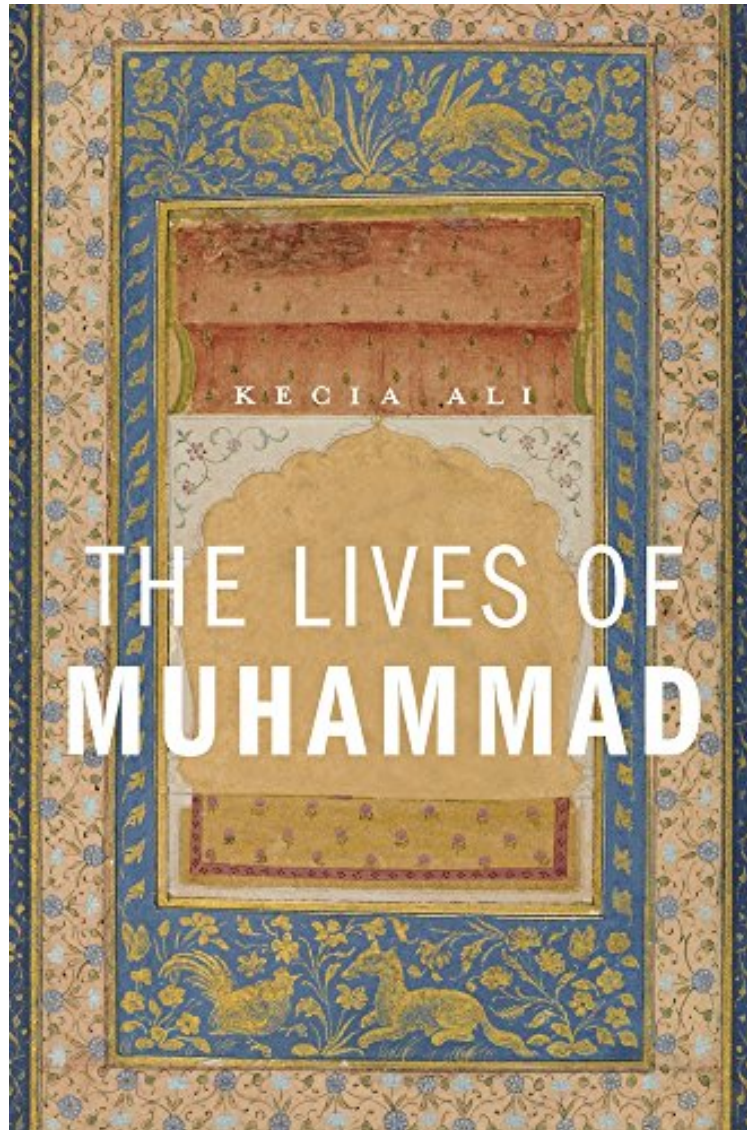


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## The Lives of Muhammad

*Kecia Ali*

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#1166938 in Books Kecia Ali 2016-03-14 Original language: English PDF # 1 7.90 x .90 x 5.10l, .0 #File Name: 0674659880352 pages The Lives of Muhammad | File size: 50.Mb

**Kecia Ali : The Lives of Muhammad** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Lives of Muhammad:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By J. Watney Just what I wanted. 1 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A scholarly treatise By L. M. Crane Ali's The Lives of Muhammad is not an easy read, being more of a scholarly treatise than an attempt at popular biography. It does cover the main body of scholarship and writing (the two are not the same) over many centuries about Muhammad's life. Yes, it doesn't include the entire body of scholarship, but the author is very up front about why certain works are referenced in detail and others are barely

