

*THE BURNNING OF
LIBRARIES
IN IRAN AND ALEXANDRIA*

by
MURTADHA MUTAHHARI

TRANSLATED BY
N.P. NAZARENO
M. NEKODAST



ISLAMIC PROPAGATION ORGANIZATION

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Publisher's Note

The present book is one of the works of Martyr Ayatullah Murtadha Mutahhari. Though brief, it reveals extensive research about the concerned topic.

We hope that the book will prove to be of great use to those wanting to learn more about the ancient libraries of Iran and Alexandria.

Islamic Propagation Organization,
International Relations Dept.

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*IN THE NAME OF GOD, THE COMPASSIONATE,
THE MERCIFUL*

FOREWORD

What has been presented in this short treatise concerns a historical issue, the notes of which I had always wanted to publish for years.

About a decade ago, I spoke on the issue under the title: "The burning of books in Alexandria", (at the advent of Arab domination) at the Husseiniyeh Irshad Islamic Institute. At the time, I was also working on the book "Mutual Services of Islam and Iran" and thought of incorporating the subject on the alleged burning of libraries in Iran and Alexandria, as an integral part of the above-mentioned book. However, something unexpected came up and I decided not to include it in

that book at that time.

This year, however, (in the eighth edition) of “Mutual Services of Islam and Iran”, I managed to include it in its last chapter. This booklet is now printed separately with the hope that interested people who already have the seven parts of the above-mentioned book and who might want to have this part as well, may derive benefits therefrom although the subject is itself worth reading as a separate treatise.

This booklet, in other words, is a part of the book “Mutual Services of Islam and Iran” with a few changes made as were necessary for a separate printing. I hope this book will be useful in defusing skepticism deliberately created by some authors in regard to a part of the history of Islam.

Murtadha Mutahhari
Dhul-Hijja 1398 A.H.
Aban 1357 A.H.

WAVES OF FALSE PROPAGANDA

One of the issues that should be discussed in relation with Iran and Islam is the burning of books in Iran by its Muslim conquerors. It is about half a century that false propaganda attempts have been harnessed to embellish the issue with historical veracity. The matter has also been included in textbooks for university, high school and elementary students as an ominous measure to imbibe dubious ideas about Islam in the minds of our youth, while academic books demand inclusion of nothing but factual information.

If this alleged conflagration had been true historically and that Muslims had burned libraries in Iran or Egypt, then one could say that Islam had been destructive rather than constructive, or at least, one must say that Islam had been the destroyer of civilizations and cultures, in spite of the

fact that it had also built a civilization and culture, or that, though Islam had rendered Iran benefits, it had also done harm to it. In other words, being a blessing to Iran in some ways, Islam has also afflicted the country with the plight of burning its books!

Much has been written and said on the matter that Iran had libraries and institutions for both elementary and advanced level of educational training but which had been destroyed by the Muslim conquerors. Thus to some Iranians who do not have a thorough understanding of this issue, it has developed a certain credibility.

A PHYSICIAN'S OPINION

A few years back I got hold of a magazine called "Tandurust" which apparently was a medical journal. A summary of a speech, delivered by a certain Iranian physician at one of the universities in the West, had been included. This man after referring to Sa'adi's famous poetry "All Adam's descendants are incorporated into one body" had remarked that Sa'adi was the the first Iranian poet who instituted the idea of a united nation. "Greece has been", said he, "the seat of civilization; it had had great philosophers and thinkers like Socrates, Plato, etc. However, in reality, what could be compared with the universities in today's world was what Khosrow Anushirwan, the Sassanid king, had estab-

lished in Iran. In Shush (South of Iran), then capital of Iran, there was a great institution of learning known as Jundy Shahpoor. A university which lasted for years until the Arabs who invaded Iran razed it to the ground along with other institutions; and though our sacred religion, Islam, explicitly professes that knowledge should be sought even if you have to traverse the whole of china (i.e. far-flung places), the invading Arabs went against the express orders of the Messenger of Islam and burned the Iranian national library and other scientific institutions. From that time on, Iran had been under Arab domination for two centuries.”¹

COMMENTS

Declarations and assertions, typical of this one above, which are being said and written without relevant proofs and documents are numerous. But before we scrutinize the historical veracity of this matter and retaliate with scientific proofs to the arguments of persons who have presented a chain of so-called authentic evidences in this connection, we would like to respond to this respectable physician who spoke so decisively at an international conference of medical doctors whose knowledge of history, of course, was not any better than that of his own.

To begin with, after the decline of the Greek civilization and before Jundy Shahpoor was founded in Iran, Alexandria's great university used to be the center of learning which Jundy Shahpoor was nowhere to be compared with.

During the second century and the latter part of the first century after the Hijra, Muslims who indulged in the translation of foreign sciences into Arabic, greatly benefitted from Alexandrian works. Details regarding this matter can be procured from relevant sources.

Secondly, when the Arabs came to Iran, Jundy Shahpoor university which was more a medical institution than to be called a center of learning, was left virtually untouched and continued operating until the beginning of the 4th century A.H. Later on, Baghdad became the site of a circle of great learning and gradually Jundy Shahpoor was overshadowed, eventually coming to an end. However, the Abbaside Caliphs, in order to transform Baghdad into a seat of learning, employed Jundy Shahpoor's astrologers and doctors to serve in their court. Persons such as Ibn Masooyeh and Bakhtisho'a were products of Jundy Shahpoor. In other words, claims and assertions that Jundy Shahpoor was levelled to the ground by Arab conquerors are all baseless and unfounded.

Thirdly, Jundy Shahpoor had a faculty of Christian scholars who were in connection,

religion-wise, with the Roman circle of learning in Antakieh. In other words, the very essence of this center was Christian Roman and not the Zoroastrian Iranian. It is true that geographically, politically and culturally, this academy was part of and was connected with Iran, but the entity it had generated for itself was that of a complete alienation from the Iranian identity and its association with non-Zoroastrian and foreign institutions was too express to be overlooked.

Furthermore, there were other centers of learning in the Transoxiana which were under the influence and supervision of Buddhist monks.

Iranians and Iran have always been identified with learning. But during the rule of the Sassanid dynasty, the authoritative influence of Zoroastrian high priests who were staunchly opposed to the propagation of knowledge was an obstacle to the scientific growth in the country.

This was the reason why in southwest and northeast Iran where the Zoroastrian clergy enjoyed the least influence, schools and circles of learning flourished whereas in areas where that sluggish attitude prevailed, the tree of knowledge never bore any fruit.

Fourthly, it would have been a lot better if this revered physician, who blabbered so much about the "Arabs' destruction of the Iranian pre-Islamic national archives and institutions of learning", had specified their exact location. Were

they in Hamadan? In Isfahan? Shiraz? Azarbaijan? Nishabour? Teesfoon? Were they in the sky? On the ground? Where??

How come this man and the likes of him have knowledge of such a destruction of such archives but do not know where they had been situated.

No document on such a matter has ever existed. The detailed accounts of the momentous incident of the arrival of Islam in Iran and Byzantine Rome which have been preserved authentically, do not contain a single line which mentioned any archive being demolished or burned and not a single document has ever been found regarding such an incident.

DOCTOR SHAFaq'S IDEA

Among writers of literature, history and geography who would compose works for high schools according to the interests of the ruling regime, the late Doctor Rezazadeh Shafaq was a knowledgeable man who somehow lent justice to the incident, in his book "History of Literature" (written in 1978 for high school students). He wrote: "A multitude of religious, literary, scientific and historical books were written and translated from other languages during the Sassanid period.

"Documents, literary works by the court's

poets and singers prove that pieces of poetry were written but, obviously, were not encouraged to flourish at a national level. Poetry and lyrical odes were common only among court affiliates and the Zoroastrian clergy, and since these two social classes were characterized by corruption and moral degeneration just as the whole of the Sassanid dynasty was due to culmination of corruption and the advent of various sects in the religion, it can easily be concluded that literature was not flourishing at the time of the arrival of the Islamic faith.”

SCIENCE AND CULTURE IN ZOROASTRIAN CIRCLES

Authenticated documents show that people who composed the so-called Zoroastrian “scientific” circles were not interested in science, culture and books nor did they ever encourage their cultivation.

At this point we quote Jaahidh who, though, an Arab, did not suffer from any Arab prejudice and who copiously wrote against Arabs. In his book, “Al Muhassin wal-Adhdad”² he writes: “Iranians were not very interested in writing books but quite enthusiastic about building.”

In the book “The Iranian Civilization” orienta-

lists³ agree on the absence of any literary vignette in the Zoroastrian faith of the Sassanid era.

There is a unanimous convergence of opinions among noted researchers that even the reproduction of the Avesta (Zoroaster's religious book) was very limited and virtually prohibited. Apparently, when Alexander (the Macedonian conqueror) invaded Iran, there was just a couple of Avesta in existence, one of which was in Estakhar and burned by Alexander.

Seemingly, books and schools, literacy and education were confined among court affiliates and clergy and the rest of the society and other groups never had access to any kind of academic training. Quite naturally, science and knowledge did not develop due to the fact that scholars usually spring from the deprived class not from the opulent cadre.

Curators and potters bring birth to Ibn Sinas (Avicennas), Abu Reyhans, Farabis and Muhammad Ibn Zacharriah Razi and not the affluent and the royal class. Just like what the late Dr. Shafaq had said, the upper social class was usually characterized by degeneration during the Sassanid era and in a corrupt class science and culture will never develop and grow.

THE IRANIANS' OWN NONCHALANCE IN PRESERVING THEIR PRE-ISLAMIC HERITAGE

Indubitably, there was something of scientific and literary value which were worth preserving, during the Sassanid era. During the Islamic period numerous Sassanid cultural and scientific works were translated into Arabic and preserved up until the present time, however, a great number of such works and literary pieces had also been certainly demolished not because of burning or similar incidents but because of natural causes and reasons which usually occur whenever there is change in the people's thoughts and ideas, and when a certain culture dominates another, consensus and beliefs are adapted accordingly, and consequentially, an ancient culture eventually fades into oblivion in a manner so extremely detrimental because of neglect and indifference. Thus scientific and literary works belonging to such a culture would

finally be buried in the past and completely forgotten.

A typical example of this today is observed in the process of the domination of Western culture over the Islamic. Western culture is now prevailing in the Iranian society and has overshadowed Islamic culture which explains why efforts to preserve and safeguard the latter have altogether ceased. Valuable pamphlets and works in natural sciences, mathematics, literature, philosophy and religion which were available and kept in private libraries until a few years back have disappeared and there is no information on their whereabouts. They could be found quite regularly at local grocery shops for wrapping purposes or being tossed away by the wind. According to Professor Jallaluddin Huma'ee, copies of handwritten books and pamphlets on Islam collected by the late Majlisi from around the world, were sold by the kilo to people on the streets.

