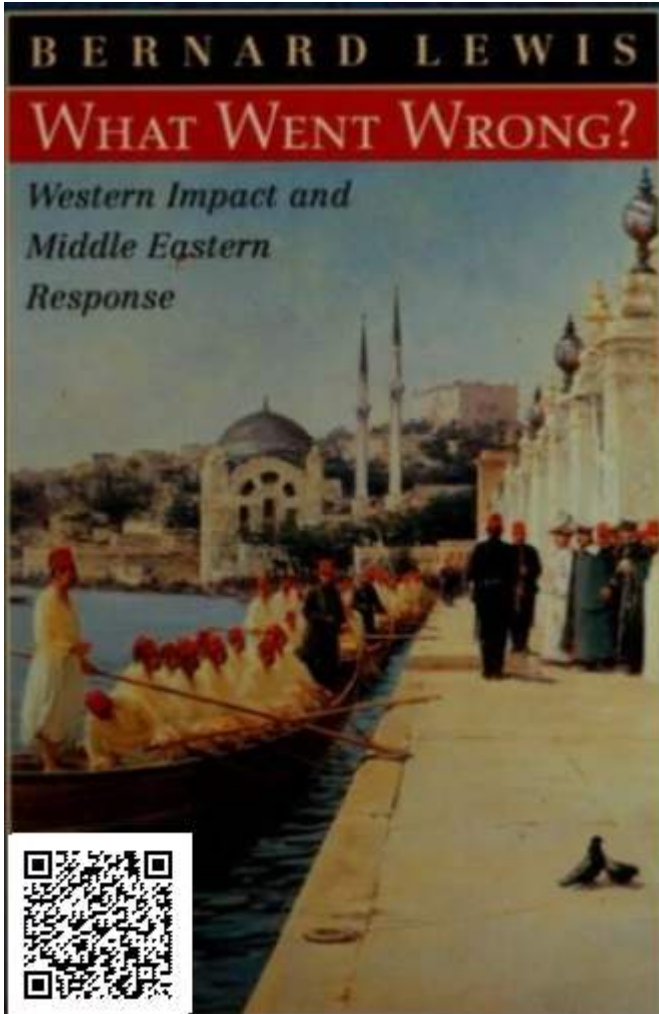


What Went Wrong?

By Bernard Lewis

Review & Excerpts



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“If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.” — Sun Tzu, The Art of War

Introduction by Amazon.com:

For centuries, the world of Islam was in the forefront of human achievement -- the foremost military and economic power in the world, the leader in the arts and sciences of civilization. Christian Europe was seen as an outer darkness of barbarism and unbelief from which there was nothing to learn or to fear. And then everything changed. The West won victory after victory, first on the battlefield and then in the marketplace. In this elegantly written volume, Bernard Lewis, a renowned authority on Islamic affairs, examines the anguished reaction of the

Islamic world as it tried to make sense of how it had been overtaken, overshadowed, and dominated by the West. In a fascinating portrait of a culture in turmoil, Lewis shows how the Middle East turned its attention to understanding European weaponry, industry, government, education, and culture. He also describes how some Middle Easterners fastened blame on a series of scapegoats, while others asked not "Who did this to us?" but rather "Where did we go wrong?" With a new Afterword that addresses September 11 and its aftermath, *What Went Wrong?* is an urgent, accessible book that no one who is concerned with contemporary affairs will want to miss (208 pages)

<https://www.amazon.com/What-Went-Wrong-Between-Modernity/dp/0060516054>

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Bernard Lewis

Bernard Lewis, FBA (31 May 1916 – 19 May 2018) was a British American historian specializing in oriental studies. He was also known as a public intellectual and political commentator. Lewis was the Cleveland E. Dodge Professor Emeritus of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University. Lewis' expertise was in the history of Islam and the interaction between Islam and the West. He was also noted in academic circles for his works on the history of the Ottoman Empire.

Lewis served as a soldier in the British Army in the Royal Armored Corps and Intelligence Corps during the Second World War before being seconded to the

Foreign Office. After the war, he returned to the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London and was appointed to the new chair in Near and **Middle Eastern History**.

In 2007 and 1999, respectively, Lewis was called "the West's leading interpreter of the Middle East" and "the most influential post war historian of Islam and the Middle East". His advice was frequently sought by neoconservative policymakers, including the Bush administration. However, his support of the Iraq War and neoconservative ideals have since come under scrutiny.

Lewis was also notable for his public debates with Edward Said, who accused Lewis and other orientalists of misrepresenting Islam and serving the purposes of imperialist domination, to which Lewis responded by defending Orientalism as a facet of humanism and accusing Said of politicizing the subject. Lewis argued that the deaths of the Armenian Genocide resulted from a struggle between two nationalistic movements and that there is no proof of intent by the Ottoman government to exterminate the Armenian nation. These views prompted a number of scholars to accuse Lewis of genocide denial and resulted in a successful civil lawsuit against him in a French court.

Review-1

"What Went Wrong?" by Bernard Lewis is a thought-provoking and insightful examination of the historical and contemporary challenges facing the

Muslim world. The book delves into the complex and often turbulent relationship between the Islamic world and the West, shedding light on the reasons behind the decline of Islamic civilization and the rise of Western dominance.

Lewis, a renowned scholar of Middle Eastern and Islamic history, brings his extensive knowledge and expertise to the fore in this work. The book is divided into several chapters that explore different aspects of the Muslim world's interactions with the West, spanning from the Ottoman Empire to the present day. Lewis meticulously dissects various key factors contributing to the challenges faced by the Muslim world, such as political and economic stagnation, social and cultural dynamics, and the impact of colonialism.

One of the strengths of "**What Went Wrong?**" is Lewis's ability to provide historical context and nuanced analysis. He delves into the historical roots of the Muslim world's difficulties, showcasing the long trajectory of decline and the reasons behind it. This historical perspective allows readers to understand the complexities of the region and its relations with the West. The book also addresses the impact of European colonialism and the subsequent struggle for independence in many Muslim-majority countries. Lewis's portrayal of the challenges faced by these nations as they navigated the transition from colonial rule to independent statehood is particularly insightful.

However, "What Went Wrong?" is not without its critics. Some argue that Lewis's approach may

oversimplify or generalize complex issues within the Muslim world. Critics also suggest that the book's title, "**What Went Wrong?**," might imply a monolithic view of the Muslim world's problems, which can be problematic when discussing such a diverse and multifaceted region. Nevertheless, it is imperative for Muslims to confront reality and lead lives of honor in the world by accommodating and coexisting with others. (*Brig Aftab Khan*)¹

Review-2

"What Went Wrong?" is a book written by Bernard Lewis that explores the reasons behind the decline of the Islamic world and its response to Western influence¹. The book was published in 2002, before the events of 9/11, and has been both praised and criticized for its analysis of the relationship between the West and the Islamic world.

According to a review by Victoria Stodden, Lewis's book offers an explanation of how Muslims view political science and constitutional law differently from Westerners¹. For Muslims, Holy Law lays out the role of the ruler and his relationship to believers (his subjects). The typical Western metric for evaluating governments (on a scale from liberty to tyranny) is misplaced here since liberty is a legal term in the Middle Eastern context, not a political term as used in the West. The converse of tyranny is justice, not liberty, and justice meant that the ruler was there by right and not by usurpation and that he governs according to God's law,

¹ <https://DefenceJournal.com/author/aftab-khan>

which usually came down to a spectrum between arbitrary and consultative government. Lewis notes that this latter issue is not well defined in the Koran, and thus debate ensues, but authoritative non-consultative government is seen as undesirable, even from a ruler accepted as legitimate.

The book has also been reviewed by other publications such as The Guardian ² and Kirkus Reviews ³. However, I could not find any reviews that explicitly discuss what went wrong with Bernard Lewis's book.

