

To President Obama: Regarding Islam and Science

2009-06-10 21:30:50 by Southern

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In his latest essay, Fjordman examines what Barack Obama called "civilization's debt to Islam."

US President Barack Hussein Obama's speech delivered at Cairo University in Egypt on June 4 2009 contained so many half-truths, distortions or plain lies that it is almost impossible to deal with all of them adequately in a single essay. I will concentrate on the science part in particular here. Take this quote:

"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; our understanding of how disease spreads and how it can be healed. Islamic culture has given us majestic arches and soaring spires; timeless poetry and cherished music; elegant calligraphy and places of peaceful contemplation. And throughout history, Islam has demonstrated through words and deeds the possibilities of religious tolerance and racial equality."

Is there even a single truthful statement in this entire paragraph? Perhaps Muslims had some decent calligraphy, and a few of their scholars made contributions to algebra, but apart from that it's almost total nonsense. The magnetic compass was invented by the Chinese, and possibly by Europeans independently. Printing of books, too, was invented by the Chinese, and was stubbornly and persistently rejected by Muslims for a thousand years or more due to Islamic religious resistance. They liked the Chinese invention of gunpowder a lot more.

No direct link has ever been proven between Gutenberg's printing press and printing in East Asia, although it is conceivable that the basic idea of printing had been imported to Europe. In contrast, we know with 100% certainty that Muslims were familiar with East Asian printing but aggressively rejected it. Scholar Thomas Allsen in his book *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia* has described how the authorities in Iran under Mongolian rule in 1294 attempted to introduce Chinese-style printed banknotes but failed due to popular resistance:

"Certainly the Muslim world exhibited an active and sustained opposition to movable type technologies emanating from Europe in the fifteenth century and later. This opposition, based on social, religious, and political considerations, lasted well into the eighteenth century. Only then were presses of European origin introduced into the Ottoman Empire and only in the next century did printing become widespread in the Arab world and Iran. This long-term reluctance, the

disinterest in European typography, and the failure to exploit the indigenous printing traditions of Egypt certainly argue for some kind of fundamental structural or ideological antipathy to this particular technology.”

It is likely that due to trade, Middle Easterners were familiar with printing centuries before this incident, yet because of Islamic religious resistance they did not adopt this great invention until a thousand years or more after it had been invented in China. Minorities such as Jews or Greek and Armenian Christians were the first to use printing presses in the Ottoman realms. The first book printed in the Persian language was probably a Judaeo-Persian Pentateuch.

As for music, Greek theory on the subject evolved from Pythagoras before 500 BC. The Church was the dominant institution in post-Roman Europe and drew on Greek philosophy and musical theory. Some elements of Christian observances may derive from Jewish tradition, too, chiefly the chanting of Scripture and the signing of psalms, poems of praise from the Book of Psalms. Christians integrated music into their liturgy. In the Western Church, Gregorian chant and the development of polyphonic music was valued as decoration, a concept central to medieval art and architecture. According to *A History of Western Music, Seventh Edition*, by Donald J. Grout, Peter J. Burkholder and Claude V. Palisca, “Polyphonic performance heightened the grandeur of chant and thus of the liturgy itself.” This gave rise to a musical tradition which led to Bach, Mozart and Beethoven. Nothing similar happened in the Islamic world, despite the fact that Muslims initially had access to much of the same material. I have described this in my essay *Why Muslims Like Hitler, but Not Mozart*.

Historian Bernard Lewis writes in *The Middle East: A Brief History of the Last 2,000 Years*:

“Since Muslim worship, with the limited exception of some dervish orders, makes no use of music, musicians in the Islamic lands lacked the immense advantage enjoyed by Christian musicians through the patronage of the Church and of its high dignitaries. The patronage of the court and of the great houses, though no doubt useful, was intermittent and episodic, and dangerously subject to the whims of the mighty. Muslim musicians devised no standard system of notation, and their compositions are therefore known only by the fallible and variable medium of memory. There is no preserved corpus of classical Islamic music comparable with that of the European musical tradition. All that remains is a quite extensive theoretical literature on music, some descriptions and portrayals of musicians and musical occasions by writers and artists, a number of old instruments in various stages of preservation, and of course the living memory of long-past performances.”