Indeed, at the time of the conquest of Iran, there must have been books in the country some of which were quite precious and were part of private collections which might have been preserved until two or three centuries later. However after the Muslims' conquest of the country, the Iranians having accepted Islam, adopted the Arabic script and language.

However, the Pahlavi script and language in which old Persian literary and scientific books

were written, were eventually obliterated and soon became useless to the majority of people until no trace of them was left.

Accusatory statements regarding the alleged existence and the so-called deliberate destruction of scientific archives and institutions by “Arab invaders” at the time Islam came to Iran are but mere legends and baseless. burning of books as presented by the accusers.

EVIDENCES OF THE BURNING OF BOOKS AS PRESENTED BY THE ACCUSERS

Ibrahim Pourdavood whose “good” intention is quite clear and who, as the late Qazvini put it, is strongly against the Arabs and anything Arabic, did not leave a single stone unturned searching every page of history books, to find “proofs”—which of course, were too unfounded to be called proofs (and most probably abrogated from the original quotation—and presented them as tangible proofs of the infamous “destruction” of educational and scientific archives and centers of learning by the Arab conquerors of Iran. This bold attempt to distort history soon won followers some of whom were those least expected to be impressed by such baseless claims. The late Dr. Mo’iin was one of them. In this book, “The Mazdisna and the Persian Literature”, the late Dr. Mo’iin discussed the results of Arab invasion of Iran and most of the evidences and reasonings he presented were quoted from Pourdavood.

They are the following:

1. That Sir John Malcolm, an Englishman, had

written about the event in his book of history.

2. That in pre-Islamic Arabia, at the advent of Islam, the Arabs were an ignorant and primitive people. According to Waqedi, in Mecca at the time of Hadhrat Muhammad's declaration of prophethood only 17 people among the Quraish tribe were literate.

The last Bedouin poet, Dhul-ramma would conceal his literacy and would say, "Literacy among us is derogatory."⁴

3. In his book, "Al Bayan wal-Tabiyin", Jaahidh has written about one Quraishite chieftain who, upon seeing a young lad busy reading a book, yelled at him in dismay: "Shame on you, what you are doing is fit only for teachers and beggars."

In pre-Islamic era, educating children among Arabs was considered a contemptible task. A teacher earned not more than 60 dirhams, quite a low income during that time.⁵

4. In a chapter entitled Al Uloum al-Aqliyah wa Asnafoha in his book "Introduction to History", Ibn Khaldoun writes: "when Iran was conquered, a lot of books in this country came into the possession of the Arabs. Sa'ad Ibn Abi Waqqas asked the permission of Umar ibn al-Khuttub (the second caliph) to translate those books for use by the Muslims. Umar, as a response, wrote: "These works will have to be destroyed. If ever there is guidance to be found in those, God has sent us a better guide (the Quran); if there is harm in them,

God has protected us from the evil in them.”

Hence, those books were burned and destroyed and the Iranian thought which had been contained in those books was obliterated and could not benefit us.⁶

Abulfaraj ibn al-Ibry in his book “Mukhtasar al Duwal”, Abdul Latif Baghadi in “Al Ifadata wal Itabar and Qufti in “Tarikh al Hukama” in introducing the life of Yahya Nahvi, Haj Khalifa in “Kashfu-l-Dhunoon ” and Dr. Safa in the “History of Rational Sciences” all wrote about the burning of books in Alexandria by the Arabs. (That is, if it is proved that the Arabs burned libraries in Alexandria, it could also be logically construed that wherever they found any library, they would burn it. It would not then be very surprising that they did the same thing when they conquered Iran). However, Shibli Ni’amani in his “Alexandria’s Library” (translated into Persian by Fakhr Da’ee and also Mister Mujtaba Minavi in Sukhan magazine, No. 74, page 584) have refuted the credibility of such an incident (burning of books in Alexandria).

5. Abu Reyhan Birouni in Al-AtharalBaqiah wrote about Khwarazm that: “After the retrogression of its citizens to apostasy, Qutayba Ibn Muslim, reconquered Khwarazm, and appointed Askujmook as its governor-general. Qutayba wiped out all traces of Khwarazmi sciences and script up to the point of extinction. He killed or exiled

anybody who knew the local script and was well-versed in the sciences. Thus, all the events which took place inside the country were concealed from the outside world and no document or means remained available to discern what actually happened there after the arrival of Islam.⁷

Abu Reyhan further continues: "And because Qutayba Ibn Muslim massacred all Khwarazm's writers and scholars and burned their books and other literary works, the Khwarazm citizens remained illiterate, and whenever an occasion arose when they would be in need of those books, they would just rely on their memory. And since a long time elapsed, minor aspects of Khwarazmi thought and various ideas were forgotten. What remained was but a general conception of past incidents accepted by a majority.

6. Tales of burning books by Abdullah Ibn Tahir found in Tadhkratul Shu'ara by Dowlatshah Samarghandi.

The six items above were the so-called "evidences" which supposedly proved the authenticity of the incident of burning books in Iran as presented by the late Doctor Mo'iin. Among these proofs, the fourth one quoted from Ibn Khaldoun and the tale of the same incident occurring in Alexandria as conveyed by Ibn Al-Ibry, Al-Bagdadi and Al-Qafti confirmed by what Haj Khalifa has written in his Kashful Dhunoon are the most signi-

ficant. All these we will examine and scrutinize.

A seventh "evidence" which did not catch the attention of the late Dr. Mo'iin but which has been excessively quoted by Jurjy Zidon [George Gordon, the Egyptian historian] and some Iranian writers, has frequently been—posed as a proof of the Arabs' antagonism toward knowledge (books) and science. That is, the second caliph (Umar ibn al Khuttab) strictly banned the writing and compilation of books by propagating the slogan "The Quran is all we need" strictly declaring forbidden compilations of anything that had to do with science. Anybody caught involved in such an effort was considered a criminal. Such a prohibition continued until the second century (A.H.) when it stopped as dictated by the needs of the time.

The logic used by the accusers is that it is only natural that a certain people who never permitted themselves to be involved in writing and compiling books, would never let the vanquished nations to do such.

To begin with, we cross-examine the proofs that the late Dr. Mo'iin presented with the exception of the fourth and then we would deal with the seventh and then the fourth one.

SIR JOHN MALCOLM'S WORDS

The first proof, that is, what Sir John Malcolm had said had already been included and criticized in the book "Mutual Services of Islam and Iran" in the second chapter entitled "Opinions." In that book his viewpoints and allegations had already been duly invalidated. According to the book "Mazdisna and Persian Literature", Sir John Malcolm has said: "The followers of the Arab Prophet treated so relentlessly the Iranians because they took a firm and unyielding stance in the defense of their country and religion; the Arabs, after victory destroyed anything that might induce or consolidate national solidarity among the Iranians. Cities, were razed to ground and fire temples were burned. They beheaded the Zoroastrian priests who were in charge of the maintenance and supervision of temples. Books written by the scholars of this nation whether in science, history or religion were destroyed and anybody who would be found in possession of such books was killed. In those days the prejudiced Arabs did not know of any book except the Quran nor wanted

to know of any. They called Mazdean priests magis and sorcerers and their works nothing but black magic. What remained of the Iranian national heritage after that catastrophic invasion could now be deduced from what happened to the Greek and the Roman books and works.

As I have written in "Mutual Services of Islam and Iran", I now quote: "What this so-called historian claims is unprecedented and cannot be traced back to any existing historical document. We must presume then that this Sir John Malcolm had documents in his possession that no other human soul had ever laid his eyes on or which nobody had touched nor read, or that this historian never deemed it necessary to reveal them. Truly, we just have to assume such lest, God forbid, we might entertain some dubious ideas about this eminent historian who, of course never worked for the British Foreign Ministry in writing his book, so, how is it ever possible to doubt his "sincerity!?"

Contrary to what most historians say, what this chronologer intended to say which he claimed to be in some invisible documents filed nowhere else but the British Foreign Ministry, was that the Iranians fought bravely and obdurately and defended their land and religion and quite surprisingly with such obstinacy and a population of approximately 140 million equipped with quite advanced war equipment, the Iranians could not overcome the 40-50 thousand Arabs who numbered not even

one-tenth of the total armed Iranian soldiers and who were nowhere to be compared with them in terms of war equipment, strategy and military techniques. If what Sir John Malcolm said was right then surely, the defeat of the Iranians must have been due to their own venality and baseness and not because of their dissatisfaction about their government and the internal system and order then existing in Iran nor was it a result of the Iranians' voluntary attraction towards the new custom and ideology called Islam.

The second contention was that the Iranian cities were levelled to the ground by the Muslim Arabs. Now, where on earth these cities were, what their names were and what history books had made any mention of them?? Sir John Malcolm is obliged to give us the answer to these questions.

The third statement was that Mazdean priests and temple overseers were beheaded and the fire temples were burned down. On the contrary, historians and chronologers, like Masoudi, Muqaddisi, etc. have written that fire temples were still standing erect during their time, i.e. the 4th century A.H. And as agreed in pacts, Muslim commanders undertook the task of preserving temples and places of worship of the People of the Book including those of magis. This was a subject matter that Sir John Malcolm did not want to discuss.

The fourth evidence was that scientific and religious books of Iran and anybody caught with

their possession were totally wiped out.

The fifth evidence which we hear from this "just" historian for the first time is that the Muslim Arabs called the Mazdean priests sorcerers and their books nothing but black magic.

Sir John Malcolm lived in the 13th century A.H. which is 13 centuries since the beginning of the Islamic era. And because Sir John Malcolm could not have been an eyewitness to an incident which took place 1300 years ago and even if we assume that Sir John Malcolm was an impartial man, his words and contention need be supported by documents which he did not present since there is none.

THE ARAB ILLITERACY

The second proof was the problem of illiteracy of the Arabs, a fact which the Quran itself had attested to. But what kind of proof is it? Does it not seem so illogical that because the ignorant Arabs were illiterate they burned the Iranian book?

Twenty-five years elapsed from pre-Islamic Age of Ignorance in Arabia until the age of Islamic conquests, and in that period of time the noble Prophet of Islam (S) initiated an extensive and amazing literacy movement in Medina.

