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Book Reviews

***Hadīth, Piety and Law: Selected Studies.* By Christopher Melchert. Atlanta, Georgia: Lockwood Press, 2015. Pp. 359. ISBN: 978-1-937040-49-9.**

Reviewer: Khairil Husaini Bin Jamil. Department of Qur'ān and Sunnah Studies, Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia. Email: husaini@iium.edu.my

Whilst typical modern discourse on Islam speaks of terms such as traditionalism, secularism, salafism, sufism, liberalism, terrorism, etc, the book under review represents an assiduous venture into the historical formative period of Islamic thought and civilisation where traditional Islamic scriptural sciences were at the peak of attention and formulation. Focusing mostly on the second half of the ninth century, Christopher Melchert, a professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies at Oxford, evinces through this collection of engaging articles his profound sympathy for the prominent Muslim historical figures, who according to the editors of this Lockwood series, belong to various pietistic currents that seemed sceptical of some rationalistic tendencies of the time. As a person who has been observing the traditional, rational and spirito-mystical orientations and dimensions in *ḥadīth* studies, I can clearly perceive the nexus between this concern and Melchert's long-standing encounter with the Ḥanbalite history and tradition; a legal school associated with Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and the partisan of *ḥadīth*. Although in his exordium, Melchert reminisces over his extended involvement in the academic world and the events behind most articles he had published, -where the anecdotes related to the three works of Terry Burke occupied the very first episode of his journey-, it was the *Taqrīb al-Tahdhīb* of Ibn Ḥajar, the famous abridged biographical dictionary of *ḥadīth* narrators that opened his eyes to the study of sects, groups, networks and trends amongst the historical figures and led to his first published article. It is understandable then to find the subjects of traditional *ḥadīth* study, non-

mystical pietism and classical jurisprudence eventually interweaved and exemplified in the sixteen chapters of this book, which are appositely arranged under three rubrics; *ḥadīth*, piety, and law.

The first section treats the theme of *ḥadīth*. Although its titles seem quite nonpolemical, the five articles prove to be challenging and thought-provoking especially for readers with intermediate knowledge of the field. In his first article on Ibn Hanbal and his adversaries, Melchert hypothesises that Ibn Ḥanbal's opponents were not mainly of the Mu'tazilah, the Shī'ah or the rationalist Ḥanafīyah as often thought, but rather those he classified as the semi-rationalists. He devises the issue of "the created Qur'ān" and the accusation of *lafẓīyah* (the statement that one's pronunciation of the Qur'ān is created) as the navigational key to this putative tendency. Melchert has proposed several names such as al-Karābīsī, Ibn Kullāb, al-Muḥāsibi, al-Qalānīsī and others who were loosely associated with al-Shāfi'ī, and some of whom were regarded as the predecessors of the Ash'arites as illustrated by Harith Ramli in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*. Such a postulation can also be reflected in the modern-day polemics between the Salafis and the Ash'aris. Nevertheless, to portray a momentous trend based on exiguous issues would be quite an exaggeration. Moreover, Melchert's inclination to include al-Bukhārī in this group would be unsettling for many observants since it is difficult to imagine al-Bukhārī as a semi-rationalist, for his traditional persona. Melchert himself is not unfamiliar with al-Bukhārī's life and works. The other two articles of this section were dedicated for this highly revered scholar. The first details the transmissions and later treatments of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* whilst the second examines al-Bukhārī's style in *al-Tārīkh al-Kabīr (The Great History)*. In the latter, Melchert has successfully unsubstantiated Norman Calder's questioning of the attribution of the treatise to al-Bukhārī. For Melchert, the evident professionalisation of *ḥadīth* science in the work may actually reflect a particular Northeastern Khurāsānī influence. His investigation method to arrive at this conclusion should be exploited effectively by specialised students. However, Melchert has also professed his inclination towards the sceptical approach to *ḥadīth* literature as adopted by Goldziher, Juynboll and the rest. His conclusion on the authorship of *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* faithfully reveals this attitude. For this reason, Melchert's treatment of its history is best accompanied with the reading of Gregor Schoeler's *The Oral and the Written in Early*

Islam and Jonathan Brown's work, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim*. One of the striking arguments of Melchert is the amateurism of *ḥadīth* sciences represented in Ibn Ḥanbal's *al-'Ilal wa Ma'rifat al-Rijāl* (*Recognising the Narrators and the Narration Flaws*). This was the outcome of his pursuit for the distinctive feature of Ibn Ḥanbal's *Musnad* in comparison to other *ḥadīth* compilations especially the Six Books. This technical study provides the main ingredient for his article on the *Musnad*. It was subsequently followed by an analysis of al-Nasā'ī's method of *ḥadīth* criticism, which according to Melchert, relies solely on *isnād* comparison and a sort of "impressionistic", "intuitive" and "unsystematic" corroborative technique. Nonetheless, Melchert believes that al-Nasā'ī's method has accurately represented the ninth-century *ḥadīth* criticism which makes it a better substitution for Ibn Sa'd. Ibn Sa'd, together with Ibn Ḥanbal and Ibn Ma'in have been identified by Scott Lucas as the main predecessors for the later generations of *ḥadīth* critics, namely, the *ḥuffāz* (See his work, *Constructive Critics*).

