

Hüseyin Yılmaz. *Caliphate Redefined: The Mystical Turn in Ottoman Political Thought*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018. 384 pages. ISBN: 9780691174808.

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The Ottomans rose from obscure origins to create a global Islamic Empire at the crossroads of the world and managed to survive during the most turbulent ages of history. What is achieved on the other hand by the Ottoman writers of political thought seems no less glorious; they managed to create a coherent and consented upon discourse on rulership to legitimize the rule of an upstart family in societies that had had recent memories of two of the greatest universal empires in history: The Arab Caliphate and the Mongolian Khanate. A number of studies so far, some of which are very recent, explored the legitimizing mechanisms that operated in the post-Caliphate/Khanate Eurasia, with a few of these inquiring into the role mysticism had in their formation. Yet to the knowledge of this reviewer, no study has explored this within the context of Ottoman Sufism. For this reason, Hüseyin Yılmaz's comprehensive treatment of Sufi contributions to the development of Ottoman political thought can justifiably be considered groundbreaking. This work is a product of very diligent research and scholarship. Full of insightful arguments, the study fills an important gap in the field and sets a framework for future researchers. Last but not the least is the wordplay in the title, which promises the reader a spirited discussion even before opening the cover.

Yılmaz sets himself a very ambitious goal. Grappling with two concepts that have permeated almost every Ottoman written output (i.e., mysticism and

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politics) is indeed a very difficult task. The evidence is scattered, most of the time ambiguous in nature, and “endlessly symbolic and flexible,” as the author himself acknowledges (131). This makes critical terms such as Sufistic almost impossible to pin down and fully define. In order to deal with these challenges, Yılmaz declares the limits of his research in the introduction as a strictly political literary work that leaves aside broad cultural and social contexts as well as the larger notions of the caliphate and messianic visions unless directly linked to the development of political literature. His main argument is that a shift had taken place in the post-Abbasid world from the historical/juristic notion of caliphate as the successor of the Prophet (*khalifat Rasūl Allāh*) to the mystified concept of God’s vicegerent (*khalifat Allāh*) as a product of a process of a negotiation between the Ottoman ruling establishment and the various Sufi groups and Sufi-minded literati. As Sufis expounded, this new form of leadership “could be attained not through a contract with or subjugation of the Muslim community, but through learning, piety, morality, and spiritual perfection” (182). In addition to unearthing previously unstudied and lesser-known manuscripts, Yılmaz offers a novel reading to already studied sources such as the hagiographies, epics, titles, and regalia employed in documents and prefaces of political treatises, which had otherwise been dismissed as laudatory, formulaic, and mythical. These sources help him provide an alternative angle to the mental world of Ottoman political writers.

In the Introduction, Yılmaz chooses not to engage with the available literature at length, instead sufficing with brief references to Cornell Fleischer, Kathryn Babayan, Mercedes García-Arenal Rodríguez, Moin Ahmad Nizami, and a quote from Marshall Hodgson (d. 1968), which he fittingly describes as a “sign post... largely overlooked” (4). Here he introduces the major themes upon which he constructed his study, such as the major political writers from the “Süleymanic age” (5), and the Rumi character of their language. Following the Introduction is a rather long chapter on the development of Ottoman political thought from its origins up to the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century A.H, titled “The Discourse of Rulership.” The author divides this period into three ages: the Ages of Angst, Excitement, and Perfection. Major historical moments (i.e., the Timurid irruption in 1402, the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, and the incorporation of Mamluk territories in 1517) are presented as turning points in this narrative. Yılmaz observes a direct link between the languages of the works produced, the social groups that produced them, and the “political ideals and imageries inculcated from the Ottomans’ own historical experience” (15). He argues that the sophistication of the Ottoman ruling mechanism increased literacy among the Ottoman elite and consequently

changed the composition and taste of the intended audience of the political works. During the Age of Angst, the earliest Ottoman works were produced in simple and crude Turkish for frontier warlords, whereas in the Age of Excitement after the conquest of Istanbul and the ensuing transformation of the Ottoman enterprise, political works began to be written in the more universal languages of Persian and Arabic. Eventually in the Age of Perfection, Turkish developed into “the mandarin language of the empire” (94), a medium sophisticated enough to produce intellectual output on political thought and compete with the other two universal Islamicate languages. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, however, as the empire experienced an unprecedented growth in territory and its ruling mechanism, the discourse on rulership came to be expressed in three occupational vernaculars: administrative, juristic, and Sufistic. These were articulated by and circulated among three social groups with porous and flexible boundaries among them. Yılmaz is very skillful at categorizing and naming an otherwise very complex and tangled literature. Although his linear scheme and categories such as High Islam may occasionally raise eyebrows, they help the reader deal with a very dense and diversified material.

