

**The Islamic Scholarly Tradition: Studies in History,  
Law, and Thought in Honor of Professor  
Michael Allan Cook**

*Asad Q. Ahmed, Behnam Sadeghi, and Michael Bonner, eds.  
Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011. 385 pages.*

This collection comprises fourteen papers delivered at a December 2010 conference held at Princeton University in honor of Michael A. Cook, as well as a preface and an introduction. Its four sections are designed to reflect the prin-

cial areas of Near Eastern and Islamic studies to which Cook has contributed: “Early Islamic History,” “Early Modern and Modern Islamic History,” “Juridical and Intellectual History,” and “Reinterpretations and Transformations.” The papers cover a broad geographic range from al-Andalus to Central Asia, and an extensive disciplinary range, with studies of calendars, conquest, *fatāwā*, *tafsīr*, and logic, among other subjects.

Part 1 begins with Michael Bonner’s “‘Time Has Come Full Circle’: Markets, Fairs, and the Calendar in Arabia before Islam,” which addresses the intercalation of Arabia’s pre-Islamic calendar and the utility of sources for social history in dealing with this topic. He extends his confirmation of intercalation to a discussion of trade and social activity, noting that the shift to the Islamic lunar calendar indicated a shift to a new moral and social order and a true “revolution” in breaking with the past. In “The *Wasiyya* of Abū Hāshim: The Impact of Polemic in Premodern Muslim Historiography,” Najam Haider focuses on reports of the alleged testament (in 98/716-17) of Abu Hashim in which, written just before his death, he transferred his imamate and leadership to the Abbasid Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Abdullah. Relying primarily on Jacob Lassner’s approach to early material of this kind, which focuses on political propaganda and ideological debates, the author highlights the competition among reports of this testament and, later on in the Mamluk period, the processes of crafting a historical narrative that removed the polemical aspects. His study exemplifies the use of an alternative approach to early Islamic history, one that focuses on what compilations of historical reports tell us about contemporaneous political situations and religious doctrine, as well as about the historiographic methods of pre-modern historians.

Petra Sijpesteijn’s “Building an Egyptian Identity” describes the “active process of islamicization” (p. 86) in the third/ninth-fourth/tenth centuries that brought such pre-Islamic, ancient Egyptian monuments as the “Old Lady’s Wall” into a new Islamic memory of conquest projected into the past. In a similar vein, Maribel Fierro’s “The Battle of the Ditch (al-Khandaq) of the Cordoban Caliph ‘Abd al-Rahmān III” examines the appropriation of the Prophet’s Battle of the Ditch by Muslim historians to interpret, with either approbation or recrimination, the Spanish Umayyad caliph’s battle.

Nancy Khalek’s “Dreams of Hagia Sophia: The Muslim Siege of Constantinople in 674 CE, Abū Ayyūb al-Ansārī, and the Medieval Islamic Imagination,” which concludes part 1, explores how this figure’s life story shifted from “biography to hagiography, from Arabic to Ottoman,” and eventually became “integral to the story of the fall of Constantinople” in 1453 (p. 133).

She skillfully argues that the Ottoman conflation of General Maslama ibn Abd al-Malik with Abu Ayyub al-Ansari maneuvers the truth of either man's life into the ideal position for an empire "struggl[ing] over the territory of religious imagination" (p. 145).

Leading off part 2 is Adam Sabra's "'The Second Ottoman Conquest of Egypt': Rhetoric and Politics in Seventeenth-Century Egyptian Historiography." His essay draws our attention to an ideological clash between political rhetoric and historical narrative in accounts – curiously intertwined and full of historical intrigue as to their composition as well – of a mutiny put down by Ottoman forces in the early seventeenth century. Also challenging reigning narratives of Ottoman history, Jane Hathaway uses her "Habeşi Mehmed Agha: The Chief Harem Eunuch (Darüssade Ağası) of the Ottoman Empire" to describe a period of change in the Ottoman Empire represented through accounts of the life, patronage activity, and tomb complex of the initial First Chief Harem Eunuch of the Ottoman palace of the later sixteenth century. Samer Traboulsi, in his "'I Entered Mecca ... and I Destroyed All the Tombs': Some Remarks on Saudi-Ottoman Correspondence," goes well beyond the purported sender (Su'ud ibn 'Abd al-Aziz) and the intended Ottoman recipient (Selim III) of a letter declaring the former's takeover of the Hijaz in the early nineteenth century. He demonstrates quite intriguingly how it was likely the combination of a South Arabian pilgrim's report of the takeover and new stipulations regarding the yearly hajj, as well as Viscount George Annesley's attempt to report on the situation in Arabia, that produced the provocative letter that showed up in Arabic-language sources over a century after it was "sent."

