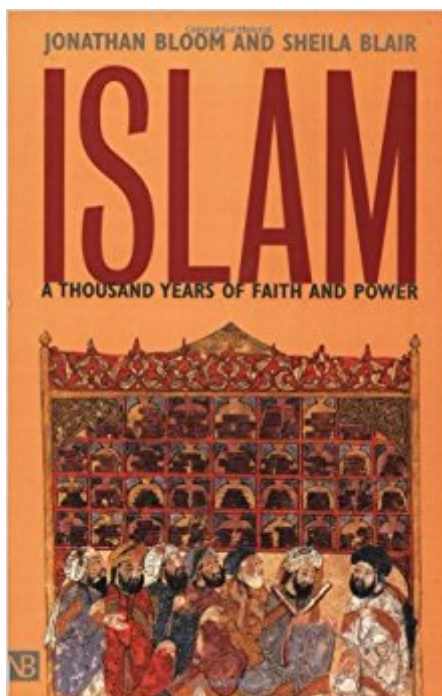


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Islam: A Thousand Years Of Faith And Power



Synopsis

In its first thousand years—from the revelations to Muhammad in the seventh century to the great Islamic empires of the sixteenth—Islamic civilization flourished. While Europeans suffered through the Dark Ages, Muslims in such cities as Jerusalem, Damascus, Alexandria, Fez, Tunis, Cairo, and Baghdad made remarkable advances in philosophy, science, medicine, literature, and art. This engrossing and accessible book explores the first millennium of Islamic culture, shattering stereotypes and enlightening readers about the events and achievements that have shaped contemporary Islamic civilization. Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair examine the rise of Islam, the life of Muhammad, and the Islamic principles of faith. They describe the golden age of the Abbasids, the Mongol invasions, and the great Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal empires that emerged in their wake. Their narrative, complemented by excerpts of the Koran, poetry, biographies, inscriptions, travel guides, and even a thirteenth-century recipe, concludes with a brief epilogue that takes us to the twenty-first century. Colorfully illustrated, this book is a wonderful introduction to the rich history of a civilization that still radically affects the world.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"A timely study and important background to understanding the faith of more than one-fifth of the world's population today." John L. Esposito, University Professor, Georgetown University and author of *Islam: The Straight Path* and editor of *The Oxford History of Islam*

"A timely study and important background to understanding the faith of more than one-fifth of the world's population today."—John L. Esposito, University Professor, Georgetown University and author of *Islam: The Straight Path* and editor of *The Oxford History of Islam*

The book itself is very readable. It did take a while longer getting to me (from the time I ordered it) than I anticipated.

This is a required text for a World Civilization class my kids are taking (grade 9). They report that it is comprehensive, but the similar names and many names and dates can get confusing. The book is not written in a very engaging style, according to them.

A very good introductory text to Islam that leaves you wanting to read more. The text is clear and simple, helping the reader understand complex issues, yet not oversimplifying the intricate nature of Islam. Highly recommend it!!

not much use to a Muslim

Bottom line summary: A fairly good place to start if you have no background in the beliefs of or cultural history of Islam. Somewhat uneven because it was originally written as a companion book for a TV series. _____ The choice to select Professors Bloom and Blair's *Islam: A Thousand Years of Faith and Power* should consider that¹. It is a companion book for a Television miniseries intended to showcase Ancient Muslim history and culture from the point of view of Muslim cultural achievements.² Both the program and the original book predate the events of 9/11. In the general US population there were some varying levels of concern over what was understood to be a small, murderous sub population among the Muslims but no sense of immediate threat from this group.³ There remains in the US a very uneven understanding of what the Muslim religion is about, what its followers believe and what its history includes. *Islam: A Thousand Years of Faith and Power* is a reasonable place to start if your interest is to answer these kinds of initial questions. If you already feel comfortable with this level of discussion or are in need of a more sophisticated education this is not your book. If you have come to the conclusion that the Muslim Extremists are the only part of the religion you care to consider, or that the entire community of believers is suspect or worse, this is not the book that will confirm your opinions. Among my several disappointments with this book is the fact that every topic seems to result in a discussion of

