

in this part of Europe, the picture is not simple, and Norris avoids simplistic conclusions. He emphasizes that in the Baltic region the daily practice of Islam has, over the centuries, been influenced by local popular beliefs which can be traced back to ancient Shamanism, popular Catholic, Orthodox and even Calvinistic beliefs. On the other hand, the culture of the Muslim East has long fascinated local Christians. As a result, to this day, Christian faith – Orthodox or Catholic – co-exists with Islam and Karaism (pp. 131, 133).

Norris' book is a remarkable study, the narrative clear and attractive. Readers unfamiliar with the issues and the region will find support in the maps, photographs, glossary of the terms used amongst the Lithuanian Tatars, and the appendix containing a Tatar document in Arabic script from the Latvian National Library. The importance of the book lies in its dealings with ethnic and religious minorities in Europe "facing a distinct undermining of their identity". The author stresses that these centuries-old communities, divided by political frontiers, with cultural minority status, living for centuries amidst Catholic and Orthodox Christianity, and Judaism both Karaite and Rabbinical, represent "almost totally neglected corner of the World of Islam" (p. 1) and are, paradoxically, threatened now by the Middle Eastern Islamic movements of the twenty-first century.

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NANCY UM:

The Merchant Houses of Mocha. Trade and Architecture in an Indian Ocean Port.

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University of Washington Press, 2009. \$30. ISBN 978 0 295 98911 2.

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With her study of Mocha in the period between 1650 and 1750, Nancy Um has broken new ground through an innovative combination of architectural and archival materials, thus combining the approaches of historian and art historian in a unique way. This is a particular achievement as very little of the architectural heritage has survived, and the way in which Um uses textual sources to complement the remaining material is exemplary. As a result, she succeeds in convincingly demonstrating how, during the period and due to a combination of Yemeni, Ottoman and Indian Ocean circumstances, Mocha became a major port in the southern Red Sea and a pivotal (albeit not the only) centre of the profitable coffee trade. Between 1538 and 1635, Mocha had become the southernmost Ottoman port, linking the trading worlds of the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. The ousting of the Ottomans from the Yemeni coast by the Qāsimi government in 1635 turned it into a port receiving ships not intending to travel onwards to the Ottoman realms, but often delivering goods which were then transported northwards into the Ottoman Empire's nearest (and only official) port of entry, namely Jeddah.

After setting out this scenario in the first chapter, Um moves on to explain in chapter two the importance of Mocha in terms of its integration into the Yemeni coffee trade network, confirming Brower's challenge to the "popular myths about Mocha's singular place as Yemen's coffee capital" (p. 37) and arguing that the ports of Hodeida and Luhayya were more convenient for traders from the northern Red Sea. Coffee distribution was organized through Bayt al-Faqih, which served as the central emporium for this trade. She further explains how the Mocha trade was

far more diverse than just that for coffee. Being part of a mountain-based Imamate which drew significant revenues from its sea trade, it is not surprising that the Imam usually appointed one of his ablest men as Governor of the Mocha.

The administrative structure of the littoral society in general, and the city of Mocha in particular, is the topic of the third chapter. Um bases her deliberations on both existing literature and biographical information available in Yemeni historiography, which, interestingly, includes a few references to the houses built by these governors (p. 57). She also shows how these governors invested in the urban structure of Mocha, although their main concern was with buildings in the highlands. We can thus see a contrast between the Ottomans, whose governors built in the provinces as an expression of imperial representation (and personal investment), and their Qāsimi counterparts who were more concerned with the centre of power and doctrine in the Yemeni highlands (most lowlanders following the Sunni Shāfi‘i school of law).

Chapter 4 takes us into the world of the merchants and captains (*nākhūdhās*) who often moved between Surat and Mocha, and the land-based merchants organizing the transfer of goods between inland Yemen and the ports. Um argues that the worlds of the two mercantile outlooks (sea and land) were obviously connected, for example by brokers, but concludes, since no mention is made of an important sea-based merchant in local biographies, that he was not considered to conform to the image of a pious merchant. This might be because of his Indian connections (Um is silent as to his religious affiliation, although his possible Turkish origins seem to imply that he might have been a Sunni), or to his close interaction with European traders. Conversely, a similarly important Sunni inland trader is mentioned extensively, possibly because of his important pious contributions and the different type of his links to the Imam’s court. While I am not entirely convinced that one such case suffices to assume a “sharp social rift between the world of the seafaring, ship-owning merchant and the world of the land-based merchant” (p. 91), a closer investigation of the underlying thesis on the basis of further research would certainly be worth pursuing.

