

Women's Lamentation and Death Rituals in Early Islam

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The ruptures that are consigned to the rise of Islam have been represented in Islamic historiography as having been fundamental. Muhammad's mission was to usher in a radical departure from the religious and social mores of pre-Islamic Arabia. A sweeping transformation of society was required. Muslims therefore, erected boundaries between the acceptable and the reprehensible and between an old and a new order, mobilizing, the concept of *jahiliyya* to create distance from certain types of non-Islamic practices and behavior, notably, death rituals.

This paper analyzes the ways in which Mourning rituals served as markers in the articulation of religious identities and the evolving conceptions of Islam in its early centuries. The excessiveness of the pre-Islamic female lamenters would be contrasted to the controlled, quietist attitude, which the women of the new faith were to follow upon the death of their loved ones. One of the paper's main conclusions is that women's roles in death rituals were critical in providing new normative guidelines, which were to be contrasted with pre-Islamic practices; and that their personality and participation in death rituals during this pivotal era served as markers for religious and ideological shifts constitutive of the period.

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