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**Lecture by Professor Bernard Lewis, Professor Emeritus, Princeton
University
On**

THE PERIODIZATION OF HISTORY

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PROF. BERNARD LEWIS, Professor Emeritus, Princeton

Prof. Abraham Nitzan:

Good evening, I am Abraham Nitzan, the Director of the Mortimer and Raymond Sacklar Institute of Advanced Studies here at Tel Aviv University and I am very happy to open yet another lecture by Bernard Lewis. One of the things that I like about being the director of this institute is that this is an occasion when I introduce a speaker from what is called the 'West' side of Campus - that is to say the humanities and social studies at the University. This gives me the opportunity to reflect a little on two cultures - the concept that was introduced by C.P. Snow at the beginning of the previous century: these two cultures – humanities on one side and sciences on the other in our Institutes. This is my opportunity as a representative of the East side of campus to do this on such occasions. A year or two ago we sat at dinner after one of Bernard's lectures and I sat across the table from Martin Kramer, who is a colleague from the West side of campus and a former student of Bernard Lewis. The discussion turned to the study of history and what is the position of history on the line that connects science and arts: on the one side, history relies on understanding and collecting and getting to know the facts, and from this point of view, this is science. From the other point of view, this has also to do with interpreting these facts and deducing some future trends from these trends and there is a lot of personal input and possibly also bias. So the question of to what extent the study of history is science and to what extent the interpreting part of history is the art of the historian as artist is, in my opinion, a fascinating question. I know that I am stepping on dangerous grounds here where half a century ago, historians of science and sociology tried to advance the notion that science also depends on the subjective input and the sociological

background of the scientist. This theory gave rise to what became known in the previous century as the "Science War" because scientists really fiercely objected to this idea that their profession had anything to do with subjective judgments.

I have no intention to open a new front in this war tonight. Let me focus on what is clearly true in both cultures: that a prerequisite to forming an opinion and making an interpretation is familiarity and understanding of the facts. One cannot overestimate this also when it comes to decision-making in the political world. I remember that Bernard Lewis himself made a comment to an Israeli newspaper a few years ago – that one reason why the Camp David negotiations between Barak and Arafat failed was that they did not understand each other's culture and biases. Bernard Lewis has over many years played a decisive role in promoting such familiarity with and understanding of Muslim culture and society in the Western world, and this is also what he has done for us here at Tel Aviv University in many lectures. He is a graduate of the University of London and taught for many years at Princeton University. He is now their Professor Emeritus of Near Eastern Studies. More importantly for us, for many years now – actually nearly a quarter of a century – he has been a regular visitor to Tel Aviv University, a fellow of our Institute of Advanced Studies, and he has shared with us his wisdom and insight on history, history of the Middle East, the history of the Jews in the Middle East and in Europe. Two weeks from now he will talk to us on 'Choices for the Middle East'. Today the subject of his talk is 'Periodization of History'.

Please, Bernard Lewis.

Prof. Bernard Lewis:

Thank you Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen. May I begin by saying how delighted I am to be here once again on my Nth visit and to face this welcoming audience – I can feel the welcome oozing from you.

Let me turn now to my topic, which is what you want to hear about. My subject this evening is the periodization of history and I would like to begin by telling you two stories from a very remote past when I was a young lecturer in the University of London just beginning to learn my profession. On one occasion I was asked by the School of Oriental and African studies at which I was teaching to sit on the committee which interviewed applicants for undergraduate places. These were people who were in the last year of high school and were applying for a place in the university and this committee had the job of interviewing the various applicants and then making not a decision, but a recommendation on whom should be accepted. One of the applicants was a young lady – presumably about 18 years old from a school on the Welsh border who said that she wanted to come in order to study Chinese history. This seemed a somewhat improbable aspiration and we asked her why and she said, "As long as she could remember, she had been fascinated by China; she had read every book she could lay her hands on about China, Chinese history, Chinese culture and now that she was going to university, her dearest wish was to learn Chinese in order to study Chinese history more closely". Well, my colleagues who knew more about Chinese things than I did asked her various appropriate questions; when it was my turn to ask, I asked a sort of normal historian's question and said "You are interested in Chinese history. Is your interest mainly in ancient or medieval or modern history?" And this young lady looked at me for a while, hesitated, and then said, "Sir, if you can tell me what these words mean in relation to

Chinese history, I will try to answer your question." It was a very intelligent and also a very courageous answer. We accepted her of course enthusiastically but she didn't come. I don't know why; she may have had a better offer elsewhere or perhaps she did not want to come to a place where the professors ask such stupid questions.

