

INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE

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Program & Policy  
Area Studies

FROM: JM

DATE: June 27, 1950

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COMMENTS:

This is an exceedingly interesting paper. I hope CIB will receive a copy. *run*

- A provocative document.

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- a suggestive contribution.

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SUBJECT: "Area Studies" and the Near East

The visits I made to Iran, Iraq, and Egypt between April 17 and May 18, 1950, have seemed increasingly to be in many ways the most formative visits I have ever made in my work for the Foundation, particularly in the fact that they posed rather sharply the problem of how the people of one culture can come to an understanding of peoples of other cultures. This was, to be sure, my second visit to the Near East but it brought my first opportunity really to get any grasp of the thought and tradition of these peoples. Virtually every one of the talks I had during this period of nearly five weeks turned in one way or another on this subject; and as I look back on it I can more than ever see how fortunate I was in my capacity as an RF officer in having access to individuals who were unusually well qualified for such discussion.

I should guess now that the Near East is the area of the world in which this problem poses itself best, for the simple reason that it is a pretty coherent human region and conscious of its coherence - as, for example, I doubt that the Far East or Southeast Asia is. Its coherence resides in the first place in a common memory, at least for the rise of Islam and the Arab expansion down to the rise of modern nationalism. In the second place, it still has in large measure a common outlook on the rest of the world which, to be appreciated, has to be almost physically experienced; in the Near East one is strikingly conscious of a different horizon, with Europe to the west, the Soviet Union to the north, Pakistan and the Indian Ocean to east and southeast, and Equatorial Africa to the south and southwest. Almost physically in the Near East one is in a different physical world and even the alien gains some consciousness of the fact that is uppermost in the minds of those who are native to the region.

From this position the world and its history has a distinctly different look. One feels, for example, the Crusades from another angle. One becomes aware of what he had known in theory; e.g. the influence of Persian architecture on the Gothic architecture of Western Europe. One sees 19th century western imperialism in a different light; for example in terms of constant Egyptian effort to gain seats on the Board of Directors of the Suez Canal which, as every Near Easterner knows, by the terms of the ninety-nine-year lease becomes Egyptian property in 1968.

In this position one is almost driven to discover for himself, inasfar as he is able to, who these people are. Curiously, what he has read of them is



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of less use than he might have supposed. On the spot it seems to have told more of who they have been - information that is useful in its way and still in many respects extraordinarily valid. But as one begins to have a sense of who these people are, considerations emerge which seem largely untreated in the literature and these are the very considerations, as one comes to think of them, which are fundamental for the understanding of these peoples as they are.

Without any pretention to penetration or to accuracy, perhaps I can best explain what I am driving at by recording, as I shall in the following section, some of the considerations which came to seem salient as I thought back over these visits during my stay in Florence. I know that they do have some validity, for I took occasion there more or less to review what I had written with one of the ablest and most detached Near Easterners I know, Dr. Matta Akrawi, a Christian Iraqi, now a member of the Unesco Secretariat; and I know from his comments and reactions that these considerations were uppermost for him as for me.

They are, of course, fallible in one important respect, namely, that they derive exclusively from conversations with people who spoke English or French and who, for the most part, had had their advanced education in the West. Lacking ability to speak Arabic and Persian, I could have no direct contact with the less westernized mass of the population, and any knowledge I could gain of it was necessarily through these more or less westernized spokesmen.

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I had thought from what I had read of these countries that the salient consideration would be their religious outlook, Islam. That preconception proved useful, for it led me to pay more attention than I might have otherwise to that aspect of their life and thought. But the final outcome was that Islam seems to me now a consideration of only secondary importance, the primary consideration for them and for us being the process of westernization which they are undergoing.

One might think modernization a preferable term. But modernization should imply a development rooted in their cultures, an evolution by which those cultures accommodated themselves to the demands of the present-day world. Very little of this kind of evolution is discernible. Wherever change can be noted, it involves the adoption, hardly even the adaptation, of practices and ways of thinking that have developed in the west. The use of the alternate term, westernization, should be a constant reminder that what is "modern" in the Near East is essentially alien to its practices and thinking. It seems merely modern to us of the west, because in origin it is essentially western.

