



Women, Islam, and Abbasid Identity

By Nadia Maria El Cheikh

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When the Abbasids overthrew the Umayyad dynasty in 750 CE, an important element in legitimizing their newly won authority involved defining themselves in the eyes of their Islamic subjects. Nadia Maria El Cheikh shows that ideas about women were central to the process by which the Abbasid caliphate, which ushered in Islam's Golden Age, achieved self-definition.

In most medieval Islamic cultures, Arab Islam stood in opposition to *jahl*, or the state of impurity and corruption that existed prior to Islam's founding. Over time, the concept of *jahl* evolved into a more general term describing a condition of ignorance and barbarism, as well as a condition specifically associated in Abbasid discourse with women. Concepts of womanhood and gender became a major organizing principle for articulating Muslim identity. Groups whose beliefs and behaviors were perceived by the Abbasids as a threat—not only the *jahilis* who lived before the prophet Muhammad but peoples living beyond the borders of their empire, such as the Byzantines, and heretics who defied the strictures of their rule, such as the Qaramita—were represented in Abbasid texts through gendered metaphors and concepts of sexual difference. These in turn influenced how women were viewed, and thus contributed to the historical construction of Muslim women's identity.

Through its investigation of how gender and sexuality were used to articulate cultural differences and formulate identities in Abbasid systems of power and thought, *Women, Islam, and Abbasid Identity* demonstrates the importance of women to the writing of early Islamic history.

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Editorial Review

Review

In *Women, Islam, and Abbasid Identity*, El Cheikh offers a well-crafted and distinctly fresh approach to the formation of Islamic identity. This is a work of high scholarly caliber that will make a significant contribution to the study of early Islam. (Nancy Khalek, Brown University)

El Cheikh demonstrates convincingly and elegantly that ideas about women and gender are key to marking temporal, religious, sectarian, and ideological boundaries. There is a real need for this accessible work for those who want to learn more about Islamic history. (Kecia Ali, Boston University)

About the Author

Nadia Maria El Cheikh is Professor of History at the American University of Beirut.

Users Review

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The actual book *Women, Islam, and Abbasid Identity* has a lot info on it. So when you read this book you can get a lot of profit. The book was authored by the very famous author. The author makes some research prior to write this book. This kind of book very easy to read you can get the point easily after perusing this book.

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