

of aspects of it than had been achieved in previous modern studies. Her discussions are often lengthy and involved, preceded by expressions of perplexity and astonishment about the Mu‘tazilite position and arguments. This is partly due to Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s difficult and sloppy language and style of argumentation in his *Kitāb al-Mughnī*, which itself is only partly extant, and some volumes of whose edition are replete with faulty readings. A fuller study of the foundations of Mu‘tazilite theological thought on justice, however, would also have obviated some of the initial perplexity in dealing with ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s treatment of various questions of ethics.

A serious misunderstanding of Mu‘tazilite doctrine, putting their credentials as rationalist theologians into question, must here be noted. The author asserts that “in the Mu‘tazilite definition of belief (*īmān*) belief is constituted by external acts of obedience over and against the cognitive act of belief” (p. 151). In contrast, “the Ash‘arites gave primacy to the internal, cognitive act of belief in God’s unity as a criterion for faith” (p. 7). In reality, the Mu‘tazila regularly stipulated as the first obligation of every person *compos mentis* on reaching maturity to acquire knowledge of God, not just to aver belief (*taṣḍīq*) in His unity as the Ash‘arites required. Many modern theologians and philosophers obviously define faith as belief in God and hold rational knowledge of God to be impossible. Medieval Ash‘arites and philosophers mostly considered such knowledge as reasonable, at least for advanced scholars and the elite of philosophers, but would not require it from the mass of ordinary believers. That Mu‘tazilites were interested only in external acts as a criterion for faith is entirely mistaken.

Acceptance of the rational foundation of Mu‘tazilite theological thought on justice does not require acceptance of all their teaching on ethics and desert. The author is evidently right in questioning their doctrine on the divine threat (*wa‘īd*) and punishment. Justice, as defined by them, allows reward above what is deserved as a favour of the benefactor, but it does not allow punishment beyond desert. Only a tyrant metes out punishment above desert. In insisting that God will inevitably carry out His scriptural threat of infinite punishment in hell-fire for finite offence, the Mu‘tazila abandoned their rational principles for popular religious belief. They ought to have realized that this threat can only be justified as a rhetorical one. They commonly claimed that if God failed to carry it out, He would be lying in the Quran. Is a mother, when she warns her misbehaving toddler: “I’ll give you a hot bottom if you don’t stop!” actually lying if she does not carry out her threat, realizing that a spanking would be excessive punishment?

Wilferd Madelung

JAMES GREHAN:

Everyday Life and Consumer Culture in 18th-Century Damascus.

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Everyday Life and Consumer Culture is an extraordinary achievement, and a real break-through in the field. One of its great strengths is its author’s humanistic concern for ordinary people, whose life experiences and often straitened circumstances come to life on every page. The book’s principal source materials, apart from the chronicles and the writings of contemporary religious scholars (especially al-Budayri, Ibn Kanna and ‘Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulsi), are about a thousand

Damascus probate inventories dating from 1750 to 1767. These inventories are not all-inclusive, in that they were only drawn up when there were minor heirs or when an individual died intestate, but they provide a remarkable amount of information. André Raymond was the first to pioneer the use of similar materials, for eighteenth-century Cairo, in *Artisans et Commerçants du Cairo, 1773–74*), and Colette Establet and Jean-Paul Pascual published *Familles et Fortunes à Damas: 450 foyers damascains en 1700* in 1994, also using probate inventories, but Grehan has used the material to create a detailed history of daily life in mid-eighteenth century Damascus. The first chapter, “City and environment”, sets the scene and is a wonderfully evocative description of the city, which should go into any anthology of writing on Middle Eastern cities during the period.

A great deal of the book is taken up with the precariousness, poverty and unpredictability of ordinary people’s lives; about a third of it is about bread and other food items. Fortunately, two of the principal chroniclers of the day give a great deal of information on prices and price fluctuations, which form the basis of several of the tables in chapters 2 and 3. The vagaries of nature (drought, heat, floods, earthquakes, locusts, epidemics) meant that a major concern was the availability and price of wheat and bread. To these insecurities should be added the generally chaotic conditions of the Ottoman Arab provinces in the second half of the eighteenth century, as noted by Thieck (Aleppo, 1985), Marcus (Aleppo, 1989), Dina Khoury (Mosul, 1997) Marino (Damascus, 1997), Fattah (Baghdad and Basra, 1997) and Douwes (Hama and Damascus, 2000). Grain was an immensely political commodity, and much of the local economy was devoted to meeting the “hunger for bread” (p. 69). There were bread riots in 1734, 1743, 1747, 1749, 1757 and 1758, largely in response to incompetence or corruption in handling the supply of wheat. In addition, “Bread riots were . . . linked to wider conflicts in urban society and often coincided with other manifestations of street violence” (p. 92), a general result of the pattern of Ottoman decentralization which brought constant factional strife to the cities of Syria (see Bodman, 1963, on the struggles between the janissaries and *ashraf* in Aleppo between 1760 and 1826).

