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EDWARD W. LANE
A CRITIQUE OF HIS LIFE AND WORK

The Magic Horse from the Arabian Nights, translated by Edward Lane, is a wonderful story. It begins with a mighty Persian King. "And while the King was sitting on the throne of his dominions, on a certain day, during one of these festivals, there came in to him three sages: with one of them was a peacock of gold; and with the second, a trumpet of brass; and with the third, a horse of ivory and ebony..."¹ Each gift had its own practical uses. The King's son decided to mount the ivory horse, which could fly. It took him on a trip through the upper regions of the sky. After a while he wanted to return to Earth. "Now when he had obtained what he desired with respect to the horse, he proceeded on it towards the earth, and began to look at its countries and cities, which he knew not; for he had never seen them before during the whole of his life."²

This story reminds me of Edward Lane for two reasons. First, Lane took his own gift of mastering languages and made a career of studying Arabic. This gift, in turn, enabled him to delve deeply into the recesses of the Egyptian mind and spirit, in addition to learning about its cities and monuments. And secondly, although Lane never saw Egypt until he was a young adult, the country had a lasting effect on him.

Lane should primarily be remembered as an expert lexicographer. His master work was the *English-Arabic Lexicon* published in 1863. But it was *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, published in 1836, which first caught my eye, as it did with many of the mid-Victorian population who read it when it first was published. I immediately noticed the steel engravings, which piqued my current interest in copper etchings, like the ones done by Tristram Ellis, a member of the Royal Society of Etchers during the nineteenth century. Ellis also spent time in the Middle East, much as Lane did.

Lane also influenced me in another way. After reading Leila Ahmed's book about him, I decided to attend Friday mosque gatherings at McGill.

¹ *The Magic Horse*, from *The Arabian Nights*, trans. Edward Lane (London: V. Gollancz, 1930), p. 4. *The Magic Horse* is a beautifully illustrated book found in The Rare Books Room of McLellan Library.

² *The Magic Horse*, p. 4.

A friend was kind enough to explain the intricacies of prayer etiquette and the meanings of the khutbas after the services. Lane also spent many years engaging in such behavior. This was a major reason for his success.

...Lane is remarkable among scholars in that he gained his knowledge and his insights into Arab society by living as an Arab among Arabs, taking up residence in Cairo, in the Muslim quarter. He is also remarkable in that the experience of living between or within, two cultures seems to have been for him unperplexing and even enriching, rather than the splintering, disintegrative experience it was to be for a later generation of Englishmen: for Doughty, for Lawrence, who were also, like Lane to adopt Arab dress.³

Lane was not unusual in donning Arab garb. But he was remarkable in the way he forged new ways of thinking about the Middle East.

Gathering, clarifying, shaping into coherence the impressions and intimations of its actuality that had already begun to undermine old ideas, Lane more vitally than any contributed to the shaping of a new image of the Near East, as exemplified by Egypt and particularly by Cairo, one of the capital cities of Islam.⁴

Lane maintained a long term commitment to studying Arabic, Islam, and Egypt throughout his distinguished career as a scholar-traveler.

This paper will begin by presenting brief information about the personal background of Edward Lane. Then I will cover his travels, publications, and contributions to Islamic Studies. This will provide proper background about Lane before discussing the critiques of his works and his career as an Orientalist. I intend to refute most of Edward Said's criticisms of Lane. The intended result is to provide the reader with an accurate and critical study of Lane and his accomplishments.

Lane's Personal Background

Edward William Lane, third son of the Rev. Dr. Theophilus Lane, grand-nephew of Gainsborough on his mother's side, was born on September 17, 1801, at Hereford. His father looked after his early education, but

³ Leila Ahmed, *Edward W. Lane: A Study of his life and works and of British ideas of the Middle East in the nineteenth century* (London: Longman, 1978), p. vi (preface). I doubt if Lane himself had an easy time of living between two cultures. He may have just been able to handle it better than Doughty and Lawrence.

⁴ Ahmed, p. 3.

when he died in 1814 the boy was sent to grammar school at Bath and afterwards at Hereford.⁵

"His father, killed in a carriage accident when Lane was a young boy, was a Prebendary of Hereford Cathedral."⁶ Fortunately, Lane's mother was left to care for him. "His mother...was a woman of intellect and high principle, and to her he was greatly indebted for the development of his mental and moral qualities."⁷

Lane displayed an unusual ability in mathematics but turned down the chance to study at Cambridge. Instead, he decided to live with his brother, Richard, who was a promising engraver in London. Edward combined intensive Arabic study with his lithographical training.

For a full three years before embarking for Egypt Lane intensively prepared himself for his enterprise. During this period he pursued, according to Lane-Poole, the study of "Eastern things" so unremittingly that he seriously endangered his health. He began to study Arabic and Arabic grammar in 1822; at about the same time he subscribed to the publications of the Egyptian Society, a society whose publications were designed for the dedicated Egyptian antiquarian, and, as this suggests, Lane was at first interested in ancient as well as in modern Egypt. Then, he went to some trouble also to master the use of the camera lucida, an instrument that would enable him to record faithfully the monuments and scenes encountered in his voyage up the Nile.⁸

Lane set sail for Egypt in July of 1825.

