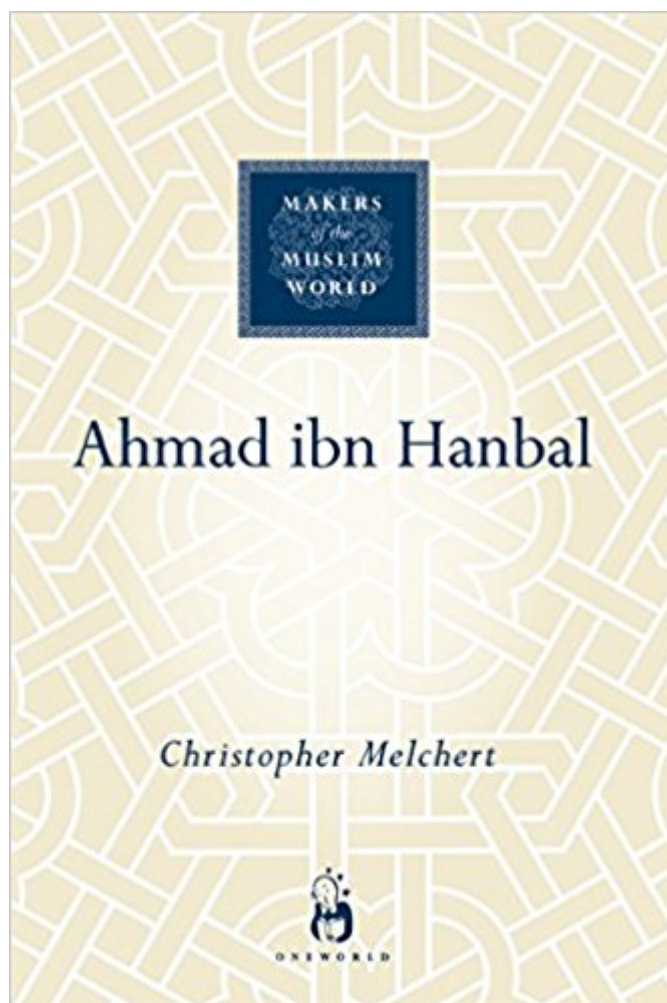


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Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (Makers Of The Muslim World)



Synopsis

Christopher Melchert examines the forefather of the fourth of the four principal Sunni schools of jurisprudence, the Hanbali. Upholding the view that the Qur'an was uncreated and the direct word of God, Ahmad ibn Hanbal (780-855) thought that the holy text should be read literally, rejecting any possibility for metaphorical or revisionist interpretation. Melchert assesses the importance of ibn Hanbal's teachings and analyses their relevance in modern Sunni Islam.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Dr Christopher Melchert is a lecturer in Arabic and Islam at the Oriental Institute, Oxford University. He has written numerous published articles on Islam and specifically Ahmad ibn Hanbal.

I cannot come away from reading this book without feeling a deep sense of respect for Ahmad ibn Hanbal, and I am not one who subscribes to the rigid proclamations of people who follow the school of thought that eventually took him as its founder. Melchert does a wonderful job of conveying the inner tensions that defined Ahmad's life. Ultimately, Ahmad was a "melancholy figure", one - like any individual - who had his inner contradictions and ambivalences. He led a very austere life, yet did not advocate people to be 'spiritual athletes', testing their endurance with lengthy feats of denial. He advocated for a hadith-based religion, which ultimately triumphed, but he was not above using reason if it suited his ultimate project, although times he did it grudgingly and discreetly. The book is short and a great read, with the last few chapters particularly most meaningful. His occasion

'digressions' that discuss modern analogies and comparisons with Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Protestantism, and modern Islamists were helpful. The chapter on hadith is somewhat technical, but doesn't detract from the overall thrust of the book. Melchert certainly has an affection for his subject, which he acknowledges and explains in his Conclusion. My one major criticism is that there was not enough referencing, for those who would like to explore more on the subject. For those who come to this book to refute the constant assertions that Ahmad was a rigid jurisprudent who is a precursor to modern Islamism, you will be richly rewarded. Fundamentalists, beware.

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