

FROM BABEL TO DRAGOMANS

INTERPRETING THE MIDDLE EAST



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CONTENTS



<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>Credits</i>	<i>ix</i>
Introduction	1

PART ONE: PAST HISTORY

1	An Islamic Mosque	15
2	From Babel to Dragomans	18
3	Middle East Feasts	33
4	Iran in History	43
5	Palimpsests of Jewish History: Christian, Muslim and Secular Diaspora	53
6	Some Notes on Land, Money and Power in Medieval Islam	60
7	An Interpretation of Fatimid History	66
8	Propaganda in the Pre-Modern Middle East: A Preliminary Classification	79
9	Monarchy in the Middle East	92
10	Religion and Murder in the Middle East	100
11	The Mughals and the Ottomans	108
12	Europe and the Turks: The Civilization of the Ottoman Empire	115
13	Europe and Islam: Muslim Perceptions and Experience	121
14	Cold War and Détente in the Sixteenth Century	135
15	From Pilgrims to Tourists: A Survey of Middle Eastern Travel	137
16	The British Mandate for Palestine in Historical Perspective	152
17	Pan-Arabism	156
18	The Emergence of Modern Israel	181
19	Orientalist Notes on the Soviet–United Arab Republic Treaty of 27 May 1971	188
20	A Taxonomy of Group Hatred	196
21	Islam and the West	205

PART TWO: CURRENT HISTORY

22	The Middle East, Westernized Despite Itself	221
23	The Middle East in World Affairs	232
24	Friends and Enemies: Reflections After a War	240
25	Return to Cairo	247
26	Middle East at Prayer	265
27	At the United Nations	269
28	The Anti-Zionist Resolution	274
29	Right and Left in Lebanon	284
30	The Shi'a	290
31	Islamic Revolution	299
32	The Enemies of God	313
33	The Roots of Muslim Rage	319
34	The Other Middle East Problems	332
35	Did You Say "American Imperialism"?: Power, Weakness, and Choices in the Middle East	343
36	The Law of Islam	351
37	Not Everybody Hates Saddam	354
38	Mideast States: Pawns No Longer in Imperial Games	357
39	What Saddam Wrought	360
40	The "Sick Man" of Today Coughs Closer to Home	364
41	Revisiting the Paradox of Modern Turkey	367
42	We Must Be Clear	369
43	Deconstructing Osama and His Evil Appeal	371
44	Targeted by a History of Hatred	374
45	A Time for Toppling	378

PART THREE: ABOUT HISTORY

46	In Defense of History	383
47	First-Person Narrative in the Middle East	396
48	Reflections on Islamic Historiography	405
49	The Ottoman Archives: A Source for European History	414
50	History Writing and National Revival in Turkey	421
51	On Occidentalism and Orientalism	430

Introduction



Most of the articles, studies and lectures assembled in this volume date from the period of my professional life which began in the autumn of 1949, when I was appointed to the newly-created chair of the History of the Near and Middle East at the School of Oriental and African Studies in the University of London.

I first set foot in the school as an undergraduate student in 1933. Already then I was not entirely a newcomer to Middle Eastern studies. My initiation had begun at an early age, when I was confronted with the need to study a difficult, ancient Middle Eastern text—to be precise, part of Chapter 26 of the Book of Leviticus. At the age of eleven or twelve, along with most Jewish children, I was instructed in the rudiments of Hebrew to prepare me for my Bar Mitzvah, the synagogue ceremony by which Jewish boys—and in modern times also girls—are formally recognized as full, adult members of the community. At that time and in that place, this normally implied only learning the alphabet, memorizing the tunes, and acquiring a sufficient command of the Hebrew script to read and chant the text without understanding it. In the normal course of events, no more than that was expected of pupils; no more was provided by teachers. But for me, another language, and more especially another script, offered new excitement, and led to the joyous discovery that Hebrew was not merely a kind of encipherment of prayers and rituals, to be memorized and recited parrot-fashion. It was a language with a grammar, which one could actually learn like the Latin or French that I was learning at school—or rather, like both of them at the same time, since Hebrew was at once a classical and a modern language. By good fortune, I had a teacher who could respond to my childish enthusiasm, and it was he who helped me find my way on one of the two paths that led to my subsequent career—the fascination with exotic languages.

It was therefore natural that I should continue my Hebrew studies, under his direction, after the completion of the Bar Mitzvah ceremony, and by the time I was ready to go to university, I had read widely and deeply in Hebrew. All this whetted my appetite for more of the same. The more serious study of Hebrew led inevitably to Aramaic, and later, in a more adventurous shift, to Arabic. Though I never made much progress with Aramaic, I became much more interested in Arabic, and was able to indulge that interest more effectively when I went to university. At one stage I was engaged simultaneously in the study of Latin, Greek, Biblical Hebrew and Classical Arabic—a rather heavy program of dead languages for a mere undergraduate. As a graduate student, I expanded my study of Arabic, and added Persian and Turkish.

My main subject of interest, however, was history. I had always been greatly attracted to this subject, and even as a child I had a curious desire to know the history of the other side. In England, when I was at primary school, history basically meant English history, and for a long time this, as taught at that level, consisted largely of wars with the French. From this, I developed a curiosity about French history and asked my father to get me a history of France—in English, of course. He did so, and I was able to consider the history of the Anglo-French wars from both sides. I found it both a rewarding and a stimulating experience.

A little later, chapters in my history textbooks on such topics as the Crusades and the Eastern Question raised similar questions. Here too my Bar Mitzvah marked a turning point. Like most other Bar Mitzvah boys, I received a number of presents, one of which was an outline of Jewish history, a subject about which I previously knew very little. My eager and immediate reading of this book brought me to such fascinating and exotic places as Moorish Cordova, Baghdad under the Caliphs, and Ottoman Istanbul. These were no doubt the first steps on the path which led to my career as an historian of the Middle East.

The degree structure at the University of London at that time made it possible for me to take an honours (that is to say, specialized) degree in history with special reference to the Middle East. This enabled me to continue my linguistic adventures, and at the same time to find my true vocation as a historian. As far as I know, there was no comparable undergraduate program available at any other university at the time. I therefore chose that university and that syllabus—choices and opportunities for which I remain profoundly grateful.

After some years of study in Middle Eastern history and languages at the School of Oriental (later also “and African”) Studies in the University of London, my professor, the late Sir Hamilton Gibb, summoned me and said: “You have now been studying the Middle East for four years. Don’t you think it’s time you saw the place?” A traveling fellowship from the Royal Asiatic Society, given to me on Professor Gibb’s recommendation, enabled me to follow his advice, and in the academic year 1937–1938 I set out on my first trip to the Middle East.

My first port of call was Egypt. Arriving (by sea, of course) at Port Said, I

remembered the English Arabist Edward Lane's description of his first arrival in the region whose language and culture had so fascinated him. As he put it, I felt like a Muslim bridegroom meeting the bride with whom he is to spend the rest of his life, and seeing her for the first time after the wedding.

At first, communication was not easy. Though the syllabus and the courses I attended included modern history, my main interest was in the period that in European history is called medieval, a term not very appropriate to the great age of Arab and Islamic civilization. My language studies followed the same line. When I arrived in Egypt the only Arabic I knew was classical Arabic, which was about as useful for conversation as Ciceronian Latin would be in present-day Naples. But I managed to acquire some colloquial Arabic, and enrolled as an "auditor" in Cairo University. I did what students usually do—attended lectures and meetings, read books and newspapers, talked, and—more especially—listened, and on one occasion even attended a student demonstration, I can no longer recall for what cause. From Egypt, I traveled extensively in Palestine, Syria, Lebanon and Turkey, and in the early summer of 1938 returned to London, where I settled down to serious work. My main task during that period was study rather than research, though I did manage to make some progress in the collection of materials for my dissertation, which I completed after my return to England.

In 1938 the University of London offered me a position as an assistant lecturer in Islamic History. The first class I taught in 1938 consisted of four students, three Arabs and an Iranian. I remember my father asking me in wonderment at the time why the University of London would pay me a salary to teach Arab history to Arabs. Many others have asked more or less the same question, in a variety of forms. Some also asked why Arab students would come to England to study their own history, and were given—by both the students and their teachers—a variety of answers. For whatever reasons, they continued to come, and for the rest of my teaching career in England a varying number of my undergraduate students and a steady majority of my graduate students were Arabs from Arab countries.

A year after my appointment, war broke out, and in due course I, along with everyone else, went into the armed forces. I was initially assigned to the Royal Armoured Corps, but soon, either because of my aptitude for languages or my ineptitude with tanks, I was transferred to Intelligence. From there, in 1941–1945, I was attached to a department of the Foreign Office dealing with Middle Eastern matters. I was in Cairo when the war ended, and, thanks to an accelerated release, was back at the University on 1 September 1945.

