

On the Reviews Section

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In the article “East, what is ‘East?’” the prominent Syrian poet Adonis wrote: “By limiting the term East [*Sharq*] to geographical semantics, we destroy its cultural connotations. Additionally, this interpretation cancels out the political connotations of the relationship between the people from the East with others [from different regions.]”¹ This sentence encapsulates the orientation of the Book Review Section. The interaction of social, political, and religious developments within the conceptual frame of the Levant as a geo-cultural concept leaves us with the impression of an unwritten story. In this section we attempt to capture the moments of tension, division and solidarity between the ethnic and religious groups of the region in the modern period, and to weave old and new interactions between scholars and the regional literature. We encourage debate and a close reading of prominent academic works and strive for a wider range of reviews including works in local languages, such as Arabic, Hebrew, Persian, and Turkish.

In the current issue, we present four reviews. **Paul Kingston** examines Oren Barak’s *The Lebanese Army: A National Institution in a Divided Society* and stresses its importance in presenting the socio-political limitations of the military institution. Kingston shows that when the Lebanese Army was pushed beyond its political and social foundations its symbolic power weakened. Barak’s work can be seen as a representative case study for nation-state formation in the multi-sectarian context of the region.

Abigail Jacobson’s review of Michelle U. Campos’s *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians and Jews in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine* stresses the book’s significance in uncovering different angles of the special relations between the people of the three monotheistic religions in the Imperial Ottoman Empire. The book emphasizes the lessons to be learned from this particular case study on the more general citizenship discourse.

The third review focuses on theoretical and methodological questions in an interregional context. **John Efron's** review of Ursula Wokoeck's *German Orientalism: The Study of the Middle East and Islam from 1800-1945* highlights the book's contribution in exploring the sociology, context, and evolution of German Orientalism. Wokoeck's book illuminates a branch of Western studies of the "Orient" that was ignored—or "omitted" as suggested by Efron—by Edward Said. *German Orientalism* indirectly challenges Said's post-colonial paradigm of the relationship between colonialism and Orientalism in Western historical inquiry.

Yusri Hazran looks at Georges Tarabichi's *Hartaqat* [Heresies], a work originally published in Arabic. In this collection of essays, Tarabichi addresses controversial topics in the Arab intellectual and political sphere and endeavors to ontologize the concept of secularism in the Arab and Islamic historical heritage. As Hazran indicates, the significance of Tarabichi's work goes beyond theoretical-academic analysis as it offers tools to analyze contemporary realities, such as the current revolutionary Arab Spring.

Despite their different topics we find the four books to be in dialogue with one another. While Wokoeck's *German Orientalism* looks at how the "Orient" was perceived by European-German eyes, the focus and critique of Tarabichi's *Hartaqat* are local. In addition, both works provide intra-regional perspectives on the question of modernity while choosing different points of departure. We also found it noteworthy to juxtapose Campos's *Ottoman Brothers* and Barak's *The Lebanese Army* so as to compare two different historical periods in Middle East research and look at similar questions that have been asked about the role of specific social and political institutions in creating a sense—true or imagined—of belonging.

Notes

- 1 Adonis, *al-Muhit al-Aswad* (Beirut: Dar al-Saqi, 2005), 238. [Translated from the Arabic by Wael Abu-Uksa]