supposed to be the topic of the volume. In sum, this is a collection with several must-read pieces that should spur more scholarship.

DOI:10.1017/rms.2015.10

Carine Bourget
University of Arizona

Jörg Matthias Determann. *Historiography in Saudi Arabia: Globalization and the State in the Middle East*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2014. xviii + 325 pages, acknowledgements, bibliography, index. Cloth US$95.00 ISBN 978-1-7807-6664-5.

It is often assumed that historical writing in the Arabian Peninsula countries consists of praising rulers' achievements, legitimizing dynastic exclusivism, and presenting rulers as singular drivers of progress. Jörg Matthias Determann's *Historiography in Saudi Arabia* challenges this simplistic narrative through comprehensive, in-depth analysis of Saudi historical writings from the foundation of the first Saudi state through the present. He argues for recognition of a "narrative plurality" resulting from the interplay between nation building and the development of historical writing and demonstrates that history is not only a state-driven endeavor but also a means by which individual citizens can make personal contributions to and demands upon the development and understanding of the state.

Determann's analysis begins with the "founding fathers" of Saudi historiography, Husayn ibn Ghannam and ʿUthman ibn ʿAbd Allah ibn Bishr, who chronicled the first Saudi state (1744–1818) and established the "dynastic exclusivism" that marked Saudi historical writing up to the 1960s. These works asserted the 1744 Saudi–Wahhabi religious-political alliance as the critical factor in establishing the first Saudi state as a religious project to redress a presumed widespread *jahiliyyah* (age of ignorance). The assertion of the state's religious project favored the presentation of the Al Saud as central players in a broader narrative of Arab and Islamic salvation history, thus granting divine legitimacy to their state project and seemingly guaranteeing a central role to religious scholars in perpetuity. Determann uses this foundation as a springboard for examining how and why changes to this narrative took place and what political purposes these changes served.

Determann posits the first major change in Saudi historiographical writing occurred between the 1920s and 1970s, when the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was founded, consolidated, and developed into a modern country.

Determann postulates that the rise of a "particularistic expression" of a given community's historical independence from the Al Saud was tied to their desire to recover local political, religious, and social traditions from those of Najd, as well as to assert alternative presentations of local history. From the 1970s this trend expanded into even more particularized narratives focusing on the contributions of specific towns and tribes, as well as of the Shiʿa, to Saudi history and nation building as a way of claiming a stake in national history and oil revenues.

At the same time, Determann also notes a shift toward the Saudization of dynastic historiography itself in the 1960s, as the Al Saud sought an increasingly central role in promulgating the "development" paradigm, thus creating an alternative base of legitimacy for dynastic claims at the heart of Saudi national identity. Added to this was the assertion by particularized narratives of a strong Islamic presence in the pre-Wahhabi era, and the development of "contextualist" arguments by social and economic historians from the 1970s onward that sought to explain events by examining their relationship to their surrounding context. Thus, rather than an "ideal truth" consisting of names, dates, and key events, history came to be understood as the product of broader social, economic, and political processes, particularly those of settlement and state formation.

Determann also takes the reader inside the politics of historical production by examining the roles of government agencies and institutions (e.g., King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives, Ministry of Information and Culture) in both exercising and working around censorship. He also considers the unintended consequences of state-financed education and employment on historiography, as foreign-trained Saudis came into contact with new methodologies and applied them to Saudi history writing.

In short, Determann's book is a fascinating account of the history of Saudi historiography. It analyses not only the content of Saudi histories but also the context of both the histories and the historians. The only shortcomings of this book are the relative absence of female Saudi historians because of access issues related to gender segregation—a point that Determann himself makes—and an abbreviated endnote format that challenges the reader to dig through the bibliography for referenced sources. Such shortcomings, however, should not take away from the book's impressive achievement. It marks a new, intellectually rigorous milestone in the study of Arab historiography that demonstrates the importance of not simply reading

https://doi.org/10.1017/rms.2015.11 Published online by Cambridge University Press

history as such, but of questioning the psychology and politics behind its construction.

DOI:10.1017/rms.2015.11

Natana J. DeLong-Bas
Boston College

Sebastian Elsässer. *The Coptic Question in the Mubarak Era: Debating National Identity, Religion, and Citizenship*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. xviii + 319 pages, illustrations, references. Cloth US$74.00 ISBN 978-0-1993-6839-6.

As academics try to interpret the recent tumultuous events in Egypt, the role of Coptic–Muslim relations will likely play a significant part. Such investigations would do well to consult Sebastian Elsässer's book, which focuses on the formation of discourses in particular historical junctures and discusses how such discourse is used and to what effect. Arguing that "a discourse is a symbolic struggle between social actors over definitions of reality and normativity" (3), Elsässer sees "contemporary debates about the Coptic question as a struggle between different discourses, each of which builds on a certain set of preconceptions and conceptual choices" (2). Elsässer is to be commended for highlighting such conceptual choices and for emphasizing that any discussion of the Copts must take into account the broader social and political movements in Mubarak's Egypt, since as the author says, "a minority question is also a majority question" (1).

Part one of the book (chapters 1–3) provides a survey of the historical, social, political, and religious dimensions of relations between Muslims and Christians in Mubarak's Egypt. The author emphasizes that the Coptic question emerged in the context of modernity and the modern state and questions some dominant narratives of Egyptian history. For example, although the 1919 revolution led to the establishment of a state based on a secularly defined Egyptian nation, Elsässer argues that "religious symbols, references, and networks remained highly significant," and that "most contemporaries regarded national and a religious belonging as perfectly compatible" (33).

In chapter 2, the author questions the assumed cause-and-effect relationship between Islamization and sectarian strife and asks if there are other, "perhaps more important ingredients to sectarian violence than the machinations of Islamist groups" (68). In chapter 3, Elsässer argues that "it is crucial to notice that there existed both *random* discrimination caused