Syrian Studies Association Bulletin

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Edith Szanto, Editor; Benjamin Smuin, Book Review Editor

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Letter from the President

Hilary Kalmbach

01 June 2017

As I write this, we are finalising plans for this year’s MESA meeting. Please remember when booking your hotel and travel that our events will occur in the afternoon of the ‘meeting in conjunction’ day, which is Saturday 18 November 2017. Keep an eye on our Facebook page (@syrianstudies) for more information.

We very much look forward to seeing you at MESA this coming autumn. Our reception will provide an opportunity to continue the discussion we began last year about how we can overcome barriers to the production of new knowledge on Syria, and in so doing make some sort of positive contribution towards the situations faced by Syria and Syrians today. The full brief for last year’s panel is in the previous newsletter, though I will say more here about the points made by our panelists.

The panel began with remarks from Professor Leif Stenberg, Founding Director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Lund University in Sweden and now the Director of the Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations at the Aga Khan University in London. As an anthropologist, he has continued his research by interviewing Syrians living outside of Syria. In his experience, this has involved a significant methodological shift, but presents new possibilities, in part because Syrians-in-exile can speak more freely than their counterparts at home. He called for Syria to be understood not only as a geographical place, but also a transnational concept. He suggested that this shift, along with new sources and new ways of working, paves the way for new and exciting types of scholarship on Syria, spearheaded in part by a new generation of Syria scholars in which Syrians-in-exile are playing an important role.

Our next speaker spoke about migrants and migration from the perspective of a historian. Stacy Fahrenthold, Visiting Assistant Professor at California State University, Fresno, spoke about researching her book on the political activities of Syrian migrants in Brazil, Argentina, and the United States between 1908 and 1921. The multi-site nature of this work made it crucial to examine the social geographies that exist between places though social and professional networks. The complexity and expense of this work makes collaboration crucial.

Ted Falk, a graduate student at the University of California San Diego, focused on the challenges and possibilities of writing history using the Ottoman archives. He noted that there is a significant amount of Arabic material related to Syria in these archives, mostly originals but also some copies of documents from elsewhere, and that gradually more of these materials are being digitised. Challenges presented to historians who do not read Ottoman include needing at least some Turkish to find the Arabic documents and indexes that are Latinised but not standardised. He also noted that a degree of savviness is advisable, as searches are monitored.

Many additional options for addressing these challenges were raised in a lengthy discussion between the panelists and
A significant point raised was that anthropologists and historians face challenges related to access that are related yet contrasting, so our way forward is likely to need two distinct strands. If you were not able to attend the discussion last year, but are interested in being involved in our efforts in this area, please let me know at h.kalmbach@sussex.ac.uk.

At the start of 2017, we welcomed several new officers to the board. **Edith Szanto** of the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani is our bulletin editor, and is to be congratulated for producing her first edition in coordination with book review editor Benjamin Smuin. **Malissa Taylor** of the University of Massachusetts in Amherst chairs our Prize Committee, **Dara Conduit** of Deakin University in Melbourne, Australia is our webmaster, and **Reem Bailony** of Georgetown University in Washington, DC is our new member-at-large. Our liaison positions in Syria and Lebanon continue to remain vacant. As you can see, the SSA board now has a distinctly international flavour, with officers based in Australia, the Middle East, Europe, and both coasts of the United States.

Best wishes,

Hilary Kalmbach

*Dr Hilary Kalmbach holds a tenured position in the History Department at the University of Sussex in the United Kingdom. Her research focuses on Islam in the modern Middle East, with particular attention to authority, knowledge, education, and gender. She is the founding director of MENACS, the Middle East and North African Centre at Sussex, and is the current President of the Syrian Studies Association.*
This idea that minorities in the Middle East are clearly identifiable, separate, longstanding communities persisted for many decades, even as scholars began to acknowledge the flexible nature of such communal categorizations. As Gabriel Ben-Dor put it in 1999, “The authentic ethnic approach ... emphasizes both the dynamics of change in ethnic identity and consciousness and the more or less objective variables that define majorities and minorities, which tend to endure over time.”

