



The Arab Mind

Raphael Patai , Norvell B. De Atkine (Foreword by)

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Since its original publication in 1983, the revised edition of Raphael Patai's The Arab Mind has been recognized as one of the seminal works in the field of Middle Eastern studies. This penetrating analysis unlocks the mysteries of Arab society to help us better understand a complex, proud and ancient culture. The Arab Mind discusses the upbringing of a typical Arab boy or girl, the intense concern with honor and courage, the Arabs' tendency toward extremes of behavior, and their ambivalent attitudes toward the West. Chapters are devoted to the influence of Islam, sexual mores, Arab language and Arab art, Bedouin values, Arab nationalism, and the pervasive influence of Westernization.

With a new foreword by Norvell B. DeAtkine, Director of Middle East Studies at the JFK Special Warfare Center and School, Fort Bragg, N.C., this book unravels the complexities of Arab traditions and provides authentic revelations of Arab mind and character.

The Arab Mind Details

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From Reader Review The Arab Mind for online ebook

Hassan says

Would not help you to understand Arab but rather judge them. It Also assume there is one Arab mind

Kameel Nasr says

This book became a standard text for American foreign service employees after it came out in the 1970s and is responsible for distorting America's relationship with the Arab world. In a word, the book is racist. It globs together hundreds of millions of people in a series of cliches and distortions. If the book was about any other ethnic group, African Americans, Roman Catholics, Latinos, there would be a thousand condemnations. Gore Vidal said that America never got it right with its intervention in the Arab world, and one reason is this very flawed work.

Robert Krenzel says

I read this book about a year and a half prior to my first deployment to Iraq. I read it again prior to my second deployment, which had me embedded in an Iraqi unit. This book is not the absolute last word on the subject, but it is a useful introduction to Arab psychology and culture.

There are some bits that may be a bit overdone, but I will admit to experiencing things in Iraq that made me think, "Oh, THAT'S what Patai was talking about!" Perhaps I was just that ignorant, but this book inspired me to study, to read, and to learn. I still have quite a lot to learn, but "The Arab Mind" was an excellent starting point.

Michael O'Brien says

While at times it gets a bit academic, overall, this is an outstanding reference for those trying to gain a better understanding of Arab culture and society and the drivers and influences behind them. I enjoyed this book a great deal and found its information absolutely fascinating.

????? ?????? says

I'd say this is one of the few books I've seen written about Arabs by a non-Arab person, but in a fair and well explained manner. I might not really agree with all things brought in by the author in this book, however, I do accept them as being "what he sees and believes", especially with the fact that those view are presented by the author mostly with some supportive evidence.

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Wissam El Cheikh Hassan says

It started somewhat interestingly with good historical and social contextual analysis of the Arabs. At some point after about a third of the book it seems the writing just starting putting words next to each other without any sense about Arabs., particularly images of mothers' caressing their sons' penises, or Arab men being circumcised in front of their brides, and a whole chapter on sexual hospitality where men would offer their wives to their guests. As a work of sexual fantasy it might be a mediocre read, but nothing more.

Ron says

Read this before living in Saudi Arabia for two years (1983-1985). Was an invaluable preparation for the different thought processes I'd find. I found more diversity among Saudis than the book lead me to expect, but it was right on in the different vector between Western and Middle eastern thought.

I rated it three because it was not then a very readable text. Hopefully accessibility has improved in later editions.

No, I can't explain it in a few sentences. You need to read the book.

Tariq Mahmood says

For a detailed anthropological study of the Arab race, Raphael has indeed done a pretty thorough job. He has demonstrated the Arab conscience, both internal and external in great detail with countless examples from the current history. Questions like why Western colonists are hated so much more than the Ottomans who colonized all of the Arab countries far longer, the Arab relationship with modernity, its treatment of women, episodes of sudden and inexplicable emotional outbursts are adequately covered by numerous examples from arabic literature.

I would highly recommend this valuable book to any one interested in the Arabic race.

