Introduction: The Ties that Bound the Societies of the Islamic Empire

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This volume aims to mark a shift in the way we study the history of the early Islamic empire and its regional successors in the Umayyad and Abbasid period (with one paper introducing a broader chronology by focusing on the thirteenth century). The central thesis of this volume is that the early Islamic empire was tied together by networks of social dependency that can be tracked through the linguistic and material traces of interconnectivity in our sources – the traces of the 'ties that bind' society.[1] These relations between individuals and groups are an important part of what made the early Islamic empire and held it together. The publication emerges from several years of conversations about how to formulate a holistic approach to the early Islamic empire in the framework of the research project Embedding conquest: naturalising Muslim rule in the early Islamic empire (600–1000) funded by the European Research Council.[2] While there have been various small-scale case studies on social relationships in early Islam, especially in relation to philanthropy and care of the poor,[3] patronage of scholars and the arts,[4] religious

[1] While 'dependency' is often used with a negative connotation, here we do not assume it to be intrinsically oppressive, though in some cases dependency relationships may be so. See Keir Martin, 'Dependence', *Cambridge encyclopedia of anthropology*, http://doi.org/10.29164/21-dependence, accessed 1.11.2022. See the section, 'The Ties that Bind', below.

[2] For a full description of the project, see https://emco.hcommons.org/. This work was supported by the European Research Council under Grant number 683194. We would like to thank the EmCo team, Alon Dar, Reza Huseini, Birte Kristiansen, Cecilia Palombo, and Eline Scheerlinck for their comments on earlier drafts. Any remaining mistakes remain, of course, our own.

[3] See e.g. Zachary Chitwood and Esther Möller (eds.), *Foundations and the power of giving. Christian, Jewish and Muslim perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 2020); Adam Sabra, *Poverty and charity in medieval Islam. Mamluk Egypt, 1250–1517* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[4] E.g. Sonja Brentjes, *Teaching and learning the sciences in Islamicate societies (700–1800)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018); Judith Pfeiffer, *Politics, patronage and the transmission of knowledge in 13th–15th-century Tabriz* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Jocelyn Sharlet, *Patronage and poetry in the Islamic world. Social mobility and status in the medieval Middle East and Central Asia* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011); Ana Akasoy, *Philosophie und Mystik in der späten Almohadenzeit. Die Sizilianischen Fragen des Ibn Sabʿīn* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

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interaction and conversion,[5] client–patron relations,[6] and, in the political realm, on ruler–subject relations,[7] rarely do these studies set their frame of reference at the level of the empire itself.[8] In this volume we aim to demonstrate how the very particular relationships that emerge from focused case studies can and should be understood as constituent parts of the early Islamic empire as a whole. Indeed, it is precisely through the granular particularity of individual cases that we can see the practice of empire.[9] Focusing on the language used by our sources to describe relations and interactions (see also

[5]   E.g. Mohamed Meouak (ed.), *Biografías magrebíes. Identidades y grupos religiosos, sociales y políticos en el Magreb medieval (*Madrid: CSIC, 2013); Ragnhild Johnsrud Zorgati, *Pluralism in the Middle Ages. Hybrid identities, conversion and mixed marriages in medieval Iberia* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Uri Simonsohn, *A common justice. The legal allegiances of Christians and Jews under early Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Dominique Valérian (ed.), *Islamisation et arabisation de l'occident musulman médiéval (VIIe–XIIe siècle)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2011); Dorothea Weltecke, *Minderheiten und Mehrheiten. Erkundungen religiösen Komplexität im mittelalterichen Afro-Asien* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020).

[6]   E.g. Monique Bernards and John Nawas (eds.), *Patronate and patronage in early and classical Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2005); Roy Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and leadership in an early Islamic society* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2001).

[7]   Alain George and Andrew Marsham (eds.), *Power, patronage and memory in early Islam: Perspectives on Umayyad elites* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Jürgen Paul, *Herrscher, Gemeinwesen, Vermittler. Ostiran und Transoxanien in vormongolischer Zeit* (Beirut & Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 1996); Jürgen Paul, *Lokale und imperiale Herrschaft im Iran des 12. Jahrhunderts* (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2016); Julien Loiseau, *Les Mamelouks XIIIe–XVIe siècle. Une expérience du pouvoir dans l'Islam médiéval* (Paris: Seuil, 2014); Andrew Marsham, *Rituals of Islamic monarchy: Accession and succession in the first Muslim empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

[8]   E.g., a standard, overview work (the *New Cambridge History of Islam.* Volume 1, *The formation of the Islamic world, sixth to eleventh centuries*, edited by Chase Robinson. Volume 2, *The western Islamic world, eleventh to eighteenth centuries*, edited by Maribel Fierro. Volume 3, *The eastern Islamic world, eleventh to eighteenth centuries*, edited by David O. Morgan and Anthony Reid, all published in 2010) does not include a chapter on social relations, nor does that form a prominent part of the discussion throughout the volumes. This is in contrast to work on the late Roman empire, European medieval world and medieval China. See e.g. Arnaldo Marcone, 'Late Roman social relations', in Averil Cameron and Peter Garnsey (eds.), *The Cambridge ancient history,* Volume 13, *The later Roman empire, AD 337–425* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 338–370; Peter Heather, 'State, lordship and community in the West (c. AD 400–600)', in Averil Cameron, Bryan Ward-Perkins and Michael Whitby (eds.), *The Cambridge ancient history,* Volume 14, *Late antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 437–468; Ian Morris and Walter Scheidel (eds.), *The dynamics of ancient empires: State power from Assyria to Byzantium* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); and the classic Ramsay MacMullen, *Roman social relations, 50 BC to AD 284* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

[9]   *Doing* empire, as Tom Tölle calls it. 'Early modern empires: an introduction to the recent literature', in *H-Soz-Kult, Kommunikation und Fachinformation für die Geschichtswissenschaften*, www.hsozkult.de/literaturereview/id/forschungsberichte-2021, accessed 15/4/2021. Tölle reiterates the call for focus on practising imperial agents rather than their self-proclaimed goals as formulated by Anne Laura Stoler, Carole McGranahan, and Peter C. Perdue in the introduction to their edited volume *Imperial formations* (Santa Fe: University of Santa Fe Press, 2007).

