

Chapter 1

Images of Islam in Europe

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, sales of the Qur'an shot up dramatically in the United States. People who otherwise would not have had much interest in Islam turned to its holy book to find explanations for why the attacks had occurred. What prompts this automatic association between the actions of some individuals and their religion? Certainly no one turned to the Bible, either the Old or New Testaments, to understand why Timothy McVeigh bombed the Oklahoma federal building. Why then are Arabs and Muslims seen primarily through the lens of Islam?

To answer this question we turn to the dominant images of Islam and Muslims in the West. In particular, we will examine the ways in which ruling elites in Europe throughout history have constructed particular images of the "Muslim enemy" to advance their political ambitions. In short, the history of "Islam and the West," as it is commonly described, is not the story of religious conflict, but rather of conflict born of *political* rivalry and competing imperial agendas.

This is not to suggest, however, that the encounter between "East" and "West" has always been bitter and hostile. I put "East" and "West" in quotes to recognize the fact that there is no monolithic "East," just as there is no singular "West." Rather, the peoples who lived in the geographic locations that we call Europe and the Near East, in the period under study in this chapter from the eighth to the eighteenth centuries, were marked by cultural, linguistic, ethnic, class, national and other forms of difference. There has been, therefore, not just one image of Islam in the West but multiple images. For instance, ordinary Europeans who encountered their counterparts in the Near East sometimes found much to admire and respect. Yet, it would be wrong to underestimate the hold that any society's ruling ideas have on its people. That is, even while ordinary people can and do resist dominant ideas, those who rule a society tend to set the terms of discussion. By the same token, when elites change their minds about a certain topic, it produces a corresponding shift in the larger society.

The image of Islam in Europe has gone through a series of such shifts. Far from being a simple "clash of civilizations," the East-West encounter is complex, dynamic, and contradictory. This chapter outlines the changing historical circumstances that have produced different images of Islam and Muslims in the West.

Early Contact with Islam

Islam emerged in the seventh century in the Hijaz region of Arabia, which includes the cities of Mecca and Medina. This region was a major hub for trade activity, and the Arabs who lived there were in constant contact with their Christian Byzantine and Persian Sassanid neighbors. It was in this context that Muhammad, a trader by profession, began to devote time to spiritual matters. Muhammad worked for his older, wealthy wife, whose caravans traded with Syria. Muslims believe that in the year 610, while Muhammad was on a retreat in the hills near Mecca, the angel Gabriel appeared to him to deliver a message from God. Over the course of the next two decades (610–632 CE), Muhammad had several such revelations, and on that basis he propagated a new religion called Islam. The word *Islam* means "the act of submission"; a *Muslim* is someone who

submits to God's will. The Qur'an, the holy book of Islam, is a compilation of the Word of God revealed to Muhammad, his prophet.

At first there were very few converts to Islam. The people of Mecca initially met Muhammad with hostility. This came in part from the message he preached, which was that God expects people to share their wealth with those needier than them. In 622 Muhammad and his followers left Mecca to travel to Medina, a journey referred to as the *Hijra*. Here Muhammad became a spiritual and a political leader and attracted a growing community of believers; by the time of his death in 632, Islam had spread beyond the Hijaz and into other parts of Arabia.

Within two decades of Muhammad's death, Arab Muslim armies not only defeated the Sassanid dynasty (which had ruled Persia and the neighboring regions for centuries) but also took over parts of the Byzantine Empire's territories. The expansion continued under the Umayyad dynasty (661–750 CE) into North Africa, and then into Europe in the early eighth century. Their conquests began in Spain, continued through the entire Iberian Peninsula, and reached into Italy.

This incursion into Europe drew alarm. At this stage, however, the Muslim invaders were seen as just another menace—no different from the other armies menacing the borders. Norman Daniel characterizes the first four hundred years of contact (between 700 and 1100 CE) as the “age of ignorance.” During this period the West “knew virtually nothing of Islam as a religion. For them Islam was only one of a large number of enemies threatening Christendom from every direction, and they had no interest in distinguishing the primitive idolators of Northmen, Slav, and Magyars from the monotheism of Islam. . . . there is no sign that anyone in northern Europe had even heard the name Mahomet.”¹

This lack of information about Islam did not, however, stop the elites in Northern Europe from developing an image of the people they called the Saracens. The Venerable Bede, an eighth-century Bible scholar, expressed the dominant view at the time, arguing that the Saracens were the children of Hagar, one of Abraham's wives. Hagar's son Ishmael was associated with the Saracens, and his brother Isaac was understood to be the forefather of the Jews (and therefore the Christians).² Despite this familial association, the Saracens were still reviled as barbarians.