building and architecture. This make sense given the fact that the book is bound to the not presently available visuals of the TV broadcast, but leads a serious student with more questions than answers. Muhammad is the father of this religion and his life is dealt with in much less than a chapter. There are a few details about the almost immediate splintering of the religion, but this discussion is neither deep nor especially informative. The religion he inspired no functions via interpretations and rulings contained in a variety of the sayings collected into the Koran. Very little of these books and the functions, characteristics and methods of Sharia law are discussed. What we get is a series of travelogues, identifying places then or now ruled by various Islamic courts. Some loyal to a remote Caliphate, others beholding to only local authorities. There is almost no military history, very little about daily life for the people in the various locations and always more about buildings, mosques, colleges and palaces. There are scatted and scant biographies of some local Pashas and Caliphs, a few writers or philosophers. Much beyond who had been playboys and which ones had been empire builders we get little. Between the lines we get glimpses of the internal struggles among the various Islamic political powers and would be powers. There is no analysis to explain why these struggles existed and which ones fit where in a modern rubric of fundamentalist, or tolerant. Please note that this history ends in the late 1600's. Europe as a continent is becoming dominant among the larger world of competing powers. The various Islamic powers are or have peaked in their respective roles at the top of this competition. Where extremists exists they have no ability to project threats into the daily awareness of most Europeans, or the not yet independent United States. Ultimately what makes this book what it is; is that it was intended as a intro to Islamic Culture. It was not designed to discuss many of the things about which I had hoped to learn. I cannot down star it for the fact that it is designed to be less than my needs. I recommend Islam: A Thousand Years of Faith and Power as a starting place. I caution that it is incomplete, selective and purpose built to highlight topics easily conveyed in video.

Over the past month, I read "Islam: A Thousand Years of Faith and Power by Jonathon Bloom and Sheila Blair. (Published February 1st 2002, by Yale University Press) The book was about the evolution of the Islamic religion and its effects on the peoples of the Middle East, Northern Africa, India, and Central Asia until about 1600 AD. It also gave insight about the numerous leaders of the empires which engulfed Islamic lands. The book begins by talking about the world around the time of Muhammad, the founder of Islam. The Byzantines ruled over much of the Mediterranean Sea, the Sasainans much of Persia (Modern Iran) and the surrounding realms. The book then goes on to describe the homeland of Muhammad, the Arabian Peninsula. The peninsula is mostly made up of a

harsh desert that extends for miles. Even under these conditions, cities filled with bazaars were built above from the sand. Muhammad was born in the desert climate and eventually grew into a man and traveled around the Middle East, gaining wisdom. The first sign of Muhammad's role with god was when he was allegedly visited by an angel who told him to preach god's message. Eventually Muhammad gathered followers and gained power in Mecca where he later died. After Muhammad's death there was a crisis over who would be the next to lead the religion, but in the end, Muhammad's son-in-law, Ali took over the religion. Ali's succession of Muhammad is still controversial to this day, and the legitimacy of Muhammad's successors is one of the differences between Shia' and Sunni Islam. Ali and his successors helped spread the religion through conquests, and eventually they spread Islam to Africa, the rest of the Middle East and into parts of Western Asia. Dynasties of Muslims families were established during this time like the Abbasids of Baghdad, and the Umayyads of North Africa. Under the prosperity of political stability, these cultures flourished in the arts, and sciences. These empires took the knowledge of the thinkers of ancient Rome and Greece and combined them with their own knowledge to create things like an early attempt at a glider, Algebra, and an estimate at the circumference of the earth. These wealth empires built massive mosques and other public buildings in the grand cities of Cairo, Fez, and Damascus. However, the prosperity would not last. Crises arose in the empires that would weaken them. The first was the Crusaders from Europe who fought to reclaim Jerusalem and Canaan from the Fatimid Caliphate in the name of Christianity. Though the Crusaders were successful in the first crusade, they failed on the following attempts to reclaim Jerusalem. Later on in 1492, the Christians of Spain would finally defeat the Moors of Northern Africa ending Islamic rule and influence in the Iberian Peninsula. With the Crusaders mostly gone, the Muslims could return to their daily lives. Not long after though, the Mongols began to invade Islamic lands, starting by destroying the once prosperous city of Baghdad. The defeat opened the flood gates and the Mongols soon became the primary rulers of Islam. Even in Cairo which was not occupied by the Mongols, the Black Plague ravaged the city and reportedly killed a thousand a day. Eventually, the Mongol Empire fell apart but it had left its mark on Islam. The Mongols had helped create a Persian-Islamic culture originating in Iran which spread as far as India. The people of the culture, called the Safavids were very prosperous and well known for the carpets, jewelry and other goods they exported to Europe where they were popular with the royals. The Safavids often fought against the Ottoman Empire from Turkey, who had finally defeated the once powerful Byzantines. The Ottomans made Istanbul (formally Constantinople) their capital. After capturing Istanbul, the Ottomans wanted to extend Islamic power into mainland Europe so they set out to expand their lands. The Ottomans made it as

