

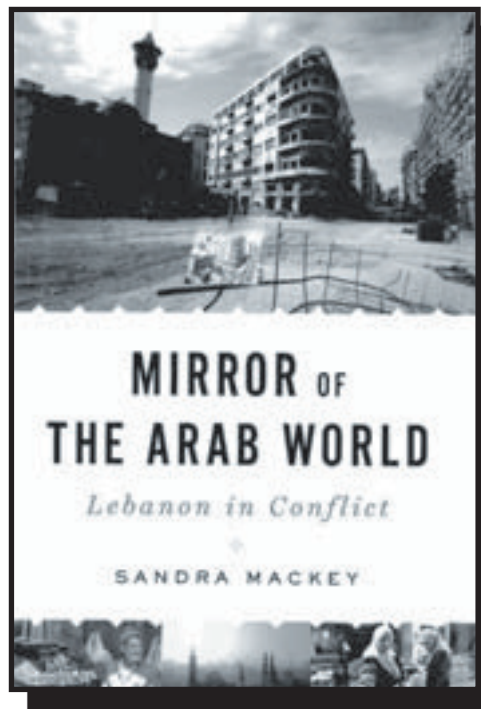
BOOK REVIEW | **Mirror of the Arab World: Lebanon in Conflict**

by Sandra Mackey | Reviewed by Kip Kirkpatrick (Lay '07)

Mirror of the Arab World concludes with this sobering observation: “Most Arabs, Westerners, and Israelis—Muslims, Christians, and Jews—are ignoring the warning signs that three faiths and three cultures...are on a collision course that could be catastrophic for all.” While most of us sort of figured that out after the events of 9-11, few of us really understand how we got to this point and why the conflicts in the Arab world are so intractable and dangerous. Sandra Mackey’s book provides that understanding.

Mackey utilizes history and developments in Lebanon as a lens through which to see and understand the realities of the Arab world. Most of us have been vaguely and generally aware of events in Lebanon over the years. But, most of us didn’t pay much attention to “what was going on over there” because “they’ve been fighting among themselves for centuries” and it probably “really doesn’t have much to do with us.” Fortunately for those of us who were not paying much attention, Sandra Mackey was paying close attention. What’s going on over there does have a lot to do with us. This book gets us headed in the direction of a better understanding of the Arab world.

Mackey lives in Atlanta and has written a number of books on the Middle East. *Mirror of the Arab World* is her latest. It is well written, well researched and factual. She covers a lot of ground in only 266 pages, but more importantly, she provides an understandable, substantive analysis of the Arab world and the cultural, political and religious forces which shape it, the conflicts within the Arab world and the conflicts between the Arab world and the West. Her analysis that Arab cultures are dependent on family, tribe, religion and sect for individual identity and security, rather than on national institutions or governments, explains a lot about why things are as they are in the Middle East today. Her assessment of the



role of the U.S., Israel and Europe in creating the morass in the Middle East is precise and blunt.

As a METS 2007 traveler, I must confess that I was somewhat puzzled by the “Arabs first and Christians second” statement we heard our first night in Damascus, and I was more than a little confused after Sofyan’s Sunni vs. Shia explanation on the bus ride to Petra. *Mirror of the Arab World* clears up a lot on both issues and guides us toward a better understanding of the complex situation in the Arab world.

Sandra Mackey is to be commended for sharing her knowledge and analysis. Reading the book inevitably causes one to wonder about the Bush administration’s understanding of the Arab world before invading Iraq in 2003. It also leads one to speculate about whether things might be very different today if Mr. Bush had spoken with Mrs. Mackey before making the decision to invade Iraq.