

The Muslim Brotherhood: Evolution of an Islamist Movement by Carrie Rosefsky Wickham.  
Princeton University Press 2013

Much has been written about the Muslim Brotherhood, especially since the terrorist attacks on America of 2001 when the West sought to understand the roots of Islamist extremism. The figure of Sayyid Qutb always looms large in such analyses, but because the Brotherhood had been proscribed in Egypt for so long the interest in them and their founder ideologues was somewhat specialised.

Since the downfall of the Mubarak regime, the democratic election of the Muslim Brotherhood to government and the Presidency, in the form of Mohammed Morsi, and that government's overthrow by the Egyptian military, however, the need to understand fully the Muslim Brotherhood, and its potential for regaining power, is paramount for anyone interested in the Middle East, and particularly aware of the real threat that an Egyptian implosion might pose to the region and the world.

Professor Carrie Rosefsky Wickham has written an outstanding history of the Brotherhood, from the days of its inception to the elections of 2011-12. The book is divided into nine chapters: Conceptualizing Islamist Movement Change; The Brotherhood's Early Years; The Brotherhood's Foray into Electoral Politics; The Wasat Party Initiative and the Brotherhood's Response; The Brotherhood's Seesaw between Self-Assertion and Self-Restraint; Repression and Retrenchment; The Brotherhood and the Egyptian Uprising; Egypt's Islamist Movement in Comparative Perspective; The Muslim Brotherhood in (Egypt's) Transition. There are also detailed notes and a solid bibliography.

Whether she writes of technical, political, ideological or theological matters, Carrie Wickham's text is elegantly and engagingly written; she acknowledges that even after two decades' study of the Brotherhood much still remains unknown, and against the backdrop of Egypt's current instability it is impossible to see how and in which direction matters will develop.

It would, however, appear self-evident that whatever transpires the Muslim Brotherhood will be key players, whether in government or on the street, and this excellent work of historical analysis will be essential reading for all those who want a grounded and informed understanding of events.

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