



Kingmakers: The Invention of the Modern Middle East

By Shareen Blair Brysac, Karl E. Meyer

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A brilliant narrative history tracing today's troubles back to the grandiose imperial overreach of Great Britain and the United States.

Kingmakers is the gripping story of how the modern Middle East came to be, as told through the lives of the Britons and Americans who shaped it. Some are famous (Lawrence of Arabia and Gertrude Bell); others infamous (Harry St. John Philby, father of Kim); some forgotten (Sir Mark Sykes, Israel's godfather, and A. T. Wilson, the territorial creator of Iraq). All helped enthroned rulers in a region whose very name is an Anglo-American invention. The aim of this engrossing character-driven narrative is to restore to life the colorful figures who gave us the Middle East in which Americans are enmeshed today. 30 illustrations; 2 maps

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Eminent Imperialists might be a better title for this sprightly episodic history of Anglo-American meddling in the Middle East, from the 1882 British invasion of Egypt to the current Iraq War, told through profiles of the officials who spearheaded those policies. Journalists Meyer and Brysac (*Tournament of Shadows*) spotlight well-known, flamboyant figures like T.E. Lawrence (of Arabia) and British Arabist Gertrude Bell. But they focus on unsung toilers in the trenches of imperial rule like A.T. Wilson, the British colonial administrator whose idea it was to cobble Iraq together out of three fractious Ottoman provinces, and Kermit Roosevelt, the CIA agent who choreographed the 1953 ouster of Iranian prime minister Mohammed Mossadeq. Policy continuities—securing the approaches to India and access to oil—sometimes get overshadowed by the authors' biographical approach, but in a sense that's the point. Their imperialism is marked by idiosyncrasy, improvisation, unforeseen circumstances and unintended—usually tragic—consequences. Policy was very much driven by the personalities who constructed it: their Orientalist enthusiasms, knee-jerk assumptions of Anglo-Saxon racial superiority, arcane Straussian precepts and stubborn maverick streaks loom as large as cold geostrategic calculations. The result is a colorful study of empire as a very human endeavor. 30 illus., 2 maps. (*June*)

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From Booklist

The term Middle East is a Western creation; that is appropriate, since some of the nation-states in that volatile region were cobbled together to serve the imperial and economic designs of Britain, France, and the U.S. Meyer is a foreign affairs writer for the New York Times and the Washington Post. Brysac is a journalist and formerly a producer of documentaries for CBS News. They have written a timely and engrossing study of the men and women who were instrumental in giving birth to some of the nations, institutions, and chronic problems of the area. Some of these figures, like T. E. Lawrence and Gertrude Bell, are famous. Others were almost faceless civil servants and bureaucrats who effectively operated in the shadows on behalf of the interests of their nations. There is even a chapter devoted to Paul Wolfowitz, whose fantasies were influential in bringing on our current predicament in Iraq. What seems to unite these characters is a degree of imperial hubris and an appalling unwillingness to consider the long-term consequences of their actions. This is an important work. --Jay Freeman

Review

Beautifully written and researched.

The story resonates with excitement . . . a first-class, always engrossing account of events. . . . A most necessary and rewarding book, and a primer on what not to do in the Middle East. "

Beautifully written and researched. "

Users Review

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