

The End of Islamic Spain

This grim series of events marks the conclusion of nine hundred years of active Islamic life in Spain (711–1610), which had brought that country glory and prestige. The great universities or *jawami`* and *madrasahs* which had inspired Western Europe to expand in this line during the 12th and 13th centuries; had been wiped out: Granada was the last of these schools which Ibn Battutah, the Moroccan globetrotter, visited at the end of his travels in the mid 14th century. They now give us a different date for the founding of the University of Granada, after its Christian conquest in the 16th century. And of course it was a different school with different objectives.

The French confiscated college endowments—in similar fashion in 19th century Algeria, as the Italians did in Libya in this present one, and forbade Libyan Muslims from enrolling in them. Thus the five *madrasahs* or Islamic colleges in pre-colonial Algeria were reduced to the *Universite d'Alger*, where students had to speak French in order to enrol in this by then the only institution of higher learning in that colony.

This anti-Islamic system has thus continued till this century and the Algerian revolt, which the policy in part motivated. How different from the city of Montreal with its distinct institutions in both French and English, Catholic, Protestant and secular!

Ironically, a ship full of books sent by the emperor of Morocco, Mulay Zidan, to the Ottoman sultan in Istanbul in Turkey was intercepted in 1611 by Spanish pirates off the port of Sale under Philip III, the king of the final expulsion. This collection or library is now lodged in the Escorial, the `slag heap' as the name means, that gloomy palace and monastery in the hills northwest of Madrid where Philip II withdrew to spend his last years (like the Pedregal or `Lava Field' South of Mexico City where UNAM, the renewed university of Mexico is located).

The Escorial now constitutes the basis of the holdings of Arabic books which have been preserved in Spain, plus those which had been reappearing during the past century, especially in Aragon around Zaragoza, and are now housed in the National Library in Madrid, thanks to the labours of don Julian Ribera and don Eduardo Saavedra. Ironically, this Escorial collection, as we have noted is of Moroccan origin and was seized by Spanish pirates.

The 18th century Maronite librarian Miguel Cassiri could not read the Maghribi script, and therefore catalogued many of these books and manuscripts as of "Turkish and Persian" origin.

The monuments of Granada, Seville and Cordoba now attract the tourists to visit Spain, though often without understanding their full significance and underlying tragedy. Their beauty alone sustains them. The wholesale expulsion of Muslims inflicted havoc and misery every where; it cost the Spanish people one of the most productive sectors in their society, and the best agricultural workers: fruit (peaches, apricots, oranges and other citrus fruit) came to Spain through their husbandry; so did rice and sugar from southern Asia, as did silk and paper.

These industrial processes, not articles of trade, had been brought by Muslim merchants or travellers from China via Persia and Central Asia, as well as porcelain where we see the Chinese blue reappear in Majolica ware. All these were technical processes which had been introduced under Muslim rule.

The economy suffered penury when the country lost its productive workmen in this wanton fashion, Muslim artisans who had laboured diligently in the crafts and agriculture. Hardworking and thrifty shopkeepers, bakers and butchers, water carriers were forced out of business and faced restrictive legislation on their activities everywhere.

The arts and crafts of Spain truly suffered: Mudejar mechanical and technical methods in tile-making, for both floors and walls, which require different processes; carpenters and cabinetmakers (who developed their trade in the high wooden ceilings of the Andean countries, to which some Mudejar workmen were exiled, and whose skill elaborated this safeguard against the earthquakes of that southern continent); blacksmiths and coppersmiths, all suffered exile and penury.

The manufacture of textiles lagged as well, especially cotton and silk weaving in Granada, Seville and Pastrana. The making of woollen blankets and rugs also declined. The silk industry was brought centuries before by Muslim traders from China, as was that of paper, whose raw material was esparto grass grown around Valencia. Hundreds of silk works and countless tile factories are said to have gone out of business in the Seville region alone.

Irrigation engineering, especially in and around Valencia's *Huerta*, suffered from the expulsion of its best workmen. Farms and fields lay abandoned in the Alpujarras mountains southeast of Granada. Generally trade was stifled in those parts of Spain where Muslim or "Morisco" workmen, the busy and talented Mudejars, had plied their trade.

Many Spanish names and words are Arabic in origin, and alive today (but seldom "Moorish" ones – the only truly Berber words in modern Spanish are *jinete* from the Zanata tribe, for 'horseman', 'rider'; and *zanahoria* for 'carrot'). *Alfarero* for 'potter'; *albanil* meaning 'mason' or 'builder' in Spanish, from *al-Banna'* (whose name appears in that of IIsan al-Banna' of Egypt, the founder of the Muslim Brethren in this century); *alcalde* from *al-qadi* ('judge') but now meaning 'mayor' in Latin America; words like *azulejo* from *az-zulayj* for 'tile', so important for Islamic decoration on floors and walls with its

ongoing, "endless" patterns that seek the pure infinity of God; *almohada* from *al-mukhaddah* for 'pillow'; *azucar* for 'sugar' which comes ultimately from Indian and Sanskrit.

The havoc which these murderers and sadists created throughout Spanish society still demands redress. The great Spanish genocides should be named and condemned for their vandalism and murder of peaceful Spanish citizens; the arch criminals were: Ximenez de Cisneros, to begin with, who started the unholy action; Pedro de Deza who assisted him in these crimes; Diego de Deza (two of them), and Diego de Espinosa, who worked with Philip II, that gloomy monarch, reflecting perhaps the madness of his grandmother Jane; and Jaime Bleda, that last great genocide in the employ of Philip III. These men were fanatics of the first order whose zeal ruined their native country for two centuries.

