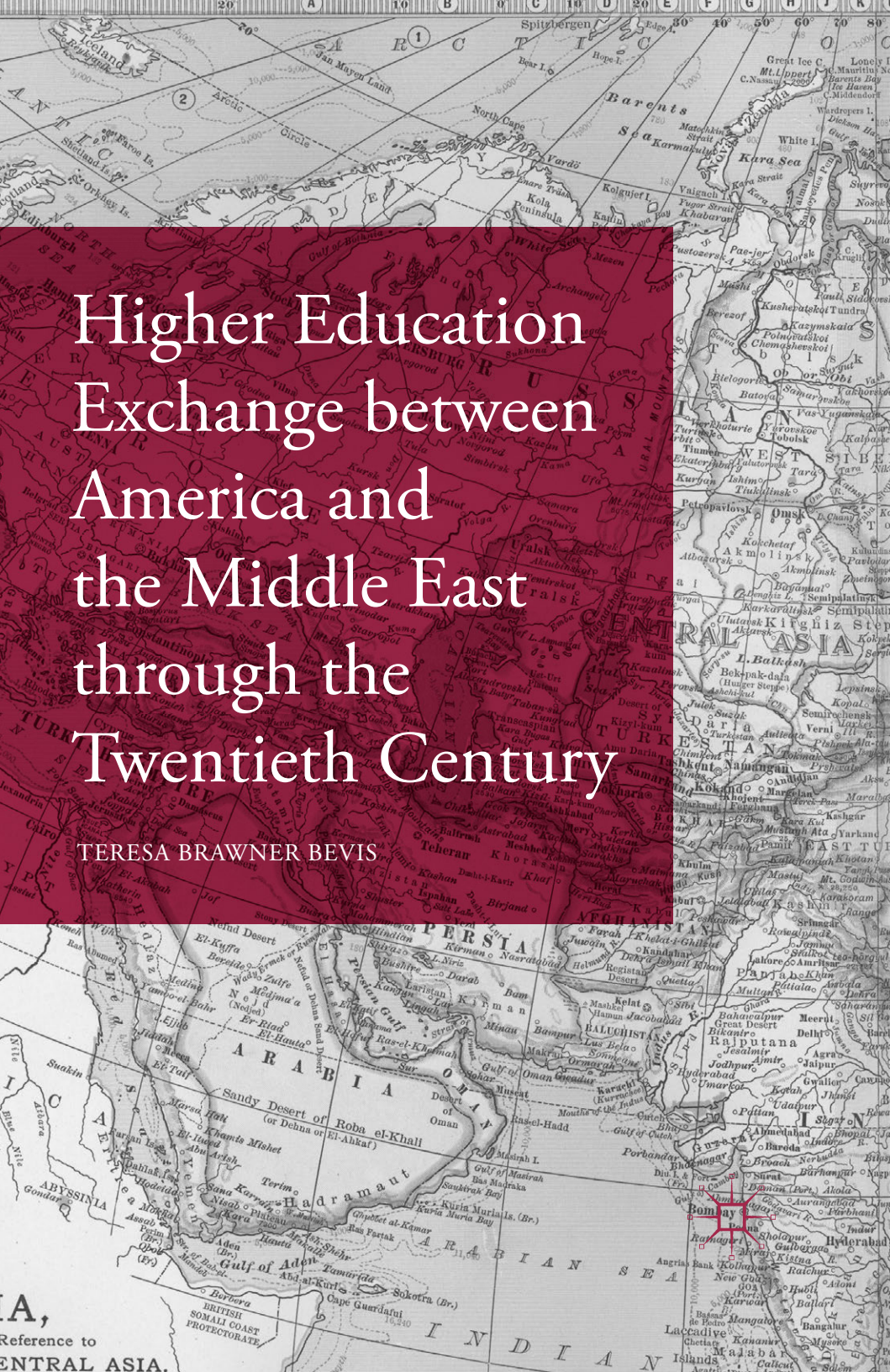

Higher Education Exchange between America and the Middle East through the Twentieth Century

