upon the shared intellectual history of Judaism and Islam, and is certainly a fine tribute to the work of Joel Kraemer.

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Postal Systems in the Pre-Modern Islamic World. By Adam J. Silverstein. pp. xii, 214. (Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization) Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007.
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In this study of one of the fundamental institutions of the Islamic empire in the Middle East, Silverstein surveys the history of the *barīd*, or state postal and intelligence network, of the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates and its various manifestations under subsequent successor states down to the Mamluk period. He also compares the *barīd* with the Mongol post, the *yām*, which included what was "perhaps the longest postal route in pre-modern history", linking Europe and the Far East. This is institutional history in the *longue durée*, synthesising for the first time much material previously confined to scholarship with narrower geographical and chronological parameters, as well as breaking entirely new ground, particularly on the pre-Islamic Arabian and early caliphal *barīd*. This long view brings out the great importance of communications to the Arabian and Mongol nomad empires of the pre-modern Middle East, and the extent to which the interaction of their respective nomadic cultures with the institutions of settled empire led to the development of astonishingly swift communications networks.

For Silverstein, Islamic history in the proper perspective must begin long before Islam, in the pre-Islamic world of the Roman and Iranian empires, as well as in the Arabian Peninsula itself. Part I of three begins with the Achaemenids (539–330 BCE) and follows the history of the Iranian postal systems until Sasanian times (224–650 CE) before turning to the Roman *cursus publicus*, beginning in the reign of Augustus (23 BCE–14 CE). Silverstein argues that, although other terms for a courier or messenger (*bashīr*, *rasūl*) were also in use in sixth and seventh-century pre-Islamic Arabia, the term *barīd* had entered Arabic before Islam from the Greek *beredarion* (Latin, *veredarius*), and that Arabians were also familiar with the language of the Persian communications network. However, it was only with the conquest of their empire in the seventh century that the Arabians came to require a highly centralised 'inter-regional' postal system. This combined features of Roman, Iranian and Arabian practice and came to be known exclusively as the *barīd*.

Part II is the longest section of the book. It addresses the evolution and decline of the 'caliphal *barīd*' of the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates and the postal systems of the various successor states that ruled the Islamic Middle East before the coming of the Mongols (ie *c.* 660 – *c.* 1250 CE). Three main turning-points in the history of the caliphal *barīd* are noted: its reorganisation and development under the Marwanid Umayyads (r. 684–750 CE); the centralisation of the postal network under the Abbasid caliph, al-Mutawakkil (r. 847–61), when, Silverstein argues, a central *dīwān al-barīd* ('office of the post') was created for the first time; finally, the disintegration of the unified caliphate during and after the late ninth century. This fragmentation of political authority necessitates the separate treatment of the communications networks of the Fatimid caliphate, the Samanid and Ghaznavid emirates and the Buyid and Seljuk states (the Seljuks, Silverstein notes, did without a formal intelligence and communications network, to their detriment).

Part III covers the much shorter period from *c.* 1250 – *c.* 1400 CE, and focuses on the Mongol *yām* and the *barīd* of Mamluk state that resisted them. Regarding the *yām*, Silverstein follows previous scholarship in suggesting that it was heavily influenced by the Chinese *Yi* (or *Li*). (Although he does

point out that eighth-century documentary evidence suggests that the use of the term *yām* in Central Asia long-predated the Mongol conquests). He notes that the fully-developed *yām* probably influenced the communications networks of the Delhi Sultanate, the Ottomans and the Timurids. However, he makes a much fuller examination of the Mamluk *barīd*, another postal system said to have been modelled on the *yām*, and observes that the claim of the Mamluk-era writer, 'Umarī, that the Mamluk *barīd* was a revived Abbasid institution (and so not simply an imitation of Mongol practice) was not entirely without foundation.

The book ends with a useful appendix on the speed of the postal systems, preceded by four conclusions. First, an efficient postal network contributed both to the material power of the monarch and his symbolic power; it was widely held that neglect of the *barīd* led to the fall of the Umayyads and the Seljuks' failure to confront the Isma'īlīs and Crusaders effectively. Second, the precise form of the postal system could vary quite widely between dynasties (sometimes, it seems, for symbolic and political reasons) and according to the exigencies of terrain and resources (beacons, runners, pigeons and merchants were all alternatives to riders on various mounts). Third, what was most 'Islamic' about 'Islamic' postal systems was the light burden placed on local populations thanks to centralised funding (at least in the middle Abbasid period, under the Mamluks and after the conversion of the Mongols). Finally, as noted above, nomad conquerors were in a position to exploit and enhance the communications networks of the settled regions they occupied – a distinctive feature of Middle Eastern history. Most of this makes very good use of the book's long view and is persuasive. However, the notion of an 'Islamic' character for postal systems perhaps requires some further justification. The argument appears to be one about acceptable forms of taxation in Abbasid and post-Abbasid, 'classical' Islam, but one suspects that, like the Ghaznavids, many pre-modern Islamic regimes which had less centralised and monetised tax systems imposed more heavily on local populations.

