

# THE CASE OF MUSLIM SCHOLARSHIP

(Part I)

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*Gratitude toward God teaches Man to see with the heart's eye*

*the blessings veiled in affliction*

(Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*)

## 1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The aim of the present essay - the result of certain 'front experiences' in the teaching of postgraduate students - is to introduce a wider audience to some of the problems and deficiencies of contemporary Muslim historiography and to some of its effects with regard to a proper understanding of the very nature of 'Islamic civilization'. Emphasis shall be put on some of the general problems of contemporary Muslim scholarship. In the light of contemporary tragic events such as the traumatic experiences of the Muslim communities in Southeast Europe and in the currently still Russian-occupied regions of the Caucasus as well as militant pseudo-religious confrontations in South and Southeast Asia, the emphasis of this paper shall also be on a *dialogue* of civilizations and concepts rather than on confrontation.

In November 1999 the present contributor had been asked by the *International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC)*, Kuala Lumpur,

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to deliver as its official representative a lecture in Singapore<sup>55</sup> for which the title “Towards an Islamic Concept of History: A Response to Western Historians” had been suggested. As someone who is occupying himself with the teaching of and the research on various aspects of the history of the Muslims<sup>56</sup> I considered this task also an excellent opportunity for arranging and putting down to paper my own thoughts on this not only for historians momentous subject. However, I then thought it appropriate to change the proposed title in order to extend the focus towards the addressing of attitudes of non-Muslim and Muslim scholarship as well. The present bipartite article constitutes the text of the aforesaid Singapore lecture.

The underlying principal design of this essay is the sincere attempt of doing away with certain stereotyping and demonizations of the respective ‘other’ (i.e. ‘*the Muslim*’ and ‘*the non-Muslim*’) in order to ‘diagnose’ *properly* shortcomings in current scholarship on the civilization of the Muslims and furthermore of trying to show ways for possible ‘remedies’. What follows might appear highly personal and at times, even polemical to some. Nonetheless, many of the points that have been made in the present contribution had been compared carefully with the views of friends (Muslims and non-Muslims alike) and are furthermore based on personal experiences as a teacher and when I had been living in various ‘Muslim’ and ‘non-Muslim’ countries and I can confidently say that (as someone who had been a Muslim all his conscious life, a ‘long-time convert’ so to speak). I ‘experienced’ ‘East’ and ‘West’ to the same degree. The perhaps prevailing thought-provoking character of the paper is therefore the result of full intention from my part. I should like to mention that the forthcoming second part of this essay will deal in a similar fashion with some selected problems and shortcomings with regard to *non-Muslim* scholarship on the civilization of Islam.

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<sup>55</sup> At the *Religious Teachers’ Association of Singapore (PERGAS)*, in Singapore on 5th and 6th August 2000.

<sup>56</sup> For the reasons why I am hesitating to apply the term ‘Islamic history’ see *infra*.

## 2. ISLAMIC HISTORY OR HISTORY OF THE MUSLIMS, ONLY A

### MATTER OF HAIRSPLITTING?

Labels are always *evaluating* statements, whether they relate *in reality* to a referred to subject-matter or not. The attribute 'Islamic' seems to be one of those labels. In our daily speech the expression 'Islamic' possesses mainly two qualities: firstly, the word 'Islamic' is commonly used when referring to members of the *Religion of Islam*<sup>57</sup> in order to distinguish them from those of other systems, such as Christians, Hindus and others alike. It should be noted here that the locution 'Islamic' has also been applied with the same connotation, namely as a technical term, in the Qur'<sup>«n</sup>.<sup>58</sup>

However, it is the second application of 'Islamic', namely as an initially referred to *evaluating* statement with which we are concerned with here: the component 'Islamic' in antipodes such as 'Islamic rulers'/'un-Islamic rulers', 'Islamic society'/'un-Islamic society' or 'Islamic countries'/'un-Islamic countries' is already prepossessed by certain ethical connotations. It is however strange (and in my personal view unfortunate since inconsequent) that the parlance 'Islamic history' is common usage whereas we hardly come across the expression '*un*-Islamic history', whether from the part of Muslim or non-Muslim scholars. Applied in this fashion the term 'Islamic' would unconsciously evoke in our mind associations with something what is 'good', 'based on Qur'<sup>«n</sup> and Sunnah' and ultimately with what is 'liked, desired, supported by the Almighty'.