In Muslim-ruled Spain, however, there was a mix of ideas. On one hand, “derogatory and abusive myths about the Saracens were widespread among the Christian and Jewish masses. But these myths were mixed with more reliable impressions based on actual daily contact.”³ Muslim rule over the Iberian Peninsula (Spain, Portugal, and parts of southern France) lasted for eight centuries before the Christians finally drove their Muslim rulers out in 1492. During this period, Christians and Jews were tolerated as “people of the book,” and were allowed to practice their religion if they paid a fee. This sustained contact mitigated and tempered the more hostile images.

Al-Andalus and Muslim Rule in Europe

While the rest of Europe was enduring a period of cultural stagnation known as the “Dark Ages,” al-Andalus, as the Iberian Peninsula came to be known under Muslim rule, saw the growth and development of human knowledge. The works of various great societies, from the Greeks to the Persians, were translated into Arabic in the many libraries created by Muslim rulers (not only in al-Andalus, but also in Baghdad under the

Abbasid dynasty). One great seat of learning was Cordoba in Spain. Here, as elsewhere, tremendous advances were made in the fields of philosophy, medicine, astronomy, architecture, and even urban development. While the rest of Europe stagnated in darkness, the citizens of Cordoba enjoyed streetlights and running water.⁴

In the context of a flourishing civilization, it is not surprising that negative attitudes towards the “Moors” (Spanish Muslims) would dissipate. Speaking to these changing attitudes, one Christian writer complained:

The Christians love to read the poems and romances of the Arabs; they study the Arab theologians and philosophers, not to refute them but to form a correct and elegant Arabic [sic]. Where is the layman who now reads the Latin commentaries on the Holy Scriptures, or who studies the Gospels, prophets or apostles? Alas! all talented young Christians read and study with enthusiasm the Arab books; they gather immense libraries at great expense; they despise the Christian language as unworthy of attention. They have forgotten their language. For every one who can write a letter in Latin to a friend, there are a thousand who can express themselves in Arabic with elegance, and write better poems in this language than the Arabs themselves.⁵

María Rosa Menocal, who has studied the intersections of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim thought in al-Andalus, argues that this society was characterized, particularly its intellectual and artistic realms, by *convivencia* or coexistence in relative peace. And while this age was not free of conflict—as Menocal’s detractors have noted—it nevertheless serves as an example of tolerance and relative harmony between peoples of various faiths. In fact, Park51, the Islamic community center in lower Manhattan whose construction sparked controversy in 2010, was originally named Cordoba House as a tribute to this spirit of *convivencia*.⁶ This controversy is discussed further in Chapter Eight.

Intellectually, Europe owes a debt of gratitude to scholars in the Near East. Various Muslim empires not only initiated a period of translation of the great works of various cultures; but oversaw a period of development. For instance, Muslim scholars built on Persian and Greek scientific concepts, and their work then paved the way for the Renaissance and the development of modern science.⁷

Europe finally began the process of moving out of the Dark Ages in the early 1100s, and intellectuals flocked to the various libraries of the Muslim empires to regain lost knowledge. This period saw the re-translation of the great works of humanity from Arabic back into European languages. Through this process, European intellectuals came to absorb the profound contributions made by Near Eastern thinkers. As Zachary Lockman writes,

Translated Arabic writings on medicine, mathematics, astronomy and other sciences were for centuries used as textbooks in medieval Europe, while the writings of Muslim philosophers like Ibn Sina (980–1037, known in the West as Avicenna) and Ibn Rushd (1126–98, known as Averroes), and Jewish philosophers who wrote mainly in Arabic like Maimonides (Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, 1135–1204), were eagerly read and discussed and influenced several generations of medieval Christian philosophers and theologians.⁸

