

Book Reviews

MUHSIN J. AL-MUSAWI, *The Islamic Context of The Thousand and One Nights* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009). Pp. x, 334.

REVIEWED BY ROBERT IRWIN

Muhsin J. al-Musawi is the author of several previous studies on literature, including *Scheherazade in England: A Study of Nineteenth-Century English Criticism of the Arabian Nights* (Washington, 1981). That book concluded by quoting an article by the American scholar of Hebrew Crawford Howell Toy in the *Atlantic Review* of June 1889. Toy characterised *The Thousand and One Nights* as follows: “The book is both the history of Moslem culture and the record of Moslem *esprit* in the palmy days of the Arabs in Asia; it gives a truer as well as a more vivid picture of their life than all the ordinary histories combined.”

A study of the Islamic context of *The Thousand and One Nights* would in principle be very welcome. The relevant article on “Religion” in *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, edited by Ulrich Marzolph and Richard van Leeuwen, noted the omnipresence of religion in the stories. “Religion governs the moral codes, the social relations, and the imaginations of the heroes. It is part of a social and individual notion of normality that is neither unduly stressed nor questioned.” The article went on to discuss fate, trust in God, proselytizing stories, and inter-faith relations. Clearly the subject is an important one and hitherto rather neglected.

There is much of value in al-Musawi’s book. He relates themes and practices in the stories to those found in other literary sources including *Kalīlah wa-Dimnah*, the essays of al-Jāhīz, the table talk of al-Tanūkhī, the dos and don’ts of *hisbah* manuals, the law books, and other sources. The idea that the thoroughly urban tales of the *Nights* only became popular in Europe as that continent became more urban is attractive. The hitherto neglected importance of such motifs as tree climbing (this in the frame story) is brought out. It is also pleasant to learn of the lady mentioned by al-Jāhīz, who had two of the attributes of Paradise, “coolness and width.” One looks forward to al-Musawi’s forthcoming annotated bibliography of *The Arabian Nights*.

In *The Islamic Context of The Thousand and One Nights*, al-Musawi has set out to develop Toy’s verdict on the *Nights* in considerable detail. But there are some problems. The first is that al-Musawi seems afraid of being too easily understood. Consider, for example, this sentence: “The concomitance of the judicial and the narrative is significant here, as in many other cases, since jurisprudence is predicated on factual grounds that demand an answer in keeping with Islamic teaching



Book reviews ©2011 by review authors.

DOI: [10.6082/M1PC30HP](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1PC30HP). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M1PC30HP>)

DOI of Vol. XV: [10.6082/M10G3H74](https://doi.org/10.6082/M10G3H74). See <https://doi.org/10.6082/JJT7-Q854> to download the full volume or individual articles. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY). See <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html> for more information about copyright and open access.

from the prime period of its social and economic expansion and growth.” Or this one: “The premise falls short of Ibn Khaldun’s historical and social perspective, for the association with the Islamic warning against the accumulation of riches and the neglect of piety and faith implies resignation and an acceptance of consequences.”

Another problem is a pervasive vagueness about chronology. He repeatedly states that the oldest surviving manuscript of the *Nights*, the one used by Antoine Galland, dates from the thirteenth or fourteenth century, but, as I suggested in *The Arabian Nights: A Companion* and as Heinz Grotzfeld has conclusively demonstrated in essays about the endings of the *Nights* and about numismatic evidence within the *Nights*, the manuscript in question must have been compiled in the late fifteenth century. At times al-Musawi wants to use the *Nights* stories to illustrate Abbasid custom and practice and, correspondingly, to use Abbasid literature to highlight or clarify themes in the stories of the *Nights*. At other times he prefers to set the stories in an Ayyubid or Mamluk context, but most often he prefers to generalize about a changeless Islamic society. It is a pity he has neglected the painstakingly researched studies by Patrice Coussonnet on the dating of individual stories, most notably in *Pensée mythique, idéologie et aspirations sociales dans un conte des Mille et une nuits* (Paris, 1989). (That particular study dated the composition of “The Story of the Great Merchant ‘Alī of Cairo, Son of Ḥasan the Jeweller of Baghdad” to the fifteenth century. In another study Coussonnet conclusively dated the story of “Nūr al-Dīn and Shams al-Dīn” to the early fifteenth century.)

It is difficult to say how much stories that are ostensibly set in the Abbasid period do actually represent Abbasid realities. In an essay entitled “From History to Fiction: The Tale Told by the King’s Steward” (published in volume three of Muhsin Mahdi’s edition of the core tales as they appear in the manuscript of the *Nights* from which Antoine Galland translated), Mahdi pointed that while that particular tale, notionally set in the Abbasid period, might have pleased an audience in the Mamluk period, it would not have satisfied a tenth-century audience for “they would have found it silly and cold, not because they lacked imagination or were ignorant, but because they knew too much. It was a tale about their city and history and institutions and customs, and it was ridiculously inaccurate.” Although al-Musawi points to the importance of the list of foodstuffs carried by the porter who has been hired for that purpose by the lady of Baghdad, he has not noticed how many of those foodstuffs have a Syrian or Egyptian provenance. Rather, he takes the list as evidence of nostalgia for Abbasid affluence.