Adam Glantz says

This is a disappointing book from a scholar with such great credentials. Arabs are presented ahistorically and from a meandering perspective that swings between psychology, sociology, cultural studies & political

science, depending upon which body of knowledge can be deployed to do the most damage. In many cases, the author relies on folk aphorisms & employs unfair, archetypal comparisons with "the average Westerner" or "the average American". So many fallacies. Terrible stuff.

Wachlin007 Hotmail says

This book is about Arab culture. It is written by a non-Arab who has spent his lifetime studying the Arabic language and culture. The author has lived in the Middle East for extensive periods of time and has many Arab friends. I found it to be an enlightening book. He uses many historical examples to explain why Arabs are who they are and do what they do.

♥ Ibrahim ♥ says

As an Arab, I am amazed at this author what genius he has in presenting the Arab mind as if he is an insider himself. He talks about Al Fahlawi for instance, the typical Arab who is praised for his wit and cunningness in being such a con artist. If you say to my father that so and so is a fahlwai, he would smile and say, good for him; such a clever man! This is by far the best book I have seen in English written about my people, the Arabs. If you have one bit of interest in the Arab people, you should by all means get your copy of this book and don't hesitate to email me or contact me directly. I will be at your service.

Your Arab friend in North Carolina,

Bubba Abraham

Cæsar Dic?x says

A very unscientific, biased and full-of-lies-book. I am really astonished at how the author claimed living between Arabs, yet most of what he talks about is nonsense. I will try to make my review as short as possible, but i want to indicate something that no one talked about; Patai was Jewish, he lived in the time of Arab-Israeli conflicts, so i can't trust him a bit, and it's understandable that he might sided with Israel, but come on, why relying on his account while i have much better books (Arabs: A Japanese perspective & A World without Islam). Now let me start :

01. Mothers don't caress their sons' penises, this is a twisted and hideous idea i don't know where he got it from.
02. His obsession with Bedouin life-style and values and elevating them over Islam are grave errors. Pre-Islam Bedouins used to bury their daughters, i don't see that happen now.
- 03- Arab men are circumcised in front of their brides? really? who does the circumcision? The bride i assume! Not true at all. Circumcision are done on the first week after the boy is born.
- 04- Sexual Hospitality? Now for God's sake who would believe such crap? Arabs are known to be jealous on their women and care for women's dignity. another error.
- 05- The relying on folk aphorisms and cliches to paint a wide spectrum with a single brush.
- 06- Arabs are aware that the majority of Muslims are not Arabs. Ask any primary schools student and he will tell you the biggest Muslim country is Indonesia..The author lied again.
- 07- Sex is not a bad thing to Arabs, if it was how the hell did they come to existence? Wi-Fi signals?. What

we consider bad is pre-marital sex, because it destroys societal foundations and spread adultery and fornication.

08- There's nothing called Arab culture, it must be Arab "cultures".. The Egyptian Arab's culture was formed by many aspects (Pharonic + Coptic + Arabic + whether Northern city dweller, or Middle and Delta peasants or Oasis Bedouins or Southern Tribal..etc).. Then you have The Saudi's culture (Hijaz, Najd, or Tohama..coastal or inland, city or desert..etc. The same with Syrian's culture (Bedouin or city dweller or peasant. coastal or inland "sharing borders with Turkey or Iraq..Sunni Muslim or Shiite..etc. The North African Berber aspect of culture differs from the Byzantine and Persian influences in the Levant. I can go on and on and on. But that's enough for this point.

09- Arab men's honor doesn't rely on women's behavior, yes it does some damage, but honor is apparent in many other aspects (i.e. never hit a woman, never spy on people, do your best when you have guests "extreme hospitality", never be treacherous, respect your word, never lose heart, defend your family..etc.

10- Sex is not humiliation, on the contrary, Arabs want to marry in an early age, because they respect their women and don't want to do them any harm.

11- I agree with him that there's an obvious hypocrisy in the behavior of "some" Arab men when they have pre-marital sex but forbid their sisters to do the same. For my part i am 29 and i have never had sex before, not even a kiss because i want to get married and see that later, also i make sure that none of my two sisters does anything like that, and the best thing is that i don't have to give them advice as they know that it's in their best interest. I wrote that not to brag but to tell people reading this that i am not a unique guy, all my neighbors, friends _save a few of them_ and relatives didn't have sex before marriage. It's so common that people save themselves till after marriage.

