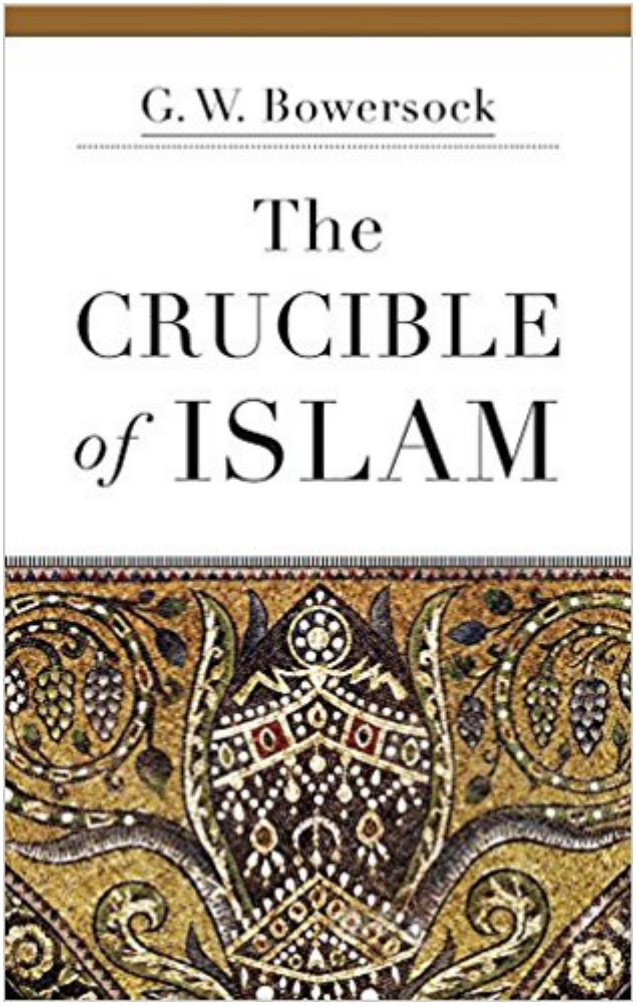
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The Crucible Of Islam



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Synopsis

Little is known about Arabia in the sixth century CE. Yet from this distant time and place emerged a faith and an empire that stretched from the Iberian peninsula to India. Today, Muslims account for nearly a quarter of the global population. G. W. Bowersock seeks to illuminate this most obscure and yet most dynamic period in the history of IslamÃ¢â ¬â ¢from the mid-sixth to mid-seventh centuryÃ¢â ¬â ¢exploring why arid Arabia proved to be such fertile ground for MuhammadÃ¢â ¬â„¢s prophetic message, and why that message spread so quickly to the wider world.In MuhammadÃ¢â ¬â„¢s time Arabia stood at the crossroads of great empires, a place where Christianity, Judaism, and local polytheistic traditions vied for adherents. Mecca, MuhammadÃ¢â ¬â„¢s birthplace, belonged to the part of Arabia recently conquered by the Ethiopian Christian king Abraha. But Ethiopia lost western Arabia to Persia following AbrahaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s death, while the death of the Byzantine emperor in 602 further destabilized the region. Within this chaotic environment, where lands and populations were traded frequently among competing powers and belief systems, Muhammad began winning converts to his revelations. In a troubled age, his followers coalesced into a powerful force, conquering Palestine, Syria, and Egypt and laying the groundwork of the Umayyad Caliphate.The crucible of Islam remains an elusive vessel. Although we may never grasp it firmly, Bowersock offers the most detailed description of its contours and the most compelling explanation of how one of the worldÃ¢â ¬â„¢s great religions took shape.

Book Information

Hardcover: 240 pages

Publisher: Harvard University Press (April 10, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0674057767

ISBN-13: 978-0674057760

Product Dimensions: 4.7 x 1 x 7 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars 19 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #213,244 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #148 inÃ Â Books > Religion & Spirituality > Islam > History #157 inÃ Â Books > History > World > Religious > Islam #247 inÃ Â Books > History > Middle East > Israel & Palestine

