

beginning”; it is even suggested that “it took many centuries for the version called ‘Uthmanic to be accepted by all Muslims” (p. 23). One does wonder which sources are being referred to: the condemnation of Ibn Miqdam and Ibn Shanabūdh along with the significance of the codex of Ubayy is fleetingly mentioned; and earlier in his introduction reports on the collection of the Quran are discussed. Still, none of these materials are contextually relevant to the claims that there was “a great protest movement”. Indeed, one suspects that pronounced arguments among early Sunni luminaries about the devotional importance of *lectiones*, together with variegated discussions on conceptual constructs such as abrogation, are being inadvertently identified with the developed notion of *tahrīf*. Fittingly, John Wansbrough expressed the view that even non-canonical (*amṣār*) codices (metropolitan or indigenous) did not display the “differences either among themselves or from the ‘Uthmānic recension which are alleged to have provoked the editorial measures attributed to the third caliph” and that even the non-canonical variants ascribed to the figure of Ibn Mas‘ūd were in his view “not genuinely independent of the ‘Uthmanic recension” (*Quranic Studies*. Oxford: OUP, 1977, 44–5). The works of the early grammarians, including luminaries such as Sībawayhi (d. c. 180/796), al-Farrā’ (d. 207/822), and al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ (d. 215/830), hold the keys to unravelling the intricacies surrounding the historical imposition of the ‘Uthmānic codices, but these have not been discussed in the introduction nor are they used in the notes section. Yet, if one were to discount the pro-Imāmī readings which feature in the *Kitāb al-qirā’āt*, the remaining *lectiones* would certainly be consistent with the form of variants featured in the literature of *qirā’āt*. Accordingly, al-Sayyārī’s text is crucial not only for gauging the doctrinal development of the notion of *tahrīf* in the early third/ninth century, but also, in certain respects, it provides an evident indication of the textual authority achieved by the ‘Uthmānic codex.

**Mustafa Shah**

SAUL KELLY:

*War and Politics in the Desert: Britain and Libya during the Second World War.*

(The Society for Libyan Studies.) 256 pp. London: Silphium Press, 2010. ISBN 978 1 900971 09 6.

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Scholarship on the North African Campaign during the Second World War has focused principally on military operations in general or has paid particular attention to the battles of El Alamein (in the Egyptian coastal area) or to Operation Torch (the American and British invasion of French North Africa). There is no satisfactory study to explain how the war affected the Italian colony of Libya. Saul Kelly’s book fills this void. *War and Politics in the Desert: Britain and Libya during the Second World War* does not scrutinize the military operations, but rather the British political debates on the future of the Italian colony of Libya.

Framed by a prologue and an epilogue, the seven chapters are grouped into three sections corresponding to the chronological sequence of the war and to the three main political facts which, according to the author, played an important role in shaping the future of Libya thereafter. The prologue (“Italy, Britain and Libya 1911 to 1940”) briefly outlines the main events of the Italian colonial presence in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, the two former Ottoman provinces which, at the

beginning of the Italian occupation (1911), were commonly referred to as Libya. The name Libya was officially given to the two provinces only in 1934 when they were unified in a single colony.

In the first section (“The first year: 1940–1941. Prelude to the declaration on the Sanusis”) the author shows how the short period from June 1940 to April 1941 was crucial in determining future British politics. In this period, during which the first British occupation of Cyrenaica (late January–April 1941) took place, Great Britain started to develop an interest in Cyrenaica, if not in Libya as a whole. The British sought the co-operation of the Sanusi leaders. The Sanusiyya, a reformist Sufi movement which emerged in the nineteenth century, acted as a unifying force among the tribes of Cyrenaica. It is worth underlining that the book is based almost exclusively on unpublished archival sources (mainly from the British National Archives). This allows him not only to uncover events hitherto unknown, for example he presents the first in-depth look at Arab initiatives on the future of Libya, but also to provide new interpretations and to add new information to well-known events, such as the story of the Sanusi/Libyan Arab Force, the volunteer battalions who served with the British against the Italians in Libya.

The Declaration on the Sanusis, by British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden in January 1942, is the key theme of the second section (“The second year: 1941–42. The declaration on the Sanusis”). It stated that owing to Sanusi engagement on their side during the war, the British had pledged that the Sanusi of Cyrenaica need never return to Italian rule following the war. Historians consider this episode, after the Italo-Sanusi agreement of al-Rajma which granted Idris al-Sanusi the hereditary title of the Amir of the Sanusi in 1920, the second important step towards the acknowledgement of the Sanusis as the main political actors in the area. Kelly analyses this event not only in the light of the military operation, but also places it in the broader context of British political expectations in the Middle East after the war.

