The Shias of Pakistan: An Assertive and Beleaguered Minority, by Andreas Rieck. C. Hurst, 2016. 544pp., Hb. £45. ISBN-13: 9781849043557.

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The Shias of Pakistan is a pioneering study of the main actors and organizations that have shaped the country's Shī'ī Islam since the late colonial period. The book has been long in the making. After having completed the bulk of the manuscript already in 2001, it took its author Andreas Rieck fifteen additional years until his study would finally see the light of day. Yet, this long delay has not diminished the importance and timeliness of the work. No major monograph on the topic has been published in the last decade, which is a surprising phenomenon in itself given the fact that Pakistan's Shī'īs form the second largest community worldwide after their coreligionists in Iran. Even more important for the relevance and merit of the book is Rieck's underlying methodological choice. He bases his careful analysis almost exclusively on fresh, unstudied Urdu sources with pride of place being devoted to the 1938–1981 issues of the Shī'ī weekly *Razākār* (The Volunteer), published from Lahore. This impressive achievement manifests itself, for example, in 156 pages of highly useful endnotes which deserve to be read in their own right. These are packed with biographical information on leading, but often unknown, players in the story Rieck tells so well. His references point to crucial additional resources and will easily generate countless new research ideas within a still embryonic field.

The short preface spells out that the work intends to cover “mainly three different parallel developments” (Rieck 2016, xiii). First, Rieck devotes his attention to internal Shī'ī concerns like the build-up of a religious infrastructure after the partition of the Subcontinent in 1947 and debates over leadership and orthodoxy, which took place between communal organizations, religious scholars (*ulamā*), and popular preachers (*zākirs*). A second focus lies on the demands Shī'ī representatives voiced in their interactions with federal and provincial governments in order to safeguard particular rights for their community. Third, the book also explores in detail the various manifestations of Sunni–Shī'ī conflict and traces how its scope has widened since the 1940s.

Regarding the last aspect, Rieck comes out with his perhaps strongest statement and argument throughout the book, emphasizing the steadfastly non-sectarian character of the Pakistani state and absolving the political elite from direct responsibility for incidents on the ground. According to him, Pakistani security personnel were “doing their best” to protect Shī'ī ceremonies.

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The country's leaders were only insofar to blame for the bleak contemporary situation as they have not "mustered the courage to tackle its root cause, namely religious extremism" (Rieck 2016, 337). Yet, despite increasing instances of violence since the 1990s, Rieck identifies a continuity with Pakistan's early years because "mainstream political parties have never made any distinction between Sunnis and Shias" and Shī'īs in general enjoy a "privileged position in many profession due to their social and educational background" (Rieck 2016, xi). Such a one-sided portrayal is somewhat surprising, given not only the long history of Sunni–Shī'ī tensions in South Asia. This exculpation also downplays the important linkages that sectarian actors enjoy with the highest echelons of power in Pakistan, all of which is amply documented by Rieck himself.

Chapter 1 and 2 provide essential background reading on the spread of Shī'ī Islam in the Subcontinent through itinerant preachers, Sufis, and Persian-speaking bureaucrats of Iranian origin, culminating in the faith's "official" manifestations in several Shī'ī-dominated states, most notably the principality of Awadh with Lucknow as the leading center of Shī'ī learning in India. After the uprising of 1857, novel Shī'ī communal organizations, polemicists and still influential landlords endowed the community with unprecedented tools to foster a distinct religious identity. Despite initial closeness to the Congress and reservations expressed by Shī'ī organizations towards the possible implications of Pakistan as an exclusively Sunni state, in Rieck's view most Shī'īs came to adopt a position of unconditional support for the Muslim League (Rieck 2016, 53). This section of the book displays significant overlap with Justin Jones's *Shi'a Islam in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) and it is unfortunate that the timing of publication did not allow Rieck to engage some of the more provocative arguments advanced by Jones, such as that Shī'ī Islam came to see itself almost as a freestanding, independent religion or that particular polemics on both the Sunni and Shī'ī side were pushed by younger scholars aiming to stake out religious authority for themselves.

