

Housing the Stranger in the Mediterranean World: Lodging, Trade and Travel in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. By Olivia Remie Constable. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003; pp. xii + 427; ill., maps, plans. £45).

Following upon her pioneering study of the Iberian Peninsula's long-distance trade,¹ Olivia Remie Constable, in *Housing the Stranger in the Mediterranean World*, turns her attention to the wider rhythms of trade and travel in the Mediterranean from late antiquity to the later Middle Ages, focusing on the evolving institutional families of the commercial spaces called *pandocheion*, *funduq*, and *fundicum* (or *fondaco*).² She masterfully draws together strands of linguistic, cultural, economic, and religious history, to weave a picture of Mediterranean trade and cross-cultural interaction Braudelian in its scope; yet it is also full of important details and close, context-specific studies useful to scholars seeking both a convenient *entrée* to sources that are often scattered and hard to access, and an intelligent analysis of those sources. Constable not only provides an insightful overview of trade in the Mediterranean during a time of vast change and evolution, but also asks and answers fundamental questions about changing concepts of culture and identity, and self and other, from Muslim, Jewish and Christian perspectives over a period of more than a thousand years.

It is a tall order, but Constable is up to the task, and she employs a dizzying array of sources to help her complete it. It is this impressive range and creative use of evidence that first strikes the reader; Constable makes use of pilgrim accounts, anecdotes, hagiographies, law codes, and artistic works, as well as a variety of other textual, archaeological, architectural, and epigraphical sources, to supplement the more usual account registers and trade agreements utilized by the economic historian. Moreover, Constable is as wide-ranging in the geographical range of her material, tapping Arabic, Jewish, Byzantine, and European evidence to illustrate the changing functions (and differing concepts) of the *funduq* in Mediterranean trade.

Such a multivalent approach is fundamental to Constable's argument, which contends that linguistic differences in names for commercial spaces, i.e. *pandocheion*, *funduq*, *khān*, *wakāla*, *loggia*, *fondaco*, *alhóndiga*, ghetto, and their numerous vernacular variations, carry more than mere etymological interest. For Constable, determining which culture uses which word, and when, and why, serves as a key not only to the functions of the institutions themselves, but to their history, and the place and interrelation they held in the minds of those people who used them.

Constable's study asks further important questions about the nature and history of these institutions, for the change from *pandocheion* to *funduq* to *fondaco* involves a richer, more complex transition than simply the movement of a word from Greek to Arabic to Latin. The sheer longevity of these institutions – from the Athenian *pandocheion* of the fifth century BC to the Venetian *Fondaco dei Tedeschi*, which

remained a possession of the Venetian government as late as 1797 – testifies to their ongoing utility and importance. Yet, perhaps even more strikingly, this family of institutions, which had flourished for almost two millennia, began to disappear during the early modern period, affected by what Constable sees as a ‘fundamental shift in economic and cultural norms in the Mediterranean world’ (p. 356). This shift is evident in the evolution in the meaning of *fondaco*, from its medieval connotation of a nexus of trade and cross-cultural Christian, Jewish, and Muslim interaction, to the modern Italian sense of ‘warehouse’; and in the change of the Arabic *funduq*, which earlier denoted space that combined commercial, communal, and charitable activities, but later evolved to mean simply ‘hotel’ in modern Arabic: it is, to Constable, characteristic of an essential difference between the medieval and the modern age.

In her conclusion, Constable writes that she had begun her study expecting to find evidence of proto-colonialism in the ‘little pieces of Europe’ that were *fondacos* on Muslim soil. What she did find was quite different and much more interesting: *fondacos* were ‘colonies without the apparatus and assumptions of colonialism’ (p. 357), wherein foreign traders lived and did business only under local strictures and only by local licence. Indeed, as Constable points out, ‘the decline of the *funduq* and *fondaco* in the Mediterranean world coincided chronologically with the first expressions of colonialism, as traditionally conceived’ (p. 357). However, the millennia before this change occupy the bulk of the study.

It is both the strength and weakness of Constable’s argument that she finds that these institutions were inherently similar. While the questions she asks are vital to our understanding of why these commercial spaces were so long-lived, and what that long life says about the nature of trade and cultural interactions on the Mediterranean rim, the organization of the material also produces repetitive conclusions. One finds oneself wishing that she would step beyond a mere reiteration of her argument. No reader in the last quarter of the book could be unaware that Constable sees the transference of the Muslim *funduq* to the Venetian *fondaco* as being directed by specific local and commercial needs, and as a testament to the institutions’ enduring ‘importance, versatility, and ubiquity’ (p. 10); but it is perhaps a little wearying to be reminded of the same conclusion so often.