Noting the absence of Shi‘is in the stories, al-Musawi argues that “the material as transmitted and accumulated obviously took a final form sometime in the twelfth century when Fatimid sentiments lingered only among the general populace but rarely in elitist scholarship, which subscribed to the official discourse.” First, I do not think it at all obvious that the *Nights* took final form in the twelfth century. That



would have to be demonstrated. Secondly, the official discourse in Egypt was Fatimid and Isma‘ili for almost three quarters of the twelfth century. Because so much of the discussion in *The Islamic Context of the Thousand and One Nights* takes place in a chronological limbo, there is little that is specifically relevant to students of Mamluk social history.

The discussion is concentrated on the stories found in the Galland manuscript and therefore also in the Mahdi edition and the Haddawy translation. Only occasionally does al-Musawi focus on the additional stories that are found in the Bulaq edition. This means that there is little or no discussion of stories which were almost certainly composed in the Mamluk period, such as the crime stories featuring Crafty Dalilah and Mercury ‘Ali, or “The Man of Upper Egypt and His Frankish Wife.” According to al-Musawi, the Bulaq edition of 1835 “demonstrates the intervention of compilers, editors, and redactors in matters relating to the Islamic context of the tales. Especially in religious matters and poetic extracts, this edition can authenticate or debate the nature of poetic misreading or distortion and its historical relevance to the primacy of specific Islamic laws in certain periods.” But this still leaves it unclear why the Bulaq version is to be preferred to the more comprehensive Calcutta II edition of 1839–42.

A close focus on religious issues in the stories would have been welcome, but al-Musawi uses “Islam” in a broad sense to encompass the culture of a vast region over many centuries. In this very broad sense, even wine drinking and adultery can be seen as Islamic. With reference to the sifting and collating of the tales, al-Musawi writes that “the outcome is a cultural repertoire, an inventory of many directions, that may be defined metaphorically as Islamic to account for life as it was desired or made available in talks, anecdotes, and, in some cases, lived.”

At several points Musawi touches on Sufi themes in the *Nights*. Referring to the three tales told by one-eyed men that are boxed within “The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies,” he argues that the “emphasis placed on the figure of the *qalandar* and the transfer into the *Thousand and One Nights* of this characterization and naming could be used to date this set of Baghdadi tales to between the eleventh and twelfth centuries.” Specifically he relates it to Aḥmad al-Ghazālī’s brand of Sufism, with its combination of spirit and love, the internalization of “blame” and regret in surrender and devotion to the Beloved. But if one actually reads the stories told by the three one-eyed mendicants, they seem to be devoid of any spiritual content. Though the mendicants have repented their various importunities, there is no indication that they have turned to the “Beloved” or are following any specific spiritual discipline. Al-Musawi suggests that the mendicants finally attain “total contentment upon the immersion in the divine beatitude,” but the stories they tell, tales of lost love and missed opportunities, do not suggest contentment at all.



It seems unlikely that medieval readers would have discovered Sufi messages in the tales the mendicants related about subterranean love and mutilation. So how Sufi are the alleged “*qalandars*”? It is true that their shaven heads, beards, and eyebrows certainly conform to the appearance of the *qalandar* dervishes as attested in other sources, but the author of their stories seems to have had little actual knowledge of or interest in the ways of the *qalandars*. On a point of chronology, the *qalandar* movement seems to have originated in Khurasan in the eleventh century, but only became widespread in the western Islamic lands in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, so the specific linkage to al-Ghazālī’s Sufism seems implausible. As al-Musawi notes elsewhere, the second *qalandar* claims to have studied jurisprudence in a book by al-Shāṭibī, and this scholar died in 1388.

“What holds the collection together, and what upholds the concept of nationhood, Islamic or Arab, is the Islamic context,” according to al-Musawi, but this is studiously vague, for he never explains what “concept of nationhood” is embodied in the extremely diverse stories. Indeed, it is doubtful whether it is appropriate to think in terms of nations in pre-modern times. It is of course a chronological paradox that this collection of Islamic tales is set within a frame story about Shahriyar, Shahzaman and Shahrazad that is situated in Sassanid times. Moreover, within this frame story there is a boxed set of stories (the Hunchback cycle) that are told to the king of China, who, it is implied, is a Muslim.

As his quotation of Crawford Howell Toy may suggest, al-Musawi tends to quote the judgements of nineteenth-century figures such as Leigh Hunt, Bernard Cracroft, Walter Bagehot, Thomas Carlyle, and James Mew as authoritative, but none of these writers knew Arabic or had made any serious study of the *Nights* and several of them were mediocrities. For the most part, their essays on the subject were under-researched, bookmanly chats designed to entertain a general readership. Leigh Hunt, in particular, was a specialist in enthusing in a perfectly uncritical way about the joys of reading. (As the apparently sunny and uncritical Harold Skimpole, he featured in Dickens’s *Bleak House*.) In a discussion of “The City of Brass” al-Musawi cites a not very interesting article published in the *Spectator* in 1882 with reference to the alleged “mysticism of the Desert” in this story. Surely, it would have been more useful to have taken into consideration the views of Mia Gerhardt, Andreas Hamori, or Abdelfattah Killito?

Al-Musawi’s enthusiasm for Victorian litterateurs sits oddly with his bleak view that to translate something or to study something from another culture is to appropriate it. “Galland made the East a property available to be possessed, accommodated and plundered.” Though the British empire later “appropriated” Arab Islamic culture in the nineteenth century, al-Musawi declares that earlier Arab empires did not appropriate the cultures of others, but it is hard to follow his reasoning on this point.



Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras IV: Proceedings of the 9th and 10th International Colloquium Organized at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in May 2000 and May 2001. Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 140. Edited by U. Vermeulen and J. Van Steenbergen (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2005). Pp. xii + 496.