These ignorant Arabs became so devoted to a religion whose Prophet ordered that any war cap-

tive who knew writing and reading could buy off his freedom by teaching Muslim children. The Prophet of these people would encourage some of his companions to learn foreign languages like Syriac, Hebrew and Persian. He had a special group of about 20 "secretaries" (minutemen) each one of whom was assigned administrative tasks.¹¹ Ignorant Arabs became so attached to a religion whose God has "sworn by the pen and writing" ¹² and the Divine revelation which descended to the prophet started with "Read" and "Teach"¹³

Didn't the ways of the Prophet (S) and the exalted position the Quran had assigned for reading, writing and knowledge ever have any effect on ignorant Arabs who were simply in love with the Quran and the prophet to render them optimistic in regard to books, science writings and literature?

THE QURAI SHITE "CONTEMPT"

THE QURAI SHITE "CONTEMPT" FOR KNOWLEDGE AND TEACHING

The third proof tells of the contempt that the Quraish tribe and other Arabs had for an educators' post: "The Quraish and Arabs reacted with contempt toward educating children and counted it base and considered literacy a disgrace", it has been alleged.

In the above-mentioned statement the teaching profession has been clearly quoted to be a servile job because of its low income returns, something that we are witnessing today in Iran. Educators, teachers and the clergy belong to the low income class of the Iranian society, a fact which leads some to shift their course of profession. Everybody knows in Iran today that whenever a young teacher or instructor or clergyman seeks a girl's hand in marriage and his competitor is a trader or a constructor or a businessman, priority

is often extended to the latter even if he is illiterate except on very rare occasion. Why? Is it because intellect and knowledge are servile? Certainly not, it does not have any connection with contempt for tuition or knowledge. Offering a girl's hand in marriage to literate low-income men requires a little sacrifice on the girl's part and not everyone is quite ready for such a sacrifice.

Strange enough how their logic worked when they said that because a Quraishite reproached a child for reading a book, hence it must be deduced that they bore inherent hatred for knowledge and therefore, wherever they set their foot on, they burned every single book they laid their eyes on. It is like saying that Iranians are generally against literacy and education and that they destroy any book and library they come across and are advocates of cheap art and worthless artifacts only because an Iranian poet and writer, Ubaid Zakani, once said:

“Hey you, seek not knowledge to your utmost or you will not be able to earn your daily bread; futility, cheap art you seek instead thus, restore your rights from powerful and weak.” Or that because Abu Hiyyan Tawhidi burned his books due to mendicancy and poverty, therefore his nation was expressly opposed to science and literacy.

THE BURNING INCIDENT AT KHWARAZM

The fifth proof about the burning incident at Khwarazm which Abu Reyhan allegedly had written is nowhere to be found in writing and Abu Reyhan had not presented any document. Abu Reyhan was a man of many virtues, and a researcher of history and never exaggerated in what he said, and there was not too wide a time-gap between him and the alleged incident being a native of Khwarazm. He lived from the second half of the 4th century A.H. till the first half of the 5th century A.H. and Khwarazm was conquered during the time of Walid Ibn Abdu-l-Malik in 93 A.H. It is not then improbable that what he claimed did really take place.

First of all, what Abu Reyhan wrote about concerned Khwarazm and its language and not Iranian books written in Pahlavi (old Persian) or the Avestan language.

Secondly, in the prologue of the book "Sayd-ala" or "Saydana" which is not yet published, Abu Reyhan, discussed the language and skills of the Khwarazm people in expressing scientific concepts and preferred using Arabic to old Persian or Khwarazmian languages saying: "This language

(Khwarazmian) is not capable of expressing scientific thought, and relating scientific thought in this language tantamounts to a helpless attempt of placing a camel in a funnel."¹⁴

If it were true that voluminous works existed and were written in the Khwarazmian language, Abu Reyhan would not have spoken of the inadequacy of this language the way he did. The books which Abu Reyhan spoke about were a set of history books. It was only during the time of Abdul Malik that Qutayba Ibn Muslim trated the Khwarazmian people in a harsh way and not during the time of the four rightly guided caliphs. If the tale of burning books in Khwarazm is authentic and not exaggerated,¹⁵ then what Qutayba did in Khwarazm was certainly inhumane and un-Islamic and was contrary to the ways of other Muslim conquerors who, being the holy Prophet's companions and influenced by his teachings, conquered Iran and the Byzantine empire.

The conquest of Khwarazm occurred in the time of the most ignoble era of the Umayyad reign and what Qutayba did, could not be considered as an example of the treatment of Iranian people in general by Muslim conquerors.

Educational institutions and libraries might have existed in Iran but they were in Teesfoon or Hamadan or Nahavand or Isfahan or Istakhar or Nishabour or Azarbaijan and not in Khwarazm; and the language in which these scientific books

had been written, would have been Pahlavi and not Khwarazmian which was just a dialect. Persian books which were translated into Arabic during the Islamic era such as "Kaleela wa Damna" by Ibn Muqqafa and a portion of Aristotelian logic by Muqqafa or his son were in Pahlavi not in Khwarazmian nor any other dialect. Christenson writes: "Abdu-l Malik Ibn Marwan ordered the translation of a Pahlavi book into Arabic."¹⁶ That the scientific works of a certain language be totally destroyed by the invasion of a foreign intruder and that the people's connection with their past be totally severed, may occur in the realm of a dialect limited to a small area. It is quite obvious that a mere dialect can never emerge as a rich and affluent scientific language capable of bringing into existence an archive of medical, mathematical, natural science, astronomical, literary and religious books.

If ever a certain language flourishes and emerges well-developed or quite rich enough to give form to a huge collection of scientific books, the people who speak it will never revert into ignorance just because of a foreign invasion. No incursion into Iran more horrible than the Mongol invasion has ever occurred. Unheard-of manslaughter characterized Mongol's invasion and all libraries and books were fed to the flames. But in spite of all these, the Mongols could not totally destroy all scientific books written in the Arabic and Persian

languages and sever the affinity of post-Mongolian Iranian to pre-Mongolian era. Furthermore, the scientific culture delineated in Arabic and Persian was too well-developed to be eradicated by such massacres. So, what was consumed by flames in Khwarazm was nothing but some insignificant literary and Zoroastrian works the contents and nature of which we are quite aware and Abu Reyhan, too had not claimed anything more than this. Upon a close scrutiny of Abu Reyhan's account of such an incident, one would understand that he was referring to historical and religious books (and not voluminous scientific works).

THE BOOK-BURNING BY ABDULLAH IBN TAHIR

This story of Abdullah Ibn Tahir's alleged burning of books is quite amazing and is something everybody must hear. This sixth evidence was brought up by the late Dr. Mo'iiin as a proof and corollary to his claims that the invading Arabs obliterated monumental scientific heritage. Abdullah Ibn Tahir Dhulyaminein, Mamun's famous Iranian commander of the Khurassan army who won the war between Mamun and Amin, sons of Harun al-Rashid, in favor of Mamun over Ali Ibn Issa, the Arab commander of Amin's army. Later,

he also conquered Baghdad and killed Amin, a victory that unconditionally opened the gates of the Al-Rashid's wealthy kingdom for Mamun.

Ibn Tahir himself was a staunch anti-Arab zealot. He paid 30,000 dirhams to Allan-e Shu'uby who was working at Harun's court and compiled all the ugliness and defects of the Arabs in a book called Mathaleb-ul-Arab."¹⁷

His son Abdullah who was accused of the "infamous burning of books" started the line of Tahirian rulers and was the first to declare Khurasan as an independent state ruled by an independent Iranian government.

Abdullah, just like his father, hated the Arabs. Here, we will witness how Islam and history worked wonders. This same Abdullah, an Iranian anti-Arab zealot who was strong and powerful enough as to declare independence from Baghdad burned all pre-Islamic Persian books because he strongly believed that with the Quran all these books were futile.

Once a man came to Abdullah Ibn Tahir's court in Nishabour and presented an ancient Persian book. When asked what it was, he said it was the story of "Wameq and Adhra" and that this love story had been written by wisemen and presented to Anushirwan (the Sassanid king). Ibn Tahir said: "We read the Quran and do not have any need for such a book. The word of God and the Prophet's traditions are sufficient enough for us and more-

over, because it is written by magis, we consider it repugnant and disgraceful.' Ibn Tahir, after the incident, burned the book and ordered to do the same to any Persian books written by Zoroastrian magis.¹⁸ Why he did it, I do not know. Most probably it was a reflection of the hatred Iranians held for magis. Anyway, the books were burned by Abdullah Ibn Tahir, an Iranian and not an Arab. So, such an act could not be accorded to Arabs of the 3rd century, what more to Arabs of the first century of Islam. And not all Iranians should be blamed for what Abdullah Ibn Tahir did. One cannot claim that all Iranians burned every single book, except the Quran, they could find. We admit that what Abdullah had done was most unbecoming but our contention is that when a certain culture undergoes the domination of another, advocates of the new culture lavishly welcome it to the detriment of the old voluntarily. The Iranians who rejoiced at the new intricate culture brought by Islam never showed any desire to preserve their ancient culture and as a matter of fact, immediately embarked upon obliterating it. There have been many Iranians, like Abdullah Ibn Tahir who in spite of their hatred for the Arabs who would dictate the legitimacy of a certain race over people, displayed great zeal in favor of Islam and developed the same degree of prejudice against the magis' culture and works.

BURNING OF BOOKS IN HISTORY

If the motive in rationalizing Ibn Tahir's act is to tell the world of such a precedent, there is no need for it, because the world has been and is witness to such incidents. In our age, we witnessed Ahmad Kasravi's book burning rituals. Christians in massacring Muslims in Andalusia set on fire 80,000 books.¹⁹ Jurjy Zidon admitted that the Christian crusaders burned 3 million books when they invaded Syria and Palestine.²⁰ The Turks burned books in Egypt.²¹ Sultan Mahmud Ghazanawi burned books in Rey.²² The Mongols burned the library at Merv.²³ The Zoroastrians burned books of the Mazdakites during the Sasanid era.²⁴ Even orientalist have unanimously attested to this fact. Alexander, the Great also burned Persian books.²⁵ The Romans burned the works of Archimedes, the noted Greek mathematician.²⁶ Later, we will look into the burning of books by the Christians in Alexandria.

George Sarton in "The History of Science" states that "Pythagoras, the Greek sophist, in one of his books discussed truth and reality saying, "I cannot say gods exist nor can I say they do not.