My second story, also from the same period, relates to a request I received from a very distinguished Oxford professor - Sir Maurice Powicke – to participate in a project on which he was working. He was at that time one of the best-known medieval historians in England, a very distinguished scholar in the field of medieval history, and I was surprised to learn that he occupied the Regius Chair of Modern History at Oxford University – a Regius Chair at Oxford and Cambridge is a chair established by the Crown. I was a little puzzled: he is the Regius Professor of Modern History but he is a medievalist. So I asked a friend from Oxford how this could happen and I was told with a rather contemptuous smile that at Oxford, modern history begins with the fall of Rome.

These two stories are by way of introduction – they created a sort of awareness, even an alertness, which I might otherwise have lacked. This terminology – ancient, medieval, modern – is now used almost universally, whether appropriate or not. Those of you who are students of the history of Islam will certainly be aware of a famous book called 'Medieval Islam' written by one of the most distinguished scholars in the field. It is an excellent book still many years after its original publication, an invaluable resource for any student of Muslim history. But the title is an absurdity: what it means is not Medieval Islam – it means that period of Islamic history which corresponds to the Medieval period in European history. This classification – ancient, medieval,

modern – is European; it was invented by Europeans in Europe to classify the different phases of European history; and like so many other things from Europe, it was either adopted by or imposed upon the rest of the world, whether appropriate or not.

Now even for Europe, the term 'Medieval' is comparatively recent - how recent I did not realize until these incidents provoked me to look into the matter more closely. For a very long time, history was divided – and I am still speaking now of Europe – history was divided into ancient and modern and, as my friends at Oxford told me, Modern History began with the Fall of Rome. The two Regius Professorships of Modern History at Oxford and Cambridge were founded in the year 1724 and both of them were concerned almost exclusively with Medieval History – what we would now call medieval history, that's to say Modern in the sense that it was post-Roman.

The term 'Medieval' is comparatively recent; the very notion of some sort of interval between ancient and modern is comparatively recent. For a long time, as I said, it was simply Ancient and Modern. Now the division between ancient and modern has varied somewhat; normally it was the Fall of Rome but historians have differed as to how precisely to date the Fall of Rome. It wasn't a single action; it was a process and different historians have rather arbitrarily chosen different dates -but mainly from the late fourth into the early fifth century: either the fall of Rome or the advent of Christianity, which is in another sense the beginning of the Modern Era and indeed the beginning of the Calendar which is still used, a calendar which was for long known as AD – Anno Domini, the Year of the Lord, obviously a Christian designation. Nowadays that is no longer politically correct and AD has been replaced

by CE – the Common Era (that makes it possible for Jews and Muslims to use it without embarrassment). This era was used backwards as well as forwards so that we had BC – which means Before Christ but has now become BCE – Before the Common Era.

Let me come now to the emergence of the notion 'Medieval'. In the English language, we are fortunate in having dictionaries which date fairly precisely the earliest recorded use of a word. The earliest recorded use – in English – of the word Medieval is **1827**. Through the whole of the medieval period, they were totally unaware of being medieval. The notion of medieval seems to have developed (I say 'seems to' because it is not totally certain but very likely) seems to have developed in Italy among the humanists at the early stages of the Renaissance as they contemplated the glory of the ruins of Rome all around them, considered the situation which had followed and saw the beginnings of a new dawn of civilization of which they themselves were the creators. Petrarch, the great Italian poet, in the 1330's invented a new term: the Dark Ages, a term which has since passed common usage, the Dark Ages meaning the end of civilization represented by Greece and Rome, a period of barbarism and ignorance. He dated it approximately from the late fifth century to about the year 1000. Another Italian humanist, Flavio Biondi, about a century later took the matter a step further and invented another new term: the Middle Ages. But, as I remarked earlier, its general acceptance and use, and more particularly the adjective 'Medieval' did not come till much later.

Later scholars were engaged in extensive research on history, not only forwards but even backwards, into an increasingly remote past, so remote that they developed a new periodization, by tools and weapons:

Stone Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age, and with increasing knowledge, with increasing documentation in the form of archaeological remnants, they sub-divided it so that the Stone Age was sub-divided into the Old Stone Age, the Middle Stone Age, the New Stone Age: Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, ...

