Review Essay

Toward the Islamization of History: A Historical Survey

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History, or more properly the writing of history, had been during the times of the ancient Greeks and Romans an elitist activity, meant for glorifying the class of power, position, and birth. Parts of these histories were fabulous in nature. The Muslims (Arabs) introduced the idea of history as factual record. During the Middle Ages, history writing slipped into what it was in the Greco-Roman times. In the 16th century, the middle class, those with accumulated capital, wrote histories. A colonial history, too, developed, enshrining a Euroean view of history that still continues in school curricula. The 20th century saw changes. The writing of history became an imperialist necessity. When imperialism collapsed, the focus disappeared. History became miniaturized and atomized. The entry of television and information technology brought instant histories. Islamic history writing accepts history as an instrument of Allah's will and mode of living the good life.

Generally, mankind is and has been concerned with history. How could it be otherwise? The desire to be remembered and to shape experience are powerful incentives. Of course, writing from an entirely neutral perspective is not possible. All observers have explicit and implicit agendas. This article's goal is to note and analyze these agendas and to show how the historical slant has grown decidedly Euro-American.

The Greeks, the Romans, and All That

It is usual to consider historiography as a distinct discipline, from the times of the ancient Greeks, who considered it part (even as a vulgar part) of their wide-ranging intellecutal activities. It is usual, too, to drive a wedge between classical and late-classical Greek history writing. A modern commentator and translator, speaking of Plutarch (100 C.E.), notes:

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> Plutarch is, as it were, a backward-looking writer standing on the last range which divided the pagan civilization from the Christian. He lacks the startlingly original and impersonal quality of Periclean literature, just as that literature lacks his intimacy on the one hand and the breadth of his tolerance and philanthropy on the other. He was no Thucydides, applying a ruthlessly objective analysis to uncover the historical process. He was a lover of tradition, and his prime object was at once to cherish and understand the greatness of the past and to reassert it as a living ideal.[1]

Even Thucydides (460–399 B.C.E.) in the *Peloponnesian Wars,* however, did not write any neutral history. He wrote from the point of view of an establishment aristocrat, confronting the hoi polloi, where Greek society was essentially that of his own class, and the value system he was advocating was pure elitism. This concern runs through like a gold thread in such breath-taking histories as Xenophon's (444–359 B.C.E.) *Anabasis.*

There is not much to differentiate Thucydides from Plutarch, once the variation in style is conceded. Though Plutarch was backward looking, "standing on the last range which divided the pagan civilization from the Christian," both were standing for a well-read elitist class. And the last range was not all that precipitous. The pagan civilization, through Latin, cognate in time and space with Greek, infiltrated the early Christendom and even the ecclesiastical hierarchy, through the Vagantes, the underground verses of such as the archpoet and the deep concern with Latin and Greek verse and prose, as demonstrated by Helen Waddell in her *Wandering Scholars.* (The ancient Greeks were xenophobic about others' languages. For instance, Herodotus, while being expansive about Egyptian and Persian civilizations, was wholly convinced that Greek was effortlessly superior to Egyptian or Persian languages.) Ancient Greek history, along with its successors, was a class (elitist) history, written by and for the members of that class and unrufulled by involvement with serfs, slaves, helots, and plebs.

Roman or Latin history took after its Greek ancestor. Its histories were either self-congratulatory or offered an elitist view of life. The former type was often written by successful generals, as Julius Caesar's *Gallic Wars.* (Histories written by politicians or generals, while they give an immediacy not available elsewhere, usually suffer from a personalized view of everything. This is just as true of modern histories, such as that of Sir Winston Churchill, particularly his *Hinge of Fate.*)

The second kind of Roman history was written by poets, orators, and government officials, all of whom were members of the Roman establish-

ment. And the views of that class and group were retained by those historians. For instance, Suetonius (Gaius Tranqillus) (fl. 99 C.E.), a son of a Roman knight and himself chief secretary to Emperor Hadrian, approvingly cites one of Augustus Caesar's policies. He wrote, in his history *The Twelve Caesars:*

> Augustus thought it most important not to let the native Roman stock be tainted with foreign or servile blood, and was therefore very unwilling to create new Roman citizens, or to permit the manumission of more than a limited number of slaves. . . . (Not only did he make it extremely difficult for slaves to be freed, and still more difficult for them to attain full independence.[2])

Suetonius was equally supportive of the class (group) distinctions which Augustus maintained. Referring to the same emperor, Suetonius noted, with scandalized admiration, that he treated the lower orders with excessive kindness.