Although the Latin Church rejected Ibn Sina’s work, such contributions opened the door to more accurate understandings of Islam and Muslims. One person who contributed

significantly to this was Peter the Venerable, who among other things had the Qur'an translated. Yet, while access to the Qur'an (as well as other translated Arabic texts) generated a more realistic picture of Islam among non-Muslims, the Church also quoted it selectively to construct anti-Muslim propaganda.⁹

The Crusades and the Reconquista

The period of European intellectual growth in the eleventh century was accompanied by growth in commerce and trade. Markets and towns began to spring up. By this point, however, Islam was no longer one enemy among many; the other pagan raiders (such as the Normans and Magyars) who had relentlessly invaded Christian Europe in the ninth and tenth centuries had been converted and integrated. The only enemy that remained were the Muslims and their various kingdoms. In Spain, Christian rulers in the north began a war to retake the Iberian Peninsula from the Muslims; this came to be known as the Reconquista (reconquest).

In the East, the Christian Byzantine Empire (or Eastern Rome) suffered a series of defeats at the hands of the Muslim Seljuq Turks. The emperor wrote to Pope Urban II to seek Europe's help against the Turks. His call was heeded. Urban launched a holy war (known as the Crusades) in 1095 and called upon all Christians in Europe to unite and fight against the "enemies of God." This charge wasn't simply, or even primarily, about religion. As John Esposito explains, "For the Pope, the call to the defense of the faith and Jerusalem provided an ideal opportunity to gain recognition for papal authority and its role in legitimating temporal rulers, and to reunite the Eastern (Greek) and Western (Latin) churches."¹⁰ In short, it was about the consolidation of power through religious rhetoric.

European rulers took up the call to battle for a variety of different reasons. "Christian rulers, knights, and merchants were driven by the political, military, and economic advantages that would result from the establishment of a Latin kingdom in the Middle East."¹¹ Those who joined the armies were driven by everything from religious zeal to the rewards of plunder. The end result was the production of a united Christian Europe over which the papacy held spiritual authority.

The image of the Muslim enemy and of Islam as a demonic religion started to come into focus in this context in the late eleventh century. Mobilizing the population for a holy war required religious arguments; it became necessary to acquire information about Islam, its teachings, the life of the prophet Muhammad, and so on in order to argue against them. Here the works of Peter the Venerable and others provided useful fodder for the Church to attack Islam as a heresy and Muhammad as a false prophet.

What Christians now confronted was a religion that was similar to theirs but which challenged the primacy of their belief system. The God of Christianity is the same God of Abraham worshipped in Islam, but Christianity claims that God's revelation in the form of Jesus marked the end of revelation and of prophecy. Islam makes a similar claim, but argues that Muhammad was the last prophet who received the final and correct Word of God.

This was not the first time Christianity had encountered such a challenge. Jews, similarly, do not accept the Christian version of revelation and prophecy. However, Jews weren't marching armies into Christian capitals. They were not an existential threat in the way the Muslim empires were. Thus, as Richard Southern suggests, it was easy for

Christianity to dismiss the Jewish challenge because of the “economic and social inferiority of the Jews.”¹² In other words, Jews did not have the social, economic, or political power to threaten Christendom. Furthermore, Christians also had access to “an embarrassing wealth of material for answering the Jewish case.”¹³ Such material was now collected for the case against Islam.

Norman Daniel has conducted one of the most authoritative studies on the image of Islam generated by the intellectual elite in the West from the early twelfth to the middle of the fourteenth century. His book shows that key among their various lines of attack was the argument that Islam’s revelations were “pseudo-prophecies,” based not only on the authority of Christian scriptures but also on the notion that Muhammad could not be a prophet. Instead, Muhammad was cast as “a low-born and pagan upstart, who schemed himself into power, who maintained it by pretended revelations, and who spread it both by violence and by permitting to others the same lascivious practices he indulged himself.”¹⁴ We see at this stage the association of Islam with violence, a theme that would recur over the centuries. The thrust here was that those who didn’t come under Muhammad’s spell, as the “simpleminded” Arabs had, were either subjugated with violent force or enticed with sexual indulgences.

