Introduction

At a time when the Syrian regime is facing an unprecedented wave of popular unrest, the political stance of the ulama is of utmost importance. In the 1960s and 1970s, as urban, religious, and Sunni elites, the ulama numbered among the main opponents of the Ba'thist regime, which was led by sons of peasants who were often members of the Alawite community and were driven by secular and socialist ideals. In the early 1980s, moreover, the bloody suppression of the Islamist insurgency, in which many sons and followers of the ulama were directly involved, led to dozens of clerics being driven into exile.

Three decades later, as the flame of revolt flares up, the influence of the clergy over Syrian society has increased considerably. This situation results from the population's growing religious fervour, and from official policies which, although still extremely repressive even by regional standards, have nevertheless relaxed in the last two decades. Potentially, then, the ulama could now constitute a more significant threat to the regime than they did in the past; but in fact the reality is more complex, both because of the clerics' understandable fears of state repression and because of the rapprochement between state and clergy that has taken place over the previous decade. This deepening partnership has been part of a broader trend whose consequences are now unfolding before our eyes: the Ba'th's alliance with its former enemies, the urban elites, has led it to turn its back on its original social base, peasants and the poor; and the latter have provided most of the manpower in the current uprising.

At the same time, though, it would be an oversimplification to say that nearly half a century after the Ba'thist coup of 1963, the ulama are, once

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again, on the 'wrong' side of a revolution. Indeed, some of the few major demonstrations witnessed thus far in the central districts of Damascus have originated in mosques that symbolise old traditions of clerical resistance to the Ba'th. In other words, just like the quietism of many clerics, the rebellious attitude of some of their colleagues has its origin in the long-standing processes that this book sets out to recover.

Damascus, 31 March 2007. Night is falling on the Sheikh 'Abd al-Karim al-Rifa'i mosque, a huge, futuristic building erected at the entrance to the upscale subdivision of Tanzim Kafr Suse and named in honour of one of the great figures of the Islamic 'renaissance' that occurred in the early days of the Ba'thist regime. Four years later, almost to the day, the first anti-regime demonstrations of central Damascus would start from here. But we are not there yet. In this twelfth day of Rabi' al-Awwal 1428 (hegira year), Muslims celebrate the Prophet's birthday (Mawlid) and a traffic jam is paralysing the streets that lead to the al-Rifa'i mosque.

Thousands of the faithful take their places for the evening on the carpets of the building, which is decorated for the occasion with light bulbs, banners, and green pennants. In a corner of the mosque, seated before a large model of the green-domed tomb of Muhammad, a choir of students from the mosque (mostly students of scientific university faculties) sings the glory of the Messenger. Faced with an apathetic crowd, impassive ulama, merchants, and other notables are seated on plastic chairs or, the most important of them, in leather armchairs. Periodically, they get up to hug a distinguished visitor who has gone through the crowd via a cordoned-off passage. Three or four times during the evening, prophetic anthems are interrupted by the exhortations of the clerics.[1]

Are we witnessing here some formal event? Nothing seems to indicate it. No state official is attending the ceremony. In addition, while we are just two months away from the plebiscite that will renew the mandate of President Bashar al-Asad, the only reference to state power heard in the speeches is particularly negative, since it takes the form of a warning. This comes from Sheikh Usama al-Rifa'i (b. 1944), the preacher of the mosque and the eldest son of the scholar who gave it his name. This

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[1] For a description and analysis of the meanings of the celebration of the Mawlid in Syria, see Thomas Pierret, 'Staging the Authority of the Ulama: The Celebration of the Mawlid in Urban Syria', in *Ethnographies of Islam*, ed. Paulo Pinto, Thomas Pierret, Kathryn Spellman, and Baudouin Dupret (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 93–104.

former political exile concludes his speech by attaching the legitimacy of the regime to the embrace of an Islamic agenda:

I must warn the leaders in our country … that their power … springs from the umma. Thus, since this umma has come back to its religion … those leaders have no other choice but to reflect the desire of their people and to raise the flag of Islam. Indeed, their [future] position depends on their return to God … and to the desire of the umma … If they don't reflect this desire, they will lose their credibility and in the end, they will lose everything in this world … and God will replace them with better people.[2]

