

# Murals of the Middle East in Our Minds

Leonard S. Kenworthy

MANY MASTERPIECES of painting have been retouched so often by amateurs that the outer layers must be removed before the originals can be seen. This is a delicate and dangerous process but a necessary one in order to reveal the painting of the master artist.

A similar task confronts social studies teachers who want to help students discover the truth about the Middle East. The murals of that part of the world in the minds of most students, and often of teachers, are filled with a curious assortment of stereotypes daubed on in brilliant colors by motion picture producers, Sunday supplement writers, and well-meaning but often misinformed Sunday School teachers and ministers.

These murals usually include harems filled with Hollywood starlets flimsily clad in nylon dresses and imitation jewelry, wild looking saints with streaks of lightning flashing over their heads, modern monarchs streaking by in Cadillacs or racing cars, and street mobs decapitating their most recent ruler.

Removing such stereotypes is a delicate and difficult task requiring creative social studies teaching. Even then the truth may not be found. But the canvas or canvases may be relatively clean and a more accurate mural or series of murals can then be painted of this complex, colorful, creative, and sometimes chaotic part of the world.

Space will not permit the writer to do more than sketch with broad strokes a few of the murals that should be in our minds. The details will have to be filled in by social studies teachers

and students, making much use of rich browns, blues, and greens—favorite colors of this part of the world.

Here, then, are eight murals on the Middle East:

*Mural One: The Land and Resources.* This mural is painted against a background map of the Middle East, with the borders of the mural very faint in order to remind people of the indefinite geographical boundaries of this area.

In a central position is a mountain peak which serves as a representation of such mountains as the Hindu Kush in Afghanistan, the Taurus and Anti-Taurus mountains of Iran, and the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon peaks of Lebanon and Syria, as well as the plateau character of much of this entire area.

Next to this peak is a large, flat area painted in many shades of brown, with an occasional green oasis breaking the expanse. This reminds us of the importance of such deserts as the Arabian, Syrian, and Sahara.

There is a bright green, horseshoe-shaped symbol of the Fertile Crescent, but there are also ugly ravines and giant chasms showing the effect of erosion over the centuries. With a sense of humor, but also with a serious purpose in mind, the painter has included a goat—one of the deadliest enemies of conservation in the Middle East.

The rim of this mural seems at first sight to be a continuous blue line, representing such bodies of water as the Arabian Sea, the Red Sea, the Mediterranean, the Black and Caspian Seas, and the Persian Gulf. And there are three broad strokes in blue in the center of the mural which depict the Nile, the Tigris, and the Euphrates rivers.

Finally, one's eyes catch the tiny oil derricks which dot this mural, the fields of grain, cotton, and tobacco, the citrus fruit orchards, the sheep and camels and horses, and an occasional mining operation for such products as chrome, potassium, and copper.

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This article is a companion piece to "The New Map of Africa in My Mind," which appeared in the March 1960 issue of *Social Education*. Dr. Kenworthy is Professor of Education at Brooklyn College and the author of several books, including *Leaders of New Nations* (Doubleday and Company, 1959) and *Profile of Nigeria* (Doubleday, 1960).

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At the edge of the mural we see the bare outlines of Europe, Africa, and Asia, reminding us of the strategic location of this area as a crossroads of continents throughout history.

*Mural Two: The People and Their Ways of Living.* This mural seems to be a montage of many groups of people engaged in a variety of activities. As we glance quickly across the canvas we see a group of men seated at tables in a coffee-house, sipping their thick, black coffee while they listen to the radio installed in one corner. Then we spot a group of women and children drawing water from the village well and chatting with each other. Nearby is a camel caravan passing through the Khyber Pass between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The largest figure is a peasant farmer on a tiny plot of ground breaking the soil with an old-fashioned wooden plow. He is a symbol of the 75 percent of the population in this part of our globe who engage in primitive farming. In a later mural we shall see his modern counterpart.

Then there are groups of school children and university students, shoppers in open bazaars or souks and in large, modern stores, and groups of men working in oil refineries, textile mills, and small factories producing everything from rope, made from the jute of Pakistan, to sugar.

