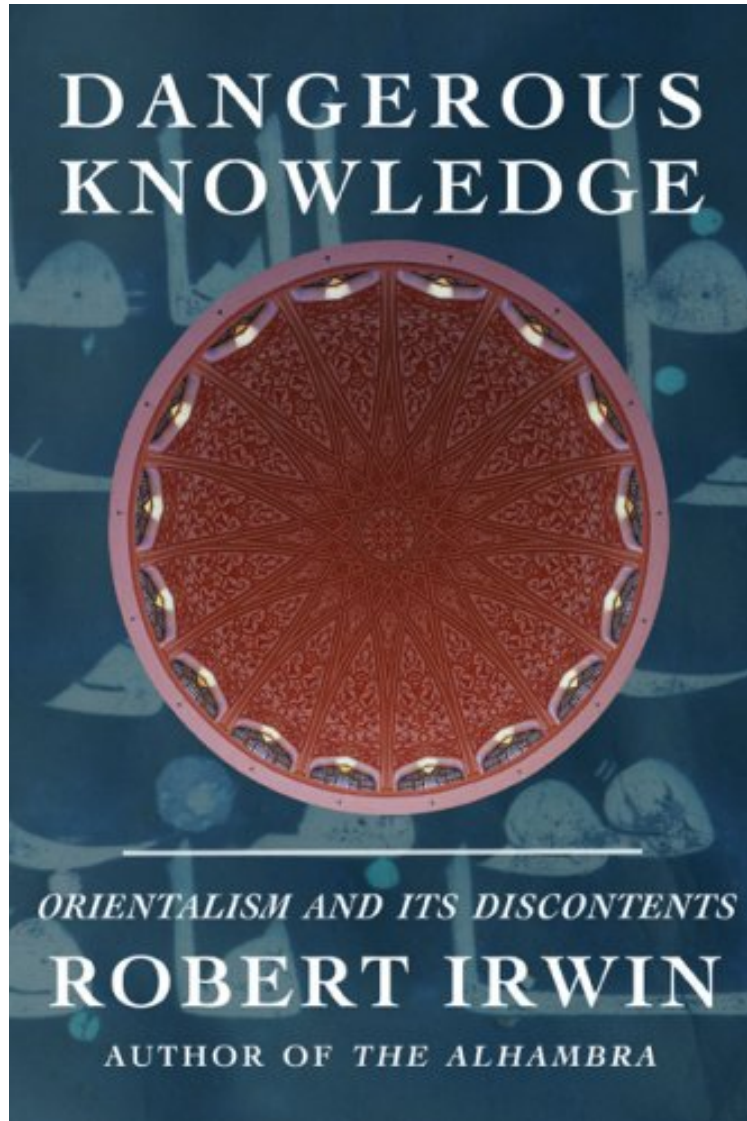


(Download free pdf) Dangerous Knowledge: Orientalism and Its Discontents

Dangerous Knowledge: Orientalism and Its Discontents

Robert Irwin

ebooks | Download PDF | *ePub | DOC | audiobook



 Download

 Read Online

#1976068 in Books 2006-11-02 2006-11-02Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 9.22 x 1.32 x 6.321, 1.43
#File Name: 158567835X376 pages | File size: 29.Mb

Robert Irwin : Dangerous Knowledge: Orientalism and Its Discontents before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Dangerous Knowledge: Orientalism and Its Discontents:

5 of 6 people found the following review helpful. A Response to Edward SaidBy Martin AsinerDANGEROUS KNOWLEDGE is really a book of two parts. In the first, Robert Irwin gives an overview of Orientalism. This is no easy feat since the term itself is unfamiliar to even otherwise well-educated Americans. The term does not lend itself to ready definition since it implies a focus on the Orient. Irwin does not limit Orientalism to China and Japan. He

defines it as broadly speaking the discipline that relates to the entire spectrum of studies that includes all non-European areas of interest. Thus, it subsumes history, literature, music, mathematics and just about any segment of human endeavor that is founded in Asia, Africa, or nearby island societies. Irwin notes that Orientalism, using his broad definition, can be extended all the way back to classic Greek civilization. Irwin outlines a vast historical sweep of a myriad of names all of whom had something to say about civilizations that lay beyond the Euphrates. As he lists these names, one is impressed that the totality of their writings were often at odds with each other. Most of the early Orientalists tended to think of Arabic societies as their respective points of interest. Rather than seeing these Arabic societies as symbolic of an exotic "Other" as recent critics like Edward Said have charged, they instead were more likely to view Islam as a competitor to Christianity, and even here if there were truly any "other" it would be more likely that the myriad subsets of Christianity would be that other. The first part of *DANGEROUS KNOWLEDGE* is tough reading since the reader must absorb an imposingly long list of names, dates, and movements, sort of like reading an arcane history text of an unknown civilization. The second part is easier to grasp since Irwin zooms in on the life, times, and writings of Edward Said. Said, who died in 2003, was a pro-Palestinian, anti-Zionist, and anti-Western writer and thinker. His anti-American stance is not at all that unusual even given his tenured professor position at Columbia. Said is the author of many books, most of which exhibit his life-long obsession with justifying the deeds of the Palestinians as they sought to create a homeland in Jerusalem. Said's major book is *ORIENTALISM*, a surprise bestseller that is a confused mishmash of beliefs. Irwin takes exception to Said's claim that all of Western culture views all of Oriental culture as exotic, erotic, and just plain sexy. Irwin retorts that the vast majority of Orientalists from Plato to the present tended to see the East mostly in terms of the west. The allure of the east was anything but a vaguely defined "other." As Irwin was writing the first part of *DANGEROUS KNOWLEDGE*, he was clarifying that the "danger" of the title lay more in Said's misreading of Oriental culture than in any threat by the west toward the east. *DANGEROUS KNOWLEDGE* is an indispensable tool to counter the claims of the relativists and deconstructionists who assert that western culture is on its last and well-earned legs.

