

Book Review

Lewis, B. (1975). *History: Remembered, Recovered, Invented*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. ; ISBN: 0-691-03547-4

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Abstract

How is history used? What are the ways history is used? In this book review, Nihat Kahveci analyzes how Bernard Lewis's *History: Remembered, Recovered, Invented* seeks the answers to these important questions. Lewis states in the preface that the historian sometimes "needs to leave his period, his area, and his topic, and take a boarder look at the nature of his vocation and discipline". The book is such reflection on nature of historical knowledge and discipline of history. Organizing different examples of historical events, the book takes a broad look at the discipline of history.

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Lewis distinguishes three senses of history. The first one is "remembered history," "the collective memory of a community or nation or other entity-what it, or its rulers and leaders, poets, and sages, choose to remember as significant, both as reality and symbol." (p. 12). The second is "recovered history" which is forgotten historical events rejected at some stage by the communal memory and recovered by academic scholarship--- the reconstruction of a forgotten past. The third is "invented history," that is described as history for a purpose. From Lewis's description of his "invented history," it is hard to distinguish "invented history" from other two categories of history (remembered, recovered).

In the first lecture Lewis argues what makes up history. Lewis gives examples of his argument of "use of history". Lewis categorizes three pasts of Turkish people. The first is the remembered past of the Ottoman-Islamic period. "This was the common, corporate recollection of the Ottoman Turkish people, embodied in their schoolbooks, their poems, their literature, and their self-awareness." The second is the recovered history of Turkish people which has developed in two different directions. One is that the local history of Turkey, the ancient peoples and civilizations of Anatolia going back ancient times – the Hittites as ancestors of the Turks. The second direction is the history of the Turks before coming to Anatolia. Sources of the recovered history came from European science of Turcology. Lewis argues that there were two essential contexts framing the two dimensions of Turkish history: The first dimension is patriotism which can be defined by loyalty of country. The second dimension is the idea of unification of all Turkish speaking countries which is named as the Pan-Turkism. Pan-Turkism is a nationalist doctrine based on common identity, that Mustafa Kemal Ataturk made the conscious choice by choosing patriotism and rejecting pan-Turkism. Lewis clearly highlights the relationships between historiography and political identity by quoting an example from Republican Party Program: "The fatherland is the sacred country within our present political boundaries, where the Turkish nation lives with its ancient and illustrious history and with its past glories still living on the depths of its soil" (Lewis, 1975, p. 39).

Lewis identifies that the third type of history "invented history," as "devised and interpreted from remembered and recovered history where feasible, and fabricated where not" (p.12). Lewis states that invention of history requires rejection of undesired past to build new identity and future: "Nationalist historiography rejects the dynastic past, rejects even the previous basis of group identity" (p.65). Lewis gives an example from the 19th and early 20th centuries to show how invented history is formed: "Jewish, Arabic, Persian, and Turkish historical novelists did much to form the self-image of the new, secular-educated reading public among these peoples, with far-reaching political consequences" (p.58). After Turkish Independence War, the new Turkish Republic was constructed a new, modern, secular, nation-state by rejection of the Ottoman Past. Even though Lewis describes 'Recovered History' as reconstruction of a forgotten past, his description might create ambiguity between the terms 'Recovered History' and 'Invented History'. Lewis argues "reconstruction begs the basic question, and disguises what would be better described as construction. The word itself indicates the dangers of the process, and leads us to third type of history" (p.12).

In the second lecture, 'Medium and Message', Lewis explores the types of the collective memories of a community. Then, he explores the invention of history. According to Lewis, idealization of history has a purpose:

Invention is of several types, and has several functions. Broadly, its aim is to embellish -- to correct or remove what is distasteful in the past, and replace it with something more acceptable, more encouraging, and more conducive to the purpose in hand. It may be spontaneous, as in heroic sagas, romantic, as in a good deal of 19th and 20th century writing, or officially sponsored and even imposed (p.57).

Lewis goes on to introduce another function of history --as invented-- which legitimize authority. He suggests that at first sight, this function of history has similar purpose as embellishment, but it is the more specific with its aims and methods. Thus Lewis suggests that sometimes invention of history can aim to undermine authority instead of legitimating it: "to assert new claims and new arguments, sometimes even a new identity, in conflict with the old order." (p.65). Lewis explains this situation by illustrating nationalist effects of 19th and 20th centuries' historians on historiography. It is stated that nationalist historiography refuses the old loyalties, and the previous basis of group identity. "Nationalist historiography, coinciding with the romantic age, presents highly colored version of the past, the purpose of which is to encourage these new notions and destroy the old" (Lewis, 1975, p.65).

Lewis also gives attention to Soviet historiography as a practice of historical rewriting. He describes the Soviet type of historiography as state –imposed control and direction. Lewis argues that there are many ways of expressing intentions of history. Among the ways of invention of history, he claims, the most effective is force. But Soviets have had a difficulty to continue that historiography in accordance with changing official necessities:

This is not only means that the past has to be written to accord with the requirements of the present; it further means that every time there is a change in the present though the triumph of one faction over another, or even a change of policy within the ruling faction, the past must again be rewritten to accord with the requirements of the new present (Lewis, 1975, p.65).

In the third and last lecture, Lewis gives the examples of history "As it Should Have Been", rather than telling history "like it was". At this point, it is worth quoting Lewis' words about the essentials of scholarly historical research. According to Lewis, the essential and distinctive characteristic of scholarly historical research is not to have directed and predetermined results:

The historian does not set out to prove a thesis, or select material to establish some point, but follows the evidence where it leads. No human being is free from human failings, among them loyalties and prejudices which may color his perception and presentation of history. The essence of the critical scholarly historian is that he is aware of this fact, and instead of indulging his prejudices seeks to identify and correct them (Lewis, 1975, p.54).

In regard to Turkish History, Lewis argues that from the eighteen century to nineteenth century a new picture of Turkish History emerged in the view of Pre-Islamic history. The ideas came from new European science of Turcology. This Turkish history of the pre-Islamic period was a forgotten and rejected chapter of Turk history, which can be classified as "recovered history" (Lewis, 2002). By means of having new sources and studies of pre-Islamic Turks and their history and language, Turks accomplished a great change in their understanding of their corporate identity, "their relations with other groups past and present, and their place in the two fundamental visions of the human predicament, the historical and the philosophic" (Lewis, 2002, p. 345).

I think that this is an invaluable book in the area of history. Answering purposive use of history and distinguishing it some categories can be considered as answering the question "what the history is." Lewis's *History: Remembered, Recovered, Invented* may offer a way of thinking about history curricula

and textbooks and their transformation in Turkey by means of explaining what the use of stages of history and historiography.

References

Lewis, B. (2002). *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, (3rd ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.

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