On what grounds did the Church claim that Islam attracted followers through sexual deviance and perversion? For Christians, marriage meant a union with one partner, dissoluble only by death—they thus pointed to Muhammad’s multiple wives as proof of his perversion. (Abraham’s multiple wives, however, were left out of the debate.) Islam permitted men to take four wives, allowed divorce, and even allowed divorced women to remarry. Christians viewed this with horror. In both scholarly and popular accounts, all sorts of venomous (and entirely fictional) stories began to circulate:

Muhammad was said to be a magician, a sorcerer who used his evil powers to produce fake miracles and thereby seduce men into embracing his false doctrines; he was a renegade Christian priest, perhaps even a cardinal, whose frustrated lust for power led him to seek revenge on the church by propagating his own pernicious teachings; he was sexually promiscuous, an adulterer, and promoted licentiousness in order to ensnare men into depravity; his death was as disgusting and shameful as his life, for he was devoured by dogs, or suffocated by pigs during an epileptic fit.¹⁵

Such outrageous and apocryphal stories began to circulate with apparently no need for evidence of any sort. (You can find still some of them today being propagated by the likes of Glenn Beck.) The result was that Islam was debased and constructed as a dangerous enemy.

What was particularly dangerous about this enemy was that not only was it taking over Christian lands, but worse still, it was succeeding in converting people to Islam. When Muslim armies advanced on Christian lands from the seventh to the eleventh centuries, many non-Muslim subjects (including Christians and Jews) converted to Islam. For instance, non-Orthodox Christians who were persecuted by the Greek Church welcomed Muslim rule. Over time many converted.

Islam, therefore, was a serious political and existential threat. It had to go, and this meant mobilizing an army to retake the Holy Land, rid Spain of the interlopers, and reestablish Christian hegemony. Such a task necessitated the kinds of demonic and highly negative images discussed above. Even during this period, though, pockets of more

sympathetic representations and relations existed. The culture of al-Andalus was one such exception, as was the attitude among Christian scholars in the rest of Europe following the period of retranslation.

In addition, direct contact with Muslims also produced images that went against the grain. Commerce between Muslim and Christian traders, while not amicable, was at least conducted on terms of mutual respect. Similarly, on the battlefield, the crusaders loathed the infidels but praised their military prowess and told stories of the bravery of Muslim warriors.¹⁶ The emperor Saladin, who retook Jerusalem from the crusaders and was therefore an archenemy, was nevertheless admired for his chivalry. An abundance of stories were written about him and his name was given to European children for generations to come. Nevertheless, most scholars of the Middle Ages agree that the dominant view of Islam and of Muslims during this period was extremely negative.

From Polemic to Indifference

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as Europe began to come out of the Middle Ages and into the modern era, its polemical construction of Islam changed. As Islam was less and less seen as an existential threat, an attitude of indifference crept in. This shift was the product of a number of developments. First, the project of a united Christian Europe started to break down around this time due to the rise of nationalism and proto-nationalist identifications. Christians were beginning to define themselves as French, English, Spanish etc. Such internal divisions among Christians deflected attention away from their external enemy. Second, the renaissance of European culture further weakened the authority of the church. The key source of anti-Muslim religious zeal, the Church, was no longer able to foment holy wars; the Crusades came to an end. Third, the Mongols had now entered the picture and posed a threat to Europe. This recognition of lands beyond Europe, and of threats beyond the Muslims, meant that the world could no longer be divided neatly into Christian vs. Muslim in a narrow, simplistic way. The confluence of these factors led to a more tolerant view of Islam.¹⁷

This period, marked though it was by relatively peaceful relations, flourishing trade, and a general attitude of indifference, was soon to be punctuated by a new enemy: the rising Ottoman Empire.

The Ottomans

Osman, the founder of the Ottoman Empire, turned against Mongol rule in the late thirteenth century and began a period of conquest. In the century that followed, Ottoman armies expanded into the eastern Mediterranean region and the Balkans. Just as they did during the early conquests of the Muslim armies in the seventh and eighth centuries, some people in Christian states welcomed the Turks in order to escape religious persecution, this time at the hands of the Roman Catholic Church. The Ottoman policy of “live and let live” stood in contrast to the intolerance that Orthodox Christians and other religious minorities faced under the Church. Balkan peasants captured this mood with the saying “better the turban of the Turk than the tiara of the Pope.”¹⁸

In 1453 the Ottomans captured Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire, and brought an end to Christian rule in the East. They now turned their attention to other parts of Europe, conquering Belgrade in 1523. These incursions deep into Europe

brought the new Muslim enemy into focus. However, this time the enemy was viewed in secular terms and seen as a political rather than a religious threat (even though the term “Turk” became synonymous for Muslim). Two periods followed: the first, a period of admiration for the new Ottoman enemies, who were seen as a great European power; the second, a complete reversal of this mood, as the Ottomans begin a period of decline relative to Europe.

