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Edited by Maribel Fierro

Excerpt

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## Introduction

MARIBEL FIERRO

What do the geographical areas included in this volume have in common over a period reaching from the fifth/eleventh to the twelfth/eighteenth century that would give meaning to both the periodisation and the geographical subdivisions used here? As noted in their introduction by the editors of volume 3 of the *New Cambridge history of Islam (The eastern Islamic world, fifth/eleventh to twelfth/eighteenth centuries)*, a certain degree of arbitrariness always accompanies the need to make temporal and territorial divisions. The obvious Mediterranean articulation of the political and commercial trends dealt with in this volume should not obscure the deep connections that linked the western and eastern Islamic worlds – their populations, their religious and political concepts and practices, and their economies. It is also obvious that the encounter, not to say clash, with the two great civilisations of India and China mostly affected the eastern regions of the Islamic world, while the encounter and clash with Christendom had a deeper impact on the western Islamic regions. But here again things were not as simple as may appear. The westward diffusion of tea from China can be used to exemplify the often convoluted paths through which links between different areas were established. Having been used in the Chinese empire for centuries, tea was not introduced into Iran until the eleventh/seventeenth century; yet it was not from there that it crossed into the Ottoman lands. Instead, Russia was the channel through which tea made its way to Turkey in the nineteenth century, and from there it moved to the Fertile Crescent, Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula, Algeria and Tunis – lands where coffee had been introduced, starting in Arabia, from the ninth/fifteenth century onwards.<sup>1</sup> But tea had reached the ‘far Maghrib’ much earlier. Dutch sea-traders brought it to western Europe in the early seventeenth century, and from there it became known in England. Enterprising British trade then led Moroccan and Saharan populations to become habituated to its consumption in the eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup> This panoramic view of the diffusion of tea reflects the complex interplay between

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political, economic, cultural and religious factors. Complexity reveals itself even when commonalities and continuities are sought after and stressed, while it also forces us to consider the extent of the differences and disruptions that geographical and temporal diversity seem to imply. What follows is intended to serve as a roadmap to guide the reader through this volume, which is devoted to the history of the western Islamic world from the disintegration of the (real or apparent) political unity brought about by the early caliphates to the moment at which the regions in question started to be overtaken by European colonialism and modernity.

## A geo-political framework

The Fāṭimid caliphate at its peak between 365/975 and 415/1025 extended from Tunisia and Sicily in the west to Ḥimṣ and Tripoli in the east. By the middle of the fifth/eleventh century, the western possessions were lost to Berber rulers, the Zīrids, while Palestine was threatened by Turkish incursions and, later on, lost to the Crusaders, with the exception of a few coastal towns. Mecca and Medina acknowledged Fāṭimid rule until the reign of the caliph al-Mustanṣir (427–87/1036–94). Cairo became the resting-place of the Fāṭimid caliphs, including those who had died in Ifrīqiya, thus stressing the genealogical legitimacy of their imamate.<sup>3</sup>

The Almohad caliphate at its height extended from the Sūs (southern Morocco) to the Iberian Peninsula and from the Atlantic to the central Maghrib.<sup>4</sup> Its collapse gave rise to different political entities in al-Andalus and in what are now Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. The Berber Almohads presented themselves as inheritors of the Mahdī Ibn Tūmart's legacy of religious and political reform, while at the same time claiming a Qaysī (referring to the northern Arab tribe of Qays 'Aylān that includes Quraysh) genealogy. For all their propaganda of universal rule, the Almohads were never able to capture the Holy Cities, control over which was an important basis for Ayyūbid, Mamlūk and Ottoman claims to legitimacy. Tinmal in southern Morocco, where Ibn Tūmart's grave was located, was the destination of caliphal visits, but its appeal remained regional and was short-lived.

