
Reviewed by Benjamin Smuin

In the world of Syrian studies, Abdul-Karim Rafeq is, or at least should be, a household name. His countless contributions to the history of Syria under the Ottoman Empire have spurred and influenced numerous studies on the complex nature of Syria’s history throughout his career, and have spurred the careers of countless other historians of Syria. Whether in Syria, Europe, Japan or the United States, Rafeq has had a noticeable impact on the trajectory of modern Syrian history. *Syria and Bilad al-Sham under Ottoman Rule* is a collection of articles in honor of Rafeq, and most follow the central principles of Rafeq’s work, including detailed usage of Ottoman court records and legal traditions.

The book begins with a detailed introduction by Peter Sluglett, in which he summarizes the various articles in a way that makes a review of this nature almost impossible to write without stepping on his toes. Following the introduction is a complete bibliography of Dr. Rafeq’s published works compiled by T.J. Fitzgerald, a feat in and of itself. The remainder of the work is divided into seven parts, each representing a different aspect of Rafeq’s career. The first part, entitled ‘Encomia: Rafeq the Historian,’ contains essays by Muhammad Adnan Bakhit, the late Nicola Ziadeh, Ulrike Freitag, Abdallah Hannah and James A. Reilly that discuss Dr. Rafeq’s impact on a personal level.

The second section, ‘The Economic History of Ottoman Rule in *Bilad al-Sham,*’ contains selections from Thomas Philipp, Farouk Hoblos, Mohammad al-Mubaidin (trans. by W. Matt Malczycki), and Daniel Crecelius. In ‘The Economic Impact of the Ottoman Conquest on *Bilad al-Sham,*’ Philipp examines the economic impact of the integration of *Bilad al-Sham* into the Ottoman Empire, concluding that the Ottoman conquests of Arab lands transformed those lands into part of a ‘huge free trade zone,’ which in turn led to increased benefits from the expansion of international trade (pp. 112-113). Farouk Hoblos’ article ‘Public Services and Tax Revenues in Ottoman Tripoli,’ presents an interesting argument for Ottoman Tripoli, in which he asserts that given that the main purpose of the taxation system seems to have been to extract as much as possible in the way of resources from the local population, there is little to differentiate Ottoman rule from colonial occupation.

Part Three, ‘Space, Urban Institutions and Society in Ottoman *Bilad al-Sham,*’ contains the work of Stefan Weber, Brigitte Marino, Toru Miura and Stefan Knost. While each article in these sections is worthy of individual praise and evaluation, doing so would turn this simple review into something much more. That being said, Stefan Weber’s selection, ‘The Making of and Ottoman Harbour Town: Sidon/Saida from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries’ is a fantastic piece of history, the result of several years of fieldwork and of archaeological and archival studies. Weber utilizes written records and material evidence to provide an eloquent analysis of the city’s rise throughout the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, noting its importance as the second major city, the other being Damascus, in southern *Bilad al-Sham,* its role as a provincial capital in the early seventeenth century, and its important strategic position as the port of Damascus. To do so, he examines the *waqf* of the Grand Vezir Sokollu Mehmed Pasha in the sixteenth century in a trans-regional level of analysis, the *waqfiyya* of Kücük Ahmed Pasha in the seventeenth century on a regional level, and the story of the Hammud family of the eighteenth century on a local level.
Though he presents it in much more detail, ultimately the analysis is superb, and shows how Sidon’s development “was based on maritime trade, its geographical setting, new political entities and perhaps above all on the activities of distinctive social agents” (p. 239).

