

Khaled El-Rouayheb. *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century: Scholarly Currents in the Ottoman Empire and Maghreb*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015. 416 pages. ISBN: 9781107042964.

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In his latest book Khaled El-Rouayheb, professor of Islamic intellectual history at Harvard University, delves into the intellectual dynamism present in the Ottoman Empire and North Africa during the seventeenth century. His conclusions continue to challenge conceptions related to this field, many of which are generally accepted true but do not have a very solid foundation. His *Relational Syllogism and the History of Arabic Logic*,<sup>1</sup> published in 2010, cast substantial doubt on a view that has become widely accepted among academics: Within the Islamic world, no new thought developed in the field of logic after the twelfth century.

By reserving the last three chapters of *Relational Syllogism* to the subject of the Ottoman tradition of logic and his deliberate placement of Ismā'il Gelenbevi's (d. 1791) portrait on its cover, the author has signaled the extent of the importance he gives to this period of intellectual activity within the empire. In this new book, he continues to put forth the richness of the Ottoman world of thought during the seventeenth century, which included certain swaths of North African, and casts significant doubt upon the following prejudices. First, he disputes the common conception among Ottoman historians that the Ottomans' intellectual "golden age" occurred under Süleyman the Magnificent (r. 1520-1566) and was then followed by a period of stagnation and finally regression. Therefore, for the Ottomans the seventeenth century was far removed from innovation, stagnant, and a repetition of the past. Second, according to those who started the Arab *al-Nahda* (cultural renaissance) movement, the centuries preceding the Arabs' nineteenth-century awakening were an age of imitation dominated by

1 Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Relational Syllogisms and the History of Arabic Logic, 900-1900* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010).

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Sufism combined with superstitious belief and rituals. Therefore, one cannot speak of any significant intellectual activity during them. In fact, one can almost believe that there was no intellectual activity at all when compared with what was being produced by such contemporaneous European scholars and philosophers as Galileo Galilei (d. 1642), René Descartes (d. 1650), Isaac Newton (d. 1726/27), and John Locke (d. 1704).

In his book, El-Rouayheb frequently refers to the methodology he follows: To examine every environment of culture within its own peculiar conditions and using its own terminology. According to him, such Ottoman scholars as Kâtib Çelebî (d. 1067/1657), Ibn Sallûm (Şâlih b. Naşrallâh, d. 1080/1669), and Es'ad Yânyavî (d. 1143/1731) became interested in new ideas that had emerged in Europe and translated the relevant works. However, it is incorrect to consider those who did not engage with these types of ideas as being close-minded and completely disregard their intellectual activities. Such an attitude, according to the author, must ask itself: Did Europe's philosophers and scholars engage with the ideas of Ottoman scholars and translate their books? If they did not, which was most often the case, could one also accuse them of being close-minded? He also wonders why no one has asked that if the Ottomans were interested in Europe, why were they not interested in China as well? (p. 357)

El-Rouayheb differs from those who opine that the empire's intellectual history should be understood by emphasizing what was happening in Europe at that time. Thus, he seeks to present the Ottomans' own historical development and internal interactions in regards to its intellectual world. In addition, he asserts that the social, cultural, political, and economic dimensions of these intellectual activities should be taken into account. Moreover, according to him, because the existent historiography has been established in accordance with the paradigm of regression, the Ottoman scholars' intellectual works have not been subjected to serious research. For this exact reason, El-Rouayheb puts forth the main theses of his book by considering the primary sources of the period he is examining.

The author examines three intellectual developments with the intention of challenging these two above-mentioned basic prejudices, which are still common. Accordingly, the book consists of three parts that are each divided into three sections. The first part examines the influence that the Kurdish and Azerbaijani scholars who migrated to Ottoman lands when the Shiite Safavids came to power in Iran had on the Istanbul and Anatolian peers with respect to the *ādāb al-baḥṡ* (the rules of inquiry) and *ādāb al-muṭāla'a* (deep reading) sciences. El-Rouayheb discusses the burst of interest that occurred toward *ādāb al-baḥṡ* due to these migrant scholars and the formation of the new discipline of *ādāb al-muṭāla'a*. Effectively constructed by Müneccimbâşî (d. 1113/1702), this discipline taught one how to elevate oneself

to a level of being able to examine a book analytically without seeking any assistance from a guide. In other words, it enabled readers to subject the text to a critical and deep reading.

In this sense, El-Rouayheb calls attention to a few points. First, this migration wave was one reason for intellectual dynamism and change in the intellectual development process. Students within the empire started to acquire *ijāzas* (permission to teach) of education from these scholars. This system, for example, enabled Dawānī's (d. 908/1502) views to move out of Iran and into the Ottoman world. When the *ijāzas* of Gelenbevī (d. 1205/1791) and Zāhid al-Kawtharī (d. 1952), one of the Ottoman's last-period scholars, are examined, one notices that their names are connected to Dawānī through scholars that came from the east. Second, this migration not only resulted in a transmission of ideas, but also led to the formation of new disciplines (e.g., *ādāb al-muṭāla'a*).

The book's second part focuses on intellectual activity in North Africa. El-Rouayheb calls attention to migrations toward the east due to religious pilgrimage (*hajj*) after the collapse of the Sa'did dynasty in Morocco. In the seventeenth century, many scholars came from West and North Africa to settle in Egypt and the Hejaz. One of the most important consequences of this was the transmission of the thoughts of North Africa's great Ash'ari scholar Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Sanūsī (d. 895/1490) to eastern centers of education, namely al-Azhar, through the agency of his students as well as the determination of the nature of intellectual life here until the nineteenth century. As El-Rouayheb emphasizes, this scholar insisted that imitation (*taqlid*) was insufficient in relation to faith and that its truths had to be accepted through verification (*taḥqīq*) with all of its reasons. Thus he stressed the importance of logic and theology. His students ensured the continuance of this emphasis in such centers of education as al-Azhar and also wrote books to transmit this understanding further afield.

