

chapter, the analysis offers contextualized reading of selected poems given both in Arabic and English translation (some of the translations are by the author, which is an excellent didactical tool that can be very useful to students and learners of Arabic). Chapter 2 focuses on al-Bayati and how his innovations in form and content revolutionized Arabic poetry as he moved beyond committed poetry into writing poetry more concerned with poetic creativity and language. The self-reflexive turn where poetry and the poet, as an anxious and alienated subject, take center stage was not devoid of a concern for the struggle of humankind. Chapter 3 discusses the trajectory of Hijazi as a Nasserist and a proponent of Arab nationalism. The 1967 defeat ended his poetic career as the poet of the regime, and a long hiatus marked his disengagement from his creative process. However, as he witnessed the Arab uprisings, politics became a source of inspiration anew for Hijazi, and he became a poet recommitted to the people and not to a leader. The last chapter is dedicated to one of the most important poets of modern Arabic poetry: the Palestinian Mahmoud Darwish. The author shows how the concept of political *iltizām* took on a militant and anti-Israeli tone with the early poetry of Darwish, and how it contributed in creating readers committed to the Palestinian cause. Yet though dedicated to the Palestinian cause, his poetry nevertheless witnessed many changes and transformations. From the poet of resistance and displacement, *Modern Arabic Poetry* argues that Darwish's poetry moved from an "extroverted political poetry" to a more "introverted" stance. A selection of major poems is contextualized and thoroughly analyzed where the author identifies and analyzes the changes in Darwish's poetry, mainly his ability to humanize the enemy and see him as a human other. The book concludes on the survival of the perennial potential of the notion of commitment and the new meanings it takes on as poets continue to be inspired by people's aspirations for and dreams about freedom and justice.

Many excellent books on Arab poets and modern Arab poetry have been published in the last few years. Muhsin J. al-Musawi's *Arabic Poetry: Trajectories of Modernity and Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 2006) provides comprehensive coverage of modern and postmodern poetry from the 1950s onwards. *The Poet's Art and His Nation* by Khaled Mattawa (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2014) focuses on Mahmoud Darwish and offers an overview of the life and work of Palestine's national poet. Athamneh's book goes further in shaping knowledge and scholarship in the way it offers a comprehensive analysis and a historical interpretation of change in modern Arabic poetry. It will help scholars and generations of literature students navigate the development of this art and its connections to the dynamics in Arab politics.

CHRISTOPHER PHILLIPS, *The Battle for Syria: International Rivalry in the New Middle East* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2016). Pp. 320. \$30.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780300217179

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Although *The Battle for Syria* does discuss the internal aspects of the conflict in Syria that has raged since 2011, author Christopher Phillips focuses on the actions of the six principal external actors involved in this conflict: the United States, Russia, Iran, Turkey,

Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. In it, Phillips describes in detail how Russia and Iran have supported the Asad regime; how Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar supported its opponents, but often worked at cross-purposes; and how the Obama Administration pursued a confused policy of calling for Asad to step down but doing little to bring this about, working much harder to combat ISIS, and seeking to prevent large-scale US military involvement in Syria. One of the main themes of the book is that the United States is no longer a hegemonic power in the Middle East, and that some external actors (Russia and Iran) recognized this while others (Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar) did not. The latter three in particular kept expecting that greater US support for the anti-Asad opposition would materialize, but this did not occur.

The book is based on a thorough reading of press accounts and analytical reports as well as interviews (some attributed, and some not) with knowledgeable observers from many countries. What emerges from Phillips's analysis is a complicated portrait of how differing resources, geographic realities, domestic political factors, definitions of national interests, relations with different Syrian actors, and analyses of the situation all contributed to the policies of these external powers. Adding further complication, of course, is how their differing policies all fared on the ground, collided with one another, and contributed to further policy change.

The descriptive nature of the book may disappoint international relations theorists. But that should not detract from the value of Phillips's analysis to those primarily interested in understanding the international dimensions of the conflict in Syria. In addition, international relations theorists should also find the book useful both for testing and formulating theories about how conflicts play out where there are numerous external actors involved. What Phillips's complex account shows is that there can be no simple theory explaining this.