As for the second section, several important Islamic concepts such as *taṣawwuf*, *zuhd*, *taqwā*, and *khashyah* were treated although through a sort of prosopographical approach. The section, nevertheless, is not detached completely from the theme of *ḥadīth*. Under the gamut of piety, Melchert dedicated two articles; first on the early renunciants as *ḥadīth* transmitters, and second on the distinctive form of religious devoutness practised by the *ḥadīth* folks (the traditionists and the *tradens*). Unremitting seriousness and a contractual, moralistic conception of the Islamic *ummah* were identified as the two salient features of their pietism which distinguish it from the piety of others particularly the Ṣūfis. Melchert even goes further to delineate the piety of *ahl al-adab* (littérateurs) and the early Shī'ites. Noticing the oddness between the piety of *ḥadīth* folks and the practice of the Ṣūfis, particularly between the ninth-century Ḥanbalis and the crystallising Ṣūfī movements, Melchert investigates the genesis and the evolution of the aforementioned concepts. He concludes that classical Ṣūfism can be traced back to the circle of the Baṣran Abū Ḥātim al-'Aṭṭār (building relatively on Bernd Radtke's thesis of distinctive early Ṣūfis) and that there was a transition from asceticism to mysticism in the middle of ninth century prior to the great Sunnī Junaydī synthesis -attributed to Junayd of Baghdad (298 AH). In a review by Anis Ahmad on Melchert's article, he criticises Melchert's acceptance of *sharī'ah-tarīqah* dualism following the

normative Western's conception of Islamic mysticism. However, Anis did not offer any explanation for the accusation of blasphemies and events of conflicts that demarcate between asceticism and mysticism as argued by Melchert. These intricacies are of greatest importance for modern readers who wish to study originality and authenticity in the devotional practices of observant Muslims. The articles of this section have provided important questions for this vital spectrum.

The third section of this book represents Melchert's adventure with the history of, particularly Sunnī, legal schools. The articles demonstrated his undertaking of several influential theses promoted by earlier Western researchers such as Joseph Schacht, George Makdisi, and Norman Calder. However, Melchert did exhibit his own musings in the subject as evident in his discovery of the traditionist-jurisprudents. According to him, this new group could be regarded as the middle stream between the two opposing sides expounded by Schacht, namely, the traditionalist and the rationalist. Building on the sceptical premises as well, Melchert questions the Kūfan origin of Ḥanafism arguing for the centrality of Baghdād and Baṣrah in the formation of the doctrine. He also suggests that al-Māwardi's and Abū Ya'la's *Aḥkām al-Ṣulṭāniyyah* could be a replication of each other or of an unknown original. His article also questions the originality of *al-Umm* which was attributed to al-Shāfi'ī. For this, he was refuted by Ahmad El Shamsy although Melchert still maintain some of his conclusions. Elsewhere, I have noted few misreading that occurred in Melchert's apprehension of early texts and statements as also indicated by El Shamsy (see his article *al-Shāfi'ī's Written Corpus* and my unpublished thesis at SOAS titled *Traditional Sunnī Epistemology*). Nevertheless, numerous questions raised by Melchert pertaining to the history of the formation of legal thought are useful for further inspection and research, especially in the abovementioned three areas.

One of the challenges a reader may face in enjoying the book is its inconsistencies in the use of transliteration styles. Although the editors have already alerted the readers, it does affect the fluency of cognition, moreover with the presence of multitudinous Arabic names. On another note, the book is nearly impossible to be obtained in Malaysia as of the date of this review. Such a challenging book should be examined and deliberated at least at the relevant department of the higher education institutions. To conclude, the book provides fair attempts at challenging

the approach towards the history of scriptural sciences and assertive invitations to fill up some notable lacunae particularly in the study of non-mystical pietism and the metahistorical perspective of *ḥadīth* principles and criticism.

Conversations with Tunku Abdul Rahman. By Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2016, pp. 216, ISBN: 978-981-4634-14-4.

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The late Abdullah Ahmad wrote the book *Conversations with Tunku Abdul Rahman* in 1985 but chose to publish it only in 2016. He passed away, at the age of 79 after battling cancer, in the same year that the book was published. Abdullah had served as the editor-in-chief of the *New Straits Times*, a member of parliament for Kok Lanas, Kelantan, the Deputy Minister at the Prime Minister Office, the head of Malaysian Special Envoy to the United Nations and a columnist for *Sinar Harian*. However, the career that initiated and shaped the writing of the book was when Abdullah held the position as the political secretary to the then Deputy Prime Minister, Tun Abdul Razak, from 1957 until 1963. He continued to be the political secretary when Tun Razak became the Prime Minister from 1963 to 1974. Abdullah was the nation's first political secretary ever officially appointed. On the section of "A Note from the Author", he narrated that his first meeting with Tunku Abdul Rahman (hereafter Tunku) was in 1957. Even though their meetings became more frequent afterwards, it was only between 1982 and 1984 that the conversations were held with the aim of writing this book. Abdullah had recorded the conversations and used them to assist him in the writing. He wished that the book would be able to transport the readers "to as close as possible to the people, place and events spoken about" (p.7).

In the preface that he wrote in 1985, Abdullah chronicled the major events surrounding the formation of Malaysia in 1963. Among them was the massive opposition ('Konfrontasi') led by Indonesian President, Sukarno, and backed by the Philippines' Macapagal, as well as the

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