Introduction

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Muslims were practicing Islam on American soil long before the United States declared its independence in 1776. Perhaps the most famous Muslim to set foot in the British North American colonies was Ayuba Suleiman Diallo (1701-1773), better known in U.S. history as Job ben Solomon. “Very constant in his devotions,” according to his biographer Thomas Bluett, Diallo was a highly-educated religious leader who was a member of the ruling family from Futa Toro in Senegambia, West Africa. Enslaved in 1730 and brought to Annapolis, Maryland, he was sold to a settler who lived on Kent Island in the Chesapeake Bay, where he lived until 1733. At first made to work as a hand in the tobacco fields, Ayuba, or Job, eventually became a cattle herder. “Job would often leave the cattle,” according to Bluett, “and withdraw into the woods to pray.” As a trained imam, or prayer leader, Ayuba would likely try his best to point his body toward Mecca, Arabia, just as other Muslims do when they prostrate their bodies in the direction of Islam’s most important shrine. “But a white boy frequently watched him,” recounted Bluett, “and whilst he was at his devotion would mock him, and throw dirt in his face.”[1]

Bluett said this harassment “very much disturbed Job,” but it did not prevent him from continuing his religious practice. Bluett first discovered that Ayuba was a Muslim when Ayuba “pronounced the words Allah and Mahommed; by which, and his refusing a glass of wine we offered him, we perceived he was a Mahometan [Muslim].” Even though he could not speak English, Ayuba believed, correctly, that invoking the names of Allah, the Arabic word for God, and the Prophet Muhammad, whom Muslims revere as the Messenger of God, would successfully communicate his identity as a Muslim. Bluett was impressed by the sincere

reverence that seemed to accompany Ayuba's every mention of God's name: "he showed upon all occasions a singular veneration for the name of God, and never pronounced the word Allah without a peculiar accent and a remarkable pause." In addition, Ayuba's refusal to accept the hospitable offer of a glass of wine was a sign of Ayuba's ethical commitment to abstinence from alcoholic beverages. During a 1733 sea voyage to England, Bluett wrote, "we often permitted him to kill our fresh stock that he might eat of it himself; for he eats no flesh, unless he has killed the animal with his own hands, or knows that it has been killed by some Mussulman [Muslim]. He has no scruple about fish; but won't touch a bit of pork, it being expressly forbidden by their Law." Bluett was observing Ayuba's ethical commitments to eating halal, or permissible, meat. Based on Bluett's description, it seems that Ayuba insisted on following the dietary guidelines of Shari'a, which Bluett called Islamic "law" but could also be translated as an Islamic "way of life" or "path to salvation." Once Ayuba learned English, he and Bluett discussed the Christian belief in the Trinity, the idea that the one God is also three persons: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. After he "perused it with a great deal of care," Ayuba declared that his Arabic New Testament contained no mention of three gods.[2] For him, God was One, not Three in One.

Ayuba Suleiman Diallo was one of tens of thousands of Muslim Americans who were performing Islamic rituals and following ethical norms outlined in the Shari'a before the United States became an independent nation in 1776. Today approximately one to two percent of the U.S. population is Muslim, meaning that there are perhaps three to six million Muslims in the United States.[3] Their religious traditions have been part of the American experience since the moment that Europeans and Africans arrived in the Western hemisphere, but Muslims have always been religious minorities and the general public's knowledge about basic Islamic beliefs

and practices remains limited.[4] Islam is sometimes seen mainly as a political rather than a religious concern, and it is often associated with controversy rather than curiosity.[5]

This book is driven by the desire to provide clear answers to essential, but basic, questions about how observant Muslim Americans practice Islam: how do they pray? What religious holidays do they celebrate? How do Muslim Americans welcome a child into the world, get married, and bury their dead? What dietary rules do they follow? What kinds of charitable activities do they do? What is it like for American Muslims to go on *hajj*, the annual religious pilgrimage to Mecca? What role does the Qur'an play in Muslim Americans' daily lives? Is there anything like religious music or sacred dance in Muslim America?

The book's contributors, all experts on some aspect of Islam in the United States, take us to homes, religious congregations, schools, workplaces, cemeteries, restaurants, the Internet, and all the way to Mecca to see how Muslim American individuals discuss, debate, and implement answers to such questions in their daily lives. Their engaging narratives illuminate what Islam looks like as a lived religion in the United States. Muslim Americans have fashioned a set of religious institutions, ethics, and rituals that would be both familiar and strange to Ayuba Suleiman Diallo. This volume brings that vibrant world of religious practice to life. Points of commonality among Muslim Americans often include a shared love of the Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an, the seventh-century scripture that he revealed. And for many, but certainly not all Muslim Americans, the Shari'a provides specific guidelines on how to pray, what to eat and wear, how to bury the dead, when to fast, and how to perform the hajj. But even as the majority of Muslim Americans identify with a shared history, sacred texts, and authoritative religious interpretations, Muslim Americans themselves often point out that diversity is built into the