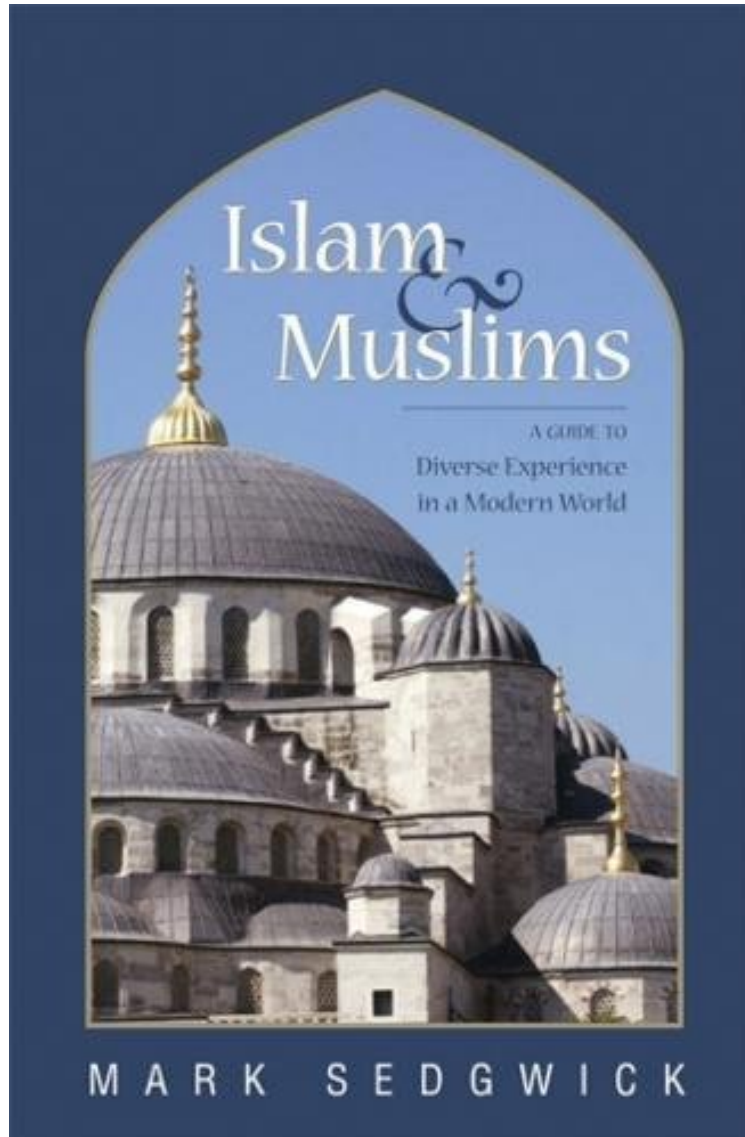


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Islam Muslims: A Guide to Diverse Experience in a Modern World

Mark Sedgwick

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Mark Sedgwick : Islam Muslims: A Guide to Diverse Experience in a Modern World before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Islam Muslims: A Guide to Diverse Experience in a Modern World:

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Introducing the people next doorBy George F. SimonsThis easy-to-read presentation of Islam and Muslims by Mark Sedgwick could just as well have been titled, An introduction to the people next door. The book is a matter-of-fact approach to Muslims, their culture, their thinking and their habits with

