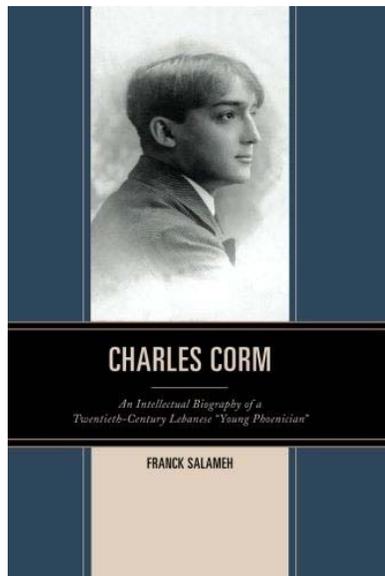


Brief Reviews, Summer 2016



Charles Corm: An Intellectual Biography of a Twentieth-Century Lebanese “Young Phoenician.” By **Franck Salameh.** Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2015. 282 pp. \$85.

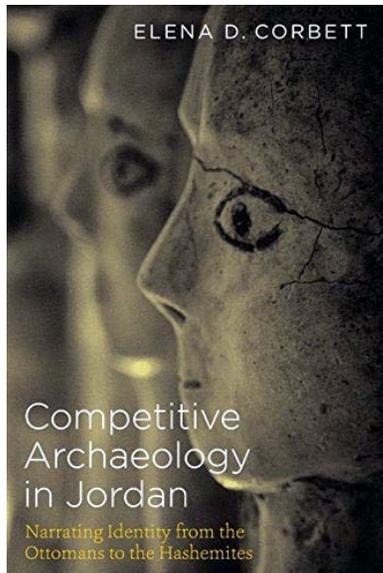
Salameh of Boston College provides an eloquent and profound biography of Charles Corm, Lebanese writer, industrialist, and philanthropist. Corm’s story is a breath of fresh air for a region torn by morbid impulses and for a Middle East that has forgotten about a home-grown humanism that once tried to flourish as an ideology for coexistence, culture, and liberal democracy. Born in 1894 in cosmopolitan Beirut, Corm was the doyen of Phoenicianism, an ideology

for those aspiring to build a new country deserving of its past. Corm believed in the glory and contribution of Phoenicia to Western civilization—not least, the invention of the alphabet—and became the messenger of the movement that sought a separate, non-Arab identity as a foundational basis for Greater Lebanon. Phoenicianism for Corm was the fount out of which humanism first emerged. In this regard, Corm quotes the Tyrian-Roman jurist Ulpian (c. 170-223 CE), who held that “according to natural law, all men are born free and equal.”

But Corm did not disown the contributions of Arabs in his philosophy. Salameh’s biography illustrates that Corm advocated a distinct Lebanese-Phoenician hybridity, which could, for example, pay equal tribute to Nasif Yazigi (1800-71) and Ibrahim Yazigi (1847-1906), who helped revive Arabic belle lettres and modernize the language. He was also a devout Christian who found no contradiction between humanism, with its valorizing of human nature and free will, and his faith.

Salameh’s book is a timely but sad reflection on what the Middle East could have become, a region that has so much to offer but which remains mostly unreceptive to Corm’s enlightened ideas.

Robert G. Rabil
Florida Atlantic University



Competitive Archaeology in Jordan: Narrating Identity from the Ottomans to the Hashemites. By Elena D. Corbett. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014, 2015. 312 pp. \$40 (\$27.95, paper).

At the simplest level, Jordan is a state carved out of the remains of the Ottoman Empire in 1921 at Winston Churchill's urging as a reward to the Hashemite clan of the Arabian Hejaz for its dubious contributions to His Majesty's World War I war efforts. But Jordan is comprised of multiple ethnic groups with no common history with the minority Hashemites controlling all the others. What role, if any, has archaeology played in integrating Jordan and legitimating the Hashemite dynasty?

Corbett, who works in Amman for an international student exchange organization, suggests that archaeological research in Jordan has been characterized by competitions between Western imperialist archaeologists and their indigenous Ottoman counterparts, by British authorities, and finally by Jordanian, Palestinian, and Israeli scholars and diggers. The author does not hide her contempt for imperialism and

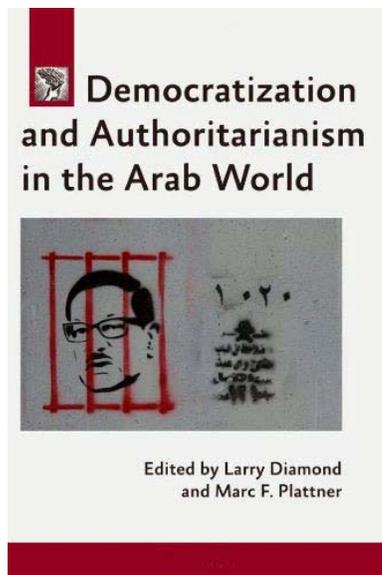
Zionism, and there are harsh critiques of the British Mandate, its use of archaeology, and specifically of Nelson Glueck, the American rabbi and pioneering explorer of Transjordan. But even she admits that Arab nationalists pondering the same past invented "a narrative that conflated Arabs and Semites, Arabized all ancient peoples with the borders of the broad Arab *watan*, [homeland] and ... [claimed] that the Arab presence on the landscape was older than any other."

The land that is Jordan today was largely inhabited in the first millennium BCE (the period depicted in the Old Testament) by Moabites, Edomites, and Ammonites—ancient Israel's enemies and kinfolk—as well as by Israelites themselves. There are impressive Greco-Roman and Nabatean remains, places of significance for Christian tourists, and a growing corpus of astonishing prehistoric sites. None of them, however, can easily serve as a focal point for Jordanians, that is for Hashemites, Bedouin, Palestinians, or others.

Corbett presents many interesting details regarding Jordanian cultural history, albeit in a kaleidoscopic manner and with painfully convoluted jargon, but the period from 1967 to the present receives short shrift. Much more, for example, could be said regarding King Hussein's renovations of Islamic sites and shrines, which paralleled efforts by Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Further, much of the book is not about Jordan at all but rather Ottoman-era thought regarding antiquity, the impact of which was marginal at best. Nor does she say much regarding competition between Jordan's Hashemite and Palestinian narratives.

Ultimately the question of how, or whether, the past serves to integrate Jordan today remains unanswered.

Alexander Joffe
Middle East Forum



Democratization and Authoritarianism in the Arab World. Edited by Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014. 388 pp. \$34.95, paper.

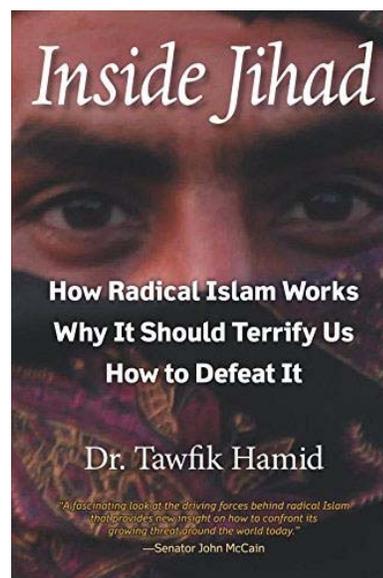
This patched-together collection of twenty-nine previously published articles boasts a title suggesting the final word on the subject. It is not. Focusing exclusively on the opening stages of the Arab uprisings of roughly 2011-13, the editors have divided their work into two sections—sixteen thematic essays followed by thirteen country studies—seemingly for convenience sake alone as they offer no theoretical justification for this approach. The studies themselves are constructed haphazardly while the narrative is often outdated. Syria, for instance, where the bloodiest uprising shows no signs of ending, is covered in one meager essay; Iraq, Oman, and Lebanon merit none.

Why Johns Hopkins University would want to publish a work like this, filled with assertions that have been overturned by events, mystifies. In one false pronouncement by Mark Tessler et al., we learn that the Arab uprisings led to “the fall of dictators and a reversal of the de-liberalization

process.” Zoltan Barany is bullish on the future of Libya because of “the intensive political and military involvement of Western democracies on behalf of the rebels.” Stephane Lacroix’s essay on Saudi Arabia exhibits a total ignorance of the intricacies of Saudi royal politics, positing a mythical royal faction that would ally itself with Shiite “reformists.”

Selecting previously published articles for an edited book is admittedly not an easy task. In this case, it would seem as if the editors imagined that the timeliness of their topic permits them to include any articles they liked, regardless of enduring value. This disservice to the field of comparative politics renders the book as palatable as years-old bread.

Hilal Khashan
American University of Beirut



Inside Jihad, updated ed. By Tawfik Hamid. Mountain Lake Park, Md.: Mountain Lake Press, 2015. 238 pp. \$16.95.

Aymannawahiri, al-Qaeda’s leader and chief ideologue, once turned to the author of this newly reissued book and

declared, “Young Muslims like you are the hope for the future return of Khilafa [the Caliphate or Islamic global dominance].” Thus, this exploration of Islamic radicalism by Hamid, a former member of the Egyptian jihad group al-Jama’a al-Islamiya and now a Muslim reformer, is a welcome and honest take on the Islamist menace afflicting the world today.

Cutting through the prevailing denial and obfuscation about the nature of Islam and its teachings, the author asserts that “claiming Islam is peaceful without changing the violent teachings constitutes unrealistic lip service that aims at deceiving others.” Along these lines, Hamid targets the deceptive and misleading presentations about Islam frequently employed by Islamists to portray their faith as a religion of peace. His chapter, “Myths and Misconceptions about Islamism,” is an exercise in genuine myth-busting as he explains lucidly why poverty, discrimination, and authoritarian rule are not, as popularly thought, the root causes of Islamic terrorism.

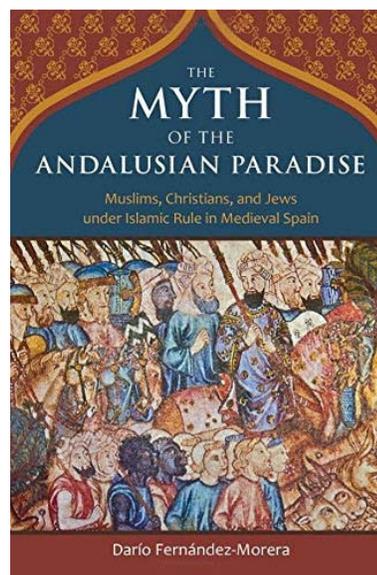
He demonstrates that the ideological impetus for that terrorism comes from sources that most Western analysts take pains to write off as having nothing whatsoever to do with it: the Qur’an and Sunna (body of recommended practice). Hamid goes beyond merely pointing this out but instead offers sober and carefully calibrated recommendations for how the faith can begin to undergo a genuine reformation that would provide a lasting foundation for pluralistic and peaceful societies in the Islamic world.

Hamid is likewise clear-sighted and unsparing when recounting the failure of Muslim societies and the West. While the idea that the West is responsible for the rise of jihad terror and Islamism worldwide is commonplace on the political Left, Hamid turns that notion on its head. He agrees that the West is to a great degree responsible for the ascendancy of jihadist groups but argues

that political concessions—not the alleged ruthlessness of the U.S. response to terror—combined with weak military actions have emboldened the radicals.

The approach Hamid takes to Islam in *Inside Jihad* may provide some hope to those in the West who wish to withstand Zawahiri and his allies by incorporating peaceful Muslims into the fabric of a genuinely pluralistic West. Whether he succeeds in attracting sufficient numbers of Muslims to make a difference remains to be seen.

Robert Spencer
Jihad Watch



The Myth of the Andalusian Paradise: Muslims, Christians and Jews under Islamic Rule in Medieval Spain. By Darío Fernández-Morera. Wilmington, Del.: ISI Books, 2016. 376 pp. \$29.95.

The era of Muslim predominance in the Iberian Peninsula (eighth to thirteenth centuries) has long generated a historical narrative of a dynamic and brilliant civilization, contrasting sharply with a primitive if not brutish Western Europe apparently lacking in cultural instruments. In this reading, the “paradise” of *convivencia*

(living together) was one of mutual tolerance with political, social, and religious harmony flourishing in al-Andalus between the followers of the three Abrahamic, monotheistic religions.

Through an examination of primary sources, Fernández-Morera of Northwestern University has produced an intelligent reinterpretation that reconsiders the historiographic and intellectual vision of the superiority of this civilization as well as the myth of a peaceful tolerance and *convivencia* fostered by the Islamic conquerors with a look at the underside of Islamic civilization in medieval Spain.

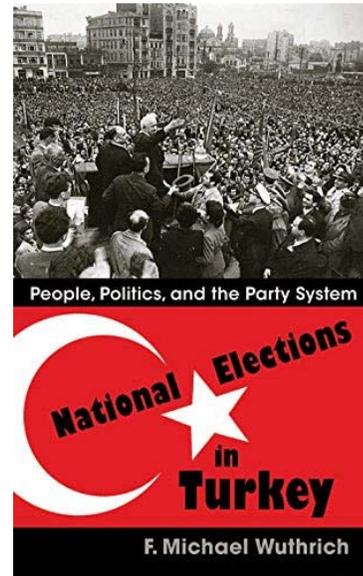
In its seven chapters, the book undertakes a journey through the main paradigms of the peninsular encounter between Islamic and Christian civilizations. Beginning with the conquest of Hispania by Muslim armies in the early eighth century, it delves into the juridical status of Christians and Jews under Muslim rule as well as the condition of women in this idealized period. The author demonstrates that the conquered Visigoth kingdom had a classical foundation, established largely by Archbishop Isidore of Seville (c. 560- 636), which was not inferior to that of the North African invaders under Arab leadership.

Doubtlessly, the process of Muslim acculturation produced a new, multicultural social landscape that created a model of material and artistic wealth, but that same landscape contained within it many dark features, among them sexual slavery, religious repression, ruthless forms of punishment (stonings, beheadings, crucifixions, impalings) and the subordination and exploitation of non-Muslim communities.

Often a work of historical revisionism is a dubious exercise in discovering trendy, hidden agendas with little bearing on the actual record of the past. *The Myth of the Andalusian Paradise* is decidedly not such a study and is instead a bracing remedy to a

good deal of the academic pabulum that passes for scholarship on Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations.

Julia Pavón Benito
University of Navarra



National Elections in Turkey: People, Politics, and the Party System. By F. Michael Wuthrich. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2015. 376 pp. \$49.95.

Wuthrich of the University of Kansas presents a useful analysis of Turkey's democratic electoral history, which essentially began in 1950 after decades of one-party rule under the Kemalist Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP). For Turkey's opposition parties, whose votes seem more or less stuck in neutral since the Islamist Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) came to power in 2002, his research is indispensable.

Wuthrich examines the rhetoric employed in contemporary campaigns, examining party election manifestos and campaign speeches as well as strategies deployed for collecting votes. He analyzes

how today's political parties compete for votes and how the electorate is actually orienting itself within the current political environment. Without neglecting the importance of identity and in-group/out-group categorizations in voting, Wuthrich's research finds that those identities, including religious/secular, Turkish/Kurdish, and Sunni/Alevi divisions, have often been secondary concerns for the general electorate; more important concerns are bread-and-butter economic issues, unemployment, or anything beyond "identity." The author also uses graphs and tables to substantiate what every Turk knows but cannot verify: The electorate is inherently right-wing. In a voting bloc patterns table, Wuthrich shows, for example, that the "Right" bloc in Turkey increased from 59.8 percent in 1950 to 66.7 percent in 2011.

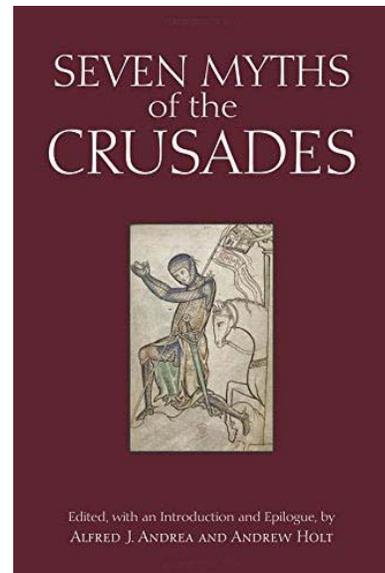
Politicians as well as scholars who view the Turkish political landscape with unease because of the direction that the seemingly unchallenged Islamists led by Erdoğan are taking the country will benefit from Wuthrich's insights.

Burak Bekdil
Hürriyet

Seven Myths of the Crusades. Edited by Alfred J. Andrea and Andrew Holt. Cambridge, Mass.: Hackett Publishing, 2015. 248 pp. \$54 (\$19, paper).

As the editors make clear in their preface, *Seven Myths of the Crusades* is presented as an antidote to the "outpouring of exaggerations, misperceptions, errors, misrepresentations, and fabrications" that proliferate in popular discourse about the Crusades. In the course of seven chapters, each written by a specialist and supported by scholarly notes and fresh research, this short primer examines and exposes the many anachronisms around the Crusades.

Andrea, professor emeritus, University of Vermont, and Holt of Florida



State College make their basic assumption clear from the outset stating that the

notion that medieval people ... were 'just like us' and acted out of motives very much like our own ... has led to some basic misunderstandings of the crusades and the people involved in them.

While not all chapters are equally enlightening, the more useful ones deal with large and important themes including whether the Crusaders were motivated by proto-colonialist greed, irrational fanaticism, or sincere piety. Paul Crawford examines whether the First Crusade was an "unprovoked offense or overdue defense" against Islam while Mona Hamad and Edward Peters question whether modern-day Muslims actually still hold a grudge against the West because they have "a nine-hundred-year-long grievance."

A few sections—such as those dealing with the Children's Crusade and Templar myths—while intrinsically interesting—are less sweeping in their significance. Others do not so much debunk myths as provide up-to-date scholarship: Daniel P. Franke's "The

Crusades and Medieval Anti-Judaism: Cause or Consequence?” for example, does not minimize the plight of European Jews but rather places it in historical context.

Despite President Obama downplaying ISIS atrocities by invoking the Crusades in February 2015,¹ this book convincingly demonstrates that his view runs

“counter to the mainstream of today’s scholarly interpretation—a general consensus built upon decades of research, reflection, and debate.”

Raymond Ibrahim
Middle East Forum



¹ Pres. Obama, National Prayer Breakfast, Washington Hilton, Washington, D.C., [Feb. 5, 2015](#).