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978-0-521-77056-9 - A History of Islamic Societies: Second Edition

Ira M. Lapidus

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Reviews for the first edition, 1988:

“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.”

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“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. For the first time the worldwide history of Islamic societies is made accessible to the interested reader.”

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*A HISTORY OF  
ISLAMIC SOCIETIES*

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In the second edition of this now classic work, Ira Lapidus explores the origins and evolution of Muslim societies, across the world. His overarching vision brings perspective and coherence to a rich and diverse history, which has been updated and revised. The book is divided into three parts. The first covers the formative era of Islamic civilization from the revelation of the Quran to the thirteenth century, and examines the transformation of Islam from a complex of doctrines and cultures into the organizing principles of Middle Eastern societies. The second traces the creation of similar societies in the Balkans, North Africa, Central Asia, China, India, Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. The third part explores the reaction of these societies to European imperialism, and describes how they emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century as independent states with fledgling economies. The concluding chapters consider Islam's most recent history, the formation of Islamic revival movements in their religious, community-building and political dimensions, and global Islamic identities and organizations.

Throughout, the author engages with the social structures of these societies, their families and communities, religious congregations and political regimes. The richness of Islamic civilisation is illustrated through its language, theology, philosophy and law, through its art and architecture.

Since it was first published this book has become essential reading for students and for all those seeking to understand the Muslim peoples, their history and their civilization. In these troubled times, this book is an education and an illumination.

IRA M. LAPIDUS is Professor Emeritus of History, University of California at Berkeley. He is one of the most distinguished and highly regarded scholars writing Islamic history today. His many articles and books include *Islam, Politics and Social Movements* (edited with Edmund Burke, 1988) and *Contemporary Islamic Movements in Historical Perspective* (1984). The first edition of *A History of Islamic Societies* was published in 1988 as a supplement to *The Cambridge History of Islam* (1970). Since publication, the book has become a classic work of history. The second edition brings this definitive and best-selling book to a new generation of readers.

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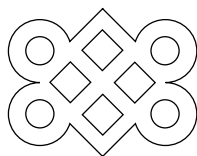
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SECOND EDITION



IRA M. LAPIDUS

*Emeritus, University of California, Berkeley*



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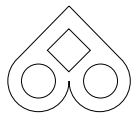
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CONTENTS



<i>List of illustrations</i>	xiii
<i>List of maps</i>	xv
<i>Lists of tables and figures</i>	xvii
<i>Preface and acknowledgments to the first edition</i>	xviii
<i>Preface and acknowledgments to the second edition</i>	xxvii
<i>Publisher's preface</i>	xxx

**PART I THE ORIGINS OF ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION:  
THE MIDDLE EAST FROM c. 600 TO c. 1200**

Introduction: Middle Eastern societies before the advent of Islam	3
Ancient empires	4
Religion and society before Islam	6

THE PREACHING OF ISLAM

1 Arabia	10
Clans and kingdoms	12
Poetry and the gods	15
2 The life of the Prophet	18
Muhammad in Mecca	20
The Medina years	23
Triumph and the return to Mecca	27
The old world and the new religion	28

THE ARAB-MUSLIM IMPERIUM (632–945)

3 The Arab conquests and the socio-economic bases of empire	31
The Arab conquests	31
The administration of the new empire	34

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-77056-9 - A History of Islamic Societies: Second Edition

Ira M. Lapidus

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Economic change and the new urban societies	38
Clients, converts, and communities	40
4 The Caliphate	45
From nomadic kingdom to Syrian monarchy	45
The 'Abbasid empire: social revolution and political reaction	56
5 Cosmopolitan Islam: the Islam of the imperial elite	67
Art, architecture, and the concept of the Caliphate	68
The Arabic humanities	74
Persian literature	76
Hellenism	77
6 Urban Islam: the Islam of the religious elites	81
Sunni scripturalism	82
Theology	87
Mystics and Sufism	90
Shi'i Islam	94
7 Islamic culture and the separation of state and religion	99
8 The fall of the 'Abbasid empire	103
The decline of the central government	103
Provincial autonomy and disintegration	106
FROM ISLAMIC CULTURE TO ISLAMIC SOCIETY: IRAN AND IRAQ, 945–c. 1200	
9 The post-'Abbasid Middle Eastern state system	112
Iraq, Iran, and the eastern provinces	112
The Saljuq empire	117
The slave states and administration	120
The iqta' system and Middle Eastern feudalism	122
Local courts and regional cultures: Islam in Persian garb	125
10 Muslim communities and Middle Eastern societies	133
The Shi'i communities	133
The schools of law and Sunni sectarianism	134
Sufi brotherhoods	137
Muslim religious movements and the state	141
Islamic institutions and a mass Islamic society	142
11 The collective ideal	147
The juristic theory	147
Mirrors for princes	149
The philosopher-king	152
12 The Personal Ethic	156
Normative Islam: scripture, Sufism, and theology	156
Sufism in the post-'Abbasid era	158
Al-Ghazzali: his life	160
Al-Ghazzali: his vision	162
Rationality and theology	166