It was not easy to resume an academic career after an interval of almost six years doing very different work. I had acquired a close, intense but highly specialized knowledge of some aspects of the modern situation in the Middle East in the course of my wartime duties, but I had to relearn my profession, both as a teacher and as a researcher. In 1949 I was appointed to the new chair in Near

and Middle Eastern History at the age of 33, one of a generation that was still young in years but prematurely aged in experience and, one hoped, in wisdom. The immediate post-war period was a good time for young scholars just starting or re-starting their careers—a time of rapid and extensive development in the universities, which faced a double challenge: a five-year backlog of students who had gone straight from high school to the armed forces and wished to resume their academic education, and a skeletal academic apparatus, in urgent need of expansion and development to meet the demands of a new age. One of the answers to this demand was the creation of new teaching positions in previously neglected subjects, notably in the field of Oriental and African studies.

The university, wisely, decided that I should begin my tenure by going on what was called “study leave,” to update and broaden my acquaintance with the region whose history I was to reach and research. When I set out on my third tour of the Middle East, beginning in the autumn of 1949, the situation in the region had been transformed beyond recognition. In the aftermath of the Arab-Israel War of 1948, severe restrictions were imposed by Arab governments on access and even entry by Jews, and this considerably reduced the number of places to which I could go, and in which I could work. Since then, there has been some easing of this rule in some but not all Arab countries, and it became possible for me to renew and extend my acquaintances with the Arab east. But in 1949, for Jewish scholars interested in the Middle East, only three countries in the region were open—Turkey, Iran and Israel. It was in these three countries therefore that I arranged to spend the academic year 1949–1950, most of the time in Turkey and in Iran. Iran was a new experience—the first of many visits over the years. My previous direct experience of Turkey was limited to a very short visit, as a student, in the spring of 1938.

I began in Istanbul, which because of the unique richness of its libraries and archives, offered special attractions to the historian of the Middle East. My primary interest remained classical Islamic civilization, an interest which I now extended to the great age of the Ottoman Empire. I counted on being able to use the collections of Arabic and other Islamic manuscripts in Turkish libraries. I also applied, with little expectation of success, for permission to use the Imperial Ottoman Archives. These archives had been described by various Turkish scholars, and a number of documents had been published, mostly in Turkish scholarly journals, in the course of the years—enough to whet, but not to satisfy a historian’s appetite. No Westerner had however been admitted to these archives, apart from a very small number of expert archivists brought in as consultants. These were the central archives of the Ottoman Empire, extending over many centuries. It was known that they contained tens of thousands of bound registers and letter-books, and millions of documents. It was obvious that these archives would be a precious, indeed an indispensable, source for the history of all the lands that had ever formed part of the Ottoman Empire, and of value even for

others, like Iran, that had been involved with the Ottomans in one way or another. But so far access had only been allowed to Turkish scholars.

It was my good fortune, rather than any particular merit on my part, that I submitted my application precisely at the moment when the custodians of the archives decided to pursue a more liberal policy, and I was both astonished and delighted to receive the coveted permit. Feeling rather like a child turned loose in a toy shop, or like an intruder in Ali Baba's cave, I hardly knew where to turn first.

Publications are of course an essential part of any academic career, both as a means of self-expression, and as a ladder for advancement. My earliest publications followed the usual pattern in our profession. First came some articles, developed from seminar papers, and placed in learned journals by the good offices of my professors. Second—and the first in book form—was my doctoral dissertation. I had finished this just before the outbreak of war, and when the University of London offered me the opportunity, through a subvention, to transform a dissertation into a real, published book, I responded eagerly. The future looked very problematic at the time, and I wanted to leave something behind me. In retrospect, I do not think it was such a good idea, as the thesis was not ready for publication. It was completed in great haste because of the war that was looming, and was published in five hundred copies in 1940, under the title *The Origins of Ismailism*, dealing with the historical and religious background of the Fatimid Caliphs, a dynasty that came to power in North Africa in 909, and conquered Egypt in 969 C.E. It took at least ten years to sell the whole edition. I was however very gratified when an Arabic translation was published in Baghdad in 1947. This was the first of many Arabic (and later also Persian and Turkish) translations of my books. For this one the publishers actually asked my permission, which I gave with alacrity, and sent me some complimentary copies, which I received with delight.

My next publication, apart from minor odds and ends, was a little book called *The Arabs in History*. A London publishing house was preparing a series of short books under the editorship of a very distinguished medieval historian, Sir Maurice Powicke. He gave me the title and asked me to write not a short history of the Arabs, but an interpretative essay on the role of Arabs in history. I was much attracted by this idea and was enormously flattered that a famous historian had actually written to me asking me for this book. The publishers even offered me money, in the form a small advance—a new experience at the time. This was my first serious attempt to deal with a broader subject over a longer period, and to do so in a form addressed not solely to a few academic colleagues and/or rivals but to a previously unknown species—the general reader.

As a student of the Middle East, my interests and training were primarily

historical rather than—as with most of my predecessors, teachers and contemporaries—philological and literary. I did however serve a brief apprenticeship in these disciplines and am profoundly grateful for having done so. The first and most rudimentary test of an historian's competence is that he should be able to read his sources, and this is not always easy, as for example when the language is classical Arabic or the writing is a crabbed Ottoman bureaucratic script.

And that is not all. The historian of a region, of a period, of a group of people, or even of a topic, must know something of its cultural context, and for this literature is an indispensable guide. Fortunately, this was one part of my studies and of my subsequent researches which I particularly enjoyed. As a child and for a while as a young man, I cherished delusions of a literary career, seeing myself first as a poet, and then as an essayist. In time, with more or less regret, I abandoned these delusions, and devoted whatever literary skills I could muster to the presentation of my work as a historian, supplemented and in a sense illustrated by translations.

The surest test of one's understanding of a text in another language is translating it into one's own. One may believe that one has really grasped the meaning of a text, only to find, in the process of translation, that one's understanding has serious gaps and even flaws. As a schoolboy and then as a student, I was of course required to translate texts from—and in accordance with English educational usage at that time, into—the languages I was studying. My translations into these languages were usually a disaster, though no doubt they served some educational purpose. But the task of translating from these languages into English was stimulating, challenging, even exciting, and I continued to do it long after it ceased to be a pedagogic requirement. A not inconsiderable part of my published work consists of translations of texts, generally pre-modern, in various Middle Eastern languages. In most of them my purpose was to offer the student or other reader some insight into how Middle Eastern history looks as seen through Middle Eastern eyes. Occasionally, I attempted to give the reader of English some experience, however diminished, of the pleasures of Middle Eastern literature.

A new phase in my professional and personal life began with my move from London to Princeton in 1974. This gave me several very substantial advantages. The first was more free time. Since my appointment was a joint one between Princeton University and the Institute for Advanced Study, I taught only one semester a year; the rest of my time was free of teaching responsibilities—except of course for the supervision of graduate students preparing dissertations. For a teacher with a sense of responsibility towards his students—that means most of us—this is a task that goes on all through the year and often continues for years after the student has completed his formal studies and requirements. I count such relationships with former students, many of them now professors, among the most rewarding that the academic profession has to offer.

A second advantage was that being a newcomer from another country and a

part-timer in both institutions, I was free from the kind of administrative and bureaucratic entanglements that had built up, over decades, in England. This was a most welcome relief. I must confess that I never had much taste for administrative responsibilities. Had that been my desire, I would have either gone into business, in pursuit of real money, or into government, in pursuit of real power. I would not have stayed in the university, where neither the money nor the power is real. The satisfactions of the scholarly life are of quite a different character.

Finally, at Princeton I was provided with the kind of infrastructure which English universities simply could not afford, such as hiring student assistants to find and fetch me books from the library, to check references and help with other tedious and time-consuming but essential tasks. Here, too, the time-saving was enormous.

There was another important change; I was growing older, at least physically, and I decided that it was time to start closing the files. During the course of my work as a researcher and as a teacher, perhaps most of all simply as a reader, I had built up a series of files on topics which aroused my special interest. Whenever I came across anything relevant, I made a note of it and put it in the appropriate file. What I have been doing since coming to Princeton is taking these accumulations of material built up over the course of the years, organizing and where necessary, expanding them by further research, and preparing them for publication. This is the explanation of what might otherwise seem a large output in a relatively short time, as contrasted with a rather small output in a much longer time previously.

Some of these resulted in books preceded and followed by a scatter of articles—the political language of Islam, the Judaeo-Islamic tradition, race and slavery in the Middle East, the emergence of modern Turkey, the Muslim discovery of Europe. These last formed part of a larger topic, of deeper concern. I have always been interested in the relations between the Islamic Middle East and the Christian and post-Christian West—the Islamic advance into Europe from the South West and then the South East, and the Christian reconquest and counter-attack; the impact of both Western action and Western civilization on the Islamic peoples and societies of the Middle East; the successive phases of Middle Eastern response; the perception and the study, or lack of study, of each by the other.

