

Prof. Scott B. Noegel  
Chair, Dept. of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization  
University of Washington

**Book note:**

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# Islam

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**THE MIDDLE EAST: A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE LAST 2,000 YEARS.** By Bernard Lewis. New York: Scribner's, 1995. Pp. xii + 433. N.p., ISBN 0-684-80712-2.

An immensely readable and fascinating survey of the social, economic, and cultural changes that have shaped the Middle East. Beginning with the Roman and Persian empires, Lewis documents contact between the East and the West and the impact of the one upon the other. Throughout, the material is treated with a great deal of sensitivity and with enriching acumen. In addition to outlining the oscillating plays of power between Christians and Muslims, Mongols, Turks, Mamluks, and Safavids, the book is spiced thoroughly with captivating anecdotes and enlightening etymologies. This is more than a listing of historical events; it is a profound history of ideas. The reader learns, for example, how changes in clothing, hairstyle, food, and leisure habits were introduced, how the ruling institutions interact with the general populace, and whence derive characteristics and terms so closely associated with the Middle East today. Particularly interesting foci include the development and impact in the West of Eastern conceptions of religion and law, the preoccupation of Middle Eastern elite classes, the changing models of education, the role of literature and music, and the challenges of modernity in the region. A combination of an encyclopedic knowledge and great love for the subject, this book is highly recommended.

*Scott B. Noegel*  
*University of Washington*  
*Seattle, WA 98195*