

period. Arab knowledge of China, she explains, remains limited; whereas Chinese expertise of Arab societies and cultures is on the rise.

Mediatized religion by a slew of televangelist preachers from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt is the topic of Tuve Buchmann Floden's chapter. These preachers have an immense impact on the practice and understanding of Islam involving millions on a transnational basis. Finally, Sean Foley treats us to the sounds and messages of the Lebanese-Swedish superstar Maher Zain — his vocals, music, and his impact on a global scale. Music and Islamic televangelism are under-studied phenomena in the making of contemporary Islamic sensibilities. Anecdotally one can say that these mediatized versions of faith are possibly the most popular religious currency of a large section of affluent and upper-class Muslims around the world.

Is the appetite for examining Muslim societies through the lens of revival and reform still compelling, or are these currents now just a new normal? The chapters in this volume persuade me that they describe very regular, interesting, and innovative forms of religious, political, and cultural practices that are both similar and different from past practices. It is the quotidian, scholarly, and networked lives and professions of people over time that Voll described as continuity and change. But this book discloses how practices take place in discrete geographical spaces that now deserve our attention. This collection is a welcome update of older debates and thematizes new ones, though it could have benefited from a framing chapter that compared the newer research against some of the themes and questions Voll raised nearly three decades ago.

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PRE-TWENTIETH-CENTURY HISTORY

Empire of Salons: Conquest and Community in Early Modern Ottoman Lands, by Helen Pfeifer. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2022. 320 pages. \$39.95.

Reviewed by Christine Philliou

The Ottoman Empire appears paradoxical to us in the modern world in so many ways. First and foremost, its territories and claims of sovereignty and authority do not fit our twenty-first-century conceptions of regions or continents: the Ottomans ruled over areas now known as the Middle East, the Balkans, North Africa, and the Black Sea littoral into what is today Russia and Ukraine. Based on current assumptions, since the Ottoman dynasty and ruling class was Muslim, one might also think their relationship to the region we now call the Middle East must have been seamless, natural, or at least unproblematic, since the Middle East, too, features Islam as the dominant creed. Yet, as anyone who has studied the topic will know, the Ottoman Empire originated in northwest Anatolia, in today's Turkey, and spread through what we now call the Balkans and the Anatolian peninsula for more than two centuries before expanding into the Arabic-speaking regions of what we now call the Middle East. The Arab lands — Hijaz and areas that are now Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Israel/Palestine — were the heartland of the caliphates and of the classical learned tradition of Islam as it developed over the previous nine centuries. The Arab lands were home to a dense, complex, and erudite tradition of letters, jurisprudence, education, theology, and a self-conscious, highly sophisticated urban civilization.

The manner of conquest and the process of incorporation/integration (and the lack thereof) of the Arab lands for the Ottomans was qualitatively different from what had gone on in the Balkans and Anatolia, which were the original core areas of the empire. And of course, the relationship

between “conquerors” and “conquered” was entirely different, in many ways and for many reasons, in the Balkans/Anatolia versus the Arab lands. For one, just as the Ottoman ruling class was turning to an orthodox Sunni variant of Islam to legitimize its rule, in contradistinction to the rising threat of the Shi‘i Safavid state to the east, the Ottomans acquired the very heartland of the Islamic world — not just Damascus and Baghdad, the former seats of the Umayyad and ‘Abbasid Caliphates, but Mamluk Cairo, the seat of the caliphate since the mid-thirteenth century and the undisputed center of Islamic learning, and even Jerusalem, Mecca, and Medina themselves. Any arrogance that would accompany conquest on the part of the Ottomans would have to be tempered by humility, and deep veneration for speakers of the Arabic language (which Ottoman rulers were not) as the language of the Qur’an, for the preeminent scholars of Islamic jurisprudence (which the Ottomans were not), and residents of the holiest cities and regions for adherents of Islam.

Questions about how and why the Ottomans conquered these Arab lands in 1516/17, the lines of continuity and points of rupture between Mamluk rule over these territories and Ottoman political and military supremacy there, have been as intriguing as they have been elusive for scholars. To what extent did the already sophisticated and centuries-old Arabic-speaking elite urban culture in the Levant, for instance, bend to, assimilate, or even acknowledge the legitimacy of their new Ottoman overlords, many of whom were Christian converts from the Balkans, no less? How did the Ottomans, seen as scruffy if not crude outsiders, encounter the holders of the classical/high tradition and canonical texts of Islamic jurisprudence or the world of *adab*, or manners and customs of urban elite gentlemen, in major centers such as Damascus?