During the last half century, in the domains of religion, nationhood, and society, far-reaching and significant changes took place, including both successes and failures, both in the return to old traditions and in the pursuit of new ideas. My work involved a study of these changes, the new perceptions of freedom, both national and personal, and the attempts being made to achieve it; the changing content and significance of national and patriotic loyalties; and the resurgence of religious and communal identities and commitments. In looking at these processes, I tried to situate them in both a global and a regional context—in the shifting interplay of regional and global powers on the one hand,

and in the far-reaching changes in Middle Eastern economies and societies on the other. Many of these topics, inevitably, are highly controversial, and evoke passionate debate among scholars and others, both in the region and abroad.

A few years ago, in the course of an interview, I was asked: “Why do you always deal with sensitive subjects?” To which I responded: “The answer to your question is contained in the metaphor you have used. The sensitive place in the body, physical or social, is where something is wrong. Sensitivity is a signal the body sends us, that something needs attention, which is what I try to give. I don’t agree with the implicit meaning of your question that there are taboo subjects.”

There are, of course, in other societies, many taboo subjects. Some people in our own society and more particularly in the academic community wish to impose similar constraints, notably in the discussion of non-Western civilizations and religions, and even of contemporary non-Western leaders and movements. This approach, now widespread especially in the universities and the media, is defended—sometimes indeed enforced—in the name of sensitivity and is challenged or derided—usually by those whose careers are not at stake—as censorship or “political correctness.” Some critics of Western scholarship, including some Westerners, even question the very right of outsiders to research, write, or teach Middle Eastern or Islamic history. Others go still further, accusing such outsiders of pursuing a hidden agenda and of devising or using special methods to serve it.

I have sometimes been asked about the “special methods” that I and my colleagues use. I don’t think that there is a special method for studying Islamic or Middle Eastern history, different from the methods we would use for studying any other kind of history. History is history—our motivations may be different; our purposes may be different, and certainly the subject matter will be different, but the method is basically the same. To use one method for studying our own history and another method for studying someone else’s history would be dishonest. The serious study of history, one’s own or anyone else’s, must be based on primary sources, and these must be examined in the original, not through the filter of translation, adaptation, or summary. All of these may easily be slanted to serve some political, ideological or other purpose. They will inevitably reflect the filtrator’s perceptions. Learning a language for such study is not necessarily a predatory intrusion. It is more likely to be inspired by respect and above all by intellectual curiosity.

What is the historian trying to do? First, on the most rudimentary level, to find out what happened. Then, at a rather more sophisticated level, to find out how it happened. And, for the intellectually ambitious, why it happened. This is surely the really interesting part of understanding the past.

The study of recent and contemporary history presents special problems to the historian. There is the obvious difficulty arising from the fragmentary and usually secondary quality of documentation. In compensation there is the im-

mediacy of his own experience of the events of his own time. This in turn brings another danger—that of the historian’s personal involvement and commitments. We are all, including historians, the children of our time and place, with loyalties, or at least predispositions, determined by country, race, gender, religion, ideology, and economic, social, and cultural background. Some have argued that, since complete impartiality is impossible, the historian should abandon the attempt as false and hypocritical, and present himself frankly as a partisan of his cause. If his cause is just, according to this view, his story will to that degree be authentic. If his cause is unjust, his story will be flawed and should be dismissed accordingly.

I adhere to a different view: that the historian owes it to himself and to his readers to try, to the best of his ability, to be objective or at least to be fair—to be conscious of his own commitments and concerns and make due allowance and, where necessary, correction for them; and to try and present the different aspects of a problem and the different sides to a dispute in such a way as to allow the reader to form his own independent judgment. Above all, the historian should not prejudge issues and predetermine results by the arbitrary definition of topic and selection of evidence, and the use of emotionally charged or biased language. As a famous economist once remarked, “Complete asepsis is impossible, but one does not for that reason perform surgery in a sewer.”

My readers will judge for themselves how far I have succeeded over the years in my antiseptic precautions to avoid infection. I derive some reassurance from the reception of the first edition of one of my books on recent and contemporary history. It was translated and published both in Hebrew, by the publishing house of the Israeli Ministry of Defense, and in Arabic, by the Muslim Brothers. The translator of the Arabic version, in his introductory remarks, observed that the author of this book was one of two things: a candid friend or an honorable enemy, and in either case, one who does not distort or evade the truth. I am content to abide by that judgment.

The study of past history is illuminated by what we see happening around us, just as our understanding of what we see happening around us now is enriched by knowledge of past experiences. But this does not mean that one has to slant past history so as to serve some present purpose, or let the grievances of today distort our understanding of yesterday.

In a free society, different historians put forward different points of views, with changes of theme and emphasis even when discussing the same events and evidence. At one time, when religion was generally agreed to be the crucial element in human affairs, scholars and others who wrote about the history of the Middle East and its relations with the West saw their topic almost entirely in terms of the religious encounters between Islam and Christianity, with Judaism somewhere in the middle. In the nineteenth century, with the rise of nationalism and ethnic awareness, historians once again looked back into the past from their own time and perceived not just Muslims and Christians, but Arabs,

Persians, and Turks. More recently, economic and social historians have looked with a new awareness and acuteness at the structures of Middle Eastern economies and societies, in remote as well as recent times. Like the historians of religion, historians of ethnicity and of society were at times guilty of some over-emphasis, but by bringing these perceptions from the modern West to the study of the medieval Middle East, they were able to enrich and deepen our understanding of religious, ethnic and socio-economic relationships, in the past as well as the present.

In my early studies I was mainly interested in the period when the Islamic Middle East was most different from the West, least affected by the West, and in most respects far in advance of the West. I never lost my interest in early Islamic history, but it ceased to be my primary concern. The opportunity to enter the hitherto sealed Ottoman archives in 1949 was too good to miss; it provided me with a chance to pursue a topic in which I was already deeply interested—the history of the Ottoman Empire. Most of my published work since then has spanned the medieval, Ottoman, and modern periods, or some combination of the three.

But no specialist on the Middle East—not even an Assyriologist or an Egyptologist—can wholly ignore the contemporary scene. My war service gave me an intimate knowledge of some aspects of modern Middle Eastern life and politics. My travels in Middle Eastern countries, my occasional meetings with Middle Eastern monarchs and other rulers, more extensively with academic colleagues, and, perhaps most of all, my encounters with Middle Eastern students, kept me in touch with what was happening on the ground. From time to time I ceded to the temptation to make some public pronouncement on Middle Eastern events, usually in the form of an interview or article in some review or magazine or, occasionally, newspaper. Since coming to America I have written at greater length on recent and contemporary topics.

Anyone who studies the evolution of a civilization must, in the course of time, devote some thought to the broader and more general aspects of his topic, as distinct from the more specific objects of his immediate research. Any writer or teacher of history must from time to time explore, at least in his mind, the larger implications of the historic process. And, on a more mundane level, any professional scholar must, at times, pause and consider the state and needs of the field of scholarship in which he works, more especially when, as now, this field, and indeed scholarship itself, are under attack. Some of my thoughts on these matters are included in this volume.

The following pieces were written over a period of half a century, and cover a wide variety of topics. Most of them appeared in periodicals of one sort or another, ranging from learned quarterlies to daily newspapers, and their topics correspondingly range from problems of early medieval history to yesterday's headlines and tomorrow's challenges. Some were lectures. Others were contributions to colloquia and symposia held in various places, and originally published

in the proceedings of these gatherings. Several of these were held in foreign countries and published in foreign languages. My English originals of such papers are published here for the first time. Some of the papers have not previously been published in any form.

With a few minor changes, I have kept all these essays in the form in which they were originally published. In a few places, I have made cuts, usually to avoid overlaps and repetitions, occasionally to remove matter no longer of any current interest. Such cuts are indicated in the usual way. In a very few places, I have inserted a brief explanatory note, in brackets.

In general, I have excluded specialist, technical studies, based directly on primary sources and heavily footnoted. These are accessible to specialists in the learned journals where they originally appeared; they would offer little of interest to the general reader.

All the articles in this volume deal with history in one form or another. I have divided them into three main groups—past history, present history, and about history. Clearly, the first and second at least overlap. What I have tried to do is to limit the second category, current history, to discussions of events or at least of processes while they were actually occurring. The third—about history—considers the tasks and duties of the historian, and in particular the problems of writing the history of the Middle East, both from inside and outside the region.

The Emergence of Modern Israel



In the second half of the nineteenth century, when political Zionism was born, the entity known as “the Jews” consisted of several distinct and disparate groups. Two of them were, by the criteria of the societies in which they lived, nations; the rest were religious minorities, with a varying degree of acceptance and assimilation within the nations to which they belonged.

