



The Seljuqs: politics, society and culture

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Despite the above remarks and reservations, which are not exhaustive, Toch's study is an impressive scholarly achievement. His overview of around 1,000 years of Jewish economic history in an extensive geographic area is well-grounded in the general historical context, thoroughly based on recent research, and offers on the whole a convincing revisionist view of the topic. His book will undoubtedly remain a standard work for many years to come, both for those focusing on Jewish history and for practitioners of 'general' medieval history.

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Notes

1. David Jacoby, "The Jews in the Byzantine economy, seventh to mid-fifteenth century." In *Jews in Byzantium: dialectics of majority and minority cultures*, edited by R. Bonfil, G. Stroumsa, O. Irshai, and R. Talgam (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 219–255, 245–246.
2. Mario Re, "La Vita di S. Zosimo vescovo di Siracusa come fonte per la storia della Sicilia del VII secolo." In *La Sicile de Byzance à l'islam*, edited by Anneliese Nef and Vivien Prigent (Paris: De Boccard, 2010), 189–204, esp., 197–204.
3. Jacoby, "Jews in the Byzantine economy," 230.
4. *Ibid.*, 224, 226.
5. Johannes Koder and Friedrich Hild, *Hellas und Thessalia*, vol. 1 of *Tabula Imperii Byzantini* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1976), 199 (s.v. Larmyna), 251 (s.v. Rebenikos).
6. Jacoby, "Jews in the Byzantine economy," 230, 235, 238, 244–245.
7. *Ibid.*, 247.
8. David Jacoby, "Jews and Christians in Venetian Crete: segregation, interaction, and conflict." In *Interstizi: Culture ebraico-cristiane a Venezia e nei suoi domini dal medioevo all'età modern*, edited by U. Israel et al., (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2010), 246–249.
9. Constantin Zuckerman, "On the Kievan letter from the Genizah of Cairo." *Ruthenica* 10 (2011): 7–56.

The Seljuqs: politics, society and culture, edited by Christian Lange and Songül Mecit, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2012, 318 pp., 29 illustrations, £22.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-7486-6857-1

Everyone teaching pre-modern Islamic history would easily agree that the Seljuqs have been understudied, despite their obvious importance for Islamic history as the first Turkic dynasty that ruled in the centre of the Middle East and the 'switchmen' (to borrow the editors' phrase) who initiated a host of enduring changes – political, economic, religious – in the history of the Muslim world. This volume, the proceedings of a conference titled 'The Seljuqs: Islam revitalized?' that took place in Edinburgh in 2008, is an offshoot and continuation of the growing scholarly interest in this dynasty in the last decade. It contains an informative introduction and 15 articles divided into the subsections of 'Politics', 'Society' and 'Culture', which deal with both the Great Seljuqs (1040–1194) and the Seljuqs of Rum (1081–1307). The articles – usually solid and innovative – cover a wide range of topics, although most of them are rather specific and do not directly refer to each other, even when they deal with the same city.

The volume begins with a useful introduction that reviews the development of Seljuq studies in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, highlighting recent publications. The authors might have mentioned also the growing availability of translated sources,¹ which have surely facilitated the study of the Seljuqs in the Western world. A more elaborated discussion of the main debates in Seljuq scholarship today – such as the character of the Sunni revival and the Seljuq contribution to it; the impact and manifestation of the Seljuqs' steppe past and their connections with their tribal population (the Turkmen or Ghuzz); relations between nomads and settled populations and consideration of the question of the group to which the Seljuqs belong – would have also been welcome.

