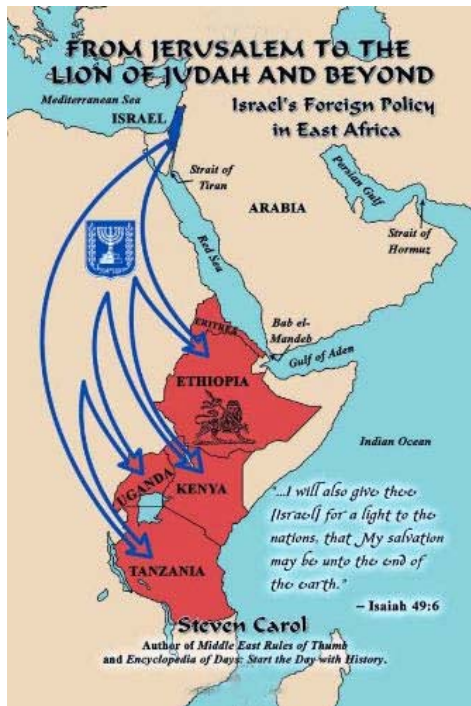


## Brief Reviews, Fall 2014



**From Jerusalem to the Lion of Judah and Beyond: Israel's Foreign Policy in East Africa.** By Steven Carol. Bloomington, Ind.: iUniverse, Inc., 2012. 499 pp. \$29.95, paper.

Israel's golden age of diplomacy in the 1950s and 1960s comes to life in this exploration of relations with Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. Carol of St. John's University documents that a mix of self-interest and altruism enabled Israel to gain "international recognition and respectability."

Beginning in the 1950s, Israel extended agricultural, technological, economic, and military assistance, along with health and medical services, to these poor countries. Shimon Peres, then director general of the Defense Ministry, articulated the Israeli goal: "To surround the belt of [Arab] enmity with a belt of friendship in the new [African] countries" and to create a welcoming African counterweight to hostile Egypt.

But relations weakened after the 1967 Six-Day War and crumbled following the 1973 Yom Kippur War, at which time Israel was increasingly depicted in the international arena as a malevolent imperial and colonial occupying power. Jerusalem's East African friends, with their significant Muslim populations and radical governments, pulled back. By July 1976, Entebbe, Uganda, was the refuge of choice for Palestinian airplane hijackers, and by the 1980s, Africa had been "reduced to minor importance in Israeli policy planning."

Carol describes Israeli policy as a mixture of pragmatic engagement with potential allies and a manifestation of the "most valued [Jewish] traditions of rendering assistance to the less fortunate, grounded on social equality." Exploring this mix, he illuminates an important but distant chapter of Israeli history.

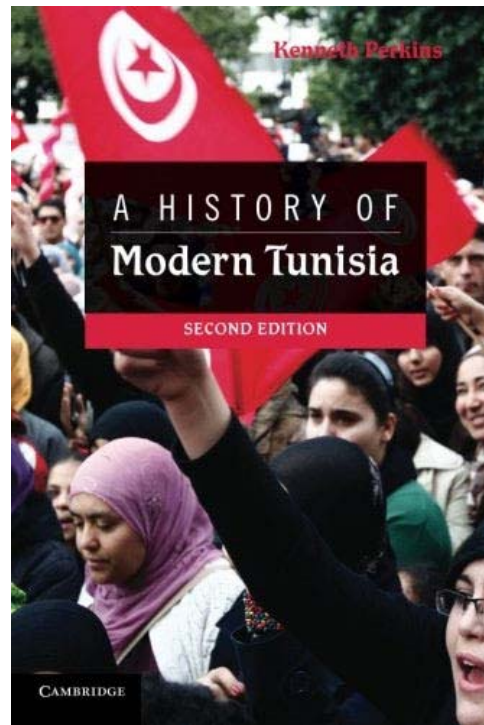
Jerold S. Auerbach  
Author of *Against the Grain:*  
*A Historian's Journey*

**A History of Modern Tunisia, 2nd ed. By Kenneth Perkins. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014. 306 pp. \$29.99, paper.**

In the wake of the uprisings that swept across the Middle East in early 2011, Tunisia remains the only country that may be inching toward a relatively successful outcome. Few, however, are acquainted with Tunisian history or society. In this, his second edition of *A History of Modern Tunisia*, Perkins, a leading scholar who has spent his professional life studying that country, provides a comprehensive overview to fill that gap.

