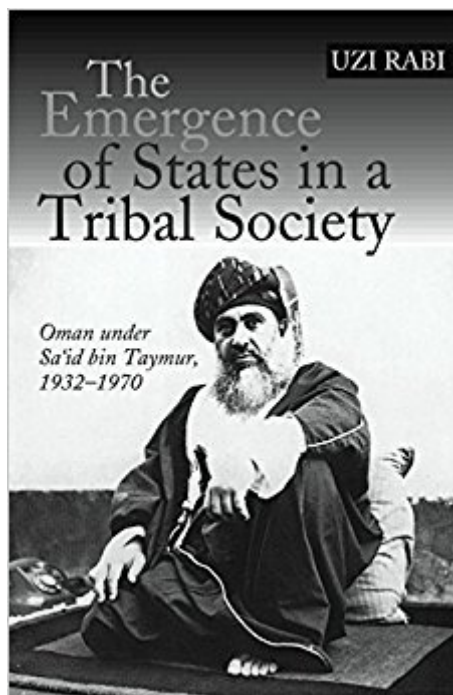




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The Emergence Of States In A Tribal Society: Oman Under Sa'id Bin Taymur, 1932-1970



Synopsis

The Emergence of States in a Tribal Society - now in paperback - reassesses the reign of Sa'id bin Taymur, who was deposed by his son, Qabus bin Sa'id, in a coup in July 1970. Contemporary historiography of the period of Sa'id's rule (1932-1970) views Oman as medieval and isolationist, whereas Qabus' later government is seen as progressive and enlightened, with his ascendancy to the throne often described as the "rebirth of Oman" from its "medieval slumber" into a thriving and prosperous sultanate. This study refutes the prevailing view that Sa'id's four-decade reign should be perceived as a place where time stood still. The author offers a critical look at the economic, political, social, and cultural aspects of Oman during the reign of Sa'id bin Taymur. The book mainly focuses on tribe-state relations, emphasizing their dynamic interaction, with particular attention paid to the relationships between the tribal groups. It reinterprets a significant time in the modern history of the Arabian Peninsula and pre-oil societies.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“Rabi examines the complex method employed by which Taymur brought about the integration of the several tribes into a more unified political system while simultaneously and cautiously using the oil revenue without reducing the state's adherence to Islamic principles of governance. The author is to be commended for the intricacy of his coverage of the social and anthropological aspects of the historical development of this portion of the Persian Gulf. This effort will undoubtedly become a basic reading requirement for an appreciation of the

historical development of modern Oman. **•Digest of Middle East Studies**

“Rabi presents a fascinating account and, indeed, a striking reassessment of the long reign of Sultan Sa’id bin Taymur. Earlier studies for the most part dismissed the reign of Sa’id as “medieval and isolationist” and regarded the government that succeeded it under Sa’id’s English-educated son, Qabus, as “progressive and enlightened.” Rabi has studied closely Sa’id’s reign, and convincingly asserts that his government “proved to be a responsive administration that adjusted itself to political and socioeconomic challenges.” Under Sa’id, Muscat and Oman were united as “the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman.” In 1964, oil in commercial quantities was discovered in Oman, increasing dramatically the income of the state, yet Sa’id seemed less than able to deal with some of the demands of the time. As his son, Qabus put it: “I have watched with growing dismay and increasing anger the inability of my father to use the new found wealth of this country for the needs of its people.” On 26 July 1970, Qabus, joined by others in Oman, led a coup and sent Sa’id into exile. Although Sa’id’s 38-year reign ended in personal disaster, his accomplishments were important, and Rabi makes a strong case for them. Highly recommended.

•Choice

Prof. Uzi Rabi PhD (Tel Aviv University, 2000) is the Chair of the Department of Middle Eastern and African History, and the Director of the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv University. He specializes in the fields of the modern history of states and societies in the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula; oil and politics in the Middle East; Iranian–Arab relations; and Sunni–Shi’i tensions.

A wonderful and insightful book. I am enjoying reading it a lot. The book arrived in pristine conditions. Great experience.

In *The Emergence of States in a Tribal Society*, Rabi, a lecturer in history at Tel Aviv University, provides a history of Oman during the rule of Sa’id bin Taymur (1932-70). Using British documents, European travel accounts, a handful of Omani chronicles, and a smattering of Arabic newspapers published outside Oman, Rabi challenges conventional wisdom depicting Sa’id’s authoritarian rule as harsh and backward, if not medieval. Instead, Rabi argues that Sa’id was skilled and capable, even if not progressive. While he unified and stabilized a divided, tribal, and economically bankrupt

society, Rabi suggests he had little choice but to resist British pressure to reform in order to preserve his unified domain's tenuous balance. The narrative is straightforward, and Rabi's writing clear. After an introductory chapter explaining both the tribal and political backdrop to Omani society and the growth of British political influence, Rabi lays out a basic political and diplomatic history, beginning with Sa'id's inheritance of the country, continuing through the unification of the Sultanate of Muscat with the Imamate of Oman, and culminating in the challenge from the communist-inspired Dhofar rebellion. Whereas British authorities and, for that matter, other Arab leaders saw Sa'id as detached and uninterested, Rabi argues that he recognized economic autonomy to be key to preserving Oman's independence in the face of the British challenge. Rabi depicts Sa'id as a skillful tactician who preserved Omani territorial claims, even in the face of an expansionist Saudi kingdom. As he traces Oman's development, though, reliance on British sources may not be enough. Imperial Iran played a crucial role in crushing the Dhofar rebellion, and its documents--many published and, therefore accessible even to an Israeli author--bear exploitation. While *The Emergence of States in a Tribal Society* is a useful chronicle, Rabi's attempt to redefine Sa'id's legacy feels forced. That an autocrat can make a camel train run on time should not absolve him of questions about his backwardness. Around the Persian Gulf, Sa'id's contemporaries faced similar problems but, rather than crush modernity, many embraced it. In Iran, for example, like Oman a state in which the British exerted influence but not direct control, Reza Shah both crushed tribal separatism and embraced modernizing reforms. And, if Sa'id's tactics were necessary to hold the state together, then why did Oman not fall apart when his son and current leader Sultan Qabus bin Sa'id seized power on July 23, 1970? After all, the younger Sa'id immediately ushered in reforms that the Omani population embraced. While academic culture promotes revisionism, sometimes conventional wisdom is rooted in reality. Nevertheless, for those interested in this unexplored but formative period in Omani political history and not put off by his tome's unnecessarily high price, Rabi has put together a useful study of an often ignored time and place. Michael Rubin *Middle East Quarterly* Summer 2007

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