There are those who are critical of Mr. Lewis as a scholar and consequently believe that he shouldn't be quoted as an authority. You should always maintain a healthy criticism of any writer, but I know from other sources that the above mentioned quotes are largely correct.

Many forms of music are banned in Islam. The Reliance of the Traveller by Ahmad Ibn Lulu Ibn Al-Naqib and Noah Ha Mim Keller has been formally approved by al-Azhar in Egypt, the highest institution of religious learning among Sunni Muslims. It quotes a number of ahadith, authoritative sayings of Muhammad and his companions which form the core Islamic texts next to the Koran, among them one which says that "There will be peoples of my Community who will hold fornication, silk, wine, and musical instruments to be lawful ..." Another quote says that: "On the Day of Resurrection, Allah will pour molten lead into the ears of whoever sits listening to a songstress." The scholarly conclusion is that "All of this is explicit and compelling textual evidence that musical instruments of all types are unlawful." Another legal ruling says that "It is unlawful to use musical instruments - such as those which drinkers are known for, like the mandolin, lute, cymbals, and flute - or to listen to them. It is permissible to play the tambourine at weddings, circumcisions, and other times, even if it has bells on its sides. Beating the kuba, a long drum with a narrow middle, is unlawful."

While I certainly do disagree with Mr. Lewis sometimes, in my experience he occasionally errs by being too positive when writing about Islamic culture, not too negative. If you believe Lewis, "The earliest specifically anti-Semitic statements in the Middle East occurred among the Christian minorities, and can usually be traced back to European originals." This view fits well with the anti-European, Multicultural bias of modern media and academia, yet it is completely and utterly wrong, as Dr. Andrew G. Bostom has conclusively demonstrated in his extremely well-researched book *The Legacy of Islamic Antisemitism*.

I wouldn't say that absolutely no scholarly achievements were made in the medieval Islamic world, only that they are greatly exaggerated for political reasons today. Let us divide scholars into three categories: Category 1 consists of those who make minor contributions, category 2 medium-level ones. Category 3 consists of scholars who make major, fundamental contributions to an important branch of science or found an entirely new scholarly discipline. Examples of the latter would include Isaac Newton, Albert Einstein, Nicolaus Copernicus, Aristotle, René Descartes or Galileo Galilei. Not a single scholar of this stature has ever been produced in the Islamic world even at the best of times. Finding some medieval Muslim scholars who made minor contributions to mathematics or alchemy is not very difficult, and I can probably name half a dozen to a dozen individuals who might qualify under category 2.

The highest-ranking contribution of any Muslim scholar in my view came from Alhazen (Ibn al-Haytham) in optics. The mathematician Muhammad al-Khwarizmi did not "invent" algebra; the ancient Egyptians, Mesopotamians, Indians, Chinese and others had early forms of algebra; the most important pre-modern scholar was arguably Diophantus of Alexandria in the third century AD, and modern algebra was created in Europe. Nevertheless, just like you cannot write a history of optics without mentioning Alhazen, you cannot properly write a history of algebra without mentioning al-Khwarizmi. In historiography, Ibn Khaldun could be mentioned,

although he shared the contempt for all non-Muslim cultures which hampered the growth of history, archaeology and comparative linguistics in the Islamic world. Muslim scholars did not seriously study other cultures with curiosity and describe them with fairness, al-Biruni's writings about India being one of very major few exceptions to this rule.

Geber (Jabir ibn Hayyan) did good work in alchemy for his time and may have been the first person to create some acids, but he falls far short of Antoine Lavoisier and those who developed modern chemistry in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Europe. The Persian Omar Khayyam was a creative mathematician, and fellow Persians Avicenna (Ibn Sina) and well as Rhazes (al-Razi) were capable physicians for their time, but Khayyam was at best a highly unorthodox Muslim and al-Razi didn't believe a single word of the Islamic religion. Whatever contributions they made were more in spite of than because of Islam. Moreover, while I do consider al-Razi to have been a competent physician, the greatest revolution in the world history of medicine was the germ theory of disease, championed by the Frenchman Louis Pasteur and the German Robert Koch in late nineteenth century Europe. They were aided in this by the microscope, which was an exclusively European invention.