Saladin's (r. 569–89/1174–93) direct or indirect rule comprised not only Egypt and Syria, including most of the territories recently held by the Franks, but also a portion of Mesopotamia, the Ḥijāz, Yemen and Cyrenaica. Saladin's forces also penetrated deep – but only temporarily – into Nubia. As 'Reviver of the empire of the Commander of the faithful', the Ayyūbid ruler put an end to the Fāṭimid caliphate and supported 'Abbāsīd legitimacy. Mostly noted for his jihad against

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the Crusaders, his reign witnessed the official strengthening of Sunnism in Egypt after the Fāṭimid/Ismāʿīlī experience.<sup>5</sup>

The Mamlūk sultanate was centred in Egypt and Syria. As successors of the Ayyūbids, the Mamlūks made jihad against the Crusaders a crucial element of the legitimacy of their rule. At the beginning, they visited the tomb of the last Ayyūbid sultan (al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb) as the site of the ceremony in which new Mamlūk officers were commissioned, but with Khalīl (r. 689–93/1290–3) it was replaced by the tomb of Qalāwūn (r. 678–89/1279–90). Mongol advance and the fall of Baghdad provided a new basis for Mamlūk legitimacy with the transfer of the ʿAbbāsid caliphate to Cairo (656/1258) and the victory of ʿAyn Jālūt (658/1260) against the Mongols.<sup>6</sup>

The Ottoman empire extended from Anatolia to the Safavid empire in the east – with the barrier formed by the mountains of eastern Anatolia, Azerbaijan and the Caucasus – and included Syria (922/1516) and Egypt (922/1517), while in North Africa the so-called Corsair states were under Ottoman control. The conquest of south-eastern Europe, which gave the Ottomans access to substantial material resources, had lasting consequences in the area. The last ʿAbbāsid caliph, al-Mutawakkil III, was with the Mamlūk army when the latter was defeated by the Ottomans at the battle of Marj Dābiq (922/1516) and was deported to Constantinople. The ʿAbbāsid caliphate ended with him. The Ottoman sultans used the caliphal title, even claiming in the tenth/sixteenth century that al-Mutawakkil had named Sultan Selīm I as his heir. The Ottoman caliphate was abolished in 1924.<sup>7</sup> The Moroccan Saʿdis also made caliphal claims, using their Sharīfī descent, their Sufi connections (they moved al-Jazūlī's tomb to Marrakesh), their jihad against the Christians and the conquest of the Sūdān to strengthen their legitimacy. Ottoman expansion stopped at Morocco.<sup>8</sup>

For the purpose of this volume, the geo-political area in which these and lesser dynasties ruled has been divided into three sections. The first includes al-Andalus and North and West Africa. The second embraces Egypt, Syria, western Arabia and Yemen. The last section concentrates on Anatolia and the Balkans. The first four parts into which this volume is divided correspond to each of those areas in combination with a chronological and political framework. Thus, Part I deals with al-Andalus and North and West Africa, and Part II with Egypt, Syria, western Arabia and Yemen from the fifth/eleventh until the ninth/fifteenth centuries, before Ottoman rule. Part III concentrates on the Ottoman empire, from pre-Ottoman Anatolia to the extension of Ottoman rule in the Balkans, Syria, Egypt, western Arabia and Yemen. Part IV focuses again on North and West Africa from the tenth/sixteenth to the twelfth/eighteenth centuries, both from the perspective of

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those lands that remained outside the sphere of Ottoman power (Morocco and sub-Saharan West Africa) and of those that fell under the control of the Sublime Porte.

Part V of this volume is intended to bring together some of the threads that have sustained the narrative in the preceding parts, with an analytical and comparative perspective. Focusing on rulers, soldiers, peasants, traders and scholars, it comprises five chapters, dealing with state formation and organisation, conversion to Islam, taxation and the raising and payment of armies, trade and scholarship.

Within the first four parts, the chapters chiefly concentrate on ruling dynasties and the narrative of their political history. Volume 4 of the *New Cambridge history of Islam* deals with religion, culture and society during the period covered in volumes 1–3, but it is obvious that any treatment of political history necessarily involves society, economy, culture and religion. What follows is an overview of some of the issues that have informed the treatment of political history by the various contributors, issues that are treated in more detail in Part V of this volume.