Phase One: Contradictory Views of the Ottomans

The new Muslim enemy was now seen as part of Europe rather than an outsider. The threat it posed to its neighbors was seen not as a religious one; rather, it was the threat represented by a powerful, arguably the most powerful, European state. Furthermore, the Turks were by and large considered to be ethnically European. One theory suggested that they were like the French and the Italians: descendants of the Trojans.¹⁹ This theory bears some semblance to the Abraham-Hagar story in that Muslims are seen as a part of Europe’s history; even while they are enemies, they are still a part of the family, so to speak.

Such Ottoman European genealogies were accepted by some and rejected by others. Nevertheless, various European figures made alliances with the Ottomans. A French king allied himself with a Turkish sultan against the Habsburg Empire; the Pope similarly forged an alliance opposing the Habsburg emperor’s plans for a crusade against the Ottomans.²⁰ Jews fleeing Europe, particularly after their expulsion from Spain in 1492, found a home in the Ottoman Empire. This was true too of Protestants and other dissident Christians seeking to escape Catholic persecution. In short, the diversity that marked al-Andalus found its reflection in the Ottoman territories; Christians and Jews not only lived in an atmosphere of tolerance but also experienced prosperity.

In contrast, Europe was going through a bitter and violent conflict between Protestants and Catholics. The first half of the sixteenth century saw the emergence of the Reformation. This internal dissent within Christianity created a climate where Islam came to be seen as yet another schism, albeit a dangerous one. Thus, even while Martin Luther, who led the Protestant Reformation, had negative things to say about Islam, he viewed the Vatican as the greater enemy. For Luther, only after the defeat of Catholicism could Islam be beaten.²¹ Defenders of Catholicism attacked Protestantism by comparing it to Islam, in some instances seeing it as worse than Islam. Along the way, the Ottomans became involved in this struggle on the side of the Protestants against their common enemy, the Habsburgs, who were the defenders of Catholicism.

The image of the Ottomans in this period was contradictory. On the one hand, in popular literature the Ottomans were depicted as cruel and violent, in ways that drew on earlier caricatures of Muslims; there was also a morbid fascination with the sexual lives of the Turks and intense curiosity about the harem. On the other hand, however, for those who understood the Ottoman system of administration, there was appreciation for its efficiency as well as the overall grandeur of the empire.

The sixteenth century also saw the emergence of some of the first studies of the Orient to adopt a more open-minded and disinterested tone. At the broader level, the Renaissance led to the scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, marking a shift to studying the natural world through the use of empirical and scientific

methods (as opposed to religious ones). This would also impact how Islam was studied in the various newly constituted Oriental centers in Paris, Oxford, and Rome. This “more objective understanding of the Middle East,” Maxime Rodinson explains, arose from factors such as “geographical proximity, close political relations, increasing economic interactions, [and] the growing number of travelers and missionaries who journeyed to the East.”²²

However, as the Ottoman Empire started to decline, particularly after its defeat in Vienna in 1683, the attitude of admiration and even of tolerance and neutrality it had enjoyed dissipated.

Phase Two: Oriental Despotism

During the seventeenth century, as the Ottoman Empire began to lose its military superiority over Europe, European travelers to Ottoman lands found more to criticize than to respect. The Turks were now depicted as “boorish, ignorant, dishonorable, immoral, ineffectual, corrupt and irrational. The older image of the Ottoman state as an efficient, just, virtuous and tolerant meritocracy faded away, to be replaced by a depiction of that state as corrupt, oppressive and brutal.”²³ In part, this was accurate: the Ottoman system had in fact seen a decline, as described by its own chroniclers.

But Europe’s contempt towards the East had more to do with its new image of itself. European thinkers during the Renaissance and later imagined their history as an unbroken line of continuity from ancient Greece and Rome to the present—in the process exorcising the Islamic history of Europe. Europe now imagined itself as superior, the heir to the democratic political systems of the Greeks and Romans, and therefore very different from the despotic regimes that it now saw as characterizing the East. In contrast to the democratic West, the Ottomans came to be seen as the manifestation of “Asian despotism.” Ottoman integration into Europe was therefore short-lived, and the Muslim enemy would again become Europe’s “other.”

