

The Question is...? Myths and Fallacies Surrounding the Decline of Muslim Civilisation

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THE QUESTION IS...? MYTHS AND FALLACIES SURROUNDING THE DECLINE OF MUSLIM CIVILISATION

Abstract

This paper discusses mainstream Western interpretations of the causes of decline of Islamic civilisation. It identifies and questions forces and factors often blamed by such interpretations. It also suggests some explanations for Islamic decline.

The paper specifically looks into a number of claims; that Islam was the cause of ignorance in the Muslim world; that Islam obstructs progress; that Islamic Orthodoxy played a destructive role; that Turks and Berbers, portrayed as dim fanatics by Shaw, played a damaging role in the Islamic World entering it into – as Renan put it – a period of ignorant brutality.

Major factors, which contributed to the collapse of Islamic Caliphates in both East and West, are discussed. These include the destruction, which the Mongols inflicted, and the subsequent slow progress of Muslim civilisation due to the lack of a solid foundation on which to build further progress in the various fields of knowledge. The destruction of the Muslim economy at the hands of crusading Christian forces through constant devastating raids on wealthy ports, preventing the formation of any stable base for exchange, is detailed.

Prelude

If the Muslims are so good, and did so much, as this web site is arguing, then, why is the Muslim world locked into the impoverished state it is? Why is the Muslim world a significant part of the under-developed world? And why do so few recent scientific discoveries come from the Muslim world? Furthermore what has caused the Muslim world, which brought Western Christendom out of barbarism, to be overtaken by its successors?

These are abstruse matters, impossible to answer adequately here in view of the many diverse variables relevant to this issue. Nevertheless, this paper aims to look at some of the reasons given by Western writers for the steep decline of Islamic civilisation. Many such reasons are refuted in the course of the text. Then, some of the underlying reasons for the decline of Islamic civilisation are suggested.

REASONS OF ISLAMIC DECLINE ACCORDING TO WESTERN WRITERS

Sarton says:

*"The achievements of the Arabic speaking peoples between the ninth and twelfth centuries are so great as to baffle our understanding. The decadence of Islam and of Arabic is almost as puzzling in its speed and completeness as their phenomenal rise. Scholars will forever try to explain it as they try to explain the decadence and fall of Rome. Such questions are exceedingly complex and it is impossible to answer them in a simple way."*¹

Most Western writers, even some favourable to Islamic civilisation, however, blame either Islam or some Muslim ethnic groups for the decline of Muslim civilisation. Here, their arguments are considered.

Islam as the cause of the decadence of the Muslim world

Toland in the "Doutes sur les Religions", translated from an English text in 1739, claims that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) ordered his followers to be ignorant:

*'because he clearly saw that the spirit of inquiry would not favour him. This is how Islam maintained itself.'*²

Diderot, equally, in letter of 30 October 1759, held that the Prophet was the greatest enemy of reason; that he could not read or write, and so this encouraged Muslims to hate and have contempt for knowledge, which in turn secured the survival of Islam.³ And with the exception of the Qur'an, 'all books were burned, either because they were superfluous if they contained only what was in it or they were pernicious if they contained anything that was omitted from it.' Here, of course, like many of his peers, he is referring to the alleged infamous incident of the burning of the library of Alexandria, an incident always rekindled to justify Islamic antagonism to learning. Voltaire, thus, cunningly, forgave the Muslims for 'burning the Library of Alexandria'... 'haven't they by that also destroyed monumental errors of men.'⁴ Diderot also asserts that in the time of Caliph Al-Mamun, people were heard shouting for his death because he had fostered science at the expense of the 'holy ignorance' of the faithful believers.⁵ Admiral Bauffremont in the report of his journey to the Mediterranean and the Levant in 1766, says:

*'All the people who recognise the Koran give rise to more or less the same reflection; it is everywhere the most odious and despicable of governments.'*⁶

J.D. Bate (1836-1923), who served as a missionary in India (1865-1897), and who also contributed many articles to the Missionary Herald and the Baptist Magazine, held that:

*"Islam reduces to a state of degradation every civilised state over which it obtains ascendancy and renders impossible the social and moral elevation, beyond a certain point, of even the most degraded people. Wherever Islam has obtained the sole ascendancy, the vast induction of twelve centuries tells one uniform tale-that the ascendancy has been the death knell of all progress and the signal for general stagnation."*⁷

W.St Clair Tisdall (1859-1928), Head of Mission at Bombay late 1888 onwards; also secretary of Persia Mission (1892-94); and from 1912 until his death: associate editor of the missionary organ: The Moslem World was very much convinced that:

*'No great civilisation, no scientist of note, no renowned school of philosophy, has ever arisen on purely Muhammedan ground.'*⁸

E.A. Freeman; 1833-91, from 1884 Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford, judged 'the West to be progressive, legal, monogamous and Christian,' the East 'stationary, arbitrary, polygamous and Mahometan.'⁹

The communists: Karl Marx and Engels were also in agreement that Islam was a hindrance to progress, and in its elimination and that of its proponents was the road to progress. Engels was able to write in 1848 in an article in the Northern Star, that:

*"the French victory over Emir Abd el Kader (1808-83) (in Algeria) was finally a good thing for the progress of civilisation, as the Bedouin are barbarous thieves preying on the sedentary populations, whose supposed noble liberty can only appear admirable from the distance"*¹⁰

Whilst for Karl Marx:

*'Whatever may have been the crimes of England, she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about... a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia.'*¹¹

Renan (1823-92) lengthily here comments why, and how Islam hampered progress:¹²

*"The Semitic spirit has produced monotheism, and Christianity and Islam have conquered the world, but it can produce nothing else-no myths, therefore no higher literature or art, because of the terrible simplicity of the Semitic spirit, closing the human mind to every subtle idea, to every fine sentiment, to all rational research, in order to confront it with an eternal tautology: God is God,"*¹³

which has prevented the rise of science.

In a lecture on Islam and science, Renan repeated this thesis in other terms:

*"Everyone who has been in the Orient or Africa will have been struck by the kind of iron circle in which the believer's head is enclosed, making him absolutely closed to science, and incapable of opening himself to anything new."*¹⁴

Renan states that the success of Islamic science, which he fully appreciates, is due to the fact that the scientific thrust was totally unaffected by Islam, an enclave, primarily the work of non-Islamic people such as the Nestorians, Harranians, etc, living in the land of Islam, but escaping, as he puts it, 'the Islamic pressure'.¹⁵

Of course Renan completely ignores that the overwhelming majority of Muslim scientists (Al-Khwarizmi; Ibn Sina; Ibn Khaldun; Al-Zahrawi; Ibn Al-Haytham, Al-Biruni; Al-Kindi etc) are true Muslims from Turkey, the Maghreb, Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Yemen, Spain, etc. He fails to notice either that the overwhelming majority of Muslim intellectuals, hoped to be guided in every respect by their faith, citing, as Pedersen reminds his readers¹⁶, the formula 'In the name of Allah the Merciful, the Compassionate', and always begging Allah to grant them the grace and strength to carry through the enterprise, and guide them in their endeavour, to make their work serve what is right and useful.