TERESA BRAWNER BEVIS

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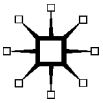

HIGHER EDUCATION EXCHANGE BETWEEN AMERICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST THROUGH THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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Preface

Now and then Dame Violet Penelope Dickson would ride her tall Arabian horse along the gulf coastline from her home, past the American Embassy. We could see her coming from a distance, and she would sometimes stop to chat for a moment and admire our sand castles. One day she must have decided it was a good time to teach us all something. "Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta," she said from atop that grand horse. "Say it back to me." We did. After many recitations she had successfully taught us every letter. A half century later, I remember those childhood lessons on the beach in Kuwait, and I can still recite the Greek alphabet.

Violet Dickson was the widow of British Colonel H. R. P. Dickson and lived in Kuwait for more than 60 years. Like her husband, she published some of the first English-language books about their beloved adopted country. Even so, despite an abiding association with the region, they recognized their personal limitations in transcribing the culture. In Colonel Dickson's book *The Arab of the Desert, A Glimpse into Badawin Life in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia*, he wisely disclaimed any deep knowledge of the complexities of the Arabic language and its many derivatives. I respectfully borrow his statement from that book, in a similar attempt to disclose my own limitations:

> In representing Arabic . . . I have striven to write what I heard, however far removed from literary forms. To simplify typesetting, I have not attempted to distinguish the Arabic sounds of 'ain and hamr.ah but to represent both [in some cases] by an apostrophe. Similarly I have not sought to differentiate the Arabic varieties of s, t, h, etc., nor systematically to insert the final silent h. I lay no claim to a profound knowledge of classical or literary Arabic, and I therefore crave the indulgence of those learned in these matters.

Over the years the discipline of Orientalism left us with innumerable transliteration systems. Then came the Victorians who, as Dickson put

it, just did things their own way. In this book concessions to the many variations have produced a simplified usage. For example, diacritical marks on the "heavy" consonants have been omitted, merciful to the typesetters.

It is difficult to discern what might be termed "correct" in terms of Arabic transliterations. One of many examples is the word "sheik." The vowel combination seems rational ("i" before "e" except after "c," or when pronounced "ay" and in "neighbor" or "weigh"). But because Americans frequently mispronounce their own language, the term often still comes out as "sheek." A more representative spelling is "shaykh." But in the interest of using the commonly recognized spellings, especially for American readers, "sheik" or "sheikh" are used. Mekkah is left as Mecca, Bahrayn is left Bahrain. The intention throughout is to make the reading of the text easy rather than attempt to, as in my case, pursue the impossible task of making things grammatically accurate.

Like Colonel Dickson, I readily acknowledge my limited command of Arabic, Farsi, or other Middle Eastern languages, and have conceded to use spellings and terms most common or most referenced, depending on context and time period. Scholars will undoubtedly ferret out inconsistencies. Therefore it is my hope that readers will use the text for its content and purpose—to provide a historical overview of higher education exchange between the two dynamic regions—rather than judge its linguistic precision. It is also my hope that the author's deep appreciation of the rich contributions of the peoples of the Middle East, a place I still remember as "home," is plainly evident. No disrespect is intended by any unintentional misspellings.

My affection and respect for the Middle East and my pursuit of research on the region have in fact been lifelong. Kuwait was my home during my childhood years, from the time Tom and Louise Brawner moved there from California in 1959, making ours among the first American families to travel there for the newly developing oil industry. A native of Texas, my father had worked with the oil pipe and supply industry in California, then later accepted an offer from the American Independent Oil Company to administer their offices in downtown Kuwait City. It was a bold move for a young American family to relocate to the Middle East in those days, to a part of the world still largely unexplored by Westerners. In my mother's hometown in Arkansas, an article in the local newspaper announced our departure. "They're Off to Kuwait, Kuwait, They Said" was the headline. Because so many Americans were not familiar with the tiny Persian Gulf country at that time, it was necessary to clarify its geographic position at the outset of the story.

