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Sh. Ahmed Arafat

FROM ARABIC INTO LATIN

HOW THE MUSLIM CIVILIZATION SHAPED THE RENAISSANCE

In his speech on “Islam and the West” at Oxford University in 1993, Prince Charles observes: *“If there is much misunderstanding in the West about the nature of Islam, there is also much ignorance about the debt our own culture and civilization owe to the Islamic world. It is a failure, which stems, I think, from the straight-jacket of history, which we have inherited. The medieval Islamic world, from central Asia to the shores of the Atlantic, was a world where scholars and men of learning flourished. But because we have tended to see Islam as the enemy of the West, as an alien culture, society, and system of belief, we have tended to ignore or erase its great relevance to our own history.”*

This statement does not come as a surprise to me as I met Prince Charles in Al-Azhar Mosque in 2006 and got to know that his promotion of understanding, tolerance and respect is based on knowledge and courage, the absence

of which gives rise to fear and intolerance. Indeed, possessing negative preconceptions about Islam is a failure to recognize the significance of Muslim contributions to the development of modern civilization. Montgomery Watt similarly asserted: *“For our cultural indebtedness to Islam, however, we Europeans have a blind spot. We sometimes belittle the extent and importance of Islamic influence in our heritage and sometimes overlook it altogether... To try to cover it over and deny it is a mark of false pride.”*¹

Furthermore, Watt observes, *“when one keeps hold of all the facts of the medieval confrontation of Christianity and Islam, it is clear that the influence of Islam on western Christendom is greater than is usually realized. Not merely did Islam share with Western Europe many material products and technical discoveries; not merely did it stimulate Europe intellectually in the fields of science and philosophy; but it provoked Europe into forming a new image of itself. Because Europe was reacting against Islam it belittled the influence of Saracens [a medieval European reference to Muslims] and exaggerated its dependence on its Greek and Roman heritage. So today an important task for us is to correct this false emphasis and to acknowledge fully our debt to the Arab and Islamic world.”*²

Those familiar with Muslim medieval heritage understand what Watt asserts is not an exaggeration. This brief article seeks to illustrate the genius of the Muslim and Arabic civilization and how its contributions inspired the European renaissance.

¹ Montgomery Watt, *The Influence of Islam on Medieval Europe*, Islamic Surveys, 1972; p.

² Ibid., p. 84

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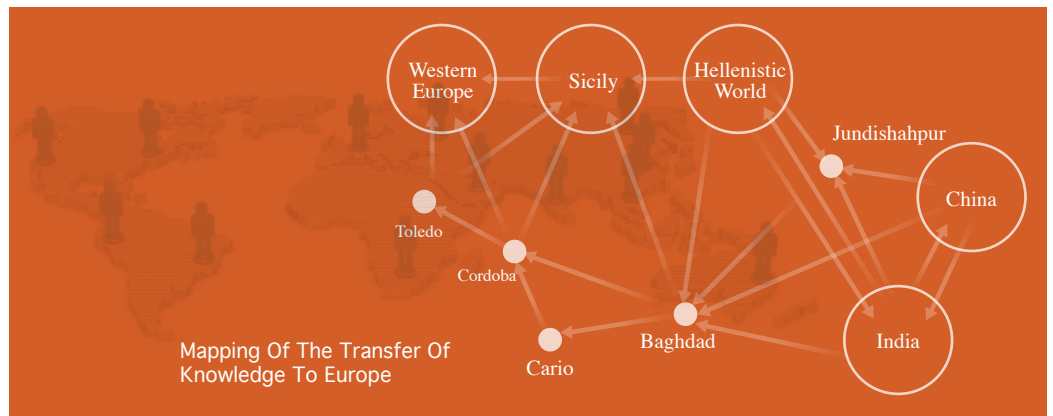
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sance. I will rely purposefully on western references to illustrate the intellectual role of Muslim civilization and its impact on Europe according to the west. My goal is fourfold: (1) to challenge the current negative portrayal of Muslims, (2) to exemplify the real practice of Islam leads to the rise of civilization, (3) to support our Muslim youth to gain confidence in their own heritage and to be able to actively participate in the making of modern civilization with the full realization that knowledge, science and education are not foreign to, but cherished hallmarks of their Islamic heritage and identity, and (4) to serve as an eye-opener for everyone to explore the legacy of the civilization of Islam on their own, simply because this topic is usually covered in encyclopedias! One may start by exploring the books referenced in this article.

