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Review

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Source: *Islamic Law and Society*, Vol. 5, No. 3, The Islamic Inheritance System (1998), pp. 456-460

Published by: Brill

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3399268>

Accessed: 25-04-2016 01:25 UTC

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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 *'ibādāt* and *mu'āmalāt*.

² On the complex notion of *ibtidā'* (*commencement, début*) in Arab-Islamic thought, see Muḥammad 'Alī al-Tahānawī, *Mawsū'at kashshāf iṣṭilāḥāt al-funūn wa'l-'ulūm*, 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

of “the ideal Islamic city” (p. 174) in addition to “a model of economic administration” and “an educational ideal” (p. 231). The most troubling word here is “ideal,” which recurs frequently in Essid’s text: Is “ideal” supposed to denote a *utopian* notion of the city, the economy, and social life in general? If so, what is the relation between the “ideal” and the underlying social “reality”? Or does “ideal” denote a *discursive* reality: that is, representations of the city, economy, and administration, which have been discursively constructed based on Greek literature and thought? In that case, discourse and practice are two complementary entities. But if Essid is correct about the decisiveness of Greek influence, then the “origin” of Islamic economic thought contains many more “Western” elements than traditionally thought and is thus not worth crediting on its own for its approach to the city and the economy; indeed, one wonders whether there was any *genuine* “contribution of Arab-Muslim thinkers [to non-Western economic thought]” (p. 3): What was the exact nature of this “contribution”, and, since it was essentially Greek, why should it fall in the domain of “non-Western” economic thought? Inasmuch as some of those Arab and Muslim thinkers seem to have been influenced by the Greeks as greatly as Adam Smith was, why should we look at them and think about them in any manner *other* than the manner in which the West did? In other words, how genuine is this “otherness”? Not very, if we are to believe Essid’s account.

Overall, Essid manages to construct a remarkably clear and systematic thesis from his selection of Islamic texts. The key word here, which brings together several levels—from the political to the economic to the social—is the Greek *oikonomia*, “a concept expressing this effort to adapt means to ends, to organize [and] govern men and [to] manage resources in such a way as to produce greater wealth and accomplish greater well-being” (p. 6). According to Essid, an equivalent concept in Islam is that of *tadbir* (from the verb *dabbara*, “to pay attention to where things lead”) which, like its Greek equivalent, adapts means to ends, and focuses very broadly on “government”—the government of the self and others. This notion of “government” is similar to the Greek notion characterized by Michel Foucault as the “care of the self” (*le souci de soi*): the government of others entails first the art of governing one’s own self. Indeed, *governmentality*, understood as the art and “knowledge” of governing one’s self and others, might well be the broadest theme in Essid’s book. Once Essid links *tadbir* to its Greek equivalent of *oikonomia*, he moves easily between the three “spheres” that he wishes to link together under the concept of *tadbir*: politics (sovereignty, delegation, execution); economics as such (the functions of *hisba* and the *muhtasib*); and, finally, household administration. Thus, the “sphere of economics” is meaningful only within the broader notion of governmentality—the political and the household: somehow, it doesn’t make much sense in this system to conceive of an autonomous economic level, independent of the other levels.

Before assigning a purpose to economics, however, Essid must establish a *raison d’être* for the politics of the sovereign. In the section devoted to politics, Essid finds a coherence in the belles-lettres (*adab*) literature which deals, in one way or another, with political power. In the *naṣiḥa* (exhortation), or

“Mirrors for Princes” literature, the primary focus is on kingly ethics, court etiquette, and the art of exercising political power. The express purpose of such a literature was to provide a friendly and disinterested admonition to rulers and their immediate entourage: how to be just and fair; how to select competent and honest individuals for the crucial post of *wazīr* (prime minister)—a process that involves the notion of *delegation* of power—and for that of *kātib* (scribe) who has to execute and “assign each thing to its rightful place” (p. 105). It is significant that the office of the scribe implied the practice of writing and the spread of language (Arabic), two functions which made possible the establishment of an efficient bureaucracy that could connect the multitude of ethnic, religious, tribal, and linguistic groups of the provinces with the center of the empire.

Having worked out the “cohesiveness” of the political, Essid moves on, in the second part of his study, to show how the notion of “government,” which already at the political level was not merely instrumental but also moral and ethical, was essential to understanding the concept of the “economic” in Islam. Surprisingly—considering that from the early Islam of the Rāshidūn until the last days of the Ottoman Empire, the main source of wealth for the state and its bureaucracy was land, or more precisely “ground-rent”—Essid devotes the second part *in toto* to the urban institutions of the *ḥisba* and *muḥtasib*, that is, the control of the marketplace (here again, as before, such institutions were not purely instrumental but also fell under the general concept of “governmentality”). Quite probably, Essid’s reductionism is the outcome of his narrowing down of “politics” in Islam to its Greek heritage; but the section on politics is not convincing in the first place, and then, by the time we reach the second section, on the marketplace, and the third, on the household, the arguments become less and less convincing.

In my view, what constitutes Essid’s failure to problematize the political and the economic in Islam can be summarized in three very brief points:

(i) *The choice of texts*. In order to give Greek coherence and rationality to Islamic political and economic thought, Essid had to favor *falsafa* and *adab* texts over others. The almost total absence of *fiqh* texts, for example, where much less Greek influence is found than in other genres, is striking. Indeed, it is in *fiqh* works that we primarily find serious references to value, labor, money, land tenure, the waqf system, and the like. Of the three major *kharāj* books (in addition to Abū ‘Ubayd’s *Kitāb al-amwāl*), only that of Abū Yūsuf is quoted (and only on a couple of occasions), and Essid definitely missed an opportunity here for a careful analysis of a major book on “economy” (see below). But even *adab* texts were not, for the most part, heavily influenced by the Greek logos. How much Greek heritage is there, say, in Iṣbahānī’s *Aghānī*? In fact, Arab-Islamic culture absorbed many of the Mesopotamian arts and sciences at its disposal—Greek, Hebrew, Persian, and Turkish—and it would be extremely imprudent to reduce the process of cultural formation to one major influence.

