

the lives of its subjects cum citizens for generations to come. New housing and education schemes, for example, came to reinforce communalism because Turkmen and Assyrians were more likely to have the resources to purchase IPC-built homes, whereas the company's Muslim and Kurdish employees were generally poorer and thus likely to take up residence in the city itself (pp. 113–14).

Ultimately, this book calls upon Iraqi studies scholars to look beyond the zero-sum framework of ethnic conflict; after all, as Bet-Shlimon reminds us, “political, social, and economic trends over the course of the twentieth century subjected every Kirkuki to profound harm in some way...” (196). The extension of state authority using (and if necessary, creating) privileged communities or classes allowed to accrue monetary and sociopolitical capital in return for loyalty, consent, or cooperation is a much more consistent feature than the saliency, legibility, and status of ethnic identities in modern Iraq. Centering analysis on political economy and the way that specific, contextual, contingent decisions by members of communal groups may have contributed to the subject or time period in question actively deconstructs constructed ethnic categories that hinder the search for solutions to short and long-term problems faced by all Kirkukis. This is not just responsible scholarship; this is the value of public-facing scholarship that holds Iraqi and American leaders accountable for perpetuating ethnic, regional, and communal categories that put all Iraqis, all of Iraq, at risk, and prevents advancement of encompassing, universal reforms.

City of Black Gold is highly recommended. Bet-Shlimon's interdisciplinary research provides clear evidence of the role of institutions—state, private, and those in-between—in the state-building process in both colonial and post-colonial settings. The book itself ably roots those developments in different eras of Ottoman, Hashemite, and Republican Iraq, highlighting what is unique while showing continuities and legacies that influence regional and communal responses to politics over time. As a work of urban and sociopolitical history, it is required reading for any scholar of modern Iraq, the oil industry in the Middle East, or the material and psychological legacies of using ethnicization as an instrument for political and economic aims. This concise, organized, and clearly-written book, which also includes new versions of maps of Kirkuk that are otherwise difficult to find, will be equally useful in the classroom at the advanced undergraduate and graduate level. In keeping with the book's attention to perception, power, and management of information and resources as a form of political power, Bet-Shlimon's insightful essay on the archives of the Iraqi Ba'ath Party, held by the National Defense University and the Hoover Institution in Washington, D.C. and Stanford, CA, respectively, should also be read by all scholars working on these and other imperial archives.

doi:10.1017/S0020743821000258

National Symbols in Modern Iran: Identity, Ethnicity, and Collective Memory. Menahem Merhav, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2019). Pp. 258. \$29.95 paper. ISBN: 9780815636663

Reviewed by Assal Rad, Department of History, University of California, Irvine, Irvine, CA, USA
(arad@uci.edu)

Despite the potency of contemporary nationalist identities, the advent of the nation-state is still young within the greater span of human history. In the 20th century, the burgeoning of nation-states, and with them the complex idea of nationhood, was central to social movements and conflicts the world over. Given its weight and consequence, it is no surprise that the study of nations and the formation of national identities has captured the attention of so many scholars. The case of Iran in the 20th century presented an especially perplexing case for adherents of a westernized model of modernity. Fundamentally tied to imperialism, this sort of Orientalist bent understood Europe and its offshoots as the models for how all new nations would develop over time. Menahem Merhav's *National*

Symbols in Modern Iran helps to elucidate why these forced notions of modernity were problematic and failed in the case of Iran with the revolution of 1979.

While the Pahlavi monarchs (1925–79) worked to develop their vision of modern Iran through advancements in infrastructure, a more centralized state, and an organized military, alongside the physical manifestations of modernity came the ideological construction of Iranian identity and nationalism through the use of carefully chosen symbols and the transmission of collective memory. Merhavy's study examines the Pahlavi account, the historical antecedents that it expanded on, and how the narrative of the state was interpreted by its opposition. Central to the author's argument is the idea that once a symbol is promoted it cannot easily be controlled by the state, "symbols, once cultivated, take on a life of their own because their content and meaning are open to both interpretation and appropriation" (p. 17). This key assertion questions the extent of state power and invites the reader to look more closely at the agency of ordinary Iranians and influence from below.

Merhavy's study puts together a coherent outline that traces the use of Iran's pre-Islamic history beginning in the late 19th century under the Qajar monarchs, how those ideas were expanded under the Pahlavi dynasty, and eventually evolved to center Iranian identity around the crown and the Shah himself. Before focusing on two central symbols cultivated by the Pahlavi dynasty, the figure of Cyrus the Great and the ruins of Persepolis, the author also provides some insights into the struggle over Iranian identity that has often been reduced to a binary of pre-Islamic versus Shi'i Iran. The author also explores change versus continuity in post-revolutionary Iran, under the Islamic Republic to provide a full arc of how these specific symbols have been transmitted over time.

Where his study stands out is in two chapters dedicated to Cyrus and Persepolis respectively, and the role of archeology and archeological digs, which were tied again to the western powers who first controlled these projects. Merhavy skillfully connects the Shah's reliance and favor for the west with his perceived illegitimacy at home, as a negative feedback loop that pushed the Shah further away from the Iranian populace. In his continued attempts to gain legitimacy, the Shah looked to western powers both for his actual position of power with the coup of 1953, and also through the discovery and propagation of ancient symbols dug out of the earth and defined by western scholars, "The context of the personality cult in Iran after 1953 is connected to the need to generate legitimacy for a regime that had recently revealed a high degree of fragility and dependence on foreign aid for its very survival" (p. 76).