Lane's Travels, Publications, and Contributions to Islamic Studies

During the nineteenth century, Europeans were familiar with Egypt because of the Bible and travel literature. But the information they had about Egypt was limited. "Until the nineteenth century records of a direct experience of it had been scarce, and such travellers' descriptions as did exist tended either to consist mainly of fable or to be only vague and limited."⁹ But it was common for Egyptian antiquities to be displayed in European museums in the early

⁵ A. J. Arberry, *Oriental Essays: Portraits of Seven Scholars* (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1960), p. 87.

⁶ Ahmed, p. vii (preface).

⁷ Edward W. Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians: Written in Egypt during the Years 1833-1835* (The Hague and London: East-West Publications, 1978 ed.), p. 8.

⁸ Ahmed, p. 2.

⁹ Ahmed, p. 3.

nineteenth century. Lane may have seen such a display in the Egyptian Hall of London.¹⁰ Europeans were particularly attracted to Egypt because of its Biblical setting.

Visitors looked forward to seeing the sites of some of the most famous Old Testament events. Painters of biblical scenes in particular (such as Frederick Goodall, the sole subject of whose first visit in 1858 was to “paint the Scriptural subjects”) found in the contemporary scenery and people of Egypt, a fruitful source of inspiration and material.¹¹

Lane attempted to revise European ideas of the Middle East clouded by idealism and Biblical imagery. He did this by living for three extended periods in Egypt. From 1825 to 1828, he took notes and drew sepia sketches for his “Description of Egypt;” from 1833 to 1835, he compiled research that was to be the basis of *The Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*; and from 1842 to 1849, he compiled the *Arabic-English Lexicon*.¹² Lane’s intentions from the beginning were to render a scientific, objective study of the Egyptian culture, its people, religions and languages.

I was not visiting Egypt merely for my amusement; to examine its pyramids and temples and grottoes, and after satisfying my curiosity to quit it for other scenes and other pleasures: but I was about to throw myself entirely among strangers, among a people of whom I had heard the most contradictory accounts; I was to adopt their language, their customs, and their dress; and in order to make as much progress in the study of their literature, it was my intention to associate almost exclusively with the Muslim inhabitants.¹³

Lane’s initial trip to Egypt began in Alexandria where he was careful to observe his surroundings.

...though fascinated by the kaleidoscopic variety of life on the streets of the ancient port, the “bearded visage of the Turk, the Moor, and the Egyptian, – the noble and hardy look of the sunburnt Bedawee enveloped in his ample woolen sheet or hooded cloak – the mean and

¹⁰ A h m e d, p. 8. See A h m e d’s *Edward W. Lane*, p. 8 for a full description of the Egyptian Hall.

¹¹ Christopher P i c k, *Egypt: A Traveller’s Anthology*, London: John Murray 1991, pp. 3-4.

¹² L a n e, *Manners and Customs*, pp. 9-10. A number of Lane’s sketches and drawings are in the British Museum of London.

¹³ Edward Lane in A r b e r r y, pp. 89-90. Arberry never fully explains why Lane chose to associate only with Muslims. If Lane did want to execute a comprehensive study of the Egyptian culture, why would he spend time only with Muslims?

ragged clothing of many of the lower orders, contrasted with the gaudy splendour or graceful habit of some of their superiors – the lounging soldier with his pipe and pistols and yataghan, – the blind beggar – the dirty naked child, and the veiled female,” and though “the shady side of the scene was somewhat forcibly disclosed a few paces further on, by a brawl, a murder, and a decapitation, all occurring in the space of a few minutes, the young traveller quickly concluded that Alexandria was too cosmopolitan to engage his serious attention. On September 28th, he was glad to accept an invitation to join a party making for Cairo, a journey still possible only by canal.¹⁴

Lane had a talent for taking detailed notes and making sketches of his subjects.

In Cairo he was once more busily sketching and making notes. Close by Bab-el-Hadeed, the area of Cairo in which he lived, there was another of those prolific “lofty mounds of rubbish”; this particular one was much appreciated by Lane, for it had a “round tower” and “a telegraph” upon it, and commanded “a most magnificent view of the city and suburbs and the Citadel.” “Soon after my arrival, I made a very elaborate drawing of this scene, with the camera lucida. From no other spot can so good a view of the metropolis...be obtained.” At Khan el Khalleelee, a Cairo bazaar, Lane would sketch on very small scraps of paper held in the palm of his hand, so that he might appear to be writing, “for I wished to avoid being seen, in the public places, engaged in so heathenish an act as drawing;” or he would hide the paper beneath the cloak of his now Arab dress.¹⁵

At this time, Lane began to frequent coffee shops and attend Friday prayers. He attempted to only associate with Muslims and avoided the company of Europeans. Lane found shelter in a tomb located in the City of the Dead section of Cairo. His close association with Egyptians enabled him to collect material for *Description of Egypt*. He returned to England in 1828 to locate a publisher. Back in Egypt four years later, Lane was determined to produce a work that focused more on the manners and customs of the Egyptians, as opposed to the ancient monuments which characterized his first publication. The result was *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*,

¹⁴ A r b e r r y, p. 90.

