



The Jews of Islam

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Probing the Muslims' attitude toward Judaism as a special case of their view of other religious minorities in Islamic countries, Bernard Lewis demolishes two competing stereotypes: the fanatical warrior, sword in one hand and Qur'an in the other, and the Muslim designer of an interfaith utopia. Available for the first time in paperback, his portrayal of the Judaeo-Islamic tradition is set against a vivid background of Jewish and Islamic history.

The Jews of Islam Details

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David Simon says

Bernard Lewis writes with suppositions and strives to make his point with lack of population data and other statistics. Annotating stories are stretched or misused in order to establish his threads of thought. There were some entertaining moments when presumed ideas conflict. The book covers relationships between peoples of the ancient Near East, Europe and North Africa who are Islamic, Jewish and Christian.

Erika Falk says

The first chapter of this book was a solid five stars. It examines what the Koran and other seminal Islamic works say about how Jews should be treated. Lewis argues that by and large in Islamic countries Jews were not regularly forcibly converted, slaughtered, and expelled (like they were in Western Europe) -- though this did happen. Rather, Islamic law in general allows Jews to practice their religion as long as they are treated with systematic persecution, humiliation, and contempt. The rest of the book also is well researched and well written, but was simply of less interest to me (thus the three stars).

Craig Bolton says

The Jews of Islam by Bernard Lewis (1987)

Sagheer Afzal says

This book profoundly troubled me. Bernard Lewis perfectly delineated the way Jews have been treated by Muslim societies. At best they were treated with contempt at worst they were subjected to the kind of treatment that blacks in South Africa experienced. What perturbed me was the fact that those who meted out such treatment did so in the name of Islam. Pious, and God fearing Caliphs like Ibn Umar who renounced worldly goods and who frugal lives had no qualms about subjecting Jews to such discrimination. People such as Irshad Manji have made a name for themselves by demonizing Islam and saying that Quran contains hateful passages about Jews.

This is not the case at all. The second Caliph Umar is described as having a very intolerant attitude towards Jews; in his view, the Jews opted not to choose the religion of Islam and as such were not worthy of consideration. The justification of this view is debatable. But in reading this book you have to bear in mind that the character of any religion can never be fully portrayed by the actions of its followers. It is also useful to note that however bad the treatment of Jews by Muslim it very often paled into insignificance when you consider how they were treated by the Christian empire. The example of Christ had as much impact on the prejudices of Christians as the the example of Muhammad (PBUH) on Muslims.

Anyone who wishes to find an answer for the shocking treatment of Muslims by Jews should not turn to the Quran but to a psychological experiment conducted in Stanford University in 1970. A mock prison was created in the basement of Stanford University. A group of volunteers were divided into prisoners and guards for two weeks. Within six days the prison guards became vicious and sadistic. Professor Zimbardo who led

the experiment concluded that the majority of people can be seduced into behaving in a manner atypical of their beliefs.

I think you can apply that same reasoning to the way Jews were treated by Muslims. In any society where a group of people be they Muslims or Christians have dominance over another group of people; their human nature will inevitably compel them to acts of cruelty and sadism. Religion does not matter very much at all in this situation. Some of the rules and regulations set out by Muslims for the Jews described by Bernard Lewis would horrify most people today. 'If a Jew is struck in the face by a Muslim he must not retaliate but instead must keep his head down.' One particular Imam is described as saying: 'If you wash a negro 200 times you will not find any signs of whiteness so it is with the Jews...they will always be impure.' Truly shocking to think that such an attitude could have been the norm in any society.

The only fault with this book is that Bernard Lewis should have given more emphasis on the anti-Semitism of Muslims today. But all in all; a very concise and informative read.

Miriam says

This study covers Muslim attitudes toward Jews from the first days of Islam up to the 20th century. Sources include Jurist fatwas, Qur'an commentaries, literature, theological doctrines, and archival sources.

Muslim perception of the Jews changed over time and varied according to region and political conditions. It cannot broadly be categorized as an attitude either extraordinarily repressive or tolerant, although both extremes occurred.

Islamic scripture does not place non-believers on par with believers, and paints the Jews in a particularly harsh light. However, periodic hostility toward the Jews can be readily explained by historical factors without recourse to theology. Early Muslims tended to be more wary of Jews than they were of Christians, but as they increasingly came into conflict with Christians they became more friendly toward the Jews up to the Ottoman 16th century, a high point of tolerance.

Central Islamic lands such as Turkey, Egypt and the Levant were generally more tolerant than peripheral areas such as Iran and Morocco; however, Spain and the Hijaz were notable exceptions to this rule. Jews and Muslim often had a symbiotic relationship, exchanging theological ideas, scientific knowledge, and technological advances.
