

# Professor Sato Tsugitaka and His Achievements

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Professor Sato Tsugitaka 佐藤次高, head of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko (Oriental Library), and professor in the Faculty of Letters, Arts and Sciences at Waseda University, died suddenly on April 11, 2011. Having retired from the Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology at the University of Tokyo in March 2003, he became the first professor in Waseda's Faculty of Letters specializing in Islamic history. From the beginning of FY 2006, as the leader of the Islamic Area Studies program of the National Institutes for the Humanities (NIHU), he headed inter-institutional research between Waseda University, the University of Tokyo, Sophia University, Kyoto University and the Toyo Bunko.

It was only a few days before his death that news of Professor Sato's critical condition was made known. Everyone was shocked when they heard. The cancer that has been discovered one and half years previously had moved to the bone marrow and his health had then deteriorated rapidly. It was Professor Sato's wish that his illness not be made public and he declined all visits to his sickbed. According to Islam, a person's death is decided by God and when the time comes there can be no delaying it even for a second. I think that Professor Sato departed on his final journey serenely, unflustered and unresisting. His funeral, held at Zojoji temple in Tokyo, was attended by close to a thousand people. Condolences were received from many colleagues overseas, including Abdul-Karim Rafeq (USA), R. Stephen Humphreys (USA), Dale E. Eickelman (USA), Nelly Hanna (Egypt), Mahmoud Al-Qaysi (Iraq), Randi Deguilhem (France) and Ilhan Shahin (Turkey).

Professor Sato was born in Yokohama on August 27, 1942. His parents were farmers, and he himself said that it was through helping with the work on the farm that he cultivated the necessary stamina and patience to study history, as well as developing a natural interest in rural society. He entered the Junior Division of Natural Sciences II of the University of Tokyo in 1963, and two years later moved to the Department of Oriental History in the Faculty of Letters of the same university, where he met Professor Shimada Johei 嶋田襄平 of Chuo University, who was then in

charge of teaching Arabic, and who had just returned from studying in the United Kingdom. Professor Sato remarked that he was very influenced by Shimada's eagerness and enthusiasm for his subject. For his graduation thesis his interest in social and economic history led him to take up the administrative system under the 'Abbasids, while his master's dissertation took as its theme land surveys during the Mamluk period. This study led directly to his research into the Iqtā' (allocated tax revenue) system. In 1968, when he was 26, he became a research fellow in the Institute of Oriental Culture (now, Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia) at the University of Tokyo. He moved to the Faculty of Letters and Education at Ochanomizu University in 1974 and in 1980 returned to the University of Tokyo to become an associate professor in the Faculty of Letters (promoted to full professor in 1990), where he was in charge of teaching the history of Western Asia. He published prolifically, including nine monographs, and in 2000 received the Imperial Prize of the Japan Academy for his work on the Iqtā' system. In addition, he acted as head of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko for twenty years, and also held important positions in various academic associations, including president of the Japan Association for Middle East Studies (1997–2001) and director of the Toho Gakkai (Institute of Eastern Culture). He led the study of Islam and the Middle East in Japan as the head of the Islamic Area Studies project (Kaken Grant-in-Aid, 1997–2002).

Professor Sato's first research interest was the Iqtā' system, and his work in this area was brought together in *State and Society in Medieval Islam: Studies on the Iqtā' system in Arab Society* (1986; in Japanese). It viewed the Iqtā' system not simply as a land system but, from the tenth century on, as the nucleus that linked state and society and determined their form. He rejected the idea of "Islamic feudalism" that had exerted a considerable influence on European and Arab scholars, and emphasized, from a close examination of a large number of historical sources including manuscripts, the diverse ways in which state and society acted. He contributed an article entitled "A Study on the Islamic Feudal System" (in Japanese) to the eighth volume of a multi-volume world history published by Iwanami Shoten in 1969. When writing an article on land surveys, he had read an article by Araki Moriaki 安良城盛昭 on the historical significance of Hideyoshi's cadastral surveys in Japanese history, which shows that he did not lack an interest in historical concepts. However, as far as the concept of feudalism went, he thought it could not explain characteristic features in the working of the Islamic state and society, such as different

ethnic groups, a monetary economy, slave-soldiers, commercial activities and nomads. In 1997, a revised version of *State and Society in Medieval Islam* appeared in English as *State and Rural Society in Medieval Islam*, published in Leiden by Brill. Its subtitle, “Sultans, Muqta‘as and Fallahun,” clearly demonstrates Sato’s approach of analysing state and society through the relationship between these three groups. On the other hand, his interest in the state itself bore fruit in a monograph of 2004, *State and Kingship in Islam* (in Japanese).

