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**John Haldon (ed.), *Money, Power and Politics in Early Islamic Syria: A Review of Current Debates*. Farnham, Ashgate, 2010. Pp. 226. £60. ISBN 978-0-7546-6849-7 (Hbk).**

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This volume represents the product of a series of papers delivered at a workshop held at Princeton University in May 2007. As its title explicitly states, the principle aim of the publication is not to produce a definitive discussion of the formation of the fiscal, social and economic infrastructure of Early Islamic Syria, but to introduce a selection of the most current debates concerning a period which is perceived to represent a significant shift from the cultural, political and socio-economic patterns of Late Antiquity.

The chronological focus of this book, covering the period of the sixth to tenth centuries, but with particular emphasis on the seventh, provides a refreshing remedy to many publications which focus upon specific aspects of the 'Byzantine' or 'Early Islamic' phases of the region – an essentially artificial bracketing which inhibits a nuanced appreciation of socio-economic change in the region in this period. This focus provides a useful context to many of the discussions in the book, enabling the reader to examine the maturation of long term economic, urban and social processes, but also to evaluate the significant impact that the formation of an Early Islamic polity had upon institutional ideologies and fiscal organisation in the region.

The volume has succeeded admirably in joining together a selection of some of the most active scholars in this discipline, a feature which makes this single volume a useful treasury of critical scholarship for all students of the Early Islamic period. *Money, Power and Politics* offers nine articles, each focused on individual themes – broadly, covering questions of coinage, taxation, land ownership and elites – but delivered with particular emphasis on placing these individual developments within a broader historical and archaeological

context. John Haldon's introduction to the volume provides a concise, but effective, induction into the main developments in the region between the sixth and eighth centuries, incorporating a useful synthesis of recent archaeological and historical scholarship. This adequately sets the agenda for the nine articles of the book. Though offering no definitive conclusions, Haldon's systematic discussion of the material, and some of its limitations, sets the tone for the critical and questioning nature of many of the subsequent discussions. Particularly enlivening is Haldon's inclusion of the Sassanid occupation of the early seventh century as a potential factor in subsequent administrative organisation of the region. Although unable to provide a detailed discussion, due to the introductory nature of the context, the inclusion of this period, liberated from the more apocalyptic sentiments of the limited (and largely unexamined) source material, offers some exciting opportunities for future academic enquiry.

The first article of the volume, a contribution by Alan Walmsley entitled '*Coinage and the Economy of Syria-Palestine in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries CE*', addresses the question of the production, distribution and circulation of coinage in Syria-Palestine between the seventh and eighth centuries. Of particular value is Walsmley's useful integration of the numismatic evidence within a wider framework of fiscal reorganisation in the region following the Sassanid occupation and 'Abd al-Malik's reforms of the 690s. His discussions of the Byzantine proxy issues and transitional coins of the mid-seventh century offer insightful comments, not simply in highlighting their important economic function during this formative phase, but also through the suggestion that they represent an organised local response from ecclesiastical authorities: a feature of particular interest to scholars of Christian communities in the Early Islamic period.

Similarly compelling arguments accompany his discussion of distribution and demonetisation of many areas of the region. Each one of these issues perhaps warrants a separate detailed study, but nonetheless they offer an exciting prospect for future critical research.

Complementing Walmsley's study in many themes is that of R. Stephen Humphreys' contribution in the second article on '*Christian Communities in Early Islamic Syria and Northern Jazira: the Dynamics of Adaptation*'. Following a subject which has received considerable academic focus over the past twenty years, Humphreys' argument raises some key critical points regarding our understanding of the nature of Christian communities in Early Islamic Syria - in particular, the factors surrounding their diminishing presence in the ninth and tenth centuries. Although his conclusions are admittedly preliminary, his argument and search for explanations represent a welcome shift from the simple discussion of 'abandonment' or 'continuity' which often frames the discussion of Syro-Palestinian Christian communities in this period. Humphreys' suggestion that this process of 'decline' may be attributed to transitions in elite identity proffers some particularly enticing questions which warrant further critical reflection.