The simple fact that a former exile can talk this way at a public event attests to the profound changes that have permeated the relationship between the regime and Muslim clerics since the bloody suppression of the Islamist insurgency of 1979–82. After it was repressed and, in certain cities, decimated, the clergy took advantage of the disaffection with Ba'thist ideology and the eradication of the Muslim Brothers, which granted it a monopoly on the representation of the Islamic trend, to patiently reconstitute its forces and increase its margins of freedom within the framework of an ambiguous partnership with the state.[3] Remarkably, the most prominent Syrian ulama of the early twenty-first century are not all traditional clients of the regime but also figures who, like Usama al-Rifa'i, have long suffered from state repression.

From these observations, this book intends first to correct a number of misconceptions about Syria. The first of these is that the regime, because of its secular character and the fact that it is dominated by members of the Alawite minority, never enjoyed any kind of religious legitimacy among Sunnis.[4] I will show that, at least until 2011, the political leadership managed to establish ambiguous, but nevertheless robust, partnerships with religious figures who had genuine credibility in the eyes of many Muslims.

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[2] Quoted in Thomas Pierret and Kjetil Selvik, 'Limits of "Authoritarian Upgrading" in Syria: Private Welfare, Islamic Charities, and the Rise of the Zayd Movement', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 41, no. 4 (2009), 595–614, at 609.

[3] As will appear throughout this book, the idea according to which there is no clergy in Sunni Islam is an ideal, not a social reality.

[4] The dominant Sunni tradition has always considered Alawites as infidels. The only prominent Sunni Muslim scholar who issued a pro-Alawite fatwa in the twentieth century was Mufti of Jerusalem Amin al-Husseini, who did so for very political (nationalistic) reasons. See Yvette Talhamy, 'The Fatwas and the Nusayri/Alawis of Syria', *Middle Eastern Studies* 46, no. 2 (2010), 175–94.

Understanding state–ulama relations in Syria also means getting rid of another piece of common wisdom on local politics, a tendency to overestimate the regime's capacity for social engineering ('manipulation'). From this perspective the gradual rebuilding of the power of the clergy after 1982 is seen as the result of official policies which reportedly 'encouraged' the development of a quietist version of Islam, thus creating a genie that became harder to keep contained.[5] Actually, the case of Usama al-Rifa'i and his network illustrates the fact that the Syrian government has been forced to take into account religious forces whose wide social roots result from long-term processes that go back to a time prior to the advent of the Ba'th and have been only partially affected by the interventions of the latter. In fact, the regime has not encouraged the re-Islamisation of society: it has only worked for limiting its political implications. This leads us to the second axis of my main argument, which refers to a broader debate on the fate of Sunni clerics in the contemporary era.

In the twentieth century, the Syrian ulama not only faced the challenge of secularist authoritarianism but also structural changes that, as in the rest of the Muslim world, seemed to irreparably undermine their power bases. These perils, which stemmed from the construction of the modern state that had started in the previous century,[6] included the secularisation of law,[7] the expansion of state control over religious institutions, and the modernisation–democratisation of education.

The first of these developments often excluded clerics from the judicial institutions in favour of specialists in positive law. The second, which led to the subsuming of religious endowments (*waqf*, pl. *awqaf*) under state control,[8] the bureaucratisation of religious personnel,[9] and the institutionalisation of its training under the aegis of the state,[10] was likely to put

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[5] See in particular the articles published in 2005–6 by the Syrian correspondent of *al-Hayat*, Ibrahim Hamidi.

[6] Moshe Ma'oz, 'The Ulama and the Process of Modernisation in Syria during the Mid-Nineteenth Century', *Asian and African Studies*, no. 7 (1971), 77–88.

[7] Bernard Botiveau, 'Le mouvement de rationalisation du droit en Syrie au cours de la première moitié du XXe siècle', *Bulletin d'études orientales* 35 (1983), 123–35.

[8] Randi Deguilhem, 'Le *waqf* en Syrie indépendante', in *Le Waqf dans le monde musulman contemporain (XIXe–XXe siècles)*, ed. Faruk Bilici (Istanbul: Institut Français d'Études Anatoliennes, 1994), 123–44.