4 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Too general; doesn't really go into necessary detail to properly polemicize with Said
By Lester Palaiologos
Irwin's book expresses dissatisfaction with Said's "Orientalism". It also insists that its goal is not to renounce Said as such, but rehabilitate the scholars whom Said describes as "Orientalist". Unfortunately, the description of the scholars is, while interesting in itself, is flawed. Few words are dedicated to the scholars' ideas, as opposed to their biographies. Thus, the reader can't really decide what Said got right or wrong about them. Yes, we learn the scholar X felt a passion towards Orient and had a bunch of intriguing eccentricities, but what about their actual attitude toward the people they studied, their attitude to European colonialism? Even their technical achievements are usually mentioned in passing. Strangely enough, the most well-written part of the book is the chapter which directly argues with Said. Irwin does note some of Said's deficiencies, like his penchant for broad generalizations and the rather irrational dislike of linguistic classification (one feels that Said was influenced too much by the "any classification is bad" flavour of postmodernism), but the disappointing main part of the book doesn't, as a previous reviewer noted, really manage to back up Irwin's refutations.

12 of 15 people found the following review helpful. Not Quite Convincing--But a Good Read!
By The Conscience of Zeno
Irwin is a well-known critic of Edward Said and "Orientalism". Here he marshals his considerable intellectual resources to define a workable timeline of Orientalist knowledge in order to make his essential point that Said was a late comer to this area of studies and didn't even know very much about it, being politically motivated in his outlook. Does he succeed? Not quite. No doubt Irwin is far more knowledgeable than Said ever was about the history of Orientalism, but he fails to deal convincingly with Said's essential point that Orientalism was a biased body of knowledge that existed mostly for the purpose of subjugating the East. Furthermore, his hatred for Said's ideas sometimes teeters on the edge of paranoia. Nevertheless, this book provides a detailed history of Orientalist studies in the West from the very beginnings of Islam to the modern reemergence of religious conflict.

The publication of Edward Said's hugely influential *Orientalism* in 1981 called into question the entire history of the Western study of Islamic culture, condemning this scholarly tradition as one that presented inaccurate and deliberately demeaning representations of Islamic peoples and institutions so much so that the words "Oriental" and "Orientalist" have come to take on the most negative connotations. But what is Orientalism, and who were the Orientalists, and how did Western scholars of Islamic culture come to be vilified as insidious agents of European imperialism? In Robert Irwin's groundbreaking new history, he answers this question with a detailed and colorful story of the motley crew of intellectuals and eccentrics who brought an understanding of the Islamic world to the West. In a narrative that ranges from an analysis of Ancient Greek perceptions of the Persians to a portrait of the first Western European translators of Arabic to the contemporary Muslim world's perceptions of the Western study of Islam, Irwin affirms the value of the Orientalists' legacy: not only for the contemporary scholars who have disowned it, but also for anyone committed to fostering the cross-cultural understanding which could bridge the real or imagined gulf between Islamic and Western civilization. *Dangerous Knowledge* is a both riveting and entertaining history, a bold argument, and an urgent redress of our conceptions about Western cultures' relationship with its nearest neighbor.

From Publishers Weekly Starred . Almost 30 years ago, in his classic *Orientalism*, the late cultural critic Edward Said published a scathing denunciation of Oriental studies, blaming the field for the rise of Western imperialism and racist views about Arabs and other Eastern peoples. British historian Irwin (*The Alhambra*) fiercely condemns Said's misinterpretation, offering both a brilliant defense of Orientalism and a masterful intellectual history of the Orientalists and their work, which opened windows on the world of Asia in general and Islam in particular, providing the West with glimpses of the social and religious practices of these cultures. Irwin surveys the history of Orientalism from the Greeks through the Middle Ages to its height in the 18th and 19th centuries. He chronicles the lives and works of the men who introduced the ideas of Islamic and Asian culture to the West. Many of these men were biblical critics whose command of Hebrew allowed them to move easily to Arabic and to explore the Koran. In the 17th century, the dragomans, or translators, moved the study of Islam forward by providing translations of Turkish, Arabic and Persian texts. Irwin's wide-ranging study splendidly captures a time when intellectual polymaths traversed foreign territories in search of new and compelling ideas. (Oct.) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. Latter-day Orientalists and students of intellectual history will benefit greatly from this study. -- Kirkus s, July 2006 About the Author ROBERT IRWIN, the eminent Arabist, is the author of *The Arabian Nightmare*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *Dangerous Knowledge*, *Prayer-Cushions of the Flesh*, and *The Limits of Vision*, also available from Overlook.