much guidance but little intrusion by the author. It presents the diversity of Muslims from the most devout to the most secular, in geographical contexts worldwide with the excursions into the background needed to know how certain Muslim beliefs, behaviors and practices came about. Understanding is enhanced by copious points of contact with the Western readers own cultural history and heritage. What I found most overwhelming in the larger part of the book was a sense of a vast array of people and peoples who were in fact not much different from my own. These are my neighbors, both present and past. Recognition of similarity need not be a denial of difference. Much of the dynamics, many of the attitudes and practices of Muslims can be found today among those of us who are not Muslim, but who bear another religion or none at all. From a belief and values perspective, it was easy to recognize and sympathize with many of the attitudes and behaviors of Muslims described in the book. In many cases they parallel what was normal in the environments pre-Vatican II Catholicism and pre-ecumenical Protestantism in which I grew up. One of the advantages of aging is that one has a memory that exceeds the trends, fashions and cycles of thinking that have occurred in ones lifetime, the waxing and waning of both skirt lines and fundamentalisms. We remember where we came from and the places we have passed through. We also remember the need to defend who we were and to carry our heritage with us in hostile environments. Attitudes about modesty, piety, gender roles, charity and responsibility to ones family were and are not unique to Islam, though forms of expression may differ widely. The authors simple but comprehensive descriptions allow us to have these insights. Sedgwick is also excellent at distinguishing what belongs to Islam religiously and historically from conditions and events which are due to economic, educational and political factors that are often confused with our assessment of Muslims and of Islam. That the poor and uneducated, legion in many parts of the Muslim world should have certain beliefs and habits that others and even they themselves see as part of religion is not surprising nor should we think of it as peculiar to Islam. Then, what is the problem? Having connected with the people next door and become understanding at least, if not accepting of their attitudes and behaviors, we need to face, as Sedgwick does in his final chapters, the political drive of Islamism and the concept of the clash of civilizations. He reminds us that the need for political and economic change in much of the Islamic world is both enormous and pressing in the everyday lives of Muslims, and that religion is the only available constellating force for renewal or revolution. The author reminds us of the history that underlies the Islamist present. The colonialism, interference and exploitation of Western governments and enterprises, both past and present make them an inevitable target in the efforts for change. US Americans may wonder why they are targeted. Henry Ford may have claimed that history is bunk but in fact history is bunkers, guns and exploitation. Islam and Muslims makes it clear that through our alliances with both former colonial powers, unpopular indigenous rulers and the state of Israel, now capped by our military engagement and threats the USA has become the embodiment of the devil of colonialism and the new crusaders. There is little reason in present circumstances for popular Muslim sentiment to favor the USA or those allied with it despite the need for development, technology, and other potentially helpful Western resources. The prognosis for political stability in most areas of the Muslim world is certainly in the short term not very hopeful. There is no reason to expect a lessening of either internal tension and violence or its spillover to the rest of the world. While the clash of civilizations may become a self-fulfilling prophesy because of our propensity for dualist thinking and policies of isolation, Sedgwick clearly identifies its roots elsewhere. The ongoing animosity and violence are the result of festering socioeconomic problems that become political agendas which in turn exploit religious identity to secure and maintain power. While socio-economic problems can be addressed, endless violence and conflict result when the issues have been raised to the intractable level of religious and ethnic identity. In reviewing this book, I claim no special critical knowledge of Islam. Having avidly devoured Philip Hittis 1937 History of the Arabs (the 10th edition is still a must in the field) in high school under the tutelage of a prof who made history come alive, I received at least a good outline of Islams historical and cultural development along with an abiding curiosity. I sensed myself enriched by Sedgwicks far reaching comprehension of the cultures and peoples of Islam, but also expect that readers who are approaching Muslims and Islam for the first time will find the book user-friendly as well as at least in some small degree enlightening and reassuring given the current frantic political climate whose chief product seems to be the generation of fear about each other. The book is particularly good at describing the various communities, divisions and sects found in Islam both past and present. Each chapter ends with a brief summary highlighting the key issues discussed. Sedgwick speaks personally as well as objectively and makes it clear when he is doing so. One senses that the book is like a parlor conversation with an expert, both knowledgeable and personable. Though its lucid text leaves little to be researched, Islam and Muslims is furnished with a convenient glossary and a set of charts that allow the reader to get a sense of the size of Muslim populations by regions of the world. It ends with a bibliography which is conveniently shaped into a set of recommended readings by chapter. 6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. An evenhanded, straightforward evaluation By Midwest Book Review Dr. Mark Sedgwick (associate professor of modern Middle East history, American University in Cairo) introduces Western readers to the Islamic world and explores the various different Muslim societies in Islam Muslims: A Guide to Diverse Experience in a Modern World. Accessible to lay readers of all backgrounds, regardless of personal familiarity with Islam, Islam Muslims briefly surveys the faith's history but is much more strongly concerned with Muslims in the present day - from world view and worship practices to family practices, daily life, the intersection of Islam and politics including the unfortunate reality

of Islamic political violence. An evenhanded, straightforward evaluation, to be commended especially for its close scrutiny of the cultural differences that at first glance make Islamic and Muslim practices alien to Westerners, and Western culture confusing to or misinterpreted by Muslims.