> It will be enough to record that a fine was the sole punishment he awarded Junius Novatus, plebian, for circulating a most damaging libel on him under the name of Agrippa Postumus . . . [Augustus's] morning audiences were open to commoners as well as knights and senators, and he behaved very sociably to all who came with requests.[3]

As the early Middle Ages faded away, European historiography turned upon itself. With the breakdown of civil administration and the rise of warlords (as kings) in many parts of Europe, consequent to the collapse of the Roman Empire, the ruling elite became less educated than it was. Learning became a clerical (ecclesiastical) monopoly. Historiography split into two categories. One kind was regional and parochial histories written by abbeys and convents. An important example of this genre was the history of England by the venerable Bede. Though anecdotal in part, it is suffused with the immediacy of life in Jarrow. The other kind was history as a collection of adventurous episodes, with a strong slant toward Christianity and a looking down on other peoples. They easily passed into ballads and folktales and connected up with tales of chivalry, as associated with the mythical King Arthur's Round Table and the quest for the Grail. Equally mythical figures such as Prestor John, king of Africa, were employed as part of the universal over-arching reach of Christianity.[4]

Meanwhile, the influence of Islam had created a new kind of men-of-letters, who were more properly physical and social scientists. Even some of the European scholars of the nineteenth century, who were broad-minded, were appreciative of the efforts of the Muslim scholars. Speaking of the events during the eighth and eleventh centuries, Sir James Emerson Tennent (1804–69), parliamentarian, lawyer, colonial administrator, and historian, noted in his survey of Arab historiography:

> Accurate knowledge was essential for the civil government of their conquests, and the pilgrimage to Mekka, indispensable once at least in the life of every Mahometan, rendered the followers of the new faith acquainted with many countries in addition to their own.
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> Hence the records of their voyages, though presenting numerous exaggerations altogether incredible, exhibit a superiority over the productions of the Greeks and the Romans. To avoid the fault of dullness, both the latter were accustomed to enliven their topographical itineraries, not so much by "moving accidents" and "hair-breadth scapes," as by mingling fanciful descriptions of monsters and natural phenomena, with romantic accounts of the gems and splendours of the East. Hence from Ctesias to Sir John Mandeville, every early traveller in India had his "hinto to speak," and each strove to embellish his story by incorporating with the facts he had witnessed, improbable reports collected from the representations of others. Such were their excesses in this direction, that the Greeks formed a class of "paradoxical" literature, by collecting into separate volumes the marvels and wonders gravely related by their voyagers and historians.
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> The Arabs, on the contrary, with sounder discretion, generally kept their "travellers histories" distinct from their sober narratives, and whilst the marvellous incidents related by adventurous seamen were received as materials for the storytellers and romancers, the staple of their forms of government, their institutions, their productions, and their trade.[5]

In support of his statements, Tennent referred to such writers as Strabo, P. Mela, Pliny, Aelian, Diodorus Siculus, Agathemerus, Arriani, and Ptolemy.[6]

It is, of course, true that the early historians were geographers, too. Sometimes there was much geography and at other times, there was less. But without geography, there could be no history. A sense of geography is always important to the historian and to the reader.

History in the Premodern Age

The capture of Constantinople by the Turkish sultan toward the end the fifteenth century was presumably the time when Europe began to think afresh. The diffusion of the classics of the ancient Greeks and the Romans and their acceptance into the universities and abbeys of Europe, it was said, was the beginning of the intellectual enlivening of Europe, which was to result in the Renaissance. The intellectually alive began to think anew, to fashion new theories, and to experiment with new notions and attitudes, freed from the mind-set of Aristotelianism and Platonism. But more important was the rise of the nation-state and the emergence of elites of principalities, eager to use the resources of their principalities for themselves alone.

The elites among the Italian city-states were among the earliest to realize their identity, their unity, and their monolithic integrity.[7] But it was the larger nation-states, England, France, Spain, and Portugal, that realized totally the historicity of their middle-class elites. The suppression of the monasteries and the reduction of the ecclesiastical establishment made England the pioneer, in this respect. That elite had accumulated capital, and it needed possible avenues of investment.

Imperialism formed an easy answer. The privateers who regularly robbed the Spanish merchantmen and bullion vessels became the sinews and the merchants of London, with their concept of "chartered companies," the funding sources of their investment. As a result, an imperial history developed. Richard Hakluyt was assiduous in the collection of travellers tales. These tales, historic and geographic, treated the other races of the world as objects to be exploited. There were microstudies, like the antiquarian works on London by Stow. And the reminder to the past times historiography was Sir Walter Raleigh's *History of the World,* written while he was prisoner in the Tower of London, awaiting execution. The peculiar circumstances of its composition could not make it a significant work.

