

to address general ethnographic questions. It also has prepared the way for further study of specific cultural practices that helped to reproduce the social fabric of the Mycenaean world. For our understanding of the Mycenaean society, this book is clearly of great importance.

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ARABICA

WIELAND, C. — Syrien nach dem Irak-Krieg. Bastion gegen Islamisten oder Staat vor dem Kollaps? (Islamkundliche Untersuchungen, 263). Klaus Schwarz Verlag, Berlin, 2004. (23,5 cm, 169). ISBN 3-87997-323-7. ISSN 0939-1940.

Dr. Wieland notes that relatively few books have been published on contemporary Syria for a wider public. He describes his own book as “das Ergebnis durchdiskutierter Nächte und zahlreicher Interviews mit Zeitzeugen wie Oppositionellen, Regierungsmitgliedern und ihnen nahe stehenden Personen, Analysten, Unternehmern, islamischen Geistlichen und vielen Freunden. Die Studie versteht sich als aktueller Beitrag zur syrischen Zeitgeschichte mit wissenschaftlichem Anspruch, aber auch als lebendige Lektüre für Laien und Interessierte durch eine journalistische Herangehensweise. Trotz einleitender Kapitel über historische und ideengeschichtliche Aspekte liegt der Fokus auf der aktuellen politischen Situation in Syrien.... Vielleicht kann das Werk dadurch auch ein Beitrag zum gegenseitigen Verständnis und Dialog sein.” (pp. 6-7).

In my opinion the main value of this book is to be found within the material distilled from the many discussions and interviews Dr. Wieland had, as well as within his descriptions and analysis of the political and social atmosphere in contemporary Syria. In particular, I found his analysis of various less well known positive aspects of Syria refreshing, the more so where he compares Syria to other countries in the region, in fields such as secularism, religious tolerance or the position of women in society. But there is also some exaggeration, for instance when he quotes his sources as saying nostalgically that “in the 1960s and 1970s women used to sit in teahouses together with men until late at night” (p. 22). I did not notice such a phenomenon when in Syria at the time. Portraying some of the more positive dimensions of Syria does not mean that Dr. Wieland is without criticism. He rather makes a serious effort to provide the reader with a more balanced picture, in contrast to the many prevalent negative political descriptions of Syria, for instance as a “rogue” or “terrorist” state. Next to Syria, Dr. Wieland also deals with various other parties playing a role in the Middle East, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union, Israel, Hizbollah, Iran, the Baʿth Party in both Syria and Iraq, and the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood.

The book is somewhat mixed in composition, as mentioned by the author himself. Some chapters are for the general reader, others are more academic, and yet other chapters are rather journalistic in style.

The chapter on the Baʿth Party and its ideology is more an analysis of various types of nationalism than that it is a clear description of the Baʿth ideology itself. According to Wieland, the Arab nationalism of the Baʿth Party should be

seen as having an “ethnic-national” dimension, but he does not provide a definition of what an “ethnic group” really is, as this would be outside the scope of this book: “Auf die lange Debatte der Nationalismusforschung, wie real oder konstruiert eine Ethnie tatsächlich ist und wie sie deshalb behandelt werden soll, kann hier leider nicht im Detail eingegangen werden. (p. 35).

Wieland considers the so-called “ethnic-nationalist” tinted ideology of the Baʿth Party as being contradictory with its socialism, calling this combination a “*Spagat*” (splits) (p. 45). His argument is that people who belong to a nation are usually classified according to “primordial characteristics” such as descent, whereas socialism is oriented towards social classes, which come into existence because of socio-economic developments. But I do not see how it would be contradictory to have a combination of these different categories in a single ideology.

He quotes Tibi saying that the Baʿth ideologist Michel ʿAflaq was “enthusiastic about Hitler” (p. 42), but does not explain any further. Here I think Wieland should have gone back to primary Arabic sources (which he, in general, uses rather little). He mentions Zaki al-Arsuzi as one of the founding leaders of the Baʿth Party, but the much more prominent politician Akram al-Hawrani does not occur in the book, even when the Arab Socialist Party is shortly mentioned.

