MEDIEVAL EUROPEAN RELATIONS WITH THE ISLAMIC WORLD IN THE WORKS OF THE HISTORIAN MAḤMŪD ISMĀʿĪL

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Abstract

The Egyptian scholar Maḥmūd Ismāʿīl ʿAbd al-Rāziq (b. 1940) is one of the most famous and influential contemporary Arab historians of the medieval period. In his ten volume work Sūsiyūlūjiyyā al-Fikr al-Islāmī, he presented a comprehensive history of medieval Islamic civilisation in its economic, social, political and cultural aspects arranged around a bold, innovative theoretical framework, employing novel terminology and a new system of periodisation. His approach is historical materialist. He begins with a careful reconstruction of the socio-economic bases of a given historical period which in his view provides the foundation for understanding first the political history and then the cultural and intellectual production of the given period. This article will discuss Ismāʿīl's model of medieval Islamic history with special attention to the place of the major Christian-Muslim confrontations of the medieval period in his works: namely the Crusades, the Reconquista, and the Norman conquest of Sicily. We will see that in contrast to many other Arab historians he does not attach great importance to the ideological and religious aspects of these struggles, but rather views them in the context of competition for control of international trade routes. We will also examine his views on the effects that these conflicts had on internal developments within medieval Muslim society.

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Introduction

The Egyptian scholar Maḥmūd Ismāʿīl ʿAbd al-Rāziq (b. 1940) is one of the most famous and influential contemporary Arab historians.[1] He is a specialist in the history of the medieval Maghrib by training who has written many important monographs and articles on the history of the region. Ismāʿīl has considerably influenced the study of medieval Islamic history in the Arab World. During the 1970s he taught at Fez University where he played a key role in establishing the Moroccan school of historiography, training some of the leading contemporary Moroccan historians such as Ibrāhīm al-Qādirī Būtshīsh and Aḥmad al-Ṭāhirī. In the 1990s he worked as a visiting professor at Kuwait University before returning to Egypt where he is currently emeritus professor of history at ʿAyn Shams University in Cairo. His former students, many prominent historians themselves, teach in universities across the Arab World from the Maghreb to the Gulf. They share his commitment to the historical-materialist approach, with a great interest in social and economic questions, as well as the history of mentalities. They have in turn trained a third generation of promising historians. Many of these younger historians identify themselves as adherents of "al-Madrasa al-Maḥmūdīya" or the historiographical school of Maḥmūd Ismāʿīl.[2]

Ismāʿīl's *magnum opus* is a ten-volume history of Islamic civilization from its origins until the sixteenth century entitled *Sūsiyūlūjīyā al-Fikr al-Islāmī* (*Sociology of Islamic Thought*).[3] His writings are informed by a Marxian vision of history in which class struggle plays a key role. He makes great use of the Marxist concept of the "modes of production" in an innovative manner that

[1] He is commonly known as Maḥmūd Ismāʿīl, therefore in this paper we will henceforth refer to him as Ismāʿīl rather than ʿAbd al-Rāziq.

[2] For more information about Ismāʿīl's life, scholarship, and his influence on other historians see Amar S. Baadj, "Maḥmūd Ismāʿīl and his Historical-Materialist Approach to the History of the Medieval Islamic World", in B. Zachariah, R. Raphael, and B. Bernet, eds. *What's Left of Marxism: Historiography and the Possibilities of Thinking with Marxian Themes and Concepts* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020) pp. 147-170; Brahim El Kadiri Boutchich and Azeddine Guessous, "L'histoire sociale et économique médiévale de Al-Magrib et Al-Andalus chez les chercheurs arabes", in Amar S. Baadj, ed. *A Handbook of Modern Arabic Historical Scholarship on the Ancient and Medieval Periods* (Leiden: Brill, 2021) pp. 431-444; Maḥmūd Ismāʿīl, *Jadal al-Anā wa al-Ākhar: Sīra Dhātīya* (Cairo: Al-Ruʾya, 2008).