In the case of Cyrus the Great, the Shah attempted to depict himself as his direct heir, yet, as Merhavy aptly points out, Cyrus was relatively unknown to Iranians until 1879 when his famed cylinder was discovered by British archeologists. Whereas poets like Ferdowsi and Hafez were recognized figures, Cyrus was not yet familiar to most Iranians or part of Iranian national consciousness. Instead of building his own image on a symbol well known to the Iranian masses, with Cyrus, the image had to be "built from scratch" (p. 74). In his examination of Persepolis, the author looks closely at the now infamous celebrations at the ancient Achaemenid capital, for what the Shah had marked year 2500 in Iran. According to Merhavy, like much of the Shah's national identity production, the event had the opposite effect, "the festivities symbolize not the high point of the regime's ability to create legitimacy for itself but rather a milestone in the Pahlavi regime's loss of legitimacy in Iran" (p. 115).

While his study is focused on the use of symbols in the Pahlavi era, Merhavy also provides a glimpse into the evolution of these symbols after the revolution of 1979. Like the Pahlavi dynasty, the Islamic Republic omits histories that are not suited to its rendition of Iran's national narrative. Despite its attempts to overlook Iran's pre-Islamic symbols, the state cannot control the meaning of those symbols for Iranian people. Unlike the Shah, Merhavy argues, the Islamic Republic has been more adaptable, evolving from an ideology of transnational Islamism to Iranianized Islam that elevates Iranian nationalism.

Examining the actions of these state actors, both the Pahlavi kings and the Islamic Republic, would benefit from a more thorough consideration of the global context. Merhavy certainly does not present the actions of the state as if they are in a vacuum, however, a deeper look at regional developments, global currents, and more primary sources from ordinary Iranians, would provide an even richer perspective, especially of views from below. Additionally, in discussing the post-revolutionary period, Merhavy mentions diaspora Iranians as another group that became influential in the debate over national symbols. As a

distinct group, it demands more than a short comment to connect this group to the relevance of the overall argument.

Finally, though Merhavy dedicates a chapter to competing historical perspectives on Iran, he focuses on only three key figures—Ali Shariati, Morteza Motahhari, and Shojaeddin Shafa—for his analysis. While these individuals certainly provide a spectrum of ideas about Iranian identity, given the importance and diversity of the market of ideas in 20th century Iran, this section could have benefitted from a larger sample of Iranian thinkers.

These small critiques aside, Merhavy provides an excellent addition to the ever-growing study of Iranian nationalism, while making a contribution to scholarship on identity and collective memory more broadly. The author's chronological and clear structure makes the book palatable for both expert and novice alike. Such a study would benefit greatly from field research in Iran, which as the author notes is not possible because of political complications. Here's to hoping the genuine pursuit of knowledge triumphs over political divides to facilitate greater learning and understanding.

doi:10.1017/S0020743821000271

Axis of Hope: Iranian Women's Rights Activism Across Borders.
Catherine Z. Sameh, (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2019).
Pp. 187. \$95.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780295746302

Reviewed by Niki Akhavan, Department of Media and Communication Studies, The Catholic University of America, Washington, DC, USA (akhavan@cua.edu)

The advent of Iran's women's right movement is usually traced to the Constitutional Revolution, and in the 115 years since, women and women's rights activists have found themselves caught in the midst of varying power struggles over the future of Iran and the region. In the literature on Iran, this is often addressed in domestic terms: for example, there is a fair amount of scholarship on how women and their bodies were at the center of Pahlavi programs of "modernizing" Iran; another body of work focuses on similar processes in the post-Revolutionary project of "Islamization." Less attention has been paid to how international politics and external dynamics have impacted movements for women's rights in Iran. Catherine Sameh's *Axis of Hope* is keenly aware of the dual pressures contemporary Iranian women's rights activists face. Sameh provides a sketch of Iranian feminist activism that is optimistic without downplaying either the domestic or international complexities. In this alone, her work makes an important contribution to the literature on the Iranian women's rights movement and to discussions of Iranian social movements more broadly.

In providing a framework that is attuned to both national and international factors and yet hopeful, Sameh's work is theoretically robust and engages a wide range of scholarly and mainstream discussions on contemporary Iran. Acknowledging feminist critiques of human rights discourses as well as the neoliberal and neocolonial projects they enable, Sameh sets out to argue that "the bottom-up practices of Iranian women's rights activists, as well as the affects and effects of their campaigns, projects, and networks, have political and epistemic significance despite (or perhaps beyond) the thorny entanglement of women's human rights praxis within structures of colonial modernity" (p.12). Sameh notes that while decolonial theory has taken past and present colonial structures to task for their gendered and racialized exercise of power, it has not been sensitive to similar exercises of hierarchical power in postcolonial settings. Sameh locates her work in this gap, downplaying neither the state and societal discrimination against women in Iran nor the neoliberal and neocolonial systems which try to instrumentalize women's movements for their own agendas. Sameh is also careful to point out that she does not intend to "stabilize the category of 'Iranian women's rights activist' by presenting the subjects of [her] book as singular or