

here again Fahmy is well served by his pioneering use of oral/aural sources, since the guardians of high culture and language were mostly indifferent to the colloquial character of new media, albeit sometimes outraged by its alleged impact on morals.

While sometimes overstating the “counterhegemonic” nature of popular culture, *Ordinary Egyptians* offers a stimulating and valuable re-examination of the formative decades of Egyptian nationalism. The acknowledged utility of colloquial media in Egypt’s 2011 uprising strengthens the plausibility of the book’s central thesis. The conclusion suggests, with justice, that studies of nationalism elsewhere, particularly in the Arab world, would stand to gain from the adoption of similar methods and sources.

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NADER SOHRABI. *Revolution and Constitutionalism in the Ottoman Empire and Iran*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 2011. Pp. viii, 447. \$95.00.

This is a meticulously researched study on how and why constitutional revolutions first occurred in the Middle East. Moving beyond the simplistic cultural diffusion model that silences the agency of local actors, Nader Sohrabi develops a multilevel explanation ranging from the global to the regional and then to the local. He extensively employs the rich Ottoman imperial archives to examine the 1908 Young Turk revolution and then tests his theoretical model on the less successful 1906 Iranian revolution. Sohrabi contends that even though the global context provides the repertoire and the regional context informs the narrative, the shape that a particular revolution takes relies almost exclusively on the local context—namely on the inherent elements of the indigenous social structure. In short, Ottoman modernizing reforms generated a middle class that streamlined the army and bureaucracy, which in turn sustained constitutionalism; since no such middle class emerged in Iran, constitutionalism was doomed in the long run.

What Sohrabi has undertaken is very original in three aspects. First, he historicizes revolutions by considering contemporaneous ideologies as the chief organizing principle. Second, he approaches the 1908 Young Turk and 1906 Iranian revolutions not chronologically, but as comparative cases in relation to how each one negotiated ideologies. And third, he simultaneously engages the insights provided by the social sciences, history, and area studies on the one side and global, regional, and local level analyses on the other. As such, the theoretical approach Sohrabi takes is Weberian: he locates the origins and dynamic of social change in ideas rather than material conditions. The amount of archival analysis is breathtaking; Sohrabi relies heavily on original archival documents and contemporaneous periodicals to recreate the local conditions in the Ottoman Empire and Iran. The result is a first-rate study that scholars

working on the Middle East in general and those studying the Ottoman Empire, Turkey, and Iran in particular will use as a reference book for years to come.

The lengthy book is organized into seven chapters, with the first five articulating the Ottoman Empire during the 1908 constitutional moment, and the other two focusing comparatively on Iran during its 1906 moment. It is evident that such chronology is predicated on the origins and course of constitutionalism. In the Ottoman Empire, the systematic institutional reforms created modern cadres that not only generated but also sustained the elements of constitutionalism until the end of the empire and into the Turkish Republic. Yet in Iran, the constitutional revolution was almost accidental, appearing at a particular historical juncture without the necessary cadres there to sustain it at the expense of the monarchy. Hence, the course of events in the Ottoman case provides the elements of revolutionary success against which the earlier Iranian outcome is then analyzed.

Sohrabi concludes the book by discussing first the affinities of the Iranian and Ottoman constitutional revolutions at the global level: the shared global masterframe instigated radical reforms that in turn generated counterrevolutions in both empires. At the regional level, the intelligentsia in both empires likewise invented a constitutional tradition for Islam, regarding it as a panacea for state weakness. Locally, however, differences in the social structures ultimately determined the different outcomes. In Iran, religion and kingship interacted with constitutionalism, but the notion of monarchical justice remained relevant. In the Ottoman Empire, constitutionalism came to serve as shorthand for the equality of all Ottoman elements, an ideological development lacking in Iran. In the end, the generation of the Ottoman middle class sustained constitutionalism; whereas its lack in Iran curtailed constitutionalism.

It is hard to take issue with a meticulously crafted and executed analysis based on such rich archival documentation. Indeed, once the theoretical framework set by Sohrabi is accepted as the starting point, the analysis works out beautifully, highlighting very significant similarities and differences between the rarely compared Ottoman and Iranian cases. In the Turkish case, however, Sohrabi’s narrative appears too closely aligned with that of the official Ottoman state, ultimately identifying the constitutional revolution with the Sunni Muslim middle class that dominated not only the end of empire but also the Turkish Republic. As such, not enough attention is paid to those who were gradually marginalized over the same course of time, namely non-Muslim minorities, the Kurds, or the religious clergy. Hence Sohrabi’s narrative privileges ideas in general and Western revolutionary ideas in particular, and that privileging in turn directs our attention to the middle class present in the emerging state-controlled public sphere. But then again, this points to a future research project, one that would not have emerged had it not

been for this excellent initial study into historical change by Sohrabi.