His second research interest was the Mamluks, who administered the Iqtā‘ system, and he published a study of them in 1991, entitled *The Mamlūks, Islamic Rulers from a Heretical World* (in Japanese). As the subtitle shows, he was interested in seeking how the Mamluks, who had been purchased as slaves, were able to become an elite and take hold of political power. At the same time, he regarded the way Islamic societies accepted and used the “other” to be their distinctive feature. He thus rejected the generalization that slavery equals discrimination and suggested that a new criterion should be introduced.

His third interest was local society. An article that he included in his *State and Society in Medieval Islam* entitled “Rural Society and Peasants in Egypt from the 12th to 14th Century” (in Japanese) had been written in 1973 during his time as a research fellow and it was to be a keystone for his further research. His starting point to write this article was that, when he wrote about Islamic feudalism, he realised that the materials he had studied did not allow him to write more than a few pages about villages and peasants under the Iqtā‘ system. However, after he returned from a year’s study in Iraq in 1969–70, he began writing about Egyptian rural society in detail, using materials like the local histories and gazetteers that he had collected abroad. Then, in 1983 he submitted an article to the journal *Shakaishi Kenkyu* (Social history) about the ‘*ayyārūn* (gangs of toughs or gallants) in medieval Baghdad, and he later commented that this had made him aware of “the city beyond the village.” Though this might seem to represent a change of direction from the village to the city, Professor Sato’s consistent interest was the “sphere of social activity” where the elements of village, city and nomadism were organically linked. He also wrote a history of the Syrian city of Jabala in English (1988) and added a chapter to *State and Rural Society in Medieval Islam* concerning the revolt of Nuṣayrī peasants in Jabala. In addition, in 2001 he published a monograph in Japanese on the legend of the wandering saint Sultan Ibrahim, who was buried in Jabala. He confessed at the Symposium com-

memorating the centenary of the Department of Oriental History at the University of Tokyo in December 2010, four months before his death, that when he was writing his article on Egyptian rural society in 1973, he decided that his style of writing should be appropriate to the new type of research he was undertaking, and so he aimed at writing comprehensible social history, breaking away from the traditional abstruse style of articles in Asian history.

His fourth interest was the connection between lifestyle and material objects. This was brought to fruition in his final publication, *The Social History of Sugar* (in Japanese) in 2009. Using a wide variety of historical sources, this work shed light on the production and use of sugar in the Middle East, which had until then represented a lacuna in the world history of sugar. His interest in the subject of sugar derived from work he did on its production and taxation in the Fayyum region when preparing his article on Egyptian rural society. Thus *The Social History of Sugar* incorporates materials gathered over forty years, including historical sources, medical and pharmaceutical texts, cookery books and literary works. He would record the information in his sources onto cards and then put them together when writing up his articles. Professor Sato did not change this research method even with the advent of computers. His study at home was filled with strong wooden boxes containing his card files, among which were those concerning sugar. He always visited the places that he was studying, and he related how he received a hint about how to interpret the historical sources he was reading when he came across an unglazed ceramic pot used for refining sugar in a regional museum at Ajlun in Jordan in 2006. He also visited the Faculty of Agriculture of the University of Tokyo to find out more about the sugar refining process. *The Social History of Sugar* is a testament both to his inquisitive mind and his patience in hunting down source material. The English version of this work was completed in December 2010, and has been selected as the first volume to be published by Brill in a planned Islamic Area Studies Monograph Series.

