

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-27762-4 - Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages, Student Edition

Ira M. Lapidus

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

MUSLIM CITIES
IN THE
LATER MIDDLE AGES

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-27762-4 - Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages, Student Edition

Ira M. Lapidus

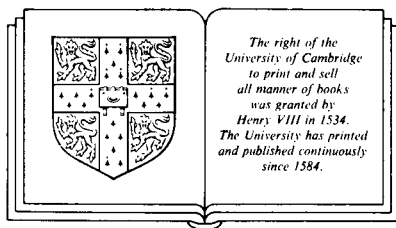
Frontmatter

[More information](#)

MUSLIM CITIES IN THE LATER MIDDLE AGES

Student edition

IRA M. LAPIDUS



CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE

LONDON NEW YORK NEW ROCHELLE

MELBOURNE SYDNEY

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-27762-4 - Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages, Student Edition

Ira M. Lapidus

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521263610

First edition published by Harvard University Press, 1967

and © The President and Fellows of Harvard College

Student edition with new preface and bibliographical notes, omitting
appendices, notes and bibliography, published by Cambridge University
Press, 1984

© Ira M. Lapidus, 1984

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without the written
permission of the copyright holder.

Re-issued in this digitally printed version 2008

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

Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number: 83-20858

ISBN 978-0-521-26361-0 hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-27762-4 paperback

TO MY MOTHER AND FATHER

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-27762-4 - Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages, Student Edition

Ira M. Lapidus

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS

PREFACE	vii
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER I · A HISTORY OF CITIES IN THE MAMLUK EMPIRE	9
The Pacification of Syria: 1260–1317	
Prosperity and Security: The Fourteenth Century	
The Time of Troubles: 1388–1422	
The Fifteenth Century Restoration: 1422–1470	
The Fall of the Mamluk Empire: 1470–1517	
CHAPTER II · THE MAMLUK REGIME IN THE LIFE OF THE CITIES	44
The State and the Privatization of Power	
The Economic Powers of the Mamluk Household	
Controls over Property, Labor, and Materials	
The Emirs in the Functioning of the Urban Community	
Conclusion	
CHAPTER III · THE URBAN SOCIETY	79
The Classes of the Population	
The Organization of the Quarters	
The Organization of Economic Life	
Fraternal Associations on the Margin of Society	
The Ulama and the Foundation of an Urban Society	
Conclusion	
CHAPTER IV · THE POLITICAL SYSTEM: THE MAMLUK STATE AND THE URBAN NOTABLES	116
The Merchants	
The Ulama	
Conclusion	

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-27762-4 - Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages, Student Edition

Ira M. Lapidus

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS

CHAPTER V · THE POLITICAL SYSTEM: THE COMMON PEOPLE BETWEEN VIOLENCE AND IMPOTENCE	143
Economic Grievances and the Protests of the Common People	
The Roles of the Damascus <i>Zu'ar</i>	
Mamluk Controls over Popular Military Actions	
The Control of Lumpenproletarian Violence	
Conclusion	
CHAPTER VI · CONCLUSION: SOCIETY AND POLITY IN MEDIÉVAL MUSLIM CITIES	185
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES	192
INDEX	198
MAPS	
The Mamluk Empire	10
Aleppo at the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century	45
Damascus and Environs	47
Cairo	49

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-27762-4 - Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages, Student Edition

Ira M. Lapidus

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

This book is a study of the social and political processes of the cities of Egypt and Syria in the Mamluk era (1250–1517). It concentrates on Damascus and Aleppo with supporting studies of the Mamluk capital of Cairo. Occasionally, when it seemed that the situations of all the cities must be similar, information based on the study of Cairo has been used to answer important questions for which data on the Syrian cities are lacking. Other cities in the Mamluk Empire, Alexandria, Beirut, Tripoli, and smaller towns, are also discussed.

The sources for such a study are many. They include chronicles, biographies, inscriptions, descriptions of towns, administrative manuals, travelers' reports, diplomatic correspondence, treaties, works of art, and archaeological and artistic remains. Interpreting these materials poses many problems because they do not analyze the society out of which they came in terms which directly answer our present questions about historical reality. The information they give us about economic, social, and many political realities are but laconic references, abbreviations, clues which must have been meaningful to contemporaries but which are enigmatic for us. Any study of the period in which they were recorded requires gathering a multitude of tiny details, questioning their meaning, and using each one to cast light on the others until finally they begin to reveal the society which recorded them.