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NOGA EFRATI. *Women in Iraq: Past Meets Present*. New York: Columbia University Press. 2012. Pp. xviii, 236. Cloth \$45.00, e-book \$35.99.

Noga Efrati's study of the women's movement in Iraq under the British Mandate and the monarchy during the first half of the twentieth century focuses on an important facet of Iraqi modern history. She places the struggle of Iraqi women for political equality and the amelioration of their position in the areas of personal status and family law in the context of Iraqi political history and illustrates the complexities of that struggle due to the interconnection of politics, religion, and culture.

That women first voted in Iraqi elections only in 1980 under Saddam Hussein's authoritarian Ba'ath regime is ironic. First occupying then awarded Iraq as a League of Nations Mandate after World War I, the British established a constitutional monarchy there but were determined to rule the country "on the cheap," in essence ensuring loyalty to the state by outsourcing local authority to tribal leaders. But, by giving such leaders authority to settle local disputes according to methods and customs that were not necessarily Islamic, the British essentially revived a tribal system that was becoming increasingly moribund by the end of the Ottoman Empire.

For women, this resulted in a sacrifice of their well-being. The laws the British introduced, notably the Tribal Criminal and Civil Disputes Regulation (TC-CDR) and the Exposition of Family Law, transformed a vast and complex literature of custom in the first instance and, in the second, an extreme view of Islamic Shari'a into a modern legal code that relegated women to second-class status. The British also left in place and inserted into the constitution the Ottoman practice of delegating family law to the religious authority. Under the Mandate and throughout the monarchy, not only were women denied the right to vote, but harsh tribal codes and an extreme interpretation of Islamic practice legally enshrined the definition of women as property controlled by male kin in areas of child marriage, inheritance, and honor disputes.

Many Iraqis opposed British policy from the outset, including women, urban intellectuals, members of the newly emergent Iraqi middle class, and even some tribal sheikhs. Efrati's important contribution to our understanding of modern Iraqi history is her analysis of the struggle for women's rights that took place before the revolution of 1958 and not solely after the fall of the monarchy. She demonstrates how, through the 1930s and 1940s, in the press and politically, Iraqi women and their supporters fought unsuccessfully to change laws that approved of child marriage and the personal status code that relegated women solely to the home. After

World War II during the brief interlude of political liberalism, the struggle gained steam as the women's movement expanded, was strengthened and institutionalized, only to split into national and universal approaches pitting national liberation against women's rights.

In the 1950s, the national focus on modernization sidelined the women's suffrage issue when the government created linkages between modernization and gender relations that complicated the struggle for equality and political participation. Women's "progress," or literacy, was linked to the question of suffrage, a connection that exacerbated gender issues because the government had to come to terms with the fact that socially assertive, politically astute women were seen as threatening to Muslim men. The government's solution to broaden the definition of home and family, so that rather than strive in the "narrow" realm of politics women would work for the common good or the care of all of Iraq's children, may have been seen to be compatible with Islam, but it did not result in the vote. Nevertheless, despite the political setbacks, the groundwork laid set the stage for the new gender discourse that emerged after the fall of the monarchy in 1958 and continued well into the second half of the twentieth century.

Based on meticulous analysis of the writings of Iraqi actors as well as on British archival materials, Efrati's book incorporates the work of individuals, parties, and institutions and integrates the competing national and universal narratives of political reform into an important history of the early period of the Iraqi women's movement.

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JONATHAN CONANT. *Staying Roman: Conquest and Identity in Africa and the Mediterranean, 439–700*. (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, Fourth Series.) New York: Cambridge University Press. 2012. Pp. xviii, 438. \$99.00.

This is an important book, one that will now be essential reading for anyone interested in the history of North Africa in the period after the Vandal conquest. Jonathan Conant answers two key questions: first, what it meant to be "Roman" in North Africa in the aftermath of the fall of the empire; and, second, how and why the region's Romanized inhabitants, and the elite in particular, maintained their Romano-African identity in the face of foreign (first Vandal, then Byzantine) rule. Conant's analysis draws on an impressively wide array of literary and epigraphic sources, as well as a prosopographical database he created that comprises nearly 2,000 people, mostly men, who lived in, or had close connections to, North Africa in the period between 439 and 700. Inevitably then, his focus is on the region's elite and, even more narrowly, on the "higher echelons of power" (p. 15). Conant is acutely, and appropriately,