


The Venture of Islam, Vol 2: The Expansion of Islam in the Middle Periods

Marshall G.S. Hodgson

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The Venture of Islam has been honored as a magisterial work of the mind since its publication in early 1975. In this three-volume study, illustrated with charts and maps, Hodgson traces and interprets the historical development of Islamic civilization from before the birth of Muhammad to the middle of the twentieth century. This work grew out of the famous course on Islamic civilization that Hodgson created and taught for many years at the University of Chicago.

In the second work of this three-volume set, Hodgson investigates the establishment of an international Islamic civilization through about 1500. This includes a theoretical discussion of cultural patterning in the Islamic world and the Occident.

"This is a nonpareil work, not only because of its command of its subject but also because it demonstrates how, ideally, history should be written."—*The New Yorker*

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Chris says

Interesting, but it's so dry that it takes a lot of work to push through it. I read the first volume, but I just couldn't force my way through this one. These are full of information, but more than a little overwhelming. Too many names, places, and empires to keep track of. More maps, charts, etc. would really help the entire series.

Sagheer Afzal says

Although needlessly tangential and verbose this particular volume does succeed in its primary aim, it does inform the reader of how Islam expanded in the middle periods. The problem however is this book really does struggle under its own weight. Hodgson seems to have been obsessed with this notion that the history of a religion is dependent on other co-existing religions and cultures. You can't deny there is truth in this; but to try to recount every possible impact makes for arduous and laborious reading.

There were a few places in the book where I doubted the validity of some of his statements; such as his idea that that the early Muslims had a global sense of brotherhood or that homosexuality was a common practice in segregated households.

Disappointingly, despite the author's painstaking research. A question which I have had for a very long time was left unanswered. Namely, how comes there was a period of 500 years when no scientific investigation took place in the Islamic world?

A couple of fundamental points which I would have expected to be analysed deeply in an Islamic history book were also skimmed over. 1) The Sacking of Baghdad; what impact did it have on the Islamic world? 2) What led Genghis Khan's grandson Berke to convert the Islam and how was he able to halt the planned destruction of the Kaabah?

That said; I did gain a couple of insights from this book. Such as how beneficial Sufims was in spreading Islam to all corners of the globe.

Hodgson makes an interesting point as to the conversion of people to Islam. People did not convert because they were spellbound by the wonders of the Quran. They converted because they did not enjoy the inferior status of being a 'Dhimmi' let alone the tax you had to pay.

Islam spread through India because there was much in Sufism that complemented Hindu mysticism.

The itinerate Sufi with his simple monotheistic message did more to propagate Islam than the Shariah minded cleric.

John says

The Venture of Islam series is simply the best history of the the Islamic (and Islamicate!) world as a whole. Hodgson was such a visionary thinker, it is a shame he passed away so young!

Zachary Moore says

The second installment of Hodgson's trilogy is if anything even better than the first, giving the reader a bird's eye view of the socio-cultural context of late medieval Islam. As in the first volume, I particularly enjoyed Hodgson's treatment of religious developments and especially of sufism. I wish the author had been even more told than usual in questioning the traditional narrative of Islamic decline as the society that emerges from the pages of this work is revealed as one in the full prime of health and vitality and in no sense decadent.

Joseph Lumbard says

The most comprehensive History of the Islamic World in the Medieval Period. Deals with dynastic, culture and intellectual developments. Well written and extremely erudite, it is a reference used by all specialists in the field. I am not as enamored of volume I as I am of this volume.