In one corner the painter has sketched several types of homes, ranging from the very common flat-roofed structures to modern apartment houses in such rapidly growing cities as Ankara, Baghdad, Beirut, Cairo, Karachi, Teheran, and Tel-Aviv. A closer look reveals a kibbutz in Israel, a refugee camp, a group of tents of Bedouin nomads, and the bee-hive looking houses of northern Syria.

If we could hear the people in this mural talking, there would be a predominance of Arabic, even though it would represent several dialects. But we would also hear Turkish, Persian, Hebrew, Urdu, French, English, and many other tongues.

We have not lingered long in front of this mural, but its central theme of *variety* has been made.

*Mural Three: Their Religions.* This is a more simple mural in which the painter has given the central position to the famous Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, a sacred spot to Jews, Christians, and Moslems, hoping thereby to show the common features of these three world faiths which had their origins in the Middle East.

In smaller pictures he shows a mosque, a church, and a synagogue and adds the crescent, the cross, and the Star of David as symbols of these three religions.

In order not to complicate the picture, he has obviously omitted any mention of the divisions within each of these three groups, but this is a detail which we can study for ourselves.

Historically, Zoroastrianism also had its beginnings in this part of the globe, but its adherents now live for the most part in India and Pakistan, where they are known as Parsees.

Had the painter wished to dwell on the divisive aspects of religion, he could have portrayed the fighters in the Crusades, the 14 million refugees in Pakistan and India at the time of partition, and the hostilities between Jews and Arabs in the last few years as a result of the partition of Palestine.

*Mural Four: Their Governments.* In the background of this mural are the flags of all the nations of the Middle East. Many of them are in the process of being raised, which is the painter's method of reminding us that many of these countries are new nations.

In the center is a large and deep chasm, and around it the leaders are precariously grouped as if they might fall into the abyss any moment. Obviously this is a reference to the vacuum which existed when the Western European nations pulled out of this part of the world politically after World War II.

In one group are King Saud of Saudi Arabia, King Idris of Libya, King Hussein of Jordan, King Zahir of Afghanistan, and King Pahlevi of Iran. Close by are Colonel Nasser of Egypt, Abdul Karim Kassem of Iraq, General Cemal Gursel of Turkey, General Fuad Chehab of Lebanon, Field Marshal Mohammad Ayub Khan of Pakistan, and Lieutenant General Ibrahim Abboud of the Sudan. Cut off from the rest by a barbed-wire fence is David Ben-Gurion of Israel, an isolated figure in the midst of the Arab world.

In the background are many figures, some of them elder statesmen, some of them soldiers, and some of them groups of men and women taking part in orderly elections.

In the northeast part of this mural is a hand, reaching into Afghanistan, and in the western part of the mural is a large oil tanker, representing the interest of Russia and also of France, England, and the United States in this area. Two large question marks and the initials AL and CENTO make one pause to consider the impor-



tance of the Arab League and the Central Treaty Organization in this area.

*Mural Five: Their Economies.* At the center of this mural is a huge bar graph showing the per capita income of the various countries of the Middle East. Because of its oil production, Kuwait leads with \$1600 per person per year (but actually not so equally divided), Israel comes next with \$800, followed by Lebanon and Turkey with \$250 each. The others are approximately \$100 or less per person per year.

This might be enough to cause considerable contemplation about the economics of this area, but the painter has gone further.

On one side of the bar graph he has shown groups of farmers working on poor soil and with poor seeds and tools. Near them are craftsmen producing beautiful objects but earning little income. The house of a wealthy landlord points to the archaic land systems of most countries, with, for example, one thousand families owning until recently 70 percent of the land of Iran. Here again are the tents and shacks of nearly a million refugees, most of them still not employed.

On the other side of the bar graph the painter has placed some of the more promising economic developments of this region. Here is a dam under construction, representing such new dams as the Aswan High Dam in Egypt, the Habbaniya and Wadi Tharthar projects on the Tigris and Euphrates in Iraq, and the various dams on the Indus in West Pakistan. Here, too, is a figure of "50-50" which represents the new division of profits from oil sales between the local country and the foreign oil company in a majority of instances. A group of factories stands for the light industries which are beginning to appear in most countries, especially in Egypt, Israel, Pakistan, Syria, and Turkey. The stick figure of a man with an arm band marked "U.N." represents the use of technical assistance from that international body in the Middle East.