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<sup>57</sup> Confer Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Meaning and Experience of Happiness in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993) [German translation by Muhammad Ismail Marcinkowski under the title *Die Bedeutung und das Erleben von Glückseligkeit in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1998)]. See also Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and the Philosophy of Science* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1989) [German translation by Muhammad Ismail Marcinkowski under the title *Islam und die geistigen Grundlagen von Wissenschaft. übersetzung aus dem Englischen, mit Einleitung* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, forthcoming in 2000)].

<sup>58</sup> For instance, in Qur'<sup>«n</sup> 3 (*fi*-i 'Imr'<sup>«n</sup>): 19.

When it comes to talk about the human capability of judgment and finally to the question of the possibility of human ‘justice’, however, there seems to be no final objectivity since we are all products of our respective socialization and upbringing as well as our religious, cultural and ethnical backgrounds. Humans are prone to judge but they do not like to be judged themselves easily. The application of the term ‘*Islamic* history’ appears therefore to be highly inconsequent, if it is not, in the same way as the above-mentioned antipodes, subjected to ethically based criticism.

As a logical consequence and in my particular understanding then there is no such thing like ‘*Islamic* history’. I would rather prefer to speak of the ‘history of the *Muslims*’ and in the same manner of ‘the civilization of the *Muslims*’ rather than of ‘*Islamic* civilization’. In a quite similar fashion we use to refer to European, Indian or Ottoman history and beyond that of Jewish or Christian history, without necessarily implying any *qualitative* judgement about the respective society or the course of its history. The question to be asked in this context then is: “Why this attitude - that is to say, the attempt to record the pure facts and the actual course of historical events rather than wishful thinking is causing so much problems among Muslims, historians in particular?”

At this place, we should recall what we have just investigated: In the light of all what has been stated so far the expression ‘*Islamic* history’ can rightly be considered an *evaluating* statement. From this follows logically and this is actually the point which I would like to make that it must also be possible to speak about ‘*un-Islamic* history’ (or at least about some parts of it). In the eyes, a considerable part of the early Muslims, for instance, Umayyad rule was certainly ‘*un-Islamic*’ in terms of the personal conduct of the majority of its rulers. This approach has, in my view, nothing to do with the questioning of the teachings of Islam *per se*, but on the contrary, it intends to keep the message of Islam ‘pure’ by pointing the finger on the wounds in order to heal them rather than keeping silence and thus causing the ‘death’ of the entire ‘organism’ or the *ummah*, so to speak. Therefore the term ‘history of the

Muslims' or 'history of the Muslim community', namely its consideration as mere 'cause of events', appears to be more appropriate since it is neutral. This procedure is far from being an attempt to 'secularise' history, or from separating the 'principle of political leadership' from the purely religious tenets. But rather the opposite is the case: Instead of a 'never mind, they still had been Muslims' attitude with regard to the establishment of *mulk* — Umayyad kingship for instance in the Muslim community—I personally would propose an attitude of clear disassociation and *ethically* motivated criticism based on the Islamic sources and the general requirements for any scholarly investigation.

In the light of the just outlined it has hopefully become clear by now that a discussion of the character, nature and development of the history of the civilization and history of the Muslims involves *essential* matters concerning *Weltanschauung* and perception of realities. Therefore, the question whether we should refer to the term 'history of the Muslims as proposed by the present contributor or rather to 'Islamic history' as done by others, cannot be considered as mere 'hair-splitting'.

### **3. SELECTED ASPECTS OF CONTEMPORARY MUSLIM HISTORIOGRAPHY**

Some of us including the present contributor, are studying history ('Islamic' history and civilization, in particular) not only for the sake of earning our 'daily bread' but also because we find certain aspects of it interesting, uplifting, edifying and at times, beautiful and inspiring. On the other hand, however and with respect to something which can be referred to as 'idolization of Islamic history', we should also be aware of certain *misconceptions* from the part of the Muslims in past and present times concerning the question of what are the constituents or components of an 'Islamic' civilization. At times, Muslims too should accept the fact that some of the views held by Muslims *themselves* concerning their own history are simply wrong, distorted and incomplete. We have to understand this in order to be able to perceive and teach history in a proper and adequate manner. We have to see that it are not only some imaginary, stereotyped or even real

‘opponents’, let’s say ‘the orientalist’, ‘the westerners’ or ‘the non-Muslims’ who are the main obstacles to an appropriate understanding and evaluation of ‘Islamic’ history. Often it are rather the Muslims *themselves*. In this regard and in the light of the fact that there is no such thing as complete ‘objectivity’ we also have to state that the true task of a contemporary Muslim historiographer and teacher of history - in fact of *any* scholar in the field of history is to present the greatest hours of a particular culture side by side with its darkest episodes. This can be achieved by referring always to those sources which are considered authentic by the members of a particular religion or culture *themselves*.

