A COMPANION TO THE HISTORY OF THE MIDDLE EAST

Edited by

Youssef M. Choueiri
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Edited by

Youssef M. Choueiri
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Preface and Acknowledgments

Middle Eastern history is a vast field that no single work can realistically aspire to cover in all its periods, themes, and major events. Bearing in mind that this area is credited with introducing for the first time in human culture a huge number of inventions, instruments, tools and methods of organization, deemed necessary for launching enduring forms of civilization, all historical investigation ought ideally to revisit the earliest glimmerings of the dawn of history itself. Such an investigation would have to take account of agriculture, city planning, regular armies, market-places, temples, alphabetical systems of writing, monotheism, the wheel, empire building, tyranny versus accountable government, mathematics, geometry, astronomy and epic poetry, to mention only the most obvious Middle Eastern contributions to ancient as well as modern culture.

Although works of considerable erudition, the result of either painstaking archaeological explorations or diligent reconstruction of documentary evidence, have over the last two centuries been published, edited and continually updated, fresh discoveries are constantly being made and new theories are periodically advanced to throw light on a particular era or some material remains. Consequently, Middle Eastern historiography, or writings on the Middle Eastern past, be they in the form of narratives or theoretical treatises based on primary sources, has by and large been turned into an open field capable of receiving a steady stream of speculations and conjectures, without having to grapple with an ever-present threat of being swept away by the torrent of uncontrolled floodgates.

This volume was planned with all the above caveats, state-of-the-art contributions and latest scholarly efforts in mind. Our original plan, initially put forward by Tessa Harvey, Publisher of Blackwell History Division, was to produce a volume devoted to the modern history of the Middle East. However, further discussions and wider consultations with a number of colleagues convinced us to widen the scope of the historical treatment in order to offer a more solid analytical study of the formative and middle periods of Islam, on the one hand, and to allow readers and students to form a more informed judgement as to the continuities and ruptures in Middle Eastern historical development, on the other. I would like to thank in this respect the four anonymous readers who were first approached to offer their considered opinion on the feasibility of such a project as well as the need for its availability. Its main purpose
remains to act as a companion to the study and understanding of the Middle East as a historical field of considerable human, strategic, and economic interest.

As our preliminary outline began to take shape, a more comprehensive picture started to emerge, so much so that it became imperative for us to pay equal attention to all the crucial and relevant episodes of Middle Eastern societies. These societies, driven as they are by both a global configuration of modernity and a sense of affiliation to local cultures tied to a long list of civilizations, historical memories, or symbols, have in the last few decades been forced to reassess their past achievements and legacies, be they inherited or imposed, and in a critical spirit, ranging from moderate debates in academic institutions to violent acts of defiance. Hence, both modernity and local habits of thought and practice have recently been subjected to scrutiny by a motley array of Middle Easterners, in an effort to find new ways of coping with the modern world with all its technological, economic, political and cultural complexities.

More importantly, while the rise of Islam ushered in a new turning point in the history of the region, it paved the way for the formation of distinctly developed forms and structures which were capable of undergoing a process of slow or abrupt changes. These changes brought about by a modern scheme of things, embracing the idea of industrial innovation together with an accountable form of governance and administrative efficiency, in addition to paying particular attention to the well-being of ordinary citizens, sum up the multifaceted dilemmas facing Middle Eastern societies under a new wave of globalism.

Thus, the final structure of the volume and its organization were the result of fruitful exchanges of ideas, dialogues and a willingness to revise or modify earlier versions and proposals. It is therefore with great pleasure and gratitude that I would like to thank all those whose direct or indirect contributions made the completion of this volume possible. I am grateful to Carl Petry, William L. Cleveland, Stephen Humphreys, Fred Donner, and Alexander Knysh for their support, advice, and inspiration. Although the final structure of the volume was my own, I wish to thank Nelida Fuccaro, Abdul-Karim Rafeq, Peter Sluglett, and Michael Chamberlain for convincing me to introduce new themes or allow more room for certain approaches.

