

A history of the middle east book review examples

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Introduction:

In this seminal book which is around 400 pages long, the author manages to cram a detailed history of the Middle eastern problem from the early years of the 1800's to the present day. He succinctly manages to combine what occurred in the Colonial period where the Arab peoples were consistently exploited for their rich natural resources while he also manages to keep an open mind on other issues such as the traditions of Islam as well as several intrinsic problems which permeate the area and which have continued to this day.

Essentially Mansfield offers a study of the Arab people and how their mannerisms and foibles have helped to shape the Middle East in the manner that we know it today. This is obviously the main thrust of the book which also focuses copiously on particular periods such as the post World war 1 scenario where Britain flexed its muscles in Palestine and where the seeds of today's conflict between Jews and arabs were intrinsically sown.

There is also an essential part of the book which deals effectively with what is happening now in the Middle East especially with the Gulf war and its long term effects on the situation there. Everything seems to be quite appalling to Mansfield, especially American intervention which left the area in tatters and economically ruined, in fact he is extremely hard on that score and finds several ways to castigate the profligacy of the west in this regard. This is probably the most interesting section as it also has some alternative opinions by another author who is perhaps more on the ball with a journalistic style that suits the subject admirably.

Early parts of the Colonial period

Mansfield is strikingly detailed when he discusses this period which is replete with problems and historical gaps. Essentially the Arabs in the Middle east were the subjects of the Ottoman Empire and thus were heavily influenced by that way of life. However their nomadic strains were also in evidence and these also have a bearing on proceedings in more ways than one. Mansfield explores the relationship of the people with their land and one begins to understand that borders are certainly not an issue here, a mistake which several colonial powers made after their first encounters in the area.

Obviously there were rich pickings to be had in most of what is now modern day Iraq and Iran although countries such as modern day Syria and Jordan were also strategically and politically important. Mansfield almost relates his story with an uncanny subservience to detail although he is always very matter of fact and circumspect about proceedings. The British intrusion into India and other similar countries is also explained at length and there is some understanding of the nomadic nature of tribes in the Pashtun regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan where one can intrinsically observe the differences of lifestyle which lead to obvious confrontation in this regard.

The City of Judah

Jerusalem today remains a city riven by religious factions although it is controlled practically in its entirety by Israel who have kept the most important icons as a bastion of Judaism, something which is explained in considerable detail by Mansfield. After centuries of decadence and abandon by the Turks where the city was left to rot without much hope of rising again, the British occupied it in the early 20th century where a revival of

archeological interest took place and many important finds were unearthed. However the city was still populated by Arabs which had reduced it to a stinking hovel and this undoubtedly had a great effect on the architecture and splendor of Jerusalem as a whole. It was not until 1947 and the establishment of a Jewish state did Jerusalem really take off as a city of beauty once again, a phoenix actually rising from the ashes. Mansfield seems to subscribe to this argument although he is much less dismissive of the Arabs than other contemporaries who can be quite scathing on the decline which Jerusalem had to face in this regard.

Today Jerusalem is practically a city where Jewish influence is paramount. The Christian influence has almost disappeared although there is a vast tourism industry in that respect. The Muslim culture certainly has no place at the moment as the Jews are adamant not to accept any partition of the city alongside sectarian or religious lines. Thus one can conclude that all three religions have had a profound influence on the city of Jerusalem over several centuries yet it has returned full circle to its original roots, the roots of Judaism and Jewishness which after all make it the City of Judah. The chapter which deals with Jerusalem is highly interesting in this sense as it manages to combine existing schools of thought on this controversial issue, yet at the same time we understand that Arabs are not to be taken lightly on any score and have their own thoughts and means to acquire what they believe is right. The continuing debate on the partition of Jerusalem is something which is dealt with extensively by Mansfield who is also quite rational in his explanation on how this whole crisis can be solved although he also leaves some grey areas which need further expansion. In some parts of the book,

the journalistic style used may be a bit brash and unforgiving although this fits in quite admirably with the whole style and forward lookingness of the subject in question.

The creation of the state of Israel is also a subject which is dealt with in considerable in Mansfield's book. The lack of political leadership by the British comes up for extensive criticism here and one cannot but agree with the arguments espoused. The future conflicts in the area and the rise of political figures such as Gamal Nasser are also skimmed upon and which certainly make for interesting reading throughout. Lebanon is another hot potatoe which is tackled extensively here and one does feel that Mansfield has a certain sympathy with this country's plight. The rise of terrorist organizations within the Middle eastern context is also discussed in considerable detail and one does feel that Mansfield really grasps the bull by its horns in this respect. Again the journalistic style used is uncannily much more helpful in this regard for a better understanding of everything under the microscope.

