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Amira K. Bennison, Alison L. Gascoigne, eds. *Cities in the Pre-Modern Islamic World: The Urban Impact of Religion, State and Society.* Soas/Routledge Studies on the Middle East Series. London: Routledge, 2007. xiii + 231 pp. $150.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-415-42439-4.

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"Islamic World": A Safer Category Than the Islamic City?

"Islamic World" seems to be a safer category than the Islamic City to talk about cities ruled by Muslims; however, is it really immune from the limitations of broad categories? The Islamic City was a hypothetical model that ascribed religion a special role in the form and organization of the city. It identified an inward oriented city, with a Friday mosque and a market at its center, surrounded by close-knit, ethnically segregated residential neighborhoods. This model originated by French scholarship of the Maghreb in the first half of the twentieth century and underwent various revisions as scholars from different disciplines and countries contributed to the debate. In the 1980s, it also attracted the attention of Arab architects, disenchanted by mainstream modernism and commissioned to build large-scale developments in the Middle East. Since then, the Islamic City seems to have lost its validity as a viable model, thanks to a generation of revisionist critics who recognized that the stereotypical model drawn by Orientalist scholarship was flawed in many respects.[1] It was too simplistic as a theoretical construct and failed to take into consideration the diverse beginnings, historical transformation, and other aspects that inform the form of a city, such as patronage, use, external threats, internal social dynamics, and physical determinants of climate, materials, and topography, to cite but a few.

Just as critics of the Islamic City model pointed out that there is no equivalent discussion of the Christian City, "Islamic World" may still be considered a problematic grouping together of cities of diverse geographies and times. *Cities in the Pre-Modern Islamic World* stems from a conference, entitled "The City and Its Parts: Articulations of Ceremonial and Social Space in Islamic Urban Contexts," held in 2004 at Cambridge University. Amira K. Bennison, one of the two editors of this volume, explains the objective of the volume as follows: "The objective of this volume is to move away from theoretical and typological issues and to approach the subject of the city from a variety of disciplinary perspectives that explore how religion 'contextualized' urban life and form, and how particular urban institutions 'worked' at specific times and places" (p. 4). Thus, the editors do ascribe religion an important (but not necessarily an absolute determining) role that supports such a categorization. Hence, this review will identify how this role has been conceptualized by the individual contributors.

One of the biases of Orientalist scholarship of the cities in the Middle East had to do with periodization. In the case of the Middle East, it was suggested, for instance, that under the Ottomans (early sixteenth to early nineteenth or twentieth century) Arab cities declined, and since postcolonial independence, they have but poorly mimicked Western urban and architectural forms.[2] A recent compilation using the category of the "Islamic World," *The City in the Islamic World* (2008), self-consciously expands to include a section on the "modern and contemporary city." There are also several edited volumes that bring together studies on modern and contemporary cities, and they prefer to use the geographical categorization of the "Middle East" or the linguistic and cultural categorization of "Arab" rather than "Islamic."[3] *Cities in the Pre-Modern Islamic World* sticks with the "pre-modern" framing but also acknowledges the plurality of the cities under consideration. In relationship to the temporal and geographical extent, from the Iberian Peninsula to North India, Bennison explains, the "pre-modern" in the title refers to the period from the Umayyads in the seventh century all the way until the colonial era. In addition, the editors sought "to bring together work that might otherwise not be viewed in parallel" (p. 5). Yet there is no concluding chapter to reiterate to the readers the productive outcome of an otherwise

questionably wide scope.

The first section, "The Genesis of 'Islamic' Cities," consists of three papers on early Islamic cities from the seventh and eighth centuries. In his examination of the desert castles in greater Syria, Donald Whitcomb argues that urban planning in the initial phase of Islamic conquest was informed by western and southwestern Arabian models of urbanism rather than solely derived from the Hellenistic and Roman world. Simon O'Meara examines the founding legends of Fez, Wasit, al-Rafiqa, Madinat al-Zahira, Kairouan, Baghdad, and Samarra to argue that the legends all share elements that embody the Islamic city as a conceptual ideal. The legends are rituals that reenact the prophetic foundation or appropriation of the oasis of Yathrib as the holy city of Medina by the Prophet himself. The legends then ascribe such prophetic status to both the founders and the inhabitants "in an age that was frequently suspicious of urban life" (p. 36). Islam here is a medium that is effectively called on in the process of centralization and urbanization of a rural and nomadic population. In the final paper of this section, Tim Williams examines the city of Sultan Kala in Merv (present-day Turkmenistan) from the eighth to the thirteenth century. Merv is the site of several ancient cities starting in the fifth century BC. With the arrival of Islam in the seventh century AD, it became an important center not only for commerce but also for Islam's eastern expansion. Sultan Kala was laid to the west of the old town to thrive until the Mongol invasion (1221), which severely damaged it. Archeologists can examine what the city looked like in its thirteenth-century form and from that extrapolate what it looked like during the eighth century, when it was first laid out. Making ample use of satellite imagery together with site observations and literary sources, Williams explains that even though Sultan Kala does not display a grid layout, it was nevertheless planned; there was indeed a structure to urban form that differentiated between public and private spaces, and it evolved over time with its boundaries changing over its five hundred years of habitation.