Source:

(1) Book Review: "What Went Wrong" by Bernard Lewis.

<https://archive.blogs.harvard.edu/idblog/2008/03/15/book-review-what-went-wrong-by-bernard-lewis/>

(2) Passports to paradise | History books | The Guardian.

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/sep/22/historybooks.highereducation>

(3) ISLAM AND THE WEST | Kirkus Reviews.

<https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/bernard-lewis/islam-and-the-west/>

(4) The Muslim Discovery of Europe by Bernard Lewis | Goodreads.

https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/137632.The_Muslim_Discovery_of_Europe

(5) Islam and the West by Bernard Lewis | Goodreads.

https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/229852.Islam_and_the_West

Excerpts

Preface:

For centuries, the world of Islam was in the forefront of human achievement -- the foremost military and economic power in the world, the leader in the arts and sciences of civilization. Christian Europe was seen as an outer darkness of barbarism and unbelief from which there was nothing to learn or to fear. And then everything changed. The West won victory after victory, first on the battlefield and then in the marketplace.

In this elegantly written volume, Bernard Lewis, a renowned authority on Islamic affairs, examines the anguished reaction of the Islamic world as it tried to make sense of how it had been overtaken, overshadowed, and dominated by the West. In a fascinating portrait of a culture in turmoil, Lewis shows how the Middle East turned its attention to understanding European weaponry, industry, government, education, and culture. He also describes how some Middle Easterners fastened blame on a series of scapegoats, while others asked not "Who did this to us?" but rather "Where did we go wrong?"

With a new Afterword that addresses September 11 and its aftermath, *What Went Wrong?* is an urgent, accessible book that no one who is concerned with contemporary affairs will want to miss.

What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response is a book by Bernard Lewis released in January 2002, shortly after the September 11 terrorist attack, but written shortly before. The nucleus of this book appeared as an article published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in January 2002.

The book's thesis is that throughout recent history, specifically beginning with the failure of the second Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1683, the Islamic world has failed to modernize or to keep pace with the Western world in a variety of respects, and that this failure has been seen by many within the Islamic world as having allowed Western powers to acquire a disastrous position of dominance over those regions.

Introduction:

For many centuries the world of Islam was in the forefront of human civilization and achievement. In the Muslims' own perception, Islam itself was indeed coterminous with civilization, and beyond its borders there were only barbarians and infidels. This perception of self and other was enjoyed by most if not all other civilization—Greece, Rome, India, China, and one could add more recent examples. In the era between the decline of antiquity and the dawn of modernity, that is, in the centuries designated in European history as medieval, the Islamic claim was not without justification. Muslims were of course aware that there were other, more or less civilized, societies on earth, in China, in India, in Christendom.

But China was remote and little known; India was in the process of subjugation and Islamization. Christendom had a certain special importance, in that it constituted the only serious rival to Islam as a world faith and a world power. But in the Muslim view, the faith was superseded by the final Islamic revelation, and the power was being steadily overcome by the greater, divinely guided power of Islam.

In the course of the seventh century, Muslim armies advancing from Arabia conquered Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and North Africa, all until then part of Christendom, and most of the new recruits to Islam, west of Iran and Arabia, were indeed converts from Christianity. In the eighth century, from their bases in

North Africa, Arab Muslim forces, now joined by Berber converts, conquered Spain and Portugal and invaded France; in the ninth century they conquered Sicily and invaded the Italian mainland. In 846 C.E. a naval expedition from Sicily even entered the River Tiber, and Arab forces sacked Ostia and Rome. This provoked the first attempts to organize an effective Christian counterattack. A subsequent series of campaigns to recover the Holy Land, known as the Crusades, ended in failure and expulsion.

In Europe, Christian arms were more successful. By the end of the eleventh century the Muslims had been expelled from Sicily, and in 1492, almost eight centuries after the first Muslim landing in Spain, the long struggle for the reconquest ended in victory, opening the way to a Christian invasion of Africa and Asia. But meanwhile there were other Muslim threats to European Christendom. In the East, between 1237 and 1240 C.E., the Tatars of the Golden Horde conquered Russia; in 1252 the Khan of the Golden Horde and his people were converted to Islam. Russia, with much of Eastern Europe, was subject to Muslim rule, and it was not until the late fifteenth century that the Russians finally freed their country from what they called the Tatar yoke.” In the meantime a third wave of Muslim attack had begun, that of the Ottoman Turks, who conquered Anatolia, captured the ancient Christian city of Constantinople, invaded and colonized the Balkan peninsula, and threatened the very heart of Europe, twice reaching as far as Vienna.

At the peak of Islamic power, there was only one civilization that was comparable in the level, quality, and variety of achievement; that was of course China. But Chinese civilization remained essentially local, limited to one region, East Asia, and to one racial group.

Islam in contrast created a world civilization, polyethnic, multiracial, international, one might even say intercontinental.

For centuries the world view and self-view of Muslims seemed well grounded. Islam represented the greatest military power on earth— its armies, at the very same time, were invading Europe and Africa, India and China. It was the foremost economic power in the world, trading in a wide range of commodities through a far-flung network of commerce and communications in Asia, Europe, and Africa.

Islam had achieved the highest level so far in human history in the arts and sciences of civilization. Inheriting the knowledge and skills of the ancient Middle East, of Greece and of Persia,* it added to them new and important innovations from outside, such as the use and manufacture of paper from China and decimal positional numbering from India. It is difficult to imagine modern literature or science without one or the other.

Isolation with little contact Infidel West

One Cause of decline of Muslims, Living in isolation with little contact and knowledge if Infidel West

Before the end of the eighteenth century Turks, Iranians, and other Middle Easterners had had very little

opportunity for direct observation of the West—nothing remotely comparable with the opportunities that Westerners had enjoyed in the East even in the period when the West was inferior in every material and cultural respect. Contacts occurred mainly in three areas—diplomacy, commerce, and war. But while the European powers from relatively early times maintained offices, then consulates, and eventually embassies in the East, the Eastern powers did not follow this practice and sent only rare and brief special missions.

A similar disparity may be seen in commerce. Western merchants traveled extensively and, on the whole, freely in the Muslim lands. Middle-Eastern merchants did not normally travel in the West. Muslims had an extreme reluctance to venture into non-Muslim territory, and the Westerners did not want them to come. When, for example, it was proposed to establish an inn and warehouse for Turkish merchants in Venice, there was a long and anguished debate in the councils of the Venetian state, whether or not the Turks should be allowed to build such a center.¹ The importance of the Turkey trade for Venice was obvious, and Venetian merchants were well ensconced in Istanbul and other Turkish cities. But there were strong objections before the proposal was approved. One of the arguments was that this would be even worse than having Jews and Protestants, because unlike the Jews, the Turks had an army and a navy, and were therefore really dangerous. Sometimes, when the Turks sent one of their emissaries to a European ruler, there would be anxious

debate in the country to which he was going, and even in the countries through which he would pass, on whether or not such envoys should be permitted to come or pass. This was by no means an easy or obvious question.

On the Muslim side, there was an equal reluctance to go to Europe. The Muslim jurists discuss at some length whether it is permissible for a Muslim to live in a non-Muslim country. They consider the case of the non-Muslim in his own country, or in their terms, the infidel in the land of the infidels, who sees the light and is converted to the true faith. May he stay where he is or may he not? The general consensus of the classical jurists is no. It is not possible for a Muslim to live a good Muslim life in an infidel land. He must leave home and go to some Muslim country. An even harder case was posed by the reconquest of Spain. If a Muslim land is conquered by the Christians, may they stay under Christian rule? The answer of many jurists was again no, they may not stay. The Moroccan al-Wanshars,² considering the case of Spain, posed what turned out to be a purely hypothetical question: if the Christian government is tolerant and allows them to practice their religion, may they then stay? His answer was that in that case it is all the more important for them to leave, because under a tolerant government, the danger of apostasy is greater. The Muslim attitude was different from that of other eastern civilizations that suffered the impact of the expanding West. For Hindus, Buddhists, Confucians, and others, Christianity and Christendom

were new and unknown. Those who came from there, and the things they brought, could therefore be considered more or less on their merits. For Muslims, Christianity, and therefore by implication everything associated with it, was known, familiar, and discounted. Christianity and Judaism were precursors of Islam, with holy books deriving from authentic revelations, but incomplete and corrupted by their unworthy custodians, and therefore superseded by the final and perfect revelation of Islam. What was true in Christianity was incorporated in Islam. What was not so incorporated was false.

