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**Paper, Books, Purchasing Power and Economic Performance in the Medieval
Islamic Middle East, 700-1500 AD**

Abstract

Why and how did Muslims adopt the use of paper? Islamic paper changed literacy practices around the world, yet very little is known and understood about the course and circumstances of its adoption in the Middle East. This study suggests that the historical trajectory of the adoption of paper is better understood within a context of economic change in the Middle East between the 7th and 10th centuries. Using quantitative evidence from a newly constructed database this study argues that a rise in purchasing power of wages, demand for luxury goods, a shift in agrarian patterns and technological advances, account for the decline in the price of paper and books. The last section explores the link between the new communication medium and improvements in economic performance in areas involving human capital, knowledge storage and information technology.