[3] Maḥmūd Ismāʿīl, *Sūsiyūlūjīyā al-Fikr al-Islāmī*, vols. 1–7 (Cairo: Sīnā li al-Nashr; Beirut: Al-Intishār al-ʿArabī, 2000), vols. 8–10 (Cairo: Miṣr al-Maḥrūsa, 2005).

differs from the traditional usage. In his view, the social, political, and intellectual development of the medieval Islamic world was shaped by the interplay of two competing modes of production: the feudal and bourgeois modes of production. At times, one mode was ascendant over the other, however, the non-ascendant mode subsisted in a marginal role.[4]

In his *Sociology of Islamic Thought* Ismāʿīl developed a unique periodization of Islamic history. The first Umayyad Caliphate (661-750) witnessed the preponderance of the feudal mode of production. The Abbasid Revolution which caused its downfall was the last of many anti-Umayyad bourgeois revolts and it ushered in the "First Bourgeois Awakening" which lasted until the middle of the ninth century. This was followed by a brief resurgence of feudalism in the middle of the ninth century when the Turks were ascendant in Baghdad and the Umayyad amirate of Cordoba underwent a process of disintegration.[5] The second, most important Bourgeois Awakening began in the early tenth century and lasted until about the middle of the eleventh century. This was when the Buwayhids ruled in Mesopotamia and western Iran, the Fatimids in Ifrīqīya and later Egypt, and when the Umayyads of Cordoba regained direct control over al-Andalus and proclaimed their caliphate. In Ismāʿīl's view, this was the period of the greatest economic expansion and intellectual enlightenment in the history of the medieval Islamic World, when the urban middle class was at the peak of its socio-economic, political and cultural influence.[6] From the late eleventh century onwards, feudalism once again became the dominant mode of production in the Islamic World while the bourgeois mode was relegated to secondary status. The urban bourgeoisie declined in importance while nomadic groups entered the Islamic lands such as the Seljuks in the Near East, the Banū Hilāl in Ifrīqīya, and the Almoravids in the far West. Regimes of a military-feudal character eventually took root throughout much of the Islamic World while important trade routes in the Mediterranean fell under the domination of European maritime powers.[7]

According to Ismāʿīl, a thorough study of the socio-economic bases of Islamic history in a given period is a prerequisite to contextualizing and

[4] Ismāʿīl, *Sūsiyūlūjīyā*, vol. 1, p. 30.

[5] Ismāʿīl, *Sūsiyūlūjīyā*, vol. 1, pp. 147-184.

[6] Ismāʿīl, *Sūsiyūlūjīyā*, vol. 2, pp. 105-187.

[7] Maḥmūd Ismāʿīl, "Al-Iqṭāʿ fī al-ʿAlam al-Islāmī, min Muntaṣaf al-Qarn al-Khāmis ilā Awāʾil al-Qarn al-ʿĀshir al-Hijrī: bayn al-Jadal al-Naẓarī wa al-Wāqiʿ al-Tārīkhī," *Ḥawlīyāt Kullīyat al-Ādāb* 11, (1990) pp. 9-87, esp. pp. 25-40.

understanding the political, religious, and intellectual developments of the same period. This approach is exemplified in the second part of the above-mentioned *Sociology of Islamic Thought* in which the author commences his account of what he calls the period of "Bourgeois Revival" (mid-tenth to mid-eleventh century A.D.) with a careful study of the "economic bases" which include land tenure, agriculture, manufacturing, and trade. This is followed by a consideration of the "Social Structure" which discusses the social classes that he divides into aristocracy, bourgeoisie and oppressed classes (peasants, slaves, urban poor). The third section is called "Sociology of Political History" which gives a sketch of the major political-ideological movements of the period and how the class struggle played out at the level of political history. After sketching the socio-economic conditions and their political ramifications, he delves into a discussion of the superstructure, the cultural and intellectual history of the period. This includes chapters on the natural sciences, the traditional or religious sciences (such as Qur'ān exegesis, traditions of the Prophet, jurisprudence), literature and philology, art and architecture, theology and philosophy, mysticism and finally a detailed discussion of the historical and geographical sciences during the period under study.[8]