As a secondary consideration, the fact of Islam is by no means to be disregarded. Islam in a sense stands for what these cultures were before westernization began. It still stands for those parts of their cultures which have not undergone westernization, and which operate now as a conservative force in the face of increasing westernization. Islam is still the consideration which binds these countries together, and more than geographical situation, language, or history, makes them part of a human region in which westernization only slowly makes its way.

The force of Islam is by no means constant throughout their populations. The part of their people who have more readily accepted westernization in their work and thinking, are by and large the least devout. Few of them, so far as I could ascertain, follow the ritual of prayer, or do more than evoke Islam except on ceremonial occasions like marriage or funerals. Yet even this more westernized group is by no means free of Islam. Their public actions and their utterances can never disregard the fact of the devoutness of the great mass of the people, which in various ways calls them to account if their actions or their utterances are too much at variance with Islamic practices and thought.

Furthermore, for all the apparent emancipation of this westernized group, Islam is a part of the mentality and character formation of every member of it. With the exception of the various Christian minorities, few, if any, members of it were educated as children otherwise than in strict Moslem families. It is hard now to imagine Taha Hussein, at present Egyptian Minister of Education, or Ahmed Amin, Director of the Cultural Commission of the Arab League, or Fadil Jamali, the Iraqi most active in foreign affairs, in other than western dress. Yet it was not many years ago that they wore the gown and turban of the young sheikh, and only recently Jamali brought back from exile to Iraq the mullah with whom he studied as a young man - not ostensibly for religious reasons, but for the influence against communism he could and is exerting in his Friday preaching in the mosques.

The extent to which Islam is operative in the present thinking of this group is hard to determine. Its operation is probably best described in psychological rather than in religious terms. It probably underlies their



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virtual unanimity in assigning more importance than is characteristic of the west to the inwardness of the personality, and to the imperturbability into which they can retreat. The Moslem ritual of prayer is not involved with petition: it is rather a ceremonial that is meaningful in placing the individual in the material and spiritual universe. It is in part, in the language of the Koran, a refuge in which the personality rediscovers its stability in that placement. Its consequences may be manifest in the seeming fact that suicide is hardly known in Islam - save among the more completely westernized; and that so far as I could discover, the rate of schizoid psychoses is far lower.

The operation, or even the remembered ideal, of this inwardness gives the Moslem a sense of superiority - and perhaps with reason - over the more exteriorized man from the west. That superiority is demonstrated, if he can remain imperturbable within himself, when the westerner is perturbed. At the same time this heritage of inwardness is hardly to his advantage when he must work and think in western ways, least of all to western eyes when frustration, instead of stimulating him to further effort, leads him to seek refuge in a seemingly unproductive inwardness. In that situation, he saves himself, but loses the world.

In general then, westernization is taking place progressively in a broad culture, that of Islam, which is not evolving of itself. Such modernization - change in the face of world conditions in politics, communication, science, and mass education - as has taken place is almost exclusively the result of westernization, and not of indigenous forces. The almost total lack of Islamic thinking on the present-day situation of Islam is universally deplored, but not remedied, by taking thought. Thus in the microcosmic manifestations in the individual personality, the assertion of superiority tends to be symptomatic of the basic insecurity in an individual who by inheritance and formation has one way of behavior, in a situation which increasingly requires other forms of behavior.

The manifestations of this basic insecurity in the macrocosm of the Islamic world are manifold. It seems a world of individuals who think they know who they have been, but who are increasingly aware that they do not know what they are. What they are has been thrust on them with almost shattering rapidity. It was some years later than 1924, when Attaturk began the official westernization of Turkey, that Reza Shah began comparable reforms in Iran. Nationality for Iraq began only in 1932. Egypt, with a longer but more gradual history of westernization dating from the time of Mohammed Ali (died in 1850) while indebted as is Iraq to the westernizing influence of British rule, has really been responsible for her own destiny only since the Second World War. And westernization for all three of these countries over the past fifty years has been marked by involvement, disruptive involvement, in two western wars. History has moved so fast for them that in a sense what was once their history no longer is.

Till recently their history, they thought, was essentially the history of Islam, at least from the time of the Prophet, and the spread of his doctrine through the Arab expansion. With westernization leading to their nationhood, this view of their history is now put in question. While on the one hand the coming of nationalism to the Near East is deplored as one of the worst features of current westernization - somewhat nostalgically, I suspect, against the



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background of a supposed Islamic unity - on the other hand, nationhood forces a review of history.