The first and larger of the two nations consisted of the Jews of Eastern Europe. Most of these were to be found in the great belt of territory stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea, and comprising the so-called Pale of Settlement—the area within which alone, by a statute promulgated in 1804, Jews were permitted to live in the Russian Empire. The Jewish communities in these provinces came into being under the aegis of the Polish-Lithuanian State, which had accorded them tolerance and a measure of autonomy. Through the successive partitions of Poland the great majority of them had passed under the rule of the Czars of Russia, who thus acquired by conquest the Jewish subjects whom they had refused to accept by any other means. These new subjects suffered greatly by the change.

In addition to the Jews of the Russian Pale of Settlement, there were similar groups beyond the Russian western border, in other former Polish territories annexed to Prussia and Austria-Hungary, as well as in Roumania. By about 1880 the Jews in this area numbered between five and six million, that is to say some three-quarters of the entire Jewish population of the world.

This Jewish community had most, if not all, of the characteristics of a national minority in Eastern Europe—a common culture and way of life, a common religion, a putative common descent, and a common language (Yiddish) exclusive to them. They had their own literature, provided their own schools, and created a form of higher education, in the rabbinical seminaries. In a sense they even

had a common territory in the Pale, based on the former Polish-Lithuanian State, and a common history extending back over many centuries within that political framework. True, they were not a majority in that area—though in a few parts of it they attained even that—but this was less of an anomaly than might at first appear in regions of very mixed population. The Yiddish nation of Eastern Europe had no political existence—but the same was true of all but a few of their neighbours. The Jews formed an ethnic but not a legal nationality, in this resembling the Poles, the Baltic peoples, the Ukrainians and many others.

The second Jewish nation was of quite a different type. This was the Jewish *Millet* in Islam, more particularly in the Ottoman Empire. Here again the Jewish entity conformed to the prevailing pattern—that of a religio-political subject community like the Armenians or the Greeks. In the early nineteenth century the word Greek in the Ottoman Empire denoted religion, not ethnic or linguistic nationality, and the term covered Orthodox Christians speaking Roumanian, Albanian, Bulgarian, Serbian and Arabic as well as Greek. The Jewish *Millet* too was multi-lingual, including speakers of Arabic, Spanish, Greek, Kurdish, Aramaic and other languages. The largest Jewish community under Muslim rule was that of the Ottoman Empire. Other, smaller, groups existed in Iran and Central Asia, in the Yemen, Morocco, and in various territories formerly under Islamic rule now incorporated in the European colonial empires, especially those of France and Russia. No reliable statistics are available for these countries, but the number of Jews under Muslim rule at the time is put at roughly one million.

The remainder of the Jewish people consisted of more or less assimilated religious minorities. The most important of these were in the lands of German culture in middle Europe—in Germany and in the western parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Other, smaller, groups were to be found in Western Europe, and there were new but growing communities in the United States and other countries of European settlement overseas. These Jewish minorities were barely distinguishable in language, culture and a way of life from their compatriots of other religions. The differences were diminishing with the twin processes of emancipation and secularization, and, to the innocent optimists of the early decades of this [the 20th] century, it seemed that there would be no halt or hindrance to the continuation and completion of this process. They were to learn otherwise.

Nationalism was in the air in the nineteenth century, and Jews were variously affected. In the West, they became fervent patriots of the countries of which they were more or less equal citizens. In the East—both European and Islamic—the situation was more complex and more difficult. Theoretically, the change from religious to national identities and loyalties should have improved their position, by transforming them from a tolerated minority to an integral part of the nation. In fact, their position went from bad to worse. The old intolerance was modernized and magnified; the old restraints weakened or removed. In a time of rapid social change and heightened ethnic awareness, the Jews remained unbelievers

and became aliens, exposed to a hostility which ranged, in different countries, from petty but wounding snobbery to violent persecution. For the traditional, believing Jew, suffering for his religion was a voluntary trial which he could endure with dignity, fortitude, and confidence. For the aspiring citizen it was a degradation and an affront, against which he had no inner defence of self-respect.

The new nationalism confronted the Jews with new problems; to some it also suggested a new solution. If the nation—an entity defined by descent, culture and aspiration—was the only natural and rightful basis of statehood, why then the Jews were also a nation, and must have their own State. The first precursor of modern Zionism was a Bosnian Rabbi called Yehuda Alkalai, who in 1843 produced a scheme for a man-made Jewish restoration in Palestine—without waiting for the Messiah. The problem was posed for him, in an acute form, by the anti-Jewish trouble in Damascus in 1840; the model for a solution was provided by the Serbian and Greek national revivals. In 1862 a Rabbi in Posen, in Prussian Poland, exhorted his co-religionists to “take to heart the examples of the Italians, Poles, and Hungarians.” In the same year Moses Hess, an emancipated, radical German Jew, published his *Rome and Jerusalem*, the first of a long series of socialist Zionist Utopias.

In the course of the nineteenth century, the idea of a Jewish national restoration in Palestine became widely known. It aroused the interest of Jews in many lands; it even attracted the attention of Christian observers as diverse as Napoleon, Palmerston, Shaftesbury, and George Eliot.

The name Zionist and the political movement called by it were both born in Austria-Hungary—also the home of modern anti-semitism. Within the sprawling and variegated Habsburg monarchy assimilated modern Jews and unassimilated traditional Jews lived side by side, encountering both modern and traditional antagonisms. The founder of the Zionist organization was Theodor Herzl, a Hungarian-born Viennese Jew, and the history of the movement is conventionally dated from the publication of his booklet, *The Jewish State*, in 1896.

But Herzl had many predecessors, in both theory and action. The most important of them, as also of his disciples and successors, were not Central but East Europeans.

In a very real sense, Jewish nationalism, with the State of Israel which is its ultimate result, was a creation of the Yiddish nation in Eastern Europe. Its romanticism, its socialism, its populism, its linkage of religion and nationality are familiar features of East European political thought and life.

Zionism has many sources. Some of these are traditionally and authentically Jewish. One such is the Jewish religion itself with its recurring stress on Zion, Jerusalem, and the Holy Land, and on the interwoven themes of bondage and liberation, of exile and return. These occupy a central position in the Jewish religious tradition, and a worshipper is reminded of them daily and throughout the year by the Jewish liturgy.

Another is Hassidism—the movement of religious revival which arose among Polish Jews in the late seventeenth century and affected large parts of East European Jewry. This movement, which gave new warmth and vitality to the rabbinic Judaism of that time, was an important, perhaps a necessary, prerequisite to the growth and spread of the Zionist movement. It is certainly remarkable how large a proportion of the pioneers of Zionism, and still more of the Hebrew revival, were men of Hassidic background.

Linked with this was the Jewish tradition of Messianism—the belief in a Redeemer who would rescue the Jews from captivity and restore them to their promised homeland. There were many aspirants to this role, some better known than others. The last to announce his advent and mission in purely religious terms was a seventeenth-century Turkish Jew called Shabbetai Sevi, a grotesque and tragic figure who was able for a while to win delirious support among Jews in both east and west. His failure and apostasy brought them disillusionment and despair. After this time, the Jews—now exposed to new, external influences—began to look elsewhere for the realization of their messianic hopes, and to turn from religious to secular redeemers.

There was no lack of problems requiring the attentions of a Redeemer. Throughout the Pale of Settlement, Jews were the victims of poverty, repression, permanent discrimination, and occasional persecution. The ideas, ideals and ideologies of the East European peoples among whom the Jews were living seemed to offer solutions which the gradual growth of secular knowledge among Jews made accessible and attractive to them. East European socialism, anarchism and populism all made their various contributions to the growth of one more nationalism among the others. Some believed that the Jews should seek freedom and renewal by fighting shoulder to shoulder with the peoples among whom they lived. Others—the Zionists—saw in the universal minority status of the Jews the basic cause of all their troubles, and believed that only in a Jewish country, ruled eventually by a Jewish State, would they be able to achieve true emancipation.

Many Jews found a personal solution to their problem by emigrating, above all to the United States. Between 1870 and 1900 more than half a million East European Jews migrated to the West. Between 1900 and 1914 the figure exceeded a million and a half. All in all, about one-third of the Jews of Eastern Europe are estimated to have left their homes in search of a new life in the West. Of the remainder, the overwhelming majority stayed where they were, most of them engaged exclusively in the personal struggle for survival, some—few but not unimportant—seeking a political end to their troubles, through participation in Russian revolutionary movements. Another group, insignificant in numbers but far-reaching in effect, found another way. In 1882 some young Jews, most of them students, met in Kharkov and formed an organization called Lovers of Zion. Their aim was emigration—not to the broad lands of the West, but to a remote and largely derelict Ottoman province known in Christendom but not

to its inhabitants as Palestine. The settlements which they and their successors founded, in the teeth of immense difficulties and obstacles, formed the nucleus of what was eventually to be the State of Israel.

