

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

On Robert McDaniel's Review of Middle East: Past and Present

To The Editor:

Anyone who is reckless enough to appear in print, especially in a general textbook, must expect to be criticized by all comers. It is impossible to please everyone. Usually what one praises the other condemns. I expected as much when I set out on this perilous course. But I was naive enough to think that even a most critical review would be constructive and edifying. Professor McDaniel's review of my book, Middle East: Past and Present, in Iranian Studies (Winter, 1972), has been most disappointing. His flippant tone, affected statements, and exaggerated generalities are neither constructive nor edifying. For example, in the Introduction I describe what seems to me to be the ingredients of nationalism in the Middle East, namely (1) pride in the past, (2) feeling of inferiority about the present, (3) secularism, (4) suspicion of the west, and (5) confusion of choice. Dr. McDaniel may not agree with my analysis, but how in the world can he deduce from the above that all I said was "people in the Middle East love their countries as you and I," only a psychiatrist may know.

Although the number of misprints, miss-spellings, transposed dates, etc. has been exaggerated by the reviewer, they are most distressing to me and I accept full responsibility. I am still mystified as to how "Hastings" disappeared after the indexer saw it on p. 212 and recorded it in the index!

Going through the morass of innuendoes and flippant statements, two criticisms deserve comment. One is McDaniel's contention that I have not provided the students a historical perspective. For a good example he claims that I should have mentioned the whole gamut of the problems relating to India such as defence, communications, etc., when I relate that Warren Hastings established a trading post in Cairo. In the first place reference to the pages where India is mentioned will reveal that I have discussed a number of these problems where they become relevant. These simply were not the issues during the eighteenth century. It was after the British Government assumed control of India in 1857 that it became interested in buying shares of the Suez Canal and building the London-Delhi telegraph line, etc. The East India Company was basically a business establishment and its concerns were limited. Furthermore, British contacts with the Middle East were not only via India, as McDaniel clearly implies. Be that as it may, Prof. McDaniel is wrong when he states that I have "ignored" these problems, and when he follows that by saying that this "occurs on page after page," he is downright irresponsible.

The other subject is the role I give Iran in the development of Middle East history. Prof. McDaniel is not against it but apparently believes that I should have done it inobtrusively while no one was looking! He accuses me of doing this "with a vengeance" plus some Iranian "national foibles." For a good example of this "foible" he has chosen my statement that at the beginning of the eighteenth century and some 300 years before that the destiny of the Middle East and India were in the hands of the Ottomans, Safavids and Moguls--all Turks--and that "a cultured person was judged by his knowledge of the literature, history, art, and mores of the Persians." I wish I had space to discuss this matter fully but anyone who knows anything about Indian history knows that Persian was the language of the Mogul court and it was not until late eighteenth century that Urdu began to come into vogue. Nevertheless in mid-nineteenth century when the Mogul empire fell, English replaced Persian in schools, offices, etc. As to the Ottoman empire, it may suffice to

quote Serif Mardin in The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought (p. 123) that as late as the middle of the nineteenth century "fluency in this language [Persian] was an important qualification for advancement...." Now if this was true in the mid-nineteenth century, what is so confusing or out of line about the beginning of the eighteenth century and before that?

The real problem is that generally American books on the Middle East consistently ignore Iran. For instance, the text written by Prof. Sydney Fisher does not have one blessed page on Iran from the advent of Islam until the twentieth century. All references to Iran are incidental and adjunct to Arab and Ottoman histories. Consequently when readers see a book that has given a third of the space to Iran they are tempted to think that it is excessive. If the author happens to be a Persian, the temptation to think so becomes greater, and their reaction to it becomes emotional and sometimes irrational. Consider, for example, Prof. McDaniel's reaction to my transliteration. Every one knows that "Muhammad," "Uthman," "Ahmad," etc. are spelled that way because the Arabs pronounce them that way. When it comes to Ottoman history, however, these same names are spelled by me and many others as "Mehmed," "Osman," "Ahmed," etc. McDaniel does not find anything objectionable in this because, after all, the Turks have the right to pronounce words their own way. But when I do exactly the same thing in dealing with Persian history and write "Esma'il," and "Esfahan," etc., Dr. McDaniel is emotionally wrought up and finds it an "untidy business." His criticism is absolutely irrational. By the way, I am not the only one (see Russia and Britain in Persia, by Firuz Kazemzadeh; but then he is another Persian with "foibles"!)

Actually Prof. McDaniel should not be blamed for this unreasonable attitude. After all, the official journal of the Middle East Studies Association is no better. In the guide for transliteration it has two variations for Turkish but has lumped Arabic and Persian together in favor of Arabic, of course. It is nearly three years that my

objections and suggestions have been ignored, and the silence has been as absolute as it has been contemptuous. It is so much easier to go along with the establishment and be called a scholar than run the risk of being one.

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