It is thus important for a contemporary historian and Muslims should not constitute an exception in this regard to develop in the first place an ability to do justice to others (rather than always expecting it from others) and in the second place to question certain historical developments in the past of one’s own culture. This might at times amount to ‘slaughtering holy cows’, if this metaphor may be allowed. With respect to the history of the Muslims, this shall be exemplified in the following by referring to the so-called ‘Golden Age of Conquests’ after the demise of the Prophet during the first century of the Islamic calendar.

In the eyes of a quite considerable part of the early Muslims for instance, the period of the Umayyad ‘caliphs’, which started in the year 41 AH/661 CE (thus not even three decades after the demise of the Prophet) and lasted upto 127 AH/750 CE, was certainly most ‘un-Islamic’ in terms of the personal conduct of the majority of the rulers. What is usually considered as ‘Islamic’ history is thus not and cannot be *Heilsgeschichte* or ‘history of salvation’ of a kind akin to the *History of the Church* by Eusebius (c. 260-339

CE),<sup>59</sup> but as in the case of the history of other cultures, civilizations and religious systems principally open to constructive criticism.

As a positive example for how to deal appropriately with our early history Dr. YaÁy« Kh«lid Blankenships' excellent book *The End of the Jib«d State. The Reign of Hisb«m Ibn 'Abd al-Malik and The Collapse of the Umayyads*,<sup>60</sup> the work of an American convert and professor at the University of Temple, should be mentioned, which should also serve as an excellent example of what modern Muslim historiography is capable of. Blankenship has a full command over the historical sources and presents the subject matter in a completely scholarly manner without falling back to the category of the ancient storytellers, who still dominate contemporary Muslim historiography. The main design of his book is the search for *rational* explanations for the stagnation of the Muslim conquests under the Umayyads, which go beyond an elaboration on their supposed or actual 'wickedness' and 'impiety'. It is significant to note that, while Blankenship is proceeding from a Muslim's perspective, he is still making full use of the possibilities of contemporary scholarship and scientific methodology (which should actually be standard). His work brings us a step forward on the way of *de-mystifying history*. It has to be stressed here that the 'Age of Conquests' which saw the fall of S««nid Iran and the emergence of a new commonwealth and civilization (rather than 'empire') that stretched over three continents from Central Asia to the Atlantic Ocean, had been considered in the past as something which came about *alone* by the grace of God. Similar views are still current among ordinary Muslims with regard to the circumstances which brought those conquests to a halt. Blankenship, in turn, does not understand 'Muslim scholarship' in a way which 'permits' only the consultation of works compiled by Muslims (a self-restricting banality in itself).

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<sup>59</sup> See Eusebius of Caesarea, *The History of the Church. From Christ to Constantine*, trans. by G.A. Williamson, rev. and ed. with a new introduction by Andrew Louth (London: Penguin, 1989).

<sup>60</sup> Khalid Yahya Blankenship, *The End of the Jib«d State. The Reign of Hisb«m Ibn 'Abd al-Malik and the Collapse of the Umayyads* (Albany: SUNY, 1994).

Unfortunately, Blankenship seems to stand alone in the field, since presently, those Muslim scholars who intend to break out of this vicious circle of dilettantism by trying to follow the standards of modern scholarship (which begins already with banalities such as the proper arrangement of bibliography, footnotes and includes painstaking proof reading and the final appearance as a printed work of scholarship), have to constantly to defend themselves against those of their co-religionists whose real motif might in most cases be found in envy, as a result of the critic's own failure as a scholar. This kind of 'standard-criticism' goes usually under the label 'orientalism' and comes in most cases from the corner of those who deign to refer to themselves as 'Muslim revivalists'.<sup>61</sup> The aforesaid 'standard-criticism', all too often summarized as 'orientalism', is to be found in a somewhat condensed form in the more recent booklet *Subverting Islam: The Role of Orientalist Centres* by Dr. Ahmad Ghorab, where it is stated:<sup>62</sup>