Language and Rhetoric below), and what they show of the modes, expressions, and conditions that governed communication and interaction, we aim to understand the driving forces behind the early Islamic empire as extending beyond motives of economy and conquest.[10]

Before we proceed, then, it is appropriate to define both how we understand the early Islamic empire, and what kinds of approaches are taken here to study it. In this introduction, we lay out, through a series of sub-headings, some key approaches and themes that structure this volume. The final three of these sub-headings, 'Communities', 'Institutions', and 'Interpersonal Ties', also serve to divide the chapters of this book into broad thematic sections. It must be understood, however, that regardless of this division, all chapters deal with multiple modes of connecting and communicating in the early Islamic empire and its successors. Thus, most of the chapters in this book speak to types of connection beyond the broad section in which they have been placed.

Understanding the Empire: Late Antiquity and Empire Studies

The plurality of its inhabitants' ethnic, religious, and regional identities is generally considered to be the constitutive characteristic of any empire. And understanding how an empire managed its diverse populations is key to understanding its characteristic features. The Islamic empire was no exception, reaching from the Atlantic Ocean to the borders of China, albeit not all under the direct political control of the caliph during the period under study. The linguistically, religiously, ethnically, and culturally heterogeneous population may have been headed by Arabic-speaking political, legal, religious, and military elites, but it was ruled by a diverse administrative

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[10] See Peter Webb's criticism of Robert Hoyland's materialist view on the Arab conquests focusing mainly, in his eyes, on economic factors (Peter Webb, 'March of Islam' *Times Literary Supplement*, 13 March, 2015, review of Robert G. Hoyland*, In God's path: The Arab conquests and the creation of an Islamic empire (*Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017)). Traditional historical overviews mostly present the conquests as a series of political events. Cf. Hugh Kennedy, *The great Arab conquests: How the spread of Islam changed the world we live in* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2007); Fred Donner, *The early Islamic conquests* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982). Michael Mann's classical study on legitimacy (*The sources of social power*, volumes 1–4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986–2013)) identifies four sources of social power: ideology, economy, military and politics. Mann's model has been criticised for ignoring a politics of identity, including inherited identities such as kinship, but also imagined and created identities, as a source of legitimacy and the presence of power networks in society. Cf. Anatol Lieven's review of *The sources of social power,* volume 4 in *International journal of politics, culture and society* 29 (2016): 209–214; John A. Hall and Ralph Schroeder, *An anatomy of power: The social theory of Michael Mann* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

and governmental class of secretaries, scribes, and tax-collectors, both as a residue from the empires that preceded it and because diversity fitted Islamic imperial policy.[11] Especially Persian but also other local languages, literatures, and aesthetic expressions soon played at least as important a role as Arabic in cultural and literary production. The majority of the population throughout this period was not Muslim but Christian, Jewish, Zoroastrian, and to a smaller extent Hindu, Buddhist, and other.

A key contention of this volume is that the coherence and longevity of the Islamic empire is to be explained by the way in which it was successfully embedded within the social networks of the societies it brought together. That is, an enduring and geographically far-flung political unity encompassing a very diverse population was achieved by integrating numerous networks of interpersonal relations both in formal and informal institutions.[12] This new insight is built on two scholarly developments.

The first scholarly development we draw upon is the insight of empire studies that empires are not ruled by top–down force alone, but that legitimacy and stability are created in various ways, both top–down and bottom–up.[13] It has become clear that while institutions such as the caliphate, law, the military, religious leadership, and their various infrastructures are crucial elements of government, understanding the functioning of the early Islamic empire takes us far beyond the courts, academies, monasteries, and

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[11] Petra M. Sijpesteijn, 'A multilingual policy. The early Islamic empire and its many languages of governance', in Antoine Borrut, Manuela Ceballos, and Alison M. Vacca (eds.), *Navigating language in the early Islamic world: Multilingualism and language change in the first centuries of Islam*, 43–88 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2024).

[12] For formal structure, see e.g. the *walāʾ* system integrating clients, converts, and freedmen into a fictional tribal system (Patricia Crone, *Slaves on horses. The evolution of the Islamic polity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980)). For the porous tribal structure incorporating many more than those connected through bloodlines, see also **Leube**'s contribution to this volume. Ties of kinship in the early caliphate are examined in another publication of the project: Birte Kristiansen and Cecilia Palombo (eds.), 'Ties of kinship', special issue of *Medieval encounters. Ties of kingship and Islamicate societies,* special issue of *Medieval Encounters* 29 (2023). For informal structures, see e.g. the role that local elites played as power and cultural brokers in the early Islamic empire (Uriel Simonsohn and Luke Yarbrough, https://iias .huji.ac.il/cultural-brokerage-pre-modern-islam, accessed 1/3/2021). See also Cecilia Palombo's dissertation showing Christian religious leaders playing instrumental roles in the Muslim administration of Egypt centuries after the establishment of Muslim rule in the province, 'The Christian clergy's Islamic local government in late Marwanid and Abbasid Egypt', unpublished PhD dissertation (Princeton University, 2020).

[13] Krishan Kumar, *Empires. A historical and political sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); Gregory E. Areshian (ed.), *Empires and diversity: On the crossroads of archaeology, anthropology, and history* (Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Press, 2013); Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in world history: Power and the politics of difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Karen Barkey, *Empire of difference. The Ottomans in comparative perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

palaces to an arena in which all inhabitants of the empire participated in shaping it.[14] The practices of empire that we aim to access through our case studies include not only the actions and expressions of imperial agents, the secretaries, tax-collectors, agents of law and order, and the body of governing personnel, but extend into the fabric of society. Several of the papers in this volume deal with connections at the lowest, visible, social layers, showing, however (because actors from higher levels of society were involved or because interactions mirror those at different hierarchical strata), that these are not isolated phenomena but form a continuum with similar interactions throughout society. The individuals who figure in the credit-related documents studied by **Palombo** and **Hoyland**, for example, are largely unknown, but they belonged to elites as well as lower social layers, involving legal and economic institutions and private persons. The legal transactions they are involved in, moreover, intersect with the legal debates conducted by jurists at urban courts and academies.[15] The letters and petitions that **Sijpesteijn** and **Zinger** present were exchanged between 'middle- and lower-class' individuals otherwise not known from the historical record, but these texts show striking similarities with the correspondence of political rulers and their agents. **Bauer** and **Hayes** discuss the (emotional) content of administrative decrees, but private letters exchanged between anonymous individuals lower down the social hierarchy also show that rhetorical devices between sectors of society clearly overlapped.

