

BOOK REVIEW



Historicizing Sunni Islam in the Ottoman Empire, c. 1450–c. 1750

Edited by Tijana Krstić and Derin Terzioğlu

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The edited volume “Historicizing Sunnī Islam in the Ottoman Empire, c. 1450–c. 1750,” curated by Tijana Krstić and Derin Terzioğlu, poses a comprehensive analysis. It comprises three chapters that introduce a nuanced exploration of Sunnī orthodoxy within the complex socio-political landscape of the Ottoman Empire during the early modern period. The book’s in-depth analysis of Sunnī identity formation, institutionalization, and interaction with other religious and intellectual currents makes it a must-read for scholars and students in Ottoman studies and Islamic history, ensuring their engagement with the latest research in their field.

The editors set the stage with a thoughtful introduction (pp. 1-30), frame the discourse within the broader historical context, and highlight the significance of reexamining Sunnī orthodoxy in dialogue with the past and the present. The subsequent chapters are organized into three distinct parts, each searching for specific aspects of Sunnī Islam’s evolution within the Ottoman Empire.

Chapter I lays the groundwork for the ensuing exploration. Helen Pfeifer’s examination of the emergence of a new hadith culture in the Ottoman Empire during the sixteenth century decodes the intellectual currents shaping Sunnī identity. Nabil al-Tikriti’s study of Shāhẓādah Qorqud’s writings draws a contrarian perspective, challenging conventional narratives and illuminating early articulations of Ottoman Sunnism. Derin Terzioğlu’s research of Ibn Taymiyyah’s influence on the early modern Ottomans provides valued intuitions into the ideological underpinnings of Sunnī orthodoxy within the Empire.

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Tijana Krstić's exploration of Ottoman catechisms redefine the role of knowledge and belief boundaries, providing a fresh perspective on religious education and indoctrination. Nir Shafir and Guy Burak intensify the discourse by examining the interpretation of heresy and the edification of Ottoman supplicants, respectively.

Chapter II focuses on the spatial aspects of Sunnī Islam's dissemination and consolidation within Ottoman society. Çiğdem Kafescioğlu's study of urban institutions and their transformative roles underscores the dynamic nature of Ottoman religious spaces. Grigor Boykov's exploration of Abdāl-affiliated convents furnishes significant perceptions into the process of "Sunnitizing" Khalwatī darwishes and interprets the intersection of spirituality and statecraft. H. Evren Sünnetçioğlu's scrutiny of congregational prayers and *imāms* elucidates the juridical debates surrounding religious practices. At the same time, Ünver Rüstem's examination of postclassical Sultanic mosques poses a glimpse into the evolving architectural expressions of Ottoman piety.

Chapter III explores the complex interplay between Sunnī Islam, Shī'ism, and Qizilbash identity within the Ottoman realm. Ayşe Baltacıoğlu-Brammer's study challenges prevailing victimhood narratives and presents Qizilbash actors as nuanced borderland actors. Vefa Erginbaş's exploration of Ottoman historical writing suggests additional knowledge into the reception and interpretation of controversial figures like Yazīd ibn Mu'āwiyah. Besides, it focuses on the dynamic relationship between history and ideology. Selim Güngörürler's assessment of Ottoman-Safavid peacetime diplomacy delivers a fascinating glimpse into the pragmatic realities of confessional politics in the early modern era.

After an overall discussion, all studies must find the literary drawbacks. Within Chapter I, the study "A New Hadith Culture? Arab Scholars and Ottoman Sunnitization in the Sixteenth Century" by Helen Pfeifer (pp. 31-61) presents a comprehensive examination of the emergence of a new hadith culture within the Ottoman Empire during the sixteenth century and sheds light on the dynamic interactions between Arab scholars and Ottoman intellectual circles. The chapter also suggests valuable intuition into the processes of Sunnitization and the transmission of religious knowledge within the Ottoman context, contributing to a deeper understanding of the intellectual and cultural

dynamics of the period. However, engaging with theoretical frameworks related to cultural exchange and intellectual synthesis could be advantageous. Incorporating perspectives from cross-cultural studies or postcolonial theory could refine the study and lay out a broader context for understanding the dynamics of Sunnitization.

