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## REVIEWS OF BOOKS

### TO THE EDITOR:

Bernard Lewis's book, *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (1982), has not received fair treatment in the review by Richard Bulliet (*AHR*, 88 [1983]: 439–40). Bulliet briefly acknowledges that this study is an "impressive and useful contribution," a judgment that comes as no surprise, for Lewis is the doyen of English-speaking Middle East historians. But then the reviewer launches into a sustained attack, accusing the author of bias against Islam. The tenor of this study, he argues, is "derisive and condescending toward Muslims to such an extent that the book's analytical value is seriously undermined." This is a powerful charge which, if it is to stick, must be proven.

But there is no proof. Rather, Bulliet, like all those others who make it a practice to defame Lewis, relies on the attribution of malicious intent. Lewis's scholarly objectives are once again subjected to vicious interpretations; the reviewer presumes that Lewis wishes to denigrate Muslims and finds evidence wherever he can, reading dark meanings into even the most innocuous facts. For reasons of space, two examples must suffice to demonstrate the thrust of the whole review; the reader can then judge for himself.

First, Bulliet objects to the title of the book. He argues that *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* makes Muslims look bad: "Why suggest a comparison between the explosion of knowledge and curiosity in Europe and a tepid lack of interest in the lands of Islam if not to show the latter to be deficient?" If so

manifestly neutral a phrase as *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* conveys Muslim deficiency, no title is safe. Can Professor Bulliet suggest an alternative title which would not be susceptible to his criticism ("Glimpses of the Northern Barbarians")? Indeed, the title of Bulliet's own books could be subjected to similar aspersions: thus, *The Patricians of Nishapur* could be understood as fomenting class differences, *Kicked to Death by a Camel* as deriding Arab customs, and *The Tomb of the Twelfth Imam* as ridiculing the Islamic religion.

Second, Lewis observes that Muslims refrained from learning European languages, leaving this domain to their non-Muslim subjects. He then writes of the few exceptions: "By the second quarter of the nineteenth century, the number of [Muslims] able to read a European language was still remarkably small, and many of them were converts or sons or grandsons of converts from Christianity or Judaism to Islam." The point is clear: so much did non-Muslims dominate this sphere of activity that even those few Muslims who did know European languages had a non-Muslim background. Bulliet, however, draws a nasty conclusion from this: for him, Lewis's "implication is that Christian and Jewish mental vigor can persist genetically for some time against Muslim torpor." This not only misrepresents what Lewis says, but—and here I am admittedly speculating—this misrepresentation appears intentional.

To my mind, Professor Bulliet is perhaps the outstanding younger American historian of the Middle East. The originality of his mind and the quality of his writings have assured him a brilliant career; why then, does he join those seeking to establish a reputation through political attacks on Bernard Lewis?

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