[9] Annabelle Böttcher, *Syrische Religionspolitik unter Asad* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Arnold-Bergstraesser-Institut, 1998).

[10] Bernard Botiveau, 'La formation des oulémas en Syrie: la faculté de shari'a de l'Université de Damas', in *Les Intellectuels et le pouvoir: Syrie, Égypte, Tunisie, Algérie*, ed. Gilbert Delanoue (Cairo: CEDEJ, 1986), 67–91.

an end to their economic autonomy and take away their monopoly on the training of their successors.[11] As for the transformation of the education system, it produced a new type of literate elite that saw the world-view of the ulama as outdated.[12] Even when they displayed a religious sensibility, as was for instance the case with the leaders of the Muslim Brothers, some of these intellectuals derided the traditional Islamic scholarly corpus, whose mastery is the basis of the authority of the ulama, as archaic and dispensable. Instead of following the opinions of their predecessors, they claimed the right to direct interpretation of revealed texts.[13] Combined with the development of print and other mass media, which made some form of religious knowledge accessible to almost everyone, this development seemed to constitute 'a major assault on the ulama as interpreters of Islam'.[14]

Although the Syrian clergy has indeed faced all these dangers, the outcome of the battle has been far from uniformly negative. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the process of bureaucratisation having remained very superficial, the ulama retain broad financial independence through their partnership with the private sector. In addition, they continue to exercise, if not a monopoly, at least a leading role in the training of future men of religion. The reason for that is partly that they have adapted to new teaching methods through the establishment of modern private institutes, which have enabled them to produce young clerics on a much larger scale than traditional methods. More unexpected was the fact that the old structures that were threatened by the dynamics of modernisation (the master–disciple relationship, study circles) were transformed, thanks to the flexibility given to them by their informality, into a powerful instrument of defence of the influence of the clerics. It is by relying on these structures that the ulama have integrated into their networks these graduates of secular schooling who were at one time perceived as the main threat to their

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[11] For Egypt, see Gilles Kepel, 'Les oulémas, l'intelligentsia et les islamistes en Égypte: système social, ordre transcendantal et ordre traduit', *Revue française de science politique* 35, no. 3 (1985), 424–45.

[12] For Egypt, see Gregory Starrett, *Putting Islam to Work: Education, Politics, and Religious Transformation in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

[13] For the early Egyptian Muslim Brothers, see Richard Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 211–14, 238.

[14] Francis Robinson, 'Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Impact of Print', *Modern Asian Studies* 27, no. 1 (1993), 229–51, at 249. For a similar argument regarding modern media, see Dale Eickelman and Jon Anderson, *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003).

authority. In fact, far from systematically becoming a rival of the *'alim* (sing. of ulama), the 'pious engineer' often became his disciple, when he had not himself attained the status of 'alim after having complied with the rules of acquisition of knowledge that were defined by his elders.

Central here is the notion of tradition in the sense of a heritage whose content and rules of transmission are regarded as relatively intangible. If the Syrian ulama can still control the training of their successors, despite the institutionalisation of specialised Islamic teaching, if they can include a pharmacist, it is because they have imposed among a large number of their co-religionists the idea that mastery of religious knowledge requires more than a diploma or self-teaching through books: it necessitates the study of the traditional scholarly corpus under the supervision of the custodians of that heritage – that is, themselves.

The fundamental cause of the ulama's success in promoting this conception is not only the force of their arguments, or the docility of their flocks, or state repression against the supporters of a modernised approach to religious knowledge. It is rather the fact that the ulama were the first, and leading, actors to respond to the main sociological conse- quence of the modern Islamic 'awakening', that is to say, the exponential increase in demand for religious education.

The rapid growth of a literate population wishing to study the Quran, the hadith, and fiqh has brought new customers to the old networks of religious scholarship, thus entailing the latter's development to an extent unprecedented in history. To this was added the now familiar phenom- enon of sheikhs who have exploited the potential of mass media (news- papers, essays, tapes, radio and television, Internet) to reach an even wider audience. Social change was thus transformed from a threat into an opportunity.

