

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Distant Relations: Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500 Years by H. E. Chehabi

Review by: Maziar Behrooz

Source: *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (May, 2009), pp. 331-332

Published by: Cambridge University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40206119>

Accessed: 24-06-2020 17:53 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](mailto: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

Cambridge University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *International Journal of Middle East Studies*

How does the historian measure this effect? Is this ideology limited to an elite audience, a well-placed circle of Japanese, Ottoman, Indian, or other Asian individuals, or are there other nontextual means by which Pan-Asian ideas are articulated that seep into Asians' everyday lives? The issue of literacy rears its head here, and although Japanese society in the 19th and 20th centuries is more literate than many other Asian cultures, the question remains unanswered.

H. E. CHEHABI, *Distant Relations: Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500 Years* (London: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 2006). Pp. 322. \$79.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY MAZIAR BEHROOZ, Department of History, San Francisco State University, San Francisco, Calif.; e-mail: mroozbeh@sfsu.edu  
doi:10.1017/S0020743809090801

Adherers of Imami (Twelver) Shi'i Islam seem to have been witnessing a sense of empowerment during the past three decades. From the banks of River Litani to the highlands of Bamyan, from Gujrat to Azerbaijan, the message seems to be the same: the Shi'i moment in history has arrived. The 2006 victory of the Hizbullah movement in Lebanon against the mighty Israeli army would be impossible to understand without paying due attention to this ongoing Shi'i revival. In a similar vein, it seems clear that the Shi'i sense of empowerment is rooted in Iran, this most Shi'i of all countries, and its 1979 revolution.

In this context, the book under review is an important contribution to the field of Middle East and Islamic studies and has arrived at an opportune time. An overview of the historical connection between Iran and Lebanon seems to be pivotal in understanding the Shi'i sense of empowerment. If Iran's revolution represents the starting point of the revival trend in the Shi'i world, the Hizbullah movement is a manifestation of one of its most successful examples. After all, no Arab army has caused Israel to admit defeat as it did in evaluating its 2006 encounter with Hizbullah.

The book is well edited and well organized. It has enlisted contributions from a number of scholars in both Iran and Lebanon. It is divided into three parts, the first part dealing with Iran and preindependence Lebanon and the second and third parts addressing Lebanon and Iran during the Pahlavi period and beyond. The stated purpose of the book is to provide the reader with a historical overview of relations between the two regions and peoples of Iran and Lebanon. It begins its survey from about the time the Ottoman Empire became the primary overlord of Lebanon and develops the narrative up to modern times.

All the chapters are well researched, with the first chapter, appropriately, assigned to a reprint of the late Albert Hourani's work on historical ties between Iranian 'ulama' and Lebanon. Students of Iran and its modern history will find the examination of close historical ties between Iran and Lebanon on various levels to be refreshing. Of particular interest is the role of Lebanese clerical families in building up Shi'i Islam in Iran and the important role Lebanon has played in providing modern educational opportunities to many Iranians.

The second part of the book examines Lebanon and Iran in light of the Pahlavi period and the period immediately after the 1979 revolution in Iran. Of particular interest is the chapter on imam Musa Sadr and his role in Lebanon as well as his connections to the shah's regime in Iran.

The third part examines revolutionary Iran's relations with Hizbullah. Although the history of Hizbullah had been researched by others, this section of the book provides an overview on how the process of Shi'i empowerment migrated from Iran to Lebanon. Another important

contribution of this section is its evaluation of the dynamics in relations between Islamic Iran and Hizbullah as it relates to factional infighting in Iran.

This book provides the reader with an overview of the relational dynamics between the two important Shi'i communities of Iran and Lebanon. The collection is a window into the complexities of each region and their relations with each other. It provides the reader with a road map of how the politics of Shi'i empowerment began in Iran in 1979 and migrated to Lebanon in the 1980s. Sections of the book have utility for undergraduate courses in Middle East studies, and any graduate course dealing with the region's social movements might benefit from it.

ZIBA MIR-HOSSEINI AND RICHARD TAPPER, *Islam and Democracy in Iran: Eshkevari and the Quest for Reform* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2006). Pp. 198. \$26.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY NADER HASHEMI, Josef Korbel School of International Studies, University of Denver, Denver, Colo.; e-mail: nhashemi@du.edu

doi:10.1017/S0020743809090813

Ziba Mir-Hosseini and Richard Tapper's important new book, *Islam and Democracy in Iran: Eshkevari and the Quest for Reform*, tells the story of the struggle for democracy in Iran through the writings and experiences of a dissident, mid-ranking cleric Hasan Yousefi Eshkevari. Religiously liberal and politically progressive, Eshkevari is a prominent member of the Iranian National-Religious Alliance, an association of political activists, intellectuals, and writers whose worldview is inspired and shaped by the legacies of Muhammad Mossadeq, 'Ali Shariati, Mehdi Bazargan, and Ayatollah Mahmud Taleqani.

Through the translation of his key writings and interviews from the late 1990s, the volume provides a window into Eshkevari's political and religious thinking and, by extension, into Iranian politics. This time period coincided with the liberal opening under Muhammad Khatami's presidency as Iranian society was engaged in full debate about the relationships between Islam and democracy, religion and state, reason and revelation, and tradition and modernity. Although further public articulation of these debates has been squashed by a conservative crackdown against Khatami's reformist agenda, it is widely believed that Iran's political culture underwent an important transformation during this period. One indication of this is how today even Khatami's detractors often invoke the rhetoric of freedom, rights, and democracy in ways unheard of prior to his electoral victory.

Mir-Hosseini and Tapper, respected anthropologists at the University of London, divide their book into five chapters, including a prologue and an epilogue. Each chapter begins with a detailed explanation of the background and political context necessary to understand Eshkevari's selected writings. The book commences with a chapter for the nonspecialist reader on the history of the Islam-democracy debate inside Iran, which covers most of the key events during Iran's 20th century and focuses on the postrevolutionary period in general and the Khatami period in particular. With the possible exception of Ahmad Ashraf and Ali Banuazizi's essay, "Iran's Torturous Path to 'Islamic Liberalism,'" (*International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* [Winter 2001]), this chapter, along with the epilogue, provides the single most insightful, rigorous, and up-to-date chronology and analysis of Iran's struggle for democracy during this phase of its political history.

The next section shifts to the figure of Eshkevari. Chapter 2 includes three texts, which are utilized to provide important biographical information. While in prison between 2000 and 2004, Eshkevari managed to write a short autobiography, which is included in the volume. It