

# Naser Dumairieh, *Intellectual Life in the Hijāz before Wahhabism: Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī's (d. 1101/1690) Theology of Sufism*

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The Islamic intellectual thought of the thirteenth to nineteenth centuries has long been represented as an intellectual “decadence” or “sclerosis,” due to the discourse of orientalists. In recent decades, however, researchers have sought to challenge the orientalist paradigm by highlighting the scholarly currents and vigorous discussions that characterized the period in question. As a direct critique of the narratives of either “decline” or “ignorance” that persist in Islamic intellectual historiography, Naser Dumairieh’s recent book attempts to reveal the situation of rational and theoretical sciences in the Hijāz by focusing on the life and work of al-Kūrānī, the seventeenth-century Shāfi’i hadith scholar, Sufi, and theologian. Following the footsteps of Khaled el-Roauyheb’s influential book *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century*, Dumairieh not only examines al-Kūrānī’s ideas, but also offers a comprehensive glimpse into the intellectual life in contemporary Hijāz.

The book consists of six chapters. The first chapter handles the regional and local factors that evolved the Hijāz into one of the most dynamic intellectual centers in the Islamic world in the seventeenth century. These factors include securing roads which led to the Hijāz, improving the region’s economic welfare, and stabilizing the political-administrative sphere. Building on this, the second chapter examines how these developments affected the intellectual life in the Hijāz. Dumairieh first discusses the effects of economic prosperity through the development of such educational institutions as madrasas and libraries before analyzing

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the theoretical and practical intellectual activities which were carried out in these institutions. Emphasizing the popularity of the rational sciences in the scholarly circles of the period, the author discusses the educational curriculum as well as the influence leading scholarly figures in the region had on these sciences. In this regard, he focuses on the roots of rational sciences in the region and explains how "*isnād*" became widespread as a method of transmitting knowledge during the period.

The third chapter offers al-Kūrānī's intellectual biography by highlighting his education, teachers, disciples, and contemporaries. Apart from biographical and bio-bibliographical sources, this chapter mostly relies on reports of al-Kūrānī's life and career from his disciples. The fourth chapter is devoted to the identification of al-Kūrānī's works which have been dispersed in manuscript libraries around the world. Dumairieh examines 86 works penned by al-Kūrānī, briefly introducing each of them. In addition to those examined, the author lists the titles of 26 other works which have been attributed to al-Kūrānī in historical and bibliographical sources but were not accessible during the writing of this book. He also mentions three other works which he believes have been falsely attributed to al-Kūrānī in the sources.

The author writes that he originally planned to examine al-Kūrānī's theological ideas and thoughts on Sufism in two distinct chapters. However, he states that his research eventually led him to believe that al-Kūrānī's thoughts on Sufism were deeply intertwined with his theology. Thus, he discusses al-Kūrānī's metaphysical and cosmological thoughts in the fifth chapter, before analyzing the related sub-topics that pertain to the presented arguments in the following chapter. It is noteworthy that the topics discussed in these two chapters are the issues for which al-Kūrānī was criticized during and after his lifetime. Through these chapters, the author aims to demonstrate that "al-Kūrānī sought to establish an Islamic worldview that combined philosophical and theological consideration, in addition to the Sufi experience, while emphasizing the agreement of reason and Sufi revealing (*kashf*) with the revelation of the Quran and hadith" (p. 244). To achieve this, he first evaluates al-Kūrānī's views on the states of existence, on God's essence and attributes, and his overall views on Sufism. He then examines various controversial subjects which al-Kūrānī inherited from Ibn al-'Arabī, including the faith of the Pharaoh, the satanic verses, and the eternity of hell.

This book is a significant contribution to the literature because it introduces al-Kūrānī's works, most of which are still in manuscript form, and offers a general outlook of the intellectual life of seventeenth-century Hijāz. Unlike el-Rouayheb, whose approach to the intellectual historiography

centers on the examination of engagement of scholars from diverse geographic locations in similar scholarly debates, Dumairieh focuses on “a case study that demonstrates originality of Islamic intellectual life in the post-classical period” (p. 304). Through this work, the author contributes to recent literature which has attempted to make sense of the period in terms of the scholarly activity. He offers a novel perspective on the views found in the Hijaz in the pre-modern period as well as the impact of al-Kūrānī’s thought on Wahhabism.

The multiplicity of the sources al-Kūrānī cited in his works, the huge number of scholars he benefited from, and the diversity of the topics he handled in his works make a holistic analysis of his thought difficult—a fact that must be taken into consideration while evaluating Dumairieh’s study. The author appears to have had two choices while preparing his book: either to examine a small number of issues in detail or to cover many of them briefly. He appears to have chosen the second option, as he has outlined al-Kūrānī’s views on Sufism theology without analyzing them more comprehensively.

In addition, there are some issues in the organization of the book, such as the hierarchy of chapter titles and inconsistencies in the titles and the content of the chapters. For example, within a section in the second chapter called “Educational Institutions in the Hijaz,” which deals with such educational institutions as madrasas, dervish lodges, and bookbinders, there is the subtitle “Theoretical and Practical Sciences in the Hijaz.” This title is present despite the content of the latter being largely irrelevant to the main title.

Another problem is the inconsistency regarding the names of works, scholars, and sects. For example, in the chapter two, the author attributes *al-Imdād bi-ma’rifat ‘ulūw al-isnād* to Sālīm al-Başrī (p. 82), whereas he attributes this work to ‘Abd Allāh b. Sālīm al-Başrī in the third chapter (p. 123). Or, in the fourth chapter, the author states that al-Taftāzānī was a Māturidī theologian (p.178), but in the following chapter, he states that he was an Ash’arī author (p. 269). Similar mistakes can be observed in al-Kūrānī’s works as well. Al-Kūrānī’s treatise *Jalā’ al-naẓar bi-taḥrīr al-jabr fī al-ikhtiyār* is recorded under the title *Risāla fī bayān al-muqaddimāt al-arba’a li-l-tawḍīḥ* in some catalogues; thus, Dumairieh wrongly introduces this single treatise as two different works (p. 156). The author made a similar mistake with regard to al-Kūrānī’s gloss on al-Dawānī’s commentary on *al-‘Aqā’id al-‘Ādudiyya*. He mistakenly considers an incomplete copy of al-Kūrānī’s gloss on *Sharḥ al-‘Aqā’id al-‘Ādudiyya* as a separate work. However, when comparing the works in question,

it becomes clear that al-Kūrānī has a single gloss on *Sharh al-'Aqā'id al-'Ādudiyya* (p. 164-165).

Despite its flaws, Dumairieh's study represents a significant contribution to the field of the seventeenth-century intellectual historiography. The author's examination of al-Kūrānī, a highly controversial figure during this period, provides valuable insights into his views and works. Furthermore, the discussions taking place around various issues within the book have the potential to trigger further research in the field of intellectual history.