



Social Origins Of Islam: Mind, Economy, Discourse

Mohammed Bamyeh

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The story of the origins of Islam provides a rich and suggestive example of sweeping cultural transformation. Incorporating both innovation and continuity, Islam built upon the existing cultural patterns among the peoples of the Arabian peninsula even as it threatened to eradicate these same patterns. In this provocative interdisciplinary study, Mohammed A. Bamyeh combines perspectives from sociology, literary studies, anthropology, and economic history to examine the cultural ecology that fostered Islam.

Highlighting the pivotal connections in pre-Islamic society between the emergence of certain economic practices (such as trade and money-based exchange), world view (as rendered in pre-Islamic literature and theology), and the reconfiguration of transtribal patterns of solidarity and settlement, Bamyeh finds in the genesis of Islam a sophisticated model for examining ideological transformation in general.

At the heart of Bamyeh's enterprise are close readings of both the Qur'an and the pre-Islamic poetry that preceded it. Bamyeh uncovers in these texts narrative and pedagogical content, poetic structure, use of metaphor, and historical references that are suggestive of societies in transition. He also explores the expressive limits of the pre-Islamic literature and its transmutation into Qur'anic speech in the wake of social transformation.

Emphasizing the organic connections between belief structures, economic formations, and modes of discourse in pre-Islamic Arabia, *The Social Origins of Islam* explains how various material and discursive changes made the idea of Islam possible at a particular point in history. More broadly, it persuasively demonstrates how grand cultural shifts give rise to new systems of faith.

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