The remaining six core chapters cover about ten years each, roughly aligned with political constellations like "The Ayub Khan Era, 1958–1968" or "The Interim Democratic Decade, 1988–1999." Each individual chapter deals with the three main concerns mentioned above. Rieck shows in detail and with great skill how new Shī'ī organizations (along with religious seminaries and mosques) were established in independent Pakistan. He provides a fascinating discussion of how these—despite all their internal differences—found themselves caught up in the uncomfortable position of fighting on two fronts simultaneously. On the one hand, Shī'ī leaders were eager to prevent any legislation and initiative on part of the state that would lead to an exclusive or superior position for Ḥanafī law. On the other hand, they collaborated with Sunni 'ulamā' in demanding an Islamic constitution, pushing for the implementation of the *sharī'a*, or

exerting pressure to classify the Aḥmadīs as non-Muslims (Rieck 2016, 68). On numerous occasions, however, their Sunnī allies turned the tables against the Shī'īs and attempted to deploy their leverage as junior partners of coalitions in the National Assembly to demand restrictions on Shī'ī worship (Rieck 2016, 236 and 262–263). A further strength of the book consists in the care Rieck devotes to disentangle the pre-history of Shī'ī political activism which by no means originated only in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Instead, already the 1960s witnessed the country-wide establishment of so-called “Shī'ī Demand Committees” which were able to mobilize up to 15,000 participants for pan-Pakistan gatherings. The movement demanded separate religious education for Shī'īs, the exclusive Shī'ī control over Shī'ī religious endowments (*awqāf*), and full freedom and protection for Shī'ī mourning rites (*'azādārī*) (Rieck 2016, 133–145). Bound up with these developments is the gradual rise in importance of the religious scholars, whom Rieck views as a particular “class” (Rieck 2016, 327). Whereas the first Shī'ī organizations in the 1950s were dominated by influential landlords, the *'ulamā'* have taken over more and more leadership positions, which is also reflected in their commanding presence within Pakistan's foremost contemporary Shī'ī political-religious party, *Majlis-i Waḥdat-i Muslimīn* (The Council of Unity among Muslims). Yet, the authority of the *'ulamā'* did not and still does not go unchallenged: in particular popular preachers as well as traditionalist scholars have often attacked the self-styled “orthodox,” predominantly reformist and at times political-minded *'ulamā'* as betraying the unique esoteric heritage of Shī'ī Islam and as acting on the behest of foreign (Sunnī) powers (Rieck 2016, 86–98, 124–133, 171–180, 221–222). Especially this harsh language used and the continuing vitality of the “traditionalist” camp, which continues to dominate the pulpit of Shī'ī mourning ceremonies (*majālis*), distinguishes Pakistan from Middle Eastern contexts like Lebanon, Iran, or Iraq.

Given Rieck's painstaking efforts to dissect the internal Shī'ī diversity, it is remarkable how little attention he devotes to the power of ideas in his study. Instead of appreciating the alternative visions of Shī'ī Islam presented by reformers and traditionalists in their own right, the latter merely defended in his view “well-entrenched elements of popular belief and practice,” but not core elements of the Shī'ī faith (Rieck 2016, 179). Similarly, even though Rieck is very much attuned to instances of sectarian violence since the 1950s, he does not demonstrate any interest in exploring how sectarian polemics have changed and shifted especially in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution and the emergence of zealous anti-Shī'ī organizations like the Army of the Companions of the Prophet (*Sipāh-i Ṣaḥāba*) (Rieck 2016, 87, 231–238 and 249–263). In particular the last chapter “The Musharraf and Zardari Eras, 2000–2013” suffers from such an approach because it merely consists of a listing of acts of sectarian violence all over Pakistan, including the tribal areas, year after year without any further

analysis. Finally, even though leading Shīʿī Grand Ayatollahs and both Najaf and Qom as reference points for religious discourses and authoritative rulings make frequent appearances in Rieck's work, what happens to traveling religious ideas and how they get reformulated in South Asia apparently are no concerns for him.

Despite these shortcomings, there is no doubt that Andreas Rieck has given us a brilliant and erudite study that provides an unrivaled account of the nuts-and-bolts of intra- and anti-Shīʿī debates in Pakistan. *The Shias of Pakistan* is a thought-provoking, highly recommended, and indeed indispensable resource for anyone interested in Islam in South Asia, modern Shīʿism, sectarian dynamics, questions of authority in Islam, and the impact of the Iranian Revolution in Pakistan.