



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

Matthew S. Gordon, The Rise of Islam. First paperback ed. (Greenwood Guides to Historic Events of the Medieval World.) Indianapolis, Ind., and Cambridge, Eng.: Hackett, 2008. Pp. xxxv, 181 plus 7 black-and-white figures; maps. \$14.95. First published in 2005.

Citation for published version:

Marsham, A 2010, 'Matthew S. Gordon, The Rise of Islam. First paperback ed. (Greenwood Guides to Historic Events of the Medieval World.) Indianapolis, Ind., and Cambridge, Eng.: Hackett, 2008. Pp. xxxv, 181 plus 7 black-and-white figures; maps. \$14.95. First published in 2005.', *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies*, vol. 85, no. 3, pp. 676-678. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0038713410001600>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1017/S0038713410001600](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0038713410001600)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Published In:

Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies

Publisher Rights Statement:

© Marsham, A. (2010). Matthew S. Gordon, The Rise of Islam. First paperback ed. (Greenwood Guides to Historic Events of the Medieval World.) Indianapolis, Ind., and Cambridge, Eng.: Hackett, 2008. Pp. xxxv, 181 plus 7 black-and-white figures; maps. \$14.95. First published in 2005. *Speculum-A journal of medieval studies*, 85(3), 676-678doi: 10.1017/S0038713410001600

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



This line of thinking raises, in turn, the issue of the second part of George's title: *and the Early British Church*. Except for a discussion of the *Passio Albani*, George does not consider any other literary product of the British church in the fifth and sixth centuries. The corpus of authentic works by British writers in this period is easily controlled. Besides the *De excidio* and the *Passio Albani*, there are only the fragmentary letters of Gildas, the two letters of Patrick, the *De gratia* of Faustus of Riez, and, arguably, the penitential of Uinniau (the recipient of Gildas's letters). A look at the epistolary fragments and the *Penitentialis Uinniani* would have aided the discussion of Gildas's views on forgiveness of sin, which became an important feature for the sixth-century British church and, later, for the Irish church. "Pure" Pelagians held grave reservations about the possibility of forgiveness of sins committed after baptism. A defense of forgiveness (with consequent repeatable penance) would place Gildas in the camp of "reformed" Pelagians (semi-Pelagians).

Inevitably, there are causes for disagreement. George's statement (p. 89), "Pelagius and his followers did not overlook the importance of grace, but described its workings differently to Augustine," is misleading. Pelagians indeed used the word *gratia* but in a way so radically different from Augustine as to exclude any dialogue. For Pelagians grace equals the good nature (including free will) that God gives to all without distinction, plus the law. There was no room for a grace that favored some while excluding others. The "semi-Pelagians" made room for "prevenient" grace, yet continued to speak of obtaining grace through merit. I cannot agree, then, with George's suggestion (p. 7) that the only offending Augustinian doctrine that Faustus sought to mediate was predestination, for if every issue of grace must first come from God, then predestination inevitably follows. Thus, the workings of grace (and free will) remained an issue for anti-Augustinians. There is less evidence for opposition to the notion of inherited (original) sin. However, one could speculate that the allegedly radical effects of inherited sin on the operation of the will would have made anyone but a hardened Augustinian highly uncomfortable.

Notwithstanding these remarks, Karen George has written an important book. By showing that the most significant fifth-to-sixth-century writer of post-Roman Britain held doctrinal views antithetical to the more extreme Augustinian positions advanced on the Continent, she has moved the shelf life of the Pelagian debate in Britain a century beyond the missions of Germanus. By keeping her focus narrow George has achieved valuable results.