In the second chapter, “The Caliphate Mystified,” Yılmaz moves on to a deeper analysis of the first two Ages of Angst and Excitement, which stretch from the end of 13<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup>. This chapter is organized under five subchapters consecutively titled: The Ottoman *Dawla*, The Contest for Caliphate, Rulers and Dervishes, The Ottoman *Dawla* Lost and Found, and Converging and Diverging Spheres of Authority. With each subchapter chronologically following the other, Yılmaz leads the reader into almost an archeological expedition to discover the roots and evolution of the Ottoman notions of universal sovereignty and legitimacy. The first subchapter starts with the emergence of the concept of *dawla* (period of rule) during the Abbasid revolution and ends with the collapse of the Seljuk order. The second subchapter focuses on the Anatolian frontiers and highlights the role of early Ottoman scholars/Sufis such as Dāvūd-u Kayserī (d. 751/1350) and Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī (d. 710/1311) as conveyors of the emerging religiopolitical ideals along the Irano-Mediterranean zone. This period witnessed increased activity from Sufi orders, thus the following subchapter closely studies two major hagiographical source: Elvan Çelebi’s (d. after 760/1358-59) *Menākīb al-Kudsiyye fi Menāsīb al-Ünsiyye* and Ahmed Eflākī’s (d. 761/1360) *Menākīb al-‘Ārifin*. Yılmaz’s treatment of “hagiographies as a new genre of political writing” (119) is refreshing, though his attempt at putting these two primary sources as representatives of the two dichotomous versions of Sufism may be problematic. The rest of the chapter covers the period from the “creative destruction” (127) of

Timur (d. 807/1405) in 1402 to the end of Bāyezid II's (d. 918/1512) reign in 1512. Yılmaz argues this period to have created anxiety among the Ottoman elite and concomitantly led to vernacularization in political writing. As a result, this period witnessed Murad II (d. 855/1451) being declared as the "first Ottoman caliph in the Sufistic sense" (131). As the title of this chapter suggests, Yılmaz sees a clear direction toward the mystification of an otherwise very legalistic understanding of caliphate that had been based on historical experience, a process definitely triggered and heavily influenced by Mongolian invasions yet having roots before the sack of Baghdad in 1258. Also, the frontier conditions of Anatolia proved to be a perfect setting for the new idea of a mystified caliphate to flourish, as clearly demonstrated by the hagiographical work left by major orders.

The third and fourth chapters explore the major themes surrounding the sultanate and caliphate respectively during the Suleymanic age, the main period under Yılmaz's focus. Chapter III, "The Sultan and the Sultanate," starts with the subchapter of Reconciling Visions of Rulership, which scrutinizes the sultanic designations produced by the Ottoman chancery that Yılmaz describes as "a minting house of sultanic titles" (147). As the chapter continues, the author discusses the works of well-known authors such as Kınalızāde (d. 979/1572) and Lutfi Pasha (d. 970/1563). Here Yılmaz argues that Ottoman intellectuals had developed a moralist attitude that opted to guide the ruler to act properly rather than constitute a fully articulated theory of rulership. The following subchapter, *The Raison d'être of the Sultanate*, grapples with theories about the nature of humanity and society that necessitated the sultanate. In this subchapter, Yılmaz extensively references the section on politics in Taşköprizāde's (d. 968/1561) *Miftāḥ-al-Sa'āda* to demonstrate that the main purpose of Ottoman political thought was to elevate the moral quality of the ruler to that of ruler-prophets sent by God. Therefore, the following subchapter is aptly titled Rulership as a Grace from God. This subchapter explains the abovementioned moralist paradigm and elaborates on Grace Theory as one of the tenets of the mystified conception of the caliphate. This theory claims vicegerency to be granted by God to all human beings as the representatives of His government on earth. Namely in the words of Ottoman authors, rulership is a *vehb-i ilāhī* or *'atiyye-i rabbānī*, but the ruler needs to attain spiritual perfection to receive it. Morality of rulership in this context acquires a new significance because rulership is now beyond the administration of mundane human affairs. The Nature of Ruler, which is also the title of the next subchapter, is thus something that deeply preoccupied the minds of Ottoman authors. With references to İdris-i Bitlisi (d. 926/1520), Celālzāde Mustafa (d. 975/1567), and Hızır Münşi (d. 963-64/1556)

in addition to those mentioned above, Yılmaz in the last two subchapters, The Question of Morality and The Status of Rulership Among Humankind, discusses morality not as a way to attain rulership but as a way to keep God's grace where the ontological status of sultanate is the apex of humanity with the exception of prophethood.