REVIEWED BY PAUL E. WALKER, The University of Chicago

This volume, the fourth to present the papers of colloquia held in successive years at the Catholic University of Louvain, is like its predecessors a mixed bag of often fine scholarship on a broad range of topics. Here there are twenty-one articles by sixteen different experts on the Fatimid, Ayyubid, and Mamluk periods, the majority in English with four in French and two in German. (Unfortunately, a few of those in English could have benefited from the help of a competent editor; as printed they are barely intelligible.) Five cover the Fatimids, seven the Ayyubids, and nine the Mamluks. The subject matter of the individual contributions is diverse, likewise the methods employed. Michael Brett, for example, offers three pieces interpreting in grand style key problems of Fatimid rule: conversion to Islam, the role of the Coptic church, and the reign of Badr al-Jamālī. At the other end of the spectrum, Hanspeter Hanisch's report on the archaeology of the citadel of Harran runs a full 125 pages in great detail, complete with tables and a copious supply of photographs. Needless to say the other entries are more modest in size, though many hardly less so in importance. Heinz Halm's attempt to pin down the source and authorship of the two texts that make up the *Kitāb al-Dhakhā'ir wa-al-Tuhaf*, Stefan Heidemann's theories concerning Numayrid al-Raqqā, Pierre-Vincent Claverie on the "mauvais chrétiens" in the Orient of the crusading period and, separately, on Philippe Mainebeuf in Cairo (1291), Nicholas Coureas on Christian attempts to control Cypriot trade with the Mamluks, Donald S. Richards on the office of *wilāyat al-Qāhirah*, and Jo Van Steenbergen's identification of a late medieval cadastral survey of Egypt are good examples. But there are others as well.

The rest of the contributions are just as varied. Taef El-Azhari writes on Ayyubid women and eunuchs; Yehoshua Frenkel writes about chains of transmission in first Ayyubid *samā'āt* and then in Mamluk women's *samā'āt*; Konrad Hirschler contributes on the sociology of medieval Arabic historical scholarship (Ibn Wāṣil and Abū Shāmah); Denys Pringle reports on the Ayla/Aqaba fortresses; Dionisius Agius describes an inscribed ostrich egg from Qusayr; Corinne Morisot, a *waqfiyah* of Jaqmaq in favor of Mecca; Gino Schallenberg analyzes the Sufi terminology of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah; and finally U. Vermeulen offers a short piece on the official dress of the Mamluks.



Book reviews ©2011 by review authors.

DOI: [10.6082/M1PC30HP](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1PC30HP). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M1PC30HP>)

DOI of Vol. XV: [10.6082/M10G3H74](https://doi.org/10.6082/M10G3H74). See <https://doi.org/10.6082/JJT7-Q854> to download the full volume or individual articles. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY). See <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html> for more information about copyright and open access.

With so much offered over a long span of time, dealing with such a spread of subjects, few readers, including this reviewer, will have an equal interest in each one. And not all are either major contributions or of a similar high standard. Even so it is certain that specialists in any or all of the three periods will find many items in this volume that are quite well worth their time.

Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras V: Proceedings of the 11th, 12th and 13th International Colloquium Organized at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in May 2002, 2003 and 2004. Orientalia lovaniensia analecta 169. Edited by U. Vermeulen and K. d'Hulster (Leuven: Peeters, 2007).

REVIEWED BY YOSSEF RAPOPORT, Queen Mary University of London

The publication of the proceedings of the Leuven annual colloquia has now become an established tradition in the field of Fatimid and Mamluk studies. This is the fifth volume in the series, and, like its predecessors, it is particularly strong on economic and political history. The following remarks are intended to highlight some of the outstanding contributions in the volume, out of a total of thirty-one.

Several of the contributions in the Fatimid section deal with the institutions of the *da'wah*. S. Calderini's survey of the surviving manuals for Isma'ili *dā'īs* is particularly useful. Calderini notes the overall idealized character of these manuals, but she also indicates changes over time and space, especially after the establishment of the Fatimid state, when the *dā'ī* became a representative of the head of state in the Fatimid domains, and a leader of the local Isma'ili community outside the Fatimid realms. The essay comprehensively covers the surviving literature and places it in its historical context. D. Cortese supplements the discussion of the *da'wah* with a study of references to women in the same manuals, pointing out that *dā'īs* were especially encouraged to target women.

Heinz Halm offers a new reading of the career of the Fatimid vizier Badr al-Jamālī (466–87/1074–94) as a precursor to the later military regimes. Al-Jamālī's personal biography, and even his personal name, is typical of slaves. He assumes titles and responsibilities which are far beyond that of earlier Fatimid viziers—most significantly, military functions. In these respects, his role resembles that of the Ayyubid and Mamluk sultans of the following centuries. Halm is also right to note that this development parallels the emergence of the Seljuk sultans in Baghdad a few decades earlier. Rather than viewing the transition from the rule of the caliph to the rule of the sultan as an exclusively Sunni development, the rise of Badr al-Jamālī suggests a deeper shift towards military rule throughout the Islamic



world during the eleventh century. J. Den Heijer complements the discussion with a study of the building activities of the Fatimid vizier, who populated Cairo with non-official civilian population, and his reconstructing the walls of the city. The inscriptions over the renovated Bāb al-Naṣr glorified Badr al-Jamālī on par with the Fatimid caliph, and even above him.

