

detailed study of archival practices. The editions are carefully prepared, and the translations help to make them accessible to non-specialists and comparativists. The study includes essays on Burhān al-Dīn's life, archiving practices, the sales booklet as a form of documentation, the library contexts, and book prices.

Recent studies on archival practices in the medieval Middle East, here understood as the period preceding the Ottoman conquest of Egypt, Syria, and the Hijaz, emphasize the ubiquity of written documents and the paucity of state archives. The highly developed legal culture of the period produced endless streams of documentation, but notaries did not necessarily keep copies of the documents they drafted and comprehensive court archives did not exist until the middle of the sixteenth century. Legal documents were archived by families, endowment institutions (both Muslim and Christian), and the households of military slaves. When a judge wanted to review a prior legal decision, he instructed the parties to submit their documents and identify witnesses who could testify in their favour.

The disposition of Burhān al-Dīn's estate was one such legal procedure in which the deceased's personal archive was submitted to the judge who had a series of documents compiled concerning the sale of the deceased's library. The beneficiaries were Burhān al-Dīn's orphans, and the authors might have given more thought to the way in which the judge managed the orphans' property during their minority.

A substantial part of the study is devoted to reconstructing the relationship between different documents and the manner of their composition, down to the level of how they were folded and the orthography of numerals. These details will fascinate specialists in medieval archival practices and suggest ways for historians working on other documents to reconstruct and interpret private archives. For non-specialists, this material may be too detailed, and the earlier chapters are likely to be of greater interest.

Although the authors make an effort to engage with the secondary literature on Ottoman libraries and estate inventories, it is clear that more discussion is needed between specialists in the medieval and early modern periods. Although the Ottomans introduced important changes in archiving practices in the lands they conquered, there were also significant continuities in the production of legal documents. The survival of so much evidence from the Ottoman period could assist medievalists in interpreting the more fragmentary evidence available to them. For their part, Ottomanists might discover that some practices with which they are familiar have deeper roots than they realize.

doi:10.1017/S0041977X23000861

**Bernard O'Kane, A.C.S. Peacock
and Mark Muehlhaeusler (eds): *Inscriptions of the
Medieval Islamic World***

Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023. ISBN 978 | 4744 8944 7.

Konrad Hirschler

University of Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany
Email: konrad.hirschler@uni-hamburg.de

This volume is a splendid milestone in the study of epigraphy in the medieval Islamic world, bringing together an impressively diverse set of authors. Its over 700 pages are



generously illustrated with some 250 high-quality images. The 21 substantive chapters cover inscriptions stretching from al-Andalus to Afghanistan covering along the way regions such as Morocco, Crimea, Syria, and the Arabian Peninsula. Reflecting the editors' interests, the chronological focus is on the period between c. 1000 and 1500, and there is a particularly strong regional cluster of articles on Persia. The Central and South Asian worlds receive rather limited treatment, but it is a particular strength of the volume to have included hitherto poorly studied contexts (such as inscriptions from the Crimean Khanate). The volume not only covers the expected architectural inscriptions, but also takes into account inscriptions on a wide range of objects including coins (R. McClary), pen boxes (F. Bauden), tombstones (V. Porter on early Islamic Egypt), ceramics (R. Wrightson on ninth/tenth-century Iraq), metalwork (D. Behrens-Abouseif on Mamluk Egypt), manuscripts (S. Ünlüönen on inscriptions in Persian illustrations) and graffiti (R. Tokunaga on early Islamic Hijaz).

