

conversion. With actual conversion rates remaining low because “the social, linguistic, religious, cultural, and even spatial chasm that existed between Arab and Egyptian communities throughout Umayyad rule was simply immense and seldom traversed” (p. 60), Mikhail shows how the Arab Muslim presence profoundly affected Egyptian Christian communities, from Christian religious positions and functionaries (chapter 9) to Arabization.

By focusing on the religious dimension(s) of the changes described in this book, Mikhail has not only incorporated a rich source base of narrative and documentary texts in many different languages, but most important of all, offers us a fresh look on the transformative processes of this crucial period of Egypt’s history. His admirably clear writing style and convenient presentation in many short thematic chapters in roughly chronological order make the book into a very useful source for beginners as well as more advanced students of early medieval Egypt.

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DANIELLA TALMON-HELLER and KATIA CYTRYN-SILVERMAN (eds):

Material Evidence and Narrative Sources: Interdisciplinary Studies of the History of the Muslim Middle East.

(Islamic History and Civilization, Studies and Texts 108.) xx, 390 pp.

Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014. €110. ISBN 978 9 004 27159 3.

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This volume offers a range of interdisciplinary research. The chapters deal with topics dating from the early Islamic period through to the late twentieth century. Art historians, archaeologists, numismatists, sillographers and historians contribute perspectives, with a recurrent concern being to find ways to correlate visual and material culture with evidence drawn from primary written sources.

This interpretive process is aimed, as the subtitle of the volume indicates, at the reconstruction of the “history of the Muslim Middle East”. This seems an overly specific categorization in that it sidelines the non-Muslim dimensions of society (the book does, however, include a fine study based on a document from the Cairo Geniza) as well as the vital interactions between Muslims, Jews and Christians that are such a feature of the cultures of the Middle East. The presence of “history” in the subtitle brings to mind the fact that the disciplines of archaeology and art history are still sometimes called upon to support a dominant narrative created by texts. There is, of course, the danger that scholars can underestimate the extent to which aesthetic or technological advances in the material record can follow trajectories largely independent of political and economic factors – dynastic change, military conflict, famines, and so on – that loom large in contemporary chronicles.

Interdisciplinarity has become something of a mantra in modern humanistic scholarship. The introduction to the volume (penned by the editors and Yasser Tabbaa) notes that students of Islamic art and archaeology have long embraced the idea that primary textual sources are an essential dimension of the analysis of physical evidence. Oleg Grabar’s 1959 study of the Dome of the Rock is justly cited as a turning point in the study of Islamic material culture. Conversely, historians such as Hugh Kennedy and Michael Morony have widened their scope to incorporate numismatic data and archaeology. One might ask, therefore, what novel approaches are being advanced in the present volume given the claim that

the authors have been “guided by our rigorous adherence to the prevailing methodologies of our respective disciplines” (p. 1)?

These methodologies are mostly left implicit, with the approaches adopted in some chapters appearing rather conventional. If this is somewhat disappointing, the reader is amply compensated by the sheer range of source material utilized by the contributors to this volume. Notable too is the conscientious way in which the art historians and archaeologists now approach the interpretation of primary written sources. These sources are carefully evaluated in terms of authorship, function and wider context prior to the extraction of nuggets of information.

The book itself comprises fifteen chapters, written by established scholars and emerging names in their respective fields. The chapters are organized into five thematic sections: economics and trade; governmental authority; material culture; changing landscapes; and monuments. The following paragraphs pick out what seem, from this reviewer’s perspective, to be the most interesting themes and approaches.

The focus on portable objects is welcome, and includes some fascinating contributions. Bacharach draws on his long experience of teaching Islamic history to make some acute observations about how coins were employed and perceived. Heidemann is also concerned with numismatic evidence. He offers a masterly examination of the role of coins in measuring levels of economic activity. Amitai-Preiss adopts a narrower focus, using a series of seals to illuminate events of a single year (155/771–72). Frenkel and Lester offer an edition and translation of a partial inventory from the Geniza archive. The authors sift through the challenging vocabulary of this document in order to suggest correlations with surviving objects in metal, ceramic, and stone. They conclude that the document lists the stock of a Cairene pawnbroker.