There are so many things that obstruct the mind in comprehending such an issue and the very first one is the obscurity of the issue itself and the other is the short life span of man.”²⁷ Sarton Continues: “This statement was the reason why his books were burned in the year 411 A.D., and which was the first incident of burning books ever recorded in history.”²⁸

PROHIBITION OF COMPILATION AND WRITING OF BOOKS BY THE SECOND CALIPH

The seventh proof which is about the prohibition of writing and collecting of scientific books in the Islamic world by the second caliph which lasted for 100 years is another evidence which is quite interesting. In “Mutual Services of Islam and Iran”, I had repeatedly discussed the services rendered to Islam by the Iranians in the third chapter entitled “When Did Writing and Compiling of Books Begin?” I have to point out here again that what concerns the second caliph in this connection pertains to the writing of the Prophet’s traditions.

In the early part of the Islamic era there had been differences between Umar and some companions of the Prophet (S) like Imam Ali (A.S) about the manner the Prophet’s traditions must be

compiled and written.

The first group headed by Umar contested that the traditions of the Prophet (S) must be library used to be known as (Amood Al-Sawary) he did not encourage the compiling and writing of those lest, he surmised, they might be mistaken for the Quran and divert attention from the Quran completely. However, the second group headed by Imam Ali (A.S) insisted on the compilation of the traditions from the very beginning. Anyway, the Muslims in following the second caliph did not undertake any effort to compile the traditions for one century. But 100 years later, the people broke up with Umar's decision and adopted what Imam Ali believed should be done. This is why the Shi'ites (followers) of Imam Ali succeeded in collecting the traditions of the prophet some hundred years before the Sunni community.

Here, we clearly understand that the composition and compilation of books were not absolutely prohibited among the Arabs; and a people who would never allow themselves to compile and write books would certainly push the cultural heritage of other people into extinction. Furthermore, the prohibition and restriction concerned only the traditions of the Prophet and did not apply to any other works. Besides, such a restriction prevailed among the Sunni community while the Shi'ites never adopted the same policy regarding traditions.

In other words, the issue did not at all concern writing books.

THE CONTENTIONS OF JURJY ZIDON AND DR. SAFA

It would be somewhat regrettable if what Jurjy Zidon in “The History of Islamic Civilization” and Dr. Dhahibullah Safa in “the History of Rational sciences in Islam” had said on this matter is not mentioned. Dr. Safa writes: “The Arabs just like the rest of the Muslims believed that Islam obliterates anything pre-Islamic, and this was how that attitude prevailed among Muslims that the Quran abrogates all books, and Islam abolishes all religions. Their Muslim leaders, too, strictly prohibited the reading of any books and any religious book besides the Quran.

“It is said that once the Prophet (S) saw Umar holding a page of the Torah (Jewish scripture). He was enraged and harshly reproached Umar: ‘Did I not bring you a brilliant and purified religion? By God, if Moses had been alive, he would have no choice but to follow me,’ said the Prophet. In the same regard, the Prophet declared: ‘Neither reject nor accept the People of the Book in what they call religion.... Tell them, we believe in what has

been revealed to us and in what had come down to you (not what you have made of it yourselves). Our God and your God are one and the same.”

There is a famous tradition which says: “Tales of the past and those predicting your future and the laws governing over you are found in the Quran.”

The words of the Holy Quran testify to the truth that: “Nothing exists unless it has been revealed in a clarifying book (the Quran).” These statements, quite naturally, became the fortified base of a certain belief and consequently, the unconditional reliance on the Quran and the traditions and indifference towards all kinds of books and other works.²⁹ (A similar statement was written in “The History of Islamic Civilization by Jurjy Zidon Persian translation, pp. 54 and 55).

COMMENTS:

Such approaches by these scholarly men really amaze me. Apparently, they are not aware that the statement “Islam abolishes all that was before it” referred to the abolition of past religious laws, customs and habits with the advent of Islam. This statement meant rescinding all religious rituals of the Age of Ignorance—the ignorance of the polytheists or the People of the Book.

It did not have any reference to non-religious

practices and traditions. Besides, the statement "Islam makes up for what was before it" means that Islam forgives and forgets what has happened in the past and is not retroactive. That is, if a certain offense is committed by a Muslim, Islam punishes him. But if a non-Muslim commits the same and then later accepts the faith, Islam does not hold him responsible for the offense he had done before. All Muslims have clearly comprehended the meaning of such statements and they still do. I wonder how these writers arrived at such an interpretation and how a billion Muslims did? Where do their contentions stand, where does mine?

The tradition from Umar explicitly showed that the Prophet (S) declared the rescinding of the Torah and Moses' religion with the coming of the Quran and the ultimate religion (Islam). Therefore, the Holy Prophet did not forbid the study of any book or religious books; he forbade the study of past religious scriptures. The Holy Prophet forbade the study of the Torah lest the Muslims mix the obsolete and misleading ancient religious laws with the new Islamic laws. As for that commandment of the Prophet not to deny nor confirm what the People of the Book said, he also referred to religious tales and probably laws.

With these statements the Prophet (S) wanted the Muslims to understand that the People of the Book had combined the truth with the false in

their scriptures. The Prophet addressed the Muslims saying: "Because you might not understand them; you might confirm what is false instead of deny it, or deny the truth instead of confirming it." It meant that tales of old, prophecy and governing laws found in the Quran, and which can also be found in Nahj al-Balagha, referred to stories of religious origin, the Hereafter and canonical laws and meant that with the Quran, no other religious books were necessary.

And the most hilarious of all is the reference to the "Quranic" verse: 'Not a thing, fresh or withered, but it is in a book manifest (Quran: 6-59)', which as far as I know not a single Quranic exegetist has regarded as referring to the Quran. All interpreters have confirmed that the "clarified book" in the verse refers to the hidden scripture (Loh-i-Mahfuz) kept with God. This verse and the above quoted tradition was never what these gentlemen have presumed, baselessly concluding that this verse and tradition were meant to establish a basic Islamic thought to destroy any book on whatever science or technology except the Quran.

IBN KHALDOUN'S WORDS

Now, we will look into the fourth proof which had been presented by the late Dr. Mo'iin.

Dr. Mo'iin, quoting Pourdavood, claimed as if Ibn Khaldoun had decisively commented on the incident of burning books in Iran and as if Abulfarraj Ibn al-Ibry, Abdul Latif Baghdadi, Qufti and Haj Khalifa had had concrete proofs on the incident, while he knew for a fact that contemporary European historians have explicitly attested to the baselessness of the burning of books by Muslims in Alexandria. But the late Dr. Mo'iin dismissed all these proofs and was contented with just quoting the denial of Shibli No'mani and Minavi in this connection without close examination of the authenticity of the evidences they had gathered. Now, let us briefly present the outlines of the accounts of researchers in regard to the burning incident in Alexandria and our own points. Later, we will look into the account allegedly to have been given by Ibn Khaldoun and Haj Khalifa in regard to the burning of books in Iran.

AN ACCOUNT OF THE BURNING OF BOOKS IN ALEXANDRIA

Those who accused Muslim Arabs of burning books in Iran have often referred to a similar incident which took place in Alexandria as an evidence. Evidently, if the illiteracy of pre-Islamic Arabs or the humiliation of a teacher by a Qurayshite or the burning of Books by the Iranian Abdullah ibn Tahir, and by Qutayba ibn Muslim in Khwarazm 100 years after the first Islamic conquests be the supposedly concrete proofs of the burning of libraries in Iran by Muslim Arabs, then the burning of books in Alexandria by a wise and intelligent person like Amr Ibn Aas—under instructions from his incumbent caliph—who was reportedly acquainted with a famous Alexandrian philosopher of his time and would benefit from his teachings, could surely be regarded as an evidence to the burning of books in Iran. Therefore, these groups have always recounted with excessive verbosity the incident of book-burning in Alexandria.

THE CAUSE AND NATURE OF THE INCIDENT IN ALEXANDRIA

Before everything else, it should be mentioned that the writing of the history of Islam and Islamic conquests—general or specific (conquests of a certain region)—began towards the end of the second century A.H. copies of which are available to us nowadays.

Besides Islamic historians, some Christians have also meticulously written about the conquest of Alexandria, but accounts of any burning incident in Alexandria or Iran written before the Age of Crusades are not available in any history books whether Islamic, Christian or Jewish. It was only in the late 6th century A.H. and the early 7th century when for the first time Abdullatif Baghdadi who was a Christian, mentioned in his personal travel accounts known as “Perceptible Matters and Incidents in Egypt” (Al-ifadatu-wal-I’tibar fil-

Umour-i-l-Mushahdati wal-Hawadithi-l-Mu'aya-nati bi-Ardhi Misr) in which he talked about matters and incidents he had personally witnessed. In regard to a pillar located where the Alexandrian library used to be known as (Amood al-Sawary) he said: "... and it is said that this column had been one of the columns on which a platform had been built. Here Aristotle used to teach and there was an academy and a library that Amr ibn al-Aas had burned down upon the instruction given by the caliph." Abdullatif did not want to say anything but there had been rumors among people (most probably his co-religious people) which he intentionally avoided to verify, and had introduced his narrative accounts with "It is said, or it is believed." The prevailing consensus in the transmission of traditions and the relation of narrations demand that documents always go with it just like how Tabari the historian and most traditionalists would do. The best way to transmit or relate narrations is to provide discretionary documents for the readers to be able to discriminate which tradition is authentic and which is not and in case of an authentic document accept that tradition.

The transmission of a certain tradition without proofs and documents can be done in two ways. The first way is by presenting it as a solid fact which goes something like: "In that year, this

or that incident took place.” Or: “they used to say” or “it was said” or “they say that in that year this or that incident occurred”. If the incident is transmitted like the first one, the transmitter himself is quite certain about what he transmits but, of course, others who hear such a tradition transmitted without proofs and documents would always doubt its veracity. Traditionalists also would never count such tradition reliable. European researchers would never consider the undocumented tradition authentic and might relate such by mentioning that “such a tradition was mentioned by a certain person in his book without providing the documents”, meaning it is historically unreliable.

However, if a tradition is transmitted through “they say...” or “people say” or “it has been said” or through some ways similar (that is when the verb is in the passive voice) it means that even the transmitter himself does not completely rely on the authenticity of the tradition. Some traditionalists believe that the word “qila” (it has been said) not only demonstrates a narrator’s uncertainty but it also points out to the tradition’s unreliability.

Abdullatif gave a typical example of a tradition which he himself was not sure about.



