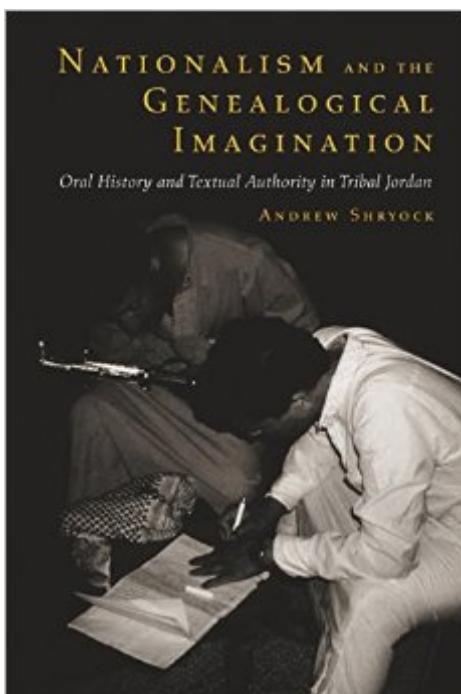


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Nationalism And The Genealogical Imagination: Oral History And Textual Authority In Tribal Jordan (Comparative Studies On Muslim Societies)



Synopsis

This book explores the transition from oral to written history now taking place in tribal Jordan, a transition that reveals the many ways in which modernity, literate historicity, and national identity are developing in the contemporary Middle East. As traditional Bedouin storytellers and literate historians lead him through a world of hidden documents, contested photographs, and meticulously reconstructed pedigrees, Andrew Shryock describes how he becomes enmeshed in historical debates, ranging from the local to the national level. The world the Bedouin inhabit is rich in oral tradition and historical argument, in subtle reflections on the nature of truth and its relationship to poetics, textuality, and power. Skillfully blending anthropology and history, Shryock discusses the substance of tribal history through the eyes of its creators—those who sustain an older tradition of authoritative oral history and those who have experimented with the first written accounts. His focus throughout is on the development of a "genealogical nationalism" as well as on the tensions that arise between tribe and state. Rich in both personal revelation and cultural implications, this book poses a provocative challenge to traditional assumptions about the way history is written.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Andrew Shryock captures the fragmented nature of oral histories among the Bedouin tribes of a Jordanian region known as the Balqa. This text, which is actually an ethnography, brings into relief greater concepts of history that are often not obvious. The histories that Andrew collects have never been written, except a few segments in travelogues. This brings to mind questions about the

unsubstantiated faith in written historical texts. Andrew illustrates that it is possible to interrogate the oral histories in the same way other historians interrogate archival data. Questions of the source of the document, the identity of the author, the comparison of data with other sources creates a "complete reality" of history. While Andrew flirts with this definition of history in chapter one when he compares the data he retrieves from oral histories to data found in archives, he also opens several other issues entirely. The oral histories of the Balga tribes are by their very nature fragmentary and disjointed. They do not lend themselves to a uniform, linear universal whole history. Instead, they provide only highlights. This brings to mind a question of validity for so-called modern history. How much is filled in like the archeologist filling in the gaps in crumbled structures? Is it possible that the Balga tribes' oral histories, untouched by the pressure of conformity, be closer to historical truth than the modern version whose rough edges have been hewn squarely into a proper line? Andrew also illustrates the uses that are not directly historical. Oral histories contribute a part to building political clout and are propagated because of political clout. Moreover, the oral histories play a part in identity forming for young members of the tribes.

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