

conclusion (on p. 224) that concerns about the legitimacy and appropriateness of the practices that emerged in association with Rajab can be found throughout Sunni discourse, but not within Imami texts.

Some aspects of the book's argument are really good and offer an important foundation for future studies of sacred space and time in the pre-modern Islamic world. I have already mentioned that the section on the shrines for al-Husayn's head is generally more effective and interesting: the points Talmon-Heller makes there about the potential for exclusivity and inclusion in the development of narratives associated with shrines are well worth taking away. She is also really good at stressing the interplay between time and space in the emergence of ideas about sanctity and rites. There is a particularly interesting discussion of Ibn Taymiyya's (d. 1328) understanding of the relationship between sanctity of time and place (see esp. p. 116): he thought it a much greater problem to venerate illegitimately a place than to perform an act of veneration at a time not specifically sanctioned.

Most of the more questionable aspects of the book's approach come in the section on Rajab. Talmon-Heller does explain, on page 5 of the introduction, her decision to focus on Rajab's veneration mostly in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk worlds: to give coherence to the book by using as far as possible the same authors who discussed the shrines of al-Husayn's head. This decision certainly does give a sense of cohesion, but it left some slightly confusing sections (at least to me). It was sometimes unclear, for example, to what extent the term "Fatimid" was being used as a chronological marker or as something more meaningful heuristically. Much of the discussion in the chapter entitled "Rajab under Fatimid Rule" is addressed to practices and debates within the Fatimid empire, but then an author like the Baghdadi Sunni 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (d. 1166) is brought in as the pivot for the discussion of fasting during Rajab (pp. 171–73). The book's broad sweep does also mean that many topics of great interest are either left aside or dealt with fairly briefly, although there is of course a payoff here as the book offers interesting synthesis and conclusions drawn from a study of the bigger picture.

On the whole, *Sacred Place and Sacred Time in the Medieval Islamic Middle East* offers an effective study of the combination of political motivations and widespread enthusiasm behind the creation, maintenance, and development of places and practices associated with sacred places and times. I fully recommend it to anyone interested in the history of these issues in the pre-modern world.

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Slavery and Islam. Jonathan A. C. Brown, (London: One World, 2019). Pp. 430. \$40.00 cloth. ISBN: 9781786076359

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Several works on slavery in the Islamic world were published in 2019, including Bernard K. Freamon's *Possessed by the Right Hand* and Mary Ann Fay's edited volume, *Slavery in the Islamic World*. What distinguishes Jonathan A.C. Brown's contribution to this scholarship is its central question: how are believing Muslims supposed to make sense of Muhammad as both a moral exemplar and a slave owner?

Brown begins the book by positioning himself as a practicing Muslim for whom this question did not feel particularly relevant until ISIS emerged in 2014. ISIS' enslavement of minority religious groups in Iraq impelled a flurry of debate within and outside the Muslim community about the Qur'an and the Prophet's stance on slavery—the question suddenly became urgent, and it defied easy answers. Brown tackles the question using a combination of history, law, and philosophy. He states his argument clearly in the Introduction to the book: "Not everything that we label 'slavery' in history was always wrong in every time and place" (p. 5). This argument is bound to make readers uncomfortable. Brown acknowledges that slavery is an uncomfortable topic and that "the study of history is inherently destabilizing" (p. 8). Nevertheless, he insists that we consider the topic seriously.

In Chapter 1, Brown discusses the difficulty of defining slavery and argues that *riqq* (the Arabic term often translated as “slavery”) does not mean the same thing as the English word “slavery.” After laying this definitional groundwork, Chapter 2 highlights the often ambiguous, contested nature of rulings on *riqq* in the shari‘a. Brown also explicates the rights and restrictions of slaves in the shari‘a, including rights of religious practice, life, and physical protection. In Chapter 3, Brown reminds his audience that Islamic civilization cannot be reduced to the shari‘a. This chapter surveys the diverse forms of slavery practiced across the far-flung Islamic world from the 7th through 19th centuries.

Building upon these legal and historical overviews, Chapter 4 uses philosophical tools to tackle the book’s central question. For Brown, the moral conundrum of Muhammad as a slave owner is resolved when one relinquishes the idea that *riqq* is the same thing as “slavery.” Certainly, the abuses people have in mind when they think of “slavery” today are morally reprehensible, but *riqq* as an abstraction cannot be declared morally reprehensible. That does not mean that *riqq* is necessarily good—it is an unfortunate situation to be avoided and ameliorated—but it is not inherently evil.

Nevertheless, most Muslims today think slavery is wrong. Chapter 5 therefore analyses various strains of Muslim abolitionist thinking, showing that Muslim scholars until very recently offered no moral condemnation of slavery *per se*, but rather prohibited slavery if it was done badly, in inappropriate circumstances, or in conflict with the interests of Muslim governments. The fact that the shari‘a can *prohibit* but not *morally condemn* slavery leads to the uncomfortable realization that slavery could be reinstated in the future if the conditions were deemed right. Enter ISIS in Chapter 6, who claimed the time was in fact right to reinstitute *riqq*. Brown dismisses ISIS as a “grotesque and egregious exception” (p. 262) and rejects any attempts to invoke ISIS as evidence that slavery and Islam go hand-in-hand. Brown ends this chapter by arguing that the Prophet and early Muslims were “veritable turbines of emancipation,” and that emancipation was “baked into the Shariah’s internal logic and functioning” (p. 263–4). While I agree that the early Islamic tradition strongly encourages manumission, this emancipatory ethic has a paradoxical outcome that Brown fails to address adequately, which is that the frequent manumission of slaves historically also drove demand for more slaves.

