

Islam: Culture, Institutions and Agents

AYŞEGÜL ÇİMEN*

Islamic Culture: A Study of Cultural Anthropology

By Farid Younos

Author House: Bloomington, 2013, 158 pages, \$26.87, ISBN: 9781491823446

Early Islamic Institutions: Administration and Taxation from the Caliphate to the Umayyads and Abbasids

By Abd al-Aziz Duri

New York: I.B.Tauris, 2011, 256 pages, \$45.00, ISBN: 9781848850606

Son Dönem Osmanlı Suriye'sinde Islahat Hareketleri (Islamic Reform: Politics and Social Change in Late Ottoman Syria)

By David Dean Commins

İstanbul: Mahya, 2014, 318 pages, 18.75 TL, ISBN: 9786055222246

The three books reviewed in this article do not seem closely related in the first impression. Younos' book sheds light upon Islamic culture in the context of cultural anthropology; Duri's book scrutinizes some of the significant Islamic institutions, their emergence, evolution, functioning, as well as the principles that emerged during the formative period of Islam. The last book, *Islamic Reform*, focuses on a number of religious intellectuals' lives in a wide context, and their reactions to the nineteenth century transformations that undermined their importance. What connects these books is Islam,

and its followers' agencies in the social, political and economic sphere. Relying mainly on diverse subfields of study, these authors introduce basic principles of Islam, the culture and tradition in which the religion emerged, Muslims' ways of conducting their agencies in accordance with Islamic principles, and their reactions to changing circumstances in due course. Despite their commonalities, these books are considerably different from each other with regard to their approaches, methodology, their use of primary and secondary sources, and their target audience. However, the books might be read together in

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Insight Turkey
Vol. 19 / No. 4 /
2017, pp. 175-185

order to grasp Islam in respect to its source, basic tenets, practice and their relation to the political and fiscal organization of the Islamic State, the dynamics of its evolution according to new circumstances, culture and tradition. Additionally, the transformation that the Ottoman Syria went through in the nineteenth century and the religious intellectuals' response to that transformation, disagreements and consensus might render a comparative reading of theoretical problems in different time periods.

Farid Younos has already authored four books, focusing on Islam, Islamic culture, Islamic sociology, democracy and gender equality in Islam. The current book, *Islamic Culture: a Study of Cultural Anthropology*, is devoted to an analysis of Islam from an anthropological perspective. Given the subtitle of the book, one could expect that it would provide anthropological insights for Islam and Islamic culture by applying certain anthropological methodologies. Yet although Younos very briefly discusses this perspective in the first part of the book, the reader should not expect to attain an analytical observation of the cultural anthropology of Islam. Culture and anthropology are only referred to as terms in cases where they are needed. For that reason, this book may not fall within the area of anthropological studies, or one of its subfields, cultural anthropology.

Younos briefly explains the classifications of anthropology and cultural anthropology in particular. Then he briefly mentions the non-empirical

principles of cultural anthropology. Questions like 'how people set up their daily lives, and how they emerge as a group having certain uniform value systems' were asked to describe the field of study of cultural anthropology. Referring to the non-empirical principles of cultural anthropology, Younos prefers the definition of culture from the Islamic perspective, rather than dealing with the metaphysical principles of anthropology. (p. iii). His further endeavor is to avoid including Islamic sociology and history in the book. Studying Islam, Muslims, and their norms and values based upon the tradition of the prophet Muhammed is what Younos puts under the rubric of cultural anthropology. Additionally, Arabic as the language of the *Qur'an* is also referred to in its relation to Islamic linguistic anthropology. (p. iv)

The primary objective of the author, as explicitly specified in the first part of the book, is to make non-Muslims in Europe and in the United States acquainted with Islamic Culture. Younos holds that to generate a sense of harmony and coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims in western countries where Islamophobia has become rampant, both sides must learn each other's cultures. Additionally, in one of his highly articulated arguments, Younos states, "Muslims have to change their lifestyles for the sake of progress," and "Islamic law has the power in itself to accommodate the needs of our time" (p. 2). However, what kind of lifestyle Muslims should adopt, and the content of the progress he touts are not presented in

detail. The 'official Islamophobia' that Younos identifies as the stand non-Muslim governments take against Muslims, causes terrorism and radicalism. In this regard, it is possible to argue that despite the contents' descriptive and informative wording, this book is written as a reaction to incognizant non-Muslims, if not also for the same group of Muslims.

