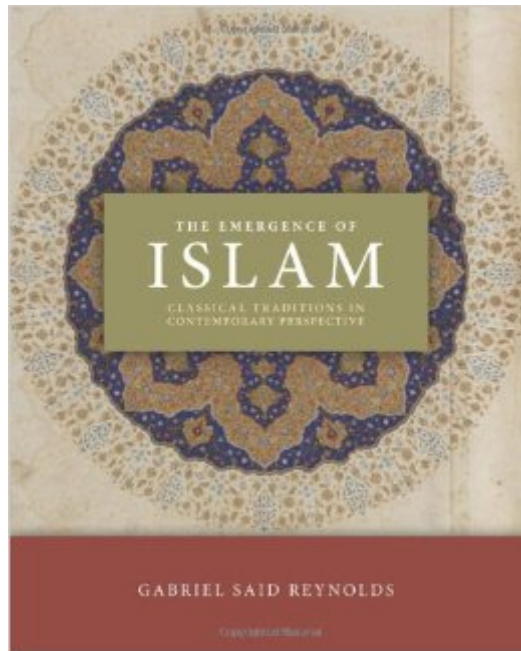


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The Emergence Of Islam: Classical Traditions In Contemporary Perspective



Synopsis

This brief survey text tells the story of Islam. Gabriel Said Reynolds organizes his study in three parts, beginning with Muhammad's early life and rise to power, showing the origins and development of the Qur'an with a distinctive, if unique, juxtaposition between the Qur'an and biblical literature, and concluding with an overview of modern and fundamentalist narratives of Islam's origin, which reveals how those who represent Islam's future begin by shaping its past. Reynolds's narrative of Islam's founding traces Muhammad's life in Mecca and Medina as well as the first four caliphs whose history illustrates the differences between Sunni and Shi'ite views of Islam. His fascinating look at the structure and meaning of the Qur'an and its use of biblical language helps to illustrate and clarify its religious meaning. The book yields a rich understanding of diverse interpretations of Islam's emergence, suggesting that its emergence is itself ever-developing. The book provides a variety of helpful pedagogy, including chapter summaries, questions for review and discussion, photos, maps, suggested readings, glossary, and timeline.

Book Information

Paperback: 224 pages

Publisher: Fortress Press; 59285th edition (April 1, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0800698592

ISBN-13: 978-0800698591

Product Dimensions: 9.1 x 7.4 x 0.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (13 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #508,048 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #334 in [Books > Religion & Spirituality > Islam > History](#) #354 in [Books > History > World > Religious > Islam](#) #1311 in [Books > Religion & Spirituality > Religious Studies > Comparative Religion](#)

Customer Reviews

Most books on early Islam are either one-sided or highly specialized -- popular works on this subject tend to present either a pious repetition of traditional Muslim narratives, or else shrill partisan attacks against those traditions. Academic works tend to avoid those same pitfalls, but they are usually so technical and narrow that they remain inaccessible for a general audience. This book is very different. Professor Reynolds has beautifully and clearly set forth (1) the traditional Muslim narrative of the emergence of Islam *and* (2) the problems and historical difficulties that modern

scholars have identified with that traditional narrative. In analyzing those historical difficulties, he explains how the Quran itself sheds light on how Islam emerged, what sort of religious environment it emerged in, and why the hadith/sira/shariah were later developed to explicate certain features of the more ancient text, while addressing what were (by then) a much later and radically different set of social/religious issues. As a simple example, the later Muslim tradition is heavily focused on Mecca, arguing that Mohammed began speaking against the polytheists in Mecca. Yet the Qur'an itself is primarily directed at Christians and Jews, and does not directly even mention Mecca, with relatively few mentions of polytheism (the Arabic word often translated as "polytheists" actually meaning "associators," i.e. those who falsely associate other persons (Jesus/Holy Spirit) with Allah). Read through the later Muslim tradition, the Qur'an is all about Mohammed receiving a monotheistic revelation and attempting to convert the polytheists, receiving this new revelation in the isolated polytheistic city of Mecca.

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