mentioned or left out. By including the viewpoints of both polemicists and serious scholars of both Muslim and non-Muslim backgrounds, along with historical and cultural details of when each paper or book was written, the reader is able to more ably parse both the influence and validity of these works. As is true of other historical religious leaders/prophets, "facts" are often hard to come by and often suffer from bias, consciously or unconsciously, when their biographies are written. The religion gets in the way of the history. Cultural mores centuries old may seem outdated or naive when viewed with today's prism of hindsight and change. Various references view Muhammad through different lenses. That's why the plural "Lives" instead of the singular Life. The book examines most of these perspectives..Ali faces these problems head-on, however, and informs us of both the mundane and controversial aspects of scholarship on Muhammad's life. She even addresses the very definition of "scholarship" about Muhammad and how it continues to change over time. The reader is also introduced to the tremendous differences in opinion about details of Muhammad's life by Muslim scholars. This goes far beyond the Sunni and Shiite controversies. The book only mentions the Quran in a few places. It's possible to examine the historical Muhammad or Jesus without constantly referencing the Quran or Bible. Some reviewers find this to be an omission, but I think it frees the author from having to always "test" a fact against the religious literature which, by definition, carries its own bias. In the end, I was glad I read this book. It was very informative and provided both historical and cultural perspective about Muhammad. Its attempt to be fair and thorough required constant references and their context, which provided insight, but slowed the narrative. 18 of 23 people found the following review helpful. Short and worth reading, but not a critical biography.

By j a haverstick I have a real interest in the biographies of people who we don't know much about. Jesus, a big one, Shakespeare, of course, Socrates ( about whom we ironically know too much - all contradictory), Alexander, etc. About these people, though, we have a lot of "contextual history", as Ali puts it. But we don't really know much about life in the deserts of southern Arabia and so the rich background which accompanies those other figures is missing here. Imagine you're a bright young student from Peking who decides one day to find out who Jesus was. That's the position I was in a few years ago (except for the "bright, young student" part) when I decided to bone up on Mohammed. Sure, I've got a couple Palestinian friends but though pretty well acculturated to our greatest-land-ever-to-exist, asking them about Mohammed is like asking a Southern Baptist about Jesus. If our Peking woman just starts sampling the Jesus literature she'll be swamped. What to read first, and what credence to give any of it? Of course, there's the Bible, just as there's the Koran...but good luck with that! I bought two bios of Mohammed and the Cambridge Companion and thereby got an adequate survey (can't locate the specific books as we're moving and my library's in boxes). I wasn't crazy about either of the books, though, but would at least suggest that any one unfamiliar with the basic life at least go to Wikipedia for the outline story before she starts to read the work under review. As Ali points out, as with Jesus, Socrates, etc. this Urstory is a matter of great debate - including the opinion that the person didn't exist at all! This book does not, as I had hoped, review the early works and analyze and parse them. The program instead is to explicate the whole range of historiographies of Mohammed with all of their agenda and prejudices to bring the reader to an understanding of how "Mohammed" came to be who he is in the contemporary consciousness of Muslims, Christians and Jews. Most of the works investigated are from the 18 and 19 hundreds, not the 7 and 8 hundreds. Once I got over my disappointment on the subject matter and came to accept the book for what it is, I got a lot out of it. One significant theme is how Muslim history has developed in an interplay with the West. That was a new thought, as I was tending to think of religions as sui generis. It became a lot more convincing to me as I later reflected on how Christianity came to be what it is only by rubbing against Neo-Platonism and pagan and mystery cults (though our "fundamentalist" friends ignorantly believe it sprang forth from the forehead of Jesus!). The penultimate chapters of this book explore the reactions to Mohammed's relationships to two of his wives and how that has played with the historians and commentators: the first "monogamous" relationship Khadija and the later child-bride member of the harem, Aisha. These relationships both have their controversial aspects and Ali describes how they are finessed by various biographers. The sexual presumptions of our own culture are hard to shake. I'd mention John Marshall's bride (yes, that John Marshall) was perhaps 16, but they had been "going out" for a while before, she 14 and he an adult. See, colonial America, was different...unlike, I guess the sands of 8th century Arabia. Ali is quite neutral in her comments on these gender and sexual issues, which is refreshing. The last chapter, "an enlightened man", was my favorite as it examined, albeit briefly, the connection between the founders of Christianity, Buddhism and Islam. Compare and contrast. This was perhaps also the most superficial chapter, which, as I say, didn't keep it from being thought provoking. She pointed out that Islam is a protestant religion, depending, that is, on the worshiper's relationship with the text. That's surely the situation with the Muslims I know and when I think about with most of the billion in the world, Indonesia, Europe, Morocco, et. al. You get a different idea if you focus only on the very angry jihadists in the Levant. All in all, I'm glad I read the book and can't deny receiving a few insights, but it's more for a class in the historiography of religion than religious biography.

Kecia Ali delves into the many ways the Prophets life story has been told from the earliest days of Islam to the present, by both Muslims and non-Muslims. Emphasizing the major transformations since the nineteenth century, she shows that far from being mutually opposed, these various perspectives have become increasingly interdependent.