Nowadays, historians have another problem and that is that the modern history is getting longer and longer. This creates another problem of, shall we say classification and designation. Even if we give up the idea that modern history starts with the fall of Rome and just started with the end of the Middle Ages (whenever that may be), it is still a long period and getting longer every day. Some historians have invented terms like Early Modern, distinguishing between early modern and modern. Others have taken the more dangerous step of using the term contemporary, so that Modern History means yesterday and Contemporary History means today. But what about tomorrow which becomes today in a very short time? In German, they use the term *Neuzeit* for the modern period (the New Time) and then, when that was getting a bit stale, they invented the term *Neueste Zeit* – the Newest Time. Well, what comes next? We've heard of course of Post-Modern but that has rather a different connotation. I hope some of you will at least live to see what is the next phase.

But Ancient – Medieval – Modern is not the only periodization. There have been a number of others which I want to look at briefly. One of them is of course by the means of production and the ownership of the means of production – in other words, the Marxist approach, dividing history into the eras of slavery, feudalism and capitalism. There is a fascinating literature, from the Soviet Union in the immediate pre-war period when a group of Soviet Orientalists, specialists in Arab, Persian,

Turkish and more generally Islamic history, tried to periodize Islamic history, according to the only system of periodization that was permitted in the Soviet Union – namely the Marxist one. So which is the slave society and which is the bourgeois society? – You have arguments as to whether the Koran is a slave-owning document or a feudal document and a lot more. To us this seems nonsensical and absurd but our own practice of using the West European terminology is perhaps more sophisticatedly absurd.

Another periodization that is very commonly used nowadays and has formed the basis of several popular philosophies of history is what you might call the biological metaphor: the history of civilization begins with conception and grows through infancy, childhood, adolescence and maturity, includes mating and procreation, and ends with decay and death. Many histories in the twentieth century, starting even in the late nineteenth century, were written on this basic classification. This raises interesting questions about what is there before and what comes after. The term '*barbarism*' is generally used to indicate something other than civilization. But there is of course a very interesting difference between the barbarians who are going up towards civilization and the barbarians who are coming down from a decayed civilization. I think it is a difference which is of particular relevance to our time. (Don't ask me to elaborate on that).

Sometimes historians have tried to classify history, periodize history I should say, on the basis of some major event. One example I have already given you – the fall of Rome; another example – the rise of Christianity. Sometimes more precise dates than that are used: for a long time, for example, the date 1453 was seen as extraordinarily significant.

This was the date when the Christian city of Constantinople was captured by the Muslim Ottoman Turks; this was the last Christian stronghold in the East and its capture by the Turks completed a process which had been going on for centuries. At one time it was quite common to regard this as the end of the Middle Ages and the starting point of the Modern Era, though this seems to me to be a rather exaggerated interpretation of that event.

Another popular year with the periodizers is 1492 which combines a number of different events, all very significant in their way I suppose the best known is the discovery of America; another is the expulsion of the Jews from Spain; another – usually forgotten except among those concerned – is the completion of the Reconquest of Spain. Earlier in that same year, 1492, the Christians conquered the last Muslim stronghold on Spanish soil, the city of Granada, the completion of what is known in Spanish history as the Reconquista.

The expulsion of the Jews – obviously a major event in Jewish history – and from the point of view of the historian of the Jews certainly a crucial event – is also important in another respect. What we often tend to overlook is that the expulsion of the Jews in 1492 was what you might call a 'dry run' for the bigger and more important task of expelling the Muslims. The Muslims in re-conquered Spain were far more numerous than the Jews. Expelling them, giving the choice of baptism or death, was obviously a much more difficult operation than for the Jews. The expulsion of the Jews, I think, could be seen as a pilot project and the expulsion of the Muslims came in the early years of the sixteenth century, in phases for different parts. But in that sense too, it was the beginning of a new era.

Another event of 1492 – a crucial event that is usually forgotten, but one to which a French historian recently drew attention – that is the publication of a book called *Grammatica Castellana* - Castilian grammar, by a Spanish scholar called *Antonio de Nebrija*. What makes it important is that this was the first time that a grammar had been compiled of a European vernacular. Until then, the situation in Europe was rather similar to the situation in the Arab world today: they used a dead language for written purposes and regarded the languages which they spoke as merely dialects, not worthy of serious attention. This was the first time that a scholar produced a grammar, establishing correct usage of what until then had been a dialect. It was the first of many and marks the beginning of the acceptance of Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, French and other languages re-placing Medieval Latin which sank into a well-deserved oblivion.