These sources are ordered and interpreted in terms of a number of concerns, some of which derive from studies of European medieval and renaissance city societies: how were urban societies governed; what institutions made them ordered communities? The European tradition of study emphasizes formal governmental and legal institutions in the form either of communes, self-governing corporate associations of urban dwellers, or of imperial bureaucracies through which state regimes administered town communities. Muslim cities, it is apparent, cannot be understood in either mould. They were clearly not organized by self-governing corporate bodies, nor, even when they were dominated by empires with strong military and bureaucratic machinery, were they actually governed by bureaucratic means. An earlier generation of

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-27762-4 - Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages, Student Edition

Ira M. Lapidus

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

MUSLIM CITIES IN THE LATER MIDDLE AGES

scholars imagined that Muslim cities must therefore be chaotic, formless, collections of villages. Upon reflection this can hardly be believed. Surely cities with tens and even hundreds of thousands of residents were ordered societies. The problem is to understand what kind of order regulated the lives of their inhabitants.

Drawing on the work of Weber, Parsons, and other students of social process I have proposed that this order was the pattern of social relationships among individuals, classes, and groups of the population. These included the Mamluks, or the state military elite, the ulama or religious leaders, the merchants, and organized bodies of commoners, including such diverse groups of people as the residents of town quarters, young men's gangs, and beggars' guilds. An equilibrium or self-balancing pattern of ordered relationships appears to be the key to understanding how Muslim cities functioned. The description of these relationships introduced by an historical chapter makes up the substance of this book.

In the fifteen years since the book was first published my own conception of the subject has changed. The crucial issue then seemed to be the differences among European and Muslim societies. Having found a way to describe the operation of a Muslim society in its own terms, and yet in terms which made possible comparison of Muslim and other forms of city organization, my thoughts turned to questions about the origin of the type of urban society found in Mamluk Egypt and Syria and to questions of how Mamluk period cities may be compared with Muslim cities in other regions and periods. In a number of articles I have tried to trace the origins of the Mamluk period social pattern back to earlier Egyptian, Syrian and other Middle Eastern cities, back to military, religious and social institutions which took form in the Saljuq (1055–c.1200) and late Abbasid (c.850–946) eras, and even, in principle, back to pre-Islamic times. At the same time I thought further about the very concept of the book: how we study urban societies, what variables we consider; indeed, in a more philosophic vein, what we mean by urban societies and what is the object of our study. From the vantage of these further researches and reflections this portrait of particular Mamluk period cities remains an effective model of Muslim urban processes; further interpretive discussion, however, will help to bring out its comparative, evolutionary and methodological implications.

In *Muslim Cities* Mamluk era cities are presented as a case study, but should nonetheless be seen as a phase in the centuries-long evolution of

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-27762-4 - Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages, Student Edition

Ira M. Lapidus

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Muslim political and social institutions, and indeed as a phase in a millennia-long evolution of Middle Eastern societies going back to Mesopotamian temple and city-states of the third millennium B.C. Islamic urban societies were heirs to and variants upon a more ancient pattern of Middle Eastern urban development. It may be useful to consider some of the central features of this evolutionary development as a way of understanding the historical position of Muslim and Mamluk period urban communities.

Middle Eastern cities have their origin in pre-urban Mesopotamian agricultural village communities. In these villages the family was probably the most important social body. Leadership was a function of fatherhood; worship was conducted by and on behalf of families, property was controlled and distributed within them. Some kinds of clientage–patronage relationships, such as the attachment of strong-arm men to a patriarch or local rich man, of devotees to a temple or cult, or of metalworking specialists to particular villages, were also undoubtedly important ways of organizing these small communities.

Village life was not static, however. Over time irrigation became more extensive, pottery improved in quality and decoration, metallurgy began and bronze tools appeared alongside of stone. There is evidence for some degree of economic specialization in herding, fishing, garden agriculture, grain-growing, trade and metalworking, and for a wide network of exchanges. From the evidence of technological and economic change we can infer that the specialization of labor was probably increasing as individuals shifted from part-time farming and craft work into full-time specialization in pottery-working, metallurgy or trade. The growing specialization of labor in turn implied stratification to help control and coordinate a more complex society and to exploit increasing resources. Family patriarchs, warriors, priests or landowners emerged as bosses, patrons and rulers. Moreover, toward the end of the fourth millennium the archaeological record indicates that village temples were being built on an ever-increasing scale.