Like the white Anglo-Saxon Protestants in the United States, the East European pioneers and their descendants in Israel have ceased to form the majority of the population. Again, like their American counterparts, however, the founding fathers of Israel and their descendants have retained their primacy in two important respects. One, the more practical, is through their continued predominance in the interlocking system of personal, family and institutional loyalties which constitutes the Israeli establishment. The other, more permanent, is through the stamp which they have imposed on the very nature of the Israeli State and society. Modern Israel is in a very real sense the creation of the East European pioneers, and later immigrants, from Central Europe and from the countries of Asia and Africa, have been constrained with greater or lesser willingness to assimilate to the pattern established by these pioneers. Even the language of the East European founding fathers, like that of the English settlers in North America, has somehow imposed itself on Israel as a whole. Hebrew is of course quite a different language from Yiddish, and belongs to a different family. But the transformation of Hebrew from a learned and liturgical language into a living, modern language, while yet retaining a distinctively Jewish character, was the achievement of people who came with a distinctively Jewish language of their own—Yiddish. In a very real sense modern Hebrew is a reincarnation of Yiddish—the same soul in a new lexical body. . . .

These and related features may help to provide an answer to a question which has often puzzled observers of the Israeli scene—that democracy survives and indeed flourishes in a setting which is in every way unfavourable to it; a population the overwhelming majority of whom come from countries without any tradition of democratic government, a region in which democratic ways and processes are almost universally discredited, and a continuing struggle, since the very foundation of the State, which inevitably assigns a major role to the armed forces and lays great stress on the patriotic and martial virtues. There seemed every reason why Israel should follow her neighbours into military dictatorship—yet Israel has not done so, and shows little sign of doing so in the foreseeable future.

Perhaps the most important factor preventing the emergence and acceptance of an autocratic régime in Israel is the deep-rooted tradition of voluntarism which exists among the population. In both the Polish kingdom and the Ottoman Empire, the two States from which the overwhelming majority of Israelis originated, the Jews had enjoyed a very large measure of autonomy in the conduct of their own affairs—social, cultural and even fiscal as well as purely religious. The old Polish system of Jewish autonomy in the so-called Council of the Four Lands, like the Ottoman *Millet* system, had allowed the Jews substantial independence in running their lives. Both of these traditions of autonomy had been

eroded in the course of the nineteenth century—that of Poland by the subjection of the greater part of Polish Jewry to the harsher rule of Czarist Russia, that of the Ottoman Empire through the abrogation of the *Millet* system under the influence of the centralizing reforms of the Tanzimat and after. Thanks largely to Czarist and reformist inefficiency, however, this process of erosion had not gone very far, and the principle of voluntary organization from within had remained very strong among communities for whom the State was remote, alien, and marginal to most of their interests and activities. For the more important East European community it was also an irremediably hostile entity in which they had no share and which they could not hope to influence. The resulting traditions—of mistrust for authority on the one hand and of voluntary self-administration on the other—still survive very vigorously in Israel, and provide the main basis for the flourishing network of separate autonomous organizations through which Israel functions. . . .

The East Europeans were the first but not the only immigrants. During the 1930s they were followed by large-scale immigration from middle Europe—from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Hungary—of Jews of a rather different kind. These were assimilated Europeans, basically members of religious minorities in their countries of origin, and very different in culture and outlook from the Yiddish nation. Relations between middle and East Europeans formed an important theme in Jewish Palestine in the 1930s and early '40s, and gave rise to many conflicts and antagonisms.

These conflicts are now for the most part settled and forgotten—largely because, after the absorption of the shattered survivors in the Displaced Persons camps, there was not and could not be any further large-scale immigration from these countries. Subsequent immigration from the Western world, from North and South America, from South Africa and from Western Europe has presented fewer problems—partly because it was much smaller in scale, partly because it consisted very largely of Jews with—at one or two generations removed—the same East European background as the original settlers.

Far more important, however, has been the migration, since the foundation of the State, of great numbers of Jews from the Middle East and North Africa. These at one time constituted a fairly small minority within the Jewish community in Palestine; they and their descendants now form more than half of the Jewish population of Israel. For a variety of reasons they have failed to attain anything like the share of positions of power and influence corresponding to their numbers, and this has given rise to much complaint and bitterness. There are many reasons for this disparity, some arising from the different standards and qualifications brought by the immigrants, some from the inability of new groups to penetrate the closely interlocked and well-ensconced Israeli establishment.

There is indeed a profound difference between the two communities. Some see this difference in traditional terms, as a rivalry between Ashkenazic and Sefardic Jews; others present it in more fashionable dress, as a conflict between

Europeans and Afro-Asians, with the latter of course cast in the role of victims. Neither interpretation quite corresponds to the realities; neither reveals the basic issues. Essentially, this is a confrontation between the Jews of Christendom and the Jews of Islam. European and American Jews are not Christians, as Middle Eastern and North African Jews are not Muslims, yet both are deeply marked by the cultures, standards, values and outlooks of their countries of origin, and even in Israel continue to maintain many of their characteristic attitudes. The encounter of two civilizations, of two worlds, within a single small State constitutes what is perhaps the major internal problem of Israel at the present day.

It is now in the process of being further complicated by the massive arrival of a third group—the Jews from Soviet Russia. These come from a background which is neither Christian nor Muslim but Communist; it remains to be seen how much they will bring with them from their country of origin, and how this will be brought into accord with what they find in Israel.

21

Islam and the West



There was nothing unreasonable in believing that the Muslim world would attain the power and prosperity of Europe by the same methods Europe had used, and that this could be done without endangering any of the essential values of Islam.

Elie Kedourie¹

Until the nineteenth century, Muslims commonly spoke neither of the West nor of Europe when they wished to designate the Western or European world. The term West, when used in a cultural and political sense, was applied inside and not outside the Islamic oecumene. In the form *maghrib*—literally the land of the sunset—it designated North Africa west of Egypt, that is the western part of the Islamic world, contrasted with *mashriq*, the eastern half or land of the sunrise. The term Europe occurs in a few places in early Arabic geographical literature, then disappears. It entered through translations from the Greek, as part of the Greek geographical system of continents, which was adopted in a fragmentary form by Muslim geographical writers and dropped at an early date. Even when it was used, the term Europe was purely geographical, and was never injected with the cultural, historical, and latterly even political content which the names of the continents acquired in European and subsequently, under European influence, in universal usage.

For Muslims—as also for most medieval but few modern Christians—the core of identity was religion, rather than nation, country, or continent, and the basic divisions of mankind were religiously determined.

In discussions of the inhabitants of the outside world in general, the commonest designation until the nineteenth century, and in some regions later, was *kuffār*, unbelievers. Where greater precision was needed in distinguishing

between different groups of unbelievers or different political entities among them, Muslim historians tended to use ethnic rather than territorial terms. The peoples of Christian Europe are variously referred to as Romans (*Rūm*), Slavs (*Saqāliba*), and, for the inhabitants of western Europe, Franks—a term which no doubt reached the Arabs via Byzantium, and was transmitted by the Arabs to the Persians, Turks, and other Muslim peoples. This practice of referring to the peoples of Christendom by ethnic names parallels the Western practice, until comparatively modern times, of denoting Muslims by such ethnic terms as Moors, Turks, and Tartars, in different parts of Europe.

The Muslim perception of these Western or European or Frankish lands passed through several phases. In the earliest Muslim accounts of Western Europe, mostly in geographical writings, these countries appear as remote and exotic, also as backward and unimportant. This perception was not greatly changed when the Westerners forced themselves on Muslim attention in Spain, Sicily, and Syria, and established direct contact in a number of ways.

In so far as there was a scholarly or scientific interest in the West, it was geographical. Muslim historians were not interested in the history of the outside world which, as they understood the value and purpose of history, lacked both value and purpose. Muslim theologians were little concerned with Christian doctrines—why after all should they be interested in an earlier and superseded form of God's revelation? And for the few that were interested, better information was more easily accessible among the many Christian communities living in the lands of Islam. There was no interest in the sciences and arts of Europe. They knew there was nothing of the one; they assumed there was nothing of the other. Only the geographers show some interest in the West, and even that a limited one. One geographical writer even apologizes for devoting some attention to these remote and uninteresting places. His excuse is the need for completeness.²

This indeed is the key to such interest as existed. Geography by definition should be universal, and a complete geographical survey must therefore include even the benighted and insignificant barbarians beyond the western limits. Some of these accounts include human as well as physical geography. Writers give some ethnological data, at times approaching almost an anthropology of the barbarian neighbours of Islam. Their sources of information were both written and oral. The written information came mainly from ancient Greek writings, from which Muslim scholars derived their first notions of the configuration of the European continent and islands. Oral information came from such few travellers as ventured from the Islamic world to Europe and back—captives, merchants, and an occasional diplomatic envoy.

