

J.E. PETERSON, ed. *The Emergence of the Gulf States: Studies in Modern History*. London: Bloomsbury Academic Press, 2016. xvi + 352 pages, glossary, chronology, index. Cloth US\$216.00 ISBN 978-1472587602.

This book provides a state-of-the-field for all scholars and is a solid introduction to the major works and contributions that have shaped Gulf Studies in the last twenty-five years. J. E. Peterson sets it up as a series of historiographical/literature review essays. Every chapter save one has two sections. The first part sets up the narrative for the topic and the second provides a bibliographical overview.

The scope of this book is vast, but largely focuses on the period from 1800 to the present. The chapters are arranged both chronologically and thematically. It largely incorporates the work of established scholars, though the inclusion of Fahad Ahmad Bishara shows a nod towards the younger generation. Peterson's introduction promises a "fresh, broad, interpretive approach" and provides a basic outline of the book overall as well as of Gulf history and historiography, particularly post-1971 (1).

Almost every subsequent contribution reinforces a single idea: that the creation of states disrupted the politics, economics, and/or social ties in the Gulf, creating more inward-focused scholarship and political/social/economic development in the process. The scholarship and states ignore the historic ties and interactions that the Gulf had across contemporary state boundaries. This book works to remedy the omission.

Although not presented in this way, the articles are grouped thematically. D.T. Potts' contributions on pre-modern history, Michael Crawford's exploration of religion, and Hala Fattah's and Lawrence G. Potter's discussions of intra-Gulf relations all revolve around a single idea: that historically the Gulf was a region connected within itself. Persians and Arabs historically traded, fought, negotiated, and intermarried with regularity. The nation-state created disconnections politically, socially, and academically, impacting not only how people interact throughout the littoral, but also how scholars examine these interactions.

The book then goes on to examine the transnational connections between the Gulf and regions outside of it. Peterson's own contribution on European imperialism and a discussion of the Gulf's connections to the Indian Ocean and Arab World by Fahad Ahmed Bishara and Patricia Risso reinforce the idea that the Gulf impacted and was impacted by interactions beyond itself. Bishara and Risso note that these interactions via the Indian Ocean were stronger than the overland ties to the Middle East. Peterson suggests that Gulf

societies experienced different European imperial groups in different ways and that the decision to become involved in the Gulf impacted the imperial regimes as well.

A third group of the chapters addresses social and political transformations in the twentieth century. Bishara, Bernard Haykel, Steffen Hertog, Clive Holes, and James Onley discuss economic transformations in the Gulf paying particular attention to the social impact of these transformations. Dale F. Eickelman explores tribes and tribal identity in the Gulf arguing that this identity is being fixed by the states, but was historically a fluid identity category. Hala Fattah's second contribution explores the social structures more broadly in the Gulf, arguing that the Gulf was socially fluid and inclusive historically beyond the notion of tribe. Clive Holes suggests the spread of media and technology has limited the historical diversity and heterogeneity of Gulf language, culture, and identity.

In terms of political transformations, Frauke Heard-Bey and Steffen Hertog address state construction in the GCC (Heard-Bey) and the effects of oil (Hertog) to end the book. They both argue separately that the ruling families have created states that are not meritocratic, democratic, or socially homogenous, but are stable and successful nonetheless.

This work reinvigorates a tradition of comparative history that characterized the Gulf in the 1970s, putting the different states into dialogue, but does so in a historiographical way. It is not just comparing the histories, but comparing the scholarship to point out strong and weak points. This is a book that seeks to drive the field in a new direction and is a critique of the nation-centric, microhistorical scholarship of the past few decades. Further, the steadfast dedication to the transnational experience in the Gulf works to mitigate the Arab or Persian emphasis so often seen in scholarship.

The primary strength of this work is the dual nature of the chapters included. Having both the narrative and bibliographical section provides the reader with the context as well as depth of the scholarship. The inclusion of eminent scholars provides a primer for Gulf history that has been lacking for many years. The contributions are generally short and the ones that are longer, tend to be well organized. The inclusion of high-quality, color maps, along with black and white photographs and charts, provides visual interest and additional utility for scholars and students of Gulf history.

One of the largest weaknesses is the omission of a specific discussion of Ottoman, Omani, Wahhabi, or Persian imperial influence on the Gulf region. Although each of these empires is discussed tangentially, including more on these empires and their influences on the region would have reinforced the purpose of the book to push the boundaries of traditional

scholarship. The book's purpose as a reflection on the state-of-the-field, makes this an understandable gap. A second weakness is its limitations as a teaching tool. The book purposefully lacks footnotes (11). This is not a book for a discipline specific course beyond history. Though it could provide a useful background to political scientists, international relations scholars, and anthropologists, and includes contributions from these fields, it will be most useful to historians.

This could be mitigated by using this book in conjunction with David Commins' *The Gulf States: A History*, but this book's staggering price tag makes it unlikely for anyone to assign it in a course.

Despite these weaknesses, this book is a must have for any student or scholar of Gulf or Middle East Studies. It will easily provide students with a solid starting point for research. This book would pair well for scholars teaching a Gulf history course or for non-Gulf specialists looking to gain entry to Gulf Studies. ✨

DOI:[10.1017/rms.2017.6](https://doi.org/10.1017/rms.2017.6)

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DAVID SIMS. *Egypt's Desert Dreams: Development or Disaster?* Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2014. vii + 401 pages, list of illustrations, acronyms, acknowledgments, forward, notes, glossary, bibliography, index. Cloth US\$49.95 ISBN 978-977-416-668-6.

David Sims' thoroughly researched and compellingly argued *Egypt's Desert Dreams* provides an analysis of the ideological and sociopolitical conditions that have propelled a "national imperative" to develop Egypt's deserts from the mid-twentieth century into the beginning of the twenty-first. The book has three central projects, the first of which is an accounting of what desert development projects have accomplished in terms of their stated aims: agricultural production, employment, sustainable economic opportunities, and the redistribution of population. Secondly, Sims examines why success in these projects has been so elusive. Finally, he examines why there has been such a dearth of evaluation of desert ventures and why this history of limited success is so rarely discussed. In each section, Sim addresses what the implications have been, and are likely to be, of the political changes in Egypt over the last six years. This text adds to a rich and growing field of research on the function of environmental projects to legitimate and extend state power in the region (see Jones, Toby Craig. 2010. *Desert Kingdom: How Oil and Water forged*