Everything was different in Kuwait. My first memory is of arriving at the old Kuwait airport and clinging close to my mother. When we reached our house, large and sand-colored and so different from our middle-class California craftsman, it was located very near what was then the American Consulate. The Persian Gulf was just a few hundred yards from our front door, a deep turquoise blue and always with a steady stream of oil tankers on its horizon. I was glad to learn that two other American girls lived at the consulate compounds, just my age, the daughters of Talcott Seelye, who would later serve as US ambassador to Tunisia and then as ambassador to Syria. They would be my first friends in Kuwait.

Our house would become a popular spot for my growing circle of childhood friends, and in fact for almost all American and British families living in Kuwait at the time. My mother accepted an unexpected opportunity to serve as the sole distributor of American movies in Kuwait, a position created by Modern Film Corporation in New York. Our garage in Kuwait would become her office and a film warehouse. First-run American movies were routinely shipped from the corporation in New York to our house, in Kuwait, where her Indian assistant Xavier would lease them (and the necessary projectors) out to oil companies, embassies, and assorted sheiks. In Kuwait, in the early 1960s, the only way one could view an American movie was to rent it from our garage, or to be invited to our house, where we often set up a projector to entertain guests with the latest American movie, in our living room. I can remember watching then-current movies like *The Miracle Worker* and many others there, frequently in the company of assorted American or British Embassy personnel, oil company executives, or members of the various missionary families who ran the church and hospital. At a time when there existed no theater in Kuwait that showed English-speaking films, and with only a small local television station that broadcast almost entirely in Arabic, it was a treat indeed to occasionally watch a "real American movie."

Facilities and services that catered to Western Europeans and Americans during those years were generally scarce. The only English-speaking school in Kuwait when we arrived in 1960 was the British-run primary school at Shuwaik, now the location of Kuwait University. I attended there for the first years, then after grade five my parents hired a private teacher and employed the Calvert correspondence system from Baltimore, setting up a private school at our home for three of the embassy children and myself. At the time, private tutoring was the only means of educating Americans past the fifth grade in Kuwait. Some of

my friends were sent off to boarding school at American Community School in Beirut, the nearest alternative, or to Switzerland. Almost every American in Kuwait attended the only Christian Protestant church, run by the Scudders, a preeminent missionary family in the Middle East. And everyone's physician was Dr. Mary Allison, at the time the only practicing American doctor in Kuwait.

Only in recent years have I recognized the significance of that pivotal time period for both America and the Middle East, and what a rare opportunity I was given, albeit at a young age, to witness some of its progress firsthand and to know many of the people who helped shape it. In the early 1960s a social and economic transformation was taking place in the region—in the oil-producing countries in particular—that was similar in scope to changes that had taken centuries to evolve in Europe. In the Middle East, however, such a transformation would take place in the next generation, aided to an undetermined degree by higher learning exchange with the United States of America. While much has been written about the oil industry and of the many efforts of the early Christian missionaries in developing America's relationship with the Middle East, few book-length works have been published about the academic connections that have so rapidly expanded in scope and importance over the past half century. It is a privilege to have the opportunity to offer the first comprehensive summary of this significant and continuing component of American higher education history.

Acknowledgments

Heartfelt thanks are first owed to my husband, David, and our children, Thomas and Elizabeth, whose love and support have at all times been essential and indispensable; and to my late parents, Thomas A. and Louise King Brawner, whose decision to move from California to Kuwait forever instilled in their only offspring a lifelong appreciation for the countries and peoples of the Middle East. Thanks are also owed to those who provided reviews and edits during the writing process. Thanks are also owed to Dr. Yassaman Mirdamadi, with the University of Arkansas, who kindly agreed to review the manuscript at the rough draft stage, as did Dr. Adnan Haydar, a professor of Arabic in the same institution. Special and sincere thanks are extended to my colleague and friend HRH Princess Areej Ghazi of Jordan, who provided continuous support and encouragement throughout the long process, and who, through our conversations, helped me to better understand Islam and its connections to Christianity and to scholarship. HRH Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad has been similarly generous in offering his advice, edits, and many thoughtful suggestions for this book, a donation of scholarship for which the author is very grateful.

