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The Imamate Tradition of Oman by John C. Wilkinson

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The most important contribution of this book, particularly for scholars seriously interested in the study of Soviet fertility, is its detailed exposition of the findings of the numerous studies conducted in recent years by Soviet demographers concerning the factors affecting actual and desired fertility. A related contribution, perhaps more important to the Soviet scholar whose major interest is not in the study of fertility, is the comprehensive presentation of major data compiled from Soviet vital statistics and from the censuses of 1897, 1926, 1939, 1959, and 1970. (Unfortunately, so few data have been released from the 1979 census to date that they are almost worthless from the standpoint of studying fertility.) Finally, the very comprehensive discussion of recent Soviet pronatalist policy and the debates among Soviet demographers as to what policy ought to be should also prove very useful to all Soviet scholars whether or not their prime area of concern is the study of fertility.

What I find disconcerting about this book is the authors' failure to set forth, in other than a cursory manner, what other Western scholars have had to say about fertility in the Soviet Union. Furthermore, almost all that they do report about such work is excessively disparaging.

Ellen Jones and Fred W. Grupp state that their purpose is to test three hypotheses: the first relating modernization to natality decrease, the second relating modernization to decrease in the strength of patriarchal family values mediated by a cultural filter, and the third relating decline in patriarchal family values to fertility decrease. The term "hypothesis" implies that we have only tentative knowledge. In reality all three of these so-called hypotheses are established paradigms accepted by all demographers. Moreover, Western scholars who have previously studied Soviet fertility have indeed long since confirmed each of them. But, because the authors pay so little attention to this previous work, many readers will get the false impression that up to now Western scholars have paid no attention to the topics treated here.

Furthermore, it is very irritating to a reviewer to see his own work misunderstood. The authors report on page 92, "Our findings are difficult to reconcile with Heer's." In reality my findings were identical to theirs. However, they misread my unstandardized multiple regression coefficient to be a zero-order correlation.

Because the authors have been inattentive to the work of other Western scholars, they fail to consider the very important problem of why the desired fertility of the Islamic nationalities of Soviet Central Asia is higher than that existing in the Islamic nations outside the Soviet Union despite the fact that the level of modernization among the Soviet Islamic nationalities is so much

higher. This puzzle is at the cutting edge of the research conducted both by Western and Soviet scholars and is obviously of major importance for the future ethnic composition of the Soviet Union.

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NEAR EAST

JOHN C. WILKINSON. *The Imamate Tradition of Oman*. (Cambridge Middle East Library.) New York: Cambridge University Press. 1987. Pp. xii, 415. \$59.50.

Before becoming an Oxford don, John C. Wilkinson worked in Oman's oil industry and came to know the country intimately. Initially, he conceived this work to be merely a narrative of the recent history of southeast Arabia showing how competition between two international oil conglomerates, the British-dominated Iraq Petroleum Company group and the Arabian American Oil Company, fanned a simmering rivalry for political dominance within the region after World War II. Although this confrontation was generally labeled the "Buraimi Dispute," by the 1950s it actually centered on control over Oman. Its most violent manifestation was the discord that pitted the British-backed sultan, who ruled Oman's coast, against the Ibāḍī Imam, who prevailed in its interior and was the rather reluctant object of Saudi Arabia's support.

To Wilkinson the key to understanding these events was knowing the nature of Oman's Ibāḍī Imamate and the tribal society on which it was founded. Eventually, his uncomplicated original plan evolved into an organizationally complex, profoundly thoughtful volume that analyzes two millennia of Omani history. It expertly links the underlying geographic, ecological, and socioeconomic factors that historically have conditioned human existence in Oman to long-term intellectual, religious, and ideological movements, as well as to the contemporary political events that were Wilkinson's initial concern. Moreover, he relates all this to Omani interactions with other parts of Arabia, Iran, India, and, especially, East Africa.