12- After accusations of being racist, the author made a book about the Jewish mind, did he exposed the Jews? no way, he criticized them for what? guess! : Over-working, being genius, and a little bit alcoholic..yeah that's right, that was his critique..Awesome.

I got tired of writing all these, but believe me it's a worthless book, it's only use could be to study how propaganda against certain people works.

If you need a respected un-biased book on Muslims and of course Arab Mind, Check Graham Fuller's "A World without Islam" it explains nearly everything on the subject and the best thing is that it was written by a man who studied Middle-East and Islam and worked for the CIA as an adviser, so he knows what he talks about.

Janna says

I selected this book as research material for my next novel. Wow. What thorough insight into the Arab psyche. I encourage all Americans to read this book. It explains a lot of things that confused me about US/Arab relations. This book is not for entertainment, but it kept me engrossed.

Charles says

Looking at other reviews of "The Arab Mind," it appears readers divide into two camps. The first group, for whom ideology matters more than reality, hate this book. The second group, largely military, for whom their

lives depend on an accurate perception of reality, love this book. This divergence alone suggests the book is worth reading.

“The Arab Mind” was once an obscure book by an obscure man. Its rise to semi-prominence began in 2004, when during the Iraq War the American military, desperately short of soldiers who knew anything about Arab culture, but desperately needing to insert thousands of soldiers into that culture, began (informally) distributing the book to officers. To all accounts, the book was extremely useful to those officers.

However, the book also came in for a great deal of criticism, led by agitprop artist Seymour Hersh, because it is not politically correct. It dispassionately analyzes Arab culture, and offers a clear roadmap for interacting with that culture. But it also recognizes that Arab culture is very different from American and Western culture, and in some ways inferior. This dispassionate analysis does not serve the ends of the social justice warrior crowd, so they cry racism.

The irony of all this is that Patai actually is very sympathetic to Arabs. He likes Arabs and Arab culture. He lived for decades in Jerusalem (pre-Israel). And, in fact, his conclusions about Arab culture (he last updated the book in 1983, shortly before he died, though it was first published in 1976) are generally quite optimistic about the future of Arabs and Arab culture. If you actually read his book, you see that Patai is far from anti-Arab. But you have to read the book.

There’s the rub. It’s entirely obvious that most or all of those who criticize the book haven’t read it. The critics never have any specifics—they object to the very idea that Arab culture could be perceived as anything but wonderful in all regards. These critics are the people who are slaves to the multicultural ideal, which in brief is that no culture is better in any way than any other, except that all cultures are superior to evil Western/Christian culture. Closely tied to this “ideal” is oppression theory—that cultures and peoples deemed to be oppressed by the West are necessarily particularly virtuous. Because any objective observer can easily discern a range of problems and defects in Arab culture, cognitive dissonance results—given that Arabs are presumed to be and have been oppressed by Western colonialism/imperialism/racism, how can they be anything but perfect and wonderfully virtuous? Because the answer is “they can’t be,” therefore scholars like Patai must be liars. No need to read any books or address any arguments! More time to join the latest howling low-information Twitter mob!

The major criticism of Patai is always variants of “there is no such thing as ‘the Arab mind’—that’s racist and ignores that people are different.” The reality is that Patai is extremely careful to repeatedly note that he is merely drawing a picture of the Arab “modal personality.” (“Modal” is a much better chosen word than “average” would have been.) He emphasize that this involves generalizations of qualities that contain many variations among individuals. Patai exhaustively demonstrates that Arabs themselves have always held that there is a common Arab approach to some things (as any culture has), for example: “As can be seen from these quotes from Maqrizi, educated Arabs in the fourteenth and fifteenth century were well aware, not only of the existence of an Arab national character, but also of the character differences between the Arab peoples inhabiting different countries.” One of the most interesting aspects of the book is how Patai uses historical Arab sources to buttress his own conclusions, from Ibn Khaldun on forward.