Based on this, the author advocates that those Islamic modernists who emerged at the end of the nineteenth century, among them Muḥammad 'Abduh (d. 1905), were mistaken when they depicted the pre-nineteenth-century Islamic world as being a realm ruled by absolute imitation. He also believes that this attitude is not too different from that of the Orientalists. According to El-Rouayheb, the comments made by 'Abduh indicate that he was completely unaware of the al-Azhar scholars of the previous generation, among them Bājūrī (d. 1277/1860) and Faḍālī (d. 1236/1820-21) (p. 360). Unfortunately, judging the Islamic world without having sufficient knowledge is not just a characteristic of the West, but also one that Muslims cannot get rid of either.

The third part of the book discusses the mystical thought, namely, Sufism, that spread from Azerbaijan and Iran to the Arab-speaking areas. Sufis enabled the doctrine of the Unity of Existence (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) to become prevalent, a development that weakened the Ash'ariyya and Māturīdiyya schools in those areas in which they settled. El-Rouayheb points out that the traditionalist doctrine based on Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) and Ḥanbalī thought, even though it may seem paradoxical, was on the rise in parallel with the doctrine of the Unity of Existence. Here, the author presents a very detailed and deep analysis of the parties that evaluated this doctrine differently. The criticisms of Taftāzānī (d. 792/1390) and the responses made by Kūrānī (d. 1101/1690) and Nāblusī (d. 1143/1731) show that high-level philosophical discussions had taken place. El-Rouayheb also mentions that for Ibn 'Arabī's thought to be understood in the form of a mystical monism as the Unity of Existence should not obscure the fact that there were alternative interpretations. For example, Imam Sha'rānī (d. 973/1565) states that he defends an interpretation that is more congruent with Sunni theology (p. 344).

In short, this book includes many paradigm-shifting claims, including the main theses summarized above. It is impossible for us to mention all of the theses here, which is why we advise those who are interested in this subject to read this book and *study* (*muṭāla'a*) it thoroughly. The author supports his theses by the primary texts, which he presents and then examines and analyzes in a very detailed way. In addition, it seems as though some of his claims may trigger new debates. For example, El-Rouayheb sees Nāblusī as both a monist – he claims that this scholar adopted Qūnawī's Unity of Existence interpretation – and as an occasionalist, because Nāblusī defends the idea that everything, including human action, emerges as a direct result of the efficacy of God. (pp. 302-305, 332-342).

Although this interpretation seems quite original, it opens the way to a lot of question marks in terms of consistency. For example, to what extent can one combine occasionalism, which the majority of Sunni theologians defend, with a monist understanding of the Unity of Existence? According to the theologians' conception of causality, upon which they rely when putting forth occasionalism, originated things can only exist due to an efficient cause. Thus every originated thing has a cause.

Also, first the locus of originated things must be originated, because the locus itself, being a locus to an originated thing, is subject to change; therefore, it is under causal influence. Second, the number of originated things on the locus cannot be infinite in number. In other words, an infinite number of originated things from pre-eternity onward cannot have reached our present day, for the theologians consider

that the concept of actual infinity is absurd or that traversing it is impossible. Therefore, the locus for originated things must have a beginning, as it cannot be pre-eternal.

Due to these reasons, God, in the occasionalist theory, is understood as a being that transcends originated things, and hence is completely immutable and eternal. In that case, according to this doctrine, God cannot be a locus for originated things; whereas in monism, because there is truly only one being and this being is regarded as God in the context in which we are speaking, originated things are not separate creations that are outside of God's being; they are simply modifications of that singular being. Therefore, in terms of monism, God is a locus for originated things. And this, according to the theologians, cannot be accepted because it violates God's pre-eternal state and transcendence.<sup>2</sup> Even if such a being were the direct cause of everything, because this being cannot be called "God," the principal thesis of occasionalism, namely, that "everything occurs as a result of the efficiency of God," will have been violated.

The book may be criticized because it has limited the seventeenth century of the Ottoman intellectual world only to these three intellectual contexts. Khaled El-Rouayheb accepts the validity of this criticism but nevertheless stresses that these three contexts are sufficient to support his main thesis: The seventeenth-century Ottoman intellectual world cannot be described as stagnant, for it was quite active and the site of a significant amount of innovation. The book is an important resource, one that may be used to change the minds of many people who have accepted the widely held view regarding the Ottomans without actually having any deep or extensive knowledge on the topic.

Although El-Rouayheb views his book as being a humble step toward discovering the still largely unknown intellectual world of the Ottomans, his book may be regarded as a candidate for a "cornerstone" work in the field of Ottoman intellectual history, for it sets an example for new studies that will be carried out with this kind of academic maturity. El-Rouayheb continues his journey toward understanding the Ottomans and Islamic thought after the twelfth century. In fact, he is currently researching natural philosophy in the Ottoman, Safavid, and Babur Empires during 1500-1800. I am certain that when these works are published, we will once again learn many new things.

2 For more information about monism within the context of al-Ghazālī's view, see our article Nazif Muh-taroğlu and Chryssi Sidiropoulou. "Is al-Ghazālī a Monist? A Response to Alexander Treiger," *Kalam Journal* (forthcoming).