Equally long-lived has been Hourani’s approach to defining the primary characteristics of these “minorities,” who are described by their theological systems first and their linguistic-national attributes second. His Christian minorities are characterized by their theological points of origination: the Eastern patriarchates’ split from Rome in the eleventh century, the Nestorian controversies over the nature of the Trinity in the fifth century, the Monophysite doctrines about the oneness of Christ and Jesus. Muslim minorities appear as defined by the Sunni-Shi’a split over the Caliphate in the seventh century, by the Alawi belief in a “Divine Triad,” by the Druze theology of transmigration of souls. Similarly, Hourani’s linguistic minorities are sorted by the strengths of their claims to nationality; the Armenians “have a continuous history as a national entity in this homeland since ancient times,” while the Kurds have a “group of dialects” spoken by “a number of Moslem tribes, scarcely united enough to be called a

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2 Gabriel Ben-Dor, “Minorities in the Middle East: Theory and Practice,” in *Minorities and the State in the Arab World*, ed. Ofra Bengio and Gabriel Ben-Dor (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1999), 6.
This approach to the question of minorities in the Arab world dominated the public perception of non-Muslim and non-Arab communities in the region for decades, and sometimes entered into a public realm already primed to view Sunni Islam as a monolithic entity engaged in various forms of institutionalized discrimination against non-Muslim or non-Arab communities.

But over the past twenty years, a new picture of minorities in the Arab world has begun to emerge in the scholarly literature – one that eschews the picture of static, clearly defined, predetermined minorities in a permanent state of tense relations with an equally predetermined Sunni Arab majority. Increasingly, scholars have begun to think about the modern phenomenon of “minorities” as the consequence of a process of minoritization, beginning in the late nineteenth century and continuing to unfold through the present day. Rather than offering a definition of “minority,” then, the essays in this volume seek to examine the processes by which minority identities in the Arab world have been constantly formed, practiced, and altered. They challenges the idea that ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities stand permanently outside majoritarian states across the Arab world. Collectively, these essays make three central arguments: that the category of “minority” became meaningful only with the rise of the modern nation-state; that in this new political landscape, groups labeled minorities often sought simultaneously to project an essential cultural “authenticity” and a nationalist commitment through specific and focused types of political engagement; and that Middle Eastern and North African minority identities owe much of their modern self-definition to developments within diaspora populations and other transnational frameworks.

Laura Robson is an associate professor of Middle Eastern history at Portland State University in Portland, Oregon. She is editor of Minorities and the Arab World: New Perspectives and author of Colonialism and Christianity in Mandate Palestine and the forthcoming States of Separation: Transfer, Partition, and the Making of the Modern Middle East.

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Research Notes

The Levantine–Kurdish Synthesis: How Syrian Refugees Revolutionized The Kurdish Restaurant Scene

By Sherwan Hindreen

Was there anything positive to come out of the Syrian crisis? When thinking of the Syrian Civil War, we are generally reminded of the hundreds of thousands who have died and of the millions that are either displaced or have fled. Naturally, it is hard to think of anything positive or fruitful arising from this calamity. Yet, in the mountain town of Sulaimani in Iraqi Kurdistan, Syrian refugees have alleviated a little of the economic stagnation by bringing with them their regionally famous, unique, and delicious cuisine.

Whatever coverage the Syrian refugee crisis receives from the American media, it usually focuses on Russian-American relations or the refugees crossing into Europe. Consequently, it is easy to forget that the places that have borne most of the fallout of the conflict are Syria's neighbors. Even among those, the attention of the international community is distributed unequally. Iraq, and especially Kurdistan, a country marred by its own war, is perhaps the most ignored.

Kurdistan has been a haven for refugees since the mid 2000s, when tens of thousands of Iraqi refugees escaping sectarian violence in Arab Iraq poured into the mountainous northern region. As the Syrian war unfolded, the number jumped to hundreds of thousands. The rise and expansion of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the subsequent civil war further contributed to the increase in refugees. The pressure these refugees put on the Kurdish government became tangible when the 2014 crash in oil prices ignited a financial crisis in oil-dependent Iraq, and by extension Kurdistan. The budget collapse meant that the government no longer or only sporadically paid civil servants and since the government provides employment to most of the population, the majority of the Kurdish people were now forced make do without a regular income. Unemployment among the youth skyrocketed, and the military engagements with ISIS weighed heavily on both the Kurdish government and on the people.

In spite of all of this, the general Kurdish attitude towards Syrian refugees has been that of welcome. Of course, it helps that the refugees are overwhelmingly Syrian Kurds. Also, the memory of the 1991 Kurdish uprising against Saddam Hussein’s regime, in which most of the population of Kurdistan ended up as refugees on the Turkish mountains until an American intervention allowed them to return home, is still fresh in people’s minds. This has helped cultivate compassion for the plight of the Syrians. It also helped that many Syrians have pull their weight by contributing to and developing the Kurdish restaurant scene.