Yet it is this very repetition that is the greatest strength of Constable’s work, for while her conclusions may be similar, *how* she arrives at those conclusions differs in each chapter, and this variation creates the real interest and value of her study. Constable meticulously contextualizes each of her analyses of *funduq* and *fondaco* by culture and period. This is no slapdash, all-encompassing historical study that washes whole regions and ages with the same assertive brush, but a nuanced investigation, sensitive to linguistic, cultural, political and economic changes.

Constable begins by tracing the late-antique inn called the *pandocheion* (a Greek term meaning ‘accepting all comers’) from its practical definition as an inn where travellers

of every nation and faith were accommodated, to the connotations that such inns held for Jewish, Christian and pagan writers. Writers of each faith, more often than not, linked such institutions not only with real prostitution and lawlessness, but also used the *pandocheion* as a shared metaphor for a place of worldly temptations and epiphanies. The *pandocheion* was not the only form of accommodation available to travellers; it vied with the more specifically religious *xenodocheion*, also a place of lodging, but a charitable one intended to provide free lodging to religious travellers (whether pilgrims, monks, or others). It is characteristic of Constable's argument that she sees the lack of a Latin cognate for *pandocheion* and the presence instead of *xenodochium* in early medieval Europe as indicative of the distinct functions of the institutions, where *xenodochium* came to designate expressly religious hostels for the poor and for pilgrims. *Pandocheion*, however, developed cognates in languages other than Latin, among them Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, and Arabic, where *pandocheion* became *funduq*. This transference (and lack of transference) Constable sees as a marker of correlations between

function, religious associations, and cross-cultural transferability. Put in its most simple form: commercial and secular institutions are more apt to cross boundaries created by faith than ones with a greater religious valency. Thus while the ubiquitous *pandocheion* transferred easily from a pagan and Jewish setting, to a Christian, then Muslim, context, the strongly Christian *xenodocheion* could not make the transition to Islam (p. 38).

The combined attractions of economic incentive and functional utility in a non-religious context would facilitate the spread of the *pandocheion* into Muslim territories, and those same attractions of utility and profit would further encourage the creation of similar institutions in southern Europe in the later Middle Ages.

However, each time the institutions made the leap from one culture to another, exactly which aspects and functions made that leap depended on the needs and the desires of the community 'importing' the institution. Nor were these cross-cultural transferences one-sided. As the early Muslim community adopted the *funduq*, the Byzantine community, already familiar with *pandocheions* and *xenodocheions*, began using *foundax*, a word with an Arabic root, to describe a foundation directly modelled upon the Islamic institution. As Constable points out, such a linguistic trade indicates the 'vitality and multi-directionality of communications and commerce in the medieval Mediterranean world' (p. 64). Whether *funduq* or *foundax*, these institutions combined commercial and charitable characteristics with spaces for lodging and trade, and both were founded and administered by governments as well as private individuals. Such administration could be extremely lucrative, and in the eleventh and twelfth centuries the *funduq* evolved to meet the increasing needs of Islamic merchant communities, as Christian commerce began to proliferate in the Mediterranean.

During the twelfth century, Muslim *funduqs* changed from institutions that provided lodging and commercial space mainly to travellers within the *Dār al-Islām* to institutions that provided cultural and commercial space particularly for western Christians. Although, in his review of Constable's earlier *Trade and Traders in Muslim Spain*, David Abulafia expressed his regret that Constable had not more to say about the current emphasis on the problem of unequal exchange between Christian and Muslim economies,³ he should here be satisfied, for Constable looks closely at precisely this unequal exchange and its effects on the evolution of the *fondaco* and *funduq*. As she observes, 'The existence of the *funduq* and *fondaco* in the Muslim world encouraged European traders to visit Islamic ports, while the lack of comparable institutions in European cities mean that Muslim merchants rarely journeyed to European markets' (p.110). Such arrangements allowed for Christian and Muslim trade and cultural exchange even in times of unrest, but also encouraged 'restrictive regulations and patterns of segregation' (p. 110), including the practices of local authorities barring the *fondaco*'s doors at night from the outside, or preventing or regulating potentially culturally-explosive activities such as the sale of wine or the keeping of pigs. Yet even these institutions did not remain static, and the later thirteenth century saw the emergence of *loggias* alongside *fondacos* as alternative commercial and lodging spaces. These institutions shared many characteristics with *fondacos*, but proliferated more widely in Christian cities, whereas the *fondaco* maintained its dominance in Muslim communities even into the Ottoman regime (p. 157).

