Sharia (Islamic Law) is one of the most established and controversial legal systems in the world. The literal meaning of Sharia is “the way to the watering hole” and is Islam’s prescribed way (or set of guidelines) for living morally and achieving salvation. Based on the Koran and the Sunnah—the sayings and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad—Islamic law is the result of efforts of scholars over centuries, to translate God’s will into a legal system of mandatory beliefs and behavior.

Because Sharia governs the lives of 900 million people worldwide, this legal system is cornerstone of the national law of several nations, and Sharia is playing an increasingly important role in international business transactions, banking/finance, and various aspects of personal law in many nations. Furthermore, many Americans have an erroneous or incomplete view of Sharia, and sometimes these views give rise to counterproductive ideas such as Islamophobia.

This research guide presents historical and doctrinal perspectives required to understand the development of Islamic jurisprudence and its application. In addition to its historical treatment, this work also covers selected current issues of significance. The first part provides background information on Sharia (including its origins and history, what it consists of, and its methodology) and an introduction to many of the issues that Sharia addresses. The second part contains a concise yet comprehensive annotated bibliography of academic legal literature to assist those researching Sharia. Individual sections cover primary sources (including statutes and case law), while subsequent chapters deal with secondary materials such as journals, treatises, and reference works on substantive areas of law. The goal of this work is to enhance the understanding of Islamic law; in so doing, it explains the complexity of reconciling law with custom, and religious laws with secular laws.
Table of Contents

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

PREFACE
   Overview
   Purpose of the Work

I. INTRODUCTION
   Understanding Islamic Law
   The Basic Sources of Islamic Law
   What Is Sharia?
   Difference between Sharia and Sunna
   How the Sharia Developed
   The Role of the Quran in Islamic Law
   The Significance of the Hadith in Islamic Law
   The Role of Sharia to Islamic Law
   Development of Sharia
   Ritual Law (Ibadat)
   Fasts
   Zakat
   Hajj
   Difference between the Sharia and Fiqh
   Distinguishing between the Sharia and Islamic Jurisprudence
   Islamic Jurisprudence
   Judicial Interpretations of Sharia
   How Sharia Differs from Western Legal Systems

   I. INTRODUCTION
   Understanding Islamic Law
   The Basic Sources of Islamic Law
   What Is Sharia?
   Difference between Sharia and Sunna
   How the Sharia Developed
   The Role of the Quran in Islamic Law
   The Significance of the Hadith in Islamic Law
   The Role of Sharia to Islamic Law
   Development of Sharia
   Ritual Law (Ibadat)
   Fasts
   Zakat
   Hajj
   Difference between the Sharia and Fiqh
   Distinguishing between the Sharia and Islamic Jurisprudence
   Islamic Jurisprudence
   Judicial Interpretations of Sharia
   How Sharia Differs from Western Legal Systems

   Research Strategy
   Principles of Islamic Law

   II. WORKS IN SUBSTANTIVE AREAS OF LAW
      General
      Islamic Jurisprudence (Fiqh, Usual al-fiqh)
      Ijtihad (Legal Reasoning)
      Schools of Islamic Law (madhashib)
      Sunni School
      Shia School
      Furu al-Fiqh (Areas of Substantive Law,
      Branches of the Law)
      General Works of Islamic Law
      Histories of Islamic Law
      Arbitration (Community-based Arbitration)
      Banking and Financial Institutions
      Islamic Finance
      Business Practices
      Commercial Law
      Comparative Law
      Constitutional Law
      Corporations
      Criminal Procedure
      Corporate Law
      Criminal Law
      Family Law (including Domestic Relations)
      General
      Arbitration
      Child Custody
      Children
      Conflicts of Law
      Divorce

   III. REFERENCE SOURCES OF SHARIA
      Scholarly Compilations
      Dictionaries
      Histories
      Quran
      Commentaries on the Quran
      Encyclopedias
      Handbooks

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Christopher Anglim is a Reference Librarian at the University of the District of Columbia & American University Washington College of Law, Pence Law Library with a JD, MBA, MPA, MLS, and a MA in History. In addition, he is in the process of completing his Masters in Homeland Security (MHS). Anglim has focused on achieving an effective balance between individual liberties and reasonable protections against terrorism and other national security threats. He is active in organizations such as the Center of Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University. He has written several other books, articles, and papers on issues of law, political science, government, religion, and business, Anglim is also a previous winner of the AALL Joseph L. Andrews Bibliographic Award for his title Joined in Common Enterprise: A Bibliography on the Origins of Early Anglo-American Partnership Law.