Customer Reviews

Bowersock paints a concise portrait of IslamÃ¢â ¬â„¢s early formation and consolidation, focusing on the political, social, economic, and religious conditions of 6th- and 7th-century ArabiaÃ¢â ¬Â¦Bowersock clearly and succinctly describes the stage upon which Islam emerged, and also dispels certain rumors, myths, and half-histories that have come to dominate popular notions of the period (and even persist in scholarship)Ã¢â ¬Â¦Given the historical and current relationships and tensions among various groups of Jews, Christians, and Muslims, this brief and easily digestible introduction will interest and please a wide variety of readers. (Publishers Weekly 2017-02-20)To write about the Arabian background of the Prophet Muhammad, about the origin of Islam in Mecca and Medina, and about the first conquests that led to the formation of the Arab empire (roughly between 560 and 690 AD) is to attempt to describe the first moments of a supernovaÃ¢â ¬â ¢the flash of a stupendous detonation that marks the death of a massive star and the release of enormous amounts of energy. G.W. Bowersock has met this challenge in a little book of explosive originality and penetrating judgmentÃ¢â ¬Â¦With The Crucible of Islam we reach the very center of this roiling world. We look into the depths of the crucible itself, to seize, in a true historical perspective, the Ã¢â ¬Ëœmolten ingredientsÃ¢â ¬â„¢ that came to form Islam. His book is an exercise in the art of historical truth. Bowersock is a classical scholar. He derives his skills from a tradition that reaches back to the Renaissance, to Erasmus and to Lorenzo Valla, whose demolition of the legendary Donation of Constantine he has himself translated with gusto. His book derives its strength from the method advocated by the great classical scholar Richard Bentley (1662Ã¢â ¬â œ1742): ratio et res ipsaÃ¢â ¬â ¢reason confronting the thing itselfÃ¢â ¬Â¦Part of the joy of reading this account of the background and emergence of early Islam is the knowledge that Bowersock has built it from solid stones, the weight of every one of which he has tested with his own critical mind. Secure that we are in the hands of a master, let us think about the implications of the substantial gains to scholarship that Bowersock has brought us in this compressed masterpieceÃ¢â ¬Â¦We must be grateful to Bowersock for giving us, at this time, a masterpiece of the historianÃ¢â ¬â„¢s craft. (Peter Brown New York Review of Books 2017-05-11)This work is highly recommended for those interested in the religious and political attitudes that gave rise to Islam. (Muhammed Hassanali Booklist 2017-05-18)

G. W. Bowersock is Professor Emeritus of Ancient History at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton.

This is a book of prodigious scholarship, with a wealth of detail, much of which will escape the

non-specialist. Nonetheless, the story it tells us of great importance to our world today, plagued by rampant misunderstanding of the complex interrelationships amongst the Abrahamic faiths and, especially in the modern West, widespread ignorance of Islam, sometimes even on the part of avowed Muslims. At a price of $15 or so, it’s rather too expensive for a slim volume, fully 20% of which not text but scholarly apparatus, i.e. index, footnotes, etc. However, personally I regret neither the expenditure nor the effort of the reading, and recommend this book to anyone whose interests are thus inclined.

I was disappointed with "The Crucible of Islam." I don’t fault Prof. Bowersock’s scholarship, but his writing! I have rarely encountered a book with so much internal repetition! At one point, I began to wonder if my Kindle had accidentally taken me back to the first chapter. Were the chapters written as separate essays with no thought of how they fit together? Elsewhere there were instances where he would repeat observations/conclusions that he had just made two or three pages before. Are there no editors for academic books anymore? Bowersock promised a history of the Arabian peninsula before Islam. Certainly the focus on etymology and epigraphy were new to me, but I’m not sure I learned much more than I knew before, except more about Ethiopian intervention in Arabia. Perhaps that was enough, but I wasn’t left with a very vivid picture of what Arab society was like before Mohammed.

This is the third of three short books about the shifts among the civilizations vieing for control of the Arabian Peninsula before and up to the beginning of the Muslim era. If you already know a lot about it you don’t need to read any of them, and if you know nothing about the times and the place it’s not going to be of much use. But if your existing knowledge is slight and your curiosity is strong these books have much to learn from. The view is from a height with only the slightest attention to the historical details that resulted in the ascendency of Muhammad on the Peninsula, but unfortunately the history of the rise and decline of the other empires active in that time and place hovers just beyond the scope of the books. Nor should the reader expect description of the cultures, their interactions of the actual battles involved in the shifting relations among them. Still, Bowersock’s authoritative coverage of his topic is well worth spending time with.

Outlines a part of history that many of us have not been taught, especially in the US. The geopolitical interactions of that location go back to the late Roman empires. It’s an eye opener and might help to explain the history of today’s conflicts in a location where memories span

centuries.Another interesting book THE CRUSADES THROUGH ARAB EYES, by Amin Maalouf ISBN 0-8052-0898-4 might be worth a purchase too.

Professor Gowersock's books are written for a wide audience of people who are interested enough in Late Antiquity to work their way through text after text in order to make some sense out of this distant past. In Professor Gowersock's recent books, "The Throne of Adulis",and this one, he offers us a dynamic view of sixth and seventh century Ethiopia and the Arabian Peninsula, and the influences of Persia and Byzantium on this region. Of particular interest are the influences on Muhammad and the circumstances that enabled his prophetic vision to prevail. As an amateur, non-academic in history, there is a lot to marvel about in this short book. His books and those of Hugh Kennedy compel the Euro-centric reader to open his/her mind to a vast and complicated history of the Middle East, through Afghanistan and India.

Insightful view of pre-Islamic Arabia evoking a rich pluralistic heritage that encompassed Judaism, Christianity, Arab monotheism andpolytheism. Innovative history, well-researched and well written.

Interesting and informative.

excellent explaination of Islam.

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