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978-0-521-85868-7 - Postal Systems in the Pre-Modern Islamic World

Adam J. Silverstein

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Postal Systems in the Pre-Modern Islamic World

Adam Silverstein's book offers a fascinating account of the official methods of communication employed in the Near East from pre-Islamic times through to the Mamluk period. Postal systems were set up by rulers in order to maintain control over vast tracts of land. These systems, invented centuries before steam-engines or cars, enabled the swift and efficient circulation of different commodities – from people and horses to exotic fruits and ice – and, of course, news and letters. As the correspondence transported often included confidential reports from a ruler's provinces, such postal systems doubled as espionage networks through which news reached the central authorities quickly enough to allow a timely reaction to events. The book sheds light not only on the role of communications technology in Islamic history, but also on how nomadic culture contributed to empire-building in the Near East, and the ways in which the nascent Islamic state distinguished itself from the Byzantine and Sasanid empires that preceded it. This is a long-awaited contribution to the history of pre-modern communications systems in the Near Eastern world.

ADAM SILVERSTEIN is Lecturer in Islamic History at the Oriental Institute, University of Oxford.

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In loving memory of my grandfather,
Harold Silverstein (1915–2000),
who taught me math

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Abbreviations

<i>ABD</i> :	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> (six volumes), ed. D. N. Freedman, London, 1992
<i>BSOAS</i> :	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
<i>CAD</i> (Chicago Assyrian Dictionary):	<i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i> , Chicago, 1956–
<i>CIS</i> :	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum</i> , Paris, 1881–1930
<i>EI2</i> :	<i>The Encyclopaedia of Islam: New Edition/ Prepared by a Number of Leading Orientalists</i> , H. A. R. Gibb (et al.), Leiden, 1960–2003
<i>Elr</i> :	<i>Encyclopaedia Iranica</i> , E. Yarshater (ed.), London, 1982–
<i>HJAS</i> :	<i>Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies</i>
<i>HMEIS</i> :	<i>Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies</i>
<i>JAH</i> :	<i>Journal of Asian History</i>
<i>JAOS</i> :	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JESHO</i> :	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
<i>JRAS</i> :	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
<i>JSAI</i> :	<i>Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam</i>
<i>JSS</i> :	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>ODB</i> :	<i>The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium</i> , Oxford, 1991
<i>P. Oxy.</i>	<i>The Oxyrhynchus Papyri</i> , Egypt Exploration Society in Graeco-Roman Memoirs, London, 1898–
<i>P. Ross. Georg.</i>	<i>Papyri russischer und georgischer Sammlungen</i> , Tiflis, 1925–35
<i>ZDMG</i> :	<i>Zeitschrift der deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>