

Review

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Persien zwischen England und Russland, 1918-1925: Grossmachteinflüsse und nationaler Wiederaufstieg am Beispiel des Iran

by Werner Zürrer

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of Makerere College. Unfortunately, Coryndon was also the man who divided the land in Southern Rhodesia between black tribes and white settlers.

Bruce Fetter's article on Martin Rutten's career illustrates L. H. Gann's judgment that the spirit of Belgium administration was "pedantic, bureaucratic, and rigidly empirical" (p. 371). Woodruff Smith's article on Julius Graf Zech auf Neuhofen and Gann's on Heinrich Schnee provide us with a positive scholarly view of German governors, suggesting that they were as interested in development, social reform, technical education, health, legal systems, etc., as any other European governors.

Altogether *African Proconsuls* is a satisfactory book. Its overall high quality is a tribute to the editors and contributors. However, the last chapter is somewhat incongruous. A. E. Afigbo, the prominent Nigerian historian, criticizes the proconsuls as "a monstrous regiment of European adventurers" (p. 524). He seems to regret the book on several grounds, questioning the biographical approach to African history and doubting the importance of colonial governors in general. He proposes that, in most cases, psychoanalysis rather than "conventional historical analysis" (p. 531) is a more appropriate approach to understanding colonial governors and their work. To my mind, these propositions are debatable. For a conclusion to *African Proconsuls* more in keeping with the spirit of the book, I would return to the introduction by Gann and Duignan: "They [the colonial governors] were the unacknowledged state builders of modern Africa. The newly independent republics that now cover the African map are, for the most part, of colonial provenance. They owe their boundaries, their modern administrative systems, the foundation of their modern economy, their modern social services and their modern transport system, and—above all—the language of modern government and of modern cultural intercourse to the colonial rulers—among whom the governors occupied a key position" (pp. 6–7).

Gann and Duignan believe that Europe's achievements in Africa are more substantial than many African and imperial historians will concede. One may disagree with their judgments while appreciating the knowledge and understanding from which these judgments spring. Without glossing over unsavory aspects of colonialism, they argue plausibly and with copious evidence that positive achievements outweigh negative ones. Both these books are typical of their work as authors and editors, and they belong in any library with pretensions to excellence in their holdings on African and imperial history.

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**Persien zwischen England und Russland, 1918–1925: Grossmacheinflüsse und nationaler Wiederaufstieg am Beispiel des Iran.** By Werner Zürcher.

Bern and Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, 1978. Pp. 501. Sw Fr 98.

Only a handful of countries escaped European colonization in modern times, a major achievement; yet for most of these countries, continued independence meant having to play in the dangerous game of international diplomacy. In contrast to the placid political life of colonies in the early part of this century, Japan, China, Thailand, Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, Arabia, Yemen, and Ethiopia had to maneuver between domestic pressures and the ominous

presence of European powers. Most of these governments pursued traditional methods of statecraft, warfare, and economics as long as they could—until they came close to losing sovereignty. Then, by making strenuous adjustments to modern ways, they retained independence. The near collapse and subsequent rise of Japan, China, and Turkey are all well studied; Werner Zürrer, for the first time in a European language, now tells the intricate story of Iran.

In 1921, Iran lay nearly prostrate before the ambitions of Great Britain (based in India) and Russia (expanding from Central Asia toward the Indian Ocean). The central government had lost control of several provinces; the economy was in disarray; political power was contested between the last shah of the Qajar dynasty, Parliament, and the army. Within four years, under the dynamic leadership of Reza Khan (later Reza Shah), the government of Iran reasserted itself both domestically and internationally; how this occurred is the subject of this book.

Zürrer's account divides into three parts. Part 1 discusses circumstances leading from the Bolshevik Revolution to the Anglo-Persian Agreement of August 9, 1919, the result of Iranian fears of Soviet aggression and agitation. Part 2 traces the intricate and largely hidden consequences of this agreement up to the coup d'état of Reza Shah in 1921. During these two years Iran came perilously close to losing control over its political and economic affairs. The final part, twice as long as either of the others, explains how the Iranians exploited an English and Russian standoff to reassert control over their country. Zürrer copiously documents the state of relations between Iran and the powers (including eventually also the United States). These events are presented skillfully and accurately. While he offers no major new interpretations, Zürrer does make available a great deal of information in a coherent account.

