

HÜSEYİN YILMAZ:

*Caliphate Redefined: The Mystical Turn in Ottoman Political Thought*.  
xiii, 384 pp. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018. ISBN 978  
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It is hard to overstate the importance of Hüseyin Yılmaz's long-awaited *Caliphate Redefined: The Mystical Turn in Ottoman Political Thought* to the study of Islamic political thought in general and in the post-Mongol Islamic east in particular. Although the geographical focus of the book is on the core lands of the Ottoman domains, that is, western and central Anatolia and the Balkans, Yılmaz's study is in conversation with recent studies of political thought and discourses of rulership in other parts of what the late Shahab Ahmed called the Balkans-to-Bengal Complex and beyond. Indeed, one of the many merits of this monograph is the author's ability to weave multiple discourses, registers and geographical and temporal scopes into a coherent narrative. In so doing, Yılmaz succeeds in tracing intellectual and cultural trends that span the eastern Islamic lands from the thirteenth through the late sixteenth centuries, while pointing to the particularities of the Ottoman discourses of rulership.

It would be difficult to do justice in a short review to the complexity of Yılmaz's narrative and the multiple insights that dot this highly erudite study, as dozens of texts by numerous authors, some better known than others, are examined throughout the book's five chapters. After a long chapter that surveys the history of political writing in the Ottoman domains from the thirteenth century through the sixteenth centuries, Yılmaz examines in the following four chapters several interrelated aspects of the what he calls the "mystical turn". To summarize the nature of this turn, in the post-Abbasid world Sufis in collaboration with rulers (and jurists and bureaucrats) developed imageries and vocabularies of power that turned the caliph into a universal spiritual leader, a pole (*qutb* or *ghaws*) of the universe. This mystified caliphate, or poleship, could bridge "Islamic and non-Islamic notions of rulership" and bridge the worldly and spiritual realms. Importantly, this perception of the caliphate was broader than the juristic one, which emphasized the governmental and legal role of the caliph as imam. The redefined caliph was a moral and ethical figure whose rule and authority emanated from God and reflected His attributes (such as mercy and munificence). And, as "God's chosen agent", the caliph/Ottoman sultan assumed the messianic title of *mahdi* and renewers of religion. Accordingly, the Ottoman sultan/caliph was perceived as the pillar of a virtuous city and the defender of faith against heretics and infidels.

Yılmaz's study of the mystical turn in the Ottoman and, more generally, in the post-Mongol/post-Abbasid contexts offers a framework that adds layers to the recent historiography on Ottoman Islam. Specifically, the authority of the Ottoman sultan/caliph and his central role in a divinely ordained order may explain the centrality of the Ottoman dynasty and of individual sultans in articulating "correct"/"orthodox" doctrines in the second half of the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries. Moreover, this political cosmology may have also contributed to the emergences of certain legal claims made by ruling members of the Ottoman dynasty. Further, the fact that the mystical turn was not exclusively an Ottoman phenomenon may allow an examination of the impact of post-Abbasid mystical turns on local articulations of orthodoxies throughout the eastern Islamic lands and beyond (as some of

the elements of the mystical turn, as Yılmaz demonstrates, were shared by the Sa'di dynasty in the Maghreb).

Beyond the study of the Ottoman mystical turn, it is worth dwelling on Yılmaz's emphasis on the process of redefinition itself. One of the greatest challenges of the study of the post-Mongol/post-Abbasid period, to my mind, is understanding the changes that numerous institutions and terms underwent in that period while retaining the same name. In this respect, Yılmaz's study is exemplary of the kind of genealogical inquiry that is needed. Indeed, Yılmaz's *Caliphate Redefined* can be read as an attempt to reconstruct a post-Abbasid/post-Mongol glossary of key political terms and ideas (such as caliphate, sultanate, and *dawla*). Yılmaz's by and large successful reconstruction owes to the special attention he pays to the differences between genres and discourses (juristic, Sufistic etc) and to the particular manners in which each of these discourses and genres employed the same terms. In addition, *Caliphate Redefined* (especially the first chapter) is one of the best studies to date on the linguistic and cultural geographies of the Ottoman lands. Most notably, Yılmaz demonstrates the centrality of the conversation the Sufis, scholars and rulers from the Ottoman lands held with their eastern, "Turko-Mongol" counterparts, while their connections with their southern colleagues (mostly from the Mamluk sultanate) were much less significant. It is for this reason that the political writing in Arabic and the Arabic political vocabulary in the post-Abbasid period receive much less attention in his study.

Finally, a comment on style is in order. Yılmaz's book is extremely rich with details and remarkable insights. In addition, there are significant overlaps and repetitions between the chapters. The overlaps, repetitions and the density of the text may render the book somewhat challenging for non-specialists and students. This is somewhat unfortunate as the importance of Yılmaz's argument deserves broad readership. Specialized and advanced readers will surely benefit immensely from this study.

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LESLIE PEIRCE:

*Empress of the East: How a European Slave Girl became Queen of the Ottoman Empire.*

viii, 359 pp. New York: Basic Books, 2017. £20. ISBN 978 0 465 03251 8.  
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Most academics do not find writing a popular history very easy. You need a good story line, preferably narrative, and justification by reference notes must be kept to a non-frightening minimum. It helps if your historical subject also resonates with topics of today. Leslie Peirce's *Empress of the East* meets all these requirements, particularly the last. This book is not only a rags-to-riches story about how a woman of slave origin made the best of the opportunities available to rise to a position of considerable dynastic significance, carving out for herself a new role as Ottoman queen and breaking a number of apparent taboos in the process. In part, it also responds to the excitement created by a recent Turkish television series dramatizing the reign of the Ottoman sultan Süleyman (1520–66) and the human interest story of his romance with Hürrem/Roxelana. But, despite its title,