



## Bulletin d'études orientales

Supplément LVII | Mars 2008

Le pouvoir à l'âge des sultanats dans le *Bilād al-Shām*.  
Séminaire IFPO-ACOR, Amman 15-16 mai 2005

---

### Foreword

Bethany J. Walker

---



#### Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/beo/151>

ISBN: 978-2-35159-318-9

ISSN: 2077-4079

#### Publisher

Presses de l'Institut français du Proche-Orient

#### Printed version

Date of publication: 1 March 2008

Number of pages: 15-18

ISBN: 978-2-35159-038-4

ISSN: 0253-1623

#### Electronic reference

Bethany J. Walker, « Foreword », *Bulletin d'études orientales* [Online], Supplément LVII | Mars 2008, Online since 13 November 2009, connection on 04 May 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/beo/151>

---

## FOREWORD

Bethany J. WALKER

*Grand Valley State University*

---

“Exercising Power in the Age of the Sultanates” was launched the spring of 2004 as a three-year research collaboration between the French (l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale) and American (American Research Center in Egypt) institutes in Cairo. The goal of the project from the start was an ambitious one: “to elaborate a new periodization in the history of the Islamic world derived from its own sources,” focusing on the previously ill-defined period between the age of the Caliphates, when the classical culture and institutions of medieval Islam developed and of the states of the modern Middle East emerged<sup>1</sup>. Borrowing Marshall Hodgson’s moniker of “The Age of the Sultanates”, this period is often characterized as one of increasing militarization of the state, homogenization of Islamic culture, and the emergence of particular global processes that brought the politically fragmented world of Islam into increasingly closer contact, roughly corresponding to the thirteenth through early nineteenth centuries C.E.<sup>2</sup>. The Steering Committee of the original IFAO-ARCE proposal, of which I was a member, designed a project that would further define this period by creating a research referent based on the ways in which power was exercised along three modalities: the production of power, the manifestation of power, and the reception of power. Such a construct allows for comparative and multi-disciplinary approaches, as well as giving voice to the poor and peasants. Such approaches are well grounded in world, globalization, and political economic theories but have not yet experienced a currency in Islamic studies of the

---

1. English and French abstracts of the original project proposal can be found on-line at [www.arce.org/ifao/ifao.html](http://www.arce.org/ifao/ifao.html). The American portion of the project was funded by the U.S. Department of Education and the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. State Department.

2. Hodgson’s three-part series, *The Venture of Islam: A Short History of Islamic Civilization* (Chicago, 1961), has become a classic in Islamic historiography and is often used in American universities as required texts in courses on pre-modern Islamic history.

pre-modern period. The Sultanates project would produce, in the end, a body of literature published as monographs, to be used as scholarly and classroom reference, in an effort to better understand this key political institution in Islam and the cultures that it created.

The following year, in 2005, regional conferences were launched in Cairo and Amman, in which scholars affiliated with the French and American research centers in Cairo, Amman, Damascus, Istanbul, Tunis, and Sanaa presented the results of the previous year's research on this common theme. Each region defined "the age of the sultanates" according to the geographical and political criteria most appropriate for their areas of specialization, which is indicative of the fact that the sultanate as a political system had a different lifespan in different regions. Themes that emerged from these conferences were wide-ranging and included examinations of the physical expression of state power in the city and countryside (through building projects and inscriptional programs), the variety of ways in which conquered peoples collaborated with and resisted the state, and the multiple roles of religious and tribal leadership.

This monograph represents the proceedings of the Amman conference, which was held jointly at IFPO (L'Institut Français du Proche Orient) and ACOR (American Center of Oriental Research) 13-15 May 2005<sup>3</sup>. Our regional conference highlighted Bilad al-Sham and Iraq/Iran between the twelfth and early nineteenth centuries, as representing transitional geographic and chronological zones in the creation and then collapse of the sultanate system. For six months prior to the conference, the six participants, representing what we believed to be some of the most innovative scholarship on the Crusader, Ayyubid/Mamluk, and Ottoman Bilad al-Sham and Il Khanid Iran, collaborated long-distance on the project theme, by reorienting our research to explore the conference theme, exchanging with one another drafts of our work and offprints of previously published work, and through regular e-mails<sup>4</sup>. The three-day conference began with a reception at IFPO and was followed by a full day of bi-lingual presentations in round-table fashion at ACOR, ending that Sunday with excursions to local sites of common historical and research interest.

