

intercession (*shifā'āt*), reliance on divine intervention (*tavakkul*), visiting and worshipping shrines (*ziyārat*), the return of prophetic figures (*raj'at*), people's imitation of learned clerics (*taqlid*), the existence of antichrist (*dajal*), the necessity for shedding tears (*geryeh*), or the belief in sense-based miracles (*mu'jizāt hassī*) (p. 68). Sangelaji argued that these practices and rituals, which were encouraged and propagated by the renowned conservative cleric Mohammad-Baqer Majlisi (1616–98), fashioned the core of what Twelver Shi'ism had come to be since the 17th century. They also detracted from the true spirit of Shi'ism which he considered to be a religion of protest rather than submission. Hence, Sangelaji believed in the necessity to revert back to interpreting “true” Shi'i Islam by way of the Qur'an as a guide. He also advocated for the application of human reasoning to the world around oneself in order to advance one's material and spiritual situation. This right, he argued, had been taken away from people by the clerical establishment who argued that “the Qur'an was incomprehensible to ordinary people” (p. 79). The traditional clerics argued as well that only the Prophet and infallible imams could read and interpret the Qur'an in a proper way. In their absence, it was the clerics who could discharge that task in however imperfect a way. Sangelaji argued that if human intellect and independent thought (*ra'i*) were not applied to the different and unprecedented cases of our time, then Islam would be incapable of adjusting itself to modern changes. Nor did the clerics have any monopoly over independent thought and reasoning. Sangelaji saw that ordinary people were always reliant on their *mujtahids*, rather than themselves to interpret Qur'anic verses. His reforms were meant to contain a popular practice that perpetuated the privileged status of the clerics. One cannot help but see the similarity of this approach with that of Martin Luther who tried to reform what he saw to be the superficial aspects of his faith and remove the monopoly of power from the clergy.

Rahnema also enlightens his readers that Sangelaji challenged the validity, the importance, the authenticities, and substantial reliance on reports (hadiths) of the imams in post-Majlisi Shi'ism while underscoring the significance of the Qur'an in understanding modern Iran. Rahnema further elucidates in Chapters 7 and 8 that to perpetuate their domination and monopoly on faith, certain popular practices were encouraged by the established clerics. These included for example “sacrificing animals for ‘others’ or asking for favors, or intercession from others” (p. 125). Sangelaji's unyielding and relentless campaign for reform caused his opponents to label him a Wahhabi. Rahnema expertly examines Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhab's (1703–92) writings and ideology with those of Sangelaji and interweaves the inconsistency of the two ideologues, showing that although there are certain commonalities between the two, their approaches and understandings are vastly separate.

In conclusion, Rahnema's book is a well-argued addition to the field of Islamic, Shi'i, and Iranian studies. It is valuable to students and scholars alike who are pursuing the subject of the Iranian Revolution and the formation of its theocracy. The book will also be appreciated by those who advocate religious reform in Islam.

JOSEPH SASSOON, *Anatomy of Authoritarianism in the Arab Republics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). Pp. 325. \$94.99 cloth, \$29.99 paper. ISBN: 9781107618312

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Political scientists devoted to the study of Arab politics have long grappled with the “exceptionalism” of authoritarianism's durability, robustness, and resiliency in the Arab world, whether among republics or monarchies. Even as other world regions experienced moments of democratic transition, Arab states seemed immune to such changes. A robust literature of its own developed

to explain this theoretically challenging and empirically puzzling reality. It was assumed that the Arab Spring would overturn much of this literature only to witness either the total collapse of some states (Libya, Syria, Yemen, Iraq) or the return or reinforcement of previous authoritarian practices (Algeria, Sudan, Egypt).

One lesson derived from these experiences is never to discard your literature on authoritarianism, something that one would have been tempted to do with Joseph Sassoon's book in the immediate aftermath of the Arab Spring. Instead his book serves as a necessary primer for those trying to fathom how regimes facing multiple domestic, regional, and global challenges continue to maintain unfettered control over their societies. While more descriptive than analytical in its presentation, Sassoon convincingly identifies, via close reading of political memoirs, the full universe of factors that combine to create, enforce, and maintain political authoritarianism in the Arab republics and, by extension, the Arab monarchies since both regime types employ similar instruments of co-optation, coercion, and containment.

Sassoon has assembled over 120 memoirs from a broad range of political, military, intelligence, governmental, economic, journalistic, and literary figures, both those close to power and those in opposition, including former political prisoners, to structure an anatomy of authoritarianism in eight Arab republics—Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen.

The author groups political memoirs into six categories—specific event biographies, autobiographies, memoirs of work and public service, staged memoirs, biographies written by others, and autobiography in the third person. One cannot help but be impressed by the extraordinary diversity of memoirists Sassoon has located and interpreted, ranging from relatively obscure individuals such as the Syrian Ba'athist official Mansur al-Atrash to famed Tunisian labor leader Habib 'Achur to the controversial Algerian general Khalid Nezzar to Saddam Hussein's Iraqi ambassador to Washington Muhammad al-Mashhat to the globally recognized Egyptian feminist writer and activist Nawal al-Sa'adawi.

