Maher Jarrar’s attempt to piece together the corpus of Aban b. ‘Uthmān al-‘Abd al-Hāmār is a valiant attempt to chart out new territory where, to the best of my knowledge, there is an empty spot in the work of traditional Shi’ite scholars.

By far the two most important articles in this collection, and the ones that have the most substance, are Motzki’s article on the Murder of Ibn Abi l-Huqayq (often referred to as “Abū Rāfi’” in the sources), and that of Görke on “The Historical Traditions about al-Ḥudaybiya” (pp. 240 ff). Both authors organize the texts about the incident they are studying by their isnāds. In this way, they are able to identify groups of reports. Each such group of reports has its peculiarities that are common to all the reports within the group. Then, within the group, each report is different from the other. Looking at all these reports without reference to their isnāds (as is the common practice among the Orientalists), one would naturally conclude that the evidence of the aḥādīth on this topic is hopelessly confused. Again, were one to dispense with the isnād, one could reconstruct any “history” of the text that pleased one’s fancy. With the isnāds in front of the researcher, at least we can separate the differences in the reports introduced by the transmission of the text from the differences we would want to attribute to partisan politics, suppression, dogma, and the like.

I cannot understand how any scholar working with “the sources” can justify simply ignoring the many versions of every hadīth and the information encoded in the isnād of each hadīth. There is much discussion of applying insights of Biblical criticism to the study of hadīth. But consider someone theorizing on a passage from Luke, while ignoring a parallel passage in, say, Paul. Is this not gross negligence?

Ahmad Hasan


The book under review is purportedly written about the history of Jordon during the fateful years of 1939 to 1947. At least, this is what the title suggests. After glancing through it, one may say that the volume is a compendium of letters of the ex-King Abdullah ['Abd Allāh] of Jordan, interspersed with, and
often unrelated to the text and context, a few tables about the Arab Legion, but it (d. 1951) certainly is not a work of history.

This is the work of a retired Major General of the Arab Legion, Maan Abu Nowar, who later held the post of Deputy Prime Minister for a small stint. The book proves once again that writing history is a professional and scholarly task and not everyone is qualified to do justice to it. The book is not even a memoir, since the author hardly ever mentions himself. In any case, at the time of the independence of the tiny kingdom from the British mandate, the author was a junior rank officer, who was not at all close to the decision makers of his country. The author’s own association with the Arab Legion notwithstanding, the Legion itself was nothing more than a small paramilitary unit of the desert emirate raised by the British after the first World War. It was not something around which the history of the Middle East, or even that of Jordan, could revolve.

This is the third in a series of books on Jordanian history, authored by Nowar. The reviewer has not had the opportunity of going through the other two books, but the present one is certainly an apology for the late King Abdullah. The book could not have been written but for the “encouragement of His Majesty King Hussein”, as the author acknowledges at the outset. King Hussein (d. 1999) had succeeded to the throne just one year after the death of his grandfather, King Abdullah. The intervening year saw a brief reign of his father King Ṭalāl who was assassinated in 1952. In the same assault, the young prince Hussein was saved miraculously when the assassin’s bullet deflected after hitting a medal on his royal uniform. The book has all the trappings of propaganda literature that the monarchs of the Middle East are so greatly infatuated with, a literature that would glorify them and their families. The official publications in Iraq and Syria praising Saddam Hussein (r.1979–2003) and Hafiz el Asad (r. 1970–2001), respectively, were no different in tone and style.

I would hesitate to say that Nowar has done a good job. Quoting long letters from Emir (Amir) Abdullah (as he was then known) to the British Residents or to the British Government in London, chapter after chapter, and page after page, the reader gets the impression that Abdullah was a typical megalomaniac ruler whose only interest was to become the King of Syria through intrigues with the British, and of course, at the cost of Arab and Muslim interests. I wonder whether this could have been the intent of the author or he has grasped the fact that his book gives a negative image of the person he ostensibly wishes to glorify. The author claims that the facts presented in his book are accurate and any “quarrel the reader may have” would relate to his “presentation of them” (p. x).
The author quotes Gen. Glubb describing the post World War I political situation in the Arabian peninsula as:

“...with the arrival of the British, the Turks withdrew from senior posts and the petty Arab employees suddenly found dazzling careers open to them. The penurious infantry captain found himself a colonel or a general. The ill-paid petty bureaucrat burst out as an excellency...the vast majority of these people had spent their lives...furthering the extension of the rule of their Turkish masters over the Arab population. But sudden elevation from the plodding clerks to provincial governors was too much for their mental balance. Arab nationalism became the order of the day. All sorts of people who had formerly been desirous of currying favor with the Turks, suddenly discovered themselves the happy possessors of pure Arab pedigrees, proving themselves to be the descendants of the Umayyads, the Abbasides, or the ...prophet” (p. 3).