While Tunisia's previous position in the international arena was historically limited, as the first Arab country in the twenty-first century to overthrow its repressive dictatorship, it is frequently cited in Western capitals as a successful model for political transition from authoritarianism to democracy. Having subsequently held elections, struggled through post-revolutionary political turbulence and instability, and more recently managed to hammer out a new constitution, there may be some truth to that optimism.

Perkins takes his readers on a tightly-packed tour of modern Tunisian history, focusing on the pre-colonial and French colonial eras, the nationalist struggle for independence (1956), and the challenges of independence. In the process, he focuses on several themes that underscore Tunisian public life: the search for political leadership; a quest to reach a consensus on the role of religion in society; the management of the economy; and efforts to cultivate the country's cultural heritage.



At some points, a more detailed analysis is called for. For example, the social importance of Habib Bourguiba's control of the nationalist movement, which catapulted figures from the periphery to the pinnacle of Tunisian politics, could be discussed further. And while the book's new chapter on the Tunisian revolution offers much needed detail, some aspects, such as the role of the country's trade unions in these events, could be amplified. These questions may be explored in more detail in future studies, which will undoubtedly rely on Perkins' broad overview.

Daniel Zisenwine  
U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis

**WALID PHARES**

AUTHOR OF *FUTURE JIHAD*

THE **LOST  
SPRING**

**U.S. POLICY IN THE  
MIDDLE EAST  
AND CATASTROPHES TO AVOID**

**The Lost Spring: U.S. Policy in the Middle East and Catastrophes to Avoid. By Walid Phares. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. 248 pp. \$27.**

Phares, a once-advisor to Mitt Romney, offers unstructured thoughts in a book about the Arab uprisings with two main objectives: to remind the world that the author accurately predicted them and to plead for a tougher U.S. policy in the Middle East.

Throughout the book, Phares hails himself as a man of vision who “foresaw what was to be called the Arab Spring.” Statements such as “I felt the moment was right to issue strong warnings to the West” drag along, to the probable annoyance of

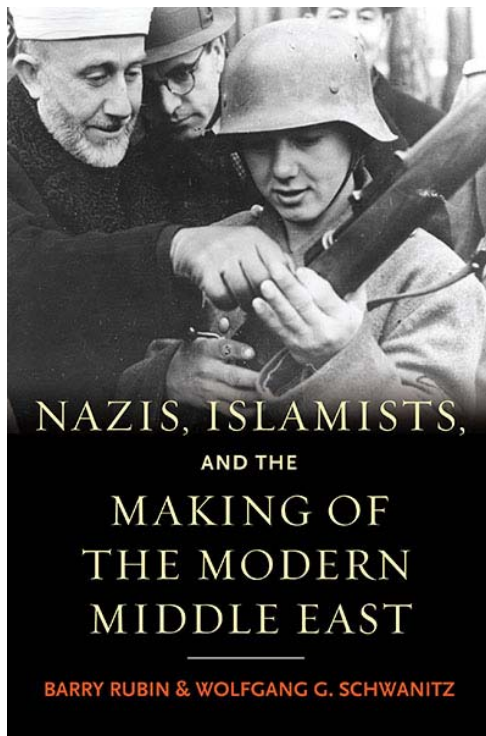
most readers. Phares even claims to have foreseen the attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi.

Phares chides the Obama administration for seeking “a partnership with the Muslim Brotherhood” and abandoning the cause of democracy in the Middle East. At the same time, he justifies the overthrow of Mohamed Morsi in Egypt on the grounds that “being elected alone isn’t a guarantee of democracy.”

In fact, Phares ranks the destruction of Islamism as the highest priority, even if this entails years of violence. For him, the only solution for the travails of Arab societies is to cut off “the Jihadist ideology at its roots.” He does not allow for a situation where expanding civil societies can apply persistent pressures on the Islamists to modify their political perceptions and eventually coerce them to accept the concept of the civil state. Phares seems uninterested in seeing Arab political systems mature.

The book has a slapped-together quality. For example, Phares inaccurately refers to the Levant as a separate geographical entity from Syria, Lebanon, and the Palestinian Authority. He mistakenly calls former Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak an Arab nationalist. He refers to Bahrain as an oil-rich country with only a slight Shiite majority. He suggests that Saudi men have become politically empowered.

Hilal Khashan  
American University of Beirut



**Nazis, Islamists, and the Making of the Modern Middle East. By Barry Rubin and Wolfgang G. Schwanitz. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014. 340 pp. \$35.**

With Islamist groups taking advantage of uprisings across the Middle East, notably in Egypt, where the Muslim Brotherhood succeeded for a time in gaining power and is still widely viewed as the democratically elected government of Egypt, the publication of this richly researched book, a joint production of two leading Middle East scholars, could not be timelier. While many analysts ascribe the so-called “Arab Spring” to a yearning for democracy, Rubin and Schwanitz remind us of a deep and abiding connection between radical Islamism and imperial, then later, Nazi Germany.

It was Kaiser Wilhelm II who first set the template in his cynical World War I strategy of fomenting jihad among Muslim subjects in British, French, and Russian territories in the Near East and North Africa. One side-effect of this strategy was German

complicity in the Armenian massacres, which could well have served as a model for Hitler’s treatment of the Jews.

Most of the book is devoted to demonstrating the close collaboration between National Socialism and Islamism, based on a common deployment of racism, nationalism, religious bigotry, and intolerance. Begun before World War II, this collaboration continued for decades after the Nazi defeat with the help of numerous war criminals who found refuge in Arab lands. The key figure in this dark saga was the British-installed Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin Husseini, an eager associate of Hitler, and just as viciously anti-Semitic.

The authors contend that Husseini was himself partly responsible for the Holocaust. It was almost immediately after his meeting with Hitler on November 28, 1941, at which time the Palestinian leader demanded and received the cessation of all Jewish emigration to Palestine in exchange for Muslim support for the Axis, that Hitler convoked the Wannsee Conference. Having closed the door on the last possible escape route for the Jews, genocide became the “final solution.”

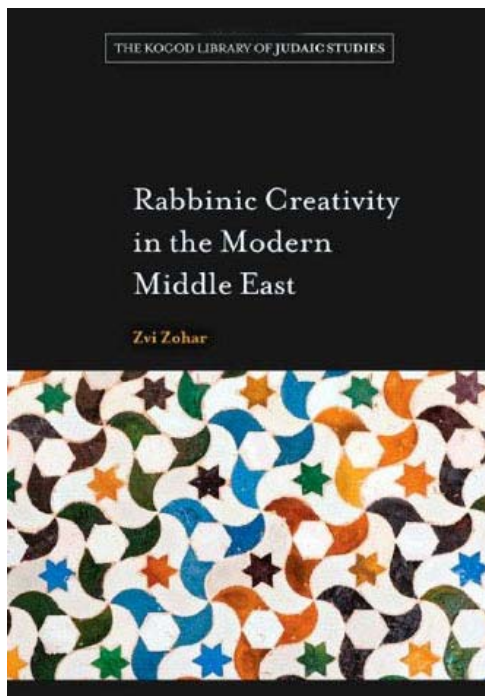
The authors’ essential thesis is that, without Husseini’s influence, more moderate Arab voices might have prevailed over radicalism, and “there might have been other options” to war in 1948: “Once al-Husaini was allowed to re-establish himself as unchallengeable leader of the Palestinian Arabs, this ensured that no compromise or two-state solution would be considered, while making certain that Arab leaders would be intimidated and driven to war. Al-Husaini’s and the radical legacy have continued to dominate the Palestinian national and the Islamist global movement down to the present day.”

The failure of Husseini’s plan to expunge all Jews from Palestine led him to adapt the hitherto rejected notion of partition to his own ends. The two-stage strategy—essentially gaining a foothold in the West

Bank and Gaza and using this land as a base for destroying Israel—was crafted by Hussein and passed along to his protégé Yasser Arafat.

Rubin and Schwanitz offer a compelling and somber insight into Islamism that must be taken into account when reflecting on the problems of the Middle East today, not least by thoughtful and open-minded Muslims. Sadly, Rubin did not see the finished product of collaboration with Schwanitz. He died just as their book was coming off the presses.

Lionel Gossman  
Princeton University



**Rabbinic Creativity in the Modern Middle East.** By Zvi Zohar. London: Bloomsbury, 2013. 399 pp. \$140 (\$42.95, paper).