The history of orientalism shows that it was closely connected with the needs and purposes of colonialism and with Christian missionary ambitions. That connection remains. It has now become a part of the geo-political strategies of Western governments and their intelligence services. Western study of Islam as a formal discipline has long been established in specialist faculties called 'Oriental Institutes', the best known founded as long ago as the early and mid-eighteenth century. They have since spread much further and are now called 'centres' for 'Islamic studies'. The change of mind is certainly intended to deceive Muslims who naturally enough would distrust the Oriental Institutes. The purposes (and prejudices) of Orientalism are now offered as

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<sup>61</sup> It should be noted here that the term 'revivalism' is quite inappropriate with regard to Islam. In this regard it should be noted that one can only revive something what been declared 'dead' (and this is perhaps something we do not necessarily want to assume in the case of Islam...).

<sup>62</sup> Ahmad Ghorab, *Subverting Islam. The Role of Orientalist Centres* (Kuala Lumpur: The Open Press, 1995, reprint), pp. 3-4.



‘Islamic studies’; and the purposes of Christian missions are now presented as ‘Christian-Muslim relations’.

Although such kind of impetuous, generalizing and therefore unqualified views might have the sincere intention of creating a certain degree of awareness among practising Muslims (a motif to which the present writer would fully ascribe), it is at the same time perhaps no coincident that the majority of the aforesaid ‘critics’ of those adhering to modern scholarship are themselves including Dr. Ghorab - graduates from and therefore ‘products’ of ‘western’ universities, thus ‘western-’educated, a fact which gives rise to the question of their *own* credibility. Not all ‘orientalists’ are ‘colonizing monsters’, which appears to be a rather stale and stereotyping platitude and which as in Dr. Ghorab’s case is at times digged out in case of ‘usefulness’ for certain political and therefore, short-term reasons.

However, let us now leave the field of polemics in order to search for examples of ‘proper’ historiographical scholarship in our own past, i.e. in the past of Muslim scholarship. Muslim researchers who try to follow the just referred to pattern of scholarly historiography which deserves that name have a good companion in the well-known Maghribine scholar Ibn Khaldën (732-808 AH/1332-1406 CE), who is usually considered as a ‘fore-runner’ of modern ‘sociology’. In fact, his work, which is commonly known as *Al-Muqaddimah* or ‘Introduction’ (to history), and its author, a practising and traditionally educated Muslim scholar after all, seem to be among the earliest quasi ‘precocious’, examples for the ‘analytical approach’ in Muslim historiography,<sup>63</sup> if not beyond. Although the present contributor does not necessarily consider himself as an ‘Ibn-Khaldënist’ or slavish adherent to *all* the theories which are to be found throughout this work. The following ideas by Ibn Khaldën are quite relevant to our subject. Right at the beginning of

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<sup>63</sup> [Walâ al-Dân ‘Abd al-RaĀmĀn b. MuĀammad b. MuĀammad b. Abâ Bakr MuĀammad b. al-Āasan] Ibn Khaldën, *The Muqaddimah. An Introduction to History*, translated from the Arabic by Franz Rosenthal, edited and abridged by N.J. Dawood (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981, Bollingen Paperbacks).

Ibn Khaldën's work we are faced with a statement which strikes us because of its quasi 'modern' premonition: <sup>64</sup>

The (writing of history) requires numerous sources and much varied knowledge. It also requires a good speculative mind and thoroughness which lead the historian to the truth and keep him from slips and errors. If he trusts historical information in its plain transmitted form and has no clear knowledge of the principles resulting from custom, the fundamental facts of politics, the nature of civilization, or the conditions governing human social organization and if furthermore, he does not evaluate remote or ancient material through comparison with near or contemporary material, he often cannot avoid stumbling, slipping and deviating from the path of truth. Historians, Qur'«n commentators and leading transmitters have committed frequent errors in the stories and events they reported. They accepted them in the plain transmitted form without regard for its value. They did not check them with the principles underlying such historical situations, nor did they compare them with similar material. Also, they did not probe with the yardstick of philosophy, with the help of knowledge of the nature of things or with the help of speculation and historical insight. Therefore, they strayed from the truth and found themselves lost in the desert of baseless assumptions and errors. This is especially the case with figures, either of sums of money or of soldiers, whenever they occur in stories. They offer a good opportunity for false information and constitute a vehicle for nonsensical statements. They must be controlled and checked with the help of known fundamental facts.

