

1979 "two-track" decision which called for deployment of American Pershing II's coupled with negotiation with the Soviets—fell to the Christian Democrat-Free Democrat coalition of Helmut Kohl and Hans-Dietrich Genscher, along with their allies in the West German neoconservative movement.

Ultimately the *Bundestag* voted on November 22, 1983 in favor of deployment: pro-Western "militant democracy" had won. But it is important to remember that throughout the controversy, supporters of Euromissile deployment had faced not only vilification and threats from the Soviet Union but the vociferous lunacy of the German New Left. Figures like Egon Bahr and Oskar Lafontaine of the Social Democrats had sought to manipulate German neutralist and nationalist sentiments in order to distance the Federal Republic from America and the West.

THE efforts of many of these same figures on the Left to whitewash the Honecker regime in East Germany, and then in the late 80's to delay German unification, will probably keep the SPD out of power for some time to come. Nevertheless, the constituency they represent, with its strength in the German media and academy, appeals to the deep-seated desire of a large part of the German population to opt out of world conflict altogether. This is a problem for Germany's allies, to the extent that the Soviet Union remains a threat and is willing to seek political concessions by brandishing the nuclear arsenal, now one of its only remaining assets as a world power. Germany's half-hearted support of the American-led coalition in the Gulf War, together with its shocking laxity in controlling German exports to Saddam Hussein, suggests that dictatorships other than the Soviet Union may be able to exploit the German dread of international tension, terrorism, and war.

Democracy in united Germany is secure, but the postwar tradition of "militant democracy" which Jeffrey Herf chronicles has much work to do, all the more so if the German people are to integrate

successfully the relics of empire brought to light by Amity Shlaes.

Baghdad Kitsch

THE MONUMENT: ART, VULGARITY, AND RESPONSIBILITY IN IRAQ. By SAMIR AL-KHALIL. *University of California Press*. 168 pp. \$35.00. \$16.95 paper.

CULTURE, HISTORY & IDEOLOGY IN THE FORMATION OF BATHIST IRAQ, 1968-89. By AMATZIA BARAM. *St. Martin's*. 196 pp. \$35.00.

Reviewed by DANIEL PIPES

ONLY a few months ago most Americans saw Iraq as just another third-world country under the rule of a wretched dictatorship. To be sure, it was clear that Sad-

DANIEL PIPES, director of the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia, recently published *The Rushdie Affair* (Birch Lane Press) and *Greater Syria* (Oxford University Press).

dam Hussein's internal repression was extreme; it was also clear that by attacking Iran in 1980, Saddam had initiated the century's longest conventional war. His bellicose rhetoric of early 1990 showed that he had learned little from those eight years of war. Still, in fundamental ways Saddam did not seem to differ from other noxious dictators. In terms of atrocities, aggressiveness, capricious rule, Baghdad's record seemed not much worse than that of Damascus next door.

The invasion of Kuwait not only had the effect of turning the spotlight on Iraq, and so making more information suddenly available, but it has compelled, or should compel, a deeper look into Iraqi public life. In aid of that project a good place to start is *Republic of Fear*, a book published in early 1989 to little fanfare by the pseudonymous author Samir al-Khalil.*

* University of California Press. Two paperback versions are now available, from California and from Pantheon.

THE BATTLE OF THE BOOKS

History and Literature in the Augustan Age



By JOSEPH M. LEVINE.

Joseph Levine here provides a witty and erudite account of the acrimonious quarrel between the "ancients" and the "moderns" that excited the English world of letters from 1690 until the 1730s. According to Levine, this dispute, which Jonathan Swift dubbed "the Battle of the Books," was an installment in the long-standing debate about the relationship of classical learning to modern life. "A masterly account of a major episode in European cultural history."—Anthony Grafton, Princeton University. \$29.95

CORNELL
University Press

124 Roberts Place
Ithaca, NY 14850

Republic of Fear is probably the first-ever insider's account to explain the logic behind a Middle Eastern dictatorship. Khalil does this by drawing both on his personal experience in Iraq and by immersing himself in English-language scholarship on tyranny and on the Middle East. He uses these sources to paint a powerful picture of an Iraqi hell, a place where "nothing is as it seems and nothing can be taken for granted."

Republic of Fear deals only with politics. Now, fortuitously, we have two small but spirited books exploring the cultural dimension of Saddam Hussein's kingdom. The one by Khalil himself, entitled simply *The Monument*, muses on the ramifications of a pair of gargantuan archways unveiled in Baghdad in August 1989. The other, by Amatzia Baram of Haifa University, dissects Baghdad's changing nationalist ideologies. The two books complement each other well, with Khalil's close angry reading serving as a case study for Baram's cool historical survey. Together, the books provide sophisticated insights into the life of the mind in Iraq, establishing a sound basis for understanding the ruler and the government that recently led their country to calamity.