The book consists of nine parts. Tawhid, Abraham, the language of the *Qur'an*, the Prophet Muhammed, Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem are all discussed in the first part in the context of Islamic Anthropology and culture. Putting emphasis on the revelation, Younos argues that Muhammed was the founder of Islamic culture; he didn't inherit this culture from his ancestors, rather he based it on what he received from God.

In the literature of Islamic history, it has been debated whether the pre-Islamic Arab and Persian world had imprinted upon Islam their long-lasting tradition and culture. Scholars like Marshall Hodgson, Chase Robinson, and Aziz al-Duri draw attention to these aforementioned imprints of pre-Islamic Arabia. Yet although Younos' book is devoted to understanding Islam from the perspective of cultural anthropology, it does not include any of these arguments. Nor does it cohere to a particular time period, a literature review, a discussion of disputed arguments on certain topics, a considerable number of secondary sources, or a general evaluation of Islam in different parts of the world. In terms of cultural anthropology,

one might have expected the author to provide a section on the theoretical and methodological principles of studying Islam under the rubric of cultural anthropology. At least, the author might have provided a discussion on the possibility of Islamic cultural anthropology. Studies in the field of Islamic anthropology have been published for more than four decades. As Asad's article puts it,¹ one of the main arguments for the possibility of Islamic anthropology is the diverse forms of Islam. With this respect, taking all of the geographically, ethnically, and linguistically different forms of Islam as one single totality is controversial. Since the study of the anthropology of Islam is still a question of methodology, it would be great if the author had boldly discussed the topic in terms of theory and concept.

The author provides basic knowledge for the layperson, such as the principles of Islam, its belief system, the *Qur'an*, *hadith*, prayer, *wudu*, the branches of Islam; family, personal and social life, Sufism and mysticism. However, he doesn't answer questions like, 'what is the nature and possibility of the cultural anthropology of Islam? What is the object of this investigation?' The book provides a well-organized and comprehensive knowledge on Islam. Younos deserves credit for his interest in the field of Islamic anthropology and his purpose to publish on this subject matter, but his readers should wait for a second book on which the author might analyze Islam in respect to cultural anthropology. The field could be regarded relatively new, if theoretical

and methodological aspects become a subject of inquiry, rich sources of Islamic cultural anthropology would be utilized more efficiently.

The second book, *Early Islamic Institutions*, meticulously examines how basic and significant Islamic institutions emerged, evolved and developed during the first ages of Islam. The prolific scholar Duri has already authored and co-authored more than twenty books dealing mainly with the political, economic and cultural history of Islamic civilization, as well as Arab historiography. At the time of his death in 2010, he was among the historians who reflected upon the Islamic civilization from a different perspective. Taking into consideration the coloring of the Islamic Empire by the long lasting traditions of the Arabian Peninsula, Greco-Roman and Persians, he contextualized the evolution of the Islamic Empire in contact, continuity and rupture.

In *Early Islamic Institutions*, Duri tries to understand the institutional aspect of the rapid expansion of Islam, focusing on its roots and functioning, and showing the dynamics of Islamic governance and administration. Among these, political, fiscal and administrative systems are the main focal points. Duri argues that the ways in which different models evolved and renewed themselves is the key for understanding Islamic administration and governance.

Early Islamic Institutions consists of three chapters devoted to three main institutional developments, namely

the caliphate, fiscal, and administrative systems. In the first chapter, Duri scrutinizes the roots of political and religious leadership among Arabs starting from the pre-Islamic period of Mecca, the Sasanian Empire, and the Byzantine lands; he then makes some deductions from these traditions as well as Islam's own establishment of systems during the periods of the prophet, the Rashidun, the Umayyads, the Abbasids, and the Buyyids. Laying emphasis on tribe as the basis of social and political systems in the Arabian Peninsula, Duri claims that the consultative council (*majlis al-shura*) was composed of the most powerful members and the chief of the community. The sheikh, chosen by the *majlis*, had to be distinguished by his bravery, generosity, wisdom, and will for serving the community. Although the sheikh had the right to appoint his successor in hard times, such inheritance of authority was not normative. Additionally, the majority of the sheikh's actions and decisions had to be confirmed by the *majlis*. *Mala*, the senate of Meccans, was composed of the chief families and the people who had financial influence. If any need arose, like consultations, deliberations, crucial marriages, proclamations of wars etc., the council gathered at *dar al-nadwah*, several meters north of the *ka'bah*. Duri states that although this 'council of ten' had a very crucial position as they were mainly from the tribe of Quraysh, none of them had absolute hegemonic power. During the emergence of Islam, the most prominent member of the council was Abu Sufyan. His sayings, however, were evi-

dence for the lack of any hegemonic power: “I do not contradict Quraysh, I do whatever they do” (p. 4).

