

Bernard Lewis, *Cultures in Conflict. Christians, Muslims, and Jews in the Age of Discovery* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995)

Hot on the heels of the quincentennial anniversary of 1492, the year Columbus 'discovered' America, Bernard Lewis presented lectures at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, drawing attention to some other events occurring in that same year, namely "the Christian conquest of Granada, the last outpost of Muslim power in the Iberian Peninsula, and the expulsion a few months later of the Jews from all of Spain." Lewis argues that these apparently disparate events were in fact closely interrelated and seeks to explain how the three processes of conquest, expulsion and discovery fit within a larger context of international, interreligious and intercontinental history.

Lewis shows that not only did the Christian capture of Granada end the long struggle to recover and reconquest western Europe, but it also prepared the ground for the great European counterattack. The voyages of the Spanish and Portuguese navigators were profoundly marked the beginning of this, with the removal of Jews and, in much larger numbers, Muslims, being a necessary part of this same counterattack.

Lewis also shows how this was followed by a resurgent Europe pursuing Muslims in their own territories - the Russians pursuing the Tatars into Tartary, establishing a domination over Central and northern Asia, and the Spaniards and Portuguese, with other maritime peoples, pursuing the Moors into Africa and Asia, with American being, almost incidentally, being 'discovered' and colonized along the way.

Chapter 1. Conquest

The expansion of western Europe, beginning with Columbus, had "a special quality of moral delinquency, absent from such earlier, relatively innocent expansions as those of the Mongols, the Huns, the Ottomans, the Arabs, the Aztecs - even from the concurrent expansion of the Muscovites, whose manifest destiny also took them from sea to shining sea, that is, from the Baltic to the Pacific" (7).

Apart from sparsely inhabited lands conquered, colonized and settled by the advancing Europeans, they particularly clashed with the existing civilizations of China, India and Islam.

On Jan 2, 1492, "the combined armies of the Catholic monarchs Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile entered the previously surrendered city of Granada, the last stronghold of Muslim power in Spain, and thus achieved the final Christian victory in the eight-century-long struggle between Christianity and Islam for the mastery of the Iberian Peninsula" (8).

In sharp contrast to Europe's relations with Islam, with respect to India and China, Europeans had no real knowledge, no past record of dealings and, therefore, no set attitudes, with Indians and Chinese knowing even less about Europe. Further, while China and India are places, Islam is a religion, being, in principle, universal in its beliefs, in self-perception and its ambitions (9). Before this period of expansion Christianity was as European as Hinduism was Indian (10). By contrast, Islam was not only European but also self-evidently Asian and also African. Buddhism, by comparison, had become a regional religion in East and Southeast Asia, which lacked missionary

ardour. During the medieval period Christianity and Islam rightly saw the other as its principal rival.

Missionaries and traders were motivated to travel all over the world by the forces of faith and greed, but also by fear, wanting to ensure that never again would European Christendom have to live under the constant and imminent menace of Islam, as it had for around a thousand years, from the early seventh century till the second and final Turkish withdrawal from the walls of Vienna in 1683 (11).

1492 only marked the end of the first wave of Muslim expansion into Europe. But this was followed by a second wave when the Mongols brought Russia and most of eastern Europe under Islam. Eventually, after a long and bitter struggle, there was a Christian reconquest forcing the withdrawal of Islamised Tatars from Russia. But there was a third wave, when Seljuk and Ottoman Turks, following the conquest of Anatolia, established a mighty empire in the Balkan Peninsula, with Constantinople conquered and Vienna besieged on two occasions. Indeed, Barbary corsairs carried a naval jihad as far as the British Isles and even, on one occasion, to Iceland (12). For most Muslims Christendom - first Byzantine and then European - was the House of War par excellence (14).

The great and continuing hostility between Islam and Christendom was not due to misperception and misunderstanding, for both understood each other very well. They denounced each other as infidels, with both claiming possession of universal and final truths and a duty to bring God's last word to the rest of the world.