MICHAEL W. HERREN, York University

MATTHEW S. GORDON, *The Rise of Islam*. First paperback ed. (Greenwood Guides to Historic Events of the Medieval World.) Indianapolis, Ind., and Cambridge, Eng.: Hackett, 2008. Pp. xxxv, 181 plus 7 black-and-white figures; maps. \$14.95. First published in 2005.

doi:10.1017/S0038713410001600

The Rise of Islam is an introductory textbook and sourcebook for the early history of Islamic civilization. It spans the three centuries between the life of the Prophet Muhammad (d. 632 C.E.) and the fragmentation of Abbasid imperial power in the early tenth century. The main historical discussion is presented in six short chapters—ninety-five pages in total. Almost an equal amount of space is devoted to fifteen short biographical essays on important or interesting historical figures and fifteen extracts from translated primary texts, all of which follow the main text. There are also seven black-and-white images, a short chronology of key events, a glossary, index, and maps of the Middle East, Baghdad, and Samarra.

The first challenge in presenting early Islamic history to those who are new to the subject is that of setting out the political narrative clearly while retaining sufficient detail to allow the

religio-political roots of matters such as the Sunni-Shi'i divide to be clearly understood; the second challenge is conveying some of the texture of the evolving social, economic, religious, and cultural life of the major centers of the Muslim world. This book responds successfully to both, balancing a clear political narrative with important themes in social, economic, and religious history. Early chapters outline the historical narrative from 600 to 750 C.E. The second half of the discussion is more thematic, introducing Islamic urbanism, the caliphal court, commerce, slavery, the military, and scholarship and science. There is also a detailed discussion of the evolution of religious practices and beliefs. The last chapter is a short coda, describing the emergence in the tenth century of Fatimid Cairo and Umayyad Córdoba as rival imperial centers to Abbasid Baghdad.

The key themes are handled deftly, and the complexities of recent scholarship are presented in a balanced fashion. The discussion of the Qur'an succeeds in situating the text in its historical context while at the same time responding to current interest in questions of gender and jihad. The material on the cities of the Abbasid period in chapter 4 and the lucid introduction to Sunnism, Shi'ism, and Sufism presented in chapter 5 are particularly useful because often absent from works with an exclusively political focus. The weakest chapter is the last: there is a strong case for taking the story a little later than the mid-to-late tenth century. The flowering of Mediterranean Islamic civilization in Córdoba and Cairo is mentioned briefly, but nothing is said of contemporaneous developments in Bukhara and Samarkand; these Central Asian cities, and the work of Eastern scholars such as Ibn Sina and al-Biruni, should probably make an appearance in a primer on early Islamic civilization.

The inclusion of translated source extracts and images of material culture is an excellent idea. The selection of such texts is an almost impossible task, but those presented here connect well with themes discussed in the main text. Only the absence of poetry is regrettable, given its central place in Arab-Islamic culture. Seven images are rather few. Nonetheless, those chosen complement the text well, with the exception of a Seljuk-era incense burner; a Fatimid- or Buyid-era object would connect better with the book's chronological parameters. The combination of a clear and accurate narrative with these and the other resources makes this book a very good choice for an introductory course on Islamic history or for classes on early Islamic civilization in a broader medieval or world history context. The material would be suitable for advanced high school and introductory-level undergraduate students.

For a paperback at such a reasonable price, the book is well produced, with only a handful of very minor errors. The chronology gives the dates of the second civil war as 680–92, which is a little unusual; 683–92 is the convention. The Buyids appear in the chronology, whereas they are Buwayhids in the main text. In chapter 3 the date of the public declaration of the Abbasid revolution is wrongly 749 (it is correctly given as 747 in the chronology). On page 43 a reference to a nonexistent "illustration 10" appears to mean illustration 3. One slightly more important weakness is that in a few places the references are very light indeed. No doubt there is pressure not to burden such a book with too many footnotes, but passages such as the discussions of the Kharijites in chapter 5 would be improved by one or two references to the main surveys or to more specialist scholarship. It is also a little strange that Brill's excellent *Encyclopaedia of Islam* does not appear in the annotated bibliography.