Duri states that in the era of the Prophet, religion and politics were undifferentiated in the call to Islam. Protecting Muslims and maintaining peace and security were the first two goals. Rather than disregarding the long-standing tradition of tribal solidarity and fraternity, the prophet Mohammed applied the system in a broader form and with a religious basis (p. 8).

Duri examines how the caliphate emerged and developed during different periods of Islamic history until the time of the Buwayhids, laying emphasis on the importance of the institution. The developments after the prophet proved that although the prophets’ death was predictable, neither he himself nor his *ummah* generated a sophisticated system of caliphate. Referencing Ibn ‘Abbas, Duri recalls Abu Bakr’s words to the community: “You must have a man who takes charge of your affair(s) (*am-rakum*), leads your prayers and fights your enemies” (p. 13). The author claims that the dissent and arguments between *muhajriûn* and *ansâr* about the succession were articulated on the grounds of tribal reflexes. However, the impetus behind the election of Abu Bakr was his being one of two in the cave on the way to Madina, as well as the fact that the prophet had delegated him to lead the prayers in his absence. In its general form, the election of the first caliphs revealed a system of free election (p. 15). Duri

claims that the address Abu Bakr gave in the mosque laid the political foundation of Islam. Abu Bakr clarified that he was responsible for the Muslims and that the foundation of his rule was justice. All members of the community were equal before the law, *jihad* was the pillar of the state, and the *dustûr* (constitution) of the Muslims was the word of Allah and the *sunnah* (words and actions) of the prophet Muhammad (p. 16).

In order to prevent *fitnah* (strife) among Muslims, Abu Bakr designated “Umar as his successor; but even if his community asked Umar to designate a caliph after him he refused to do this” (pp. 17-18). However, a council of six persons for conducting *shura* (consultation) was derived from his remarks. Among these six, Uthman and Ali contended for the caliphate. Contrary to Wellhausen and Hodgson, Duri claims that Uthman was not the weakest one; particularly from the aspect of tribal solidarity he was the strongest one. However, increasing grievances among garrison towns, as well as the discontents ended in his killing and Ali’s caliphate. The caliphate in this period was based on ‘election’ followed by the system of *ba’yah*. Duri sees this *rashidun*’s system of election as a synthesis of the influence of Arab tradition and Islam’s spirit.

In practice, the caliphate under the Umayyads could be said to be embroiled in a continuous conflict between three principles: The Islamic principle (election of the most righteous and best for Muslims), the

tribal principle (the ascendancy of the tribe; election of the most widely influential person, the eldest and the most inclined to service of its individuals), and the principle of direct inheritance from father to son. Having a significant reserve, he describes the caliphate during the Umayyads as the rule of Arab and Arab tradition gradually directed towards despotism, and a transition from the stage of election to that of absolute inheritance, which was maintained also during the Abbasids' caliphate (pp. 26-27). The Abbasids transformed the system of the caliphate into a more abstract and religiously based form, combining the despotic outlook of the Persians with the sacrosanct character of the caliph, based on kinship and being a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. Utilizing the ministerial system (*wizârah*), they availed themselves of 'pseudo-partners.' In terms of the theoretical foundations of the caliphate, Duri compares and contrasts different sects of Islam like *Sunni*, *Shi'i* and *Khariji*. Referencing Abu Yusuf's *Kitâb al-Kharaj*, al-Mâverdi's *al-Ahkâm al-Sultâniyah* and al-Baghdâdi's *Usûl al-Dîn*, the author compares different opinions and theories of the caliphate based upon the historical facts and the *fuqahâs* (Islamic jurist's) theoretical deductions. Quoting from al-Shahrastâni's *al-Milâl wa al-Nihal*, he states that the *Kharijites* were more egalitarian in permitting and extending the right of being caliph to non-Arabs; a Qurayshi Arab, an Abyssinian or a Nabatian slave, and even a woman could be a caliph (pp. 60-61). Finally, Duri explains the Shi'ite theory of the caliphate with

reference to al-Kulayni's *Usûl al-Kâfi*. Attributing a divine character to the caliphs, the Shi'ites were inclined to designate *imams* among the *ahl al-bayt*, basing the source of the theory on the *Qur'an*, *sunnah* and the sayings of *imams* rather than historical facts (pp. 63-67).

