

The Shiites of Lebanon under Ottoman Rule, 1516-1788

By *Stefan Winter*

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 204 pp., ISBN 9780521765848.

Stefan Winter's recent study is a truly revisionist reading of the history of Lebanese communities under the Ottoman Empire. It is the product of a problem-oriented and well-organized research; an earlier version had been submitted as a doctoral dissertation to Chicago University in 2002. It is based on a rich bibliography comprising archival documents and secondary sources in many languages. Here, the author strikes a balance between local and official administrative sources. The reader feels that the Ottoman center is well represented by the regulations and orders dispatched to the Lebanese region. The author, however, narrates his story from a viewpoint within the cities of Lebanon.

The book begins with a critical and communicative evaluation of the relevant historiography. In the first chapter, Winter contextualizes the past of the Shiites in the Ottoman Empire, giving a short summary concerning the Shiite holy places in Iraq and discussing the Shiites of Jabal 'Amil. Briefly he also examines the historical experiences of unorthodox religious movements that in varying degrees were connected to Shiism, such as the Bektaşis and Kızılbaş. He also attempts to explore mental reflections of Shiism in mainstream "Ottoman thought." In the second chapter, he explains the foundation of Ottoman rule in Syria and Lebanon in the sixteenth century and describes the relationships between imperial and local power holders, such as the Shiite Harfush, but also the Druze emirates including that of Fahreddin Ma'n. In the third chapter, Winter delves into the past of the

Hamada emirate, the cooperation of these emirs with the Ottoman center, and their rule over Mount Lebanon between 1641 and 1685. In the fourth and fifth chapters, the author explores the transitions between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: in response to financial and political challenges, the Ottoman center moved from a more decentralized and tolerant structure to a more centralized and inflexible one. In these chapters, the author explains the ways in which Ottoman governments forced the local power holders to obey their authority. In the sixth and final chapter, he explains "the decline of Shiite rule in Tripoli and the Bekaa" in the eighteenth century: the Shihabi emirate took the place of the Harfush and Hamada.

Winter challenges the long established Maronite-centered historiography. He complains that most authors to date have uncritically relied on local chronicles and western consular reports. Recommending a diversification of source material, he particularly suggests a more intensive use of Ottoman source material. In taking this approach, Winter readily admits his debt to the works of Ahmad Beydoun and Kamal Salibi, who almost a quarter century ago, have questioned and criticized Lebanese national historiography for its 'confessionalist' premises. Sadly although Kamal Salibi ranks as the 'grand old man' of Lebanese historiography, his and Beydoun's ideas have not gained wide acceptance, and thus Stefan Winter's approach continues to be innovative.

The author is well aware of the prob-

lems involved in ascribing a strictly defined ideology to the Ottoman elites. In his work, state and ideology appear as things that rulers, bureaucrats and countless other functionaries make and remake almost in every generation. From this recurrent process there result certain behavioral patterns, which show continuities with respect to earlier policies. With these processes constantly in mind, Stefan Winter examines the long-term history of the ethno-religious communities inhabiting the area that now encompasses Lebanon, demonstrating the complexities of changing state-society relations between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries.

Stefan Winter dates the beginning of contemporary Lebanon two centuries earlier than customary: for him the key event is the Ottoman conquest of 1516. Since then the Shiite communities of Lebanon have played a role that is much more ambiguous than has been conventionally accepted. Certainly, the Ottoman elite often came down heavily on people that its members had defined as heretics. But at the same time there was a good deal of 'unofficial tolerance' and certain Shiite families were integrated into the provincial governing body as tax collectors. As Stefan Winter puts the case, conventional historiography has legitimized and magnified the status of Druze feudal lords. As a result other groups, particularly the Shiites, have been 'edited out' of the picture. Therefore, this book primarily comes out as a critique of romantic and nationalist Lebanese historical writing and asserts the Shiite roots of Lebanese history. Winter shows that Shiite influence did not decline until the late eighteenth century. In other words, the author asserts that the national history of Lebanon begins not only with the exten-

sion of the Druze and Maronite communities' influence in the region but also with the breaking of Shiite power.

Winter also criticizes Marxist-inspired idealizing descriptions of class-based political confrontations between the inhabitants of Lebanon and the Ottoman central administration, rejecting as "historicized mythologies" the notions of relentless Ottoman oppression and romanticized Lebanese liberation. According to this author, such simplifications obscure the inter-confessional diversity of the region and more seriously obfuscate the domestic conflicts that occurred even in the middle of the struggle against what was supposedly the 'common enemy,' namely the power-holders at the Ottoman center. He dwells on the example of the Shiite Hamadas who in the middle of the seventeenth century were involved in intra-Maronite disputes and ruled over a Maronite district. At the same time, Christians played certain roles in the internal conflicts of the Shiite Hamadas. Similarly, the author argues that the Shiites of Mount of 'Amil were not living in an isolated world as supposed by the Lebanese historiography. On the whole, the author as a historian appears to defend Ottoman rule, traditionally accused as the *bête noire* of the modern nationalist historical writing that developed in the countries formerly belonging to the Ottoman Empire.

