

level illiteracy rates in order to support claims about poor voters. To be clear, Masoud acknowledges the inferential challenge explicitly whenever he introduces ecological data; one worry is that such cautionary notes could be overlooked by readers who are unfamiliar with the problem and will dismiss them as standard academic hedging. It would have been hard to accept the book's conclusions had they been based primarily on this type of data. Fortunately, the ecological evidence is just one of several types of data employed; when combined, they make a compelling case that none alone could make.

Ultimately, Masoud makes no claims to having the last word in the debate over whether Islamist successes are due to material, ideational, or organizational factors. The information-based story he offers is persuasively argued and supported by a mix of evidence that, while containing no smoking guns, does build a strong circumstantial case for his claims. This book is, therefore, a compelling addition to an ongoing, and always improving, conversation about elections in Egypt and the developing world more generally. ✂

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RONALD A. MESSIER AND JAMES A. MILLER. *The Last Civilized Place: Sijilmasa and Its Saharan Destiny*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015. xiv + 279, acknowledgements, note on transliteration, notes, glossary, index. Cloth US\$55.00 ISBN 978-0-292-76665-5.

The Last Civilized Place is an unusual and engaging volume, weaving together archaeological and historical information about the southern Moroccan city of Sijilmasa, generally acknowledged as one of the earliest Muslim urban foundations in the region and a hugely important entrepot in the trans-Saharan trade for nearly a millennium. Although known to scholars working on Morocco, Sijilmasa has frequently been cast into shadow by the prominence of Fes, Marrakesh, Rabat, and Meknes, the so-called “imperial cities” on the modern tourist trail, and the abandonment of the medieval city for its modern successor, Rissani. However, for many centuries, Sijilmasa was probably the largest and most important city in the western Maghreb, rivalled only by Ceuta on the Straits of Gibraltar. It was the place where the founder of the Fatimid dynasty sought refuge from his eastern rivals, the first city captured by the Almoravids when they emerged from the

Sahara to found an empire, and a prize which the Almohads, Marinids and the Zayyanids all waged numerous campaigns to control. It is, therefore, an important step forward in our understanding of pre-modern Moroccan history to have a volume such as this that places Sijilmasa firmly at the center of the narrative.

The book begins with an atmospheric prologue to Sijilmasa that uses Ibn Battuta's account of his passage through the city *en route* for West Africa, to lay out the main areas of the city and subsidiary settlements such as Suq Ben Akla. It then moves to consider scholarly and methodological "approaches to Sijilmasa," including its position within histories of trans-Saharan commerce and debates on the Islamic city, the kinds of archaeological evidence that the site provides, and the microhistory of the excavations undertaken by the authors and their collaborators in the 1990s.

After this introductory material, broadly speaking chronological chapters explore Sijilmasa's history during its first phase as the capital of the Kharijite Banu Midrar, its "imperial" phase under Almoravid, Almohad and Marinid rule from the eleventh to the fourteenth century, the Filalian era when it regained a certain independence, and then its final phase from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century as the cradle of the still-ruling 'Alawi dynasty. The encounters of the archaeologists themselves with the local population and the myths and legends of Sijilmasa that the latter recounted form an additional strand.

The outline history in which Sijilmasa is embedded is, of course, not new and functions primarily as the context for Sijilmasa's own story which is elucidated by reference to the archaeological findings of Ronald Messier, James Miller, and their collaborators. Therefore, it is in the discussions of the finds at Sijilmasa and their implications that the book comes into its own. Although Messier and Miller point out that they have previously published information on their findings, this book brings that body of work together and presents it to a more general readership, interwoven with the historical narrative.

Among the most noteworthy findings are indications that Sijilmasa did not fall into decay after its sack by the Marinids in 1393, despite textual suggestions to the contrary. It is also fascinating to learn more about the development of the city's morphology through the changing siting and orientation of the great mosque and the citadel, and about its unusual satellite settlement or suburb, Suq Ben Akla, where the markets serving caravans were located. The book concludes with an assessment of Sijilmasa in comparison to various theoretical models about cities in the Islamic world and a review of the future of the site, which is faced with pressure from

the urban expansion of Rissani and ambiguities about its future status and development as a heritage site.

There is a certain tension between the often chatty and personal tone adopted by the authors and the more scholarly aspects of the book; it is likely that readers will come to it for one or the other, and engage primarily with that. Nonetheless, there is an implicit justification for this style in the idea that Sijilmasa was a real place with real inhabitants and that the lives of the people in the Tafilalt oasis around the site today, and their interactions with archaeologists, are simply another page in Sijilmasa's story. Although it is a small point, the Arabic transliteration falters on a few occasions, for example the Marinid sultan Abu Sa'id is called Abu Sayid and the land tax is described as *khasraj* rather than *kharaj*, which could lead to a modicum of confusion in teaching environments.

Such quibbles aside, this is an accessible and fascinating introduction to Sijilmasa's past which draws this vitally important city into the orbit of western Maghrebi history and shows the value of combining textual and archaeological investigations to create a more rounded vision of the past. It sheds light not only on the life of Sijilmasa itself but also medieval urban life in Morocco more generally. I have no doubt that it will make a valuable addition to many a course list on Islamic urbanism, North African history, the history of trade—the trans-Saharan trade in particular—as well as on archaeology. ✦

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WILLIAMSON MURRAY AND KEVIN M. WOODS. *The Iran–Iraq War: A Military and Strategic History*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2014. xiv + 397 pages, appendixes, bibliography, index. Paper US\$34.99 ISBN 978-1-1076-7392-2.

Williamson Murray and Kevin Woods have made a valuable contribution with their new book on the Iran–Iraq War. As they state in the preface to the work, “The 1980–1988 war between Iraq and Iran was one of the largest and, yet, one of the least documented conventional conflicts in the twentieth century” (xi). As two well-respected military historians, their book not only adds to our understanding of the war, but also places it within the context of other modern wars and thus does a small part to alleviate the historiographical problem that they identify.