In the second chapter, Duri sheds light on fiscal systems (*al-nuzum al-maliyah*). He first examines different systems of taxation based on categorizations like the lands conquered by force and the lands conquered by peace agreement, and sub-categorizations like Arab and non-Arab lands. The issue of dividing the booty (*al-khums*) into fifths, the share of Allah and the Messenger, the share of a foot soldier and a cavalry member *kharaj*, *jizya* and *'ushr* are all explained in detail utilizing sources like Ibn Hisham, Ibn al-Salâm, al-Baladhuri and Abu Yusuf, as well as the *Qur'an*. One of the questions that the author dwells upon is the distribution of conquered lands among Muslims: While the prophet had distributed the lands among Muslims as well as the existing users of the lands in order to keep cultivation progressing efficiently, 'Umar didn't follow this precedent and made the land *fay*,' a common property of Muslims, in order to keep collecting taxes equivalently for later generations. However, Duri also lays emphasis on the ancient character of those conquered lands that had carried their deeply rooted fiscal systems and traditions.

According to Duri, the sophisticated systematization of the fiscal system of

the Islamic State was first introduced by ‘Umar Ibn al-Khattâb, since he used *ijtihâd*, (independent reasoning) and didn’t follow the prophet’s method in certain matters. Additionally, the author relates Umar’s method of administration of the lands to the long lasting traditions of the Byzantine and Sassanian empires with necessary modifications (p. 90). Although in his period the absence of Islamic legislation (except regarding the division of booty), and the Arab’s inexperience in the financial sphere made his term unstable, it was also quite a flexible era. Both *kharaj* and *jizyah* were forms of the symbolic subjugation of non-Muslims; it was not a medium of humiliation. ‘Umar’s method was to keep the Arabs’ military achievements benefiting them with the money and crops coming from the non-Muslim population. Duri discusses *kharaj*, *jizyah* and other taxes by examining primary sources, like Abu Yusuf (*Kitâb al-Kharaj*), al-Jahsiyârî, al-Tabarî and al-Ya’qûbî, and their systematization under the Abbasids.

The last chapter is devoted to the Islamic institution of *diwân*² which was structurally generated by ‘Umar in order to provide financial, administrative and military systematization. In response to changing needs and circumstances, the institution developed and branched out in due course. Focusing on the central *diwâns*, Duri argues that based on their functions and foundations, central *diwans* and local *diwans* in the provinces (*wilâyât*) and the garrison cities (*amsâr*) were to be distinguished

first. However, their differences became invisible with the Umayyad’s Arabicisation. The prime mover for the establishment of *diwans* was the wealth coming from the conquered lands and the need for the systematic distribution of huge amounts of money. Umar’s intention to establish *diwân* was also strongly related to the need to register the members of the army and systematize stipends. Duri says historians do not agree upon the origin of this institution, i.e. whether it was Sassanian or Byzantine, but agree that it was first to register the fighters of Islam in conquests. Examining the evolution of the institution, Duri provides insights into some central questions like precedence and ranks in *diwans*. According to that ‘Umar applied the principle of serving for Islam and distinguished the Banu Hashim tribe for their call to Islam (p. 165). Additionally, relying on primary sources like al-Tabari and Baladhuri, Duri says that ‘Umar also registered women for the ranks of ‘*ata* (a stipend for the fighters) and that Arabs and *mawali* (non-Arab clients) were regarded equal in their registering for ‘*ata*.

Duri discusses some arguments regarding the reasons for the existence of local languages in *diwan*. He suggests that rather than personal and volatile reasons, as some historians argue, it was the lack of Arabs’ expertise in scribing. Thus Greek and Pahlavi was dominant in *diwans*, especially in *diwan al-kharaj*, until the supremacy of Arabic under caliphs Abd’ al-Malik bin Marwan and al-Walid bin ‘Abd al-Malik. For the Ab-

basid era the author also deals with the system of *wizarah* (state ministry) as a key for the centralization of the Abbasid *diwan*. The development of different branches of *diwans* by subsequent Abbasid caliphs is the main focus of the author in this section, since many of them brought about the centralization of the system one after the other. For the decreasing influence of the *diwans*, Duri discusses the possible reasons, including the dominant control by the Turks that began at the end of ninth century. However, here the author should have made his claim bolder in order to clarify the changing dynamics which led to the downfall of the activities of these institutions (pp. 175-176).

