Report for the SSHA Presidential Book Prize, 2016
Submitted by Susannah Ottaway, chair
Committee Members: Dan Slater and Aaron Panofsky


The Presidential Book Prize Committee is pleased to report that we have unanimously selected Jonathan Wyrtzen's Making Morocco from a very competitive field of nominees for the 2016 prize.

Citation: Jonathan Wyrtzen's Making Morocco is an extraordinary work of social science history. Making Morocco's historical coverage is remarkably thorough and sweeping; the author exhibits incredible scope in his research, and mastery of an immensely rich set of materials (from poetry to diplomatic messages in a variety of languages across a century of history). The monograph engages with the most important theorists of nationalism, colonialism, and state formation, and uses Pierre Bourdieu's field theory as a framework to orient and organize the socio-historical problems of the case and to make sense of the different types of problems various actors faced as they moved forward. His analysis makes constant reference to core categories of political sociology (state, nation, political field, religious and political authority, identity and social boundaries, classification struggles, etc.), and he does so in exceptionally clear and engaging prose. Rather than sidelining what might appear to be more tangential themes in the politics of identity formation in Morocco, Wyrtzen examines deeply not only French colonialism but also the Spanish zone, and he makes central to his analysis the Jewish question and the role of gender. These areas of analysis allow Wyrtzen to examine his outcome of interest – which is really a historical process of interest – from every conceivable analytical and empirical angle. The end-product is an absolutely exemplary study of colonialism, identity formation, and the classification struggles that accompany them. This is not a work of high-brow social theory, but a classic work of history, deeply influenced but not excessively burdened by social-theoretical baggage.

Process: We received 17 books for consideration for the prize, nearly all of them nominated by the publishers rather than the authors. Four of the nominated books were by authors who did not meet our cut-off for the date of their Ph.Ds, and so these were not considered. At least two of us read each book submitted, and then all three of us read the top five books in the final round of consideration for the book prize. In our discussions (which were conducted via e-mail), we easily agreed on the top five selections, and then we independently arrived at our consensus top choice. We agreed that several other books were also excellent (particularly Leah Gordon's From Power to Prejudice (Chicago, 2015)), but each of us found Wyrtzen's book to be a truly extraordinary contribution not only to his field, but to social science history more broadly.

Suggestions for Change to Process: We ran into several challenges this year. First, although the SSHA website stipulates that nominations should include the author's c.v., almost none of the books arrived with information on the author, so we had to chase up information on the author's Ph.D. date – a particular challenge because several authors were at universities outside of the United States. Can we highlight more effectively the requirement that submissions be accompanied by a c.v.? Second, the committee was appointed quite late, and the website not updated for a while, so some presses never did get exam copies to all the committee members, and other presses had to be repeatedly contacted before they sent the copies. Could next year's committee be appointed
earlier, and the addresses of the committee members clearly indicated on the SSHA website as soon as possible, well before the summer months. On a final note, it is disheartening, as an early modern social historian, to have spent three years on this committee and never seen a nominee that was even close to my own field; it would be nice if we could make sure that the prize is announced/circulated in venues that are likely to include early modern and medieval scholars.