(128) during times of annihilation. She demonstrates convincingly the intense, personal and political, contemporary meaning of artistic production linked to what are commonly thought of as religious rituals.

*We Are Iraqis* is a very welcome addition to the sparse literature on contemporary Iraqi society. For students new to modern Iraq (or the Middle East), the book may serve as a thought-provoking introduction to a wide range of topics in addition to its core theme of modern Iraqi art, such as the sociology of displacement and war, Sunni-Shi'a relations, gender relations, and the politics and history of Iraq and its neighboring states. Single chapters could serve as excellent additions to core syllabi, for example, to open alternative, critical, or simply personal perspectives on the course topic at hand. To readers more familiar with one or more of its main themes, *We Are Iraqis* offers an interdisciplinary conversation, and enough new and creative perspectives to stimulate and engage both the mind and the heart.

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**Mai al-Nakib.** *The Hidden Light of Objects.* Doha: Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation, 2014. 237 pages. Cloth US$15.99 ISBN 978-9-9921-9541-3.

**M**ai al-Nakib's short stories are full of surprises. They are located in the Middle East, mostly in Kuwait and Lebanon, but it is people who are the heart of each one. Many are children and adolescents. They are shown growing up, dealing with death and other losses, the confusions of love, and the even larger confusions that come from losing it. Seasons, terrain, and lifestyles shape the dilemmas and opportunities they encounter, embracing them in a complex web of culture and practice that, as strong as iron bars, constrains their choices. As someone who has studied Kuwait for most of a professional lifetime, I was drawn most strongly to the stories taking place there. The events of the Iraqi invasion and occupation are the pivot in my own relationship to Kuwait. This happened shortly after I had returned to the United States after a spring 1990 Fulbright fellowship. On my first trip back nearly a year after liberation, the then U.S. ambassador to Kuwait, Skip Gnehm, told me that his was the only embassy in the Middle East covered in pro-American graffiti.

Gnehm's pride is echoed in my favorite story in this collection, about a little Kuwaiti girl whose parents might well have wanted to write pro-American graffiti on the embassy walls. Instead, they wrote their message by changing the name of their only daughter to Amerika. Amerika loved her new name even though she wasn't quite sure what it meant. "[W]henever she told people her

name it made them exuberant. 'Yes! We should be grateful.... You will never forget to be thankful to America. Neither should we.' Always the exuberance. To begin with" (197).

The story unspools from that exuberant beginning. Amerika taught herself American English and treasured what she learned about her liberator: Halloween, icicles, autumn leaves, Central Park. Learning about America from satellite TV, she conceived a system for collecting objects signifying America in a wooden box divided into twenty-five square compartments. The contents are a list of childhood delights, from Froot Loops® and peanuts (for peanut butter) to baseball cards and marbles. In the last compartment, she put little strips of paper on which she had written American idioms. She was limited in how many she could collect because they all had to fit inside one square. If she wanted to add a new idiom, she had to take an old one out. But she saved the old ones, too, in a stamp album, which she grew to love almost as much as the box itself.

Amerika enjoyed an American-style upbringing. She was the baby in a family of eight, and everyone indulged her. Her mother decided that "she would rather Amerika take shape on her own and make her own shapes in turn.... Fatma was taking a risk, making a quiet decision to allow something she could not predict to happen" (204). Amerika was an easy child to rear, content to entertain herself for many hours, working on her collection box and stamp book. She learned proper English by reading books (not a normal pastime of most Kuwaitis).

The iron bars of two places structure Amerika's choices. In Kuwait, Amerika was never her teachers' favorite student. She was too bright and too "American" for their taste. By the time she was fourteen, she was the only girl in her class who did not wear *hijab*. Her mother told her that before the invasion few Kuwaiti women did, something I noticed myself, along with the rush to adopt the most radical styles of veiling after liberation. "[W]ith the sharp cheddar fervor of true believers, [they] covered their entire faces in black, a new, creepier breed of *niqab*" (205). Amerika and her mother valued modesty but disdained conformity: "Kuwaiti women were modest but they were not mice, Amerika" (205).

Not being a mouse earned Amerika exclusion and scorn. She could escape the misery of school by retreating into her treasure box, but even this comfort was denied when America dropped its iron bars, separating her from the dreams and ideals the treasure box embodied. I remember the exuberance of Kuwaitis when the U.S. and U.K. invaded Iraq in 2003. Saddam would be gone forever. But this memory is missing in Amerika's story, as is the descent into casual abuse and murder, the torture of Iraqi prisoners of war, and the shock

of Abu Ghraib when the rumors became pictures on every computer screen. Amerika's story takes place more quickly than "real time," but it is a metaphor. Looking back, it really did not take very long for America to turn into Iraq. Mai al-Nakib's powerful stories make a reader think hard about what she knows about herself and the people with whom she shares her life. They also evoke a deep reconsideration of what the reader "knows" about "the Middle East." For that reason alone, I hope they will be widely read.

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**Zayde Antrim.** *Routes and Realms: The Power of Place in the Early Islamic World.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 212 pages; acknowledgments; note on translations, transliterations, and dates; glossary; notes; bibliography; index. Cloth US$65.00 ISBN 978-0-1999-1387-9.

This book is a compilation of previously published articles and talks, as Antrim's entry on the faculty page of Trinity College, Hartford, CT reveals. It consists of an introduction and three chapters (homeland, cities, regions). The book purports to establish that there was a "discourse of place" in a broad range of texts and a more limited range of maps that were produced, mostly in Arabic, during the first centuries of the Abbasid dynasty. In its three chapters the author extracts anthologies, historical chronicles, and geographical works, to which she has added the occasional travel account, astronomical work, and religious treatise (2). These brief extracts are joined in the form of quotes and summaries to an easy-flowing combination of reformulated opinions and interpretations of previous researchers.

The author's own contributions seem to consist in the usage of a relatively limited vocabulary of current academic jargon like crafting, performing, constructing, imagining, invoking, evoking, body, discourse, strategy, nurture, and the like; the erasure of differences between genres, skills, beliefs, and values that, according to more traditional approaches to historical analysis, characterize poetry, historical writing, mathematical texts, and the styles and models of descriptive versus mathematical geography; the avoidance of analysis of the various sources, which she mined for the alleged discourse of place; and the thorough abstention from contextualization of authors, copyists, and other actors, their works, and the traces they left behind.

While other reviewers may emphasize strengths they find in the book, I find too many problems stand in my way of doing so. Antrim does not explain why she chose the period from the ninth to the eleventh centuries for her