A PROOF OF THE INAUTHENTICITY OF ABDULLATIF'S NARRATION

It is improbable that Abdullatif did not know that Aristotle had never set his foot on Egypt nor Alexandria let alone having taught at a stoic in that Alexandrian library. Alexandria was founded after Aristotle's time, and was built after Alexander conquered Egypt. The plan for the construction of this city was made during the time of Alexander and probably the construction started in his time, too. Alexandria, then, gradually emerged into a city. Aristotle and Alexander were contemporary figures.

So, whether Abdullatif personally believed in the authenticity of his own transmission or not, this tradition is contextually weak, that is including the said teaching of Aristotle behind an Alexandrian podium—an issue that is historically baseless.

If in the transmission of a tradition or in its narration some definitely false incidents had been included, it is quite obvious that the rest of it is also wrong. The burning of an Alexandrian library

by Muslims, from credibility point of view, is just like saying that Aristotle taught in that place.

Therefore, Abdullatif's narration is weak and lacking documents and proofs; it is also suffering from lack of contextual credibility because it clearly includes false information; it lacks the sufficient reliability of a good tradition and had been related in such a way that shows that the transmitter himself was uncertain about it.

THE TIME GAP BETWEEN THE INCIDENT AND ITS NARRATION

On top of all these: If Abdullatif was living at the time of the Muslim conquest of Alexandria (first century A.H.) or at least contemporaneously with the Islamic historians who narrated the conquest, quoting others in their books (2nd century till 4th century A.H.), it might be possible that Abdullatif accidentally met someone who had directly or indirectly eyewitnessed the said incident and had told Abdullatif and that the other historians had never encountered such man. But then, Abdullatif compiled his book at the end of the 6th century A.H. and early 7th century A.H.³⁰ That is about 600 years since the Arabs invaded Alexandria in 17 or 18 A.H. and in the span of 600 years, no historical book had been written and no

nistirian whether Muslim, Jewish, Christian, or others had written about the incident and that... It was only in Abdullatif's collection six centuries later, that such an event came to be recorded in.

Thus Abdullatif's transmission does not carry much value and is even weaker than an undocumented narration "known as a Mursil narration" [meaning that the chain of narration originated from the second generation after the Prophet (S)] and cannot be relied upon and had been presented in the form of a narration proved baseless by other attestations.

SELF-CONTRADICTORY STATEMENTS

The most significant aspect of it all is that history itself bore witness that Alexandria had been the victim of pillaging, plundering and conflagration on several occasions prior to the Arab conquest of the city and by the time the Muslims conquered it, the great library of Alexandria was never the way it used to be. The only books the Muslim conquerors found were those that belonged to individual citizens and which the Muslims made use of in the second century until the fourth century A.H.

Learning all these, we are reminded of the story which goes something like: A fellow once said: "Jacob, the son of an Imam, was ripped apart by a wolf on top of a minaret." Another fellow

denied it by saying: "It was not the son of an Imam, it was the son of a prophet; it was not Jacob, it was Joseph; and it was not on top of a minaret, it was at the bottom of a well. Furthermore, the whole story was not true, the wolf did not rip Joseph apart."

At this point I would like to offer the readers a perspective view of what Will Durant, the noted historian, said: "The weakness of Abdullatif's narration lies in the fact that: (1)—The most significant section of the Alexandrian library was burned by the Christians during the reign of Archbishop Tufinis in the year 392 C.E. (about 250 years before the Muslim conquest of Alexandria).

No historian had written nor mentioned any incident of burning occurring in Alexandria for a period of five centuries (possibly six) in spite of the fact that Otakius was the Archbishop of Alexandria in the year 322 A.H. (933 C.E.) and had recorded the conquest of Alexandria by the Arabs in full details. This is one of the main reasons why historians question the veracity of the incident and look at it as a mere legend of the olden times. The destruction of the Alexandrian library which took place gradually was one of the most tragic events in the history of the world."³¹

In his book, "History of Civilization" Will Durant talked about the gradual destruction of Alexandrian libraries at the hands of the Christians. (Interested parties may refer to the sixth, ninth,

and eleventh volumes of the Persian translation of History of Civilization).

Gustav Lubon says in "The Islamic and Arab Civilization:" "the burning of books in Alexandria which had been attributed to the Muslim conquerors is quite surprising. It is quite amazing that accounts of such an imaginary event could live on for such a long time and be met with approval. But now, this assertion has been clarified and proved wrong and researchers agree that burning was done by the Christians in pre-Islamic time just as the temples and idols of Alexandria were demolished by them; and that at the time of Islamic conquest; there were not any books left as to be burned by Muslims.

From 332 B.C. when it was built up to the time of the Islamic conquests, Alexandria was considered a great and significant city in the world for a period of almost 1000 years. During the reign of the Ptolemaic kings, wise men and philosophers would gather in Alexandria. They also set up great institutions libraries but scientific development did not last. In 48 B.C., Romans invaded Alexandria under Caesar, and inflicted irreparable blows upon the city's scientific life. Though Alexandria flourished again at the time of the Roman domination, it was short lived. A controversial wave of religious upheavals swept the populace in spite of the atrocity and the harsh measures the Roman emperors took against them. This madness persis-

ted until Christianity became the official religion. At this time Theodor ruled to obliterate all traces of paganism and destroyed temples, idols³² and burned their libraries.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ALEXANDRIAN LIBRARY

Alexandria which still stands as one of the most famous cities of Egypt, was founded or planned by Alexander around the year 400 B.C. henceforth it was named Alexandria. His successors in Egypt known as Ptolemies set up a museum and library which, as a matter of fact, was an academy that later evolved into something like that of a great circle of learning. Many Alexandrian scientists and learned men competed with the great men of Greece and ranked amongst the world's eminent figures. Alexandria's Academy of learning commenced functioning around the third and second century B.C. and lasted until 400 C.E. During the rule of Alexander and his vicegerents, Egypt was completely under the influence of Greek politics. When Greek civilization started declining, the Romans whose capital was in present-day Rome engaged the Greeks in a war that resulted in the

latter's defeat. Egypt and Alexandria became part of the vast Roman empire politically. Four centuries after Christ, the Roman empire was split into Eastern Rome (Byzantine) with its capital in Constantinople (Istanbul) and Western Rome with its capital in today's Rome. Eastern Rome became the seat of Christianity which proved to have a decadent effect on both the Greek and Roman empires. The Medieval Ages which marked the deterioration of Western civilization began about this time (i.e. when the Roman Empire split).

Subsequent to the conversion of Eastern Roman Empire into Christianity, the influential clergy prevailed the idea that teaching sciences and philosophy was sacrilegious and persecuted scholars and philosophers whom they considered atheists, misled and misleaders. Thus after Caesar's invasion (48 C.E.), the library of Alexandria was ransacked and subject to intermittent burning.

Constantine I was the first Byzantine emperor who accepted the Christian faith. Justinian one of his descendants, closed down the Academy of Athens in 6th century C.E. while in the fourth century C.E., the Alexandrian Academy had been already closed. The Athenian Academy came to an end in 529 C.E., forty-one years before the birth of the noble Prophet (S) of Islam, eighty-one years before the first Divine revelation, 94 years before his emigration to Medina, 105 years before his death and 120 years or so before the Islamic con-

quest of Alexandria.

THE CHRISTIANS' PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE AGAINST THE MUSLIMS

It is now quite clear that the Alexandrian Academy which was set up by idol-worshippers and polytheists was razed to the ground by the Christians. However, in the Age of the Crusades which lasted 200 years (5th and 6th century A.H.), the Christians became acquainted with Islamic culture and civilization which enlightened them on many aspects. The final defeat of the Crusaders at the hands of Muslims created in their hearts a certain animosity and they initiated a psychological warfare against Muslims. The Christians indulged in adverse publicities against Islam, the Quran, the Prophet (S) and the Muslims, to the degree that it has become a disgrace among civilized Christians of modern times. To make excuses for their ancestors' mistakes, Christians have written books to express their regret such as "An Apology to Muhammad and the Quran"³⁴ The issue of burning of books by Muslims was a psychological warfare instigated by the Christians which few Muslims from the seventh century A.H. had also quoted and narrated in their books without carefully considering to find out whether it was factual or fictitious

or at least being aware of the manners of narration, introduce the narrative with "It is a rumor....." or "It is said....." or "It is narrated...." as a narration would require. On the contrary, some narrators reflected it just like an ordinary tradition in their books heedless of the fact that rumor-mongers were Christian crusaders and their motive was to derogate Muslims. And in the contemporary century, Colonialism, considering it a prime target, has provoked national prejudices towards Islam among Muslims. That is why, the likes of Pourdavood who narrated this fictitious incident as a historical event and magnified what Abdullatif had compiled, have infused it in the minds of unaware young students.

IBN AL-IBRY'S IDEA

So far, we have quoted and evaluated what Abdullatif had said. Now let us examine the words of Ibn al-ibry in this connection.

Abulfarraj Ibn al-ibry was a Jewish physician who was born in 623 A.H. in Malta (Asia Minor). His father abandoned the Jewish faith and became a Christian. Abulfarraj began his education by studying the principles of Christianity. He was in full command of Syriac and Arabic and wrote an extensive history book in Syriac using Syriac, Arabic and Greek sources. In this book no mention of the burning incident in Alexandria had been

made. He then compiled Mukhtasar Al-Duwal, a summary of the Syriac history book in Arabic all copies of which are said to be incomplete and deficient. Now what is surprising is that Mukhtasar Al-Duwal was an abridged rendition of the lengthy original Syriac history and did not include details, yet it is said that it included events which were not found in the detailed Syriac volume. One such incident is the burning of books in Alexandria by Muslims.

Doctor Pocock, a college professor from Oxford and a man who has always been involved in publication of lies and dissemination of anti-Islamic propaganda, translated and published the book Mukhtasar Al-Duwal into English. Since then, the rumor regarding the burning of books in Alexandria by the Muslims spread in Europe. (Of course, the spread of this fictitious tale started in Europe through the book by Pocock, however, it actually originated from Abdullatif's narration of the incident—which we already clarified—and Qufati's "Akhbar al-Hukama", [which we will discuss later]. It was only until these recent centuries that this tale had been refuted and subsequently proved baseless by European historians and researchers like Gibbon, Carlyle, Gustav Lubon and others.³⁵

The incident as described in Mukhtasar al-Duwal is as follows: "Yahya Nahvi, better known to us as a grammarian, held a celebrated post among Arabs during those days. He was a resident

of Alexandria and a Christian who adhered to Jacob's church and preached Suwary thought. Later, Yahya rejected the Christian faith and reverted to atheism. The Christian scholars of Egypt all advised him to turn away from atheism but he refused. Hopeless of his reconversion they (the church elders) stripped Yahya of all the titles he had. He was still living when Amr ibn Aas conquered Egypt. Once, Yahya met Amr ibn Aas and the latter became acquainted with his scientific excellence and position and endowed him with so much respect. He spoke with so much wisdom and in a manner the Arabs had not known. His words affected Amr so much that he was completely fascinated by Yahya. From then onward, Amr, who himself was an intelligent and wise man never let Yahya out of his sight.