If we compare what happened then in Europe with what has happened and is still happening in the Arab world, which confronts a similar problem, I think that is very enlightening.

Another date often adduced is 1789 – the French Revolution, which many see as the starting point of modern history – not only in France but all over the world. I see it simply as a slightly delayed centennial of the English revolution of 1688 but I may be prejudiced in this.

A more recent turning-point, I think you will all agree, is 1948 and what I am thinking of is of course the establishment of the State of Israel. A crucial date in the history of the Jews, quite obviously; but also a crucial date in the history of the region, and more broadly for other parts of the world that are affected by or involved in this region. It was for the

Jews a glorious victory, for the Arabs a humiliating defeat, and the memory of those events still remains very powerful on both sides with diametrically opposite effects.

Some historians have used rather more limited periodizations, choosing a much shorter period for the purpose of study. One such is a reign: we talk about the Elizabethan period for example and I think one may say it is a genuine period as historians use that term. We talk about the Victorian period and I was surprised to discover that the term Victorian is also extensively used in the United States, though that country was never part of the realm of Queen Victoria. Nevertheless it has become an accepted term (I am still not quite sure why; perhaps you can enlighten me...) Another dynastic designation is 'Napoleonic' – a rather different category. I find it interesting that the only two reigns in England which have given a generally accepted name to a period are both women – Elizabethan and Victorian. One does use the word Georgian, but it lacks precision, nor does it have quite the same impact as those others.

Sometimes historians have chosen a limited time with distinctive features, and here I will offer you one outstanding example: a book by the British historian Arthur Marwick on the nineteen-sixties. A short period but one with a quite remarkable sequence of major events - the Kennedy presidency, and assassination; the first man on the moon; the birth control pill with its social and cultural consequences; and the student revolution and the Vietnam problem and so on and so forth. And the Beatles of course.

That also raises another interesting question relevant to periodization: where do you begin? Where do you end? I have talked of periodization in terms of years; as Marwick in his history of the 'sixties

points out quite accurately – I don't think one can contest it – "to write the history of the 'sixties, you must begin in the late 'fifties and you can't stop until you're well into the early seventies". I think – Once stated, it's obvious.

Let me turn now to my main theme and that is Middle Eastern history. All I have said so far is by way of preliminary or preparation. The Middle East is the region of the most ancient civilizations known to mankind: but its peoples underwent a series of cataclysmic changes: through conquest and domination, or conversion. The Middle East was Hellenized, it was Romanized, in a different way it was Christianized and then, most comprehensively by conquest and conversion – it was Islamized, – each of these beginning very definitely a new and different era. One indication of the change is the fate of the languages; these were ancient written languages in the Middle East. With one exception – with this audience I don't need to say which – with one exception the languages of the Ancient Middle East were all totally forgotten; they were dead and forgotten; the languages were unknown, the scripts were unknown, and replaced by later forms which in turn were also replaced. Aramaic came to be spoken in most of what is now known as the Fertile Crescent; Coptic – a later form of the ancient language – came to be dominant in Egypt. But with the Arab conquest, these two died out. Coptic and Aramaic were limited to the rituals of their churches; and Aramaic to a few villages where it is still spoken. If you go on the main road north from Damascus, ... on the right lane on thirty miles you take a turn to the Left and you come to a valley called *Ma'loula* where there are three villages where they still speak Aramaic, using the same dialect of Aramaic as was spoken by Jesus and his contemporaries.

There is one partial exception to this change and that is the Persians. The Persians did not adopt the Arabic language; they retained their own language but in a very basic form. They lost the old script and therefore with it, they lost the ancient identity and memory. Only the Jews, and the Jews alone, retained their language, their memory and their identity, Unfortunately that does not help us very much because the Jews stopped writing history: after the end of the biblical period, the Jews seemed to have lost interest in history. Indeed, Maimonides even says in two different places in his writings that history is a waste of time: it serves no purpose, either for the mind or for the body. He says it's the sort of thing that the 'goyim' do. It's not too difficult to see why: history needs a patron, it needs a public. The Jews of the Diaspora had neither. So that between the end of the ancient Jewish state and the emergence of the new curiosity of the Renaissance, there is – strange as it may seem – no Jewish historiography. There's a lot of history, a lot happening, and a lot of historical remnants, sources, documents, inscriptions, manuscripts, all sorts of things, but nobody was actually writing history. Because there was no reason to do so.