It is true that some texts were reintroduced to Europe via Arabic translations, at least initially before they were supplemented by translations directly from Byzantine Greek originals, and that these have left traces in certain words. For instance, quite a few stars in modern European languages have Arabic names or Arabized versions of older Greek names. However, it is important to remember that astronomy in the Islamic world, with certain exceptions due to influences from India, was based on a Ptolemaic Greek theoretical framework, just as it was in Europe. After the translation movement, it is striking to notice how fast Europeans surpassed whatever scholarly achievements had been made in the Middle East.

The best Muslim scholars could be capable observational astronomers, above all Ulugh Beg. A few of them made some adjustments to Ptolemaic astronomical theory, among them Nasir al-Din al-Tusi and Ibn al-Shatir, but none of them ever made a huge conceptual breakthrough comparable to that provided by Copernicus in 1543 when he put the Sun, not the Earth, at the center of our Solar System. With the work of Tycho Brahe and Johannes Kepler afterward, Ptolemaic astronomy was in reality outdated in Europe even before Galileo and others introduced telescopic astronomy in 1609. In contrast, Muslims resisted Copernican heliocentrism in some cases into the twentieth century. Scholar Toby E. Huff explains in his excellent book *The Rise of Early Modern Science: Islam, China and the West*, second edition:

“In the Indian subcontinent, Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-98) was at the forefront of intellectual reform in India, encouraging India to adopt Western educational standards. In his early career of the 1840s, he had defended the Ptolemaic view against Copernicanism, believing that this was incumbent upon the devout Muslim. As he studied the matter more, he realized the need to adopt heliocentric view and

to reconcile its metaphysics with traditional interpretations of the Quran. Soon after he moved to adopt the heliocentric position, he ran into overwhelming opposition, especially Jamil al-Din al-Afghani's (d. 1897) attack of the early 1880s. At that point Ahmad Khan fully recognized the clash between the worldview of modern science and traditional Islamic thought. His efforts to articulate a new synthesis fell on hard times."

Among the major regions on the planet, the two with the most similar medieval starting point were the Middle East and Europe. Greek geometry was unknown in East Asia in pre-modern times. This constituted a major disadvantage for Chinese, Japanese and Korean scholars in optics and astronomy. The only regions in the world where clear glass was extensively made were the Middle East and Europe. Clear glass was used by Europeans to create eyeglasses for the correction of eyesight, and later for the creation of microscopes and telescopes and thus the birth of modern medicine and astronomy. The Mayans in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica did not know how to make glass and could not have made glass lenses for microscopes or telescopes. Middle Eastern Muslims could have done so, but they didn't. Likewise, medieval Europeans invented mechanical clocks while Muslims did not, despite a similar starting point.

Muslims had access to Greek optical theory, which is why Alhazen could achieve what he did. It is puzzling that his Book of Optics, possibly the greatest original scientific work ever written in the Arabic language, was largely ignored in the Arabic-speaking world, yet was studied with interest in Europe. It was written in Cairo, Egypt, but was not studied at al-Azhar close to where Alhazen lived for many years. Ibn al-Nafis in Cairo described the pulmonary circulation of the blood in the thirteenth century, yet his discovery was not followed up, despite the fact that he lived and worked in one of the major cities of the Islamic world.

Even though al-Azhar was a center of education in the Islamic world, it was a center of religious learning and sharia law, not secular learning and science. In contrast, Greek natural philosophy and secular learning was taught at medieval European universities in addition to religious subjects, which is why optics was studied by scholars at European universities. The excellent historian of science Edward Grant explains this in his book Science and Religion.

While university-educated people were a miniscule fraction of the total European population, their cumulative influence should not be underestimated. A striking number of the leading scholars in early modern Europe, from Copernicus to Galileo and Newton, had studied at these institutions. Although the Scientific Revolution began in the seventeenth century with the systematic use of the experimental method and a more critical view of the knowledge of the ancients, exemplified by individuals such as Galileo, the initial institutional basis for these developments was laid with the natural philosophers of the medieval universities.

