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The Mediterranean Seminar Review

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Review Editor: Andrew Devereux (History: University of California San Diego)

Editorial Assistant: Aaron Stamper (History: Princeton University)

Delattre, Alain, Marie Legendre, and Petra Sijpesteijn, eds., *Authority and Control in the Countryside: From Antiquity to Islam in the Mediterranean and Near East (6<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> Century)* Leiden Studies in Islam and Society, 9 (Leiden: Brill, 2019). Pp.: xviii + 594. 31 Figures. 4 Maps. ISBN 978-9004386358. Paper \$83.

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The period bridging Late Antiquity and the era of Muslim expansion in the larger Mediterranean world – extending from the Atlantic coast to the Tigris – has been the subject of much original, revisionist scholarship in recent years, tying together archaeology (vis-à-vis both material culture and landscape), art history, literary studies and historical studies, often involving “new” sources and perspective, be these newly-studied papyri, recently discovered manuscripts or literary sources produced by sub-altern or historiographically marginalized peoples. Delattre, Legendre, and Sijpesteijn’s *Authority and Control in the Countryside: From Antiquity to Islam in the Mediterranean and Near East (6<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> Century)* fits very much into this mold. The volume brings together seventeen essays by scholars from North America, the Middle East and Europe, including new and established academics, who incorporate perspectives rooted in a range of discrete areas and various disciplines and methodologies. The focus here is, as the title indicates, the subject of authority and control in the slippery, textually marginalized, yet economically crucial rural hinterlands. Authority and control are conceived of broadly, including direct administrative control, whether fiscal, political or military – what might be qualified as “coercive” – an indirect forces, or “soft” power media, such as intellectual and religious currents, and literary, artistic and cultural models and motifs. Both types of forces are at play in this hinge period, situated between the era of Roman and Sasanian dominion and the coalescing of Islamic culture and systems of government. The very Mediterranean tension between the idealized and orthodox aspirations of the brokers of power and holders of authority and the indifference and ambiguities of the organic messiness on the ground can be seen in each of these studies, which are grouped under four rubrics: “A Question of Sources,” “Territoriality,” “Land Use and Resources,” and “Local Rule and Networks.” A capsule review such as this is too short to even summarize this list of contributions, let alone do justice to the variety, originality and quality of scholarship in this collection. Suffice to say it should be required reading for anyone interested in this crucial period of western history, and on the shelves of every serious research library.



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