¹⁵ A h m e d, p. 26.

published in 1836. Lane attempted to present an objective study of Egypt in this publication, void of the inaccurate travel literature which was pervasive in Europe at that time. "With all his natural gift for anecdote, Lane the scholar kept a tight rein on Lane the story-teller, and only permitted himself occasional excursions into the ridiculous."¹⁶

Lane's next task was to begin translating *The Arabian Nights*, which he completed in 1838. Two years later, he married a slave named Nefeeseh, who had been bought for him by Hay, a close friend of Lane's.¹⁷ Lane used his practical knowledge of Islam to help him complete *Selections from the Kur'an* in 1841.¹⁸ The Englishman had great difficulty understanding the Qur'an during this time but he managed to complete it before beginning work on the Lexicon in 1842.

On my arrival at Cairo, I first had recourse, for help in making my preparations, to an accomplished Arabic Scholar, the late M. Fulgence Fresnel, with whom, during a former residence in Egypt, I had contacted an intimate friendship. Previously informed by me of my project, he had tested the qualifications of several learned natives for the task of assisting me in collecting, transcribing, and collating, the materials from which my lexicon was to be composed; and he recommended to me, as the person whom he esteemed the most fit, the sheykh Ibraheem (surnamed `Abd-el-Ghaffar Ed-Dasoo-Kee).¹⁹

Lane could not have accomplished his monumental lexicographical work without the assistance of sheykh Ibraheem who rendered valuable help to the scholar in helping him secure manuscripts from mosques.

It was indispensable, I believe, to the success of my undertaking, that I should most carefully avoid whatever might draw down disrespect from the `Ulama of Cairo, or others of the Muslim inhabitants, either upon myself or upon the sheykh who was to assist me in procuring the chief materials for the composition of my work.²⁰

Lane thrived on learning the intricacies of the Arabic language as he became increasingly disheartened by the European influences slowly creeping into Egyptian architecture and styles of dress.

¹⁶ Arberry, p. 97.

¹⁷ Ahmed, pp. 38-39.

¹⁸ Ahmed, p. 40. One wonders why Lane would choose to study the Qur'an when he had complained about the difficulties of being able to study its passages.

¹⁹ Edward W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, Book I - Part I, London: Williams and Norgate, 1863 ed., p. V (preface).

²⁰ Lane, *Lexicon*, pp. V-VI (preface).

Cairo has long been trying to become a bastard of Paris instead of the picturesque city of El-Mo'izz and Sal ahed-Deen, and to forget its traditions of the palmy days of Islam and its memorials of the chivalrous heroes of crusading times.²¹

European encroachment on Islamic beliefs and customs combined with the flagrant inaccuracy of travel literature about Egypt increased Lane's fervor to produce his works using Arabic sources combined with a dispassionate point of view. He wanted to refute the prevalent notion that the Middle East was inferior to Europe. "By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the common thread was the apparent differences between the western and eastern civilizations in the sense that the West was advanced and the East archaic."²² Lane used his style of writing to promote a clearer, more positive view of the Middle East.

In writing *Modern Egyptians* Lane, like Kinglake, discarded all features of the travel form, from which work had directly originated, that were irrelevant to his particular purpose: the definition of modern Egyptian society. He discarded not only the conventional framework, the narrative of a journey, but also all reference to personal experience that did not directly further his objective: and he consulted exclusively, in the ordering and shaping of his work, the requirements of his chosen theme.²³

It is doubtful that Lane would have shaped such a style of writing if he had remained in England. The twelve years he spent in Egypt challenged him to think and shape his opinions and thoughts in two different contexts.

...Lane, in an ability to grasp, and even to draw personally on, the modes and terms of being of two cultures; in, as that implies, an extension of awareness and a widening of sympathy, for himself and, through his works, for his contemporaries; in a life-work grounded on the intuitive realisation that the modes and manifestations of a culture-religion, customs, social organisation -

²¹ Edward W. Lane, *Arabian Society in the Middle Ages: Studies from the Thousand and One Nights*, ed. Stanley Lane-Poole, London: Curzon Press, 1971 ed., p. xi. Neither Ahmed nor Arberry elaborates on whether Lane took any practical measures to address his complaints about Egypt becoming too Europeanized.

²² Lynne M. Murphy, "Muslim Family Life in the Middle East as Depicted by Victorian Women Residents", Master of Arts Thesis, Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University 1986, p. 2. See Lynne Murphy's "Muslim Family Life in the Middle East as Depicted by Victorian Women Residents" for a more detailed study of nineteenth century European misconceptions of Islam and the Middle East.

