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BOOK REVIEWS

SHARĀRA, Waḍḍāḥ. *Al-Umma al-qaliqa*. Beirut: Dār al-Nahār, 1996. Pp. 337. $12.00.

FAḌLALLAH, Muḥammad Ḥusayn. *Al-Masāʾil al-fiqhiyya*. Vol. I. Beirut: Dār al-Malāk, 1995. Pp. 338. $4.00.

In 1844, the newly established Damascus *majlis* of the Tanẓīmāt, composed of twelve Sunni members from the *aʿyān* families of the city (both the Christian and Jewish members had been ousted a couple of years earlier), were pondering, in one of their routine weekly meetings, an *iltizām* case from the Baʿlabakk region in north-east Lebanon. The *multazim* of the region was an emir from the Shīʿī Ḥarfūsh family. When the *majlis* realized that the *multazim* had been late in paying his *mīrī* dues for the last few years and that he had decided not to pay them in the future, its members drafted an angry memo, strongly condemning the entire Shīʿī population of the region for being a "confession," *milla*, of opportunists who did not appreciate what the Ottoman sultan was doing for them and how well he was treating them; the *majlis* then qualified the Shīʿīs—using a description common in Ottoman élite circles—as "the confession of refusal," *al-milla al-rāfiḍa*—a reference to the well-known reputation of the Shīʿīs for having refused to endorse any *khalīfa* appointment after the death of the Prophet, except for the fourth caliph, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. The marginalization of the Shīʿīs in Bilād al-Shām under Ottoman rule was to determine their fate for the twentieth century, and, as the two books under review show, this has led to a major role for the Shīʿī "community" under the newly established Lebanese "state."

Waḍḍāḥ Sharāra, professor of social sciences at the Lebanese University in Beirut, prefers to describe the Shīʿīs as "the anxious group," *al-umma al-qaliqa*. *Umma* could also be translated either as "nation," which is too strong, or as "confession," which would make it synonymous with *milla* (it sometimes is). Sharāra's book, a genealogical investigation of the fractured Shīʿī *umma* from 1908 through the inter-war period, is the first in a trilogy, followed in the same year by a study on Ḥizbullāh (*Dawlat ḥizbuʾl-lāh* [Beirut: Dār al-Nahār, 1997]), and a forthcoming work on Shīʿism in Lebanon today will be based on 500 interviews with people uprooted as a result of the Lebanese civil war, the *muhajjarūn*.

What probably brings together Sharāra's research of the last twenty years are three assumptions that become increasingly explicit from one work to the next. The first assumption relates to the essential notion of *ahl*, which may be rendered as relatives or kin, or family, or inhabitants who "behave" as relatives towards each other. The difficulty in translating *ahl* into English results from the fact that Western societies, in which one finds social stratification and economically oriented classes, do not have a socio-historical equivalent to *ahl*. The problem—and beauty—with concepts like "group feeling" (*ʿaṣabiyya*) and *ahl* is that, even though they depend heavily on *actual* "blood ties,"

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they never exclude "associations" based on elements other than pure kinship. To Sharāra, *ahl* also can signify an association based on kinship in its less restricted sense, a kinship of religion, ideology, custom, habit, and the like; the predominance of one of these elements over the others is determined by the specificity of the historical condition in question. For example, the Wahhābī ideology, since its early formative period in the eighteenth century, was essentially anti-tribal and used all kinds of *ahl* associations to expand its territorial base in the Najd. In other words, in the same way that *ʿaṣabiyya* is, according to Ibn Khaldūn, both "real" and "fictitious" (*wahmī*), so too *ahl* is an element of the social imaginary not reducible to blood kinship. In short, the typical characterization of some Arab and Middle Eastern societies as "tribal" or as "segmentary societies" based purely on kinship is simply inaccurate because it underestimates the ideological force of some types of "relations" which are essential for the dominant *ʿaṣabiyya* to expand its political and territorial basis.

The second assumption underlying Sharāra's work is that the social scientist ideally needs to track down the discursive practices of the individuals who claim to speak "in the name of the group" in order to follow the manner in which associations relating to *ahl* are made and unmade. *Al-Umma al-qaliqa* is based largely on those "subjective narratives" which form the basis of the group's "individualities." Rather than imposing an arbitrary order on the chaos of history, the social scientist becomes—for a while at least—a prisoner of the labyrinth of "subjective narratives." Such an approach is more discursive than hermeneutical since the aim here is not really to interpret or explain those discourses, but rather to create a common "ground" for their diversity. In short, we want to look at the *a priori* formations of those discourses in an historical framework: what are their implicit presuppositions, their purposes, and the social objects they intend to create?

