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Mohammed Hocine Benkheira/Avner Giladi/Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen/Jacqueline Sublet, *La famille en islam d'après les sources arabes*, Les indes savantes, Paris 2013, 554 pp., Index and 26 images, ISBN: 978-2-84654-357-6.

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With the publication of *La famille en islam d'après les sources arabes*, the four authors, Mohammed Hocine BENKHEIRA, Avner GILADI, Catherine MAYEUR-JAOUEN, and Jacqueline SUBLET present an informed and innovative analysis of the family in Islam. The book consists of an introduction and eight chapters, and should be intended as “un vrai travail commun, non pas collectif, mais une sorte de méditation à quatre où nous avons progressé ensemble.”(12)

In the introduction the authors present their methodological approach. They start with a reference to some of the most widespread clichés on the family in Islam: “la répudiation, la polygamie, la chaleur encombrante de familles élargies, la tribu, le statut déplorable de la femme, l'ombre écrasante de pères tyranniques” (13). The authors consider these clichés as the result of an essentially Eurocentric approach, which has been used to denounce “l'arriération des sociétés musulmanes, la différence ontologique des leurs modèles familiaux et la marginalité de la condition féminine, systématiquement opprimée” (13). The modernization of these societies (and their colonization, we could add) has been presented as the only way to save “les femmes et les familles de l'oppression patriarcale” (13). Though, Muslim apologists did not critically engage with these clichés, but reacted creating new ones. Indeed, they tried to depict the family, and namely the ideal middle-class nuclear family, as a stable and eminently Islamic concept. In doing so, they tried to transform “en norme islamique une création historique relativement recent” (14). Instead, as the authors put it, “si un modèle islamique de la famille s'est progressivement mis en place grâce aux formulations des juristes (IX^e–X^e siècles), ses interprétations, applications et manifestations historiques sont extrêmement diverses. Ce modèle, exposé surtout dans la littérature de type normatif, a donné lieu à quantité des variantes: il ne s'est jamais réalisé à l'état pur dans l'histoire des sociétés musulmanes” (14).

Notwithstanding the variety of social practices, the authors recognize that there are four orientations that the normative Islamic texts have been able to impose: “la filiation patrilinéaire; la puissance paternelle assez étendue (le patriarcat, si l'on veut); l'asymétrie systématique entre homme et femme (l'inégalité); et enfin l'idée que la raison d'être de la famille est la procréation, voire une idéologie nataliste”, with “le pivot de tout l'édifice” being constituted “par la filiation patrilinéaire” (15).

In the introduction the authors also discuss the title of the book, *La famille en Islam d'après les sources arabes*, which could be subject to contestation. Indeed, the authors themselves recognize that “L’islam n’est pas nécessairement le cadre de référence adéquat pour étudier la famille”, especially as “il n’existe pas un seul islam en réalité” (38): there are clearly local elements, linguistic differences, social aspects that need to be taken into account. Moreover, the authors themselves recognize that the book mostly focused on sunnī sources, neglecting shīʿī sources. Nevertheless, the authors are also aware that the term “Middle East”, a modern construct, would have been even less adequate to describe the Islamic pre-modern world. They make clear that their choice should not be intended as “un article de foi essentialiste, mais exprime au plus près ce que nos sources nous amènent à étudier: comment les sources arabes émanant d’auteurs musulmans présentent la famille” (39).

The authors decided to focus on the “analyse de sources arabes fondamentales de l’époque de l’islam classique et du Moyen Âge, c’est à dire des sources qui vont du VII^e au XVI^e siècle, soit jusqu’à la conquête ottoman” (17), analysing “hagiographies, biographies, débats juridiques, traités de consolation, recueils de fatwas” (39). They move between discourse analysis and the analysis of social practices. Indeed, the sources they selected are “apparemment théoriques et abstraites, normatives et édifiantes, dictent nos chapitres qui présentent donc davantage des norms et une éthique qu’une réalité, davantage une histoire des représentations islamiques de la famille qu’une histoire de la famille en islam à proprement parler” (39). In order to investigate social practices, the authors also examined sources which are “tout aussi normatives mais plus techniques” (39), like “ouvrages médicaux écrites autour de la conception et de la pédiatrie” (39), or “manuels de *ḥisba* qui abordent, bien que là encore sur le mode normatif, les rapports entre maître et élève, entre parents et enseignants de *kuttāb*” (39). The relevance of the selected sources, which mostly (but not only) date back to the medieval period, is explained considering that “leur audience ne se limite ni au monde arabe, ni à la période médiévale. Ces sources ont une importance particulière dans le domaine normatif: les savants en sciences religieuses, les oulémas, les experts en droit musulman, sunnites et chiites, partout dans le monde musulman, les connaissent” (40).

