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978-1-107-04479-1 - Disability in the Ottoman Arab World, 1500–1800

Sara Scalenghe

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## Disability in the Ottoman Arab World, 1500–1800

Physical, sensory, and mental impairments can influence an individual's status in society as much as the more familiar categories of gender, sexual orientation, age, class, religion, race, and ethnicity. This was especially true of the early modern Arab Ottoman world, where being judged able or disabled impacted every aspect of a person's life, including performance of religious rituals, marriage, job opportunities, and the ability to buy and sell property. Sara Scalenghe's book is the first on the history of both physical and mental disabilities not only in the Middle East and North Africa, but also in the premodern non-Western world. Unlike previous scholarly works that examine disability as discussed in religious texts, this study focuses on representations and classifications of disability and impairment across a wide range of primary sources, including chronicles, biographies, the law, medicine, belles lettres, and dream manuals. As such, this is a sociocultural history that seeks to explain how blindness, deafness and muteness, impairments of the mind, and intersex were understood and experienced in a specific Arab-Islamic context within the geographical area that includes present-day Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine/Israel under Ottoman rule in the early modern period.

Sara Scalenghe is an assistant professor of history at Loyola University Maryland.

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*Loyola University Maryland*



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32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

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[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107044791](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107044791)

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First published 2014

Printed in the United States of America

*A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

Scalenghe, Sara, 1970– author.

Disability in the Ottoman Arab world, 1500–1800 / Sara Scalenghe, Loyola University Maryland.

pages cm. – (Cambridge studies in Islamic civilization)

ISBN 978-1-107-04479-1 (hardback)

1. People with disabilities – Middle East – History. 2. Human body – Social aspects – Middle East. 3. Intersexuality – History. 4. Insanity (Law) – Middle East – History. I. Title. II. Series: Cambridge studies in Islamic civilization.

HV1559.M53S23 2014

305.9080956–dc23 2013039679

ISBN 978-1-107-04479-1 Hardback

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*To my father and my brother, Franco and Davide, and  
to the memory of my mother and my sister, Laura and Cecilia.*

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## Acknowledgments

This book first began as a doctoral dissertation at Georgetown University under the supervision of the incomparable Judith Tucker, the most marvelous mentor a graduate student could hope for. Throughout the years she has been unfailingly supportive, and a lot of fun to boot. I am also very grateful to the other members of my dissertation committee, Carol Benedict, Ahmad Dallal, Beshara Doumani, and John Voll, for their probing questions and incisive comments, and to Chris Toensing and Kevin Martin, who have shared this journey with me since our old days on Ontario Road in graduate school. That they read every word of the book manuscript is just one more reason I love them.

My quest for sources, especially manuscripts, in the archives and libraries of Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Germany, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and the United States was supported by generous funding, including an International Dissertation Research Fellowship from the Social Science Research Council, a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Program, a Cosmos Club Foundation Young Scholars Award, and a Bernadotte E. Schmitt Grant for Research in European, African, or Asian History awarded by the American Historical Association.

Dissertation writing was made possible by a Charlotte W. Newcombe Dissertation Fellowship from the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation and by a Royden B. Davis Dissertation Fellowship provided by Georgetown's History Department. A Qatar

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Post-Doctoral Fellowship at the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies at Georgetown University and junior sabbatical semesters as well as summer faculty grants from Indiana University Bloomington and Loyola University Maryland were instrumental in giving me the time and resources to make substantive revisions to the manuscript, including expanding its geographical scope to Egypt.

I owe an enormous intellectual debt to Susan Burch, who introduced me to the richness of the field of disability history, critiqued each chapter of this book, and encouraged me to make it accessible to non-Middle Eastern specialists. I continue to be inspired by her integrity and the rigor of her scholarship. Jeff Brune, too, generously read every word and gave me extensive and incisive feedback that compelled me to rewrite entire sections. Cathy Kudlick's suggestions, especially for Chapter 2, were invaluable and led me to rethink some of my central assumptions. I also thank her for inviting me to share my work in her seminar on the body at the Paul K. Longmore Institute on Disability at San Francisco State University and at the Bay Area Disability Studies Consortium in March 2013. Although my flight was canceled due to stormy weather, her class discussed the book manuscript and took the trouble to type and email their insightful remarks to me.

Over the years I have benefited from the opportunity to share parts of my work in progress at conferences, workshops, seminars, graduate colloquia, and talks in the United States and abroad. In particular, I wish to thank Jim Gelvin and the Center for Near Eastern Studies at UCLA for inviting me to give a talk in February 2012, and Susan Burch for the opportunity to speak at Middlebury College in April 2013. The observations made by faculty and students at those two events were crucial for sharpening my thinking in the final stages of revising.

I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers at Cambridge University Press for their very helpful comments, to the production team at Cambridge University Press, to Nancy Zibman for preparing the index, to Laurie King for reviewing the proofs, and to my saintly father for double-checking that the citations in every footnote and in the bibliography were formatted correctly.

## Note on Transliteration, Personal Names, Dates, and Translations

I have transliterated Arabic and Turkish words in accordance with the system devised by *The International Journal of Middle East Studies*. As a general rule, words that recur frequently, like *khunthā*, have diacritical marks and are italicized only the first time they appear.

As I explain in Chapter 2, Arabic personal names can be very long because they often comprise onomastic chains that report the name of the father and, if known, of the paternal grandfather and great-grandfather, in addition to several other nouns and adjectives that indicate place of origin and/or residence, occupation, honorific titles, and other distinguishing characteristics. For the sake of prose, as a general rule I provide only the first and last name of an individual in the main body of the text. Thus, for example, Muhammad b. Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Naqshabandi al-Hanafi al-Asamm al-‘Arbili is shortened to Muhammad al-‘Arbili. In the case of authors, a longer version of their names is listed in the footnotes and bibliography. I have, however, made several exceptions to this rule, including when a person was only known by his or her first name and father’s name, for example, ‘Itban b. Malik (“b.” is an abbreviation for “ibn,” “son of”), or for those who were commonly addressed by an honorific title rather than by their first name, for example, Najm al-Din (“the star of the faith”) al-Ghazzi.

I used conversion tables to convert all dates from the Islamic calendar (called “Hijri,” which means “of the emigration,” because it begins in 622 CE when the Prophet Muhammad emigrated from Mecca

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*Note on Transliteration*

to Medina) to the Gregorian or Common Era calendar (CE). Because the Islamic calendar is lunar and the Gregorian is solar, we can convert dates with precision only if we know the day, month, and year that an event took place. Thus, for instance, Muharram 1, 1208, Hijri corresponds to August 8, 1793, but Ramadan 1, 1208, is April 2, 1794. When the full Hijri date was not available to me and all I had was “the year 1208 Hijri,” I converted it as 1793/4 CE.

All English translations from Arabic, Turkish, French, and Italian are my own unless otherwise specified.