

Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA)

Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The Early Abbasid Caliphate: A Political History* by Hugh Kennedy

Review by: Daniel Pipes

Source: *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (July 1982), pp. 94-95

Published by: Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23058176>

Accessed: 03-02-2019 03:56 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin*

Also in this first chapter, of special interest to Western students of Iran, is biographical information translated from the Persian sources, on Sheikh Hadi Najmabadi, Mirza Agha Khan Kermani, and Sheikh Ahmad Ruhi.

The second and third chapters carry further the issues related to the background of the Constitutional Movement. In chapter 2, the alliance between the religious leadership and the Westernized political activists is discussed. While believing that this kind of alliance "is virtually without parallel either in the Islamic or the non-Islamic world," the author presents some historical factors which, in her opinion, caused the Ulama and the radicals to merge. Her research on this question has convinced her that "the date of the alliance can be pinpointed fairly accurately to the tobacco protest of 1891-92, which forced the cancellation of a British monopoly concession on all dealings in tobacco" (p. 54).

Chapter 3 is entitled "Popular Participation in the Persian Revolution of 1905-1911." This contains no new material, and is simply an account of the Tobacco Incident of 1891 and the taking of sanctuary (*bast*) in the British Legation in 1905 by urban-class demonstrators as a protest against the shah's government. Both of these were significant events in the history of Iranian constitutionalism. In the fourth chapter, the last in section 1, the author briefly reviews the socioreligious history of Iran from pre-Islamic times to the present. This presentation, though cursory, is extremely useful to the student.

Under the title of "Socio-Economic Change," which heads the book's second section, comprising Chapters 5 through 8, Professor Keddie reviews the economic history of modern Iran, then the social classes, capitalism, land reform, oil, and agrarian and economic policies. Chapter 5 is a rudimentary outline of the fundamentals of Iran's economic history, almost entirely based on Charles Issawi's work, *The Economic History of Iran, 1800-1914*.

Chapter 6 deals with Iranian class structure during the 19th and 20th centuries. Though extremely simplified, it does give the general reader a clear picture of the positions of the secular and religious hierarchies, and their relationships to less privileged classes, such as women, peasants, and the minorities. The last chapters of the work review more important and complex issues, such as agrarian conditions, social and economic planning and development, and the impact of the nation's oil industry on the government's policies for reform and modernization. Of particular use to students should be the author's historical and economic account of the land system and its reform, which is basically a summary of the research on that subject by Prof. Ann Lambton and others during the last decade or so.

The present work's usefulness can be appreciated best by serious students of modern Iran, who may want to use its materials as points of departure for further research. Professor Keddie has posed many questions which still must be answered and, at the same time, she has provided in her thorough footnotes the sources from which in-depth studies and new interpretations may be produced.

...Hafez Farmayan, University of Texas-Austin

Hugh Kennedy. *The Early Abbasid Caliphate: A Political History.*
London: Croom Helm, Ltd., 1981. Bibliography, index. 238 pp.
\$27.50

Hugh Kennedy, lecturer in the Department of Mediaeval History

at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, has written a solid and useful account of the major political developments during the first 80 years of ^CAbbasid rule, 131-218/749-833. This book, a revision of his 1977 dissertation submitted to Cambridge University under the title, "Politics and the Political Elite in the Early Abbasid Caliphate," provides the careful collation of public affairs that must precede other, more engaging forms of historical inquiry; without a clear idea of who did what, and when, and why, the study of social, economic, and cultural developments has no proper framework. Mr. Kennedy has thoroughly examined numerous Arabic sources covering this period, including a few manuscripts. He has also made good use of research by prior historians, especially that of Sabatino Moscati.

Mr. Kennedy achieves what he sets out to do; his book provides a full account of the caliphs, their courts, succession disputes, local insurrections, and full-scale wars. Some of these events have been studied in detail before (such as the ^CAlid revolts or the civil war between al-Amin and al-Ma'mun); others have not. The events of 198-204/813-819 are convincingly presented both as a whole and as a second stage in the civil war that began in 193/809 (chapter 9), making Kennedy's account the most coherent yet presented of those confusing years. He also provides a history of Khurasan after the ^CAbbasid takeover (chapter 11). Here and elsewhere, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate* reliably guides the historian through the Arabic sources.

Errors are few and not significant. For instance, there is no evidence that *mawla* power peaked during al-Mahdī's reign (pp. 103, 109). Slight mistakes in dating do occur; there are two examples on page 217: Abū'l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī died in 356/967 and not in 365/975; al-Jahshiyārī died in 331/942, not in 306/912, as stated (in any case, 306 A.H. is 918-919 A.D.). The text is well edited; transliteration errors are few. Why, however, did Mr. Kennedy drop the Arabic "al-" from almost all names and titles?

My criticisms concern what this book is *not* more than what it is. It is not creative, theoretical, or thought-provoking. Granted, our sources for this period concentrate on the caliph and his court, but is it necessary to assign each caliph to a chapter and to conclude nearly every chapter with the caliph's death? Did everything stop and start again when one ruler died and another took his place?

Mr. Kennedy asks no questions of his material and so can give no answers. He makes good points in the introduction: "In the early Abbasid period, political differences were worked out in succession disputes and provincial rebellions" (p. 15), yet nothing comes of this insight. What do these two mechanisms imply? Did they adequately encompass divergent tensions? The introduction also asserts that "the period of the early Abbasid caliphs was of great significance for the history of Islamic society" (p. 16), but nothing in the text substantiates this. Mr. Kennedy does not indicate which institutions developed out of the events he describes in such detail, nor does he demonstrate how political events bore on other aspects of life.

If there is a wider significance to the events of this period, the reader must figure it out on his own, for the author provides only a factual backdrop. Mr. Kennedy has produced a work of competent scholarship, but I regret that he did not approach his subject with more imagination. His book has value, but little to spark the reader's interest. Is it not time to demand more of historians writing on the Middle East? Editors should decline manuscripts which contain facts only; higher publishing standards might then stimulate more lively historical writing.

...Daniel Pipes, University of Chicago