It is not here where Renan's argument ends though. He has plans for the land of Islam:

"It is the Aryan spirit," he holds, 'which has created everything else: political life in the real sense, art, literature-the Semitic peoples have nothing of it, apart from some poetry-above all science and

philosophy. In these matters, 'we are entirely Greek.' Even the so-called Arabic sciences were a continuation of Greek sciences...Christianity; too, in its developed form is the work of Europe. The future of humanity therefore lies with the peoples of Europe. But there is a necessary condition for this to happen: the destruction of the Semitic element in civilisation, and of the theocratic power of Islam.;"¹⁷

Lebanese born Philip Hitti of Princeton University, is fully aware of the role of Islam in promoting civilisation, and even praised that civilisation, as he put it, of 'The Arabs.'¹⁸ It hence contradicts with what he says:

*"Modernisation on the intellectual spiritual level involves secularisation. Secularisation means more than separation between church and state. It replaces providential interpretation of historic events and current happenings to the individual with rational interpretation based on physical and psychological forces. Hardly a current issue of an Arabic newspaper lacks repeated mention of the name of Allah in connection with reports of birth and death, sickness and health, fortune and calamity success or failure, a relic of bygone thinking."*¹⁹

More recently, another academic, Huff, who tells how Islam is hostile to science; begins with praise: 'considered altogether, in mathematics, astronomy, optics, physics, and medicine, Arabic science was the most advanced in the world.' After the praise follows the attack. He asks: why didn't Arabic science give rise to modern science (as if all the science of Al-Khwarizmi, Ibn Sina, Al-Biruni, and the many others whom he himself admits gave rise to today's modern civilisation was not fundamental enough) and why did it go into decline beginning in the twelfth century.²⁰ Referring to Armand Abel,²¹ he gives the answer: religion: Islam,

*"A common formulation of the negative influence of religious forces on scientific advance suggests that the twelfth and thirteenth centuries witnessed the rise of mysticism as a social movement. This in turn spawned religious intolerance, especially for the natural sciences and the substitution of the pursuit of the occult sciences in place of the study of the Greek and rational sciences."*²²

This brings us to the so-called Orthodoxy, which others also blame for the decadence of Islam and its civilisation.

The 'Destructive' Role of Islamic Orthodoxy

Beginning with Sarton (1884-1956), who states that:

*"The great toleration shown to non Muslims by the early Abbasid caliphs, and especially by Al-Mamun and Al-Mutassim, came to a sudden end under Al-Mutawakkil (847-861), who approved himself a fanatical champion of Sunnite orthodoxy and persecuted with equal cruelty the people of other faiths and the Mutazila, that is the liberals of his own faith. Yet Al-Mutawakkil continued to protect men of science, chiefly the physicians, and encouraged the school of translators headed by Hunain ibn Ishaq."*²³

Although Al-Mutawakil has been blamed for killing Islamic learning in the 9th Century, yet we find a century later another figure is blamed for this killing. This primary guilty source for suppressing Islamic learning is

identified as Al-Ashari of Basra. Al-Ashari, (873/874-d.935/6), Sarton tells us, was first a Mu'tazilite who 'reconverted to Sunnite orthodoxy in 913 and henceforth his whole activity was devoted to the rationalization and the defence of his faith.' He may be called the founder of Muslim scholasticism, and re-established theological unity and 'orthodoxy.'²⁴

Wiet et al report the 'destructive' role of Al-Ashari to us:

*"His (Al-Ashari) ideas were seized on by the pious bigots, and it was this group that precipitated the decline of Islamic intellectual life. Its pietist rigour could lead nowhere but to the enslavement of thought; its ideas were imposed on the believer in the form of a catechism."*²⁵

For E.G. Browne, the destructiveness of Al-Ashari's influence compares to that of Genghis Khan (1167-1227) and Hulagu (1217-65).²⁶

Multhauf, who had already identified the destructive impact of Islamic Orthodoxy with the ninth century, also moves it forward to coincide with Al-Ashari and Al-Farabi. He says:

*"An Orthodox and anti-intellectual reaction gained momentum in Baghdad during the lifetime of Al-Farabi (b.ca 870; d. Damascus 950), and the great philosophers of Islam subsequently appeared elsewhere."*²⁷

Thus, according to Browne and Wiet and others, Orthodoxy killed free thought and science in the tenth century, whilst we can find that in the first half of the tenth century, the Muslims actually were at the peak of their achievements, as outlined by Sarton:

*"The main task of mankind was accomplished by Muslims. The greatest philosopher, Al-Farabi, was a Muslim; the greatest mathematicians, Abu Kamil and Ibrahim ibn Sinan, were Muslims; the greatest geographer and encyclopaedist, Al-Masudi, was a Muslim; the greatest historian, Al-Tabari, was still a Muslim."*²⁸

There were also: Al-Ashari, himself, Al-Hamdani, Abu Dulaf, Abu Al-Faraj Al-Isfahani, Ibn Duraid; Ibn Rusta, Ibn Al-Faqih, Abu Zaid; Abu Bakr Al-Razi; Al-Balkhi and Al-Jaihani; Al-Farabi and Ibn Amajur

*'Thus was Muslim culture the highest of those days, stretching from central Asia to the Western end of the world.'*²⁹

Hence those who identified Al-Ashari as a prime negative figure are way off the mark.

Even though the destruction of Islamic learning by Orthodoxy is supposed to have long since happened, Some "scholars" described this death happening yet again. Thus, Von Grunebaum tells:

*"From the orthodox viewpoint nothing was lost and perhaps a great deal gained when, in the later Middle Ages, Islamic civilisation prepared to renounce the foreign sciences that could not but appear as dangerous distractions. The retrenchment of intellectual scope must have seemed a small price to pay for the preservation of the original religious experience. Not only substance but method as well came under suspicion."*³⁰

Whilst for Campbell:

*"With the twelfth century, we find the decay of the liberal intellectual activity in Islam. The increasing ascendancy of Turkish races and their intolerance (a characteristic, it must be acknowledged, of most proselytes) was the first cause of the growth of this inhibitory influence among the Muslims.... Thus, while ethnic philosophy began to find a home in Latin Europe, the orthodox reaction of Islam reduced the Arabic philosophers and physicians to silence."*³¹

Amongst the Orthodox, it seems there are those who are more orthodox (thus more destructive) than others. The main culprits according to Western historians were the Turks and Berbers.

