

policy, which worked effectively for food supply in eighteenth-century Beijing, came to be regarded as unnecessary baggage. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the state spent a great deal of resources in order to maintain the granary system because of its usefulness in preventing famine, but in doing so loosened the vigilance required to prevent the breakdown of the bureaucratic class whose duty was to manage it. In the end, all that remained was a mere shadow of the former granary system and a legion of corrupt bureaucrats. In such a way Li narrates the process of “deterioration” that was ushered in by Qing governmental food and river control policies, a phenomenon that she ascribes not to fundamental weaknesses of the policies themselves, but rather to the way these policies related to the various conditions of the places in which they were implemented.

Historical theories of the sort Li promotes in this work, such as the notion that the success of Qing economic policies later caused ordinary people to suffer and the natural environment to decline, in fact share the same orientation as Chinese ecological history, which has gained wide currency since the 1990s.<sup>4</sup> As Li states at the beginning of her volume, ecological history frequently emphasizes a mechanism by which human intervention in the natural environment often causes environmental decline, and indeed has a negative impact on society. This work interprets state interventions such as river control and the granary system as the main factors leading to the deterioration of the natural environment in northern China. As such, I believe we should regard this work as an important contribution to a new mode of historical studies.

As the author notes, despite the Qing period paradox of successful governmental interventionist policies actually causing damage in the long run, the hallowed tradition of governmental famine relief has continued in modern and contemporary China. In recent years, environmental problems in China and the need to solve them is of primary concern. The Chinese government and Chinese scholars have begun to pay attention to the history of famine and famine relief in their country, bearing in mind the necessity of formulating responses to environmental problems. The author suggests what they could learn from the historical experience of famine and famine relief in the Qing period, and furnishes an outlook for the future of the country and its government. In that sense, though Li’s work focuses on the later imperial period, it also might function as a basic guide to resolving many problems of the contemporary period. It is worthy to be read closely not only by scholars studying Qing history, but also by those studying more recent periods.

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*Aden & the Indian Ocean Trade: 150 Years in the Life of a Medieval Arabian Port.*

By Roxani Eleni Margariti. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007. Pp. xiii + 343. ISBN 10: 0807830763; 13: 978-0807830765.

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This magnificent book sets out to explore “the development and deployment of physical space and institutions for the sake of transoceanic trade” in medieval Aden, “emphasizing the urban stage and its actors, who looked constantly seaward” (p. 2). To this end, the author has labored with both force

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4 See Ueda Makoto 上田信, “Seitai kankyō no rekishi: Chūgoku kenkyū kara no teigen” 生態環境の歴史—中国研究からの提言 [Ecological History: Suggestions from Studies on China], in Society of Socio-Economic History, ed., *Shakai keizai shigaku no kadai to tenbō* 社会経済史学の課題と展望 [Issues and Views of Socio-Economic History], Tokyo: Yūhikaku, 2002. In this article, Ueda introduces recent related discussions in Japan.

and sensitivity on an overwhelming array of primary, and mostly fragmentary, sources, taking full advantage of the recent scholarship on Yemeni historiography, architectural history, and archaeology. The result is one of the most comprehensive and erudite contributions seen in the past three decades to the ever-expanding literature on Indian Ocean trade.

The book consists of an extensive Introduction, two major parts consisting of three chapters each, and a Conclusion. The Introduction lays out the scope and the overarching theme of the book, as well as historiography, methods and sources, periodization and chronology, and a brief history of the Yemeni harbor of Aden to 626/1228. The author gives special attention to primary sources, which she arranges under the rubrics of 1) “Cairo Geniza and S. D. Goitein’s India Book”; 2) “Travel and History Writing” (mainly the *Ta’rikh al-mustabṣir* by Ibn al-Mujāwir [fl. c. 626/1228] and the *Ta’rikh thaghr ‘Adan* by Abū Makhrama [d. 947/1540]); and 3) “Rasulid documents”, chiefly the administrative and fiscal archives known as *al-Daftar al-Muḏaffari* (a yearbook or an almanac) and an early fifteenth-century short administrative document entitled *Malakhkhaṣ al-ḥiṭan*. While some of these sources have been explored, masterfully, by S. D. Goitein, R. B. Serjeant, G. Rex Smith, and Dan Varisco (to name a few), many others are less known and little studied. This is the first time, to my knowledge, that all of these texts have been brought together, and the author’s reading and synthesis of them is new and refreshing. In this regard, she has taken pains to discuss why the Cairo Geniza documents – mostly in Judeo-Arabic, namely Arabic in Hebrew script, written by Jewish merchants – are relevant to the present inquiry, a story about predominantly Arab-Muslim merchants’ activities in and around Aden (pp. 18–22).

Part I, “The Physical Entrepôt”, treats Aden’s physical world. In three chapters, “The Environment”, “Topography of the Harbor”, and “Topography of the Port City”, we witness Margariti’s innovative method at work, brilliantly. This is not your typical social economic history of the Islamic Near East: the historical survey, informed by medieval Arabic narrative sources and the British colonial archives, is juxtaposed with modern-day Google Earth satellite images, resulting in a historical and visual panorama of an ever-evolving, living process of Aden, from medieval times to the present day. In Chapter 1, I found the comparative reading of the thirteenth-century travelers’ itineraries, placed alongside British colonial maps of Aden and its vicinity with regard to roads and routes, to be insightful (pp. 54–55), and the region-by-region delineation of the Hinterland of Aden, including al-Mabāh, Rubāk, Lakhaba, Laḥj, and Abyan, compelling (pp. 56–67). In Chapters 2 and 3 the author’s approach to the topography of Aden, both as a harbor and a port city, is truly interdisciplinary in nature. It yields an informative synthesis from a vantage point rarely seen in traditional text-based scholarship.

