

*Social Sciences*

*Division II Faculty Publications*

---

Wesleyan University

Year 1994

---

Review of “Ascesa e Caduta di una  
Famiglia di Asraf Sciiti di Aleppo: I  
Zuhrawi o Zuhra-Zada” by Marco Salati

Laurie Nussdorfer  
Wesleyan University, [lnussdorfer@wesleyan.edu](mailto:lnussdorfer@wesleyan.edu)

Review: [untitled]

Author(s): Laurie Nussdorfer

Reviewed work(s):

Ascesa e Caduta di una Famiglia di Asraf Sciiti di Aleppo: I Zuhrawi o Zuhra-Zada (1600-1700) by Marco Salati

Source: *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Feb., 1994), pp. 139-140

Published by: Cambridge University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/164073>

Accessed: 12/08/2009 11:06

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=cup>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1995 to build trusted digital archives for scholarship. We work with the scholarly community to preserve their work and the materials they rely upon, and to build a common research platform that promotes the discovery and use of these resources. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



Cambridge University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *International Journal of Middle East Studies*.

This is a significant study that is seriously researched and well written. It deserves to be read thoughtfully by all scholars of the Arab–Israeli conflict and should be included in college and university libraries that maintain collections in that controversial field.

MARCO SALATI, *Ascesa e Caduta di una Famiglia di Asraf Sciiti di Aleppo: I Zuhrawi o Zuhra-Zada (1600–1700)* (Rome: Istituto per l'Oriente C. A. Nallino, 1992). Pp. 186.

REVIEWED BY LAURIE NUSSDORFER, History Department, Wesleyan University, Middletown, Conn.

This is a study, based on the author's 1990 dissertation for the University of Rome, of the last few generations of an Ashraf family who occupied a prestigious place in Aleppo society from the 12th to the 18th centuries. Salati hopes that his investigation of the Zuhrawi family in the 17th century will illuminate the larger history of the Ashraf, descendants of the Prophet, not only in Aleppo but in the Ottoman Empire as a whole. He also seeks to reclaim the 17th century as a period to be understood in its own right and on its own terms, rather than being viewed only as the forerunner to Aleppo's more dramatic 18th century. Drawing exclusively on sources in Syria, chiefly the thousands of documents composing the registers in Damascus of the shari'a court of Aleppo and five volumes of waqf acts in Aleppo itself, Salati has pieced together the genealogy, public offices held, and business dealings of the Zuhrawi family.

His book begins with a brief survey of the noble lineage of this family from the 12th to the 17th centuries and of the pious endowments established by them before the Ottoman conquest of Syria in 1517. Salati then traces the features of the Ashraf as a group in Ottoman Aleppo. A tiny minority of the population—1,680 out of 80,000 in 1537—the Ashraf were always more prominent in Aleppo than in other town, although the reasons for this were a mystery even to the Ottomans. As a group they ranged in socioeconomic status from humble craftsmen to substantial merchants and functionaries, and they were to be found in all sections of the city and even outside the city walls. After an initial period of suspicion, the Ottomans confirmed their ancient privilege to be judged only by other Ashraf and gave them exemptions from certain taxes.

Salati argues for the citywide prestige and importance of the official who headed the Ashraf, the *naqib al-Ashraf*, despite the community's tiny size. The *naqib* was counted among the elite of local dignitaries, and his voice was heard by Ottoman officials on problems of commerce, taxation, food supply, safety, and administrative misconduct; it was particularly decisive in judicial testimony. The *naqib* in Aleppo was "the image of justice, rectitude, experience, respect and prestige" (p. 38). Salati is quick to point out the material advantages that could accrue to an official with this image, when supplemented by personal and family standing, influence, wealth, and connections. To the *naqib al-Ashraf* might well go those posts of public trust as administrator of pious endowments that could so often provide opportunities to acquire profits and to expand client networks. This section prepares us to appreciate the social and political significance of the Zuhrawi family, whose members held this key office for the Ashraf during much of the 17th century.