The 'Destructive' role of the Turks and Berbers

The Turks, and other non Arab Muslims (Berbers), are labelled as dim fanatics as noted by Shaw.³²

*"Here, is according to me,' Renan says 'the most curious lesson which result from this whole history. The Arab philosophy offers the example, more or less unique of a very high culture suppressed nearly instantly without leaving any traces, and forgotten by the people who have created it. Islamism unravelled in this circumstance what was irremediably narrow in its genius. Christianity, too, had been little favourable to the development of positive science. It had managed to stop in Spain and hinder it in Italy; but did not suffocate it, and even the prominent branches of the Christian family had ended up reconciling themselves with it. Incapable to transform itself, and to admit any element of civilian and profane life, Islam tore out of its bosom every germ of rational culture. This fatal tendency was fought whilst Islam was in the hands of the Arabs, a refined and highly spiritual race, and the Persians, a race that leans strongly towards speculation; but it could not rule since the barbarians (Turks, Berbers, etc.) took over the lead of Islam. The Islamic world then entered in a period of ignorant brutality, from which it emerged only to fall into the mournful agony in which it is struggling at present."*³³

Somehow just as Renan, Lebon says:

*"The Arab race was very delicate and very indulgent, and never departed from a tolerant spirit. However, when in the thirteenth century, the Arabs disappeared from the scene, and power fell in the hands of Turks and Berbers: 'heavy' races, 'brutal' and 'brainless,' intolerance began to rule amongst the Muslims. It is not doctrines that are intolerant, but men from amongst those entities just cited...Intolerance is the mark of the 'inferior' races: Turks and Berbers."*³⁴

From Wiet and his group:

*"For a century and a half the Samanids did battle against the nomad Turks of central Asia. These barbarian tribes had, as mercenaries, swelled the forces of the caliphate."*³⁵

"The nature of the army changed as a result of the constant influx of Turkish mercenaries, recruited from central Asia. Arabs and Khorassians were eliminated and these praetorian guards came to yield a dominant influence, a fact that was profoundly to alter the political balance of power in

Islam. These Turks were arrogant and insufferable; they made and unmade caliphs at will, without respect even for their persons."³⁶

And by the same authors:

*"We may date the apogee of the Moslem world in the tenth century, when Arab control of the Mediterranean and its environs was at its height. But already its future decomposition was heralded by the opposition between three rival caliphates. In the eleventh century the Moslem world was subjected to major invasions, those of the Berbers and especially of the Turks."*³⁷

The same impression is carried by Artz:

*"The striking decline that followed this golden age was due to a number of causes. In the middle of the eleventh century, the backward Seljuk Turks, lately converted to Mohammedanism, took Baghdad and much of the Near East. The Seljuk authorities were repressive against all who did not agree with the orthodox Muslim theologians; in the long and bitter fight of orthodoxy against freedom of thought, the orthodox now, at last, won the upper hand... At the same time the Seljuks could not maintain order; constant revolt and general anarchy, broken rarely by a strong and enlightened ruler, brought devastation, depopulation, and stagnation. Muslim civilization had, from the eleventh century on, something of the same problem of being overrun by inferior cultures that the Roman Empire had had in the fifth century... Only in North Africa and in Spain did the old lights of Islamic learning still burn brightly."*³⁸

Wiet and his group blame not just the Seljuks, but also their setting up of the Madrassa system (by Nizam al-Mulk), the destructive effect of the Madrassas they outline here:

*"Following the extension of the Madrassa system, however, religion began to exert an inimical influence on intellectual enquiry.' There was nothing,' writes Father Abd Al-Jahl, 'not even the establishment of a state-organized educational system, hitherto non-existent, which did not contribute to the general ossification. Creative intellectual endeavour was stifled by the creation of universities in Baghdad and elsewhere, which were intended to foster it. A certain formalism in university thinking, even discounting the narrowness of ideas, was bound to induce decadence, if only by a display of useless erudition and respect for the commonplace. The outcome was the production of a stratum of the half-educated, who had, as it were, undergone a discipline of committing text-books to memory: it was inevitably the end of all independent thinking.... The teaching of the Madrassa ossified, and decadence descended on the east, for the same reason as in the west-abandonment of the classical culture; but it was at the moment when Europe, in part via Arab civilization, was making its rediscovery of just that same classical antiquity, that the eastern universities were plumbing the depths of their decline. Inflated rhetoric was supplanting feeling and a parish-pump parochialism was exchanging works of quality for manuals of recent local compilation."*³⁹

REFUTATIONS

Attacks on Islam, the so-called Orthodoxy the Berbers and Turks are refuted here.

Beginning with Islam

This website already contains enough articles to highlight the fact that the Qur'an never opposed science. To the contrary, the Qur'an, and the Hadith, both preached the search for learning. Many instances are found throughout this site to confirm this. Besides, Muslim scholars never had any problem with their faith. None of them was ever burnt at the stake for his ideas. Just to give one or two illustrations of this and the closeness between Islam and science, it is useful to refer to Dreyer in respect of the spherical shape of the earth, a notion which in Western Christendom, almost until modern times, led its proponents to be forced to recant or be burnt at the stake. In the world of Islam, in contrast, Dreyer holds, there was no such hostility to science, and there exists no record of any Muslim being persecuted for stating that the earth was a sphere capable of being inhabited all over; and that it was also very small compared to the size of the universe.⁴⁰

The closeness of faith and science is best caught here in Al-Battani's reflection in the beginning of his *Zij Al-Sabi*:

*"the science of stellar bodies is of immense utility because it makes possible the knowledge of the length of the year, the months, and different times and seasons; the lengthening and shortening of day and night, the positions of the sun and the moon as well as their eclipses, and the courses of the planets in their direct and their retrograde motions, the alterations of their forms, and the arrangement of their spheres. This, he asserts, leads people, who reflect deeply and persistently, to the proof of the oneness of God and the comprehension of His majesty, to His immense wisdom, infinite power, and to a grasp of the excellence of His act."*⁴¹

Islam as a worldview civilisation

"The rapid and almost miraculous development of the human mind was the inevitable consequence of a policy based upon those principles whose application had promoted the wonderful progress of every nation ruled by the enlightened successors of Mohammed," says Scott.⁴²

Thus, when Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) began preaching the word of Islam, Durant notes, `Arabia was a desert flotsam of idolatrous tribes; when he died it was a nation.⁴³

Trimingham highlights some of the ways Islam altered African society, through:

- The disintegration of organised cults of ancestor and community spirits governing social life, and the redirection of worship to the one God.
- Changes in ideas of morality approved behaviour finds a new source in a written law.
- Desacredation of the idea of sacrifice. Adoption of Islamic idea of *Sadaqa*. Influence of Arabic and consequent increase in the means of expression through the Muslim World. Sacrilege
- Special consideration accorded to traders and trading. Creation of a regulated trading class. The effect of Islamic contractual law and prohibition of usury.
- Islamic sensitivity to nakedness, leading to adoption of clothing as an element of surface uniformity. The effect of ritual regulations upon personal cleanliness. Refinement in manners and material life through introduction to a more developed civilisation. Effect of Islamic taboos on certain types of food, drink, actions and representation art.

With regard to the blaming of Berbers and Turks for the decadence of Islam and its civilisation, this website is full of articles and instances that demonstrate how both Berbers and Turks have considerably contributed to Islamic civilisation. Examples of architectural brilliance in particular have highlighted this contribution. Besides, had Western centred historians looked more closely, they would have found that Ibn Rushd, Ibn Tufail, Ibn Zuhr, and many similar scholars found an exceedingly encouraging environment amidst the Almohads Berbers,⁴⁴ and Al-Khazin, Al-Jazari and many illustrious scientists of Islam were actively sponsored by the Seljuk rulers. The Seljuk rulers gave Islam the madrassa, which was the first institution that opened doors of learning to all children, regardless of their income, the first case of universal learning in history. The madrassa, contrary to what Wiet et al and others say, was used as a model on which the first university colleges in Europe and America were based⁴⁵. Moreover, the Turks produced great scientists and scholars, geographers, architects and leaders whom history will find hard to equal: men such as Al-Farabi, Al-Biruni, Al-Khwarizmi, Al-Battani, Thabit Ibn Qurra, Bayazid, Muhammed II and Piri Reis.