It is a great distortion to conceive of the Crusades as an early Western venture in aggressive imperialism, as is often done nowadays. Rather, in the context of the time, it was part of the *reconquista*, with the crusade being a long-delayed response to the jihad, an attempt to recover by holy war what had been lost by holy war, especially the Christian Holy Land.

Eventual Christian victories "were due in no small part to their superior weaponry and technology and to the stronger economies that supported them", with the invention of firearms giving "an immense and often decisive advantage to Europeans in their warfare with others" (20), with some Muslim states rejecting firearms or making very little use of them. Also the West enjoyed a growing superiority at sea. The use of the mill and the innovation of printing illustrated the greater technological sophistication of western Europe. Further, in the later Middle Ages Muslim states were typified by change-resistant slave military societies, also associated with the segregation and subordination of women. While the women of Christian Europe were far from equal with men, the relative freedom and participation shocked Muslim visitors, all of them male, to Western lands: "Western civilization was richer for women's presence; Muslim civilization, poorer by their absence" (24).

1492 was also significant for two other events signaling the disparity between Christian and Islamic societies: (1) the death of Lorenzo de' Medici, the archetypal Renaissance prince, the pioneer of the new Western craft of foreign policy, which played a large part in the subsequent expansion of the European powers; (2) the first attempt, by Antonio de Nebrija, to stabilize and standardize a European vernacular and turn it into

a literary language, thus beginning the move away from the artificial language of Latin, while leaving Muslims with artificial classical Arabic.

Chapter 2. Expulsion

On April 13, 1602 the Venetian republic was petitioned not to establish the Fondaco dei Turchi on a regular basis, because by providing board and lodging for Turkish merchants it would contribute to the presence of sufficient numbers of Turks in one place who would then inevitably build a mosque and worship Muhammad, while also facilitating the political designs of the Turks (30).

Significantly, in this context Jews were also linked as enemies of the church, though regarded as posing much less of a threat. The Jews had been treated with reasonable tolerance in Christian Europe during the Dark Ages, but the Crusades changed that. Indeed, from the late 11th century onwards many Jewish communities in central and western Europe were offered the choice of conversion or death. Jews and Turks were commonly named together in polemic and sometimes Muslims were cast as agents of the Jews or, more often, vice versa.

History had impressed upon European leaders that the previous surges of Islam necessitated the adoption of defensive and perhaps preemptive measures to prevent a possible Muslim return.

The move to expel Jews was only partly due to the recognition that large numbers of Jews who had been forcibly converted to Christianity were secretly transmitting their old faith to their children and grandchildren. More serious was the accusation correctly identified by St. John of Capistrano, that Jews were spreading a deceitful notion among Christians that everyone could be saved in his own faith. This was based on rabbinic teaching that seven commandments, binding on all humanity, had been revealed to Noah prior to the Ten Commandments, with five of them forming a kind of natural law code, defining true righteousness, qualifying the righteous of all peoples to have a share in paradise (34-35).

After the victory at Granada and the union of Spanish kingdoms Jews were first targeted, being perceived as a greater doctrinal threat to Christians and as the most vulnerable to Christian power. Indeed, their expulsion was relatively safe and easy and served to pave the way for the more difficult, but vastly more important task of expelling the Muslims (35). The Edict of Expulsion of the Jews was proclaimed in Granada on March 31, 1492 and promulgated on April 29: "All Jews were to accept baptism or leave the kingdom by 31 July" (36). Prior to this, in the late 13th and early 14th centuries Jews had been expelled by royal decree from the kingdoms of Naples, England and France, plus from many cities and principalities. In 1496 the Jews of Portugal, plus approximately 100,000 Spanish Jews were expelled, with the largest proportion finding refuge in Turkey, though also in countries such as France, Holland, England and even Italy.

