'FAZAL AL-ARAB ←‘AL-AURBA’. By Dr. Sigrid Hunke Nahe Weg-2 Bonn. (Germany). Arabic translation by Dr. Fawād Ḥasnain ‘Ali, Published by Dar al-Ma’raf, Cairo, Egypt. Pages 436. Price not indicated. Perhaps available free from the author.

'Europe's Indebtness to Arabs', that is what the title of this Arabic version of a German book means. This work is being given wide publicity throughout the world and especially in the Arab countries. Favourable reviews on the book are appearing in the Arab press. The husband of the author told me in Algiers at the time of Sixth Seminar on Islamic Thought that its Urdu version will be published shortly from Pakistan.

The author, a German orientalist, gives the impression that the book has been written for the Western readers, but the important historical facts have been presented in such a way that the work becomes useless for the Western reader as no references have been given to substantiate the various discussions. It is needless to say that the works of the orientalists had value only on account of their references based on constant research work. Inspite of this glaring shortcoming the translator Dr. Fawād Ḥasnain ‘Ali of Egypt elevates the author to the status of the Chancellor of the German Republic in importance, bestowing on her the title of ‘Shams ‘Uthub’ (The Sun of God). (5). I take this opportunity to introduce this much publicised though controversial work to the Pakistani readers.

In the introduction the author makes it clear that the topic of the book is Arabs and their Culture and not Islam, (p-11) although she could not deny, that Arabs rose to the pinnacle of their glory due to Islam. (p. 17). However like her fellow orientalists she never misses any chance to distort Islamic teachings. For example about the observation of purdah by the Muslim women, she remarks that it is against the nature of Arabs whose women folk were as free as the modern European women and these were the Iranians who introduced purdah in Arabic Society. (p. 347). Similarly she magnifies those historical events which go against the interest of the present Muslim world. Take the example of 'Aqṣa Mosque' which has been desecrated by the Jews some time back. According to the research of the Author, it was actually the famous Church of Holy Maryam which was converted into 'Aqṣa Mosque' by Caliph 'Abdul Malik. (p-353). If this contention of the author is accepted then perhaps no room is left for the Muslims to agitate on its desecration. Similar stories are related about the Qurṭaba Mosque of Spain and all the other famous mosques of Islam.

The book consists of seven chapters and its main theme is that the Arabs and the Europeans had friendly relations during whole of their history. In the early periods the West benefitted from the progressive thoughts of the Arabs and as a corollary now the Arabs should do the same. The book is concluded with the remarks that the co-operation between the Arabs and the Europeans will be blessing for the humanity at large. (p-412).

But unfortunately her thesis is marred by the Crusades waged by the Europeans against the Muslim Arabs for more than two centuries. The author very cleverly shifts
the blame for the hundreds of the Crusades on to the Seljuk Turks, observing that while the Arabs and the Europeans had friendly relations, these Turks who were very cruel and tyrant by nature occupied Jerusalem and posed a danger for the Roman Empire and their rude behaviour resulted in the Crusades. (p. 39). The Muslims are proud of the Seljuk Dynasty not only for preventing the European religious bigots to enter Islamic lands, but for their grand contribution to the Islamic Culture. The author in her tirade against these glorious Muslim Rulers forgets that these were the Seljuks who gave the world the famous ‘Nizamia University of Baghdad’ on whose pattern most of the Western Universities were established.

In the first chapter the influences of the Arabs over Europe enlisted are: Use of pigeons for postal purposes (p-50); use of perfumes and scents; introduction of Baths and Improvement in Dresses. (p-51). While praising the Arabs for these progressive thoughts she mentions the thousands of Baths in Baghdad which beside other facilities had hair-cutting saloons for men and women (p-52). Hair-cutting saloons for women in the Islamic Capital of Baghdad is a new piece of research.

The second chapter discusses the numerals which according to the author is an Indian achievement and was passed on to Europe after refinement by the Arabs. (P-53). The third chapter is devoted to the development of astronomy by the Arabs. But its development is described in such a way that leaves no place for the Arabs to rejoice. The three famous sons of Mūsā the Astronomer who are believed to have influenced Europe in this field are shown as taking their lessons from an expert Iranian Astronomer (p-126), and again it was passed on to Europe by their non-Muslim disciples.(p-112).

Muslim Medical Science which is the topic of the fourth chapter has left indelible influence on West. Like many Western Scholars, the author is full of praise for the Muslim contribution in this field notably by Abū Bakr Moḥammad Ibn Zakrīā Rāzī (d-155) and Ibn Sinā (Avicenna p-210). However she forgets that both of these physicians were of Iranian origin, while those of Arab origin have been given very little space. For example the greatest of the Arab Physician and Surgeon Abul Kasim az-Zahravi has been treated in a half page only (p-186). There is no reference to his famous Encyclopaedia of Medicines and Surgery entitled ‘Al-Taṣreef’ which consisted of thirty books. Perhaps the reason being that az-Zahravi was a staunch and faithful Muslim while al-Rāzī the Iranian who dominates the chapter of more than hundred pages was an atheist. It would have been more appropriate if these achievements of the Arabs as well as non-Arabs were discussed under Islamic Culture.

In the Vth chapter the author defends the Arabs in a very strange way. Refuting the charges that Arabs were cruel and tyrant in their conquests, it is observed that they conquered different lands only for the sake of booty and plunder and nothing else. (p-241). In this chapter she also tries to estrange the Arabs from the Iranians by remarking that in the whole conquered lands only the Iranians hated the Arab's culture. (p-250). Also her praise for Imām Ibn Ḥāzem-the philosopher, who was the first sociologist to write the Philosophy of History leaves no room for Arab rejoicing by pointing to his Spanish origin. (p-250).

These are some of the many painful features of the book which will hurt every Muslim. It seemed to me very strange when some Arab Scholars praised this book during
the Sixth Seminar on Islamic Thought held recently in Algeria. During the discussion on Turks in the Seminar when Mr. Ahmed Hamani, Chairman of the Supreme Islamic Council of Algeria defended the Turks, it gave me courage to ask his opinion about the book under review. He remarked that the husband of the author, himself an orientalist had been a professional diplomat in Arab lands for many years, and one could not expect any service in the cause of Islam by a non-Muslim. I would like to conclude my review with a remark made by Prof. Syedi Mohammad Yousaf Jeeri of Målî who was present at the time of my query. He woefully said it would be a good thing if ever our Arab brothers would be able to know the fact that the State of Israel was the direct result of the labours of these orientalists, most of whom are of Jewish origin.

Rafiullah.