CHAPTER 1

Antiquity

"My heart is on fire," John Ledyard wrote to his friend Thomas Jefferson. "I . . . do not think that mountains or oceans shall oppose my passage to glory."[1] The year was 1788 and Ledyard was about to become the first citizen from the newly independent United States of America to explore part of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and record his findings. At the request of Henry Beaufoy of London's African Society, Ledyard was to travel the course of the Nile from Cairo to Sennar in the eastern Sudan, a long and treacherous journey never before attempted by a Westerner. He would return from his mission not only embattled and worn but also profoundly inspired, laden with journals spilling over with enthusiasm and the details of every observation.

These far-distant lands were places about which most Americans knew very little, except for what they may have read in Biblical verses or adventure novels. Ledyard's journey, which sought to expand knowledge and intercultural understanding of the area, was perhaps the first purely educational connection of any kind between America and the Middle Eastern region. Two more centuries would pass before substantial collaborations of education exchange would take place.

From the time of the Barbary Wars the United States has had an important, albeit unsteady, relationship with the region now known as the Middle East. America's first foreign war had been fought there and its navy was inaugurated partly in response to a threat emanating from that region. America's founding fathers were evidently intrigued by the culture; Thomas Jefferson, for example, is said to have taught himself basic Arabic using a copy of the Quran that he kept in his personal library, and he is reported to have observed the first presidential

Iftaar by breaking fast with a Tunisian ambassador at sunset. American presidents Ulysses S. Grant, Theodore Roosevelt, and John F. Kennedy were moved by and wrote about the region.

From the beginning Middle Eastern inspirations have made their way into American jargon, and the influence of Arabic and Islamic traditions can be found throughout the language and literature of the United States.[2] Many often-used English words are derived from the original Arabic (al-jabr = algebra; al-kemia = chemistry; al-kuhl = alcohol; laymun = lemon; naranj = orange; qahwah = coffee; tafrik = traffic; zirafah = giraffe, to name just a few). A substantial number of terms from the Middle East have found their way into American literary and visual arts—the well-known tune from the movie *The Sound of Music*, "Do Re Mi Fa So La Ti Do," had its origins in tenth-century Arabic musical notation.[3] There are countless examples.

The culture of the Middle East inspired iconic works by a number of early writers, among them Herman Melville, Edith Wharton, and Mark Twain, whose books have left deep imprints on American literature. The nation's art and architecture is similarly infused with Middle Eastern influences. An example is the Statue of Liberty, which had its conceptual origins in the region. French sculptor Auguste Bartholdi's 1855 journey to Egypt and his tour of ancient pyramids and temples instantly sparked his passion for large-scale monuments. He set about designing a colossal statue of a robed woman holding a torch, which he hoped would be used as a lighthouse along the Suez Canal, a project the Egyptian government had expressed an interest in funding. He called it "Egypt Brings Light to Asia." The project was abandoned and the original statue was not produced. However, a few years later, a variation of Bartholdi's plan was brought to fruition in the United States, when he was commissioned to design the Statue of "Liberty Enlightening the World" in New York City.

Variant Definitions of "Middle East"

The vast expanse of territories most people now think of as the Middle East is a complex amalgam of ethnicities, religions, and traditions within a mix of countries whose borders have sometimes been reinvented, often due to foreign intervention. The complexities have resulted in a protracted history of local skirmishes, regional battles, and full-on wars. Since ancient times the culture of the Middle Eastern region has been impacted by the traditions of its conquering forces—Greeks, Romans, Ottomans, Western Europeans, and Mongols—a circumstance that

has, over time, produced a rich and vibrant mosaic of cultures and perspectives.

