

Imperial Power and Maritime Trade: Mecca and Cairo in the Later Middle Ages. By JOHN L. MELOY. Chicago: MIDDLE EAST DOCUMENTATION CENTER, UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO, 2010. Pp. xiii + 305. \$59.95.

Despite its religious significance for every Muslim, there is no doubt that Mecca was little active on the political scene after the Prophet's death. With the shift of the Islamic empire's political power to Syria and then Iraq, the whole region remained a peripheral area, barely mentioned in the works of historians across the ages. The annual departure of the pilgrimage caravan and its return with the accompanying palanquin (*maḥmal*) were the main events that occupied the historians, along with the problems faced by the pilgrims while traveling to and sojourning in the holy city. A difference of treatment only occurs when Mecca and Medina came under the influence of the Mamlūk sultans and Egyptian and Syrian historians began collecting more data on the region. While other cities of the Muslim world were a focal point for many authors who devoted several works to them, Mecca was subject to scant treatment in historiographical sources. Although two Meccan authors—al-Azraqī (d. 858) and al-Fākihī (d. 885)—wrote the history of their city in the ninth century, it was not until the fifteenth century that another local author, al-Fāsī (d. 1429), decided to dedicate several of his books to the same topic. Between them spans a gap of six centuries of almost total silence. From a modern point of view, the research carried out on the holy city reflects this state. Most of the studies deal with Mecca's early history (shortly before the appearance of Islam and during the first century of Islam) or with the late period (mainly the twentieth century with the emergence of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia).

Notwithstanding this, with the publication of his works on Mecca in the early fifteenth century al-Fāsī inspired several authors during the same century and up to the nineteenth century to allot more time to Meccan history and to the region in general. Muḥammad al-Ḥabīb al-Hila assembled the names of all these authors and the titles of their works in *al-Taʾrīkh wa-l-muʾarrikhūn bi-Makka min al-qarn al-thālith al-hijrī ilā l-qarn al-thālith ʿashara* (London, 1994; see my review in *Mamlūk Studies Review* 3 [1999], 223–30), whose publication constituted a landmark. In the meantime, the most significant of these sources composed between the fifteenth and the nineteenth centuries were critically edited and made available to a broader audience. Consequently, the writing of a history of Mecca in the middle period became a more achievable goal.

The book under review by John Lash Meloy is a result of this increased interest in the history of the holy city (also published in 2010 was Laylā Amīn ʿAbd al-Majīd's *al-Tanzīmāt al-idāriyya wa-l-mālīyya fī Makka l-mukarrama fī l-ʿaṣr al-mamlūkī, 667–923/1268–1517* [Riyadh], which has a different scope). For many years now Meloy has specialized in the premodern history of the Ḥijāz, and of Mecca in particular, and he has published several articles on various aspects of Meccan history in the Mamlūk period. While his Ph.D. dissertation ("Mamluk Authority, Meccan Autonomy, and Red Sea Trade, 797–859/1395–1455"), presented at the University of Chicago in 1998, already dealt partially with the material found in this book, it took him several years to expand the project to the second part of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century. It is worth pointing out that when he began his research, few of the primary sources had been published and he had to consult the manuscripts on microfilm. Although his job was in part facilitated by the critical editions that have since appeared, he had to modify and replace the references to the manuscripts in his dissertation with ones to the printed editions.

The book's focus is on the history of Mecca in the fifteenth century, when local historiography witnessed a new start. The author aims to reassess the view of Richard Mortel in *al-Aḥwāl al-siyāsiyya wa-l-iqtisādiyya bi-Makka fī l-ʿaṣr al-mamlūkī* (Riyadh, 1985) that, as Meloy puts it, was somewhat biased by the Cairo-centric presentation given by the Mamlūk sources, even though the Meccan sources referred to above were also analyzed. Meloy's main criticism is that Mortel separated the political and economic dimensions of indigenous power in Mecca, which led to the conclusion of Cairo's undisputed sovereignty over the holy city. Meloy's thesis is that the economic and political systems in Mecca and the Ḥijāz were deeply integrated; in consequence the nature of the relationship between the Sharīfs and the Mamlūk sultans was more sophisticated than the Mamlūk sources depict it. With the advent of the Mamlūk sultanate and the fall of the ʿAbbāsīd caliphate in Baghdad, the Ḥijāz became the object of

greater attention on the part of the Mamlūk sultans. Always in search of legitimacy, the sultans tried to consolidate their power by instituting various forms of political ritual in Cairo as well as, and maybe above all, in Mecca and Medina, namely, the invocation of the name of the reigning sultan at the call to prayer and before the weekly sermon, and the annual dispatch of the *maḥmal* and *kiswa* (the cloth covering the Ka'ba), which were a prerogative of the 'Abbāsid caliph in the preceding centuries. The sultans also introduced the title of *amīr* for the rulers of Mecca and Medina, which meant that for the Egyptian chancery they were then considered "vassals" of the sultans. This titulature was conferred by the sultan and accepted by the Sharīfs. A simplistic analysis of this relationship would assume the submission of the latter to the former. Meloy's intent is to investigate this relationship on another basis, viz., the economic boom that Mecca witnessed with the shift of the trade route to its port Jeddah in the early fifteenth century, which made it one of the commercial termini between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean. The shift brought about an enrichment for the city and the Sharīfs and stirred the ever-growing sultanic appetite for financial resources. In Meloy's view, the economic and political systems should be surveyed together in order to properly evaluate their integration and the impact of one on the other in Mecca. By analyzing the impact this economic development had on the holy city, Meloy wanted to examine how the Mamlūk hegemony expressed itself in the Ḥijāz, particularly with respect to the competition for revenues generated by the commerce.

