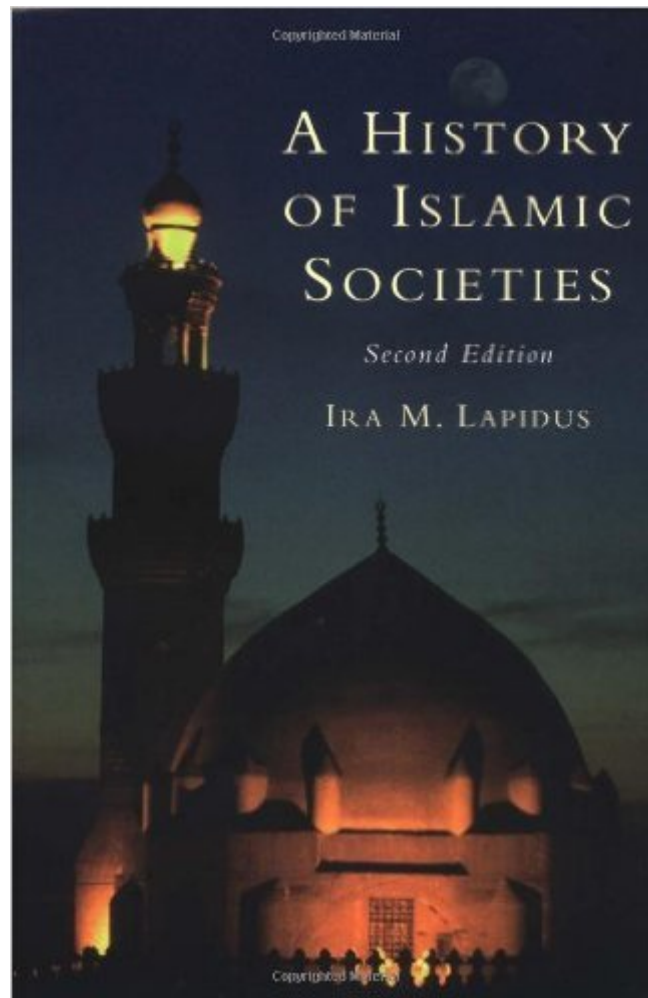


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# A History Of Islamic Societies



## Synopsis

Long considered a classic, *A History of Islamic Societies* is now that much more useful a reference for general readers and scholars alike. Widely praised for its balanced and comprehensive account, Ira Lapidus' work has been fully revised in its coverage of each country and region of the Muslim world through 2001. It incorporates the origins and evolution of Islamic societies and brings into focus the historical processes that gave shape to the manifold varieties of contemporary Islam. The concluding chapters survey the growing influence of the Islamist movements within national states and in their transnational or global dimensions, including the Islamic revival, Islamist politics and terrorism. An updated discussion of the roles of women in Islamic societies is added, with new sections about Afghanistan and Muslims in Europe, America, and the Philippines. Ira M. Lapidus is Professor Emeritus of History at the University of California at Berkeley. His many books and articles include *Islam, Politics and Social Movements* (University of California Press, 1988) and *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1984).

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The back cover claims this to be an "[a]uthorative and comprehensive history of Islamic societies written for the general reader and student that will no doubt prove to be a classic work in its field." I am happy to report that claim to be justified. In clear and accessible style for college-level reading, Lapidus covers the Arab-Turkish-Iranian core as well as the African, Indian, and Indonesian periphery of the Muslim world. He also touches on the ex-Soviet and Chinese Muslims. The differences in political and economic organization are highlighted and contrasted, the variations of

Islamic belief are explored, and the challenges of modernity are addressed. If you're looking for a chronicling of dynastic politics, military vicissitudes, and 'great man' theories of history, look elsewhere. If you want a comprehensive, balanced synthesis comparing Islamic societies for the last 1400 years, read this book. After reading "A History of Islamic Societies", consider moving on to Marshall Hodgson's three-volume set "The Venture of Islam".

This is no ordinary history facts-and-dates book for beginners. The rule is that you must have some general idea of the whole Islamic history, preferably have read J.J. Saunderson's 'The History of Medieval Islam.' For those of you who have done your reading this is the perfect companion to test your arguments to the very limits. Some of Lapidus' arguments inconveniently disturb sacred faith of the pious, others might open up new horizon to the seculars, but mostly the arguments offer relevant issues never before thought correlated. Buy it, read it, and love it. But don't hesitate to throw it out of the window when it gets too obstructing. Just pick it up the next day and read it some more, only then you'll appreciate what Prof. Lapidus has done for us. It easily become a classic in a short while.

This is a classic work on the history of Islamic societies. I'm not a historian, but found the book very readable. Its 900+ pages present an in-depth analysis of the history of North Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, leading up to the rise of Islam. Interestingly, Lapidus reveals the rise of Islam did not happen in a sudden, broad sweep, as I had been led to believe. Rather, Islam was adopted by Bedouins, merchants, etc. one tribe and village at a time. According to Lapidus, Islam has been marked with internal strife from the beginning when numerous civil wars over doctrine, leadership, and interpretation of the Prophet's message, led to the division of the faith into its Sunni and Shi'a sects. It is an incredible story that every westerner should read. The book covers the periods prior to Mohammed's revelations through the 20th century, and is divided into three parts: The Origins of Islamic Civilization: 600 to 1200 The Worldwide diffusion of Islamic Societies The Modern Transformation As a Christian, I found the depiction of Christianity's role in the Middle East, especially in the early days of Islam, interesting. Lapidus is a noted scholar and has done us all a service by writing this book. I highly recommend it.

Lapidus' writing style is magnificent for a book of this depth (and length). Rather than writing dates and facts, he ties together the story of Islam with a scholar's perspective. He writes clearly, breaking up specific themes that require special consideration, and never hesitates to acknowledge when a

specific topic is a subject of speculation or debate. Lapidus does the religion justice in portraying it objectively; not as an evil or superior religion, but as a historical religion (with moments of beauty and depravity experienced by every faith) which served as scaffolding to a Middle Eastern empire, and continues to unite over a billion people throughout the world. I remember learning "World History" in regards to the history of the Roman/European/North American events, but not once was the history of Africa (asides from light discussions on European colonialism), the Middle East and Asia discussed in highschool. It's unfortunate that most of us North Americans continue to learn absolutely nothing about the history of over half the world...

This work is an excellent overview of Islamic societies. Also, it is highly readable for a history book. Of course, it can get dull at times just as all really detailed history books must, but this work remains highly lucid throughout. The strongest breakthrough of this book concerns its treatment of the Arabization of Middle East and the developement of what we know as the modern Arab identity. However, to typify in a few sentence as book of this scope is impossible. Once you read it, you will find yourself going it back to it again and again for reference and for understanding modern events.

This is an excellent book of history. It was not intended, I am sure, to be an explanation of "true Islam" as called for by another reviewer. I have a reservation or two about Lapidus's conclusions, but his presentation of the material stands as the best overview of the course of history from Arabia to the entire globe you can buy today. For a more general introduction to the religion of Islam, try Carl Ernst \*Following Muhammad\* or Frederick Denny \*An Introduction to Islam\* and THEN dig into history with this book.

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