Moreover, my thanks go to all the contributors, without whose diligence, positive responses and devotion to the world of scholarship, this volume would not have been possible. I would also like to thank James McDougall for offering to translate from French into English chapter 11 by André Raymond. To all the editorial staff at Blackwell I wish to extend my profound gratitude. I would like to thank, in particular, Helen Lawton, Angela Cohen, and Tessa Harvey. I would also like to single out Graeme Leonard for copy-editing the typescript with admirable thoroughness and meticulousness.

This book is dedicated to my daughter Hiba, both as a symbolic gesture of appreciation and an earnest attempt to reaffirm my belief in her generation as it prepares itself to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.
A Note on Transliteration

The system of transliterating Arabic, Persian, and Turkish letters and words has been reduced to a minimum in most chapters. Under these circumstances only hamza or ‘ and ‘ayn have been retained. However, in the first three chapters, in addition to chapters 5, 7, and 8, dealing as they do with classical Islam or featuring a number of technical Arabic terms, the Library of Congress transliteration system has been used.

Exeter, April 2005
Introduction

Youssef M. Choueiri

Modern Middle Eastern history is a relative newcomer to the academic field. Its emergence as an autonomous and legitimate field of study is closely connected with the Second World War, the onset of the Cold War, and the gradual decline of both Britain and France as colonial powers. For a long time, British, and to some extent French, diplomats and academics referred to this area as the Near East or le proche-orient, a designation which served to cover all cultures, histories, and languages of the region. Thus one could be a Near Eastern scholar studying Assyrian texts or researching the impact of the Industrial Revolution on native crafts in Syria. In other words, the old label was sufficiently flexible and generously commodious to allow ancient and contemporary eras to shelter under its wing. This flexibility is, however, denied the more recent label, which is a peculiarly American, and to some extent, Soviet invention.

Nowadays, to be a Middle Eastern specialist is, more often than not, a reference to someone whose scholarly, diplomatic, or journalistic interests are focused on the modern and contemporary aspects of the region.

Initially, both the Near and Middle East tended to coincide geographically, embracing the core countries of Iran, Turkey, Iraq, Greater Syria, Egypt, the Sudan, and Libya. With the passage of time and the emergence of the Arab world as a political block of states grouped under the umbrella of the Arab League, the designation widened to include North Africa as a whole. The Companion to Middle Eastern history will adopt this wider designation as its field of study.

As to the interpretations and theoretical schemes adopted to explain the long march of events or pinpoint significant changes of socio-economic structures, a number of conflicting paradigms have been adopted and expounded.

In its early scholarly stages, the trajectory of Middle Eastern history was often judged to be governed by one single overriding factor or cluster of factors. By the sheer presence of one underlying element, it was then assumed that the historical development of the Middle East tended to follow a lopsided, distorted, and invariably repetitive trajectory. All its societies and historical periods were, as a result, lumped together and deemed to obey a constant pattern of ironclad rigidity or a primordial essence. Whereas some scholars alluded to the universal aridity of its environment, others fastened on religion as a determinant that tended to rear its head, albeit under various guises, in almost all socio-political and economic upheavals. Yet others would underline the obfuscating patriarchal structures of its families as the most plausible
explanatory device, conditioning and reproducing its regularly repeated series of violence or docility.

All these single-factor paradigmatic approaches were in the main meant to set apart the Middle East and treat it as a deviant cultural region, or as an unfortunate example of a frozen historical entity. Coinciding with the advent of modernity and European colonial expansionism, such arguments were explicitly or implicitly used to justify foreign intervention as the only agent capable of introducing the benefits of civilized norms of behaviour and governance. It is in this respect that modernity was denied a foothold in the Middle East except in its foreign incarnation or in the shape of marginal minorities anxious to overcome their lowly status.

