BOOK REVIEW

VOICES OF ISLAM. Edited by Vincent J. Cornell. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007, 5 vol. ISBN: 0-275-98732-9. $450.00.

Vincent J. Cornell, editor of *Voices of Islam* and Asa Griggs Candler Professor of Middle East and Islamic Studies at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, writes “It has long been a truism to say that Islam is the most misunderstood religion in the world” (vii). He finds the situation expressed by this statement to be ironic since Islam is one of the most studied religions in the world. Despite the recent plethora of titles dealing with Islam, many Americans remain uninformed about the Muslim world. The situation, he laments, has become worse since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Library patrons may be surprised to learn that half of all Muslims in the world live east of Lahore, Pakistan, and that Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world. In this sense, Islam is an Asian religion. Only one quarter of the world’s Muslims live in the Middle East and North Africa. Cornell contends that Islam is as much a worldwide religion as Christianity. There are between 4 and 6 million Muslims in the United States; 10 million in Western Europe; and nearly 20 million live within the borders of the Russian Federation. With these figures in mind, it is a mistake to think of Islam as a monolithic religion. Cornell contends that the vast majority of Western books written on Islam have been penned by non-Muslims. To counteract this situation, *Voices of Islam* brings together the voices of approximately 50 leading Muslims from around the world, and seeks to present “an accurate, comprehensive, and accessible account of Islamic
doctrines, practices, and worldviews for a general reader at the senior
high school and university undergraduate level” (xii).

Volumes 1 (“Voices of Tradition”) and 5 (“Voices of Change”) nicely frame the five-volume set. Volume 1 provides a good overview of Islam, with separate articles for “What is Sunni Islam?” by Feisal Abadul Rauf and “What is Shiite Islam?” by Azim Nanji and Farhad Daftary. Karima Diane Alavi explains the five pillars of Islam: the proclamation of faith, prayer, charity, the fast of Ramadan, and the pilgrimage to Mecca in “Pillars of Religion and Faith.” Volume 5 tackles various issues of modernism in Islam, with such articles as “Islam in the African American Experience” by Aminah Beverly McCloud and “Sexual Diversity in Islam” by Scott Sirajul Haqq Kugle. Other authors deal with heresy, race and ethnicity, and Islam and the West. Patrons of community college libraries will also find value in Volume 3, “Voices of Life: Family Home, and Society.” This volume contains fascinating material for students in anthropology and sociology, with articles dealing with “Pregnancy and Childbirth in Islam,” “Caring for the Ill in Islam,” and “Marriage in Islam,” etc. Volumes 2 and 4 are more specialized. Volume 2, “Voices of the Spirit,” can be consulted by students in religious studies classes. Volume 4, “Voices of Art, Beauty and Science” will prove of value to students studying world music.

Voices of Islam will have immense cross-disciplinary appeal and should be considered for purchase by all community college libraries.

Wendell G. Johnson, MLS, PhD
Social Sciences Librarian
University Libraries
Northern Illinois University