The Rise of Islam is one of twelve volumes in the Greenwood Guides to Historic Events of the Medieval World, and it is very heartening to see early Islamic history in an introductory series on medieval history. However, most of the other books in the series appear to focus on aspects of the history of Latin Christendom in the eleventh to fifteenth centuries C.E. (The two other exceptions are *Genghis Khan and Mongol Rule* and *The Puebloan Society of Chaco Canyon*.) Further volumes on the transformation of the late Roman world and

on the Carolingian and Byzantine empires might serve to fill in the gaps between this volume and many of the others; more on the Islamic world in the tenth to fifteenth centuries (and perhaps also more on medieval African, Asian, and American subjects) would also be welcome additions.

ANDREW MARSHAM, University of Edinburgh

GINA L. GRECO and CHRISTINE M. ROSE, transs., *The Good Wife's Guide: Le ménagier de Paris. A Medieval Household Book*. Ithaca, N.Y., and London: Cornell University Press, 2009. Pp. xii, 367; black-and-white frontispiece and 1 black-and-white figure. \$69.95 (cloth); \$24.95 (paper).
doi:10.1017/S0038713410001612

The Good Wife's Guide (*Le ménagier de Paris*, ca. 1392) is a highly interesting medieval work: this anonymous compilation of instructive materials drawn from different branches of knowledge has all the good qualities of a summa, but it also has controversial messages about a woman's subservient roles in family and society. Dissatisfied with the early (bowdlerized and incomplete) translation by Eileen Power (1928, *The Goodman of Paris*), Gina L. Greco and Christine M. Rose offer not only a modern and integral rendition of the Old French text but also a reinterpretation of it. The two authors argue that the main focus of the book is not the figure of the husband-narrator but that of the teenage wife, for whose instruction the work was written. Greco and Rose's translation also engages in an implicit (and subtly polemical) dialogue with the first modern edition of *Le ménagier* (1864, by Baron J. Pichon, who published the book as a mere tract of mores and domestic economics) and with the more recent translations from 1981 (by Georgine E. Brereton and Janet M. Ferrier) and 1994 (by Karin Ueltschi). As those editions and translations omitted sizable portions of the original text (the tale of Griselda, the tale of Prudence, and the allegorical poem *Le chemin de povreté et de richesse*), Greco and Rose's scholarly work does justice to the medieval text by offering a complete translation of these portions in their original location within the extant manuscript. The value of *The Good Wife's Guide* as proposed by Greco and Rose also resides in a greater emphasis placed on the worth of *Le ménagier* as a literary work, an emphasis outlined in the critical introduction, where Rose provides an extended and sharp analysis of the tale of Griselda, seen as the centerpiece of the moral tract. Excellent is also the discussion of *Le ménagier* in the ampler context of conduct and household books, as illustrated by Christine de Pizan, Philippe de Mézières, and others. The book proper is divided in two main sections: the central one is the translation of the lengthy tract featuring the moral qualities necessary to a perfect young wife, with a strong accent placed on the requirement of absolute obedience. The tract is richly furnished with exempla of marriages where the abusive behaviors of husbands are chiefly meant to improve the characters of wives. The second section begins with a masterly translation of *Le chemin de povreté et de richesse*, continues with articles on domestic management and cooking, and ends with a treatise on raising and hunting with hawks, initially a part of the third section of *Le ménagier* (dealing with games of society), which is now lost or was never written. Another obvious merit of Greco and Rose's translation are the introductory notes preceding some of the articles, notes that serve as useful hermeneutic keys to an otherwise difficult text. Equally welcome and useful is the glossary of culinary terms at the end of the book. The paleographical and linguistic skills of the two translators are outstanding; they have covered a great variety of sources, ranging from penitential books and databases of medieval cookbooks to French equestrian clubs, farmers' markets in France, and Web sites on falconry and various animals. Gina L. Greco and Christine M. Rose have revalued a crucial book for medieval studies, presenting a complete and magisterially translated