(ii) *The reading of the texts*. To take one common example, Abū Yūsuf’s *Kitāb al-kharāj* is obviously about land tenure in the early classical system and about the two “taxes” of *kharāj* and *‘ushr* imposed on landowners or

“tenant-farmers.” However, for a book supposedly on “taxes,” it contains, in addition, long admonitions to the caliph (specifically Hārūn al-Rashīd) on the duties of a just ruler; and digressions on the distribution of booty in early Islam and on the manner in which the caliph ‘Umar avoided *de justesse* dividing the lands of Syria and Iraq (the Sawād) among the Muslim conquerors who were eager to get their “booty” as soon as possible. The *Kitāb* also contains long chapters on the *ahl al-dhimma*, the Christians and Jews, who had had imposed on them the “special” taxes of *kharāj* and *jizya*, not to mention the *distinctive* dress they had to wear in public; other chapters treat punishments (*ḥudūd*) and procedures for stoning those who have committed fornication (*zinā*). All this does not sound like material from a Greek background. For example, Abū Yūsuf noted that the booty (*khums*) obviously had to be distributed within the *umma*. However, the Prophet’s wives, his uncles, and the different clans that supported him were all *unequally* treated in the distribution process, depending upon their kinship lines (*qarāba*) and their degree of “closeness” to the Prophet. There were also other criteria: for example, those who fought with the Prophet at Badr and Khaybar had larger shares than those who “missed” the crucial battles. When the system matured under the caliph ‘Umar, new “taxes” were imposed, such as the *kharāj* and the *‘ushr*, but, again, the imposition of these taxes was uneven.

The point here is that the Muslim conquerors inherited a society already rent by ethnic, religious and regional divisions, but contrary to what Essid thinks, such divisions were not ended by the adoption of Greek notions of government and justice. Nor did scribal authority and the use of a unifying language have anything to do with such notions; on the contrary, the conquerors kept their own divisions and grafted all state institutions onto acknowledged “kinship” relations (kinship is here understood in the broad meaning given to it by Ibn Khaldūn: that is, in its “fictitious” dimension, as something *wahmī* which is not restricted by real genealogical lines of affiliation). The *dār al-Islām*, which, as Essid shows, was supposed to conform to principles of “unity” and “cohesiveness,” was consumed from within by an anthropology of war instituted by successive Muslim governments; over time it increasingly came to resemble the *dār al-ḥarb*.

The social and political divisions which can be “read” in *Kitāb al-kharāj* because they became an essential part of governmental policies and taxation, and which Abū Yūsuf constructed based on the traditional chains of transmission (*isnād*), are to be found throughout Islamic literature and, in particular, in the *adab* texts which Essid uses extensively: whether we refer to the *ḥadīths* of Muslim and Bukhārī, the *adab* works of Jāhīz, Ibn Qutayba, or Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih (*al-‘Iqd al-farīd*), or the histories of Mas‘ūdī and Ṭabarī, conflicts within the *ahl* (“kinship” in its broad sense) are everywhere: the divisions of the Rāshidūn period; the feud between ‘Alī and Mu‘āwīya; the emergence of the *khawārij*; the bloody ‘Abbāsīd revolution; the interminable strife inside the ‘Abbāsīd empire following the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd. Interestingly, a particular notion of “care of the self” can be detected in this literature, but besides the fact that it differs significantly from its Greek counterpart, it needs to be contextualized within the specificity of Arab-Islamic

history: for example, Mu'āwiya's claim to *hilm*, or "forbearance," is 'closer to the Machiavellian *virtù* than to Greek "governance."

For the purpose of analyzing this labyrinthine history, Ibn Khaldūn, whom Essid refers to only casually, is of great help. He stated in his *Muqaddima* that political power is preserved through "group feeling," *'aṣabiyya*. However, once the dominant *'aṣabiyya* assumes political power, it does so by "sub-serving" all other "group feelings" to it: "subservience," *istitbā'*, is a process very different from the Greek (or Western) notion of "political integration" by means of a just government ruling over a "society of individuals"; indeed, "subservience" means forcing the other "group feelings" to surrender to the dominant one without, however, compelling them to change their kinship, legal, and social structures. Without doubt, the *polis* was very different.

The biggest mystery to me is the title of Essid's book: *Why Critique?* And what does this *Critique* consist of since Essid does nothing more than *describe* the Greek origins of Islamic political and economic thought? Actually, a critique would have been possible had Essid followed the non-Greek "origins" of economic life in Islamic societies: they are still very dominant in those societies despite all the talk about Westernization and world-economies.

Finally, there are minor problems in form and editing. Essid's book is based on a work he originally wrote in French, apparently a doctoral dissertation (no French publisher is mentioned in the copyright). The English translation is generally well done, but, in addition to a few typos and *hamzas* wrongly exchanged with *'ayns* throughout, many Arabic texts have been quoted in their French translations instead of relying on the original Arabic for fresh English translations: Māwardī's *Aḥkām*, the *Kitāb al-tāj* of Jāhīz, Ibn 'Abdūn's *Risāla*, and the *Kitāb al-kharāj*, are all quoted in French! The same applies to some non-English and classical authors (e.g. Marx quoted in French on pp. 171 and 196). The book ends with a rich bibliography, but it has not been fully adapted to the needs of English readers. Thus, Schacht, Jack Goody, Ibn Khaldūn, Aristotle, Marx, and Weber, are all referred to in their French editions.

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