

Islam in Europe – Annual Conference 2010

The historical presence of Islam in Europe

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They desire to extinguish Allah's Light
with their mouths,
but Allah will perfect His Light
though the kafirun hate it.

It is He Who sent His Messenger with guidance
and the Deen of Truth
to exalt it over every other deen,
though the mushrikun hate it. (Qur'an : 61.8-9)

Aoudhu bi'llahi min'ash-shaytan'ar-rajim ~ Bismillahi'r-Rahmani'r-Rahim
Ash-shaduan la ilaha il'Allah ~ wa ash-shaduanna Muhammad ar-rasulu'llah

Introduction

The Qur'an repeatedly distinguishes between two very different kinds of people : the *muminun* and the *kafirun* – that is, between those who accept Allah and His Messengers, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on all of them, and those who reject Allah and His Messengers. Allah not only describes the respective characteristics of these two groupings in the Qur'an, but also provides many historical examples of the interaction between them. The *muminun* are those who have accepted the Prophet of their time, of whom there have been 124,000 in the history of the world.

It has always been understood by the Muslims at least that the way of life which was embodied by all of the Prophets, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on them and on their families and companions and true followers, was essentially one and the same life-transaction, grounded in the worship of the One Creator of the heavens and the earth and all that exists, both in the Seen and in the Unseen worlds – the way of Islam. When the way of Islam is viewed from this perspective, then it is clear that all the Prophets were Prophets of Islam. It is, when understood in this sense, impossible to make any distinction between them, other than to recognise that although their teaching of Tawhid did not change – since Allah does not change, their respective shari'as sometimes varied from one time to another, with the shari'a brought by the Prophet Muhammad being the simplest of them all.

It is important, when considering the history of Europe, to be fully aware that sayyedina Musa and sayyedina Isa were sent specifically to the Banu Israel, that is,

to the descendants of the twelve sons of sayyedina Yaqub, who was also known as Israel, the son of sayyedina Ishaq, the son of sayyedina Ibrahim. When the teachings of sayyedina Musa and sayyedina Isa were conveyed outside the Banu Israel and into Europe, they were gradually changed and transformed into what we now know as the ancient and modern religions of Judaism and Christianity – religions which in some respects have no resemblance to the original teachings of these two great Messengers of Allah and which have been subjected to periodic re-formations since their initial emergence.

Although it would be possible – although difficult because of the distortions and innovations which have taken place – to consider the historical presence of the original Islam of these earlier Prophets in Europe, this presentation will be concerned specifically with the historical presence in Europe of the final manifestation of Islam, as embodied and conveyed by the Seal of the Prophets and the Best of Creation, sayyedina Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace abundantly.

The ulama' are agreed that the dividing line between the *mumin* and the *kafir* is the prayer. If a person repeats the *shahada* and does the obligatory *salat*, then he or she is accepted as a Muslim. There are the *munafiqun*, the hypocrites, who outwardly appear to be Muslim while inwardly rejecting Islam – and they of course are of and with the *kafirun* both in this world and the next.

Wherever the prayer is done, the *salat* has been established and the presence of Islam is apparent. And as Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib says in his Diwan, two *raka'ts* done with love are better than a thousand *raka'ts* done without love.

There is of course a difference between the lone traveller who does the prayer in its time, wherever he or she happens to be, and a community of Muslims who pray together in *jam'at* in a *jumu'a* mosque. Usually one leads to the other.

A *jam'at* of three people is the seed of a community. A community is the seed of a civilised society. There was a time when sayyedina Muhammad and sayyedatana Khadija and sayyedina Ali were the only three people on the face of the earth who could be seen doing the prayer at the Ka'aba. See how large the ummah of Muhammad has grown! There was a time when there were only three members of this community in Granada who could be seen doing the prayer in Cordoba. See how large this community which belongs to the ummah of Muhammad has grown! Allah is al-Basit, the One Who expands – and Allah is al-Qabid, the One Who contracts.

The nature of history

We see this process of expansion and contraction in the unfolding of the historical presence of Islam in Europe. It begins in a small way and then it expands and then it contracts – and then it either expands again or else it begins elsewhere in a small way and then it expands and then it contracts. Even as the Muslim army of Tariq ibn Ziyad was pushing into France, the seeds of the Christian reconquista were taking root in the Asturias.