The political part includes a contribution by C.E. Bosworth on the Seljuqs' origins, or, more precisely, the Oghuz in Muslim and non-Muslim sources up to the early eleventh century. Carole Hillenbrand's intriguing article 'Aspects of the courts of the Great Seljuqs', highlights the amalgamation of imperial traditions that inspired the Seljuqs – Inner Asian, Iranian and Islamic-Abbasid. Her analysis of the Seljuq court begins with a richly detailed image – unfortunately poorly reproduced – of a typical Turkish medieval court that stresses the relative lack of hierarchy between the ruler and his retinue. She then focuses on three facets of the court – each of which is deserving of a further investigation – the *nawba* (drum beating) ceremony; patronage of men of letters; and hunting. Hillenbrand discusses the antecedents – Iranian and/or Islamic – of all three and uses an obscure passage that mentions colours (red, white and black *nawbas*) as a proof for retaining the 'old Turkic colour symbolism'. Her conclusion is that 'the gradual process of assimilation of the nomadic Turks was now fully in train' (35). A different interpretation may be that the Turks were quick to adopt customs that fitted well with their own indigenous ones, thereby also 'Turkicizing' the Iranian or Muslim elements, as assimilation is rarely a one-side process. Deborah Tor's article collects evidence for the pious or non-pious behaviour of the Great Seljuq sultans in their (late) chronicles, and concludes that most sultans were remembered as being deeply religious men; thus, at least the Seljuq court historians saw the sultans as potentially responsible for initiating the Sunni revival. Songül Mecit's contribution – my favourite in this section – 'Kingship and ideology under the Rum Seljuqs', analyses the titles of the Rum Seljuqs in the mid-twelfth to mid-thirteenth centuries. Basing his presentation on a close reading of inscriptions, coins and literary sources, he convincingly shows that the titles evolved over time in response to contemporaneous political realities. While all the sultans retained the main elements of the Great Seljuqs' ideology, namely the sultan as an autocratic monarch, defender of Islam and loyal ally of the Abbasid caliph, each had his own particular characteristics: Izz al-Din Kilj Arslan II (r. 1156–1192) stresses the jihadi role of the sultan, mainly in order to compete with the counter-crusade ideology of Zanji and Saladin. The titles of Kay Kaus (r. 1211–1210) highlight his position as 'Ruler of the two seas', following the conquest of Sinop and Anatolia and the transformation of the Rum sultanate into a wealthy maritime power. Kay Kubadh (r. 1220–1237) emphasized the sultan's noble lineage, namely his genealogical connection to the Great Seljuqs, and alleged claim to world conquest (perhaps informed by Chinggisid ideology?). Mecit concludes that such ideological formulations played an important role in transforming the rebellious Seljuq branch that established the Anatolian dynasty into a Perso-Islamic state that presented itself as the Seljuqs' heir. Andrew Peacock's impressive article continues this line and reviews later uses of Seljuq legitimacy, especially via genealogy, in Anatolia, from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century, from the Rum Seljuqs, via various Seljuq pretenders of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and into the Karamanids and the Ottomans.

The second part, 'Society', begins with Jürgen Paul's reconstruction of the post-Malikshah succession struggle from the point of view of the losers, highlighting the role of the nomadic Ghuzz in enabling Arslan Arghun, Malikshah's grandson, to establish himself as an ephemeral ruler in Khurasan. Vanessa van Renterghem reviews the development and control of Abbasid Baghdad. She questions the paradigm of the Sunni revival as a deliberate Seljuq policy, and instead highlights a set of transformations that the city experienced under the Seljuqs, notably its closer integration into the eastern, Turco-Iranian, Islamic world, encouraged by the considerable migration of 'eastern' scholars, soldiers and officials. Daphna Efrat reviews the public sphere in Seljuq Baghdad, giving central place to 'Sunni revivalism', which she attributes to the local religious scholars, not to the Sultans, who, however, supported them. Like Efrat, David Durand-Guédy highlights the role of urban notables as balancing the sultans' power but in the context of Isfahan. He presents the example of the Khujandis, a Khurasani family brought to Isfahan by Nizam al-Mulk, which headed the Isfahani Shafi'ites for 175 years. The Khujandis are convincingly presented as representatives of the fate of urban elites in the sultanate, and the article draws attention to the important political and economic interests involved in the allegedly religious *inter-madhab* conflicts. Christian Lange's excellent article reviews the changes in the office of the *muhtasib* under the Seljuqs, explaining the increase of its importance by the Seljuqs' avoidance of cities, and their counting on the *muhtasib*, a representative of the sultan's absolute power, to control them. Under the Seljuqs, the office (curiously hardly mentioned in the other articles) gained more punitive forces, thus blurring the lines between *hisba* and *shurta* (police). It also became more interventionist, allowing the *muhtasib* to transgress into the private sphere of Muslim households as censor who asserts religiously correct behaviour, thereby leading the jurists to defend the private sphere.