The painter has made his point that this whole area is economically underdeveloped but that there has been some progress in making the economies of most of these nations viable.

*Mural Six: Their Education.* On this panel there are seven groups of people representing various approaches to education in the Middle East. One is a Koranic school with a group of boys studying together, the major educational effort in most places until recent times. Along-

side it is a group of university students, reminding the viewers of the ancient centers of learning, among them Cairo's Al-Azhar, which preserved and advanced medicine, architecture, mathematics, and other fields for centuries—and which still exist. A third is a small mission school with boys and girls studying together, symbolizing the contribution that such schools have made over a long period, exemplified by such American-sponsored schools as the American University of Beirut and Roberts College. A fourth picture shows a small but new school with boys and girls together in the classrooms, a symbol of the growing number of children in classrooms of elementary schools. A fifth picture is of a Rural Institute in Turkey, a promising attempt of that country to develop teachers for rural areas by training them in the country rather than in the cities. The sixth picture is of a technical institute, a much needed type of school in this whole area and one which is gaining in numbers and in prestige. The last picture is of groups of adults gathered around radios and movie screens, as examples of two of the methods used by almost all the countries to decrease adult illiteracy.

*Mural Seven: Their History.* This mural is of a very different type from the others. It looks like a mammoth procession of people along the "Highway of History," carrying different banners and dressed in many different kinds of clothes. Along the highway are milestones giving the dates of each group. In this way the painter has tried to depict the long, unbroken history of the Middle East from the days of the ancient Egyptians, Sumerians, Hittites, Assyrians, and Babylonians through the eras of the Persians, Greeks, Romans, and Arabs to the Crusades, and on through the hegemony of the Ottomans to the period of Western European domination and the present period of nationalism and independence. It is a colorful pageant which makes us aware again that these have been the countries of the conquered as well as the countries of the conquerors throughout more than 5,000 years of recorded history—a fact which should never be forgotten in trying to understand or to interpret the Middle East.

*Mural Eight: Their Contributions to the World.* In this mural the painter has reproduced a beautiful room with a ribbed ceiling and delicately patterned mosaics. On the floor he has placed a magnificent Persian rug. On the rug he has placed a variety of items, including books



of mathematics, medical instruments, books of fables, a chess board, the alphabet, a lute, guitar and tambourine, a small telescope, a few garden tools, some choice pieces of pottery and some Persian miniatures, leather figures representing Arab Shadow Plays, the Koran and Bible, a few pieces of lace and brocade, some silver enamels and a miniature boat to represent the Phoenicians and their daring exploits as traders. In small letters in the foreground he has placed the phrase, "Creators and Brokers of Civilization."

#### AIMS AND METHODS

In any teaching assignment, as in many other aspects of life, it is important to have clear aims—and a limited number of them. In the foregoing part of this article the writer has attempted to select eight major aims for any study of the Middle East. Readers may not agree with the choice, but they are encouraged to think through the major aspects to be stressed as they look at this part of the world.

With young children it is probably advisable to concentrate largely on the people of the Middle East and their ways of living, trying to understand that they are interesting human beings, carrying on the same activities as Americans—but often in different ways. With older boys and girls, the emphasis should be upon facing similar problems, and finding different solutions owing to history, geography, economics, and philosophy.

If it is decided to study a variety of countries, teachers are urged to develop depth rather than breadth. There are so many aspects to the study of any country that it is impossible to do justice to a single nation in less than two or three weeks. It seems better, therefore, to limit the number of nations to be examined rather than to encourage a superficial study of several countries.<sup>1</sup>

Many methods should be used in a study of the Middle East as in studies of any part of the globe. The interest of different pupils will be aroused through different methods. Furthermore, no one method can possibly cover the multi-dimensional approach necessary to an adequate study of a country or culture.