Alternative Islam: philosophy, gnostic and popular Sufism	169
The dialogues within Islam	177
Conclusion: The Middle Eastern Islamic paradigm	183
The formation of imperial Islamic society	184
States and communities in a fragmented Middle East	187
Coping with the limits of worldly life	189
State and religion in the Islamic paradigm	192

**Part II THE WORLDWIDE DIFFUSION OF ISLAMIC SOCIETIES  
FROM THE TENTH TO THE NINETEENTH CENTURIES**

Introduction: the Islamic world and the rise of Europe	197
Conversion to Islam	197
Muslim elites and Islamic communities	206
The social structure of Islam	211
Muslim states	215
Confrontation with Europe	218

THE MIDDLE EASTERN ISLAMIC SOCIETIES

13 Iran: the Mongol, Timurid, and Safavid empires	226
The Mongols	226
The Timurids	229
Iranian society and Sufi movements	231
Safavid Iran	234
The conversion of Iran to Shi'ism	241
The dissolution of the Safavid empire	244
14 The Turkish migrations and the Ottoman empire	248
The migrations and Turkish-Islamic states in Anatolia (1071–1243)	248
The rise of the Ottomans (c. 1280–1453)	250
The Ottoman world empire	253
The Ottoman state	258
Rulers and subjects	263
The Ottoman economy	268
Provincial administration	273
The Ottoman empire in disarray	275
15 The Arab Middle East	283
Egypt and Syria in the “Caliphal” age	283
The Saljuq model: state and religion	290
The Ottoman era	294
16 Islamic North Africa and Spain to the nineteenth century	299
State formation in the “Caliphal” phase	299
Spanish-Islamic civilization	309
The tripartite regime: Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco from the thirteenth to the nineteenth centuries	319
States and Islam: North African variations	333

ISLAM IN CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN ASIA

17	Inner Asia from the Mongol conquests to the nineteenth century	337
	The western and northern steppes	338
	Turkestan (Transoxania, Khwarizm, and Farghana)	345
	Eastern Turkestan and China	351
18	The Indian subcontinent: the Delhi Sultanates and the Mughal empire	356
	The Muslim conquests and the Delhi Sultanates	356
	Conversion and the Muslim communities	361
	The varieties of Indian Islam	364
	Muslim holy men and political authority	367
	The Mughal empire	368
	The decline of the Mughal empire	378
19	The formation of Islamic societies in Southeast Asia	382
	The diffusion of Islam	382
	The Portuguese, the Dutch, and the Muslim states	384
	Islamic societies in Southeast Asia	387
	The new imperialism	397

ISLAM IN AFRICA

20	Islam in Sudanic, savannah, and forest West Africa	400
	The kingdoms of western and central Sudan	400
	Merchants and missionaries in the desert, forest, and coastal regions	409
	The West African jihads	416
21	Islam in East Africa and the rise of European colonial empires	429
	Sudan	429
	The coastal cities and Swahili Islam	432
	Ethiopia and Somalia	435
	Colonialism and the defeat of Muslim expansion	438
	Conclusion: the varieties of Islamic society	443

**PART III THE MODERN TRANSFORMATION:  
MUSLIM PEOPLES IN THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES**

	Introduction: modernity and the transformation of Muslim societies	453
	Islamic modernism	457
	Islamic reformism	461

NATIONALISM AND ISLAM IN THE MIDDLE EAST

22	Iran: state and religion in the modern era	469
	Qajar Iran: the long nineteenth century	469
	The constitutional crisis	473
	Twentieth-century Iran: the Pahlavi era	476
	The ‘ulama’ and the revolution	482
	The Islamic Republic	485

*Contents*

**xi**

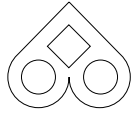
23	The dissolution of the Ottoman empire and the modernization of Turkey	489
	The partition of the Ottoman empire	489
	Ottoman reform	493
	Republican Turkey	501
24	Egypt: secularism and Islamic modernity	512
	The nineteenth-century reforming state	512
	British colonial rule	515
	The Egyptian awakening: from Islamic modernism to nationalism	516
	The liberal republic	519
	The Nasser era	523
	Sadat and Mubarak	526
25	The Arab Middle East: Arabism, military states, and Islam	535
	Notables and the rise of Arab nationalism	535
	Arabism in the colonial period	540
	The struggle for Arab unity and the contemporary fertile crescent states	546
	The Palestinian movement and the struggle for Palestine	557
	The Arabian peninsula	566
	Arab states, nationalism, and Islam	580
26	North Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries	586
	Algeria	586
	Tunisia	601
	Morocco	606
	Libya	612
	Islam in state ideologies and opposition movements	615

SECULARISM AND ISLAM IN CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN ASIA