I have encountered few if any institutions outside of Europe that I would call

“universities” in the Western sense before modern times. Among the best candidates is the Great Monastery of Nalanda in India, which was a Buddhist institution. It was not built by Muslims; it was destroyed by them, as were so many cultural treasures in India and Central Asia. Al-Azhar was created in the tenth century AD and is often hailed as one of the oldest “universities” in the world. Yet in the early twentieth century, the blind Egyptian author Taha Husayn complained about the total lack of critical thinking he encountered at the institution:

“The four years I spent [at al-Azhar] seemed to me like forty, so utterly drawn out they were....It was life of unrelieved repetition, with never a new thing, from the time the study began until it was over. After the dawn prayer came the study of Tawhid, the doctrine of [Allah's] unity; then fiqh, or jurisprudence, after sunrise; then the study of Arabic grammar during the forenoon, following a dull meal; then more grammar in the wake of the noon prayer. After this came a grudging bit of leisure and then, again, another snatch of wearisome food until, the evening prayer performed, I proceeded to the logic class which some shaikh or other conducted. Throughout these studies it was all merely a case of hearing re-iterated words and traditional talk which aroused no chord in my heart, nor taste in my appetite. There was no food for one's intelligence, no new knowledge adding to one's store.”

Taha Husayn was the kind of intellectual who found absolutely no room for free inquiry at this leading Islamic madrasa. He enrolled at the secular Cairo University, founded after European models in 1908, and continued his education at the Sorbonne in Paris. Although best known abroad for his autobiography *Al-Ayyam* (The Days), he created a controversy in Egypt by daring to suggest that some passages of the Koran should not be read literally, and for claiming that some pre-Islamic poetry had been forged to give credibility to traditional Islamic history. For this he was accused of heresy. Had he lived in the more aggressively Islamic atmosphere a few generations later, he might well have been killed. Egyptian writer Naguib Mahfouz was stabbed in the neck and almost killed by enraged Muslims in 1994.

The Greek texts that were translated into Arabic were usually copied from manuscripts by Greek-speaking Byzantine Christians. As Timothy Gregory writes in *A History of Byzantium*, “It is often pointed out that the Arabs made use of the writings and ideas of the ancient Greek philosophers, mathematicians, and scientists, and they played a significant role in the transmission of that knowledge to the medieval West (in the twelfth century). What is not always recognized is that to the Arabs these works were 'Byzantine,' and they borrowed the books from Byzantine libraries, where the manuscripts had been preserved and copied, and translated them into Arabic as an important foundation for their own science and culture.”

Muslims rejected most of the Roman heritage and many aspects of the Greek one, from wine, sculpture and pictorial arts to theater; the only aspect of Greco-Roman civilization that was more compatible with Islam than with Christian culture was slavery. I have explained why in my essay *Why Christians Accepted Greek Natural*

Philosophy, But Muslims Did Not.

In medicine, there is the phenomenon of “transplant rejection,” which happens when an organ is transplanted into another body and that body's immune system rejects it as an alien intrusion. This is a useful analogy to keep in mind when assessing how Muslims and Christians treated Greek natural philosophy during the Middle Ages. Muslims did engage the Greek heritage, but only parts of it, and eventually even this limited acceptance was rejected by theologians such as al-Ghazali. The immune system of Islamic culture considered Greek philosophical ideas to constitute an alien intrusion into its body, fought them and ultimately rejected them. In contrast, for Christian culture, the Greek philosophical heritage did not constitute something alien. Christians did not accept all parts of the Greek heritage as valid for them, but most of them didn't consider Greek logic, modes of thinking and philosophical vocabulary per se to be something alien and hostile. We could say that Christianity was a Jewish child, baptized in water steeped in a Greek philosophical vocabulary and raised in a Greco-Roman environment. This new synthesis was personified by Saint Paul, a Greek-speaking Jew, a follower of the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth and a Roman citizen.

French writer Rémi Brague believes that Muslims in particular usually lacked the European instinct for self-criticism and appreciation of “the Other.” They, or rather non-Muslims under their rule, did translate scientific works from Greek and a few other languages into Arabic, but they usually didn't bother to preserve the originals. This made “renaissances,” the act of going back to the sources to reinterpret them, impossible in the Islamic world. It also made it impossible for anything resembling the linguistic scholars of modern Europe to emerge.

European scholars not only translated texts from Greek, and later from Persian and Sanskrit; they proceeded to explore and explain how these languages came into existence in the first place, which was far beyond what any Muslim scholar had even contemplated doing. Greek shares a common history with Persian and Sanskrit: They are all Indo-European languages, as are Germanic languages such as English. The Indo-European family is the largest and most influential language family in human history, and it all traces back to a single, hypothetical Proto-Indo-European language which must have existed thousands of years ago.

