cannot but reiterate a ‘traditional’ view (sanctioned by consensus) regarding apostasy as a grave religious and social evil that is punishable by death if it becomes public. This is perhaps a case of the “constants” mentioned by Zaman, about which Qarāḍāwī’s “new” *fiqh* cannot but be unrelenting. Here, we see that ‘moderation’ and ‘centerism’ do not necessarily mean liberalism (214), which could, ironically, extend the scholar’s influence and authority, not only to ordinary Muslims seeking to remain faithful to Islam in the modern world, but even to extremist groups (such as Egypt’s *al-Jamā‘a al-Islāmiyya*) that undergo a process of doctrinal ‘revision’ and ‘de-radicalization.’

In the next chapter, Katajun Amirpur examines the changes through which the institution of *velāyat-e faqīh* has undergone after Khomeynī’s death in 1989. He begins with the circumstances that led to the choice of ‘Alī Khāmene’ī as Iran’s supreme leader despite the presence of more qualified Shī‘ī scholars. This was made possible by a revision made to the Iranian constitution that Khomeynī himself ordered when his original successor—Grand Ayatollah Ḥoseyn Montazerī—fell out of favor. Now the credentials of the authoritative leader extend beyond religious knowledge to include political skills and acumen (222). This latter point has been emphasized, or exploited, by Khāmene’ī during his now 25 years in office, such that one can say that “[o]ne generation after the Islamic Revolution, scholars’ titles...say more about their bearers’ position in the political hierarchy of Iran than about their scholarship and their standing in the religious community or with their lay followers” (225). But in addition to his striving for recognition as a *marja‘*, a “source of emulation” with the highest religious credentials, Khāmene’ī and some of his supporters have propagated the view that the *rahbar* (leader) is God’s choice, and it is not an arbitrary one. Thus, even if the leader is ostensibly elected by the Council of Experts, his position entitles him to be the ultimate religious and political authority as well as the source of legitimacy for any law that the Parliament itself makes (229). What is noteworthy here is that ordinary Shī‘īs have now lost their traditional capacity to choose their own exclusive *marja‘* and are forced to follow the views of a particular scholar when he disagrees with their own chosen *marja‘*s. In all this, we see contradictory understandings of the institution of *velāyat-e faqīh*, understandings of which range from viewing it as a consultative position for a *faqīh* who is appointed by people and whose authority is based on a contractual relationship with them (Montazerī’s view, 236-237), to propagating it as the “undisputed truth” and “only [legitimate] Shi‘ite form of government” in the era of the Great Occultation (231). Remarkably, “those in authority among you” is cited as Qur’anic evidence for this latter view.

In the last chapter of this volume, Markus Dressler discusses the case of the “modern *dede*,” the communal leader of the Turkish Alevis. Traditionally, the authority of the *dede* was

based on a number of factors, including descent, social skills, and mystical and religious knowledge (270). This had to change in the face of both secularization and urbanization in the twentieth century, especially after the establishment of the Turkish Republic. With the movement of Alevis to urban centers and the emergence of an Alevi urban elite in the middle of the century, the authority of traditional *dedes* was eroded. Among other things, it came to be limited to ‘religious’ and ‘non-religious’ matters (270), and the new secular—but still committed nonetheless to Alevi cultural tradition—elite became the representative of the Alevis as a social movement in Turkey and the link with the rest of the society (274-275). All this led to the emergence of a new type of ‘modern’ *dedes* who are active in Alevi institution building and reach out to the wider society. A good example is İzzettin Doğan (b. 1940), a law professor and leader of a huge foundation that supervises hundreds of smaller organizations in both Turkey and Germany and claims to represent ninety-nine percent of all Alevis. In addition to his prominent *dede* descent, charisma, successful networking, and closeness to the Turkish secular elite as a conservative Kemalist, Doğan is also successful due to his modern education, which meets the expectations of modern Alevis (282). In addition to initiating serious debates on the role and authority of *dedes* in the present, these expectations have led to a shortage in the number of qualified *dedes*. While all this has undermined the authority of *dedes*, Dressler notes that they are still likely to play significant ritual and spiritual roles in the Alevi community (290).

Overall, this is a useful volume that would give readers a fair idea about its subject matter. The book has a few typos and errors (such as “*hilm*” for *hulm* or *hulum* on page 56), and given that it was originally published in 2006, information about its contributors could perhaps have been updated.

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