Western Colonialism and History

Western colonialism, spearheaded by Portugal and Spain, then joined by England, France, Netherlands and later Germany and the United States (briefly), shaped the writing of history. This dynamic process brings us close to the nineteenth century. History, then, split into three levels. There were, for instance, the historiography of travel, which contained much current history of the foreign lands. In Britain, Richard Hakluyt and others

after him assiduously collected all the manuscripts of the famed travels of the day and brought them into print and made them available to the Good and the Great. (Even today, the society in his name publishes editions of those classics.) These books were a handy guide to the rich opportunities that lay for them in the remoter lands, and forming chartered companies and fitting out merchantmen to Asia and the Far East was no mere adventures but lucrative business. If foreign commerce was the engine of growth of expanding capitalism, then travel-history writing was its lubricant.

There was, too, the sort of general history which held itself aloof from personal inclinations and strove to find out hidden historical meanings. Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is an erudite example. With a mass of primary and secondary material, Gibbon was able to give a secular history, and Voltaire wrote according to their lights.

But the most persistent colonial history was being fashioned at a different level. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the British, the Dutch, and the French had secured a substantial portion of the globe as their colonial possession. Into the schools of these colonies, these paramount powers introduced the subject of history. These studies were articulated as world history, European history, and indigenous history. The last one incorporated the history of the colonized country (colony) where the schools were situated. Thus, this was a history in which the people of the ruling country as well as the educated (or would-be educated) of the ruled people participated. In the course of time, the educational infrastructure which maintained the curriculum, of which history was one subject, grew with the increase in population.

Thousands, even millions of textbooks, commentaries, cribs, synopses, and teachers' textbooks were published. Publishing houses flourished, mainly in the ruling countries. Behind these instructional works of history were the theoretical and systems-making books, from which the ruling ideas were derived. All of them were cognizant of the civilizing roles of the colonial powers. Some, referring to the British experience, were brash (Seeley is one example); others were more discreet.

Even books on British history had a sense of complete assurance. For instance, Gardner's work on the Tudors presents that monarchy as the decision makers of the most dynamic and strongest power of Europe rather than as a recently established kingship of Europe's frontier island. All these views were systematically and continuously piped into the colonial schools, colleges, higher learning institutes, and training colleges. A closer look at

the content of history teaching in the colonies seems necessary. And the British model was and is the most pervasive.

It ranged over not only the White Commonwealth countries, but also the Indian subcontinent, Sri Lanka, Burma, Malaysia, British Africa and islands such as Fiji and Trinidad. In this environment, history writing was a graphic presentation of the British presence. From the primary school, the secondary school, the tertiary colleges, this history was served in different formats but with the same underlying scheme, the status and function of *Pax Brittanica*. The core module, surveyed the entire gamut of history (mainly European history) in neat chunks, which could be chronologically systematized as follows:

The Old Stone Age
The New Stone Age
The Bronze (and other) Ages
The Middle East Civilizations
  Egyptian, Sumerian, Babylonian, Assyrian, etc. (as far as they impinged on Britain and Europe)
The Eastern Civilizations
  The Indian Classical Age
  The Chinese (very brief)
The Greek Civilization
The Roman Civilization
The Dark Ages
The Middle Ages (an amorphous period)
The Renaissance
The Reformation
The Nation-State
Elizabethan England
The Stuarts
The "Glorious Revolution"
The Century of Rationalism
Napoleonic Britain (i.e., the social and militaristic consequences of Napoleon)
The Industrial Revolution
Victorian Britain and its Aftermath
The First World War
Between the Wars
The Second World War
The post-war Period (this was a ragbag of events of some twenty years ago, the later ones being pushed into the anomalous category of "current affairs")

Certain aspects of this categorization need emphasis. One was the implicit understanding that history is the chronological ranking of powerful individuals. From the British version, this pantheon consisted of King Alfred, William Duke of Normand, Henry II, Henry VIII, Queen Elizabeth, Charles II, William of Orange, and Queen Victoria, who loomed large in their respective periods. Oliver Cromwell was the only commoner to contest this limelight; hence, he was often shown as a bounder. The historical events of these periods, were conceived as being initiated or, at least,

shaped by these master minds (sovereigns). The resulting dominance, irascibility, destruction, and dereliction, or sheer vileness were largely the criteria by which their historical immortality was ensured. Inefficient, ineffective, and harmless rulers, such as Edward the Confessor, Harold (of the battle of Hastings), and Charles I, were sidelined.

