

PREFACE

Saints and sainthood are and have been of great significance in the Islamic world and Islam. Saints functioned within the society as teachers, healers and mediators, and in politics as military commanders and diplomatic agents. Their tombs, found everywhere, are shrines, foci of pilgrimages, and centers of worship, curative ritual, and festivals. Saints are an essential characteristic of Islamic society.

Saints have not, however, been studied to a degree commensurate with their importance. Indeed, they have generally been neglected by both Muslim and Western scholars. Some Muslim scholars consider saints and sainthood as less than fully acceptable in Islam. Western scholars, aware of the theoretical problems connected with sainthood, and familiar, usually, with saint-veneration in only a single country or locality, have tended to view it as a phenomenon of only local and limited significance. The International Conference on Saints and Sainthood in Islam at Berkeley was organized to discuss practices and beliefs concerning saints among Muslim peoples, to investigate the interesting tension between Islamic theory and practice regarding sainthood, and to help overcome scholarly parochialism in their study. The conference, which took place in April, 1987, was designed to attract scholars from all over the world, to encourage studies of many different parts of the Islamic world, and to involve investigations in a wide variety of disciplines. Participants came from Canada, France, Norway, and Turkey, from a number of universities in the United States, and even from Australia. They presented materials on Afghanistan, Africa, Iran, Kurdistan, South and South East Asia and Turkey, investigating among other things ritual practices in saint veneration, the political and social roles of saints and the music, art and architecture of saint veneration. The conferees presented their papers with enthusiasm and style. More important, they enjoyed and were stimulated by one another's work. We publish their papers here in hopes of bringing this enjoyment and stimulation to a wider audience.

Grace Martin Smith