Every day Allah is on a new affair. Everything in creation is coming into existence and fading out of existence – and only the Face of Allah remains.

Being aware of the divine dimension of existence, T S Eliot wrote that history is a pattern of timeless moments – which is one way of describing the Face of Allah in a poetic manner. This is also part of the meaning of Napoleon’s observation that history is a myth which is agreed upon – because although it may appear to exist for a while, nothing lasts – although he was also indicating the fact that historians and humans simplify matters because the creation is so multi-faceted that it cannot be comprehensively summarised, whether in a few or even in many words.

As the *hadith qudsi* states, “The sons of Adam curse *ad-dahr* (time/space), but I am *ad-dahr* (time/space) – in My hand is the night and the day.” (Bukhari)

Bearing this in mind, we can attempt, in a few minutes, to summarise part of what has taken place in Europe during the passage of more than fourteen centuries! Both the possibility and impossibility of such a task was indicated by William Blake who wrote:

To see a world in a grain of sand,
And heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
And eternity in an hour.

Muslim conquests in Europe

There are two gateways into Europe from the south : to the west, the crossing from Tanger to the Iberian peninsula – and to the east, the crossing over the Bosphorus to Istanbul.

According to ancient historians, the two land masses of North Africa and Spain used to be spanned by a vast stone bridge whose foundations were called the Pillars of Hercules. Pascual de Gayangos, who translated an abridged version of Al-Maqqari’s history of Islam in Andalus, notes that he personally saw what appeared to be the remains of these foundations on the Spanish side, while swimming in the sea near Cadiz during an exceptionally low tide in the mid-nineteenth century.

Historically, the presence of Islam in Europe was first established in Spain : The first recorded (by At-Tabari and other historians) presence of Muslims in Europe took place during the khalifate of sayyidina ‘Uthman, may Allah be pleased with him, when a party sent by him landed briefly in the south-east of Andalus. This was probably the first time that the *salat* was done on European soil. This event is an indication of how swiftly Islam spread after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, *salla’llahu alayhi wa salam*. Within one century, Islam had spread from Makka and Madina in Arabia as far west as Morocco and Spain and as far east as northern India.

Without wishing to overload you with too many dates, let us consider some important landmarks in time:

In the west, Alexandria was occupied in 643 CE and Fustat (near Cairo) was conquered and Qayrawan established in 670 CE by Uqba bin Nafi', of whom Ibn Idhari Al-Marrakushi relates in his *Al-Bayan al-Maghrib* that when Uqba reached the Atlantic ocean, he rode his horse into the sea and said, "Ya Allah, if the sea had not prevented me, I would have galloped on for ever like Dhu'l-Qarnayn, upholding your *deen* and fighting the *kafirun*!" Tariq ibn Ziyad and the Muslim army under the command of Musa ibn Nusayr crossed over to Andalus and conquered Cordoba in 711 CE.

In the east, sayyidina Umar conquered Jerusalem and took Damascus in 635 CE, with the Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa Mosque being completed in 692 CE. The conquest of Herat and Balkh in 651 and the fall of Kabul in 664 CE opened the way to India. Sind, in north-east India fell to the Muslims in 712 CE, the same year that Toledo fell to the Muslims in Andalus.

Although the Muslims besieged Constantinople twice, between 674 and 678 CE and again between 717 and 718 CE, this gateway into south eastern Europe was not finally conquered until 1453 by Sultan Mehmed II al-Fatih. It was in 669 CE that the Companion Abu Ayub Al-Ansari, may Allah be pleased with him, died *shahid* outside the walls of Constantinople. His grave is a place of light and *baraka* that reminds the visitor of Madina al-Munawarra – of the presence of Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and of the Presence of Allah *subhanahu wa ta'ala*.

Without awareness of these presences, there can be no true awareness of the historical presence of Islam.

In fact there are many graves of the early Muslims to be found in what is now known as modern Istanbul – including some whose occupants can not possibly be whom they are said to be, such as Abu Dhar al-Ghifari and Amr ibn Al-'As, may Allah be pleased with them! Across the Bosphorus is the grave of Yusha, the servant of sayyidina Musa when he met Al-Khidr. It is said that Yusha's grave marks the *majma'a'l-bahrain* – the "meeting of the two seas" where this meeting, described in *Surat'l-Kahf*, took place – in this case the Black Sea and the Aegean Sea, although other traditions locate the meeting elsewhere, for example, at the junction of the White Nile and the Blue Nile, or where the Nile meets the Mediterranean – and Allah knows best.

