Ahmad S. Dallal. *Islam without Europe: Traditions of Reform in Eighteenth-Century Islamic Thought*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018. 440 pages. ISBN: 9781469641409.

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For most of the twentieth century, Western studies of Islamic intellectual history were dominated by a narrative of "decline" or "stagnation," the assumption being that intellectual life in the Islamic world entered a period of decline after the twelfth or thirteenth century that lasted until the nineteenth century. The traditional Orientalist view is that this "decline" ended with the 1798 French invasion of Egypt, which is commonly held to have marked the beginning of the modern history of the Middle East and the Muslim world.

This narrative has recently been challenged and is no longer accepted unquestioningly in academic circles. Although a substantial number of studies have discredited this supposed economic and political decline during the eighteenth century, the narrative of a contemporaneous intellectual decline has not yet been fully challenged and undermined. The revisionists' attempt to qualify the narrative of decline and construct alternative accounts had – and continue to have – many weaknesses. For example, they acknowledge that that century was very active in terms of political and social movements, but have largely ignored its thinkers' intellectual contributions. Thus, their attempts to qualify this latter decline need to be reevaluated and discussed.

Dallal's refutation of Orientalist and revisionist views goes back almost twenty-five years, as a reading of his "The Origins and Objectives of Islamic Revivalist Thought, 1750-1850" shows.[1] Even at that time, scholars recognized that the eighteenth century was vibrant and that reform movements had appeared

throughout the Muslim world. However, revisionists failed to identify the elements of its intellectual innovations. In his recent groundbreaking book *Islam without Europe*, Dallal extends his project of revising the revisionists' assumptions and provides a detailed intellectual study of the eighteenth century to fill the gap left by the latter's non-attention to the scholars' intellectual contributions. He does this by reconstructing "the exceptional cultural achievements of the eighteenth century" (3). Dallal's study includes that century's most famous scholars or activists: Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl al-Amīr al-Ṣanʿānī (d. 1182/1769) and Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Shawkānī (d. 1250/1834) of Yemen, Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī of India (d. 1176/1762), Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb of Arabia (d. 1201/1787), ʿUthmān Ibn Fūdī of West Africa (d. 1232/1817), and Muḥammad bin ʿAlī al-Sanūsī of North Africa (d. 1276/1859). Despite the absence of a list of sources and references, Dallal uses a wide range of primary sources, including both the works of the scholars studied here and material written about them by their contemporaries and followers, as well as an enormous array of secondary sources, most of which are critically discussed.

Focusing on the political and social aspects of this period's numerous reform movements reveals some common characteristics, such as a concern with the socio-moral reconstruction and reform of society based on a "return" to pristine Islam in terms of the Quran and the Sunna, as well as proclaiming the right of *ijtihād* along with an interest in *ḥadīth* and Sufism. This has made some scholars wonder if these movements, regardless of their geographical location, if they perhaps had a common origin or inspiration. The Wahhabi movement has been suggested as the inspiring example, as has the al-Ḥaramayn circle, which comprised a group of seventeenth-century scholars in the Ḥijāz. Dallal's focus on these movements' intellectual aspects enables him to reject the common origin theory and emphasize reading them within their specific social and political contexts.

As we will soon see, each chapter is dedicated to a general common idea that was widespread among academic circles of the eighteenth century, the thread running through every chapter of the book is the idea of rejecting *taqlīd* (imitation) and calling for *ijtihād* (independent legal reasoning) as solutions to social ills. Dallal connects all of the century's social, political, and intellectual problems with this *taqlid-ijtihād* dichotomy. The spread of imitation, he argues, created the biggest problem: zealous partisanship as regards the schools of law *(tamadhhub)*. In the case of Wahhabism, this sectarianism reached its peak with *takfīr* (condemning fellow Muslims as unbelievers). As *tamadhhub* created a kind of monopoly on the truth within a specific school of thought, most of the eighteenth-century scholars sought

to undermine all exclusive claims to intellectual authority, whether asserted by jurists, Sufis, theologians, or politicians. Their strategy was to create an alternative authority instead of directly fighting against the political and traditional authorities.

In the book's five chapters and conclusion, Dallal therefore revises the above-mentioned common ideas and elaborates on intellectual aspects thus far neglected. The first chapter focuses on refuting what he considers as the most misleading idea of those revisionist efforts, namely, viewing the Wahhabi movement as the paradigm of eighteenth-century intellectual movements. In fact, as the author argues throughout his book, this movement is the major intellectual exception because an analysis of their general features and social and intellectual programs reveals that "most eighteenth-century thinkers would have disagreed with Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb on almost all of the issues he addressed" (23). While most contemporaneous reformers rejected *takfīr* and worked mainly for social justice and against political problems, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's writings focused on creedal issues to the exclusion of everything else. His enemies were Muslims who held what he considered to be wrong beliefs about God, not the tyrants who oppressed Muslims, a worldview that led him to *takfīr*.