However, these theoretical approaches have, since the 1980s, been subjected to wide-ranging critical assessments and shown to be affiliated with an outmoded Orientalist scheme of things. These assessments have consequently shifted the debate to a different level, whereby more sophisticated explanations came into play. Modernity, for example, was now assumed to constitute a universal character, which affects all cultures, albeit at an uneven pace of intensity. In other words, the Middle East has, in line with other societies, experienced the same wave of transformation and self-transformation and offered its own indigenous modes of responses and engagement. Hence, policies and programmes of nation building, modernization, democratic transformation, and a sustained level of development were considered to be intrinsic configurations of the region’s landscape.

By placing the Middle East within the wider contours of world history, historical interpretations became attuned to the presence of a complex pattern of development. Such a pattern could henceforth indicate discontinuity as well as imaginative modes of linking the past to the present. Although no uniform theoretical treatment has so far received the tacit or explicit agreement of the majority of Middle Eastern specialists, it has become almost impossible to parade primordial or permanent factors to account for the multifaceted and multi-layered history of our region.

The Companion to the History of the Middle East is therefore planned to build on the achievements of this recent scholarship, expand its parameters and offer as far as possible a fresh account of the positive and negative aspects of its subject matter. While primarily focused on modern and contemporary periods, its scope is designed to include a number of chapters on the classical and pre-modern features of its institutions, economies, and cultures. Its purpose is to situate a variety of topics within a chronological framework capable of providing a lively and concise narrative.

The structure of the volume is divided into seven parts, together with an introductory chapter.

Part I introduces the Middle East as a historical entity by tracing its general development, with particular attention to the formative period of Islam and the subsequent emergence of an imperial Islamic domain and the establishment of the caliphate as a symbol of both unity and diversity. Whereas Gerald Hawting discusses in chapter 1 the rise of Islam through the perspective of the most recent scholarship, Fred Donner offers the reader in chapter 2 a nuanced interpretation of the Islamic conquests and the underlying motives of their leaders and organizers. By doing so, the image of Islam in both chapters becomes more complex and often far removed from familiar perspectives or received stereotypes. Hugh Kennedy traces in chapter 3 the emergence, development, and eventual decline of the caliphate as one of the most enduring and original Islamic institutions brought into being after the death of the Prophet Muhammad.
Part II delineates the consolidation of religious, cultural, and political traditions in response to the daily life and practical challenges faced by the new community. These include jurisprudence, Sufism and the integration of non-Muslims into the imperial structures of the caliphate. Shi‘ism is also discussed as another response to the social and political upheavals following the elaboration of mainstream traditions. Zouhair Ghazzal demonstrates how the religious establishment in Islam, dominated by religious scholars or ‘Ulama’, developed over time in tandem with its own community in order to meet new needs or respond to different circumstances. Hence, the Sunni religious establishment in Islam is studied in its classical and modern contexts to delineate its varied functions in integrating both Muslims and non-Muslims into the wide world of Islamic culture (chapter 4). Robert Gleave completes this delineation by focusing in chapter 5 on the rise of Shi‘ism as an Islamic movement straddling various schools of thought and sects. His account is based on a historical perspective that is conscious of past events and their contingent character, as well as more recent developments, particularly in the wake of the triumph of the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979. Alexander Knysh in chapter 6 tackles a third theme which by its very chequered history has been of vital importance in both the middle Islamic period and the modern era. Thus, after surveying the various historiographical traditions developed over the centuries for the study of Sufism, he presents his own interpretations based on his original research into this lively subject.

Part III sets out to depict the process of transition to military rule or the militarization of Islam under a wide variety of dynasties. Ethnic origins, modalities of recruitment, and modes of economic management are highlighted as elaborate administrative structures designed to tackle a novel configuration of problems: declining revenues, the crusades and the threat of the Mongols. In chapter 7 Michael Chamberlain discusses these broad issues in relation to the Seljuks and the Ayyubids. It is also in this context that P. M. Holt in chapter 8 studies the Mamluk Institution in its widest significance and implications, with particular attention to its political and economic impact in the urban and rural areas. A similar cluster of problems are identified by Michael Brett in chapter 9, dealing with North African or Maghribi societies between 1056 and 1659.

