

Third Edition, Revised and Updated

A Concise History of the

Middle East



Arthur Goldschmidt, Jr.

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Third Edition, Revised and Updated

Westview Press / Boulder and London

*To the memory of
AGNES INGLIS O'NEILL
teacher, counselor, friend*

*She taught every subject with a spirit of fun
and each pupil in a spirit of love.*

Paperback cover art, by Ann Pangborn, is based on a geometric design by J. Bourgoïn.

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Preface

When I started to teach Middle East history, I was sure that I would never write a textbook. Nothing in my graduate training or early research experience had led me to esteem writing for beginners in my field. Textbooks were the means by which second-rate minds made their reputations or feathered their financial nests. When I wrote the first edition of *A Concise History of the Middle East* after twelve years of teaching, I feared it might reveal a deflated self-image or a touch of avarice. Would it, I wondered, meet a general need?

Evidently, it has. I have met or heard from countless people who have either taught from the book or got their first exposure to Middle East history from having to read it for a class. I felt that teachers and students needed a book that reflected current scholarship, did not hide its ideas behind a pseudoscholarly style addressed to pedants, and did not reinforce political or ethnic biases. Not only students, but members of the wider English-speaking public as well, deserve to have a clear explanation of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the role of the Middle East in the energy crisis, and the Islamic resurgence. The book has gone through two editions and, despite the appearance of other general Middle East histories, has become ever more widely used in North American colleges and universities.

More and more scholars, both Middle Eastern and Western, are enlarging what we know about the history of the area. We can—and we must—share their findings with college and university students, both to arouse their interest in the Middle East and to make them more aware of themselves by exposure to other life-styles, other areas, and other eras. Teachers and textbooks cannot free themselves from bias, but let us at least make sure that our students see more than one side

to the burning issues of the present and the past. Let us also make what we know accessible to the wider public. Many people—not only students—care about what is happening now in the Middle East, and how things came to be that way. Someday, perhaps, I shall turn over what I have written to the brave new world of the videocassette recorder.

Any work of art or scholarship follows conventions. In writing a book that introduces a recondite subject to students and general readers, the author must tell the audience what these conventions will be. The English system of weights and measures is giving way to the metric system; this book uses both. Prices expressed in non-American currencies, ancient or modern, are given 1987 U.S. dollar equivalents. All dates are based on the Gregorian calendar. But Western readers are warned that Muslims follow a twelve-month lunar calendar dated from the year in which Muhammad and his associates moved from Mecca to Medina. Quite naturally, they use this calendar in teaching or studying Islamic history. Conversion between the two systems is cumbersome and prone to error. When dates appear in parentheses following a ruler's name, they refer to the span of his or her reign. Personal names in languages using the Arabic script are transliterated according to the Library of Congress system, minus the diacritics, except for a few persons and places mentioned often in the press. The same applies to technical terms that cannot be translated simply and accurately into English. I have kept these to a minimum.

This book has an immense number and variety of sources. Almost every book or article that I have read and most people with whom I have conversed have left some imprint on what I think and write. I have left out footnotes, which are apt to distract student readers, but put in a long bibliographic essay at the end. In some places I have specifically cited scholars who have influenced my treatment of certain topics, partly because I wanted students of Middle East history to recognize their names. No doubt I have omitted some important ones. I expect instructors to fill in the gaps for their students.

I set out to write the first edition in the style I might use to write a series of personal letters to young adults, taking into account their concerns and experiences. I wanted to find a middle ground between telegraphic brevity and boring thoroughness. At times I shot from the hip. Not surprisingly, I hit my foot more than once. Professors James Jankowski (University of Colorado) and Glenn Perry (Indiana State University) read and critiqued the original version, which I used in mimeographed form for my classes between 1977 and 1979. My students helped me to improve the style and coverage of the book by their comments and criticisms and also by what they showed, in their written or oral tests and in classroom discussions, to be understandable or abstruse. Some even sacrificed Sunday afternoons to meet in our living room to review the book in minute detail while I was revising it for publication. Patricia Kozlik (now Kabra) was notably generous with her