Sharāra's third assumption is that one should not expect an easy resolution from this labyrinth of narratives. A previous generation of scholars saw in Hourani's *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* the possibility of "modern thought" ready to face the new challenges stemming from westernization and world-capitalism; and the same generation of scholars, by creating an ideology of "Arab nationalism," advanced the idea that the old *aʿyān* class had, by the turn of the twentieth century, evolved into something more coherent than it had been in earlier generations. The result was to impose a degree of cohesiveness on societies whose primary aim was not "rationalization." Indeed, the study of the narratives and discursive practices produced by the previous generation of scholars points in most instances to their internal structural weakness and lack of cohesiveness. Even the Weberian notion of disenchantment is inadequate to describe the malaise of a history which seems to stumble at every juncture.

The Shīʿīs, like the other "minority" *millet*s of the Ottoman empire, such as the Maronites and Druze in Mount Lebanon, also lived in a *jabal*, a mountainous area of South Lebanon known as Jabal ʿĀmil, commonly referred to today as "the South." When the "population of the south," *ahl al-junūb*, were confronted with such challenges as the end of the Ottoman empire

and Fayṣal's government in Damascus; the French Mandate; the creation of the Grand Liban in 1920 and then its full "independence" in 1943; and, last but not least, the creation of the Israeli state in 1948, the Shī'ī *umma* was an aggregate of different groups and ideologies torn apart by a poor social fabric and brought together by the religious framework of "Shī'ism." Even at this level, Shī'ī identity seemed to be torn apart by competing national loyalties: Lebanese, Iraqi, or Iranian?

Sharāra devotes his first chapter to *al-'Urfān*, a monthly journal which was to become the centerpiece, for many Shī'ī *'ulamā'* and intellectuals, of the ideas and aspirations expressed on behalf of a "community" besieged from the south and the east by Sunni Islam and from the north by the Maronites and Druze. In early 1909, only a few months after the coup carried out by the Committee of Union and Progress (C.U.P.), Shaykh Aḥmad 'Ārif al-Zayn, a Shī'ī *'ālim*, published the first issue of *al-'Urfān*. In his opening editorial, Zayn looked at the C.U.P. coup as the event which destroyed the barrier that had prevented the "Ottoman nation" (*al-umma al-'uthmāniyya*) from following "the law of the universe and of life" (*sunnat al-kawn wa'l-ḥayāt*). This "law" pushes beings and things, whether societies or individuals, to reach higher levels in their existence, that is, to opt for "progress (*taqaddum*)." The C.U.P., according to Zayn, broke this icy barrier which had imposed "coercion (*istibdād*)" on spirits, ideas, and minds. The model to follow on the path towards progress as a "law of nature" was Japan, which had just finished a victorious war with the Russian empire. *Al-'Urfān*, which addressed itself to the Shī'ī "intellectuals" in the broad sense —as bureaucrats of the empire, landowners or *multazim*s, merchants, *'ulamā'*, and intellectuals —saw a "free" "Ottoman nation" as one which openly recognized the specificities of the religious, communal, cultural, ethnic and local groups, while maintaining, on the other hand, the notion of the Japanese model of a "strong nation."

Sharāra's opening chapter on *al-'Urfān* and its founder sets the tone for the rest of his book. *Al-'Urfān*'s inaugural statements, among others, point to the inconsistency, weakness, and fragmentation of the ideological framework of the Shī'ī *umma*. First the inconsistency: *al-'Urfān* postulated the possibility of a "free" "Ottoman nation" in the near future that would integrate its populations into a "cohesive whole"; *al-'Urfān*'s discourse, however, was addressed exclusively to the Shī'ī population of Jabal 'Āmil: thus, there was not even the slightest concern that a set of autonomous *millet*s might be incapable of engendering the "strong nation" desired by *al-'Urfān*; worse still was the turning towards Japan as a model for power, freedom, and progress (in the 1930s, Nazi Germany replaced Japan and other nations as a model for order, efficiency, and rationality for "nationalists" such as Qusṭanṭīn Zurayq and Anṭūn Sa'ādeh): here again the inconsistency was not perceived and it was left out of the picture. As to the "progress" that this "Ottoman *umma*" should one day aim at, it was conceptualized as something "natural (*ṭabī'ī*)" rather than a combination of socio-historical trends and events.

