

# GENERAL INTRODUCTION

AS EVERYONE MUST KNOW, the relations between Europe and the Muslim world are very much in the news: European diplomacy with Iran or within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; Muslim immigration to European countries; the position of European oil companies in Arab economies; the economic trade agreements between the European Union (EU) and the countries of the Maghreb; Turkey's negotiations to join the EU; European reactions to the democratic revolutions sweeping the Arab world. All these pressing matters and many others as well, which could lead to cooperation, concord, or conflict, will remain key issues for European and Muslim societies throughout the twenty-first century and beyond.

This book explores the history of this rich and complex relationship, which began in the 630s, when the armies of Constantinople and Medina fought for control of Syria-Palestine. Since then, and for nearly fifteen centuries, there have been continuous and extremely varied forms of contact: wars, conquests, reconquests, diplomacy, alliances, commerce, marriages, the slave trade, translations, technological exchanges, and imitation and emulation in art and culture. Far from marginal curiosities within the history of the European and Muslim peoples, these contacts have profoundly marked them both.

The importance, richness, and scope of these relations, so apparent to anyone who knows the history of Europe or of the Muslim countries, are not obvious to everyone, however. The American political scientist Samuel P. Huntington claims that "during most of human existence, contacts between civilizations were intermittent or nonexistent."<sup>1</sup> According to him, it was only with the Portuguese and Spanish explorations and colonization at the turn of the sixteenth century that civilizations entered into permanent contact with each other. On the basis of that huge historical error, Huntington constructed his infamous thesis of the "clash of civilizations," which maintains that a limited number of distinct "civilizations" (the West, Islam, China, and so on) developed autonomously and then confronted each other.

How are we to address the relationship between Europe and the Muslim world without falling into Huntington's trap of placing two "civilizations," Islam and Europe, in opposition? Let us begin by defining our terms—that of "Europe" first and foremost. For the geographers of Greek and Roman antiquity, Europe was one of the three parts of the world, alongside Asia and Africa (or Libya). That idea can also be found in the Latin cartographers of the Middle Ages, who represented the world on "T and O" maps, so called because they depict the ocean as a circle surrounding the land mass, and the waters of the Mediterranean, the Nile, and the Tanais as a T dividing the world into three

continents. But that long-lasting geographical tradition seems to have had little influence on real identities: people considered themselves Genoese or Normans, they were part of a kingdom or an empire, but they rarely called themselves “Europeans.” The larger frame of reference was religious: the church, in theory, united all Christians. But the unity of the church was in fact fictive, since many theological and institutional issues divided the various Christian communities. By the ninth century, some Latin authors were speaking of *Christianitas* (Christendom) to designate all those who recognized the pope’s authority and who used Latin as the liturgical language. But that entity was centered in Europe, which left out most of the world’s Christians. And Latin Christendom was rapidly expanding, first within Spain and northeastern Europe and in the islands of the Mediterranean (Sicily, Corsica, the Balearics, Cyprus). It briefly seized control of a part of Palestine: Jerusalem was in the hands of the Crusader kings from 1099 to 1187, and the Latins held a section of the Palestinian coast until 1291. From the Portuguese and Spanish colonial ventures beginning in the late fifteenth century to Napoleon’s expedition to Egypt, European expansion played out in other parts of the world.

Among Arab authors as well, “Europe” (*Arufa*), a term inherited from the Greek tradition, was presented in learned geography as one of the parts of the world. But it had a minimal role, since Arab geographers generally rejected the division into continents in favor of a different schema, also of Greek origin: they separated the world into climates, usually seven in number. They therefore considered Europe not a unit but rather distinct countries (*balad*): those of the *Rūm* (Byzantines), the *Ifranġ* (Franks), the Slavs, and so on. That is, they viewed these regions in terms of plurality and diversity rather than as a “rival” civilization. In this book, we shall be content to use the term “Europe” to denote the continent’s current delimitations, with all the ambiguity that implies as to its eastern boundaries.