Between 3500 and 2750 B.C. these differentiated economic activities, stratified elites, and temple commitments led to a new form of social, economic and religious organization – the temple communities. The temple communities united different clans and lineages, different headmen, magnates and their clients, and different village communities into a single body dedicated to the service of the gods. On the basis of this religious consensus the temples acted as an economic agency for the

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-27762-4 - Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages, Student Edition

Ira M. Lapidus

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

MUSLIM CITIES IN THE LATER MIDDLE AGES

mobilization of surplus goods and labor and for the redistribution of the social product among communities of farmers, herders, fishermen, craftsmen, traders, metalworkers and others. Eventually the temples owned land, collected taxes and invested in irrigation. They manufactured textiles and other goods and traded in precious materials.

These temple communities brought into being the first cities. They concentrated a population of managers, priests, craftsmen and workers around the temple precincts; their activities brought surrounding villages into close contact with the religious and social center. Temple communities evolved into compact city-states.

The temple city era was superseded around 2400 B.C. by the first of the ancient empires. Mesopotamian cities were conquered by invaders from without and were incorporated into larger scale regimes. Though empires rapidly succeeded each other they introduced lasting and cumulative political, social, economic, and cultural changes. The most striking change was the perfection of royal centralized rule and the legitimation of imperial kingship. Kings and their governors became the local rulers. Secular rule with religious legitimation was separated from priestly rule; the administration of royal justice superseded the judicial activities of the priests. By 2000 B.C. temple control of land had disintegrated in favor of a more variegated distribution of property including royal, feudal and private as well as surviving temple lands. Also by then, merchants and craftsmen moved from the patronage of the temple to the patronage of the royal household and then gradually freed themselves to become independent entrepreneurs. By Hammurabi's time (c. 1750 B.C.) independent merchants operated with their own capital alongside of government agents and government regulated traders. The elements of a private economy in land and in long-distance trade were in being. A new conception of the universe accompanied these changes. In a world of centralized empires, extensive trade and considerable geographic mobility for elites, the need for order and justice was projected onto the cosmos. Increasingly the gods came to be conceived not only as powerful but as cosmic in jurisdiction, and even as rational and ethical beings. Individuals began to conceive of the gods as beings who cared for their personal welfare as well as for the wellbeing of communities.

Empires then transformed societies by breaking up the integral unity of the temple structures and the harmony of smaller cities and village communities. Individuals were set free from household, village and

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-27762-4 - Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages, Student Edition

Ira M. Lapidus

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

temple control. A more highly differentiated society had come into being. Kingship was specialized for rule; temples for worship; markets for trade; law for regulation. Having disrupted the bonds of the old societies empires helped provide the common languages, shared religious beliefs, legal systems, and political concepts essential to the new.

With the institutionalization of empires, cities were utterly transformed. Temple cities and city-states ceased to be territorial governments, municipalities, communalities of worshippers or communities of economic exchanges. Cities were no longer independent collectivities. Henceforth they were only units in the functioning of a larger society.

Fifteen hundred years lie between the consolidation of the ancient Mesopotamian empire societies and the rise of Islam. In this epoch great Middle Eastern empires rose and fell but the heritage of the social structure, built *not on cities*, but on familial, tribal, and clientele communities, markets, temples and later churches, and imperial regimes, was transmitted down to the Islamic era.

Arab and Islamic urban societies emerged out of this matrix. The Arab conquests and migrations established an Arab population with a distinct linguistic, religious, and social identity in both newly built towns and cities and in the suburbs and villages surrounding already established towns. The Arabs adopted late Byzantine and Sassanian imperial institutions to their own uses. The existing Middle Eastern economy and other forms of social organization they took over intact. Thus Islamic era Middle Eastern cities would be built upon the integration of ancient Middle Eastern forms and concepts of political, economic and social organization and Arab Muslim cultural values and identity.

The construction of an Islamic-type Middle Eastern urban society occupied five hundred years from the Arab conquest to the Saljuq era. In the period of the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates (661 to 946) the institutional prototypes for parochial local groups in their specifically Islamic form, for religious communities, and for state military and administrative practices, took shape. In the subsequent Saljuq (1055–c. 1200) age these institutions came to mature form and were integrated into the first Islamic type of Middle Eastern urban society.

From ancient times through the early Islamic era strong local communities were the basic building block of Middle Eastern societies. They were reinforced at the beginning of the Islamic era by Arab immigrants who were organized into tightly knit families and clans

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-27762-4 - Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages, Student Edition

Ira M. Lapidus

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

MUSLIM CITIES IN THE LATER MIDDLE AGES

aligned by tribes. Each clan was settled in a quarter, suburb or village of its own, served by a local mosque, cemetery, market and other public facilities. More than a century after the conquests, the varied ethnic and multi-religious population of Baghdad, the Islamic capital, was also grouped by quarters and districts. In each Middle Eastern region and in each subsequent period nomadic invasions, and variations in the ethnic composition of the population and in regional social structure, caused the identity of local populations to vary, but strong quarters, clans, gangs, and other local groups remained basic to the urban social structure.