The Sufistic understanding of caliphate with its nature and legacy takes center stage in Yılmaz's analyses in the fourth chapter titled "The Caliph and the Caliphate." Yılmaz notes the transition from the historical and juristic understanding of caliphate (*khalifat Rasūl Allāh*) to the Sufistic notion (*khalīfat Allāh*) to have been almost complete by the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. The chapter begins with the subchapter titled God's Government, which highlights the parallelisms Sufi authors posed between God's and sultan's governments as a natural result of the direct link established between them. As Yılmaz presents, "Molding of rulership after the model of God's government" (188) was these authors' primary concern. Godly attributes such as unity, *rubūbiyyat*, knowledge, and prowess are all seen as the attributes that should be manifested in the ideal rulership. The Shadow of God on Earth, the next subchapter, explores the usages for the well-known designation of *ẓill Allāh*. Yılmaz then moves on to the subchapter of Prophethood as Rulership to discuss the image of prophethood in the minds of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century authors as a combined political and spiritual authority and the extent to which ideal rulership was its continuation. The fourth subchapter of The Sultanate as Caliphate explores the ontological connection between rulership/sultanate and viceregency/caliphate according to the Qur'ān, non-conformist Sufis, and İdrīs-i Bitlisi. Having mapped out the sources of authority (God and His Prophet) and the ideal ruler's link to both in political works, Yılmaz in the fifth subchapter of Prophet's Successor and God's Vicegerent sophisticates the differences between the two interpretations of the caliphate with references to the perception of *imamate*. This led to governance and power turning into a mystical experience; masters of such experience in the Sufistic political literature (i.e., the invisible saints) posed an unwarranted competition to the rule of the Ottoman household. The next subchapter, aptly titled Rulership as Mystical Experience, explains how certain Sufi groups, particularly the Bayrami-Melametis, posed a problem for the Ottoman dynasty and how this potential rift between Sufis and the sultan was prevented by the formulation of an "unseen pole rather than the current shaykh of the order" (205). The concept of the *ma'nevī* (esoteric) caliphate along with other ways of qualifying the caliphate were all products of the anxiety on part of the Sufis stemming from the possibility of conflict between their orders and the ruling establishment. The ensuing subchapter

of The Caliphate as Unified Authority is an exposition of such qualifications of the caliphate by prominent authors from the Akbarian tradition. Yılmaz concludes this chapter with the subchapter of From Sultanate to Caliphate, pointing out a very important aspect of the Sufistic notion of caliphate: its practicality, flexibility, and ability to be customized and reformulated (216). In the words of the author, “this concept of rulership was practical application of Ibn ‘Arabi’s mystification of Fārābī’s notion of philosopher king” (217).

The final chapter of the study, “The Myth of the Caliphate,” begins with the section titled God’s Chosen Dynasty and examines the titles of *gāzī*, renewer of religion, custodian of two holy cities, and defenders of holy law, as used by prominent Ottoman authors ranging from Sehi Bey (d. 955/1548) to Ibn Kemal (d. 940/1534). According to Yılmaz, these designations and attributions underline the uniqueness in history and irreplaceability of the Ottoman lineage. In the light of such haughty claims, the question of the Ottoman house’s origins becomes very important, and the following subchapter of Mystification of the Origins sends the reader back to the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century when the questions of origins first emerged. In the absence of a fully systematized notion of the Sufistic caliphate and facing the danger of collapse following the Timurid debacle, the 15<sup>th</sup>-century Ottoman historical works *Halilnâme* and *İskendernâme* as well as the historical writings from *Âşıkpaşazâde* (d. after 889/1484) and İdris-i Bitlisi all tried to trace the Ottoman lineage back to one of pre-Mongolian sources of legitimacy in different ways. In this context, Yılmaz argues that the conquest of Constantinople had opened up new venues for legitimation as well as a rift between the Ottoman house and their traditional Sufi allies. The third subchapter of Mehmed II and the Making of the Ottoman Archetype explores over the political writings from the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century the impact of Mehmed II’s (d. 886/1481) empire-building project, such as the rise of urban Persianate culture and Sufism at the expense of the Turcoman/nomad version. The final wave of Ottoman expansion during the reigns of Selim I (d. 926/1520) and Süleyman I (d. 974/1566) brought new challenges of legitimacy due to the Ottomans facing sectarian competition from the Safavids in the East and claims of universal sovereignty from the Spanish Habsburgs in the West. Yılmaz chooses to focus more on the works that counter the Safavid propaganda, more specifically the writings of “Enigmatic court Physician, Tabib Ramazan” (253), and “Şirvani, an overzealous mystic and a passionate enemy of Safavids” (257) in the fourth subchapter titled Suleyman I and Designing the Ottoman Epitome. In this section, Yılmaz demonstrates how Ottoman authors, equipped not only with the newly established mystified notion of caliphate but also with a whole arsenal of