Iraq, for example, is essentially an Arab country, for all its Christian and Kurdish minorities. But as a present-day nation, its history is diverging from that of the other Arab countries, as for example, Saudi Arabia and Hashemite Jordan. To be sure, its ruling family is Hashemite, and characteristically its Regent never sits in the presence of Abdullah, King of Hashemite Jordan, till invited to do so. But as a present-day nation, Iraq's destiny is not necessarily that of Jordan. It is perhaps not entirely an accident of westernization that at a time of some financial stringency, Iraqi archaeologists still have funds to follow for themselves the lead of western archaeologists in discovering Iraq's prehistoric contributions to the origins of western civilization.

Egypt, though the seat of and the leading member of the Arab League, though the principal seat of Arab learning and Moslem tradition, is beginning to think of her history in other than terms of Arab history. It is a commonplace of Egyptian conversation now to remark the continuous cultural tradition of the fellaheen, in the face of Arab influence. And a forthcoming book, the appearance of which may create considerable controversy, will state the conclusion of a scholar, till now largely concerned with Arab history, that the relevant history of Egypt begins with the time of Mohammed Ali.

It would require more knowledge of the intellectual and cultural history of Iran than I possess to state with assurance that the independence of Persian history from Arabic is now more positive than in earlier times. It is a fact that Reza Shah's reform included the establishment of a Persian Academy, one of whose functions was to purge Persian of Arabic words. And it was noteworthy that the display of objects, and the comments of a member of the museum staff who took me about the museum in Tehran were alike intended to demonstrate the decadent influence of Arab art.

Thus westernization, and its consequent nationalism, bring into question all that the people of these countries have been, at the same time that it confronts them with the question of who they are. This essentially humanistic view of the situation of these peoples seems fundamental for any understanding of them or of their cultures. At any rate, to start from this view gives a means of understanding other aspects of their situation.

By way of illustration, let me return to the unchallengeable fact, that evolution is proceeding not by indigenous development, but by the adoption, rather than the adaptation, of westernization. So far as I can ascertain, the dominant intellectuals of all these countries are of the first generation of westernization, that is, of the first generation to study in the west. They were, almost without discoverable exception, originally trained in strict Moslem tradition. It was they, sometimes with the encouragement of teachers with no direct experience of the west, who broke with that tradition, and brought back to the Near East what they regarded as the best of what they had learned in the west.

But the situation to which they returned was not the situation in which they had studied in the west. In the first place, the old tradition was still strong in teaching - lectures in which the last quarter hour was devoted to



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dictating notes which were memorized by students and fed back on examination papers. Furthermore, few of them could earn a livelihood solely from teaching, and to earn it meant taking a variety of other work, which sapped their time and energy, and left little for further scholarly work or thought. In short, they were, in some respects, more symbols of westernization than agents of it, though the force of their thought and practice is not to be minimized.

A second generation of intellectuals, their students, are now coming to the fore. By the influence of their elders they have, particularly in the universities, begun to look at life around them with partially western eyes. They seem to me less ready than were their elders, by and large, simply to adopt what the west has taught them, and far more inclined to be concerned with its adaptation to their psychology and to their culture. For them the question, in what spheres, and to what degree does Islam want westernization, is the important question. They are at least somewhat surer of who they are than were their elders of that first generation.

How productive their work will be remains to be seen, for in general this second generation is only just now beginning to produce. That it will encounter setbacks is to be taken for granted. Their elders will try to protect their freedom of utterance, in the face of orthodox disapproval and censorship, and in the face of political restraint.

In Moslem orthodoxy, validity is still tested by reference to orthodox doctrine. In Egypt, for example, published work which fails in such measurement at the hands of the ulema of Al-Azhar is either subject of attack, or in fact banned through influence exerted on the governmental censorship, maintained presumably for purely political reasons. The number of young intellectuals, particularly writers, now in prison in any of these three countries is unascertainable, but certainly in the hundreds. Arrests are ordinarily made on the basis of communistic charges, but it is generally agreed that such charges are no more than a convenience.