27	The Indian subcontinent: India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh	620
	Muslim militancy from Plassey to 1857	622
	From the Mutiny to World War I	623
	From cultural to political action	629
	From elite to mass politics	632
	The Pakistan movement	635
	The Muslims of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh	640
	Conclusion	650
28	Islam in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines	652
	Dutch rule and the capitalist system in the Indies	652
	Indonesian traditionalism, nationalism, and Islamic reform	658
	Compromise and competition: 1900–1955	666
	Indonesia from 1955 to the present	670
	British Malaya and independent Malaysia	675
	The Philippines	681
	Conclusion	683
29	Inner Asia under Russian and Chinese rule; the Caucasus and Afghanistan	684
	Tsarist rule and Jadid	684
	The revolutionary era	693
	Soviet modernization	700

Newly independent states in formerly Soviet Inner Asia	709
The Caucasus	714
Afghanistan	718
The Muslims of China	725
Conclusion	731
ISLAM IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY AFRICA	
30 Islam in West Africa	732
Colonialism and independence: African states and Islam	732
Mauritania	738
Senegal	741
Nigeria	745
The Wahhabis and reformist movements	754
31 Islam in East Africa	761
Sudan	761
Somalia	768
Ethiopia and Eritrea	770
Swahili East Africa	772
Universal Islam and African diversity	780
ISLAM IN THE WEST	
32 Muslims in Europe and America	785
Eastern Europe	785
Western Europe	789
Immigrant identities in Europe: a broad spectrum of responses	803
Muslims in America	805
Conclusion: secularized Islam and Islamic revival	814
The institutional and cultural features of pre-modern Islamic societies	815
The nineteenth- and twentieth-century transformation of Muslim societies	817
The Islamic revival	822
Contemporary patterns in the relations between states and Islamic societies	835
The neo-Islamic states	844
Muslims as political minorities	850
The role of women in Muslim societies	851
Concluding remarks	867
Glossary	873
Bibliography	884
Index	941

ILLUSTRATIONS

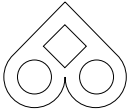


1	The Pilgrimage to the Ka'ba (Newspix.com.au)	2
2	The Dome of the Rock	52
3	The central portico of the Umayyad Mosque of Damascus (Courtesy of Gordon Holler)	70
4	Mosaics of the Damascus mosque (detail) (Courtesy of Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom)	72
5	A page of an illuminated Quran (Reproduced by kind permission of the Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin)	83
6	An old woman petitions Sultan Sanjar (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Alexander Smith Cochran, 1913. 13.228.7 fol.17)	129
7	A youth prostrating himself before a ruler (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Edward Binney, 3rd, Collection of Turkish Art. Photograph © 2002 Museum Associates LACMA)	150
8	A Sufi preaching (The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford)	175
9	The battle of the twelve heroes (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Nasli M. Heeramanek Collection, Gift of Joan Palevsky, by Exchange Photograph © 2002 Museum Associates LACMA)	196
10	The Maydan of Isfahan (© Roger Wood/CORBIS)	238
11	Persian court dress in the Safavid period: (a) male Persian court dress in the Safavid Period: (b) female (Cornelius de Bruyn: Travels in Muscovy, Persia and Part of the East Indies, 1737)	239 240
12	Sultan Selim the First (Sonia Halliday Photographs)	262
13	The Sultan Ahmed (Blue) Mosque, Istanbul (Photodisc/Getty Images)	270
14	Sultan Ahmed (Blue) Mosque, Istanbul; (interior) (Photodisc/Getty Images)	271
15	Patio de los Leones, Alhambra (Granada, Spain) (Ray Lifchez Collection, Architecture Visual Resources Library, University of California at Berkeley)	317
16	The Registan of Samarqand (Courtesy of Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom)	346
17	The marriage of Akbar (Victoria and Albert Museum)	373

18	The Taj Mahal (Courtesy of Thomas Metcalf)	376
19	The Ubadiyah mosque, Kuala Kangson, Malaysia (The Photo Source)	389
20	Nigerian men and horses in quilted cloth armour (Photograph by Eliot Elisofan, 1970 Image no. VII-6, 36 Eliot Elisofan Photographic Archives National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution)	422
21	The Muharram Procession, Calcutta (© Earl and Nazima Kowall/CORBIS)	452
22	A girls' school, Tehran (© David and Peter Turnley/CORBIS)	486
23	Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and the Shah of Iran (Australian Picture Library/CORBIS)	504
24	President Nasser's car is mobbed by townspeople (Popperphoto)	525
25	HAMAS posters for student council elections; al-Azhar University, Gaza (Courtesy of Jeroen Gunning)	564
26	Families celebrate the end of Ramadan at the Jami' Masjid of Delhi (Courtesy of Thomas Metcalf)	642
27	Pakistani soldiers (Hagar Shour/Camera Press)	647
28	Dawn prayer to celebrate the end of Ramadan, Jogjakarta, Indonesia (Hutchinson Library)	655
29	'Ulama' study the Quran in Tashkent (Novosti Photo Library)	707
30	The Mosque of Mazar-i Sharif, Afghanistan	721
31	A Mosque in Inner Mongolia (© Nik Wheeler/CORBIS)	728
32	The Friday Mosque at Mopti, Mali (Marli Shamir)	757
33	The tomb of the Mahdi, Omdurman, Sudan (Hutchinson Library)	764
34	An anti-Rushdie demonstration, London (© Richard Wood/CORBIS )	800