## Old and new Muslims

Most of the lands covered here (Syria, Egypt, North Africa, al-Andalus, Sicily, with Anatolia as one of the exceptions) had already been under Muslim rule for three or four centuries. By the fifth/eleventh century, Muslims had just become or were becoming the majority of the population across these regions. From this time onwards the different regions in various ways experienced shifts from 'new' to 'old' Muslim societies. Arabisation was helped in areas such as Egypt and North Africa by large-scale immigration of Arab tribes. Berber survived as a daily language, and there were some attempts at using it as an Islamic literary language. Latin and Romance in al-Andalus and Coptic in Egypt died out, the latter surviving after the seventh/thirteenth century only for liturgical use. The sixth/twelfth century also saw the disappearance of the indigenous Christian community in al-Andalus through expulsion and conversion, a process that went hand in hand with the confiscation of the Church lands. A similar development took place in Egypt in the eighth/fourteenth century, when the endowed properties (*waqfs*) of the local churches were confiscated by the Mamlūk government, leading the Copts to mass conversion. If the Sunnī identity of Egypt had taken shape under the Ayyūbids, its Islamisation was achieved under the Mamlūks. The slow process of Islamisation in North Africa saw the reduction of ancient Khārijī

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settlements, the disappearance of local variants of Islam – such as the religion of the Barghawāta – and also of imported Shī‘ism, and the emergence of a distinct and innovative local interpretation of Islam, that of Almohadism. Its blend of Mahdism and rationalism made possible the appearance of unique intellectual figures such as the Sufi Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240) – who had a lasting influence in the East where he settled – and the philosopher Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198) – whose influence was mostly limited to Latin Christendom.

By the eighth/fourteenth century, the penetration of Turkish tribes into the remains of the Byzantine empire opened up new lands to Muslim rule, and to the spread of the Islamic religion and the Turkish language. The second half of the ninth/fifteenth century witnessed the loss of al-Andalus (with the fall of Granada in 897/1492) on the western shore of the Mediterranean Sea, while on the eastern shore the Ottomans conquered Byzantium (857/1453) and started their expansion into the Balkans. Muslim penetration – mostly peaceful through traders, scholars and Sufis – in West and East Africa continued at an uninterrupted pace. Arabic had a place in these new Muslim societies as the language of the new religion. Turkish, the language of conquerors and rulers, not only survived for daily communication, but gained new vitality as an Islamic language. The possibility that the Romance language of the Christian conquerors of al-Andalus could become an Islamic language for the communities of Mudejars (Muslims living under Christian rule) came to nothing, as those communities eventually disappeared through emigration, forced conversion and final expulsion.

During his famous travels, the North African Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (d. 770/1368 or 779/1377) saw much among his fellow Muslims in West Africa, Egypt, Syria, Anatolia and further east that looked alien to him, but in every place he met other religious scholars and Sufis with whom he often shared a common language – Arabic – and a common religious and legal culture. There were local contexts for the expression of a universal faith. The production, transmission and assimilation of what has been called an ‘international Sunnī culture’ were the main features of the intellectual and social endeavour of the scholars living in those societies. One crucial impulse in that endeavour had been the effort to check the attraction of Ismā‘īlī and, more generally, Shī‘ī doctrines and political thought, with al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) as its main representative. Later on, the dangers represented by the attraction of certain Sufi doctrines (God’s love, the unity of existence), and the threat posed by the Mongol rulers and their infidel legal code, as well as the need to check the fragmentation of Revelation propelled by the legal schools, motivated the

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innovative religious and political doctrines of another influential scholar, Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328).

