Politics from Above, Politics from Below: The Middle East in the Age of Economic Reform

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Abstract: Even today, economic liberalization is widely supposed to replace the tyranny of the state with the freedom of the individual and, therefore, the uniformity of politics from above with the liveliness and colour of politics from below. This book analyses developments in the Middle East, arriving at far less reassuring conclusions: that economic liberalization has failed to entail the continuous growth and widespread welfare gains expected by its proponents; and that by privileging privatization and crony capitalism over competitive but regulated markets and political reform, it has also failed to decentralize and democratize the allocation of resources, be they material or symbolic, to enable individuals to participate meaningfully in the production of social norms. Contributors include Roger Owen, Sami Zubaida, Valentine M. Moghadam, Jean-Noel Ferrié, Enid Hill, Ulrich G. Wurzel, Ray Bush, Baudouin Dupret, Cilja Harders, Armando Salvatore, Reem Saad, Nadje Sadig el-Ali, Amr Hamzawi, Fanny Colonna and Reinoud Leenders.

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What concerns politics, I think that the perception of Middle East political development should be revised. This is due to the fact that, to my firm belief, the evolution of the political system in the region would never exactly follow the Western pattern, i.e. the pattern that is common and acceptable for the West. The discussion and evidence provided above suggest that such a distinct political development in the Middle East is shaped and influenced not only by the rentier nature of the economy, but also by the religious issues and deeply rooted political as well as social traditions.

Even today, economic liberalization is widely supposed to replace the tyranny of the state with the freedom of the individual, and, therefore, the uniformity of politics from above with the liveliness and color of politics from below. This book analyzes developments in the Middle East, arriving at far less reassuring conclusions: that economic liberalization has failed to entail the continuous growth and widespread welfare gains expected by its proponents. By emphasizing privatization and crony capitalism rather than markets, it has also failed to decentralize and democratize the allocation of