Ibn Khaldën is rightly to be considered as a pioneering Muslim scholar in his attempt to let prevail reason(ing) and rationality in the science of

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

historiography. Unfortunately, he and his work had been unable to exercise any influence upon the next following generations of Muslim scholars who were to witness the technological, military and political rise of Europe, which is usually referred to by labels such as the 'Age of Discoveries' and similar alike. This regrettable circumstance was on the one hand due to the lack of significant immediate disciples and on the other hand (and perhaps more importantly) to the prevailing intellectual climate during that time which seems to have prevented a somewhat more speculative rational approach in the science of historiography. In the view of the present author, it is this conscious *denying* and at times suppression of reasoning Muslim authorities and scholars which led to the problem of replying *effectively* to the impact of what is usually subsumed under the locution 'the West'. This denial of reform made Muslims to consider 'the West' as a threat only, not as a challenge and an inspiration to find new solutions (which, however, may still be differing from 'the West').

It seems that the *early* Muslims' attitude had been different in this regard. Although they too had to face the challenges of their non-Muslim neighbours militarily or otherwise, that had not been subject of this 'anxiety of contact' (which is at times accompanied by a kind of 'inferiority complex') to other civilizations or value-systems which we have to witness in our times among many of the Muslims of all levels of society. In my personal understanding this completely different, more 'open-minded' attitude of the earlier Muslims (for instance, during the early 'Abbasid period which saw a unique flourishing of the entire then known sciences and furthermore of theology, philosophy and the arts) is the fruit of their firmness in the tenets of the Islamic belief and value-system which in turn resulted in the state of 'being-sure-of-oneself' and ultimately in tolerance. Tolerance doesn't mean here to ascribe to other, non-Muslim theological views, but refers rather to patience and love to God, Who is the only One Who guides. Muslims of those times, for instance, did not see any difficulties in adapting the sciences of the Hellenes and others and applying them to their own needs and

requirements. I am deeply convinced that it was this open attitude of the earlier generations of Muslims in general which attracted non-Muslims to enter into the Religion of Islam.

With regard to our topic we have to state clearly that what remains of the job of a Muslim historian is a close approximation to the *facts*. In a historiographical study, for instance, we have to consider as many reliable and well-documented sources as possible and to refrain from mixing up (legitimate) commentary and interpretation with the presentation of facts. Again, as in the case of serious journalism, scholarly information and commentary for whatever purpose should be separated from each other. Benchmark in cases of doubt during the final evaluation are, of course, Qur'ān and Sunnah and the ethics derived there from side by side with the guidelines of reasoning. This practice of referring to the Sunnah should, by the way, apply to both denominations within Islam, namely Sunnites and Shā'ites, although the latter are relying on a somewhat extended corpus of Traditions (to which they add those attributed to their respective Imāms).

Another point which I would like to make and which is significantly linked to the us here concerning topic of contemporary Muslim historiography (i.e. ultimately the way in which the civilization of the Muslims is presented to the readers of works concerned with history) is the circumstance that the entire religion/civilization of Islam is today often rejected in the West and elsewhere not because of supposed 'unattractiveness' of its teachings (for instance, the dress code and the various prescriptions concerning food etc.), but rather in the manner Islam is practised by the mass of the Muslims and more importantly in the way 'the others', non-Muslims, are dealt with in daily Muslim life and how they are portrayed in the literary sources. It is a matter of fact that Islam is today among non-Muslims in 'the West' considered as a religion of 'the East' only (somewhat similar to Buddhism or Hinduism) which has ultimately no bearing upon them because of its supposed limited 'cultural scope'. It is true that this regrettable circumstance might be the result of certain

misconceptions from the part of ‘the Westerners’ themselves and that Islam *does* in fact emphasise cultural understanding and the unity of humanity.