²³ Ahmed, p. 86.

embodied perceptions and insights fundamentally intelligible to, and therefore in some sense recognisable as valid to, the members of another culture; in a life-work grounded, at perhaps a yet more fundamental level, on a profound and imperturbable assurance that the ways of an alien culture, of the Islamic culture, did not challenge, negate, or threaten those of European culture, but merely provided alternative and equally effective terms of being; and in, finally, a life-long dedication, more and more explicitly with each successive work, to the "translation," the making intelligible of those ways and the perceptions and insights they embodied, to members of his own culture.²⁴

An example of Lane's desire to educate Europeans about Islam was his detailed account of Muslim prayer-life at the mosque. Lane designed intricate woodcuts of the various postures Muslims assume in prayer to complement his writings about the subject. This type of description was new to European eyes.

By thus continually defining the beliefs and forms he described in the terms in which they were practiced and experience, Lane was presenting Islam and Islamic society in a way that was radically novel to Western writings on Islam, and, indeed, probably to Western representations of any alien culture.²⁵

Lane's style was different because he did not impose his own belief structures or values on the subjects being studied. This was most unusual in his day and age. Lane was writing at a time when Islam was often denigrated by Orientalists.

It might be said in general of the European Orientalists, from the so called Age of Discovery to the turn of the present century, ...often appreciated those literatures (Islamic) more than some of the Islamic peoples themselves. Certainly their linguistic preparation in an age before tape recorders, their devotion, their breadth of vision, and their sheer achievements should inspire their modern progeny to envy, if nothing better. Had it not been for such men, it would still be impossible to put together an anthology of Islamic literature today.

On the other hand, and at the risk of lese-majeste, it must be said that some Western scholars of Islam and its literatures have themselves blocked the way to a wider

²⁴ Ahmed, p. 101.

²⁵ Ahmed, p. 111.

and greater appreciation of these matters. Sometimes their studies have shown absolutely vicious prejudice against Islam, and palpable distaste for its literature.²⁶

Lane was painfully aware of such distorted and condescending approaches to the study of Islam and its peoples. His approach was to gain accurate representations of the culture by studying even the casual events of daily life in Egypt.

It was natural that Lane should be attracted to the Mediaeval legends and romances which in his time were still being recited by story-tellers in the coffee shops of Cairo. His appetite had been whetted by the Bedouin refugee whom he sheltered in his tomb by the Pyramids....²⁷

Lane made sure that Islam was the central feature of his works.

The centrality and dominance of Islam and its vision, and its shaping influence in almost all areas of experience in the society Lane described are clearly reflected in the notes to the *Nights*, as they were in *Modern Egyptian*. By exploring more deeply and drawing more extensively, as Lane does in the notes, on the resources of Arabic civilisation, on its mythologies, literature, history and historical legend, and above all on its Tradition, Lane if anything accentuated this.²⁸

Lane's translation of *The Arabian Nights* was received with mixed results. Some Europeans were puzzled but pleased by Lane's biblical style of translating the *Nights*.

"The semi-scriptural tone rather startled us in the humorous passages," noted the *London and Westminster*, "but we consented to anything for the sake of truth." While the *Foreign Quarterly* noted approvingly that Lane's translation preserved the full "character of the original..." and added, "The felicity with which the original style has been preserved throughout his translation is another of its singular merit...we became in the perusal half-orientalised." The *Eclectic* observed "the full peculiarities of eastern style are preserved and we could almost imagine an oriental addressing us, only in English instead of Arabic."²⁹

²⁶ James Kritzack, *Anthology of Islamic Literature, from the rise of Islam to modern times*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston 1964, pp. 7-8.

²⁷ Arberry, 102.

²⁸ Ahmed, p. 149.

²⁹ Ahmed, p. 157.

Other observers were less gracious in assessing his translation which omitted numerous sexual references in the tales.

The principle value of E.W. Lane's translation lies in the notes, for his knowledge of Cairo society was encyclopedic; the work was intended for "the drawing room table" and is, accordingly a mere castrated selection of the original.³⁰

Burton's translation of *Nights* left little to the imagination. Galland's version reflected the French style of literature. Husain Haddawy adds his critique of all three versions:

In translating the work as they did, they violated its integrity – Lane by emasculating it; Burton by reproducing its Arabic peculiarities and adding other idiosyncracies of his own; and Galland by altering it to suit French taste, although this method comes the closest to producing the intended effect.³¹

Lane was also criticized for lacking imagination in his translation.

At this point in his career Lane began to shift his interest to other academic endeavors.

The first half of Lane's productive life, the life of the traveller and raconteur and strictly amateur scholar, was now ending: it would have called for unusual powers of prevision to foretell how he would employ his time and talents during his remaining years.³²

Lane continued to live as a humble scholar in Cairo with his wife, his sister Sophia and her three children. He avoided eating pork and drinking wine. Lane set his sights on the challenge of assembling an Arabic-English Lexicon. Fortunately, he had the assistance of the Duke of Northumberland who supplied Lane with £150 annually to work on the task.³³ Lane spent seven long years compiling his most noteworthy achievement. It was not done without numerous complexities.

