Mamluk period on the basis of a comprehensive analysis of archaeological data and written evidence. Incidentally, by combining written and archaeological sources, Walker’s study seems to be the only one in the volume that fully realizes the principle of interdisciplinarity proclaimed in the preface.

Overall, the book provides a large amount of data for researchers of particular regions, but fails to offer a synthetic analysis of this information. The heterogeneity of topics is such that even the combination of two introductions and a conclusion ultimately does not succeed in fulfilling this task. We must agree with one of the editors who in the foreword wrote that the studies featured in this volume “must be seen as forming essential building blocks for broader synthetic studies.”

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Alexei A. Krol
Moscow State University


When it comes to understanding revolutions, what happens in the courts matters as much as what happens on the streets. That is the key insight of Yoram Meital’s timely book Revolutionary Justice: Special Courts and the Formation of Republican Egypt. Couched within the assertion that trial transcripts offer insights about the broader political struggles in a nation’s transitional phase, Meital’s book meticulously recounts the 1950s prosecution of Egypt’s former regime leaders and the Muslim Brotherhood in the Revolutionary Courts and the People’s Courts, respectively. While he acknowledges these cases were in fact show trials, Meital persuasively argues they warrant closer examination as an informative historical archive.

As Meital methodically dissects the details and circumstances surrounding these historic 1950s trials, he reveals uncanny parallels between the transitional period after Egypt’s 1952 revolution and the aftermath of the 2011 revolutionary moment. Although the Revolutionary and People’s Courts each targeted a distinct set of alleged internal enemies of the state, they invoked similar themes. One of these has become deeply entrenched in the Egyptian collective psyche: a fixation on foreign “invisible hands” interfering in Egyptian politics to weaken the country. Animated by this conspiracy theory and under the rubric of
national security and the rule of law, a military-led regime prosecuted secular and Muslim Brotherhood (MB) leaders for allegedly undermining the 1952 and 2011 revolutions. In both cases, the generals turned presidents exploited the courts to effectively counter a populist revolution.

Invoking a “state of exception” that mandated extraordinary measures, Gamal Abdel Nasser started a precedent of using special courts to prosecute the regime’s purported enemies. The cooptation of the judiciary to enforce the Revolutionary Command Council’s (RCC) vision of a new revolutionary order has sustained the military as the most powerful state institution ever since. Former general turned president Hosni Mubarak continued Nasser’s legacy with his special security courts in the 1990s, as did former general turned president Anwar Sadat when he sweepingly prosecuted opponents to his peace deal with Israel. In the most recent iteration of judicial cooptation, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi created special security circuits within the judiciary comprised of handpicked judges. As anticipated, these loyalist judges sentenced thousands of Muslim Brotherhood members to death or life in prison, followed by a series of convictions of those whose courage to protest in Tahrir Square on January 25 triggered the 2011 revolution.

Both sets of trials validated a narrative put forth by Nasser and al-Sisi – the nation and the army as one hand. The implication of this narrative is that the military is the only institution capable of governing in Egypt’s best interest. It further portrays purported “secularists” from the prior regime as corrupt and political Islamists as violent.

A salient theme within Egypt’s contemporary political discourse is the vilification of the Muslim Brotherhood as a threat to national security – their support for the 1952 revolution notwithstanding. The political Islamist is depicted as brandishing a bomb or other weapon at his dual enemies: the Egyptian effendi and the officers who led the revolution. The same associations of fitna, or civil war and social unrest, with the Muslim Brotherhood and rumored links to secret plots echoed in the courtrooms of the trials of Mohamed Morsi, the Murshid (supreme spiritual guides of the MB), and other MB leaders. Regardless of how frequently or loudly the MB condemned violence and worked through the electoral system over the past six decades, they are caricatured as a terrorist organization. This criminalization began after an assassination attempt was made on Nasser’s life in 1953 – an event the MB claims was merely a pretext to silence their calls for a civilian government. Nasser was facing growing opposition to his refusal to transfer control from the RCC to a civilian government. By blaming the MB for the attempt on his life, Nasser secured his spot as president for life.
Students of Egypt are all too familiar with the scapegoating of the MB’s indigenous social and political movement as the culprit for the country’s myriad ailments. What Meital’s book illuminates, however, is how the Revolutionary and People’s Courts under Nasser established the foundation for this narrative and for the consequent legal responses by a lineage of military rulers. Lifted straight from Nasser’s playbook, al-Sisi designated the MB as a terrorist organization in 2013, thereby eliminating Egypt’s first democratically elected civilian government since 1952. Al-Sisi was facing growing demands for institutional reforms that would redistribute power from the military and internal security forces to other state institutions. That the MB was the strongest, most disciplined organization pushing for a civilianization of governance made it all the more necessary for the military to crush them. Revolutionary Justice explains the roots of the narratives that persuaded the Egyptian people to reject the MB as traitors and support the military as the most suitable governors.