Among the many methods which teachers can use are the following:

*a. Through globes and maps.* The location of

the Middle East is a prime factor in understanding it, and this can be done only through a wide use of globes and maps, including air-age maps. Some of the confusion regarding the many civilizations in this part of the world will be lessened, too, by the use of maps in simple historical atlases and by maps made by pupils.

*b. Through time-lines.* Because this area has such a long and complicated history, time-lines should be used. Especially recommended is a giant time-line to be placed on the wall of a classroom for frequent use during the study of the history of this area.

*c. Through biography.* The Middle East is rich in biography, and students should be encouraged to read as much in this field as possible. High school teachers might well keep in mind the several well-written accounts of Harold Lamb on men from this part of the world as well as accounts of more recent personalities.

*d. Through pictures, films, and filmstrips.* Because this is a "foreign" part of the world to pupils and because they cannot visit it, pictures of many kinds are a "must." Pictures in textbooks should be studied, pictures collected and mounted on cardboard, and films and filmstrips amply used.

*e. Through role-playing, panels, and debates.* There is no better way to "feel" as other people feel than to read and talk about them and then to try to talk and act as they might do. From the earliest years in school, children can role-play stories of children in the Middle East. And older boys and girls can play the roles of leaders or common people in this part of the world, learning thereby to understand them.

*f. Through music, games, and dances.* Taking part in games and dances of the Middle East or singing some of the more simple songs of that area is highly recommended, especially for younger children. But a warning is sounded that much of the music will be difficult for Western ears to understand and appreciate.

*g. Through trips to art galleries and museums.* Wherever possible, use should be made of nearby art galleries and museums to understand the history and contributions of the Middle East, but this should be supplemented by emphasis upon contemporary affairs lest pupils think of the Middle East only in terms of its history.

*h. Through textbooks and supplementary materials.* Mention of the foregoing methods does not mean that the writer is opposed to using textbooks. It means that they should be used wisely and well and supplemented or comple-

<sup>1</sup> For suggestions on how to study a country see "Studying Other Countries" by Leonard S. Kenworthy in the April, 1959, issue of *Social Education*.



mented by a variety of other reading materials and other experiences.

Teachers who are studying the Middle East with their pupils are urged to give careful consideration to a comprehensive and cumulative program on this area throughout the 12 years of elementary and secondary schools. There is plenty of "content" for a look at this area two or three times in the course of a pupil's school years, but elementary, junior and senior high school teachers need to consult each other on what is to be emphasized at the different levels. The emphasis in the primary grades probably should be on their peers in that part of the world; in the upper elementary grades, on ways of living; in the junior high on countries; and in the senior high schools on history and contemporary problems.

#### SPECIAL RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

Most teachers developing lessons on the Middle East will want to read a few books on that area, chosen according to their own needs and interests and availability of materials. Studying the materials which pupils are going to use will provide further background. In addition to these sources, they may want to avail themselves of other materials already selected for their use.

The best such source is "A Packet on the Middle East," prepared by the American Association for Middle East Studies (730 Fifth Ave., New York 19) and sold for \$2. This contains several pamphlets, two maps, ten pages of pictures, a list of recordings and a list of films and filmstrips.

Another helpful aid is "A Selected Bibliography of Books, Films, Records, and Exhibitions about Asia" published by the United States government and sold for 25 cents by the Government Printing Office, Washington 25, D.C.

"Studying the Middle East in Elementary Schools" (35 cents) and "The Middle East: A Resource Unit for Secondary Schools" (50 cents) and a booklet on "Free and Inexpensive Materials on World Affairs Materials" (\$1) are sold by World Affairs Materials (Brooklyn College, Brooklyn 10, New York).

A general "Reading List on the Middle East" may be purchased for 25 cents from the World Affairs Center (345 East 46th St., New York).

