



A Middle East Mosaic: Fragments of Life, Letters and History (Modern Library Classics)

Bernard Lewis

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In times of war and in peace, from the earliest days of the Roman Empire to our own, Westerners have journeyed to the lands of the middle east, bringing back accounts of their adventures and impressions. Yet it was never a one way exchange. From the first Arab embassy to the Vikings in the 9th century to the internet musings of the Taliban, **A Middle East Mosaic** collects a rich, boisterous literature of cultural exchange.

We see the American Revolution through the eyes of a Moroccan Ambassador and the French Revolution through a series of Imperial Ottoman proclamations. We find surprising portraits of Napoleon ("a brigand chief"), TE Lawrence and Ataturk. We learn what George Washington and Machiavelli thought of Turkish politics and hear Flaubert and Thackeray rail against eastern crime and punishment. We peer into Voltaire's business correspondence and follow the footsteps of Mark Twain, Richard Burton, Gertrude Bell and Ibn Battuta, the Marco Polo of the east. Great discoveries are recorded - an Egyptian Ambassador is introduced to electricity and dismisses the spectacle as "frankish trickery;" another pronounces the invention of a secure mail system most useful for assignations. We enter the harem with a 16th century organ maker and emerge with Ottoman reform.

It was not until the sixteenth century that the first middle eastern rulers entered into diplomatic relations with European rulers, but trade often precede diplomatic relations. Business men from the days of the crusades against Saladin to the oil prospecting of Samuel Cox and his descendants have seen great possibilities in the markets of the middle east. And throughout the centuries we have been united by war. We witness the outbreak of the Crimean war with Karl Marx and enter Egypt with Napoleon. We observe Arab customs with George Patton and visit Baghdad and Cairo with George F. Kennan in the second world war. When Usama bin Laden rails against "Jews and crusaders" occupying the holy land, he is rehearsing a grievance with a long history.

This symphony of voices, full of wit and wisdom, spite and wonder, suspicion, befuddlement and occasional insight, is ordered and explained by our foremost living historian of the middle east. The fruit of a lifetime of scholarship and erudition, **A Middle East Mosaic** is a dazzling capstone to a brilliant career. In a spirited reappraisal of western views of the east and eastern views of the west over the last two thousand years, Bernard Lewis gives us a brilliant over-view of 2,000 years of commerce, diplomacy, war and exploration.

This book is a delight, a treasury of stories drawn from letters, diaries and histories, but also from unpublished archives and previously untranslated accounts. Diplomats and interpreters, slaves, soldiers, pilgrims and missionaries, princes and spies, businessmen, doctors and priests all pour forth their stories of the people and events that shaped history. **A Middle East Mosaic** cannot fail to appeal to anyone with an appetite for history and a curiosity about the vagaries of cultural exchange.

From the Hardcover edition.

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