With respect to the book as a whole, it might be suggested that the tenth–twelfth centuries and the successor states to the Mongols of the fourteenth century are a little short-changed because the book's focus tends to be on the major imperial powers of the pre-modern Islamic Middle East. Also, very occasionally, the literary sources seem to be taken too much at face value. For example, in Part I, one suspects that Procopius' unfavourable comparison in his *Secret History* of the poor quality of Roman intelligence, under Justinian, with the reliable intelligence of the Iranians, under Khusro, is part of Procopius' wider programme of invective against the Roman emperor, and thus not secure evidence for the Justinianic post. (What it *is*, is further evidence for the importance of the post in the image of Near Eastern monarchy). Likewise, one wonders about the Seljuks and their lack of *barīd* (which, it must be said, is very widely-accepted): the Seljuks came from a pastoral nomad background and would have had natural aptitude for fast communication; might Niẓām al-Mulk's criticism of the lack of spies (*aṣḥāb al-akhbār*) employed by the state not be the whole story? Elsewhere, Middle Eastern influence on the Mongol *yām* is noted: might this have come via the remnants of Seljuk systems rather than from the Mamluks?

Overall, however, there is very little to disagree with here and much that is impressive. As the first comprehensive survey of Islamic postal networks, Silverstein's book is likely to remain a very useful reference work for some time to come. A great range of source material, in many languages, and from many regions and periods, is sifted and analysed. The balance between the literary evidence of histories, geographies and administrative manuals and the documentary evidence of papyri and other primary material is struck very well. In at least one case, a very new source is brought to bear on the question of the postal system (the anonymous, Buyid-era, *Siyāsat al-mulūk*, first discussed by Silverstein in 2002–3), as are many under-exploited ones (including the documentary material). In its long perspective (in total, nearly 2,000 years), and its willingness to connect institutional history to other historical patterns, including those determined by ecology and technology, this book is an important and wide-ranging

contribution to Middle Eastern history. Furthermore, it is lucid, readable and elegantly produced, with clear maps and a good index.

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A Selection from the Millet Manuscript Library, Ali Emiri Efendi and his World. The Catalogue of an Exhibition organised by the Pera Museum. Edited by Ekrem Isin, Compiled by S. Mubahats, Kutukoglu, Ugur Derman, Cicek Derman. pp. 392. Istanbul, The Pera Museum, 2007.

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A Selection from the Millet Manuscript Library, Ali Emiri Efendi and His World is a catalogue prepared for an exhibition of splendid items from the collection of Ali Emiri Efendi, which was organised by the Suna and Inan Kirac Foundation, the Pera Museum and the Istanbul Research Institute. The exhibition ran from 23 January 2007 until 1 July 2007. It was dedicated to the memory of Ali Emiri Efendi (d.1924), an outstanding Ottoman intellectual, poet, historian, biographer, publisher and bibliophile. As the founder of the Millet Manuscript Library in Istanbul (17 April 1916), Ali Emiri Efendi truly deserves this tribute. Through this exhibition, 49 imperial edicts, 31 calligraphic works and 69 manuscripts, selected from the collections of the Library, were presented to the general public for the first time.

The catalogue is bilingual in Turkish and English, and it combines essays on the life and works of Ali Emiri Efendi and detailed illustrations of the exhibited items with notes on the historical and aesthetical values of the selected works. The foreword by Suna and Inan Kirac, 'On the luminous path of an unconventional man of culture', is followed by a prelude by Atilla Koc, the Minister of Culture and Tourism, 'A heroic lover of books and culture: Ali Emiri Efendi'. The opening essay by Ekrem Isin, 'The portrait of a conservative in the age of Ottoman modernization', is an insightful introduction to the life and social atmosphere of Ali Emiri Efendi, emphasising his qualifications, particularly as a collector of manuscripts. The second essay, 'The Library of Ali Emiri Efendi' by Tuba Cavdar, is about the establishment of the Millet Library, perhaps the greatest personal achievement of Ali Emiri Efendi. 'Millet Library from the Republic until Today', the third essay, by Melek Gencboyaci, gives an account on the various stages of the library, and its collaboration with the Suna and Inan Kirac Foundation.

The final and erudite essay by Mubahat S. Kutukoglu, 'On *tughra*, *firman* and *berat*', is a thoughtful introduction to the functional and historical background of the *tughra* 'the Ottoman imperial monogram', *firman* 'royal decree' and *berat* 'royal diploma'. This article is particularly useful to the English reader as it represents the most detailed paper published in English on this subject. Tribute should be made to the valuable contributions of Ugur Derman, who has written annotated entries for the calligraphic items of this catalogue as well. All these essays provide a wealth of information both for beginners and specialists.

The essays are followed by four separate sections dedicated to *firman*s, *qit'a*s 'album pages', *levha*s 'calligraphic panels' and books. Among the exhibits in the first section is the *berat* of Suleyman the Magnificent, dated 27 February 1556, it is exceptional in terms of the quality of its courtly illumination and calligraphy. The rest of the decree collection consists of lavishly decorated *berat*s and *firman*s of Selim II (r. 1566–74), Murad III (r. 1574–95), Mehmed III (r. 1595–1603), Ahmed I (r. 1603–1617), Osman II (r. 1618–1622), Mehmed IV (r. 1648–1687), Ahmed III (r. 1703–1730), Mahmud I (r. 1730–1754), Osman III (1754–1757), Selim III (r. 1789–1808), Mahmud II (r. 1808–1839), Abdulmecid