Meloy's analysis is based on a great variety of sources: Egyptian and Syrian historians for the Mamlūk side and Meccan historians for the local side, chancery works (which provide a one-sided view of the relationships, given that they were all written by Egyptian authors), and numismatic and epigraphic evidence (inscriptions containing edicts, decrees, etc.). The first two chapters provide an introduction to the Ḥijāz: the first lays the political and historiographical groundwork and the second offers a geographical description with a review of economical issues. Meloy then proceeds with a chronological review of the history of the sharifate, dividing the period under study into five chapters, each corresponding to a variation in the relationships between the Meccan Sharīfs and the Mamlūk sultans. Chapter three is devoted to the reign of Sharīf Ḥasan ibn 'Ajlān (d. 1426), roughly covering the years 1400–1420; chapter four treats his last years and his son Barakāt's reign, ending with Barsbāy's death, roughly corresponding to the years 1420–1440; chapter five deals with Barakāt's last years (d. 1455) and the early years of his son Muḥammad's reign (d. 1497), which correspond to the reigns of three Mamlūk sultans—Jaḡmaq, Īnāl, and Khushqadam—i.e., roughly from 1445–1470; chapter six is dedicated to the period that broadly extends from 1470 to 1500, during which the *sharīf* Muḥammad consolidated his power and the sultan Qā'itbāy secured his grip on the sultanate in Cairo; and chapter seven focuses on the economic decline accelerated by the Portuguese attacks in the Red Sea, and the subsequent political collapse in Mecca. Even though the Sharīfs managed to retain their hold on power in Mecca until the beginning of the twentieth century, they never regained the political role they had played five centuries previously.

Meloy's reconstruction of the history of this period is very convincing. His main conclusions are that, from the Mamlūk point of view, the Ḥijāz was an integral part of their sultanate, a claim expressed in many ways. But as with all their territories situated on the periphery, the Ḥijāz was just a region pledging allegiance to the sultan who, in turn, regarded its ruler as a subordinate officer and the region under his control as a kind of protectorate. As for the Sharīfs, some may have considered the sultan as their overlord, but never consistently: they saw themselves more as allies who could break the alliance if necessary. On a local level, the allegiance to the Mamlūks was more instrumental than the Mamlūks were inclined to recognize. All in all the Sharīfs played the role of brokers in their region. As Meloy puts it, "the political needs and interests of the Sharīfs of Mecca had to be reconciled with those of the sultans of Cairo, a process that involved a clash of political cultures between the Meccan reliance on alliances versus the Mamlūk reliance on allegiances" (p. 20).

One of the merits of Meloy's book is to remind us that the state of relationships between two powers such as the Mamlūk sultanate and the amirate of Mecca was more complex than we generally assume. In light of this, our vision of the traditional "overlord vs. vassal" concept should be reassessed. It is clear that on a local level the perception of the status was different. In light of this new position it would

also be interesting to investigate how the Ayyūbids of Ḥisn Kayfā, in northern Syria, or some of the buffer-states like the Qaramānids envisaged their status vis-à-vis the Mamlūk sultans.

There is only one thing I would like to temper. When speaking of the ideological campaign between the Mamlūks and the Tīmūrids aimed at establishing their symbolic presence in Mecca, Meloy mentions the proposal made by Shāhrukh to Barsbāy for the sending of the *kiswa*. This now needs to be revised in light of very recent research based on the diplomatic correspondence between the two sovereigns: it appears that Shāhrukh's claim to send the *kiswa* concerned only the interior covering (*al-kiswa l-dākhiliyya*)—not the exterior one—which was regularly sent each year by the Mamlūk sultan as one of his privileges. Malika Dekkiche, “Le Caire carrefour des ambassades: Étude historique et diplomatique de la correspondance échangée entre les sultans mamlouks circassiens et les souverains timourides et turcomans (Qara Qoyunlu-Qaramanides) au XVe s. d'après le ms. ar 4440 (BnF, Paris),” 2 vols. (Ph.D. diss., University of Liège, 2011), 1: 74–130. The interior covering carried lesser ideological importance given that it was hung inside the building, only accessible to a small number of Meccans and pilgrims on prescribed dates during the year. The impact was thus more religious than ideological. This piece of information shows how careful we must be with our sources; in this case, the difference is made by the contents of letters of which the Muslim historians did not have knowledge.

The book is nicely produced and pleasant to read. The bibliography is impressive for both primary and secondary sources. Not only did Meloy consult manuscripts, but he also extended his readings to fields generally neglected by historians even though they are a fount of considerable information on the question of ideology, i.e., epigraphic and numismatic evidence. The author must be particularly commended as well for not having consulted references only in English and Arabic but also in French and German. Foreign Ph.D. dissertations were also consulted. In this regard it should be mentioned that Éric Vallet's dissertation, quoted by the author, has now been published (Paris, 2011; see the review in *JAOS* 132,?). The chancery manual *al-Maqṣid al-rafiʿ al-munshaʿ al-hādī li-ṣināʿat al-inshāʿ* (Paris, BNF MS arabe 4439) and tentatively attributed to Bahāʾ al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Luṭf Allāh al-Khālidi (said to have died in 1438) has also recently been definitively identified as the work of Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Saḥmāwī al-Qāhirī (d. 1463). Its real title is *al-Thaḡhr al-bāsim fī ṣināʿat al-kātib wa-l-kātim* (ed. Ashraf Muḥammad Anas Mursī, Cairo, 2009, 2 vols.).

To conclude, Meloy's book constitutes a milestone in the field of Middle Eastern studies and will remain the standard work on the history of fifteenth-century Mecca. It is a must read for everyone interested in the economy of the region and its links with commerce in the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean in the fifteenth century.

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