

The Rebel and the Imām in Early Islam

Engaging with contemporary debates about the sources that shape our understanding of the early Muslim world, Najam Haider proposes a new model for Muslim historical writing that draws on late antique historiography to challenge the imposition of modern notions of history on a premodern society.

Haider discusses three key case studies – the revolt of Mukhtār b. Abī ‘Ubayd (d. 67/687), the life of the Twelver Shī‘ī Imām Mūsā al-Kāzīm (d. 183/799), and the rebellion and subsequent death of the Zaydī Shī‘ī Imām Yaḥyā b. ‘Abd Allāh (d. 187/803) – in calling for a new line of inquiry which focuses on larger historiographical questions. What were the rules that governed historical writing in the early Muslim world? What were the intended audiences for these works? In the process, he rejects artificial divisions between Sunnī and Shī‘ī historical writing.

NAJAM HAIDER is a professor in the Department of Religion at Barnard College, Columbia University. He is the author of *The Origins of the Shī‘a* (2011), focusing on the role of ritual and sacred space in the formation of Shī‘ī identity, and *Shī‘ī Islam* (2014), which examines three branches of Shī‘ī Islam – Zaydī, Twelver, and Ismā‘īlī – through a framework of memory. He has travelled extensively in the Middle East, including Syria, where he was a Fulbright scholar, and Yemen, where he studied with traditional Zaydī scholars.

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Explorations in Muslim Historiography

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For Hamza and Fizza

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Note on Transliteration and Dates

The system of transliteration employed for rendering Arabic names, technical terms, and other phrases in Latin characters is essentially the same as that employed in most contemporaneous academic journals (e.g. the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* and *Islamic Law and Society*). The primary exceptions to this strict transliteration are certain well-established locations which are referred to by their common names. Most prominent among these are the cities of Mecca and Medina and the geographical regions of Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and Iran. The final *tā' marbūṭa* is indicated in transliteration only when in a conjunctive form and audibly pronounced.

Dates are given according to the Hijrī and Gregorian calendars (e.g. 122/740). Death dates are provided at the first mention of a historical figure in the main text. The death dates of authors mentioned exclusively in footnotes are included in the bibliography.

Explanation of Citation

The footnotes in each chapter are in an abbreviated form. The full citation for each work is provided in the bibliography. Important historical figures and geographical locations are identified at their first mention in each chapter.

Front cover image

An illustration depicting the storming of the fortress in the region of Kish held by the mysterious al-Muqanna‘ (d. 166/783), who rebelled in Transoxiana against the ‘Abbāsid caliph al-Mahdī (r. 158–69/775–84), taken from the earliest extant illustrated manuscript of al-Birūnī’s (d. 440/1048) *Athār al-bāqiya ‘an al-qurūn al-khāliya* (commonly known as *The Chronology of Ancient Nations*). The manuscript (Or. Ms. 161, illustration on folio 93v), located in the Special Collections Department of Edinburgh University Library, was produced by the calligrapher Ibn Kutbi in the year 1307. The image depicts troops on horseback aiming arrows at the archers on the wall of the building, who are also preparing to fire. According to al-Birūnī, al-Muqanna‘ was killed during this siege, with considerable controversy surrounding the details of his death.