

VISCOM Project  
Austrian Academy of Sciences / University of Vienna

Ph.D. Project Abstract

## **Slaves in medieval Yemen: An Analysis of Historical Sources**

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This Ph.D. thesis will explore the complex phenomenon of slavery in medieval Yemen through the analysis of historical sources from the twelfth to the early fifteenth century. The different social positions and roles occupied by slaves during that time, as well as the impacts of gender, ethnic background and religious denomination on them will be analyzed.

The proposed research lies within the field of historical anthropology, and will draw upon its theoretical and methodological tools. Ethnographic works will be drawn upon to assess the legacy of historical slavery in contemporary Yemen. Different types of historical sources on medieval Yemen will be analyzed, in order to illuminate the complex phenomenon of slavery at the time. Biographical source material will be examined to assess how social positions could change over the course of an individual's life.

This research will be conducted as part of the project *VISCOM - Visions of Community - Comparative Approaches to Ethnicity, Region and Empire in Christianity, Islam and Buddhism (400-1600 CE)*, carried out by the University of Vienna and the Austrian Academy of Sciences. PH.D. supervisors are Andre Gingrich (Director of the Institute for Social Anthropology, Austrian Academy of Sciences; Professor of Social Anthropology, University of Vienna), Christina Lutter (Professor of History at the University of Vienna) and Dr. Johann Heiss (Institute for Social Anthropology, Austrian Academy of Sciences).

This research shall serve a dual purpose. Firstly, it will add historical depth to anthropological understandings of marginalization and slavery in contemporary Yemen. Secondly, it can contribute to global research on slavery by adding a specific case study from a region and time when slavery was a much more common and rather complex phenomenon.