

Given its focus on semantics, Badawi and Abdel Haleem's work will find its main utility among those who are interested in basic translation activity, likely in the context of individual study. Understood this way, the work may be viewed as an edited concordance with the duplicate illustrations of senses removed. For further development in the analysis of the text of the Quran this dictionary will have limited functionality. That said, the book will, of course, be useful to have at hand, although free online resources are already providing similar material. For example, the "Project Root List" at [www.studyquran.co.uk/PRLonline.htm](http://www.studyquran.co.uk/PRLonline.htm) displays the beginnings of what can be done – its concordance function is full (although it does not link to the Arabic of specific passages) and it provides references to Lane's dictionary in graphic/PDF format page by page.

**Andrew Rippin**

LEOR HALEVI:

*Muhammad's Grave: Death Rites and the Making of Islamic Society.* xiii, 400 pp. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. £22.50. ISBN 978 0 231 13742 3. doi:10.1017/S0041977X09000135

A significant chapter, and one always found in works of *fiqh* literature written during the post-formative period of Islamic law, is that dealing with funerary practices (*kitāb al-janā'iz*). This chapter traditionally discusses broad issues of death and offers specific procedures for treating the dead, such as how to bathe, pray over and bury the corpse. In one Shafiite work, the *Minhāj al-ṭālibīn* of Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Nawawī, for example, readers are told that the dead and the dying should be directed to face the Ka'ba, that the confession of faith is to be spoken so that the dying can hear, that the thirty-sixth chapter of the Quran be recited, that a man's corpse should be washed by a man and a woman's by a woman, and that the *walī* of the deceased is more competent to lead the prayer than the chief of the state or governor. However, very few scholars in the history of Islam have engaged in the study of how death rituals were constructed in Muslim society, particularly during the first to third centuries, which period is often described as the cradle of Islamic law. What we find in al-Nawawī's text as well as others is the product of sophisticated fourth-century traditions, a period when legal methodologies had been established and the boundaries of the *madhhabs* fully identified.

*Muhammad's Grave* represents an attempt to get around this impasse. It seeks to increase understanding of the development of death rituals during the period when *uṣūl al-fiqh* did not yet constitute a synthesis of rationalist and traditionalist beliefs. Halevi highlights how the Muslims of the *ahl al-ʿilm*, who lived after the death of Muḥammad and who resided for the most part in Kūfa or Basra, struggled to find legitimate and legal ways to treat the dead, which were in keeping with the revelations and traditions of the prophet and therefore distinctly Islamic. The term "Islamic" in this case is generally considered to create boundaries between Muslims and non-Muslims, either to respond to (adaptive) or abolish (reactive) the older traditions. Muslims, he argues, even though they share the tradition of burial with Jews and Christians, feel it necessary to separate themselves from the latter, and to some extent from Zoroastrians, by creating death ritual traditions that differed from those of their predecessors.

In support of his narrative on the Islamization of death rituals by the Muslims, Halevi uses both Muslim oral traditions and archaeological evidence, particularly epitaphs or inscriptions and tombstones, for each represents a particular idea of Islam. As for the first, one may question the reliability of the Muslim oral tradition and be sceptical as to its usefulness as a historical source for the early Muslim community. However, Halevi had warned himself of such scepticism and affirms that he himself benefited from many of their methodological insights. Moving beyond historians who doubt the reliability of Muslim tradition, Halevi reads oral traditions and texts as literary products of early Muslim culture, hoping to gain an insight into the ideological agenda of the transmitters of the traditions and their social function in the rapidly growing Muslim society.

One of the fruits of his readings of Muslim oral traditions as literary products is his insightful narrative on the historical origins of the reaction against wailing for the dead by the early Muslim pietists, in this case the Kūfans. This opposition not only continues the departure of Muslim rituals from their Jewish and Christian setting, but also indirectly elevated men of learning at the expense of women, eventually leading to social dependency and the exclusion of women from the ritual of funerals as we see today.

Guided by gender historians, among others, Halevi points out that wailing for the dead is a universal phenomenon, practised not only by the Greeks or Jāhiliyah but also animals. That wailing is practised predominantly by women, he writes, can be explained by the fact that this was a system in which women were economically dependent on men; it is the women who naturally felt the loss of men who were supposed to be their protectors. Muslim tradition, however, considered wailing to be an act of the devil and consistently reject such a practice. One prophetic *ḥadīth*, for example, says that the person who “tears at the garment [to expose] the breasts, and strikes at her cheeks, and calls out the invocations of *al-Jāhiliya* is not one of us”. The reason for the opposition is simple: “wailing was an act of complaining against the judgment of God, a manner of rebelling with exasperation against His decree”.