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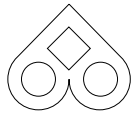
1	The Middle East on the eve of the Muslim era	11
2	The Arab-Muslim empire to AD 750	35
3	Iraq and Baghdad in the early ‘Abbasid era	57
4	The post-imperial succession regimes: late tenth century	113
5	The Middle East in the Ghaznavid era: early eleventh century	115
6	The Saljuq empire in the late eleventh century	118
7	The expansion of Muslim states and populations: 900–1700	199
8	Muslim schools of law and Sufi brotherhoods: c. 1500	212
9	European domination over Muslim and other lands: 1815	224
10	The Mongol empires in the thirteenth century	227
11	Iran under the Safavids: seventeenth century	236
12	The expansion of the Ottoman empire: c. 1280–1683	256
13	Egypt and Syria, showing the Crusader states in the twelfth century	288
14	North Africa, Spain, and the Mediterranean in the ninth century	303
15	North Africa, Spain, and the Mediterranean in the late eleventh century and the Almoravid conquests	305
16	North Africa and Spain in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries	320
17	Russian expansion in Muslim Inner Asia to 1920	343
18	The Delhi Sultanates	359
19	The Mughal empire: 1605–1707	370
20	Muslim states of Southeast Asia to 1800	386
21	The Portuguese, Dutch, and British empires in Southeast Asia: 1500–1914	396
22	Sub-Saharan Africa: eleventh to fourteenth centuries	403
23	Sub-Saharan Africa: sixteenth to eighteenth centuries	407
24	Trade, settlements, and the diffusion of Islam in West Africa: 1500–1900	412
25	The jihad states of the nineteenth century	417
26	East Africa	430
27	Colonial expansion in Africa to c. 1900	439
28	European domination and the Muslim world: c. 1920	454

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-77056-9 - A History of Islamic Societies: Second Edition  
Ira M. Lapidus  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

29	Islamic reform and resistance movements: eighteenth and nineteenth centuries	463
30	Territorial losses and the partition of the Ottoman empire: 1683–1923	491
31	The Middle East between the world wars	542
32	Arab–Israeli conflict: (a) UN Partition Plan, 1947;	561
	(b) Israel and the occupied territories, 1967	561
33	Arabia and the Persian Gulf: c. 1974	577
34	India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh	641
35	Soviet and Chinese Inner Asia to 1990	699
36	Oil fields and pipelines: the Middle East and Inner Asia	711
37	Ethnic populations in Inner Asia and Afghanistan	719
38	Northern and Sudanic Africa: c. 1980	739
39	Muslim population by percentage of total population	831



TABLES AND FIGURES



TABLES

1	Islam in world history	9
2	Outline chronology of early Islamic history	46
3	Early schools of law	85
4	Middle Eastern provincial regimes: 'Abbasid empire and post-imperial era	109
5	Central concepts in law	157
6	The vocabulary of Sufism	167
7	Muslim religious movements and sects	178
8	Muslim worship	181
9	The social organization of Sufism	210
10	Muslim religious officials	215
11	Iran: outline chronology	230
12	The Ottoman dynasty	251
13	North Africa: outline chronology	300
14	Inner Asia: outline chronology	340
15	Muslim India: outline chronology	357
16	Muslim reform ( <i>tajdid</i> ) movements, eighteenth to twentieth centuries	464
17	Regimes of the Arabian peninsula	568
18	Muslim population by countries	832
19	Muslim population by region	836

FIGURES

1	The family of the Prophet	19
2	The Banu Umayya and the Umayyad Caliphs	48
3	The 'Abbasid Caliphs to the disintegration of the empire	55
4	The Shi'i imams	96
5	Saljuq-period dynasties	119
6	The early tariqat and their founders	139
7	The Isma'ili imams	284
8	The Qadiriya and the Tijaniya in West Africa	415

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[More information](#)

*PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS  
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Islam is the religion of peoples who inhabit the middle regions of the planet from the Atlantic shores of Africa to the South Pacific, from the steppes of Siberia to the remote islands of South Asia: Berbers, West Africans, Sudanese, Swahili-speaking East Africans, Middle Eastern Arabs, Turks, Iranians, Turkish and Persian peoples of Central Asia, Afghans, Pakistanis, many millions of Indians and Chinese, most of the peoples of Malaysia and Indonesia, and minorities in the Philippines – some one-and-a-quarter billion people adhere to Islam. In ethnic background, language, customs, social and political organization, and forms of culture and technology, they represent innumerable variations of human experience. Yet Islam unites them. Though Islam is not often the totality of their lives, it permeates their self-conception, regulates their daily existence, provides the bonds of society, and fulfills the yearning for salvation. For all its variousness, Islam forges one of the great spiritual families of mankind.

