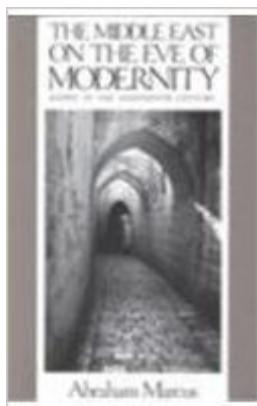


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The Middle East On The Eve Of Modernity: Aleppo In The Eighteenth Century (Study Of The Middle East Institute Ser)



Synopsis

In this innovative historical portrait of society in the premodern Middle East, Abraham Marcus takes us on a guided tour of a past world, revealing its inner workings and throwing new light on its realities during the crucial century before the onset of modernization in the region. Focusing on the great Syrian city of Aleppo, he pieces together aspects of life ranging from business and family to disease and popular pastimes. This work of social history shows how many of the accepted notions and assumptions about what is commonly called premodern, Islamic, or traditional society are inaccurate or unfounded, and draws our attention to the intricacies of a world that may appear alien and exotic but was by no means simple, primitive, or static.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"In this much-admired history of society in the premodern Middle East, originally published (cloth) in 1989, Marcus throws new light on the great Syrian city of Aleppo during the crucial century before the onset of regional modernization" -- "Book News"

--This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I was born and I grew up in the mid-20th century Aleppo, at the time it was undergoing another generational transformation after the end of the French "mandate". I still recall living in a world where 3 totally different generations existed during this transition. A grand-father with an ottoman

dress (long robe, long coat and a red fez) living in a traditional open-center Arabic design house in a neighborhood that looked very much like the one on the cover picture. A father who was the product of a heavy French influence on that society, having been born just after the French occupation, and myself as a child in a society still searching for its soul and identity after independence from the Ottomans and the French in less than a half-century period of time. Professor Marcus has captured a vivid image of that very complex society, in a city that now is considered to be the longest continuously inhabited city in history, with its ethnic and religious mix, and was able to make some sense of the structure and dynamics of that society that was entrenched in centuries of Ottoman influence, along with a major role of the Islamic faith as a dominant religion. I have finally understood the exact meaning of many of the titles that I heard growing up, and their importance, and the mechanisms of transition between the levels of the society, the interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims in a generally tolerant environment. A balance disturbed by the French, who in a short period 1921-1946 promoted the Christian minority to a dominant role, creating a temporary instability, that was gradually resolved by the natural forces of the society over the next 25 years. This is a well-written well-researched book. There is no doubt that it is a much easier read for a native of Aleppo than a graduate student of Middle-Eastern culture.

Professor Marcus has given us information that was not available to the public before. If you are interested in Aleppo and its history, you will love this book. It is very enlightening and carefully sourced. I thank Professor Marcus who is a obviously a true scholar.

Marcus' work is an astonishing achievement in historical description and archival research. While being careful not to transgress of limitations of his sources, he nonetheless is able to construct a fascinating, intriguing picture of life in Aleppo, Syria in the 18th century. His organization scheme focuses predominately on beginning with a wide lens view of Aleppo as situated in the Ottoman Empire and the vicissitudes of political life, economic fortune and misfortune, and at times social chaos and upheaval down to the more narrow view of the every day life of individual and his relation to his body/health, religion, family and neighbors. The book is extremely readable while maintaining scholarly rigor at the same time. I would have no hesitations recommended it to anyone generally interested in the Middle East or traveling through the region with an interest in its history. My impression of the overarching thesis of the book was that Aleppo as a society was anything but stagnant and frozen in time but was a dynamic society of adaptation and profound efforts to maintain tradition and religious belief. This being said, Marcus, unlike a scholar such as Peter Gran,

see no tendencies or intimations of a development of an Aleppine modernity prior to contact with an ever-expanding Europe. In other words, there was no autochthonous tendency towards what is now considered to be the ostensibly universal process of 'modernization'.

This is a unique and scholarly award-winning study of the history of Aleppo in the eighteenth century. The author who is a history professor himself, did an exhaustive literature review of the events of this Syrian city around the time of the instant study. however, and wrightly so, he mainly relied on the review of the records of the religious court (shari'a) in the city.

I didn't find this text very helpful because it described Aleppo in the eighteenth century using narration. I didn't feel like the Author had the right to speculate the way he did. This text was required for a class I took. At the end of the semester we wrote a research paper, and I found this text to be useless.

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