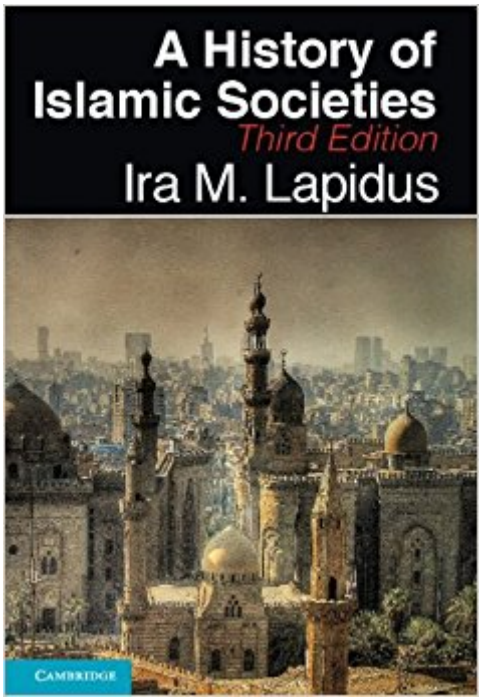
A History Of Islamic Societies



Synopsis

This new edition of one of the most widely used course books on Islamic civilizations around the world has been substantially revised to incorporate the new scholarship and insights of the last twenty-five years. Ira Lapidus' history explores the beginnings and transformations of Islamic civilizations in the Middle East and details Islam's worldwide diffusion. The history is divided into four parts. Part I is a comprehensive account of pre-Islamic late antiquity; the beginnings of Islam; the early Islamic empires; and Islamic religious, artistic, legal and intellectual cultures. Part II deals with the construction in the Middle East of Islamic religious communities and states to the fifteenth century. Part III includes the history to the nineteenth century of Islamic North Africa and Spain; the Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal empires; and other Islamic societies in Asia and Africa. Part IV accounts for the impact of European commercial and imperial domination on Islamic societies and traces the development of the modern national state system and the simultaneous Islamic revival from the early nineteenth century to the present.

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Customer Reviews

Review of previous edition: "This book is a major undertaking and deserves to be saluted as an outstanding achievement. Professor Lapidus' A History of Islamic Societies belongs to a rare breed of works." World QuarterlyReview of previous edition: "I do not think that any other world civilization can boast a comparable general account of such substance and quality. ... This is a great deal more than a textbook. It is a product of learning, intellect and style of an extremely high order." Journal of the Royal Asiatic SocietyReview of previous edition: "The value of A History of Islamic Societies lies

in its sheer comprehensiveness. In one volume a vast amount of material is synthesized and presented in a clear and effective style. There is nothing else like it." The Journal of Asian StudiesReview of previous edition: "Lapidus is concerned not with defining an essential Islam, but rather with mapping the role of Islamic beliefs, institutions and identities in particular historical contexts." International Journal of Middle East StudiesReview of previous edition: "Ira Lapidus' A History of Islamic Societies has served students for twenty-five years as an accessible but thorough introduction to the full sweep of Islamic history. The book provides a powerful comparative framework for appreciating both diversity and continuity in Islamic historical experience." Islam and Christian-Muslim RelationsReview of previous edition: "By this singular work Lapidus, Professor Emeritus of History at the University of California, Berkeley, has ... placed himself in the recording of Islamic history on a pedestal equivalent to Gibbon's for that of Rome." The Book Review Literary Trust, New Delhi

This new edition of one of the most widely used course books on Islamic civilizations around the world has been substantially revised to incorporate the new scholarship and insights of the last twenty-five years. Ira Lapidus' history explores the beginnings and transformations of Islamic civilizations in the Middle East and details Islam's worldwide diffusion.