The Middle East has, in its history, been home to substantial populations of Arabs, Turks, Turkomans, Persians, Kurds, Azeris, Copts, Jews, Assyrians, Maronites, Circassians, Somalie, Armenians, Druze, and a number of other minor ethnic groups. As far as the physical region is concerned, there is as yet no universal consensus on its territorial definition and "gray areas" of interpretation remain. Some classify Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, and Algeria as Middle Eastern, while others regard North Africa as a separate entity.[4] Some Middle Eastern studies departments in American universities exclude Pakistan and Afghanistan, while others include the Caucasus and Southwest Asia.

Alternative names sometimes used for the Middle East, such as Arab World or Arab Civilization or Islamic World, are generally inaccurate with regard to ethnic or religious makeup. Such terms do, on the other hand, correctly emphasize the preeminence of Arabic and Islam in the historical development of the Middle East's overall culture and identity. Arabic is both symbolically and practically predominant in the region, partly because of its prestige as the language of the Quran, but also because it was the language of the arts, sciences, and letters during the region's Golden Age of learning. However, it would be inaccurate to suggest that all artists, scientists, and writers who contributed to the region's academic advances have been Arabs. The visionaries and builders of this multifaceted civilization have emerged from every ethnic group within the *ummah*.[5]

Early uses of the term "Middle East" were most often references to the area between Mesopotamia and Burma—somewhere between what Westerners termed the "Near East" and the "Far East." The modern definition took its shape following World War I, after the Ottoman Empire was defeated by the British and their allies, and the region was partitioned into various nations. But even before the fall of the Ottomans, the terms "Near East" and "Far East" were beginning to fall into disuse. In September 1902, an article titled "The Persian Gulf and International Relations" penned by American naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan was published in the *National Review*, a British journal. In the article Mahan employed the term "Middle East" to designate territory between Arabia and India. After the Suez Canal, said the article, the strategic importance of this region was "the most important passage for Britain to control in order to keep the Russians from advancing toward India," which was a British colony.[6] At the time the British and Russian Empires were vying for influence in Central Asia in a rivalry known as "The Great Game."

Mahan's article was reprinted in *The Times*, and then was followed by a series of 20 articles titled "The Middle East Question" by another author, Sir Ignatius Valentine Chirol. In this series the term was expanded to include "those regions of Asia which extend to the borders in India or command the approaches to India."[7] From that point forward, *The Times* discontinued the use of quotation marks from subsequent printings of the term Middle East. Some claim that the term was actually introduced well before Mahan's articles, which may be the case, but the account provided here is the best documented, and has come to be the generally accepted story.

The term was defined in part by American policy. The Middle East Institute was founded in Washington, DC, in 1946, further delineating the term in the United States. Then in 1957 the Eisenhower Doctrine described the Middle East as the area "between and including Libya on the west and Pakistan on the east, with Syria and Iraq on the North and the Arabian peninsula to the south, plus the Sudan and Ethiopia." In 1958 the US State Department more specifically defined the region as including only Egypt, Syria, Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar. Today the definition has expanded to include much of North Africa; thus the acronym MENA is, in some cases, replacing the former terminology. This MENA designation typically includes the above-mentioned countries, with the addition of Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Oman, Yemen, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Palestine, and Iran. The Institute of International Education (IIE), which provides the annual census of foreign student exchange enrollments, currently includes all of the aforementioned countries with the addition of Cyprus and Turkey (figure 1.1).

