

Naser Dumairieh. *Intellectual Life in the Hijāz before Wahhabism: Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī's (d. 1101/1690) Theology of Sufism*. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2022. 361 pages. ix + 361 pages. ISBN: 9789004499041.

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The post-classical Islamic intellectual history has garnered increased attention in recent decades. While most of the works from the period, often summarily dismissed as unoriginal commentaries and glosses, are tucked away in manuscript libraries, there are scholars undertaking the formidable task of exploring these almost obscure works and their authors. Naser Dumairieh's book stands as a valuable addition to this literature. By taking Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī in center, Dumairieh not only presents a cohesive overview of some of the most acute theological and intellectual debates of the seventeenth century but also highlights the importance of the Hijaz, and its centrality and complexity in global Islamic intellectual history well before the rise of Wahhabism and other reformist movements in the eighteenth century.

Both the seventeenth century and the Hijaz have been the backwaters of the academic scene until recently. The seventeenth century, wedged between the high classical age of Islamic intellectual history and the dizzying transformations of the modern age has indeed witnessed dynamic and productive intellectual debates. Khaled el-Rouayheb's work, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century*, has previously explored this period, highlighting the significance of Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī. Naser Dumairieh builds upon this with a detailed and careful study of al-Kūrānī's works and a comprehensive account of historical and contextual factors that enabled and supported a vibrant intellectual milieu for al-Kūrānī and his contemporaries. Similarly, for long the Hijaz was thought to have been marginalized

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with the rise of territorial empires and relegated to a political and social backwater of the Islamic world until the rise of Wahhabism in the eighteenth century and its global repercussions in the nineteenth century. Dumairieh's book presents a correction to both assumptions, demonstrating that despite its political subjugation the Hijaz has indeed benefited from the rivaling patronage of the Mughal and Ottoman empires in the seventeenth century. Mecca and particularly Medina attracted numerous scholars from all over the Islamic world fostering a remarkable intellectual efflorescence. Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī emerged as a towering figure, with his students and ideas reaching across the Islamic world from the Maghreb to Southeast and East Asia. The eighteenth century and al-Kūrānī's students have received attention primarily in relation to activist revivalist movements with a distinctively Sufi-cum-reformist streak and a new interest in *ḥadīth* scholarship across the Islamic world. The vibrant social reformist agenda of these movements, however, mostly overshadowed their intellectual contribution. As Dumairieh shows in this book, al-Kūrānī and his contemporaries were sophisticated rational theologians and practicing Sufis as well as leading scholars in the revival of *ḥadīth* studies. Al-Kūrānī's theology, as evidenced in his numerous works, incorporated Ibn 'Arabī's thought, and concepts, most importantly *waḥdat al-wujūd* into the Ash'arite theology. Despite some parallels with contemporary and modern Salafi positions, al-Kūrānī's arguments were rooted in a specific reading and synthesis of al-Ash'arī's works and the theory of *waḥdat al-wujūd* through a rational methodology.

Dumairieh's book is organized into six chapters and three appendices. The initial chapters provide a historical overview of the Hijaz and the local and global factors that contributed to its emergence as a significant intellectual center in the mid-seventeenth century. The first chapter outlines conjunctural factors such as the rise of the Safavids in Iran and the migration of Sunni scholars to the Hijaz, increased maritime traffic between the Indian sub-continent and the Hijaz due to European navigation in the Indian Ocean, the generous gifts and endowments from the Mughals for the benefit of the two Holy Cities, and the political stability and safety of pilgrimage routes with the Ottoman control over the region. In the second chapter, Dumairieh delves into the intellectual and educational institutions in the Hijaz, focusing on prominent scholars who excelled in various scholarly fields, especially physical/theoretical and rational sciences. In this chapter, Dumairieh introduces a significant source for Islamic intellectual history—the *isnāds* or the texts of transmission of a certain book—which prove invaluable for tracing the transmission of

texts to seventeenth-century Hijaz and, ultimately, to Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī. After this contextual groundwork, in Chapters Three and Four, Dumairieh sketches a biography of Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī as a scholar, who epitomized the intellectual efflorescence in the Hijaz through his life and work. Starting from his early years and education in his hometown Shahrān then in Baghdad and Damascus, he introduces al-Kūrānī's teachers and students. Lastly, the chapters offer an overview of al-Kūrānī's extensive body of work, comprising over a hundred titles, including books, treatises, and epistolary tracts that address questions related to theology and Sufism.

Dumairieh's biggest contribution lies in his careful treatment of al-Kūrānī's intellectual edifice and presenting how he attempted to rebuild the Islamic theology based on Ibn 'Arabī's thought (192) and the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. In the fifth and sixth chapters, Dumairieh provides an in-depth analysis of al-Kūrānī's most salient theological positions and his sometimes controversial but always very impactful views on some thorny questions related to theology and Sufism. In Chapter Five he analyzes the fundamental elements of al-Kūrānī's metaphysical thought by delineating them from his numerous works and provides a systematic narrative of his main arguments including God's description as absolute existence, allegorical interpretation of God's attributes, God's knowledge of particulars, free will and predestination, and finally the key Akbarian doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. In all these, al-Kūrānī was scrupulous in providing ample testaments from the Quran and the *ḥadīths* as well as from the early Ash'arite literature. Yet his method was rational and intellectual, although he affirmed the existence of a higher form of knowledge, namely divine emanation (268). Dumairieh argues that for al-Kūrānī *waḥdat al-wujūd* was not merely a term or "the subject of Sufi experience through *kashf and dhawq*" but "a complete doctrine" (270) that permeated all his works and framed his cosmographical and metaphysical approach and that can be articulated and conveyed in a rational and intellectual manner.