When we move from the ideological to the socio-historical level, we realize that the *a'yān*, although still the dominant group in society, had lost a great

deal of the formal coherence that they had enjoyed in previous centuries. Capitalist penetration, commercialization of land, and later, the breakdown of the empire, among other factors, had all taken their toll on the Shīʿī community and its notables. Several bandit groups (ʿiṣābāt) had started raiding the Christian territory in the north; the ʿashāʾir families (rural chieftains) surprisingly had imposed themselves as a leading force; new families, enriched by trading activity, wanted their word heard too; as to the other more "rooted" families, at every historical juncture (starting with Fayṣal's rule in Damascus), they ended up bitterly divided. Indeed, the breakdown of the empire accelerated the divisions among the Shīʿīs to such an extent that by the time an "independent Lebanese state" came into existence in 1943, there was absolutely no sense of "community" that might have served as a cornerstone for this newly created "state."

Sharāra's history does not lend itself to easy summary because once the "plot" which brings history forward disappears, the Shīʿī angst transfers itself to the historian, who is left stripped of any history except for a history of disenchantment. Having traveled far from the optimistic "Arabic thought in the liberal age" and the notables' "Arab nationalism," Sharāra, with his full-fledged realism, opens up new ways of writing the history of Arab societies.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

Unlike the Sunnis, whose highest religious offices, such as the muftī or shaykh-al-Islām (or even the shaykh-al-Azhar in Cairo), are state appointments (previously made by the Ottoman state and, today, by the various national Arab and Islamic states), the Shīʿīs do not subject their highest marjaʿ (literally, "reference" or "referee" and also marjaʿ-i taqlīd, "source of imitation") to any official appointment—whether political or otherwise. There are, in principle, no "official" rules by which to determine who the "referee" will be—except, of course, that he should be a male ʿālim well-versed in fiqh. The choice of marjaʿ is an open contest, and in practice there can be several winners. The marjaʿ is not, in principle, subject to geographical constraints: a "referee" in Najaf or Beirut might become an authority figure all over the Shīʿī world—that is, Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon (and throughout the Shīʿī diaspora)—and he might find himself competing with several other referees.

Historically, the genealogical line of Shīʿī Imāms goes back to the fourth caliph, ʿAlī, and his wife, Fāṭima, daughter of the Prophet. Their sons, grandsons, and subsequent descendants were known among the Shīʿīs as the Imāms. The most well-known line—or rather the most moderate—the so-called Twelver Shīʿa, had its twelfth Imām disappear in the second half of the tenth century in obscure circumstances; his messianic return is awaited by the Twelver Shīʿa to this day. The question of a "referent," marjaʿiyya, was raised, according to many Shīʿī sources, immediately after the disappearance of the twelfth Imām, al-Mahdī al-Muntaẓar. Initially, Shīʿīs "referred" to his "four ambassadors" (al-sufarāʾ al-arbaʿa) and then, after the fourth/tenth century, to those who studied under their guidance. Thus, the issue of the marjaʿ was raised because of the vacuum created by the sudden disappearance of the

still awaited Imām; once he appears, the "community" (umma) should no longer need any "references."

Since the tenth century, many 'ulamā' have become "referees" and excelled in Shī'ī fiqh during the time when Najaf, a small town close to Kufa in southern Iraq where the tomb of the Imām 'Alī is located, became the place which excelled in the teaching of fiqh and its interpretation. In recent history, both Khomeini and Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ṣadr became such "referees." They both pleaded for the idea that the marja'iyya al-shī'iyya had become too passive by not doing much to improve the status of the Shī'a around the world during the period of waiting for the re-appearance of the long-awaited Mahdī. In the 1960s, they advanced the idea of a more dynamic and aggressive marja'iyya whose ultimate goal would be the creation of an "Islamic state." Bāqir al-Ṣadr coined the term marja'iyya rashīda to denote this new dynamism which consisted of pushing the Shī'a towards resistance and action.

