

sides to this problematic. *Jewish Muslims* makes a concerted effort to link texts and social life, but by necessity it carries out limited work in this direction. This is an inherent and fundamental limitation not of *Jewish Muslims*, but rather of the single-author approach that has defined the writing of history ever since the latter emerged as an academic discipline in the 19th century. The other side of the same problematic, however, is addressable within the ambit of traditional history writing. The chief question is how the discourse about the Jewishness of Muslims links to other discourses, such as those discussed in the author's own work on commensality, or Mark Pegg's on heresy, Nancy Caciola's on gender, Benjamin Weber's on later crusades, this reviewer's work on trade embargoes, or James Muldoon's on the linkages between high medieval discourses and early modern practices beyond the confines of Europe. To be clear, publication realities make the approach adopted by David Freidenreich in *Jewish Muslims* unassailable. It would be unfair to ask an author to complicate their work in a manner that would appeal to a handful of colleagues but that publishers—and even some reviewers—are likely to oppose rather than embrace. Nevertheless, the specialist is left to hope that Freidenreich and fellow medievalists will continue to work in this direction and tackle head-on the role that interlocking discourses stemming from Western religious thought played in shaping medieval and early modern Western European history, and thereby also world history in the early modern period.

In short, David Freidenreich's *Jewish Muslims* is an extremely well-researched and well-written book that should make the short list of all students of medieval history as it offers a definitive treatment of its subject while stimulating further research.

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The Persistence of Orientalism: Anglo-American Historians and Modern Egypt

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Across a career that has spanned nearly half a century, the historian Peter Gran has positioned himself as a committed and unsparing critic of the field of Middle East studies. In a classic review essay published by *IJMES* in 1978, "Modern Trends in Egyptian Historiography," Gran not only anticipated the importance of the cohort of social historians from Ayn Shams University whose scholarship would dominate the discipline in Egypt for decades to come, but he also announced what would remain a lifelong campaign of encouraging Anglo-American scholars to engage more closely with the work of their counterparts in the region. Several years later, in his first monograph, *Islamic Roots of Capitalism: Egypt, 1760–1840*, Gran would take aim at the established periodization of modern Egyptian history and the profoundly Eurocentric conception of historical change implied by it. Through his innovative use of archival and manuscript sources, he offered a new perspective on an Egyptian society already deeply enmeshed in the economic and cultural dynamism of commercial capitalism in the Mediterranean world well before the Napoleonic invasion of 1798. Breaking with the economistic conventions of other social historians at the time, Gran also pursued a mode of historical analysis that would relate the intellectual output of Egyptian



‘ulama’ in the late 18th century to the material transformations unfolding around them. He thereby sought to bridge political economy and cultural history at the very moment when the rift between them seemed otherwise to be widening.

The initial reception of *Islamic Roots* was somewhat mixed, with many reviewers praising the book for its ambition while also raising concerns about Gran’s use of sources and evidence. But, in time, Gran’s major arguments would contribute to several important shifts in Middle East studies. Consequently, his work is still taught, and cited widely, for its methodological interventions and its role in upending long-established narratives of Ottoman decline.

In light of this lasting, positive influence, Gran’s most recent book, *The Persistence of Orientalism: Anglo-American Historians and Modern Egypt*, has a decidedly tragic quality. It reads as the scolding retrospective of a scholar determined to relitigate his case and seemingly unaware that he won it long ago. As Gran puts it, the text offers an attempt to “explain why Anglo-American scholars specializing in the study of modern Egypt have for a long time assumed that the country’s political system resembled the Pharaonic political system described in the book of Exodus: autocratic in nature and highly centralized, presumably more so than other countries” (p. 140). This enduring “paradigm of Egypt as an oriental despotism,” as the author defines it, has a number of subsidiary implications for how Anglophone historians write histories of Egypt (p. 1). Most notably, in attributing to Egypt an enduring condition of political and economic stasis, the paradigm locates the conditions for historical change mainly in Europe or in populations of European origin residing in the region. It is on this basis that Napoleon’s arrival so often appears to represent the singular moment of origin for Egyptian modernity.

