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978-1-107-02641-4 - Religion and State in Syria: The Sunni Ulama from Coup to Revolution

Thomas Pierret

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Religion and State in Syria

While Syria has been dominated since the 1960s by a determinedly secular regime, the uprising that began there in 2011 has raised many questions about the role of Islam in the country's politics. This book, which is based on the author's extensive fieldwork in Syria's mosques and schools and on interviews with local Muslim scholars, is the first comprehensive study of the country's little-known religious scene and its most influential actors, the ulama. It demonstrates that with the eradication of the Muslim Brothers after the failed insurrection of 1982, Sunni men of religion became the only voice of the Islamic trend in the country. Through educational programmes, the establishment of charitable foundations, and their deft handling of tribal and merchant networks, they took advantage of popular disaffection with secular ideologies to increase their influence over society. In recent years, with the Islamic resurgence, the Alawi-dominated Ba'athist regime was compelled to bring the clergy into the political fold. This ambiguous relationship was exposed in 2011 by the division of the Sunni clergy among regime supporters, bystanders, and opponents. This book affords an entirely new perspective on Syrian society as it stands at the crossroads of political and social fragmentation.

Thomas Pierret is a Lecturer in Contemporary Islam at the University of Edinburgh. He has edited two volumes on contemporary Islam and published numerous journal articles, book sections, and entries for the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Since the beginning of the Syrian uprising in 2011, he has been featured extensively in media such as the *New York Times*, *Foreign Policy*, *Le Monde*, the BBC, France 24, Al Jazeera English, and AFP.

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[More information](#)

To the martyrs of the Syrian revolution

To Mériam and Loueï

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Thomas Pierret
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	page xi
<i>A Note on Conventions</i>	xiii
Introduction	I
Prologue: Aborted Institutionalisation (1946–1979)	17
1 The Era of the ‘Founding Sheikhs’ (1920–1979)	23
2 Landscapes after the Battle (1979–2007)	64
3 (Re)defining Orthodoxy against Reformist Trends	100
4 The Turban and the Chequebook: Political Economy of the Syrian Religious Elite	144
5 Ulama and Islamists in the Political Field	163
6 Reforms and Revolution	212
Conclusion	239
<i>Bibliography</i>	245
<i>Index</i>	263

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[More information](#)

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Acknowledgements

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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A Note on Conventions

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NAMES

Arabic names are transcribed according to the preceding system unless a different transcription is dominant in English-language texts (e.g. Hussein, not Husayn; Abdullah, not ‘Abd Allah).

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