

Walvin contends that British authors have tended to downplay the substantial role that Britain played in the making of the transatlantic slave trade and the dispersal of Africans worldwide. He therefore attempts to cast more light on British involvement by emphasizing the economic factors drove it. The development of plantation economies in North America and the West Indies, built around the cultivation of cash crops like sugar, rice, and tobacco, prompted the need for cheap African labor. The British shipping industry responded to that need by dominating the Atlantic slave trade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. That trade stimulated the development not only of the shipping industry, but also of other areas of the British economy such as finance, insurance and manufacturing. Sugar and tobacco, harvested with slave labor, fed a large and hungry market in Britain and helped to define and develop popular tastes.

The first chapter of the book discusses early European involvement in the transatlantic slave trade before the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For Walvin, the Portuguese, Dutch, and Spanish used the example of Moorish Spain which initially used slaves to work on sugar plantations in the Mediterranean, and the British simply followed the precedent set by the Portuguese and the Dutch.

The middle chapters of the book discuss the development of the plantation system in the West Indies and North America, including an interesting chapter on slave culture. The last chapters discuss abolitionism and blacks in Great Britain following emancipation.

According to Walvin, the importance of British involvement in the transatlantic slave trade was that it "brought the Atlantic system to a degree of economic perfection which profited themselves and their colonies in proportion to the plundering of Africa and the violation of their African captives" (31). This insistence on an economic connection is the book's main strength.

Like similar works, for example, Hugh Thomas's *The Slave Trade: The Story the Atlantic Slave Trade* (New York, 1997), *Black Atlantic* does not offer new interpretations but instead summarizes the main debates in the study of the transatlantic slave trade. Its strength lies in its popularization of knowledge, which makes the work more accessible to audiences that are less familiar with the literature.

Although Walvin makes the case that the British engaged in the transatlantic slave trade for economic purposes, he does not explicate thoroughly enough that "black," the conception associated with people from Africa, was a result of the transatlantic slave trade. Consequently, he gives the impression to a non-scholarly audience that Africans or "blacks" are, essentially and historically, victims of the slave trade and oppression in general.

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Pamuk, Sevket

A Monetary History of the Ottoman Empire

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

276 pp., \$69.95, ISBN 0-521-44197-8

Publication Date: December 1999

Sevket Pamuk, a professor of economics and economic history at Bogaziçi University in Istanbul, has written an excellent survey of the coinage and economic history of the Ottoman Empire from the reign of Mehmed II (1444 and 1451-81) to 1924. It should have wide appeal to numismatists, historians, and students of economics.

Pamuk supplies his readers with an extensive bibliography (twenty-six single-spaced pages) and good illustrations of the most important Ottoman coin types. However, I would have appreciated a glossary. For example, in one sentence Pamuk states: "One budju equaled three silver batlakas or twenty-four billion *mazunas*" (183). He gives descriptions of *budjus* and *batlakas*, but there is nothing more about *mazunas*.

After a brief discussion of early Turkish coinage, Pamuk describes the foundation of Ottoman coinage by Mehmed II based on the silver *akçe* and the gold *sultani*; then he persuasively defends Mehmed II's several debasements of the *akçe*, which Pamuk claims were carefully planned so that Mehmed's well-filled treasury would help him to achieve his conquests and his consolidation of the Ottoman sultanate. Pamuk points out that the *akçe* and the *sultani* remained stable for a century after Mehmed's death in 1481, as did the copper coins called *mangirs*; but *mangirs* could not be used in payments to the state.

Later Pamuk argues against the idea that the price revolution of the sixteenth century in the Near East led to the crisis in Ottoman finances that commenced about 1585. Instead, Pamuk contends that the debasements of the *akçe* during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were "short-term measures undertaken by weak governments struggling against the fiscal burden of prolonged military campaigns and a variety of political problems" (142). This seventeenth-century monetary crisis, however, led to the abandonment of the *akçe* and the issuance in 1690 of a new large silver coin, the *kurus*, based on the Polish *złota*.

From 1720 to 1789 the Ottoman coinage remained stable, but in 1785 the Ottomans reduced the silver content of the *kurus* by one-third. The Ottoman wars with Russia and Austria evidently led to this debasement. By 1844, after "the great debasement," the silver *kurus* contained only 1 percent of silver as the Ottoman Empire began to disintegrate.

In 1844 the Turkish sultanate finally gave up debasements and went on what Pamuk calls "the limping gold standard." The gold *lira* and the silver *kurus* became legal tender, with one hundred *kurus* equaling one gold *lira*. Supported by European banks and governments, the Ottoman coinage then

remained relatively stable until the end of the Ottoman Empire in 1924.

This is an important book, one that is highly recommended to all who are interested in the monetary history of the Ottoman Empire.

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Hovannisian, Richard G.,
and Georges Sabagh, eds.

Religion and Culture in Medieval Islam

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

120 pp., \$49.95, ISBN 0-521-62350-2

Publication Date January 2000

George L. Makdisi, a noted professor of Arabic and Islamic civilization at the University of Pennsylvania, gathered a group of colleagues to produce this volume on aspects of Islamic culture, society, and literature. It will supplement the standard works on medieval Islam by G. E. von Grunebaum and Carl Brockleman.

In the first essay Makdisi discusses the origins of Western scholasticism. It originated with traditional Islamic jurists who created a legal science, a method of research and writing that led to a license to teach in an autonomous scholarly system, which we now call "academic freedom." This was the system introduced into Bologna for the teaching of Roman law, but it was changed in Paris when scholasticism was used to teach religious philosophy.

The second essay, by W. Montgomery Watt, compares the problems for Jews who felt the impact of both Hellenism and Romanism with those of today's Muslims in contact with Western civilization. Some Jews accepted Hellenism, but many tried to remain exclusive and associate only with their religious kinsmen. Today some Muslim traditionalists try to maintain the exclusivism of Islam and would like to reject the modern world, while a few "liberals" want to retain their faith and accept Western concepts.

The selection by Merlin Swartz deals with the little-studied importance of the homily or sermon in medieval Islam. He focuses on Ibn al-Jawzi, who deserves to be called a humanist because of his multidisciplinary approach to homilies. His students were versed in the religious disciplines as well as grammar, rhetoric, literature, poetry, history, and they drew metaphors from medicine.

Irfan Shadid recounts why literature was paramount in relation to philosophy, theology, science, arts and architecture. He cites the dogmas associated with the Qur'an, namely, that it is in Arabic and is miraculous. The Qur'an is the actual word of God, not human prophets, and was a literary masterpiece. Its perfection excluded all forms of the arts except calligraphy and poetry.

The article by George Saliba examines the Aristotelian theory of change as an explanation of natural phenomena and astrology and