In contrast, Islamic historiography from the very beginning is quite extraordinarily rich, detailed and sophisticated. It has been calculated that, from the advent of Islam until the end of the Middle Ages (say roughly the fifteenth century) the bulk of historical writings in Arabic alone, in this pre-modern period is more extensive than the entire western output in Latin, in Greek and in all the European vernaculars. As another example of the historical mindedness of Islam, I would point to the situation in India: India is a country of very ancient civilization going back many centuries, if not millennia, before the advent of Islam but we know nothing of the history of ancient India because the Hindus did not

regard it as important. History was seen as irrelevant, unimportant; they would have agreed with the notion that it was a waste of time. The recorded history of India begins with the Arab-Muslim conquest; our knowledge of what happened before that has been laboriously put together from historical remnants, documents, inscriptions and the like.

Why? Why were Muslims so concerned with history? Why did it matter so much to them? Because, for the Muslim, history is the record of the working out of God's plan for mankind: everything that happens is ordained, decreed by God. Let me interject for a moment to say this does not mean a complete belief in predestination. The way it was put by one Muslim divine is: Yes the Koran says nothing shall befall us save what God has written for us. The text is perfectly clear (Arabic). But as the medieval Muslim philosopher says, history is not a game of chess, it is a game of backgammon and we don't have complete freedom of choice. Fate – God – Destiny determines the throw of the dice. But within the throw of the dice, we still have some choices; we can still win or lose the game. I think that is a very instructive metaphor.

History is important as I say, because it represents the record of God's purpose for mankind. It follows therefore that the only history that matters is Muslim history: that history which is not enlightened by the Koran or by Islam is of no value. That means two things: history before Islam, which is called *Jahiliya* (the age of ignorance) or history outside Islam, the lands of the unbelievers. So you get some quite remarkable phenomena resulting from that. On the one hand, as I said, there is an enormously rich historiographic literature, starting from the time of the Prophet himself. With some background about the earlier period, there are in the Koran, in the biography, in the traditions; there are some allusions to an earlier past, mainly biblical allusions, which require some

explanation. So there is some attention – but minimal attention – to the pre-Islamic past. Otherwise the history of the Middle East before Islam was obliterated and forgotten. So, in the region with the oldest, longest history in the world, all the old languages and scripts were forgotten; the monuments and the writings destroyed or disregarded. In Egypt, for example, Pharaoh was known only in the *Koranic* version which is much the same as the biblical version and this has sometimes given rise in modern Egypt to agonizing dilemmas: at the time of the '73 war, or possibly one of the earlier ones, there is an Egyptian woman writer who tackled the *Koranic* version of the Exodus story. Now in the *Koranic* version of the Exodus story, Pharaoh is the bad guy and the Jews – the children of Israel – are God's people. In other words, it is much the same as the biblical version and that somehow seemed inappropriate to modern Egypt. She suggested (obviously very cautiously and carefully) that maybe the Koran had got it wrong and that one should take the side of Pharaoh rather than of the *banu Isra'il*. This did not have much support. Even into modern times – we remember when Sadat was murdered, the leader of the group that murdered him proclaimed proudly 'I have killed Pharaoh'. Obviously he did not mean that Sadat was a great and glorious leader; he was talking about Pharaoh as the personification of evil, as the enemy of God's people and the fact that God's people in that particular story happen to be the Israelites did not bother him.

It did bother a number of others.

The revival of interest in the ancient past came very slowly and in its early states was due entirely to foreigners. The recovery of the lost past in Egypt, in Syria, in Iraq was the work of that terrible breed of people known as the Orientalists, mostly European and later some

American. It was their work entirely which made it possible to discover, to decipher, to interpret, to reconstruct the languages and recover the long-lost history of Ancient Egypt. It was not until 1868 that, for the first time, an Egyptian scholar, a Sheikh from *Al-Azhar* who spent some years in Paris, wrote a history of Egypt which ended where all the previous histories of Egypt had begun – namely with the Arab conquest. This was something entirely new.

