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INCLUDING ISLAM

Although the divide between Islam and Europe will always be deeper than that between the different European peoples, there are two reasons why we simply cannot do without Islam in the construction of European cultural history: namely the unique opportunity to compare its assimilation of the same [antique] heritage, and on account of the abundance of [the two sides'] historical interactions.

—C. H. Becker, *Islamstudien* (1924–32) 1.39 (lecture delivered in 1921)

THE WEST AND THE REST

In this brief programmatic book, I contribute a new angle to the debate about “the West and the Rest.” One party is eager to explain how Europe and eventually North America—the North Atlantic world—left the rest in the dust from about 1500. The other side argues that Asia—China, Japan, and the Islamic trio of Mughals, Safavids, and Ottomans—remained largely free of European encroachment until the mid-1700s, but then either collapsed for internal reasons, or else were gradually undermined by colonial powers’ superior technological, economic, and military clout. Europe is relativized and its supposedly exceptional destiny undermined; but it still wins in the end, along with its North American offshoot.¹

This is all just the latest phase in other long-standing debates about America’s destiny and Europe’s identity, the latter a focus of particular concern now given the impetus toward European integration—or disintegration—provided by the economic crisis that broke out in 2007. North Atlantic hegemony is no longer a given—it is more and more shadowed by two great Asian powers, China and India. It appears that the dominance of the West is on the

1 See for example M. G. S. Hodgson, *The venture of Islam* (Chicago 1974) 3, esp. 3–15; J. Darwin, *After Tamerlane* (London 2007); S. F. Dale, *The Muslim empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals* (Cambridge 2010). I use the term “North Atlantic” to denote the shared heritage and attitudes of Europe and North America, and “Eurocentric” to refer to a particular European emphasis apparent in many histories of Europe and/or Asia dealing with periods before—and even after—the two sides of the Atlantic came into regular contact, irrespective of whether they are written by Europeans or North Americans.

way to becoming one more historical period, and that future historians will be as much concerned to explain its loss as its rise.

If Asian economic competition is one cloud on the North Atlantic world's horizon, another is Islam—both the religion that goes under that name even though it has many branches sometimes bitterly hostile to each other, and the cultural region created by it, the “Islamic world,” which has in most phases of its history included large non-Muslim populations. Asiatic economic competition can be faced with some equanimity or at least resignation by societies that have benefited (as well as suffered) for decades now from a deluge of cheap consumer goods. The Islamic world, by contrast, represents not an economic challenge but something more insidious, a moral and spiritual competitor offering different norms of conduct and a variant vision of man and God unnervingly close—yet at the same time a challenge, as the Qur’ān makes explicit—to the values espoused by “Judeo-Christian” civilization. (The ideal reader will forgive essentializing references to “Judaism,” “Christianity,” and “Islam” for ease of general exposition, be aware that all three emerged gradually not ready-made as distinct identities,² and take due account of allusions, especially in my later chapters, to “orthodox” and “heretics,” Latin, Greek, Syriac, and Armenian strands in Christianity, and Sunnis, Shiites, and different traditions of law in Islam.)

My purpose here is not to join this debate directly, but to overhaul its foundations, especially as regards the role of Islam and the Islamic world. In doing this, I hope to contribute to a sounder and more generous understanding of Islam's historical and intellectual contribution. I do not believe this can be attained by compiling a balance sheet of what the North Atlantic and Islamic worlds have achieved, or done to each other, since 1500. The sum total of what these civilizations are—and may come to be—cannot be grasped only in terms of the last half millennium. Instead we have to go back to the First Millennium, during which Christianity was born and matured, roughly in the middle of which the Prophet³ Muḥammad received or conceived the Qur’ān, and by the end of which Islam had matured sufficiently to be compared with patristic Christianity.⁴

2 On Islam see recently F. M. Donner, *Muhammad and the believers* (Cambridge, Mass. 2010). With A. W. Hughes, *Abrahamic religions* (New York 2012), I eschew the hold-all “Abrahamic” terminology. Is using it for writing history (e. g. J. Goody, *Renaissances* [Cambridge 2010]) the price we pay for a global perspective?

3 While the Qur’ān calls Muḥammad both “messenger” (rasūl) and “prophet” (nabī), the consecrated English usage is adopted here.

4 The period and region here addressed are determined by the basic question about Islam. M. Mann, *The sources of social power* (Cambridge 1986–2013; 1st: 2012) 1.301–3, poses a more general sociological question, about the emergence and articulation of “transcendent power,” and locates four relevant religions born “in about one thousand years from the birth of Buddha to the death of Muḥammad” (Christianity and Hinduism being the other two). Naturally, the relevant geographical region extends

In the first place we need to reformulate the history of the First Millennium in order to fit Islam into it, for the Arabian doctrine is excluded from the conventional narrative by historians eager to draw a direct line from late Antiquity, through the European Middle Ages, to the Renaissance and Modernity. Next we need to ask this: what was the nature of this new Islamic religion whose features, however debatably fast or slow to emerge, were quite discernible by 1000 CE? How did it relate to other contemporary civilizations, and those of Antiquity? Viewed from our present-day vantage point, does it make sense that Islam's "classical" moment is excluded from North Atlantic educational curricula, while the European Middle Ages, even though less taught than they were a generation or so ago, still constitute the indispensable conceptual and historical link between us and the foundations of a European culture conceived of as Greek, Roman, Jewish, and Christian—but nothing much to do with Islam? After all, the European Union now has a Muslim population that some put at twenty million, around twice the size of a middling member country such as Portugal or Greece.