Between 1600-1200 BC you could find horse-drawn chariots in use throughout Eurasia, from the border regions of Shang Dynasty China via Egypt and Anatolia to Northern Europe. This corresponds to the period of the ancient Vedas and the emergence of Vedic Sanskrit in India. Peoples speaking Indo-European languages played a vital role in the diffusion of wheeled vehicles. The Proto-Indo-European language which has been reconstructed by leading European and Western linguists over the past two centuries contains words for a technological package which probably did not exist before 4000 BC, possible not even before 3500 BC. PIE must accordingly in all likelihood have been a living language in the fourth millennium BC.

It is likely that a very early form of PIE existed before 4000 BC and a very late form slightly after 3000 BC. Before 3000 BC, PIE was rapidly expanding geographically, probably aided by early forms of wheeled vehicles, and gradually broke apart into what would soon emerge as different Indo-European branches. Scholars J. P. Mallory and D. Q. Adams tell the tale in *The Oxford Introduction to Proto-Indo-European and the Proto-Indo-European World*:

“[I]ndividual Indo-European groups are attested by c. 2000 BC. One might then place a notional date of c. 4500-2500 BC on Proto-Indo-European. The linguist will note that the presumed dates for the existence of Proto-Indo-European arrived at by this method are congruent with those established by linguists' 'informed estimation'. The two dating techniques, linguistic and archaeological, are at least independent and congruent with one another. If one reviews discussions of the dates by which the various Indo-European groups first emerged, we find an interesting and somewhat disturbing phenomenon. By c. 2000 BC we have traces of Anatolian, and hence linguists are willing to place the emergence of Proto-Anatolian to c. 2500 BC or considerably earlier. We have already differentiated Indo-Aryan in the Mitanni treaty by c. 1500 BC so undifferentiated Proto-Indo-Iranian must be earlier, and dates on the order of 2500-2000 BC are often suggested. Mycenaean Greek, the language of the Linear B tablets, is known by c. 1300 BC if not somewhat earlier and is different enough from its Bronze Age contemporaries (Indo-Iranian or Anatolian) and from reconstructed PIE to predispose a linguist to place a date of c. 2000 BC or earlier for Proto-Greek itself.”

Before Islam, Greek was still a major language throughout the Eastern Mediterranean and beyond, including in Anatolia or Asia Minor, now occupied by Turkish-speaking Muslims and called “Turkey.” Muslims have spent 1400 years wiping out Greek-speaking communities throughout the entire region, a process that has continued into the twenty-first century at the island of Cyprus, yet they now want credit for “preserving the Greek cultural heritage.” When the Ottoman Turks gradually conquered the Greek heartland, the Balkans and the Near East, they showed no serious interest in studying the culture and history of their new subjects.

As Bruce G. Trigger writes in *A History of Archaeological Thought*, second edition, “Serious archaeological work did not begin in Greece, however, until after that country’s independence from Turkey in the early nineteenth century.” Ibn Warraq explains in his well-researched book *Defending the West* why archaeology was invented by Europeans in the post-Enlightenment period. Muslims, despite the fact that they controlled the cradles of the most ancient civilizations on the planet, were indifferent or actively hostile to their remains. Austen Henry Layard, who was active in Mesopotamia (Iraq) in the mid-nineteenth century, recounts this story of Claudius Rich, a pioneer of field archaeology and British Resident in Baghdad:

“Rich learnt from the inhabitants of Mosul that, some time previous to his visit, a sculpture, representing various forms of men and animals, had been dug up in a

mound forming part of the great inclosure. This strange object had been the cause of general wonder, and the whole population had issued from the walls to gaze upon it. The ulema [religious scholars] having at length pronounced that these figures were idols of the infidels, the Mohammedans, like obedient disciples, so completely destroyed them, that Mr. Rich was unable to obtain even a fragment.”