---

3. We want to thank the staff of both institutes and particularly the Directors, Drs. Jean-François Salles and Floréal Sanagustin (IFPO-Amman and -Damascus) and Pierre Bikai (former Director, ACOR) for the logistical planning and hospitality that made this conference possible. A synopsis of the conference can be found on-line at [www.caorc.org/news/highlights/acor/acor-2005-05-16b.htm](http://www.caorc.org/news/highlights/acor/acor-2005-05-16b.htm).

4. The sixth participant, Adel Mann of the Vanleer Institute, was unable to submit his paper for publication in this volume, and we regret that it could not be included. His biography and select works, however, are included at the end of this volume.

Bilad al-Sham and Iran together offer a useful picture of the way that power was exercised on the imperial frontier. This region represents not only a political but also a religious and cultural frontier, where power relations were represented by a variety of actors and where multiple identities and loyalties materialized, often simultaneously. The region is a place of contention on many levels where imperial and local administrative, economic, social and military structures often fluctuated. Bilad al-Sham, for the Crusader and Ayyubid/Mamluk/Ottoman world, and Iran, for the Mongols, give us a uniquely provincial perspective, from which we can cull local voices thanks to the written and material record.

The contributions to this volume thus advance a provincial perspective on the exercise of power in such political systems. The authors are wide-ranging in their use of sources and methodologies, pulling on traditional history (political, economic, administrative, legal), art and architectural history, and archaeology. Their work falls into two broad themes, both of which reflect a provincial perspective: the production, manifestation and reception of power in the form of fortifications and administrative structures and cultures. Three of the papers address the ways in which sultanates use fortifications to create, enhance, and perpetuate their power in the provinces and newly conquered territories. Cédric Devais compares the ways the Crusaders used their military building programs to control and secure the Sawad and Transjordan, exploring the multifaceted relations of the Crusader state with local Muslim dynasties while giving a special affection to how these relations created a heterogeneity in defensive structures and networks. The intent to create a particular local response to these defensive programs suggests that the Crusaders had much greater ambitions in Jordan than just securing communication corridors. The projection of Ottoman power into the former Mamluk territories and the buttressing of claims to religious legitimacy through the building of *hajj* forts are the foci of Andrew Petersen's article. His chronological comparison of such building programs in the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries illustrate the ways in which Ottoman self-image had developed over this period and how "power" was articulated. By comparing Ayyubid and Mamluk systems of fortification in Egypt and Syria, the final paper in this section, by Benjamin Michaudel, assesses their transformation in Syria in response to changing regional political realities and economic structures. Both Michaudel and Devais consider fortifications, in this sense, as expressions of provincial and local autonomy, rather than merely unilateral projections of imperial power.

The final two contributions to this volume shift their focus to what may appear only as the mundane realm of provincial administration; with only a superficial reading of the sources,

however, as the authors demonstrate, it is in precisely this area that some of the richest encounters between the ruler and ruled played out serving as the forum in which locals were able to either resist or cooperate with the state, as suited their interests. Denise Aigle explores the clientism and patronage that obscured relations between the Mongols and the ruled with the absorption of formerly independent Muslim states, remnants of the former Seljuk Sultanate, into the Mongol Empire. Fluctuating relations with local elites in Fars, in particular, created a vacillating “dual administration” that local leaders were able to manipulate to further their own interests, at the expense of their countrymen. In the final contribution to the volume, Bethany Walker uses the model of political ecology to investigate peasant responses to attempts by the Mamluk state to control land in Jordan. Land, as the basis of power in the Mamluk Sultanate, and a constantly shifting rural administration are important factors in the negotiation of power on the level of provincial administration.

On a final note, we would like to express gratitude to IFPO (l’Institut Français Proche-Orient), Drs. Sanagustin and Salles, and their staff for publishing this volume.