Then, the following title, “A Contrarian Voice: Şehzâde Qorqud’s (d. 919/1513) Writings on Kalâm and the Early Articulation of Ottoman Sunnism” by Nabil al-Tikriti (pp. 62- 100) stipulates a fresh perspective on the early articulation of Ottoman Sunnism by examining the writings of Shâhzâdah Qorqud, challenging conventional narratives and highlighting the diversity of intellectual currents within the Ottoman Empire. The chapter boosts our understanding of Ottoman intellectual history by exploring the role of individual voices in shaping religious discourse and identity during the Empire’s formative period. On the one hand, while the chapter delivers a valuable understanding of Shâhzâdah Qorqud’s writings and their significance in Ottoman intellectual history, it could be enriched by a more extensive inspection of the broader socio-political context in which these writings emerged. From the perspective of political history or social theory, it could deepen the research inquiry and propose a new apprehension into the relationship between intellectual currents and broader historical processes.

After Nabil al-Tikriti’s study, the title “Ibn Taymiyya, al-Siyâsa al-Shar‘iyya, and the Early Modern Ottomans” by Derin Terzioğlu (pp. 101-154) comes into the front. Terzioğlu approaches a nuanced assessment of the influence of Ibn Taymiyyah’s political thought on the early modern Ottomans and explores the complex interactions between religious ideology and political practice within the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, this section contributes to our understanding of the intellectual and political dynamics of the period. It also highlights how religious ideas shaped Ottoman statecraft and governance. Thus, the chapter allows constructive perceptions of the reception of Ibn Taymiyyah’s ideas within the Ottoman context, which could increase its value from a more critical engagement with the implications of these ideas for broader historical processes. Incorporating perspectives from political theory or comparative politics could improve the research and give new insights into the relationship between religion and power in the Ottoman Empire.

Another interesting academic research “You Must Know Your Faith in Detail: Redefinition of the Role of Knowledge and Boundaries of Belief in Ottoman Catechisms (‘İlm-i hâls)” by Tijana Krstić (pp. 155-195) describes a detailed assessment of Ottoman catechisms and their role in redefining the boundaries of religious knowledge and belief within the Ottoman Empire and clears up the processes of religious education and indoctrination during the period. Therefore, it could benefit from a more explicit engagement with the broader cultural and intellectual contexts in which these catechisms emerged. Incorporating perspectives from cultural history or literary studies could upgrade the evaluation and make new perceptions into the relationship between religious education and broader cultural processes.

Nir Shafir’s work, “How to Read Heresy in the Ottoman World” (pp. 196-231), illustrates an innovative approach to studying heresy in the Ottoman Empire, investigating how textual and visual sources were used to identify and interpret heterodox beliefs and practices. Moreover, the study focuses on constructing religious orthodoxy and heterodoxy within the Ottoman context and highlights the role of textual and visual culture in shaping religious identity and discourse. Hence, regarding the lack of study, it would be more exclusive if the author used systematic analysis of the methods and techniques to identify and interpret heterodox beliefs. Meanwhile, religious studies or anthropology could polish the inspection of religious diversity and conflict dynamics within the Ottoman Empire.

The title, “Prayers, Commentaries, and the Edification of the Ottoman Supplicant” by Guy Burak (pp. 232-254), presents a comprehensive scrutiny of Ottoman prayers and their role in shaping religious practice and belief within the Ottoman Empire and clarifies how prayers were used to edify and instruct supplicants. In emphasizing how prayers functioned as a means of moral and spiritual instruction, this section enhances our understanding of the aspects of Ottoman religious practice. However, more cultural history or performance studies could deepen the arguments and hold out a new perspective on the relationship between religious practice and broader cultural processes.

