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The Crucible of Islam

G. W. Bowersock

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G. W. Bowersock : The Crucible of Islam before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Crucible of Islam:

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the Abrahamic faiths and, especially in the modern West, widespread ignorance of Islam, sometimes even on the part of avowed Muslims. At a price of \$15 or so, it's rather too expensive for a slim volume, fully 20% of which not text but scholarly apparatus, i.e. index, footnotes, etc. However, personally I regret neither the expenditure nor the effort of the reading, and recommend this book to anyone whose interests are thus inclined. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A book worth reading By Jeff Smith This is the third of three short books about the shifts among the civilizations vying for control of the Arabian Peninsula before and up to the beginning of the Muslim era. If you already know a lot about it you don't need to read any of them, and if you know nothing about the times and the place it's not going to be of much use. But if your existing knowledge is slight and your curiosity is strong these books have much to learn from. The view is from a height with only the slightest attention to the historical details that resulted in the ascendancy of Muhammad on the Peninsula, but unfortunately the history of the rise and decline of the other empires active in that time and place hovers just beyond the scope of the books. Nor should the reader expect description of the cultures, their interactions of the actual battles involved in the shifting relations among them. Still, Bowersock's authoritative coverage of his topic is well worth spending time with. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Outlines a part of history that many of us have ... By None Outlines a part of history that many of us have not been taught, especially in the US. The geopolitical interactions of that location go back to the late Roman empires. It's an eye opener and might help to explain the history of today's conflicts in a location where memories span centuries. Another interesting book THE CRUSADES THROUGH ARAB EYES, by Amin Maalouf ISBN 0-8052-0898-4 might be worth a purchase too.

Little is known about Arabia in the sixth century CE. Yet from this distant time and place emerged a faith and an empire that stretched from the Iberian peninsula to India. Today, Muslims account for nearly a quarter of the global population. G. W. Bowersock seeks to illuminate this most obscure and yet most dynamic period in the history of Islam from the mid-sixth to mid-seventh century exploring why arid Arabia proved to be such fertile ground for Muhammad's prophetic message, and why that message spread so quickly to the wider world. In Muhammad's time Arabia stood at the crossroads of great empires, a place where Christianity, Judaism, and local polytheistic traditions vied for adherents. Mecca, Muhammad's birthplace, belonged to the part of Arabia recently conquered by the Ethiopian Christian king Abraha. But Ethiopia lost western Arabia to Persia following Abraha's death, while the death of the Byzantine emperor in 602 further destabilized the region. Within this chaotic environment, where lands and populations were traded frequently among competing powers and belief systems, Muhammad began winning converts to his revelations. In a troubled age, his followers coalesced into a powerful force, conquering Palestine, Syria, and Egypt and laying the groundwork of the Umayyad Caliphate. The crucible of Islam remains an elusive vessel. Although we may never grasp it firmly, Bowersock offers the most detailed description of its contours and the most compelling explanation of how one of the world's great religions took shape.

Bowersock paints a concise portrait of Islam's early formation and consolidation, focusing on the political, social, economic, and religious conditions of 6th- and 7th-century Arabia. Bowersock clearly and succinctly describes the stage upon which Islam emerged, and also dispels certain rumors, myths, and half-histories that have come to dominate popular notions of the period (and even persist in scholarship). Given the historical and current relationships and tensions among various groups of Jews, Christians, and Muslims, this brief and easily digestible introduction will interest and please a wide variety of readers. (Publishers Weekly 2017-02-20) To write about the Arabian background of the Prophet Muhammad, about the origin of Islam in Mecca and Medina, and about the first conquests that led to the formation of the Arab empire (roughly between 560 and 690 AD) is to attempt to describe the first moments of a supernova—the flash of a stupendous detonation that marks the death of a massive star and the release of enormous amounts of energy. G.W. Bowersock has met this challenge in a little book of explosive originality and penetrating judgment. With *The Crucible of Islam* we reach the very center of this roiling world. We look into the depths of the crucible itself, to seize, in a true historical perspective, the molten ingredients that came to form Islam. His book is an exercise in the art of historical truth. Bowersock is a classical scholar. He derives his skills from a tradition that reaches back to the Renaissance, to Erasmus and to Lorenzo Valla, whose demolition of the legendary Donation of Constantine he has himself translated with gusto. His book derives its strength from the method advocated by the great classical scholar Richard Bentley (1662-1742): *ratio et res ipsa*—reason confronting the thing itself. Part of the joy of reading this account of the background and emergence of early Islam is the knowledge that Bowersock has built it from solid stones, the weight of every one of which he has tested with his own critical mind. Secure that we are in the hands of a master, let us think about the implications of the substantial gains to scholarship that Bowersock has brought us in this compressed masterpiece. We must be grateful to Bowersock for giving us, at this time, a masterpiece of the historians' craft. (Peter Brown *New York Times Book Review* 2017-05-11) This work is highly recommended for those interested in the religious and political attitudes that gave rise to Islam. (Muhammed Hassanali *Booklist* 2017-05-18) This is an invaluable examination of the origins of a great religion. (G. M. Smith *Choice* 2017-10-01) About the

Author G. W. Bowersock is Professor Emeritus of Ancient History at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton.