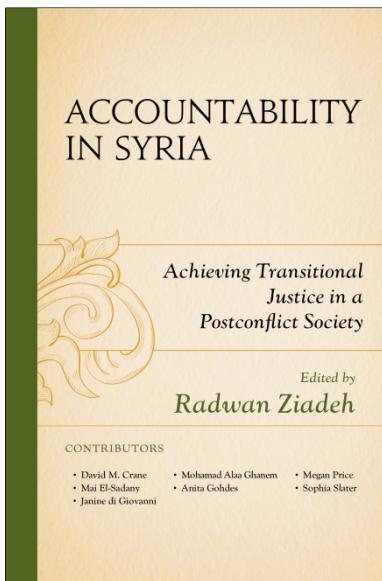


Brief Reviews, Winter 2021



Accountability in Syria: Achieving Transitional Justice in a Postconflict Society. Edited by Radwan Ziadeh. New York: Lexington Books, 2020. 142 pp. \$90.

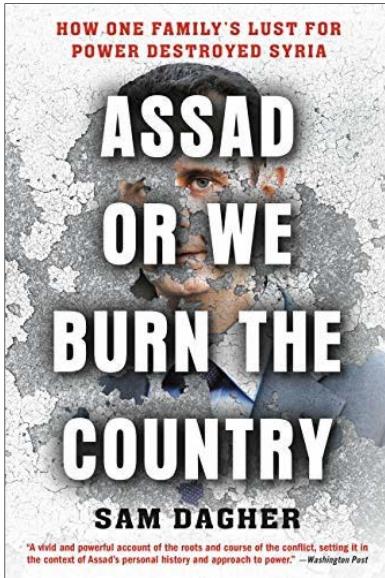
Accountability in Syria explores crimes against humanity committed during the Syria civil war and examines the ways Syrians might seek justice. These include recourse through the international system and a proposed new “hybrid court system.” The volume contains important testimony that deserves to be read, with contributions from senior Syrian opponents to the Assad regime as well as international journalists and researchers, providing a comparative perspective. Subjects covered include the

bogus efforts by the Syrian regime to present the surrender of rebel-controlled areas and the return of regime authority as “reconciliation” and “local ceasefires”; a comparison between the siege of Sarajevo and the Assad regime’s besieging of Daraya; plus details of the regime’s demographic engineering.

Editor Ziadeh is a well-known and respected Syrian oppositionist and U.S. resident. He argues in his chapter on “Transition, Justice and Accountability” for the establishment of a “hybrid international court” to examine human rights violations in Syria. The term refers to a model previously applied in post-conflict Cambodia and Sierra Leone. Tribunals would be “held on Syrian territory, and will involve the direct participation of Syrian judges, supported by international expertise, perhaps under the supervision of the United Nations.”

The problem with such laudable hopes, as Ziadeh notes, is that both the Syrian regime—and Russia through the U.N. Security Council—would dismiss any move to establish such courts. Indeed, the stark fact brought home by the essays in this valuable book is, as one of the contributors notes, that the world has largely stood by “while Syrians suffered unimaginable atrocities,” a reminder of the weakness of international law and institutions in the absence of powerful states wishing to enforce their edicts.

Jonathan Spyer
Middle East Center
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Assad or We Burn the Country: How One Family's Lust for Power Destroyed Syria. By Sam Dagher. Boston: Little Brown, 2019. 592 pp. \$29 (\$18.99, paper).

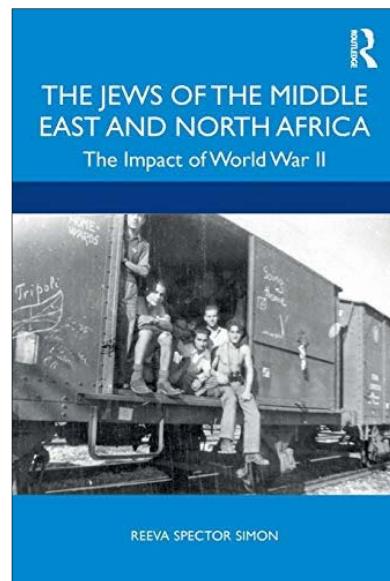
Dagher gives an account of the Syrian civil war from its beginnings as an unarmed civilian uprising, its transition into an armed insurgency, and its bloody conclusion in the ambiguous and partial victory of the Assad regime. The author, a journalist stationed in Damascus, provides a comprehensive picture focusing on the Syrian participants, including rebel activists. But the narrative in particular centers on Manaf Tlass, son of Mustafa Tlass, Hafez Assad's long-serving defense minister. The younger Tlass, a general in the Syrian Republican Guard, defected to the opposition early in the war but was sidelined there, unable to find a new role.