As with China and India, an already visible future in which Islam will be increasingly prominent has to be brought into play if historians are to formulate questions that elucidate our ongoing quandaries rather than reinforcing Eurocentric stereotypes about the past and present. History is engagement with the past not just as it was then but as it confronts and molds us now. And beyond the historian's contribution to the public debate with its mainly social and political parameters, there are intellectual and spiritual benefits to be had from a contextualized approach to early Islam. It may, for example, uncover fertile dimensions of the tradition forgotten or misapprehended even by Muslims themselves, for they too write history selectively. Arabic philosophy, to take just one example, turns out to have been far from exclusively Muslim: there were also Christians and Jews and Mazdeans/Zoroastrians who philosophized in Arabic. Philosophy both contextualizes and provides fresh approaches to a tradition that, if entered through the austerities of Qur'anic scholarship and theology, may seem alien and impenetrable to the non-Muslim. Muslims too may benefit from reading their orthodoxies against the grain, which the philosophical tradition tends to encourage. The more rational and therefore philosophical strains of Muslim theology, "Mu'tazilism" or "Neo-Mu'tazilism," are under attack from fundamentalists in the contemporary Islamic world, as part of general pressure for social and political purification.⁵ But understanding of these controversies is hard to achieve without the historian's perspective and context.

farther into Asia than does mine: see below, n. 11. But Mann is not very interested in geography; nor would it make sense to study Islam only up to the death of its founder.

5 R. C. Martin and M. R. Woodward, *Defenders of reason in Islam: Mu'tazilism from medieval school to modern symbol* (Oxford 1997). T. Bauer, *Die Kultur der Ambiguität* (Berlin 2011) 385–87, points out that Mu'tazilism has not been exempt from dogmatism.

It may be objected that philosophy was and remains a minority pursuit. But more general study of early Islam can improve our appreciation of its interaction with the imaginative worlds of Biblical and rabbinic Judaism and Eastern, especially Syriac, Christianity. Note particularly the Corpus Coranicum project at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences, which aims, by “realigning the Qur’ān into Late Antiquity” and tracking Jewish and Christian parallels to the Qur’anic text, to present it as part of the European heritage and illuminate the range of possible relationships between these monotheistic belief systems, not just then but now too.⁶ Through the Qur’anic Jesus, for instance, we grow to appreciate the shared prophetic heritage of all three religions, obscured by Christian insistence on the uniqueness of God’s son. By studying the debates between Muslims and Christians in the Abbasid Caliphate, Christians may be helped to see their teachings in ways that bring out their essential compatibility with Islam’s strict monotheism. If one starts from what both religions—and Judaism—affirm, namely the unity of God, then what Muslims see as Christianity’s two stumbling blocks, namely the Trinity and Incarnation, may be understood as means of communicating that unity to humans. Although the modern study of comparative religion originated in Christian European scholars’ investigations of Judaism and the Greco-Roman tradition, Islam offers a still better vantage point, as was already apparent in the work of, for example, the Eastern Iranian polymath and historian of—among much else—religion, Bīrūnī (d. 1048).⁷

Going back to the First Millennium makes sense, then, in terms of defining and securing the foundations of the contemporary debate with and about Islam. Non-Muslim scholarship on Islam has rightly been criticized for obsession with origins, and neglect of the living tradition with its distinctive view of the foundational phase.⁸ But it is also true that failure to look behind later orthodoxies and rigidified dogmatic formulations (especially fundamentalist ones, which tend to simplify a diverse, un-self-consciously polyvalent, “ambiguous” tradition in response to criticism contained in universalizing, hegemonial Western discourse⁹) can suggest Islam is by its very nature inflexible and closed to the world around it. No student of Islamic origins, at least in the manner of the Corpus Coranicum project, will easily fall into this trap. Nor

6 See contributions by A. Neuwirth and M. J. Marx to D. Hartwig and others (eds), *Im vollen Licht der Geschichte: Die Wissenschaft des Judentums und die Anfänge der kritischen Koranforschung* (Würzburg 2008) 11–53; A. Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike: Ein europäischer Zugang* (Berlin 2010); <http://koran.bbaw.de>; www.corpuscoranicum.de.

7 G. G. Stroumsa, *A new science* (Cambridge, Mass. 2010) 10–11, 22, 41; F. de Blois, “Bīrūnī, Abū Rayhān vii,” *Elr* 4.283–85.

8 Cf. A. Hourani, *Islam in European thought* (Cambridge 1991) 41, 42, 50, 59–60. Beginning in the 1970s, Anglo-Saxon skepticism about the formative phase led to neglect of that too: N. Sinai, *Fort-schreibung und Auslegung: Studien zur frühen Koraninterpretation* (Wiesbaden 2009) IX.

9 This is the argument of Bauer, *Ambiguität* [1:5], e.g., 186–87, 268–69.

will any sociologist of religion aware of the fluidity of ordinary Christian and Muslim identities, and the hybridity of both religions outside the compartmentalized minds of intellectuals.¹⁰ Going back to the First Millennium also provides a logical and helpful frame for studying the last phases of Antiquity in conjunction with the “Byzantine” Greek, Latin, and Arabic civilizations as they emerged from it. Although the Islamic world plays a prominent role in the argument of this book, it is by no means my only focus of attention. Islam’s coming served still further to diversify—as well as harmonize—the already existing pre-Islamic polyphony of Judaism, Christianity, Greek philosophy (to which I attach special importance), Mazdaism, Manicheism, and so on.

Greco-Roman Antiquity, symbolized by the Parthenon and Colosseum, and the Middle Ages and Renaissance—Chartres and Florence—still dominate our view of premodern history. But in recent decades another, more than merely intermediate or transitional vista has opened up, that of the “long” late Antiquity from 200 to 800 CE, which I here further expand into the First Millennium from Augustus to Bīrūnī’s contemporary and correspondent, Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna). Our world, even if we define it in the narrowest North Atlantic terms, is now and will increasingly be indebted to *all* the various and entangled cultural strands that place the Eurasian¹¹ First Millennium at the crossroads of history, and the career of the Prophet Muḥammad at the heart of the First Millennium. I propose the First Millennium not as an alternative to the traditional tripartite periodization of history into ancient, medieval, and modern, but as a new focus within the existing framework. If taken seriously, this will have consequences for how we look at the two traditional periods it overlaps, namely Antiquity and the Middle Ages (a question I address in the closing pages of my last chapter). But the concern of the present book is to argue the intrinsic merits of the First Millennium.