We find a similar situation with regard to most of the other countries of the Middle East: when the Persians who, unlike the peoples of Iraq and Syria and Egypt, had preserved a form of their language and had preserved a certain identity, when they wanted to do something about their history, there was nothing available to them. They could no longer read the Old Persian language and there was nothing available to them in Arabic. All they had was myths and legends; the genuine history of pre-Islamic Persia was totally lost and forgotten until it was discovered, deciphered and brought to them by Western scholars. *Cyrus* for example, the great Persian hero was totally unknown in Iran until modern times when they read about him in English and French.

I mentioned the lack of interest in previous history: there is an almost equal – not quite but almost equal lack of interest in external history. The Middle East, after all, was between regions of ancient civilization. They had extensive dealings with India and with China – commercial, cultural and many other things; but with rare exceptions we don't find the slightest interest in the history of China or of India. There is one book on India which is regarded as remarkable, indeed unique; none, as far as I am aware, about China. China was seen as a source of valuable knowledge 'Seek wisdom even in China' the Prophet is quoted as

saying but Chinese history? No, of no interest. A little more interest in the history of Christendom: in Christendom they recognized a cognized civilization. China and India were totally alien.

Christendom was a civilization inspired by a religion, in some respects similar and in other respects of course different from their own, but recognizable for a Muslim even in the Middle Ages. It was the kind of religion which he might not share but could understand, and also he saw in Christendom a rival. Christians and Muslims share an attribute which, as far as I know, does not appear in any other religion: the belief that their message from God is not only true (all religions believe that) but exclusive; that they are the fortunate recipients of God's final message to mankind. Join them and be saved, refuse and be damned. This was their shared perception and they understood each other perfectly well, and they could really argue meaningfully. In the Middle Ages even we find this happening in Spain, where Christians and Muslims lived side by side. If a Christian said to a Muslim or a Muslim said to a Christian, "You are an infidel and you will burn in hell", each understood exactly what the other meant because they both meant exactly the same thing. A statement of that sort would have been meaningless to a Hindu or Buddhist or a Confucian.

There was therefore rather more interest in Christendom with which they had such very extensive contacts – all the way from the Levant to Spain and even into France and Italy. But nevertheless, the total amount written on Christian history, on European history, is absolutely minimal and we find for example that they have practically nothing to say about the Byzantine Empire, their next-door neighbor for many centuries. One would have thought that even for practical political and military reasons

they would be interested but no; we find that they have very little to say about the Reformation which would have been extremely important to the Ottoman Turks since the quarrels between Protestants and Catholics gave them a weapon which they could and did use very effectively.

The Thirty-Years' War in Germany – you would think that that would matter to them; it's just beyond their frontier, happening over a long period of time and of immediate and vital concern to the Ottoman government. The Ottomans had very full and detailed writings but the Thirty-Years' War, to the best of my historical recollection, gets about a page and a half.

There were some attempts at Western history, but very little. The first and in many ways the most significant exception is an early 14th-Century historian in Persia called *Rashid ad-Din*. He was a Jewish convert to Islam working for a Mongol ruler so in two respects he is hardly typical of Islamic historiography. He was physician and adviser – historian and physician, professions very frequently combined in the Middle Ages. He worked for a Mongol ruler, as I said; and either at his own initiative or at the request of that ruler, he started to do a universal history – the first such to my knowledge. A history which was to include all known civilizations – even a history of the Franks, he calls it. It was based on a medieval European chronicle which he was able to get translated for his use. We find a few more attempts of this kind in the Ottoman period. Some Ottoman historians (they were after all invading Europe; they occupied a large part of South-Eastern Europe; they were conducting maritime in Western Europe even as far as the British Isles and Iceland and Madeira. Nevertheless the lack of interest in what was going on in Europe is staggering; there were a few exceptions; in fact we

find historians who managed to get translations of European chronicles but what is striking is not only the rarity of such works but the total lack of interest in them. We have mentions of them; sometimes we have one fragmentary manuscript which survives in Leipzig or Cambridge because it was picked up by some Western traveler, but there was a total lack of interest at home. In other words there was no 'Occidentalism' compared to the Orientalism which flourished in Christian Europe. Interest did not begin until the Nineteenth Century.