Dagher writes well and never allows his accessible style to detract from the seriousness of his narrative. The book offers a comprehensive account of the rise of the Assad regime, the sectarian core of its support, and the brutal means by which it has maintained itself. The book's emphasis is

very much on the fight between the regime and the insurgency, less on the conflict between Islamic State (ISIS) and the coalition against it. Dagher offers fascinating insights into the inner workings of the regime at the highest level and harrowing eyewitness accounts of how the regime terrorized citizens who dared to challenge its authority.

As Dagher makes clear, the choice inherent in the book's title proved to be misleading. Tragically, Syrians now find themselves in a reality where the Assad regime has survived, but the country has been largely destroyed. *Assad or We Burn the Country* is a valuable addition to the literature on the Syrian war and is likely to remain one of the standard texts on this subject.

Jonathan Spyer



The Jews of the Middle East and North Africa. The Impact of World War II. By Reeva Spector Simon. New York: Routledge, 2020. 288 pp. \$150 (\$44.95, paper).

Hitler's plan for the "Final Solution" of the Jews included the destruction of "some

eleven million,” which likely included victims from Turkey to North Africa. Simon of Yeshiva University believes that only timing and logistics prevented the annihilation when, after 1940, the Axis turned to that region. Simon provides the first country-by-country account of the war’s impact on a million Jews from Morocco to Iran.

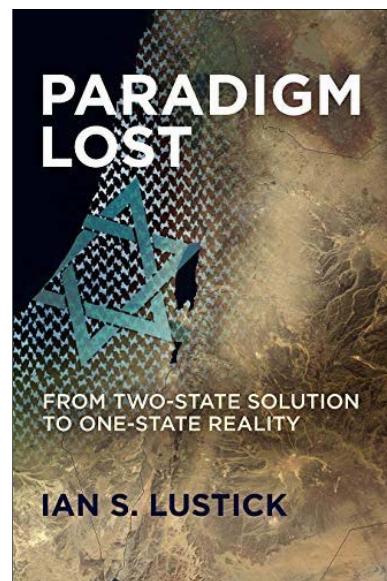
Simon recounts how most North African Jews came under the control of the German collaborators in the Vichy government after France surrendered in June 1940. Vichy regime regulations excluded 110,000 Jews from government jobs in Algeria, 68,000 Jews in Tunisia, and 35,000 in Syria and Lebanon. Italian planes bombed Haifa in July and September 1940. In June 1941, the Luftwaffe bombed Tel Aviv, Jaffa, and Haifa. As German troops approached, the grand mufti of Jerusalem, Amin al-Husseini, called on the Arabs to kill Egypt’s 80,000 Jews. The Farhud pogrom in Baghdad killed 200 Jews in 1941. Thousands were forced into labor camps in Morocco, Algeria, and Libya, and some were sent to death camps, as were 1,200 Algerian Jews and 2,080 Turkish Jews from metropolitan France. Although Turkish leaders stayed neutral, they were often pro-German.

Elsewhere, Simon reports, Jews were rescued, for instance, in Morocco, Iran, and Turkey. Most of North Africa’s Jews survived as the French and Italians did not have time to set up death camps while the Nazis found no secure way to get North African Jews into Europe’s killing centers. By the end of 1942, the Allies had liberated most of the Levant, and by May 1943, the Axis capitulated in North Africa.

Simon offers a valuable, nuanced, and much needed synopsis of how this war impacted Middle Eastern and North African Jews. This reviewer hopes for a follow-up study to show how still unrepentant of

genocides and expulsion, Arab rulers persecuted those communities further, harming both them and the larger societies.