Duri also addresses the system of *wizârah*. Focusing predominantly on the origin of the word *wazir* and the office of *wizarah*, he meticulously examines the evolution of the system, its theoretical foundations through practice, and the essential characteristics of a *wazir*. The development of the system of *wizarah* has long history according to the author. He describes the first century of the Abbasid age as the trial period for the *wizârah* system, and mentions how the office of *wizarah* and *kâtib* were interchangeably used by Abbasid caliphs. (p. 186) The author also addresses the power struggle between the caliphs and the *wazirs*, focusing on each caliphs' term and the evolution of the doctrines of the system of *wizarah*. To distinguish the *wazirs* of the Abbasid court, the author provides the example of the Barmakid family, scrutinizing their extensive authority in different offices

of the government in al-Rashid's age. He notes that the apex of the caliphate during al-Ma'mun's age was also a climax of the *wizarah*. In discussing the reasons for this, Duri mentions the special signed edict (*tawqî'*) with its content that had not been given earlier to *wazirs* officially. Here the author discusses how the Abbasid court had to deal with Persian influence over their affairs, while also benefiting from the Persians to a great extent. This chapter ends with the theories of *wizarah* based on primary sources such as al-Mawardi, Abû Ya'la, al-Mas'ûdi, and Ibn al-Taqtaqî.

The book brings forward a long debated issue of how and to what extent the pre-Islamic traditions of Arabia and the long-lasting Empires of the Byzantine and Sasanian era colored the evolution of Islamic institutions. He registers the imprints of the pre-Islamic Near East on Islam and its institutions. Although Duri attaches importance to this issue in many parts of his work, directly or indirectly, it is not his main objective. Rather, Duri contextualizes the institutional developments of the Islamic empire in a far-reaching context. He lays emphasis on the significance of these developments in comprehending the successive and rapid expansion of Islam, the main theoretical differences according to different sects, and how Muslims dealt with changing circumstances. In examining the formative period of Islam, he scrutinizes the relationship between politics and Islam, and tries to elucidate the coherent mode of governance both in theory and practice. The author does

not merely examine the institutions from the point of their origins; the elements attributed to these institutions are analyzed along with their features. Particularly for readers with a good grasp of knowledge of Islamic history, this book renders a deep examining of Islamic institutions and their development with frequent reference to theory and practice.

The third book reviewed in this article is *Son Dönem Osmanlı Suriye'sinde Islahat Hareketleri*, authored by David Dean Commins and translated into Turkish by Yusuf Kılıç. The original title of the book is *Islamic Reform: Politics and Social Change in Late Ottoman Syria* (1990). The author's field of study is mainly Islamic modernism in Ottoman Syria, Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia, and modernism in Islamic thought. Apart from journal articles, encyclopedia entries and the book *Islamic Reform*, Commins has also authored two other books: *Historical Dictionary of Syria* (1989), and *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (2006). Consisting of ten chapters, *Islamic Reform* is predominantly based on the Islamic reformers of Syria, whom Commins identifies as the Salafis (p. 17). He discusses their social origins, their relations among themselves and with the conservative *ulema*,³ their main points of departure from conservative *ulema*, their agenda of reform, and their political experiences in the first quarter of the twentieth century.

Commins addresses the topic of Islamic reform in Syria from the perspective of the social history of

intellectuals and their complex interactions. Starting with Damascus' *ulema*, the author provides the larger context of the developments in the nineteenth century, including the *Tanzimat* (reformation of the Islamic Empire), which left its imprints on the Islamic reform movement in Syria. The intellectual trends and transmission of knowledge in a wider Muslim world is examined to deduce the sources and the agents of the religious reform movement in Damascus, like the *Wahhabis*, the *Alusis* of Baghdad, 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jazayiri, Abduh and Afgani. In this regard, some of the publications that played a vital role in the communication of these scholars are explicated, such as '*Urwat-al-Wuthga* (p. 69).

