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*Monsoon Revolution; Republicans, Sultans and Empires in Oman, 1965-1976*, by Abdel Razzaq Takriti (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2013; pp.viii+340).

The history of Arab lefts, and more broadly of popular movements that have fought for social and political revolutionary emancipation in the Middle East, remains for the most part to be written. The Dhofar Revolution in the 1960s and the 1970s, which was the longest-running popular armed struggle in the history of the Arabian Peninsula, opposed an absolute ‘monarchical-tribal order that revolved around a British-maintained ruler’ (p.6) and an indigenous revolutionary movement organised in a Popular Front inspired by Arab nationalism and anti-colonialist ideals. With *Monsoon Revolution*, Abdel Razzaq Takriti, who was appointed in 2015 Arab-American Educational Foundation Chair in Modern Arab History at the University of Houston (United States), signs a brilliant chapter of this Arab history.

Based on a doctoral dissertation completed at Oxford and winner of the prestigious Middle East Studies Association of North America Malcolm Kerr Award for Best Doctoral Dissertation in the Humanities in 2011, the book claims a three-fold ambition. It aims first at historical retrieval, by providing a comprehensive analysis of the structure and dynamics of the Dhofar revolution ‘free from [its] current imprisonment in colonial accounts, counterinsurgency studies [and] official histories’ (p.2). Indeed, the Dhofar war has been the subject of many English-language publications, in their vast majority memoirs of former British militaries serving in the Sultan’s forces or publications feeding into a Manichean Anglo-Sultanic historiography that has portrayed the conflict as a war of freedom fighters against anti-religious dogmatic ‘bloodthirsty Communists’ (p.245), relying quasi-exclusively on British documents. In addition to a comprehensive approach of all British material available, Takriti draws on and provides English-speaking readers with access to previously unexplored Arabic personal documents and interviews collected in Oman, Bahrain, Lebanon and Syria. The author gives a nuanced and complex picture, highlighting in particular the evolutions and shifts that took place within the Revolution and the conflicting British priorities and interests between London’s various administrations, political residents and consuls in the Gulf and British advisers to the Sultan. The meticulous balance maintained by the author between colonial and revolutionary accounts and sources gives the book its invaluable richness and makes it the definitive reference on ‘Britain’s last classic colonial war in the region’ (cover page).

A second fulfilled goal of the book is to revise the history of Oman and de-construct a number of assumptions, including the state-centric approach conveyed in most academic literature and historiography of the Gulf. By presenting a people’s history concerned with social dynamics and transformations from below, Takriti ‘shifts the focus from the ruler to the people who made this history themselves’ (p.3). The author shows how people of the Arabian Peninsula, by their contestation, struggle and mobilisations ‘played an essential but neglected role in shaping the economic, social and political history of Oman’ (p.310), despite the negation work pursued later by the Sultanate authorities. While the post-1970 official historiography has consisted in banishing the twentieth century’s events from collective memory and has aimed at naturalising the autocratic political order, *Monsoon Revolution* shows convincingly to what extent current absolutism in Oman, far from being a natural and intemporal order, was ‘a matter of imperial choice’ (p.215), only ‘one of several paths that Oman could have taken’ (p.310). It has been a political project which could not arise without ‘British colonial ascendancy, which was the essential factor in anchoring absolutism. […] Omani absolutism was a recent outcome of a series of historical contests over the character and location of sovereign terminal political authority’ (pp.3 and 9). Chapters 8 (‘Constructing an Absolutist State’) and 10 (‘From Citizenship to Subjecthood’) are particularly highlighting in detailing the political choices that were made during the first half of the 1970s to centralise the power around the person of the sultan, who showed ‘hawkishness’ and ruthlessness towards his own subjects (p.274) during the war, and to preclude all democratic options: ‘Rather than being an exciting time of reform, 1970-1971 was a period of missed economic and political opportunities’ (p.195). In the same vein, relying on previously untapped UK Ministry of Defence files, Takriti, in a crucial chapter 7, gives the first detailed academic account of the July 1970 coup that brought the current ruler to power, while access to Foreign Office records on this topic remains denied to the public until now.

Lastly, and probably even most importantly, Takriti’s ambition is to re-contextualise the events that happened in Oman in the 1960s and the 1970s. Far from being disconnected from wider Arab and international dynamics, as Oman’s Ministry of Information and the British authorities have desperately tried to present, in order to preserve the autocratic status quo in the Sultanate, Oman’s contemporary history is ‘a small but essential’ chapter of the ‘struggle between imperial and popular sovereignties […] The Sultanate was dependent on global networks of imperial and monarchical solidarity, while the revolution was strongly tied to transnational revolutionary networks and communities of revolution in the Arab world and beyond’ (p.310).

If the reader can regret haphazardness in the transliteration system of Arabic names, this should not overshadow the scope and contribution of this book. Far more than a useful addition to the scholarly literature on the Arabian Peninsula, *Monsoon Revolution* must be ranked at the same level as anthropological and historical reference works by Fredrik Barth and Dale Eickelman. Like them, the significance of Takriti’s original research on Oman extends well beyond the very case of this ‘periphery of the periphery’ (p.309) of the Arab world. By its contribution to key debates on the link between colonialism and absolutism, on the perpetuation of authoritarianism and subjecthood in post-colonial societies, but even more on the extreme topicality of the quest for popular sovereignty, emancipation and dignity, *Monsoon Revolution* is an immensely rewarding book.

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