



The Emergence of Modern Shi'ism: Islamic Reform in Iraq and Iran

By Zackery M. Heern

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Scholars often locate the origins of the modern Islamic world in European colonialism or Islamic reactions to European modernity. *The Emergence of Modern Shi'ism* focuses instead on the rise of Islamic movements indigenous to the Middle East, which developed in direct response to the collapse and decentralization of the so-called Islamic gunpowder empires. In other words, new Shi'i, Sunni, and Sufi movements emerged as the Safavid, Ottoman, and Mughal empires decentralized and disintegrated.

Professor Heern specifically highlights the emergence of modern Usuli Shi'ism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Therefore, this book outlines the historical background and ideological roots of the most powerful movement in modern Shi'i history. The long-term impact of the Usuli revival was that Shi'i scholars gained unprecedented social, political, and economic power in Iran and southern Iraq. Usuli clerics claimed authority to issue binding legal judgments, which, they argued, must be observed by all Shi'is. By the early nineteenth century, Usulism became a popular, fiercely independent, transnational Islamic movement. Usuli clerics continue to operate at the heart of social and political developments in contemporary Iraq and Iran.

Thought provoking and challenging, this book examines the foundations of modern Islam, and provides fascinating insight into the region's religious and political developments both past and present.

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Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1355674 in Books
- Brand: ONEWorld Publications
- Published on: 2015-07-14
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.10" h x .90" w x 6.10" l, .95 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 240 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

'Zackery Heern has produced a very important and deeply researched contribution to the history of Shi'ism. At last there is a book that sets developments in Shi'ism in the context of the larger Islamic world. Scholars of Islamic studies will greatly benefit from reading this book.' Roy P. Mottahedeh, Gurney Professor of History, Harvard University, Author of *The Mantle of the Prophet*

'This is an absorbing account of the rise of modern Shi'ism and of the rise of the Shi'i clergy as authoritative interpreters (*mujtahids*) of theology, religious practice, and the law. Zackery Heern aptly situates the 'triumph of Usuli Shi'ism' in Iraq and Iran, brought to fruition by Vahid Bihbihani and his disciples during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, within broader contemporary currents of Islamic religious revival and reform.' Peter Sluglett, Director, Middle East Institute, National University of Singapore, Author of *Iraq Since 1958*

'A major achievement. This original new work explains not only the roots of modern Shiite thought but also places these roots into the context of Middle Eastern religious reformism since the second half of the 1700s. An excellent and timely introduction for students as well as general readers seeking to understand the beginnings of modern Islam.' Peter Von Sivers, Associate Professor, History, University of Utah, Author of *Patterns of World History*

'Heern not only provides the most thorough intellectual, social and organizational analysis of the rise of the rationalist Usuli school in Shi'ism, but contextualizes it within the framework of local, regional and global changes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Significantly, he posits these developments as an important manifestation of the global phenomenon of multiple modernities.' Meir Litvak, Associate Professor, Department of Middle Eastern History, Tel Aviv University, Author of *Shi'i Scholars of Nineteenth-Century Iraq*

This book 'challenges European hegemonic discourse which views modernity as a European phenomenon that spread to the rest of the world, and instead postulates neo-Usulism as a Shi'i form of modernity that developed in a world in which multiple modernities have prevailed.' Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies

'A challenging and thought-provoking read... [Heern] has written an engaging essay on the little known story of the birth of the Shia neo-Usuli movement and its evolution from the late 18th century until its culmination into contemporary Shi'ism... The study operates like a core sample of Middle Eastern modern history more broadly, revealing the interactions and overlap between grand-scale socio-political shifts and local spiritual and intellectual reactions and innovations.' Religioscope

'Heern has done a great and of course difficult job'. Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies 'Many discussions of Islamic movements of renewal and reform pay insufficient attention to Shi'i reformers. Heern provides an important resource for correcting this imbalance... His discussions of the issues involved in the way Muslim movements define knowledge and authority... provide a basis for more comprehensive examinations of renewalist thought' Journal of Islamic Studies 'Many discussions of Islamic movements of renewal and reform pay insufficient attention to Shi'i reformers. Heern provides an important resource for correcting for this imbalance. His comparative analysis of the three eighteenth/nineteenth century movements provides a

useful critical framework for this more inclusive coverage of Muslim renewal movements. His discussions of the issues involved in the way Muslim movements define knowledge and authority, both in the debates within Shi'ism and in comparison with the Sunni and Sufi approaches ... provide a basis for more comprehensive examinations of renewalist thought.' -- Professor John O. Voll, Georgetown University Journal of Islamic Studies 'Heern... is primarily concerned with the Shias, Islam's second-largest denomination after the Sunnis. But he refreshingly teases out the parallels between the three movements, rather than their differences as most other commentators have done.' The Economist 'A challenging and thought-provoking read.' Religioscope

About the Author

Zackery M. Heern is a specialist of the Middle East and Islamic Studies. He is an Assistant Professor in the Department of History at Idaho State University.

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