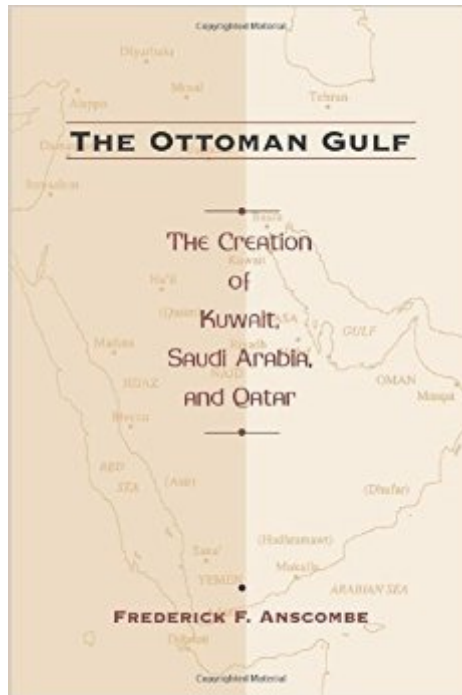


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The Ottoman Gulf: The Creation Of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, And Qatar



Synopsis

What caused the decline of the Ottoman empire in the Persian Gulf? Why has history credited only London, not Istanbul, with bringing about the birth of the modern Gulf States? Using the Ottoman imperial archives, as well as European and Arab sources, Anscombe explains how the combination of poor communication, scarce resources, and misplaced security concerns undermined Istanbul's control and ultimately drove the Gulf shaikhs to seek independence with ties to the British.

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Customer Reviews

In *The Ottoman Gulf*, Frederick F. Anscombe sets out to show the inaccuracy of the thought that Britain was the main force behind the creation of the Persian Gulf's Arab states. Anscombe indicates the responsibility of the Ottoman Empire and its operations in Arabia as the central factor behind the development of the states of Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. Instead of the conventional notion that Britain always intended to establish its influence and gain dominance in the region, Anscombe argues that it was rather the Ottoman rule of the area that led to the formation of the states. As Anscombe states in his introduction, "...if the Ottomans had governed the mainland effectively, Britain would not have become entangled in the territories that were to become the states of Kuwait, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia...the British were drawn, often unwillingly and even unwittingly, into mainland politics" (3). Anscombe begins his narrative by tracing the causes for the renewed Ottoman interest in the Arabian Peninsula that arose during the 1870s. Istanbul felt that it needed to reassert its right to rule over the area so that a Wahhabi insurrection could be avoided and so that the Ottoman governance of the area north of the Peninsula, such as Iraq and Syria,

could be protected from the raiding tribes that achieved were so prevalent in the Peninsula in the late 19th century. However, as Anscombe also points out, the Ottomans did feel competition from the British in the region. But Anscombe describes that this competition was fictitious and created much more by Ottoman insecurity than actual British interest and action. The author then proceeds to cover the Ottoman take of the region of Hasa and the subsequent governance of Midhat Pasha in the area.

The modern history of the Persian Gulf has been the subject of several published studies, most notably those of J.B. Kelly and Briton Cooper Busch. The perspective of those works was, however, decidedly Anglocentric, relying heavily on British documents from the Foreign and India Offices. Frederick Anscombe offers a new perspective; he relies largely on the Ottoman archives, though the standard English language works are by no means ignored. Anscombe is particularly interested in the economic factors which hindered Ottoman attempts to subjugate the eastern Arabian littoral (largely, between Qatar and Kuwait) during the period 1870-1914. The initial impetus for the Ottoman policy of asserting control over this largely autonomous area was provided by the British. The Ottomans were concerned that British obsession with maintaining the routes to India would result in attempts to establish hegemony over the Gulf (in which the British already had a large presence), Arabia and Kuwait. These fears had some justification during the last quarter of the 19th century and the early years of the 20th. But the Ottoman plan for bringing eastern Arabia under tighter control was doomed from the outset, because however well-conceived the plans for doing so, the Ottomans had neither the economic strength nor the will to bring their plans to fruition. Al-Hasa, the province of eastern Arabia bordering the Gulf, had little to offer the Ottomans in the way of economic return. This meant that the reforms, the communications infrastructure and, ultimately, the political dependence which the Ottomans intended to establish in the region would have to be funded by the Porte.

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