This is a famous book. Together with Marshall HodgsonÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s three-volume ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“The Venture of Islam,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• it is the touchstone of modern long-form histories of the Islamic world. ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“A History of Islamic Societies,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• as its title implies, covers both history and theology. Given that I like history, and that I have a particular interest in comparative theology (primarily as between Christianity and Islam, with forays into other religions, living and dead), you would think reading this book would be, for me, an ideal way to spend my time. But it nearly defeated me.It is not that it is a bad book. It is a great book for what it isÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •a reference book. It has more in common with an encyclopedia than with a narrative history. Oh, itÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s not badly written, just very dryly, and organized in a way that makes it much more useful as a reference. If I want to know the history of ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Nineteenth Century Turkestan (Transoxania, Khwarizm, and Farghana),ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• I simply have to turn to pages 345 through 350. ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Qajar IranÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •pages 469 to 472. And so on. Most of what you could ever want to know about any society that has ever had a substantial Muslim presence is in this thousand-page book.But no normal person can remember this torrent of information. Certainly,

there are a few people with prodigy memories who can remember a lot of it (though true photographic memory is a myth). And if you are already a true expert, who has been exposed to much or all of this information in the course of prior studies, you may remember portions, particularly those of notable interest to you personally, because the information will serve to reinforce what you already know. For most people, though, reading this or anything else once, in isolation, is likely to result in its near-total disappearance from memory, unless it is reinforced in some way by repetition from some other source.So the problem with this book is that the casual reader will not remember the facts in this book, other than to the extent they are part of common currency (e.g., Muhammad was the prophet of Islam). Some other facts do fall into that categoryÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •maybe not common currency, but they are discussed or referred to frequently enough in the modern era to not just be facts in isolation to the reader (e.g., Shiite Islam dominates in Iran). Unfortunately, the vast majority of facts in this book do not fit into that category, so the time spent reading this book completely through will, unfortunately, almost certainly be wasted.This is merely one example of a problem with modern reading on any complex topic, such as substantial history or political philosophy. Unless you are immersed in a milieu where you are frequently exposed and re-exposed to the relevant facts and concepts, either directly or tangentially, during study or work as well as in casual conversation and interchange, most people immediately forget most of what they read. In the past, educated people shared, to a certain degree, a common training and outlook, such that numerous literary/historical/political references were universally recognized, often being used as a shorthand. The most common references, unsurprisingly, were episodes from Greek, Roman and English history, as a glance at most fiction or autobiography, as well as academic works, written prior to 1960 will show. Thus, many episodes in history became part of the lingua franca, and new facts connected, even tangentially, to those episodes were easier to remember. But as the core of what used constitutes Western education has expanded (or decayed), and in daily life the options of what to read, and what other entertainment to consume, have also greatly expanded, this common basis of communication has disappeared. This necessarily means that for any complex topic that is not in common currency, the non-professional reader, to remember what he reads and thereby to retain value, either has to create his own repetition, through reading multiple works close in time to each other, or by writing review-type summaries (which is why I am writing this). Or he must somehow find a daily milieu where reinforcement can occur, which I find difficult to believe today exists outside of academic environments.But this is a book review, not (merely) some meta thoughts about reading. Perhaps it is fortunate that Ira Lapidus wrote this book before Islam became a political football in the West. (I read the second edition, published in 2005; the first edition was

published in 1988, and in 2014 a third edition was published). ThatÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s not to say there wasnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t a political angle in 1988. At that point for some years a variety of academics had pushed back against a supposed ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“OrientalismÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •the alleged failure of Western academics, and Westerners in general, to appreciate the virtues and wonders of non-Western societies, together with the supposed tendency of Westerners to ascribe characteristics to non-Western societies marking them as some combination of degenerate and incompetent. While that criticism may make sense and have value if judiciously applied, it is not clear to me that ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“EurocentricÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• bias was, say prior to 1980, the problem we are told it was. After all, earlier writers such as the enormously influential Steven Runciman had long taken an aggressively pro-Muslim, anti-Western and anti-Christian stance, and literate adventurers such as T.E. Lawrence and Wilfred Thesiger had brought appreciation for certain Middle Eastern ways. And given that cultural Marxists are universal liars about the past, and there is a substantial overlap between the enemies of ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“OrientalismÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• and cultural Marxists, IÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢m betting thereÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s more to the story than weÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢re told.So my guess is that supposed 20th Century Eurocentrism is largely a greatly exaggerated caricature. Not to mention that it is pretty clearly the case that since 1200 or so, European societies have been hugely superior to any other world society, by nearly any measureÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •therefore, largely, criticizing Eurocentrism is like complaining we are anthropocentric because we care more about humans than dolphins. Well, yes. Dolphins are inferior to us, so we study and care about them less than humans, just as other world societies were inferior to, and less important than, Europe for a very long time. Recognizing this is recognizing reality, not an insult. (Whether Europe still has any claim to pride of place is a separate question, and not one that obviously has a pleasing answer to Europeans, or Americans.) But, in any case, Lapidus has little to say about Europe, and this book is not overtly an entry in the anti-ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“OrientalistÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• campaigns, since it is as straightforward an account as straightforward gets.There is another political fly in the ointment, of course. Since 2001, of course, the American picture of Islam has become clouded, on the one hand by many on the right endorsing a superficial and wholly negative view of Islam and Islamic societies, and by many (mostly on the left, but also including many on the right, such as George Bush, and hard-to-place silly men, such as Pope Francis) whitewashing less-pleasant theological characteristics and historical behaviors based on Islam and common in Islamic societies. Both approaches incorrectly view Islamic societies as monolithic and fail to grasp the rich texture of nearly 1500 years of Islam.