On the Christian side there was a similar difference in attitude to the three major Asian civilizations, and for obvious reasons. Neither 37

Indians nor Chinese ruled the Christian holy land, nor had they conquered Spain, captured Constantinople, or besieged Vienna. Neither Hindus nor Buddhists nor yet Confucians had ever dismissed the Christian gospels as corrupt and outdated, and offered a later, better version of God's word to replace them. There were special difficulties in the long encounter between Islam and Christendom that were not present in the encounters between either of these civilizations and the remoter civilizations of Asia.

Muslims in general had little desire or incentive to venture into Christian Europe, and indeed the doctors of the Holy Law for the most part prohibited such journeys, except for a specific and limited purpose. The usual purpose—later the excuse—was to ransom captives.

Some, but not all juristic authorities also permitted travel in infidel lands to purchase supplies in times of shortage.

Even among the very small number of people from Middle-Eastern countries who ventured into the West for diplomacy or commerce, a significant proportion were not Muslims but members of the minority religious communities. These were occasionally Jews, more often nonCatholic Christians, Greeks or Armenians, who were considered to be fairly reliable from an Ottoman point of view. Certainly they could not be suspected of sympathy with the Catholic powers.

In these circumstances it is not surprising that there was virtually no knowledge of Western languages. Only Italian had some currency in the Eastern Mediterranean, and served as a medium of communication between East and West. But even this involved Eastern Christians and Jews and rarely, if ever, Muslims. Minority doctors with Western training also played an increasing role in the practice of medicine. Arabic, Persian, and Turkish scientific writings of the period show some limited acquaintance with Western medicine and Western geography, both needed for practical reasons, but no awareness of Western history or culture.

The discovery of the New World illustrates both points. A Turkish version of Columbus's own (now lost) map, prepared in 1513, survives in the Topkapı¹ Palace in Istanbul, where it remained, unconsulted and unknown, until it was discovered by a German scholar in 1929.

A Turkish book on the New World was written in the late sixteenth century, and was apparently based on information from European sources—oral rather than written. It describes the flora, fauna, and inhabitants of the New World, and, of course, expresses the hope that this blessed land would in due course be illuminated by the light of Islam and added to the sultan's realms. This too remained unknown until it was printed in Istanbul in 1729.

Eastern Languages

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries chairs of Arabic were established in the major European universities. Later Persian was added—but not Turkish. This being a modern language, it was, like English, French, German, et cetera, not seen as a subject for university study.

There was a considerable body of printed literature, in European languages, dealing with the history, culture, religion, and current conditions of the Islamic world. The European reader even had at his disposal a selection of Middle-Eastern classical literature in translation.⁹ European Christians had a further advantage; they could also find help from the local communities of their Christian co-religionists, of whom there were many in Turkey, Egypt, Syria, and even as far east as Iraq and Iran.

Muslim visitors had no comparable recourse in western Europe, where the Muslim communities had been

expelled after the reconquest and where no contact or recruitment was permitted.

But a new start was made in the 1830s, and thereafter first Turks, then Persians, and then other Middle-Eastern governments, as these came into existence, attained a high level of diplomatic skill and professionalism.

Interaction and Learning from infidels

It is difficult for a Westerner to appreciate the magnitude of this change, in a society accustomed to despise the infidel barbarians beyond the frontiers of civilization. Even traveling abroad was suspect; the idea of studying under infidel teachers was inconceivable. The question of learning from infidels arose at a relatively early date in connection with directly military matters. The story is told in the Turkish chronicles of a Venetian war galley that was cast ashore in a storm and abandoned by its crew. Ottoman naval specialists examined the hulk, and found things that they thought it might be useful to adopt. But the religio-legal question arose—is it permissible to imitate the infidels? The answer of the religious authorities was that it is permissible to imitate the infidels in order to more effectively fight against them. The same argument was used in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when the ulema were again consulted on the lawfulness of the various Westernizing reforms in the armed forces and, more especially, the establishment of schools with European (not always converted) teachers and European (not

always translated) textbooks. A question often asked by the memorialists was: “Why is it that in the past we were always able to catch up with the new devices of the infidels, and now we are no longer able to do so?” Interestingly, for a long time they did not ask why it was always the infidels who introduced the new devices. When they did ask this question, something more than modernization—catching up—was involved.

First the pasha of Egypt, then the sultan of Turkey, then the shah of Persia all sent selected groups of students to London, Paris, and elsewhere. At first these student missions were overwhelmingly military, and their purpose was to ferret out and master the secrets of Western warfare. But this involved learning Western languages, and these students found other, perhaps more interesting, reading matter besides their military manuals. For the first time young Muslims from the Middle East were directly exposed to the impact of Western ideas. In the past, the barrier between the two civilizations was such that the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the scientific revolution had been irrelevant and unknown in the Islamic Middle East. But the revolutions in France offered new ideas and new models.

The final answers given by traditional writers to the older formulation of the question were always “let us go back to our roots, to the good old ways, to the true faith, to the word of God.” With that of course there was always the assumption that if things are going badly, we are being punished by God for having abandoned the

true path. That argument loses cogency when it is the infidels who are benefiting from the change.

Middle Easterners found it difficult to consider what we might call civilizational or cultural answers to this question. To preach a return to authentic, pristine Islam was one thing; to seek the answer in Christian ways or ideas was another—and, according to the notions of the time, self-evidently absurd. Muslims were accustomed to regard Christianity as an earlier, corrupted version of the true faith of which Islam.

was the final perfection. One does not go forward by going backward. There must therefore be some circumstance other than religion or culture, which is part of religion, to account for the otherwise unaccountable superiority achieved by the Western world.

Westerner at the time—and many Muslims at the present day—might suggest science and the philosophy that sustains it. This view would not have occurred to those for whom philosophy was the handmaiden of theology and science merely a collection of pieces of knowledge and of devices. Muslims had their own philosophy that had retained and perfected the heritage of the ancients under the aegis of Islam. They had also their own science, handed down by their own great scientists of the past..

Instead they looked for the secret of Western success in those features of the West that were most distinctive, most different from anything in their own experience—and not tainted with Christianity. The French Revolution, the first major movement of ideas in

Europe that was not explicitly or implicitly Christian, and even projected itself in the East as anti-Christian, had seemed for a while to offer such a choice. But under the Empire and the Restoration it lost this appeal. For the whole of the nineteenth and most of the twentieth century the search for the hidden talisman concentrated on two aspects of the West—economics and politics, or to put it differently, wealth and power.

Later attempts to catch up with the Industrial Revolution fared little better. Unlike the rising powers of Asia, most of which started from a lower economic base than the Middle East, the countries in the region still lag behind in investment, job creation, productivity, and therefore in exports and incomes.

According to a World Bank estimate, the total exports of the Arab world other than fossil fuels amount to less than those of Finland, a country of five million inhabitants. Nor is much coming into the region by way of capital investment. On the contrary, wealthy Middle Easterners prefer to invest their capital abroad, in the developed world.

The other immediately visible difference between Islam and the West was in politics and more particularly in administration. Already in the eighteenth century ambassadors to Berlin and Vienna, later to Paris and London, describe—with wonderment and sometimes with admiration—the functioning of an efficient bureaucratic administration in which appointment and promotion are by merit and qualification rather than by patronage and favor, and recommend the adoption of

something similar.