Part IV ushers in a new type of Middle Eastern state: territorially based, yet imbued with an enduring imperial ethos. The Ottoman and the Safavid traditions of statecraft are seen as the last imperial experiments in an area becoming increasingly diversified as a result of momentous changes in the world at large. Metin Kunt in chapter 10 cogently highlights these two traditions of statecraft and institution building. It was also towards the end of this period that a certain type of Middle Eastern urban life matured and left its cultural imprint as a permanent legacy of city life down to the present time. André Raymond in chapter 11 demolishes the old paradigm posited by French Orientalists in their depiction of Middle Eastern or Islamic cities by delineating the multifaceted function of Middle Eastern cities in their public spaces and internal dynamism.

Part V concentrates on the rapid, internal and external, changes which cut across all countries of the Middle East. These included the commercial and the industrial revolutions, the emergence of European nation-states bent on a policy of overseas expansion and the first glimmerings of an internal drive for reform in the Ottoman world. In chapter 12 Abdul-Karim Rafeq plots the inexorable changes, which accompanied European imperial expansionism in both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He also shows how a different balance of power was the end-result of an
uneven relationship as the repercussions of the Industrial Revolution began to dominate Middle Eastern societies. On the other hand, Peter Sluglett in chapter 13 undertakes to weave the different strands of independence movements that emerged in the wake of the arrival of colonialism under varied guises and forms. By doing so he shows how the present system of national states came into being, highlighting at the same time its points of weakness and strength.

Part VI addresses the implications of colonial rule and the struggle for independence. These twin phenomena spawned a number of interdependent movements or political discourses: nationalism, Zionism, political parties, and modern armed forces. In addition, Middle Eastern political economies were subjected to structural and long-term changes as a direct result of the emergence of newly independent states. Whereas Emma Murphy in chapter 14 treats Zionism in all its shades and schools since its inception in the nineteenth century, the three principal nationalist movements in the Middle East – Arab, Turkish and Iranian – are discussed in chapters 15 (Youssef Choueiri) and 16 (Ioannis N. Grigoriadis and Ali Ansari). The pivotal function of political parties and trade unions is introduced by Raymond Hinnebusch in chapter 17. These organizations are discussed in their modern historical context and shown to be vehicles of long-term social and political changes. However, political parties were often sidestepped or hijacked by young military officers anxious to implement immediate radical policies of wealth redistribution or rapid industrialization. In chapter 18 Gareth Stansfield focuses his analysis on the various theories and historical narratives advanced by a number of scholars to explain or chronicle the intervention of Middle East military elites in political life. Simon Murden revisits in chapter 19 the various historical and theoretical accounts that sought to interpret the weak economic performances or achievements of most Middle Eastern states. His line of argument ranges over the inadequate analytical tools of these theoretical narratives by seeking to discover an indigenous bundle of cultural attitudes and political assumptions which have rarely been highlighted in their social and economic ramifications.