So the criticisms are misplaced. In fact, what’s apparent is that other authors on this topic who actually spend any time with Arabs, even those who loathe Patai, agree with Patai. You can see that Patai is largely or totally correct in his general conclusions about Arabs by comparing his analysis to the bizarrely awful book “Understanding Arabs,” by Margaret Nydell. That book, which is pushed as an alternative to Patai’s for soldiers and diplomats, says the exact same things about Arabs that Patai does. The difference is that

Nydell's entire book is an attempt to excuse that behavior and to excoriate America and Americans. Patai (writing in 1976) was merely interested in objectivity; Nydell in propaganda. But the facts they offer the reader are close to identical.

For example, Nydell says "Arabs consciously reserve the right to look at the world in a subjective way, particularly if a more objective assessment of a situation would bring to mind a too-painful truth." This is exactly the same thing Patai says, though in different words. When Nydell leaves off her propaganda and gets around to actually talking about "Arab values," friendship, emotion, male/female relationships, social structure and formalities, and so forth, she in essence says the same things as Patai, though in less detail. Patai and Nydell also address improvidence, predestination, the tendency to substitute words for action, violence of words, control of temper, etc. (Later sections of Patai's book address more technical subjects that Nydell doesn't, such as the Arab approach to decorative arts, literature, and music. Patai also addresses what to Westerners are obscure points like what is apparently a very large and very important cultural difference between Arabs from the north and south of the Arabian peninsula, so-called dual descent, either Qays or Yaman.)

Another important point to make when reading and analyzing Patai is that he focuses relatively little on Islam. Nowadays, Islam gets all the ink in the West, for obvious reasons. But in Patai's analysis, Islam is important, but largely subordinate in the formation of the Arab mind to Bedouin culture and the idolization of Bedouin culture. Patai also carefully distinguishes "Arab" from "Muslim," and criticizes other authors who don't (including many Arabs and Muslims). "Bravery and manliness, hospitality and generosity, and the honor syndrome, all pre-Islamic concepts of Bedouin origin, are the dominant concerns. Yet, with one exception, none of them is part of the ethical system of the Koran; and conversely (again with the same exception), none of the ethical teachings of the Koran have developed into a dominant feature in the actual Arab ethics of virtue." Patai further addresses sexual behavior and how Bedouin values play into sexual shame, particularly familial shame, in way that leads to behavior like honor killings of female relatives perceived as lacking sexual virtue. (He is not remotely obsessed with Arab sexual behavior, contrary to occasional criticisms, but he does discuss it, as he should.)

Occasionally the book shows its age, though generally its analysis is timeless. For example, Patai states "The days of religious wars between Christians and Muslims (although not between Muslims and Hindus) are gone." He was wrong about that, and Samuel Huntington was right about Islam's bloody borders. But then, Patai, as I say, was very positive about the Arab future, in a way that has not been borne out in the past three decades. For example, he extensively addresses, positively, the question of Arab unity and its implication for the Arab future, primarily through a theoretical discussion buttressed by behaviors during Arab/Israeli conflicts during the 1960s and 1970s. Contrary to his hopes, though, Arab unity has declined greatly, with the fragmentation of nation-states brought by the Arab Spring, and the rise of crypto-Kharrijites like ISIS.

One point about the Kindle version—it literally makes the frequent Arabic phrases that Patai uses unreadable. Weird symbols like apples are substituted for Arabic characters. It's not critical unless you speak Arabic, I suppose (which I certainly don't), but it does sharply detract from reading the book on the Kindle.

If you're interested in the Middle East, reading clear-eyed analyses like Patai is important. We, and our government officials, soldiers, businesspeople and diplomats, do ourselves no favors by deliberately blinding ourselves to reality, both its ugly and its pretty faces. Ignoring reality is the luxury of an opulent society. A short-lived luxury, usually, if history is any guide.

Natassia says

A very thorough guide to the cultural differences between the West and the Middle East. As about as non biased as you will find and it cites a wealth of research.
