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The Ideological Uses of Early Islam

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Once largely the preserve of Orientalists and philologists, early Islamic history increasingly commands the interest of a wide audience of readers. *The First Muslims* is written to appeal to those unfamiliar with this history.¹ The book sets out to subvert Islamist readings of that history. This review takes issue with the author's understanding of early Islamic history, particularly the Qurʾān, the 'Islamic state' and jihad, and also raises a

number of more general questions about the ideological uses to which the early Islamic past can be put.

...

It should be stated at the outset that the challenge in writing for such an audience is considerable. Contemporary Muslim activists are frequently in the news, but early Muslims made history as tribesmen and sectarians in a geography (mostly western Arabia, Syria and Iraq) and period (the seventh and early eighth centuries) that lie...

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