Wolfgang G. Schwanitz
Middle East Forum



Paradigm Lost: From Two-State Solution to One-State Reality. By Ian S. Lustick. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019. 194 pp. \$27.50.

Lustick of the University of Pennsylvania purports to explain why efforts to implement the “two-state solution” have failed, ascribing the repeated failures to three primary Israeli missteps: the “Iron Wall” strategy of “treating the Arabs as an enemy with whom compromise might ultimately be possible, but only after their will had been broken by successive and painful defeats”; the use of the Holocaust as a “template for Jewish life” as in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s repeated declarations that “it’s 1938 and Iran is Germany”; and the dominance of the “Israel lobby” over U.S.

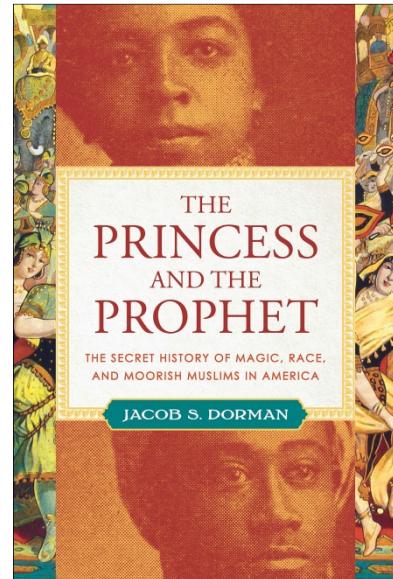
foreign policy. He asserts, “A Palestinian state could have been established and could have coexisted peacefully alongside Israel, but the opportunity to establish it was historically perishable and is no longer available.”

Lustick recommends discarding the idea of a Palestinian state entirely and focusing on the “one-state reality” of Israel as a state for both Jews and Arabs—in other words, no longer a Jewish state. He insists that such a unitary state would result in alliances between Jewish and Arab groups with compatible political perspectives.

This analysis, however, suffers from the same defect that mars much conventional wisdom regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: It assumes, despite an abundance of evidence to the contrary, that the obstacles for peace are entirely on the Israeli side, and that adjustments in Israeli policies will secure peaceful coexistence with the Palestinians. Lustick ignores the genocidal rhetoric broadcast on Palestinian Authority and Hamas’ television networks. He says nothing about the fact that Palestinians, not Israelis, have rejected all previous offers to establish a Palestinian state, including the Trump “Deal of the Century.”

The assumption that Palestinian Arabs and other non-Westerners are simply passive reactors to the good or ill that is done to them by Western entities, rather than having any perspectives or imperatives of their own, is ethnocentric. Lustick is silent regarding the Qur’anic command to “drive them out from where they drove you out” (2:191), which animates Palestinian intransigence and re-fusal to accept the existence of Israel in any form. This book fails due to its ignorance of these core facts.

Robert Spencer
Jihad Watch



The Princess and the Prophet: The Secret History of Magic, Race, and Moorish Muslims in America. By Jacob S. Dorman. Boston: Beacon Press, 2020. 304 pp. \$29.95.

Readers may be surprised to learn that two versions of Islam exist in the United States. One is the normative religion, founded 1,400 years ago in the Middle East; the other is indigenous African-American Islam. While the later evolution of African-American Islam is [well known](#), its origins until now have remained murky, limited to a sense that the [Moorish Science Temple of America](#) (MSTA), the first Muslim mass movement in America, emerged in 1925, and its successor, the [Nation of Islam](#) (NoI), five years later. But who was the key figure that founded this new form of Islam? And whence derived his irregular ideas about Islam?