In both eras, top jurists supported the generals’ counter-revolutionary power grab. The acclaimed jurists Abdel-Razzak Sanhuri and Sulayman Hafiz sanctioned Nasser’s Revolutionary Courts because they saw the monarchy and the Wafd party as the primary causes of Egypt’s woes. Indeed, the judges presiding over the Revolutionary Courts made it a point to portray the RCC as comprised of reasonable men who used trials, rather than execution chambers, to bring to justice the former regime officials. Similarly, Adly Mansour and the other justices on the Supreme Constitutional Court stood by al-Sisi when he announced the deposition of President Mohamed Morsi on Egyptian television. Paradoxically, the deposition of a civilian president by a general was not acknowledged as a military coup by Egypt’s esteemed jurists, notwithstanding the move’s direct contravention with the rule of law.

Though Nasser needed special courts to litigate the revolution, six decades later al-Sisi could manipulate the ordinary judiciary. Authoritarians create special courts when they cannot rely on the ordinary judiciary to produce the regime’s desired outcomes. But when judges can be coerced or bribed into doing the executive’s bidding, quashing of opposition occurs within the ordinary judiciary. Although Sanhuri and Hafiz initially supported Nasser, it is unclear from Meital’s rendering whether the judiciary as a collective supported the creation of special courts or saw it as a threat to their independence. Similarly, it remains difficult to assess whether the judges selected to aggressively prosecute the Muslim Brotherhood and secular revolutionary protestors were representative of over 10,000 Egyptian judges.
In the end, *Revolutionary Justice* provides an insightful historical context that explains why Egyptians were denied meaningful self-governance after their two populist revolutions. As the military and Muslim Brotherhood vied for dominance, Egyptians were denied the political space to develop a third way that is more transparent, inclusive, and democratic in representing the diverse needs of more than 90 million people. For that reason, revolutionary justice continues to elude Egypt.

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Sahar F. Aziz  
*Rutgers School of Law, Newark*


Brinkley Messick’s long-awaited *Shari’a Scripts* is a study of the relationship between epistemology and materiality in the textual universe of highland Yemen in the first half of the twentieth century. Moreover, it is an attempt to understand *shari’a* and its history as a set of complex relationships between texts and genres, each of which has its own temporality and geographical circulation. Some of the relationships are quite specific – for instance, concepts or formulae that were employed across genres – while others are somewhat more general and touch on the place writing and the written word occupies in the imagination of individuals and communities. *Shari’a Scripts* is not the first attempt at reading the “grammar” of *shari’a* across genres and discourses, but it is the most thorough study to date to systematically examine the materiality of texts along with a close reading of doctrinal works on the reliability of writing and the written word in the Zaydi tradition.

At the core of *Shari’a Scripts* lies a distinction between two separate yet interrelated hermeneutical clusters of the texts – the “library” and the “archive” – within the Zaydi juridical culture. The genres and texts represented in the “library” are more general in their formulation, in the sense that they are stripped of particular details that stem from a specific locality, and cosmopolitan (following Sheldon Pollock’s usage) in their geographical circulation. Among the “library” texts, Messick lists *fiqh* manuals, fatwas, and the Zaydi imam’s choices (*ikhtiyarat*). The “archival” genres and texts, by contrast, are situated in a specific geographical and temporal context and are thus local. These include minutes of court cases, court resolutions, and contracts. The dynamics between the “library” and