Part Four, ‘The Ottoman State and Local Society in Bilad al-Sham,’ contains selections by Steve Tamari, Massoud Daher (trans. by W. Matt Malczycki), Astrid Meier, Collette Establet and Jean-Paul Pascual, Martha Mundy, and Hidemitsu Kuroki. Tamari provides an interesting argument suggesting that Arab national consciousness may be traceable as far back as the late-seventeenth century, basing his arguments on texts written by Syrians claiming their land as part of a bilad al-‘arab. Mundy’s article, ‘Islamic Law and the Order of the State: The Legal Status of the Cultivator,” is a detailed study based both on fatwa collections of the various Hanafi muftis of Damascus and a wider selection of Hanafi legal texts. Essentially, she probes the question over the obligation of cultivators to pay taxes on lands they have abandoned, and their right to leave the land altogether. Rejecting many accounts and interpretations on this matter as incorrect, Mundy tackles an interesting aspect of Islamic law with an intriguing and well-formulated analysis. Also of note is the article by Colette Establet and Jean-Paul Pascual, ‘La société damascène et la campagne analysée à travers les registres de cadis.’ The article utilizes two distinct collections of seventeenth-century sources: the inventories of deceased members of the Ottoman military and records pertaining to orphans and minors. They analyze the way in which estates and debts were administered on behalf of the minors concerned, and ultimately hope to open further avenues of research into how the Ottoman state and military personnel fit into the cultural landscape of the Damascene countryside.

Part Five, ‘Religion and Society in Bilad Sham,’ contains contributions from Bernard Heyberger, Bruce Masters, Souad Slim and Dick Douwes, which range from Heyberger’s nuanced account of the history of Christians before the Tanzimat and their place in Ottoman society to Slim’s utilization of the awqaf records of Armenians, Greek Catholics, Jacobites, and Maronites in nineteenth century Aleppo. Douwes’ article, ‘Migration, Faith and Community: Extra-local Linkages in Coastal Syria’ is an attempt to read the history of the religious practices of the Isma’ilis and Nusayris and their encounters with ‘modernity’ through a local context rather than through the more common imperial context.

Part Six, ‘Europeans in Bilad al-Sham,’ contains two articles, by the late André Raymond and Leila Fawaz. Raymond details the ways in which two maps of Aleppo, one by Alexander Russell and the other by Vincent Germain, differ. One interesting facet of this article is how by 1818 there seems to have been far less interest in displaying how a military occupation of Aleppo could be carried out. Leila Fawaz’ article utilizes a set of unpublished memoirs of Comtesse de Perthuis who visited the Levant twice in the 1850s and early 1860s and provides an interesting account of Levantine society from the perspective of a foreigner unfamiliar with the culture and language of the region.

The final part of the book, ‘Bilad al-Sham in the Late Ottoman and Mandatory Periods,’ contains articles by Peter Sluglett, Sarab Atassi, Maher al-Charif and Dalal Arsuzi-Elamir. Sluglett provides a good historiographical overview of cities and towns in the late Ottoman period, which should serve as a decent starting point for any students or scholars interested in, yet unfamiliar with, the topic. Atassi’s article, ‘Dar ‘Uthman Nuri pasha et le développement des quartiers de al-‘Afif et de Jisr al-Abyad à la fin de l’époque ottomane,’ contains a lively discussion of the Damascene house used by Amir Faysal and later General Gouraud, that is now the official residence of the French ambassador. Maher al-Charif addresses the current interest in Ottoman Palestine, and the recent work of Michelle Campos is a testament to its growing popularity.
Finally, Dalal Arsuzi discusses the Antakya uprising throughout 1918-1926, challenging the dominance of the ‘center’-based analysis in the occurrence of nationalist rebellions.

In sum, the articles of this collection span a wide array of topics and time periods, and employ various theoretical bases and source material. An underlying theme, however, is an undeniable connection to the work of ‘Abdul Karim-Rafeq. His pioneering work in the history of Syria and *Bilad al-Sham* in the Ottoman period is unparalleled in modern Middle Eastern historiography. These papers, originally given at a conference for Rafeq in Beirut and Damascus in 2004, represent a significant collection of the more recent work on Syria and *Bilad al-Sham*. Though it may be too expensive for use in the classroom, it is nonetheless a great addition to the library of any scholar of Syrian history. The expanse and breadth of the volume is a testament to the profound influence Rafeq has had on the modern state of Syrian studies, especially as it relates to Syria under the Ottoman Empire, although simply because an article has not been fully analyzed in this review should not be taken as an indication that it was a lesser contribution than those mentioned. The volume is a welcome addition to the historiography of Syrian history, and a fabulous tribute to the greatest historian of Ottoman Syria.

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