Within the urban context these basic units of society were integrated into still larger communities. Commercial exchanges and markets brought people of diverse communal background into common enterprises. So, too, did Islamic religious loyalties and the formation of schools of law, theology and mysticism. Muslim religious associations began with scholars devoted to Koran, *hadīth*, law or theology, and ascetics and mystics, surrounded by their devotees and followers. From the eighth to the eleventh centuries such groups coalesced into the Muslim schools of law, Sufi brotherhoods and Shi'a sects. These religious bodies provided for education, charity, judicial administration, worship, spiritual fellowship, and healing. With the breakdown of the Muslim Caliphate, in the tenth century, and the ensuing nomadic invasions, such religious groups evolved new concepts of authority regulating the relations of masters and disciples, generated new physical facilities such as madrasa colleges and Sufi *khānaqās*, and had these facilities endowed in perpetuity with property-based income. Muslim religious associations acquired new legal and administrative functions, a political role in the daily operation of urban communities, and often transformed their followings into political factions. With the widespread conversion of Middle Eastern peoples to Islam in the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries Muslim socio-religious communities became the basis of a Middle Eastern wide urban social organization.

Throughout this long period, the state also played a part in the organization of Muslim urban communities. The early Islamic empires were founded under the auspices of the Caliphate which in principle unified political and religious authority. The Caliphate, however, rapidly evolved into an imperial institution whose military and administrative functions much outweighed, especially in the eyes of Muslim religious leaders, its actual religious importance. With the collapse of the Caliphate

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-27762-4 - Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages, Student Edition

Ira M. Lapidus

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

empire, slave warlords, regional chiefs, and central Asian nomadic invaders established new suzerainties, generally called Sultanates, on the basis of conquest. The new Sultanates were built upon slave military forces reinforced by Turkish or other nomadic auxiliaries, and a quasi-bureaucratic system of *iqṭā'* or benefice administration for the collection of taxes and the payment of troops. Such governments claimed legitimacy on the basis of a combination of Iranian, Turkish, and Islamic concepts of monarchy. The new states were Islamic only in that they governed Muslim peoples and gave patronage and protection to Islamic religious activities.

By the eleventh century the evolution of Muslim parochial, commercial, religious, and political institutions reached definitive form in eastern Iran and Afghanistan. With the conversion of great numbers of Middle Eastern peoples to Islam, the establishment of the Saljuq empire and the eastern Saljuq provincial states, the consolidation of the schools of law and the system of madrasa education, and the emergence of Sufism as an organized religious movement, a new form of Muslim society came into being. Saljuq period urban society was based upon an understanding between the Saljuq-led slave and nomadic elites and their administrative staffs, the local communities built around ulama and Sufi leadership, and armed parochial groups including quarters, gangs of *ayyarūn*, *ghāzīs* and tribal forces. Saljuq government was built around the collaboration of the Saljuq military elite with the ulama notables of the towns—a collaboration which expressed itself in state support of Muslim schools of law, madrasas, *khānaqās*, and other religious activities in return for ulama assistance in administration and legitimation of the military elites. By the Saljuq period the evolving political and religious institutions had coalesced into a form of government for Iranian urban societies.

Though the historical details are still scarcely known, it seems that the pattern of Saljuq urban institutions worked out in Iran was transmitted westward to Baghdad and later to Anatolia, Syria, and Egypt. With the reign of Nūr al-Dīn (1146–74) the madrasa and *khānaqā* system of organized Muslim judicial and educational administration was recreated in Damascus. Muslim religious life was rebuilt around formal schools and endowed properties, and was increasingly subordinated to state control. The construction of an Iranian-type urban religious community in Damascus depended upon the migration of scholars and Sufis from Iran and other Muslim territories to the new center of

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-27762-4 - Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages, Student Edition

Ira M. Lapidus

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

MUSLIM CITIES IN THE LATER MIDDLE AGES

patronage. With the conquest of Egypt, Saladin (1169–93) transferred the Saljuq system of urban social organization into the newly conquered land. Under Ayyūbid auspices the whole structure of state administration and state patronage for Islamic religious life pioneered in Iran and Iraq was reproduced in the western parts of the Middle East.