In order to be socially effective the repression of wailing needed the co-operation of the pietists, who sometimes did more than transmit the oral traditions of the prophet. The Kūfan traditionists, Halevi notes, were more inclined to fabricate traditions to achieve what they considered the ideal Muslim society. A statement attributed to the prominent Kūfan jurist Abū Ḥanīfa, “let women not be present at funerals, lest they try the living and harm the dead” is the best example of how oral tradition was constructed to move the community of believers towards an ideal society and distance it from Jāhili practice. The idea that women bewailing the dead would cause harm to the dead is by no means justified by the Quran. Neither do we find opposition to wailing in Malik’s *Muwattaʿa*, which is considered authoritative in the Medinese tradition. To support their position, the Kūfans found it necessary to build up their Arabian credibility by linking some of their traditions with Meccan authorities. The Meccan links, therefore, were intended to strengthen the traditions of the Kūfans *vis à vis* the Medinese tradition.

Another important finding in this book is the analysis of tombstones discovered in the cemetery of Aswān in southern Egypt bearing dates between 721 and 729 CE. In past decades we have been convinced by John Wansbrough’s argument that the canonization of the Quran took place in ‘Abbāsīd times, around the ninth century, and that the process occurred due to “interconfessional polemics”, rather than as a result of simple, gradual progress. The precise quranic quotations found on the tombstones, however, although they do not reveal anything about the collection of the standard ‘Uthmānic text, call into question Wansbrough’s theory of polygenesis. For this reason Halevi argues that the scriptural diffusion of canonical verses into provincial location had begun by the third decade of the eighth century, thus

undermining Wansbrough's canonization process via interconfessional polemics in the ninth century.

Halevi's findings in this book – the development of urban processions and communal prayers, the issue of the politics of burials, or the torture of the spirit and corpse in the grave – generally confirm the author's contention that, after the death of the prophet, it was the learned men who acted as the agents of Islamization in society, not the official caliphs or sultans.

Halevi, with a matchless imagination in relating the traditions and events of the past, has brought home the significance of Islamic death ritual for our understanding of the past. He has opened the way for further research in this much-overlooked field.

**Fachrizar Halim**

PAUL E. WALKER:

*Fatimid History and Ismaili Doctrine.*

(Variorum Collected Studies Series.) xii, 338 pp. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008. £65. ISBN 978 0 7546 5952 5.

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The present volume is a collection of thirteen articles by Paul E. Walker (University of Chicago, Center for Middle Eastern Studies) published in journals and edited books between 1972 and 2004. Their selection reflects a recurrent focus of research of this prolific scholar, namely the interplay between Fatimid history and Ismaili doctrine. This is not an easy field to master due to the nature of the primary sources available: on the one hand the Ismaili doctrinal literature, composed mainly for insiders, dealt only rarely with historical events and, when it did, reinterpreted them within a wider meta-historical framework; on the other, historical works written by outsiders were either polemical in nature or offered limited understanding of doctrinal issues. Walker has convincingly shown that Ismaili doctrine was indeed inextricably linked to Fatimid government and dynastic rule (297–567/909–1171), the most obvious example being the nature of Fatimid leadership, both temporal (caliph) and religious (imam).

This volume is also a testimony to Walker's remarkable contribution to the field of Ismaili and Fatimid studies, which ranges from his historical analysis of the Fatimids' confrontation with the Byzantines and the 'Abbāsids to his studies on early Ismaili cosmology and philosophy, to his evaluation of the Fatimid caliphate.

In his introduction to the volume, Walker provides a thematic grouping of his papers, which I will follow here.

First, by examining specific institutions of the Fatimid state, papers I and II deal with the extent to and ways in which Ismaili doctrine shaped Fatimid dynastic policy. Paper I focuses on the state institutions of learning and whether they spread Ismailism as a doctrine. Walker discusses the case of al-Azhar and carefully distinguishes it from other educational institutions, their specific roles and developments. His aim is to dispel a myth (i.e. al-Azhar as the first Islamic university) and, by way of careful analysis of the extant evidence, Walker concludes that, in fact, al-Azhar was a college only for a brief period and it did not serve as headquarters of the Ismaili *da'wa* (mission or propaganda), but rather as an important congregational mosque. This raises the issue of whether the Fatimid state ever attempted a mass conversion of its subject populations. In paper II, Walker analyses *naṣṣ* (the designation of one's successor to the imamate), a cardinal doctrine for the existence and legitimacy of the Fatimid dynasty but which, in practice, proved highly