

Khaled El-Rouayheb. *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century: Scholarly Currents in the Ottoman Empire and the Maghreb*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. 399 pages.

Kenan Tekin

Columbia University, Middle Eastern, South Asian,
African Studies
kt2383@columbia.edu

Recent decades have witnessed a surge in Ottoman studies that counter and rectify decline paradigm in the political, economic, institutional, and social history of the early modern period. However, the intellectual history of the period still remains untapped to a large extent. Khaled El-Rouayheb, who has already made some inroads in this area with articles and a previous monograph on history of logic, just published another significant work entitled *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century: Scholarly Currents in the Ottoman Empire and the Maghreb*. This book responds to the lacuna in the scholarship with an encompassing study of the intellectual trends in the seventeenth century Islamic world.

Islamic Intellectual History is divided into three parts, each devoted to a scholarly and intellectual current including rational sciences, theology, and mysticism. Each part in turn consists of three chapters. The first chapter of each part maps the intellectual current in general, and subsequent two chapters detail the relevant trend by closely analyzing some representative works.

In the first part, El-Rouayheb points out a hitherto unacknowledged development in the core Ottoman lands, i.e. the reinvigoration of rational sciences in the early modern period. The periodization of the Ottoman intellectual history so far has been that of nascent beginnings, a golden age of rational sciences between the reign of Mehmed II and Süleyman the Magnificent, and a steep decline thereafter due to Kadızadeli movement, from which the Ottomans never recuperated up until the nineteenth century. El-Rouayheb criticizes this decline narrative by not only showing that the causal explanations for decline of rational sciences are themselves inaccurate, but actually by demonstrating that these sciences flourished

in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This renewed interest in rational sciences, according to El-Rouayheb, was connected with the rise of Shiite Safavid dynasty, which led to the persecution of the Sunni scholars of Persia. These scholars escaped for safe havens in the Ottoman Empire, and brought with them a body of learning, and thus ignited a heightened interest in rational sciences in the core Ottoman domains via Azeri and Kurdish scholars. El-Rouayheb demonstrates this by examining Ottoman scholarly output in the fields of philosophy, logic, and dialectics which witnessed an unprecedented increase. El-Rouayheb notes the role played by two scholars in particular, namely Mulla Çelebi Amidi, and Hoca Abdurrahim. Both of them studied in the Kurdish region and had genealogies of learning that went back to the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Persian scholars. It is regrettable that El-Rouayheb does not emphasize the role of Muhammed Emin b. Sadreddin Şirvani, in this regard.

Intense study of instrumental and rational sciences also led to seeking knowledge by perusing books in private. This is demonstrated by an analysis of Müneccimbaşı Ahmed Dede and Saçaklızade's treatises on proper manner of perusing books (*adab al-mutala'a*) and education (*Tartib al-'Ulum*), respectively. El-Rouayheb also suggests that the interest in "deep reading" (*mutala'a 'amiqa*, a phrase used by Saçaklızade) was perhaps due to changes in the promotions in the *ilmiye* career. This explanation seems plausible given the fact that provincial students were seeking proper manners of learning in order to compete with graduates of core madrasas of the Empire. In this regard it is not surprising that both treatises were written in the provinces rather than the capital.

In the second part of the book, El-Rouayheb provides an account of the eastward movement of learning in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. El-Rouayheb unearths as yet unnoticed transmission of knowledge from the Arab-West (the Maghreb) to the Arab-East (Cairo, Damascus, and the Arabian Peninsula). He shows that simultaneously with the rise of economy, scholarly contributions in logic and theology increased in the Maghreb. These works became part of the curriculum in Cairo and elsewhere in Syria and Arabia, as the scholars themselves moved eastward due to political turmoil, and to the established custom of pilgrimage. It is owing to the legacy of the highland Berber scholars that Cairo was introduced to a more vigorous and advanced study of logic and rational theology.