What about the “Islamic world”? It can be assimilated to the term *dār al-islām*, widespread among the Arab authors, which literally means “house of Islam.” This refers to all those territories where Islam is the dominant religion, and is not to be confused with the *umma*, the community of Muslim believers as a whole. The *dār al-islām* is not inhabited solely by Muslims. Also residing there are *dhimmis*, “protected” minorities (Jews, Christians, Mazdeans). And the *umma* includes Muslims who live outside the *dār al-islām*: captives or minorities living in regions ruled by non-Muslims, traders in the Indian Ocean or in sub-Saharan Africa, or (in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries) emigrants to Europe or America.

Clearly, the *dār al-islām* is no more stable a geographical entity than is Europe: it expanded rapidly throughout the Middle Ages. It came into being with a wave of lightning conquests that, over the century following Muhammad’s death in 632, gave the Muslims control of an empire extending from the Indus and the Hindu Kush to the Atlantic coasts of Morocco and Portugal. Although

that expansion slowed subsequently, it resumed later by other means: through the mass conversion of the Turks from the ninth century on and of the Mongols beginning in the thirteenth century, which brought Islam to central Asia and to China's doorstep. The Islamized Mongols went on to conquer a good part of northern India. Elsewhere, Islam spread through commerce: to the kingdoms of western Africa such as Mali, or to the Indian Ocean, from Zanzibar to Java. Between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, Christian kings of Northern Iberia conquered al-Andalus, or Muslim Spain. But during the same period, the Ottoman Empire extended its power into the heart of Europe. For the medieval period, we shall direct our interest primarily to the part of the *dār al-islām* that had close contacts with Europe, particularly the Mediterranean regions.

What was the European perception of the *dār al-islām*? The words "Islam" and "Muslim" entered European languages only belatedly: "Islam" was used in French for the first time in 1697, in English in 1818; "musulman" can be found in French from the mid-sixteenth century on, and "Moslim" in English as of 1615.<sup>2</sup> Before that time, the terms for Muslims generally referred to ethnic origin: "Arab," "Turk," "Persian," "Moor." There were also biblical terms: "Ishmaelites" or "sons of Ishmael," since, in the biblical and Qur'anic tradition, Ishmael was considered the forefather of the Arabs. Similarly, Muslims were called "Hagarenes," after Hagar, the mother of Ishmael. But the most commonly used term in the Middle Ages was undoubtedly "Saracen." For ancient geographers, that word of obscure origin referred to one of the peoples of Arabia. It then came to designate all Arabs, and then, more generally, Muslims. To denote Islam, the expressions "law of the Saracens" (*lex Sarracenorum*) or "law of Muhammad" (*lex Mahumeti*) were often used. With the rise of the Ottoman Empire in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, people spoke primarily of "Turks," or often, "the Turk" in the singular. If there was a Latin expression equivalent to *dār al-islām* in the Middle Ages, it was probably *terrae Sarracenorum* (lands of the Saracens). Many European authors of the time vacillated between a monolithic view of the Saracens, considered universally hostile to the Christians, and a more nuanced view sensitive to the great diversity of regions and peoples.

Were there, as Huntington claims, two rival civilizations—founded on universalist ideologies and competing in their expansionist aims—that clashed with each other, brandishing the banners of the Crusade and of jihad? Or rather, as the historian Richard Bulliet maintains, were these two branches of a single "Islam-Christian" civilization, with deep roots in a common religious, cultural, and intellectual heritage: the civilization of the ancient Mediterranean and the Near East; biblical revelation; and Greek and Hellenistic science and philosophy? In Bulliet's view, that common heritage grew stronger over fifteen centuries, thanks to the uninterrupted exchange of goods, persons, and ideas.<sup>3</sup> If we view the Muslim world and Europe (or the West) as two branches of a single civilization, the idea of a "clash of civilizations" no longer makes any sense. And

this is not simply a matter of words. For example, to see the Muslim conquest of Spain (711), the First Crusade (1099), the taking of Constantinople by the Ottomans (1453), the conquest of Granada (1492), Napoleon's Egyptian expedition (1798–1801), the French conquest of Algeria (1830–1847), and the U.S. interventions in Iraq (1991 and 2003) as so many manifestations, so much evidence, of a supposed “clash of civilizations” makes any search for more specific explanations superfluous. But no one, in delineating the wars within Europe or in Muslim countries, resorts to such an explanatory straitjacket. Whether discussing the Ottoman conquest of the Mamluks, the Wars of Religion in Europe, or the world wars that tore Europe asunder in the twentieth century, historians seek to explain events without appealing to some “clash of civilizations.” France was often at war with its neighbors, particularly Great Britain and Germany, but no one claims it belonged to a “civilization” distinct from them.