Many Spanish and Portuguese Jews responded by publicly accepting but privately rejecting the imposed faith (dubbed Marranism). They were known as *conversos* or *nuevos cristianos*, "new Christians", but unofficially were often called *marranos*, literally meaning "swine" or, figuratively, "a person of swinish character or habits", because they were suspected of practising Judaism in secret. While in even tolerant

Christian countries reversion from Christianity to Judaism was punishable by death, in Muslim lands, where apostasy from Islam was a capital offence, apostasy from Christianity to Judaism was not, hence the preference of Jewish *marranos* who resettled in Turkey for life in a Muslim nation. Turkish archives, studied by Lewis, revealed that Jews were welcomed by Turkish rulers and were often relocated according to political necessities in order “to provide the Ottoman governor with an economically active and politically reliable element” (43-44), since, unlike Christians, and often being refugees from Christian countries, they had no desire to be ‘liberated’ from the Ottoman yoke.

For Muslims the reconquest by Christian powers meant for them a change from domination to subordination. The many who accepted this new status and continued to live under Christian rule were contemptuously called by other Muslims *mudejar*, meaning “tame or domesticated animals”, as opposed to “wild animals.” Muslim jurists began to debate whether it was permissible for Muslims to remain under non-Muslim rule, with most believing they must leave in such a situation in accordance with Muhammad’s *hijra* model (45-46).

The final conquest of Granada was effected by a negotiated capitulation which did not confiscate Muslim property and assets but encouraged them to sell them and migrate elsewhere. From 1492 onwards Muslims faced increasing pressure to convert or depart. By December 14, 1499, this drove Muslims to open revolt, which was put down by armed force in 1501. In 1502 remaining Muslims in Castile, including Granada, were given the same choice offered ten years prior to Jews: baptism, exile or death. Those who stayed were known as *moriscos*, the Muslim equivalent of Jewish *marranos* (47). From 1609-1614 the rest of *morisco* population, estimated at the time at 320,000, that is, around 3% of the total population, was expelled, most going to North Africa.

In 1713 when the Spanish government ceded Gibraltar to Great Britain it was on condition that no Jew or Moor be allowed to reside there, though Great Britain allowed Moors and Jews to buy and sell there for 30 days, with requirements being so relaxed that during the 18th century Jews, mostly from Morocco of Spanish origin, came to form between a quarter and a third of its population (49-50).

Chapter 3. Discovery

There was a widespread assumption that to win the war against Islam it was necessary to carry the fight to Muslims after driving them out of Iberia and Russia. An essential dimension of the voyages of discovery involved seeking primacy over Islam, with the creation of direct links with sources of products serving to cut out the middleman, seeking “to outflank the power of Islam by finding co-religionists, business partners, and perhaps even allies in the remote lands beyond the eastern and southern limits of Muslim power” (59). This was accompanied by realization of “the obvious tactical need to prevent [Muslims] from regrouping and to forestall a counterattack” (59).

Lewis regards the discovery of America, as part of European discovery of the world, as that which above all “ensured the triumph of Europe over its rivals, especially Islam, and the consequent universal acceptance of European notions and categories” (69): “...the discovery of America, for better or for worse, was a turning point in human history and an essential part of the transition to a modernity that began in Europe and was carried all over the world by European discoverers, conquerors, missionaries, colonists, and, let us add, refugees. Far more than the contemporary conquest of Granada, it ensured, in the long run, the triumph of Europe

over its enemies. The mines of the New World gave European Christendom gold and silver to finance its trade, its wars, and its inventions. The fields and plantations of the Americas gave it new resources and commodities and enabled Europeans, for the first time, to trade with the Muslims and others as equals and, ultimately, as superiors. And the very encounter with strange lands and peoples, unknown to history and scripture alike, contributed mightily to the breaking of intellectual molds and the freeing of the human mind and spirit" (72-73).

While Lewis welcomes contemporary Western stress on multiculturalism he warns that multiculturalism "becomes dangerous and demeaning to all cultures when it presents an idealized and sometimes invented version of other cultures and contrasts them with a demonized parody of the West" (76-77). Lewis recognizes the very real possibility that Western culture may go: "The lack of conviction of many of those who should be its defenders and the passionate intensity of its accusers may well join to complete its destruction" (79). However, if it does go *imperialism, sexism and racism* (words of Western coinage, but not evils invented by the West) will not go with it: "More likely casualties will be the freedom to denounce them and the effort to end them" (79).