This schedule of British history was linked to European history either by "generalizing" or "specializing" British constants. For instance, the Vikings, Jutes, Angles, Saxons, Danes, and Normans of Europe were subsumed under their activities in Britain. The history of medieval France, with its concomitant castles, chivalry, and minstrels, was reflected in the attempts of English kings to reassert their authority in France, as dukes of Normandy. The struggles of Henry VIII and Elizabeth, ecclesiastical and political, encapsulated the history of Spain of those days. The Reformation in England was, in effect, the impact of the Lutheran onslaught on Roman Catholicism in Europe. The Renaissance likewise was the transfer of the thinking of Erasmus and other Grecians and Latinists into the mind-set of English intellectuals such as Colet, Grostete, and Thomas More. The history of the Middle East, too, came in sideways through the Crusades or the British kings' struggles in the Holy Land. The travails of the Netherlands under Spain entered British history when William of Orange became king of England. The unification of Italy, masterminded by Count Cavour, and that of Germany, wet-nursed by Graf Otto von Bismarck, were significant in nineteenth-century Britain, because of their impact on the balance of power, which was a life or death issue for British imperialism. Further, the violence of the two world wars integrated Britain with the rest of Europe (in the same way as they did with the United States, the first British colony to break away). And today, the economic weakness of Britain has tended to weld Britain with the European Union.

This is not to say that the other European countries tended to look upon history and history writing as broad-based studies of humanity. On the contrary; for instance, Britain used to play the role of the traditional villain in French history writing, exacerbated after Napolean, and moderated only in World War I. The modern history of Italy is frequently viewed as the history of latter-day Romans; even writings about the history of Arabs, as viewed through the eyes of Arabists such as C.A. Nallino, have a tendency of confusing, mentally, the clan structure of Arabs with the tribal structure of classical Rome.

There were some variations of this schedule of classification, as far as the British model was concerned. At the senior secondary level, i.e., grades eleven and twelve, a subject called Eastern (or Indian) history was introduced in the British colonies of Asia. This related largely to the history of the Indian subcontinent, along with Burma. Since the histories of these lands were written, for the most part, by members of the Indian civil service and linguists, both categories being not mutually exclusive, these showed the influence of the British mainland history, in technology. These histories themselves were shaped around powerful individuals. The kings of the Mahajanapada, the Gupta monarchies, and the Satevahanas, among others, began to take on the characteristics of the Tudor kings and the Merovingians and the Carolingians of medieval Europe. Emperor Asoka was seen as the Asian equivalent of the Holy Roman emperor.

The dynasty reminded the British writers on history of European equivalents and counterparts. Thus, Akbar became a sort of Asian Charlemagne and his successors, Jehangir and Shah Jehan, like Louis XIVs. Aurangzeb was the only person who could not be fitted in this historical schema.

In a way, the British methodology of history writing as applied to Asia, had its own constraints. The British historians had picked up the traditional languages, such as Sanskrit, Pali, Persian, and Urdu, through academic reading or employing the techniques of languages already known to them — Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. This bookish learning they supplemented through local teachers, the *pandits* and the *munshis*. It would be enough to cite a single instance. The *Mahavamsa*, the Sinhala chronicle of kings, written in the sixth century C.E., had seen much translation and commentary by Europeans. The pragmatic base of their approach has been neatly encapsulated by its earliest translator, George Turnour, member of the Ceylon Civil Service and principal officer in the Central Province of Ceylon, who published his rendering from its original Pali into English in 1837. He wrote:

> I have possessed the advantage, from my official position of almost daily intercourse with the heads of the Buddhistical Church, of access to their libraries, and of their assistance both in the selection of the works I consulted and in the explanation of the passages which required elucidation.[8]

That excerpt pinpoints two particular drawbacks of such translations. One is the exoticism of the subject as perceived by the European translator. A later translator, Wilhelm Geiger, a German scholar whose own translation

appeared in 1912, indicated the debilitating nature of this exoticism. He wrote:

> One meets in the chronicle again and again with objects, notices and terms which are unknown and unintelligible to a European but may easily be explained by a native scholar.[9]

In any case, the presence or availability of "native scholars" could not always be guaranteed. Second, the official position these Europeans had and the enormous power which went with it, in most cases, would have made the "native scholars" complaisant and willing to go along with the views held by the European historians.