Ismāʿīl maintains the principle of the "unity of the phenomenon in Islamic history" according to which both the Maghrib and the Mashriq passed through the same feudal or bourgeois phases at approximately the same time.[9] He treats the movements of medieval Western European military expansion in the Mediterranean Basin, including the Reconquista, the Norman conquest of Sicily, and the Crusades, as related phenomena. In his view there was a complex interaction between these and other "external factors" on the one hand and various socio-economic "internal developments" of the Islamic world on the other hand that resulted in the decline of the middle class and the entrenchment of feudalism in the Islamic lands.[10]

The Period of "Reactionary Feudalism"

The first Western European Christian advances against the Islamic world coincided with what Ismāʿīl calls the period of "Reactionary Feudalism" in Islamic history, between the middle of the ninth and the middle of the tenth

[8] Ismāʿīl, *Sūsiyūlūjīyā*, vols. 2-5.

[9] Ismāʿīl, *Sūsiyūlūjīyā*, vol. 2, p. 27.

[10] Ismāʿīl, *Sūsiyūlūjīyā*, vol. 2, pp. 188-204.

centuries. According to Ismāʿīl, the Islamic bourgeoisie was primarily mercantile in character and heavily dependent on the central government which controlled the trade routes, in contrast to its European counterpart which was closely tied to the productive sector and had interests that were antithetical to those of the government. Therefore, the Islamic bourgeoisie was exceptionally sensitive to changes in the international balance of power, which affected the trade routes, and to changes in the power structure at home, particularly the seizure of power by nomadic groups that formed military aristocracies.[11]

In Al-Andalus this period witnessed the fragmentation of the territory of the Umayyad amirate of Cordoba and the development of Berber, Arab and Slav factions in the military. On the external front the Norsemen launched devastating raids against the Iberian Peninsula beginning in 844. The Franks and the local Christian powers in the Iberian Peninsula such as Asturias and Leon took advantage of the temporary disunity and weakness on the Muslim side to invade al-Andalus and conquer Muslim territories in the frontier zone.[12]

In the Eastern and Central Mediterranean, Byzantium experienced a resurgence of military and naval power under the Macedonian dynasty (856-1056) while the Abbasid caliphate was greatly weakened during the period of the ascendancy of the Turkic slave soldiers due to palace conspiracies and major revolutionary movements such as the Zanj Revolt (late ninth century) and the Qarmatian Revolt (early tenth century).[13]

The Aghlabid state in Ifrīqīya became destabilized in the late ninth century due to the struggle between the African slave soldiers (*Sūdān*) imported by the rulers and the Arab *jund*. The latter were eventually exterminated by the African corps which played the same disruptive role that the Turkic guard played in Abbasid Iraq. They alienated the civilian population through their brutality and rapaciousness while the Aghlabid rulers isolated themselves from the masses of Qayrawān, taking refuge in the new administrative city of Raqqāda.[14] Regional revolts flared while conflict with other North African dynasties like the Rustamids of the Central Maghrib jeopardized the overland

[11] Ismāʿīl, *Sūsiyūlūjīyā*, vol. 2, pp. 15-16.
[12] Ismāʿīl, *Sūsiyūlūjīyā*, vol. 2, pp. 18-20.
[13] Ismāʿīl, *Sūsiyūlūjīyā*, vol. 2, pp. 17, 22.
[14] Ismāʿīl, *Sūsiyūlūjīyā*, vol. 2, p. 22.

trade routes. The resulting economic decline was reflected in the debasement of the late Aghlabid coinage.[15]

