As someone who has looked at similar local judicial records for other Ottoman-Syrian towns, I am impressed with Doumani's industry and thoroughness. This book was a long time in the making, and no wonder given the masses of material that it marshals. Doumani knows the records of Tripoli and Nablus inside out, and he is a reliable guide to unlocking their meaning for his thesis. The specialist audience to whom this book is addressed will find much to ponder, not least the degree to which popular generalizations about social life in the past have little evidentiary grounding.

Nonspecialists may find the book dense or recondite. However, I hope that Doumani's arguments will find their way into new editions of widely read and widely taught textbooks. His interventions will encourage fresh thinking about patriarchy, family structures, and shari'a in precolonial times. Words such as "Islam(ic)," "Arab," and "Syria" are excluded from the book's title, perhaps in an effort to sidestep the baggage or assumptions often associated with them. *Family Life in the Ottoman Mediterranean* should be read by all who work in and teach social history of the Ottoman lands.

ETHAN L. MENCHINGER, *The First of the Modern Ottomans: The Intellectual History of Ahmed Vasıf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). $99.00 cloth. ISBN: 9781107197978

REVIEWED BY VEFA ERGINBAŞ, Department of History, Providence College, Providence, R.I.; e-mail: erginbas@providence.edu
doi:10.1017/S002074381800065X

Ethan L. Menchinger's monograph *The First of the Modern Ottomans: The Intellectual History of Ahmed Vasıf* offers a skillful analysis of an 18th-century Ottoman bureaucrat, intellectual, and historian. Writing Ottoman intellectual history is an arduous task that requires much reading in between the lines, a healthy amount of speculation, and a firm grasp of the political, social, and economic conditions of a genuinely volatile empire. There are not many similar studies to Menchinger's in English; one could perhaps recall Cornell Fleischer's, now classic, 1986 study, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Ali (1541–1600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986) and Virginia Aksan's work, *An Ottoman Statesman in War and Peace: Ahmed Resmi Efend* (New York: Brill, 1995). Menchinger has indeed chosen a suitable figure for such an intellectual endeavor: Ahmed Vasıf's life spanned the second half of the 18th century as he had a long career in the broader Ottoman administration in various capacities. Ahmed Vasıf also left a good paper trail for someone to reconstruct his life and times. Menchinger bases his study mostly on Vasıf's multivolume history, *Mehâsinü'l-Âsâr ve Hakâîkü'l Ahbâr* (*The Charms and Truths of Relics and Annals*), even though he also utilizes Vasıf's other works on top of a good number of contemporary sources.

Menchinger follows Vasıf's life chronologically while contextualizing major turning points in his life corresponding to the trajectory of the Ottoman Empire in the second half of the 18th century and first years of the 19th century. This period witnessed significant territorial losses that culminated in the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (1774) and the birth of the "New Order." Indeed, the 18th century is a prolific period for someone to observe the birth pangs of the modern Ottoman state. Intellectuals of the 18th century, among them Ahmed Vasıf, deeply struggled with the changing realities of warfare. By the end of this century, the once-mighty Ottoman army had been reduced to rubble, having lost one major battle after another, especially against their Russian rivals. These realities pushed Ottoman intellectuals to question their ancient wisdom about the empire, and its place in world history; this wisdom is what Menchinger creatively calls "Ottoman

exceptionalism": "For them (educated Ottomans), the empire was nothing less than a worldly expression of God's will and favor for the Ottoman dynasty, a 'manifest destiny' or exceptionalism for which they found proof in the past events" (p. 5). If the Ottomans were chosen by God to spread His religion and create a world order (*nizam-ı alem*), why had they been losing on the battlefield? Ottoman intellectuals all had their ideas on these issues and on how to save the empire; much of their emphasis was on the old formula of reviving the ancient custom (*kanun-u kadim*) and reinstituting forgotten ideals. A few among them, on the other hand, believed in the obsolescence of old ways and propagated new ideas and reform. Ahmed Vasıf fell in between these two camps. Being a relentless pragmatist, he first supported the old formula, and then, after seeing with his own eyes the necessity of substantial reforms, he became an ardent proponent of change. Menchinger aptly demonstrates Vasıf's and his peers' inner struggles with these questions and their intellectual dilemmas.

Menchinger does several things very well. First of all, he writes well. Even though his monograph grew out of his dissertation, it goes above and beyond. The author weaves his ideas cogently and coherently in the book with an apparent appeal to the general educated audience. Secondly, he has successfully introduced a rarely mentioned group of intellectuals and statesmen in the Ottoman Empire: the proponents of peace (versus war). The Ottoman state has been traditionally, and rightly to a certain extent, known as the state always at war and only occasionally and temporarily at peace. Menchinger argues that Ottomans saw peace as the "lesser of two evils," which the state should pursue only in extraordinary circumstances and under duress. Even in that case, it must be an "honorable peace" with which the enemy is not dictating its terms. Menchinger masterfully demonstrates how a group of Ottoman intellectuals and statesmen sought permanent peace as the best alternative for the empire, especially in its current conditions in the late 18th century. Thirdly, Menchinger invites us into the mind of an Ottoman intellectual of the age by providing a penetrating analysis of the terms and ideas Vasıf used while dealing with the crisis of the empire, ideas such as *mukabele bi'l misl* or "reciprocation" as Menchinger translates. Reciprocation, which in this context refers to a need to meet the enemy with its tactics and tools, looms large in Vasıf's intellectual world. The Ottomans must act with reciprocation, according to Vasıf, if they seek to overcome their enemies. They should also act according to the causes and not expect supernatural victories. Finally, Menchinger's work beautifully lays out the painful (and at times sad) and elusive trajectory of the career of an Ottoman statesman in the second half of the 18th century. In Vasıf's own example, the author displays the necessary steps one must take to survive (and rarely thrive) in the Ottoman bureaucracy and the significance of alliances and rivalries in the court for one's career.