The final section (“The third year: 1942–3. The conquest of Libya”) deals with the definitive British occupation of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania and the Free French Force occupation of Fezzan, which until then had been governed as part of Tripolitania. The author convincingly argues that the British authorities probably accepted the French presence “by way for their exclusion from Operation Torch” (p. 203).

The long epilogue (“Britain, Libya and the start of the Cold War, 1943–1954”) deals with post-war plans on the future of Libya, the failure of the Four Power Commission of Investigation, the role of the United Nations in forging the new independent United Kingdom of Libya, and US and British strategic aims in the country. As noted above, the book’s great strength is that it is based mainly on primary sources. Nevertheless, I would have appreciated more extensive use of the existing literature in the prologue and epilogue. For instance, it is not clear why in the epilogue the author fails to cite Scott L. Bills, *The Libyan Arena. The United States, Britain, and the Council of Foreign Ministers, 1945–48* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1995), the most extensive work on the immediate post-war years.

The book is supplemented with maps and about thirty photographs, taken from public and private collections, which are helpful for non-specialists seeking familiarity with the region and the key protagonists. The editing is very accurate and the typographical design elegant; there are no misprints and the spelling of Arabic personal names and place names is consistent throughout.

In short, this book makes an important contribution not only to military history but also to the history of modern Libya. Kelly’s work amounts to a definitive history of Libya during the Second World War. It will surely become a standard reference work for anyone interested in the making of the Libyan nation-state, and will

stimulate further research on this period of the British administration in Cyrenaica and Tripolitania.

**Anna Baldinetti**

ROBERT IRWIN:

*Mamlūks and Crusaders – Men of the Sword and Men of the Pen.*

(Variorum Collected Studies.) xiv, 368 pp. Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010. £95. ISBN 978 1 4094 0775 1.

doi:10.1017/S0041977X11000152

The Variorum series brings together in one volume previously published essays by eminent historians; the value of these anthologies is that not only are seminal articles made more accessible, but readers can appreciate the full extent of the historian's oeuvre. In the case of Robert Irwin, this Variorum collection emphasizes just how familiar the author is with a huge body of medieval Arabic literature and how capable he is of drawing original and important historical formulations from a study of these texts.

I am primarily a crusade historian and while the book's title is a little misleading – of the twenty-three essays reproduced here, only six are directly concerned with the crusade – there is no doubting the importance of Robert Irwin's contribution to the field. It is well established that the evolution of crusading studies has suffered from a lack of participation by scholars equipped with the language skills and contextual knowledge to make the most of medieval Arabic sources. For the Latin sources we have a considerable – and ever-increasing – body of scholarship, have engaged in widespread debates and as a result have generated a deep appreciation of the nuances of the texts under examination. For many of the key Arabic sources, we are lacking modern scholarly editions and translations, let alone a thriving culture of scholarly debate over how the texts should be read. As Irwin himself puts it in his entertaining survey of Western scholarship's engagement with the medieval Arabic sources for the crusades, “far too few Arabic (and Persian and Turkish) sources have been brought into play. Few sources have been looked at except the obvious chronicles and biographical dictionaries. On the whole, the chronicles have been used merely to provide information to confirm or supplement the Western materials. There has been little attempt to, as it were, get inside those sources and recreate the *Einfühlung* of the Muslim counter-crusade”.

The anthology provides an excellent case study demonstrating what is possible with regard to medieval Arabic source analysis in Irwin's evaluation of Usamah ibn Munquidh's twelfth-century autobiographical guide to the ways of the world. Usamah's is a much-quoted text, mainly for its lively passages on the contrasts between Christian and Muslim practices in his day, but until Irwin's study few scholars would have appreciated the literary traditions informing the construction of the text and – more importantly for those seeking historical information in it – the considerable biases and lacunae in regard to Usamah's own involvement in Egyptian affairs.

Robert Irwin is a novelist as well as a historian and this impacts on the anthology in two ways. First, all of the essays are very readable. Not all (or rather, many) of the Variorum series publications can be read from cover to cover for pleasure. But when the historian is unafraid of writing sentences like, “although Creswell was Wiet's furious enemy and rival, this was not really Wiet's fault, since what Creswell