After setting out the political and economic world of Mochans, Um proceeds to discuss the urban form and orientation of the city, which resembled other Red Sea towns in its contrast between an imposing seaside façade and a much more humble interior (chapter 5). On the basis of old maps, traveller reports and an investigation of all available materials on the urban structures and their histories she reconstructs the historical urban geography and the links between its religious and secular component parts. In a fascinating consideration, she applies a cosmological approach when discussing the concentration of religious structures on the Eastern (land) walls in contrast to the commercial and governmental establishments near the shore.

Moving further from the broad to the specific, chapter 6 takes us into the houses and trading structures. Here, Um debunks another notion of conformity in “the Islamic city”, namely the existence of urban khāns. With the exception of one simple Ottoman *wikāla* intended only for brief stays, the city had no such structure. Instead, Um shows that the merchant houses, often termed “factories” in Western documents, served many of the functions of khāns, certainly for the wealthier among the merchant class, and were in some ways similar to what could be observed for the Red Sea port of Jeddah in the nineteenth century. On the basis of this finding, she goes on to analyse the data we have to explain the layout and use of the space by its inhabitants and visitors. She then enters the debate about “the Arab house”, convincingly pushing the need for localized consideration to the point of showing how houses could differ in their internal organization even among the Red Sea ports, in spite of exterior and functional similarities.

Finally, chapter 7 takes issue with the notion of ethnic and religious segregation, demonstrating the differences between Yemeni towns and showing the functionality

of living arrangements within and without the city's fortifications, in spite of the striking existence of a Jewish quarter *extra muros*. Jews shared this fate with many Somalis and Yemenis, notably those of limited means. In contrast, the Banyan as well as the European merchants lived with other traders in the security of the walled city. She thus succeeds in showing that "Religious difference was only one axis along which spatial segregation was articulated throughout the city" (p. 184).

The disturbances within the Qāsīmi dynasty and its eventual downfall caused Mocha to lose its role in international trade (one might have added here the much diminished international significance of Yemeni coffee production), which was taken up by other Red Sea ports. The growth of Jeddah in the nineteenth century might well be one result of the demise of its old rival, although ports such as Hodeida or Suakin and Massawa on the other shore of the Red Sea offered further alternatives, unless specifically Yemeni products were in demand.

Overall, Um succeeds in providing a penetrating image of seventeenth–eighteenth century Mocha, and does so using an innovative methodology. At the same time, her important contribution to debates on port cities in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean with regard to their functioning and relation to sea and hinterland, as well as to debates on architectural history, will surely have a major impact on how we understand urban history on the Arabian Peninsula and beyond. This unusually well-written work deserves a place on reading lists in art history, the history of the Arabian Peninsula as well as the history of the Red Sea and Indian Ocean, and port cities in general.

Ulrike Freitag

TOM TRIER, HEDVIG LOHM and DAVID SZAKONYI (eds):

Under Siege: Inter-Ethnic Relations in Abkhazia.

xi, 159 pp. London: Hurst & Company, 2010. £25. ISBN 978 1 84904 020 4.

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The more information provided to Western audiences about Abkhazia and its dispute with Georgia, the better, so that attitudes and policies can be predicated on facts rather than ignorance, as has regularly been the case. But not all works are necessarily (wholly) accurate in what they present to their readers. The present volume is a mixture of wheat and chaff, and the latter could easily have been winnowed out prior to publication.

Abkhazia achieved *de facto* independence from Georgia at the end of September 1993 after a fourteen-month war. Though official recognition was granted by Russia on 26 August 2008, and since then by three other states, most of the international community is not (yet) prepared to acknowledge Abkhazia's *de jure* status. This needed to be stated once in the introduction; but inserting the words "*de facto*" each time the country or one of its governmental posts is mentioned soon irritates the reader.

The authors' fieldwork was conducted in 2007, and, unfortunately, some of their statements are out of date. I would advise those unfamiliar with the region to look elsewhere for background to the current situation, but what the authors have to say about their central concern of inter-ethnic relations is perceptive and pertinent. Recognizing the achievements made by Abkhazia, despite years of international sanctions and blockade, the authors address a wide range of issues that the authorities will eventually have to tackle. And, given the multi-ethnic makeup of