However, this noble message, which addresses the *entire* mankind, gets today all too often lost among tendencies which try to ‘nationalize’ Islam, which are distorting it thus to Arabic, Turkish, Iranian, Malay and otherwise caricatures of the original, supra-national meaning and which stress supposed cultural and at times, ethnic differences. It is in the view of the present writer very saddening that this kind of attitude usually ascribed to the ‘colonialists’ and ‘the West’ is nowadays prevailing in contemporary Muslim historiography. At times, this kind of attitude can also be subsumed under the label ‘third-worldism’, which over-stresses the role of Islam as a ‘factor of (political) liberation’ of ‘the East’ from ‘the yoke of Western colonialism and imperialism’, thus reducing the noble message of Islam to a few, often ethnicising propaganda bubbles. Authors ascribing to that kind of worldview like Ghorab (himself a ‘western-’educated scholar, as we have already seen above) tend to see in ‘the West’ alone the ‘embodiment of Evil’. Needless to say that this haughty and quasi-ethnizing attitude (which is in constant need for supposed or actual ‘foes’) is unable to see in converts to Islam with a different cultural background an enrichment, in particular if he happens to be a ‘Westerner’. Again, it should be emphasized that it is essential to overcome anxieties by trying to get to know each other without necessarily giving up prerogatives. Falling into stereotyping however, such as ‘ethnicism’ (to say the least) and religious prejudice is a sign of fear and insecurity of one’s own religion. Criticism from the part of converts (whether during the days of the Umayyad kingdom or today, for instance by the present writer) is all too often rejected by ‘born Muslims’, who seem to ignore the fact that the first Muslim was himself a ‘convert’.

Apparently, the early Muslims did not face the presently prevailing problem of keeping in contact with ‘other’, non-Muslim civilizations, since they were lacking this all-penetrating ‘inferiority-complex’ which we come across today. The early Muslims had no difficulty in travelling and describing

other value systems and cultures, which they considered to be an enrichment—not a danger—to their own. The present writer is aware of the fact that here is not the place for analysing ‘decline’ and ‘stagnation’ which the civilization of the Muslims was facing during later periods. However, rather than constantly lamenting the effects of ‘colonialism’ (in a similar fashion as in the case of the already referred to issue of ‘orientalism’) which is rather a *result*, not a *cause*, it is essential to analyse properly certain purely *internal* political events in the history of the Muslims which affected their mind-setting and intellectual activity in a negative paralysing manner and which hindered them from responding effectively to what is commonly known as ‘the impact of the West’.

#### **4. CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM IN THE LEARNED TRADITION OF THE MUSLIMS: THE *NaĀĀĀat*-OR ‘ADVISE-GENRE’**

That Muslims do not have to start from the beginning in terms of *constructive criticism* will become clear by considering the fact that we possess in the literary tradition of the Muslims a treasure and a richness which is hardly rivalled by any other civilization. The stratagem or the main objective of *NaĀĀĀat* or ‘advise-literature’, which constitutes a separate genre of *constructive criticism* within the framework of the administrative literature of the Muslims, is that *theory and practice* have to be in constant agreement, quasi in a kind of balance with each other. Already more than 900 years ago, for instance, the ideals of Islamic administration had been put to paper by NiĀm al-Mulk (408-85/1018-92) the famous vizier (‘Prime Minister’ we would rather say today) of the SaljĀqs, in his famous work *Siyar al-MulĀk*, ‘Conduct of Kings’, which is perhaps more commonly known as *SiyasatnĀmah NiĀm al-Mulk*, then, provides us with the outline or better the touchstone, with regard

to how to proceed with regard to Islamic administration. In his *Siyasatnāmah* he states:<sup>65</sup>

It is for kings to observe His [namely God's] pleasure (His name be glorified) and the pleasure of The Truth is in the charity which is done to His creatures and in the justice which is spread among them. A kingdom which is blessed by its people will endure and increase from day to day, while its king will enjoy power and prosperity; in this world he will acquire good fame, in the next world salvation and his reckoning will be easier. Great men have said, 'A kingdom may last while there is irreligion, but it will not endure when there is oppression.

It is thus the idea and the ideal of *justice* which is to determine those of the Muslims and not only them who are employed in responsible positions dealing with administrative matters. It is to us highly interesting that Nīkam al-Mulk does not link the requirement of the prevailing of justice necessarily to religion, Islam in particular. It is essential to understand that the expression 'non-practical' administrative literature doesn't mean here 'not being practicable' or 'being rather complicated in nature'. 'Non-practical' means here rather *ethically motivated advise-literature* which is in the context of Islamic literary tradition also referred to as the *Nā'āt*- or *Mirrors of Princes*-genre. Belonging to this 'ethical' type are works such as the aforesaid *Siyasatnāmah*<sup>66</sup> by Nīkam al-Mulk and the *Nā'āt al-Mulūk* by the theologian

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<sup>65</sup> Nīkam al-Mulk [al-Āsan b. 'Alā al-ñĒĀ], *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings*, trans. Hubert Darke (London, Henley, and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978, 2d ed.), p. 12.