But the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1978, the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, the assassination of Bāqir al-Ṣadr, and the death of Khomeini weakened the traditional role of Najaf in the production of Shī'ī fiqh and divided the marja'iyya between Najaf and Tehran: in the last decade or so, two marja's have succeeded in imposing themselves: Ḥujjat al-Islām 'Alī Khāmina'ī (the murshid of the Iranian revolution after Khomeini's death and president of the Republic, 1981-89); and 'Alī Sīstānī, who resides in Najaf, author of a well-known treatise, Manāhij al-ṣāliḥīn. ('Alī Muntaẓarī has recently challenged the authority of Khāmina'ī by criticizing the traditional notion of wilāyet al-faqīh and proposing instead the ambiguous wilāyet al-sha'b.) The Lebanese civil war, which took its toll on the Shī'a of Lebanon, created a need for local referees. A first opportunity was created by the Imām Mūsa al-Ṣadr, founder of the "Amal (Hope) movement" (originally a militia and now a parliamentary bloc), who soon "vanished" in Libya in the early years of the civil war. After the Israeli invasion in 1982, which led to the expulsion of the Palestine Liberation Organization from Lebanon, a replica of the Iranian Ḥizbullah ("Party of God") was created. Soon, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍlallah, an 'ālim with the title of āyatullah (literally, a verse of God), which was also Khomeini's official title, became publicly known as the "spiritual guide" of the Ḥizbullah group in Lebanon.

Born in South Lebanon in 1936, Faḍlallah received his religious and legal education in Najaf and for a time had Bāqir al-Ṣadr as a teacher. A prolific writer with twenty published books and pamphlets to his name, Faḍlallah's last book, two volumes of the Masā'il fiqhiyya ("questions of jurisprudence"),[1] could be taken, at a time when great confusion prevails in Shī'ī circles, as an attempt to create a new marja'iyya, first in Lebanon and then abroad.

As its title implies, the Masā'il is organized in a question-and-answer mode with over 1200 questions (literally, a mas'ala is a "problem") in the first volume alone, and is structured around the well-known themes of Islamic fiqh (there are no major differences between Sunni and Shī'ī Islam in terms of the themes posed): prayer and ablution; the khums, trade and commerce; marriage, family life, sexuality, etc. Although each chapter, or sub-chapter, is

organized around a specific theme, the question-and-answer style of organization is not always helpful: First, because many questions receive only short answers; second, because the multitude of questions, which sometimes are not organized in logical order, breaks the thrust of the argument (a short historical introduction for each chapter, describing where the *fiqh* stands on a particular issue, would have been helpful; unfortunately, bibliographical references have been avoided, thus making it harder to check the author's references); third, and most important, Faḍlallah does not always provide his readers (or "listeners") with the *logic* behind his solutions to the problems raised, which again makes it difficult to tie together such a large number of questions into a coherent whole. There are many questions—and this may be a novelty—which are dictated by the urgent needs of contemporary youth: questions about wearing jeans or shorts, or leather jackets, or belts at prayer time (does it make a difference whether the leather is from a non-Islamic country or not, or whether it is genuine or made up of chemicals?); on polishing one's hair with cream; on masturbation and sexual matters. It is not always clear, however, whether the questions themselves were actually posed by believers to Faḍlallah or instead drafted in a purely hypothetical manner (an issue that has occupied students of *fatwā*s for a long time). Indeed, the *Masāʾil* seem a combination of both—real and hypothetical—but does it really matter?

Faḍlallah's primary concern is to explicate the difference and relation between *ijtihād* and *taqlīd*, which is the title of the first chapter in volume one. A *marjaʿ*—like Faḍlallah himself—is essentially a person who practices *ijtihād*, that is, the sustained effort to interpret Islamic law based on the Qurʾān and the Sunna—a process described as *istinbāṭ* which, in its most straightforward meaning, points to an act of deduction and inference (from the scriptural sources); at a broader, more creative level, *istinbāṭ* could be used synonymously with either *ibtikār* (invention) or *istikhrāj* (extraction or eduction). Whatever meaning we adopt, the practice of *ijtihād* is the highest and most important stage in the process. In theory, the number of *mujtahid*s at a given time should not exceed two or three (there is no stipulation regarding a particular number) because only the *marjaʿ* is a *mujtahid*. What the other *ʿulamāʾ* do, once confronted with a "problem," is to consult the higher *marjaʿ*, that is, they practice *taqlīd*, or imitation, "the acceptance (*iltizām*) of the *mujtahid*'s *fatwā*" (p. 11). In practice things are not always simple and straight-forward: the *mukallaf* might not find a single *marjaʿ* who would accept the question; or he might find one who would not—or could not—give him the needed answer. For these and other reasons, Faḍlallah pleads repeatedly throughout the *Masāʾil* for what he refers to as *iḥtiyāṭ* (caution or prudence), and many of his answers accordingly have cautionary alternatives appended to them: "You could do this, but it would be wiser from the point of view of *iḥtiyāṭ* to do so-and-so."

