



The Middle East

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE LAST 2,000 YEARS

Bernard Lewis

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In a sweeping and vivid survey, renowned historian Bernard Lewis charts the history of the Middle East over the last 2,000 years, from the birth of Christianity through the modern era, focusing on the successive transformations that have shaped it.

Drawing on material from a multitude of sources, including the work of archaeologists and scholars, Lewis chronologically traces the political, economical, social, and cultural development of the Middle East, from Hellenization in antiquity to the impact of westernization on Islamic culture. Meticulously researched, this enlightening narrative explores the patterns of history that have repeated themselves in the Middle East.

From the ancient conflicts to the current geographical and religious disputes between the Arabs and the Israelis, Lewis examines the ability of this region to unite and solve its problems and asks if, in the future, these unresolved conflicts will ultimately lead to the ethnic and cultural factionalism that tore apart the former Yugoslavia.

Elegantly written, scholarly yet accessible, *The Middle East* is the most comprehensive single volume history of the region ever written from the world's foremost authority on the Middle East.

The Middle East Details

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Author : Bernard Lewis

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Amin Mosayyebzadeh says

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Thomas says

Anyone who wants to understand the Middle East should start with Bernard Lewis.

Aaron says

A good general history of the Middle East with a strong focus on Islamic (think Turkish, Lewis's main area of study) history from 622 AD to the first gulf war. The most important sections cover culture, local politics and the lower classes, subjects rarely covered in most surveys, which often seem to only bounce from war to war.

Andrew Rosner says

This is a somewhat condensed examination of the last two thousand years of history in the Middle East. If you're looking for detailed biographies of every major historical figure during that time, or elaborate accounts of military conquest, this probably isn't the volume for you. On the other hand, if you're curious about the broader cultural, technological and linguistic currents that have shaped the region, you've found a home. At the book's centre is Islam, and the book occasionally feels like a history of Islam rather than the Middle East as a whole. Still, as Lewis argues, it has been the defining force for the region since its emergence from the Arabian deserts over fourteen centuries ago. And if there's a historian in the West who understands the theological underpinnings of Islam and its relationship with the other great faiths of the region (Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, even the contributions of the Greeks), I haven't read him. If nothing else, this book and Lewis' work as a whole disproves Edward Said's rather offensive thesis concerning Western outlooks on the Middle East.

Lewis does a very good job of describing the forces shaping daily life in the Middle East; the bureaucratic administration of the Ottoman empire, land tenure, agriculture, languages, literature, even music. If there's one minor failing, I think he could have developed a more explicit thesis on why the West was able to catch up and eventually surpass the Islamic world in virtually every field of human endeavour (to be fair, though, he has addressed this subject in other books). And one does get a sense of a once great civilization that has lost its way and is still struggling to cope with the changes wrought by modernity.

Leonardo Rydin Gorjão says

Extensive and somewhat hard if not your main topic of occupation. I battled through but enjoyed. As someone born in the "West", with little or no contact with Islam, this book clarified plenty of what I had imagined to be.

Simone says

This is an interesting overview of Middle Eastern history by respected Middle East scholar Lewis. Although, as some other reviewers here have noted, his style is not highly entertaining, if you are interested in learning something and enjoy challenging your mind, rather than being passively entertained by pop culture versions of history, it's worth the effort. Lewis takes the panoramic view of the social, cultural, religious, and political history of the region, which I found illuminating of current events. In particular, the knowledge I gained about the workings and dissolution of the Ottoman Empire has enriched, deepened, and changed my view of events from the Syrian Civil War to the Arab-Israeli conflict. I appreciated greatly that Lewis' tone was neither apologetic nor condescending towards his chosen subject, but rather respectful and as objective as one can be.

My main criticism of the book is that it did not entirely live up to its title. In a book on the history of the whole Middle Eastern region, one would expect a balance in coverage of the Ottoman Empire and the Muslim empires of Persia/Iran. Lewis spent the vast majority of the book describing characteristics and events of the Ottoman Empire. I came away with only a vague idea of events in Persia/Iran. Nonetheless, I highly recommend this book.