<sup>66</sup> On the *Siyasatnāmah* see also Ann K. S. Lambton, "Quis Custodiet Custodes. Some Reflections on the Persian Theory of Government," *Studia Islamica* 5 (1955), pp. 130-1, 133 and 144. On the *Nā'āt*-genre in the Āfavid context see also William C. Chittick, "Two Seventeenth-Century Persian Tracts on Kingship and Rulers," in: *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism*, ed. Said Amir Arjomand (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1988), pp. 267-304; Mu'ammad Taqā Dānishpazhēh, "An Annotated Bibliography on Government and Statecraft," trans., adapt. Andrew Newman, in: *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism*, ed. Said Amir Arjomand (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press,

Abë Ā«mid al-Ghaz«lâ al-ñëĀâ (450-505/ 1059/60-1111).<sup>67</sup> To this genre of ‘non-practical’ administrative literature we would like to subsume also works of a somewhat more theoretical character such as *Al-AĀk«m al-SulĀ«niyyah* by the Sh«fite jurist Al-M«wardâ (364-450/974-1058)<sup>68</sup> since he deals with *desired* circumstances and not with political *facts* that had been prevailing during his lifetime, i.e. the transition-period between the domination of the caliphate by the Bëyids and Saljëqs, respectively. To this category belongs also the *Akhl«q-i N«Āirâ*, written in elaborate Persian by the eminent Twelver Shâite philosopher and scientist Khw«jah NaĀâr al-Dân ñëĀâ (597-672/1201-74),<sup>69</sup> a work which been intended by its author to serve as an introduction to ‘practical philosophy’. Khw«jah NaĀâr al-Dân flourished during Iran’s Ýlkh«nid or Mongol period hold himself high administrative posts.

Exceptions of a more ‘practical’ character from among those ‘advise’-works are the *Rusëm D«r al-Khikfah* which had been compiled by the convert

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1988), pp. 213-39. Apparent Persian influence in Malay *naĀâĀat*-literature had already been stressed by Sir Richard Winstedt, in particular with regard to the *T«j al-Sak«Āân*, a work of seemingly Persian origin, which had been translated into Malay in 1012/1603: see his *A History of Classical Malay Literature*, revised, edited and introduced by Yusof A. Talib (Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society Reprint No.12) (Kuala Lumpur: MBRAS 1996, 2d impression), pp. 95-7 and 204-9. For the alleged Persian origin see *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>67</sup> See A. K. S. Lambton, “The Theory of Kingship in the *NaĀâĀat al-Mulëk* of Ghaz«lâ,” *Islamic Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1954), pp. 47-55.

<sup>68</sup> [Abë'l-Āasan ‘Alâ b. MuĀammad b. Āabâb] al-M«wardâ, *The Ordinances of Government. A Translation of Al-AĀk«m al-SulĀ«niyya w'al-Wikyat al-Dâniyya*, trans. Wafaa H. Wahba (Reading: Garnet Publishing Ltd., 1996); Lambton, “Quis Custodies Custodes,” *Studia Islamica* 5 (1955), pp. 128. On single aspects consult also H. F. Amedroz, “The Office of Kadi in the *Abkam Sultaniyya* of Mawardi,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1910), pp. 761-96, and idem, “The Mazalim Jurisdiction in the *Abkam Sultaniyya* of Mawardi,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1911), pp. 635-74.

<sup>69</sup> NaĀâr ad-Dân ñësâ, *The Nasirean Ethics*, trans. G.M. Wickens (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1964). See also M. Minovi and V. Minorsky, “NaĀr al-Dân ñësâ on Finance,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 10 (1941), pp. 755-89; Lambton, “Quis Custodies Custodes,” *Studia Islamica* 5 (1955), pp. 141-2 and 146.



Hikl al-Â«bâ‘ (359-448/969-1056)<sup>70</sup> which deals with the organization of the court administration during the ‘Abb«sid period, and a chapter in the *Maf«tâ‘ al-‘Ul«m* by Al-Khw«rizmâ (fl. 2nd half of the 4th/10th century)<sup>71</sup> with emphasis on the practice under the S«m«nids. However, although Hikl al-Â«bâ‘ described in his treatise administrative practice it should be understood that this practice, similar in the case of the already referred to al-M«wardâ, had by their time, i.e. the B«yid and then Salj«k domination already become obsolete. Thus, both works belong still to the genre of ‘non-practical’ advise-literature.