The impact of Western examples and Western ideas also brought new definitions of identity and consequently new allegiances and aspirations.

In the meantime the process of modernization was accentuated and accelerated by three major developments in communication: 1. Printing. The establishment and spread of printing presses. 2. Translation. At first this was limited; then increasing numbers of books were translated, printed, and distributed in Turkish, Arabic, and Persian. The earliest translations obviously were of works deemed useful by the rulers and officials who commissioned them. But in time works of literary content were also translated and published.

An editorial in the first issue of the Ottoman Monitor, dated May 14, 1832, sets forth the purpose and functions of these early official newspapers. The newspaper, it explains, is a natural development of the old tradition of imperial historiography, with the same function of “making known the true nature of events and the real purport of the acts and commands of the government, in order to prevent misunderstanding and forestall uninformed criticism.” This conception of the role of the press has not entirely disappeared from the region. “A further purpose,” the article explains, “is to provide

useful knowledge on commerce, science and the arts.

The establishment of newspapers and magazines in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish brought several significant

changes—the opportunity, for the first time, to follow events inside and outside the Islamic world.

Law

Together with the journalist came another newcomer, whose appearance was equally portentous—the lawyer. In an Islamic state, there is in principle no law other than the shar‘a, the Holy Law of Islam. The reforms of the nineteenth century and the needs of commercial and other contacts with Europe led to the enactment of new laws, modeled on those of Europe—commercial, civil, criminal, and finally constitutional. In the traditional order the only lawyers were the ulema, the doctors of the Holy Law, at once jurists and theologians. The secular lawyer, pleading in courts administering secular law, represented a new and influential element in society.

Education

Education too, in the old order, had been largely the preserve of the men of religion. This also was taken from them, as reforming and imperial rulers alike found it necessary to establish schools and later colleges and universities, to teach modern skills and dispense modern knowledge. The new-style teacher, sometimes schoolmaster, sometimes professor, joined the journalist and the lawyer as one of the intellectual pillars of the new order.

The cumulative effect of reform and modernization was, paradoxically, not to increase freedom but to reinforce

autocracy:

1. By strengthening the central power through the new apparatus of communication and enforcement that modern technology placed at its disposal, and
2. By enfeebling or abrogating the limiting traditional intermediate powers such as the provincial gentry and magistracy, the urban patriciate, the ulema, and the old-established military bodies such as the Corps of Janissaries. Their authority derived from tradition and recognition rather than from the central government, toward which they could therefore afford to adopt a more independent attitude. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries their power, in the provinces and even in the capital.

Muslim Lands under West

The once great Ottoman Empire was defeated and occupied, its Muslim provinces parceled out among the victorious powers. Persia, though technically neutral, had been overrun by British and Russian forces, sometimes as allies, sometimes as rivals, sometimes as both. The rest of the Muslim world was incorporated in one or other of the great European empires. It seemed that the long struggle between Islam and Christendom, between the Islamic empires and Europe, had ended in a decisive victory for the West.

They taught their subjects English, French, and Dutch because they needed clerks in their offices and counting houses. But once these subjects had mastered a Western European language, as did

increasing numbers of Muslims in Western-dominated Asia and Africa, they found a new world open to them, full of new and dangerous ideas such as political freedom and national sovereignty and responsible government by the consent of the governed.

Some of the movements of revolt against Western rule were inspired by religion and fought in the name of Islam. But the most effective at that time—those that actually won political independence—were led by Westernized intellectuals who fought the West with its own intellectual weapons.

In the West, one makes money in the market, and uses it to buy or influence power. In the East, one seizes power, and uses it to make money.

Morally there is no difference between the two, but their impact on the economy and on the polity is very different.

The earliest and most extensive progress was in the economic position of women. Even under the traditional dispensation this was relatively good, and certainly far better than that of women in most Christian countries before the adoption of modern legislation. Muslim women, as wives and as daughters, had very definite property rights, which were recognized and enforced by law.

Through the nineteenth century an increasing number of young Muslims, most of them officers or civil servants, most of them Ottoman, began to speak of

how Europe, “the smallest of the continents,” achieved paramountcy in the modern world through its mastery of the sciences. Some speak more broadly of knowledge—the same word designates both knowledge and science.

And yet, despite all these efforts, and despite the foundation of schools and faculties of sciences in almost all the new universities, the incorporation of modern science—or should one say Western science?—was lamentably slow.

The reluctance of the Islamic Middle East to accept European science is the more remarkable if one considers the immense contribution of the Islamic civilization of the Middle Ages to the rise of modern science.

In the development and transmission of the various branches of science, men in the medieval Middle East—some Christian, some Jewish, most of them Muslim—played a vital role. They had inherited the ancient wisdom of Egypt and Babylon. They had translated and preserved much that would have otherwise been lost of the wisdom and science of Persia openness enabled them to add much that was new from the science and techniques of India and China.

Nor was the role of the medieval Islamic scientist purely one of collection and preservation. In the medieval Middle East, scientists developed an approach rarely used by the ancients—experiment. Through this and other means they brought major

advances in virtually all the sciences.

Much of this was transmitted to the medieval West, whence eager students went to study in what were then Muslim centers of learning in Spain and Sicily, while others translated scientific texts from Arabic into Latin, some original, some adapted from ancient Greek works. Modern science owes an immense debt to these transmitters. And then, approximately from the end of the Middle Ages, there was a dramatic change. In Europe, the scientific movement advanced enormously in the era of the Renaissance, the Discoveries, the technological revolution, and the vast changes, both intellectual and material, that preceded, accompanied, and followed them. In the Muslim world, independent inquiry virtually came to an end, and science was for the most part reduced to the veneration of a corpus of approved knowledge. There were some practical innovations—thus, for example, incubators were invented in Egypt, vaccination against smallpox in Turkey. These were, however, not seen as belonging to the realm of science, but as practical devices, and we know of them primarily from Western travelers.

Another example of the widening gap may be seen in the fate of the great observatory built in Galata, in Istanbul, in 1577. This was due to the initiative of Taq al-Dn (ca. 1526–1585), a major figure in Muslim scientific history and the author of several books on astronomy, optics, and mechanical clocks.

Taq alDn's observatory was razed to the ground by a squad of Janissaries, by order of the sultan, on the recommendation of the Chief Mufti.

The relationship between Christendom and Islam in the sciences was now reversed. Those who had been disciples now became teachers; those who had been masters became pupils, often reluctant and resentful pupils. They were willing enough to accept the products of infidel science in warfare and medicine, where they could make the difference between victory and defeat, between life and death. But the underlying philosophy and the sociopolitical context of these scientific achievements proved more difficult to accept or even to recognize. This rejection is one of the more striking differences between the Middle East and other parts of the non-Western world that have in one way or another endured the impact of Western civilization.

It is often said that Islam is an egalitarian religion. There is much truth in this assertion. If we compare Islam at the time of its advent with the societies that surrounded it—the stratified feudalism of Iran and the caste system of India to the east, the privileged aristocracies of both Byzantine and Latin Europe to the West—the Islamic dispensation does indeed bring a message of equality. Not only does Islam not endorse such systems of social differentiation; it explicitly and resolutely rejects them. The actions and utterances of the Prophet, the honored precedents of the early rulers of Islam as preserved by tradition, are overwhelmingly against privilege by descent, by birth, by status, by wealth, or even by race,

and insist that rank and honor are determined only by piety and merit in Islam.

The Muslim woman had property rights unparalleled in the modern West until comparatively recent times. Even for the slave, Islamic law recognized human rights—the term “civil rights” has no meaning in the context of those times and places—unknown in classical antiquity, in the Orient, or in the colonial and postcolonial societies of the Americas.