STATE OF THE LITERATURE

This book aims to advance our knowledge of the still under-studied Sunni religious elite in Syria, but also to enrich the literature on Muslim schol- ars in the modern period; hence the reflection on the broader transforma- tions of religious authority in Muslim societies.[15]

[15] See Marc Gaborieau and Malika Zeghal (eds.), 'Autorités religieuses en islam', *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 49, no. 125 (2004), 5–210; Gudrun Krämer and Sabine Schmidtke, *Speaking for Islam: Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); Frédéric Volpi and Bryan Turner (eds.), 'Authority and Islam', *Theory, Cultures & Society* 24, no. 2 (2007), 1–240.

Most of the bibliography on modern Syrian Islam concerns the Muslim Brothers,[16] on the one hand, and the reformist and Sufi currents during the period from the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries,[17] on the other.

Regarding more contemporary issues, existing works focus on Sufism,[18] official religious policies, institutions and discourses,[19] pro-regime ulama such as the late Grand Mufti Ahmad Kaftaru, and Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti,[20]

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[16] To mention only the most important publications: Johannes Reissner, *Ideologie und Politik der Muslimbrüder Syriens: Von den Wahlen 1947 bis zum Verbot unter Adib ash-Shishakli* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Klaus Shwarz, 1980); Hans Günter Lobmeyer, *Opposition und Widerstand in Syrien* (Hamburg: Deutsches Orient-Institut, 1995).

[17] Norbert Tapiéro, *Les Idées réformistes d'al-Kawakibi, 1265–1320=1849–1902: contribution à l'étude de l'Islam moderne* (Paris: Les Editions Arabes, 1956); David Dean Commins, *Islamic Reform: Politics and Social Change in Late Ottoman Syria* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Itzchak Weismann, *Taste of Modernity: Sufism, Salafiyya, and Arabism in Late Ottoman Damascus* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); on Sufi traditions, see the numerous works by Itzchak Weismann that are mentioned throughout this book.

[18] Frederick de Jong, 'Les confréries mystiques musulmanes du Machreq arabe: centres de gravité, signes de déclin et de renaissance', in *Sufi Orders in Ottoman and post-Ottoman era in Egypt and the Middle East* (Istanbul: ISIS Press, 2000), 197–234; Eric Geoffroy, 'Soufisme, réformisme et pouvoir en Syrie contemporaine', *Egypte/Monde arabe*, no. 29 (1997), 11–21; Paulo Pinto, 'Sufism and the Political Economy of Morality in Syria', *Interdisciplinary Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 15 (2006), 103–36; see also, on the cult of saints in Aleppo, Julia Gonnella, *Islamische Heiligenverehrung im urbanen Kontext am Beispiel von Aleppo (Syrien)* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 1995).

[19] Böttcher, *Syrische Religionspolitik*; Olivier Carré, *La Légitimation islamique des socialismes arabes: analyse conceptuelle combinatoire des manuels scolaires égyptiens, syriens et irakiens* (Paris: FNSP, 1979); Andreas Christmann, 'An Invented Piety? Subduing Ramadan in Syria State Media', *Yearbook of the Sociology of Islam* 3 (2001), 243–63; Mordechai Kedar, *Asad in Search of Legitimacy: Message and Rhetoric in the Syrian Press under Hafiz and Bashar* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2005), 78–131; Eyal Zisser, 'Syria, the Ba'th Regime and the Islamic Movement: Stepping on a New Path?', *The Muslim World*, no. 95 (2005), 43–65, at 50; Joshua Landis, 'Syria: Secularism, Arabism and Sunni Orthodoxy', in *Tailor-Made Islam: Religion, Identity and Nation in Middle Eastern Schoolbooks*, ed. Eleanor Doumato and Gregory Starrett (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2006), 177–96; on the (limited) place of Islam in official Ba'thist history, see Stéphane Valter, *La Construction nationale syrienne* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2002).