Now let me come back to my theme of periodization: how did Muslim historians periodize and sub-divide? In the Western world the usual practice was by kingdoms; kingdom and country, and kingdoms being sub-divided by dynasties and interrupted by conquests. Muslim historians usually classified by dynasties and capitals, and I stress 'capitals' not 'countries'; not nations – cities. So you have for example Phase One: the patriarchal caliphate ruling from *Medina*. Phase Two: the *Umayyad caliphs* ruling from Damascus; Phase Three: the *Abbasid caliphs* ruling from Baghdad, and so on. It is remarkable that we simply do not find country histories at all: we find histories of cities; we find histories of dynasties, and of course most of all we find what they would call 'Universal history', namely the history of the Islamic world as such. But not of countries; indeed it is often rather difficult to find names of countries. If you look at the present-day map of the world starting in the West – of the Islamic world; there is no word in Arabic for either Algeria or Tunisia; the words they use mean *Algiers* or *Tunis*. They used the name of the chief city for the country. The name Libya was unknown in the Muslim world until the Italians exhumed it from ancient Rome and imposed it on their colony. In Egypt more often than not, they used the

same word *Misr* for Cairo and for Egypt.; *Shām* - the same word for Damascus and for Syria,. The name *Suria* is again exhumed from a much earlier period in modern times and is based on a Greek version of an ancient Syrian name for the country as such. Last - most striking of all – there is no word in Arabic for *Arabia*; that is not because Arabic is a poor language; Arabic is a remarkably rich language but if you want to talk about Arabia, you have to call it the Land of the Arabs, or the Peninsula of the Arabs or the Arabian Peninsula or the Arabian kingdom. In other words you have Arabian as an adjective and you have Arabs as a noun but you do not have a word which can simply be translated as Arabia.

In Turkey the name *Turkiya* was first adopted in Turkey by the Republic; it was a European name for Turkey. It was the European practice. You have France which is inhabited by Frenchmen who speak French; you have Germany which is inhabited by Germans who speak German and so on, but that did not apply in the Middle East and the idea of Turkey as a country inhabited by Turks who speak Turkish was entirely new, and that was an important part of the *Kemalist* revolution. In other parts of the Islamic world, it has not happened yet. In this again there is a very strong contrast with Western historiography.

Let me come now to the present and for the time being final stage in the periodization of Middle Eastern history by Middle Easterners and here I will draw your attention to the writings and utterances of Osama bin-Laden, in many ways one of the leading figures in the Islamic world, whether we like it or not. For him, the basic fact of history for many centuries past is the global conflict between Islam and Christendom and, as he presents it, and he has done this in a number of his writings, there have been ups and downs. Sometimes Islam is advancing, sometimes Islam is retreating. On both sides – various leaders, various dynasties

ruling from various capitals just as the Muslims have their caliphates in Medina and Damascus, in Baghdad, in Cairo, in Istanbul, so too the Christians have their various emperors ruling in various capitals. The lowest point of Muslim defeat and humiliation was 1918 when – as he points out – the last of the great Muslim Empires (that of the Ottomans) was defeated and destroyed, its territories partitioned among the victorious Christian allies, its ruler deposed and not long after that, even the remnant taken over by a secularist anti-Muslim Turkish movement abolishing the caliphate and sending the last Caliph into exile. For Osama bin-Laden and his followers, this was the final ultimate humiliation of Islam when almost the whole of the Islamic world was under foreign rule divided chiefly between the three great empires of Britain, France and Russia but with significant parts also held by Italy, Holland and others. The beginning of the Resurgence, as he sees it – and again I am quoting Osama bin-Laden – is after the Second World War, after 1945, when the British and the French Empires collapse and their former territories become more or less independent, albeit not under the kind of regimes that he would like, but nevertheless no longer under Infidel rule. This is also the period when new powers are emerging – the Soviet Union and the United States, what he sees as the two new Super Powers, between them sharing control of the world of the infidels and dividing it between them, dividing it or disputing it, I should say between them. As he sees it – and again this comes again and again in his writing – in this final phase (and again, he insists that it is a final phase) the world of Islam confronts two rival powers in the world of the Infidels. In the war in Afghanistan, he says, we defeated and destroyed one of them – the Soviet Union. Most Americans and other Westerners see that as a victory for the United

States or more specifically, for the policies of President Reagan. For Osama Bin-Laden and his followers, it was nothing of the kind. It was a victory of the Muslim *Mujahedin* and, as he says again and again, we have now defeated and destroyed the more deadly and the more dangerous of the two infidel super powers; there remain only the weak and pampered and effeminate Americans, and they will be easy to deal with and then will come the end of time and the end of history.

Well he has been rather disappointed by his results since then but he and his followers are continuing the struggle. We will stop at that point thank you.

Prof. Nitzan:

Thank you very much Prof. Lewis. We have time for some questions.