The second development that has influenced our approach is the increasingly nuanced understanding of the interconnectedness of the larger world of which the Islamic empire was a part. This interconnectedness is both synchronous and diachronic. Recent decades have seen a salutary shift towards seeing the early Islamic Middle East not as a fundamentally new framework but as the heir and continuation of the late antique world in which it was embedded.[16] This development has a number of important consequences that should be highlighted. First, the legacy of the eastern Roman

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[14] Regina Grafe and Alejandra Irigoin, 'A stakeholder empire: The political economy of Spanish imperial rule in America', *Economic history review* 65 (2012): 609–651; Myles Lavan, Richard E. Payne, and John Weisweiler, *Cosmopolitanism and empire: Universal rulers, local elites, and cultural integration in the ancient Near East and Mediterranean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[15] See e.g. Petra Sijpesteijn, 'Good governance in theory and practice. Comparing Abū Yūsuf's *Kitāb al-Kharāj* with papyri', in *The historian of Islam at work. Essays in honor of Hugh N. Kennedy.* Maaike van Berkel and Letitia Osti (eds.) (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 183–200.

[16] See e.g. the works published as part of the series 'Studies in late antiquity and early Islam' (SLAEI), formerly published by Darwin Press, Princeton, and recently recontinued by Gerlach Press. See also the ERC-funded consolidator grant (Grant agreement ID 8666043) 'The Qur'an as a source for late antiquity' with PI Holger M. Zellentin (Tübingen University) running from 2020 to 2025.

and Sasanian empires that predated the rise of Islam long continued to be important. This legacy is evident throughout the volume. Many contributions to this volume indicate that it is not desirable to ask black and white questions such as 'Is x institution derived from Arabia or from pre-Islamic late antiquity?' for the pre-Islamic Arabian forms and institutions spread by the empire were themselves already formed in communication with the broader world of late antiquity. Thus, **Hoyland**'s contribution suggests that debt slavery was a product of a late antique Mediterranean world of which (Islamic) Arabia was a part; caliph ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (r. 717–720) and Muslim jurists developed ideas about debt slavery in accordance with the legal thinking of the time. This is not just the influence of the past, however, for the attitudes of Muslim jurists towards (temporary) debt slavery were influenced by evolving late antique Byzantine and Zoroastrian ideas as well as Arabian ones. Our sources show how Muslim ideas continued to develop, increasingly expressing disapproval of debt slavery, which is why ʿUmar's ideas, frozen in time in the letter studied by **Hoyland**, were 'forgotten' by later sources because they were outdated, reflecting an earlier, more pragmatic attitude towards temporary debt slavery. Meanwhile, **Berkes**' Arabic letter formulae that appear in Greek decrees show how Arab governors and their Greek-writing secretaries on the one hand continued older Greek chancery styles, while on the other hand they integrated innovative elements to signal the establishment of Arab rule. The subsequent appearance of these Arabic formulae in Coptic private correspondence indicates that this was not only a top–down process, but that Greek and Coptic letter-writers aimed also to signal close relations with the new rulers through epistolary formulae. **Schmidt**'s messengers in Islamic Egypt operated in languages and according to practices and routes inherited from the Byzantine empire, but new elements were introduced as well by the Arabs in need of controlling a diverse population with tools and institutions they inherited. **Vroom** observes that material culture in Sicily reflects political rule, with Byzantine amphorae slowly being replaced by Islamic ones as Islamic rule spread over the island. Local production and imported wares start to reflect Islamic models as economic zones follow military-political competition. **Sijpesteijn**'s and **Zinger**'s studies of the rhetoric of letters (Arabic ones from the 8th–9th centuries and Judaeo-Arabic ones from the 13th century respectively) show biblical and (ancient) Near Eastern themes interacting with specific medieval Egyptian historical and social contexts. **Huseini** shows how certain inhabitants of the Rob region of early Islamic Bactria turned to a neighbouring non-Muslim Turkic king to stop the disintegration of the household structures under the influence of Islam. When

their converted elder brother refused to continue the Bactrian tradition of polyandrous cohabitation and joint ownership of the household's properties that legally bound them and instead approached the Muslim authorities, another brother tried to secure his socio-economic basis by appealing to non-Muslim authorities. Such examples show us that change or resistance to change is not always produced by ideological principles, and that the desire to hold on to existing structures can also be motivated by socio-economic concerns. Some social forms gave way to the pressure of new exigencies, while other late antique, pre-Islamic forms lived on as part of Islam or the broader imperial society. Meanwhile, **Palombo**'s approach is to examine the papyri from Islamic Egypt as a group on its own not in relation to what came before and after. In so doing, she aims to counter scholarship that has artificially separated linguistic traditions in early Islamic Egypt, studying them in the framework of the empires where these languages prevailed rather than in the context in which they occurred. **Palombo** does not deny a persistence of existing practices but purposely cuts with the Roman past, warning against 'overextending the gradual formation of Islam out of late antiquity'. There is no single story of the imposition of Arab or Muslim institutions, then, but a constant evolution of forms from various sources within an interconnected empire.

Multiple Approaches and Sources of History Writing

It has long been recognised that literary sources cannot be read as providing a transparent window onto the events of early Islam, or indeed events in general.[17] As a response, we have seen the rise in the importance of three broad kinds of studies. First, there has been an increased focus on documentary sources,[18] material culture, and archaeology, though scholars are moving beyond naive attempts to use such sources to merely disprove or verify elements mentioned in the literary sources. Second, scholars have turned to literary traditions that are considered to be at least partially independent, if not isolated, from Islamic historiography, including Greek, Coptic, Syriac, and Pahlavi, to mention just a few, acknowledging that

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[17] Chase F. Robinson, *Islamic history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Fred Donner, *Narratives of Islamic origins* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1998); Stephen Humphries, *Islamic history. A framework for enquiry. Revised edition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

[18] Here we make a contrast between 'documentary' sources, recovered through archaeology, and 'literary' sources, by which we refer to any written text that has been transmitted and copied in manuscripts and printed editions, without any aesthetic judgement implied by using this term.

'Islamic' history cannot be written with recourse only to Arabic sources. Third, we have seen a proliferation of studies that argue for reading historical narratives not to reconstruct past events but to understand the meanings for their audiences and the intentions of their authors.