Mark Becher says

I thought the book was a useful overview of Middle Eastern history from the Roman Empire through the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Obviously that is a lot of ground to cover in less than four hundred pages, so the level of detail is not terribly great. Lewis is aiming instead for a general understanding of the major trends in the region's development. Since the entire subject was new to me at the time of reading this book I had to resign myself to letting many of the dates and names slide past me for the time being; you just can't hope to catch all of the information the first time through. But it did provide me a useful skeleton outline of events and personalities, so that now as I continue to read in the field I am beginning to recognize details I have seen before rather than constantly coming across new information. The book is emphatically not a history of Islam; but only touches on it as a part of the history of the region. But I would suggest the work as a

necessary historical background for any serious study of the content and especially the development of the Muslim faith. I would argue that it would be exceptionally difficult to arrive at any decent understanding of Islam without first studying the region in which it originated and the peoples by whom it was adopted and who were/are responsible for its propagation.

Alex Hui says

This book provides a very detailed account of how Islam influence the Middle East from sixth century and how the West shape the recent picture of Middle East. Readers may find the book focus much on Islam and a bit little of what happened regionally during Middle Age. It's also a good book on mental development of Middle East people.

Dennis says

Positives: Lewis does an excellent job in the middle section of the book analyzing aspects of Middle East culture and government, such as the state and the arts. His anecdotes are longer in these sections, and he is better at focusing on subjects that he finds important. His modern history section is tightly written as well and fairly entertaining.

Negatives: First, Lewis has a pro-colonial and pro-Western bias that shines strongly in the modern history section. Lewis certainly believes that Western society and philosophy is "better," and seems to chide Middle Eastern states for not following it as he thinks is best. Second, the section on pre-Islamic and medieval history is very boring and fact-focused. To me, it seemed that Lewis had a weaker grasp of pre-Ottoman history and decided to give a comprehensive narration rather than focus on the most important themes/states. Unfortunately, this doesn't make for engaging reading, especially when he limits himself to 130 or so pages.

Tim Green says

An interesting overview of the history of the Middle East.

Trying to condense two millennia of history of an entire region into one book is rather ambitious and at times one does get confused with the details and direction. This is particularly true in the earlier part of the book, covering the earlier history, where of course records are rare. But whilst I don't come away from this book thinking I understand the history well, I do now have a rough idea of how the history has developed.

Where the book really picks up is in the last hundred pages or so, covering the last couple of centuries. Here the historical record is far more detailed, allowing a far more in depth analysis and fortunately for me is where my particular interests lie.

Overall an interesting read.

Matt says

Lewis is a good historian and his was an enjoyable enough read (more so than Karen Armstrong's book on the same subject). Creates a good understanding of some of the great historical ironies (e.g. how an ascendent Islamic culture preserved much of the history and literature that were foundational for liberal western culture, how Islamic culture went into a great period of decline in part because they didn't know of any good sources of energy to fuel their economic growth). A good companion book would be Reza Aslan's "No God But God." Lewis deals with theology in the context of history, while Aslan's focus is the theology of Islam from a moderate perspective.

Cynthia says

This was a fantastic book! A clear, unbiased presentation of Middle East history over the last 2000 years - and told in such a compelling way that it was more than just facts and figures but a dramatic and engaging story. Lewis has a definite knack for story telling, turns of phrase, and well placed vignettes. Actually, I think there are at least three or four blockbuster movies we could make from this book!

Charlie says

Wow.

I saw this book in the bargain bin and figured I could not go wrong. My historical knowledge, well my knowledge period, of the middle-east was quite minimal.

There is a lot of information in this tome, more than a person could ever hope to retain. That said, I think it is more than possible for most people to slog through and gain great insight into the politics, the religion of this rich and fascinating part of the world.

This read is a major endeavor so be prepared, but if you are truly looking for a comprehensive history of the middle-east, this is the book for you. If not, well, find an abridged edition. =)

Shotgun says

To že v knize jsou popisovány d?jiny, kultura, atd... nejen jedné zem? ale Blízkého východu jako celku pomáhá více rozum?t situaci v tomto regionu a pochopit co a pro?.

Na to, o jaký druh literatury jde, se ?te opravdu dob?e a auto?i ?tená?e nezahlcují nadm?rným množstvím dat, jmen vládc? a podobných v?cí. Doporu?uji.

Parsa Parvin says

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