“One day Yahya told Amr that everything in Alexandria was at their disposal, that is, of course, those which might prove beneficial to them. However, Yahya asked Amr to grant them those things which they (Arabs) would never need since Alexandrian people deserved them more than anybody else did. When asked by Amr what those things were, he answered: ‘The books of Wisdom and philosophy which are kept at the government’s library.’ Amr Ibn Aas replied that he had to consult the Caliph (Umar Ibn al-Khuttub) regarding the request since it was not within his authority to

decide on such matters. Umar was informed and in reply he wrote: 'If these books are in conformity with the Quran, then there is no need for them, but if they are contradictory to it then they must be destroyed.' Upon receipt of the letter. Amr Ibn Aas immediately embarked on the demolition of the library. He ordered to take the books to public baths and for the succeeding six months they were fed to the public baths' furnaces. What actually happened could well easily be accepted by the reader without surprise.'³⁶

COMMENTS:

Unfortunately, with all the suggestions and recommendations made by Abulfaraj (that is, of course, if he had really initially brought up the issue) and/or with all the pleas and entreaties that Professor Pocock had made, this tale just cannot be accepted whether with surprise or without it! Furthermore, as already mentioned earlier, even Abdullatif's narration, which had been presented as a historical event without documents and sources, is something that is quite unacceptable, especially because 600 years after the incident had supposedly taken place, not a word had been written about it in history. Researchers have also proved that at the time of the Muslim conquest of Alexandria not one library could be found and the big commotion

was just too much ado about nothing. There are other evidences and reasons available proving the inauthenticity of the incident. First, the hero of the story, Yahya Nahvi, was a philosopher who according to recent researches and documents died about a hundred years before the Muslims came to Alexandria and his alleged meeting with Amr Ibn Aas was nothing but a myth!

It is amazing that Dr. Dhabihulla Safa writes in the *History of Rational Sciences in Islam*: "Yahya Nahvi was one of the eminent figures at the Alexandrian Academy in the late fifth and early sixth century—about a hundred years before the Prophet's (S) emigration to Medina." Dr. Safa then writes on page eighteen of his book: "It was believed that Yahya lived until the Muslims led by Aas conquered Egypt (641 C.E.)," but then historical evidences show that Yahya Nahvi was counted as one of the noted figures of the late 5th and first half of the 6th century and the tale that he had lived from the late 5th till mid-7th century just transgresses all rational standards and accepted notions." Still, Dr. Safa has used this tale whose two heroes are Yahya Nahvi and Amr Ibn Aas, as the proof of the burning of books in Alexandria!!!

Another aspect of the story that leaves one stupefied is that Shibli Ni'mani attested to the fact that the meeting between Yahya and Amr really took place in spite of the fact that he has also written that Yahya was one of the seven scholars

who left Alexandria due to the repressive measures applied by Justinian of Rome and sought refuge in Iran at the court of Khosrow Anushirwan. No'mani did not take into consideration the time difference of more than 120 years from Yahya's emigration to Iran till the Muslim conquest of Alexandria. It is rationally impossible that being the noted and eminent wise man of Alexandria of 120 years before the conquest of Alexandria, Yahya at the time of the incident was still living as a counsellor to Amr Ibn Aas. Therefore, the story of Yahya's meeting with Amr is entirely baseless even in traditions which have not mentioned about the Alexandrian library.

This fictitious encounter of Yahya and Amr as narrated by Abulfaraj could be compared to Abdullatif's story of Aristotle's having taught at the Alexandrian Academy; the authors were heedless of its inconformity with historical accounts.

Second, the allegation that Amr Ibn Aas upon receipt of orders from Umar, the then Caliph, immediately disposed of the books by distributing them among Alexandrian public baths to be used as fuel which kept the furnaces fed for six months. It is a fact that Alexandria was the largest city in Egypt and one of the biggest in the world during that time which quite fascinated Amr Ibn Aas, who in his report to the Caliph, said: "In this city there are about 4,000 public baths, 4000 palaces, 40,000 Jews subject to tax, 400 public amusement centers,

and 12,000 vegetable shops that sell fresh vegetables.”

It can be concluded then that for a period of six months 4,000 public baths had been provided with fuel, that is, the number of books was so tremendous that it would supply a public bath for 70,000 days, that is about 2,000 years!! And besides, what is more surprising is that Abulfaraj claimed that all these books were on wisdom and philosophy and not on any other subjects.

Let us analyze the situation a bit more. Since the dawn of civilization up to this modern age, after centuries and centuries, have there been printed such a fantastic number of books on philosophy and logic enough to feed the furnaces of 4,000 public baths for six months? How vast could have been the land area occupied by the library where those books had been shelved? It is to be noted that books were not stored like wheat in a barn but filed nicely in shelves accessible to the people. And then a Christian priest was dispatched to Alexandria in the 4th century C.E. and was ordered by the then emperor to destroy the library. The priest's report went like this: "I found all the shelves in the library empty of books on my arrival. " ³⁷

Thus how can we certainly deduce that such a library could have occupied an area bigger than a whole city!

Today, with industrial progress and advanced printing machines and unprecedented modern in-

ventions, great and big libraries have been built in the world, particularly in the U.S. and the USSR, just as great and big cities now exist in the world. But I still cannot believe that there exists today a library wherein the books would be enough to supply the furnaces of a city's public baths for a period of six months. All these so-called proofs prove nothing but the fictitious nature of the story the likes of which could only be found in a fairy-tale book. Some people say that once a man in his exaggerated description of Hirat city claimed that it was such an unusually large city and over populated that he said: "During that time there were 21,000 one-eyed Ahmad who cooked and sold trotters and heads of sheep and goats!!!" Considering the fact that all the inhabitants' name could not possibly have been Ahmad nor all of them were one-eyed and cooks of trotters and sheep's heads; then if it were true that there had been 21,000 one-eyed Ahmad who cooked and sold sheep's head in Hirat, then what would have been the total population of the city? If we count all the people in the world, their number would not be enough since there cannot be 21,000 one-eyed Ahmads in the whole world!!

Abulfaraj's narration of the burning incident can be compared to the story of one-eyed Ahmad, the cook. Therefore, the compilers of the English encyclopedias according to Ni'mani took Abulfaraj's tale as a hilarious joke.

Third, Shibli Ni'mani and some researchers in the West agree: "During those days books were made of animal hides—something which could not be used as fuel at all. The tale claiming that those books were used to feed the baths' furnaces was ambiguous and absurd." No'mani quoted a man called Monsieur Pierre as having said: "We are quite certain that the public baths of Alexandria would never use books written on hides as long as they had other fuel reserves to use. It must be noted that most of the library's books had been compiled on animal hides."³⁸

Fourth, if such a big library had ever existed in Alexandria, Amr would have mentioned it in his report on the city to the Caliph. In his report, even public amusement centers and vegetable shops were included while there is no mention of the library.

Fifth, Alexandrians signed a peace agreement with the Muslims after the conquest of their city by Amr ibn Aas and were counted as non-Muslim subjects living under Islamic rule. Muslim laws concerning conquered peoples were also applied to them. Under those regulations they were free to practice their own religious beliefs and hold ceremonies, worship in their temples and their property, life and dignity were protected. The Islamic government was their protector and guarantor. In his peace treaty with the people of Alexandria,

Amr ibn Aas wrote: "This is a security agreement between Amr ibn Aas and the people of Egypt guaranteeing complete protection of life, wealth, residence and other property." As narrated in Mujam al-Buldaan, the following had been specified: "The land, property and wealth of the people of Egypt rightfully belong to them and nobody is allowed to trespass over their property and other rights."³⁹

The Muslims' general behavior towards the People of the Book was such that after conquest of their lands they would treat them as Ahlal zimma (conquered people) obliging them to pay a certain tax (the jizya) to the Islamic government. In return, the Muslims would undertake to protect the people's lives, wealth, dignity and temples. The same was done in the case of the Alexandrians. It would not have mattered so much had Abulfaraj in his narration mentioned the Muslims' burning of Alexandrian library before such a peace agreement. On the contrary, Abulfaraj said: "This incident (destruction of the library) took place long after the conquest of Alexandria due to the statements made by Yahya Nahvi....." meaning that the Muslims committed such an act after signing a peace agreement is totally against their traditions in dealing with conquered nations.

Sixth, historical accounts we have of Amr and Umar do not agree that such incident had taken

place in their time. Amr was an efficient, intelligent man who had an independent mind and was the kind who would impose his ideas on Umar. History books show that Umar was not interested in invading Egypt, but Amr ibn Aas insisted upon it. As far as we know, Amr ibn Aas asked Umar for the go-ahead but before the former got the permission, he had already started the attack. If, as mentioned in the narration, Nahvi was Amr's companion and associate and that Amr, owing to his indigenous intellect, would enjoy Nahvi's wise sayings and company, in writing to Umar, Amr would write in a way to save the library which was so valuable to his friend Yahya. He would not just be contented with simply seeking Umar's permission and burn those books so dear to Yahya right before his very eyes upon receipt of Umar's letter without any further correspondence to save them.

Furthermore, Amr's behavior was one of a conqueror interested in reform, progress and prosperity not one of a tyrant's or an oppressor's like that of Qutayba ibn Muslim's. Will Durant writes: "Amr ibn Aas ruled with justice. A portion of the huge volume of collected taxes was allocated by him for the maintenance and repairs of canals, bridges and the renovation of waterways⁴⁰ that connected the Nile with the Red Sea in the olden times. Thus, he opened the way for vessels sailing from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean. In the year 114 A.H. (732C.E.) the canal became full

of sand again and was abandoned.⁴¹ It is quite hard to imagine that an individual who had had a keen and a generous attitude towards social welfare could have been capable of committing acts such as burning a great library. Umar was a tough man but still none has ever doubted his distinctive character and foresight. In order not to shoulder all responsibilities personally, Umar would seek help from others. Regarding important issues especially foreign policy he would form councils which have been mentioned in history books and in the Nahjul-Balagha as well.