This somewhat befuddled view of the European writers was based on several fundamental assumptions: epigraphical sources and written or surmised facts. Both these quantifications were related through one point — the dating of the reign of kings and other significant events. When discrepancies arose between the dating of several scholars or when one savant refused to accept the documentation of another, deep and acrimonious controversies and disagreements resulted.[10]

The Tunnel Vision of Colonial History Writing

While established societies of one kind with a deep past could be seen in the likeness of European nation-states (which was the case with the old empires of the Indian subcontinent), quite a different situation obtained with other old civilizations. For instance, British historians and college historians did not pay attention to Asian countries such as China, Japan, and Thailand. Hence knowledge of these countries was sparse among the school children or Asian specialists of the Indian subcontinent. This tunnel vision was not limited to British historiographers. The historians of the colonial empire of the French dispensation concentrated mainly on what was then called Indochina (which included Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos). The Dutch historians took up the history of the then Dutch East Indies and its environs and nothing else. The colonial historians of the United States did not look beyond the Philippines. The underlying factor was that each European colonial power was concerned only with the history of the Asian lands it controlled.

This tunnel vision depended on two techniques: the doctrine of "discovery" and the doctrine of "clientship" of other civilizations and other countries.

The first doctrine presumes that until a "new" country is "discovered" by the Westerners, it has no effective history. In this sense, North America was a nonentity until it was "discovered" by Colombus (though some writers say that the honor should really go to the Cabots). South America lay outside the ken of history until its "discovery" by such Spanish adventurers as Cortes, Pizarro, and Balbao. Francis Drake was supposed to have done the same service to the Philippines. In its turn, Australia was considered the habitat of marsupials and dead creatures, until its "discovery" by Captain Cook. Tasmania, rather a poor relation of Australia, carries in its title the name of its Dutch "discoverer."

The doctrine of "discovery" has a variant called the doctrine of exploration, wherein the land may have a sizeable population but lacks guns and gunpowder with which the Europeans sought to impose their pacification. This doctrine fit quite comfortably with the ground situation of Africa (usually prefaced by the word "Darkest") in the nineteenth century. Evangelists like Livingstone, Mungo Park, and Speke "explored" unknown (that is, to Europeans) Africa. They were assisted in their labors by itinerant wealthy landowners like Samuel Baker, or advenuresome linguists like Richard Burton, or even prepaparazzi journalists like Henry Morton Stanley. This doctrine of "discovery" and that of "exploration" obviously meant for the Europeans the possibility of those indigenous peoples participating in the benefits of Western civilization, which ranged from cheap chintz material to syphillis. However, by all accounts, indigenous American tribes (subsumed as "Red Indians") such as the Iroquois and the Sioux, as well as others of many countries such as the Maori of New Zealand, lived purposeful, satisfying, environment-friendly lives, until disrupted by the entry of the Europeans. The Incas, the Aztecs, and the Toltecs of South America had a high degree of civilization. But their liberal use of gold dust, which aggravated the cupidity of European adventurers, made their civilizations intolerable to the Europeans.

The extant books by the ancient Asian historians were dismissed as stylistically and technically amateurish.

Curriculum fitting, as regards history, has undergone many changes during this century. At the beginning, there were some popular modes. These could be summarized as trivialization, romanticization, and formalization. Trivialization was the preferred mode in teaching history in the early grades (up to grade 5). One or two items in the life of historical personages are chosen and a story is woven around them. Instances that readily occur to

the mind are the events of King Alfred and the cakes; King Harold at the Battle of Hastings; King John and the barons at Runnymede; and Sir Francis allegedly Drake finishing his game of bowls even as the Spanish Armada approached. These are really clichés emphasizing the superiority of individuals and, by implication, the groups from which they came.

Romanticization is the next step in history teaching. In this case events such as the Crusades are presented in terms of heroes (the Christian knights and the common soldiers) and villains (the Muslims subsumed as "Saracen"). Of course, this is a highly biased history. Even when the so-called heroes behave villainously, such as when one European king imprisons another European king, viz. the imprisonment of Richard of England, the villainy is glossed over through distracting attention by introducing the substory of Richard's minstrel, Bondel, initiating measures to ransom his master.

In the higher grades and even at the university level, the teaching of history takes on the mode of formalization. This entails the slicing of parts of history into thin slabs and discussing them doctrinally. All these are partisan. Some of them might be extremely biased, such as the conquest of Constantinople by the Turks in 1485 and the portrayal of the Turks and Muslims generally as being opposed to books and culture. Some other topics are biased in a different way. For instance, the "slabs" of Renaissance, Reformation, and Counterreformation might be viewed from different angles, depending on whether the teachers are Roman Catholics or Protestants.