Suffice it to say that this city, once known as Byzantium, and then as Constantinople, and then as Istanbul has always been a cross-roads between the north and the south and the east and the west, the gateway to south-eastern Europe.

Although they were initially unable to take Constantinople, the Muslims also pushed northwards between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea into the Caucasus where they faced high mountains and fierce resistance from the Khazars. It is interesting to note that At-Tabari relates accounts of at least two successful expeditions

made by the early Muslims to find and examine the wall that had been erected (as described in *Surat'l-Kahf*) by Dhu'l-Qarnayn (whom, some say, was in fact Alexander the Great), in order to prevent Juj wa Majuj – Gog and Magog – spreading south through the Caucasus.

Professor D. M. Dunlop refers to these accounts in his book, *The History of the Jewish Khazars*, stating that the wall in question was “the Caucasus fortification (dating from pre-Islamic times) known as the Wall of Darband”, and observing that “successive courses of bright and dark material (copper and iron) are the most prominent feature of both accounts ...”

It is perhaps because the Muslims were initially unable to penetrate northwards into south-eastern Europe that they spread further eastwards into India and then beyond, as far as China, Malaysia and Indonesia.

In the west, however, it was a different story, and by 717 CE the Muslims had taken most of Spain and crossed the Pyrenees. Their advance was stopped in 732 CE at Poitiers in France – a place where decisive, tide-turning battles have been fought more than once. Indeed it was Tariq ibn Ziyad’s intention to circle round through southern Europe and meet up with the Muslim armies besieging Constantinople, but this was not Allah’s plan. The Muslim army only reached as far east as Narbonne in 715 CE. In 759 CE the Muslims were obliged to withdraw south of the Pyrenees.

During this early period of expansion into south-western Europe, as well as the Balearic islands, many of the islands in the Mediterranean were conquered by the Muslims: Crete in 825, Sardinia and Sicily in 827, Cyprus in 649, Corsica in 850 and Malta in 870 CE.

We are all aware, to a greater or lesser extent, of the extraordinary flowering of Islam in Andalus which took place between 711 and 1236 CE. Many books have been written on the subject.

We are also aware of how after the expansion, contraction inevitably followed, to the extent that by 1609 the Muslims had almost all been expelled from the Iberian peninsular – although we remember Tariq ibn Ziyad’s words when he first ordered the *adhan* to be called in the valleys of Andalucia : “The adhan will continue to be called in this land until the *yawm al-qiyama!*”

While the Muslims were experiencing contraction in the west of southern Europe, so too they were experiencing expansion in the east of southern Europe. As Allah took away power from the Muslims in Andalus, he gave power to the Muslims in Anatolia. Although the mediaeval Roman Catholic Christian crusades (spanning the period 1095 to 1272 CE) had made inroads into the holy Land, with Jerusalem being conquered by them in 1099, by 1187 CE Salahuddin had re-taken the city. Choosing an easier target, Constantinople was sacked and pillaged by the crusaders in 1204 CE, effectively bringing an end to the Byzantine empire!

The energy of the crusaders exhausted, and the onslaught of Gheniz Khan and the Mongols absorbed or halted (notably at the battle of Ain Jalut in 1260 CE), the Ottomans gradually expanded their control in Anatolia (Adrianople was captured in 1361) and the Balkans (the battle of Kosovo took place in 1389), finally taking Constantinople in 1453 in the east, some forty years before the fall of Granada in the west and the conquest further east of Samarkand by Babur, the first of the Moghul emperors, in 1492.

Just as the real khalifate moved from Baghdad to Cordoba, so too the real khalifate moved from Cordoba to Istanbul. Insh'Allah in this age the real khalifate will remain in Europe – and Allah knows best.

After the fall of Constantinople, with the Ottoman khalifate truly established, the Ottomans expanded rapidly, re-uniting the Muslim lands and conquering new territory. Led by Sultan Salim Yavuz, the Muslims had reached Cairo to the south by 1517. In the north, Hungary was occupied after the decisive victory of Mohács in 1526, the same year in which Babur led the decisive victory at Panipat in India, taking command of the Delhi sultanate shortly afterwards. Vienna was besieged by the Ottoman army in 1529.