Phillips does show, however, that when larger powers are not (or not strongly) engaged in a conflict, then smaller ones can play an important and outsized role. But when larger ones that were less engaged become more so, then the role of smaller powers diminish—as his discussion of the role of Qatar suggests. What Phillips also shows is that while the anti-Asad external powers (the United States, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Qatar) often worked at cross-purposes, the pro-Asad external powers (Russia and Iran) were able to coordinate more effectively. Many authors have pointed out that Russian–Iranian relations have often been contentious, and that differences between them in Syria could emerge. What Phillips shows, though, is that at least in Syria, Russian and Iranian interests are indeed different, but not so much opposed to each other. The Russian military intervention in Syria that began in September 2015, though, did serve to increase the relative influence of Russia compared to Iran in Syria.

Phillips's account concludes at the end of the first quarter of 2016. That being the case, his book does not cover the Trump Administration's policy, the decline of ISIS, Turkey's intervention in Afrin, or the growing tension between Israel on the one hand and Iran and Hizbullah on the other. Phillips pointed out that Israel played a remarkably passive role in the Syrian conflict up through early 2016. But with the increased tension between Israel and Iran/Hizbullah after the decline of ISIS, an updated version of the book might have to include Israel as one of the important external actors in Syria both in its own right and in terms of how it influences Trump Administration policy toward Syria.

Phillips has provided an excellent account of the role played by external actors in the Syrian civil war. While events taking place after the book's completion in early 2016 are not covered, *The Battle for Syria* is an essential guide for understanding the international aspects of the Syrian conflict that have taken place since then. It is, in my view, a book that scholars, students, and the interested public will all find useful.

ROGER HARDY, *The Poisoned Well: Empire and Its Legacy in the Middle East* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2016). Pp. 280. \$29.95 cloth. ISBN: 9780190623203

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Roger Hardy's *The Poisoned Well* provides a vivid narrative history of 20th-century imperialism and decolonization in the Middle East. A distinguished journalist who worked for the BBC World Service for most of his professional career, Hardy bases his book on a ten-part radio series entitled *The Making of the Middle East*, which he produced in the 1990s.

To readers of the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* the study provides few new insights. Yet it offers an engaging overview, full of insightful anecdotes and colorful detail, which may be used as an introductory textbook for undergraduate teaching, to complement other major syntheses such as William Cleveland's *A History of the Modern Middle East* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1968), Roger Owen's *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Routledge, 2004), and James Gelvin's *The Modern Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Spanning the period from World War I and the fall of the Ottomans to the British retreat from Aden, *The Poisoned Well* examines the clashes between "Western" imperialism and Middle Eastern resistance. Its ten chapters deal chronologically with one conflict after the other, country by country, thereby providing a vast panorama of the Middle East's struggles for sovereignty.

Chapter 1 begins with the decline and fall of the Ottoman Empire and explores the emergence of Kemalist Turkey. Chapter 2 turns to the foundation of Saudi Arabia in 1926 and, subsequently, the Arabian American Oil Company—"a state within a state"—tracing British and American attempts to control its oil wealth and geopolitical location up to the end of World War II. The following parts tell the history of the independence struggles of the Arab Eastern Mediterranean, from the end of the French mandates in Syria and Lebanon (Chapter 3) to the withdrawal of British troops from Palestine (Chapter 4). One of the most fascinating chapters of the book, Chapter 5 discusses Britain's complex relationship with Jordan, spanning from Churchill's (then colonial secretary) meeting with Abdullah in 1921 to the monarch's assassination by a young Palestinian as he entered Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque on Friday, 20 July 1951. Hardy then discusses the region's great anti-imperial confrontations of the 1950s, which marked the end of Europe's hegemony in the Middle East, from the Mossadeq coup of 1953 (Chapter 6), to the Suez Crisis of 1956 (Chapter 7), to Iraq's 14 July 1958 revolution (Chapter 8), which ended the Hashemite monarchy and British influence in the country. The final two chapters discuss the Algerian War and independence in 1962, tracing the conflict back to France's