legal oversight in conducting marital relations, others insisted on such oversight so that the husband would not overstep his bounds despite his authority. Overall, the purpose of part 1 of the book is to subject the historical Islamic interpretive tradition, mythologized as indisputably authoritative, to a careful examination that uncovers its very human, socially and historically constructed assumptions, which in turn affect not only the ways in which verses are read and interpreted, but imbricated into social institutions as legal and theological dispensations, protections, and practices surrounding marriage and marital relations.

The second part turns to contemporary discussions and comprises two chapters, the first of which (chapter 4) examines a spectrum of positions on Q. 4:34, ranging from the traditionalist to the reformist, while the second (chapter 5) takes up the question of the struggle between idealized patriarchal (pre-colonial) and egalitarian (postcolonial) cosmologies. The Conclusion of the book engages the larger issue of whether the unquestioned authority given to the mythic Islamic tradition has become stifling for contemporary Muslims, and suggests that demythologizing pre-colonial interpretations ("the Islamic tradition") through an examination of the tradition's logic and assumptions, as indeed this book has so compellingly done, opens up generative spaces for the living community of contemporary believers "to advocate for innovative hermeneutical strategies that are responsive" to their concerns (223), such as eliminating violence against women. Overall, this book is a welcome addition to the growing literature contesting the hegemony of the historically bound interpretive tradition that bears testament to its rich discursive efforts, but ultimately argues that the task of interpretation is ongoing and must not be shirked.

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Mary Ann Fay. *Unveiling the Harem: Elite Women and the Paradox of Seclusion in Eighteenth-Century Cairo*. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2012. xvii + 331 pages, acknowledgements, note on transliteration, photographs, tables, notes, references, index. Cloth US$45.00 ISBN 978-0-8156-3293-1.

For those who believe that Muslim harem women were prisoners within an enclosed space in the house deprived of mobility, legal personhood, economic independence, and power, Fay's study of the late Mamluk harem will be eye-opening. For historians of Mamluk-era Egypt, the value of Fay's work lies in her revision of a male-centered scholarly narrative.

Fay begins by explaining Mamluk power as centered around the household, which was both a kinship construct and a residence. Mamluk men perpetuated household power by purchasing, training, and freeing slaves from the Caucasus and Georgia who became their fictive sons and brothers and their real wives and concubines. Fay's extensive research into archived *waqf* endowment documents demonstrates that Mamluk women were far from chattel slaves. In fact, Mamluk women were central to the consolidation and continuity of powerful Mamluk households. Due to internecine conflict among Mamluk houses, wives lived longer than husbands. Through dower and inheritance, wives accrued vast economic resources, of types and values similar to those owned by prosperous male merchants, and deployed their properties for private and public benefit. An heir who married the widow of his household head would keep that property within the household and ensure his own legitimacy. Fay compares this with the plight of Lady Mary Montagu, an eighteenth-century Englishwoman whose lack of property rights rendered her powerless and who envied the Muslim ladies who owned, sold, and endowed their properties at will.

Fay's strongest chapters are 6 through 10. Chapter 6 traces the social geography of the city as powerful families moved in and out of fashionable quarters. Fay describes Mamluk neighborhoods, public celebrations, and street life that women saw and participated in, allowing the reader to visualize the public spaces women navigated. Chapter 7 analyzes the architecture of Cairo harems, showing that the harem was "not an enclosed space inside a larger male space" mappable via nineteenth-century conceptions of private vs. public space (208). Rather, women penetrated so-called male spaces using balconies and bays with lattice-wood *mashrabiyya* screens and styles of veiling that allowed women to retain their anonymity in public. Chapter 8 extrapolates from scant extant evidence the social life of a harem lady: visits to bathhouses, to cemeteries, to relatives; reception of guests; management of the household and business investments—a far cry from the sexualized indolence imagined by European travel writers. In chapter 9, Fay brings all the parts of her analysis together to retell the history of the late Mamluk revival with the women as subjects, using the stories of three Mamluk ladies. Fay also points out that the apparent paradox—veiled, secluded, and sexually-subjugated women possessing property, legal personhood, and economic influence—dissolves when one drops the assumption that seclusion meant women were confined to the private sphere (255). The final chapter argues that we derive our image of harem life from the assumption that veiling and seclusion had "fixed and universal meaning that transcend time and space" (259). Fay argues that twentieth-century feminist opponents of the harem

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and veiling cannot tell us about the pre-modern harem, because the political and economic structures that empowered harem women collapsed in the nineteenth century, when power was "reallocated in a reconfigured public sphere," leaving women "stranded in a space that became almost purely domestic" (267).

Fay's introductory literature review and summary of Mamluk history make this work accessible to novice graduate and advanced undergraduate students; however, she overreaches some points. She glosses over the racial hierarchy of Islamic slavery and does not question whether a study of white upper-class freed slaves suffices to represent "the harem." Others, notably Afaf Marsot, have previously shown the economic power of Mamluk women, and it remains unclear whether these women are exceptions or exemplars. Fay also asserts (against Carl Petry) that women "accumulated" property. While her evidence shows women inheriting, selling, and endowing properties, it does not show that women acquired properties intentionally because of their knowledge of the markets; rather, her evidence suggests accumulation through inheritance and dower. There are also signs of careless editing, such as the use of "nationality" for "ethnicity," repetitive definitions, and transliteration inconsistencies. Despite these flaws, Fay's study remains a fascinating, useful contribution to the history of late Mamluk Egypt.

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Richard Gauvain. *Salafi Ritual Purity: In the Presence of God*. London & New York, NY: Routledge, 2013. x + 383 pages, acknowledgments, notes, bibliography, index. Hardcover US$155.00 ISBN 978-0-7103-1356-0.

Richard Gauvain's latest book investigates ritual purity (*tahara*) in Salafi practice through ethnographic material collected in Cairo between 2006 and 2009. Making ritual purity the pivot of his analysis is well grounded. Salafism and purity, as Gauvain writes, are "natural bedfellows": Contemporary Salafism's focus on everyday social conduct coupled with Salafis' emphasis on individual virtue as the key to a pious society make ritual purity a rich topic for analysis.

Gauvain aims to read Salafi purity-related rituals, and specifically *tahara* and *wudu'* (minor ablution), which the author sees as often-disregarded aspects of Salafism, as they "absorb, reflect, and generate dominant religio-social concerns" (16). That is, Gauvain reads them as instruments for