Other aspects that may seem similar between Wahhabism and the other reform movements, among them rejecting *taqlīd*, criticizing some excessive Sufi behaviors and ideas, the attitude toward political authority, and the special interest in *ḥadīth* studies, were actually, as Dallal shows, elaborated by other thinkers for very different reasons. Moreover, they were distinct both in their content and scope. Each of these ideas is analyzed in a separate chapter to reveal the peculiarity of their regional context and show how they differed from those held by the Wahhabis.

In chapter 2, Dallal contends that the eighteenth century's greatest social ill was sectarianism and its ensuing divisions. *Ijtihād* had previously been proposed as the solution and thus can hardly be considered an exclusive characteristic of eighteenth-century thought. However, the characteristic feature of that century's discussions was the scholars' focus on widening *ijtihād*'s scope so that it would become obligatory for all Muslims (68). Different reformers articulated diverse conceptions of it, and regional differences resulted in various conceptions of *ijtihād* concurring on the importance of spreading its undertaking to larger sectors of Muslim society. Even though this focus sought to undermine imitation (*taqlīd*), 'Abd al-Wahhāb's opposition to *taqlīd* was used only to undermine traditional authority and thus was not contrasted with its logical opposite: *ijtihād*.

Emphasizing regional differences is the essential argument in Dallal's refutation of revisionist assertions of a common origin and Wahhabi influence. These reformers' groundbreaking intellectual contributions were made within the context of regional traditions and thus simply reflected their concern for their own societies' problems and their attempts to provide real solutions. Local learning and canons demonstrate the distinct characteristics that they acquired at the local level.

Chapter 3 examines the revisionists' assertion that Sufism had no intellectual or spiritual rigor. This emphasis shifted the scholars' focus from the intellectual content of eighteenth-century writings on Sufism or *ḥadīth* to the social uses of these two disciplines. *Ijtihād*, Dallal argues, in fact had a direct influence on Sufism, for rejecting imitation means rejecting the Sufis shaykhs' authority as intermediary intellectual authorities. All eighteenth-century reformers, whether practitioners or opponents of Sufism, undermined this claim of intermediary intellectual authority to varying degrees, confronted the problems of their societies, and proposed realistic solutions (95). Even here the Wahhabi example was the exception. Criticism of Sufism during this century was not an intellectual or a doctrinal position against Sufism, but part of the reformers' project to undermine its leaders' exclusive claims of being intermediaries in terms of knowledge. It was also conditioned by local contexts, as in the cases of al-Ṣanʿānī and al-Shawkānī, whose criticism was clearly rooted in Yemen's Zaydi legacy and was part of their rejection of *taqlīd*.

Chapter 4 discusses the political aspects of reform and these reformers' connection to the political authorities. *Taqlīd*, viewed as the root of all social ills, is present even in discussions of political problems. In these reformers' opinion, *madhhab*s were tools that reinforced, rather than diluted and dispersed, the power of central political authorities. Dallal cites al-Shawkānī, a pillar of political authority, and asserts that even when he engaged in political activities he always sought to undermine its exclusive claims to authority through his many critiques of state practices, among them taxation policies, unwarranted calls for jihad, and tribal alliances (145). Dallal's argues that this independent political stance reflects al-Shawkānī's intellectual independence.

Chapter 5 explains how some of these reformers used *ḥadīth* as the main weapon against *tamadhhub*. Emphasizing that its study was one of the eighteenth-century reformers' shared characteristics, its primary value was understood to be a function of its accessibility to ordinary Muslims and thus the impossibility of professionalizing or monopolizing the knowledge that derives from it. Spreading

the acceptance of Sunnī *ḥadīth* works in Zaydī Yemen was initiated to create an alternative authority to that *madhhab*. Both the *fiqh madhhab* and doctrinal aspects would be influenced by *ḥadīth* studies, since Zaydī scholars would usually avoid accepting the narratives of some of the Prophet's Companions because they had opposed Imām ʿAlī.

In India, *ḥadīth* played a similarly essential role in balancing the domination of the Ḥanafī *madhhab*. Shāh Walī Allāh's preference for Imām Mālik's (d. 179/795) *Muwaṭṭaʾ* is very significant in this context, for it is not only a book of *ḥadīth*, but also an authority for both jurists and traditionalists. "By asserting that Mālik's *Muwaṭṭaʾ* is the most authoritative book after the Qurʾān," Dallal reminds us, "Walī Allāh forced his fellow Ḥanafīs to recognize an authority outside their own legal tradition" (253). Through these two examples, Dallal demonstrates that *ḥadīth* served as a tool of *ijtihād* and as a means to create an alternative authority that helped undermine the exclusive claims to knowledge made by theologians, jurists, and Sufis. This literature also involved a radical revisiting of the structures of authority.