In his research, Dorman of the University of Nevada has answered these two questions, a

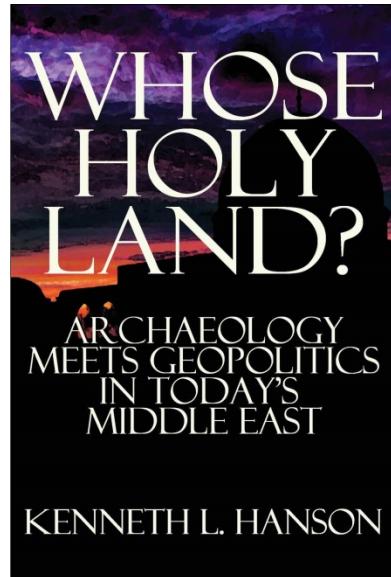
signal contribution. African-American Islam, it turns out, is not a local franchise but a distinct folk religion that originated about a century ago primarily in Newark, Chicago, and Detroit and whose tenets deeply contradict those of normative Islam.

Dorman identified the key founder of African-American Islam, the man known publicly and to history as the Prophet Noble Drew Ali to be John Walter Brister (1879–1929), an entertainer and quack doctor. Second, he places MSTA into its cultural milieu, one of benign American fascination with and even respect for the Middle East and Islam, making Asian, Islamic, Arab, and Moorish themes widespread in the golden age of vaudeville and the circus.

For African-Americans, Oriental themes took on a much deeper meaning by offering a potential escape from the racism that oppressed their lives. Being “Hindoo,” “Egyptian,” or “Moorish” implied not being from Africa, and thereby offered the potential of avoiding the stigma associated with that heritage. Dorman summarizes: “For Drew Ali and his followers, Islam became the antidote to white racism.”

African-American Islam has receded into the background, especially since 1975, increasingly replaced by normative Islam, a trend that will likely further accelerate with the passing of the NOI’s current leader, Louis Farrakhan, now 87. But Walter Brister and the MSTA have earned a permanent place in American history by serving as the original bridge for 700,000 African-Americans, and likely many more in the future, to move from Christianity to Islam.

Daniel Pipes



Whose Holy Land? Archaeology Meets Geopolitics in Today's Middle East. By Kenneth L. Hanson. Nashville: World Encounter Institute/New English Review Press, 2020. 246 pp. \$29.55 (\$19.99, paper).

Hanson, associate professor of Judaic Studies, University of Central Florida, has written an unusual defense of biblical archaeology and its role in the Arab-Israeli conflict, concentrating on biblical sites such as Hebron, Shechem, Shiloh, and Jericho, and the most intractable site of all, Jerusalem. In doing so, he unintentionally reiterates the key arguments of biblical archaeology’s critics, namely that it is designed to “prove” the antiquity of Jews in the southern Levant and thereby “legitimize” the existence of the modern State of Israel.

One of his goals is to assault claims by Palestinians and Arabs that they predate Jews in the Holy Land and that Jewish history in the region is invented. This is an important

task, but Hanson does so by means of potted history derived from often outdated secondary sources, repeating assertions that specialists no longer accept.

Hanson elides such problems as the Israelis turning over the area of the City of David to a private group for research and presentation. He lauds the conjoined but contradictory tasks of archaeological research and building Jewish neighborhoods. He similarly praises the excavation of the Western Wall tunnels, subsequently converted into privately controlled prayer spaces.

Throughout, he takes Palestinian criticism and denialism and international condemnation as validating the necessity and indeed the wisdom of Israeli actions. Hanson dismisses controversy within the Israeli archaeology community regarding methods and interpretations as “political correctness” while praising the wisdom of the Israeli Right taking matters into its own hands.

Hanson takes side journeys through a thwarted Jewish conspiracy to blow up mosques on the Temple Mount; the Temple

Institute’s efforts to prepare for a future Third Temple, including breeding a red heifer; the history of Jews in Hebron; the plans for a casino in Jericho, and the destruction of Canaanite Shechem. He bounces the reader back and forth between fragments of Biblical and other ancient texts, the sketchiest outline of archaeological finds, and modern geopolitics.

Hanson correctly notes that scholars and politicians routinely support indigenous peoples discovering their pasts through archaeology, with the singular exception of Jews. But such hypocrisy does not obviate the need for states to manage archaeology and heritage with an eye towards scholarship. Israelis seriously debate these matters endlessly in ways that Hanson caricatures. Ultimately, Hanson’s polemics do biblical archaeology and Israel no favor.

Alex Joffe
Middle East Forum