The above quoted para also explains the rise of the Sharif Hussain (d. 1925) of Makkah and of course his son, Abdullah, the Emir of the British created entity of Trans-Jordan. Interestingly though, the author does not realize the obvious fallacy and expends the next three pages in explaining the affinity of the Jordanian people to Emir Abdullah through “religious and national bonds” (p. 4) and eulogizing the Emir as the most fervent nationalist (p. 5). The book is full of sweeping value judgments, when a letter of Emir Abdullah is called “historic” and the Sykes Picot Agreement of 1916 between Britain, France and Russia is declared as “traitorous” (p. 5). The author seems not to have felt the need of explaining or justifying such adjectives.

The author agrees that the Emir had no doubt that the Saudi King Ibn Sa‘ūd (d. 1969) wanted Syria for his son prince Faisal, and that he did not relish the idea of being sandwiched between two Saudi Kingdoms. He wanted to regain Hijaz wherefrom his father Sherif Hussein had been expelled and to become the King of Syria as well (p. 11). Probably he thought that the only power that could grant him his wish was the British Empire. So most of his letters betray a tone of servility and intrigue. For instance, on 11 June 1940, he wrote to Lord Lloyd, the British Secretary of State for Colonies:

You are well aware of the situation in Iraq. And the Arabian peninsula is in the hands of a man whose attitude towards you is similar to his attitude in the past towards the Ottoman government, of which he was one of the protégés... (p. 36).

While accusing King Ibn Saud of betraying the Ottoman Sultan, Abdullah continued to warn the British that he could do the same with them. While

1 It is noteworthy that Emir Abdullah never used the expression ‘Saudi Arabia’.
advancing his own name as the “most loyal subject” of the British throne, he used to forget in his naiveté that his father had likewise betrayed the same Ottoman Sultan and that the British would think twice before banking on his (Abdullah’s) loyalty.

There is, in the above quoted passage, a reference to the “situation in” Iraq which had a rather enlightened and politically conscious society. The progressive officers in the Iraqi army had formed a group, nicknamed the “Golden Square”. The whole Arab world, according to Albert Hourani, had high hopes that the Iraqi army was destined to unite the Arabs by blood and iron as Prussia had united Germany (p. 37). The Jordanian Emir tried to pressurize Iraq not to give shelter to the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Amin al-Husayni (d. 1974). He also refused to allow the Palestinian refugees to settle in Trans-Jordan (p. 36). He tried to encash his more-loyal-than-the-king attitude with the British. At least, this is the impression that the reader gets going through all his letters reproduced in the book.

Not only did Abdullah try to protect the British interests in Iraq, Palestine and the Trans-Jordan, at the cost of Muslim and Arab causes, but he also went to the extent of trying to plunge Egypt into the war and thereby placed the lives of Egyptian Muslim soldiers in jeopardy to serve the imperialist designs of the British (and probably his own on Syria). He made a 10-day visit to Cairo where King Faruk (d. 1965) made it clear to him that if Egypt entered the war on the side of Britain, she had nothing to gain if Britain won the war and everything to lose if it lost. The King treated Emir Abdullah with all the insult and disdain by addressing him by the word ‘Inta’ (you rather than thou), offering him tea in a smaller cup than his own and on the whole displayed ill-manners. But Emir Abdullah could not care less about these insults.

He had no qualms in playing with the Muslim blood by inviting the British to “hit the enemy in Iraq immediately” and “every tank and every aircraft in Syria must be taken by the British Forces” (paras 6 & 8 of the Emir’s letter to Gen. Sir Henry Wilson, GOC of the British Forces in Jerusalem, as quoted on p. 58). As fate would have it, it fell to the lot of his illustrious scion to the throne, King Hussein, to play with the Muslim blood by ordering the Black September massacre of the Palestinian refugees in Amman in 1970.

