

Slavery, the State, and Islam

Slavery, the State, and Islam looks at slavery as the foundation of power and the state in the Muslim world. Closely examining major theological and literary Islamic texts, it challenges traditional approaches to the subject. Servitude was a foundation for the construction of the new state on the Arabian peninsula. It constituted the essence of a relationship of authority as found in the Koran. The dominant stereotypes and traditions of equality as promoted by Islam, particularly its leniency toward slaves, are questioned. This original, pioneering book overturns the mythical view of caliphal power in Islam. It examines authority as it functions in the Arab world today and helps to explain the difficulty of attempting to instill freedom and democracy there.

Mohammed Ennaji holds a doctorate in economics and is professor at Mohammed V University in Morocco. A historian, writer, and journalist, he is an active proponent of culture in Morocco, where he organizes various cultural events, including international conferences and festivals. He is the author of several studies and books, including *Serving the Master: Slavery and Society in Nineteenth-Century Morocco* (1999).

Slavery, the State, and Islam

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
 978-0-521-13545-0 — Slavery, the State, and Islam
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 Frontmatter
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CAMBRIDGE
 UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
 314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India
 103 Penang Road, #05-06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,
 a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of
 education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521135450

© Mille et une nuits, département de la Librairie Arthème Fayard 2007

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First published in French as *Le sujet et le mamelouk: Esclavage, pouvoir et
 religion dans le monde arabe* by Mille et une nuits, département de la
 Librairie Arthème Fayard 2007

First English edition published by Cambridge University Press & Assessment 2013

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data

Ennaji, Mohammed.

Slavery, the state, and Islam / Mohammed Ennaji, Mohammed V University,
 Teresa Lavender Fagan.

pages cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-521-11962-7 (hardback) –

ISBN 978-0-521-13545-0 (pbk.)

I. Slavery and Islam. I. Fagan, Teresa Lavender. II. Title.

HT919.E548 2013

297.5'675-dc23 2013006874

ISBN 978-0-521-11962-7 Hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-13545-0 Paperback

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 remain, accurate or appropriate.

*I wish to thank Aline Schulman and Juan Goytisolo
for their kind support.*

*I am grateful to Régis Debray for the interest
he has shown in my work.*

*I wish also to thank Professor Paul Lovejoy for
his kind assistance.*

*This book is dedicated to my wife Naoual, for her
patient support and her radiant smile.*

Contents

<i>Foreword by Paul E. Lovejoy</i>	<i>page ix</i>
Introduction: The Sources and Structures of the Bond of Authority	i
1 The Deadly Lie, or the Death Announcement	5
2 The Battleground of Servitude: An Illusory Freedom	15
3 Open-Air Servitude	48
4 The Master of Heaven and the Master of Earth	83
5 The King and His Subjects	120
6 The King and His Entourage	165
7 The King's Threshold, or the Weapon of Forced Servitude	207
Conclusion: Between Heaven and Earth	242
<i>Principal Sources</i>	245
<i>Thematic Index</i>	247
<i>Index of Places and People</i>	250

Foreword

Mohammed Ennaji explores dark corners of Islamic thought in this magnificent and poetic excursion into the fabric of Muslim society. Through the explication of dozens of classical texts by Muslim intellectuals on the meaning and historical significance of power, religious authority, and slavery, Ennaji takes us on an odyssey through the rich intellectual and often mystical traditions that have given substance to the social and intellectual fabric of Islam. While some of the texts have been accessible to scholars who are not fluent in Arabic, the majority are largely unknown outside of Islamic scholarship. Ennaji's discussion engages these texts virtually exclusively, not relying on a secondary literature in English or French that attempts to analyze the intellectual discourse of historical Islam and contemporary politics.

As Ennaji demonstrates, the failure to consider this vast Islamic literature has distorted our understanding of the importance of slavery and servitude in history, not just in the Muslim world and Islamic thought, but more globally, with comparative implications for understanding the impact of slavery elsewhere, from China to Africa and as far as the Americas. Ennaji confronts a deep and sophisticated written tradition within Islam that reveals complex contradictions in the social and political history of the state and society. Ennaji contends that the legal framework, the metaphoric implications of language, and the variety of social expressions of slavery reveal power relationships that permeate the Islamic world. These relationships have generated an ideology of hierarchy that fully incorporates slavery as a fundamental and necessary construct of Islamic society.

A sociologist, historian, political theorist, and linguist, Professor Ennaji reveals a command of disciplines that is astonishing. His sociological perspective is evident in the focus on the hierarchy and social construction of servitude. His knowledge of history informs his contemporary readings of the texts. His appreciation of political theory is the fabric of the study. Through his examination of the meaning of words in Arabic, Ennaji demonstrates how etymology can reveal hidden relationships in expressions of power and hierarchy. He extends this cross-disciplinary exploration into symbolism and metaphor, again as a way of revealing hidden meanings and implicit assumptions about power and authority. In his important earlier study, *Serving the Master: Slavery and Society in Nineteenth-Century Morocco* (1999), originally published as *Soldats, domestiques et concubines: L'esclavage au Maroc au XIX^e siècle* (1994), Ennaji demonstrated the importance of slavery in Moroccan society and the complexity of its history. Far from an idyllic and benign view of slavery, *Serving the Master* shows the danger of superficial generalizations and reveals the contradictions in society as exposed through the experiences of soldiers, concubines, and domestic servants who were slaves.

Because the current study involves the examination of Arabic texts, the approach is fundamentally empirical. Ennaji is not concerned with examining how power relationships in Islam have been understood in the scholarly literature of history and Islamic studies; rather, he cites almost exclusively the Arabic texts themselves. He demonstrates a broad and sophisticated knowledge of hundreds of texts that characterize the extensive literature of Islam. Few scholars can match Ennaji's command of primary sources. Through his own literary style, he successfully translates this font of classical knowledge from Arabic first into French and now into English. In providing an intellectual commentary on this extensive library, Ennaji not only provides access to a rich body of knowledge not accessible in French or English but also transcends the Arabic sources through his explication and his juxtaposition of the texts. In effect, Ennaji's commentary itself could be in Arabic, thereby fully engaging the intellectual milieu from which the book derives.

Originally published in French, Ennaji's examination of slavery, the state, and Islam challenges us to think again about the complexities of Islam at a time when it is essential that people throughout the world increase their understanding of themselves in the complex multicultural world in which we live. Ennaji bridges a gap that has discouraged dialogue, both among Muslim intellectuals themselves and between Muslims and others.

Although considerable scholarly attempts have been made to engage Muslim societies in the study of slavery and its meaning, it has been a difficult challenge that has had limited success. The UNESCO initiative to explore the “slave route” has been global in perspective, but it has been far easier to examine the trajectory of slavery in the Americas and its impact on Europe and elsewhere than to engage Muslim countries in the discussion. Silence has been the chosen answer, even though the UNESCO project has always included Muslims representing countries that are predominately or entirely Muslim.

Common misconceptions of Islam have not helped the dialogue. Despite the number of countries that are predominately Muslim or have substantial Muslim minorities, many people think only of the Middle East and perhaps North Africa as Muslim. Hence the issues that Ennaji explores touch the lives and histories of a considerable part of the world. Moreover, the interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims make the exploration of the place of slavery in the history of Islam a global question. Ennaji’s intention is to foster intercultural dialogue, focusing on slavery and diversity as issues to be confronted to overcome injustices of the past and present. In the multicultural world in which we live, Ennaji’s analytical study promotes interculturalism by demonstrating how the confluence of cultures and the convergence of diasporas form the basis for meaningful dialogue.

Paul E. Lovejoy