Professor Sato's research was underpinned by his studies abroad, especially in the countries of the Middle East, and by the interchanges he had with scholars there. During his time as a research fellow at the University of Tokyo, he had the opportunity to study in Iraq for a year, from the winter of 1969. There he studied under Professor Salih Ahmad al-'Ali of the University of Baghdad. He also visited Cairo at that time, where he was treated with great kindness by, among others, Professor Said 'Abd al-Fattah 'Ashur of Cairo University. In 1971, after his return to Japan, he

wrote an article entitled “Islamic Historians of Egypt and Iraq Today” (in Japanese), a detailed introduction to the research being done by these scholars through the medium of Arabic. He opened the article with the following words: “In the study of Islamic history in Japan, the study of medieval Islamic history in the modern Arabic-speaking countries has been, down to the present, almost unknown... Perhaps this lack of regard has been justified by asserting that the results of the study of Islamic history in the modern Arabic-speaking countries have been insignificant both empirically and theoretically. Consequently, there has been little concern about what kind of historical consciousness scholars in those countries have, and what kind of historical research they are pursuing, since from the nineteenth century, scholars in the region have inevitably been confronted by European capitalism and forced to reinterpret their own past tradition.”

His criticism of the Euro-centric historical research of the time was biting. In Japan, though the mainstream of the study of history in postwar Japan had moved to empirical and scientific research, in reaction to the imperialist and Asianist views of history-writing during wartime, there was a strong perception among scholars of both Asian and Western history that the study of history in Asia, including Japan, lagged behind that of Europe and America. Already in the 1960s, the scholars Morimoto Kosei 森本公誠 (history of the early Egyptian tax system) and Itagaki Yuzo 板垣雄三 (modern Arab history) had studied in Egypt, but research into the history of the various Arab countries remained within the realm of the unknown at that time. Professor Sato subsequently visited the Middle East frequently. In 1984 he was sent to the JSPS Cairo Research Center as a research fellow, and in 1986 he undertook fieldwork in Syria. He always encouraged his young graduate students to study in the Middle East, as opposed to Europe or America, and to live among the local society there. He also recommended that they make their work available in Arabic or the local language, even if only in abstract, so that it might be known among local scholars. When I first visited Egypt and Syria, despite my awkward Arabic, I typed up abstracts of my articles, which I showed to the scholars to whom Professor Sato had given me an introduction. This allowed me to receive truly kind criticism of my work. Such interchanges led to the establishment of a network of Japanese scholars and their counterparts in the Arab countries and other countries of the Middle East.

Professor Sato attended his first conference abroad in 1974, at the first International Conference on the History of Bilad-al-Sham held in

Jordan. There he presented a paper entitled “The Historical Character of al-Rawk al-Nāṣirī in Mamlūk Syria.” The organizer of the conference was Jordan’s Professor Muhammed ‘Adnan al-Bakhit who visited Japan to participate in the International Conference of Urbanism in Islam in 1990. There Professor Sato also met Professor Abdul-Karim Rafeq of Damascus University for the first time and began their long association in Syria, the USA and Japan. In 1997, as we have seen, Brill published his *State and Rural Society in Medieval Islam: Sultans, Muqta’s and Fallahun*, a revised and expanded version of his 1986 work based on his doctoral dissertation. In the intervening years he had spent time in Egypt, Turkey, the United States and other places searching out new materials, and subsequently the English publication was supplemented with twenty manuscript sources and ninety-nine revised sources. In 1993 he had the opportunity to spend a year overseas, and spent the time searching research institutions in the United States and the Middle East exhaustively for historical materials and secondary literature. He himself called this his “Iqṭā‘ journey.” There was no alteration in the framework of his book, but his newly gained stock of information based on those materials was incorporated into the narrative of the main text and into the footnotes. Through the publication of this work, Professor Sato gained an established reputation abroad as a scholar of the Iqṭā‘ system and the Mamluks. From 1998, he contributed three articles to the *Mamlūk Studies Review*, published by the University of Chicago, and in 2006 he was guest editor of a special issue focusing on Mamluk Studies in Japan, with articles contributed by six Japanese scholars. He also contributed two items to the well-regarded *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (new edition) at the editors’ request, one on “Ushur” (tithe) and the other on “al-Yābānī” (the Japanese); in the latter he described the history of the relations between the Arab-Muslim world and Japan.