The scientific, geographical interest was supplemented by another motive, a liking for the strange and wonderful (*al-'ajīb wa'l-gharīb*). There was a general taste for curious and wonderful stories that found its apotheosis in the *Thousand and One Nights*. Travellers from the East to Europe, like travellers from Europe to the East in another age, had no difficulty in finding wonders and marvels and

curious tales with which to regale their readers. This element continues into comparatively modern times. Thus, an Ottoman janissary officer who visited Vienna in the early eighteenth century adorns his otherwise factual, prosaic account of his trip with strange and wonderful stories of miracles performed during the Turkish siege and retreat some years previous to his visit.³

Practical and material interest in western Europe was for long very limited. Until the discovery of America, the colonization of south and south-east Asia and the consequent enrichment of the maritime powers, western Europe had very little to offer by way of exports. English wool and a few other small items are occasionally mentioned in Muslim sources, but they do not seem to have been of great significance. For most of the Middle Ages the most important export to the lands of Islam from Europe was, as from tropical Africa, slaves. They were imported in great numbers across both the northern and southern frontiers of Islam. Both north and south of the Islamic lands slaves were sometimes taken in war, sometimes seized by raiders, sometimes—with increasing frequency—offered for sale by African or European slave merchants. The supply of slaves from western Europe was eventually reduced to a mere trickle, acquired through the efforts of the Barbary corsairs; the supply of east Europeans continued for much longer, as a result of the Ottoman wars in south-eastern Europe and the raids of the Crimean Tartars among the Russians, Poles, and Ukrainians. There is little evidence, however, that these white slaves from Europe had any great effect on Muslim perceptions or ways, any more than did the much greater numbers of black slaves imported from tropical Africa.

Another important element in the Muslim perception of western Europe, from the Middle Ages onwards, was the military. Muslim visitors to Europe looked around them, as men do in hostile or potentially hostile territory, and noted information of military value, such as the location of roads, bridges, passes, and the like. The early triumphs of the Crusaders in the east impressed upon Muslim war departments that in some areas at least Frankish arms were superior, and the inference was quickly drawn and applied. European prisoners of war were set to work building fortifications; European mercenaries and adventurers were employed in some numbers, and a traffic in arms and other war materials began which has grown steadily in the course of the centuries. As early as 1174, Saladin wrote a letter to the caliph in Baghdad justifying his action in encouraging Christian commerce in the territories which he had reconquered from the Crusaders and in buying arms from the Christian states. “Now,” he says, “there is not one of them that does not bring to our lands his weapons of war and battle, giving us the choicest of what they make and inherit . . .”⁴ The result, he goes on to explain, was that these Christian merchants were supplying him with all kinds of armaments, to the advantage of Islam and the detriment of Christendom. The Christian church was of the same opinion, but all its efforts and denunciations failed to prevent the steady growth of this trade. Centuries later, when the Ottoman Turks were advancing into south-eastern Europe, they were always

able to buy much needed equipment for their fleets and armies from the Protestant powers, and even obtain financial cover from Italian banks.

All this, however, had little or no influence on Muslim perceptions and attitudes, as long as Muslim armies continued to be victorious. The sultans bought war materiel and military expertise for cash, and saw in this no more than a business transaction. The Turks in particular adopted such European inventions as handguns and artillery and used them to great effect, without thereby modifying their view of the barbarians from whom they acquired these weapons.

The real change in attitude began when the Ottoman and later other Muslim governments found it necessary to adopt not just European weapons, but European ways of using them. In the early eighteenth century the great French soldier Maurice de Saxe, observing battles between the Austrians and Ottomans in south-eastern Europe, put his finger on the main reason for the Ottoman lack of success: "What they [the Turks] lack is not valor, not numbers, not riches; it is order, discipline, and the manner of fighting."⁵ The important thing was "la manière de combattre," and it was this that gave the European enemies of the Ottomans their growing superiority in the battlefield. The Turkish commanders had certainly not read the *Rêveries* of Maurice de Saxe, but they had independently come to the same conclusion, and initiated a process of change which began as a limited military reform and culminated as a far-reaching social and cultural transformation.

Defeat in battle is the most perspicuous of arguments, and the lesson was driven home in a series of heavy blows. In the west, the Muslims were finally expelled from Spain and Portugal, and the triumphant Christians followed their former rulers into Africa and then into Asia. In the east, the Russians threw off the Tatar yoke and, like the Portuguese in the west but with far greater success, pursued their former masters into their homelands. With the conquest of Astrakhan in 1554, the Russians were on the shores of the Caspian; the following century they reached the northern shores of the Black Sea, thus beginning the long process of conquest and colonization which incorporated vast Muslim lands in the Russian Empire and brought the Russians as near neighbours to the heartlands of the Middle East. In central Europe the last great Ottoman attack failed before the walls of Vienna in 1683, and in the retreat that followed, the Ottomans lost Budapest, which they had held for a century and a half, and began their long rearguard action through the Balkan peninsula.

These changes gave a new importance to those elements in the Islamic world which were in one sense or another intermediaries between Islam and Christendom. They were of several kinds. The first group to achieve significance were the refugees who came from Spain and Portugal seeking asylum in North Africa and in the Ottoman lands of the eastern Mediterranean. These consisted of both Muslims and Jews, including some who had submitted under pain of death to enforced Christianization, and had then fled to more tolerant lands in order to declare their true religions. The Muslim Moriscos and the Jewish Marranos com-

ing from Spain and Portugal to North Africa and the Ottoman lands brought skills, knowledge, and some wealth from what were then among the most advanced countries in Europe. Another group of newcomers from Europe, smaller but not unimportant, were those whom the Christians called renegades and whom the Muslims called *muhtedi*, one who has found the right path. Not all these adventurers found it necessary to adopt Islam. Some entered the Ottoman service while retaining their previous religions. These newcomers—converts, adventurers, mercenaries, and others—helped to initiate what one may now begin to call the Europeanization of Turkey.

By the seventeenth century the flow of newcomers from Europe, whether renegades or refugees, was drying up. But if Europeans were no longer coming to the Middle East, a new element was appearing to take their place: Middle Easterners going to Europe. These were from the Middle Eastern Christian communities who began to establish contacts with western Europe in various ways, notably by sending their sons to Italian and later other European colleges and universities for education. The Greeks were the leaders in this movement; other Christian communities followed. The Roman Catholic Church had always been interested in the eastern Christians. In the late sixteenth century the Vatican became increasingly active among these communities, sending missionaries to work among them in Lebanon and elsewhere, and founding colleges in Italy for the study of their languages and the education of their clergy. Their direct impact was in the main limited to the Uniate churches, breakaway groups of the eastern churches that had entered into communion with Rome and established close ecclesiastical and educational links with the Vatican. The indirect influence of these contacts spread to their orthodox co-religionists and even to their Muslim neighbours. The school and order founded by the Catholic Armenian Mekhitar became for a time the centre of Armenian intellectual life; the Uniate Maronites of Lebanon, the first Arabic-speaking community to communicate directly with the West, were later to play a crucial role in opening the Arab world to Western intellectual influence.

The Maronite impact on the Arab world did not become important until the nineteenth century. Long before that, Greek and Armenian Christians, for whom Turkish was a second or sometimes even a first language, were filtering Western knowledge and ideas to the dominant Ottoman Turks.

Apart from these various Westernized or Westernizing Middle Eastern Christians, there was, increasingly, a direct European presence which became more influential as the real power relationship between Europe and the Islamic world changed to the disadvantage of the latter. At first Westerners came mainly as traders or diplomats (the latter were for long seen by the Ottomans as also being concerned principally with trade). From the eighteenth century onwards, another group of Europeans began to appear—military and naval officers assisting in the training of the new style Ottoman forces. At first, these were hired on individual contracts; later they were serving officers seconded by their home governments.

All these changes made for increased contacts between Muslims and Europeans. Educated Greeks, Armenians, and Maronites, able to speak and write a Western language as well as having a good command of Turkish or Arabic, created a possibility for genuine cultural exchanges, beyond the limited political, military, and commercial interpreting of earlier times. European instructors in Muslim military academies made it necessary, for the first time, for young Muslim cadets to view Europeans as dispensers of useful knowledge and not merely as infidels and barbarians. And the steady advance of European power—penetration, encroachment, domination, in some areas even annexation—was finally bringing increasing numbers of Muslim statesmen and soldiers to the view that a better understanding of this Western world was essential to their survival.

One noticeable change is in the literature of travel to Europe. Until the seventeenth century we have almost no information about Muslim travellers to Europe. While European travellers to the East—soldiers, pilgrims, merchants, captives—had already produced a considerable literature, there was nothing comparable on the Muslim side. Few Muslims travelled voluntarily to the lands of the infidels. Even the involuntary travellers, the many captives taken in the endless wars by land and sea, had nothing to say after their ransom and return, and perhaps no one to listen. In this they differed markedly from their European counterparts, whose reports of their adventures seem to have been in some demand. An Arab prisoner of war in Rome in the ninth century, an Andalusian diplomatic visitor to France and Germany in the tenth, a princely Ottoman exile in France and Italy in the fifteenth, these and one or two others have left a few notes and fragments which constitute almost the whole of the Muslim travel literature in Europe.