Readers should therefore not be fooled by the title of this book: It will have less to do with relations between Europe and the Islamic world than with those between Genoese and Tunisians, Constantinopolitans and Alexandrians, Catalans and Maghrebis. It will deal not with the relations between two “civilizations” but with the complex and diverse relations between many individuals and groups that belong to what we lump together, with all the ambiguity already noted, under the umbrella terms “Europe” and “the Islamic world.”

This book will also not be a theoretical argument or an ideological manifesto. The authors will not attempt systematically to refute Huntington's theses or the corresponding theses of those who have inspired the current Islamist movements promoting jihad. Similarly, Islam and Christianity will not be objects of study *qua* religions: we will not seek their common roots, their points of divergence or potential points of intersection. We will simply attempt to revive a long history, many aspects of which have fallen into oblivion, and to replace simplistic and reductive schemata with evidence of a richer and more complex history. Furthermore, it is not history itself that we will bring to light: historians can never provide anything but a reconstruction, within a discourse that imposes an order on the mass of raw material and that makes selections. That mass is so large in this case, given the long period we have embraced, the many angles from which the subject can be approached, and the variety of levels at which it can be grasped, that the authors have abandoned any idea of providing an exhaustive treatment. The pages that follow do not constitute a systematic treatise or even a textbook on the question. This book is closer in form to the essay, a more subjective and hence more arbitrary genre that privileges the significant event, the illustrative example, the telling quotation as a function of a few guiding ideas. Yet readers will encounter not *one* essay but three in succession, each divided into a series of chapters. The authors—the first dealing with the medieval period, the second with the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries, and the third with the contemporary period—have carried out their respective tasks in rather different ways. The reason no doubt lies in their individual

personalities but also in more objective factors. The three periods belong to different historical fields, whether in terms of the quantity and quality of the available documentation, the status of the respective historiographies, and, last but not least, the historical circumstances themselves, which in each era bring different questions to the fore.

Part I of this book is devoted to the history of relations in the Middle Ages, that is, from the 630s to the fifteenth century. Chapter 1 examines how medieval Arab and European geographers perceived the world and the populations who lived in it. John Tolan pays particular attention to the image of Europeans in Arab geography and to that of the East in Latin geography. In both Christian and Muslim territories, ideologies of holy war were often used to justify conquest of the “infidels,” as he demonstrates in chapter 2, devoted to the development of the concepts of jihad, Crusade, and *reconquista*. These ideologies glorified war waged for the “true” religion but rarely ruled out political and military alliances with princes belonging to rival faiths. Nor did they prevent princes from setting aside a protected but subaltern place for religious minorities. Chapter 3 examines the fate of the minority Christians in the Muslim countries of Europe and of minority Muslims in Christian countries. In the Mediterranean world, commerce established strong ties between the European seaport cities (such as Pisa, Venice, Genoa, and Barcelona) and ports in the Muslim world. Especially from the twelfth century on, trade had a profound impact on all the societies it touched, as Tolan shows in chapter 4. Last, chapter 5 deals with intellectual, cultural, and artistic exchanges, studying in particular the profound impact of Arab science and philosophy on the intellectual revival of Europe that began in the twelfth century.

Part II deals with what French historians call the “modern period,” which extends from the late fifteenth to the late eighteenth century. Some may object that such a demarcation makes more sense for Western history (for which it was devised) than for the history of Islam. It is justified, however, inasmuch as, within the history of Islam itself, that period has certain identifying characteristics, such as the emergence and blossoming of several great empires, which replaced the political fragmentation of the previous phase: the empire of the Great Moguls in India, that of the Shiite Safavids in Persia, and the Ottomans. In recognizing that, with the advent of modernity, this period was marked by profound changes in Europe, we must acknowledge above all that the relationship between Europe and the Islamic world entered a new phase at that time. We will privilege the history of the Ottoman Empire, since its destiny is thoroughly interwoven with Europe, to such a degree that the two histories merge in part. Chapter 6 retraces that shared history. Focusing on the Ottoman conquest in Europe, Gilles Veinstein recites the litany of events by which the history of Europe became indistinguishable from that of its relationship, whether good or bad, with the principal Muslim power of the time. Chapter 7 details the characteristics of that “other Europe” resulting from the Ottoman conquest:

a multiethnic and multifaith Europe under the domination of the Crescent. The presence of the “infidels” in Europe and the threat it posed constituted the worst of scandals for Christendom. Chapter 8 delineates all the forms of antagonism that, at the ideological level, irremediably pitted the two protagonists against each other. The religious factor remained significant, as in the Middle Ages, usually taking the same forms as in medieval polemics. But that mutual rejection also took new forms, feeding on sources of exclusion that were not specifically religious. Chapter 9 highlights another consequence of the schism between the two Europes (unequally represented in contemporary European memory): the existence of an Islamic-Christian border running through the middle of the continent. That border was the site of permanent confrontations, both physical and symbolic, but also of mutual exchanges and influences. A striking expression of these influences can be found in the twin sociomilitary organizations that, under various designations and with characteristics proper to each, were a constant on both sides, along the entire length of the land and sea border. On that demarcation line dividing Europe, alternative societies arising from the social and religious tensions of the interior faced off: these adversaries resembled each other only to better enter into opposition. This space between, this world apart, tended to play by its own rules when negotiating the relationship between states and, when necessary, came to disrupt the *modus vivendi* these states set in place. Chapter 10 tempers the predominantly dark and negative image of the preceding chapters. Breaches existed in the wall of hostility, and centuries of coexistence can in no way be reduced to an uninterrupted succession of violent acts and confrontations. Ideological antagonism regularly yielded to political realism or commercial pragmatism, which, of course, did not eliminate the antagonism but at least bracketed it. Other temperaments, such as a taste for exoticism, intellectual curiosity, or philosophical speculation could more effectively break down the ideological barrier, but they undermined it only to a very limited degree during the period under consideration.

Part III begins with the major rupture of the second half of the eighteenth century, which historians used to call “the origin of the Eastern question.” Henry Laurens examines the different phenomena that suddenly placed Europe in the position of a superpower with, as a corollary, plans to conquer the Old World. From the early nineteenth century on, it became clear to Muslim elites that, to survive, they would have to accept change. The agreed-upon plan was to form modern states, but that entailed fundamental transformations of society and of culture.

Those regions that succeeded in preserving formal independence were caught up in a race between European encroachment or interference and the establishment of a strong state, which also had to call on the Europeans for assistance. Because of that dynamic of change, it is difficult to determine what was borrowed pure and simple and what was the result of evolutionary synchronism: the complex question of the emancipation of non-Muslims in

Islamic territory is a case in point. Other regions had to face the “colonial night” of European domination, which in certain places eventually adopted the form of settlement colonies.

The Muslim world was far from passive when confronted with Europe’s multifaceted advance. Rather, it entered a cycle of accelerated transformation, culminating in the adoption of the nationality principle as the new mode of social organization. The new forms of political expression contested both the imperial Islamic heritage and the modern colonial empires. Then, at the start of the twentieth century, the Muslim world entered the revolutionary era. Its emancipation increased with World War I, which, however, devastated its entire continental space, from Morocco to India.

Independence, won by armed struggle when necessary, has imposed new challenges on the Islamic world in its confrontation with Europe: nationalism and Islamism, development and dependency, modern states and religious or ethnic communities. The Muslim world was both the prize and the agent of the new cold war conflicts, which perpetuated the logic of involvement and interference introduced in the nineteenth century.

At the same time, migratory movements gave birth to a “European” Islam within the former colonial metropolises. Multiculturalism partly encompasses the colonial heritage but within an entirely new perspective. At a time when the “north bank” of the Mediterranean is coalescing into a European Union, Europe is called on to define its identity in terms of its proximity to the Muslim world. The culturalist discourses on both sides tend to want to deny the inner life they share as a result of fifteen centuries of common history.

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