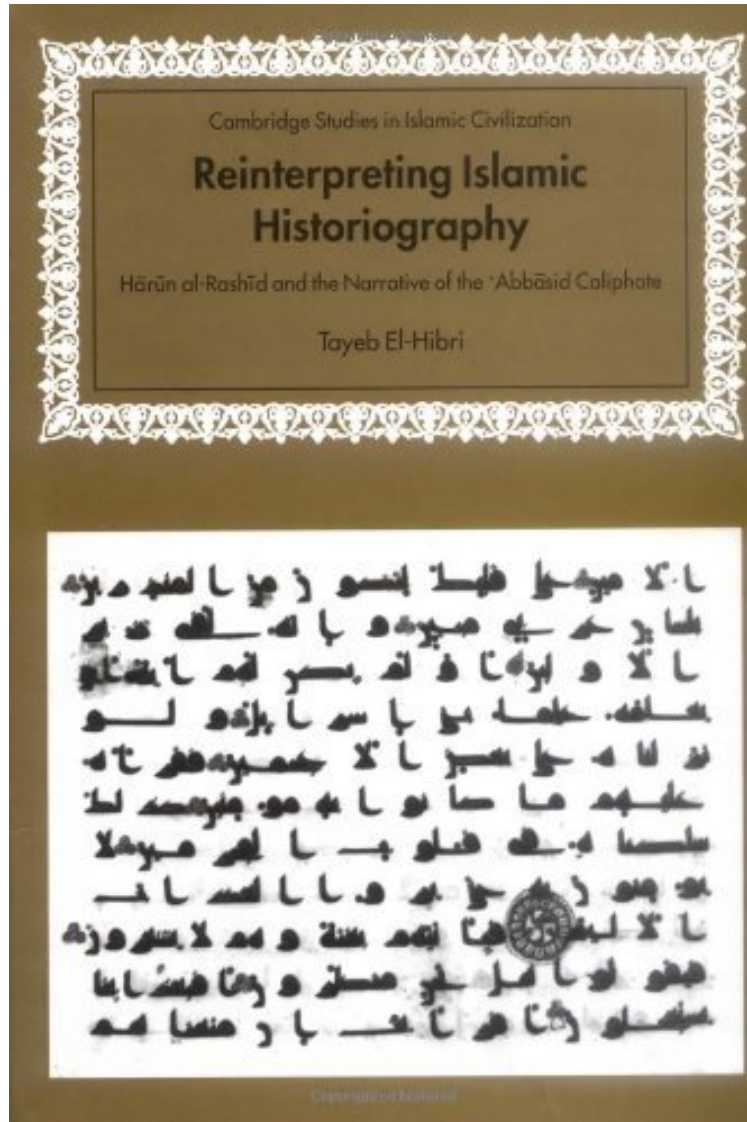


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Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography: Harun al-Rashid and the Narrative of the Abbasid Caliphate (Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization)

Tayeb El-Hibri

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Tayeb El-Hibri : Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography: Harun al-Rashid and the Narrative of the Abbasid Caliphate (Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography: Harun al-Rashid and the Narrative of the Abbasid Caliphate (Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization):

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. narrating caliphate from Rashid to Mutawakkil By Tron Honto El-Hibri has taken a new approach to the historical sources relating to the Abbasid caliphate in order to clarify the factual from the fanciful. I personally would summarize it as follows. The early historical narratives that we read were written without a concern for the most prominent questions modern intellectuals desire to be answered (e.g., political causation, economic realities, psychological motivations, etc.); therefore, the best way to approach these text before pursuing our questions is to ask what the aims and questions of the authors of these works were trying to accomplish and answer. Rather than these modern questions, the narratives of the Abbasid caliphate, he argues, were more interested in events from a moralizing and religious perspective. Thus, El-Hibri makes the convincing case that these are not factual recollections of political realities or events but are rather embellished narratives either serving ideology or in the service of demonstrating some religious moral. Taking individual accounts relating to caliphal reigns from Harun al-Rashid to al-Mutawakkil, he makes a convincing case for the 'literary character' of narratives while providing useful methodological tools for identifying these moralizing currents.

The history of the early 'Abbasid Caliphate has long been studied as a factual or interpretive synthesis of various accounts preserved in the medieval Islamic chronicles. Tayeb El-Hibri's book breaks with the traditional approach, applying a literary-critical reading to examine the lives of the caliphs. By focusing on the reigns of Harun al-Rashid and his successors, the study demonstrates how the various historical accounts were not in fact intended as faithful portraits of the past, but as allusive devices used to shed light on controversial religious, political and social issues of the period. The analysis also reveals how the exercise of decoding Islamic historiography, through an investigation of the narrative strategies and thematic motifs used in the chronicles, can uncover new layers of meaning and even identify the early narrators. This is an important book which represents a landmark in the field of early Islamic historiography.

"Al-Hibri's analysis is a careful argument for an 'Islamic salvation history'..." Journal of the American Academy of Religion. "...a significant contribution to contemporary scholarship of classical Islamic narratives. It stands out for its literary-critical approach to the question of intentions and meanings...students of both classical Islamic literature and historiography will find it useful and informative." Arab Studies Journal "El-Hibri...breaks with the traditional approach to the history of the Abbasid caliphate in the eighth and ninth centuries...He shows how decoding Islamic historiography through study of its narrative strategies and thematic motifs can uncover important new layers of meaning." Book News "...the book is very clearly written..." Religious Studies "Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography is a pioneering work filled with powerful arguments that challenge historians to read Abbasid chronicles in fresh ways, to embrace techniques of literary criticism, and to consider their own assumptions carefully." Kate Lang, Journal of Near Eastern Studies