The World Bank lists the countries making up MENA as Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, the UAE, West Bank and Gaza, and Yemen. For the purposes of this text, especially when discussing current topics, the terms Middle East and MENA are used more or less interchangeably. This text focuses chiefly on the Arabic/Islamic countries in the region that have had a significant history of higher education exchange with the United States. Some take issue with its Western origins, but over time the term Middle East has come into almost universally accepted use. Partly because of the influence of Western journalism, the Arabic equivalent of the term Middle East (*ash-Sharq al-Awsat*; the Persian equivalent is *Khavar-e miyaneh*) has also taken on standard usage in the mainstream press in most of the region. In Arab publications the designation *Mashriq*, from the

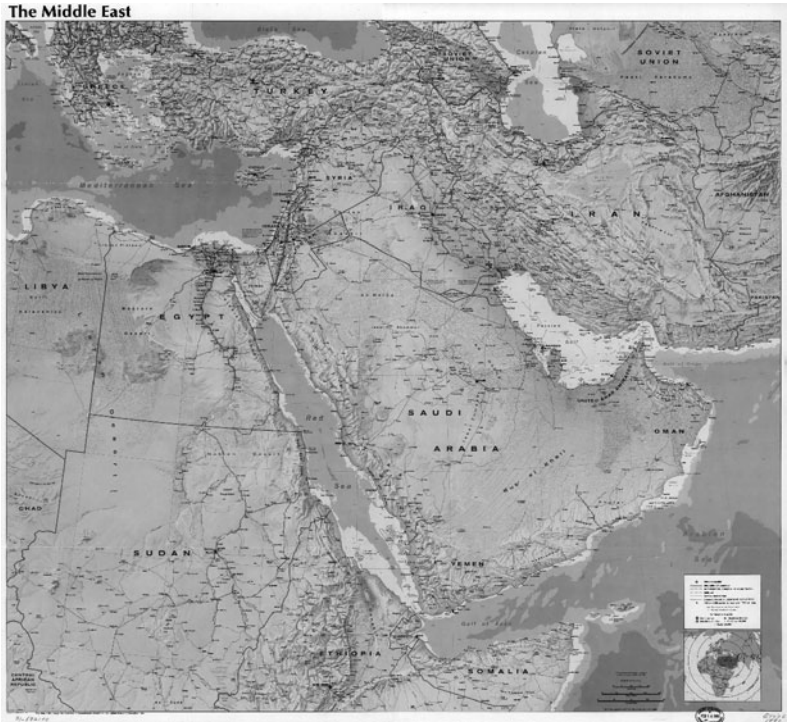

Figure 1.1 Map of the Middle East.

Arabic root for east, further denotes a variously defined region around the Levant, in the eastern part of the Arabic-speaking world. The term *Maghreb* refers to the western part.

Orientalism

Since the eighteenth century the term "Orientalist" has been used to designate scholars of Oriental studies. The term "Orientalism" traditionally refers to the East (Orient), in contrast to the Occident (West).

A great deal of important literature about the Middle East has been added to the historical archives by Orientalist scholars. The approach of Orientalism assumes that there is something special and different about those living in the East, which is discoverable through the methods of scholarship practiced in the West. In recent years controversy has emerged regarding the Orientalist approach of European and American

historians, as to whether or not their publications reflect a true picture of the region. Some contend they hold a slanted view based on some preconceptions. Some regard Orientalist scholarship as a reflection of a relationship of imperial and intellectual domination of a West that feels superior to the East, and they challenge its validity. On one hand, Orientalism has given much of what we know about the region. On the other hand, inaccuracies may have arisen as a result of the researchers' personal perspectives. These inconsistencies may also exist in literature pertaining to the history of education in the Middle East, and of academic exchange, therefore efforts have been made in this text to present views from a variety of scholarly sources—from both East and West.

In 1978 Palestinian scholar Edward Said published his influential book, *Orientalism,* which argued that the field was a pervasive Western tradition, both artistic and academic, riddled with prejudiced interpretations shaped by European imperialism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[8] It had become a scholarly tradition, he believed. In the late twentieth century growing numbers of academics from the Middle East were publishing somewhat different views, taking issue with some of the earlier Orientalist studies. The Orientalist's approach to Islam has also been far less than accurate, according to Said.

