

slogans surrounded by the most common symbols.

Church decoration extends far beyond the sanctuary, moreover. Corridors, meeting rooms, and offices are almost invariably adorned with posters. Some of these have uplifting slogans (if not from the Bible, then from Kahlil Gibran) superimposed on hazy but colourful photographs of children playing sweetly and innocently in meadows, mountains glowing dramatically in the light of sunrise, and tropical fish swimming near the surface of a tranquil sea. Others have moralistic slogans (if not from the Bible, then from Che Guevara) superimposed on black-and-white photographs of children starving on the streets of Calcutta, freedom fighters behind bars in El Salvador, or protest marches in Beijing.

In functional terms, none of this stuff is art in the avant-garde sense; messages are too explicit and clear. In stylistic terms, though, none of it is art in the other sense; forms are too simple and uncluttered. Somehow, these artifacts do not quite fit the binary classification system that McDannell has used throughout the book. Attention to this recent phenomenon, therefore, would have improved her discussion (in the concluding chapter) of Christian retailing in our own time.

In spite of my misgivings over the ideological subtext of one chapter, I recommend this book very highly as a much-needed supplement to the standard works on both American art and American religion.

NOTES

1. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (1957. Reprint. San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1959).
2. Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Doubleday, 1977) and *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1977); Mark C. Carnes, *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
3. John Dominic Crossan: *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story* (Niles, Ill.: Argus Communications, 1975). Crossan did not invent the idea that

parables are stories that undermine or subvert world views. That much had always been obvious. He called attention, however, to the idea that parables lie at the opposite end of the (oral or) literary continuum from myths — which support or sustain world views. In doing so, he greatly (but implicitly) strengthened what had long been the liberal position: that the parabolic utterances of Jesus were more important than the mythic traditions in which they were embedded (including not only those of the ancient Israelites but those of the nascent church as well).

Robert Elgood, *The Arms and Armour of Arabia in the Eighteenth, Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*

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Elgood, Robert. *The Arms and Armour of Arabia in the Eighteenth, Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Aldershot, England: Scolar Press, 1994, 138 pp., illus., appendices, glossary, index, cloth, US \$99.50, ISBN 0-85967-972-1. In North America, Brookfield, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing, 1994.

This is a book of significant physical and technical scope. With pages measuring 9-1/4 inches by 12-1/2 inches, it contains numerous photographs, many in color, of museum quality weaponry as well as black-and-white period photographs of their users. *Arms and Armour*

addresses all types of weapons and armour used by the indigenous warriors of the Arabian Peninsula in the last three centuries by synthesizing a number of factors and disciplines. Moreover, Elgood writes in an engaging and lively prose with an ease indicating familiarity with the topic.

The book is divided into ten chapters covering the area and its people; swords; clubs, axes and maces; firearms and accoutrements; Arab gunpowder; cannon; modern firearms and ammunitions; lances and spears; daggers and knives; and defensive arms. Although the chapters are of vastly uneven length, each is thor-

oughly focused. With an additional three relevant appendices, *Arms and Armour* introduces the reader to the commerce and the lore of Arabian weaponry while generally avoiding discussion of its use, hence assuming knowledge on the part of the reader. Due to the richness of the illustrations, the initial impression is that of either a coffee-table book or a museum exhibition catalogue. However, the multi-dimensional approach used by the author in his narrative dispels this impression. Indeed, Elgood uses history, both classical and modern literature, economics, sociology, the *Kor'an*, and travel accounts to weave his story.

Because Arabia produced few of the sophisticated goods its inhabitants used, and because the peninsula has been blessed by a fortuitous location on the crossroads of international commerce since ancient times, the author presents a detailed discussion of the sources of weapons used by the Arabs and the routes travelled by their sellers. Elgood examines the role that neighbouring societies such as Persia and India or remote countries such as Britain and Germany played in the dissemination of sword blades and other implements of personal combat. The "arms bazaar" is, indeed, the book's strongest point.

Arms and Armour is also successful by situating the weaponry in its relevant social and cultural contexts. Quoting extensively from secondary sources, many authored by the great orientalist of the nineteenth century or by respected twentieth-century academics such as David Ayalon or Eliahu Ashtor, Elgood assesses the impact the weapons had on the social structure of Arabia. Especially informative is the analysis of key cultural elements and the manner in which these were affected by different types of weapons and their use. For example, the discussion on the introduction and use of gunpowder and their impact on the martial ethos of the Mamluks and early Ottomans is telling. The chapters on muzzle-loaders and rifles quote at length from the writings of explorers and travelers such as Burton, the Blunts, T. E. Lawrence, and Philby, who ably chronicled their cultural discoveries. A discussion of modern warfare weaponry in Arabia in the twentieth century is entirely missing from the book owing perhaps to the book's focus on pre-modern weaponry. Nonetheless, this is odd given the fact that some of the area's nation-states are the world's greatest consumers of modern warfare weaponry — with the resulting socio-political consequences.

Well within the scope of the book, and highly informative, are three appendices. The first briefly examines the role of traditional weapons in the application of *shari'a* or Islamic law. The second chronicles the manufacture of legendary Damascus swords in the last three centuries. The third is a description of the renovation of a Persian sword that the author witnessed and which he reports in detail.

Arms and Armour is a valuable tool for an understanding of traditional weaponry and its impact on a society. It measures the role played by commercial relations, manufacturing processes, and available markets. It analyzes the political and cultural factors that dictated the uses of such weaponry. Lastly, it traces the historical continuum in a largely successful attempt to situate the weaponry and its uses in the broad sweep of Arabian history. It is therefore a successful effort in the history of highly specific objects.

Nonetheless, the book is not without its drawbacks. For a highly specialized work that extensively uses Arabic words to describe the weapons it assesses, a discussion of transliteration is mysteriously lacking. The resulting application of transliteration is a confusing challenge for all but trained Arabists. While the maps are useful in locating areas of trade and battle engagements, they are not drawn to scale. And situating Turkey north of the Crimean Peninsula does not help, even though the Peninsula itself was briefly part of the Ottoman Empire in the Early Modern period. Although Elgood's discussion of weaponry is highly informative, the same cannot be said of his historical analyses. The idea of a *Pax Islamica* is problematic at best. His narrative of the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt and its subsequent effects is simplistic and erroneous — Muhammad Ali did not fight the British — and takes away from the rich and detailed technical narrative. The discussion and chronology of World War I in the Middle East and the post-war settlements, so relevant to the modern Arab world, is unfocused and omits much that is pertinent to an understanding of interwar Arab history that Elgood, nonetheless, analyzes at length in the context of Sa'udi expansionism. Finally, the entire work is marred by extremely weak editing reflected both in misspellings — the legendary twentieth-century Sa'udi monarch was Ibn Sa'ud not Ibn Sa'id — and tangled grammar.