

Re-orienting studies of knowledge dissemination in and from Islamicate societies

Wednesday, July 16, 2025 11:00 AM (30 minutes)

Most studies of the dissemination of knowledge among Islamicate societies have focused on the early Abbasid period, as well as the transport of manuscripts and the travel of people between al-Andalus, North Africa and the central Muslim lands until about the end of the Abbasid caliphate. A second field of research concerns their translations into Latin, derived vernaculars and into Hebrew in different parts of Europe.

In contrast, the dissemination of knowledge and its material objects into other regions to the South, East and North of the Abbasid capital until the mid-thirteenth century and among other centers of knowledge in the subsequent centuries has at best been investigated in a very limited number of cases. A major exception is the Ottoman Empire whose intellectual relationships to other Islamicate societies and across the Mediterranean have attracted substantial attention in the last three decades. A minor exception concerns the impact of Muslim scholars and knowledge objects in Yuan and Ming China.

I plan to give a small survey on these studies, point to recent work on the triangle of relationships between Iran, Central Asia and India, as well as the networks between Cairo, the North African coast and sub-Saharan Africa, and add some reflections on how we can learn more about the dissemination of knowledge to Islamicate societies in eastern Europe and Southeast Asia.

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Session Classification: The Spread of Knowledge