To start, we all know that Hippocrates is the Greek father of medicine and the great ‘Western’ physician. We also know that Roland of Parma published his *Surgery* with numerous detailed illustrations. Do you know how the Italian artist portrayed the ‘Western’ physician? “In Arab dress, with a turban.”³ Second, you might know that Aristotle is referred to as the First Teacher? Guess who was the Second Teacher? Al-Farabi!

These facts should not come as a surprise since, besides Baghdad, medieval Spain, especially Sicily and Toledo, was a world center of learning created by Muslims. E.J. Holymard observes that “[D]uring the twelfth and thirteenth centuries there was a scientific renaissance in Europe, and scholars from Christian countries journeyed to Muslim universities in Spain, Egypt, Syria and even Morocco in order to acquire knowledge from their foes in religion but friends in learning. Arabic science soon began to filter through, and by the middle of the thirteenth century the trickle had become a river.”⁴

To get a sense of the influential presence of Muslim scholars in medieval and early Renaissance, just have a look at this alphabetical list of Latinized names of Muslim philosophers and, for details, explore their legacies on your own if you wish: Abalphatus Asphahanensis (mathematician, 10th century), Abenguefith (physician, d. 1074), Abubacer or Abentophal (philosopher and physician, d. 1185), Abulfeda (historian d. 1331), Albategnius (astronomer and mathematician, d. 929), Alboacen (jurist, d. 1058), Albohali (astronomer/astrologer, d. 835), Albucasis (physician and surgeon, d. 1013), Albumasar (astronomer/astrologer, d. 886), Alchabitius (astrologer, d. 967), Alfarabius (philosopher, d. 950), Alfraganus (astronomer, d. 880), Algazel (theologian and mystic, d. 1111), Algorismus (mathematician, d. 850), Algizar (physician, d. 980), Alhazen (father of optics, d. 1040), Alkindus (polymath, d. 873), Ametus filius Iosephi (mathematician, d. 912), Anaritius (mathematician, 10th century), Alpetragius (astronomer, d. 1204), Arzachel (astronomer, d. 1087), Avem-

³ Mark Graham, *How Islam Created The Modern World*, amana publications, 2006; p.

⁴ Russel R, *The Works of Geber: A New Edition with Introduction* by E.J. Holymard, 1928; xv

⁵ This list along with the authors’ major works translated into Latin can be found at <http://www.muslimheritage.com/article/latinized-names-muslim-scholars>

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pace (scientist and philosopher, d. 1138), Averroes (famed physician, philosopher and polymath, d. 1198), Avenzoar (physician, d. 1161), Avicenna (physician and philosopher, d. 1037), Azophi (astronomer, d. 986), Dreses (geographer, d. 1165), Geber (father of chemistry, d. 815), Haly Heben Rodan (physician and astronomer, d. 1061), Haly Abnenragel (astronomer and mathematician, d. after 1041), Machometus Bagdedinus (mathematician, d. 1037), Omar Tiberiadis, Rhazes (physician and philosopher, d. 925), Sorsanus (physician, d. 1037), Thebith (astronomer and mathematician, d. 901), and Trium fratum (three scholars active in mechanics, geometry and engineering, 9th century).⁵

Their Arabic names respectfully are Abu al-Fath al-Isfahani, Ibn Wafid, Ibn Tufayl, Abu al-Fida', al-Battani, al-Mawardi, Abu Ali al-Khayyat, Abu al-Qasim al-Zahrawi, Abu al-Ma'shar al-Falaki, al-Qabisi, al-Farabi, Abu al-'Abbas al-Farghani, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, al-Khawarizmi, Ibn al-Jazzar, al-Hasan Ibn al-Haytham, al-Kindi, Ahmed Ibn Yusuf al-Misri, al-Nayrizi, al-Bitruji, al-Zarqali, Ibn Bajja, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Zuhr, Ibn Sina, Abu al-Husayn al-Sufi, al-Idrisi, Jabir ibn Hayyan, Ali ibn Rudwan al-Misri, Ali ibn al-Rijal, Muhammad al-Baghdadi, Umar al-Tabari, Abu Bakr al-Razi, al-Juzani, Thabit ibn Qurra, and the Banu Musa Brothers.

