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Oman: Politics And Society In The Qaboos State (Columbia/Hurst)



Synopsis

With the help of British advisors, Sultan Qaboos overthrew his father, the ruler of Oman, in 1970, yet few expected the new leader to thrive. Sultan Qaboos was an unfamiliar figure to his own people, and Oman was a poor country wracked by multiple civil wars. Nevertheless, Sultan Qaboos cemented his rule by introducing a policy of national unification and assimilating all of Oman into an oil rentier state framework. He also promoted the idea that the figure of the sultan could embody the state, which later led to a celebration of the sultan as an incarnation of Oman's "renaissance." Based on years of research, Marc Valeri treats the political career of Sultan Qaboos as a case study revealing the social and political mechanisms of authoritarianism in postcolonial states. Valeri examines how Sultan Qaboos established and constantly renewed his base in order to meet internal and external challenges to his power. He also considers what happens when one part of this model, namely an oil-rent economy, falters, and the privileges enjoyed by half the population are no longer tenable. In particular, Valeri addresses the creation of a different model and how this pursuit depends as much on the network of power and privilege that has developed alongside polity as on the interference of economic and technological forces. At the same time, different and overlapping identities-ethnic, religious, historical, or a combination thereof-persist and in some cases reemerge, intertwining with challenges to wider state- and nation-building exercises and to the regime's legitimizing strategies. In conclusion, Valeri expands his focus beyond the state of Oman, evaluating the practices of other Arab monarchies in Morocco, Jordan, and the Persian Gulf.

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