It is actually a hostility to Berbers and Turks that explains their being blamed for the decadence of Islam. This hostility has its reasons. The Berbers, both Almoravids and Almohads, have contributed to a major historical phase of Islamic history, that is, holding up the Christian crusade advance in Spain. Indeed, soon after the death of the leader al-Mansur, Muslim Spain fell into disunity and chaos during the era of the 'party (Taifa) kings' (reyes de taifas, muluk at-tawa'if) (1009-1091), when the Peninsula dissolved into as many as thirty more or less independent rulers, who fought each other.⁴⁶ This emboldened Christian princes in North West Spain who gradually moved south, absorbing one Islamic region after the other, very often using one against the other.⁴⁷ In their ultimate panic some Reyes called on the Almoravid leader, Yusuf Ibn Tashfin, to assist them on three occasions; but each time after crushing the Christian armies, he was asked to leave Spain, to be re-called once the Reyes (Taifa rulers) were threatened again. The third time he was invited, in 1090, Ibn Tashfin crossed the straits of Gibraltar from Morocco, and this time eliminated the inept Reyes, and installed Almoravid rule all over the country. Under Almoravid rule not only was the unity of the Muslim Peninsula regained, but also there re-appeared in the West a combative form of Islam that responded to the Christian combativeness.⁴⁸

When the Almoravid power collapsed, the Almohads came to the fore in 1147. Their most determinant victory was on the 18th of July 1196, when they inflicted a crushing defeat on the Christian alliance of many armies at Alarcos, the Christian army being virtually exterminated.⁴⁹ However, once their rule was weakened by internal rivalries, the Almohads were themselves crushed at Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212, a defeat which Lewis rightly recognised, 'broke the back of Muslim power in the Peninsula.'⁵⁰ Cordova fell in 1236, Seville in 1248, and soon followed the other towns and cities, only leaving the Grenada enclave which was to fall in 1492.

The important outcome, however, is that had the Berbers failed to respond to the Spanish advance over two centuries, it would have been very likely that Christian Spain would have proceeded to occupy the whole of North Africa .

Similar grounds with respect to the hostility to the Seljuks apply. In 1092, the leading vizier of Seljuk history, Nizam Al-Mulk, was murdered. He was the founder of the madrassa system which taught that no government could be secure without a religious base.⁵¹ A month after Nizam's death, Malik Shah (1072-92), the third Seljuk sultan, died in suspicious circumstances, followed closely by his wife, grandson and many

other powerful political figures.⁵² Leaderless, the Islamic world was rife with intense internal strife while jockeying for power in both the Eastern Islamic world and Egypt ensued. The two sons of Malik Shah, Barkyaruk and Muhammad were locked in a conflict, which ate up all the available military resources throughout the East.⁵³ In Syria, there were also small, mutually hostile city states. Eleventh century Syria, Lamonte notes, was 'a crazy quilt of semi independent states.'⁵⁴ In the middle of this Muslim disunity, Pope Urban II (1088-1099) launched his call for the Crusades. His stated reasons for attack, as he said in his rallying call to the Crusades:

*"It is urgent for you to bring hastily to your brothers in the Orient the help so often promised and that's of pressing necessity. The Turks and the Arabs have attacked them...., and penetrating always further inside Christian countries, have on seven occasions beaten them in battle, and have killed and taken captive a great number, and have destroyed churches and devastated the kingdom."*⁵⁵

However, Hillenbrand notes, the timing of the First Crusade simply could not have been

*"more propitious. Had the Europeans somehow been briefed that this was the perfect moment to pounce? Unfortunately there is little evidence on this in the Islamic sources, but seldom had the arm of coincidence been longer."*⁵⁶

The only force that stood to fight was that of the Seljuks. The Seljuks, under the leadership of Qilij Arslan, Mawdud, Il-Bursuqi and others, fought the Crusaders until the rise of the first leader who was able to unite the Muslim armies: Imad Eddin Zangi (himself a Seljuk) (1127-1146), followed by his son Nur Eddin (Zangi) (1146-1174). Thus, in the crucial period when the Muslims were at their most divided, it was Seljuk opposition that managed to limit the impact of the Crusades, and inflict on them the biggest reverses such as that at Nicea in October 1096, when the Seljuk Turks led by Qilij Arslan destroyed the Crusade vanguard and the whole of its advanced camp.⁵⁷ In 1099, the Turks crushed the 'Peoples' Crusade' at Civetot (Anatolia); in the year 1100, the Seljuk Danishmand fell on Bohemund near the town of Malatia, and after decimating his army took Bohemund prisoner.⁵⁸ In 1104, the Franks, leaving Edessa in search of plunder within Muslim towns in the vicinity, were met (by the river) by the Turks who decapitated the Frankish army, and took into captivity Baldwin of Edessa and Count Jocelyn of Tell Bashir.⁵⁹ In April 1110, the Atabeg Mawdud, the Seljuk commander of Mosul, began moving against Edessa with the support of the Ortoqid Ilghazi and the Emir of Mayyafaraqin, Soqman Al-Qutbi.⁶⁰ Informed by their spies, the Franks hastened to meet him at the Euphrates. The Franks, although more numerous, were defeated by the Turks.⁶¹ Ghazi, an Ortoqid Turk, met by the combined forces of Roger of Antioch, Baldwin of Jerusalem and Galeran, was able to beat them at the battle of Balat (also known as the field of blood) in June 1119.⁶² Aleppo was on the verge of starvation when it was rescued by Il-Bursuqi, governor of Mosul in January 1225, forcing the Franks into retreat.⁶³ When Il Bursuqi was murdered in 1127, Imad Eddin Zangi, was appointed to replace him as commander of the east. After conquering the citadel of al-Atharib in 1130, with his legendary fierceness, Zangi destroyed it and razed it to the ground.⁶⁴ Under Zangi's command a serious mobilisation of jihad began. Greater and more dedicated forces coalesced around him which in 1137 led to the first Muslim successes in recovering Kafartab, Maarat al-Numan, Bizaa, and Athareb from the Franks.⁶⁵ Zangi led his offensive against Edessa, and for the first time since the Crusaders' arrival in 1096, Islamic forces were united around him: Turks, Arabs and Kurds fighting together.⁶⁶ The taking of Edessa in 1144 marked a significant turning point in Muslim fortunes, for not just the city, but the whole state was

regained for Islam; by far the greatest victory of the Muslim forces for nearly half a century. So distraught was the Pope with such loss, that the second Crusade was launched shortly afterwards.⁶⁷