While mainly composing from the Taj el-'Aroos, I have often had before me, or by my side, eight or ten other lexicons, (presenting three different arrangements to the

³⁰ P.H. Newby, in preface of Sir Richard Burton, *The Book of the Thousand and One Nights*, A Selection by P.H. Newby, London: Arthur Barker Ltd., 1950, p. 9.

³¹ *The Arabian Nights*, transl. Husain Haddawy, based on the text of the Fourteenth-Century Syrian Manuscript, ed. Muhsin Mahdi, New York: W.W. Norton and Company 1990, pp. XXV-XXVI (preface).

³² Arberry, p. 106.

³³ Ahmed, p. 42. This seems like a meager amount of money to me. I do not see how Lane and his wife, along with his sister and her three sons, could have survived on such a minimal amount of money.

roots, and all of them differing in the order, or rather disorder, of the words explained), requiring to be consulted at the same time.³⁴

Lane's tremendous patience and fortitude paid off. His publication remains a valuable reference even today. Lane, no doubt, had moments of despair during the process.

Nearly twenty years have now elapsed since I commenced this work. Had I foreseen that the whole labor of the composition must fall upon me or the project be abandoned, and had I foreseen the length of time that it would require of me, unaided, I should certainly not have had the courage to undertake it.³⁵

Lane, with family in tow, left for England in 1849. The Egyptian summers had become too severe for him to stand. He left the lexicon in Egypt to be completed by Shaikh Ibraheem.

Lane took a house in Hastings, but finding that the resort did not agree with him, after a year he moved to the milder climate of Worthing, and during the twenty-five years he lived there he left the place but once, going to Brighton to see his old friend Outram; and nothing but severe illness could compel him to take a day's rest.³⁶

Lane had led a distinguished life that was recognized by a number of organizations.

In 1858 the Royal Society of Literature elected Lane to honorary membership, an example followed eight years later by the Royal Asiatic Society. In 1864 he was made a corresponding member of the Academie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres of the Institut de France. In 1875 he received his only academic degree, when the University of Leiden, then celebrating its tercentenary, conferred on him the Doctorate of Letters honoris causa.³⁷

Lane's life, like Hodgson's, was a mixture of joy and sorrow. He had planned on his eldest nephew continuing his scholarly endeavors but the young man died suddenly in 1867 leaving a young family.³⁸ Once again, Lane's house became a home for another collection of children. Lane knew what it was like to lose a father at such a young age.

³⁴ Lane, *Lexicon*, p. xxii (preface).

³⁵ Lane, *Lexicon*, p. xxii (preface).

³⁶ Arberry, p. 113.

³⁷ Arberry, p. 114. It is puzzling to me why Lane received only one academic honor during his lifetime.

³⁸ Arberry, p. 114. Lane apparently had an unending amount of patience and love to be able to take on a second family at such a late time in his life.

Part of Lane's success was his own sense of self-discipline and spirituality. A committed Christian, Lane learned a significant amount about religious faith by also being committed to attending Friday prayers on a regular basis. Taking his own faith seriously perhaps led him to take Islam seriously as well. Lane's primary motivation, though, was on a higher plane than religious faith.

For fame he cared little; money, beyond what sufficed him for his modest wants, he desired not. Pure love of knowledge was the motive of his work, and to learning, unsoiled with baser aims, he dedicated a long and studious life, rich in fruits.³⁹

Critique of Lane as an Orientalist and His Works

Edward Said defines Orientalism as follows:

Orientalism of course involves several overlapping aspects: first, the changing historical and cultural relationship between Europe and Asia, a relationship with a 4,000 year old history; second, the scientific discipline in the West according to which, beginning in the early nineteenth century, one specialised in the study of various Oriental cultures and traditions; and third, the ideological suppositions, images and fantasies about a region of the world called the Orient.⁴⁰

Said criticizes Lane for being an active participant in the Orientalist mode of thought which subjugated the Orient and its peoples. "Orientalism was a scientific movement whose analogue in the world of politics was the Orient's colonial accumulation and acquisition by Europe. The Orient was, therefore, not Europe's interlocutor, but its silent Other."⁴¹ Said insists that Lane aided in dominating the Orient by imposing his scientific grid of classifications when studying Egypt. His addition to other critiques of Orientalism is the following: "...in common with all the recent critics of Orientalism, I think that two things are especially important – one, a methodological vigilance that construes Orientalism less as a positive than as a critical discipline and therefore makes it subject to intense scrutiny and confinement of the Orient to go on without challenge."⁴²

³⁹ Arberry, p. 121.

⁴⁰ Edward Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered", *The Contemporary Study of the Arab World*, ed. Earl L. Sullivan and Jacqueline S. Ismael, Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press 1991, pp. 35-36.