The *Na‘â‘ât*- or ‘advise-genre’ flourished also in the Ottoman empire<sup>72</sup> and in the empire of the Indian Tâmerids or Mughals. A well-researched example for the genre from the late 10th/16th century is Mu‘Çaf« ‘ÿlâs (948-1008/1541-1599) *Nu‘â‘ât al-Sal«Çân*<sup>73</sup> or ‘Counsel for Sultans’ which he compiled in Ottoman-Turkish. In fact, the Ottoman literary tradition is particularly rich of administrative literature, whether ‘practical or ‘non-practical. In particular, amazing is the frankness and open but constructive

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<sup>70</sup> Hikl al-Â«bâ‘, *Rus«m D«r al-Khik«fab* (*The Rules and Regulations of the ‘Abbasid Court*), trans., intro. and annot. Elie A. Salem (Beirut: Lebanese Commission for the Translation of Great Works, 1977).

<sup>71</sup> Translated into English by Clifford Edmund Bosworth, “Ab« ‘Abdall«h al-Khw«rizmâ on the Technical Terms of the Secretary’s Art: A Contribution to the Administrative History of Medieval Islam”, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 12, no. 2 (1969), pp. 113-64.

<sup>72</sup> On Ottoman ‘advise-literature’ in general see Rhodes Murphy, “Ottoman Historical Writing in the Seventeenth Century: A Survey of the General Development of the Genre after the Reign of Sultan Ahmed I (1603-1617)”, *Archivum Ottomanicum* 13 (1993-4), p. 282; Franz Taeschner, “Die Osmanische Literatur”, in: *Handbuch der Orientalistik*, 1. Abteilung, Band V, 1. Abschnitt (Leiden & Cologne: E.J. Brill, 1982), pp. 313-4.

<sup>73</sup> Refer to Andreas Tietze (ed., trans.), *Mustafa Ali’s Council for Sultans of 1581*, 2 vols. (Vienna: österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse: Denkschriften, vols. 137 and 158, 1979 and 1982). Refer on ‘Ali furthermore to Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire. The Historian Mustafa Ali (1541-1600)* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986); Taeschner, “Die Osmanische Literatur”, 312-3, Murphy, “Ottoman Historical Writing in the Seventeenth Century”, 302-3, and Franz Babinger, *Die Geschichtsschreiber der Osmanen und ihre Werke* (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1927), 144-145, no. 120.

criticism which we come across in the field of the Ottoman *Mirror of Princes*-genre. Unfortunately, the given framework does not allow elaborating further on this exciting subject. Thus, Mu'ÄÇafâ 'ÿlâ, who as a member of the higher Ottoman administrative class, knew what he was talking about when he described the mores of many of his colleagues during his time in the following fashion:<sup>74</sup>

To sum up, this humble slave, watching carefully has [always] seen the vezirs in pleasure and luxury enjoying themselves without end in their palaces and gardens and the other members of the Imperial council occupied with the acquisition of money and property, always going along with the vezirs, should they even order the abrogation of justice. Likewise have I found those that were closest to the ruler and occupied high offices with the ruler's favours and bounties being showered upon them to be silent *vis-à-vis* this problem.

## 5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

By now it should have become clear that the foundations for constructive criticism within the framework of the civilization of the Muslims, especially with regard to historiography are just in front of us. The pure fact of the existence of *ethically motivated advise-literature* in the historiographical tradition of the Muslims exemplifies perhaps best the circumstance that the history of the Muslims has not been immune from the errors and shortcomings to be found in other civilizations since we are all humans and in need of guidance.

Another positive lesson to be learnt from the above stated is that in the future a more 'interdisciplinary approach', bringing together international scholars of a wide range of fields, such as philosophers of history, experts in administration, architects, scientist, authorities in the fields of Islamic

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<sup>74</sup> Tietze, (ed., trans.), *Mustafa Ali's Council for Sultans of 1581*, vol. 1, p. 19 (with orthographical corrections by the present writer).

economic thought, history and alike, is urgently needed in order to cover a wide range of aspects concerning Muslim life, since it is the latter, namely *life*, which should be the focal point of any scholarly interest. In that manner we might be able to 'turn to life' the picture of a *truly* 'Islamic' civilization, a term which refers to a prevailing spirit or *Lebensgefühl* and which is encompassing a wide and varying range of aspects, such as science, administration, language and literature, social life, popular culture and religion. It goes thus far beyond the narrow boundaries of some selected legal aspects, such as the penal code and alike. Unfortunately, it is the last-mentioned legal aspect which still dominates the discussion with regard to 'Islamic civilization'.