This book is the history of how these multitudes have become Muslims and what Islam means to them. In this book we ask: What is Islam? What are its values? How did so many peoples, so different and dispersed, become Muslims? What does Islam contribute to their character, to their way of living, to the ordering of their communities, and to their aspirations and identity? What are the historical conditions that have given rise to Islamic religious and cultural values; what are the manifold ways in which it is understood and practiced? To answer these questions we shall see how religious concepts about the nature of reality and the meaning of human experience, embedded at once in holy scripture and works of commentary, and as thoughts and feelings in the minds and hearts of Muslim believers, have given shape to the lifestyles and institutions of Muslim peoples, and how reciprocally the political and social experiences of Muslim peoples have been given expression in the values and symbols of Islam. Our history of Islam is the history of a dialogue between religious symbols and everyday reality.

This history will be presented in two dimensions: one historical and evolutionary, an effort to account for the formation of Islamic societies and their change over

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

time; the other analytic and comparative, which attempts to understand the variations among them. Three methodological and historical assumptions underlie this approach. The first is that the history of whole societies may be presented in terms of their institutional systems. An institution, whether an empire, a mode of economic exchange, a family, or a religious practice, is a human activity carried out in a patterned relationship with other human beings as defined and legitimized in the mental world of the participants. An institution encompasses at once an activity, a pattern of social relations, and a set of mental constructs.

The second assumption is that the history of Islamic societies may be told in terms of four basic types of institutions: familial, including tribal, ethnic, and other small-scale community groups; economic, the organization of production and distribution of material goods; cultural or religious concepts of ultimate values and human goals and the collectivities built upon such commitments; and political, the organization of conflict resolution, defense, and domination.

The third assumption is that the institutional patterns characteristic of Islamic societies had their origin in ancient Mesopotamia in the third millennium BC. The constellation of lineage and tribal, religious, and political structures created by the Mesopotamian city-states and empires set the foundations for the later evolution of Middle Eastern societies before and during the Islamic era, and was either reproduced or diffused from the Middle East to other Islamic societies. Thus the Middle Eastern Islamic society was based upon the infusion of more ancient institutions with an Islamic cultural style and identity. These Middle Eastern Islamic institutions in turn interacted with the institutions and cultures of other world regions to create a number of variant Islamic societies. In the modern era these variant societies were again transformed, this time by interaction with Europe. Modern Islamic countries are each the product of the interaction of a particular regional form of Islamic society with different forms of European imperial, economic, and cultural influences. The variation among modern Islamic societies may be traced to older patterns.

Part I examines the formative era of Islamic civilization from the revelation of the Quran to the thirteenth century. It begins with the Prophet Muhammad, and continues with the classical Islamic era which gave rise to Arabic literature, Islamic religious teaching, and cosmopolitan artistic achievements – a tripartite complex of tribal–ethnic, religious, and courtly–aristocratic cultures from which all later versions of Islamic civilization derive. It attempts to explain the development of this civilization in terms of the relationship of Islamic cultures to past patterns of Middle Eastern societies, and in terms of the cultural effects of the formation of new empires, urbanization, and social change. It concludes with the history of Iraq and Iran from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries, to explain the transformation of Islam from a complex of doctrines and cultural systems into the operative principles of a Middle Eastern society. In this period, Muslim peoples formed new state and communal institutions (Shi'i "sects," Sunni schools of law, and Sufi brotherhoods), and

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Ira M. Lapidus

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xx

*Preface and acknowledgments to the first edition*

defined the relations of political regimes to religious bodies. This was the age in which Islam became the religion of the masses of Middle Eastern peoples.

In its turn the Islamic version of Middle Eastern society became a paradigm for the creation of similar societies in other parts of the world. Part II traces the diffusion of the Middle Eastern Islamic paradigm. From the seventh to the nineteenth centuries, Islam became the religion of peoples in the Arab Middle East, Inner Asia and China, India, Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Balkans. It considers the forces behind the diffusion of Islam, and the interaction between Islamic religious values and existing cultures and societies. It also examines the consolidation of Islamic regimes including the Mughal, Ottoman, and Safavid empires, and Islamic states in Southeast Asia, Africa, and elsewhere, and their varied ways of integrating political regimes, Islamic religious institutions, and non-Islamic values and forms of community.