This same view leads to some understanding of the present political situation, particularly the political situation of the supposedly Arab states, Egypt and Iraq. In assuming nationhood, each almost automatically became members of the prevailing international government, first the League of Nations, and subsequently the United Nations. Western nationalism led to western internationalism. Internationalism is therefore a form of westernization, and a form which was to deal internationally with the political problems of the Near East.

For right or for wrong, the Near Eastern view is that western internationalism has now imposed on the Near East a solution of its principal political problem, Palestine, which is less of a lasting solution than the Near East could have achieved for itself. It has to be recognized that what is now thought of as "the Near East solution" was one that was in many respects in the best tradition of the Near Eastern cultures, and one held in fact by some of the most far-sighted Zionist leaders, notably Judah Magnes (till his recent death the Chancellor of the Hebrew University at Jerusalem); that is, the creation of a federal state of Palestine, in which the traditional toleration of minorities would have been the cardinal principle. To be sure, the Arab States were at fault in not proposing federalization until too late in the UN discussions for it seriously to be taken into account. But this is now forgotten or disregarded,



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and in the decision for partition, it is felt in the Near East, that internationalism allowed itself to be forced into a solution which did not fit the facts as the Near East knew them, by strategic and political pressures which should not have been decisive.

The consequences are proving, and will increasingly be, tragic. Leaving aside the refugee problem, though not disregarding its seriousness, most tragic is the prevalence of an unprecedented antisemitism where little or none had ever existed. (Even now, for example, the lawyer of the King of Egypt is an Egyptian Jew.) To be sure, this is now an antisemitism which is being exploited for political purposes, and from the first the Palestine question has been a politically convenient means of evoking nationalistic sentiments, where such sentiments were hardly strong. But in Iraq, for example, the trade of Baghdad has for centuries been largely in Jewish hands. Now the Jewish traders are progressively selling out, giving up their Iraqi citizenship, and emigrating to Palestine, their departure leaving a gap in the Iraqi economy that may be more serious than is as yet recognized.

Here essentially is an instance in which the Near East believes, rightly or wrongly, westernization to have been mistaken, a situation in which the Near East could have worked out a solution more creative and more in its own tradition than that imposed by the west. The measures by which the solution was imposed were essentially those of western power politics, not those of bargaining and compromise that have been traditional in the Near East. Westernization here, in Near Eastern eyes, has failed deplorably, and the only good to be retrieved from an essentially tragic situation may be to confront the Near East with the necessity of thinking out its own political problems in its own way, and so of developing its political thinking.

But this failure of westernization comes at a moment when there seems at least a possibility of formative thinking on the part of the intellectuals of the second generation of western training. Will this failure further inhibit their work, further subject it to the restraints of an Islamic orthodoxy which can muster the support of the devout masses?

It is generally recognized that the danger exists of a fanatic anti-westernism, like that characteristic of the Moslem Brotherhood in Egypt, which might at any time rise up from the mass of the people to assert the orthodoxy of Islam and the inadmissibility of all forms of westernism in life and thought. Very probably Burton's assertion of nearly a century ago that only an unrecognized Arabic-speaking westerner can appreciate the distrust and even hate of everything non-Moslem on the part of the average Arab, is still valid.

The unanswered question of who these people are, which westernization raises, likewise has its consequences in their relations with one another, particularly in the basic human relations of family life. I had no opportunity to explore this subject in Iran, so that what follows refers only to Iraq and Egypt. But the development of family relations seems essentially the same in both countries, though the two are years apart in that regard.

In Egypt, the emancipation of women in the westernized group is supposedly complete. It began, as Toynbee has noted, in the early westernizing measures of Mohammed Ali. The pose is now to find it difficult to remember when women were veiled, much less in complete seclusion. Yet Egyptian women are only now beginning to play a positive role in society, and that to the



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discomfort of their men. It would be interesting to know what still is the proportion of women to men who have been granted or gained an opportunity to study abroad: my guess is that it would be exceedingly small.

In such conversations on this subject as were possible for me in Egypt, the key element seemed to be that Egyptian women of the class undergoing westernization, were in constant fear of divorce, which in Islamic law rests on the initiative of the husband. They could not be sure that at any moment their husband might not put them away. This fear, of course, is simply a reflection of their husbands' disquiet at their increasing activity outside the home. And that disquiet in turn is undoubtedly reflected in their behavior toward their husbands. In my very small sample, I got the impression that westernized men were happiest in their family relations when they were married to a western woman. One spoke of his Swiss protestant wife with deep feeling when he said that he had never known her to lie.