The Aghlabids progressively conquered Sicily from the Byzantines between 827 and 902 and also established footholds on the Italian mainland. Ismāʿīl points out that their progress in the Sicilian campaign was directly linked to the situation in Ifrīqīya. Whenever the Aghlabids were preoccupied with civil wars or revolts in North Africa, they neglected the Sicilian front where their advance was stalled or even partially reversed. This explains why the conquest took seventy years.[16] The maritime situation of the Christian powers in the Central Mediterranean improved during this period. The resurgence of Byzantine naval activity in the region beginning in the late ninth century, after a period of weakness in the earlier part of the century, played a major role in this. The Byzantines enjoyed several victories in Sicily during the 870s and 880s, though ultimately they were unable to prevent the fall of the island.[17] On the Italian mainland, they were more successful. The Byzantine navy played a decisive role in the capture of Bari, the main Aghlabid base in Italy, by the forces of the Carolingian emperor Louis II in 871.[18]

The collapse of the Aghlabid state in the first decade of the tenth century at the hands of the Kutāma rebels significantly weakened the position of the Muslims in the Central Mediterranean region for several years until the Fatimids managed to consolidate power in Ifrīqīya and Sicily and establish a formidable navy. The Byzantines and the Italian maritime states were quick to exploit periods of weakness and disorder by launching direct raids on the North African coastline. Such attacks threatened the important east-west trade routes, both maritime and land-based, which connected Ifrīqīya to Egypt, as well as the maritime routes which linked Sicily to North Africa. The extensive network of coastal fortifications, notably the fortified monasteries (*rubuṭ*) which were constructed in Aghlabid Ifrīqīya, testify to the gravity of the danger posed by such raids.[19] In Ismāʿīl's view, the disruption of the major international sea and land trade routes, coupled with the ascendancy of an expensive and turbulent foreign-born mercenary army at home along with

[15] Ismāʿīl, *Sūsiyūlūjīyā*, vol. 2, pp. 48-49.

[16] Maḥmūd Ismāʿīl, *Al-Aghāliba 184 h – 296 h: Sīyāsatuhum al-Khārijīya* (Cairo: Ein for Human and Social Sciences, 2000) pp. 159-160.

[17] Ismāʿīl, *Al-Aghāliba*, pp. 157-158.

[18] Ismāʿīl, *Al-Aghāliba*, pp. 176-177.

[19] Ismāʿīl, *Al-Aghāliba*, pp. 148-149.

the rise of regional warlords, were all factors which served to weaken the mercantile bourgeoisie and strengthen feudal tendencies.

The Second "Bourgeois Awakening" in the Islamic World

According to Ismāʿīl, this feudal dominance was temporary, soon giving way to the second and most important "bourgeois awakening" in Islamic history which lasted from approximately the middle of the tenth century until the middle of the eleventh century. He considers this period to have been the time of the greatest economic expansion and intellectual enlightenment in the history of the medieval Islamic World, when the urban middle class was at the peak of its socio-economic, political and cultural influence. The trend towards political decentralization and fragmentation was reversed and three great "bourgeois-influenced states" (the Arabic term used is *mutabarjaza*, meaning literally "bourgeoisised") arose: the Buwayhids in Iraq and western Iran (945–1055), the Fatimids in the Maghrib and later Egypt and Syria (909–1171), and the Umayyad Caliphate of Cordoba (929–1031). Ismāʿīl uses the term "bourgeois-influenced" because although the bourgeoisie did not actually assume direct power in any of these states, the bourgeoisie dominated the bureaucracies and institutions of the states and its attitudes influenced the ruling aristocracy.[20]

The Fatimid caliphate in Ifrīqīya and the revived Umayyad caliphate that ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III had established in Cordoba were both formidable naval powers. Despite their conflicts with each other, they managed to arrest the naval expansion of the Christian maritime states in the Western and Central Mediterranean and forced them once more onto the defensive. There was a lack of unity between the Byzantines, the Holy Roman Empire, and the Italian city-states, and indeed several of the latter entered into trade agreements with the Fatimids. Major international trade routes of the time were under the domination of the bourgeois-influenced Muslim empires. For instance, the maritime routes between Ifrīqīya, Sicily and Egypt, the trans-Saharan routes, and the Red Sea trade were controlled by the Fatimids and their vassals. Despite political disunity within the Islamic world, merchants traveled with relative freedom between states.[21]

[20] Ismāʿīl, *Sūsiyūlūjīyā*, vol. 2, pp. 151–155, 200.
[21] Ismāʿīl, *Sūsiyūlūjīyā*, vol. 2, pp. 175-177.

