As a welcome addition to the Islamic Studies library, *Law and Tradition in Classical Islamic Thought*, edited by Michael Cook, Najam Haider, Intisar Rabb, and Asma Sayeed, compiles a series of thoughtful essays into an engaging Festschrift in honor of Professor Hossein Modarressi. Professor Modaressi, a leading Muslim scholar with a broad bibliography, has been well served by the volume’s fifteen eclectic and original articles, covering a wide variety of topics across both Sunnī and Shi‘ī disciplines and ranging from astronomy to legal theory. Despite the editors attempt to organize the scholarship into five sections, the subject matter of each article is starkly distinct from those surrounding it, and the compendium does not truly coalesce into a cohesive whole. The seeming disorganization, however, is not as much a flaw as it is reflective of the diversity of Professor Modaressi’s own scholarship. *Law and Tradition in Classical Islamic Thought* is not a single book but, instead, a mosaic that illuminates some of the least studied – and occasionally arcane – issues of Islamic scholarship.

As a Festschrift, *Law and Tradition in Classical Islamic Thought* assumes a level of knowledge in its readers beyond the rudimentary. Indeed, the volume demands a solid foundation in both Sunnī and Shi‘ī scholarship in order to fully appreciate the rigorous analyses provided by every article. The articles spare no time in providing background to concepts such as ‘*amal or* ra‘y, nor do they expound in great detail the ideologies characteristic of certain time periods. Names, events, and theories are regularly deployed without explication. Without sufficient preexisting knowledge, the volume may prove challenging to novice readers.

Part I is ostensibly devoted to “Source Studies,” a field of special interest to Professor Modarressi. Chapter 1, by Etan Kolberg, explores the Abū Basīr tradition and its prevalent usage in works of Shi‘ī exegetes. The account features a conversation between Ja‘far al-Sādiq and his student Abū Basīr regarding the privileged fate of the Shi‘ī people. According to Kolberg, the account fits well within the Shi‘a tradition while reinforcing the perceived Divine favorability of the Shi‘ī community, thereby finding a comfortable home in Shi‘ī exegetical literature. Chapter 2, by Behnam Sadeghi, reviews the criteria for emending the Quran through the application of Devin Stewart’s unitary model as the object of scrutiny. By considering two Quranic verses under Stewart’s rubric, Sadeghi casts doubt on the model by offering three equally acceptable alternatives for emendation, concluding that specific outcomes are ultimately dependent upon the specific model applied. In chapter 3, Najam Haider examines a pivotal visit to Medina by Mu‘āwiya b. Abī Sufyān, the first Umayyad caliph. While visiting Medina, Mu‘āwiya fails to recite and vocalize the *takbir* and the *basmala* during prayer, inciting outrage from the community. Haider considers the account from within the broader context of Mālikī and Shāfī‘ī perspectives on the appropriate treatment of the *basmala* and *takbir* during prayer; while the Mālikī School favours tradition (‘*amal) over text, the Shāfī‘ī school “rel[ies] overwhelmingly on textual arguments” (52).
Part II considers the topic of Shi'ite traditions broadly conceived. Chapter 4, by Hassan F. Ansari, traces the historical development of Kitāb al-wastiyya, a lost Imāmī text attributed to Isa b. Al-Mustafad, in classical Shi'ite thought. Ansari attempts to parse out the origins of the text by considering classical narratives of its supposed author, but is stymied in his attempt by significantly conflicting accounts, thereby revealing the larger drawbacks of unquestioned adherence to any particular interpretation in Islamic scholarship as a whole. In Chapter 5, Asma Sayeed examines the role of women in Imāmī and Sunnī biographical collections. According to Sayeed, women in Imāmī biographies receive little recognition in comparison to their Sunnī counterparts, the latter of whom were often recognized as hadith transmitters. Sayeed sets forth both historical and ideological explanations for the distinction. She posits that women were less likely to receive recognition for their contributions to Shi'ite scholarship due to a desire to protect them from persecution, and second, that women were in fact equally important to the Shi'ite community as the Sunnī – they simply filled roles other than hadith transmitters. Finally, in Chapter 6, Michael Cook analyzes the Shi'ite prayer tradition of inclining to the left, a tradition that has been justified by resort to a range of disciplines including law, geography, astronomy, theology, and archaeology. Cook outlines the weaknesses of each discipline’s explanation, thereby revealing the oft-ignored limitations of applying rational thought to tradition.

