

ABSTRACTS FOR THE CONFERENCE EXPECTATIONS OF JUSTICE AND POLITICAL
POWER IN THE ISLAMICATE WORLD (CA. 600-1500 CE)



(IN THE ORDER OF THE PROGRAMME)

In quest of justice: making and unmaking a ruler and the issue of violence in Ibādī political thought - Enki Baptiste (Lyon-2 University)

From the middle of the 8th century onwards, Ibādī ulama have theorized a political system based on the idea of justice, consultation and fairness and grounded on the institution of an (s)elected Imam. Ibādī have often been categorized as violent, marginal and unorthodox Muslims by the Sunni heresiographical books. Consequently, their political thought never received a great attention, though the Omani corpus proves to be one of the richest and oldest we have for the first centuries of Islam.

Our paper aims at understanding how Ibādī political thought perceived what should be the perfect ruler. Based on multiple sources (the Qur'ān, the *hadith* compilations, the *sunna*), Ibādī ulama have formulated a system in which “even a black and mutilated slave can be imam” as long as he implements justice, discretionary punishments and proves to be fair.

Conversely, if these expectations of justice are disappointed, the ruler might be overthrown. Violence can be used as a way to restore equity among the subjects and a revolutionary action is a valuable option in the political field.

Nevertheless, violence against the Imam has an ambiguous place within the Ibādī political thought: never desired, it is yet possible to use it in accordance with juridical codes set by ulama. Studying the Imamate framework allows to shed light on these mechanisms

The Sufi Shaykh as a Channel for Redressing Injustice in the Mamluk Sultanate - Or Amir (Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

One of the prominent features of the Mamluk Sultanate (1250-1517) was a wide ethnic, linguistic and cultural gap between the ruling elite of Turkish-nomad origins and the local, predominantly sedentary and Arabic speaking, subject population. Scholarship in recent decades has moved away from the paradigm of a tyrant Turkish military caste which abused and exploited their subjects while segregating themselves in the citadel, and more nuanced approaches now show that there was much in common between the mamluks and their subjects. However, the foreignness of the ruling elite and its monopoly over military and economic resources were still very much part of the living experience of the population.

One social institution which somewhat bridged the rulers-subjects divide and offered a feeling of shared values and justice was the Sufi shaykh. Many shaykhs were venerated as saints by rulers and subjects alike and were thus able to play a role of social brokers, who mediated between them. Many depictions of the visits of emirs and sultans to the *zāwīya* of a Sufi saint portray it as a liminal place, where a status reversal takes place: the ruler would manifest almost theatrical humility in front of the shaykh, who is portrayed as the “true ruler of the land” and whose *zāwīya* is allegorically compared to a court. Although these accounts are obviously replete by tropes, I argue that the shaykhs were able to offer a symbolic, and at times actual, alternative channel for redressing injustices, which benefitted both rulers and subjects.

Expectations of Justice in the Late Seljuq Period: Case Studies in Petitioning the Ruler - Deborah Tor (University of Notre Dame)

The early Seljuq period is widely recognized as having been unusually illuminating with respect to the expectations regarding justice that leading religious, intellectual, and political figures held of rulers. Indeed, some of the best-known and most important mirrors for princes were written during this time: Kay Kā'ūs's *Qābūs Nāmah* (c. 1082); the great vizier Nizām al-Mulk's *Siyar al-Mulūk* (c. 1091); al-Ghazālī's *Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk* and *Kitāb al-Mustazhiri*; the first Turkish work, Yūsuf Khāṣṣ Ḥājib's *Kutadghu Bilig*, and so forth. Moreover, many modern scholars, most recently and thoroughly Louise Marlow, have studied these texts for what they reveal about eleventh-century expectations regarding justice and political power.