The period after 1960 has seen the transformation of these procedures in several countries. This has been due to changes in the total curricula. History was jettisoned as a discrete subject in secondary school. It has been replaced by the amorphous course "social studies" in which history, civics, and geography are thrown together and grossly simplified. In this course, history is written and taught at breakneck speed, where, for instance, the more than two millenia of Pharoanic Egypt is encapsulated into three study periods of forty minutes each. This situation is like visiting a museum on a motorcycle. Platitudes and biased views take up the landscape.

The Moral Dimension and History Writing

The Western discipline of history writing was in the initial stages in the hands of Christian ecclesiastics (clerics and clerks). Hence it was visited by Christian ethics, some of which spilled into general human morality, such

as the concept of Just Price. Even when Western history writing was taken up by those with a relaxed attitude toward the Christian church, the outside environment, to some extent, shaped their literary conscience.

The Industrial Revolution and the consolidation of capitalism changed all that. The existence of an establishment — affluent, influential, educated, and leisured class — became an a priori condition for history writing. Further, the presence of the economic factor, the availability of capital for those sufficiently energetic or talented or unscrupulous despite undistinguished birth or education, made new inroads into standard history writing. The springs of economic activity began to claim the attention of historians. Based on a German model, R.H. Tawney, in his *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, investigated the role of Protestant Christianity in furnishing the financial wherewithall for the rising middle class in Europe. Later, the historian Charles Beard studied the economic bases and attitudes of the Founding Fathers of the United States Constitution and decided that the Constitution was the collective will and testament of the educated, landowning, slave-keeping plutocracy of the United States.

In Britain, the establishment was stronger. Even when debunkers such as Lytton Strachey in his *Eminent Victorians* laughed at the icons of the establishment such as Dr. Arnold and Miss Florence Nightingale, the laughter was modulated by the fact that Strachey himself belonged to the establishment. Meanwhile, the university establishment had brought out its collective vision. The Cambridge histories, originally planned out by Lord Acton, were works by many hands. These were overarching projects encompassing the ancient, the medieval, and the modern. Later, these spread through space and time, including the British Empire, India, and the Islamic countries; the latest in the series is *The Cambridge History of the Pacific Islanders* (edited by Donald Denoon et al.). Oxford University had equivalent aims. These books were monumental tomes, but written by single authors. The German counterparts, pioneered by von Ranke, were even more monumental and detailed and aimed at a "neutral history," although in actual fact they reflected the stolid values of the cultivated Junker class. The French and the Italian histories were roughly of the same aim and objective, the former more flamboyant and the latter more philosophical.

An objectivity of a different kind was attempted by some historians (some of them expatriates from Germany) among the British academic circles. Members of this group, led by Sir Lewis Namier, were as much archivists as historians. In order to study the workings of the British gov-

erning structures of the eighteenth century, they accumulated biographical details of members of parliament and other persons. By these means, it was thought nonskewed, neutral history writing would emerge. Obviously, Sir Lewis Namier thought the parts were greater than the whole.

A different kind of group thinking was being fashioned among some other British historians. Driven by the doctrine that it was the economic factor that was the key to history, these historians, including Christopher Hill, D. Petegorsky, Eris Hobsbawm, and Morton, wrote in terms of class relations. The English civil war, for them, was a straight fight between the landed aristocracy and the up and coming tradesmen and middle class. (Earlier, the French historian Emile Halevy had made preliminary forays into this field.)

The traditional historians replied to these onslaughts in their own way. They disembowelled the dynastic and political parts from their standard histories and presented the remainder as social history. They depended much on literary allusions. No wonder that Trevelyan named the chapter headings of his *Social History* after Chaucer, Shakespeare, and other literary figures. Sir Arthur Bryant gave his a bouncy, frolicsome quality.

By that time, English positivism and French existentialism had provided the European intellectuals with a sanitized, wafer-thin ethical dimension. Three different types of history resulted: history as "integrated circuitry," miniaturized history, and atomized history.

The integrated circuitry approach to history is where history writing has both the hardware and software elements, as it were. Two examples only need to be cited. One is cyclical (hardware-based), and the other is linear (hardware-based). One is Arnold Toynbee's *A Study of History*; the second is Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West*. Toynbee saw history in terms of birth, growth, and decline and fall. Each of the civilizations he cited, according to him, showed the same organic features. (Earlier, the Islamic scholar, Ibn Khaldun, outlined an equivalent process, but his theory merely demonstrated the unfolding process, in human terms, of the Creator's Will.) On the other hand, Toynbee's was self-determining and self-motivated. That is why his vision of history seems so artificial and largely futile. Spengler's theory is specifically designed to prove his theory that Europe was on a crash course to oblivion. Spengler demonstrated the process. He does not furnish the reason or the underlying principle of this process.

