

Phillips has provided an excellent account of the role played by external actors in the Syrian civil war. While events taking place after the book's completion in early 2016 are not covered, *The Battle for Syria* is an essential guide for understanding the international aspects of the Syrian conflict that have taken place since then. It is, in my view, a book that scholars, students, and the interested public will all find useful.

ROGER HARDY, *The Poisoned Well: Empire and Its Legacy in the Middle East* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2016). Pp. 280. \$29.95 cloth. ISBN: 9780190623203

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doi:10.1017/S0020743818001046

Roger Hardy's *The Poisoned Well* provides a vivid narrative history of 20th-century imperialism and decolonization in the Middle East. A distinguished journalist who worked for the BBC World Service for most of his professional career, Hardy bases his book on a ten-part radio series entitled *The Making of the Middle East*, which he produced in the 1990s.

To readers of the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* the study provides few new insights. Yet it offers an engaging overview, full of insightful anecdotes and colorful detail, which may be used as an introductory textbook for undergraduate teaching, to complement other major syntheses such as William Cleveland's *A History of the Modern Middle East* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1968), Roger Owen's *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Routledge, 2004), and James Gelvin's *The Modern Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Spanning the period from World War I and the fall of the Ottomans to the British retreat from Aden, *The Poisoned Well* examines the clashes between "Western" imperialism and Middle Eastern resistance. Its ten chapters deal chronologically with one conflict after the other, country by country, thereby providing a vast panorama of the Middle East's struggles for sovereignty.

Chapter 1 begins with the decline and fall of the Ottoman Empire and explores the emergence of Kemalist Turkey. Chapter 2 turns to the foundation of Saudi Arabia in 1926 and, subsequently, the Arabian American Oil Company—"a state within a state"—tracing British and American attempts to control its oil wealth and geopolitical location up to the end of World War II. The following parts tell the history of the independence struggles of the Arab Eastern Mediterranean, from the end of the French mandates in Syria and Lebanon (Chapter 3) to the withdrawal of British troops from Palestine (Chapter 4). One of the most fascinating chapters of the book, Chapter 5 discusses Britain's complex relationship with Jordan, spanning from Churchill's (then colonial secretary) meeting with Abdullah in 1921 to the monarch's assassination by a young Palestinian as he entered Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque on Friday, 20 July 1951. Hardy then discusses the region's great anti-imperial confrontations of the 1950s, which marked the end of Europe's hegemony in the Middle East, from the Mossadeq coup of 1953 (Chapter 6), to the Suez Crisis of 1956 (Chapter 7), to Iraq's 14 July 1958 revolution (Chapter 8), which ended the Hashemite monarchy and British influence in the country. The final two chapters discuss the Algerian War and independence in 1962, tracing the conflict back to France's

conquest of the country in the 1830s and 1840s (Chapter 9), and the establishment of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen in 1967 (Chapter 10). Although all of these regional chapters have a major crisis as their vantage point, they also explore their broader contexts and often trace the conflicts back to the 19th century, offering a general overview of European imperialism in the wider Middle East.

Particularly thought-provoking is the epilogue, which discusses the question raised in the subtitle of the book: the imperial legacy in the Middle East. Although Hardy argues that British and French imperialism, including many of the boundaries, legal and cultural, which it established, did indeed significantly contribute to today's political ruptures, rivalries, and conflicts in the Middle East, he dismisses calls to blame Western imperialism for all of the region's current ills, warning against a paternalistic view of the region's populations as "passive victims of Western" imperialism (p. 205), instead emphasizing their agency.

The major strengths of the book are its vivid narrative and the centrality it gives to individuals and personal stories (the book also includes a *dramatis personae*). Hardy has a gift for portraying characters, skillfully sketching major figures (and some lesser known political actors). The book thereby provides lively insights into individual experiences of the complex processes of decolonization and anti-imperial resistance in the region. And yet Hardy manages to abstain from romanticizing the story, and leaves no doubt that the story of European imperialism was first and foremost a story of racism, exploitation, and violence.

A weakness of the book is its focus on elites—on political leaders. More could have been said on the history of the Middle East's anticolonial struggle from below. Moreover, it draws almost exclusively on English language literature and sources, such as memoirs, letters, and travelogues. The book's main focus is the Arab Middle East; and the author refuses to use the term "Persian Gulf," which he calls "Gulf" (while he keeps other historical oceanic names), a common feature of histories influenced, consciously or not, by radical Arab ethno-nationalism, which seeks to roll back the Persian influence in the Middle East and eradicate its presence in the region from the historical record.

The Poisoned Well is a popular history and provides neither any new information nor radically innovative interpretations of modern Middle Eastern history. It also lacks historiographical references and broader conceptual reflections. As a textbook, however, it will be of use. In contrast to other major textbooks on the history of the region, which often cover a vast amount of ground, its focus on selected major anticolonial crises makes it attractive and easy to approach for students; it may be assigned together with the Elizabeth Monroe classic *Britain's Moment in the Middle East* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins Press, 1963). Overall, *The Poisoned Well* provides a well-written and colorful account of the Middle East in the age of decolonization.

BANU TURNAOĞLU, *The Formation of Turkish Republicanism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2017). Pp. 314. \$39.95 cloth. ISBN: 9780691172743

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doi:10.1017/S0020743818001125

In this carefully researched book, Banu Turnaoğlu seeks to shed light on the challenges of the Turkish republican state by tracing the origins and the evolution of the republican