To Faḍlallah, the interpretive process moves within the triangle of *ijtihād*, *taqlīd*, and *iḥtiyāṭ*. This is necessary because, before issuing his *fatwā*, the *mujtahid* must explore the bounds of the vast literature left by his prede-cessors. In response to several questions, Faḍlallah makes it plain that he

finds the most prudent (*al-aḥwaṭ*) opinion that of a *mujtahid* who is still living rather than that of a dead one, even though the opinions of the dead should be consulted as a "beginning" or as an "initiation (*ibtidāʾ*)."[1] Having done this, it is then permissible to opt by "division (*tabʿīḍ*)" (p. 13) among the opinions of those *mujtahid*s who are still alive and those who are dead; unfortunately, it is not clear what the principle of *tabʿīḍ* implies: Does it simply mean that one may choose among *mujtahid*s on a single issue, that is, choose one *mujtahid* rather than another? And if so, on what basis? Or does it imply that the opinions of a single *mujtahid* do not have to be taken as a whole, but may be distinguished according to current needs and interest, and, accordingly, a *selection*—division—is performed on the basis of immediate concerns? Finally, one consults "the more knowledgeable person (*aʿlam*)." The notion of *aʿlamiyya* ("the art of the more learned") may shed some light on the above-mentioned ambiguities relating to *tabʿīḍ*. Faḍlallah unhesitatingly declares that one should rely on the "more knowledgeable" only in situations in which there is a need for something "specifically concrete" (*idrāk al-wāqiʿ*), such as the advice of a doctor when there is a danger to one's life (p. 13). He adds that to be effective the notion of *aʿlamiyya* frequently needs to be used in conjunction with that of *tabʿīḍ*: thus, according to Faḍlallah, we might need to consult, on, say, a specific corporal issue, one *ʿālim* who is knowledgeable in Qurʾān and *ḥadīth*, another who is knowledgeable in *uṣūl al-fiqh*, and, finally, a doctor (p. 14). From this example it becomes evident that *tabʿīḍ*, for Faḍlallah, means to utilize *specialization* in various fields in order to arrive, finally, at a *single fatwā* for a given problem.

Having established his "method" for working out the problems, Faḍlallah moves to more concrete issues affecting the daily lives of individuals, issues routinely dealt with in *fiqh* manuals. The common theme in daily matters is that of "purity" (*ṭahāra*): whether one is praying, performing an ablution, or simply touching another person, the real concern is always "purity." To Faḍlallah, *any* person is in essence pure (*ṭāhir*) whether Muslim or not. What is of interest to us here is to see how Faḍlallah distinguishes himself on this single issue from the majority of the *mujtahid*s past and present. He acknowledges that his assertion that "every person is by essence *ṭāhir*" distinguishes him from other *mujtahid*s. However, he sees in this something positive—indeed, something to take pride in, since it is an essential aspect of the "creativity" (*ibdāʿ*) of a *marjaʿ* to disagree with everyone, on the basis, of course, of a more convincing interpretation of the the sacred texts (interview in *al-Nahār*, 27 July 1995, p. 7). Furthermore, Faḍlallah is so attached to his understanding of *ṭahāra* that he refuses to adopt the *iḥtiyāṭ* which he usually recommends.

The most important economic issue raised in the *Masāʾil* is that of the "income tax" known as the *khums*. Among the Sunnis, it is generally accepted that the *khums* was the earliest and most primitive system of booty distribution among the Muslim conquerors (Abū Yūsuf's *Kitāb al-kharāj* explains the "primitive" aspect of the *khums* quite well). This system was subsequently "superseded" by the *kharāj* and *ʿushr*, both land-taxes; the *zakāt*; and the *jizya* imposed on non-Muslims. The system reportedly matured under the second

caliph, 'Umar, who the Shī'a do not recognize as a legitimate successor to the Prophet; they might therefore have kept the *khums* for this specific reason. Faḍlallah is mainly concerned to determine the types of income or capital that could be subjected to the *khums*. The problem here, as before, is that he does not construct a general definition of *khums*; instead, the reader must deduce such a definition from the fifty-four questions-and-answers on what income is eligible for the *khums*, and from twenty or so further questions on who is eligible for its collection. The assumption here is that the *khums* is one-fifth of the "capital" accumulated over a one-year period; in other words, if a person starts the year with a capital of x, and eight months later he makes a surplus of Dx, then at the end of the year the *khums* is levied exclusively on the original capital x (assuming of course that it has not been spent), and this is paid only once (that is, x is not thereafter subject to further taxation); as to the Dx, it will be eligible for the *khums* once it has been owned for one year. Unlike the Sunnis who can collect "on their own" the 2.5 percent *zakāt* (much less than the 20 percent *khums*) and give it at the discretion of the state to the poor, the Shī'a have to submit their *khums* directly to a "legal authority" (*ḥākim shar'ī*) or someone who represents him (p. 137); and it is permissible for a believer to spend his *khums*, after consulting the *ḥākim*, on some pious project. Unfortunately, only a few details are given regarding what the *ḥākim* should do with the *khums*, and apart from a terse note to the effect that there is a *sahm* for the Imām and another one for the *sādah* (descendants of the Prophet), Faḍlallah says little about where this money goes and how it should be redistributed, although he does emphasize that the *sahm* in question "is not the personal property of the Imām but that of the *Imāmah*" (p. 140).