However, the writings of the later Seljuq period— the twelfth century, including the first half of it, which all Seljuq chroniclers considered to have been the zenith of Seljuq rule under Sultan Sanjar— despite having been equally important for the study of the subject of justice and what it entailed of rulers, have been almost completely neglected. This paper has therefore chosen for its case study the most unusual primary source of the period: The series of letters written by the great jurist and theologian al-Ghazālī, directed to the then-Seljuq Sultan of Khurāsān and his viziers, found in the collection *Faḍā'il al-anām min rasā'il ḥujjat al-Islām*. These letters include not only numerous admonitions and petitions for justice, both for himself personally, individuals on whose behalf he intervenes, and the people of Tūs and the Muslims of Khurāsān more generally, but also numerous ruminations and reflections upon the subject of justice itself, and the duties it enjoins upon Muslim rulers. These letters thus constitute the only extant primary source showing a real interaction, as opposed to the idealized or even imaginary ones contained in hagiographies such as Ghaznavī's *Maqāmāt-i zhanda pīl*, between a leading religious figure of the day and the rulers of the time on the subject of justice. Al-Ghazālī's practical conception of justice as revealed in his correspondence with rulers and viziers will be placed within the context of both the *speculae regis* of the early Seljuq period, but also the idealized depictions contained in the 12th-century hagiographies such as *Maqāmāt-i zhanda pīl*.

“Policing the ruler. The *ṣāliḥ* in al-Tiġānī's *Riḥla*” - Sébastien Garnier (CNRS)

Close to Tunis, the area of *Šarīk* can be viewed as its hinterland. Its spatial connection to the capital city of the Hafids (*reg.* 625-982/1228-1574) opens up the scope for a symbolic counterpower, as we will see.

In his famous ifrīqiyan travelogue, al-Tiġānī (*fl.* 709/1309) retells two anecdotes showing how a *ṣāliḥ* can act in a context where the exercise of authority has to be redressed. What should be undertaken to face illegal taxation? What should be done when confronting bad behaviour in a mosque? If a ruler violates the Law, the intervention of a pious man can punish him or educate him.

Focusing on these two concrete case studies, we shall reflect on a possible renewal of *Fürstenspiegel* in the late medieval Maghreb through the lens of sainthood. At the end, we will consider whether the stories involving these holy characters constitute a sub-genre of the Mirrors.

‘He who tortures people in this world, God will torture him on the Day of Resurrection’: Taxation narratives in the development of a literary discourse on good governance - Noémie Lucas (University of Edinburgh)

Al-Ya‘qūbī, in his *Ta‘rīkh*, recalled that in 184/800, Hārūn al-Rashīd ordered ‘Abdallāh b. al-Ḥaytham b. Sām to recover the tax arrears in the Sawād and ‘Abdallāh applied force to do so. The same year, Hārūn al-Rashīd became seriously ill then recovered. Al-Fuḍayl b. ‘Iyād (m. 187/803), a *ḥadīth* transmitter and *zāhid*, who visited the Caliph and saw that people were suffering from the forceful extraction of taxes arrears told him to relieve them arguing that Muḥammad said: ‘He who tortures people in this world, God will torture him on the Day of Resurrection’. Al-Rashīd then abolished the use of punishment for the year 184/800.

The account denounces the unjust behavior of the caliph’s subordinate and it implicitly recommends justice. The illness of Hārūn al-Rashīd can be regarded as a consequence of ‘Abdallāh’s violent actions against subjects of the empire, and thus, as a divine punishment.

This account has been the trigger of an ongoing research on reports dealing with fiscal issues in chronographies, especially accounts dealing with the way taxes, notably the *kharāj*, were administered and collected. This paper will present my first observations. It will notably investigate how these accounts were used to promote fair governance. It will also consider how and why taxation can be studied as a vantage point for assessing good government and fair ruling during the first three centuries of Islam.

A case of illegal manipulation of an endowed property - Angela Isoldi (Radboud University)

The Mamluk Sultanate is a period that saw the foundation of a great amount of charitable trusts (Ar: *waqf*, *awqāf*). The management of an endowed property was in the hands of administrators appointed by the founder of the *waqf* (the *wāqif*) and, at the same time, it was also under the supervision of high regime officials. Since some of the most important contemporary chronicles (e.g. *al-Nujūm al-Zāhira*) describe in great detail a few cases of unlawful *waqf* exploitation, it is possible to get an insight into the dynamics and the personal ties behind such incidents. In fact, cases of fraudulent manipulation of *awqāf* could involve several persons, including prominent figures. With the aim of unravelling the network of corrupt functionaries involved in the manipulation of a *waqf*, this paper focuses on a case of illegal purchase of endowed baths and shops that took place in Cairo during the reign of Sultan Jaqmaq (r. 1438-1453 CE). This incident was reported by the historian Ibn Taghrī-Birdī, who denounced the connivance of high legal authorities in the process. On the basis of this episode, this paper will also discuss the social impact of corruption in the administration of a *waqf*. Given the pivotal role of the *waqf* institution in providing the urban population with public facilities, such as drinking water and public baths, the manipulation and mismanagement of endowments by corrupt functionaries are likely to have negatively affected the targeted beneficiaries of these charitable trusts.