Question: (inaudible)

Prof. Lewis:

There is in Islam, as in Christianity and in Judaism, an apocalyptic scenario for the end of time for a final struggle between the forces of good and the forces of evil, variously defined as anti-Christ, as *Gog* and *Maggog* and, in Islam, as *Dajjāl* and so on. There is an important trend in Iran particularly, but with followers elsewhere, who believe that that period has now begun, that we are now engaged in the final apocalyptic struggle – the struggle of God's chosen envoy – the *Mahdi* – against the forces of evil and this is an extremely dangerous mind-set because it has serious consequences. In the Cold War, both sides had nuclear weapons but neither side used because they were prevented by what was known as MAD – Mutual Assured Destruction. With an apocalyptic mind-set,

mutual assured destruction is not a deterrent, it is an inducement and I think we should be well aware and conscious of this danger. Now fortunately *Ahmalinajad* seems to be losing ground in Iran; it seems that not all Iranians share his apocalyptic mind-set but it still remains a very dangerous situation.

Question: (inaudible)

Prof. Lewis:

I did not include all categories; I mentioned tools in antiquity but – Yes, I think one can make a case for a periodization by scientific achievements, particularly those with immediate economic effects: developments in communication for example; the adopting of printing. But here there are interesting differences between the Islamic world and the West. In the earlier stages in what you might call the Golden Age of Islam, they accepted new techniques and new ideas very willingly. They accepted paper from China, for example: paper was unknown in the Middle East, it was first manufactured in China and was imported from China. They took to it and made very extensive use of it and it played a major part in the cultural development of the time. It also was important for economic development – imagine trying to keep your business accounts on papyrus or on clay tablets. ..

But later they rejected printing which also came from China and the Far East; they simply refused. Printing was brought again by the Jews who came from Spain in 1492; they asked permission to bring their printing presses with them when they went to Turkey. They were welcomed in Turkey but they were told, 'Yes you can print, but you must not print in the Arabic script, only in your own script.' Printing was seen

as somehow blasphemous. One suspects that the Guild of Calligraphers may have had something to do with this too.

You find changes in attitude: take for example the circulation of the blood – a major discovery in medicine. Well, it is usually attributed to ... but actually it comes much earlier. We have a medieval physician in Baghdad who actually wrote a book in Arabic in which he describes it, but it had no effect and no impact. Technological, scientific changes can be very important but they have to have the right atmosphere in order to be accepted and to have impact. If you look at the major developments in our own time, in the field of communication in particular – travel, manufacture and so on – yes I would agree, the impact is enormous and that makes the rejection of these the more remarkable in other societies.

Question: (inaudible)

Prof. Lewis:

I did not say they are indifferent to history; on the contrary, they are very interested in history. At all stages and in all Islamic societies, you find an enormous attention to history and a very voluminous writing of history. What they are not interested in is other people's history; they are not interested in the meaningless gyrations of pagans and barbarians.

Question: (inaudible)

Prof. Lewis:

I have been asked about periodization by language.

Yes that is certainly a possibility; I did allude to it in speaking of the adopting of vernaculars in Europe, which marks a very important change. One finds it elsewhere too: in the world conquered by the Arabs, for a long time Arabic was the sole language which could be used in government, commerce, culture and so on. Then gradually the conquered peoples began to re-emerge with their own languages in the new Islamite form. In Persian, written in the Arabic script with a large Arabic vocabulary, but still Persian not Arabic. This is followed by Turkish and *Urdu* and other languages. One can, for certain purposes, periodize by languages, yes certainly.

Question: (inaudible)

Prof. Lewis:

They were certainly very interested in what they regarded as useful. They knew that the ancient Greeks had reached a high level in medicine, in engineering, and a number of other useful practical sciences. And they therefore took steps to arrange for the translation of the relevant works into Arabic so that they could use them. On the other hand they were not the least bit interested in what they did not regard as useful. So for example, they translated those works of Aristotle which they thought were useful but they made no attempt to translate any of the ancient Greek historians or any of the ancient Greek literature. None of the poems, the epics, the plays – none of that is translated; none even of the historical narratives which you might expect would arouse some interest. And by the way the translators were mostly Christians and Jews.

Prof. Nitzan:

Prof. Lewis' second lecture this year will be take place on Jan. 21st, same time same place, on Choices for the Middle East.

Prof. Lewis: In other words, I'll start where I left off.

Applause.