time, effort, and advice. Lawrence Conrad (now teaching at the Wellcome Institute in London) corrected some of my errors in early Islamic history. My wife, Louise, answered many questions. She and our sons, Steve and Paul, endured my efforts to formulate my ideas out loud at mealtimes. Ilene Glenn rescued my wife and me by typing most of the manuscript. Once it reached Westview Press, Lynne Rienner, Patty Hodgins, and Lisa DeGrazio supplied advice, copyediting, and moral encouragement. Don Kunze (then a graduate student, now an assistant professor of architecture, at the Pennsylvania State University), aided by Barbara Droms, drew the maps to my sometimes protean specifications. Financial help came from the Department of History, the College of the Liberal Arts, and the Central Fund for Research of the Pennsylvania State University as well as from my parents, Arthur E. and Elizabeth Wickenden Goldschmidt.

After the book was published in 1979, I began to see some typographical, historical, and methodological errors. So, not surprisingly, did the reviewers. Since the book soon found many users, and since events in the area did not stand still, I had little chance to rest before the time came to prepare the second edition. This "slightly less concise history" included an additional chapter on events between 1978 and 1982, a chronology, and some changes in the first twenty chapters, the Glossary, and the Bibliographic Essay. Don Kunze, aided by Chuck Siegel, revised his maps. Various people suggested additions, deletions, and other changes. Ann Pangborn enhanced the text and the cover with her illustrations. Professor Herbert Bodman (University of North Carolina) lent me his annotated copy of the first edition. Professors Neil Caplan (Vanier College), William Griswold (Colorado State University), Philip Mattar (then at Columbia University), Canfield F. Smith (University of Alabama at Birmingham), and Pedro Ramet (then at the University of California at Santa Barbara) wrote me some comments. Many students offered to help, and I still recall Josh Novak's efforts to help me boil down the Iranian revolution and Ken Mayers' research efforts and wise advice on many aspects of the book. At Westview Press, Lynn Arts, Michele McTighe, and Christine Arden worked on the second edition, and Lynne Rienner continued to prod or to encourage me.

Continuing changes in the Middle East, new developments in scholarship, and my own evolving perspective on the area have combined to make me undertake a third edition of my ever less concise history. More professors and students have written or spoken to me about it. Professor Jere Bacharach (University of Washington) marked up the introduction and the first eight chapters. Dr. Lois Aroian (now a U.S. Foreign Service officer) sent me a copy of the review she had written for the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. Dr. H. T. Abu-Zahra, Senior Medical Oncologist at the Windsor (Ontario) Regional Cancer Center, wrote me about some errors, as did Alexandra Torres, then a Bryn Mawr College student. Yoram Egesi, a Penn State student, helped

me to rewrite my section on Zionism. Miriam Gilbert, Holly Arrow, and Lauri Fults assumed, on behalf of Westview Press, the duties of goading, prodding, and encouraging me to make the necessary changes. Christine Arden's blue pencil again struck out my worst solecisms, whenever I tried to see how far I could evade the conventions of Westview style. Edythe Porpa wrestled the myriad of names, places, and events into the exhaustive index.

Although I am grateful to all persons named in this preface and to many others I have not named, I remain accountable for all errors of fact or interpretation and welcome, as always, readers' comments and advice. Now that I have replaced my typewriter with a word processor, your suggestions for the book's revision will be less irksome for me to put into effect. When we all can communicate by computers with modems, textbook writing will at last come to be like letter writing. Then I will have come full circle.

The work of a great teacher never perishes; hence the original dedication of this book—to an elementary school teacher and principal whose knowledge, ideas, and enthusiasm live on in thousands of her former pupils—shall endure.

Arthur Goldschmidt, Jr.