The last forty years have seen important changes in the field of history writing. The dismantling of the British, French, and Dutch empires has

robbed the colonial histories of their purpose. While the civilizing roles of elites in paramount states had long ago lost their academic prominence, there were still vestiges of European powers purveying Western scientific cultures to colonies or ex-colonies, as a persistent theme in history writing. Even these approaches faded away when Europe and America entered into a phase of "gender equalization." Active history writing was beginning to be reckoned as an activity of chauvinists. There began the phase of debunking colonial "machismo" histories and their replacement by "indigenous" histories. Still later came the phase of debunking the debunkers.

There were two ways in which these value-driven attempts could be sidelined. One is miniaturization and the other atomization. In the miniaturized histories, specific acts or human activities are historicized. These range from histories of golf to histories of painting the nude. In atomized history writing, a small chunk, sometimes a wafer, of human activity is analyzed in detail. These, too, may range from polio among the Veddahs of the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka (1900–1910) to a history of the schools which Francois Villon (1431–1463) attended. In these kinds of histories, details abort theory.

The coming into prominence of the computer and the new information technology (IT) has provided a new dimension to history writing. Television has brought about a transformation in the appreciation of current history. Current history no longer consists of events of limited scope and time, experienced by some individuals accidentally placed there. On the contrary, it is a generalized quasi-experience, perceived by enormous number of people for whom the televised events have only entertainment value. Some writers have noticed that the characteristic features of these and associated processes are the principles of dematerialization, omnipresence, and malleability.[11] Other writers have demonstrated that television presentation of ceremonial events, such as a coronation or funeral of a royal, is more generalized and so more "real" than what is actually experienced by the on-the-spot participant or observer who sees only a small part of the proceedings, briefly, and surmises the rest.

In this sense, history, any history, is a lame duck. The IT purveyors and experts claim that in a world where television makes everyone a vicarious participant in momentous events throughout the world, there is instant history. At the same time, through linked computers and satellite transmissions, anyone, with computer assistance, can browse through libraries (which they had never visited). So, everyone can be a historian of sorts "tai-

loring" his history of whatever happens in the outside world. In this transformation, history, they would say, has come to its end.

Some of the orthodox histories, viz, the books written by "nonelectronic historians," have been driven upon themselves. Using Saussurian procedures they have fashioned a new version of history. It is a history concerning itself with the mutability of texts, a history where things do not mean what they say. The theorists of this history include Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Hayden White. There is thus a profound fermenting of Western type histories. This is combined with the feeling that history is somehow out of touch with reality and so is rather dispensable. This depressing situation has even infected Third World universities, generally standard bearers of Western culture and Western-slanted Eastern cultures. For instance, the University of Peradeniya in Sri Lanka has placed history among its "endangered" subjects.[12] (Curiously, the other subjects in the endangered list included Western classical culture, Sanskrit, Pali, and English, all of which were either subjects of traditional importance or elitist.)

History, History Writing and the Islamic Response

As noted above, the Islamic historians of medieval times (and, of course, of every period) have looked upon history as a recording of ascertained and ascertainable facts and as having a purpose laid down by Allah. They have rejected, totally and rightly, any idea of a purposeless blind watchmaker. The Islamic response is clear. Islam insists on purpose in life and, thus, also, on the moral principle. These automatically follow in history writing and teaching, too. The most pervasive and inchoate major premise in Western thinking and history writing, of which some instances have been sketched in the foregoing pages of this article, assumes that man is the measure of all things. This invites the conclusion that man can do anything and everything and that man is not accountable. This illusion has led to innumerable difficulties and sufferings that afflict the world today.

Islam, on the other hand, casts responsibility and accountability on man. And history is the unfolding of these principles in time.

Islam gives great importance to history. For instance, Surah 'Asr (Time through the Ages) declares:

> By (the token of) Time (through the ages), verily man is in loss, except such as have faith and do righteous deeds, and (join together) in the mutual teaching of Truth, and of patience and constancy.

A commentator notes:

> An appeal is made to Time as one of the creations of Allah of which everyone knows something but of which no one can fully explain the exact significance.[13]

The next principle to be noted is that man is the vicegerent of Allah and that man is always responsible and accountable for his own actions. In that sense, history is a continuing balance sheet of man's actions in the world. Islam reiterates that Allah assesses human societies and although He gives many chances of redemption, there comes a time when these societies meet with their merited destinies. The Holy Qur'an is replete with these instances. For example, in referring to the Thamud people it says:

> And remember how He made you inheritors after the 'Ad people. And gave you habitations in the land. Ye build for yourselves palaces and castles in (open) plains, and carve out homes in the mountains. So bring the remembrance the benefits (ye have received) from Allah and refrain from evil and mischief on the earth. (7:74)

But the Thamud people were resolute in their evil conduct and the result was

> So the earthquake took them unawares, and they lay prostrate in their homes in the morning (7:78)

These words, to the reader of today, have a sobering effect of what is actually taking place in the world today. It is thus righteousness that is the test of prosperity and the enduring of the people, not a mere accumulation of disposable goods and services.

