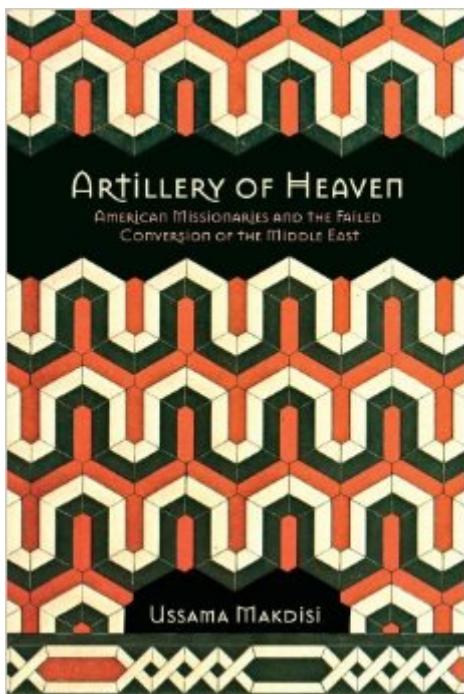


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Artillery Of Heaven: American Missionaries And The Failed Conversion Of The Middle East (The United States In The World)



Synopsis

The complex relationship between America and the Arab world goes back further than most people realize. In *Artillery of Heaven*, Ussama Makdisi presents a foundational American encounter with the Arab world that occurred in the nineteenth century, shortly after the arrival of the first American Protestant missionaries in the Middle East. He tells the dramatic tale of the conversion and death of As'ad Shidyaq, the earliest Arab convert to American Protestantism. The struggle over this man's body and soulâ •and over how his story might be toldâ •changed the actors and cultures on both sides. In the unfamiliar, multireligious landscape of the Middle East, American missionaries at first conflated Arabs with Native Americans and American culture with an uncompromising evangelical Christianity. In turn, their Christian and Muslim opponents in the Ottoman Empire condemned the missionaries as malevolent intruders. Yet during the ensuing confrontation within and across cultures an unanticipated spirit of toleration was born that cannot be credited to either Americans or Arabs alone. Makdisi provides a genuinely transnational narrative for this new, liberal awakening in the Middle East, and the challenges that beset it. By exploring missed opportunities for cultural understanding, by retrieving unused historical evidence, and by juxtaposing for the first time Arab perspectives and archives with American ones, this book counters a notion of an inevitable clash of civilizations and thus reshapes our view of the history of America in the Arab world.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

So much coverage of the Middle East and what is considered part of the Arab world is done

through the lens of the "clash of civilizations" The ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have done nothing if not reinforce these same views. Ussama Makdisi, however, in his book *Artillery of Heaven*, makes a strong and persuasive argument against such binary thinking. This book is about the 19th century American missionary movement to the people of present-day Lebanon. The author immediately dispenses with the "clash of civilizations" frame by revealing that the focus of the missionaries work was not so much on the Muslim majority but rather on the Maronite, Orthodox and Catholic Christian minorities in this part of the Ottoman empire. A large part of this was due to the unique position of the missionaries in the middle east as opposed to the other places they chose to proselytize such as Africa and the Pacific as he makes clear when he says " without the constant threat of militias or disease to herd the remnants of a politically broken native population into praying towns or to plead for Puritan benevolence, the nineteenth-century missionaries were confronted with the limits of the Word to transform ancient worlds." This book does not just criticize the missionaries and their sometimes misguided actions but rather puts them in the context of the American historical experiences and also a result of the actions of the people who they were attempting to convert who were by no means passive participants in their own destinies. By presenting the different participants as active participants in their own fates, Makdisi shows how the interaction of the many different cultures would come to create leaders with a dynamism that can neither be said to be East or West. This book is good at examining both progressive and reactionary trends in both communities and sets a model for further study of this region.

Great book.

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