In Chapter 7, Brown discusses the thorny problem of concubinage and consent. He points out that the modern notion of “consent” is just as arbitrary and amorphous as other abstractions. While the shari‘a does not recognize consent as a salient aspect of sexual relationships, the shari‘a does recognize the principle of *ḍarar* (harm). If non-consensual sex (including concubinage) is deemed harmful by our society, then it is acceptable for shari‘a to prohibit it. While Brown’s solution is rather ingenious, it does not resolve any of the problems he previously raised with the notion of consent. Moreover, it appears to this reviewer that “harm” could be just as slippery a concept as any other, and just as open to abuse, injustice, and inequality. I found this chapter to be the most troubling and least convincing in the book.

The book ends with six fascinating appendices, which are short excursions ranging from a translated account from the *Hilyat al-Awliya* to a consideration of whether historical Sunni thinkers considered it legal to enslave Imami Shi‘a.

Overall, this book is erudite and thought provoking; it will be of interest to scholars of slavery in many fields. Brown synthesizes a great deal of secondary scholarship and cites evidence from numerous primary sources. The book is especially strong in its presentation of hadith evidence (both sound and unsound), as well as its discussion of Sunni legal thinkers from the late Medieval period, such as Taqi al-Din al-Subki (d. 1355) and Ibn Hajar (d. 1449), whose views on slavery have been insufficiently studied. Brown also engages with the thought of numerous 20th- and 21st-century Muslim intellectuals, from Abul A‘la Maududi (d. 1979) to the contemporary Iranian intellectual Mohsen Kadivar. Brown’s writing is engaging and accessible; he uses illustrative examples from social media, *Game of Thrones*, and other sources that non-specialists and students will find relatable. Despite this relatability, readers should expect to feel uncomfortable while reading this book, and probably to disagree with many of Brown’s arguments.

I will conclude by acknowledging my own positionality as a secular, non-Muslim historian. I am comfortable with the idea that people in the past had different moral standards than we have today. When I study the past, I do not ask whether something was *right* or *good* but merely seek to understand what *was*. That is, I feel no need to defend the morality of the past because I do not look to the past for moral

authority. I therefore cannot say whether Brown's conclusions will be satisfying for those Muslim readers who do accept the moral authority of the early Islamic past, but I suggest they read the book to find out for themselves.

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Electric News in Colonial Algeria. Arthur Asseraf, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2019). Pp. 256. \$80.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780198844044

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Electric News in Colonial Algeria by Cambridge historian Arthur Asseraf is an excellent study of information and media in six decades of French rule in Algeria, 1881 to 1940, “the period of maximum French power in North Africa” (p. 2). The book analyzes a capacious and multilingual assemblage of newspapers, magazines, manuscripts, telegrams, films, songs, poetry, radio, and even rumors, accessed partly through surveillance records of reported speech. Asseraf addresses not only the content of the news in colonial Algeria but also the material infrastructure of its transmission and circulation, the experience of its consumption, and the political and sensory shifts it engendered.

Underpinning his inquiry is an ambitious, revisionist reading of Benedict Anderson's canonical portrayal in *Imagined Communities* of the relationship between “print capitalism” and nationalism. Where Anderson shows how print constituted the nation in the modern period, Asseraf argues that print along with other media polarized colonial Algeria, fracturing the country into competing polities. Asseraf's introduction makes clear that he intends the book as a contribution to global histories of the news. In his account, Algeria provides an example of the operation of the news in the late 19th and early 20th centuries; Algeria, in other words, becomes the locus for a question of universal import rather than an exceptional site, as the country is often framed in narratives of modern history. In large part, his book convincingly balances the global with the particular, delivering a theoretically rich account of the news without neglecting the Algerian context.

Asseraf's most compelling argument is a reconstruction of the relationship between news and time. Many readers will be familiar with Anderson's notion of an “empty, homogenous time” typified by newspaper reading and conducive to unitary nationalisms. Asseraf's critique replaces this concept with the finding that news in Algeria produced disparate concepts of time as multiple iterations of media, new and old, transmitted and printed, instantaneous and slower-moving, foreign and local, interacted with different readers and listeners.

Although the global purview of *Electric News* is evident, *IJMES* readers may be particularly interested in its relationship to literatures on the modern Middle East and North Africa. The book demonstrates command over an extensive body of English-language secondary work. (The discussion of French-language secondary literature is similarly thorough). One of Asseraf's references is On Barak's study of Egypt, *On Time*, which also revises Anderson although Barak's focus is on technology rather than an ostensible “print capitalism.” *Electric News* positions itself in conversation with scholarship on media by Ami Ayalon, Walter Armbrust, Ziad Fahmy, Rebecca Scales, and Andrea Stanton. Asseraf builds on the research on nationalism by Israel Gershoni, James Jankowski, Charles Smith, James McDougall, Mary Lewis, and Ziad Fahmy. Unusual for a work on French North Africa, *Electric News* includes literature on Libya and Palestine in a chapter (Chapter 5) about the news emanating from these places. A smattering of Arabic-language secondary sources—it would have been interesting to see broader use of this literature—connects *Electric News* to historiographical conversations in Arabic (Chapter 1).