⁴¹ Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered", p. 39.

⁴² Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered", p. 40. Unfortunately, Said does not appreciate that someone like Lane actually took the care to attempt a systematic study of one facet of the Orient. Viewing this type of study as a "confinement" seems strange to me.

Edmund Burke III counters with what he describes as the positive contributions of Orientalism:

What orientalism contributed to the study of Islamic societies was the concept of Islamic civilizations... Nineteenth-century French orientalists also shared with the students of Islamic societies the romantic quest for the exotic, for depaysment, perhaps ultimately for the self.⁴³

Scholars like Lane pushed for the accurate representation of Islam and the Middle East at a time when most literature about those subjects was murky and inaccurate. It's undeniable that Lane and others like him did go to the Orient in search of adventure. But who wouldn't feel a sense of adventure and romance when travelling to a foreign land for the first time?

Burke does point out that writers like Flaubert were guilty of studying the subjects in the Orient as sexual objects. In addition, Europeans did tend to exert their power over people of the Orient by disregarding cultural mores and maintaining an attitude of superiority. Lane was guilty of expurgating sexual portions of the *Nights* so as to not offend his Victorian audience. Writing as an editor does give one a certain amount of power over the subject. The fact that Lane took advantage of this power cannot be denied.

I believe it is important to study the roots of Orientalism to see why there are inherent problems in this academic discipline. To accomplish this, one must go back to the early beginning of Islam itself:

From the beginning, the roots of Judaeo-Christian hostility to Islam were seen in the Qur'an. The "People of the Book" were quick not only to deny but to challenge Muhammad's role as the bearer of the divine message...⁴⁴

The challenge to Islam and the Prophet Muhammad did not end there.

The Byzantine polemicists were not ignored by triumphant Islam, nor did it neglect to reciprocate their venomous effusion. But the Byzantines were in due course even surpassed by their medieval European successors in cultivating hatred and prejudice through the dissemination of abusive and false accounts. Thus to them Islam was "the work of the devil," the Qur'an "a tissue of absurdities" and Muhammad "a false prophet," "an imposter" or "antichrist." The Muslims were some sort of brutes with hardly any human qualities.⁴⁵

⁴³ Edmund Burke III, "The Sociology of Islam: The French Tradition", [in:] *Islamic Studies: A Tradition and Its Problems*, ed. Malcolm H. Kerr, Malibu, CA: Undena Publications 1980, p. 75.

⁴⁴ A.L. Tibawi, *English Speaking Orientalists: A Critique of their Approach to Islam and Arab Nationalism*, "Muslim World" 53 (1963), p. 185.

⁴⁵ Tibawi, p. 185.

Tibawi correctly asserts that this type of thinking about Islam was inherited by the Europeans who were among the first to study Islam and Arabic. His point is well made by a reference to the following letter in which the Cambridge officials were discussing the first chair of Arabic.

In a letter dated May 9, 1636, addressed to the founder of the chair they state: "The work itself we conceive to tend not only to the advancement of good literature by bringing to light much knowledge which as yet is locked up in that learned tongue, but also to the good service of the King and State in our commerce with the Eastern nations, and in God's good time to the enlargement of the borders of the Church, and propagation of Christian religion to them who now sit in darkness."⁴⁶

Unfortunately, this was the current of thought behind Oriental studies. Lane, for example, was the son of a clergyman. Even though he remained sympathetic to Islam, I suspect he was raised to think of his own religion as being morally and intellectually superior to other religions. Despite the varied background of Orientalists, most of them were raised with this type of intellectual thought. But the people who studied Orientalism did have different interests in mind, as Hodgson explains:

First there were those who studied the Ottoman empire, which played so major a role in modern Europe. They came to it usually in the first instance from the viewpoint of European diplomatic history. Such scholars tended to see the whole of Islamdom from the political perspective of Istanbul, the Ottoman capital. Second, there were those, normally British, who entered Islamic studies in India so as to master Persian as good civil servants, or at least they were inspired by Indian interests. For them, the imperial transition of Delhi tended to be the culmination of Islamicate history. Third, there were the Semitists, often interested primarily in Hebrew studies, who were lured into Arabic. For the, headquarters tended to be Cairo, the most vital of Arabic-using cities in the nineteenth century, though some turned to Syria or the Maghrib. They were commonly philologists rather than historians, and they learned to see Islamicate culture through the eyes of the late Egyptian and Syrian Sunni writers most in vogue in Cairo.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Tibawi, p. 187.

⁴⁷ Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, Volume One of the Classical Age of Islam, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1977 ed., p. 39.

Lane would most neatly fit into the third category of Hodgson's listing. He was primarily a philologist who was a master at recording precise details of the subject at hand. His genius for detail is one of the primary criticisms Said directs at Lane's works. In describing *Modern Egyptian* Said notes: "...the book is organized, not simply as the narrative of Lane's residence in Egypt but as narrative structure overwhelmed by Orientalist restructuring and detail."⁴⁸ Ironically, Said fails to discuss the fact that Lane was trying to avoid the style of the vague and often false nineteenth century travel reports of Egypt by rendering a thorough description of his subjects.

