

Postal Systems In The Pre Modern Islamic World Cambridge Studies In Islamic Civilization

Labor and Politics in the U.S. Postal Service grew out of concern for the way a large public organization does its work. It reflects my effort to link experience working as a letter carrier and mail collector with subsequent years of study in the field of organizational sociology. The final product is an academic book that certainly reveals great distance from experience in the postal workplace, but I must confess that the book still presents more a view from the bottom than a view from the top of the post office. I hope this view proves beneficial. It turns out that studying the post office has become an ongoing project that has outlived several jobs, relationships, and hairlines. What originated as a historical study of the 1970 reorganization became an analysis of the causes and consequences of an ongoing process of restructuring and technological change in the post office. Fortunately for me, similar restructurings have recently occurred in organizations and industries across the nation and around the world. The competitive pressures, new technologies, and political and class-based conflicts discussed in this book are perhaps more relevant today than they were in the late 1970s when I began research on the post office.

Adam Silverstein's book offers a fascinating account of the official methods of communication employed in the Near East from pre-Islamic times through the

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Mamluk period. Postal systems were set up by rulers in order to maintain control over vast tracts of land. These systems, invented centuries before steam-engines or cars, enabled the swift circulation of different commodities - from letters, people and horses to exotic fruits and ice. As the correspondence transported often included confidential reports from a ruler's provinces, such postal systems doubled as espionage-networks through which news reached the central authorities quickly enough to allow a timely reaction to events. The book sheds light not only on the role of communications technology in Islamic history, but also on how nomadic culture contributed to empire-building in the Near East. This is a long-awaited contribution to the history of pre-modern communications systems in the Near Eastern world.

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