

Over-Stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East (1995). Field's readable, insightful book, based on his many years in the region and on extensive interviews, is a balanced, useful addition.

The book is divided into two parts. The first deals with the history and reasons for the failure of Arab nations to adjust successfully to the modern world in the last fifty years. The failures include a loss of faith in government; the inability to transform into modern democracies; inefficient, corrupt, and debt-ridden economies; fear of ever-permeating Western influence's debilitating impact on Arab culture; religious schism; and failure to achieve peace. The longer second section treats efforts at reform in different parts of the Arab world, which Field argues are largely driven by Western influence and the realities of a global economy. Many of these reforms promise a measure of success.

After a very fine introductory overview of the Arab world within its Middle East and Islamic context, Field provides three good historical chapters that treat developments in World War I through the present. He then elucidates the corruption of the state and the economic stagnation that prevail and he offers a case study of Algeria as an example of larger problems in the region. The chapter on Saudi Arabia is a particularly interesting study of problems and reform. Although quite different from most Arab countries both in economic and cultural terms, Saudi Arabia's vast resources make it a pivotal Arab state. Once the vision of the future, now the debt-ridden kingdom is going in the opposite direction of most of the poor states that are making some economic progress. Corruption, political stagnation, the challenge of Islamic fundamentalists, and the aspirations of an emerging middle class may be more vivid in Saudi Arabia than in other states. However, unlike Said K. Aburish's pessimistic *The Rise, Corruption, and Coming Fall of the House of Saud* (1995), Field presents a picture of necessary economic and structural changes coming from the current challenges, and he is more generous toward the political leadership of King Fahd and the Al-Saud family corporation. While Field is not unduly sanguine, it is hard to believe that he and Aburish looked at the same country.

This is a very fine book for understanding the changing Arab world. It is useful for garnering lecture material, and in a paperback edition it would make good reading for an advanced undergraduate course on contemporary Arab politics. With its largely secular and economic focus, it should be used in conjunction with another work that gives broader attention to Islamic resurgence, possibly Mir Zohair Husain's *Global Islamic Politics* (1995). As for me, Field will replace Milton Viorst's *Sandcastles* in my course on Islamic and Middle East Politics.

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Roger Collins. *Early Medieval Spain: Unity in Diversity, 400-1000*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995. Second edition. Pp. xxiii, 317. Paper, \$16.95. ISBN 0-312-12662-X.

Roger Collins, an English academic, is the best-known medievalist writing in English about the Iberian peninsula, particularly for the early period. His second edition of *Early Medieval Spain* provides a relatively inexpensive background work for a period once all but lost to American students.

His book, written clearly and suitable for advanced high school students as well as university undergraduates, may be particularly useful not only for history students investigating the Middle Ages outside of Britain and France but also as a background for students in their second or third

year of Spanish language studies who wish to study the period when Latin began (but did not quite finish) evolving into Castilian.

The narration begins with the twilight of Roman Spain and the arrival of the Visigoths from northern Europe. These Germanic warriors created a pastoral, feudal, and clan-ridden society—often credited with developing laws collectively known as the *fueros* (from the Latin word *forum*), a unique blend of local autonomy and aristocratic codes, which regions of northern Spain have fought to maintain in the face of centralism ever since. At the same time, the Christian Church, based in Toledo, managed to become the state religion by the late 600s.

In 712, a second people arrived in Iberia. Islam, the empire of Muhammadism, brought Arabs and many other North African tribesmen to Spain. Christianity retreated to the mountains of the north and northeast, to Asturias, León, Pamplona, Aragón, and (sometimes) Catalonia. The rest of Spain, subject to the Muslims, fell under the Umayyad caliphate. If independence of state and religion was lost, the Spaniards of the large Umayyad territory did benefit from receipt of Middle Eastern technology and the preserved science and philosophy of Greece and Rome that also, somewhat ironically, accompanied the Arabs in their relocation to southwestern Europe. This imperial culture of the Umayyads contrasts vividly with the Christian north; religious purity among the Christians, diversity and sophistication among the Muslims—just the reversal of Europe and the Middle East today.

In the end, ca. 1000 A.D., the spread of Christianity and the rise of fundamentalist tribal interpretations of Muhammadism doomed the Umayyad capital of Córdoba, and two hundred years later the Christians reoccupied the region. Collins tells this fascinating story with the latest scholarship, but also with a broad pen that evokes the reader's imagination to this oriental Mediterranean world. The book enlarges our sense of Spanish diversity and explains how the often contentious regions of Spain originally diverged.

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Stephen J. Lee. *Peter the Great*. London & New York: Routledge, 1993. Pp. X, 78. Paper \$9.95. ISBN 0-415-09279-5.

William Marshall. *Peter the Great*. London & New York: Longman, 1996. Pp. vi, 149. Paper \$12.86. ISBN 0-582-00355-5.

Two very similar books with the exact same title designed to augment the typical textbook survey of one of Russia's most turbulent, complex, and historic periods—that of Peter the Great. Both works are authored or edited by English scholars. S. J. Lee's volume on Peter is part of the "Lancaster Pamphlets" series that includes more than 40 titles on major topics in European history. William Marshall's volume, nearly twice the length of Lee's, is part of the "Seminar Studies in History" series, a series of approximately 75 titles on British and world history and edited by R. Lockyer, Emeritus Reader in History at the University of London. While both books share several basic features and purposes, they also have a few significant differences as well.

First, the similarities. Both volumes are short, condensed outlines of the reign of Peter the Great, with good maps and chronological charts or genealogical tables, and both are readable. Each book is designed to bring into sharper focus all the major events, themes, and historiographical interpretations of Peter's tumultuous reign. In terms of significant differences between the two volumes, the Marshall book contains two helpful glossaries—one is a typical