Said also describes Lane as a "fake Muslim and genuine Westerner."⁴⁹ This is in reference to Lane's Arab garb and his mosque attendance along with his near exclusive association with Muslims in Egypt. But Lane never denied being a Westerner or for that manner being a Christian. He exhibited more integrity than Burton (whom Said seems to favor over Lane), who went on pilgrimage disguised as a Muslim doctor. Lane also chose not to engage in sexual escapades such as those indulged in by some French literary writers. Lane simply tried to study the culture by blending in with the people and Islamic customs as much as possible without giving up his self-identity. How would Mr. Said have behaved if he had gone on a similar adventure-study stint to Paris, for example?

Said also criticizes Lane for remaining too detached from the culture he studied and wrote about. Yet how can someone like Lane produce a lexicographical work of near unparalleled quality if he maintained a "cold distance from Egyptian life"⁵⁰ as stated by Said. Could it be that Mr. Said is a bit jealous of just how successful Lane was at blending into the Egyptian society?

As previously stated, Said is correct in asserting that Lane was guilty of editing sexual references from the *Nights* to prepare a suitable version for Victorian England. Said overextends himself, though, by stating, "No pilgrim, French or English, could so ruthlessly dominate his self or his subject as Lane did."⁵¹ First of all, Lane had to establish credibility for himself in the scholarly world; the man only had a secondary school education! Granted, his style contained Orientalist overtones. But it is easy to look back and criticize someone who was busy doing his best to publish what he thought was accurate material during the morally strict Victorian age. Lane did not get rich as a result of his publications. This fact alone should quell some of Said's criticisms. Lane is also taken to task by Said who levels a common criticism against Lane – he had no imagination in his writings. But here you have an

⁴⁸ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books 1979, p. 161.

⁴⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, p. 161.

⁵⁰ Said, *Orientalism*, p. 162.

⁵¹ Said, *Orientalism*, p. 170.

English professor criticizing the writing of a lexicographer. What would Lane have to say about Mr. Said's philological skills?

Other scholars have plenty to say about Said's methodological approach to Orientalism as a science. "The proper assessment of Said's thesis on Orientalism is not that it is wrong, but that it is monolithic and undialectical."⁵² Said ignores the works of scholars like Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Marshall Hodgson, who tried to break out of the Orientalist tradition of scholarship. Smith is known for cultivating a proper respect of the Islamic view of the holy Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad. In the past, Orientalists were known for studying Islam from a scientific posture void of any concern or interest in learning about or participating in the Islamic view of the one God. That cannot be said exclusively any more.

Hodgson's placement of Islam in the context of world history also goes unnoticed by Said. In "Orientalism Reconsidered," (p. 35) Said wonders why he should have included German Orientalists in his critique of Orientalism when he is chastised by others for making such a glaring omission. This is a clear example of Said lacking the thoroughness of detail that so characterizes Lane's works. Also, Tibawi ("English Speaking Orientalists", Part II, p. 303) mentions that he thinks Orientalists, in general, care more about the study of Arabic than they do about Islam. Would this be an accurate description of Lane, who spent an endless amount of time recording Muslim prayer postures in his writings and subsequent woodcuts?

My opinion is that Lane cared deeply about Islam, Egypt, its peoples and its customs. He tried to ascertain an accurate portrayal of Islam in Egypt at that point in history. This was significant because Islam never stays the same. "The very comprehensiveness of the vision of Islam as it is unfolded has insured that it can never be quite the same from one place or one time to another."⁵³ As students of Islam, it is important that we place an emphasis on making sure that visions of Islam are presented accurately and fairly in the classroom. Tibawi is correct to some extent in asserting a continued problem of the study of Islam "...with certain honorable exceptions the professional Orientalists still persist in the distortion and misrepresentation of Islam..."⁵⁴

This type of distortion occurs when scholars are not making efforts to (1) respect Islam and its system of beliefs; (2) or become an active participant in the culture, language and people being studied. That is why Lane remains an example of someone who was able to successfully engage in such a study of Islam. Few scholars have matched his determination and willingness to so

⁵² Antonio Roberto Gualtieri, *Hermeneutics of the Old and New Orientalism*, [in:] *The Contemporary Study of the Arab World*, ed. Earl L. Sullivan and Jacqueline S. Ismael, Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press 1991, p. 54.

⁵³ Hodgson, p. 79.

⁵⁴ A.L. Tibawi, *Second Critique of English-Speaking Orientalists and Their Approach to Islam and the Arabs*, "The Islamic Quarterly" 23 (1979), p. 43.

deeply enter a culture and to study it with such precision. This remains a rare feat in the world of scholarship.

Conclusion

Another critique of Lane by Said can be sifted through to point out the positive merits of Lane's life and career.

