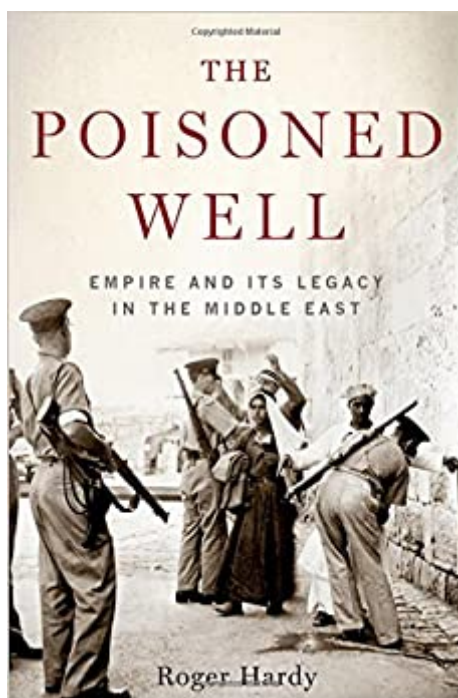


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The Poisoned Well: Empire And Its Legacy In The Middle East



Synopsis

The conflicts and crises of today's Middle East are rooted in the colonial era. To better understand them, we need to acknowledge how Western imperialism negatively shaped the region and its destiny in the half-century between World War I and the happenings of the Cold War. That is the challenging argument of *The Poisoned Well*, which provides a vivid account of the struggle against European colonial rule in ten states stretching from North Africa to south Arabia. Drawing on a rich cast of eye-witnesses - ranging from nationalists and colonial administrators to soldiers, spies, and courtesans - *The Poisoned Well* brings to life the story of the making of the Middle East, highlighting the great dramas of decolonization such as the end of the Palestine mandate, the Suez crisis, the Algerian war of independence, and the retreat from Aden. It argues that imperialism sowed the seeds of future conflict - and poisoned relations between the Middle East and the West. Bolstered by firsthand accounts and interviews, readers will find a wise and humanistic account of the struggle for independence in the Middle East. Written by a former BBC journalist, it is a far-ranging, landmark work that will serve as the definitive history of Western imperialism in the Middle East for years to come.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Recommended."--CHOICE

Roger Hardy worked for more than twenty years as a Middle East analyst with the BBC World Service. He is the author of *The Muslim Revolt: A Journey through Political Islam* (Hurst and

Colombia University Press, 2010) and is a Research Associate at the Centre for International Studies in Oxford.

Well and judiciously presented. Unfortunately it seems we westerners see things through a different prism than those we impact so acutely as we strive to meet our destiny through acquisition of their natural resources. Given what to this point has been the state of human affairs, questions regarding colonial legacy will continually arise for the foreseeable future.

This is a great read. Fluid. Coherent. Flows nicely. Great historical data and fresh insight. Put together very well and nicely written.

This is a well written, focused and profound examination of the multi- forces and events creating today's dynamic conflicts across the Region. Roger THardy has created a compelling "story" highlighting the complexity within the "DNA " of these competition, distrustful and nationalistic states grounded on tribalism and religion. " The Poisoned Well" is a must read for individuals seeking to understand and grasp the confusing and complex forces at work in The Middle East. This is an outstanding history and insightful study of a critically important region in our world.

A good and brief introduction with insights into how imperialist Europe shaped the modern middle east.

