

Histories of the Middle East: Studies in Middle Eastern Society, Economy, and Law in Honor of A. L. Udovitch

*Roxani Eleni Margariti, Adam Sabra, and Petra M. Sijpesteijn, eds.
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This collection of papers, presented at a Princeton University conference held in May 2008, opens with an extensive bibliography of Abraham L. Udovitch's works and a preface detailing his scholarship on the medieval Islamic world's economic institutions, social structure, legal theory, and practices. The preface also highlights Udovitch's role and scholarly contributions, prolific publications and international academic collaboration, his respect for interdisciplinary examination and combination of various methods, as well as the diversity of his intellectual pursuits and teachings. The editors praise his visionary approach of focusing on seemingly unconnected texts to uncover the past, such as combining normative legal texts with narratives from diverse sources and genres. His students, as demonstrated in this volume, have adopted these methods. Udovitch's role in changing the writing of medieval Islamic history is lauded, as is his encouragement to explore new techniques and methodologies as well as his attention to the human experience within history.

Mark Cohen, whose introduction examines Udovitch's many roles (viz., scholar, leading historian, activist, and teacher) provides a biography focused on the professor's life and projects. The nine essays, loosely grouped into four unmarked categories, discuss the main areas of Udovitch's interests: (1) "Economic History" highlights the intersections between the legal theory of commerce and the commercial practices of institutions. It includes contributions by Petra Sijpesteijn and Michael Bonner; (2) "Social History" relates economic and social actions, underlines their thematic and methodological commonalities, and comprises essays by Adam Sabra and Jonathan Berkey; (3) "Mediterranean and Indian Ocean" deals with "Middle Eastern History in its Geographic contexts" and coalesces around what has been termed Udovitch's "Mediterraneanist" concerns, namely, interdenominational relations and negotiations bridging the gap between "rigid principles and supple accommodation." This includes contributions by Olivia Remie Constable, Yossef Rapaport, and Hassan Khalilieh; and (4) "Urbanism," the study of cities as sites of economic exchanges and interactions between individuals and groups, combining legal, political, ideological, and intellectual dimensions to form the realities of daily life. This includes two contributions by Boaz Shoshan and Roxani Margariti.

Apart from the first essay, all contributions are arranged chronologically (from the pre-Islamic to the Mamluk eras) and cover the western Mediterranean to the western Indian Ocean. Although there is no obvious division into units or sections, all emphasize a close reading and rereading of primary sources and different combinations of narrative genres. This combination of various types of readings and the use of documents produced by different religious communities is analyzed in order to synthesize an understanding of the areas under research in each category.

Jonathan P. Berkey's "There Are 'Ulama', and Then There Are 'Ulama': Minor Religious Institutions and Minor Religious Functionaries in Medieval Cairo" focuses on the ulama by analyzing their origin, rise, and development. He identifies biographical dictionaries as important tools to study social history and social reality, as well as *waqfiyas* (foundation deeds) and Geniza documents. Berkey examines the extent and limits of patronage for religious scholars in Mamluk society by looking at wage data extracted from the Sultan Hasan mosque's *waqfiyas* to arrive at an understanding of the learned class and their role as mediators between their communities and its rulers.

Bonner's "The Arabian Silent Trade: Profit and Nobility in the 'Markets of the Arabs'" explores pre-Islamic modes of exchange by looking at the pre-Islamic "silent trade." He cites evidence from Arabic poetry and prose and then compares it to later Muslim jurists' works and hadiths about the practice to understand it in the Islamic context. Bonner concludes that this particular trade was associated with ruling and status and assumed two forms: one that permitted rulers to control external commerce by means of bargaining techniques, and another one that allowed notables to evade reprobation and disgrace by means of a secrecy code.

In "Ringling Bells in Hafsid Tunis: Religious Concessions to Christian *Fondacos* in the Later Thirteenth Century," Constable studies the political negotiations of Christian and Muslim Mediterranean sovereigns through the talks between the Tunisian Hafsids and the Argonese crown regarding privileges for Catalan merchants (representative of all Christian traders), especially concerning religious freedom. She studies the treaty between them, extant in both Latin and Arabic, that was meant to last for fifteen years. Due to multifarious political reasons, however, it was reduced to a list of desiderata. This reality explains the generous privileges, ranging from the freedom of religious practice, the appointment of priests, facilities (e.g., churches or chapels, cemeteries, bathhouses, and gardens), the performance of last rites and permits of Christian burial, and the ringing of church bells. She concludes that although these generous concessions were not enforced, they were in line with diplomatic patterns and practices of that period.