The Seljuk role, thus, went as far as saving whole Islamic domains from total extinction especially in regard to the wholesale slaughter by the crusaders of populations in Antioch, Maarat Al-Numan, Jerusalem, etc....⁶⁸

The Ottomans fighting for Islam from the late thirteenth century until the early twentieth century were inevitably bound to incur opprobrium from the majority of Western historians. To give more justice to the Ottoman contribution to civilisation in this paper is impossible. It is, however, worth noting a recent piece of work that involved a diverse range of world authorities on such contributions in abundant detail.⁶⁹

The attacks on the Turks and Berbers, whilst seemingly praising the Arabs follow a historical pattern, now centuries old, whereby one Middle Eastern group has always been favoured at the expense of another, generally to defeat the stronger. These tactics have been used during the Crusades (1096-1291), in the re-taking of Spain (13th century); against the Ottomans (14th-20th); in the conquest of India (18th –19th century) and against the Mamluks (13th-19th century). Every time an attack was intended, one Muslim ethnic group was armed to fight another so as to gain control of Islamic lands. During the nineteenth century) the Arabs were being indirectly praised and the Turks demonised: it was, of course, the time of a European colonisation of the Muslim world, and it was quite normal for the colonising powers to try to detach the Arabs from their Ottoman rulers by a diversity of tactics such as praising the Arabs, and building an alliance with one to beat the other. Of course, it is both repelling, and difficult for Muslims to understand this, as fomenting feuds between communities, and ethnic groups is worse than murder, as stated repeatedly in the Qur'an.

The above examples show that the role of the Turks and Berbers was not the cause of decline but that they managed to unite the Muslim that had become fractious and to repel the invading crusaders and Mongols saving the Muslim lands and the Muslim populations from extermination.

The scientific output of Islam declined to a very large extent because from the 1220s onwards, all eastern parts of Ferghana, Khwarizm, Herat, and other parts of the Muslim World were devastated by the Mongols with every single piece of major infrastructure wiped out and hundreds of thousands of people slaughtered.⁷⁰ Then the Muslims lost many of their great centres of power and civilisation, most of them permanently: Cordova (1236), Valencia (1238), Seville (1249) and the rest of Spain except Grenada; and others temporarily such as Baghdad (1258), Syria (Aleppo, Damascus, etc, in 1259-1260); this in addition to the loss of Sicily in the late eleventh century. Even those that were recovered, Baghdad and other Syrian towns and cities, were severely devastated, and were further disrupted by other invasions (e.g. Timur the Lame, who even carried Syrian artisans back to his land). No civilisation, even today's most powerful, can survive if all main centres of power are lost to, or devastated by, barbarian hordes such as the Mongols.

This can be demonstrated⁷¹ by a consultation of either Sarton,⁷¹ or the Dictionary of Scientific Biography⁷² which shows that almost 90% of famed Muslims came from such places devastated by the Crusaders and the Mongols, 95% of whom lived before the end of the thirteenth century. These are some of the aspects that are going to be looked at now.

VARIOUS REASONS BEHIND THE DECADENCE OF ISLAMIC CIVILISATION

A number of reasons explain the disintegration of Islamic civilisation. Some of the major reasons, by no means all, are to be considered here:

The Destruction of the Islamic Caliphates in both East and West

Islamic civilisation sprang into existence soon after the revelation of Islam through Muhammad (622 C.E.). It lasted for a large part of the Middle Ages but succumbed to outside forces during the thirteenth century following the loss of the Islamic centres of power and associated civilisation: Cordova (1236), Valencia (1238), Seville (1249), and Baghdad (1258), all falling in the space of few decades between each other to invading forces. Soon after Baghdad, Damascus, and other Syrian centres also fell to invading Mongol hordes, completing a cycle of disasters that had begun a few decades before.

On the particular impact of the Mongols, Browne concedes 'the awful catastrophe' of the Mongol or Tartar invasion of the thirteenth century, which inflicted on Islam a blow from which it has never recovered.⁷³ The caliphate was overthrown and its metropolis sacked and laid waste in A.D. 1258, and though the surviving scholars of the younger generation carried on the sound tradition of scholarship for a while longer, there is, broadly speaking, a difference not only of degree but of kind between the literary and scientific work done before and after the thirteenth century throughout the lands of Islam. Medicine and history owed their comparative immunity to the desire of the savage conquerors for health and fame.⁷⁴

Sir Thomas Arnold comments on this Mongol onslaught:

*"Muslim civilisation has never recovered from the destructions which the Mongols inflicted upon it. Great centres of culture, such as Herat and Bukhara, were reduced to ashes and the Muslim population was ruthlessly massacred..... Under the command of Hulagu, they appeared before the walls of Baghdad, and after a brief siege of one month the last Caliph of the Abbasid house, Mustasim, had to surrender, and was put to death together with most of the members of his family; 800,000 of the inhabitants were brought out in batches from the city to be massacred, and the greater part of the city itself was destroyed by fire."*⁷⁵

Glubb's outline⁷⁶ of the event has few more details of interest, and concludes with:

*"For five hundred years, Baghdad had been a city of palaces, mosques, libraries and colleges. Its universities and hospitals were the most up to date in the world. Nothing now remained but heaps of rubble and a stench of decaying human flesh."*⁷⁷

Syria, once a thriving centre of Islamic power and civilization suffered a similar fate. One example appears typical. Here, Lapidus charts, briefly, the fate of Aleppo, once one of the thriving trading cities of Syria, rich in crafts and craftsmen. It was occupied by the Mongols three times and thus reduced to a state of destitution. In 1260 the citadel, the walls, the grand mosque, and surrounding structures were destroyed. According to accounts, the population was systematically slaughtered. In 1280, mosques, Madrassas, the houses of emirs, and the sultan's palace were pillaged and burned. And the same happened again in 1300, and in the following years.⁷⁸ The sharp decline of the Syrian population illustrates very well what befell the country in those critical centuries.⁷⁹ At the time of the Frankish invasion the country's population stood at

2.7 million inhabitants;⁸⁰ two centuries on, despite a revival under the Mameluks, in 1343, it stood at only 1.2 millions.⁸¹

The arrival of Timur at the end of the fourteenth century finished any chance of a recovery by the Muslim East after the Mongol onslaught. The historian Gibbon narrates:

"Timur's front was covered with a line of Indian elephants, whose turrets were filled with archers and Greek fire: the rapid evolutions of his cavalry completed the dismay and disorder; the Syrians fell back on each other: many thousands were stifled or slaughtered in the entrance of the great street; the Moguls entered with the fugitives; and after a short defence, the citadel, the impregnable citadel of Aleppo, was surrendered. Among the suppliants and captives, Timur distinguished the doctors of the law, whom he invited to the dangerous honour of a personal conference... During this peaceful conversation the streets of Aleppo streamed with blood, and re-echoed with the cries of mothers and children, with the shrieks of violated virgins. The rich plunder that was abandoned to his soldiers might stimulate their avarice; but their cruelty was enforced by the peremptory command of producing an adequate number of heads, which, according to his custom, were curiously piled in columns and pyramids: the Moguls celebrated the feast of victory, while the surviving Moslems passed the night in tears and in chains. I shall not dwell on the march of the destroyer from Aleppo to Damascus, where he was rudely encountered, and almost overthrown, by the armies of Egypt... (but) abandoned by their prince, the inhabitants of Damascus still defended their walls; and Timur consented to raise the siege, if they would adorn his retreat with a gift or ransom; each article of nine pieces .