Speaking of the text-oriented domain, Part 2, “The Commercial Entrepôt”, is a tour de force of social economic history of Aden and Indian Ocean trade at large, based on solid analyses of historical and documentary sources. In this regard, G. Rex Smith’s pioneering work on medieval Aden, based on the Arabic narrative sources, laid the groundwork for the present investigation, and to this Margariti adds the testimony of the Cairo Geniza. Hers is by far one of the most satisfying syntheses of the Geniza materials I have seen in a long time. Unlike some of the recent Geniza studies that tend to reduce research to a merely philological exercise, ignoring the contexts under which these documents were written, Margariti addresses the “structure, mechanisms, procedures, and ultimate role” (p. 111) of trade in the life of medieval Aden with a social historian’s eye on the big picture and an economic historian’s keen sense of statistical minutia. What distinguishes the present work is its meticulous, critical use of the rich Geniza documents, in careful comparison with what the literary sources have to offer (Ibn al-Mujāwir, and others).

Chapter 4, “The Customshouse”, takes up the issues of clearing customs (*al-furḍa* and the officers in charge) and taxation (import and export, exemptions, extra charges, and the galley tax). Although some technical details still remain unclear, Margariti guides us to solid quantitative ground, thanks to a painstaking comparative analysis strengthened by detailed tabulations (pp. 127–31). Likewise,

Chapter 5, “Ships and Shipping”, and Chapter 6, “Mercantile and Legal Services”, both build upon previous scholarship but with refreshing insight and, at times, revisionist verve. By the latter, I am referring in particular to Margariti’s new take on the long-debated issue of the origins and workings of the *kārim* group (pp. 152–54) in Chapter 5, and, in Chapter 6, her revisionist synthesis of the argument between Goitein and Smith concerning official and non-official positions of merchants’ representative(s), the so-called *wakīl al-tujjār* (pp. 178–88).

Another important methodological question the author raises pertains to the so-called *geniza* phenomenon of the pre-modern Islamic Near East (pp. 198–99) in light of recent discoveries and studies of other Arabic documents outside the Cairo Geniza, such as the Quseir (*al-Quṣayr al-qadīm*) documents from the Red Sea trade routes. Margariti makes it clear that for the present investigation the Cairo Geniza documents are of pivotal importance as primary sources only because of the circumstances and contexts in which they were situated. The Geniza documents most frequently cited herein are the ones from the prominent Jewish merchants operating in Aden, Cairo, and India who were directly involved in the India Ocean trade: the Maḍmūns, the Ben Yijūs, and the al-Lebdis. In this regard, this book is judicious in its assessment and cautious about concluding over-hastily the existence of a widespread, almost universal *geniza* system of documentation before more groundwork in this area has been conducted. As a student of medieval Arabic documents, I cannot agree more. (As a matter of fact, a 2007 University of Chicago Ph.D. dissertation by Katherine Burke argues that, in archaeological terms, the Quseir texts in no way could be categorized as a *geniza*.)

The book is beautifully produced, and includes illustrations and maps. The maps are excellent, but the quality of the illustrations varies, partly due to their small size. This is understandable. The author and the publisher are to be commended for supplying in transliteration profuse quotes from the original Arabic texts, mostly from the Geniza documents. For a work of such scope, some minor slips are perhaps inevitable: there are a few obvious errors (pp. 207, 208: 696/1154, for 569/1154?). In the transliterations, one discovers here and there some missing or misplaced dots and macrons, as well as occasional inconsistencies in proper names (which appear mostly among lowercase letters, but sometimes in capital letters as well – the name Ṭughtekīn [p. 93], for example, is spelled Ṭughtakīn elsewhere throughout). There are also a few terms and phrases I would have transcribed differently: p. 251, n. 43, *lamman* > *lammā*, *yudūrū* > *yudīrū* or *yadūrū*; p. 256, n. 20: *ihtudama* > *ihtadama* or *uhtudima*; p. 264, n. 80, *binā’hu* > *binā’ihī*; p. 280, n. 50, *inna* > *in*; n. 51, *an* > *anna*.

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*Safavid Iran: Rebirth of a Persian Empire.*

By Andrew J. Newman. London and New York: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2006. Pp. 281.

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Research produced over the past two decades has greatly advanced our knowledge about the political, religious, socio-economic and cultural aspects of Safavid Iran. The frequency in recent years of international conferences concerned with the Safavid dynasty attests to the high level of interest among scholars. Most historians, however, have concentrated on the study of the evolution of the Safavid order to a polity, or to the glorious achievements of Abbas I. Because of the general perception that upon his death the dynasty entered into a stage of decline (ultimately leading to the fall of Isfahan to the Afghans in 1722), study of the post-Abbas era, in contrast, has long been underdeveloped, even neglected. If concerned at all, research has paid much more attention to the reasons of dynastic weakening. And despite the recent publication of numerous works dealing with specific