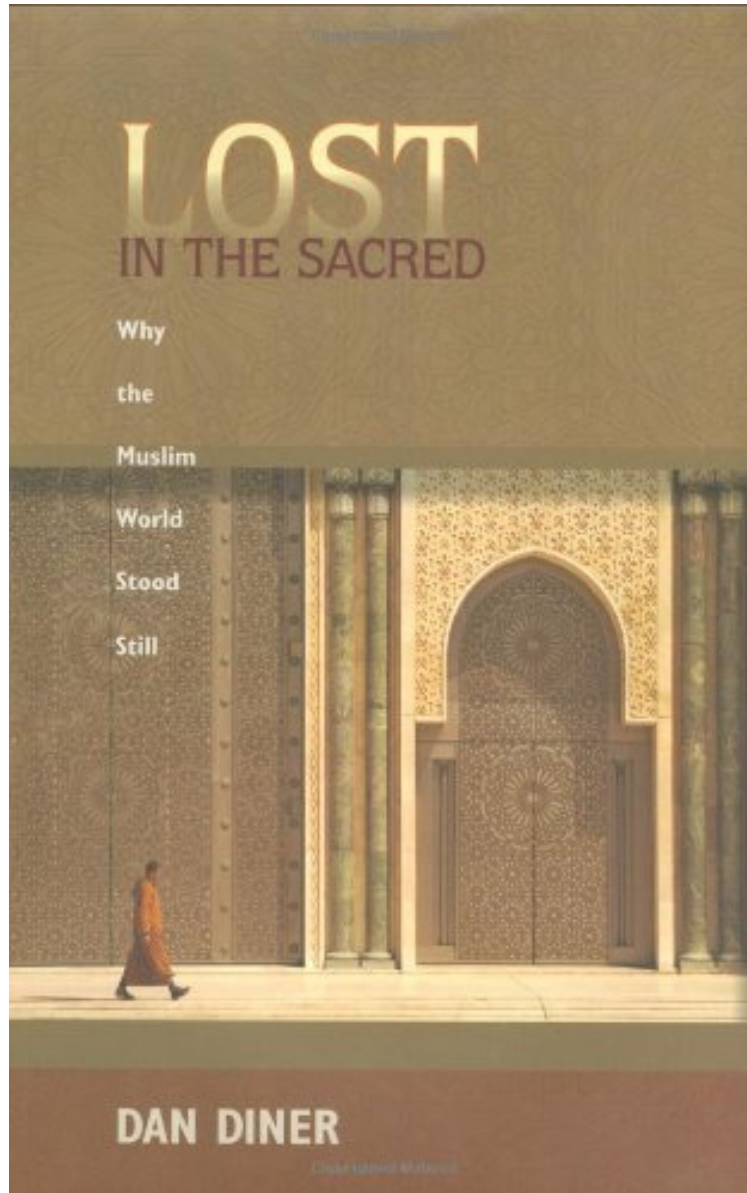


(Mobile pdf) Lost in the Sacred: Why the Muslim World Stood Still

Lost in the Sacred: Why the Muslim World Stood Still

Dan Diner

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Dan Diner : Lost in the Sacred: Why the Muslim World Stood Still before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Lost in the Sacred: Why the Muslim World Stood Still:

8 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Fresh, Insightful, and bound to advance the debateBy ChrisLASince the publication of the Arab Human Development Report in 2002, there has been increased focus on WHY the Middle