In Chapter II, Çiğdem Kafescioğlu’s “Lives and Afterlives of an Urban Institution and Its Spaces: The Early Ottoman ‘İmāret as

Mosque” (pp. 255-307) yields a detailed examination of the early Ottoman ‘*imārah* as a mosque. It also affords valuable intuitions into its historical development, spatial organization, and societal significance. The study explicates the complex relationship between urban institutions and religious spaces by enriching our understanding of Ottoman urban life. However, this chapter adopts an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on architectural history, urban studies, and religious studies to analyze the ‘*Imāret* as both a physical structure and a social institution. This interdisciplinary perspective enhances the depth and breadth of the study, making it accessible to a wide range of scholars. Furthermore, the chapter bears a comprehensive research outline of the early Ottoman ‘*imārah*; it could benefit from a comparative perspective. Incorporating comparative case studies or engaging with similar urban institutions in other contexts could enhance the considerations and submit a broader understanding of the role of mosques in urban life.

Grigor Boykov’s research title, “Abdāl-affiliated Convents and ‘Sunnitizing’ Halveti Dervishes in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Rumeli” (pp. 308-340), depicts original research on the Abdāl-affiliated convents and their role in “Sunnitizing” Khalwatī darwīshes in sixteenth-century Ottoman Rumeli. The chapter fills a gap in existing scholarships by providing new visions into the dynamics of religious conversion and institutionalization within the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, the chapter is rich in historical detail and contributes a nuanced understanding of the social, political, and religious factors shaping the emergence of Sunnī orthodoxy among the Khalwatī darwīshes. Boykov’s meticulous archival research and attention to primary sources contribute to the depth and credibility of the investigation. Therefore, some readers may find Boykov’s study overly complex, especially for those unfamiliar with the intricacies of Ottoman religious history. While the chapter renders precious knowledge, a more accessible presentation of key concepts and arguments could enhance its readability and appeal to a broader audience.

Another academic title of this chapter is H. Evren Sünnetçioğlu’s “Attendance at the Five Daily Congregational Prayers, Imams and Their Communities in the Jurisprudential Debates during the Ottoman Age of Sunnitization” (pp. 341-375). He thoroughly examines the

jurisprudential debates surrounding attendance at the five daily congregational prayers during the Ottoman age of Sunnitization. The chapter delivers significant intuitions into the evolving interpretations of Sunnī Islam's religious obligations and communal practices. The chapter engages with various primary sources, including legal treatises, fatwá collections, and court records. It also presents a rich and nuanced analysis of the debates among Ottoman jurists and religious scholars. On the other hand, its narrow focus on jurisprudential debates may limit its relevance to scholars outside the field of Islamic law. A more explicit discussion of the broader implications of these debates for Ottoman society and culture could enhance the chapter's significance and appeal.

The title "Piety and Presence in the Postclassical Sultanic Mosque" by Ünver Rüstem (pp. 376-422) portrays an innovative approach to the study of postclassical Sultanic mosques, concentrating on the interplay between piety and presence in the architectural design and spatial organization of these religious institutions. The chapter breaks new ground by exploring the experiential dimension of mosque architecture, enriching our understanding of religious practice in the Ottoman Empire. However, the chapter visually explores mosque architecture and incorporates images, plans, and diagrams to illustrate key concepts and arguments. This visual approach enhances the reader's engagement with the material, providing a deeper appreciation of mosque design's aesthetic and symbolic dimensions. Therefore, it could benefit from a comparative perspective. Comparative case studies or cross-cultural comparisons could enrich the analysis and recommend a broader understanding of the evolution of mosque architecture in the Islamic world.