He organized a number of international conferences in connection with the “Urbanism in Islam” Project (1987–1990) and the Islamic Area Studies Project (1997–2002; 2006–2010). He edited the two volumes that arose out of these projects, *Islamic Urbanism in Human History* (1997) and *Muslim Society: Historical and Comparative Aspects* (2004). As the leader of the “Islamic Area Studies” Project, Professor Sato acted as host at international conferences held in Kyoto (1999, 2010) and Kisarazu (2002). Also, joint international conferences were held in Kuala Lumpur in 2008, co-sponsored by the Asia-Europe Institute of the University of Malaya, and in Cairo in 2009, co-sponsored by Cairo University. He gave keynote speeches at these conferences, both in Japan and abroad, and played a

role in transmitting Japanese scholarship on the Middle East and Islam to the world. After the September 11 incident, he was asked to be a member of the Regional Advisory Panel on the Middle Eastern and North African Studies at the Social Science Research Council (New York) and to organise a survey of Middle East Studies in Japan which was reported at the Middle East Studies Association in North America (MESA) annual meeting in 2003. He put a lot of effort into developing exchanges with scholars of the Middle East in China and Korea and throughout East Asia, and visited Beijing and Seoul. Concealing his illness, he attended an international symposium on Bridging the Middle East and East Asia, held in Beirut in January 2011. It was to be his last journey overseas.

During his times abroad, one of the things that Professor Sato was passionate about was collecting historical materials. During his first stay abroad, in Iraq, he prepared a long hand-written list of the books he wanted to buy, and then drew a line through the item when he had purchased it. I heard after he died that his elder brother gave him a book budget of 500,000 yen as a farewell gift, and this allowed him to buy whatever he wished. He continued to buy primary and secondary works wherever he went, and his bookshelves filled two rooms of his house. They included 4100 works in Arabic, 1500 works in European languages and 2000 works in Japanese. He did not just use them himself, but happily lent them to students wanting to study Arab history. When we asked Professor Sato about a book that was not in the university library, he would tell us in a matter of days whether he had it or not. He kept card boxes in his library at home containing details about his books, and he had his books arranged on the shelves according to period, so it was possible to discover a particular book quickly from the vast number he had. His book collection has been donated to the Waseda University library at the wish of both Professor Sato and his family. In several years, once the books have been catalogued, it is intended that they will be made available for use. As well, he encouraged the Toyo Bunko to collect historical materials in Arabic, Persian, Turkish and other Middle Eastern languages, and he also played a central role in providing for the dissemination of information about materials held when the Toyo Bunko was designated the Documentation Center for the Islamic Area Studies Project. Research using historical documents in local languages is taken for granted today, but Professor Sato's contribution in creating a context that made that possible was very great indeed.

He was also closely involved in planning works that would provide a

basis for understanding the history of the Middle East and Islam. He was a co-editor, with Shimada Johei and Itagaki Yuzo, of the *Cyclopedia of Islam* (1982, new edition 2002; in Japanese). He was often associated with plans to publish a general history of the Middle East and the Islamic World and drew up a schedule for publication. Works published in this series include *A General Outline of the History of Islam* (1986, co-edited with Itagaki Yuzo; in Japanese), *History of the Islamic World* (1993; in Japanese), *A History of West Asia* (2002; in Japanese) and *The History of Islam* (2010, co-edited with Kosugi Yasushi 小杉泰; in Japanese). As a member of the editorial committee for a standard high school textbook on World History (published by Yamakawa Shuppansha), he wrote the part on Islamic history. When he was deputy director of the Center for East Asian Cultural Studies for UNESCO, affiliated with the Toyo Bunko, he proposed the compilation of a *Bibliography of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies in Japan* (2 vols., 1992–93). It contains citations of 15,000 books and articles published by Japanese or in Japanese on Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies between 1868 and 1988. Professor Sato wanted the names of authors and publications to be written in foreign languages as well as Japanese so that the bibliography could also be of use to researchers overseas. Later this Bibliography was supplemented with data from the Japan Association for Middle East Studies and the Islamic Area Studies Program of NIHU. This data is now available online from the Bibliographical Database maintained by the IAS Center at the Toyo Bunko.

