Introduction to Volume II

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Locating Violence in Context

Violence permeated much of social life across the vast geographical space of the European, American, Asian and Islamic worlds and through the broad sweep of what is often termed the Middle Millennium (roughly 500 to 1500).[1] In the chapters that follow, violence is analysed from Japan and China in the east, across Central Asia and North Africa, to western Europe, with chapters on ritualised violence in the Americas before the European conquest. We follow four broad lines of inquiry: the formation of centralised polities through war and conquest; institution building and ideological expression by these same polities; control of extensive trade networks; and the emergence and dominance of religious ecumenes.[2] These contexts, of course, are by no means inclusive of all the violence produced by and within the societies under consideration in this volume.

Violence was a given – an inevitable ingredient, it would seem – of everyday conduct at the individual and domestic levels across cultures. In many socio-cultural settings such violence involved gendered and legal relations. The pater familias imposed authority over the household just as the owner exercised authority over the enslaved, a physical discipline normalised by custom and law. Equally, parents used physical discipline on their offspring (legitimate or otherwise), again in 'normal' and legally sanctioned patterns. We might always assume the pursuance of such violent practices even if they transpired in the shadows nearly always beyond our analytic reach.

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1 B. Kedar and M. Wiesner-Hanks, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge World History*, vol. V (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 1–40. See also *The Global Middle Ages – Past & Present,* Supplement 13 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).
2 Kedar and Wiesner-Hanks, 'Introduction'.

It needs be said, too, that taking the precise measure of the incidence and severity of patterns of violence (of any sort) remains an elusive goal. Thus, for example, early enthusiastic efforts in the late twentieth century to utilise computers in producing generalisations about crime and conviction rates, such as in the case of premodern England with its precocious and surviving corpus of royal governmental records, failed to meet expectations. There was not only the difficulty of obtaining (even from massive English archival deposits) sufficient and comparable runs of documentation but also the uncertainty over the correlation of crown prosecution with the incidence of quotidian social violence. Governing agencies, moreover, had not yet criminalised many forms of violence, and some even received voluble praise from poets or priests, and validation in art, especially when carried out by those whose elevated social status guaranteed a right to defend sacred honour through physical action.

One faces a similar dilemma in attempting to account for frequency and levels of violence in Near Eastern society in the first centuries of the Islamic period. References in the Qur'an, Hadith (the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad) and early Islamic juridical writings would seem to suggest regular, quotidian patterns of domestic and other forms of 'low-level' violence but certainly do not offer quantifiable information of any sort. Much the same can be said of the countless references to a variety of types of violence that occur in the voluminous works of *adab* ('belles-lettres') and poetry produced over centuries, in a variety of languages, including Arabic, Persian and Turkish, by Near Eastern writers. For the most part, these are works of and about urban society and evince patterns both of criminality and of stern governance (so torture, executions and the like). Political unrest – driven, in cases, by sectarian divisions between Sunnis and Shi'a, or of an internecine sort within each of these two broad communities – is also a constant in narrative and literary accounts, though again one is at a loss to take a detailed measure of such activity.

Similarly, no unidirectional trend towards greater control over violence can confidently be traced in our sources. Rather, the tension created by the simultaneous need for violence (and praise for its dramatic exercise) existed, across culture and region, side by side with concerns for the realisation of a more peaceful social order. In early medieval Europe, monarchs at the level of kingdoms, great lords, and urban ruling bodies at a more provincial or even local level, sought to classify some violence as illicit and worked to establish social order within which disputes might be settled through judicial decisions in court or arranged compromises between contending parties.

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Given such conditions, agriculture, trade, pilgrimage and other activities could be conducted with some hope of security. Yet these same waxing powers often cherished territorial goals of their own. Such ambitions could only be achieved by the use of armed might which was becoming increasingly available through rising capacities of revenue extraction that provided the means for territorial expansion.

Confronting violence was, likewise, an abiding question for all Eurasian religious traditions. The manner in which religious establishments addressed violence and its impact on the socio-moral order varied widely. In Latin Christendom, a predominant view was that one carried out the will of God for social advancement: the spiritual mission had more chance of success in a less violent world. But here, too, violence had to be accommodated. If, at one level, Christian religious elites wearied of losses of landed property and goods to assault and thievery by the rapacious, great or small, at the same time, in a broader sense, they were profoundly caught up in a proud world of power and property. The typical reaction, then, was to support violence by lay patrons or turn themselves to warfare through the articulation of spiritual goals and blessings promised to participating warriors and lay notables. The elite in lay society, for their part, may increasingly have become culturally refined, as their literature, art and architecture demonstrates; yet they long showed how much they felt their origins as a warrior elite that settled issues with edged weaponry, their vigorous actions paralleling those in the heroic code they cherished and patronised. They could be confident that such bold and vigorous action would be highly praised and long remembered through song, verse and artistic creations.