Wieland alleges that the “religious” ʿAflaq could not be reconciled with “atheist Marxism” (p. 45). But the conflict at the time within the Baʿth Party about the role of socialism was much more about the question of whether Arab nationalism should have precedence over socialism or the other way round, rather than about socialism itself. Wieland also writes about “the Christian” [Michel] Kilo (p. 116), or “the Kurd” Kufaro (p. 125) when in the described context their religious or ethnic backgrounds are not really relevant. The details in themselves may be correct, but they sometimes suggest a focus which diverts attention from the main theme with which Wieland is concerned.

Wieland incorrectly notes that ʿAflaq, when in Iraq, was during some time the deputy of Saddam Husayn (p. 46). In his capacity of Secretary General of the Iraqi based National Command of the Baʿth Party, ʿAflaq was officially always in a higher position, however, although this did not imply that he held any real power in Iraq.

Wieland argues that the Syrian population allows itself to be easily distracted from Syrian internal and economic problems, due to the so-called pro-Palestinian hard-line rhetoric of the Syrian mass media (p. 62). But I have strong doubts about this thesis. Attracting the attention of the population to one theme during a crisis situation is very possible. But to keep attracting this attention at the cost of other important issues seems to be quite unlikely, if it is about a period of tens of years, let alone more than half a century (i.e. since 1948).

Wieland gives a good description of the possibilities and impossibilities of President Bashar al-Asad, when it comes to exercising power over the so-called Baʿthist old guard, or to carrying out social and political reforms.

Wieland gives an interesting description of the Kurdish factor in Syrian political life. The Turkish PKK is, however, incorrectly described as the “Communist Party of Kurdistan” whereas the correct name is the “Kurdish Workers Party”.

Wieland explains in detail how he intends to transcribe Arabic words, and he even quotes some titles in the original

Arabic script. But the transcriptions are not always consequent, clear or correct. Neither are some of the quotations in Arabic.

The page numbers mentioned in the Index are almost all incorrect. If one subtracts four from the given numbers, however, the Index becomes "correct" and usable.

Wieland gives an interesting analysis of both the secular and Islamic opposition in Syria, of the tactical positions of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood concerning democracy, and of the role of the media. (In this respect it would have been interesting to have an analysis of how the combination of Syrian censorship and the freedom to look at satellite television stations such as Al Jazeera, works in practice, and which effects this could have had on Syrian public opinion). Wieland also deals with the issue of "terrorism" and the categorizing by the United States and Israel of Syria as a "rogue state" ("*Schurkenstaat*"), and notes that all depends on the definition of terrorism one wishes to use for which parties. He gives a critical analysis of US policies towards Syria and its democratic opposition. On several occasions his arguments are rather politicised. Wieland also gives some suggestions for political options vis-à-vis Syria which could be, or might have been pursued by the European Union. But although these suggestions might theoretically have been correct, they occasionally sound rather unrealistic when it comes to real politics. Wieland, for instance, suggests that UK Prime Minister Blair should have made a conditional linkage between his support for the United States in its policies towards Iraq in 2003, and subsequent US efforts to be undertaken after the fall of the Ba'ath regime in Baghdad towards Israel, forcing the latter for instance to stop building settlements in the occupied territories and to work more seriously for a peace settlement with the Palestinians (p. 148). Without this linkage, Blair, according to Wieland, provided President Bush with a "*Blanko-Scheck*" (p. 149). But real politics work differently.

In his last chapter "*Ausblick*", Wieland provides some interesting views on how Western countries might strategically and delicately deal with Syria, including its democratic and moderate opposition forces, so as to prevent Islamic fundamentalist and other anti-Western forces from strengthening their positions.

In 2006 an updated and revised version of Dr. Wieland's book was published in English.