

Studies that problematize essentialist notions of patriarchy and the inferior position in which it places women. ✂

DOI:[10.1017/rms.2018.35](https://doi.org/10.1017/rms.2018.35)

Ginger Feather  
University of Kansas

**AHMAD DALLAL**, *Prophets, Messiahs, and “the Extinction of the Grayzone”: The Political Theology of ISIS* (Washington D.C.: Tadween Publishing, 2017). Pp. 51. \$9.99 cloth. ISBN: 9781939067272.

**A**hmad Dallal has added an excellent little book to the growing body of literature on the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). And Dallal's book is little; coming in at just under fifty pages, it is a brisk but insightful read. Dallal seeks not simply to describe ISIS or explain its rise, both of which have been done before, but rather to interpret ISIS through a genealogy of the religious and political concepts they employ. His analysis weaves together contemporary political philosophy, anthropology of religion, and key primary sources in a way that gives readers purchase on the Islamic State's political theology. It is a unique success in the field.

Dallal draws his inspiration for analyzing ISIS from the contemporary critical discipline of political theology, a project Dallal describes in the short introduction. Drawing on theorists like Carl Schmitt and Paul Kahn, Dallal argues that at moments of revolution, like the Arab uprising that began in 2010–11, notions of legitimacy and legality are torn apart, and political theology as a critical enterprise begins. It is also when new political orders are born and new competing realities are possible. “Democratic transition is one such possibility,” Dallal cautions, “but so is ISIS (and many things in between)” (6). What the Islamic State offers as an alternative to the failed states that prompted the uprisings is an imagined new order. Dallal seeks to understand what this new order is, and inquire how “political concepts are deployed by ISIS, ask[ing] where they come from (their genealogy) and how they hold together (their architecture)” (12).

The remainder of Dallal's study is divided into four chapters. The first approaches the question that has become almost inevitable in treatments of the Islamic State: Is ISIS Islamic? Dallal makes a reasoned case that to understand ISIS as Islamic does not mean that Muslims must agree with ISIS, nor does it follow that ISIS is a necessary or inevitable outcome of

Muslim belief and practice. Dallal instead argues for “trying to understand the arguments made by ISIS as they relate to the traditions they invoke” and “the way they position themselves within the Islamic tradition” (10). Accepting that ISIS participates in a larger discursive tradition that is recognizably Islamic does not preclude criticism from both within and outside the tradition. The following two chapters cover the history of the Islamic State’s emergence from al-Qa’ida and the key ideological principles of the Islamic State, respectively. These principles, based on Dallal’s close reading of several seminal jihadist documents, principally the infamous *The Management of Savagery (Idarat at-Tawahhush)* by Abu Bakr Naji, include the strategic deployment of violence, sectarianism, and the establishment of a state.

State authority in ISIS’s project is given a sustained treatment in the fourth and final chapter, where Dallal argues that the center of ISIS’s ideology is the establishment of a state, or caliphate. As opposed to al-Qa’ida, the state is not the ideal outcome of struggle, but its animating principle: “for ISIS, the state or caliphate is not a future prospect resulting from current struggles, but the very reality that legitimizes all actions in the present” (26). This is why utopian images of a “pure” Muslim society and efforts at state building play such a prominent role in the Islamic State’s propaganda. Islam is reduced to the state, and the state is represented as *hierophany*, the sacred embodiment of divine law. Central to the state is the provision of justice, but not social or redistributive justice which, for ISIS, are “only invoked for tactical reasons” (27). Rather, it is something closer to a theodicy. Dallal describes this as a “prophetic justice” that envisions savage warfare as welcome, temporary suffering that averts a later cosmic punishment, and a “messianic” justice that celebrates both success and defeat as stages of apocalyptic expectation. Both “messianic” and “prophetic” justice, according to Dallal, serve primarily to absolve the Islamic State from the responsibility of alleviating human suffering, or even countenancing its expectation.

Many studies on specific aspects of the Islamic State have been published in the last few years, but few have sought to interpret its overall project. Dallal’s discussion of prophetic and messianic justice in ISIS’s political theology is innovative in its study but also limited by its brevity. There is much here to unpack: How do these two models of justice interact in ISIS’s political theology? How do they compare with other radical, apocalyptic theodicies? In addition, Dallal begins with the discipline of political theology, but aside from a discussion in the introduction it is not clear how it informs his method throughout the book. Still, the book is a valuable contribution to

studies on the Islamic State, and would fit well in advanced undergraduate courses related to religion and politics. ✨

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Anthony R. Byrd  
Emory University

**JAMES M. DORSEY**, *The Turbulent World of Middle East Soccer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). Pp. 382. \$24.95 cloth. ISBN: 9780199394975.

*The Turbulent World of Middle East Soccer* offers a rare analysis of the co-mingling of economics, culture, and politics in the “global game” of football (also known as soccer) in the Middle East. James Dorsey eloquently presents these intersections in the history of Middle Eastern football and its connections to the most recent “Arab Spring” protests in the region. Dorsey’s *The Turbulent World of Middle East Soccer* is a welcome discussion of a momentous era in Middle Eastern history, as it presents readers with an alternative lens to understand the dynamics of power in the region. This book successfully communicates to a wide audience, academic and non-academic alike, and will undoubtedly draw readers from football enthusiasts.

Dorsey illustrates and documents the context of football’s impact on everyday life and the region’s politics through rich presentations of multiple societies in the Middle East and North Africa. Most notably, readers will find detailed accounts of this historical and contemporary background for Algeria, Libya, Egypt, and Turkey. Dorsey also contextualizes the enthusiasm for football in the Middle East as part of a broader, global context for the game’s influence around the world. He states that the “deep-seated passion for football is paralleled only by religion”(12). Accordingly, the author frames the game, its economic and sociocultural facets, and its venues as one area that Middle Eastern and North African leaders deemed crucial for their well-being. Dorsey illustrates this intimate involvement of the region’s rulers in football by describing how football becomes another arena of power. Examples of this include: demonstrative punishments of national team players in Iraq; the micromanagement and patronage of football associations by the rulers and the members of the ruler’s family in Libya and Iraq; and Hosni Mubarak’s habit of awarding medallions to the Egyptian national team after international triumphs.

Dorsey is primarily concerned with the role of football within the Middle East and North Africa, but he also provides examples that illustrate the