In spite of this, however, it is probably true that even at the beginning of the nineteenth century a poor man of humble origin had a better chance of attaining to wealth, power, and dignity in the Islamic lands than in any of the states of Christian Europe, including post-Revolutionary France.

There was still opportunity for those who were free, male, and Muslim—but there were severe restrictions on those who lacked any of these three essential qualifications. The slave, the woman, and the unbeliever were subject to strictly enforced legal, as well as social, disabilities, affecting them in almost every aspect of their daily lives.

Islam recognizes no ordination, no sacraments, no priestly mediation between the believer and God. The so-called clergyman is perceived as a teacher, a guide, a scholar in theology and law, but not as a priest.

Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. The children of Israel fled from bondage, and wandered for 40 years in the wilderness before they were permitted to enter the Promised Land. Their leader Moses had only a glimpse,

and was not himself permitted to enter. Jesus was humiliated and crucified, and his followers suffered persecution and martyrdom for centuries, before they were finally able to win over the ruler, and to adapt the state, its language, and its institutions to their purpose. Muhammad achieved victory and triumph in his own lifetime. He conquered his promised land, and created his own state, of which he himself was supreme sovereign. As such, he promulgated laws, dispensed justice, levied taxes, raised armies, made war, and made peace. In a word, he ruled, and the story of his decisions and actions as ruler is sanctified in Muslim scripture and amplified in Muslim tradition.

The Muslims brought their own scripture, in their own language, and created their own state, with their own sovereign institution and their own holy law. Since the state was Islamic, and was indeed created as an instrument of Islam by its founder, there was no need for any separate religious institution. The state was the church and the church was the state and God was head of both, with the Prophet as his representative on earth.

In the words of an ancient and much cited tradition: "Islam, the ruler, and the people are like the tent, the pole, the ropes and the pegs. The tent is Islam, the pole is the ruler, the ropes and pegs are the people. None can thrive without the others

Another relevant difference between Islamic and Christian political notions is the survival, and latterly revival, in the Islamic world, of the religious basis of identity which, in Christian Europe, was to a large

extent replaced by the territorial or ethnic nation-state. Nations and countries of course existed in the Islamic world, and there is much evidence, in the literature, of a sense of ethnic, cultural, and occasionally regional identity. But at no time were these seen as forming the basis of statehood or of political identity and allegiance. In the vast and rich historiographic literature of Islam, there are basically three kinds of historical topic. There are universal histories, meaning, with few exceptions, the history of the Islamic oecumene and the caliphs and sultans who ruled over it. There are dynastic histories, focused on a ruling family and covering the often extremely variable territories over which it ruled. There are local or regional histories, most commonly of a city and the immediately surrounding district. These last are primarily topographical and biographical. There are no histories however of the Arabs or of Arabia, of the Turks or of Turkey, of the Iranians or of Iran. These are very ancient entities, but very modern notions. And in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when, under the impact of new ideas and pressures from abroad, Muslims began to define themselves and their loyalties in national and patriotic terms, it is surely significant that in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish alike, the words used to designate “the nation” are words that had previously been used to designate the religious polity of Islam—and this, despite the available choice of a number of words of primarily ethnic or territorial content.

Secularism

In the secularization of the West, God was twice dethroned and replaced—as the source of sovereignty by the people, as the object of worship by the nation. Both of these ideas were alien to Islam, but in the course of the nineteenth century they became more familiar, and in the twentieth they became dominant among the Westernized intelligentsia who, for a while, ruled many if not most Muslim states.

In a nation-state defined by the country over which it ruled or the nation that constituted its population, a secular state was in principle possible.

Only one Muslim state, the Turkish Republic, formally adopted secularism as a principle, and enacted the removal of Islam from the constitution and the abrogation of the shar‘a, which ceased to be part of the law of the land. The six former Soviet republics of predominantly Muslim population inherited a rigorously secular system, except in the sense that communism was an established faith. So far most of them show little inclination to Islamize their laws and institutions. One or two other Muslim countries went some of the way toward separation, and several more restricted shar‘a law to marriage, divorce, and inheritance, and adopted modern, mostly West European, laws in other matters. More recently, there has been a strong reaction against these changes. A whole series of Islamic radical and militant movements, loosely and inaccurately designated as “fundamentalist,” share the objective of

undoing the secularizing reforms of the last century, abolishing the imported codes of law and the social customs that came with them, and returning to the Holy Law of Islam and an Islamic political order.

In three countries, Iran, Afghanistan, and Sudan, these forces have gained power. In several others they exercise growing influence, and a number of governments have begun to reintroduce shar'a law, whether from conviction or—among the more conservative regimes—as a precaution. Even nationalism and patriotism, which after some initial opposition from pious Muslims had begun to be generally accepted, are now once again questioned and sometimes even denounced as anti-Islamic. In some Arab countries, defenders of what has by now become the old-style secular nationalism accuse the Islamic fundamentalists of dividing the Arab nation and setting Muslim against Christian. The fundamentalists reply that it is the nationalists who are divisive, by setting Turk against Persian against Arab within the larger community of Islam, and that theirs is the greater and more heinous offense.

In the literature of the Muslim radicals and militants the enemy has been variously defined. Sometimes he is the Jew or Zionist, sometimes the Christian or missionary, sometimes the Western imperialist, sometimes—less frequently—the Russian or other communist.⁷ But their primary enemies, and the most immediate object of their campaigns and attacks, are the native secularizers—those who have tried to weaken or modify

the Islamic basis of the state by introducing secular schools and universities, secular laws and courts, and thus excluding Islam and its professional exponents from the two major areas of education and justice.

Enemies of Islam?

The arch-enemy for most of them is Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic and the first great secularizing reformer in the Muslim world. Characters as diverse as King Faruq and Presidents Nasser and Sadat in Egypt, Hafiz al-Asad in Syria and Saddam Hussein in Iraq, the Shah of Persia and the kings and princes of Arabia, were denounced as the most dangerous enemies of Islam, the enemies from within.

Terror ideology

The issue was defined with striking clarity in a widely circulated booklet by Muhammad 'Abd al-Salm Faraj, the ideological guide of the group that murdered President Sadat of Egypt:

Fighting the near enemy is more important than fighting the distant enemy. In jiha-d the blood of the Muslims must flow until victory is achieved. But the question now arises: is this victory for the benefit of an existing Islamic state, or is it for the benefit of the existing infidel regime?

And is it a strengthening of the foundations of this regime which deviates from the law of God?

These rulers only exploit the opportunity offered to them by the nationalist ideas of some Muslims, in order to accomplish purposes which are not Islamic, despite their outward appearance of Islam. The struggle of a jiha-d must be under Muslim auspices and under Muslim leadership, and concerning this there is no dispute.

The cause of the existence of imperialism in the lands of Islam lies in these self-same rulers. To begin the struggle against imperialism would be a work that is neither glorious nor useful, but only a waste of time. It is our duty to concentrate on our Islamic cause, which means first and foremost establishing God's law in our own country, and causing the word of God to prevail. There can be no doubt that the first battlefield of the jiha-d is the extirpation of these infidel leaderships and their replacement by a perfect Islamic order. From this will come release.

Role of Clergy

Even after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the practice continued in the Ottoman successor states in the Middle East, where governments appointed functionaries with the title Chief Mufti, exercising religious, one might even say ecclesiastical, jurisdiction over a city, a province, or a country, and playing a political role unknown in classical Islam. One sees it even more dramatically in the ayatollahs of Iran, a title dating from quite modern times and unknown to classical Islamic history. If the rulers of the Islamic

Republic but knew it, what they are doing is Christianizing Islam in an institutional sense, though not of course in any religious sense. They have already endowed Iran with the functional equivalents of a pontificate, a college of cardinals, a bench of bishops, and, especially, an inquisition,⁹ all previously alien to Islam. They may in time provoke a Reformation.