apocalyptic and messianic themes and concepts, occult signs, fabricated lineages and esoteric re-readings of the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth, deployed everything in their possession to counter the Safavid propaganda. The last subchapter here in this wonderful exposition of the roots and development of the mystified caliphate is aptly titled The Seal of the Caliphate. In this section, Yılmaz demonstrates how the Ottoman Caliphate had assumed an apocalyptic and messianic meaning and was depicted as the seal of the caliphate that is divinely destined to rule until the end of times, in addition to Süleyman the Lawgiver being presented as the second coming of the Prophet-King Solomon and the *mahdī*. Yılmaz's two main sources in this section are Ibn 'Īsā Saruhānī's (d. 967/1559-60) *Rumūzü'l-Kunūz* on the future history of the Ottomans up to 2028 CE and Ali Dede's (d. 1007/1598) *Khawātimū'l-Hikem*. In the end Yılmaz lays in front of the reader a series of complex and mystic threads of thought, out of which he puts together an intricate picture of the ideological scene of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The value of Hüseyin Yılmaz's contribution is hard to diminish or dismiss. However, such an ambitious project is of course not devoid of problems or small editing mistakes. First and foremost, the study needs a chronological table listing the examined works and their authors. Yılmaz added a very helpful glossary but a chart that maps intellectual influences would significantly increase the readers' comprehension and hence their fulfillment. Secondly, although Yılmaz successfully dealt with an insurmountable source base, adding two significant sets of sources would greatly support his argumentation. The first one would be the endowment deeds (*waqfiyyas*) of the sultans and their royal families. The endowment deeds of Anatolia in particular predate the Ottoman period and are replete with invaluable materials because they were composed by local jurists, most of the time for Sufi edifices. The second source base would be epigraphic material from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, most of which have been studied and published in detail. Although Yılmaz addresses the Seljuk epigraphic material in various places, this reviewer particularly hoped in *God's Shadow on Earth* in Chapter IV to come across a reference to the epitaph on the Bāb-ı Humāyūn of Topkapı Palace, which describes Mehmet II as God's shadow over humans and djinns. The inscription's calligrapher could be inspired by Sufi literature because he is known as 'Alī b. Yaḥyā Şūfī (d.882/1477-78). Thirdly, Yılmaz extensively and quite correctly points out how Sufi orders mimicked political titles such as emir, pasha, and sultan and even aspired for political power over their followers. However, he does not address the Sufi usage of the term *halife* [caliph] as an organizational title given to the trained disciples who were sent away by the head shaykh of an order to distant lands for the expansion of

followers. Finally, poor editorial choices significantly reduce the clarity of Yılmaz's narrative. For example, one finds authors to be fully introduced pages after their shortened name is used. For example, we learn Şirvani's full name on page 92, while the shortened form "Şirvani" is first mentioned on page 51. What makes this even more convoluted is that the text reference two authors whose moniker is Şirvani: Hüseyin bin Abdullah and Mahmud. Similarly, the same author is inconsistently referred to as "Mustafa b. Abdullah" on page 93, "Dizdar Mustafa" on page 156, and just "Dizdar" for the rest of the study.

All these insignificant details cannot eclipse Hüseyin Yılmaz's monumental contribution to the field of Ottoman studies in general or to the history of Ottoman political thought in particular. As a student of Ottoman Sufism, this reviewer also finds this work immensely important in his own field and looks forward to its publication in paperback and eventual translation into Turkish.