In the last chapter, the academic contribution "Neither Victim Nor Accomplice: The Kızılbaş as Borderland Actors in the Early Modern Ottoman Realm," noted by Ayşe Baltacıoğlu and Brammer (pp. 423-450), clarifies a nuanced portrayal of the Qizilbash, challenging traditional narratives that often depict them solely as victims or rebels within the Ottoman Empire. The chapter expounds on the agency and complexities of Qizilbash identity and politics by positioning them as borderland actors. In offering fresh insights into the dynamics of religious diversity and interaction in the early modern period, the chapter contributes to historiographical debates surrounding religious

minorities in the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, both researchers draw on various sources, including archival materials, literary texts, and secondary scholarship, and develop the research module with multiple perspectives and methodological approaches.

However, some readers may need more than the scope of geographical and chronological coverage. A broader examination of Qizilbash communities across different regions and periods could further enhance the quality of the study. Some may also desire theoretical frameworks about identity, agency, and power. Integrating postcolonial or critical race theory perspectives could deepen the analysis and produce new perceptions into the construction of Qizilbash identity within the Ottoman Empire.

The second title of the third chapter, "Reading Ottoman Sunnism through Islamic History: Approaches toward Yazīd b. Muʿāwīyah in Ottoman Historical Writing" by Vefa Erginbaş (pp. 451-478), designs a thought-provoking examination of Ottoman historical writing through the lens of Yazīd ibn Muʿāwīyah is a controversial figure in early Islamic history. In analyzing how Ottoman scholars interpreted and engaged with Yazīd, the chapter enlightens on the intersections between Sunnī orthodoxy and historical memory. It demonstrates a high methodological rigor and draws on a wide range of primary sources while critically and constructively engaging with secondary scholarship. The chapter's exploration of Sunnī orthodoxy and historical interpretation has relevance beyond the early modern period. It contributes to broader discussions on the relationship between religious identity, historical memory, and political authority.

However, the chapter has some narrow scopes. Though the subject matter is complex and specialized, a certain familiarity with Islamic history and historiography is required. Greater clarity and contextualization could enhance accessibility for readers less familiar with the topic. Meanwhile, its detailed exploration of Ottoman approaches toward Yazīd ibn Muʿāwīyah may be pointed out from a broader investigation of how Ottoman scholars engaged with other figures and events in Islamic history. A comparative approach could enhance the analysis and suggest a more comprehensive understanding of Ottoman historical writing.

The last title of this book, "Islamic Discourse in Ottoman-Safavid Peacetime Diplomacy after 1049/1639" by Selim Güngörürler (pp. 479-

500), remarks a well-noted study. The contributor comprehensively examines Islamic discourse in Ottoman-Safavid peacetime diplomacy, offering valuable intuitions into the religious dimensions of diplomatic relations between the two empires. Its focus mainly on peacetime diplomacy adds an essential dimension to our understanding of Ottoman-Safavid relations, moving beyond conventional narratives of conflict and rivalry. GÜNGÖRÜRLER also draws on diverse sources, including diplomatic correspondence, historical narratives, and religious texts. Therefore, some bookworms and researchers may find the abundance of historical and diplomatic detail overwhelming, particularly those less familiar with the intricacies of Ottoman-Safavid relations. Greater clarity and synthesis could enhance accessibility without sacrificing scholarly rigor. Moreover, it needs a comparative perspective with neighboring powers or regions that could improve the reviewed title and give broader concepts into the dynamics of Islamic diplomacy in the early modern period.

In conclusion, the book depicts a rich and multifaceted exploration of Sunnī orthodoxy within the Ottoman context. While the book provides valuable insights into various dimensions of Sunnitization, there are opportunities for further engagement with theoretical frameworks and comparative perspectives. Therefore, it represents a significant contribution to Ottoman studies and Islamic history, inviting scholars to revisit and rethink conventional narratives of religious identity and power in the early modern period. The book offers valuable contributions to understanding religious identity, historical memory, and diplomatic relations within the Ottoman Empire. While each chapter presents its strengths and limitations, they enrich the scholarly discourse on early modern Ottoman history and Islamic studies.

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