This book, reference book or not, is an excellent corrective to both tendencies. It is a strictly neutral account of the facts of Islamic societies, which to an open-minded reader makes for a generally positive account of Muslim societies. For, as with any great civilization, one can come up with an endless litany of horrors, since bad behavior characterizes all men, but that should not overly detract from the glories of the civilization.I will not try to summarize the book, because it is not susceptible to summary. I will note that it is more of a social history than an economic history, and that the book does have some large-scale themes that become evident, even if they are not put front-and-center by the author. First, there is recognition of the incredible multiplicity within Islam (I would say ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“diversity,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• but that word has been ruined). Modestly well-informed Americans are aware of the split between Sunni and Shiite, even if they donÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t comprehend its origin and meaning. But a longitudinal view of Muslim history, as Lapidus offers, not only shows the origin and myriad details of that particular division, but many other fault lines and divisions (not necessarily with the same negative consequences), ranging from Sunni schools of law (madhhab); to the rich variety of Sufi practice, belief and impact (frequently as leaders of violence, in contradiction to the ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“dervishÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• stereotype); to the many ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“fundamentalistÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• movements, such as the Kharijites, dating back to earliest Muslim times but with successors such as the Wahhabis and ISIS today. And thatÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s just theological diversityÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •the culture of the Maghreb was very different than that of Persia, which was (and is) very different from that of Southeast Asia, and so on, despite the commonality of Muslim belief. Not to mention that all this is a gross over-simplification of how we got to nowÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •for example, to get to the four current schools of Sunni law (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali) was a long and arduous, not to say tortuous and dangerous, process for thousands of the worldÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s brightest minds for hundreds of years. All this Lapidus covers in great detailÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •for example, take this sample summary sentence to a paragraph, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“The AshÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢aris and the Maturidis steered a middle course between MuÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢tazili rationalism and Hanbali literalism.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• I find this fascinating. Your mileage may vary.A second theme is the strength of Islam. While Islam spread mostly by armed conquest, Lapidus notes that ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“If there is an underlying common factor in the worldwide diffusion of Islam it seems to be its capacity to generate religious fellowship, larger-order communities, and states among peoples otherwise living in highly factionalized or fragmented societies.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• Ultimately, whether for the practical reasons of personal advancement, or for spiritual reasons, internal or the external ones of belonging to a larger, in fact worldwide, community, Islam proved attractive to