Part III explores a wide range of topics under the rubric of Islamic legal tradition. Chapter 7, by Baber Johansen, examines the analytical methods applied by al-Ghāzālī and al-Sarahkī in reasserting the dormant concept of ra'y during the ninth century, a period in which legal norms were formed exclusively via rigidly systematic doctrine. Both scholars resort to “contemplation” (ta'ammul) in order to provide an alternative to the highly restrictive rationality of the time. Although al-Ghāzālī and al-Sarahkī differ as to the appropriate scope of contemplation as applied to legal reasoning – al-Ghāzālī application is narrower than al-Sarahkī – both scholars advocate for the use of ta'ammul by Islamic jurists due to their status as “successors of the Prophet as far as dispensation of justice is concerned” (132). Next, in chapter 8, Instisar Rabb considers the role of jurists in Islamic legal scholarship by presenting a hypothetical world in which jurists do not exist. Rabb argues that the common perception that jurists are a necessary component of the Islamic legal system is inaccurate. Rabb applies the principles of substantive and procedural minimalism to conclude that the minimalist doctrine could effectively play the role of jurists by “accommodat[ing] a plurality of views within a particular system framed by a known set of fundamental values” (153). In chapter 9, Khaled Abou El Fadl discusses the compatibility of contemporary human rights law with Islamic legal tradition. Although the latter is commonly perceived as fundamentally incompatible with the former, El Fadl traces the evolution of both institutions to reveal their common foundation in Greek stoicism and natural law. Only when natural law evolves into the formation of natural rights based on the will of a majority of citizenry does human rights law deviate from the apolitical Islamic legal tradition, a deviation that eventually contributes to the popular delegitimation of Islamic law.

Part IV examines the interplay of philosophical traditions within Islamic thought. Chapter 10, by Robert Wisnovsky, outlines the criteria employed by the philosopher Yahyā b. ‘Adī in approaching the study of a philosophical work. Though ‘Adī was a Jacobite Christian, his criteria, based on the works of Greek logicians such as Aristotle, were intended for an Arabic-
reading audience, thereby reflecting the complex and interdependent relationship between Christian, Greek, and Islamic philosophical study. In chapter 11, Sabine Schmidtke explores the possibility that a commentary historically attributed to Najm al-Dīn al-Kātibī’s al-Shamsiyya may actually have been written by Joshua Maimonides, a leader of the Jewish community in Syria. Schmidtke does not expound upon the substance of the commentary itself, but instead questions its origin by presenting significant similarities between it and other writings by Joshua Maimonides, which often relied heavily on Muslim authors such as al-Ghāzālī. Schmidtke’s attribution of the commentary to Joshua Maimonides fits squarely within the “barely…explored” (204) overlap between Muslim and Jewish cultures during the medieval, late medieval, and premodern Islamic period. Chapter 12, by Asad Q. Ahmad, traces the historical development of logic in India, leading up to the establishment of the Khayrabadi School. Ahmad lays out four key periods in the development of logic as a philosophical discipline in India, from the 16th century educational reforms that introduced the discipline, to its codification and standardization, and finally, to its incorporation into the Khayrabadi School, which maintained the curriculum while reviving the works of classical authors.

Finally, Part V contains three dense articles that examine historical traditions in Islam and the interplay between Islamic, Jewish, and Christian traditions. Chapter 13, by Roy P. Mottahedeh, provides a detailed overview of the narratives of the Prophet Solomon as set forth by premodern Iranian scholars, for whom the topic of Solomon held a particularly significant interest. According to Mottahedeh, “[c]orrelating Biblical history with ancient Iranian history was a major concern” (264) for these scholars, who sought legitimization through a synchronic reading of Solomon’s travels. Chapter 14, by Wilfred Madelung, analyzes the influence of Shi‘ī scholar Muḥammed al-Ḥasan b. Muṣṭafā al-Nawbakhtī on prominent Sunnī and Mu‘tazīli scholars, such as Ibn al-Jawzī and Ibn Taymiyya. Instead of obeying the conceptual limits of sectarianism, al-Nawbakhtī respects the core tenets of Mu‘tazīli thought while heavily contributing to the works of his Sunnī counterparts in the discipline of astronomy. And in chapter 15, Richard W. Bulliet employs a quantitative study of conversion rates both to and from Islam during the Byzantine period to argue that the development of any particular legal system in a community cannot be completely disentangled from the community’s religious evolution. Instead, “the systematization and elaboration of law” (289) is dependent, at least in part, on the growth of a religious community to an undefined tipping point in the conversion process.

While each chapter of the volume has considerable merit, a number stand out as particularly noteworthy for Scriptural Reasoning readers. Chapter 9, by Khaled Abou El Fadl, calls into question the perception that Islamic law cannot be reconciled with contemporary conceptions of human rights. By tracing both to a common ancestor, El Fadl casts aside this perception in favor of a more complicated, interdependent relationship between Islamic law and human rights. Similarly, chapters 13 through 15 examine elements of another relationship that has often been subsumed by contemporary conflict: the relationship between the Islamic tradition and its Jewish and Christian counterparts. In a world where the differences between Islam, Judaism, and Christianity are often stressed and the similarities forgotten, these chapters provide a useful starting point for further discussion about the interplay between religious communities.

Law and Tradition in Classic Islamic Thought is not for the academically faint of heart. In order to truly appreciate the magnitude of the volume, the reader must be prepared to undertake further
study of the subject matter, as well as to shift gears, sometimes jarringly, from one chapter to the next. For those who are so prepared, however, this Festschrift is an invaluable work for scholars and a wonderful reminder of the richness of Professor Modarressi’s scholarship in areas of Islamic study that too often go unchallenged.