Despite Zürrer's previous work on European diplomacy (*Die Nahostpolitik Frankreichs und Russlands, 1891–1898* [Wiesbaden, 1970]) and the title of this one, this is *not* a diplomatic history. This book deals foremost not with English and Russian maneuvers but with Iran (as the author explicitly points out, pp. 7–8, 477). Herein lies my principal objection; as a history of Iran, it is terribly flawed. The author's extensive research in the English, French, German, and American government archives and his command of the Russian materials all serve him well for the actions of Europeans but not to understand Iranians. It strikes me as remarkable that a serious history of a non-Western state can still be undertaken without knowledge of the local language. In an era of unmitigated Eurocentrism, this was acceptable; but no longer, for it builds an incomplete and distorted picture.

The picture is incomplete because European archives cannot replace the information available in Persian. Even without considering archives in Iran, vast amounts of primary source material in Persian are in print: newspapers, magazines, memoirs (especially valuable in a government where politicians treated official papers as their own), and collections of documents. Besides these, Iranians have built up a formidable body of secondary studies on this period: to mention only one, Husayn Makki's *Tārīkh-i Bīst Sālah-i Īrān* (Teheran, 1323 Sh./1944–45), a massive three-volume work dealing just with the period 1921–25. Writing on Iranian history without Persian is no less outrageous than writing on French history without French.

Also, not knowing Persian is symptomatic of a wider ignorance; Zürrer has

no feelings for Iran, its traditions, religion, history, ideals, or mores. His account, not surprisingly, emphasizes what he knows and comprehends—the Europeans. Iran becomes an exotic backdrop for Europeans. Zürrer has almost no understanding of the power of the Muslim religious authorities, the importance of regional allegiances, or the attitudes toward foreigners; and without a feel for these, his book exaggerates the importance of the European actors in Iran.

In sum, then: Zürrer reliably presents European and U.S. information on a key episode in Iranian history; he does not, however, provide a complete picture.

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**Parliaments and English Politics, 1621–1629.** By *Conrad Russell*.

London and New York: Oxford University Press, Clarendon Press, 1979. Pp. xxii+453. \$36.00.

Conrad Russell's long-awaited study of the Parliaments of the 1620s is richly rewarding. It is narrative history in the grand tradition—interpretation unfolding with events—and if the pace can no longer be as stately as it was with Gardiner, or the style as masterful, the impact will nevertheless be as great. Amassing every known source for the seven sessions of the Houses in this most crucial decade, Russell provides a densely packed yet thoroughly readable account of its issues and personalities. He has an eye for the apt illustration and an ear for the secret harmonies of the seventeenth century. He has been able to recreate the dynamism of this period with penetrating intelligence and trenchant wit while offering a challenging new interpretation of parliamentary history. He provides much to puzzle over in revising a century-old orthodoxy, and much which will be assailed by modern historians, but *Parliaments and English Policy* is now the touchstone for all future study.

The narrative is, of course, shaped by the parliamentary sessions, but three themes presented in a lengthy opening chapter are interwoven in the chronology. First is the peripheral role of Parliament within the institutional structure of Stuart government. Parliamentary historians have raised the Houses, and especially the Commons, to a parity with the king and his council, ascribing an importance to their proceedings out of all proportion to reality. The king, his ministers, and his local officials were the permanent governors of the nation, and Parliament's role was as a council to them. Each Parliament of the 1620s was called with war imminent or in progress, and its purpose was to provide extraordinary revenue to an increasingly bankrupt Crown. Its residual function, to present the grievances of the kingdom, was chiefly manifested in attention to local administration through the passage of bills. The fiscal necessities of James I and Charles I and the impending or existing dangers of foreign conflict continually overrode the desire of members for legal remedies to more mundane problems. The Parliament of 1621 failed in both capacities, providing neither money nor legislation; the Parliament of 1624 succeeded spectacularly in passing bills. By playing down the importance of Parliament in Stuart government Russell is left with the task of explaining why, after 1626, sessions were convened at all. In one of his most