How was this scientific Renaissance born in the Muslim world and how was it transferred to Western Europe? Well, it all started with medieval Baghdad. In Baghdad emerged *Bayt al-Hikmah* (The House of Wisdom)⁶, founded by the Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid (d. 809), which flourished during the reign of his son al-Ma'mun (d. 833). In *The House of Wisdom*, a Translation Movement was sponsored and funded by the Abbasid caliphs. This resulted in the translation of countless books on philosophy and science from Greek and other languages into Arabic, which by then was the official language of knowledge and business in the Muslim world.

The productions of *The House of Wisdom* advanced Muslim thought and academia as Muslim scholars adopted, modified, criticized or expanded the Greek ideas. By the middle of the ninth century, the House of Wisdom had the largest selection of books in the world. It took Western Europe a thousand years to hear about Greek heritage

and reach the level of philosophical inquiries and scientific experimentation achieved in the Muslim world! This knowledge and spirit was transferred to Muslim Spain where Muslims, Jews and Christians worked on exploring the Greek tradition and the issue of reason and revelation.

With the fall of Granada in 1492, and after a short period of tolerance, there was a long history of forced conversion among Muslims and Jews, leading to the horrible crimes of the Inquisition and finally the complete expulsion of Muslims and Jews from Spain. Meanwhile, Arabic was outlawed as spoken language and Arabic books were ordered to be burnt except for philosophical and scientific manuscripts. Such is the case of Cardinal Cisneros who ordered the burning of all Arabic books except a few hundred books on philosophy and medicine that he sent to his college at Alcala.⁷

Christians would then inherit Greek and Arabic traditions and start the 'second' Translation Movement that eventually led to the transforming of Western thought and scholarship. Translation centers were mainly in Toledo, Sicily and France.⁸ Gerald, who would later be Pope Sylvester, attributed "Europe's progressiveness to a large extent in a wise gathering of the fruits of Muslim culture."⁹ For instance, some of Nicholas Copernicus' ideas could be traced back to people like Ibn al-Shatir and Tusi as discussed in the works of George Saliba and F. Jamil Ragep. Major translated books included Al-Farabi's *Classification of the Sciences*, Avicenna's *Canon of Medicine*, *The Cure and Metaphysics*, Ibn Tufayl's philosophical tale *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, Averroes' medical work on *al-Kulliyyat* (Generalities) and *Great and Middle Commentaries on Aristotle*, Abu Ma'shar's *Introduction to Astrology*, Alhazen's *Optics*, Abu Bakr al-Razi medical work *Al-Hawi*, al-Ghazali's *Aims of the Philosophers and Incoherence of the Philosophers*, and Ibn Wahshīyah's *Al-filāḥah al-nabaṭīyah* (Nabataean Agriculture) ...etc.¹⁰ Charles Burnett listed 131 textual items translated into Latin. Many of these Muslim works were the standard textbooks in European universities for centuries.

Finally, in the words of Maria Rosa Menocal: "*Not just Córdoba shone ... but the whole of Al-Andalus over which its caliph presided. In the end, it would be Al-Andalus' vast intellectual wealth, inseparable from its prosperity in the material realm, that made it the 'ornament of the world.'*"¹¹

⁶ For details, see *The House of Wisdom* by Jonathan Lyons and *The House of Wisdom* by Jim

⁷ See Haig A Bosmajian, *Burning Books*, p. 64.

⁸ See George Saliba, *Rethinking the Roots of Modern Science: Arabic Scientific Manuscripts in European Libraries*.

⁹ See Sarton II, p. 279, quoted in Ghazanfar's *CIVILIZATIONAL CONNECTIONS: EARLY ISLAM AND LATIN-EUROPEAN RENAISSANCE*.

