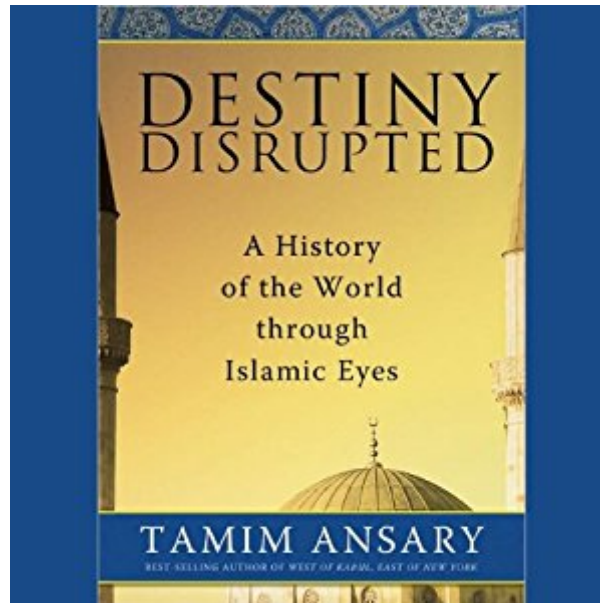


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Destiny Disrupted: A History Of The World Through Islamic Eyes



Synopsis

Until about 1800, the West and the Islamic realm were like two adjacent, parallel universes, each assuming itself to be the center of the world while ignoring the other. As Europeans colonized the globe, the two world histories intersected and the Western narrative drove the other one under. The West hardly noticed, but the Islamic world found the encounter profoundly disrupting. This book reveals the parallel "other" narrative of world history to help us make sense of today's world conflicts. Ansary traces the history of the Muslim world from pre-Mohammedan days through 9/11, introducing people, events, empires, legends, and religious disputes, both in terms of what happened and how it was understood and interpreted.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Tamim Ansary's 'History of the World through Islamic Eyes' is purposefully reminiscent of H.G. Wells's 'Outline of History' or of Will Durant's many volumes, or of any high school textbook of Western Civilization, meaning implicitly everything worth recording. Ansary declares as much in his preface. He intends to write a universal history from the point of view of the 'Middle World', in which Europe will be peripheral until the final chapters. No, not Jung Gwo, the "Middle Realm" of China! In fact, China will be even more peripheral than Europe in Ansary's textbook. His Middle World will be Islam, as a culture and a civilization, and his middle point in geography, Mecca, will also be his starting point in time. The European outline of history has always been the westward succession of leadership, from Greece to Rome to northern Europe to America, a viewpoint of manifest destiny

that has justified much imperialism and jingoism. An Islamic history, Ansary says, would be an expansion from a center, rather like ripples spreading from the event of the Hijra in 622 AD, an expansion that should have been destined to encompass the whole world. For the first thousand years of this history, it was perfectly plausible for the most educated classes of Islamic societies to maintain such a viewpoint, Ansary maintains. But then that 'destiny' was disrupted by the unforeseen economic and technological revolutions of the rude barbarians of Europe. Such a perception of history, as a calamitous disruption of the proper order of things, underlies the resentment and hostility of Muslims throughout the Middle World toward the West. Ansary writes very simply. His prose would pass muster for a high school textbook. But his simplicity is eloquent and lucid.

A good history is synthesis; its author judges for themselves what constitutes a 'major event' or current of history and crafts these events into a narrative arc. This is why history is also subjective - different people will decide what is major or minor differently. Most histories I've read, whether it be H. G. Wells' Short History of the World/ Outline of World History, or the book I read recently titled A History of Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years suffer from the sin of Euro-centrism (like most standard world maps, I might add). For the period from just before the birth of Christ to the 'end of history' announced by Fukuyama at the end of the Cold War, they focus on first the Roman Empire, then its decline, and then the continent of Europe with brief forays into Asia Minor and the Levant. These histories tend to oversimplify things like the Hun or Mongol invasions as "barbarians coming from the East", as though these tribes appeared in the middle of nowhere fully formed and attacked "civilization". This is why Tamim Ansary's book is a refreshing departure. He focuses on the other world history - the history of first Islam, beginning with the life of the Prophet Mohammed, the Khalifate(s) that followed and then the fortunes and misfortunes of the Eastern Empire centered on Istanbul and its inheritance. I found it telling that rather than treating Islam (in his words) as part of a set also containing Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism etc, OR as part of a set also containing Communism, Capitalism, Socialism etc, OR as part of a set of civilizations - Roman, Western, Eastern, Indian, Chinese etc, he treats it as another history, whose jagged edges fit into the Europe-centered world history that most of us learnt in school.

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