The first paper to the second section, "Power and the City," by Bennison examines a very long period of the changing ruler-ruled relationship through an analysis of ceremonial and urban planning. Umayyads in Cordoba deferred to Syrian as well as local Visigoth precedents as they initially ruled over a Christian-majority population. As they consolidated their power, the Umayyads devised ceremonials that were partially guided by their ambitions for influence over North West Africa. In North West Africa, first Almoravids, then Almohads, had different relations to the populations over which they ruled in terms of the version of Islam they followed but also in terms of their ethnic and cultural origins, and this reflected in distinct types of urban intervention. The Almoravids and Almohads both skillfully wove the Umayyad past into their ceremonial life. Following this, Jonathan Bloom examines the arrival of Shiite Fatimids (from present-day Tunisia to Egypt) first as a large army under General Jawhar as-Siqilli and then as a court to rule over the Sunni-majority local population, and he discusses the various factors that influenced the foundation of Cairo as a military encampment (969) next to the already existing city of Fustat and its development into a ritual city and the capital (973) of the Fatimids as part of their vision to expand to the east. The third and fourth papers in this middle section turn farther east. David Thomas summarizes historians' debates on the identification of Jam in present-day Afganistan with Firuzkuh, the summer capital of the short-lived sultanate of Ghurid (1150-1223), which was, just as Sultan Kala, destroyed by the Mongols. Thomas explains that fieldwork undertaken since 2003 uncovered several important artifacts and findings which suggest that a flood may have played an important part in the destruction of most of the city's architecture, thereby explaining the presence of the mysteriously freestanding minaret that marks the site. Stephen P. Blake also suggests that the abandonment of Fatepuh Sikri may have had to do with a devastating flood in 1582 as well as further difficulties with water provision to the city. Blake discusses first Fatepuh Sikri and then Isfahan, respectively the sixteenth-century Mughal (present-day India) and seventeenth-century Safavid (present-day Iran) capital cities. In his brief comparison that arrives in the conclusion, Blake provides a twofold explanation for the differences in the planning and architectural program of these cities. First, their relative wealth reflects on their bazaars; India being richer, Fatepuh Sikri had a developed bazaar from its earliest dates. Second, both cities reflect their rulers' "problems of religious authority and legitimacy," Akbar ruling over a diverse population in India, and Abbas over diverse religious sects in Isfahan, resulting in religious architecture to take a relatively more central role in the design of Isfahan (p. 155).

The third and final section, "The Impact of Religion on Urban Life," begins with the other editor Alison L. Gascoigne's account of the water supply of Tinnīs, an island city in the Nile Delta of Egypt, which at the height of its prosperity from the ninth to the eleventh century, acquired an elaborate water works system installed by its Muslim rulers. The provision of fresh water was necessary for individual consumption as well as for the Islamic practice of ablution. Gascoigne explains that the

early cisterns and distribution system founded by Muslim rulers as a public service transformed over time to private control. Islamic practice and law was one of the factors that shaped the overall planning and management of water in the city. The remaining two papers in this section each focus on an urban institution, the hospital and the caravanserai. Comparing two fourteenth-century hospitals, one in Granada and the other in Christian Valencia, through an analysis of location and social role, Athena C. Syrakoy analyzes the effect of religious context. While in earlier times, a Muslim ruler typically constructed a mosque, by the fourteenth century, such charitable institutions as a hospital were more suitable to assert his power. Nicholas Warner examines a building complex in Cairo, named after its patron, Ridwan Bey, who was a powerful local official in charge of the annual caravan to Mecca in the mid-seventeenth century. This complex included religious, commercial, and residential functions that served the caravan. Warner argues that spiritual and material concerns, piety, and commerce were intertwined in the ceremonial procession of the Cairo-Mecca pilgrimage.

It clearly emerges after this summary of the papers that religion seems to have played a very important albeit not a singularly determining role. None of the papers in the volume ascribe to a homogenized definition of religion or a static description of religious practice. They highlight religious diversity and adaptation. Religious differences, many of the papers elucidate, encouraged Muslim rulers of the cities under consideration to use ceremony, architecture, planning, and public works for legitimization and protection as well as for bolstering their following and consolidating their rule. What is also innovative is that the editors brought together historians, who work mainly with textual sources to examine links and connections across cities, and archeologists, who tend to focus on a singular city but expand existing knowledge through fieldwork, where literary and historical accounts are not enough. It is this kind of disciplinary interaction that is the potential productive outcome of volumes with wide scopes.

Notes

[1]. Janet L. Abu-Lughod, "The Islamic City–Historic Myth, Islamic Essence, and Contemporary Relevance," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 2 (1987): 155-176; Nezar AlSayyad, *Cities and Caliphs: On the Genesis of Arab Muslim Urbanism* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991); and Andre Raymond, "Islamic City, Arab City: Orientalist Myths and Recent Views," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 21, no. 1 (1994): 3-18.

[2]. The lingering influence of Orientalism, where the supposed dichotomy between Islamic-traditional versus Western-modern becomes the dominant lens for interpreting urban life and form, can be observed in the relatively recent book by Stefano Bianca, *Urban Form in the Arab World: Past and Present* (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 2000).

[3]. Jens Hanssen, Thomas Philipp, and Stefan Weber, eds., *The Empire in the City: Arab Provincial Capitals in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Würzburg: Ergon in Kommission, 2002); Hans Chr. Korsholm Nielsen and Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, eds., *Middle Eastern Cities, 1900-1950: Public Places and Public Spheres in Transformation* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2001); Yasser Elsheshtawy, ed., *Planning Middle Eastern Cities: An Urban Kaleidoscope in a Globalizing World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004); and Yasser Elsheshtawy, ed., *The Evolving Arab City: Tradition, Modernity and Urban Developmen*t (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).

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