The Expectation of Political Justice in *Fatāwa* in the Mamluk Sultanate (1258-1517) - Rana Osman (SOAS)

The Mamluk Sultanate (1258-1517) marked a pivotal political rupture in Muslim polity that yielded strategic negotiations between different doctrines of ruler-legitimization in the Muslim tradition. With the rise of the Mamluks to power in Egypt, the ruler's political ideology took the form of a coerced and autocratic political leadership cloaked with the emblematic theological-based claims to power. However, the religious class remained essential by investing their legitimating resources into influencing how *de facto* rulers exercised their power and recognized the sultan's symbolic office—*sine* community consent. This resulted in the fossilization of an abstract systemic

conception of just rule and accountability—all while tasking the usurper with the duty to uphold justice. Yet, the extent to which the meaning of just politics was discussed or expected, this paper will argue, may be discovered through an uncategorical reading of *fatāwā* compendia and thus provide a context of not only the political sphere but the co-development of political theory. Specifically, I will show that while a muftī may not have called for outright rebellion against an unjust ruler, but may have alluded to occurrences of unjust rule, such as forced land sale by a ruler, which in turn may have encouraged a centred an ethico-religious conception of justice in Islamic political thought. Thus, *fatāwā* produced during the Mamluk Sultanate by three then-contemporary scholars: al-Nawawī (d. 1277), Ibn Taymiyya (d.1328), and Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406) will be examined. This selection is preliminary and based on scholars who have surviving *fatāwā* collections and are widely known for their political theorization.

The Rebellion at Fakhkh (169/786): Balancing Political Pragmatism and Just Rule in Zaydī Shī'ism - Najam Haidar (Columbia University)

My proposed paper focuses on the 'Alid Zaydī rebellion of al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī Ṣāhib Fakhkh which took place in the Ḥijāz in 169/786. Drawing on Zaydī reports of the movement (taken from a range of sources but featuring Aḥmad b. Sahl al-Rāzī's [d. early 4th/10th century] *Akhbār Fakhkh*), I explore the way Zaydī historical narratives were shaped by a very specific notion of justice wherein it was incumbent upon all Muslims to oppose tyrannical rule. This seminal feature of Zaydī theology and political theory was embodied in the doctrine of *khurūj* which itself underwent multiple stages of revision, reflecting the practical circumstances of the Zaydī community. In the case of al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī, the causes of his rebellion were specifically ascribed to unjust political measures implemented by the caliph al-Hādī (rl. 169-70/785-6). This revolt was then used to create binaries between just and unjust rule which became the basis for the critique of rival Shī'ī figures (i.e., Mūsā al-Kāzīm d. 184/800). After the failure of the rebellion, Zaydī historical reports became the grounds for debate between groups of Zaydīs who (a) advocated a strict adherence to political justice and (b) supported pragmatic

political compromise. Overall, this paper is an exploration of notions of just rule within the religious community that is most closely associated with this concept (the Zaydīs) through a very specific case study (the rebellion at Fakhkh).

Keynote: The Perso-Islamic Ideas and Ideal of Kingship – Nasrin Askari (University of Birmingham)

Drawing on evidence from Zoroastrian literature and ancient Persian beliefs reflected in it, and through a close comparison between the portrayal of Ardashīr (r. 224–241), the founder of the Sasanian empire, in the *Shāhnāma* and other sources written in Middle Persian, Arabic, and Persian, this paper discusses the concept of justice in connection with the attributes of an ideal ruler based on ancient Persian paradigms that were applicable to an Islamic context.

'The World Will Not Forgive Their Misdeeds': Rebellion as Response to Injustice - Hannah-Lena Hagemann & Alon Dar (Universität Hamburg)

In many traditions, the concepts, discourse and often also the practice of justice are inextricably linked with the subject of rebellion. This certainly applies to the (pre-modern) Islamicate context, in which issues of (in)justice feature prominently e.g. in the rhetoric of rebellion, while the problem of rebellion contributed in a major way to the development of an Islamic discourse on just rule, for instance. This paper will look at a number of case studies from the early Islamic period where rebellion was (presented as) a response to injustice; specifically, it will respond to conference themes 2 and 3, “getting rid of unjust rulers” and “calling on rulers to be just”. The selected examples mostly involve caliphal governors, but at least in one case, the caliph himself is explicitly accused of injustice, although the rebellious actions here are not directed against his immediate person.