The Ottomans continued to consolidate their rule during the course of the next two centuries, but inevitably expansion had to be followed by contraction. The beginnings of what we know as the modern world appeared, the European colonial era was ushered in and with the advent of the industrial revolution and the more sophisticated technology which followed in its wake, the world changed for ever. Not only territory, but also hearts and minds were colonised.

It is thanks to the keen insight and profound knowledge of sayyedina Shaykh Dr Abdalqadir as-Sufi ad-Darqawi al-Murabit into what happened during this period of transition from the old to the new that we understand exactly how the khalifate of Sultan Abdalhamid II was eventually undermined and destroyed – and how the Muslims in every land were weakened and overcome by the introduction of usury into their financial transactions. It is also thanks to sayyedina Shaykh's guidance that we are aware of how this process can be and is being reversed.

One result of the European colonial era is evident throughout the world today: As is often the case with the rise and fall of empires, the colonised in one age have become the colonisers in the following age. There are now many Muslims, whose family roots are in the Muslim lands which were once colonised by the Europeans, now living in the lands of those who once colonised them. They have not entered these lands at the head of any army, but by invitation, to serve as cheap labour, or to study and become skilled professionals, or as refugees.

To the extent that the Muslims in Europe embody the *deen* of Islam, they strengthen and support the societies of which they are a part. They are in fact the seeds of a new civilisation, insh'Allah, as the post-colonial banking empire decays and collapses.

Another significant feature of Europe today is the growing number of the direct descendants of the European colonisers who are embracing Islam, of whom some are present here today – not because they have been forced to do so, but because the sword of reason has sharpened their intellects and refined their capacity to recognise the difference between what is beneficial and what is harmful and Allah has expanded their hearts to Islam.

The continuing historical presence of Islam in Europe today is a matter of divine decree – and nothing can stop it.

Islam in Europe

Although it is possible, historically, to trace the passage of armies and record the outcomes of decisive battles, this is not a true measure of what actually happened. How armies behave is a measure of the character and knowledge or ignorance of the men and women who are in them. Consider what happened during the conquest of Makka by the Muslims in 630 – and compare it with the sack of Constantinople by the crusaders in 1204 CE. Consider what happened when Jerusalem was taken by the crusaders in 1099 – and compare it with what happened when Salahuddin and the Muslims took Jerusalem back in 1187 CE.

The Muslims' rules of engagement require noble character and mercy and an awareness of the presence of Allah and of the final reckoning on the *yawm al-qiyama*. The conduct of the *muminun* and the conduct of the *kafirun* and *munafiqun* in times of both war and peace are markedly different, in whatever age you study them – and no amount of media manipulation can make one appear to be the other for very long.

It was the American judge, Justice Holmes, who said that history is what those who won say it is. We see this especially in the way military operations are reported today – but however military action is reported or recorded, whether accurately or inaccurately, this is not a complete historical record. It is only part of the story. Armies come and go, but what they leave behind them is significant.

You have been presented with a partial overview, a list of key events and dates which illustrate how expansion and contraction govern what happens – just as our lungs expand and contract with each breath and our hearts expand and contract with each heart beat – and which indicate to some extent the historical presence of Islam in Europe.

However the true measure of this presence is the texture of society and the quality of life in that society. After the battles were over, was there respect and justice and peace between people? Did the strong look after the weak or take advantage of them? Did the rich feed the poor or ignore them? Were people slaves of each other or slaves only of Allah? Was the true *deen* of Islam established in the land or not?

And by this we mean the *deen* which the Prophet Muhammad embodied and established, *salla'llahu alayhi wa salam* – not some re-formed version. Again, it is

thanks to sayyedina Shaykh Dr Abdalqadir as-Sufi ad-Darqawi al-Murabit that we have a clear understanding of what the *deen* of Islam actually is.

As we saw at the beginning of this presentation, the dividing line between the *mumin* and the *kafir* is the prayer. The *salat* is what was given to our Messenger, *salla'llahu alayhi wa salam*, at the culmination of his *isra wa'l-miraj*. Shaykh Moulay al-Arabi ad-Darqawi, may Allah be pleased with him, wrote that when he reflected on the benefits of doing the prayer, he saw that these were so great that he was tempted to say that you do not need a shaykh – but then he added, “but you need a shaykh!”