Samir al-Khalil recounts how, in 1985, President Saddam Hussein enunciated his vision of a victory monument and how, four years later, he rode his white stallion under a pair of giant steel arches standing at either end of a huge parade ground in central Baghdad. The Victory Arch, Khalil explains, differs from all other such structures (the Arch of Titus in Rome, the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, Washington Square Arch in New York City) in being not architectural but statuesque. Each archway is formed by two forearms ending in clenched fists grasping swords; the swords cross at the apex, forming a bow 130 feet above the ground.

Even more than by the vulgarity and size of the monument, Khalil is intrigued and appalled by its realism. A total of 2,500 helmets are clustered at each base; they were worn by Iranian soldiers killed in action in the war with Iraq. Dead

Iraqi soldiers contributed their weapons which, melted down, have metamorphosed into the two pairs of outsized swords. But most odious of all in Khalil's eyes is the fact that the forearms and fists of the Victory Arch are precise replicas of Saddam Hussein's own limbs ("complete with hair follicles, the odd scratch and blemish").

Khalil would be the first to admit that this wretched edifice may well be unworthy of serious discussion; he dwells on it because of its aptness as a symbol of the sordidness of Iraqi political and cultural life. Politically, the Victory Arch reifies Saddam's "personal joy in politics," a joy deriving from the fact that in his Iraq the ruler alone acts politically. Culturally, the "sheer blinding inanity" of the arch points to the near-impossibility of creating significant works of imagination under that raging despotism. Indeed, Khalil goes so far as to condemn as "worthless" everything produced by the Iraqi intelligentsia during the Saddam years.

Following the Czech novelist Milan Kundera, Khalil postulates *kitsch* as a central aspect of totalitarian rule. Unlike some despots who have tried to repress the arts, Saddam Hussein sought to harness them to his rule, and he succeeded. Among the artists so mobilized, opportunism, cynicism, and the instinct to survive drove out more refined sensibilities. Even the serious artists of yesteryear (Iraq's most notable tradition was in sculpture) succumbed to the threats and blandishments of the state. Via state-issued specifications, Saddam suborned the entirety of Iraqi culture to the ruler's whim. Public architecture had special importance in this assertion of state omnipotence; Khalil concludes that "the moment Saddam Hussein turned his dreams into the city of all Iraqis, he snuffed out art and invested *kitsch* with a totalizing sovereignty."

Looking to the future, Khalil is far from optimistic. In contrast to the flimsy statues of older, less durable regimes, torn down by mobs with ropes, Saddam Hussein's monuments "are founded upon cavernous layers of reinforced concrete buried deep under the ground; it will take more than ropes and

eager hearts to bring them down." The fact that the Iraqi dictator was still in power in early May of this year, after having suffered one of the most devastating military defeats of modern history, shows the aptness of Khalil's metaphor.

AMATZIA BARAM'S compelling thesis is that government ideology in Iraq has undergone profound changes in the past two decades. When the Ba'thists seized power in 1968, they espoused their party's classic theme: "the Arabs form one nation." From the point of view of the Sunni Arabs who totally dominated the Iraqi Ba'th party, this ideology of radical pan-Arab nationalism had the great advantage of engaging Iraq deeply in the affairs of other (Sunni) Arab states, such as those surrounding the Arab-Israeli conflict. It also had the benefit of neatly excluding the other two major population groups in Iraq, the Sunni Kurds and the Shiite Arabs.

But the tensions thus aroused were too great, for Sunni Arabs constitute just one-quarter of the Iraqi population. Also, it quickly became apparent that less sophisticated Iraqis had difficulty identifying with the abstraction of pan-Arab nationalism. In short, the need to reach out to the majority of the population forced the Ba'thists to modify their principles.

They did so by sloughing off their single-minded preoccupation with Arab unity in favor of a much more Iraq-centered credo. The two approaches were contradictory, but they did entail a very different spirit. Iraq had been but a part of the Arab nation; now it became a whole unto itself. The old ideal of Arab unity gave way to a new one of harmonious relations among the distinct nations of Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and so forth. Instead of a single Arab nation, a loose federation became the ideal; the main constant was that Iraq would play a leading role.

This shift affected virtually all areas of Iraqi life, for the regime sought not just to define its own mission, but to reshape the identity of its citizens. As Baram shows, Arab folklore, archeology, rites, symbols, art, theater, poetry, and

history were replaced by their Iraqi equivalents.

Some of the pleasure in reading Baram's fine study lies in savoring the absurdities of Iraqi nationalist excess he uncovers. Thus, in 1980, just after the war with Iran began, Saddam Hussein advised his less literate countrymen that if they had difficulty reading Ba'th principles, all they had to do was "sniff the soil of this land." Hammurabi's biography was reworked so that it bore, in Baram's words, a "strange resemblance" to Saddam's own. In a typical conflation of time, the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III, who beat King Jehu of Israel in 842 B.C.E., was hailed as the first Iraqi king "to work toward the liberation of Palestine from the Israelites." And so forth.

