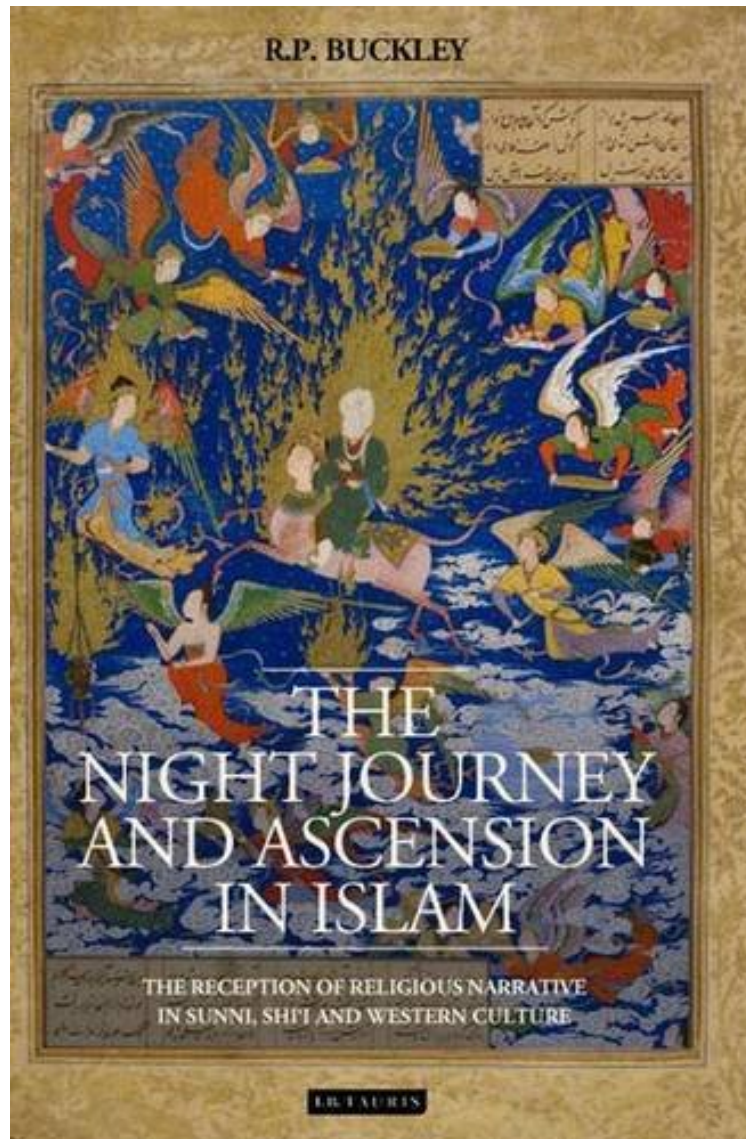


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The Night Journey and Ascension in Islam: The Reception of Religious Narrative in Sunni, Shi'i and Western Culture (Library of Middle East History)

Ron Buckley

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The night journey (isra') and ascension to heaven (mi'raj) is a singularly auspicious event in the biography of the Prophet Muhammad, and is one of the most popular religious narratives in Islam. Among other things, it is seen to confirm the Prophet as the final prophet, to explain how the five daily prayers were introduced to the Muslim community as a religious duty, and to give an early explanation of the concepts of heaven and hell. The night journey and ascension are, moreover, the greatest of miracles ascribed to Muhammad. Here, Ron Buckley explores how the Islamic understanding of the night journey and ascension has evolved and the implications of the ways in which it has evolved. He therefore addresses issues such as why Muslims believe or disbelieve in the isra' and the mi'raj and in what terms they conceive of the journey: is it to be taken literally? Was it a vision, a dream or a mystical experience? Or is it some kind of figurative representation? The conclusions in *The Night Journey and Ascension in Islam* touch on fundamental issues within Islam, including attitudes to the miraculous, the nature of Muhammad's prophethood, the authenticity of prophetic tradition (hadith) and the age-old debate between faith and rationality. In addition to examining Shi'i traditions pertaining to the journey, this book also deals with Western non-Muslim assessments of the isra' and mi'raj from the medieval period up to the present day. It is this analysis which constitutes an integral part of Western polemical material regarding Muhammad and Islam and forms a record of conflict and rapprochement between Christian Europe and the Islamic Middle East. It thus holds vital analysis for those involved in the research of early Islam, the history of religion in the Middle East and Islam's early and developing relationship with Christianity.

About the Author Ron Buckley is Senior Lecturer in Arabic Studies at the University of Manchester.