This means that a more accurate measure of the historical presence of Islam in Europe is not a detailed record of battles and rulers and dynasties and empires, or of how much of a map is coloured green and for how long, but simply whether or not the *salat* was established and by how many – and more importantly, how many *rak'ats* were done with love and how many without love. These intimate details are recorded thoroughly by the angels, but are seldom mentioned in history books.

I know from my own travels that every so often I find myself in a company of which I say to myself, “This is a taste of what the Companions enjoyed with the Messenger of Allah, *salla'llahu alayhi wa salam*.” The existence of such a company, however small or large, is the true measure of the historical presence of Islam in Europe.

Since ideas sometimes travel more swiftly than people, it is of course valid to remind people of the influence of the earlier Muslims in Europe, whether it be the influence of thought and philosophy, or of the scientific method and inventions and discoveries, or of the exploration of the heavens and the earth, or of medicine and music and arts and culture, or of jurisprudence and governance.

The recent 1001 inventions initiative (www.1001inventions.com), for example, has provided an easily accessible cameo of what has been described as the golden age of the Muslims – which cast light on the dark ages of Europe and which inspired the European renaissance and illuminated the European enlightenment and prompted so many of the European “discoveries” which, without much difficulty, can in fact be traced back to the earlier discoveries made by Muslims.

The giving praise where it is due aspect of this kind of backward look is summarised well in a passage from part of the book of *Ecclesiasticus* which was written in about 180 BC by Jesus Ben Sirach and which is to be found in the Christian apocrypha :

Let us now praise famous men
and our fathers that begat us,
Such as did bear rule in their kingdoms,
men renowned for their power,
Leaders of the people by their counsels
and by their knowledge.
Such as found out musical tunes,
and recited verses in writing:

All these were honoured in their generations,
and were the glory of their times.
And some there be which have no memorial;
who are perished as though they had never been.
Their bodies are buried in peace,
but their name liveth for evermore.

(Vaughan Williams, adapted from *Ecclesiasticus* 44:1-15)

These aspects of bringing about a sea change in people's awareness and quality of life are of course part of the measure of the historical presence of Islam in Europe – and beyond – but what matters is the present, since this is all that we have. We wish our own lives and our own age to be golden. It is reported that sayyedinā 'Isa, *alayhi salam*, said: “The world consists of three days: yesterday which has passed, from which you have nothing in your hand; tomorrow of which you do not know whether you will reach it or not; and today in which you are, so avail yourself of it.”

Conclusion

As long as we are present in this world – as long as we have breath in our bodies and hearts that are beating – all of us present today are part of the living historical presence of Islam in Europe. Each moment that passes is history in the making. The quality and texture of our lives illustrates what our history will be. The Muslims before us have lived their lives, whether in Europe or elsewhere. They will only be questioned on the *yawm al-qiyama* about what they did. Each one of us will only be questioned about what each one of us did during our brief time on earth :

Did we help to establish the *deen* of Islam in Europe in our life times? Did we help to convey the message of Islam to those who were unaware of it? Did we help to free today's slaves from unjust taxation? Did we help those people who were being oppressed? Did we help to revive amirate and then khalifate? Did we help to re-introduce the gold dinar and the silver dirham and the just collection and re-distribution of zakat? Did we celebrate life by following the way of Muhammad, *salla'llahu alayhi wa salam*?

We ask Allah that we can say “Yes” to all of these questions. We ask that we have lives for which we are truly grateful. We ask Allah to be merciful to our parents who brought us up in such a way that we were able to recognise Islam and embrace it. We ask Allah to give our guide Shaykh Dr Abdalqadir as-Sufi ad-Darqawi al-Murabit health and strength *fi sabili'llah* and a long life and a generous reward in both worlds. We ask Allah to bless and guide our Rais and our Amirs. We ask Allah to give life and expansion to the Muslims wherever they are, as the empire of the bankers decays and collapses – just as You gave life to the Muslims in Andalus thirteen centuries ago when the Visigothic kingdom in the Iberian peninsula was in decay and collapse. Ya Allah! we ask You that we live long enough to see Your Word uppermost in the land as You have promised. Amin