In the third part, El-Rouayheb demonstrates that Arab-Islamic lands witnessed a noticeable change in the reception of Ibn 'Arabi's thought in the same period. While in the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries some scholars embraced Ibn 'Arabi as a respectable scholar and saint, they were still

refrained from embracing the idea of unity of existence (*wahdat al-wujud*) that was propagated by later commentators such as Konevi and his Persian followers. However, in seventeenth century there was a shift in this regard simultaneously with the spread and influence of Shattari and Naqshbandi orders from India, and Khalwati Sufi order of Anatolia. These Sufi orders spread to the Arab-Islamic lands monist-mysticism, which gave way to a criticism of Ash'ari theology in favor of Hanbali traditionalism in the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire. El-Rouayheb's account of this seventeenth century development problematizes the commonplace juxtaposition of Ibn 'Arabi-inspired sufism and the Hanbali traditionalism. In this instance, it turns out that monist-mystics shared a common ground with Hanbali traditionalism concerning a number of issues including a critique of Ash'ari occasionalism and secondary causation, the value of studying rational theology, the related issue of interpreting anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the Qur'an, and the question of eternity of Qur'an. El-Rouayheb discusses the role of some key figures including Qushashi, Kurani, and Nabulusi who are indicative of and brought about this shift in the Arab-Islamic world, and prepared the ground for the modern Salafism.

El-Rouayheb's book is a paragon of Islamic and Ottoman intellectual historiography, hence, there are few things that one might contest which still would not take away anything from the value of the book as it stands. One of them is the totally unnecessary defense of a more conservative kind of intellectual history that is textual through and through. El-Rouayheb argues that it is not necessary to involve political, institutional, and social studies, and that it is legitimate to do an intellectual history of the Ottoman Empire that is focused on the content of texts alone. Be that as it may, that kind of intellectual history is quite limited as it would not provide satisfactory explanations for the changes in the content of texts themselves. In fact, El-Rouayheb himself provides political, social, and institutional explanations for above-mentioned intellectual trends in the Ottoman Empire and North Africa, which make his analysis of texts more interesting and convincing. Clearly his own practice is contrary to what he advocates, thus mystifying his defense of an outdated approach to intellectual history.

Another issue that one might question further is the emphasis put on the novelty of "deep reading" or layered reading in the early modern period. El-Rouayheb contrasts a few pedagogical texts from previous centuries with similar texts written at the turn of the eighteenth century to evince that previously students were discouraged, and in fact barred, from studying texts by themselves. Whereas in the early modern period there was a call for studying texts in private. However, El-Rouayheb himself acknowledges that deep reading as advocated by Müneccimbaşı and Saçaklızade,

is expected of those who have already mastered linguistic and rational sciences i.e. advanced students of madrasas. Hence, there is a possibility of finding deep reading in practice in earlier periods as well. For instance, El-Rouayheb acknowledges that there is evidence which shows that scholars were practicing *mutala'a*, as shown by his analysis of Ibn Jama'a's treatise on education. Further studies of commentaries and glosses from the earlier period are needed in order to establish the novelty of deep reading in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Overall, the book under review is a reliable and accessible work of scholarship. El-Rouayheb's writing is quite analytical and lucid, and his research is astute and trustworthy. As a modern academic verifier (*muhaqqiq*), El-Rouayheb does not take the existing claims for granted. Using manuscripts (title pages, prefaces, colophons, marginalia, and contemporary correspondences) El-Rouayheb corrects mistakes concerning identity of authors, death dates, and publications. Throughout the book, El-Rouayheb also time and again shows that some of commonly held views regarding Sufi thought, Ash'ari theology, and early modern Islamic and Ottoman intellectual history, are contrary to the facts as revealed by close reading of texts themselves. In that regard, reading *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century* is a must for those studying Islamic philosophy and theology, Sufism, and intellectual history of the Ottoman Empire and the Maghreb. The book as a whole or in part is recommended as a textbook as well for courses in these areas.

**Nassim Nicholas Taleb. *Siyah Kuğu*
-Olasılıksız Görünenin Etkisi. Çev.
Nazan Arıbaş. İstanbul: Varlık Yayınları,
2008. 424 sayfa.**

Mustafa Yavuz

İstanbul Medeniyet Üniversitesi, Bilim Tarihi Bölümü
mustafa.yavuz@medeniyet.edu.tr

Beş bölümden müteşekkil bu kitapta, Lübnan asıllı Amerikalı yazar Nassim Nicholas Taleb, "Siyah Kuğu" metaforunu kullanarak, olmasına nere-