Therefore in reading accounts of Middle Eastern history it is prudent to keep in mind that Western researchers have compiled much of the academic information relating to that region. And while the many scholarly works of well-known Western historians are vital contributions, it should also be noted that recent Middle Eastern scholars are today in the process of challenging many of the ancient and modern histories that have so far been generally accepted in the West.

Some Orientalists have defended their work, arguing that yes, a great deal of Middle Eastern and Islamic history has been documented by those foreign to the culture, but this does not necessarily mean their publications are inaccurate. They point out that much of the world's historical documentation has been authored by those who did not actually take part in it. As with most debates, both arguments have merit.

Empires

The ancient Phoenicians were known as "purple people." At its prime (from about 800 to 1200 BCE) Phoenicia had comprised several city-states along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea through what is now Syria, Lebanon, and northern Israel, the island city of Tyre and the city of Sidon its most powerful centers. They were a great maritime populace,

known for ships adorned with fine carvings of horses' heads in homage to Yamm, their god of the sea. But they were especially known for the deep and beautiful purple dyes that had been manufactured in Tyre for centuries, developed at first for the robes of Mesopotamian royalty. The dyes gave Phoenicia its name—from the Greek *Phoinikes* for Tyranian purple—and for generations they had rendered the hands and arms of its thousands of workers a vibrant hue.

Phoenicia is identified with more far-reaching contributions, as noted by the Greek chronicler Herodotus who cited the region as nothing less than the birthplace of the alphabet, a basis for all Western languages. Words originating from ancient Phoenicia are evident throughout the English language—the city of Gebal (called Byblos by the Greeks), for example, gave the Christian Bible its name.

The ancient Near East witnessed the origins of civilization, some even earlier than the colorful Phoenicians, in areas between and surrounding the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers—the so-called Fertile Crescent. Sumerians and Akkadians (later known as Babylonians and Assyrians) were among the first to flourish in this region, developing city-states by the fourth millennium BCE, landscapes dotted with ziggurats built for the worship of patron deities. Sumer, the most prominent of the city-states, gave its language to the area and developed the world's first formal system of writing. The Assyrian Empire (1250–612 BCE) and the Neo-Assyrian Empire (911–605 BCE) predominated early on, and at their peak would govern all of what is now Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Kuwait, Jordan, Egypt, Cyprus, and Bahrain, along with areas of Iran, Turkey, Armenia, Georgia, Sudan, and Saudi Arabia. Assyrian imperial expansion brought into the Assyrian sphere many nomadic and barbaric communities, now bestowed with civilization.

In ancient Mesopotamia and Syria the dominant languages were Semitic, subdivided into several different families. The Akkadian family, to which both Assyrians and Babylonians belonged, was the oldest and most used of the languages in Mesopotamia. The Canaanite family included biblical Hebrew, Phoenician, with its North African offshoot Carthaginian, as well as a number of other closely related tongues. By the beginning of the Christian era, most of these languages had for the most part disappeared, replaced by a group belonging to another Semitic family, called Aramaic. Of the Canaanitic languages, Phoenician was still spoken in the Levant seaports and the North African colonies; Hebrew, though no longer the common language of the Jews, survived as a language of religion, literature, and scholarship.

At the dawn of the Christian era the Arabic language, historically the last of the Semitic types to enter the region, was basically confined to the central and northern parts of the Arabian Peninsula. The more advanced communities of the southwest, in the area that is present-day Yemen, spoke another Semitic language known as Southern Arabian, similar to Ethiopic. There is evidence that Arabic speakers entered and settled in the Syrian and Iraqi borderlands in the north, even before the great Arab conquests of the seventh century, leading to the triumph of Arabic throughout the region. In the Fertile Crescent, Aramaic was eventually replaced by Arabic as well, although even today it still survives in the rituals of some of the Eastern Churches and in a few remote villages.[9]

From the beginning it was the geographical position of the Middle East that made it the center of trade routes and also put it in the paths of invading armies. Routes converged upon the region from the east through the Iranian plateau and from the north through the Caucasus, the Hellespont, and Asia Minor. Ancient trails penetrated the Middle East from the west through the Mediterranean Sea; and from the south through Arabia, Egypt, the Persian Gulf, and the Red Sea. Along these same routes also came migrations of peoples.