In Iraq, the emancipation of women is only beginning. Paradoxically, it was there that I had my only opportunity of talking with women who still for all practical purposes are in seclusion. With one of them who wished to solve her problem by getting a fellowship to take her abroad, I had the opportunity to a long and leisurely conversation, at the house of a British lady. When we pressed this Iraqi woman, a widow with a son three years old, as to what Iraqi women wanted, her only answer was, "Their freedom." Anything more was unimaginable. The Queen Mother in Iraq, who in England drives her own car and moves freely in society, has never appeared in public in Baghdad. And though Iraqi ladies were this year invited to the young King's birthday party, the invitations were revoked two days before the party, it being generally understood that they would next year be issued and not revoked.

An inadequate but undoubtedly significant inquiry carried on in Iraq by an Egyptian psychologist (married incidentally to an Iraqi) produced a dominant answer from men on this topic: Iraqi men are unhappy that their wives now pay so little attention to the management of the household. This, coupled with the fact that over thirty percent of unmarried Iraqi women of the more or less westernized group studied admit to heterosexual intercourse, in a country where discovery could well mean murder at the hands of the male members of a woman's family, at the very least indicates serious strains.

Here, then, are people, who even in their intimate lives are living in two worlds, each with strong attraction. Psychologically they are deeply rooted in their world, essentially the world of Islam. Except for the very youngest of them, it was in that world, in that tradition, that their personality had its formation. The "inwardness" it values is still, to a degree that may not be appreciated, their refuge. Perhaps they harbor, unwittingly, the same impulses to retreat into that world, which in others less cultivated, less committed to westernization, makes it possible to mobilize masses of the people in reactionary movements like the Moslem Brotherhood.

But for this more cultivated group there is no real possibility of turning back. They, and their countries with them, are now irretrievably committed to westernization, whatever may be the sentiments of the mass of the people. As nations in the modern world, as member states of the United Nations, these countries are virtually obliged to behave in western ways - an obligation of which the domestic consequences may be far-reaching.



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At present, however, they are internally far from westernized. In the sphere of government, western forms have been adopted - even imposed, as in the case of the British-drawn constitution of Iraq - but without any discernible evolution in political thinking on which such government can solidly rest.

For all the constitutional provisions on the subject, it is questionable if any of the Near Eastern countries, other than such marginal nations as Turkey and Lebanon, have ever had a fair election. It is common knowledge in Egypt that the surprise victory of the Wafd, while very probably good for the country, owed itself not to an expression of the people's will, but rather to a well-concealed plan on the part of the police, which in collecting ballots, saw to it that a Wafdist majority piled up. To arrange this outcome or that, within the ostensible framework of western constitutional government, is still of the essence of Near Eastern politics.

For all the administrative statutes, and civil service regulations on western models, day to day administration is still in large measure in the old tradition of personal influence. Efficiency in administration may depend on an official's having a "follow-up man" who by the influence he wields as a person can see to it that this or that document pursues its course from desk to desk.

Here, in short, is a world region which over the past century, indeed increasingly during the past thirty years, has adopted westernization without growing into or up to it. Its possibility of natural growth existed, and still exists, as all agree, in the framework of Islam. But overtly or covertly Islam put itself in opposition to westernization - to a degree that led Mustapha Kemal in Turkey to take control of religion by the nationalization of all religious property. Nowhere in recent years, so far as I could ascertain, has leadership - like that which Al-Afghani or Mohammed Abdu earlier exercised in Egypt - paralleled in Islam the demands which the role of nationhood, and the force of westernization have imposed upon these countries.

In all of them (again with the exception of Lebanon and Turkey - and in the latter Islam is reasserting its influence) Islam has remained a conservative and even reactionary force. In so far as it is still in Islam that the personalities of the peoples of these countries had their formation, in so far as their memories are of Islam, Islam is today in the face of the westernization that enmeshes and surrounds them, a divisive influence - an influence that makes it more than ever difficult for them, as for us, to see clearly who and what they are. A better understanding of themselves depends, for them as for us, on facing squarely such considerations as these. The inclination to do so is not yet strong. Reactionary forces, and in some measure pride stand in the way. For the intellectuals who are qualified to undertake the task, opportunities to do so are limited: university and government salaries are so meagre that time which might be devoted to inquiry has to be given to other jobs to gain a decent livelihood. How much will be done without some evocative stimulus, is questionable.