Each of these interpretive frameworks is present in our volume. At the heart of our research lies the conscious combination and comparison of documentary, material, and literary sources to write history. Very often, specialists of documents or material culture and specialists of literary texts circulate, publish, and think in different domains. This is slowly changing, but still there is insufficient dialogue between specialists of historiography and intellectual history, and specialists of material culture. This volume seeks to promote and intensify the dialogue between these fields. This is not always easy. Courtly culture and belles-lettres often seem a world away from the down-to-earth documents dug up from the trash heaps of the Fayyum or Bactria. There is, moreover, still a strong tendency amongst document specialists to consider material evidence as unmediated, direct, and therefore neutral and objective. Archaeology, material culture, and documents have, however, their own complex sets of interpretive challenges – not least because their explanation relies heavily on, again, historical sources and the researcher's subjective view.[19] But it is precisely such a breadth of perspective that a holistic vision of the early Islamic empire requires. Moreover, the literary and documentary evidence portray different but interconnected worlds, with individuals regularly travelling between them. This means that we must continue to build an effective set of methodologies both for working on literary and material sources and also for combining their insights. In this volume, **Leube** incorporates archaeological information about early Islamic cities in his understanding of historical accounts about Kufa to understand the spatial dynamic of tribal politics. **Vroom** uses archaeological, in particular ceramic, finds to contribute to the historiography of the Islamic conquest of Sicily. **Hoyland**, **Palombo,** and **Bauer** combine legal

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[19]   Methodological discussions of the potential and limits of material sources for the study of Islamic history are limited. In their introduction to *The Oxford handbook of Islamic archaeology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), the editors Bethany J. Walker, Timothy Insoll, and Corisande Fenwick 'problematize the relation between Islamic archaeology and history'. Insights from ancient history are useful. For the misguided view that papyri offer an unmediated perspective on history, see Roger S. Bagnall, *Reading papyri, writing ancient history. Second edition* (London: Routledge, 2019). Petra Sijpesteijn discusses similar issues in her chapter on Arabic papyri in Roger S. Bagnall (ed.), *The Oxford handbook of papyrology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 452–472. Similarly, Christopher Howgego shows how coins can be used responsibly as a source for history writing in *Ancient history from coins* (London: Routledge, 1995).

documents, recording forced labour or debt slavery and marriage, respectively, with legal and theological writings to understand how legal prescriptions and descriptions, and socio-economic considerations, intertwine. **Zinger** integrates moral arguments presented in private letters with ethical debates in other sources. **Vanthieghem** and **Hayes** study both decrees preserved on papyrus and such documents cited in chronicles and Hadith works to understand how their typologies follow each other.

The shift towards the narratological analysis of the meanings of historical stories has its own challenges and limitations. Narratological approaches have been salutary in encouraging a more holistic view of the function and nature of our literary sources and what they were trying to achieve. However, the idea that historical narratives are, at heart, about meaning-creation not fact-recording does not really give us a way out of the methodological conundrum. To comprehend the meaning of narratives, we must understand the societies in which such narratives circulated and the technologies and media through which they were transmitted. Attempting to understand societies where these narratives were produced and circulated leads to the same historiographical dilemmas because we will have to use the same historical sources in order to do so. What is the way out of this vicious circle? Historical inquiry is ultimately provisional and requires a process of modelling rather than settling upon definitive conclusions. To the extent that historians of the early Islamic empire now acknowledge this, we can say that we have moved beyond revisionism to a productive synthesis of different approaches towards the complex societies under the microscope, in which the narratological and historiographical analyses are aware of the material and documentary, and vice versa.

Language and Rhetoric

The analysis of rhetorical devices is a prominent element of many studies in this volume, allowing us to see how the ethical-political programmes of actors in the early Islamic empire were expressed both in documents and literary texts. The analysis of both the meaning and the social function of language is a key method for applying the acknowledgement that both facts and meanings can be studied in an integrated fashion. Thus, **Gordon** analyses the narratives describing the pledge of allegiance made to the son of Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn (r. 868–884) as an example of literary meaning-making aimed at proposing certain ethical truths that the audience of these texts was to draw from history; but also as a reservoir of information about how the Ṭūlūnid political

project was presented to contemporaries. In **Gordon**'s view, historical narratives operate like mirrors-for-princes with an ethical-normative dimension. While they narrate the creation and maintenance of ties at historical moments, they also reinterpret and reproduce how these ties are to be understood as they are received by future generations. **Lucas** looks at the complex history of a state letter that caliph Hishām (r. 724–743) is purported to have sent to his disobedient governor of Iraq, Khālid ibn al-Qaṣrī (in office 724–738), studying the role this letter played in narratives of the dismissal of this governor. She links her historiographical investigation with the way in which such letters embodied the ties that linked a caliph to his governor, arguing that the preservation and literary elaboration of such letters derives from their meaning as exemplary political gestures.

In **Hoyland**'s discussion of documentary evidence and literary sources, the temporary enslavement of free people for debt, which had initially been considered as a practical solution, was met with mounting disapproval that influenced later jurists' writings. Such literary discourses are resources for the conceptualisation and performance of social ties in a literary context, informing the ethics of behaviour in society. Understanding their literary nature does not render such texts useless as sources for the study of how these relations operated in society but rather allows us to study them as reflections on social processes.

Several of the studies in this volume focus on language as constitutive of and performative of social relations.[20] Language plays a key role in creating relations of social dependency. Thus, the language in documents not only describes relationships but can also be actively performative of social relations, creating and reinforcing ties by appealing to certain principles. Through a focus on language and the rhetoric of dependency, we can talk about meanings and we can model social structures; and, more importantly, we can talk about how these aspects were intertwined. Language is socially embedded: both documents and literary texts had an audience and a function which, when analysed, can tell us much about both producer and recipient.