The book presents the Imamate as a religious expression of Oman's tribal system. It never developed a permanent hierarchy of administrative officials, its effectiveness depended on the personal ability of the Imam, and its authority was exercised through the cooperation of major local leaders scattered across the country. As a political institution it seldom functioned as more than a "semi-state," and, for twelve hundred years, a legitimate government in Oman was perceived as

one in which the Imam was not a law giver but a law enforcer whose actions were guided by the major religious leaders who interpreted Islamic law according to Ibāḍī tradition. Wilkinson sees Oman's history until the 1950s as a cyclical succession of attempts to realize this ideal in which any attempts to centralize authority always stimulated a centrifugal reaction. Most recently, the cycle was exemplified by the Ibāḍī *nahda* (renaissance) of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which eventually was overwhelmed in the 1950s and 1960s. His interpretation provides plausible balance to the several sultanate-oriented explanations of modern Omani history that have appeared recently.

This is not an easy book to read—perhaps because it deals with complex concepts little understood even by specialists. Also, I have trouble accepting Wilkinson's conclusion that the "Imamate tradition" will not play a role in Oman's future. But these are quibbles. Wilkinson has combined his intimate familiarity with the hitherto little-known corpus of Omani writings and his firsthand knowledge of Oman itself with analytical skill and verve to produce a pioneering and seminal study.

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HABIB LAJJEVARDI. *Labor Unions and Autocracy in Iran*. (Contemporary Issues in the Middle East.) Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press. 1985. Pp. xviii, 328. \$29.95.

Despite its title, Habib Lajjevardi's book is a very good study not so much of the interrelationship between labor unions and autocracy but of the vital role played by foreign powers, essentially Great Britain, Russia, and, later, the United States, in the formation, rise, and fall of organized labor movements in Iran in the twentieth century. It provides ample evidence, based on British and American archival materials, for the author's argument that, while the Russian revolution "molded the character of Iran's labor movement and increased the pace in which it developed" (p. 4), Britain regarded it as a mere instrument of Soviet expansionist designs detrimental to its own interests in the region, a view the United States in turn came to share.

In eight interesting chapters Lajjevardi reveals the close collaboration that existed between Iranian trade unions, the Communist, or Tudeh, party, and the Soviet Union and documents British manipulation of the Ministry of Labor and its regulations. He depicts the period of successful

mobilization of Iranian workers by Communist-led trade unions and the gains achieved through strikes, work stoppages, and collective bargaining with employers as corresponding to periods of cooperation between the Western powers and the Soviet Union in Iran. Thus, for instance, the war period 1941–44 of Anglo-Russian alliance witnessed the reemergence of constitutional government in Iran and the formation of the Tudeh party and its affiliated Trade Union of the Workers of Iran. Though active chiefly in Tehran and Isfahan, both organizations chose to maintain law and order among the workers in Russian-occupied Azerbaijan and practiced a policy of nonintervention in British-occupied Khuzistan. The years 1944–46 were a period of confrontation as the tide of war receded and the leftist-dominated labor movement, encountering aggressive hostility on the part of wealthy employers, shifted from a reformist to a militant stance. Thus, independent trade unions were brought together in a confederation, the Central United Council of the Trade Union of Workers and Toilers of Iran (CUC).

The confrontation between the CUC and the state involved not only labor disputes but also political issues. Lajjevardi shows how, in response to the central government's rejection of the Russian request for oil concessions in the northern province, the Tudeh party and the CUC staged mass demonstrations and strikes in most major industrial cities in the fall of 1944. Tehran's reaction was, more often than not, dictated by international political considerations. In spring 1946, while Britain was already withdrawing its troops from the south and pressing for Russian evacuation from the north, Prime Minister Ahmad Qavam adopted conciliatory gestures toward the Tudeh party and the CUC. A comprehensive labor law was introduced for the first time in Iran, recognizing in principle the collective bargaining power of the unions and redressing some of labor's grievances. Simultaneously, however, and on British advice, a newly formed Ministry of Labor set up new regulations to ensure government control over the unions. Conversely, following the Russian evacuation of Azerbaijan, and when British and American representatives in the region increasingly viewed the trade unions as Soviet tools, covert and overt actions were undertaken to discredit and eventually destroy the power of the trade unions. Government-sponsored unions were allowed to emerge that made a mockery of the very idea of trade unionism.

The last two chapters and the epilogue, covering the period 1953 through the revolution of 1978–79, are less satisfactory. They are not as well documented; the far-reaching reforms of the 1960s and early 1970s are summarily introduced