## Caliphs and sultans

An Ismāʿīlī dynasty, the Fātimids, had managed to rule an extensive area of the former ʿAbbāsid caliphate for almost three centuries (297–567/909–1171). They ruled as caliphs, thereby challenging ʿAbbāsid legitimacy, while their existence and success provoked the proclamation of yet another caliphate, that of the Umayyads in the Iberian Peninsula. The latter was to have an ephemeral existence, leading to the disintegration of the political unity of al-Andalus, with new rulers of different ethnic backgrounds coming to power (they were Arabs, Berbers and slaves, usually of Slav origin; note the absence of rulers of Hispano-Roman or Hispano-Gothic origins).<sup>9</sup> All those Taifa (Party) kings proved unable to solve the problem of their military weakness when confronted with Christian expansion.

Of the three caliphates that coexisted in the fourth/tenth century, only the ʿAbbāsid survived after the sixth/twelfth century, even if mostly in a symbolic way. It served to legitimise the Saljuq sultanates and Berber Almoravid rule, and also helped the Andalusī opponents of the Almohad caliphate in their struggle for legitimacy. In 567/1171, Saladin had the name of the ʿAbbāsid caliph pronounced in the mosques of Cairo for the first time in over two hundred years. The seat of the caliphate was to move to Cairo when in 656/1258 the Mongols sacked Baghdad, and in the tenth/sixteenth century the last ʿAbbāsid caliph lived under Ottoman control. By then, the ʿAbbāsid caliphate existed in form only, while Sunnī legal scholars had already adjusted the theory of the caliphate accordingly, with al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058) a crucial figure in that endeavour. ʿAbbāsid survival as an effective caliphate might have worked out otherwise had an attempt by the caliph al-Nāṣir (r. 575–622/1180–1225) to give the caliphate a new social and political basis of power not failed.<sup>10</sup> The Almohad political and religious system, that needs to be analysed taking into account the Fātimid precedent, and some Sufi orders responded – among other factors – to similar tendencies for centralised and hierarchical socio-political organisations.<sup>11</sup>

The Ottomans' rise to power – greatly helped at the beginning by avoidance of the faction fighting that characterised other Turcoman polities – and later the Ottoman sultans' claim to be entitled to the inheritance of the ʿAbbāsid caliphs were consolidated by the control of Medina and Mecca. When in 925/1519 the Habsburg Charles V was elected Holy Roman

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Emperor, the road was open for Süleymān I claiming the title of caliph. The interplay between Christian and Islamic political and religious titles, and the corresponding doctrines sustaining them, underline the intertwining at various levels of what could be understood as an 'Islam-Christian civilisation', with its most open manifestations in those regions where contact was closer, such as the Iberian Peninsula, Norman Sicily, the Balkans and the southern regions of the Russian empire.<sup>12</sup>

The Ottoman sultan's right to universal Islamic sovereignty was reinforced by declaring the Safavid shahs to be heretic. Accusations of heterodoxy and infidelity were often instrumental in the acquisition of political power and in the process of state formation, as shown by the Almohad declaration of Almoravid unbelief because of their anthropomorphism, and by various examples in sub-Saharan Africa. Genealogies of power in the Sunnī world were another instrument to reinforce and legitimise the exercise of political and religious authority. Sharīfism (descent from the Prophet's family) developed alongside Sufism as well as the increasing veneration for the Prophet Muḥammad, of which the spread of his Nativity (*mawlid*) after the seventh/thirteenth century is a clear sign.

## Soldiers and peasants

The Fāṭimids had established their caliphate by using the military power of a Berber tribe, the Kutāma. The combination of tribe and charismatic religious leadership was a recipe for the success of new dynasties arising in the Maghrib.<sup>13</sup> Berber charismatic leadership was channelled within Mālikī Sunnism in the case of the Almoravids (Ṣanhāja), while the Almohads (Maṣmūda and Zanāta) attempted what might be described as a political and doctrinal 'Sunnitisation' of Shī'ism. The dynasty that succeeded the Almohads in the western Maghrib (Morocco), the Marīnids (Zanāta), would, for their part, resort to the jihad spirit and to the return to traditional Mālikī Sunnism.<sup>14</sup> The armies of these new dynasties did not preserve their original Berber tribal character, as succeeding rulers had to face internal disaffection and growing external threat. The new sources of recruitment (Christian mercenaries, black slaves, Arab tribesmen, alien Berber groups) provided temporary solutions, but would prove to be inadequate to face 'societies organized for war' such as those that had arisen in the Christian part of the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>15</sup> Christian advance did not stop at the Straits of Gibraltar. Portuguese and Spanish expansion on the southern shore of the Mediterranean had profound effects in the internal politics of the Maghrib. From the seventh/thirteenth century