people, both those outside and those under Muslim domination. As more than one person has pointed out, mass conversion of Muslims to any other religion is essentially unheard of, and only part of the reason is the capital punishment frequently meted out throughout history to Muslim apostates. The strength of Muslim bonds of spirit and solidarity must also be important, perhaps more important. Whether, in some counterfactual world, if a new Godfrey of Bouillon were to conquer Muslim lands and establish Christian dominance, over some lengthy period of time mass re-conversions might occur is an interesting question.In considering such a question, itÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s important to remember it took many hundreds of years before the Middle East became as Muslim as it is today. In fact, Lapidus notes that during the Crusades, a substantial majority of the population of the Levant was still Christian. Here, and in many other locations, Lapidus notes that for quite some time, the new Muslim overlords not only did not pursue conversions, they positively discouraged conversions, because that would reduce the tax base (since Muslims were exempt from certain taxes), increase the number of people among whom the booty of war had to be distributed, and erode the distinction between conquerors and conquered. In fact, the usual early practice was to build entirely new garrison cities (amsar; the origin of Fustat (Cairo, sort of) and Basra) to avoid mixing of the masses. Not to mention that the Muslim conquerors had no problem extensively using and working with Christian (and Jewish, and Zoroastrian) elites for everything from scribal services to translation to science to other forms of administration, making no effort to convert them. We in the West tend to see Islam through the prism of Christianity, an evangelizing religion. Theologically Islam requires that Islam dominate around the globe (and most especially never lose any area it has once dominated); usually conversion is a vastly lower priority, if a priority at all. (Failure to appreciate this makes it more difficult to understand modern conflicts with Islam.) Christianity, of course, has usually taken a more evangelization-focused approach (although in the modern world, we have Pope Francis denigrating evangelization, a circumstance entirely bizarre). But for the reasons earlier given relating to the strength of Islam, I would think that if Christianity were to regain its historical approach to evangelization, my guess is that re-conversions of Muslim areas might be possibleÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •but only coupled with conquest, and only over a very long period of time.A third theme, or rather characteristic, is objectivity. So, for example, unlike Muslim apologists such as Karen Armstrong (a crypto-Muslim falsely claiming to be Christian), Lapidus does not ignore that as part of his early conquests, Muhammad ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“destroy[ed] his opponents, including the Jewish clans.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• But he does not over-emphasize this, or any other of what would be regarded by moderns as bad behavior by Muhammad (or other early Muslims), as, frankly, many

American conservatives tend to do today. Any honest observer knows that pre-modern warfare involved a large amount of unpleasantness, including frequent mass killing of the defeated. Richard the Lion-Hearted massacred Saracen prisoners in 1191 when he was besieging Acre, as we are constantly told in an attempt to paint the Crusades in a bad light; we are never reminded that the Mamluks massacred every civilian in the city they could get their hands on during and after the later Siege of Acre in 1291. Such examples are legion. Spending oneÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s time criticizing such past behavior is a waste of time and shows a personal agenda, one thankfully missing in this book.I could pick out many other interesting topics from this book to discuss.
ThatÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s the nature of reference works, of courseÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •if you take an encyclopedia and open it at random, you are likely to be rewarded, just as you are with this book. To take another random example, something of particular interest to me is something is that is too often forgotten todayÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •why Islam succeeded in rapid early expansion.
ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“The reasons for the relatively rapid success of the Arab-Muslim conquests are not hard to find. The Byzantine and Sasanian empires were both militarily exhausted by several decades of warfare prior to the Arab-Muslim invasions. The Christian populationsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •the Copts in Egypt, the Monophysites in Syria, and the Nestorians in IraqÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •all had long histories of troubled relations with their Byzantine and Sasanian overlords. Their disaffection was important in the cases where Christian-Arab border tribes and military auxiliaries joined the conquerors and where fortified cities capitulated. The conquests, then were due to victories over militarily weakened powers and were consolidated because local populations were content to accept the new regime.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• ItÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s analysis like this (buttressed by plenty of detail) that make this book so worthwhile, on any topic you may care to refer to it for.By the end of the book, Lapidus takes the story of Islamic societies all the way to the present day (and presumably the third edition takes it a decade beyond the second). I personally am less interested in the modern era, but you can find objective facts and analysis on that era as well in this book, something hard to get if you rely on, say, Wikipedia. Thus, itÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s not that IÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢m not recommending this bookÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •I do recommend this book. I just donÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t recommend sitting down and reading it cover to cover. The opportunity cost is too high relative to the information youÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢re likely to retain. But as a book to have close at hand to beat up people during Facebook discussions, itÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s excellent.

As a revert to Islam, I appreciate the information this book has to offer. I cannot think of a more

detailed book. If you wish to learn more about the foundations of Islam, the Prophet, and history of the Islamic world, then this is the book for you. The only critique I have of this book is that it slightly drags on. It took me over a year to finish! It is very lengthy as it covers everything from pre-Islamic Arabian society to the modern era.

Excellent!

Great book & quality

Boring.

Ira M. Lapidus claims to be a scholar of Islam and Muslim societies, but I found his book to be lacking. The most glaring flaw of this book is that his account of the early Islamic period is simply highly incorrect and erroneous. If you want to read books on Islamic history, I humbly suggest that the student look elsewhere.

Collection of Islamic Articles based on Quran and Hadith Law and Tradition in Classical Islamic Thought: Studies in Honor of Professor Hossein Modarressi (Palgrave Series in Islamic Theology, Law) Domestic Violence and the Islamic Tradition (Oxford Islamic Legal Studies)