In two rich contributions, Yaacov Lev uses a variety of previously unexplored documentary sources to examine the economic significance of the transition from Fatimid to Ayyubid rule. When Saladin ordered the dismantling of the centralized, lavish Fatimid palace, one of the results was a decline in demand for luxury goods, and Lev interestingly suggests that the decreased demand for luxury textiles is the underlying reason for the disappearance of the textile center of Tinnīs. Moreover, in contrast to the Fatimid close regulation of trade, Saladin abolished a significant number of customs and fees on merchants in the capital, as part of a more general policy of relaxing state control of the economy. Lev utilizes al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil's *Al-Mutaḥaddidāt*, a daily diary quoted by al-Maqrīzī, and in particular the list of revenues and expenditures for 585/1189, as well as similar late Fatimid fiscal documents. The result is an impressive set of quantitative data, which suggests that the Ayyubids enjoyed increasing revenues from agricultural production. For the province of the Fayyum, for example, there is ample evidence to indicate a decidedly sharp rise in government revenues between 1170 and 1240. Thus, Lev is right to assert that neither the introduction of the Ayyubid *iqṭā'* system nor the diversion of funds towards military conquests have had any adverse impact on Egypt's economy. Moreover, by using al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil's diary, Lev is also able to put a price tag on Saladin's financial support of the scholars and the mystics: between 200,000 and 300,000 dinars, a good investment given the impeccable reputation they have given him over the centuries.

In a well-written contribution, which is also one of the most interesting in the volume, L. Richter-Bernburg highlights the unique sensibilities of 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī's account of his visit to Egypt. Unlike other medieval observers of Egypt's Pharaonic antiquities, 'Abd al-Laṭīf's observations on architecture are resolutely naturalistic, and he refuses to resort to "jinn, primeval giants, magic whips or divine direct intervention" (p. 351). Indeed, 'Abd al-Laṭīf's chief interest is in the ingenious craftsmanship which brought the monuments into existence, rather than in the occult or religious significance of the structure. The monument that impressed him most deeply was the great sphinx in Giza, where he most admired the technical achievement of blowing up the human features to gigantic scale, yet at the same time he shows himself to be appreciative of the monument's aesthetic value. Richter-Bernburg manages to provide a vivid portrayal of al-Baghdādī as a writer who works both within and outside the established tradition of medieval Islamic travel literature.



A. Petersen's contribution on new towns in Mamluk Palestine examines the distinct features of towns established in the Islamic world after 1000 C.E., and specifically those founded by the Mamluk authorities. While the cities of the early Islamic period have received much scholarly attention, new cities, such as the Almohad Qaṣr al-Ṣaghīr founded in 1184, or Sulṭānīyah built by Öljeitü in 1313, have been relatively neglected. In this essay, Petersen focuses on Majdal (near the destroyed port of Ascalon) and Safed. Compared to the cities of early Islam, these new urban centers were of moderate size, and of no apparent orthogonal plan. They were also based around the castle, or the *qal'ah*, which in many cases was a remnant of the Crusader period. And, finally, these new towns were built along the revived Cairo-Damascus coastal road, often replacing ports destroyed by the Mamluks during the second half of the thirteenth century.

Other contributions worthy of special note include a comprehensive, well-illustrated study of the architecture of the Citadel of Damascus under the Seljuks, Ayyubids, and Mamluks, written by H. Hanisch. This will surely be a useful reference work for the growing number of scholars interested in Mamluk military architecture. K. D'Hulster's erudite, polyglot comparison of several Turkish translations of Sa'dī's *Gülistān* offers a rare window into the cultural life of the Mamluk courts in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, specifically highlighting the continued influence of the Persian literary canon on the Mamluk elite. Finally, Th. M. Wijntjes' study of the visit of Pedro Mártir, an ambassador of the Spanish court, to Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī deftly demonstrates that many European sources on the late Mamluk period are yet to be fully explored.

The editors of the volume should be commended for continuing to make the proceedings of the Leuven conferences available to all scholars working in the field, especially given the number of contributions and resulting size of the volume. However, several contributions really do suffer from weak copy-editing, and plans for providing indices in future volumes in the series would be very welcome.

NORMAN D. NICOL, *Sylloge of Islamic Coins in the Ashmolean*. Vol. 6, *The Egyptian Dynasties* (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 2007). Pp. 21 + 82 plates.

REVIEWED BY WARREN C. SCHULTZ, DePaul University

In the mid-1990s, the Heberdon Coin Room of the Ashmolean Museum embarked upon an ambitious ten-volume plan to publish their collection of Islamic coins in sylloge format. The Ashmolean's own significant holdings had by that time been supplemented by the addition of the important Shamir Shama collection (via long-



Book reviews ©2011 by review authors.

DOI: [10.6082/M1PC30HP](https://doi.org/10.6082/M1PC30HP). (<https://doi.org/10.6082/M1PC30HP>)

DOI of Vol. XV: [10.6082/M10G3H74](https://doi.org/10.6082/M10G3H74). See <https://doi.org/10.6082/JJT7-Q854> to download the full volume or individual articles. This work is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY). See <http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/msr.html> for more information about copyright and open access.

term loan in 1994), and thus totaled some 13,500 coins. Under the series-editorship of Luke Treadwell, this volume is the fourth of the ten to appear. In it, Norman D. Nicol provides first a very brief introduction (pp. 11–13) and then detailed descriptions and images of 1584 coins (on 82 plates) from the major dynasties of Egypt and Syria for the period 254–692/868–1517: those of the Tulunids (coins 1–126); the Ikhshidids (127–217); the Fatimids (218–829); the Zengids (830–853); the Ayyubids (854–1153); and the Mamluks (1154–1584). As with the previous three volumes of the SICA series, the production values are high and the 1:1 coin images clear, precise, and detailed. The publication of these 1584 coins is a welcome addition to the monetary history of Egypt and Syria in general, and to the field of Mamluk numismatics in particular. The Heberdon holdings in Mamluk coins are particularly strong for copper *fulūs*, which, given the paucity of previously published images of these types of coins, is especially noteworthy. That said, non-numismatic specialists who will use this book should be aware of two wider contexts in which this volume appears. The first is the state of the field for the numismatic history of Egypt and Syria. The second is a wider debate on the best ways to organize numismatic material for publication.