The Arab Spring has brought about intrinsic changes in the way in which we view the countries which make up the Arab world. From relatively peaceful uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia to the bloodbaths in Libya and Syria (and to a lesser extent, Bahrain), we have seen the protests against totalitarian and authoritative dictatorships. In this sense, countries such as Jordan and Morocco have also experienced protests although these have been on a much smaller scale than those seen in other Arab countries and the countries' respective leaders have been quick to implement political reforms to assuage their respective populations. Although Mansfield could not have

known that the Arab Spring was forthcoming (his book was published in 2005), there is an uncanny sense that he actually knew that something was going to happen in this respect especially in the way he writes about dictators in countries such as Egypt, Jordan and Syria.

Key events in Jordan

One must remember that Jordan is quite a small country with limited resources and has been ruled by the Abdullah family for decades. Jordan's peace treaty with Israel also plays an important role for stability in the Middle East and this may also be seen as a factor for outside intervention to calm the protests. As explained the main focus of the protestors has been to secure relatively better living and working conditions for the poorer section of the populace who have been singularly hard hit by the recession. King Abdullah II who is a relatively young monarch has immediately sensed the pulse of the people and has put into place a number of social and economic reforms which have calmed down the protests although some issues, especially the one of democratic freedom still remain. Again, Mansfield manages to describe the Jordanian situation with an uncanny sense of purpose, he has an uncanny grasp of all that is going on in that country especially with regards to its past and all comes together quite excitingly in the whole process.

Being a relatively small country, Jordan has potential to distribute its natural and human resources accordingly to ensure wealth creation. However, as so often happens, most of the country's wealth is concentrated in the hands of the very few although this has been changing over the past years. The country has also opened up to western exposure and the capital Amman is

full of bars and discotheques while the young generation has full access to the internet. This relatively liberal regime has also assisted in burgeoning economic growth over the past few years although this has slowed considerably due to the recession which is quite understandable.

Medical tourism is also an area which is important for the country's economy and which has seen substantial growth over the past years. King Abdullah would be wise to continue protecting this important sector as it provides substantial opportunities for employment as well as increasing the country's economic resources and GDP. The population is relatively literate with levels approaching close to 100 per cent in the younger part of the population although there is still significant illiteracy in rural areas and among the older population.

Groups and movements involved in the protests:

Since there are quite a few political parties in the country, the issue of democratic freedom has not actually cropped up in the protests. However, only one part wields any political power with the others being largely marginalized and this is the Islamic action front. Some of the protests have seen the involvement of these other political parties but their effect has been quite minimal to say the least. Again, the protests centred chiefly on better socio economic conditions for the poorer classes although Jordan remains one of the most economically successful countries in the whole Arab region. Social media was relatively absent during the protests in Jordan for various reasons. First of all, it was not necessary to mobilize large parts of the population for these protests as the bulk were quite content with the country's situation. Secondly, the protests were quite sporadic and disjointed

and were nowhere near as intense as those experienced in countries such as Egypt and Tunisia. Youth's access to internet also assists them to become much more westernized in this sense and the need to turn to large scale social media mobilization was largely discounted in Jordan. Again Mansfield could not have been proficient in the social media sphere in 2005 but he does indicate some pointers that Arab's embracement of technology would leave them going places and thus challenging the established dictatorial order.

The country's future

Jordan is a small yet rich country although it lacks natural resources. It should continue to concentrate on its strong points which are medical tourism, the fact that it is an important transportation hub in the region and it can also act as a mediator between other countries such as Syria which is close to it. Otherwise the country can continue going it alone as it has substantial potential both economically as well as socially to continue advancing and making the most of the opportunities presented to it.

Conclusion: a book for all seasons

Peter mansfield's book on the Middle East is truly a seminal text which definitely cannot be ignored. In a way it is almost an essential companion for those who wish to learn more about the subject but it also has several strong points for those who are seasoned enough in this regard. Through his copiously written text, Mansfield manages to conjure romantic notions on the Arab peoples which may be arguable but his wealth of style and penchant for detailed information certainly serves him in good stead. Obviously one take a

much greater interest in what is happening in today's day and age Middle East which is replete with conflicts and problems, as well as the new phenomenon of the Arab Spring which has perhaps redefined the way we think about the area. The parts on the Colonial period as well as the post Colonial period are also important as they focus on the creation of the state of Israel which still remains controversial to this day. The same can be said for the continuing Palestinian question and the rise of conflict in Lebanon which are treated quite admirably by Mansfield and which continue to shed new light on the huge problems faced by these peoples who are continuously in a war of attrition with each other. It is a book which is highly recommendable in every respect and which should offer a far greater understanding of the Middle Eastern question than is prevalent nowadays.