The Four Contexts

The four contexts in which to read the contributions to the volume, again, cover most of the most common manifestations of collective violence across the specified regions and cultures of the global stage.

War, raiding and conquest typically informed relations between nomadic and agro-urban peoples. Patterns of assault, plunder and enslavement acted frequently as a prelude to episodes of more systematic violence. Chinese–Inner Asian relations over centuries were subject to ever-mounting pressures exerted in both directions by Chinese imperial forces on the one hand and Turkic and other nomadic/frontier forces on the other.[3] If confrontation was

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3 See Nicola Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and its Enemies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) and Jonathan Skaff, *Sui-Tang China and its Turko-Mongol Neighbors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

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mitigated by commercial ties, diplomacy and cultural exchange – patterns better understood today by historians – the fact of organised violence persisted. Similarly, in the late antique Near East, 'Saracens', a term used by Byzantine writers for southern peripheral Near Eastern peoples, preyed on the Byzantine and Sasanid realms over generations, often with slave trafficking as a central motivation.[4] In time, in the sixth and seventh centuries, in an effort to mitigate the violence and elicit the support of local intermediaries, Rome and Byzantium recruited Arabian and Syrian frontier tribes as clients. The experience – a sustained exposure to the 'lessons' of imperial state conduct – probably played a part in setting the stage for the Arab/Islamic invasions that followed upon the initial expansion of the 'Medinan state' under the Prophet Muhammad (570–632) and his immediate successors, notably Umar I, later known as the 'rightly guided' caliphs (632–61).[5]

Peoples of peripheries – steppe, deserts and seas – attacked China, Iran, Byzantium and other complex agrarian regions. In nearly all cases, on land, military forces were mounted, highly mobile and lightly armoured, relying on the horse and/or camel and the deployment of the bow and lance, pitted against often more encumbered and less flexible central armies. The more immediate consequences included imperial state-formation and/or territorial expansion on the part of the once-peripheral forces, as in the case of the Arab/ Muslim conquerors or, centuries later, the Mongols following their sweep into Song China in the thirteenth century. Longer-range consequences ensued as well. The defeat of Tang Chinese forces in 751 at the Battle of Talas by an Abbasid army, allied with Turkish Karluks, resulted in the end of Chinese imperial expansion westward into Central Asia. Muslim control of Transoxiana for the next 400 years, and important transformations in religious and material culture, including technologies of silk-weaving and paper-making, followed.

War and conquest were also instruments of the legitimate state. The point at which warfare, especially in Europe, no longer was the privilege of aristocrats bent on proving their honour and turned into the duty of peasants pressed into service by the state is a marker of how violence became integral to socio-political aims. The Hundred Years War in fourteenth-century England was a case of war waged to preserve the realm rather than the king's personal honour, and thus indicative of how the obligations that subjects owed their monarch became a matter of public scrutiny. State-sanctioned violence

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4 Noel Lenski, 'Captivity and Slavery among the Saracens in Late Antiquity (ca. 250–630 CE)', *Antiquité Tardive* 19 (2011), 237–66.
5 See Robert G. Hoyland, *In God's Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

justified war and conquest while unsanctioned violence often transpired in the aftermath of victory, with the winner eliminating his potential rivals.

A significant historiographical challenge arises here.[6] Few nomadic societies left written records, and with the relative scarcity of archaeological evidence, historians rely, in accounting for the upheaval and ruin these peoples engendered, on records produced either by the vanquished or, at subsequent stages of socio-political development, by the victors themselves in the context of imperial state governance. In the Americas, pre-Columbian writings survived only for the Mesoamerican culture area. To make sense of the seventh-century Arab/Islamic invasions of the Near East, Egypt and North Africa, historians have on hand a number of contemporary accounts produced by Jewish, Christian, Zoroastrian and pagan writers on the one hand, and the much later accounts of Muslim Arabic writers, on the other. In the latter case, hindsight left a deep imprint on the memory and attitudes of the writers: as recipients of state support by the early Abbasid court (eighth to tenth centuries), scholars and bureaucrats framed accounts of the Arab conquests in terms of contemporary fiscal and political anxieties that postdated the conquests by long decades. Similarly, Chinese local gazetteers contain precise accounts of what happened to thirteenth-century Eurasian cities that resisted the Mongols as their armies swept westward. Narratives, in this case, only encouraged further distinctions between native and foreign peoples. All such accounts are also heavily coloured by views of what the conquests 'meant' – success as a token of divine favour, say, or, alternatively, subjugation as a sign of divine displeasure – and each is thus to be negotiated with great care.