Both contexts emerge from the following comment by Treadwell in his forward (p. 9): “This volume fills a need. To date the copious publications of medieval Egyptian and Syrian coinage [*context one*] have consisted of dynastic corpora and catalogues. This is the first catalogue to provide a regional overview of the dynasties concerned and will for this reason be of particular interest to historians and students of the medieval Near East [*context two*].” As Treadwell alluded, there is a prolific body of scholarship on the monetary and numismatic history of Egypt and Syria. Nicol, however, has provided only a very brief bibliographic introduction to this scholarship. While it is true that in sylloges the emphasis should be on the coins, as it is here, rather than an in-depth historiographic analysis of the field, users of this volume will need to turn elsewhere to get an appreciation of just how numerous these previous publications are. Mamlukists, in particular, may turn to the numismatic section of the Chicago Online Bibliography of Mamluk Studies to see the number of titles available, especially those published since the appearance of Paul Balog’s seminal *The Coinage of the Mamluk Sultans of Egypt and Syria*, Numismatic Studies no. 12 (New York: American Numismatic Society, 1964).

The second context has to do with organizational schemas for presenting numismatic information. This volume is called a sylloge. This term may be unfamiliar to non-numismatists and thus some historical and terminological background is useful here. The frequent use of the term “usually,” however, signals that exceptions to the following assertions may be encountered. The use of sylloges is relatively new in Islamic numismatics. The first institution to begin a sylloge series for Islamic coins was the Forschungstelle für islamische Numismatik in Tübingen, under the



directorship of Lutz Ilisch. The first volume of this institution's *Sylloge Numorum Arabicorum Tübingen*—or SNAT as it is commonly known—appeared in 1993. The Heberdon Coin Room was the second major collection to embark upon a sylloge series. As it is widely understood, sylloges publish the complete holdings of one institution, within the chronological and geographic parameters of the coinage singled out for study. Usually every coin in that collection is described and illustrated, subject to editorial and curatorial judgment, regardless of overall rarity or commonness, and independent of whether it is an example of which the institution has several specimens or only one. Thus the user of any sylloge volume will have access to information about all the pertinent coins which that collection holds, but depending on the strengths of the particular collection, will likely not see the entire range of any numismatic series. Additionally, sylloges are also usually organized by mint series, which means that coins are presented in chronological order by mint of issue. A sylloge's table of contents, for example, usually features mints as the primary organizational criterion, with regnal periods of any ruler serving as a secondary or tertiary criteria.

Sylloges are different from two other common methods of publishing coin collections, those which for better or worse can be called traditional catalogues and those known as corpora. Sylloges are different from the former in two fashions. The first is that traditional catalogues usually only describe and illustrate a sample of their collection. Duplicates, in particular, are usually just listed rather than illustrated. The second is that most traditional catalogues follow a dynastic organizational schema rather than one based upon mint series, meaning that the first level of organization is ruler's reign, as opposed to mints which are relegated to a subsidiary catalogue variable. Sylloges are also different from dynastic corpora, such as Balog's mentioned above, for the latter not only are usually organized by regnal period but aim for as complete as possible representation of the entire numismatic issues of a dynasty by drawing upon coins from many collections.

These distinctions between the regnal organization of traditional catalogues and corpora versus the mint organization of sylloges may strike the non-specialist as trivial, but they are not. To put it another way, numismatic works organized first by dynastic details primarily support the identification of individual coins, while those organized by mint series support the analysis of wider numismatic questions not specifically bound to an individual ruler or even dynasty. Moreover, one of the widely agreed aims of sylloges of collections is the publication of more specimens of coins to add to the archive of specimens readily accessible for analysis. These larger samples are necessary, to give but one example, in matters of die analysis, which in turn can shed more light on questions of mint issue output. This debate is clearly ongoing, and proponents of both organizational schemas will no doubt continue to argue their points.



This digression is pertinent since the forward to the first volume published of the SICA series (vol. 10, *Arabia and East Africa*, 1999, by Steve Album) contained the following statement:

The choice of ordering by mint is becoming increasingly common in the field these days and for good reason: it allows the development of all aspects of a coin series to be studied in the sequence within which the coins were actually produced, i.e., in both their geographical and chronological contexts. The disadvantage of this method is that it tends to favour the reader who has some numismatic knowledge over the historian who does not. In order to facilitate the use of the catalogue by non-numismatists, careful attention has been paid to the compilation of indexes of names, titles, and dynasties (Treadwell, p. vi).

Volume 6, however, unlike the preceding three, is arranged differently:

The catalogue is arranged in chronological sequence of the ruling dynasties subdivided by ruler. This is a departure from the procedure followed in the other volumes of this series. I find that the complex issues of several dynasties are easier to understand when the entire spectrum of each particular ruler's issues are described next to another (Nicol, vol. 6, p. 11).

