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### **Review of Liat Kozma, Cyrus Schayegh, and Avner Wishnitzer (eds.), *A Global Middle East: Mobility, Materiality and Culture in the Modern Age, 1880-1940***

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## NEW MIDDLE EASTERN REVIEWS

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### **A Global Middle East: Mobility, Materiality and Culture in the Modern Age, 1880-1940**

Edited by Liat Kozma, Cyrus Schayegh, and Avner Wishnitzer  
London, I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2015, 377 pp., \$110.00/ £68.00  
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Kozma, Schayegh, and Wishnitzer's volume explores the deep social transformation that the Middle East underwent as a result of the "First Modern Globalization." These transformations were instigated by the emergence of the Westphalian state system, engagement with the capitalist economic order and the introduction of modern education. The volume focuses on the complex theme of mobility as a key feature of globalization by studying the flow into, around, and out of the region under three headings: people, objects, and ideas. It effectively shows that the Middle East was not simply a passive subject of change, but was a region composed of agents very much engaged in the flow of materials and ideal that transformed the region and beyond.

The volume weaves local histories into broader trends. It does this by placing the localities and cities within a wider history and informs the reader about the ways that the economic, political and cultural spheres of the region were reconfigured as a result of interactions with capitalistic markets. This process is demonstrated by tracing the impact of objects, lifestyles, and ideas on the extant networks, traditions and modes of life that existed in the Middle East.

The volume comprises fourteen chapters divided into four sections with images, maps and illustrations to help the reader along. The ten long chapters are written by a range of reputable scholars and the four shorter chapters are written by skilled doctoral candidates. The aim of the four sections under the headings of "Global network, local networking," "People on the move," "Object and related practices on the move," and "Ideas on the move" are as follows:

The first section studies the formation of global networks through the lens of two different localities based on micro-histories. Schayegh argues that globalization was channeled over the local structures and urban elites were at the core of the transformations that took place. He uses an 1888 survey of the Jawlan Heights, written by a German-American engineer, to tell how the locals were involved in the integration of Bilad al-Sham into the thriving "Euro-centric global capitalist market" (p.26). Ben-Dror's chapter focuses on the Horn of Africa and on the Muslim community of Harar in the eastern coast of Somali. It shows how the occupation of the Harar Emirate by the Egyptians in "1875 ushered in the era of globalization in the city" (p.59). Egyptians equated re-Islamization with modernization as part of their "civilizing mission" in Africa.

Section two is about the movement of individuals, restrictions of this movement, and its impact on receiving and exporting societies. “Globalization from below” was vital for the transfer of thoughts and modes of life from one area to another. In Chapter 3, Huber traces the “migration of students and academics in early 20<sup>th</sup> century over large distances for better educational opportunities” in the newly established universities of Cairo (p. 82). She argues that the spread of education was not simply the replication of “Western models, in fact, it was much more complex phenomenon in 1920s and 1930s” (p. 102). It combined import with change as the formation of a “cosmopolitan citizen” and “institutional differences” gained steam. Biancani sheds light on how the concentration of foreign capital and cheap labor from Europe transformed Cairo into a major metropolitan city. Some economically disadvantaged Europeans migrated there not to serve as colonial overseers, but as sex workers. Ben-Naeh discusses how the European investment and the possibility of economic immigration to western societies impacted the lives of Anatolia’s Jewish communities with a focus on the abandoned women, *agunot*. At the turn of the twentieth century, Jaffa became a cosmopolitan port city and an epicenter for global migrants. Dierauff places the Zionist migration within this development, and highlights “that modern Jewish immigration was not as unique as portrayed in Zionist or Arab historiography” (p. 165-6).

The third part focuses on objects. Examples include Singer sewing machines, books, newspapers and drugs that brought the world into the homes and work-places of locals. Hanley illustrates the interest of the modern state in regulating movement across borders by issuing personal identification documents such as passports. Ram reconstructs the story of cannabis and opium traffickers in the Ottoman realms. He argues that unresponsiveness of the imperial officials to narcotic trafficking was economically driven—to provide for the demands of the European markets. Kupferschmidt tells us how it was not only major infrastructure projects (steam navigation, railways, telegraphs networks, and electric grids) that were imported, but also how smaller technologies were acquired “initially by elites, but gradually trickled down to lower strata” (p.231).

He agrees that the ‘technoscape’ became unidirectional during this time, but argues that consumers had a measure of agency with regard to acquisition. Usage of smaller machineries in many cases translated to additional revenues of income, saving and women empowerment. Some people simply wanted to be at par with their European counterparts. Kuperschmidt’s empirical data posits challenges to older theories of “power structures” and “class exploitation.” Novick’s chapter shows how the locals embraced the new moveable beehive that was introduced to them by two American explorer-beekeepers in 1880.

Finally this volume shifts away from moving peoples and objects to the adoption and challenge that ideologies and concepts carried with them. Buessow examines Abduh’s seminal work, *Risalat al-Tawid*, Theology of Unity, and highlights the book’s two distinctive features: 1) hybridity of ideas (including the rationalist Shi’a theology introduced to him by his mentor al-Afghani), and self-cultivation practices, and 2) the use of empirical evidence when discussing the past. *Risalat al-Tawid* is a nexus of ideas “convergent evolution,” which affected not only the contemporary understanding of Sunni Islam, but the act of Islamic identity-construction and its symbols of distinction. Ayalon’s chapter argues that globalization brought printing and the quest for reading into the region. The tidal wave of ideas, people, technologies and practices plunged the region into an essentially unfamiliar terrain. The hub of literacy was initially in Lebanon, then in Egypt and before spreading unevenly across the region. Bicer-Deveci argues that the Ottoman women’s journal, *Kadinlar Dunyasi*, was a product of the interactions between regional

feminist and international women's organizations. Langner demonstrates that, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the processes of globalization reshaped Middle Eastern Islam. It went through internal reconstruction and created a framework for what a religion is and had to include. At the same time, religious education and doctrine became more uniform.

This volume offers an in-depth analysis of the ways that the forces of globalization and local actors interacted in the Middle East between 1880 and 1940, and shows that globalization was led by the Europeans, but not dominated by them. It demonstrates a nuanced understanding of the local histories and global trends that unfolded in the Middle East at the turn of the twentieth century. It utilizes a wide array of primary sources, relevant indigenous studies, and other European languages to address the bidirectional ties of locals-to-global, "glocalization," in the Middle East, 1880-1940. This volume's "scalar framework" is an effective approach highlighting bottom-up processes of cultural production and hybridity, societal transformation and the rise of urbanism

The writing throughout is clear and engaging. Students and specialists will find this publication very useful. It is also important for policymakers since some of same themes are now at the core of contemporary affairs. The bibliographies at the end of each chapter include new published works, which are useful for historians of capitalism and theorists of globalization.

The volume also has some minor shortcomings. None of the chapters directly answers or fully engages on the question of precisely how the Great War and the ensuing Sykes-Picot Agreement, impacted the movement of people and objects. It is also unclear whether globalization led to class cohesiveness that cut across the traditional ethnic and religious fault lines. Was rapid social stratification in localities under review the cause of political stability or instability? Did class formation and steep population rise have any impact on religiosity revival? Overall, this volume offers a wonderful analysis of the societal transformations that the Middle East experienced during the first wave of globalization. It forces us to rethink the rhetoric of victimization and hegemony that appeared after the conclusion of the Second World War. How, one wonders, will the present generation throughout the Middle East react to the current wave of neoliberalism?