

GARTH FOWDEN, *BEFORE AND AFTER MUHAMMAD, THE FIRST MILLENNIUM REFOCUSED*, PRINCETON – LONDON: PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2014, 230 PP. ISBN 9780691158532 (HBK).

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The first Millennium was a period of great changes and relevant historical events that shaped our present world. The events that took place during this period would configure not only the course of the Eastern history, where most of these events happened, but Western history as well.

The innovative approach to the historical analysis of the first Millennium, followed by Fowden in this work, is a revolutionary and most needed new perspective on the study of this historical period. As the subtitle in the book suggests, Fowden refocuses the way we understand the history of the East and West, reexamining the influence that specific events had in the history of ideas and the development of civilizations.

The main point of this work is the reconsideration of the role played by Islam, which traditionally had been treated as a new religion that was not relevant in Western history. Fowden shows the importance of Islam in the configuration of European history giving relevance to the cultural and religious context in which Islam emerged. The author also refers to Christianity and Judaism and some traditions related with the history of ideas such as the Greek philosophy, Manichaeism, among others, without this historical analysis cannot be understood.

The book is divided in seven chapters. The first chapter ('Including Islam', pp. 1-17) presents the content of the book. The author develops his own questions about the role played by Islam in History, which he will answer throughout the work. This introductory chapter allows Fowden to highlight the influence of

Islam in the development of history in the Mediterranean Basin as well as Western Europe. The author alludes to the work of Gibbon on the fall of the Roman Empire (1776-1788), which is considered by Fowden and other historians, as a pioneer of this type of analysis.

In the second chapter ('Time: beyond Late Antiquity', pp. 18-48), Fowden reconsiders the role that the scholars traditionally gave to Islam. The author also refers to different works in which the History of Europe has been considered from a new perspective. Most of these works, presented by art historians, offered new elements for the reinterpretation of history, which influences Fowden's research.

In the third chapter ('A new periodization: the first Millennium', pp. 49-91) Fowden describes his own idea that the first Millennium should be considered as a complete historical period instead of the fragmented periods in which this time had been traditionally divided by scholars. For the author, there are prophetic, scriptural and exegetical periods that could be identified in some ancient sources, which corroborate this idea of continuity. He explains this idea of continuity as a 'maturity' which is the result of a transformation process of history, in opposition to the idea of decline of civilizations. Fowden takes some examples from different authors (Greek, Syriac and Arabic) and historical events to show this idea of continuity through the first Millennium.

The fourth chapter ('Space: an Eastward Shift', pp. 92-126) deals with geographical issues on the space where the three monotheisms took place, referred by Fowden as the 'Mountain Arena'. The author describes his idea of a geographical context for the first Millennium, which he calls the 'Eurasian Hinge', composed by the Iranian Plateau, the Eastern Mediterranean as well as the 'Mountain Arena'. For the author, this context was where the Achaemenid Empire and the Caliphate of the Umayyads and Abbasids coexisted and evolved with Christian Rome, therefore influencing each other.

Inasmuch as the history of religions and ideas plays an important role in this book, the fifth ('Exegetical cultures 1: Aristotelianism', pp.127-163) as well as the sixth chapter ('Exegetical cultures 2: Law and religion', pp.164-197) centers on these issues. Fowden shows the influence that the Aristotelian ideas had in other traditions such as Christian and Islamic works. The author highlights the importance that the translation of the works of well-known authors into different languages (e.g., Syriac and Latin) had in the evolution of these ideas and to connect the history of East and West. In the sixth chapter Fowden continues

his discussion on the influence Aristotle's thought had in other traditions, however, he insists that these multiple traditions be considered as one.

In the seventh chapter ('Viewpoints around 1000: Tūs, Baṣra, Baghdad, Pisa', pp. 198-218) Fowden centers his analysis on four cities, which are significant examples of the transmission of knowledge and the development of new ideas during this period. He starts this chapter with a description of the Avestan religion, which allows him to introduce Firdawsi's work *Shāhnāma*. From Baṣra, Fowden highlights the encyclopedic writings of the Brethren of Purity that influenced Muslim thought of the 10th CE. In this context, Baghdad was relevant for the Caliphate, due to its role as center of knowledge, where different scholars met to propitiate new ideas, especially knowledge associated with a diversity of faiths. Pisa is for the author the city where Latin Europe comes back from a dormant period, fighting with Islam's heritage.

Finally, the author suggests a range of topics that could be analyzed further in depth each chapter ('Prospects for further research', pp. 219-224). Fowden assumes –laudably– here that there are some ideas in his work requiring a more in depth analysis and further development. In fact, in many of his commentaries, in this section of his book, the author is already developing some of these topics further.

This is an excellent work that reconsiders the traditional concept of history. The author, following an innovative approach, provides a new view of the history of ideas and religions during the transitional period between Late Antiquity and Medieval Age.

Furthermore, Fowden presents a work about historical view that could be adapted to present time in which a dialogue is necessary to establish better relations between different religions and cultures.