

BOOK REVIEWS

**Revolution: Structure and Meaning in World History. Said Amir Arjomand, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019. Pp. 400. \$55.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780226026848**

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Said Arjomand has written a book on revolutions that will appeal to a wide variety of experts in the history of the Middle East. Let me emphasize “history”; only two pages address the Arab Revolutions of 2011. This book is about revolutions from 2340 BCE to 1260 CE, all of which either occurred in or affected the history of the Middle East, and particularly Iran. Arjomand’s command of this wide swathe of history is impressive, and his expertise in the history of Iran in particular is mobilized to place the events he discusses in the context of global history.

Arjomand begins with a fine survey of theories of revolution, from Aristotle to modern social science. But he rejects most of this work as far too narrow, fixed upon a small set of events of local interest. Whether it was democratic reform in Athens, or the French Revolution, these theorists adopted notions of “revolution” based on particular archetypes, and thus examined only one kind of institutional change. Arjomand instead offers a new typology of revolutions, which many will find idiosyncratic, but that he puts to good use.

Arjomand adopts the basic, widely held notion of “revolution” as a change in the core institutions of political authority brought about by a process including mass mobilization, that starts with the breakdown of, or rebellion against, existing political authorities, and ends with the reconstruction of new political institutions. He also adopts the notion that revolutions are not all of one type, but have evolved and show different characteristics depending on the context of both world-historical time and the particular types of prior regime. However, where most modern political scientists and sociologists consider such events to be “revolutions” only when they mark the overthrow of the political authority of a regime over a specific territory, Arjomand takes a much broader view. He includes events that involve the integration of diverse or fragmented polities under a new imperial regime; events that involve the restructuring and assertion of religious authority in temporal affairs; and events that involve campaigns of conquest that produced new or reorganized political structures with significantly stronger or more centralized regimes.

Arjomand identifies four types of revolutions. Three of these mainly integrate new actors into the polity, while one expands state power by replacing a weaker government with a stronger one with a new level of centralization and bureaucratic authority. The last he labels as “Tocquevillian Revolutions,” including the French and Russian Revolutions, but also the Gregorian Papal Revolution and the Abbasid Revolution. The three integrative types he labels: “Constitutive Revolutions,” which build imperial states from scattered domains (such as Sargon’s creation of an empire in Akkad by integrating diverse Mesopotamian city-states); “Aristotelian-Paretan Revolutions,” which integrate formerly excluded or marginal elites and their followers by renovating the institutions of an existing state (as with Cleisthenes’ constitutional reforms in Athens), and “Khaldunian Revolutions,” in which peripheral forces, either nomadic or guerrilla forces, overthrow and then reshape a regime to raise the role of the peripheral communities.

Aside from the colorful names, the typology is sometimes hard to follow, but is useful in showing the variety of ways in which political authority and institutions have been remodeled across history. More important and satisfying are the ten case studies of “revolutions,” or what most scholars would call cases of major world-historical changes in political structures. These start with the founding of the Akkadian Empire, then proceed to the Athenian creation of a constitutional regime, the shift from Roman Republic to Roman Empire, and then two additional events that Arjomand, alone as far as I know, considers revolutions: the consolidation of imperial authority under the Flavian emperors, and the shift to a Syrian-African dynasty with more oriental patterns of rule under the Severans. The five remaining cases are the creation of an Iranian national and imperial state under the Sasanians; the creation of the Islamic

religion and early polity under Muhammed and his direct successors; the Abbasid revolution, which created the Baghdad caliphate; the Gregorian revolution which reconstituted the Papacy as an autonomous, bureaucratic and centralized authority that contended with rulers of European states and called forth the Crusades to reconquer the Holy Lands; and Genghis Khan's creation of a pan-Eurasian Mongol Empire.

Whether or not one agrees that all these events are "revolutions," one can certainly agree that they were major historical turning points in how political and religious authority were constituted and exercised. Assembling them all in one narrative creates a volume of great sweep and numerous insights. Arjomand shows how each of these events altered local institutions, but also affected subsequent events and patterns of authority in adjacent and sometimes distant regions.

Particularly striking is how often Persian/Iranian history is shown to be crucial to wider currents of world history. Persian power recast the politics of the Middle East from Pharaonic Egypt to Alexander's Hellenistic empire; its Oriental influences increasingly shaped the nature of Imperial government in Rome; Persians were crucial to the founding and core culture of the Abbasid Caliphate; and Persia became the core western conquest of the Mongols.

This is a book of rare scope, and is exceptional in the degree to which its soaring ambition is fully supported by the depth of knowledge and creative insights of the author. Any reader will come away having learned new things, and having their imagination stretched and prior understanding of world history challenged. Arjomand has added a wonderful contribution to the small number of scholarly works that truly address world history, and his Perso-centric, as opposed to Euro-centric approach, is a startling and refreshing recasting of the three millennia from the Akkadian to the Mongolian Empires.

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## **The Apple of His Eye: Converts from Islam in the Reign of Louis IX. William Chester Jordan, Jews, Christians, and Muslims from the Ancient to the Modern World Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019. Pp. 190. \$35.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780691190112**

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Over twenty-five years ago, I encountered the crusader bishop and missionary Jacques de Vitry's account of the sack of Ayyubid Damietta. Writing to Pope Honorius III, Paris-trained crusade preachers, and Cistercians and beguines in Flanders-Brabant, Jacques described the human and material treasures he salvaged from the detritus of a once-great city. In addition to silks, precious vessels, and coin, there were Muslim prisoners reserved to be exchanged for Christian captives or sold as slaves to Christian owners, with the exception of some children, who with great labor and expense Jacques managed to commandeer. However, after baptism, more than five hundred, so he believed, crossed over to the Lord. Described in terms of the virginal martyrs of Apocalypse 14:4, it appears they perished. Other surviving youths were sent to some of Jacques' friends so that they could be raised and "imbued with sacred letters" for "the worship of God." A poignant postscript addressed to John of Nivelles mentions that his letter was accompanied by two boys snatched from the burning of Babylon (Apoc. 18:9–10) with silk cloths and other letters to be shown to the Cistercian abbot of Villers and mutual acquaintances (Huygens, 6.128, 133). Those young individuals, uprooted from their culture and religion, haunted me, but I was never able to trace their ultimate fate. William Chester Jordan, on the other hand, has been able to map out the fate of relocated individuals such as these, only a generation after Jacques de Vitry.

In his timely book, Jordan has been able to reconstruct the impetus behind Louis IX's missionary dreams and attempted acclimation of Muslim converts to French Christian culture. Only a master scholar could responsibly and believably speculate from the fragmentary and often-biased surviving evidence, but the panoramic portrait Jordan paints is a gripping one bound to appeal to audiences inhabiting a