While the targets of rebel activities are limited here, our case studies show the interplay of rebellion and justice in quite different ways – from the violent removal of a tyrannical governor that ultimately found official approval to revolt as a desperate last resort against gubernatorial greed that ended in bitter military defeat. The paper will attempt to answer, as fully as possible, how and why the chosen examples differ with regard to i) the ideas and expectations of justice they propel; ii) what actions (or lack thereof) qualified as injustice; iii) how individual protagonists responded to failed expectations of justice; and iv) how such conflicts were ultimately resolved. Finally, our discussion will also address issues such as the labelling and categorisation of certain acts and events (e.g., when does group action classify as rebellion?); historiographical challenges; and the question of rebellion as an unjust or disruptive act in itself.

Taxes, Advice Literature, and the Sultan's Wrath: Emotional History and Competing Notions of Just Rule at the Mamluk Court of Qāniṣawh al-Ghawrī (r. 1501–1516) - Christian Mauder (University of Bergen)

Scholarship on the history of Egypt has commonly depicted Qāniṣawh al-Ghawrī, the penultimate Mamluk ruler, as an unusually tyrannical ruler. This verdict is based on accounts of the sultan's fiscal and military policies included in historiographical sources that have long dominated scholarly explorations of late Mamluk history. The paper seeks to problematize this mono-dimensional perception of late Mamluk rule in general and al-Ghawrī's reign in particular from two angles.

First, the paper argues based on a sizeable corpus of advice literature composed for Sultan al-Ghawrī and his library that courtly notions of just rule were not only in themselves highly diverse, but also at variance with those expressed in late Mamluk historiographical literature. This led to a situation in which conflicting discourses of just rule – based, e.g., on religious notions, Persianate political wisdom, and Mamluk political and administrative precedents – competed with each other in late Mamluk society. The fact that this discursive complexity has hitherto not been taken into account has led to misrepresentations of late Mamluk political thought.

Second, the paper builds on insights from the history of emotions to explore how texts produced for al-Ghawrī's library depict the sultan's emotions, especially his wrath, as important factors in the implementation of just rule. These texts understand the sultan's anger not as compromising his ability to rule justly, but as central to combatting corruption in his realm. This finding cautions against misreading late Mamluk sources including portrayals of angry rulers as evidence for a political culture devoid of deeper ideological commitments.

Defining 'adl for a Fifteenth-Century Courtly Context: 'Seeking Justice' in the Writings of Ibn 'Arabshah (d. 1450/854) - Mustafa Banister (Ghent University)

The well-travelled Syrian litterateur and scholar Ahmad Ibn 'Arabshah (1389-1450) absorbed and reinterpreted transregional and translinguistic discourses on justice ('adl). In the wake of his boyhood abduction by Tamerlane in 1400 he spent time as a courtier in the Timurid, Golden Horde, and Ottoman realms, before returning to his native Syrian homelands in the "Mamluk" sultanate of Cairo. This case study explores Ibn 'Arabshah's engagement with the discourse of justice and righteous rule in late medieval Egypt through an examination of three texts: his scathing biography of Tamerlane (*'Aja'ib al-ma'qdur*), his panegyric of the Cairo sultan Jaqmaq (*Ta'lif al-tahir*), and his work of animal fable *Fürstenspiegel* (*Fakihat al-khulafa'*), all produced between 1439-1444. These texts collectively devote numerous pages to the justice of the ruler to help guide his behavior. The intended reader in these cases was the sultan of Cairo, al-Zahir Jaqmaq (1438-1453), and they were composed in the context of the author's desire to win patronage positions from the court of the sultan. By isolating key passages on 'adl in these three works, notions of justice across the premodern Islamic world emerge from this highly cosmopolitan polyglot reflecting his absorption of notions

of the ruler's justice emanating from the Arabo, Perso, and Turko-Mongolian literary traditions. Through textual analysis and word counting methods, this paper explores manifestations of and expectations for kingly justice in the biographical writings and kingly advice literature of a fifteenth-century Muslim litterateur and historian.

