

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.

The book is not meant to be the definitive history of the Iran–Iraq War, but rather an analysis of Iraq’s strategy and decision making process. Its greatest strength is its wealth of unique sources. The book came out of the Iraqi Perspectives Project, which was a U.S. government sponsored program following the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The project was designed to provide lessons for future American military leaders and policy makers. As such, the authors enjoyed unprecedented access to internal Iraqi archives and had the benefit of staffs to assist them in sorting and translating files. The authors also met with senior Iraqi officials; the footnotes show interviews in Cairo, Dubai, and other places to which they had to travel to find scattered members of the former regime. The result is a book which is essential for anyone who wishes to study Saddam’s Iraq.

The book follows a narrative of the Iran–Iraq War that those who are already familiar with the conflict will recognize: The war began when the Iranian revolution threatened to spill over into Iraq, and create unrest among Iraqi Shi‘a. Saddam, with some justification, blamed the new regime in Tehran. The Iraqi regime considered this a violation of previous understandings in which each state agreed not to interfere in the other’s internal affairs. Saddam used this justification to launch a war against what he considered to be an Iranian regime weakened by the chaos of revolution and international isolation. The Iranian regime did not collapse as expected, and a few months into the war, Saddam was looking to negotiate its end. However, the Iranians saw the Iraqi assault as a validation of their view that Saddam’s Ba‘thist regime was an intolerable evil, which needed to be destroyed. It took eight long years and hundreds of thousands of casualties before revolutionary Iran finally agreed to negotiate a ceasefire.

While this outline of the conflict is well-known, the details which Murray and Woods provide offer new insights about what occurred behind the scenes and how decisions were made, as well as which plans worked and which did not. This is especially true on the Iraqi side, where readers are provided with transcripts of high level meetings between Saddam and his closest advisors as well as documentation from the military and intelligence services. However, Iraqi intelligence also managed to acquire several extensive Iranian assessments and after-action reports on the conflict. These documents, when added to the accounts provided by the surprisingly proficient Iraqi intelligence services, help to detail what was occurring from the Iranian perspective.

Iraqi Signals Intelligence appears to have been particularly adept and it managed to mollify several poor decisions by inept Iraqi generals. The book’s discussion of Iraq’s use of chemical weapons is also quite rich. While some

Iraqis used euphemisms such as *special weapons*, it was not uncommon for senior officials, including Saddam, to be quite frank in their conversations about using chemical weapons and their reasons for doing so: the weapons “destroy any living creature on the fronts” (221–2). The records also suggest that the regime may have been deterred by the potential international consequences of using those weapons to their full extent. In one instance, an advisor to Saddam stated, “the situation is ripe for us to choose an important city ... of Iran and attack it with a chemical blow ... I mean... [we] should wipe it from existence, and whatever happens, happens... we have the capability...” (295). Despite that capability, and the fact that it may have ended the war, the regime never did so. Perhaps one of the greatest insights that the book demonstrates is that “pushed to the wall, the Iraqis were capable of institutional learning” (183). This challenges the standard narrative of the Iraqi regime as a bunch of yes-men who were incapable of telling Saddam the truth and thus incapable of reform.

Despite these considerable contributions, some Middle East specialists will notice that neither author appears to be trained in Arabic. Thus some Arabic sources are conspicuously absent. For example, the former head of Iraqi Military Intelligence, Wafiq al-Samarra’i, has written a widely cited memoir that covers the conflict in depth. It would have been interesting to see it and similar sources compared with the archival records. Also, in some instances the translation of words can be confusing. For example on page 228, the authors discuss the “Hoveyzeh Marshes” in one paragraph and the “Hawr al-Hawizeh” in the next. This is actually the same name rendered two different ways—the first a Persian transliteration with the word “marshes” translated to English, and the second an Arabic transliteration with the word “marshes” left untranslated. Also in a few cases the authors quote documents describing “the Farsi enemy” (175, 184). However, “Farsi” is simply the Arabic word for Persian. Thus the Iraqi documents were referencing the “Persian enemy.” This and other similar examples could be confusing to someone unfamiliar with the terms.

Nevertheless, these shortcomings in no way negate the important contribution that the book makes to an unjustifiably understudied subject. It should be essential reading for scholars interested in Iraqi and Iranian history as well as modern warfare more generally. ✦

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