*General Materials for Elementary Schools.* A small shelf of ten books and a pamphlet on the Middle East for elementary schools would include John C. Caldwell's *Let's Visit the Middle East* (John Day, 1958), Francis Copeland's *Land*

*Between: The Story of the Middle East* (Abelard-Schuman, 1958), Susan Nevil's *Picture Story of the Middle East* (McKay, 1956), Vernon Quinn's *Picture Map Geography of Asia* (Lippincott, 1955), and Mary Brittain's *Arab Lands* (Holiday, 1947) as general volumes on the entire area. This shelf would also include Florence Mary Fitch's *Allah the God of Islam: Moslem Life and Worship* (Lothrop, 1950) and Azriel Eisenberg's *The Great Discovery* (Abelard-Schuman, 1956) and Alan Honour's *Cave of Riches* (Whittlesey House, 1956) on the Dead Sea scrolls. On fun and games it would include Joan Rowland's *Fun and Festival from the Middle East* (Friendship Press, 1958) and Nina Millen's *Games Around the World* (Friendship Press, 1959). Of these the writer recommends most heartily the Copeland volume for children as an outstanding book.

*General Materials for Secondary Schools.* Some pupils in secondary schools will need to use some of the references already listed under elementary schools while others will need to use books written primarily for adults.

There are, however, several publications intended primarily for secondary school pupils or especially suited for their use. Among these are four general pamphlets: Two of these are intended as textbooks. They are Emil Lengyel's *The Changing Middle East* (John Day, 1960) and S. Shepard Jones' *America's Role in the Middle East* (Science Research, 1958). The other two are Foreign Policy Headline Books entitled *Middle East in Turmoil* (1957) and *What the Arabs Think* (1952), both obtainable from the Foreign Policy Association (345 East 46th St., N.Y.C. 17).

The one world history textbook which treats the Middle East as a unit is Ethel Ewing's *Our Widening World* (Rand McNally, 1958).

The May, 1960 issue of *Current History* is devoted to "Progress in the Middle East" and should be an excellent source for high school students (obtainable from 1822 Ludlow St., Philadelphia 3 at 80 cents). A reprint of the special issue of *The Atlantic Monthly* on "Perspective on the Arab World" is especially good on cultural phases (obtainable from Intercultural Publications, 60 East 42nd St., New York 17, at 25 cents each for 10 or more copies). The *National Geographic Magazine* for November, 1958 has a general account on "The Arab World" which could be used profitably by many pupils.

In the field of biography Harold Lamb has written several accounts, such as those on *Cyrus the Great* and *Suleiman the Magnificent* and the



writer has recently published a volume on *Leaders of New Nations* which includes chapters on Nasser, King Hussein, and Ben-Gurion. (All three of these volumes are published by Doubleday.)

Over a period of several months, *Scholastic* magazine has printed stories of young people, including several from the Middle East. These have been printed together under the title *Young People of the Eastern Mediterranean* and edited by Charles Joy (Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1959).

On the religions of the Middle East, nearly all pupils will enjoy and profit from *Life* magazine's volume on *The World's Great Religions* (Simon and Schuster, 1958) or the Special Edition for Young Readers, both editions printed in beautiful color. Some students will also enjoy Ruth Smith's *Tree of Life* (Viking, 1942) with its excerpts from the sacred writings of several religions.

*Resources on Countries of the Middle East.* In addition to volumes for adults which deal with specific countries, there is some material for children and young people, which is noted here country by country.

*Afghanistan.* Patricia and Robert Kingsbury's small volume on *Afghanistan and the Himalayan States* (Doubleday, 1960) contains many colored pictures and a good text. This is one of the *Around the World Books*.

*Arabian Peninsula.* Another of the *Around the World Books* is devoted to *The Arabian Peninsula*, written by Harry Hazard (Doubleday, 1959). For children there is Clarice Pont's *No School on Friday* (McKay, 1953) and Eleanor Hoffman's *White Mare of the Black Tents* (Dodd, 1949). Much material is available free from the Arabian-American Oil Company (505 Park Ave., New York 22).

*Egypt.* On this nation there is much available material. Among the recent books are Jeanette Brown's tiny volume for children on *Deedee's Holiday* (Friendship Press, 1956), Arensa Sondergaard's *My First Geography of the Suez Canal* (Little, 1960), and Charles Joy's *Island in the Desert: The Challenge of the Nile* (Coward-McCann, 1959), written for upper elementary and Junior high school readers. Zaki Mahmoud's *The Land and People of Egypt* (Lippincott, 1959) is the most recent volume for older secondary school readers.