Yet the urgency of some indigenous modernization within Islam, to support and give roots to the westernization which is proceeding there apace, seems patent. Here is a major world region, with a population in the order of three hundred millions, which is unhappily divided within itself, torn between two pulls. Here is a region already with ten votes in the United Nations in which the people are psychologically insecure in nationhood, and prone to show it in their international behavior.



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I am inclined to believe that the stimulus which might evoke the thinking which Islam so sorely needs to do may reside in a sincere and demonstrable interest outside Islam in a better understanding of its people. Such an interest certainly has a peculiar timeliness, as the "second generation" of western-trained Moslems is coming to its full productive power. It can, apparently, as my talks with them seemed to show, strengthen their inclination to explain themselves, by its very appeal to their pride in what they are and in what they have to give. One remark which I found everywhere appreciated was that attributed to the great French orientalist, Massignon, to the effect that western scholars had now done all they could to explain the East; for the better explanation we have to await the work of the eastern scholars - many of whom now seem to me capable of the task, and with a little encouragement ready to undertake it.

It would be grandiloquent to suppose that a single agency like the RF could accomplish much in this regard. Yet it might have seemed grandiloquent eighty years ago even to have imagined that a small missionary college at Beirut could play the part it now can be seen to have played in the development which the Near East has undergone since that time. Beside being the seed bed of the Arab awakening, as is now generally agreed, the American University at Beirut, by an education that encouraged thought and action, has supplied the countries of the Near East with such leadership as now exists there. One grave and inevitable defect of that leadership, however, as its inadequacy now appears, is the fact that it developed in the framework of Christianity rather than of Islam, and the concomitant fact that many of the ablest leaders the AUB produced were themselves Christian, and hence without much personal influence in and on Islam.

If a similar leadership in thought and action could so be evoked on the essentially Moslem universities of the present nations of the Near East, the consequences might be similarly incalculable. And to me one promising way of evoking such leadership is to encourage some of the ablest of Near Eastern Moslem scholars to focus their attention on such considerations as I have noted here. A sincere interest in this possibility on the part of the RF, made demonstrable by the material assistance it could provide, would at least constitute a beginning.



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These then are some of the major considerations which immediately pose themselves for one person from the west simply interested in getting some understanding of the peoples of the Near East. Actually, as I know from my talk with Akrawi and with others, they are considerations which are very much in the minds of the educated people of these countries acutely aware as they are of their position in the contemporary world and of the problems which that position involves. I think it not an overstatement to say that these considerations are very close to the realities of their existence.

If I had any advantage in making these inquiries, it was perhaps the simple advantage of ignorance and lack of commitment to any one approach. In other words, such considerations as these arise when one makes his inquiries simply as a reasonably intelligent human being - as a kind of sympathetic layman. Naturally, inquiry of this kind can go only so far. But the lesson which I believe these visits taught me is the desirability and perhaps even the necessity of an essentially lay approach to the problem of intercultural interpretation, at least in its initial stage.

This view was surprisingly well borne out in some final conversations I had in Egypt with a group of "second generation" Egyptian intellectuals. We took for our general topic, what questions needed to be asked about the Arab world to make its tradition, thought, and outlook understandable to other sections of the world. As long as we could keep our discussion on this lay level, questions began to emerge which seemed to all of us incisive; for example, all of us agreed as laymen that a whole series of questions about the actual role of Islam in the formation of personality, in the daily thought and conduct of the peoples of the Near East, were questions of high importance. All of those present admitted their inability at present to give quick answers to such questions. Curiously, they were questions which had not posed themselves before and yet they certainly were questions whose answers would be fundamental for any real understanding of the Islamic world.

It was striking when at one point in this conversation a historian present turned <sup>the</sup> historian on us and began to pose questions of another order as, for example, growth of the labor movement in Egypt. Others present turned on him with surprising vehemence to say, "No, no; that's not the kind of thinking we're getting at." In short, when a discipline intruded, everyone felt we were off the track: we had ceased to be the laymen that we should be at this stage.

