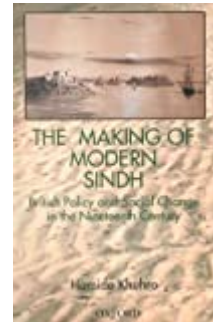


Hamida Khuhro. *The Making of Modern Sindh: British Policy and Social Change in the Nineteenth Century.* Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1999. xxxix + 329 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-579008-5.



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Revisiting Sindh

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The first thing to note about *The Making of Modern Sindh* is that it is a reprint of the book first published by Indus Publications in Karachi in 1978. Oxford University Press, Karachi, has brought it out as reprint – reset type with a short “Introduction to this Edition” by the author – not as a revised edition. Still the press indicates “First published 1999” on the copyright page. Why a reputable press uses this deceptive practice remains a mystery. It is certainly aggravating.

This quibble with the publisher should not detract from the usefulness of having once again in circulation a substantial and still unsurpassed study of British policy in the newly conquered province of Sindh. The original book was based on the author’s PhD dissertation at the University of London under Major J.B. Harrison with assistance from J.A. Gallagher of Cambridge. It holds up well as a meticulously researched study of British policy. Dr. Khuhro has combed the available material in the India Office records, and as a consequence presents a detailed picture of British efforts to consolidate power in Sindh after Sir Charles Napier’s conquest in 1843. We

learn of the successive attempts of early administrators from Napier to Bartle Frere to turn Sindhi *jagir* holders into a loyal gentry. Khuhro deems that effort to have been successful as evidenced by the failure of the Sindhi elite to join the rebel cause in 1857.

She judges the settlement of the land revenue to have been less successful. The unwillingness of the Bombay governors to extend settlements beyond ten years in hopes of an improved revenue stifled enterprising *ze-mindars* and held agriculture at a low level of production. The management of the Indus irrigation system, by Khuhro’s account looks more like folly. The improvement schemes of inexperienced European amateurs, fearful that the much more numerous and experienced traditional canal keepers would cheat if put in charge, inevitably went awry. Napier’s preference for military men over more competent civil servants was part of the problem, but when better administrative arrangements and more competent personnel were put in place by Bartle Frere, post-Mutiny financial stringency prevented their schemes from being carried out. Educational schemes modeled on those of the Bombay presidency with pro-

vision for local tax support likewise came to very little in the period up to the 1860s covered by Khuhro's book.

The book has the virtues and limitations of a study of this kind based, as it is, on one-sided evidence. We learn about British dreams of empire and development schemes which were to turn this strategically important but backward province into an Egypt along the Indus. We also learn of the failure of most of those schemes due to folly, incompetence, and formidable obstacles resulting in very little of the "social change" indicated in the book's subtitle.

The book derives from an era when historical scholars readily accepted an interpretive framework which assigned all agency to the West. The indigenous population is very nearly out of sight. Khuhro does not provide a

coherent or complete picture of the pre-conquest elite so that it is difficult to measure the changes that took place as a result of British *jagir* and land revenue policies. She ignores entirely the religious element in Sindhi social and political life such as that provided by Sarah Ansari fourteen years later in her study of the Sufi *pirs* of Sindh. One wishes for a study that would put early nineteenth-century Sindhi economy and society in a broader perspective such as that provided by C.A. Bayly in *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*. There was undoubtedly more adaptation and dynamism on the part of indigenous players than one would suspect from Khuhro's study. In her brief introduction to this "edition," Khuhro indicates that she is aware of these limitations and that fashions in historical scholarship have changed in the quarter of a century since the book was written, but she offers no second thoughts and reissues the book without change.

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