

H-Net Reviews

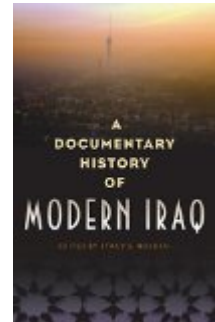
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Stacy E. Holden. *A Documentary History of Modern Iraq*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012. 397 pp. \$74.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-4016-5.

Reviewed by Daniel Spector

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey



Iraq has been the center of attention for Americans since at least August 1990 and the invasion of Kuwait, followed by the First Gulf War. In 2003 the Second Gulf War led to the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, and since then years of unrest as the Shi'a majority has replaced the Sunni minority in Baghdad, and the Kurds in the north have largely gone their own way. There is a growing literature describing and analyzing these important Middle Eastern events. Stacy Holden, who earned a PhD from the University of Boston in 2005, worked for the State Department in North Africa, and is currently an associate professor of history at Purdue, presents a useful volume of printed materials that illustrate the history of Iraq since Ottoman times. After an introduction in which she presents a brief overview of Iraqi history from 1903 to the beginning of the U.S.-led Coalition Provisional Authority in 2003, she seeks to address the question, "How would the diverse population of this multiethnic and multisectarian state forge a coherent nation loyal to a unified state?" (p. 2). This question remains unanswered and Professor Holden's collection of materials goes a good way to explaining why.

The first chapter, "Ottoman Mesopotamia, 1903-1920," discusses the last years of an empire that had ruled most of the Middle East and North Africa for six centuries. It begins with a description of the marriage and life of a Baghdadi Jewish girl in 1903. At that time a third of Baghdad's population of 150,000 were Jewish. The author pursues the theme of the Jewish minority among the diverse peoples of Iraq throughout her work, beginning with this anecdote and later, in chapter 10, discussing the experiences of other peoples through the administration of Iraq under the Coalition Provisional Authority in 2003 and 2004. Other writings from this period include British

lieutenant colonel Mark Sykes's observations on Mosul in 1906, the Young Turk Proclamation of 1908, and other observations on this period of Iraqi history. Each is introduced with the author's recommendations about what readers should look for. The chapter ends with a bibliography of sources for further investigation.

The succeeding chapters follow the same pattern as Professor Holden leads the reader through the "British Mandate, 1920-1932," "The Hashemite Monarchy, 1932-1941," "Ending the Old Regime, 1941-1958," "The Revolutionary Era, 1958-1968," "Consolidating Ba'athist Power, 1968-1979," "The Iran-Iraq War, 1980-1990," "The Persian Gulf War and Sanctions, 1990-2002," "The Invasion of Iraq, 2001-2003," and "the Occupation of Iraq under the Coalition Provisional Authority, 2003-2004." The last three chapters will be of primary interest to American readers; topics include Ambassador April Glaspie's meeting with Saddam Hussein before his invasion of Kuwait, the United Nations sanctions against Iraq after that invasion, how the Gulf War was experienced in Baghdad, Saddam's reaction to 9/11 in 2001, President Bush's argument for the Second Gulf War to depose Saddam and his regime, Bush's "Mission Accomplished" speech, and various observations on Iraq under the Coalition Provisional Authority. Again, each selection is introduced with the author's thoughts and guidance on what readers should look for as they examine it.

Any anthology is necessarily a selection of what the author believes best illustrates the topic under discussion. Readers should be aware that there are other materials to be examined. For example, Mark Sykes gives his impressions on Mosul before World War I, but the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement he authored with his French

counterpart during the war, spitting Ottoman lands between the two powers, would also have been of interest. The bibliographies after each chapter, secondary source material presented at the end of the book, and the author's comments will lead the interested student to copious material on modern Iraq.

A minor criticism involves the title of Paul Bremer, director of the Coalition Provisional Authority after the 2003 Gulf War. Professor Holden identifies him as a lieutenant (Lt.), a rather low company grade military rank,

while he was actually not in the military and held ambassadorial status with the State Department before and during his time in Iraq. The confusion may have originated in the first initial of his full name, "L." which may have been mistaken for an abbreviation of "Lieutenant." Future printings might correct this.

For anyone interested in learning more about American involvement in Iraq since 1990, Dr. Holden's *Documentary History of Modern Iraq* is a good place to begin.

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