

From Iberia to China: Some Interactions of the Islamic World with the West and the East. Edited by Abdallah Abdel-Ati Al-Naggar, Ágnes Judit Szilágyi, and Zoltán Prantner.

Cairo–Budapest: Eötvös Loránd University Faculty of Humanities – Egyptian Academy for Printing & Translation & Publishing, 2022. 216 pp.

Dávid Biró 

Modern and Contemporary World History Doctoral Programme, Doctoral School of History, Eötvös Loránd University, 6–8 Múzeum körút, 1088 Budapest, Hungary; birodave@gmail.com

Since the rise of Islam in the seventh century, there has been constant interaction between Europe and the Islamic world, often with profound consequences on both sides. These diverse relationships were deepest and most influential in the Middle East and North Africa, and within a few centuries, the Arab-Islamic civilisation made a significant contribution to the development of European Christian civilisation. The main routes for this transfer were Sicily and Spain. However, Islam has done much more than geographically define Europe.

The 216-page book entitled *From Iberia to China: Some Interactions of the Islamic World with the West and the East* was edited by Abdallah Abdel-Ati Al-Naggar, a senior fellow at the Office of the President and International Department of the Egyptian Academy of Sciences, Ágnes Judit Szilágyi, the Head of Department of Modern and Contemporary World History at Eötvös Loránd University, and Zoltán Prantner, Associate Professor at Kodolányi János University.

The studies in the first of the four blocks in the book called “Centuries of Islamic Impact on Western Europe” guide us from the early medieval Islamic conquest to the Islamic cultural heritage of the twentieth century. In the first study, Shaimaa Albanna examines the cultural identity of Western Andalusia, highlighting the definition of cultural identity and its importance in preserving the cultural tendencies of peoples. One of the key findings of the study is that nature played a major role in shaping the Islamic identity of Portugal, and that the identity of Western Andalusia is the result of the merging of Arabs, Berbers, and other identities. In the following study, Ali A. El-Sayed’s aim was to demonstrate the application of historical, archaeological, and geographical aspects related to the period of the Crusades, in which observations

of ancient Egyptian antiquities come to the fore. The third study, written by Rania Mohammad Ibrahim, concerns the period between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries and the economic boycott between the Islamic East and Europe. This study focuses on key cases of economic boycotts between Muslims and Christians. In her writing, she explains the decisions by the papacy to prohibit European cities to trade with Muslims, and the extent of these cities' commitment to the Pope's decisions.

In the next study, Ágnes Judit Szilágyi presents the career of the French-Portuguese pianist Marie-Antoinette Aussenac (1883–1971). We learn that in 1920 her personality caught the attention of the *Atlântida* magazine. The presentation of this aspect is definitely special since we know little about the lives and work of female characters at the beginning of the twentieth century. It adds to the thrill of reading about Aussenac's career that in the early thirties she became a follower of Babism, the Shia reformist movement. The next piece by Viola Szabó is a historical work on the tomb of Gül Baba in today's Budapest. The mausoleum of Gül Baba was a well-known site of pilgrimage for Muslims and Turks in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Relying on archival sources, Szabó gives an insight into its importance in the twentieth century. We also get clues about the context of the Budapest government's efforts to support the Muslim community in the early twentieth century. Because of its topic, this piece might be better placed in the next block focusing on East Central Europe.

The second block is entitled "Twentieth Century Contacts between East-Central Europe and the Near East." The articles present economic and diplomatic relations between the two regions during the Cold War period. In the first study, Elizabeth Bishop examines the role of the Yugoslav presidential ship *Galeb* in Arab-European relations, highlighting the meeting between Josip Broz Tito and Gamal Abdul Nasser. At the beginning of the study, the author describes the origin and diplomatic importance of the ship. Then she presents relations between Egypt and Yugoslavia, the cooperation in the nationalisation of the Suez Canal. Lukács Krajcsír's paper "From Strong Military Cooperation to Headless Evacuation," presents the relations between Czechoslovakia and Egypt, starting from the conclusion of the 1955 Arms Purchase Agreement to the outbreak of the Suez Crisis. The study describes the economic and political relations between the two countries. The author points out that trade between Czechoslovakia and Egypt was based not only on arms sales, but also on the sale of many other products, such as diesel equipment, locomotives, tractors, and others. Krajcsír uses a number of archival sources that can serve as a priority database of information for further research on the subject.

In their paper, Abdallah Abdel-Ati Al-Naggar and László J. Nagy examine Iraqi-Hungarian relations between 1958 and 1989. The study uses interesting archival sources which show from a new perspective the activities of Hungarian diplomats, the establishment of important meetings, and the development of economic

and political relations between the two countries. The second study by the same authors entitled “The Hungarian – Gulf Relation in the 1970s and 1980s” highlights the relationship between Hungary and Kuwait. In addition to archival sources, the authors rely on a number of contemporary Hungarian press sources that covered these relations. In “The Hungarian Assessments of the Yemeni Consequences of the Khartoum Arab Summit,” Zoltán Prantner examines how the Yemeni civil war was portrayed in Hungarian diplomatic documents and in the press during the 1967 Khartoum process. Prantner presents the events leading up to the conclusion of the Egyptian–Saudi agreement on Yemen and the position of the socialist countries on the Yemen issue before the Khartoum Arab Summit.

The third block deals with Saudi Arabia and the Far East, where we learn about the topic through a total of three studies. Beáta Kornéli’s paper gives an insight into the early history of the emerging Saudi Arabia. As the presence of the British became decisive in the region around the turn of the century, Abdelaziz Ibn Saud sought diplomatic relations from 1902. After initial failures, the processes accelerated with the 1914 arrival of Henry Irvine Shakespear, who achieved great success in his diplomatic discussions with the sheikhs of the Gulf. The next article by Máté Percze also deals with the twentieth-century history of Saudi Arabia, showing how the country managed to develop from its establishment to becoming a regional middle power. In the last article of the block, László K. Gulyás describes the relationship between Saudi Arabia and China, presenting their history and the reasons for deepening them since 2010. These include China’s huge demand for raw materials and the fact that the Saudi leadership wants to reduce the country’s dependence on oil for its economy. The study addresses a very important issue, as Saudi Arabia has traditionally maintained good relations with the United States, one of its most important allies in the Middle East.

The fourth and final block of book reviews contains four items: two separate papers by Zoltán Prantner and János Besenyő, a joint study by Abdallah Abdel-Ati Al-Naggar and Sherif Reda Aboushanab, and another joint work by Zoltán Prantner and Sherif Reda Aboushanab. Naturally, all reviews focus on books related to the Islamic world, faithfully fitting the main direction of the volume.

From Iberia to China provides new and important research results on a topic that has received less attention. These studies may make an important contribution to Arab and European relations, which in turn strengthens the relationship between the two academic communities.

