

why ISIS has managed to bring back the caliphate as a powerful political vision despite the dominance of spiritual reinterpretations of the office in the aftermath of 1924 as shown so powerfully by Hassan.

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ROGER OWEN:

*A Life in Middle East Studies.*

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Part memoir and part history of the development of area studies as it relates to the Middle East, Roger Owen's new book, *A Life in Middle East Studies*, offers readers a text that successfully combines a charming account of a lifetime in academia with an insightful assessment of the development, and possible future, of Middle East area studies on both sides of the Atlantic. As such, while the region-specific material might at first glance have limited relevance to those in other areas, it actually deals with matters that concern area studies more widely, and academia as a whole.

Arranged in seven chapters, the book can more broadly be divided into two halves: the first deals more or less with Owen's experiences living and working in the Middle East; the second with academia and professional development, more particularly, his own and that of Middle East area studies at Oxford and Harvard. Taken together, the book's final two sections, "Lessons (By Way of a Conclusion)", and "Epilogue: My Sixty Years of Studying the Middle East", provide a pithy, not to say poignant, summation of the author's involvement in a field that has been transformed almost beyond recognition since he started out.

As one might expect from a man known as much for his generosity as a teacher as for the rigour he brings to his scholarship, there is a lack of bombast in these closing pages. Instead, one is confronted, in the gentlest possible fashion, with some decidedly undogmatic parting thoughts, which instead of being didactic encourage the reader to a more reflective response.

The early chapters take readers back more than half a century to a very different time in the life of the modern Middle East. Owen's first encounters with the Middle East took place in 1955–1956, during his National Service in the British Army, when he was based in Cyprus, then Britain's base from which to keep a beady eye on the eastern Mediterranean and wider Middle East. While doing his DPhil in Economic History at St Antony's, Oxford, Owen speaks fondly of working under Albert Hourani, the celebrated historian of the modern Middle East and a leading figure in the establishment and growth of Middle Eastern area studies at Oxford.

With the development of Middle East area studies in mind, Owen is able to offer a unique perspective on how this unfolded on both sides of the Atlantic. After serving four terms as Director of St Antony's College Middle East Centre, Owen moved to Harvard in 1993, where he became director of that university's Center for Middle Eastern Studies (CMES).

Although familiar territory to anyone involved in area studies, Owen deals in brief with the very different contexts under which Middle East studies developed

in Europe and the United States, not to mention the dissimilar relationship between the academy and government in those settings. Moving beyond the mundane, Owen adds value to the subject with reference to those he refers to as “the ‘pioneers’ of modern Middle East studies as a separate academic discipline”, including Hamilton Gibb, Hourani, Ann Lambton, AJ Meyer, and Elizabeth Monroe. Nor does he neglect friends and colleagues from SOAS, and the University of London more widely.

Among Owen’s earlier works, *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2000) remains an important text in the field, while his latest book, *The Rise and Fall of Arab Presidents for Life* (2012), was, and remains, extremely timely. He writes here about how both books came into being, and the publication date of the latter title is particularly noteworthy.

Having delivered the completed manuscript of *The Rise and Fall of Arab Presidents for Life* to his publishers in December 2010, just as the so-called Arab Spring was starting, his thesis discussed how, starting in the 1980s, the Middle East witnessed “the growth of a monarchical style of rule, with palaces, wives as first ladies, and sons as crown princes in waiting. . . . Key to my new thinking was the notion that those around Qaddafi, and probably the other presidents as well, took great care to present their masters with pictures of the world as they wanted, perhaps even needed, to see it, rather than as it actually was.” Owen makes a compelling argument, but it is the question of what comes next that now confronts those of us working on the region: perhaps it is always too early to say.

It also seems appropriate here, in reviewing a memoir-cum-institutional history, to draw attention to one other of Owen’s books, and his sole biographical study. In deciding to write a life of Evelyn Baring, *Lord Cromer: Victorian Imperialist, Edwardian Proconsul* (2004) Owen starts by asking, “‘What is a life?’ I asked myself, a question posed by so many through the ages and answered in so many different ways. And what is involved in writing the life of someone other than oneself? . . . it remained something of a chastening and often bewildering process . . . Judging him and evaluating the impact of his life was more difficult.” As indeed it must be for all such endeavours.

To end on a personal note, although this reviewer was long familiar with, and often reliant upon, Owen’s scholarly output, it was not until 2013 that we met, in Washington, DC, when Professor Owen gave the keynote address at a one-day conference organized and hosted by the Institute for Middle East Studies at the Elliot School of International Affairs, George Washington University. Owen’s 30-minute presentation was fluent, clearly argued and, whether because or in spite of his lack of notes, lively enough to engage his audience from start to finish. The same polished performance comes through in this book, as indeed it does with the rest of his written output. Illuminating and full of insight, this is an authoritative narrative that avoids being prescriptive, and an academic memoir that is fresh and fun. A delight to read.

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