East is so far behind the rest of the world in education, economic development, and social-political institutions, despite all their oil wealth. The well-worn excuses of colonialism and globalization really can't be defended because former colonies in other parts of the world have flourished. Diner puts his finger on some quite unique aspects of Middle Eastern Arab culture which go a long way to explain their backwardness -- including the sacrosanct language of Allah, a circular view of history, a highly centralized control of government and economy, and an all-pervasive control of human existence both public and private. The latter is more troubling today as more and more Arabs and Muslims migrate to non-Muslim countries which have a strict separation of church and state. Diner's hope is that the cultural tensions felt outside the Middle East will spur changes to the traditions that have for so long strangled Arab progress. This book, hopefully, will change the conversation in the Middle East as well as in the non-Muslim world away from lame excuses to pragmatic reforms which include embracing secularization, enlightenment, and modernity. There can be no justification for going back to an idealized era in the 7th Century. The translation is smooth, and the book is highly readable both for the layman and the scholar. 10 of 12 people found the following review helpful. Is Arab-Muslim secularization simply impossible? By Dennis Waters I found Dan Diner's book to be frustrating - intellectually sweeping and insightful at many points but wandering off and losing momentum at others. Fortunately it is short (180 pages of text) so I was finished before the frustration built too high. That the Arab Middle East is a laggard in most measures of economic development, education, and technological progress is beyond dispute. Why this is so is more controversial. And whether it matters - i.e., should it be a source of worry or a source of pride? - is another question altogether. Diner's thesis is that secularization - in essence, church-state separation - is the key prerequisite for Western-style economic growth and technical innovation. In the Arab-Muslim world, however, the sacred permeates society to the extent that secularization is not possible. *Lost in the Sacred* builds this case with an extensive historical and cultural survey, which proceeds in reverse chronological order, from recent history back through the emergence of secularization among the Turks, the rise and fall of the Ottoman Empire, and the "golden age" of medieval Arab civilization. There is way more rich detail and useful insight than can be summarized here, but Diner is especially good on why the sacred Arabic language and the printing press do not get along, why the Ottomans essentially ignored the Europeans' discovery of the New World, and why Arab historiography eschews the Western idea of progress. There are also numerous meanderings down less useful paths, and the book concludes in a relatively weak fashion. *Lost in the Sacred* is a translation from the German. It is mostly handled well, but the occasional long and unwieldy sentence creeps in and brings the flow to an abrupt halt. I am very glad I read *Lost in the Sacred* and would recommend it to anyone interested in the intersection of the sacred and the profane among Muslims in the Arab world. 20 of 25 people found the following review helpful. What Went Wrong (Again) With Islam? By Fred W. Hallberg This was my first encounter with Dan Diner's work. He is a wonderful writer, and I look forward to other works of his. I was drawn to this book by his promise to explain why the Muslim world has so abjectly failed to modernize. This issue is made salient by the events of 9/11, which revealed the depth of Muslim hatred toward the West. Why was Islam apparently unable to become another participating member of the modern world, like China or India or Brazil? Why this lust to destroy the achievements of the West rather than to enjoy them? The only other author I have found who has anything of substance to say on this topic is Bernard Lewis. His books "The Muslim Discovery of Europe" (1982), and "The Crisis of Islam" (2003), were addressed to this issue. But Lewis failed to answer my questions satisfactorily. The target of his explanation had to be Arabia, but his examples and evidence are almost entirely derived from Turkey. But above all I felt Lewis succeeded only in describing the Muslim failure to modernize, not in explaining it. Sure Muslims had suppressed the use of the printing press for 300 years. But why? The scribes may have had a special interest in this suppression, but why did scribes have so much more ability to impose their interests on Muslim countries than they did in the West? The inability of Muslims to modernize, and their general hostility toward western modernity, remained unexplained. Dan Diner goes much deeper in his quest for the historical causes of this effect than does Lewis. He draws attention to the special status of oral recitation in the communication of the sacred Word of God in Islam, and uses that to explain the resistance to printing the Koran. The Koran is not to be read, so much as recited aloud from memory, and the written text is merely a memory aid to facilitate this process. Diner traces the unwillingness of Muslims to accept cultural innovation and to the immutability of the recited sacred Word of God. Mechanical printing was a sacrilege because it removed the Sacred Word too far from its revealed source. So far so good. But the same could be said of printed versions of Hebrew scripture, or of printed versions of the New Testament. Why were they not stopped in their tracks by the distance of printed translations from the original oral revelation, or at least from the hand-copied manuscripts? This is where Diner gets difficult. I am abbreviating here, but Diner traces the immutability of the revealed Word in Islam to a conservative political philosophy shared by Leo Strauss and religious fundamentalists of whatever faith. This is the view that unless social and political norms are based on immutable revealed foundations, life will degenerate into emptiness and nihilism. Muslims, like Orthodox Jews and political conservatives like Strauss, fear cultural changes because they believe these changes will destroy the disciplining structures which give life meaning and value. This is hard for an American Midwestern Pragmatist like myself to swallow. First, no example of "Revealed Truth" is in fact free of error and contradiction. Consider the contradictions between the seven day creation story and the Adam and Eve story in