As all this implies, I have come to feel that in talking about "well-integrated interpretations of other cultures" we have been talking about something without doing much about it. This "integration", it now seems to me, is to be achieved in intercultural interpretation not by any concert of disciplines but rather by an essentially humane beginning in which individuals or groups put into the background for the time being whatever disciplines they have acquired and look at the people and the culture to be interpreted primarily as human beings wishing to understand them as they are. When questions have been formulated in this way - and only then - does disciplined inquiry come into play; and I suspect it will then come into play in an orchestration that could before only have been imagined.



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To cite briefly one concrete possibility: an important consideration which I have not, I think, mentioned hitherto throughout this region is the phenomenon of "tribal thinking." It is hard for an alien to appreciate that in Iraq probably as many as 75% of the population is now living tribally or has so recently emerged from tribal life that its tribal identity is still strong in its awareness. Someone remarked, for example, that it is no accident that certain quarters of the apparently modern city of Baghdad have tribal designations: a study of population of these quarters would undoubtedly show a high proportion of individuals come from the tribe for which the quarter is named. Actually, under the British-drawn constitution, representation is such that the tribes have a virtual majority in the Iraqi parliament. If this is, as it seems, a major consideration for the understanding of the Arab people, what single discipline is appropriate to its study? Is it not patent that a number of disciplines must be brought to bear to gain any adequate understanding of this phenomenon? Furthermore, is this a question which would have been likely to emerge in any disciplinary approach to the interpretation of the Arab people? Interestingly enough, my attention was first drawn to it by a former archaeologist who had become aware of the phenomenon from his work as a political officer in the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad.

In other words, in this general view it seems that we have expected "integration" in area studies without having insisted on a step that may be essential if "integration" is to result. Actually we did insist on something like this step, when we required the American University at Beirut to give some thought to the subjects it was to deal with in its current project for studying the outlook of the modern Arab world, with results that may constitute some advance in area study.

But I am convinced now that in the further development of interpretation of the Near East, as much for Near Easterners as for the rest of us, we must insist still more on a lay canvass of the field. For that reason, I think CBF's suggestion that we encourage the holding of an "international conference" in Egypt on questions that need to be dealt with is precisely the kind of step that needs to be taken. If this can be a genuine "international conference," it will comprise on the one hand Arab scholars from countries other than Egypt - a prime desideratum - and scholars from the West who can speak not so much as scholars and more as westerners.

If such a conference does its work well, I believe it will do much to minimize CBF's understandable fear of propagandistic interpretation, because properly posed questions will move subsequent inquiry to a terrain where propaganda would be difficult, impossible, or even unimportant qua propaganda.

That terrain, as I see it from this trip, is where the people of an area really live, where their day to day memories, problems, and hopes reside. In other words, the true integration we seek in studies of this kind is to be found in the lives of the people who live in the cultures which require mutual interpretation. The questions to be asked, and answered, are in the last analysis, questions about them, not about their cultures, - essentially humane questions.



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If we can experiment with, and demonstrate the validity of this approach, as I believe we can, in a new project for the interpretation of the Arab outlook, we shall help in putting the whole business of area study on a firmer basis. Our chances for such success, if we follow this procedure, are good. Here is a field in which departmentalization has, as yet, less force. As I have implied, Arab scholars, while able to behave as scholars with all the discipline their study in the West has provided, still are acutely aware and interested in themselves as Arabs. Such western scholars as might take part, when one stops to think of it, are thought of and perhaps think more of themselves as orientalists than as historians, or philosophers, or students of literature or language. In short, I believe discussion at such a conference could be readily held to the human terrain from which the really salient questions will emerge.

When once the questions to be answered have been agreed on in this way - when the data to be studied has been identified - appropriate and disciplined ways of proceeding will be clearer. Then, as I see it, the disciplines that have tended to dominate in area study will fall each into its proper role. Each will contribute in its way to outcomes which are not primarily historical, or philosophical, or literary, or linguistic, but which rather constitute a truly humane portrayal of the living peoples in whom these cultures live and grow. That kind of outcome, as I see it, is what we want and have been seeking when we stress the need for work that will make for better "intercultural understanding."

JM:AM