

THE ARABS

by Maxime Rodinson

translated by Arthur Goldhammer

(University of Chicago Press; 188 pp.; \$12.50/\$5.95)

ISLAM IN THE MODERN WORLD AND OTHER STUDIES

by Elie Kedourie

(A New Republic Book: Holt, Rinehart and Winston; 332 pp.; \$17.95)

Daniel Pipes

Who *are* the Arabs? Whoever speaks Arabic. This obvious response ignores both the Arabic-speaking groups who shy away from Arab identity (Berbers, Maltese, Copts, Druze, Jews, Kurds) and non-Arabic speakers who cultivate it (Somalis, Comoro islanders). Out of this complexity Rodinson produces an amazingly intricate definition. Arabs are those who:

1. speak a variant of Arabic *and* regard it as their natural language, the language they ought to speak or, if they do not speak it, nevertheless have the same estimation of it;

2. regard as their patrimony the history and cultural traits of the people that has called itself and that others have called Arab, for whom one of those cultural traits has been, since the seventh century, belief in the Muslim religion (which is not limited exclu-

sively to this people);

3. (what amounts to the same thing) claim Arab identity and possess an awareness of being Arab.

Rodinson's book systematically looks at Arab history, pan-Arabism, future prospects, and common elements among Arabs. The author, a leading authority at the Sorbonne, is knowledgeable and specific. His short book, though it often reads like a reference work—or physics text—contains much of interest. "Arab" probably derives from the Semitic word *carabah*, "steppe"; the earliest inscription in Arabic dates from A.D. 328, on a tombstone of a ruler who called himself "king of all the Arabs"; Maltese is a dialect of Arabic but its speakers, being Catholic, try to forget this fact. Communist parties first put forward the notion of unity among Arabs; according to UNESCO, a quarter of the "brain drain" involves Arabs.

But there is much to criticize. As the definition above shows, the style is turgid and the translation reads too much like French. Rodinson's biases against Turks, Israel, liberalism, and the West frequently intrude on otherwise restrained prose. More serious, the central question of pan-Arabism is unac-

countably neglected—how Arabs came to believe they form a single people and why they want to live under a single government. Arabic speakers never thought of themselves as a people before this century, identifying themselves by family, tribe, village, region, class, or religion, but not by language. Today no other group of sovereign states considers its divisions a moral offense. Though Rodinson traces the history of pan-Arabism, he fails to explain its origins. Perhaps his adamant Marxism prevents him from appreciating the crucial role of Islam, which calls on its adherents to unite under a single rule and not to fight each other. While hardly ever realized, this ideal has retained a strong hold on Muslims throughout the centuries. Pan-Arabism represents a modernized, secularized version of this ideal. The urge to unite Arab speakers draws on the powerful emotions associated with unifying Muslims. Without a discussion of this Islamic element Rodinson misses the most intriguing aspect of the Arab identity.

Elie Kedourie, professor of history at the London School of Economics, promises that he will explore in detail "the

fortunes of Islam in the Middle East," but he does less than justice to his promise, devoting less than a quarter of his text to Islam. The book is a collection of seventeen essays following comparable collections published in 1970 and 1974. Most of the essays deal with Kedourie's two principal interests, "Great-Power policies in the [Middle East] from the first world war onwards and the coming to be and spread of an ideological-nationalist and radical style of politics in the Arab world."

Kedourie's erudition is impressive. He knows remarkably much about political history, both general and Middle Eastern—the kind of detailed familiarity that comes only with decades of experience. His passionate, unconventional views are striking. Kedourie approves of very little about the twentieth century and not much more about the nineteenth, be it the Romantic movement, the trend toward greater government control, or the advent of psychohistory. Without saying so in so many words, he regrets the passing of both the Ottoman and British empires. This takes on added interest when one realizes that Mr. Kedourie grew up in Iraq, for centuries under Ottoman control and for decades under British.

One theme runs through most of Kedourie's writings—the interaction of Europe and its culture with the Middle East. He has little interest in the indigenous culture itself but is fascinated to show, in differing contexts, its response to Europe. He calls the "spread of European ideas and techniques...the most significant and striking theme in the modern history of Islam," concluding that it aggravated conditions in the Middle East, making Muslims "highly strung and deeply disturbed." Unfortunate as he considers European influence, the author does not believe independence has been better. The empires meant stability. Discussing the "perils of independence" in Lebanon, for example, he notes that if Lebanese history in the twentieth century has a moral, "it is surely that independence can be as constraining as dependence, and sometimes perhaps even downright disastrous."

It should be evident that Kedourie thrives on debunking current wisdom. His minority views make him a *bête noire* in some intellectual circles; but few of his critics have the wit and command of facts to challenge his arguments. **WV**

Middle East Wrap-Up

The idea of order in the Middle East may be anomalous, but we try here to put some order into the explosion of books about that traditional focal point of apocalyptic expectations. Albert Hourani's **The Emergence of the Modern Middle East** (University of California; 220 pp.; \$30.00) is a collection of thirteen historical essays in a companion volume to the same press's earlier **Europe and the Middle East**. Thomas A. Bryson, in **Seeds of Mideast Crisis: The United States Diplomatic Role in the Middle East During World War II** (McFarland & Co.; 226 pp.; \$15.95), traces America's present involvement in the area to its groping for ways of containing the USSR, among other concerns, during the war. Robert Legvold of the Council of Foreign Relations sounds a "restrained alarm" in **The Middle East Challenge: 1980-1985** (Southern Illinois University; 192 pp.; \$12.95 [paper]). Paul Jabber investigates the prospects for arms control in the light of developments since 1973 in **Not by War Alone: Security and Arms Control in the Middle East** (University of California; 200 pp.; \$12.50), and he includes a case study of a previous attempt to develop an arms control system for the area. **Change and the Muslim World**, edited by Philip H. Stoddard, *et al.* (Syracuse University Press; 224 pp.; \$9.95 [paper]), contains seventeen essays that deal with the differing assumptions and perceptions of Muslims and non-Muslims. Another collection of essays, **Islam and Power in the Contemporary Muslim World**, edited by Alex Cudsi and Ali E. Dessouki (Johns Hopkins; 224 pp.; \$20.00), addresses problems of tradition and modernity.

David Holden, a correspondent of the London *Times*, was mysteriously murdered while writing, with Richard Johns and James Buchan, **The House of Saud: The Rise and Rule of the Most Powerful Dynasty in the Arab World** (Holt Rinehart; 464 pp.; \$17.95). Irvine H. Anderson takes a look at the complex relationships between the U.S. Government and the business world in **Aramco, the United States, and Saudi Arabia: A Study of the Dynamics of Foreign Oil Policy, 1933-1950** (Princeton; 288 pp.; \$15.00). *More to come.*