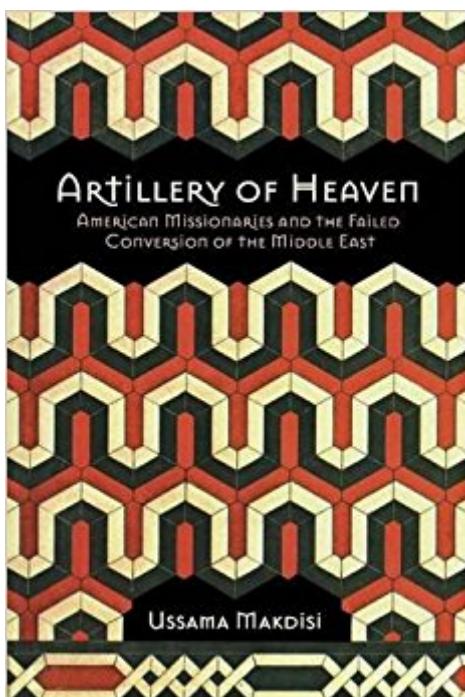


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# Artillery Of Heaven: American Missionaries And The Failed Conversion Of The Middle East (The United States In The World)



## 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 soul—*and* over how his story might be told—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

"This richly researched study not only accomplishes the historian's basic task of explaining what happened and who was involved. It also contributes to a better understanding of the confrontation between the West and the Middle East in modern times." *Foreign Affairs* "Makdisi presents a simple but remarkable story of the first Protestant missionaries to the Middle East and of the life and death of their Lebanese Maronite (Christian) follower, As'ad Shidyaq. . . . Makdisi is a skilled scholar equally comfortable with nuanced English and Arabic sources . . . and he successfully refutes both the historical claims of American and Islamic 'exceptionalism' and their 'essentialist' doctrines." *Library Journal* "Lucid and elegantly written, Ussama Makdisi's *Artillery of Heaven* accomplishes two big things. First, while examining 19th-century American missionary encounters in the Arab Ottoman territories, it presents a model for a new kind of transnational history that sheds light on American engagement with the world. Second, and at a time when much of the Arab past has been 'effectively demarcated . . . as a forbidden no-man's-land' because of fear of what 'divisive narratives' of the past may dredge up, it scrutinizes the raw history of the 'multireligious world' in the Ottoman region that is now Lebanon." *Heather J. Sharkey, Middle East Journal, 62:4* "Makdisi is certainly not the first to locate the origins of Arab nationalism within the missionary movement, but that's not really his aim. Rather, he wants to demonstrate that progressive, secular, ecumenical ideas have prospered in Lebanon, only to be repeatedly eradicated by insiders and outsiders, each according to their own agenda." *The Nation* "Makdisi's meticulously researched, beautifully written book sets a high standard for forthcoming studies on missionaries in the Middle East. He painstakingly analyzes the roots of complex, multidirectional movements of influence, culture, ideas, and religiosity that have characterized the contact between East and West, America and the Arab world. The result is an impressive work of transnational history." *American Historical Review* "Artillery of Heaven stands as a signal contribution to the growing body of North American and British scholarship that is remaking the history of missions and missionaries. Moving beyond the spent debates over whether western missionaries were saints or cultural imperialists, Makdisi and this company of likeminded scholars train their attention on those who were the objects of conversion and their agency in shaping colonial encounters. Readers will find much to admire in his eloquent and balanced book and much to ponder in its evocation of the earliest beginnings of the complex relationship between the United States and the Middle East." *Christine Leigh Heyrman, Church History* "This new book is a remarkable tour de force. It establishes Ussama Makdisi's place as one of the premier historians of the modern Arab world, of the Arab-American encounter, and of Lebanon. It represents

the best kind of intercultural history, weaving seamlessly a narrative of missionary actions against their American background, and of Lebanese reactions in their Ottoman context. This book does both things, masterfully and apparently effortlessly." ª Rashid Khalidi, Edward Said Professor of Arab Studies, Middle East Institute, Columbia University"Through a contextualized reading of the tragic story of As'ad Shidyaq, Ussama Makdisi powerfully narrates and deconstructs the encounter between American Protestant missionaries and Maronite Christian leaders in nineteenth-century Lebanon. This nuanced study explores a pivotal moment in local cross-cultural contact, and shows how broader currents of multiculturalism emerged from the mix. Makdisi's study exemplifies the new mission history at its best, as well as provides important insights into the meaning of religio-political sectarianism in the Middle East today. This is a great book." ª Dana L. Robert, Truman Collins Professor of World Christianity and History of Christian Mission, Boston University"This is one of the most stimulating and enjoyable books I've read for years. Ussama Makdisi's rare achievement is to straddle two completely different and interesting topics: the history of U.S. missionary endeavor within the United States, and some of the results of its manifestations abroad in Lebanon. The Artillery of Heaven contains an unflattering but utterly convincing critique of the effortless racial superiority inherent in the American missionary enterprise in the nineteenth century, as well as the projection of the myth of late nineteenth-century 'Christian America' as the ideal society." ª Peter Sluglett, University of Utah"Ussama Makdisi strikes at the heart of a model of a 'clash of civilizations' that so pervades conventional, generalizing accounts of a transhistorical dissonance between America and the Arab world. His subtle and rich account of American missionaries and their failed efforts to garner Ottoman converts in the early nineteenth century resets the historical and cultural parameters for understanding this encounter as one piece of a longer history of missionary work among Native Americans. Most striking, he takes his fine-grained interpretive cues from Muslim and Christian actors who themselves were critical and creative in thinking about different notions of faith at a time when coexistence was not proclaimed but, in reflective practice, actively pursued." ª Ann L. Stoler, Willy Brandt Distinguished University Professor of Anthropology and Historical Studies and Chair of the Department of Anthropology, New School University"This passionately written and engaging book presents interesting material that has not before seen the light of day. Ussama Makdisi addresses very important transnational and intercultural issues concerning the transmission of and reaction to missionary culture. Throughout, he gives a balanced account of American and Maronite/Lebanese relations, revealing details of the social structure and values of Ottoman society. Artillery of Heaven illuminates the cultural contacts and misunderstandings involved at a different time in American cultural expansion." ª clan

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Great book.

So much coverage of the Middle East and what is considered part of the Arab world is done thorough the lens of the "clash of civilizations" The ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have done nothing if not reenforce 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 immediatly dispenses with the "clash of civilizations" frame by reveling 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 prostlatize such as Africa and the Pacific as he makes clear when he says " without the constant threat of militias or disease to herd the remanents 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 doese not just criticize the missionaries and their sometimes misguided actions but rather puts them in the context of the American historical experiencs 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 desitivities. By presenting the diffrent 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.

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