Ottoman political pragmatism had favored the Shiite Harfush Emirs in the sixteenth century when they were of practical use to the central authorities. However, when their service was no longer needed, the authorities did not hesitate to damage their reputation. Stefan Winter highlights certain cases in which being a Shiite in Lebanon actually might make it easier for a local power-holder to obtain the recom-

mendations needed for obtaining lucrative tax-farms, however in other cases, such a lord might find it more expedient to claim that he was a Sunni, normally of the Shafi'i persuasion. Throughout, Stefan Winter tries to convince the reader that religious concerns played less decisive roles than a modern reader might think. The most important characteristics of Lebanese political history under sixteenth and eighteenth century Ottoman rule were 'mutual dependency' and 'complex ties of power relationships' between local subjects, intermediaries and imperial authorities. As fiscal concerns were dominant, the distribution of tax farms had nothing to do with sectarian identity; what counted was maximization of revenues and enhanced government control. With regard to religion Stefan Winter emphasizes the importance of the tribal life-style and "folk Islam," instead of a religiosity shaped according to Islamic law. In this sense, Winter shares the views of Hanna Batatu as well as Marion Farouq and Peter Sluglett concerning the history of nineteenth-century Iraq.

Winter's book rejects the notion of an unchanging ideology of Ottoman 'revulsion' against its Shiite subjects, an assumption mainly based on fatwas produced in the sixteenth century. Showing examples of non-Sunni communities, which preferred to cooperate with the Ottoman governments instead of protesting against them, Stefan Winter argues that the Ottoman Empire did not embrace an enduring policy of 'humiliation' and 'marginalization' against its non-Sunni inhabitants. Hence, although the established ad-hoc consensus might have been highly fragile, being Shiite in Lebanon did not prevent the Shiite Hamada and Harfush tribes from integrating into Ottoman imperial rule. Adopting

the thesis of Robert Ian Moore, concerning the formation of a persecuting society in the European middle ages, Winter argues that the "anti-Shiite impulse" emerged among bureaucratic circles whenever a political necessity appeared and mostly during long-term shifts and structural instabilities. In this regard, the persecution of Kızılbaş in the sixteenth century is represented as a temporal event rather than an articulation of a universal Ottoman antagonism against Shiites. According to Winter, the same thing applied to the Lebanese experience. As the priorities of the provincial government changed, fiscal and political adjustments contributed to the reformulation and adaptation of an offensive discourse against Shiism in the last decades of the seventeenth century. The main reasons behind the Ottoman campaign against the Shiite Hamada tribe, which had held onto power in Tripoli during most of the seventeenth century, were its unruly behavior and the trouble it had caused recently settled tribes. Only after the marginalization of Shiites did central Ottoman authorities co-operate with the Shihabis in destroying Shiite rule in Mount Lebanon. Stefan Winter argues that for the Ottomans, the Shiite Hamadas were primarily brigands before they were members of any sect. However, Winter also points out that after the Shiite emirs proved unable to deliver further services to the Ottoman government, the memory of their previous utility quickly disappeared.

In his argument, the author adopts some concepts developed by the French Annales School and tries to identify structural transformations that the Ottoman Empire went through. As a direct consequence, historical agency is given to structures rather than to people. Thus,

for example, the personal cruelty of Cezzar Ahmad Pasha represents a return to “the normal mode of the Ayan rule” in the eighteenth century; such statements can fairly be criticized for undermining the role of human agency in history. On the other hand, despite noting some long-term changes, Winter’s book basically focuses on a chain of political events. This choice does not exactly further the literary quality of a familiar shortcoming among historians who use extensive archival material. Minute anecdotal detail not only becomes tiresome but also occasionally seems not to lead anywhere. Sometimes the reader awaits the concluding paragraphs with impatience. Even a local Lebanese reader well versed in Lebanese geography, may be lost in the plethora of personal and place names. In addition, un-translated quotations in French, especially in the fifth and sixth chapters, might not be very helpful to the non-francophone reader. However, the major difficulty with the book is that although it is called “The Shiites of Lebanon under Ottoman rule,” I have not found

a single reference to the social lives of these people. Thus, the narrative concentrates mainly on fiscal and political events, which undoubtedly have their importance but need to be connected with the social reality familiar to these politically ambitious, occasionally rebellious, and occasionally cooperative Lebanese Shiites lived.

Stefan Winter is well aware of the political potential inherent in his study. Without ever indulging in teleological speculations, he points out that the problems of present-day Lebanon cannot be understood without taking account of the Shiites, who were a constitutive component of the population that in time was to become the Lebanese people. In reinserting the Shiite emirates into Lebanese history and revising the current Maronite cum-Druze-centered historiography, the author has made a brilliant contribution to Shiite, Lebanese, Ottoman and more generally, Middle Eastern studies.

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From Hellenism to Islam, Cultural and Linguistic Change in the Roman Near East

Edited by *Hannah M. Cotton, Robert G. Hoyland, Jonathan J. Price and David L. Wasserstein*

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This is an important addition to the mounting literature on the cultural and especially the linguistic mix in the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire in the period before the Arab conquests. It arose from a conference and a related research theme on epigraphy and cultural and lin-

guistic change in the Near East “from Hellenism to Islam,” organised by the Institute for Advanced Studies of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in the year 2002-3. This background, as well as the connection of three members of the research group with the international project, which aims