

**Stephan Conermann (Hrsg.): Everything is on the Move. The Mamluk Empire as a Node in (Trans-) Regional Networks (= Mamluk Studies, vol. 7), Bonn: V&R unipress 2014, 353 S.**

Reviewed by  
Isa Blumi, Geneva

For most readers of *Comparativ*, evoking the Mamluks will likely conjure up associations with the Medieval and Early Modern “Islamic” world and a system of military recruitment that sent capable Circassian, Central Asian and Balkan men to serve rulers in the Islamic World, many of whom were once “slaves” themselves. A geographically vast polity that entails a complex web of intersecting chains of human associations, what is called the “Mamluk Empire” in this book invariably corresponds well with revisionist approaches to telling a global history. Fusing the now extensive theoretical literature on how we can understand any number of complex societies through the prism of “nodes of different networks [that] existed side-by-side,” Editor Dr. Professor Conermann (University of Bonn) and his fellow 14 contributors provide an elegant argument for comparative research that cuts across disciplines and periods of expertise. Indeed, Dr. Conermann’s exceptional volume highlights the various ways one integrates the Mamluk Caliphates with various new approaches to the study of Global History which must include the analysis of

how “networks” disaggregate, rather than neatly codify, both human constituencies and the geographies they inhabit.

In this regard, most of the contributions successfully integrate the various concepts refined in both the New Area Studies and the critical reassessment of the phenomenon of the “Empire-State” informed by the so-called spatial turn in modern historiography. The result is a number of exceptionally sophisticated chapters that help the reader identify a number of physical and cognitive networks with one or more nodes in Mamluk-controlled territories.

In one way or another, be it through the notion of “egocentric networks” developed by Steve Borgatti, or the various “Mental Networks” first conceived in these terms by Dipesh Chakrabarti, we see how fruitful the cross-fertilization of concepts of association can be to the study of the 1250–1500 period in the larger Islamic World. In fact, each of the 15 chapters, authored by experts of the early modern world, contribute to this appreciation for the interactions reflected in the various social, intellectual, military, scientific and commercial networks intersecting the complex polities administered by the non-Arab soldier-administrators known as Mamluks by way of either of these two frameworks of analysis.

Crucially, some chapters actually highlight how neatly interchangeable such approaches are and that the very study of, for instance, educational networks that linked scholars of the era can contribute to shaping the career paths, and thus influence the political standing of the jurists, soldiers, administrators, and clergy who made up these societies. The two chapters authored by Thomas Bauer and Moham-

mad Gharaibeh on such egocentric networks are in this sense bridging as well the other important theories known as Mental Networks. As concepts (legal traditions, spiritual guidance, scientific and even artistic methods) we come to realize that the geographic reach of human interactions, often formally infused by religious or educational institutions actively patronized by the Mamluk state, reflect the underlying intellectual guiding principle of the volume: “connectivity in motion” (p. 23). In this regard, Albrecht Fuess’ discussion on how the concept of Holy War developed and transformed from the Mamluk to the Ottoman periods reveals how ideological as well as strategic distinctions necessarily meant war was experienced and fought in very different ways over the period covered in this volume. For the Mamluks, according to Fuess, this notion of jihad constituted a defensive idea while that of the Ottomans promoted state expansionism, and important distinctions between two seemingly similar political orders are made clearer with the actual study of how people migrated within and beyond these Mamluk and Ottoman territories. In Bethany Walker’s study, drawing mainly from the analysis of villages, the “community” becomes an active space of interaction infused with “actor networks” that crucially sheds analytical light on how migration can also help orientate Mamluk constituencies in ways that ultimately contribute to the very political formulations that make the Mamluk and Ottoman regimes in Syria and Egypt especially evocative in a Global History frame.

It is here that the contribution by Henning Sievert perhaps best highlights the value of this volume to a larger reading

audience. The sequestration and settlement of soldiers drawn from the Balkans, Central Asia and the Caucasus invariably creates the kind of contentious exchanges deemed critical to understanding the depth and variability of networks shaping village and urban life in the world at this time. As first studied so brilliantly by Professor Jane Hathaway more than 20 years ago, the politics of military „households“ constituted those struggles to establish and expand influence in the settled constituencies these soldiers made in Mamluk Syria and Egypt that ultimately animated the ideological underpinnings of a truly trans-regional, integrative, and highly political social order. In this respect, Sievert’s social network analysis not only sheds light on the power struggles between clans formed around prominent migrant soldiers, but also the importance of family networks (the households that Jane Hathaway first studied in both early modern Egypt and Yemen), elaborating on the types of relations these men forged with local women, larger families, merchants, scholars and other (sometimes rival) households. It is these deeply researched nodes of exchange – read as kinship, commercial, spiritual and performative relations – that constitute the entire spectrum of network analysis on offer in this valuable book.

In many ways this volume makes for a perfect text to teach Global history as most of the contributions help the reader appreciate how differently we can adopt the notions of networks to develop a more complex picture of the ways in which various peoples, often of different religious, political, and geographic orientation, interacted. Such intersections of “different” peoples seems essential to teach the younger stu-

dent in our present times where the reductive logic of the media infuses also the textbooks sold to university students today. The contribution of George Christ for instance, usefully analyzes how something akin to “news networks” informing merchants trading between Venice and various Mamluk polities shaped the contours of the entire Mediterranean’s political economy. As such, these networks integrated as well as defined both the distinctive and shared spaces by which actors engaged each other. As social, political, cultural, and/or economic interactions manifested in various kinds of networks, these exchanges extended the legal barriers that seemingly secured distinctive roles for subjects of these Mamluk polities, as demonstrated in the chapter by Johannes Pahlitzsch. Indeed, as Orthodox Christians constantly forged working relationships across the political boundaries separating Byzantium and the Mamluk Sultanate, Dr. Pahlitzsch offers a fascinating contrastive study to those who found similarly complex associations shaping Mamluk spirituality. Michael Winter, in an excellent comparison of two distinctive Sufi networks emerging in Syria and Egypt, as well as Carl F. Petry, in his study of the travels of various mystics in the period, help the reader reconceive the geographic, spiritual and ultimately cultural “limits” of the Medieval/Early Modern world. In sum, this volume is an excellent addition to the already extensive literature fitting this genre and, more importantly, usefully contributes and expands the sophisticated conclusions made by the vanguards of trans-regional studies of this era to highlight how we must move beyond the crude binary constructions that still, in

the media and many academic texts, distinguish Islam from Europe.

**Silke Strickrodt: Afro-European Trade in the Atlantic World. The Western Slave Coast c. 1550–c. 1885, Woodbridge: James Curry 2015, 266 S.**

Reviewed by  
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After the Scramble for ‘the Popos’ took off in the 1880s, the people of Little Popo (modern Aného) were incorporated in German Togoland (Togo), whereas those of Grand Popo found themselves subjected to French rule in Dahomey (Bénin). Though debates among historians of Africa tend to question if the colonial partition actually mattered much to the local inhabitants, to the peoples of these two western Slave Coast states – Grand Popo (Hula) and Little Popo (Ge) – it did. Only shortly before they had experienced the transformation from the slave trade to the legitimate trade, but the new boundaries cut the coastal centres off from the palm oil plantations situated inland. It also impeded canoe transport across the region’s lagoon system, which since time immemorial had been a pillar of their economy. In spite of this, as Strickrodt argues, it is a simplification to regard this dramatic partition to be just an external matter - caused by foreign settlers who were attracted to get their piece of the pie. Structural disunity among Popo’s fragmented commercial