

FRANZ ROSENTHAL



Man versus Society in
Medieval Islam

EDITED BY DIMITRI GUTAS

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Man versus Society in Medieval Islam

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(Above) Yusuf in prison and (below) Zuleikha as an old woman before Yusuf. Mid-17th century Safavid period. Ink on paper H: 19.8 W: 10.4 cm. Iran.

(FREER GALLERY OF ART, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION, WASHINGTON, D.C.: PURCHASE, F1953-37)

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Cover illustration: Dioscurides, *Materia medica*. Codex medicus Graecus 1, f. 167^v, dating from 532 AD. Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek.

Image of *κάνναβις ἡμερος* (*cannabis sativa*), transliterated in Arabic in upper right and, in Hebrew, in lower left corner, and translated into Arabic as *qinnab bustāni*, garden cannabis, in the left margin, for the benefit of the illustrator of the Arabic translation. See below, p. 155.

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Foreword

The remarkable scholarly career of the most brilliant representative of the heroic and final stage of classical Orientalism, Franz Rosenthal (1914–2003),¹ was crowned by a series of studies on the “historical sociology” of pre-modern Islamic civilization.² In book after book and article after article for over fifty years, he studied what he called “the tensions and conflicts that existed between individuals and society in medieval Islam,” a subject to which he gave the title *Man versus Society in Islam*. Rosenthal had initially intended to treat the subject in a single large work, but the great variety of topics that were to be treated as well as the vastness and complexity of the available material made him realize that it would not “be possible for [him] to bring to a satisfactory conclusion a comprehensive work such as [he] had envisaged,” and he decided to publish his various studies independently, though he cautioned the reader that the “outlook and emphasis” of each study “may become clearer if viewed against the background from which it originated.”³ Though each one of his studies on these topics is itself a highly original, thorough, and authoritative treatment, the full force and significance of the unitary project he originally conceived, the “background” he speaks about which gives meaning to the whole—the panorama of pre-modern Muslim social history—cannot be properly perceived and appreciated unless it is read in juxtaposition with the others. To that end, but also to provide easy access to these scattered studies and to stimulate further research, they are here reprinted collectively in a single publication, thereby realizing Rosenthal’s original comprehensive work and fulfilling a desideratum expressed by others.⁴

The studies that form part of this projected work and are reprinted in this collection are, first, four monographs, presented in chronological order: *The*

1 As I called him in my introductory essay to the reprint of his *Knowledge Triumphant*, Leiden: Brill, 2007, p. xiii. Franz Rosenthal was Sterling Professor of Arabic and Semitic Studies at Yale University (1956–1985). For his biographical memoir see my obituary in *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 149.3 (2005) 441–446, and, in greater detail, David C. Reisman’s “In Memoriam: Franz Rosenthal. August 31, 1914–April 8, 2003,” *Aleph* 3 (2003) 329–342. A bibliography of his works can be found in *Oriens* 36 (2001) xiii–xxxiv.

2 “The Study of Muslim Intellectual and Social History” p. 1; below, p. 3.

3 Foreword to *The Muslim Concept of Freedom*, p. viii; below, p. 24.

4 E.g., by Ernest Gellner in his review of *The Muslim Concept of Freedom* in *Philosophy*, 39.147 (1964) 86.