

BOOK REVIEW RESPONSE

A Response to Aaron Jakes's Review of *The Persistence of Orientalism: Anglo-American Historian and Modern Egypt*

Peter Gran

Department of History, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA, USA

Email: peter.gran@temple.edu

In his review of *The Persistence of Orientalism* (IJMES 56, no. 1, 189–91) Professor Aaron Jakes contends that my recent work amounts to a re-litigation of matters already settled by the publication of my earlier *Islamic Roots of Capitalism* (1979). Would that this was the case! But it is not, as his flawed synopses of my work make clear. First the new book is a spinoff of other books I have written, and second, *Islamic Roots* was not written as he seems to think mainly for those studying the late 18th century. It was written for all those broadly concerned with the issue of the Hegelian construction of history as the rise of the West, as well as for those concerned with the diffusionist approach to the subject of modernism in Egypt. In *Islamic Roots* I also raised the question of the interplay between the secular and religious inside the scholastic tradition. Professor Jakes errs in claiming much of this has been discussed in our field, much less settled. As for *The Persistence of Orientalism*, it is a book with a different argument, one that I hope will be of some interest. Very briefly, the book speaks to the inadequate response of American intellectuals to the challenge of multiculturalism of the 1970's and thereafter, and how we in our field are affected by it in our work and how we may in some small way help in responding to the challenge. In the book I argue that over the past century our field has maintained an identity-based neo-Biblical paradigm for the study of Egypt, one retaining the imagery of stagnation, despotism and of change as external, thus making Western colonialism or neo-colonialism something to be welcomed. Seemingly, the role of the field has been to make the subject conform to the needs of that kind of a particular Anglo-American identity. What I hope, given the amount of information about Egypt to which we now are privy, is that we might move beyond that role and hopefully produce better science, more helpful results for Egypt, and for our society, which is currently torn between holding on to old King Tut and moving forward to create some new American identity synthesis. Dozens of scholars write about such matters. Jakes errs in imagining I think I am alone in thinking such thoughts or that I am writing tragedy or claiming some unique objectivity, or that I am a language fetishist. Keep guessing! This is a book about the persistence of orientalism in this field among British and American scholars as a matter of scholarly choice. The background to it was our American problems that prompted me to write *The Rise of the Rich* (2009) and *Beyond Eurocentrism* (1996) and now this book, which only in a few respects connects to *Islamic Roots*, a work from another era.

Aaron Jakes chose not to reply.