When Professor Sato said that when he was writing an article it was as if he were drawing “a single picture.” This is said to have been the motto of Furushima Toshio 古島敏雄, a historian of early modern Japan. Professor Sato was concerned how to reconstruct the fragmentary facts gleaned from documents so as to present the total picture. He neglected any research based on verifiable fact if it was concerned only with the detail and ignored the total picture. He supported research that challenged accepted theories head-on, even if it criticised his own work. He had no time for abstract argument. Professor Sato himself always tackled difficult and complicated subjects, like the Iqtā’ system, the Mamluks, rural society, ‘*ayyārūn*, saints and sugar. Each of them was “a single picture,” as well as contributions that filled in piece by piece the blanks in the enormous picture that was Islamic society. In the background of Islamic Area Studies was his experience of the type of historical study that advocated the understanding of a region “from the deciphering of a single old document.”



Professor Sato disliked any standing on ceremony or ostentation. When out drinking he would happily speak with anyone, without discrimination, and we would always address him as “Mr.,” never “Professor.” He would take visiting researchers from overseas to *izakaya*, to drink with him and continue their discussions, and invite those staying long-term in Japan to his home, where he would often greet them wearing kimono.

He did not speak particularly of historical methodology in his publications but rather set out models using actual examples. There was a résumé of his research left behind in his study after his death, where he noted, “I have an interest in periodization and historical theory. But it is hard to abandon those chance meetings with Arabic materials that portray the true face of people.” He also wrote, “Jesus, Muhammed, Luther and those who promoted the Meiji Restoration were all radicals. I try to think radically and flexibly, not confused by common understanding.” Here we hear the hidden thoughts of Professor Sato, whose journey along the royal road of historical research appeared so smooth. May he rest in peace.

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35. "The Scope and Potential of Islamic Area Studies." MESA 32nd Annual Meeting, Chicago, December 5, 1998.
36. "Islam in Asia: Perspectives from Middle Eastern Studies." The 3rd Conference of AFMA, Tokyo Keizai University, Tokyo, May 15, 1999.
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39. "Western and Japanese Approaches to Islam." Institute of Political and International Studies, Tehran, July 28, 2001.
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44. "Opening Address." JAMES International Workshop on Changing Knowledge and Authority in Islam, in cooperation with The Toyo Bunko, funded by Japan Foundation, The University of Tokyo, Tokyo, March 25–26, 2004.
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47. "Middle Eastern Studies in Japan." Round table "Knowledge Production, Academia and the Public Sphere" at the Beirut Conference on Public Spheres, Beirut (October 22–24, 2004), October 23, 2004.
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49. "New Islamic Area Studies in Japan since 2006." The Second World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies (WOCMES-2), Amman (June 11–16, 2006), June 14, 2006.
50. "Keynote Speech." The 7th Edition of the Tunisia-Japan Symposium on Society, Science & Technology, University of Sousse, Sousse, Tunisia, December 4, 2006.
51. "Opening Address, New Horizons in Islamic Area Studies in Japan." A pre-organized panel "Roles of Intellectuals in Medieval Muslim Societies" at MESA 41st Annual Meeting, Montreal, November 17, 2007.
52. "Welcome Speech." The International Workshop of NIHU Program Islamic Area Studies "Rethinking Tariqa: What Makes Something Tariqa?," Kyoto University, Kyoto (October 12–13, 2008), October 12, 2008.
53. "Welcoming Address." The International Conference of Islamic Area Studies, Kuala Lumpur (November 22–23, 2008), November 22, 2008.
54. "Nakba Revisited: Memories and Histories from a Comparative Perspective." Islamic Area Studies Symposium "Nakba after Sixty Years: Memories and Histories in Palestine and East Asia," The University of Tokyo, Tokyo, December 12, 2008.
55. "Iraq and Japan in History." International Workshop "Iraq and Japan in Modern History: Modernity and Tradition," Waseda University, Tokyo, July 17, 2009.
56. "Prosperity (*'imāra*) and Disasters (*fasād*) in Egypt during the Ayyubid and Mamluk Periods: Focused on Sugar Production." Conference "Hybridity of Historical Disasters: Nature, Society and Power" organized by Karl Jaspers Centre for Transcultural Studies at Heidelberg University in cooperation



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