Christian governments in newly conquered territories also saw value in these related institutions, and Constable draws upon her considerable expertise in the trade of the Iberian Peninsula to draw an in-depth portrait of the evolution of the *fondaco* and its adaptation by subsequent rulers, from Alfonso X of Castile (1252-1284) and James I of Aragón (1213-1276) to Ferdinand and Isabella (1474-1504). In each case, Constable takes pains to point out how each ruler adapted the *fondaco* to suit his or her own political and economic interests; a testament, she argues, to the fundamental utility and universality of the institution. Constable repeats the analysis and argument – with important distinctions – for *fondacos* in Sicily, southern Italy, and the Crusader states.

The changing balance of power in the Mediterranean, and the growth and eventual dominance of Christian maritime heavyweights such as Venice and Genoa, had a similar effect on the evolution of Muslim *funduqs* as on the increasingly non-residential Christian *fondacos*. Institutions such as the *khān* in Ayyūbid and Mamlūk cities, or the *wakāla* in late Mamlūk and Ottoman areas, gained prevalence; all of these saw a gradual change from the trade-and-hospitality functions of the *funduq* to a more purely commercial establishment. In addition, during the fourteenth century, Muslim control of overland trade routes and the concurrent growing Christian control of seaborne trade saw ports along the North African coast and in the Middle East gain importance as terminal trading destinations, causing *fondacos* to become

‘increasingly regulated and ... ever more important as the critical interface between the two religious, political and economic spheres’ (p. 233).

The later Middle Ages saw a few attempts to import Eastern-style *fondacos* into Christian cities, but they met competition from indigenous institutions such as Hanseatic lodges, private inns, and monastic hostels. True Eastern-style *fondacos* took root only in already ‘Eastern-friendly’ societies such as Italy and Spain. More importantly, however, the segregation and control that such institutions provided required both the need and the ability to enforce such restrictions – and while Venice had both the desire and the power to do so, many other European cities could not enforce such strict regulations, nor may they have wished so to do. In the end, as Constable argues, the exact function and nature of the *fondaco* institution depended greatly upon the commercial and social needs of the communities in which it was placed.

Constable offers a substantial bibliography useful both to scholars and students. Overall, her work presents complex issues and sources in a carefully structured, readable manner. Her argument does tread well-travelled ground, especially given the keen interest in cross-cultural studies and in Mediterranean trade over the past decade. However, Constable’s study deserves attention for the way she enhances our understanding of wider medieval concepts of self and other within the particular context of the *fondaco*, and of how those concepts could be reinforced or changed by shifting patterns of trade and commerce. By focusing on a particular set of related institutions and their linguistic markers, Constable effectively navigates the development of those institutions over an impressively long period of time without falling into the Scylla of producing bland generalities, or the Charybdis of forsaking a larger conclusion in lieu of dense, local studies. *Housing the Stranger in the Mediterranean World* successfully sails between those two traps to provide an invaluable glimpse into the web of complex religious, social, linguistic and economic interactions that characterized the Mediterranean world before (and even occasionally into) the early modern period.

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NOTES:

¹ O. R. Constable, *Trade and Traders in Muslim Spain: The Commercial Realignment of the Iberian Peninsula, 900-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Of additional interest is her *Medieval Iberia: Readings from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Sources* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).

² Constable here adds her unique perspective to a growing number of works exploring the considerable movement, trade, and communication of peoples around the Mediterranean. M. McCormick's *The Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce AD 300-900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) illuminates such activity in a period once considered relatively dormant, while D. S. H. Abulafia's *Commerce and Conquest in the Mediterranean 1100-1500* (Aldershot, Hampshire & Brookfield, Vt.: Variorum, 1993) and his *A Mediterranean Emporium: the Catalan Kingdom of Majorca* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) offer examples of both a larger-context study and a particular, in-depth analysis of the sort proliferating in this area of research.

³ D. S. H. Abulafia, review of O. R. Constable, *Trade and Traders in Muslim Spain*, *Business History Review*, 69 (1995), p. 110.