The multiplicity of languages that appears in the contributions reflects the linguistic and cultural diversity of the populations participating in the Islamic empire. Rhetorical methods were shared across linguistic

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[20] This is a continuation of both the profound consequences of the linguistic turn for the humanities and of a much older tradition: the philological humanistic tradition. Cf. Sheldon Pollock, Benjamin A. Elman and Ku-ming Kevin Chang (eds.), *World Philology* (New Haven: Harvard University Press, 2015).

domains, as the Greek and Arabic decrees studied by **Bauer** and the Arabic, Coptic, and Judaeo-Arabic letters presented in **Sijpesteijn**'s and **Zinger**'s papers make clear. **Palombo** studies Coptic and Arabic loan agreements as well as other genres of texts to study credit mechanisms as a social institution in the Islamicate medieval world. **Bauer** demonstrates how a history-of-emotions approach more often associated with literary production can be applied to documentary material, including Arabic letters from governors, showing how emotion relates to Islamic rule in Egypt. Emotional language establishes hierarchical relations between ruler and ruled and husband and wife. **Berkes** looks at Greek and Coptic papyrus letters and processes of Arabicisation to understand how using religiously neutral language in administrative letters created a tie between Muslim rulers and Christian Egyptians following the establishment of Arab rule in Egypt. The presence of the Arabic expressions in translation is also reflective of historical processes of Arabicisation and the expansion of Muslim administrative rule. These studies reflect a society in which linguistic elements and conceptual units circulated across language boundaries, where multilingual environments and the sharing of cultural models prevailed.

A linguistic lens may be applied to see how contemporary historical sources describe social-dependency relations. For example, **Pierre** provides an analysis of the development of definitions of community boundaries against a background of inter-religious contact. By examining Muslim and Christian prescriptions (in multiple languages) for communal interaction, he deals with the rhetoric of preserving religious group identity and purity in the context of the complex social interactions within which these discourses arose. **Palombo** examines discourses on debt in Fusṭāṭ and other urban centres through the repeated use of technical words and formulae across literary and documentary texts.

Quite apart from imperial structures, the populations of the empire were diverse and characterised by numerous local institutions and forms of behaviour, and so an understanding of the broader links that tied the empire together also requires research using expertise in different local languages and forms: Greek, Coptic, Bactrian, Syriac, as well as the imperial idiom of Arabic. Several contributions (**Berkes**, **Hoyland**, **Huseini**, **Palombo**, **Pierre**, **Schmidt**, **Sijpesteijn**, **Zinger**) include material in different languages, but the volume as a whole is an attempt to bring the different linguistic domains of the early Islamic empire into discussion as well.

The Ties that Bind

This book applies a social-historical lens to consider not only top–down political decisions and policy changes as the drivers of historical change but also phenomena that emerge from a broader social base. The key framework we focus on is social interdependency as expressed through both personal and group relations. It is our contention that ties of patronage, family, friendship, dynasty, and religion and the overlapping and intersecting networks they formed crucially shaped the early Islamic empire.[21]

What ties exactly are we talking about? The definitions of a social 'tie', 'relationship' or 'connection' are manifold.[22] Here, in order to open a broad conversation among contributors, and with the field in general, we work with a broad definition of social ties as comprising processes, mechanisms, or categories that pattern interactions among entities (primarily, here, individuals or groups) in a way that generates lasting, visible, and mutual expectations for behaviour. These connections may be embedded in various forms of discourse or institution, including legal or formal, informal, vernacular, or implicit. They are often normative, that is, generating binding expectations for behaviour that may result in the loss of social capital if violated. Connections in the Islamic empire could be formed horizontally between more or less equal individuals or peer groups but extended also vertically along relations of patronage such as teacher–student, parent–child, and master–follower. They were created, enforced and invoked from the top–down and from the bottom–up. Connections could follow from physical contact, realised through human exchange, via conquest (**Vroom**) and messengers (**Schmidt**), or via material objects, such as letters (**Bauer**, **Berkes**, **Hayes**, **Sijpesteijn**, **Vanthieghem**, **Zinger**), legal contracts (**Bauer**, **Gordon**, **Hoyland**, **Huseini**, **Palombo**), or the circulation of material objects within the economic sphere such as amphorae (**Vroom**). Other relations resulted, however, from perceived solidarities, cultural appeals, ideologies, and communal identities based on imagined associations and abstract notions of inter-relatedness. Material aspects can still play a role in such relations. The Kinda from Kufa presented by **Leube** incorporated

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21 See Notes 9 and 11 above for the argument around seeing beyond conquest and commerce as the driving forces of empire.

22 Note that we use the terms 'ties', 'connections', 'relations', and 'relationships' promiscuously in this introduction. Each might be developed theoretically at some length, but that is not our aim here. For further discussion about the debate in anthropology and sociology over what constitutes a social tie, see e.g. Marilyn Strathern, 'Relations', *Cambridge encyclopedia of anthropology*, www.anthroencyclopedia.com/entry/relations#h2ref-3, accessed 1.11.2022.

'strangers' in an imagined tribal unit, allowing them to benefit socially and economically. Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn used economic means to enforce loyalty to his ruling house in Egypt, as **Gordon** argues. **Palombo** sees communities of agents involved in a multiplicity of interpersonal credit exchanges.

Among all this diversity of subject material there are a number of elements that we can identify as common concerns when we analyse these different types of relationships: the responsibilities, rights, and expectations that bind the parties into a relationship. These aspects can be made explicit but often remain implicit in their language and effects. Some ties are conceived of as more permanent than others, while in some there may be ambiguity, as in **Gordon's** oath of allegiance, whose binding effects appear fragile because of the political context. Once established, ties can be broken, but often at the cost of social capital, as **Gordon** suggests. **Hurvitz** shows how the loyalty of the Sunni populace of Baghdad for the Abbasid caliph remained ideologically important but was placed under pressure when the caliph's ability to protect and lead was under question. Other contributions examine how connections are ignored, dissolved, or redirected. **Leube**, for example, shows tribal loyalties being replaced by political ones. While ties can be broken or re-created, we must not therefore dismiss them as meaningless or 'merely' rhetorical. The rhetoric of interconnectivity is not empty but part of the very stuff that makes up social realities.

In conceiving this volume we have primarily focused on social relations that are actively acquired and intentionally cultivated and maintained, as opposed, for example, to kinship ties or those formed by family enterprises and professions passed from parent to child.[23] In other words, we study long-term social interactions that are to some extent formalised or conventionalised in language. However, the boundaries between types of ties can be blurry. Intentionally acquired contracts or ties of loyalty or reciprocity constantly interact and overlap with inherited ties, overarching cultural conventions or a broader ethos of group solidarity.[24] Social ties are founded

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[23] Mottahedeh makes this distinction between inherited and acquired ties in *Loyalty and leadership in an early Islamic society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980). The 'Embedding Conquest' research group responsible for this volume also organised a conference in December 2021 on the role of kinship in the early Islamic empire. In this volume, kinship ties play a role in the contributions of **Zinger, Sijpesteijn** and **Leube**. See also the research group dedicated to Kinship and Community in the Early and Medieval Islamic Mediterranean at the Haifa Center for Mediterranean History, https://hcmh.haifa.ac.il/index.php/academic-activity/research-groups/16-academic-activity/118-kinship-and-community-in-the-early-and-medieval-islamic-mediterranean. The proceedings of which were published as: Birte Kristiansen and Cecilia Palombo (eds.), 'Ties of kinship', special issue of *Medieval Encounters. Ties of kinship in Islamicate societies*. Special issue of *Medieval Encounters* 29 (2023).

