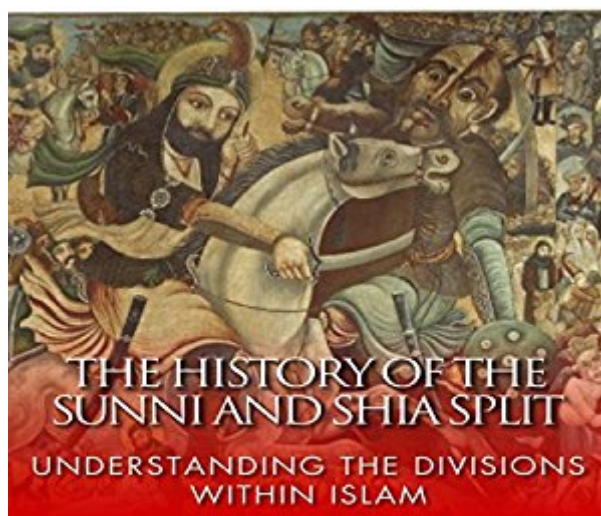


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The History Of The Sunni And Shia Split: Understanding The Divisions Within Islam



by
CHARLES RIVER EDITORS



Synopsis

"Our followers are of three kinds, one who follows us but depends on others, one who is like a glass involved in his own reflections, but the best are those who are like gold, the more they suffer the more they shine." - Muhammad al-Baqir

Different branches of the same religion are the exception more than the rule, and they have had a profound impact upon history. The schism between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches influenced relationships between nations across Europe, and religious intolerance based on different Christian faiths led to persecution and outright violence across the continent for centuries. The Protestant Reformation split Christianity further, and the results culminated in the incredibly destructive 30 Years' War in the 17th century. Today, the most important religious split is between the Sunnis and the Shias (Shiites) within Islam. Unlike divisions in other faiths - between Conservative and Orthodox Jews or Catholic and Protestant Christians - the split between the Sunnis and Shia has existed almost as long as the faith itself, and it quickly emerged out of tensions created by the political crisis after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. In a sense, what are now two different forms of Islam essentially started as political factions within the unified body of Muslim believers. Over the past few centuries, Christians have mostly been able to live alongside their co-religionists, but the split between the Sunnis and Shias is still so pronounced that many adherents of each branch view each other with disdain if not as outright apostates or non-believers.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a short booklet (not a book) that is somewhat informative but leaves off much history for the sake of brevity. The cover is very attractive. It includes some nice maps but the maps were obviously shrunk to fit the pages and the city names are so small that most cannot be read. Finally there are no page numbers, which I found irritating. All in all, I would not recommend this book. It needs to be expanded and it needs to include legible maps.

I found that I learned more about the differences in belief between Sunni and Shia Muslims from this short synopsis than anything else I've read. The book provides extensive footnotes so that one can determine the source of the various statements in this book. The bibliography list is long and provides one with multiple sources to learn about Shia and/or Sunni Muslims.

This book is a clear and interesting guidance to any reader who is not Muslim to understand the current geopolitical situation in the middle east and also its relation to the global waves of terrorism which are affecting many countries in the Western world today. The author was smart enough to capture mere facts with clear sequence since the emergence of Islam to lead us to understand the conflict running among the Arab countries in general. He also approached the point of conflict among the different Islamic sects from one aspect and also their hatred to other religions from another aspect. I see it of real value to any reader who is looking for a concise reference any sharp, chronological history and present thread of the Islamic middle eastern wars and differences.

A good, easy to understand history of the divisions in early Islam that led to the Sunni-Shia schism dating right back to the succession from the Prophet Mohammed. Dr Harasta runs through the foundation of Islam by Mohammed in the 7th century and traces the early divisions after Mohammed's death between who felt the successor, or Caliphate, should be chosen from the original 'Ummah' or Community of followers and those who felt a successor should be a descendant of Mohammed himself, namely his daughter Fatima & Ali, by way of their sons (Mohammed's grandsons) Hassan & Hussein. Dr Harasta's history traces the bitterness that developed shortly after the death of Mohammed and the conflict with the descendants (Shia) and the Omayyid Caliphate centred in Damascus which led to the deaths of Hasan & Hussein and the Battle of Karbala in Iraq. This history is easy to read and gives an very good background to understanding the events in the Middle Eastern world and Iran today right up to the development of Isis. Recommended to any non-Moslem wishing to understand the Islamic world today.

Interesting and informative, but very badly edited- no actually not edited at all. Lots of basic grammar errors make it unpleasant to read.

Nice primer on the conflict between Sunni's and Shia's. Book could have been put together a bit better. For example, the illustrations of the paintings should have been in color and provenance of each illustration noted.

With all of the turmoil across the Middle East, having a basic understanding Islam is certainly relevant. I am far from a scholar on Islamic studies so this short read equipped me with some basic insights to the roots of the divisions between Sunni and Shia groups. The book is easy to read in one sitting and allows for a taste of the historical significance of hatred that is brewing between the groups. I would imagine there are other books that could be recommended for a greater depth of understanding, but this is a concise introduction that I think is a good start.

Not the last word on the subject, nor the most in depth. But a fast and quick way to wade through a lot of history and religious conflict. It will get you up to speed on the subject fast.

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