*But no sooner had he introduced himself into the city, under colour of a truce, than he perfidiously violated the treaty; imposed a contribution of ten millions of gold... and after a period of seven centuries, Damascus was reduced to ashes, because a Tartar was moved by religious zeal to avenge the blood of an Arab. The losses and fatigues of the campaign obliged Timur to renounce the conquest of Palestine and Egypt; but in his return to the Euphrates he delivered Aleppo to the flames... but I shall briefly mention that he erected on the ruins of Baghdad a pyramid of ninety thousand heads."*⁸²

In Spain, the same picture of devastation emerges. Read gives vivid, albeit brief, extracts of destruction and slaughter that followed each conquest of Muslim towns and cities during the Christian reconquista (11th to 13th centuries).⁸³ More details are given by Scott⁸⁴ and Lea.⁸⁵ Just one illustration is that, after the battle of Navas de Tolosa in 1212, which heralded the end of Islamic Spain, 70 000 Muslims were slaughtered at the order of the Bishops of Toledo and Narbonne who were present at the scene.⁸⁶

The combined Mongol-Timur- Papal endorsed onslaught, left very little behind that could constitute a solid foundation for furthering the impetus of Islam in the field of science or knowledge. Following the loss of Baghdad and Cordova, in particular, there were few centres left to provide a focus for such activities. Damascus and Seville, the next two cities in terms of importance and influence, had also been lost; and so had the far eastern towns and cities of Central Asia. It ought to be remembered that Palermo and Sicily had also been lost over a century before even though at first the Christian rulers were keen to employ Arab scholars. Thus, only Cairo remained in the hands of the Mamluks. And the Mamluks were at war against Crusaders, Mongols, Armenians, and their Muslim allies; thus engaged in a wide fight for Islam. Islamic power in fact, in the hands of its defenders, Mamluks and Turks, now was primarily militarily orientated.

With such pressures on the land there was little time for most minds to linger on astronomical or mathematical theorising. Thus, the once intense energy devoted to science, and the relaxed spirit of scientific discovery, prevalent under the early Abbassids, although not totally forgotten, largely gave way to the battling minds. The ensuing signs of science and splendour after the thirteenth century, whether in the writing of Ibn Khaldun or the completion of the Alhambra, or the construction of observatories, were far too apart in time, in complete contrast with the academically intense times (9th-13th centuries).

Scholars were now too widely dispersed; Madrassas and libraries had been ransacked; hospitals ruined; dams, bridges, irrigation works generally fell into disrepair; traditional trade between east and west totally disrupted. Any attempts for rebuilding were hindered by further developments. European pirates, from the thirteenth until the sixteenth century would affect the city ports of North Africa as far as Egypt, jeopardising trade severely. By the time such attacks were checked by Ottomans and Algerian seamen during the sixteenth century, serious damage had been inflicted, hardly any trading infrastructure or organization was left; and the high seas were still made no go areas by Christian pirates. In the late fourteenth century Timur had also erupted from the east, and with his hordes, literally razed to the ground any infrastructure that had escaped the Mongols: schools, hospitals, irrigation works, dams.... besides slaughtering almost whole local populations from Afghanistan to the Syrian coast. Today many regions in the once thriving and irrigated Islamic lands are just as Timur left them seven centuries ago. Then came the Portuguese in the late fifteenth to disrupt Islamic trade with India, China and the rest of the region. By then, only the Ottomans prevented the whole land of Islam from total collapse, although gradual losses of territory (the Mughal empire, the central Asian lands, etc) were already taking place. When Ottoman power declined, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the land of Islam disintegrated, one place after the other, falling into the hands of the Europeans, until Islamic control and power were dissipated at the end of the first world war (1918).

The Decay of Islamic Rule

The Muslims also stand responsible for their own decadence. After the early conquests, Islamic rule became very corrupt, and this considerably weakened the caliphate in facing the invasions described above. It is beyond the remit of this study to identify and analyse all cases of corruption of power within the Islamic world. Notwithstanding it was overall quite evident. Thus, in Muslim Spain, in the words of Scott:

*"The character of the Mussulmans of Spain was defiled by all the vices which follow in the train of prodigal luxury and boundless wealth. Among these drunkenness was one of the most common. Personages of the highest rank were not ashamed to appear in public while intoxicated... National degeneracy early indicated the approaching and inevitable dissolution of the empire. . The posterity of the conquerors, who in three years had marched from Gibraltar to the centre of France, became in the course of a few generations cowardly, effeminate, corrupt."*⁸⁷

And what was true of Spain also applied in the Abbasid court; the Caliph, whose duty was to defend the city against the Mongols, died instead in a sack trampled by horses; a true symbol of the lack of resoluteness and decadence of the Caliphate. In face of such degeneracy, only the opportune intervention of the Berber Almoravids and Almohads had kept Spain in Muslim hands for another two centuries, while the Turkish-Kurdish and Arab armies led by the Seljuks, Zangi and Salah Eddin, checked collapse in the East for about two more centuries.

Islam produced great leaders (Baybars, Mohammed II, Bayazid, Al-Mansur, Yussef Ibn Taschfin, Nur Eddin Zangi, etc.) but also produced some weak ones, which combined over time to contribute to the slow decay of Muslim power. One can cite the Nasrid ruler of Granada Abu 'Abdullah (Boabdil as the Christians scholars called him) 1482-92, who sold the Muslim emirate of Grenada for gold, and who fought his father Mulay Hasan and his uncle, Al-Zeghal, who were at the time fighting the Spaniards. One can cite the Reyes of the Taifas, who fought each other in alliance with Christian forces against other Muslim rulers in Spain; one can name the successors of Salah Eddin El-Ayyubi who also too often fought in alliance with the Crusaders against the Mamluks and Turks.... The focus here, though, is on the life and rule of one Muslim ruler, Al-Hakem I, who ruled Spain between 796 and 822, to highlight the point.

Before Al-Hakem I had become Emir in 796, his father Hisham (ruled 788-796), who had defended Spain successfully against the Franks and northern Christian attacks, assembled the Great Council of the realm to swear fealty to his son, Al-Hakem I, who was to succeed him. When the ceremony concluded, he addressed the young prince with the following words:

*"Dispense justice without distinction to the poor and to the rich, be kind and gentle to those dependent upon thee, for all are alike the creatures of God. Entrust the keeping of thee cities and provinces to loyal and experienced chieftains; chastise without pity ministers who oppress thy subjects; govern thy soldiers with moderation and firmness; remember that arms are given them to defend, not to devastate, their country; and be careful always that they are regularly paid, and that they may ever rely upon thy promises. Strive to make thyself beloved by the people, for in their affection is the security of the state, in their fear its danger, in their hatred its certain ruin. Protect those who cultivate the fields and furnish the bread that sustains us; do not permit their harvests to be injured, or their forests to be destroyed. Act in all respects so that thy subjects may bless thee and live in happiness under thy protection, and thus, and in no other way, will thou obtain the renown of the most glorious prince."*⁸⁸

Al-Hakem I did just the opposite which only goes to serve as an illustration of how the best can be very often followed by the worst of one's own blood.