Hebrew scripture, or the problem of the "Satanic Verses" in the Koran (where the Prophet is portrayed as changing his mind about an alleged revelation from God). Kant showed us another way to ground our beliefs. Analyze the practices which are required for a fruitful social life, and ask what are the norms presupposed by these indispensable practices. (Kant called such an analysis a "transcendental deduction.") This gives us all the norms and procedures of validation one needs for a vital and developing culture. (My understanding of Kant is of course mediated by Habermas.) My advice to my Islamic colleagues is to come on in. The water of modernity is fine, at least so long as you do not allow your fears of developmental change to make you cruel and destructive.

Lost in the Sacred poses questions about the Muslim world that no other book by a Western writer has dared to ask. Focusing on the Arab Middle East, Dan Diner asks what caused the Muslim world to lag behind so dramatically. Is Western dominance to blame? Or is the problem even with Islam itself? These questions, however unsettling, need to be asked--and they are being posed all across the Muslim world today. This book provides cautious answers that are no less disturbing than the questions. Diner argues that Islam's cultural stasis is not due to the Muslim faith itself, but to the nature of the sacred it is infused with and that penetrates every aspect of life--spiritual and material. He reveals how the sacred in Islam suspends the acceleration of social time, hinders change, and circumvents secularization and modernity. Diner takes readers on an unforgettable intellectual journey, from today's global conflicts back into the distant past. He describes the Muslim encounter with the emerging West in early modernity, the challenges Western imperial expansion posed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the time-suspending impact of Arabic as a sacred language, the prevention of print, the classical age of Islam with its dazzling heights of learning and culture--and much more. Diner traces an entangled perspective, combining the spiritual with the social, and the cultural with the political. Throughout, he draws our attention to the urgent need for secularization and modernization in Islam. The Muslim world is in crisis. Lost in the Sacred explains why.

"All the evidence--yes, all--points to the ossification of Muslim thought and Muslim behavior in the world. . . . [Lost in the Sacred: Why the Muslim World Stood Still] makes the point clearly and convincingly."--Martin Peretz, New Republic "[Diner] analyzes how the Middle East, which led in cultural, mathematical, and scientific innovation during Europe's Dark Ages, lost momentum. . . . A deep and thorough analysis of the causes of the problems identified by the Arab Human Development Report that will be of interest to followers of Middle Eastern history and politics and those looking to understand the differences with the West."--Deirdre Sinnott, ForeWord Magazine "Lost in the Sacred offers a very refreshing perspective into the thinking of the Arab world as compared to the Muslim world. . . . This book is invaluable for anyone willing to go beyond the political rhetoric and understand the multiple factors that brought on the ossification of Arab society and, to a lesser degree, the Islamic world."--Tarek Fatah, The Globe and Mail "Diner seeks to explore and understand the nature of the sacred in Islam through a combination of historical overview, socio-cultural reflection, politico-economic consideration and analysis of the role played by knowledge, language and speech in the formation of the Islamic worldview."--Muhammad Khan, Muslim News "Diner's connection of various dates, places, and persons flowing together in a polished narrative. He fills his relatively short book with an abundance of information that manages never to overwhelm."--Joshua Arnold, Common "This book makes an exceptionally important contribution to our understanding of the Muslim world. . . . It can be highly recommended."--Mia Roth, European Legacy From the Back Cover "Dan Diner's breadth of knowledge, capacity for clear and broad interpretation, and stylistic sovereignty will no doubt make this a classic in the field."--Anson Rabinbach, Princeton University "A controversial but refreshingly un-Anglo-Saxon search for answers to some outsized questions."--Michael Cook, Princeton University "Lost in the Sacred offers a broad synthesis on a key problem of the contemporary Middle East, hence of the world at large. It sets out to describe and account for a strange historical phenomenon: how is it that the Arab world so slowly changes--nay, came to some sort of a standstill? Diner handles the best sources and secondary literature with great skill and literary talent."--Rmi Brague, author of The Law of God About the Author Dan Diner is professor of modern history at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and director of the Simon Dubnow Institute for Jewish History and Culture at the University of Leipzig. His books include Beyond the Conceivable: Studies on Germany, Nazism, and the Holocaust and Cataclysms: A History of the Twentieth Century from Europe's Edge.