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onwards, Muslim military power in the western Mediterranean was forced to face an expanding Christendom that was putting to use new technologies in war both by land and by sea.<sup>16</sup>

The Fāṭimids used their Berber troops to conquer Egypt in 358/969. Also with Berber troops, they tried to extend their rule to Syrian lands (Damascus was ruled briefly by a Berber governor). It might then have appeared that Berber armies were going to play a crucial role in the political and military fortunes of Egypt and the Near East. But it was the Turkish ethnic element that eventually rose to prominence in those areas (Turkish troops were even to be found in Morocco), thus overcoming the previous preference for ethnically diverse armies whose factional struggles could serve the interests of the rulers. Turks could be enslaved, while Berbers (even if only nominally Muslim) were not. The Fāṭimid caliph al-ʿAzīz (r. 365–86/975–96) had already brought Turkish slave troops into his army. Berbers did not excel in archery, and when they began to expand into Syria they suffered defeat at the hands of Turkish troops who were skilled horsemen and archers – the Zangid Nūr al-Dīn (r. 541–70/1146–74) was reported to say that only the arrows of the Turks were effective against the Crusader army.<sup>17</sup> It was also the Turks who brought about the fall of the Byzantine empire, whereas the military capabilities of the Berbers were restricted to North Africa and Egypt. The use of Turkish cavalry accelerated during the Ayyūbid period, as horsemanship was crucial in the cavalry-based army, although, in contrast with the Fāṭimid period, the institution of military slavery played a minor role under the Ayyūbids. By the seventh/thirteenth century, Turkish slave recruits were in especially abundant supply as a result of the Mongol invasions, creating large pools of captives who found themselves on the slave market. Several theories have been put forward regarding why the *mamlūk* system became so prominent: manpower shortages; technological advances such as the introduction of the stirrup, which transformed the role of the cavalry; Muslim withdrawal from political life because of its failure to approximate an Islamic ideal; the preservation of nomad vitality; the evolution of an elite more interested in commercial life than in military affairs.<sup>18</sup>

There were varying degrees of organisation and hierarchisation in the armies, from the Ayyūbid army, strongly dependent on the *amīrs*, to the control and centralisation attempted by the Almohad caliphs. The military-slave institution as embodied in the Mamlūk sultanate was one of the most successful and lasting of its versions. Mamlūk armies defeated both the Crusaders and the Mongols, and the Mamlūk sultans were thus perceived as the saviours of Islam. The Almohads – who like the Almoravids had to resort



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to Christian militias in their armies<sup>19</sup> – did not manage to stop Castilian and Aragonese military advance, and the Naṣrīds survived by becoming vassals of the Christians or by taking advantage of their internal quarrels. The Marīnids in Morocco and the Ḥafṣids in Tunis remained minor powers. There were attempts to seek Mamlūk intervention in the Iberian Peninsula, but to no avail. Battlefield losses were avoided, because of the expenses involved in the purchase and training of *mamlūks*, and thus after Sultan Qalāwūn's death in 689/1290 there were few campaigns abroad by *mamlūk* armies. By the ninth/fifteenth century, the *mamlūk* institution was showing signs of indiscipline and decaying effectiveness. The power and identity of the nomadic tribes grew at the expense of the Mamlūk state, probably owing to the influence of plague – the Black Death raged from 748/1347 to 750/1349. Plague affected the Bedouin less, and the Bedouin emerged as the effective arbiters of political power in a number of regions in the south.<sup>20</sup> (Bedouin tribes remained a source of instability and danger to the state, for example the Berber Hawwāra in Upper Egypt during Mamlūk times.)