Popular Understanding of Fiscal Justice in Second-/Eighth-century Kufa - Aseel Najib (Columbia University)

The term "fiscal justice" in the title of this paper refers to notions about the just management of wealth by the political apparatus—that is, caliphs and the governors, regional rulers, and tax collectors whom they appointed, according to the hierarchical schema of premodern Muslim governance. In his monograph, *In God's Path*, Robert Hoyland suggests that one of the reasons for the inability of the Muslims to maintain a centralized, unified empire was that its members demanded a share in its wealth and frequently rebelled in order to procure it. This demand was quite prominent in Kufa, as is most recently discussed by Najam Haider in a chapter on the rebellion of Mukhtār in *The Rebel and the Imām in Early Islam*.

Yet, a proper examination of this demand on its own terms is sorely needed, and it is this gap that my paper intends to fill. The source material from which I will reconstruct this demand includes the speeches and poems associated with a series of Alid revolts in or involving Kufa—those of Zayd b. 'Alī in 122/740, 'Abd Allāh b. Mu'awiya in 127/744, and Muḥammad and Ibrāhīm b. 'Abd Allāh in 145/763. The questions which I will answer in my paper include: what are the terms and concepts which these texts utilize in their demand for fiscal justice, and do they bear connections to those employed in Kufan religio-legal circles? What is the relationship between fiscal justice and ideas about egalitarianism, moral leadership, just taxation, and wealth disbursement? Finally, how do these texts compare with those associated with Khārijī revolts in the same period?

The Justly Killed Imam: An early Mu'tazilī *apologia* for the killing of the caliph 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān (r. 23-36/644-656) - Sean Anthony (Ohio State University)

In recent years, scholars have witnessed the discovery and publication of numerous texts attributed to prominent early thinkers from the Mu'tazilah. One of the most interesting of these is a book called *Kitāb al-Maqālāt* attributed to Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī (d. 303/915), a prominent and influential representative of the Basran Mu'tazilah. The work contains a wide array of polemics directed against rival Muslim religious movements: the ḥadīth folk (the "Ḥashwiyyah") especially but also Shi'ah and Kharijites. This paper focuses on two sections of this work dedicated to a sustained polemic against the so-called 'Uthmāniyyah – the partisans and defenders

of the third caliph 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān. For those familiar with the largely hagiographical treatment of 'Uthmān's caliphate prevalent in Sunni historiography, the treatment of 'Uthmān's assassination in the *Kitāb al-Maqālāt* is striking. The author makes a passionate case for why the killing of the caliph 'Uthmān in 36/656 was not only a just and righteous act but also was an act done with the consensus (*ijmā'*) of the early community of Muslims. This paper reviews and presents these arguments as an early (and rare) Muslim apologia for regicide, situates them in the context of early Arabo-Islamic historiography, and evaluates whether or not they support, or undermine, the text's attribution to al-Jubbā'ī.

Political Undercurrents. Justice and Interpersonal Politics in the Abbasid Bathhouse - Taryn Marashi (Vanderbilt University)

In Isfahan, in the year 935, a group of servants ambushed a warlord named Mardāwīj in a bathhouse. Mardāwīj fought off the attack and barrage of arrows coming from a broken glass window in the roof, but ultimately died clutching a wound to his abdomen. While the case is remarkable, retribution against a member of the political elite in a bathhouse was not. A site of cosmopolitanism and revelry, a bathhouse was a place of social encounter, ritual, and, importantly, contestation. Contemporary scholarship has long considered the social role, poetic literary appeal, and cultures of bathing from the Roman to the Ottoman era. But a bathhouse was also a site of danger and death. An unassuming place where individuals could unmask themselves of dress and identity, put aside their weapons, and relax in the heady steam, a public bathhouse became an opportune stage for assassinations. With few windows and exits, its architectural necessities ensured privacy and confinement, qualities that made it an ideal space for acts of violence. The case of Mardāwīj shows that a bathhouse played a critical role in the expression of justice and rivalry between members of the political elite as well as gendered, marginalized individuals. Focusing on cases of political assassination in bathhouses in Abbasid society (750-1258), we gain deeper insight into alternative spaces of justice where competition, imprisonment, and punishment occurred with impunity.