Chapter 2 deals with bread: chapters 3 and 4 discuss other foodstuffs and drink. The list of the food available to Damascenes (lamb/mutton, chicken, milk, cream, yoghurt, cheese, eggs, olive oil, pulses, seasonal fruit and vegetables) is typical of the “Mediterranean diet” extolled in health magazines today. (An English traveller in the 1830s found the Damascene diet better than that available to workers in contemporary Britain.) Grehan estimates a daily calorie intake of about 3,000, which seems quite adequate for those who could afford it. “Drink” includes water, coffee and tobacco (which one “drinks” in Arabic); there is a very interesting section on the water supply, and the communal responsibility of the inhabitants of city quarters to maintain the rudimentary supply and sewage system

The last two chapters deal with domestic space and fashion and deportment. The inventories are extremely informative on the size of houses or “apartments”; 37 per cent of the deceased owned at least part of a house (p. 157). An interesting finding from the inventories is that there was very little in the way of furniture; there were very few tables and chairs, and no beds. Only 25 per cent of the deceased had writing instruments, and fewer still (6 per cent) had books. In fact, both rich and poor had relatively few possessions apart from clothes, pots and pans, mattresses, bolsters, curtains and floor coverings.

The section on heat, light and hygiene, particularly the remarks on inadequate heating, reminded me vividly of the struggle to keep warm in a modern house in Aleppo in January/February 1988. In the eighteenth century the only available form of heating was a *manqal* or charcoal-fired portable brazier, since there were

no fireplaces or chimneys. Lighting was also a problem, as most rooms had no windows. The lack of adequate sanitation that Grehan describes was by no means peculiar to the Middle East; Frederick the Great's palace of Sans Souci in Potsdam (constructed between 1745 and 1747) had no internal toilets or washrooms – and in contrast with Europe, public bathhouses were a regular feature of Middle Eastern cities. London did not have an adequate network of piped sewage until Sir John Simon's period in office as the city's Medical Officer of Health between 1848 and 1858.

As Grehan says, the eighteenth century was a time of consolidation, not innovation, in the Ottoman provinces: that came rather later, not, perhaps until the 1830s or 1840s. The centrality of time keeping, so vital to the continuing momentum of the industrial revolution, was not a feature of life in eighteenth-century Damascus. On the other hand, what Grehan calls the “long Ottoman peace” brought an expansion in trade and a steady growth in the urban population, in the sense of the extension of the city's physical space, as discussed in detail in Raymond's *Les grandes villes arabes à l'époque ottomane* (1985).

Grehan's Conclusion is worth quoting at length:

Townspople were very much distracted by workaday routines, and in the midst of prayers, funerals, and other religious rituals, casually haggled, struck bargains, and prattled about their business. They had other things on their mind, which continually called their thoughts back to household and marketplace, and required endless care and attention. More than religion, it was this struggle for survival and sufficiency which stood at the center of popular culture. It bred a mentality which, in coping with all the persistent challenges of pre-modern life, was unavoidably worldly and pragmatic (p. 234).

A constant motif of Grehan's writing, and one of his principal contributions to the field, is his concern to depict the lives of ordinary people with sympathy, understanding and respect. His work shows subtlety and insight; it is social history at its best, simply and elegantly written, with a keen eye and ear for the nuances of social reality.

Peter Sluglett

ELYSE SEMERDJIAN:

“Off the Straight Path”: *Illicit Sex, Law and Community in Ottoman Aleppo*.

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“Off the Straight Path” is a highly original work on adultery, immorality and offences against public order in the Ottoman Empire, with empirical evidence from Aleppo, one of the Empire's major provincial capitals. Some of the less obviously attractive features of Islam are what are generally termed the *hadd* punishments, which variously mandate the amputation of limbs, stoning or execution, for theft, adultery, murder and so on. In her examination of some 300 years of the