At issue in part is our ability to reconstruct the many elements that informed state-sponsored violence and the effort to impose central monopoly over the use of force: patterns of recruitment and training; the shaping of command structures; and the 'mundane' activities of feeding, housing and compensating troops. Scholarship on the long history of relations between Byzantium and the Sasanid empire – the third to the sixth centuries – argues over the extent to which they were informed by military confrontation.[7] Questions also surround, for example, the turn in the early Abbasid period to a so-called 'slave military' option. The phenomenon can be traced to Abbasid Ifriqiya (modern-day Tunisia), governed at that point by the Aghlabids (800–909), whose armies

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6 On warfare in late antiquity, see Brent D. Shaw, 'War and Violence', in G. W. Bowersock, Peter Brown and Oleg Grabar (eds.), *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 130–69.

7 See Beate Dignas and Engelbert Winter, *Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity: Neighbors and Rivals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 70.

contained black 'slave' units, and, almost simultaneously, Khurasan, governed at that point by the future caliph, al-Ma'mun (r. 813–33). His brother, Abu Ishaq al-Muʿtasim (r. 833–42), took up the effort of recruiting Turkic and other Inner Asian fighters, forming in the process a substantial new armed force in Abbasid Iraq.[8] The option of the 'slave military' remained to later Islamic-era dynasties, though modern scholars have been careful to note that most such polities, among them the Ghaznavids (977–1186), Seljuqs (1040–1194) and Ayyubids (1169–c. 1260), relied typically on hybrid forces, both on the campaign trail and in sustaining law and order within their respective realms. Scholars of Mongol military history are often better served in regard to military organisation, campaign movement, and so on: contemporary and later accounts, in Latin, Chinese and Persian, among other koines, offer detailed assessment of the structures, tactics and materiel of Mongol armies.

The Mamluk sultanate, as a 'slave military' state, poses a problem of explanation: is it right to consider the arming of slaves as a 'thousand-year' episode, spanning, in other words, the length of Near Eastern/Islamic history? A remarkably durable state (1250–1517), the sultanate confronted early in its history the Mongols in Syria and crusader forces along the Palestinian coast, and, over its history, sustained a formidable military state that drew significantly on a trafficking in Turkic and then at a later stage Circassian recruits. In much the same fashion as the Abbasid, Fatimid and Seljuq states, to name but a few other dynastic powers of Islamic history, the Mamluk administration relied on extensive local security and intelligence networks in assuring law and order. The effort, which included sustained use of social monitoring, surveillance and public killings, relied throughout as much on the constant 'promise' of violence by the state as on its execution.

Western European states built on Carolingian foundations and linked central governments with local administration in various ways. In England each county sheriff was a royal official and law and administration was supervised by itinerant justices (the *eyre*) and regular audits of sheriffs' accounts by the Exchequer. French governments placed royal officials (*baillis* and *sénéchaux*) over local *prévotts*, and relied on a system of appeals to central royal courts by those dissatisfied with local justice. Public punishment of those found guilty of crimes was dramatic, even though chopping off limbs gave way by the early thirteenth century to hanging. Royal and civic governments tried to restrain tournaments; originally seen as a danger to public order, this extreme sport did

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8 For one history of the Abbasid 'slave military', see Matthew S. Gordon, *The Breaking of a Thousand Swords: A History of the Turkish Military of Samarra* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001).

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gradually take on ritualised form and a diminished field of action from a wide swath of countryside to particular locations. Kings in western Europe gradually learned that leading in chivalric enterprises and tournaments produced better results than any attempts at prohibition.