The Final Victory of Feudalism

In Ismāʿīl's periodization of Islamic history, the second bourgeois flowering came to an end in the late eleventh century as reactionary feudalism gradually became entrenched across the Islamic World and has remained so down to modern times. According to him, there were two, mutually reinforcing causes for the decline of the Islamic bourgeoisie and of the "bourgeoisised" states that it influenced (the Fatimid, Buyid, and Cordoban Umayyad states). The first cause was the seizure of power in the centers of civilization by semi-nomadic peripheral groups led by military aristocracies that instituted feudal regimes in order to pay their followers. The prime examples of such regimes were the Seljuks in the eastern Islamic world and the Almoravids in the Maghrib and al-Andalus. Ismāʿīl likens them to the "external proletariat" described by Arnold Toynbee and maintains that their role in medieval Islamic history was similar to that of the Germanic tribes in late Roman history. He notes that in both cases they were invited by weak rulers who required their military assistance: the Almoravids into al-Andalus by the *Mulūk al-Ṭawāʾif* in order to stem the Christian advance, and the Seljuks by the powerless ʿAbbāsid caliphs. The second factor was an external one, the loss of control by the major Islamic powers over the sea routes that were critically important to international trade and the decline of their role as intermediaries in such trade. A notable example of the latter was the monopolization of commerce between the eastern and western halves of the Mediterranean by the Italian merchant fleets in the twelfth century, whereas previously this trade had been conducted in Muslim vessels.[22]

Fatimid decline began in the reign of the caliph al-Mustanṣir (1036-1094). According to Ismāʿīl, Byzantine land and naval victories over the Fatimids in Syria during the eleventh century weakened the Fatimid position in the Eastern Mediterranean and paved the way for the Crusaders who arrived at the end of the century and succeeded in completely expelling the Fatimids from Bilād al-Shām. During the last years of Fatimid rule they invaded Egypt itself, intervening in Fatimid civil wars, while Byzantine and Italian fleets raided the Egyptian ports. In the Central Mediterranean the Normans conquered Sicily between 1061 and 1091 while the Genoese and Pisans sacked the Zirid capital at al-Mahdīya in 1087. In the 1140s the Normans directly occupied al-Mahdīya and most of the other major ports in Ifrīqīya. As a consequence, European maritime powers, particularly Pisa, Genoa, and

[22] Ismāʿīl, *Sūsiyūlūjīyā* vol. 2, p. 22; 188-204.

Venice, came to dominate the principal trade routes in the Central and Eastern Mediterranean from which the vessels of Muslim states were now largely excluded. Not only was trade between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean in European hands, but even trade between the Maghrib and Mashriq was now nearly monopolized by the ships of the Italian republics.[23] According to Ismāʿīl, the Red Sea trade also declined in the eleventh and twelfth centuries due to the Hilālī Arab tribes which threatened communications between the Red Sea ports and the Nile Valley, Fatimid loss of control over Yemen and the Hijaz, and piracy in the Indian Ocean.[24]

The Zirids of Ifrīqīya were vassals of the Fatimid caliphs who played an important role in securing the overland trade routes between Ifrīqīya and Egypt as well as the trans-Saharan routes that supplied the Fatimid economy with gold and luxury imports from West Africa. During the early part of the reign of the caliph al-Mustanṣir, the Zirids threw off their allegiance to the Fatimid caliphate and recognized instead the Abbasid caliphs of Baghdad. Ismāʿīl maintains the traditional narrative of a Hilālī invasion of Ifrīqīya in the 1050s according to which the Fatimid vizier instigated the tribes of the Banū Hilāl, who were then settled in Upper Egypt, to invade Ifrīqīya in order to punish the refractory Zirid ruler al-Muʿizz b. Bādīs as well as to relieve Egypt from the presence of these turbulent bedouin.[25] They defeated the Zirid army and sacked Qayrawān, the greatest city in Ifrīqīya. In subsequent decades further waves of pastoralist Arab tribes arrived in Ifrīqīya from Egypt, including the Banū Sulaym. These tribes spread westwards into the Central and Western Maghrib. Ismāʿīl accepts the opinion held by many, though not all modern historians, that the Hilālī and Sulaymī migrations had far-reaching and negative effects on the economies of Ifrīqīya and the Central Maghrib, leading to a decline in agriculture and settled life and the spread of pastoralism. In his view the Hilālī invasion was also responsible for cutting the overland trade routes between Ifrīqīya and Egypt and for disrupting the trans-Saharan trade, thus depriving the Fatimid economy of West African gold among other products.[26]