The laws that sustained these abuses should be formally rescinded: these breaches of human rights need to be redressed in this more liberal age of human history. Some were in effect as late as this century, notably as regulations against Protestant chapels and mosques, like the one in the Ceuta market; any Protestant church in Spain was forbidden to show what it was outwardly, and had to be disguised till after the Franco era. The mosque in Ceuta lies downstairs next to the public toilets in the market, for the country folk who come there to pray. These ugly laws need to be revoked formally, and, if possible, the property seized restored to the international Islamic community.

In Argentina today, the only Muslim name that is permitted by the public registry offices is Omar. The present president, Carlos Menem, although born a Muslim of Syrian descent, was obliged to declare himself a Catholic before he could run for president of that country. The Tatars in Poland in this century were similarly forced to become Catholics if they wanted to remain in that country.

This does not represent religious freedom, but reflects the Counter-Reformation of Europe that drove the Protestants and Socinians from Poland, whereas they survived in Hungary because the Ottoman government there protected all Christian sects.

This struggle for religious freedom is not over if we consider how the Turks are treated in Bulgaria today, or the Muslims in Central Asia: Since these laws and their effects remain until this day, it is not an internal Spanish matter but an international problem which still demands solution not subject to internal jurisdiction.

Islamic centres of authority and worship were all destroyed in Spain; these should be reconstituted wherever possible as they were during that country's greatest glory. The ongoing holocaust of the Palestinians witnesses the continuation of such illegal practices till this day.

On the other hand, the Muslim actors in this tragedy are too often anonymous, like our Young Man from Arevalo, or bore "Christian" names they were forced to assume. The Granadines had squabbled among themselves; they were not entirely innocent victims, but to some extent deserved their fate, especially the quarrelling upper classes.

This verdict applies to the royal family and the nobles, not the industrious citizenry: the Zagirs and Avencerrajes (*banu Sarraj* or 'Saddlers') carried on feuds that ruined the kingdom in the last half of the 15th century before the Christian conquest, quarrels which the Castilians and Aragonese were more than happy to take advantage of. Boabdil (*Abu `Abdillah*), the last ineffectual sultan or king, as his mother said, "wept like a woman over what he could not defend as a man " at the Moor's Last Sign on the highway going up the hills leading to the south coast, where he would embark for exile in Morocco. In his train Leo Africanus may have gone, but as a young boy.

Sadly they recall other Spanish exiles: Ibn 'Arabi, the mystic from Murcia in the 13th century who is buried in Damascus; and Ibn Khaldun from a distinguished Sevillian family which was exiled in 1248 by Ferdinand III. The latter scholar wrote a philosophy of history centuries before Spengler and Toynbee, and founded sociology long before August Comte ever thought of it.

Likewise we should recall the now nameless people who died at their own expense in the Inquisitorial prisons by the hundreds, or were roasted at the stake all up the East coast of Spain so the civil authority cynically would not "have blood on their hands."

Maqqari, the Algerian historian wrote *Nafh, al-Tib* or 'The Fragrant Breath' in the 17th Century to record Andalusian history. This vast field needs study. This is history that we Muslims should know, five hundred years after the fact, and not the myths and legends that tourists half learn about Spain's decline into religious and political intolerance.

Americo Castro's book on *Espaaca en su historia* which Professor Edmund King of Princeton translated into English as *The Structure of Spanish History* (Princeton University Press 1954) likewise challenges the official version of Spanish history.

Spain thus became a closed society in the 17th century, suffering a general intellectual depression that was so different from the glorious Umayyad caliphate of the 10th century or the philosophic decades that followed. Most Spaniards now lived in ignorance of real theological issues except that they knew that they were Catholics, although they did not know how to discuss these issues with outsiders.

The "Holy" Office was finally abolished by the Cortes or Spanish parliament in 1813 after the Napoleonic wars (but Simon Bergaiio never returned from his Cuban exile). Islam has never been so ruthless nor abusive of human rights in its age of glory in Spain, except possibly for the so-called "martyrs" of Cordoba who persistently sought their "martyrdom" in the 9th century under `Abdurrahman II.

Under constant pressure the authorities were finally obliged to punish them under the prevailing law of blasphemy. The Turks in the Balkans protected the churches of Byzantium and Rome which had oppressed the Bogomils, ancestors of the contemporary Bosnian and Albanian Muslims. The Hungarian Protestants survived as well because the liberal Ottoman religious policy protected them from the suppression they encountered in Poland, Lithuania, and we might add, Hapsburg Austria. The Greek Patriarchate remains in Istanbul, or as they prefer to call it, Constantinople, and not in Athens or

Moscow. These facts of religious freedom need to be remembered in this age of freedom.

A rise in highway robbery had resulted from the general oppression and loss of livelihood, although the robbers were not always Muslims or Moriscos. If a "Morisco" were met on the high road away from home, he could be searched, taken prisoner and even killed by any Christian neighbour (or *vecino*).

The state no longer protected Muslims in their lives, property or beliefs. This lack of responsibility on the part of Spanish public authorities for the general welfare of all citizens, and the suffering by the generally peace-loving public lay like a pall over Spanish society for the next two hundred years.

More than one hundred thousand peaceful and valuable Muslim citizens are estimated to have been expelled from Old and New Castile alone in 1610. A figure of 200,000 has been suggested as the number expelled from all Spain by some persons desirous of making the havoc seem minor but this is low; while the official version of 300,000 is uncertain as well.

Perhaps as many as two million were exiled or displaced. Certainly it was enough people to disrupt both industry and agriculture, which suffered drastically, especially in the prevailing climate of fear; the whole economy of Spain was stifled in important sectors for decades if not for two centuries at least.

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