The first sign of a change came in the far west of Islam, in Morocco. This was the first Muslim country to perceive, and indeed to feel, the rise and expansion of European power. The Moroccans had seen the loss of Spain, for many centuries a part of the Arab Muslim world, and had received Spanish Muslim exiles in their own land. They had undergone invasion by both Spaniards and Portuguese and had had difficulty maintaining themselves. Already in the seventeenth century, the Moroccans were facing problems which Turks, Egyptians, and Persians did not have to confront until centuries later. This experience, and the resulting awareness of danger, is reflected in a series of Moroccan reports written by ambassadors to Europe and more particularly to Spain.

The earliest of these Moroccan ambassadors to leave a detailed record of his travels and impressions was the vizier al-Ghassani, who was sent to Spain by the sultan of Morocco in 1690–1. His book, the first description of Spain by a Muslim visitor since the end of the Reconquest, is of quite remarkable interest. His comments on Spanish life and affairs reveal him as a man of intelligence and discernment, keenly interested in what he saw, and with considerable powers of observation and analysis. His discussion is not limited to the moment and place of his mission but extends outwards to cover other countries in western

Europe, and backwards to embrace some centuries of European history. In addition to the political and military information which was presumably the primary concern of his government, he also devoted some attention to religious matters, including discussions of the confessional and the Inquisition; of social and economic matters, including some very revealing comments on Spanish customs and attitudes; and some perceptive remarks on the economic effects on Spain of the wealth of the Indies.⁶ Al-Ghassani was followed by several other Moroccan ambassadors in the course of the eighteenth century. One of them, Muhammad ibn 'Uthman al-Miknasi, gives what is probably the first account in Arabic of the American revolution and the establishment of the United States.⁷

Ottoman travellers to Europe are, as one would expect, more numerous than Moroccans, but it was some time before their reports reached the level of interest and information that the Moroccan reports offer. Three examples may suffice, to illustrate successive phases in the Ottoman perception of the West and in the Ottoman manner of presenting their perceptions to their readers at home.

The first of the three was the famous traveller Evliya Çelebi, who went to Vienna in 1665 in the suite of a Turkish ambassador, Kara Mehmed Pasha. Evliya still represents an Islamic empire conscious of its unchallengeable superiority in religion and consequently also in wealth and power. In his comments he appears as amused, sometimes even playful, occasionally disdainful. But at the same time he offers something clearly different from the earlier tradition of unconcern and contempt. His description is very detailed and reveals to his Ottoman reader a society with many positive features—a well-disciplined army, a fair and efficient system of administration of justice, prosperous towns and countryside, and a thriving capital city. In general he avoids explicit comparisons between Ottoman and Austrian situations; the exceptions are for example his preference for European clocks and watches to those in use in Turkey, or his praise for the well-stocked and well-kept library of St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna, which he contrasts favourably with the mismanaged mosque libraries of Cairo and Istanbul.⁸

Evliya, even when he has something to praise, still reflects a society that is self-assured to the point of complacency. Yirmisekiz Mehmed Efendi, who went to Paris as ambassador in 1720–1, reflects a very different situation. Between Evliya's journey to Vienna and his own trip to Paris, much had happened. The Ottomans had withdrawn from Vienna and had lost Budapest, and their defeats at the hands of the Austrians had been sealed in the peace treaties of Carlowitz (1699) and Passarowitz (1718), in the second of which Mehmed Efendi himself had participated as Ottoman plenipotentiary. Even worse, the Ottomans were now acutely aware of a new and terrible danger, not yet perceived in Evliya's day—the threat of Russia from the north. Not surprisingly, therefore, Mehmed Efendi looked at France with a different eye, not that of a confident visitor from an unchallengeably superior power, but the anxious eye of an emissary from a state threatened on several sides. He came to Paris with a different purpose,

seeking help and guidance and seeing for the first time in a west European country a possible model for reform, perhaps even, in a very limited sense, an ally against his sovereign's enemies.

Mehmed Efendi was interested in many things. He describes the observatory, the scientific instruments, the practice of medicine in France, industry and manufactures, the network of communications by road and canal, bridges and locks, and even says something about cultural activities, such as the theatre and the opera. In general, Mehmed Efendi does not make explicit comparisons, still less recommendations for change in a Westernizing direction. But these are implicit in some of his descriptions of French institutions, practices, and ways. His son, who accompanied him and later had a distinguished official career of his own, even learned French. This was a remarkable and for long a unique accomplishment.⁹

A document recently made known supplies an interesting addendum to Mehmed Efendi's account of his journey. On his return to Istanbul, he appears to have distributed a number of gifts to his colleagues, family, and friends. The new appetites which these aroused can be gathered from the list of items which the grand vizier shortly afterwards asked a French dragoman, going to Paris on leave, to bring with him on his return to Istanbul. They include optical instruments, eyeglasses, binoculars, microscopes, burning mirrors, Gobelin tapestries, small repeating watches, pictures of fortresses, towns, and gardens, as well as many other items. There was also, according to the dragoman in question, a verbal request for a thousand bottles of champagne and nine hundred bottles of burgundy. The Frenchman complied with most of these requests and in particular brought a thousand prints of fortresses and other scenes.¹⁰

The third example is 'Azmi Efendi, who went to Berlin as Ottoman ambassador in 1790. Between Mehmed Efendi's trip to Paris and his own journey to Prussia, the Ottoman position had again deteriorated, this time very sharply. A disastrous war with Russia had ended in the treaty of Küçük-Kaynarca of 1774, which gave the Russians immense territorial and other gains. This was followed by the Russian annexation of the Crimea and the rapid extension of Russian power in the Black Sea area. In 'Azmi's report, Europeans appear as powerful and advancing rivals, posing a major threat to the empire. In order to guard against them it was necessary to study them and perhaps even—so as to accomplish this purpose—to imitate some of their ways.

By this time the idea of imitation was no longer new or entirely strange in Ottoman circles, since several eighteenth-century writers had advanced it in various forms. 'Azmi's report, after the normal description of his travels and activities, contains a detailed account of the kingdom of Prussia under subject headings—the administration of the country, the inhabitants, the high government offices, the treasury, the population, the government food stores, the military, the arsenal, and the artillery magazines. 'Azmi speaks of the Prussian economic effort to foster trade and establish industry and to maintain a sound

and healthy treasury. The most important passages are those in which he describes the structure of the Prussian army, with its system of training, and the efficiency of the Prussian state organization, with its hierarchy of established and competent officials. 'Azmi was not content, like some of his predecessors, to convey his recommendations by hints and suggestions. Instead, he ends his report with a series of specific recommendations for the improvement of the Ottoman governmental and military apparatus, by adopting some of the best features of the Prussian system. In time 'Azmi's report came to be an important text for Ottoman officers and officials pressing for urgently needed reforms. One of the interesting features of his report is his description of the Prussian system as what would now be called a meritocracy, and his recommendation that this be adopted in place of the traditional Ottoman system of patronage and clientage.¹¹

From the late eighteenth century and during the nineteenth century—the date and pace differ from region to region—the Islamic world was subjected to the devastating impact of Western power, techniques, and ideas. Some regions were conquered and became part of the European empires of Great Britain, France, Holland, and Russia. Even the Ottoman Empire and Iran, though never formally conquered or occupied, found their independence in effect severely curtailed.

The first major change affecting Muslim perceptions of the West was in the channels and media of communication. Where previously Muslim visitors to Europe, even in the age of Ottoman retreat, had been few and far between, they now became frequent and numerous. From the end of the eighteenth century, the Ottomans and later other Muslim states established resident diplomatic missions in European capitals, thus bringing into being a whole group of government officials with direct knowledge of a European country and, increasingly, of a European language. This last was of special significance. Whereas previously Muslims had had to rely almost entirely on non-Muslims or new converts to Islam for interpretation and translation, there now emerged—at first slowly and reluctantly, then with rapidly gathering momentum—a new élite of native Muslims with a command of at least one European language. Such knowledge, previously despised, became tolerable, then useful, and finally indispensable. In the early years of the nineteenth century the first student missions were sent from Egypt, Turkey, and Iran to European schools—at first mainly military, then over the whole range of education. These few hundred students played an important role after their return to their own countries. They were the outriders of a vast army of eager young Muslims who lived for a while in a European city and, as is the way of students, learned more from their fellow-students than from their teachers. In the Europe of the 1830s and 1840s, there was much that was interesting to learn.

One result of the lessons learned was that after the mid-century, diplomats and students were followed by a third category of Muslim visitors to Europe—political exiles. Most important among these were the Young Ottomans, a group

of liberal patriots who wished to bring their country the benefits of Western-style constitutional and parliamentary government, in which they saw the talisman of Western success and power. Before long groups of Muslim exiles, publishing manifestos, newspapers, pamphlets, and books, became a familiar feature of the European scene.

