Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts: Essays in Honor of Professor Patricia Crone

Behnam Sadeghi, Asad Q. Ahmed, Adam Silverstein, and Robert Hoyland, eds.
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This book is an important addition to the by-now rich collection of edited volumes and monographs published by Brill under the heading "Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and Texts." It contains twenty-two essays written by leading scholars, historians, and philologists in honor of their late colleague

and teacher Patricia Crone (professor of Islamic history, Institute for Advanced Study), who passed away a few months after the publication of the volume. For students of Islam, Crone needs no introduction. Her scholarship has marked the field through its erudition as well as its distinctive boldness and controversial nature that, at times, drew virulent criticism. Perceived by some as arrogant and hasty, by others as incisive and daring, she was not one to mince words. This volume, starting with an intimate "memoir" by Judith Herrin and concluding with an appreciative scholarly review by Chase Robinson, tends to overlook Crone's divisive personality and does much to present her as an ideal academic and mentor. She was, as the editors lyrically phrase it, a "seeker and lover of truth."

Although the volume is not thematically organized, most of the contributions deal with law, politics, and identity, which were Crone's primary research interests. They frequently engage topics addressed in passing in Crone's own work, notably *Roman, Provincial, and Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), *Medieval Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), and *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). However, the meticulousness of the historical research and the methodological difficulties in the field often allow only for inconclusive results.

In view of the wider debate on the sources of the Shari'ah, G. Hawting and D. M. Eisenberg seek to complicate the origins of non-refundable advance payment ("earnest money") by providing a comparative study of the practice in Islamic and Jewish laws. P. Pavlovitch and D. S. Powers, in a collaborative work that will be of particular interest to students of hadith, endeavor to date a specific prophetic saying related to inheritance guidelines. In doing so, they rely on the well-established *isnād-cum-matn* approach, but also pay attention to datable elements from the transmission (*matn*) itself in an effort to reconstruct the different layers of its composition. C. Melchert suggests, against Crone, the centrality of Kufa and Basra in early Islamic legal controversies, as reflected in Ibn Abi Shayba's *Muṣannaf*. K. Bauer offers a social historical approach to *tafsīr* by studying how the formulation of marriage contracts might have been influenced by an exegetical gloss to Q. 2:228 attributed to al-Dahhak. She explores, in particular, the origin of the formula *ḥuṣn al-ṣubḥah* (good companionship) that qualifies the husband-wife relationship in many medieval marriage contracts and considers to what extent it departs from the jurists' analogy of marriage to ownership.

On politics, D. Tor provides an illustration to the case made by Crone and Hind in *God's Caliph* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986)

that the caliph's religious authority gradually waned under the pressure of an emerging class of religious scholars by looking at the figure of al-Fudayl b. 'Iyad and his relationship to Harun al-Rashid. M. Gordon turns his attention to Abbasid intra-imperial power relations and ponders on why Ibn Tulun, the powerful governor of Egypt, remained loyal to the central authority in Bagdad. C. Wickham engages in a cross-cultural exploration of memory construction by administrators in Byzantium, the Islamic caliphate, and China. Looking at the *Nishwār al-Muḥāḍarah*, a tenth-century *adab* work addressed to the secretarial class, Wickham remarks that military events, which typically center on rulers and their might, are conspicuously absent from Muslim public memory, thus highlighting once more the Abbasid caliphs' declining authority.

Six contributions grapple with questions of identity in Islamic history, addressing wide-ranging issues through a reflexive engagement with the categories used by historians to make sense of the past. M. Mavroudi calls for a re-examination of the triangular relationship between Ancient Greek, Byzantine, and Arab civilizations. Debunking the clearly loaded question of who "saved" the Greek heritage, she makes a case for the persistence of classical Greek education in both Byzantium and Arab-administered lands to conclude that "nobody 'saved' them single-handedly" (p. 327). Addressing the thorny issue of the relationship between early Islam and the previous two Biblical religions, G. Stroumsa provides an overview of the different – and so far inconclusive – attempts to contextualize the emergence of Islam within a predominantly Jewish or Christian context. While the case Stroumsa makes for a "Jewish Christian" milieu remains tentative, this contribution, penned by a leading scholar of Jewish and Christian thought in Late Antiquity, represents a welcome transdisciplinary perspective on a question that continues to preoccupy the field.

Two articles focus on the Andalusian experience. D. Wasserstein follows four generations of one particular Jewish family, that of Yehoseph Ibn al-Naghrila, the vizier of Granada's ruler, and the pretext for public discontent that led to the 1066 Granada massacre. Through biographic historiography, Wasserstein intends to highlight the ambiguity of Jewish prosperity in Muslim lands, for while Judaism thrived under Islam and was, in his view, literally "saved" by the coming of the new religion (p. 526), Jews, unlike Christians, remained vulnerable precisely because they had the means of maintaining a distinct identity. D. Abulafia, emphasizing the stakes involved in the modern myth of the Andalusian "convivencia," calls for a dispassionate examination of the different experiences of Jews, Christians, and Mus-

lims living in medieval Spain under Muslim or Christian rule. His panoramic treatment of the topic reads as a useful; however, this quick introduction leaves one wishing for more.