Part VII seeks to highlight issues and social movements that have surfaced and preoccupied historians and Middle Eastern specialists in the second half of the twentieth century, and are most likely to gain momentum well into the twenty-first. These range from oil and urban growth to the role of women and democratic human rights. In chapter 20 Michael Bonine seeks to situate the study of Middle Eastern urbanism and Islamic cities within a growing field of historical and social science disciplines concerned with the city as a unit of investigation. He highlights in particular the rapid urban development in all Middle Eastern states as well as the consequences for both the environment and their inhabitants, be they men, women or children. This is followed by oil and development (chapter 21), which tackles the industry of oil and its revenues in so far as they relate to internal domestic issues. Thus, Paul Stevens analyses the historical background of this vital industry and then proceeds to show its negative results in spite of the huge revenues it generates for a considerable number of countries in the region. Valentine Moghadam focuses attention in chapter 22 on gender issues, inequalities and relations of power in their Middle Eastern contexts. Her analysis accords full recognition to the political, social, economic, and cultural diversity of Middle Eastern women, while at the same time showing acute awareness of common characteristics born out of similar historical experiences. In politics and religion (chapter 23) Beverley Milton-Edwards brings out
the significance of religion as a marker of identity, on the one hand, and the constant readjustments and constructs such an identity is subjected to in its journey to grapple with the upheavals of modernity, on the other. Her discussion embraces Jewish, Christian and Muslim religious experiences and their various historical endeavours to reinvent both politics and religion as part of a modern project. The fact that more space is given to Islamist movements and discourses than to Jewish or Christian ones, is a testimony to the vocal, and more often than not, strident character of these movements. Lise Storm in chapter 24 considers the question of minorities in their Middle Eastern contexts. Basing her analysis on a rigorous definition of ethno-national minorities while at the same time alluding to all other categories, including religious minorities, she concentrates on three conspicuous national groups: the Berbers, the Kurds and the Palestinians. The reactivation of religion, or the invention of religiously based discourses, is noted by Tim Niblock in chapter 25 in its original impulse to form part of a wider development sweeping across Middle Eastern countries in varying degrees of intensity and sustainability. Hence the rediscovery of civil society in conjunction with the advent of a new democratic drive is diagnosed, with a clear propensity to rehabilitate a wide range of social forces and institutions, formerly considered to belong to a bygone age. In chapter 26, Simon Bromley offers a panoramic view of the Middle East in its regional and international contexts. While his analytical approach contests the applicability of a geopolitical term that had its origins within European culture rather than the region designated as the Middle East, he traces the emergence of its states-system back to the imperial era following the First World War. Nevertheless, local social forces and political actors are also singled out for their specific roles in bringing about present-day Middle Eastern political order and its national/territorial states. The chapter also poses the question of a potential Middle Eastern unity based on either Islam or Arabism. More importantly, issues related to legitimacy, the increasingly visible role of the United States and the kind of reform programmes that are needed to achieve concrete development occupy the rest of the chapter.

The volume is, moreover, structured so as to respond to four major differentiated regional or political units: Iran, Turkey, Israel, and the Arab world. The Arab world itself is approached according to the local rhythms of its constituent parts: the Maghrib, the Nile Valley, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Fertile Crescent. However, in most cases the Arab world seemed to represent in its general historical transformations an evolving entity with common cultural and political affinities.

Another point we had to bear in mind was the desirability of treating certain topics as overarching entities that serve to throw light on the structure as a whole. Part VII is designed to serve such a purpose by allowing ample space to deal with common issues such as religion, oil and development, Middle Eastern women, politics and religion, democracy, urbanization, minorities and the states-system in its international context.
PART I

The Formative Period of Islam
CHAPTER ONE

The Rise of Islam

GERALD R. HAWTING

Introduction

Expressions such as ‘the rise of Islam’, ‘the emergence of Islam’, and ‘the origins of Islam’ are ambiguous and understood differently by different people. Commonly taken today simply as the name of a religion, historically Islam refers to something much bigger than what is generally understood now by the word religion. In pre-modern times, and in many places still, Islam implies a way of life involving such things as political, social, and economic norms and behaviour. An Islamic society may include groups that follow religions other than Islam. In that sense, Islam is a culture deeply affected by the religion of Islam but also by things which to modern eyes may appear to have little to do with religion, or to have sources that are not Islamic. To determine a precise point of origin for such a complex of ideas, practices and institutions is probably not possible. To decide a time at which its ‘rise’ or ‘emergence’ was over and when it existed in a state of maturity will involve a number of subjective judgements. Here the rise of Islam is envisaged as a process covering two to three hundred years, from approximately AD 600 to 900.