The 'Culture' part includes case studies from the realms of literature, architecture and religious scholarship. Robert Gleave's excellent article deals with Shi'i jurisprudence and proves that despite the 'Sunni revival', Shi'ite scholarship too continued under the Seljuqs, and its fruits were highly appreciated in post-Seljuq Shi'ite circles; Massimo Campanini returns to al-Ghazali's political philosophy and his attitude towards the sultans. Vahid Behmardi discusses the relationship between the Persian *Maqāmāt al-Ḥamīdī* and their famous Arabic antecedents as a means to explore the development of Persian literature in its formative period. Scott Redford analyses building inscriptions from four cities conquered by the Seljuqs of Rum in 1210–1230 and documents a process of centralization of the sultan's power vis-à-vis that of his military commanders. Robert Hillenbrand concludes the book with an analysis – accompanied by wonderful pictures – of the Seljuq monuments in Turkmenistan. He compared them with the Seljuq remains in Iran, suggesting the development of local variants in Seljuq architecture, and finishes with a detailed description of Sultan Sanjar's mausoleum, which he sees as the first in a line of Islamic mausoleums that culminated with the Taj Mahal.

The editors define the volume's goal as being 'to showcase the current state of the art in Seljuq studies and to stimulate the growing interest in the Seljuqs' (7). Have they succeeded? Certainly some articles are thought-provoking and others call for further elaboration. Moreover, taken together, they provide quite a few insights into major issues in Seljuq history, and not only the Sunni revival. For the question of the retaining of the Seljuqs' steppe tradition, for example, we find the preservation of the joint sovereignty, embedded in each member of the royal clan (Mecit); elements of court protocol (Hillenbrand); the aversion to dwelling in cities (Durand-Guédy and Lange); and the – debated – reliance on nomadic forces (Paul). What the volume also makes clear, however, is how needed is a new synthesis of Seljuq history that would deal explicitly and

engagingly, on the basis of such case studies and others, with the bigger issues of Seljuq history in their full political, economic and intellectual context. Moreover, while this volume, varied as it is, remains squarely within the confines of the 'Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies' discipline, one might have hoped that such a synthesis would also have referred to various world-history themes relevant to the Seljuqs, such as environmental history,² conversion, or the nature of Seljuq imperial rule. Lastly, a purely technical reservation: a good bibliography is a must in any 'state-of-the-art' compilation, yet the volume contains no such thing, and even the separate chapters, alas, include only notes, not bibliographical references. Despite these quibbles, the book is a welcome and important addition to the growing scholarly literature on the pivotal Seljuq dynasty, and will surely benefit scholars and advanced students alike.

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Notes

1. E.g., Ibn al-Athīr, 'Izz al-Dīn, *The annals of the Saljuq Turks: selections from al-Kāmil fī 'l-ta'rikh*, trans. D.S. Richards (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002); Rashīd al-Dīn Ṭabīb, Faḍl Allāh, Ṣahīr al-Dīn Nīshāpūrī, *The history of the Seljuq Turks from the Jāmi' al-tawārikh: an Ilkhanid adaptation of the Saljūq-nāma of Ṣahīr al-Dīn Nīshāpūrī*, trans. Kenneth Allin Luthe, ed. C.E. Bosworth (Richmond: Curzon, 2001; London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2010); Ḥusaynī, Ṣadr al-Dīn 'Alī b. Nāṣir, *The history of the Seljuq state: a translation with commentary of the 'Akhbār al-dawla al-saljūqiyya*, trans. C.E. Bosworth (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2011).
2. See for example Richard W. Bulliet, *Cotton, climate and camels* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), curiously omitted from the introduction; Peacock's *Early Seljuq History* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2010), and now also Ronnie Ellenblum, *The collapse of the eastern Mediterranean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Le sucre: production, commercialisation et usages dans la Méditerranée médiévale, by Mohamed Ouerfelli, Leiden, Brill, 2008, 825 pp., €156.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-9004163102

Research on the production of and trade in sugar has been going on since the second half of the nineteenth century. While partly relying on work by previous authors, Ouerfelli's massive synthesis on sugar in the Mediterranean region supersedes them in two ways: it is based on much richer evidence, and offers a much broader view of the topic. Ouerfelli uses a larger array of Western primary written sources, among them unpublished archival documents yielding abundant quantitative data on cargoes, prices and wages. He also relies upon Arabic agronomic treatises, the works of Arab geographers, travellers' reports and culinary sources, as well as archaeological finds that point to the building, maintenance and repair of water conduits, reservoirs and distribution channels for irrigation, and the operation of presses and sugar mills.

Part I (15–309) deals with the slow diffusion of sugar-cane, its cultivation, the development of extraction techniques in the Mediterranean region, and sugar's evolution from a rare and exotic product to a commercial commodity. Khuzistan was the region in which the extraction of sugar was perfected and the physicians of the Gundishapur school