In the introduction the authors also warn the readers on three aspects. The first one is the importance of having a historical approach to terminology: for example, the Arab terms *usra* and *ʿāʾila* are recent terms, which have been adapted to define “des réalités nouvelles ou des idéaux modernes et pour traduire le concept occidental moderne: *usra* insiste sur les liens qui unissent, tandis que *ʿāʾila* met l’accent sur la responsabilité du père de famille, chargé de trouver la subsistance des membres de son foyer” (19). The second warning is that “l’in-

sistance sur la femme musulmane, son voile et son statut est une obsession contemporaine qui ne remonte guère qu'à la fin du XIX^e siècle et tend à se renforcer" (23). In reality, the reclusion of women was not so generalized as it is believed, and in medieval and pre-modern Islam it was only "un phénomène urbain de la haute société, un marqueur social pourrait-on dire, que la grande majorité des femmes n'a jamais connu, ni à la campagne, ni dans les milieux populaires urbains" (23). The third warning concerns the frequent temptation to "retracer à tout prix dans le passé des familles en terre d'islam une évolution téléologique qui conduirait nécessairement de la famille traditionnelle patriarcale à la famille moderne nucléaire, fruit de la modernité et lieu d'épanouissement des individus" (24–25). Indeed, this entails the assumption that the enlarged family was effectively the dominant model in the Islamic medieval world, while this was probably true for the elite but not for the majority of the population (25).

One of the innovative elements of the book is the attempt to deconstruct the concept itself of family: what does "family" mean? To do so, the authors look at different kinds of kinship: blood kinship, milk kinship, kinship by affinity and the relation with freed slaves and "clients" (*mawālī*) (26). A first point of departure is that "la famille c'est souvent (mais pas uniquement) les gens qui vivent sous un même toit, plutôt que seulement les individus qui ont entre eux un lien de consanguinité" (27). Consequently the authors underline the importance of the house and do not neglect the relevance of the part reserved to women ("l'*endarūn* persan, le harem arabe, le *haremlık* turc") (28). Nevertheless, they are also aware that this only applies to the "elite house", which was certainly not the dominant model. Therefore, they rely also on other sources, like tombs inscriptions, which allow them to reconstruct the genealogy of a person, especially in case of a respectable figure or a saint (29), or *waqfs*. Clearly the use of different sources can give different results: "selon que l'on lit les sources normatives ou que l'on aborde leur application ou non, ou plutôt leur interprétation dans les archives, la vision que l'on peut concevoir de l'histoire de la famille au Moyen-Orient, et en Islam plus généralement, en est profondément modifiée" (33).

After this substantial theoretical introduction, the book is divided into eight chapters. The first two chapters are devoted to terminology. In the first chapter the authors take into examination lexicographical, religious and juridical sources, in order to investigate the Arabic terminology concerning kinship. They focus for example on the already mentioned difference between *usra* and 'ā'ila, between *āl* ("le mot *āl* désigne moins la famille que la maison") (49), and *ahl* ("le terme *ahl* est analogue à celui de *āl*. Dans un sens spécifique, ce terme désigne le lien entre un groupe de personnes et une activité, un objet, un état, etc.") (50). They also discuss the term *qarāba*, which literally refers to closeness and by extension to kin. Interestingly, the authors also bring the gender component into their analy-

sis, discussing the difference between *‘amm/‘amma* (paternal uncle/aunt) and *ḥāl/hāla* (maternal uncle/aunt) (57–58), and also analyse the distinction, starting from the 4th/10th century, between three forms of kinship: “consanguinité (*nasab*), allaitement (*raḍā’*) et alliance (*ṣihr, muṣāhara*)” (65).