By the eighteenth century the Middle Eastern paradigm for an Islamic society had been replicated, multiplied, and modified into a worldwide family of societies. Each was a recognizable variant upon an underlying structure of familial-communal, religious, and state institutions. Each also represented a version of the various ways in which Islamic belief, culture, and social institutions have interacted with the still broader complex of human organization – including the non-Islamic institutions of political regimes, systems of economic production and exchange, non-Islamic forms of kinship, tribal, and ethnic communities, and pre-Islamic or non-Islamic modes of culture. Here we explore the degree to which the Middle Eastern paradigm was transferred to new Islamic societies. What was the relation of Islamic to pre-Islamic institutions in these regions? What were the similarities and differences among these numerous Islamic societies?

The transformation of Islamic societies from the eighteenth century to the present tests the resilience of the historical templates and the identity of the Islamic world system. In part III we see how Islamic societies were profoundly disrupted by the breakup of Muslim empires, economic decline, internal religious conflict, and by the establishment of European economic, political, and cultural domination. These forces led to the creation of national states, to the modernization of agriculture, to industrialization, to major changes in class structure, and to the acceptance of secular nationalist and other modern ideologies. In the course of these changes Islamic thought and Islamic communal institutions have been radically altered.

The legacy of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historical change, however, is not a unilinear movement toward “modernization,” but a heritage of continuing conflict in Muslim countries over political, economic, and cultural goals. Political decline and European intervention have led to a struggle among political elites, scholarly (*‘ulama’*) and mystical (Sufi) religious leaders, and revivalist movements for political and social power. While secularized political elites tend to favor modernization in Western forms, and the redefinition of Islam to make it consistent with modern forms of state and economy, religious reformers espouse the revitalization of moral values and the formation of new political communities on Islamic

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Ira M. Lapidus

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

principles. By examining the historical forms of political and religious organization, the impact of European imperialisms, and the political and ideological struggles of competing elites in Muslim countries, this book will attempt to interpret the development of present-day societies.

Has the impact of the West and of modern technical civilization generated a new form of society or do the historical political and religious templates still regulate the destiny of new Muslim nations? Do present conditions reflect the cultural and political qualities of the imperial, sectarian, and tribal societies of the eighteenth century or have the nineteenth- and twentieth-century transformations of economy, class structure, and values generated a new evolutionary stage in the history of Islamic societies?

This is not, it should be clear, an effort to define an essential Islam, but rather an attempt to develop a comparative method of assessing the role of Islamic beliefs, institutions, and identities in particular historical contexts. The mechanism I have adopted to do this – the expository framework – is based on the assumptions that Islamic societies are built upon institutions and that these institutions are subject to internal variation, to variations in the relationships among them, and to variations over time. The limited number of institutional factors imposes a constraint that allows us to conceive this large subject in some ordered way, but also allows for the depiction of individual societies as concrete and different entities. By exploring the variation of institutions in differing contexts, we may be able to comprehend why Islamic societies are similar in general form and yet differ so much in specific qualities.

In this volume primary emphasis will be placed upon the communal, religious, and political institutions of Islamic societies rather than upon technologies and economies. I subordinate economic to non-economic institutions because the distinctive historical developments in Islamic societies in the last millennium have been cultural and political; and because differences of culture and institutions differentiate Islamic societies from each other and from other human civilizations. In Muslim societies the basic forms of economic production and exchange were set down in the pre-Islamic era. The forms of agricultural and pastoral production, handicrafts, manufacturing, prevailing systems of exchange, and technological capacities are all older than, and continue through, the Islamic era in their inherited forms. This is not to deny that there has been considerable variation in economic activity in and among Muslim societies, such as in the relative role of pastoral, agricultural, commercial, and manufacturing activities, or in degrees of poverty and prosperity, or in the distribution of wealth; or that these differences have important cultural and political implications, or that economic considerations are an essential aspect of all human values and social action. Still, the fundamental modes of economic production and exchange were basically unaltered until the modern era, and economic and technological changes were not the primary sources of political and cultural variation or of changes in class structure and social organization. Until the modern era economic

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Ira M. Lapidus

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

activity remained embedded in communal and political structures, and class divisions in society did not determine, but were inherent in, state and religious organizations. Even in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when European capitalism and profound economic and technological changes have influenced Islamic societies, economically derived classes such as merchants and proletariats were weakly developed in Muslim countries, and political and religious elites, institutions, and cultural values played a predominant role in the development of these societies. While cultural and sociopolitical institutions and economic and technological forces can each be an autonomous causal factor in historical change, in the history of Islamic societies the former have been the significant locus of historical individuation. Whether twentieth-century technological and economic change now call into question the existence of an Islamic group of societies is a moot point.

These assumptions derive from a variety of historical, social scientific, and philosophical sources. As a historian, however, my primary interest is not in theory but in the adaptation of the theory to the needs of a coherent and meaningful exposition. The central problem of this book is how to present a history of enormous diversity – the history of societies that to sight and sound are utterly different – and yet preserve some sense of their historical and institutional relatedness. For the reader this book is intended to provide a coherent overview of Islamic history. As a teacher I think that the endless everyday flow of events and news confuses rather than enlightens us, and that a large “map” of the subject as a whole is essential to the understanding of particular occurrences. Only from an overall point of view can we acquire the poise, distance, and perspective that make it possible to identify basic structural factors and long-term historical trends, and distinguish them from accidental and short-term considerations.