Most scholarship on Middle Eastern Judaism is written from a Euro-centric or even Ashkenazi-centric perspective, according to which Middle Eastern Jews are “others.” The

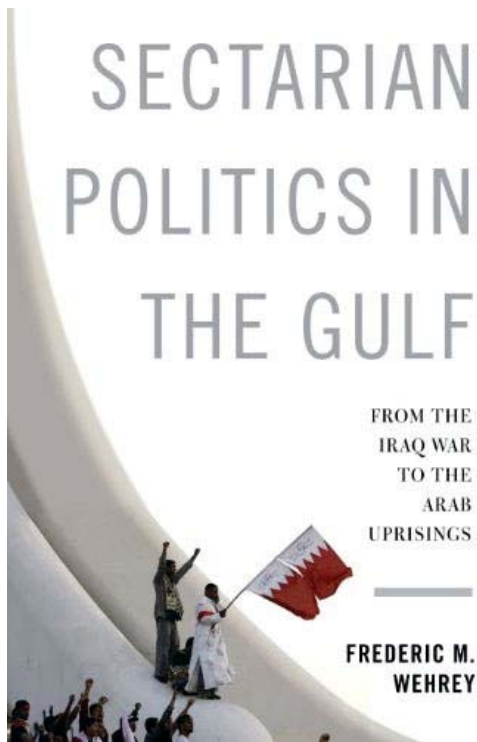
great strength of *Rabbinic Creativity* is that it offers the perspective of prominent rabbis of their day active in centers of Sephardi learning such as Baghdad, Aleppo, and Cairo. While aware of Jewish-legal developments in Europe, the rabbis in question were not over-awed by them, and persisted in deciding matters of Jewish law and communal policy in a spirit far removed from that of their European colleagues. Nineteenth-century European orthodoxy was more often than not characterized by opposition to innovation and a withdrawal behind barriers erected to keep the faithful from “contamination” by new currents. The rabbis brought to light by Zohar were more open to innovation and more concerned with preserving the unity of the entire Jewish community.

The bulk of the book consists of a series of fascinating case studies supporting this generalization. Some may feel that declaiming on the difference between Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jewries is “old hat” (despite the increasing orthodoxy of Sephardic Jewry in Israel and the Diaspora), but Zohar probes beyond that commonplace observation. In analyzing the rabbinic careers of figures such as Abdallah Somekh (Iraq, 1813-89), Yitzhak Dayyan (Aleppo, 1878-1964), Israel Moshe Hazzan (Cairo, 1808-62), and others, Zohar argues convincingly that the Sephardic and Ashkenazi approaches were not simply functions of different historical circumstances but reflected deep-seated cultural differences. These differences relate to the Sephardic view concerning the centrality of the Jewish community in defining Judaism. Further, for these Sephardic rabbis, their view of the non-binding character of precedents allowed the decisor on Jewish law greater leeway to adjust decisions to the demands of the present. However, his account also paints a picture of the roads not taken by Israeli Sephardic rabbis as they have

become increasingly “haredized” or ultra-orthodox over the last generation.

Zohar is an engaging writer, and *Rabbinic Creativity in the Modern Middle East* is a significant contribution to our understanding of the complex background of contemporary Jewry in general and the State of Israel in particular.

Menachem Kellner  
Shalem College, Jerusalem



**Sectarian Politics in the Gulf: From the Iraq War to the Arab Uprisings.** By Frederic M. Wehrey. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014. 352 pp. \$45.

The sectarian politics of this work’s title refers to the often-tense relationship between Sunnis and Shiites in the Persian Gulf region. Wehrey, a senior associate in the