Lane's choice was between living without "inconvenience and discomfort" and accomplishing his study of the modern Egyptians. The result of his choice is plainly to have made possible his definition of the Egyptians, since he had become one of them, his perspective would no longer have been antiseptically and asexually lexicographical. In two important and urgent ways, therefore, Lane gains scholarly credibility and legitimacy. First, by interfering with the ordinary narrative course of human life: this is the function of his colossal detail, in which the observing intelligence of a foreigner can introduce and then piece together massive information. The Egyptians are disemboweled for exposition, so to speak, then put together admonishingly by Lane. Second, by disengaging from the generation of Egyptian-Oriental life: this is the function of his subduing his animal appetite in the interest of disseminating information, not in and for Egypt, but in and for European learning at large. To have achieved both the imposition of a scholarly will upon an untidy reality and an intentional shift away from the place of his residence to the scene of his scholarly reputation is the source of his great fame in the annals of Orientalism. Useful knowledge such as his could only have been obtained, formulated, and diffused by such denials.⁵⁵

Lane did choose the hardship of living in Egypt under less than ideal conditions to gather his information. He acquired a chronic stomach problem in Egypt as a result of drinking contaminated water. Yet, Lane continued his studies with few complaints. As noted, his monetary awards were enough to take care of himself and his family but nothing much more than that. Lane was an Englishman and he knew his limitations. He knew that speaking the language well, knowing Arabic grammar and the customs of Egyptians did not make him an Egyptian. Lane was able to participate in Egypt's Islamic culture without losing his personal identity.

⁵⁵ Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 163-164.

Lane gained scholarly distinction by not being afraid to create a new type of Middle Eastern scholarship aimed at expanding the horizons of his European counterparts. *The Arabic-English Lexicon* he designed was the highlight of his enterprise. Lane's unending thirst for knowledge was to the benefit of Islamic Studies. His work was a pioneering effort in the attempt to understand Islam from an Islamic point of view based on his experiences in Egypt. This type of study is what we must continue to build on today.

Our fundamental purpose must be an understanding of the human achievements of the civilization in their own terms.... The place of the civilization in the world-historical chain of events, and its usefulness as an example of what culture can be, come out naturally and necessarily as we try to understand what is special to the human endeavours that have been tied together by the presence of the Islamic vision.⁵⁶

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⁵⁶ Hodgson, p. 98.

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MARIA KOWALSKA

AL-MAS'ŪDĪ'S STELLUNG IN GESCHICHTE DER ARABISCHEN LITERATUR

Viele Forscher der Geschichte der arabischen Literatur halten al-Mas'ūdī für einen Historiker, Geographen, Reisenden und auch für einen Verbreiter des Wissens – Literaten, also für einen Adīb.

Was war er eigentlich? Der französische Orientalist Ch. Pellat stellte diese Frage in einem seiner Artikel unter dem Titel: "Was al-Mas'ūdī a Historian or an Adīb?"¹ Um zu diesem Thema eine Stellung zu nehmen, entschloß ich mich das Leben und das Werk von al-Mas'ūdī zu erforschen und die Meinung anderer Wissenschaftler über ihn in Betracht zu ziehen.

Die einzigen Quellen der Erkenntnis seiner Biographie sind seine zwei erhalten gebliebene und herausgegebene Werke: *Murūḡ ad-dahab wa ma'ādin al-ḡawhar* (Goldene Wiesen und Edelsteinmine) und *Kitāb at-tanbīh wa al-iṣrāf* (Das Buch der Erinnerung und Revision).

Al-Mas'ūdī (Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī)² wurde in Bagdad, zwischen 890 und 900 geboren. Er stammte aus einer echt arabischen Familie, die aus Hiğaz kam. Von seinem Vorfahren namens Mas'ūd, der dem Genossenkreis des Propheten Muḥammad angehörte, bekam er den Beinamen al-Mas'ūdī. Sein Studium beschränkte er nicht auf den engen Kreis der islamischen Theologie. Er ließ sich vielmehr von jener allgemein wissenschaftlichen Bewegung anregen, die damals im Anschluß an die Übersetzung der wichtigsten Werke griechischer Gelehrten in Irak in Blüte stand, und zugleich durch die von den Hafenstädten des persischen Meerbusens ausgehende, über das islamische Reich hinausstrebende Erdkunde.³ Den größten Teil seines Lebens verbrachte er angeblich in Basra, ausgenommen

¹ "Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society", 1961, 9, S. 231-234.

² Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur*, Weimar 1898, Bd. I, S. 144-145, Supplementband I, S. 220-221; *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition (EI²), Leiden 1986, vol. VI, p. 784-789; I. J. Kračkovskij, *Izbrannye sočinenija*, Bd. IV – *Arabska geografičeskaja literatura*, Moskwa-Leningrad 1957, S. 171-184; I. Hrbek, *Ryžoviště Zlata a Doly Drahokamů*, Praha 1983, S. 7-24.

³ Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur*. Zweite Ausgabe mit Berichtigungen, Leipzig 1909, S. 109.