Nicol is of course entitled to this view. The result, however, is a missed opportunity. By organizing by ruler rather than mint, this volume presents like a compilation of excerpts from those aforementioned "dynastic corpora and catalogues" rather than offering something that the field still lacks, namely an overview of the mint series over this long era. As it is, the reader moves from the Tulunids through the Mamluks, ruler by ruler, but does not easily see the processes which change over a chronological time span asynchronous to those regnal periods. Thus we end up with another work which is primarily an aid identification rather than a work that privileges wider analysis by situating the coins in those geographical and chronological contexts. Nevertheless, the addition of 1584 coins from this important collection to the published archive of Islamic numismatic evidence is still to be celebrated.



ABDALLAH KAHIL, *The Sultan Ḥasan Complex in Cairo 1357–1364: A Case Study in the Formation of Mamluk Style*. Beirut Texts and Studies 98 (Beirut: Orient-Institut Beirut, 2008). Pp. 403, illustrations.

REVIEWED BY BERNARD O’KANE, The American University in Cairo

It is strange that we should have waited so long for an art historical monograph on the greatest Mamluk monument. Despite Cairo’s fame as a city with one of the most dense concentrations of pre-modern Islamic architecture, monographs on its buildings are few and far between, most having been written from the perspective of those involved in their architectural restoration.¹

This book is a revised version of the author’s doctoral dissertation, completed in 2002, and although in the preface Kahil apologises to the publication manager of the series for late delivery of the manuscript, the intervening time has been used profitably to expand and refine his text. One of his major findings, the extensive design input of the monument’s building supervisor (*shādd al-‘imā’ir*) (the amir Muḥammad ibn Bīlik al-Muḥsinī, who was also a noted calligrapher), was published in the interim in the festschrift for Priscilla Soucek,² but the information is also included here, as it should be.

In his introduction Kahil gives the historical background, discusses previous interpretations of the complex, and sets out his main purpose, which is a meticulous documentation of the building’s structure and decoration, backed by copious references and comparisons not only to monuments in Cairo but also to those in such Syrian centers as Damascus, Aleppo, and Tripoli. The author’s obvious familiarity with the monuments from the whole of Mamluk territory makes these comparisons all the more pertinent.

His discussion (pp. 36–38) of the annexes of the monument, those areas situated behind the portal and which now contain ablutions facilities, clearly shows them to be fabrications of Herz and the Comité. Another surprise is the extent to which the tomb was envisaged to be an independent unit within the whole complex. Reminiscent of his grandfather Qalāwūn’s tomb, the entrance was guarded by ten of his manumitted slaves. Doris Behrens-Abouseif has recently highlighted how Mamluk tomb chambers were often categorized as *masjids* in *waqfiyahs* to legitimize prayers within them,³ and in this case, to lead the five daily prayers, the tomb even

¹ E.g., the volumes on the Barqūq and Faraj ibn Barqūq complexes by Saleh Lamei Mostafa, and Max Herz’s books on the Qalāwūn and Sultan Ḥasan complexes.

² “The Architect/s of the Sultan Ḥasan Complex in Cairo,” in *Pearls from Water, Rubies from Stone: Studies in Islamic Art in Honor of Priscilla Soucek*, ed. Linda Komaroff and Jaclynne Kerner, *Artibus Asiae* 66, no. 2 (2006), 155–74.

³ *Cairo of the Mamluks* (Cairo, 2008), 18. Kahil (p. 58) further shows how the *waqfiyah* characterized the burial space within the tomb as private property, further circumventing possible legal



had its own imam, different from the one who performed the same duties in the adjacent qiblah *īwān*. The scale of the mausoleum was reflected in the provision of a team of one hundred twenty Quran readers to provide round the clock recitation—Qalāwūn’s tomb had a “mere” fifty. This makes the projection of the tomb on three sides of the Maydān Rumaylah more understandable, as the continuous chanting of the Quran would have reminded passersby to pray for the occupant of the tomb.

In his extensive discussion (pp. 53–58) of the anomalous placement of the tomb behind the qiblah *īwān* Kahil alludes to the parallel of the Turbat-i Shakyh Jām complex. His characterization of the dome chamber there as a tomb is incorrect (the tomb is an open one in front of the preceding *īwān*), although Kahil rightly dismisses the example as a parallel on the grounds that the *īwān* there, as in Ilkhanid Friday mosques such as that at Varamin, was conceived as an entrance to the dome behind, unlike the qiblah *īwān* of Sultan Ḥasan which totally obscures the view of the dome and which, with its depth and elaborate decoration, was the focal point of the congregational mosque of the complex.

The portal and its decoration are the subject of the third chapter. Kahil mentions the Seljuq and Iklhanid parallels for the original paired minaret design, although he also notes that a desire to surpass previous Cairene monuments with multiple minarets would probably have been a factor. But the fact that the one being built was so unstable as to fall down during construction supports Michael Rogers’ contention that, unlike the Anatolian Seljuq examples on which it might have been loosely based, it was made of stone and was not buttressed from the side of the portal, denoting the work of a craftsman who had admired the form but was unfamiliar with the structural procedures.⁴ The same craftsman might have designed one particular strapwork pattern (pl. 220), a dense ungrooved basket-weave that can be read as interlocking hexagons, whose only parallels are also in Seljuk Anatolia.⁵

With regards to the reused colonettes that adorn the plinth, Kahil plausibly notes (p. 83) that after the Mamluk raid on Adana in 1360 the portal of the church was sent to Cairo, and that these might have been part of this booty, especially given their similarities to Cilician manuscript illumination. He also brings out the parallels with contemporary Cairene Quranic illumination, particularly relevant considering the involvement, noted above, of the calligrapher Muḥammad ibn Bīlik al-Muḥsinī as supervisor of the building.