There is no mention of Umar's formation of a council that would decide on what to do with the Alexandrian library nor is there any trace of his consultation with anybody in this connection. It is quite improbable that he ever made such an important decision without consultation. And also, if Umar had believed in the significance of those books, the Quran being sufficient for him, he would certainly be of the opinion that with mosques around, temples would have served no purpose. But how come in his treaties with the people it had always been stipulated that churches, synagogues and even fire temples would be allowed to co-exist with mosques and Muslims, and that the Islamic government should undertake to preserve and maintain these places of worship in recognition of the privileges of non-Muslims, and in exchange for the people's acceptance of Islamic conditions

set for conquered lands.

Seventh, assuming that Umar had given such orders, isn't it quite hard to believe that the Alexandrian Jews and Christians showed no opposition and quite calmly, unresponsively watched the conflagration that consumed the books which contained their cultural and historical heritage without even trying to save a page of such significant books clandestinely ?

QUFTI'S OPINION

An exact replica of Abulfaraj's narration Qufti's is just as equally defective. Like Abulfaraj who did not mention the story in his detailed history book written in Syriac, but quite strange enough, who included it in its summary in Arabic, Mukhtasar al-Duwal, Qufti also excluded this story when he wrote the History of Egypt,⁴² but in his book Akhbaru-l-Ulama wa Akhbaru-l-Hukma (which is a history of philosophy) he mentioned the incident in the chapter concerning Yahya Nahvi's life without authentic documentation. Therefore, Yahya was also one of the two heroes of Qufti's story according to which those books on philosophy and wisdom provided for a six-month fuel supply of 4,000 public baths in Alexandria. Qufti claimed that Yahya Nahvi used to be a seaman then when he reached the age of

45, he suddenly felt a desire to study and later emerged as a philosopher, physician, a man of letters and the bishop of Alexandria all at the same time.

YAHYA NAHVI AMIDST THE AMBIGUITY OF HISTORY

Yahya Nahvi's place in history is one kind of a historical ambiguity. Obviously, a philosopher-bishop by the name of Yahya Nahvi lived in pre-Islamic Alexandria. It was the same man who, contradicted Abarqalis and Aristotle, in a book which he wrote in defending Christian principles. Abu Ali Sina (Avicenna) despicably talked about him in his famous letter to Abu Reyhan Biruni stating that Yahya had written the book to deceive the Christian people and not because it was oozing out of his great faith in Christianity.

Ibn Nadeem also mentioned about Yahya's meeting with Amr ibn Aas in al-Fihrist, but did not say anything about the library of Alexandria. In a quite authentic book Suwwan al-Hikma, Abu Suleiman Mantiqi wrote that Yahya lived during the time of Uthman and Muawiya. So, either Ibn Nadeem's and Abu Suleiman's narrations are baseless or that Yahya who allegedly had lived

during Amr Ibn Aas' and Muawiya's time was different from that celebrated personality who, being Alexandria's bishop, had written excessively on Aristotles books and others.

It is not too remote that those who made up the story of the burning of books in Alexandria used the name Yahya Nahvi as mentioned by Ibn Nadeem and Abu Suleiman Mantiqi and related the story without considering the possibility that there might be two different persons with that name and that the person who presumably had lived during the time of Amr Ibn Aas, Uthman and Muawiya could not have been the same famous bishop-philosopher of pre-Islamic Alexandria. What is, therefore, quite obvious is that the Alexandrian Yahya Nahvi, a philosopher, doctor and interpreter of Aristotle's works and the famous bishop of Alexandria could not have lived until the time of Amr Ibn Aas and Muawiya.

Haj Khalifa's Opinion

Haj Khalifa was a more recent figure and lived in the 11th century A.H. He was an expert on books who categorized books and was not a historian. He wrote the book *Kashfu-1-Dhunoon* which was a valuable catalogue of significant books and written works.

What has been quoted from Haj Khalifa in-

cludes two parts: First: "At the advent of Islam, the Arabs paid attention mainly to three fields of science: Language, religious laws and medicine with which they were acquainted before, and which was quite indispensable. Other than these, the Arabs did not care much about the other sciences. The Arabs wanted that basic Islamic principles be firmly imbibed in the people's mind before other sciences be introduced." Up to this point Haj Khalifa's words are true. In "Mutual Services of Islam and Iran", in the chapter on the services rendered by Iran to Islam, we discussed when and how sciences grew and developed in Islamic era. Islamic sciences started with recitation of the Quran, religious jurisprudence and language structure, and in the beginning no attention was accorded to philosophical, natural, or mathematical sciences.

Second: "It is said that the Arabs would burn every single book they laid their hands on whenever they invaded cities." Here we see that Haj Khalifa, although not a historian had employed the same method of narration that most narrators do. He did not directly say that the Arabs burned books when they invaded cities to confirm the originality of the incident but rather used the same introductory phrase "it is said that....."

There is no doubt that such a story would be disseminated among people during Haj Khalifa's

time, that is, in the 11th century after the Hijra; for 400 years the story went down from generation to generation. It is just like saying that it was so frequently said that Muslims of the advent of Islam would burn any books that they laid their eyes on. If today we narrate this story it wouldn't be a lie because we have already understood that such a story had been initially told since the time of Abdullatif, Abulfaraj and Qufti and then was conveyed to later generations. So actually Haj Khalifa just like Abdullatif and others had not presented any new document or sources. He related the story told in his time using the passive form of the verb which depicted uncertainty.

MIQRIZI

In the succeeding generation, after Abdullatif another set of individuals quoted him in their books, a matter which needs no further discussion as we are quite aware of the nature of Abdullatif's narration. One of these individuals was Miqrizi who wrote a book about Egypt's history known as Khutat-e Miqrizi in which he, as a historian discussed the conquest of Alexandria but never mentioned any burning of books. However, in describing "Amoud As-Suwary" Abdullatif wrote his famous narration about the incident and Miqrizi quoted him word for word. From this we under-

stand that Miqrizi did not in the least believe in the authenticity of Abdullatif's narration. Otherwise, he would have mentioned it while writing about Alexandria's conquest or would delete the phrase "it has been said" if he were himself certain about the story's authenticity.

IBN KHALDOUN AND THE ISSUE OF BURNING OF BOOKS IN IRAN

Now, we look into what Ibn Khaldoun had said in regard to the alleged burning of books in Iran, the fourth proof that the late Dr. Moin had quoted from Pourdavood. If we do not trace the origins of Ibn Khaldoun's narration and believe in Pourdavood's "Yashtha" to which the late Dr. Mo'iin had referred, we must, being a historian, say that Khaldoun must not be compared to Abdullatif, a physician who merely wanted to jot down the memoirs of his journey, or to Abulfaraj, also a physician, or to Haj Khalifa, a librarian or even to Qufti, a writer of biographies of philosophers.

Ibn Khaldoun lived in the late 8th century and early 9th century A.H. and was not a historian of the 2nd and 3rd or 4th centuries to be able to

narrate a story by quoting a person directly without reference to older documents. However, as a historian he could be relied upon and if he narrated a story as an axiomatic truth, then he should have come across evidences that were reliable at least from his own view. So his narration, though not to be construed as authentic, must be considered a "Mursil" narration. However, Ibn Khaldoun did not deliberate on the matter and used the passive form of the verb. He introduced the story with the phrase "walaqqad yaqaal" verily, it is said that.....) which is an expression representing "weak" tradition and which is not even a "Mursil" narration. He also added an introductory portion to the narration which just aggravated its weak quality. After stating that rational sciences would always develop as a consequence of urban developments—(a social principle seemingly acceptable to him only and not other historians)—he deduced that rational sciences in Iran must have grown owing to the country's urban development and prosperity and continued that: "It is said the Greeks borrowed rational sciences from the Iranians when Alexander killed Dara, the last Achaemenian king and established his hegemony over Persia; he took possession of an unlimited number of Persian books and scientific works. And when Iran was conquered by the Arabs who found numerous books there, Sa'ad Waqqas reported the situation to Umar..." That Alexander had taken scientific books from Iran to Greece

and that after the invasion of Iran, the Greeks cultivated the new sciences brought to them is something that no history book had recorded and is absolutely baseless. However, Mr. Pourdavood deceitfully deleted the first part of the narration which included the passive-tensed introductory expression "it is said that....." and fabricated a story regarding the transfer of Iranian scientific books and works to Greece.

HOW THE RUMORS STARTED

What Ibn Khaldoun had mentioned as the source of rumor seems to be different from the source of the tale concerning the burning of books in Alexandria. The first source was the Christians themselves. In order to relieve themselves of the guilt of the crime they committed, they propagated that the Muslims were responsible for the incident. On the other hand, the sources that Ibn Khaldoun had referred to were apparently his contemporary Shu'ubiyans (a movement within early Islamic Commonwealth of Nations which refused to recognize the privileged status of the Arabs.) Ibn Khaldoun himself was not devoid of Shu'ubiy and anti-Arab tendency.

The Shu'ubiyans of Iran believed that arts (and sciences) are only with Iranians. It can probably be deduced from the appearance of Ibn

Khaldoun's statement. They aimed at imposing the assumption that the Greeks imitated the scientific expertise of the Persians while the whole world knows very well that Alexander invaded Iran at the time of Aristotle when Greek culture and civilization were at their peak.

So far every statement quoted from Ibn Khaldoun has been taken from the prologue of his book written on philosophy and social matters. No one has ever quoted this incident from his history book entitled "Al-Abr Wa Diwanu-l-Mubtida wal-Ikhbar." If Ibn Khaldoun cared about the historical significance of this story then he must have narrated it in that book.

Unfortunately, Ibn Khaldoun's history is not at my disposal but if such an incident had ever been mentioned, it would never be concealed from the eyes of those who are looking for such pretexts against Islam. If such matters existed in Ibn Khaldoun's history, it would have been quoted from that book and not from its prologue, so his history book must be referred to, in this connection.

OTHER PROOFS OF THE MENDACITY OF THE STORY

In addition to the absence of reliable origins and the employment of the passive form of the verb in the narration of the story, there are also a group of other historical evidences which attested to the fictitious nature of the story of the burning of books in Alexandria unanimously agreeing that the Alexandrian library was already ruined before the Islamic era began.

There are also evidences at hand which negate the occurrence of a book-burning incident in Iran. One contention had been that history books show no record of the existence of a library in Iran, while the Alexandrian library which existed between 300 B.C. and 400 C.E. had been mentioned in history. However, if there had been libraries in Iran, the burning of which was missed by historians, then at least its founding or existence would have been mentioned somewhere in those

history books especially when we consider the fact that events in Iran and its history had been so carefully included more than anything else in the history of Islam written by Iranian historians. Besides, owing to the anti-Arab attitude of Shu'ubiyans if such burning had ever taken place, then it must definitely have been recorded with all the details in their books.