Thus the Mamluk era cities were built around a system of political, religious, and communal organization which had for centuries been in the making. They inherited an ancient pattern of parochial communities integrated into commercial market organizations, religious associations, and state institutions. In the Mamluk era these institutions were found in particular variant forms. Research on other periods, regions and cities is still too little developed to be certain about the variations, but a few observations may be attempted. One is that the Mamluk era consolidated the tendency toward slave dominance in state administration. In this era slave military forces seized control of the Sultanate, and excluded other tribal, ethnic or local elites, and even their own children, from full participation in the state machine. The Mamluks also consolidated the tendency toward state sponsorship, patronage and control over Sunni Islam. While earlier Saljuq and Ayyūbid regimes had favored one or another or several Muslim schools of law, the Mamluks were the first to endow all four schools of law, appoint Qadis representing each one and support numerous Sufi brotherhoods and venerated shrines. In a later era the Ottoman dynasty would bring Mamluk precedents to their culmination in the Janissary system and a thoroughly bureaucratized organization of Sunni religious activity.

Thus the Mamluk era urban societies described in this volume must be understood as having evolved out of earlier Islamic and Middle Eastern social and political institutions and as representing a particular variant of Islamic society. Close examination of Mamluk era cities, however, reveals that “institution” in its Islamic and Middle Eastern urban context has a particular meaning. The “institutional” history of Middle Eastern and Islamic urban societies is not to be understood in terms of formal political, legal, and social structures, but rather in terms of informal relations among individuals, classes and groups.

Moreover, it has become clear that the “institutional” or interactional approach to the study of urban societies, while more appropriate than formal political or legal analysis, also has to be supplemented by research into the cultural as well as the social processes underlying the functioning of urban societies. To understand the operation of an “ungoverned”

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-27762-4 - Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages, Student Edition

Ira M. Lapidus

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

political community it is necessary to explore not only social action but the concepts and values that bear on the ordering of social relationships, the religious and mythic symbols of social order, and the mentality of peoples. The social action approach has to be supplemented by study of such factors as the norms of family life and the ways in which they are transposed into commercial, religious and political relations. For the family motif operates to shape business loyalties, religious discipleship and political clientage and slavery as much as family ties proper. Patronage and clientage relations also have inner governing norms; to understand them it is essential to understand more generally the patterns of dyadic relations among individuals in friendships, business partnerships, religious instruction and political action.

Religious and mythic concepts about the nature of human society are equally important. Concepts of the state and the role of ruler in society not only inform the political activity of individuals but generate the shared vocabularies, the held-in-common ways of understanding the meaning of social existence, which are the very basis of human solidarity. These include legal, theological, mystical, and magical concepts of kingship, of the authority of religious leaders, of the venerability of holy men, eschatological and messianic beliefs in divine redemption, and other Muslim concepts about the interpenetration of the spiritual and material world. A full understanding of Muslim cities requires the study of historic institutions, social action, and cultural vocabularies which together regulate the patterns of human behavior that make them societies.

The evolutionary and comparative, the social action and the culturalist approaches, all point to a more general observation about Islamic urban studies. They point to the fact that the study of cities cannot be isolated from the study of the larger societies and cultures of which they are a part. The institutional structures, the patterns of social action, and the cultural vocabularies which must be employed to understand these cities are expressions of a still more general Middle Eastern Islamic pattern of society. While cities represent important concentrations of population and activities and an imposing physical presence, they cannot be viewed as unitary economic, political, or cultural entities or as total societies. These cities, after all, were not a special form of human society, but were the physical setting of a larger social system, the places which concentrated population, and the centers for economic, political, and cultural transactions. Muslim cities were not ordinarily independent

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-27762-4 - Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages, Student Edition

Ira M. Lapidus

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

MUSLIM CITIES IN THE LATER MIDDLE AGES

political bodies. They were subject to state regimes which embraced a much larger territory. They were composed of Muslim religious associations which were not territorial at all. They did not have self-contained economies for they depended on regional agricultural production and international trade. Nor did they have an exclusive local culture. They have been indispensable to the organization of more complex societies, but they were not themselves a defining institution of Islamic or Middle Eastern societies. For these reasons *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages* should be seen less in terms of “urban” history, a case examination of the functioning of cities, and more as a partial contribution to the study of a wider history of Islamic societies and the role of cities in the functioning of the more embracing society. From this point of view we may use this study of cities as an entrée into the larger history of Islamic societies.

In this edition intended for students and general readers the appendices, bibliography and notes which assemble data for analysis and refer to the literary sources from which they come have been removed in the interest of economy. I refer the reader interested in the scholarly apparatus to the earlier edition. I would like once again to express my lasting gratitude to all of those who helped me in the preparation of this book.