[20] Böttcher, *Syrische Religionspolitik*; Leif Stenberg, 'Young, Male and Sufi Muslim in the City of Damascus', in *Youth and Youth Culture in the Contemporary Middle East*, ed. Jørgen Bæck Simonsen (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2005), 68–91; Andreas Christmann, 'Islamic Scholar and Religious Leader: A Portrait of Muhammad Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti', *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 9, no. 2 (1998), 149–69; Sandra Houot, 'Le Cheikh al-Bouti: exemple d'une éthique de la médiation aux fins de résolution du conflit', *Maghreb – Machrek*, no. 198 (2009), 53–64.

reformist intellectuals,[21] the use of the Internet by clerics,[22] and female preachers.[23]

Western bibliography on Syrian Islam therefore suffers from two major deficiencies that I am willing to address in this book: first, by focusing on major figures of official Islam or the Muslim Brothers, it ignores the significant portion of the local religious elite that belongs to neither of these categories; second, by focusing on personalities or groups viewed in isolation, it does not offer an overall analysis of the structuring of the clergy and of the challenges it faces.

With regard to the Sunni world as a whole, the literature on contemporary ulama also remains limited because research has long been inhibited by the fact that modernisation theories have popularised the idea that this social category was on the decline. Certainly, this idea has undergone welcome revisions.[24] However, most of the existing literature is characterised by profound imbalances. The first is a focus on the 'mass-media sheikhs', whether they rely on print or broadcasting,[25] to the detriment

[21] Paul Heck, 'Religious Renewal in Syria: The Case of Muhammad al-Habash', *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 15, no. 2 (2004), 185–207; Muhammad Shahrur, Andreas Christmann, and Dale F. Eickelman, *The Qur'an, Morality and Critical Reason: The Essential Muhammad Shahrur* (Boston: Brill, 2009).

[22] Sandra Houot, 'Culture religieuse et média électronique: le cas du cheikh Muhammad al-Buti', *Maghreb – Machrek*, no. 178 (2003), 75–87; Ermete Mariani, 'Les oulémas syriens à la recherche d'une audience virtuelle', in *La société de l'information au Proche-Orient*, ed. Yves Gonzalez-Quijano (Lyons: Gremmo, 2007), 93–116; Andreas Christmann, 'Les cheikhs syriens et l'Internet', in *La Syrie au présent*, ed. Youssef Courbage, Baudouin Dupret, Mohammed Al-Dbiyat, and Zouhair Ghazzal (Paris: Actes Sud, 2007), 421–8.

[23] Hilary Kalmbach, 'Social and Religious Change in Damascus', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 35, no. 1 (2008), 37–57; Aurelia Ardito, 'Les cercles féminins de la Qubaysiyya à Damas', *Le Mouvement Social*, no. 231 (2010), 77–88.

[24] Andrée Feillard, *Islam et Armée dans l'Indonésie contemporaine: les pionniers de la tradition* (Paris: L'Harmattan and Association Archipel, 1995); Malika Zeghal, *Gardiens de l'islam: les oulémas d'Al Azhar dans l'Egypte contemporaine* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1996); Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Nabil Mouline, *Les Clercs de l'islam: autorité religieuse et pouvoir politique en Arabie saoudite, XVIIIe–XXIe siècle* (Paris: PUF, 2011). See also Meir Hatina (ed.), *Guardians of Faith in Modern Times: 'Ulama in the Middle East* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

[25] In addition to the aforementioned works on al-Buti, see, among many others: Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, 'Muhammad Mutawalli al-Sha'rawi: A Portrait of a Contemporary 'Alim in Egypt', in *Islam, Nationalism and Radicalism in Egypt and the Sudan*, ed. Gabriel Warburg and Uri Kupferschmidt (New York: Praeger, 1983), 281–97; Serif Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990); Jan-Peter Hartung, *Viele Wege und ein Ziel: Leben und Wirken von Sayyid Abu l-Hasan 'Ali al-Hasani Nadwi (1914–1999)* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2004); Bettina Gräf and Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, *Global Mufti: The Phenomenon of Yusuf al-Qaradawi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

of their less visible but extremely important colleagues who work to pre-
serve the classical scholarly tradition,[26] or maintain direct daily contact
with the faithful through educational and charitable activities. A second
deficiency is that the majority of the publications concern individuals
or particular doctrinal trends rather than the entire religious elite in a
particular context.[27] A third problem is that possibilities of comparison
between countries are limited by the fact that there are very few in-depth
social–historical studies on the second half of the twentieth century,[28] and
that two of them concern cases, namely Egypt and Saudi Arabia, that are
characterised by an exceptionally high level of integration of the ulama
into state institutions.