EDWARD GIBBON

In writing *Before and after Muḥammad* I have come to a better appreciation of Edward Gibbon. He is renowned for his account of Rome’s decline from her Antonine Golden Age to her sack in 410 by Alaric’s Goths, thirty-one out of seventy-one chapters. Indeed, some whose researches get no further

10 J. B. V. Tannous, *Syria between Byzantium and Islam* (diss. Princeton 2010) 430–80.

11 Eurasia: By this fashionable, ill-defined term I mean neither the whole landmass, nor “west of India,” but Europe plus Asia to the extent they share cultural traditions, notably Christianity and Islam. Therefore India and China are included, but only for the sake of religions that originated on the far western rim of Asia (though Chinese Christianity is expanding spectacularly at the moment). Similarly, I define the North Atlantic world primarily in terms of shared culture, the result of European conquest and/or mission in America. In chapter 4 I identify a more focused sector of Eurasia, the region from Afghanistan to the East Mediterranean basin with which this book is mainly concerned, as the “Eurasian Hinge.”

than the title-page believe that *The history of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire* concerns only the Roman Mediterranean and excludes both Asiatic Christianity and Islam.¹² Gibbon's undeniable conviction that the European civilization of his day was the pinnacle of human achievement¹³ makes him a clear-cut Eurocentrist too. Yet reading the whole work, one sees him setting an agenda that today seems more valid than ever. Gibbon was obliged to retain the attention of a classically educated audience, while conveying his own response (evolving as he wrote) to the story of an already more than millennial Rome renewed on the Bosphorus, and compelled to face victorious Arab armies in the seventh century and the encroachments of the Turks from the eleventh. Present-day historians, at least in Europe and North America, have to deal with a comparable tension between a public informed only about the history of the North Atlantic world, and their own appreciation of the consequences globalization must have for the formulation of meaningful historical questions.

An exit from both dead ends—fixation with Rome Old and New, Latin and Greek,¹⁴ or with the North Atlantic world—is offered by the study of Islamic history. To justify neglecting Rome on the Tiber for alien, Greek Rome on the Bosphorus, Gibbon argued in chapter 48 (1788) that “the fate of the Byzantine monarchy is *passively* connected with the most splendid and important revolutions which have changed the state of the world.” By this he meant especially the rise of Islam and the empires of the Arabs and then the Turks—of whom he observed that “like Romulus, the founder of that martial people was suckled by a she-wolf.”¹⁵ Gibbon reassured his readers that, while “the excursive line may embrace the wilds of Arabia and Tartary,” still “the circle [of the *Decline and fall*] will be ultimately reduced to the decreasing limit of the Roman monarchy.”¹⁶ Hence, the great work's coda offers a prospect of the ruins of Old Rome at the dawn of the Renaissance, and it can even be argued that Rome's “firm edifice” has been present throughout the excursus, an “absent centre” implicitly contrasted to “the transient dynasties

12 E.g., S. F. Johnson, “Preface: On the uniqueness of late Antiquity,” in id. (ed.), *The Oxford handbook of late Antiquity* (New York 2012) xii–xiii, xv, xx (“the intra-Roman narrative of Gibbon has largely been abandoned in every quarter of the field”; but in the pre-Islamic period alone Gibbon discusses, sometimes for an entire chapter, Persians, Germans, Huns, Goths, Germanic successor states, Slavs, Turks, Avars, Ethiopians, etc.). And, in the same volume, R. Hoyland, “Early Islam as a late antique religion,” 1054–55.

13 Gibbon, “General observations on the fall of the Roman Empire in the West”: 2.511.

14 I set aside the extreme position according to which Europe is a *Latin* Roman assimilation and synthesis of Hebraism, Hellenism, and Christianity, sidelining East Rome (“Byzantium”) as well as Islam: R. Brague, *Europe, la voie romaine* (Paris 1999, revised ed. with “Postface”) 28–36, 46, 159–63; cf. F. G. Maier, *Die Verwandlung der Mittelmeerwelt* (Frankfurt am Main 1968) 359. Pocock 4.208 observes that the exclusion of Spain from the traditional European master narrative removed a chance to insert Islam.

15 Gibbon 48: 3.25 (first quotation), and cf. 42: 2.694 (she-wolf), 50: 3.151, 64: 3.791, 69: 3.978.

16 Gibbon 48: 3.25; cf. 48: 3.26, 51: 3.237.

of Asia.”¹⁷ Nevertheless, the space and extended narrative Gibbon devotes to the Islamic world, in a book whose declared subject is Rome and Europe, can only impress. This was a historian who could praise, repeatedly, the rationality of the Muslim Prophet and his Qur’ān,¹⁸ and devote long chapters to the Arab, Turkish, and Mongol Empires, on his way to Mehmed II’s capture of Constantinople, which offered the formal excuse for these accounts.

After the last volume was published in 1788, Gibbon went back to the first page of volume 1, where he had defined his purpose as “to deduce the most important circumstances of its [Rome’s] decline and fall; a revolution which will ever be remembered, and is still felt by the nations of the earth.” He took out his pen and, in the margin of his copy, rephrased his objective as “to prosecute the decline and fall of the Empire of Rome: of whose language, Religion and laws the impression will be long preserved in our own, and the neighbouring countries of Europe.” And having in this way shifted his emphasis away from “wars, and the administration of public affairs, . . . the principal subjects of history,” toward the durability of culture, and from the whole world to Europe alone as the field of Rome’s influence, he added an “NB” to himself: “Have Asia and Africa, from Japan to Morocco, any feeling or memory of the Roman Empire?”¹⁹ Without underestimating the extent to which *Decline and fall* already enlarges European into Eurasian history,²⁰ one appreciates that in this note Gibbon is moving on, not denying Rome but certainly relativizing it.