[24] Marina Rustow, 'Patronage in the context of solidarity and reciprocity: two paradigms of social cohesion in the premodern Mediterranean', in Esperzanza Alfonso and Jonathan Decter (eds.),

on different bases and fall into different categories, but one type of connection often overlaps with another and the operations of different social spheres can reinforce each other.

The case studies presented in this volume make it clear that the Islamic empire was characterised not by one particular kind of connection. A multitude of interacting and overlapping ties and networks were at work. These ties are visible in every corner of the empire, though often in different forms, and they were binding and impactful, albeit liable to be broken and renegotiated. Relationships are based on expectations. They come with rights and responsibilities but they need to be maintained and managed. The constituent members of a relationship need constant reminding of what this means for their behaviour, their dealings with other members of the relationship and with those outside it. Relations are not static but are constantly subject to reformulation, redirection, extension, and contraction. Relations can be broken to establish new ones, even if this is sometimes traumatic and costly.

The relations described in this volume are almost always hierarchically constructed. Community leaders, governmental officials, or family members hardly ever form totally equal relationships amongst the stakeholders of the empire. Some of these relationships – such as those between the caliph and his governors, a master and his slave, a husband and his wife, a father and his son – were more asymmetrical than others. But even a client can hold his patron to account for certain forms of protection and help. A petitioner clothes his request in rhetorical forms conveying supplication but also entitlement. A debtor and creditor are interdependent in their financial relationship. And even a rebel can ask for justice at his trial. In other words, because these individuals interacted with each other not randomly but within the confines of established relations, however many and diverse such relationships they may have maintained simultaneously, they were never entirely powerless, nor were they reduced to guessing the rules of the game of social interdependency.

Patronage, production, and transmission of texts in medieval and early-modern Jewish cultures, (Medieval church studies 34) (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 13–44. It is worth noting that our intention in this volume is to address both relationships between individuals and between or within groups, considering these levels as part of the same intertwined whole and thus subject to the same mechanisms that build the connections and ties that form the social fabric holding society together. This approach contrasts somewhat with works that focus primarily on communities as a distinctive societal factor, such as Sabrina Feickert, Anna Haut, and Kathrin Sharaf (eds.), *Faces of communities. Social ties between trust, loyalty and conflict* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2014) and Rutger Kramer and Walter Pohl (eds.), *Communities and empires in the post-Roman and Islamic world. c. 400–1000 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

It is the expectations and rules that we aim to discover by examining the patterns of interactions between individuals and groups. Taken together, these expectations form the key to understanding the workings of the early Islamic empire.

Interpersonal Ties

Ties between individuals are the foundation of the social-dependency structures discussed in this volume, but this section collects chapters in which these interpersonal ties are particularly visible. These ties can take various forms. As mentioned above, this volume focuses more particularly on ties that could be engineered or acquired through intentional activity, rather than ties that an individual was born into. However, it must be acknowledged that particular, localised, interpersonal ties were always and everywhere constructed with reference to larger, *longue-durée*, societal structures which anchored these interpersonal ties. Thus, for example, reciprocity and patronage are realised with reference to kinship via both parental and marriage relations (**Bauer**, **Gordon**, **Zinger**); while contractual obligations (**Gordon**, **Hoyland**, **Palombo**) and economic dependency (**Hoyland**, **Palombo**, **Zinger**) fit into larger legal and political frameworks; and petitioning relationships (**Sijpesteijn**, **Zinger**) are forged within deeply ingrained attitudes to moral duty, obligation, and reciprocity. While we are grouping the relationships discussed in this section under the rubric of the 'interpersonal', then, much of their meaning and force arises from their embeddedness in larger communal or institutional patterns that generated particular expectations in individual cases.

Interpersonal ties could intersect with ties to one's community in two major ways. First, because ties to individuals might equate to ties to one's community; for example, in **Zinger**'s case, the responsibility of a son towards his father involved the values of the Jewish community in thirteenth-century Cairo as a whole. The father sent letters to his relations in an attempt to reach his runaway son. In these he referred to the son's abuse of the parent–child relationship and his ruining their business relations by making bad commercial decisions during his flight. The father also saw his son's defiance of the standards of proper comportment for a young Jewish man in Cairo as a failure to perform his duties towards the family and the local community. Thus, by defying the expectations of the one-to-one relationship with his father, the son by extension abused his membership in the community of Jewish merchants. As **Gordon** shows, when Egyptian elites

withdrew their support for the ruler's son, Abū al-Jaysh Khumārawayh, despite the oaths of allegiance they had publicly and privately sworn, they cut the ties that bound them personally to an unfit ruler. In the historian al-Balawī's (fl. later tenth century) contemplation of the ethical and emotional aspects of loyalty and personal interconnections underwriting a ruler's position, this story goes beyond that of the relation between specific members of Egypt's elite and the province's ruler, as the actors become types within the moral evaluation of ruler–supporter interactions in an Islamic imperial context.

Interpersonal ties thus intersect with community relations as individuals share the ideological and cultural commitments of a community, expressed in the language of shared communal values. When petitioners approach a potential patron, they can draw upon cultural expectations to forge a personal relationship, as **Sijpesteijn** shows in her analysis of claims of aloneness and helplessness used by letter writers in eighth- and ninth-century Egypt.