Kurdistan is a mountainous and harsh land. Life has always been rough, and it wasn’t until a few decades ago that the majority of the population became urban. Naturally, the food has always been much simpler and bland compared to the cuisine of the Kurds’ neighbors, whether they were Arabs, Persians, Turks or Armenians. This perhaps explains the rapid rise in the popularity of
Syrian foods. Though Iraqi Arabs were familiar with some Syrian dishes known as ‘Levantine starters’, among Iraqi Kurds, Syrian cooking was largely unknown. Famous Syrian dishes like Fetteh, Hummus, Fattoush, Broasted, and Muhammara were unfamiliar and new to Iraqi Kurds. The first Syrian dishes to appear in Kurdistan were street food items like Falafel and Shawarma. Kurdish versions of these dishes existed for a long time, but none could hold a candle to the Syrian originals, and soon the latter took over the street food scene.

One of these Syrian fast food restaurants is Sham, which is the Syrian colloquial name for Damascus, where the owner is from. The restaurant is small, but it has a large base of costumers that is made up predominately of local Kurds, but also resident Iraqi Arabs and migrant Syrians. They sell Middle Eastern fast foods like Falafal, Shish Taouk, and Shawarma, and also western ones like Hamburgers. Their most famous item however is Sujuk, a sandwich brought to Kurdistan for the first time by Syrians.

Sham Fast Food Restaurant in Sulaimani
Sham’s staff includes Syrians from Aleppo, Qamishli, Homs, and Idlib, among other cities from all over Syria. They also belong to various ethnic and religious communities of Syria, including Arabs, Kurds, Turkomen, and Syriac Christians. When I asked their main chef about the most interesting difference between his Kurdish and Syrian customers, he said: “Onions. People here love onions in everything!”

but they never made them with ingredients like lemon juice, sumac, yogurt, and pomegranate sauce. Finally, there are the sweets. The Kurdish bazaar now offers delicious new sweets like Syrian Baklava, Basbousa, Kunafeh, Ma’amoul, and Qata’ef. By around 2015, local Kurdish food businesses realized that to compete with the new arrivals they would have to join them.

The Syrian refugee workers here are from all over Syria

As the violence in Syria encroached on major urban centers like Aleppo, Syrian restaurateurs escaping the conflict arrived in Kurdistan to reopen their businesses in a safer environment. Kurds have been eating dishes like Kebab and Kibbeh for centuries,

Today, all successful restaurants are staffed with Syrian cooks and waiters. The former ensure that the dishes are properly made and the latter are hired for their experience in Syria. After all, Syrian Kurds used to be the backbone of a flourishing hospitality industry in Damascus.
It is yet unknown when the Syrian crisis will end, or when the millions of refugees will see their abandoned homes again, if ever. But in Kurdistan, some Syrians found repose from the horror that forced them to flee their land in the compassion of the locals, and they managed to build meaningful lives in a country no less turbulent from their own. No one in Kurdistan is worried about the ‘flood’ of Syrian refugees. What they are worried about is which Syrian restaurant to go to for lunch.

Sherwan Hindreen graduated as the valedictorian from the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani in 2017 with a Bachelor of Arts in International Studies. He is currently a research assistant and is interested in the religions and histories of the Levant and Iraq.
Feature Article

The History of the Syrian Constitution

By Radwan Ziadeh

On 18 December 2015 the Security Council adopted Resolution 2254. This resolution requires, among other things, the drafting of a new constitution for Syria. As Syria embarks on the peace process, the foundations of which were laid out in Geneva, it is worth remembering the history of the various constitutions adopted by Syria in the past.

Syria has had at least twelve constitutions since it obtained independence in 1946 and since the last French soldier withdrew from Syrian soil in 1947. President Shukri al-Kuwatli, who was the first Syrian president after independence, amended the constitution Syria had inherited from the French and changed the electoral system. Al-Kuwatli then amended the constitution again in 1949 to allow the president to be reelected directly after the completion of his first term. Shortly thereafter, Husni al-Zaim deposed al-Kuwatli in a coup d’état on March 30, 1949, and suspended the constitution.

In August 1949, Sami al-Hinnawi led yet another military coup and then called for the election of a Constitutional Assembly to draft a new constitution. A new law was issued calling for the election of this assembly and Syrian women were allowed to vote for the first time. The Constitution of 1950, also known as the Constitution of Independence, marked a significant democratic development in Syria. It proclaimed Syria as a representative state, granted broad powers to the prime minister and, at the same time, limited the powers of the president. The constitution strengthened judicial authority, as well as the state’s democratic institutions, by modernizing the Supreme Constitutional Court. The Constitution of 1950 included rights and public freedoms and it was modeled on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights issued in 1948.

