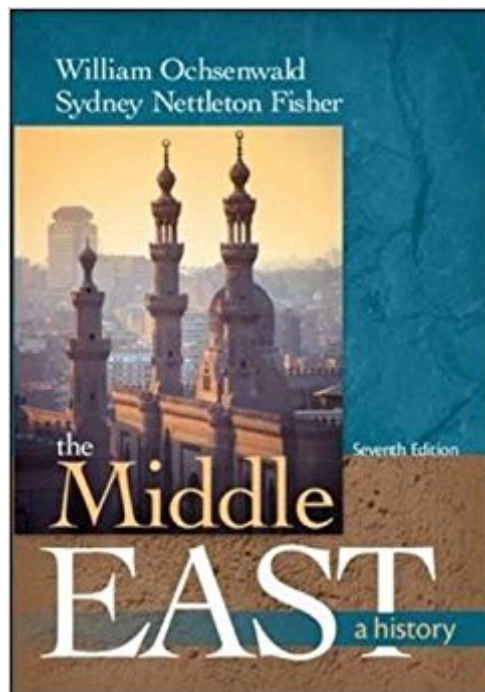


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The Middle East: A History



Synopsis

Now celebrating its fiftieth anniversary, *The Middle East: A History* has long been the standard introductory textbook in the field of Middle Eastern history. It is the most comprehensive one-volume treatment of Middle Eastern history from the rise of Islam to the present time now available, featuring full coverage of the central and peripheral Middle East. There is a thorough and balanced discussion of the political, religious, social, gender, economic, and cultural history of the region. As a comprehensive textbook, it provides teachers and students with a general introduction in narrative form to the chief elements in Middle Eastern history, thereby allowing readers to proceed into more specialized topics and themes with a firm understanding. This new edition features major revisions for the period from 1939 to the present, including updated analyses of Iraq since 2003, the status of the Arab-Israeli peace process, and the administration of Mahmud Ahmadinejad in Iran.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Obviously a very extensive and difficult topic to cover, I thought that the organization of the book made this book not only easy to read, but also incredibly informative. After reading the book, I felt that I had a good understanding of the history of the Middle East, the problems that have been overcome, and the issues still to be resolved. Would highly recommend.

Great read. Informed me a lot about the middle east. Culture, norms, and lifestyles.

I haven't read much of it yet, but so far very informative, should expand my knowledge base about the middle east.

Book served its required purpose in my class. It showed up to my residence a little dirty but I wasn't one to complain as the text was completely usable

this was a long time ago so i dont remember so much... but it was the first order i did form you and i remember i thought i got the book really soon after ordering it.. and i guess everything was good since i cant remember anything in particular(:

If this book is needed for a course, what you need to find will be listed and labeled in a readable easy to find manner. However, be careful from whom you re-purchase from. And reconsider that what may be "Good" condition to someone may not be for all. The front cover was more bent than an Origami piece.

I am an undergrad English major who is by no means an history buff and who, prior to her Middle Eastern history class last semester, had very little knowledge of the Middle East's past. This certainly colors my perspective of this book. However, as a non-history-person, I found it dense, hard to read, and poorly organized on a sentence-and-paragraph level. This subject is, in my opinion, far too broad to be condensed into such a (relatively) short text--it deserves volumes, not a single book. Consequently, in order to fit everything, the authors for the most part pared down the content to names, places, and dates, including very little interpretation and explanation. I, for one, found it difficult to imagine the historical Middle East based only on these bare-bones facts, so I couldn't connect with the material and, therefore, couldn't really retain any of it. Probably in consequence of the super-condensation of the content, sentences and paragraphs tended to be jumpy. There were quite a few cases in which the topic would change mid-sentence, with no warning and no apparent relation between the two topics. I found similar abrupt subject switches inter- and intra-paragraph. This last item may be nitpicking, but I did find a couple of typos and grammatical errors in the text, which (as something of a grammarian) I found highly distracting.... But, then again, I can only speak from my perspective; the other two reviewers, who may have had more prior experience with history than I have, seemed to enjoy the book well enough. In a much more positive vein, I will say that the bibliographies at the end of every chapter were both impressive and immensely helpful--particularly if, for instance, you have to do outside readings or research. I wrote that particular review right after finishing the history course I mentioned, and I was pretty frazzled at the time. So the review is a less clear and forgiving (and

more laced with vitriol) than it should have been. I guess I do feel that the subject matter is a bit too complex to be tackled in such detail in a single volume. But the main problem, I think, is that the book seems to have been reviewed only by historians. I see this a lot when I edit essays and articles by specialists in their fields--a lot of knowledge is assumed, and the text doesn't make concessions for those who don't think like someone in that field. In this case, my more historically-minded and -informed husband understood the book a great deal better than I did. So if you're a history buff, you'll probably have a fine time with this book! If your mind works well with names, places, and dates, it's the thing for you. If you're more inclined to think in abstractions, it might not be such an easy read. Also, I honestly do think that the text could use some help with sentence- and paragraph-level organization and transitions. In places it's very jumpy.