Following the brief Napoleonic expedition to Egypt around 1800, a new fad for ancient Egypt began in nineteenth century Europe. This took the local Muslims completely by surprise, as they could not understand why anybody would be interested in worthless infidel stones. The lavishly illustrated book *Egyptian Treasures from the Egyptian Museum in Cairo* elaborates:

“Initially the Egyptians were unaware of the motives behind the Westerners’ interest in what for them were simply stones emerging from the ground. A rumor then began to circulate that these stones concealed untold treasures. The inhabitants of the villages in the vicinity of archaeological sites began to attack statues, tombs, and temples in the vain hope of extracting jewels and precious objects. Soon, however, Egyptians came to realize that the foreigners were interested in the stones themselves rather than anything they were rumored to contain. While they did not themselves see the attraction of a lump of carved rock, they became masters in the search for and discovery of antiquities. When they were short of authentic relics they had no hesitation in producing fakes, so well made as to fool even the Egyptologists of the era.”

The French expedition to Egypt in 1798-1801 brought many scholars to catalogue the ancient monuments, thus founding modern Egyptology. The trilingual Rosetta Stone, discovered in 1799, was employed by the great French philologist Jean-François Champollion to decipher the Egyptian hieroglyphs in 1822. He made use of the Coptic language to achieve this. Arab and Turkish Muslims had controlled Egypt for more than a thousand years, yet had apparently never managed to decipher the hieroglyphs nor for the most part displayed much interest in doing so. Europeans did so in a single generation after they reappeared in force in Egypt, and they did so with the help of the liturgical language of the Copts, the Egyptian Christians, a direct link to ancient Egypt that the Arab invaders hadn't managed to completely eradicate.

The French scholar Auguste Mariette during a stay in Egypt became convinced that the country needed more effective legislation regarding the conservation of its monuments. He was responsible for the constitution of the Egyptian Antiquities Service and the foundation of the first Egyptian Museum in Cairo. He was buried in the garden in front of this museum, and his remains rest within a stone sarcophagus that resembles those of ancient Egypt.

It is not a coincidence that the Islamic world was often slow at adopting cultural inventions from the outside world. Muslims tend to be indifferent at best toward non-Muslim cultures, past or present, at worst actively hostile. An attack on statues

at a museum in Cairo in 2006 by a veiled woman screaming “Infidels, infidels!” shocked the outside world. She had been inspired by the Egyptian Grand Mufti Ali Gomaa, who quoted a saying by Muhammad that sculptors will be among those receiving the harshest punishment on Judgment Day. According to the extremely influential Egyptian scholar Yusuf al-Qaradawi at his website Islam Online, “Islam prohibits statues and three-dimensional figures of the living creatures,” except dolls made for children. “Therefore, the statues of ancient Egyptians are prohibited.”

The great Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan were demolished by the Taliban regime in 2001, aided by Pakistani and Saudi engineers, who decreed that they would destroy images they deemed “offensive to Islam.” It is tempting to conclude that the only reason why the famous pyramids of Egypt have survived to this day is because they were so big that it proved too complicated, costly and time-consuming for Muslims to destroy them. Otherwise they might well have ended up like countless Hindu temples in India and Buddhist statues in Central Asia, or Christian and Jewish places of worship from Indonesia to Kosovo. The smallest of the three Giza Pyramids outside of the modern city of Cairo did in fact suffer visible damage after an attempt by a medieval Muslim ruler to dismantle this infidel monument.

US President Obama claims that “throughout history, Islam has demonstrated through words and deeds the possibilities of religious tolerance and racial equality.” In reality, it is rather difficult to find such examples from any region in the world with a significant Islamic presence. Islamic doctrines specifically state that Muslims are not supposed to consider non-Muslims to be their equals; they are supposed to wage war against them until they convert or submit. I recommend that Mr. Obama reads the great work of scholar Bat Ye’or on this subject. Sir Jadunath Sarkar, the pre-eminent historian of Mughal India, wrote this about dhimmitude, the humiliating apartheid system imposed upon non-Muslims under Islamic rule:

“The conversion of the entire population to Islam and the extinction of every form of dissent is the ideal of the Muslim State. If any infidel is suffered to exist in the community, it is as a necessary evil, and for a transitional period only....A non-Muslim therefore cannot be a citizen of the State; he is a member of a depressed class; his status is a modified form of slavery. He lives under a contract (dhimma) with the State....In short, his continued existence in the State after the conquest of his country by the Muslims is conditional upon his person and property made subservient to the cause of Islam.”