In the conclusion, Dallal addresses the sources for what he considers to be the most original thought of the eighteenth century: *uṣūl al-fiqh* (lit. the principles of jurisprudence, or legal theory) and *uṣūl al-ḥadīth* (the theory of *ḥadīth*). *Uṣūl* were sites of original and critical reflection through which normative disciplinary authority was questioned and radically undermined. By historicizing knowledge, including *uṣūl*, eighteenth-century reformers were able to argue that there is no certainty in *uṣūl* principles, just as there is no certainty in the branches of the law (*furūʿ*), and that it is an *ijtihādī* discipline that admits multiple interpretations (285). The sources of the sharīʿa were revised with a critical attitude toward *ijmāʿ* (consensus) and *qiyās* (analogy) in order to promote the Quran and the *ḥadīth*, which are accessible to all Muslims at all times. In this case, these reformers achieved what Dallal describes in several contexts as "democratized conceptions of knowledge." It is fitting that the author, who starts his book by arguing that these reformers wanted to widen *ijtihād*'s scope to include all Muslims by taking into account its different degrees, concludes with *taysīr* (providing facility and ease as one of the Lawgiver's intents).

Dallal's strategy of moving back and forth between five or six thinkers looking for each one's peculiarity within his local context makes the book rich and detailed in content, but exhausting for a reader who is trying to follow their arguments and intellectual productions. Emphasizing *ijtihād* and refuting *taqlīd* in each chapter, as well as trying to display the differences between these movements and the Wahhabi movement, creates some repepitive sections. And despite the fact that

Dallal criticizes the domination of al-Shawkānī and Walī Allāh in the writing of the historians of the eighteenth century, one can easily notice that his own work relies heavily on their works as well.

Although the author clearly states that "the objective of this book, however, is not simply to question the current historians' accounts of the eighteenth century but also to reconstruct the thought-world of this period" (18), it seems that he could not escape the frame of these studies in terms of the ideas, personalities, or areas studied. In other words, he limits himself to a particular set of personalities and their ideas. His independent perspective and criticism of early works are clear, but his decision not to expand the scope of his research to shed light on new intellectual figures, disciplines, or geographical zones is rather surprising. Thus, his presentation of Islamic thought during the eighteenth century offers yet another misleading vision, for nothing is mentioned about Cairo, Damascus, and Baghdad; there are no traces of Iran or most of the Ottoman Empire; and there is a complete absence of such major intellectual disciplines as logic, philosophy, and theology.

Another point on which Dallal criticizes the works of historians of the eighteenth century is their focus on context more than content, which has caused them to underestimate the intellectual contributions of that century's reformers. But he undermines the force of this argument by making hasty judgments, without presenting any proof, of some scholars, such as: "In fact, in contrast to al-Shawkānī's massive contributions, there is no evidence that al-Kurdī [al-Kūrānī] [who has two entries in the index] made [an] equally significant intellectual contribution" (64). Given that fewer than ten out of al-Kūrānī's 100 works have been published, it is very early to proffer such a judgment.

And, although the author demonstrates the eighteenth century's vibrant intellectual activities, his assertation that this period marked both the creative culmination of traditional Islamic traditions and epistemologies as well as, and simultaneously, the end of these traditions is debatable. Without seeing a comprehensive study of intellectual life during the earlier centuries and of the developments of traditional disciplines after the colonial period, it is difficult to accept such a claim.

Islam without Europe is valuable in that it is mostly based on primary sources. This pioneering work, which provides us with a deeper understanding of some strands of pre-modern Islamic thought, is also valuable to those interested in

contemporary Islamic fundamentalism, the rise of which, as Dallal explains, has nothing to do with eighteenth-century Wahhabism. To understand the latter's reemergence in the twentieth century, he argues, we need to understand the new regional balance of power created by the collapse of Ottoman Empire and the rise of British influence in the Arabian Peninsula, alongside the discovery of oil.

Dallal's arguments for the flourishing of intellectual activities during the eighteenth century in different parts of Muslim world mean that more scholars, texts, and debates will need to be integrated into the general narrative of Islamic thought if we wish to develop a more accurate picture of Islamic intellectual history during the post-classical period. This work contributes to these efforts by systematically revising, examining, and analyzing some of that century's most important thinkers. The author's successful shifting of the dominant perspective of the history of the eighteenth century corrects some of the major generally accepted and widespread ideas and rectifies numerous academic perspectives, most notably those of the revisionists. *Islam without Europe* is a significant contribution to the growing body of scholarly efforts that challenge the "decline" narrative. Moreover, it offers convincing evidence that the eighteenth century contained interesting, original intellectual contributions that hopefully will motivate more studies on the post-classical and pre-modern periods.

Dallal's book is mainly an analysis of contemporary scholars' views of the eighteenth century. In addition to its main contribution, it also sheds light on this period's intellectual life more broadly. Although he presents the views of historians which he criticizes both intensively and fairly by referring to their works in the endnotes, those who want to grasp both his arguments and the significance of his book must have a comprehensive knowledge of Western academic studies of the eighteenth century. Thus, it is directed primarily to specialized researchers and graduate students.