



Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing (Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam, No. 14)

By Fred McGraw Donner

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How and why did Muslims first come to write their own history? The author argues in this work that the Islamic historical tradition arose not out of "idle curiosity," or through imitation of antique models, but as a response to a variety of challenges facing the Islamic community during its first several centuries (ca. seventh to tenth centuries C.E.). The narratives that resulted focused on certain themes of Islamic origins, selected to legitimize particular aspects of the Islamic community and faith in one or another. These included the need to establish the status of Muhammad (d. 632) as prophet, to affirm that the community to which they belonged was the direct descendant of the original community founded by the Prophet, to explain (and justify) Muslim hegemony over vast populations of non-Muslims in the rapidly growing Islamic empire, and to articulate different positions in the ongoing debate with the Islamic community itself over political and religious leadership. An examination of these key themes of early Islamic historiography and the issues generating them is placed in the context of other styles of legitimation in the early Islamic community, including such methods as appeals to piety and genealogy.

Narratives of Islamic Origins is a groundbreaking work that represents the first comprehensive tradition-critical account of the origins and rise of Arab-Islamic historiography, and is essential reading for all historians of medieval Islamic history and civilization, and for all those interested in the historiography of comparative civilizations.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Fred M. Donner is Professor of Near Eastern History, The Oriental Institute and the University of Chicago, where he is the Chair, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations. He is the author of numerous studies on early Islamic history and historiography.

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