This “modified form of slavery” is now frequently hailed as the pinnacle of “tolerance.” If the semi-slaves rebel against this system and desire equal rights and self-determination, Jihad resumes. This happened with the Greeks, Serbs, Bulgarians and other Christian dhimmi subjects of the Ottoman Empire, who were repressed with massacres, culminating in the genocide by Turkish and Kurdish Muslims against Armenians in the early twentieth century.

Even for those regions which were not under Islamic rule, endemic Jihad raids disrupted normal communications between many regions of Europe and the Byzantine Empire, where Classical texts were still preserved. As historian Ibn Khaldun proudly proclaimed about the Early Middle Ages: "The Christian could no longer float a plank upon the sea." Dr. Mahatir, the outgoing Prime Minister of Malaysia, during an OIC (Organization of Islamic Conference) summit in 2003 wished for a return to the glory days when "Europeans had to kneel at the feet of Muslim scholars in order to access their own scholastic heritage."

Jihad piracy, slavery and attacks on European countries were a constant menace from the seventh century until the Barbary States of North Africa in the nineteenth century. Some would argue that it is resurfacing now. I have explained this in my online essays *Europeans as Victims of Colonialism* and *Fourteen Centuries of War against European Civilization*, which is included in my printed book *Defeating Eurabia*.

Paul Fregosi in his book *Jihad in the West: Muslim Conquests from the 7th to the 21st Centuries* calls Islamic Jihad "the most unrecorded and disregarded major event of history. It has, in fact, been largely ignored," although it has been a fact of life in Europe, Asia and Africa for almost 1400 years. As Fregosi says, "Western colonization of nearby Muslim lands lasted 130 years, from the 1830s to the 1960s. Muslim colonization of nearby European lands lasted 1300 years, from the 600s to the mid-1960s. Yet, strangely, it is the Muslims...who are the most bitter about colonialism and the humiliations to which they have been subjected; and it is the Europeans who harbor the shame and the guilt. It should be the other way around."

If we look at the post-Roman period as a whole, a picture emerges where Europe was under siege by hostile aliens for most of the time, yet succeeded against all odds. Already before AD 1300, Europeans had created a rapidly expanding network of universities, an institution which had no real equivalent anywhere else, and had invented mechanical clocks and eyeglasses. It is easy to underestimate the importance of this, but the ability to make accurate measurements of natural phenomena was of vital importance during the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions. The manufacture of eyeglasses led indirectly to the development of microscopes and telescopes, and thus to modern medicine and astronomy. The network of universities facilitated the spread of information and debate and served as an incubator for many later scientific advances. All of these innovations were made centuries before European colonialism had begun, indeed at a time when Europe itself was a victim of colonialism and had been so for a very long time. Parts of Spain were still under Islamic occupation, an aggressive Jihad was being waged by the Turks in the remaining Byzantine lands, and the coasts from France via Italy to Russia had suffered centuries of Islamic raids.

It is true that the transatlantic slave trade is a dark chapter in Western history, but one of the reasons why it was possible to establish this trade was that it could tap into the large and well-established Islamic slave trade in this region. All the way

back to ancient Egypt, slavery was an important component of Africa's trade with other continents. Yet according to Robert O. Collins and James M. Burns in *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa*, "The advent of the Islamic age coincided with a sharp increase in the African slave trade." The expansion of the trans-Saharan slave trade was a response to demand in the markets of Muslim North Africa:

"The moral justification for the enslavement of Africans south of the Sahara by Muslims was accepted by the fact they were 'unbelievers' (kafirin) practicing their traditional religions with many gods, not the one God of Islam. The need for slaves, whether acquired by violence or by commercial exchange, revived the ancient but somnolent trans-Saharan trade, which became a major supplier of slaves for North Africa and Islamic Spain. The earliest Muslim account of slaves crossing the Sahara from the Fezzan in southern Libya to Tripoli on the Mediterranean coast was written in the seventh century, but from the ninth century to the nineteenth there are a multitude of accounts of the pillage by military states of the Sahel, known to North African Muslims as bilad al-sudan, ('land of the blacks'), of pagan Africans who were sold to Muslim merchants and marched across the desert as a most profitable commodity in their elaborate commercial networks. By the tenth century there was a steady stream of slaves taken from the kingdoms of the Western Sudan and the Chad Basin crossing the Sahara. Many died on the way, but the survivors fetched a great profit in the vibrant markets of Sijilmasa, Tripoli, and Cairo."