Kahil also discusses in detail the chinoiserie decoration on the chamfering at the sides of the portal (pl. 23); it might have been useful to include in the analysis the findings of Rachel Ward, who has shown how such chinoiserie quickly became

objections.

⁴ J. M. Rogers, “Seljuk Influences on the Monuments of Cairo,” *Kunst des Orients* 7(1970–71): 47.

⁵ *Ibid.*, fig. 12, showing the great *īwān* of the hospital of Kaykā’ūs, Sivas, or on the mihrab of the Erzurum Friday Mosque: Ömür Bakırer, *Anadolu Mihrablari* (Ankara, 1976), pl. 30.



standard, at least in metalwork, after the establishment of trade relations between the Ilkhanids and the Mamluks in the 1320s.⁶

Throughout the book the meticulous descriptions of decoration bring into focus features that have otherwise not been noticed or discussed in the literature, such as the central recess on the northern side with an unusual six-pointed star with curving sides, and a square panel with an interlacing geometric design surrounding the oculus above it (pls. 15, 227, 261a). The appreciation of these details is greatly facilitated by the number of original drawings published by the author, helpfully grouped by him in related clusters. It is worth singling out two drawings that are notable for their virtuosity: those of the *muqarnas* of the portal and the vestibule (pls. 216–17), each of stunning complexity.

In his section (p. 126) on the living units of the madrasahs, Kahil compares them to Cairene *rab*'s, suggesting that the madrasah courtyards are a combination of the *rab*' and a *khānqāh* courtyard with an *īwān* such as that of Baybars al-Jāshankīr. However, I'm not sure that it is helpful to cite the *rab*' in this context, especially since one of the chief characteristics of the *rab*', its arrangement of the living units in a duplex with a two-storey *īwān* unit facing the exterior, is not present at Sultan Ḥasan.

In discussing the bulbous dome of the Sultan Ḥasan fountain Kahil suggests (p. 132) that it may have derived from Fatimid prototypes at Aswan or that of the *mashhad* of al-Juyūshī. The Fatimid examples, however, even if they have a drum, are not truly bulbous. More plausible prototypes for the bulbous domes of Cairo, which appear there after the middle of the fourteenth century, might be the Muzaffarid tomb of Sultan Bakht Āghā at Isfahan datable to 752/1351, and a no longer extant dome at Isfahan from the first half of the fourteenth century that has been attributed to the Ilkhanid Sultan Abū Sa'īd.⁷

The tomb chamber receives a chapter to itself, and here as elsewhere the discussion of the formal and decorative parallels is as thorough as one could wish. Kahil notes that the painting on the pendentives was restored by Herz, but suggests (p. 160) that the painting has an Ottoman character. To me, however, the combination of arabesques on the main *muqarnas* units and of chinoiserie-inspired blossoms on the polylobed blind niches above them is fully in keeping with the original decoration of the complex. He also comments on the unusual legibility of the main inscription in the tomb chamber, and while this is certainly true, it was unfortunately achieved by large thick letters which are surprising for their lack of adherence to the usual canons that distinguish the finest Mamluk monumental epigraphy.

⁶ "Brass, Gold and Silver from Mamluk Egypt: Metal Vessels Made for Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 14 (2004): 66.

⁷ Luṭfallāh Hunarfar, *Ganjīnah-i āsār-i tārikhī-i Isfahān* (Isfahan, 1350/1971), respectively pp. 318, 295 (the drawing he reproduces on p. 295 is not, as cited, after Dieulafoy, but after Flandin).



Editorially, a number of suggestions can be made. While the author's English is admirably clear, concise, and jargon-free, there are typographical errors, slips in grammar and translation, and references to incorrect plate numbers too numerous to list that should have been caught by an editor. The continental system of pluralizing Arabic nouns by adding hyphens after them (e.g. *madhhab-s*) is distracting—the hyphens should have been omitted. An index would also have substantially increased the usefulness of the work. Some of the plates are underexposed, a pity especially in the illustration of the vestibule (pl. 41), which is given the unusual luxury of a full page reproduction. I'm not sure of the utility of the photos (pl. 7) of the sun striking the upper row of *muqarnas* on the portal: the time and angle of this varies greatly with the seasons. With regard to the bibliography, Howayda al-Harithy's *The Waqf Document of Sultan al-Nāṣir Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn* (Beirut, 2001) is omitted. Even though the author himself provides the most pertinent extracts from the *waqfiyahs* in his publication, it should have been included, or we should have been told why it was omitted.

As well as being a compendium of all the information one could want on the building, including its complete epigraphic program, for instance, the book's discussion of comparative material is comprehensive. This is well illustrated by the discussion of the possible contributions of the architect al-Ḥujayj to the complex (pp. 181 ff.), an individual who had traveled to Ḥamāh to view a *qā'āh* that had earlier been built in the city by its ruler Abū al-Fidā', before building one for his patron at the citadel.⁸ Kahil rightly points out the importance of this episode in indicating the receptiveness of patrons to emulating architecture in other areas.

In sum, this work shows an extremely impressive mastery of the primary and secondary literature on the subject and related areas. It will remain the definitive account of the building for the foreseeable future.