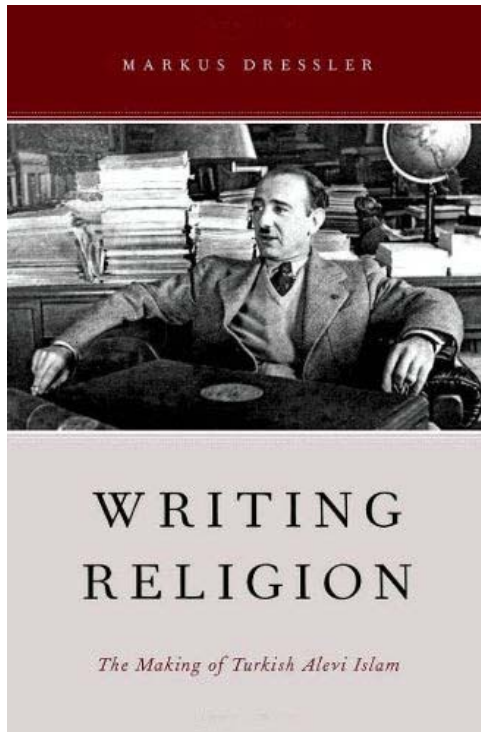
Middle East Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, offers a comprehensive analysis of their conflict, which will be appreciated by policymakers and journalists, as well as scholars. The book is chock-full of insights and a deeply nuanced understanding of regional Shiite-Sunni tensions and is a fine addition to other recent treatments of the subject.

Wehrey takes the reader through Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait where the Shiite populations are significant. Here, the emphasis on Shiite identity is strongly influenced by politics; it seems to wax and wane with regional and internal developments. Thus Kuwait’s Shiites have improved their lot and connection to the state by virtue of their resistance to the Iraqi occupation in 1990-91. The analysis of Saudi Arabia is quite good although it would have been useful to point out that anti-Shiism is a cornerstone of Wahhabi ideology, which views Shiite adherents as polytheists. This puts a great burden on Saudi Shiites trying to gain a piece of the Saudi pie or tolerance for their beliefs.

At times the book veers into unnecessary and distracting rhetorical devices as when Wehrey terms sectarianism an “enigma” that “has long perplexed scholars and observers of the Middle East, particularly since 2006.” It is, in fact, the enduring default option in many Middle Eastern countries, and the author basically admits it, stressing the transnational dimension of Shiite sectarianism. Similarly, he maintains that sectarianism in the Persian Gulf region is neither an immutable feature nor a manufactured construct as claimed by some Western analysts. However, his analysis does suggest a certain immutability: Shiite-Sunni tensions are here to stay although their relevance seems to rise and fall with the vicissitudes of the region’s politics.

Wehrey offers no recommendations for U.S. policy—nor should he. Sectarianism is something better left for local forces to handle. Washington is not good at managing enduring internal conflicts in faraway places.

Joshua Teitelbaum  
Bar-Ilan University



**Writing Religion: The Making of Turkish Alevi Islam.** By Markus Dressler. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. 323 pp. \$58.50.

Dressler, an assistant professor of religious studies at Bayreuth University in Germany, writes that Alevism is viewed by “most insiders and outsiders” as “part of the Islamic tradition, although located on its margins,” and most often described as heterodox and syncretic reflecting the influences of Sufism as well as the Shiite sect. And yet, “it is widely taken for granted

that Alevism constitutes an intrinsic part of Anatolian and Turkish culture ... carry[ing] an ancient Turkish heritage ... [from] the depths of [the] Central Asian Turkish past.”

Alevis constitute a sizable minority of Turkey’s inhabitants, 10-15 percent of the national census, according to Dressler. The author contends that roughly 20-30 percent of these are Kurdish. Alevis are also present in the Turkish migrant communities in Germany and other Western European countries.

Despite these numbers, Turkish authorities have tended to disregard the Alevi sect, either by ignoring it or declaring it part of the dominant, state-administered Sunni Muslim community. This approach results in anti-Alevi discrimination. Alevis complain that they and their spiritual leaders are denied government support of the kind granted to Sunnis and their clerics. Alevis also call for the removal of the state-sponsored “Religious Culture and Ethics” curricula from schools or, at least, the inclusion in them of “adequate and positive” materials on Alevism. They further seek recognition of Alevi houses of worship with standing equal to mosques, churches, and synagogues. The most tragic example of their plight was a 1993 Islamist attack on an Alevi cultural celebration in a building set afire where thirty-seven people, mainly Alevis, perished.

Dressler has produced the first detailed study of Alevi history published in English. Although heavy with contemporary academic jargon, its breadth is encyclopedic. Notwithstanding its sometime convoluted form, *Writing Religion* is an important and necessary addition to Turkish studies.

Stephen Schwartz  
Center for Islamic Pluralism

