



Revolution and Constitutionalism in the Ottoman Empire and Iran

Nader Sohrabi

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As a wave of democratic social movements, under the influence of "velvet" revolutions, is sweeping the Middle East, this book calls attention to an earlier wave that swept the region a century ago. In his book on constitutional revolutions in the Ottoman Empire and Iran, Nader Sohrabi considers global diffusion of institutions and ideas, their regional and local networking, and the long-term consequences for adaptation to local exigencies. There are lessons to be learned here. The revolutions, despite the differing social structures of the societies in which they happened, shared the same objectives and demands. Furthermore, the suddenness and simultaneity of their appearance point to a commonality that transcended the localities. Arguing that revolutions are time-bound phenomena whose forms follow global models in vogue at particular historical junctures, the book challenges the ahistorical and purely local understanding of them. Furthermore, it provides a strong case that macrostructural preconditions alone cannot explain the occurrence of revolutions; rather, global waves, intervention of agency, and additional contingent events work together to bring them about in competition with other possible outcomes. Beyond concern for how and why revolutions happen, the book offers a comparative account of the process of institutionalizing constitutionalism in two settings. The comparison highlights many similarities in the powers struggles, including the paradox inherent in the "constitutional revolutions." Comparison also affords exploration of a key difference: the reason for greater resilience of democratic institutions in the Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey in contrast to Iran. In making his case, Sohrabi draws on a wide array of archival and primary sources that afford a minute look at the revolutions as they unfold.

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