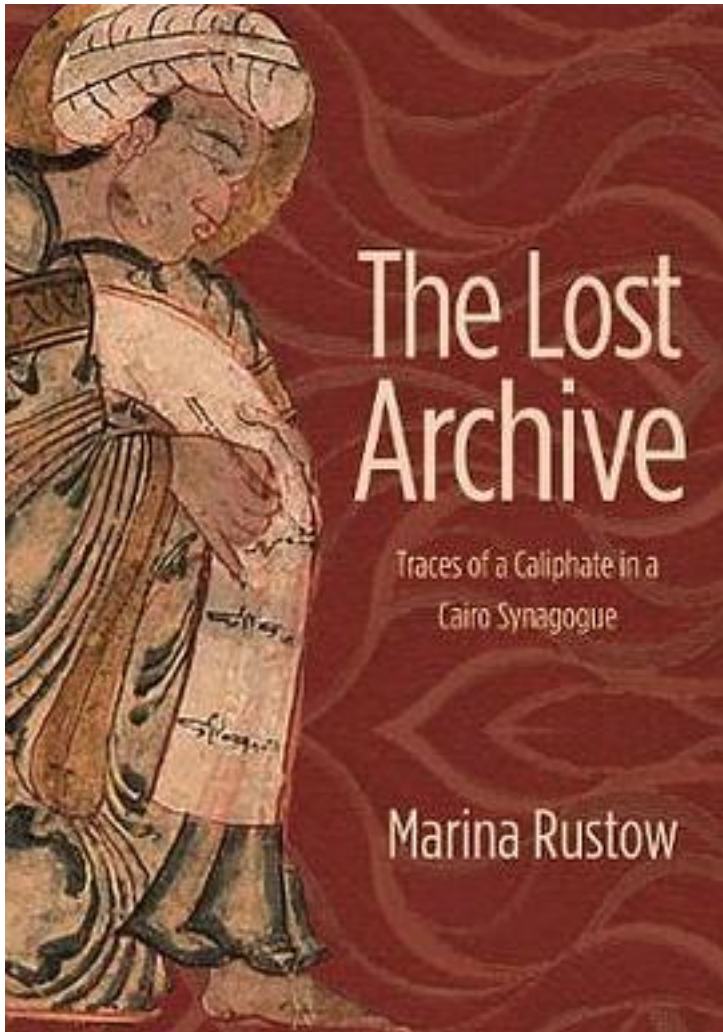


The Lost Archive



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出版者:Princeton University Press

出版时间:2020-1

装帧:Hardcover

isbn:9780691156477

The lost archive of the Fatimid caliphate (909–1171) survived in an unexpected place:

the storage room, or geniza, of a synagogue in Cairo, recycled as scrap paper and deposited there by medieval Jews. Marina Rustow tells the story of this extraordinary find, inviting us to reconsider the longstanding but mistaken consensus that before 1500 the dynasties of the Islamic Middle East produced few documents, and preserved even fewer.

Beginning with government documents before the Fatimids and paper's westward spread across Asia, Rustow reveals a millennial tradition of state record keeping whose very continuities suggest the strength of Middle Eastern institutions, not their weakness. Tracing the complex routes by which Arabic documents made their way from Fatimid palace officials to Jewish scribes, the book provides a rare window onto a robust culture of documentation and archiving not only comparable to that of medieval Europe, but, in many cases, surpassing it. Above all, Rustow argues that the problem of archives in the medieval Middle East lies not with the region's administrative culture, but with our failure to understand preindustrial documentary ecology.

Illustrated with stunning examples from the Cairo Geniza, this compelling book advances our understanding of documents as physical artifacts, showing how the records of the Fatimid caliphate, once recovered, deciphered, and studied, can help change our thinking about the medieval Islamic world and about premodern politics more broadly.

作者介绍:

Marina Rustow is the Khedouri A. Zilkha Professor of Jewish Civilization in the Near East and professor of Near Eastern studies and history at Princeton University. She is director of the Princeton Geniza Lab and a MacArthur fellow, and is the author of *Heresy and the Politics of Community: The Jews of the Fatimid Caliphate*.

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