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"We sent down water from the sky, blessed water whereby We caused to grow gardens, grains for harvest, tall palm-trees with their spathes, piled one above the other - sustenance for (Our) servants. Therewith We gave (new) life to a dead land. So will be the emergence (from the tombs)." [TMQ 50:9-11] (*description of the water cycle*)

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March 2008 / Safar 1428

Issue 4

QURAN AND SCIENCE

ISLAMIC CULTURE

The suggestion that religion is at odds with science is and always has been alien to Islam. Nevertheless it is a notion that has become prevalent within society today. This is largely due to historical factors involving the separation of the church and the state, which occurred throughout Medieval Europe.

There was a long fought battle between those who claimed to be custodians of Christianity (the ruling elite) and those who challenged their power in the name of progress and enlightenment. They questioned, can religion and science co-exist?

There were many thinkers who questioned the authority of the church and indeed, Christianity itself. Their doubts arose after the realisation that certain passages in the Bible contradicted contemporary scientific discoveries. The rise of science flew in the face of Church authority. Great thinkers such as Galileo were suppressed - he spent the last days of his life under house arrest, being forced to retract his findings that the Earth revolved around the Sun and not vice versa as the Church held. Papal decrees were issued, forbidding the study of nature and even supporting the punishment of death for disobedience. However, just as medieval Europe plunged into an era of darkness, the Islamic civilization was thriving with knowledge.

Not only did the Quran confirm modern day discoveries, it in fact presented detailed scientific facts centuries before their discovery - a

firm testimony to its divinity. Embryology, Geology, Geography and Astronomy are just a few of the many fields of science addressed by the Quran. From the water cycle to the Earth's orbit, it inspired mankind to marvel at the Creator of such wonders. Science progressed in unison with Islam, which did not stifle the spirit of scientific enquiry as witnessed in Europe. Enthused by the information within the Quran, Muslim scientists embarked upon a journey that saw the Islamic World catapulted forward as the most advanced civilization of its time - an envy to the rest of the world, who looked on in wonder.

So what are the scientific miracles within the Quran? Allah (swt) describes the water cycle in the Quran, (see left), yet the first clear formulation of the water cycle is attributed to Barnard Palissy in 1580 - some 1000 years after this verse was revealed. The Quran also detailed the human embryological stages over 1400 years ago. Yet scientists have only recently discovered such detail through the aid of powerful microscopes.

"We created man from an extract of clay. Then We made him as a drop in a place of settlement, firmly fixed. Then We made the drop into an *alaraqah* (leech, suspended thing and blood clot,) then We made the *alaraqah* into *mudghah* (chewed substance)." [TMQ 23:12-14]

The Arabic word *alaraqah* meaning 'leech', 'suspended thing' and 'blood clot', matches closely with the current description of how an embryo appears in the early stages. It is leech-like in its shape and also feeds off the blood of its mother, just as a leech feeds. It is suspended in the womb and contains large amounts of blood which does not circulate initially, similar to a blood clot. The Arabic

word *mudghah* meaning 'chewed substance' matches closely with the appearance of an embryo at the next stage. The embryo has somites on its back which resemble teeth marks. Professor Keith Moore, a prominent embryologist, stated at a Medical conference in 1981 in Saudi Arabia that he believed, "...these statements must have come to Muhammad from God, because all of this knowledge was not discovered until many centuries later."

Professor Emeritus Frank Press, a former Science Advisor to US President Jimmy Carter, describes in his book entitled "Earth," how mountains have underlying roots which are deeply embedded in the ground and thus, mountains have a shape like a peg. The Quran describes the mountains as pegs ;

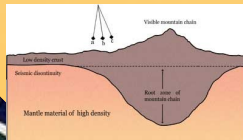
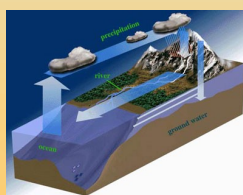
"Have We not made the earth as a bed, and the mountains as pegs?" [TMQ 78:6-7]

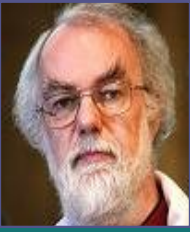
Mountains also stabilise the crust of the Earth and hinder shaking. The Quran states,

"And He has set firm the mountains in the earth that it would not shake with you..." [TMQ 6:15].

This knowledge is relatively new to geologists, only being understood within the framework of plate tectonics since the late 1960's.

