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Editors' Introduction

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# THE HISTORY OF ISLAM IN AUSTRALIA

## EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Salih Yucel and Abu Bakr Sirajuddin Cook\*

The history of Islam within Australia is an important, yet often overlooked, part of Australian history. Muslim presence in Australia has helped shape multicultural experience facilitating intercultural dialogue as well as contributing significantly to the development of the Australian nation. However, to date, it has received minimal scholarly attention. There have been significant studies on the engagements of the Maccasans, Muslim fishermen from Indonesia, with the Indigenous peoples of northern Australia. These studies have detailed the cultural interactions and trade between them and the lasting impacts of the inclusion of language foreign to Australian soil. There is also an increasing awareness of Australia's cameleers, many of whom were Muslims, and the contribution they made to maintaining trade routes and assisting early Australian explorers. Despite the growing interest in the field, the history of Islam in Australia remains an understudied area of research. This rich history dates back further than we thought and has possibly had a greater impact than what is recognised. Given the current political and social climate surrounding Islam globally, it is timely that this volume of the *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* is published. This volume brings to light the depth and richness of Australia's Islamic heritage, challenging some of the prevalent assumptions on the topic, and calls for further studies in this field.

Australia has proclaimed itself as being a successful example of a multicultural society. It is a society that has been shaped, and continues to be shaped, by a diverse range of cultural inputs. With this being the case, it is justifiable to ask how and why the contributions of Muslims to Australia have been largely overlooked. Peta Jeffries' article "Locating Settler Colonialism in the Myths of Burke and Wills – Aboriginal and Islamic People's Involvement in Reimagining Successful Exploration of Inland Australia" explores this issue. Jeffries utilises the notion of space-off to "describe how some key aspects of colonial exploration and settlement have been ignored or denied throughout the historical memorialisation of particular events." In identifying an erasure of historical elements and peoples, Jeffries focuses on the famous Burke and Wills expedition to highlight the prevailing monocultural narrative of this venture and how any achievements arising from this expedition must be

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understood as arriving through multicultural engagement, in this case with contributions specifically from Muslim and Aboriginal peoples.

The discussion of interaction between Muslim and Aboriginal peoples during the Burke and Wills expedition paves the way for a broader examination of this type of cross-cultural and interfaith dialogue in Australian history. David Sneddon explores this in pre- and post-colonial Australia in his article “The Early History of Micro and Meso Dialogue Between Muslims and Non-Muslims in Australia”. Sneddon explores these dialogues prior to the 1950s as he acknowledges that most organisations that facilitate this dialogue, prevalent within modern Australia, came into existence from the 1960s onwards. Sneddon states “it appears the most effective micro and meso dialogue to date was between the Macassan Muslim fishermen and the Indigenous people of the Yolgnu.” Untainted by the colonialist inclination, Muslim engagement with the Aboriginal peoples of northern Australia represents one of Australia’s earliest cross-cultural and interfaith dialogues. This has had substantial and lasting impacts and is informative for ongoing interfaith dialogue between Australia’s indigenous peoples and Islam.

Australia’s early interfaith dialogues were not always as successful as between the Macassans and the Yolgnu. Shifts in social needs, both perceived and real, as well as ideas about Australian identity shaped prevailing views of Islam, Muslims, and cross-cultural dialogue. Katy Nebhan’s article “Revulsions & Reflections: The Coloured & the White Muslim in Australia’s Print Media from Late Nineteenth Century to the Early Twentieth” traces these shifting views as played out within the print media. Nebhan shows that Australia’s view of Islam, and the Muslims that resided within, were not always derogatory and that when the fledgling Muslim communities felt Islam was being misrepresented, there were attempts to rectify it through both the popular media of the time and in other fledgling Australian Islamic publications. Nebhan also shows that rather than being a distant and isolated settlement, the views of Islam promoted through Australia’s media was, in part, shaped by shifting global Eurocentric views. Of particular importance is the bringing to light the cultural diversity of Australia’s early Muslims, especially of those with an Anglo-Australian heritage.

The cultural diversity of Australia’s Islamic heritage is only one part of the history of Islam in Australia. Islam is not a monolith and includes a diversity of subgroups, interpretations, and practices. One such group who had a significant impact on the spread and development of Islam globally are the Sufis. As Islam spread into Australia, so too did Sufism. Cook’s article “*Tasawwuf ‘Ustraliya: Prolegomena to a History of Sufism in Australia*” makes a case for Australia’s Sufi heritage and documents evidence of Sufism in the early engagements of Islam within Australia. Cook notes that documenting such a history presents some challenges and makes suggestions as to how these might be overcome.

The history of Islam in Australia is not limited to trade, expeditions, and interfaith dialogue. Muslims have contributed to Australia at many levels. Dzavid Haveric’s article “ANZAC Muslims: An Untold Story” shows how “When the Commonwealth of Australia

became immersed in two World Wars, Australian Muslims accepted the national call – they shed their blood and gave their lives for Australia’s freedom and democracy”. The largely overlooked aspect of Australian Muslim’s contribution, both at home and abroad, to the nation’s interests at a time of global crisis highlights the sacrifices they made, in accordance with their faith, for the country they called home. Another, more recent, contribution has been the development of Muslim Student Associations across Australia’s universities, as detailed in Mahsheed Ansari’s article “The Muslim Student Associations (MSAS) and the Formation of the Australian *Ummah*”. Along with being an avenue for student activism, Ansari details how these associations worked for social justice and inclusion for both national and international Muslim students and facilitating the maintenance locally and exportation of Australian university education.

The history of any community cannot overlook the contributions of specific individuals who have made a substantial contribution to the development of that community. Throughout the history of Islam in Australia there have been many exceptional individuals who have sacrificed their time, effort, and finances for the benefit of Australia generally and Australian Muslims specifically. Two such individuals are Mahomet Allum and Sayyid Ibrahim Dellal. Daud Abdul-Fattah Batchelor’s article “Mahomet Allum: Australia’s Leading Herbalist-Benefactor?” aims to present a balanced overview of Mahomet Allum’s life and contribution to Australian Islam. Batchelor does not shy away from the controversy that surrounds Allum’s life and contextualises it within the shifting cultural norms of 20th century Australia. Allum is presented as a multifaceted individual that contributed in a diversity of ways to Australia as a country, the well-being of Australians in general, and promoting Islam within Australia. Salih Yucel’s article “Sayyid Ibrahim Dellal: An Analysis of Untold Stories of a ‘Living History’” is an extension of his previous book documenting the life of Dellal. It brings to the foreground three previously undocumented aspects of Dellal’s persona, namely his family lineage and Sayyidhood, his involvement with the Ajayoglu family, and his heretofore unpublished poetry. Both of these articles highlight significant impacts one individual can have on both their adopted country and community while also showcasing the contributions they each, in their own ways, made to the history of Islam in Australia.

Each of the articles in this special volume of the *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* showcases different elements of the history of Islam in Australia. In doing so, they underscore the diverse ways Islam, and Muslims, have influenced Australia and its history. Taken together, these articles show that the history of Islam in Australia deserves greater scholarly attention and wider recognition as part of the broader Australian history. As a volume, these articles can be seen as an invitation to others to study, explore, and showcase the history of Islam and Muslims in Australia.