A few comments about the organization of the book may help readers find their way through this large volume. First, the reader should be cautioned that the factual narrative approach of this book conceals great uncertainties of historical judgment, incomplete knowledge, conflicts of opinion and interpretation among experts, and constantly changing research which brings new knowledge and new points of view to the fore. Little has been said about the degree of reliability or the margin of error in the presentation of information, but the book is based upon the most reliable research and interpretation, though the reader should be aware that parts of the work are provisional and exploratory in nature, and represent the author’s best judgment about particular subjects.

The book is divided into three parts, each of which has an introduction and conclusion which deal with the organizing concepts upon which the book is based and summarize the important themes that come up in the narrative chapters. For an overview of the evolution of Islamic societies, these introductory and concluding chapters may be read separately or in conjunction with selected period or regional histories.

Each of the three main divisions deals with a particular epoch in Islamic history – the origins, diffusion, and modern transformation of Islamic societies. This means

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978-0-521-77056-9 - A History of Islamic Societies: Second Edition

Ira M. Lapidus

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

that Islamic culture, arts, literatures, and religious values are discussed primarily in part I, and are only referred to in a summary way in parts II and III. Regional histories also are ordinarily divided into two or three sections. The history of Middle Eastern Islamic societies is divided among all three parts; the histories of other Islamic societies feature in parts II and III. There are, however, a number of exceptions. While part I deals generally with the formation of Middle Eastern Islamic societies from the seventh to the thirteenth centuries, for narrative convenience the early histories of the Arab Middle East, North Africa, and Spain are grouped with their regional histories in part II; portions of these chapters may usefully be read in conjunction with part I. Similarly, the entire history of the Arabian peninsula, Libya, the Caucasus, Afghanistan, and the Philippines is found in part III rather than being scattered through the volume. The history of all these societies concludes around 2000.

The definition of geographic regions also requires some arbitrary simplifications. Muslim world areas are by and large defined in regional terms such as Middle East, North Africa, Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia, West and East Africa, and so on. For convenience of reference, and despite the obvious anachronism, these areas or parts of them are commonly identified by the names of present national states such as India, Indonesia, or Nigeria. This is to simplify identification for readers unfamiliar with the geography of these vast regions and to avoid such cumbersome locutions as “areas now part of the state of —,” but it should be clear that the use of these terms does not necessarily imply any similarity of state and social organization or of cultural style between pre-modern and contemporary times. It should also be noted that I have placed the history of Libya in the chapter on North Africa and the Sudan in East Africa though these countries also belong to the Arab Middle East. Finally, not all Muslim regions are covered in this book. Some Muslim minorities, as in mainland Southeast Asia and Ceylon, are not discussed.

Transliterations from the numerous native languages of Muslim peoples have been simplified for the convenience of English readers. In general I have tried to follow standard scholarly usage for each world area, modified by the elimination of diacritical marks and sometimes adapted to give a fair sense of pronunciation. Certain standard Arabic terms and names are given in their original, usually Arabic, literary form despite actual variations in spelling and pronunciation the world over. Dates are given in the Christian era.

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978-0-521-77056-9 - A History of Islamic Societies: Second Edition

Ira M. Lapidus

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-77056-9 - A History of Islamic Societies: Second Edition

Ira M. Lapidus

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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With the permission of the publishers extensive passages have been quoted or adapted from my previous publications:

"Adulthood in Islam: Religious Maturity in the Islamic Tradition," *Daedalus*, Spring 1976, pp. 93–108.

"Islam and the Historical Experience of Muslim Peoples," *Islamic Studies: A Tradition and its Problems*, ed. Malcolm H. Kerr, Malibu, Calif.: Undena Publications, 1980, pp. 89–102.

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Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-77056-9 - A History of Islamic Societies: Second Edition

Ira M. Lapidus

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xxvi

*Preface and acknowledgments to the first edition*

*Asian Islam*, ed. Barbara Metcalf, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, pp. 38–61. © 1984, The Regents of the University of California.

*Contemporary Islamic Movements in Historical Perspective*, Policy Papers No. 18, Institute of International Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 83.

“Mamluk Patronage and the Arts in Egypt,” *Muqarnas*, 11, 1984, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, pp. 173–81.