Two more contributions examine the ethnic plurality that characterized the Abbasid world. M. Cooperson draws attention to the historical contingency of identity, an issue that became painfully evident to the Arab minority when language, religion, and culture failed to serve as straightforward cues for determining ethnicity. The blurring of ethnic identities resulted in Arab distress but also encouraged creative responses, as can be seen in al-Mas'udi's (896-956) universal history. M. Larkin provides a second case-study of identity reformulation in the eastern Islamic lands through the figure of al-Mutannabi (915-65). As a proud Arab poet who wrote eulogies for the Persianate Buyids, he found himself embedded in complex personal and collective cultural negotiations. Larkin argues that it might have been partially for that reason that his poetry is markedly innovative.

Another set of articles can be described as belonging to the history of ideas. K. Van Bladel traces the ways through which Indian science, particularly astronomy, reached the Abbasid court of al-Mansur (r. 754-75). The journey was surprisingly indirect, with the Chinese Tang dynasty (618-907) playing a central role. Kh. El-Rouayheb addresses a fascinating offshoot of the Ash'ari doctrine of theological voluntarism. If God is not bound by human understandings of right and wrong and acts are ethical only insofar as they respect the divine commands and prohibitions, does God have to tell the truth? El-Rouayheb reviews how prominent medieval thinkers addressed this philosophical problem. Also in the field of theology, F. Zimmermann exposes the similarities between early *kalām* rhetorical strategies and Greek dilemmatic arguments in which opponents are cornered through a series of closed questions. He argues that early Muslim theologians naturally came to rely upon what must have been a living tradition of Greco-Syriac disputation.

Reflecting Crone's commitment to a close reading of primary sources, a number of articles translate and analyze little-known manuscripts. R. Hoyland examines two brief letters that document Muslim-Christian relationships in the early Umayyad period. Dated to the 680s and conserved on a papyrus found in Nessana (the Negev desert), the letters convey an unequivocal rebuke from a regional authority to local administrators who wronged the native Christian population, probably in regards to tax collection. The sender of the letters reminds the local officials of "the protection of God and the protection of his messenger" ("*dhimmat allah wa dhimmat al-rasūl*") granted to the inhabitants. Such an expression contrasts with the significantly less binding "*dhimma* of

you and your fathers" that was later accorded to Christians and Jews in exchange for paying the *jizyah*. On this basis, Hoyland suggests that the rights of non-Muslims under Arab administration were initially more strongly upheld than they came to be within a few decades of the conquest.

D. Stewart translates and analyzes an eleventh-century Shi'i commentary on Q. 9:122 that addresses the role of jurists in relation to the Occulted Imam. A. Silverstein discusses a little-known Samaritan version of the Biblical Book of Esther composed in the fourteenth century. Tracing the author's sources and attempting to determine his aims, Silverstein sheds some light on the bitter Jewish-Samaritan rivalry. B. T. Krieger edits, translates, and discusses a Nusayri manual written in Syria in 1889 that promotes practices such as wife-sharing and orgiastic nights. Krieger believes it is genuine, but concedes that more research is needed to fully apprehend its significance.

Last but not least, J. Witztum's article stands on its own. It is a careful study of two sets of parallel narratives in the Qur'an that recall the fall of Adam on one hand, and the Israelites' worship of the golden calf on the other. Witztum breaks new ground in charting the plausible evolution of these stories in the Qur'an by paying special attention to the divergences between the different accounts and by stressing the need to address the *sūrah* as a literary unity. Moreover, his well-argued call for a more sustained engagement with scholarship produced in Muslim lands is worthy of note. Indeed, it offers – in the eyes of this reviewer at least – a more promising response to some challenges facing Islamic studies than Chase Robinson's attempt to re-cast Patricia Crone as a post-Orientalist pioneer.

Robinson's provocative "Crone and the End of Orientalism," which closes the volume, is founded on a surprisingly restrictive understanding of Orientalism as an institution whose essential shortcomings were "self-serving consensus" and "disciplinary inertia." In his view, Crone's achievement was to provoke "stimulating controversy" and open up the field to exciting new ideas and hypotheses. Although Crone undoubtedly did much to liberate the field from its intellectual conservatism, she contributed little to problematize another kind of insularity, that of western-based scholars discussing eastern subjects. The political dimensions that inevitably accompany Occidental discourses on Islam are certainly not ignored by Robinson. He recognizes that the "stakes are high" and that "[i]n some respects, these are the best and worst of times for Islamic studies" (p. 611). However, the attitude he suggests that scholars adopt, following Crone's example, to transcend that insularity is disconcertingly unilateral: "For the scholar, what better way to reduce the 'tension' between 'historian and believer' than to highlight the constructed and

contingent nature of orthodoxy in general and the Sunni synthesis in particular?" (pp. 613-14). That Robinson does not deem it necessary to further scrutinize such an understanding of the scholar's mission would indicate that a certain kind of "Orientalism" definitely lives on.

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