Glossary of Arabic Terms

‘alim — a Muslim religious scholar, theologian
‘aql — human intellect or reason
‘ibada — service to God; the foremost religious and civic duty of a Muslim
‘Ibadis — the current name of Kharajis (see below)
‘ulama — the plural of ‘alim; the collective body of Muslim theologians
‘urf — custom or customary
aman — safe conduct or security
caliph — originally deputy of Muhammad; Muhammad’s successor as leaders or rulers of the Islamic community
Dar al-Harb — the Abode of War (i.e. Europe)
faqih — jurist, expert in Islamic law
fatwa — legal ruling
fiqh — Islamic jurisprudence
fuqaha — plural of faqih (q.v.)
hadith — the traditions and pronouncements of Muhammad
Hanafi — one of the four sunni (q.v.) schools of law founded by Abu Hanifa (d. 767)
Hanbali — one of the four sunni (q.v.) schools of law founded by Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (d. 855)
haram — refuge or asylum
hisba — the Muslim dictum to promote good and prohibit evil
ibada — the individual believer’s obligation of service to God to achieve salvation
ijma — consensus
ijtihad — independent human reasoning or judgment
Ikhwan al Muslimin — Muslim Brotherhood
imam — leader of prayer; extended to mean leader of the community, particularly among shi’is; title used by shi‘i religious rulers
imama — leadership of the Muslim community
Ismailis — a Shi‘i faction that under the leadership of the Aga Kahn, located mainly in Pakistan, India, and East Africa
isnad — chain of transmission of a single or multiple hadiths
istihsan — juristic preference
ithna ‘Asharis — Twelvers, the majority of Shi‘i’s concentrated chiefly in Iran and Iraq
kanun — sultanic law created by the decrees of the Ottoman sultans as opposed to religious law
Kharijis — a sect that advocated election or deposition of a ruler by the community rather than by heredity
khulafa — stewards (of the earth)
ma’ — water
madhhab — a school of law
madjahib — plural of madhhab (q.v.)
Maliki — the name of one of the sunni (q.v.) schools of law founded by Malik ibn Anas (d. 795)
maslaha — reform; to mend or improve; technically actions taken for the moral betterment or safety of the community
mazalim — complaints; the name of the courts that dealt with political, criminal and land cases
Mecele — the Ottoman Civil Code of 1858
musha — free community property and rights
mubah — private ownership (of water)
mulk — an inalienable right to something
musha — communal rights
mushtasib — a magistrate or inspector in charge of markets, weights and measures, and public morals
musnad — a compendium of hadiths
mutanajjis — polluted (water)
Muwatta — first compendium of Islamic law
nahr — river; pl. anhar
nizamiyya — 19th century secular courts of general jurisdiction
qa‘bayn — two ankles (or heels)
qanat — system of excavated underground channels for the movement of irrigation water drawn from higher elevations
qiyas — reasoning by analogy
ra‘y — personal reasoning
risala — treatise
sahib al-mazalim — magistrate or superintendent of the mazalim (q.v.) courts
sahib ash-shurta — magistrate or chief of police
Shafi‘i — the name of one of the sunni (q.v.) schools of law founded by Muhammad ash-Shafi‘i (d. 820)
Sharia — Islamic law
Shariba — drinking water
Shi‘i — followers of the “party” of Ali; the principal minority sect of Islam; original meaning “party”, “partisan”
shirb — the right to irrigated land
siyar — military campaigns
sunna — actions and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad; originally meant customary practice or tradition
sunny — the majority sect of Islam including the four orthodox schools of law
taher — pure (water for religious purposes)
tahur — clean (water for drinking)
umma — the Muslim community
usul-al-fiqh — the bases or “roots” of jurisprudence; jurisprudence
zahir — a meaning which is evident, apparent
Zaidis — the smallest faction of Shi‘is, located mainly in Yemen