

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.

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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

especially hated about Wiet was that the latter was French”, or “in his studies, Berthereau was somewhat hindered by the assistance of a villainous and idle Syrian Arabic speaker called Joseph Chahin”, the reader looks forward to the next authorial judgement. Second, Irwin is fascinated by the colourful, extraordinary, and adventurous elements of texts as well as the wider Arabic traditions of storytelling. This does not lead to self-indulgence. In Irwin’s hands investigations of literary themes can be a route to knowledge of the activities of all manner of professions whose deeds are rarely featured in histories and chronicles concerned with the actions of the ruling elite.

As I write this review, hundreds of thousands of people are demonstrating in Cairo and this creates a strong resonance with some of the essays in this anthology, not least Irwin’s study of the *Futuwwa*. The *futuwwa* was an institution that evolved in Arabic culture from being a tenth-century means of providing young warriors with feasting, hospitality and good fellowship on their travels, to being a body of thugs who, by early modern times and especially in Cairo, were considered disreputable rogues, running small-time rackets and controlling districts that needed to be monitored carefully by the elite. For these districts proved to be centres of opposition to the authorities, whether Turks or Bonaparte’s troops. As Irwin concludes, “the defence of poor and humble citizens from the oppression of the alien Turkish soldiery was surely one of the most important roles of *futuwwa* lodges and similar groups.”

The chronological arrangement of the essays maps Robert Irwin’s interests and shows his growing engagement with and authority on Mamluk history. Here are essays on the historiography of the subject, on individual sources, on the political struggles of particular rulers and periods and one reassessing the commonly held argument – derived from David Ayalon’s influential 1956 study – that the failure of the Mamluks to adopt the use of firearms contributed to the demise of the Mamluk Sultanate.

An anthology of this sort runs the risk of drawing attention to a scholar’s tendency (which we all engage in to some degree) to draw on the same material from one essay to the next, but Robert Irwin’s interests and expertise are so wide-ranging that such a practice is hardly noticeable in the collection. And although the same framing device about the unique appropriateness of an aphorism by Sir Lewis Namier is used in two essays with regard to two different texts, this is a terribly minor flaw in an otherwise sparkling collection of learned and stimulating essays.

Conor Kostick

YUKA KADOI:

Islamic Chinoiserie: The Art of Mongol Iran.

(Edinburgh Studies in Islamic Art.) xvii, 286 pp. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009. £75. ISBN 978 0 7486 3582 5.

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The art world has always been some steps ahead of the world of political history when it comes to interpreting the legacy of the Mongols and their cultural contributions. Art historians had recognized the cultural wealth of the Ilkhanate and the strong Chinese influence on the Iranian art of the period long before Thomas Allsen published his ground-breaking research in his far-reaching study, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia* (Cambridge University Press, 2001). They were already celebrating