[Ali] examines Muhammad biographies as a genre to which both Muslim and non-Muslim authors have contributed. The modern telling of Muhammad's biography appears in Ali's work as a collaboration between Muslims and non-Muslims, revivalists and reformists, sympathetic outsiders and antagonistic critics who drew not only from a more or less stable outline of Muhammad's life, but also from worldwide notions of great men and from certain controversies. For Ali, the development of Muhammad's biography serves to undermine the famed clash-of-civilizations thesis, in which the West and the Muslim world exist as separate and self-contained wholes. In her view, the mutual influence between Muslim and non-Muslim writers presents a world of shared values and assumptions about what constitutes authoritative evidence, in which writers who aim to defend Muhammad and those who seek to discredit him together produce a body of literature that is neither East nor West. Ali's coverage of historical shifts among Muhammad's followers and opponents alike challenges our ideas about universal norms. *The Lives of Muhammad* leads its reader to rethink assumptions about history, biography and the imagined East-West divide. [It] serves to skillfully complicate modern debates over Muhammad's life and character, and his relevance for modern Muslims. (Michael Muhammad Knight Washington Post 2014-12-15) Ali offers a controversial thesis: Biographies of Muhammad have taken a Protestant turn. She focuses on Muhammad not as a source of metaphysical truth or personal piety but as a historical person with his own life story. Just as depictions of the historical Jesus are ever-changing, refashioned to fit new circumstances, so is the quest for the historical Muhammad. No one can finish Ali's book without a renewed curiosity about reading, interpretation, and authority. (Bruce R. Lawrence Chronicle of Higher Education 2014-10-06) *The Lives of Muhammad* is not merely a biography, but a biography of biographies. It's a book devoted to unraveling the story of the Muslim prophet over the last 1,500 years and a serious contribution to the debate over what is real, what is apocryphal and what is myth. *The Lives of Muhammad* has set the bar high and it is [Ali's] best work to date. It is exhaustive, well-researched and an amazing contribution to the humanities. (Shyam K. Sriram PopMatters 2014-11-11) Ali takes an innovative approach to a biography of Muhammad, comparing the various accounts of his life in what is probably the only book to do so comprehensively. She concludes that, as sensibilities evolved in the time since Muhammad's life, the biographies of the prophet expanded or even altered in keeping with prevailing mores. (Publishers Weekly 2014-10-06) An extraordinarily insightful and illuminating book, well-written and highly readable. Henceforth it will be essential reading alongside any biography of Muhammad. (Leila Ahmed, Harvard University) Kecia Ali has written an engaging and accessible book for anyone wishing to understand a wide variety of historical and current perspectives on Muhammad's life. (Mona Siddiqui, University of Edinburgh) This book explores the stories around not just Prophet Muhammad, but also those close to him. The primary focus is to uncover the motivations behind these stories, and trace the shifting emphasis that evolved as these narratives were told and retold. These stories were tailored and pressed into service by both opponents and proponents of Muslims from the advent of Islam to contemporary times. (Muhammed Hassanali Booklist 2014-10-15) Ali attempts to uncover not only the stories of the Prophet Muhammad and those close to him but also the motivations behind recording or retelling these stories. Ali traces the shifting emphasis on the narratives through time and across several authors who crafted these stories and deployed them either to legitimize or discredit Muhammad's prophethood. (Muhammed Hassanali Library Journal 2014-09-05) Muhammad presents two violently incompatible faces to the historian. For devout Muslims, relying both on the Quran and the vast corpus of sacred traditions, the hadith, he serves as the unimpeachable model for human behavior, not only in matters of faith and ritual but in the most humdrum aspects of daily life, from marital and business relations to personal hygiene, including even the proper use of the toothpick. For non-Muslims, drawing on the same sources, he has been viewed from the earliest times as lustful and barbarous, as a raving impostor aping the ancient prophets; nowadays he is further charged with misogyny and pedophilia. The contrast is so stark as to appear irreconcilable. Instead of attempting to skirt this divergence, Ali uses it to structure her inquiry. (Eric Ormsby Wall Street Journal 2015-01-09) About the Author Kecia Ali is Associate Professor of Religion at Boston University.