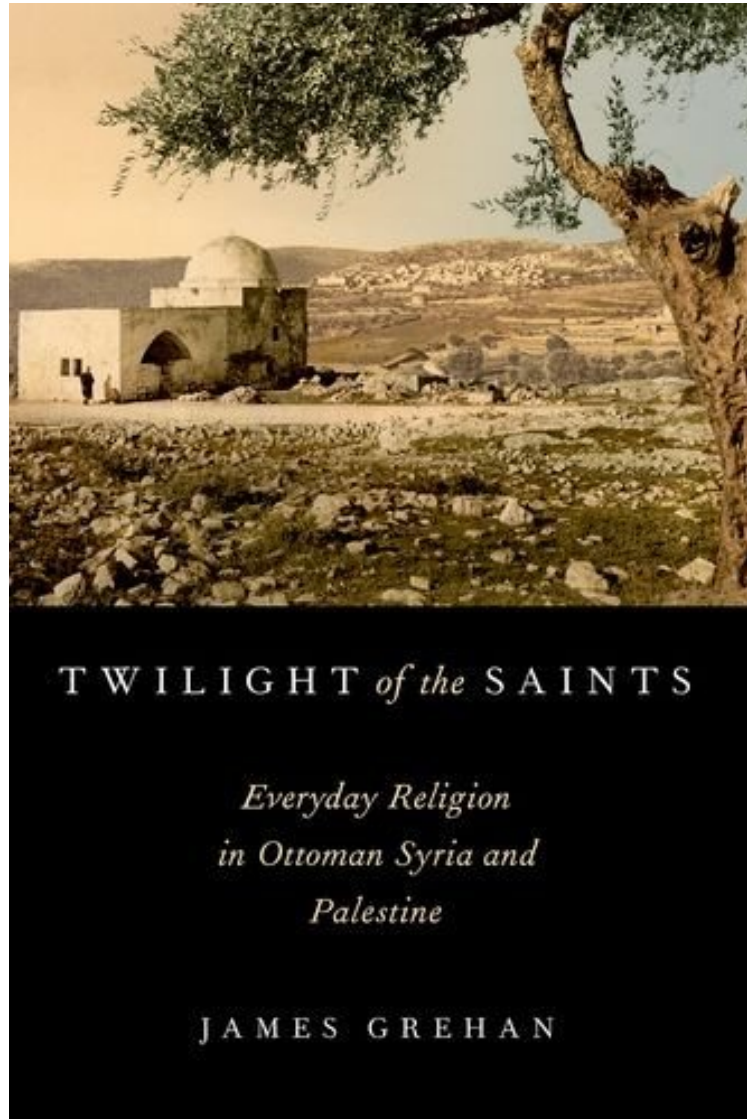


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# Twilight of the Saints: Everyday Religion in Ottoman Syria and Palestine

*James Grehan*

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**James Grehan : Twilight of the Saints: Everyday Religion in Ottoman Syria and Palestine** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Twilight of the Saints: Everyday Religion in Ottoman Syria and Palestine:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. How did Islam really work "on the ground"? Read this. By MajhulA terrific piece of scholarship. I disagree with his general framework, but anyone interested in Islam in history, as it was

actually lived, must read this book. The author swamped himself in difficult and obscure 19th and early 20th-century sources and the picture he draws of Syrian Islam in the period (as well as Syrian Christianity) is really superb.

In this study of everyday religious culture in early modern Syria and Palestine, James Grehan offers a social history that looks beyond conventional ways of thinking about religion in the Middle East. The most common narratives about the region introduce us to the separate traditions of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, highlighting how each one has created its own distinctive traditions and communities. *Twilight of the Saints* offers a reinterpretation of religious and cultural history in a region which is today associated with division and violence. Exploring the religious habits of ordinary people, from the late seventeenth to the end of the nineteenth century, when the region was part of the Ottoman Empire, Grehan shows that members of different religious groups participated in a common, overarching religious culture that was still visible at the beginning of the twentieth century. Most evident in the countryside, though present everywhere, this religious mainstream thrived in a society in which few people had access to formal religious teachings. This older, folk religious culture was steeped in notions and rituals that the modern world, with its mainly theological conception of religion, has utterly repudiated. Indeed, the people of Syria and Palestine today would hardly recognize religion as it was experienced in the not-so-distant past. Only by uncovering this lost lived religion, argues Grehan, can we appreciate the largely unacknowledged revolution in religion that has taken place in the region over the last century.

"Grehan's writing is clear and his words well selected. One of the most refreshing aspects of this work is the methodology he uses, a combination of ethnography and social history, to read the land and the people who interact with it...Grehan's *Twilight of the Saints* skillfully illustrates quotidian religious practice before modernity and presents the faith-based and social anxieties brought about by the gradual modernizing and restructuring of the education systems in the Ottoman Empire, which led to a general disenchantment and a rationalist turn to text. In describing this before-and-after picture, Grehan profoundly displays the danger in projecting today's religious and faith practices backward in time, erasing the world of spirits, saints, and syncretism, or relegating it to a folkloric past."--*The Journal of Religion* "Deeply engaging and delightful."--H-Net "Grehan provides new and important insights into religious faith and practice in Ottoman Syria and Palestine, but more broadly, his utilization of the concept of agrarian religion is a major contribution to understanding pre-modern religion. This book should be of help to anyone interested in the world history of religion." --John Voll, Professor Emeritus of Islamic History, Georgetown University "Too often, the religious attitudes of pre-modern societies such as those of Syria and Palestine during the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries are interpreted through the prism of modern conceptions of religion. In a long-overdue intervention, Grehan demonstrates that these views warp our understanding of their history, and project our modern conflicts over religion onto the past in misleading ways. It will be an essential reader for decades to come." --John Curry, author of *The Transformation of Muslim Mystical Thought: The Rise of the Halveti Order 1350-1650* (2010) "Grehan's book is a pioneering study of folk religion in the Middle East on the eve of modernity. Looking for evidence 'on the ground' rather than in the texts of ulama or Islamic modernists, this richly documented historical ethnography of Syria and Palestine charts a world of saints and tombs, caves, and trees, genies and rites of blood which was shared by Muslims, Christians, and Jews of all walks of life." --Itzhak Weismann, author of *Taste of Modernity: Sufism, Salafiyya and Arabism in Late Ottoman Damascus* "Grehan provides an important corrective to earlier scholarly biases, such as describing folk customs in terms of their deviance from textual norms, and he recognizes that urban elites repeatedly joined in supposedly rural practices, whether venerating saints or appeasing ghosts. The author's careful appraisal of the evidence demonstrates that there is less of a gap between countryside and cityscape as much as there is a gulf between premodern and modern ways of enacting religion. A major benefit comes from how Grehan reads Muslim, Jewish, and Christian sources all together, emphasizing shared practices and common presumptions." --CHOICE About the Author James Grehan is Associate Professor of history at Portland State University. He received his doctoral degree in history from the University of Texas at Austin. He currently lives in Portland with his wife and son.