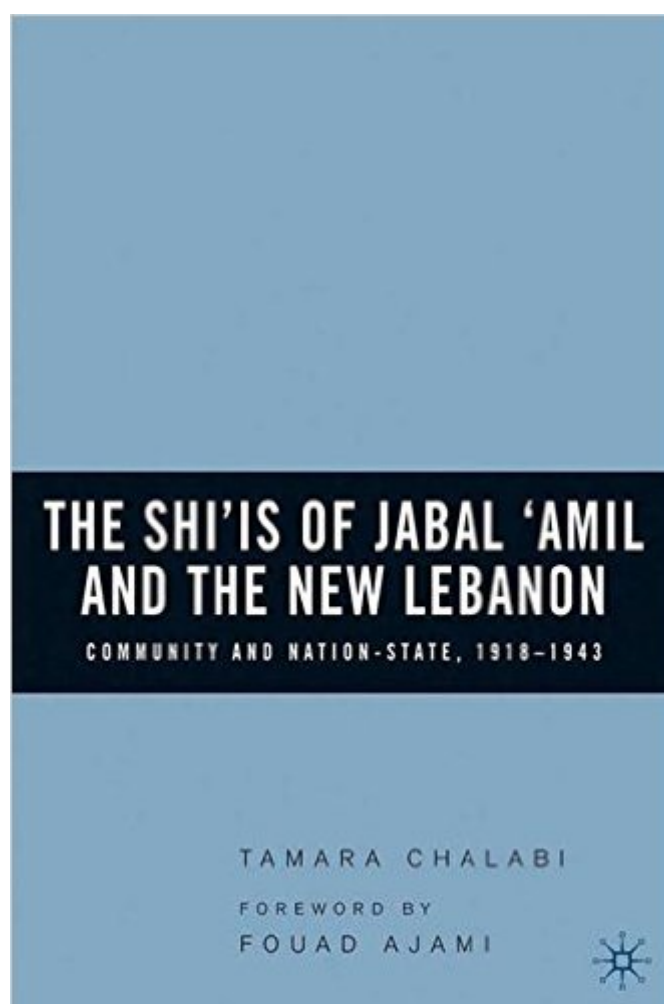


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The Shi'is Of Jabal 'Amil And The New Lebanon: Community And Nation-State, 1918-1943



Synopsis

Tamara Chalabi highlights the development of a 'politics of demand' and the increased political activism of this community in a time of great change. It also explores how Arab nationalism was transformed from an ideology of opposition and empowerment of marginal communities, into a tool for the assertion of political domination.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Both Western and Arabic-language histories have neglected the Shi`ites of modern Lebanon. Chalabi masterfully brings this missing history to life in a reworked Harvard doctoral dissertation. In an age where academics favor theory and polemic over scholarship, she fulfills the traditional detective function of historians. Fluent in English, French, and Arabic, she explored old archives and never-before-used personal libraries in southern Lebanese towns and villages. Excerpts from diaries flesh out political history to add a sense of local culture. Chalabi begins her narrative at the end of the Ottoman era, describing the shape of society and economic life, not only the interplay of religious clerics, prominent families, and the nouveaux riches but also their relations with the Ottoman leadership. She traces these through the disruptions of the early twentieth century. World War I hit the `Amilis (that is, residents of Jabal `Amil) hard via conscription and famine. Chalabi shows how the Shi`ites maneuvered through Arab nationalism, the French Mandate, and Lebanese state formation. Her exploration of competing gangs supported by French and Syrian concerns brings to light an important element of local history that remains strong in Lebanon today--Robin

Hood-like figures who rob government tax collectors and redistribute their money. Acknowledging such local culture is necessary to understand contemporary regional attitudes toward the central government. As Lebanon approached independence, intellectual debate focused upon conflicting notions of Arab and Lebanese identity, not only in Beirut and among the Christian and Sunni elite but also among the Shi'ites. The Arab nationalist narrative eventually won out, and Shi'ites resented their marginalization by the Beirut elite.

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