¹⁰ For a good study of the translators from Arabic into Latin, see Charles Burnett's *Arabic into Latin in the Middle Ages: The Translators and Their Intellectual and Social Context*.

¹¹ Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain*

EVENTS OF THE MONTH



The Mosque Foundation Hosted the DHS Civil Rights and Civil Liberties Community Engagement Roundtable. Many Muslim community leaders attended this event, together with multiple representatives from government agencies such as US Citizenship & Immigration Services, Transportation Security Administration, Customs & Border Protection, US Attorney's Office for Northern District of Illinois, Federal Bureau on Investigation and others. Ms. Charlotte Burrows, Commissioner of US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, presented an overview of her office.



In coordination with MAS PACE, the Mosque Foundation provided Free Health Screening & Blood Drive to neighbors and community members who received comprehensive physical exams by medical professionals.

EL HAJJ, PEREGRINAJE A LA CASA SAGRADA



Dhul Hijja es uno de los cuatro meses sagrados. En este mes los musulmanes cuales Allah le ha otorgado la bendición de visitar Su Casa Sagrada, "La Kaba" en Mecca, se preparan para realizar los rituales de la peregrinación. Tuve la dicha de hacer una entrevista con una persona que tuvo la bendición de peregrinar a la Casa Sagrada en Mecca. Su nombre es Ermelinda Isa, tiene 73 años mashaAllah, nació en Brasil y tuvo la oportunidad de hacer el Hajj dos veces. Le pregunte, ¿Que fue lo que la motivó hacer el Hajj y estas son sus palabras. "En el año 1997, tuve el privilegio de hacer el Hajj. Quería hacer el Hajj pues es una obligación si tienes los medios para hacerlo. También para sentirme consagrada que fui a la Casa de Allah". Cual fue su impresión al ver la Casa Sagrada por primera vez?,"Me emocioné mucho y sentí como un miedo porque mire tanta gente diferente y no conocía a nadie, entonces hice una suplica a Allah y ni bien levante mi rostro mi amiga Jenine estaba frente a mí. Yo lloré de emoción porque Allah me contestó mi suplica ahí, terminando de hacer mi suplica. También me impresionó mucho al ver enormes saltamontes verdes con dos ojos que parecían esmeralda. Tuve mucho cuidado de no lastimarlos o matarlos porque en el Hajj no se puede matar tan siquiera una mosca". Como se sintió, experimentó algo asombroso?, "Al estar en Mina, experimenté un miedo al ver el tamaño de una de las tantas montañas, tan enorme y ver el tamaño de las personas que parecían como hormiguitas caminando al lado de la montaña". "Otra de las tantas experiencias durante mi Hajj fue cuando caminaba en Medina, cerca de el cementerio donde están enterrados los compañeros de el profeta (saws) sentí un escalofrío y todos los pelos de mi cuerpo se erizaron, hasta el momento cada vez que me acuerdo de esa experiencia en el Hajj me ocurre lo mismo." Que consejo le daría a otros creyentes sobre el Hajj?," Si tienen los medios para hacer el Hajj, haganlo! "Yo le suplico a Allah (SWAT), O Allah, Tu eres el Más Misericordioso ten misericordia de los musulmanes que quieren hacer el Hajj pero no pueden y dales la oportunidad que puedan hacerlo" Amen

InshaAllah la experiencia compartida por la hermana de fe, Ermelinda Isa nos da ánimo para hacer el Hajj.