From a regional perspective, the races were roughly divided into two clusters. One was the Semitic group that came from the south, which included the Babylonians, the Assyrians, the Aramaeans, the Canaanites, the Hebrews, and the Arabs. The other group was the non-Semitic peoples, made up of early Sumerians, the Kassites, the Hittites, the Medo-Persians, the Philistines, the Greeks, the Romans, the Mongols, the Kurds, and the Turks. The groups often conflicted.

From the early sixth century BCE, a number of Persian states dominated the region, beginning with the Medes and the Neo-Babylonian Empire. The Achaemenid Empire that followed would become the first Persian Empire, conquered by Alexander the Great in the fourth century BCE. Revived by the Central Asian Iranian Parthians a century later, the Persian Empire was continued by their successors, the Sassanids, who would build a realm to include sizable parts of what is now the Asian region of the Middle East.

In the first century CE, the expanding Roman Republic gradually absorbed the entire Eastern Mediterranean, including much of the Near East. The Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire that now ruled from the Balkans to the Euphrates was defined by Christianity, a circumstance that created deep philosophical divisions between the Byzantine emperor Constantine's doctrines and the belief systems of the Middle East.

The availability of Hellenistic culture and Roman polity helped to prepare the way for the rise of the Byzantines and the spread of Christianity, a missionary religion whose followers believed that they possessed God's final revelation and that it was no less than their sacred duty to bring their message to all mankind. When the emperor Constantine (311–337) himself converted to Christianity, citizens across the empire had adopted the beliefs as well. In time the religion would predominate, leading to the establishment of the Roman Catholic Church, from which Protestantism and its offshoots would later emerge. "By the time of the great Christian emperor Justinian (527–569), the full panoply of Roman power was used not only to establish the supremacy of Christianity over other religions, but also to enforce the supremacy of one state-approved doctrine."[10] Already Christianity had divided into several Churches, each debating issues of theological doctrine and claiming to know the real truth. Many of the various Churches would divide even further according to personal, jurisdictional, regional, or even national allegiances.

Soon a new and powerful religion, Islam, would arise in the Middle East with a similar sense of mission as Christianity, but with a different vision of how to approach its goals. Just as Christianity had done, Islam developed into more than one sect. Most Muslims came to identify themselves as either Shia, those who believe Muhammad's successor to be a descendant of the Prophet's daughter Fatima; or Sunni, who hold to the philosophy that Muhammad's successor should be the most promising, chosen individual. It is a division of ideals that has since developed a great schism, or duality, in the Muslim world. For about four centuries it seemed likely that Shia Islam would prevail and it reached a height of power around 1000 CE. But then the Seljuk Turks came to dominate, followed by their Ottoman successors, all fiercely Sunni. Shi-ism continued to survive in Persia and other areas, but over time constituted a declining minority of Islam. There is actually considerable similarity in the basic beliefs and rituals of Sunni and Shia Islam. The original divisions were to some degree historical and political, and had to do with disagreements regarding the succession of power after the death of Muhammad.

Christianity and Islam, while similar in core ideals, upheld very dissimilar ambitions and approaches to universal enlightenment, making a clash almost inevitable.[11] Arab armies, in a succession of Muslim conquests led by visionary caliphs and skillful commanders, swept through the Middle East reducing Byzantine lands by at least half and surrounding the ill-fated Persians. They could not be stopped until they reached