

2009-04-14 19:07:49 by Southern

In the ancient world and throughout much of the Middle East today, bowing is just about the worst thing someone can do.

Raymond Ibrahim

Is Obama's deep bow (with slightly bent knee) to the Saudi king as bad as it seems? The White House, apparently forgetful that we live in the Internet age, where everything is swiftly documented and disseminated — or else thinking it leads a nation of the blind — insists the president did not bow. He supposedly always bends in half when shaking hands with shorter people, though he certainly seemed quite erect when saluting the British queen, who is much shorter than the Saudi king.

Obama bowed; this much is certainly not open to debate. All that is left now is to place his odious obeisance in context. As such, history has much to say about the seemingly innocuous bow.

Millennia before the current war between the West and Islam — the war Obama insists does not exist in the first place — the ancient Greeks (forebears of Western civilization) warred with the Persians (forebears of the soon-to-be-nuclear Islamic theocracy, Iran).

Writing in the 5th century B.C., the Greek historian Herodotus explained: "When the Persians meet one another in the roads, you can see whether those who meet are of equal rank. For instead of greeting by words, they kiss each other on the mouth; but if one of them is inferior to the other, they kiss one another on the cheeks."

This explanation reminds one of Bush's hand-holding/kissing sessions with the same Saudi monarch, which some insist exonerate Obama's bow. Not so; as the Greek historian explains above, such behavior is representative of equal rank in Eastern cultures.

As for Obama's conduct, Herodotus continues, "yet if one is of much less noble rank than the other, he falls down before him and worships him."

"Much less noble rank"? Could Obama, like his wife Michelle, who only recently became proud of America, be operating under the conviction that being American is not all that noble?

As for "falls down before him and worships," this phrase is a translation of the Greek word *proskunesis*, which means "to make obeisance," to "worship, adore," as one would a god, or king, or god-king. Basically, to fall on one's face in prostration to another. Connotatively, it implies "to make like a dog" — base, servile, and submissive.

While common to the caste-like system of Persia, prostration was something the freedom-loving Greeks scorned. Indeed, wars were waged simply because the Greeks refused to submit — literally and figuratively — to Persian tyranny.

According to Arrian's chronicle, at the height of Alexander the Great's power — when his hubris against the gods and megalomania against man were most burgeoning — he decided to implement the proskunesis in his court, provoking controversy among the Macedonians, until one of their numbers, Callisthenes, rebuked him by saying, "Will you actually compel the Greeks as well, the freest of mankind, to do you obeisance?" Another close companion to Alexander, Clitus, vexed at the former's increasing pomposity and the lack of manly dignity at his court, told Alexander, in the words of the historian Plutarch, that "he [Alexander] had better live and converse with barbarians and slaves who would not scruple to bow the knee to his Persian girdle." His words cost him his life.

It was one decade ago, when I studied ancient history with Victor Davis Hanson, that I last examined the proskunesis (never thinking the day was nigh when it would have modern applicability — and thanks to a U.S. president!). Recently corresponding with VDH about this whole sordid affair, he confirmed that "the Macedonians seemed to really have felt proskunesis was about the worst thing someone could do."

In light of the West's ancestors' utter contempt for proskunesis, let us now examine Obama's prostration in context:

First, it must be affirmed that, as with ancient Greeks, Americans find bows, prostrations, and other servile gestures distasteful. Interestingly, the Muslim world shares this same view, particularly so-called "radicals," who are constantly condemning "manmade" governments, such as democracies, as systems of "human-worship" to be eschewed at all cost. Writes Ayman al-Zawahiri: "Know that democracy, that is, 'rule of the people,' is a new religion that deifies the masses by giving them the right to legislate without being shackled down to any other authority" (The Al Qaeda Reader, p. 130).

This, by the way, is why the Saudi monarch does not tamper with Sharia: doing so would be tantamount to self-apotheosis. Expecting prostrations from others would be viewed little better by the theocrats surrounding him. (Watch the video and note that, while the king proceeded with an extended right arm, Obama dived in with a bow, almost taking the former aback.)

In short, both Muslims and Americans (at least until very recently for the latter) find bowing to be an odious enterprise and therefore do not offer it to, nor expect it from, others.

Conversely, some Far Eastern cultures incorporate the bow. Had Obama been in Japan and bowed (and received a reciprocal bow signifying equality), his actions

would have been culturally appropriate (not to mention expected). Yet, Obama had as much reason to bow to a Muslim as he would have to a Christian or Jew.

Yet surely he didn't bow to Abdullah due to the latter's exalted status in the Muslim world ("Guardian of the Two Sanctities"), but rather out of politeness, because Abdullah is a king, royalty. Not so. Were this true, upon meeting the British queen — equal "royalty" — Obama would have stooped to her as well. (Nor can his iPod gift be considered surrogate.)

Whatever prompted that rather instinctive bow — Obama may be used to bending the knee to Saudi royalty, considering that Saudis may have paid his college tuition — and regardless of antiquated notions of "honor" and "dignity," merely diplomatically, it was a bad move.

Not only is the Wahhabi king a symbol of the most "radical" form of Islam — it's not for nothing that 15 of the 19 9/11 hijackers, not to mention bin Laden, were Saudis — but his Sharia-enforcing kingdom is cited as one of the worst human rights violators in the world. Bowing to this man was therefore symbolically a bow of submission to radical Islam and all its attendant human rights violations.

This is compounded by the fact that, immediately preceding this ignoble bow, Obama was busy profusely apologizing to the Islamic world, insisting that the U.S. is not at war with Islam — and "never will be." Jihadis the world over must have been relieved to know that not only does the leader of the most powerful Western nation have no intention of naming them or placing them in context — so much for that first strategy of warfare, "know your enemy" — but that nothing they do in the future will ever cause the sleeping infidel giant's leader to arouse it.

Similarly, Obama's obeisance should give nuke-seeking Iran even more hope in its endeavors. After all, if the leader of the free West so readily bends the knee to Wahhabi despotism, how long before he bows to Iran, the true heir of proskunesis-Persia? And if he does not fully bow willingly, that is only more incentive for Iran to hasten and acquire nukes, so he can be made to bow unwillingly.

Finally, any would-be "moderates" or assertive governments who may have been serious about combating radical Islam and its attendant humanitarian abuses via Sharia have, through Obama's bow to the personification of radical Islam, just received a clear message: aside from occasional, perfunctory lip service, you're really on your own.

As for all those who would defend Obama's bow by saying he was being "diplomatic," because, you know, we "need" Saudi oil, how does that justify bowing, unprecedented from an American president, unexpected from the Saudi king?

When Alexander the Great, drunk with hubris, took on despotic ways, demanding

that others prostrate themselves before him, the Macedonians revolted; some were put to death. What a long way Western civilization has come when today the leader of the free world and heir to democratic ancient Greece, far from despotically demanding that others offer him obeisance, voluntarily opts to prostrate himself — and in essence, all of America — before another. And what another.

[PajamasMedia](#)

<http://www.southernwolf.net/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=1244>