The French writer Montesquieu, writing in 1748, explained that Asia was destined to be despotic because of the way its hot climate affected the temperaments of its people. He argued that in cooler regions such as Europe the people tended to be active and therefore braver, whereas in the warmer climates of Asia the people were inactive and therefore servile and effeminate.²⁴ It followed from this that democracy was more at home in the former, while the servile people of the East were capable only of despotism. While Montesquieu’s bizarre and ridiculous theory is long out of style, the notion of “Oriental despotism” and the belief that the people of the Middle East and North Africa are best suited to dictatorships has endured.

The origin of this myth is based in Europe’s transformation and its subsequent rise to global dominance. Up until 1500 or so, Europe was a marginal player on the world stage relative to other great powers (such as the Ottomans, Chinese, and Indians). It overcame its backwardness, thanks in no small part to the rise of capitalism. The question of the origins of capitalism is a complex and hotly debated issue, and I will not discuss it here. For our purposes, let me state that the growth of capitalism conferred various advantages—technological, military, communication, and so on—which led first to European dominance over world trade and then eventually to colonialism and imperialism.

By the eighteenth century, the once-invincible Ottomans lost their ability even to resist European incursions into their territory. The “Muslim world,” no longer a military threat, saw its image shift again—this time into the realm of the exotic. In the early part of the eighteenth century, the epic collection of folk tales *One Thousand and One Nights* was translated into European languages. Its stories of the Muslim world as an exotic and fantastic land populated by genies, harems, and all things enchanting and amusing to Westerners had a great influence on how Europe perceived the East. This would be followed yet another shift, however, the turn to a more accurate understanding of Islam during the era of the Enlightenment.

Romanticism and the Enlightenment

The trend towards the exotic was fueled by the growth of Romanticism, an artistic and philosophical movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The image of an exotic Orient associated with “sensuality, promise, terror, sublimity, idyllic pleasure, [and] intense energy” can be found in the works of musicians, painters, novelists, and philosophers from Mozart to Byron, Hugo, and Goethe.²⁵ To be fair, the Romantics did not only look to the East for the exotic: they also looked to their own past, drawing from Gothic tales and stories of European barbarians. Rodinson summarizes the Romantic vision of the East as follows:

The image was characterized by fierce and lavish scenes in a wild array of colors; harems and seraglios; decapitated bodies, women hurled into the Bosphorus in sacks; feluccas and brigantines displaying the Crescent flag; round, turquoise domes and white minarets soaring to the heavens; viziers, eunuchs, and odalisques; refreshing springs under palm trees; *giaours* with their throats slit; captive women forced into submission by their lustful captors.²⁶

This wild, sensual, and exotic image of the Orient would coexist with a more accurate representation of Islam during the Enlightenment, the philosophical movement that argued against Christian dogma and for reason and rationality as the means to achieve human progress.

The Enlightenment saw the birth of scholarship on Islam that was both realistic and sympathetic.²⁷ For instance, in contrast to the vicious medieval demonization of Muhammad, several philosophers published tracts arguing that Muhammad was not an imposter. Voltaire defended Muhammad as a great thinker and founder of a rational religion even as he (and other Enlightenment critics of organized religion) condemned Islam quite acerbically. Daniel explains Voltaire’s contradictory stances: “We must say that Voltaire first thought an attack on Islam useful for an attack on religion generally; and later saw the advantage of treating the facts less passionately, in order to recommend natural religion at the expense of Christian belief.”²⁸

The Romantic movement rejected the Enlightenment philosophers’ emphasis on rationality and instead valorized emotion, intuition, and imagination. For Romantic poets, philosophers, novelists, and painters, the East was a source of great wisdom and spiritual advancement. They contrasted this image with their own societies, which had lost these qualities in the mad rush to industrialization and capitalist modernity. Thus, the romantics

drew on Eastern styles of literary expression, architectures, and other such creative arenas.

