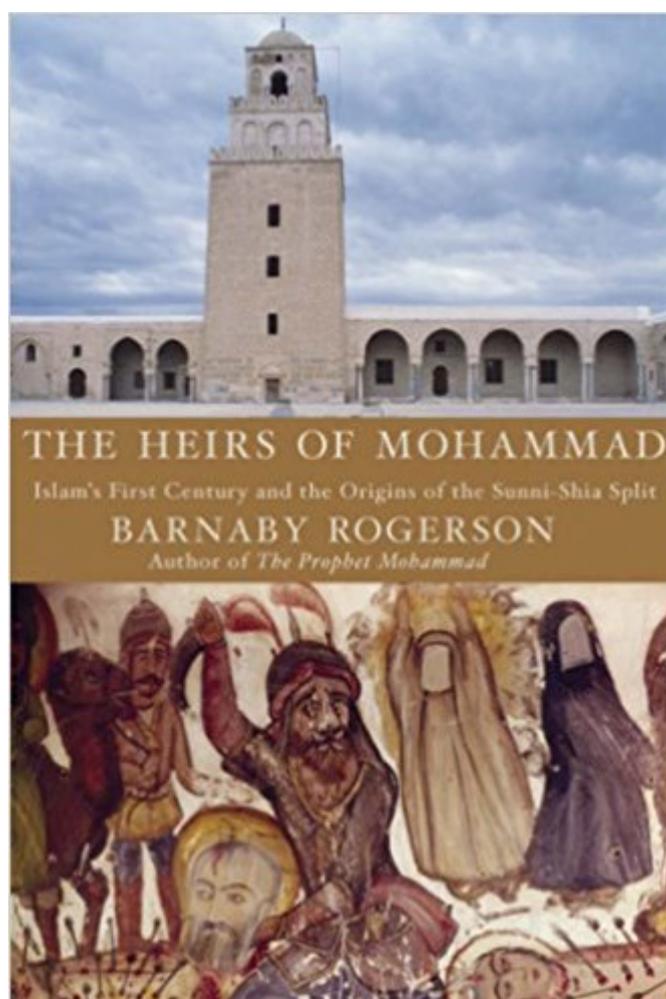


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The Heirs Of Muhammad: Islam's First Century And The Origins Of The Sunni-Shia Split



Synopsis

The Prophet Mohammad brought his vision of the word of God to the Arabs, and within a generation of his death, his followers'as vivid a cast of heroic individuals as history has known'had exploded out of Arabia to confront the two great superpowers of the seventh century and establish Islam and with it a new civilization. The Heirs of the Prophet Mohammad is a swaggering saga of ambition, achievement, self-sacrificing nobility and blood rivalry. In it, acclaimed historian Barnaby Rogerson recounts the lives of the handful of individuals--the first four Caliphs, the Prophet's widows and the conquering generals--who led and influenced Islam after the death of Mohammad. Within this fifty-year span of conquest and empire-building, Rogerson identifies the seeds of discord that destroyed the unity of Islam and traces the roots of the schism between Sunni and Shia Muslims to the rivalry of the two people who best knew and loved the Prophet: his cousin and son-in-law Ali and his wife Aisha.

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Customer Reviews

THE HEIRS OF MUHAMMAD by British journalist and travelogue author Barnaby Rogerson is both a thoroughly researched and quite enjoyable recounting of nascent Islam's first century and the origins of its split into Sunni and Shi'a factions. Rogerson has gone to great lengths with this book to show that Islam, like all mass movements, was troubled by factionalism and in-fighting even before the death of the Muhammad. In Part 1 he details the rivalries amongst the Prophet's wives (called here by their respectful title, "the Mothers of the Faithful"), the roots of Aisha's lifelong hatred for Ali, and the rise in importance of such former adversaries of the Islamic faith as the Umayyad clan of

the Quraysh and various other families, clans and tribes, who were now jockeying for leadership in the growing Muslim state. Part 2 opens with the death of Muhammad and the institution of the politico-religious office of leadership known as the Caliphate. Abu Bakr is chosen over Ali as Muhammad's successor - and thus the origin of the Sunni/Shi'a split. Rogerson also recounts another event little known to most non-Muslims: the Ridda Wars. Also called the War Against Apostasy, these were a series of battles fought to bring rebellious Bedouin and settled Arab tribes back under Islamic rule. It is here that the author shows the complex political and religious makeup which existed in the Arabian peninsula: Arab clients of the Roman emperor in Constantinople, Arabian tribes under Persian cultural and political influence, or tribes and clans who desired not only to revert back towards indigenous pagan cults but also to the Christianity that they had only recently adopted before adopting Islam itself.

Anyone who thinks that the early days of the Moslem caliphate were ideal has very little notion of the web of intrigues that involved the companions of Muhammad after his death. This remarkable book charts the story of the first four caliphs and how Islam was able to spread as rapidly as it did. First Arabia, then Egypt, the Magreb, Syria, and what is now Iraq and the states of the Persian Gulf, all within the span of a generation. Military capability of the early companions of Muhammed provides one explanation. The culture of Arabian tribesman provided a perfect training ground for warfare. There were also some marvelously capable individuals who were selected early on for prominent roles in the new religion. However, this was not a ministry of all talents, rather what Barnaby Rogerson shows us is that there were as many takes on Islam as there were initial followers. This book provides the novice reader with a number of portraits of the early leaders of the heroic age of Islam. Not only are the first four caliphs represented. These are Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali. Each had particular administrative strengths and weaknesses. Uthman, for example lacked military experience, but proved an able administrator and was responsible for assembling a written version of the Koran from the oral tradition. However, while the caliphs provide the structure of the book there are other fascinating individuals represented in the book, such as Ayisha, the favorite wife of Muhammed. The book's subtext is the origins of the Sunni Shi'ite split and this Rogerson expertly charts. He shows that this split was driven as much by the early successes of Islam as anything else.

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