The aforementioned are but a few examples the Quran has to offer, revealed at a time where the society was largely illiterate and nomadic. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was a man of humble origins who could not read or write. Yet how was it possible for such intricacies to be described in the deserts of Arabia in the 6th Century CE? Evidently, the Quran truly is a miracle, and a mercy sent upon mankind.





Last month the Archbishop of Canterbury,

Dr Rowan Williams caused a furore in the media when in he remarked in a speech that "it seems unavoidable," that parts of the Islamic Shariah law will be adopted in the UK.

He indicated that the UK Muslim minority population of 1.6 million should be able like the Jewish community, to choose to settle some of their legal disputes in Shariah courts, thereby contributing to a greater community cohesion.

Whatever the intentions behind his speech, there ensued a barrage of insults and attacks upon Shariah Law, often demonstrating a staggering level of ignorance. Indeed, the media and politicians had a field day denouncing the speech. The Sun newspaper accusing the Archbishop of giving heart to the "Muslim terrorists".

A number of issues have



Arzu Merali shares her thoughts on her work with the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC).



emerged from the hype. Firstly, it is apparent that there is a deliberate, ongoing campaign to ridicule and insult the Shariah Law and Islam in general. It appears to be part of a programme to discredit a way of life that many around the Muslim world are calling for, and want seen implemented in their societies (although **not** in the UK).

Muslims in Britain should defend the Shariah, and also clarify what the Islamic Shariah system actually is; an Islamic model of an alternative way of life that was practically implemented for over 1300 years. It is an inclusive system that allows the Dhimmis (non-Muslim citizens of the caliphate), to have their own courts and judges, in which family and personal disputes could be arbitrated according to the tenets of their faith. Sir Thomas Arnold in his book 'The Call to Islam' mentions how under the Ottoman Sultans (Caliphate) the Christian Patriarch and the Grand Synod could decide all matters of faith and dogma without any interference of the State; something that was never the case under the previous Byzantine emperors.

Conversely, in Britain and Europe today, we are witnessing a disturbing growth of intolerance towards Islam and Muslims. In addition to the attack on the Shariah law by leading British politicians, a Danish paper has chosen to reprint offensive cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Is it any wonder that Muslims feel apprehensive in today's society?

The idea of a religious court having any position in the British secular society is not an unprecedented one. Jewish Courts (Beth Din) are in daily use in Britain resolving civil disputes covering issues ranging from Business to divorce. Provided the disputing parties are in agreement, their cases are heard by the Beth Din and the eventual decision is made binding.

Like Jewish courts, the proposal was for but civil disputes in Shariah courts such as divorce and inheritance and subject to consent. And just as Beth Din is described as binding civil arbitration, who do not seek to replace the state's civil courts, the same would apply for Shariah court. Yet strangely enough

today, the mere mention of Shariah law raises concerns about the carriage of justice with respect to gender equality, and even the penal system.

Yet western historians like Hume held that justice under Shariah in Andalusia. He wrote, "Side by side with the new rulers lived the Christians and Jews in peace. The latter rich with commerce and industry were content to let the memory of their oppression by the priest-ridden Goths sleep... Learned in all the arts and sciences, cultured and tolerant, they were treated by the Moors with marked respect, and multiplied exceedingly all over Spain.."

It is essential for people to closely examine, with open minds, the Shariah system and see it for what it was. Surely the World is in need of a system that encompasses all minorities and religions into one harmonious society without attacking individual beliefs and practices? Today, Muslims feel their religion constantly under attack and the need for greater dialogue and debate is necessary now more than ever.

WHO'S WHO

Arzu Merali, is a mother from Wembley, West London who studied English Literature at Cambridge University before completing post-graduate studies in Law and International Relations. She has had various articles on Islam, human rights and many other topics published in various journals from the academic to the popular, and is editor of the online journal Palestine Internationalist. She is also well known for her active role as a volunteer for the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) - an independent non-profit, organisation, based in London. Its work includes submission of reports to governments and

international organizations, writing articles, monitoring the media, cataloguing war crimes, producing research papers, taking on discrimination cases and much, much more.

Through their tireless efforts and campaigning, thousands of prisoner-releases have taken place. Notable among these are some of the Turkish prisoners of faith such as Huda Kaya - a detainee held for participating in a protest against a headscarf ban in Turkish Universities.