Before turning to the biographical chapters that form the centerpiece of his research, Salati briefly discusses the evidence for his contention that the Zuhrawi parted company with both the Ashraf and the other Aleppine Muslims in their religious affiliation and were the last remnant of Aleppo's medieval Shi'ism. The evidence is sparse and indirect; there is certainly nothing from the pens of the Zuhrawi themselves, though they do provide funds for a pilgrimage to the Shi'i sanctuary of Husayn at Karbala in one of the pious endowments they

set up. Despite its silences and ambiguities, however, it is enough to convince Salati, for whom their “Shi‘ite identity” is an important part of the family’s fascination.

Given the Ashraf’s general prestige and the prominence of the Zuhrawi family, the “rise and fall” in Salati’s title refers not to the family’s whole history but to the economic and political fortunes of men in only two generations of one branch: Ahmad, active from ca. 1630 to the late 1670s, and his brother, and Ahmad’s son, Hasan, active from 1660 to the late 1680s. A third of the book is devoted to their activities, painstakingly reconstructed from the registers and waqf documents. Both father and son hold the post of *naqib al-Ashraf* and become waqf administrators, and both use these offices to help build up the family’s patrimony by marriage alliances, credit arrangements, and diversified investments. Salati’s detailed discussion of the Zuhrawi’s economic strategy confirms many of the findings of Bruce Masters’s *The Origins of Western Economic Dominance in the Middle East: Mercantilism and the Islamic Economy in Aleppo, 1600–1750* (New York, 1988), which he frequently cites. The Zuhrawi are not averse to commerce (they invested in soap making), but they made their real profits from lending money to rural villagers to pay taxes to the Ottoman state. They are largely indifferent to urban real estate and commercial enterprises. Their economic goals seem to be to establish themselves as patrons to client villages and to gain a monopoly over all village resources, from imposts to grain. What is interesting is to see how the role of waqf administrator can aid such an agenda. Success greets their efforts, and the family ends the century with a substantially improved portfolio.

So why the “fall”? It is mysterious, precipitous, and indubitable. First, the Zuhrawi cease to be chosen as *naqib al-Ashraf* after 1666. Salati thinks this is because of their Shi‘ism, which he suspects was exploited by a rival, and he argues that the loss of the office cut them off from tax farming just at the moment when it shifted to an even more lucrative system (*malikana*). But the real reason for the “fall” is the failure of the male line, which dies out under the burden of no less than ten onslaughts of plague between 1678 and 1744. By 1755 all of this ancient Ashraf lineage, even the family compound in Aleppo, was gone.

Salati wishes to see the 17th century on its own terms, and in his careful reconstruction of the predatory townsman’s takeover of the countryside he certainly highlights a crucial phenomenon of that century. But he cannot resist looking forward to the striking developments in Aleppo that follow the close of his story. While his book sheds no light at all on the sources of Ashraf turbulence in the 18th century, he does make the case that the emergence of a local group of notables in the Ottoman Empire in the late 1700s had roots in the family strategies of the 1600s. Salati may have had grander ambitions for his subject, but this carefully researched study offers a useful contribution nonetheless.

SURAIYA FAROQHI, *Herrscher über Mekka. Die Geschichte der Pilgerfahrt* (Munich: Artemis Verlag, 1990). Pp. 351. (English version, *Pilgrims and Sultans: The Hajj under the Ottomans* [London: I. B. Tauris, forthcoming 1993].)

REVIEWED BY L. SCHATKOWSKI SCHILCHER, Departments of History and Arab and Islamic Studies, Villanova University, Villanova, Pa.

There are few institutions of Islamic history that are as well-suited as the Meccan pilgrimage for providing us with insights of a long-term and multiregional nature. By virtue of its critical link to state legitimacy, its regularity, its geographic centrality and spread, and the records it produced casting light on multifaceted social, diplomatic, and economic importance, the hajj is a historian’s delight. Taking the pilgrimage as a microcosm, this extremely well-researched study supports the notion that far from the monolithic “traditional society” contemporary Middle Eastern political scientists would project, the early-modern and modern