In the beautifully written *Empire of Salons*, Helen Pfeifer sets out to answer these questions, looking not through the lens of official state policy or military operations but of the informal, in vivo interactions that took place in social gatherings, or *majalis*, in cities such as Damascus. She

translates the word *majlis* (the singular) as salon, likening them to Enlightenment-era France, which would presumably be more familiar to the intended readership of *Empire of Salons*. Pfeifer at once uses the “salon” as a window or vantage point onto the processes we already know were underway and argues that the *majlis* was the locus and even catalyst for the process of encounter, conquest, and assimilation/integration of the Arab lands into the Ottoman ecumene during the sixteenth century. Specifically, she structures her narrative around the life of one Damascene gentleman, Badr al-Din al-Ghazzi (1499–1577), and relies on his travel narrative from Damascus to Istanbul in the 1530s for many of her observations on the Arab-Ottoman encounter as seen through salons. And for the most part she supplements these sources with contemporary chronicles and biographical dictionaries, which are notoriously difficult to interpret as they were composed for specific reasons, at particular times, often contained layers of rhetoric and intertextual references, and assumed deep knowledge of the canon of religious, literary, and philosophical texts.

The phases of Pfeifer’s story of encounter, conquest, and community are reflected in the chapter titles: “A World Divided,” “An Empire Connecting,” “A Place in the Elite,” “The Art of Conversation,” “The Transmission of Knowledge,” and finally, “An Empire Polarized.” Within this longer arc, Pfeifer is highly attentive to providing the background and context for her gentlemen and their salons, although she resists foregrounding the crucial if complicated concept of *adab* in introducing the centuries-old urban elite culture that produced salons — and mentions in a footnote that the tradition of these gatherings goes all the way back to the symposia of Greek antiquity. The book’s basic argument is that the *majlis* has been neglected as a site of, and analytical concept for, imperial conquest and governance in favor of the more formal institutions such as the madrasa and the bureaucracy. Similarly, the book argues that tracing the informal interactions and processes that went on in seemingly informal social gatherings in urban centers such

as Damascus allows us to see a broader picture of governance and all that went into the Ottoman effort to govern.

Pfeifer's study provides a fresh concept and space for the reader to think about the many elusive questions regarding the Ottoman conquest of the Arab world. Her point that conquest and incorporation/integration did not just happen on the battlefield and in the bureaucracy or institutions of higher learning is well taken, and her foray into the far more nebulous world of social gatherings is courageous. In her attempt to make the topic less esoteric to a lay audience, however, she does sacrifice some complexity surrounding the encounter, and produces binaries that may not have been binaries. Framing this as only a two-sided encounter, for instance between "Rumis" (literally Romans/Byzantines, but in this case the Ottomans) and "Arabs," is to leave out some important considerations, such as the fact that the (also non-Arab) Mamluks had already been ruling these areas for 300 years before the Ottomans arrived. This begs the question of how much of a rupture the Ottoman conquest was and to what extent the Ottomans simply stepped into the shoes of the Mamluks and to what extent the Arabic-speaking elites allowed them to do so. It also neglects the fact that a major catalyst for the Ottoman conquest of these lands was the existential rivalry between the Ottomans, increasingly defining themselves as a Sunni power, and the Shi'i Safavids to the east. Pfeifer's repeated generalization about the universality of, common horizons within, and mutual understanding across the Islamic ecumene is limited to the *Sunni* Islamic ecumene, passing over the deep and violent divide with Shi'i Islam. Furthermore, so many of the "Rumi" officials that were arriving in the Arab lands may indeed have been Turkish-speaking but were also of Slavic, Christian convert stock, adding another layer of complexity, not to mention the foreignness of the new conquerors vis-à-vis urban Arab elites.

All in all, *Empire of Salons* is a gracefully written, accessible portrayal of the majlis/salon and its importance in the pro-

cess of conquest in the Levant and its — never completed — incorporation into the Ottoman imperial ecumene. This book will surely open new avenues and conversations about the sixteenth century and the complex shifts and encounters that took place and, indeed, the new kinds of communities that formed in their wake.

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