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THE ADENIS: Local, Regional and Transregional Networks and Allegiances at Yemen's Indian Ocean Hub in the Middle Ages

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ABSTRACT

As the seat of an independent polity in the 11th and 12th centuries, the port city of Aden developed commercial and fiscal institutions and infrastructure to become one of the most frequented entrepôts in the Western Indian Ocean. This was partly thanks to its strategic geographical location and advantageous natural topography and mostly due to the institutions and infrastructure developed under the leadership of elites either directly involved in trade or profiting from the extraction of commercial taxes. From the middle of the 12th century onward the port became part of larger territorial states—first through the Ayyubid conquest and government of large parts of Yemen in the second half of the 12th and first quarter of the 13th century, and then through the establishment of an important and long-lasting successor state under the Rasulids that administered the port in the following two centuries. My talk will address the balance of local, regional and transregional allegiances of the various groups inhabiting the Yemeni port city in these different periods of its urban history, both in terms of political power-struggles and alliances and in terms of personal, ethnic, religious and professional affiliations. I will examine the overlapping interests of the Adeni participants in the networks of trade, politics and culture criss-crossing the Western Indian Ocean and its tributary seas, and comment on what the relevant sources can tell us about how identities or “axes of belonging” formed and changed for the inhabitants of the well-connected Yemeni port city.

BIOGRAPHY

Roxani Eleni Margariti is an Associate Professor of Middle Eastern Studies at Emory University's Department of Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies. This spring she is the Nina Maria Gorrissen Fellow in History at the American Academy in Berlin. She earned her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in archaeology from University College London and Texas A&M University respectively, and holds a Ph.D. in Near Eastern Studies from Princeton University. Her research interests focus on Middle Eastern and Indian Ocean social and economic history, with an emphasis on maritime history and material culture. She is also interested in the construction of the Islamic past in the Balkans. She has participated in archaeological excavations and surveys in England, Greece, Turkey, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates. Her first book, *Aden and the Indian Ocean Trade: 150 Years in the Life of a Medieval Arabian Port* (2007), was a study of urban topography and commercial institutions at the Yemeni port. She also co-edited two volumes, *Histories of the Middle East: Studies in Middle Eastern Economy, Society, and Law in Honor of A.L. Udovitch* (2010) and *Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Medieval and Early Modern Times: A Festschrift in Honor of Mark R. Cohen* (2014). She is currently working on a second monograph focused on a biography of the Dahlak Archipelago in the Southern Red Sea in medieval and early modern times.