far west as Vienna but were defeated and could not continue into Austria, perhaps preventing Europe from becoming Islamic as well. At the height of their power, the Ottomans ruled from Western Africa to the Persian Gulf, an empire that rivaled the size of the Roman Empire. The Ottoman Empire would last many centuries until it dissolved following World War I. The Mughal Empire in India was arguably the grandest of the regional powers. The vast natural resources of India helped create the many goods like cinnamon, cotton, and sugarcane as well as the many splendors of the Mughal Empire, the most famous being the Taj Mahal. The story ends around 1600 AD, a thousand years after the lifetime of Muhammad, who changed the world forever. I liked the book because I learned a lot about the history of the Middle East, something that is not taught in school. I also enjoyed learning about how much Islam influenced the world. For example, I never knew that the Taj Mahal was a creation of a Muslim noble. Also I never knew about Abbas Ibn Firnas and how he reportedly glided through the air. In the book, it says that a historian of the time, Ahmed al-Maqqari reportedly said "He covered himself with feathers, attached a couple of wings to his body, and, getting on an eminence, flung himself down into the air, when according to the testimony of several trustworthy writers who witnessed the performance, he flew a considerable distance, as if he had been a bird, but, in alighting again on the place whence he had started, his back was very much hurt, for not knowing that birds when they alight come down upon their tails, he forgot to provide himself with one." Therefore, an Islamic mathematician was technically the first person to fly, a thousand years before the Wright Brothers. I also learned many things about the contributions of the Islamic culture to Western Civilization. For example, I learned that many mathematical terms originate from Arabic like Algebra (al-jabr), and the reason x is used as a variable in math. The story goes that Arabic mathematicians used the expression shay as the unknown, and when the Spanish conquered Moorish cities they learned about shay and translated it to xay since x is pronounced as ch in Spanish, giving us x . Also, I never knew that the numerical system we use is also an Arabic creation because the Arabs took the numerical system from India, modified it slightly and later introduced it to Europe. Not only is it used today, but it was also popularized by Leonard Fibonacci, the Italian mathematician the Fibonacci sequence is named after. I would recommend this book to readers 16 and older because it is a nonfiction book, a genre that younger readers typically find uninteresting, and also that the book has a lot to do with history and a culture many Americans are not accustomed to, therefore they may be reluctant to open their horizons. The book is also very factual and beneficial to people who are interested in English words' origins as well because of the numerous words taken from Arabic and Persian that are used in our language. I feel that readers below 16 would not truly appreciate the significance the Islamic culture

has on us today, and the younger readers might have a hard time getting past the stereotypes associated with the culture.

In trying to better understand Islam, I bought this book on and have found it to be quite good-excellent, in fact. I was not looking for an in-depth scholarly work, but an overview and perspective. Mission accomplished. Each chapter is neatly organized into topical information that follows logically and neatly dovetails into the previous chapters. The full color photographs are excellent- I truly wish more books would offer up such visuals as well as Bloom and Blair have in this book. If you're looking for depth ad naseum, this isn't your book. But if you're looking for an interesting read with a reasonable index and reasonable "cast of characters" outlined both in the book and in the index, give this one a shot.

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