Being a holy Islamic movement for justice and indiscriminate in the beginning, the Shu'ubiyans later on emerged as a group of racists and anti-Arabs. The Iranian Shu'ubiyans based their books on the defects of the Arabs and were always finding faults, would magnify and spread them everywhere. They would search every page of history and would never miss anything, no matter how trivial, that might be to the detriment of the Arabs.

Therefore, if the Arabs possessed such a character so vicious as to burn libraries particularly the Iranian library, the Shu'ubiyans who were at the peak of their anti-Arab activities in the second century after the Hijra backed by the then ruling Abbasides, a staunch political opponent and critic of the Umayyads and the Arabs, would not have kept quiet in regard to such matters. Instead, they would have created a big commotion. The fact that these prejudiced anti-Arab Shu'ubiyans did not mention a word about the burning, quite points to the fictitious origin of the story.

EPILOGUE

An outline of our accounts is that no historical document from Islamic and other sources show that there had been any burning done by Muslims up to the 7th century A.H. that is, 600 years after the invasion of Iran and Alexandria. It was not until the 7th century A.H. that the issue arose. Those who accused the Muslim Arabs never presented any concrete document and thus, naturally their narrations have no historical credibility. This uncertainty, even if there was no other weak points in those narrations is enough to render them weak and incredible.

Second, all narrations came down from generation to generation quoting rumors among people by word of mouth except the ones by Abulfaraj and Qufti who narrated the incident as an actual event. Historical narratives are governed by certain rules. Whenever a historian narrated an event as told by people he usually introduces it with the phrase, "It is said that such an incident took place,". It is not confirming that it had actually happened and clearly shows that the narrator himself does not believe in its authenticity.

Thirdly, the narrations of the same tale in the 7th century A.H. by Abdullatif, Abulfaraj and Qufi which are the origins of other narrations consist of sheer lies rendering the documents inauthentic. Furthermore, there are other proofs of the inauthenticity of the narration even if they did not include documentary weakness in themselves.

AN APOLOGY TO THE READERS

Our readers might feel that it is mere verbosity to talk about this matter and that much effort had been wasted in criticizing the account. They might also think that the brief discussion which has just been presented was quite sufficient and comprehensive although some additional explanation could have entailed it.

I agree that in examining the authenticity of this narration as a historical event, it is not necessary to go into so many details. However, our dear readers must carefully take notice that the nature and the essence of the story trespassed all existing rules of historical and scientific narration and one which had been intentionally written for propaganda purposes. To historians who are impartial in their treatment of evidences, whether Muslims or non-Muslims, this story is indisputably baseless. On the other hand, those who benefit by propagating this historical fallacy are nevertheless employing

different ways to amplify it to cater for their propaganda campaign (against Islam). The attempts to magnify the burning incident in Iran and Alexandria has gradually evolved into a manner and method of attacking Islam and Muslims as ordered by certain circles.

Shibli-al-No'amani in his "Alexandrian Library" said that: "European historians like Gibbon, Carlyle, Godfrey, Hector, Renan, Sidlew, etc. considered those absurdities, published in Europe regarding Islam and Muslims, as erratic and baseless. However these baseless narrations are still current in public compilations and dissemination of popular narrations. It must be realized that among historical myths, the tale of the burning of Alexandrian library was one issue that Europe publicized with such bewildering pomposity. Books of history, novels, religion, logic and philosophy and the like are not spared of this ambiguity (to give the myth a reality in the minds of the people, it was inserted in any book, even in books of philosophy and logic!) Once it was even one of the questions in a college final examination in Calcutta University in India (which was supervised by English professors!) As part of the examination on Logic the following question had been asked: "Explain the paralogism of the following: If the books conform with the Quran, then there is no

need for them; if they contradict the Quran then they must be burned.”⁴³ Shibli No’amani then took notice of the politics that had been employed in asking such a question pondering whether it had been asked out of sympathy and pity because the books were burned or some other issues were involved. If it was out of sympathy, No’amani asked, then why had not there been any for the conflagration that took place during the invasion of Andalusia and the wars of Crusade by the Christians?!!!

Shibli No’amani gave the following reply: “The main reason is that burning was done by the Christians themselves in pre-Islamic Alexandria. In order to acquit themselves of the crime, they publicize this false notion that the Muslim had burned

Shibli’s statement only referred to the incident in Alexandria and is not the only reason. The main cause was colonial exploitation. Political and economic exploitation succeeds when cultural exploitation takes form. The people’s inherent dislike for their own culture accounts for the primary factor of a successful cultural alienation. Exploiters have known very well from experience that Muslims are backed by a culture and an ideology which is Islam. Other issues propagated in conferences, festivals, congresses and seminars never left the conference halls nor reached the masses. Therefore, the people’s mind must be

deprived of that belief, faith, trust and virtue to mold them according to Western patterns.

In conspiring to transform the religious attitude of people into one of pessimism towards their own culture and ideology, nothing could be better than to poison the mind of the younger generation by propagating that: "The people whom the youth look up to as missioned to lead humanity toward salvation and redemption and invaded other countries, toppling some regimes under such a pretext, were those who committed the worst of crimes of which the burning of books is an example."

So, it is not at all surprising why the British board of examiners in Calcutta University considered the fictitious tale of burning books as the only question that had to be asked on sophistry in logic. This question has also been included in the 12th grade textbook of "Bases of Philosophy" under the heading Analogy in logic printed in tens of thousands of copies each year and placed at the disposal of simple and unaware high school students. Despite the mental strain that the writer went through he could not think of any other question except that same question asked of students in Calcutta University and phrased it in the following way: "A syllogistic analogy might be joined or disjoined, that is, having a composite quality. This kind of analogy can best be described by what the Arab leader tried to do in order to justify the burning of Sassanid library reasoning

outh that: These books either conform or contradict the Quran; if they are in conformity with it, then they are not needed and if they contradict the Quran, they are unnecessary and harmful, and anything that is damaging and extra must be burned in any way.”⁴⁴

A few years back I spoke on the same subject at the Husseiniyeh Irshad Islamic Institute and pointed out its ambiguity. After the concluding series of the lecture I received a letter from a faithful participant asking what my motive in disclosing the hollowness of the issue was. Let the people, he said, believe in this lie because it is propaganda against Umar Ibn Al-Khuttab and Amr Ibn Aas.”

This faithful man had surmised that all this adverse publicity from Europe to India on which books and romantic novels have been written were done in order that the issue would be construed as an anti-Umar or anti-Amr Ibn Aas’ sentiment or to pay tribute to Shi’ite religion and defame Imam Ali’s opponents. People like this man, do not seem to realize that when such matters are brought up, it is only the issue of Islam which is in question and not this or that personality. They are not aware that in today’s world the best weapon against a religion is no longer the theological and subjective logical reasonings. Nowadays the best method of propagation for or against a religion is to discuss the attitude of its followers toward the issues of culture and civilization in the course of that reli-

FOOTNOTES:

1. Tandurust (the healthy body) Magazine, 1945, v.2
2. Al Muhassin wal-adhdad; p. 4
3. The Iranian Civilization, p. 178
4. The Glory of Persia, p. 36-37
5. Dr. Souratgar: History of Literature. Published by Wa'dh wa Khutaba Institute, p. 10.
6. Pourdavood: Yasht'ha, v.2, p. 20
7. Pourdavood: Yasht'ha, v. 2, pp. 21-23 as told by Muhammad Qazvini.
8. Al Aathar al-Baqiah printed in Lidden, p. 30
9. Mazdisna and Persian literature, p. 13
10. Murtadha Mutahhari: Mutual Services of Islam and Iran, 6th printing, p. 161
11. Refer to Murtadha Mutahhari: The Illiterate Prophet
12. Suratu-l Qalam, The Holy Quran.
13. Suratu-l Alaq, verses 1-5.
14. Mujtaba Minavi: A study of Abu Reyhan Birooni. Published by the faculty of theology and Islamic Culture.
15. Dr. Zarrinkoob has regarded the story as dubious in his book "The Report Card of Islam
16. Iran during the Sassanid Era, p. 86
17. Ahmad Amin: Dhuhul-Islam, v.1 p. 64
18. Brown: History of literature, v. 1. Translated by Ali Pasha Saleh, p. 510, as told by Dowlatshah Samarqandi.
19. Dr. Muhammad Ibrahim Ayyati: History of Andalusia, Jurjy Zidon (George Gordon): History of Islamic civilization, Persian translation, v.3, p. 65
20. Jurjy Zidon: History of Islamic Civilization, v.3 p. 65
21. Will Durant: History of Civilization
22. Jurjy Zidon: History of Islamic civilization, v.3 p. 66

23. Will Durant: History of Civilization, v. 11, p. 315
24. Christenson: Iran during the Sassannid Era, p. 385
25. Ibn Nadim: Al Fihrist, Printed in Cairo, P. 351
26. Al Fihrist, p. 386
27. Ahmad Aram: History of Science (Persian Translation),
p. 271
28. History of Science, p. 271
29. Dr. Dhahibullah Safa: History of Rational Sciences in
Islam, p. 32
30. Abdullatif finished compiling his book in 604 A.H. Shibli
No'amani: Alexandria, p. 28
31. Will Durant: History of Civilization, Persian Translation,
v. 11, p. 219
32. The famous library of Alexandria was established by a
people who are referred to as idol worshippers.
33. The History of Islamic and Arab Civilization, 4th print-
ing, pp. 263-265 (concise volume)
34. A book by John Davenport, translated into Persian by
Gholamreza Saidi. Davenport strongly denied the burning of books
in Alexandria by the Muslims in the same book, p. 22
35. Shibli No'amani: Alexandrian Library, PP. 14, 15, 38
36. Shibli No'amani: Alexandrian Library, pp. 16-18
37. Shibli No'amani: Alexandrian Library, p. 50.
38. Shibli No'amani: Alexandrian Library, p. 53
39. Shibli No'amani: Alexandrian Library, p. 56
40. This canal was probably the same Suez Canal which had
been re-opened in recent centuries.
41. Will Durant: History of Civilization, Persian Translation,
v. 11, p. 220.
42. Jurjy Zidon: History of Islamic Civilization, Persian
Translation, v. 3, p. 64.
43. Shibli No'amani Alexandrian Library p. 6
44. Dr. Ali Siasi: Bases of Philosophy, p. 254