[23] Ismāʿīl, "Al-Iqṭāʿ", pp. 26-28.

[24] Ismāʿīl, "Al-Iqṭāʿ", p. 29; Ismāʿīl, *Sūsiyūlūjīyā*, vol. 2, pp. 190-191.

[25] For alternative views on the Banū Hilāl see Michael Brett, *Ibn Khaldun and the Medieval Maghrib* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999); Jean Poncet, "Le mythe de la catastrophe hilalienne," *Annales* 22, no. 5 (1967) pp. 1099–1120.

[26] Ismāʿīl, "Al-Iqṭāʿ", pp. 26-27.

The loss of trade revenues coupled with natural disasters and social disturbances in the eleventh century caused the collapse of the Egyptian economy. In order to suppress rebellions and fight civil wars, the leading actors in the Fatimid state turned to various peripheral groups such as the Turks, Armenians, Arabs, and Sūdān. Since they could no longer pay salaries for the soldiers, they had to give them *iqṭāʿāt* (grants of land, or of income from specific lands), thus laying the foundations for feudalism in Ismāʿīl's view.[27] During the final years of Fatimid rule, rival viziers invited into Egypt first the army of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem, and then the Kurdish and Turkic forces of the Zankids. Eventually Saladin, the leader of the Zankid expeditionary force in Egypt, seized the reins of power for himself and established the Ayyubid dynasty, which was a feudal-military state in Ismāʿīl's opinion.[28]

In the far west of the Islamic world as well, the centralized, bourgeois-influenced regime of the Cordoba Caliphate rapidly disintegrated after 1009. The provinces fell under the rule of local warlords while class-warfare broke out in Cordoba itself between the commoners and the military aristocracy. As in Egypt, the military aristocrats had recourse to mercenary troops drawn from semi-nomadic peripheral groups, in this case the Berbers and Slavs, in order to suppress the revolts of the commoners and to fight against each other. The cost of maintaining mercenary armies created a spiral-effect as unbearable taxation measures were imposed on the civilian population, while the foreign soldiers took to plundering and looting them, thus leading to more popular revolts. When the treasury was empty there was no option but to assign the soldiers grants of land as substitution for a salary. The caliphate was succeeded in due course by the local petty rulers known as the *Mulūk al-Ṭawāʾif*, whose reigns marked the return of feudalism and warlordism to al-Andalus. They drew the Christian kingdoms in the north of Spain into their squabbles and the latter exploited the situation to make impressive conquests at the expense of the Muslims, as witnessed by the capture of Toledo in 1085.[29] Meanwhile, in Ismāʿīl's estimation, al-Andalus' international trade declined in the eleventh century due to the Norman conquests in the Central

[27] Many historians, most notably Claude Cahen, reject the use of the term feudal to describe medieval Islamic societies, believing that feudalism had a uniquely western European context. For more on the Islamic feudalism debate see Baadj, "Maḥmūd Ismāʿīl", pp. 162-164.

[28] Ismāʿīl, *Sūsiyūlūjīyā*, vol. 2, pp. 190-192.

[29] Ismāʿīl, "Al-Iqṭāʿ", pp. 37-38; Ismāʿīl, *Sūsiyūlūjīyā*, vol. 2, pp. 193-196.