This is to see dynasties and states as typical agents of violence. In 581, when the Sui dynasty (581–618) took political power over all of China, the regime burned and razed to the ground the thriving city of Jiankang (the future site of Nanjing), a city with nearly a million residents and a booming entrepôt for domestic and imported goods, as well as a centre for Buddhists (both Chinese and foreign), for fear of its reclaiming adherents to former local regimes.[9] And it is to see dynasties and states as victims of violence. Regicide – the killings of the early caliphs (Umar I, Uthman and Ali ibn Abi Talib) and the later beheading of the Abbasid caliph al-Amin (813) are among many examples – and assassination, that of the Seljuq vizier and regent Nizam al-Mulk (1092) the subject of much fascination, coloured Near Eastern political history. European warriors, encouraged by papal theological innovations, launched crusades first against the Islamic world in the eleventh century. By the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, kings levied taxes to support crusades and led their warriors not only against the Islamic world, but also against Germanic pagans and even fellow Christians.

And violence, in the early and medieval Islamic period, as across European and Asian history, surged from 'below' as well. The Jacquerie of fourteenth-century France, as well as the the Irmandiños rising in fifteenth-century Galicia and the rebellion of the Remences in fifteenth-century Catalonia, saw commoners brutally attack knights and nobles in a response against chivalric social violence. In England, the Great Rising of 1381 saw peasants together with a segment of the middle class violently rise up to demand that royal government better serve their needs. All of these European rebellions were crushed by the power of the state or the chivalric elite. Artisans and craftsmen rebelled against the Florentine government, demanding economic privileges and access to government in the late fourteenth-century Ciompi Revolt. Here there was some success, with the Ciompi coming to control the Florentine government for several years. Similarly, civil war, sparked by fiscal, religious and social divisions, wracked early Islamic society in recurring fashion. Rounds of civil conflict (Ar. *fitna*, pl. *fitan*) furthered sectarian

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9 Liu Shufen, 'Jiankang and the Commercial Empire of the Southern Dynasties: Change and Continuity in Medieval Chinese Economic History', in P. Ebrey, S. Pearce and A. Spiro (eds.), *Culture and Power in the Reconstitution of the Chinese Realm, 200–600* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2001), pp. 35–52.

formation and, in several cases, led to changes of regimes, as in the Marwanid–Zubayrid clash of the seventh century and the Abbasid coup against the Umayyad state in the mid eighth century. Rebellion was no less frequent a pattern; one thinks of the many challenges to the early 'proto-Sunni' authority of the Abbasid state by Shi'i movements, notably that of the Isma'ilis in the tenth century, whose success led to the flourishing of the Fatimid caliphate (909–1171) in Egypt, or the extended Zanj revolt of the later ninth century, an uprising the suppression of which cost the Abbasid state enormous human and fiscal wealth.

Rebels, as in the case of the Zanj, could and did frequently conquer territory outright. Turning from the Islamic realm to imperial China, in the ninth century a former salt-smuggler, Huang Chao, led an insurgency (875) against the mighty Tang dynasty and captured vast portions of the empire, including the world-famous city of Chang'an. It would take almost ten years before the Tang state eliminated Huang and his followers. Despite its wealth, religious tolerance and political efficiency, the Song state (960–1279) saw numerous rural rebellions, including those tinged by utopian goals such as that led by Fang La (d. 1121), who was fictionalised in the well-known Chinese novel *Water Margin*. While China long possessed a literary heritage of hero-ism focused on high-born men, by the twelfth century oral tales of men like Fang La were reaching a broader public that idealised the man of action, the *haohan*, usually from a low societal status, and in possession of such qualities as courage, fortitude, endurance and stoicism, and who embodied an alter-native kind of masculinity that was emotional in contrast to the kind of manhood in traditional Chinese ethics that stressed self-control.[10]

Trade, our third context, is not often approached from the vantage point of violence, whether in organised or more 'mundane' forms. Huang Chao's uprising stands as a reminder, however, of the linkage of violence and trade. Huang not only disrupted trade at home but also threatened China's far-reaching international trade networks. Early, in a reign of terror, he massacred the large community of foreigners, mainly Arab and Persian sea-faring traders, temporarily resident in Guangzhou, which, in the long term, detracted inter-national commerce from the port for nearly a hundred years. Huang Chao, like many ambitious tyrants, saw foreigners as a threat to his regime. As for the early Islamic period, historians have considered the role played by trade, whether in relation to commercial expansion, or, for example, the efforts of

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10 Bret Hinsch, *Masculinities in Chinese History* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), pp. 117–18.

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the Sasanid and Byzantine states, followed thereafter by the early Islamic caliphate, to wrest control over lucrative commercial routes, this in the context of the political upheaval of the sixth- and seventh-century Near East. A key outcome of the Arab/Islamic conquests was not only the destruction of the Sasanid state and the ouster of the Byzantine presence from North Africa, Egypt and the Levant, but the greater integration of the two former economies into a single, transregional agrarian and commercial market sustained, through the early and medieval Islamic period, by urban investment and consumption.