The first contribution to part 3, Nurit Tsafir's "The 'Āqila in Hanafi Law: Some Preliminary Notes," examines the peculiarly Hanafi understanding of an *'āqilah* – a person's agnatic relatives who are collectively liable to pay blood-money – as a man's military cohort. She then shows how this idea survived in various regional Hanafi opinions over the generations as a professional cohort collective liability in cases of homicide and/or bodily harm committed by a group member. Nimrod Hurvitz's "Legal Doctrines, Historical Contexts, and Moral Visions: The Case of Sectarians in the Courts of Law" looks at the formative and early post-formative moral-legal treatment of the testimony of "sectarians" in courts of law. He concludes that the doctrine concerning their testimony was a result of significant social change. Furthermore, Hurvitz observes that a given jurist's legal doctrine was informed by his moral assumptions, and thus the competing doctrines concerning the sectarians' testimony are innately different due to the competing moral assumptions of their representative jurists. This latter point is particularly

noteworthy as a comment on the role of competing moral and legal epistemologies in Islamic thought.

Justin Stearns rounds out part 3 with his “Legal Status of Science in the Muslim World in the Early Modern Period: An Initial Consideration of *Fatwās* From Three Maghribī Sources,” which reveals that most of the jurists he reads generally approve of the study and practice of science and medicine. Furthering our understanding of the dynamism of post-eleventh-century Islamic law, he shows that jurists even made use of “both legal and scientific precedents in order to craft authoritative opinions that reflect both the jurists’ interpretation of the intention of the scriptural sources, and the exigencies of the Muslim community” (p. 287).

In the volume’s final section, Karen Bauer’s “‘I Have Seen the People’s Antipathy to this Knowledge’: The Muslim Exegete and His Audience, 5th/11th–6th/12th Centuries” presents a more nuanced picture of the uses and prescription of *tafsīr* works during this period, showing us how the authors intended (or not) their works to be read. Of particular importance is her derivation of the role of *tafsīr* in higher education, even the *madrasah*, and her classification of *tafsīr* literature – augmenting Walid Saleh’s work in this – into categories that begin to help us better understand their authors’ intentions and purposes. Leor Halevi’s “*Lex Mahomethi*: Carnal and Spiritual Representations of Islamic Law and Ritual in a Twelfth-Century Dialogue by a Jewish Convert to Christianity” brings to light the purposeful tension between the author Petrus Alfonsi’s interlocutors, Moses the Jew and Petrus the Christian, in creating an accurate and sympathetic account of Islam and its doctrines on the one hand (Moses), and a polemical substantiation of Christianity’s superiority to Islam on the other (Petrus).

The volume’s final article, Asad Q. Ahmed’s “Systematic Growth in Sustained Error: A Case Study in the Dynamism of Post-Classical Islamic Scholasticism,” explores how significant shifts in the formal logical systems of the post-classical period, derived from erroneous interpretation inherent to “the internal dialectics of scholastic texts” (p. 348), continued without correction because no one was reading the original texts (in this case, of Ibn Sina) and eventually created a coherent new logical tradition. Like Stearns and Bauer’s work, an important consequence of Ahmed’s study is to demonstrate the continued activity and vitality of the Islamic intellectual tradition even in the post-classical period. Ahmed’s article ends with material for specialists or those interested in further details, including a table making clear the erroneous understanding of the subject term (pp. 356–62); an annotated translation of al-Amidi on Ibn Sina (pp. 363–71); and the Arabic text of al-Amidi (pp. 372–77).

Each contribution contains footnotes and a bibliography, although bibliographic organization is not standardized. The volume features one map of Arabia's pre-Islamic markets (p. 47); a chart of polemical comparison (p. 71) and an appendix of sources (pp. 78-81) for Haider's contribution; an image of the Topkapi Palace as depicted in Lokman's *Hünernāme* (p. 185); photographs of the Habeşi Mehmed Agha Mosque's exterior (p. 187) and interior (p. 188); and color photos of the honoree himself (p. ii). It ends with an index of all the contributions. Perhaps most usefully, the editors also include Cook's complete bibliography (pp. xvii-xix).

Dale J. Correa  
Department of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies  
New York University, New York City, NY