The second chapter analyses the different names that are used to refer to a person. The authors showed how the analysis of these names can contribute to the reconstruction of the biography of a person, bringing for example into light the cities where he/she lived. They do so through a detailed case study, and namely that of the Qaşṭallānī, a family which was particularly important in the Near East between the 12th and the 15th century.

The third chapter is devoted to an analysis of the most relevant juridical aspects in relation to the family: the authors investigate for example the concepts of marriage, polygyny, marital power, *mahr*, the dissolution of a marriage, the obstacles to a marriage, the duties and the rights of the spouses, the concept of filiation, the duration of pregnancy or the law of inheritance, taking into account the Qur’ān, the Sunna and juridical treaties.

The fourth chapter, which is probably the most innovative part of the book, focuses on milk kinship, a particular and original product of Muslim jurists. The authors also shed light on the concept of the “lait du mâle”, which allows to create the figure of the “père du lait” and, consequently, of a system of kinship based on the blood kinship model.

The fifth chapter focuses on the concept of childhood, and on the rites of passage that signal the entrance of the child into adulthood. The authors here focus on theoretical and normative sources related to the education of children and to the relation between children and parents.

The sixth chapter investigates the “world of emotions” between children and their parents. The authors particularly look at the treaties of consolation for parents who lost their children, showing that in the classical and medieval period Muslims were not only authorized, but even encouraged to explicitly show their feelings of love and affection for their children.

The seventh chapter investigates familial relationships in hagiographical works. Starting from the case of the Prophet and his family, the authors demonstrate that hagiography represents an important source for the history of the family, because “Le saint musulman est, dans la grande majorité des cas, mari et père, à la différence notamment du saint chrétien” (311).

The last chapter proposes a history of social practices concerning the family during the modern and the contemporary period, from the 17th to the 21st century. Modernity also affected familial relationships, influencing the diffusion of the patriarchal and nuclear family between the elites. Indeed, “le modèle de la famille patriarcale – supposé typiquement islamique ou typiquement arabe –

s'est en grand partie, au Moyen-Orient, renforcé tardivement (à partir du XVIII^e siècle ou du XIX^e siècle selon les cas), et est même parfois une création inventée *a posteriori*, liée à des évolutions politiques et économiques, apparue à la fin de l'Empire ottoman, et fossilisée en partie sous l'influence de la modernité occidentale, voire de l'orientalisme et du réformisme musulman" (35).

This chapter also confirms the thesis that the celebration of the nuclear family based on the marital couple is strictly interconnected with the emergence of nationalism, which perceived the family as the place where "good citizens" were educated. This also had the consequence of improving women's rights, because nationalists supported the idea that only educated women could bring up good citizens.¹

In conclusion, it can be said that this book fills a gap within the field of Islamic studies and will certainly become a reference work for scholars interested in the history of the family and in social history in general. Notwithstanding the difficult task and the risk of reifying the concept of family, the authors avoided any essentialism thanks to their historically grounded analysis and their use of different kinds of Arab sources. Moreover, the authors also set the field for further research, mentioning other aspects which would deserve more investigation, like the case of working-women: "Sages-femmes, domestiques, employées des hammams, cuisinières, musiciennes, fileuses et brodeuses de l'époque mamlouke ou ottoman ... Beaucoup de ces femmes avaient un mari, des enfants: comment conciliaient-elles travail et vie de famille? Quelle part apportaient-elles au revenu familial?" (34). And what about women working in rural areas or, later, women working in factories? We do not have any information about these women, which probably were the majority, while we know much more about polygamy or women living in the harem, notwithstanding their statistical irrelevance. It is maybe time in both Islamic Studies and Gender Studies to reflect on what sources could be used in order to fill this gap, and certainly this book is fundamental for those scholars who are willing to move in this direction.

¹ This topic has already been investigated by several authors. See for example Hoda ELSADDA, *Gender, Nation, and the Arabic Novel: Egypt, 1892–2008*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2012; Beth BARON, *Egypt as a Woman. Nationalism, Gender, and Politics*, University of California Press, Berkeley 2005; Margot BADRAN, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1995; Nadjé AL-ALI, *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East: The Egyptian Women's Movement*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge MA 2002.