Islam has its own, not monolithic but broadly consistent, accounts of its origins and early history. Much reported in the Muslim traditional accounts is accepted as fact also by those who have tried to develop new understandings of what the emergence of Islam involved and how it occurred. It is the overall framework and different ways of looking at things that distinguish the more traditional versions of the rise of Islam from newer, academic ones. Beginning with a broadly traditional perspective should simplify the subsequent presentation of the ways in which academic scholarship has suggested new interpretations and approaches.

A Tradition-based Account

Muslims have presented Islam as the continuation of the true monotheist religion taught by Abraham (Ibrāhīm) and all the prophets sent by God to mankind before and after him. Abraham brought his religion to the Arabs of Arabia when he built the Ka‘ba (literally ‘cube’), the sanctuary of God, at Mecca, and established the rites of worship there. Abraham left his son Ishmael (Ismā‘īl) in Mecca, and Ishmael became the ancestor of the main branch of the Arab people. For some time the Arabs were faithful to Abraham’s religion but following a pattern common throughout human
history, they gradually fell away from the true path and lapsed into polytheism and idolatry. God then sent Muḥammad, the final prophet, to call them to Islam, which is identical with the religion of Abraham, and to make it supreme throughout the world. God’s reasons for choosing Muḥammad as His prophet, and for sending him at the time and place He did, are inscrutable.1

Traditionally, the life of the prophet Muḥammad and the few decades after his death in AD 632 are seen as the time when Islam was established in a substantial sense as a religion, a state, and a society. For many, expressions like ‘the rise of Islam’ refer almost exclusively to the activities of the Prophet and his immediate successors. That is the time before Islam came out of Arabia.

Born in Mecca in western Arabia (the Hijāz) at a time given only imprecisely in the traditional biographies but generally taken to be about AD 570, Muḥammad, according to tradition, began to receive revelations from God when he was aged about forty. With some exceptions, his Meccan fellow townsmen rejected his teachings and his claims to be a prophet. At a date equivalent to AD 622 he and some of his Meccan followers left his native town in order to settle in the oasis town of Yathrib (later called Medina) about three hundred miles to the north. That event, known as the Hijra, is presented as the turning point in his fortunes. Subsequently (according to tradition seventeen years later), the year in which it occurred was chosen as the first of a new, Islamic era (the Hijri era, abbreviated AH).2

In Yathrib Muḥammad was successful in establishing a religious and political community and in overcoming various enemies. Prominent among them were the large Jewish community of Yathrib and the still pagan leaders of Mecca. The Jews, accused of conspiring with his pagan enemies, were removed from the scene by deportations and then executions. Two years before his death he was able to lead a band of his followers to Mecca and occupy the town without much bloodshed. Its sanctuary, the Ka’ba, was cleansed of idolatry and again dedicated to the worship of the one true God (Allāh) for which Abraham had established it.

God’s revelations came to Muḥammad on many occasions throughout his prophetic career. The angel Gabriel (Jibrīl), brought the very words of God himself. In addition, God guided the Prophet’s own words and behaviour, which his companions remembered and transmitted to later generations. Thus God made His will known in two ways, through His words (later to be collected in the Qur’ān) and through the Prophet’s own words and deeds, collectively known as his Sunna. By the time of Muḥammad’s death, the fundamental elements of Muslim belief and religious life (the so-called ‘five pillars of Islam’) had been fixed in their normative forms, the Islamic revelation was complete (although not yet committed to writing), and a state and society ruled by the Prophet from Medina and based on Islam established.3

Following his death, according to this view, there occurred a consolidation and extension of what he had achieved. From AD 632 until 661 the political and religious community founded by Muḥammad in Arabia was ruled by a succession of four caliphs, often called the ‘Rightly Guided Caliphs’.4 For many this was the Golden Age of Islam. God’s words were collected from those who had memorized them or written some of them down, and the unchangeable text of the Qur’ān as we know it today was fixed in writing.5 The institution of the caliphate was founded in order to provide succession to the Prophet’s religious and political leadership (although prophecy had ended with his death). The first four caliphs, all of whom had been close companions of the Prophet, were in the best position to rule according to the