The City in the Islamic World. Salma Jayyusi, general editor, Renata Holod, Attilio Petrucciolo, and André Raymond, special editors. Handbuch der Orientalistik/ Handbook of Oriental Studies, Section 1, The Near and Middle East, vol 94. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008). Two volumes. Pp. 1142 + 321 pp. of plates.

REVIEWED BY JOHN RODENBECK

Brill's blurb for this pair of hefty, expensive, and lavishly illustrated tomes quotes directly from the joint introduction by its three distinguished special editors. Both the blurb and the introduction tell us that the purpose of these volumes is "to draw

⁸ Also mentioned in the contemporary publication of Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo*, 43.



attention to the sites of life, politics and culture where current and past generations of the Islamic world have made their mark. Unlike many previous volumes dealing with the city in the Islamic world, this one has been specially expanded not only to include snapshots of historical fabric, but also to deal with the transformation of this fabric into modern and contemporary urban entities.”

This latter claim is probably more or less true. The 7500-odd Western studies of “the Middle Eastern City and Islamic Urbanism” listed by Bonine, Ehlers, Krafft, and Stöber in their great bibliography (1994) do indeed divide generally into two sorts: those obviously intent on urban history and those preoccupied with urban fabric and morphology.

The general editor of these two Brill volumes is Salma Jayyusi, a scholar better known as a poet, literary anthologist, and champion of Arab culture than as an expert on cities. Her candid and graceful preface not only explains the genesis of these two books, but points to their most salient feature: the fact that they were written and edited by well-established specialists, but are intended for a far more general audience. This audience includes people who may be more or less ignorant of Middle Eastern languages and culture. It is surely for this reason that such an impressive collection found support at the cultural summit of the Muslim world, in this case funding from Prince ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Fahd ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. The venture was so risky that it is difficult to conceive of its being published otherwise.

“The single leading concept,” as the special editors remark quite early in their joint introduction, “has been to consider the city as a living organism.” Such words are clearly not to be taken as a rhetorical gesture towards a set of politically-correct pieties, but as signaling real attitudes that have been too rare in the past. In Cairo, for example, they were championed 30 years ago by Laila ‘Ali Ibrahim, but she was virtually alone. During a conference on conservation of Cairo’s Historic Zone in 1980, for example, an international expert toured the Darb al-Aḥmar checking off for demolition buildings that he thought were “un-Islamic,” while a local design firm produced an elaborate and costly plan for enclosing the Darb al-Aḥmar and Fatimid al-Qāhirah in a *cordon sanitaire* of six-lane boulevards, expelling all “modern” activities, dressing the remaining inhabitants willy-nilly in medieval costume, and compelling them to turn out cheap tourist wares or perform in occasional folk-pageants.

One notes with relief that the special editors have also consciously avoided the pitfalls of deduction from some platonic idea of “the Islamic city,” an abstraction built around a notion of exclusively Muslim needs. This inheritance from earlier scholars bedeviled thinking about cities and urbanism in the Muslim world for decades. The title the editors have thus carefully given these volumes suggests instead that the organic urban entities under examination and the varied elements that compose them have actually existed or do in fact still exist within the Muslim world.



Though these studies constitute a *tour d'horizon*, they do not attempt to take in the entirety of that world; and it is obvious that to have done so would have served no very useful purpose. A consideration of Indonesia, for example, is excluded completely; and out of 48 articles, only six (three each) concern the great cities of India and Persia. There is one article on Ottoman cities of the Balkans, one on Bukhara and Samarkand, one on sub-Saharan cities, while the Arabian Peninsula is represented only by an article on Sana'a and one on Dubai. Though references are made to scholarship at work on cities in Al-Andalus, there is no study here of Muslim urbanism in Western Europe. This reviewer, who lives in a region of southern France that had an Arab governor for 40 crucial years and where Arab rule still survives in local fact and legend, regrets the slow progress on that particular front.

Mamlukologists, though unlikely to learn anything new in their own field, will be gratified at the appearance here of important large-scale articles by scholars already well known for their work on Cairo or on specific questions about urbanism in a Mamluk context. André Raymond, for example, is not only one of the special editors, but also the author of three magisterial articles.

In an article called "The Mamluk City," Doris Behrens-Abouseif offers a parallel to Chapter VIII of her indispensable book, *Cairo of the Mamluks: A History of the Architecture and Its Culture* (2007). A significant difference, however, is that her book uses three illuminating maps, of which only two are reproduced here and in reductions of 60 per cent and 70 per cent, which limit their usefulness. Partial compensation is the addition of four stunning Orientalist views of Cairo, clearly aimed at a non-specialist audience, two by Louis-François Cassas (1756–1827) and two by K. L. Libay (1814–88). It is regrettable, incidentally, that illustrations referred to throughout this massive work had to be gathered at the end of the second volume, rather than appearing with the articles they illustrate. For the reader to locate illustrations thus requires reference to the names of the authors of particular articles as listed in the table of contents.

Sophie Denoix is represented by an article called "Founded Cities of the Muslim World," which contains separate sections on both Fuṣṭāṭ and al-Qāhirah. Nelly Hanna's "Guilds in Recent Historical Scholarship" wisely emphasizes what is really recent and ignores the vehemently authoritative conclusions of forty years ago to the effect that such organizations never existed. A penultimate article by Eric Denis, as circumlocutory as its subject matter would suggest, describes what is happening in the carcinopolis of present-day Cairo, which makes the Mamluk city seem like a golden dream.

