

"Anything You Can Do I Can Do Better":

A Female Jurist in Twelfth-Century Aleppo

Professor Dr. Michael Cook, Princeton University



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Most societies distinguish men's work from women's work, and those with sophisticated legal systems typically assign the cultivation of legal knowledge to men. But human life is full of exceptions, and this lecture considers the case of a female jurist with expertise in Islamic law. The focus is on male attitudes to her, and the tentative conclusion is that Islam, like capitalism and socialism, has its contradictions.

Michael Cook is Professor Emeritus of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University. A leading scholar of premodern Islamic history, he has published widely on Islamic law, ethics, early Muslim sources, and the formation of Islamic civilization, as well as on broader comparative questions of religion and politics. Educated at Cambridge and the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, he taught at SOAS until 1986 and then at Princeton until his retirement in 2025. He is the author or co-author of more than a dozen influential books and the recipient of major international awards, including the Holberg Prize, the Albert Hourani Book Award, and the Balzan Prize. His most recent book, *A History of the Muslim World: From Its Origins to the Dawn of Modernity* (2024), offers a remarkable synthesis of the history of Muslim societies from the rise of Islam to the early modern period.

This talk is hosted by the SNSF Starting Grant Trall. Tracing Labour in Islamicate Legal Traditions (PI Serena Tolino)