Commins then delves into the social origins of the reformers in Syria and certain prolific figures like members of the Bitar Family, Jamal al-Din Qasimi, Tahir al-Jaza'iri and others. Scrutinizing the reformers' agenda, the author follows the traces of their main critics on the present understanding of Islam. He describes the efforts of different Syrian groups, including the Salafis, the *ulema*, and state officials, and addresses the ways in which they dealt with the fundamental changes of the long nineteenth century, drawing upon primary sources such as the first person accounts of reformers themselves, as well as archival documents. Moreover, the reaction of the conservative *ulema* against calls for Islamic reform, their close contact with the ruling elites, and the Ottoman response to the reformers' acts in Damascus

are examined, focusing in detail upon certain cases. The network created by the Salafis, including scholars from Egypt, Beirut, Iraq and Morocco are analyzed through first person accounts and archival documents. In later chapters of the book, the author focuses on Salafi interpretations of Islam, particularly on reason, unity (*vahdet*), society and social life with specific reference to Jamal al-Din Qasimi, a prominent Salafi in Damascus. Additionally, different reformist groups in Damascus like the Young Turks and Arab nationalists, and their relation with the Salafis through the agencies of Tahir al-Jaza'iri and the reformist governors of Syria are described (pp. 188-190). In addition to the Salafis, the author also deals with the opposite camp. Focusing on the conservative *ulema* and their anti-Salafi publications like *Haqâiq*, Commins sheds light upon some of the main conflicting issues between them, such as the gate of *ijtihad*, tomb visits, and praying to prophets for intercession (p. 236). The last chapter of the book is devoted to the political experiences of reformers between 1908 and 1914. The Salafis believed that the constitutional restoration of 1908 was the realization of their dream after a long period of effort. Arabists, the Arab Renaissance Society, and the Salafis all celebrated the coming of "freedom." However, Commins points out how each group of reformers ascribed a different meaning to this magical word, especially noting the caution of Jamal al-din Qasimi, who warned people to take this word into consideration in the context of Islam (p. 254).

Commins' depiction of three portraits in the introduction provides a great summary of the differently oriented religious fervors of three generations who were central to the reform movement in Syria: customary interpretation of Islam, scripturalist (*nass*) reform, and Arabism. Comparing their main points of differentiation, he examines the transformation of the noble stratum in Arab cities, particularly in the second half of the nineteenth century. Describing this transformation as the 'break of monopoly of Islamic discourse,' the author states that the call to turn to the authoritative sources of Islam, the *Qur'an* and *sunna*, which he terms scripturalism, was the unique representation of the reformers' response to their displacement. For him, two nineteenth century developments made the calls for reforms more vital: the need for Muslims to unite against the growing military threat of Europe, and the necessity of avoiding secular challenges to Islam reflecting upon the foundation and "true path" (*sirat al-mustaqim*).

Commins says that two factors were decisive in distinguishing modern era reform leaders and religious scholars (*ulema*): the undermining of the prestige of Syrian religious scholars during the nineteenth century, and the evolution of the scholars themselves through their contact with scholars outside Syria. Additionally, the administrative, legal and political reforms of the Tanzimat era clearly minimized the representative status of religious scholars in Syria, as the center was decisive in eliminating the

intermediary actors to control the remote territories more directly. Moreover, the secular forms of education stated in the reforms also reduced the scholars' importance as the authorities of religious knowledge. Commins supports his argument with reference to publications in Syria between 1880 and 1908 and says that the rate of books written on nonreligious subjects shows the growth of the secular trend in general (p. 41). Strikingly, the reform-minded intellectuals and religious scholars were well organized, and had a strong network and hope for the future.

The book provides an analysis of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century developments in the greater Arab lands, their imprints in Syria, and the reactions of the different group of religious intellectuals to the ongoing transformation in the context of Syria. This enables readers to delve into the relations between Istanbul and Syria and the main breaking points in which the actors' reac-

tions might have colored later generations. It is vital to remember that for religious intellectuals in Syria, events in Istanbul or any Ottoman-centered development was not the only source of enthusiasm or motivation. Rather, they had their own conception of the world that reflected their roots in those lands as well as their contact with the imperial center. In this regard, Commins meticulously examines the dynamics of Syria, the social origins of Syrian intellectuals, and the wider environment in which these prolific scholars carried on their vivid discussions and ideals for the future. ■

Endnotes

1. Talal Asad, *Qui Parle*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (2009), pp. 1-30.
2. An institution founded first by the second caliph 'Umar for the organization of the pay, registering of the fighter forces and regulation of the treasury in order.
3. *Ulema*, overwhelmingly men, learned in Islamic traditions, theology and law. It is the plural of Arabic *âlim*, basically one possessing the knowledge *ilm*.