Succumbing to that perspective would have made a quite different book;²¹ but even reading the account Gibbon did give us, of the inexorable rise and titanic conquests of the Arabs, Turks, and Mongols, one is struck by what a Pandora’s box his attempt to explain the East Roman Emperor Heraclius’s defeats in the 630s turned out to be.²² Still more remarkable is the realization that in writing it, Gibbon was harking very far back indeed, to his “blind and

17 P. Ghosh, “The conception of Gibbon’s *History*,” in R. McKitterick and R. Quinault (eds), *Edward Gibbon and Empire* (Cambridge 1997) 309, 311–12 (the first and last phrases are Gibbon’s).

18 See below, 22–23.

19 Gibbon 9: 1.252; 3.1094.

20 Cf. Pocock 1.3–4, 113. Note also Gibbon’s undated draft “Outlines of the history of the world,” ed. P. B. Craddock, *The English essays of Edward Gibbon* (Oxford 1972) 163–98; cf. J. G. A. Pocock, “The ‘Outlines of the history of the world,’” in A. T. Grafton and J. H. M. Salmon (eds), *Historians and ideologues* (Rochester, NY 2001) 211–30.

21 The same would be true of the present book if, instead of focusing on the First Millennium, it addressed the full implications of non-Eurocentricity for the history of the second and third millennia. Cf. K. Blankinship, “Islam and world history: Toward a new periodization,” *American journal of Islamic social sciences* 8 (1991) 433–35. (My thanks to Peter O’Brien for knowledge of this article.) The interaction of Christian and Muslim worldviews is nonetheless a global phenomenon, as, for example, in Indonesia or Nigeria.

22 An intimately related problem, Iran’s defeat by Heraclius in the 620s, has given rise to another *Decline and fall*: P. Pourshariati, *Decline and fall of the Sasanian Empire* (London 2008), esp. 2.

boyish taste for the pursuit of exotic history” in such as Simon Ockley and the *Universal history* (1736–68), among whose contributors was George Sale the translator of the Qur’ān—Gibbon held both these early English Orientalists in lasting esteem.²³ In the decades during which *The history of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire* gestated, both Arabic and Persian studies were expanding in several parts of Europe; but then as now the dominant historical narrative ran from Rome, through medieval Christendom and especially the relations of Papacy and empire, to the reemergence of civil society and the modern European system of nation-states variously enlightened. Gibbon was leading his public into ill-charted territory, and for reasons that he does not fully explain or perhaps even understand. European economic, political, and military encroachment on Asia was entering its crucial phase, though, as Gibbon wrote. He knew the broader issues through both his readings and his grandfather’s disastrous involvement in the 1720 South Sea Bubble.²⁴ Arguably, the implication of his book was that these vast new horizons, especially the Islamic empires of the Mughals, Safavids, and Ottomans, could be reframed as a part, however excursively, of Europe’s foundational Roman history. But did he actually intend this, or his readers grasp it? Gibbon and Islam remains a blind spot in scholarship.²⁵

23 J. Murray (ed.), *The autobiographies of Edward Gibbon* (London 1897²) 56–58, 79, 121, 224, characteristically emphasizing the inadequacy of his formal education in order to explain how his masterpiece transgressed so many conventional scholarly boundaries. Cf. on Ockley and Sale the Bibliographical Index to Womersley’s edition of the *Decline and fall*, also therein Gibbon’s less favorable view of the *Universal history*, despite its attention to the East.

24 Pocock 4.229–45 on the Abbé Raynal’s *Histoire des deux Indes*; Murray (ed.), *Autobiographies of Edward Gibbon* [1:23] 11–17.

25 For a few suggestive pages, see A. Momigliano, “Eighteenth-century prelude to Mr. Gibbon,” in id., *Sesto contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico* (Rome 1980) 257–63, but also Ghosh, in McKitterick and Quinault (eds), *Edward Gibbon and Empire* [1:17: a volume largely neglectful of Islam] 294 n. 127. Ghosh well discusses, 300–316, the structural problems of books 4–6 (1788) and their “abjuration of a master narrative” (305); also their dismissal of the “transient dynasties of Asia” compared to Rome’s “firm edifice” (311–12). For Pocock, *Barbarism and religion*, Gibbon’s eastward turn is “the strangest of his decisions”: 1.3, 3.1; also 1.2, on Gibbon’s trajectory from the Germanic successor states “in whose barbarism may be found the seeds of European liberty” to “*the less rewarding question* of with what (if anything) Slav and Turkish barbarians have replaced the empire in the east” (my italics). See also, in a similar vein, 1.304; 2.4, 121, 303, 371, 373–74, 379–80, 390, 393–94, 402; 4.230; 5.374. Pocock bases his work on the three volumes Gibbon published from 1776 to 1781, accepts the conventional judgment that *Decline and fall* climaxes with the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West, and still at the end of his latest installment observes of the 1788 volumes, “These were radically different histories; it is far from certain that Gibbon resolved on ways of dealing with them, or that European historiography . . . offered him the means of doing so”: 5.385–86. Ghosh’s explaining where Gibbon went wrong is more interesting than Pocock’s lamenting or patronizing it; but neither gets to grips with the eastward turn. D. Womersley’s analysis of the whole work, *The transformation of The decline and fall of the Roman Empire* (Cambridge 1988), expatiates on Eastern Rome but not the Islamic empires, though note 209–11 on Gibbon’s echoing of his account of Rome’s fall in his description of the Caliphate’s collapse (and his implicitly more ironical stance toward theories of historical causality—see below, 14–15). One might imagine that ne-

