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Sommario/riassunto	Most studies on Islamic, Arab and Ottoman societies are content with the role of testimony that texts available to researchers can play, thus reducing the role of text and language to a mimetic description of past events. The point here is to show that any understanding of social relations implies, first, to consider the textual production of a society by questioning the meaning assignable to the texts themselves. It also supposes that the analysis of texts, whatever their societal and institutional context, must consider its sources as discursive practices, in order not to reduce them to their preliminary function of factual testimony. Drawing on a wide variety of Ottoman "legal" texts produced in Beirut and Damascus in the 19th century, this book avoids linking

these texts to the normative values of “Islamic law”, but on the contrary documents the way in which discursive practices operate concretely on a specific terrain. Different levels of practices then emerge, all documented by the social actors who made their very existence possible.