What precedes constitutes an incised outline of this book. The argu-
ment to be developed revolves around the thesis developed above – that
is, the fact that the resources of tradition allowed the Syrian ulama to
overcome the challenges of social change and Ba'thist authoritarianism.
Whereas previous works on the modern ulama have stressed that they
were able to take advantage of the Islamic revival that started in the
1970s, I push the argument further by asserting that in Syria at least,
'traditional' religious leaders have in fact *pioneered* that movement. The
book is also a monograph that provides an overall picture of the trans-
formations of the learned religious elite in twentieth- and early twenty-
first-century Syria. It therefore explores its history, social basis, structures
and organisations, daily social practices, and doctrinal controversies (in
particular between the traditionalist and Salafi trends), without forget-
ting, of course, their relations with the economic and political–military
elites.

DEFINITION OF THE TOPIC

From a historical point of view, the status of Sunni 'alim has always been
acquired through a process of reputation building rather than through
institutional arrangements: since there is no Muslim equivalent of
Christian ordination, the right to wear the white turban – the symbol of

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[26] For a rare example of an analysis of modern practices of writing and publication related
to the Islamic scholarly heritage, see Zaman, *The Ulama*, 38–59.
[27] See for instance, among the growing literature on the Salafi trend, Bernard Rougier (ed.),
Qu'est-ce que le salafisme? (Paris: PUF, 2008); Roel Meijer (ed.), *Global Salafism: Islam's
New Religious Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).
[28] The main exceptions are the books of Feillard, Zeghal, and Mouline. Zaman is mostly
concerned with discourses and political behaviour.

religious knowledge – depends on the informal assent of elder scholars and followers.

In modern times, the boundary that separates the ulama from the rest of society has undergone a dual process of clarification and confusion: clarification, because the state has tried to delineate the class of Muslim clergy through legal and administrative devices;[29] confusion, because the modernisation of education entailed the emergence of new, secularly trained literate elites claiming religious authority in the name of the Sunni Islamic ideal according to which there should be no clergy in Islam.

However, I will show in this book that in Syria at least, contemporary changes have had relatively few consequences for the definition of the status of 'alim. In the twenty-first century, what distinguishes the latter from other believers is not a mere difference in degree of religious expertise, but rather a difference in kind: as Muhammad Qasim Zaman puts it, 'it is a combination of their intellectual *formation*, their *vocation*, and, crucially, their *orientation* viz., a certain sense of continuity with the Islamic tradition, that defines the ulama as ulama'.[30] Evidence of this includes the fact that books from the 'heritage' (*turath*) remain the basis of their training, and the critical editions of these books (*tahqiq*) are nowadays the subject of numerous doctoral dissertations, when they do not become full-fledged professional specialisations in themselves.

It is from the same point of view that we must understand the Muslim scholars' frequent mention of the hadith that states: 'the ulama are the heirs of the prophets (*warthat al-anbiya'*)'. For instance, on the occasion of a meeting convened by the Ministry of Awqaf (religious endowments) in honour of the Sheikh of the Umayyad Mosque, 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Halabi (1925–2012),[31] Sheikh Husam al-Din al-Farfur (b. 1951), one of al-Halabi's disciples, was suddenly racked with sobs during his speech:

To present our sheikh, I will say only one thing: look at this Muhammadian face! Look at this Muhammadian face! Look at the faces of the people of knowledge, these heirs of the prophets, and you will know who they are! … When I look at our sheikhs here, I feel like I am in the midst of the remains of our pious ancestors [*baqiyat al-salaf*].[32]

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[29] For the example of Iran, see Arang Keshavarzian, 'Turban or Hat, Seminarian or Soldier: State Building and Clergy Building in Reza Shah's Iran', *Journal of Church and State* 45, no. 1 (2003), 81–112.

[30] Zaman, *The Ulama*, 10.

[31] 'Sheikh of the Umayyad Mosque' is an informal title that is given to the scholar who teaches after the dawn prayer under the 'Eagle's Cupola' (*qubbat al-nasr*).

[32] Observation by the author, Umayyad Mosque, Damascus, 14 April 2008.