Archaeology is well represented. Whitcomb considers the ways in which gender is reflected in the material culture of the Red Sea port of Quseir. This is an interesting question, though his conclusions are rather preliminary in character. The study of early Islamic Ramla by Shmueli and Goldfus shows how interdisciplinary approaches – including aerial photography and published excavations – can facilitate the reinterpretation of written sources. The authors argue that, contrary to earlier viewpoints, the city was not fortified during the tenth century.

Several chapters concern themselves with architecture, with some addressing single monuments and others clusters of buildings. Meital discusses the changing iconography of Egypt’s Monument to the Unknown Soldier before and after the assassination of Anwār al-Sādāt in 1981. Sharef-Davidovich argues that palaces played an important role as foci of new neighbourhoods in late nineteenth-century Istanbul. Hartmuth offers novel approaches, inspired by the work of Jan Vansina, to the interpretation of oral traditions relating to the construction of the sixteenth-century mosque of Foča. He argues that such sources should not be dismissed simply because they contain unreliable components.

The activities of two relatively atypical architectural patrons, a Fatimid Queen Mother (Calderini and Cortese) and the chief surgeon of a fifteenth-century *bimaristān* (Hamza), are reconstructed on the basis of textual evidence. The latter is notable for its reconstruction of the groundplan of the founder’s tomb complex described in the *waqfiyya* document. Kühn concentrates instead on a craftsman called al-Dimyāṭī, a master carpenter engaged in the production of *minbars* in fifteenth-century Cairo. He was deemed important enough to warrant an entry in a biographical dictionary.

In summary, this is a thought-provoking contribution to the study of Islamic material culture. Adopting a wide range of approaches, the authors show how portable objects, monuments, and architectural fittings can be understood within their

precise historical and cultural contexts. The chapters are supported by generous illustration, much of it in colour. The diversity of the subject matter, the consistent quality of the scholarship, and the visually attractive layout should attract a wide readership for this valuable volume.

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MA‘MAR IBN RĀSHID (ed. and trans. SEAN W. ANTHONY, Foreword by M.A.S. ABDEL HALEEM):

The Expeditions: An Early Biography of Muḥammad.

(Library of Arabic Literature.) xlv, 372 pp. New York: New York University Press, 2014. \$35. ISBN 978 0 8147 6963 8.

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While studies of the composition of the earliest narratives of the Prophet Muḥammad’s life and the authenticity of the material they contain have proliferated in recent years, translations into English of extant Arabic texts remain relatively rare. Sean Anthony’s new edition and complete English translation of the section entitled “Book on the Expeditions” (*Kitāb al-Maghāzī*) from the Yemeni jurist ‘Abd al-Razzāq ibn Ḥammām’s (d. 211/827) *Muṣannaf* is, therefore, a very welcome publication. The work – as we have quickly come to expect from the Library of Arabic Literature series – is very handsomely produced with a decent introduction preceding the edition and translation itself. There have already been two editions of this *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* and, since there is only one extant manuscript witness to the text, Anthony’s Arabic text offers no particularly important new readings. The major advance here is the production of an Arabic text alongside the translation, which is very readable in a modern English idiom, and well-annotated. I leave the task of making comprehensive suggestions for corrections and emendations to the text and translation to others (for a start, see Maher Jarrar’s review in *Speculum* 90/2, 2015, 560–62); instead, it seems worth using this review to make some broader observations about the authorship of the work and the historiographical value of the text.

Although the text is extracted from a much larger book called the *Muṣannaf* by ‘Abd al-Razzāq, Anthony is reasonably confident (and he is in generally good company here) that what we really have is a redaction of a work on Muḥammad’s career originally taught to ‘Abd al-Razzāq by his teacher, Ma‘mar ibn Rāshid (d. 154/770). Anthony suggests that Ma‘mar was “the pivotal personality responsible for its content and form” (p. xx), but this is far easier a claim to make for the former than for the latter. The argument that Ma‘mar was mainly responsible for the extant *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*’s organization is certainly not implausible, but it remains undemonstrated. The suggestion that this *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* may be something very close to a final product as Ma‘mar imagined it is hard to sustain. At the very least, what we have is a later redaction of Ma‘mar’s material, some of which seems to have been altered for a range of reasons; Anthony himself notes a possible example of censorship at pp. 192–3 (§21.1.1) and p. 306, n. 227. The work clearly does not include everything taught by Ma‘mar on material related to Muḥammad’s career and expeditions and even includes three reports – admittedly a tiny number proportionally – not transmitted by Ma‘mar: a very clear indication of some level of later redaction.