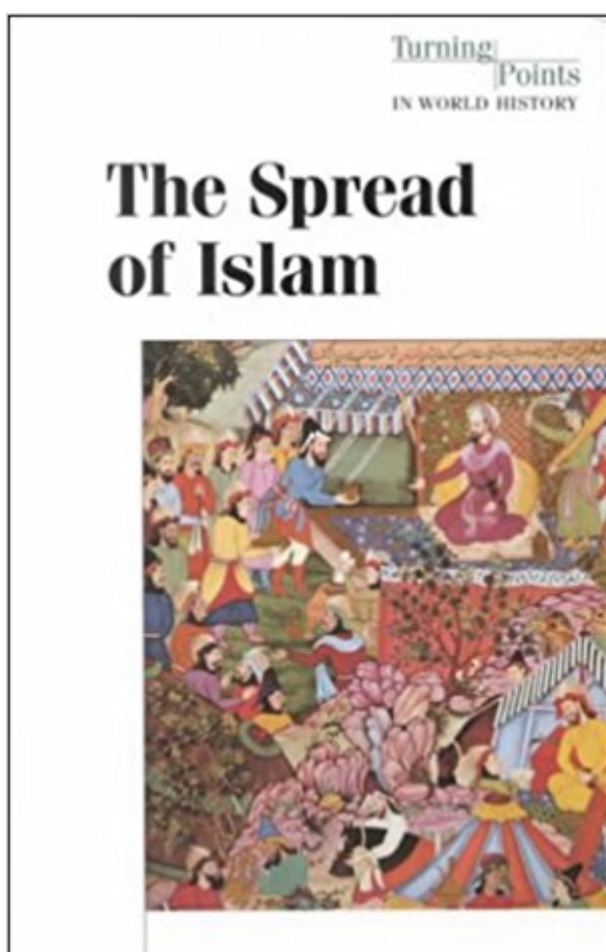


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The Spread Of Islam (Hardcover Edition) (Turning Points In World History)



Synopsis

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Customer Reviews

Gr. 9[^]-12. This collection of essays and book excerpts, part of the Turning Points in World History series, presents a view of Islam through mainly Western eyes. There are some stereotypes about "tribal life untouched by civilization" and "the Quran's preoccupation with battles, spoils and women," but the best writers are fair and informative, pointing out American misperceptions of the modern Islamic resurgence. An excellent essay discusses the problems of Muslim immigrants in the U.S. and American converts to Islam. Another writer describes the nature and causes of the current Islamic revival in the Middle East. Some of the best essays deal with Islamic literature and art, including religious inspiration through story and art, and the Islamic contributions to science and math. An appendix of original documents provides excerpts from the Koran and various personal perspectives, including a 1960 speech by Malcolm X. As one writer points out, these are subjects barely represented in most world history classrooms. Hazel Rochman

A GOOD introduction to Islam!

In reading this book, I was interested in the history, techniques, and factors that gave rise to the spread of Islam from its earliest days to the present. The first quarter of this book, was an excellent introduction to the early spread of Islam from Mohammad's life both prior to and during his

revelations of the Koran, as well as the first four Caliph's. However, after that, the book had one quick bit on the spread of Islam from Arabia, throughout N. Africa, into Spain, into the Balkans, and its halt at Vienna and in present day France. However, this portion of the book was very tersely covered, to the point where there was no substantive history there. Then the book spent an inordinant amount of time on Art in Islam, Literary Styles in Islam and other factors that either do not enter into the history of the spread of Islam, or if they do, then they weren't explained in the text. The last section of the book, on more contemporary issues such as Muslims in America were interesting, but again did not shed light on the basic aspect of the spread of Islam. In summary, I'm glad I read this book, but was disappointed overall that it strayed so far from it's apparent target.

"The spread of Islam" is a sort of study guide under the "Turning Points on World History" collection. The book is a collection of essays by recognized journalists and historians, most of them not embracers of the faith. It is so advised in the foreword, and it is a good way for the reader to measure the degree of impartiality each author has on the subject - or not. What is particularly interesting about a book like this is the insight it provides in what is commonly known as "la petite histoire". Thus, on page 14 we learn that ..." Muhammad's first visitation by an angel terrified and revulsed him. Thinking he had been possessed by the jinn"... "Shaking, Muhammad crawled on his hands and knees until he reached Khadija (his wife), asking her to cover him and shield him from the presence. She held him in her arms, soothed him and tried to take his fears away, the comfort she offered each time Muhammad saw visions and heard voices." What a beautiful example of a supportive wife. Succeding articles emphasize the much-preferred westernized notion of Islam as a faith established rather by the sword than by the word. In fact, in a world post-Osama Bin Laden, Islam seems to be a constant target for philosophers, historians and religious leaders alike to be blamed as a belligerent and intolerant faith, although in practice, its principles are openly conducive to peace. The deliverance of a new vision almost always generates controversy. In analizing the value of a doctrine, the general view of the historical context is vital. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) had a message. People could follow it or not; however, it was more than imperative that it be delivered. And it had to be delivered amidst a sociological system of usury and cruelty, where tolerance for different ideas was not only slashed, but it was also resisted to the extreme. What is a prophet to do, should we then ask, when he is not even given the option to be heard? Not only that, but he is prosecuted as a common criminal. The Gospels show us this almost constantly, to the extent that Jesus himself had to admit that "a prophet is never accepted in his own country". To paraphrase Gandhi (someone else worth listening to) first they hate you, then they laugh at you,

then... you win. Central articles expound on the Golden Age of Baghdad from the 7th to the 12th century, during the period of the Abbasids. Those were the times for expansion of the arts on every level within the muslim world, the times that saw the construction of the Taj Majal in India, and the retelling of stories that would then become "The Thousand and One Nights" The book closes with articles referring to different political viewpoints within Islam, covering the Iranian Revolution of 1979, which deposed the Shah; and the plans for an Islamic Common Market, very much under the lines of the European Economic Community. These are all very scary ideas for the western world, where the typical idea of a muslim is equal almost always to someone born in any of the countries of the Arabian peninsula, who bathes once a week and has their neighbor for dessert. This perception is described on page 184: "...author Jack Shaheen provides examples of stereotyping. He notes the tendency to picture the Arab at different times as extremely wealthy, cruel, stupid, oriented toward the use of terror, and generally unattractive. The stereotypic pattern which categorizes whole peoples has thus put the Arab and his religion in the role of villain." The last essay offers a perspective into the daily life of a muslim woman living in America, and an Appendix, which provides further illumination with sides stories about verses of the Holy Qu'ran, poetry about the forbidden pleasures of drinking, a cooking recipe in the form of a poetical stanza, and other curiosities. Last, but not least, we find some very good advice from a long lost Persian King to his son: "Rather become known for veracity, so that if ever in an emergency you utter a lie it will be believed." (Page 210)

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