Mediterranean and the accompanying monopolization of the East-West and North-South Mediterranean trade routes by European maritime powers, as well as the seizure of the westernmost trans-Saharan route by the Sanḥāja Berbers.[30]

Eventually the rulers of the Andalusi petty states had no option left but to invite the Almoravids from North Africa into the Iberian Peninsula in order to save themselves from the Christian advance, just as the last Fatimids invited the Zankids into Egypt in order to counterbalance the Crusaders. The Almoravids, like the Seljuks and later the Ayyubids in the east, created a military-feudal regime in which the army was supported by land grants. The Almohad and Merinid dynasties which succeeded the Almoravids in the far west of the Islamic World continued to be organized on a feudal basis.[31] According to ʿAbd al-ʿUmar, one of Ismāʿīl's students, the results of such a long period of feudal rule in the Maghrib were the marginalization of the middle class or bourgeoisie, which was subsumed into the common class, an absence of strong institutions, and political fragmentation. He believes that the internal structural weaknesses caused by feudalism led to external weakness at the end of the Middle Ages when the North African polities proved incapable of competing with the European nation-states and eventually fell to them as colonies, just as the Muslim polities in al-Andalus had fallen to the Spanish monarchy in an earlier period.[32]

Finally, in the eastern half of the Islamic world the bourgeois-influenced Buwayhid state in Mesopotamia and Iran was also affected by changes in the international trade routes. According to Ismāʿīl, the Persian Gulf trade, which was of vital importance to the Buwayhid economy, declined towards the end of the eleventh century. In the Far East the Chinese monopolized maritime trade between China and India, excluding Muslim shipping, while Indian pirates disrupted trade between India and the Gulf. Meanwhile, within the Gulf itself pirates from the island of Qays (Kīsh) ravaged the coastal ports and the leading Buwayhid port of Sīrāf was abandoned. The commercial expansion of the Italian city-states into the eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea and the Byzantine revival also negatively affected Buwayhid trade. Overland trade along the Silk Road that had previously passed through

[30] Ismāʿīl, *Sūsiyūlūjīyā*, vol. 6, p. 33.

[31] Ismāʿīl, *Sūsiyūlūjīyā*, vol. 6, pp. 34-36.

[32] Muḥammad ʿAbd al-ʿUmar, "Al-Iqṭāʿ wa Atharuhu al-Siyāsī wa al-Ijtimāʿī fī al-Maghrib Khilāl ʿAṣray al-Murābiṭīn wa al-Muwaḥḥidīn" (PhD thesis, ʿAyn Shams, 2007) especially pp. 278-287.

Baghdad now bypassed Iraq and was redirected instead to Constantinople through Asia Minor or further north to the Volga.[33]

Ismāʿīl believes that the decline in trade caused a decrease in tax revenue, forcing the government to raise taxes and duties, oppressing the already troubled merchants and craftsmen. This caused class conflict to break out in Baghdad and the other Iraqi cities. Ismāʿīl identifies three parties to this conflict: the commoners or *ʿayyārūn*, the bourgeois movement which he believes was led by al-Basāsirī (d. 1060) and the military aristocracy which relied on Turkic mercenaries to fight the other factions. The Abbasid caliph turned for help to a nomadic tribal confederation from the periphery, that of the Seljuk Turks, inviting their ruler Tughril Beg (1037-1063) to Baghdad in 1055. Tughril returned to Baghdad in 1060 when he defeated al-Basāsirī and permanently annexed Iraq to the Seljuk Empire, which expanded to embrace most of the Near East. In Ismāʿīl's opinion the Seljuk state was a feudal military empire of a federal nature.[34]

Conclusion

As we have seen, Ismāʿīl treats the Reconquista in Iberia, the early medieval expansion of the Normans and the Italian city-states in the Central Mediterranean, and the Crusades in the Near East as related phenomena. He goes further than most historians however in mentioning such events in the same sentence as piracy in the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean as well as Chinese exclusion of shipping and merchants from Muslim lands along the maritime routes between China and India. He considers all of these events to have been external factors which contributed to the loss of control of international trade routes by the major Muslim empires and thereby contributed to the weakness of the largely mercantile bourgeoisie in the Islamic world. However, these external factors alone did not drive socio-economic developments in the Islamic world but only in tandem with other internal factors. There is little discussion of religious or other ideological factors behind the Medieval Mediterranean Muslim-Christian conflicts in Ismāʿīl's work. The major significance of all of these conflicts for him is how they resulted in changes in the flow of international trade.