I received an advance copy of this book via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review. Roger Hardy has set out a monumental task for himself. In *Poisoned Well*, he seeks to lay out the development of the Middle East we see in our news feeds every day. From the downfall of the Ottoman Empire, to the bitter struggles that marked the death throes of European imperialism in the middle decades of the 20th century, Hardy focuses on the impact of European colonialism on the region and how imperial hubris helped to develop reactionary movements whose impact is still being felt today. The scope of *Poisoned Well* is quite sweeping. It begins with the breaking up of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War. In the post war peace talks, the Empire (which had allied with Germany) was to be broken up and split among the two major Allied powers at the talks, namely Britain and France. The plan, on paper, was for the pieces of the Ottoman Empire (some divided, literally at random, into new nation states by the Europeans) to be come colonies and protectorates of either France or Britain, with the goal of westernizing and

modernizing these new countries, and eventually returning them to independence, as staunch allies of the west, safeguarding European interests in the Middle East. What actually happened should shock no one. The European powers found it hard to let go of their new colonies, especially after oil was discovered in the region. Hardy takes us on a whirlwind tour of the region, giving us insight into the development of modern day Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Algiers, Iraq, Syria, and of course the still violently contentious Palestine/Israel conflict. Each country is allotted its own chapter, which generally gives some history of the area under the Ottoman Turks, and progresses through the start of colonization, through World War Two, and on to independence. With each, Hardy gives us both sides of coin, the British or French officials (political or military) who ran the country, and the nationals who pushed against them for freedom. Hardy gives special attention to the evolution of nationalist movements in each country, showing how the steps (and missteps) taken by the Europeans helped to shape the nationalist movements they were working against. As you progress further into the book, certain names on both sides start to repeat, and you realize there's another layer underneath Hardy's narrative. European names reappear when politicians, journalists, or spies move from country to country for their work. The Arabic names reappear and you realize that there were two fronts to the nationalist movement in the Middle East. There was a nation-state level movement within each colony, but there was also a pan-Arabic nationalist movement, seeking to unify all the Arab nations under one banner (Hardy points out that this is very similar to one of the goals of the radical Jihadists we see today). In all, Hardy has produced a wide-reaching, yet accessible book. It provides a great jumping off point for folks (like me) who don't know much about the history of the Middle East; yet his use of first person accounts (though these are mostly from European sources) should interest a scholar of the area. In fact, I'd say that the weakest part of *Poisoned Well* is also the strongest. By giving us such a broad look at the colonial history of the Middle East, Hardy naturally has to sacrifice detail. Each chapter is a complete story in its own right, but Hardy will mention something in passing in the midst of a paragraph, and you get the feeling he just compressed a major political turning point into a few words. Fortunately, a *Dramatis Personae* and a bibliography at the end of the book allow for further reading. Those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it. Reading *Poisoned Well*, it is striking (and depressing) how cyclical the western world's dealings with the Middle East really are.

ranks 3 stars as a critical review, but I don't feel able to give it 4. First, the praise: essentially ten standalone essays on how different nations (Syria/Lebanon and Israel/Palestine are combined in

single chapters) achieved their current statehood - essentially independence from Ottoman, French and (especially) British empires. (Saudi Arabia is a bit different). Each essay paints a convincing picture and would serve a visitor to that country well as historical background. BUT... the standalone nature of the essays prevents an integrated view from the imperialist perspective. The general narrative is that imperialism is bad and I don't disagree, but some understanding of the imperial viewpoint would have made this a better book. To keep this short, let's just focus on the principal empire - British. (i) Britain emerged from WW2 bankrupt and empire could only be afforded if it generated sufficient revenue. (ii) Imperial breakup post WW2 was inevitable partly because independence promises had been made to secure imperial support during the war, partly because colonies overrun, especially by the Japanese, saw no merit in having the (albeit more benevolent) British return and enjoy the local revenue generation and partly because of the domino effect - granting independence to one nation leads to demands from many others, (iii) Indian independence meant the need to maintain land, sea and (increasingly important) air connections in the Middle East was greatly reduced. (iv) The US, emerging as a superpower from WW2 with considerable wealth, saw both commercial and ideological benefits in imperial breakup. Yet these points find little place in the book, which concentrates instead on strictly local issues.

Although missing some important events .Very good read I recommend it if you interested to know the roots of the trouble in the middle east

Full of facts and written in an engaging way. Great read to better understand the current situation between the Middle East and the West

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