By singling out certain durable, “longue durée” currents in human experience—notably Greco-Roman rationalism and the Jewish-Christian-Muslim monotheistic traditions—which I consider to be crucially important both in their historical origins and development, and in their influence over us now, I too end up offering the reader what is sometimes derisively referred to as a “grand narrative”—what is more, one based on concepts, and in particular religious concepts. I make no apology. The past has enormous intrinsic interest, including at the purely antiquarian level; and for some that interest is sufficient motive for study.²⁶ But there are others who come to history with questions about its role in making us what we are now. To help make sense of the unfolding present in relation to the past, historians must cast a wide net, while searching the past for alternative ways of thinking to those now prevalent. An eminent Marxist historian recently deplored the two grand narratives to which, he believes, early medieval Europe falls victim, “the narrative of nationalism and the narrative of modernity.”²⁷ His omission of “the formation of Christendom” serves to double-underline what separates his approach from the one I offer here, which is shy neither of large-scale narrative nor of ideas, notably religious and philosophical ideas.²⁸

ISLAM AND LATE ANTIQUITY

My fundamental question about history and thought “before and after Muḥammad” can be put in various ways: Was Islam, as has usually been assumed, a perversion—or the nemesis—of the (late) ancient and early Christian world from which North Atlantic civilization derives its identity? Or was it perhaps its further evolution, or at least a viable alternative line of development? Does the Muslims’ hijra era beginning in 622 denote a decisive turn in

glect of these chapters is best overcome by a separate publication: E. Gibbon (tr. J. Sporschil), *Der Sieg des Islam* (Frankfurt am Main 2003, with an essay on “Gibbons Muhammad” by R. Schulze) ; id. (tr. F. Guizot), *Mahomet et la naissance de l’islam* (Paris 2011). Within months of their appearance in London, excerpts were translated by A. H. W. von Walterstern, “Die Eroberung von Mekka,” *Neue Literatur und Völkerkunde* 2–2 (1788) 400–410, and C. G. Körner, “Mahomet: Ein Fragment,” *Der Teutsche Merkur* (April 1789) 70–93, 217–42. My thanks to Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus and Gustav Seibt for this information.

26 J.-M. Carrié, “‘Bas-Empire’ ou ‘Antiquité tardive’?,” in J.-M. Carrié and A. Rousselle, *L’empire romain en mutation* (Paris 1999) 21 (quoting Paul Veyne); C. Wickham, *The inheritance of Rome* (London 2009) 553 (by way of repudiating “metahistorical narrative”).

27 Wickham, *Inheritance* [1:26] 3.

28 Cf. D. Armitage, “What’s the big idea? Intellectual history and the *longue durée*,” *History of European ideas* 38 (2012) 1–15, drawing attention to revived interest among historians in both ideas and their diachronic, transmissional aspect (while exemplifying, in excluding *fitna* from his discussion of the concept of civil war, the continuing blind spot toward Islam, and in particular the direct bearing of the early *fitnas* on faith values).

history, perhaps even a completely fresh start? Or is it just one identity marker in a world full already of identities to which early Muslims were as much indebted as averse? And linked to these questions about the meaning of the new Muslim era are others about the dates and events commonly seen as marking the end of Antiquity.

What about, for example, the murder of the Emperor Maurice at Constantinople in 602? This is now widely taken to mark the end of the shorter—and more generally accepted—“late Antiquity,” deemed to run from roughly 300 to 600.²⁹ And yet the “Last Great War of Antiquity” between Rome and Iran, which Maurice’s death provoked, mirrored numerous other such conflicts between Iran and the lands to the west of it, which had molded history and mentalities ever since the Battle of Marathon in 490 BCE. Xerxes torching the Athens acropolis in 480, Alexander incinerating Persepolis in 331, Heraclius destroying fire temples and Khosrow II’s palaces at Ctesiphon a millennium later in the 620s,³⁰ all were links in an ever more self-conscious tradition of East-West hostility. Indeed the story of Alexander was remodeled in Syriac to make him a Christian king subduing Iran in the image of Heraclius. Parts of this Syriac version echo in sura 18 of the Qur’ān, while sura 30 begins with a direct evocation of the Great War.³¹ And the late antique empires of Qayṣar (Caesar) and Kisrā (Khosrow) continued long after this to be a vivid presence to Muslims, whether through constant contact with the lands and peoples still ruled from Constantinople, or through a more artistic and literary memory of the Sasanid court at Ctesiphon. One thinks of some of the best-known material evidence from the Umayyad period (661–750): the Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik’s (685–705) “Arab-Byzantine” and “Arab-Sasanian” coins; his Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, so indebted to Christian architecture; and the Sasanian-style relief carvings on the Mushattā facade now in Berlin.³²

In the course of the seventh century the East Roman Empire did indeed go through a damaging socioeconomic as well as political crisis, while the Sasanian state crumbled into dust. But no power vacuum was allowed to develop; urban life in the Caliphate continued, often along quite familiar lines; and once the crisis had passed, even battered Constantinople re-

29 Already in the Renaissance, the sixth century was regarded as still a part of Antiquity: P. R. Ghosh, “Gibbon’s Dark Ages,” *Journal of Roman studies* 73 (1983) 17 n. 109, to which add that only Le Nain de Tillemont’s death prevented him from carrying his *Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire ecclésiastique des six premiers siècles* (Brussels 1693–1712), much exploited by Gibbon, down to the end of the sixth century.

30 Sebeos (attributed), *Armenian history* [tr. R. W. Thomson (Liverpool 1999)] 124, 127.

31 K. van Bladel, “The *Alexander legend* in the Qur’ān 18:83–102,” in G. S. Reynolds (ed.), *The Qur’ān in its historical context* (London 2008) 175–203.