Unlike the West, there never was a Muslim abolitionist movement since slavery is permitted according to sharia, Islamic religious law, and remains so to this day. When the open practice of slavery was finally abolished in most of the Islamic world, this was only due to external Western pressure, ranging from the American war against the Barbary Pirates of Muslim North Africa to the naval power of the British Empire. Slavery was taken for granted throughout Islamic history and lasted longer than did the Western slave trade. Robert Spencer elaborates in his book *A Religion of Peace?: Why Christianity Is and Islam Isn't*:

"Nor was there a Muslim abolitionist movement, no Clarkson, Wilberforce, or Garrison. When the slave trade ended, it was ended not through Muslim efforts but through British military force. Even so, there is evidence that slavery continues beneath the surface in some Muslim countries — notably Saudi Arabia, which only abolished slavery in 1962; Yemen and Oman, both of which ended legal slavery in 1970; and Niger, which didn't abolish slavery until 2004. In Niger, the ban is widely ignored, and as many as one million people remain in bondage. Slaves are bred, often raped, and generally treated like animals. There are even slavery cases involving Muslims in the United States. A Saudi named Homaidan al-Turki was sentenced in September 2006 to twenty-seven years to life in prison for keeping a woman as a slave in his Colorado home. For his part, al-Turki claimed that he was a victim of anti-Muslim bias."

There are several names in use for Iran, Iraq, Jordan and Syria. One is the "Near East." Another is "West Asia," which excludes Egypt, a country with strong historical

ties to this region. I prefer the term the “Middle East” because it is a reminder that this region is in the middle of Eurasia. It was the only region that had regular contacts with all major civilizations in the Old World, from Mediterranean Europe via India to East Asia. The Chinese had little exposure to Greek mathematics and natural philosophy whereas Muslims were well familiar with Greek ideas and geometry. Europe suffered the worst disadvantages by having little direct contact with South, Southeast and East Asia, largely cut off by Muslims. The favorable geographical position of the Middle East is demonstrated by the early access to Chinese paper and the Indian numeral system, to name but two important inventions. Europeans eventually greatly outperformed Muslims in science, despite having a significantly weaker starting point.

In addition to this, the Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca and one of the five pillars of Islam, could have been a great opportunity for exchanging scientific and technological information to and from all regions of the Old World. This did happen occasionally; some inventions were transferred to sub-Saharan West Africa in this way. Primarily, however, it served to spread information on how to conduct Jihad against infidels or to implement sharia law.

Muslims enjoyed a favorable geographical position, ruled over significant numbers of non-Muslims and had access to the accumulated learning of many of the oldest civilizations in the world. The challenge here is not to explain why there was a brief burst of creativity in the earliest centuries of Islamic rule; the challenge is to explain why this didn't last. Islam's much-vaunted “Golden Age” was in reality the twilight of the conquered pre-Islamic cultures, an echo of times passed in a region that was still, for a while, majority non-Muslim.

The Greater Middle East was the seat of the oldest known civilizations on the planet and the source of many of the most important inventions in human history, including writing and the alphabet. It is surely no coincidence that the first civilization in the Indian subcontinent arose in the Indus Valley in the northwest, close to Sumerian Mesopotamia, just as it is no coincidence that literate European civilizations took root in lands that were geographically close to Egypt and the Fertile Crescent: The Minoan civilization of Crete, later Greece and the Balkans, then Rome. Contrast this with modern times, when the Balkans is Europe's number one trouble spot. So is the seat of the first Indian civilization, in Pakistan and Kashmir.

I've recently re-read the bestselling book *Guns, Germs, and Steel* by the American evolutionary biologist Jared Diamond. What strikes me is how Diamond, with his emphasis on geography and diseases, fails to explain the rise of the West and especially why English, not Arabic, Chinese, Sanskrit or Mayan, became the world's lingua franca. His most important flaw is his failure to explain how the Middle East went from being a global center of civilization to being the global center of anti-civilization it arguably is today. This was not caused by smallpox or because zebras are more difficult to domesticate than water buffaloes; it was caused by Islam, which remains the main cause of the backwardness of this region.

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