Even today, some opposition groups hold that the Constitution of 1950 is the best one to return to because it symbolizes an era of republican values and democracy. It was the first constitution in the region to give the women the right to vote and to participate in politics even before many European countries gave women these rights. Also, it was the first and only constitution drafted by a democratically elected Constituent Assembly in Syrian history.

Syrians re-instituted the 1950 Constitution twice. In 1951, it was suspended following a military coup. In 1953, a new constitution was promulgated which can be described as the first presidential constitution. It removed the position of the prime minister from government and gave extensive executive powers to the president in a system that resembled that of the United States of America. The president was now voted in by a popular vote, rather than the parliament.

The 1950 Constitution was reinstated after more military coups in 1954. Initially, al-Shishakli was first overthrown, but he reinstated himself in a countercoup. Afterwards, he restored the Constitution of 1950.
The 1950 Constitution was once again suspended in 1958 when the majority of Syrians voted to unite with the Republic of Egypt under Gamal Abdel Nasser to form the United Arab Republic. The 1950 Constitution was replaced with a temporary constitution drafted by Nasser. However, this constitution was discarded after Syria and Egypt separated in 1961. Then, the new Syrian government in 1962 decided to return to the 1950 Constitution until a new one could be drafted.

When the Ba’th Party came to power through a military coup in March 1963, it immediately suspended the constitution and imposed a state of emergency, which was not lifted until after March 2011. The National Council for Revolutionary Command issued a temporary constitution for the country in 1964, another constitution in 1969, and a yet another one after Hafez al-Assad assumed power in 1971.

In 1973, Hafez al-Assad formed a committee to draft a permanent constitution for the country. This constitution was adopted via a popular referendum and imposed the Ba’th Party’s ideas and principles upon Syrian society. It proclaimed that the Ba’th Party was the leading party of the state and society and declared the Ba’th Party’s National Council for Revolutionary Command to be the sole organization authorized to nominate the president. This was the official beginning of the one party system that dominated Syria for almost four decades.

In 2012, this constitution was amended under the pressure of demonstrations that emerged at the beginning of the Syrian Revolution in March 2011. This newly amended constitution became the Constitution of 2012. Although the Constitution of 2012 nullified Article 8, which stated that the Ba’th Party was the leading party of the state and society, the broad and far-reaching powers of the president remained unchanged.

During the Geneva negotiation in 2016, the Syrian opposition recommended the immediate suspension of the 2012 Constitution and the reinstatement of the 1950 Constitution because it is the most recent constitutional document in Syria’s history to have been drafted by a fairly elected Constituent Assembly. While the 1950 Constitution enjoys some popular legitimacy, there are some points to consider. For one, the 1950 Constitution is 67 years old, and since then Syria has undergone many political and social changes. For that reason, the Syrian opposition called for the establishment of a transitional government, which would govern according to the Geneva communiqué in 2012 as a governing body. This transitional government would issue a constitutional declaration of limited power and duration. It would clarify the government’s powers, its tasks, and its administrative nature. It would define its time frame, its mechanisms, and its methods for organizing the election of a new Constituent Assembly charged with drafting a permanent constitution, which would be put to a referendum at a later point.

We are probably still very far from drafting a new constitution for Syria. But as this article has shown, we may surmise that Syria has had ample experience with constitutionalism. Given that Syria restored
the Constitution of 1950 twice, it might be worth looking at for a third time.

Radwan Ziadeh is a senior analyst at the Arab Center – Washington D.C. He is also the founder and director of the Damascus Center for Human Rights Studies in Syria (www.dchrss.org) and co-founder and executive director of the Syrian Center for Political and Strategic Studies in Washington, D.C. (www scpss.org). He is currently a Visiting Scholar at the Philipps University – Marburg in Germany, and Fellow at the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU) in Washington D.C.
Book Reviews


Reviewed by Myriam Ababsa

Freemasonry entered the Ottoman Empire in the context of European economic and political intervention in the Middle East, and 1860 sectarian violence in Damascus and Mount Lebanon. But contrary to common perception of freemasonry as a tool of the West abroad, masonic lodges in Greater Syria at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century were independent structures. Syria presents a specificity in the fact that the lodges were created by Syrians and not by Europeans, as was the case in Egypt and in Constantinople during the same period. Dorothee Sommer convincingly shows how the lodges were crucial element in the formation of intellectual life in Beirut and Mount Lebanon, and how freemasonry worked as a socio-cultural movement in an Empire in search of modernity. Sommer’s thesis is that freemasonry served to unite disparate groupings by producing interreligious sociability in a fragmented Ottoman society. Based on archives and interviews with relatives of former members of Masonic orders in Tripoli and El Mina (Lebanon), the author tends to share the very utopian dream of the brotherhood to unite mankind for its well-being.