Al-Hakem I shared many qualities with despots: ineptitude to defend the realm combined with extreme ferocity towards his subjects. He was prone to frequent alcoholic intoxications, a vice which outraged public opinion and provoked the contempt of the conscientious Muslim, made the palace a scene of orgies that were the reproach and the scandal of the capital.⁸⁹ He was the first Spanish Muslim monarch to have his throne surrounded with splendour and a personal guard of six thousand men.⁹⁰ Al-Hakem had an exaggerated idea of his authority with an implacable spirit matched by a merciless severity in the infliction of punishment for even trifling offences all of which attitudes increased the terror with which he was regarded by noble, peasant, and theologian.⁹¹ He was responsible for the 'Day of the Ditch,' when he invited the elite of Toledo for a banquet. The guests went in one after the other thinking they were to celebrate, and were all beheaded. The number of victims of this awful crime is variously stated at from seven hundred to five thousand. As the bodies were decapitated, they were cast into a trench, which had been dug during the construction of the castle. From this fact, the deed which violated the rites of hospitality so sacred in the eye of the Arab, the day became known in the annals of the Peninsula as the 'Day of the Ditch.'⁹² More rebellions followed these massacres, rebellions themselves followed by further massacres. For his protection Al-Hakem had an army always stationed at the gate of his palace, his Haras

all of Christian origin.⁹³ At some point, following yet another mass uprising, he massacred the population in the thousands. Three hundred of those conspicuous for their rank, or for the part they played, especially the religious figures, were nailed, head downward, to posts on the bank of the river at Cordova. Al-Hakem even had the suburbs where Cordova first originated razed to the ground.⁹⁴ The inhabitants were banished within three days, under the penalty of crucifixion.⁹⁵

Cruel, yet very much ineffective al-Hakem was. The loss of Barcelona in 800 during the rule of al-Hakem I by the Muslims was the first great success for the Christians that revived their confidence in that they could defeat the Muslims. Scott notes the surprising indifference or culpable neglect of al-Hakem in allowing the enemies of his faith and his dynasty to wrest from its brave defenders one of the most considerable and prosperous cities in his dominions.⁹⁶ Much worse for the Muslims, from Barcelona, the Christians were going to take over the whole of Catalonia, completing this by 811, thorough colonisation under the rule of Charlemagne. This was going to provide the now more confident Christian forces with a stronghold over which they would rebuild, and where they were to regroup to mount decisive counter attacks in the future to wrest Spain from Muslim control.

The last years of Al-Hakem are here told by Scott:

*"His closing years were passed in the seclusion of the harem, where, diverted by the companionship of the beauties of his seraglio, amidst the excitements of intemperance and of every species of debauchery, he endeavoured to forget the sinister events of his chequered career and the manifold acts of cruelty which had avenged the crimes and errors of those who were unfortunate enough to incur his resentment. The controlling maxim of his policy had always been that mildness was synonymous with cowardice, and that the sword alone must govern the people. Oppressed with the memory of his crimes, haunted by the groans and imprecations of his expiring victims, he became the prey of frightful hallucinations, the offspring of a disordered brain. In the middle of the night he startled the palace with shriek and anguish. The slightest delay or opposition provoked him into fury. He summoned his drowsy councillors in haste from their beds as if for the discussion of affairs of the greatest moment, and, as soon as they were assembled, dismissed them without ceremony. He reviewed his guards at midnight. The hours of darkness were usually whiled away with the women of the harem.... For four years Al-Hakem continued in this deplorable condition, until relieved by a painful and lingering death."*⁹⁷

The Destruction of the Muslim Economic System

Attacks on Islamic centres of wealth on land and on sea by Western Christian pirates greatly reduced the economic power of Muslim lands. Braudel notes, indeed,⁹⁸ how the fortune of Islam were the city ports of Alexandria, Palermo, Tunis, Bejaia, Almeira, etc. in securing wealth and prosperity for as long as the Muslims were powerful, yet came to suffer from the tenth century raids by Christian European pirates. 'It is the destiny of the rich,' Braudel explains 'to become prey and temptations for the poor. In the tenth century, contrary to a subsequent epoch, the rich was the Muslim power, and the poor was the Christian.'⁹⁹ The Mediterranean, once an Islamic lake, now sank any venture, Braudel quotes, saying:

*"Do not wonder to see my hair grow white from sorrow, but you must wonder why the black of my eyes had not become white instead. Now the sea belongs to the Roum. Boats that venture on it only do at great risk. Only the land belongs to the Muslims."*¹⁰⁰

Not that secure either were the coastal towns of Egypt and North Africa, which became constant targets to devastating raids, which prevented the formation of any stable base for exchange, whatever its scale. In the eleventh century, the Christians aware of the weaker Muslims (disunited in Spain, fighting each other both in the East as well as in Sicily and no longer content to defend their territories) look for Muslim fleets, follow them and provoke them; disembark in Africa and set on fire the countryside and warehouses.¹⁰¹ Never were hostilities more vivid, more murderous, and more incessant.¹⁰² In 1146, Djidelli (North East Algeria) was taken and ransacked by Christian forces.¹⁰³ In 1284 and 1285, Roger Doria, Admiral of Aragon, profiting from a moment when the pretenders were fighting for the throne in Tunis, landed suddenly on the island of Gerba, ravaging its countryside, gathering immense booty, and taking more than 2000 captives, who he sold in Europe. In 1304, the Christians were delighted when the Pisan fleet, reinforced by Genoese ships, and probably Provençal ships, took the city of Bone, and ravaged the coast to Carthage.¹⁰⁴ In 1365 a combined European fleet totalling 165 vessels departed for a secret target, the direction to Alexandria only cited at the last moment. On October 9, 1365, they landed; and for seven days they slaughtered, pillaged, and set the city on fire.¹⁰⁵ The years after (December 1366, and September 1367), Egyptian and Syrian coastal towns suffered raids led by the crusading monarch Peter I of Portugal¹⁰⁶. Morocco for its part had to face the combined alliance of Castilians and Genoese until 1344, this combined strength of the Christian powers being necessary to beat the Moroccan fleet.¹⁰⁷

During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, both Syrian and Egyptian coastal towns also had to face attacks of Christian pirates, making landings and carrying devastating raids such as those of Boucicaud (c.1366–1421, marshal of France) in 1403.¹⁰⁸ Coastal towns such as Beirut, Tripoli, Alexandria, Rosetta and Damietta, suffered constant debilitating raids. The Mamluks were obliged to spend more on their sea defences and sought materials using escorted expeditions to the Anatolian coasts, which bled them financially.¹⁰⁹