32 Cf. G. Fowden, *Qaysar ‘Amra* (Berkeley 2004), Index s.vv. “East Roman Empire,” “Sasanian Irān.”

mained not just an imperial capital, but the capital of the “Romans”;³³ while the Sasanians arguably returned in the guise of the Abbasids. At least in part, 602 is a popular termination for Antiquity because most ancient historians are culturally as well as educationally unprepared for either Arabic or Islam. The 602 terminus tells us more about our (post-)Jewish/Christian selves than about the seventh century.

If 602 hardly convinces as either end or beginning, what of 529, with Justinian’s closing of the Athens philosophy schools? Visitors to the new Acropolis Museum opened in 2009 are firmly informed that this and the triumph of Christianity mark the end of Antiquity. Yet we know philosophy continued to be studied after that date at Alexandria, which was a far more influential center.³⁴ The year 529 has proven a durable red herring because Plato, on whom late Athenian philosophers concentrated, seems a more plainly pagan figure, and therefore more representative of Antiquity, than Aristotle, on whom the Alexandrians focused. This highlighting of the Platonists has chimed all too well with historians’ urge to find as richly symbolic as possible an end point for late Antiquity. What better than the Christian absolutist Justinian’s assault on the very heart of Antiquity, the Athens philosophy schools, already adulterated and weakened by a mixture of magic (or “theurgy”) and Orphic or Chaldaean revelation? But the evolving strength of Aristotelianism, not just after 529 but after Muḥammad as well, undermines this convenient periodization.

Latterly, Aristotelianism’s role in the indispensable intellectual underpinnings of the period we are concerned with has been underlined by the Ancient commentators on Aristotle project guided by Richard Sorabji, which has liberated this whole thought world from the dignified obscurity imposed by the Berlin edition’s twenty-three stout, austere volumes (themselves originally intended, and used, mainly as a mine for fragments of the Presocratics, Peripatetics, and Stoics³⁵). In tandem with Sorabji’s project, research has intensified on the Syriac and Arabic Aristotle translations and commentaries.³⁶ What is emerging is a picture of a coherent and profoundly

33 Hence the use in this book of “East Rome” not “Byzantium,” which implies the foundation of a new empire. Gibbon writes of “Romans” or “Greeks,” where modern scholars have “Byzantines,” an epithet Gibbon reserves for the instruments of empire and Church, notably the “Byzantine court/palace/throne.”

34 P. Hoffmann, “Damascius,” *DPA* 2.556–59; C. Wildberg, “Philosophy in the reign of Justinian,” in M. Maas (ed.), *The Cambridge companion to the age of Justinian* (Cambridge 2005) 316–40; M. di Branco, *La città dei filosofi: Storia di Atene da Marco Aurelio a Giustiniano* (Florence 2006) 192–97; E. J. Watts, *City and school in late antique Athens and Alexandria* (Berkeley 2006) 111–42, 232–56.

35 S. Fazzo, “Aristotelianism as a commentary tradition,” in P. Adamson and others (eds), *Philosophy, science and exegesis in Greek, Arabic and Latin commentaries* (London 2004) 1.1–2.

36 On the importance of the ACA project for Arabic philosophy, see R. Wisnovsky, “The nature and scope of Arabic philosophical commentary in post-classical (ca. 1100–1900 AD) Islamic intellectual history,” in Adamson and others (eds), *Philosophy, science and exegesis* [1:35] 2.149–52.

influential Aristotelian tradition that did not become prominent until after the beginning of the First Millennium, matured among the commentators of fifth- to sixth-century Alexandria, and broke through the commentary stage to a new synthesis, less tied to the Aristotelian texts, around the turn of the millennium thanks to the learned but also innovative mind of Ibn Sīnā. Of all this there will be more to say in chapter 5. Meanwhile, if one is looking for something truly epoch making that happened in 529, it is ready to hand in the first publication of the *Justinianic code*, a compilation of Roman law from the reign of Hadrian up to Justinian himself. The second, revised edition, issued in 534, of this summation of Rome's social and political wisdom accumulated during the first half of the First Millennium was also to mold whoever used Roman law subsequently, down to the present day.³⁷ The year 529 was a major point of transmission, and stage of transformation, in Roman civilization, not the catastrophic end of Antiquity; and this would have been more widely grasped, had ancient historians been in the habit of incorporating law in their curriculum (Gibbon is again the outstanding exception).

Admittedly it is easier to discern the end of Antiquity in the West, as Germanic kingdoms establish themselves during the fifth century on territories once ruled direct from Rome, as Latin becomes the language of the conquered not the victors, and as the Church annexes the legacy of Romanitas. But our fundamental question is about the relationship between the Islamic world and Antiquity, so our primary concern must be with the East. And there, the end of Antiquity is far from easy to nail down. In any case our interest in Islam, and its relationship with Judaism and Christianity, means that neither Greece and Rome, nor even the formation of Christendom, can any more be the *sole* determinant of our periodization. The traditional division among Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and Modern Times no longer responds to our most pressing question—unless you think Islam enjoyed a “medieval” phase, or is even by definition “medieval.”³⁸ We become aware of the need to redefine, at least partially, the framework of our history, and to refocus its contents. This reframing and refocusing will affect space as well as time, the geographical as well as chronological parameters, as we shall see in the next three chapters.

With the effect induced on our view of Antiquity, and indeed the whole of history both before and after Muḥammad, by taking due account of Islam,

37 C. Humfress, “Law and legal practice in the age of Justinian,” in Maas (ed.), *Age of Justinian* [1:34] 161–84. On Roman law's retreat in the later twentieth century, see A. Schiavone (tr. J. Carden and A. Shugaar), *The invention of law in the West* (Cambridge, Mass. 2012) 16–18.