The first chapter covers the intellectual and political context in which freemason lodges were opened under the rule of Abdulhamid II in Lebanon and Syria. It presents Ottomanism as the reaction of Ottoman authorities to the increasing intervention of the Western powers in the Empire in the mid nineteenth century. The aim of Ottomanism was to strengthen the attachment of the individual to the Empire and to reintegrate minorities, who may have been tempted by acquiring foreign citizenship. A set of three laws was adopted to restore the Ottoman control over its subjects and territories by means of modernising reforms (1858 Land Law, 1864 Vilayet Law, and the 1869 Law of Ottoman Nationality), but too much emphasis was given to the Turkish contribution to the Empire, and Ottomanism failed to counter the rise of several nationalisms. As Paul Dumont underlined, the positive effect of nationalism was “the destruction of ethnic and religious barriers between different components of the Ottoman population” (p. 37).

The second chapter, entitled ‘Masonic Principles Challenged’, explains the development of masonic principles and shows its ability to unite Syrian members. In 18th century Europe, freemason lodges were arenas for the formation of the emerging concept of civil society, and of a new political culture based on the individual; free but united by fraternity and equality. Turkish and Egyptian lodges turned towards nationalism and displayed antipathy against Western meddling (p. 67). But the lodges in Greater Syria never cut their ties with Western lodges, and did not develop a nationalist discourse. Arab thinkers, such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Mohammed Abduh, Yacoub Sarruf, and Faris Nimr used freemasonry as a tool, but most of them had developed their thoughts prior to initiation in a lodge. According to Sommer, “When freemasons spoke about
emancipation, they did not consider a political separation from the Ottoman Empire; rather and emancipation of thought and liberation from religious confinement that had made it impossible to create a feeling of belonging among Syrians” (p. 72).

The third chapter (‘Masonic Grand Bodies’) covers the various affiliations of freemasons. The Grand Lodge of Scotland, founded in 1736 in Edinburgh, opened one of the first lodges in Aleppo and Smyrna, but lodges expanded mainly in Constantinople and Cairo a century later. According to Paul Dumont, the proclamation of the 1839 Reform Edict allowed Ottomans and foreigners alike to establish philanthropic societies, and served to the opening of lodges. Turkish lodges supported the Young Turk movement prior to 1908 revolution and kept their distance from their affiliated European lodges. Lodges in Greater Syria used different affiliations to European bodies, but never parted from them.

The fourth chapter examines the role of masonic lodges in late Ottoman Beirut. Freemasons in Beirut had to compromise between the universal conception of the brotherhood and the formation of a particular identity. The first lodges used French for the rituals and initiation, but Arabic might have been used for the debates. Prominent masons were members of major families, such as the Sursock, who were Christians, and the Abdulwahab, two of the few Muslim families who joined freemasonry from its very inception in the region. Freemasons numbered nearly 1,500 by the time of the Young Turk Revolution, “outnumbering any other social and political institution besides religious communities” (p. 217). Though interesting, the chapter is a bit too descriptive and lacks a substantial argument, instead providing successive biographies of members of several lodges.

The fifth chapter analyses lodges in Mount Lebanon, the members of which tended to be associated with the theatre and arts in general. The sixth chapter deals with lodges in Tripoli and El Mina (near Tripoli). The city was more conservative and had considerably fewer intellectual activities, seeing that it was more focused on trade, especially after the introduction of steam shipping by the middle of 19th century. Three masonic lodges were created between 1906 and 1918. Two were under the Grand Lodge of Scotland and a third under the Grand National Lodge of Egypt. The first sessions of Al Kadisha lodge were conducted in French. It constituted a form of inter-sectarian sociability, which enabled them to create networks. But although the lodges sought to strive towards tolerance and unity, they were themselves the places of political and religious disputes (for instance Sunneen lodge was closed by the Grand Lodge of Scotland in 1927). The 1908 Young Turk revolution in the Middle East had an impact on the civic sphere, with increased intellectual and political activities. Modernization included the possibility of playing with several identities, and created its own bounds.

