

Ottoman-Iranian Borderlands: Making a Boundary, 1843-1914. Sabri Ateş. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. ISBN 978-1107033658

This work offers a well-researched study of the border areas between the Ottoman Empire (Turkey) and Iran focused on the period from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This topic has received little attention from scholars, despite its obvious importance to the history of the Middle East. This volume successfully builds upon the work of Richard Schofield and Pirouz Mojtahed-Zadeh and their studies on the borders of Iran with neighboring states. The extensive use of archival material along with numerous published sources provides fascinating insights into this understudied topic.

Drawing significantly on documents from the *Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi* BAO (The Prime ministry Ottoman Archive) in Istanbul, the Public Records Office PRO in London, and the *Ketakhane-e Majlis-e Shoray-e Eslam* KMSE (The Library of the Consultative Assembly) in Tehran, Ateş skillfully synthesizes this material into a very well-researched and lucid monograph. This volume provides excellent and hard-to-find maps of the Ottoman-Qajar frontier as well as interesting illustrations and pictures. The photographs from the Alexander Ilyas collection housed in the Finnish Museum of Photography in Helsinki are wonderful and give a glimpse into the border delineation process.

With seven chapters the long process of transition from borderland to bordered land is coherently laid out and cited. Chapter one, the introduction, lays out Ateş' terminology related to borderlands and borders. He engages with Islamic and Ottoman conceptualizations of frontiers and borders and provides an overview of Ottoman-Iranian relations along the border before the

rise of the Qajars. In the second chapter, Ateş describes political situation between the Ottomans and Qajars along the Kurdish frontier. He highlights the changing role of Kurdish grandees and tribal confederations in the face of the encroaching power of the Ottoman and Qajar states. Details concerning the last Ottoman-Iranian war and the subsequent peace treaty are also provided. Chapter three describes the establishment of the first boundary delineation commission and the role of the British and the Russians in establishing a framework for a final boundary between Iran and the Ottoman Empire. Chapter four discusses the final boundary commission and the complex dynamic between the Ottomans, Qajars, British, and the Russians in establishing the border. Along with this, the role of local Kurds, Arabs, and others is effectively woven into the narrative. The fifth chapter narrates how the new border dealt with the major political upheavals of the Crimean War 1853-1856 and the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878. These conflicts disturbed the tenuous nature of the border and forced further revisions and negotiations. Despite these modifications, the border commission was satisfied with its work, and peace between the Ottoman Empire and the Qajars held. Chapter six is, perhaps, the strongest and most original section of this work. It gives wonderful details concerning the Ottoman expansion into Iranian Azerbaijan, 1905-1911. This gradual encroachment violated all previous agreements, but all of the powers were engaged elsewhere and unable to invoke an effective protest. The episode became moot as the Ottoman Empire itself had other issues in North Africa and the Balkans to which it needed to attend. The gains of the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were abandoned and the border solidified again.

This work has something to offer scholars of the Middle East as well as teachers alike. This very readable work provides insights into modern border issues. The work provides an accessible account of the Ottoman-Iranian borderland that could be used by 9-12 teachers to provide

comparisons with the US-Mexico border or US-Canada border. Also, the negotiation of the Ottoman-Iranian border could also be used as comparison for the negotiations of the Post-WWI Middle East and Eastern Europe. Scholars interested in Ottoman History, particularly in eastern Anatolia, and Qajar history will find this volume of great service. Scholars of Borderland Studies and boundary negotiation will find this work very useful as a case study for the Middle East.

Ateş provides numerous examples of the manifold problems of shifting from borderlands to bordered lands. The new strong statist regimes pushed peoples with ambiguous identities to “choose” one of the official sanctioned camps that now regularized the border.

This work is the state of the field on this topic. It synthesizes Ottoman Turkish, Modern Turkish Persian, and English sources as well as previous literature to provide a comprehensive study of the delineation of the Ottoman-Iranian borderland 1847-1914. This work also provides an extensive bibliography, which should be a starting point for all would-be researchers of this topic.

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