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Introduction

This book sets out to introduce the Middle East to students and to other readers who have never had exposure to the area. *Middle East* is a rather imprecise term describing a geographical area that extends from Egypt to Afghanistan, or the cultural region in which Islam arose and developed. I plan to make the term clearer in the opening chapter. First let me defend my belief that history is the discipline best suited for your introduction to the Middle East. After all, you might look at the Middle East through its systems for allocating power and values, using the discipline of political science. An economist would focus on the ways in which its inhabitants organize themselves to satisfy their material needs. A student of comparative religions would examine their various systems of belief and worship. A geographer would study the interaction between the people and their physical surroundings. Sociologists and cultural anthropologists would analyze the institutions and group behavior of the various peoples who constitute the Middle East. You could also treat the various cultures or life-styles of the region through its languages, literature, architecture, art, folklore, and even its cuisine.

Why history? Some of you may have picked up a rather dismal picture of history from schools or books. History is supposed to be the study of events that took place in the past. These events have been carefully gathered together, checked for accuracy, and written down in chronological order by historians, a strange breed of antiquarians who shamble between dusty libraries and musty archives. History teachers pass these accounts along to young people by means of textbooks and lectures. These are organized according to the reigns of rulers or the life-spans of nation-states, divided into manageable chunks of time. Students memorize this "history"—as little as they can get away with—in the form of facts,

names, and dates. Only an occasional concept, casually communicated and dimly grasped, adds some seasoning to the stew. A kind teacher may tell a class just to learn the "trends." These are interpreted by the students to mean vague statements unsupported by evidence from the unheeded lectures or the unread textbook. History, in this all too common conception, is a dreary bore, a dead subject suited only to cranks, to antique-lovers, or perhaps to a few students looking for bits of small talk with which to impress their peers. It is not useful. It will not get students jobs. It cannot predict what will happen in the future. History does not repeat itself, even if historians do repeat other historians.

But let me respond. I do have some better ideas of what history is, how it should be studied and taught, and why we bother to learn it. Some of my ideas may seem obvious if you have already taken several college or university courses in history. Or you may already be an avid reader of history books. My ideas may change in the years to come. In time, you may want to set me straight. But first let me say what I think about this subject and how it relates to your introduction to the Middle East.

History belongs to all of us. Whenever you talk about something that happened to yourself, your friends, your community, or your country, you are relating history through events that took place in the past. Everyone does this at least some of the time. History has no technical vocabulary, except what is needed to describe a particular time or place, society or culture. It can cover politics, economics, life-styles, beliefs, works of literature or art, cities or rural areas, incidents you remember, stories older people told you, or subjects you can only read about. Broadly speaking, everything that has ever happened up to the moment you read these lines is history, or the study of the past.

As an academic discipline, though, history mainly examines those aspects of the past that have been written down or passed on by word of mouth. Historians cannot write or teach about an event that was never recorded. The unrecorded event might be trivial: What did Columbus have for breakfast on 12 October 1492? Or it might be a big question: When Muhammad was dying on 8 June 632, whom did he want as his successor? Historians do not treat all recorded events as being equally important, any more than you would if you were writing a letter home just after you had arrived at a new place. They evaluate past events, stressing some while downgrading or even omitting others. What historians think is worth mentioning can also change over time or vary from place to place. I will look at this historiographical dimension later on.

How do historians pick the events they mention or stress? Often, they base their choices on the degree to which those events affected what happened later on. Just as chemistry goes beyond spotting the elements on the periodic table, history deals with more than just isolated happenings. Historians look at cause-and-effect relationships. The Pil-

grims sailed to Plymouth in 1620 *because* they wanted to worship God in their own way. Russian intellectuals, workers, and peasants hated the autocratic (if inefficient) rule of Tsar Nicholas II; *therefore*, they organized revolutionary movements until they overthrew him in 1917. We ask not only *what* events occurred, but also *why*.