There are a number of criticisms that can be made of the model of medieval Islamic history that Ismāʿīl has presented. It seems at times that he tries too

[33] Ismāʿīl, "Iqṭāʿ", pp. 29-30.
[34] Ismāʿīl, *Sūsiyūlūjīyā*, vol. 2, pp. 164-166.

hard to fit disparate events that occurred in far-flung regions under very different circumstances into an overly-rigid periodization. For example, during the so-called "feudal resurgence" of the late ninth and early tenth centuries, while there certainly were severe political and social crises in al-Andalus and in the Abbasid Near East at this time, the evidence of a crisis in Ifrīqīya during this period is less clear. It was precisely in the late ninth century that the Aghlabids completed the conquest of Sicily, and the transition from Aghlabid to Fatimid rule did not result in any weakening of the Muslim position in the Central Mediterranean, though this may simply have been due to the weakness and divisions of the Christian states in the Italian Peninsula which were unable to exploit the Aghlabid collapse in the way that the Christians of northern Spain were able to exploit the crisis of the Umayyad amirate in Cordoba.

The concept of the "nomadic peripheral peoples" as a Toynbean "external proletariat" who invariably created feudal-military regimes once they seized power in the imperial center also deserves further consideration. Ismāʿīl gives as prime examples of this phenomenon the Almoravids in al-Andalus and the western Maghrib and the Seljuks in the Near East. However, it should be borne in mind that two of Ismāʿīl's "bourgeois-influenced" regimes were also created by tribal pastoral groups from the peripheries that were considered uncivilized by their neighbours, namely the Buwayhids who were Daylamites from a remote mountainous region of Iran near the Caspian Sea, and the Fatimids who owed their rise in Ifrīqīya to the support of the Kutāma tribes that inhabited the mountainous country around Jijel in eastern Algeria. It should be noted as well that the conventional view of most contemporary historians is that the military *iqṭāʿ* system (which Ismāʿīl equates with feudalism) began not with the Seljuks but rather under the Buwayhids.[35] If one accepts that there was indeed feudalism in the medieval Islamic world, it is hard to see why the period of the Daylamite Buwayhids, warlike mountaineers who rewarded their followers with *iqṭāʿāt* and divided their "empire" into several appanages each governed by a different line of princes in the manner of a loose confederation, should be seen as the antithesis of feudalism while their successors, the Seljuks, a nomadic steppe people who governed their state in much the same loose manner as the Buwayhids by

[35] For example, see Sato Tsugitaka, *State and Rural Society in Medieval Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1997) p. 6.

dividing it into principalities, should be blamed for the final "feudal resurgence".[36]

Finally, Ismāʿīl makes very interesting observations about the possible effects that piracy in the Indian Ocean and Chinese commercial competition with the Islamic world may have had on socio-economic developments in the latter. Unfortunately his references are to older secondary works by such scholars as Heyd, Metz and Cahen who themselves were not specialists in the civilizations of the Far East.[37] It would be most beneficial to have a joint team of Islamicists, Indologists, and Sinologists undertake a careful and detailed study of economic and trade relations between China, India, and the Islamic World during the period between the eighth and thirteenth centuries relying on the latest numismatic and archeological evidence as well as all available primary sources.

[36] Most contemporary historians, especially in the west, have great reservations about the use of the term feudal to describe non-European civilizations. For more on the controversy regarding feudalism in the Islamic world see Baadj, "Maḥmūd Ismāʿīl", pp. 162-164.

[37] Ismāʿīl, *Sūsiyūlūjīyā*, vol. 2, pp. 17, 43, 109-114.