Hugh Kennedy's contribution to the final chapter of the book (chapter nine), '*Syrian Elites from Byzantium to Islam: Survival or Extinction?*', in which he examines the changing social and political profile of elites between the sixth and eighth centuries, complements this study well. Kennedy provides a concise but valuable survey of the surviving evidence and its limitations, and the subject is likely to have important implications for many other areas of research. Particularly interesting, though deserving of a separate study, is Kennedy's acknowledgement of the ambiguity surrounding the term *Rūm* in the literary sources for this period (p.189): a point which reinforces the complexity of social and political intercourse between various groups in this period.

In this sentiment, the third article, by Arietta Papaconstantinou, '*Administering the Early Islamic Empire: Insights from the Papyri*', provides a similarly sophisticated appraisal of many of the key assumptions made regarding the implementation of the *jizyah* and *kharaj* in this formative period. Her reasoned approach to the surviving papyrological material offers some useful qualifications on how our understanding of the Early Islamic administration is often (misguidedly) reduced to a simple process of binary opposition between

Muslim-administration/Christian-subject by outlining the more complex nature of these interactions in the seventh century. Like Papaconstantinou, Clive Foss's discussion of Mu 'āwīya in the fourth article of the volume, *'Mu 'āwīya's State'*, aims at challenging existing assumptions enshrined in historical approaches to this period and figure. Foss's shrewd use of the papyrological and literary evidence raises some key points in the role of Mu 'āwīya as a precursor to the later fiscal and administrative apparatus that emerges in the reign of 'Abd al-Malik, and clearly exposes a greater degree of complexity than previously assumed. However, I find Foss's use of the Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States (1933) as a gauge for the success of Mu 'āwīya's policies slightly questionable, preferring instead Papaconstantinou's careful qualifications on the difficulty of the application of post-Napoleonic concepts of state building upon studies of the Early Islamic period (p.70).

Two further contributions (chapters five and six) by Gene Heck (*'First Century Islamic Currency: Mastering the Message from the Money'*) and Lutz Ilisch (*'Abd al'Malik's Monetary Reform in Copper and the Failure of Centralization'*) continue these broader themes of centralisation and monetary policy through the use of numismatic evidence. These studies are also complemented in the volume by an article by Jarius Banaji, *'Late Antique Legacies and Muslim Economic Expansion'* (chapter eight) which argues for the significant transformation of existing economic patterns of the Late Antique world and the contribution of Early Islamic society to the development of pre-modern capitalism. Though this hypothesis presents an interesting perspective of evolving economic and trading patterns in the Early Islamic period, it is a shame that Banaji does not seek to offer a more comprehensive discussion of the role of archaeology in this debate, and the article's reliance upon literary material stands in marked contrast to the more multidisciplinary approaches adopted by other contributions in this volume.

Strictly archaeological in approach is Jodi Magness' contribution to a rereading of the archaeological material uncovered during excavations at Jerusalem and Hammath Gader. In *'Early Islamic Urbanism and Building*

*Activity in Jerusalem and Hammath Gader* (chapter seven) Magness' careful scrutiny of the archaeological data argues for significant occupational phases at these sites after the earthquake of 749 CE; in both cases, probably into the eleventh century. Magness' detailed re-examination presents a range of wider implications for the vast corpus of archaeological sites whose traditional chronologies are increasingly questionable in the light of recent lines of academic enquiry; ongoing reappraisals of many sites may significantly reconfigure our understanding of the Early Islamic landscape.

All the contributions to the volume are accessibly written, well illustrated and accompanied by excellent bibliographies. One of the strongest qualities of the volume is the way in which many of its contributors have sought to remedy the traditional disciplinary divisions between archaeologists, literary scholars and numismatists which are still apparent in many published discussions of the Early Islamic period. The inter-disciplinary method may not be entirely new, but the manner in which the contributors expertly demonstrate its effectiveness reinforces the potential of this approach in understanding the transformative developments of the seventh century. Individual readers may desire to focus on specific articles, but one of the most engaging aspects of this book is that readers willing to negotiate articles beyond their specific disciplinary interest will encounter several critical points which have a wider relevance to the discipline and individual research.

*Money, Power and Politics* is not a comprehensive introduction to the economic, social or political history of Early Islamic Syria, but the fact that it contains such a wealth of critical observation and an introduction to current debate makes it an essential accompaniment to broader histories of Early Islamic Syria. For this reviewer, it will be a constant source of reference.