Baram ends his study in 1989, just before Saddam Hussein's sudden adoption of still another ideology. As war with the United States and its allies loomed, Saddam wrapped himself more and more tightly in the green flag of Islam. In January 1991, he had the Islamic slogan "God Is Great" put on the Iraqi flag, and announced that this was "the lofty banner our fighters are guided by and believe in." Like other Muslim leaders before him (Nasser, Sadat, Arafat), Saddam discovered the utility of Islam in time of crisis. By the time the war began, Saddam sounded more like the Ayatollah Khomeini than his old secularist self.

THE ease with which a ruler like Saddam can skate from one program to another points to the superficiality of ideology in the Middle East. So, too, does the fact that what happened in Iraq under Saddam Hussein is very similar to what has happened in Syria under Hafez al-Assad. In both regimes, the ideal of a single, grand Arab nation was quietly dropped in favor of a less visionary, more local nationalist impulse, with Saddam's aspiration to a Greater Iraq (conquering Kuwait, trying to take Khuzistan province from Iran) paralleled by Assad's efforts to cobble together a Greater Syria (by invading Lebanon, controlling the Palestinian organizations, leaning on the Jordanian monarchy).

Saddam Hussein is a strongman, ruling on behalf of himself and his small community, adopting whatever instruments further his power; ideology has been but a cover for those ends. What counts are not the words but having the clout to get one's arms and fists reproduced on a monumental scale, down to the very follicles.

Children & God

THE SPIRITUAL LIFE OF CHILDREN.

By ROBERT COLES. *Houghton Mifflin*. 358 pp. \$22.95.

Reviewed by CHESTER E. FINN, JR.

ROBERT COLES has spent most of the past 30 years listening to children talk, gently prodding them to share with him and his tape recorder their hopes and fears, their beliefs and ideas, their anxieties and satisfactions. His inquiries have carried him to Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America, as well as into nearly every corner of the United States. And they have provided much of the content of an astonishingly prolific career. This is Coles's 51st book, the 20th written primarily about—or for—children, and the eighth (Coles says the last) of his distinctive studies of their inner lives.

Trained (by the likes of Anna Freud and Erik Erikson) as a child psychiatrist and analyst, gifted with a keen ear, good eye, and agreeable prose style, Coles gives over most of his pages here as in his previous volumes to direct quotations from (and drawings by) the boys and girls he has interviewed. Deftly selected and shaped to illuminate points that Coles rarely states baldly, these protracted excerpts resemble interwoven case studies. One must enjoy prolonged immersion in the thoughts and words of children to relish these volumes.

Not that Coles removes himself from the picture; in truth, few paragraphs pass without some comment on what a youngster has said, Coles's reaction, his strategy for

eliciting more, or a fragment of his own life that the child's words call to mind. Yet the children occupy center stage while Coles stays in the wings, giving cues, comfort, and occasional direction.

It is practically impossible to gauge the force of that direction. If he did not invent this genre—part sociology, part biography (and autobiography), part essay, part clinical file—Robert Coles is surely its foremost contemporary practitioner. So skillful is he that, while we can often glimpse him drawing his witnesses out, it is hard to tell which of the views conveyed through their voices are intrinsically important to the children uttering them and which are significant chiefly to the author.

Were these doctrinaire or even highly opinionated books, that haziness would be grounds for concern. Too often of late, crusaders for one or another political cause—nuclear non-proliferation, environmentalism, etc.—have drafted children as surrogates, quoting them selectively, cultivating anxieties in their minds, using their innocence, their alleged suffering, their presumed clarity of vision and honesty of expression as vehicles for adult agendas.* Robert Coles does not work that way. He is an explicator, not an exploiter. Although his choice of topic obviously determines the basic direction of his inquiry, he is exquisitely, sometimes painfully, self-conscious about his own words and behavior during these conversations, striving to eliminate static and distortion from the sound system through which we are invited to eavesdrop.

He is also too respectful of his young subjects to drag them into disputes among grown-ups, and too confident of their resilience and adaptability to succumb to the easy suggestion that adults must intervene to shield them from ideas and events. During the recent war in the Persian Gulf, for example, as psychologists, educators, and counselors of every sort stumbled over one

CHESTER E. FINN, JR.'s new book, *We Must Take Charge: Our Schools and Our Children*, has just been published by *The Free Press*.

* See "The Nuclear Bubble" by Joseph Adelson (COMMENTARY, November 1990) and "Terrorizing Children" by Chester E. Finn, Jr., and Joseph Adelson (COMMENTARY, April 1985).