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## Reviews of Books

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ADAPTIONS AND INNOVATIONS: STUDIES ON THE INTERACTION BETWEEN JEWISH AND ISLAMIC THOUGHT AND LITERATURE FROM THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES TO THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY, DEDICATED TO PROFESSOR JOEL L. KRAEMER. Edited by TZVI LANGERMANN and JOSEF STERN, (Collection de la Revue des Études juives). pp. 441. Leuven, Peeters, 2007.  
doi:10.1017/S1356186308009103

Joel Kraemer, John Henry Barrows Professor Emeritus at the University of Chicago, is renowned for his work in two principal fields – the history of Islamic thought and culture, and the life of the leading Jewish philosopher of the medieval Islamic world, Moses Maimonides. The twenty articles presented in this excellent volume represent broadly these two particular areas of interest, being mainly concerned with the intersection of Jewish and Islamic ideas, with cross-pollination on a philosophical and literary level, and, to a lesser degree, with the approach taken by more recent Jewish scholarship of Islam.

Fittingly, given Kraemer's tremendous contribution to the field, a number of the studies focus upon Maimonides. These include Michael Schwarz on his use of the term *al-fiqh*, Sarah Pessin on his interpretation of the teacher's role, and an interesting piece by Miriam Galston on the modern relevance of Maimonides' legal writings. In tune with the theme of the volume, three studies deal specifically with Averroes and Maimonides: Alfred Ivry on 'conjunction' in both philosophers' works, Ralph Lerner on the call for philosophy, and Barry Kogan on the two philosophers' approaches to scripture. This last article, the longest in the volume, culminates in a convincing challenge to the traditional scholarly belief that Maimonides was unaware – at least before he wrote the Guide for the Perplexed – of Averroes' work.

The interaction of Islamic and Jewish thought is also dealt with by Binyamin Abrahamov, who shows Sa'adya's familiarity with Islamic theological literature, by Rémi Brague on the word *talattuḥ*, and by Gad Freudenthal and Mauro Zonta on the complex literary history of Ibn Bahrīz's translation of Nichomachus. On the scriptural front, Uri Rubin looks at the Islamicisation of biblical history in the early Muslim period, and Wālid Saleh examines al-Biqā'ī's burgeoning obsession with the Hebrew Bible.

Further studies deal with the philosophers Crescas (Tzvi Langermann) and al-Fārābī (Charles Butterworth), with religious tolerance in the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (Abbas Hamdani) and intolerance in the *Manhaj al-Ṣawāb* (Joseph Sadan), with al-Dāhīrī's playful Sefer ha-Musar (Adena Tanenbaum) and the Queen of Sheba's purported riddles (Jacob Lassner), with the Islamic interpretation of the 'Hamitic Myth' in Genesis 9 (Reuven Firestone), with an interesting Genizah letter concerning Judah ha-Levi (Mordechai A. Friedman), and with two intellectual circles in interwar Jerusalem (Steven Wasserstrom). There is a short biography of Joel Kraemer by Joel Stern, along with Kraemer's essay 'My teachers', and useful indexes. The book contains a great number of interesting studies touching

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 *dūwān 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