Ibn 'Arabī's description of God as "Absolute Existence" (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq* or *al-wujūd al-mahd*) has been quite controversial for many theologians belonging to different schools and it plays a foundational role in al-Kūrānī's theology. One of the main objections to this description was spurred by the contention that absolute implied a universal or abstract concept that could not exist extra-mentally. However, al-Kūrānī insistently maintained that "absolute existence means unqualified and unconditioned existence" and that "nothing is like Him" (181). Thus, absolute existence denotes not only extra-mental existence but also necessary existence which

is indeed implied by the standard Ash'arite doctrine that God's essence is identical to His existence. For al-Kūrānī, a critical consequence of God's description as Absolute Existence is that God can manifest Himself in any form without restriction and therefore the apparently anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the Quran and the *ḥadiths* do not need to be interpreted allegorically. This was a stark divergence with the later Ash'arite literature and was founded on a revisionist reading of the writings of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī, who according to al-Kūrānī rejected all allegorical interpretations, unlike the later Ash'arite theologians. Furthermore, by establishing the idea of nonexistent eternal realities or fixed entities with reference to Ash'arite theological argumentation al-Kūrānī presented an Ash'arite exposition of *wahdat al-wujūd*: since God is absolute and the only real existence outside of mind all things other than God are loci of manifestation (*majlā*) of God's attributes. (269) Similarly, once al-Kūrānī argued that realities or uncreated quiddities are eternal and affirmed in God's knowledge, this had consequences for several key theological positions including creation, predestination, and God's knowledge of particulars (215) that he has discussed and answered in his numerous treatises. Dumairieh meticulously parses through these works and presents a synthesized account that he describes as the historical peak of reconciliation of the three Islamic intellectual traditions: the *kalām*, philosophy, and Sufism, based on reason, mystical experience, and revelation. (270)

In addition to this key Akbarian concept, in Chapter Six Dumairieh discusses al-Kūrānī's position on some other controversial matters that have historically caused bitter and unremitting acrimony between Ibn 'Arabī's followers and opponents such as the question as the nature of Pharaoh's faith at the crossing of the Red Sea or the challenging matter of the Satanic verses. In this last chapter, Dumairieh introduces these subsidiary topics which formed a significant part of al-Kūrānī's writings and also dragged him into controversies and polemics, particularly with North African Ash'arī scholars. These topics included the faith of Pharaoh, the case of the Satanic verses, unuttered speech, the precedence of God's mercy and the annihilation of Hell-fire, and the preference between the reality of Ka'ba and the reality of Muhammad. Most of these topics were issues were closely connected to Ibn 'Arabī's assertions, and in some instances, al-Kūrānī aligned more with Ḥanbalī positions. Dumairieh emphasizes that al-Kūrānī defended Ibn 'Arabī's views not only through intellectual reasoning but also by extensively quoting the Quran and the *ḥadith*; and in every matter, he adopted a conciliatory stance between the Ash'arī and Ḥanbalī opinions.

In conclusion, Dumairieh underlines that al-Kūrānī's life and works provide a very good illustration of the depth and extent of intellectual debates and questions in the seventeenth century, at the intersection of Sufism, *kalām*, and philosophy. While the political and economic conditions that invigorated the intellectual scene in the Hijaz in the seventeenth century started to subside by the eighteenth century, intellectual activity and cross-regional impact of Hijazi scholars proved to be enduring; this continued intellectual vigor challenges the overarching narrative of decline, let alone of a long intellectual hiatus before the rise of Wahhabism and its distinctive form of Salafism that characterized the region from the nineteenth century onward.

A study of Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī is of paramount interest for tracing Ibn 'Arabī's influence on mainstream Islamic theology and Dumairieh's work exhibits the extent of the impact of Ibn 'Arabī's thought in Islamic theology in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Although al-Kūrānī had his opponents, who were sometimes rather fierce, his works and students have been widely dispersed among Ash'arite communities from the Maghreb to East Asia. The Akbarian slant in the lands of the Rum has been already remarked, however, with this book Dumairieh shows that through Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī the influence of Ibn 'Arabī's thought and the concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd* has had a much more extensive impact on Islamic theology and metaphysical thought.

Naser Dumairieh's book is a truly welcomed contribution to the field of post-classical Islamic intellectual history, focusing on one of the central figures of the seventeenth century, Ibrahim al-Kūrānī, whose influence extended over a broad geography from East and Southeast Asia to the Ottoman Istanbul and the Maghreb. Dumairieh excels in both presenting a picture of the general conditions of seventeenth-century Hijaz and Ibrahim al-Kūrānī's intricate theological and metaphysical thought, which is no small feat considering the highly theoretical and abstruse nature of the topics discussed. He succeeds very well in distilling and elucidating the complex argumentations dispersed across al-Kūrānī's numerous works, most of which remain in manuscript format. The three appendices at the end of the book providing lists of al-Kūrānī's teachers, students, and works are of great assistance to scholars in the field. Dumairieh's book presents a superb example of the type of intellectual history that combines rigorous textual analysis and historical contextualization. Given its reliance on mostly unpublished primary sources and highly specialized metaphysical topics and philosophical argumentation it requires of the reader an affinity with the questions and methodology of Islamic theology and metaphysics.