Personal relations are frequently structured by formal and informal institutions. This is well demonstrated by the contributions of **Hoyland** and **Palombo**. **Hoyland** discusses the changing attitudes towards (temporary) debt slavery amongst Muslim and other contemporary jurists. Debt slavery resulted from an obligation which itself followed from financial interaction between two parties. Unable to pay off a debt to their creditor, individuals could enter a (temporary) relation of legal slavery to repay their debts through physical labour. **Palombo** presents lending practices involving members of monastic communities as recorded in legal, papyrus documents from Egypt. Legal deeds, with the whole apparatus of scribes, secretaries, and ultimately the legal courts, in which many of the debt agreements were recorded, supported and formalised the relationship of personal dependency between debtor and creditor, between slave and master. Although the two parties to a legal deed could establish or abolish, with mutual agreement, their legal obligations without interference from legal personnel, their ties by definition extended beyond the personal to involve the institutions of the law. **Palombo** understands credit transactions as an institution in the sense of a set of social regularities, composed of numerous regular interpersonal interactions which, taken together, generated expectations for behaviour. Interpersonal debtor–creditor relations included individuals who participated in formal institutions such as Christian monasteries. A final way in which these relations flow into the institutional is the interaction with taxation.

Institutions

Institutions can be defined in various ways, including in a more formal sense and a less formal sense.[25] This volume documents the existence of different levels of institutions that structured the lives of the inhabitants of the early Islamic empire. The contributions grouped in the 'Institutions' section of the book focus more particularly on the ties forged in the context of governmental and administrative structures. For political rulers, the question of how to ensure loyalty or at least adherence from their subjects was a recurring issue. The contributions in this section show the concrete instruments and political mechanisms that the ruler had at his disposal to tie his subjects (elites as well as the lower layers of society, and groups as well as individuals) to his person and to the institutions of rule.

One of the main points that the contributions highlight is that relations between the ruler and the ruled needed constant attention and active maintenance. **Gordon** and **Lucas** both show that political loyalty cannot be assumed but has to be expressly established. Caliph Hishām's letter to his governor of Iraq, Khālid al-Qaṣrī, discussed by **Lucas**, displays how a ruler interacted with one of his intermediaries, and what arguments he used to evoke the obligations existing between them. Letters were, in fact, a key tool to connect a ruler to his representatives, working beyond the communication of information contained in them to establish ties of intimacy, trust, and loyalty. This function is also discussed in the papers of **Berkes** in the 'Communities' section and by **Bauer**. The decrees, discussed by **Bauer**, sent by the Egyptian governor Qurra ibn Sharīk (in office 709–715) to the local district head, appeal to rules of good governance transcending the specific dynamics of the correspondence between these two men. Such conventions engage with an empire-wide framework involving a set of expectations that governed the caliphal, political project as a whole. **Vanthieghem** discusses a special form of administrative letter: the Abbasid decree. His contribution fills a lacuna in our understanding of the development of the form of Arabic decrees. While the formulary of decrees has been studied for the Fatimid

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[25] There is no universally accepted definition of 'institution', and it tends to be used on a spectrum of lesser to greater informality. See Eduardo Manzano, 'Why did Islamic medieval institutions become so different from Western medieval institutions?', *Medieval worlds* 1 (2015): 122. Scott notes that 'Institutions are social structures that have attained a high degree of resilience [and are] composed of cultural, cognitive, normative, and regulative elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life'. William Richard Scott, *Institutions and organizations: ideas and interests*, 3rd edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008), 48.

and Mamluk periods, no systematic work has been done to identify the formulary of the decree genre for earlier periods. **Vanthieghem** combines information from papyri and literary sources to reconstruct a typology that existed across the Islamic empire, illuminating the presence of the Abbasid state in all provinces of the empire. **Hayes** similarly analyses a set of letters written by a Shiʿi imam in response to questions or to disseminate policy directives, comparing them with extant letters on papyrus. This establishes, importantly, that the imams and their agents were running administrative and governmental institutions with practices comparable to those found in the contemporaneous Abbasid state. This does not mean that the imams' letters did not contain their own, unique elements tying the recipients to the community leader and to each other.

The role of messengers in delivering the letter to the right person was distinctive in the Shiʿi community examined by **Hayes**, but messengers played a crucial role in conveying information and goods reliably throughout the empire. **Schmidt** presents an overview, on the basis of Arabic, Greek, and Coptic papyrological material, of how an elaborate and reliable system of messengers was maintained. Sometimes armed, conveying oral and written messages as well as goods, collecting services and materials for the sender, the messengers in Egypt operated in the private and public spheres. **Schmidt**'s discussion of the armed messengers who transported tax revenues and other items suggests the ways in which the business of managing a populace was dependent upon the existing institutions which bound individuals together horizontally, as well as providing tools for the conquerors to exert their influence over the institutions they inherited and adapted. A third concrete instrument at the rulers' disposal was the *wafd,* the delegation of members of the provincial ruling elites to the caliph's court. **Huseini** looks at how a political ruler, in this case Kera-tonga, the Turkic king of Kadagstan in eastern Bactria, offered protection to inhabitants otherwise subject to the Abbasids. The protection document **Huseini** studies not only shows that the Turkic king's legal and moral authority continued to apply to his formal citizens, but that he maintained connections further afield with petitioners from within 'conquered' Abbasid domains appealing to him.

Legal and economic structures played a role in tying people into the Muslim state. Rulers applied economic means in an attempt to maintain connections to and ensure loyalty from their subjects. Rulers deliberately distributed booty, lands, and jobs to secure the ruling elite's loyalty. **Gordon** shows that the handing out of financial favours was a strategy for Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn to attempt to secure the continued loyalty of Egyptian

elites to the dynasty he founded. Economic assets could be employed to obtain positions of leadership, as the Kinda tribesmen **Leube** presents did very effectively. Conversely, the Ismaili followers of the Fatimid caliph were urged to make financial donations to obtain special religious knowledge and thereby to demonstrate a higher degree of loyalty, as **Walker** shows in his discussion of one of the ways in which the Fatimid caliphate established its rule in the beginning phase of its existence as an empire. **Huseini** explores how local Bactrian families simultaneously displayed a political alliance to the Muslims through payments of taxes to the new rulers and a moral alliance to the Turkic ruler by turning to him for support in legal disputes.

In societies in which religion reinforces political legitimacy, political ties will often have a religious component, though its articulation is not always expected, as **Walker** shows in his study of how the Fatimids balanced the demands of their Ismaili convictions against a commitment to ruling a religiously diverse population. The Fatimids, whose religious policy when they first began to rule in Ifrīqiyya was relatively less tolerant and accommodating, encountered the fierce opposition of an entrenched Maliki establishment. The Fatimids were thus forced to adopt a more practical approach to ruling a majority non-Ismaili population, while even so focusing a separate policy aimed at recruiting initiates to its Ismaili *daʿwa* and maintaining their religiously based devotion and loyalty.