The need to understand Islam and Muslims has never been greater, both because of conflicts that dominate the news and because of the increasing presence of Muslims in Western societies. There are hundreds of books that introduce the Western reader to Islam, and dozens of books that explore various Muslim societies (usually Arab ones). *Islam Muslims* is the first to bring together both, explaining Islam in theory and in practice across the diverse Muslim world. Readers learn not just what Islam says about everything from the nature of God to marriage to prayer to politics, but also how individual Muslims (traditional or modern, devout or barely observant) apply teachings in everyday life.

A user-friendly book that is beneficial to a popular audience....It is particularly useful for non-Muslims who are newly encountering Muslim communities in the West or are traveling in or moving to a Muslim-majority country....*Islam Muslims* is one of the best books of its kind in English to date. *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies* Mark Sedgwick's *Islam Muslims* is an accessible and informative survey of the way Islam is actually practiced today, written in a refreshingly direct style. It will appeal especially to the general reader seeking a knowledgeable but nontechnical view of Muslim societies. Looking for a really good one-stop book on Islam and Muslims to recommend to friends and relations? *Islam Muslims* is up-to-date, well-informed, insightful, and sympathetic without being evasive. Michael Cook, author of *The Koran: A Very Short Introduction* *Islam Muslims* is really very, very good. I can attest that I truly enjoyed reading it, taking great satisfaction in the way that it managed time after time to "get it right". L. Carl Brown, Garrett Professor in Foreign Affairs Emeritus, Princeton University From the Publisher "Sedgwick's long experience of living in the Muslim world and studying Islam gives authority to this book which successfully balances coverage of formal beliefs and actual practices. This realistic analysis is sympathetic but not apologetic. *Islam and Muslims* is a very helpful resource for anyone trying to understand the dynamics of Islamic history and contemporary Muslim life." John Voll, Professor of Islamic History at Georgetown University, and Associate Director, Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University. "Islam Muslims is really very, very good. I can attest that I truly enjoyed reading it, taking great satisfaction in the way that Mark Sedgwick managed time after time to get it right." L. Carl Brown, Garrett Professor in Foreign Affairs Emeritus, Princeton University "Looking for a really good one-stop book on Islam and Muslims to recommend to friends and relations? *Islam and Muslims* is up-to-date, well-informed, insightful and sympathetic without being evasive." Michael Cook, author of *The Koran: A Very Short Introduction* "Mark Sedgwick's *Islam and Muslims* is an accessible and informative survey of the way Islam is actually practiced today, written in a refreshingly direct style. It will appeal especially to the general reader seeking a knowledgeable but non-technical view of Muslim societies." Carl Ernst, Director, Carolina Center for the Study of the Middle East and Muslim Civilizations, William R. Kenan Professor of Religious Studies, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill "Islam Muslims draws on Mark Sedgwick's expertise and experiences as a scholar of Islam who has lived among Muslims for many years. The book stands out for its insightful focus on the everyday life of ordinary Muslims. Through comparisons between Islamic, Jewish and Christian traditions, *Islam Muslims* succeeds in explaining to non-Muslims in the West not only the ideals of Islam, but also the diverse ways Islam is experienced by contemporary Muslims." Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, Assistant Professor of Religion and Humanities, Reed College "Islam and Muslims is a most accessible, intimately informative, and thoroughly engaging read. Students and general readers alike will simply love this book. Whether one is wondering about how Muslims worship, what Muslims think about family and gender, why Islam has clashed with the West, or all of these and more, this unique book is one that I would most highly recommend!" Bradley S. Clough, Abdulhadi H. Taher Chair in Comparative Religion, The American University in Cairo About the Author Mark Sedgwick was born in London, and grew up in England, Spain, and France. His interest in history and the world beyond the West was first awakened by his grandfather, who celebrated his 21st birthday in Egypt during the 1919 Revolution, saw some of the Turkish War of Independence, and then moved on to Imperial India. Mark studied history at Oxford University, did a PhD on Sufism at the University of Bergen in Norway, and taught for 20 years at the American University in Cairo. He now teaches at Aarhus University in Denmark, where he is Coordinator of the Arab and Islamic Studies Unit.