38 Cf. D. Varisco, “Making ‘medieval’ Islam meaningful,” *Medieval encounters* 13 (2007) 385–412; D. Ali, “The historiography of the medieval in South Asia,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 22 (2012) 7–8. The phrase “medieval Islam” may sometimes be innocent of ill will but never of unintentional irony, given the civilizational gap between Baghdad and Aachen.

compare the consequences for European thought of discovering the Americas.³⁹ In the New World, Europeans acquired not just a vast access of fresh knowledge, but an awareness of their ability to turn that knowledge to their own account, transforming it into power and wealth. They found people living at what seemed a more primitive stage of history, who inspired them to project themselves back, imaginatively, into their own remotest past, hitherto dominated by the account in Genesis.⁴⁰ An Englishman might find rudiments of heraldry in the war paints of Virginian Indians, and deduce “that Heraldry was ingrafted *naturally* into the sense of humane race.”⁴¹ Another Englishman might dream of finding a whole Iroquois literature, which would offer a unique encounter with the human mind, placed in circumstances we have never experienced and governed by manners and religious opinions utterly contrary to our own.⁴²

Not that the reasons for Europeans’ ignorance of Islam and America were the same. Islam was “terra incognita” because Europeans had chosen to ignore it, not because they had not found it. Today, taking it on board entails an acknowledgment of omission, or even error. One pays a certain psychological price. In particular, the relativizing of a whole set of absolute (Christian) truth claims in the light of another, long deliberately neglected set of absolute (Muslim) truth claims is no small thing. Enthusiasts for religious verity may be led thereby to embrace Islam, or reject it and reaffirm their Christian identity. The historian, by contrast, will be led to a better-founded skepticism of dogmatic religion in general, but also to a warmer appreciation of the rational, often more or less explicitly Aristotelian, undergirding which is part of the Jewish-Christian-Muslim monotheisms—not from their original formulation, but acquired since, often to meet the demands of controversy and polemic. This is an area of religious doctrine less dependent on arbitrary assertion and more relevant to the wider, ongoing philosophical and scientific debate about reality and how we may approach it.

The question is, ultimately, not just how Islam can be fitted in to a refocused, more generous, and open view of history, but also how much of the monotheist and ancient philosophical traditions generally can or ought to be

39 The comparison was suggested by Momigliano, *Sesto contributo* [1:25] 262–63. Others have compared Europe’s reaction to Amerindian religions with its medieval incomprehension of Islam: G. Stroumsa, *New science* [1:7] 19–20 (and chap. 1 generally, on the shocking impact of the discovery of America on the study of religion). See also A. Grafton, *Joseph Scaliger* (Oxford 1983–93) 2.361–62, on the effect on Scaliger’s scholarship of widening Chinese as well as American horizons.

40 Cf. Darwin, *After Tamerlane* [1:1] 209; and N. Giakovaki, *Ευρώπη μέσω Ελλάδας* (Athens 2006) 275–77, for the discovery of Greece and especially Athens in the 1670s, contextualized by contemporaries in contrast with New World primitiveness.

41 John Gibbon, quoted by his great-grandnephew Edward Gibbon: Murray (ed.), *Autobiographies of Edward Gibbon* [1:23] 8, 213, 368 (but cf. J. Gawthrop, “A history of Edward Gibbon’s six autobiographical manuscripts”, *British Library journal* 25 (1999) 188).

42 E. Gibbon, *Essai sur l’étude de la littérature* (London 1761) 61–62, §47, tr. Pocock 1.230.

part of our contemporary intellectual armory. Numerous exponents of modernity have been hostile to any form of religion, especially to Islam, which has so far responded to Enlightenment concerns much less than either Christianity or Judaism. Monotheism may legitimately be accused of encouraging a dangerous anthropocentricity and indifference to nature,⁴³ and being obsessed both with closed and petrified “canonical” collections of sacred texts, and with the resultant “orthodoxy”/“heresy” binary. The associated tyranny of Aristotle and rationalism, especially logic, has often been resented. So too the grip of religion-based law, especially on certain varieties of Judaism and Islam. The airtight “identities” that such authoritarian traditions foster have been a bane as well as a blessing, while the technological shrinking of our world throws these identities onto the defensive and makes them still more aggressive. But there is also a more constructive side to the debate. Looking afresh at the First Millennium in particular may, as already suggested, help us recover neglected but fertile aspects of the Muslim intellectual heritage, while taking seriously the shared patristic heritage helps bridge gaps in understanding between the churches. Reinvigorating the monotheist traditions opens up, in turn, the possibility of a richer, less constrictedly materialist approach to well-worn controversies such as the value of human life or the natural environment. In other words, religious and secular thought can be made to work creatively together.

By posing if not necessarily solving problems such as these, we engage more closely with some of the profounder issues of intellectual orientation that preoccupy our age. We also demonstrate a type of “philosophic history” (as opposed to antiquarian erudition) not driven by ideological agendas as Ernst Stein feared,⁴⁴ but instead, as was Gibbon’s ideal, concerned to establish a sound and critical, not merely serialistic or annalistic narrative in order to explain the causes of things on as wide a canvas as possible, to illuminate the differing characters of nations, and to trace the emergence and improvement of modern (European) secular and commercial societies.⁴⁵ On the maximalist view, philosophic history studies the past in order to reflect on the existential issues which preoccupy the historian as a participant in his or her own times. But it must not be polemical or politically engaged; it may indeed subvert the patterns imposed by theory, system, and causality. It must resist the tendency toward zeal and rigidity inherent in philosophy itself, as Gibbon was painfully aware from the example of the Emperor Julian; and it

