

Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu,

The House of Sciences: The First Modern University in the Muslim World,

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019, 296 p., ISBN 978-0-1900-5155-6.

Studies of educational institutions in the late Ottoman Empire in English language constitute both a robust and simultaneously underdeveloped field of analysis. Over the last 30 years, works on metropolitan, provincial, and missionary schooling, pedagogical reforms, and educational policies have demonstrated through fine grained historical analysis how the development of educational institutions was shaped by both external pressures and internal forces, all the while transforming modes of imperial governance and notions of subjectivity and citizenship alongside it. However, much of the institutional landscape of the late Ottoman and early Republican periods remain underexplored when compared to the rich literature on Ottoman and Turkish political and social history. Precisely how institutional and social-discursive forces interacted to produce many of the late Ottoman transformations familiar to most specialists in the field remains a question in need of continued consideration.

Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu's long-anticipated *The House of Sciences: The First Modern University in the Muslim World* is the first English-language monograph on the formation and development of the Ottoman university, the *Darülfünun* (lit. "House of Sciences"). A culmination of more than 30 years of research and writing, İhsanoğlu's exhaustive overview of the *Darülfünun* from its founding in the Tanzimat period in the middle of the nineteenth century to its pre-Republican transformations in the early twentieth traces the history of the modern research university as an idea through its successes and failures as an institution and as a site for various practices of knowledge production, dissemination, and legitimation in the late Ottoman Empire. It takes important steps towards rectifying a significant gap in English-language scholarship on Ottoman higher education beyond the *medrese* [ar. *madrassa*] by demonstrating how the history of the Ottoman university is simultaneously the history of changing Ottoman conceptions and practices of religious, political and social reform. In İhsanoğlu's work, the late Ottoman university emerges as a space for the articulation of contending imperial anxieties about what "modernization" (and perhaps modernity) meant to Ottoman statesmen and intellectuals during the transformation from an imperial world order structured by discourses of civilization, science, and progress to one premised on the actualization of a new practices of governance and organization based on ideas of ethnicity, race, and national-belonging—that is, the modern nation-state.

The House of Sciences contains an introduction, three main parts, and an “analytical overview” in lieu of a conclusion. A useful appendix provides an “institutional topography of the *Darülfünun*” via a succinct overview of the various faculties and institutes affiliated with the school. More than a cultural history, *The House of Sciences* provides a detailed institutional genealogy of the *Darülfünun* drawn from wide-ranging primary sources describing everything from practical considerations about hiring and curricula to theoretical concerns regarding the meaning and place of scientific inquiry and the role of theology (*ilahiyat*) within the university as an emergent social scientific discipline, or *Religionswissenschaft*.

The introduction briefly introduces the reader to the emergence of modern university in Europe as well as the “diffusion” of the university beyond the *loci classici* of Western European institutions of higher education in France, Germany, and England. İhsanoğlu attends to the emergence of the university form in North America, British India, and Japan as well as in Ottoman İstanbul, Syria, and Lebanon. Much to his credit, he does not speak of wholly imported models to be imitated (although he indicates that some did think in precisely such terms), rather he focuses his attention on historical precedents, generative developments, and socially-located institutional conditions, all the while recognizing that many intellectuals and bureaucrats felt as though they were conscripted into a process of colonial modernization that new institutions might have the power to ameliorate or mediate. In this understanding, the *Darülfünun* is not a European university clothed in Ottoman culture and symbols, but rather a novel institution that cannot be reduced to German, French, or British origins (no matter how influential Humboldt or the French *grande écoles* might have been). But neither was the *Darülfünun* a continuation of the *medrese* system. Indeed, as İhsanoğlu shows, the *Darülfünun* was a departure from the systems of education, both rudimentary and advanced, that existed in Ottoman lands prior to the mid-19th century. This is one of İhsanoğlu’s more interesting observations, demonstrating how Ottoman statesmen sought to integrate the *Darülfünun* into a variegated educational environment that included numerous stakeholders ranging from religious scholars in the office of *Şeyhülislam* to modernizing reformers working in Ottoman state bureaucracies (some of whom also belonged to the religious scholarly apparatus).

Part One, “Genesis, Development, and Closure of the *Darülfünun*” outlines the various attempts at creating, institutionalizing, and operating the *Darülfünun* from its inception in the 1840s to its closure in the first decade of the Turkish Republic in 1933, when it was dissolved and reconstituted as İstanbul University.

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This work builds on İhsanoğlu's previous research published in several articles in the academic journal *Belleten* as well as his encyclopedic two-volume work, *Darülfünun: Osmanlı'da Kültürel Modernleşmenin Odağı* [The Darülfünun: A Center of Cultural Modernization in the Ottoman Empire]. By carefully documenting the various stages the *Darülfünun* underwent as an advanced institute giving public lectures to a modern research university divided into departments of law, medicine, literature, science, and divinity with their own faculties, budgets, and courses of study, İhsanoğlu paints a picture of struggle and contestation over the meaning of education, pedagogy, and science.

Parts Two and Three address the institutionalization of new concepts and pedagogical norms within the İstanbul *Darülfünun* and its wider legacy in both the Ottoman provinces and in Qajar Iran and Afghanistan. These sections will be of interest to those studying the substantive changes which occurred in scientific terminology within Ottoman educational institutions as well those interested in how such transformations affected regional developments outside the imperial center.

The House of Sciences is a most welcome contribution to late Ottoman and early Republican intellectual history. No doubt, it will serve as a foundational English-language reference for scholars and students interested in the development and circulation of the global university and its authoritative discourses. Yet, what remains unclear in *The House of Sciences* are the particular characteristics and revolutionary reformulations which occurred through the institutionalization of disciplines and faculties within the *Darülfünun*. Precisely how the development and structure of the modern research university inaugurated an epistemic transformation impacting various traditions of inquiry such as law (*hukuk*) and theology (*ilahiyat*) needs more careful consideration. For example, the *Darülfünun* Faculty of Divinity underwent multiple iterations and eventually came under the control of modernists, who, after 1924, sought to remake Islamic theology into a modern social science akin to the sociology of religion. Such acts of conceptual translation displaced prior traditions of legal and theological reasoning by marshalling the university as a tool for religious reform at a moment of great social and political change. However, the strength of *The House of Sciences* lies in that it invites further research at the nexus of intellectual and institutional reforms at the end of empire by illuminating precisely how the modern university became so natural and essential for the production and legitimation of nearly all forms of knowledge in the modern world.

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