



The Asiatic Mode of Production: Oriental Despotism, Historical Materialism, and Indian History (Explorations in Social Structures)

Brendan O'Leary

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Western perceptions of Oriental history have usually combined images of despots presiding over bloody slaughter with harems overpopulated with sensuous concubines. Karl Marx's theory of an "Asiatic mode of production" is one of the most controversial examples of occidental visions of the East which have mixed fact and fantasy, and in this trenchant but accessible book the controversies surrounding Marx's ideas are rigorously examined. Brendan O'Leary's revision of the conventional wisdom of the Asiatic mode of production shows up the inaccuracy of many previous critics of Marx and Engels' writings - notably the theoretical and empirical deficiencies of Karl Wittfogel's "Oriental Despotism", the most famous reconstruction of the concept - and shows how the theory poses an insuperable dilemma for historical materialism: Marx's theory of history is damned with the concept, and damned without it.

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