Women, who in Islamic law have the right to own and dispose of property, figure prominently among founders of waqfs, sometimes reaching almost half the number. This is perhaps the only area in the traditional Muslim society, in which they approach equality with men. By means of the institution of waqf, many services, which in other systems are the principal or sole responsibility of the state, were provided by private initiative.

Islam could not be a theocracy

In this sense, classical Islam had no priesthood, no prelates who might rule or even decisively influence those who did. The caliph, who was head of a governing institution that was state and church in one, was himself neither a jurist nor a theologian, but a practitioner of the arts of politics and sometimes of war. The office of ayatollah is a creation of the nineteenth century; the rule of Khomeini and of his successor as “supreme jurist” an innovation of the twentieth.

Coercion

There is nothing in Islamic history to compare with the emancipation, acceptance, and integration of

other-believers and non-believers in the West; but equally, there is nothing in Islamic history to compare with the Spanish expulsion of Jews and Muslims, the Inquisition, the Auto da fé's, the wars of religion, not to speak of more recent crimes of commission and acquiescence. There were occasional persecutions, but they were rare, and usually of brief duration, related to local and specific circumstances.

s. Within certain limits and subject to certain restrictions, Islamic governments were willing to tolerate the practice, though not the dissemination, of other revealed, monotheistic religions. They were able to pass an even severer test, by tolerating divergent forms of their own. Even polytheists, though condemned by the strict letter of the law to a choice between conversion and enslavement, were in fact tolerated, as Islamic rule spread to most of India. Only the total unbeliever—the agnostic or atheist— The same standard was applied in the tolerance of deviant forms of Islam. In modern times, Islamic tolerance has been somewhat diminished.

The threat that Christendom now seemed to be offering to Islam was no longer merely military and political; it was beginning to shake the very structure of Muslim society. Western rulers, and, to a far greater extent, their enthusiastic Muslim disciples and imitators, brought in a whole series of reforms, almost all of them of Western origin or inspiration, which increasingly affected the way Muslims lived in their countries, their ci

Use of religion by the state

and the use of the state power by the clergy to impose their doctrines and rules on others. This is a problem long seen as purely Christian, not relevant to Muslims or for that matter to Jews, for whom a similar problem has arisen in Israel. Looking at the contemporary Middle East, both Muslim and Jewish, one must ask whether this is still true—or whether Muslims and Jews may perhaps have caught a Christian disease and might therefore consider a Christian remedy.

In a later letter, written in 1560, Busbecq noted: “. . . no nation has shown less reluctance to adopt the useful inventions of others; for example, they have appropriated to their own use large and small cannons and many other of our discoveries. They have, however, never been able to bring themselves to print books and set up public clocks. They hold that their scriptures, that is, their sacred books, would no longer be scriptures if they were printed; and if they established public clocks, they think that the authority of their muezzins and their ancient rites would suffer diminution.”

Some centuries earlier, the Islamic Middle East had led the world in science and technology, including devices for measuring time. But Middle-Eastern technology and science ceased to develop, precisely at the moment when Europe and more specifically Western Europe was advancing to new heights. The disparity was gradual, but progressive.

Medieval states did not have frontiers in the modern sense. On land as in time, there was no precise line of demarcation, but rather a zone, a band, or interval. This was sufficient for all practical purposes. Islamic laws regulating relations within and between states deal with people, not places. A ruler ruled as far as he could collect taxes and maintain order. Where there were no taxes to collect, the precise boundary didn't matter.

Modern Middle East

The modern history of the Middle East, according to a convention accepted by most historians of the region, begins in 1798, when the French Revolution, in the persons of General Napoleon Bonaparte and his expedition, arrived in Egypt, and for the first time subjected one of the heartlands of Islam to the rule of a Western power and the direct impact of Western attitudes and ideas. Interestingly, this aspect of the French occupation was seen immediately in Istanbul, where the sultan, as suzerain of Egypt, was much concerned about the seditious effect of these ideas on his subjects. A proclamation was therefore prepared and distributed both in Turkish and in Arabic throughout the Ottoman lands, refuting the doctrines of revolutionary.

Modernisation Sultan Hameed II

The primary purpose of the modernization was military. Defeat had made it clear even to the most

conservatively reluctant that something was wrong and needed to be put right, and the sultan and his advisors set to work to create a new army. 1830. This meant, of course, a new officer corps, with new training and new weapons, and the infrastructure that was needed to support, train, equip and move this army.

History

Medieval Islam was an intensely historical-minded society, and produced a vast, rich, and varied historical literature. But medieval Muslims were not interested in non-Muslim history, nor in pre-Muslim history apart from some limited attention to the historical references in the Quran. Until the Mongol conquests, they had virtually nothing to say about their neighbors in Asia, Africa, and Europe, and very little even about their own pagan ancestors. The inclusion of the Islamic lands in the vast Mongol Empire brought some awareness of other civilizations, but it was of limited effect and duration. The Ottoman Turks did show some mild interest in the history of their neighbors.

The first Turkish printing press, which flourished in Istanbul in the first half of the eighteenth century, printed in all 17 books, of which a fair number were books on history.

The nineteenth century brought a considerable development in the movement of translation from Western languages into Turkish in Turkey and Egypt, then into Arabic in Egypt and Syria, finally into Persian in Persia and India. Egypt of course is an

Arabic-speaking country, but its first modernizing ruler, Muuhammad 'Al Pasha (ruled 1805–1848), was an Ottoman of Albanian origin, and he and his top military and other officials were all Turkish-speaking. The printing press that he set up in Bulaq published the first important series of printed translations of European books into both Turkish and Arabic. Between 1822 and 1842, 243 books were printed in Cairo, the great majority translations, more than half of them into Turkish.

History primarily meant political and military history, much of it in the form of biography. There was no great interest in that, and none in anything else. Middle-Eastern readers knew for example nothing of the Renaissance and precious little even of the Reformation, despite its obvious relevance to the conduct of Ottoman foreign policy.

The Jews, followed later by the Greeks and Armenians were allowed to print in their own languages and scripts but were strictly forbidden to print in the Arabic script. The argument put forward at the time was that this, being the script in which the Qur'n was written, was sacred, and therefore printing it would be a kind of desecration. Another possible factor was the vested interest of the guild of calligraphers.

The development of Persian printing vividly illustrates the diverse influences shaping the cultural history of Iran. Woodblock printing was introduced into Iran as early as the thirteenth century by the Mongol rulers who used it, Chinese-style, to print paper money. Despite the

threat of capital punishment for refusing to accept it, the mass of the population would have nothing to do with the paper money, and the attempt was abandoned. The first book printed in the Persian language was probably a Judaeo-Persian Pentateuch, in Hebrew.

Printing Press, Delay of 3 Centuries

An interesting comment on this process was made by Kemal Atatürk in his speech at the opening of the new law school in Ankara on November 5, 1925: “Think of the Turkish victory of 1453, the conquest of Constantinople, and its place in the course of world history. That same might and power which, in defiance of a whole world, made Istanbul forever the property of the Turkish people, was too weak to overcome the ill-omened resistance of the men of law and to receive in Turkey the printing press, which had been invented at about the same time. Three centuries of observation and hesitation were needed, of effort and energy expended for and against, before antiquated laws and their exponents would permit the entry of printing into our country.”

Translators

A translation requires a translator, and a translator has to know both languages, the language from which he is translating and the language into which he is translating. Such knowledge, strange as it may seem, was extremely rare in the Middle East until

comparatively late. There were very few Muslims who knew any Christian language; it was considered unnecessary, even to some extent demeaning.

Exchanges

Medieval Europe took its religion from the Middle East, as the modern Middle East took its politics from Europe. And just as some Europeans managed to create a Christianity without compassion, so did some Middle Easterners create a democracy without freedom. In every era of human history, modernity, or some equivalent term has meant the ways, norms, and standards of the dominant and expanding civilization.