*Iran.* General accounts of Iran include Alice Taylor's *Iran* (Holiday, 1955) and Donald Bar-

ton's *Iran* (Doubleday, 1958), a volume in the *Around the World Series*. For children there is Alice Kelsey's book of folk tales entitled *Once the Mullah* (Longman's, 1954) and her volume entitled *I Give You My Colt* (Longmans, 1956).

*Iraq.* The only recent reference on Iraq suitable for young people is an article in the October, 1958 *National Geographic* on "Iraq—Where Oil and Water Mix."

*Israel.* Of the many books on Israel special mention should be made of Nora Kubie's *First Book of Israel* (Watts, 1953), Gloria Hoffman's *Home At Last: A Story of Children in Israel Today* (McKay, 1951), Sonia Gidal's *Meier Shfeya: A Children's Village in Israel* (Behrman House, 1950), Sonia and Tim Gidal's *My Village in Israel* (Panethon, 1959), and an older volume by Evelyn Greenberg on *The Little Tractor Who Travelled to Israel* (Behrman, 1949). For junior and senior high school pupils one of the best accounts is Gail Hoffman's *Land and People of Israel* (Lippincott, 1955). A wealth of free material is available from the Israel Office of Information (11 East 70th St., New York 21).

*Lebanon.* There are four new references on this nation, three of them for children. These are Dorothy Blatter's *The Thirsty Village* (Friendship Press, 1958), Jim Breetveld's *Getting to Know Lebanon* (Coward, 1959), the section in the 1958 *Hi-Neighbor* book of UNICEF (U.S. Committee on UNICEF, United Nations, New York), and an article in the *National Geographic* for April, 1958 on "Young-Old Lebanon Lives by Trade." World Affairs Materials (Brooklyn College, Brooklyn 10) has two brief biographical booklets on "Charles Malik Speaks" and "Khalil Gibran Speaks" available at two for 15 cents.

*Pakistan.* John C. Caldwell has done an interesting volume, profusely illustrated, entitled *Let's Visit Pakistan* (John Day, 1960) which is especially good for upper elementary school pupils. For older students there are three new or fairly new books. One is Patricia and Robert Kingsbury's *Pakistan* (Doubleday, 1958) in the *Around the World Series*, a second is Herbert Feldman's *The Land and People of Pakistan* (Macmillan, 1958), and a third is Geoffrey Tease's *The Young Traveler in India and Pakistan* (Dutton, 1956). Teachers will find the "Fun and Festival from India, Pakistan and Ceylon" (Friendship Press, 1954) very helpful.

*Turkey.* Among the best books for children on Turkey are Marjorie Darling's *Journey to Ankara* (Macmillan, 1954), Nizabet Eye's *Turgut*



*Lives in Turkey* (Longmans, 1939), Lucile McDonald's *Sheker's Lucky Piece* (Oxford, 1941), and Alice Kelsey's book of humorous folktales entitled *Once the Hodja* (Longmans, 1953). For slightly older pupils in elementary or junior high school there is Fanny Davis' *Getting to Know Turkey* (Coward-McCann, 1957).

For junior and senior high school students there are four new volumes. These include Ali Riza's *The Land and People of Turkey* (Macmillan, 1958), William Spencer's *Land and People of Turkey* (Lippincott, 1958), Alexander Melamid's *Turkey* (Doubleday, 1957) in the Around the World Series, and Ray Brock's *Ghost on Horseback: The Incredible Ataturk* (Little, Brown, 1955).

A wealth of material is also available from the

Turkish Information Office, 444 East 52nd St., New York 22. Of special interest is a complete kit on Turkey sold by the International Communications Foundations (9033 Wilshire Blvd., Beverly Hills, California) for \$58, including artifacts, four color filmstrips, and study prints.

Unfortunately there is nothing of special interest to report on Jordan, Libya, the Sudan, and Syria.

*Films and filmstrips.* Persons desiring material on films and filmstrips on the Middle East should consult the "Sight and Sound" section of this issue, obtain the film list in the Middle East Packet referred to earlier, or purchase a "List of Films on the Middle East" from the World Affairs Center (345 East 46th St., New York 17). This list costs 15 cents.