Just rule in premodern *bilād al-sūdān*: Aḥmad Bābā al-Tinbukṭī (d. 1627) as a pioneer of Muslim political thought in West Africa - Marta G. Novo (Autonomous University of Madrid)

The decadence of the Askya dynasty and the fall of the Songhay Empire inspired the treatise *Jalb al-ni'ma wa-daf' al-niqma bi-mujānabat al-wulāt al-ḡalama* (*The obtention of bliss and avoidance of ill by sidling evil rulers*), written by Aḥmad Bābā al-Tinbukṭī (d. 1627) shortly before the Moroccan occupation of the Niger Bend at the end of the 10th/16th-century, which caused the deportation of his powerful clan, the Aqīts, deeply involved the socio-political, economic and intellectual transformation of the *bilād al-sūdān*. Conceived as a warning for

his scholarly peers, as well as for himself, against frequenting oppressive rulers, the treatise constituted a veiled critique against Songhay authority, defined as unjust, impious and fratricide, in a time when the Aqīt clan was its most direct rival. The religious authority derived from the judgeship of their hometown Timbuktu, which the Aqīt household had occupied for over a century, was a privileged promontory from which this Berber clan contributed to build Ṣanhāja political and religious leadership at the beginnings of *bīḍān* hegemony in the Saharo-Sahelian space. Al-Tinbuktī's self-consciousness of the sociopolitical role of Ṣanhāja 'ulamā' can also be identified in his short treatise *Tuḥfat al-fuḍalā' bi-ba'd faḍā'il al-'ulamā'* (*The treasure of the excellent or the merits of scholars*), where the author underlines the moral prevalence of jurists and of learned piety before the charismatic leadership of Sufi devotion, as well as in part of his biographical dictionaries. As this paper will show, Aḥmad Bābā's early works should be considered as some of the earliest pieces of West african political thought, essential for the study of the rise of *bīḍān* society in 10th/16th-century *bilād al-sūdān* and its conception of "true" Muslim rule.

The Enforcement of Justice in the Laws (*Kanun*) of the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II (1451-1481) - Linda T. Darling (University of Arizona)

The fourteenth-century Ottomans inherited concepts of justice from their Middle Eastern forebears, Seljuks and Abbasids, and their Central Asian ancestors, Karakhanids and Mongols. Justice forms a prominent theme in literature written or translated in their first two centuries, and Ottoman documents reveal what they did with those concepts. According to the poet Ahmedi, the Ottomans saw themselves as founding a just society, in contrast to Ilkhanid injustice and extortion, particularly in taxation. One of the vehicles of administrative justice was the lawcodes (*kanunnames*) the Ottomans wrote, following the Turco-Mongol precedent of ruler's law. This paper examines the Ottomans' pursuit of just governance as it appears in their fifteenth-century lawcodes.

The earliest lawcodes come from the reign of Mehmed II, known for his justice. The lawcodes of his period, the first for which such evidence survives, did not present arguments for justice; they enacted it. The paper examines Mehmed's lawcodes, analyzing the justice meted out, the expectations they laid on taxpayers and officials, and the mechanisms through which justice was served. Lacking travel permission, the 11-volume collection of *kanunnames* published by Ahmet Akgündüz becomes the main source.

This paper fits with theme IV, Transparency and Anti-Corruption, second half. It emphasizes the administration's checks and balances against corruption, ideas of justice inherent in the regulations, and the sanctions for dereliction. It does not maintain that there was no corruption, but that the government was aware of the possibility and established institutional deterrents in reaction against perceived injustice.

Expectations of Justice under the Fatimids - Marina Rustow (Princeton University)

The petition-and-response process was among the Fatimid caliphs' main means of interacting with their subjects. Most surviving Fatimid petitions contain subjects' complaints about the misdeeds of lower-level officials. This fact suggests the regime was committed to justice, or committed to *seeming* committed to justice. Even when subjects petitioned for reasons other than complaints about corrupt or negligent appointees — such as when they sought mediation in conflicts with other subjects — they phrased their petitions as complaints against the corruption of lower officials, presumably in order to draw the attention of the caliph or vizier.

Systems of hearing individual petitions by their very nature assume that individual problems and rights-claims merit attention. But when the solutions clustered into categories, they created precedents; precedents, in turn, created presumptions; presumptions could be tantamount to guaranteed legal rights. The central question at the heart of my current research, on which I'll give an interim report here, is: Given that, among many other premodern governments, the Fatimids took an interest in hearing the rights claims of subjects, should we rethink the seemingly settled consensus that before the modern democratic nation-state, rulers dispensed privileges, while after it, individuals possessed rights?