Then came the Portuguese irruption, an irruption well highlighted by the policy of Prince Henry the Navigator of Portugal (1394-1460). His mind, according to Russel, was always dominated by a zealous devotion to the twin doctrines of chivalry and Crusade.¹¹⁰ In his writings are expressed his views: 'War against the Moors will satisfy both purposes (earthly and thereafter) and should, therefore, be undertaken.'¹¹¹

Portuguese piracy literally gave the coup de grace to the Islamic economic system in the Indian Ocean. Hitherto, and throughout the medieval period, Abu Lughod explains, Muslim ships and merchants dominated the western circuit between the Persian Gulf-Red Sea and the south Indian coasts; there, they were joined by Indian ships that shared with the Chinese, dominion over the second circuit to the Strait.¹¹² Chaudhuri observes:

*"before the arrival of the Portuguese.... in 1498 there had been no organised attempt by any political power to control the sea lanes and the long distance trade of Asia... The Indian Ocean as a whole and its different seas were not dominated by any particular nation or empires."*¹¹³

All changed with the Portuguese, who deliberately massacred Muslim merchants.¹¹⁴ The Portuguese, according to Heyd:

*"Pursued simultaneously two objectives aiming for the same end: the extension of their own trade, through the opening of more outlets, and the suppression of that of the Arabs by the destruction of their trading fleet. It is impossible to count the number of Arab boats that their (the Portuguese) fleet attacked whether on the high seas, or close to the coastline; sank; burnt down after everything was looted, and their passengers and crew all slaughtered."*¹¹⁵

Crawford has highlighted in detail the massacres committed by the Portuguese.¹¹⁶ In the fifteenth century, they carried on a piratical crusade against every Muslim ship they could find. Meeting with a vessel containing two hundred and sixty pilgrims bound for Mecca, of whom some fifty were women and children, they saved and baptised twenty of the children; the remainder were locked inside the ship before setting it on fire.¹¹⁷

In 1500, Vasco De Gama, a Knight of Christ, on arriving in the region bombarded the city of Calicut for three days, before embarking upon cutting off ears; noses and hands of prisoners and then setting them alight. Following that, de Gama sank boats of pilgrims who were on their way to Mecca, ordering his men to spear the survivors in the water.¹¹⁸

Albuquerque, after capturing Goa, sent this message to the Sultan:

*"I burnt the city and put everyone to the sword and for four days your men shed blood continuously. No matter where we found them, we did not spare the life of a single Muslim; we filled the mosques with them and set them on fire..."*¹¹⁹

For their success, the Portuguese had the help of many local allies. The Sultan of Gujarat, Bahadur Shah, ceded thus the Island of Diu, from which they operated, to the Portuguese in 1535.¹²⁰ And Shah Ismail, armed by them, also fought on the Portuguese side.¹²¹

In this process, the Portuguese ruined the Mamluk state with its futile massive expenses for the protection of its fleet.¹²²

In North Africa, to avoid the pillage, Muslim principalities agreed payments to Christian protection. Thus, the treaty with Bejaia of 1314, for instance, agreed a payment to the king of Aragon of 500 ducats a year from the yield of the 'robes e mercaderies que pagaren dret en la duana de Bugia'.¹²³ The treaties of 1314 and 1323 with Tunis allotted to the king 4000 ducats a year out of the dues paid by his subjects.¹²⁴ It was normal for medieval Hispanic Christian states, Armesto notes, 'to mulct Moorish neighbours for protection money,' and frequently this tributary relationship was prelude to eventual conquest. The rights of legitimate 're-conquest' (re-conquista), which Hispanic Christian kings, claimed for the Muslims were universally assumed to extend into North Africa.¹²⁵

Consequently, the Portuguese took Ceuta in 1415, Ksar-el-Srir, and advanced their outpost towards Tangiers in 1458, and further advanced into Anfa between Azamour Ra bat and Arzilla in 1471, and finally Tangiers capitulated to them.¹²⁶ The Spaniards took Granada (1492), then Melila (1497), Mers el-Kebir (1505); Oran (1509); Bejaia and Tripoli (1510), and were threatening to take the whole of North Africa until the Turkish intervention pushed them back. In fact, in the Mediterranean, Turkish and Algerian fleets battled against Spanish, Genoese and Venetian fleets for the next century and a half.¹²⁷ The Moroccans, on the other hand, at last destroyed the Portuguese power at the Battle of the Three Kings, which took place

on the 4th of August, 1578,¹²⁸ when the Moroccans wiped out the whole Portuguese nobility and the best of its knights and army in a battle that cost the lives of three kings.¹²⁹ On the eve of that battle, the whole Portuguese nobility had arrived in Morocco accompanied by their courts and servants expecting to remain in Morocco eternally.¹³⁰

The Moroccans destroyed Portuguese power, but other powers still prowled the seas. Already, early in the sixteenth century warring merchants descended upon the Atlantic coast of North Africa between the capture of Agadir (1505) and the fortification of Mazagran (1514) with devastating efficiency.¹³¹ Coastal fortifications helped the Christian Europeans to lock Muslims within Morocco and secured the oceanic routes leading to India and beyond.¹³²

Christian pirates bled the Moroccan economy, Mathiex holds, and this just at the time when North Africa and the Levant were awakening to the importance of its maritime trade.¹³³ Muslim coastlines became zones of insecurity, and Islamic maritime trade died no sooner than it was born.¹³⁴ In an effort to escape ravages caused by such pirates (often encouraged by Christian kings), Mathiex explains, Muslim traders used foreign shipping rather than those of the Muslims in order to obtain protection if taken by the pirates; but European pirates found ways round that, citing that Pavilions only covered merchandise.¹³⁵ Livourne (a slave port) was so thriving (safe from attacks on Muslim vessels) that any Christian slave trader at the end of the seventeenth century had two or three commercial houses, which specialised in slave trade, and the poorest amongst them had a capital of 150,000 Ecus.¹³⁶ Involved in this lucrative trade were some of the highest ranking figures of Western Christendom, even such respected figures of English life, as Sir Robert Cecil. The latter on 12 January 1603 informed Sir Walter Raleigh of his intention to invest in a certain privateer, inviting him and Lord Cobham to take shares in the venture.¹³⁷ By the summer of 1600 no quarter of the Mediterranean was safe from their violence. 'For this accursed race is grown so bold that it goes everywhere without hesitation, using barbarous cruelty, and sinking ships,' said a Venetian ambassador.¹³⁸ Those who were taken prisoners had no better fate than those killed, condemned to the galleys for perpetuity. The Muslims who converted to Christianity to escape enslavement on the boats galleys hardly escaped such a fate.¹³⁹

So Western powers, armed with sailing ships encircled the Muslim land.¹⁴⁰ Muslim North Africa became economically impoverished as the Trans-Saharan traffic, which had sustained it, was diverted to European vessels operating along the Atlantic coast of West Africa.¹⁴¹ Along the east coast of Africa, most Islamic cities simply declined, while Muslim shippers of the Red Sea, Persian Gulf, and Hadramut were reduced to the less important traffic along East African shores and across the Indian Ocean to India and Ceylon.¹⁴² Soon, the colonising French and English would arrive and continue the War against the Muslims. Work began by the Portuguese and the Spaniards.

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