Overall, as Rodinson notes, the “eighteenth century saw the Muslim East through fraternal and understanding eyes”; during the “the Enlightenment, the Muslims were not singled out as being different from other men.”²⁹ This attitude would shift with the rise of European colonialism and the birth of Orientalism—a new body of ideas that served to justify conquest. We turn to this shift in the next chapter.

This chapter outlined some of the key shifts in the European image of Islam from the seventh to the eighteenth centuries. This journey through history shows us that at first, between the seventh and eleventh centuries, Muslim incursions into Europe were viewed no differently than other pagan invasions. In fact, the Saracens were believed to be descendents of Abraham and therefore from the same “family” as Christians and Jews. Yet, once other “pagans” integrated into Christian Europe, the powerful Muslim enemy became an “other” that had to be vanquished through holy wars. For Christian Europe, the Muslim empires represented an existential threat that had to be destroyed.

Yet, even in the eleventh century, as the Church was propagating hostile images of Islam to mobilize for the Crusades and the reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula, a favorable image also came into being through the work of European scholars. As they began to retranslate the great works of human knowledge, they came to appreciate the contributions of Eastern scholars. Muslim rule in al-Andalus not only helped foster enormous intellectual leaps, it also marked a period of *convivencia* or tolerance, where Muslims, Christians, and Jews lived in relative peace.

When Christian Europe, under the spiritual leadership of the Vatican, began to break down, its focus shifted away from the Muslim enemy. The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries therefore saw a turn away from polemic toward indifference—until the Ottoman Empire began to advance into Europe in the early sixteenth century, heralding a new threat. This time, however, the enemy was seen as a secular and political threat rather than a religious one. The Ottomans were seen as Europeans of sorts, and admired for their many accomplishments. They even made alliances with various European leaders against others.

The next shift occurred when Europe arose from its long period of historical decline relative to other powers to begin a period of ascendance. The rise of Europe and the relative decline of the Ottomans turned admiration into contempt. The East in general and the Ottomans in particular were seen as inferior to the West and capable only of producing despotic societies. This polemical image then shifted into an exotic one during the Romantic era. This fantasy coexisted with the more accurate visions of Islam and the Muslim world produced during the Enlightenment.

In short, contrary to the myth that the West and the East have always been in conflict, conflict has in fact coexisted with cooperation. Far from the notion that “East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet,” what we have seen is that the histories of the East and the West are deeply intertwined. More important perhaps, the history outlined in this chapter also shows that the “West” has not uniformly harbored negative images of Islam. During moments of conflict, political elites mobilized Islamophobia as a means to advance their larger agendas, whether this was Papal supremacy over Europe or Christian rulers’ expansionist ambitions. In short, Islam bashing has been a useful tool in power politics. In the following centuries, during the era

of modern colonialism, the demonization of Islam and Muslims would continue. This time, however, as the following chapter demonstrates, it would be given new legitimacy in the academy and turned into a science.

¹ Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (One World: Oxford, 1960), reprint, 1993, 14–15.

² See R. W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 16–19.

³ Maxime Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 5.

⁴ Jason Webster (author of *Andalus: Unlocking the Secrets of Moorish Spain*, New York: Doubleday, 2004) quoted in the documentary film *An Islamic History of Europe* (London: BBC Four, 2009), directed by Rageh Omaar. Available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x0IaCK-7z5o>.

⁵ Southern, *Western Views of Islam*, 21.

⁶ http://www.intersectionsinternational.org/files/ImamFeisalAbdulRauf_InterviewTranscript.pdf

⁷ George Saliba, *Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

⁸ Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 31.

⁹ Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam*, 14–15.

¹⁰ John Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (3rd edition), New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, 39.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 39.

¹² Southern, *Western Views of Islam*, 5.

¹³ Southern, *Western Views of Islam*, 5.

¹⁴ Daniel, *Islam and the West*, 100.

¹⁵ Daniel, *Islam and the West*, 35.

¹⁶ Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam*, 21–22.

¹⁷ Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam*, 24–27.

¹⁸ Quoted in John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 41.

¹⁹ Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam*, 36.

²⁰ Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East*, 41.

²¹ Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East*, 42.

²² Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam*, 37.

²³ Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East*, 45–6.

²⁴ Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East*, 47.

²⁵ Edward Saïd, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978), 118.

²⁶ Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam*, 59.

²⁷ Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam*, 46–47.

²⁸ Daniel, *Islam and the West*, 312.

²⁹ Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam*, 48–49.