

Review of The shadow of God and the hidden imam: religion, political order, and societal change in Shiite Iran from the beginning to 1980, by Said Amir Arjomand

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The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order, and Societal Change in Shiite Iran from the Beginning to 1890. By SAID AMIR ARJOMAND. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984. Pp. xii+355.

Arjomand's detailed and creative application of Weberian categories to a central event in Iranian history, the gradual political establishment of a Twelver "Shiite hierarchy" (or "orthodoxy" of legal scholars) under the Safavid dynasty in Iran (1501–1722), seems destined to become a classic in its field, as more specialized historians and sociologists begin to test his many provocative interpretations, or to apply those hypotheses in other Islamic contexts. The historical core of his study is preceded by a survey of older Persian ideals of sacred kingship and the millenarian Shiite "extremist" movements that led to the successes of the early Safavids; and a shorter concluding section traces the role of the "orthodox" Shiite clerical party in its interactions with the Qajar dynasty and the religiopolitical alternatives posed by the Shaykhis, Babis, and Bahais during the period 1785–1890.

Islamic history in all periods and regions offers inexhaustible material for those sharing Weber's interest in "religiously motivated sociopolitical transformations," and Arjomand's detailed study of conflicting Twelver Shiite ideologies in this specific historical context should provide a healthy antidote to the stereotypes spread today by the mass media, apologists, and polemicists (on all sides) and by most introductory discussions of "Islam and politics." Students of religions who do not have any specialized background in these subjects (or who are simply curious about contemporary events in Iran) should at least come away from this work with a healthy respect for the remarkable diversity of forms of Islamic thought and the continued transformations of their political, ideological dimensions in specific historical and regional contexts.

Finally, the uninitiated reader may need to be reminded that this book's explicit focus on the relations of Shiite religious ideologies and the struggle for power among a narrow clerical and political elite necessarily leaves out vast domains of religious life and practice in Safavid and Qajar Iran (including the often decisive *non*political claims and contents of movements, such as "gnostic Shiism," that are discussed here). Such central religious phenomena include the ongoing development of "popular" (nonclerical, but not necessarily millenarian) forms of Shiism throughout various nonurban segments of the population; a multitude of ethnic minority Sunni groups, including major Sufi orders; the continued pervasive influence of pre-Safavid mystical poetry (Rumi, Hafez, etc.) in both elite and popular religious culture; and the deeper popular survival of the myths and expectations of "sacred kingship," so evident in the unexpected role eventually played by Khomeini. [JAMES WINSTON MORRIS, *Princeton University*]