Perhaps the most important single development was education—not only of increasing numbers of Muslim students going to Europe but also, to an ever greater extent, by the establishment of Western schools and colleges in the Muslim lands and eventually even the partial Westernization of the schools established by the Muslim governments themselves. An important part of this process was the extension of military training through the modernization—which at that time meant the Westernization—of the armed forces. Western military advisers came from many quarters. Prussia, later Germany, maintained a series of military missions in Turkey from 1835 to 1919, with far-reaching effects on the Turkish army.¹² British and French military and naval officers also played a role, though a smaller one, in Turkey and a somewhat greater one in some of the Arab countries. The ending of a major war in the Western world often provided a supply of experienced military officers suddenly rendered supernumerary, and seeking an outlet for their talents. After the Napoleonic Wars, many French officers were available for service in Egypt. At the end of the American Civil War, retired American officers began to undertake the retraining and reorganization of the Egyptian army. Russian military lessons to the Muslim armies were for most of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries administered on the battlefield rather than in the classroom. There were, however, some Russian officers training the Persian gendarmerie, and in more recent times Soviet military missions have begun to play a major role in several Muslim countries.

In this new phase the number of Muslim visitors to Europe increased greatly, and so too did the literature produced by them. For a long time the prevailing attitude towards Europe was one of respect, even of admiration. Muslim writers naturally enough did not regard the new masters of the world with any great affection, nor were they prepared to concede them any real merit in what was for them the most important aspect of all—the religious, a term which at that time, for them, included the cultural and intellectual. The old attitude of uninformed contempt, while still surviving no doubt among those who stayed at home, virtually disappeared among those who ventured abroad. The main stimulus was still the perception of their own weakness and poverty and the desire to emulate and if possible equal the wealth and power of the Western world. This desire became the more acute as events demonstrated with increasing urgency the dangers to which this inequality exposed the Muslim world—the dangers of domination, of exploitation, even of conquest.

There were, however, some differences of opinion as to the nature of the lessons to be learned; there were still some difficulties in making those lessons palatable among the largely unconvinced and unpersuaded public at home.

Among the earlier writers in this period of growing European domination, two themes predominate, both of them developments of themes already perceptible in earlier writings. They are respectively the military and the political. The one began as a concern with Western weapons, then with Western methods of warfare. This in turn developed into a concern with Western technology and eventually industry, as the realization spread that it was to no small extent on these that the superiority of Western armies depended. In the course of the nineteenth century, Muslim awareness of economic inferiority began to equal their awareness of the more dramatic and more obvious political and military weakness of the Islamic world, and some Muslim rulers began to be concerned with economic development along Western lines, not just as a support for better armies and navies, but for its own sake.

The second change was a growing interest in Western methods of government. At first Muslim visitors showed no interest whatever in this topic. Apart from a few passing references in medieval texts, a first brief account was given in the mid-seventeenth century by the well-known Ottoman scholar and polymath, Kâtib Çelebi. His information is scattered and fragmentary, on some points remarkably detailed, on others strikingly inaccurate. The book was never printed and is little known. Other Ottoman writers of the period show little or no interest in European affairs, even just across their border. Thus, the extremely voluminous Ottoman chronicles of the seventeenth century pay only the slightest attention to the events of the Thirty Years War, and even less to its causes and consequences. A brief reference to European laws and forms of government occurs in a Persian book written in 1732. The writer notes with regret that he had been unable to accept the suggestion of an English sea-captain whom he had met to visit Europe where, he implies, they order these things better. It is not until the mid-eighteenth century that we find the first factual account of European governments and armies, written and printed by a Hungarian convert to Islam who rose high in the Ottoman service.¹³

The last years of the century saw a major reform effort. A new printing press was installed in Istanbul, from which a number of books, both original and translated, were published; foreign officers in greater numbers were appointed as instructors in the military and naval schools; permanent Ottoman embassies were opened in London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, and St. Petersburg, and the French—first through their embassy in Istanbul, then through their newly acquired bases in Greece and Egypt—began to disseminate information and ideas about the recent revolution in France. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, an Ottoman historian speaks approvingly of parliamentary institutions in the states of Europe, for which he uses the striking euphemism “certain well organized state,”¹⁴ and suggests in a very tentative way that similar consultative institutions would have a place in the Ottoman governmental and administrative tradition. The idea of consultative and deliberative procedures is deep rooted in Islamic theory and Ottoman practice. What was new was the idea, imported from Eu-

rope, of freedom as a political and not merely a juridical concept—freedom in the sense of the rights of the subject against the state, rights to be enshrined in a code of laws and protected by the law and the judiciary. It was these notions that gave rise to the Muslim constitutional movement which grew steadily during the nineteenth century and reached its climax in the Persian and Ottoman constitutional revolutions of 1905 and 1908.

Since then there have been great disappointments. Western military methods did not win the hoped-for victories; Western economic and political panaceas brought neither the prosperity nor the freedom for which they had been prescribed. In a mood of outrage and revulsion, there has been a return to older perceptions and responses, and to many the West again appears as something alien, pagan, and noxious, still hostile, but no longer terrifying. For the time being Western values in general, and Western political ways in particular, enjoy little esteem or respect. But it would be rash to say that they are dead in the Islamic world.

Notes

1. Elie Kedourie, *Islam in the Modern World and Other Studies* (London, 1980), p. 7.
2. 'Umari, ed. M. Amari, "Al-'Umari, Condizioni degli stati Cristiani dell' Occidente secondo una relazione di Domenichino Doria da Genova," *Atti R. Acad. Linc. Mem.*, xi (1883), text p. 15, trans. p. 87.
3. F. von Kraelitz-Greifenhorst, "Bericht über den Zug des Gross-Botschafters Ibrahim Pascha nach Wien im Jahre 1719," *Akademie der Wiss. Wien: Phil. Hist. Kl. Sitzungsberichte*, clviii (1909), 26–77.
4. Abu Shama, *Kitāb al-Rawḍatayn fī akbbār al-dawlatayn*, 2nd edition, ed. M. Ḥilmī Aḥmad (Cairo, 1962), i, pt. 2, 621–22.
5. Maurice de Saxe, *Mes Rêveries* (1757), i. 86–87, cited in *War, Technology and Society in the Middle East*, ed. V. J. Parry and M. E. Yapp (London, 1975), p. 256.
6. Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhab, al-Wazir al-Ghassani, *Riblat al-wazir fī iftikāk al-asir*, ed. and Spanish translation by Alfredo Bustani (Tangier, 1940). Bustani's edition is somewhat abridged. For a full French translation from a manuscript, see H. Sauvaire, *Voyage en Espagne d'un Ambassadeur Marocain* (Paris, 1884). On these Moroccan travellers in general, see Henri Pérès, *L'Espagne vue par les voyageurs musulmans de 1610 [sic: recte 1690] à 1930* (Paris, 1937).
7. Muhammad ibn 'Uthman al-Miknasi, *al-Iksār fī fikāk al-asīr*, ed. Muh. al-Fasi (Rabat, 1965).
8. Evliya, *Seyahatname* (Istanbul, 1314 A.H.), vii; cf. German translation, R. F. Kreutel, *Im Reiche des Goldenen Apfels* (Graz, 1957).
9. There are several editions of the embassy report of Mehmed Said, in both the old and new Turkish scripts, with some variations in the text. The book was first published in Paris and Istanbul with a French translation as *Relation de l'ambassade de Mehmet Effendi à la cour de France en 1721 écrite par lui même et traduit par Julien Galland* (Constantinople and Paris, 1757). A new edition of Galland's version, without the text but with many additional documents, was edited by Gilles Veinstein: Mehmet Efendi, *Le paradis des infidèles* (Paris, 1981). On these authors, see further B. Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (New York, 1982); and Faik Reşit Unat, *Osmanlı sefirleri ve sefaretnameleri* (Ankara, 1968).
10. Cited by Veinstein, pp. 48–49.

11. 'Azmi, *Sefaretname 1205 senesinde Prusya Kıraltı İkinci Fredrik Guillaum in nezdine memur olan Ahmed 'Azmi Efendinin'dir* (Istanbul, 1303 A.H.), p. 52. German translation by Otto Müller-Kohlshorn, *Azmi Efendis Gesandtschaftsreise an den preussischen Hof* (Berlin, 1918) (not seen).
12. On the German military missions to Turkey, see Jehuda L. Wallach, *Anatomie einer Militärhilfe: die preussisch-deutschen Militärmissionen in der Türkei 1835–1919* (Tel Aviv–Düsseldorf, 1976).
13. Ibrahim Müteferrika, *Usul al-bikem fi nizam al-umem* (Istanbul, 1144 A.H.); *idem*, French version, *Traité de la Tactique* (Vienna, 1769).
14. Şanizade, *Tarih* (Istanbul, 1290–1 A.H.), iv, 2–3.