Faḍlallah's discourse is typical of *fiqh* in general: it is not concerned with its own historicity, and it does not bother to relate itself to actual historical conjunctures. While formally addressing himself to the Shī'īs of the world, Faḍlallah's primary audience appears to be the Lebanese Shī'īs. But he does not give the slightest hint as to how this *umma* should structure its discourse and action vis-à-vis the presence of the Lebanese state, or other confessional groups for that matter; after all—and this proves to be the only exception in the Arab world—this state is not "Islamic"; it has to manage the affairs of seventeen officially recognized religious groups; it imposes taxes, military service, and offers a quasi "secular" education through its school system and university. With regard to the *khums*, for example, a believer has to deliver 20 percent of his income to a religious authority on a yearly basis; in addition, he must pay all taxes imposed by the state, a heavy burden indeed. The question should be raised (and it is not raised in the *Masā'il*), What type of "consciousness" will this believer end up with? He looks more like Sartre's waiter with two heads and two minds than a healthy Lebanese "citizen."

This brings us back to the *umma qaliqa*. In Sharāra's narrative, the various discourses of the Shī'a—if we were to abstract them for their peculiarities —share the same problems as do the discursive practices of the other confessional groups. The result has been an incessant undermining of the fragile existence of the nascent Lebanese "state": these several discourses manifest little internal coherence, poorly connect with each other, and have

little awareness of historical conjunctures; indeed, juxtaposed to each other, they look like those geographical strata which survive by ignoring each other's existence. Sadly, Faḍlallah's discourse stands side by side with equally closed discursive systems.

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[1] Since volume two was published long after this review was completed, it was not possible to include an assessment of its contents. It contains 1067 questions concerned with the two major themes of ʿibādāt and muʿāmalāt.

[2] On the complex notion of ibtidāʾ (commencement, début) in Arab-Islamic thought, see Muḥammad ʿAlī al-Tahānawī, Mawsūʿat kashshāf iṣṭilāḥāt al-funūn waʾl-ʿulūm, vol. I (Beirut: Librarie du Liban, 1996), 81-83.

ESSID, Yassine. *A Critique of the Origins of Islamic Economic Thought.* Leiden-New York-Köln: E.J. Brill, 1995. Pp. 257. ISBN 90-04-10079-2. $85.00.

Yassine Essid begins his *Critique* with an ambitious general question: "Is it possible that the history of economic thought consists only of Western ideas?" (p. 3). Yet, even though Essid devotes an entire book to a demonstration of the fact that Arab-Islamic culture did have an "economic thought," this confirmation surprisingly comes at the expense of reducing what he refers to as the "origins" of "Islamic economic thought" to its Greek—hence mainly Platonic and Aristotelian—elements:

> From the standpoint of discursive training, Greek thought enabled Arab-Muslim thinkers to rationalize their economic discourse, which until then [the ninth century A.D.] had consisted of no more than injunctions, commandments, punishments and rewards, and to rethink an economic behavior that was judged effective only to the extent to which it conformed to revealed law. In following the Greek example, these thinkers arrived at an understanding of economic activity as a comprehensive whole, and were able to judge its effectiveness both through a model of economic administration and through an educational ideal (p. 230).

Even though Essid makes several other less enthusiastic statements about Greek influence —e.g., "The model of state administration and supervision of the city never reveals exclusively, nor even distinctly, the influence of the Greeks" (p. 8)—he seems to be fully convinced that in two of the most influential intellectual fields, that of belles-lettres (*adab*), and even more so of philosophy (*falsafa*), Greek influence was so great that it completely restructured Islamic economic and intellectual life (the quintessential moment in this movement of thought and ideas may well have been the period in which Ibn Rushd was regarded as the world "authority" on Aristotle's works). In Essid's analysis, Greek influence made possible a reconstruction