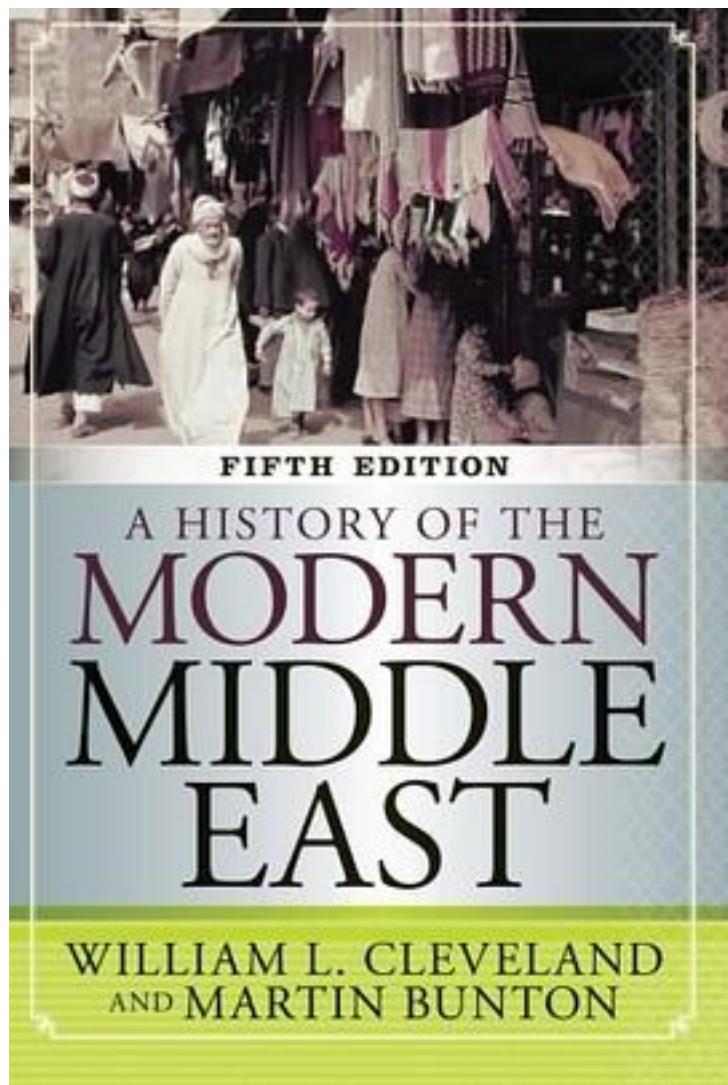


# A History of the Modern Middle East



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The religion of Islam is often viewed solely in terms of its origins in the barren and sparsely settled Arabian Peninsula. To be sure, it was in the Arabian city of Mecca that Islam was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in the years A.D. 610 to A.D. 632. However, during the century following Muhammad's death, the Arabs expanded out of the peninsula and conquered a world empire stretching from Spain to present-day Pakistan. The great capital cities of the first Arab-Islamic empires—Damascus and Baghdad—were not located in Arabia but in the long-settled lands of antiquity. To understand the development of Islam and Islamic civilization, we must recognize that the Middle East region into which Islam expanded was a rich repository of centuries of accumulated intellectual exchanges, religious experiences, and administrative practices. Islamic society built upon these existing foundations and was shaped by them. As Ira Lapidus has written, "The civilization of Islam, though born in Mecca, also had its progenitors in Palestine, Babylonia, and Persepolis."  
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