

THE EDITOR'S DESK

One of the most striking and long-lasting European impressions of the empires of the Islamic East has involved presumptions of their arbitrary and despotic nature. From the times of the great Islamic Caliphs through those of the Ottoman sultans the West has looked at the Middle East as being, somehow, under the complete control of politico-religious despots ruling under the banner of Islam. In traditional Islamic society, this was far from the truth. Government in the Middle East in Islamic times was limited largely to the tasks involved in exploiting the wealth produced by the subjects through taxation, defending and expanding the state, and encouraging and defending the religion of Islam. Large areas of life, particularly the spheres of economic activity and internal social organization, were left to the subjects to organize as they wished through a series of interlocking religious, economic, and social organizations which lay, for the most part, entirely outside the scope of the state. When governments decayed and empires declined and decomposed, it was this strong permeating substructure of Middle Eastern society which survived and came to the fore to defend the mass of the people against the worst results of political disintegration and military invasion and anarchy. Even within the scope which was assumed by the various empires of Islam, the rulers were limited not only by the laws of the *Sharī'a* as well as the ever increasing body of secular legislation, but also by the sheer complexity of government, which made it impossible for the individual ruler, however despotic he might have wished to be, to achieve anything like what the West would call despotism or even autocracy.

One of the principal contributions of modernization in the Middle East starting in the nineteenth century was to provide its rulers with a kind of centralized power and means to exercise that power in a manner little dreamed of by even the most powerful of the caliphs and sultans of the past. So it was in the Ottoman empire during the reforms of the nineteenth century *Tanzimat*, with Sultan Abd ul-Hamid II and the Young Turks inheriting an apparatus of centralized power far greater than that of the greatest Ottoman sultans, Mohammad the Conqueror and Süleyman the Magnificent. And so also in Iran, where the Qajars were able to build a kind of despotic absolute power that even the greatest of Safavids was never able to achieve. It is this development which is the subject of 'Oriental Despotism: The Case of Qajar Iran', by Ervand Abrahamian, of Baruch College, City University of New York.

In our other contributions, Hafez F. Farmayan, of the University of Texas, Austin, supplements Dr Abrahamian's essay with a presentation of the principal source materials available for study of Persian history during and after the Qajars, in 'Observations on Sources for the Study of Nineteenth and Twentieth

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Century Iranian History'. David G. Edens, of the University of Connecticut, Storrs, Connecticut, applies the theories of revolution developed by the great Harvard historian, Crane Brinton, to analyzing the Saudi revolution in Arabia; and turning to the processes of modernization in the Ottoman empire and modern Turkey, Edward C. Clark, of the University of Texas, Austin, discusses industrial modernization, while M. T. Ozelli, of Fordham University, describes 'The Evolution of the Formal Educational System and its Relation to Economic Growth Policies in the First Turkish Republic'. Finally, Alan S. Kaye, of California State University at Fullerton, discusses Arabic phonology as part of his review of a recent work on the subject of Daud Abdo.

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