And yet despite those shortcomings, these volumes contain a great deal of information, insight, and inspiration. Among their most important interventions are to bring to light the impact of distinctly neoliberal modes of governance on modern religions, and to suggest how deeply entwined modern religion has become with the norms and practices of consumerism. The claim that these two tendencies are widespread and of fundamental importance is persuasive and it should play an important role in directing future research.

## *Religion and State in Syria: The Sunni Ulama from Coup to* Revolution. By Thomas Pierret. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2013. 287 pp. $29.99 paper, $95.00 cloth

doi:10.1017/S1755048314000340

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By writing *Religion and State in Syria: The Sunni Ulama from Coup to Revolution*, Thomas Pierret has done scholars and analysts a great service. From now on, all serious enquiries into Syrian politics and religion must begin with Pierret's work. His book provides a thorough and encyclopedic discussion of Syrian Sunni scholars and clerics from the French colonial period until the beginning of the ongoing Syrian uprising. Most academic literature focuses on individual scholars or the influence of modern technology and assumes, as has been the case in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, that ulama (Islamic legal scholars) have been incorporated into the state apparatus. Pierret's book not only examines scholars who belong to the Muslim Brotherhood or individual Sufi orders, it observantly discusses even minor local scholars and clerics, and shows how various movements have interacted and overlapped over the course of the 20th century.

Pierret's overarching argument is that "the resources of Islamic tradition allowed the ulama to overcome the challenges of social change and Ba'thist authoritarianism" (9). The ulama, in other words, were able to

remain relevant and autonomous by remaining flexible politically, sustaining relationships with merchants, and conducting informal learning circles. Unfortunately, the book does not theorize the main concept of the thesis, namely tradition, and therefore does not contribute to the rich and sophisticated literature on the notion as spearheaded by anthropologist Talal Asad and his students.

Following the introduction, a brief prologue on "aborted institutionalization" provides readers with an overview of the relationship between the state and religious institutions from the 1930s to the 1970s. Pierret explains that Syrian religious institutions did not have deep roots. For instance, the post of a grand 'alim was only established in 1938. Following 1963, the Ba'th were at first hostile to the religious elite and then proved largely disinterested. More specifically, the relative lack of official religious schools and the government's lack of interest in nationalizing private institutes enabled the ulama to maintain their position as guardians of tradition and learning. It is this observation and its implications that constitute Pierret's most brilliant insight.

The first and second chapters, as well as the fifth chapter, deepen the diachronic analysis of state-ulama relations. At first, the relative lack of religious educational institutions prompted individual ulama to open private religious schools and initiate informal study circles. One such movement rooted in informal study circles is the Zaydi movement, which endeavored to teach religious sciences to otherwise secular professionals. The movement, which Pierret traces throughout the book, was disbanded following the 1979–1982 uprising, but resurfaced in the late 1990s when it proved highly successful in raising money for Islamic charities because of its warm relationship with urban upper- and middle-class professionals and merchants. In the 1980s and early 1990s, the Syrian government ensured that only loyalist ulama would be heard. These included Grand Mufti Ahmad Kuftaro and Said Ramadan al-Buti, a professor at the University of Damascus. The former was an apologist, while the latter tried to position himself as a mediator between ulama, Islamists, and the government.

The third chapter discusses the construction of orthodoxy and positions Sunni ulama in relation to Sufis, the Muslim Brotherhood, reformist thinkers, and Salafis. It argues that the ulama were able to successfully defend Syrian Sunnism, which has always been steeped in moralistic Sufism, against Salafism, especially when the government persecuted "Wahhabism" after September 11, 2001. At the same time, orthodoxy did not remain unaffected as it distanced itself from esoteric Sufism, as

well as reformist and feminist thought (as exemplified inter alia by Muhammad al-Habash).

The fourth chapter lays out the links between the ulama and the merchant classes which helped the former maintain financial autonomy from the state. Historically, the ulama were often themselves merchants. Following the 1960s, Ba'th economic liberalization benefitted small and medium sized entrepreneurs who in turn funded the ulama's charitable institutions and schools. When wealthy large-scale businessmen arose after 2000, the Zaydis and other ulama were able to forge beneficial relations with them. The importance of these relationships further impacted the ulama's connections with political figures, as the fifth chapter illustrates. Pierret contrasts the ulama with Islamist activists and argues that the former acted largely according to its "sectoral interests," while the latter behaved more like a political party. He notes that Islamists and the ulama may agree on goals, but they often disagree on methods.

The last part of the fifth and the final sixth chapter discuss the tumultuous ulama-state relations leading up to and including the ongoing uprising. Following the brief opening that accompanied Bashar al-Assad's ascendance to power in 2000, the government once again clamped down on the clergy. Next, the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003 and the assassination of the former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri helped rally Syrians and the ulama around the government. Concurrently, the Sunni ulama complained about increasing activities by feminist organizations and Shi'i missionaries. The 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel helped lay the latter issue at rest by popularizing Hezbollah. From 2008 onward, the government once again felt the need to enforce secularism. Over the next year, it shut prayer rooms in malls, banned face-veils at the university, and imprisoned several ulama and Islamic activists. In the wake of the revolution, three kinds of ulama sided with the revolutionaries alongside provincial ulama: reformists, newly marginalized ulama, and independent-minded scholars. Numerous ulama fled the country. The overwhelming majority of urban ulama, however, remained silent, in part because their merchant constituents had benefited from Bashar's economic reforms.

Detailed and integrated, the book is largely suited for analysts and specialists, as the heavy use of Arabic and lack of appendices makes it a difficult read for undergraduates or the general public. While it cannot, of course, predict the future, the book nevertheless provides an invaluable source for those researching the current Syrian uprising.