Horsemanship was as crucial for the *mamlūk* army as it had been for that of the Ayyūbids. Adoption of gunpowder-based weapons such as the harquebus, which could not be operated from horseback, would have profoundly transformed the structure of the army and therefore of the ruling elite. Rejection of the new guns has been considered to have led to *mamlūk* technological inferiority and to the defeat of Marj Dābiq in 922/1516, when the Ottomans seized the advantage after they opened fire on the *mamlūk* cavalry with artillery and muskets.<sup>21</sup> Although the Ottoman armies continued to make use of a well-trained infantry and gunpowder technology, the *mamlūk* institution survived under the Ottomans, thus showing a remarkable degree of adaptability. The Ottomans created 'an institution of artificial kinship, the janissary standing army, which functioned as an extension of the royal household'.<sup>22</sup> By the eleventh/seventeenth century, Ottoman military superiority was showing signs of decay, as only limited attempts were made to catch up with the increased firepower of European and especially of the Russian armies.

It has been said that 'the most important function of a pre-modern Islamic state was the raising and paying of the military forces. This determined the composition of the elite, the system of taxation and revenue raising and ultimately the success or failure of the regime.'<sup>23</sup> In the eastern part of the Mediterranean, there was a general growth of the *iqṭā'* system, consisting broadly of allocating the revenues from designated lands to military personnel, which replaced cash payments from the central government. The *iqṭā'*

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system implied the notion of the divisibility of power and the impossibility of maintaining territorial unification. While there is no lack of studies devoted to the *iqṭāʿ* system in the Near East and Egypt, developments in the western Mediterranean are less well known. In the early Ottoman period, taxes were collected by the holders of *tīmārs* (military fiefs). From the tenth/sixteenth century onwards, the prevalent system was that of tax-farming. The sources at our disposal do not always yield much information about how peasants (on whom the burden of taxation mostly fell) accepted or resisted tax collection. We would like to have for other periods and cases data as detailed as those that have been recorded for the peasants (fellahs) of Tunis showing their waves of protest at the imposition of new and unjust taxes during the twelfth–thirteenth/eighteenth–nineteenth centuries.<sup>24</sup> Islamic taxation was confessional as well, and was therefore much affected by changes involving the *dhimmī* communities (religious groups such as Jews and Christians granted a Covenant of protection). The minting of coins reflected the needs of taxation – also of trade – and how the extraction of wealth was legitimised by those carrying it out. The Almohads brought their revolution into the minting of coins, producing what a recent study has called the ‘first truly Islamic coin’, i.e., the square dirham.<sup>25</sup> The Venetian ducat, which circulated widely in Muslim marketplaces, influenced the reforms in Mamlūk money (ninth/fifteenth century). Almoravid coins, for their part, had a profound impact on the Christian kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula.

## Local and state elites

The Fāṭimids, the Almohads and the Ottomans, with their ideologies of universal rule, developed highly centralised bureaucratic organisations for the fiscal, political and legal administration of the territories under their rule. The Mamlūks also had a sophisticated bureaucratic and financial apparatus by which the military elite controlled the country and its sources of wealth. By contrast, Ayyūbid rule was not imperial, and the Ayyūbid ‘Muslim military patronage state’ was not predominantly bureaucratic or institutional. By giving members of the ruling family confederacy-wide powers over certain areas, the Ayyūbid system gave rise to rivalries and constant divisions that led to fragmentation and counteracted its positive side, namely family solidarity.<sup>26</sup> The Ottomans carried centralisation further than previous governments, as shown by their army, their policy of legal codification, the creation of impersonal bureaucratic procedures, and the development of administratively subordinate religious elites. We have access to archival material for the