Given this premise, it is clear that history to the Islamic scholar and reader must mean the introduction of the principle of morality in history writing and teaching. Hence, history becomes a normative art but, the norms are those that are given by Allah and not mere norms generated within that particular book or work. And yet some subthemes invite attention when history is Islamized. These are more concerned with specific aspects of historical writing such as the denuding of the myths of "infamous Saracen" and the "ferocious barbaric corsairs" (whether in ballads or in serious work). Some of these might be schematized as follows:

a. Greater attention should be paid to the civilizations of the Middle East (Islamic countries) as originators of learning and skills. Modern research is coming to terms with the view that

much of the learning of the ancient Greeks was preserved and elaborated on by the intellectual efforts of the Muslims of the Middle East. In any case, the Greek literati were unconcerned with applying their learning to daily working lives of their "inferiors."

b. To study and reassess the role of the Turkish empire as an engine of civilization and not merely as a fighting machine, as has been the view hitherto.

c. Reassessment of the nature and scope of the Renaissance, evaluating the contributions made by Muslim thinkers. This would necessitate an organic study of Arabic language and learning.

d. Reexamination of the nature of Greek science, one important field being mathematics.

e. Reevaluation of the role and significance of Islamic Central Asia.

f. Reassessment of the Islamic peoples of Asia and the Far East in terms of their historical social, economic and religious roles.

g. Reexamination of the role of the Arabs in Asian navigation and the contribution made by Islamic mariners and geographers in facilitating the Iberian (Spanish and Portuguese) "discovery" of the seaway to India and the Far East.

h. Rerecord the Islamic impact on the peoples of Europe prior to the twentieth century.

Some of these subthemes might be extremely important in the efforts to Islamize history writing as purposeful activities of humankind, rather than the endorsement of a Western-centered version of a chronology of ceaseless warfare and irresponsible behavior.

Notes

1. Ian Scott-Kilvert (translator), *The Rise and Fall of Athens; Nine Greek Lives by Plutarch* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), 7.
2. Robert Graves (translator), *Suetonius, the Twelve Caesars* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1957), 73.
3. Ibid., 77, 81.

4. There was a Muslim poetic tradition in the early poems. See J.M. Cohen, *A History of Western Literature* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1956), 28. Perhaps Cohen's views were based on Robert Curtius, *Europaisshe Literatur und Lateinisches Mittelalter*. One important difference between Europeans and other "inferior" races, from the point of European romancers, was that the "inferior" races were felt to be inclined to cannibalism. The disquieting factor was that the doctrine of transsubstantiation could be construed, on a mental level, as approaching cannibalism. This was a point at issue between the post-Middle Age Catholics and Protestants. Compare with F. Lestringant, *Cannibals*, trans., Rosemary Morris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); and *Une Sainte Horreur ou le voyage Eucharistе XV–XVII Siecles* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997).

5. Sir James Emerson Tennent, *Ceylon, an Account of the Island Physical, Historical and Topographical*, vol. 1 (Dehiwela, Sri Lanka: Tisara, 1977 reprint of Fourth London edition), 496.

6. Ibid., 465–476.

7. Compare with Philip Jones, *The Italian City-State; From Commune to Signoria* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

8. Cited in Ananda W.P. Guruge, *Mahavamsa, the Great Chronicle of Sri Lanka* (Colombo: ANCL, 1989), 27.

9. Ibid., 21.

10. Wilhelm Geiger and Mabel Haynes Bode, *The Mahavamsa or the Great Chronicle of Ceylon* (Colombo: Government Information Department, 1950 reprint of the original 1912 edition), xii and lxiii. In these pages Geiger replies to his critics.

11. Compare with Robin Widdison, "Electronic Law Practice and Exercise in Legal Terminology," *Modern Law Review (London)*, 60, no. 2 (March 1997): 144–145.

12. *University of Peradeniya (Sri Lanka) Calendar 1991/1992*, 33.

13. 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī, *The Meaning of the Holy Quran* (Beltsville, MD: amana publications, 1997), note 6262, 1693.

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