43 Cf., e.g., Neuwirth, *Koran als Text* [1:6] 431, 440.

44 E. Stein, *Geschichte des spätromischen Reiches* 1 (Vienna 1928) VII = p. XV of the French translation.

45 Gibbon, “General observations”: 2.511–16; 48: 3.26, 49: 3.95 (on freedom and knowledge expanding the faculties of man), 53: 3.409, 61: 3.728 with n. 69, 64: 3.791, 810 n. 41; cf. A. Momigliano, *Studies in historiography* (London 1966) 40–55; D. Womersley, “Introduction” to Gibbon 1.xx–xxiv; Pocock 1.111–12.

must not stifle the irreducible individuality of historical actors. It is not the least of the rewards to be had from reading Gibbon's account of East Rome and Islam, that we see him gradually adjusting himself to this more complex understanding of the historian's art.⁴⁶ The student of the past, having received there "an education in irony,"⁴⁷ may permit himself or herself, at most, "a philosophic smile."⁴⁸ In the end it is the painstaking and accurate historian who must prevail.

SUMMARY

At the end of this introductory chapter, some brief indication of how the argument will proceed may be found helpful.

Chapter 2, "Time: Beyond late Antiquity," investigates the role late antique scholarship has occasionally assigned to Islam. Among the protagonists: Alois Riegl, Josef Strzygowski, Henri Pirenne, and Peter Brown. Art history has played a conspicuous part. Brown's influential synthesis tracing continuities across a broad periodization up to c. 800 has of late bred a reaction by scholars eager to reassert the dimensions of catastrophe and decline he—and his pupils—are felt to have neglected. The materialist orientation of this new work fails, though, to take due account of the conceptual dimension of human experience. And for the concepts with which we are here concerned, especially their Arabic articulation, even the long late Antiquity to c. 800 is not an adequate canvas.

Chapter 3, "A new periodization: The First Millennium," presents my case for the First Millennium as an alternative or parallel periodization. Besides the three major monotheisms, the First Millennium also sees Greek philosophy, Roman law, Mazdaism, and Manicheism attaining intellectual and institutional maturation. By this I mean the completion of three successive stages of development: prophetic, scriptural, and exegetical, the last involving distillation of systematic doctrine from a textual/scriptural canon derived from prophecy, revelation, philosophical teaching, or law giving. I then focus on certain Greek and Arabic/Syriac historians who, taken together, may be seen as adumbrating the First Millennium periodization along with its conceptual, specifically monotheist, emphasis.

Chapter 4, "Space: An eastward shift," turns from time to space, revising the geographical framework—no longer the Mediterranean world of the Greeks and Romans, but what I call the "Eurasian Hinge," a triptych of re-

46 Cf. Womersley's "Introduction," esp. xxiv–xxxix, xlv–xlvi, liv–lv, lxvi, xciv–civ; id., *Transformation* [1:25] 203, 209–13, 237, 242–74, 287, 296–97; and above, n. 25.

47 Pocock 1.230; cf. 238–39.

48 Gibbon 69: 3.1012 and n. 90.

gions with the Iranian plateau and the Eastern Mediterranean as its wings, and as its centerpiece that cradle of monotheisms, the “Mountain Arena” stretching from the Zagros to the Mediterranean and from South Arabia to the Taurus. These vast horizons nourished two world empires no other could challenge: the Achaemenids with their continuator Alexander, and a millennium later the Islamic Caliphate of the Umayyads and Abbasids, of central importance to the argument presented here. Both, along with Christian Rome, spawned political and cultural “commonwealths” too, within the same frame.

Chapters 5 and 6, both devoted to “Exegetical cultures,” aim to impart a clearer contour to the First Millennium’s crucial conceptual aspects. Chapter 5 focuses on “Aristotelianism” both as an autonomous philosophy and as a denominator common to several of the traditions I am concerned with. Harmonized, especially in the Alexandrian schools, with Plato, Aristotle came to be seen as the distillation of Greek thought, while his logic, in particular, proved indispensable to the formulation of “orthodoxy” and the demolition of “heresy” within Christianity and Islam alike. Alexandrian Aristotelianism was then conveyed to Baghdad thanks largely to Syriac Christian translators. At the turn of the millennium Ibn Sīnā took a decisive step beyond the Alexandrian commentary tradition into a new, personal synthesis of Islamic theology and Aristotle.

Chapter 6, on “Law and religion,” examines several other major learned or religious traditions which flourished during the First Millennium, in order to demonstrate their maturation through exegesis of and commentary on authoritative texts. Roman law, rabbinic Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are successively considered from this angle, in order to consolidate our portrait of the First Millennium as the source not only of the three great texts that have most deeply molded Eurasian civilization (the Christian Bible, the *Justinianic code*, and the Qur’ān), but also of the exegetical traditions through which these often recalcitrant books were transformed into usable public doctrine.

The final chapter, “Viewpoints around 1000: Ṭūs, Baṣra, Baghdad, Pisa,” treats the years around 1000 as a viewing point from which to look mainly back but also a little bit forward, and consolidate our sense of the First Millennium’s distinctiveness. It picks out and elaborates certain themes broached earlier in the book, associating each one with a particular city. Ṭūs stands for Iran, notably the composition of its national epic, the *Shahname*, at the close of the millennium. Baṣra stands for the encyclopedic erudition of the Brethren of Purity at the end of the tenth century, drawing on the whole heritage of the First Millennium to offer a way of salvation to the Muslim soul. Baghdad stands for the Abbasid capital’s learned circles and their openness to reasoned argument and Aristotelian logic to facilitate debate between members of the many different faiths espoused by its inhabitants. In conclusion,

I consider what effect adoption of the First Millennium as an alternative periodization might have on study of ancient and medieval history. Pisa stands for the eleventh-century reemergence of Latin Europe, still in the shadow of Islam but bursting already with aggressive energy and a new cultural self-confidence.