Su hermana en Islam,

Celia Snowber



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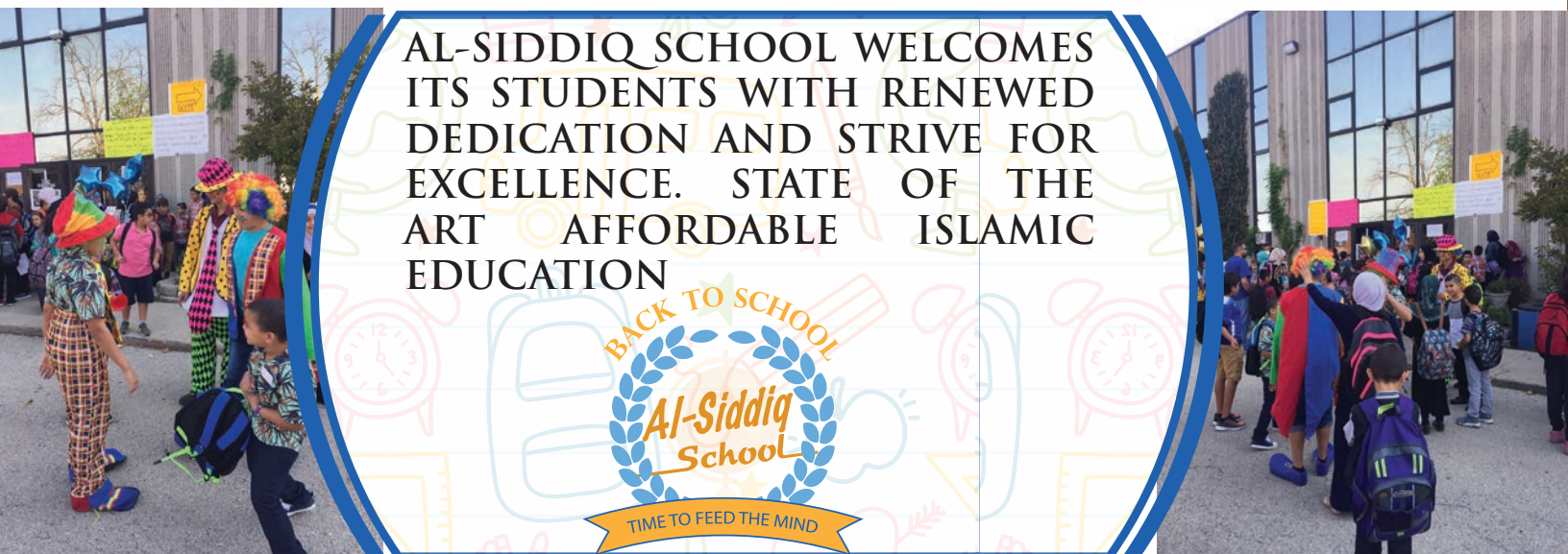


AL-SIDDIQ SCHOOL LOOKS FORWARD TO SERVING YOU AND YOUR CHILDREN AND STRIVE TO PROVIDE QUALITY EDUCATION TO YOUR CHILDREN

As Al-Siddiq School's Assistant Principal serving our students and community for the last 10 years, I would like to welcome you to the 2017-2018 academic school year. We look forward to serving you and your children this year and we strive to provide the highest and best quality education. We are constantly working to perfect and review the curriculum, make appropriate changes, adopt effective teaching techniques, and participate in trainings to ensure that our students receive the best possible education and benefit the most during the school day. We would like to encourage parents to be engaged in their children's learning, check the work of their children, and communicate regularly with teachers. May Allah (SWT) make the new year a blessed year and purify our intentions.

Ms. Bothaina Zahdan

Al-Siddiq School Assistant Principal



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AL-SIDDIQ SCHOOL CONDUCTED A TWO-DAY STRATEGIC PLANNING RETREAT TO ENSURE THE BEST WEEKEND ISLAMIC EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN IN OUR COMMUNITY ON AUGUST 19-20



FOR CONTINUED EXCELLENCE, AL-SIDDIQ SCHOOL HELD ONE-DAY TRAINING FOR ITS STAFF ON INTERACTIVE TEACHING AND MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGIES.

8 TOP PRIORITIES FOR AL-SIDDIQ SCHOOL FOR 2017-2018

1. Providing quality education to teach children how to read Quran and Arabic: No child is left behind.
2. Staff development: Every teacher, teacher aide, or staff/volunteer must be properly trained to provide the best learning environment for the students in our community.
3. Adoption of state of the art books for teaching Quran and Arabic.
4. Review of Islamic Studies curriculum and books to ensure the School continues to meet the expectations of today's students and environment.
5. Improving communications with parents for better learning.
6. Development of programs to train parents and increase their engagement.
7. Enrichment of the School environment with more sport and leisure activities to facilitate learning.
8. Evaluation and monitoring of our staff and various activities.