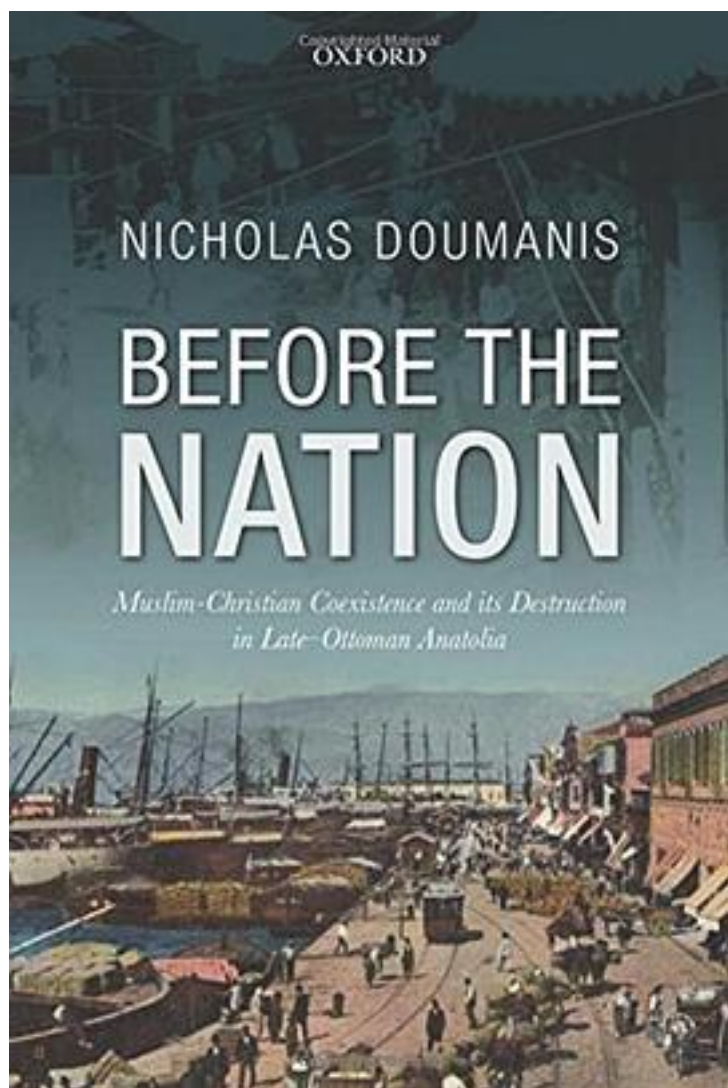


Before the Nation



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Exploring how theories of 'nation-ness' that continue to be evoked in present-day Japan emerged and evolved, Susan L. Burns provides a close examination of kokugaku, a late-eighteenth-century Japanese intellectual movement. Departing from earlier studies of kokugaku (which means 'the study of our country'), Burns considers how three of the more marginalized participants in the movement challenged its principal founder and engaged its fundamental concerns about what defines the Japanese nation and unifies those within it. Central to Burns's analysis is the Kojikiden of Motoori Norinaga, arguably the most important intellectual production of Japan's early modern period. Burns situates the Kojikiden as one of a series of attempts to analyze and interpret the mytho-histories dating from the early eighth century, the Kojiki and Nihon shoki. Nativist scholars like Norinaga saw these texts as keys to an original, authentic, and idyllic 'Japan' that existed before 'flawed' foreign influences, notably Confucianism and Buddhism, tainted it. Hailed in the nineteenth century as the begetter of a new national consciousness, Norinaga's Kojikiden was later condemned by some as a source of Japan's twentieth-century descent into militarism, war, and defeat. Burns looks in depth at three kokugaku writers - Ueda Akinari, Fujitani Mitsue, and Tachibana Moribe - who contested Norinaga's interpretations and produced competing readings of the mytho-histories that stressed community as a basis for Japanese social and cultural identity. Though relegated to the footnotes by a later generation of scholars, these writers were quite influential in their day, and by recovering their arguments, Burns reveals kokugaku as a complex debate involving history, language, and subjectivity - with repercussions extending well into the modern era.

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