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Non-Sunni Muslims in the Late Ottoman Empire: State and Missionary Perceptions of the Alawis presents a unique and in-depth analysis of the position of the Alawi community within the socio-political and religious landscape of the late Ottoman Empire. The originality of the research lies in its use of both Ottoman and missionary sources, which are scarce and often under-utilised in Alawi studies. By providing a comprehensive overview of Alawi history and beliefs from these two perspectives, the author successfully fills a significant gap in the existing literature.

Often shrouded in mystery and misunderstanding, the Alawis have long been the subject of intrigue and scholarly neglect. This book seeks to rectify this by exploring the complex dynamics between the Alawis, the Ottoman state and Protestant missionaries. The author's approach highlights the complex interplay of religious, political and social factors that have shaped Alawi identity and its interactions with wider imperial and colonial forces.

The book begins by reviewing the state of research on the Alawis, establishing their historical context and distinguishing them from other non-Sunni groups such as the Alevis/Bektashis and the Nusayris.

The first chapter shifts the focus to the socio-economic structures of the Alawi community, exploring how their geographical isolation in mountainous regions shaped their interactions with the Ottoman state. The author examines in detail the various socio-political mechanisms employed by the Ottoman authorities, including taxation, military conscription and efforts at religious integration. These discussions illustrate the oscillation between coercion and accommodation in the empire's treatment of religious minorities.

Moreover, it outlines the origins of Nusayrism, founded by Muhammad ibn Nusayr in the 9th century. Initially rejected by Hasan al-‘Askari, the eleventh Imam, Nusayrism developed as a ‘ghulat’ (extreme) Shia sect in Iraq and Syria. Al-Khasibi played a crucial role in the spread of the sect in the 10th century, establishing its doctrines.

Despite internal conflicts and external pressures, such as the condemnation of Ibn Taymiyya in the 14th century, the Nusayris maintained their practices, especially in the mountainous regions. The Tanzimat reforms of the 19th century aimed to integrate various groups into the Ottoman legal system, but the Nusayris continued to resist taxation and military conscription, often finding ways around Ottoman authority. The reforms eventually gave them a more secure legal status, thanks to European influence and missionary activity.

After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the French granted the Nusayris, now called Alawites, a dominant religious status in Syria, marking a significant shift from their marginalised position to political recognition. This chapter traces the socio-political journey of Nusayrism through centuries of resistance and adaptation.

The second chapter examines 19th Protestant missionary efforts to convert Alawis and other non-Sunni Muslims, presenting them as targets of Christian benevolence. It examines the missionaries' successes and failures, their cultural encounters with the Alawi community, and the resistance they encountered. Initially driven by millenarian beliefs, American missionaries shifted from proselytising to civilising, promoting American ideals around the world. In the Ottoman Empire, Protestant missionaries turned their attention to non-Sunni Muslim groups such as Alevis, Druze, and Nusayris seeing them as more amenable to conversion than Sunni Muslims. They took advantage of the Tanzimat reforms of 1839, which granted legal recognition and certain rights to various religious communities, including Protestants. The chapter also looks at David Metheny's missions among the Nusayris, who were seen as isolated and degraded, which met with Ottoman opposition, notably in the case of Telgie Ibrahim, leading to diplomatic tensions over religious freedom and missionary activity.

The third chapter focuses on the Ottoman policy of 'correction of beliefs,' first implemented by Mahmud II and later intensified under Abdülhamid II. Mahmud II targeted groups such as the Bektashis by associating them with the Janissaries, leading to their persecution and forced conversion. The 'correction of beliefs' developed as a state policy aimed at integrating heterodox Muslim communities, such as the Alevis and Druze, into Sunni orthodoxy. Under Abdülhamid II, this policy became part of a broader civilising mission, with efforts to educate and convert these groups through state-sponsored programmes. The chapter examines how these measures were enforced, the role of religious officials, and the varying degrees of success and resistance encountered. It highlights the imperial aim of using Islam as a tool for social and political cohesion, while addressing the complex interactions between the state and different religious communities.

The fourth and final chapter examines the complex socio-political dynamics and changing fortunes of the Nusayri community during the transformative Young Turk era. It examines the initial euphoria of various ethnic and religious groups, including the Nusayris, following the 1908 revolution. However, it highlights the subsequent disillusionment as the promised freedoms failed to materialise, culminating in local and central tensions. The chapter also explores the enthusiastic but ultimately challenging efforts of Protestant missionaries who, despite widespread resistance and socio-political obstacles, found limited but significant acceptance among the Nusayris. It illustrates the nuanced interaction between revolutionary aspirations, religious outreach and the complex realities faced by the Nusayris in an era of disturbance and reform.

A notable strength of the book lies in its balanced approach, which employs a range of primary sources to offer a nuanced perspective on the Alawite experience. The incorporation of rare archival material, such as missionary reports and Ottoman documents, contributes to the book's credibility and depth. By situating the Alawis within the broader context of Ottoman policy towards heterodox groups, the author illuminates the complexities of religious identity and state control during this period.

The book's critical analysis of the motivations behind Ottoman and missionary actions is noteworthy. The author contextualises Ottoman policy within the empire's broader attempts at centralisation and modernisation, particularly during the Tanzimat reforms. The period of reform and its impact on religious minorities, including the Alawites, is skilfully handled, providing the reader with a clear understanding of the delicate balance the Ottoman state sought to maintain between religious orthodoxy and administrative pragmatism.

The author's treatment of missionary encounters is particularly illuminating, presenting them not just as religious endeavours but as cultural and political enterprises that often clashed with local traditions and state interests. The nuanced portrayal of these encounters underlines the complexity of religious conversion and the resistance it often engendered. The narrative effectively conveys the challenges faced by the missionaries and the agency of the Alawis in coping with these pressures.

Overall, *Non-Sunni Muslims in the Late Ottoman Empire* makes a significant contribution to the study of the status of these groups in the Ottoman Empire and the state's treatment of religious minorities. Its meticulous research and comprehensive approach provide valuable insights into the interplay between state power, religious identity and missionary influence. The book is an essential resource for scholars interested in the dynamics of the Ottoman Empire and the socio-religious history of the Alawites.

It is a commendable piece of scholarship that invites further research and discussion: The depth of the book and the author's analytical rigour make it a valuable addition to the existing literature on the subject. By uncovering the layers of historical interaction and examining the Alawis' responses to external pressures, the author not only enriches our understanding of this community, but also provides a template for the study of other marginalised groups in complex imperial contexts.