The Cambridge Companion to American Islam offers a scholarly overview of the state of research on American Muslims and American Islam. The book presents the reader with a comprehensive discussion of the debates, challenges, and opportunities that American Muslims have faced through centuries of American history. This volume also covers the creative ways in which American Muslims have responded to the serious challenges that they have faced and continue to face in constructing a religious praxis and complex identities that are grounded in both a universal tradition and the particularities of their local contexts. The book introduces the reader to some of the many facets of the lives of American Muslims that can only be understood in their interactions with Islam’s entanglement in the American experiment.

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THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO

AMERICAN ISLAM

Edited by

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University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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Note on Transliteration

It is customary for Islamic studies scholars to explain their transliteration system, in part as proof that we are aware of the complex rules guiding our field and the languages associated with it. We have used a very simplified transliteration system for Arabic, Persian, Urdu, and Turkish words. Those familiar with these languages will easily identify the correct terms and those who are not will benefit more from the explanation in the glossary. In addition to ease of reading, we have refrained from using a more complicated system because American Muslims generally use simplified transliterations of key religious vocabulary that has been integrated into American Muslim English, including the use of English plurals for Arabic words.
Glossary

adhan. The call to prayer, for five daily prayers (see salat).
da‘wah. Literally “invitation.” Used to describe missionary activities to spread Islam.
dhikr (or zikr). Invocation or remembrance. The term for a particular Sufi practice involving the invocation of one of the Divine names, or the very term Allah, with the aim of attuning the consciousness of the faithful with that of Divine Presence.

Eid al-fitr. Feast of Fastbreaking. The celebration at the end of the month of Ramadan.
fatwa. A ruling or decree issued by an Islamic legal scholar.
fiqh. Human interpretation of shari‘ah (Divine law), Islamic jurisprudence.
hadith. A saying of the Prophet Muhammad. Also used for the collected sayings of Muhammad.
hajj. Pilgrimage to Mecca, one of the five pillars of Islam.
halal. Lawful or permissible according to Islamic law.
bijab. One of the terms for the Muslim headscarf.
i‘jma‘. Consensus of a community of scholars on a legal issue.
imam. In Sunni Islam, the leader of congregational prayer. In a Shi‘i context, the title for the immediate descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. Also used as a title for mosque and community leaders in the American context.
marja‘ (pl. maraji‘). The title of a leading Islamic legal scholar in Twelver Shi‘ism, one to whom the followers turn for authoritative interpretations.
mawlid. Celebration in honor of the birthday of an important religious figure, including that of the Prophet Muhammad.
mazar. Tomb or mausoleum of an important religious figure.
Mi‘raj. The night journey and heavenly ascension of the Prophet Muhammad.
muezzin. Caller to prayer.
nikah. Marriage ceremony.
niqab. Face “veil” or cover that some Muslim women wear.
pir. Elder religious leader figure, especially in Sufism. Same as shaykh.
Glossary

qutb. Literally “pole.” Term for the function of a high-ranking Sufi teacher as a vertical axis that connects this world to God.

Ramadan. The month of fasting in the Islamic calendar.

salat. The five daily prayers, one of the five pillars.

shahadah. The Muslim testimony of faith, first of the five pillars of Islam, declaring “There is no god but God, and Muhammad is God's messenger.”

shari'ah. Divine law, sometimes used for Islamic Law. To be distinguished from fiqh, which is jurisprudence.

shaykh. Elder religious leader figure.

sunnah. The life acts of the Prophet Muhammad, including his sayings (see hadith).

tariqas. English plural of the Arabic term tariqa, which literally means “mystical path.” A hierarchically structured Sufi community led by a Sufi shaykh or pir (teacher).


‘ulama. Religious scholars, with expertise in Qur’anic interpretation and law.

ummah. Muslim community.

zakat. Alms, charitable giving, one of the five pillars of Islam.