



Genèse du Moyen-Orient: Le Golfe à l'Age des Impérialismes (vers 1800–vers 1914)

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GUILLEMETTE CROUZET, *Genèse du Moyen-Orient: Le Golfe à l'Age des Impérialismes (vers 1800–vers 1914)* [Genesis of the Middle East: The Gulf in the Age of Imperialisms (c.1800–c.1914)] (Seysse: Champ Vallon, 2015), 752 pages; €35 paperback.

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Academic endeavours sometimes resemble that of a man looking for his keys under a lamppost. The keys are probably not there, but it is the only lit-up place in the street. Guillemette Crouzet likely knows this story, and purportedly wrote her *Genesis of the Middle East* to overcome narrow historiographical interpretations of nineteenth century Gulf politics. Her main argument is that the Gulf as a coherent entity was largely shaped by British India. To support her thesis, Crouzet expands the scope of analysis of the Gulf across time (1800–1914); but also, more importantly, across space. By examining the region within broader commercial (chapters six, seven, and eight) and geopolitical dynamics (chapters two, three, nine, and ten), she contends that it was conceived — in Bombay and Calcutta rather than in London — as a protective shield for British India and its trading routes (pp. 145, 497). The macroscopic focus adopted in the book is ambitious but Crouzet largely lives up to the expectations that she raises.

Crouzet does not consider the Gulf in the nineteenth century as an uncontested “British lake” (p. 227). With the chosen macro-spatial angle she explores the wider geopolitical interactions between the British, the Ottomans, Germans, Russians, and the French (chapter nine is dedicated specifically to the latter). Even within the British administration, British intervention in the Gulf was never an uncontested issue. Rather, it resulted from different, sometimes conflicting, priorities between British governments in London and India (see examples on pp. 108, 121, 172, 265). In particular, British representatives in India, from Sir John Malcom to Lord Curzon, were determinant in shaping the Gulf as a frontier, a “limes” (p. 113), a central route (p. 303), and a passage (p. 224) to the Jewel of the Crown. In short, Crouzet’s Gulf is an elastic, fluid and globalized entity. Rather than a history of the Gulf, it is an account of the region within a broader Indian Ocean world that is presented to the reader.

Empirically, Crouzet develops detailed and systematic case studies: piracy, slavery, and the commerce of pearls and dates, amongst others. She examines how British opposition to piracy and slavery, and the imposition of the Maritime Truce, was central to Britain’s perception of, and justification for, its role in the region and that of its imperial rivals (pp. 129, 175). For instance, she subtly deconstructs essentialist imperialist accounts (and commonplace academic readings) of piracy. In so doing, she develops a political economic analysis of this activity, particularly salient in moments of socio-economic depression in the Gulf; and that endured British interventionism (pp. 73–78, 84–88). Contextualizing “piracy” within British imperialist discourse, Crouzet describes it as “the tree that hides the forest” (p. 95). Indeed, builders of the British Empire, nourished by travellers’ tales of the Gulf, provided motives for the pacification of this region, notably through commerce. Pacification through trade enabled the British to eliminate piracy, but also, ultimately, to keep imperial rivals, such as the “maudits Français”, out of the Gulf.

Methodologically, Crouzet’s scrutinizes events in the Gulf between 1800 and 1914, as well as what *could* have taken place in the region. The volume is fraught with accounts of failed consultations, aborted negotiations, and policies deviating from original designs. In showing the failed attempts of France to secure some positions in Oman for instance, or the failure of Britain’s Indian Office to garner support for a more hawkish stance towards France in the event of the Entente Cordiale, Crouzet gives flesh to the complex diplomatic intricacies tying the Gulf to British India.

Conceptually, Crouzet adds to the historiographical debate on formal and informal empire. Not only does she present the role played in the Gulf by various actors — Indian merchants, the German military, British travellers, French officials — the reader is also made aware of the various forms of “accommodation” (p. 150) or coercion (military intervention and special commercial treaties, amongst others) that the British pursued in the region. Hence, Crouzet considers the formal-informal forms of empire as a continuum rather than a dichotomy and argues again that it was chiefly carried out Britain’s Indian Office, as testified by the “Indianization” of Gulf politics (p. 542).

Crouzet’s macroscopic approach to the Gulf is ambitious. As a result, however, not all parts of her demonstration are evenly developed. That is the case, for instance, for one the most interesting insights of the book: the claim that the conceptualization of the “Middle East” was born in India and modelled around the Gulf (pp. 338, 498). According to Crouzet, the concept was not invented in books but, rather, was theorized *a posteriori* by Alfred Mahan and Valentine Chirole, people very much aware of the importance of British India at the time. This brings the analysis to a meta-level: not only is the Gulf geo-strategically important to British India, it is also central to the birth of the concept of the Middle East itself. This fascinating insight is unfortunately dealt with in the last pages of the book and could have been further substantiated.

All in all, Crouzet’s contribution, theoretically commendable and empirically very elaborate, will prove an important resource to Gulf Studies specialists, historians, and political scientists alike.

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ADAM HANIEH, *Class and Capitalism in the Gulf Arab States* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 264 pages; \$36.00 paperback.

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In an interview published in *The Happy Hypocrite*, Qatari artist Sophia al-Maria asks the novelist William Gibson if he has any thoughts on oil — “As a fuel. As power. As a monster?” Gibson replies that he is “agnostic” about substances like oil. “I think of them as being morally neutral until we do something with them”.¹

This neutral view of oil finds a similar expression in Adam Hanieh’s *Capitalism and Class in the Gulf Arab States*. To Hanieh, you cannot understand oil in itself — it takes on meaning only through the networks and social relations in which it is embedded. Thus, oil in the Gulf is not a mere commodity but, as with sugar in the eighteenth century or cotton in the nineteenth, an entire political-economic world is created around it. Hanieh’s principal investigation is to explore the emergence and formation of this political-economic world, and in particular its stewards and beneficiaries — the ruling capitalist class of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, what he terms Khaleeji Capital.

The book — first published in 2011, and updated in 2014 with an epilogue — pulls off the rare feat of being both empirically and theoretically rich. Empirically, there is excellent detail on the

¹ Sophia al-Maria (ed.), *The Happy Hypocrite* 8: *Fresh Hell* (2015).