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978-0-521-29131-6 - Islamic History: A New Interpretation - I, A.D. 600-750  
(A.H. 132)

M. A. Shaban

Frontmatter

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# ISLAMIC HISTORY

A NEW INTERPRETATION

**I**

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# ISLAMIC HISTORY

## A NEW INTERPRETATION

### I

A.D. 600-750 (A.H. 132)



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## PREFACE

This work presents a new interpretation of early Islamic history in the light of a detailed scrutiny of the sources available. This interpretation not only uses newly discovered material but also, and perhaps to a greater extent, re-examines and re-interprets material which has been known to us for many decades. Indeed, the latter proved most rewarding in my study *The 'Abbāsīd Revolution*, and in this volume I follow basically the same approach, applying it to the whole Arab empire instead of only to the province of Khurāsān.

For the purposes of this work, a systematic attempt has been made to follow, as closely as possible, the establishment of an Islamic regime in Arabia and its sudden expansion into an empire. Special attention has been given to the way the Arab tribesmen were settled in the various provinces, their relationship with the conquered peoples, their varying interests, activities and rivalries, their relations with the central government and the attempts of the latter to establish its authority over the vast conquered territories. At the same time, an effort has been made to spare the reader the elaborate details of each particular situation and to present instead a concerted analysis of the constantly changing conditions all over the empire.

The events of this period have too often been explained on the basis of imaginary tribal jealousies or irrational personal conflicts. Such explanations completely neglect the logical interests of the Arabs and severely underrate their normal human capability to adjust to new circumstances. Admittedly this is never easy to do and it takes time, but the Arabs, who were able to adapt themselves to the harsh life of the Arabian Peninsula, could certainly adapt themselves to a more comfortable life elsewhere. The history of the period studied in this volume is, in fact, the history of the problems of this adaptation with all its implications. The Arab statesmen, in spite of their occasional shortcomings, were responsible leaders primarily concerned with the success of their policies, the preservation of their empire and the welfare of their followers in the circumstances of their times. The political behaviour of these leaders and their changes of policy must be understood in this light as logical steps in pursuit of their

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objectives rather than as whimsical actions based on personal hatred or fanatical delusions.

There is no doubt that Arabic sources contain enough reliable material to provide a good deal more than a broad outline of the history of this period. It has been my concern to find, understand and analyse such material in the light of the general character of each source and in relation to the material collected from other sources. In this respect, considerable care has been taken to ascertain the exact meaning and to define the precise use of important terms used by the compilers of the sources and the authorities they quote. In most cases such definition has helped to explain the specific interests and activities of the groups and peoples concerned. This basic understanding is vital to the proper use of these sources and without it one can be led into a wilderness of incomprehensible phenomena.

Footnotes have been deliberately kept to a minimum and only major sources are cited in support of points of fact and interpretation. No attempt has been made to discuss the arguments of other scholars of this period. Such discussion would only have confused the issues and seriously disrupted the sequence of arguments put forward in this volume. However, it is my hope that this work will be challenging to students and scholars alike and may stimulate further research on the subject.

I also hope that it will not be long before the appearance of my next work which deals with the history of the 'Abbāsīd period until the Turkish Saljūq invasion.

M. A. S.

*Cambridge*

*February, 1971*