We can regret that the author does not quote the major book Ottoman Brothers. Muslims, Christians and Jews in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine written by Michele Campos. Campos shows how freemasonry helped to shape the civic public sphere evolving in the Ottoman Empire. The link between masonic lodges and municipal bodies is missing. It would
also have been relevant to analyse the recruitment to the lodges, and to study the reaffirmation of social classes, but the work remains of remarkable value.

Myriam Ababsa is an associate researcher at IFPO Amman, and is a social geographer.


Reviewed by L.S. Schilcher

This is a monumental work. In it we have the raw material left behind by a contemporary observer of more than a decade of Syrian realities in the mid-19th century. The material has been transcribed, sorted and intelligently presented and interpreted. It is a phenomenal achievement given that the material was so scattered, in a variety of scripts and languages, and very often barely legible. The author has excavated both private and public archives, repeating the exercise again when so much more became available after the reunification of Germany.

This observer was Johann Gottfried Wetzstein, a European, but neither French nor British. Alone this fact makes the work significant. How much Syrian history has been written on the basis of colonial archives! But here we have a voice from Germany, itself a not yet integrated Empire, and an ingénue in the rivalry among European powers. Consul Wetzstein was

5 Johan Gottfried Wetzstein (1815-1905) was the first Prussian Consul in Damascus. He was posted there from 1849 to 1861. In addition to representing the political interests of Prussia he was obliged to promote the trade between Syria and Prussia as well as with other German states of the Customs Union. From the outset Wetzstein refused payment for his work. With that, however, he greatly underestimated the expenses of a European life-style in the Orient. Consequently, he purchased two fallow villages with the goal of improving his desolate financial situation. The enterprise failed in the end due to political circumstances. After his return to Berlin in 1862 he continued as a professor at the Friedrich-William University, and he taught courses on the culture and customs of the contemporary Palestinians at the Jewish Academy. He also made himself available with advice and actions to the Prussian foreign office. It is very fortunate that the legacy of J.G. Wetzstein was discovered in 1980 and opened to public view. There were chiefly his articles, which had appeared in scholarly journals concerning the Ottoman province of Syria but also a vast number of letters and files of rare Arabic documents relevant to the province of Damascus in the 19th century. Nothing of this value had ever been found. Wetzstein also collected valuable Arabic manuscripts, which are now preserved in university libraries in Berlin, Leipzig and Tuebingen, an invaluable source for studies of the Middle East. His collected writings and official correspondence reveal the difficulties of Prussian representation in this region and demonstrate how complicated and oppressive the life of this Consul in Damascus was.
fluent in Arabic and intent on being integrated into the local elite. He had to report regularly to his superiors in Istanbul. Yet, he had himself to cope with local economic, social, and political conditions in order to support himself and his family.

The book first devotes considerable attention to the development of Prussian foreign policy in the Ottoman Empire, its consular structure and interests, its protected persons and local employees, and the expenses of these operations. Next, Consul Wetzstein’s fascinating contemporary observations are presented: These deal with Damascene commerce, the city’s caravan trade, and its market place, and German efforts in trade.

Nestled within the presentation is a 57-page chapter dealing with the events in Damascus of 1860. Wetzstein was present in Damascus during the massacres of Christians. He was intimate with many of the city’s notables and had alert local informants, and there is a 10-column index of names on pgs. 380-384. It cannot be overlooked that Huhn is viscerally and intellectually conflicted in her presentation of Wetzstein’s treatment and interpretation of these events. It is this chapter, which will initially attract the most interest and is also likely to be the most controversial. Perhaps, in the interests of a wider audience, at least this chapter should be translated into English.

But the historical interest will extend beyond this chapter. It is astonishing that this European decided to invest in local agriculture to support himself. He purchased local villages! With his extensive records of that enterprise, as organized here, we have a unique contemporary window into the struggles between city and hinterland, local and export traders, new capital and traditional banking, and Ottoman tax collectors and villagers. It is a far more concrete view of local realities than that provided by Arabic biographical dictionaries or European travellers’ reports. Nor is it presented in the formulaic texts of the Ottoman court records. And Wetzstein was not just an observer like the other Consuls, he was an active participant.

The contribution made by this book to sources and contemporary interpretations is immense. The next step will be to integrate this material into the historical discourse. No study on 19th century Ottoman Syria would be comprehensive without an intimate knowledge of the contents of this book.

Linda Schatkowski is an independent scholar. She is retired and she was the founder and former president of the Syrian Studies Association.