IHRC are also actively engaged in campaigns here in

MEET THE COMMUNITY

the UK such as that against discrimination of Muslim women. This aims to prevent governments and statutory bodies discriminating against Muslim women who wear hijab (headscarf). We caught up with Arzu to share her thoughts and experiences working with IHRC.

1. Could you describe a little about Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC)?

•• IHRC was set up in 1997 as a response to the Qur'anic injunctions to stand up for the oppressed regardless of who they are. Sadly then and now some 80% of victims of oppression world-wide are Muslim

and this is reflected very heavily in the type of work we undertake. As an NGO (Non Governmental Organisations), we have special consultative status with the United Nations, and our work is recognised at various levels. We have three sections: campaign, research and advocacy.”

2. What is your role within this organisation and how long have you been with them ?

“ It’s moving towards 11 years now. I was one of IHRC’s founders back in 1997 and have run the research side of things for most of that time, albeit as a volunteer. ”

3. What inspired you to set up this organisation and become involved in their work?

“ I had a strange but happy journey to this path. My original degree is in English Literature. I subsequently did some postgraduate studies in Law with a view to becoming a solicitor. I felt the ethical minefields were probably a bit too much for me to handle and ended up through my voluntary work in human rights, doing a bit of journalism.

What I found though was that I was writing about different human right’s issues and the plights of various peoples, and realised that maybe I should be trying to do something more proactive about this.

IHRC was born out of various activists from and with different projects coming together to share the vision of IHRC. ”

4. Is there a notable case that you are involved with currently?

“There are so many cases

that need highlighting, it’s difficult to think where to begin. I think I’d like to ask readers to look beyond the news headlines. We see the suffering in Iraq and other places, but there are many other problems world-wide, e.g. the problems of oppression generally in Burma, but specifically of the Rohingya and other Muslims, who are not only facing the same oppression as well as everyone else from the government but are now facing discrimination from wider

society as a result of anti-Muslim backlashes after 9-11 etc. ”

5. What do you think is the role of Muslims living in Britain?

“ I think essentially it’s the same role as anywhere else and in any other context i.e. enjoining the good and forbidding the evil. We shouldn’t compromise on that, however tricky our situation might be. ”



The Palestine Internationalist is an on-line journal that features articles and submissions on a quarterly basis. It focuses on key issues in the struggle for the liberation of Palestine and the Palestinian people.

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NATURAL SCIENCES ISLAMIC HERITAGE

The Muslim scientific revolution produced a renaissance. It saw Muslims firmly placed at the pinnacle of the civilized world for eight centuries, driven by the Quranic impetus to contemplate the physical world around us. Muslim scientists acted in the knowledge that their investigation of God's creation was a path through which they could get to know Him (swt), and appreciate the true purpose of life. Allah (swt) says;

“Say: Travel through the earth and see how Allah originated creation; so will Allah produce the second creation (of the Afterlife): for Allah has power over all things.” [TMQ 29:20]

Geography

Within a few decades of the death of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), vast numbers of people across continents of Africa, Asia and Europe had chosen Islam as their way of life. Muslims were natural explorers since Islam obligated a pilgrimage (Hajj) to Mecca for every able-bodied person at least once in their life time. Thus, huge numbers of pilgrims travelled from the farthest reaches of the Islamic world to Makkah. Dozens of travel guides were written to assist in the journey, charting the best routes. Importantly, the pilgrimage facilitated the exchange of ideas and knowledge as people mingled before the House of God.

Muslims also travelled far and

wide to conduct trade, and to spread the message of Islam. Travel to the far-flung Islamic world enabled scholars to compile large amounts of geographical and climatic data from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Many maps were produced, some of which revealing with considerable accuracy features such as the origin of the Nile, a fact discovered much later in the West. Whilst Islamic geography was primarily a continuation of the Greek and Roman scholarship which had been lost in Christian Europe, there were some additions to the collective knowledge by Muslim geographers, especially by Ibn-Battuta and Ibn-Khaldun, both of whom renowned in the West for written accounts of their extensive explorations.

Al-Khwārizmī worked at the “House of Wisdom,” in Baghdad, under the caliphate of al-Ma’mūn. In his book, “The Image of the Earth,” were presented the coordinates of localities in the known world based, on those in the Geography of Ptolemy (fl. AD 127-145) but with more precise values for the length of the Mediterranean Sea and the positions of cities in Asia and Africa. The book details latitudes and longitudes, of cities, mountains, seas, islands, geographical regions and rivers. In particular it is clear that where more local

Ibn Battuta was best known as a traveler and explorer, who documented his travels over a period of almost 30 years, covering some 73,000 miles. His journeys took him almost all over the Islamic world - from NW Africa to India, SE Asia to China. He surpassed his predecessor Marco Polo and was the most travelled person of his time. The last of the great Muslim geographers, he gave way to the European age of exploration.