Khalilieh, in his “An Overview of the Slaves’ Juridical Status at Sea in Romano-Byzantine, and Islamic Laws” investigates the treatment of slavery in the maritime legal traditions of the Mediterranean. He looks at sustenance, liability, the eligibility of slaves boarding ships, carriage, accommodation, injury, death, newborn slaves, and human jettison while indicating the interconnections and divergences among the different Mediterranean traditions of maritime law. This article, which fills a gap in legal theory and practice with regard to the status of slaves onboard ships, concludes that their legal status at sea and in ports remains relatively vague.

Margariti’s “Maritime Cityscapes: Lessons from Real and Imagined Topographies of Western Indian Ocean Ports” evaluates the historiography of western Indian Ocean port cities and medieval Indian Ocean exchanges. She focuses mainly on Arabic materials and assesses how urban topography reflects the place of any particular city in a broader network, the political and strategic competition between those cities, and the material reflections of social stratification within them. Aden, Suhar, Jeddah, Alexandria, Qusayr, Siraf, and al-Mukha are cited as examples.

In “Demonizing Zenobia: The Legend of al-Zabba’ in Islamic Sources,” David Powers deals with the formative dynamics of the Islamic narrative tradition. He compares different and diverse accounts of the famous Arab queen Zenobia (a.k.a. al-Zabba’) to separate history from legend and reach the kernel of truth. He describes the art of Arab storytelling using Arabic literary traditions to point out parallels between the narratives about ‘Adi b. Zayd b. Hammad, Jadhima b. al-Abrash, ‘Adi b. Nasr, and Raqash, as well as Bilqis and Zaynab bint Jahsh. He concludes that Islamic narratives were driven by theology and that more research is needed to identify and analyze the social factors behind them.

In “The View from the South: The Map of the Book of Curiosities and the Commercial Revolution of the Eleventh Century,” Rapaport covers the balance of trade and war in the maritime world of the eastern Mediterranean and the dynamics of the Mediterranean economy. He uses the “Book of Curiosities” to argue for the definitive naval origin of the information of the Aegean world’s topography and human geography. In addition, he proves Udovitch’s argument that Europe’s commercial revolution was inextricably tied to the increase of textile production and increased trade relations in the Mediterranean, despite the hostile relationship between the Byzantine and Fatimid empires. He concludes that the manuscript’s geographical information emerged from a historical moment when strategic competition continued even as commercial ties increased.

Sabra, in his “From Artisan to Courtier: Sufism and Social Mobility in Fifteenth-Century Egypt,” studies the political and social capital of Shams al-Din Muhammad al-Hanafi, a prominent Cairene Sufi master, by linking his intellectual biography to his political influence and thereby stressing his role as a link between his devotees and the Mamluk political elite. By subjecting the hagiographical portrait of this important Shadhili mystic to historical analysis, Sabra uncovers the political and economic dimensions of the patronage system that centered around him and extended from the city to the countryside. In “Mini-Dramas by the Water: On Irrigation Rights and Disputes in Fifteenth-Century Damascus,” Shoshan looks at the adjudication of water rights in Mamluk Damascus. He uses the diary of a fifteenth-century Damascene judge to paint a vivacious picture of urban and suburban topography and intergroup dynamics and negotiations of water rights. The last essay, “Army Economics: An Early Papyrus Letter Related to ‘Ata’ Payments” by Sijpesteijn, inspects the development and first expression of Muslim institutions by examining an early eighth-century papyrus about the Umayyad dynasty’s allocation of government stipends and pensions in newly conquered territories via redistributing the wealth from the conquests.

Despite the loose division in the introduction, the volume has no formal classification and the contributions seem to be published in alphabetical order. The articles by Sijpesteijn, Sabra, and Berkey echo their professor’s interests in medieval Egypt, being a Mediterranean country, while Margariti’s contribution can also be fitted into the urbanism part. The thematic link among the essays is loose, following Udovitch’s diverse interests. Still, the volume is a stimulating collection, true to the honoree’s methodology. It raises interesting questions and fills research gaps with excellent individual essays that form an extensive homage to Udovitch’s scholarship and model. The reproduction of maps of Rapaport’s contribution and the photo of the papyrus used by Sijpesteijn at the end enliven the volume.

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