

TOBY MATTHIESEN. *The Other Saudis: Shiism, Dissent and Sectarianism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015). Pp. 292. \$29.99 paper. ISBN 9781107618237.

This book by Toby Matthiesen, derived from a Ph.D. he defended at London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in 2011, lies at the crossroads of history and social sciences. It mostly covers a historical period from the late nineteenth century to the present, with a clear focus on the history of Shi'i Islamist movements. The book's strength is its ability to provide a wealth of details thanks to the gathering of very diverse sources. Beyond the classic British and American diplomatic records and the clerical dictionaries focusing on the lives of important Shi'i scholars, which are typically used by historians of Shi'ism, the sources include the local historiography in Arabic, private archives of important local actors, publications by the Saudi Shi'i Islamic movements and also sixty in-depth interviews with Saudi Shi'i activists. Many of these sources were collected during the several field trips to Saudi Arabia that Matthiesen took between 2007 and 2013 and have never been examined before.

The Other Saudis fills a gap in the scholarship in several ways. First, it provides fulsome details on several aspects of the history of Saudi Shi'as of which we only had a partial view. Second, building on previous scholarship on sectarianism and ethnicity in the Middle East and beyond, it poses important social sciences research questions about the working of sectarianism in a context where this phenomenon is not just "about political economy or identity politics [but] also about religious beliefs per se" (8) since Wahhabism, which can be described as the legitimizing ideology of the Saudi state, regards the Shi'as as deviants who need to be put back on the right track of pure Islam.

Like previous scholarship on Saudi Shi'as, Matthiesen's book shows that despite this difficult religious division the relations between the Saudi ruling elites and their Shi'i citizens have been based on pragmatism rather than on any kind of project to "Wahhabize" the Shi'as. What the book shows in detail is the way the relations were crafted through a quite classic, indirect rule approach. Actually, *The Other Saudis* can be read as a sociological history of the transformation of Shi'i intermediaries with the Saudi state. Indeed, building on Albert Hourani's work on the politics of notables under Ottoman rule, it shows the importance of the Shi'i notables – clerics, merchants and landowners – in the Kingdom's Eastern province where most of the Shi'a population resides and where its oil

reserves are concentrated, beginning right after the region's conquest in 1913 and at the inception of the Saudi state.

In Chapter One, the author insists that the issue of the Shi'i religious courts, that is of whether the Saudi Shi'as could retain their own personal status institutions based on the *ja'fari fiqh* (school of jurisprudence followed by the majority of Shi'a groups) and hence avoid legal "Wahhabization," became "an early cornerstone of Shia identity politics" (65). The choice by Al Sa'ud to grant the Shi'as autonomy in matters of family law helped strengthen the traditional elites and, in particular, the clerics among them. Here Matthiesen offers the first comprehensive analysis of this status group: the different and rival jurisprudential commitments (*usulis* who prioritize reason in interpretation and *akhbaris* who retain a focus on ratified words and deeds of the Prophet and his Shi'i interpreters) and theological (*shaykhis*, adhering to the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad Al-Ahsa'i, d. 1826) schools important in the Eastern province; and how the clerical class underwent important changes when most of the notables refused to engage in opposition politics from the 1970s onward, opening the way to activist clerics, many of whom did not come from the old established clerical families. While they were never totally sidelined, from the 1950s onward, the notables had to deal with activists of various ideological persuasions and, from the 1970s onward, with Shi'i Islamic activists. In Chapter Two, Matthiesen underlines the importance of the incorporation of many Shi'as into ARAMCO, the oil company that the Saudi state fully controlled by 1988 (113), as a vehicle of class transformation, upward mobility, and politicization among the Shi'as.

Chapters Three through Seven deal with the history of Shi'i Islamist movements. The reader learns many unknown facts: for example, the way Saudi clerics were integrated into the transnational networks that typically tie Gulf Shi'as to the supreme religious authority – the *marja'iyya* – and the related political movements in the Iraqi cities of Najaf and Karbala. The rivalry between the Shirazi current, aggregated around the leadership of the Karbala-based *marja'* and political activist Mohammed al-Shirazi, and the Khatt al-Imam current, which originated in the Najaf-based al-Da'wa movement and maintained its alignment with the Islamic Republic of Iran after the Shirazists distanced themselves from the late 1980s onward, is fleshed out with new details. So is the shift of the Shirazists away from the revolutionary strategy and towards a reformist approach, which occurred as early as the late 1980s. The 2011 riots in the region of Qatif are also covered in detail. Altogether these chapters illuminate how the first generation of Shi'i Islamists experienced a deep transformation of their

ideology, of the way they envision the fate of the Shi'as in Saudi Arabia and of their position toward the state. As a result of these transformations, they were able to be accepted by the incumbents as the main representatives of the Shi'as as a separate segment of the Saudi society with the right to maintain its sectarian difference. They were also, however, trapped by the limitations inherent to the politics of Shi'i notables: "they tried to work within the system but could not deliver the changes they had hoped for" (214). And hence, they could not prevent the radicalization of younger generations who refused to admit that the mobilizations of the past decades only resulted in confirming the Shi'a's' right to communal difference without making any significant progress in the domain of equal social and economic opportunities. ✂

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STEPHEN McPHILIPS AND PAUL D. WORDSWORTH, EDs. *Landscapes of the Islamic World: Archaeology, History and Ethnography* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). Pp. 272. \$75.00 cloth. ISBN 9780812247640.

The publication of the book *Landscapes of the Islamic World* sheds much-needed light on the development of Islamic civilization in rural areas, which have long remained understudied compared to Islamic urban centers, despite the fact that, historically, most of the Muslim population has resided there.

As the editors of this volume emphasize, demographic growth in countries across the Middle East has led to rapid urbanization and intensive agricultural development of the land, often with little regard for the preservation of monuments – lending particular urgency to the study of landscape archaeology. In recent years, war and vandalism have further threatened archaeological sites in the Middle East, placing many of them under the category of rescue archaeology. Given this multiplicity of threats, archaeologists and historians should once again accelerate the pace of research of new monuments and comprehension and publication of the existing data.

The articles featured in this volume are divided into four parts: hydroeconomies (the efficient management of finite water resources); agriculture, pastoralism, and subsistence; landscape of commerce and