Many of the techniques discussed above that rulers used to establish loyalty and support amongst their constituencies operated concurrently. Political, economic, and religious factors worked together, as the contributions of **Leube, Walker,** and **Gordon** highlight. The public and the private, moreover, often overlapped in establishing or appealing to dependency networks involving the authorities. Public figures were deeply invested in networks of familial and personal obligation, warning us against underestimating (and misjudging according to 'modern' standards) the degree to which public and private spheres in government overlapped. **Schmidt**'s messenger networks served private as well as official needs. However, the mixing of private and public interests was sometimes considered inappropriate, as the measures to limit opportunistic behaviour by **Schmidt**'s messengers show. Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn attempted to transfer public and private pledges of allegiance made during his lifetime to his descendants in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to secure the Ṭūlūnid house, **Gordon** argues.

Communities

The chapters grouped together in the 'Communities' section of this book all illuminate important dimensions of the ways in which life for the inhabitants of the early Islamic empire was shaped by their membership in and commitment to one community or more of shared belonging. Community can be thought of at different levels: for example, at the level of a shared locale; shared structures; or shared values.[26] Each of these can generate group identity that operates as a strong connector, encouraging individuals to reach for shared goals, protect common interests, and conform to desired policies. But such ties can also be used to control group members, dictate their behaviour, and compel allegiances. How community boundaries are defined and by whom, on what basis group membership is granted, and how boundaries are policed are all crucial questions for community members, as the cases presented in this section make clear.

However strictly group boundaries are drawn in our sources, they were invariably porous in practice. Group composition was dynamic, as the example that **Leube** presents of the Kinda in Kufa, who absorbed non-tribal members, shows. Paradoxically, boundaries were seemingly drawn more sharply the more frequently they were crossed. Christian–Muslim socialisation was exactly what gave rise to rules limiting such interaction in the first and second Islamic centuries in Iraq, as **Pierre**'s chapter suggests. Individual group members were, moreover, sometimes motivated to make connections outside their community, creating alliances in addition to or in competition with those of the community. Kinda tribal leaders made political coalitions with the caliph's agents against fellow tribesmen, as **Leube** indicates. The Coptic-writing Egyptians who incorporated Arabic greeting formulae in their letters, discussed by **Berkes**, explicitly wanted to display their loyalty to the new Muslim-Arab rulers. The credit agreements that **Palombo** presents show interpersonal relations, sometimes forming groups of individuals bound through financial interactions, cutting across other religion- or region-based groups.

It was when under stress that the ties binding communities were pulled tighter and the boundaries drawn more firmly, resulting in the construction or radicalisation of community oppositions, as several papers in this section show. **Pierre** discusses how Christian authorities introduced rules on eating the slaughtered animals and marrying the wives of other communities, as anxiety over intermixing in the social sphere rose. Muslim

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[26] See Nigel Rapport and Joanna Overing, 'Community', in *Social and cultural anthropology: the key concepts,* ed. Nigel Rapport (London: Routledge, 2000), 60–61.

jurists responded with similar interdictions aimed at excluding members of existing religions. **Hurvitz** shows that Hanbali rioters behaved with increasing hostility in the streets of Abbasid Baghdad as they felt the caliphs' ability to ensure the security of the realm on general, and Sunni religious principles in particular, weaken. It was the assurance of Sunni group protection that bound Sunni/Hanbali subjects to the Abbasid caliphs, and the loss of confidence in that assurance led them to draw a sharper line around themselves and their beliefs. As **Vroom**'s potters and traders in Sicily show us, while Mediterranean trade activity continued to take place across political borders after the Muslim conquest of the island, political subordination and loyalties left obvious traces in the material record.

So what were the ties that connected communities? The presentations in this section discuss tribal (**Leube**), economic-political (**Vroom**), and religious (**Hurvitz**, **Pierre**, **Berkes**) factors. Shared identities evolved to support group interests, sometimes with deliberate pressure from above based upon ideological and imagined solidarities. In several cases economic motives played a role in tying members into the community. **Leube** shows how Kinda tribal leaders made use of economic assets to establish their position. **Vroom**'s amphorae circulated in trade networks but nevertheless aligned according to the political-military competition between the Muslims and Byzantines. Christian Egyptian officials in Muslim service were under economic pressure as the administration slowly changed its languages and personnel. It is this dynamic in the administration that **Berkes** uses as a background to the spread of Arabic greeting formulae through Greek and Coptic letters. But politics also intersected in these group identities, as was already mentioned in relation to the contributions of **Leube** and **Hurvitz**. This could lead to unexpected alliances, as is explored by **Hurvitz**, whose contribution highlights how the ideals of Hanbali activists in Baghdad were sometimes at odds with the ruler whose legitimacy underpinned their world view. Group solidarity based on shared cultural, religious, ideological, and political values and goals, creating ties that extended beyond personal connections, obviously played an important role in binding community members, but so did reciprocal relations, such as patronage and other interpersonal relationships, as group members were connected to individuals within and outside the group in (co)dependency.

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Taken together, the papers in this volume show the variety of ties of social dependency that worked in and sustained the early Muslim empire. These

ties did not just arise organically to be exploited but had to be initiated, defined and subsequently cultivated and reinforced through discourses of dependency, responsibility, and identity. The examples cited in this volume's chapters continually demonstrate the performative nature of the ties that bind society, which had to be created or maintained through repeated assertion.

The language of our sources not only describes these relationships but also shapes and colours them, whether it is in the direct form of a speech or letter, or through a literary discourse surrounding the relationships described. The relations surveyed in this volume were formed along familial, economic, political, religious, and material lines and often involved several elements. Similarly, in order to mobilise an existing relationship for specific goals, appeals were made to a multitude of arguments. Moreover, ties between groups and individuals were not static but constantly evolved under the influence of historical and personal circumstances and as the interests of the constituent parties changed. Pragmatic, reciprocal relations and those based on appeals to group solidarity were intertwined, as individuals made references to ideological and cultural norms that were prevalent in the definition of social groups but also helped to structure interpersonal relations in the private and institutional spheres. Most importantly, the ties described held their constituent parties in a relation of codependency in which each held expectations of rights and responsibilities towards the other. Although many relations were asymmetrical, power was never totally unchecked.

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