



Karabela, Mehmet. Islamic Thought Through Protestant Eyes

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Karabela, Mehmet.

Islamic Thought Through Protestant Eyes.

New York: Routledge, 2021. Pp. 369 + 16 b/w ill. ISBN 9780367549541 (hardback) US\$160.

By exploring the Protestant Reformations, in *Islamic Thought Through Protestant Eyes*, Mehmet Karabela is dealing with one of the critical chapters in the history of Christianity. Historians generally considered the Reformations solely a European and Christian phenomenon and, therefore, focused their attention on the Protestant-Catholic divide and the conflict between orthodox and Pietist Lutheran factions with their Calvinist opponents. A cursory look at the titles and indexes of the books on the history of the Protestant Reformations published in the last few decades reveals to us that, even in our contemporary times, the term “Islam” has not been generally associated with the study of Protestant Reformations. No serious attempt has been made to understand the Protestant Reformations as part of global intellectual history or to bring out their significance in promoting interfaith relations. Therefore, to broaden the conventional interpretations of the Reformations, Karabela has argued that they should not be approached merely within a Euro-Christian framework. Rather, their history and evolution need to be understood in relation to Europe’s shared history with Islam and its network with the Middle East. Europe was connected to the Islamic world for several centuries before the Protestant Reformations. The Iberian peninsula was conquered at the beginning of the eighth century, and Spain remained one of the great Muslim civilizations until the end of the fifteenth century. European Christians performed pilgrimages to Jerusalem, which was under the custody of Muslim rulers until European crusaders captured it.

In *Islamic Thought Through Protestant Eyes*, Karabela studied the translation and analysis of seventeen Latin dissertations, disputations, and academic works defended and presented at Germany’s Protestant universities, such as Wittenberg, Leipzig, Helmstedt, and Danzig, from the 1650s to the 1800s to show how Lutheran theologians and scholars rigorously engaged with Islamic thought. To make the book readable and easily accessible, Karabela has written an introductory essay in part 1, where he succinctly discusses the Lutheran authors and their texts and analyzes how they used Islam to dismiss Catholicism and prove that Protestantism was the only “true religion.” He divides the remainder of the book into three parts. In part 2, which contains six chapters,

he focuses on the writings of August Pfeiffer, Friedrich Ulrich Calixt, Michael Lange, Hieronymus Kromayer, and Christian Benedikt Michaelis in order to highlight their interpretations of Islam as religious thought, a system of theology, and morality. The subsequent eight chapters, which constitute the book's third part, introduce the Lutheran views on the origins and development of Islamic philosophy, which they perceived as antithetical to reason and truth. In this section of the book, Karabela analyzes the works of Peter von Ludewig, Johannes Steuchius, Johann Weitenkampf, Friedrich Rudolph, Georg Walch, and Samuel Schelwig. In part 4 of the book, with three chapters, Karabela examines the writings of Sebastian Kirchmaier and Pfeiffer to explain how Lutherans used the Sunni-Shia schism to justify the Protestant-Catholic divide and establish the truth of Protestant Christianity. It is significant to note the lack of interest in Hadith and Islamic mystical (Sufism) and legal (Shariah) traditions within post-Reformation Lutheran academic circles.

Karabela discusses how post-Reformation German Lutheran scholars described Islam as a patchwork religion formed out of pagan and Judeo-Christian traditions. Thus, though Islam is connected to Christianity, which deserves attention, they considered it a false and hollow religion, stained by empty rituals and ceremonies. So, Karabela argues, their approach to Islam was a complex admiration of hostility and intrigue. It helped them liken Islam to Catholicism and use it as a weapon against their opponents (4). Like Islam, they thought Catholicism was an illogical and irrational religion, where there was no room for argumentation and challenging religious authority. Orthodox Lutherans further argued that Muslims and Catholics used extratextual sources, hadith and papal authority, to explain their beliefs and practices. In Karabela's opinion, their engagement with Islamic thought provided post-Reformation Lutherans with the needed resources to develop a separate Protestant identity and an uncompromising attitude towards Catholicism. However, due to their emphasis on *sola scriptura*, Lutheran scholars of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had primarily focused on the Quranic texts to understand Islamic thought. Unlike Sunnis, their discovery that Shiites held a "similar" *sola scriptura* position helped them find an ally outside of Christian traditions and justify the Catholic-Lutheran divide, which was parallel to the sectarian divisions in Islam.

The "Protestentization of Islam" is a dominant theme within the study of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Muslim reformers' attitudes towards European modernity. In *Islamic Thought Through Protestant Eyes*, Karabela

engages in this discourse with a different twist. He argues that early modern Protestant engagement with Islam shaped salient features of Protestantism. The Protestants' obsession with Islam was partially driven by fear of the mighty Ottoman Empire and its incursions into Eastern Europe. Lutheran scholars were nervous about the Ottomans' unwillingness to separate religion from politics in the wake of the Thirty Years' War and the emergence of secularism thought in Europe. Unlike the Orientalists, who came a century later, post-Reformation Lutheran scholars were writing from the edge rather than the centre. However, unintentionally, their discourse on Islam created an archive and vocabulary that would serve the Orientalists to imagine Islam and justify the colonization of the Muslim world. Therefore, *Islamic Thought Through Protestant Eyes* is an essential resource for libraries, graduate students, and scholars interested in studying the genealogy of Orientalism, the formation of Protestant traditions, European interactions with Islamic thought, and the construction of Protestant identity in the post-Reformation periods.

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