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The Modern History Of Iraq



Synopsis

Phebe Marr's bestselling history of modern Iraq, updated with incisive analysis of events since 2003

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

At a time when Iraq seems more violent, unstable, and unpredictable than ever, it is vital to know how things came to be this way. Marr's History of Modern Iraq is a good place to start. After a chapter covering the various ethnic groups inside Iraq, Marr begins her book during the time period of the British mandate and continues through to 2003. Each major era of modern Iraq is covered in its own chapter, some of which include rule by Qasim, rule by the Arif brothers, and also the various incarnations of the Baath party. When discussing each of these time periods, Marr discusses ethnic tensions, social and economic issues, as well as foreign policy. Each chapter serves as a mini crash course on that particular part of Iraqi history. What makes her book particularly valuable is that she is able to link what happened during the chapter in question to the overall direction that Iraq took. With so many drastic and sometimes violent transfers of power, it would be easy to assume that Iraq was in a sense starting over with each new regime. Marr demonstrates that every era was in many ways a logical progression of what came before it. Marr states in her preface that the book is not to be an exhaustive and detailed history of modern Iraq, but that it's supposed to be a clear and readable one-volume account of the forces that shaped modern Iraq. In that goal she largely succeeds with the exception of the period following the 1990-91 Gulf War. There were many extremely important events shaping Iraq during this period that she either leaves out completely or barely mentions. Since this is the time period that leads directly into what's happening in Iraq now,

the more detailed the coverage of this era, the better.

Modern History of Iraq, a history book, is very good read because it focuses and combines our misunderstanding of the Iraqi people, fills in our information and knowledge gap without the normal drab history textbook feel. The book focuses on several important themes: the search for national identity in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious state; the struggle to achieve economic development and modernity in a traditional society; and the political dynamics that have led to the current dire situation in Iraq. Marr begins with a chapter discussing the various ethnic groups within Iraq. Following this she begins a historical trip from the British mandate through 2003. Each major coup, change of power, is covered extensively in its own chapter giving the read a full understanding not only of the events but the conditions that caused change. Dr. Phebe Marr has published several books on the Middle East, including contributing to *The Government and Politics of the Middle East and North Africa, Fourth Edition*, edited by David Long and Bernard Reich (Westview Press 2002). Academically and politically, she has worked with the editorial board for the *Middle East Journal*, a Senior Fellow at the Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University (1985-1997), the Woodrow Wilson Center Fellowship and a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. She is a leading specialist on Iraq and its domestic politics and foreign policy. Since Iraq can only date its history as a nation to the British Mandate in 1921, "Modern History of Iraq" captures the essence of the development of a country in the 20th century.

Marr, an academic middle east historian, has been studying the history of modern Iraq for decades. Her studies are substantially helped by her apparent fluency in Arabic, and the Iraqi dialect, giving her access to a vast collection of published work and documents written in Arabic. She understands the region, and I'm very inclined that she knows the country probably better than most Iraqis, including politicians, do. The book follows a chronological order, starting with a brief introduction of the history of Iraq before the 20th century, and an explanation of the country's location, geography, and demographics. The meat of the book starts in the 2nd chapter with the formation of the monarchy in 1920, and progresses from there dedicating a chapter to each distinctive era of the 90 or so years covered by this book, ending in 2011. The material is very heavily referenced, with everything from old to new, citing Iraqi and foreign government reports, newspaper articles, academic studies, UN reports, radio and TV interviews, personal interviews by Marr, and published books, both in Arabic and English. We, Iraqis, often think historical data is either lost or falsified due to our lack of trust in our own government institutions. But it is amazing how much data and documents is available on

the country, and from highly reputable sources. However, it is not all praise and rave when it comes to this title. First, the language. It is an incredibly frustrating read. Sentences can often span several lines, with the subject providing the context connecting the words left to the very end. Simple terms often have obscure synonyms (even to Google, Merriam-Webster, and thesaurus.com).

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