Sometimes we argue about causal relationships. Did the institution of slavery cause the Civil War? Did Roosevelt's New Deal end the Great Depression? Was the creation of Israel in 1948 the result of Hitler's attempt to destroy the Jews of Europe during World War II? When we study cause-and-effect relationships, we are studying processes. What makes individuals or groups act, react, make decisions, or refrain from acting? The answers usually depend on the time and the place. We may have our own ideas about what forces motivate human actions. I will share some of mine as the story unfolds and in my concluding chapter. As we study more recent events, we may think that we know more about what made the people tick; but, in fact, our own feelings may color our views. We may also have to do without some of the sources we need, such as memoirs and government documents, which are often closed for at least a generation to protect people's careers and reputations.

There is another dimension to history, one we tend to overlook even though it affects our thinking. What makes our society or civilization, country or culture, different from others existing at the same time? How does American life in the 1980s differ from what it was in the 1890s? On the other hand, does our modern age have certain universal qualities in common, making the contemporary United States and Egypt like each other now and different from what both were like a century ago? Do the English have certain traits that span differences of time or region, such that an English person of 1800 and one of today are more like each other than either is like, say, Iranians of the corresponding dates? Historians often make such comparisons.

My last paragraph brings up still another issue. What are the most meaningful units of historical study? The West has a strong tradition of studying national history—that of the United States, Britain, France, Russia, or, for that matter, China or Japan. In other parts of the world, including the Middle East, political boundaries have changed so often that nation-states have not existed until recently, let alone served as meaningful units of historical study. In the Islamic and Middle Eastern tradition, historical studies are apt to center on dynasties (ruling families), whose time spans and territories vary widely. The Ottoman Empire, for example, was a large state made up of Turks, Arabs, Greeks, and many other ethnic groups. Its rulers, called sultans, all belonged to a family descended from a Turkish warrior named Osman. It was not a nation but a dynastic state—one that lasted a long time and affected many other peoples. But Middle East historians are now developing a system of periodization that is less political and more closely related to changes in people's economic and social life. This book will straddle

the issue. At some times I will use the old dynastic divisions of time and space, or for the modern period a country-by-country approach, making major wars and crises the points of division. At other times I will examine the history topically, in terms of "Islamic civilization" or "westernizing reform." As professional historians learn more about the Middle East, our writing will become more systematic and sophisticated.

From what we now know about Middle East history, I believe that our most meaningful unit of study is not the dynasty or the nation-state but the civilization. Although the term *civilization* is easier to describe than to define, this book, especially in its earlier chapters, focuses on an interlocking complex of rulers and subjects, governments and laws, arts and letters, cultures and customs, cities and villages—in short, on a civilization that has prevailed in most of western Asia and northern Africa since the seventh century, all tied together by the religion of Islam. You will see how Islamic beliefs and practices produced institutions for all aspects of Middle Eastern life. Then you will learn how Muslim patterns of belief and action were jarred by the impact of the West. You will look at some of the ways in which the peoples of the Middle East have coped with Western domination, accepting the best but rejecting the rest of European and U.S. culture. You will also see how they have won back their political independence and how they have started to regain their autonomy as a civilization. I believe this to be the best way to approach the study of the Middle East for the first time.

But why, you may ask, should anyone want to study the Middle East, let alone the history of Islamic civilization? I argue that the study of any subject, from philosophy to physics, is potentially an adventure of the mind. Islamic history is a subject worth studying for its own sake. Confronted by distances of time and space, and by differences of thought patterns and life-styles, we learn more about ourselves—about our era, area, beliefs, and customs. Islam is somewhat like Christianity and Judaism, but not entirely so. The peoples of the Middle East (like those of the West) are partial heirs to the Greeks and the Romans. To a greater degree, however, they are direct successors of the still earlier civilizations of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Persia, and other lands of the ancient Middle East. As a result, they have evolved in a direction quite different from ours. They are rather like our cousins, neither brothers nor strangers to us.

In another sense, our culture is their debtor. Our religious beliefs and observances are derived from those of the Hebrews, Egyptians, Persians, Arameans, and Greeks living in the Middle East before Islam. Moreover, many Westerners do not know what they have learned from Islamic culture. Some of the technical aspects of cultural transmission, especially in philosophy, mathematics, and science, I will save for later. For now, a brief look at the background of some everyday English words will serve to back up my point.