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Robert G. Hoyland, *In God's Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of the Islamic Empire*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2015. Pp. x, 303. ISBN 978-0-19-991636-8.

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Robert Hoyland (NYU) challenges the common interpretation of the Arab conquests as a blindingly quick expansion that swept through the Middle East and North Africa and destroyed the existing Roman and Persian societies. In so doing, he uses nontraditional primary sources to reconstruct the views of contemporary non-Arabs or non-Muslims who were able to rapidly integrate themselves into high positions by converting to Islam and supporting the new governing structure. The Arab empire's absorption of various influences and existing social and political structures in its newly conquered lands allowed its armies to continue their operations with the assurance of some level of loyalty to the new power structures.

Hoyland opens a new perspective on the experiences of those most affected by the Arab invasion, many of whom thought the new conquerors would not stay long and that they could soon return to their prior social, political, or religious patterns of life. Indeed, some Arab armies recognized existing power structures, provided those in power paid the required taxes. Although the Arab armies fought in the name of Islam, Hoyland's non-Islamic sources reveal a variety of motives among their soldiers. Some fought for booty more than religion and non-Muslim soldiers had their own, not necessarily religious, motivations.

Besides the rise of Islam, the mid-sixth century witnessed a devolution of the existing power structures in the Middle East. Significant internal challenges degraded the Persian, Byzantine, and Chinese empires' ability to project power in the region. This in turn left an opening for a Yemini empire to flourish; it introduced monotheistic Judaism in the region, providing the conditions for Islam to grow into a powerful force.

Hoyland attributes the swift rise of Islam to the religion's allowance for sharing the material wealth acquired during the conquest. Letting soldiers enrich themselves at the expense of the conquered created a powerful incentive for recruits. Also, men in the newly conquered areas could convert and fight for the empire, receiving the same benefits as Muslim troops. Hoyland departs, too, from traditional accounts in his investigation of the fighters' motives. Religion was, of course, prominent among them, but the author argues persuasively that seeing it as the only reason soldiers fought and supported military campaigns is too simplistic and, furthermore, discounts the religious motivation of the enemies who fought against them.

Hoyland disputes the accepted narrative of the conquests in his discussion of Arab governance of newly conquered territories: in short, the previous governments were typically left intact with the understanding that they would pay their taxes and support the new regime. As the conquests lengthened the reach of the government in Medina, Arab influences began changing the previous Byzantine or Roman-inspired cultures. Arabic soon became the language of government and society in the Middle East, but local elites remained the same during the transition and smoothly adapted to and into Arab power structures.

During the mid-600s, though many faiths persisted in the empire, it became increasingly clear that those hoping to thrive in the new Arab governments must be or become Muslims. Islamic scholars have seen these developments as a model for other Muslim rulers to emulate. Hoyland believes this line of thought is a deficiency in traditional histories of the period, because it forestalls critical questions about the role of non-Islamic soldiers and civilians in government and society.

Conversion to Islam remedied many of the disabilities faced by non-Muslims or non-Arabs. And, too, as the Arab armies' thirst for manpower grew, social and religious distinctions gave way and Arab forces increasingly allowed non-Muslims to participate directly in the fighting and, in some cases, even to enter the officer corps.

As the expansion of the empire slowed, the Umayyad rulers sought different sources of revenue. They instituted a new tax on non-Muslims only (and sometime recent converts as well). As more of their subjects

converted to Islam, tax revenues dwindled, and the Umayyads instituted a land tax on Muslims and non-Muslims alike. This change in policy reflected another factor that, Hoyland argues, is overlooked in other histories—the ability of people to enter the new power structure. Conversion offered many benefits: once individuals joined Islam, they enjoyed a social status similar to that of Arab Muslims. Hoyland rightly stresses that this enabled the empire to capitalize on existing populations in a way that more culturally homogenous conquering forces could not.

People like Muqatil ibn Hayyan, Jahm ibn Safwan, and Abu Muslim are a good example of how quickly many of the conquered people became involved in the religious, cultural, and political life of the world of the conquerors.... Western scholars fixated on the speed of the Arab conquests, but what is much more remarkable is the rapid rate at which a new empire emerged from the ashes of the old. If one examines the family histories of some of the main actors of this new regime, both Arab and non-Arab, one can see that in only three generations their whole social situation and cultural orientation has [sic] changed beyond recognition. (206)

After a hundred years of conquests, Arab armies had reached natural barriers and well founded states that stopped the expansion of the empire and, with it, the booty system that funded their expeditions. This made the tax system even more critical to the functioning of the state and maintenance of the military. After its wildly successful phase of expansion, the Arab empire lost Spain and saw its rule threatened by the revolt of the Berbers in the Maghreb. Unlike Christianity, Islam lacked a well defined ruling hierarchy of clerical leaders to give legitimacy to any ruling faction.

The courage of those who fought in the Arab conquest made it successful, not necessarily the religious ideology they fought in support of. Arab nomadic warriors had fought the Byzantine and Persian empires before the rise of Islam and understood their enemies' weaknesses. Religion was an invaluable organizing tool, offering an ideology that permitted converts and the conquered to prosper even under an occupying force. Rapid assimilation of conquered peoples in the new power structures, together with the use of existing political entities to control new territories facilitated the breathtaking expansion but did not foster a durable loyalty to the new regime.

Robert Hoyland's shrewd use of hitherto neglected sources for the rise of Islam clarifies the perspective of the conquered and their interpretation of events rather than reiterating conventional accounts of Islamic expansion and government. *In God's Path* will appeal strongly to readers who want a more holistic view of the rise of Islam in the Middle East.