

## Obama Flunks History at Cairo U

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In his speech to the Muslim world in Cairo, President Barack Obama claimed: "As a student of history, I also know civilization's debt to Islam. It was Islam — at places like Al-Azhar University — that carried the light of learning through so many centuries, paving the way for Europe's Renaissance and Enlightenment. It was innovation in Muslim communities that developed the order of algebra; our magnetic compass and tools of navigation; our mastery of pens and printing."

Obama is not much of a "student of history" if he believes this. Almost every advance he attributes to the Muslims was due to someone else.

The non-Muslim Chinese invented the magnetic compass and printing (Gutenberg invented not printing, but movable type). The non-Muslim Hindu Indians invented algebra and the decimal numbering system. The non-Muslim European Christians invented the university.

I can't address advances in medicine, but I have studied the history of astronomy and physics. The Muslims contributed nothing.

All modern physics descends from Galileo (1564 -1642); all modern astronomy from Copernicus (1473-1543). If you study Galileo's works carefully, as I have, you see that he started with the achievements of the Greek mathematical physicist Archimedes of Syracuse (c. 287 BC - c. 212 BC). If you study Copernicus' works carefully, as I have, you will see that Copernicus' great book *On the Revolutions* is essentially a heliocentric re-working of the geocentric astronomy textbook by the Greek Ptolemy (c. 90 AD - 168 AD). Copernicus mostly used even Ptolemy's data for the positions of the planets.

Note the dates for Archimedes/Galileo and Ptolemy/Copernicus. It is as if the Muslim world never existed. As far as their fundamental contributions to physics and astronomy, it did not.

If one reads history of science textbooks prior to about 1980, one will find very little mention of Muslim "contributions" to physics and astronomy. This is reasonable, because there weren't any. In the past generation, however, political correctness has dictated that Muslims be given credit for discoveries they did not make.

Certainly, the Muslims were a conduit for the discoveries of others. The word "algebra" is indeed derived from an Arabic word. The books of Archimedes and

Ptolemy used by Galileo and Copernicus were indeed translations into Latin from the Arabic. But let us never forget that Archimedes and Ptolemy wrote their books in Greek, not Arabic. They were Greeks, not Muslims.

Most of the names for the brightest stars are of Arabic origin, because the names of these stars given in Ptolemy's textbook were never translated from the Arabic. But do you think that the Arabs were the first humans to observe Rigel and Betelgeuse, the first and second brightest stars in Orion?

The reason Muslims never developed fundamental physics is because the leading Muslim theologians declared the idea of fixed physical laws to be heretical. The Qur'an (verse 6:64) states: "The Jews have said, 'God's hand is fettered.' Fettered are their hands, and they are cursed for what they have said. Nay, but His hands are outspread; He expends how He will." The standard Muslim interpretation of this passage has been that there cannot be unchanging physical laws because Allah may change the laws at any moment. In 1982, the Institute for Policy Studies in Islamabad, Pakistan, criticized a chemistry textbook by saying: "There is latent poison present in the subheading Energy Causes Changes because it gives the impression that energy is the true cause rather than Allah. Similarly it is unIslamic to teach that mixing hydrogen and oxygen automatically produces water. The Islamic way is this: when atoms of hydrogen approach atoms of oxygen, then by the Will of Allah water is produced." The implication is clear: next week, Allah may change his mind about water being a compound of hydrogen and oxygen. With this sort of worldview, how could one possibly be a scientist?

The cosmology of the Qur'an is obviously geocentric, and as a consequence, Al-Azhar University, which Obama singles out for praise in his speech, still teaches Ptolemaic astronomy.

There was one truly great "Muslim" physicist, the Nobel Prize winning Pakistani, Mohammed Abdus Salam. I put "Muslim" in quotes, because Salam belonged to the Ahmadi sect of Islam, a sect that accepts modern science. But in 1974, the Pakistani parliament declared the Ahmadi sect heretical, and its members are currently being persecuted in Pakistan. Contemporary Muslim historians generally do not list Salam as an important Muslim scientist. Had he remained in Pakistan, he quite possibly would have been killed.

During the Cold War, it was commonplace for leftist academics to attribute many discoveries to scientists in Communist countries, discoveries that had actually been made in the West. So now leftist academics attribute to Muslims discoveries that had actually been made by others.

I never expected to hear a president of the United States do so.

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The lad, alas, is not too bright; not, certainly, bright enough to be a President, but there we have it: all troubles will now flow from a not very smart youth...

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