Large map of the world (which Caliph Al-Ma'mun ordered to be drawn)

LITERATURE continued....

knowledge was available to al-Khwarizmi such as the regions of Arabia, Africa and the Far East, his work was considerably more accurate than that of Ptolemy. He also assisted in the construction of a world map commissioned by al-Ma'mun and participated in a project to determine the circumference of the Earth, which had long been known to be spherical, by measuring the length of a degree of a meridian through the plain of Sinjar in Iraq.

Geology

The vast expanse of the Islamic world enabled the Muslims to develop natural history based not only on the Mediterranean world, as was the case of the Greek natural historians, but also on most of

the Eurasian and even African land masses. Knowledge of minerals, plants and animals were assembled from areas as far away as the Malay world. Al-Biruni in his study of India turned to the natural history and even geology of the region, describing correctly the sedimentary nature of the Ganges basin. He also discovered that water can change the face of stone by erosion. And also noted alluvial material that landed close to mountains was coarse in texture whilst material found further away was finer. He also wrote an outstanding work on mineralogy.

Meteorology

Ibn Doraid Al-Azdi, born in Basra 223 AH, completed many works but his main work included a book entitled "Descriptions of Rain and

Clouds," comprising 27 chapters dedicated to observations of aerial events - the first scientific descriptions of rain and clouds. The book dealt with weather forecasting, descriptions of clouds, (their motion, accumulation, thickening and change of form). It also documented the types of rainfall and its effects on soil and ground water resources.

Muslims in the field of Natural Sciences introduced vast knowledge and understanding of the physical world. Islam facilitated the desire in people to open their minds to learn, to marvel at God's creation and thus led them to venture across the known and unknown world, drawing closer to their Creator Allah (swt).

It was in fact with the help of Muslim geographers and navigators that Magellan crossed the Cape of Good Hope into the Indian Ocean. Columbus set sail from Spain in 1492, with a Muslim Navigator and Arab translator, maps and equipment. His goal was to cross the Atlantic to reach China and India. But he discovered the Americas instead.

Bridges Editorial

"If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." With this aphorism, Isaac Newton, the greatest scientist of his time, described the process of invention and innovation when he paid tribute to the scientific works of the likes of Galileo and Copernicus before him. After all, discoveries make use of innovations that have gone before and provide the basis for those that will follow. Surely we do not live in a world today, so far gone that we cannot respect those 'giants' who worked before us and on whose shoulders our research and breakthroughs are based?

Apparently so, for it grieves me today to see the extent to which Islam and its contribution to humanity has been so callously tossed aside. It was the laws of Shariah that created a great civilisation centuries ago - when implemented soundly, and not in the corrupt form seen today in the Muslim World. The result was the transformation of the uneducated nomads of the deserts in Arabia into world leaders. They implemented the laws of Shariah, bringing justice and protection to the weak, regardless of race, gender, colour or religion. As described inside this issue, it aided the preservation of ancient knowledge otherwise lost by Medieval Europe. Society prospered through technological and intellectual achievements in many scientific fields, that formed the foundations for the European Renaissance. Today, this very same Shariah law stands on trial, reduced to a crudely caricatured system that appears to have brought nothing but stoning to death and cutting the hands of thieves.

The response, or should I say onslaught of the media and government towards Dr. Rowan William's comments regarding Shariah Law demonstrates the extent of the hatred that

exists towards Islam. It breeds a desire to irrationally overlook Islam's contribution and impact on world history. More seriously it wilfully misleads the masses into believing an Islamic society is one to be feared. But is there really a cause to fear? I beg to disagree!

Muslims want to see Shariah law established in the Muslim world (and not the UK as the media rants). The Islamic Shariah offers powerful deterrents. The society we really ought to fear is the one we live in. British jails are over

crowded to the extent that prisoners are released early, only to re-offend in the face of a system of justice which fails miserably. Anti-social behaviour, gun and knife crime are rampant. This is a system where a woman watched her rapist win a £7m lottery ticket, bought whilst on weekend leave from prison! The Shariah law on the other hand historically produced responsible citizens who honoured peoples lives and property. They truly considered the consequences of their actions, knowing full well they would be held to account.

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