Every dominant civilization has imposed its own modernity in its prime. The Hellenistic kingdoms, the Roman Empire, the medieval Christendoms, and Islam, as well as the ancient civilizations of India and China, all imposed their norms over a wide area and radiated their influence over a much broader one, far beyond their imperial frontiers. Islam was the first to make significant progress toward what it perceived as its universal mission, but modern Western civilization is the first to embrace the whole planet. Today, for the time being, as Atatürk recognized and as Indian computer scientists and Japanese high-tech companies appreciate, the dominant civilization is Western, and Western standards therefore define modernity.

CONCLUSION

In the course of the twentieth century it became abundantly clear in the Middle East and indeed all over the lands of Islam that things had indeed gone badly wrong. Compared with its millennial rival, Christendom, the world of Islam had become poor, weak, and ignorant. In the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the primacy and therefore the dominance of the West was clear for all to see, invading the Muslim in every aspect of his public and—more painfully—even his private life.

Modernizers—by reform or revolution—concentrated their efforts in three main areas: military, economic, and political. The results achieved were, to say the least, disappointing. The quest for victory by updated armies brought a series of humiliating defeats. The quest for prosperity through development brought, in some countries, impoverished and corrupt economies in recurring need of external aid, in others an unhealthy dependence on a single resource—fossil fuels. And even these were discovered, extracted, and put to use by Western ingenuity and industry, and doomed, sooner or later, to be exhausted or superseded—probably superseded, as the international community grows weary of a fuel that pollutes the land, the sea, and the air wherever it is used or transported, and puts the world economy at the mercy of a clique of capricious autocrats. Worst of all is the political result: The long quest for freedom has left a string of shabby tyrannies,

ranging from traditional autocracies to new-style dictatorships, modern only in their apparatus of repression and indoctrination.

Many remedies have been tried—weapons and factories, schools and parliaments—but none achieved the desired result. Here and there they brought some alleviation, and even—to limited elements of the population—some benefit. But they failed to remedy or even to halt the deteriorating imbalance between Islam and the Western world. There was worse to come. It was bad enough for Muslims to feel weak and poor after centuries of being rich and strong, to lose the leadership that they had come to regard as their right, and to be reduced to the role of followers of the West. The twentieth century, particularly the second half, brought further humiliations—the awareness that they were no longer even the first among the followers, but were falling ever further back in the lengthening line of eager and more successful Westernizers, notably in East Asia. The rise of Japan had been an encouragement, but also a reproach. The later rise of the other new Asian economic powers brought only reproach. The proud heirs of ancient civilizations had got used to hiring Western firms to carry out tasks that their own contractors and technicians were apparently not capable of doing. Now they found themselves inviting contractors and technicians from Korea—only recently emerged from Japanese colonial rule—to perform these same tasks. Following is bad enough; limping in the rear is far worse. By all the standards that

matter in the modern world—economic development and job creation, literacy and educational and scientific achievement, political freedom and respect for human rights—what was once a mighty civilization has indeed fallen low.

“Who did this to us?” is of course a common human response when things are going badly, and there have indeed been many in the Middle East, past and present, who have asked this question. They found several different answers. It is usually easier and always more satisfying to blame others for one’s misfortunes. For a long time, the Mongols were the favorite villains, and the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century were blamed for the destruction of both Muslim power and Islamic civilization, and for what was seen as the ensuing weakness and stagnation. But after a while historians, Muslims and others, pointed to two flaws in this argument. The first was that some of the greatest cultural achievements of the Muslim peoples, notably in Iran, came after, not before, the Mongol invasions. The second, more difficult to accept but nevertheless undeniable, was that the Mongols overthrew an empire that was already fatally weakened—indeed, it is difficult to see how the once mighty empire of the caliphs would otherwise have succumbed to a horde of nomadic horsemen riding across the steppes from East Asia.

The rise of nationalism—itself an import from Europe—produced new perceptions. Arabs could lay the blame for their troubles on the Turks who had ruled them for many centuries. Turks could blame the

stagnation of their civilization on the dead weight of the Arab past in which the creative energies of the Turkish people were caught and immobilized. Persians could blame the loss of their ancient glories on Arabs, Turks, and Mongols impartially.

The period of French and British paramountcy in much of the Arab world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries produced a new and more plausible scapegoat—Western imperialism. In the Middle East, there have been good reasons for such blame. Western political domination, economic penetration, and—longest, deepest, and most insidious of all—cultural influence, had changed the face of the region and transformed the lives of its people, turning them in new directions, arousing new hopes and fears, creating new dangers and new expectations equally without precedent in their own cultural past. But the Anglo-French interlude was comparatively brief and ended half a century ago; the change for the worse began long before their arrival and continued unabated after their departure. Inevitably, their role as villains was taken over by the United States, along with other aspects of the leadership of the West. The attempt to transfer the guilt to America has won considerable support, but for similar reasons remains unconvincing. Anglo-French rule and American influence, like the Mongol invasions, were a consequence, not a cause, of the inner weakness of Middle-Eastern states and societies. Some observers, both inside and outside the region, have pointed to the differences in the post

imperial development of former British possessions—for example, between Aden in the Middle East and such places as Singapore and Hong Kong; or between the various lands that once made up the British Empire in India.

Another European contribution to this debate is anti-Semitism, and blaming “the Jews” for all that goes wrong. Jews in traditional Islamic societies experienced the normal constraints and occasional hazards of minority status. In most significant respects, they were better off under Muslim than under Christian rule, until the rise and spread of Western tolerance in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

With rare exceptions, where hostile stereotypes of the Jew existed in the Islamic tradition, they tended to be contemptuous and dismissive rather than suspicious and obsessive. This made the events of 1948—the failure of five Arab states and armies to prevent half a million Jews from establishing a state in the debris of the British Mandate for Palestine—all the more of a shock. As some writers at the time observed, it was bad enough to be defeated by the great imperial powers of the West; to suffer the same fate at the hands of a contemptible gang of Jews was an intolerable humiliation. Anti-Semitism and its demonized picture of the Jew as a scheming, evil monster provided a soothing answer.

The earliest specifically anti-Semitic statements in the Middle East occurred among the Christian minorities, and can usually be traced back to European originals.

They had limited impact, and at the time for example of the Dreyfus trial in France, when a Jewish officer was unjustly accused and condemned by a hostile court, Muslim comments usually favored the persecuted Jew against his Christian persecutors. But the poison continued to spread, and from 1933 Nazi Germany and its various agencies made a concerted and on the whole remarkably successful effort to promote and disseminate European style anti-Semitism in the Arab world. The struggle for Palestine greatly facilitated the acceptance of the anti-Semitic interpretation of history, and led some to blame all evil in the Middle East and indeed in the world on secret Jewish plots. This interpretation has pervaded much of the public discourse in the region, including education, the media, and even entertainment.