Here a comment on the style of governance of the Jordanian monarchy is in order. Emir Abdullah, who so proudly flaunted his Hashemite lineage, did not want to be seen as a mere British tout. He demonstrated his Islamic credentials in many weird ways. For instance, he ordered imprisonment of a
person for the ‘vulgarity’ of walking in the street alongside his wife who was pushing the pram of their newborn child (p. 144).

At the time of the termination of the French mandate, in the wake of defeat in the World War II, over Syria and Lebanon, Emir Abdullah embarked on efforts designed to reunite the three countries in the name of Arab unity arguing for a monarchial form of government with himself as the King (p. 76). He thought that this would be the reward of his unflinching loyalty to the British. The latter, however, did not take the Emir or his letters seriously. Prime Minister Churchill (d. 1965) was dismissive of him calling him “our creation” (p. 84).

President Saddam Hussein’s humiliation at the hands of the Americans, for whom he had so long acted as a proxy in attacking the neighbouring Muslim countries, bears testimony to the fact that history repeats itself. It will not be out of place to pose a question here. After 34 years of bravado about the weapons development programme, Mu'ammar al-Qaddafi of Libya took no time in surrendering to the West, by renouncing all WMDs, when he saw Saddam Hussein’s fate. Maybe, he has saved his skin from the prospect of rotting in Guantanamo, but will the Libyan people ever have a chance to make him account for the $18 billion that he had spent from the tax-payer’s pocket on his much-trumpeted weaponization program?

The fifth chapter of the book deals with the attempts of the Emir to destabilize the republican government of newly-independent Syria and the following, i.e. the sixth, chapter with his efforts to undermine the ongoing endeavors for the creation of the League of Arab States if the proposed League would not contribute to his dreams of becoming King of Arab States.

Following the end of British mandate in Jordan, Emir Abdullah declared the emirate to be a Hashemite Kingdom and assumed the title of King on 17 June 1946. He followed the example of Saudi Arabia (which he referred to as Najd), in naming the country as if it were a family property. The following year he declared March 8 as a national holiday commemorating the declaration of his brother late King Faisal (d. 1933) [not the Saudi King Faisal (d. 1975)] as King of Syria (p. 226).

The Syrian government continued to insist that it would welcome the merger of Trans-Jordan with Syria without, of course, compromising the republican structure of the country to suit the personal ambitions of Abdullah (p. 154). Syria was generally dismissive of Abdullah. At the time of her independence, she had not considered Abdullah important enough to be included in the list of the 77 heads of state who were notified of Syria’s independence. The book then ends arbitrarily at the year 1947.
Of the 363 pages of the book, the text ends at page 275, the rest of the pages are annexures. In the main body thus, no less than 195 pages contain wholly or partially quotes and reproduction of letters and reports. Around 30 are the endnotes. Of the remaining few, most are unrelated tables and lists. For instance, while telling that 17 lawyers were licensed in 1941, the list of names of all of them was not called for (p. 80). More preposterous was the list of names of all 48 pupils who passed the matriculation exam the same year. Equally out of place would have been the list of names of officers, down to the Sergeant-Major level, of each formation of the Arab Legion in the Appendices, let alone in the main body of the book, as the author has done.

Saad S. Khan


*The Empire and the Crescent: Global Implications for a New American Century* presents itself as a “timely and authoritative perspective on the relations between the West and Islamic societies” (jacket flap). Indeed, the book does just that through the compilation of fifteen articles by renowned scholars in the fields of religion, politics, and economics. *The Empire and the Crescent* enlightens the readers to the danger of, and destruction caused by, the attitude of leaving global affairs, especially of the Muslim world, in the hands of the hegemonic United States. The book could almost be considered a warning from the scholarly left to the tenuous and volatile nature of the world situation today and the urgent need for change.

The articles in the work are divided into two sections, “The Empire” and “The Crescent”. As the section titles suggest, the first half of *The Empire and the Crescent* deals with the actions and actors of American foreign policy. The second section, “The Crescent”, is slightly less unified in theme but broader in scope. The main purpose of “The Crescent” seems to be to place the ramifications of U.S. foreign policy introduced in “The Empire” in the context of the Islamic world. These divisions serve the work well, providing a sort of cause-and-effect study of America as a world empire.