In *The Middle East: A History*, Ochsenswald and Fisher produced a book that successfully tackles the vast and complex subject of Middle Eastern History. Both the format and style are geared for the busy college student, making it a relatively easy read. The authors did not sacrifice knowledge, however, and after reading the book, a comprehensive understanding of the Middle East, its problems, triumphs and remaining obstacles will be gained. The region has experienced some of the greatest fluctuations in fortune known to man. Parts I & II cover the rise of Islam with particular focus on the great Ottoman and Safavid Empires. Once upon a time Crusaders stood in awe of the dazzling intellectual and material advances of the culture they encountered in the region. By the 19th century, however, the Middle East found itself inferior to Europe in many areas; technology, military power, economic and political development and more. This widening gap between Europe and the Middle East is described in detail in Part III. The desperate attempt to cope with European encroachment is dealt with. These efforts are described as largely unsuccessful as the Ottoman Empire gradually shrank in size and power, Egypt succumbed to British domination and Iran melted away like a lump of sugar in a glass of water. The emergence of a Middle East free from foreign control after two world wars is the next topic. Finally, in part IV developments over the last century are treated. The authors maintain a very factual, balanced and objective treatment of events and personalities. For example, in the evaluation of Reza Shah the authors go back and forth five times between the negative and positive aspects of his rule until the reader is able to view his achievements with a balanced, fair and discerning eye. In another instance, European attempts to profit and take advantage of conditions are remarked on, while at the same time encouraging and positive changes initiated or influenced by Europeans are described. For example, on page 289 Ismail's thorough

Europeanization resulted in a determined effort to end the slave trade in the Sudan. Reformers faced a daunting series of obstacles. Constant diplomatic and military crises and pressures from European imperial ambitions often made reform difficult for the Ottomans (294). Strong-willed reformers such as Mahmud II possessed the best of intentions but often their reforms never went beyond a declaration. For example he declared compulsory education but never found the means to carry out this goal (276). As the authors note on page 308,

“Decreeing reforms in Istanbul was one thing, but executing the changes throughout the enormous empire was another. A lack of trained personnel is an additional factor; To make the reforms work, both in the central government and in the provinces, required the commitment of more people that were available” (301).

Constant opposition to reform by the ulama was another element in slowing or derailing reform efforts (276). Conservative power centers such as the janissaries and ulama often had to be broken before progress could go further. Other important themes in the book are the emergence of nationalism and the clash between secularism and religion/tradition. In a region as intensely religious as the Middle East this is an inescapable fact. Kemal Ataturk’s secularizing regime and the 1979 Revolution are but two instances. The issue of the status of women arose as a vigorously-debated topic in late Nineteenth Century Egypt. The technical and political superiority of Europe was, some argued, in some measure due to the widespread education of women. Progress was slow, however, and the first government-run primary school was only opened in 1917. These issues are still being worked out in the Middle East. The problem of how to cover such a broad topic without skipping vital details is a difficult task. Because European involvement is discussed in terms of a peripheral force intruding upon the central focus of the Middle East, it is to be expected that Europeans will not receive the same thorough treatment. For all that, it is important to avoid at least leaving the reader with unbalanced notions of European interventionism. On page 378, for example, the events leading up to the Balfour Declaration are discussed. The vital Jewish contribution to the British war effort, such as Chaim Weizman’s development of acetone production for the Royal Navy, deserved at least a mention as an important, if indirect cause moving Britain towards the declaration. Only brief paragraphs are given to the actual explanation of Zionism. Given the underpinning role of Zionism in the on-going Middle East crisis, this brevity is inexplicable. Another example is on page 343 in which the Anglo-Egyptian reconquest of the Sudan in 1898 is discussed. The action is treated solely as a move on the chess board of imperial ambitions e.g. the Italian conquest of Eritrea and the French penetration of the upper Nile triggering Ten Downing Street into a response. They do not mention the pressure brought by the British public’s

outrage over the slaying of Charles George Gordon and lurid accounts of Mahdist brutality that appeared in written form. Although such brevity is unavoidable in such an overview, it is a pity that the reader is left with a view bereft of the moral dimensions that underlay much European enterprises which had come to play a role by the Victorian era. As to the Middle East itself the reviewer was unclear about the reasons behind the 1960 military coup in Turkey. Going only by the information in the text, the following reasons for the Turkish military takeover and subsequent execution of Prime Minister Adnan Menderes are given; 1. An economic downturn, 2.

3. Opposition to the Democrat government among the urban class and 3. Menderes' indifferent attitude towards this opposition. These facts seem hardly serious enough to take over a government and hang a Prime Minister. On further research this reviewer discovered that the crimes Menderes and others were accused of included high treason and that the tension in Turkish society was viewed as threatening to lead to civil war. The text does not give the impression of such an extreme crisis. Despite what are probably unavoidable gaps, this fine work is highly recommended by anyone needing or wishing to gain a solid grasp of the essential events and developments of Middle Eastern history.

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