Another view of the Jewish component, based in reality rather than fantasy, may be more instructive. The modern Israeli state and society were built by Jews who came from Christendom and Islam; that is, on the one hand from Europe and the Americas, on the other from the Middle East and North Africa. Judaism, or more broadly Jewishness, is a religion in the fullest sense—a system of belief and societies experienced the normal constraints and occasional hazards of minority status. In most significant respects, they were better off under Muslim than under Christian rule, until the rise and spread of Western tolerance in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

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Judaeo-Christian tradition, on the other, what we may with equal justification call the Judaeo-Islamic tradition. In present-day Israel these two traditions meet and, with increasing frequency, collide. Their collisions are variously expressed, in communal, religious, ethnic, even party-political terms. But in many of their encounters what we see is a clash between Christendom and Islam, oddly represented by their former Jewish minorities, who reflect, as it were in miniature, both the strengths and the weaknesses of the two civilizations of which they had been part. The conflict, coexistence, or combination of these two traditions within a single small state, with a shared religion and a common citizenship and allegiance, should prove illuminating. For Israel, this issue may have an existential significance, since the survival of the state, surrounded, outnumbered and outgunned by neighbors who reject its very right to exist, may depend on its largely Western-derived qualitative edge. An argument sometimes adduced is that the cause of the changed relationship between East and West is not a Middle-Eastern decline but a Western upsurge—the Discoveries, the scientific movement, the technological, industrial, and political revolutions that transformed the West and vastly increased its wealth and power. But these comparisons do not answer the questions; they merely restate it—Why did the discoverers of America sail from Spain and not a Muslim Atlantic port, where such voyages were indeed attempted in earlier times? Why did the great scientific breakthrough occur in

Europe and not, as one might reasonably have expected, in the richer, more advanced, and in most respects more enlightened realm of Islam? A more sophisticated form of the blame game finds its targets inside, rather than outside the society. One such target is religion, for some specifically Islam. But to blame Islam as such is usually hazardous, and rarely attempted. Nor is it very plausible. For most of the Middle Ages, it was neither the older cultures of the Orient nor the newer cultures of the West that were the major centers of civilization and progress, but the world of Islam in the middle. It was there that old sciences were recovered and developed and new sciences created; there that new industries were born and manufactures and commerce expanded to a level previously without precedent. It was there, too, that governments and societies achieved a degree of freedom of thought and expression that led persecuted Jews and even dissident Christians to flee for refuge from Christendom to Islam. The medieval Islamic world offered only limited freedom in comparison with modern ideals and even with modern practice in the more advanced democracies, but it offered vastly more freedom than any of its predecessors, its contemporaries and most of its successors.

The point has often been made—if Islam is an obstacle to freedom, to science, to economic development, how is it that Muslim society in the past was a pioneer in all three, and this when Muslims were much closer in time to the sources and inspiration of their faith than they are

now? Some have indeed posed the question in a different form—not “What has Islam done to the Muslims?” but “What have the Muslims done to Islam?,” and have answered by laying the blame on specific teachers and doctrines and groups.

For those nowadays known as Islamists or fundamentalists, the failures and shortcomings of the modern Islamic lands afflicted them because they adopted alien notions and practices. They fell away from authentic Islam, and thus lost their former greatness. Those known as modernists or reformers take the opposite view, and see the cause of this loss not in the abandonment but in the retention of old ways, and especially in the inflexibility and ubiquity of the Islamic clergy. These, they say, are responsible for the persistence of beliefs and practices that might have been creative and progressive a thousand years ago, but are neither today. Their usual tactic is not to denounce religion as such, still less Islam in particular, but to level their criticism against fanaticism. It is to fanaticism, and more particularly to fanatical religious authorities, that they attribute the stifling of the once great Islamic scientific movement, and, more generally, of freedom of thought and expression.

A more usual approach to this theme is to discuss not religion in general, but a specific problem: the place of religion and of its professional exponents in the political order. For these, a principal cause of Western progress is the separation of church and state and the creation of a civil society governed by secular laws. For others, the

main culprit is Muslim sexism, and the relegation of women to an inferior position in society, thus depriving the Islamic world of the talents and energies of half its people, and entrusting the crucial early years of the upbringing of the other half to illiterate and downtrodden mothers. The products of such an education, it was said, are likely to grow up either arrogant or submissive, and unfit for a free, open society. However one evaluates their views, the success or failure of secularists and feminists will be a major factor in shaping the Middle-Eastern future.

Some have sought the causes of this painful asymmetry in a variety of factors—the exhaustion of precious metals, coinciding with the discovery and exploitation by Europe of the resources of the new world; inbreeding, due to the prevalence of cousin marriage, especially in the countryside; the depredations of the goat that, by stripping the bark off trees and tearing up grass by the roots, turned once fertile lands into deserts. Others point to the disuse of wheeled vehicles in the pre-modern Middle East, variously explained as a cause or as a symptom of what went wrong.⁴ Familiar in antiquity, they became rare in the medieval centuries, and remained so until they were reintroduced under European influence or rule. Western travelers in the Middle East note their absence; Middle-Eastern travelers in the West note their presence.

In a sense, this was a symptom of a bigger problem. A cart is large and, for a peasant, relatively costly. It is difficult to conceal and easy to requisition. At a time and

place where neither law nor custom restricted the powers of even local authorities, visible and mobile assets were a poor investment.⁵ The same fear of predatory authority—or neighbors—may be seen in the structure of traditional houses and quarters: the high, windowless walls, the almost hidden entrances in narrow alleyways, the careful avoidance of any visible sign of wealth. This much is clear—the advent of paved roads and wheeled vehicles in modern times brought no alleviation of the larger problems. Some of the solutions that once commanded passionate support have been discarded. The two dominant movements in the twentieth century were socialism and nationalism. Both have been discredited, the first by its failure, the second by its success and consequent exposure as ineffective. Freedom, interpreted to mean independence, was seen as the great talisman that would bring all other benefits. The overwhelming majority of Muslims now live in independent states, which have brought no solutions to their problems. The bastard offspring of both ideologies, national socialism, still survives in a few states that have preserved the Nazi Fascist style of dictatorial government and indoctrination, the one through a vast and ubiquitous security apparatus, the other through a single all-powerful party. These regimes too have failed every test except survival, and have brought none of the promised benefits. If anything, their infrastructures are even more antiquated than the others, their armed forces designed primarily for terror and repression. At the present day two answers to this question

command widespread support in the region, each with its own diagnosis of what is wrong, and the corresponding prescription for its cure. The one, attributing all evil to the abandonment of the divine heritage of Islam, advocates a return to a real or imagined past. That is the way of the Iranian Revolution and of the so-called fundamentalist movements and regimes in other Muslim countries. The other way is that of secular democracy, best embodied in the Turkish Republic founded by Kemal Atatürk.

Meanwhile the blame game—the Turks, the Mongols, the imperialists, the Jews, the Americans—continues, and shows little sign of abating. For the governments, at once oppressive and ineffectual, that rule much of the Middle East, this game serves a useful, indeed an essential purpose—to explain the poverty that they have failed to alleviate and to justify the tyranny that they have intensified. In this way they seek to deflect the mounting anger of their unhappy subjects against other, outer targets.

But for growing numbers of Middle Easterners it is giving way to a more self-critical approach. The question “Who did this to us?” has led only to neurotic fantasies and conspiracy theories. The other question—“What did we do wrong?”—has led naturally to a second question: “How do we put it right?” In that question, and in the various answers that are being found, lie the best hopes for the future. If the peoples of the Middle East continue on their present path, the suicide bomber may become a metaphor for the whole

region, and there will be no escape from a downward spiral of hate and spite, rage and self-pity, poverty and oppression, culminating sooner or later in yet another alien domination; perhaps from a new Europe reverting to old ways, perhaps from a resurgent Russia, perhaps from some new, expanding superpower in the East. If they can abandon grievance and victimhood, settle their differences, and join their talents, energies, and resources in a common creative endeavor, then they can once again make the Middle East, in modern times as it was in antiquity and in the Middle Ages, a major center of civilization. For the time being, the choice is their own.

Afterword

The core of this book was a series of three public lectures given at the Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen in Vienna in September 1999 and published by them, in German translation, under the title *Kultur and Modernisierung im Nahen Osten*, in 2001. The Vienna lectures, extensively recast and re-written, constitute the basis of Chapters 1–3. Later chapters include passages from other previous publications: an article published in the *Revue de Métaphysique*, 1995, and three contributions—the first to the International Congress of Historical Sciences, Madrid (1992), the second and third to colloquia held in Strasbourg (1980) and Castel Gandolfo (1998). All three were published in the proceedings of these meetings. My thanks are due to the organizers of these various events for giving me the opportunity to

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Videos:

1. <https://youtu.be/QA0GN7jGHJg>
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