It would seem, in sum, that however peaceful and profitable trade and trading diasporas could be, they were seldom strangers to violence. The Middle Millennium saw an unprecedented expansion in both long-distance and regional trade as well as in the variety and quantity of the goods exchanged; the sheer value of the goods, however, attracted the covetous. While Adam Smith proclaimed the human propensity to truck, barter and exchange, one may also add the human proclivity to rob, pilfer and extort. With regard to violence and trade in the Middle Millennium, one can think of robber-bandits along the intercontinental highways such as the trade routes composing the 'Silk Road' or sea brigands operating in the Mediterranean across the ancient and medieval periods. The violence of pirates operating in the western Indian Ocean was well known: travellers, including Marco Polo (d. 1324) and Ibn Battuta (d. 1377), documented the well-armed and organised efforts of pirates operating along the Indian Malabar coast.[11]

The increasing regularity of trade within Europe, across its adjoining seas and into Africa and especially Asia created new opportunities for cultural exchange but was also paired with violent behaviour. The appearance of the Vikings in northern Europe around the turn of the ninth century represented the bountiful marriage of trading and raiding. The opening act of the Viking Age, a raid in 789 near Portland in southern England, may have begun as a mercantile mission but it ended with the slaughter of the Anglo-Saxon reeve. The Viking expansion across the north Atlantic was probably driven at least in part by the desire for fruitful new lands and economic opportunities, which could be seized violently when they could not be secured commercially. The commercial nature of Scandinavian society in early medieval Europe facilitated violent behaviour that was recorded as some of the most horrific of the age.

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11 Sebastian Prange, 'A Trade of No Dishonor: Piracy, Commerce, and Community in the Western Indian Ocean, Twelfth to Sixteenth Century', *American Historical Review* 116.5 (2011), 1,269–93.

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Commercial activity similarly encouraged violent activity in southern Europe and the Mediterranean basin in the later medieval period. Italian merchant republics, chief among them Venice and Genoa, sent commercial expeditions across the Mediterranean and Black Sea coasts, sometimes establishing a presence diplomatically, as the Republic of Genoa did with the purchase of the city of Kaffa from the Golden Horde in the thirteenth century. The European commercial presence was always tense in such locations, leading to war between the Genoese and the Mongols in the 1290s, the 1300s and the 1340s; this last war helped to create a disease vector for the Black Death into the Mediterranean basin. Often enough, though, the merchant republics used violence to establish or extend their commercial prowess. The Fourth Crusade, launched in 1202 to claim Jerusalem for Christendom, was manipulated and directed by the Venetian doge, Enrico Dandolo, first to attack the Christian city of Zara, which had resisted Venetian dominance. The doge then helped convince the crusading army to attack his commercial rivals, the Byzantines, leading to the sack of the city of Byzantium, and the establishment of the short-lived Latin Empire of Constantinople. Commercial interests provided ample incentive throughout the European Middle Ages for violent behaviour and warfare.

Unlike the view of neoclassical economics where trade is mutually beneficial and exchange is voluntary, the real world is and was a messy place where involuntary trade occurred as well. The intersection of trade, raiding and enslavement deserves especial mention, given the ubiquity of the latter institution across this long era. The activity of 'Saracens' of late antique Syria, Viking invasions, and the marauding of Mongol bands in the later medieval period are but three examples.[12] The active commerce in human beings conducted by Japanese Kyushu-based merchants beginning in the last quarter of the thirteenth century brought them profit from the thousands of Chinese and Korean captives forcibly sold into indentured slavery.[13] Slavery, high-level trade and violent state-level confrontation merged, as well, in the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century eastern Mediterranean. Commercial concerns, and, especially, access to the Black Sea region – the source of slave military recruits – informed diplomatic, political and military initiatives by the Bahri Mamluk sultanate in Egypt, confronted as it was by the ambitions of Genoa, Venice, Byzantium and the Ilkhanid state (1256–1353), the Mongol polity then in control of Anatolia, Iraq and Iran. The Mamluk state, in the

12 Ronald Finlay and Kevin H. O'Rourke, *Power and Plenty: Trade, War and the World Economy in the Second Millennium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).
13 Thomas Nelson, 'Slavery in Medieval Japan', *Monumenta Nipponica* 59.4 (2004), 463–92.