Using the insights derived from these diverse written sources, Sassoon identifies how the key instruments and agencies of state power were developed and deepened over decades to ensure that centralized authority remained supreme. Over five chapters the author provides granular accounts of how the ruling political party, the military, the security services, the economy, and the leadership were all mobilized on behalf of state power. While many of the general attributes associated with the *mukhabarāt* state are well known, Sassoon unearths fascinating if not shocking details of how far regimes would go to prevent autonomous civil society from asserting itself, including the widespread use of torture, creating massive security bureaucracies, monitoring the most minor of activities, and fostering an environment of fear.

The book's objective of deconstructing the authoritarian phenomenon seems somewhat compromised with its penultimate chapter devoted to the Arab Spring, whose convulsive uprisings overthrew every assumption about the "resiliency" and "robustness" of Arab authoritarian republics. Since four of the eight Arab republics (Libya, Syria, Yemen, Iraq) are either failed states or on the verge of total collapse, it seems unclear what one is to make of the "resiliency" of Arab authoritarian republics. Yet even this paradox may resolve itself by the reappearance of the same authoritarian impulse among the republics still standing.

While the author justifies excluding Arab monarchies from the category of authoritarianism on the basis of the amount of research it would involve and the size of the book that would be produced, it seems that a truly comparative and theoretically enriching analysis may have been missed by not trying to determine how authoritarianism differed between Arab monarchies and republics, particularly since none of the monarchies were overthrown as a result of the Arab Spring. Other scholars have argued, for example, that oil rents and hereditary succession have served to bind militaries to incumbent regimes thereby preventing system breakdown, with the apparent exception of oil-rich Libya whose collapse is best explained by the intervention of foreign forces.

Among Sassoon's eight authoritarian republics only Tunisia gets somewhat of a passing mark in terms of its democratic transition, although many of the prerevolutionary personalities embedded in the two previous regimes of Habib Bourguiba (Burqiba) and Zayn al-'Abidin bin 'Ali are today very much in positions of power and authority, beginning with the president himself, Béji Caïd Essebsi (Baji Qa'id al-Sibsi).

While Sassoon's study does not generate new theories on Arab authoritarianism, it does provide the kind of rich and detailed account, supported by firsthand experiences, on how the architecture of despotism is conceived, constructed, and commanded across a range of putatively different regime types that all share the same goal of holding on to power at all cost. The book reads less as cogent political analysis than as sharp-eyed storytelling communicated in lively and jargon-free prose. One cannot help but be impressed by the scope, depth, and variety of primary and secondary sources in multiple languages that the author consulted.

Probably the broader intellectual and policy take away from Sassoon's study is the degree to which political authoritarianism has endured or revived not only in the Arab republics and monarchies but throughout the world. Although autocratic power has evolved into different institutional forms and has employed diverse cooptive strategies of control, whether as competitive authoritarianism, pure despotism, one party dictatorship, illiberal democracy, or totalitarian democracy, it remains in its essence the greatest threat to liberal democracy from which no regime or political system is completely immune, whether in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe, or the United States.

KRISTIAN COATES ULRICHSEN, *Qatar and the Arab Spring* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). Pp. 256. \$54.95 cloth. ISBN: 9780190210977

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The curious rise to prominence of Qatar has remained unexplained and misunderstood for a number of years. The scholarship of the Persian Gulf tends to focus on the role of empire in the region's evolution, on the two regional hegemony (Iran and Saudi Arabia), or on discrete "nonpolitical" topics such as energy or Islam. This lacuna has been relieved by several works on Qatar (and, indeed, on the other smaller Arab Gulf states) in recent years, but none are more fluid and readable than Kristian Coates Ulrichsen's *Qatar and the Arab Spring*.

First and foremost, it is gratifying to see that Ulrichsen has not attempted to shoehorn Qatar and its politics into a generic model of some description or otherwise contort its fascinatingly personalized politics into a theoretical straitjacket. Instead, one gets the impression that he has adopted a country-first approach, looking to Qatar to assess the roots of its policies and the rationales underpinning them. Subsequently, he underpins his conclusions using rigorous but appropriate theoretical tools—the state branding and soft power literatures complement a framework based on the conception of managed multidependency—that lends the book academic heft.

Given the vibrancy and flexibility of Qatar's foreign policy, it is a testament to Ulrichsen and his scholarship that his book remains relevant two years since its publication. The epilogue leaves the reader in spring 2014, which allows Ulrichsen to include two key events: the succession of Emir Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani in June 2013 and the withdrawal of the Saudi, Bahraini, and Emirati ambassadors from Doha in March 2014. The cornerstone of the book's ability to remain relevant is its savvy grasp of the nature of policy-making in Qatar.

Ulrichsen argues that "a pragmatic acknowledgement of the changing policy-making arena" reveals that the small state enjoys an "absence of stronger countervailing political or public