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978-0-521-77056-9 - A History of Islamic Societies: Second Edition

Ira M. Lapidus

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

*PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS  
TO THE SECOND EDITION*



This book was first published in 1988 on the basis of research that extended to about 1980. At that time the contemporary Islamic revival was in an early stage. There had been an Islamic revolution in Iran, but whether it would spread to other, and Sunni, Muslim countries was much debated. After a long phase of secularization in politics and law, and the beginnings of an economic development process not connected to Islam, the revival reaffirmed the importance of Islam in the contemporary construction of Muslim societies. The beginnings of the Islamic revival made it possible to see that Muslim societies worldwide shared a common heritage and elements of a common identity. The evidence of their relatedness, however tenuous at the time, enabled us to look for the evolutionary origin of that common identity and to see the processes of the formation of Islamic societies as a historical whole. Thus in the first edition we were able to see the origins of Islamic civilizations in the ancient Near East and in the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, and see the successive phases of historical development. In the first phase an Islamic culture and society was formed in the Middle East. In the second phase the Middle Eastern Islamic culture was carried by conquerors, missionaries, and merchants to other parts of the world, where Islamic institutions again interacted with local ones to form new groups of different, but related, societies. Each of these societies was the product of two parent cultures, one Muslim and the other local. In the next phase of development each of these societies had a fateful encounter with European imperialism, economic power and cultural influences, and each responded in a unique way to form its mid-twentieth-century configuration.

After twenty more years, we are in a fourth phase. The third is not yet complete, but in this phase many of the “grandchildren” Islamic societies have reaffirmed their shared religious heritage. The revival is manifested in a wave of reformist, Salafi- or Wahhabi-type movements, which teach a return to the teachings of the Quran and the Prophet. It is manifest in widespread missionary, educational, and community-building movements, and above all it is manifest in political action. Muslim

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978-0-521-77056-9 - A History of Islamic Societies: Second Edition

Ira M. Lapidus

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xxviii

*Preface and acknowledgments to the second edition*

politics varies from pacific and cooperative to oppositional and violent, but the hallmark of the revival is the drive to create Islamic states in place of the failed secular states of the mid- and late twentieth century.

The rise of these movements has made it useful to prepare a second edition of this book. While there has been a wealth of scholarship on the early periods, I believe that the narrative and analysis presented in parts I and II of the first edition remains fundamentally sound. It is the third part that requires updating. The story of the burgeoning of these movements and their impact on Muslim communities and states must not only be brought to the present, but requires us to reevaluate recent history. Thus, in part III each chapter on national and regional histories has been brought up to date, and the story reintegrated to see the full sweep of developments from the middle of the century to the present. In the conclusion I have tried to reassess the balance of power between the secular legacy of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the contemporary revival.

While the Islamic revival occupies much of our attention, it is not the only force operative in Muslim societies today. In the revised version I consider the continuing importance of secularization, the formation of modernist–Islamist hybrids, the maturation of new and more complex Islamic–national identities, and the emergence of a global Muslim identity. With so many forces in play, the Islamic revival is not likely to be the final phase in the evolution of Islamic societies.

In the course of revising the book, I have also filled a few important lacunae. There are new sections on Afghanistan and the Philippines, and expanded chapters on Islam in the Caucasus and Central Asia. There is a new chapter on Muslim peoples in Europe and America. The concluding section on women and gender has been enlarged and brought up to date, and there is a new discussion of the emergence of global Islamic identities and movements, including the recent terrorist events. The bibliography has been enlarged to include works dealing with the last two decades. While there are a number of smaller Muslim communities not considered in the text, the history is again up to date and comprehensive in its coverage.

In preparing the new edition I have again been blessed with the help of many friends and colleagues. To Marigold Acland, my Cambridge editor, I owe the inspiration for a new edition, the determination to awaken me to my duty, and helpful interventions throughout the process of revision. Murat Dagli tracked down data, maps, photos and bibliography. Scott Strauss helped with the research on Africa. Nancy Reynolds prepared a first draft of the new parts of the revised chapter on Islam in South Asia. Renate Holub and Laurence Michalak gave me good insights and helped correct the text for the chapter on Muslims in Europe and America. David Yaghoubian read through the whole of revised Part III and gave me innumerable suggestions for improvements. Saba Mahmood thoughtfully reviewed the conclusion. The chapter on women and gender has been revised with the help of and co-authored with Lisa Pollard. She has provided good counsel, insights, corrections, and new textual material. Nadine Ghammache skillfully prepared the manuscript.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-77056-9 - A History of Islamic Societies: Second Edition

Ira M. Lapidus

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Preface and acknowledgments to the second edition***xxix**

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“A Sober Survey of the Islamic World,” *Orbis*, 40, 1996, pp. 391–404.

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“Between Universalism and Particularism: The Historical Bases of Muslim Communal, National, and Global Identities,” *Global Networks*, 1, 2001, pp. 19–36.

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Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-77056-9 - A History of Islamic Societies: Second Edition

Ira M. Lapidus

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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The Press Syndicate originally commissioned Ira Lapidus to write *A History of Islamic Societies* as a supplement to *The Cambridge History of Islam*, which was published in 1970 in two volumes. His would be a unique enterprise, a monumental work with the status of a Cambridge History, but by one hand and integrated by one coherent vision. Since its publication in 1988, it has surpassed all expectations. The book has become a classic work of history. This second edition brings this definitive and bestselling book to a new generation of readers.

xxx