A few improvements could have made the study even better. First of all, Menchinger could have engaged in depth with the decline paradigm and its proponents, ancient and modern. The very problem he is dealing with in this book, the question of reform and how best to achieve it, was indeed broached by an earlier generation of intellectuals and historians, such as Lütfi Paşa and Koçi Bey, in not so different a manner than Ahmed Vasıf. Even though Menchinger is aware of some of these perspectives and footnotes them, it would have significantly contributed to his study if he had earnestly engaged with these views from the 16th and 17th centuries, and demonstrated the continuities and ruptures. Secondly, it is probably not the author's intention, but some of his comments on Ahmed Vasıf, especially the ones on the latter's embassy in Spain, remind one of old-school Orientalism. He depicts Vasıf as a somewhat close-minded Muslim with a rigid worldview who believed in the superiority of his civilization while deriding the others. The author denies Vasıf the benefit of the doubt by stating similar views in other places: "We should not downplay the mental barriers that he (Vasıf) and others faced. An Ottoman ambassador might at times explore a host culture and its customs, but this interest was usually personal and of much less weight than geopolitical goals" (p. 122). Vasıf, with his unpleasant character, of course, could easily lead someone into this view. However, one is hard-pressed to ask: To what extent are Vasıf's

writings indicative of his own worldview? How much of this is rhetorical and expressions of a genre that is meant to please the audience? After all, if Vasıf were such an imperceptive person, he would not be attending European music concerts, operas, and ladies' salons in Spain. Similarly, he would not be convinced of the absolute need for reform if he did not get much out of his embassies. Lastly, we are told in the title of the book that Vasıf was the first of the "modern Ottomans." Menchinger only alludes to this issue in the introduction by stating that modernity should not be defined solely by technology and progress but also by mentality and worldview (p. 8). In the rest of the book, however, he does not detail what exactly makes Vasıf modern, let alone the first modern. In my view, if we are to assign someone this title, it should be İbrahim Müteferrika, a figure about whom Menchinger also writes in this book. Even though he lived almost half a century before Vasıf, he tackled even more impressively and progressively many of the issues Vasıf struggled with in his works.

Regardless of these issues Menchinger has adeptly taken on a daunting task. He offers us a rare glimpse of the inner workings of the mind of an Ottoman intellectual in a tumultuous era. His work should be of interest to anyone who wants to learn how the Ottoman intellectuals grappled with the major internal and external crises at the onset of modernity. I believe a complementary study on peacemaking and peacemakers in the Ottoman Empire, one perhaps by Menchinger himself, would be another major contribution to our understanding of the empire in the 18th century. Such a study, no doubt, would help us revise our notions of the Ottoman statesmen and bureaucrats as hawkish war propagators.

CONSTANTIN A. PANCHENKO, *Arab Orthodox Christians under the Ottomans: 1516–1831*, trans. Brittany Pheiffer Noble and Samuel Noble (Jordanville, N.Y.: Holy Trinity Seminary Press, 2016). Pp. 688. $29.95 paper. ISBN: 9781942699088

REVIEWED BY JOHN-PAUL A. GHOBRIAL, Department of History, Balliol College, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK; e-mail: john-paul.ghobrial@balliol.ox.ac.uk
doi:10.1017/S0020743818000661

Arab Orthodox Christians under the Ottomans by Constantin Panchenko, the Russian scholar and historian of Middle Eastern Christianity, was first published in Russian in Moscow in 2012. Brittany Pheiffer Noble and Samuel Noble have done readers a great service by making it available to us in English. Panchenko's study offers a detailed and comprehensive account of the history of Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman Empire stretching over four centuries, the first of its kind for the early modern period. In doing so, Panchenko aspires to nothing less than a *histoire totale* of Eastern Christianity, one that extends far beyond the well-worn trails of religious history in order to present an all-encompassing ("maximally complete" in his words) study of the "entire way of life" for one community of Middle Eastern Christians. The first two chapters set out the relevant historical (6th–15th centuries) and political (Ottoman) contexts. Each of the successive chapters excavates various layers of the history of Orthodox Christianity: geography and demographics in Chapter 3, social and religious authority in Chapter 4, monasticism in Chapter 5, connections with other empires beyond the Ottoman world in Chapter 6, the holy places in Jerusalem in Chapter 7, foreign relations in Chapter 8, the conversion of some members of the community to Catholicism in Chapter 9, and the literary and cultural production of Orthodoxy in Chapter 10.

This book is important for several reasons. Although ostensibly a study of the Orthodox Christians of Syria and Palestine—the Arabic-speaking communities of the Orthodox Church under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Constantinople—Panchenko's approach is not constrained by the dogged focus on doctrine or theology that too often muddles our understanding of the social