In Gran’s account, the field of Egyptian history, which he tracks across more than a century, has always been Anglo-American. The most influential articulations of the Oriental despotism paradigm appeared in the writings of figures directly involved in the British occupation of Egypt after 1882, most notably Lord Cromer. By the early 1900s, as the imperialist ambitions of the United States grew, this corpus of British colonial knowledge production about Egypt became a key source of inspiration for strategies of rule in new territories acquired by the American government. But the immediate, practical utility of the paradigm does not alone explain its putative durability across more than a century. Rather, Gran posits that its continuing dominance “can probably be better understood from a consideration of American identity issues than from a short-term cause-and-effect type of science” (p. 28). On this understanding, the story of Moses’ flight from Pharaoh’s Egypt forms the very bedrock of Western notions of racial and cultural superiority, such that “if one tampers with that story, a great deal of what follows or is related to it becomes less certain” (p. 30).

While Gran insists that he is nearly alone in having broken free from this fixture of Anglo-American identity, he provides little explanation of the conditions affording him such exceptional critical distance. The closest he comes to doing so may be in the book’s penultimate paragraph where, commenting on “language acquisition as a possible barometer of de-Orientalization,” he quips, “My impression is that students generally learn Arabic as a dead language with a few spoken words useful in restaurants” (p. 146). Disparaging remarks of this kind are peppered throughout the text, and they form part of a larger pattern of omissions, misrepresentations, and factual errors that are at once unfortunate and necessary to sustain many of the book’s central claims.

As Gran’s description of the study of Egyptian history moves forward into the 20th century, his assertions come to depend more and more upon the choice and characterization of works he does or does not deem representative of the field. To consider only a few examples, his treatment of the 1940s to the 1970s makes no mention of Roger Owen, whose pioneering research on the economic history of modern Egypt formed the basis for an epistemological critique of Orientalism that anticipated Edward Said’s famous essay by nearly a decade. Gran’s cursory engagement with Albert Hourani’s landmark text *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* is justified by the puzzling and falsifiable assertion that the book “did not devote

much attention to Egypt” (p. 53). In the following section, the “Period of Globalization” from the 1970s to the present, Gran places the publication date of Judith Tucker’s landmark 1985 study *Women in Nineteenth-Century Egypt* in 2002 before dismissing the book for an alleged “decision to regard all of these women as outside of history even though they were workers” (p. 62). While the word “dictator” and its cognates appear nowhere in the text, Gran proceeds to describe Timothy Mitchell’s groundbreaking monograph *Colonising Egypt*—albeit with some evident appreciation—as an attempt to understand more precisely “the idea of the dictator” (p. 76). Beyond these examples, there is, moreover, a vast list of important studies Gran fails to address entirely or buries in the footnotes.

By the end of this unusual mapping of the field, Gran does acknowledge a “groundswell of critique” among more recent scholars who “aspire to break with the past” (p. 79). But, from there, he quickly reverts to an emphasis on the enduring influence of an “orthodox narrative” (p. 81). For this, he turns to the second volume of *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, edited by M. W. Daly, in which, he argues, “those facts that get selected tend to get organized in a particular way that is defined by the paradigm [of Oriental despotism]” (p. 81). Here, once again, it is Gran who seems to read the evidence to suit his own purposes. In his treatment of Khaled Fahmy’s chapter on Muhammad ‘Ali Pasha, for example, Gran interprets the sustained emphasis on “coercive treatment of the peasantry” as yet another expression of the despotism paradigm (p. 89). Lost in this reading is how Fahmy might be more concerned with challenging nationalist appropriations of Muhammad ‘Ali by the ruling military regime in Egypt than he is with representations of Egypt abroad. But beyond this stubborn indifference to the diverse scholarly agendas of his colleagues, the larger issue here is the choice to treat this single, multi-authored volume as illustrative of a far more rich and variegated historiography in the first place.

Ultimately, *The Persistence of Orientalism* is the work of an eminent scholar seeking to understand how a lifetime of critical provocations has shaped the trajectory of his field. A different approach to that task might have entailed research of another sort, from the historical comparison of syllabi and reading lists for field exams to a broader survey of new scholarship on the latter half of the 18th century, which has been a recurring focus of Gran’s work since *Islamic Roots*. Gran, likely, could have found ample validation of his labors in such a survey. It is a pity that he chose, instead, to describe the work of several generations who have benefited from his insights in a way that will appear virtually unrecognizable to most.

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