The articles are consistently of highest quality and they either bring entirely new material into scholarship or reinterpret known material in a convincing manner. One argumentative strand emerging from this volume is for instance the argumentative potential of seemingly generic and ahistorical inscription. Doris Behrens-Abouseif's article on Mamluk-period metalwork focuses on inscriptions without immediate "historical value" (such as the names of patrons, or dates), but instead poetic inscriptions praising the object's beauty, and also the topics of patience, love and wine. These "ahistorical" inscriptions and objects had been largely neglected in scholarship that favoured their "more historical" peers. Yet such objects with generic inscriptions obviously have a history and, as Behrens-Abouseif shows, in Egypt they are particularly a phenomenon of the fifteenth century. In that sense they might be linked to Bethany Walker's analysis of the changing nature of ceramic artefacts as evidence of political transformations and a social widening of artistic patronage during that period (*Mamlūk Studies Review* 8/1, 2004, 1–114). A splendid example of the reinterpretation of known material is Scott Redford's article on the transition from angular (Kufic) to rounded (*naskh*) inscriptions in medieval Syria, Anatolia and northern Mesopotamia from the eleventh century onwards. The author also moves beyond the "historical" inscription with dates and names to build a much wider corpus including pseudo-epigraphy. This in turn allows him to propose a fascinating argument of a much more gradual transition than hitherto assumed, with angular script retaining a central function for esoteric, apotropaic and talismanic purposes. The article by P.T. Nagy and U. Bongianino addresses the phenomenon of seemingly generic square Kufic "*barakat Muḥammad*" inscriptions in Morocco. They build up a fascinating argument on the function of these inscriptions as icons that were crucial for negotiating the status of the region's political elites and descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad. At the same time the authors convincingly set these icons into a much wider history of the veneration of the prophet that found expression in a wide range of media.

The volume is based on a joint American University of Cairo/University of St. Andrews conference held in Cairo in 2019. All contributions are based on clearly delimited corpora of materials (or case studies) and are thus often addressing very different conversation partners (scholarship on Andalusian history, on Ilkhanid history, on Mamluk history and so on). The overarching conceptualization of the volume in terms of "Islamic inscriptions" (meaning, to a large extent, inscriptions in "Arabic script") leaves ample space for its fascinating range of case studies. The object-driven nature of most articles also ensures that the broad category of Islamic is constantly grounded in local variation and specificity. As might be expected, the bottom-up approach of the individual case studies means that the overarching analytical value of the volume in terms of fostering or advancing a broader argument remains to some extent limited. In this regard, the introduction focuses on the well-known trope of the outstanding importance of the written word in the Islamic

traditions as the volume's central feature – regrettably without substantiating this claim by comparing the epigraphic tradition and practices in Islamicate societies with those in other historical contexts. Especially in light of the fascinating case studies that follow it would have been helpful either to develop a more focused overarching conceptualization for the volume as a whole or to highlight those numerous argumentative and methodological strands shared by various articles in the volume.

One broader trend that the volume does show very convincingly is how far the field of studying inscriptions in Arabic script has come in terms of bringing text-driven philological approaches and object-driven art-historical approaches into conversation. For too long inscriptions have been dealt with as “deboned” texts (to take Tamer el-Leithy's term) as has been done with manuscripts – texts that were separated from their material context and that were transmigrated to print or digital editions. In contrast, the case studies in this volume beautifully show how text and materiality can be masterfully combined to trace local peculiarities and individual idiosyncrasies, but also long-term developments and trans-regional exchanges. This volume is overall a pleasure to read and is highly recommended for students of epigraphy and Islamicate history in general.

doi:10.1017/S0041977X23000927

Ankur Barua: *Exploring Hindu Philosophy*

**(Series in Global Philosophy.) Sheffield, UK and Bristol, CT:
Equinox, 2023. ISBN 978 1 80050 269 7.**

John Nemeč

University of Virginia, Charlottesville, USA
jwn3y@virginia.edu

Hinduism is tremendously varied in its internal diversity, because the term refers to a host of traditions that developed and found practice across the Indian subcontinent and over the course of more than two millennia. To specify an array of materials to be studied under the broad title of “Hindu Philosophy”, and in a manner sufficiently narrow that it can fit into a short introductory book, is therefore no simple matter. Nevertheless, Ankur Barua, in this elegant volume of deceptively simple presentation, represents Hindu thought in a manner that sympathetically covers the subject with admirable range and yet is ideally suited for students.

Barua begins with a simple but significant proposition: to “... convey one key point to you [the reader]: while the patterns of arguments and counterarguments in Hindu styles of reasoning occasionally become quite rarefied, such patterns do ‘touch base’ with some of our basic experiences, ideas, and thoughts” (p. ix). This “key point” in turn suggests that Barua will engage fully his double experience, which was nurtured in two intellectual contexts: a department of philosophy and a faculty of divinity (p. x). He is interested in the analytical sophistication of Indian philosophy, but only while also remaining sensitive to its religious dimension, to the capacity for careful thought to further what Hindu thought can offer to a “philosophy of life” (p. 5). There can be no denying, as Barua