appeared to be somewhat amalgamated to defend against colonial influences in many Arab societies. And yet it may be said that the present work is incomplete because it does not thoroughly investigate the sources on freedom in a *religious* context. Religious figures and their writings are noted and discussed in this book but the focus remains on the political dimension of their thought. The questions that the author explores here are not insignificant; in fact they are vital for our understanding of the history of ideological and ideational trends regarding personal, cultural, and institutional freedoms, and the civilizational forces that nurtured them over the last two centuries. However, the picture it paints is limited.

Freedom is central to any belief system, and Islam is no exception. For example, the *tafsīr* (exegesis) literature would have been helpful in analyzing the development of the notion by examining relevant scriptural passages that deal with personal moral agency. Even though this work aims to be an in-depth analysis of the *political* meanings of freedom, it is nevertheless important to show the "organic" connections that exist between the religious and the political. It may be argued that the notion of personal freedom or agency is central in any civilizational matrix, especially one that engenders a transnational religion such as Islam or Christianity. The Qur'an proclaims "there is no compulsion in religion," pointing to the necessity of freedom to choose to believe or not to believe. Of course, for the Qur'an the choice is presented as one between "right" and "wrong." Nevertheless, the choice is there and so is the inherent notion of freedom. Despite this missing piece, Abu ʿUksa's work makes an important contribution to the field by showing the processes (and stages within these) that were instrumental in the transformation of Arabic thought with respect to the concept of freedom.

BESHARA B. DOUMANI, *Family Life in the Ottoman Mediterranean: A Social History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). Pp. 372. $28.29 paper. ISBN: 9780521133272

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Beshara Doumani's new book on Ottoman Syria is a significant intervention into family history, urban history, and legal history. The author is most intensively in dialogue with fellow social historians whose work on the Ottoman Empire relies on local judicial records. Doumani was among an early cohort of scholars who used such records in the 1980s and 1990s to write social history, exemplified by his book on Nablus and its region titled *Rediscovering Palestine: Family Life in the Ottoman Mediterranean* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). This new publication builds on and extends his earlier work to ask questions about family structures, political economy, and legal practices in the Ottoman Middle East.

Here, Doumani challenges essentialist assumptions of the Ottoman-Syrian past. These assumptions encompass patriarchy, the "traditional" Arab-Muslim family, and the meaning of shariʿa in the precolonial era. Doumani wants readers to realize how little of what is (thought to be) known about these matters is rooted in empirical research. He argues that the expression or manifestations of these concepts cannot be ascertained or understood by deductive reasoning, which produces little more than unexamined tropes and stereotypes. His alternative approach is to use family endowments and lawsuits from the towns of Nablus and Tripoli between the 17th and 19th centuries to understand how families were structured. The local shariʿa courts were central to establishing and adjudicating endowments, and through good fortune, extensive court archives from both places are extant in these years, allowing direct comparisons to be made.

Close reading and careful documentation reveal that family bequest patterns in Nablus and Tripoli were significantly different from one another, despite that both towns were linguistically Arab, majority Muslim, located in Syria, and part of the same Ottoman political structure. A few large families dominated the scene in Nablus. As part of these clans' strategy for consolidating and retaining control of resources, men of these families deprived women of property and legal agency. In Tripoli, by contrast, productive property ownership was spread more widely and encompassed both men and women. Family endowments in Nablus were nearly all male-centric, privileging men and their descendants over matrilineal lines of descent. Moreover, few Nabulsi women made endowments. Family endowments in Tripoli, by contrast, typically designated women as beneficiaries, often in equal measure to male beneficiaries. Women also endowed productive properties in their own names in Tripoli. In both towns, endowments cut out agnates. In Nablus this had the effect of ensuring that male heirs and descendants would have exclusive access to a family endowment's income. In Tripoli, exclusion of agnates assured direct descendants (women and men alike) of income against the claims of other blood relations.

The book establishes this contrasting pattern between the two towns through a detailed discussion of specific endowments and of lawsuits connected to them. Doumani singles out particular litigants to describe and to trace their cases, in an effort to personalize (as much as is possible) the general story or analysis on offer. He describes four patterns in the structuring of family endowments, grouped according to the designation of beneficiaries, and he analyzes what patterns appear most often in the two cities, including changes over time. The specific cases are distilled and referenced in tabular data, used to support the analysis. The reader thus has access to a wealth of raw material from this research. Moreover, key or representative documents are photographically reproduced.

Having established a palpable difference in the two towns' property devolution patterns, and noting the greater inclusion of women in Tripoli compared to Nablus, the book seeks to explain this difference by invoking the cities' respective political economies. Leading families of Nablus depended on advance purchase (*salam*) contracts with regional peasants for delivery of olive oil, essential to the city's soap business. Tripoli's wealth, on the other hand, came from its fruit orchards, including mulberries used in raising silkworms.

For Nabulsi merchant-manufacturers to get their olive oil, a small number of tightly or narrowly held family businesses cultivated multigenerational relationships with peasant farmers. The urbanites did not own the villages' olive groves, located as they were mostly on *miri* lands with villagers exercising usufructuary rights. But Tripoli's fruits, including its mulberries, came from the city's surrounding green belt, comparable in kind (though not in extent) to the Damascus Ghuta. Here, *milk* (private freehold) property was common, typically represented in urbanites' ownership of trees in orchards (even when the underlying property belonged to a *waqf*). In contrast to Nablus, the wealth-generating products of Tripoli were directly owned by Tarabulsis and their partners in the market garden lands. It was not necessary for leading Tarabulsi families to consolidate their holdings in tightly held family networks to access their city's main source of wealth production. Nabulsis seeking influence in the countryside had to ally with, or be part of, clans with a history of paramilitary authority. But Tarabulsis from all walks of life (clerical, mercantile, artisanal) had direct access to their town's green belt.

This contrast, Doumani argues, explains the very different patterns of family structure and authority in the two cities. Rather than merely being local representations of generic modes of patriarchy, Arab-Muslim family life and "pure" precolonial shari'a principles, variation in family structure, and authority in Tripoli and Nablus reflect the different political and economic forces that shaped the two towns. Implications of Doumani's analysis are that appeals to "tradition," whether these are cast as pre-colonial, or Islamic, or Arab, are neither illuminating nor empirically grounded.

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

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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