

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Robert S. Lopez, Irving W. Raymond. *Medieval Trade in the Mediterranean World: Illustrative Documents*. Records of Western Civilization Series. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001. xiii + 472 pp. \$79.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-231-12357-0.

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Columbia University Press has reissued Robert Lopez and Irving Raymond's 1955 collection of translated medieval Mediterranean trade documents. The initial value of the work was as a source of primary documents formerly unavailable in published editions or in English translations. The texts, footnotes, and section introductions written by the editors remain exactly as in the original edition, but Olivia Remie Constable has provided a necessary complement to the reissued text in her Foreword and in a new bibliography that supplements the original "Works Cited."

*Medieval Trade* contains about two hundred documents translated, with commentaries by Lopez, who was a Professor of History at Yale, and edited by Raymond, who was a Professor of History at the City University of New York. The book is divided into five sections that broadly treat exchange between Europe, the Byzantine Empire, and Islamic lands; markets and merchandise; contracts and investments; trade routes and associated problems; and, practical manuals and methods. These five sections are further subdivided thematically and contain brief introductions to the documents.

Islamicists not already familiar with the work will be disappointed that the varied collection of letters, contracts, lists, and tax records illustrating European (especially Italian) commercial practices far outweighs Islamic sources, and that the translations of the Islamic texts were derived from European translations rather than the Arabic. Instead of tax rolls or contracts, the Islamic contribution to medieval trade is represented by a description of trade and traders, a list of tenth-century Iraqi imports, passages from a commercial handbook,

and descriptions of cities and rural markets, all taken from works of narrative or geographic literature.[1] References to the Islamic world do surface elsewhere in the book, but these references are not always indexed.[2] The bias toward Italian evidence reflects Lopez and Raymond's belief in Italy's peerless role in the medieval "commercial revolution," which they viewed as the precursor of the modern European capitalist economy. It also reflects the state of medieval Islamic economic history prior to the groundbreaking work on the Geniza documents, begun by Goitein around the time of the publication of *Medieval Trade*.

The weakness of the book with respect to medieval Islamic trade is partly ameliorated by Constable's Foreword, in which she reviews the expansion of medieval studies to include subjects and regions that were considered marginal at mid-century, emphasizes the Islamic world and the importance of the Geniza documents and recent documentary finds, and refers readers to works which have challenged Lopez and Raymond's Eurocentric view of Mediterranean economic history.[3]

Though Islamicists will probably not be satisfied with the book as a stand-alone text in the classroom, it may still be useful as a ready source of translated Arabic texts describing Islamic cities, commodities, and ideal business practices. References to contact between European and Islamic traders will be of interest for those interested in social history and comparative studies, and Islamicists will find the last half-century's scholarship on Islamic economies well represented in the new thirteen-page bibliography.

Notes

[1]. Passages are taken from Ibn Khurradadhbah (Docs. 5 and 6), Ibn Hawqal (Docs. 16 and 17), Ibn Abi Zar' (Doc. 25), Ibn Jubayr (Doc. 26), and Abu al- Fadl Ja'far Ibn 'Ali al-Dimashqi (Doc. 198).

[2]. For example in letters detailing the business deals between Italian and Tunisian merchants (Docs. 190 and 191), references to European merchants in the trading centers of Iran, India, and Syria, and vice versa (Docs.

123, 149)

[3]. As an introduction Constable recommends David Abulafia, "Asia, Africa, and the Trade of Medieval Europe," in *Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 402-473. She also notes the importance of Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

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